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SEARCH AND RECOVERY

(C) The Search and Recovery Forces remained very active again this quarter participating in eleven rescue attempts.* The major portion of the efforts took place during the Lam Son 719 operation which received a large fraction of the total Air Force resources used during that period. On several occasions Combat Crewmembers were downed in close proximity to the Lam Son 719 hostilities and some of these rescue attempts resulted in heroic and exciting efforts.¹¹⁶

(C) In another situation a SAR (Search and Recovery) was not officially generated but resources from Nakhon Phanom RTAFB were used to recover nine crewmembers who successfully bailed out of an AC-119 Gunship. The Aircraft Commander directed all crewmembers not required for flight to bail out approximately ten miles north of Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. The Pilot, Copilot and Flight Engineer remained to land the aircraft safely. The nine crewmembers who bailed out were picked up within 64 minutes and only two of them sustained injuries, none serious.¹¹⁷

(C) The aircraft, Stinger 21, had completed a normal night mission in the Barrel Roll area of Laos and departed for home with Bingo (minimum safe) fuel. Approximately eight minutes later

* There are nine Search and Recoveries discussed in the following pages. The tenth, Sandy 04, is covered as part of the Witchdoctor 05 report. Four A-1's from this station participated in the rescue of Falcon 84 Alpha and Bravo who were down in North Vietnam. The effort was controlled by another agency and was not included in this report.

116. Observation by 56th SPOFWG Historian.

117. Interview, 56th SPOFWG Historian with LtCol G. Botbyl, Operations Officer, 18th SOS and Aircraft Commander of Stinger 21, 16 Apr 71.

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all oil was lost to the right reciprocating engine necessitating a shut-down. During the shut-down phase a fire developed in the engine but was quickly extinguished. At this point it was realized that fuel quantity would be a problem due to the inefficient operation of jet engines at low altitudes and required high power settings. There were no acceptable divert fields closer than Nakhon Phanom RTAFB and it was determined that this station could be reached with 15 minutes fuel remaining. By the time Stinger 21 reached the Bomblines (70 miles north) it was apparent that fuel consumption was exceeding expectations and if that rate continued there would be less than five minutes of fuel remaining over station. The Aircraft Commander initiated a slow descent and jettisoned all remaining ammunition, brass cartridges, the flare launcher, excess survival kits and the four Mini-guns. All crewmembers prepared for bail out and the flight continued. When Stinger 21 was seven minutes away from landing there appeared to be from seven to eight minutes fuel remaining. Prior to reaching extreme low altitudes all but required crewmembers were directed to egress. The remaining three crewmembers shut down the two jet engines and safely landed with only one reciprocating engine with from 10 to 20 seconds of fuel remaining. ¹¹⁸

(C) During the emergency Knife 47, a CH-3 helicopter and Pedro 46 (Rescue Alert HH-43B Helicopter) were launched from Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. Spud 22, a US Army Mohawk helicopter, was flying in the area and reported to assist in locating the downed crewmembers.

118. Ibid.

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All the survivors landed in a safe area between nine and ten miles north of this station and were immediately picked up, eight of them by Pedro 46 and the other by Knife 47. Two crew-members suffered hair line bone fractures during the contact phase of their bail out and all other survivors returned uninjured. ¹¹⁹

(U) Other Search and Recovery efforts are discussed on the following pages. ¹²⁰

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.