

'Hit, Heading West...' Starts Rescue in North

SAS Vietnam Bureau

SAIGON—A Thailand based Air Force pilot was rescued from Communist territory Friday after his plane was shot down over North Vietnam.

Another plane was hit at the same time but managed to limp back to 1st base.

The pilot—Maj. Paul R. Craw, 36, of Wichita, Kan.—was flying his 120th mission over the north when his F-405 Thunderchief was hit.

"I'm hit and heading west,"

Craw radioed. Then the signal went dead.

Another pilot, Capt. Thomas P. Hitchcock of East Hampton, Va., saw Craw's landing gear drop off and smoke pour from the plane but did not know if Craw bailed out.

As the plane crashed, Hitchcock heard a garbled message over the radio. It was from Craw: "... I think I broke my leg and I can't move. ..."

Hitchcock circled over his downed companion until his

plane started to drop. It, too, had been hit by fire. Hitchcock radioed for help and was escorted back to Takli AB, Thailand.

Other Thunderchiefs and A-1E Skyraiders flew over Craw's hiding place on a hillside, keeping North Vietnamese searchers away from the American pilot.

Within 20 minutes a Jolly Green Giant rescue chopper dropped a line and picked up the wounded pilot.

It was the 33rd rescue for the

helicopter crew, from Detachment, 2, 37th Air Rescue and Recovery Sq. Craw's plane was the 505th U.S. aircraft downed over North Vietnam.

U.S. pilots flew 103 missions over the north against enemy sites in the panhandle, east of Haiphong and near Dien Bien Phu.

Air Force pilots flew 31 missions, Navy pilots 66 and Marine fliers six.

Three Army helicopters were hit by ground fire over the

south. Two were downed and three crewman were wounded.

The other chopper was hit by a claymore mine detonated in a tree in Long An Province but was able to fly to Vung Tau.

Planes flew 426 sorties in the republic, including 187 supporting ground forces.

Army helicopters killed 46 Viet Cong during 5,800 sorties. Marine helicopters flew 833 sorties.

B-52s struck twice 18 miles southwest of Hue.