

Locher: 'It's a miracle'

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 weapon 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.

Upon return Locher was greeted by Gen. John W. Vogt, Seventh Air Force commander.

The rescued weapons 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."