

EJECTION

Over enemy



Lieu

To inform other Army Aviators in general, and Mohawk pilots in particular, what it's like to eject from a Mohawk over enemy territory, here is my background. I am a little over two years out of flight school, Mohawk rated a year, and now serving in the Republic of Vietnam.

Our unit had been trained in many phases of special warfare, but the one I will deal with is survival. During Mohawk tran-

sition, I attended the survival course at Fort Rucker, Ala., an 8-hour block of instruction. Our unit again took this course before leaving for Vietnam. I also attended the Infantry Escape and Evasion Course at Fort Benning, Ga., while I was in OCS. Both courses were excellent and contributed much to my return to civilization.

The survival gear which we normally carry follows. An M-3C lifevest is connected to our inte-

grated torso harness. The M-3C contains a lifevest, two night flares, a two-piece PSK personal survival kit, shark repellent and dye marker. We carry in the seat a PSK-2 which contains a one-man life raft, water distiller, day/night flares, signal mirror, shark repellent, dye marker, and food packages. We also carry a survival knife, one-cell flashlight, lensatic compass, and a 45-caliber pistol.

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Enemy Territory

Lieutenant Edward B. Cribb



THE DATE was 9 March 1963, 1315 hours. Two JOV-1C Mohawks took off from an airfield. Our aircraft tactical designations were Hawk 01 and Hawk 02; I was flying Hawk 02. We proceeded to the target area and began search for a suspected VC (Viet Cong) regimental headquarters.

I was 200 feet above the very heavy jungle growth, flying up a canyon at about 130 knots with 15° of flaps extended. (This is the only way to fly if you expect to see anything in the jungle.) I added power to fly out of the canyon. The hawk was climbing nicely, losing only about 10 knots of airspeed, when the right (#2) engine quit almost all power. I added full power and tried to feather, alerting Hawk 01 that I was in trouble. Before I could feather the right engine, it came back on line. I had fire-walled both throttles, but the right engine still did not develop full power. It looked like a narrow squeak, but I could just clear the ridge. Due to the terrain, a climb was impossible. Just then, the engine again quit almost all power. I was below single engine speed, had nothing I could drop off the wings, and starting to mush in. Still slightly below the ridge, I told my Vietnamese observer to eject. After telling him three times, I decided to set

him an example, which I did posthaste. I ejected at 90 knots, slightly below the ridgeline and about 150 yards short of it. The Mohawk crashed and burned.

The only thing I remember about the ejection was what felt like a quick backflip. There was no feeling of a terrific amount of force or any recollection of heavy g loading on my person. I was rendered unconscious or at least dazed, because I remember nothing for approximately the next 1½ hours. During that period, I abandoned all my equipment. All I had on me when I came to was a short-sleeve flight suit and a pair of boots. I don't know what caused the dazed condition. I had no head injury except for an abrasion and a black eye, caused by wearing sunglasses during ejection.

An interesting point: we had been told that a knee board would break your leg in ejection, but this was not true in my case. My ejection was through the canopy because of the limited amount of time, by usage of the overhead firing handle.

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U. S. ARMY AVIATION

AUGUST 1963



Typical Vietnamese jungle like this envelopes the author after his ejection. Survival training saved his life.

Here the training I had prevailed, because I took up a good body position and ejected through what could be described as a reflex action. I was talking to the observer and keying the mike with my left hand and tried to grab the face curtain as it came down. I missed it and suffered a slight dislocation of my left shoulder during the ejection. This was my only injury. I never did feel any soreness in my back.

I was told by others and surmised by evidence that I went to the wreckage and shed my flack vest by the aircraft. The observer had ejected right after me. I helped him get away from the fire. Then I wandered away from the wreck and was lost in the woods when I came to my senses. Examining myself, the only injuries I could find were scratches and an extremely sore shoulder and arm.

I spent practically the remainder of the day searching for the wreck to get my survival gear, but the wreck had stopped burning and I could not find it. I was told later that another Mohawk pilot had been given the coordinates of the wreck and flew over it for 10 minutes without seeing it, and when Hawk 01 returned, it had to make sev-

eral low passes before the new pilot saw a piece of wreckage. Needless to say, the jungle was quite thick.

Toward dusk, I came upon a stream running eastward, the direction in which I had to go if I were to walk out. I started downstream. Meeting my observer shortly before dark, I showed him a place off the stream to sleep, and told him not to light a fire. He had a nasty cut on his left cheek and seemed to be suffering from extreme shock. Walking off about 100 meters, I bedded down for the night. I separated us because I knew we were in a very active VC area. This was later confirmed when the ground search party found numerous VC training aids and signs.

During the night, which was for the most part sleepless, I heard several groups crashing through the extremely thick underbrush, as near as about 30 yards. They sounded as if they were using machetes. My heart never sounded as loud as it did during their passing. The next morning my observer told me many VC had passed him also.

Just before light the next morning, I decided to climb a high ridge and try to see the terrain. When I finally reached the top, the brush was

Vietnamese ranger like this one helped rescue Army Aviator from Viet Cong



U. S. ARMY AVIATION DIG

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thick, only light could be seen through it. I returned to the river and found that my observer was extremely weak and could not manage under his own power. Supporting him with my right arm, we started out. The stream was very difficult traveling and we both tired rapidly. About 1300 hours, he gave up completely and could no longer travel. He seemed to have lost the will to live. After much persuading to no avail, I told him to stay in the middle of a small clearing in the river all day and hide at night. I marked the area the best I could and moved onward.

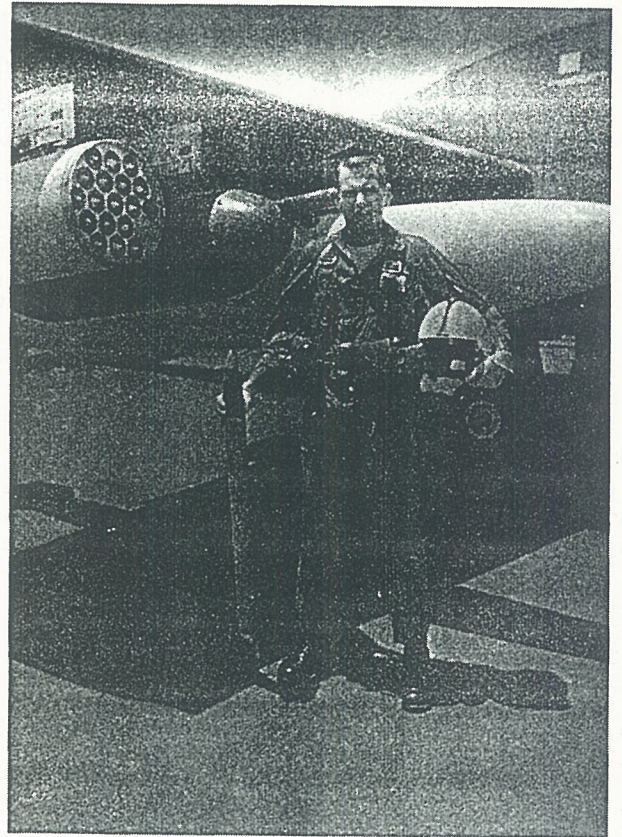
Knowing that this would be my strongest day, I had to make time. The stream was the only mode of travel. Of course the VC also knew this, so I tried to be as cautious as I could. A good cover of aircraft was overhead and I hoped the VC were in hiding. The jungle was extremely thick, with visibility about 5 yards, made up of vines closely resembling concertina wire. The small amount of travel I did over land marked my bare arms up very badly. The jungle was a wall, starting at the river's edge. The river was spring fed and quite cold. It descended very rapidly and was quite steep in places, with a bottom of large rocks and boulders. Only about 100 yards of smooth bottomed easy walking was along the entire 8 kilometers I walked.

I planned to walk until about an hour before dusk and then stop and start a fire, dry out, and perhaps cook something to eat. About 30 minutes before dusk all hell broke loose in the form of a thunderstorm. It moved over me and dumped rain for 3 hours. I had no shelter, fire, or food that night.

During the night, I was introduced to a little fellow called a leach. I guess the rain brought them out. When I awakened in the morning, after a sleepless night, I had about 100 of them on my legs, arms, and body. My legs were a moving mass of leaches. I had no dry matches to apply heat, the best way to get them off, so I had to pull them off.

I again sallied forth downstream. That day was filled with rest stops and sickness. I had been sick all night and it was worse as I walked. I was relieved at one thing, however: no further signs of VC were seen. I hoped I had outdistanced them.

I was sighted by a Marine CH-34 helicopter at about 1100 hours the morning of the third day. I was quite elated, although so weak I collapsed on a rock in the middle of the river. At this time I noticed that there was no lower back to my flight suit. I had worn it away on the rocks. At



Author dressed for mission in Vietnam

1300, I was met by a group of Marines, U. S. Army, and Vietnamese Rangers, who came upstream from some helicopter landing sites. They had a doctor with them who braced my arm.

I explained to these people where my observer was and described the spot. A company of Vietnamese Rangers was sent back; they found the spot but not my observer. He had either crawled into the jungle or the VC had gotten him. We continued down a beaten trail, which they had just made, to the helicopters. From there, I was taken to the 8th Field Hospital.

I wish I could think of some primary important lesson I learned, or could think of some points of wisdom to pass on, but my only recommendation is to keep your head and prevent that old enemy, panic. I have been taught that the most important single factor is the will to survive. With this precept, I most emphatically concur. Also, you may plan far enough ahead to wear a long sleeve flight suit. I was an extremely lucky young aviator. I acted through reflex action. If my training had not been so good, no one can say what might have happened.