

Last Newsman Out of Fallen City

(In the following dispatch, the last journalist to escape from Quang Tri, freelance photographer Ennio Lacobucci, describes the fall of the city to North Vietnamese forces.)

By ENNIO LACOBUCCI

SAIGON (UPI) — I didn't believe we would get out. I thought we would be killed.

The ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) were running away. Some of them took off their uniforms and mixed in with the refugees. They left some brand new rifles and ammunition behind.

By late Monday our chances were getting slimmer and slimmer. I knew we would have to rely on the American helicopters to get us out.

I arrived in Quang Tri last Wednesday by hitch-hiking from Phu Bai to Hue and taking a taxi from there to Quang Tri. I think my car was the last one to get through before the road was cut.

When I got into Quang Tri I tried to find out what was going on. I realized the situation was very bad. The civilians were panicky.

People were packing to move to the south. Then the heavy shelling started.

The enemy guns were concentrating on a bridge to the south, which was later blown by the Americans to try to slow the Communist advance.

I made my way to the American compound. The people there were glad to see me.

The Americans wanted to know what was happening south of Quang Tri.

They were very nervous. So was I.

The next day, Friday, I left the compound to take pictures of wounded, and got wounded myself.

I was taking pictures of some trucks of civilians that had been ambushed on Highway 1 just south of the city when I was lifted from the ground and dropped back again. I got some shrapnel

in my leg. It was a slight wound.

The truck I was in had hit a mine. People were screaming.

I took pictures. Here on the road, mines had killed about 30 people and injured about 60 who had been in three big trucks.

When I returned to Quang Tri the shelling was heavier.

Helicopters could not land. There was too much fire.

I decided to try to get out. I thought the only way to do this was by road. I got a ride in a jeep to the point where I had seen the trucks mined.

I went past the site by going off the road and through some dunes.

There was no traffic coming north from Hue. I was frightened. I was alone. I decided to go back to Quang Tri.

I passed the bodies I had photographed the previous day. Refugees were streaming south as I went north. Shells were impacting all around. I saw bits of arms and legs lying along the highway.

When I got back to the American compound there were only a few South Vietnamese still there with the Americans. Everyone was scared. Sunday, when I went back into Quang Tri City, I saw there were fewer soldiers than there had been.

The refugees were leaving in droves. The soldiers were all mixed up with them.

I realized the danger so I went back to the American compound. On the way back I took pictures of the ARVN moving out with the refugees.

The B52 strikes were getting closer and closer. At this point, we all wondered how we could get out. I was pinning my hopes on the Americans.

Late Saturday, we moved to Quang Tri's old citadel, the ARVN headquarters. When we got there, we knew we were still surrounded.

I was told by the Americans we would march out to the coast and a ship on the gulf would pick us up. That night we slept on the floor of the citadel.

About mid-day Sunday, the incoming rounds landed very close. The ARVN packed up and tried to run south to Hue by road.

A South Vietnamese general tried to make it to Hue in an armored personnel carrier. He returned about an hour later.

The citadel was burning and then they began to fire on us with mortars.

I was sure we would not get out. I thought it would be a disaster.

Then the choppers came in.

Businessmen Elect

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States Chamber of Commerce announced Saturday the election of William S. Lowe, board chairman of A.P. Green Refractories Co., Mexico, Mo., as its new president.

● WAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

corner of the compound, to await the landing of a second rescue helicopter.

Enemy shells were still being dropped on the city and the first of the invading troops had already infiltrated to a dangerously close position.

KEPT HIS COOL

"The only thing to do under the circumstances," said Sgt. LaPointe, "was to keep cool until that second chopper arrived."

That pleasant whirring sound was heard about 20 minutes later and not a moment too soon.

Sgt. LaPointe directed the second loading on the copter but this time he was not about to be left behind.

"I got on the chopper first and helped the others aboard. We didn't have much time to spare but one thing I knew," he said, "I wasn't about to be left behind again."

He expressed surprise that the enemy fire against the copter was less than that had been leveled against the first copter.

But danger still lurked around the next turn for the helicopter and its passengers. No sooner had the craft become airborne than a radio message was received.

Somehow a few of the U.S. advisers had been left behind and they issued a plea for rescue.

As the copter swooped down on the location where the advisers were supposedly hiding, Sgt. LaPointe saw two men clad in dark clothing emerge from an alleyway and begin firing on the copter.

ENEMY TRICK

It had been a clever ruse. The enemy had managed to get the fake message sent over the same frequency used by the U.S. rescue copters.

Sgt. LaPointe manned the copters mini-guns and trained his fire on the two men who soon scurried for the same alleyway from which they had emerged moments earlier. "We didn't see them again," said now-weary LaPointe.

Describing the scene in the capital city, he said: "It sure was the noisiest place I'd ever been in. Nothing but explosions and small arms fire all over the place."

The mission had been accomplished. The 80 advisers had been safely plucked from amidst the encroaching enemy troops.

On April 3, Sgt. LaPointe was aboard another copter that was going to the rescue of several

downed U.S. pilots near Quang Tri. The lead helicopter on the mission was hit by enemy fire and lost use of its guns. Sgt. LaPointe exposed himself to enemy fire as he manned the copter's mini-guns and went to the rescue of the other helicopter crew which had crash landed nearby.

The Air Force called this a feat which reflected great credit on LaPointe and the Air Force.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Paul LaPointe, 63 Tudor St., he is a graduate of the former Trade High and has been in the Air Force for two years and in Vietnam less than one year.

JUNE DISCHARGE

Sgt. LaPointe is due for discharge in June. One memory of his service in Vietnam that will be with him, however, will be that risky rescue mission in Quang Tri.

Meanwhile, North Vietnamese troops, fresh from one of their biggest victories of the war moved from two directions toward refugee-swollen Hue, South Vietnam's third largest city and apparently the next major target for the driving communist forces.

North Vietnamese soldiers swept through Quang Tri earlier in the day and took control of the entire northern 30 miles of South Vietnam. They grouped for a possible move against a new South Vietnamese defense line only 15 miles north of Hue, the former imperial capital.

An estimated two North Vietnamese divisions — more than 20,000 men — also pushed toward Hue from the Southwest. They earlier set up huge 130mm artillery at the captured artillery base bastogne about 12 miles from the old capital.

So far there have been no attacks against the U. S. base at Phu Bai, just south of Hue, which houses about 2,000 Americans.

Quang Tri was the first South Vietnamese provincial capital to fall to the North Vietnamese in the war although Communists held parts of Hue for 29 days during the Tet offensive in 1968.

MAJOR DEFEAT

The fall of Quang Tri where the current offensive began was a major setback for the South Vietnamese.

"There is no doubt that the South Vietnamese army suffered a major defeat," a high U.S. military source said. "This is not something that can be papered over."

An estimated 50,000 refugees trekked southward from Quang Tri upward Hue during the day.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS AIRSPACE RESCUE AND RECOVERY STATION (HARRS)
SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILLINOIS 61950



13 JULY 1972

005

Letter of Appreciation

37TH ARRS (OF)
APO 96327

1. We were pleased to receive the attached copy of a letter from Mr & Mrs B. A. Willetts of LeClaire, Iowa. They had sent the letter to the Secretary of the Air Force in the hope that word of their appreciation would reach the men involved in rescuing their son from Quang Tri on 1 May 1972.

2. Our records indicate that Sgt David W. Young and Sgt Robert Lapointe are assigned to your organization. General Everest has requested that the attached letter of appreciation be brought to the attention of Sgt Young and Sgt Lapointe as well as all others involved in the Quang Tri rescue mission.


JOHN W. BROADUS, Captain, USAF
Commander, Hq Sq Section, Hq ARRS

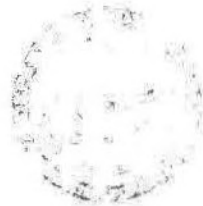
1 Atch

1. Ltr from Mr & Mrs
B. A. Willetts



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20315



Dear Mr. and Mrs. Willetts:

This is to acknowledge your kind letter of June 5 to Secretary of the Air Force, Robert C. Seamans, Jr.

We have been unable, so far, to identify the Air Force unit that performed the rescue operation you mentioned at Quang Tri on May 1, 1972.

However, we are sending a copy of your letter to the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service in hopes that they will forward your sentiments to the men who performed the rescue.

Good Morning!

It's Thursday, May 4, 1972

Davenport-Bettendorf, Iowa

8

TIMES DEMOCRAT Wednesday, May 3, 1972
Davenport-Bettendorf, Iowa

Clinton GI's Rescue Role

"Oh, that's my kid," Mrs. Warren C. Young, Clinton, Iowa, exclaimed when she learned that Sgt. David W. Young, 23, was safe after helping rescue 80 Americans and others from Quang Tri just before that city was abandoned to the North Vietnamese Monday.

When she heard details of the rescue operation from an Associated Press release, Mrs. Young recognized the name of another Air Force man, Sgt. Robert Lapointe, 22.

"THAT'S DAVE'S buddy," said Mrs. Young, whose first word of the harrowing incident came to her from the Times Democrat Tuesday.

Sgt. Young and Sgt. Lapointe reported to the Associated Press they drew less fire than expected from North Vietnamese troops on the ground but it was the noisiest place they've ever been in.

"There were explosions going on all over the place," Lapointe said.

Lapointe found himself stranded on the ground as the first helicopter lifted out.

He said as his helicopter came in two men in dirty dark clothes emerged from an alley and fired on the craft. "I opened up with my machine and got rid of them," he said. "We didn't have any trouble on the ground."

SGT. YOUNG said the city itself was deserted. "We saw nothing moving. Quang Tri always looked desolate, but it's really desolate now. There were a lot of shell-holed houses and some military equipment in the streets."



Sgt. David Young

"It looks like maybe some of the South Vietnamese just left everything behind, changed into civilian clothes and went south."

The first helicopter came out with 37 persons, the second with 45 and the third 50, including the 80 Americans, 43 Vietnamese and a French photographer.

Lapointe said when he found himself stranded on the ground as the first helicopter lifted out, he helped organize the remaining persons.

"AFTER 15 minutes we didn't have any trouble loading them," Lapointe said. "When the second helicopter landed, I was the first to get on. I sure wasn't going to be left behind."

While three of the big helicopters took part in the actual rescue, a fourth, hovering as a reserve ship, received a radio call to fly down to the rescue site.

The call was a fake by North Vietnamese troops using the American radio fre-

quency, an officer said. The message was, "Hey we's got more people down here."

The helicopter landed and a rescuer jumped off to make a search. He saw two enemy soldiers coming toward him, firing a machine gun. A gunner aboard the chopper killed them, the rescuer jumped aboard, and the helicopter pulled out.

TWO SUPPORTING aircraft were lost to ground fire and one pilot is missing, officials said in Vietnam.

Otherwise the daring operation went off nearly as planned although rescuers said there was a mad rush by refugees for the first of four big Air Force Jolly Green Giant helicopters, possibly because they did not realize there would be more.

Sgt. Young, whose parents reside at 1911 N. 6th St., Clinton, entered the Air Force in September 1967. He recently extended his enlistment by 2 years.

YOUNG HAS spent 1½ years in Vietnam and his mother hopes he will return to the United States in time for a leave permitting him to attend his Clinton High School class' fifth-year reunion in July.

When the Clinton airman returns to his station, he probably will find a letter from his youngest sister, Susie, a third-grader at Horace Mann School, Clinton.

Their mother said, "I never change a word. He puts them up in the building, and all his buddies read them."

Sgt. Young has a brother, Doug, a junior at Clinton High School, and sister, Karen, who attends Clinton Community College where the sergeant was enrolled before enlisting.

Three years

Kevin O'Brien, 32, was born without vision in his left eye. He grew up in Chicago's tough West Side and now resides in

time. The two are trying to make ends meet.

—MUSCATINE
Continued On Page 2

Business
Classified
Editorial
Horoscope
Obituaries

Pages 23, 25
Pages 29-35
Page 8
Page 27
Page 26

Clinton GI Helps Save 80 Yanks



Sgt. David Young.

"Oh, that's my kid," Mrs. Warren C. Young, Clinton, Iowa, exclaimed when she learned that Sgt. David W. Young, 23, was safe after helping rescue 80 Americans, and others from Quang Tri just before that city was abandoned to the North Vietnamese Monday.

When she heard details of the rescue operation from an Associated Press release, Mrs. Young recognized the name of another Air Force man, Sgt. Robert Lapointe, 22.

"THAT'S DAVE'S buddy," said Mrs. Young, whose first word of the harrowing incident came to her from the Times-Democrat today.

Sgt. Young and Sgt. Lapointe reported to the Associated Press they drew less fire than expected from North Vietnamese troops on the ground but it was the noisiest place they've ever been in.

"There were explosions going on all over the place," Lapointe said.

Lapointe found himself stranded on the ground as the first helicopter lifted out.

He said as his helicopter came in two men in dirty dark clothes emerged from an alley and fired on the craft. "I opened up with my minigun and got rid of them," he said. "We didn't have any trouble on the ground."

SGT. YOUNG said the city itself was deserted. "We saw nothing moving. Quang Tri always looked desolate, but it's really

desolate now. There were a lot of shelled-out houses and some military equipment in the streets."

"It looks like maybe some of the South Vietnamese just left everything behind, changed into civilian clothes and went south."

The first helicopter came out with 37 persons, the second with 45 and the third 50, including the 80 Americans, 43 Vietnamese and a French photographer.

Lapointe said when he found himself stranded on the ground as the first helicopter lifted out, he helped organize the remaining persons.

"AFTER 15 minutes, we didn't have any trouble loading them," Lapointe said. "When the second helicopter landed, I was the first to get on. I sure wasn't going to be left behind."

While three of the big helicopters took part in the actual rescue, a fourth, hovering as a reserve ship, received a radio call to fly down to the rescue site.

The call was a fake by North Vietnamese troops using the American radio fre-

—DARING
Continued On Page 2

Daring Rescue Mission—

Continued From Page 1

quency, an officer said. The message was, "Hey we's got more people down here."

The helicopter landed and a rescue man jumped off to make a search. He saw two enemy soldiers coming toward him, firing a machine gun. A gunner aboard the chopper killed them, the rescueman jumped aboard, and the helicopter pulled out.

TWO SUPPORTING aircraft were lost to ground fire and one pilot is missing, officials said in Vietnam.

Otherwise the daring operation went off nearly as planned although rescuemen said there was a mad rush by refugees for the first of four big Air Force Jolly Green Giant helicopters, possibly because they did not realize there would be more.

Sgt. Young, whose parents reside at

1811 N. 6th St., Clinton, entered the Air Force in September 1967. He recently extended his enlistment by 2 years.

YOUNG HAS spent 1½ years in Vietnam and his mother hopes he will return to the United States in time for a leave permitting him to attend his Clinton High School class' fifth-year reunion in July.

When the Clinton airman returns to his station, he probably will find a letter from his youngest sister, Susie, a third-grader at Horace Mann School, Clinton.

Their mother said, "I never change a word. He puts them up in the building, and all his buddies read them."

Sgt. Young has a brother, Doug, a junior at Clinton High School, and sister, Karen, who attends Clinton Community College where the sergeant was enrolled before enlisting.

Tri city said another 10 American fighting men stayed behind with South Vietnamese Marines.

AIR FORCE TIMES

May 31, 1972



Evacuated men are safe now and can sport big grins.

Copters Evacuate 132 From Embattled City

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam (7AF) — Five U.S. Air Force HH-53 helicopters performed the largest evacuation of the Southeast Asian conflict May 1 evening when they airlifted 132 Americans and Vietnamese out of Quang Tri to Da Nang.

Three of the HH-53s, of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang Airfield, were responsible for carrying out the evacuees. A fourth helicopter landed to make sure all persons were evacuated and a fifth stood by in case it was needed.

Air Force and Navy air strikes paved the way for the helicopters, which still had to weave through ground fire from North Vietnamese tanks and anti-aircraft guns on their way into and out of the provincial capital.

Miraculously, no one was injured aboard the helicopters during the rescue operation.

While supporting the effort, an Air Force O-2 Forward Air Control (FAC) aircraft and A-1 rescue support fighter were shot down.

394 Refugees

... ON ONE PLANE

See Page 30

The FAC pilot bailed out and was rescued by friendly ground forces. The fighter pilot ditched his A-1 in the ocean and was picked up by an Army helicopter.

The first Super Jolly Green Gi-

ant to land received sniper fire from two enemy soldiers. Pararescue specialist SSgt. Robert L. LaPointe silenced them with his mini-gun.

After his helicopter landed, LaPointe jumped out and organized the persons on the ground so the operation would go smoothly. He remained on the ground and boarded the second helicopter to land.

The fourth helicopter landed to make sure that all the persons had been picked up. When it was on the ground it received automatic weapon and sniper fire. PJ Sgt. William J. Thompson, knocked out the automatic and the sniper fire was suppressed by PJ Sgt. Daniel G. Manion.

All the HH-53s returned safely to Da Nang.



GUNFIGHTER GAZETTE

Vol VI, Number 18

DA NANG AIRFIELD

May 6, 1972

Jollys evacuate Quang Tri advisors

"This may have been the biggest and the hottest extraction in the history of the Air Force rescue service," exclaimed Lt. Col. William M. Harris, commander of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron here.

Four of the squadron's Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopters, accompanied by heavy close air support, went into Quang Tri City at approximately 1635 hours Monday, bringing out all the remaining American advisors. A total of 132 personnel were lifted from the center of the city, including some ARVN and Popular Forces. All personnel landed safely here and the mission was terminated at 1850 hours.

Despite the close air support provided by U.S. Air Force fighter-bombers, the Jollys received considerable ground fire from inside and around the city, with mortar and artillery rounds coming in from the surrounding areas and sporadic ground and sniper fire from inside the city itself. At the time of the rescue, Quang Tri was surrounded by three NVA divisions. There was no battle damage to the four helicopters.

The first Jolly to go in airlifted 37 of the advisors.

While on the ground, the crew encountered hostile sniper fire from two enemy troops. Sergeant Robert L. LaPointe, a pararescueman (PJ), returned fire with the mini-gun from his position in the rear of the aircraft. Both snipers were believed to be dead.

(Continued on Page 6)

Quang Tri evacuated...

(Continued from Page 1)

The second Jolly encountered sporadic small arms fire, but "nothing close" during their touchdown. 45 persons were picked up this time.

The third helicopter experienced light hostile fire as they lifted the remaining 50 persons. However, they reported that ground troops were approaching the landing pad as they lifted off.

Since the original plan for the rescue was for each bird to pick up 40 persons, the fourth bird went in expecting to pick up the last load of advisors.

The advisors were supposed to run up the ramp in the back of the aircraft as soon as it touched down. When no one came, Sgt. William J. Thompson, another pararescuer, stuck his head out to look around. Almost immediately, an enemy troop began "walking up" automatic M-16 fire towards his position. Quickly slipping behind the mini-gun, Thompson silenced the gunman.

After getting a radio affirmation that all the American advisors had been picked up, Capt. Donald A. Sutton, aircraft commander, decided the area was too hot to stick around.

Although Captain Sutton's crew did not pick up any survivors, they have the distinction of being the last Americans in Quang Tri.

Both the rescue crews and the advisors commented on the smoothness and efficiency of the mission. One advisor said, "The Air Force did a tremendous job of laying down very close air-to-ground support. They must have laid out one hell of an operation to get us out."

Colonel Harris added, "The FACs (forward air controllers) worked with the fast-movers (fighter-bombers) and did a tremendous job of putting in air strikes and all the good ordnance at the critical places. The Sandys (A-1 Skyraiders) did a fantastic job of laying in air support and escorting our Jollys."

Crewing the first HH-53 rescue helicopter were Maj. Jackson K. Scott, Jr., aircraft commander; Capt. David E. Mullenix, co-pilot; Sgt. Ronald W. Blackwell, flight engineer; Sgt. David W. Young, and Sgt. LaPointe, pararescuemen.

The second chopper was crewed by Capt. Rodney S. Griffith, aircraft commander; Maj. Anthony A. Gates, co-pilot; SSgt. David Garcia, flight engineer; and SSgt. Cole E. Panning and Sgt. Charles B. McQuoid II, pararescuemen.

On board the third rescue craft were Capt. John K. Weiner, aircraft commander; Capt. Gary A. Dake, co-pilot; SSgt. William A. Simm, flight engineer; and Sgt. Richard L. Steed and A1C Michael A. Aillet, were the pararescuemen.

Along with Captain Sutton on the fourth chopper were Maj. Jerry J. Gilbert, co-pilot, SSgt. Jimmy D. Minshew, flight engineer; and Sergeant Manion and Sergeant Thompson, pararescuemen.

AIR RESCUE

Vol. 3 No. 4

Scott AFB, Ill. 62225

April 1972

Jolly pilot nets Silver Star

McCHORD AFB, Wash. — Maj. Rodney S. Griffith, 4th Military Airlift Squadron, was recently awarded the Silver Star, the nation's third highest military honor.

On May 1, 1972, while serving as an HH-53 helicopter commander in the Republic of Vietnam, Major Griffith (then captain) participated in an emergency evacuation of 129 American and Vietnamese Army men from besieged Quang Tri.

Despite U. S. Air Force and Navy air strikes to pave the way for the rescue operation, Major Griffith's helicopter had to weave through a corridor of ground fire from North Vietnamese tanks and antiaircraft guns to and from the provincial capital.

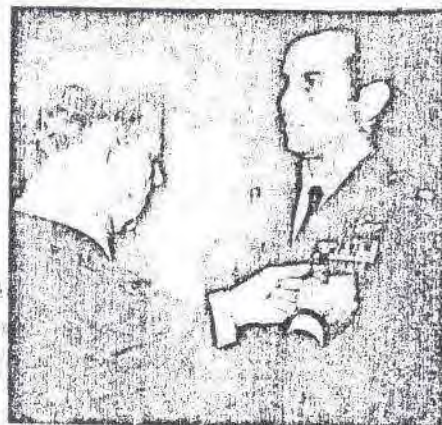
Landing in the midst of the

burning city with artillery bursts all around them, Major Griffith and his crew brought 47 American advisors to safety unharmed.

"At the time I was scared to death," Major Griffith said. "Considering all the other rescue missions I had participated in during my tour in Vietnam, this was the first time I felt we weren't going to make it out."

During the ceremony, Col. Charles A. Bonney, Jr., vice commander of McChord's 62nd Military Airlift Wing, lauded Major Griffith saying "You, sir, are a man I am proud to be associated with."

Major Griffith is presently a flight examiner with McChord's 4th Military Airlift Wing.



Col. Charles A. Bonney, vice commander of McChord's 62nd Military Airlift Wing, pins the Silver Star on Maj. Rodney S. Griffith at ceremonies held there recently. (U.S. Air Force Photo)

Two PJs save Norse sailor

Two pararescuemen parachuted into the Atlantic 150 miles east of New York to rescue a survivor of an abandoned Norwegian freighter March 25.

The pararescuemen, TSgt. Roy A. Taylor, 24, of Quincy, Mass., and Sgt. Rickey J. Coler, 23, Big Bend, Wis., parachuted from their HC-130 to a small wood and styrofoam bright orange "life box" to rescue Stein Gabrielsen, 23, of Oslo, Norway.

Gabrielsen was one of 30 crewmembers of the Norse Variant a 541-foot Norwegian coal freighter

enroute to Hamburg, Germany from Norfolk, Va. Less than 200 miles from New York, a severe Atlantic storm destroyed the ship and the sailors abandoned the vessel.

An extensive search effort by the Air Force and Coast Guard was hampered by the stormy seas. At 9 A.M., March 25, an HC-130 from Pease AFB, N.H., sighted three box-like rafts within a 25 square mile radius, but only one had a survivor.

The two pararescuemen parachuted to within 25 feet of the raft, inflated their personal dinghies,

and dogpaddled to the survivor. Once there, they attached their rafts to the survivor's raft and began treating him for shock and exposure.

Two hours later, the S.S. Mobile Lube, a commercial tanker, picked up the two pararescuemen and the survivor. From the Mobile Lube they were transported by helicopter to the Coast Guard cutter Cherokee and then to the aircraft carrier Independence. The pararescuemen were flown to Norfolk Naval Air Station. Gabrielsen remained on the carrier under a doctor's care.

Air Force HH-53s carry out largest evacuation of the war

TAN SON NHUT AB, Republic of Vietnam (7AF) — Five U.S. Air Force HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters performed the largest evacuation of the Southeast Asian conflict on Monday evening May 1, when they airlifted 132 Americans and Vietnamese out of Quang Tri.

Three of the HH-53s, of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Da Nang Airfield, were responsible for carrying out the evacuees. A fourth helicopter landed to make sure all persons were evacuated and a fifth stood by in case it was needed.

The 132 evacuees were taken to Da Nang.

U.S. Air Force and Navy air strikes paved the way for the helicopters, which still had to weave through a corridor of ground fire from North Vietnamese tanks and anti-aircraft guns on their way into and out of the provincial capital.

Miraculously, no one was injured aboard the helicopters during the rescue operation.

While supporting the effort, an Air Force 0-2 Forward Air Control (FAC) aircraft and A-1 Sandy rescue support fighter were shot down. The FAC pilot bailed out and was rescued by friendly ground forces. The fighter pilot ditched his A-1 in the ocean and was picked up by an Army helicopter.

The first Super Jolly Green

Giant to land received sniper fire from two enemy soldiers. Pararescue specialist (PJ) Sgt. Robert L. LaPointe, of Lynn, Mass., silenced them with bursts from his mini-gun in the rear of the helicopter.

After his helicopter landed, LaPointe jumped out and organized the persons on the

continued on page 8

HH-53s Largest evacuation

continued from page 1

ground so the operation would go smoothly. He remained on the ground and boarded the second helicopter to land.

The first helicopter picked up 37 evacuees, the second, 45. And the third, 50.

The fourth Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter landed to make sure that all the persons had been picked up. When it was on the ground it received AK-47 automatic weapon and sniper fire from the North Vietnamese in the landing area. PJ Sgt. William J. Thompson, of Sananseimo, Calif., knocked out the AK-47 with bursts of his mini-gun and the sniper fire was suppressed by PJ Sgt. Daniel G. Manion of Richfield Springs, N.Y.

All the HH-53s returned safely to Da Nang.

Besides LaPointe, the crew on the first Jolly Green Giant to land included Maj. Jackson R. Scott Jr., aircraft commander from Summerville, S.C.; Capt. David E. Mullenix, co-pilot from Barkdale, Ark.; Sgt. Ronald

Blackwell, flight engineer from Titusville, Fla.; and Sgt. David Young, a PJ from Clinto, Iowa.

The second helicopter crew consisted of Capt. Rodney S. Griffith, aircraft commander from Choctaw, Okla.; Maj. Anthony A. Gates, co-pilot from Crossett, Ark.; SSgt. David Garcia, flight engineer from Santa Ana, Calif.; and PJs SSgt. Cole E. Panning, LaPorte, Tex., and Sgt. Charles B. McQuoid II, OF Chicago.

The third HH-53 was crewed by Capt. John R. Weimer, aircraft commander from Akron, Ohio; Capt. Gary A. Dake, co-pilot from Kenfield, N.Y.; SSgt. William A. Simm, flight engineer from Pittsburgh; and PJs Sgt. Michael A. Aillet, Houston, and Sgt. Richard L. Steed, Santa Ana.

Besides Manion and Thompson on the fourth helicopter, were Capt. Donald A. Sutton, aircraft commander from Ridley, Md.; Maj. Jerry J. Gilbert, co-pilot from Lafayette, La.; and SSgt. Jimmie D. Minshew, flight engineer from Gadsden, Ala.



... called it "Mission Impossible."
... called it off ... to everyone's surprise—
... they renamed it ...

Miracle Mission

by TED R. STURM

to keep abreast of everything happening on the ground and in the air.

While they waited, the *Jolly Green* crews used the time to recheck everything. Guns were checked and rechecked, armor adjusted and fuel and power computations gone over. Aboard Major Scott's aircraft was an Army helicopter pilot who had been into the Citadel many times. He would serve as a guide to the LZ for the lead *Jolly Green*. Scott's copilot, Capt. David E. Mullenix, spent much of the waiting time explaining the *Jolly Green's* characteristics to the Army lieutenant, who flew the smaller Army *Cobra* and *Huey*.

Voices crackled continuously over the radio.

"I'm going to put a smoke rocket on the beach where I want you to enter." It was Sandy Seven, the A-1E leader whose support flight would pave the way for the *Jollys*.

"Roger," Scott acknowledged. "Are you in touch with *Bilk*?" *Bilk* was the FAC guiding the whole operation.

"Roger, *Jolly Seven One*," Sandy Seven answered. "He's directing some fast movers on a strike." Fast movers were the F-4 *Phantoms* working the area around Quang Tri.

"O.K.," Scott said. "I can't contact him. Ask him if there is some kind of delay we don't know about, or if we can go ahead in."

In a few minutes Sandy Seven answered. He told the rescue force that there were enemy tanks in the area, and that things were kind of mixed up on the ground.

"They're trying to straighten it out now," Sandy Seven said. "*Bilk* wants you to stand by."

Captain Mullenix, who had interrupted his rundown on the HH-53 long enough to listen, said to Scott over the intercome:

"So they got tanks in there they didn't know about, eh? I don't think we ought to rush into anything. Let them take all the time they need to get things ready."

Scott nodded his agreement, and checked with his engineer, Sgt. Ronald Blackwell. "How about refiguring to find out how much power we'll need to hover in ground effect with 4,500 pounds of fuel?"

"Roger, sir," Blackwell answered,

"stand by one." In a few minutes he had the answer. "You'll need 95 percent, Major."

"Thanks, Sergeant Blackwell," Major Scott answered.

The radio crackled again. "SAM! SAM! Vicinity of DMZ—everybody keep your heads up!"

The voice was unknown, but it didn't matter. The threat wasn't close enough to worry the *Jolly Greens* anyway.

That's when the call came in to start the run. In the back, the two PJs, SSgt. Robert L. LaPointe and Sgt. David Young made sure their mini-guns were ready.

The *Sandys* had done their job well, strafing and bombing enemy positions, but there were so many enemy troops below, the *Jolly Greens* would still have to weave through a corridor of ground fire from tanks and antiaircraft guns. Then, on the ground even for a few minutes, they would be extremely vulnerable.

As Major Scott brought the big helicopter closer to the Citadel, the crew eliminated all but the absolutely necessary talk.

"We're starting the run-in," Scott told Bilk. "OK, Babes," the FAC came back.

"Lieutenant, where's that LZ?"

"Just west of that smoke, Major. See that yellow smoke in the middle, there? Just west of it," the Army man replied.

"Engineer, start the APP."

"It's on, sir, it's on!" Blackwell came back. The APP is the Auxiliary Power Plant.

"All set in the back, Major. No ground fire yet." It was LaPointe's voice.

"Watch those houses over there! OK, OK, you're looking good, Scotty!"

"SAM threat, Western DMZ!"

"Diamond Six, *Bilk* Control, Diamond Six, *Bilk* Control."

"Clear the primary, Diamond, clear the primary!"

Nobody in the helicopters paid any attention to the constant radio chatter. All eyes were on the LZ and the crowd of people waiting for the *Jolly Green*, now only a few yards away.

Artillery and rocket shells were exploding all over Quang Tri, and as Scott's aircraft drew nearer the LZ,

four, picked up a radio message from the Citadel.

"Hey," the voice said, "we've got more people down here!"

Sutton set his *Jolly* on the spot as his PJs got ready to pick up the survivors, who were supposed to run up the ramp in the back of the aircraft as soon as it landed. When nobody showed for almost a full minute, Sgt. William J. Thompson stuck his head out the back to have a look. He saw no survivors, but he did see an enemy soldier who immediately began to walk a stream of automatic AK-47 fire toward Thompson and the helicopter. With lightning speed, the PJ leaped to his minigun. A short burst stopped the soldier in his tracks. Additional sniper fire was silenced by the other PJ, Sgt. Daniel G. Manion, who was also firing away with his minigun.

Meanwhile, the pilot had gotten radio confirmation from the air that there were no more survivors, and he immediately decided he and his *Jolly Green* crew could find a much better place to while away the time. Sutton poured on the power and his chopper lifted up and away.

They got no survivors, but they did gain the distinction of being the last Americans in Quang Tri.

What of the radio call that had brought them in? A trap. It was the enemy, pulling the helicopter in for what they must have figured was a sure kill. But they didn't reckon with either Captain Sutton or his fast-shooting PJs!

By 1850 hours, the operation was over. Everybody was safe at Da Nang.

But the most incredible part of the story was just being realized. *Not one crewmember or evacuee sustained any injury whatsoever! Moreover, there was not one bit of battle damage to any helicopter! Not even a single bullet hole!*

And while one *Sandys* supporting the rescue was downed, as was a FAC aircraft, both pilots were saved. The FAC pilot bailed out and was rescued by friendly ground forces. The fighter pilot ditched his A-1E in the ocean and was picked up by an Army helicopter.

"I can only say the Lord was with us all that day," Colonel Harris said later. He was also effusive in his praise of the team effort represented by the

Quang Tri rescue.

"Without the support of the FACs, the F-4s, the *Sandys* and the Navy, we couldn't have pulled this one off at all. But I also hope everyone will remember the team members who didn't make the headlines," he said.

He was referring to the *Jolly Green* maintenance men and all the support people who get plenty of work, but little glory.

"When we had only a few short hours to prepare for this mission," he pointed out, "these guys worked



through the night getting our birds ready to fly. I sure hope everyone remembers them!"

The men who flew those *Jolly Greens* into the jaws of death and out again that day still marvel that they are all alive.

As one man said, "Quang Tri was kind of like deliberately putting your foot into a bear trap and waiting for the snap that didn't come.

"Or sitting in a bunker and watching a bomb land a foot away, then discovering it's a dud. You feel like you have only seconds to live."

Not that Quang Tri was an unsprung trap or a dud—only that for some unknown reason it neither snapped nor blew up when by all conceivable odds it should have done both. Within minutes after the last *Jolly Green* pulled out of the Citadel, it and Quang Tri proper was overrun by the enemy.

That's pretty close.

Even for a miracle mission.