

8 Fliers Hoisted From Red Nest

DA NANG, Vietnam (UPI)-Eight American airmen downed 19 hours in the midst of a Viet Cong stronghold were rescued Sunday in a dramatic, two-hour mission with U.S. planes firing on Communists within 10 yards of their position.

The Americans were aboard two Army "Huey" helicopters shot down Saturday in the "Happy Valley," about 20 miles south-southwest of Da Nang.

Both choppers went down several miles from the point where they were hit, and the four-man crew of the aircraft were not located until the following day. None of the crewmen was hurt.

Two Air Force A1E Skyraiders were first to reach the area. Piloted by Capt. Tommy Stroud, 26, of Waco, Tex., and Capt. Lyn Oberdier, 30, Toledo, Ohio, the planes began firing on Viet Cong positions.

A "Jolly Green Giant" rescue helicopter arrived within a short time. "He started drawing ground fire and he had to pull out while we worked the area over again," Stroud said.

The helicopter returned about 10 minutes later, but again was unable to take a hovering position because of heavy Communist fire. Then it had to return to Da Nang for refueling.

Army helicopter gunships soon arrived. "They sterilized the area," Stroud said. "Sometimes the strafing fire got to within 10 yards of the downed men."

The helicopter gunships and the Skyraiders continued their bombing and strafing passes for 45 minutes, until two more Jolly Green Giants arrived and hovered over the downed men.

The choppers were 50 feet above the treetops. They lowered hoist lines to the ground. Two men at a time were pulled on each line. Each rescue craft took up four men.

Stroud said the two enlisted crewmen of each downed

chopper were sent up first. The pilots and copilots were last up.

The downed airmen were not immediately identified.

One of the downed fliers said later that he saw only 15 Viet Cong in the area but Stroud said the pilots above saw at least twice that number.

2/20th ARA Crews Rescued by Jolly Greens Story by Chuck Germeck

(Blue Max 27a Btry 2/20 ARA, 1st Cav 67-68)



On 19 April 1968 the 1st Cavalry Division's air assault into the A Shau Valley began. Our hog gun team from A Battery 2/20th ARA, was called upon to support a troop insertion by the 227th AHB into the valley. Capt. Mills was A/C of the lead ship with Lt. Hawks as his pilot. I was A/C of the wing ship, and W.O. Raymond was my pilot.

The insertion was into a one ship LZ on a mountain ridge in the northern end of the valley. After reviewing the after action report of the A Shau Valley by the 227th AHB, I believe this was the five slick, 2 gun insertion into "Signal Hill".

Our team took off from LZ Sharon at Quang Tri, climbed to 5000 to 6000 feet to get over the clouds and flew west toward the valley. When we reached the A Shau, we descended through holes in the clouds and married up with the assault team and C&C ship.

The mountain had been prepped pretty well by the Air Force, and we were not called upon to prep the LZ with our 2.75" rockets. The top of the mountain was pot marked with craters from the air strikes and the remnants of some trees surrounded the LZ. As I recall the insertion was a very difficult one for the slicks. The decent angle was steep and the remaining trees made it impossible to land. At least one slick lost control and crashed into the LZ, rolling down the slope before it was stopped by some trees. As I recall another slick crashed into the LZ, but without having kept a diary of my tour, I may be wrong trying to think back 30 years.

When the slicks completed the insertion into the LZ they left with their gun support. Our team was asked to stay on station with the C&C to provide fire support if needed. Eventually, the C&C left to refuel, while we stayed on station waiting for his return with another ARA team.

Soon after his departure the holes in the clouds started to close cutting off entry into the valley. Of course, it also meant our way

out was cut off. Our only recourse was to attempt to fly out low level through the side valleys.

As I recall we searched the eastern side of the valley for a passageway. We took some fire as we searched for a way out, but none seriously disabled our aircraft. After what seemed an eternity of searching for a way out it became apparent that it was futile. We had flown off our maps and weren't exactly sure where we were. To make matters worse we were running low on fuel.

Eventually, we had to put our ships down. I landed first near a small stream. As I landed Capt. Mills saw a VC running away so we knew they were in the area, and they knew we were there. About five minutes later Capt. Mills landed his ship next to mine.

It was obvious that staying near the aircraft would be out of the question since the VC saw us land. We decided to pull what ordinance we could from the aircraft and search for a place to hide.

We hadn't fired any rockets so each aircraft still had its full load of 48 rockets. We couldn't do much with the rockets, but we removed all the hand held weapons. We were pretty heavily armed with four M60 machine guns, one 40mm grenade launcher, an M1 carbine, a 12-gauge shotgun, two M16 rifles and each member's side arm. Plus, Capt. Mills and myself had the emergency radios from our aircraft. We left our helmets and some personal articles behind, like my 35 mm camera.

The hill next to where we landed had a bluff that faced the aircraft. We climbed the hill and positioned ourselves at the top of the bluff in a heavily thicketed area for the evening.

I don't know if all of us were able to sleep, but I managed some. I'll never forget awaking early in the morning as we heard the

noises of the VC as they approached the aircraft. Just before dawn they hit the aircraft and we had a bird's eye view.

As they fired rounds at the aircraft some of the ships rockets were launched. Luckily they impacted into the side of the cliff below us. One of our guys had his camera and he stayed busy taking pictures of the VC attack. After the VC determined that we were not with the aircraft they put our helmets on, got into the seats and played pilot.

Since the VC didn't find us with the aircraft they started to search for us. We decided to leave our position so we could get to the top of the hill. Capt. Mills and myself alternated broadcasting May Day calls on our emergency radios.

Just as we were nearing the top of the hill I heard a response to one of my broadcasts. It was an Air Force C130 who was flying figure eight patterns from Da Nang to the DMZ. We later learned that his mission was to locate downed jet pilots. The ceiling was low and we couldn't see the C130, but he homed in on our signal and called in a team of A-1E Skyraiders for support.

As we waited for them to come on station we saw groups of VC encircling the hill searching for us. When the A-1Es arrived we directed their fire at the VC positions and started searching for an area where the Jolly Greens could get to us.

When the Jolly Greens came on station they help direct us to a small clearing just down from the top of the hill. As the first Jolly Green came in I heard heavy fire from the VC positions and he had to pull out. As I recall he made repeated attempts to hover over us, but at some point had to leave station.

The A-1E's came in for more runs against the VC positions. Then gunships from HHB and A Btry of the 2/20th ARA arrived.

They hit the areas around us pretty hard as we directed them to VC positions using our emergency radios.

Another flight of Jolly Greens arrived on station and they came in to pick us up as the gunships provided cover. My crew was the first to be pulled up the hoist. They took two of us at a time, my crew chief and gunner first, and then myself and W.O. Raymond. The second Jolly Green came in and pulled out Capt. Mill's crew.

As the Jolly Greens circled the area, I saw Air Force jets hit the hill with napalm. One of the ARA gunships hit our aircraft. The Jolly Greens flew us to Da Nang.

We were treated to a fine steak dinner, with ice cream for desert. Not bad for us 1st Cav guys who were used to eating C rations for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

We learned that we had landed in the Happy Valley area due east of Da Nang.

After the customary handshakes and thank you's, aircraft from 2/20th flew us back to LZ Sharon at Quang Tri. We arrived just in time to attend our own memorial service.