

'Jolly Greens' Supply First Step for Med Evacuations

By TSgt. Marv Matter

DA NANG—The versatile HH-3E "Jolly Green Giant" is used for flying missions that mean life or death to many in Southeast Asia. But another assignment has been handed to the rescue helicopter as it travels to hospitals throughout Da Nang bringing patients to one of the Air Force's major casualty staging areas.

"Jolly Greens" from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang AB fly daily to the 95th U.S. Army Field Hospital to pick up wounded soldiers prepared for evacuation to major Far East and U.S. hospitals. The helicopter trip to the 22nd Casualty Staging Flight is the soldier's first step on his way out of Vietnam.

"Each morning the people at the 95th call us and give us the number of individuals who are ready to make the short trip to the local casualty staging flight," related Maj. Russell G. Mills, Reno, Nev., a veteran rescue pilot. "Using their figures, we schedule the number of missions we will have to fly to transport the patients.

"We carry a maximum of 10 patients each mission. In addition to the four-man crew, the medical evacuation choppers carry two medical technicians on flights."

The medics take care of the patients during loading, while flying, and off-load the injured once the "bird" sets down at the air base. "It is a real help in moving the patients from our facility to the staging area," declared Army SFC Joseph Satagaj, assigned to the 67th Medical Group Headquarters. "Before we started using the 'Jolly Green Giants' from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, the patients had to be transported by bus. It was a slow and drawn out ride over the bumpy roads. This is a much better way."

The sergeant, a veteran of three wars, is an old hand at using helicopters to evacuate wounded.

"I instructed Army specialists in the use of helicopters for evacuation before I came to this assignment while at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. Using the choppers takes a lot of strain off the patient in making the trip," commented Sergeant Statagat.

For the pilots and the crewmembers, the short-haul medical evacuation flights are "milk runs."

"There is no comparison between the medical evacuation flight and the rescue mission," noted Major Mills. "The rescue mission is always unscheduled and filled with many unknown elements. Until you get to the site, you don't really know the type of environment or whether there will be enemy ground fire. Naturally with these unknown elements, the rescue mission is much more hazardous flying."

"Jolly Greens" from the 37th ARRS have rescued more than 450 people in the Vietnam war. Most of the rescues have been pilots downed in hostile territory.

HH-43 "Pedros" along with HH-3E and HH-53 "Jolly Green Giants" of the 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group have rescued more than 2,400 persons in SEA and have evacuated thousands of patients.

But the medical evacuation flights, although not as dangerous as rescue missions, provide a vital first step to recovery for the wounded men of I Corps.



Mercy Mission

Army corpsmen load patients from the 95th Field Hospital in a waiting Air Force HH-3E "Jolly Green" helicopter belonging to the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang AB for a short ride to the 22nd Casualty Staging Flight.

(Photo by Sgt. Will Callen)