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What is Operation Sandy to recover the missing US pilot?

Search and rescue missions behind enemy lines initiated by the United States during the Vietnam War

April 4, 2026



Photo by Recce Reports / StockTrek Images via AFP – A U.S. Air Force Black Hawk helicopter

PILOTOPERATION SANDYVIETNAMIRAN

3 minutes of reading

AGI – Rumors are swirling about the **pilots of the US F-15 downed yesterday** in Iran. While the United States admits that one of the two was indeed captured, **Tehran is denying it for now** . The Iranian regime also denies, however, that the Americans managed to recover one of the two airmen, something the US maintains. However, Tehran has stated on X that " **if Iran captures pilots** , they will not be treated like prisoners in the Israeli detention centers of Sde Teiman or in those run by the United States in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. **We respect international law** and Islamic mercy."

The efforts to recover the crewman of the downed F-15E Strike Eagle over Iran have brought to the forefront the topic of **combat search and rescue (CSAR)** operations behind enemy lines, pioneered by the **United States** during the **Vietnam War** and nicknamed "Sandy" in the jargon. The typical formation consisted of a low-wing A-1 Skyraider fighter-bomber escorting helicopters searching for the crews of **downed aircraft** or stranded soldiers. **In Vietnam, US SAR forces** saved 3,833 people at the cost of the lives of 71 rescuers and the loss of 45 aircraft.

CSAR missions in hostile territory are among the most complex and dangerous of any conflict today. Increasingly sophisticated, they are now an integral part of the preparations for any **military operation** . The **U.S. Air Force** 's **elite** specialized paratrooper unit, called **Pararescue Jumpers** (known as the "Swiss Army Knives of the USAF"), is often deployed close to areas where **U.S. aircraft are at risk of being shot down** . In some cases, intelligence agencies secretly contact locals to **plan assistance** for incidents like these.

Training of search teams

The **typical search formation** for **missing persons** consists of **helicopters** such as **Black Hawks** carrying at least 24 **paratroopers** , plus a **ground attack aircraft** such as the A10 Thunderbolt II "Warthog." **Aerial refueling aircraft** are usually also involved .

How search and recovery takes place

The **priority** is to search for **signs of life** before the enemy approaches the area: starting from the point where the **missing soldier or soldiers are** believed to have ejected, the search is carried out within a radius of terrain within which they could have moved on foot. The **signals** can come from the **transmitter** attached to the **ejection seats** or from the **encrypted radio** issued to the pilots along with a pistol with spare magazines, a **medical kit** , and **energy bars** . Once the **missing soldier** has been located , the **paratroopers** reach him, provide **medical assistance** if necessary , and then reach the **recovery** point for **helicopters** , relying on **cover from the air** .

A Success Story: Scott O'Grady

In 1995, during the **Bosnian War** , **American pilot Scott F. O'Grady** was tracked and rescued by **Marines** thanks to **signals from his radio** .

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