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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
PRIDE IN THE PAST - FAITH IN THE FUTURE

Rescue pickup made in Hanoi suburbs

TAN SON NHUT AB - U.S. Air Force search and rescue forces penetrated North Vietnam May 20 to within 35 miles of Hanoi to rescue Air Force 1st Lt. John D. Markle, an F-4 Phantom pilot credited with downing a MIG ten days earlier. Braving SAMs, AAA and MIGs, an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter 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 Sandys flying rescue escort, and included the Super Jolly Green Giants, F-4 Phantoms, F-105 Thuds and HC-130 King aircraft.

Markle's back-seater remains missing.

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," Markle said, "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 (people) searching through

the brush all around me."

Because of rough terrain and a thick canopy of trees, the Sandy pilots had difficulty in pinpointing the lieutenant'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 thunder storms 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 the major. "The clouds got down 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."

"The roughest part was getting into and out of the pickup area," Encinas declared. "We had heavy anti-aircraft fire both ways and we saw several SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) launched." At least seven SAMs were fired at the Sandys and Jolly Greens.

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

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