

Rescue Teams Applauded

SAIGON (AP)—Aerial rescue teams that back up American fliers drew star billing Saturday under fire of two pilots downed over North Viet Nam.

Saved from death or capture were Lt. Cmdr. Thomas Tucker, Long Prairie, Minn., and Capt. Edward Skowron, Cheshire, Mass.

A veteran Navy pilot, Tucker was rescued from Haiphong harbor by fellow jet fliers and a Navy helicopter crew as Communist vessels closed in after his RF8 Crusader was shot down on a photographic mission last Wednesday.

"It was a great performance," Tucker said.

Skowron was plucked from the Tonkin Gulf Friday by a U.S. Air Force amphibious Albatross that landed with

mortar fire churning the water only 30 or 40 yards away. Crippling shots from ground guns had wrecked his Air Force F105 Thunderchief about 80 miles north of the border.

Cmdr. Robert S. Vermilya, Chula Vista, Calif., commanded the Navy helicopter that lifted Tucker to safety.

Capt. Duane A. Miller, Seymour, Wis., piloted the Albatross. S. Sgt. William C. Sutton, Goldsboro, N. C., the pararescueman of the five-man crew, swam to Skowron and tied a rope around him to draw him to the taxing aircraft as the Red shore batteries whammed away.

"Sutton was so fast he practically walked on the water," said the Albatross navigator, Capt. Harold G. King, Crestview, Fla.

Officers said that, in Tucker's case, North Vietnamese sampans closed in with the evident aim of capturing him after he bailed out into the harbor south-east of Haiphong.

Vermilya said the Communist vessels were within 100 yards of the life raft when they were driven off by fire from Tucker's wingman, Lt. Cmdr. Foster Teague, and other American jet pilots.

The helicopter commander told a Saigon news conference the jets "blew one out of the harbor and set another on fire."

The other sampans began a rapid retreat then, Vermilya said, and the nearest one was 300 yards away when the chopper hovered over Tucker to pluck him from North Viet Nam's most important port.

Daring Rescue Completed Under Heavy Enemy Fire

TAN SON NHUT — "Our pararescueman was so fast he practically walked on water getting to the downed pilot," said Capt. Harold G. King of Crestview, Fla.

Captain King is the navigator of an Air Force HU-16 amphibious Albatross which recently plucked an F-105 Thunderchief pilot from the water off the coast of North Vietnam. Communist mortars and shore batteries made a concerted but futile effort to sink the rescue aircraft.

In an early morning raid Capt. Edward Skowron of Cheshire, Mass., dove his Thunderchief at an enemy truck stalled approximately 40 miles north of Dong Hoi. During his attack, Captain Skowron's plane was crippled by ground fire. He headed for the South China Sea and ejected near the Mui Ron Ma peninsula, landing less than two miles from the beach.

Twenty minutes later an HU-16 scrambled by the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang splashed into the narrow bay beside the downed flyer. Immediately, enemy guns and mortars erupted from the shore line which stretched around three sides of the survivor.

"The first burst of mortars blew geysers into the air 30 to 40 yards from our wingtip," said Albatross pilot, Capt. Duane A. Miller of Seymour, Wis. "We could also hear explosions from the shore which meant they were probably throwing more than mortars at us."

Captain King recalls, "As we taxied up to the pilot, I ran back to the hatch to help get him aboard. That's when our pararescueman, SSgt. William C. Sutton of Goldsboro, N.C. showed the speed. Swimming out to the pilot he tied a rope around him, and we pulled him right in. We could see and hear the ground fire the whole time."

Within two minutes the Albatross leaped into the air and headed for Da Nang. On board, a very grateful Captain Skowron mentioned he thought he might have fractured his ankle in the bail out. Sergeant Sutton applied a splint which relieved the pain.

At Da Nang, the pilot was transferred to an Air Force HH-43 Huskie helicopter and flown to a nearby hospital.

Others in the rescue crew included the flight mechanic, AIC Robert Johnson of Compton, Calif., and radio operator SSgt. Gerald L. Jones of Dallas, Ore.