

OV-10 Pair Saved Twice In 16 Days After Ejecting

DA NANG AFLD, Vietnam — "I was thinking maybe we had run out of luck," Capt. Arthur L. Moxon related after he and Maj. Samuel R. Ross had been rescued from an enemy infested area near Dak To. It was the second time in only 16 days the two forward air controllers (FACs) were forced to parachute from a damaged aircraft.

Major Ross, 35, and Captain Moxon, 24, from the 20th Tactical Air Support Sq. here, were shot down by enemy anti-aircraft fire June 4 over an area heavily populated with enemy troops. They were pulled to safety after two hours on the ground by rescue crews of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Sq., the "Jolly Greens," from Da Nang Aflld. (Air Force Times of June 30).

Sixteen days after their first brush with death, the two men again became the subject of a massive search and rescue (SAR) operation.

While on a visual reconnaissance mission over Military Region II near where the boundaries of Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam meet, they developed problems in the left engine of their twin-engine OV-10.

Uncertain if they had been hit by ground fire, they made a futile attempt to revive the engine. "We dropped all our external rocket pods and fuel tanks to lighten the aircraft in order to keep enough altitude to make it back to Pleiku AB," said Major Ross.

"Our main concern was trying to hold level flight, which became increasingly difficult as time went on," he stated. "We were below most of the peaks in the area, but we were hoping to nurse the aircraft through the valleys in the area to nearby Dak To."

For nearly 30 minutes, they dodged the mountain tops, trying

to bring the crippled aircraft to a safe landing. An HC-130 that serves as the control point for SAR efforts maintained constant contact with the endangered crew and directed them through the rugged terrain.

"Finally, there were no lower valleys to get into and the ridges were all above us, so about 15 miles out of Dak To, we decided that there was no way we were going to be able to maintain level flight and get over the ridges to Dak To."

The aircraft began to roll at the low level, so the crewmen made the decision to eject. "I ejected first and as I was coming down I saw the plane impact on a ridge. At first I didn't see Major Ross' parachute, and all I could think of was that he didn't get out. I was looking all around trying to spot his 'chute, hoping that he had made it," related Captain Moxon. "Right before I hit the ground, I spotted him. It was then that I realized I had no idea where I was going to land, and I looked down and saw that I was headed towards water."

"I tried to steer the 'chute towards the east, but landed in the water anyway," he continued. "My first sensation was of drowning, but I felt the mud under my feet and knew it wasn't deep enough to require inflating the life preservers."

"I was in mud and water up to my neck, and I kind of half-swam,

half-crawled to the edge. Once I got clear of the water, I immediately saw Major Ross up the hill waving at me, and I headed towards him."

"We looked at each other, and my first thought was, 'Oh no! We don't want to go through this again,'" commented the captain.

"This was the first time I fully realized it had happened twice. Until the last minute before we ejected, I was fully confident that the aircraft would fly. I was more nervous on the ground this time, probably from the previous experience," related the captain.

Rescue forces had been alerted and immediately went to work. Crews from the 37th ARRS, their previous rescuers, were on the way and nearby U.S. Army helicopters headed for the SAR area.

Helicopter gunships and A-1s from the 56th Special Operations Wg. also arrived and remained on alert over the enemy-infested area to locate and suppress any gunfire before the rescue aircraft arrived.

A UH-1 helicopter from B Troop, 7th Reg., of the 7-17th Air Cav. Div. at Camp Holloway near Pleiku, came in and hovered a few inches above the water as the men waded through the mud and scrambled aboard.

The helicopter took them to Dak To where the "Jolly Greens" picked them up to return them to Da Nang.



ONCE AGAIN Capt. Arthur L. Moxon, left, and Maj. Samuel R. Ross breathe sighs of relief on arrival at Da Nang Aflld. after being rescued for the second time in 16 days.