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Rescues pilot near Hanoi

TAN SON NHUT AB, RVN -- Search and rescue forces penetrated North Vietnam to within 35 miles of Hanoi to rescue 1st Lt. John D. Markle, an F-4 Phantom pilot credited with downing a MIG in early May.

Braving surface-to-air missiles, antiaircraft artillery and MIGs, an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant of the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron picked up the lieutenant six hours after he was shot down.

The search and rescue task force was led by A-1 Skyraiders flying rescue escort, and included the Super Jolly Green Giants, F-4 Phantoms, F-105 Thuds and HC-130 Hercules.

The lieutenant landed in some trees after ejecting from his aircraft and was left dangling 20 feet above the ground.

"I was pulling on the risers to straighten them," said Lieutenant Markle, "and suddenly I found myself sitting in a bush at ground level."

"I kept hearing people moving within 50 to 100 feet of me and felt sure they would find me. Their barking dogs kept hanging around after the people left. I heard beating drums and searching through the brush all around me."

The first rescue aircraft on scene was an A-1 flown by 1st Lt. Bob Carlson.

Because of rough terrain and a thick covering of trees, the Sandy pilots had difficulty in pinpointing Lieutenant Markle's position when they first reached the area. Rapidly deteriorating weather and communist ground fire compounded the situation.

The pilot of the HH-53 which made the pickup, Capt. Mark C. Schibler said, "We had to fly right through five or six big thunderstorms to reach the area."

Maj. Zeke Encinas, an A-1 pilot, said that they worked with low fuel, low weather and high terrain.

"The long distance and time involved caused fuel problems for everyone," explained Major Encinas. "The clouds got below 3,000 feet and we had to fly below the ridgelines to locate the survivor. We had so many MIG warnings that we lost count."

Lieutenant Markle continued, "I was lying on my back, well-hidden under the broad leaves of a tree. The Sandys were laying down ordnance all around to clear the area, and I told them over my radio how far away it was falling and in what direction. Finally, a Sandy put one smoke rocket on one side of me and another one on the other side. They really know their job and do it well."

Capt. Ronald E. Smith, an A-1 pilot, was the on-scene commander for the rescue. He and his wing man, 1st Lt. Byron Hukee, provided protection for the downed pilot and directed the movements of the Super Jolly Green Giants.

"The on-scene commander gave a detailed briefing on how the pickup would proceed and he gave me precise instructions on how to mark my position for the rescue chopper," related Lieutenant Markle.



1ST LT. JOHN D. MARKLE is greeted by A-1 Sandy pilots who escorted the HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant to his rescue 35 miles from Hanoi.

Major Encinas and his wing man, 1st Lt. Lance Smith, led the helicopters to Lieutenant Markle.

Lieutenant Markle said, "The Jolly Green hovered right over my smoke marker and dropped the cable within 15 feet of me. It was beautiful."

As the forces withdrew from the area they were trailed by ground fire. Although Captain Schibler's Super Jolly Green Giant received several hits, no one was injured and the damage was later declared minor.

"The roughest part was getting into and out of the pickup area," Major Encinas declared. "We had heavy antiaircraft fire both ways and we saw several SAMs launched." At least seven SAMs were fired at the Sandys and HH-53s.

Back at his home base, Lieutenant Markle commented, "I knew they wouldn't leave me up there. These guys are real pros."

Captain Schibler later remarked, "This mission was an outstanding example of the teamwork involved in a SAR and one of the most gratifying rescues I have made in my eight years of rescue work."

Members of the captain's crew were: 2nd Lt. Clifton L. Hutchinson, copilot; SSgt. Tommy Bryant Jr., flight engineer; and Sgt. Paul C. Perry and A1C Robert W. Mason, pararescuemen.