

## WORD FROM ABOVE

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By J. T. WOLKERSTORFER  
Associated Press

QUANG TRI, Vietnam—Shot down and surrounded by North Vietnamese in Laos, 1st Lt. Ralph E. Elliott heard his commander tell him on the radio: "You're a captain now."

That's how the 23-year-old helicopter pilot from Jacksonville, Fla., got his promotion last week. His captain's bars glittered on his uniform yesterday as he told the story.

He said the commander was in a helicopter above him and his six-man crew in southern Laos, trying to get down for a rescue. But North Vietnamese fire drove him off.

### Rescued by Vietnamese

Elliott's helicopter went down last Thursday with three rounds in the engine. He and his crew got out yesterday with the help of South Vietnamese ground troops called Hac Bao.

One of Elliott's men, Spec. 4 Harold Brasket of Vancouver, Wash., a 21-year-old door gunner, declared: "It was a bad experience."

Elliott told newsmen that his helicopter was shot down while flying a standby recovery mission for other choppers ferrying South Vietnamese troops into a landing zone several miles inside Laos.

Elliott said no one was hurt and heard the crewmen found an abandoned machine gun site and took up defensive positions.

"I got on a survival radio to let them know where we were and that everybody was okay," Elliott said. "There were Air Force FAC's overhead right away, and some-

body was overhead the whole time we were there." FACs are Forward Air Controllers.

### Hostile Territory

"The whole area was saturated with North Vietnamese army troops. The first night I estimated at least 100 NVA were in our area, but I was later told that figure was low. They must have thought we

had been extracted already because they weren't looking for us. They were busy tearing up the aircraft and taking parts of it."

The next day three helicopters came in to try to pick up the crew but were driven off by heavy ground fire.

Late Saturday afternoon, Elliott went on, three platoons of Hac Bao were put down in a

landing zone about two miles from the Americans. The Hac Bao are a Black Panther reconnaissance company from South Vietnam's 1st Infantry Division. They have been used extensively for rescue work in Laos since the operation began Feb. 8.

### North Vietnamese Attack

On Saturday night, Elliott said, the North Vietnamese "must have realized we were still there because the Hac Bao had been inserted. We traded heavy fire with them for about 45 minutes. We might have got some, I don't know, but I'm glad they pulled back because we were running low on ammo."

The captain said a B52 bomber strike was called in about half a mile northeast of them Saturday night and that it lasted from four to five minutes.

The Hac Bao reached the position of the Americans at 11 a.m. yesterday, Elliott said.

"They took us out the same way they had come in," Elliott said. "There was an NVA bunker about every 30 feet and they must have had a really tough time getting in. We walked out with them about two miles through dense jungle."

"Then they cut a landing zone out of a hillside and two slicks (helicopters) came in to pick us up."

Asked if he would like to go back to Laos again, Elliott said he had told his commander he would if he was needed to point out the trouble spots.

"But I'm not real anxious to fly back into Laos real soon again," he added.



—Associated Press

Capt. Ralph E. Elliott (right) with SP4 Harold Brasket.