



FACT SHEET

RESCUE OF BAT 21

In one of the most difficult rescues of the war, Lt. Col. Iceal "Gene" Hambleton was recovered from enemy territory after 11 1/2 days on the ground. This was the largest rescue operation in USAF history.

On April 2, 1972, 53-year-old navigator Lt. Col. Hambleton was the only crewmember to safely eject after his EB-66 (call sign *Bat 21*) was hit by a surface-to-air missile. He landed in the middle of the spearhead of the enemy's massive [Easter Offensive](#).

Several courageous attempts were made to recover Hambleton. After the loss of numerous aircraft and personnel, a new plan was devised. Authorities planned a ground recovery, but they needed Hambleton to move away from his hiding spot to a nearby river.

Knowing Hambleton was an avid golfer, authorities gave him directional and distance information by naming specific holes at different golf courses. One forward air controller, Capt. Harold Icke, spent countless hours orbiting near Hambleton and communicating by radio throughout the ordeal.

After "playing" nine holes and nearing collapse from hunger and exhaustion, Hambleton had moved to a location where U.S. Navy SEAL LT Tom Norris and South Vietnamese SEAL Petty Officer Nguyen Van Kiet safely recovered him.



This mosaic reconnaissance photograph was used by the 3rd Aerospace Rescue Recovery Group to plan Lt. Col. Iceal "Gene" Hambleton's rescue in 1972. (U.S. Air Force photo)