

ARRS Saves 732 During Busy 1971

HQ. ARRS, Scott AFB, Ill. — Members of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service saved the lives of 732 persons during 1971. The rescues were on land and sea, in peace and war. There were sailors, airmen and soldiers; merchant seamen from a dozen lands — including the Soviet Union — and civilians both in America and foreign countries.

ARRS crews are spotted at more than 100 locations around the globe. There were 250 lives saved in the Southeast Asian combat zone and 51 military personnel saved elsewhere. The remaining 31 lives saved were those of civilians.

Brig. Gen. Frank K. Everest Jr., ARRS commander, said that in its 25-year history, ARRS has saved more than 22,000 lives. Not one of these saves could be credited to any one individual," he said. "It was teamwork, both men and machines, that counts for success."

The pararescuemen — PJs for short — frequently parachuted into hazardous areas to effect rescues. One dived into shark-infested seas to help save men from a ship that sank.

On three occasions, PJs parachuted onto the decks of Russian vessels to aid injured and sick seamen. Rescue crews prowled northern Mexico after heavy floods to save 19 persons and helicopters seemingly went out from the Panama Canal bases every month to help find ships adrift. One team in Utah rescued a troop of Boy Scouts when their rafts capsized in the Colorado River.

In 1971, at Loring AFB, Maine, 1C Marilyn Pierce became the

first WAF to join an ARRS Detachment.

The Cheney Award to rescue personnel went to Maj. Travis Wofford for his action in pulling fellow crew members from a burning helicopter.

Citation of Honor from the Air Force Association when, on successive days, he saved the lives of eight persons in hazardous seas near Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam.

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam — Five men were plucked from hostile jungles in Laos within a nine-day period through the efforts of an enormous rescue apparatus.

An F-105 pilot, Maj. Robert E. Belli, spent a harrowing 20 hours on the ground near Mu Gia pass after he was shot down by a SAM launched from North Vietnam. A second crew member in his plane is listed as missing.

Nasty weather and darkness set in just as an SAR force found him. The major reported the enemy had not spotted him and, although he had a broken arm and possible broken leg, he would be able to manage for a while. An HC-130 orbited all night and stayed in contact with him, while fighter-bombers kept the enemy away.

Early in the morning, an A-1 pilot spotted him and two HH-53s were led to the area. One picked him up on the first try.

A week later, rescue crews dashed to Laos again when an F-4 crew from the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing at Da Nang was shot down.

Voice contact was established almost immediately. The pilot, Lt. Col. Arthur S. Blissett, reported that he was uninjured, but had landed in a tree top 70 feet from the ground and preferred to stay there.

The backseater, Lt. Michael H. Murray, was on the ground, under the jungle canopy. They spent the night there and in the morning an A-1 directed an HH-53 to the area. They spied Colonel Blissett tied in his tree top and went looking for Murray. They found him and lifted him to safety, then dangled a pararescueman into the trees to assist the colonel.

The third rescue came two days later. Ironically, the crew had been diverted from a combat support mission to aid in the search for another downed plane.

Pilot Maj. William T. Stanley tried to engage threatening MIG fighters but did not. Just as they were reaching fuel limits, missiles and anti-aircraft opened up. Stanley and his backseater, Capt. Lester O'Brien, evaded the menacing fire but ran out of fuel while doing so and had to eject.

They spent 23 hours on the ground while nasty weather and ground fire kept rescuers away.