

Kwang Ju Rescue Saves 18 Lives

KWANG JU AB—Seven Korean soldiers and 11 civilians won't soon forget the air rescue personnel at this base. Their life will be a constant reminder to them of the day they stared death in the face and were plucked from its grasp by four Americans.

The Americans, Maj. William F. Cunningham Jr., Maj. Wayne L. Ritter, TSgt. Larry K. Henderson, and SSgt. Kelsey R. Adams, are assigned to Det. 10, 41st Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing here.

The day the men were called into action was by no means an ideal one for rescue operations. Heavy rain pelted the base and a shroud of fog forced closing of the air field. Such a day is normally a paperwork day for a helicopter unit.

But at 8:30 a.m., the paperwork was shoved aside when the rescue unit received a call from Lt. Col. Hesun S. John, safety officer for the Republic of Korea's 1st Fighter Wing here.

Colonel John informed the rescue alert crew that seven Korean Army Corps of Engineers troops were stranded on the top of a diesel shovel in the middle of the Hwang Yong River and that the river was rising rapidly. The normally placid, sand-bar ridden river had been swollen by more than three inches of rain and had turned into a raging torrent.

Despite the adverse weather conditions the rescuemen were off in a matter of minutes with Colonel John along as guide and interpreter.

Minutes later, Major Cunningham, 33, of Columbus, Ohio, was hovering his HH-43B Huskie helicopter over the nearly-submerged piece of equipment. He positioned the helicopter, with the assistance of his co-pilot, Major Ritter, 38, of Monteno, Ill., about 15 feet above the men.

Sergeant Adams, 24, of Detroit, Mich., a pararescueman, was lowered to the roof of the diesel cab where he assisted the Korean soldiers in putting on the rescue hoist. One by one they were raised and helped into the chopper by Sergeant Henderson, 38, of Tampa, Fla., the flight mechanic.

Four men were taken to safety first and then the other three along with Sergeant Adams.

After talking with the soldiers, Colonel John learned that the

1969 Pedro SAR Kwang Ju AB Korea



RESCUED 18 PEOPLE—A rescue crew of Det. 10, 41st Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing at Kwang Ju AB, was responsible early this month for the rescue of 18 Koreans from the flooding Hwang Yong River near the base. Crew members were, from left, TSgt. Larry K. Henderson, SSgt. Kelsey R. Adams, Lt. Col. Hesun S. John, Maj. Wayne L. Ritter and Maj. William F. Cunningham Jr. Colonel John is safety officer for the Republic of Korea Air Force's 1st Fighter Wing at Kwang Ju. (U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY SGT. LINUS ORMSBY)

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men were taking fill from the river when they suddenly discovered a "wall of water" gushing toward them. They sought refuge on the top of the piece of equipment and spent nearly four and a half hours there watching the water inch its way toward them.

The diesel was eventually completely covered. The depth of the river was estimated to have arisen 10 feet.

Called Out Again

Upon returning to the base, rescue personnel noticed that one of the helicopter blades had been damaged. As is the practice, immediate repairs were made in the event another rescue mission should be called. And it wasn't long before one was called.

At 1 p.m. Colonel John called again. This time 11 Korean civilian workers were trapped on a

sandbar which was rapidly becoming smaller as raging waters deluged it.

The scene was only two miles downstream from the morning's incident. As the rescue men appeared over the area it appeared to them that the civilians were attempting to construct a makeshift raft and fighting the erosion of their tiny island with shovels, throwing dirt into rapidly disappearing edges of the sandbar.

The helicopter was positioned about one foot above the area with the right wheels over the island, the left ones over the water. This allowed an open area on the sandbar for rescue operations. Again, Sergeants Adams and Henderson guided the men into the chopper, using the sandbar as a step. Two trips were required to ferry the men to safety.

Referring to the rescue mission, Colonel John said that all 18 men could very well have been lost in the swift waters had not help arrived in time.