

Leave No Man Behind

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Part IV-9 Indian Summer Navy Late '66

On November 1, 1966, Lieutenant Gerald B. Griffin and Lieutenant Junior Grade William Hobdy and crew were called from their SAR holding orbit near Haiphong and escorted toward the port city. A USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVA-42) Skyhawk Iron Hand SAM suppression aircraft escorting a recce bird, after an air strike had stirred up the defenses, ran into too much opposition. While dueling with a SAM site five miles north of the city, the VA-72 A-4 was hit by AAA gunnery, and set afire. The pilot nursed it to barely feet wet before it became uncontrollable. The pilot, Lieutenant Allan R. Carpenter, who had been shot down and rescued from the open sea of the Gulf of Tonkin back on August 21, 1966, came down this time in a tighter place. He was three miles offshore, between downtown Haiphong and a sandy peninsula protruding south from the mainland northeast of the city. Carpenter's two wingmen circled alone over him, strafing several small boats which had put out from shore and were approaching him. One left, low state, and when the other ran out of ammunition, the pilot rolled in and pickled his centerline external fuel close to the nearest boat.

Griffin and Hobdy entered the outer harbor low and fast (for a helicopter), "escorted" by Navy F-4s, who were out of sight somewhere above, unlike the SPADs who could stay down low and maintain visual contact with the helicopter. Higher above, there were many jets creating hate and discontent with the harbor defenses. Crossing the harbor, Big Mother drew small arms fire from a metal shed on stilts out on a mud flat. Griffin called out the threatening fire, and the RESCAP replied:

"Roger, we have it."

Before the helicopter could get to Carpenter, the North Vietnamese boats picked him up and headed back for shore on the sandy peninsula where a number of troops awaited. As the helicopter approached the boat, the VA-72 pilot above, still orbiting his wingman, continued to encourage Griffin to try to rescue Carpenter from the boat. Small arms fire then opened up from the southern tip of the uninhabited peninsula from a grove of trees. Hobdy called it out, and, almost immediately, clumps of trees were catapulted into the sky by large explosions and the firing stopped. But the boat had made the beach and the crew turned their captive over to the troops who met the boat. The wingman still wanted the helicopter to try to wrest him from the troops, but concussion from an AA round which exploded just outside the helicopter cargo door, knocked the crewman gunner stationed there on his butt, and Griffin turned away from the guns on the shore line. Overhead, cooler heads prevailed and the commander on the scene ordered the entire rescue force to clear the area and RTB. On the way back out of the harbor, the HS-6 Big Mother crew noticed only muddy water where the tin shed had been.