



air force news

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Editorials ...page 4

Vung Tau Vacation ...page 5

Voting Infopage 10

Pinuppage 11

Recce navigator rescued after 7 days in North Vietnam

TAN SON NHUT AB - Two U.S. Air Force HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters and four A-1 Sandys slipped across the mountains into the heart of North Vietnam on April 27 and snatched 1st Lt. Ernest S. Clark to safety.

Clark from Mount Airy, N.C., was the "back-seater" in an Air Force RF-4 Phantom reconnaissance aircraft that was shot down by a SAM missile on April 20 northwest of Dong Hoi. His pilot is listed as missing.

The navigator stated that the "plane was coming apart all around me," after the SAM struck. He bailed out and for the next seven days evaded enemy capture in rough mountain terrain. On one occasion he saw a North Vietnamese patrol party "within 12 feet of me."

Search and rescue aircraft of the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron were unable to locate Clark or make radio contact for two days after his bail-out. On the third day, aircraft monitoring the area made radio contact and rescue planning began.

His most difficult day was April 23 when he ran out of water and began moving. He fell off a cliff, breaking his survival pistol, but finally made his way to "the highest hill in the area."

The first rescue attempt was made on April 26 but heavy rains prevented the pick-up. On the afternoon of April 27, with A-1 Sandys providing air cover, the rescue team brought off the epic recovery, moving into enemy territory, evading "at least three SAMs" and successfully recovering Clark.

Capt. Dennis M. Borosk was pilot of the "low chopper," which went in to make the rescue. The downed RF-4 navigator was completely hidden by thick jungle in the rugged terrain below.

At first Borosk flew his Jolly Green past Clark's position and then backed up his rescue aircraft, using radio directions from the downed navigator. Finally, with the help of his flight engineer, Sgt. Dennis C. Chriswell, the chopper pilot maneuvered the big Jolly Green Giant into position.

The jungle penetrator was lowered more than 150 feet into the thick foliage below. Clark strapped himself on the penetrator and was hoisted through the jungle canopy to the Jolly Green.

He suffered no serious injuries during the ordeal but was quite weak when the rescue forces finally recovered him.

The Super Jolly Green Giants received heavy ground fire as they raced home over the North Vietnamese countryside but none of the Jollys took hits.

The two pararescue specialists (PJs), Sgt. Charles D. McGrath and SSgt. Charles D. Morrow, fed the tired and hungry lieutenant tuna fish and other snacks as the rescue forces headed home.



U.S. Air Force Photo

Lieutenant Clark

....all smiles and safe