

control chemicals, and cluster bombs. Normally, these aircraft remained on the ground, fueled and fully armed, until requested by Sandy Low lead.⁵⁶

When Sandy Low determined that it was safe for the Jolly Greens, recovery attempt, he called Sandy High down for a detailed briefing on the survivor's location, enemy force dispositions, and any other factors deemed important. Sandy High then joined the two choppers in their orbit area and escorted the helicopter designated as "low bird" down for the pickup. The other helicopter, the "high bird", remained in its orbit, ready to rush in if the need arose.⁵⁷ This constituted the classic search and rescue task force, virtually unchanged from the mid-sixties through the end of the war, and very much like the rescue patterns flown by the Germans in World War II. In reality, rescue situations always differed, with terrain, enemy resistance, and the condition of the survivor determining specific tactics.

As the war continued, the North Vietnamese, Viet Cong, and Pathet Lao used increasingly sophisticated weapons and tactics to frustrate rescue efforts. Rescue forces reacted to these challenges by developing new weapons and changing tactics. Tear gas bombs and riot control chemicals were some of the most controversial weapons used to support rescue operations. These weapons included Cluster Bomb Unit (CBU)-19A/B and CBU-30A antipersonnel area denial bombs, which were essentially tear gas bombs. Also used was the Bomb Live Unit (BLU)-52A/B, a weapon concocted by mixing bulk tear gas with the ingredients in the BLU-1C fire bomb.⁵⁸

Since November 3, 1965, the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam had the authority to authorize use of riot control agents. Command policy for the use of these munitions, as stated in MACV Directive 525-11, considered riot control agents as normal components of combat power. Tear gas was used by American as well as South Vietnamese forces in operations that included forcing the Viet Cong out of their tunnel hideaways.⁵⁹

On February 2, 1968, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the use of riot control munitions during search and rescue operations in Laos.⁶⁰ The use of weapons with chemical and biological overtones was politically sensitive, and their use was even more of a problem in Laos where all military operations were hypersensitive. Although the on-scene commander was authorized to use riot control munitions if he felt the rescue operation was in jeopardy, he had to relay his decision immediately to Headquarters, Seventh Air Force, and to the 3d Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group in Saigon.⁶¹ Consequently, between February 1968 and June 1971, riot control munitions were used only a score of times in Laos.⁶²

A February 15, 1969, mission on which CBU-19 tear gas bombs were used demonstrated the power of these weapons. A rescue effort for the pilot of an F-4, down in the enemy-infested A Shau Valley area near the Laos-South Vietnam border, dragged into its second day. Enemy 37-mm and