

Downed Navy Pilot Pulled Out of Laos

DA NANG (Special) — A U.S. Navy pilot was hauled out of dense Laotian jungle Sunday after spending 15 hours on the ground.

Lt. Richard E. Forman Jr., 28, flying from the USS Ranger, was shot down late Saturday about 20 miles into Laos. He was picked up by a crew from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Sq.

"I was making my third and final pass over the strike target when I was hit by the enemy fire. The aircraft burst into flames and went into uncontrolled flight, so I ejected," Forman said.

Forman described the area where he was shot down as having "rolling hills with a road winding through them. I landed in a pretty heavily vegetated area, so it was easy to find cover."

Although he did not see any enemy troops in the area, the lieutenant received ground fire while parachuting down. He also said he could hear vehicle traffic on the road some distance away.

"Early in the morning I got quite a scare when I heard some noises in the bushes around me. At first, I thought the enemy was out looking for me. It really startled me when I found out it was just a bunch of wild turkeys," he said.

An Air Force forward air controller (FAC) from the 20th Tactical Air Support Sq., 1st Lt. Richard K. Ottem, 25, was directing the Navy pilot when he was hit. "The bullets ripped all along the belly of the aircraft," Ottem said, "but I saw a good chute and was able to make radio contact with the pilot after he had landed and found out he was all right."

Although he was low on fuel, the FAC stayed over the downed pilot until another aircraft came

in to relieve him. FACs maintained a constant vigil over the area throughout the night.

Early the next morning Ottem returned to the area to resume the search and rescue effort. "I saw the chute go down and knew right where the man was, so I wanted to be there to help in the rescue effort," he said. "It was a great relief when I heard that he had been picked up."

"Surprisingly, the night seemed to go by pretty rapidly," Forman said. "The first thing in the morning I saw the FACs accompanied by A1 Skyraiders in the area. The A1s really saturated the area with their bombs."

After the area had been saturated by the Skyraiders and jet fighter-bombers, an HH53 Super Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopter piloted by Capt. Glen W. Walder, 34, went in to make the pickup.

