

AF's 'Egress Shop' a Blast for Pilots

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SAIGON — "Egress Shop."

There it was, right there on page 146 of the U.S. government's Vietnam phone directory. The U.S. Air Force had an egress shop on Tan Son Nhut AB.

Webster's defines the noun "egress" as a "place or means of going out."

Now "egress" is a high class synonym for "exit." It's usually thought of in connection with P.T. Barnum who supposedly charged folks a dime to enter a

hallway marked "This Way to Egress."

As the seekers filed through blank corridors hoping for a look at some exotic new animal species and found instead a doorway leading back outside, P.T. Barnum cooled it, counted his change and coined the phrase "there's a sucker born every minute."

If the U.S. Air Force was buying, selling or fixing egress, some explanation was clearly called for. I drove over.

"Ejection seats," explained M.SGT. Marvin J. Williams in

the spotless, brightly lit workshop, "Have to be inspected after every 150 flying hours."

This, then, was their bag: Egress with a vengeance. A momentary 10 "G" kick in the pants and two seconds later the pilot is 250 feet above his stricken aircraft with parachute descent guaranteed, even if the pilot is unconscious, by barometric sensors and timing devices.

Though nearly instantaneous, the ejection procedure is complicated.

The pilot first pulls down a combination actuator and face

curtain, or alternatively a "D ring."

This triggers a series of explosive events in which the plane canopy is blown, and the pilot and seat assembly eject/ed. Seconds later a drogue parachute is released, then a second control chute, and finally, after the seat falls away, the pilot's own personal chute appears.

From then on he's on his own his egress completed.

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