

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

HALL OF FAME

2013 Inductees

Drones
Son Tay Raid

Laos
The Secret War

2013 Commander
Leadership Awards

Winter/Spring 2014



Vol 3: Issue 1

Foreword by Richard Secord, Maj Gen (Ret)
ACA Chairman of the Board



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Publisher

Richard Secord
info@aircommando.org

Editor in Chief

Dennis Barnett
info@aircommando.org

Contributing Editors

Scott McIntosh
Rick Newton
Pete Riley
Darrel Whitcomb

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, Chairman of the Board
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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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FOREWORD



CHINDIT CHATTER

Over two years ago the ACA started publishing the Air Commando Journal (ACJ) aimed at being a quarterly professional magazine to feature Air Commandos past, present and future. This is the ninth issue.

We have been delighted to receive numerous plaudits literally from around the globe. And we hope to continue this pursuit of excellence with the help of our contributors, volunteers and the financial support of our advertisers.

I want to single out special praise due our two staff members that work hard on the ACJ – Jeanette Moore, graphic design and composition, and Shannon Pressley, advertising and sponsorship. Without these ladies we would be sunk!

We have several volunteers who are very important in publishing ACJ. They include “cold eyes” reviews by Rick Newton, Scott McIntosh, Pete Riley, and Darrel Whitcomb and relevant stories by Air Commandos who actually participated in the operations described.

It is also sent to all congressional offices and numerous places in the Pentagon as well as being posted electronically on our web site (www.aircommando.org)

While handing out kudos I want to give special recognition to Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett, our President, the editor and driving force behind the ACJ. And a special shout out to Gen (Ret.) T. Michael Moseley, USAF, 18th Chief of Staff, who is ACA’s policy and financial advisor and responsible for developing a number of our advertisers.

Needless to say I am very proud of the ACJ and hope for many more years of excellence. However we need assistance in the form of commercial sponsors, advertisers and donations to ensure a long life for YOUR Journal. All who can please help us!

Please enjoy this latest Air Commando Journal.
Any Time, Any Place!



Maj Gen (Ret) Richard Secord
Air Commando Association
Chairman of the Board

As Gen Secord stated in his foreword, this is our ninth edition of the Air Commando Journal (ACJ). We are proud to start our third year of production. The publication of a professional journal dedicated to Air Force Special operators was a concept whose time had come. While there were naturally more than a few skeptics about the chance for success the ACJ staff, made up of mostly volunteers, took on the task with the same attitude of Special Operators across the spectrum, they found a way to accomplish the task at hand when others would not or could not. This group is as diverse in its makeup as Air Commandos are in their skill sets utilized in accomplishing the nation’s bidding, Any Time - Any Place.



We need to thank and recognize several, individually. First, we gather our articles from almost exclusively volunteer authors throughout the Air Commando community. We cannot thank those who have contributed their time, talents and stories enough. However, we have a group of folks that have become regular contributors. Harry Bright has been our most prolific with wonderful articles on Air Commando heroes and we are very appreciative of all his contributions. Dr Hallion, former Air Force Historian, has periodically provided great treatise’s on unique aspects of Air Commando history. We are pleased that he has agreed to more articles in the future.

Secondly, we also have a excellent group of volunteer editors. Rick Newton, Pete Riley, Darrel Whitcomb (also becoming a regular author) and Maj Scott McIntosh have all given freely of their time to smooth out submissions for easier readability. We cannot thank them enough.

We are also extremely appreciative of all our advertisers. Obviously, the production of a journal with nearly an 8,000 hard copy distribution is a fairly expensive enterprise and our advertisers enable us to continue the effort. We need to thank Gen Secord for not only taking the lead in the recruitment of our advertisers, but also believing in the concept from the beginning and enabling us to go forward. Shannon Pressley, one of only two ACA employees, is key to tracking and maintaining contact and correspondence with our advertisers. She accomplishes this in addition to her many other duties as ACA Executive Assistant and Public Affairs Coordinator.

The second of ACA’s employees is Jeanette Moore. Jeanette was already an employee of ACA when we determined that we wanted to give ACJ a go. Coupled with her many duties as our Membership Coordinator, she happened to be a graphic designer by trade. Without her unique ability on board from the beginning, we would not have set off on the endeavor to publish. Her talents are readily visible to all when you first gaze on the cover and dive into the content of the ACJ. Her fingerprints are not only all over each publication, she literally takes the concept for each edition and weaves the graphics, layout, and overall design from a pile of articles and photos and works her magic into producing the end product that we are so proud of. She, like Shannon, does all this while continuing a wide array of other duties. We are indeed lucky to have them both on board.

Finally, we need to thank you the readers for all the feedback you have provided over the last two years. We also look to you for even more in the future. The “Hotwash” section is your opportunity. As Gen Schwartz stated in the Foreword in our inaugural edition, “...I anticipate that future editions of Air Commando Journal will contain, from

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Combat Talon Issue

Congratulations to Col Jerry Thigpen on his explanation on the evolution and employment of the Fulton Surface To Air Recovery System, or the 'Skyhook' in the last ACJ. As a Special Forces soldier, the capability was of great professional interest for 'in extremis' exfil. But there's also a personal angle; an old friend, then Lt Col Roland 'Dutt' Dutton, US Army, was one of a two-man extraction demonstration in Vietnam in 1967. Assigned to MACV-SOG, Dutt and an official from another government agency volunteered to show this proven technique to MACV staff. Years later, Dutt gave me a series of 35mm slides which showed he and his partner rigged, lifting off, (see above photo) and then being retrieved into what I assume was a Combat Talon; mission accomplished.

What the pictures don't show, however, is what occurred between the snatch and the recovery. Dutt was a man of large stature, while the other man was not. Unfortunately, the size differential got the pair to windmilling, and Dutt said they slapped and kicked each other silly, which led to about three days in the Army hospital in Long Binh. He always gave the system high marks for originality and was proud of the Skyhook badge Mr. Fulton presented to him, but said that he'd wait for its procedures to mature somewhat before he volunteered again.

Bob Leicht
Middletown, DE

Combat Talons in the Son Tay Raid

Congratulations to John Gargus for his excellent article on the Son Tay Raid (Vol 2, Issue 4, Fall 2013). I was Det. 2

Commander at the time. I distinctly remember Gen. Manor's visit. We had recently been relegated to condemned buildings at Pope, which we had attempted to improve by some interior painting. That is how I was referred to as "Colonel Cleansweep." At the meeting with him were the Operations Officer, and the Maintenance Officer, Gen. Manor requested one augmented crew and about 25 maintenance personnel for a training exercise for an undetermined period. We were not told of the ultimate purpose of the exercise.

I reminded him, that in addition to our operational mission, the Det was responsible for training Combat Talon crew members. There were only 12 Combat Talon aircraft in the inventory: 4 each at Pope, Nha Trang and Ramstein. Three at Pope were Fulton Recovery equipped. We had six augmented crews, most, if not all instructors. Only the Ops Officer and myself were not on crews

We agreed that we could handle the the mission, as well as the training commitment. My instructions to the Ops Officer were to select the best personnel, yet not jeopardize training. This was really no problem, as all crew members were highly qualified. I went on a 2-week leave shortly afterward and had no hand in selecting the crew or maintenance personnel.

I remember visiting the detached crew once at Eglin, just to see how things were going. It was not until I was driving home a day after the raid that I heard about it. I knew immediately that the Det. 2 aircraft had participated.

Lt Col (Ret) Peyton E Cook, USAF
Southern Pines, NC

As a recently new member of the Air Commando Association I was impressed with the summer edition of the *Air Commando Journal*. But the latest edition (Vol 2: Issue 4) was over the top. I was a loadmaster with the 1st SOS out of Kadena Air Base in 1972 – this brought back a lot of memories that had been put away for 40-plus years.

Well done to the editors, staff, and writers of the ACJ. Thank you for your skill and dedication to the publication of a wonderful journal. Because of this issue, I have become a life member of the Air Commando Association.

Dave Clark
Vancouver, WA

A Zorro Tale

I am Debra Duffy (Deken) and was searching articles which mentioned my father, retired Air Force Col George T. (Tom) Deken. (He passed away in October of 1985.)

Retired Brig Gen Noah Loy wrote a fascinating article *A Zorro Tale* (Vol 1, Issue 1, Sep 2011) and mentioned my father and working with him and Brig Gen Harry 'Heinie' Aderholt.

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time to time, much of our trademark candor....." The hotwash after every mission both real world and training, was filled with this candor and as Gen Schwartz went on to say "Reflection and self-criticism have always served us well. And indeed, they will propel us forward, with common cause and a shared vision of operational excellence." This is precisely why we named our reader feedback section "Hotwash." We welcome any and all critical input both good and bad and for ideas and requests for future issues.

This, the ninth edition, is filled with a wide range of articles. There are historical essays and several little known vignettes of unique Air Force Special Operations missions. We invite you to enjoy this issue of Air Commando Journal.



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

Hotwashcontinued from page 6

I only know bits and pieces about what my father was involved with and would love to write an email to Mr. Loy sometime. Do you have an email address where I can reach him?

Dad was a base commander at both Ubon and Udorn, he was training Laotian pilots and was part of the Air Commando group in Thailand. I found this article very emotional and meaningful.

Thank you,
Debra Duffy (Deken)

Mrs Duffy,

We are so glad to have given you another opportunity to learn about your father's service to our country. Maj Gen Dick Secord who is the current Chairman of the ACA knew your father very well and would be glad to communicate with you. Here is his email address, rvsecord@gmail.com so you may contact him regarding your father.

Jeanette Moore

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. Thank you in advance for your interest in the Air Commando Journal.

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2013 Air Commando HALL OF FAME

The Air Commando Hall of Fame Committee met on 6 Aug 2013 to consider the overwhelming response to the 2013 request for nominations. We received a total of 16 nominations for considerations which is fairly consistent with the number in previous years' submissions, however the big difference was the dramatic increase in the overall quality of the nominations and the higher levels of performance and significant contributions by the nominees to special operations. We present the 2013 Air Commando Hall of Fame Selectees:



Joseph D. Becker

Col Joseph D. Becker distinguished himself during a lifetime of contributions to the nation, special operations and the Air Commando community. Col Becker's long and outstanding career as an Air Commando included assignments in all four MH-53 units and culminated with command of the 21st Special Operations Squadron. Additionally, he served on the Special Operations Command Europe staff, the Joint Special Operations Command staff and as commander of the Aviation Tactics Evaluation Group. He commanded units at the squadron, group and expeditionary wing level, and served as the first and only Air Force Director of Operations, and later the Chief of Staff of the Joint Special Operations Command. Over the course of his 27 year career (the vast majority in special operations assignments), he planned, led and commanded joint special operations missions in Central and South

America, East and West Africa, the Levant, the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. He played crucial roles in virtually every special operations undertaking from the mid-80's through his retirement in 2009. Since his retirement, Col Becker has been a tireless advocate for the growth and expansion of the Air Commando Association, including being a founding member of the ACA's Rocky Mountain Chapter. His many awards and decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, and the Air Medal. Col Becker's selfless service and duty to country reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.



Frank J. Kisner

Lt Gen Frank Kisner distinguished himself as an Air Commando and leader at all levels of command throughout his long and illustrious 33 year career. Gen Kisner's first assignment as an Air Commando was flying the MC-130 Combat Talon I as a member of the 1st SOS, Clark AB, Philippines in the 1990s. While there he rose to the level of flight examiner and Chief of the 353rd SOW Standardization and Evaluation. Gen Kisner was then assigned to Joint Special Operation Command, Ft Bragg, NC. During that time he was deployed as a planner for Desert Storm. After a stint at Intermediate Service School, Gen Kisner was assigned to the 7th SOS, RAF Mildenhall where he served as squadron commander. During this time he led the 7th SOS to an outstanding Operational Readiness Inspection and also was Airborne Mission Commander of a mission to rescue 36 Americans and 26 foreign nationals from the war torn Republic of Congo at Brazzaville. This mission was awarded the Mackay Trophy

for the most meritorious flight in the Air Force for 1997. After a staff tour, Gen Kisner commanded both the 16th Special Operations Group and the 16th SOW. In both capacities he led from the front in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. After selection for his third star, Gen Kisner was named the first ever commander of the newly formed NATO Special Operations Forces Headquarters. In this capacity he had a huge impact on the successful employment of both American and NATO SOF supporting the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Gen Kisner has had a long and distinguished career as an Air Commando leader, as a mentor to hundreds of young leaders and a lasting positive influence on the application of Air Force Special Operations power that will be felt for years to come, reflecting great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.



Ronald W. Terry

Col Ronald W. Terry's contributions have proven to be unparalleled in the annals of the Air Commando legacy. Col Terry, the "Father of the side firing gunship" changed forever the character of close air support and armed interdiction. Returning from a fact finding mission in South Vietnam, then Capt Terry came up with the idea for a side firing aircraft that seemed to fit an operational requirement. Capt Terry gained backing from Gen Curtis Lemay to conduct a combat evaluation of a C-47 aircraft outfitted with miniguns. On the first night sortie they dropped 17 flares and expended 9,000 rounds breaking up two assaults. Puff the Magic Dragon, call sign Spooky was born. For Project Gunship II, Capt Terry outfitted a C-130A with four miniguns and four 20mm Gatling guns. With the outstanding results of these initiatives, Maj Terry instituted Gunship III which created the AC-119G and AC-119K. Maj Terry then conceived Surprise Package, increasing the AC-130's standoff range and lethality by replacing two of the 20mm Gatling guns with two 40mm Bofors cannons, adding a low light TV system, a digital fire control computer and a laser target designator. Maj Terry then upgraded the AC-130H replacing one of the 40mm Bofors cannons with a 105mm howitzer. Not content with these significant achievements, Lt Col Terry rescued a failing MH-53 Pave Low program and was called to action to head the Credible Sport Iranian hostage rescue project. Col Terry continues to work to improve gunship capabilities on current and future AC-130s. The distinctive accomplishments of Col Terry reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.



Gary L. Weikel

Col Gary L. Weikel distinguished himself while assigned to multiple Air Commando organizations during his outstanding 27 year career. His legacy of leadership shaped officer and NCO leaders that drove Pave Low successes spanning a quarter of a century of combat operations. Col Weikel's combat experiences in Southeast Asia coupled with his relentless leadership were key in fielding critical technologies and techniques that would prove crucial for the SOF helicopter force. He was the preeminent leader of the new, special operations crew force that fielded the Pave Low for Special Operations Forces. His influence, vision and drive were the ingredients which forged a crew force ready for a second attempt to rescue the hostages held in the US Embassy in Iran. Under his leadership, including squadron command, the 20th SOS became a honed combat ready Pave Low squadron, a revolutionary first of its kind. His staff actions expanded the Pave Low assets five-fold, and under his command were combat proven in Panama during

Operation Just Cause. As a staff officer, Col Weikel was unequalled in insight and effectiveness. He was centerpiece of the "Iron Majors" who derailed the transfer of the Pave Low capability to the Army via "Initiative 17." His actions were foundational in establishing the number one priority for USAF SOF assets and he also provided key support of the legislation that drove formation of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and USSOCOM. Col Weikel's contributions to the air commando family were bold, selfless and in line with the tradition of Air Commando visionaries. Col Weikel's extraordinary dedication, exceptional commitment and contributions to the Special Operations Mission reflect great credit on himself, Air Force Special Operations, and the United States Air Force.

Atwell L. Wiley

CMSgt Atwell L. "Duke" Wiley [Deceased] served the United States of America as a Special Operations Force operator for almost 34 years both as a military member and federal civil servant. Chief Wiley deployed to Vietnam in 1968 as a Combat Spear Loadmaster, flying black C-130s throughout Southeast Asia. Returning to Pope AFB, NC, he joined the Det 2 of the 1st SOW, teaching SOF crewmembers what he had learned in his recent combat tour. Moving on to Hurlburt Field, Chief Wiley was selected as a lead planner for both Desert One and Operation Honey Badger, the two attempts to rescue hostages from the American Embassy in Iran. Further, he led the development of rapid infil/exfil off the rear of SOF MC-130s and codified the procedures for heavy fuel blivet air drops designed to deliver fuel to users far from fixed wing landing areas. During Operation Urgent Fury, Chief Wiley was one of the lead air planners for the SOF air armada that rescued American medical students in Grenada. Chief Wiley joined a small group of professional SOF warriors in 23rd Air Force, becoming a "Plank Holder" in DOS in the Operations Directorate where he served with dedication as a civil servant for the next 14 years. His many awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal and the Air Medal with 4 OLCs. Chief Wiley distinguished himself by outstanding sustained performance as an Air Commando throughout his long and distinguished career until his untimely death from cancer in 2002. Chief Wiley's exceptional commitment and contributions to the nation reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and the United States Air Force.



A DC-130A Hercules drone control aircraft takes off from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, AZ. Four BQM-34 Firebee drones are attached to the wing pylons. (US Air Force photo)

SON TAY RAID

Intelligence Gathering by

DRONES

By Col (Ret) Roland D Guidry, USAF
DC-130A/E Aircraft Commander Operations
Bumpy Action and Buffalo Hunter

Editor's Note: The unmanned aerial vehicles used for intelligence and reconnaissance duties were properly called "drones" as they were not normally piloted by a human. Today's UAVs, such as those flown by the 3rd SOS (MQ-1) and 33rd SOS (MQ-9), are piloted and it is therefore not appropriate to call them drones.

Much has been written about the Son Tay Raid of November 1970 and the failure to obtain last minute intelligence to confirm that the camp was still occupied by American POWs. This article covers the development of the US Air Force drone weapon system and sheds light on the successes, and the failures of photo reconnaissance drones in capturing key intelligence photos to support the Son Tay raid.

The history of drones used in the photo reconnaissance and other roles is linked to the shooting down of U-2 reconnaissance planes over Russia on May 1, 1960, and the capture of its pilot, Capt Frances Gary Powers, and over Cuba in 1962. There was a great need to learn more about the SA-2 surface-to-air missiles (SAM) that had shot down these two aircraft.

The corrective action initiated in the early 1960s was to develop a system of unmanned aircraft, code name "Lightning Bug" and "Compass Cookie" for use initially as "SAM Sniffers" in Cuba. They were used as expendable decoys to capture critical electronic intelligence associated with the guidance and firing system for the SA-2 SAM. A secondary objective was to send high altitude drones into China to monitor Chinese involvement in the early stages of the conflict in Southeast Asia (SEA). A third objective was to use high altitude drones in photo reconnaissance to avoid the capture of aircrew members flying manned aircraft.

The drone photo reconnaissance programs from 1964 to 1975 were known as Operations Blue Springs, Bumble Bug, Bumpy Action and Buffalo Hunter. In those days, the drones



Capt Roland D Guidry, DC-130 Aircraft Commander at Bien Hoa prior to a Buffalo Hunter mission. (Photo courtesy of author)

were referred to as Special Purpose Aircraft or SPAs and designated as series 147XXX Special Purpose Aircraft where XXX was the specific drone model. Drones were designed to be either ground-launched using booster rockets or to be air launched from pylons beneath the wings of specially-modified C-130 aircraft, designated the DC-130A and DC-130E. The initial SPAs were an offshoot of the 50s-era Ryan Aeronautical Corporation BQM-34A Firebee target drones with stronger engines and extended wings to allow the SPAs to achieve high altitudes similar to U-2s.

The drones were pre-programmed to fly specific routes from the launch point to the target area then on to a recovery orbit, but could be taken off the program and manually flown for course correction, if necessary. To recover the drones, Sikorsky CH-3 helicopters were modified with the Mid Air Retrieval System (MARS) similar to that used by C-130s to snatch film packages during parachute descent after being ejected from first-generation satellites. The drone launch, control, and recovery squadron, the 350th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron (350thSRS) was assigned to Strategic Air Command (SAC) as part of the 100th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing along with its sister U-2 squadron. I was a DC-130 pilot/aircraft commander in the 350th SRS from 1967 to 1971 during which

my aircrew launched well over 100 drones into North Vietnam and China in operations Bumpy Action and Buffalo Hunter.

When North Vietnamese air defenses made operations by manned RF-101, RF-4C, RF-8, and RF-5C photo reconnaissance aircraft too hazardous, the decision was made to use the strategic reconnaissance drones in a tactical reconnaissance role. Variations of the high-altitude BQM-34 Firebee were produced with short wings for extremely low altitude flight. This enabled the drones to avoid radar detection, minimize being shot down by enemy action, and fly beneath the cloud cover that often hampered other photo reconnaissance systems.

The range of the low altitude drones was not sufficient to launch them from ground sites in South Vietnam. Launching from US Navy ships was attempted and rejected. Therefore, forward operating locations were established in South Vietnam and Thailand for air launch and recovery of the drones. The DC-130s were located at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam and later at U-Tapao, Thailand, and the CH-3 recovery aircraft were at Da Nang, South Vietnam, and later at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. In addition, Ground Recovery Control Officers were stationed at Monkey Mountain near Da Nang—their task was to control the recovery of the drones returning from missions off the coast of Da Nang. SAC would not release operational control of the drones to 7th Air Force in Saigon, so the missions were controlled from SAC Headquarters in Omaha, NE, halfway around the world and many times zones away. A cumbersome system at best.

Typically, two aircraft and two launch aircrews were TDY to Bien Hoa or U-Tapao for rotations that lasted 70 days, with a parallel setup of CH-3 MARS aircrews and Ground Recovery Control Officers at Da Nang.

All missions that targeted SEA, China, and North Korea were classified as Top Secret, as was the existence of the drone reconnaissance capability at that time. Mission profiles were similar to those employed by special operations forces: totally clandestine, mid-altitude flight followed by low

level, radar-evading penetration into enemy territory, and mission execution followed by recovery. A typical mission called for a DC-130 with a drone under each wing to launch from Bien Hoa or U-Tapao before daybreak so as to use darkness to mask the true identity of the DC-130 during taxi and takeoff and to reach the target in early morning when atmospheric conditions were favorable for photography.

If only one drone mission was scheduled that day, both drones were programmed with the same route and target information, and the drone that was judged to be operationally and navigationally superior by their operators in the DC-130, called Launch Control Officers (LCOs), would be selected for launch. If the sortie required two separate drone missions on the same DC-130 sortie, timing of the launches was normally 3 hours apart to allow for the recycling of the CH-3s at Da Nang. In this case, the two drones would be programmed for different launch points and routes.

The back end of the DC-130, in addition to stations for each of the two LCOs, contained a mission map on a plotting board to track the progress of the drone by an Airborne Recovery Control Officer (ARCO) and an Airborne Radar Technician (ART). Their task was to acquire, track, and, if necessary, manually control the drone to their targets or to the recovery area using the Microwave Command Guidance System (MCGS). The vast majority of SEA missions used low altitude drones. High altitude photo recon drones were sometimes used when the target area was free of cloud cover which did not occur very often. The MCGS system tracked the drone in flight by an antenna housed in a “chin dome” which protruded below the normal C-130 radome. The system tracked the drone position relative to the airborne DC-130. The actual location of the drone, however, was only as accurate as that of the DC-130’s navigation system, since the tracking system provided location of the drone relative to the DC-130, but not absolute geographical position. So, any error in the DC-130 position resulted in the same erroneous position of the drone on the plotting board mission map.

When the drone tracking system was initially designed, the mission of the drones was high altitude photography to supplement the U-2s where the air defenses in the target area precluded use of the U-2s. Therefore, the accuracy of the DC-130 launch point and resultant drone track was not a major factor because of the wide swath of photo coverage from over 70,000 feet. There was no anticipation when the system was modified for low altitude operations that they would need to know the absolute position of the drones over the ground. The accuracy of the DC-130’s navigation system was therefore never upgraded. A launch point inaccuracy of one mile was immaterial for high altitude drone taking photos at 70,000 feet. However, a one mile launch point deviation for a low altitude drone resulted in a 1 mile error in target coverage when the photographs were taken at 500 feet. This normally resulted in marginal oblique photography or missed targets. So, in the days before GPS and very accurate Inertial Navigation Systems, how did the DC-130 navigator direct the pilots to the exact intended launch point?

To preclude North Vietnam’s defenses from having advance warning of a drone penetration, the DC-130s flew the mission in total radio silence, including takeoff clearance from Bien Hoa tower. Takeoff was normally from 4 AM to 6 AM without a flight plan. The aircrew maintained VFR (if possible) at 17,500 feet flying overland to the Da Nang area at which time a decent was made as if entering the traffic pattern at Da Nang, mimicking the flight profile of “Klong Airlines” C-130s. (This was the nickname given to the routine airlift support missions flown in SEA.) Instead, the DC-130 would descent to 500 feet above the water offshore from Da Nang. For the next hour and a half the DC-130 would fly very low over water heading north, splitting the distance between North Vietnam’s southern panhandle and Hainan Island. The DC-130 was not equipped with terrain following/terrain avoidance radar—the low altitude over the water was maintained by visual reference if possible. If VFR flight could not be maintained, the DC-130 would proceed in IFR conditions at 500 feet over the water relying only on altimeter

readings. En-route the two LCOs would monitor the crude navigation systems of their respective drones to determine which drone was displaying the most accurate navigation information in order to decide which drone to launch for that day’s mission (single drone launch).

Typically, the DC-130 would stay at 500 feet until the navigator could paint Isle Bach Long island in the northern Gulf of Tonkin. This allowed him to update the DC-130’s location and to adjust the DC-130’s speed and track to achieve an on-time drone launch. Launch points over water in the northern Gulf of Tonkin were selected in the narrow band between two limits, just outside of the 19-mile, coastal SAM rings, but well within 30 miles of the coastline to allow the navigator to use the 30-mile range setting of the APN-59 radar to paint the land-water contrast of the North Vietnamese coastline.

At approximately 30 miles from the launch point, the DC-130 would pop up from 500 feet to launch altitude of 2,000 to 3,000 feet and slow to approximately 130 knots and maintain a very stable aircraft attitude to provide smooth airflow into the wind-milling drone engines. DC-130 airspeed was adjusted as necessary to obtain the correct windmill rpm of the drone engines for drone engine start. Once the 5% to 6% windmill rpm was achieved, along with steady DC-130 attitude, the LCOs would start the drone

engines and run their rpm to 80%. This would then allow the pilots to accelerate the DC-130 to 200 knots launch airspeed and to maneuver the aircraft as directed by the navigator to guide the DC-130 to the launch point.

The reliance on the navigator’s interpretation of aircraft location, based only on the 5-inch scope of the APN-59 radar in the 30-mile range mode for launch aircraft positioning of the DC-130, was the weak point of the whole weapon system and resulted in criticism of missed targets by the low altitude drones from uninformed critics. The critics did not understand that this was a high altitude, strategic reconnaissance system that had been thrust into a low altitude tactical reconnaissance role... operations for which it was not designed. The DC-130’s navigation system was eventually improved by the addition of the LN-16A Stellar Inertial Doppler System, but not early enough in the SEA conflict to affect the vast majority of Buffalo Hunter missions. Had GPS been operational then, it would have been of great value.

After the drone was launched and accelerated away from the DC-130, the DC-130 would make a hard climbing 180° turn to avoid entering into the SAM ring and the flaps would be lowered to 100% as soon as the airspeed declined to the flap-lowering limit. This was to



CH-3 after successful Mid Air Retrieval System (MARS) catch of a high altitude drone.



DC-130 en-route to Southeast Asia drone launch point on a Buffalo Hunter mission.
(Photo courtesy of author)

achieve a nose-down climbing attitude at 145 knots to allow the MCGS chin dome to “see” the drone by line-of-sight beneath the DC-130 fuselage and not be blocked by the body of the aircraft as the drone proceeded over enemy territory at the 6 o’clock position relative to the DC-130. The route of the drone would be monitored on the plotting board in the DC-130 and, if the drone deviated from its intended route, the drone could be taken off program and hand-flown back to its planned route and then switched back to its internal program.

The DC-130 maintained radio silence, but monitored “Bandit” calls, which were announcements of MIG launches from “Red Crown,” the Navy ship that monitored and coordinated activities in the northern Gulf of Tonkin. EB-66 electronic warfare aircraft provided jamming support on most DC-130 missions.

If the drone returned from its target run in North Vietnam, it was programmed to initiate a max-performance climb as soon as it was “feet wet “ (over the water) and to fly to an orbit at above 50,000 feet off the coast of Da Nang. Control of the drone would be handed off from the DC-130 to a Ground Recovery Control Officer at Monkey Mountain for positioning for recovery by a pair of CH-3s orbiting at 13,000 feet and rigged with the MARS system.

Due to the 500 to 1,000 foot altitude flight routes, drones collected the highest

resolution photos and were among the most survivable photo reconnaissance systems operating over North Vietnam. They were also the most effective collection system during the monsoon season when low-cloud-cover prevented high altitude systems from seeing the target areas. Drones were also used as decoys for other electronic surveillance aircraft to map the North Vietnam air defense system and later for chaff and leaflet dispensing. For example, in 1966 a high altitude drone was used as an expendable decoy to capture—and relay immediately to another capture source --- key SA-2 guidance and firing electronic signals that lead to the development of the AN/APR-26 Threat Warning System, which saved many aircraft and lives of aircrew members in the years to come. Another key role of drones was to capture Bomb Damage Assessment footage during bombing mission in North Vietnam, especially the Linebacker I and II operations over North Vietnam. From the mid-60 to the mid-70s, 3,435 drone missions were flown into North Vietnam with drone losses totaling 578. The average number of sorties by the same drone started out at less than four before the drone was lost due to enemy action or other reasons, and gradually increased to over nine sorties per drone by the end of the Buffalo Hunter operation. The record number of missions flown by one drone belonged to a low altitude drone given the name “Tom Cat” which logged 68

missions before being downed by anti-aircraft artillery fire.

If the drone returned and was successfully recovered and transported to Da Nang by the CH-3s, the DC-130s would land at Da Nang to upload the drones to their pylons and return them to home base for recycling; the film would be flown from Da Nang to Saigon by awaiting T-39 “Scatback” couriers for immediate developing and initial interpretation by photo interpreters of the 12th Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron (12th RITS).

The only other survivable reconnaissance weapon systems, the SR-71s and early satellites, were hampered by cloud cover, especially during the monsoon season, and their photo resolution was affected by the great distances between their cameras and the targets.

The most unusual North Vietnam drone photo reconnaissance mission I was involved in resulted in a photo from the mission appearing in a US magazine. My aircrew was not scheduled to fly the next day, so we all went to the club at Bien Hoa and had a few. The Airborne Recovery Control Officer (ARCO) on our crew loved White Russians (vodka, coffee liqueur, and cream) and had a few too many. At around midnight, we were contacted at the club and told that SAC Recon Center had decided to add a mission with a takeoff at 6AM. Last-minute mission additions often happened due to the time zone differences between Vietnam and Omaha. The drone we were to launch was the last of a primitive drone model that had to be partially hand-flown by the ARCO crewmember. The real reason for the mission, I suspect, was to get rid of the drone and the requirement to maintain the tech orders and other records for this one-of-a-kind piece of inventory. I helped drag the ARCO to our trailer and put him to bed while the more-sober LCOs re-acquainted themselves with the pre-planned mission route information. We were lucky that the route had been flown before and the LCOs would not have to plan the mission from scratch.

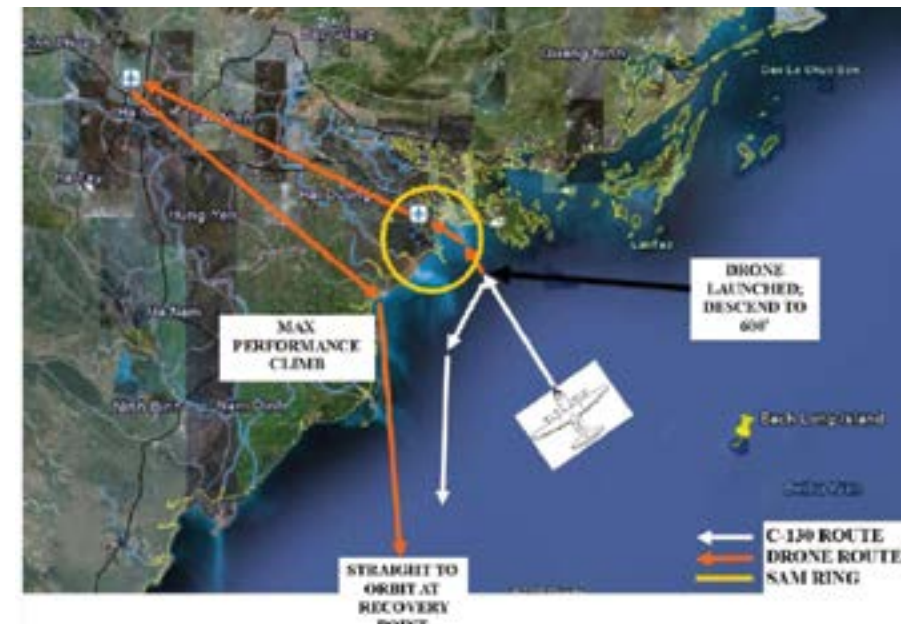
After a few hours sleep, we took off, let the ARCO get additional sleep en-route, woke him and pumped coffee

into him. We launched the drone on time and somehow he hand flew the drone successfully, staring bleary-eyed at the fluctuating needles. This particular model flew its own route, but the ARCO had to “hand fly” the altitude segments manually by monitoring the drone position on the plotting board map and manually commanding climbs, descents and throttle settings. To our astonishment, no enemy action was taken against the drone and, despite the condition of the ARCO that had to fly it, the drone returned with good photography.

A day or so later, we got a call from SAC Recon Center asking us what altitude was the drone flying on a certain segment of the route. The ARCO checked the mission data and reported “600 feet”. The response from SAC Recon Center was that the photo interpreters had determined by triangulation and other methods at their disposal that the drone was actually at 60 feet. But that is not the end of the story. A photo from that flight segment eventually appeared in Aviation Week and Space Technology on 26 Jul 1971 showing that the drone had flown under power lines and the caption that appeared with the photo included these words: “...Photo taken from an Air Force reconnaissance drone as it flew under power lines in North Vietnam demonstrates ability of unmanned aircraft, presumably controlled by operator on launching aircraft miles away, to steer vehicle at low altitudes past hazardous obstacles. Scale of support tower at left suggests drone may be less than 100 feet above terrain...”. See photo that follows.

Photographic film was initially interpreted in Saigon by the 12th RITS, followed by detailed analysis by the 1127th Field Activities Group at Ft Belvoir, Virginia. On 9 May 1970, a photo interpreter studying Buffalo Hunter drone film discovered messages from the Son Tay camp that only could have come from American POWs and could only be

Low altitude drone “Tom Cat” being pre-flighted prior to Southeast Asia mission; note numerous parachute decals symbolizing successful MARS catches following successful missions. (Photo courtesy of author)



Typical drone reconnaissance mission targeting North Vietnamese airfields and other targets. (Photo courtesy of author)

seen from the air. He initially discovered the letters S-A-R in tap code and he and other photo interpreters eventually learned the names of the POWs held in the Son Tay camp from Buffalo Hunter and SR-71 photography. The ingenious POWs at Son Tay had found a way to communicate with the outside world!! This is what started the effort to rescue the POWs from Son Tay.

Immediate feedback was not given to the DC-130 or CH-3 aircrews when significant intelligence was captured by drones they had launched or recovered in case they were shot down and captured on subsequent missions. Like the quiet

professionals of special operations, successful coverage of targets known only as a set of coordinates was sufficient mission accomplishment feedback. On a good day, we would be told that 100% of the targets had been covered on our mission. On a bad day, both drones launched on a single DC-130 sortie would not return, which happened to me once.

However, my DC-130 aircrew and that of Maj John Watson were briefed in late September of 1970 that a very important target, identified only by a set of coordinates, was in great need of photo coverage which resulted in a change in





Aviation Week and Space Technology photo in 26 Jul 1971 edition. (Photo courtesy of author)

our pattern of missions. 7th Air Force, through Headquarters SAC, had ordered a surge in drone missions targeting this set of coordinates. Only months later did we find out that the target was Son Tay and this was the surge activity to determine whether the POWs were still at the camp and to update the intelligence for the planned raid a few weeks later.

We were directed to use different tactics to deny or delay advance warning of drone penetration to enhance drone survivability. One example was to not pop up to launch altitude at the usual 30 mile initial point, but to delay the pop-up as long as possible and the resultant exposure of our aircraft to coastal enemy radar on the launch run. The drawback of this tactic was to reduce the time and distance available to the navigator to paint the land-water contrast he needed to direct the DC-130 to an accurate launch point. Another tactic was to send a decoy DC-130, with no drones attached to the pylons, to the normal Gulf of Tonkin launch area and pop up as if launching a drone. This decoy action was intended to focus the attention of the North Vietnam air defense system, including the launching of MIGs, to the Gulf, while the other DC-130 launched a drone at 20,000

feet from an overland position near the western border of North Vietnam to send the drone to cover Son Tay coming in from the west, or the “back side”.

Due to the lack of terrain features for radar identification in the Plain of Jars/Laos/western North Vietnam area, fixing the location of the DC-130 for acceptable launch accuracy using the APN-59 radar was impossible, but we tried that tactic several times anyway at high risk to the DC-130 aircrews. We were normally escorted by two Navy F-4s for protection against MIGs in the Gulf when our missions took us north of 18° 30', and by four F-4s when north of 19°. But having the F-4s escort us on the “back side” routes would have been an unacceptable tactic that would have divulged our clandestine launch, so we flew these mission during daylight hours without escort, at high risk. After more than a week-long effort at targeting Son Tay with both my and John Watson's crews flying daily 8-hour missions, the surge operation was terminated and we resumed our usual pattern of activity of each crew flying every other day and we returned to our normal targets of Hanoi, Vinh, Haiphong, Kep, Phuc Yen, and other POW camps or targets.

Only months later did I discover by reading the Stars and Stripes that the “important target” was Son Tay. My immediate reaction was that our repeated efforts to send a drone over Son Tay was

the reason the POWs were moved before the raid. I was relieved to learn when I attended the Special Operations School and heard the lecture on Son Tay that the POWs had been moved before our surge operation and that, although drone activities resulted in the discovery of the POWs at Son Tay, it was not because of the surge in targeting Son Tay that the POWs were moved.

So, why did we fail to provide crucial photographic evidence to confirm the presence of POWs at Son Tay before the raid, after having been responsible for discovering their existence in the first place? The primary reason was the limitations of the navigational systems of both the DC-130 and the drones, and other factors beyond our control, such as enemy action, weather, and drone mechanical problems...and bad luck.

After each mission, we were required to report mission results to SAC headquarters. The navigator portion of the report would normally indicate that launch was 2/3 mile long, 1/2 mile right, or some other launch inaccuracy. This, along with a consistent average of only 40% of targets successfully covered, bothered SAC Headquarters, so they sent a blue ribbon team to fly with us to determine why we repeatedly reported deviation from intended launch point and had so many missed targets. When the B-52 navigator on the blue ribbon team boarded the aircraft on our mission

being inspected, he asked, “Where is your bomb-nav radar system?” Our navigator said “We have none, we use the 5-inch scope of the APN-59 radar to vector the launch aircraft to the launch point.” Astounded, the SAC navigator stated in his report that our aircrews did a remarkable job with the equipment we had. Another factor was the drone navigation system. After launch, the drone used a not-very-accurate Doppler system to detect each mile traveled on its route. The drone's navigation system had a 3% error rate which meant that after 100 nautical miles traveled, only 50% of the time the drone would be within a 3-mile diameter circle centered on the 100 mile point along the intended route. Events were entered into the internal drone programmer to occur at certain miles-travelled points from launch, e.g. descend immediately and accelerate after launch to obtain separation from the launch aircraft, descend to 500 feet at mile 20, climb to 800 feet at mile 33 to avoid terrain, turn left 30 degrees at mile 37, camera on at mile 45, camera off at mile 50, etc. Any error in the drone's detecting miles travelled would compound with each mile travelled, resulting in events occurring before or after the intended mile point, with increasing inaccuracy the further the drone travelled.

In Benjamin Schemmer's book on the Son Tay raid, *The Raid*, he commented that one of the drones turned just before Son Tay, resulting in very good photography of the horizon beyond the camp and having missed the camp itself. This was probably on a mission where the drone was launched accurately and the drone was on centerline of its intended route, but the drone's Doppler mile counter was off, resulting in an early turn. Then there was enemy action that shot the drones down, either by anti-aircraft artillery, SAMs, or North Vietnam fighter aircraft. It has been documented that in 1970 alone, 540 MIGs were launched to intercept drones over North Vietnam.

Mechanical problems with the drones also occurred that resulted in crashes over enemy territory or en-route back to the recovery area over water. We had to make quick decisions when we would detect that the drone autopilot

was malfunctioning. This normally resulted in the drone falling out of the sky over land or water. Our choices were, command the drone parachute to deploy and have the drone land in the water in an area where the US Navy could retrieve it before it sank or do nothing and let the drone crash and destroy itself before it could be retrieved intact by the enemy. If we commanded parachutes, the DC-130 would have to try to spot the parachute during descent, race toward the drone so we could catch sight of it before it hit the water, and orbit over the floating drone while directing the US Navy to the location for the recovery of the drone. Once the drone landed in the water and the parachute sank, the floating gray-colored drone was difficult to spot and keep in sight. If the film got immersed in salt water, it could be salvaged by keeping it in salt water until being processed in Saigon. The US Navy took great pride in recovering our malfunctioning drones from the Gulf and painting a “ship” decal on the side of the drone along with the several “parachute” decals indicating successful CH-3 catches using the MARS system.

Also, the MARS system of catching the drone during parachute descent was not 100% reliable. Once in a while the MARS system would malfunction resulting in the drone crashing into the water and sinking into the waters off of Da Nang. In at least one incident, a US Navy fighter shot down one of our returning drones, mistaking it for a MIG chasing our DC-130.

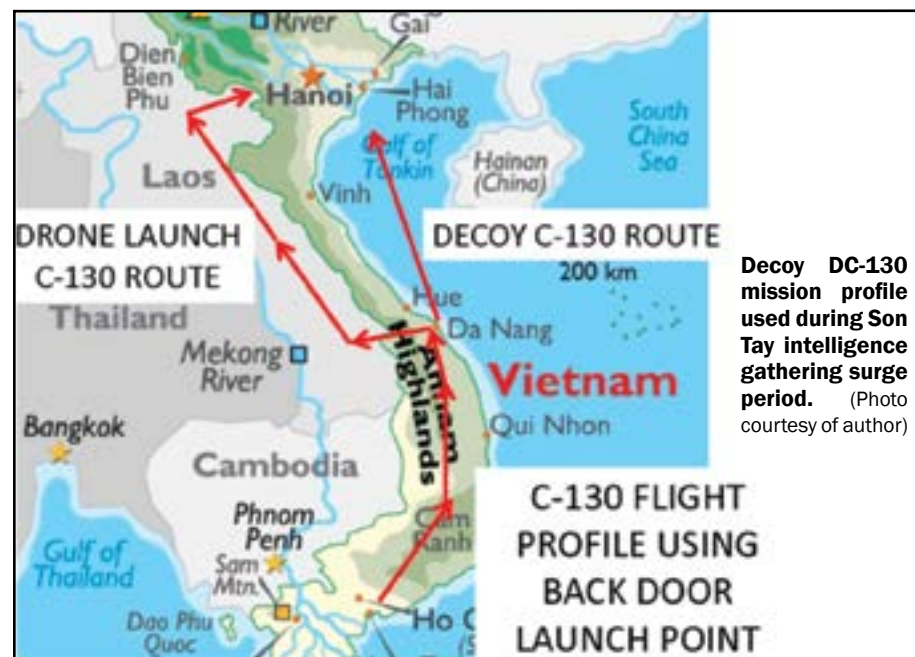
In historic retrospect, I have often wondered what would have happened during our surge missions in late September and October 1970 had one of our two DC-130 aircrews been successful in getting a drone over Son Tay and confirming that the camp was empty of POWs. Would the Son Tay raid have been scrapped? Had the Son Tay raid not occurred, the 500 or so POWs in outlying camps would not have been brought to the Hanoi Hilton and other better-defended camps nearer to Hanoi. And the POWs would have remained in solitary confinement at the outlying camps if the raid had not occurred. The tap code for communication and the establishment of the POW organization

and chain of command probably would not have been as effective as it ended up being had the raid not occurred. I have attended reunions of the Son Tay Raiders Association and been told that the welfare of all POWs increased substantially once they were brought to more centralized Hanoi-area camps in which they were able communicate with and support each other, resulting in being able to better survive their captivity.

As in Eagle Claw, the Iran hostage rescue mission, the initial profound disappointment of the participants and supporting units in the Son Tay Raid, such as the Buffalo Hunter aircrews, eventually gave way to a more positive, redemptive mode when the long-term effects of their efforts panned out. This has been repeated in several special operations. The unintended consequences of a technically “failed” mission produced unintended consequences in the form of substantial benefits, not anticipated, that enhanced special operations and US military capability far more than the benefits that would have been achieved had the mission objectives been totally satisfied.



About the Author: Col Roland D Guidry, USAF (Ret.) was involved in several Special Operations missions during his 26-year Air Force career, dominated by Special Operations in both the operational and the test and evaluation areas. In addition to Son Tay intelligence gathering as a Bumpy Action and Buffalo Hunter DC-130 Aircraft Commander, he was the commander of the 8th Special Ops Squadron and the safety pilot on the lead MC-130 on Eagle Claw, the Iran Hostage Rescue Mission. As a founding member of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), he was JSOC's first chief of air operations and second Air Force Component Commander and, as such, commanded JSOC's Air Component during preparations and exercises leading up to Urgent Fury, the Grenada Mission. He also spent nine years in Special Operations Test and Evaluation and managed the development of several Special Ops capabilities such as the Airdrop of the Rubber Raiding Craft with Seal Team Two in the mid-70s. He is an inductee into the Air Commando Hall of Fame and lectures on military aviation topics on cruise ships and other venues.





Bladder Birds

By CMSgt (Ret) Ray Doyle

During the planning for Operation Eagle Claw, the April 1980 attempt to rescue the American hostages from the embassy in Iran, the planners determined that Navy RH-53D Sea Stallion helicopters would be the best option for inserting the ground team because of their superior range and load-carrying capacity. The Navy helicopters were optimized for shipboard operations they were not air refuellable and could not fly from the aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean to Tehran. There were no MH-53 Pave Lows in AFSOC at that time.

After several tests proved that airdropping 5,000 lb fuel blivets would not meet mission requirements, the decision was made to use EC-130s from Keesler AFB, MS, with the Airborne Command, Control, and Communications capsule removed, to transport the fuel and refueling pumps, hoses, and extra equipment to Iran and set up a forward area refueling point (FARP) at the Desert One trans-load site. In the fall 2013 issue of *Air Commando Journal* (Vol. 2, Issue 4), Jerry Uttaro describes how that decision was reached.

The USAF did have a FARP option and equipment available in 1980, called Harvest Eagle. The special operations FARP procedures we know today, however, were not a tactic then. The Harvest Eagle packages had been used extensively in Southeast Asia, but were normally deployed in a benign environment. Large rubber fuel bladders, capable of holding 3000 gallons of fuel, were secured to large platforms that could be loaded into C-130 aircraft. Pumps powered by diesel engines were secured on smaller 463L pallets. The platforms with the fuel bladder were loaded on the cargo floor and the pumps were loaded on the cargo ramp. The bladders would be filled, the aircraft flown to a forward field, and the fuel

offloaded with the pumps by fuels personnel and the crew. It was decided to use this equipment and modified procedures to deliver the fuel needed by the helicopters.

I was the loadmaster on the first aircraft sent to pick up one of these Harvest Eagle packages and the fuels personnel that would accompany it. These systems would normally be loaded on C-130 aircraft with dual rails to accommodate the Harvest Eagle platforms. This was not the case for us since we were flying EC-130s that were not equipped with the rails; the cargo floor had intermediate rollers and roller conveyers, so everything had to be secured with chains. When the fuels personnel, that were to accompany the Harvest Eagle package, saw this they immediately said that they would not load their equipment onto our aircraft. After much discussion I asked to speak to their officer in charge (OIC), who in turn repeated that they were not going to load that equipment onto our aircraft. Again after much discussion, I asked if there was a secure telephone I could use. I called a number that I had written down earlier and the individual on the other end told me he would handle it and to just stand by. Within an hour a colonel arrived in a staff car. He called the OIC, the NCOIC, and I to the side and explained that he did not fully understand what was going on, but the fuels personnel were to give us whatever we needed in order to get us out of there as soon as possible. We loaded the equipment and the accompanying fuels personnel and departed for Hurlburt. Little did those fuels personnel know what they were getting into.

The Harvest Eagle Systems were normally loaded aboard and offloaded using K-loaders. We did not have an abundance of K-loaders at Hurlburt during that period. As a matter of fact

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we had exactly one. We used a rather ingenious procedure with two forklifts to load most of the aircraft. It worked, but was not a procedure that will ever be printed in any loading manual.

As we started to practice with these systems, the crews of the helicopters were concerned that the fuel we were providing would clog their fuel filters. It was the same fuel that our engines were using, but to eliminate any possibility of fuel contamination we put large fuel filters in-line between our pumps and the refueling nozzles.

We were using conventional fuels equipment, large hoses with cam-lock fittings, and very large fuel filters. We were adapting procedures to rapidly deploy this equipment out of the back of a running C-130 to a running helicopter while blacked out and looking through very antiquated NVGs.

Initially, we had fuels personnel that were trained on the Harvest Eagle equipment, but as time progressed and requirements increased, we started using

fuels personnel from Hurlburt. Some of these personnel were tapped only days prior to deployment. I took them to Supply and had flight gear issued to them and we continued to trained them enroute. It was a bit of a shock to some of these young guys, to say the least. A week before, they were driving a fuel truck or working in the fuel yard and had no idea what was coming.

After we launched from Hurlburt we remained over night in the Azores. After takeoff from the Azores the next morning, as we were climbing out, there was a very loud bang from the cargo ramp area on my aircraft. I assumed one of the cargo ramp locks had popped over center as the aircraft was pressurized. This is not uncommon and is normally not a big problem. The aircraft was packed with personnel and cargo. I took my flashlight and worked my way to the ramp area to inspect the locks. What I found was not good. Of the 10 locks that normally keep the cargo ramp closed, only 3 or 4 were engaged. Pressurizing the aircraft could

cause the rest of the lock to fail or we might not be able to hold pressurization. We took all the available chains and devices and secured the ramp to the structural members alongside it then tightened down the devices as securely as we could. I saw the aircraft a few years later and some of those structural members were still bent from all the tightening we hurriedly accomplished on that flight. We continued the rest of the mission that away, chaining the ramp after each takeoff and unchaining it when we were low enough to depressurize. When we landed in Germany after the mission, they pulled the floor panel on the ramp to fix the locks only to find that the spider gear that controlled all the locks were destroyed. That was a ramp change.



Editor's note: For more information on what the Combat Talon loadmasters accomplished to test and certify the FARP procedures, we recommend CMSgt "Taco" Sanchez's article in ACJ Vol. 2, Issue 4.

The PAVE LOW PARKING LOT

By Col Bruce Taylor



7 Dec 2001

We were scheduled for a routine mission to provide Helicopter Air Refueling (HAR) to a 4-ship of MH-53 Pave Low helicopters as they returned from an operation in Afghanistan. We launched from Masirah Island, off the southeast coast of Oman and planned to rendezvous with a KC-135 tanker over the Indian Ocean for our own in-flight refueling. We were to join and refuel the formation of Pave Lows over Pakistan, after the helicopters exited Afghanistan.

Our MC-130E departed Masirah Island en-route to our initial refueling. The crew was monitoring various command and control (C2) frequencies when we overheard that our 4-ship helicopter package was in trouble. Due to weather and mechanical issues with their scheduled in-country refueling, the Pave Lows had been unable to get their required gas and would be in a fuel-critical status in less than an hour. Our navigators did some quick calculations and determined that we would be unable to make our own scheduled tanker in time to help the helicopters. We began looking for any available aircraft that could serve as a tanker of opportunity. At the same time, we were coordinating with the Pave Low Mission Commander (MC) via SATCOM on our next move. We were able to convince a KC-10 tanker to start heading our way and then had the E-3 AWACS give us intercept vectors to the tanker.

We rendezvoused with the KC-10. Unfortunately, the tanker flat-out refused to go below their hard deck of 14,000' MSL, even though we explained we were trying to help fellow airmen in trouble. Even at full power, our Talon was too heavy and performance-limited to maintain the refueling airspeed at that altitude. The only way to establish contact the tanker was for us to climb above the KC-10, then dive at full power to break through the tanker's aerodynamic 'bow wave' and get into refueling position long enough for them to stick us. This maneuver enabled us to hang on the boom, at full power, for a minute or two for each contact.

Meanwhile, the navigators were plotting the progress of the Pave Lows and getting dismal updates about their fuel status. After several painful hookups with the KC-10, we decided we had taken on enough fuel. We climbed to take advantage of higher winds at altitude and headed towards the Paves. The helicopters were now getting desperate and made plans to ground laager (land, establish a security perimeter, and keep the engines running) in enemy territory in order to save fuel and wait for us. Realizing we would not get there in time without bending the rules, we had a quick discussion and started a shallow descent, increasing our speed beyond our maximum recommended airspeed of 250 KIAS (VMAX), while keeping



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a safe margin below our Never Exceed speed (VNE) of .64 Mach. Exceeding VNE would be catastrophic.

Mach is a ratio based on the speed of sound where Mach 1 is the speed of sound at a given altitude. Complicating matters for our crew was that the Talon does not have instrumentation that displays the aircraft's Mach number, something that is standard on aircraft that regularly operate in the transonic and supersonic ranges, but is not normally necessary for C-130s. The speed of sound is temperature and pressure dependent, so it changes with altitude. Temperature and pressure go down as altitude increases, thus the speed of sound increases the higher one flies, and vice versa. We had to keep estimating our VNE versus the indicated airspeed shown in the cockpit as we made our descent.

Communications between us, the Pave Low MC, and various C2 nodes was challenging, so we divided radio responsibilities between pilots, navigators, electronic warfare officer (EWO), and the radio operator. The helicopters were now on the ground and getting fuel low lights. They had landed in a fairly narrow valley surrounded by 8,000' mountains. At some point, the helicopter crews had a discussion about abandoning the helicopters and disabling them in place. Anxiety levels and a sense of urgency rose significantly when



we heard the laager site had also attracted the attention of the locals, who were approaching and within a few kilometers of their position. A call was made for close air support, but the nearest gunship was still about 30 minutes away.

The Pave Low MC talked us through the plan. We were to descend to 500' AGL and offset about 2 miles right of the laager point, as quickly as possible. Then, we would pull back the power, aggressively roll into a 60° left turn while bleeding off airspeed, and extend the hoses as we rolled out. This would set us up on approach and over the laager point at 110 knots. Meanwhile, the Pave Lows would throttle up as they saw us approaching and the two most fuel-critical aircraft would simultaneously plug-in as the Talon's hoses finished extending.

Amazingly, this plan worked great! It turns out the Pave Low community had discussed this option and worked out the details long before we met that night. But, it was the first time any of the Talon guys had heard of the idea. The valley was narrow and too short to complete the refueling of all four helicopters without circling back to complete the last two aircraft. Although this was a rather tactically unsound practice, the high terrain prevented us from climbing out of the valley in our refueling configuration and at the slow airspeed. Still, all four helicopters got the fuel they needed and safely returned to their base.

Unfortunately, we had given too much gas to the helicopters for us to make it back to Oman. There were no tankers available so we started coordinating for an emergency stop. We had barely enough fuel to make it to a forward operating base (FOB) in Pakistan, but that was the only solution possible. Despite some anxious moments, by doing everything we could to decrease our fuel consumption we safely arrived at final approach at the FOB, although with questionable fuel available.

To round out the evening, on short final the EWO picked up indications of an infra-red missile as we were on short final. Unable to divert and without the fuel available for a go-around, we popped flares, hoped for the best, and landed. After all that had happened that night, the refueling and subsequent flight back to our staging base in Oman was anti-climactic. We arrived at home well after sunrise.

Given the night's poor visibility, high winds, and mountainous terrain, the only chance of helping those Pave Lows was because of the MC-130E Combat Talon's unique capabilities. We used about every trick in the book and wrote a few new ones, too. The crew dealt with one crisis after another without flaw. The coordination, both inside and outside the cockpit, and expert navigation was exceptional. There is no better feeling than helping a brother-in-arms, and it's an honor to be part of the team that rose to the challenge.



About the Author: Col Bruce Taylor is the Deputy Commander, Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center. He directs formal and specialized training and education programs to produce combat-ready Air Commandos. He also oversees training for aviation advisors, enablers and augmentees who assess, train, advise and assist partner nations in foreign internal defense.

LAOS: THE SECRET WAR



Part One: Prelude to US Involvement

By: Lt Col (Ret) Ramon E. "Ray" de Arrigunaga

The name of this landlocked country in Southeast Asia (SEA) conjures up different memories and emotions for different people. The most vivid of these are found in the minds of those who were involved in combat operations there during the 1960s and 1970s.

Many of us who flew over Laos and lived there experienced the old aviation saying: "Hours and hours of boredom, punctuated by moments of sheer terror!!!"

The war in Laos was not very well known, although it was an enormous adjunct to the war in Vietnam. The war in Vietnam was telecast on an almost daily basis to millions of TV viewers, but the war in Laos was hardly ever mentioned. Yet for the tens of thousands who were actively involved in this conflict in and over Laos (including the author), this war was our reality in SEA.

The general lack of knowledge of the war in Laos was driven primarily by the fact that virtually all aspects of this conflict were classified. No one spoke openly about the war in Laos. Generally, one would speak about this war only to others who had been there. As a result, even today, there are many who are completely unfamiliar with the US involvement in Laos. However, Hurlburt Field in northwest Florida, original home of the USAF Air Commandos, was one place where this war was well known due to the number of USAF personnel who deployed to Laos from that base.

For those of us who were involved in this war, it was a

defining experience. For those of us old enough to remember, the Milton Caniff comic strip, "Terry and the Pirates," in some ways resembled our Laotian environment.

Ultimately, we were in Laos for two reasons, first we wanted to prevent the Laotian Communist leaders and insurgent army ("Pathet Lao") from capturing the government of Laos and turning it into a communist state, thereby threatening the independence of Thailand and other independent states in Southeast Asia. In this regard, we provided support to the Royal Laotian Military Forces (army and air force), as well as to the indigenous, irregular ground forces in North Laos composed mainly of the Hmong hill tribesmen, commanded by Laotian Maj Gen Vang Pao, who were trained and equipped by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Second, we wanted to interdict the vast amounts of men, equipment and supplies moving on the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT) in the eastern Laotian Panhandle en route to South Vietnam and Cambodia. Most of this interdiction effort originated in Thailand and South Vietnam.

Another lesser known supply route was the Sihanouk Trail which ran from the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville into the southeast portion of Cambodia, paralleling the lower portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail (map, p.24). Because this supply route was completely within Cambodia, it was off limits to aerial interdiction.

The war in Laos had many facets. It was totally intertwined

with the war in South Vietnam, as well as with the air war over North Vietnam. There were American military and civilian personnel who were permanently stationed in Laos. These personnel were assigned to the offices of the army and air attaches in the US Embassy in Vientiane (administrative capital of Laos). Others who were involved in these Laotian operations were the personnel at DEPCHIEF, JUSMAAGTHAI, USAID Requirements Office, and the Program Evaluation Office.

Additionally, numerous American military personnel were covertly assigned on a temporary duty basis (TDY) to perform various combat and combat support functions within Laos (USAF's "Project 404"). These functions included command and control, training indigenous forces, intelligence, logistics, communications and aircraft maintenance. Among these were the "Butterfly" and "Raven" Forward Air Controllers (FACs), who worked directly with Laotian forces. Military personnel from the Thailand Armed Forces were also involved in this war and many of these were stationed in Laos.

There were also numerous civilians who were involved in this war. Among these were the members of the CIA, the US embassy staff, other US government agencies, Air America and Continental Air Lines.

Then there were those forces located in Vietnam and in Thailand whose mission involved combat flying over Laos on an almost daily basis. These included:

- Aircrews and aircraft of the 56th Special Operations Wing (SOW), flying T-28, A1-E, A-26A, C-123, AC-119, U-10,

CH-3, and CH-53 aircraft, located at Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand (NKP), and occasionally augmented with US Army and Naval aviation units.

- FAC units like the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS), also at NKP, and its sister-squadron the 20th TASS flying out of South Vietnam. Both units flew initially O-1s, and later, O-2s and OV-10s.

- Rescue units flying HC-130s, HH-3s, and HH-53s on search and rescue missions.

- Other units flying fighter and reconnaissance aircraft (F-4, F-105, F-111 and RF-4), EC-130 Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC) aircrews ("Cricket," "Moonbeam," "Hillsboro," and "Alleycat"), and "Blind Bat" C-130 night FACs, AC-130 gunship, and US Army radio surveillance aircraft.

- Detachment 1 of the 56th SOW was located at Udorn Air Base, Thailand. Its T-28 "Waterpump" instructor pilots trained Royal Laotian Air Force pilots, to perform air interdiction, close air support, and FAC duties.

- Task Force Alpha, also located at NKP which operated the sensor array implanted along the HCMT as part of Operation Igloo White.

Working with these aerial forces were US Army Special Forces teams assigned to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam - Studies & Observations Group (MACV-SOG). These teams were inserted into the HCMT in Laos, where they conducted extremely hazardous ground reconnaissance operations.

These aerial and ground forces were also supported by B-52 bombers and KC-135 tankers flying out of U-Tapao Air Base, Thailand, and Anderson AFB, Guam. Navy aircraft from aircraft carriers operating in the South China Sea also directly supported these combat operations.

Also participating in the Laotian arena were the personnel belonging to the International Control Commission (ICC) in Laos. They flew white helicopters (mostly H-19s) and attempted to insure compliance with the provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos. The members of the ICC included Canada, Poland and India.

In order to better understand how this diverse group of people and military assets worked together in this "secret" war, we can briefly review the history of the conflict summarizing the international environment and conflicts that had taken place, globally and regionally, and which had such an enormous impact on Laos, its people, its economy, and government.

Much of the conflict in Laos was directly driven by events in Vietnam, especially during the nine years after World War II, up to, and including, the Geneva Agreements of 1954. These Agreements had an impact on Vietnam and on Laos.

In the late 1800s, France began its colonization activities in the area that became known as Indochina, and which eventually fragmented into present-day Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

At that time, Vietnam consisted of three distinct areas (map, p.25). The northern portion was referred to as Tonkin, the much-larger central portion was referred to as Annam, and the southern portion was referred to as Cochinchina.

Catholic missionaries also were involved in this area, seeking to expand Catholicism. These religious activities were always an integral part of global French colonizing efforts.

French troops arrived in the area in 1858, and French influence and control continued to expand. By 1887, France had complete control over all of the territory of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina, as well as Cambodia. Following the Franco-Siamese War of 1893, Laos was added to French Indochina. This federation would last until 1954.

In 1930, a series of anti-French uprisings erupted, instigated by Vietnamese nationalist groups who wanted to inspire the general population to revolt against French colonial authority. These efforts were put down brutally and violently. According to Dr Ronald Spector, professor of history and internal affairs at George Washington University, "An estimated 10,000 Vietnamese, many of whom had taken no part in the rebellion, were killed and another 50,000 were deported." These uprisings were a portent of things to come.

Early in WWII the French signed an armistice with Germany. The Vichy French government was left nominally in control of the southern half of France and the French colonies. On 22 September 1940 the Vichy French signed an agreement with the Japanese allowing Japan to station troops in Indochina and permit other Japanese troops to transit Indochina en route to China. By July 1941, tens of thousands additional Japanese troops had been stationed in southern Vietnam, preparing for the eventual invasion of the Dutch East Indies (present day Indonesia) and other areas in that region.

Over the next four years, Japanese influence and control in this area diminished as the Allies devastated the Japanese military throughout the Pacific, as well as in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theatre.

By March 1945, Germany was on the verge of unconditional surrender to the Allies, and Japan opted to take complete control of Indochina. With the liberation of France in March 1945, the Vichy government ceased to exist, and the Japanese feared an allied invasion of Indochina.

In the northern part of Vietnam, a guerrilla war had ensued; on one side were the units of the Free French Forces that had remained in Indochina after the fall of France in 1940 and their indigenous allies, together with the Viet Minh and the Indochinese Communist Party, all fighting together against the Imperial Japanese Army. The Viet Minh was a communist national independence coalition formed on 19 May 19 1941. The Viet Minh initially formed as a political movement to seek independence for Vietnam from France. Eventually, its military wing grew and evolved into a very potent and effective force.

The Japanese government ceased combat operations after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and formally surrendered on 2 Sep 1945. On that same date, Ho Chi Minh, one of the key Viet Minh leaders, declared the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. During the war, the US had supported the Viet Minh in their guerrilla struggle against the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh had hoped that the US would side with him and the Viet Minh, and prevent the French from returning to Indochina to reclaim their colony. This was not to be.

President Franklin Roosevelt had indicated his distaste for the French and their colonial activities. He was hopeful that Indochina could, over a period of time, be granted some autonomy and eventual independence. However, after Roosevelt's death, President Harry Truman wanted to place France in the position of a global great power once again to keep Soviet Communism from engulfing Western Europe. Since the US had no strategic interests in Indochina, Truman decided to support France against Ho Chi Minh in reclaiming its Indochina colony.

At the Potsdam Conference (July-August 1945) the Allies agreed that after hostilities terminated in the Pacific theater Chinese troops would enter the northern part of Vietnam to accept the Japanese surrender and arrange for the repatriation of Japanese troops. They also forced a tenuous, short-lived peace agreement between the French military and the Viet Minh. The Chinese remained until March 1946, at which time the French military, with an influx of troops into Indochina, re-established their control over the region. Subsequently, they engaged in a series of battles with the Viet Minh as they tried to gain control of territory in the north of Vietnam.

In the south, British troops from the China-Burma-India Theatre, also operating under the Potsdam agreement, had arrived in Saigon to accept the Japanese surrender, establish

Map showing Ho Chi Minh Trail. (Courtesy US Air Force)



law and order, minimize anarchy and protect the population. The Viet Minh had also staged numerous riots, acts of violence and rebellion throughout the southern areas. Soon thereafter, the French military arrived, and together with the British, eventually forced the Viet Minh to withdraw from the urban areas to the rural areas.

By March 1946, the British withdrew completely from Indochina. Learning from their mistakes, the Viet Minh's combat tactics evolved into hit-and-run actions, ambushes and assassinations. For the next few years, the French military was faced with an ever-widening insurgency throughout the length of Vietnam and, to a lesser extent, within Laos.

In 1949, the Chinese Communists established the People's Republic of China (PRC) under Mao Tse-Tung. Chiang Kai-Shek and his Nationalist Military Forces withdrew to Taiwan. The PRC shared a common border with the northern part of Vietnam, and the PRC began to supply the Viet Minh (under the firm control of Ho Chi Minh and his key military leader, Gen Vo Nguyen Giap) with a flood of military supplies and equipment. This added capability allowed the Viet Minh insurgency to gradually escalate into conventional warfare against the French military, especially in the North.

In April 1953, Giap invaded the northeastern portion of Laos. In May, Gen Henri Navarre became supreme commander of French forces in Indochina. Navarre selected the town of Dien Bien Phu, located on a major roadway in northwestern Vietnam, close to the Laotian border, as the place to prevent further incursions into Laos by the Viet Minh. The Battle of Dien Bien Phu began on 13 Mar 1954, and ended when the French surrendered on 8 May 1954. A major factor in the success of the Viet Minh was that the French grossly underestimated the willpower and resolve of Gen Giap, Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh. Under incredibly difficult conditions and with almost super-human efforts, they succeeded in transporting heavy artillery and weapons up to the tops of the mountains surrounding the valley of Dien Bien Phu, where the French fortifications and airfields were established. These were devastated by incessant artillery bombardment.. This was a major catastrophe which prevented transport aircraft from delivering troop reinforcements and supplies to the beleaguered French military, and prevented the wounded from being evacuated.

French involvement and influence in this part of the world began to crumble rapidly after their defeat. The French people were tired of the war and wanted to extricate the nation from further conflict. Although the defeat at Dien Bien Phu was not a mortal setback militarily, politically in France it was! In a similar turn of events, in the United States dissatisfaction with the war in Vietnam would manifest itself with increasing public demonstrations and occasional spurts of violence, especially after the Tet Offensive in Vietnam which began in January 1968.

The French steady decampment from Vietnam was part of a larger geopolitical trend. During WW II, the Japanese initially defeated French, British and Dutch forces in Indochina, Burma, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. These defeats demonstrated to the native populations of these areas that

their European colonial masters were not invincible nor were they all-powerful. These ideas fermented into anti-colonial movements which eventually resulted in the independence of many Far Eastern European colonies, to include Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaya and Burma.

In Laos, a month after the official Japanese surrender in September, 1945, the Viceroy, Prince Phetsarath Rattanavongsa attempted to convince King Sisavang Vong to unify the country by abrogating the treaty of protection with the French because they had been unable to protect Laos from the Japanese. However, the King indicated that he intended to have Laos resume its former status as a French colony. Phetsarath was in complete disagreement with the king, and together with his two younger brothers, Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince Souphanouvong, formed a new Laotian government called the Lao Issara. This government was no match for the returning French military. On 27 Aug 1946, Laos became a constitutional monarchy within the French Union, and by September, 1946, the French had regained control of Laos.

The three brothers fled into exile in Thailand and, because of differing personal ambitions, soon split into three different factions. As pointed out by noted SEA expert, Dr. Tim Castle:

Phetsarath was an "ambitious and shrewd aristocrat" who sought to place himself on the Lao throne. Souvanna Phouma, the pragmatist, doubted the wisdom of military action against the French and instead prepared quietly for a return to a reconciled and unified nation, whose independence he felt was drawing near... Souphanouvong was "fiery, and quick-tempered... [and] advocated open war. Moreover, to the distress of many Laotians, Prince Souphanouvong had increasingly involved himself with the communist Viet Minh movement in Vietnam.

By late 1949, the Lao Issara had ceased to exist. On 29 Jan 1950, Laos was granted a degree of autonomy within the French Union as an "associated state," as were Cambodia and Vietnam. A week later, the US granted diplomatic recognition to these states, paving the way for direct military and economic assistance.

In August 1950, Souphanouvong convened a revolutionary congress at the Viet Minh Headquarters north of Hanoi and established a Laotian resistance movement called the Pathet Lao. This organization would be both political and military, and would be closely allied with the Viet Minh for the next few decades. Eventually, Souphanouvong established his headquarters in the province of Sam Neua, in northeastern Laos.

Souvanna Phouma was offered, and accepted, an offer of amnesty. He returned to Laos and became Prime Minister from 1951 until 1954, and again on three other occasions. Arguably, Souvanna Phouma was the most influential politician in Laos until 1975, when Laos became the communist Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Phetsarath remained in exile until 1957, when he returned to Laos. In April, he was given his previous title of Viceroy by King Sisavang Vong. He settled in Luang Prabang, the royal

capital, and remained there until his death in October 1959.

After the defeat of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, and their subsequent withdrawal from Indochina, it appeared that the whole of Indochina could descend into anarchy and civil war. The US was especially concerned with a communist takeover of Vietnam and what that could mean for the survival of democratic states within the entire region.

On 8 May 1954, representatives from France, the USSR, the US, The People's Republic of China, Great Britain, northern Vietnam, southern Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia met in Switzerland to work out a solution to the disastrous situation in Indochina. The Geneva Agreements of 1954 divided Vietnam into North Vietnam and South Vietnam, among other things. The dividing line was the 17th Parallel. North Vietnam would be under control of the Viet Minh forces led by Ho Chi Minh and South Vietnam would be an independent democracy that would very soon be controlled by the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Shortly thereafter, France completely withdrew from Vietnam.

The Geneva Agreements also affected Laos. As stated by Dr. Tim Castle:

Addressing the future of Laos, Sir Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary, declared that "Laos should remain as an independent and neutral buffer between China and Siam [Thailand]. It is therefore essential that the United States should not attempt to establish any military influence [there]. Any attempt to do so was bound to provoke some countermove by China." The conferees agreed, and on 20 Jul 1954, Laos was "reaffirmed as a unitary, independent state with a single government in Vientiane. A cease-fire was to take effect on 6 Aug 1954, and within 120 days all "Vietnamese People's Volunteers" were to leave the country. The Pathet Lao "were to group in the two northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly pending integration into the Lao army or demobilization... [and] all foreign powers except France were prohibited from establishing or maintaining bases in Laos.

The Geneva Agreements also established an International Control Commission, consisting of Canada, Poland and India, whose task was to monitor activities in Laos and detect violations of the agreement.

However, the Geneva Agreements did not bring peace to the region. Armed conflict throughout Indochina (Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam and South Vietnam) was about to escalate even more into a long, brutal and bloody regional war that would gradually envelop the United States. Why was the US so interested in this part of the world since at that time, we had no apparent strategic interests in that region? The reasons rested elsewhere, and involved the relationship of the US and the Soviet Union.

After the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan, the Soviet Union established "de facto" control over much of Eastern Europe (East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania.). In Greece, the Greek Communists came close to overthrowing the pro-western

government. In France and Italy, the communist parties were growing stronger. China had fallen to the Communist forces of Mao Tse-Tung and became People's Republic of China (PRC). North Korea had invaded South Korea and, after a three year conflict, combat hostilities ceased. Communist insurgencies were wreaking havoc in Malaya, Burma and Indonesia, and – of course – in Indochina. Additionally, on 29 Aug 1949, the Soviet Union had detonated an atomic bomb. Communism was on the move all over the world, to include Africa and Latin America.

After the near-overthrow of the democratic Greek government by the Greek Communist Party in 1947, President Truman declared a US Doctrine of Communist Containment. His successor, President Dwight Eisenhower added a corollary to that Doctrine, subsequently known as the "Domino Theory" which postulated that the loss of Indochina to communism could result in the fall of other neighboring states in the region as well.

A line in the sand was being drawn by the US. Wittingly or unwittingly, the nation was poised to become inextricably involved in a long, expensive, and brutal war that would rage across the breadth and depth of Southeast Asia, and cost the nation dearly in lives and treasure.



About the Author: Ramon E. "Ray" de Arrigunaga retired from the Air Force as a Lt Col in 1982 as a Command Pilot after 20 years. He was selected for promotion to Colonel, but chose to retire instead. His flying career was mostly in Special Operations aircraft (C-47, B-26K/A-26A, U-10, OV-10, O1-E, and O2-A). He also logged has 707 hours combat flying time in Southeast Asia, as an OV-10 FAC in support of the US Army 1st Infantry Division in South Vietnam, and as an O-1E "Raven" FAC in North Laos. He was awarded the Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, and 11 Air Medals. After retirement, he was a government executive for 19 years. In 1993, he was awarded the Doctorate in Public Administration. In 2002, he became a member of the Political Science Department Faculty (full-time in 2004) at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, where he taught numerous courses in counterinsurgency, politics, terrorism and international relations. He and his wife of 49 years, Claudine, now permanently reside in Tallahassee, Florida.

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The Black Birds and the Astronauts

By Bernard V. Moore II



Space Shuttle Columbia touches down on lakebed runway 23 at Edwards Air Force Base, CA, to conclude the first orbital shuttle mission on 14 Apr 1981. (Photo by NASA)

It was April 1981. I was a 1st Lieutenant in the 7th SOS at Rhein-Main AB, West Germany, still an MC-130E co-pilot and assigned to Crew One, commanded by Maj Mark Tuck. Crew One was one of the squadron's two Fulton surface-to-air recovery system qualified crews. Hanging around the squadron's old two-story headquarters, building 152, I was quietly called up to the vault in the Intelligence section on the top floor, along with the rest of Crew One. Hmmm. This sounded interesting.

Once enough of us were gathered together, one of our squadron "special plans" guys asked for our attention and he began to give us a quick in-brief for a "special mission." Cool! Now this was what I got into Black Birds for!

"OK, you're gonna like this one," the planner began. What an understatement. The mission, Top Secret of course, was to be ready to rescue the Space Shuttle astronauts. What!?! That's right. Our mission was to be locked and cocked and ready to rescue the Space Shuttle

astronauts should they go down in our theater. As an aviation nut I was very puzzled because I knew something like the unpowered Space Shuttle didn't just "go down." Although at first the whole thing sounded like the setup of a practical joke being played on us by Crew Two. As the scenario was laid out, it began to seem much less crazy than it seemed at first.

Here was the situation. NASA had completed the initial flight tests of the Space Shuttle Enterprise at Edwards AFB, CA. The Shuttle was rigged to the top of a Boeing 747 and carried to high altitude. The 747 would enter a shallow dive and the Shuttle pilots would initiate separation from the jumbo jet. The Shuttle would cleanly pull up above the 747, which would then get out of its way. At this point the Shuttle pilots would fly their spaceship as a glider and learn its flight characteristics as they maneuvered toward Edwards for a power-off, dead-stick landing (the only kind of landing a Space Shuttle can perform). The test

pilots landed the Enterprise perfectly, as they did on eight more test flights, proving that it was possible to safely land the world's heaviest glider. That done, it was time for the real deal.

In April 1982, NASA was ready to start launching the Shuttle from Cape Canaveral into orbit. And, NASA wanted to be ready for any contingencies, including a failure to reach orbit or a missed approach for landing. As it was explained to Crew One in the vault, if the Shuttle suffered an emergency on launch, it would come down somewhere along its flight trajectory headed east across the Atlantic Ocean. The astronauts would try to glide their beast into a Space Shuttle emergency landing base at Moron, which had long and wide B-52 runways. But if it couldn't make Moron, it might go down somewhere unexpected, like in North Africa, and that somewhere included Col Muammar Kaddafi's Libya.

To say that Libya was openly hostile to the United States at that time is a gross understatement. Intelligence indicated

that Col Kaddafi directly supported terrorist attacks against Americans and Israelis. And in April 1981, a Libyan SU-22 fighter had fired a missile at two US Navy F-14 Tomcats. The incident ended with the SU-22 and his wingman getting splashed by the Tomcats. The fact that the F-14s were in international airspace and that the Libyans fired on the American airplanes, clearly indicated how hostile the relations were between Libya and the US. So the problem for NASA, and us, was what if the Shuttle came down in Libya? How would we safely get our astronauts back?

Well, here was NASA's plan. Their first option was for our State Department to politely notify the Libyan government that our Space Shuttle with two astronauts on board had landed in their sovereign territory, and could we please have them back? The concern was that Muammar Kaddafi might see this as hitting the jackpot, and might not in the least be interested in giving them back, or at the minimum holding the astronauts hostages to trade for some kind of concession from the US regarding Israel. Except President Reagan wasn't the kind

of guy who was interested in anything from the Libyans but "here's your space ship and your guys, anything else we can do for you." But just in case...there was the non-permissive option, and that was us.

Our job was to prepare two MC-130Es with full Fulton Skyhook rigging and make sure all aircraft systems were working perfectly. We would then sit alert during the Shuttle launch on 12 Apr 1991, ready to get airborne in about 10 minutes. The concept of operations was to take off and head at max speed toward Libya, day or night. If word came that the diplomatic option was running into any trouble, we would descend to 250 feet and cross into Libya, flying a route to where NASA said the Shuttle had landed. On reaching the Shuttle, we would contact the astronauts by radio and let them know we had arrived. The astronauts knew the plan. We would drop two two-man Fulton kits and a load of explosives next to the Shuttle. If it all landed safely, we would parachute two Combat Control Teams alongside the kits and Shuttle. The CCT guys would get the astronauts out of the Shuttle and

get them into the two-man Fulton suits as quickly as possible. Next we'd come back in to snatch the astronauts off the Libyan Desert and into the bird. While this was going on the CCT would place explosives throughout the Shuttle, at locations picked by NASA Shuttle engineers to do maximum destruction to the spaceship. They would then set off the explosives, blowing the Shuttle to bits. Next, we'd come back and use the Fulton Skyhook to extract the CCT back aboard our Combat Talon. Then we'd turn North and head out of Libyan airspace as fast as our Allison T-56-7s could take us.

Unfortunately, the darn Space Shuttle launch went beautifully, as did the next, and the next. Each time our level of alert was reduced a little until it got to the point that the squadron was simply notified of an upcoming launch. Of course it was good that the Space Shuttle launches proved to be so reliable, except for the two tragic losses that occurred much later. But it was very exciting to play a small, unknown role, in such an important and massive national effort.



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LTCOL WILLIAM ATKINSON JONES, III

Flying On Fire, To Save One Life

By Harry J. Bright, ACA Life Member

William Jones was born on 1 May 1922, in Norfolk, VA. The first seven years of his life his family lived in their ancestral home (built in 1840) in Warsaw, Virginia. His family then moved to the Charlottesville area where he graduated from Lane High School at age 16. Being an exceptional student, but too young to enter the United States Military Academy, he continued his education at the University of Virginia, graduating with a B.A. in Spanish at the age of 19. He was accepted to West Point in July 1942 and graduated on 4 Jul 1945 with a commission as a 2Lt in the US Army Air Force.

After pilot training and his first fighter unit assignment in the Philippines, Jones returned to the United States in 1948 and spent the following four years serving at Biggs AFB, TX, where he and Lois McGregor, of Bisbee, AZ were married. From December 1952 through March 1968 he was assigned to Europe with USAFE; Lake Charles AFB (Chennault AFB), LA; Pease AFB, NH; Air War College at Maxwell AFB, AL, and then duty with the Air Staff, then to the Air Staff at the Pentagon.

In March of 1968 Jones was assigned to Hurlburt Field, FL for A-1 Skyraider training, in preparation for deployment

to Thailand. The Skyraider was powered by a Wright 2,700 horse power reciprocating engine turning a 13.5-foot, four-blade propeller. It had folding wings, a tail wheel, and most still retained their tailhooks for carrier landings because it was originally built for the Navy to fly off of aircraft carriers. During Vietnam the Navy continued to fly Skyraiders off the carriers.

The A-1 had a 1,316-mile range and could travel 322 mph at 18,000 feet with a cruising speed of 198 mph. The Air Force adopted surplus Skyraiders from the Navy because of the airframe's ability to fly low and slow over the jungle canopy, making it a perfect fit for search and rescue escort missions and strike missions supporting our ground forces.

The A-1 was armed with two 20mm cannons in each wing and could carry 6,000+ lbs. of bombs, rockets, and minigun pods on 14 hardpoints under the wings and belly. It had double-self-sealing fuel tanks and could carry an external fuel tank for longer-range sorties. Some models carried special radar pods. Armor plating was installed on the underbelly and sides around the cockpit, enhancing the A-1's survivability against small arms fire. Most were painted in jungle camouflage patterns.



A-1H Skyraider in 1972 (Photo courtesy of Maj Gen (Ret) Randy Jayne II)

In April of 1968 Lt Col Jones completed his Skyraider training and was deployed to Udorn, Thailand to serve as the commander of the 602nd Special Operations Squadron (SOS). Shortly thereafter, the 602nd was transferred to Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai AFB (RTAFB), where he would be flying the A1-H model Skyraider, a single seat version with no extra seating or storage area.

Nakhon Phanom (NKP), 1968

NKP was located near the Thailand-Laos border, near the Mekong River across from Takhet, Laos. The base was approximately 365 miles northeast of Bangkok, and 235 miles southwest of Hanoi. Home of the 56th Special Operations Wing, the “Air Commandos,” the 602nd SOS was one of several assigned there. The runway was made of PSP (pierced steel plank), and most roadways had deep ditches along each side to collect and divert rain water during the monsoon season. Unimproved dirt road areas of the base would be coated with red dust during the dry season and red mud during the monsoon season. No jet-powered aircraft were stationed there except those with takeoff-assist jet engines such as the C-123K and Neptune OP-2E. A-1E, G, H and J models, A-26, T-28, C-47 (some AC-47), and O-1 planes, along with CH-3E/HH-3 “Jolly Green” helicopters were stationed there in 1968. The Navy VO-67 Squadron of twelve Lockheed Neptune OP-2E planes was there from November 1967 through June 1968, engaged in operation Muscle Shoals. Sometimes Air America’s shiny unmarked C-46 aircraft would appear.

The NKP Skyraider missions were twofold. Flying with

call sign “Firefly”, they would perform interdiction missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail and sometimes support the Royal Laotian government ground forces in conflict with Communist Pathet Lao. Flying with call sign “Sandy” they would be escorting rescue helicopters, the “Jolly Greens”. On Sandy missions they would do a search for downed aircrew and establish radio contact to determine their location on the ground. Any hostile forces in the area would be attacked from the air and kept busy while the helicopter crew performed the rescue, if everything went according to plan.

When Lt Col Jones arrived at NKP in July of 1968 to command the 602nd SOS he was 46 years old.

The Mission

On 1 Sep 1968, two F-4D fighter aircraft from Udorn RTAFB were on a predawn attack mission against trucks attempting to enter the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos via the Ban Karai Pass in North Vietnam. Their call sign was Carter Flight, 01 and 02. They were both shot down by ground fire, Carter 01 first at approximately 4:40 a.m. The two-man crew successfully ejected. Carter 02 directed their attention to the enemy ground forces advancing towards Carter 01’s crew when it too was hit by ground fire. Capt Jack Wilson (Carter 02 Alpha), the aircraft commander, and 1Lt William L. Kinkade (Carter 02 Bravo), the back seat pilot, ejected. Capt Wilson safely parachuted to the ground, but Lt Kinkade’s parachute was never seen nor was radio contact ever established. He was listed MIA and then in 1973 the Air Force officially presumed him deceased. It was later believed that he failed to eject and

was in the aircraft when it crashed. The crew from Carter 01 was rescued, but Capt Wilson remained on the ground north of Ban Karai Pass.

The terrain in which Wilson was hiding consisted of a flat valley floor with abrupt karst limestone-rock formations of mostly vertical, 600 to 1,200 foot-high slopes. There was a broken cloud layer at the level of the highest formation, with intermittent rain showers. The route the trucks used was a major enemy supply road, defended by well-trained forces using 37 mm guns and smaller anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), and therefore presenting a severe threat to aircraft operations.

The call for help was received at NKP and a flight of four A-1H Skyraiders as well as two HH-3 Jolly Green helicopters was dispatched. Bill Jones was the leader flying as Sandy 01, tail #738. The other A-1s were Sandy 02, 03, and 04. Jones and his wingman, Capt Paul A. Meeks flying Sandy 02, were flying low element (altitude) searching for the survivor while Sandy 03 and 04 were flying high element, conserving fuel and waiting for their call to action. The first aircraft to reach the area was an F-4, call sign Liner, from Udorn air base. He made contact with Wilson and located him. When Bill Jones arrived, Liner tried to direct him to Wilson’s location, but the radio in Jones’s plane malfunctioned. Misty 11, an F-100 forward air controller, arrived from Phu Cat, South Vietnam, and took over search and rescue command. He was able to contact Bill Jones, who had wandered from the immediate area due to his aforementioned radio problems. Misty 11 directed Jones to the proper altitude and vectored him back to Wilson. Jones performed several sweeps of the area, searching for Wilson and drawing fire from the gun emplacements. As he flew to the

south after the tenth or twelfth pass, he reported being hit by ground fire, hearing an explosion, and smoke in the cockpit. Jones maintained control of his airplane, and as the smoke cleared from the cockpit he continued his search for Wilson after Sandy 02 advised him of no visible damage to his aircraft.

Lt Col Jones searched for approximately 15 minutes when Capt Wilson radioed to announce that Jones was passing directly over his location. At that same moment, Jones sighted a multi-barrel gun position firing at him from a rock formation above Wilson’s location. It was too close to Wilson for the orbiting fighters to attack. If the enemy had known how close they were to him, they could have fired down on Wilson or captured him. Misty 11 contacted Wilson and instructed him to move to the north. After a short time Wilson came back on his radio to report his new location. Jones once again established radio contact with Wilson and flew over the area to attempt visual identification. He located Wilson and more enemy gun emplacements, which Wilson advised him included a 37 mm AAA piece. Jones thus decided not to bring in the Jolly Green to pick up Wilson as it was too dangerous. He attacked the gun emplacements himself with the Skyraider’s cannons and rockets, broadcasting the locations of Wilson and the guns during his first pass. He did not receive an acknowledgment. On his second pass Jones was hit by multiple weapons firing almost at eye level from the sides of the valley. Unaware if his report of Wilson’s location was received, he was now forced to switch from attack to survival mode.

The center section of his Skyraider’s fuselage had burst into flames, completely covering the area around the A-1’s cockpit. Two-thirds of the windshield was gone and an enemy



The damaged cockpit of 738, taken shortly after Jones landed back at NKP. (Photo courtesy of Lt Col [Ret] Albert J. Roberts, Jr.)

round had hit and ignited the rocket for the Yankee parachute extraction system behind the headrest. The rocket, connected to the lanyards of the pilot’s parachute risers, when activated, pulled the pilot up by his parachute harness after the canopy was jettisoned. The parachute would then deploy after clearing the aircraft. This system was now on fire and the influx of fresh air only intensified the fire engulfing the cockpit.

In a 1970 interview with *Airman* magazine, Jones stated, “I looked back over my shoulder and saw fire coming out the back end of the airplane. The instrument panel was clouded with smoke. Fire seemed to be everywhere. I knew there wasn’t anything for me to do but get out.”

Misty 11 radioed Jones, telling him to get over the karsts and bail out. Other pilots were transmitting the same message. Jones was again trying to transmit the locations of the guns and Wilson, but his transmissions were blocked by these attempts to contact him. The radio in Bill Jones’ Skyraider became disabled by the intense heat, except for only one channel, and he could only receive but not transmit on that channel. Since no one had reported receiving his transmissions, he believed only he knew these locations.

Jones climbed out of the valley and headed for safer area. He pulled the extraction handle to engage the Yankee Extraction System, but only the canopy left the aircraft. He pulled the secondary escape handle in order to attempt a manual bailout from the aircraft. As he stood up about half-way, his left arm was painfully caught in the air stream, so he pulled his arm back inside the cockpit and sat down. He then jettisoned the external fuel tank and remaining rocket stores, which in turn lessened the intensity of the fire. He could not escape the aircraft, which was a good thing as it was later established that the parachute harness and attachments had burned. When the canopy retracted from the cockpit area it created a low pressure space, allowing the fire to enter the cockpit and burn almost everything there, Bill Jones included. His oxygen mask was burned beyond use, the visor on his helmet was melted, and instrument panel gauges and knobs had melted. He had burns on his hands, fingers, arms, legs, neck, and back. The tough Skyraider, however, was still flying controllably with a fine-running engine.

Lt Col Jones decided to attempt flying the Skyraider back

to NKP, a distance of nearly 90 miles. The wind entering the cockpit area increased the pain of his burns and the swelling around his eyes. He flew his aircraft in a trim and angle that allowed him to use the small remaining part of the windscreen to deflect wind away from his face. Sandy 02, tucked in alongside and, by using hand signals, Jones advised that he would attempt to fly back to base. Meeks assumed lead and, through deteriorating weather conditions, used instrument flying in close formation to return to NKP, a 40 minute flight. Jones found the only working frequency on his radio and was thus able to hear Meeks’ directions.

As they arrived at NKP they encountered overcast and turbulent weather conditions. Meeks led Jones down to the runway. Since the hydraulic system on his plane had been damaged, Jones’ landing gear would not extend and his flaps were inoperative. He was forced to extend the gear manually and go straight in with a no-flaps landing. The landing was good and Jones was able to bring the plane to a stop and shut down the engine. Col Leonard Volet, the 56th SOW Vice Commander, was the first person to reach Jones. What he found was a completely burned out cockpit and badly burned pilot frantically reaching for his maps as he was being lifted from the aircraft. Jones refused to be treated for his injuries until he had debriefed with Intel on where the enemy gun emplacements and Capt Wilson were located.

At Ban Karai Pass, Sandy 03 and 04 had taken over the rescue operation after Meeks and Jones departed for NKP. Additional A-1s from NKP had arrived to assist, along with fighters from both the Navy and the Air Force. The gun emplacements were eventually silenced and Capt Wilson was lifted out by an HH-3 crew. The information that Jones had relayed earlier in the day was instrumental in the success of the overall operation, rescuing Wilson, and preventing the loss of additional aircrews over the hidesite.

After being stabilized by the medical teams at NKP, Jones was taken to Japan by for additional treatment of 2nd and 3rd degree burns of his neck, back, arms, hands, fingers and legs. He was then transferred to Brooks Army Hospital, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX, for extended long-term burn treatment.

Stateside Tragedy, Medal of Honor

After fully recovering from his injuries, Bill requested reassignment back to Southeast Asia to complete his combat tour. He was placed back on flying status, but assigned to Andrews AFB, MD, as the commander of the 1st Flying Training Squadron. He was promoted to the rank of colonel on 1 Nov 1969. Recommendations awarding the Medal of Honor to Bill Jones were submitted by Col E.J. White, Jr. and Gen G.S. Brown based upon written statements from Capt J.J. Jenkinson who participated in the mission, and Col T.A. Fisher, attending physician at NKP. Gen Greighton W. Abrams, the commander of United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, approved the recommendation. The US Congress approved the Medal of Honor for Col William A. Jones III, on 14 Nov 1969.

Bill Jones kept his private airplane, a Piper Pacer, at



and lost consciousness as he was returning. They could not find any problems with the aircraft controls.

Bill Jones was buried with full military honors near his ancestral home in Warsaw, VA. Next to him are the graves of his father and paternal grandfather. His wife received a personal letter of condolence from President Nixon, advising her of what a great honor it had been to personally award the nation’s highest military medal to her husband.

The Medal of Honor for Col William A. Jones, III, was presented posthumously to his wife, Mrs Lois Jones, on 6 Aug 1970, in the White House during a 3:00 p.m. ceremony awarding eight other military members their Medals of Honor. With Mrs. Jones were their three daughters and other members of Bill’s family. The youngest daughter, Mary Lee, presented President Nixon with a copy of Bill’s book *Maxims for Men-at-Arms, A “Collection of Quotations by the Great and the Humble.”* The first book had been delivered to Col Jones the day before his death.

Named in his Honor:

- The Charlottesville, VA, chapter of the Air Force Association is named for him.
- There is building named in his honor at Joint Base Andrews Naval Air Facility, Camp Springs, MD.
- 1971- The Air War College auditorium at Maxwell AFB, was named the William A. Jones Auditorium. A bronze plaque and picture of him were unveiled at the inaugural ceremony.
- 1997- At Hurlburt Field, the Walk of Fame in the airpark, was dedicated to all five Vietnam Air Commando Medal of Honor recipients. The surviving four - Bernard Fisher, James Fleming, Joe Jackson and John Levitow - were in attendance. Representing Bill Jones was his wife Lois, and their daughters Anne Gilfillan, Elizabeth Jones, and Mary Lee Kuhn, as well as their grandson, six-year-old Jack Davisson. Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, the Air Force Chief of Staff, assisted the family with unveiling the commemorative plaque honoring Bill.

Woodbridge, VA. On Saturday, 15 Nov 1969, a new airport at Culpepper, VA was making arrangements for its upcoming opening. Bill had arranged a flyover from Andrews AFB, and was flying his Pacer from Woodbridge, about 40 miles from Culpepper, to check on the progress at the new airport. A dinner party was arranged for that evening to celebrate his recent promotion to colonel. Shortly after taking off from Woodbridge, however, Bill contacted the tower to say he was turning around. He came in low, hit power lines, and was killed when the plane crashed. Investigators believed he suffered a fatal health problem

- Visitor quarters on Hurlburt Field has a suite dedicated to him called the “Jones Suite.”

Lesser Known Facts:

- Bill Jones was qualified to fly A-26, C-54, C-97, C-124, C-119, and B-47 aircraft, in addition to the A-1 Skyraider.
- In addition to the Medal of Honor, his awards included the Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, Air Medal with 3 oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal, Order of the Able Aeronauts with citation, and the Pacific Air Force Well Done Award.
- He flew 98 combat missions in Vietnam.
- Bill accumulated over 7,000 hours flying time in the various aircraft on which he was qualified.
- The plane he flew on his Medal of Honor mission, tail number 738, was repaired and returned to service in Feb 1969. 738 was used during the mission to rescue Roger Locher in 1972, after 23 days of evading enemy forces. It was shot down over Laos on 28 Sep 1972. 738 was the last Air Force Skyraider to be lost in combat in Southeast Asia.
- The Skyraider could carry many different types of bombs. In October of 1965, aboard the carrier USS Midway, Attack Squadron VA-25 loaded a toilet on the starboard wing outside hardpoint of Skyraider NE-572. The toilet was dropped on the enemy to commemorate passing the 6,000,000-pound mark for ordnance delivered during the war.
- Bill earned a B.A. degree in Spanish from the University of Virginia, a B.S. degree in Military Engineering from the United States Military Academy, and an M.S. degree in International Affairs from George Washington University, Washington DC.
- Bill played guitar and banjo, spoke Spanish, painted, sketched, and wrote. He played handball and racquetball. He enjoyed working on old cars.
- His wife, Lois, died in December of 2013.
- Bill liked to collect quotes of wisdom, especially those on military topics. While working on his Master’s degree, he compiled his favorites into a book and did his own ink illustrations. The book title is *Maxims for Men-at-Arms*. One of the writings Bill included in his book reads, “Poor is the country that has no heroes, but beggared is that people who having them forgets.”



Information sources and pictures for this article:

- Laura Jowdy, Congressional Medal of Honor Society.
- Maj Gen (ret) Randy Jayne, USAF, A-1 pilot at NKP.
- Lt Col (ret) Albert Roberts, Jr., USAF, A-1 pilot at NKP, squadron mate of Bill Jones.
- Lt Col (ret) Gene McCormack, USAF, A-1 pilot at NKP, squadron mate of Bill Jones; flew Sandy 05 on the same mission.
- Lt Col (ret) John Larrison, USAF, A-1 pilot; A-1 Skyraider Association.
- The Air Mobility Command Museum Library, Dover AFB, DE.
- McDonnell Douglas Aircraft, Volume I.
- Elizabeth Hart Jones, daughter of Bill Jones
- The author’s time at NKP, 15 Sep 1967 - 10 Sep 1968.

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Helio U-10 “Super Courier” enroute to a leaflet drop over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Its call sign was appropriately “Litterbug”. (Photo courtesy of author)

U-10 Operations

at Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand

By Lt Col (Ret) Philip French

“

At first the U-10 looked like a real come-down to a guy who had just finished six months flying the sleek and fast T-38. In reality, I was humbled pretty quickly and felt as if I had to learn to fly all over again.

— Philip French

”

Thinking I was familiar with the USAF’s weapons systems of the time, I was puzzled when my flying assignment to a U-10 came near my undergraduate pilot training (UPT) class graduation at Webb AFB, TX, in June, 1968. None of my classmates or any of the T-38 instructors had even heard of this aircraft. A bit more research soon revealed that the U-10 was a Helio “Super Courier,” a unique, high wing, single engine tail dragger with full-span leading-edge slats, four seats, and a Lycoming 295 hp engine turning a three-bladed prop. The U-10 provided remarkable short takeoff & landing (STOL) capabilities and was procured by the USAF for special operations missions.

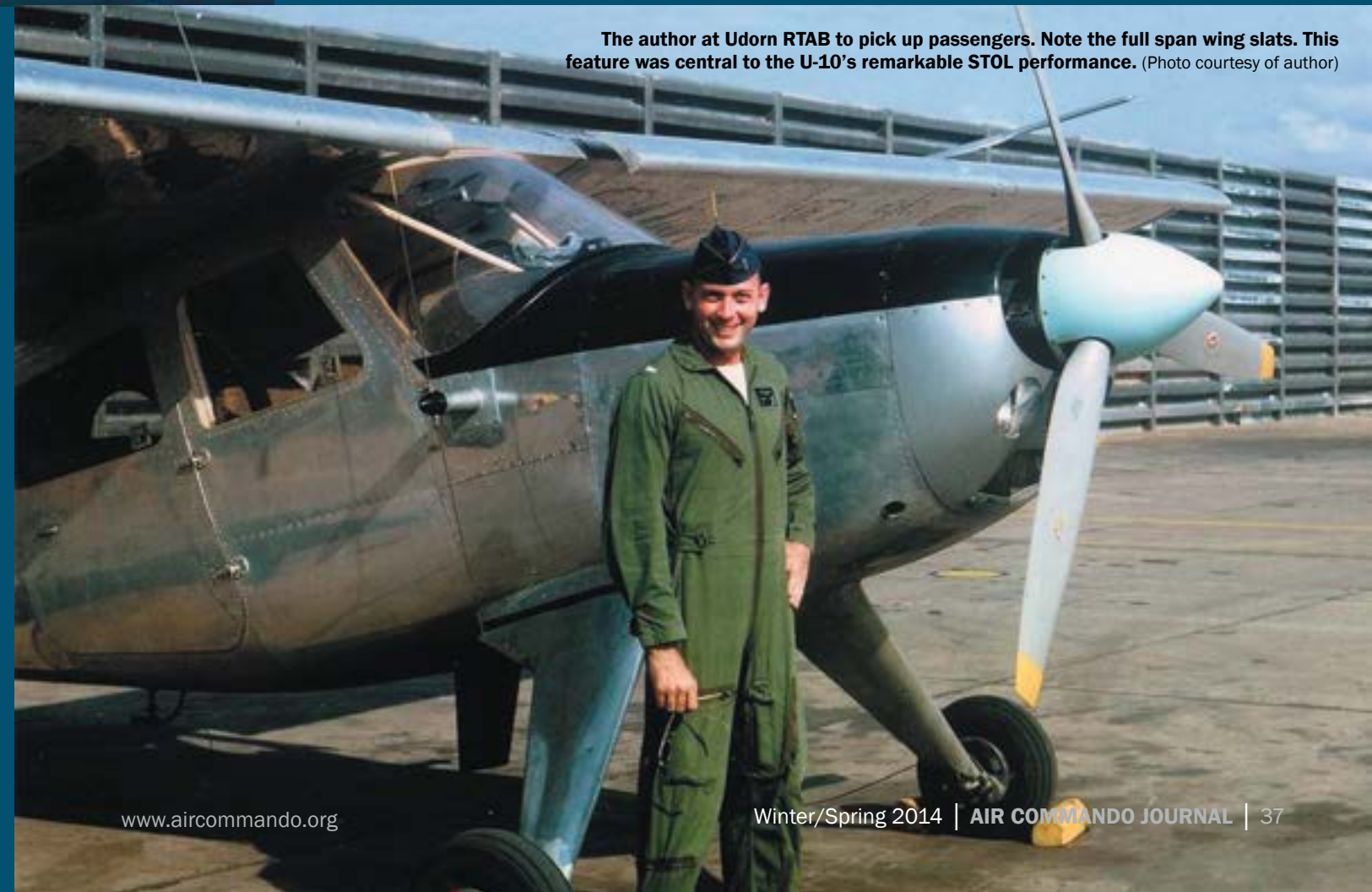
After UPT graduation I was off to Hurlburt Field/Eglin AFB, FL, for transition training. At first the U-10 looked like a real come-down to a guy who had just finished six months flying the sleek and fast T-38. In reality, I was humbled pretty quickly

and felt as if I had to learn to fly all over again. The many contrasts in performance and construction were about as stark as it gets, not the least of which was the U-10’s unique main

landing gear which featured free-castoring wheels, and almost invited ground loops. Regardless, I soon learned to love this remarkable flying machine. After basic survival school at Fairchild AFB and the “snake school” at Clark Air Base, Philippines, I was finally off to my assignment at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AB known as “NKP,” which was located along the Mekong River in extreme northeast Thailand. NKP was one of six bases used by USAF forces in Thailand and closest to the action over Laos and North Vietnam.

My arrival at NKP was a homecoming of sorts since I had earlier lived for two years in northeast Thailand as a Peace Corps volunteer in a village near the Cambodian border. Thai/Lao language skills developed during that earlier stint proved beneficial in this new USAF assignment, particularly during the more unusual missions on which I was often sent.

I was assigned to the 606th Special Operations Squadron (SOS). When I saw their U-10s for the first time, I was surprised to see that they all sported a bare, shiny aluminum finish rather than the camouflaged paint jobs of the other USAF aircraft on the ramp at NKP or the U-10s I’d recently left behind at Hurlburt. I also noted that the 606th birds wore only small aircraft serial numbers on their vertical tails and no other USAF insignia. I guessed these U-10s’ almost identical appearance to the U-10s flown by Air America was probably more than pure coincidence. Incidentally, the U-10s of the 5th SOS at Nha Trang Air Base, South Vietnam, the only other unit



The author at Udorn RTAB to pick up passengers. Note the full span wing slats. This feature was central to the U-10’s remarkable STOL performance. (Photo courtesy of author)

Editor’s Note: A ground loop is a dangerous phenomenon caused when side forces are exerted on an aircraft landing, taxiing, or taking off, and the pilot does not correct in time. The airplane will cartwheel.

landing gear which featured free-castoring wheels, and almost invited ground loops. Regardless, I soon learned to love this



A “leaflet kicker” loading a U-10 with delayed-opening fused boxes of thousands of leaflets. (Photo courtesy of author)

in Southeast Asia flying the aircraft, wore camouflage paint.

The mix of backgrounds of the U-10 pilots at NKP was interesting. About half of us were recent UPT and the other half were high-time KC-135 and B-52 senior captains and majors pulled from the Strategic Air Command (SAC) to serve their one-year remote flying tours in SEA. Those experienced guys were having a ball. They claimed this tour was the most fun they’d ever had flying and were seemingly enjoying their temporary “escape” from SAC.

I quickly accomplished my required theater qualification consisting of a few hours of dual time and an area checkout, and was soon logging missions notable for their variety and challenging flying. As evidenced by our “Litterbug” call sign, our principal mission was dropping leaflets over enemy locations, mostly the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT) in Laos, as part of a wider theater psychological warfare program.

I’ll briefly describe the sequence of events of a typical leaflet drop mission. As hard-working maintenance crews

prepared our U-10s for safe mechanical flight, others packed thousands of leaflets in boxes about 12-18 inches per side. These were tied with cord with fuses attached. The fuses were timed to sever the cords at a preset height above ground. When we arrived over the target the “leaflet kicker” armed the fuses and began throwing the boxes out the removed lower half of the left rear cockpit door. These leaflet kickers, who were most often young maintenance troops from our squadron, volunteered for these missions. This brought them some excitement and a sense of being a real part of the action. Not surprisingly, part of their motivation for volunteering was earning combat pay. These guys were real pros and it was great having them along. We pilots could not have accomplished the leaflet dropping missions without them.

While the maintenance troops were preparing the aircraft, we pilots attended our mission briefings held at the Tactical Unit Operations Center (TUOC). We received our target coordinates and some additional intelligence information to which we paid very close attention. The

latter was the last known locations of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) emplacements along our route of flight. These guns, which ranged in size from 12.7 mm to 57 mm, were capable of hits at higher effective altitudes as their size increased. To some extent we routed ourselves around the big guns, but more often we simply climbed above their reach. This commonly put us at 8,000 to 10,000 feet above ground level (AGL), and created the requirement for the time delay fuses which prevented the leaflet boxes from opening until they fell to a lower altitude. Otherwise, leaflets would have scattered all over much of Laos and North Vietnam rather than our specific target area.

These leaflet drop missions were usually flown as two-ship formations with a normal duration of just under two hours. For missions over the HCMT, we often sent a pair of two-ships. Given the limited instrumentation in the U-10 we departed NKP only in visual flight rules (VFR) conditions. However, particularly during the monsoon season, we often had to climb above heavy cloud cover enroute to the target areas, which were

typically from 40 to 80 miles east to northeast of NKP. To pinpoint our drop points in bad weather we used either Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) radials and distances from our onboard navigation equipment or got steering from the helpful USAF controllers watching us from the radar site known as “Viking” at Mukdahan, Thailand. Maybe one reason they were so helpful was that we air delivered their mail several times weekly.

When leaflet drop missions were to areas without reported AAA gun emplacements, our two-ship flight discipline sometimes became a little too relaxed. During one such trip my wingman chose to descend far lower than the “book” 3,500 foot AGL for such areas. He took a small arms projectile through the left wing, barely missing the fuel tank. That “act of aggression” called for immediate retaliation, we thought. We instantly converted from psy-ops to “armed reconnaissance” U-10s. My wingman, Capt George Spitz, (who was later killed in an EC-47 over Laos) and I decided to attack the limestone cave from where we thought the lucky shot had come. We popped open the windows next to the pilot’s left shoulder, began left

orbits of the cave, thrust our M-16s out the windows and “hosed the area!” Each of us fired two magazines of 5.56 mm ammunition loaded alternately with ball and tracer rounds. While any damage to the bad guys in and around the cave was doubtful, it was a fine adventure.

Unfortunately, after firing those two magazines from the M-16, I realized that my rudder controls were virtually locked up. The empty cartridge cases had deflected off the sloping open window back into the airplane, where they rolled down and under the cockpit floorboard. Fortunately, if handled gingerly, the U-10 continued to fly well rudderless. Luckily there was almost no crosswind requiring rudder control when landing back at NKP. My main concern by that time was dodging the “official” bullet back at the 606th ramp. I imagined getting a royal butt-chewing from the squadron commander if he found out about the unauthorized “use of force” incident. Thankfully, the ground maintenance crew sensed my panic, took up the floorboard and picked out the brass cases. The bird was put quickly back in service with all flight controls functional. Word never got back to the commander, and I learned a good lesson.

Beyond leaflet drops, our next most frequent missions were operations into short, rough airstrips where the STOL capabilities of the U-10 really came into their own. With slats deployed we could fly as slowly as 26 knots in level flight. Take-off roll was just over 300 feet. The landing roll was often less than 250 feet if we employed an aggressive, high angle-of-attack, high-power technique which allowed the wing slats to deploy.

Approach or departure obstacles had to be factored in for safe operation, even though the initial climb angle after take-off was 18 degrees. So, we had to be careful not to land in places where we’d have a tough time getting back out with passengers or freight added. Our normal cruise speed was 150 knots and the U-10 had a full-fuel range of 600 miles. These short-field operations included so-called “civic action runs,” mail deliveries to remote USAF and US Army units, one-time cargo or passenger transports to outposts throughout the northern half of Thailand, and even week-long temporary duty stints to locations in Thailand and Laos. Before landing we commonly had to make a couple of low passes over airstrips to run off grazing water buffalo and the kids tending to them.



The author (left) and a “leaflet kicker” about to take off on a mission from NKP. Parachutes, survival vests and M-16s were standard aircrew gear on out-of-country flights. (Photo courtesy of author)

On one memorable “civic action run,” I flew the 606th commander to a small village in northeast Thailand, not far from NKP, so that he could formally dedicate the new library for which our squadron had collected a fine selection of books. I was selected so he could deliver his message in English, and I could then translate into Thai for him. All went as advertised, but the colonel was long-winded. The kids and dignitaries grew restless and I quickly ran out of subtle Thai language variations for all the ways the colonel said the same thing. The library was a worthy people-to-people project, but that experience made me reluctant to get involved in any more international translation situations.

Our U-10s could also be equipped with loudspeaker systems for broadcasts over highly specific target areas. However, these missions were rare. The

audio systems were bulky “blasters” with speakers aimed out the left side of the aircraft, and the messages were normally from prerecorded cassette tapes. We had to fly tight left orbits in order to be heard on the ground clearly and flew lights-out at night so as to minimize drawing small arms fire. On one challenging dark and horizonless night speaker mission over a village in central Laos, I found it difficult to maintain the proper altitude (500 feet AGL) and the tight orbit at the same time. Using frequent instrument cross-checks I got it done, but was very glad to high-tail it back to NKP that moonless night.

Our U-10s at NKP were very much a “bush airline.” Beyond the deliveries of people and cargo into improvised airstrips, we flew a daily “shuttle” service to Don Muang Airport in Bangkok. During transits, though, we would land at Udorn and Takhli air bases to pick

up reconnaissance film and intelligence related documents for trans-shipment to Headquarters 7th Air Force. Three passengers could ride, too, and we did a brisk business. We were “forced” to overnight in the city on these shuttles and even had our own room permanently reserved at the Chao Phya Hotel. After the obligatory night-on-the-town, we headed northeast the following morning to Korat and Ubon Air Bases for more film and document pick-ups before returning to NKP. Each pilot flew the shuttle a couple of times monthly, which was a welcome break from the combat missions over Laos. These “Bangkok Shuttles” were tough and grueling work, but, as they say, “somebody had to do it.” These trips were an opportunity to kick back a little, do a little sight-seeing and have some fun flying. I recall one shuttle during which I flew at roughly 100 feet AGL the entire trip, only popping up to pattern altitude a few miles out as we approached the air bases. We needed this low level training, of course. The extent of such enroute “training” depended on how adventurous and/or appreciative the passengers on board were, too.

One of my favorite memories is the small and unusual flying role that I performed for the Bob Hope Christmas Show when they stopped at NKP in 1968. Someone came up with the clever idea of greeting Bob and his entourage with a message delivered by our U-10 airborne speaker system. I jumped at the chance to pilot that mission. We found a cassette tape of an old Bing Crosby song, and loaded in the U-10’s powerful audio system. I was ready to launch at the end of the taxiway as the C-130 carrying Bob and his gang landed. As soon as they touched down I took off and began a tight left orbit over the ramp as the C-130 shut down. As Bob came down the ramp, golf club in hand, I started the tape. He was surprised and amused as he raised his club and waved it at my U-10 circling above. That was a thrilling moment for me. Mission complete, I landed and parked the U-10 and jogged to the base outdoor arena in record time. My squadron mates had saved a seat for me, so I didn’t miss any of that glorious Bob Hope Christmas Show.

I can honestly say that not even once

was I bored flying the U-10 for a year in Thailand and Laos. We did our best to avoid boredom by devising a few antics to spice up the duty a bit. For example, we normally flew either straight-in or conventional box patterns into the large air bases in Thailand. Of course, the F-4s and F-105s flew overhead patterns and then steep turns to downwind leg as speed decreased so as to lower gear and flaps. Upon touchdown, drag parachutes were deployed to slow the jets more effectively on their landing rolls. Well, not to be outdone by the “fast movers” I obtained a very small drag chute — about three feet in diameter. This was rigged to a 25 foot length of parachute cord. I had this folded and ready next to me in the cockpit. Several miles out from Takhli Air Base one fine day I called the tower, gave them my call sign and requested an overhead pattern. I heard them snickering in the background, but they granted the request. I knew in advance which taxiway turn-off was nearest the ramp where I needed to park for a cargo pick-up. So, I bore down on the runway at high cruise speed with landing lights on. I “pitched out” directly over the turn-off I would use and quickly slowed into a spiraling downwind/base/final combination. I set up a high angle-of-attack final which allowed the leading edge slats to deploy and the airspeed to bleed off to about 35 knots. I touched down a couple hundred feet short of the turn-off and threw the makeshift drag chute out the window. By some minor miracle it didn’t tangle in the tail of the U-10, and it opened beautifully. I must admit that was a satisfying maneuver, and the tower controllers had something out of the ordinary to share with their buddies at the club that evening.

A one-week TDY into northwest Thailand illustrates the variety of missions I’ve noted. My U-10, along with the able assistance of crew chief Sgt Matt Flores, was assigned to the US Consulate in Chiang Mai. Each day we flew the consul general or others into some pretty remote villages with names such as Taek, Mae Sot, Chiang Kam, and Ban Houei Sai. One memorable mission on that TDY was to the Golden Triangle area (common borders of Thailand/Burma/Laos). That trip was for a road dedication ceremony near Hin Tack. Our U-10 and an Air America Pilatus “Porter” transported an entourage of American and Thai officials into one of the more challenging airstrips I encountered. By our STOL standards, the strip was a generous 750 feet in length, but it featured a pronounced hump in the middle. Actually, the lower half of the runway was at nearly a 20 degree angle to the upper half. I tried not to let the “sweat” factor show to the dignitaries on board, but it was a tricky touch-down and take-off at nearly maximum gross weight on that hot day. All in a day’s work for the Helio “Super Courier,” though. Its capabilities never ceased to amaze me.

Throughout the conflict in Southeast Asia, only two units, the 606th SOS and the 5th SOS operated this unique aircraft. Both units had similar missions, but only the 606th flew routinely over Laos. The 5th SOS flew mostly over South Vietnam and conducted many more loudspeaker missions. These two units were also surprisingly small. My logbook indicates having flown twelve different aircraft during the one-year tour. We lost none, and I likely flew all the airworthy U-10s in the squadron. A total of 12 USAF U-10s were lost during the

period 1962-1969. Eleven of those were lost in South Vietnam and one at Luang Prabang in northern Laos. There were five fatalities resulting from the twelve aircraft losses and no U-10 aircrew members were taken as POWs.

Earlier in this article I mentioned the bare aluminum finish of our U-10s and their striking resemblance to those operated by Air America throughout Laos. This non-USAF look served to fit in well in the short-term TDY assignments some of us had to a certain “non-existent” CIA base in Laos known as Long Chieng, aka Lima Site-20 Alternate or Lima Site 98. Among all the terrific flying experiences logged during my one-year tour, I’d rate my stint at Long Chieng as the highlight, but that’s another story for another day.

I’m quite honored to have served in Southeast Asia as a USAF pilot. The flying experience was incredibly interesting and unique. The memories of missions and USAF comrades are vivid and will last forever.



About the Author: Lt Col Philip L. French served six years on active duty. Following that he served nearly twenty years as a reservist in the capacity of admissions liaison officer for the USAF Academy and AFROTC. He graduated from Miami University of Ohio and was a two year Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand prior to attending Officer Training School (OTS). He is retired in Washington Court House, Ohio, and pursues competitive rifle shooting as a serious hobby.

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Photos do not depict actual Commander's Leadership Award recipients.



2013 Commander's Leadership Awards

TSgt Jacob W. Arnold

TSgt Jacob W. Arnold distinguished himself as CV-22 Flightline Expediter, 727th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Sergeant Arnold deployed to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar where he managed three CV-22's and the maintenance actions of 49 maintenance personnel in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. He coordinated the acceptance and bed down of three combat aircraft and 101 pallet positions of equipment for the stand-up of Joint Special Operations Air Component Central's first CV-22 unit. Furthermore, when the unit was faced with host nation flying restrictions, he took the logistics lead during four intra-theater forward operating deployments to Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait. Sergeant Arnold efficiently coordinated with host nation customs and sourced multiple mission critical components which averted the imminent loss of the expeditionary aircrew's currency. Additionally, Sergeant Arnold drove the acceptance of six new CV-22's from the Bell-Boeing production factory. He supervised the transfer process and flawless completion of over 900 inspection items ultimately doubling the 27th Special Operations Wing's CV-22 fleet. Finally, Sergeant Arnold's superior leadership was paramount in the completion of over 26,500 maintenance actions enabling 2,284 flying hours resulting in the 20th Aircraft Maintenance Unit's best maintenance metrics since it's stand-up in 2010. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Arnold reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

SSgt Edward A. Ashford

SSgt Edward A. Ashford distinguished himself as an Instruments & Flight Control Systems Journeyman, 919th Maintenance Squadron, Duke Field, Florida, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. While augmented to Hurlburt Field for 77 days, he provided critical Avionics Maintenance experience to the 4 AMU. During the Hurricane Isaac evacuation of 9 AC-130U Gunships, he quickly responded to an aircraft with an inoperative Horizontal Situation Indication. He swiftly troubleshot and repaired the aircraft replacing the defective component in under 30 minutes ensuring a critical on-time takeoff during adverse conditions. His expertise was utilized again during a rapid response to a real world alert situation when called upon to repair an inoperative Altimeter. His troubleshooting revealed a clogged line and without the proper pneumatic fittings available, he improvised a way to connect to the clogged line and purge the system quickly enabling the aircraft to successfully deploy and fulfill its mission. His undying loyalty and commitment to AFSOC and the 919 SOW was proved once again while performing 57 days on worldwide alert status at Duke Field with the MC-130E aircraft, maintaining a 100% mission ready aircraft status and the commitment to deploy at a moment's notice. As a squadron physical training leader, Sergeant Ashford stood up a fitness program assisting over 200 Airmen with individual fitness resulting in a 25% increase in passing fitness exams! Sergeant Ashford volunteered and completed the first Air Commando Course supporting the new C-145A mission at Duke Field. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Ashford reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Lucas I. Barker

TSgt Lucas I. Barker distinguished himself as Shift Lead, Aircraft Fuel Systems Section, 1st Special Operations Component Maintenance Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. Sergeant Barker masterfully lead a team of 70 highly-skilled technicians in completing more than 8,000 maintenance actions, which contributed to the 1st Special Operations Wing safely executing over 4,500 sorties and flying 18,100 hours. These maintenance actions saved the Air Force \$37 million in replacement costs while eliminating 279 hours of aircraft non mission capable time. Additionally, Sergeant Barker's drive led to his selection as the squadron's Combined Unit Inspection lead for all equipment accounts. During his preparation, he meticulously reconciled 19 accounts and provided accurate accounting for more than 1,000 items valued at \$108 million. His efforts led to zero discrepancies being identified by inspectors and enabled the squadron to earn an "Excellent" rating. Furthermore, Sergeant Barker was the command's first choice to lead a team responsible for investigating leaking auxiliary fuel cells on the MC-130H aircraft. His team identified the presence of foreign object damage, determined the root cause and implemented an immediate fix which rectified the problem Air Force wide. Finally, Sergeant Barker led the preparation of six MC-130H aircraft for a President of the United States directed mission. He ensured all aircraft were ready for departure ahead of schedule and allowed complete mission success, which included 23 United States citizens being safely evacuated from a hostile area. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Barker reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Brandon L. Brown

Capt Brandon L. Brown distinguished himself as U-28A Evaluator Pilot, 5th Special Operations Squadron, 919th Special Operations Wing, Eglin Air Force Base Field 3, Florida from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this time, Capt Brown served as the U-28 Chief of Training, overseeing an 11.5 million dollar program consisting of 9,600 flight and simulator hours, 2,750 sorties, and 215 students - a 40 percent increase from the prior fiscal year. He increased the effectiveness of training by coordinating interfly for SEALs, forging relationships, opening cross-talks, and educating users on U-28 capabilities and tactics. Capt Brown was a total professional, dedicating his off-duty time as lead volunteer for the "Destin 50 Ultra Marathon" charity race, raising 20 thousand dollars for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. He also mentored children at local elementary schools, providing a positive role model for "high-risk" children. With all the demands on Capt Brown's time, he was still able to complete his Master's Degree in one year, graduating Magna Com Laude with a 3.83 GPA. He gained the respect and honor of his leadership when he was praised by the Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center's Financial Manager for meticulous execution of \$361K budget with 100 percent accountability. Finally, Capt Brown demonstrated true leadership as Assistant Chief Pilot

at a deployed location, where he developed real time tactics for Area of Responsibility mission execution. His hard work and dedication earned him the distinction of being selected as the 5th Special Operations Squadron's Company Grade Officer of the Year, 2012. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Brandon Brown reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

SSgt Nicolas J. Crouse

SSgt Nicolas J. Crouse distinguished himself as an Aerospace Medical Technician, 193d Special Operations Medical Group, Middletown, PA from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. Sergeant Crouse is the epitome of service before self. He volunteered on numerous occasions for mandatory training and CONUS/OCONUS exercises, often on short notice. He recently deployed as one of the only trained members in support of the AFSOC Tactical Combat Casualty Care mission. Sergeant Crouse completed the three part intensive training, accumulating over 1300 training hours. This involvement came immediately after Sergeant Crouse deployed for 10 months to Afghanistan as a medical technician supporting a joint Lithuanian-National Guard security training mission. Recently Sergeant Crouse provided expert and immediate medical care to several injured service members during a large, multi-force exercise, taking a lead role, seamlessly transitioning from a participant to caregiver and evacuating the victims to a higher level of care. His willingness to mentor and educate others, along with his personal drive and outstanding medical skills justifiably credits him as being a "Commando Medic". The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Crouse reflect great credit upon himself, the 193d Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command and the United States Air Force.

SSgt Edward H. Crowe

SSgt Edward H. Crowe distinguished himself as Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Medical Logistical Readiness, for his unit from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Sergeant Crowe provided superior medical support to 468 personnel across 6 geographically separated units accomplishing Secretary of Defense-directed missions. He oversaw and executed medical readiness training and provided threat assessments for 341 aircrew members engaged in 3 areas of responsibility, enabling 5 flying units to accomplish 15,771 flight hours and 6,599 sorties across 6 continents in support of elite joint forces. Sergeant Crowe was hand-selected to deploy to the Horn of Africa as an integral part of an advanced medical training team. During this time, he instructed and certified 93 foreign soldiers on tactical combat casualty care providing lifesaving independent medical cells for their military operations. In addition, Sergeant Crowe spearheaded his unit's preparation for the 2013 Consolidated Unit Inspection. He audited revised and bolstered 8 critical self-inspection programs which was key to the organization's "Outstanding" rating and his recognition by the Inspector General as a "Superior Performer". His superb work ethic proved vital to

garnering the Higher Headquarters 2012 Independent Duty Medical Technician of the Year, Squadron of the Year and Gallant Unit Citation honors. Finally, Sergeant Crowe was awarded his Advanced Tactical Paramedic Certification and a Bachelor’s Degree in Emergency Management. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Crowe reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Alexander Dufault

Capt Alexander Dufault distinguished himself by his outstanding performance and leadership as the Officer in Charge of Operations and MC-130P Navigator, 67th Special Operations Squadron, 352d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this time, Capt Dufault was chosen as a representative of Air Force Special Operations Command to conduct D-Day memorial personnel airdrops over Normandy, as well as to teach Greek and Danish special forces forward area refueling operations, exponentially increasing their special operations capability and interoperability. Additionally, Capt Dufault deployed to Afghanistan for 125 days, conducting 60 airdrops delivering vital supplies to coalition special forces including three psychological leaflet airdrops which resulted in the surrender of multiple enemy combatants. Demonstrating calm leadership, he led an emergency resupply to coalition forces under heavy enemy fire which gave ground forces vitally-needed supplies, ensuring the survival of the entire team. Furthermore, he expertly navigated his crew out of rugged terrain after his aircraft suffered a complete loss of navigational systems, earning him and his crew the Royal Air Force Mildenhall base safety award. As a final testament to his focus and determination, Capt Dufault led the harrowing aerial refueling of three MH-47 helicopters along the Iranian border, facilitating the exfiltration of special operations forces and winning his crew the 2013 Air Force Association’s Brigadier General Hoyt Award. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Dufault reflect great credit up on himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Seamus G. Feeley

TSgt Seamus Feeley distinguished himself as a TH-1H Special Mission Aviator, 23d Flying Training Squadron, 58th Operations Group, 58th Special Operations Wing, Fort Rucker Army Installation, Alabama, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Sergeant Feeley led an 11-man team on an 800,000 dollar Special Operations Command Africa priority mission; managing over 800 training hours with 10 different career fields culminating in the first night vision goggle qualified aircrew in the Horn of Africa. As subject matter expert, he was selected to brief the Special Operations Commander of Africa on the assessment of current and future aviation capabilities of eight African nations. He was also crucial in the rescue planning process of French foreign nationals held hostage in northern Africa. Sergeant Feeley planned strategic Polish International Security Assistance Force integration, leading to

the creation of two Polish C-130 and Mi-17 special operations units and reduced deployment requirements for United States troops to Afghanistan. Furthermore, Sergeant Feeley trained a 30-member combat advisor team in a rigorous 45-day field course providing vital shoot, move, and communicate training. Additionally, he was instrumental in the creation and standup of the first-ever career enlisted aviator rotary-wing fundamental course, an undergraduate flying training course designed to reduce washout rates of high demand special mission aviators. Sergeant Feeley’s efforts enabled the creation of three syllabi in less than six months and 52,000 dollars under budget. As the flight chief for the first class, his oversight led to the flawless execution of training for seven Airmen with an on-time graduation despite utilizing new and untested syllabi. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Feeley reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Derek J. McCafferty

Capt Derek J. McCafferty distinguished himself as Instructor Pilot and Flight Commander, Plans and Exercises at his unit, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Capt McCafferty deployed in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM where he commanded 43 combat sorties and 252 combat hours. His efforts were instrumental in tracking numerous Joint Task Force high value individuals in austere locations over hostile objective areas. Capt McCafferty flexed his crew and aircraft to support an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operation that successfully located a missing American citizen for the first time in over a year. His immediate response to operational requirements garnered actionable intelligence enabling detailed personnel tracking and mission rehearsals. Additionally, Capt McCafferty commanded a robust low-visibility mission into a politically sensitive location with critical cargo displaying the United States’ resolve to host nation objectives and the sustainment of multi-national forces. While in garrison, he displayed exceptional leadership as primary planner for a 3.4 million dollar live-fire joint exercise increasing the Standoff Precision Guided Munitions lethality by 25 percent for Presidential-directed operations. Furthermore, Capt McCafferty executed four rigorous interagency exercises encompassing a vast array of mission sets. His efforts validated training and enabled the worldwide readiness of over 280 elite special operators and 3,400 combat flying hours which resulted in 14 high value individuals being captured or killed. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt McCafferty reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Ryan A. Palombo

Capt Ryan A. Palombo distinguished himself as Combat Systems Officer and Mission Crew Commander, 193d Special Operations Squadron, Middletown, Pennsylvania, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Capt Palombo’s decisive leadership and success drove numerous programs to include Special Operations Forces Air Mission Suite-Enhanced

Situational Awareness (SAMS-ESA) and the Air Force Tactical Receive Suite (AFTRS) Intel Broadcast Receiver. In addition to his flying career, Capt Palombo aggressively solved complex problems with simplified solutions resulting in his spearheading a proposal to save \$3.4 Million. While directing the operational testing and evaluations of this program Capt Palombo ensured operational success for United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and ensured capitalization of existing Ku Band Spread Spectrum (KuSS) technologies applied to specific Military Information Support Operations (MISO) requirements. Capt Palombo’s exceptional leadership spawned a Command & Control integration program, and paved the way for the \$7.6 Million SAMS-ESA aircraft modification. His unique ability to bridge gaps between the A3, A6 and A2 provided stopgap support when programs stalled between functions. Recognizing his ability, the Group Commander handpicked Capt Palombo as the first member of The Air National Guard ever to attend the rigorous Mission Information Manager (MIM) course, completing over 450 hours of instruction on more than 90 C2 applications. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Palombo reflect great credit upon himself, the Air National Guard, and the United States Air Force.

SrA Seung-Jae Oh

SrA Seung-Jae Oh distinguished himself as Cultural Advisor, United States Air Force Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. Airman Oh expertly served as a Korean cultural liaison, educator and Korean language translator for the leading education center in Air Force Special Operations Command. During this period, he provided Korean culture and language instruction to over 300 special operations and general purpose forces from all branches of the United States military and Coast Guard. Additionally, while deployed to Korea for Joint Combined Exchange Training 13-2 BALANCE KNIFE with Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group Airborne, he provided language translation and cultural support to over 100 United States Army Special Forces and Republic of Korea Special Forces soldiers. During the six week training exercise, he expertly translated operational and tactical level concepts, instructions, presentations and demonstrations from English to Korean and from Korean to English. During the first two weeks of the exercise, as the sole translator, he took on the responsibility of translating not only the spoken portion of the training but multiple documents used during the exercise. Despite his junior rank, he expertly mentored and led the five Korean soldiers that were assigned by the Korean Army to assist as translators. He expertly guided them on translating both written and spoken portions of the training. Further, he organized and directed the soldiers to maximize their effectiveness during the training. The distinctive accomplishments of Airman Oh reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Adam G. Schmidt

Capt Adam G. Schmidt distinguished himself as Flight Commander, Executive Officer, and MC-130H Combat Talon II Pilot, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Capt Schmidt prosecuted 110 combat hours, transporting 300 tons of cargo and 400 special operations forces throughout Afghanistan. He also executed eleven combat airdrops, delivering forty tons of critical supplies to forward operating bases, and piloted two military information support operations, airdropping 600,000 leaflets to promote district governance and stability in rural villages. In addition, Capt Schmidt planned and executed a crisis response mission in the Philippines, emplacing an Army quick reaction force to bolster American troops engaged with hostile insurgent forces. During a multilateral security exercise in Thailand, he airdropped twenty-four parajumpers and completed 170 training events, building crucial partner nation capacities in Southeast Asia. As Executive Officer, he guided the squadron’s preparation for the 2013 Consolidated Unit Inspection, overseeing fifty-three checklists and over 2,500 required items. His efforts earned “Superior Performer” accolades and significantly contributed to the group’s overall “Excellent” rating. Finally, Capt Schmidt concurrently commanded two squadron flights for ninety days, standing up a new unit administrative section while leading current operations in the completion of 380 accident-free flight hours along with a Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed counter-terrorism exercise. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Schmidt reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

SSgt Travis J. Simmons

SSgt Travis J. Simmons distinguished himself as Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, Group Aircrew Training and MC-130P Instructor Flight Engineer, 353d Special Operations Support Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 Jun 2012 through 31 May 2013. During this period, Sergeant Simmons flew 62 missions totaling 287 combat hours while deployed to Afghanistan in direct support of a Special Operations Task Force and the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command. His unparalleled skill in the execution of 221 sorties successfully emplaced 1.9 million pounds of war materiel and 891 special operations forces during the final combat deployment of the MC-130P Combat Shadow. Furthermore, during his combat rotation Sergeant Simmons executed 75 airdrops while defeating several enemy threats, delivering 1.2 million pounds of critically needed supplies to forward operating bases throughout Afghanistan. As an in-garrison flight instructor and weapons system expert, his consistent leadership was invaluable in ensuring that 192 aircrew and five squadrons, within an 800-person group supporting \$1.2 billion in aviation assets, maintained a 98.5% mission readiness rate. Finally, Sergeant Simmons’ innovative training processes and exemplary oversight during the 2013 Air Force Special Operations Command Consolidated Unit

Inspection were instrumental to both his Aircrew Training section and the 353d Special Operations Group earning overall “Excellent” ratings. The distinctive accomplishments of SSgt Travis Simmons reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Matthew C. Slack

Capt Matthew C. Slack distinguished himself as Flight Commander and U-28A Instructor Pilot, 319th Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Capt Slack led more than 137 military and civilian personnel while deployed more than 110 days to Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. First as assistant operations officer and then as operations officer, Capt Slack directed flight operations at three geographically separated locations, orchestrating more than 800 sorties flying over 4,300 combat hours at an impressive 98% mission effectiveness rate. Capt Slack planned and executed a worldwide committed handover of five operations sites between two U-28A squadrons, with no degradation to combat support. In garrison, as flight commander, Capt Slack led 25 fellow company grade officers, synchronizing their more than 1,200 mobility, 690 flight currency, and 920 ground training requirements. His authorship of a new squadron pre-deployment training program ensured all squadron members were prepared to deploy on-time and in direct support of command and national objectives. As mission lead at two joint exercises, Capt Slack validated newly developed tactics, techniques, and procedures paving the way for their codification as standard. Capt Slack’s leadership was recognized amongst his Air Force peer group during formal military education as he garnered the Chief of Staff award and earned distinguished graduate standing as the second in his class of 678 Squadron Officer School graduates. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Slack reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Gregory J. Walsh

Capt Gregory J. Walsh distinguished himself as Flight Commander, 24th Special Tactics Squadron, 724th Special Tactics Group, 24th Special Operations Wing, Pope Field, North Carolina, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Capt Walsh was deployed for three months as commander of Special Tactics forces and later as the Deputy Operations Officer in an elite Joint Task Force in Central Command. He led a 21-man element at combat outposts across Afghanistan targeting Al Qaeda and the Taliban during the initial phases of the conventional US force retrograde. Under his superb leadership, squadron personnel participated in 174 combat missions resulting in 69 enemy killed or captured. As the first-ever Special Tactics officer to fill the Deputy Operations Officer role, Capt Walsh personally advised the Task Force commander during 43 combat operations resulting in the removal 158 high value targets. Capt Walsh also established new kinetic targeting procedures and directed strikes on Al Qaeda’s top 35 personalities including the International

Security Assistance Force’s top five targets, devastating anti-coalition senior leadership in the region and denying key sanctuary. In addition to his exemplary combat leadership, Capt Walsh led unit participation in a Secretary of Defense-directed joint exercise, which validated Department of Defense airfield seizure and denied area infiltration capabilities. Finally, he synchronized 15 aircraft and 300 personnel during five missions as the ground force commander for the 724th Special Tactics Group-led exercise, ADVANCED GUARD. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Walsh reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Zachary S. Wahlers

TSgt Zachary S. Wahlers distinguished himself as Combat Controller and Chief Joint Terminal Attack Standards and Evaluations Examiner, 321st Special Tactics Squadron, 352d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, his Fire Support section led 36 separate close air support training events to include 18 joint and combined events throughout Europe and the United States. Sergeant Wahlers was directly responsible for preparing 41 controllers to support the squadron’s Afghanistan and European Crisis Response Force 365 -day deployment commitments. As the lead examiner in Special Operations Command Europe, he trained 56 Croatian, British and Army joint terminal attack controllers and 94 American and coalition aircrews. He nearly tripled access to critical theater assets resulting in training with 12 flying squadrons facilitating over 600 close air support missions to complete 32 evaluations and 9 upgrades, increasing the squadron’s qualified controller manning by 50 percent. His efforts made the 321st the primary ground force to facilitate all United States Air Forces in Europe and British fighter squadrons’ Afghanistan pre-deployment work ups. Furthermore, Sergeant Wahlers led a Greek and nine -squadron Joint Combined Exchange Training exercise as primary jumpmaster resulting in over 850 jumps. Finally, his leadership extended into the local community where he led the annual Geo Cache outing which hosted 34 families from his church and ran land navigation challenges for local youths. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Wahlers reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Jeremy C. Whiddon

TSgt Jeremy C. Whiddon distinguished himself as Chief Joint Terminal Attack Controller Standards and Evaluation Examiner, 21st Special Tactics Squadron, Pope Field, NC, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. Sergeant Whiddon led the training of the joint terminal attack controller program facilitating 100 multi-platform training events qualifying 62 combat mission-ready operators. During deployment, his Airmen controlled 4,929 aircraft on 1,602 combat missions, resulting in 488 enemy killed-in-action. He personally controlled 146 aircraft resulting in the destruction of 30 explosive devices and 19 enemy killed. On a combat operation, Sergeant Whiddon’s

teammate stepped on an improvised mine amputating one leg and causing severe wounds. Despite being three feet away and blown off his feet, Sergeant Whiddon remained well composed, administering life-saving medical care. He then controlled the helicopter landing zone, medically evacuating his teammate and saving his life. On another mission, Sergeant Whiddon’s team was pinned down by overwhelming enemy fire. He engaged the enemy with his weapon while controlling multiple munitions at danger-close range from AC-130 and A-10 aircraft. He selflessly exposed himself to an advancing enemy attack and heavy enemy fire, within 60 meters, and employed a hellfire missile. Although blown off his feet by the concussion of the hellfire, his decisive actions broke the enemy assault that would have surely overrun his position and enabled the medical evacuation of a wounded Special Forces soldier. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Whiddon reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Timothy E. Young

Capt Timothy E. Young distinguished himself as Plans and Tactics Flight Commander, and AC-130H Evaluator Pilot and Weapons Officer, 16th Special Operations Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. During this period, Capt Young led 22 highly-skilled planners and tacticians, successfully supporting 11 major joint training exercises. As lead contingency planner, his tactical expertise ensured crucial gunship support for a Joint Special Operations Command pre-deployment exercise, resulting in combat certification for four joint Special Operations commands. Furthermore, he coordinated the squadron’s first combat reset in over eight years, nearly doubling home station training to certify over 145 Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, and his aircraft demonstration on the Military Channel secured the AC-130 as the “World’s Most Fearsome Weapon.” An employment expert, Capt Young spearheaded the first AC-130H/W tactics forum to examine and influence next generation gunship employment. Additionally, Capt Young led the development of Cannon Air Force Base’s \$300,000 digital datalink, enabling 27th Special Operations Wing interoperability on the digital battlefield. While deployed, Capt Young served as the Combined Joint Special Operations Air Component Joint Operations Center Chief, where he directed 215 aircraft in 12 locations, executing over 10,000 combat missions totaling 98,000 hours. His efforts directly lead to the capture of 908 detainees, 76 High Value Targets, and 213 enemy insurgents killed. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Young reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Joanna J. Zemek

Capt Joanna J. Zemek distinguished herself as a Combat Aviation Advisor and Deputy Flight Commander, Central Command Flight, 6th Special Operations Squadron, Duke Field, Florida, from 1 Jun 2012 to 31 May 2013. Capt Zemek’s internationally diverse skill sets allowed her to expertly lead

intelligence advisory missions in both Southern Command and Africa Command while also leading the Central Command Flight at home station. Serving as the senior Intelligence Advisor in the unit, she instructed over 75 partner nation operators utilizing her proficiency in both Spanish and French, while also giving supervisory upgrades to multiple incoming advisors. Her expertise was critical to help the Department of State acquire four partner nation Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance aircraft, ensuring that Special Operations Command South had its number one priority country’s needs met. This required her to develop and implement 90 hours of sensor instruction leading to the destruction of six clandestine narcotic airstrips and the identification of dozens more and her leadership shined while briefing a foreign Chief of Staff on their emerging capabilities. Her tireless intelligence training in Africa resulted in the partner nation being identified as the Western African lead nation in intelligence operations during a large-scale multinational exercise. Finally, Capt Zemek’s field experience resulted in her selection to represent Air Force Special Operations Command as the sole active duty Air Force representative at the International Anti-Terrorism conference in the Sahel Seminar in Dakar, Senegal. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Zemek reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.



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. The Air Commando Association is proud to sponsor these annual awards. Presentation is at the annual convention.

Air Commando Journal Article Submission Guidelines

Our goal at the ACJ is to tell the Air Commando and USAF Special Operations story, from our beginning to today. We need your help to do that. We seek quality articles, well written, factually based, and reflecting your experiences living the special operations mission in all of its complexities. Submissions can be of any length, although 1500-3000 words would be an average suggestion. All articles will be edited as per the Air University Style and Author Guide (found online at http://aupress.maxwell.af.mil/resources/style/austyle_guide.pdf, www.aircommando.org, and at the Hurlburt Field library). Hard-copy manuscripts can be mailed to: *Air Commando Journal*, P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569-0007. However, we prefer that they be submitted electronically to: info@aircommando.org. We use MS-Word. We also appreciate accompanying photos. Photos should be high resolution (300 dpi) and must indicate the source, have a release for use, and a brief description. If your submission is copyrighted, we will indicate that on the article. Please see www.aircommando.org for more information on *Air Commando Journal* article guidelines.

Help us tell our story!

THE

NOT-SO SECRET

WAR

By Lt Col (Ret) Michael L Burton

The air and ground war fought by the US in Laos from 1965-1975 is often referred to as the "Secret War."

Certainly the thousands of airmen who served on the bases in Thailand knew where the operational missions were being carried out and while they were told to keep the mission details secret, the word was getting out. Operations were classified, but by 1968 the war in Laos was the worst kept secret around.

In January 1968 the New York Times had an article that said:

Reliable sources said today that the main thrust of United States air action in Vietnam had shifted temporarily to Laos because of increased North Vietnamese truck traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

By September of that same year, the Washington Post had this lead to a story by Robert Kaylor:

NAKHON PHANOM, Thailand (UPI)- The US Air Force is waging a secret and unconventional phase of the air war in Southeast Asia

from this base across the Mekong River from Laos.

The American pilots involved wear midnight-black flight suits and fly camouflaged twin-engine A26 bombers without identifying insignia. One of the seven US bases in Thailand, theirs alone is cloaked in secrecy. Inquiries about the mission of the US 56th Special Operations Wing at Nakhon Phanom are met with a terse "no comment" from US officials.

I was one of the "officials" who made the "no comment" comment. The official position was that it wasn't so much of a "secret" war as it was one we denied.

Until the day before I landed at Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand (NKP), I had no idea where my orders were taking me. The orders simply said "APO Classified." I had been sent TDY to a small shop in the Pentagon where I got a three-hour briefing on what my job

as an information officer was to be at a "remote, classified location." Just what that location was to be I wasn't told other than it would be in Southeast Asia.

It wasn't until I got to Saigon that I found out that I was going to a "super secret base way up north in Thailand," and finally was told it was an air commando unit.

When I walked off that C-130 onto the pieced steel planking runway, I thought I had entered a time-war. All I saw were WWII era aircraft; not a jet in sight and even the jeep that picked me up featured a machine gun mounted in the cab. After I secured a bunk in one of the hootches, I reported to Col Harry C. "Heine" Aderholt who was to be my boss. After the formal salute he came out from behind his desk and gave me a warm hand shake, and said, "So you're going to keep me out of trouble," and chuckled. Aderholt told me that I would be designated the Wing "DXI," and went on to express his frustration about the

lack of recognition his men got for all they were doing and sacrificing. I recall he expressed some rather sharp criticism (in words only he could use) of the "folks upstairs" that I was going to have to get around if I was to achieve some success in telling the stories of the airmen of the 56th. In any case he made it clear that he would have my back as long as I did my job.

Col Aderholt also said I should fly a mission with each of the operational squadrons so I would know what they were about. I managed to do this on each of the aircraft assigned except the A-26. Of course my name never appeared on any flight manifest. I took a T-28 flight with Col Aderholt, a routine but to me thrilling ride, and on landing he asked me what I would have told the press if we had crashed. He was testing me to see how I would handle such situations, but I responded that I wouldn't have to handle anything since I wouldn't be in any shape to do so if we had crashed. Later at the Officer's Club we spent quite some time talking about the loss of pilots and how difficult that was for him, especially since, "The whole damned thing is so hush-hush we can't give these men their due."

The job as the Wing DXI turned out to be more complicated than I imagined. All the tools were in place: a radio station was about to go on the air, a newspaper, of sorts was being printed, and I had a small, but great staff.

The problem was that we were restricted from mentioning anything about the operations of the wing. We couldn't even mention the type of aircraft being flown by the wing units. I was required to "sanitize" any news releases or public documents that might go off base. This included any awards or decorations and I found myself "sanitizing" Air Medal and Distinguished Flying Crosses and other citations to ensure there were no direct references to where the operations took place.

I was the "junior woodchuck" on the wing staff, which also gave me access to and insight about the air operations, tactics, and strategies under which the wing operated. These were frustrating times for Col Aderholt, his vice-commander Col Roland McCoskrie,

my subsequent boss, and their staffs and squadron commanders. Conflicting policies seemed to change weekly and left the wing at odds with the chain of command.

The operations in Laos were complicated by three key interwoven factors: first the "neutrality" of Laos, which was further complicated by the fact that there was a civil war going on inside that country; second, the chain of command was often "blurred"; and third, while the Vietnam air war strategy was to cut-off the North Vietnamese supply lines into South Vietnam, this was hampered by political policies emanating out of Washington.

As stipulated in the Geneva Accords

North Vietnam were signatories to that agreement

North Vietnam, however, had already reached an agreement with the Communist Pathet Lao to construct what became the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT), engaging thousands of troops and civilians to build the road that ran from the North through the eastern edges of Laos and Cambodia into various infiltration points in South Vietnam.

This placed the United States in a quandary. How should it support South Vietnam and also respect the neutrality of Laos which was being used as the main logistics highway for the southward movement of military forces of North Vietnam? The US followed a political



Gen Vang Pao, Ambassador William Sullivan, Bill Lair, CIA, Col Paul 'Pappy' Petigrew, (then) Col Harry 'Heinie' Aderholt.

of 1954, "The Government of Laos undertook never to permit the territory of Laos to be used in furtherance of a policy of aggression." Further, under the follow-on 1962 Geneva Agreement the 14 signatories pledged to respect Laotian neutrality, to refrain from interference — direct or indirect — in the internal affairs of Laos, and to refrain from drawing Laos into military alliance or to establish military bases in Laotian territory. The Laotian government pledged to promulgate constitutionally its commitments which would have the force of law. Both the United States and

policy aimed at both these goals.

During the time I was at NKP, most of the operational efforts by the air commandos, indeed the entire USAF effort against the HCMT was directed out of the embassy in the capital of Laos, Vientiane. The ambassador at this time was the Honorable William H. Sullivan. Sullivan was "hands on" when it came to the operations in Laos, and was referred to as "Field Marshal Sullivan." He had to tread the fine line between stopping the arms and men coming down the HCMT and respecting the neutrality of Laos. Both Aderholt and McCoskrie got along



Douglas B-26K Counter Invader at the National Museum of the United States Air Force.
(Photo courtesy of USAF)

well with Sullivan, at least from my view, but the same couldn't be said of their relationship with Seventh Air Force (7th AF).

LtGen William Momyer commanded the 7th AF, including the units stationed in Thailand at the time I was stationed at NKP. Gen Momyer not only seemed to have it in for Col Aderholt, he didn't exactly have profound respect for the operational units of the 56th. There was, literally, a jet vs. propeller aircraft debate as to which was more effective. This debate extended to the use of munitions. Both Aderholt and McCoskrie felt that 7th AF too often fragged the wrong munitions for the mission assigned. For both of them it wasn't just the effectiveness of the armaments, but the safety of the pilots that was at stake.

On top of the operations debate, Momyer and Sullivan didn't see eye-to-eye. In fact Momyer resented that an ambassador should have any say in operational control at all. The truth is that the ambassador was more familiar with the results of the operations by the 56th in Laos than Gen Momyer was.

One of my jobs was to work as a liaison with the local villagers. This meant not just in Thailand, but occasionally in Laos. This gave me the opportunity to meet Laotian Gen Vang Pao, leader of the Hmong tribes and forces, and to understand the turmoil and destruction the war brought to his country. I was deeply impressed by the valor and dedication of his troops and airmen. He told me once, as he probably told others, that "...if I only had some

more T-28s."

It was against this entire backdrop that I was given the responsibility to tell as much of the story of the 56th to the public as I legally could.

After being there for about 30 days the whole secrecy thing seemed to me to be absurd. The US strategy to defeat North Vietnam depended greatly on its air tactics and 80 or 90 percent of the air operations to achieve this flew out of the Thai bases. The air commando operations out of NKP were the most effective means of interdiction and scored the highest kill ratio for trucks and materials coming down the HCMT. Nonetheless, any operational strikes against Laotian territory were denied by US and, therefore, Air Force officials.

As the DXI, I tried to get clever. We would write releases to hometown newspapers in the US saying "Captain so-and-such received his Air Medal for operations in the extreme Northern Demilitarized Zone" – that thin area which separated North and South Vietnam. However, reviewers at 7th AF caught on to that pretty quickly and shut me down.

I also established a good relationship with the editor of the Bangkok Times, an English language newspaper that also printed the NKP News. They were able to get permission from the Thai government to send a reporter to NKP to do a story about our civic action unit, especially the medical boat that operated on the Mekong.

In fact, technically the 7th AF didn't control access to the base because it was a Royal Thai Air Force Base. On one

occasion an American reporter, Frank Wolfe, showed up on the base almost unannounced. He had received approval from the Thai Air Ministry in Bangkok, to do a story on our civic action efforts. I found out about this visit from the Public Information Operations office located over at Udorn Air Base, Thailand, who provided him with transportation to NKP! I was also instructed not to let Wolfe know anything about our flight operations and I was not to mention Laos.

At first all went well. We immediately went off the base and visited some Thai villages where we provided medical and sanitation assistance. As we were driving back to the base, I took a circuitous route to avoid his seeing any of our aircraft (not an easy thing to do). As we drove past a revetment, an CH-3 painted entirely black and definitely not a Jolly Green, rose up and took off. Before I knew it, Wolfe took a photo and asked, "Why is that helicopter painted black?"

Taken aback I blurted out "Its sister ship was shot down so they painted it black in mourning." That dumb blurb showed up in a national magazine and earned me the wrath of every information office up the chain! Fortunately, the photo wasn't printed.

One of the responsibilities I had was to put together a base guide for newly arrived troops. This was handed out along with the admonition to keep silent

about our operations. The guide had the usual stuff: BX, airmen, NCO and Officer Club hours, a heavy dose of local cultural information, and how to act in the local villages. Of course we could not say anything about our operational units.

One of the men in my office had the idea to print the cover of the guide with photos of each of our aircraft. Even if we couldn't mention them inside, at least the troops would have something to send home. I thought I had better run the idea past Col Aderholt. He loved the idea and when I reminded him about the restrictions he was the first man I ever recall saying, "It is sometimes easier to ask forgiveness than permission." Then he added, "And print it in color!"

One of my last assignments was to escort Howard Sochurek who was writing an article titled "Air Rescue Behind Enemy Lines" for *National Geographic* magazine. While mention of the HCMT was allowed, Sochurek had been briefed by everyone in the chain, including me, not to mention where the rescue operations were taking place. He did a good job and anyone reading the article would think all rescue ops were in North Vietnam because Laos was not mentioned.

Sochurek's article appeared in the September 1968 edition of *National Geographic*, the same month that the *Washington Post* uncovered the "Secret

War." It was ironic that the official position was still one of deniability or "no comment" and that went on even after 1975.

I recently sought to obtain a copy of an oral history interview done with Col McCoskrie in 1975. When I tracked down this document and asked for a copy, the response I got was that "... it is still classified and not available for distribution." The very "secretness" of the exploits and valor of the air commandos has proven to be a point of great frustration for me and I know it bothered both Aderholt and McCoskrie in their later years--they wanted their men to get their due respect.

It may be a long time before the full story of the "secret war" is available for all to see. In the meanwhile the Air Commando Association is helping by telling the story bit by bit.



Note: There are now several good books about the 56th Special Operation Wing and the role that it and its airmen played in the war in Laos.

For those that want a deeper look than I have provided here, I recommend:

- *Air Commando One*, Heinie Aderholt and America's Secret Air Wars, by Warren A. Trest
- *The Secret Vietnam War: The USAF in Thailand, 1961-1975*, by Jeffrey D. Glasser

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AT-28 loaded with ordnance including napalm. (Photo courtesy of USAF)

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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