

USS FORESTAL (CVA 59) FIRE
29 JULY 1967

During July 1967, I was a Navy Lieutenant, and the co-pilot of a UH-2 assigned to Helicopter Combat Support Squadron One (HC-1) CSAR Detachment 17, a single ship UH-2 detachment embarked in USS Fox (DLG 33) on North SAR Station. Call sign was Clementine One (Clem One for short).

29 July began quietly, but we were expecting to cover Navy and Air Force strikes in the afternoon. However, just before noon, the ship set flight quarters, announcing that Forestal was experiencing fires and explosions. We launched immediately for Yankee Station, landing on the USS Oriskany (CVA 34).

They loaded us up with fire fighting and damage control equipment, (800+ pounds firefighting foam) for our first run. We spent the afternoon and evening shuttling equipment to Forestal and bringing back injured, many of whom were seriously burned. On one run, we saw two sailors clinging to a drop tank, fished them out, dropped them on Oriskany. We never got their names or any other information.

The fires were more or less under control by late evening, so we were able to get some dinner. I was just about to enjoy an evening libation with the Oriskany helo det guys when the 1MC called, "Co-pilot of Clem One, report to flight deck control.

We launched and spent the next four hours transferring the wounded and burned to the hospital ship, USNS Repose. We were so tired by this time, I pinned the landing gear down to avoid a possible gear-up landing.

This was a true disaster, more than 130 dead, another 150 or so seriously injured. One squadron lost its entire night maintenance crew.

We flew around 13.5 hours that day and our return flight to SAR Station the next day was somber, indeed. It took the crew two days to rid the helo of the smell of burned flesh.