

10 May 1972: Reconstruction of an Air Battle

By Tom Cooper

Nov 13, 2003, 02:21

On the early morning of May 10th 1972 the US readied the first of large air strikes against North Vietnam in what became the Operation Linebacker II.

These attacks caused several large clashes between US and North Vietnamese interceptors during the Vietnam War. The first strike on that day was launched by aircraft carriers USS Constellation, USS Coral Sea and USS Kitty Hawk against targets in Haiphong area at 08:00 AM.

The MiG-Hunt along the Runway at Kep

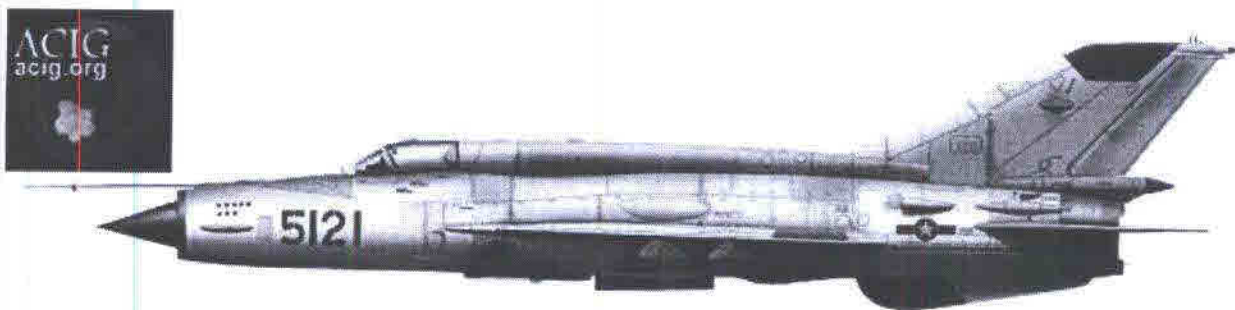
The first strike against North Vietnam on 10 May 1972 was launched from three US carriers, which operated in the Gulf of Tonking area, namely, USS Coral Sea CV-43, USS Kitty Hawk CV-63 and USS Constellation CV-64. Constellation, being the farthest south on the „Yankee Station“, started launching around 07:30 AM, Coral Sea followed some 20 minutes later, and ten minutes later Kitty Hawk.

The first of the main force to launch had been tanker planes, the EKA-3Bs and KA-6D, which now climbed to 15.000 feet and circled their mother ships. Closer to the Vietnamese coast, a full array of other aircraft were already in the air, including one E-2Bs each from Constellation and Kitty Hawk, one RC-135M from Okinawa, one U-2 from Thailand and an elderly EC-121D „Disco“ radar picket plane of the 552nd Airborne Warning and Control Wing from Korat in Thailand. From Da Nang in South Vietnam came an EP-3B Orion SIGINT-reconnaissance plane of VQ-1. Except for the high-operating U-2, which flew alone, all the other planes were to work as a team with the cruiser Chicago, which cruised in the Gulf of Tonking. Chicago was designated as PIRAZ (Positive Identification Radar Advisory Zone) ship and her combat information center was to keep track of enemy movements using data from all available sources, using the codename „Red Crown“. Ships' own radars and those of radar picket planes were to provide some of plots, but due to ground clutter they had only limited ability to track plans flying low over land. However, to safeguard the confidentiality of the sources, all information passed out over normal communications channels was to sound as if it had been learned from Chicago's own radars.

Almost half an hour elapsed between the first launch of aircraft from USS Constellation before the last plane joined the strike formation: in total, six A-6 Intruders, 12 A-7 Corsairs, 13 F-4 Phantoms and one RA-5C Vigilante reconnaissance aircraft started. Around 08:00 AM Constellation's strike package set a course for Haiphong, heading up the Gulf of Tonking. The

kill. Undaunted, Dosé launched another missile, and this hit the tail of the MiG-21, slamming the wreckage into the ground.

Ngu remained alone now, however, he continued his turn in low level, deceiving any try of two Phantom pilots to fire at him. Meanwhile, two other MiG-21s, flown by Le Thanh Dao and Vu Duc Hop, started and tried to catch Hawkins and Dosé, but Hawkins noticed them while turning into a barrel-roll behind the first MiG and ordered a fast break to the right. During the turn, both Phantom-crews noticed that they were in more danger than they had thought: the sky around them was dark with AAA bursts and one SAM was launched against them, but it passed by. The Phantoms went supersonic and sped toward the coast. However, having survived five actual or attempted Sidewinder attacks, Dang Ngoc Ngu - initially pursued by Hawkins and Dosé - now turned his MiG-21MF around and gave them a pursuit. Hawkins commented: „At that time we had strong intelligence that the MiG-21 could not do more than Mach 1.05 below five thousand feet. We were doing Mach 1.15 in combat spread, feeling cocksure as we headed towards the coast." Dosé continued: „Then a MiG-21 came up behind, overtaking fast. He made it look effortless. When I saw the MiG it was about three-quarters of a mile behind Hawkins. I called for an in-place turn." When Phantoms began turning Ngu fired a missile from the range of 1.200 meters at Hawkins. However, Hawkins was in a high-G horizontal turn and the Atoll, which initially guided, flew straight ahead. After attacking, Ngu turned hard to right and flew back to his base, claiming one Phantom as shot down.



The USAF and USN fighters encountered the much improved MiG-21MF on 10 May 1972 for the first time in combat. The good speed of this fighter at low levels was a considerable surprise. This MiG-21MF was in service with the 921st Sao Do at the time. The aircraft went on to serve during the Operation Linebacker II, in December 1972, and is said to have been the mount of Pham Tuan, when he claimed a kill against a USAF B-52D, on 27 December. This kill was never confirmed, however, as the USAF never lost a B-52 on that day. Nevertheless, the plane was subsequently seen displaying eight kill markings, apparently a sign of the number of claims by several Vietnamese pilots who flew it. Pham Tuan, on the other side, went on to become the first Vietnamese in the space. (artwork by Tom Cooper)

After taking fuel from the waiting EKA-3B tanker, Dosé and Hawkins reached Constellation as last of the whole strike package. To the delight of those on deck, Dosé performed a victory roll, then made a wide orbit and landed. While the deck crew of USS Constellation and pilots of VF-92 and VF-96 cheered, Cdr. Gus Eggert, Commander of Air Wing 8, was not delighted. Hawkins actually disobeyed an order, left the strike package without escort and went „trolling" for MiGs.

- Biloxi Flight, 4 F-4Ds from 25th TFS/8th TFW, lead by Capt. Lynn High, equipped with GBU-10s
- Jingle Flight, 4 F-4Es from 433rd TFS/8th TFW, lead by Lt.Col. Richard Hilton, equipped with GBU-10s
- Harlow Flight, 4 F-4Es from 336th/432nd TRW, strike escort
- Galore Flight, 5 F-105Gs from 17th TFS/388th TFW, Iron Hand defense suppression (5th plane airborne reserve)

Yen Vien Rail Yard Attack Force, TOT 10:05hrs

- Gopher Flight, 4 F-4Ds from 25th TFS/8th TFW, lead by Maj. Albert Munsch, equipped with Mk.82s
- Icebag Flight, 4 F-4Es from 334th TFS/8th TFW, lead by Lt.Col. Dumitru Tokanel, equipped with Mk.82s
- Bowleg Flight, 4 F-4Es from 432nd TRW, escort for Icebag and Gopher Flights
- Gigolo Flight, 4 F-4Ds 25th TFS/8th TFW, lead by Maj. Lawrence Irwing, equipped with Mk.82s
- Bertha Flight, 4 F-4Es from 336th TFS/8th TFW, lead by Lt.Col. Daniel Blake, equipped with Mk.82s
- Arroyo Flight, 4 F-4Es from 432nd TRW, escort for Bertha and Gigolo Flights
- Calgon Flight, 5 F-105Gs from 561st/388th TFW, Iron Hand defense suppression (5th plane airborne reserve)

Poststrike Reconnaissance

- Cousin Flight, 2 RF-4C from 14th TRS/432nd TRW

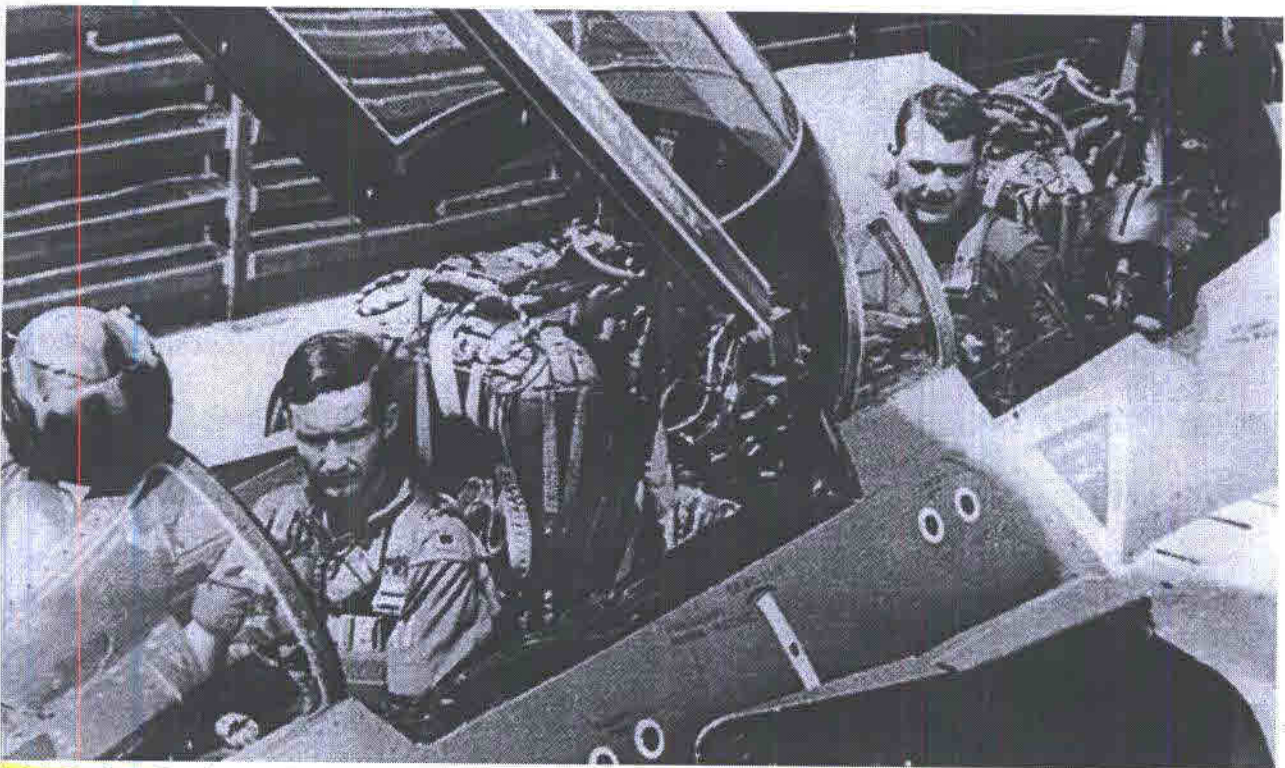
Search and Rescue

- King 21, HC-130 from 3rd ARRG/56th SOW
- Jolly Green Flight, 2 HH-53Bs from 40th ARRS/56th SOW
- Sandy Flight, 4 A-1 from 1st SOS/56th SOW
- Brenda Flight, 4 F-4E from 432nd TRW

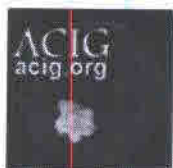
have set up an ambush for each other, and neither knew about this.

Immediately Red Crown informed the Oyster flight: „Multiple bandits in your area. I hold a Bandit at three-four-zero at twenty-four. The closest bandit I hold is zero-two-two at sixteen". Running in at 15.000 feet the MiG-21s closed rapidly, joining with four J-6s in trail in the process, and Balter flight edged toward Oyster to provide top cover. Lodge turned his flight to meet the MiGs nearly nose-on, jettisoning their external tanks and arming AIM-7 Sparrows (except Feezel, whose radar failed). After crossing the Red River south of Yen Bai Maj. Lodge ordered Oyster flight to climb towards the MIGs. The four Phantoms were divided into two elements of two aircraft. Lodge prepared to attack the leading MIG and told Capt. Ritchie and his WSO, Capt. DeBellevue, the leader of the second element of Oyster flight, to attack the third MIG.

The radars were locked on and at 13nm (24km) a warning light in the cockpit of Oyster 1 flashed, indicating that the hostile aircraft were within range. In Oyster 3 Chuck DeBellevue picked up MiG IFF-transmission on his Combat Tree equipment and informed his pilot that he had a positive hostile identification on the planes in front. Clipped instructions in Oyster 1 and 2 followed, as back-seaters locked on their radars and made the final switching for a head-on attack. The allowable steering error on the radar display began to contract and at 8nm (13km) Lodge launched his first Sparrow at the leading MiG element.

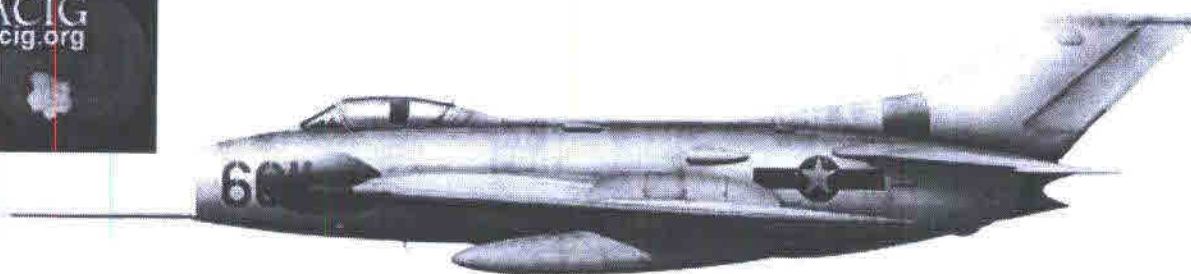
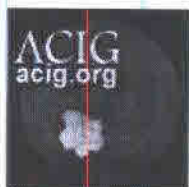


Maj. Robert Lodge and Maj. Roger Locher in the cockpit of their F-4D, seen earlier in 1972: the team had already two MiG-kills to their credit when they clashed with mysterious MiG-21s on the morning of 10 May 1972. Bellow is F-4D 65-0784 they flew on this fatefull morning. (Photo: USAF; Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Mysterious MiG: this is a reconstruction of the MiG-21 #2, clearly seen by Maj. Roger Locher from a range of barely 300ft when it almost collided with Oyster 1 during the engagement on the morning of 10 May 1972. In the following moments, Maj. Lodge turned behind this MiG in an attempt to shot it down, in turn exposing the tail of his aircraft to four J-6s that were approaching from the other side. Maj. Lodge did not survive the mission to tell the story, but in an interview for the Red Baron report, Maj. Locher recalled that this MiG wore a blue serial 53 and had its cockpit trimmed in blue. While the last detail is exceptionally unusual - then, there is no pictorial evidence of any MiG-21s of any air force being ever painted this way - the serial was probably applied in this manner, clearly indicating the origin of the aircraft: the USSR. If the pilot was Soviet remains unclear. Surely enough, a closer research about the Vietnamese reports about air battles over North Vietnam usually do not mention any kind of operations flown by foreign pilots. For many observers, this indicated that no foreign pilots have ever flown missions for the North Vietnamese air force, except perhaps one or two. In fact, however, in 2002 the North Koreans openly admitted their pilots to have flown for the SRVAF in the 1960s. A similar confirmation from the USSR-archives is still not appearing.

Major Lodge thought that the MiG-21 #4 in front of him opened the range sufficiently for a close-in shot, and called: „Oyster One padlocked!" firing a Sparrow shortly after. But, Pham Hung Son fired as well and large shells from his three large 30mm guns bridged the gap between it and Lodge's Phantom. The F-4 was hit, losing speed, but initially its crew thought they had escaped with minor damage and both the pilot and the RIO were disappointed at the sight of the lost AIM-7 and the MiG in front of them separating away. Pham Hung Son closed and fired again, and as more shells stuck his aircraft, Lodge's RIO, Captain Roger Locher, realized what happened. The right engine exploded and the Phantom ended doing hard yaws to the right. Soon after all the hydraulics was lost.



Flying at 20,000 feet, two Phantoms of Balter flight arrived in time to see the final moments of the fight, as Lodge's Phantom plunged to the earth like a meteor. Due to smoke nobody saw ejection of Captain Locher: Maj. Lodge decided to stay with the aircraft. Shaken by the sudden loss of their leader, the survivors of the Oyster flight sped away from the area. The first large clash of 10 May 1972 was over, but others were now to follow.

Unseen MiGs

During a later strike against Railway Yard at Hai Duong, between 11:00 AM and 2:15 PM, the Constellation's Air Wing, composed of F-4s, A-6s and A-7s was intercepted by a high number of Vietnamese MiG-17s and a well known series of dogfights developed, in which the F-4Js of VF-96 downed six enemy fighters. Three of these were shot down by Lt. Randy Cunningham and his RIO Lt. (jg) William Driscoll, which thus became first US aces of the Vietnam War. It is widely accepted, that during this battle USN fighters haven't suffered any losses to North-Vietnamese interceptors. By closely examining the works of Dr. Istvan Toperczer and Jeffrey Ethell this cannot be confirmed. To contrary.

At 12:54 PM, the strike package of A-6s and A-7s arrived over Hai Duong, failed to identify the target during ingress, turned around and bombed from second try. Together with bombers, F-4Js of VF-96 dropped their Rockeyes on positions of Vietnamese flaks, while Vietnamese also fired several SAMs. Finally, US aircraft started to pull out from the target, when first four MiG-17s of the 923rd FR appeared.

Only at that moment did Red Crown give the first broadcast warning of MiGs airborne, and it did not refer to those now sweeping in to engage! The MiGs, flown by Nguyen Van Tho (#1), Ta Dong Trung (#2), Nguyen Hang (#3) and one other pilot, parted in two pairs. The #3 and #4 attacked as first, and caught Cunningham off guard, but he reversed port and both Vietnamese slashed beside him. Cunningham fired one AIM-9 and it smashed into the MiG flown by Nguyen Hang, which exploded in a ball of fire (according to Vietnamese records, Hang ejected, but was killed by 20mm cannon fire from two Phantoms; as is known, USN Phantoms weren't armed with any guns or gun pods during this raid). Seconds later another MiG pulled behind Cunningham, which turned around, trying to invite his wingman, Lt. Brian Grant to shoot down the Vietnamese. Grant was then warned of another MiG behind him and accelerated away. Cunningham followed and both Phantoms disengaged. Meanwhile, Cdr. Dwight Timm, VF-96's XO, was northeast of that area, when one MiG-21 - closely followed by another MiG-17 - swept in beneath his Phantom. Timm curved around, trying a Sparrow shot, but with so many planes flying around, he was momentarily rather trying not to collide with anybody, then to fight.

which now turned according to instructions from Baldwin. Goryanec heard Baldwin's calls and turned into the MiG, attacking it from above and scoring several hits near the wing root. The MiG leveled out and turned back towards the coast, landing safely at Kep, several minutes later.

In the meantime, Van Tho joined the melee of additional MiG-17s of the 923rd FR and F-4Js of VF-96, but during his attack at one of the Phantoms, he appeared in front of Lt. Matt Connelly, which turned to approach. Hearing a good Sidewinder tone, Connelly closed, but the MiG was in a tight turn and there was little chance of a successful shot. Had Van Tho held his turn he would have escaped, but he suddenly rolled out - probably because he was out of ammunition - and Connelly's snap shot with an AIM-9 - almost at minimum range - hit the MiG's exhaust blowing it up. Nguyen Van Tho ejected and landed safely under his parachute. At the same time ex-Blue Angels pilot Lt. Steve Shoemaker charged his Phantom at 600 knots through the target area from north to south, when a MiG-17 suddenly appeared rolling over the top of him. Shoemaker's RIO, Lt. Keith Crenshaw, warned the pilot, and the Phantom accelerated towards the south, exiting from the battle area. Several miles away, Shoemaker went into a sweeping turn before lining up for another attack run.

Randy Cunningham and Brian Grant were now also trying to assess the situation, thus both Phantoms zoom climbed to 12,000 feet, and then turned around to attack again. Diving back, Cunningham almost collided with the F-4J of Cdr. Timm, which was in serious trouble: hardly 300 feet behind him was a MiG-17, completely unnoticed by Tim or his RIO, 3,000 feet behind him was a MiG-17 which already fired at him and 3,500 feet behind was a MiG-21 in tracking.

Cunningham lined up on the MiG-17 nearest to Timm - which kept his port turn - and prepared to launch, when - out of nothing - two J-6s appeared and opened fire at Cunningham. The Phantom easily evaded their fire and then realigned on the MiG-17 close behind Timm, calling Commander to reverse starboard. The call had the desired effect, and the Phantom swung rapidly clear of the nearest MiG, thus Cunningham squeezed off a Sidewinder. Timm's RIO, Lt. Jim Fox, knew nothing of the MiG nearby until after the turn. Then he caught sight of the enemy fighter to one side on a diverging heading and moments later the missile smashed into its rear. The MiG wallowed drunkenly and its pilot ejected. Remaining Vietnamese MiG-17 and MiG-21 were attacked by Brian Grant, when another Phantom appeared, pounding toward the same target. Grant had to pull away to avoid a collision! Steve Shoemaker was making a second charge through the battle arena, closing on the remaining MiG-17 and firing a Sidewinder from inside a minimum range. The MiG pilot obviously saw it and pulled into a hard turn, breaking away from Timm's F-4J.

Meanwhile Matt Connelly approached another MiG-17, which started a turn. Connelly fired a Sidewinder, which exploded in a black puff beside the target. All of a sudden the tail of the Northvietnamese fighter came off, the MiG rolled to the left and the pilot ejected. At the same time, Brian Grant fired another Sidewinder at the MiG previously attacked by Steve Shoemaker, but although the missile appeared to guide properly, it detonated well behind the target.

Meanwhile, two MiG-21PFM of the 927th FR, flown by experienced pilots Le Thanh Dao and Vu Duc Hop, were scrambled and closing to Hai Duong at an altitude of 10,000 feet. Ground control informed them that the Americans were flying 35km from Hai Duong at an altitude of

the coast, Dilworth decided to rid his plane of its missiles. He fired the four Sidewinders in turn without difficulty. But the Sparrows were mounted under the fuselage and had to be jettisoned, because there was a danger of them igniting the leaking fuel. Goryanec knew that jettisoned missiles could behave unpredictably, but nothing he had heard prepared him for what followed. The first Sparrow bumped aft down the fuselage, waggled and fell away. Then the second came, waggled a bit then started sliding across the underside of Phantom's wing. Goryanec was some 50 feet above the Phantom and slightly aft, yet, the mad Sparrow cleared the wing of the Phantom, went nose up and missed the intake of the A-7 by a few feet! „This is crazy! I'd avoided MiGs and flak, and I nearly got hit by a jettisoned Sparrow!" said Goryanec, which subsequently opened out to a more respectful distance and followed the Phantom back to Constellation, where Dilworth was able to land safely.

Cdr. Gus Eggert was now calling all Phantoms and Corsairs to disengage: „Showtimes and Pouncers, disengage and get out of there if you can!" But, moving south from Hai Duong, Randy Cunningham noticed another MiG in front of him. What followed was the epic battle, in which both planes engaged in four subsequent series of vertical rolling scissors, until the better training of Cunningham and the power of his trusty F-4J prevailed and the MiG dived away to make a fundamental error of opening the range and presenting his tail. The American made the most of the opportunity. He curved after the enemy plane, placed the gunsight pipper over it and squeezed the trigger. The Sidewinder detonated beside the tail of the MiG, which didn't blow up, but simply flew into the ground. For many years, stories were explained around, about Lt. Cunningham shooting down the greatest Vietnamese „ace", „Col. Tumb" or „Toon". Yet, during his visit to Vietnam, Dr. Toperczer couldn't find any records about a man with this name. Actually, there were very few pilots in the SRVAF, and they knew each other very well from the training and from joint service. Yet, nobody remembered any „Col. Toon" or „Tomb" (the name „Tomb" doesn't even exist in the Vietnamese language), and in 1972 there was not a single flying pilot in the SRVAF with the rank of Colonel. Also, if the SRVAF would have an ace with 13 kills to his credit, the Northvietnamese propaganda would certainly have used him.

Meanwhile, Cunningham pulled out of the dive, once more trying to take stock of the situation. To his left were yet more MiG-17s, and he had begun turning into them when a warning call made him hesitate: „Showtime heading about one-eight-zero. Heads up! You got a MiG behind you!". The caller was Matt Connelly, also heading for the coast after a successful encounter with enemy fighters, who emphasized the point by launching a Sparrow missile without guidance in the general direction of the MiG. Initially Cunningham was less than ecstatic at his colleague's action, because it looked like the Sparrow was coming right to his plane. But, the missile went past his tail and past the MiG, and served its purpose by making the enemy fighter break away from Cunningham.

At 1:06 PM, the air battle over Hai Duong was over, yet, two further events followed. During his flight towards the coast, Cunningham's Phantom was badly damaged by a SAM, and the crew was forced to eject over the coast, to be rescued by helicopters. The Coral Sea's air wing was now closing toward Hanoi, and two of its escorting Phantoms, flown by Lt.Cdr. Chuck Schroeder and Lt. Ken Cannon, were warned by Red Crown, that MiGs were in vicinity. Phantoms closed and found a single MiG-17. Schroeder attacked as first, but was outmaneuvered and had to accelerate away, while Cannon dived from above, fired a Sidewinder and shot the

June 72

2. Oyster 02B Pickup Lo A/C - Capt Stovall, AC, Capt Gillespie, CP, Sgt Walsh, FE, Sgts
 * Cakebread & McQuoid, PJs; Welborn, photog. Hi A/C - Capt Shipman, AC; Capt
 Zielinski, CP; Sgt Liles, FE; Sgts Goodlett & Williamson, PJs; Sgt Smith, photog. Went
 north of Yen Bai AF across Red River. Oyster 01B was down for 23 days; It was 22 days
 before he raised anyone on radio. All SEA forces available during pickup. Sec of Air
 Force sent congratulations

6. Maj Davis leaves for Edwards

8. Capt Zielinski & Capt Rossi launch from NKP to pickup Vampire 21 near Muldahan.
 Maj Gamble on a training flight at Camp Hunky flew over and made pickup while alert
 birds were exiting field boundaries. However, Capt Zielinski and crew picked up the
 survivors radio which was on and had been dropped to the ground. A tree pickup was
 accomplished on survivor

9. Capt Stovall goes to SAR Conference

11. Maj Ernes returns from New York & Madrid. He received a CO flying award.

12. Maj Butera visits us while outprocessing.

17. Col Robinson's Sawadee party. Col Simon becomes new 56th SCOW commander. Gen
 Clay addressed officers

19. Sawadee for Lt Col McAllister; Maj McCutcheore, maintenance officer, Capt
 Summers, Capt Mehase #3's. Capt Locher (Oyster 01B) & Lt Markle (Cosmic 16B) spoke
 in the afternoon and attended party.

20. 2 crews launched to recover Nিকে 102. During orbit Sandy 7 (Highfill) went down.
 4 crews recovered into DaNang.

21. 37th ARRS picked up Sandy 7 and Nickel 102 was picked up by Capt Orrell (AC), Capt
 Courtice (CP), Sgt Liles (HM), Salome, Webber (PJs).

24. Memorial Services for Maj Encinos (Sandy) who went down on 18 June

27. Busy day - picked up Valent 03A - Capt Orrell AC, Lt Connelly (CP), Sgt Sanders
 (HM), Walker & Musmilion (PJs). Valent 04A - Capt Stovall again (AC), Lt Hutchinson
 (CP), Sgt Simmons (HM), TSgt Reich, Sgt Nured (PJs), TSgt Shuman

25. Bad day - Jolly's were targets. 8 AC launched in SAR attempt. 6 took battle damage
 between 25-27 June SSgt Cash injured - recovering satisfactorily. AP Smith got neck

By John L. Frisbee, Contributing Editor

A Good Thought to Sleep On

The rescue of Roger Locker did more than set a couple of Vietnam War records.

ON May 8, 1972, President Nixon authorized the mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnam ports, together with regular and frequent air strikes north of the twentieth parallel. Operation Linebacker was on.

Two days later, the US Air Force launched 120 aircraft against targets in and around Hanoi. Oyster Flight, four F-4s from the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron flying MiG-CAP, was led by Maj. Bob Lodge, an outstanding young combat leader. He and his backseater, Capt. Roger Locker, were veterans of the air war, both with previous tours in southeast Asia. Also in Oyster Flight were Capts. Richard S. "Steve" Ritchie and Chuck DeBellevue, who were to become the Air Force's only F-4 "ace" team with five victories.

As Oyster Flight neared the Red River at a point about seventy-five miles northwest of Hanoi, they were alerted to the approach of MiGs. In the ensuing battle, Lodge and Locker shot down a MiG-21 and were positioning themselves to fire on another when they were hammered by 30-mm shells from two MiG-19s. The F-4's hydraulic system was knocked out, making the aircraft uncontrollable. A fire in the rear of the fuselage forced Captain Locker to punch out while the plane was inverted. Major Lodge did not eject. Since no one in the vicinity saw parachutes, it was assumed that both men had perished.

Captain Locker had, in fact, landed in trees near a MiG base at Yen Bai, north of the Red River, shaken but uninjured. He could not retrieve his parachute, which was caught in the trees, or his survival pack. After a brief radio call, he sought to put distance between himself and the parachute, which inevitably would attract a search party. (His radio signal was received by friendly aircraft, but, since there was no voice transmission, the signal probably was thought to be

sent by a North Vietnamese using a captured radio.)

Within minutes, Captain Locker heard sounds of a search party. Taking cover in a brush pile, he took stock of his situation. It wasn't encouraging. He had the contents of his survival vest, including two pints of water and a couple of snacks. Rescue so deep in enemy territory—some 350 miles north of the DMZ—was unlikely.

His best chance of rescue was to cross the heavily cultivated Red River Valley, swim the river, and work his way to the sparsely inhabited mountains about ninety miles to the west. The river lay several miles away through forested, hilly terrain. He would travel only at first light and at dusk, living off the land.

The enemy's search resumed the next morning. At one point, searchers came within thirty feet of Captain Locker's hiding place. On the third day, there were no sounds of a search party, and Locker could move some-

what more freely, but living off the land proved to be a greater problem than he had anticipated. It was too early in the season for ripened fruit, nuts, or berries. He ate what he could find, gradually weakening as the days passed. Water was no problem. There were plenty of small streams. There were also plenty of mosquitoes and drenching rains as he inched along at less than a mile a day.

Captain Locker frequently tried for radio contact, with no success. Then, on June 1, three weeks after he was shot down, as he was contemplating leaving the forest for a dicey venture into the valley, a flight of F-4s passed directly over him on their way home from a strike and, he hoped, with radio frequencies open.

Locker's call was picked up. Within hours, a small search-and-rescue (SAR) force was on its way from Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. After the A-1 Sandys were satisfied that they were talking to Locker, an HH-53C Super Jolly helicopter, flown by Capt. Dale Stovall, started in for the pickup, but the SAR force was driven off by missiles and MiGs. Maybe rescue was not possible so far north of the DMZ, after all.

Seventh Air Force thought otherwise. On June 2, another SAR force, supported by fighters, bombers, Wild Weasels, tankers, and ECM aircraft, numbering more than 100 in all, fought its way in. Captain Stovall's HH-53 picked up Roger Locker and returned him to Ubon RTAFB.

It had been a record-setting show. Captain Locker had eluded capture in enemy territory for twenty-three days, setting a record for successful evasion in the Vietnam War. Captain Stovall had twice flown his rescue helicopter further into North Vietnam than had been done before, earning him the Air Force Cross. All the principals emerged as heroes, but there is more to the story. Combat crews who would be flying Linebacker strikes north of the Red River now knew that eluding capture in that inhospitable land and rescue from Hanoi's backyard were indeed possible. That was a good thought to sleep on. ■



Over his "Triple Nickel" cap, a haggard but happy Captain Locker dons that of the SAR unit that rescued him after twenty-three days in Hanoi's backyard.

DATE TIME GROUP: 031800Z Jun 72

FROM: CINCPACAF

TO: 13AF/CC
40 ARRSQ

UNCLAS E F T O/CC

REF: RESCUE MISSION E-3-047 1 Jun 72

THE MISSION DETAILS AND PARTICULARLY THE GRATIFYING RESULTS OF THE SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY OF CAPT ROGER C. LOCHER ON 32 JUNE IS NOTED WITH EXTREME PRIDE. THIS MISSION IS INDICATIVE OF THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONALISM, COOPERATION AND DEDICATION TO DUTY DISPLAYED BY RECOVERY FORCES DURING EACH AND EVERY ACR MISSION. ALL CONCERNED ARE COMMENDED FOR THEIR EFFORTS.

DURING THIS EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS AND DIFFICULT MISSION,

SPECIALLY DESERVING OF HIGHEST PRAISE ARE THE AIRCREW MEMBERS WHO PERFORMED UNDER THE MOST HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY. CAPT LOCHER IS TO BE PERSONALLY CONGRATULATED FOR HIS OUTSTANDING EFFORTS IN EVADING CAPTURE. PLEASE CONVEY MY PERSONAL CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL FOR ANOTHER JOB WELL DONE.

BT

#2582

DATE TIME GROUP: 048200Z

FROM: 7AF TAN SON HNUT

TO: 40 ARRSQ

UNCLAS/CC

FOR CAPTAIN STOVALL AND CREW

THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE RECEIVED FROM SECRETARY OF THE
AIR FORCE IS RETRANSMITTED: QUOTE

FOR GENERAL VOGT FROM SECRETARY SEAPANS

PLEASE CONVEY MY PERSONAL CONGRATULATIONS TO THE SEARCH AND RESCUE
FORCE, AND ESPECIALLY TO CAPTAIN DALE STOVALL AND HIS HELICOPTER
CREW, FOR THEIR SUCCESSFUL RESCUE OF CAPTAIN ROGER LOCHER NEAR YEN
SAY, NVN, SUCH ACTIONS EXEMPLIFY THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF THE USAF
UNQUOTE, ONCE AGAIN, ACCEPT MY PERSONAL CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU.

JOHN W. VOGT, GENERAL, USAF

BT

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CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF

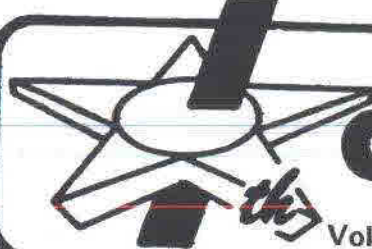
THE SILVER STAR

TO

DONALD H. GOODLETT, JR.

Staff Sergeant Donald H. Goodlett, Jr. distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force in Southeast Asia on 2 June 1972. On that date, Sergeant Goodlett, a Pararescue Recovery Technician on an HH-53C rescue helicopter, voluntarily penetrated deep into an extremely hostile and heavily defended area of North Vietnam to assist in the recovery of a downed American airman. At great risk to his own life, he willingly exposed himself to hostile ground forces while manning his machine gun position. Sergeant Goodlett's superior skill in suppressing the groundfire being directed at his vulnerable aircraft was instrumental in the successful completion of this hazardous rescue. By his gallantry and devotion to duty Sergeant Goodlett has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.





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June 23, 1972

contributions

U.S. \$4,378
\$VN 213,400 = 508
\$4,886

The fund drive continues through July 2. There is still time to join with thousands of your buddies in this worthy cause.

Locher rescued after 23 days north of Hanoi

A U.S. Air Force search and rescue task force ventured north of Hanoi early this month to recover an Air Force F-4 crew member who evaded the North Vietnamese for 23 days before he was rescued.

Capt. Roger C. Locher, a 28-year-old weapons system operator with the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing was extremely weak—he lost 15 pounds during his ordeal—but otherwise in good condition. Rescue men acclaimed the captain's presence of mind throughout the evasion and rescue.

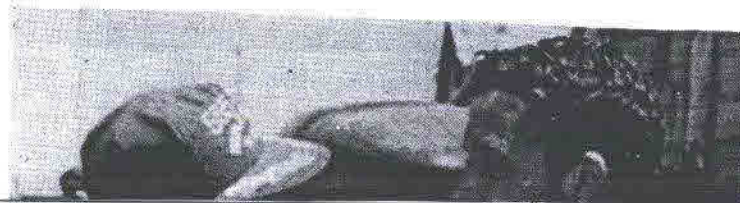
Locker and the F-4 Phantom pilot, who is still missing, were shot down May 10 by a

on my primary ejection. The next thing I heard was a big blast. When I opened my eyes, I was in my parachute and just about then I could see the airplane hit the ground right below.

"I looked around and was going into a kind of deep-dished valley. I aimed for a steep mountainside and came down through the trees. My heels were on the ground so all I had to do was unbuckle and get out. I just sat down for a minute and listened."

During the next 23 days he subsisted on fruit, nuts and berries. He was very successful in locating water.

By SSgt. Tom Merchant



ASIA (SEA)

A Dramatic Rescue

On May 10, 1972 the F-4 carrying Capt. Roger C. Locher of the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Udorn Royal Air Force Base, Thailand, was shot down by a heat-seeking missile launched from a MiG-21. Capt. Locher was on his 407th combat mission. He parachuted to safety near Yen Bai Airfield (northwest of Hanoi) but could not contact friendly aircraft with his survival radio. For the next 22 days he hid, living on fruits, nuts, and berries, until he was finally able to make radio contact with friendly aircraft.

A rescue attempt was launched on June 1 by HH-53 helicopters, A-1 attack airplanes, and an HC-130 command airplane, with F-4 and F-105 fighters providing air protection, but they were driven off by enemy MiGs. They were back the next day, deep inside North Vietnam, and an HH-53, using a newly-developed electronic location finder (ELF), pinpointed the downed airman through a canopy of jungle growth, lowered a jungle penetrator and lifted Capt. Locher to safety.

Related Museum Aircraft

- B-52D
- F-4C
- A-1E Skyraider
- F-105D
- F-105G

Page 1 of 2

"I yanked for what seemed like an eternity

to answer me. That was the first time I made radio contact." (Continued on page 8)

before being rescued on June 2.

flying his 407th combat mission. The rescue task force included HH-53 helicopters, A-1 fighters, HC-130 command aircraft and F-4 and F-105 fighters. F-4 and F-105 jet fighters to protect the slower moving aircraft.

The task force encountered heavy ground fire on its way to and from the captain's mountain-side perch.

Describing his downing, Captain Locher said, "We immediately went out of control, flopping from side to side. Then fire started coming in the back of the cockpit. It seared my canopy with bubbles and I couldn't see out anymore. The airplane slowed down and we went into a flat spin."

He ejected into "a kind of deep-dished valley." During the next 23 days he subsisted on fruit, nuts, berries, and water from banana trees.

On another day, he reported, "I went through somebody's garden and stole some chives. They had some pretty good chives there." Although he had made attempts, the captain had been unable to make radio contact with U.S. aircraft until after a June bombing mission.

"I could hear them bombing and hear the enemy shooting back so I figured when they stopped shooting that meant they were heading home. It also meant they could listen for people and I could get on the radio."

"I did this yesterday (June 1) and two flights came up to answer me." The contact triggered the search and rescue mission. The rescue forces were driven off by MIGs on their first attempt.

A second task force headed north again through heavy ground fire. When they approached Captain Locher's position, the Sandys made two passes over him, then led in a Super Jolly Green Giant, commanded by Capt. Dale E. Stovall.

Sgt. Charles B. McQuid and A1C Kenneth W. Cakebread, pararescue specialists on the HH-53, at

rest of the world

Military Preview

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By Edgar Ulsamer

SENIOR EDITOR, AIR FORCE MAGAZINE

THE AIR FORCE's bold and superbly efficient teams that rescue downed airmen have been working overtime since the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam in March of this year.

During the past four months, almost 200 "saves," many involving deep penetration into North Vietnam, have been made or directed by men of the 3d Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group (ARRGp), headquartered at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon. The total of all USAF combat rescues completed in Southeast Asia during the past seven years stands at about 2,600 at this writing.

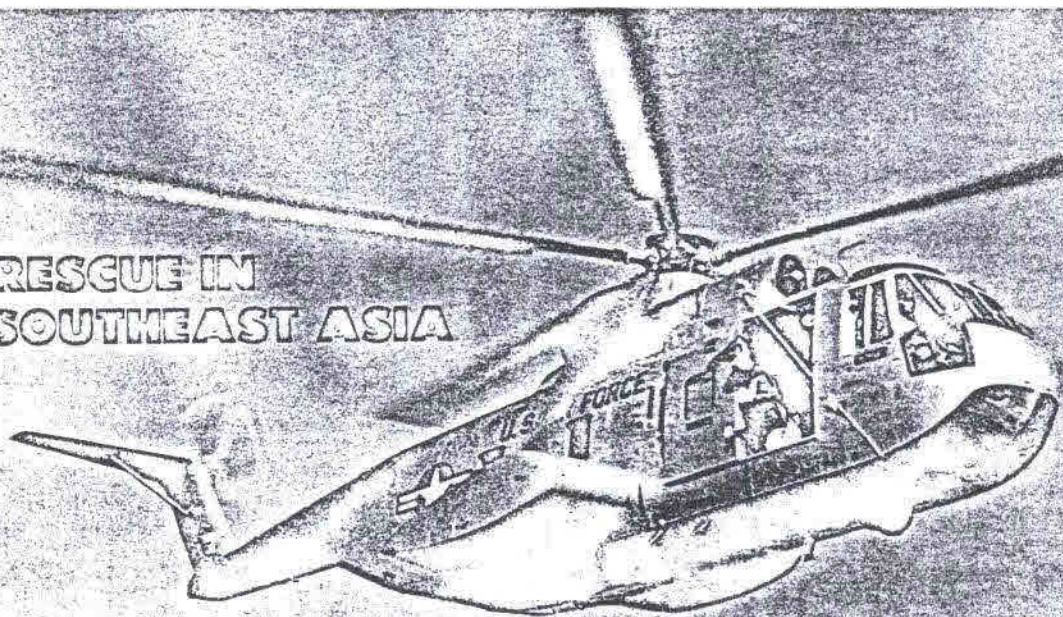
The 3d ARRGp is responsible for overseeing all USAF rescue and recovery operations in Southeast Asia. Involved is a huge area

totaling some 1,100,000 square miles in four countries and the Gulf of Siam. (The US Navy handles rescue operations in the Gulf of Tonkin and along the shoreline of North Vietnam up to five miles inland.)

The 3d covers its vast territory with a staff of fewer than 700 people and a hardware inventory of about thirty aircraft. The unit operates fixed-wing HC-130P King mission coordinators, which also serve as aerial tankers, plus HH-53 and HH-3 air-refuelable, long-range helicopters. They are known as "Super Jolly Green Giants" and "Jolly Green Giants," respectively.

The 3d Group also operates a large number of short-range HH-43 "Pedro" local rescue helicopters from eight bases in Southeast Asia. The HC-130Ps are based at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand, and the long-

AIR RESCUE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



From a human as well as a political point of view, airpower in Southeast Asia has shown one vulnerability—the downed aviators who fall into the hands of a ruthless enemy who exploits them to serve his own objectives. But an ingenious, elaborate mechanism has been created which, operated by a special breed of dedicated, fearless airmen, keeps bringing survivors back to safety . . .

Right from Hanoi's Own Backyard

range choppers at Da Nang and Tan Son Nhut in South Vietnam, as well as at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AFB.

The 3d Group also runs the Joint Rescue Coordination Center at Tan Son Nhut, code-named "Joker," and two subregional coordination centers located at Son Tra AB in South Vietnam and at Udorn Royal Thai AFB, Thailand. These centers plan and execute rescue operations in the areas under their jurisdiction and maintain command and control for each.

Air rescue operations also draw freely on personnel and planes of other USAF units, and the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Some of these "outside" forces participate in almost all search and rescue operations (SAR), under USAF direction.

At the outset of a "routine" SAR, an HC-130P King has already been prepositioned and is "orbiting" in the vicinity of combat missions being flown at that time. The SAR starts with report of a bailout, an aircraft down, or a May Day distress call. When any of these events occurs, the mission coordinator aboard the HC-130P King tries for a bearing on the downed flyer or aircraft in distress, or, failing that, to establish the location through aircrews on the scene. Once the approximate location of a downed flyer is established, the coordinator directs the rescue force to the site.

During periods of heavy air combat activity, the rescue force is likely to be airborne, but if not, is quickly launched by the mission coordinator via the "Blue Chip" Tactical Air Control Center at Tan Son Nhut. In addition to the HC-130P mission coordinator, a SAR force usually consists of at least two A-1 Sandys, aided occasionally by a forward air controller (FAC) and two HH-53s. The Sandys go in first and attempt to establish positive identification. Actual voice contact with the survivor over his survival radio is "considered almost mandatory because there are simply too many beepers {personnel locator beacons} loose around the countryside," an Air Force rescue expert told *AIR FORCE Magazine*. In several instances, the enemy has used captured beepers to bait traps for the rescue force. While no USAF rescue aircraft have been lost to ground fire due to such tricks, present procedures "more or less dictate" that a survivor be unmistakably identified before the rescue choppers go in.

To minimize the danger of detection by the enemy, downed flyers are instructed to use survival radios only intermittently and as sparingly as possible. Current long-term Air Force efforts to improve rescue operations through the application of advanced technology center on more efficient means of locating and identi-

fying survivors and providing them with some degree of mobility.

One innovative way of finding downed flyers quickly is being explored through ASAP (Advanced Survival Avionics Program), which uses a space satellite to establish the survivor's "gross," or approximate location on an essentially instantaneous basis. ASAP is premised on DME (distance measuring) techniques that evaluate the differences in the time it takes a signal from the survivor's radio to reach two points whose locations are known, i.e., the satellite and the mission coordinator aircraft. From this information the system then calculates with reasonable accuracy the survivor's location. Once the SAR force has reached that general area, another system pinpoints the exact location.

Another promising approach to the rescue problem is through a program called Air Escape and Recovery Capability. Several schemes are under investigation and have proved feasible in tests. Common to all is the survivor's ability to be propelled for many miles, perhaps as many as a hundred, from the bailout area to either friendly or less-hostile sites. The bailing-out airman attains this mobility through either a parawing (a cross between a parachute and an aircraft wing) or a rotary wing, either of which works in concert with a rocket booster to furnish power (for details on development of such a device, see "Jane's Supplement," p. 43). The systems under investigation are folded when not used and fit into the ejection seat of an F-4 aircraft. They require no modification of the aircraft's cockpit. Yet a third approach, by which the survivor is provided with mobility once he is on the ground, is under preliminary investigation but can be expected to require many more years of research and test before it can become operational.

Major Outside Support

One of the two A-1 Sandys normally assumes command control over a rescue operation once a downed flyer is located and identified. If the Sandys draw enemy ground fire, they attempt to suppress it; when the enemy is too tough for the Sandys to overcome, they call in outside support supplied by Blue Chip—usually F-4s, Navy fighters, A-7s, A-37s, and Army gunships. It is not unusual for forty to fifty combat aircraft to participate in a difficult rescue operation. (In several instances, that number has swelled to more than a hundred to deal with especially intensive ground fire.) And, at times, the supporting force can include MIG CAP (combat air patrol) air-superiority fighters and F-105 "Iron

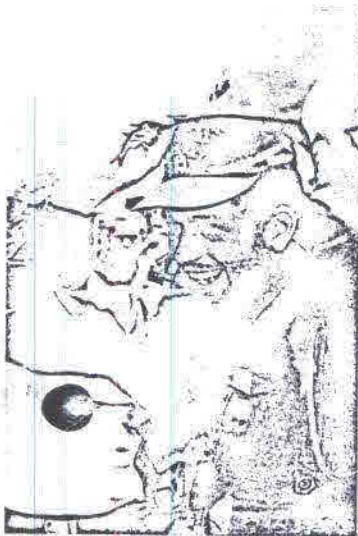
Hand" (electronic countermeasure) aircraft to combat enemy fighter aircraft.

Rescue operations in South Vietnam also involve friendly ground forces from time to time. In certain instances, when enemy forces were

so close to the downed flyer that conventional munitions couldn't be used without endangering him, the rescue force has dropped conventional riot-control agents.

After enemy fire has been suppressed to a

THE SAGA OF ROGER LOCHER



Capt. Roger C. Locher was rescued from deep within North Vietnam after avoiding capture for twenty-three days.

By
SSgt.
Tom
Merchant,
USAF

A US Air Force search and rescue task force ventured north of Hanoi early this summer to recover an Air Force F-4 crew member who evaded the North Vietnamese for twenty-three days before he was rescued.

Capt. Roger C. Locher, a twenty-eight-year-old weapon system operator with the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, was extremely weak—he lost fifteen pounds during his ordeal—but otherwise in good condition. Rescue men acclaimed the captain's presence of mind throughout the evasion and rescue.

Locher and the F-4 Phantom pilot, who still is missing, were shot down by a MIG-21 firing a heat-seeking missile. Shortly before, Locher had bagged his third MIG. He previously scored MIG hits on February 21 and May 8. When he was shot down, the captain was flying his 407th combat mission.

The rescue task force included HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters to make the actual pickup; A-1 Sandy propeller-driven fighters to locate the downed airman, suppress ground fire, and lead in the helicopters; HC-130 King command aircraft, which also refueled the helicopters on the long journey; and F-4 Phantom and F-105 Thunderchief jet fighters to protect the slower-moving aircraft.

The task force encountered heavy ground fire on its way to and from the captain's mountainside perch.

Describing his downing, Locher said, "We immediately went out of control, flopping from side to side. Then fire started coming in the back of the cockpit. It seared my canopy with bubbles and I couldn't see out anymore. The airplane slowed down and we went into a flat spin.

"I told the pilot, 'I think I'm going to have to get out. It's

starting to burn pretty bad back here.'

"I yanked for what seemed like an eternity on my primary ejection. The next thing I heard was a big blast. When I opened my eyes, I was in my parachute and just about then I could see the airplane hit the ground right below.

"I looked around and was going into a kind of deep-dished valley. I aimed for a steep mountainside and came down through the trees. My heels were on the ground so all I had to do was unbuckle and get out. I just sat down for a minute and listened."

During the next twenty-three days he subsisted on fruit, nuts, and berries. He was very successful in locating water.

"One day I eyed a banana tree all day. It didn't have any bananas on it, but I remembered I could get water out of it. Just before evening I stuck a hole in it and got myself three pints of good banana water."

On another day, he reported, "I went through somebody's garden and stole some chives. They had some pretty good chives there."

The captain constantly changed his position in search of good cover, food, and water. He covered approximately fifteen miles during his twenty-three-day ordeal.

"In this one clearing there was a hootch [hut] and behind it was a pretty steep little mountain, so I just clambered right up their garden and halfway up their mountain, quite near the top. That's where I stayed the last two days."

Although he had made attempts, the captain had been unable to make radio contact with US aircraft.

"I could hear them bombing and hear the enemy shooting back, so I figured when they stopped shooting that meant they were heading home. It also meant they could listen for people and I could get on the radio.

"I did this yesterday and two flights came up to answer me. That was the first time I made radio contact."

The contact triggered the search and rescue penetration deep into North Vietnam. The rescue forces were driven off by MIGs on their first attempt on June 1.

The next day, the task force headed north again, led in by the Sandys of the 56th Special Operations Wing. Heavy ground fire failed to dissuade the rescue aircraft as they continued north. When they approached Locher's position, the Sandys made a pass over him, circled the mountain, made another pass, and then led in a Super Jolly Green Giant, commanded by Capt. Dale E. Stovall.

As the Jolly Green of the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron moved in, automatic weapons fire erupted from a nearby hootch. Sgt. Charles B. McQuid and A1C Kenneth W. Cakebread, pararescue specialists on the HH-53, silenced the ground fire with Miniguns.

The flight engineer, Sgt. James F. Walsh, lowered the jungle penetrator to Locher.

"It sure is a good feeling to get that penetrator, strap it on, give them a thumbs-up, and hang on."

To evade further ground fire, the helicopter lifted to the top of the mountain as the captain was being hoisted in. Locher was swung onboard, and the rescue force headed home.

The trip home was no downhill glide. Every village was a source of ground fire. Trucks and even a train opened fire on the task force, but the A-1 Sandys returned the fire to protect the helicopters, and in the process destroyed one locomotive, several railroad cars, and trucks.

The rescued weapon systems officer said, "Those Jolly Greens and Sandys are just great. They did a wonderful job in getting me out of there. I can't thank them enough."