

31Mar72 Spectre 22 SAR

Northfield — The Guardian Angel. Recollections interviews of the rescue of downed F-4 crew, callsign Volant 04, 6/27/1972. HH-53C Crew: Leo W. Thacker, Jr-AC, Frank R Mason Jr.-CP, George L Wright Jr.-FE, Charles D. McGrath-PJ1, Charles D. Morrow-PJ2. Ca. 1985

Specter 22

15 Gunshipmen Rescued From Southern Laos

Reprinted from Pacific Stars and Stripes--date approx. April 3, 1972

TAN SON NHUT AB--"Happiness is Air Rescue at its best. Beautiful! Fantastic! Thanks from the SPECS," was the message received by the 3d Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group commander, Col. Cecil N. Muirhead, on behalf of his units' performance in the rescue of 15 downed AC-130 gunshipmen.

All 15 crewmembers of a downed Spectre gunship were rescued March 31 from Laos in one of the most successful recovery efforts in the Vietnam war.

The gunship, hit by communist AAA fire on an interdiction mission over the lower panhandle of Laos, was seriously damaged. The gunship pilot managed to keep the plane airborne long enough for all airmen to bail out.

The 15 men successfully parachuted to the ground, and FACs established radio contact with all the men. Each airman's location was pinpointed and rescue aircraft remained overhead throughout the night to assure the safety of the downed men.

At first light, the rescue forces began actual recovery operations. The first man was picked up at 8:30 a.m. (by) an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter commanded by Maj. Kenneth E. Ernest.

Other rescues were made by choppers commanded by Majors Frederick C. Hartstein and David G. Daus, and Capt. Dale E. Stovall recovered eight of the downed airmen, the first saves for the captain as a chopper commander.

Sgt. Charles D. McGrath and SSgt. Charles D. Morrow descended on jungle penetrators to aid injured men onto the rescue helicopters.

The last crewman was hoisted aboard at 10:30 a.m. Several men experienced minor injuries during bail out. One sustained a leg fracture and another a wound in the neck. None were listed as serious.

The Jolly Green crews experienced no ground fire in the rescue operations. The four rescue helicopters belonged to the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron.

