

7 Americans Die in Rescue of 2 Behind Enemy Lines

SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 21 (AP) — An Allied commando team snatched two United States airmen from the middle of a North Vietnamese invasion force, but the operation cost the lives of seven other Americans, United States sources disclosed today.

Despite a broken arm, a sprained back and lack of food and water, Lieut. Col. Iccal E. Hambleton managed for 11 days to evade North Vietnamese troops swarming across the demilitarized zone and sometimes coming within a few feet of him.

Colonel Hambleton, who is 53 years old, was a navigator aboard an EB-66, a modified bomber being used to jam North Vietnamese radar sites. The plane was hit by a missile on April 2 just above the DMZ and Colonel Hambleton bailed out, landing on the South Vietnamese side of the border. The other five men aboard the plane are listed as missing.

The second man rescued, Lieut. Mark N. Clark, was shot down on April 3 in an OV-10 spotter plane while participating in the search for Colonel Hambleton. Lieutenant Clark's co-pilot is missing and presumed dead.

On April 6 a United States helicopter was shot down during the search for the missing men, and all six of its crewmen were killed.

Lieutenant Clark was rescued on April 11 and Colonel Hambleton two days later, but meanwhile two other planes not connected with the search were shot down in the same area and their four crewmen were reported missing. The United States command would not allow disclosure of the rescue of Colonel Hambleton and Lieutenant Clark until today, after the search for those four men was abandoned.

Both Lieutenant Clark and Colonel Hambleton were rescued in the Dongha area below the DMZ by a volunteer team of South Vietnamese commandos led by United States Navy Lieut. Tom Norris.

Informed sources said that the team used secret techniques which they were not at

liberty to disclose. But they reported that Colonel Hambleton was taken out by sampan and floated downriver until the South Vietnamese lines were reached.

Lieutenant Norris said that Colonel Hambleton had in the days before his rescue called in air strikes against enemy forces despite his injuries and weakened condition. The calls were made by pocket radio.

When the commando team reached Colonel Hambleton at midnight on April 13, he could not walk and was barely able to crawl to a nearby stream to wash his face.

Lieutenant Norris said that the rescue team was spotted by three North Vietnamese but managed to evade them. The South Vietnamese members of the team said that they made an all-night sampan trip through enemy lines within sight of North Vietnamese tanks and troops to reach the colonel.

Flown to Danang

The commando team and Colonel Hambleton made it back to a South Vietnamese tank unit just after dawn. He was flown to a hospital in Danang.

"Hambleton was surrounded by enemy forces during most of his ordeal," said one American officer. "The search-and-rescue forces made repeated efforts to extract the men with no success. One problem was that they were caught in the North Vietnamese invasion across the DMZ. The enemy was passing through the area and it couldn't have been worse. Many times the enemy search teams were within five feet."

B-52's made several raids in efforts to divert North Vietnamese troops away from the two downed airmen. It was the first time the big bombers were reported to be used in a rescue mission.

Officers said that in addition to the B-52's, fighter-bombers and the biggest gunship the United States Air Force has, the four-engine, computerized AC-130, flew constant cover for the operation.

Colonel Hambleton is a na-

tive of Rossville, Ill. His wife lives in Tucson, Ariz. Lieutenant Clark is from Los Angeles.