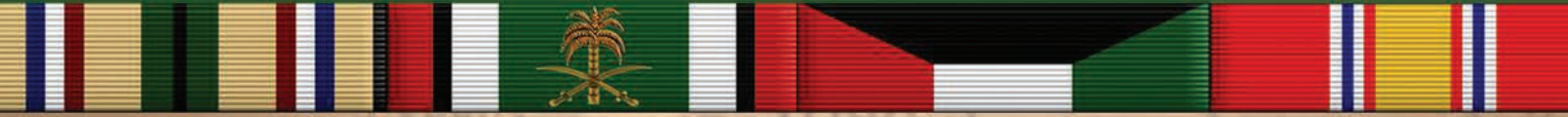


# AIR COMMANDO

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

# JOURNAL



**Planning  
Missions  
PSYOPs  
& CSARs**

**25<sup>th</sup> DESERT  
ANNIVERSARY STORM**



Vol 5: Issue 2

Foreword by Ben Orrell, Col, USAF (Ret)



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# Air Commando JOURNAL

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CCT officer Lt Tom Nalepa, CMSgt Wayne Norrad, and TSgt Duane Stanton on board a French C-130 leaving Kuwait City International Airport. (Photo courtesy of Wayne Norrad)

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# FOREWORD

The phone finally rang. I grabbed it and heard the code word I had been waiting for hours to hear. We had secure telephones but I hadn't wanted to wait for the keying process so a code word had been established to clear us to launch. "Blow Job." Timing was critical so I told the small staff around me, "We have a go," and jumped into my car and headed for the flight line. Crews were already at the helos ready to go but had not started engines because fuel was so critical. I first went to the Air Force guys because their engine start-up process was longer. "We have a go!" I yelled over the roar of the auxiliary power units. Their commander said, "Holy shit, we are really going to do it." Next I told the Army guys, "We have clearance to launch." Their commander smiled and headed for his waiting Apache crews. Finally, after all those months of waiting we were going to kick Saddam Hussein's ass. Within that same hour I sat at the end of the runway and listened as our birds and crews flew overhead. They were completely blacked out and with no moon they were completely invisible. I couldn't help but worry for their safety but at the same time I was so proud that Special Operations had been selected to fire the first shots to start the Gulf War. As the last sounds of freedom disappeared in the distance I started the car up and headed back to the Saudi Arabian jail we called headquarters and did one of the hardest things a commander ever does. Wait for some word about how things are going.

DESERT STORM had come quickly on the heels of Operation JUST CAUSE and was a real test to our command. Not only did the 1st Special Operations Wing deploy nearly all of our assets and people to the far corner of the earth, we went to a completely bare base in deplorable conditions. I was in awe of the guts and determination I saw at every level. Maintainers worked in conditions so hot that they had to use gloves to hold the hot wrenches. Tents were erected at night to help negate the effects of the heat but night brought new challenges including spiders, scorpions, and mountains of debris that had to be cleared before a tent could be erected. Still our people prevailed and even made a competition out of it, seeing which team could assemble the most tents in one night.

Dust, stifling heat, and darkness unlike anything we had ever seen were the norm. Despite those conditions our crews flew incredibly demanding missions and excelled. Unfortunately, combat sometimes results in loss of life. The loss of Spirit 03 hit us all hard and will be with us always. They died as heroes doing what they were trained to do but we will never forget them and wish with all our being that they were with us today.

I have always been proud to be an American but during Operation DESERT STORM it was so obvious what made us a great nation. The perseverance, ingenuity, and the SOF ethos from initial deployment through final execution was simply phenomenal. Our nation could have asked for nothing more from the "Great American Air Commandos" deployed in Operation DESERT STORM. Please enjoy this edition of *Air Commando Journal* that highlights some of their incredible teamwork and accomplishments.



**(Then Capt) Bennie Orrell receiving the Air Force Cross for the daring rescue of Bengal 505A, Maj Clyde Smith, USMC. (Photo from *Combat Search and Rescue in DESERT STORM* by Darrel Whitcomb, Air University Press, 2006)**



Ben Orrell, Col, USAF (Ret)  
Air Force Cross Recipient  
1st SOW Director of Operations / DESERT STORM  
Former 39th SOW Commander



# CHINDIT CHATTER

In July 1990, I signed in to the 9th SOS at Eglin and promptly left for C-130 requalification at Little Rock and then HC-130 initial qualification training at Kirtland. I finished that training and returned to Eglin on 23 December 1990 to a nearly empty 9th SOS. The squadron, as nearly all of the 1st SOW, were deployed for DESERT SHIELD. Shortly after my return, the squadron DO, Lt Col John Fuss, called me in to his office and told me that he, too, was going forward and that I, (a Lt Col (sel)) at the time, was the ranking officer and now in charge of the remainder of the unit. Very soon after Col Fuss' departure, the rest of the 1st SOW started to spin for yet another DESERT SHIELD

related tasking and the 9th SOS' remaining aircraft and crews were put on alert. We remained in that posture until we were finally given the execute order to launch on 17 January 1991...the very day that DESERT STORM began. In fact, CNN was breaking the news as we conducted our recall and launched. (It is also easy for me to remember that day, since it was one of my wife Pat's "significantly more traumatic" birthdays and she has since told everyone that I would do anything to escape that event!)



DESERT STORM was the first truly "all out" effort by the relatively new command, AFSOC. This year marks the 25th anniversary of what was a seminal event in the development and maturation of that new organization. It was a great success overall but not without some controversy in joint command relationships and, of course, the tragedy of Spirit 03. This edition of the *Air Commando Journal* highlights those efforts and we are lucky to share some of the unique insights of planners, crews and leadership across the spectrum. We are particularly thankful to Col Orrell who was one of the key 1st SOW leaders at the time for his opening in the Foreword. Hats off to all who participated in DESERT STORM and also a quiet shout out to those GABLE SHARK participants....you know who you are also.

We are just around the corner from another ACA Convention/Reunion. You will find a schedule of events later in the Journal. Please give strong consideration to taking part in as many events as possible. Along with recognizing a host of young present day Air Commandos, we will also induct five "more seasoned" veterans into the Hall of Fame.

Congratulations to Col John Easley, MSgt Scotty Fales, Col Randy O'Boyle, Col Ray Turczynski, and MSgt Tim Wilkinson. All great and deserving Americans.

Any Time - Any Place



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

## Rescue of Clyde Smith by Ben Orrell and Jolly 32

This past Memorial Day, I had a recent experience that involved fallen comrades and SOF heroes that I wanted to share.

I was asked to be a guest speaker at my nephew's Memorial Day activities on 17 May. The school he attends in Austin really does it right—Flag raising ceremony, with singing of the National Anthem followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, then the students (incredibly well-behaved First Graders!) sang a medley of patriotic songs, followed by lunch, then a presentation by two former military members.

I knew I was supposed to follow the grandfather of one of the students, and as I walked over to introduce myself, I heard him say to someone else, "I'm Clyde Smith and I was shot down in an A-6 in Vietnam." I reached out my hand to him, and asked, "are you the same Clyde Smith that Ben Orrell rescued?" He looked a little surprised, and asked me, "how could you know that?"

I told him my career had been in AFSOC and that Ben Orrell and that rescue were legendary. We sequestered ourselves in a corner, and he told me all about the rescue, (he was shot down on 9 April 1972, and rescued on 13 April), and then Clyde mentioned that Jim Harding, who was SANDY 01 for the rescue, had visited him recently, but he said that there were many associated with his rescue that he never got to meet in person.

After our talks, (during which he showed a lithograph of the three airframes—A6, A1 and HH-53, where he, Jim Harding, and Ben Orrell had all signed), we got together again before departing.

He reiterated the incredible airmanship of Jim Harding flying below the clouds as Sandy 1 to orchestrate the rescue, and the incredible heroism of the HH-53 crew of Jolly 32, pilot Ben Orrell, co-pilot Jim Casey, crew chief Bill Brinson, door gunner/winch operator Bill

Liles, and door gunner Ken Cakebread (who Clyde thought took a round through his leg).

Clyde asked that if I got a chance to do so, please pass on his highest regards to all those guys. So if I could ask for an "assist" from the ACA, please pass on my regards as well.

Warm Regards,  
Frank Kisner  
Lt Gen, USAF (Ret)  
ACA Life Member

Dennis,

Thank you for forwarding the information from Gen Kisner. Clyde and I have stayed in touch ever since the shoot down and rescue. We got together in person in 1998 to record the History Channel documentation and have seen each other off and on ever since. (You can search on the internet for Col Jim Harding to see the History Channel documentation.)

The true hero in this rescue was Clyde Smith. He kept it together for 4 days while we systemically destroyed numerous AAA positions that totally surrounded him on one of the most heavily defended sections of the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. He even survived us "gassing" him to keep the searchers away. We flew 181 sorties, between the Air Force and Navy, during the rescue. We even had to take out a nearby threatening SAM site during the rescue.

In my opinion, Clyde became a hero the second time when he took on throat cancer a couple of years ago and defeated it too. Maybe we should make Clyde an honorary Air Commando. The rest of us were just doing our job. The Sandys and Jollys had a very busy time in the 71-72 time frame.

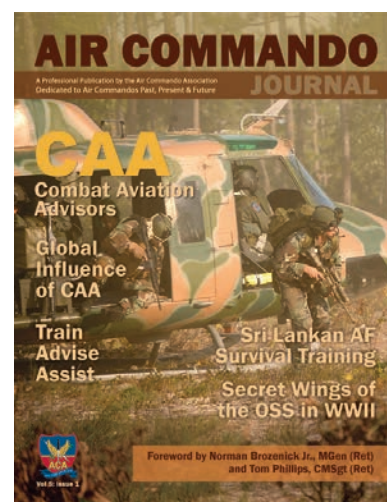
My thanks also to Gen Kisner for passing on his and Clyde's regards.

Jim Harding  
Col, USAF (Ret)  
ACA Life Member

## Combat Aviation Advisors

Colonel Barnett,

Please accept my congratulations on your production of the recent *Air Commando Journal*. And thanks to all the other people who brought it together for publication. This issue is, of course, unprecedented in show-casing the special



operations train-advise-assist role and the CAA operator. It is also unique in presenting the past, present, and future of this mission arena under one cover.

The articles, combined, will go a long way towards educating the AFSOC community on what CAA teams do and how they do it. For example, Lt Col Bryan Raridon's statements about CAA teams having to defend themselves in tactical, on-the-ground situations was especially well placed.

Imagining Air Force men and women actually maneuvering on the ground, firing weapons against enemy forces in a real-world, self-defense situation is a stretch for most AF people who have never operated forward. The strategic game in modern irregular warfare, however, is played in the enablement arena, which necessarily leads AFSOC in the direction of forward operations.

These ACJ articles will also help demystify the CAA mission and,

hopefully, push the 6 SOS towards general acceptance of it being a combat-trained unit independent of their assigned aircraft. As deeply imbedded as we are in irregular warfare around the planet, the CAA mission is still exotic stuff. I have always believed that it is absolutely crucial to include and educate the leadership on when, how, and to what effect, they can employ their CAA teams in regional warfare and special contingencies. This journal issue can have that effect, as well as demonstrate how their CAA personnel can achieve strategic effects directly. That too carries a unique flavor. Again, thanks for your great work.

With Sincere Regards,  
Jerry Klingaman  
Lt Col, USAF (Ret)  
ACA Life Member

Mr K,

*Once again your profound humility is at the fore of your very nice note. Your article, and most of all your leadership and mentoring over the years, serve as multiple cornerstones to this great career field and capability. It was truly a pleasure putting this together and, while all the CAA articles were great, an issue without your insights and experiences would have been rendered somewhat hollow.*

*Thanks for the kudos. We have a very small but capable editing team and of course, Jeanette provides the design backdrop that makes each issue so much more readable and memorable.*

vr  
Dennis Barnett  
President ACA

Sir Dennis,

Thanks for your superb leadership producing another awesome ACJ issue! You and your team wove together an informative and compelling narrative about CAA's origin, growth, and enduring

contributions...from the past to tonight.

And what an incredible contributing group of CAA veterans! Mr K, Eric Huppert, Marty Richards, and Jake... plus today's leaders like Cols Raridon, Hreczkosij and Horton. Mr K's terrific article is an instant classic! Good update from the 919th's Col Matthews. And Bernie Moore's Secret Wings was a great read, I look forward to more in future ACJ issues.

Norm Brozenick  
Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)  
ACA Life Member

### **Proud to Also Be a Member of the AFSOC Community**

My entire flying career had been in the Strategic Air Command (SAC). I was very fortunate to be selected for the SR-71 Blackbird program and fly in the squadron for five years. Then while at Air Command & Staff College the SR-71 program was terminated and MPC decided to assign me to the space community! So after school I PCSed to HQ USAF at the Pentagon and to the AF TENCAP (Tactical Exploitation of National Capabilities) office which was formed to leverage the billions of dollars spent on classified satellites and provide these National space systems capabilities to the warfighter as rapidly as possible. In 1994, after four years at the Pentagon I was offered an assignment to Hurlburt Field to run the new HQ AFSOC TENCAP office to assure special operations aircrews and units received the technology and information from these National space programs. When I received this offer—like most of the rest of the Air Force back then I did not know much about AFSOC and its mission. A colonel I worked with at the Pentagon said he had a friend I could talk to who could tell me something about AFSOC. So he brought me down the hall and introduced me to his buddy, Col Norty Schwartz! I spent the next hour with Col Schwartz discussing AFSOC, Hurlburt

and their mission. I was sold and accepted the assignment the next day from MPC.

From the time the I arrived at HQ AFSOC and was presented an AFSOC numbered coin I have been proud to have served in AFSOC. While I never flew for AFSOC I look back at my four years at the Headquarters and then 16 years with Boeing with great pride in being a contributor and member of the AFSOC community. I am as proud of being a part of AFSOC as I am being part of the select group that got to fly the SR-71. I could not ask for a more exciting career and to be a member of two of the most exciting communities in the Air Force—special ops and recce.

Doug Soifer  
Lt Col, USAF (Ret)  
Fort Walton Beach, FL  
ACA Member

Doug,

*Thanks for the nice note. The critical role that space plays in SOF's day to day operations cannot be overstated. All of us from that realm are extremely appreciative that you made that transition and assisted AFSOC in that critical time with that essential conversion.*

v/r  
Dennis Barnett  
President ACA

### **Carpetbaggers of WWII**

First and foremost, another outstanding issue of ACJ with the June 2016 issue, and a great write-up by Col Moore on our special mission roots with the OSS and SOE in WWII. Most people think of the blacked out B-24s dropping operatives and supplies when they hear of the Carpetbaggers, but the Carpetbaggers flew some other aircraft (and missions) as well. The B-24s were mostly used over German-occupied territory, but were deemed too slow and vulnerable for missions over Germany itself. For these missions the Carpetbaggers used A-26s,





hoping their extra speed would enable them to get in and out of Germany before defenses could react. A-26s dropped operatives from the bomb bay at around 300-350' AGL.

Another Carpetbagger mission set less well-known were Joan-Eleanor ("JE") missions flown in DeHavilland Mosquitos. These missions were flown to communicate with agents inside Germany using low powered VHF Joan-Eleanor radios. An operative would sit in the belly of the Mosquito while the agent on the ground had a small "Joan" transceiver. The radios operated in a frequency band which was outside of German surveillance capabilities, allowing the operator and agent to carry on an open conversation in the clear, instead of relying on Morse code for transmission. It was claimed that more information could be sent by voice in 20 minutes than would take 3 days to code, transmit, receive, and decode by Morse. The wood and fabric design of the Mosquito also provided a form of early stealth, enabling the aircraft to circle at 30-40,000' inside of German radar range without being detected. While these missions were known as JE missions by the OSS, the USAAF called them "Red Stocking" operations, hoping German intelligence would confuse them with "Blue Stocking" weather missions which were also flown by lone, unescorted Mosquitos.

Lt Col Matt Ziemann  
USAF Special Operations School  
Hurlburt Field

Matt,

*Thanks for the very kind words. We will forward your note to Col Moore.*

*Dennis Barnett  
President ACA*

Dear Col Moore,

As a 47-year veteran of Special Operations with the CIA and a OSS history buff, I thoroughly enjoyed your recent article "Secret Wings of the OSS" in the *Air Commando Journal*. I look forward to Part 2. Through a friend, now an Army Maj Gen, I sent Gen Patreaus (still in Afghanistan but appointed Director CIA) a copy of a recent biography of OSS Director, "Wild Bill" Donovan. He is a "Wild Bill" fan and honored me with a nice letter.

My main reason for writing is to recommend a great book I just finished. It is "Savage Will" by Timothy M. Gay and is available for just a few bucks at Amazon or, my favorite book source, [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com). It is a true story about an Army C-53 carrying 12 nurses and 12 medics from newly liberated Sicily to a new field hospital in Bari, Italy, just south of the front lines. Bad weather, bad comms and bad avionics caused the plane to crash land in Nazi-occupied Albania. It is a great story of survival, escape & evasion with SOE and OSS playing a part in their rescue after trekking always just ahead of Nazi search units over 150 miles of mountainous terrain in winter. I hope you have a chance to read it.

Sincerely,  
Mickey Kappes  
Merritt Island, Florida

Mickey,

*Thanks for your very nice note to Col Moore. We will forward and if you are ok with it, we will use your note in a future Hotwash section of the Journal.*

*Many thanks,  
Dennis Barnett  
President ACA*

## Air Commando Journal

I am a Writer/Editor with US Special Operations Command's History & Research Office. My office currently receives one copy of *Air Commando Journal*, to the attention of one of our historians. As a retired AF MSgt, and now working in SOCOM'S history office, I enjoy reading "*Air Commando Journal*," but find myself rushing through it when I pick it up in our mail distro, before handing it off to the historian on the Attention line. Not only do I find it interesting to read, I also consider it an informative source for reference and would appreciate having my own hard copy.

Would it be possible to add me to your mailing list, increasing our copies to 2?

Thank you.  
Laura LeBeau  
Writer/Editor  
USSOCOM History &  
Research Office

Laura,

*We are happy to hear you are enjoying the read, it also very rewarding to know that the articles within Air Commando Journal (ACJ) are being used as a source of information and reference. Our Editor, Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett, intended for this publication to be used for educational purposes, among many other things.*

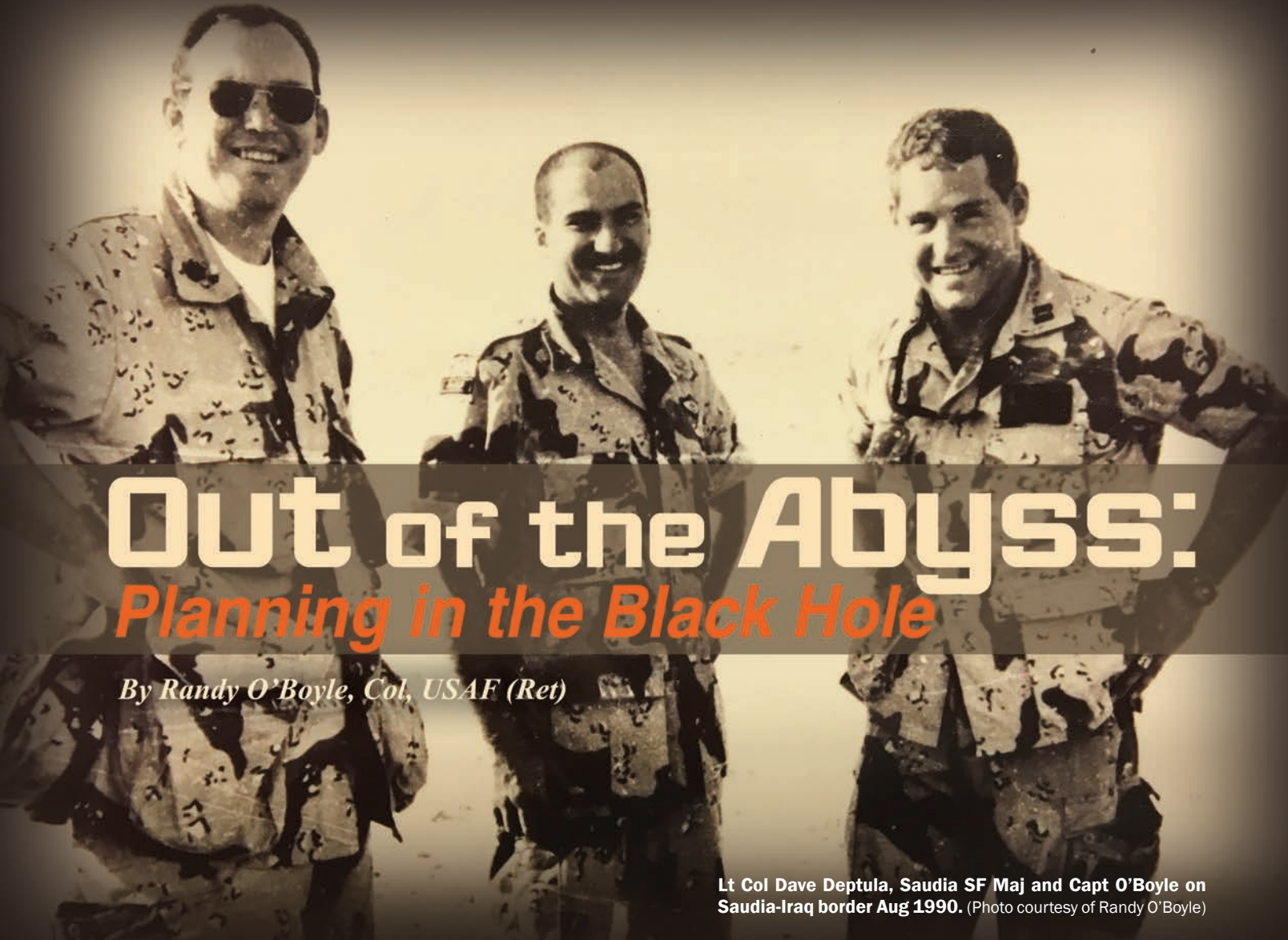
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Kindly,  
Shannon Pressley

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# Out of the Abyss: *Planning in the Black Hole*

*By Randy O'Boyle, Col, USAF (Ret)*

**Lt Col Dave Deptula, Saudia SF Maj and Capt O'Boyle on Saudia-Iraq border Aug 1990.** (Photo courtesy of Randy O'Boyle)

The Pave Low tail-gunners threw out bundles of chem-lights to mark the routes from the Initial Point (IP) to the targets for the respective trailing formations of Apaches. On schedule, Lt Col Cody's Apaches lit up two separate radar sites in Iraq with hellfire missiles at 0250 local. The first sortie of F-117's had moments before they dropped their bombs on the first two strategic targets in downtown Baghdad – the war we know as DESERT STORM (17 Jan 1991) had begun.

I was lucky enough to have an airborne electronic ringside seat. We had been on station all night to coordinate CSAR/ mission support for the MH-53 Pave Low-led Apache hit on a couple radar sites in Western Iraq. I had followed the mission in real time on board my ABCCC, flying along the border and tracked the electronic icons as the Paves/ Apaches did their work. All had gone according to the plan. The first night of

the Air Campaign had been an incredible success and Air Force Special Ops had played a critical doctrinal part.

It had all started for me just like the opening scene in the old movie Navy SEALs, I was one of the 1st SOW planners and we were at Ft Bragg for the funeral of Col Malvesti (who died in a parachute accident) when everyone's beepers started going off. For you younger folks, beepers were what you used back then, state of the art, they would give you a few word text message like "call work" and you would go try to find a pay phone.

After the alerts, we caught the last flight home, got into the Special Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) and found out plans were formulating for student body right to Kuwait. Contingency plans were being dusted off, mobility folks were scrambling, aircrews were being

organized, it was action packed drama. We had just completed a Central Command (CENTCOM) Operational Plan validation exercise a month earlier so we were in much better shape than could have been the case.

A flyer's first loyalty is always to the squadron, regardless of where you sit in the food chain, so after a brief visit to the squadron and no small amount of groveling befitting any Pave Low Evaluator Pilot resident in a wing job, Lt Col Comer (now Maj Gen, Ret) told me that he and Lt Col Dennis Ramsey had worked out a deal. I was told I would be leaving at 2230 with a group of other planners bound for MacDill. I had four hours to get to mobility, get a chem-mask refresher, shots, mobility bags, and be ready to go. I rushed home, did what I could to shore up the house, dropped the keys off to a neighbor, and rushed back to base.

When the airlift to MacDill didn't come through, we were told we still had to make the early morning launch from MacDill to the Area of Responsibility (AOR) so we called an audible, we rented five cars from Okaloosa County Airport, stuffed them with planners, mobility bags, and GAU-5's /9mm's (with lots of ammo) and took off down the Florida highways to Tampa. If we had been pulled over no doubt we would have missed the war. Driving all night we made it by 0600 only to be told by our gaining organization, Special Operations Command CENTCOM (SOCCENT), there was a 24 hour delay and we would

the reports of Saddam coming South.

We were divided up, I went to Central Command Air Force (CENTAF) to work the Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) plan. Our merry little band of 1st SOW planners, Randy Durham, Steve Payne, Eric Thompson, Rob Stewart to name a few – many cycled in – were dedicated professionals, each deeply schooled in their weapons system nuances – creative and innovative. Eric Thompson and I found ourselves requisitioning a phone closet as space was limited to everyone, the Saudis having to double the size of the HQ overnight. I took it on myself to decide that if they actually bombed

I also noticed a white haired 1-star Gen (with scarf) directing traffic. I hadn't recalled ever seeing a General up close and personal. They took me over to a Lt Col Dave Deptula (now Lt Gen Ret) who was over from the office of the SECAF and had been secretly working elements of an offensive air campaign to knock out Iraq (he had been working with Checkmate's legendary Col John Warden). Col Wilson said this is your CSAR guy. As it got fleshed out, selected officers from key specialties got quietly recruited. You had to lead a double life because you couldn't tell anyone what was going on as it was still a national security issue – defense only.

The planning area became known as the Black Hole because over time, people got spirited up there, as did I, to work fulltime. Those left to staff the defense of Saudi Arabia plan kept complaining about the planners being sucked into a black hole upstairs. Well over the course of three months the plans got refined. The Navy was integrated, which was no small effort. I remember Gen Horner at one point telling them they could sit out at sea all they wanted, but if they weren't fully integrated into the Air Tasking Order (ATO) and the Joint Air Campaign they wouldn't drop a bomb in the AOR.

Lt Col Deptula was our resident airpower seer, an adamant airpower advocate. He radiated airpower doctrine and logic. A magician behind the scenes, he kept the Air Campaign from being diluted by inter-service politics, always interceding fearlessly up the food chain to keep the needed synergy intact. Early on he drove with me and some US/Saudi special forces personnel up to the border berm to get a bird's eye view across the border. Humorously, he had the Suburban with a broken leaf spring and every time they hit a bump while speeding across the desert at 70 mph, his head hit the roof. Eventually he put his helmet on. After we had a terrorist threat against the planning area he asked me to get him a gun (the corporate Air Force wasn't big on side arms back then) so I did.

The Black Hole was my home for most of the conflict. I did get tasked to travel the whole AOR, briefing every combat unit on the CSAR plan and taking some of our famous Pave heroes



**Captains Minish and O'Boyle (shown in center) at Brit Bar, Diego Garcia after CSAR brief.** (Photo courtesy of Randy O'Boyle)

process in with the C-130 load from Hurlburt landing in an hour. Oh well.

Lt Col Steve Payne was our fearless leader, an old AC-130 pilot doing his joint staff job at SOCCENT. We jumped a C-5 for the long ride over to the desert. We had a big discussion at the back of the seating area about whether to take the anti-nerve agent pills (most of us didn't) and landed in the middle of the night at Riyadh. We had all the desert gear to include sand goggles and Rommel hats, we got in the back of a deuce and a half truck and, instead of going into the desert as anticipated, we pulled up in front of the Marriot – all the hotels had been evacuated and the King of Saudi Arabia laid it on gratis for all of us, complete with 5-star catering. We kept our machine guns hidden in our rooms, not giving our guns away to anyone and kept hearing

us in Saudi we would go downtown to Baghdad. The politically correct version was the entire DESERT SHIELD deployment was only defense, defense, defense – no offensive operations, etc. This was to dampen down the “going after the oil” story line being promoted by some knuckleheads in the press.

It was when I briefed an F-15 pilot named Steve Wilson who had come over from the National Security Council (NSC) to the desert and he saw the offensive oriented CSAR plan with forward deployed hide sites into Iraq to hasten pickups – that he took me upstairs to a conference room off Gen Horner's CENTAF commander's office. An armed guard was out front. I looked at all the maps of Iraq spread over the tables and 20 officers of all ranks working feverishly and knew big stuff was happening here.



like Corby Martin, Tim Minish and Jack Hester on AOR excursions. This all came about, because I gave one positive CSAR briefing about how we were going to forward deploy on night one so we could be there to rescue downed aircrew if needed. Apparently it went over so well, I was told to go to every air base in the AOR and give the same brief. After only two briefings in 10 days I got lambasted by the 1 star. I said, "Well General, I have no priority on the Star Flights (intra theater airlift schedule created by Randy Durham) and I just can't get there." The next thing you know, the King gave us a Challenger aircraft from the Royal Family with gold plated seat belts and they took us everywhere we needed to go. We went to the Navy's ships and air bases all over SW Asia.

Gen Buster Glosson was ever the offensive minded coach, "No we are going to destroy them." (We could use a little more Buster today I think.) Back then, most of the weapons system planners knew nothing of SOF so we were their conduit into that dark world. Back then, the USAF Weapons School was where AF fighter pilots learned how to plan for any contingency and credibility was measured by the Weapons School patch on your flight suit. SOF was not a part of Weapons School in those days so we took as much as we gave. In SOF, we routinely had access to National Level Intelligence assets. When we started getting stonewalled on needed imagery, we were told we didn't have the clearance. I remember a conversation with the general about "just tell me what war we are saving this for so I can tell the guys they aren't important enough to have it" – well the next day we had a new intel Col and pictures galore. The CSAR plan we were working was targeted to pick up a maximum of 120 airman. The number was based on some coordination with the Pentagon analysis division. They said we could expect a worst case scenario of up to 120 aircrew on the ground needing rescue in the first two-weeks based on Vietnam Linebacker II attritions data. Archived data isn't always relevant.

Brig Gen George Gray (then Col) was our 1st SOW Commander. He led us extremely well in Panama a scant eight months earlier and of course he was leading us well now. With the legendary Col Ben Orrell, an AF Cross recipient from a Vietnam Jolly Green Rescue, at the general's side we knew we could handle the rescue piece and more. Attached to SOCCENT, we were judiciously filling out their mission sets, but as the plan was evolving, AFSOF was still not working doctrinally on offensive level missions due to the NSC mandate to do defense only.

I had made a number of coordination journeys to King Fahd AB which was the epicenter for all the 1st SOW assets. As the plan developed, I told Col Gray, Col Orrell and Lt Col Comer that there were things percolating that I was not at full liberty to discuss. They weren't yet read into the Air Campaign Plan. I alluded that things were happening and they collectively said/ordered, "Get us into the war in a meaningful, doctrinal SOF way and do it now!" The CSAR mission we could handle, we were glad to do it, but there was so much more we could contribute. Those were

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my marching orders and back I went.

One day when Gen Glosson was holding court – beating up the plan – working us all over on finding better ways to strike with extreme violence, obliterate the enemy. He reminded us, “War is not sterile, it’s violent and needs warriors not accountants to prosecute it.” A “beeps and squeaks” F-111 Weapons Systems Operator Maj Gary Alexander (whose nickname was appropriately “Tron”) and an intel officer were mapping out the Iraqi radar coverage along the border. There was a vast array of coverage in

had just been briefed successfully by Gen Glosson that we were ready to go (this was early October). A few days later SOCCENT flashed a message saying unless they got a cache of weapons the size of Fort Hood, they couldn’t guarantee success. Apparently some enterprising SF NCOs had seen this strategic mission as a get-well debit card for their poorly resourced peacetime gear. Complete with reacquisitions for truckloads of Stinger shoulder-fired missiles and the latest desert vehicles, they tried to get stocked up. Couple that with the Iraqis moving

they had all been forced to fly missions into North Vietnam without a full load of bombs and they didn’t care if it took 50 years to get them all home – they were not running out.

I went back with the retooled option and began selling it back up the chain. At many different levels there were major gaps in weapons systems integration between communities. In the Black Hole, Gen Glosson and Lt Col Deptula did what airpower has historically done for our country, think outside the box. Consider all options. Not fight the last war, but learn a few lessons from it. They were open to the new mission and put it back in the plan.

As we got close to execution night, things were tense in the Black Hole, everyone tirelessly went over their part of the campaign. If there was an F-15E munitions issue the Strike Eagle guy was on stage. I was asked numerous times if we were good to go – we were and I said so. The Air Tasking Orders (ATO) were being worked over and sent out, they were all being hand delivered to the Carriers. Rescue plans revisited. Tanker tracks re-whickered. We got the final approval to go and I jumped on my ABCCC aircraft and off we went.

The first night’s mission had been a resounding success. The F-117s took out their targets, the Pave – Apache mission went exactly as scheduled. F-15Es, British Tornados, B-52s and F-111s (to name a few) all went in country and came back. Flying back to Riyadh that night I remembered the endless stream of F-16s visible above the clouds as dawn broke, inbound to their targets. It was an overwhelming display of air power.

After the second night I stopped by the Black Hole which was an absolute beehive of coordination and battle absolute assessment. We had slept on the aircraft at ArAr base in Western Iraq, after night one and launched again on night two for CSAR duty. The Black Hole effort was now at the execution level of reloading/reworking for the coming nights efforts. We were always planning a rolling two days ahead where possible. The results were overwhelmingly positive and while the atmosphere was serious and business like, there was an unmistakable air of confidence, it was extremely satisfying.



**Lt Col Deptula, Maj Buck Rogers, and Capt O'Boyle in the “Black Hole”.** (Photo courtesy of Randy O'Boyle)

the East and the far West – but North of ArAr in the central West, there were only two radar sites close to the border. We discussed there would be a big hole in the coverage if they were destroyed. We knew the F-117s wouldn’t have to worry about the coverage, but there were follow on waves of low-level B-52s, F-111s, and F-15Es. Shouldn’t we devise a plan to destroy those sites? I went to Lt Col Deptula and Gen Glosson and told them I thought we could use the National Assets from Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) – those guys are so good – they could easily ingress across the scant 20 miles of open desert and seemingly make the sites come off-line like unplugging a TV. They gave the go ahead and off to work we went.

Well, inter-service politics reared up. SOCCENT was running SOF and didn’t need the national mission boys to do this job. Unfortunately, the president

the sites back another 20 miles from the border and the mission was scrubbed. I went to Col Gray, gave him the low down and said they weren’t going to put in ground teams in advance, period. I said we could use the Pave’s with armor piercing Raufoss rounds on the 50 cal. Unbeknownst to me Col Gray, Orrell, and Lt Col Comer had developed a great relationship with the Apache Squadron Commander, Lt Col Cody (now Gen Ret) from the 101st AB and they together decided they should use the Pave’s to lead the Apaches in to take care of business (AH-64s at the time didn’t have the nav/low level systems needed for terrain following night desert flight).

The “loggie” in charge of munitions in the AOR was fretting over where to store all the bombs, thinking maybe we had too many. Gen’s Horner and Glosson almost exploded – threatening the logistician with bodily harm – said



# Air Commando Association

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This confidence grew with every night's gun camera footage viewed or CNN report aired. It was truly exciting to be a part of it. The Air Campaign Plan rolled on, picking through all the different targets. Aircraft were now getting shot down and the CSAR efforts started to boil. Our SOF first night mission footage got reviewed like all the others and again approving nods of professionalism all around. Did the mission do as intended – it definitely took the radars off the line and opened the corridor envisioned. A report of attack may have alerted the enemy command center and started the AAA sooner than expected (but the first few F-117 bombs would have surely done the same). Anecdotally, we didn't lose any aircraft that



**Capt Paul Harmon in a 12-man Pave Tent at King Fahd AB.** (Photo courtesy of Randy O'Boyle)

night. It was a doctrinal integration of SOF capabilities in support of the campaign plan. In the end, It was a good bet well executed.

There were many other funny anecdotes. For example, there was the BLU-82 fiasco when one of the generals was lamenting the need for bigger more powerful bombs, I piped up with the knowledge that Maj Eric Thompson had mentioned in one of our hooch strategy sessions (he was the MC-130 planner at SOCCENT) his guys were telling him they wanted to drop a BLU-82. So, when the General asked what else could we do, I said what I had learned. We had 32,000 pound bombs we could contribute and that we had a bunch in storage – with many smiles and much excitement – they said go forth and make it so. Well, the bad news was I didn't get the complete story, there were only 16,000 pound daisy cutters now. We could get only eight made up with slurry on short notice at the depot in Salt Lake, with another 20 coming in a few months. So, after those initial SOF attaboys by my Black Hole colleagues, my report on the limitations had me looking for a corner. Unbeknownst to me, the ever entrepreneurial Talon guys had also been working with the Army and Marines. They had coordinated to drop one just prior to the berm breaching in concert with the ground attack. When the video of that blast got into the black hole (which happened every night, it was like watching ESPN's top ten) complete with the British Forward air controllers audio, "The Yanks are losing their bleeding

minds as they just dropped a nuke!" The very next day Gen Glosson met me in the elevator and said Boa (in fighter-ville they couldn't function without nicknames, so as the resident SOF guy I was designated a snake-eater, hence Boa) come with me and he took me to the two star, who took me to the 3-star Gen Horner. I was admonished in no uncertain terms that we don't have FB-130s and if it isn't in the ATO there will be no bombs dropped in the AOR. Further, if it happened again, I would be pickled, put in a jar and sat on the shelf. With that scalding, issue ended, all was forgiven and the war went on.

We had lots of successes. Then Capt Tom Trask and crew dashed into the fray and rescued a navy F-14 pilot penetrating Iraq at 100 ft in the fog. We infiltrated lots of teams doing scud hunting in the western desert. Our Big Blue got in bit of a tizzy (that still exists today) about not getting Col Eberle and his backseater from H-3 area – that is a story all by itself. But I do remember an animated conversation with a colleague that went something like this, "Hey buckaroo you put the gear down, flaps down, fly over that area, and troll around without confirmation/location he's actually there (not captured) and we will be right behind you for the pickup." These things get emotional and I guess it depends where you sit. There was another rescue we turned down due to confirmation and excessive threat with low probability of success that the conventional Army accepted. It resulted in the shoot-down of the SAR force. AF Cross winner Ben Orrell had responded something to the effect, "You need experts, planning and critical thinking, not just bravery (that is a given) to be successful in a combat SAR."

What I most remember was being a senior Captain and thrust into a big time war scenario and marveling at the professionalism of our Airmen – all kinds; fast movers, 117s, Guard F-4Gs, tankers, and AWACs flying up close. I watched loggies moving parts and munitions, air commandos 12 to a tent, veteran generals and airpower experts – serious, daring, and decisive. Don't let anyone kid you, it was an air war pure and simple. Doesn't diminish the ground power that was expertly organized and executed, but it was three days and done. In this particular case airpower kept the guys on the ground safe.

We tried lots of new things and most of them worked – B-52s flew low on night vision goggles (for 3 days only), F-117s dazzled, drones were fired, deception plans of great cunning were executed, bio weapons destroyed strategically, F-111s repurposed from dropping bombs to plinking tanks. A-10s swarmed with Vietnam veteran Cajun guard units mentoring a new generation of combat flyers.

We got to see Bob Hope perform. We all did our job. The SOW suffered the catastrophic loss of Spirit 03. The rest of us came home to a hero's welcome. Can't believe it was 25 years ago. On second thought, with all the creaking joints maybe I can.



*About the Author: Col (ret) Randy O'Boyle was an MH-53 pilot and former 16th Special Operations Group commander. He also had experience working with Congress as a Legislative Liaison officer. He is now the President of Ultra Electronics ICE, Inc (Ultra-ICE) and lives in Manhattan, KS.*





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**We deployed to Operation DESERT SHIELD in August of 1990. At the time, I commanded the 20th Special Operations Squadron, flying the MH-53 Pave Low helicopter, and roughly half of the squadron deployed while half of the squadron stayed home for other possible missions.**

# PAVE LOW LEADERS

## *The Kickoff of Desert Storm*

*By Richard Comer, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)*

The split of the squadron in this way was not a healthy thing as half of us were living in the desert heat and in tents, far away from home and fearful that they might be there a long time with no real war to fight. Half were home and wishing to be in the desert in case there was a war. It was tough on bonding a squadron together, especially after about three months when family strains were showing for some and not others.

Our squadron had two primary missions as we trained in the desert. Combat rescue alert and a special ops mission to attack two radar sites just north of the border with Saudi Arabia. These radar sites were far away from Kuwait, west of where we were stationed in Saudi by about 400 miles and straight south of the Iraqi capital city, Baghdad. We began training for these missions, and any other special operations missions



(Photo courtesy of the Pave Low community and Vince A. DePersio.)

which might come up, by late August. We had established our living conditions in tents and had endured the extreme heat of summer. We were getting used to it by October when the weather cooled off significantly.

Early in November the President made a decision to deploy most of the troops in order to have offensive capability. My wing commander saw it as a two month delay before any action would occur. As most of the wing was split in the same way as was my squadron, he ordered all of the commanders home for a month. In my case, I attended a Commander's Training Course in Missouri, then a training exercise at my home base at Hurlburt Field. While I was there, MSgt Bobby Jenkins came into the office and asked for some time to talk.

Bobby had set up his retirement the previous summer and had begun terminal leave at the beginning of October. I was sitting at my desk working on 4 months of back-logged paperwork. I looked up to see Bobby looking at me around the doorway. His hair was already pretty long and he had a nice looking, full moustache. The home half-squadron had given a hail and farewell in mid-October where Bobby had received his medal and his plaque he had told everyone that his family needed him to get out of this business. I invited him in. I congratulated him on his now completed career. I remarked that the recent announcement of "Stop Loss" would

have caught him if he had not already been on terminal leave. He told me that he had come to talk to me about just that. He asked me if I thought the squadron needed him and, if so, what could he do to help.

I had an immediate answer for him, despite my surprise at the offer. I told him that we did need him, that the squadron's helicopter gunner force certainly needed another master sergeant for leadership, and that I would like to see him in uniform to work things here in the states for another month or so, then I would send him over to Saudi Arabia by Christmas. The currently deployed lead gunner spent four months in the desert and I couldn't give him any relief without another six-striper. Bobby looked at me for a couple of seconds and said he'd go over to the base personnel office and see what he had to do to come in off terminal leave. By two o'clock that afternoon a clean-shaven and short-haired Bobby Jenkins was sitting in the ops superintendent's office working over the schedule of training the new gunners in the .50 caliber machine gun. Bobby looked into my office to tell me he had also stopped off at home to get back into uniform. He told me then that his wife, Dottie, might be a little upset at me since I had recalled him from terminal leave and officially prevented his retirement. I consented to taking the blame as long as Bobby didn't think his wife was a violent person.

As expected, we were allowed to trade some people at the beginning of December and Bobby Jenkins came over and became the ranking helicopter gunner of the deployment. We still did not know if we were going to really have a war or whether we were going to sit in the desert and keep training for months to come. We knew the war plan, continued to train hard, and had a desert Christmas. We also watched the debates at the UN and in Congress on authorizing the President to use force and setting the 15th of January as the deadline for the Iraqis to leave Kuwait. The diplomacy and the Congressional debates made our training and preparation more urgent in our minds. The UN set the deadline for Iraq to leave Kuwait, so we also had a date set to ensure our readiness.

We trained hard the next four weeks, making sure all the newly rotated crew members were integrated into the existing crews and rehearsing what was to be the first mission of the war several times. On 12 January 1991, we received orders from our Wing Commander, Col George Gray, to move to our forward operating base for the war plan; this was a call to battle stations. We moved on January 14th to Al Jouf, a small airfield in western Saudi Arabia. It was a 6-hour flight from King Fahd International Airport where we were stationed. We organized air refuelings and the movement of essentially our entire squadron in a day and a half. When there, we were given a fairly large dormitory style building to live in—it was actually an improvement over the tents we had occupied at King Fahd airfield since August.

The war plan gave our helicopter operation the first mission of the war to cross the border into Iraq. We teamed with an Army Apache helicopter battalion, commanded by LTC Dick Cody, whose unit also moved to Al Jouf. Everyone was in place by the night of the 14th and the machines were all serviceable. We spent the 15th getting the house in order,

erecting a tent to serve as a planning/briefing facility on the flight line, establishing communications, ensuring security, and configuring the aircraft. Waiting for further instructions, we planned some local flights on the 16th to plot a dispersal location and to ensure all the aircraft remained ready.

At about 2 o'clock on the afternoon of the 16th I was at the base HQ with Col Orrell who was the commanding officer at Al Jouf. He got a secure phone call from Col Gray at King Fahd. Col Orrell told me then the war was to begin that night and H-hour was set for 0300 local time. I asked him if he meant that we should be prepared to go at that time or if we're really going. He assured me that we were going in that night, not just preparing a possibility. I know it was a dumb question, but I found it hard to believe. I did some quick calculations and told him the briefing for the crews should be set for 2230 local and the takeoff for our formations would occur around 0100. With H-Hour at 0300, our time for the Apaches to open fire on the two radar sites was 0238, or 22 minutes prior to H-Hour. We went out to the flight line to inform Dick Cody, to cancel all the afternoon flights, and ensure the maintenance folks started preparing aircraft for flights that night.

Dick was working at his aircraft, talking to his maintenance guys, and checking his aircraft forms. He came over to our car and we told him the timing of H-hour. All he said was, "S--t Hot!" and said he'd meet me at our hootch at 2130 with all of his crews. I then went over to the 53's and told the guys to finish configuring the birds and to go back to quarters for a 1600 meeting.

At that meeting, I informed everyone about the mission that night. I told them to write a letter, get a nap, and be dressed and ready at 2100 for another short meeting. The guys were quiet about the news, but obviously excited and apprehensive. They knew they were ready and that the war was probably the only way home, but they also didn't know how much resistance all this would encounter. The war planning had a worst case of 2% losses of the strike fighters going into Iraq. So, up to 6 to 10 shoot-downs could happen in the first days, meaning our guys doing rescue would probably spend a lot of time flying around in hostile territory trying to pick people up. Since for every 50 Iraqi soldiers there was expected to be an SA-7 or SA-14, we anticipated some real danger and possible losses of our MH-53s. The crews scheduled to go to Rafha to stand rescue alert, Capt Minish's and Capt Trask's, really were faced with the greatest uncertainty. The four crews (Martin's, Pulsifer's, Kingsley's, and Leonik's) planning to lead the Apaches on the two radar sites would not face such uncertainty until they completed that mission and took up rescue alert posture at Ar'ar.

SSgt Jeff Morrison and MSgt Dick Pinkowski had engineered a set-up to use our fuel dump tubes and some fire hoses with some nozzles procured off the local economy to dump fuel through the hoses and refuel the Apaches. The guys worked up and verified this method would work, but it was far from a certifiable safe operation, but if we had to use it we had

the helicopters configured. We had the kits, hoses, everything, on board if we had to use them. We also had a lot of refueling equipment set-up at Ar'ar so the Apaches could be refueled and get moving as soon as they landed.

Dick Cody, in trying to prepare for the mission, had restructured his helicopter loads. He could carry an external auxiliary fuel tank on each Apache in place of one of the racks of missiles. In so doing, he wrote new procedures on how to configure and load his helicopters so they had enough fuel to execute the mission. Still, each tank was new to his helicopter while shooting and hopefully they would all work and feed fuel. If any of them were unable to feed fuel, we were going to have an Apache in trouble. We had all the back-up plans in place to get them out of the desert if anybody got low on fuel for any reason.

As it turned out, the tanks worked and all of us guys flew really quite well on the mission. It went perfectly that night. We had our briefing and we stood there and we said "here we go." We tried not to tell all the maintenance guys what we were up to, but everybody knew it was our job to start the war. There wasn't much to say, except we were the right people for the job and we knew we had gotten ready for the job properly. We knew we were poised on the point of history of starting a pretty significant war for our country. We had nothing left to do but go fly the mission. It went exactly as planned.

We crossed the border 12 minutes after 2 in the morning for the first formation. Corby Martin's flight had the western most target, the east target was led by Mike Kingsley's crew



(Photo courtesy of the Pave Low community and Vince A. DePersio.)

and Bob Leonik's as the second helicopter on their wing. I flew as co-pilot with Leonik. We had Ben Pulsifer and his crew as number two behind Corby. The 1/101 battalion commander, LTC Cody, flew the trail helicopter in the formation led by Kingsley.

We were tensed and on the lookout as we flew the 40 minutes in Iraq before the war was to start. We were listening and looking for something to happen, nothing did. No one seemed to notice, no tracers of ground fire, and nothing we could hear on the radios. It was anti-climatical, really. Both



formations crossed the release point for the Apaches to get in the firing position within five seconds of their established time on target, and both formations of Apaches (based on what we believed our timing was) laid Hellfire missiles on the communications vans at each of the two radar sites within 5 or 10 seconds of each other. Within about three minutes, the rest of the radar sites had taken fire and the buildings were in flames. The mission was a perfect success. The Iraqis now had



(Photo courtesy of the Pave Low community and Vince A. DePersio.)

no eyes to see with over a large portion of their border and a coalition air armada streamed into the country above our two helicopter formations. I do not believe anybody detected our initial wave of fighters going into Iraq.

We had no hits against our helicopters; however, we did take some fire, Corby Martin's formation did have a couple of SA 7's fired at them. The SA-7's seemed to be fired accurately. The crew members of the Pave Low called out the inbound missiles. Berrett Harrison and Terry Null made the call for the helicopters to break and to jettison some flares to decoy the missiles. The flares did not seem to be effective as the missiles did not swerve at all toward them. The jinking of the helicopters plus the IRCMs, seemed to be what made the missiles miss the helicopters. Everybody returned, although a little bit frightened by the experience, safely.

Kingsley's formation went to Ar'ar to refuel and stood by for search and rescue operations, while Martin's formation refueled in the air and returned back to Al Jouf. Tom Trask and Tim Minish took their crews and airplanes over to Rafha to stand by for search and rescue operations, out of Rafha into central Iraq. We were very surprised that there were no shoot-downs reported to us the first night. We learned later that one Navy plane went down under fire with the wingman reporting it exploded and no expectation of a survivor. My expectation was two percent losses among the fighters. These were realistic expectations that I think all the generals had signed up to. Also, the strike aircraft achieved an almost perfect success rate on

hitting their targets. That made for a lot of success down the road in the war plan. We like to think, and we do believe, that the first mission against those radar sites had something to do with the great success that air power enjoyed in our strike and fighter operations over Iraq.

This history remains incomplete until I finish the story of the part played by Bobby Jenkins who had volunteered to come in from his retirement to try to help. Well as I said previously,

Bobby arrived in Saudi a little later than I'd promised; he got there after Christmas on the 28th of December instead of before Christmas. He briefed in on all the ways we were doing business with Larry Hunter and Dick Pinkowski. I went into the month of January with Ski and Bobby as the ranking flight engineer and the ranking gunner. They worked over the training schedule for classes on the threats, how many gun training flights, and how many desert landings and air refueling we needed before the UN deadline in the middle of January. Also, they ensured that all the tent areas were cleaned up, including the snack bar which was seeing a lot of traffic during the cold weather of winter.

When the war began I flew into Iraq, crossing the border about 45 minutes before the first bombs would fall on Baghdad. I was watching the helicopter in front of me; piloted by Mike Kingsley, it was the first coalition aircraft to cross the border. Among those in Kingsley's six man crew were Ski and Bobby

Jenkins, leading the way as we finally got onto the road which would get us home. I couldn't help but pause in my work as Leonik's co-pilot and think of Bobby, the most voluntary of volunteers, and of Dottie. I said a short prayer for his safety.

The next day when I finally had done all my debriefs and reports, I left the offices back at Al Jouf and I drove to our barracks after about 39 hours without sleep. Upon arriving in the parking lot, I pulled up beside Bobby who was standing beside a barrel stirring burning trash. I asked him if he'd slept any. He said a little, but the hootch was getting dirty and he needed to get rid of the trash. He said he liked to have a fire on cold winter days and the warmth felt good. Although he hadn't felt it during the flight the night before, he said he really had a chill when he got back, said he couldn't sleep much when the place was dirtied up and needed cleaning. I walked around the corner toward the door and ran into Ski, carrying a bag of trash. He said we had only been in this new barracks for two days and the place needed a GI Party to clean it up. He said the guys will be waking up soon and all the enlisted crews not taking up the rescue alert tonight will be assigned detail duty to get things cleaned up. I walked then into the kitchen area and MSgt Mike Lael was sitting at the table writing out the detail assignments. He left a blank in there for an officer to be assigned to participate each day on cleaning up the kitchen. He said that the pilot schedulers had agreed to put a name in on each day to have the officers help out with the housework.

Things being under control, I went to bed. 🦋

# Special Tactics in Desert Storm



*By Wayne Norrad, CMSgt, USAF (Ret)*

## PREFACE

At the Combat Control Association reunion banquet in 2003, Charlie Jones, former combat controller (CCT) and Air Commando Association Hall of Famer was asked by then Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen John Jumper, if there was anything he could do for the CCT community. Gen Jumper was speaking at the banquet celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of CCT. Charlie, seated at the head table with Gen Jumper, leaned over and said "General there is something you can do for CCT. The Air Force has never written the history of Combat Control and after 50 years, I think it's time." Gen Jumper told Charlie he'd see what he could do. Some thirteen years later the Air Force is about to publish that history book titled: The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics, 1953-2003, written by Dr. Forrest L. Marion, USAF Historical Research Agency. Some material for this article is taken from the book. I appreciate Dr. Marion giving me permission to use some of his work.

Unfortunately, Charlie Jones passed away and never got to see the history book come to fruition. This article is dedicated to him -- because without Charlie asking, CCT and Special Tactics (ST) history would still remain unwritten.

On or about August 9, 1990, the 1720th Special Tactics Group (1720 STGP, later renamed 720 STG) was tasked by Headquarters, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) to deploy an eight-man pararescue (PJ) team and five mission planners to provide a combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) capability and develop a concept of operations for the possible conflict in the Persian Gulf. About the same time three combat controllers were deployed to Riyadh and Dhahran, Saudi Arabia as liaisons and advance party personnel for the Central Command (CENTCOM) and Special Operations Command-Central (SOCCENT) staffs. Although the initial package was deployed as a management and CSAR team,

they were quickly tasked with various duties ranging from managing a major airport to teaching first aid and weapons classes. The 1723rd Special Tactics Squadron (1723 STSQ, later renamed 23 STS) became the expeditionary ST unit with augmentation from twelve other organizations including Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC) and Air National Guard assets. Additionally, members of the elite 1724th STSQ (later renamed 24 STS), Pope AFB, North Carolina were deployed later to help the US Army Special Forces go "Scud" hunting. Lastly, CCT members from Military Airlift Command (MAC) were also deployed, but will not be covered in this article, except when they augmented or relieved ST forces.



## DESERT SHIELD

The first ST member to deploy was Capt “Tony” Tino from the 1720 STGP staff. He was initially sent to United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) headquarters in Tampa, FL and then directly to Saudi Arabia the following day. CMSgt Wayne Norrad, 1723 STSQ superintendent, deployed on the first advance party aircraft from the 1st Special Operations Wing (1SOW) heading to Saudi Arabia. The advance party first landed at Riyadh, but within hours were redirected to Dhahran Air Base, Saudi Arabia. The 1SOW planners and Chief Norrad initially bedded down in a schoolhouse nearby. By August 16, combat controllers SMSgt “Bobby” Boyle, and MSgt “JD” Burch had also arrived in country. They teamed up with Tino and Norrad and headed to King Fahd International Airport (KFIA) where “the last slab of concrete” had been poured, yet was not officially open for operations. They did a quick assessment and concluded that the airfield was suitable to land any type of aircraft. Therefore, Capt Tino became KFIA’s first airfield manager. The four controllers developed the initial runway approach routes, traffic patterns, and parking plans. They officially opened the airport and controlled the first fixed-wing aircraft to ever land there. They also helped coordinate the installation of runway lighting, electricity in the control tower, potable water and air conditioning.



**King Fahd International Airport air traffic control tower was operated by combat controllers in the early stages of DESERT SHIELD.** (Photo courtesy of Wayne Norrad)

In September, Norrad returned to Hurlburt to lead the 1723 STSQ at home station since the commander position was vacant and the Director of Operations (DO) was leading the deployed unit in Saudi Arabia. The remaining ST combat controllers, augmented by nine MAC combat controllers, continued to handle all the air traffic control (ATC) duties at KFIA. In the first four weeks of DESERT SHIELD, they controlled over 30,000 takeoffs and landings. By the time they handed over control of the airfield, the number of takeoffs and landings had increased to 3,000 per day. This was quite an accomplishment considering the challenging conditions they initially worked under. The control tower elevator was inoperative for the first couple of weeks, requiring them to climb several flights of stairs with portable radios, extra batteries, water, food and other supplies on their backs. Prior to installing the air conditioning, temperatures in the tower reached 130 degrees. Bobby Boyle recalled that even at night it was so hot you couldn’t write on

paper because the sweat would just soak everything.

Sixteen additional ST personnel arrived in country on August 30, 1990 and by February 1991, the 1723 STSQ had deployed 75 personnel not including 12 PJs who flew as gunners on the MH-60s of the 55th Special Operations Squadron (SOS). Stationed to the north at Batman Air Base in eastern Turkey, combat controllers from Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany and PJs from RAF Woodbridge, United Kingdom served together in a CSAR role for operations in northern Iraq.

Just northwest of KFIA was King Khalid Military City (KKMC). At the live-fire training ranges near King Khalid, the Saudis certified certain ST combat controllers as the only US range control tower authorities. As a result, US and Coalition ground attack aircraft were able to make good use of the training opportunities there. Meanwhile at Dhahran AB, the eight-man PJ team, flying with the 20th SOS, assumed alert duties including area-orientation flights and ongoing aircrew and gunnery training.

CCT officer, Capt John “Jeff” Schuldheiss assumed the task of the Central Command Air Forces (CENTAF) fuels officer. Other ST personnel deployed to three expeditionary airfields—Al Jouf, Arar, and King Khalid Military City—to set up forward arming and refueling points (FARP). ST members quickly gained credibility with their Saudi hosts and received

permission to direct all air traffic from the previously unmanned control towers. They also conducted some 85 assault-zone surveys mainly for C-130 use throughout the border region between Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan.

In December 1990, Lt Col Craig Brothie, the 1724 STSQ commander, identified Arar as a likely airfield for use by Special Operations Forces (SOF) aircraft. He linked up with Maj Longoria there and completed surveys of five additional airfields in two days.

Retired Col Brothie recalled,

“When we drove into an airfield there was somebody there to meet us, and [soon] we were sitting down and having tea with whoever ran the airfield. Every one of these airfields was owned by Saudi Air,” who ran a few commercial flights daily into each field. Obtaining data on runways, ramp space, and logistics support, Brothie and Longoria’s trip facilitated the negotiations that led the Saudis to grant permission for US forces to use Arar. When hostilities began, this remote airfield near the Iraqi border served as a valuable forward operating location (FOL) for SOF aircraft supporting the Scud hunting mission as well as for CSAR aircraft.

Before the start of hostilities in mid-January a number of ST members redeployed to the US when it appeared they would not be needed in theater. Norrad returned to Saudi Arabia to help fill the gap along with their new squadron commander, Lt Col Mike Vrosh. The 1720 STGP also sent a few staff planners including their Physician Assistant (PA) Maj Mike



“Doc” Gallagher, a former Vietnam era PJ who commissioned after completing the PA program. Both Gallagher and CMSgt Joseph “Stu” Stanaland, another highly decorated Vietnam-era veteran, were called upon for their CSAR knowledge. MSgt Steve Jones was also sent forward as a planner, but was subsequently tasked for an operational mission because he was the only CCT member in theater who was joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) -- qualified and that skill was required for a highly covert mission.

CCT operated three forward operating bases while PJs began flying as medical/rescue specialists aboard Air Force MH-53s, MH-60s, US Army CH-47s and UH-60s. ST combat controllers launched and recovered the first attack helicopters that led the initial air strikes into Iraq clearing a path through Iraqi air defenses. TSgt John Thompson led a team that moved to Rafha Airfield from KKMC to control the initial flow of the most intensive tactical airlift operation since the Berlin Airlift. His team and the MAC CCT who relieved them controlled more than 800 C-130 landings and take-offs.

Prior to the start of the air war, ST was involved in planning a highly covert mission. Maj Mike Longoria and Lt Col “Rusty” O’Brien, a deployed F-111 squadron commander working at the Combined Air Operation Center (CAOC) at Taif Air Base, had previously worked together on beacon bombing training missions in the US. O’Brien asked Longoria if CCT could place beacons and radar reflectors along the Saudi-Iraqi border in order to update the F-111’s navigational system on the way to their targets. This was crucial since the drift factor flying across the country of Saudi Arabia would be significant. Maj Longoria grabbed A1C Andrew Martin, a young talented combat controller, and flew to Taif to meet up with O’Brien. As luck would have it, Brig Gen Buster Glosson, Director of Campaign Plans -- the man responsible for planning the bombardment of Baghdad, was on the same flight. Longoria mentioned the beacon plan to Glosson who quickly endorsed it. Glosson told Longoria to brief the beacon emplacement mission first and he would follow him with the air plan. Longoria called TSgt Thompson at KKMC and told him to get as many PPN-19 beacons from the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) as he could get his hands on. Thompson met with Col James Kraus, 5th SFG commander and asked him for all of his beacons for a highly classified mission. Kraus summoned one of his young officers, Capt Kevin McDonnell and asked him if they should give up their beacons. Capt McDonnell and Chief Norrad had become friends during an exercise in Jordan about four years earlier. McDonnell also went through Military Free-fall (HALO) School with some CCT members on Thompson’s team and had become friends with them as well. Because of these previous relationships he was supportive of the request and gave Thompson’s team the PPN-19s in exchange for a few tactical electromagnetic impulse generator (TEMIG) beacons that he needed.

One factor they had to overcome was the short battery life of the dry-cell 5590 batteries used to power the PPN-19s. Thompson decided to buy car batteries with some of the \$200K cash he was given to buy fuel, food or whatever was needed to complete his mission. Next, they tackled the

problem of how to hook up the batteries to the beacons. He sent one of his teammates, SSgt Maurice Wilson (CCT) to ask the maintenance technicians assigned to Army Task Force 160 (TF-160) at KKMC if they could “jerry-rig” wires so the batteries could be used with the PPN-19s. A1C Andy Martin and A1C Doug Eccleston tested the beacons with the F-111 navigation system and they worked. Finally, Rusty O’Brien got the radar reflectors built and trucked to KKMC, but CCT



**Damaged MH-47 landed on tires put out by ST members.** (Photo courtesy of Andrew Martin)

had no idea how big they were.

Time was critical since the air war was about to start and they had to get the beacons/reflectors in place along the border. Lt Col Del Dailey, TF-160 commander, had devised a plan to use his MH-47s to fly FARP fuel bladders and equipment forward and support the CCT’s beacon emplacement mission with his UH-60s. However, when the radar reflectors arrived at KKMC on a flatbed truck, Thompson was “taken back” by their size -- 12 feet high. He reluctantly parks the flatbed truck outside Lt Col Dailey’s office and proceeds into his office to inform him that he now needs a MH-47 for the mission. Dailey, seeing that the reflectors won’t fit in a UH-60, agrees to switch loads, which did not make the helicopter crews very happy as the FARP package was already loaded on the helicopter.

The MH-47 finally got airborne with A1C Andy Martin, A1C Doug Eccleston (CCT) and MSgt Ray Cooper (PJ) on board along with an Army security team and the beacons, reflectors and car batteries. Martin radioed the placement coordinates to AFSOCCENT while enroute to the next location. AFSOCCENT would log each set of coordinates, and pass them to the CAOC air planners over secure phone. In total, they placed eight beacons and reflectors along the Saudi-Iraqi border. Through ingenuity and terrific support from both Col Kraus and Lt Col Dailey the emplacement mission was accomplished just in time for the air war to begin.

## AIR WAR

At 22 minutes prior to H-hour, 0300 local on January 17th, two helicopter formations, each formation consisting

of two MH-53J Pave Lows leading four AH-64 Apaches, crossed the Iraqi border and performed their jobs perfectly as the Apaches simultaneously destroyed the two early-warning RADAR sites with Hellfire missiles. Just as Col George Gray, the AFSOCCENT commander had promised Gen Schwarzkopf, the mission was 100% successful. At 0300, the air campaign began as attack aircraft took advantage of this



**A1C Andy Martin posing next to a radar reflector and PPN-19 beacon.** (Photo courtesy of Andrew Martin)

RADAR gap the Apaches created. The F-111s were able to “pick-up” the beacons and reflectors thus helping guide US and Coalition attack aircraft through the gap and onto their targets in Baghdad.

Friendly aircraft losses on the first night were stunningly low. Planners anticipated losing dozens of aircraft that night, but only one US fighter, an F/A-18 Hornet, was downed. Navy Lt Cmdr Michael Speicher was shot down; his status remained in doubt for 18 years until his remains were recovered in the desert and repatriated to the US for a proper burial. One SOCCENT MH-47 helicopter sustained landing gear damage after taking evasive action to avoid an Iraqi SA-7, surface-to-air missile. The helicopter pilot flew to the airfield at Rafha, Saudi Arabia, where ST members laid out tires on which the pilot landed the helicopter without further damage.

Throughout the air campaign, ST combat controllers directed thousands of US/Coalition combat sorties and handled aircraft refueling at Al Juf, Arar, and Rafha airfields in northern Saudi Arabia. They also flew to the beacon/reflector sites on UH-60s for eight days to replace the car batteries in order to keep them functioning.

Following two unsuccessful rescue attempts of downed pilots on January 19 and 20, on the war’s fifth day AFSOCCENT accomplished its first successful CSAR. The deployed 1723 STSQ provided two PJs to each MH-53J Pave Low aircrew at Arar including Capt Tom Trask’s crew who made the daring rescue of downed Navy F-14 pilot, Lt Devon

Jones. The two PJs augmenting Trask’s aircrew were Sgt Thomas Bedard, a Special Tactics PJ and AFRC PJ, Sgt Ben Pennington. In a scene reminiscent of hundreds of rescues in Southeast Asia, the two PJs exited the helicopter and performed the pilot pickup. Bedard provided covering fire in the vicinity while Pennington assisted Jones to the waiting helicopter. The aircrew recovered to Al Juf, Saudi Arabia, completing more than six hours of flight time over enemy territory, returning the uninjured yet grateful pilot to friendly control. For this daring rescue the crew, along with Bedard and Pennington, received the MacKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year by a USAF member or organization. (Sadly, Ben Pennington was killed in a motorcycle accident in 1993, and Devon Jones conveyed his condolences to Ben’s family.)

The following night, January 22, MSgt Steve Jones was attached to a British special boat service (SBS) team (equivalent to US Navy SEALs), executing a clandestine mission deep into Iraq. The head SBS mission planner asked Lt Col Vrosh for a CCT with close-air-support experience to go in with his team. Initially, they weren’t going to tell us about the mission. After Vrosh insisted that he wouldn’t give them anyone unless they agreed to “read-in” at least one ST member. The SBS team finally allowed Norrad in their briefing room as they went through final mission planning. Norrad recalled having a tough time sending Steve Jones on that mission for fear the team would be comprised and captured. Years later retired Chief Norrad interviewed retired Maj Gen Thomas Eggers, then the AFSOC commander, for a documentary on the 25th anniversary of AFSOC. During the interview Eggers said that Americans, specifically combat controllers, were not allowed behind enemy lines for fear that they may be captured and US leadership wasn’t ready to accept that risk. Norrad never let on that they sent MSgt Jones deep into Iraq.

Infiltrating within 18 miles of Baghdad, the team located and blew up communications cables that connected Baghdad with outlying areas. Jones provided the communications and close air support expertise for the British-led team. Apparently, the “Brits” liked what they saw in Jones and asked for more combat controllers like him. ST leadership selected four additional CCT members to augment the SBS teams for follow-on missions. TSgt John “Carl” Casey, SSgt Gordy Tully, Sgt Dan Kaster and A1C Andy Martin were attached to the Brit teams for the rest of the war. However, after intensive training, all four missions being planned were cancelled for fear of fratricide with other American forces now being inserted across the border.

On January 18th, Saddam Hussein fired eight short-ranged, but deadly Scud ballistic missiles into Israel in an attempt to draw them into the conflict. Saddam’s best hope for victory appeared to be to entice Israel into the war against Iraq and thus to split the coalition, as no Arab nation could afford politically to remain in a coalition with Israel. Doing their utmost to keep Israel out of the war, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Colin Powell, designated the anti-Scud mission as the top priority for US special operations forces in the Iraq-Kuwait theater. The theater commander, Gen Schwarzkopf, appeared to some as



being wary of allowing Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) forces too great of a role in the conflict. Having been previously left out of the war, JSOC's special operators were eager to get involved and were pleased that Schwarzkopf was powerless to prevent them from performing the top-priority Scud-hunting mission.

TSgt Brian Shreve, a participant in the Scud-hunting patrols, recalled that his team had to be airlifted out of Iraq. Two days after being inserted in early February 1991, an Iraqi national driving a water truck spotted the US patrol while they reconnoitered an observation post. The driver sped off after the team refrained from shooting him which would have drawn even more attention to themselves. Shreve and his teammates drove several hours to a new hide site to get away from where they were first identified. That afternoon the team encountered an enemy element consisting of seven or eight Iraqi armored personnel carriers and a firefight ensued. The twenty or so US troops faced three times the number of Iraqi soldiers. One Army sergeant major was seriously wounded and exposed in open terrain. Recovering him became the team's sole objective until one soldier ran across the open area, hoisted the sergeant major onto his back, and carried him safely to one of the vehicles. The firefight was close to an hour old when Shreve contacted a flight of Air Force F-15 Eagles. As the daring rescue took place the F-15s arrived on-station. Shreve called in airstrikes from the F-15 as three special ops MH-53s landed nearby and loaded the SOF team aboard. The helicopters airlifted the team, including the wounded, to the airfield at Arar, Saudi Arabia.

A day later, SOF aviation assets reinserted the team into northwestern Iraq where it continued its mission until the cease-fire on February 28. Shreve, who earned a Bronze Star with Valor, noted that SSgt Bruce Barry and TSgt Mark Scholl, working with their respective special mission unit teams, "actually called in" airstrikes against Scuds. (Note: Scholl was killed in a helicopter accident in the Great Salt Lake the following year during a JSOC training exercise.)

The ground-based Scud hunt ended on a positive note when SOF teams located no less than 29 mobile Scud launchers in southwestern Iraq on February 26, just 48 hours before the start of the ceasefire. As noted historian and military author Benjamin F. Schemmer remarked, "Had US special operations teams not found the 29 Scuds poised against Israel, the next-to-last day of the war might have been the beginning of a far bigger one."

## GROUND WAR

During the ground phase, a three-man PJ team consisting of TSgt Ryan Beckmann, Sgt Bob Vaughan and Sgt Steve West accompanied members of the 5th SFG as they advanced along the coast to Kuwait City. The PJs augmented the battalion aid station and worked as frontline trauma experts, treating a total of seven patients during the brief ground action.

A four-man ST team accompanied the US Marine Corps 1st Division at the beginning of the ground war. Capt T. "Eugene" Willett's team of combat controllers, MSgt Steve Jones and MSgt Larry "Gus" Rhinehart and PJ TSgt Duane Stanton trudged alongside the Marines in their communications laden



**A1C Eric Kessel and CMSgt Norrad controlling air traffic from the "cat-walk" of KCIA's ATC Tower.** (Photo courtesy of Wayne Norrad)

humvee. For three days they crossed numerous manmade and natural barriers, mine fields, and unexploded ordnance situated between the Iraq-Kuwait border and the Kuwait City International Airport (KCIA). Upon reaching the airport, the Marines secured the airfield perimeter while Willett's team cleared a portion of one runway needed to land an eight-ship SOCCENT helicopter assault force that arrived on February 27th.



**Gordy Tully, "Carl" Casey, and Andy Martin were three of the four ST combat controllers who went into the British Embassy.** (Photo courtesy of Andrew Martin)





**Lighter presented to MSgt Gus Rhinehart from the US Ambassador to Kuwait.** (Photo courtesy of "Carl" Casey)

Willett's four men, along with the additional eight ST personnel arriving on February 27th, prepared for the arrival of fixed-wing aircraft the next morning. The ST team cleared the 10,000-foot 33-left runway, its taxiway and nearby ramp area. They removed debris that included abandoned cars, cement barriers and unexploded ordnance. In addition, ST personnel helped operate a satellite communications network.

Norrad obtained an ATC rating early in his career and happened to be the only ATC tower-rated CCT member that went forward into Kuwait. On Feb 28th, he controlled the first fixed-wing aircraft that landed at KCIA since the Iraqi invasion. He worked "local" control throughout the day while Steve Jones worked "ground" and the rest of the team marshalled aircraft around the remaining debris on the taxiways and ramp area. Norrad had to shut down landings about two o'clock in the afternoon because the wind shifted and smoke from the burning oil wells obscured the sun from the airfield making it appear as if it were dusk. Shortly after he reopened the airfield, MAC combat controllers arrived and took over the ATC functions.

Concurrently in downtown Kuwait City ST members were involved in liberating the British and American embassies. The four CCT attached to the

SBS finally got a mission with the Brits. The SBS commander asked if they could help them retake the British Embassy. Casey and Martin "fast-roped" from a hovering helicopter onto the embassy building. Martin later remarked that he was "scared to death" coming down that 90-foot rope while hovering over the tall, 15-story structure.

Tully and Kaster also "fast-roped" onto another building in the compound. They provided command-and-control communications, set up, directed and coordinated air support between the team leader and air assets. Additionally, "Gus" Rhinehart went forward to the US Embassy with the Marines. Living up to the CCT motto, "First There", Gus was the first American service member to enter the embassy compound since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The new ambassador, Edward "Skip" Gnehm greeted and presented "Gus" with a special cigarette lighter. (Note: Gus never used the lighter and gave it to his CCT friend "Carl" Casey before he succumbed to cancer. When doing research for this article I called Carl at his office and asked to clarify a few things about his mission with the SBS. At the end of the call I asked if he remembered Gus being presented with a lighter from the US ambassador. He said "yes, I have it here in my desk drawer." Pictured is the lighter some 25 years later.)

Later that day, Norrad commandeered a ride out of KCIA on a French C-130 for his ST airfield team. The C-130 was heading to another location, but using his airfield call sign, Norrad was able to radio from the cockpit to the airborne command and control aircraft and convinced them to divert the C-130 to King Fahd and drop off his team. After an uneventful flight, except for the French crew providing them with a cold beer, they landed at KFIA, offloaded their equipment and got a good night's rest. The next day, March 1st, the war was officially declared over, and ST started redeploying forces back to the US -- mission accomplished.

## POSTWAR OPERATION

On January 31, in the largest allied aerial loss of the conflict, a special operations AC-130H, call sign "Spirit 03," was shot down by an Iraqi surface-

to-air missile while supporting a US Marine unit near the border town of Khafji, Saudi Arabia. All fourteen personnel on board died when the aircraft crashed into the water just off the coast of Kuwait. One of the crewmembers, Capt Art Galvan, was a former enlisted combat controller that Norrad knew well. He was one of Galvan's instructors during his combat control school training. On March 4, following the cease-fire, a nine-man ST dive team led by MSgt Mike Sandler (PJ) conducted a search-and-recovery mission. The team flew from KFIA to a beach landing near the crash site, dispatched inflatable boats into the water and recovered several of the remains before a severe storm halted the operation.

## SUMMARY

More than 160 personnel, roughly one-half of the 1720th STGP's manpower was deployed for DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Beginning in August 1990 combat controllers "spearheaded the efforts to establish" KFIA in Saudi Arabia as a major US installation for the 'aluminum bridge' airlift that carried critically-needed personnel, supplies, and equipment into the theater. They established and provided air traffic control of three expeditionary airfields—Al Jouf, Arar and Rafha. ST teams conducted assault-zone surveys, participated in infiltration missions, placed navigational aids, planned and executed CSAR sorties, provided combat trauma assistance, controlled close air support sorties, assisted in the liberation of the American and British embassies and helped recover the remains of the "Spirit 03" aircrew.

In strategic terms, their most critical role was participating in the hunt for mobile Scud missile launchers deep inside Iraq. As Secretary of Defense Cheney said to at least one Special Tactics man after the conflict --- "So you're one of the men who kept Israel out of the war."



*About the Author: Chief (Ret) Wayne Norrad was the 2nd Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command. He also worked as an Analyst, for the 24th Special Operations Wing.*



# THE ROAD TO WAR IN DESERT STORM

*By Michael Kingsley, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)*

As I got off the plane at King Fahd Air Base in Saudi Arabia on 24 Sept 1990, I felt like a giant hair dryer was blowing across my entire body. The sun was obscured by the Mars-like dust that covered everything...the sky, the airfield and tarmac, our aircraft, and eventually our bodies. It didn't take long. I was on the second wave of the deployment to DESERT SHIELD with the 20th Special Operations Squadron. I could not imagine what the initial deployers were going through while trying to set up a base. I only had to endure another month of the intense heat and dust. But that month seemed like a long way away from the immediate task of adapting to this harsh environment while continuing to build capability to go to war, when and if that was going to occur.

Our life was pretty much the same as it is today on an initial deployment to the desert. The only difference was probably the electronic gadgets that people deploy with these days. We lived in tents by crew, and with six to a crew we could fit two crews in each tent. Each crew and, for the most part, each tent was on the same schedule for flying, sleeping, eating and time off. So, naturally, we got to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. My crew, Capt John Maubach, MSgt Dick Pinkowski, MSgt Bobby Jenkins, SrA Todd Corey, and SrA Dennis Shindle were a great fit together. We had a couple of the old heads along with a couple of fairly new guys, while John and I were somewhat in between. But the true key to our success, and quite honestly our survival, was our ability to work together to accomplish the most difficult flying missions I ever imagined. The silty sand with no ambient light made pure visual flying nearly impossible, especially at night. We had to rely on our GPS navigation and situational awareness software to keep us from getting lost and/or driving ourselves inadvertently into an unrecoverable attitude. But then came the landings. I often described it as landing the helicopter into a gigantic ashtray. Every person on the six-person crew had to keep their eyes focused on any semblance of a stable reference...a rock, any vegetation or whatever. We even tried to drop chem lights, but that didn't help at all since they were quickly blown away or obscured. So we had to just trust that the approach was straight

and stable, and there were no objects, or holes on the surface that would jeopardize the landing. And when you were within ten feet of touching down, one of the aircrew would pick up a reference to determine drift and, with the rest of the crew in cadence, help safely call the pilot into the landing. Across the squadron, we had a number of close calls with rolled tires, a lost tip tank, or a damaged tail stinger. But the constant focused training in day and night, along with sharing of best practices, eventually led us to a point where we could reliably support missions in just about any environmental condition.

The missions we anticipated should a war actually occur, most of us were somewhat skeptical early on, were primarily focused on Combat Search and Rescue and lift support to the Army Special Forces. We had not heard about the Apache mission nor much else until the early part of November 1990 when we were told there was a deadline set for Saddam Hussein to comply by 15 January 1991. So I was busy working with my crew on trying to improve the mission profiles, updating our maps every day, modifying our living quarters, and basically keeping ourselves from being bored when we were not planning or flying. By the way, there was only one phone to call home, and that was just outside the Wing Commander's office. We were authorized 15 minutes a week. One can only imagine the long line we would wait in to make a call. It was a serious issue for many folks. At some point, I can't recall exactly when, I was notified that my crew was going to be "read in" to a secret mission to potentially escort Apache helicopters into Iraq to destroy early warning radar sites. This was one of the options that was being considered at the time by Gen Schwarzkopf to open a corridor for the initial strikes into Baghdad while minimizing the risk of compromise to the strike force. This was complicated by the fact that there were three radar sites (later two) and a command and control facility that needed to be destroyed simultaneously. Also, each of the radar sites were spread out, so the mission was further complicated by time, accuracy, and the amount of ordnance required to destroy each site.

Most of the planning was already underway by the senior



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pilots Capt's Tim Minish and Corby Martin, along with a skilled flight engineer, MSgt Mike Lael. Our requirement was to start putting their plan into test rehearsals, along with the crews of AH-64 Apache helicopter, to see whether it would work. Getting to know the Apache crews and their capabilities was difficult at first. First, they lived and worked in a different place (the parking garage of the airport), both ours and their crews were totally unfamiliar the respective aircraft capabilities and limitations, and day-to-day we had our own unit missions and training to support. But the friendships grew over time at all levels and we were able to overcome most issues through teamwork and camaraderie. The most visible indication of that was the bond between Lt Col Rich Comer, MH-53 Squadron Commander, and LTC Dick Cody, AH-64 Battalion Commander. Their trust in each other and their units' capabilities, along with their confident advocacy, was most likely the deciding factor in why we were chosen to conduct this no-fail mission.

We conducted several rehearsals in an around the King Fahd airport simulating the timing, distance, and coordination required for a simultaneous strike. A critical limitation was actually our communications. The radios on the Apaches and the Pavelows were made by different companies and, to our surprise, they were not compatible in the secure communications mode. However, through trial and error we finally found that have-quick was the only semi-secure way for us to communicate between the aircraft. We were told by intelligence somewhat early on in the rehearsals that there were only two radar sites to destroy. That made it much easier with the available aircraft. So we dedicated two Pavelows to each site for redundancy, while LTC Cody dedicated four Apaches to each site. Feeling more confident that we had the basics of the mission set, we started looking at the what-ifs. What if we needed to transfer fuel between a Pavelow and an Apache? What if we lost an aircraft either before takeoff or during the mission? What if we were compromised? And so on... Many of these were difficult to answer, but with the time and teamwork we found the best solutions possible to mitigate the risk. What was noteworthy to me was one of our Flight Engineers, MSgt Jeff Morrison, led an innovative way to connect the fuel dump tube of the Pavelow to the refuel port of the Apache with fire hose and Gerry-rigged couplings. It worked. Not the prettiest setup, but we could have used it in a pinch...luckily it was not necessary.

Around the end of December, I received news that my copilot, John Maubach, needed to go home to attend to a family emergency (John later came back as an Aircraft Commander and flew several missions before the war ended). This was difficult for all of us since we were all so close together as crews, and John was very knowledgeable of the mission we were leading. But, we were able to adapt by shuffling the copilots and we added Capt Mike Beard to my crew as a replacement. Then we were told it was time to move our base of operations to



# AIR COMMANDO HALL OF FAME

## 2016 INDUCTEES

John L. Easley, Col (Ret)

Scott C. Fales, MSgt (Ret)

Thomas R. O'Boyle, Col (Ret)

Raymond Turczynski, Col (Ret)

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The Air Commando Hall of Fame Committee invites you to join us this October 15th to congratulate this year's inductees during the ACA Annual Awards Banquet. Inductees will be recognized for their outstanding life-time achievements.

**Register online at [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org)  
Banquet dinner tickets are \$60 per person.**

The 2016 convention also includes professional development, commanders' leadership awards, golf, and socializing with fellow Air Commandos.

an airfield closer to the border with Iraq. I was designated as an advance party lead to scout out the living spaces, work areas, and the parking ramp layout for all the aircraft to operate. One of my strangest memories was the abundance of cats all around the abandoned apartment building we called our new home. There must have been hundreds of them. The other memory was that this was finally becoming real to all of us. Most of us, like me, pretty much internalized the thought of going into harm's way and risking our lives. Others were much more outwardly showing signs of the stress and the fear. But, once again, leadership and teamwork were critical to keeping us all mission focused.

As the deadline of 15 January 1991 passed, we knew our mission was imminent. Lt Col Comer called us all in as a squadron and told us the President had ordered the execution of Operation DESERT STORM, and therefore our operation (EAGER ANVIL) was to commence on the night of 16 January with a time over target of 02:38 on 17 Jan. He told us he was proud of us and that he had the utmost confidence that we would be successful. For a moment I felt extremely nervous, but I quickly shook that off and gathered my crew for a step-by-step review of the mission and one last gut check. We were ready. As flight lead and with the more distant target location, we were the first crew out to the aircraft. The maintenance crew chief and all the other maintenance personnel were buzzing with nervous energy. They were just as nervous. We did our run-ups, communications checks, and taxied out to the runway with our formation, two Pavehaws and four Apaches, followed by the second formation with the same number of aircraft who would depart a few minutes later. What an awesome sight. Every aircraft was up and ready. Our formation proceeded along the preplanned route with the only communication coming from the mission commander, Lt Col Comer, over satellite communication confirming our status as a "Go." After that, there was no more communications.

As we approached the border with Iraq at 50 feet above the ground, I could barely make out the guard posts arrayed along the border. It was incredibly dark and even our night vision goggles had trouble amplifying the available light. We split the difference between the two posts and just as we crossed the border, I noticed we were flying over some structures and what looked like possible houses. My hope was that we didn't already compromise the mission, but we still pressed on. We reached the point where the Apaches needed to stop and hover over a known reference so they could accurately fire their hellfire missiles and the rest of their munitions. We had learned through the rehearsals that the best way to designate the exact location was by dropping a bundle of infra-red chem-lights. The Apache crews easily saw the chem-lights on the ground, updated their computer systems, and proceeded to fire away on the exact time, 02:38. The other formation had a little more excitement. They were spotted by the enemy and shot at by surface-to-air missiles. Fortunately, their defensive systems worked as advertised and they too were able to achieve the exact time on the target. As the Apaches were doing their work, we circled around to hold until they were complete. I still have vivid memory of the incredible destructive power of the Apache

helicopter. The site was completely destroyed and I knew then that the mission was a complete success.

When the Apaches finished destroying the radar site, what was going through my mind was the return across the border. The surprise was over and everyone knew that the war had begun. We were a lot more vulnerable as well since the sky was completely lit up by all the effects of the attacks. As we proceeded south, we saw tracer fire but we were able to find the holes in the enemy coverage enough to safely make it back across the border. Once again, the other flight had some more surface-to-air missile excitement, but they too made it safely back across with all aircraft intact. As we set down at Arar airfield to assume our next role in the war, I looked up and saw the armada of fighter and bomber aircraft flying through the corridor to attack their targets. Operation DESERT STORM had started in earnest. It also should be noted that not a single aircraft was lost on the first night of the war.

Following the Apache mission, we immediately reset our crews and our aircraft for the primary mission of CSAR and supporting Special Forces. To be honest, some of most harrowing missions of DESERT STORM were conducted after the opening mission. Capt Tom Trask led a daring daytime rescue mission resulting in saving an F-14 pilot from certain capture. Capt's Tim Minish and Paul Harmon conducted an extremely difficult rescue mission in the worst weather imaginable. Although the pilot was not recovered, their bravery and sheer determination was memorable in my mind. The rest of the missions during and even after the war are documented very well in the history books, but suffice it to say, DESERT STORM was the true beginning of what was to be another 25 years of constant combat.

Although this story is one of my experiences in Pavehlow, I wanted to end with the recognition to the many other crews from the sister squadrons who were performing well beyond the call of duty and the leadership that guided them. Some (Spirit 03) gave the ultimate sacrifice in service to our nation. Our entire wing of AC-130 Gunships, MC-130 Combat Talons, MC-130 Shadows, MH-60 Pave Hawks, Special Tactics, and all our airmen were truly the best the military had to offer and their impact on the future of Special Operations and the type warfare we are fighting today was monumental. But, most important of all was the incredible leaders that fought with, guided, advocated for, and ultimately created the force that fought so valiantly during the war. People like Col George Gray, Col Ben Orrell, Lt Col Rich Comer and many others were instrumental in the success of our operations and the role that AFSOC would play in future conflicts. They built the standard for leadership that many of us, including me, sought to follow. We, today, stand on the shoulders of those giants and continue to be the best Special Operations airmen in the world. It was a distinct honor to be a part of their legacy.



*About the Author: Maj Gen (ret) Michael Kingsley is a 32 year Air Force veteran and former AFSOC Vice Commander who currently resides in Charlotte, NC.*



# CITIZEN SOF

## IN OPERATION DESERT STORM

**Top Row: Capt Jose H. Davison, Capt Richard S. Haddad, Capt James A. Howard, TSgt Donald L. Dew, SMSgt Don S. Naftel, TSgt Ralph A. Ellis, MSgt Stephens Leonard, SSgt Myron S. Wyman, Maj Kurt F. Schroeder, MSgt Larry M. Ridge. Bottom Row: 1Lt Randal L. Bright, SSgt Brian D. Laflame, TSgt Jacky A. Simpson, TSgt Carl R. Spain, SSgt Grady L. Nichols, not pictured: TSgt Phillip M. Richards.** (Photo courtesy of Jose Davison)

*Combined narrative by Randy Bergeron, SMSgt, USAF (Ret)  
and Clay T. McCutchan, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)*

DESERT STORM was one of the first tests of the fairly new command, AFSOC, being “all in” coming on the heels of Operation JUST CAUSE. This included AFSOC’s Guard and Reserve Forces as well. The 193d Special Operations Wing (SOW) deployed two EC-130 aircraft and conducted Psychological Operations (PSYOP) before and during the war. The 919th SOG comprised of the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) and the 711th SOS were included in this all-out effort. The 71st SOS was comprised of HH-3 Jolly Green helos and the 711th SOS was made up of AC-130A model gunships. Both units made significant contributions.

The 71st SOS arrived in theater on 12 Jan 1991 and set up operations to pull alert for 51 days for night over-water combat rescue mission. They also performed several environmental damage assessment missions and sensitive missions in support of Naval and Army SOF forces.

The 711th SOS, made outstanding contributions. They

contributed five combat ready AC-130A Spectre Gunships and eight combat ready crews. The A-model gunship was one of the oldest weapon systems in the USAF at the time. The early vintage aircraft and their crews deployed from Duke Field, Florida to King Fahd International Airfield (KFIA), Saudi Arabia, employed the weapon system in combat, and re-deployed home with no loss or damage to plane or crews. Three of the crews saw direct combat and received a record number of combat awards. Reservists that remained at Duke Field continued training and maintenance of the remaining crews and gunships and the 919th SOG “slick” C-130 and crews provided much needed rotating airlift up and down the east coast of America.

From August 1990 and during Operation DESERT SHIELD that preceded STORM, the 919th SOG leadership selected balanced hard crews among the reservists and trained for the impending combat. Operations and support members



completed mobility requirements. A number of 919th reservists volunteered on mandays for deployments to Saudi Arabia to augment the 1st SOW or AFSOC staffs and then returned for recall. The 919th was recalled for war on 17 January 1991. This resulted in reservists closing their businesses or civilian jobs and completed all their family goodbyes. Just prior to the 711th departure, the active duty 16th SOS from Hurlburt Field experienced the loss AC-130H "Spirit 03". This was a very sobering event for all involved including a very serious group of departing Reserve warriors. Five 711th crews deployed the gunships while three crews and support packages flew on C-141s out of Duke Field. All arrived at KFIA in good order and were ready for combat operations in minimum time. Many of the reservists were highly experienced Southeast Asia War veterans, and past participants in real world missions to Central and South America. A number had experienced combat in Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama the year before where they were recognized for their excellent performance.


Upon arrival at KFIA, active duty gunship crews of the 16th SOS gave a sobering brief to the reservists on their recent combat experience and the shoot down of Spirit 03. The 711th SOS crews worked with the 16th SOS crews to spin up for future combat missions. The 919th maintainers rolled into getting the A-model gunships ready and supporting the 1st SOW as much

as possible.

The reservists were billeted in an abandoned construction contractor compound at KFIA near their active duty brothers and sisters of the 1st SOW. They raised their own tents and built sand bag bomb shelters. Hard, smart, innovative work improved the field conditions throughout the compound. Coupled with their military skills, their civilian job skills with electrical, carpentry, concrete, plumbing, and overall older worldly experience were very apparent and useful during the improvements made on their compound. Some of the tents became very elaborate. The chow hall food was good and plentiful and the shower/latrine facilities good. There were lots of free books and taped movies. Many went to the recreation tent and watched the 24 hour news to follow the war. A home made gym with weights was even built.

The 919th SOG Commander, air reserve technician Col Jimmie Jones provided outstanding management and leadership of the deployed force. The 711th SOS Commander was Lt Col Ron Edinger, a traditional reservist who normally worked civil service at Eglin AFB. He brought recent experience to the fight as he had also commanded the reservists during combat in Panama the year before.

Scud rocket alerts and actual attacks were experienced during this time as the reservists established training flights in the local area. Sweating out a Scud attack in full chemical gear in a hole in the ground was one of life's more interesting experiences and makes one appreciate American air superiority. After the ground war kicked off, Spectre orbits were set up just south of the combat line. The ground war went well and just before it ended, three crews from the 711th SOS conducted an unplanned cross border raid on the Al Jahar-Basra road--known as the "Road of Death." The crews inflicted significant damage on Iraqi forces with no damage to themselves despite anti-aircraft fire and surface to air missile launches.

After the end of hostilities, the 711th SOS crews participated in the search for "Spirit 03" and made preparations for redeployment home. Stops at RAF Mildenhall, Iceland, and Pease AFB proved very interesting. The "Hero" reception at Pease AFB was eye watering. The 919th operations and support types arrived at Duke Field to another "Hero" welcome by families, employers, and life long friends. A year later, the 919th hosted one of the largest combat awards presentations of the entire Air Force Reserve. 









VetJETS Inc is a Florida 501(c)(3) Non-Profit organization that exists for the purpose of transporting America's Wounded Warriors and their families. We are a company staffed by volunteers and funded by donations, operating a dedicated aircraft serving the Veteran's Airlift Command ([www.veteransairlift.org](http://www.veteransairlift.org).)

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# BLU 82s and Leaflets

## AFSOC Kit in a Desert Storm Rucksack

*By Raymond Chapman, Col, USAF (Ret)*

August 2, 1990 at 2AM local time, Saddam Hussein launched an invasion on the quiet oil-rich nation of Kuwait; he accused the tiny state of stealing oil through slant drilling. His fateful decision united a 36 country coalition to evict his half million-man Army from Kuwaiti soil. Saddam's actions started a chain reaction in the Middle East that has affected the world for the last 26 years and will continue to affect it long into the future.

August 10, 1990, just 81 days after Gen Larry D. Welch, Air Force Chief of Staff redesignated 23d Air Force as a major command, AFSOC sent an armada of aircraft to the Middle East. Their immediate mission was to assist the 82nd Airborne in their stance between a poised Iraqi Army and the ports of entry, population centers, and the oil fields of Saudi Arabia. If Saddam were to gain these strategic objectives, the coalition would be forced into a long drawn out war requiring an unfathomable logistics chain and an incomprehensible loss of life and national wealth.

Five months and five days later after waiting, planning, training, flying and reacting to intelligence indicators, the forward Air Commando team was ready to unleash honed SOF airpower to free Kuwait from the brutal occupation of the Iraqi war machine. The entire AFSOC cast was hanging-on to every intelligence briefing, every news broadcast, and every rumor, waiting for the proverbial trigger to be pulled. On the evening of January 15, 1991, the declaration came.

All concerned, who had a need to know, were summoned into a cold, brightly lit room at King Fahd International Airport where a world-class joint combined air base was built from a partially constructed commercial

airdrome. This newly erected yet untested landing field, located 20 kilometers northwest of Dhahran, was the largest airport in the world in terms of land area and boasted two parallel asphalt runways that were 13,124 feet long. Construction on this elaborate infrastructure had ceased months earlier and it was idly waiting for an assignment; the Air Commandos from Hurlburt Field were just the force to awaken its potential, and awaken it they did.

Hundreds of the squadron professionals that had been working "the plan" in the airport labyrinth over endless nights and blistering hot days had a predicted confidence that comes from experience, excellence, and expertise and all were jockeying for a clear view to the front of the room. The tiny briefing area was filled to capacity with SOF from all of the USSOCOM components and they all knew something enormous was about to be announced. However, no one in the cramped space could truly appreciate the slice of history that was about to be laid out before them.

Silence fell over the tired horde of young aviators and ground pounders as a Colonel weaved his way through the chocolate chip maze standing at attention. Facing the quiet professionals and with little fanfare, he threw back the veil on a four by six chart. There in front of the eager crowd was a map that illustrated the greatest military operation since World War II, simply referred to as the Hail Mary.

The Colonel described how the US led Coalition was going to sweep in from the west and drive the Iraqi Army towards Iran while using the Persian Gulf as a back stop. The coalition running hard from the southwest to the northeast, in concert with the 2nd Armored Division

and 1st and 2nd US Marine Division leading a charge into southern Kuwait, would squeeze the enemy north like tooth paste from a tube forcing the Iraqi Army to fight, or flee back to Baghdad.

Audacious Pave Low crews were given the task to start the war by leading Army Apache helicopters over an ominous dark desert to take out the early warning eyes of the Iraqi military leadership. The entire coalition Air Force would then funnel through the gapping air defense hole and focus on cutting off all communications and supplies to the neglected Iraqi conscripts that were on the outermost edges of their broken supply lines. The first effort was to be in Baghdad; cut off the head of the snake, leave the body wriggling in a confused and pathetic spiral of defeat and finish the attack only when Kuwait was liberated.

The briefing was complete and when the Colonel queried the audience for questions, only one was asked, WHEN? You see, every officer in the room had their plans meticulously dialed-in and each knew precisely how their particular weapon system fit into the synchronized chaos that would soon be known to the world as DESERT STORM.

On 17 Jan 1991, just hours before Task Force Normandy destroyed Iraq's early warning radar sites, Combat Talon crews flew leaflet missions inside Saudi airspace along the Kuwait, Iraq border delivering messages of death and destruction and promising safe passage for those that surrendered. The leaflet drops continued during the ensuing air campaign, promising that B-52s would sneak up on them in the quiet of the night, unseen and not heard until the fire storm and deafening explosions erupted around them. On subsequent nights, follow-up leaflets on the same targets whispered





**A BLU-82 bomb detonates after being dropped from an MC-130E aircraft by the 711th SOS at the Utah Test and Training Range on July 15, 2008.** (US Air Force photo by Capt Patrick Nichols)

**8 SOS, Crew 2, stands in front of a readied BLU-82 at King Fahd Air Base, Saudi Arabia. Crew 2 deployed in early August 1990 in support of Operation DESERT SHIELD and remained in theater until well after Operation DESERT STORM. Their missions included three separate BLU-82 drops, multiple leaflet drops, and deep penetration helicopter refueling in support of personal recovery operations.**

**16 Feb 1991, Capt Chapman prior to the three ship formation of MC-130Es dropping three BLU-82s on the entrenched enemy spread across the western edge of Faylaka Island just south of Kuwait City.**

“we know who you are and we know where you are...you’ve just experienced the wrath of the great coalition airpower. Saddam is using you as his pawns, surrender now! Hold these leaflets over your head when you approach any coalition force and point your weapons down in a compliant gesture. You will be fed, fairly treated, and returned home when the war is over.”

Bringing the BLU-82s to DESERT STORM was the brainchild of 1st SOW Commander, Col George Gray, and 8th SOS Commander Lt Col Tom Beres. There were roughly 30 of the Viet Nam era behemoths left in the Utah desert arsenal and these SOF air leaders knew that if they could convince Gen Schwarzkopf that the 15,000 pound bombs would be relevant

to his effort, he’d have them sent to his Area of Responsibility ASAP. The two men were passionate and persistent and knew that employing this Mother of all Bombs during Saddam Hussein’s self declared Mother of all Wars would curtail the enemy’s spirit and save American lives.

The Air Commando boss’ flew to Riyadh and, with the conviction and confidence that comes from decades of “making it happen,” convinced the 4- Star Army General that the BLUs could be effectively employed on a variety of targets, from clearing mine fields before the movement of the main effort, to physiologically breaking the Iraqi’s will to fight. Gen Schwarzkopf was convinced and within 96 hours





of ordering the deployment of the bombs, the first pair of the “BLUs Brothers” was on short final into King Fahd airport; no forewarning, no manifest, and an exceptional surprise to all involved. No one was more stunned than the King Fahd munitions handlers and bomb dump experts who were charged with moving and storing these Volkswagen sized, slurry filled dinosaurs.

“How big did you say the bombs are that are coming in on the C-141?”

“15,000 pounds”

“Ha Ha, sir, I believe you mean 1,500 pounds.”

“No sergeant, 15,000 pounds”

“Holy SH!# sir, I’ll have to get my supervisor, I’ll call you right back!”

Immediately the PSYOPs gurus saw the psychological effects the BLU-82s could have on the beaten down Iraqi soldiers. Just prior to the ground war the Combat Talons were once again called upon to drop leaflets. These succinct messages, combined with Commando Solo broadcasts, touted the destructive power of the BLU-82s and promised additional strikes if the Iraqi forces didn’t surrender. Millions of 3X7 pieces of paper, with graphic cartoon illustrations, rained from the dark sky slowly rotating around Saddam’s battle tired Army that was assigned the task of stopping the finest coalition ever





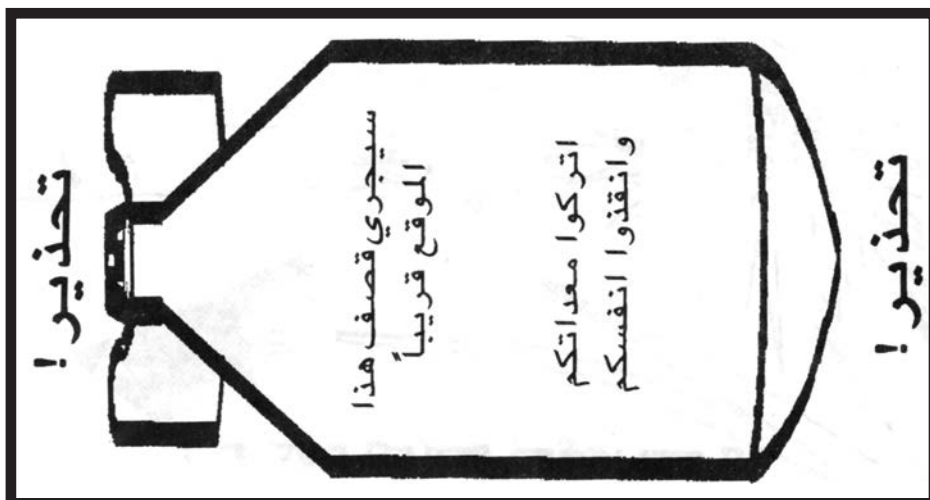
assembled. The note written in Arabic on the leaflets was simple. See illustrations.

On 16 Feb 1991, with four bomb drops under their belt, the 8th SOS was given the task to execute the trifecta, a three bomb drop, delivering 45,000 pounds of concussion causing shockwaves over the entrenched enemy on the western edge of Faylaka Island. This small 10 square-mile land mass just south of Kuwait City was poised to receive what the crews affectionately called "the Pointer Sisters." The plan called for three aircraft, approaching from three different initial points, to three separate objectives, precisely having all three of the BLU-82s detonate simultaneously on their targets. This mission was to be a diversion for Schwarzkopf's Hail Mary while concurrently demoralizing the

More than 17 million of the papers were dropped during DESERT STORM, and most surrendering Iraqi soldiers had one with them.

**Leaflet Side 1:** You have suffered stupendous losses as a result of us using the most awesome conventional bomb in this war. It is 20 times more powerful than a scud. Beware! We will bomb your positions again, and liberate Kuwait from Saddam's aggression. Rush to join your brothers in the South. You will be treated with friendship and respect. Leave this area.

**Leaflet Side 2:** Run away and save your life or stay and encounter ANNIHILATION.





Iraqi troops that had been cut off from their supply lines and isolated from their reinforcements on the mainland.

17 Feb 1991, 0203L (Call sign Mamba 32)

"Crew, Nav, One minute warning"

"Pilot, Load, I have inaccurate AAA at three o'clock"

"Crew, Pilot, we're not maneuvering unless it becomes accurate"

"10 seconds, drogue chute deployed, GREEN LIGHT---bomb's away"

"Pilot, Nav, I have the bomb on FLIR, it has separated from the pallet and has stabilized"

"Nav, keep the FLIR on bomb, I want a good video recording when this thing goes off."

"Pilot, I've lost the bomb in the clouds"

"Crew, Co-pilot, I just saw bomb detonation flashes under the clouds to the North and South; and there goes ours!"

"Crew Pilot, we're escaping to the south, congratulations and great work, now let's get the hell out of here"

"Pilot, Load, we have a problem, it looks like the bomb extraction caused some damage to the static-line retriever during extraction and we can't close the cargo door."

"Pilot, EWO, we're out of the SA-2 threat ring, you're cleared to fly back to King Fahd at 150 Knots."

On 24 Feb, 1991, the ground forces raced through Southern Iraq and Kuwait and all eyes in the joint operations center were glued to the 24 hour news coverage. The turbulence of an Army moving at highway speeds through a littered, burning battlefield, while simultaneously trying to coordinate SOF airpower support, was quite an exercise in perplexity for all involved.

"This is the lead Army ground planner, we need a BLU-82 dropped on this set of coordinates in two hours, concept of ops is to dishearten the Iraqi ground forces and break their will to fight."

"Sir, my Air Force intelligence analysts reports that the coalition ground forces are five miles beyond that point and moving northeast at 35 miles per hour."

"That's not the last report I had Captain; it looks like I'm going to have



**Secure Passage Card. This card will allow you to cross the allied lines - Arab and their families - and receive good treatment until you can reach a Combined Forces secure area where you will be treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention, and you will be back as soon as the situation ends. This is an open invitation for you and your brothers soldiers, please do it when you can.**

to kick some ass on my planning staff! Disregard that request for a BLU-82 and I'll get back to you with a new target."

As the victory unfolded it was truly an amazing sight as tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers emerged from their dusty lairs, tattered, torn, parched, and starved holding up leaflets of safe passage that SOF C-130s had littered the battle field with over the course of the war. These demoralized soldiers decided to cash in and cash in they did. By the thousands they surrendered to any and every human being in sight that they believed could unfetter them from the hell of DESERT STORM; helicopters, ground vehicles, small patrols, support forces, and for the first time in history, a CNN news crew.

27 Feb, 1991, by the war's end the 8th and 9th SOS had accurately delivered 16.5 million leaflets to their intended audience. The coup de gras came courtesy of the 8th SOS whose valiant crews dropped eleven BLU 82s on five separate missions affecting nearly every Iraqi soldier isolated along the Iraq, Kuwait border. And to the British soldier stationed at the frontier outpost on the early morning of February 7th, 1991, during the inaugural BLU missions; the Yanks did not nuke Iraq.

Unfortunately, wars are a necessary tool to free the oppressed, but have unspeakable costs to all nations involved. They change the tides of history in a way only future generations will know. All involved in DESERT STORM were scared yet bold and spent way too much

time away from loved ones. They freed a nation and planted seeds in the Middle East that will ultimately "insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty for all."

But "Liberty for All" comes at an enormous price and DESERT STORM was no different. We lost friends and team mates; sons and daughters; husbands and wives. It was a war that ignited a generational fuse that has sparked for over two and a half decades and, incredibly, still burns today. It has absorbed our children and will most likely absorb our grandchildren. The costs have been, and will continue to be immeasurable; not only exhausting our national resources, but costing the United States it's most precious treasure, the sons and daughters of America, our military heroes. To all of you from all of us, THANK YOU FOR OUR FREEDOM!



*About the Author: Col (ret) Chapman started his special operations career as a Combat Controller and culminated his 32 years of service as Vice Commander 23d Air Force and AFSOC Deputy Director for Operations. He commanded the 8th Special Operations Squadron (MC-130E Combat Talon aircraft) at Hurlburt and Duke Fields, FL and the 353d Special Operations Group in Okinawa, Japan. His joint SOF staff tours included Chief, Joint Combined Exchange Training Branch, Special Operations Command (Pacific) and Deputy Chief, Policy and Strategy Division, US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).*

# THREE GENERAL RESCUE

By Darrel Whitcomb / Copyright 2016



**A Navy pilot (Lt Devon Jones) runs toward a pararescueman and the safety of an MH-53J several hours after his F-14 was shot down. This was the first successful rescue attempt of DESERT STORM. Unfortunately, Lt Larry Slade, the Tomcat backseater was captured by Iraqi forces. He was released after the war. (Photo courtesy of AFSOC)**

Until recently they were all serving as US Air Force senior general officers. But, as young captains, their individual specialties brought them together for a brief moment for the best of reasons: to rescue a fellow airman, shot down and isolated deep in enemy territory.

Commissioned in the 1980s, Lt Gen Tom Trask and Maj Gen Mike Kingsley became MH-53 Pave Low pilots and served in special operations units, later rising to command at increasingly higher levels of authority and responsibility. Maj Gen Paul Johnson became an A-10 pilot and has had a similarly successful career serving in and commanding fighter units. However, their initial respective flying specialties led to their rendezvous over the southern desert of Iraq to rescue the pilot of a US Navy F-14, downed during Operation DESERT STORM in 1991.

It was 20 January, the third day of combat operations. So far, 13 Allied aircraft had been downed by the Iraqi air defenses. Losses were below predictions, but none of the crewmembers had been rescued. MH-53J Pave Low crews of the 20th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), which was under the operational control of the Special Operations Command component of Central Command (SOCCENT), were located at the Arar Airfield in western Saudi Arabia. They were alerted for two possible rescue missions when SOCCENT reported that enemy missiles had downed an A-6 and an F-14, both from the USS Saratoga, while they were conducting early morning strikes in western Iraq.

The SOCCENT force at Arar also included four US Navy SH-60s and, understandably, those crews wanted to rescue their service brethren. Unfortunately, the airfield was enshrouded in heavy fog and below the takeoff minimums for those aircraft. Since the Pave Lows could launch in those conditions, the local SOCCENT element commander, Lt Col Jerry Garlington, gave them the mission. He directed Moccasin 04, flown by Capt Mike Kingsley with Capt Mike Beard as copilot and their crew, to recover the A-6 crewmembers. Moccasin 05 flown by Capt Tom Trask with Maj Mike Homan as copilot and their crew were directed to recover the F-14 crewmembers. Both crews began planning their missions right away. Within a few minutes, though, the A-6 landed at an airfield in Saudi Arabia, and Kingsley's mission was cancelled.

Trask and his crew lifted off into the weather and, using their Pave Low navigational gear, headed north into Iraq to recover the pilot, Lieutenant Devon Jones, and the radar intercept officer, Lieutenant Larry Slade, of the downed F-14, Slate 46. The fog ended at the border, and the crew members found themselves traversing an almost completely flat and trackless region of Iraq with almost unlimited visibility. Trask descended to just 20 feet above the ground and utilized the best spider route for the area. As they flew, the crew received constant threat updates from an AWACS aircraft that was watching them. Additionally, the AWACS crew arranged for F-15s to provide combat air patrol and A-10s to support them on the recovery.



As the Pave Low crew cruised to the reported location of Lieutenant Slade and tried to make contact with him, the AWACS warned them that Iraqi fighter aircraft and helicopters were headed in their direction. The crew avoided them by flying just above the ground and using what little terrain masking was available. But flying at such low altitudes prevented them from making radio contact with either Jones or Slade. An orbiting EA-6B that had been part of the strike package with Slate 46 contacted Moccasin 05 and told them that the survivors were about 50 miles to the north of their position. After checking with AWACS and SOCCENT, Trask widened their search area, which was dangerously close to the Iraqi Mudaysis Airfield. Their best efforts were unsuccessful, and Moccasin 05 returned to Arar for fuel and better survivor data. Unbeknownst to them, Slade was subsequently taken prisoner by Iraqi troops.

As Moccasin 05 headed for Arar, a flight of A-10s—Sandy 57 and 58, flown by Capt Paul Johnson and 1st Lt Randy Goff—was diverted to the rescue effort. Johnson heard Jones calling on his survival radio and was able to contact him and fly to his location. When the survivor said that he could see the A-10 over his location, Johnson marked his location with his Inertial Navigation System (INS) and reported it to AWACS.

At Arar, Trask and his crew were refueling. They were instructed to take off and fly to the Al Jouf Airfield so that their aircraft could receive some needed maintenance. However, they had been monitoring the emergency radio frequency and could hear Johnson talking to Jones. Believing that Pave Low best operated when utilized with an “assault mentality,” Trask asked Col Garlington for permission to re-launch for the recovery. With the weather now clear, the US Navy SH-60 crews were again asking for the mission to rescue their service-mates. However, since Trask and his crew had just flown through that area, Garlington believed they had a tactical advantage. He directed Moccasin 05 to go, accompanied this time by Moccasin 04, with Kingsley and crew flying as the wingman.

As the two Pave Lows headed north, they could still hear Capt Johnson talking to Lieutenant Jones. Moccasin 05 contacted Johnson directly. He reported that he was in the area of the survivor but needed to depart to refuel. “Just give me the survivor’s location,” responded Trask. Using a secure means of communication, Johnson gave them the survivor’s coordinates as determined by his INS, and then he and Lieutenant Goff departed to find a tanker.

Trask and Homan quickly loaded the survivor’s location into their enhanced navigational system, plotted it on their maps, and reported to SOCCENT via SATCOM that they were proceeding to his location. However, he was much farther north than they had anticipated, and they realized that they would have to cross the main east-west highway from Baghdad to Jordan. The road was heavily used and guarded, and Trask instructed Kingsley to hold south of it while he proceeded to the survivor.

After crossing the road, Trask and crew steered directly for Jones’ location. As they did, the AWACS crew informed them that a Roland SAM site ahead of them had become active and gave them its coordinates. Homan plotted its location and determined that it was at almost the exact same position as the survivor. When the Roland site was displayed on the MH-53J’s radar warning receiver, Trask maneuvered his aircraft to stay out of its engagement zone as the AWACS controller shouted at them to turn to the east. A few minutes later, Capt Johnson and his wingman returned to the area full of fuel and contacted Moccasin 05. Trask reported that he was in the vicinity of the survivor. Johnson could not see him. Trask realized that the INS on the A-10s had probably drifted quite a bit, since Johnson and Goff had now been airborne for almost eight hours, and he used his UHF radio to home in on Johnson’s transmissions.

Johnson and Goff spotted Moccasin 05 and dropped down to guide them to the survivor. Johnson then contacted Lieutenant Jones and told him to get ready for the pickup. Jones saw the helicopter, and he remembers, “I . . . saw the Pave Low, about five feet off of the

ground. I started talking to him. I have never seen such a beautiful sight as that big brown H-53.”

Very excited now, Jones started giving Trask vectors. Unfortunately, Iraqi forces in the area were also monitoring his transmissions with surveillance / homing radios mounted in trucks and began speeding toward Jones. The left gunner on Moccasin 05, MSgt Tim Hadrych, spotted them and called them out to the rest of the crew. Homan called Sandy 57 and 58 and told them to “Smoke the trucks!” Goff hit the lead truck with several rounds of 30 mm fire, stopping it and setting it on fire. Capt Johnson also shot it with more 30 mm fire for good measure. The second truck turned around and fled. Throughout the engagement, Trask continued his approach to the survivor, who was now standing and quite visible. Trask set the Pave Low down between Lieutenant Jones and the now furiously burning enemy vehicle. He cleared his two PJs to disembark and secure Jones.

When all three were aboard, he lifted off and, with the A-10s again providing escort, turned south. He was immediately joined by Capt Kingsley and crew in Moccasin 04, who had crossed the main road to provide assistance if needed. The A-10s guided them back across the busy highway and stayed with them until they crossed the Saudi border. Johnson and Goff then headed off to find another tanker before flying back to their base at KFIA. The two Pave Lows headed for Al Jouf and a thunderous welcome.

The story is a footnote, now, to the history of that conflict. But it highlighted the mettle of those three young officers and helped their development into senior Air Force leaders still proudly serving our nation until Maj Gen Kingsley’s recent retirement.



*About the Author: Darrel Whitcomb is the author of: The Rescue of Bat 21 (1998), Combat Search and Rescue in DESERT STORM (2006), Call Sign - DUSTOFF: A History of US Army Aeromedical Evacuation from Conception to Hurricane Katrina (2011), and On a Steel Horse I Ride: A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace published in 2012 by the Air University Press.*

On 29 January 1991, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein launched an assault from Kuwait into the border town of Khafji, Saudi Arabia. As a result of the incursion, Saudi, Qatari, and US forces engaged Iraqi forces in the first major ground engagement of Operation DESERT STORM. Despite a pounding from coalition aircraft and artillery, a large Iraqi force including 40 tanks and 500 troops, entered and occupied Khafji. Coalition ground forces were quickly overpowered and rapidly pulled back from Khafji, leaving two US Marine reconnaissance teams in their hide sites, inside city limits.

From 30-31 January, coalition air strikes focused on halting reinforcements traveling down the coastal highway into Khafji. Among the aircraft were two AC-130H gunships, call signs Spirit 01 and Spirit 02. Spirit 01's crew, commanded by Maj "Mad Jack"

Flanders, was first into the fight. Shortly after taking off from their base at King Fahd International Airport, the crew of Spirit 01 was tasked to

interdict targets just north of the border on Kuwait Highway 40. In short order, they destroyed several Soviet built BMP-1 armored personnel carriers and succeeded in halting an entire column of vehicles heading towards Khafji. Iraqi Antiaircraft Artillery (AAA) was sporadic, but accurate enough to cause

## The Untold Story of AC-130 Gunship Crews

## During the Battle of Khafji

By William Walter, CMSgt, USAF (Ret)

*This article contains the highest level of detail ever published concerning the loss of AC-130H gunship "Spirit 03." It is not a US government public release. Instead, it is a detailed personal account of AC-130H involvement and the activities of the 16th Special Operations Squadron (16 SOS) during and after the Battle of Khafji. Information originates from multiple non-government sources, including personal interviews and observations by Spectre Operation DESERT STORM veterans who witnessed the events first hand.*

Editor's note: This article first appeared in the *Air Commando Journal*, Vol 1, Issue 4.





Spirit 01 to break off their attacks several times to avoid being hit.

Spirit 02 launched a few hours after Spirit 01, tweaked their guns and was tasked to interdict targets north of Spirit 01's location, much farther into Kuwait. Commanded by Capt Don Timpson, Spirit 02 rolled in on their target area and met heavy enemy fire, forcing them to break off their attack. For the next few hours, they continued re-attack attempts, but each time they began to engage, were met with an increased level of accurate AAA fire.

While Spirit 01 and Spirit 02 were engaging Iraqi forces north of Khafji, the ground situation within the city limits continued to decline as Iraqi forces exploited the town. During the same time period, Maj Paul Weaver and his crew was assigned ground alert duties at King Fahd and gunship maintenance crews worked to repair a malfunctioning fire control system (FCS) on aircraft 6567. About 2230 hrs, 6567 was called in as "crew ready," prompting Lt Col Donn Kegel, 16 SOS/CC, to launch Maj Weaver's crew to perform a Functional

Check Flight (FCF) of the aircraft. Maj Weaver's crew was assigned the call sign Spirit 03

Just after 0100hrs on 31 January, Spirit 01 had expended all its ammunition and returned to base, while Spirit 02 continued to duel with targets north of Khafji. About 0140 hrs, Spirit 03 took off and proceeded directly to the Saudi "Half Moon Bay" range complex to check out the FCS. At some point, the crew of Spirit 03 decided the system was functional and requested mission tasking. Lt Col Kegel approved their request, but since they were not in the original plans for that night, Spirit 03 spent several hours orbiting in a holding area, waiting for tasking.

North of Khafji, Spirit 02 continued to attack, but AAA threats were steadily increasing and they had their hands full dealing with multiple threats. In spite of the threat level, Spirit 02 was successful in destroying vehicles and setting off an explosion with large "secondaries." Just before 0500 hrs, Spirit 02 determined the escalating threat level made conditions "unworkable" in the target area and

decided to return to base.

While enroute to King Fahd, Spirit 02 contacted Spirit 03 to advise them to decline tasking and return to base because of the high threat level. Disregarding the recommendation, Spirit 03 chose to remain on station. Shortly after 0500, Spirit 03 received tasking from a US Marine Forward Air Controller (FAC) flying over Khafji in an OV-10.

By 0525 hours, the crew of Spirit 03 located their first target, the customs inspection post on the Saudi side of the border. A very large pillared concrete structure covering several acres, it was the only major cover in an otherwise barren stretch of desert and the Iraqis were using as a tactical cover. Spirit 03 began to fire the 105mm gun on the reinforced concrete roof of the border post to breach the facility and affect targets underneath. As they continued their attack, fire control problems thought to have been repaired returned. The Fire Control Officer, Capt Art Galvan, quickly applied corrective procedures and Spirit 03 continued to fire. Their continuous attack resulted in roof penetration and



**The southern entrance to the town of Khafji, March, 1991. The photograph was taken mid day, but oil well fires blackened the sky.** (Photo by Bill Walter)

damage to the targets underneath. Exact damage inflicted is unknown, but there was evidence of Enemy Killed In Action (EKIA) when investigating the border post site in March, '91.

By 0600, Spirit 03's fuel level was low and Begin Morning Nautical Twilight (BMNT) was quickly approaching. Lt Col Kegel radioed Spirit 03, directing them to return to base. Spirit 03 remained on station and continued to accept target tasking, even after declaring "bingo" fuel.

By 0620 hrs, the FAC had rolled out from his position over Khafji as he simultaneously passed target tasking. Spirit 03 was directed to look for Free Rocket Over Ground (FROG) systems suspected of being in the area. At that time, Spirit 03 was tracking a stationary vehicle south of the border post and was about to begin a spiral search towards the border post. Suddenly, without warning, a small Iraqi Surface to Air Missile (SAM) impacted their left wing. The missile's warhead caused localized damage to the wing and external fuel tank and started a wing fire, but Maj Weaver and Capt Bland maintained control of the aircraft. Unfortunately, the crew of Spirit 03 was unaware they had been hit in a very critical area of the wing, which was rapidly weakening caused by burning fuel pouring from ruptured fuel cells.

After about 10 seconds, as the crew continued to control the emergency condition, two thirds of the left wing suddenly broke off. An immediate loss of controlled flight and a wing-over spin

caused aircraft 6567 to spin wildly out of control. As the aircraft began to fall from the sky, a faint "Mayday" call was transmitted; these were Spirit 03's last words.

What followed was an ever increasing rate of descent and an erratic spin. This condition resulted in very high centrifugal forces and extreme G-loading, making bailout nearly impossible. The aircraft fell 9,000 feet in less than a minute, ultimately crashing into the shallow waters of the Persian Gulf. There were no survivors and no direct witnesses other than the Iraqis in the area. The only visual indication of what may have happened came from the Marine



**Spirit 03's first and last target on 31 Jan, the Saudi border post. This photo was taken in March, 1991 a few days after Spirit 03 crash site was discovered in the shallow coastal waters of the Persian Gulf.** (Photo by Bill Walter)

Corps FAC who passed target tasking just before Spirit 03 was shot down. He said he saw a "large fireball" falling from the sky in his peripheral vision as he was already a distance away from Khafji.

By 0645, Spirit 03 was overdue and not responding to radio calls. First thoughts were they had diverted to a different airfield, but a check of all possible airfields was negative. Spirit 03 was missing...and that was the only word that came out. I think everyone recognized the possibility they were shot down, but nobody wanted to admit it. Over the next few days, high resolution reconnaissance photos of the Khafji area failed to turn up evidence of a crash site. Everyone knew what target area Spirit 03 was working when they made their last radio call, but there was no sign whatsoever of a crash site in that area. It was hard to believe an entire AC-130H could vanish without a trace, so the prevailing theory was they

had taken battle damage, flew inland, and bailed out over the desert. The mystery surrounding their disappearance resulted in wild theories, but there were no easy answers to be had. Adding to the mystery is the fact the Iraqis never claimed to shoot down Spirit 03. Widely held suspicion is Iraqi witnesses to the event may have been killed during air strikes or artillery later the same day, but that cannot be confirmed.

Concern for Spirit 03's crew grew stronger as days passed and so did the mystery. Not only were our friends missing, but there was a good chance they were dead. We sat around our camp fire (which coincidentally was called the "rumor fire") wondering what their families were going through and what we could do to help solve the mystery. Optimists held hope that the crew took battle damage, bailed out and were captured by the Iraqis. We even refused to lower the United States and Spectre flag flying over the "hooch" to half staff since we felt that would signify a subliminal admission they were "gone."

By early March, the Iraqis were defeated and had retreated back to Iraq. Col Gray, 1 SOW/CC, got word of the upcoming prisoner of war repatriation and sent 14 Spectres (one for each crewmen missing) to Riyadh. We hoped our friends would be amongst those released, but again, nothing.

We desperately needed answers, so Col Gray directed all aircraft under his control to begin a grid search of the Khafji area. Initial results focused on the area west of Khafji since most believed it would have been logical for a crew to head that direction in a controlled bailout situation. After much effort, no sign of Spirit 03 was discovered. At the same time, crews were flying routine low level mail runs back and forth from King Fahd to Kuwait International Airport. Some of these missions traveled along the coast to stay clear of the search effort and oil well fires. Ironically, while trying to stay clear of the search for Spirit 03, an MC-130P spotted something unusual in the water about 600 yards off the coast, just north of Khafji. Shortly thereafter, a helicopter was sent to the area and spotted what appeared to be aircraft wreckage.

The water was only about 10 feet



deep at the point of impact, but the wreckage was difficult to spot. It appeared the aircraft created a crater on impact and had disintegrated into small pieces that were covered over by bottom sand.

Most of the wreckage was concealed by the sand and from a mere fifty feet above the surface of the Persian Gulf, few major items were visible. Identifiable wreckage included a main landing gear tire, a prop, a sunken and tattered 20 man life raft, and submerged and deployed parachutes. Spirit 03 had been found. Several hundred yards away in shallow water, the left wing section that had broken off lay on the bottom. On the shoreline, a few items had washed ashore, but otherwise, no sign of the aircraft was visible or projecting above water. The wreckage itself was concentrated in an area about one quarter acre with fragments of the aircraft scattered around the periphery.

Combat Controllers dove on the wreckage site for answers and discovered human remains. As soon as word got back to the base, our fears were confirmed and we lowered the flag to half staff. From that point on, life changed dramatically for all members of the 16 SOS and the families of our fellow Spectres and friends who toughed it out to the very end.



**The Spirit 03 crash site as viewed from the shoreline. Even though water was only about 10 feet deep, the no wreckage projected above water. This fact contributed to difficulties locating the site.** (Photo by Bill Walter)



**The Spirit 03 crash site as seen from MH-53 in March, 1991. The main wreckage was very fragmentary and confined to a small area of about one quarter acre.** (Photo by Col Jerry Buckman)

**H**istorians acknowledge this fact; the battle of Khafji was a turning point in the war. We know Spectre contributed a critical aspect to the Iraqi defeat, including Spirit 03's persistent and deadly fire. We also know that coalition victory came with a very high price.

### **The Crew of Spirit 03**

Major Paul J. Weaver,  
 Captain Arthur Galvan  
 Captain William D. Grimm,  
 Captain Dixon Walters, Jr.,  
 Captain Thomas C. Bland,  
 Senior Master Sergeant Paul G. Buege  
 Senior Master Sergeant James B. May II  
 Technical Sergeant Robert K. Hodges  
 Staff Sergeant John Lee Oelschlager  
 Staff Sergeant John P. Blessinger  
 Staff Sergeant Timothy R. Harrison,  
 Staff Sergeant Damon V. Kanuha,  
 Staff Sergeant Mark J. Schmauss,  
 Sergeant Barry M. Clark

In the Gunship world, there's an old saying "tactics are written in blood." As a result of this combat loss, tactics, techniques and procedures were rewritten and operating procedures changed. This is the true legacy of crew of Spirit 03... the countless American lives saved and the thousands of enemy defeated by crews flying the AC-130 gunship since that fateful day. For that, we owe them our utmost respect. 🦅

# Men in the Arena:

## CRASH OF DITKA 03

### [Part 2 of a 2 Part Series]

Part 1 appeared in the *Air Commando Journal*, Vol 4, Issue 2.

This is Part 2 in our 2 part series which captures the events surrounding the aftermath of the Ditka 03 crash. As we try to sum up our survival and recovery from different perspectives, we are once again challenged with limited space. And as mentioned already in Part 1, for the “full story” we encourage you to read Michael Hirsh’s book *None Braver: US Air Force Pararescuemen in the Afghanistan War* (Penguin Books, London, 2003) where Mr. Hirsh superbly captures multiple and intriguing side stories. Some which are missing here: personal experiences at the moment of impact such as that of Chris Langston (“I did a backwards summersault and landed on my feet”), and Rodney Young (“...finds himself hanging upside down, suspended from his lap belt”), and Don Tyler who is slammed into the rear of the flight engineer’s seat and dislocates his shoulder and permanently damages his rotator cuff; and Don’s mediocre (at best) medical and logistical treatment he received in later days. Also missing is the perspective from the MH-47 helicopter pilots who we were, just moments earlier, refueling (“did you just see that?!”), our 5th SOS sister ship in formation with us, and also the ultimate demise of tail #66-0213. Another absent element, albeit a compelling one, is what our loved ones went through back home as they began to receive tidbits of information; which actually started to trickle

in while we were still on the mountain. As in Part 1 of this story, excerpts from Mr. Hirsh’s book are included here and are annotated accordingly.

*From None Braver: And then it was quiet.*

*One second Ditka 03 had four 4,900 horsepower turboprop engines screaming at full power, and the next second, nothing. Not a sound...*

*There’s no raging fire, no roar of fuel tanks exploding, no chunks of hot metal flying through the air. The condition of the flight deck is pristine. There is not even a broken window.*

**CLINE:** On my last scan of the instruments before impact, I saw 25 feet on the radar altimeter and 80 knots on the airspeed indicator. I remember being amazed that the aircraft was still responsive and flying at such a low speed, especially since we still had 46,000 pounds of fuel on board. After impact, I remember being further amazed that it wasn’t more violent; I had experienced car crashes that felt more violent. Our copilot Jason Wright instinctively began executing procedures for an emergency ground egress and Right Navigator Don Tyler, despite severe pain from injuries to his shoulder, instinctively cut electrical power to the avionics bus to eliminate it as





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a potential ignition source. Following their example of disciplined crew effort, I took a moment to gather myself and set about getting accountability of all 8 of our crewmembers.

**AKINS: FIRE!!** Certainly we are on fire! We just collided into the side of a mountain...doesn't every plane crash involve some element of fire? In less than 1 second we went from flying a fuel-laden MC-130P Combat Shadow to crashing and coming to rest near the top of a snow-covered ridge line in a remote location deep in the Hindu Kush range. Miraculously I was still alive; and immediately apparent so, too, were my fellow crew members on the flight deck. But there had to be some impending explosion coming next. Fighting a rising internal panic I knew I had to exit the wreckage immediately and thus made a beeline to the forward escape hatch. As I popped my head out of the hatch the landscape that met me was, no kidding, right out of a movie set. I scanned the surrounding carnage to see what was just 30 seconds earlier a beautiful flying aircraft now a crushed airframe laying on the mountain snow field against a pitch black backdrop of sky...from a noisy environment to complete silence except for the eerie hiss of pressurized oxygen escaping the ruptured LOX lines. I noticed the center wing box had collapsed into the fuselage leaving a gaping hole on the spine of the Shadow. The left wing and number 1 and 2 engines were resting in the snow and the detached props were nowhere to be seen. Both 20-man life rafts deployed from the upper surface of each wing and came to rest on the snow. The horizontal stabilizer, normally positioned 15 feet above the ground, is also resting on the snow. Other than the immediate area behind us where we disturbed it, the snow is pristine. Such a surreal scene....but amazingly no visible flames! After taking this in for about 5 seconds the bitter cold hits me. I yelled back inside for Flight Engineer Jeff Doss to hand me my gloves, as my exposed hands literally feel like Mickey Mouse sausage fingers. Jeff keeps mumbling, "What happened, what happened?" From my perch on the ladder half way out of the aircraft, I look back down inside and for the first time consciously notice Maj John Cline (Aircraft Commander) and Lt Jason Wright (co-pilot) still in their seats calmly looking at each other. As my panic begins to subside, but yet with my heart still racing a mile a minute I marvel at their apparent ability to methodically unstrap and remove themselves from their seats. Although they're moving at a much too leisurely pace for my comfort level I'm still thinking, "We need to get the hell out of here, and fast!"

Meanwhile, Radio Operator Rodney Young at his position in the back of the plane tries to assess what just happened.

*As described in None Braver: Back in the Ditka 03 cargo bay, Rodney Young is taking stock of his situation. The console knocked off his headset and wool watch cap when it slammed into his shoulder. No problem. He'll just get down on the floor and find them. What he can't figure out is why it's raining inside the aircraft. "My face is cold and wet, so I'm asking, am I bleeding from my face? So I put my hand to my face and rub it off. Can't see anything; I've got black gloves on. Then I realized, whoa, that's gas spewing inside*

*the airplane." The sound reminds him of a sprinkler system run amok, a loud, persistent, obnoxious sound that he can't place. Then it dawned: In addition to jet fuel raining down, there's liquid oxygen blowing on his face. The valve has broken on the tank that supplies the crew's emergency oxygen masks. Puddles of gas are already forming on the floor; the cargo area is being saturated with pure oxygen. A tiny spark is all it will take to turn a survival miracle into a front page disaster report about eight American deaths in the war on terrorism.*

*Rodney knows he's got to get out of the plane before that happens, but there's one small problem: he can't see a thing. The radio operator wears contact lenses, and, fearful that they'll get saturated with gas and he'll be temporarily blinded, he's got his eyes screwed shut. Even though the plane's emergency lights came on as soon as the triggering system detected an impact greater than 2.5 Gs, keeping his eyes closed is understandably making it difficult for him to crawl around on the floor looking for his wool cap, his survival vest, his GAU-5 rifle, and the bag with his crypto—the secret punch tapes he uses to program special scrambling codes into the radios. He doesn't want to evacuate the plane without the GAU—this is bad-guy land—and the 9mm pistol that was strapped to his leg doesn't represent adequate firepower. He's willing to exit without his cap and without his survival vest. He's well trained enough to realize that he can't leave without the crypto. This forces him to unscrunch his eyelids and peek just a little, thinking he might get lucky. Ultimately, he thinks, "Screw it," and opens his eyes wide to begin the search in earnest. Then he hears voices coming from up above, and realizes that people on the flight deck are alive.*

*Abandoning the search, he begins to make his way to the left side of the aircraft, where there's access to the flight deck.*

**AKINS:** Rodney Young, covered in fuel, meets me at the forward escape hatch pushing aside a wrecked component of the galley as he makes his way from his crew station in the back. Rodney takes the emergency escape light and prepares to use it as a signal to the helicopters whom we were trying to complete refueling with just moments before. We hear them in the distance as they begin to circle back to our crash site. We both also hear Loadmaster Chris Langston yell from the back that fellow Loadmaster Jeff Pohl is injured and stuck in the wreckage. Chris can't make his way forward from his original troop door location. The collapsed wing box and the cargo floor, which has buckled up into an a-frame, are blocking his way. I yell for him to meet me at the rear escape hatch, and then throw out the forward escape rope and ease my way down and into the snow. Rodney begins to follow me, but returns when beckoned back by Jeff Doss for assistance. The trek around the left wing tip in 3 - 5 feet of snow is arduous, and a sign of the egress issues John Cline and company will face in the ensuing couple of hours. In the background I hear Rodney attempt to



make contact with someone on the radio, although not sure from where he's transmitting. What ordinarily is impossible, I literally step up onto the horizontal stabilizer from the snow and meet Chris Langston at the rear escape hatch. He informs me of Jeff's condition and, not aware of just how "stuck" Jeff is, I suggest to Chris to bring Jeff the end of the escape rope to use as an aid to pull himself out.

This is how Chris describes discovering Jeff in *None Braver*: *...loadmaster Chris Langston is slowly getting over the shock of realizing that they've crashed and he's still alive. His concern now is his partner, Jeff Pohl, and, getting no response when he calls his name, Langston begins searching for him. "I went maybe five feet and once I got closer to him, I could see him laying there. But he wasn't moving; he was just kind of laying there, not doing anything, not saying anything. I went up to him, and I touched him on his helmet. He started making some pretty painful moans, and I kind of shook him and said, 'Jeff, it's me. We can't stay here.' And he said, 'Okay, okay, I'm fine, I'm fine.' I said, 'You're sure?' and he's, like, 'Yeah,' and I remember him looking up at me, and there's a little blood trickle from his helmet. And I was, like, 'Well, it doesn't look real bad: At that point, I said, 'Follow me; I'll dig around and try to find a way out of here.' As I turned around to walk away, he says, 'Hey, I can't move.' So I went back and I said, 'What's . . . ?' He said, 'My leg is stuck.' He was up against a snowbank, so I started digging through the snow. Probably a quarter of the way up the airplane was full of snow already, and even when I landed, I was standing in snow. At that point, I started digging around, and I saw where his leg was on the outside of the airplane. It wasn't mangled or anything, but I could tell it was stuck. But I knew there was no way I was just going to pull it out of there. I took one of those emergency exit lights, and I gave it to Jeff. I said, 'Jeff, hold on to this. I'm going to get help. I'll be back.'"*

About this time, John Cline has taken an alternate route to Jeff's location. He has exited the forward hatch and, walking down the top of the airplane, enters the fuselage through the collapsed wing box and arrives at Jeff's location.

As expressed in *None Braver*, *Jeff...is pinned in the middle of the wreckage, against the Benson tank, facedown in jet fuel soaking into a cushion of packed snow that had been scooped up by the fuselage behind the wing box as it slid up the mountain. His right foot is at an ugly angle through the side of the aircraft, locked in place by sheet metal that has crunched around his ankle like a shirt collar a couple of sizes too small. Pohl's injuries include a compound fracture of his right tibia, multiple fractures of his pelvis, a broken rib, fractured cervical and thoracic vertebrae, and head injuries that result in the permanent loss of his left peripheral vision. He has bruised the membranes that attach the intestines to the abdomen, ruptured his*

*spleen, and has a scrotal hematoma. Of most concern is that he is bleeding internally, into his pelvic area.*

**AKINS:** In the meantime, the -47s had circled around and landed on the angled mountain side; one has landed down slope from us about 100 yards, and the other one up slope about the same distance. They began discharging their PJs who made their way up/down to us from both helos. In the meantime, Jason has escorted Don out of the wreckage and both began making their way to the lower helo.



**Ditka 03 crew** (Photo courtesy of Col John Cline)

As Michael Hirsh describes it: *...everyone has finally gotten out of the forward part of the plane. Copilot Jason Wright comes out the cockpit escape hatch, and then realizes that navigator Don Tyler, with his busted-up shoulder, can't possibly climb the ladder and shimmy down the rope. He goes back inside where he finds the nav just standing there dazed, moaning in pain. Having spotted a gash in the fuselage just aft of the cockpit, Wright guides Tyler down the stairwell and maneuvers him over, under, and around wreckage, until finally they emerge from the plane. Then he begins walking the nav down to the waiting helicopter. Tyler remembers feeling helpless, or worthless, because he couldn't help anybody. While he had some injuries, including a knee that was cut and bleeding and a slice through his cheek, they were minor compared to the destruction his shoulder had suffered in the crash. Unfortunately, the two experience the same kind of travail as the others had on their walk to the helo. They take a few steps, and then fall through the snow. Wright is walking abreast of Tyler, who's clutching his injured left arm with his right hand. Every time the injured nav would fall, he'd reach out to grab him, but just being touched triggered a powerful pain that shot through Tyler's entire body. Finally he screams, "No! No! No, don't touch me!" and manages to make*

*the rest of the downhill hike without help, even though it means that every time he falls through the snow, he has to dig himself out using just his right elbow. When the pair gets to the helicopter ramp, crewmen inside motion Tyler to come around to the side door. They've finally figured out that after their ordeal, the Ditka 03 crewmembers don't have the strength to haul themselves aboard. Tyler indicates he's done walking, so one of the guys makes a stirrup by cupping his hands together. Tyler steps up into it with one foot, and they toss him up and onto the ramp, then prop him up against the inside wall...*

**AKINS:** I vividly recall Jason Wright's energetic performance in and about the crash site. He truly was "Superman" as he effortlessly made his way through the snow back and forth and all over that scene. He was escorting an injured Don Tyler to one of the helicopters, communicating with the PJs, and returning back to the aircraft to recover sensitive material. While the rest of us were struggling just to travel a few feet in a timely manner in the deep snow at an altitude of nearly 10,000 feet, Jason seemed to be running everywhere without breaking a sweat while floating through the powder. During my laborious, and what seemed like a 20 minute trek from the crash site to the rescue helicopter, Jason had materialized twice from both directions as he ran back and forth. Was I hallucinating?

**CLINE:** The effort to free Loadmaster Jeff Pohl from the aircraft wreckage is the element of the entire saga most seared into my brain because of Jeff's incredible display of grit and determination. Deep in our minds we all have at some point wondered how we would acquit ourselves if ever faced with a dire life-or-death situation. We all hope that we could actually live up to the "grace under pressure" ethos so valued in military service. I witnessed Jeff Pohl exhibit a level of unfaltering courage and indomitable spirit that still deeply inspires me to this day. Few will ever face such extreme adversity, and fewer still will come through it as admirably.

Although the impact felt relatively benign to those of us on the flight deck, the story was completely different in the cargo compartment. Upon impact, Jeff suffered extreme blunt-force trauma as he was thrown forward from his scanning position in the right paratroop door and smashed in to the 11,000 pound steel fuel tank mounted in the cargo compartment. Large parts of fuselage collapsed around him and snow poured in through tears in the floor as the aircraft slid to a stop. Jeff ended up face-down in deep snow, enmeshed in twisted wreckage, with his leg pinned between the large cargo compartment fuel tank and the right side of the fuselage. His right foot and ankle dangled out of the aircraft through an almost form-fit tear in the aircraft's skin. Trapped amidst unstable aircraft wreckage, facing death from exposure to the extreme cold or from fire should the thousands of pounds of jet fuel drizzling on and around him suddenly ignite, Jeff remained levelheaded. Despite life-threatening head, neck, pelvic, leg, and internal injuries, he cracked jokes and calmly gave encouragement to me and other rescuers as we worked with improvised tools for

over an hour and a half to free his trapped leg. Aside from the horrific pain of his initial injuries, Jeff endured unspeakable additional pain with truly uncommon poise and composure during his extraction from the aircraft and transport to the waiting helicopter.

From *None Braver: Meantime*, back inside Ditka 03's crushed tail section, a desperate effort is under way to keep the trapped loadmaster alive until competent rescue help can arrive. With the help of two of the SOF shooters, the pilot tries digging the snow out from under Pohl, then grabs anything he can find—sweatshirts, mats, cardboard—and stuffs it under Pohl to provide some insulation. "Jeff was amazing," recalls Cline. "He was stuck in there, busted up pretty bad, but he was cracking jokes and keeping us calm as we were trying to get him out of there."

When copilot Wright returns to the plane, Cline tells him to find the crash ax and anything else they might be able to use to pry Pohl out. He begins looking around in the dark, trying to find it, when Cline reaches up and hands him an emergency exit light. Wright says, "I'd forgotten they pull right off the wall and you can walk around with them. For some reason I didn't remember that, and when he handed it to me, I was, like, 'Duh, I knew that all along.' "He ends up finding the ax as well as a couple of other poles he thinks might be useful as pry bars. He also finds one of the litters they carry on the plane, and passes that back as well.

Copilot Wright remembers Pohl saying, "This is a Kodak moment; can you get to my camera?" Wright says, "I remember thinking that I couldn't do it, because if we didn't get him out or something happened to him, I couldn't explain to somebody that I was sitting there taking pictures rather than getting him out." (Someone else found the camera and snapped a picture, which didn't turn out.)

The likelihood of a bad outcome is staring everyone in the face. Two shooters inside the plane and one outside are hacking away at the metal with their commando knives as though their own lives depend on it. As good as those weapons might be in hand-to-hand combat, they aren't up to this task, and it's frustrating them to the point that one of them growls, "Where are they at with the REDS kit to get him out of here?" And another responds, "It should be here by now!" No one knew that the REDS kit and the PJs to operate it are miles away, refueling.

If they'd gone in with the REDS kit—all they needed was the ax out of there—ten seconds, the guy would've been out. All they needed was probably two inches to get his ankle out.

But the five men working desperately to get Jeff Pohl out couldn't get an inch, much less two. The crash ax on the 130 is similar to what civilian firemen use. With it, you can bash a hole in a bulkhead or wall, but it's hardly a precision instrument to be swinging in a



confined place where a victim is trapped. In contrast, the PJs' ax has a sharp point at one end to poke a hole through aircraft aluminum; the other end of the extendable handle has what amounts to a giant lever-action can opener sort of like the old military 2-38 that GIs used for years to open C-ration cans.

Next they try to use a cargo strap to bend the metal. They're able to pass one end through a hole in the crushed bulkhead, then try simultaneously lifting the strap from outside and inside, but they have no leverage.

The shooter working on Pohl outside the aircraft had cut his boot off, then cut the leg on his flight suit. While they can't see bones protruding, everyone can see that the load's leg made a hard right turn at the shin, right where it poked through the wall.

Inside, Jeff is complaining to Cline that his hands and feet are cold. "I ended up stripping off all my survival gear and just laying it down around him and putting his hands inside my flight suit to keep his hands warm." But it is a stopgap measure, and everyone can sense it, including the trapped man.

The pilot wasn't optimistic. "It just ended up getting to the point where he was fading, he was starting to get glassy-eyed and said, 'Hey, you guys are really going to get me out of here, aren't you?'"

Apparently he recognized that they were trying to free him without hurting him any more, and it wasn't working. Jason Wright said, "We were pulling on him, we were doing like a one-two-three, and John had his head, I was in the middle, and the guy on the outside was kind of pushing the skin. Another guy was guiding it from inside. We'd go 'one-two-three, move; and the guy on the outside is, like, 'Stop, stop, stop!' It looks like it's taking the meat off of his bone, like filleting the skin off his leg. And we said, 'What do we do?' And at that point exactly, Jeff was just, like, 'Just get. . . just pull, just get me out of here; and that is all we needed.'"

**CLINE:** Once Jeff told us to "just get him out of there", the shooters outside the aircraft slathered his leg with hydraulic fluid they scooped up from ruptured lines leaking into the snow, and Jason and I repositioned inside the aircraft for a very hard and direct "pull".

I took a deep breath before calling out the cadence for the team to pull, then we went right at the brute-force extraction of his leg. I could hear bones breaking in Jeff's ankle as we pulled his leg free. But beyond a guttural, teeth-clenched growl as his leg popped free of the wreckage, Jeff quickly regained the remarkable composure he had maintained before we forcibly ripped his already broken leg through a jagged hole in frozen aircraft sheet metal.

Jeff then further astonished all of us by crawling unaided over twisted wreckage on his broken pelvis and with an open compound fracture in his right leg to the stretcher we used to extricate him from the aircraft. Once on the stretcher, Jeff endured numerous additional jolts to his shattered body as we repeatedly dropped the stretcher as we struggled to move

200 feet up a steep incline in chest-high snow to a waiting helicopter.

From *None Braver*: Pilot Cline remembers the ordeal this way: "It's five feet of snow uphill two hundred feet, and every second or third step two or three of us would break through up to our waist in snow and fall and drop the stretcher. We're moving him inches at a time, and it just seemed like forever. I think it took us over twenty minutes just to go the two hundred feet up to the helicopter, much less being under the rotor blast, freezing him. He's already freezing to death right in front of us, and we're underneath the rotors. Once we got inside the rotor disk and it was blowing some hot exhaust on us, it was a little better, but there was a while there where I just couldn't believe this was real. It was like living in a cartoon. Deliverance is a hundred feet away in that helicopter, and it was all we could do to move him six inches at a time, a foot at a time."



George Akins and Jeff Pohl (Photo courtesy of Col John Cline)

**CLINE:** Jeff continued to put the rest of us in awe after we finally got him into the MH-47 for the two-hour flight to Bagram. As PJs Chris Young and Keary Miller worked feverishly to stabilize Jeff's critical injuries and reverse his extreme hypothermia, Jeff matter-of-factly talked of being back in action for the 9th SOS's next rotation to the combat zone.

Again, it's difficult to fully articulate the extreme circumstances Jeff had to fight through in order to survive. It remains almost surreal to me that I was actually present to witness Jeff's incredible display of heart and resilience firsthand. His heroic actions and selfless dedication were not only instrumental in his own survival, but they should serve as deep inspiration to all airmen, and represent the highest ideals and traditions of American fighting forces.

**AKINS:** Spending what seems like a couple of hours in the back of helo with Chris Langston, Don Tyler and Rodney

# The PEOPLE The AIRCRAFT The SPIRIT of the AIR COMMANDO

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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 [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org) under the Journal tab, and at the Hurlburt Field library).

Submit files electronically to: [info@aircommando.org](mailto: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.

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Young I have the first opportunity to really absorb the full magnitude of what happened. These thoughts, coupled with wondering what's going on in the back of the airplane as our guys try to extract Jeff Pohl, keep racing through my mind. Finally, we receive word the others have successfully pulled out Jeff and are onboard the other helo. We depart the scene with bittersweet emotions: We're alive! What did I just do?! We're alive! How did this happen?! We're alive! Damn, we lost a high-value mission! The trip East to Bagram medical facility takes 3 more hours...into a beautiful sun rise. The passing snow-covered mountains, which came close to killing us, now look quite majestic in the early morning glow. I remark to Chris Langston how close they look; and he not so politely asks me to not say that again.

My thoughts on how we all survived an apparently unsurvivable impact into the mountain? While I suspect we were maintaining a true airspeed of about 85 knots when we hit terrain, I believe our angle of attack approximately matched the angle of the mountain side. Therefore our actual impact vector into the mountain was more like 40 to 50 knots. Add to the fact our collision was cushioned by about 5 feet or more of snow (which probably also immediately extinguished any ignition sources for fire). How else to explain why we all survived? As Rodney Young stated, "There are car crashes more violent from which others walked away"

**AKINS:** While six of us remaining at the K-2 medical facility under observation for about 24 hours, we had a chance to reflect together as a crew.

*From None Braver: ... The day they arrive is Ash Wednesday. Even though only a couple of the men are Catholic, it somehow is decided that they'll go to Mass en masse. So, wearing hospital gowns and slippers, they walk the quarter mile down muddy roads to the tent that serves as the chapel in the middle of the drab tent city that has been built over the past couple of months.*

*Back at the hospital, they have access to phones, computers, and food that is head and shoulders above the bulk tray rations being served at Jacobabad.*

*And they have a lot of time to sit together and contemplate what they'd been through. Pilot John Cline says they were six very happy guys. "We were giddy. I mean, we were looking around at each other; 'Can you believe that we just put an airplane into the side of a mountain, and we're all sitting here bullshitting about it?' And we skipped all the brooding. There was no terror, there was no horror, no depression. It was all just, 'Boy, we're really happy to be here. We've dodged a pretty big one.'" Now, confident that they're all okay and their two crewmates are in good hands, all they are waiting for is their release from the hospital, and a ride back home to Jacobabad.*





**John Cline and Rodney Young at K2 Hospital** (Photo courtesy of Col John Cline)

**AKINS:** While in K-2, it was also our first opportunity to place calls to our loved ones back home. During a conversation with my wife, which happened to be Valentine's Day, Amy informed me the dozen roses had arrived which I had ordered before the start of our mishap crew day. With all that had happened I completely forgot I placed that order. If it weren't for our miraculous survival, the realization that Amy could have received a dozen roses from me after my passing was a chilling thought for both of us.

Our return back to our base is also weighing on our minds.

As Michael Hirsh relays it in his book: .... *Not because they are going to have to face a grueling safety board investigation into the cause of the crash, but because they don't know whether their fellow airmen will be looking askance at them. They don't need to worry. It turns out that the plan had been to put them on a regular intratheater shuttle flight back to Jacobabad, but according to Jeff Doss, another crew in their unit made a big stink about that. "No, they're our guys; we're gonna go pick 'em up."* Doss says, *"That was huge for our mental state, because you crash an airplane on a mountain and you wonder how you're going to be received back at your unit."*

*They are transported from the hospital at K-2 to the airfield, and as the Combat Shadow's ramp opens, they can see a huge American flag hanging in the plane's cargo bay. That's when the tears begin.*

*Three hours later, the plane comes in for a landing through the nighttime smoke and haze at Jbad. It taxis to the maintenance area at one end of the airfield, and as the ramp opens, the crew of Ditka 03 can see the entire maintenance unit standing at attention, another huge American flag next to the formation. What's more, the maintenance guys are wearing complete regulation uniforms, a feat that even the most zealous commander in a combat zone would be hard-pressed to make happen.*

*And as aircraft commander Maj John Cline,*

*copilot Capt Jason Wright, navigator Maj George Akins, flight engineer MSgt Jeff Doss, loadmaster SSgt Chris Langston, and radio operator SSgt Rodney Young walk off the ramp, the entire assembled group snap a formal salute.*

*Then the party begins.*

**CLINE:** Although I do not recommend seeking out an experience like we went through in the crash, having been through such an intense event gives each of our crewmembers a very unique perspective on life and the deeper meaning of our service to the nation. Despite all the years that have passed since the crash, I am still overwhelmed with gratitude for everything that had to go our way for everyone to survive and recover from the adversity.

I am ever thankful the crew was so focused and professional, even in the extreme circumstances we found ourselves in on top of that mountain. I am ever thankful for the skill of the helicopter crews, strike team members, PJs, and the risks they took on our behalf to get us all safely off that mountainside. I am ever thankful for the warm reception we received back at our Forward Staging Base, from flyers and maintainers alike. I am ever thankful for the trust and confidence AFSOC leadership placed in our uninjured crewmembers by quickly allowing us to get back in the fight and resume flying combat missions merely three weeks later. I am ever thankful I am even here to contribute to this article.

From a professional development perspective, ever since the crash I have tried to very deliberately pay forward the consideration, trust, and opportunity for redemption that was afforded our crew. My parting thoughts for this audience are that AFSOC is indeed special, the Air Commando ethos is real, cherish every moment you are on this fabulous Air Commando team, mitigate risk and aggressively hack the mission, and pay the team forward with servant leadership that recognizes sometimes bad things happen to good people doing their best to get the job done.

To my fellow Ditka 03 warriors Jeff P, Don, George, Jason, Jeff D, Rodney, and Chris - keep the faith Brothers! You are all always in our hearts, and as we approach the 15th anniversary of the crash, Jyl and I look forward to tipping a cold one with you and your families on February 13th!



About the Authors: George Akins retired from the Air Force in December 2013 after 23 years of active duty accumulating over 4200 navigator hours. His operational flying experiences include: OPERATIONS JUST CAUSE, DESERT SHIELD, SOUTHERN WATCH, OEF, and OIF. Flying assignments include the 40th TAS, 550th FTS, and the 9th & 67th SOSs. George's last assignment was with the HQ AFSOC IG team. He currently enjoys sharing ownership of a small business in Destin, FL - Gulf Coast Electric.

Col John Cline is a career MC-130P pilot with broad operational flying experience in SOUTHERN WATCH, NORTHERN WATCH/ PROVIDE COMFORT, PROVIDE PROMISE/DENY FLIGHT, UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, OEF, and OIF. A former 9 SOS and 466 AEG Commander, he currently serves serving as a Deputy Director of Operations (A31) for AFSOC.



## BOOK REVIEW

### ***Dragonfly: The Smallest Fighter... The Fastest Gun... A-37s Over Vietnam*** By Fredrick D. Long and Lon Holtz, eds

*Reviewed by Scott E. McIntosh, Maj, USAF*

On 28 July 1967, the 604th Air Commando Squadron deployed as a unit to Bien Hoa to test the A-37 in combat, and immediately proved its utility as a close air support (CAS) platform over Vietnam. As the book points out, though, this documented fact did not ensure that it was ever well-received amongst the 7th Air Force or the F-100 and F-4 squadrons with which it shared the task.

What the Hun and Phantom did not share with this amazing airplane were the attributes that comprise the ideal CAS platform. When I was assigned to the 712th Air Support Operations Squadron a few months before 9/11, I did a lot of study on that support—because we might need to provide it to III Armored Corps; my unit ended up providing it to a completely different customer base from Bagram, but that’s another story.

Amongst my research into FLOTs, FEBAs, Killboxes, and Battlefield Air Interdiction studies, I absorbed some historical lessons on the machines we employ to put bombs on target while minimizing the chances for fratricide, and I found myself plugging into those lessons as I read these first-person accounts within the A-37’s narrative.

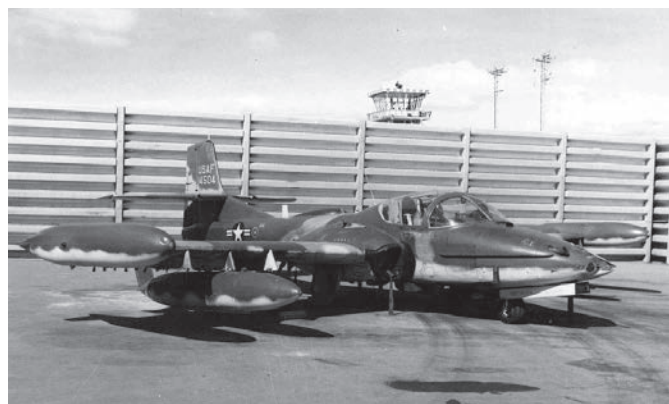
First of all, our ammo troops need to hang a lot of ordnance on an ideal CAS platform, and when the Air Force hauled retired Tweets from Davis-Monthan back to the factory in Wichita, Kansas (full disclosure: where I was born and

raised), one of the first modifications made was to strengthen the wing and install 4 pylons on the underside of that airfoil, enabling the plane to carry weaponry nearly equal to its own empty weight into combat. A 7.62mm minigun was also installed on the old trainer and after some robust testing, the gun was available to supplement robust loads of rockets, bombs, CBU’s, and napalm to go after bunkers, sampans, trucks, and enemy ground units from its base near Saigon.

Its small size undoubtedly made the A-37 harder to hit from the ground, and this was certainly important in enabling the low-altitude troops in contact (TIC) sorties it was tasked to perform. When the Forward Air Controller (also often flying Cessna aircraft) was observing and marking targets “in the weeds”, the capability to get right down there next to him to pickle ordnance undoubtedly saved some lives. In fact, one of the hazards of using low-drag bombs was shrapnel flying UP into the aircraft dropping them, and the book describes that well. The aircraft’s comparatively low stall-speed also proved beneficial in picking out ground targets over jungle firefights and logistic routes.

The book also repeatedly mentions

the Dragonfly’s capability to fly on one GE J85 engine, a factor that enabled not only a long loiter time over the fight, but the ability to return to base if AAA (or later, the SA-7 MANPAD) took out one of these upgraded engines. In fact, “[i]t became almost a routine practice for the pilot to shut down one engine while cruising to the target location.” (p.7) This capability certainly saved both Lt



**Cessna A-37A (S/N 67-14504) at Bien Hoa Air Base, South Vietnam.** (Photo courtesy of USAF)

Col Gordon Weed, copilot Jim Connally, and their aircraft when a 12.7mm round took out his right engine in a 1972 CAS mission. As he describes it:

I needed full left rudder and considerable aileron just to keep the wings level... [W]e were about 6,000 feet... and still climbing very slowly.



Aside from excessive drag from an apparent frozen engine, the aircraft was performing pretty well. Our main concern now was fuel consumption, as we had to keep a pretty high throttle setting on the left engine.

After a successful straight-in approach to Bien Hoa, the Chief of maintenance confirmed that the round had torn into the turbine, main wing spar, and engine mount. (pp. 264-5) A photo of this damage adds to the testament on the A-37's capability to absorb damage and stay in the air, a characteristic of ideal CAS aircraft from the A-10 to the Corsairs and Skyraiders the Navy and Marines famously employed over the running 1950 gun-battle near Chosin Reservoir.

Like SOF, CAS is an inherently joint activity, and even the USMC (which maintains its own Air Wing specifically to provide Marines CAS) will acknowledge that. When ground commanders request a USAF aircraft type by name, it speaks to that aircraft's battle-tested utility in that joint fight (ask your nearest soldier or Marine how he/she feels about the effort to retire the A-10 for clarity on this issue). The A-37's proven accuracy in putting on-time ordnance on-target was, according to the accounts in this history, acknowledged and sought from 1967 right up through Nixon's "Vietnamization" program. In fact, when the Marines deployed A-4s to Bien Hoa in May 1972, their pilots did check-out rides in the right seats of the 8th SOS's missions over An Loc. Dragonfly consistently makes it clear that when the aforementioned afterburner-equipped F-4s and -100s had trouble putting ordnance on the requested DMPI the A-37 could and did answer the mail at places like Hue and Khe Sanh; that accuracy is highly important when an emotional controller in the air or on the ground is dodging rounds and requesting fire support on the radio net.

"It could operate off modest runways (and short ones—so it could respond to TICs quickly), it was very versatile, easy to maintain, accurate at bombing and



**A-37 B flown by 603rd SOS Squadron Commander Lt Col Richard Secord during a refueling of the A-37 by a Air National Guard KC-97.** (Photo courtesy of Jim Iffland, Col, USAF (Ret))

strafing, and most amazing of all, it could carry the normal bomb load of a WWII flying fortress." (p.86) Indeed, the A-37 was not the first "retired" aircraft the US requested, upgraded, and employed when a primo CAS platform was needed for war. Combat Dragon, though, was "the first in Air Force history to test and evaluate a weapons system in actual combat conditions to see how the aircraft performed in several different roles," (p. 36) and this program provides a rich fabric of first-person accounts that not only weave a tapestry of the unit history, but the Vietnam War at large. There are bad days described in the book—the low-altitude bail-out that cost Maj George Shannon the use of his legs, the indirect fire and ground attacks at Bien Hoa, or the In Memory appendix which catalogs the 13 A-37 pilots lost in SEA. These are far outnumbered, though, by the good days the book records. The editors have tied the sack shut nicely—right before the Epilogue—by including diary entries from maintainer William R. Stevens. From December 1971 to October 1972, he recorded casualties, crashes, repairs, and aircraft lost in both rocket attacks and combat sorties. His testament makes for a fine summary:

It's by no means an account of everything that happened, just some things I jotted down when I had a spare minute or two. From your first day to your rotation day, it was hectic,

demanding, very stressful, hot, humid, and bone deep tiring. There seemed to be no end in sight to the tasks that we all accomplished every day. The routine became habit; everyone did what they were supposed to do to get thru [sic] their time there. We depended on each other. We accomplished what seemed to be impossible and we did it together. As the memories fade in time, it all seems like a dream, but there are times when it returns, as real as if it were yesterday. We all gave all we had to give; some gave more, some less. (p. 274)

I realize that you could plug this paragraph into any unit history, to include my own rotation to an old Soviet bomber base in Afghanistan, and that every unit deploying to combat is unique. The aircrews and support personnel that launched the A-37, have contributed to an excellent and entertaining unit history here, though, and I personally hope that the combat units I have served with can one day record their experiences as well as the A-37 Association has in this fine book.



*About the Author: Maj Scott E. McIntosh is a Regional Affairs Strategist at Allied Air Command (NATO), Ramstein Airbase, Germany. He has served as a Leadership and Command instructor at Air Command and Staff College (2009-2012) as well as the J2 at CJTF TROY, Iraq (2011).*



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