

War Heats Up

Copters to the Rescue

AS AFTIMES WENT to press, reports flowed in of rescue helicopters saving the lives of 12 American airmen following a number of crashes in the jungles of South and North Vietnam and at sea. The rescue activity is increasing, as the air war steps up to meet the North Vietnamese invasion. Accounts of recent saves follow.

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam — First Lt. Ernest (Woody) Clark of the 14th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron evaded capture by North Vietnamese soldiers for more than a week before he was picked up in one of the deepest rescue efforts ever into the north.

Clark was navigator in an RF-4 unarmed reconnaissance plane that was shot down on a mission above the DMZ. Escorted by F-104s, the craft was on a photo mission when four surface-to-air missiles were fired by the enemy.

The pilot evaded the first three but the fourth hit. "The aircraft caught fire and flames were all around me," Clark recalled. He bailed out and watched as the plane exploded and fiery chunks, no bigger than a desk, fell to the ground.

That was on April 20. "I thought it was a nightmare and I'd wake up in my hootch," the lieutenant recalled. But the nightmare was only beginning.

For two days in thick jungle, he hid "frozen" as enemy troops crawled all about him. The second day, he heard aircraft and sounds of battle, and when he tried to move, enemy gunfire pinged about him.

More patrols. More hiding. Finally, on the fourth day, he was able to make radio contact with two F-4s and a helicopter. During a long night, the helicopter orbited his position. But during the night a cold and rainy front moved in. Rain fell.

but the rescue planes pulled Clark from the jungle.

On the way back, he ate a can of tuna fish and a bunch of peaches. "That was the best meal I ever had." To his surprise, a huge throng greeted his return to Tan Son Nhut.

"The first thing I did after I left the emergency room was talk to my wife. All she did was cry but it was the most beautiful sound I ever heard."

Clark, a 1969 AF Academy graduate, was flying his 100th combat mission when he was shot down.

Pilots Saved Near Hue

DA NANG AFLD., Vietnam — Two pilots surrounded by Communist forces were plucked to safety from the jungle near Hue by HH-53 helicopters from the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron.

Capt. Peter G. Kulzer and Capt. Robert W. Comstock parachuted into enemy territory after a surface-to-air missile downed their F-4.

Maj. Anthony Gates, commander of one of four helicopters involved in the rescue, said "the area didn't look good."

Then, Maj. Jerry J. Gilbert piloted his copter to the scene to look for Comstock. A crewman spotted the downed man and in a rapid operation he was pulled out. SSgt. William A. Simm hauled in the jungle penetrator "as soon as I saw him grab hold . . . he got dragged through some trees, but he got out."

Gunship Hit, 7 Rescued

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam — Air Force and Army helicopters rescued seven of ten men aboard an AC-119 gunship that was shot down by ground forces besieging An Loc.

Rescued were Lt. Col. Byron T. Taschioglou, 1st Lt. Jimmie R. Barralow, 1st Lt. Larry D. Barbee, SSgt. Allen W. Bare, SSgt. Francis J. Sledzinski, Sgt. Delanor E. Iman and Sgt. Richard C. Corbett.

Three other men are listed as missing.

The gunship took three hits in one wing as it was supporting South Vietnamese troops.

An observation plane saw the men bail out and contacted an HC-103 airborne rescue command post. It dispatched two HH-3s from Tan Son Nhut's 3d Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group.

An Army UH-1 happened to be in the area. It picked up one crew member — and drew ground fire. Several A-1s straffed the area, then led in the HH-3s. Each picked up three men.

Maj. Joe E. Ballinger commanded one Jolly Green, Lt. Col. John J. McGuire Jr. the other. The rescues were the first for the HH-3s.

F-4 Team Rescued

DA NANG AFLD., Vietnam — Two captains who bailed into the South China Sea were rescued in short order by helicopters from Da Nang's 37th ARRS.

Capt. Michael C. Francisco and Capt. Arch F. Arthur turned seaward and bailed out when a surface-to-air missile hit their F-4 just south of the DMZ.

Capt. Donald A. Sutton arrived in command of an HH-53 and sent A1C Michael A. Aillet down to help one man into the hoist. Leaving Aillet in the water — "I knew Aillet would be okay" — he flew to the second man and got him aboard.

Aillet whiled away his time watching waterspouts from enemy mortars on shore splash harmlessly 100 yards away. The communists also fired missiles at the helicopter but Sutton ignored them, flew out to sea to stop the bother and went on home.

OFFICERS and E-7, E-8, E-9 Transfer Coming Up?

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