

PLUCKED FROM DENSE JUNGLE

Hq. 7AF, Saigon--Standing alone in a North Vietnam jungle, an Air Force F-105 Thunderchief pilot waved frantically at the Air Force HH-43C helicopter passing overhead.

Someone in the helicopter waved back. For the first time since he ejected from his flaming plane, Maj. Joseph Hutto, of Natchez, Miss., knew he was going to be rescued.

Less than two hours before, Hutto was bombing a segment of Route 1, south of Vinh, and attacking a truck convoy moving military supplies toward infiltration routes to South Vietnam.

Diving through a hail of anti-aircraft fire, Hutto made two passes over the camouflaged trucks spraying them with 20mm cannon fire. As he pulled up from the second pass, he felt the F-105 shudder. Watching his cockpit fill with smoke, he radioed the other pilots in his flight and prepared to eject.

He turned the crippled jet toward the jungle to escape the populated coastal plain and anti-aircraft sites near Vinh. Over the mountains he ejected.

Thrown into the sky by catapult ejection, he blacked out for a moment, but recovered to feel the comforting jerk of an opening parachute.

Crashing through 100 feet of deep forest, Hutto landed on the side of a steep slope. He struggled out of his parachute, drank some water and tried to use his radio.

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Through the towering trees and tangled vines, he saw his wingman attacking north Vietnamese gun positions nearby. As he listened the sound of machine gun fire from enemy guns drew closer.

Convinced the gunners were coming after him, he started moving through the brush. Using fallen teak trees and animal trails to quiet his movements, he climbed toward the crest of a ridge.

Above him, the Thunderchiefs were replaced by four A-1E Skyraiders striking nearby Communist positions. One of the Skyraider pilots fired a pod of rockets near Hutto's hiding place silencing the ground fire.

Exhausted by his scramble through the jungle, Hutto stopped to use his radio and learned a helicopter was coming after him. Not knowing his parachute could not be seen from the air, he tried to radio his position by estimating the distance he moved from the chute.

When the helicopter appeared, Hutto fired a smoke flare giving away his position to both his rescuers and the enemy. In a barely audible whisper, he called to the helicopter, "Do you see my smoke?"

"Positive," came the reply, but the helicopter, commanded by 1st Lt. Thomas E. Kenny of Rochester, N.Y., moved out of sight then returned dropping the hoist cable about 100 yards from Hutto.

Hutto realized the smoke had drifted down the hill and tried to make radio contact with the chopper crew again to bring them closer. By this time he had completely lost his voice and wasn't sure his transmission was heard.

Rescue crewmen SSgt. Aaron D. Farrion of St. Louis, Mo., pararescue-medical, and Harold R. Schrader of Satellite, Fla., crew chief, spotted Hutto waving at the chopper.

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Farrion and Schrader radioed instructions to their pilot, Kenny, dropped the cable as the helicopter hovered over Hutto and hoisted him into the chopper.

No longer alone in the jungle, Hutto hugged everyone in sight and settled down for the flight to safety. (PACAF NS)