

VIETNAM'S A Shau Valley seems to be the place where heroes are made. Maj. Bernard Fisher won a Medal of Honor there. And only a few miles from where he flew his A-1E in for an impossible rescue, Maj. Joe B. Green flirted with death while winning the Air Force's second most distinguished award for heroism—the Air Force Cross.

Joe Green grew up in an area known for distinguished sons who served their nation well. Eden, Tex., calls Gen. Ira C. Eaker, former Air Corps chief of staff, a native son. The garden community also claims Col. Wilbur J. "Red" Grumbles, the World War II fighter pilot who insisted on a second combat tour in the Pacific after being liberated from a Nazi stalag.

Maj. Gen. Earl Rudder, the ex-Ranger who led the attack on Omaha Beach to launch the D-Day offensive on June 6, 1944, calls Eden home. He's now president of Texas A&M. Adm. Chester W. Nimitz lived "just a piece down the road," as Lt. Gen. Hewitt T. Wheless, the former Air Force assistant vice chief of staff still does.

On March 30, 1968, Joe B. Green—who incidentally had been bounced on Eaker's knee as a boy—had no idea that he would be the next Eden native son to be called a hero.

March had been a busy month for Joe Green and his battle-seasoned crew. They had rescued eight aircrew members that month while flying with the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang Air Base.

A March 14 rescue of four Marines from a downed UH-1B near Hue had been particularly hairy. Ground fire was so intense at the scene that even the wounded survivors were instructed to break out the helicopter windows and fire all available weapons during the takeoff.

On March 18 Green and his crew rescued an Air Force F-100 pilot who had been downed over Mu Gia Pass, North Vietnam. Ironically, the survivor, Air Force Capt. Brian Williams, had flown with Green when they were assigned to Cannon AFB, N. Mex.

Three others had been picked up during March, and on this eventful day their HH-3E "Jolly Green" would make an even dozen aircrew members rescued for the month.

Their bird was on the alert when the call for help came. Some Marine helicopter troops were in deep trouble. The 6-foot Texan led a flight of four Jolly Greens from Da Nang to the Marine command post at Hue where a Marine colonel painted a dismal picture in the briefing.

The previous afternoon a Marine chopper had been shot down in a finger of the A Shau Valley, only four miles from where Fisher had made his rescue. A second Marine helicopter took too much lead in a rescue attempt and crashed. Two more crashed over the site in quick succession. Four birds were down. During the night eight survivors of the crashes had crawled, walked, run and slashed their way through the jungle, fighting North Vietnamese Regulars all the way. Some were wounded.

Not only was the picture grim on the ground, but the weather was abominable. A low ceiling hung over the valley floor, obscuring most of the mountain peaks. Therefore, there would be *no* suppressing fire from A-1Es. The crash site was ringed with hills from which many enemy guns were firing. The low ceiling would make it necessary to fly below some of the peaks and across the heavily fortified roads at low altitude. It was impossible to completely eliminate the heavy ground fire, and there were no friendly ground troops in the area to assist in the rescue.

"The Marine colonel asked for volunteers to look the situation over," said Green, "and we elected to give it a go." The four Jolly Greens headed for the survivors, accompanied by two armed Army *Cobras*.

To add to the misery of an already desperate situation, two more Marine *Huey* gunships were shot down while strafing the area, only 15 minutes be-

An always thorough Joe Green sits in the pilot's seat of his "Jolly Green" at Da Nang AB.



fore Green's flight went in. Survivors, some critically wounded, had managed to join the others. Six choppers were down, and ground fire was being directed at the now 14 survivors from all four quadrants.

THE flight held about five miles from the survivors in a "safe" area while the two Army *Cobras* in Green's flight went in to look things over and soften enemy resistance. While hovering in the "safe" area, the Number 2 bird in Green's flight took a lot of heavy fire from the ground and limped back to Hue to check the damage.

In radio contact with the survivors on the ground, Green flew in from east to west on his first approach. As they approached the small clearing, all hell broke loose. Ground fire was coming from everywhere. The survivors waved them off. According to Green, that was the "real heroism of the day. Some of them were literally bleeding to death," he said.

But the pass had given them a better picture of the situation. The survivors were congregated around a couple of shell holes on the side of a hill. The seriously wounded were down in one hole. Those who could fight had formed a defensive perimeter. A couple of yellow panels helped Green spot them. Trees ringed the site, many 100 to 150 feet high. It would be a tough go if they came back.

As they flew over the survivors, Green ducked in and out of the soup, giving the enemy a bobbing, weaving target. But for the men on the ground, the situation looked hopeless.

After getting out of the enemy's reach, the crew was aware of what they would face if they went back—if they did go back. No one would have blamed them if they had hightailed it for home right then.

Green looked at his crew for their decision. Capt. Frank Cardile was copilot, Sgt. Donald J. Bouchelle, pararescueman, and TSgt. Robert Q. Rector, flight engineer. They gave their silent answer. Thumbs up.

The Army *Cobras* and the Marine command post were notified. The *Cobras* pressed the attack and Green made his second approach from the southwest, ducking in and out of the thick soup and dropping over a hill on a fast approach to the hover.

They swung over the site, and again heavy fire came from all directions. The enemy was below them at the base of the hill and above them on the hillside too. But, "Those Army boys (in the armed *Cobras*) did a great job," says Green. "They could see the bad guys and were laying it on them."

The small arms and machinegun fire decreased. But it was not silenced by the pounding from the *Cobras*. Green and his crew sat vulnerable, 150 feet above the ground, barely above tree level. Captain Cardile helped direct the *Cobra* fire from his left seat. A Marine FAC also helped spotting the enemy guns but the low ceiling limited his light aircraft.

As the chopper took small arms fire, Sergeant Rector dropped the hoist with the two-man jungle penetrator. All the while the Army gunships continued to spray the enemy with machineguns and grenade launchers.

"The grenade launchers were noisy," says Green. "I didn't know but what we were blowing up."

One of the Army pilots then spotted a serious threat to the rescue bird, roosting at tree-top level. The North Vietnamese were starting to launch B-40 rockets, anti-tank weapons much like a bazooka.

"I was sitting in the right seat when the rocket came over my right shoulder from about 4 o'clock," said Green. "I assume it was a B-40 since a phosphorus trail appeared momentarily just outside the cockpit. It was probably fired from about 200 yards out and I guess it passed right through the rotor blades."

Suppressing fire continued. Sergeant Bouchelle worked one of the two M-60 machineguns on the Jolly Green, laying down a hail of lead on the enemy.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Rector got the two most seriously wounded sur-

vivors, aboard as the ground fire continued to abate. The hoist dropped again, and two more were pulled aboard.

By then the Jolly Green had been hurt, and the *Cobras* had expended their ammo. Green manhandled the chopper since he anticipated the loss of his "power assist" to the controls. "Warning lights were on everywhere," says Green, "and we were just about out of fuel."

The drama was not over in the Jolly Green as they pulled away from the site, unable to take other survivors aboard. One Marine's leg was hanging by a thread. He was bleeding profusely. Sergeant Bouchelle quickly put his medical training as a pararescue man to work.

"That guy was really a mess," says Green, "but by the time we got to Hue, he looked as if he'd just come from the emergency room at a hospital. Bouchelle had stopped the bleeding and sewn his leg together. The guy was in pretty decent shape when we landed."

And landing was another problem. The nose gear wouldn't extend. Green called this "no problem." But care had to be taken as they sat down—otherwise they could have chopped off the tail of the helicopter.

But the landing proved to be uneventful, and the wounded were quickly removed from the helicopter.

Back at the rescue site things took a turn for the better, though the situation was still critical. The ceiling lifted enough for A-1Es to pound the enemy surrounding the remaining 10. Helicopters Numbers 3 and 4 in Green's flight completed the pickup, still under heavy fire. His Number 2, after inspecting battle damage also returned to the fray, but his services weren't required.

A Shau Valley made another hero that March 30th. Joe Green finished his 12 months at Da Nang with a tally of 22 rescues—16 aircrew members and six soldiers.

Back in Eden, Tex., when the oldtimers gather around the park bench, they talk about the town's heroes—Ira Eaker, Red Grumbles, Earl Rudder ... and Air Force Cross winner Joe Green.



General George S. Brown, 7th Air Force commander, pins the Air Force Cross on Major Joe B. Green.