

the US forces. An HC-130 soon arrived on the scene and took over as on-scene commander of what proved to be a massive and complex rescue mission. Numerous aircraft including Nail FACs and other Spectres conducted a radio and visual search throughout the night to locate the survivors in preparation for a pick-up attempt at first light. It was discovered that two of the survivors had bailed out soon after the aircraft had been hit and were some 40 miles to the east of the main group of survivors. At first light in a well-coordinated operation four HH-53s from the 40th ARRS picked up 13 men from the main group, one of whom had a broken leg. A few minutes later two Air America UH-34D helicopters protected by A-1s rescued the two other survivors from a well-defended area near the Trail to the east. The huge operation on the night of the 30th/31st had involved seven HH-53s, eight A-1s, three HC-130s, 11 flights of strike aircraft (seven of which made attacks), four EB-66s, six F-105s, 14 Nail FACs, three Raven FACs, three Air America helicopters, four AC-130s and an F-4 Fast FAC. Unfortunately, the successful rescue of the entire crew of Spectre 22 was overshadowed by the attempted rescue of Bat 21 that followed in the next few days but these two operations epitomise the high points and low points that rescue crews faced in Southeast Asia.

30 March 1972

AC-130E 69-6571 16 SOS, 8 TFW, USAF, Ubon
 Capt Waylon O Fulk (survived)
 Capt E N Bolling (survived)
 13 crew, names unknown (survived)

Another Spectre gunship was lost on the night of the 30th, this time without casualties. The aircraft was one of the newer AC-130E Pave Spectre gunships that were supplementing the ageing AC-130As. The first AC-130E arrived at Ubon on 25 October 1971. The aircraft had more powerful engines and were more heavily armed with a larger ammunition load and more protective armour than the old A-models. From February 1972 under the Pave Aegis programme AC-130s were refitted with a huge 105mm howitzer that replaced the two rear 40mm guns.

Spectre 22 spotted a convoy of trucks on the Trail 35 miles north of Muang Fangdeng in southern Laos. The aircraft destroyed three of the trucks and was about to fire again to make sure of the kill when it was hit by ground fire. The aircraft was flying at 195 knots and 7,500 feet when 57mm anti-aircraft shells hit its starboard wing and fuselage. The AC-130 caught fire when fuel leaking from the starboard pylon tank ignited. Capt Fulk headed northwest towards Thailand in the hope of reaching Ubon but the crew were forced to abandon the aircraft which crashed about 15 miles southeast of Saravan. The abandonment set in motion one of the largest SAR missions ever mounted by