

HH-53s save pilot in North Vietnam

TAN SON NHUT AB, RVN -- Two Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giants and four A-1 Skyraiders slipped across the mountains into the heart of North Vietnam and snatched 1st Lt. Ernest S. Clark to safety.

Lieutenant Clark was the back-seater in an F-4 Phantom reconnaissance aircraft that was shot down by a surface-to-air missile northwest of Dune Hoi.

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 Lieutenant 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 occurred 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."



1ST LT. ERNEST S. CLARK smiles as he leaves an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant after being rescued after seven days in the mountainous terrain of North Vietnam.

The first rescue attempt was made, but heavy rains prevented a pickup. The

next afternoon, with the Skyraiders providing air cover, the rescue team

brought off the epic recovery, moving into enemy territory, evading "at least three SAMs" and successfully recovering Lieutenant Clark.

Capt. Dennis M. Boroczko was the pilot of the "low chopper" which went in to make the rescue. Lieutenant Clark was completely hidden by thick jungle in the rugged terrain below.

At first Captain Boroczko flew his Jolly Green Giant past the lieutenant'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, Captain Boroczko maneuvered his helicopter into position.

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

Lieutenant Clark 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 HH-53s took hits.

The pararescuemen, 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 for home.

One of the HH-53 crew said later, "nothing can beat a successful rescue!"

Capt. Douglas C. McGraw was the copilot of the Super Jolly Green Giant making the pickup and Capt. Mark C. Schibler commanded the second HH-53 which hovered overhead to assist in the rescue.