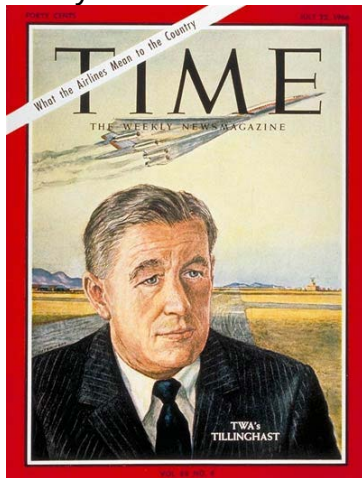


1 July 1966



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"That Others May Live"

U.S. fighter-bombers last week continued to hammer at Hanoi's roads, bridges and fuel depots. As in the week before, Hanoi responded with the most sophisticated weaponry in its defensive armory—and again found it useless. Twenty SAM ground-to-air missiles were fired. All missed. Supersonic MIG-21 fighters rose to tangle with U.S. Air Force F-4C Phantoms flying bomber escort north of Hanoi. North Viet Nam is thought to have only 15 of the advanced Russian jets, and the encounter cost them two of those, knocked down by the Phantoms' Sidewinder missiles—the second and third MIG-21 kills of the air war.

Ordinary antiaircraft fire proved something else again. So densely has Hanoi ringed likely targets that in the past month ground fire has claimed an average of one U.S. plane a day over North Vietnam. Last week five U.S. planes were downed. One of them was an Air Force Phantom. Set afire by flak, the Phantom's two-man crew sent out a distress signal, then radioed that they were going to try to reach the Gulf of Tonkin.

Hostile Land & Unforgiving Sea. Pilot Jesse J. Anderson, 39, had been orbiting his HU-16 amphibious Albatross over the Gulf for nearly seven hours when he picked up the Phantom's cry for help¹. Gunning his motors, Anderson sped toward the crippled plane. Before he arrived, the crew bailed out: one pilot dropped into the waters of the Gulf barely half a mile from the North Viet Nam coast, the other a mile farther out. Both were soon under heavy shore fire from machine guns and mortars as they bobbed helplessly in the water. Six U.S. fighter planes zoomed in to blast the shore batteries while Anderson set his Albatross down in the rolling swells. While mortar shells fell within 30 yards of the amphibian, first one pilot, then the other was pulled to safety. Within an hour after they had bailed out, both were safe at DaNang Air Base.

¹ The mission being discussed was accomplished on July 1, 1966. An F-4C using the callsign Goose 02 was shot down but made it feet wet prior to the crew ejecting. The downed F-4 crew was pilot Captain Frank Lennon and GIB Captain Thomas Weeks. The HU-16 crew consisted of Major Jesse J. Anderson (pilot), 1Lt David C. Rechlitz (copilot), 1Lt Danny J. Welborne (navigator), A1C George B Davy (flight engineer), SSgt Andrew Vest (radio operator), and SSgt Daniel L. Schmidt.

Anderson and his Albatross are part of the 650 men and 45 planes and helicopters of the Third Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group. Their primary mission: retrieving U.S. airmen shot down over the North. Their motto:

"That Others May Live." Commanded from Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport, the Third's mercy craft are scattered at radio readiness from DaNang to Thailand. Since they set up shop in Viet Nam at the end of 1964, they have rescued, from hostile land and unforgiving sea, 453 Americans—287 this year alone, 31 in the past month. Since the air war began, the Communists have downed 291 U.S. planes. Roughly 80% of the crews manage to eject and parachute away from their doomed aircraft; thanks to the Third, and the Navy's own rescue service, most are soon in U.S. hands. Of 325 who have gone down, 34 U.S. airmen are known to be prisoners in North Viet Nam.

Transceiver & Beeper. Pilots who are hit head for open water if they can. "Our chances of rescuing a pilot who falls in the Gulf of Tonkin are 99%," says the Third's commander, Colonel Arthur W. Beall, 50, of Orlando, Fla. Even over North Vietnam itself, the Third estimates that it pulls out 60% of downed airmen, excluding those who fall directly into populous or heavily garrisoned zones. Rescues are effected by a combination of coordination, technology and guts. Each airman is equipped with a \$2,400 survival kit containing, among other things, 400 ft. of nylon rope, a tracer pistol, flares, food, water, a raft and a desalting kit. The key gadget is a small mercury-battery radio that is both a voice transceiver and a beeper providing a radio fix for search and rescue planes to home in on.

A recovery mission is a formidable task force, often dedicated to finding and retrieving just one man. High overhead circles the "Crown," a C-130 command plane that coordinates the rescue. Then come four A-1 fighters to bomb and strafe any North Vietnamese on the ground around the pilot. Two helicopters, either twin-jet HH-3 "Jolly Greens" or HH-43 "Pedros," move in for the pickup. Each chopper carries a crew of four: pilot, copilot, crew chief (who acts as hoist operator, gunner and mechanical expert), and a para-rescue man expert at parachuting, scuba diving, jungle survival and medical care.

Petal-like Penetrator. It's a rare mission that is not shot at, and a still rarer one in which the helicopter can actually land to bring an airman aboard. If the downed man is seriously disabled, the Pararescue man goes down and stays with him until they can get out—which can mean as long as a day or more in enemy territory. Most often an airman is lifted out of difficult terrain by hoist. Each rescue copter has a 240-ft. cable tipped by a "forest penetrator": a 25-lb. sinker that can plunge through heavy foliage, then, petal-like, open up to form three seats. Rescue squadrons stand on alert for every sortie northward, and some even nest for a period within North Viet Nam, waiting for a mayday call.

"We have terrific morale," says one U.S. fighter-bomber pilot, "and half of it is knowing that these guys will come and get us out. They will try and try and try." To a remarkable extent, they succeed.