

FALCON 66-74-75

(C) A SAR was declared at 1400 Local time on 19 December 1971 when Falcon 66 was shot down by a MIG while flying MIG CAP for a DOZ mission in the vicinity of San Neva, Laos. Falcon 67, wingman of Falcon 66, reported that he saw two chutes open as Falcon 66 went down but that no beepers were heard and no radio communications established. Falcon 67 returned to his base without refining the location of the chutes he had seen.⁵²

(C) Sandys 03 and 04 had launched at 1330 on a routine mission to the Barroil Roll. Fifteen minutes after takeoff they were notified by KING of the SAR for Falcon 66 and were directed to a location 102 miles at 045 degrees from TAMAY around 138. This was in the area southeast of San Neva. Upon their arrival at the designated location contact was made with an Air America aircraft with the call sign "Arthur" who was searching for the survivors. The Sandys and Arthur split up the area and continued the search. They were soon joined by Nail 14 who was assigned to remain near San Neva and listen for some communication from the survivors.⁵³

(C) Shortly after the arrival of Nail 14 a beeper was heard by both the Nail and the Sandys. It was traced to an area southeast of San Neva and voice contact was established shortly

52. SARMO Report for Falcon 66/74/75, 19-Dec 71, (Doc 17).

53. Ibid.

thereafter. To everyone's surprise the voice was that of Falcon 74. He explained that Falcon 74 and 75 had joined the search for Falcon 66, but that 74 had run out of fuel and been forced to eject. Since no word had been received from Falcon 66, the search then became one to locate the known survivors from Falcon 74. With the Searcher, the Mail, and Arthur searching, the location of Falcon 74 became known, at 1625, determined to be about nine miles southeast of the base. Ground searchers were then broken to understand conditions prevailing. Sandy 33, however, decided to go under the low clouds to try to locate the chutes by visual search rather than by radio aids. While at low altitude under the clouds his aircraft developed difficulty, indicated by an oil warning light, and he was required to jettison his ordinance and return to base with Sandy 09. (A scene command was then passed to Mail 14.)⁵⁴

(C) Mail 14 continued to talk with Bravo as to refine his location. During these conversations Alpha also identified himself as being down in the same general area and able to communicate. The search by Mail 14 and Arthur was joined by Mail 09, however, due to the location close to the border of North Vietnam, operations were hampered by numerous SAM and MIG warnings. At 1648 Mail 14 refined the survivors' position to be UH 6202. The weather at that time was poor but workable, and no

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ground fire was noted in the area. A decision to stop for a pause before dark was made.⁵⁵

(C) Helly Grecks 52 and 56 were called into the area from where they had been holding near Lima Site 32. They departed from the site at 1730 with a new team of Sandy 01 and 02 inbound also. The weather closed in and darkness arrived and by 1800 conditions made it impossible to continue with the pickup. It was decided to wait until first light in the morning. The Jolly Gorgons and Sandy returned to KIP for the night and Head OP assumed on-scene command.⁵⁶

(C) During the search of the afternoon no word had been received from Falcon 66, and hope of rescue of that crew began to fade. By mid afternoon a third Falcon aircraft was also identified as missing. Falcon 75, the wingman of 74 had not only run low on fuel, but had lost navigational aids as well, and at last contact had departed the San Nena area heading over North Vietnam for the sea in hope of a "fast wet" rescue. When he departed the area he was known to be almost out of fuel. By evening 75 contact had been established with the crews of either Falcon 66 or 73.⁵⁷

(C) As darkness came the two survivors reported they could hear people moving around them. The inhabitants of the area were known to be hostile, and it became essential to isolate the two crewmen until rescue could be made in daylight. The use of HCU-12 and CDU-11 was approved, and a protective ring was applied around

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

and on the area of the survivors, directed by the Tail on-scene commander. While it served for purpose, it was to come within the next day.⁵⁸

(C) HUGs entering the area on several occasions forced the Nails to jettison their ordnance and take evasive action. In spite of those difficulties the Nails directed the application of the area denial munitions around Wilson 74 Alpha and Bravo and fired ordnance on hostile positions and known enemy gun locations.⁵⁹

(C) The first Night SAR effort was carefully planned during the night to utilize two Jolly Greens and four Sandys. The Jolly Greens were to hold in a safe area over Lima Site 32 so as to be near the pickup site when needed. Other Sandys and Nails were programmed to assist in refinement of the search.⁶⁰

(C) Before dawn on the 19th, a four plane formation of Sandys and Nails launched from HAP in time to arrive over the crash site at the end of darkness. Weather in the area was worse than the day before, with a solid low cloud deck. At first light Sandy 01 went under the clouds and after many very low passes located 74 Alpha in a position barely visible under the clouds. Bravo reported that he was clouded by, but that the clouds were right on the treetops in his location. The Jolly Greens were called in and Jolly Green 62 went under the clouds to make the rescue. He was guided to 74 Alpha and went into hover over him

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

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preparing to drop the battle plan. The rotor blades started to clear the ground under enveloped the helicopter and objective. It was the BLU-52 which had been dropped during the night to protect the survivors from hostile intruders. The Jelly Green was forced to withdraw, with the crew suffering from the effects of the BLU-52. Alpha also suffered from the same ill effects to the degree that he could hardly talk on his radio.⁶¹

(C) The crew of Jelly Green 02 required some time to recover from the BLU-52. They then put on gas masks and again started towards the objective area. The weather in the morning had deteriorated even more, to the extent that low clouds made protective passes by the Sandy impossible. Jelly Green 02 reached Alpha again and went into a hover at which point a burst of small arms fire took out one of his engines and forced him out of the area. He was escorted to Lima Site 32 by the Sandy 03/04 flight and as he drew near that site additional ground fire was encountered from the surrounding area. Sandy 02 returned fire with his 20mm cannon and mini-guns and Jelly Green 02 was able to make an emergency landing for repairs to the engine.⁶²

(D) Clouds closed in over the survivors after the second pickup attempt, and little could be done for the time being.

61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.

the mountains. He led Smoke 14 by the dist and followed him down, leaving Smoke 14 on top to direct the ascent. Conditions under the clouds were poor, with mountain peaks obscured and broken clouds in the valleys, but there were indications that visibility was improving. The Jolly Greens were called in from their holding point at Lima Site 32, about thirty minutes away. While the Jolly Greens were on the way, Smoke 14 tried to locate the objective under the clouds with the aid of Para Mail 32 over the clouds to guide him to the correct position. Smoke 14 was unable to locate Alpha or Bravo, and at 1400 he was required to return to base for fuel.⁶⁵

(C) Salties 03 and 04 next arrived on the scene, followed shortly by Jolly Greens 55 and 61 who were escorted by Salties 17 and 18. Mails 09, 32, and 39 were also in the area to assist. Due to previous holding time, the Jolly Greens now had limited time remaining on station. And it seemed to be a "now or never" time to make another rescue attempt that day. It was now Sality 03's turn to go under the clouds to conduct the search. He found conditions much as Smoke 14 had described them, with low visibility and clouds in the higher areas. After many unsuccessful attempts, often finding himself in dead end canyons but always guided back towards the survivors by Para Mail 09 and his radio warnings, Sality 03 was reported to be overhead by Alpha. The parachutes were located, and Sality 04 was directed to guide Jolly Green 55 into the area. As Sality 03 made passes to re-

including any ground fire. There was no response to the warning by Sandy 03, and Jolly Green 55 was led to the chutes. Alpha 03 and 04 circled around him. Alpha 03 and 04 saw the smoke but no smoke appeared, and Alpha could not use the helicopter. The search again started with the survivor continuing to give directions to 03 that would lead him to where the clouds were on the treetops. The chutes were nowhere in sight now. The Jolly Green was instructed to hover as close as he could to the edge of the clouds in the direction of Alpha and look for the chute from a stable position close to the ground. As he moved in the clouds lifted from 50 to 100 feet, but not enough to see the chute or survivor. The sound of the helicopter engines proved to be the key factor, and Alpha was able to talk the Jolly Green in to his location. The rescue was held with the Sandy ready to provide fire power if required.⁶⁶

(C) Bravo came up on radio while the Jolly Green was in a hover over Alpha. He gave a vector to bring the Jolly Green over his position, and soon he too was picked up. By the completion of Bravo's rescue, Alpha's previous position was again obscured in the clouds and the overcast was again thickening. All forces returned to base after a difficult but successful SAR.⁶⁷

(C) Throughout the two day SAR effort no contact was made

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.