

AIR COMMANDO

A Professional Publication by the Air Commando Association
Dedicated to Air Commandos Past, Present & Future

JOURNAL

HALL OF FAME

2012 Inductees

Gunship III
Shadow & Stinger

Operation Puma

Raven 26
The Story of Chuck Engle

Fall 2012



Vol 2: Issue 1

Foreword by Michael W. Wooley, Lt Gen (Ret)
Seventh AFSOC Commander

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15

No Room For Error

23

Combat Shadows in Operation Puma

29

Raven 26: The Story of Chuck Engle

34

Commander Leadership Awards

40

AC-130s and Iranian Hostage Rescue Attempt (Part 2 of 2)



ON THE COVER

11 Air Commando Hall of Fame

(U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt Julianne M. Showalter/Released)



AC-119 Shadow and Stinger Gunships in SEA (Photo by David Voisey)

25

Gunships III

AC-119G Shadow & AC-119K Stinger

4

Foreword:

Michael W. Wooley, Lt Gen, USAF (Ret.)

5

Chindit Chatter: *Editorial*

7

Hotwash: *Letters & Comments*

44

On the Shoulders of Giants

The Legacy of the Air Commando

48

Medal of Honor

Lt Col Joe Jackson

FOREWORD

WOW! What a Convention/Reunion we had this year. They just keep getting better and better. I am very proud of each of you for what you continue to do as Air Commandos, past and present, and for your support of your Air Commando Association. As we grow as an organization, I want to say a few words about the Air Commando Hall of Fame and your Hall of Fame Committee. We had five very deserving inductees this year, all which had a lifetime of service to our GREAT NATION as Air Commandos and you will read about each of them in this issue. As you know, we (ACA) also sponsor the AFSOC Commander's Leadership Awards and you will find out more about them as well.

Back to the Hall of Fame—to find a detailed discussion about nomination criteria, just go to our website www.aircommando.org/content/hall-fame/nominations or go to the “About” pull down and click on “Hall of Fame” to find all the resources that you will need to nominate an Air Commando that you know has made significant contributions to the betterment of Air Commando or Air Force Special Operations Forces. The committee uses a one to ten (in half point increments) scoring system similar to the Air Force Promotion System to select our Hall of Famers. Therefore, the package you submit is very important and must communicate to the committee the specifics on why your nominee should be chosen! At the end of the process, if your Air Commando was very close to being selected, then I will send a letter of feedback to you so you can rework the package, present additional facts or other things to make the package stronger. I am confident that our process allows us to select the “very best” of “the best” to be inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. It's not too early to start thinking about whom you want to submit as the 2013 nominees.

I know that you are as proud of this very professional journal as I am and we get your feedback often! As Lt Gen Brad Heithold said in our last issue, “I look forward to a hearty response from my AFSOC brethren.” Well, as many of you reminded us, we left out our AC-119 Shadow and Stinger Gunships in our Gunship issue—shame on us! We've corrected that oversight and have a super article on the AC-119s in this issue. Sit back, relax and enjoy your Air Commando Journal.



Michael W. Wooley, Lt Gen, USAF (Ret.)
Seventh AFSOC Commander
Board of Directors, ACA
Chairman, Air Commando Hall Of Fame Committee



CHINDIT CHATTER

As Gen Wooley pointed out in the foreword, this edition of ACJ focuses on the Air Commando Hall of Fame. First, I want to point out is that this is the AIR COMMANDO HALL of FAME... not the Air Commando ASSOCIATION Hall of Fame. There is no requirement to have any affiliation with ACA to be nominated and selected for this honor. That is often misconstrued.

When I look at the Hall of Fame board that hangs in the ACA conference room, I am awed by the names that are represented. There are 160 names on that board. 160 names that represent



some of the finest Americans and Air Commandos who have served this great nation of ours gallantly since World War II. When I think of the thousands of patriots who have served as Air Commandos for nearly 70 years and yet the number on this wall is only 160, I am awed by the prestige of this group and the role ACA serves to ensure Air Commando history and legacy are preserved. I am awed thinking of the stories that could be told of days and days of pure boredom interrupted by the occasional few moments of pure adrenaline rush and terror before and during the execution of the missions for which they are renowned. Names like Cochran, Alison, Aderholt, King, Gleason, Kittinger, Secord, Lutz, Bourque, Iland, Klingaman, Manor and Levitow represent the foundation of Air Commandos that led the way in making Air Commandos a force to be reckoned with today and well in to the future. They are the giants that provided the examples used by those who followed to vault Air

Commandos to today's most highly skilled, utilized and demanded capabilities in the Air Force; whose role is only going to grow in capability and employment. More recent inductees who took the stick and continued to pave the path are Schwartz, Doster, Steinbeck, Walter, Wurster, Hobson, Carney, Lampe and Downs. This year's group clearly represents the same Air Commando ethos and impact of these Hall of Famers will ensure the paths that were laid by our founding giants are broader and truly a thoroughfare for the future. There is no reason to doubt that the list of 25 superb airmen selected for this year's Commander's Leadership Award contains at least one or more names that will be added to this wall in the future. God bless the Hall of Famers and all the other Air Commandos they represent and God bless today's Air Commandos that continue to carry the fight to those in this complex world that would do America harm.



Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Ret)
ACA Vice President and Editor In Chief

Advertisers in this issue:

Black Diamond	50
Blanchard Family Wines	10
Bless The Children.....	47
Emerald Coast Convention Center	24
Lockheed Martin	30
Rally Point Management, LLC	6
Sierra Nevada Corporation	10
SSAI	18
Special Operations Warrior Foundation	2
Veteran Data Solutions.....	10



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Publisher

Richard Secord
info@aircommando.org

Editor in Chief

Dennis Barnett
info@aircommando.org

Contributing Editors

Rick Newton
Pete Riley

Public Affairs/Marketing Director

Shannon Pressley
shannon@aircommando.org

Graphic Designer

Jeanette Moore
jeanette@aircommando.org

Air Commando Association Board of Directors

Maj Gen (Ret) Richard Secord, President
Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett, Vice President
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CMSAF #9 (Ret) James Binnicker, Director
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Lt Gen (Ret) Michael Wooley, Director
CMSgt (Ret) Micheal Wright, Director



Air Commando Association

P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569

Telephone: (850) 581-0099

Fax: (850) 581-8988

Web Site: www.aircommando.org

Email: info@aircommando.org

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Teammates,

I just received the latest issue of the Air Commando Journal and was thoroughly impressed. I read the entire magazine cover to cover twice. I have been associated with AFSOC and AC-130s since 1991 and for all I thought I knew, there is obviously a lot I don't. Many thanks to Col-retired Ron Terry, Lt Col-retired Tim Schaffer, and Chief-retired Bill Walter for their very insightful and entertaining articles. The history of the venerable C-47 and the incredible lineage of the 193rd SOW were very compelling and impressive reads as well. As always, I look forward to future installments of this great magazine.

Thanks for all you do to promote our Air Commandos; past, present and future.

CMSgt Bill Turner
AFSOC Command Chief
Hurlburt Field, FL

Gunships

Have just received my copy of the summer issue of the Commando Journal and really enjoyed it. The excellent article by Col Terry stirred some long dormant memories.

In the spring of 1965, I was assigned to the SAWC as an Armorer. Col Terry, then Capt Terry came to the Hq to get some support for a follow on program for the original Gunships that were exceptionally successful. He convinced Gen Pritchard to help him and asked me if I would help. We went to Wright Pat the next day in a C47 and started installing 10 .30 Caliber Browning Machine guns shortly thereafter. The Shops at WP had made up the installation kit and we returned to Hurlburt with it soon after. That particular Aircraft later went to Forbes AFB, Kansas to be used to train the nucleus of the 4th ACS.

Paul Bunch and I accompanied 3 more kits to Clark AFB where we installed same in three aircraft. At the Conclusion, I went along back to Beinh Hoa to train

the back end crews on the very simple modification. I can personally attest to the type of leader Col Terry is. In my 29 years active duty I never served under a better man, he had a way of motivating people that is very rare and I respect him greatly.

On a later tour with the AC-119K Detachment at NKP, I got requested to help install a Modification to the C-47 consisting of the installation of 3 .50 Caliber M3 Machine Guns in Cambodian C-47s. Most of the work was done at Tan Son Nhut but we finished it up at Udorn. Two Crews of Cambodians came to Udorn and we gave them some training on the System. In retrospect, it had a lot of advantages because of the longer reach and better trajectory of the Gun compared to the 7.62 used in other applications.

In summation, I got involved with the armed 47 with 4 different configurations, SUU-11 Gun Pods, .30 Caliber Brownings, MxU/470 Modules and 3 Fifty Caliber Machine Guns and can thank the 1st ACW for that.

Keep up the excellent work with the Journal.

Doug Blair
ACA Life Member #742

While I enjoyed reading the entire journal, I found the stories on the 'Gunships' especially interesting. How many more lives could have been saved had the powers-to-be not been so entrenched and had the foresight to accept Lt Fred Nelson's idea back in 1926. All too often, these leaders are afraid to try anything new and it takes a General Billy Mitchell to sacrifice themselves to prove a point. (Luckily, this isn't always the case or we'd still be using horse and buggies...)

Changing subjects, since editor Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett USAF stated in his opening sentence of 'Chindit Chatter' that 'As in past editions we have chosen to highlight a specific aircraft or specialty,' I am wondering if the staff there has

ever considered doing an article on the 604th ACS 'Combat Dragon' test of the A-37 'Dragonfly' in the Vietnam War in 1967. With it having flown over 100,000 missions during the war, many in close air support of troops in contact, I feel the A-37 deserves to have its story also told in an exceptional publication such as your journal. Having around 400 contacts in our A-37 Association, I know you could receive a lot of help and photos for such an article. Let me know and I will publish the info in one of our newsletters.

Thank you,
Ollie Maier
ACA Life Member

Puff

I was pleased to see the photo of the 1ACS in front of Puff on page 14 of this issue -- and noticed that there I am, the last guy standing on the right-hand side of the photo (was I ever that young?! I no longer have a copy of the photo (if I ever did) and wondered if there might be a way for you to e-mail me a copy that would be any clearer than the photo in the magazine? It would be a nice souvenir.

Thanks! Keith Nance
ACA Life Member
Niceville, FL

Keith,

We are sending you an electronic version of the photo that was featured on page 14 of the Summer 2012 issue of the Air Commando Journal. It was scanned the photo from Gunships: The Story of Spooky, Shadow, Stinger, and Spectre by Wayne Mutza, page 35 to use in the Summer issue. I hope it will work for you.

Volume 1, Issue 4

My grandfather retired the US Air Force in 1985. He was at his local tennis courts recently and picked up the Air Commando Journal and flipped through

it and found a picture of the 1st Air Commandos with Puff the Magic Dragon where he is standing in front of the plane. Just thought it was an interesting story that you would be happy to hear about. He is very honored.

Emily Hannon

More on Gunships

I thoroughly enjoyed the article "Spooky, Spectre and the Man" in the Summer 2012 issue of Air Commando Journal but I am compelled to slightly amend the information in the article. While it may be that 1st Lt Fred Nelson and his side-firing machine gun equipped DH-4 may have been the first American gunship, the United States cannot take credit for inventing the concept.

You may find the following text, extracted from an article titled "An Example of WWI R&D: Aircraft Gunships" by Timothy J. Kutta which ran in COMMAND Magazine, Issue 33, Mar-Apr 1995 pp. 26-27 to be of interest. It describes the world's first aerial gunship and it was created by the Germans in World War I. It's worth noting that the armament of this first gunship was a monster for its day - 130mm. Not to be outdone, the French soon followed with a side-firing cannon but that's another story for another time.

Edward Robbeloth
ACA Life Member #2439

During the Great War, the Germans developed a class of bomber aircraft they called *Reisenflugzeug* (literally "Giant Aircraft"). These aircraft began to make their appearance during 1915, and were the largest planes designed, built and flown during the war. They were conceived as long-range strategic bombers that could attack targets deep in Allied territory....

The great size of the ... planes was dictated by the aeronautical engineering limits of the day. To lift a payload of just over 2,000 pounds, the planes required plenty of lift. Lift in 1915 could only be provided by large, long wings. The Versuchsbau Gotha-Ost (VGO) I accordingly had a wing span of 138'

5" and a fuselage that was 78' 9" long. In addition, such planes needed lots of power to propel themselves. The VGO I carried five Maybach Mb.Iva engines giving it a top speed of 68 mph and a ceiling of 9,832 feet....

[The R-planes were tested on the relatively safe Eastern Front and on 13 August 1916, were assigned a] mission to bomb the Russian seaplane base at Lebara. (Failing) to spot any seaplanes [the crew decided to attack] two destroyers moving along the coast.... Armed with three 50 kg, 18 of 20 kg and six 10 kg bombs... the R-plane chased the enemy vessels for 30 minutes. The bomber was struck several times by anti-aircraft fire, but was unsuccessful at hitting either of the ships. Upon returning to base, the pilot noted in disgust the only way a bomber could hit a ship with an aerial bomb was by using "pure luck."

While the members of the two squadrons ... [Giant Aircraft Detachment 400 and 501]...strained to work out effective tactics for use of their craft, a brilliant officer named Lt. Ernst Neuber began working on another novel idea. He wanted to build a vertically mounted 130mm canon into the belly of the R-plane. His idea was to fire downward at ships or ground targets. He reasoned a high velocity shell fired directly down at the deck of a ship would have great accuracy; and he also had no doubts such shells could penetrate the armored decks of British battleships.

Despite the stunned looks of many of the bureaucrats and senior officers who listened to his plan, the facts and the mathematical calculations seemed to make sense. So the project was endorsed for trial.

The main concern was the recoil of the cannon. Though there had been much improvement in artillery since the start of the war, a 130mm gun still packed a considerable recoil. That was usually not a problem on the ground, but attaching a cannon to an airplane frame made of wood and fabric posed a different problem.

On 25 May 1916, Neuber began a series of static tests to determine if the test plane, a Gotha East Experimental (VGO II) could handle the strain of the recoil. The first trial involved the firing

of a 26 pound projectile straight down into the ground from atop a 60 foot tower. The test demonstrated the recoil of the gun amounted to some 1100-1764 pounds and that the penetration of the shell would indeed be great enough to pierce the armor of a battleship. The aeronautical engineers...believed the VGO II could absorb a recoil force of up to 3300 pounds and still fly, so the experiment indicated the concept was workable.

On 6 October, the gun was mated to the plane and a series of ground tests was conducted to see if the aircraft would actually hold together as the engineers predicted. The cannon was mounted near the center of gravity of the airplane, with special reinforcers installed as a precaution. Both the gun and the plane performed flawlessly. Various powder charges were tried and none had any adverse effect on the performance: all of Neuber's calculations proved correct.

After installing an aiming device, the gunship was ready for its first airborne firing. On 129 October, Neuber fired the gun several times from an altitude of just over 2600 feet. The VGO II was able to absorb the recoil with no ill effect and the impact of the shell was impressive. The aiming device, however, was a problem. The test shots missed the target by an average of just over 131 feet. Hitting a moving ship from a moving plane wasn't going to be easy with that kind of error factor.

The gun and sight were sent back to the factory for modification. But by this time Neuber's experiment had caught the fancy of other ordnance, as well as aeronautical, people. Even stranger devices were in the works.

With stereotypic [sic] Teutonic efficiency, Neuber and the ordnance department developed both a new gun and a [sic] entirely new plane to carry it. Both represented remarkable technical advances for their time.

The ordnance department came up with an automatic cannon capable of firing 20 rounds a minute. This 105mm gun would be mounted amidships in the aircraft and would also fire straight down; however, it generated a recoil force of just over 6600 pounds. Obviously, the VGO II couldn't hold the new gun. So Neuber

designed and proposed to manufacture his own specialized airplane. Due to the promise of potentially great success seen so far, the German government allowed him to proceed.

Neuber's aircraft was of conventional biplane design but it mounted four 245 horsepower Maybach engines. The plane was to have a wingspan of 178' 9" and a fuselage length of 109' 10". It would have a top speed of about 60 mph and a range of 558 miles. The heart of the craft, of course, was its offensive punch. The center section was reinforced to hold the 105mm cannon and 120 rounds of ammunition. It carried eight machine guns to defend itself from fighter attack.

The new plane and cannon also provided reason to reconsider the scope of the potential missions for it. In addition to attacking the British fleet, Neuber envisioned using his R-plane to hit ground targets on and behind the front. Unfortunately for Germany, the armistice ended the war before Neuber could actually roll out his cannon-firing giants. Today we can only wonder about the psychological shock effect attacks by such aircraft would have had on Allied morale, especially if they proved able to sink a battleship or destroy some key ground target. Still, the fact remains Ernst Neuber developed the first aerial gunship; his patent number 305, 039 remains on file to prove it.

Sir,

Thank you for your response and the additional information regarding the Gunships. We appreciate all feedback and look forward to hearing from our readers.

Operation Eagle Claw

AC-130s and Iranian Hostage Rescue Attempt (Summer 2012 p. 40)

I want to thank my good friend Jim Lawrence for including, as he should have, my crew's 27 hour and 45 minute S.O.A.R.A.S.S mission in his excellent book.

Jim mistakenly stated that the mission was flown in an 8th SOS MC-130 Combat Talon by Hurlburt Field crewmembers. The aircraft (0564) and my crew were from the 1st SOS at Kadena.

Aircraft 0564 was the first C-130, of any model, modified for in-flight refueling (IFR) by Lockheed Air Services-Ontario and I was the first operational pilot checked out (by the test pilots at Edwards while doing testing on 0564).

Although pilots Terry Jahnke, John Davis, nav Rick Bakke, and "as yet unidentified FE (Bob Selby) from the 8SOS" received training with us at Eddie, they did not fly on the mission.

SOARASS (this was chosen to get a grin from the Navy in message traffic, but the squids always spelled out the whole thing) was the FIRST operational IFR mission, flown by a FIRST SOS aircrew, in a FIRST SOS aircraft. Stray Goose International members be proud. Even though Jim's crew may have beaten our record for flight time, nobody can beat FIRST.

The primary crewmembers were:

Capt Bob Meller, Aircraft Commander
Capt Jerry Nichols, Pilot
Capt Jack Holbein, Nav
MSgt Ray Doyle, LM
TSgt Rueben Cole, FE

We were augmented by:

Lt Col Steve Gardella, 1SOS/CC Pilot
Capt Mike Bach, Pilot
Capt Joe McBride, Nav
Capt Paul Whetzel, Nav
MSgt Marion "Rat" Moretz, FE
MSgt John Stumpf, LM
TSgt John Mink, RO
SSgt Chuck Javens, RO

Maj Paul Stephens (Edwards test pilot) was along for the ride in case Jerry or I screwed up. He got a long nap.

Respectfully,
Bob Meller, Lt Col (Ret)

General Secord

On behalf of the Air Commandos of Cannon Air Force Base, I extend sincere appreciation for your support of the retirement ceremony for Talon tail number 64-0523. We are extremely proud of our heritage and of what this aircraft means to AFSOC and thank the Air Commando Association for sharing

in this pride by helping to provide an appropriate retirement for this aircraft.

We look forward to the next time our paths will cross and perhaps showing you Talon 64-0523 displayed on Cannon Air Force Base.

Sincerely,

BUCK ELTON, Colonel, USAF
Commander 27SOW, Cannon AFB

Dear Mr. Harry Bright,

I'm the young man you talked with at the Air Mobility Command Museum in Dover, Delaware today, July 29th, 2012.

I enjoyed reading your article about William Pitsenbarger in the May 2012 Journal. I hope to read many more of your articles. I am an avid aviation buff. My father served in Vietnam as an artilleryman in 1968, I think it was. Speaking of the Vietnam War, one of my favorite books that relates to that war is Stephen Coonts' "Flight of the Intruder".

Gregory Devine

Sir,

Great issue. I am an AC-130U Nav, and was surprised while reading the "Hotwash" section to see the past exploits of my father in "The Ordeal of the Weasels" (page 8-9). My father Col Ted Lowry USAF (Ret) will be tickled to see this issue. He was never an Air Commando, but has always felt a great amount of kinship with the Air Commandos, even more so since his youngest son is one.

Ironically, CMSgt Wayne Fisk was the PJ who pulled him out to one of our MH-53s. As a young AC-130U Navigator I was able to provide overhead support to the same MH-53 on its last combat mission (Iraq).

Funny how things seem to go full circle.

Again, thank you and your team on such a great publication and all you continue to do in support of the Air Commandos.

Very Respectfully,
C. CHRISTAN LOWRY, Capt, USAF
1 SOG LNO to 75th Rangers

Great literature!

I currently serve as the Chief of MILCON in Civil Engineering, managing all major new construction on Hurlburt. I've recently completed such projects as the Soundside Joint Operations Planning Center, the 720th STG HQ, the 10th Combat Weather Squad Ops, two Child Development Centers, the 413th/18th Flight Test Squad facility, among many others via AF and SOF MILCON funding during this period of rapid growth at Hurlburt.

As an active duty CE CGO, I was privileged in 2007 to serve in OIF/OEF as the CJSOAC civil engineer under Gen Lengyel, and more recently as the first civil engineer on the

ground and JSOAC-H bed down OIC under Col "Buck" Elton in Haiti during the 2010 earthquake response.

I'm very honored to continue my family's SOF service in that my grandfather was the late Lt Col Joseph Madden, AF Cross recipient, Vietnam FAC, O-1 and OV-10 pilot/instructor, and former 4409th CCTS Commander. He was one of 9 individuals honored with a designated VIP suite on Hurlburt in 1988.

I have been at Hurlburt Field for over 6 years (4 as active duty, 2 as GS), but consider myself quite green in regards to USAF special operations. This Journal is just what we less seasoned members need to hear the stories and history that formed AFSOC and stay up to date on current events...Keep up the great work!

DAN WILCOXEN, PE
Civil Engineer, MILCON Chief
1st Special Operations Civil Engineer Sq
Hurlburt Field, FL

Submissions can be e-mailed to info@aircommando.org or mailed to Hot Wash c/o Air Commando Association, P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569. ACA reserves the right to eliminate those that are not deemed appropriate. However, we will answer each and every input, whether it is placed in this column or not. Thank you in advance for your interest in the Air Commando Journal.

These wines, as well as other military themed wines including the MH-53 tribute wine - the Red Scarf Blend, and the Air Force Academy Association of Graduates series, the Long Blue Line wines, can be ordered by calling James Blanchard at 303-328-1732 or by emailing james@blanchardfamilywines.com.

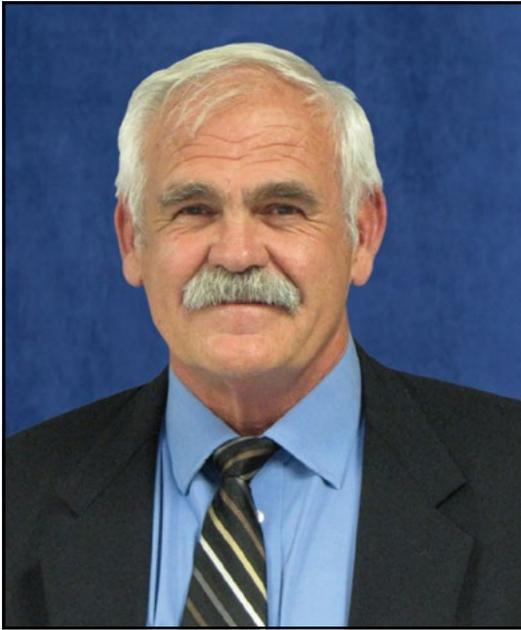
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 RICHARD L. COMER CMSGT RICHARD W. CRUTCHFIELD COL GEORGE C. FERKES COL TIMOTHY
 R. MINISH COL STEPHEN R. CONNELLY GEN CHARLES R. HOLLAND COL CHARLES G. MCMILLAN
 MAJ GEN ROBERT B. PATTERSON CMSGT GORDON H. SCOTT JAMES G. ROCHE (HONORARY)



2012
Air Commando
Hall of Fame

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 COL LEONARD "LEE" VOLET
 SSGT JOSEPH J. CONATY, JR
 COL KEITH R. GRIMES MAJ
 MICHAEL J. HOSENBAKEZ LT
 CMSGT JOHN C. RODDICK LT



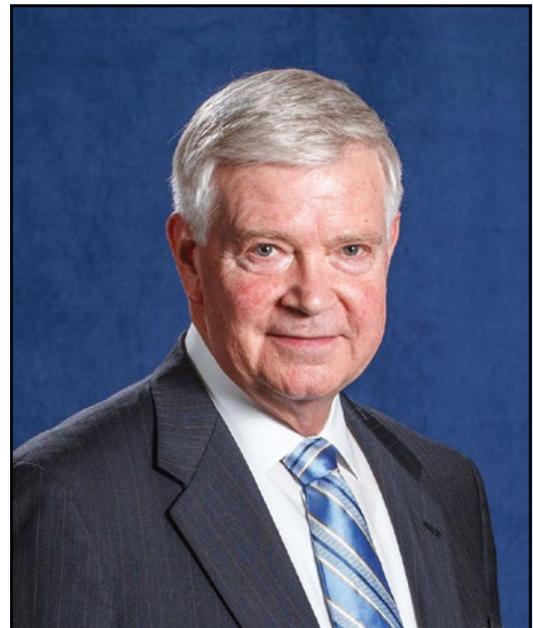
Stephen R. Connelly

Colonel Stephen R. Connelly distinguished himself through sustained performance as an Air Commando throughout his long and distinguished career. This highly decorated Air Commando was instrumental in the design, testing and fielding of both the HH-53H and the MH-53J PaveLow helicopters. It was during the early stages of this effort that he was responsible for the first night, adverse weather recovery using the unique PaveLow helicopter in the mountains of New Mexico demonstrating the significant special operations capabilities of this new weapon system. His outstanding leadership and combat experience were instrumental in getting the PaveLow helicopters assigned to special operations and the driving force in the growth of this national capability to 41 aircraft. His numerous contributions as an Air Commando were critical factors in his selection as the Air Component Commander at the highly classified Joint Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, NC. As squadron commander, group commander and culminating his career as AFSOC Director of Operations, Colonel Connelly has served as an outstanding leader and visionary for the special operations community as well as a mentor to future Air Commando leaders. He

was a highly sought after motivational speaker and for years was a key facet of AFSOC's Squadron Commander's course laying out a path to successful and compassionate leadership for these new leaders. Colonel Connelly's contribution to Air Force Special Operations are huge and long lasting and bring great credit upon Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.

Charles R. Holland

General Charles R. Holland distinguished himself through sustained performance as an Air Commando throughout his long and distinguished career culminating as Commander, United States Special Operations Command from October 2000 to November 2003. The right person for this critical command position post 9/11, General Holland had the daunting task and responsibility of commanding and directing all US Special Operations Forces and coalition partners to engage al-Qaeda, Taliban and Iraqi forces in the global war on terrorism and did so brilliantly. No stranger to combat operations he flew many combat missions in Vietnam as an AC-130 gunship pilot and was able to bring a wealth of combat experience to his future command positions. In these command positions he has clearly demonstrated outstanding leadership, teamwork and quintessential professionalism while leading our nation's special operations forces. As Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, FL from July 1997 to August 1999 his steady hand and visionary direction postured Air Commandos to meet the challenges of protecting our nation's vital interests to include other humanitarian, peacekeeping and contingency operations touching the lives of people around the world. An enabler, he was directly responsible for guiding the readiness and capability of Air Commandos and Air Force Special Operations through a remarkable and unprecedented period of growth. The imprints of his integrity and strength of character have left a lasting influence on Air Force Special Operations. General Holland's selfless duty to service and country reflect the highest credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.



General Holland's selfless duty to service and country reflect the highest credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.



Charles G. McMillan

Colonel Charles G. McMillan distinguished himself while assigned to multiple Air Commando organizations during his outstanding thirty year Air Force career. In each, he left a legacy of successful leadership and improvements in C-130 combat operations, tactics and mission planning. His vast operational experience was developed while planning and flying combat missions in Grenada, Panama, Bosnia and Afghanistan. His combat experience was gained early in his career as an aircraft commander on the EC-130 Commando Solo aircraft flying combat missions in direct support of Operation Urgent Fury, the invasion of Grenada. As an AC-130H Spectre pilot, he commanded a gunship during Operation Acid Gambit and the first successful rescue of an American hostage by US counter-terrorist forces. This mission earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross and the 1990 MacKay Trophy as the year's most meritorious flight. Col McMillan's assignments to key staff positions at Air Force Special Operations Command, Joint Special Operations Command as well as SOCCENT and SOCAFRICA attest to his unique leadership and planning skills. These skills were critical to his assignment immediately after 9-11 when he commanded over 350 Air Force and Army special operations

personnel deployed to Jordan in prelude to combat operations in Afghanistan. More recently, Col McMillan was the ranking special operations officer to the 4-Star-Staff on board the Navy ship Mt. Whitney, coordinating all special operations missions in Libya. He continues his service to Special Operations Forces after retirement as the Civilian Deputy Operations Officer at SOCCENT. Col McMillan's extraordinary dedication and his outstanding contributions to the special operations mission reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.

Robert B. Patterson

Major General Robert B. Patterson distinguished himself through extraordinary contributions to the United States Air Force Special Operations Forces over thirty-three years of service rising from a line pilot and progressing through virtually every level of command. From 1985 to his retirement in November 1989, he served as the first Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command and also Commander of 23rd Air Force, Military Airlift Command. General Patterson commanded all force units responsible for Special Operations; Combat Search and Rescue, Weather Reconnaissance, Atmospheric Sampling, Aero Medical Evacuation, Operational Support Airlift, and Nuclear Missile Site Support. Primary focus was on low intensity conflict, counter-terrorism, combat search and rescue and infiltration/exfiltration of special operations forces into and from denied territory. General Patterson was the senior Air Force officer both in Operation URGENT FURY, the American student rescue in Grenada, and Operation JUST CAUSE, the removal of President Noriega from Panama. He has earned the Military Parachute Badge and is a Command Pilot with over 12,000 flying hours. His many military awards and decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star Medals, Meritorious Service Medals and Air Medals. He has also received the Order of the Sword and the Order of the Bayonet from the Air Force Enlisted Corps. He is only the fifth person to be named as an Honorary Life Member in the long history of the Combat Control Association. General Patterson's outstanding contributions reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command and the United States Air Force.





Gordon H. Scott

Chief Master Sergeant Gordon H. Scott distinguished himself in the performance of meritorious service to multiple Air Commando organizations during his extraordinary career. Chief Scott made an indelible mark on the Air Force Special Operations Command's Career Enlisted Aviator community and continues his service in retirement as Course Director for the Special Operations Combating Terrorism Course at the Joint Special Operations University. Chief Scott flew 41 combat sorties during Operation DESERT SHIELD where he executed three Bomb Live Unit-82 airdrops over enemy targets in Iraq and Kuwait. His contributions continued as he led 7th Special Operations Squadron loadmasters through non-combatant evacuations in Liberia and Republic of Congo. His courage and skills during the Republic of Congo evacuation were recognized with his crew being awarded the Mackay Trophy for 1997. Additional recognition of his superior leadership skills came in 1999 when he was the United States Air Force Lance P. Sijan award winner. During Operation ENDURING FREEDOM Chief Scott proved pivotal in the stand-up of the 3rd Air Expeditionary Task Force in addition to flying eight missions delivering time-

critical resources to combat forces deep inside Afghanistan. Furthermore, upon returning from deployment, he turned his attention to developing and fielding a new Forward Area Manifold Cart for forward area refueling operations, this equipment is still in use today. Throughout his outstanding career, Chief Scott has led, developed and implemented MC-130 tactics, techniques and procedures still being utilized by today's special operations aviators. The distinctive accomplishments of Chief Master Sergeant Scott culminate a distinguished career in the service of his country and reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.

James G. Roche, Honorary Member

The Honorable Doctor James G. Roche has made exceptional contributions to Air Force Special Operations as the 20th Secretary of the Air Force from 2001 to 2005 and with subsequent impact as an advocate for airpower and special operations since his retirement from federal service. As the Secretary of the Air Force, Dr Roche quickly recognized the pivotal role that Air Force Special Operations have in the Global War on Terrorism and provided strategic vision and resources to enable these forces to have greatly disproportionate effect in finding and killing those that wish our nation harm. Doctor Roche focused Air Force research and funding to develop a lightweight and fully integrated system that greatly decreased the "kill chain" time to find, fix, track, target, engage and assess enemy targets while greatly reducing the complexity and weight of this man-carried equipment. In addition to advancing the technological state of art, Dr Roche and Chief of Staff of the Air Force General John Jumper, set the standard for care of our wounded and enthusiasm to cut through

the bureaucracy and created a "can-do" attitude for enhanced care within the Air Force that continues through today. Furthermore, Dr Roche was pivotal to bringing the CV-22 into the Air Force inventory ensuring the ability of Air Force Special Operations Command to project American power to any target at any time. Following his tenure as Secretary, Dr Roche continues to serve as a strong advocate for special operations Airmen and the unique effects that they bring to the battle.



No Room For Error

Submitted by Col John Carney (Ret)

Overview: Colonel Carney's interview focuses on his questions for building Air Force Special Tactics Units, leading The Special Operations Warrior Foundation, and performing with excellence. Posted on December 8th, 2009 on www.questionsforliving.com/categories/personal-performance/no-room-error.

Q: What questions did you ask yourself when you decided to become involved with Air Force Combat Control and special operations?

Carney: I was in a place called Ubon, Thailand in Southeast Asia, (it was classified at the time). We had just started building air bases there so that we could strike in northern Vietnam. That's when I first met some combat controllers. At that time, I didn't feel that I was contributing to the war effort as much as I wanted to, mainly because the job that I had was in personnel services. Once I met the combat controllers, I knew that the next time we were involved in any type of conflict like this I wanted to be in a position where I would be a "first-stringer" and really be contributing. I asked myself, "What is the best and most effective way I can contribute to this effort?" This comes back to my fundamental philosophy as a football coach, You need to contribute. If you're out there on the field, you've got to be someone who scores the touchdown, or contributing to scoring a touchdown, or stopping the opponent from getting one. You need to be contributing to the purpose of the team - I always had that in the back of my mind.



When my Air Force football career was coming to an end, I had a choice to get out of the Air Force and continue coaching or to stay the course in the Air Force. I decided that I would stay in the Air Force. That's when I fell back on my days in Southeast Asia and said, "If I am going to be in the Air Force, I'm going to get involved in something that will really contribute."

That's when I chose to go to combat control. When I went into combat control I was not very well accepted. I was a passed over major, and the chances of me making major were slim to none. I said to myself, "I have made the decision to stay in the Air Force, now I've got to see if I can make the grade." So I approached everything from that day on with the attitude that I was going to give my utmost best every day, regardless of what the outcome was going to be in the future. The very present day was most important to me. I decided that every morning that I got up, I was going to do whatever they put in front of me to the best of my ability. I succeeded in doing that. I consistently asked, "Am I doing this task to the best of my ability?" I didn't worry about the future. I worried about my present job, present training, and the people around me. It was this focus on giving my very best, in the present moment, that carried me through some tumultuous years of not knowing what my future would be in the Air Force.

Q: What were your primary questions for selecting the original team members for your first team known as Brand X?

Carney: I'm very strong on the aspect of a person's character. That was the most important criteria and the first thing that I

wanted to know. I asked a lot of questions of people who had worked with these individuals for years. I looked at a guy that really wanted to succeed. I wanted a team player, a guy who would go the extra mile for his teammates, and had a history of being a team player. He had to be liked by other combat controllers. All the members of Brand X had to have a very good moral compass that was pointing in the right direction for me and the team.

Each member had to be a very experienced combat controller, and if they weren't, they had to have some other qualities that would make me swing in their favor. I gathered a team of about six that all had these strong qualities.

Q: Am I correct in saying that from Brand X the Special Tactics teams were formed?

Carney: Absolutely. That was the precursor to Special Tactics today.

Q: And then Special Tactics brought in other groups such as the PJs?

Carney: That's what happened. The combat controllers were terribly undermanned. The slots for PJs were earned by helicopter. There were two PJs earned for every helicopter and the Air Force decided not to purchase the full contingent of helicopters. So that left about 80 PJs vulnerable to being cut because the Air Force didn't buy all the helicopters they had planned to purchase.

Given that those manpower slots were not funded, I convinced General Mall and General Patterson to give me those positions. The idea was to bring them together with combat controllers and cross-train them. These guys had a lot of experience and I didn't want to see them go away. With the merger of the PJs, we could not call it "Combat Control Detachment" any longer so we changed it to "Special Tactics Detachment". This was a combination of Combat Controllers, PJs, and support people. So that's how that all started.

Q: What were your core questions for building and training this group, once you had the initial team? In your book, you talked about trying to win the trust of Delta and SEAL Team Six. How did you train to achieve a level of performance that would instill confidence and trust with the other teams?

Carney: The way that I approached that was to get the team to buy into the fact that if we're going to add value to an operation, we needed to be able to out army the Army and out SEAL the SEALs, if we have to. We simply had to be top notch professionals, "Why would Delta and SEAL Team Six not want to work with true professionals that are good at what they do... that are the best at what they do? I would constantly ask, How can we be the very best at the skills that we will be expected to know to accomplish our mission or task?"

Regarding the actual training, First of all, we had to be in excellent physical shape. The rigors of the training back then were pretty tough on us, so we had to be in top physical condition. That was one requirement. However, the team also needed to know that there was a reason for them to be in good physical condition. Some of the conditions and standards we

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developed were challenging and you couldn't possibly perform them unless you are in top physical shape. I also wanted to make sure that they really understood all the tasks that we were expected to do to accomplish our mission. We would take the mission and look at all the ingredients that we would need to know about and train until we were experts in those skills. One my basic principles that was, "If we can't communicate, then we are worthless. If we can't get on that radio and contact the aircraft, or the army commander that were working to support, then we are worthless. We will always be able to communicate, and we will have redundant communications wherever we go." I was constantly asking myself, "How can we maintain and improve our ability to communicate?"

Several times we saved the day because we were able to communicate. Our ability to communicate made a big impact on the community.

Q: Are there other core questions you were asking when you were training the team? You mentioned top physical condition, understanding all the tasks that people were expected to do, and the ability to communicate with each other.

Carney: Each team member really had to know their basic skills and had to be right at the top. There was no room for people to be shabby. They had to be at the top of their game. They had to look at all the things that we would be required to do - whether it was moving, communicating or shooting. We had to be able to do that, and we had to be the best at it. The Army, Navy, or whoever else we were supporting, felt that they could do it internally. My attitude was, "No, you do not need to do that internally. We will do that for you." However first we had to go out and prove that we were the best at it. You cannot be the best unless you are physically fit and you know all the skills that you are expected to know and you hone those skills every day. Anyone who practices these skills every day should be good at them. Each team member knew that if they screwed up at one of those tasks, I would put them on the bench just like a football coach. Many a time I've sent a couple of them home from an exercise and said, "Go home and regroup." We could not afford to mess up if an airplane with 60 paratroopers is relying on us. If you make a mistake, you are endangering a lot of lives. This team has quite a responsibility.

Q: I remember in your book you said that over the course of your career, you were passed over for major a couple of times. However, although your career started slowly, it all of a sudden accelerated rapidly as you started to build these teams. Ultimately, you had an incredibly successful career in the Air Force. What were the primary questions that you asked yourself throughout your career?

Carney: I think the biggest questions that I would always ask myself were:

Am I leaving something undone or is there something that I could be doing better?

Is there some hole out there that I need to plug?

I needed to understand exactly what the special operations community was trying to accomplish and then what it was that I could do to be a force multiplier for the team. What can I do to

enhance anything they're trying to do, whatever it is? So I had to be very knowledgeable of what was going on in the special operations arena.

Where can I add value? I constantly asked that.

Are we in the right area?

Is that an area we should be in or is that an area that we should not be in, or bother with? I really focused. I didn't bother with anyone else's mission and I did not try to mission -creep into anyone else's area; I stayed focused on the path. Everyone must stay in their own lane. Once you start getting into everyone else's lane you start diluting what you're supposed to be doing. I asked, "What is our niche?"

What can we do to help bring this mission to a successful conclusion?

When I was passed over for major before joining air combat control, there was no way that I could control all the different events. I could not control the promotion boards, the Air Force, or the direction they were going and the type of people that wanted. So all I could do was try to the best of my ability to prove to the special operations community that we were a force multiplier; we were a group that could contribute. It was not just me as an individual, but I had a team with me. As a team, we became indispensable to the mission.

Q: What were your primary questions for leading the Special Operations Warrior Foundation?

Carney: I have been a member of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation since 1980. The foundation was started when we went over to rescue the hostages in Iran in 1980. We had the terrible accident and lost five airmen and three Marines. It was a terrible loss for special operations personnel, and these men left behind 17 children. At that time, we virtually vowed that we would see to their education. That became the mission. Unfortunately, throughout the 1980s, the foundation wasn't going anywhere. It wasn't out raising funds; it wasn't doing anything, but there were children coming in there that were eligible. I was asked by General Manor, the Chairman, and General Meyer, the Director, if I would become president.

At this time, I was a principal with Booz Allen and Hamilton as a defense consultant. I had my hands pretty well full. I was responsible for a \$186 million dollar contract. I agreed to put together a plan for where the foundation should go in the future. I did that, and in that report I basically told them that there were a lot of stains on their robes. There was a period of three or four years when they did not raise a penny, and the money was sitting in the money markets in banks when it was the hottest stock market in our history. It was really poorly run, and I pointed that out to them. Well after I presented the information, they said, "Well help us fix it." I said, "No, I did my part. Here it is. I donated my funds and raised money." But I was the only one raising money. So I discussed it with my wife. It's just the two of us. We have children, but they have grown up, and have their own lives now. I said something inside me tells me that I would consider doing this. She said, "Do what your gut feels like doing." So I left a rather lucrative job and took this one over. And then again, I had to start all over building something. I started by asking myself, "What is wrong with this organization?"

So I started learning more about the Foundation and nonprofit organizations. I peeled the onion back and looked at all the past minutes of each of the meetings. I looked at all the bylaws. I immersed myself in all the text I could find and devour on nonprofits. I studied it like I did with special tactics. I was asking “What is it that I can do to make this organization stand out?” The first thing I came up with was we need to clearly articulate what our mission is to the public. I call this the elevator speech. From the time you step on the elevator and go up one floor, you ought to be able to tell someone your organization’s mission and what you are doing with the public funds. So, the first thing that we did was to clearly define our mission. The second thing was that we needed to go out and put together a Board of Directors who have bought into this mission, and is willing to step up to the plate and help bring in the funds to enable us to do what we say we’re going to do.

Our mission is to educate the children of our fallen warriors. Previously, the Foundation would put someone through school only once we got enough money. To me that was an asinine way to do it. I said, “We should just throw the gauntlet down and say, “We are going to educate them.” So that’s the way we did it. I went out and started building a Board of Directors that were very much engaged and bought into the mission. Then I put together a program to go out to the public to share what we do at the Warrior Foundation and what our mission is. It basically grew from there. It is a noble cause. Why wouldn’t anyone want to support it? I hired staff and I told the Board that, “You have to have the organizational capacity to do this. You cannot sit around with volunteers that show up on one day or another. You’ve got to get a staff, you’ve got to pay a staff, and you have to get out there and do this like a business. So I hired an executive director, and a public relations director, and a couple of administrative people. We became a small nonprofit organization. Now I am simply sharing with the public our noble cause of supporting our men and women in special operations and their families.

In 1998, Special Operations Warrior Foundation had been operating for 18

years, and had only \$700,000 in the bank. What a travesty. When I became president in 1998, I raised \$1 million dollars, in the next year I raised \$3 million, in the following year I raised \$5 million. Today, we have \$26 million in assets and more than 800 children in our program.

Q: The last part of the interview has to do with the individual. What questions would you suggest that an individual ask him / herself to be able to achieve their own objectives without error?

Carney: Is your mission clearly stated?

Do you have a clear vision of your mission and what you are trying to accomplish? You need to have a clear understanding of your mission.

What is your job? You need to be able to clearly define your job. And then you need to know what are the key components to being successful in that job. You need to ask, “What is key in this job?”

Are you very well read and articulate regarding all the fundamentals that go into being successful? Nobody’s perfect but you should always be working to try to move towards that. I always ask myself that question.

Q: What questions should individuals ask themselves to maintain their peak performance mentally and physically?

Carney: Am I as sharp in my job today as I was when I first took it over?

Am I still asking every day, “How can I take this to the top?”

Am I treading water? Am I comfortable? Am I getting lackadaisical? Am I just taking things for granted? You have to avoid becoming complacent because if you’re only treading water, sooner or later you’re going to sink.

Q: What are the questions for being able to operate in stressful situations?

Carney: I think you need to have a strong moral compass. There is such negativity that is being fed to us through the newspapers and the talk radio. It’s just unbelievable some of the things that we are bombarded with. So you just need to have a strong faith, whatever that might be. You have to be very well attuned to understand that in your daily walk of life you’re going to have some negative

approaches to you. You are going to be faced with challenges. The only way to handle them is to first know that that’s going to happen and that’s life. You are not going to just walk down the street of life and have everything be just honky-dory. So you have to have a strong moral faith to understand that that’s life and take it as calmly as you can, and understand what is right. Use your gut. “What is right and wrong here? Maybe this other person is right and I am wrong?” You have to be able to objectively understand what you’re facing. You have to have strong moral faith and then have confidence in yourself that you understand right from wrong and know that you are always going to stick to your beliefs and do the right thing. There are times when I could be lazy and just take an easier road, but that’s not right and that would bother me so I don’t do that. Once you set your principles, and what you believe in, and if you’re always trying to do the right thing, it will carry you through. If you get into an emergency type of situation you will already be thinking that way and asking, “What’s the right thing to do here?” 

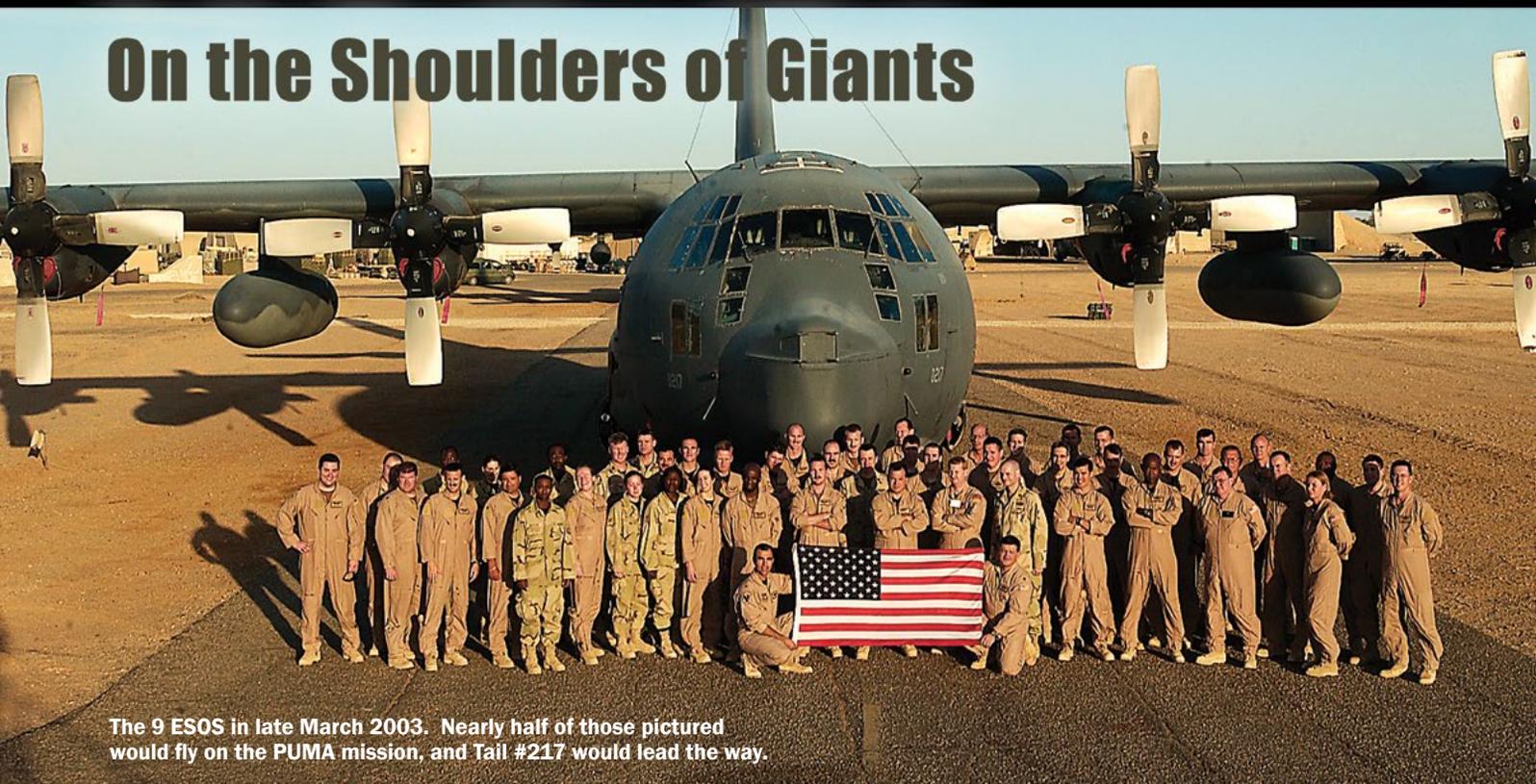
About the Author: Colonel John T. Carney Jr. has more than 30 years of professional experience, including 15 years commanding both Air Force and joint-service Special Operations units assigned to the Joint Special Operations Command, the Air Force Special Operations Command, and the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).

He was at the forefront of operations planning and tactical execution of each and every mission involving our nation’s Special Operations Forces (SOF) since the mid-1970’s, including the Iranian hostage rescue mission in 1980, as well as special operations missions conducted in Grenada, Panama, Iraq, and Kuwait. During this period, he fielded professionally organized, trained, and equipped forces and developed comprehensive, combat-tested force employment procedures that continue to guide today’s operations. His contributions were integral in paving the way for the successful rejuvenation of a solid national-level Special Operations capability.

Courtesy of www.questionsforliving.com/categories/personal-performance/no-room-error

Combat Shadows In OPERATION PUMA

On the Shoulders of Giants



The 9 ESOS in late March 2003. Nearly half of those pictured would fly on the PUMA mission, and Tail #217 would lead the way.

By Col John Cline, USAF

INTRODUCTION

As vividly and poignantly captured in the Spring 2012 Air Commando Association Journal's (ACJ) coverage of Air Force Special Operations Forces' (AFSOF) exploits in Vietnam, the Iranian hostage rescue attempt, and the invasion of Grenada, today's active duty Air Commandos do indeed "stand on the shoulders of giants" as they tackle the multitude of irregular challenges present in the increasingly complex international security environment. The equipment, tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), deliberate & dynamic planning processes, and organizational constructs AFSOF employs today represent the broad institutionalization of tough lessons learned by previous generations of Air Commandos from the strategic political/military level all the way down to the individual tactical operator level. After reading the Spring ACJ edition's stirring recounts of the challenges faced and overcome in operations KINGPIN, EAGLE CLAW/DESERT ONE, and URGENT FURY, it struck me that I had participated in an operation where AFSOF's historical dedication to incorporating lessons learned from these and other operations paid huge dividends.

On 2 April 2003, I had the privilege of leading a 3-ship element of MC-130Ps on what turned out to be the deepest penetration of well-defended enemy airspace ever attempted by COMBAT SHADOWS in order to refuel a 10-ship package of Army SOF helicopters conducting a raid on a high value target in the opening phase of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. Our 3-ship element was a very small part of a massive package of over 60 aircraft assembled to support an air assault on OBJECTIVE PUMA, one of Saddam's palaces on the banks of Lake Thar Thar, roughly 50 miles northwest of Baghdad. The mission took place a full 3 days prior to the first "thunder runs" of U.S. armored forces into the capitol, and a full week before the fall of the city, so the raid penetrated far beyond the forward line of advancing ground forces into areas where the Iraqi integrated air defense system (IADS) had yet to be fully neutralized.

The overall planning and execution of this highly successful mission demonstrated the AFSOF community's broad incorporation of many operational and tactical lessons learned in tough fights from Vietnam and Grenada all the

way through Afghanistan (Operation ANACONDA in particular). While PUMA was a very complex undertaking involving well over five dozen aircraft, the following is recounted from my limited “foxhole” as the formation commander of the 3-ship MC-130P element assigned to the mission. I’m sure there are many other perspectives among the hundreds of other airmen, soldiers, sailors, and marines involved in the raid. My ultimate intent is to capture through this glimpse of MC-130P involvement in the PUMA mission just how much our current generation of Air Commandos has benefitted from the experiences of past generations, especially regarding the incorporation of mission-enhancing

among participating units in both the planning and execution phases of the initial airfield seizure operation at Point Salines.¹ During ANACONDA in Afghanistan, late incorporation of dedicated air planning efforts resulted in a situation where the “lateral, vertical, and horizontal C2 and forward air controller (FAC) procedures sometimes did not work well.”² In both cases U.S. forces quickly adapted to the tactical situation on the ground and made things work, but the biggest “lesson learned” was that things could have gone much better had a robust, detailed joint planning effort been executed from the outset.

For the PUMA mission, integrated joint planning began stateside prior to deployment, and upon arrival in theater progressed through countless revisions, updates, and adjustments among the major supported SOF units and supporting GPF air units prior to our 3-ship element being tasked against it. Drawing on the example set during Col (Ret) Joe Tyner’s and Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett’s previous leadership in the SHADOW community, our deployed 9 SOS leadership (Lt Col Gary “Moose”

Copilot 1Lt Anthony Loicano, Left Navigator Lt Col John Glaze, Right Navigator Lt Col Gary Morrison, Flight Engineer MSgt Tom Purcell, Loadmasters TSgt Chuck Swanson and SSgt Chris Hale, and Radio Operator SSgt Jeffrey Copeland. The third crew in JAKAL 52 included Aircraft Commander Capt Rique Gwin, Copilot 1Lt Sean Williams, Left Navigator Capt Scott Roxburgh, Right Navigator 1Lt JP O’Dell, Flight Engineer SSgt Billy Mason, Loadmasters SSgt Chris Langston and SSgt Shannon Stiff, and Radio Operator SMSgt CD Dunem. Adoption of the JAKAL callsign for initial 9 ESOS operations in OIF was a tongue-in-cheek “wish you were here” homage to Pacific brethren by some 9 SOS members recently arrived from the 17 SOS at Kadena.

Upon receiving the mission, our 3 crews dove into finalizing all the key details for execution, including detailed order of battle review/threat assessment, route design, fuel plan, communications plan, and a dizzying array of “what if” bump plans. Although geographically separated from other supported and supporting elements of the complex mission package, sufficient connectivity (both technical and personal) allowed our dedicated planning cell and individual crewmembers robust access to other key SOF and GPF mission players to both submit and respond to the mountain of RFIs required to ensure a comprehensive plan. The fidelity of this planning effort was especially important due to the fact that operational constraints prevented any kind of integrated, large-scale rehearsal of the mission.

In terms of overall operational risk management (ORM), significant risk factors for the sortie included high mission complexity involving communications with five command and control agencies, severe congestion involving more than 30 tactical aircraft within 25 miles of the objective, lower than standard visibility due to suspended dust & zero moon illumination, and high gross weight operations requiring a wartime waiver. Additionally, multiple intelligence sources formally assessed the objective area as “high threat” due to considerable anti-aircraft artillery presence, multiple un-located mobile surface-to-air missile



The crew of JAKAL 50

equipment and TTPs, as well as the critical imperative to conduct effective integration of SOF and conventional air assets in support of no-fail missions.

MISSION PLANNING

Historically, one of the most challenging parts of planning and executing a complex SOF mission has been the effective integration of non-SOF elements. In URGENT FURY and ANACONDA, a lack of joint planning between SOF and general purpose force (GPF) ground and air components led to some initial coordination failures that hindered combat effectiveness. Maj Gen (Ret) Hobson’s article in the Spring ACJ recounted that during URGENT FURY in Grenada a lack of compatible secure communications hardware and appropriate bandwidth significantly hampered the timely dissemination of updated mission-critical information

Morrison and Lt Col Dan Fernandez) very carefully and deliberately populated each of our unit’s 5 OIF “hard crews” to ensure an appropriate range of experience was resident across our entire force. As missions came down they were assigned to crews in numerical order and it just so happened that when this mission came down our crew was next up in the “batting order”, then the following two crews in the rotation fell in as #2 and #3 in the formation.

My crew took the call sign JAKAL 50 and included Copilot Maj Janusz Petkowski, Left Navigator Maj Gary O’Daniel, Right Navigator Maj Bob Ennis, Flight Engineer MSgt Henry “Hank” Lopes, Loadmasters SSgt “Smith” and SSgt Rico Watkins, Radio Operator MSgt Rich Maurer, and Direct Support Operator (DSO) TSgt “Smith”. The second crew in JAKAL 51 included Aircraft Commander Capt John Coyle,

systems, and a possible Surface to Air (SA)-3 long-range missile system near the western end of the air refueling area. Higher headquarters approval was required for launch, and Col Frank Kisner (the Combined Joint Special Operations Air Component (CJSOAC) Commander) granted approval only after the crews' extremely detailed planning convinced him the mission could be accomplished with acceptable risk.

The overall CONOP had 3 x MC-130P, 5 x MC-130E, AWACS, JSTARS, and multiple A-10, F-15E, F-14D, F-16C/J, and EA-6B aircraft supporting a 10-ship helicopter package (4 x MH-47D, 4 x MH-60DAP, and 2 x MH-60L) for an assault on Objective PUMA. Four helicopter air refuelings (HARs) were planned. The first was a pre-infil top-off of the helo package to be covered by an element of 3 x MC-130Es. The second and third HARs were to be covered by a separate 2-ship element of MC-130Es, and involved keeping the 4 x MH-60DAP gunships topped off during the assault (two helos at each Air Refueling Control Time (ARCT)). The fourth HAR was a post-exfil hit of 4 x MH-47s and 2 x MH-60Ls to be supported by our 3-ship element of MC-130Ps. Total fuel offloads were planned as 36,000 lbs, 8,000 lbs, 8,000 lbs, and 36,000 lbs respectively on the four HARs.

We planned a mid-level ingress to Iraq, as this avoided all known threats on the infil route while deconflicting us with all GPF "fast mover" assets (above us) and the MC-130Es who were ahead of (and below) us.

The HAR track itself began on the eastern shore of the lake, about 25 miles north of Objective PUMA, and basically ran 100 miles west-northwest, paralleling 15-20 miles north of the Euphrates. In general the terrain was flat, but sloped upward over the track's entire length, requiring a 900-foot climb to maintain 500 AGL for the HAR. The first 15-20 miles of the track were over the lake, and we segmented the remainder of the track with 4 start-climb points, each requiring about a 200 foot climb over 15 miles. For three days running prior to the mission there were periodic Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) hits of a possible SA-3 right at the end of the planned refueling track

(which was eventually confirmed when the site went "active" during our ingress). Therefore, we planned to turn south 18 miles prior to the end of the HAR track if the helicopters hadn't gotten their full fuel offloads by then.

To mitigate our vulnerability to ground fire during the actual HAR, A-10s were fragged to provide continuous direct overwatch to our element while it traversed the refueling track in the high-threat area. We deconflicted by altitude (Shadows had 500 feet AGL and below, and the Warthogs had 1000 feet and above) so that the A-10s could keep constant eyes/guns on our low and slow formation by conducting a continuous "tactical weave" on HAR track immediately above us. The intent of having them stay so close was to enable them to immediately neutralize the source of any type of surface to air engagement.

In order to expedite the refueling process and minimize our "low and slow" time in the high threat area, our plan was to conduct an "Option 2 with spare" formation HAR. In this formation geometry the helicopters would separate into two elements with 2 mile spacing along the HAR track, and our entire 3-ship would come up from behind their trailing element for staggered slowdowns (with JAKAL 51 and 52 slowing down on the trailing helo element and JAKAL 50 pressing ahead to the lead helo element). In order to minimize the complexity of the helicopters' post-refueling formation rejoin and to maximize the effectiveness of our A-10 coverage, once refueling began our plan was for the trailing element to maintain 5 knots higher than the lead element so as to close the 2 mile gap down to 1 mile.

Our plan for egress of Iraq was a 250-mile low-level run almost directly south at 300 AGL to the

Saudi border. The route required three major Line of Communication (LOC) crossings. The first was the Euphrates River about 15 miles south of the HAR track, the second was Hwy 10 (a hundred miles further south), and the final one was the Iraqi/Saudi border itself. We planned to cross all three LOCs in a fluid line-abreast formation at max airspeed. Since there were no other specific threats to maneuver around, I briefed each wingman to maneuver at will in fluid trail for the enroute portions between each LOC, as long as #2 stayed on the right of lead, and #3 stayed on the left. With this contract, #3 only had to keep track of lead in the extremely low visibility conditions we faced, versus having to keep track of lead and #2 as in a standard fluid trail geometry.

Once out of Iraq, we planned to take on fuel from two KC-135s just south of



NVG view of MH-47 on the hose. Photo taken on 9 April 2003 on a separate mission inside Iraq. Visibility during PUMA on 2 April was much worse.



MH-47s through AAQ-117 IDS. Navigators' skillful employment of IDS and outstanding crew coordination throughout JAKAL 50 Flight proved critical to overcoming extremely low-visibility conditions during PUMA.



Mature NVG low-level, formation, and heavyweight ops TTPs honed over many years by previous generations of Air Commandos proved critical to mission success on PUMA.

the Saudi border prior to returning to our base in Jordan. Scheduled flight time was about six hours.

MISSION EXECUTION

There is an old adage among crew dogs that “as goes the brief, so goes the mission”. The opportunities for fog, friction, and distraction to impose themselves and derail smooth execution increase exponentially with the size of the formation and the complexity of the mission profile. However, for our element this one went like clockwork. Despite involving 25 crewmembers on 3 separate aircraft, superb professionalism and intense mission focus among the crews, support staff, and maintenance team ensured that the basics of crew briefing, life support and personal protection gear checkout, transportation, aircraft preflight/loading, and formation secure communications checks all proceeded on schedule.

Ten minutes prior to stations time all was in order throughout the entire 3-ship, and I did my final walk around of MC-130P tail number 66-0217. Tail #217 is noteworthy among the MC-130P fleet for having been the first aircraft to undergo extensive Special Operations Forces Improvement (SOFI) modifications in the early to mid-1990s. As a First Lieutenant at the 9 SOS, I remember feeling especially privileged as the first copilot to check out on the newly modified aircraft. Now there I was almost a decade later as a Major participating in a no-fail mission that required maximum use of the SOFI modifications to penetrate and operate in a high threat area.

While by no means constituting what would be considered anything

near a modern suite of “penetration” avionics, due to AFSOF’s integration of tough lessons learned by previous Air Commandos, at least my guys had AAQ-117 infrared detection sets (IDS – read FLIR ball), digital scan converted APN-59 radars, ALR-69 radar warning receivers, AAR-44 missile plume detectors, enhanced ALE-40 systems with forward flare dispensers, receiver air refueling receptacles (UARRSI), and fully NVG compatible internal and external lighting systems to aid them in getting the job done on this very dark night in a very dangerous area. Furthermore, to enhance my element’s self-protection capability our Direct Support Operator (DSO) employed the hatch-mounted SATCOM antenna concept pioneered during EAGLE CLAW/DESERT ONE³, and our crews would employ mature NVG formation and heavyweight flight ops TTPs that had been constantly honed from EAGLE CLAW/DESERT ONE to ANACONDA.

I completed my walk around with a gentle rub of #217’s radome, and with a quick recitation of Mercury Astronaut Alan Shepard’s famous pre-launch prayer – “Dear Lord, please don’t let me screw this up” – it was into the seat for engine start. Start, taxi, and takeoff for all three heavily loaded aircraft was uneventful, and we broke ground within 15 seconds of our fragged takeoff time. We penetrated the southwest corner of Iraq, flew north of Hwy

10, then turned east and paralleled the Iraqi/Syrian border for 150 miles before turning northeast to cross the Euphrates River into the objective area. During this last leg, AWACS reported that the suspected SA-3 at the far western end of our planned refueling track had briefly gone active and that an EA-6B Prowler was assigned to patrol the area.

We were briefed to arrive on station at H+1 hour, which should have given us 25-30 minutes of orbit time over the lake prior to the earliest anticipated exfiltration. The plan was for the 2-ship element of MC-130Es to complete their top off of the 4 MH-60’s and egress to the south low-level once we were north of the Euphrates, then we would spiral down to HAR the remaining 6-ship package at 500 feet AGL upon their exfiltration call from the objective. During our ingress it became clear over SATCOM that the ground team was going to spend less time in the palace than planned. Their exfiltration call came 20-25 minutes early, so we arrived high above the HAR track 10 minutes prior to the helicopters’ requested ARCT.

Amid the Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) traffic calling in airstrikes on and around the objective, it was initially unclear if the requested ARCT was for planned HAR 3 (2 x MH-60 DAPs) or HAR 4 (4 x MH-47s and 2 x MH-60Ls). It took several minutes for it to become clear that the mission had gotten so far ahead of schedule that HAR 3 wasn’t necessary and that it was the full exfiltration package that required fuel. It then took another several minutes for the Airborne Mission Commander (AMC)



In defeating PUMA’s high threat environment, highly proficient aircrews steeped in the SOF mindset embodied the SOF Truth that “humans are more important than hardware”.

aboard one of the Talon 1s to confirm that the 2-ship element of MC-130Es didn't have enough fuel to support HAR 4's requirements. Four minutes prior to the ARCT, the AMC assigned us to the rendezvous and cleared the Talon 1s off.

The steep descent maneuver required to get to our refueling altitude made it very difficult to acquire the helicopters on radar, and we also had no Air to Air TACAN or direct radio contact with the exfiltration package. Additionally, there was 0% moon illumination over unlit, featureless lake surface and desert terrain, so visibility through NVGs was severely restricted. Employing JAKAL 51's IDS, Lt Col Glaze was the first to find the helicopters and was quickly able to queue other formation members to their location through interplane communications. The helicopters, however, appeared to be arrayed in a single element. Not wanting to get into an irregular/unsafe formation geometry (Option 1 rendezvous with 2 spares for those familiar with HAR procedures), I made the decision to split the flight and directed JAKAL 52 to pull away and hold in order to be in position to rendezvous with the other helicopter element whenever it might show up. Then Capt Roxburgh, the Right Navigator in JAKAL 52 (#3 in our formation) got the second element of helos on his IDS and called the info forward to us as we passed abeam the exfiltration package. I ordered the flight to reform and JAKAL 52 was able to rejoin rapidly. We delayed our turn a few miles to give us time to complete our descent, and we got the helos visually through NVGs and on radar as we rolled out on track. Every crewmember was on their top game as our 3-ship element maneuvered in a very fluid situation.

The next challenge was that the two helicopter elements (3 x MH-47s in the lead element, and 1 x MH-47 and 2 x MH-60Ls in the second) initially had only about ½ mile spacing versus the 2-mile spacing we were expecting. As we got closer, the two helo elements began to spread out laterally, so after pulling abeam the trailing helo element to affect JAKAL 51's rendezvous, we (JAKAL 50) made a 30-40 degree left turn to get into position on the lead helo element. Then things settled down into a "normal" Option 2 w/ spare HAR. Amidst the explosions from

multiple fast-mover airstrikes on enemy targets near the objective, our 2-ship element of supporting A-10s arrived precisely on time and began continuous sweeps of our HAR track at 1000 AGL. As our low-and-slow nine-ship formation of fixed and rotary-wing aircraft trolled through the high threat area for over 30 minutes at 110 knots with little to no defensive maneuvering capability, it was particularly comforting to see the A-10s cross 500 feet above our heads every minute or two in their saw-tooth movements.

We (JAKAL 50) pumped 21,000 lbs of fuel to the 3 x MH-47s in the lead helo element (7K each), and JAKAL 51 pumped 11,000 lbs of fuel to the 1 x MH-47 and 2 x MH-60Ls in the second element (1 x 7K and 2 x 2K respectively). After several unsuccessful attempts at staying on our right hose in the extremely dark conditions, all 3 of our MH-47s queued up on the left hose. The extended time required to cycle all three of them through one hose bumped us up against the maximum range ring of the SA-3 mentioned previously, so we executed a deliberate threat avoidance turn off the HAR track just after the third MH-47 got on our left hose. We turned into a box pattern, 5 miles perpendicular, then 10 miles reverse parallel, then 5 miles back to our original track. Our last helo finished during our perpendicular leg back to track, so we quickly cleaned up and accelerated our 3-ship for the low-level egress of Iraq.

Our 300-foot AGL run south, including the first 2 LOC crossings, was uneventful until we were about 15 minutes north of the Iraq/Saudi border. At this point the formation encountered an unreported enemy troop concentration, which led to multiple MANPAD missile engagements for JAKAL 51 and JAKAL 52. SSgt Langston on JAKAL 52 called the first engagement in right fluid trail. He called "Flares Left" and dispensed countermeasures to a textbook missile plume and launch approximately ½ to 1-mile left of JAKAL 51, who was in the left fluid trail position. 1Lt Williams, Capt Gwin's copilot on JAKAL 52, performed the appropriate tactical maneuver. Simultaneously, SSgt Chris Hale on JAKAL 51 also saw the missile

already in the air with a direct trajectory to JAKAL 51 and called "Flares Left" and dispensed countermeasures. At this point 1Lt Loicano, JAKAL 51's co-pilot, performed the appropriate threat maneuver. Capt Coyle then took control of JAKAL 51 and almost immediately a second missile was launched from in between JAKAL 51 and JAKAL 52. This time TSgt Swanson on JAKAL 51 called "Flares Right", and SSgt Langston again called "Flares Left" on JAKAL 52, which resulted in Capt Coyle and Capt Gwin each successfully employing the appropriate threat maneuvers.

After a slight delay (just enough for us to think we were out of the immediate threat area) a third engagement came from about 1.5 miles aft and left of JAKAL 51. Again SSgt Hale on JAKAL 51 and SSgt Langston on JAKAL 52 made "Flares" calls and dispensed countermeasures while their pilots, Capt Coyle and Capt Gwin respectively, employed the appropriate threat maneuvers. Immediately following this final engagement SSgt Copeland on JAKAL 51 called the threats to AWACS and other Command and Control agencies while SMSgt Dunem on JAKAL 52 called the threat locations back to the helos (who were on the same basic route of flight) so they would avoid the area. Once across the Saudi border, we reformed to 3-ship close trail and did a fuel check. Since the operation executed well ahead of schedule, we didn't need the KC-135s that were right there ready for us, so we cut them loose. We then climbed to 10,000 feet and returned to our FSB and landed via a formation overhead approach. Rollout and block-in were uneventful.

DEBRIEF

When it was all said and done, the complex "gorilla package" assembled for the mission had enabled a 10-ship package of Army SOF helicopters to penetrate hundreds of miles into Iraq, successfully assault a target in a high threat area, and safely exfiltrate to friendly territory completely without incident. Every critical execution checklist call was made either on or ahead of time throughout the entire mission, and neither the assault team or any of its vast array of enabling SOF and conventional air assets suffered

any casualties or significant battle damage.

My 3-ship element took off on-time with no major maintenance issues, adapted to a 20-minute early shift in our primary Time Over Target (TOT), conducted low-level heavyweight air refueling with a mixed formation of helicopters in very dark conditions in a formally assessed “high threat” area, successfully defeated three separate surface-to-air engagements while traversing over 750 miles of well-defended enemy airspace, and landed back at our forward operating base 45 minutes ahead of fragged schedule. Five crewmembers (three Pilots and two Loadmasters) earned Distinguished Flying Crosses, and the remaining 20 crewmembers in our element earned single sortie Air Medals.

The MC-130P community updated a number of its mission planning, formation low level, and formation HAR TTPs based on lessons learned from PUMA. Furthermore, many of the crewmembers involved eventually rotated back to assignments at higher headquarters and the MC-130P schoolhouse at Kirtland where they were able to impart their experiences from the mission directly to follow-on generations of SHADOW crewmembers. During subsequent tours downrange I personally witnessed the continued honing of the lessons learned in PUMA throughout MC-130P participation in complex mission profiles in multiple AORs, including OIF “surge” operations in the Spring of 2008 (in the battle for Al Amarah in particular), in MC-130P support to initial probing operations around Marjah, Afghanistan in late Summer 2009, and in MC-130P operations in the Horn of Africa in Winter 2009.

CONCLUSION

In the Spring ACJ, Maj Gen (Ret) Hobson referred to Winston Churchill’s quote that, “No Operation ever goes as planned, except occasionally, and then only by accident”.⁴ While in a general sense this will always be true to one degree or another, in the specific case of PUMA I firmly believe that smooth execution was far from “accidental”; rather it was AFSOF’s deliberate institutionalization of the tough lessons learned by previous generations of Air Commandos that enabled such stellar results on such a highly complex mission. On a tactical level, PUMA proved that with a good plan, good intel support (including a DSO), mature TTPs, the right

conventional air support, and (most importantly) highly trained and proficient aircrews, even doctrinally “low to medium” threat AFSOF platforms like the MC-130P can be successfully employed to penetrate and operate in high threat areas prior to the full eradication of integrated air defense systems. On the operational level, PUMA proved that with appropriate up-front integrated joint planning focus and robust secure connectivity, even diverse, geographically separated SOF and GPF mission elements can effectively plan and execute a highly complex no-fail mission in a high threat area, even when denied the opportunity for large scale mission rehearsals.

In the nine-plus years since PUMA was executed Air Commandos have seen constant, simultaneous, widespread deployment and employment across the globe in multiple theaters of operation where they have continued to employ the equipment at their disposal in unconventional and innovative ways to tackle unique challenges on literally thousands of complex combat missions. The lifeblood of AFSOF has continued to be its ability to project force rapidly to confront emergent crises; to infiltrate and exfiltrate into and out of uncertain, hostile, or politically sensitive environments; to instantly adapt to changing circumstances and get no-fail jobs done “any time, any place”.

As our current generation of Air Commandos forges on to tackle increasingly complex threats and mission scenarios, we would all be well served to never forget the grit, determination, and sacrifices of those previous generations of Air Commandos upon whose shoulders we stand today as we face and overcome the challenges of 21st century warfare. Those giants who blazed the trail in operations such as KINGPIN, EAGLE CLAW/ DESERT ONE, URGENT FURY, and ANACONDA to show us that in addition to AFSOF’s deliberate institutionalization of lessons learned from those challenging missions, it is the capability/adaptability of the people themselves rather than the equipment they use that defines the true Air Commando ethos and lies at the heart of AFSOF’s asymmetric impact on the battlefield. 🦅

About the Author: Col John Cline is a career MC-130P pilot with broad operational flying experience in SOUTHERN WATCH, NORTHERN WATCH/PROVIDE COMFORT, PROVIDE PROMISE/DENY FLIGHT, UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, OEF, and OIF. A former 9 SOS Commander, he currently serves as Military Assistant to Lt Gen Frank Kisner, Commander of the NATO Special Operations Headquarters at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Mons, Belgium.

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GUNSHIP III

By Dr. Larry Elton Fletcher

AC-119G SHADOW & AC-119K STINGER

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Editor's Note: The story of the AC-119 gunships was regrettably omitted from Vol. 1, Issue 4, of the summer issue of Air Commando Journal. The Shadows and the Stingers played an important part in our gunship heritage and their story is told here, albeit a bit late.

AC-119K Stinger "Rollin' In" by Darby Perrin (Permission obtained)



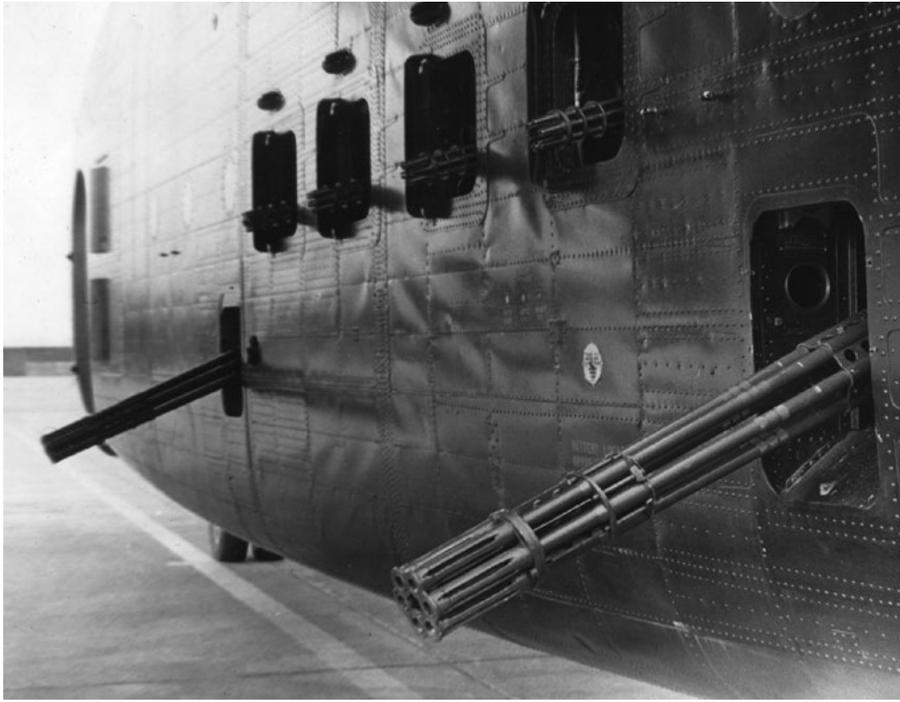
After witnessing the impact and effectiveness of the original AC-47 "Spooky" gunships, American ground commanders in Vietnam clamored for more fixed-wing gunships. Vietcong attacks on American troops and installations usually occurred during hours of darkness. An urgent need existed for additional, sustained, nighttime aerial support and more firepower to counteract enemy attacks.

The low wing AC-47 lacked payload capacity and extended loiter time. The high wing C-130 had the attributes of power, payload capacity, and extended loiter time. High wing gunships were preferred for the better visibility they afforded the crewmembers and sensors, and thus improved the acquisition of targets. Gunship II, an AC-130 was produced and sent to Southeast Asia for evaluation. Combat evaluations were most satisfactory, but the shortage of C-130 airframes available for conversion to gunships and the fact that C-130s were in great demand to haul cargo and troops slowed the fielding of more AC-130 gunships.

The Air Force consequently sought an alternative to the C-130 and turned to the high wing C-119G "Flying Boxcar" as a solution to fill the void until more AC-130 gunships could be available. The C-119 was developed after World War II as follow-on to the C-82 Packet. Flying Boxcars were utilized throughout the world as cargo carriers and troop/paratroop transports. The C-119s flew combat during the Korean War and the First Indochina War, fought by the French from 1946 – 1954 in North Vietnam, where some C-119s were modified to drop napalm on Vietminh forces at Dien Bien Phu.

The Air Staff designated the AC-119G/K Gunship III project as "Combat Hornet" on 21 February 1968. The first phase was developing improved replacement gunships for aging AC-47 gunship missions in Vietnam. The most expedient and justifiable remedy was the AC-119G model. Thus, the G model gunships took priority over the more desirable, sophisticated and powerful K models.

A contract to modify the C-119Gs to Gunship III was awarded to Fairchild-Hiller, manufacturer of C-119s. Twenty-six C-119Gs were converted into attack cargo (AC)-119G gunships. Modifications included installation of four 7.62mm



AC-119K Stinger Business Side. Four 7.62mm Miniguns & Two 20mm Vulcan Cannons.
Author Collection

miniguns, a computerized gunsight fire control system with lead computing optical gunsight and fire control display for pinpoint placement of bullets, a flare launcher housing twenty-four flares, a 1.5 million candlelight Xenon “white spot light” illuminator with variable beam, a night observation scope (NOS) which magnified starlight, moonlight, and infrared several thousand times to provide the NOS operator with a clean, though green picture of the terrain below, an auxiliary power unit (APU), ceramic armor plating for crew protection, twenty-two self-sealing fuel tank bladders in wings to suppress explosions, and updated flight, navigation, and standard radio equipment for SEA operations.

On 13 May 1968, C-119G Reserve units of the 930th Tactical Airlift Group were called to active duty. Reorganized in June as the 71st Air Commando Squadron (ACS), the squadron moved to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for gunship training. The 71st ACS, re-designated as the 71st SOS, was the only USAF Reserve unit called for combat duty in Vietnam.

The AC-119G Gunships were ferried to Vietnam by 71st SOS crews. Skirting the northern rim of the Pacific Ocean around Alaska, they island hopped from

Adak on the final legs to war. Assigned to 14th SOW, 7th AF, Pacific Air Forces, the radio call sign “Shadow” was approved in December 1968.

The first two gunships arrived at Nha Trang on 27 December. The first Shadow combat mission was flown 5 January. A combat evaluation team assessed the AC-119’s performance during the first two months of operations in-country. Satisfactory performance was reported except for forward air controller (FAC) duty because the aircraft was too slow, hard to maneuver and vulnerable to enemy fire.

Shadows proved to be extremely accurate hitting enemy targets and very effective supporting U.S. Marines and Army ground troops-in-contact with enemy forces. Ground troops soon learned the gunship name supporting them was Shadow, not Spooky. About to be overrun, one GI radioed to a FAC, “Screw the F-4s; Get me a Shadow!” The NOS enabled the gunship to see in the dark. Thus, the motto of Shadow gunship squadrons was “Deny Him the Dark.”

Eighteen Shadow gunships were in-country by 1 March. The Shadows successfully replaced AC-47 gunships transferred to the Republic of Vietnam Air Force (VNAF) and the Royal Laotian

Air Force (RLAF). 71st SOS Forward Operations Locations (FOLs) at Tan Son Nhut AB and Phan Rang AB were established and flying missions by mid-February.

71st SOS aircrews included Reservist crews highly experienced in the aircraft, supplemented by active-duty USAF crews. Combat crews consisted of Pilot/Aircraft Commander (fired guns), Co-pilot (monitored altitude, airspeed, radios), Navigator (on the flight deck, found/identified targets), another Navigator (on the cargo deck, operated the NOS to pinpoint targets for the pilot’s gunsight), Flight Engineer (fuel/engine performance), Illuminator Operator (white light/flares), and two aerial gunners. The 8-man team worked as one entity.

Shadow attack altitudes above ground level (AGL) were: 1500, 2500, 3500, and 4,500 feet. Most missions were flown at or below 3500 feet because maximum effective range of 7.62mm miniguns was 3500 feet. Weather conditions and enemy anti-aircraft guns usually determined firing altitudes. Max duration of combat missions was 6 hours with 30 minutes reserve fuel, but most missions ranged between 4 and 5 hours. Power from two Wright R-3350 radial piston-driven engines with variable four-blade propellers enabled the aircraft to cruise at 180 knots. During combat, speed was reduced to 140 knots.

The 71st SOS completed its mission of establishing Gunship III operations in Vietnam. Procedures and standards had been established, plus they recorded an impressive BDA during five months in combat. On 1 June 1969, the 71st SOS was replaced by the newly activated 17th SOS which absorbed 65% of 71st SOS personnel. Activated Reservists departed Nha Trang for Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana where they were released from active duty on 18 June.

The 17th SOS didn’t skip a beat assuming Shadow operations. In October, the 14th SOW moved its HQ and squadrons to Phan Rang AB. 17th SOS’s A Flight moved to Tuy Hoa, B Flight remained at Phan Rang, and C Flight stayed at Tan Son Nhut. Except for unofficial clandestine out-country missions, the 17th conducted operations



throughout the four military regions of South Vietnam with 18 gunships. In April 1970, A Flight moved to Phu Cat.

U.S. and ARVN ground forces invaded Cambodia on 1 May to eliminate North Vietnam Army (NVA) sanctuaries along the RVN border. Within five days of the invasion, AC-119 gunships were flying CAS and support missions for American ground

troops in Cambodia.

In June, C Flight at Tan Son Nhut was assigned the secret task of providing 24/7 air support for the Cambodian Army fighting the NVA. C Flight was quickly strengthened with additional Shadow gunships and crews from A Flight and TDY AC-119K Stingers from Da Nang, reaching 15 gunships at various times.

Mission priorities for 17th SOS Shadows were to provide close fire support of U.S. and friendly troops in contact with enemy forces, close fire support of U.S. and friendly military installations, pre-planned armed reconnaissance and interdiction of hostile areas and infiltration routes, search and rescue support, night and day armed escort of road, river, and close off-shore convoys, illumination for night fighter strikes, and harassment and interdiction of enemy.

In 1971, the priority mission for the 17th SOS shifted from operations in Cambodia to Vietnamization of AC-119G gunships. The squadron was charged with training 24 VNAF crews to take over Shadow gunships by September 1971. With the FOL at Phu Cat closed, B Flight Shadows at Phan Rang flew continual support missions for Lima Sites in southern Laos and then TDY stints at Da Nang to cover for Stinger gunships supporting Lam Son 719, the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Cambodian

air operations by C Flight continued until 17th SOS gunships and operations were turned over to the VNAF on 10 September 1971. The 17th SOS was deactivated on 30 September 1971. Shadow instructors at Tan Son Nhut remained as advisors for months later.

In the second phase of the Gunship III Project, twenty-six more C-119G aircraft were converted into AC-119K gunships at the Fairchild Hiller Plant in St. Augustine, Florida. In addition to modifications made to transform the C-119G into the AC-119G gunship, the K model had two J-85 jet engines added for greater take-off performance to accommodate heavier payloads. Increased payload included two 20mm Vulcan cannons and ammunition, beacon tracking radar, forward looking infrared radar (FLIR) and associated fire control system computers.

The 18th SOS was activated on 25 January 1969. Crews trained at Clinton County and Lockbourne AFBs. Six gunships departed Lockbourne for Vietnam on 21 October. Assigned to 14th SOW, the 18th SOS was also located at Phan Rang. The first AC-119K gunship arrived at Phan Rang on 3 November, flying combat 10 days later. By February 1970, 18 AC-119K Stinger gunships were in SEA. Call sign "Stinger" was approved by 7th AF, keeping fixed-wing gunship names starting with the letter "S." "Vengeance By Night" was Stinger's motto.

The primary mission for Stingers in Southeast Asia was interdiction of enemy lines of communication and supply routes on the Ho Chi Minh Trails in the Steel Tiger and Barrel Roll areas of Laos. Over time, Stingers would prove to be just as efficient in "killing trucks" as the Spectre. Flight levels for Stinger attacks ranged from 1500 to 5500 feet AGL, depending on weather conditions, terrain, targets, and anti-aircraft guns.





Rains of Death from Shadow Gunship Miniguns on KEL west of Phan Rang AB. Every fifth bullet fired was a red tracer. Time-delayed Photo by Shadow gunner Michael Drzyzga

If needed, the Stingers were available for close air support of ground troops and for defense of friendly installations in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Strategically located FOLs were established in-country at Da Nang and Phu Cat and out-country at Udorn, Thailand. In time, FOL Phu Cat was shut-down and FOL Udorn moved to Nahkon Phnom (NKP) RTAFB, leaving Phan Rang, Da Nang, and NKP for Stinger operations.

Stinger combat crews consisted of ten members; two pilots, three navigators (one navigated, one operated the NOS, one operated the FLIR), one flight engineer, one illuminator operator, and three aerial gunners.

Stingers reported their 1,000th enemy truck destroyed on 25 April. In May 70, Stinger 21 survived after enemy AAA shot off 1/3 (14 ft.) of the right wing including the aileron. The crew of Stinger 21 was awarded the McKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year. In Feb 71, Stinger 04 destroyed eight NVA tanks while supporting an ARVN armor unit in Laos during Operation Lam Son 719. A new Stinger record of 39 enemy trucks destroyed on a single mission was set in April 71. Secretary of the Air Force Seaman personally recognized crewmembers while visiting Da Nang.

Anticipating deactivation of 14th SOW, 7th AF transferred the 18th SOS to 56th SOW at NKP in August. A detachment of Stingers at Da Nang and an FOL at Bien Hoa were maintained in-country. During this time, Stingers played a key role in the Commando Hunt VII air campaign, NVA Spring Offensive, and the Linebacker I campaign.

Under Project Enhance, sixteen AC-119K gunships from the 18th SOS and six from the 1st SOW were transferred to the VNAF in November 72 for training of VNAF crews by 18th SOS instructor crews. On 31 December 1972, the 18th SOS was deactivated, but Stinger instructor crews continued training

VNAF crews at Da Nang until 1 March 1973.

Gunship III AC-119G Shadows served combat duty in SEA for two years, nine months. No gunships were lost to enemy action. Two gunships crashed at Tan Son Nhut claiming the lives of 11 crewmen. Twenty-four of the original twenty-six AC-119G models were transferred to the VNAF 819th Hac Long Attack Squadron.

Gunship III AC-119K Stingers served combat duty in SEA for three years, two months. Only one of the four gunships lost resulted from enemy action. 18th SOS personnel losses totaled six. Twenty-two of the original twenty-six AC-119K models were transferred to the VNAF 821st Tinh Long Attack Squadron.

The 71st SOS was reactivated on 20 May 2005 under the 58th Operations Group at Kirtland AFB, NM and currently serves as the USAF CV-22 Osprey training squadron. The 17th SOS was reactivated on 1 August 1989 under the 353rd Special Operations Wing at Clark AB, PI. The 17th SOS is currently based at Kadena AB, Japan, operating MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft.

The lineage of the 18th SOS continues in the current 18th Flight Test Squadron based at Hurlburt Field, FL. Aligned under 23rd AF on 1 January 2008, the 18th FLTS is the USAF Special Operations Command's independent field test agency, determining operational effectiveness and suitability of aircraft equipment and tactics.

For more information about Gunship III Shadow and Stinger, log on www.ac-119gunships.com and www.71stsos.com. 

About the Author: ACA Life Member, Former USAF Captain, Dr. Larry Elton Fletcher flew 177 combat missions as AC-119G Shadow gunship pilot awarded the DFC with oak leaf cluster. Fletcher has authored two novels about Shadows & Stingers in SEA. His latest nonfiction work Shadows of Southeast Asia is forthcoming. Log on his website at www.shadowgunships.com.



RAVEN 26

The Story of **Chuck Engle**

By Col Craig Duehring (Ret)



Ravens at Long Tieng around May, 1970. Left to right, Craig Duehring, Bill Lutz, Ray DeArrigunaga, Chuck Engle, Harold Mesaris, Park Bunker. On the ground is Jeff Thompson and on the engine cowling is A.D. Holt.

“Whether he was setting an altitude record for the O-1 (19,720 feet) or making a dangerous low pass to help a friend in need, he flew his aircraft to the limits as though it was simply the only way to fly.” -- Craig W. Duehring

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Chuck Engle visually checking a wing gas tank on an O-1.

Chuck Engle was an easy guy to like. He was strikingly good looking, raised on a farm in eastern Indiana, the first of four children. He was dignified in his approach and sincere in his speech, never flippant or verbose. And, he was possibly the finest natural pilot I have ever known - but a man who was willing to take risks to get the job done.

He attended public schools in Lynn, Indiana, along with 28 other youngsters who went through all 12 grades together. He was extremely active in sports, a member of the National Honor Society for all four years of high school, vice president of his class twice and drove a beautiful black 1957 Chevy Bel Air with red interior. His classmates describe him as very mature for his age, capable of deep feelings including a temper that he kept under tight control. He was a thinker and a dreamer who was deeply influenced by the book “The Prophet” by Kahlil Gibran.

After graduation, he became a physical education major at Purdue University, where he was commissioned through Air Force ROTC. He graduated from UPT in May 1969 and completed his O-1 Bird Dog checkout at Holley Field, Florida, before reporting in as a Forward Air Controller for the 26th Regiment of the “ROKS” – the Republic of Korea Army. There he flew under the call sign “Tum” for eight months before volunteering for the classified “Raven” program (Project 404) in Laos.

Chuck Engle (Raven 26) arrived in Laos during the month of May, 1970, along with another new Raven and former Tum FAC, Bill Lutz (Raven 29). As instructed, both men ditched their uniforms in favor of civilian clothes and were eventually assigned to Long Tieng, the headquarters of the legendary Hmong leader, Maj Gen Vang Pao. There were about 7-8 pilots assigned there at any given time with only 2-3 Ravens at each of the other four locations. At that time, we at Long Tieng were experiencing most of the ground fighting that was going on in Laos, although the Ho Chi Minh Trail was a war of its own. We had lost 4 Ravens during the month of April, so new faces were most welcome.

The Ravens flew the O-1 and the AT-28D interchangeably, sometimes with a Hmong interpreter, call sign “Robin”, in the back seat. We were incredibly independent by Air Force standards and did whatever was required to rain terror on the enemy. Cleverness, tenacity, adaptability and solid judgment were of paramount importance to the Ravens and, while we may

have consulted with our fellow Ravens for advice, we ultimately made the final decisions ourselves. This was fertile ground for a man of Chuck’s abilities and he wasted no time in building a reputation that spread through the FAC/fighter community like fire.

Chuck’s greatest challenge took place early in his tour - on June 20, 1970 – the day he earned the Air Force Cross. I saw him do it – from beginning to end. On that day, Chuck was flying back to Long Tieng from Vientiane when he heard King, the rescue C-130, say that an OV-10, Nail 42, had bailed out over the southern end of the Plains des Jarres (PDJ). I took off immediately from Long Tieng with a new Raven, Park Bunker (Raven 23), in my back seat and actually made radio contact with the downed pilot before my UHF radio receiver died. By this time, Ray DeArrigunaga (Raven 21) had spotted the parachute and vectored both Chuck and me towards the crash site. Chuck made radio contact with Nail 42 on guard channel and he and Ray took over the SAR while Park and I listened in on our hand held survival radios. Chuck dropped down under some low clouds to about 25 feet over the PDJ while Ray coordinated the arrival of 2 sets of A-1’s. Both Chuck and the Nail heard the sound of AK-47 fire as Chuck flew low around the area searching for the survivor. Chuck finally located the Nail hiding in a clump of bushes. Then he flew out over the PDJ to a clear area so that he could lead the fighters to the target area. The A-1s saturated the area with ordnance all the while taking heavy ground fire. The first set of fighters withdrew and the second set dropped under the clouds just as Chuck began taking much heavier ground fire from another clump of trees only 25 meters north of the Nail. He marked the target and circled back over the downed pilot and cleared the fighters in hot.

When the second set of fighters silenced the machine gun, Chuck cleared an Air America H-34 in to attempt a pick up. The helicopter took numerous hits from fresh enemy positions that suddenly opened up south and west of the survivor. The helicopter was badly damaged and forced to head for Long Tieng. A second Air America UH-1 helicopter attempted a pick up and got as far as a hover over the Nail. Yet another gun began firing and the helicopter took a serious hit in the fuel tank. Chuck spotted the



Chuck Engle shaking hands with Major General Vang Pao, the charismatic Hmong leader.

gun and flew his aircraft between it and the badly damaged UH-1, surprising the enemy but taking a hit of his own from an AK-47. The bullet entered the left wing root, clipped the fuel line that ran above his head before it flew completely through the cockpit and out the roof. Immediately, fuel spewed down the outside of the fuselage as well as down the inside of the cockpit itself, drenching his clothes on the left side. The break was upstream of the fuel selector valve so it could not be turned off.

Knowing that the radios in the Bird Dog are bolted to the floor under the back seat, he wisely shut off the FM and VHF radios but retained the UHF radio until the end of the mission. He also only fired marking rockets from the right wing as sparks under the left wing could easily have ignited the fuel spray. He marked the new target and cleared the waiting fighters on a strafing run. Only at this point, when the Nail was safe, did he finally say he needed to head home while Ray continued to direct the SAR. Park and I fell in behind Chuck and I told him to simply shut down the last radio as I would clear the way for him.

As we cleared the very last ridge (Skyline Ridge), his engine died of fuel starvation but he spiraled down and landed perfectly, rolling to a halt on the runway. While waiting for the runway to clear, I watched him run out of his dead airplane and jump into the last remaining spare aircraft. In minutes he was airborne and returned to the SAR. After swapping radios, we followed suit. When I saw him again, he was back under the clouds at 25 feet pointing out troop formations as well as another .50 cal machine gun that had been set up on a hill to the south during his absence.

By this time, the Jolly Greens and Sandy forces had arrived on station and the SAR was handed over to them. Soon Nail 42 was safely on his way back to Thailand.

On October 24, 1970, Chuck and I were flying our own O-1's, searching for enemy soldiers near Xiangkhouangville on the PDJ and, finding none, decided to try a new tactic – high/low. Chuck dropped to a few yards above the ground along Route 4 while I flew in his high 6 o'clock position, covering his actions. As Chuck jinked his aircraft back and

forth, he laughingly called out enemy positions where he could clearly see the startled look on the soldiers faces, while I dutifully noted the positions for an airstrike. But, it wasn't long before a burst of AK-47 fire raked his aircraft, including a bullet that came through his left window, shattering the Plexiglas, and passing in front of his eyes. He actually saw the bullet go by. Simultaneously, he was hit in the leg by a second bullet, just above the left ankle with the AK-47 bullet passing completely through his leg and boot and then rolling loosely onto the floor. He pushed the throttle as far forward as he could and climbed while I fired a 2.75 white phosphorous rocket behind him. Then I struggled to catch him for a rejoin.

We spent the next 45 minutes in close formation with me trying to help him overcome the feelings of nausea that threatened to steal his conscious state. At first he said his leg was numb but bleeding. I asked if he had a tourniquet with him and he replied "no". Then I suggested that he retie his boot as tightly as he could and he did so. Eventually, the feeling returned to his leg and the pain was incredible. An Air America helicopter joined us for the last 15 minutes of the journey and, as we cleared the last ridge line over LongTieng, I watched my friend circle towards the tiny runway below. As he touched down and dropped the tail wheel to the runway, Chuck saw that he was crooked and heading for the right hand ditch. With tremendous resolve, he picked up the useless limb and smashed it onto the left rudder pedal, simultaneously pulling the mixture to the cut-off position. I saw the aircraft ground loop violently but it rolled to a stop on the tarmac. Within moments, our resident doctor and the crew chiefs had him out of his plane and onto a waiting Air America Volpar for a fast flight to Udorn. Chuck refused to tell his family of his injuries and, likewise, refused to return to the U.S. choosing instead to heal himself among his buddies first on crutches, then with the help of a cane until he finally returned to the air, flying combat missions.

Amazingly, it took only a few short months before he was back in the air. Wounded warriors heal faster when they are among their buddies – something, it seems, that we have to relearn in each

war.

By the time the dry (winter) season had arrived, Chuck's reputation had begun to grow and spread throughout the fighter community in northern Thailand. It was at this point that he flew yet another remarkable mission. On December 30, 1970, Chuck was looking around the northern Plaine des Jarres when he spotted a PT-76 tank parked under a tree. He called for an airstrike but the A-1s were still a long way out and he was running low on gas. So, he turned the mission over to Park Bunker and headed home. Tragically, the tank had been set out as a trap and Park was shot down by a ZPU-23. Although short of fuel, Chuck turned back to the scene but was unable to get there before the Raven and his Hmong backseater were executed by the NVA. We can only imagine what thoughts went through Chuck's mind as he heard his friend describe his final dying moments on his survival radio. He arrived scant moments later as did Wally Krueger (Raven 20) and saw the enemy soldiers scatter when Wally fired a rocket near the downed O-1. At this point, it was critical to know if either man was possibly alive and Chuck characteristically volunteered to make a low pass over the one visible body while the A-1s covered his action. All aircraft received extremely heavy ground fire and one of the A-1s (flown by Hugh Place) was severely damaged but managed to make it home. Because of Chuck's visual assessment, we knew that our friend was dead. It was late in the afternoon and recovery of the body was impossible because of the intense ground fire. By the next day, the body had been removed.

Barely three days later, an F-4 Fast FAC (Tiger 02) was shot down just east of the Route 7/71 split and, again it fell to Chuck, who was closest to the survivors, to begin the task of enemy ground fire suppression and recovery of the crewmembers. He flew under a 1000 foot overcast sky and found the burning F-4 and then the two crewmembers. He first brought a set of two A-1s under the clouds, but it was too tight so they dropped their bombs on the nearby road and returned with their .20 mm strafe. Tiger 02B (Weapons System Operator/ WSO Rayford Brown) heard an enemy soldier approach within a few yards and

whispered on his survival radio that he needed strafe from his parachute up the hill. A moment later he was covered with dirt splattered by the impact of the bullets. The strafe impacted within 3 feet of the WSO and the enemy withdrew.

The next set of A-1s carried napalm which he directed against another enemy patrol that was nearly on top of the Tiger 02A. Later, after the rescue, the pilot said that the nape had passed under his arm and past his ear setting his dead palmetto bush on fire. He moved and then returned after the fire went out. According to both survivors, Chuck and the fighters received heavy ground fire from 12.7 mm machine guns and AK-47s. Eventually, one of the A-1s, Sandy 03, took a hit in the engine, which forced him to break off the attack and head for home. F-4s from Udorn continued the attack, but Chuck had to turn the SAR over to another Raven and headed home for gas. The Jolly Greens attempted a pick up at sunset, but pulled off when one of the pararescue men was hit by ground fire.

Well before sunrise, Chuck and Chad Swedberg (Raven 24) took off as a two-ship to get to the rescue site before dawn. Chad was forced to return to Long Tieng with a rough engine so Chuck continued on, alone in the dark. He observed that the 1,000 foot overcast deck was still covering the valley so he dove underneath and again made contact with the survivors. Heavy ground fire greeted him, but three successive flights of F-4s silenced the guns including two .37 mm anti-aircraft guns. Again, he directed napalm drops within a few feet of the crewmembers. In the end, they were both recovered successfully.

Chuck flew to Thailand to celebrate their survival and was treated as the hero that he was. Chuck was later awarded the Silver Star for this mission. Chuck was scheduled to return to the U.S. in late February, and as often happened, he moved his belongings to the Raven house in Vientiane so that he could begin the out-processing actions at the embassy and at Udorn. His flying was on an “as needed” basis. For those of us who remained at Long Tieng, the battle was intensifying daily. Rocket attacks by the steadily approaching North Vietnamese Army (NVA) became a regular night

time event. During the day, we hit back at the enemy, often directing as many as eight sets of fighters in one sortie – a limit set by the number of rockets we carried. We anticipated moving the entire night recovery operation to Vientiane, but the embassy was reluctant to make a decision that could be interpreted that we were abandoning our Hmong allies. As long as General Vang Pao remained, so did we.

In the very early morning hours of February 14, the NVA attacked our compound with six mortars and recoilless rifles while we fought back with two machine guns, M-16s and hand grenades. The lengthy battle, known ever afterward as the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, is recorded in detail in Chris Robbins’ book, “The Ravens”. Suffice it to say, the attack was halted at dawn when Killer flight, a flight of two F-4s from Ubon, accidentally dropped a full load of CBU 24/49 on the friendly position, tragically killing both friendly and enemy alike.

Chuck had been sleeping when he was notified of the attack at Long Tieng. He raced to Wattay Airport, cranked up an O-1 and took off in the early morning hours. When the F-4s left, we remained in our bunkers for 90 minutes waiting for the delayed fusing to set off the CBU’s that littered our compound. I remember distinctly the race from door to door as we moved to the flight line to see if any of the aircraft remained in serviceable condition. At that point, the familiar drone of an O-1 pounded across the roof tops as Chuck arrived on scene, followed by a seemingly endless array of fighters that had been diverted from their night time missions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I instinctively pulled my little plastic camera from my pocket and snapped a photo of his aircraft during his next pass. As usual, it was Chuck to the rescue.

Chuck could make the O-1 Bird Dog fly as no one else possibly could. He often ended his pre-strike fighter briefing by putting the aircraft into a spin, spiraling ever downward until he recovered at the altitude he wanted and, then firing a marking rocket at the target before bringing the nose back to level flight. It was a real crowd-pleaser that suitably impressed the fighter guys. It was always a great lead-in to “hit my smoke”. He was incredibly brave, more so than



I could ever be. Whether he was setting an altitude record for the O-1 (19,720 feet) or making a dangerous low pass to help a friend in need, he flew his aircraft to the limits as though it was simply the only way to fly. And we held him in the highest esteem.

On the day he crashed (Feb 22, 1971), I had driven out to the Wattay Airport at Vientiane to meet Chuck and to go over some awards and decorations write ups with him. I sat on the ramp in the open jeep and waited what seemed an unusually long time. Finally, someone came out from the operations building and told me that Chuck’s O-1 had crashed. I asked if Chuck had made it OK and was told he burned in the wreckage. I was in total shock. I walked in a daze across the flight line and stumbled against a revetment. Then in the privacy of my thoughts and the obscurity of the flight line, I fell over and cried, and cried and cried until I had no more tears to shed. As I pulled myself up, I knew that I would never feel a loss as great as that again and, so, I promised myself on the spot, that I would never cry again like that for the rest of my life – and I never have. 

About the Author: The Honorable Craig W. Duehring served 28 years in the Air Force spending most of his time flying the A-10 in Europe. From April 1970 to March 1971 he served a long tour as a Raven Forward Air Controller, stationed the entire time at Long Tieng. He flew a total of 834 combat missions. He retired in 1996 and served 2 tours in the Bush Administration, first as the Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs and finally as the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.



Photo by Scott Schaeffler of Scott Event Photo

This award recognizes AFSOC's outstanding performers from any AFSC/career field who have made the most significant contributions to mission accomplishment as determined by their respective commander. Their outstanding accomplishments make them truly deserving of this prestigious recognition.

These awards are sponsored by ACA and were presented this year by the Commander of AFSOC, Lt Gen Eric Fiel and former Secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable James Roche.

Technical Sergeant Benjamin T. Arnold

Technical Sergeant Benjamin T. Arnold distinguished himself as an EC-130J Dedicated Crew Chief while assigned to the 193d Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Middletown, Pennsylvania. His roles as an aircraft technician, front line supervisor, and aircraft mechanic trainer were instrumental in the success of the unit's emergence into new, real-world taskings. His contributions impacted the unit's ability to support vital Air Force Special Operations Command mission profiles including military free fall, joint precision airdrop, Military Information Support Operations, aerial refueling, night vision goggle operations, defensive tactics/threat avoidance, maximum effort, and unimproved runway operations. He led the maintenance and reconfiguration effort to return an aircraft from extensive depot maintenance at Warner Robbins Air Force Base to fully mission capable and ready to support a SOF mobility mission four days later.

Technical Sergeant Christiaan T. Becker

Technical Sergeant Christiaan T. Becker distinguished

himself as an Aircrew Flight Equipment Journeyman, 919th Operations Support Squadron, Duke Field, Florida. As the Noncommissioned Officer In Charge of the Precision Measurement Equipment Laboratory and the Operations Group Team Leader for relocation due to building construction, Sergeant Becker expertly directed the movement of six truckloads of two different operational squadrons' equipment into three different building locations. His outstanding shop leadership ensured 100% availability of the Aircrew Chemical Containment Area equipment during the unit's successful Operational Readiness Evaluation. Leveraging his extensive deployment experience, Sergeant Becker conducted the pre-deployment training of 16 Aircrew Flight Equipment Airmen supporting multiple worldwide contingency operations. Sergeant Becker was handpicked as the first Aircrew Flight Equipment Airman in the 919th Operations Group to become a Combat Aviation Advisor, graduating from both the Combat Aviation Advisor Initial Skills Training course and Special Operations French Language Training Course in preparation for the Wing transition into the Aviation Foreign Internal Defense mission.

Captain Garrett R. Bridges

Captain Garrett R. Bridges distinguished himself as MC-130H Combat Talon II Instructor Navigator and Chief of Plans, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan. Captain Bridges showcased his outstanding leadership as lead navigator on the first ever Navy Special Operations Forces three ship formation assault boat airdrop, traversing 3,000 miles across the Pacific and validating theater maritime interdiction operations capabilities. He further demonstrated his operational prowess when he airdropped over 200 paratroopers across 7 Korean brigades, cultivating a critical wartime relationship. Additionally, as lead MC-130H planner for a 2012 Thailand Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise, he ensured the successful accomplishment of 502 combined training events and 160 flying hours while enhancing the vital relationship with the Royal Thai Air Force. Furthermore, his tactical planning expertise proved crucial during safety exchange training with Malaysian Air Force crew members preparing for their first Afghanistan deployment. Finally, Captain Bridges was recognized as AFSOC's Foreign Asian-Pacific Council Military Meritorious Service award winner for his service throughout the Pacific region.

Staff Sergeant Patrick H. Budenski

Staff Sergeant Patrick H. Budenski distinguished himself as Radio Frequency Transmission Systems Supervisor, 352d Special Operations Support Squadron, 352d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom. Sergeant Budenski deployed on two multinational exercises, leading teams of highly-skilled radio frequency technicians responsible for the establishment of 5 secure radio links in support of 75 sorties. His actions directly contributed to the successful training of special operations forces from 14 partner nations and completion of mission essential tasks in both normal and extreme weather conditions, earning his flight the "Hard Hitters" award from the Commander of Special Operations Command Europe. Lastly, during his group's 2012 Operational Readiness Inspection, he led a 3-person team in the deployment and establishment of an Air Operations Center network, initializing communications in less than four hours. This feat smashed Air Force Special Operations Command's standard by eight hours, earned an "Outstanding" Communications and Information rating, and secured an overall "Excellent" rating for his group.

Captain Taryn C. Council

Captain Taryn C. Council distinguished herself as Intelligence Flight Commander, 321st Special Tactics Squadron, 352d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom. Captain Council led four special tactics intelligence personnel by integrating current intelligence for joint training and exercises with two operational flying squadrons and one special tactics squadron. By providing imagery and mission planning products to 43 Airman for 255 combat missions and

63 airfield surveys, she supported deployments to five separate locations in support of European Command and African Command. Additionally, as the Combined Special Operations Task Force A2 in Afghanistan, Capt Council supported a 239 special operations forces task force by leading 17 intelligence analysts from 4 units and 3 nations. She created and led Task Force 10's Information Operation concept of contingency operations resulting in 38 non-kinetic missions. Her training program became the intelligence community benchmark for the new special tactics wing and led to her being named as her group's Professional Performer of the Year for 2011.

First Lieutenant Eric M. Cranford

First Lieutenant Eric M. Cranford distinguished himself in various assignments culminating as Maintenance Operations Officer, 1st Special Operations Maintenance Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field. While deployed, he led 207 Airmen and directed maintenance on 9 CV-22 aircraft which enabled the successful generation of 388 combat sorties totaling 814 flying hours and the capture of 280 insurgents. As Maintenance Operations Officer, Lieutenant Cranford was instrumental in the standup of the Air Force's sole CV-22 depot maintenance facility. Finally, Lieutenant Cranford was the catalyst behind the seamless relocation of the Maintenance Operations Center. In collocating this command and control function with the Maintenance Group leadership and back on the flight line, he streamlined critical aircraft status information flow and greatly enhanced aircraft generation efforts.

Captain Gregory K. Crew

Captain Gregory K. Crew distinguished himself as Instructor Pilot and Flight Commander, Plans and Exercises at his unit. Captain Crew completed multiple deployments in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, where he flew 69 combat sorties and 514.6 combat hours. His efforts were instrumental in the tracking of assorted Joint Task Force High Value Targets in austere geographic locations over a hostile objective area while providing direct support to combat operations. Significantly, Captain Crew flexed his crew and aircraft to support ISR operations and successfully tracked a time sensitive, high visibility individual. His immediate response garnered actionable intelligence which enabled the successful execution of missions to recover the objective. Captain Crew's leadership solidified tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) used by crewmembers to execute this mission of strategic importance. Captain Crew was the lead planner and executed a SOCOM directed evaluation of flight TTPs in order to increase the first strike lethality of the Special Operations Precision Guided Missile used by AFSOC aircraft. These new TTPs were employed by squadron crewmembers during a kinetic strike that killed three Al-Qaeda leaders. Clearly, these efforts were instrumental in his squadron flying over 9,000 combat hours resulting in 111 High Value Individuals being captured or killed.

Technical Sergeant Stephen M. Critten

Technical Sergeant Stephen M. Critten distinguished himself as MC-130H Flight Engineer, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan. Sergeant Critten flew 154 combat hours, delivered 214 tons of cargo, and moved 541 Special Operations Forces throughout austere locations in Afghanistan enabling critical village stability operations and counterinsurgency missions. He executed 36 combat airdrops in the world's most challenging terrain, supplying forward operating bases with 343,000 pounds of critical war fighting supplies allowing troops to continuously bring the fight to the enemy. Additionally, while deployed, Sergeant Critten mentored fellow troops on Afghanistan cultural training, force multiplying local interaction. As the unit's Flight Engineer evaluator, Sergeant Critten administered six flight evaluations validating the squadron's training programs and combat mission capabilities. These actions and more culminated in Sergeant Critten being awarded the Air Force Special Operations Command Flight Engineer of the Year Award for 2011.

Captain Jacob J. Duff

Captain Jacob J. Duff distinguished himself as Instructor Pilot, 15th Special Operations Squadron, 1st Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field. Captain Duff expertly led a no-fail Somalia rescue mission, covertly infiltrating assault forces into hostile territory which directly resulted in the recovery of two hostages. His accomplishments were publically lauded by the President of the United States. Additionally, Captain Duff deployed to Afghanistan for 90 days where he commanded 53 combat missions supporting the combined ground forces offensive. In total, he airdropped over one million pounds of cargo in combat to forward operating bases across Afghanistan. On one particular mission, he nailed the point of impact to an abnormally small-sized drop zone supporting an isolated special operations team in desperate need of ammunition and supplies. Finally, he created the first formalized squadron initial training procedures for formation flights, alleviating safety concerns and improving operational risk management standards within the unit.

Captain James G. Finucane

Captain James G. Finucane distinguished himself as Flight Commander, 24th Special Tactics Squadron, Pope Field, North Carolina. Captain Finucane was deployed for four months as commander of Special Tactics forces supporting an elite Joint Task Force in Central Command. He was instrumental in the planning and execution of all Combat Search and Rescue operations covering 554 Task Force missions, including the successful recovery of a downed MH-47. In addition to his exemplary combat leadership, Captain Finucane led unit participation in three Secretary of Defense-directed joint exercises, which validated Department of Defense maritime interdiction, airfield seizure, and denied area infiltration capabilities. He synchronized 20 aircraft and 300 personnel during five missions as the ground force commander for

the 724th Special Tactics Group-led advanced air-ground integration exercise, ADVANCE GUARD. Captain Finucane was instrumental in the planning and execution of three real-world contingency operations in two separate Geographic Combatant Commands. He developed a comprehensive plan for a strategic reconnaissance mission in Central Command, and his flight provided critical rescue and command and control capability during execution of two Secretary of Defense-directed missions in other theaters.

Captain Chad G. Flann

Captain Chad G. Flann distinguished himself as AC-130U Evaluator Electronic Warfare Officer and AC-130U Flight Commander, 19th Special Operations Squadron, Air Force Special Operations Training Center, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field. Captain Flann successfully integrated two flights of over 58 students and instructors from seven different aircrew specialties into a single AC-130U training flight, compensating for a shortage of manpower, without impacting training. His efforts as a Flying Training Unit Evaluator Electronic Warfare Officer culminated in his selection as the 19th Special Operations Squadron Company Grade Officer and Electronic Warfare Officer of the year for 2011, flying over 100 instructor hours and 35 evaluator hours. Additionally, as Flight Commander, he personally conducted 26 progress review boards and developed courses of action which ensured each student's ability to succeed. He also spearheaded the first ever AC-130H to AC-130U transition course for 13 aircrew which served as a benchmark for future training.

Staff Sergeant Alan D. Hailey

Staff Sergeant Alan D. Hailey distinguished himself as a Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of the MQ-9 Reaper Weapons and Tactics office and Evaluator Sensor Operator, 33d Special Operations Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. Sergeant Hailey directly contributed to Special Operations Command Central's counterinsurgency operations by flying 162 combat support sorties totaling 318 flight hours of weaponized intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. His efforts were instrumental to Special Operations Forces direct action core task on 49 objectives, resulting in the elimination of 16 time sensitive targets. On one objective, he painstakingly followed the deputy al Qaida commander through thick mountainous vegetation for two hours while overcoming target obscuration by thunderstorms. Utilizing his systems expertise he bypassed the automatic elevation data and entered manual numbers to overcome severe crosshair drift just in time to employ two AGM-114 Hellfire missiles, eliminating the high value individual. As a combat proven warrior, he was hand selected by his commander ahead of his peers as the noncommissioned officer in charge of weapons and tactics. Finally, he deployed 143 days to fly launch and recovery operations enabling 1,932 hours of armed overwatch.

Technical Sergeant Phillip G. Hamre

Technical Sergeant Phillip G. Hamre distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as MC-130H Program Manager and Evaluator Loadmaster, 58th Training Squadron, 58th Operations Group, 58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico. Sergeant Hamre superlatively performed instructor and evaluator loadmaster duties resulting in 14 fully qualified Air Commandos. His drive, expertise and leadership were critical to the management of the entire MC-130H loadmaster formal training syllabii of instruction, which comprise a 1,386 hour annual flying training program. Additionally, Sergeant Hamre was awarded the 2011 Air Education and Training Command General Robert "Dutch" Huyser Outstanding Loadmaster award, was selected as 58th Training Squadron Noncommissioned Officer of the Year 2011, and completed the Noncommissioned Officer Academy as a Distinguished Graduate. Finally, Sergeant Hamre was a founding member of the Kirtland chapter of the Air Commando Association, where he fosters community and Special Operations Forces relations while ensuring the proud heritage is preserved.

Technical Sergeant Joseph J. Hepler

Technical Sergeant Joseph J. Hepler distinguished himself as NCOIC Operational Readiness Training, Special Tactics Training Squadron, Hurlburt Field. Sergeant Hepler expertly led a team of highly-skilled special tactics technicians in the most diverse training squadron within the United States Air Force. His expertise directly led to the training of 71 Special Tactics operators across four career fields upgraded to their five level. His leadership was impeccable in training these low density high demand assets. Furthermore those operators now serve across the globe in multiple exercises and contingency operations. TSgt Hepler also spearheaded Air Force Special Operations Command's only unilateral air and ground training exercise that spans five flying squadrons and utilizes all Battlefield Airman specialty career fields across Special Tactics. Since inception, over 320 aircrew and 98 Battlefield Airman have been trained and readied to accomplish contingency operations.

Technical Sergeant Randy S. Hoppock

TSgt Randy Hoppock distinguished himself by becoming the first Combat Aviation Advisor in the history of the Air Force Reserve Command. Sergeant Hoppock endured over three months of grueling training through the Air Force Special Operations Command Integrated Skills Training course encompassing combatives, defensive driving, advanced medical training and weaponry. Additionally, he completed 448 hours of foreign language training, significantly contributing to the success on a joint mission with the Republic of Korea

Air Force, providing vital Night Vision Goggle training to the host nation's aircrew members, resulting in that nation's Air Force's first ever Night Vision Device landing. Sergeant Hoppock's superb leadership and exceptional guidance were key factors when he provided essential Crew Resources Management training to the Korean Air Force aircrew members enhancing their combat skills and knowledge in effective crew communication. This vital training increased their knowledge of ensuring crew members interact on preventing aircraft mishaps, improving their safety of flight procedures, all working towards preventing loss of life and mitigating the loss of resources.

Captain Brian S. Maclean

Captain Brian S. Maclean distinguished himself as Flight Commander and MQ-1B Predator Instructor Pilot, 3d Special Operations Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. Captain Maclean deployed in support of contingency operations with Africa Command. He expertly led the Joint Special Operations Air Detachment intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance cell in support of 10,800 hours of airborne coverage, including 2,200 missions on targets approved by the President, eliminating 37 enemy terrorists; gaining recognition as the air detachment's number one Company Grade Officer. Furthermore, Captain Maclean served as mission commander on a multi-force security effort providing overwatch of an isolated force resulting in 21 soldiers saved and zero casualties. Finally, Captain Maclean led a 44 member flight, executed over 5,000 combat hours, coordinated 19 contingency operations, and completed 6,900 flying and ground training requirements. His leadership was key to air detachment operations and the success of his flight.

Captain Phillip R. Miller

Captain Phillip R. Miller distinguished himself as Flight Commander and U-28A Aircraft Commander, 319th Special Operations Squadron, 1st Special Operations Support Squadron, Hurlburt Field. Captain Miller was responsible for 117 people while deployed as Mission Commander for 70 days, overseeing 866 sorties totaling 4,068 combat hours. As Flight Commander, Captain Miller was responsible for overseeing over 1,248 mobility and 608 flying currency requirements of more than 26 aircrew members, along with 960 ground training requirements allowing them to deploy and directly support command and national objectives. Finally, Captain Miller's leadership extended to 10 partner aviation units and over 45 ground personnel through the execution of 13 exercises, multiple cross-tell tactics briefings with over 90 Army Rangers and Navy SEALs that resulted in a direct and decisively positive impact to combat interoperability.

First Lieutenant Seth W. Pate

First Lieutenant Seth W. Pate distinguished himself as Flight Commander, A-Flight, 11th Intelligence Squadron, Hurlburt Field. Lieutenant Pate expertly led a team of 70 highly-skilled intelligence analysts in the exploitation of more than 3,100 hours of full-motion video supporting elite special operations forces for Operations NEW DAWN and ENDURING FREEDOM. He directed the production of more than 1,000 fused intelligence products resulting in the kill or capture of 65 high-value individuals, including four of the top 25 joint task force targets in Afghanistan. His efforts increased the number of qualified mission operations commanders by 15 percent and shored up a critical manning shortfall during a period of surging mission requirements while maintaining rigorous mission standards. Finally, Lieutenant Pate deployed as a Joint Task Force Senior Intelligence Duty Officer to the Horn of Africa where he seamlessly battle tracked 10 special operations teams and 44 aircraft. He integrated intelligence from five tactical operations centers driving weekly targeting priorities.

Captain Matthew S. Plasterer

Captain Matthew S. Plasterer distinguished himself as a pilot and Aircraft Commander, 193d Special Operations Squadron, Middletown, Pennsylvania. During this period Captain Plasterer's extraordinary efforts and true dedication to the mission and success of the 193d Special Operations Wing were displayed while flying over 460 hours including 214 combat hours during 31 combat missions in support of Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR and over 50 hours of SOFFLEX directly supporting AFSOC objectives. At an exercise in December, he performed so well rehearsing the new tactical mission sets in airdrop, max-effort, and unimproved surface landing, that he was selected to participate as a copilot in the Wing's Operational Readiness inspection, in June of 2012. During the Inspection, Captain Plasterer and his crew flew four military freefall missions and airdropped six Container Delivery Systems. In all, the time on target was an amazing six seconds or less, landing all airdropped personnel and cargo on the anticipated Point of Impact. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Plasterer reflect great credit upon himself, the Air National Guard, and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Jason R. Ragan

Technical Sergeant Jason R. Ragan distinguished himself as Element Leader, Gold Flight, 24th Special Tactics Squadron, Pope Field, North Carolina. As a direct result of Sergeant Ragan's leadership and supervision, his element was able to provide over 540 man-days of full-spectrum Special Tactics capability in Afghanistan and other locations around the world. Always first to the fight, Sergeant Ragan deployed on short notice as part of a joint special operations team to execute a high-risk rescue mission. He and his team conducted a military freefall parachute insertion into hostile territory under zero illumination conditions with dangerously high winds. Upon landing he seamlessly controlled and integrated

10 separate intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and fire support aircraft, providing continuous coverage throughout the mission. Sergeant Ragan and his team advanced on foot within 50 meters of the enemy position at which time they began receiving intense enemy fire from three separate locations. Despite the effective fire, Sergeant Ragan moved forward without hesitation to help locate the hostages and move them to safety. Sergeant Ragan then skillfully coordinated a helicopter exfiltration of the hostages and the team.

Technical Sergeant Cielito J. Saxe

Technical Sergeant Cielito J. Saxe distinguished himself as a CV-22 Flightline Expediter, 58th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico. Sergeant Saxe expertly orchestrated the completion of more than 18,000 maintenance actions enabling more than 1,400 syllabus flying hours. His superior leadership ability resulted in the best 71st Special Operations Squadron flying metrics in more than six years allowing for the graduation of 37 combat-ready aircrew members. Additionally, Sergeant Saxe assumed command and control of an extremely high risk CV-22 gear-up landing. Without hesitation, he directed 15 maintenance personnel on the set-up of an emergency landing zone preventing damage to an \$89.1 million aircraft while ensuring the safety of six aircrew members. Finally, due to his exceptional logistical prowess, Sergeant Saxe was singled out as the 58 Maintenance Group's United States Marine Corp MV-22 exercise liaison. His vast V-22 platform knowledge allowed him to anticipate problems and provide solutions in support of 113 high altitude deployment spin-up sorties, giving 87 aircrew members a non-kinetic preview of likely combat operations, ultimately enhancing their survivability during real-world missions.

Technical Sergeant Daryl J. Seward

Technical Sergeant Daryl J. Seward distinguished himself in various duties culminating as AC-130U Evaluator Sensor Operator and AC-130U Flight Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, 19th Special Operations Squadron, Air Force Special Operations Training Center, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field. Sergeant Seward flew 42 training sorties totaling more than 160 instructor and evaluator hours leading to 8 sensor operators graduating. He deftly managed training of 54 students in 10 separate aircrew specialties ensuring accountability and training continuity. His efforts as a training innovator culminated in the development of five training scenarios incorporating live ground parties for 26 training sorties increasing training efficiency by 35 percent. As a Weighted Airman Promotion System Monitor, he tracked the upgrade training of 73 Airmen and 15 sets of career development courses while distributing seven cases of promotion development guides ensuring future promotion advancement. Finally, as Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the AC-130U flight he was the architect of flight tracking processes, organizing three years of flight data and email distribution, improving processes pivotal to flight continuity by 25 percent.

Technical Sergeant Jason Q. Shaffer

Technical Sergeant Jason Q. Shaffer distinguished himself as Flight Sergeant, 27th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. Sergeant Shaffer expertly led a team of 64 Security Forces members through a period of unprecedented installation growth. His technical and professional expertise were instrumental in his selection for a short-notice deployment to the Combined Joint Special Operations Air Detachment where he immediately overhauled lacking security practices enabling air-tight security for eight special operations aircraft resulting in 21 enemy killed in action and 21 tons of critical cargo transported to special operations field teams. Sergeant Shaffer's selfless devotion to duty was evident leading visits to the Armed Forces Retirement Home and coordinating visits by the Honor Flight Program for 90 World War II veterans to the National Capitol Region. Lastly, he received the prestigious Commandant's Award for superior leadership at the Robert Gaylor Noncommissioned Officer's Academy and was instrumental in the 27th Special Operations Wing's distinction as the United States Air Force's Verne Orr Award recipient for 2012.

Staff Sergeant Oviatt M. Tillery

Staff Sergeant Oviatt M. Tillery distinguished herself as Intelligence Flight Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, at her unit, Sergeant Tillery's unparalleled leadership and knowledge were vital in developing and implementing tactics and employment plans to support Secretary of Defense-directed clandestine and low visibility missions in 30 nations. Sergeant Tillery's relentless efforts ensured the uncompromised delivery of 4,498 joint, elite Special Operations Forces and more than

469,000 pounds of cargo to politically sensitive regions. Sergeant Tillery single-handedly provided decisive real-time actionable intelligence reports during an 11-day manhunt which led directly to the elimination of the Task Force's number two priority target. Sergeant Tillery provided imagery and intelligence briefings which ultimately resulted in removal of 175 al-Qaeda fighters from the battlefield. Furthermore, her continued excellence earned this Air Commando recognition as Squadron Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, Higher Headquarters level Lance P. Sijan nomination for 2011 and the Squadron Noncommissioned Officer, 1st Quarter, 2012.

Technical Sergeant Jeffrey M. Tourne

Technical Sergeant Jeffrey M. Tourne distinguished himself as Team Chief, B-Flight, 11th Intelligence Squadron, Twenty-third Air Force, Hurlburt Field. Sergeant Tourne expertly managed five theater assets for 12,600 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance hours in support of three special operations forces units, which resulted in 113 detainees and nine enemies killed in action. Sergeant Tourne provided critical overwatch to ground troops during 45 remotely piloted aircraft missions. His keen eye ensured the personal safety of over 1,000 troops. Sergeant Tourne briefed the 75th Ranger Regiment and Air Force intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance commanders on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance tactical controller duties, which increased the knowledge base to over 50 deployed personnel. Finally, Sergeant Tourne executed time-sensitive-target analysis for six troops-in-contact events that aided in killing two high-value individuals and detaining 12 others. 

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AC-130s and Iranian Hostage Rescue Attempt

(Operation Eagle Claw)



Part 2 of 2

By Lt Col Jim Lawrence (Ret.)

Excerpts from *Airman's Odyssey: An Air Force Special Operator's Incredible Journey* by Lt Col Jim Lawrence (Ret)

On 22 April 1980, as I drove around the flight line on the way to the 16th Special Operations Squadron, I noticed our maintenance troops were preparing equipment, to include mounting the engine heat shields (shaped like big bottomless tubs) just aft of the engine exhaust area. These devices disperse exhaust heat so as to make the AC-130 less vulnerable to enemy surface-to-air, heat-seeking missiles.

As a rule of thumb, if the heat shields were being installed, gunship crewmembers knew intuitively without being told the particulars that the mission was a real-world response. Per George Ferkes, former commander of the 8th SOS, the MC-130 wives said they knew the Iran mission was a go when they noticed "aircrew members packing suntan lotion and beer in their bags."¹⁴

At the squadron, we briefed and launched on a 24-hour non-stop flight from Hurlburt to an austere base in Egypt. We did not use the customary gunship call sign "Pier" as on local flights, but instead used those assigned by mission planners. The destination airfield, near the Red Sea, had been constructed by the Soviets during the 1960s.

The pilots with me were Captains Howard Solomon and Ron Lovett. Major Carl "Curly" Houston and Captain Juan Pena were the navigators. Coasting out past Jacksonville, we transited the Bermuda Triangle. There were four inflight refuelings planned for this

24-hour, 6,500 mile flight. During one of the night refuelings, north of Bermuda and in the boundaries of the infamous triangle, while we were connected to the refueling boom, the KC-135 tanker was struck by lightning. A fireball passed across the KC-135, came down the refueling boom across the top of our aircraft, and rolled off our left wing tip.

I was temporarily blinded, but could do nothing but hit the boom-disconnect button, reduce power, and drop back to gather my wits. What choice did we have? None, so back to the tanker we went and got the required fuel load to continue. But not before the flight engineer and navigator did a check of all things electrical and decided there were no electrical problems apparent.

Another guardian angel was riding with my crew for the umpteenth time.

As we passed Gibraltar heading into the Mediterranean Sea, we began closely hugging the Flight Information Region boundaries, especially when we came abeam Libya. There had been some concern that a hostile Libya under Muammar Qaddafi might decide to launch fighter aircraft to intercept and check out our flight, but luckily nothing materialized.

Our instructions were to notify HQ USAFE/CAT if we were more than one hour either side of projected time of arrival. Code words were provided to indicate alternate locations in case of a required diversion: Alpha for Lajes

(Azores), Bravo for Rota (Spain), and Charlie for Sigonella (Sicily). Upon arriving in Egyptian airspace, instead of landing Cairo West as planned, we canceled the trusted agent flight plan and continued under visual flight rules (VFR) past Luxor to our destination.

Major John Carney had members of his Combat Control Team (CCT) in place at the base, and they had aircrews ahead of time as to arrival procedures. Past Cairo, we were to maintain 10,000 feet from El Daba to Semru, then cancel Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) and proceed under VFR to RAMROD. Carney's operators set up a portable TACAN navigation transmitter and UHF radios for tower and a radar approach. We had planned a VFR landing as primary, with a CCT-directed radar approach as a backup. Passing Luxor, several large pyramids were visible on the port side.

As we approached the airfield the conditions were CAVU (ceiling and visibility unrestricted). Upon landing and deplaning, the temperature at 4:00 p.m. was a smoking 118 degrees.

After parking, flight engineers Roger Capps and Buddy Atkins examined the exterior and discovered our nose radome (cover) was shattered from the lightning strike in the Bermuda Triangle, but otherwise the aircraft suffered no other damage. Miraculously, the radar had continued to work all the way across the Atlantic and over the Mediterranean and Egypt.

Delta Force was already at the airfield, ready for briefing with us. Major Mike Couvillon of the 16 SOS had led a contingent of Hurlburt support personnel who did yeoman work cleaning the hangars, preparing cots, mosquito netting, etc.

In Washington D.C. during the run up to our deployment, a cauldron of discontent within the Carter Administration had been brewing over the decision to use military force to extract the hostages in Iran. In particular, a tension that already existed between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski was intensified by Brzezinski's more hardline approach to the Iranians.

Vance opposed the rescue attempt for several reasons. He believed the mission would jeopardize U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf, and he thought the rescue effort would draw Iran closer to the Soviet Union. He also thought the raid would endanger another 200 American citizens in Iran. His main objection, though, was that the chances of a successful military operation were not very good. He also had problems with the deception emanating from the White House regarding pronouncements that nothing was planned.¹⁵

Once the decision was made to attempt the rescue, Vance submitted his resignation on Monday, April 21st. "Carter's decision to launch the raid was more than enough to drive Vance from office – even if his influence in the White House had been intact. In fact, it was not. The rush of events in Iran, Afghanistan [where the Soviets had invaded in December 1979] and elsewhere had thrown his conciliatory, deliberate methods into eclipse – and pushed the President into an increasingly hawkish posture. And Vance had no stomach for another eight months of bitter bureaucratic infighting with Zbigniew Brzezinski..."¹⁶

In a letter of resignation, Secretary Vance wrote Carter "I have the greatest respect and admiration for you and it is with a heavy heart that I submit my resignation." Carter held the letter 7 days and replied on April 28th with a handwritten letter "To Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, I accept your resignation

with regret, but with deep appreciation for your dedicated and effective service to me and to our country. As mentioned in your letter, we have had notable accomplishments under your leadership as Secretary of State. I share your pride in what has been achieved. Because you could not support my decision regarding the rescue operation in Iran, you have made the correct decision to resign."¹⁷

The upcoming rescue attempt was termed "RICE BOWL" to give it an Asian-sounding name and avoid suspicion. By 16 January 1980, our communicators had set up a High Frequency network for daily "conditioning" in Greece, Egypt, and the USA. A series of radio calls were made every day. The White House announced publicly we were "taking no action to endanger the hostages."¹⁸

All these activities were to set the table for the operation kickoff and hopefully not rouse suspicions among our adversaries, especially the Soviets, who were believed likely to tip off the Iranians. At the staging base, we received a briefing from Delta Force in one of the Russian-built hangars that had a mock-up of the American Embassy that the CIA had painstakingly put together.

We were told three hostages – Chargé d'affaires Bruce Laingen (plus Victor Tomseth, Senior Political Officer, and Mike Howland, Security Aide) were being held separately in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and would have to be rescued from that location as well. Delta's three assault teams were commanded by Major Logan Fitch (Blue Element), Major Jim Knight (White Element) and Major Pete Schoomaker (Red Element), and the precision and timing required of each was down to the gnat's rear end. Schoomaker eventually reached 4-star rank, commanded USSOCOM, and became the 35th Chief of Staff of the Army.

Army Colonel Charlie Beckwith was the ground commander, and Air Force Colonel Jim Kyle was the air component commander. Army Major General Jim Vaught commanded the overall task force, JTF 79-1.

At the base, there was no local flying, and most idle time was spent trying to find a cooler spot to occupy; the heat was stifling, and flies were abundant. We slept

on cots with mosquito netting. No one ventured far, as the support personnel had briefed us on the possibility of stepping on land mines that were sometimes visible, and sometimes not so visible.

One Delta Force operator had preceded aircrew arrivals and had driven around the perimeter on the north side of the field, discovering a large vehicle "grave yard" with over one hundred cannibalized Soviet vehicles standing on blocks.

There were also several mine fields with large anti-tank mines inside barbed wire barriers.

The shifting winds covered and uncovered the mines daily. As the winds changed direction, and the mines were migrating back and forth, depending on wind strength and direction. Some of them moved fully outside the original mine fields and could have been almost anywhere. Not a place to go walking or driving!

It was also possible to see some of the resident Egyptian elements. They were commanded by a tall officer that always wore an Arab outfit (jeballah) and his troops wore a khaki colored uniform. All were armed with World War II Russian weapons -- mostly the PPSH-41 ("burp gun").¹⁹

American intelligence knew when Soviet spy satellites flew overhead the base in Egypt. The aircrews and support personnel sequestered themselves inside the hangars during those times to avoid tipping off the Russians, who in turn would likely have tipped off the Iranians of the American presence.

Delta Force operators who were to attack the embassy in Iran and carry out the hostage rescue were a rough-looking, specially groomed crew who could have passed for a bunch of 1960s-era hippies, or as some would say, "flower children." "They were a motley, deliberately unmilitary-looking bunch of young men. In fact, they looked a lot like the students who had seized the embassy. Most were just a few years older than the hostage-takers. They had long hair and had grown moustaches and beards, or at least gone unshaven. Many of those with fair hair had dyed it dark brown or black, figuring that might nudge the odds at least slightly in their favor if they were forced to fight

their way out of Iran. The loose-fitting, many-pocketed field jackets they wore, also dyed black, were just like the ones favored by young men in Iran. Under the Geneva Conventions, soldiers (as opposed to spies) must enter combat in uniform, so for the occasion the men all wore matching black knit caps and on their jacket sleeves had American flags that could be covered by small black Velcro patches. On the streets of Tehran the flags would invite trouble, but inside the embassy compound they would reassure the hostages that they weren't just being kidnapped by some rival Iranian faction. The men wore faded blue jeans and combat boots, and beneath their jackets some wore armored vests. Much of their gear was improvised. They had sewn additional pockets inside the jackets to carry weapons, ammo, and water. Most of the men carried sidearms, grenades, small MP-5 submachine guns with silencers, and various explosive devices."²⁰

The four 16 SOS crews commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Gallagher and Captains Donn Kegel, Herman "Bubber" Youngblood, and Jim Lawrence checked all equipment, weapons and ammo, survival vests, and escape and evasion kits with chits that could be used to try to bribe one's way out of a tight spot if on the ground in hostile territory. Not much else could be done, other than swatting hordes of flies in and around the hangars and avoid overhead satellites, as we waited for nightfall on the second night and our turn to ingress and provide overhead fire support as planned for Night Two of the operation.

Another AC-130 aircraft was to circle Mehrabad airport in Tehran. One was to cover the American Embassy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A third was to cover Manzareyah Airport which was to be a transload site for the freed hostages, 60 miles south of Tehran. The fourth aircraft was a flying spare, and its commander had to know all three missions if needed to fill in.

Satellite communication was very limited in those days; only one of the four AC-130s had SATCOM capability. No one knew the name of the operator of the SATCOM, we had all been told just to refer to him as "Doc." Aerial re-fueling was also somewhat limited, as there was only enough aggregate tanker fuel to fill the primary three AC-130 aircraft; the fourth would reverse course once over northern Saudi Arabia and return to base, if the first three were proceeding normally after taking on their fuel load. We understood Saudi Arabia was aware of our route, but would "turn a blind eye" and deny all.

As Colonel James H. Kyle later wrote in his book *The Guts to Try*, "The gunships' mission was to keep the mobs off the streets around the embassy. They would be carrying a special type of munitions, developed for use against trucks in Vietnam that produces a spectacular sparkling effect. This ordnance was an excellent fire starter, and I felt confident that it would hold even the most fanatical of mobs at bay."²¹

The ordnance Kyle described was referred to by the aircrews as "Willy Pete" which is a shortened name for white phosphorous rounds that burn extremely hot and will cook a truck or jeep in a few seconds, once struck by a few rounds of ammo from the 40mm Swedish-built Bofors cannon.

Firing the M-61 Vulcan 20mm machine guns from an altitude of 5,500 feet on a target can seem very antiseptic, but everyone on the AC-130s knew the awesome firepower



Jim Lawrence, Donn Kegel, and Herman 'Bubber' Youngblood.

available and realized the possibility of this turning into a real shoot out, especially if the American-supplied Iranian F-4 fighters got airborne, or if enemy ground fire came from areas not previously known to our intelligence personnel, or, heaven forbid, there was a mass turnout of Iranians into the streets as had been known to happen in this time of revolutionary fervor.

Night One of Operation Eagle Claw involved Delta Force being transported by six C-130s (some carried fuel bladders inside the cargo compartment) departing from a British airbase on Masirah Island, Oman, to a transload site given the codename DESERT ONE for the operation. That site had been clandestinely surveyed by a combat controller, Major John Carney, who installed in the sand radio-call-triggered pop-up runway lighting for the C-130s' arrival in the dead of night.

Once there, eight RH-53D helicopters flown by U.S. Marine aviators launching off the U. S. Navy aircraft carrier Nimitz in the Indian Ocean would land behind the C-130s, take on fuel from the C-130s, then load 120 Delta Force operators aboard the helos and proceed to a mountainous hide site about 50 miles outside Tehran where they were to be bedded down for the daylight hours awaiting Night Two operations.

Night Two involved the Delta Force operators riding pre-arranged rented trucks into Tehran to the American Embassy location where American hostages were being held, with our AC-130s flying across the northern part of Saudi Arabia and into Iran to provide fire cover for the airfields and American troops.

Famed retired Army Special Forces Major Dick Meadows left his comfortable retirement home in Crestview, Florida, then surreptitiously entered Iran, rented a warehouse, and made arrangement for Mercedes trucks to transport Delta Force members from the hide site to the edges of the American Embassy. This was the hazardous type mission with which Meadows had long been accustomed. He had been part of Operation Phoenix in Vietnam and had led an element into the Son Tay Prison Camp during a 1970 effort to free American POWs. It was old hat to him, but would get dicey later on as the mission fell apart and his hide site and codename were exposed. He escaped Iran on a commercial flight.

Sir Winston Churchill once stated "In war, nothing ever

goes according to plan except occasionally, and then only by accident.” Launching on 24 April, Night One turned into a disaster at DESERT ONE. In the wee hours after midnight, a crewmember strode into our Russian-built hangar with what crackled like a short-wave radio tuned to a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) station. There were BBC reports of crashed American aircraft and a botched hostage rescue attempt in a remote desert location deep inside Iran.

Only when the surviving 8th Special Ops Squadron crewmembers came back through our location did we learn the full extent and see first-hand the trauma of the failed operation. Five fellow Air Force members from their squadron burned to death in an aircraft right next to them, and three Marines lost their lives as well in the desert when an RH-53 helicopter crashed down on top of an EC-130 that was on loan from Keesler AFB, Mississippi, and being used as a tanker. Among the five fatalities was Captain Rick Bakke. Rick had been in on the 1975 SS Mayaguez rescue mission in Cambodia, as well as the 1977 MC-130 SOAR-ASS mission of over 27 hours.

A miraculous effort by Delta Force operator Paul Lawrence and the EC-130 loadmaster Master Sergeant Ken Bancroft (plus others) in getting Delta Force’s special mission personnel (of Major Logan Fitch’s element) out of the rear of the EC-130 kept loss of life to a minimum. Sergeant Bancroft performed heroically, and, along with Delta’s Lawrence and other C-130 crewmembers, helped save some 50 of Major Fitch’s personnel.

After the crash, all the other helos were abandoned in the desert, and all personnel other than the dead were loaded on the remaining C-130s and flown back to Oman. In their haste to avoid cooking-off ammo and Redeye missiles and get away from the site, the helo crewmembers left considerable classified information in the cockpits. The Iranians discovered and deciphered the information quickly and used that information to exploit to their psychological advantage the tremendous American disaster.

Names and code names of pilots and co-pilots were opened to the news media. Pages of code words such as “Hammer” for AC-130s, “Foreman” for the commander of the task force, “Tiger Rag” for the aircraft carrier the USS Nimitz, “Whistler” for one group of Delta Force, etc. were released to further embarrass the U.S. in world opinion.

Code words for Incirlik, Turkey, and our base in Egypt alerted the Iranians to the fact that those Islamic neighbors were cooperating with the United States. Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini even pronounced that the haboob (dust storm) that hampered the operation amounted to divine intervention by Allah to insure the Americans were unsuccessful in freeing the hostages.

With this debacle, America’s prestige was severely damaged, and the U.S. military quickly realized it was at one of the lowest points since the Vietnam War. A new nadir in American military history had been realized.

President Carter and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown set up a special commission to analyze what went wrong on the mission and make recommendations for the future. Secretary Brown came to Hurlburt Field for the memorial service for the five Air Force members who lost their lives, and the Holloway

Commission geared up for the investigation.

When later asked by Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA) of the Senate Armed Services Committee what he had learned from the failure, Delta Force’s Colonel Beckwith replied: “Senator...I learned that Murphy is alive and well. He’s in every drawer, under every rock, and on top of every hill. Sir, we purely had bad luck.”²²

After returning to Hurlburt from Egypt, in the second week in June, I gave a static display for and was interviewed by General Leroy Manor. He had headed up the Son Tay Raid into North Vietnam in 1970. I began showing him around the AC-130 and pointing out capabilities, but he quickly re-directed my efforts toward answering a slew of questions about training, communications, and coordination for Eagle Claw.

Since my last flight in AC-130Hs in 1980, the rest of the fleet was modified for in-flight refueling, and those gunships and crews proved their worth in places such as Grenada, Panama, Iraq and other hotspots.

With the introduction of the newer AC-130U platform, an even better capability has been added. Better weaponry and equipment allow U-model crews to strike an even more lethal blow where needed. An aircraft that can be pressurized is less taxing on aircrews during long deployments, leaving them fresher to quickly enter the fray.

The nature of warfare has changed in this day and age of terrorism, and AC-130s and our quiet professional aircrews will be called upon for the foreseeable future to deal with a wide variety of threats. There’s no doubt in my mind they’ll be ready for whatever mission comes their way, Anytime-Anyplace. 

About the Author: Lt Col James D. Lawrence, USAF (Ret) Air Force Command Pilot with 5,800 hours flying time over a near-27-year career. A graduate of Officer Training School and Undergraduate Pilot Training at Vance AFB, Oklahoma, he was an instructor and check pilot in the T-38 Talon, an instructor in airlift C-130s in Okinawa and Japan, and instructor and flight examiner in both the AC-130H Spectre Gunship at Hurlburt Field (16 SOS) and the HC-130 in Aerospace Rescue and Recovery (55 ARRS) at Eglin Air Force Base. In 1979, he became co-holder of a new C-130 world record for time and distance.

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On the Shoulders of Giants

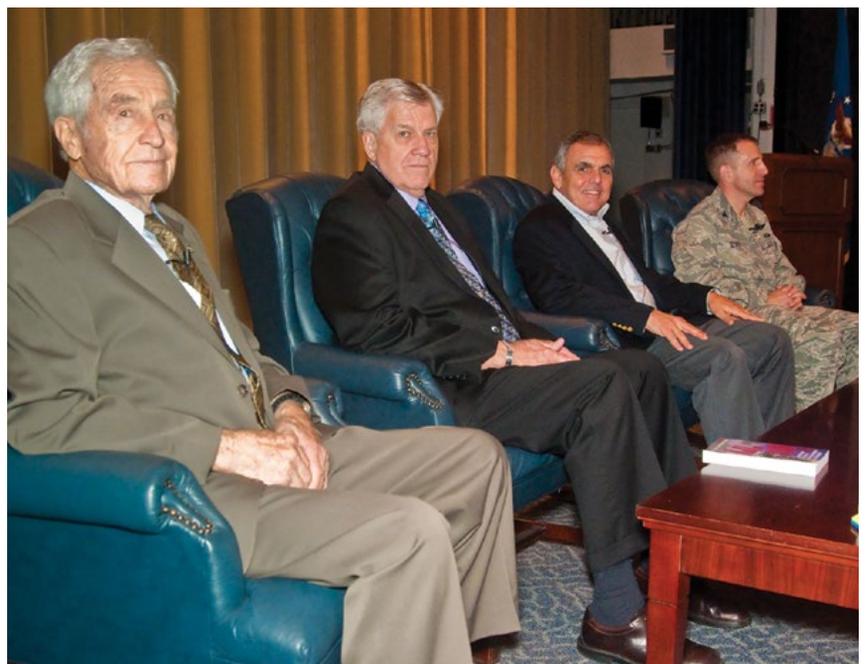
The Legacy of the Air Commando



By H. Buck Hodgkinson, Major, USAF

On 9 January 2012, Air University unveiled their inaugural eight-week Squadron Officer School (SOS) course. With the curtailment of the Air and Space Basic Course in July 2011, SOS became the sole source for company-grade officer (CGO) PME. As a result, the School made several major modifications to transition from a five-week program to the new eight-week course. One of the most noticeable of these was an increase in the overall class size. Initially growing from 400 to over 800 company-grade officers, to compensate for a “down time” during which the program was modified, SOS will eventually move to a steady-state throughput of 100% attendance at just over 600 officers in each class. In addition, the faculty has enlisted the support of a team of highly qualified, inspirational guest speakers to address its students.

During the final week of class 12B, the



first of these eight-week courses, the SOS leadership and faculty made the decision to dedicate their capstone leadership symposium to the legacy of the Air Commando. Several distinguished current and former Air Force special operators were invited to share their experiences and unique perspectives on service and leadership. Four guests, representing several generations of Air Force special operators, gathered at Maxwell AFB on 29 February 2012 and captivated the students and faculty with tales of their experiences, the leadership lessons they had learned, and their visions for the future of Air Force Special Operations Command.



Lt Gen Leroy J. Manor, USAF, Retired

The first to speak was former Pacific Command (PACOM) Chief of Staff and Operation IVORY COAST (also known as the Son Tay Raid) commander Lieutenant General (Ret) Leroy Manor. In his opening remarks, Gen Manor identified the considerations that led to the decision to attempt a rescue of American Prisoners of War (POWs) being held at the Son Tay Prison Camp. In particular: the high number of American POWs in enemy captivity; intelligence that confirmed the deplorable conditions POWs were suffering in these camps; and the possible opportunity to boost captured service members' morale with a successful rescue all contributed to the decision to proceed with the daring raid.

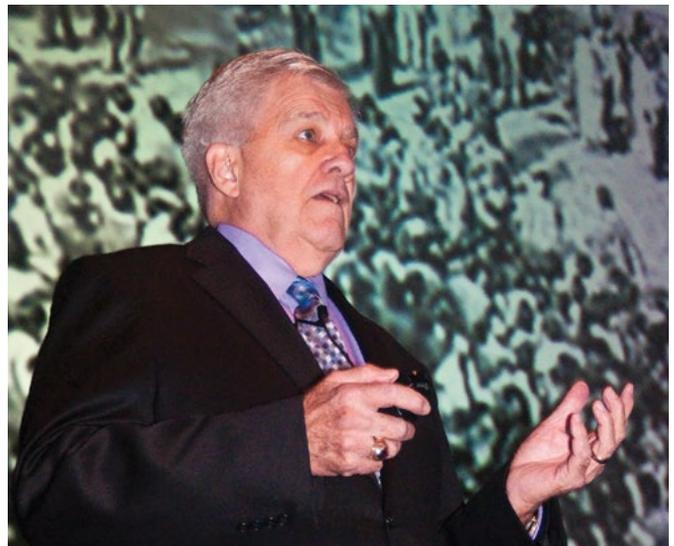
During the course of his presentation, Gen Manor gave an enlightening, first-hand account of the plan's evolution. Of particular importance was the limited intelligence that was available to support the planning effort. Multiple airframes and agencies worked together to collect data in anticipation of the rescue attempt; however even with this, the planners had only a limited understanding of the actual conditions on the ground or location of American personnel.

Although intelligence was limited, Gen Manor described robust support in other areas vital to the raid's success. In a time when "jointness" was still a nascent idea in operational planning, the Joint Task Force (JTF) still managed to gain access to and integrate assets from multiple Services into its

planning. In addition, these disparate elements were able to come together for vital training in preparation for the raid. Gen Manor attributed much of the operation's success to this training. Another contributing element, he noted, was the autonomy he and his team were granted in planning and conducting the operation.

Pentagon officials never mandated how to accomplish the mission, Gen Manor told his audience, they merely confirmed what needed to be done and let the experts figure out the best way to do it. This approach allowed the General and his team to develop a plan that leveraged the strengths of each contributing asset without having to seek permissions from the owning Service or being constrained by Service doctrine or leaders' mandates.

In the end, even though Gen Manor acknowledged that the operation failed to achieve its primary purpose of rescuing American POWs, the planning and execution of his mission was a complete success. In closing, he read a hand-written letter from then-President Richard Nixon conveying support and admiration for the warriors who performed so well in the Son Tay Raid.



Col Roland Guidry, USAF, Retired

The former 8th Special Operation Squadron Commander, Col (Ret) Roland Guidry was the next to speak. Having commanded during Operation EAGLE CLAW, Col Guidry began with a brief history lesson on the political climate that led to the eventual kidnapping of 52 Americans and the overthrow of the U.S. embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979. He then addressed the hardships that faced the Administration of then-President James Carter as it worked to address this unprecedented act of aggression. With a tight presidential race with then-candidate Ronald Regan underway and his belief that only a very limited number of politically acceptable options were available at his disposal, President Carter believed that a successful hostage rescue was essential to securing his second presidential term.

Col Guidry then addressed the creation of the JTF and the constraints that were levied prior to conducting the operation.

Among his concerns at that time was the fact that both the Air Force and Navy had aviation assets operating independently of one another. He also emphasized the following mission constraints: “(1) Don’t hurt any civilians, Iranian or otherwise; (2) there will be no war or other military action to conceal the movement of mission aircraft; and (3) the entire operation must be conducted in total darkness, radio silent, and minimal electronic emissions.” Each of these restrictions complicated mission success. In addition, Col Guidry noted that human intelligence (HUMINT) was virtually unavailable from Iran. Intelligence officials could not ascertain exactly where the US hostages were being held. This uncertainty led the Delta Force, the army counter-terrorism task force assigned to the hostage rescue, to increase in size from 70 to 120 members, a decision that had repercussions across the operation.

Next, Col Guidry addressed some details of the plan, including a decision to remain in the desert the first night. Clearly, one of the most important aspects of the plan was whether to make it a one- or two-day operation. This decision, according to Guidry, boiled down to the fact that there simply was not enough time to conduct such a massive operation in a single night. EAGLE CLAW had to be a two-day mission.

With this decision made, planners were left the unenviable task of identifying a suitable location for the task force to remain overnight. Several options were available. The task force could seize an airfield or bivouac at one of several austere stretches of the Iranian desert. In the end, the planners settled on the only place that met all three of their suitability requirements; it was remote enough that the task force would not be identified on the first night, the soil was stable enough that even the massively over-weight C-130 aircraft (190,000lbs even though the C-130’s max gross weight is 155,000lbs) would be able to operate, and it was close enough to Tehran that the helicopters would have enough fuel to conduct the operation then move the rescued hostages to Manzariyeh airfield 35 miles outside of the city. The location they selected became known as “Desert One.”

One of the most interesting points that Guidry addressed, was the multitude of innovations that he and his men made in preparation for the operation. Everything from blacked-out landings to covert communications and helicopter refueling procedures had to be developed, tested, and vetted before the rescue attempt could be made. The technology that existed at the time was simply not designed for the demanding mission that the task force had planned to undertake. A profound level of innovation was required within the 5½ months of planning; innovations in tactics, techniques and procedures that special operations forces continue to use today. In light of the profound impact that the operation had on all subsequent U.S. special operations, Col Guidry describe it as “the most successful failed missions of our time”.

Maj Gen Richard L. Comer, USAF, Retired

The third speaker to address the SOS audience was Maj Gen (Ret) Richard Comer. Gen Comer began by recounting his first-ever ride in an H-53 helicopter during a field trip just after his freshmen year at the USAF Academy in Colorado Springs,

CO. A pilot by the name of Marty Donohue piloted the aircraft seemingly inches above the treetops. Gen Comer recalled, “sitting on the ramp with a gunner’s belt on and raising [his] feet on several occasions to avoid hitting any branches” as he soared low over the foliage. Just months later, America was



captivated by the daring POW rescue attempt at the Son Tay Prison Camp in Vietnam. As he began reading more about the raid, he was stunned to find that the first aircraft to the camp was a H-53 helicopter piloted by Marty Donohue. It was at that point that he realized his goal after graduation was to become a helicopter pilot.

Gen Comer realized this dream, taking his audience from his earliest helicopter experience to the period just prior to the first Gulf War. At that time, he and his squadron members were increasingly frustrated with the lack of operational missions. He mentioned that he felt that this lack of wartime flights led many to go “fishing for missions.” Gen Comer argued this lack of operational opportunities was a product of that time. For years, he explained, the U.S. had enjoyed a time of relative peace during which many senior leaders and operators began to question how effectively their training was preparing them for actual combat. Today, the General noted, there is not the same level of concern. After more than a decade of war, today’s Airmen are comfortable with and confident in their tactics and training. That was not the case in the days leading to the first Gulf War.

As Squadron Commander of 20th Special Operations Squadron, then-Lt Col Rich Comer was asked to participate in an “extremely dangerous” mission just days prior to the U.S. attack. The MH-53J Pave Low IIIs from his squadron were at that time the only assets in theater with an integrated Global Positioning System (GPS) capability. This made them critical assets in the planning and upcoming execution of operations. GPS is a highly accurate navigational aid; a system that was essential to operational success while flying over the ever-changing sand dunes of Northern Saudi Arabia. U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) strategists had identified several

key radar sites along the Saudi Arabia-Iraq border that would need to be destroyed prior to the U.S. air offensive. Col Comer, recognizing that Pave Low's side-fired .50-caliber machineguns would be insufficient to neutralize such a target, recommended the use of the Army's AH-64 Apaches. The Pave Lows would lead a formation of Apaches – armed with AGM-114 Hellfire missiles – to each of the radar sites. The mission was code-named Operation NORMANDY.

The Pave Lows and the Apaches began training together near King Fahd International Airport, Saudi Arabia in October 1990. Operators placed particular emphasis on interoperability and joint tactics. The mixed formation/targeting training flights continued for nearly three months. Finally, on 14 January 1991 the team got permission from USCENTCOM Commander General Norman Schwarzkopf to proceed with the mission. The combined team moved to Al Jouf, Saudi Arabia to make final preparations.

The operation was a smashing success. All three radar facilities were destroyed, leaving a gaping hole in the Iraqi air defenses. Yet Gen Comer's account was calm and business-like. He bypassed the conventional "there I was," firsthand account of his mission. His message was something quite different. He noted that, "the mission was boring. If you plan well, and outclass your enemy, it should be boring. If you rely on individual acts of heroism, chances are you messed up." This message hit home with his SOS audience, most of whom have spent considerable time performing "boring" but highly successful missions in combat zones.

Col James C. Slife, USAF

Colonel James Slife, Commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) at Hurlburt Field, FL, was the last of the Air Commandos to address class 12B. He began by expressing his admiration for Gen Manor, Col Guidry, and Gen Comer and explaining how lucky the AFSOC community is to have such a strong oral history. "People in this community know these men and their contributions and realize that we are standing on the shoulders of giants," he explained. "The capabilities that we currently enjoy are a reflection of the legacy of our predecessors."

Col Slife gave a brief overview of each of the unique missions employed by 1SOW. Most students were somewhat familiar with the more traditional AFSOC missions such as airdrop, airland, and assault; however, very few realized the rapidly expanding role that ISR aircraft are playing in special operations.

When it comes to ISR assets, Col Slife pointed out the need for upgraded ISR platforms by relating how traditional "find, fix, finish" missions have evolved. During the Cold War-era, a great deal of military funding was dedicated to "finish" type missions. After all, finding massive mechanized armies in Asia and Western Europe was not considered a difficult task. In the post-Cold War-era, however, things have changed considerably. Today, the greater thrust of efforts in this arena is dedicated to "finding" the enemy. Consider the immense effort made by the intelligence community to find Osama bin Laden. According to Col Slife, the MQ-1 Predator, MQ-9 Reaper,



along with the recently declassified U-28 are fulfilling that all-important "find" role for special operations forces around the world.

These inspirational tales brought to light the rich AFSOC heritage and set the bar very high for this SOS capstone event. It also provided key leadership insights applicable to all who serve their country. In a time where resources are scarce, military funding is diminishing, and Reduction in Force boards are the new norm, CGOs must heed these lessons. After all, when it comes to getting the job done in the face of adversity, challenging the status quo, and placing the service of your country above your own personal safety, no one does it better than the Air Commandos. 🦅

About the Author: Maj Houston B. Hodgkinson is currently the Director of Operations, 29TH Student Squadron, Squadron Officer College, Maxwell AFB, AL. He previously served as Chief of Exercise Plans for the 353d Special Operations Group and as an MC-130H pilot in the 1st Special Operations Squadron.

"The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. government, the Department of Defense, or Air University."

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Medal of Honor Recipient

Lt Col Joe M. Jackson

“The Mothers Day Gift”

By Harry Bright

Editor's Note: The following article is a companion piece to the story of Kam Duc provided by Gene Adcock in Air Commando Journal, vol 1, nbr 2, Winter 2011.



Born on March 14th, 1923 in Newnan, Georgia, Joe M. Jackson developed a strong interest in airplanes early in his youth. He built and collected model airplanes during his school years and after graduating from high school in 1941, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. Joe's goal was to learn more about aeronautics. Within a few months after enlisting our country was drawn into WWII.

Joe was assigned to the B-25 Mitchell aircraft as a flight engineer. During a routine anti-submarine patrol over the Atlantic, the right engine caught fire and the pilot asked Joe what he should do to extinguish the fire. Joe told him to feather the engine, and the fire went out. From that experience Joe realized he was just as capable as the pilot, and decided to enter the Aviation Cadet Training program. After completing the schooling and graduating as a commissioned officer, he was assigned duty as a fighter pilot and spent the war as a gunnery instructor on several different types of fighters.

Joe stayed in the Army Air Corps after WWII ended. During the Korean War he piloted the F-84 Thunderjet and successfully flew 107 combat missions. After the Korean War, Joe continued to serve as a fighter pilot and was chosen as one of the first to pilots to fly the U-2 “spy plane.” As a staff officer at Strategic Air Command HQ, he was responsible for planning and directing U-2 flights over Cuba, playing a key role

in the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1968, Lt Col Joe Jackson volunteered for duty in Vietnam and transferred to the C-123 Provider, medium transport airplane. He deployed to Da Nang, Vietnam with the 311 Air Commando Squadron, 315th Special Operations Wing. This voluntary deployment would ultimately take him on a journey that would be the defining moment of his Air Force career.

KHAM DUC, May 1968

Kham Duc Special Forces Camp was located approximately 75 miles inland from the South China Sea, west of Tam Ky. It was situated south of Khe Sanh, in the I Corps jurisdiction (the northernmost military district in South Vietnam), just 10 miles from Laos. The camp was located about mid-way along a 6,000-foot asphalt runway. The runway and camp were surrounded by high rising hills with double and triple jungle canopy. Flying over it and looking down, it resembled a green bowl. Paralleling Laotian national highway 14, which was used by insurgents to move from Laos to areas around Da Nang, Kham Duc was a multi-mission camp. Those missions included: Interdiction of enemy lines of communication; reconnaissance of enemy movements; control of the population and resources of the area; combat actions; and training of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG). The village of Kham Duc, located some 800 meters away from the camp, had a population of 272 people. 85

percent of these were dependents of the CIDG. The American strike force was a cadre of men from the Army, Marines, and Air Force.

As a result of the fall of Lang Vei during the Tet offensive (located between Kham Duc and Khe Sanh), Kham Duc was the only remaining border surveillance camp in the I Corps region. Its geographical location made it an easy target if enemy forces were to establish gun positions in the surrounding hill sides. In April of 1968, intelligence reports stated that Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops were active in the area, building roads to connect with Highway 14. On May 3, 1968, large groups of enemy forces were reported in the area of the camp and a captured enemy soldier stated that the camp was to be attacked by his unit. From this information Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) ordered a battalion task force from the Americal Division into Kham Duc to reinforce the camp. C-130s that were diverted from other missions transported LTC Robert B. Nelson and troops from 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry, 196th Infantry Brigade, to the camp on May 10 and May 11. The total number of people at Kham Duc had reached 1,760.

As reinforcements were arriving for Kham Duc the camp's main forward operation base three miles to the southwest, Ngoc Tavac, was attacked and taken by two North Vietnamese regiments. The surviving defenders left the outpost and

crossed the Dak So River, climbed a hill approximately one mile from the overrun fort and cut out a landing zone for CH-46 helicopters to rescue them. By the end of the day on May 10 they were safely back in Kham Duc.

EVACUATE KHAM DUC

One by one, the seven U.S. Army machine-gun posts on the mountainsides had been overrun. This gave the enemy forces control of the hillsides surrounding Kham Duc and a full scale attack was started. Being at the bottom of the “Green Bowl” the camp was no longer able to defend itself, even with the airpower assistance from the AC-47 gunships, bomb runs in the area between Ngoc Tava and Kham Duc by B-52s, napalm and tactical runs by the A-1Es, and their own ground forces. In some cases the CIDG troops would not fight, and strangely enough those positions received only minor enemy fire. On May 11, the seriously wounded were flown out of Kham Duc by Air Force C-7A Caribou aircraft. Also that day the decision to evacuate, on recommendation from Marine Lt Gen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., was made by Gen William Westmoreland, the commander of MACV. The air sorties by the Air Force and Marines, which totaled over 140, and the Army helicopter gunship sorties did little to turn the margin of victory in favor of the Kham Duc defenders.

The actual timing of the evacuation was left to MG Samuel Koster, the commander of the Americal Division. At approximately 0100 hours on May 12, a message was received by the Army Special Forces leaders at Kham Duc that evacuation of the camp would take place later in the day. For unknown reasons several of the units were not informed of this.

As the evacuation started to take place, the first Army CH-47 helicopter to arrive was hit by enemy gun fire several times, burst into flames, and exploded. About an hour later as a C-130 packed with supplies came in for a landing (the pilot had not been told of the evacuation) it was hit in the main wing fuel tanks and one of the main landing gear tires. The pilot, Lt Col Daryl Cole, was unable to take off as the Vietnamese dependents in

the camp rushed into the plane before the cargo could be unloaded, adding excess weight. This extra weight combined with the lost main landing gear disabled the plane, so he taxied off of the runway.

The Vietnamese on the plane realized they were in danger, exited the plane, and were later evacuated by another C-130. As other planes arrived and evacuated people from the camp, the crew of Col Cole’s plane cut away the damaged tire with a bayonet. Despite the damages done to the plane, Col Cole and crew were able to take off and return to Cam Ranh Bay. They counted 85 bullet holes in the aircraft. By the time the evacuation was over, the enemy had shot down seven aircraft; one A-1E, one O-2, two C-130s, and 3 helicopters (some reports state 10 aircraft were lost).

A lot of confusion about the evacuation was created by the ‘Evacuate-Don’t Evacuate’ break down in communications due to the increasing aircraft losses. Several hours into the evacuation the Air Force personnel on the ground received notice to evacuate as there would be no more fixed wing aircraft landing at the camp. Among those was the Combat Control Team (CCT) of TSgt Morton Freedman and SSgt James Lundie, Maj Jack Gallagher - a pilot who was the Airlift Mission commander

and assigned as the OIC of the combat control team, and Capt Willard Johnson, who was the Air Force liaison officer with the Americal Division, from Chu Lai. Coinciding with the make-shift repairs of the Lt Col Cole’s C-130, the four Air Force people boarded the plane and were flown out of Kham Duc. When they arrived at Cam Ranh Bay the combat controllers and Maj Gallagher were told they weren’t supposed to leave the camp when they did, and to prepare to be re-inserted. Even though most of the CCT equipment at Kham Duc had been destroyed, they readily boarded another C-130, piloted by Maj Jay Van Cleeff, and were taken back to Kham Duc. As their plane was landing another C-130 was taking off with the last defenders of the camp.

After being airborne for a few seconds the pilot and crew of the C-130 that had delivered Maj Van Cleeff and the the CCT to Kam Duc heard over their radios that the evacuation of the camp was complete. Fighter aircraft were ordered to “destroy the camp at will.” Maj Van Cleeff immediately broadcasted “negative, negative,” telling anyone that could hear him that he had just inserted the CCT. The radio traffic fell silent. The CCT men were alone, on the ground, exchanging gun fire with the enemy.



They couldn't even talk to the aircraft overhead. The only radio they had with them, their emergency UHF radio, was disabled.

The Mother's Day Gift

It was Mother's Day, May 12, 1968. Lt Col Joe M. Jackson, detachment commander of the 315 Air Commando Wing at Da Nang, was on a check ride and routine airlift mission to Chu Lai with flight examiner and co-pilot Maj Jesse W. Campbell. The aircraft he piloted was one of the old C-123K Providers. The high wing Providers were not combat aircraft, the aluminum skin was about the thickness of six sheets of writing paper. There was no armor for protection. A cargo plane that was also used for defoliant and flare drop missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, it was powered by two Pratt & Whitney R-2800 radial engines and two GE J-85 mini-jets. The jets were added in 1966 to allow take offs on short runways. The other men of the crew were TSgt Edward M. Trejo, the flight engineer, and SSgt Manson Grubbs, the loadmaster.

While In flight, they were ordered back to Da Nang at approximately 1400 hours. There they were informed of the

Kham Duc situation and assigned to "get there and wait their turn to land and rescue defenders." They were given flak vests, extra ammo for their .38-caliber hand guns, and one extra M-16 rifle. The C-123 was refueled and the check ride was declared complete and passed. They departed for Kham Duc at 1500 hours and arrived overhead at 1530 hours. Their C-123 call sign was Bookie 771. Another C-123 piloted by Lt Col Alfred J. Jeanotte, Jr., call sign Bookie 750, had made a landing attempt to rescue the CCT, but did not see them and took off with the intent of coming back in after the crew noticed the CCT coming out of a ditch. But this was not to be, as his fuel was dangerously low. They returned to Da Nang after radioing Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC) that the CCT was alive, and informed them of their location.

The weather was deteriorating with thunder clouds filling the sky. The next plane available to attempt a rescue was Bookie 771, tail number 542. They were flying over the camp at about 9,000 feet trying to get a better understanding of the conditions on the ground. The ABCCC called Jackson and instructed him to go in. The answer was "Roger, going in."

Before landing he instructed his crew as to the individual duties each person was to perform during the assault landing and takeoff. Most importantly, TSgt. Trejo, the flight engineer, was to keep the jet engines running once they were started, as they were needed for the fast take off once the CCT members were on board the aircraft. SSgt. Grubbs, the loadmaster, was to open the rear ramp and assist the men onto the plane as fast as possible. Maj Campbell was to assist with the landing and put the flaps in full take off position when they were on the ground.

Starting southwest of the camp at 9,000 feet altitude and telling Maj Campbell to drop the flaps full down, Col Jackson made a 270 degree steep spiral decent landing

approach which took the plane to 1,000 feet altitude. The airplane dropped out of the sky at approximately 4,000 feet per minute. For the old C-123 aircraft, this was 'pushing the envelope' of its maximum operating tolerances. They leveled off at about 50 feet altitude approximately 1,500 feet from the end of the runway. Col Jackson was able to touch down on the first 100 feet of runway. Of the 6,000 foot long runway, the useable part was about 2,200 feet long, the rest being blocked by damaged aircraft, damaged runway from mortar strikes, and other wrecked vehicles. He did not reverse the propellers as this would stall out the auxiliary jet engines needed for the 'fast take off'. He stood hard on the landing gear brakes to slow the aircraft down. The enemy gunners had been fooled at first by this unorthodox landing, but they soon adjusted and began firing at the airplane from several different directions. The crew could see tracers ricocheting around the plane.

Col Jackson knew where the CCT people were. He was able to slow the plane to a crawl and turn it around within 100 feet of where they were taking cover in a ditch. As the CCT were running to the rear ramp of the plane, the crew could see bullets striking the runway in front of them and behind them. They were firing back at the enemy with their M-16s as they ran to the plane. Col Jackson was turned around in his seat looking at the crew to determine when to take off when Maj Campbell yelled "look at that!" From somewhere in the distance the enemy had fired a 122mm rocket at their plane. It skidded along the runway, broke into pieces without detonating, and stopped just in front of the nose wheel. The CCT men had boarded the airplane at that very moment.

Col Jackson maneuvered the C-123 around the rocket parts, pushed all four engines to full throttle, and took off from Kham Duc using about 1,000 feet of runway. They were being fired on by ground forces and from the hills on both sides of the runway during the takeoff. Bookie 771 had been on the ground approximately 50 seconds and survived small arms fire, mortar and machine gun fire, anti-aircraft weapons, and a rocket attack. Upon arriving at Da Nang, the



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crew inspected the airplane for damage. They counted a total of ZERO bullet holes and battle damage. No wounded crew members, all three CCT members rescued uninjured, and no damage to the airplane. This would be a Mother's Day Gift always to be remembered by the families of those seven men.

That evening when he was back in his quarters, Joe Jackson wrote a letter home to his wife. "I had an extremely exciting mission today. I can't describe it to you in a letter, but one of these days I'll tell you all about it."

The Medal of Honor

For his knowledge, skill, courage, and actions during the rescue at Kham Duc, and as the beginning of his Medal of Honor citation reads, "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty", Lt Col Joe M. Jackson was awarded the Medal of Honor on January 16, 1969 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. This would be one of the last acts as President of the United States that Lyndon Johnson would perform. Joe Jackson was 45 years old, two months away from his 46th birthday.

Also receiving the Medal of Honor with Joe that day were three other young men, one from the Navy, one from the Army, and one from the Marine Corps. The man from the Marine Corps was Maj Stephen Pless, a helicopter pilot. He and Joe Jackson were from the same hometown of Newnan, Georgia. Their families knew each other. President Johnson was heard to say "There must be something in the water down in Newnan" while presenting the Medal of Honor to these two men.

For their actions the crew of C-123K number 542 were also submitted for the Medal of Honor by Lt Col R.P. Schumann, USAF, Americal Division. Maj Jesse W. Campbell's recommendation was downgraded to the Air Force Cross, which he received. TSgt. Edward Trejo and Sgt. Manson Grubbs were downgraded and awarded the Silver Star.

Lesser Known Facts

- He developed both a method to guide aircraft back to base in poor weather and Standard Jet Penetration, which enabled



C-123K Provider

aircraft to land with low ceilings and low visibility.

- Co-developed bomb tossing method for B-47 aircraft
- He flew 298 missions in the C-123 in Vietnam.
- He was qualified to fly: P-40 Warhawk, P-63 Kingcobra, B-24 Liberator, P-47 Thunderbolt, P-51 Mustang, F-82 Twin Mustang, and F-84 Thunderbolt aircraft.
- After his Vietnam service he was assigned to the Pentagon in the Directorate of Plans.
- In 1971 he was assigned to the Air War College, teaching Strategic Studies.
- He retired from the Air Force as a Colonel in 1973, after 33 years service spanning three wars. He then went to work for Boeing at their Washington State location in their training dept. and fully retired in 1985.

• Named in his honor are the following: the Air Mobility Command named a C-17 Globemaster III in his honor; the main street at McChord AFB was named Joe M. Jackson Boulevard; the main road through his hometown of Newnan is named Joe M. Jackson Highway; the bridge over the Green River at 228th street in Kent, Washington is named in his honor; and the veterans park in Newnan, Georgia has a stone monument in his name.

• Col Joe M. Jackson was inducted into the Airlift-Tanker Hall of Fame and the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame. He was the American Combat Airman Hall of Fame inductee in 2000.

• His ribbon rack includes the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Flying Cross, four Air Medals, and the Air Force

Commendation Medal.

- During the second phase of its development the C-123 was built as the XG-20 glider.
- On May 10, 2010 NBC News featured Joe for his 18 years of volunteer service with his local church providing free meals for the needy.
- He resides in Washington State.
- On May 25, 1997, Joe Jackson was being honored as part of the 50th Anniversary of the U.S. Air Force at the Charlotte Motor Speedway, N.C, Coca-Cola 600 race. In the crowd of over 185,000 spectators was James Lundie, one of CCT men that Joe had rescued at Kham Duc. When Joe was introduced, James Lundie told his wife that Joe was the pilot that rescued him. They met later that day and continued to keep in touch with each other over the following years.



Sources for this article:

Congressional Medal of Honor Society

The Monograph series 'Airpower and the Airlift Evacuation of Kham Duc,' provided to me by Tony Tambini of the TLC Brotherhood

Air Force Magazine.com, Oct. 2005 'Rescue at Kham Duc'

YouTube interview with Joe Jackson (2)

AMC Museum, Dover Air Force Base, Delaware

Ron Gough, MSgt. Retired, U.S.A.F. Founder of the Hallway of Heroes, AMC Museum

www.af.mil-u.s.airforce

The battle and fall of Kham Duc was filled with acts of bravery and decisions both good and bad. For the long version I suggest reading 'Rescue at Kham Duc' or 'Air Power and the Airlift Evacuation of Kham Duc' H.B.



As my brothers and sisters before me, I am proud to step into history as a member of the Air Force Special Operations Command. I will walk with pride with my head held high, my heart and attitude will show my allegiance to God, country and comrades. When unable to walk another step, I will walk another mile. With freedom my goal, I will step into destiny with pride and the Air Force Special Operations Command.



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