

Almost Guests of North...

Paramedics Rescue Pilots Downed At Dien Bien Phu

SAIGON — Two Air Force paramedics braved heavy enemy gun fire near the North Vietnam village of Dien Bien Phu Dec. 6. They descended from "Jolly Green Giant" helicopters in connection with the dramatic rescue of two RF-4C Phantom pilots.

One reconnaissance pilot, the aircraft commander, had been quickly recovered but the back seat pilot was injured and required assistance.

Paramedic A2C Robert D. Bowers, 19, of Benton Harbor, Mich., descended from the first Jolly Green with a litter. The

medic secured the pilot for hoist, but was left aground when enemy gunfire raked and disabled his hovering chopper. The chopper hoisted the injured pilot aboard and withdrew from the area.

"I tried to get into the litter with the pilot but decided I couldn't hold on," Airman Bowers said he heard automatic fire from a nearby hill after the chopper left. He moved away from the area and hid in the brush.

"Everything was quiet for about 15 minutes. Then I heard whistling back and forth. There

was movement in the bushes. I covered myself up with leaves and just waited."

Airman Bowers was unaware that a pararescue man had later dropped from another Jolly Green to search for him. He was A2C Franklin D. Stevson, 21, Ossining, N.Y.

"I dropped about 20 yards away from where Airman Bowers had been lowered. As soon as I sent the penetrator back up to the helicopter the ridge I was facing seemed to open up with small arms fire. My Jolly Green was forced to take off," Airman Stevson said.

Airman Stevson lay face down until the ground fire subsided. Each time he arose to seek Airman Bowers, the gunfire opened up from the opposite ridge. "I made contact with the 'Sondy' aircraft (A-1E Skyraiders) circling above and directed him to drop ordnance near the heavy gunfire."

The Sandys, Maj. Everett L. Thomas Jr., Belton, Tex.; Capt. John P. Tillander, Hampton, Va., and Capt. William D. Fuchlow, El Paso, Tex., made passes on the weapons site and stilled the gunfire.

Another Jolly Green, the third helicopter to enter the rescue operation, came in and spotted Airman Stevson and Bowers. Airman Bowers was rescued first and a minute later Airman Stevson was hoisted to the chopper.

Airman Bowers had been down for two hours, Airman Stevson an hour-and-a-half.

The paramedics agreed that the whistles they heard were from enemy troops combing the jungle.



BACK FROM THE NORTH — Pararescue specialists A2C Robert D. Bowers of Benton Harbor, Mich. (left), and Franklin D. Stevson, Ossining, N.Y., have good reason for their smiles. They both spent almost two hours on the ground after the rescue of two reconnaissance pilots near Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam. (U.S. Air Force Photo)