

Dense Jungle

Jolly Greens Pluck Pilot from

BY TSGT. JERRY N. ODOM
DA NANG — An Air Force pilot, serving with the 136th Fighter Squadron, Tuy Hoa AB, was recently plucked from dense jungle and undergrowth in the A Shau Valley by a crew from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang AB.

First Lt. Michael J. Laskowski, Buffalo, N.Y., was on his 32nd mission when his F-100 Supersabre was damaged by enemy ground fire, forcing him to eject from the stricken aircraft.

"I was on a close air support mission hitting supply-type enemy bunkers. We had dropped our ordnance and went in for a strafing, and on the last pass I evidently turned the wrong way because they must have known where I was going. I heard a loud thump and that was it," related Lieutenant Laskowski.

After the pilot bailed out, he was spotted by an Air Force forward air controller (FAC), and an Army Huey helicopter immediately located Lieutenant Laskowski's position on the ground. However, the Army chopper was not equipped to pull the pilot out because of the 100- to 150-foot trees in the area.

"We got the call after we'd

dumped some fuel and went back after the downed pilot. The flight engineer spotted him and did a great job of guiding me right over the spot and holding me there. He's the guy who did all the work," said Major Dander.

The flight engineer, SSgt.

Jimmy L. Dodgen, Fairfield, Calif., on his last mission before returning to the United States, gave this account: "He (the downed pilot) was in a dense wooded area on a hillside. The jungle canopy must have been nearly 200 feet thick.

"As we came into the gener-

al area the FACs had already marked with smoke bombs, I looked for an opening in the canopy to drop the tree penetrator. The pilot never did fire a smoke bomb, but kept us constantly informed with his radio," he said.

An HC-130 Crown (command and control) aircraft, commanded by Capt. George E. Eldridge, Des Moines, Iowa, stayed over the rescue scene directing the efforts of the Jolly Green and the A-1 Skyraider aircraft flying cover during the pickup.

Sergeant Dodgen, on his fifth rescue, lowered 250 feet of cable into an opening in the jungle while the pilot was radioing his position. "I calculated that we placed the penetrator only 20 feet from him,"

"I wasn't worried too much about the Jolly Greens finding me, but about somebody else finding me. I was in the A Shau Valley at the time I got hit, about 46 miles from Da Nang. I managed to get about 15 miles away before I had to jump. This was the first time I ever had to bail out, and my first ride in a chopper—that is, one that really counted," concluded Lieutenant Laskowski.

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"...we got the can after we were taken off from Quang Tri," said Maj. Vernon A. Dander, Pacific Grove, Calif., rescue crew commander. "After we reached the area, we saw that the FAC had spotted the chute and located the pilot's approximate position. But we couldn't see him because there were too many trees."

"When we spotted the exact location, we realized we had too much weight, so we

he said. "A couple of seconds after he told us that he saw the penetrator fall into the forest, I could see him below putting it on. He put it on without any difficulty, and we hoisted him right on up."

"After I got hit and lost flight control," said Lieutenant Laskowski, "I headed the bird out toward the sea. Even though I lost control, I managed to get the thing in a fire light. I pulled the throttle back and finally jumped out. On the way down I had a good shot and steered toward what looked like a pretty dense area of woods and away from what looked like a path."

"Then when I went through the trees and got out of my chute, I got down on the ground and hid for a while. Finally, I got on the radio and found out that the Jolly Greens (HH-3 Huskie helicopters) were only 20 minutes away. But that seemed like an eternity."