

Dieter Dengler shot down in Laos 1Feb66 Rescued 20 July 1966

A – 1J 142031 VA- 145, USN, USS *Ranger* Lt(jg) Dieter Dengler (POW - escaped)

About an hour after Lt Eakin was shot down, another flight of four Skyraiders attacked a target deeper into Laos, war Ban Phathoung. Lt Dengler was the last to dive on the target when his aircraft was hit by ground fire. He crash-landed a few miles from the target but both wings were ripped off when the aircraft struck some trees. Despite a SAR attempt in which a USAF helicopter crew spotted and photographed his wrecked aircraft, Dengler was nowhere to be seen.

Det 2-3-8-1 Feb (Reopened 20 Jul 66)

(C) An A-1E reported spotting a man on the ground waving a white flag with an SOS panel on the ground near the DMZ. HH-3Es at Quang Tri were sent to the area; the survivor (a Navy pilot) was recovered by hoist and flown to Danang. He was in poor condition, in a state of shock and incoherent. Subject had been in captivity for a prolonged period and had recently escaped.

Extracted from Det 2 38 ARS Unit History

The HH-3 crew that rescued Dengler was Captain William E Cowell (pilot); 1Lt William C Dean (copilot); SSgt William R Gladish (flight engineer) and A1C Michael D. Leonard

February 1966 found Air Rescue focusing on SARs in Laos, medevacs in SVN, plus a couple of feet wet missions in the Tonkin Gulf. Fourteen missions saved twenty-six men. The month started off badly. On the 2nd, Navy Lt Dieter Dengler was flying an A-1H on a strike mission in Laos. He was trail aircraft in a four-ship formation. Visibility enroute to the target area was poor. When his A-1 was hit by ground fire, battle damage immediately knocked out his radios. This rendered him incapable of notifying his wingmen that he was in trouble. His aircraft was not equipped with an ejection seat and he was too low to bail out. Out of options he crashed landed in Laos. He survived the crash and immediately began evading enemy capture.

Unfortunately for Lt Dengler, no one yet knew he had crashed. A few minutes later, the other members of his flight realized that he was missing. They began a route search, on the reverse course they had flown inbound, but could not find him. Crown was notified and the HU-16 began monitoring guard for a beeper. None was heard.

The next day, his carrier launched four A-1s to accomplish second route search. This time they located the wreckage. Jollys from Udorn RTAFB scrambled to the scene. Without radio contact, the rescue force was not supposed to attempt SAR. But the Jolly Green pilot disregarded this

guidance and went in to attempt a rescue. From a hover directly over the crash, the rescue crew could see that the cockpit was empty. With no SAR objective, they departed the area. Everyone flying overhead hoped he was still alive and evading somewhere in the jungle. In fact, Lt Dengler had successfully evaded capture. He saw the rescue aircraft as they searched for him. The Lt had tried without success to raise them on his radio. Unfortunately, it would not work. On February 3rd, Lt Dengler was captured by the Pathet Lao. He was forced marched through several villages. At each stop they tortured him. Ultimately, Dieter Dengler found himself in a Laotian POW camp.

Rescue had tried to locate him and failed footnote #187

Reference footnote #189

Det 6 38 ARRS Mission Report #6-25-12 February 1966. In USAF Collection, AFHRA.