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Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia

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is left with a sense, however, that Professor Snyder's evident talents of research and writing might be better utilized in more important efforts than this.

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Tilford, Earl H. Jr. *Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia*. Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1980. 212pp. \$7.50

This is a story of ghosts, of heroic people and dramatic events which increasingly haunt the reader as he moves through the story and relives the history within the covers of Major Earl Tilford's book *Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975*.

Tilford has packed a tremendous amount of information into about 120 or so pages of text in a 212-page work, a tribute to the rigorous standards of scholarship and tight writing so evident in his book. The thoroughness of the research is evident in the bibliography and the ample footnotes and most of his material was derived from primary sources, including interviews with those involved.

This is a story which cannot miss. Of the elites in the Vietnam War, none stood higher than the men in the Air Rescue Service (renamed in 1966 the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service). These men, in their slow and vulnerable craft, routinely had to overcome the deep, skeletal fear which afflicted all of us who felt the enemy's breath as they risked everything to save a man. While this book is primarily about

Air Force rescue operations, the roles of the other services are not ignored.

Tilford's brief historical introduction reveals some surprises, such as the fact that a few helicopters were in use in the final weeks of World War II. (Read the book to find out where and why, and be even more surprised.)

Serious thought was given to air rescue during the RAF-Luftwaffe battles in 1940, and the Americans became deeply involved upon their commencing air operations in Europe and the Pacific. The Korean War and the French colonial war in Indochina enhanced the rescue role of the helicopter while revealing its limitations.

As Tilford points out, the American involvement in Indochina in the early sixties found the rescue forces ill-equipped and unprepared to recover downed crewmen or isolated troops, and air rescue always lagged a step behind as combat operations increased in intensity. Their coming of age is well described as the Air Rescue service moved up from the severely limited H-43 through the HH-3 "Jolly Green Giant" to the Buff, or "Super Jolly Green" H-53.

As the author so rightly notes, air rescue is often an afterthought in peace, and when war breaks out too many lives are needlessly lost because the needed equipment and training are generally years "away."

Typical of the dangers faced by the rescue forces was the experience of the HH-43 crew which departed a forward site in Laos to rescue a

downed F-105 pilot. As they moved in the waiting communist troops opened fire at point-blank range, downing the chopper and capturing the crew. The copilot, kept in harsh conditions in Laos, made a heroic attempt at escape after a year, but was recaptured. Tilford reports that the pilot was murdered by a peasant. Those, including this reviewer, who were in Udorn in 1965 remember the details as briefed at the time—he was given away by peasants, then beheaded by the Pathet Lao.

Crews flying over North Vietnam had a rule of thumb on rescue: up to the Black river there was a good chance of rescue; between the Black and Red rivers, one's chances for rescue dropped sharply, but a save was possible; beyond the Red river, log it out (although a few daring saves were made in Route Packs 5 and 6).

If the worst happened, crews were better off being taken in North Vietnam than by Communist Laotian guerrilla forces. To the North Vietnamese, an American flyer was a valuable pawn to be kept alive as political leverage; to the Laotians the prisoner was a bother to be disposed of as quickly as possible—hence it is not surprising to those who flew those missions that so many of the MIAs were lost in Laos. Besides, the jungle covered its scars quickly, so that wreckage rapidly disappeared from view.

There is one slight omission in the book when describing the search and rescue task force in action. This was the role played by an always unsung

group, the radar controllers ("Weapons Directors") at the area radar stations ("Brigham" at Udorn, "Invert" at Nakhon Phanom, etc.). While the airborne control ship Crown (later King) ran the show at the scene, the whole thing was organized and tracked by a young lieutenant or captain controlling the fleet at the radar station; Crown depended on him to track the force, mark the spot of a downed plane, effect the air refueling rendezvous for the supporting fighters, provide weather information, and more.

Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia contains several pages of photographs. For many, there can be no such thing as "overkill" when describing the dangers faced by the men of the rescue forces who so often risked so much in living up to their Service's motto "That Others May Live." Earl Tilford's work, valuable for both historian and the interested reader alike, does justice to those brave men.

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Stanley, Roy M. II. *Prelude to Pearl Harbor: War in China, 1937-41: Japan's Rehearsal for World War II.* New York: Scribner, 1982. 213pp. \$24.95

War books for American audiences sell better if Pearl Harbor is mentioned in the title. Relevance may also be suggested by claiming that prewar activities under study (such as Japanese operations in China) have an intimate connection