

Rescuing of Fliers A Major Operation In War in Vietnam

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DANANG, South Vietnam, March 4—The captain from the Air Rescue Squadron sat on a desk in the operations room holding a map case in his hand.

He weighed his words carefully, making sure he did not break the tight security blanket pulled over United States air strikes against North Vietnam.

Behind him on a wall was a large map. On the South China Sea near the North Vietnamese coast were two yellow circles. Inland were four others, scattered between Donghoi and the 17th Parallel, the boundary between North and South Vietnam.

"Six went down," the captain said. "We extracted five of them. We are still looking for the sixth."

Out of 160 American and Vietnamese aircraft that struck North Vietnam Tuesday, six were downed. The captain's unit, Detachment 5 of the Pacific Air Rescue Center, snatched up five of the pilots. Four were Americans and one a South Vietnamese. The pilot still missing is American.

Three of the Americans brought back by air rescue teams had parachuted over Vietnamese territory. One American and the South Vietnamese were picked up from the sea.

To get to the pilots downed on land, the detachment's H-43F helicopters had to slip over Communist-held territory and snatch up the men before fire got too heavy. Some of the unarmed helicopters were hit.

Rescue operations were helped by suppressive fire from United States fighters.

Of more than 10 American pilots who have had to bail out or crash land in enemy territory since Oct. 24, when Detachment 5 arrived in Danang, all but one were, in the captain's words, "successfully extracted."