

Backseater Lieutenant Murray (1.) gives a smiling thumbs-up with rescue crewmembers A1C William T. Lyles and SSgt. William E. Brown

40th ARRS picks up pair of downed pilots

TAN SON NHUT -- Two Air Force air crew members were returned from the jungles of Laos recently by American rescue forces after their aircraft was hit by a surface to air missile (SAM).

They were flying a F-4 Phantom from the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing, Da Nang Afl., on a reconnaissance escort mission over North Vietnam Dec. 17, when stuck by the missile. They went down about five miles west of Mu Gia Pass in Laos.

The pilot, Lt. Col. Arthur S. Blissett, and the back seater, 1st Lt. Michael H. Murray, successfully ejected from the stricken aircraft and landed in dense mountainous jungle terrain. Voice contact was established almost immediately with the downed aircrew by forward air controllers operating in the area and an HC-130 Kingbird maintained the contact throughout the night. The rescue force planned to launch for the pick-up at first light.

Colonel Blissett and Lieutenant Murray both reported that they were uninjured.

To insure their safety during the night, U.S. fighter aircraft conducted bombing and strafing strikes on the area surrounding the men who halanded about 3,500 feet apart. Colonel Blissett landed in the tree tops and spent the night there rather than risk a drop of some 70 feet to the ground.