

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

THE SAGA OF ROGER LOCHER

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. My flights came up to answer. That was the first time radio contact."

The contact triggered search and rescue per deep into North Vietnam. Rescue forces were driven by MIGs on their first attack June 1.

The next day, the task force headed north again, led by Sandys of the 56th Special Operations Wing. Heavy ground fire failed to dissuade the aircraft as they continued. When they approached their position, the Sandys made another pass, and in a Super Jolly Green commanded by Capt. Stovall.

As the Jolly Green of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron moved in, a weapons fire erupted nearby hootch. Sgt. Ch McQuid and AIC Ken Cakebread, pararescueists on the HH-53, silenced ground fire with Miniguns.

The flight engineer, Sgt. F. Walsh, lowered the jury trator to Locher.

"It sure is a good flight that penetrator, strong give them a thumbs-up hang on."

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

The trip home was a hill glide. Every village source of ground fire. Tr even a train opened fire task force, but the A-1 returned the fire to protect the helicopters, and in the destroyed one locomotive and several railroad cars.

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



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

By
SSgt.
Tom
Merchant,
USAF