

F-4 Phantom pilot wet but not for very long

By Sgt. John R. Sullivan Jr.

DA NANG AFLD — "It looked mighty good!" is the way Maj. Jerome D. Siderius described the HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter that picked him out of the water after he ejected from his F-4 Phantom near Hue recently.

The Phantom had received anti-aircraft fire while it was flying a mission. The damage caused the aircraft to explode and burn while returning to Da Nang, and the two-man crew ejected.

The other crew member has been listed as missing in action. His name is being withheld pending notification of next of kin.

"The wingman told us that we had been hit but there was no damage apparent at first," said Major Siderius.

"The first indication of trouble was a low fuel flow in the left engine. The wingman said he saw fuel streaming from one of the engines. Then lights came on indicating a fire in the aircraft — and all of a sudden there was a terrific explosion.

"The wingman radioed us and yelled, 'You're on fire. Bail out! Bail out!' and we both punched out of the aircraft.

"It seemed like I floated through the air for a long time. When I hit the water I inflated my water wings and the life raft, and I climbed in.

"It was a funny feeling just sitting

there. You realize they (the rescue crews) know you are there, but you wonder if they'll spot you and what's going to happen next," he said.

Maj. Donald L. Jensen was the aircraft commander of the Jolly Green Giant that rescued Major Siderius.

"We were on another mission in the area when we received word that the Phantom had gone down," recalled Major Jensen. "We immediately diverted to the scene, pushing that bird just as fast as it would go.

"Coming over the area, I saw one man out to the left in an orange life raft. We came in slow and low over the downed man and dropped the 'PJ' (pararescueman) into the water."

The pararescueman was SSgt. Jules C. Smith. "I jumped into the water from about 15 feet up and swam to the major. He was uninjured so I helped him out of the life raft, briefed him on the procedure and helped him onto the penetrator. Then I climbed on the penetrator myself and they pulled us into the chopper."

The sergeant continued, "We then continued the search for the other downed man. We saw an oil slick and spotted the aircraft wreckage in the shallow water, but there was no sign of the other man."

"We received word to return to Da Nang with the major," Major Jensen added. "When we left there were other aircraft in the area searching for the missing man."