

AIR FORCE NEWS SERVICE

PREPARED BY INTERNAL INFORMATION DIVISION•OFFICE OF INFORMATION•OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE
DISTRIBUTED WEEKLY TO AIR FORCE NEWSPAPERS WORLDWIDE

RELEASE NO. 8-6-65-553

AIR RESCUE SAVES NAVY PILOT

TAN SON NHUT AIR FIELD, Viet-Nam (AFNS) -- An Air Force rescue aircrew this week snatched a downed Navy pilot from certain capture or death with only seconds to spare.

Flying 63 miles north of the demilitarized zone separating the Republic of Viet-Nam from its Communist neighbor, an Air Rescue Service Kaman HH-43B Huskie helicopter crew saved Navy Lt. (j.g.) Grant R. Townsend Jr.

Crackling flames and North Vietnamese were only moments away from the downed pilot when the rescue crew, commanded by Air Force 1st Lt. Walter E. Turk, arrived.

Lieutenant Townsend had been flying a strike against North Vietnamese military targets. He was rolling in on a bombing run and had started to pull out when he felt an explosion. Flames engulfed his aircraft and he ejected.

Next thing the Navy pilot remembers is swinging from his parachute, close to the ground. Landing in an area of elephant grass about 14 feet high he was able to move only with difficulty.

Abandoning his chute, he climbed some 50 yards up a hillside into an inhabited area. He found a hiding place and contacted the other members of his Navy flight still circling overhead.

As stillness settled, Lieutenant Townsend heard people moving through the tall growth in his direction. Speaking into his survival radio, he told the circling pilots to strafe the hillside down from his chute where there were Viet Cong.

The Navy aviators rolled in and strafed the hillside. As things quieted down again, the downed pilot was told an Air Force rescue chopper would be on the scene within 40 minutes. It was then 1:45 p.m. He had gone out of his stricken aircraft at 1:07 p.m.

Before leaving his Skyhawk, Lieutenant Townsend had radioed for help and his call had been heard by Capt. Steven Stefanos, a controller on duty at the Air Force Search and Rescue Center here.

Calling for rescue aircraft to proceed to the distress area, Captain Stefanos alerted Lieutenant Turk and his crew. Along with a backup helicopter flown by Air Force Capt. Thomas J. Curtis, Lieutenant Turk took off at 1:14 p.m.

As the helicopters beat their way toward the distress scene, North Vietnamese tried repeatedly to reach Lieutenant Townsend's hilltop position. Again and again his Navy buddies flew strafing runs to drive the Communists back.

Finally, hearing voices of several people, the lieutenant called for an additional strike. This time the Navy pilots used rockets. The rockets caused the North Vietnamese to retreat but also set the elephant grass afire.

Crouched in his hiding place,, Lieutenant Townsend heard the crackle of flames.

Just as the flames reached his discarded parachute, Lieutenant Townsend heard what he described as "the wonderful whup-whup-whup of a helicopter."

M O R E