

Combined AF, Navy Effort Saves Downed Pilots

DA NANG — Two crew members of an RF-4 photo reconnaissance aircraft downed by enemy anti-aircraft artillery fire over North Vietnam recently have been rescued from the Gulf of Tonkin by a combined Air Force and Navy Rescue Task Force.

Rescued were Maj. Robert I. McCann, Dedham, Mass., and his copilot. Both ejected from their aircraft over the Gulf of Tonkin, landing just a few miles from the shore near Dong Hoi.

Major McCann was not injured, officials said, and has returned to his unit. The other crewman is recuperating from injuries on the Navy Hospital Ship Repose.

"We were hit by anti-aircraft artillery fire but I was able to control the bird well enough to get it out over the Gulf, where we ejected. My backseater landed about a mile and a half from the shore and I landed about six miles out," related the major.

"The rescue went real well as far as I am concerned. I hit the water and got my radio out and made contact with our fighter escort. I had no problem; the fighter cover was overhead all the time, so I just waited until the Jolly Green came and made the pickup. It was beautiful," he said.

Col. Nick Farrell, Goldsboro, S.C. is the vice commander of the reconnaissance aircraft's unit, and flew one of the escort aircraft.

Colonel Farrell said, "The co-operation of the Air Force-Navy and the two downed pilots made this rescue one of the smoothest I have seen. The complete effort

went off as well as you could possibly imagine."

Once the call went out for the air rescue operation, Air Force Jolly Green helicopters, Air Force fighter aircraft, and the Navy's SH-3 "Big Mother" helicopter, the U.S. Guided Missile Frigate Sterett, and aircraft from the Carrier Ranger were in the area.

An HC-130P "Crown" from the 39th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron (MAC) coordinated the ground control intercept unit and other segments of the task force.

Capt. George B. Stokes, Houston copilot of the Jolly Green which picked up Major McCann, termed the rescue "just a normal operation."

"We scrambled from our pad and were in the area about 45 minutes after take off. We flew at maximum speed and minimum altitude," he said.

"What made it so easy was the fact that the task force was

in place over the pilots and all we had to do was make our water landing and pick up McCann," Captain Stokes concluded.

Pararescueman SSgt. Allen J. Avery, Auburn, Mass., added, "Captain Oliver (pilot Capt. John D. Oliver, Marietta, Ohio) really made the job easy for me. He put the aircraft right on target so all Severns (TSgt. Charles D. Severns, San Diego, flight engineer) and I had to do was grab the pilot's hand and pull him aboard.

"He told me it was going to be a water pick up so I put on my scuba gear and went off headset to get ready to jump in, but he did such a beautiful job I didn't even get my feet wet," sergeant Avery said.

"Once we got him squared around in the aircraft, I asked him where he was from and he said Dedham, a suburb of Boston—just 15 miles from my home. I never thought I would ever rescue a fellow Bostonian," he said.

Sergeant Avery, in South Vietnam since September, added, "We talked about sports teams from our two schools and just had a good—but brief—hometown visit."

The Air Force and Navy air rescue task force consisted of: two Jolly Greens from the 37th Air Rescue Recovery Squadron (MAC), Da Nang AB; F-100s from the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, Tuy Hoa AB; an HC-130P "Crown" from the 39th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron (MAC), Tuy Hoa AB; the F-4 Phantom escort aircraft and F-105 Thunderchiefs.

Navy's force included: an SH-3 "Big Mother" helicopter from the USS Hornet, anti-submarine warfare carrier; A-4 Corsairs and A-4 Skyhawks from the Carrier Ranger; the USS Sterett, guided missile frigate, and an E-1B from Early Warning Squadron 121 from the Carrier Intrepid.



AF, Navy Effort Saves Pilot

Maj. Robert I. McCann is helped from the Jolly Green Giant helicopter 'Lucky Linda'. Assisting him is pararescueman SSgt. Allen S. Avery (in helicopter) and Col. John S. Devlin Jr. A combined Air Force and Navy rescue team recently saved Major McCann and his copilot when they were forced to eject over the Gulf of Tonkin.

(Photo by TSgt. Ed Brinton)

DEC 9, 1968 CSAR