

—15 hours on ground—

Rescue crews pluck 2 from North

DA NANG — After 15 hours on the ground in North Vietnam, two F-4 Phantom pilots were picked up by rescue crews of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron and returned safely to the Republic.

Majors Robert D. Priest and Robert L. Cubberly were forced to eject from their Phantom when it was hit by an enemy surface-to-air missile near Dong Hoi, north of the Demilitarized Zone.

The two men had successfully evaded an earlier SAM missile during their escort mission for reconnaissance aircraft, but a second SAM exploded near them causing many of their aircraft's systems to malfunction. Shortly thereafter the plane burst into flames.

"Everything happened so fast it was hard to tell exactly what was going on," recalled Major Priest. "We felt the concussion from the SAM blast

and the warning lights came on all over the instrument panel. The aircraft jerked up and we ejected."

"I landed in a tall tree and got hung up there," said Major Cubberly. "I could hear enemy troops on the ground below me. One of them was blowing a shrill whistle and the troops rejoined him down the hill and came back up again in two columns.

All this time the weight of the parachute was causing tree branches to crack. "I thought the cracking noise might alert the troops below me, but they apparently didn't even notice me," the major continued.

As poor weather and darkness crept over the area, the pilots prepared to spend the night where they were.

"I cut down some palm leaves and made a shelter to hide in and protect me from the rain, which was pouring down by this time," related Major Priest. "But I still got soaked that night.

"Things really started happening fast the next morning. As soon as it got light, we could see A-1 Skyraiders in the area.

"About 45 minutes later we saw the Jolly Green coming in," recalled Major Priest. "Before long they had picked me up and I was in the bird."

The rescue helicopter then went in and, within five minutes, had Major Cubberly picked up.

Maj. Donald L. Jensen, Jolly Green pilot, and Capt. Glen W. Walder, co-pilot, agreed that "this was a classic SAR mission."

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