

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

394 Refugees

ON ONE PLANE

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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. 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. Parar-

escue 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.

Besides LaPointe, the crew on the first Jolly Green Giant to land included Maj. Jackson R. Scott Jr., Capt. David E. Mullenix, Sgt. Ronald W. Blackwell, and Sgt. David Young.

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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 antiaircraft 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 Skyraider 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 SSgt. Robert L. LaPointe silenced them with bursts from his minigun. 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 first helicopter picked up 37 evacuees, the second, 45 and the third, 50. The fourth Super Jolly Green Giant 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. Sgt. William J. Thompson, a PJ, knocked out the AK-47 with bursts of his minigun and the sniper fire was suppressed by Sgt. Daniel G. Manion, another PJ.

All the HH-53s returned safely to DaNang. Besides LaPointe, the crew on the first HH-53 to land were Maj. Jackson R. Scott Jr., aircraft commander; Capt. David E. Mullenix, copilot; Sgt. Ronald W. Blackwell, flight engineer; and Sgt. David Young, PJ.