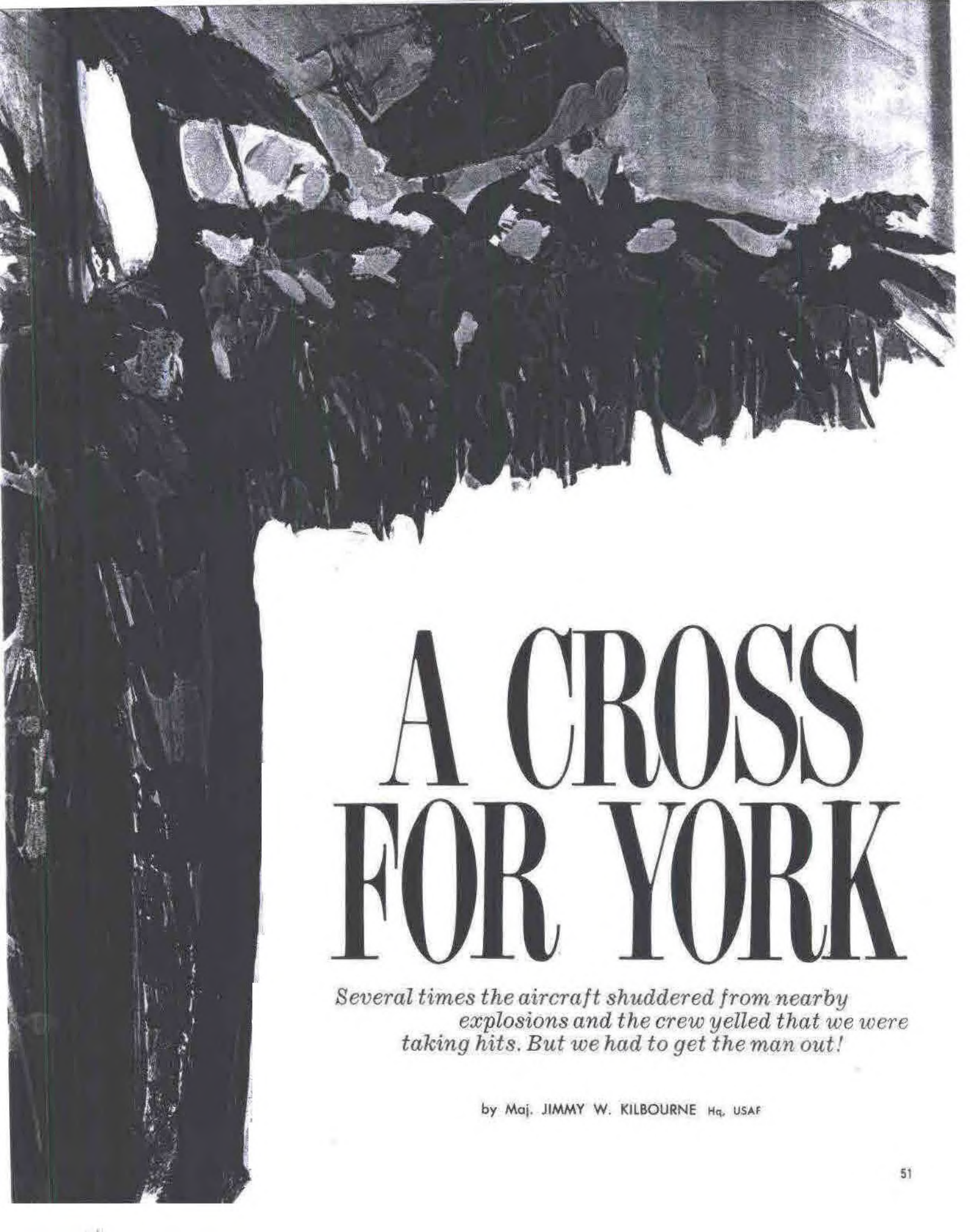




A CROSS FOR YORK

Several times the aircraft shuddered from nearby explosions and the crew yelled that we were taking hits. But we had to get the man out!

by Maj. JIMMY W. KILBOURNE Hq. USAF

THERE was no doubt in Lt. Larry Duthie's mind; this was one helluva place to punch out. But when your airplane is on fire and breaking up, there's just no other way to go—even if you *are* only 30 miles from Hanoi. So the Navy jaygee squeezed the triggers to eject. The last thing he heard before he left his burning jet was his wingman's excited voice trying to contact the rescue people.

"May day! May day!" the voice crackled over the emergency radio frequency. "My flight leader's aircraft is on fire and out of control. He has just bailed out! I'll cover him till rescue arrives!"

The transmissions continued as "Crown," the HC-130P rescue coordinator, plotted the position of the downed aircraft and launched a search and rescue (SAR) effort. The SAR force, four A-1E "Sandys" and two "Jolly Green Giant" rescue helicopters along with Crown, was on alert at forward holding points when the distress call came over the air. Leading the flight of rescue helicopters was Maj. Glen P. York, whose crew immediately plotted a course to the coordinates of the downed pilot.

When they realized exactly where the survivor was located they couldn't believe it. Dubious, Major York had his copilot, 1st Lt. Billy N. Privette, plot the course again. There was no mistake. The downed man was just 30 miles south of Hanoi, North Vietnam! Even to reach the area Major York's Jolly Green Giant and the Sandys would be forced to dodge dozens of heavy antiaircraft artillery batteries, skirt active surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites, and come within range of *Mig* fighters which were airborne at that very time. Nevertheless, the SAR force moved out.

First to go in to search for the downed American pilot were two Sandys, piloted by Maj. Theodore N. Bronczyk (Sandy 1) and Capt. William B. Carr (Sandy 2). Together, they headed for the North Vietnamese border. The two rescue helicopters were escorted by Sandys 3 and 4, flown by Capt. Paul M. Sikorski and the author. The hour-long trip across enemy jungle was hampered by poor radio communications, enemy opposition from the ground, and *Mig* fighters which combed the area.

En route, the force received another emergency message over the radio. "Bandits! Bandits! Sixty miles southwest of Hanoi."

York, Privette and the two chopper crewmen, Sgts. Theodore A. Zerbe, and Randy S. McComb, looked at each other. Sixty miles southwest of Hanoi was exactly where they were! Lieutenant Privette was to recall later that "Major York just shrugged his shoulders and pressed on. The Sandys rechecked all armament switches and stayed with us."

Major Bronczyk and Captain Carr reached the area some 20 to 30 minutes ahead of Major York and learned that the wingman, who remained in the area to cover his fallen leader, had also been shot down by the same enemy gunners. He also bailed out, landing a few miles northeast of his flight leader.

Major Bronczyk assumed control of the rescue effort and began the arduous job of locating the downed pilots. He faced many enemy gunners who were eager to score still another victory against the low, slow-flying rescue aircraft. Silencing them would be a monumental task at best. They had ably demonstrated the capability to shoot down high-performance aircraft by downing two Navy jets that very morning. They had also downed another Navy jet in that area the previous day.

The SAR force was again warned that *Mig* fighters were in the imme-

diate area. As if by design of fate an unidentified delta-wing jet fighter approached from Major Bronczyk's blind side (right rear).

"Sandy One! Bandit at 5 o'clock low!" screamed Captain Carr over the radio. Jettisoning his rockets, bombs, and external fuel tanks, Major Bronczyk took hard evasive action. Although he evaded the attacking Mig which made one pass and left, all that remained on his A-1E were four 20mm cannons. They, too, soon became useless as his aircraft was raked with a withering barrage of ground fire.

BRONCZYK stayed in the area despite his crippled aircraft and continued to direct his wingman and several Navy aircraft against the entrenched gun positions. They were successful in silencing most of the enemy gunners. Meanwhile, Sandys 3 and 4 approached the area with the two Jolly Greens. The choppers held clear while the A-1Es joined the battle.

"Big Mother," a Navy rescue helicopter, was now escorted in for the pickup attempt. A crewman standing in the open door slowly lowered the forest penetrator to the waiting pilot. The downed man destroyed his radio and prepared to mount the penetrator. He was only inches away when suddenly Big Mother pulled up without warning and headed for the coast! The Navy chopper had been hit by a burst of ground fire that critically injured the crewman in the open door. The Big Mother pilot tried desperately to reach the carrier and medical attention for the injured man. He was unsuccessful. The crewman died en route to the carrier.

In the meantime, the A-1Es attacked the new gun positions which had remained silent until the defenseless helicopter became stationary only a hundred feet above the jungle. The gunners had actually ignored the fighter-bombers to concentrate on Big Mother.

Major Bronczyk and Captain Carr, now dangerously low on fuel, were forced to withdraw. The effort was temporarily suspended while forces were regrouped. Captain Sikorski assumed control of the effort and led a renewed strike against the new gun positions. He was tracked and hit by a barrage of ground fire as he made a low pass over the survivor's position.

This renewed effort again silenced advancing enemy replacements, but the situation was still critical. The downed pilot had destroyed his radio in anticipation of being picked up by Big Mother. The rescue team no longer had voice contact with him.

Now Major York, who had been holding over a safe area, was led in for a pickup attempt. He was advised of the situation and replied, "I am under fire and taking hits, but I'll try to make the pickup."

He could have cancelled the effort. He did not. Even though he knew the odds were against him and his crew. He recalls every detail of the crucial portion of the effort conducted under virtually impossible conditions.

"During the dive from 8,000 feet, my crew reported ground fire to me and the aircraft did vibrate several times as if we were hit, but I don't believe we were. A Navy A-1 picked us up in the letdown and led us toward a small hill. When we had the hill picked out, we slowed to 30 knots. The aircraft shuddered from nearby explosions several times and the crew yelled that we were taking hits. I believed them and really thought we were being riddled. We were air-taxiing around the mountain from east to west when Privette yelled, 'There he is!'"



James Ferguson, Commander, Air Force
Command, presents Maj. Glen P. York
citation that accompanies the Air Force Cross
pinned on his blouse.

"If there was any miracle involved, it was the fact that Lieutenant Privette saw the pilot waving his arms, imbedded as he was in that thick jungle growth. He was in a camouflaged flight suit, used no flares, and gave us no signal of any kind. I did a 180-degree turn and taxied toward the east which put me next to the mountain (pilots sit on the right in helicopters) and Privette next to the enemy. When I saw that man down through all those trees it really amazed me that we had located him without flares.

"I can see the expression on his face as vividly today as when it happened and let me assure you that Lt. (j.g.) Larry Duthie was showing some concern. When I spotted him I kept my eyes glued to him and moved the helicopter forward and to the right into a hover as I continued to look down. I held the machine as close to the tops of the trees as I could and it took a lot of cable to reach him. All the time there was a lot of chatter on the radios and the crew kept telling me about how bad it was but I was concentrating on holding that HH-3 in one spot.

"When he started coming up the hoist, I looked around a bit and found I had severed the top of a small tree. When Sergeant Zerbe said the survivor was clear of the trees, I started moving out and as soon as he was aboard I came in with full collective pitch and put it right back down on the treetops until we had a couple of hills between us and the pop guns."

YORK had scarcely cleared the area when he received another call from Crown, requesting that he attempt to pick up the second Navy pilot. Captain Sikorski was now dangerously low on fuel and with unknown battle damage, was forced to leave. However, Major York advised Crown that he had 30 minutes' fuel remaining and would attempt the second pickup.

The two Sandys departed the area as Major York and his crew joined the Navy aircraft and headed north. The second pilot was much closer to Hanoi—in an even more hostile area. The rescue force was again subjected to intense ground fire and was eventually driven off by the enemy. Reluctantly, Major York limped off with one survivor aboard his Jolly Green Giant.

They picked their way back across hostile jungle to a forward base and again faced seemingly insurmountable odds. The weather had moved in and York was forced to make an instrument approach in the mountains by "homing in" on another aircraft.

As Lieutenant Privette recalled, "We didn't make a victory pass—a swing across the field at low altitude to indicate success—when we broke out. In fact, we landed straight in with two low-fuel warning lights staring at us and a nose gear that wouldn't extend."

The rescued Navy pilot, Lt. (j.g.) Larry Duthie, during debriefing, stated, "the enemy was within 50 feet of me when I mounted the forest penetrator. They withheld their fire until the rescue aircraft came into view directly overhead. Needless to say I was prepared for the long hike to Hanoi before Major York came in for the pickup."

The effort was truly remarkable. The commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet and commander in chief of the Pacific Air Forces, along with the commander of the Seventh Air Force in Vietnam, personally congratulated the rescue personnel for their "bravery, courage, and professionalism." Major York received the Air Force Cross. His crew and the four Sandy pilots received the Silver Star.

