

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

GUNSHIPS

Spooky, Spectre & the Man

How the AC-47 Gunship Came to Be

A Year with Afghan Air Force

NATO Air Training Command - Afghanistan

History of the 193 SOW

Battle of Khafji

Untold Story of AC-130H Gunship Crews

Summer 2012



Vol I: Issue 4

**Foreword by Lt Gen Bradley Heithold
Vice Commander, USSOCOM**

2012 REUNION/CONVENTION



OCT 11-14

FORT WALTON BEACH, FL

All Air Commandos Welcome

Join us at the banquet to help recognize the accomplishments of Air Commandos past, present, and future.

FRIDAY GOLF at Gator Lakes Hurlburt Field

Rooms available at the Quality Inn located in Fort Walton Beach at a special rate for Air Commandos. Call 850-275-0300 to reserve by Sept 1, 2012.

Register online at www.aircommando.org or call 850-581-0099
Email: info@aircommando.org

THURSDAY

- ▶ Early Bird Social

FRIDAY

- ▶ Golf Tournament
- ▶ Fish Fry

SATURDAY

- ▶ Business Meeting
- ▶ Banquet

SUNDAY

- ▶ ACA Open House
- ▶ Memorial Service
- ▶ BBQ

SATURDAY NIGHT BANQUET

- ▶ Social Hour 1730-1900
- ▶ Air Commando Hall of Fame Presentations
- ▶ AFSOC Commander's Leadership Awards
- ▶ Entertainment

BANQUET DINNER

Romaine Lettuce Salad with Herb Grilled Chicken Breast with Pomegranate Brined Smoked Pork Loin with Apple Butter Tomato Compote, and Garlic Infused Whipped Potatoes, along with Broccoli Florets with Baby Carrots.

RSVP by Oct 1, 2012

Dress for Active Duty military is Service Dress



WWW.AIRCOMMANDO.ORG

20

Fact vs. Folklore: the 40mm
“L-60” Bofors Gun

23

Battle of Khafji: Untold Story
of AC-130 Gunship Crews

33

4SOS Stand Up

40

AC-130s and Iranian Hostage
Rescue Attempt

51

193rd Special Operations
Wing History



ON THE COVER

10

Spooky,
Spectre and
the Man

An AC-47D, S/N 43-48499 of the 4 SOS during the late 1960s (Gunships: The Story of Spooky, Shadow, Stinger, and Spectre by Wayne Mutza, page 45.) shown with an AC-130U. (Photos courtesy: US Air Force)



27

Special Operations' Jack of All
Trades and Master of Most:
Douglas' Impressive C-47

4

Foreword:

*Lt Gen Bradley A. Heithold USAF
Vice Commander, USSOCOM*

5

Chindit Chatter: *Editorial*

7

Hotwash: *Letters & Comments*

56

Medal of Honor Recipient
Maj Bernard F. Fisher

58

Reunion Updates

FOREWORD

It has been my honor and privilege to spend the past 27 years of my career associated with the special operations community. I am especially proud to contribute to this issue of the Air Commando Journal because I have deep friendships with nearly every author published this quarter. Our shared heritage began at Hurlburt Field three decades ago. Since then, the Air Commandos of AFSOC have been, and continue to be, key contributors to our Nation's success in military engagements around the world. Air Commando Journal salutes all Special Operations Airmen, and this particular issue highlights the incredible accomplishments of the gunship community.



In this issue, Ron Terry's article traces gunship lineage from its inception as a rudimentary side-firing aircraft to today's multifaceted precision platform. In addition Dr. Hallion, former Air Force Historian, highlights the great contributions of the venerable C-47 including its use as a gunship. The Journal also explores the planned use of the gunship in the attempted Iranian hostage rescue; furthering our understanding of the gunship's maturation. Several articles in this journal provide a historical perspective of our community from the optic of experienced veterans who were there and further highlight our role in modern Defense Strategy.

Air commandos have been deployed in every American conflict in the past seven decades. We are just as relevant to the fight today as was the First Air Command Group who carried the Chindit Raiders 200 miles into enemy territory during World War II. We must not rest on our laurels. We must continue to push the envelope to maintain readiness and boost our combat effectiveness. While doing so, we can draw inspiration from our community's heroes, specifically the crew of Spirit 03 and this edition's celebrated hero, Maj Bernard Fisher. I am pleased to contribute to Air Commando Journal, and I look forward to a hearty response from my AFSOC brethren. After all, that competitive spirit fuels our efforts and has become a trademark of our community.



BRADLEY A. HEITHOLD
Lieutenant General, USAF
Vice Commander, USSOCOM



CHINDIT CHATTER

As in past editions we have chosen to highlight a specific aircraft or specialty. The summer version of ACJ is built around the theme of the very venerable gunship. The gunship history, when compared to fighter or transport aircraft, is relatively short. However, in that short period of time it has proven itself to be one of the most desired (by friendlies, both SOF and Conventional) and feared weapon systems in the Air Force inventory. We are fortunate to have among our authors Ron Terry, often referred to as the father of the modern day gunship. He lays out just how a wild vision came to fruition. The gunship continues to evolve and improve. This fact is highlighted in Lt Col Rob Masaitis' series of two articles on how the MC-130W has evolved into the AC-130W



and is yet another step in the utilization of Air Commando ingenuity in developing a very versatile and potent weapon system. Editor's note, due to operational commitments Lt Col Masaitis was not able to complete "Year of the Dragon" Part 2 in time for publishing deadlines. The article will be published in a future edition. (His first was presented in our Spring edition and if you do not have access to a hard copy and want to review that fine piece go to www.aircommando.org and click on "news and events" to access all electronic files of the Air Commando Journal).

The ability of these big lumbering machines to lay down uncannily accurate fire utilizing various weapons is truly amazing to this non-engineer Shadow pilot. I was fortunate enough to witness that capability as the JSOTF II commander flying out of Brindisi, Italy to support operations in the Balkans. Each night as the gunships launched across the Adriatic, they would toss a flare into a designated portion of the sea to use as a target to tweak their guns. Standing behind the pilot and wearing Night Vision Goggles, I was amazed to watch them begin with the

25MM and see the impact cover the flare with literally dozens of rounds in a short burst. Next up was the 40MM cannon and each shot caused the flare to bob up and down as the round impacted within what looked to me like mere inches from the flare. Finally, the big "Kahuna" the 105MM Cannon took aim and I will verify that I never saw it take more than two rounds to snuff the flare totally. All of this while orbiting at x-thousand feet above the water. All the physics of how that occurs taking into account altitude, drift, temperature, and wind velocities and at various altitudes still amazes me to this day. I was convinced that the gunship mantra, "You can run, but you will just die tired" was well deserved.

The great accomplishments of the gunship in virtually every conflict or contingency since it was first introduced in South East Asia, has not come without a price. During the SEA conflict 15 AC-47s were lost and there have been eight AC-130s lost in various combat actions. We would like to dedicate this edition of ACJ to those brave crews that made the ultimate sacrifice.



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

Air Commando JOURNAL

Advertisers in this issue:

ATK Special Mission Aircraft.....	16
Black Diamond	16
Blanchard Family Wines	24
Bless The Children.....	58
CACI	39
Eglin Federal Credit Union	39
Emerald Coast Convention Center	32
Lockheed Martin	44
Pioneer Technologies	24
Rally Point Management, LLC	28
Sierra Nevada Corporation	50
SRA	24
SSAI	50
Special Operations Warrior Foundation	59
Veteran Data Solutions.....	22

Publisher

Richard Secord
info@aircommando.org

Editor in Chief

Dennis Barnett
info@aircommando.org

Contributing Editors

Rick Newton
SMSgt (ret) Pete Riley

Public Affairs/Marketing Director

Shannon Pressley
shannon@aircommando.org

Graphic Designer

Jeanette Moore
jeanette@aircommando.org

Air Commando Association Board of Directors

Maj Gen (ret) Richard Secord, President
Col (ret) Dennis Barnett, Vice President
Col (ret) Paul Harmon, Treasurer
CMSAF #9 (ret) James Binnicker, Director
Col (ret) Thomas Bradley, Director
Maj (ret) David Freeman, Director
MSgt (ret) Joe D. Harris, Director
Maj Gen (ret) Clay McCutchan, Director
CMSgt (ret) Robert H. White, Director
Lt Gen (ret) Michael Wooley, Director
CMSgt (ret) Micheal Wright, Director



Air Commando Association

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

Telephone: (850) 581-0099

Fax: (850) 581-8988

Web Site: www.aircommando.org

Email: info@aircommando.org

This publication is for the information, interest, and enjoyment of our readers. Views and opinions expressed are of the author or source of material and do not necessarily reflect opinions, views, or endorsements of the ACA. Material in the Air Commando Journal may be reproduced provided the source is credited. Air Commando Journal is not sponsored by DoD, USAF or AFSOC.

ACA does not endorse any particular candidate or political action group. Individual members are asked to refrain from inferring or stating any such association of the ACA in their dealings with these type groups.

**Supporting Air Commandos
PAST • PRESENT • FUTURE**

SSG Robert Gutierrez Jr.
Air Force Cross Recipient

**AIR COMMANDO
ASSOCIATION**

Become a member today!
www.aircommando.org

Contributions benefit

- AFSOC Wounded Warriors
- SOWF
- AFSOC Level Awards
- Scholarships

Airmen First Class William H.

Pitsenbarger (Spring 2012, page 55)

First congratulations on a splendid Spring edition of the Air Commando Journal which I received today.

Second, the excellent final article about Airman First Class (posthumously promoted to Staff Sergeant) William H. Pitsenbarger has caused me some concern. As the president of the Special Operations Memorial Foundation, Inc., I take great pride in that we built and continue to maintain the Special Operations Memorial at MacDill AFB, and continually update it at no cost to the Government, USSOCOM or the individual families of our lost special operations warriors.

The centerpiece of the Special Operations Memorial lists the names of all special operations Medal of Honor recipients, plus three Australian Victoria Cross recipients who earned their awards while attached to US Army Special Forces in the Republic of Vietnam.

My concern is the omission of the name of SSgt Pitsenbarger. Do the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadrons (ARRS), although employing PJs, not fall within the early lineage of the AFSOC family?

Please advise if I am missing something, or if I should commence actions to add SSGT Pitsenbarger to the Special Operations Memorial.

Regards,
Geoff Barker, President
Special Operations Memorial
Foundation, Inc.

First off thanks for the kind words and thanks to you for the great work you and your organization have done. We knew when we put the Pitsenbarger piece in the ACJ that it might likely raise a concern that he was not truly an AFSOF assigned individual. However, it was our opinion that the lines of delineation during Vietnam between SOF and ARRS were blurred at best.....at least in the

execution of their respective operations and that his story needed further exploration. However, it is my opinion that you have not inadvertently omitted a SOF MOH recipient. I don't think you would get any argument from the Rescue community either.

To the Editor: I read your account of Bill Pitsenbarger with interest.

The writer has a couple of things wrong, most noteworthy is the manner in which Pits was found. When I found Pits, he did not have a medical bag in one hand and an M-16 in the other. That was first written in 1968 in the Airman's Magazine by an overly zealous writer who wanted to add flair to the story. Pitsenbarger was covered by a poncho, wearing a gas mask (because of the tear-gas used) and covered in dirt. What he did was exceptional, and it doesn't need to be embellished. I would appreciate learning the source of your information, so that I can correct it back along the line.

Henry "Harry" O'Beirne
(I recovered Pitsenbarger's body)

Mr. O'Beirne,

I made several attempts to contact remaining family of Pitsenbarger. No one would respond, if they are still alive. His parents have long since passed away, and only distant relatives seem to remain. I did talk with someone that was a neighbor of his Father years ago, and they gave me contact information for a cousin, who did not respond.

When I research my material, it usually takes me about 2 months, then, I spend a month constructing the story and rechecking questionable information. I try to "read through" the Hollywood versions. The John Levitow story was very complicated in this regard. Sometimes I am able to make contact with family or friends, as was the case with the John Levitow story and Rob Gutierrez. I must state here that it is very difficult at times to keep my personal feelings in check

and not let them enter into the story. If you ever meet Rob Gutierrez you will understand, and the Pitsenbarger story has a great injustice in it.

I would welcome any and all sources of information in order to write these stories in the real way they occurred. My next subject is Bernard Fisher. Again, attempts to contact him or his family have been unsuccessful. I have been told that they requested not to be contacted for any further information about him, as he is in poor health.

Mr. O'Beirne, it would be an honor to talk with you. You can email or call me, the ACA office staff can give you that information.

*ACA always...Salute
Harry J. Bright
Author of Airmen First Class
William H. Pitsenbarger*

P.S.

A friendly line of communications/dialog has been established with Mr. O'Beirne and myself. There has been a series of misinformation in the past concerning the actions, the down grade, and eventual up grade of Wm. Pitsenbarger's Medal Of Honor actions. Mr. O'Beirne has asked me to write the full story, with information that he will provide from others that know the truth. I have agreed, and will forward this to the ACA when I feel it is final and factual.

Anyone that might have information from the actual event can contact me thru the ACA office.

"Pedro" Picture (Spring 2012, page 57)

I don't know where you got the picture on page 57 of the Spring edition of "Air Commando Journal," but I can tell you where I got it. The picture was taken by a member of Charlie Company when we landed to evacuate the wounded. As your article states, we were the first to land the day after Pitsenbarger was lost. We fully expected him to meet us with that characteristic smile of his and when

he didn't, most of us figured he must be tending to the wounded. When we landed for a second load (we could only carry three wounded in the back of the HH-43) our PJ, Harry O'Beirne, (Harry is on the far left in the picture), met us and explained what had happened to "Pits." I, and my crew were devastated. We had not experienced any combat losses up to that point.

As to the origins of the picture, the members of Charlie Company who attended the Medal of Honor ceremony for Sgt Pitsenbarger had a mini-reunion during the same time period, which our PJ, O'Beirne, attended. The person who had taken the picture realized that Harry was one of the people involved in the Abilene evacuations and gave him some copies of the picture of which he gave me a copy, since I was the Aircraft Commander on the flight. I scanned the picture to get it in digital form and have since posted it on a couple of web sites. These events took place during my first SEA tour at Bien Hoa from Nov '65 to Nov '66. I served a second tour in the HH-53 at NKP during 1972-73 which led to my being in the "Initial Cadre" of Pave Low crews where I was in training when we brought the Paves to Hurlburt in May of 1980.

I can't tell you how much I have enjoyed the first three editions of the Air Commando Journal. Each one has articles either by or about many of the people I worked with at Hurlburt and in this last one even articles about people I worked with in Rescue. Lots of fond memories.

Mark Schibler
Lt Col, USAF, Ret.
ACA Member L4483

Spectacular Spring Issue

I was good friends with Duane Hackney (also a PJ and AF Cross Recipient). After Duane broke his back the 2nd or third time the AF said he needed to find a new career field, so he chose Intelligence. That's where I met him. I was at HQ MAC/IN and he was the NCOIC (then a SMSgt) of the 23 AF Intel shop just across the street from HQ MAC. The article on the Grenada mission brought back memories of a frantic three days of planning. Duane eventually

became a First Sergeant. We lost him in September of 1993.

Steve Herberth
ACA Life Member #768

AC-47 in Operation Dan Chi 219

Below is a recap of an AC-47 mission for which then Captain Robert K. Stein, Jr. was decorated.

Citation:

Captain Robert K. Stein, Jr. distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an AC-47 Pilot near Vi Thanh, Republic of Vietnam on 23 April 1966 and 24 April 1966. On these dates, Captain Stein flew two sorties in support of the highly successful Dan Chi 219 operation. During the encounter, Captain Stein found hostile forces trapped against a river bank and despite formidable anti-aircraft defenses and poor visibility, he remained in the extremely dangerous environment for more than seven hours helping to route the hostile forces and causing them heavy losses. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Stein reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Detailed recollections.

At 1800 hours on 23 April 1966, we took off from Binh Thuy AB in Spooky 51 and were called to a target almost immediately after take-off. We learned that an ARVN force had trapped a large group of VC along a riverbank. Illumination from flares prevented the VC from escaping across the river. When our AC-47 arrived we were given permission to fire into the riverbank area at will. We also carried flares that we used to illuminate our target area. Our standard load on the AC-47 was a crew of six – pilot, co-pilot, navigator, loadmaster and two gunners – forty flares and 23,000 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition for the three mini-guns. We almost always used the mini-guns one at a time so our ammunition would last longer. Each gun would deliver 6000 rounds a minute into a 36-foot circle tracking across the target area as we flew a modified pylon turn. To make a long story short, our crew flew four missions on that target over

the next twelve hours and, as the sole armed aircraft in the area, received credit for over 300 KIA. Each time we used up our flares and ammo we returned to Binh Thuy to refuel, re-arm and get a cup of coffee before returning to the target. On each mission we two pilots would also trade seats and swap jobs, which accounts for the two sorties noted in the citation above.

The end of the night was also memorable but more embarrassing than exciting. It was 0600 and just about dawn when we returned from the fourth sortie. I happened to be in the left seat and making the landing. As I rounded out I let the airspeed get a little low and the AC-47 tail dragger veered off into the tall elephant grass alongside the runway. After applying full power, I was able to fly (at about six inches of altitude) back to the runway and complete the landing. I figured the crew would be tight lipped about it but as we exited the plane we heard the ground crew laughing as they approached. My relief turned to embarrassment as I turned to see the main gear covered with elephant grass... so much for graceful entrances.

Robert K. Stein, Jr.
Col, USAF, Ret.

"The Ordeal of the Weasels"

There is a postscript that may be appended to Newton's article about the Son Tay Raid (*Spring 2012, page 12*), which could be entitled, "The Ordeal of the Weasels."

Five F-105G Thunderchiefs with the radio call-sign, "Firebird" and drawn from the 6010th Wild Weasel Squadron based at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) were tasked with the suppression of Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) assets.

"The sky was alive with missiles," reported Capt Ted Lowry, Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO) aboard "Firebird 5" (F-105G, 62-4436). In short order, both "Firebird 3" (F-105G, 63-8327) and 5 were damaged by near-misses from SAMs.

Riddled by shrapnel and losing fuel at a prodigious rate, "Firebird 5" met her end over Laos...tragically, within scant miles of a KC-135 tanker racing to

her rescue. Following fuel starvation of their aircraft, the crew (Maj. Don Kilgus, pilot and EWO Lowry) ejected. Lowry suffered muscular injuries as a result of the ejection, but managed to crawl into elephant grass for concealment. Both crew were subsequently rescued later that morning (Nov. 21st, 1970).

Along with the other principal players, "Firebird 3" recovered at Udorn RTAFB in extreme Northern Thailand following the raid. In a block of revetments recently vacated by RF-4C Phantoms assigned to the 11th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS) that had been re-deployed back to the US, the four surviving Wild Weasel F-105Gs were temporarily parked, with the five A-1E Skyraiders, or "Spads" (call-signs, "Peach One" through "-Five") parked opposite them on the taxiway.

Following refueling, two of each type were heard to start up and then leave, returning to home stations. These were "Firebird 2" (62-4416) and "Firebird 4" (63-8306). Complete identification of the Spads and their corresponding call-signs has never been achieved to date, to my knowledge. However, remaining at Udorn until at least sunrise were A-1Es, "45," 52-133878 and 52-135206. Bedded down across the taxiway from them were "Firebird 3" and "Firebird 1" (63-8351).

Three technicians assigned to the Airframe Repair Shop of the 432nd Field Maintenance Squadron (FMS) at Udorn were dispatched onto the blacked-out flight line to assess and commence repair of the battle damage on "Firebird 3." Staff Sergeants David A. Hansen, James E. Thomas and Percy F. Faith composed the crew.

Hampered by the restriction to illuminate only by flashlight or headlamp, work progressed slowly. Assessment revealed substantial shrapnel damage to the bottom of the left wing and the left side of the lower fuselage, extending from the bomb bay to the aft section breakaway, between Fuselage Stations F.S. 494 and 633. By sunrise and shift change, the crew had only succeeded in routing out the damaged structure in preparation for patch layout and fabrication.

Ironically, both Hansen and Thomas had completed F-105 Familiarization School before their respective

assignments in PACAF (Primary tenants at Udorn were F-4 units). Further, both had completed multiple tours at F-105 Wings based at Kadena, Okinawa and Korat and Takhli in Thailand and had extensive experience in performing major battle damage repairs on F-105s. Finally, it was Hansen's last working night in the Active Duty US Air Force!

"I felt that it was appropriate that I was able to conclude that portion of my career by performing battle damage repairs on a Wild Weasel."

As a sidebar to this account, if anyone can shed further light on the identity of the Spads and their call-signs, please contact me at: udornbigbuckthud@aol.com

Thanks,
Dave Hansen
ACA member #2835

Recommended Reading

Somewhere close to the halfway mark of the 2nd edition of the Air Commando Journal and all I can say to those that are truly interested in the now and the then of Air Force Special Ops, this is the periodical to be reading!!

Craig Landefeld
Riverview, FL

Subscription to the ACJ

Last week, at the Andrews AFB Open House & Air Show, I was introduced to my first-ever copy of "Air Commando Journal," via the Winter 2011/12 issue.

My son has just entered schooling to become a United States Air Force Combat Controller. I think the magazine is sensational; it provides my wife and I---as well as my Combat Controller aspirant son's sibling---a better understanding of what he's getting involved in.

I have 2 questions:

1) Can we obtain the "back issues" of Air Commando which existed before Winter 2011/12?

2) Is it possible for a civilian to order an ongoing subscription? (I saw that there's a website at www.AirCommando.org, but I'm of an age where I still prefer a magazine in my hands...and BTW, outstanding choice of paper stock for the

cover of the magazine!)

Would you please send any back issues to me, along with invoice; and/or please inform as to where Air Commando Journal can be ordered directly?

Thank you for your time & effort -- and big thanks to the Air Commando Association for publishing this periodical. Great stuff!

Kindest regards,
Michael Geraghty, Sr
Laurel, MD

ACA,
A colleague put a copy of Issue 3 of the ACJ on my desk, and after reading just a few pages I decided to join ACA, if for no other reason than to subscribe to this journal. Is there any way to get Issues 1 & 2 of Volume 1?

Thanks much,
Michael J. McCarthy
Col, USAF, Ret.
Alexandria, VA

Note: Back issues have been sent as requested.

Thanks,

I want to thank all of you for the Winter 2011-2012 issue and articles on Path Finder - Combat Control as SMSgt Alcide Benini was my First Shirt Det 1.

Larry A. Wright
Westland, MI

The family of Major General John Richardson Alison, United States Air Force, Retired, thanks you sincerely for your kind expression of sympathy. Thank you so much for your friendship to John. Our family appreciated your support.

Warm regards,
Penni Alison
Washington, D.C.

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

Spooky, Spectre and the Man

By Col Ronald Terry, USAF (Ret.)



“Stronger than all the armies in the world –
an idea whose time has come.”
-Victor Hugo



PREFACE

What follows is the true account of how a young Air Force Capt, Ron Terry, managed to sell the United States Air Force on a revolutionary air weapons system concept. What makes this story extraordinary is that he managed this despite immense opposition from the very bureaucracy he aimed to assist.

Terry's concept, the side firing Cargo Aircraft Gunship, was a flying platform of guns, sensors, reconnaissance systems, navigation, and command & control systems. This combination of tools, plus a highly trained crew, provided the first self-contained, night, adverse weather, close air support and armed reconnaissance weapons system in the Air Force. Due to the accuracy of the weapons and the control of the fires, gunships could be employed in extremely close support for ground personnel; all the while providing a high probability of crew survival and minimizing collateral damage to other

friendly personnel and property. It was revolutionary because, unlike fighter aircraft that had to reacquire a target after each pass, the gunship maintained complete control of the target for extended periods of time. The control was accomplished by flying a left pylon turn over the target, with the guns and aiming devices mounted on the left side of the aircraft.

Terry selected an ancient airplane, the Douglas C-47 Skytrain, to set this odyssey in motion. This C-47 soon became the AC-47 Gunship, an incredible weapon nicknamed “Spooky” and “Puff the Magic Dragon.” Later, “Spooky” became the official call sign of the AC-47 squadron.

Ron Terry was marked a maverick by the fighter Air Force... and yet his dream blossomed into the AC-130 Hercules “Spectre” gunship – the most accurate destructive weapon against enemy trucks, tanks, and troops during the war in Southeast Asia.

On an exceptionally dark night in Central Laos, Spectre 04, an AC-130A gunship, patrolled the skies over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The flight was uneventful until Capt Jimmy Krause hit the intercom and calmly announced, "Pilot, I have movers." Krause, the father of FLIR (Forward looking Infrared) in the USAF was manning the FLIR scope.

The pilot, Maj Ron Terry, dipped the left wing and started a left turn as the computer fed the location of the "movers" – trucks – into his gunsight. If the truck drivers could've looked up and seen what was pointing at them ... well, the word "terror" seems inadequate, because sticking out the left side of this huge aircraft were two 40mm Bofors cannons, two 20mm Gating guns, and two 7.62mm mini-Gatling guns. Spectre was the truck killer. Krause said, "I count 21 trucks," as Terry fired the first rounds from the 40mm cannons. The leading truck burst into flames. The second and third trucks tried going around, but Terry destroyed them and the trail was blocked. The trucks at the rear of the convoy attempted a retreat, but the 40's fired into them. The back door for the convoy on the narrow road was shut. By this time, the trucks' cargo was exploding and igniting other trucks. Five 37mm antiaircraft artillery (AAA) batteries were protecting the trucks and they opened up trying to seek out Spectre on this black night, but Spectre also had protection. Two F-4 Phantom fighter-bombers dove past the gunship, dropped bombs, CBU, and napalm onto the AAA guns, and silenced them. Terry kept on firing with the 40s and 20mm Gatlings... until there was nothing left but huge fireballs, smoke, and explosions.

Spectre 04 and its 14-man crew left the destruction and flew to an area that was suspected as a truck park. In the thick jungle below there was no sign of activity. On a prearranged signal, Terry radioed the F-4s that he was low on fuel and going home. The North Vietnamese were listening in, just as Terry had hoped. Spectre and the Phantoms flew to a safe area and loitered for fifteen minutes. The North Vietnamese felt safe and signaled their trucks to start moving. As the 36 trucks emerged from under the jungle canopy, Spectre 04 arrived back on the scene and destroyed them all.

Ron Terry had perfected the skills of flying an aircraft in a left turning orbit and firing on the target with pinpoint accuracy using guns protruding out the left side of the airplane fuselage. In doing so, he had complete control of the target because he never lost sight of it. He later added the 105mm howitzer to the array of aircraft weapons, with devastating results for enemy targets.

The mission in Laos described above is an example of "an idea whose time had come." The concept for a side-firing gunship actually started many years ago, in 1926. It proved to be an effective weapon back then, but only to the guy who thought of the idea. He never got past first base. Since 1926, four other creative and imaginative men resurrected the idea, but they, too, were thwarted by conservative, close-minded decision makers. That is, until the tenacious Ron Terry embraced the concept of the gunship. Terry fashioned it into what GEN Westmoreland later called "The most effective weapons system in Southeast Asia."

This story will take us through 1975, the end of US air operations in Southeast Asia. As the stories in this edition of the *Air Commando Journal* show, the gunship has made its presence known in Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond. But that's the epilogue... let's start at the beginning.

In 1926, 1st Lt Fred Nelson was a flight instructor at Brooks Field, San Antonio. He had been teaching pilots to attack targets "the way it's always been done" – straight-in strafing passes with guns blazing forward. He knew there had to be a better way. When attacking a target in a conventional way the pilot had to fly away from the target after each pass and then had to spend precious time trying to reacquire the target before the next pass. Nelson had an idea. One morning he drove around the gunnery range marking ground targets with bags of lime (white powder). He then went back to the airfield, took a .30 cal machine gun and mounted it so it was pointing out the left side of his Dehavilland DH-4 bi-plane. Nelson then rigged a gun sight on the wing strut of the plane, got in, and took off. His fellow pilots who watched his shenanigans thought the lieutenant

was off his rocker. Nelson then flew a left-banked circle around the ground targets and with pinpoint accuracy hit each one.¹

His concept was proven effective. He had found a better way – flying in a pylon turn meant he never lost sight of the target area and therefore had complete control. When he landed, Nelson immediately and excitedly told his commander of his idea and the results. He was devastated when his commander told him to stop flying around in circles and "do it by the book."

The stories of Nelson's side-firing gunship spread, but not until 1939 did another imaginative pilot try to do something about it. Capt Carl Crane's thesis at the Air Corps Tactical School was for the adoption of a side-firing airplane.² Crane knew about Nelson's exploits and expounded on them by recommending a two-man airplane with as many as 12 machine guns sticking out the side. His vision saw the gunship attacking mass flights of bombers, as well as "antiaircraft machine guns and gun emplacements, small sea craft, and troop concentrations." What foresight! Especially in 1939, with WWII already started. Can you imagine the difference a fleet of gunships could have made to the outcome of the many battles in Europe and throughout the Pacific Islands? No doubt thousands of American and Allied lives might have been saved.

Crane's thesis was a profound document – it fully justified the gunship concept, but he must have known the outcome of his recommendations, even before he wrote the thesis. At the beginning of the thesis, Crane quoted a speech given by Lt Col Donald Wilson, the Assistant Commandant:

"Failure to visualize the influence of new weapons and new methods is perhaps the greatest drawback to the efficient conduct of war. It has been the rule always; certainly throughout recorded history. It has been the rule for those who had to be shown – those who lacked the vision and courage necessary to accept a promising theory. These, the conservatives, are always in the majority, hence their actions and their failures are judged according to their own opinions..." and added, "in the year

1346, at Agincourt, 19,000 Englishmen demonstrated to more than three times that number of Frenchmen the value of the longbow, as opposed to mounted knights in armor. The French lost half their forces while the English lost only 50 men. In 1415, in Calais, after the French had 70 years to contemplate the adoption of the long bow, they marched 50,000 mounted knights and humble foot soldiers into the withering fire of a mere handful (14,000) of English archers using the longbow. Again, nearly half the French force was lost because they had retained their traditional weapons and methods.”³³

Unfortunately for Crane, his thesis was shelved and history seemed to repeat itself. His vision went down the very same path the French generals chose leading up to the battle at Calais in 1415. Change can be daunting.

Another young officer, Gilmour Craig MacDonald also challenged the status quo. MacDonald had been a “blow up the chemistry lab boy,” a teen and adult inventor, and all-round risk taker. He was assigned to a coastal battery in Oahu during WWII. He had already invented a gunsight for anti-aircraft guns when he proposed a side-firing aircraft – a gunship. He knew of Nelson and Crane and went at the problem from a different angle. In a letter to his headquarters in 1942 he wrote:

“Dear Sirs: With a view to providing means for continuous fire upon submarines forced to the surface (German subs were blowing up a lot of ships along the East coast), it is proposed that a fixed machine gun be mounted transversely in the aircraft so that by flying a continually banked circle, the pilot may keep the undersea-craft under continuous fire if necessary. It will be realized that aircraft with normal types of gun mounting may make one pass at the target, but must then turn and come back before being permitted another burst of fire ...”³⁴

MacDonald received no response – someone didn’t think his idea worthy of one. In 1945, MacDonald recommended a transverse firing super bazooka, plus rockets, be installed in aircraft to pin down troops in foxholes – again, as it flew a pylon turn. And once again, no response. This handsome army flier,

auto-racer, and glider pilot was persistent and when, in 1961, President Kennedy called for methods of dealing with counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam, MacDonald once more submitted his side-firing gunship proposal. At last he received a response! From Gen Disosway, the Commander of Tactical Air Command, came the words, “The silliest idea I’ve ever heard.” Perhaps the general saw the idea of a gunship as a threat to his fighter-bombers and thus a threat to future funding, mission assignments, etc?

MacDonald called the response “parochial stupidity and unwillingness to even try an unconventional weapon.” Undaunted, MacDonald got an AF Reserve buddy of his, Ralph Flexman, to come to the Targets Lab at Eglin AFB for his annual two-week active duty tour. Flexman was Assistant Chief Engineer at Bell Aerosystems and was himself an inventor. They brainstormed together and Flexman was told of the side-firing gunship and the dismal responses. Flexman was an expert on weaponry and a guy who conned his way into pilot training while wearing what was probably the first pair of contact lenses worn by a military man. The year was 1942. Flexman borrowed \$500 from his buddy to buy these plastic lenses, which covered the entire eyeball. With these new eyeballs, this poorly sighted, much determined man got past flight physicals and the various levels of flight training – and he was good. When the Army finally realized they had been duped, they initiated court-martial proceedings, but the commanding general said, “If you’re going to court-martial him, then you’re going to court-martial every flight surgeon he got by.” The general made Flexman an instructor pilot.

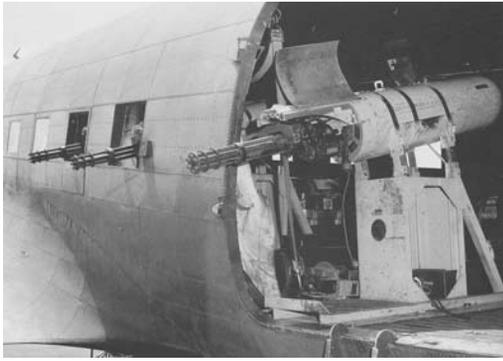
Flexman became a proponent of the gunship idea. He briefed his bosses at Bell and wrote a letter to his Air Force counterpart about the advantages of the side-firing gunship in a limited war situation – such as Vietnam. He also sent a copy of that letter to his friend Capt John C. Simons, along with the suggestion that a test program be initiated to prove the gunship theory.

John Simons was a psychologist who, like Flexman, was working on

the human aspects of flight. He worked at the Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory at Wright-Patterson AFB, OH – the hub of aeronautical research and development. To say that Simons got excited about the idea of gunships would be an understatement. He liked Flexman’s proposal to test the gunship idea and also saw the possibility that the concept would become more than a fire support platform. Simons thought that a laser could be used to designate targets or side-looking infrared equipment to acquire targets at night. He was right; fighters sometimes now use the pylon turn technique to mark targets with their lasers for laser-guided bombs.

In April 1963, John Simons set about proving the validity of the gunship idea. Simons submitted the idea to various Limited War panels at the Pentagon and to the weapons and ballistic experts of the Aeronautical Systems Division (ASD). Why they came back with negative responses is incredible, but they did, with a final retort that the idea was “technically unsound.” Simons tried sidestepping, going around, and going through, but decision-makers told him that he “should not get involved with the weapons aspect!” Simons was convinced live tests would prove the effectiveness of the gunship, but the word was “dabbling in weapons trajectories was stretching a research psychologist’s duties a bit too far.”

This battering would have stopped most men dead in their tracks. Not Simons...he persisted. One of his bosses gave him “under the table” approval for a few test flights – without armament. Day and night, Simons and other buddy pilots flew around Ohio selecting targets as they banked the C-131 and T-28 aircraft into left turn circles. They marveled at the simplicity and the ease with which a target could be acquired and held in the sight. Along the highways of Ohio, trucks and cars would stop and passengers would get out and look at the crazy airplane pilot who was flying around in circles. With cameras simulating guns, Simons presented the proof to an Aeronautical Systems Division panel, which gave the project zero priority. Simons appropriately named the effort “Project Tailchaser.” The low priority



slowed testing to a crawl and eventually Simons was assigned to other duties, but passed his gunship project along to others until it was lying dormant in a file cabinet.

Capt Ron Terry was a former fighter pilot brimming with self-confidence, and according to those who knew him, was a born leader with uncanny common sense and was also a super salesman. That such a man should pull the “Project Tailchaser” file out of the cabinet was pure fate. The gods must have really been grinning. Ron had spent time in Vietnam on a fact-finding team and came across some real problems. One in particular, the Viet Cong were rampaging through villages and forts almost unimpeded. The Viet Cong knew that normal response times for fire support requests were measured in hours before fast movers arrived on station. This allowed the Viet Cong to break contact before the fire support arrived. And more often than not, the Vietnamese had set up a “flak trap” to ambush the friendly fighters.

Terry’s vision was for the gunship to be like a police patrol car – ready to go anywhere, anytime, on short notice and with enough firepower and loiter time to inflict severe damage to the enemy and stop attacks before the enemy escaped. Furthermore, firing from a left pylon turn gave the pilot complete control over the target area, unlike conventional fighters that required a forward air controller in order to make a strike. Ron Terry was hooked. Thirty-eight years after Fred Nelson’s flight in 1926, Terry restored momentum to the gunship idea! He received permission to work the project and he and John Simons flew several flights with gun camera simulators.

Simons reiterated that a live test was needed to show the skeptics. Terry

submitted a scenario to the Limited War Office, which showed a tactical operation employing a gunship, mainly in defense of villages and forts. They liked it... but not enough to fund an official test. Terry borrowed an airplane and a crew and flew to the test range at Eglin AFB, FL. Because the trip was unofficial, Terry had to pay crew expenses with his personal credit card. At Eglin, he

borrowed a GE 7.62mm electric Gatling gun (the minigun) and, together with his team, mounted the gun on a pallet which was then fixed to the floor of the aircraft with the gun sticking out the left side door of the C-131. A triggering device was hooked to the gun, which extended all the way to Terry’s position. A camera reflex viewfinder was installed as a gunsight inside the pilot’s left side window. On the first test flight, after initial firings for alignment, Terry’s shooting was so accurate that he wrote his initial “T” on the target with this 6,000 round per minute weapon.

A curious passenger on the aircraft was Lt Col Phil O’Dwyer, who was the Director of Requirements for the 1st Combat Applications Group of the Special Air Warfare Center at Eglin AFB. He had never seen anything like this before. He was jumping up and down shouting, “Damn unbelievable! Son-of-a-gun, do it again! Let me see you do that again!” Terry did. When they got back on the ground, O’Dwyer asked Terry if he thought he could shoot as accurately at night using flares. Terry replied, “Definitely.” So, O’Dwyer said, “Show me.”

Two young airmen volunteered to go along and throw out flares. That night they went out on the water test range where Terry’s shooting was as good as it had been earlier that day. The next day, O’Dwyer arranged for 30 mannequins to be placed in foxholes and behind trees on the tactical range at Eglin AFB and told Terry, “Those represent an enemy squad in the jungles of Vietnam – see what you can do.” Terry hit all of the

mannequins. Over the next couple of days, O’Dwyer arranged various targets and Terry’s gunship hit them all. O’Dwyer then asked Terry if he could mount the guns on the types of aircraft, already being used extensively in Southeast Asia (C-47 and C-123). This was exactly what Terry wanted, as he knew that he would never be authorized to get new aircraft introduced to Southeast Asia. The C-47 was his aircraft of choice at that time because of its loiter time, dependability and availability.

Terry returned to Wright-Patterson with proof of the gunship’s effectiveness, as Technical Sergeant Tom Ritter filmed all of the Eglin test missions in their entirety. The Limited War Office really got excited when they saw the film. They reimbursed Terry for his trip and gave him official orders and funding to return to Eglin to try his experiment with the C-47.

When Terry and his crew got back to Eglin, Phil O’Dwyer was standing by with the C-47 and an audience of interested Special Forces officials. Terry surprised O’Dwyer when he asked permission to mount three miniguns on the C-47 instead of one. O’Dwyer couldn’t believe his ears and excitedly said, “Hell yes!” The triggering mechanism was rigged so he could fire one gun, two guns, or all three at the same time. Over the next two weeks, the Air Commandos concocted various target scenarios, which required very precise shooting – with immense firepower. From “killing” one or two “guerrillas” with short, accurate bursts from one gun, to “blowing away” enemy-filled hootches with all three miniguns on “full auto,” the gunship never failed. The Air Commandos were ecstatic – this was



Spooky minigun firing during a night mission. (US Air Force photo)



The 1st Air Commandos with Puff in December in 1965 , prior to their assignment to the 4 ACS. (Gunships: The Story of Spooky, Shadow, Stinger, and Spectre by Wayne Mutza, page 35. USAF Photo via Dick Noble.)

exactly what was needed in Vietnam.

At last, someone was impressed. The Special Air Warfare Center sent a wire to headquarters US Air Force and just about everyone else in the world that a “new idea” – a new concept had just been tested that would be a tremendous asset to US forces in Vietnam and “we recommend immediate deployment for combat evaluation.” Unfortunately, the response from Tactical Air Command, Pacific Air Forces, and Headquarters USAF was a resounding, “No!” Their justification was that “this is not the way we deliver ordinance in the Air Force.”

Terry kept fighting, in spite of the fact that his bosses warned him it would be an impossible task – with resistance coming from the very top. Col Cook, Chief of the Limited War Office at Wright Patterson, advised Terry that the only thing that could be done at this time was for Terry to go to the Pentagon and see if he could gather support for the program. Terry proceeded to Washington, where he knocked on many doors, showed the Eglin test footage, and briefed the concepts to many

offices in the Acquisition and Operations staffs. Although the concept and test footage impressed nearly everyone, he still received no support; too many senior generals opposed the program.

Not one to give up, Terry casually walked into the Vice Chief’s Executive Office and announced that he had an appointment to brief the Chief of Staff, Gen Curtis LeMay, on a new and important concept for SEA. The Vice Chief’s executive officer, a colonel, checked the calendar and found nothing. So, he checked with Gen LeMay’s executive officer. There was no appointment logged on General LeMay’s calendar either, but both officers were acutely aware that he often scheduled appointments without informing either of them. They assumed this to be the case. After all, it was inconceivable that a mere captain would brazenly show up without an appointment!

Having penned an appointment on LeMay’s schedule for the following week, Gen McConnell’s executive officer returned to his office and proceeded

to chew Terry out for getting his dates mixed up. Terry apologized profusely and pleaded that his boss at Wright Patterson not be informed of his error. Terry then promised to return the following week with the briefing in hand.

The following week, Terry and Ritter were back to brief the most powerful man in the Air Force about using gunships to defend villages and forts. While waiting his turn, Terry overheard the Intelligence Director tell LeMay that Viet Cong sappers and mortar crews had destroyed most of our A-1, T-28, and some B-57 aircraft the night before at Bien Hoa AB. Again, serendipity! Terry marched in and told Gen LeMay that he was going to brief him on how gunships could defend our bases against sappers and mortar crews... as well as stopping attacks on villages and forts.

The entire Air Council was in attendance, including Lt Gen Ruegg, Terry’s old boss. Ritter showed the film where Terry destroyed the Eglin targets and wrote his initial with the minigun. In a scene reminiscent of a Roman arena,

LeMay looked around and asked for a “thumbs-up or thumbs-down.”

All of the Air Council three-star generals gave thumbs down. That is... all but one. It was General Ruegg, who spoke up, “General LeMay, this is a new concept and could very well revolutionize air to ground warfare.”

General LeMay, looking at Terry, “Son, how many guns do you have?”

Terry, “Twelve, sir, three for each of the three C-47s, and three for spares.”

General LeMay, “How much funding do you need?”

Terry, “None, sir.”

General LeMay, “How long will it take you to be ready?”

Terry, “A week! I just need a plane to get me, my crew, and equipment over to Vietnam.”

General LeMay looked around his staff and, with his trademark stogie stuck in his mouth said, “Send this boy over there.”

Terry and Ritter went back to Wright-Patterson to ready the equipment and manpower. However, the “thumbs-down” staff did not give up easily. Terry’s transport to Vietnam did not materialize until a call went through from Terry’s boss to the Vice Chief of Staff, General McConnell. When Gen McConnell told Gen LeMay, he was furious! As a result, a C-141 was immediately re-routed to Wright-Patterson to transport Terry and his crew to Vietnam.

The team both modified the aircraft and served as the flight crew for combat evaluation and training of the 1st Air Commando Wing personnel. Team members included: 1st Lt Ed Sasaki, 1st Lt Ralph Kimberlin, TSgt Tom Ritter, SSgt Paul Bunch, A1C James Schmeiser, and A2C Alan Sims. Also accompanying the team was Tom Morse, a General Electric technical representative for the 7.62 Gatling guns.

Still the top brass were not finished. A wire from Gen Sweeney, Commander of Tactical Air Command, was sent to fighter commanders around the world. “This concept will place a highly vulnerable aircraft in a battlefield environment in which I believe the results will not compensate for the losses of Air Force personnel and aircraft – we should continue to vigorously oppose...

employment of such highly vulnerable aircraft.” This of course belied the fact that that C-47’s were already flying both flair and Forward Air Control (FAC) missions in Vietnam on a regular basis.

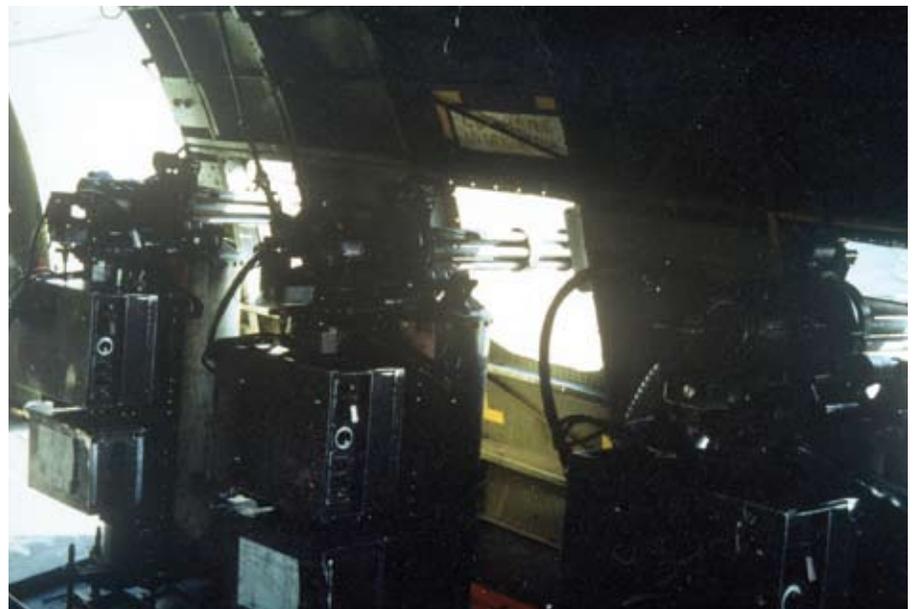
As a direct result of Gen Sweeney’s wire, an armed entourage met Terry and his team when they arrived in Saigon. They told Terry the team would be going back to the US on the next passenger flight and their mod kits and supplies would be sent later. However, before the next outbound flight was ready, a wire came in from the Gen McConnell, which angrily replied to the TAC Commander, “Be advised that this concept has had Air Staff consideration. This has the Chief’s personal okay. It certainly is in the Air Force’s interest to try the program rather than to sit on the sideline commenting...” The entourage returned and escorted Terry to the 7th Air Force Commander in Saigon, where Terry briefed him on the gunship.

With the commander’s blessing, Terry and crew were sent off to Bien Hoa AB where they modified three C-47 aircraft with guns and sights, trained crews, and got on with fighting the war. Each gunship crew consisted of pilot, co-pilot, navigator, two gunners (who actually loaded and repaired the guns – only the pilot fired the guns), a loadmaster who dispensed the flares, and a Vietnamese liaison officer who coordinated by radio with Vietnamese friendly forces. Terry’s team arrived on

December 2nd. The first daylight mission was on December 15th, and when the 1st Air Commando Wing crews were trained in gunship tactics, they flew the first night mission on December 23rd. The aircraft’s designation changed from C-47 to FC-47 (later AC-47 Armed Cargo Attack Aircraft) and the volunteer crews were transformed overnight from “trash-haulers” to combat crew members.

“Spooky” was born. The AC-47 took its name from the night missions it flew and the particular camouflage paint scheme. The aircraft’s other, unofficial, nickname, “Puff the Magic Dragon” came from the Vietnamese who, when they saw the “tongues” of fire coming from the sky (tracers), called it a dragon. This was also the Year of the Dragon in Southeast Asia.

Spooky’s reputation became well known – with incredible speed. Everyone involved in a firefight was crying out for gunship support. Viet Cong would break off attacks on villages or outposts, sometimes after the first fusillade was fired. Spooky proved itself versatile by being on airborne alert day and night. Along with flying close air support missions for ground forces and escorting friendly convoys, Spooky saved villages, forts, and Special Forces camps. During a mission flown on February 8, 1965, an AC-47 stopped a major Viet Cong offensive in the Highlands in a strike that killed over 300 Viet Cong. Before one full month of actual combat missions had



Affordable Capability Delivered.



ATK's special mission aircraft deliver affordable, weaponized and integrated ISR solutions on customer-preferred platforms for responsive defense, counterinsurgency and border/coastal security missions. This is ATK.

ATK International@atk.com www.atk.com **ATK**

been completed, the AC-47, was credited with having changed the order of battle for the Vietcong in the Mekong Delta. It is certainly fitting that the classic John Wayne movie, "The Green Berets," depicted Spooky saving a remote Special Forces camp from being overrun.

Before the combat evaluation was completed, the AC-47 had made its name. Terry couldn't have been more pleased when Gen Moore, 2nd Air Division Commander, asked for a full squadron of AC-47s. Moore was seconded by Gen Ferguson, commander of the Air Force Systems Command, who noted to Air Force Headquarters, "The reports which have been received indicated spectacular success in killing Viet Cong and in stopping attacks, together with a concurrent psychological factor way out of proportion to the effectiveness of other air and ground force efforts."

When the squadron of 20 AC-47s arrived in Vietnam, it was designated the 4th Air Commando Squadron and was dispersed to every corner of Vietnam, plus Thailand, from where the crews flew missions into Laos every night. In Laos, the AC-47's became truck busters.

In 1969, the AC-47s were handed over to the Vietnamese Air Force. At the time of the turnover to the South Vietnamese, the AC-47 had successfully defended more than 4,000 forts, hamlets and enclaves. In fact, history states that they never lost a group they were assigned to defend!

Meanwhile, Terry had been working on something a little larger, with more loitering capability, more technical equipment, greater stand-off range, and of course, more firepower. It was to be more powerful and capable all the way around. The chosen prototype aircraft was the 4-engine, high wing, C-130 Hercules. Support for the idea came from the White House, Secretary of Defense, and Secretary of the Air Force, but was still grudgingly accepted by the Air Staff. Nevertheless, approval was granted. Terry gathered around him the best flyers and engineers he could find, including Maj Jimmy Krause, a master navigator, avionics lab engineer, and the leading infrared expert in the Air Force. Kraus, plus Maj Jimmy Wolverton, Chief Engineer, and Royal Air Force Wing Commander Tom Pinkerton, Fire Control Systems Engineer, were Terry's closest friends. Wg Cdr Pinkerton was at the time on loan to the Air Force Avionics Laboratory at Wright Patterson. The program was authorized the rather paltry budget of \$500,000 to design, build, and manage the entire project. This figure included flight-testing! Together, these men conceived, engineered, and built the next gunship, appropriately named Gunship II, in the flight test modification shops at Wright Field. The prototype was modified to include four GE 7.62 miniguns (firing at 3,000 or 6,000 rounds-per-minute) and four 20mm M-61 Vulcan Gatling guns (which Terry fired at 2,500 rounds-per-minute, both to save ammunition and to increase reliability), plus sensor equipment, including the Night Observation Device, Side-looking Radar, Forward-Looking Infrared set, and a 40-Kw illuminator. These sensors were mounted on the left side of the aircraft and controlled by an analog computer, built by Pinkerton, which allowed the pilot to aim, fire, and hit the target – without ever seeing it with the naked eye.

Terry asked the Pentagon for funds to provide a beacon tracking radar for Gunship II. The Air Staff refused, so Terry "borrowed" a radar unit from the Bomarc Missile Program and mounted it on the C-130. The home-on jam feature of this particular radar was used to track small noise jammers powered by aircraft batteries and later was given to several Special Forces camps to demonstrate a first-of-its-kind, very close support capability to a friendly unit under extreme adverse weather conditions. These beacons were fabricated for Terry by technicians in

**SHORTEN THE
KILL CHAIN**



[MODULAR TACTICAL SYSTEM]

Foot-mobile tactical computing for precision targeting, C4ISR, situational awareness, and other mission specific applications.

www.bdatech.com

BLACK DIAMOND
ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

the Flight Test Modification Branch at Wright Patterson.

In 1967, Terry, his experts, plus volunteer C-130 ground and aircrew members headed to Southeast Asia and with the new gunship. The sensors and radar worked beautifully and soon the Gunship II was in high demand. They were also able to validate the significance of the all-weather support capability by saving several Special Forces camps in near zero visibility weather conditions.

It was then decided to try a new mission, night and adverse weather interdiction over the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. The Gunship II test was an unqualified success. The combat evaluation "...far exceed fighter type kill ratios on enemy trucks and other equipment... a three-fold improvement over its predecessor, the AC-47." Gunship II was so successful that by the end of 1967, Gen Westmoreland was reluctant to let the aircraft return to the US for refurbishing.

Great debate took place about the actual aircraft to replace the AC-47. Secretary of the Air Force, Dr. Harold Brown selected the C-119 (The Flying Boxcar as it was known in Korea), while others who saw the results of the Gunship II tests wanted the C-130. Finally, Dr. Brown decided on both aircraft. Controversy abounded. Gen Momyer, now Commander of 7th Air Force in Saigon, did not want the C-119 "...introduction of another obsolete system into the theater weighs heavily against the C-119." But the troops on the ground and their generals were screaming for more gunships.

In early 1968, the gunship idea, a concept once called, "The silliest idea I've ever heard," had evolved to where Secretary Brown asked for a force of 44 AC-47's, 26 AC-119G's, 52 AC-119K's, and 32 AC-130A's.

While Terry was testing the prototype in combat, production had started on the AC-130 gunship fleet. Without Terry's supervision, the first four AC-130As arrived at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base with 3 major discrepancies and 57 less drastic discrepancies. Terry and his team were sent to make repairs and modifications while the aircraft were flying combat missions. Wg Cdr Pinkerton was "smuggled" into Thailand to make repairs to the fire control system, then smuggled out again. With the repairs made and the crews retrained by Terry, the AC-130 gunships patrolled the skies of Laos nightly, with resounding success.

The North Vietnamese responded to the gunships with ever-increasing anti-aircraft defenses, most notably the 23mm and 37mm guns, so F-4 Phantom began to escort the gunships. While the AC-130, nicknamed "Spectre," was working the trucks, the Phantoms would attack the AAA batteries when they fired. One crewmember on the gunship, the Illuminator Operator, would actually extend himself over the open aft ramp so that he could scan for AAA tracers and warn the pilot if they were getting too close. Although tethered to the inside, on rare occasions, he would actually fall out during evasive maneuvers, so the words coming through the intercom "Request permission to come aboard" at 5,000 feet could break up an otherwise tension filled night.

In November 1968, DARPA and HQ USAF decided to demonstrate the gunships to a number of groups, including a sizeable contingent from the Army. The AC-47, AC-119G,



AC-47 crewmember preparing to throw a flare out of the open fuselage door. These flares helped expose enemy night attacks. (US Air Force photo)

AC-119K and the AC-130A were to do a nighttime demo at Hurlburt Field. This exercise, under the direction of then Col Harry 'Heinie' Aderholt, took place on Range 52 during the darkest moon phase. It featured many different targets highlighted by a Vietnamese village under mock siege and defended by the AC-130. Col Aderholt was cautioned by the TAC Commander not to hype this demo because "platforms of this type tend to vitiate more viable weapon systems." But the show was spectacular! Heinie was reassigned from Hurlburt five days later. The anti-gunship clique was still at work!

On May 24, 1969, the Spectre force lost its first aircraft to a 37mm gun. The aircraft took two hits, mortally wounding the illuminator Operator, Jack Troglen, and severely damaging the plane. Most of the crew was ordered to bail out and the pilot decided to try and nurse the gunship back to Ubon, Thailand. The crew was rescued, but unfortunately Troglen and Cecil Taylor, the Flight Engineer, died in the catastrophic landing.

With the loss of the first Spectre gunship and the massive increase of North Vietnamese anti-aircraft batteries, particularly in Laos, it became obvious that there was a need for the aircraft to fly at a higher altitude and standoff distance, but still have the lethal weaponry to get the job done. Terry scrounged 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns from the US Navy and modified one of the C-130s with two of these cannons, plus two 20mm Gatling guns. Tom Pinkerton upgraded his fire-control system from analog to digital and the team came up with an inertial navigation system that would store the location of targets to be

struck later by gunships or fighters. Also integrated into the computer system was a new “active” low-light-level TV. This new program was designated “Surprise Package.”

Even the Chief of Staff, Gen Jack Ryan, was impressed by the innovations of Terry and his team. Ryan remarked, “Your engineers are to be commended for evolving an inventive and unique proposal to counter a potentially serious threat to our gunship operations.” At about this time another very serendipitous event occurred. Lt Col Charles Gentzel took over as the program element monitor in the Air Staff. Also, Lt Col Charles Spicka completed a tour of duty in gunships in Vietnam. He returned to the Air Staff and was assigned as the action officer for the gunship program under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. These two men were strong believers in the gunship program and became an integral part of the total gunship team, along with Terry and his band of test engineers.

The actions of Gentzel and Spicka in setting up proper direction and procedures for the gunship programs are nothing short of heroic. What these two men accomplished over the next four years was spectacular. An entire story could be written about their efforts. For example whenever Spicka ran into

opposition about something required from the operations side, he would locate the latrine Gen Ryan was visiting at the time and managed to be there and in the stall to the right or left. Invariably, Gen Ryan, who was very fond of the gunship, would ask Spicka how it was going. Spicka’s response would be something to the effect, “It’s going great boss, but we do have this small problem.. .” and then he’d proceed to outline what really needed to be done. Shortly thereafter, direction would usually come down with the orders necessary to get it done. As the gunship program element monitor, Gentzel was always able to secure the necessary funds and ensure that the program had adequate direction from higher headquarter, while allowing all of the flexibility that Terry and the team needed to bring the programs in ahead of schedule, under budget, and exceeding the performance goals desired.

By February 1970, the Spectres had destroyed or damaged their 5,000th truck. John Simons had predicted the gunship would someday use a laser target designator... and six years later, the “Surprise Package” aircraft had one installed which guided F-4s and other strike aircraft onto AAA sites and other lucrative targets with their laser guided bombs. Because of this additional

equipment, the crew size aboard the AC-130 Spectre jumped to 14.

Haggling whether to increase the number of gunships and upgrade them continued, with feuds between President Nixon’s office, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Secretary of the Air Force Robert Seamans, and the military. Meanwhile, Under Secretary of Defense David Packard, who was really impressed by the gunship results, asked for a plan for the gunship for the decade 1970-1980. This opened up a future for the gunship beyond the Vietnam War, allowing development to continue. The strongest argument for more gunships was the figures that showed they destroyed or damaged 48 percent of trucks while flying only 8 percent of the missions against trucks. Even Dr Kissinger got into the act. Terry no longer had to advocate the system – it was telling its own story with results in combat.

Terry kept up his relentless pursuit of a better gunship and in 1971 a new C-130E was modified and armed with the US Army’s 105mm howitzer, the 40mm Bofors cannon, and two 20mm Gatlings, plus new ammunition with greater destructive power.

On August 12, 1971, Gen Brown addressed a Department of Defense symposium. To paraphrase his remarks,



One of the first AC-130As at Can Ranh AB, South Vietnam, in March 1969. (Gunships: The Story of Spooky, Shadow, Stinger, and Spectre by Wayne Mutza, page 130.)

he stated that as a creative innovation, the first experimental gunships were delivered to combat units in Southeast Asia in record time. They were so successful that it was decided to make this a regular Air Force program and it was put into the formal acquisition system. He found it would take two years to get more gunships to the theater using the formal process. So, he took the program out of the formal system, turned it back to the original small project group and received the gunships in six months.

The North Vietnamese demanded, and received from the Soviets, still heavier weapons to counter the gunship's armament and tactics. They introduced the radar-controlled 57mm and 85mm guns...and they were effective. Case in point:

"...on March 30, 1972, during night armed reconnaissance over Laos. Capt Waylon O. Fulk, commander of Spectre 22, and his crew destroyed or damaged three enemy supply trucks and touched off four secondary fires and explosions. While attacking the third truck to make sure it was destroyed, the gunship flew into a solid barrage of 57mm and 37mm AA fire. One 57mm round slammed into the right wing and another ripped the right side of the fuselage. Fuel leaking from a pylon tank burst into flames, enveloping the right wing. The spray of burning fuel also set fires on the fuselage's right side."

Capt Fulk ordered all emergency measures to put out the fires. Seeing the seriousness of the situation, he directed the other 14 crewmembers to prepare for bailout. Fulk steered the Spectre away from the intense antiaircraft fire, while reporting the emergency to controlling radar stations and nearby aircraft. Another plane soon came along and advised the gunship crew on the extent of the damage. Steadying the wounded Spectre as best he could, the aircraft commander called for crew bailout and radioed position information. Serving as jumpmaster, the illuminator operator informed Capt Fulk that 13 of the crew had "hit the silk." Fulk engaged the automatic pilot and placed the gunship in a slight turn to insure a crash-landing heading away from friendly territory. He then joined the illuminator operator at the AC-130's cargo ramp. After checking

parachute harnesses, both men jumped. Moments later, the fires and ammunition explosions turned the aircraft into three plummeting fireballs. Next day all 15 crewmembers were picked up, the largest and most successful mass crew rescue ever recorded.

Successes far outnumbered losses. From November 1971 to March 1972 over 10,000 trucks were destroyed or damaged in Southern Laos. Gunships alone accounted for 70 percent of that destruction.

The spring of 1972 saw a major offensive throughout Vietnam by the North Vietnamese and from April through June, the gunships fought in major battles, climaxing with the siege of An Loc – about 50 miles from Saigon. Spectre, along with the AC-119K Stinger, and B-52s using a "cooperative weapons delivery" technique were employed with devastating effect. They fought against tanks, antiaircraft artillery, ground artillery, mortars, and thousands of enemy troops. The battle lasted for several weeks and finally a defeated force crawled away to Cambodia. An Loc was saved even though the friendly forces were outnumbered more than 50-to-1. The gunships had come full circle – defending villages and providing close air support against the Viet Cong in the 1960s and now in 1972 – defending cities and providing close air support against battalions of North Vietnamese regulars.

The truce of January 27, 1973 ended gunship operations in Laos and Vietnam. Spectre went on to fight in Cambodia for several months thereafter and its future was assured when Gen Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff, asserted that "One of the most successful developments arising from our experience in Southeast Asia is the gunship, and we intend to keep this capability to deliver a tremendous volume of sustained accurate firepower in the tactical force."

Finally the war was over, at least for the United States. Ron Terry was assigned to Washington, DC, and in 1973, he was promoted to colonel. Ron Terry had brought a new weapons system to the Air Force – despite formidable obstacles and almost stifling opposition. He fought for constant development to keep the systems viable and surrounded himself

with a team of experts who helped attain these goals.

Colonel Terry remained involved with the gunship program even beyond his retirement in 1983. He and several of the old team served as operational and technical advisers to Lockheed Ontario for the SOFI update program for the AC-130H and to Rockwell International, Inc. for the design of the latest version of gunships, the AC-130U.

Some years later while Terry was traveling on a commercial flight in the US, his fellow passenger was a soldier who had survived the battle for Hue. When he found out that Terry was a gunship pilot and had been the Program Director for the Spooky's and Spectre; the soldier shook his hand and simply said, "You saved my life." Terry humbly acknowledged the honor, sat back in his seat and reflected back to Nelson, Crane, MacDonald, Flexman, and his buddy John Simons, and thought to himself, "How many more might have been saved?"

The story of Ron Terry and the gunships is really much more than a Vietnam War story. It is also a story about pursuing an idea until the breakthrough is made. If Nelson or Crane had made the breakthrough, then the story of WWII and Korea would have been vastly different.

"There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order."

–Machiavelli 

About the Author: Ron Terry is a former Air Force Pilot, Program Director and Laboratory Commander. He retired from active duty in 1983 after more than 31 years service, but continued to assist Special Operations in many projects thereafter. Ron currently resides in San Antonio, Texas.

1. Boyne, Walter J., "The Awesome Power of USAF Gunships," Air Force Magazine, Vol. 82, No. 4, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press (Apr 1999), pg 79.

2. Ballard, Jack S., Development and Employment of Fixed Wing Gunships, 1962 – 1972, Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, (1982), pg 1.

3. Crane, Carl J., Range Finding and Fire Control Equipment for Pursuit Armament, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Corps Tactical School, (1 Jan 1939).

4. Ballard, pg 2.



Fact vs. Folklore: the 40mm “L-60” Bofors Gun

By CMSgt Bill Walter, USAF (Ret.)

The 40mm M2A1 gun currently used on the AC-130 Gunship has Swedish roots dating back to the 1930s. Originally invented by Bofors Ordnance, Karlskoga, Sweden, as the Model 1934, you could say the gun was truly in the right place at the right time at the beginning of WWII. The outbreak of hostilities caught the United States and Great Britain woefully unequipped with suitable air defense guns. Both countries needed guns...many guns, and quickly. Trouble is there was nothing “quick” about building the Bofors gun. A single gun took Bofors 450 man-hours to produce and they could only produce limited quantities of guns per month. The US and Great Britain needed thousands of guns to support their war efforts. To meet heavy production demands, the US sought a license to build the gun themselves, but was unsuccessful in establishing a contract with Bofors. Undeterred and desperate for guns, the US decided to produce unlicensed copies of the gun. After obtaining metric drawings from

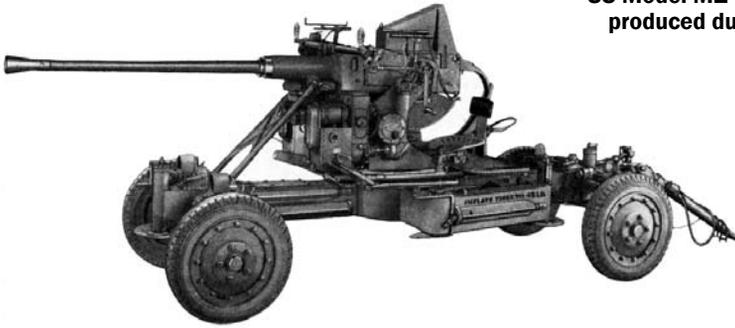
the Dutch government, Navy engineers discovered the Swedish gun was a highly complex mechanical masterpiece of more than 1500 machined steel and alloy parts. They also discovered the gun was built in the old world craftsman tradition of machining parts slightly oversized and using “file to fit at assembly” production techniques. Unfortunately, hand-fitted parts are very problematic for mass production manufacturing methods. The first US company contracted to build the naval version of the Bofors gun was York Safe & Lock, York, Pennsylvania. A contract was formally awarded in April of 1941 even though work began months earlier using “acquired” Dutch machine drawings.

The first problem encountered was conversion of the Dutch metric drawings to US measurements, which resulted in “uniquely dimensioned parts” compared to the original Bofors gun. As production began, many technical problems were encountered resulting in slow progress

and low production quantities. The final gun produced by York Safe & Lock was functionally identical, but dimensionally unique in comparison with the original Swedish gun. These guns served on US Navy ships throughout WWII.

Coinciding with the Navy gun production effort, the US Army ran a similar unlicensed 40mm gun acquisition program for the Army version of the Bofors gun. To meet projected demands, The Army decided to award a contract to Chrysler Corporation. Chrysler was very experienced in mass production methods in their automotive assembly plants, but building guns differs greatly from building automobiles. Their first problem followed the experience of York Safe & Lock. Chrysler dedicated a great deal of work to convert drawings acquired from Great Britain to American measurements. As the program progressed, Chrysler engineers decided simplification of the complex functional design was not possible. As such, Chrysler re-designed

US Model M1 40mm gun produced during WWII.



components and materials only enough to enable mass production within the capability of their production lines, tooling and foundry.

Chrysler was confident they could meet production goals, but experienced extreme difficulties standing up a production line. It took Chrysler one year to produce their first unique version of the Bofors gun. Within a few months of full production, Chrysler was manufacturing a complete gun from start to finish in 10 man-hours. This was an amazing feat that would be difficult to do today even with modern machinery. Eventually, Chrysler took the lead of all 40mm gun production and standardized both Army and Navy guns. The demand for guns at the production height of WWII was so great it surpassed Chrysler's capacity as well. To meet the wartime demand, Pontiac was awarded a contract to build 40mm guns. Pontiac built both M1 and M2 (dual) guns for the US Army. When it was all said and done, production of all versions of the US 40mm gun exceeded 60,000 units until production ceased in

the 1950s. These guns served US and allied nations well into the early 1990s. Today, the AFSOC AC-130 fleet is the sole remaining user of the gun in the entire DoD and only one of a handful of users of the 40mm "L-60" Bofors gun remaining in the world.

Differences of Navy and Army Guns

Naval guns carried the traditional Navy "Mk" (Mark) designation while Army guns carried the "M" (Model) designation. The principal differences between Navy and Army guns were the location of the trunions (elevation pivots), and the barrel and the breech casing design. Naval Mk-1 and Mk-2 guns used "water jacketed" barrels and trunions near the center of gravity of the elevating mass. Trunions of all Army models and the Naval Mk-5 (submarine/patrol craft model) were located well aft of the center of gravity to lower mount profile and all guns were equipped with air-cooled barrels.

40mm Guns on the AC-130

The L-60 40mm gun was first considered for AC-130 use in 1969 during the Vietnam War. It was meant to increase stand-off distance and improve overall combat effectiveness. Contrary to popular belief, the original AC-130A 40mm guns used in flight testing were Army M1 guns not a Navy Mk-series guns pulled from ships. These guns were heavy and cumbersome, but they existed...and looked like they could fill a rapid combat capabilities need. Mounting the 1000 lb. gun to an AC-130 was not easy. Aeronautical engineers designed an incredibly robust gun mount from plate steel, placed a gun in it, and ground

tested the assembly. Blast overpressure problems were encountered initially, but solved with extensive study and analysis. When ready for production, engineers selected the M2A1 gun from the US Army M42A1 "Duster" tracked anti-aircraft system. Duster used "mirror imaged" guns bolted together with left and right hand controls. The pair were functionally identical, but were loaded and operated from opposite sides of the Duster turret. Mounting the two guns bolted together was not practical or desirable for AC-130 use, so right hand and left hand guns were separated and modified for individual mounts. The first M2A1 (modified) guns were installed on AC-130A Gunships under the "Surprise Package" program. These guns served on AC-130A aircraft until aircraft was retired in the mid-1990s. At that time, all the left hand guns were overhauled

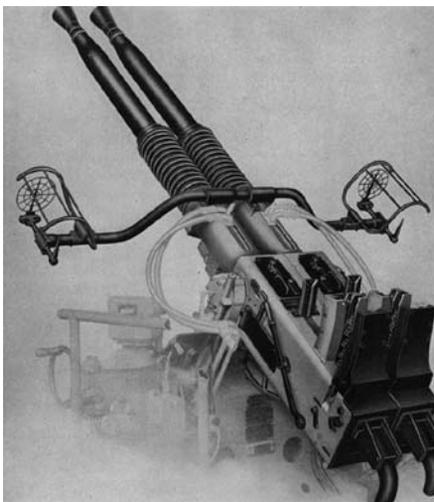


A M2A1 modified gun mount on an AC-130A.

for use on the AC-130U. These original AC-130A guns, mostly manufactured in the 1950s, continue to serve AC-130U crews in Afghanistan today.

Back to the Future?

During 2002, as Operation Enduring Freedom reached full swing, the Air Staff realized there were not enough AC-130 gunships to meet demands. In response, they initiated what was called the "Plus Four" program to rapidly build four additional AC-130U gunships. By then, the once prolific M42A1 Duster system had long since been retired. There were no guns available in the supply system for the "Plus Four" program. It appeared all viable sources for guns were depleted. An attempt was made to award a contract to produce newly manufactured guns, but production and financial reality of building a "unique-new-old-gun" was



Mk-1 and Mk-2 Navy guns.



M2A1 guns recovered from an M42A1 Duster on Nellis Range

deemed unrealistic and unaffordable.

Recognizing the problem, several AC-130 gunners stepped forward to assist the old fashioned way...scrounging. In the past, they had seen many M42A1 Duster systems sitting on target ranges on Nellis Air Force Base. The guns on the M42A1s appeared to be in very good condition and "ripe for the picking."

With this bit of intelligence, staff officers from the HQ AFSOC Gunship Requirements Branch contacted Nellis Range Operations personnel to arrange a visit to inspect the guns. After approval, several gun technicians and a program analyst quickly arranged a trip to Nellis. The guns were inspected, found to be in good condition and two dual guns were successfully recovered.

The guns were then shipped to Eglin Air Force Base for detailed inspection and modifications. Air Force Research Lab (AFRL) technicians disassembled and inspected the guns and components. They found that with few exceptions, most parts were in serviceable condition. Critical parts were metal particulate inspected and re-finished with a zinc phosphate finish. Breech casings were water-blasted to remove old paint and corrosion. Once cleaned and inspected, the breech casings were modified and machined in AFRL's Model Shop to original AC-130 "Surprise Package" drawing specifications. Once

all modifications were complete, the unpainted guns were taken to an AFRL range at Eglin for test firing. Using an original AC-130A gun mount and a firing rod borrowed from "The First Lady" (AC-130A #53-3129) at the USAF Armament Museum. Both guns tested perfectly in both single and rapid fire modes. A subsequent trip to Nellis AFB netted three more guns. These were shipped, inspected, and modified to the same standard as the first two.

After testing was completed, the guns were disassembled, re-inspected, painted flat black, re-assembled and turned into the supply system. Since these guns were manufactured by the same company at the same time that current AC-130 guns were originally built, they are matching in all respects with the current fleet of guns. The entire project took about six months to complete at a cost of \$130K. The real cost of these guns if procured today exceeds \$8.6M. A great level of credit goes to the "out-of-the-box" thinkers whose ideas and hard-work filled a critical requirement for a fraction of projected cost, delivering guns at least four years sooner than planned.



Test fire of a 1950s Pontiac classic.

40mm Gun Facts

- Not a single 40mm gun used by the US was actually built by Bofors in Sweden.
- Commonly called the Bofors "L-60," our gun is actually an L-56 (caliber x 56 = barrel length). 🦅

About the Author: Chief Bill Walter served as AC-130H/U Aerial Gunner for 26 years. He currently works at HQ AFSOC, Gunship Requirements, as a Program Analyst.

VetDS
VETERAN DATA SOLUTIONS
partnered with:
NetApp

ISR
DATA
Cloud
Mobility
Virtualization
BIG Data
VDI

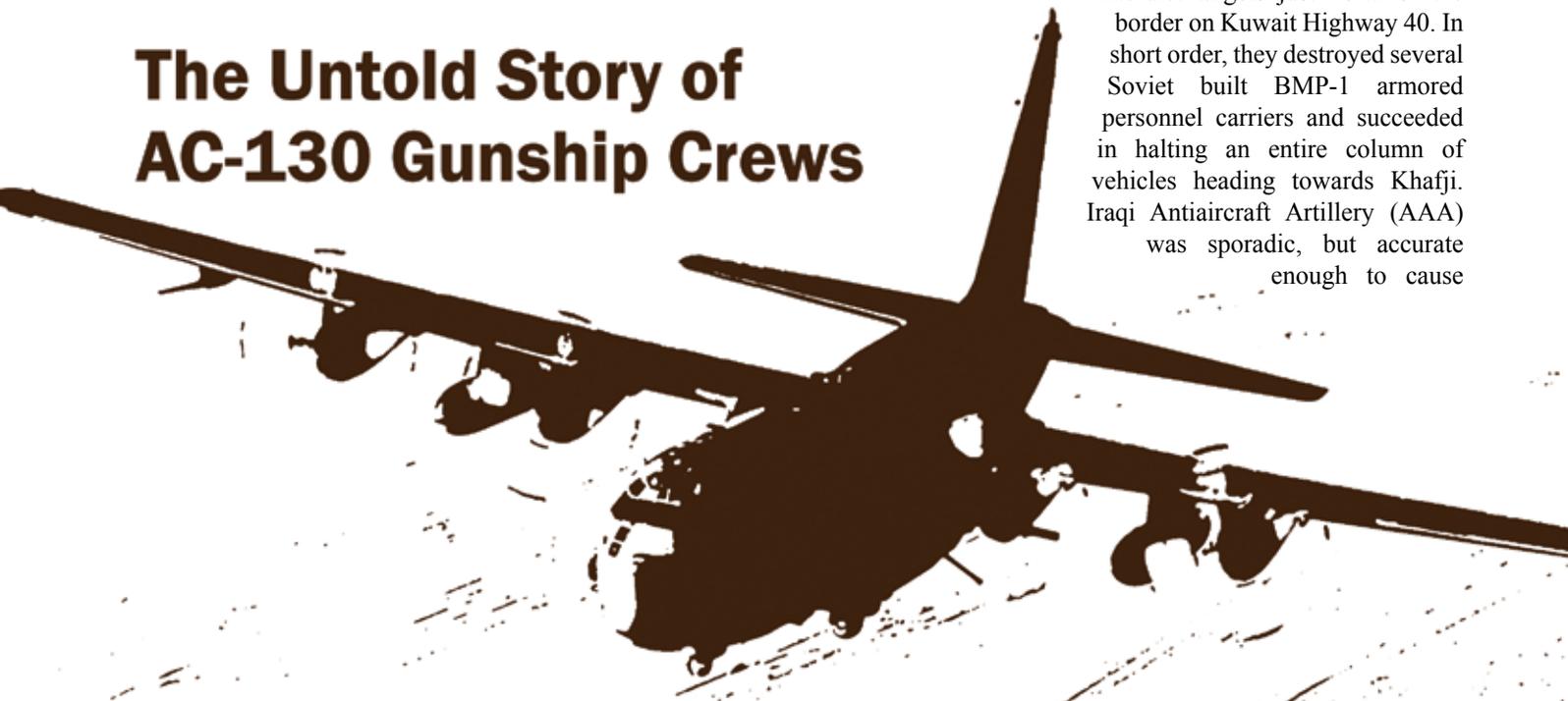
www.vetds.com

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 CMSgt Bill Walter, USAF (Ret.)

Editor's note: This article first appeared in the Air Commando Association quarterly membership newsletter February 2011.

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.

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 damage to the targets underneath. Exact



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 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 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. Colonel 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 Colonel 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



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)

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



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)

Historians 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 03s 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. 🦅

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)

Special Operations' Jack of All Trades and Master of Most:



Douglas' Impressive C-47

By Dr. Richard P. Hallion

Few aircraft in the history of aviation have succeeded in multiple roles over decades of service, and fewer still have served on opposing sides during the same conflict. One that notably did both was the Douglas DC-3 and its numerous military derivatives.

In military service (and depending on the nation and sub-model), it was known variously as the AAF-USAF C-47, USN-USMC R4D, British and Commonwealth Dakota—and, for those manufactured in Russia and Japan—the Lisunov PS-84 (later Li-2, NATO codename Cab) and the Showa L2D Type 0 (Allied codename Tabby). Altogether, Douglas manufactured a total of 10,654 civil and military versions of the DC-3/C-47/Dakota, and Japanese and Russian production added at least another 2,500 aircraft, making this branch of the Douglas transport family the most produced airliner and airlifter in aviation history, at well over 13,000 built.

Having entered airline service in the last great days of the biplane era, it flew into the era of supersonic flight and lunar landings as an American civil airliner and military airlifter, special operations aircraft, and gunship. It was re-engined with turboprops, and if a rarer sight today, is still seen occasionally droning through the skies.

The inspiration for the nominally 21-passenger DC-3 was the 14-passenger DC-2 of 1934, itself an outgrowth of the single 12-passenger DC-1 demonstrator of 1933. The DC-1 had been

designed for TWA—then Transcontinental & Western Air, later Trans World Airlines after 1950—as an all-metal replacement for its aging fleet of wooden Fokker trimotors, one of which had disintegrated in flight, killing Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne. Highly streamlined for its time, the DC-1 revolutionized commercial aviation. Douglas wisely did not place it in production, preferring to produce a slightly larger and more powerful derivative, the DC-2. It became such a success with TWA, American Airlines, and KLM that it triggered a need for a larger variant. Effectively “split” down the middle, and with another row of 7 seats, this became the DC-3, first flown on December 17, 1935, 32 years after Kitty Hawk. Within three years, 95 percent of American air traffic flew on DC-3s.

Thus, by the time Hitler unleashed his blitzkrieg on Poland, the DC-3 already had attained iconic status. It was emblematic of America's advanced commercial aviation, and the nation's devotion to streamlining and speed. The airplane was already a common sight on the world's skyways, with over 400 in airline service in the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

The outbreak of the Second World War resulted in a dramatic transformation of American aircraft production and acquisition. Almost immediately, the Army Air Forces impressed 93 civil DC-3s and ordered 10,047 more for America and its allies. The C-47 and its derivatives—the C-48/-49/-50/-51/-52/-53/-68/-84/-117, typically differing in propulsion, equipment,



C-47 Casualty Evacuation from Hagaru-ri, 1950. (Photo: National Museum of the US Air Force)

capacity, and layout—subsequently flew in every theater of the war. Among the many roles that it filled were general airlifter; troop transport and airborne forces assault aircraft; air rescue aircraft; weather reconnaissance and survey airplane; medical evacuation aircraft; electronic warfare and signals intelligence collector; and VIP transport. C-47s flew with floats and skis, and one was even modified and tested as a potential assault glider.

Name the campaign in which American forces fought during WWII, and the C-47 is there: the struggle for the Solomons; supply of Allied forces in New Guinea; expelling Japanese forces from the Aleutians; North Africa and the invasion of Sicily; the Hump; trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific air transport; the invasion of Normandy; the “bridge too far” assault on Nijmegen and Arnhem; the crossing of the Rhine; the invasion of the Philippines; the liberation of Burma; and the seizure of Okinawa. Within days of the Nazi and Japanese collapse, C-47s were on the blasted tarmac of German and Japanese airfields, supplying occupation forces.

One of the most important roles the C-47 fulfilled during the Second World War was as a special operations aircraft for covert supply, insertion, and extraction. When the AAF undertook Operation Thursday, inserting Brigadier Orde Wingate’s Chindits into Burma deep in Japanese territory in March 1944, Wingate’s air commanders—the immensely talented team of Colonels Phil Cochran and Johnny Alison—relied on C-47As for their heavy lifting. C-47As of the 5318th

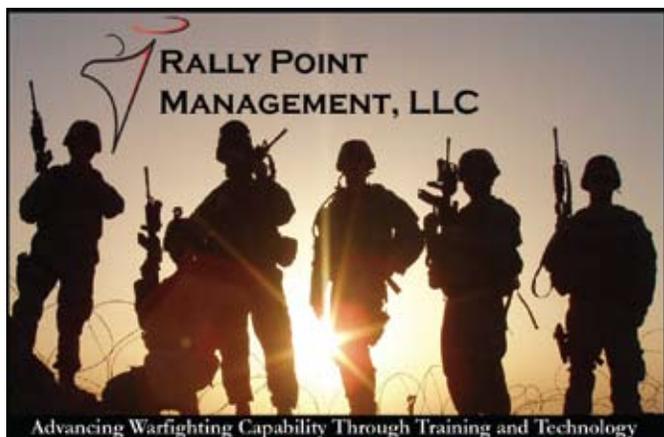
Provisional Air Unit—progenitor of the 1st Air Commando—based in Hailakandi, India, towed forty CG-4 assault gliders (one flown by Alison) during a remarkable night assault. Then, with the strips secured, they flew in heavy equipment to enlarge them so routine supply and casualty evac missions could be undertaken. Complemented by twelve UC-64 Norseman light transports, they inserted over 9,000 troops, 175 horses, 1,283 mules, and over 250 tons of supplies, enabling the Chindits and their air elements to launch punishing attacks on Japanese forces before withdrawing.

While northern Europe was too heavily defended for extensive use of the C-47 as a covert SOF insertion and extraction aircraft, the air campaigns over Italy, the Balkans, and Greece were ideally suited for the C-47. In operations that anticipated some of the special operations missions flown a half-century later in the wake of the collapse of Yugoslavia, the AAF flew food and supply drops throughout the Balkans, and used a variety of covert landing sites and techniques to insert and extract agents, messengers, combat teams, wounded partisans, and, most remarkably, to extract Allied airmen who had been shot down on bombing raids and fighter sweeps and who had been hidden by resistance forces. “Special Duty” C-47s used for these missions were modified to employ British-developed Rebecca and Eureka interrogator-beacon equipment, the former a directional locator installed in the airplane, and the latter a response beacon issued to ground teams that could transmit timed Morse signals displayed on Rebecca’s cathode ray tube display. As well, ground-teams used “Sugarphones,” a UHF short-range radio, to communicate with aircraft nearing landing sites. In several cases during Balkan operations, a crewman with a Sugarphones would parachute from a SD C-47, making last-minute assessments of landing strips and then signaling the aircraft commander that he could safely land.

Intense air strikes in 1944 had resulted in hundreds of aircrew on the run throughout the Balkans, and while sporadic recovery operations were flown behind enemy lines, a more established organization was needed. In mid-June 1944, then-Maj. Gen. Nathan Twining recommended formation of a special Aircrew Rescue Unit (ACRU). His boss, General Ira Eaker concurred, and the 15th Air Force subsequently established the first ACRU at Bari, using C-47s from Brindisi to operate into Yugoslav airstrips. Most operations used night to cloak the missions, but some operations were conducted during daylight, covered by Allied fighters. Although figures are incomplete, between August 1944 through April 1945, more than 1,240 missions evacuated 11,501 persons from Yugoslavia, Greece, and Albania, including 1,166 aircrew. (Another 1,400 were recovered from Rumania and Bulgaria by long-range B-17s hastily fitted as transports).

An excerpt from the war diary of the AAF 51st Troop Carrier Squadron for November 1944 gives an indication of what Special Duty crews faced in the pre-GPS era of inadequate or nonexistent nav aids:

“Up before daylight for an early breakfast, we pile into a Weapons Carrier to be taken out to the a/c, C-47A #186. While the Engineer, Sgt. Secrest, runs up the engines, and the Radio Operator checks his sets, the Pilot, Lt. Bell, the co-pilot,



Lt. Stowe, and the navigator, Lt. Fall, check-up the weather, and have a last look at the S-2 maps and photos of their target, a small landing strip, high up in the mountains of Greece. Returning to the plane, pins out, blocks out, a final check by the pilot, we taxi to the end of the runway, and on getting the 'green' from the tower, a roar of engines, and a moment later we are airborne.

Out over the Adriatic towards an island just off the Greek coast, Lt. Hall checks his position and gives the pilot a new course. Over the water the weather is perfect, but approaching the coast high cloud banks, piled up in fantastic shapes, obscure the ground. Further inland, occasionally a glimpse of the ground through a break in the clouds shows rugged hills and deep valleys. On arrival at the pinpoint of the target, there is no break in the clouds to be seen, and it is necessary to fly some 30 miles further on before encountering a break in the clouds sufficient to let down through. Under the clouds now, and flying in a valley, the plane rocks and bucks in the wind currents. The target sighted, marked by four white parachutes, two at each end of the runway, Lt. Bell swings around to look over the strip, and on receiving the proper answer to his signal, starts his run in to the field. There is a vicious cross wind, and the word is passed back to brace yourself, but Lt. Bell 'greases' in to an almost perfect landing.

[After off-loading 4,500 lbs. of supplies and loading some passengers] we taxi to the end of the runway, the soft surface dragging the plane so much that it is apparent that it will be hard to get off with the load we have. A last check, and the run is started; two-thirds the way down the runway, pulling 45 inches, and not getting 60 miles an hour, Lt. Bell shut down and taxied to the end of the strip to try again. As he swung the a/c around, it settled down in the soft ground and mired to the hubs.

As a rain storm was due and no assistance from trucks was available, the a/c was quickly unloaded and the long job of digging it out was started. The first several tries simply dug it in deeper, and finally, four hours later, with rock and wood tracks built under the heels and for 10 feet ahead and 20 men lifting under

each wing, Lt. Bell gunned it up the inclined tracks, and kept it going until it set on fairly solid ground. The workmen cheered as if the home team had won a big game, and we all felt relieved. Rain started coming down a few minutes later. We held a hurried conference and decided to put 2,000 lbs. of the load back on, then we took off without any trouble and headed for another landing strip to the east."

After the Second World War, though many entered civil service, particularly in Asia, Africa, South America, and the far North, the C-47 remained as the world's largest fleet of airlifters, serving with air forces and air arms around the world. It soldiered on, its record a roll-call of global hotspots: Berlin, China, Korea, Indochina, the Philippines, Malaya, the Middle East wars of 1948 and 1956, Kenya, and Taiwan.

Together with the Douglas C-54, it was the Air Force's answer to the Soviet-imposed Berlin blockade, ensuring that battered city remained free. In Korea, it reprised its Second World War role, carrying troops and supplies and evacuating casualties. During the heroic fighting withdrawal of the Marines from the Chosin reservoir, USAF, USN/USMC, and Allied C-47s/R4Ds supplied the winding column with food, ammunition, and medicine, and evacuated over 1,800 seriously wounded Marines from emergency strips at Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri. Night interdiction over Korea's mountainous terrain saw the Air Force team Douglas C-47 flare ships (called

"Fireflies") with night intruders to attack North Korean trucks and trains.

It updated its Special Duties credentials as well, wearing black undersurfaces and with flame dampers on its engine exhausts, undertaking special operations missions supporting guerrilla and sabotage teams. Staging out of Japan and Korea, it flew deep into Manchuria and China on night low-level air drops. (On one such mission, a Civil Air Transport C-47 was shot down over



The AC-47's side-firing 7.62mm miniguns. (Photo: National Museum of the US Air Force)

Jilin province, killing its two pilots; the two surviving "kickers," John Downey and Richard Fecteau, spent the next two-decades in Chinese captivity).

By the advent of the first commercial jetliners, the DC-3 was rapidly approaching old age. In 1953, the Smithsonian Institution took delivery of an Eastern Air Lines DC-3 that had flown 56,782 hours in slightly less than fifteen years of service, subsequently placing it on exhibit two decades later when the National Air and Space Museum opened to the public in July 1976. By the end of



A C-47 undertaking a psychological warfare leaflet drop. (Photo: National Museum of the US Air Force)

the 1950s, the DC-3 had been superseded on most air routes by newer aircraft, and though some few were re-engined with turboprop engines, it gradually disappeared from commercial service. But it soldiered on with the world's air arms, including with America's Department of Defense. In the Air Force, it serviced missile launch sites, test facilities and ranges, and supported operations in the Arctic and Antarctic. If all had been retired to museums or into private hands, the DC-3/C-47 would have been considered a great success. But, oddly enough, it was about to embark on arguably the most intriguing and remarkable role of its entire career: as a special operations aircraft and, particularly, as a specialized counterinsurgency gunship, in the decade-long war in Southeast Asia.

The C-47 had long-played a part in Southeast Asian conflict, dating to the China-Burma-India campaign and also to special duties missions flown into Indochina to counter the Japanese. It had been a backbone of French air operations during their fruitless attempt to preserve France's Indochina empire, beginning with eight delivered by the USAF in June 1950, and then followed by a further 41 delivered in 1952-53, supported by a USAF logistics detachment at Do Son. After the disaster at Dien Bien Phu and the subsequent Geneva Agreements forced France's withdrawal, the C-47 soldiered on with the newly

established South Vietnamese Air Force.

The year 1961 saw a sharp escalation in fighting between South Vietnamese government and insurgent and infiltrating forces, the latter coming down a steadily increasing trail network from the Communist North. In August of that year, South Vietnamese forces reported 41 firefights; the next month it exploded over ten-fold, to 450. The Republic of South Vietnam Air Force (RVNAF) consisted of one squadron of Douglas AD-6 (later A-1H) Skyraiders, two C-47 squadrons, two Cessna L-19 squadrons, and one Sikorsky H-19 squadron, hardly enough to meet the demands placed upon it. The USAF recommended equipping the RVNAF with T-33s, but the State Department demurred. Instead, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara authorized the transfer of Navy North American T-28 Trojan trainers that could be used as light attack aircraft.

In April 1961, the USAF had stood up the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (nicknamed Jungle Jim) at Eglin AFB, equipped with 8 Douglas B-26 Invaders (which soon reverted to their World War II-era designation, A-26), 8 T-28s—and 8 SC-47s, so-called because they had been modified with stronger landing gears, carried double the fuel load, and had fittings for attaching JATO solid-fuel takeoff assistance rockets. In October, in response to the deteriorating situation in Vietnam and Laos, President John F. Kennedy authorized the Air Force to deploy Jungle Jim to SEA, sending eight T-28s, four B-26s, and four SC-47s, with 155 officers and airmen, to Vietnam, under the name Farm Gate.

In an era dominated by “fast movers” and an accelerating “space race,” Farm Gate's aging propeller-driven airplanes seemed anachronistic, but they packed a punch. When Viet-Cong forces attacked a remote outpost north of Saigon on March 1, 1962, an SC-47 flare ship illuminated the terrain for two attacking T-28s that napalmed, rocketed, and then strafed the VC, forcing their withdrawal. Two days later, acting on intelligence, a Farm Gate B-26 and two Vietnamese AD-6s struck a VC training exercise, killing and wounding many of the participants.

Farm Gate marked just the beginning of what would soon be a massive deployment of Air Force personnel to Southeast Asia, an effort that would witness the service fighting its most sustained and extensive air campaign until the 9-11 attacks launched the global war on terror. In July 1963, Farm Gate at Bien Hoa was designated the 1st Air Commando Squadron (Composite) consisting of a mix of T-28s, B-26s, C-47s, and U-10s, with detachments at Pleiku and Soc Trang. By that time, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) numbered nearly 17,000 people, nearly a third from the Air Force. Virtually every Air Force combat system that could fulfill a conventional non-nuclear role participated in the war—and none was more significant, at least in the first few years, than the C-47. USAF, Vietnamese, Air America, and some coalition C-47s were used for a variety of troop-lift, resupply, and support missions, while specialized variants flew electronic intelligence missions and undertook a range of covert operations. As the war expanded and airlift needs increased, the C-47s were joined by a wide range of airlifters, including Marine R4Ds, Army CV-2 Caribous (later transferred to the USAF as the C-7), and USAF C-123s.



The web of supply lines from North Vietnam into the South. (Photo: National Museum of the US Air Force)

As the war grew in complexity, so too, did the demands made upon American airpower. One of the major challenges was hamlet defense; building on tactics the Viet-Minh had used over a decade previously against the French, the Viet-Cong attacked hamlets and outposts at night, hoping to overwhelm defenders before dawn brought reinforcements and airpower. Nor was this all: on the night of October 31-November 1, VC sappers attacked Bien Hoa air base, destroying 10 aircraft (7 of them American) and damaging 18 more.

The answer was the long-loiter side-firing multi-gun “gunship:” yet another role for the already venerable C-47.

The side-firing concept was not new in aviation history, having been proposed shortly after the First World War, nor was it the first time that the C-47 had been used as a ground strafers: during CBI operations, Capt John E. “Blackie” Porter had equipped two C-47s with Bren guns and hand-held Thompson .45 cal. submachine guns, and used one to strafe and destroy a Japanese fighter that had force-landed. In the early 1960s, a group of maverick Air Force and industry advocates promoted the idea of a side-firing gunship, undertaking experimental studies of sights, target designator, and side-firing guns in trials at Wright-Patterson AFB and at Eglin AFB. Through the efforts of these individuals, and, in particular, then-Capt Ronald W. Terry, the idea of the armed gunship was turned into reality, and in the face of great official skepticism, even opposition and some hostility from conventionally-minded stalwarts in PACAF and TAC.

Trials over the Eglin water range using a Convair C-131B equipped with a lateral sight and a side-firing 7.62mm (.30 cal.) GE SUU-11A 6,000 rounds-per-minute minigun proved that the concept could be devastatingly effective. Terry, encouraged, put three SUU-11As in a C-47, and in a series of tests in September 1964 confirmed the value of the weapon. Two months later, Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay gave his blessing, and Terry took a team to Vietnam in early December 1964, quickly modifying two C-47s initially designated as “FC-47” (for Fighter-Cargo) special attackers. The FC-47—eventually redesignated AC-47D



Time-lapse ground view of the curtain of fire laid by an AC-47 during Tet. (Photo: National Museum of the US Air Force)

in September 1965, apparently to avoid offending fighter pilot sensibilities—carried eight crewmembers, consisting of an aircraft commander/pilot, copilot, flight mechanic, navigator, RVNAF liaison observer, loadmaster, and two gunners to operate, and, if necessary, troubleshoot the miniguns.

The C-47 gunship first flew in combat on December 15, 1964. It scored its first notable success on December 21, riddling a building in which a group of VC had taken cover, killing over 20. On the night of December 23-24, Terry’s team flew their first night mission, defending two hamlets under VC attack in the Mekong Delta. In both cases, the VC broke off their attacks after Terry and his crew struck. Subsequent hamlet defense missions over the next few weeks were equally successful, as were battlefield interdiction missions supporting Army operations in the II Corps area. So great was the need for gunships that Terry oversaw another modification program where four C-47s were modified to carry 10 .30 cal. machine guns, serving until replaced by the more “advanced” AC-47Ds with their miniguns. The first AC-47D gunship squadron, the 4th Air Commando Squadron (4th ACS), deployed with 20 aircraft to Tan Son Nhut air base in November 1965. The Air Force issued a news release later that

month announcing the existence of the program and its arrival in theater.

Variouly known as “Spooky,” “Dragonship,” but perhaps most familiarly as “Puff the Magic Dragon” (shortened simply to “Puff”), the AC-47Ds of the 4th ACS were heavily used in sometimes extended nighttime sieges, defending 500 forts, outposts, and hamlets in 1966 alone, an average of more than 1 per night (the next year, it rose to nearly 1,600). In one case, on the night of October 11, 1966, a single AC-47D expended 43,500 7.62mm rounds successfully protecting a besieged hamlet in Kien Phong province, a record for a single night. The AC-47D was equally effective furnishing battlefield support. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Robert Cushman, Jr. praised the AC-47D crews supporting his Third Marine Amphibious Force for their “outstanding performance,” noting that “Immediate response and enthusiastic and devastating support have become the trademarks of ‘Spooky’ in I Corps.” Such was the need for additional AC-47Ds (and more advanced gunships as well, leading to the first Lockheed AC-130As) that in late 1967, the Air Force activated another squadron, the 14th ACS (later redesignated the 3rd ACS) at Nha Trang. (Subsequently, in August 1968, the 3rd and 4th ACS became the 3rd and 4th Special Operations Squadrons).

The AC-47Ds extended their range of operations into Laos, undertook riverine attacks against VC sampans, escorted truck convoys, acted as forward air controllers, and, based in Thailand at Udorn and Nakhon Phanom, undertook 6-hour interdiction strikes against infiltration routes in Laos. The latter could be tremendously effective when the gunships located a target. On the night of February 23, 1966, as an Air Force after-action study laconically reported:

“Captain William Pratt and his AC-47 crew spotted a truck convoy halted where a bomb crater gutted the road. Working in a valley with sheer cliffs, the gunship first struck the rear truck setting it afire. Next the aircraft began an orbiting strike maneuver around the trapped trucks. The convoy replied to the attack with intense small arms fire. The gunship stayed on the target, destroying 11 trucks and damaging many more.”

The AC-47Ds were not immune from loss, particularly as the VC and their NVA compatriots began using heavier and longer-ranging 37mm anti-aircraft guns. By the summer of 1966, six had been lost in approximately seven months, a stiff attrition rate highlighting the AC-47Ds’ vulnerability to heavier-caliber automatic weapons. The combat experience with the AC-47D led to progressive upgrades of its weapons, sensors, and protective systems.

On January 30, 1968, the VC launched the infamous Tet offensive across South Vietnam. Tactically, it was a disastrous miscalculation, for the VC never recovered from the losses it sustained, but strategically, thanks largely to American and foreign media, it had a tremendous psychological impact upon the political and public will of the United States. From the VC perspective, their fortunes might have been better had it not been for the Spooky crews, who relentlessly defended South Vietnam from the air. The next year, 1969, marked the end of USAF Spooky operations in Southeast Asia. In March, a 3rd SOS AC-47D commanded by Col. Conrad S. Allman, commander of the 14th Special Operations Wing, flew the wing’s 150,000th combat mission. That June, the 3rd SOS began transferring its AC-47Ds to the RVNAF. In the early hours of December 1, 1969, Spooky 41 landed back at Phan Rang, having flown the 4th SOS’s last “fragged” mission. Two weeks later, its AC-47Ds were divided up among the RVNAF, the Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF), and the USAF’s 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing (4th TRW) at Udorn, the latter

to fly in support of Laotian forces until RLAF could take over. In 4 years of operations, the AC-47Ds had prevented nearly 4,000 hamlets, outposts, and forts from falling to the VC, had supported US, Vietnamese, and other friendly forces in combat, and had fired 97 million rounds of 7.62mm ammunition.

Altogether, 15 AC-47Ds were lost in combat. It would have been 16, except for one act of almost inconceivable bravery by a 23-year-old 3rd SOS loadmaster from Connecticut, then-A1C John L. Levitow. When his AC-47D, Spooky 71, took a random hit from a VC 82mm mortar on the night of February 24, 1969, the resulting blast riddled the airplane, threw it into a steep bank, and wounded those in the back of the airplane, Levitow among them. Only the AC-47D’s rugged structure, a legacy of the DC-1/2/3’s multicellular wing design, saved it from immediately breaking up. But it was still in danger, and it was John Levitow who prevented disaster. What happened next is best summarized in his citation for the Medal of Honor, which he received from President Richard M. Nixon on May 14, 1970:

“The resulting explosion ripped a hole two feet in diameter through the wing and fragments made over 3,500 holes in the fuselage. All occupants of the cargo compartment were wounded and helplessly slammed against the floor and fuselage. The explosion tore an activated flare from the grasp of a crewmember who had been launching flares to provide illumination for Army ground troops engaged in combat. Sgt. Levitow, though stunned by the concussion of the blast and suffering from over 40 fragment wounds in the back and legs, staggered to his feet and turned to assist the man nearest to him who had been knocked down and was bleeding heavily. As he was moving his wounded comrade forward and away from the opened cargo compartment door, he saw the smoking flare ahead of him in the aisle. Realizing the danger involved and complete disregarding his own wounds, Sgt. Levitow started toward the burning flare. The aircraft was partially out of control and the flare was rolling wildly from side to side. Sgt. Levitow struggled forward despite the loss of blood from his many wounds and the “partial loss of feeling in his right leg. Unable to grasp the rolling flare with his hands, he threw himself bodily upon the burning flare. Hugging the deadly device to his body, he dragged himself back to the rear of the aircraft and hurled the flare through the open cargo door. At that instant the flare separated and ignited in the air, but clear of the aircraft. Sgt. Levitow, by his selfless and heroic actions, saved the aircraft and its entire crew from certain death and destruction.”

The saga of Spooky 71 teaches a never-to-be-forgotten lesson: the AC-47D was one tough bird—but tougher still were those who flew and maintained it. 

About the Author: Dr Richard P. Hallion was the former Air Force Historian. He has also been the Curator of Space Science and Exploration, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C. Dr Hallion recently served as Senior Adviser for Air and Space Issues, Directorate for Security, Counterintelligence and Special Programs Oversight, the Pentagon, Washington, D.C. An accomplished author of numerous books and publications he continues to write and lecture on aviation.



PRECISION, SERVICE, LOYALTY, DISCIPLINE.
—ADD HOSPITALITY—
and you'd have the Emerald Coast Convention Center.

**EMERALD COAST
CONVENTION CENTER**
DESTIN | FT. WALTON BEACH | OKALOOSA ISLAND

EmeraldCoastConventionCenter.com | 877.574.5123 | sales@co.okaloosa.fl.us



4SOS STANDUP

By Lt Col Tim Shaffer (Ret.)

This article is my recollection of the events leading to the standup and first operational deployments of the 4th SOS. They are unabashedly biased to make me the hero of my own story. I know others will have a different view of these events and I hope you will relate those through this publication.

This AC-130U story begins before the aircraft even had a designation. I was the chief pilot at the 16th SOS when the crew station working group had just concluded their first meeting. Capt “Beef” Haddad was the pilot representative on the working group and lamented to the squadron commander, Lt Col Walt Evens, that the working group, headed by Maj Jim Johnson, a Fire Control Officer from the headquarters, had stripped the aircraft commander of the trigger and relegated the pilots to “bus driver” status. Beef felt the pilot representative should be at least a major to restore the commander status of the pilot. Lt Col Evens called me into the office and told me to find a field grade pilot who had not been passed over, with retainability of at least three years, and with a degree in engineering or science. The search didn’t take too long...I could only find one pilot that met the criteria, me. It was during these crew station working groups that Capt Brad Heithold, Capt John Riley, and I discussed the future of side firing gunships at the Red Onion restaurant.

The plan was for the AC-130A gunships to be retired, the AC-130H aircraft would then transfer to the 711th SOS, and the AC-130U would go to the 16th SOS. Our conclusion, though, was that appropriate systems from the AC-130A could be transferred to a newer, C-130H, airframe and upgraded with the SOF Improvement (SOFI) modifications being fielded on other AFSOC aircraft. This would allow the USAF Reserve to take on a training function as its primary responsibility, keep the AC-130Hs with the SOFI modifications in the active-duty

16th SOS, and form a new squadron around the AC-130Us. We suggested that the AC-130Us would be based at the proposed west coast base for AFSOC.

The standup of the Operational Test and Evaluation team for the AC-130U at Edwards AFB occurred at about the same times as Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Lt Col Jim Braswell was named the Test Director with Maj Dave Bator acting as his Operations Officer until I could join the team after Desert Storm. I had been the Test Director of the AC-130H SOFI Developmental Test and Evaluation (DT&E) and Operational Test and Evaluation (OT&E), and assisted Jim in the selection of the test team. As we assembled the team, we were looking for a team that could perform the AC-130U OT&E, and would also form the initial cadre of the squadron.

Little did we know the pivotal role Desert Storm would play in the future of the AC-130U and 4th SOS. Due to the maximum effort required from the 16th SOS and the AC-130Hs, AFSOC

“
Little did we know
the pivotal role Desert
Storm would play
in the future of the
AC-130U and 4th SOS.
”



decided to deploy the SOFI modified AC-130Hs to Saudi Arabia. Col Marv Schott, the commander of the Special Mission Operational Test and Evaluation Center,) and I were called to 23 AF to brief Col Lee Hess on the capabilities of the SOFI aircraft and the test crews. The OT&E team had restructured the test program into three phases; could the SOFI AC-130Hs perform equal to the AC-130A, could the aircraft perform equal to the current AC-130H, and how much more capability did the new gunship provide beyond the standard AC-130H. With the first two, and most of the third, phases completed, all of the crews were current in the AC-130H and were mobility-ready. Col Hess appointed me as deployment operations officer under the command of Col Mike Guidry. The 16th SOS mission commander was Lt Col Rick Spencer. Part way through the deployment, one of the SOFI pilots had medical problems and I swapped with Rick and became the gunship mission commander. During this deployment a close friendship formed between Rick and I that would later shape the 4th SOS.

After the deployment, I headed to Edwards AFB to take on the role of operations officer and then commander of the 18th Flight Test Squadron. Following a reorganization of operational test responsibility, I moved to the Air Force

Operational Test and Evaluation Center (AFOTEC) as the Test Director and Maj Rob Schmidt became the 18th Flight Test Squadron commander, with Maj Dave Bator as his operations officer. Our time at Edwards was challenging, but laid the foundation for that cadre we had discussed at the Red Onion so many years before.

It was during this time after Desert Storm, that the 16th SOS began flying missions into the Balkans. The crews flying over Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia were suffering in the frigid, high altitude environment. Since these were our brothers-in-arms, and we were testing the replacement aircraft that would address many of their concerns, we took it as personal challenge to get the AC-130U fielded as quickly as possible. However, this was not the DT&E community's normal operating style. We often joked that the DT&E guys had an infinite number of test points and wanted to test them all three times. At times we felt we were pushing on a rope as we worked on getting the AC-130U fielded.

The 25mm Gatling gun gave us more than a few headaches. There was concern over a runaway gun firing all 3000 rounds and bursting a gun barrel. We failed in our attempts to convince the "experts" that we had several methods to prevent or stop a runaway gun, like removing the hydraulic pressure from the gun through shutoff valves, isolation valves, pump switches, or circuit breakers. This led to the heavy weight barrel study which entailed a new hydraulic pump study. These delays resulted in our program being placed on a Congressional oversight list. Trust me when I tell you that you don't want to have Congressional staffers looking over your shoulder all the time, especially working this type of program. We decided we were going to put together a plan to shoot the gun by Christmas and dubbed it "Christmas Present" for the System Program Office (SPO) at Wright Patterson AFB. The DT&E guys gladly let us run with it as they were relieved of the duty to interface with the Congressional staffers.

As we planned the first tests of the gun, we had to shoot on the Edwards AFB's tiny impact range. The range's small size forced us to use Target

Practice (non-explosive) rounds. Around the middle of December, after jumping through all the safety and administrative "hoops" we were ready to go. Then it rained, and rained, and rained. Just before Christmas, the weather cleared and we finally got to shoot the gun. We fired four 25-round bursts into the mud—our first time shooting the 25mm from an AC-130U, and we couldn't even prove we hit the ground.

Our challenges with the 25mm did not stop there. Later, after the system was more mature and we were using it regularly, the test range at China Lake took video of the bottom of the aircraft while we were firing. The video showed muzzle blasts/flashes in the vicinity of the propellers. You would have thought we had lost a nuclear weapon. All firing missions were suspended pending the outcome of an investigation into the extremely hazardous situation of gun gas being sympathetically detonated on the propeller tips and the possibility of the aircraft losing a propeller. We tried not to laugh in front of the DT&E guys, and unsuccessfully pointed out that the apparent detonations occurring on the propeller tips were an illusion brought on by camera angle. The gun's depression angle, coupled with the airspeed, would require the gun gas exiting the barrel at approximately 2800 feet per second to make an immediate 90-degree turn upwards, in order to get anywhere near the props.

We received permission to repeat the flight and it showed the same flashes. This time we videotaped the event through the small window by the gun and it clearly showed the flashes occurring well below the props. Our video was confiscated however, since it had not been approved by the Test Center. We contacted the Munitions and Weapon System Safety engineer at Eglin, Mr. Preston Parker, and he informed us it was a phenomenon known as secondary gun gas ignition and had been experienced on the A-10. He further explained that the 20mm Gatling guns would do the same thing, but was never a concern. The DT&E guys didn't accept the report from Preston and convened a board of their own Edwards engineering "experts." The first thing these engineers said was, "It was outside

their area of expertise,” I made them re-state that three times before it sunk into the DT&E guys. One of the Edwards engineers informed us that there was instrumentation that could measure the pressure on the propellers. We explained that when a C-130 flies through a change of air density as small as a cloud, we could see a fluctuation in the torque gauge and very minor flux on the tachometer. If that wasn't sensitive enough, the frequency meter gave a 4 to 1 increase in scale and the maintenance engine test meter was another order of magnitude increase. The decision was made to suspend live fire missions until the propeller could be instrumented; six weeks. The engineers were dumbfounded when the results came in and the propellers were oblivious to the secondary gun gas ignitions.

This is just a small sample of the fun and games we experienced at Edwards. We had similar situations with the All Light Level TV (ALLTV), strike radar, electronic counter measures, and even the test environment. Who ever heard of only allowing day test missions for a night-attack weapon system?

We reached the point in the OT&E where we needed to fly test sorties in an operationally relevant environment which was not available at Edwards. By this time, AFSOC had lost their sense of humor in the never-ending testing and associated money drain demanded by the DT&E community. We planned a phased rotation of test personnel back to Hurlburt to establish the dedicated OT&E. Our first contingent arrived at Hurlburt Field in December 1993. We spent two months setting up operations in a condemned building near the Billeting Office, and then rotated back to Edwards to cover the remaining test flights there while the rest of the team moved to Hurlburt. Like everything else we had done at Edwards, the rotations did not go smoothly.

AFSOC placed a cadre of very experienced maintenance folks on the team who were dedicated to verification and validation of technical manuals and support equipment. They would monitor the contractor and military maintenance crews at Edwards as they maintained the aircraft. There were approximately 45 maintenance people that formed the cadre of AC-130U maintainers. It was

AFSOC's plan that those 45 people would transfer to Hurlburt to form the initial cadre of the maintenance squadron. I went to the Edwards AFB Deputy Commander for Maintenance (DCM) to work out a schedule on rotating those people back to Hurlburt and establish their families in Northwest Florida while covering the testing at Edwards. He told me we could not have the people, as the Wright Patterson AFB C-141s were being transferred to Edwards and he needed maintenance folks for those aircraft. I pointed out they were the only maintenance troops with experience on the AC-130U, and it would adversely impact our ability to achieve an operationally ready status in a reasonable time frame, not to mention that C-141 maintenance troops were plentiful throughout the Air Force. He pointedly stated, “not my problem.”

I was very frustrated when I went home that night. I think the cussing and swearing in the front yard was an indicator to my neighbor that something was not right. As I explained the dilemma to my neighbor, who happened to be the Deputy DCM, he laughed. He said it would not be that big of a problem as the DCM was scheduled for about six weeks of pre-command courses. Once the DCM left, my neighbor would approve the AC-130U maintainers' orders and push the paperwork through. His plan was to have all the moves accomplished before the DCM returned. I asked him if that wouldn't put him in hot water with his boss. Again he laughed and said he would be retired before the DCM got back. So, in the best Air Commando tradition, when an obstacle to mission accomplishment was thrown into our path, we simply overcame and adapted. Incidentally, the DCM nearly had a stroke when he returned.

It needs to be said that our entire time at Edwards was not difficult or depressing. It was like an overseas assignment. Most all of us lived on base, within blocks of each other. We had quarterly team parties, roasted pigs, celebrated birthdays, and held promotion parties. We attended all the Test Center functions and our team always stood out. The Test Center guys had the normal peacetime medals, while gunship team had medals from all their

operational deployments and missions--it was more than noticeable.

One evening as we were all getting dressed up for a formal dinner, the 16th SOS was attacking Mohamed Aidid's strong points in Somalia. The attack was carried live on TV and we could identify the sounds of 40mm gunfire. The newscaster said he could hear a C-130 getting closer then farther away. Kind of like an orbit!! We tore ourselves away from our TVs and proceeded to the club. The excitement was over by the time I got there, but what I heard was that SMSgt Mark Gunn had gone into the bar and turned the big screen TV onto the Somalia report. One of the test pilots picked up the changer and turned the TV back to a basketball game. Mark turned it back to Somalia. This went back and forth a couple of times until Mark changed it and smashed the controller. The test pilot bowed up, but his friends grabbed him and pointed out Mark's medals and told him, “That's one of the gunship guys; you really don't want to mess with him.”

We got involved with the community; one of our spouses, Petey Brennan, worked with the high school cheerleaders, my wife Susie had a Girl Scout troop, and Carla Schmidt led a Cub Scout den. As a team we sponsored an old fashioned sock hop at the high school. We also continued the tradition established by the MC-130H Talon II test team, winning the small unit intramural trophy every year we were there. The Edwards folks were so concerned about us taking the trophy with us when we left that they broke into our trophy case and stole it back.

Finally established at Hurlburt Field, we were in full swing testing the aircraft operationally when I was called to Gen Bailey's (16 SOW/CC) office. He asked if I was confident in the operational capability of the AC-130U and our test team. I told him I was confident in both, but we needed to re-certify some of the guys in a couple of areas, like small arms marksmanship. He told me it was his intent to use our all-weather capability in Haiti if that operation went forward. He gave us carte blanche to get ready. His decision to use an aircraft still being tested was questioned at every level. We even had a couple of generals fly with us to evaluate our combat capability

and the ability of the AC-130U to find targets through the weather. We flew up to “attack” a building in Alabama. The weather was a broken cloud deck below us. At about 30 miles out, Maj Rob Schmidt, the navigator, locked the target with the radar through the clouds. He stated that he confirmed the target, but something did not look right. He continued to track with the electro-optical sensors slaved to the target. The crew continued the attack run, but concurred with Rob that the target “just didn’t look right.” As we rolled into the orbit we saw the building on the TV through a break in the clouds. Evidently, while we had been at Edwards, it had burned down, making it look strange on the radar. The generals were impressed with the system and the crew, but in the end, Gen Bailey did not prevail and the Haiti mission went on without the AC-130U.

A couple of months later our test was coming to its conclusion. I was summoned to Col Gary Heckman’s (16 OG/CC) office. He told me that it was time to announce the selection for the new gunship squadron commander—and it wouldn’t be me. He gave all the reasons; I had been at Edwards and was a relative unknown to the Group and Wing, I had not been a DO or Commander of an operational unit, and frankly, other than Col Marv Schott the commander of SMOTEC I didn’t have a sponsor. He told me the new commander would be the current commander of the 16th Operational Support Squadron, Rick Spencer. He extolled Rick’s virtues and how he was the perfect choice. I think he finally noticed how pale and sweaty I was...I thought I was going to throw up on his sofa. He quickly told me he was sorry, he should have told me up front I was to be operations officer. I recovered my composure and told him if I couldn’t be the commander, I couldn’t think of a better choice than Rick. He had his secretary call Rick into the office and “introduced” the commander to his operations officer. We went back to Rick’s office where he told me he had not politicked for the job, but when offered, could not refuse. He was happy with me being his ops officer and knew I had planned the new squadron organization for some time. He told me we had

two years to reach Initial Operational Capability (IOC), but wanted to know if I thought we could pull it off quicker. I told him I had a plan and sketched it out on a napkin he had on his desk. He liked the plan and told me he would handle the base/wing and I was to set up the squadron.

I had studied elite organizations in other Services and how they structured their forces and trained for missions. My plan was an extreme break from how the 16th SOS was structured. Not that the 16th SOS was wrong, it was just that we had a different imperative. They were an established organization with a proud history and tradition, while we were starting from scratch. My plan was to form three deployable flights consisting of three “hard crews” each. The test team members would be spread throughout the flights so that each crew included some AC-130U experienced members. Each flight would have someone trained in ground and flight safety, mobility operations, mission planners, etc. In essence, each flight would be a self-contained, deployable unit. When they deployed they would have all the squadron disciplines with them, and they would not deplete that part of the squadron remaining in garrison.

To grow the squadron we were allowed to recruit from across the Air Force. We joked that the only criteria to join the 4th SOS was being able to fog a mirror. What we got was a large number of field grade officers, largely from B-52s, who were stuck in staff positions. When we interviewed them we told them promotion was unlikely, we would exploit their experience, work them like captains, fly them till they couldn’t walk, and ultimately deploy them to crappy places around the world to make history. They volunteered in droves. When I would fill out the slides for the Ops Group briefings, it would show we averaged over 3000 flying hours per person and over 250 combat hours each, but only 30 hours in type (gunships). We were the most experienced inexperienced squadron in the Air Force.

There are a million details that go into standing up a squadron. We politicked to be the 4th SOS so that our heritage could be derived from the Vietnam era AC-47

Spooky squadron. It also turned out to be difficult to get a squadron patch approved. Political correctness was alive and well and there were many constraints on what could be depicted and that any unit insignia needed to have a heritage link. Our first choice was the original 4th SOS round black patch with two evil looking eyes. That choice was rejected because the B-2 squadrons were using it. After a couple of other rejections we settled on a ghost with two lightning bolts, with the ghost being modeled after the nose art on the AC-47 in the Hurlburt Air Park.

We also had to select a squadron secretary. Rick and I sat in his office discussing the attributes we wanted in our first admin person. When we were finished, we had come up what could only be described as the attributes of Aunt Bee from the old Andy Griffith show. The Civilian Personnel Office called and said they were sending over a woman for us to interview whose position at the Headquarters had been eliminated and she was a “must hire.” A few minutes later a hush fell over the building. TSgt Libby Horn, our chief of admin (and Edwards test team member) came in the office and announced our interviewee had arrived. She had a strange smile on her face. In walked “Christie Brinkley.” Actually, it was Beverly, but she just looked like the *Sports Illustrated* model, Christie Brinkley. Rick and I conducted a brief interview and Beverly told us she could start within two weeks and left. I walked over to the paper cutter and told Rick we might as well cut them off, our wives would never believe Beverly was a must hire. He said “Yea, we didn’t even ask her if she could type.” Beverly did a great job helping us set the squadron up from scratch.

Our spouses were considered a part of the team from the beginning. Rick’s wife Shirley, and my wife Susie, set out to educate the new spouses on what it meant to have a husband in the 4th SOS. They set up Saturday morning briefings (so the husbands could babysit) that covered everything from who to call if the checkbook doesn’t balance to what does it mean if a staff car pulls up with uniformed guys walking to the front door. The base agencies provided spectacular support, and wives walked away with

AC-130 before modification.



a handbook of information, a sense of operational security, and an appreciation of how important their husbands were to national security. The wing adopted a very similar program a couple of years later.

We held the Assumption of Command Ceremony on 4 May 1995 with a combined Operations and Maintenance Squadron. We rapidly got the crews qualified, attended every exercise we could find, and felt we were ready for our “operationally relevant” deployment that would verify we had met IOC and were combat ready.

We were scheduled to participate in FOAL EAGLE, an exercise in Korea that would also be an Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) for the AF SOF in the Pacific. We thought this would be it. We planned to fly non-stop from Hurlburt to Taegu AB (establishing a new C-130 record) and prove we had the right stuff. Our plan to fly non-stop was rejected as being too ambitious. (Two years later the squadron did fly non-stop to Korea setting the record.) We were the only ones who really thought we could be ready for IOC that quick, so there were no inspection criteria or inspectors ready for us at FOAL EAGLE.

One night during FOAL EAGLE, we had one of our two crews flying a live-fire mission, transitioning to an air base defense mission over Osan AB. The weather was bad, but the mission was an opportunity to demonstrate the radar. The crew that was off had been told they could have a drink or two, but not to get drunk. Rick and I had just sat down to dinner when a runner told us we were needed at the Wing Operations Center. When we arrived, we were asked if we dropped paratroopers out of the gunship. We told them, “No, why?” They then informed us

that our gunship was orbiting Osan and they had reports of paratroopers landing on the golf course. We gave the crew a call on the SATCOM and asked if everything was okay. They replied, “Funny you should ask, we’ve been asked to check around the golf course for parachutes. We just had a break in the clouds and in fact, there are parachutes scattered around.”

About a minute later base sirens were going off, anti-aircraft positions were manned, and the searchlights came on. We checked the status of our bird and they were “Winchester” (out of ammo). We told them to return for rearming/refueling. Since we were not operational, we had not been allowed to deploy with IR countermeasures, so the Talon II guys offered up their spare IRCM magazines. We ordered ammunition for our spare and another load of ammunition and fuel for the returning plane.

Rick headed back to the squadron ops center to gather up the planners and I went to get the second crew together. I found them at the bowling alley and it was obvious they had enjoyed more than a drink or two. I found one crewmember among the bowling pins, wearing only his long johns as the other crewmembers had been using him as a bowling ball. I got the sober guys organized and got everyone back to the dorm and into

their mission oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear. They were to go to the armory and draw small arms. We started the coffee brewing; it was going to be a long night.

The small arms had been bulk shipped and were packed with grease, so the planners started cleaning M-9s and loading magazines. Rick and I went to the revetments to meet the returning plane and as the engines were shutdown, maintenance troops poured over the aircraft like an Indy car pit stop. Fuel trucks, ammo trailers, and organized chaos...what a sight! We took the crew back to the dorm to get their MOPP gear, then to the chow hall. After they grabbed a sandwich, we took them to the ops center and issued weapons. In an incredibly short amount of time we had gone from a dead stop to having two aircraft locked and loaded, two crews (substituting planners for those incapacitated crewmembers) ready to launch, and everyone in their MOPP gear and sheltered. It took a couple of hours for the Koreans to sort out the situation, and discover that the paratroopers were part of an uncoordinated, friendly infiltration of Osan AB. We unwound the crews and reset for the next night’s activities. The rest of the deployment was uneventful and at the termination of the exercise, we traveled from base to base across Korea giving tours to the Korean wing commanders.

We returned to Hurlburt with a new level of confidence. We certainly didn’t have combat experience with our new weapon system, but we knew what its capabilities were, and we now knew what we were capable of.

Three months later we participated in the Wing’s Operational Readiness Exercise in preparation for the May ORI.



AC-130 after modification.



We refined our procedures, planned and practiced against the inspection criteria, and deployed to NAS Cecil Field to show the inspectors we had the right stuff. The inspection was anticlimactic as we found we were so much more prepared than required that we challenged ourselves to accuracy and time on target exceeding the inspection standards. The high point for us was to work with the Navy SEALs and British Special Forces. The ORI outcome was never in doubt and it was fun to watch the guys working hard, intensely committed to making the grade. What they didn't know was we were knocking it out of the park. Other squadrons weren't doing so well which just made us "amateurs" look even better.

Rick and I had told the newbies that in SOF coming home after a deployment was an "un-deployment." Redeployment meant picking up from your deployed location and deploying someplace else. As the squadron was letting down after their successful ORI, the orders arrived—pack up half of the force and move to Central America and resume "combat" operations. That's what they did without missing a beat. One year after stand up we were operational!

J.D. Rudman's flight was chosen to be the first AC-130U deployment to replace the 16th SOS in Bosnia. We worked them hard, culminating with a Joint Readiness Exercise (JRX). As they went through their final mobility preparations, I went with one aircraft to MacDill AFB. GEN Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wanted a briefing from GEN Shelton, the Commander of USSOCOM on the capabilities and readiness of the 4th SOS, and he wanted to see the aircraft and meet some crewmembers. We had a standard VIP tour that started with the crew lined up coming from the crew entrance door with one crewmember (gunner in this case) outfitted in our "go to war" gear. It was hot and the generals were very late showing up. We had lined up several times when word came they were on the way. When they finally showed up we were standing at parade rest, ready and waiting. Calling the formation to attention, I welcomed the generals. GEN Shalikashvili shook the gunner's hand, apologized for being late, looked over his gear and turned to me and asked if it was okay for the gunner to shed the gear. As the generals went down the line and shook hands, the crewmembers would peel off and go to their stations. The tour went quickly, and the generals asked very informed

questions as we ended at the ramp, behind the 105mm. The ramp was down and a cooling breeze was blowing through. The two generals leaned on the life support bin and exchanged stories of how gunships had saved their lives in Vietnam. When they were through reminiscing GEN Shalikashvili told GEN Shelton "lets get this squadron over to Bosnia were they can do some good." The generals shook my hand and each gave me a bag full of coins for the crew and left. Apparently, they went back to the GEN Shelton's office and signed the deployment orders. By the time I got base operations to call Rick with the outcome of the tour, he had received the "Go" and crews were in the process of getting out of town. By the time we got back to Hurlburt, they were gone.

Now it was time to concentrate on the flight that would rotate over three months later. They had a very heavy live-fire/dry-fire training schedule which culminated in a JRX at McChord AFB. On the way back to Hurlburt Field, we dropped into Peterson AFB, CO, with the crew mostly USAF Academy graduates and CMSgt Bo Ano (his daughter was a "Doolie," a freshman). I also got to enjoy performing the homecoming fly-by at my 20th USAFA class reunion.

Rick was eventually promoted to colonel and Lt Col Bob Hudson was named to be his replacement. I deployed to relieve Rick in the Balkans so he could hold the change of command, and during our overlap, the AC-130U came under fire for the first time. The mission was to check suspicious areas under construction only at night. As the gunship rolled into its orbit a shoulder fired missile came up. The defensive systems did their job and the missile missed the aircraft and detonated well above and away. The rules of engagement required the crew to avoid confrontation and depart the area. They could only engage in self-defense if there was no other option. They were still high on adrenalin, bringing to mind Churchill's statement that "There is nothing more exhilarating than to be shot at without result." Rick and I had been shot at before, and knew what they were going through. Rick had the maintenance troops bring the empty flare tubes to de-brief and we used a sharpie to write the date of the engagement and gave them to the flight and maintenance crews.

A couple of days later the press release declared that the crew had actually seen fireworks and were not shot at. President Clinton had stated there was no violence in Bosnia and someone shooting a SAM at a US aircraft did not fit that storyline. How fireworks track flares was never addressed. The crew was deflated and we reassured them that we all knew the truth, and that the important fact was that they were alive. We received back channel information that there had been witnesses to the launch, but their reports were discounted.

On another night, I was commanding one of the crews and we were on alert eating dinner when our pagers went off. It was like something out of a WWII movie. We grabbed our flight gear and boarded buses to ride from San Vito Air Station to our aircraft at Brindisi Air Base. We were getting outfitted as we rode, and hit the ground running as the bus stopped. The seals were broken by the ground crew and we jumped into our seats and buckled in. As the copilot was starting the checklist, the planners handed me a mission folder. They said, "Boss, we

don't know how to tell you this, but your job tonight is to protect Russian peacekeepers and Muslim Serbs from Christian Serbs." They were right. Nothing in my military training had prepared me for this mission. They told me the peacekeepers were pinned down by cross fire between the Muslims and Christians. I asked how we would know which were Muslims and which were Christians. They just shrugged.

We launched, maxed the airspeed, and loaded the guns in anger for the first time. As we approached the area, we made radio contact with the ground party. We were not sure how we were going to talk to the Russians, and the contact came up and was whispering into the radio. We could hear gunfire in the background. The ground party spoke excellent English and asked, "Are you a Spooky?" We confirmed, and he said I'm from the other side of the ramp, meaning he was a Hurlburt Combat Controller (CCT). We asked which side of the road were the Christians. He chuckled and said they all looked alike, they all had the same weapons, and they were all shooting over his head. Since we couldn't sort it out we decided to find an open area and shoot the snot out of it hoping to influence both the good guys and the bad guys. Just as we rolled in, all the gunfire ceased. The CCT guy said, "They know you're here." So much for shooting for the first time in combat. We watched as both sides built campfires and we escorted the Russians back to their checkpoint. We called that one the "Boy Scout Jamboree."

We had one other significant mission while I was there. We were tasked with watching over three factories in Tusla. A shipment of arms, ammunition, and shoulder fired missiles were expected to be delivered to one of the three locations. We spotted the convoy and had really itchy trigger fingers, but we were denied permission to fire. The next day, soldiers raided the factory and recovered hundreds of rifles, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and several missiles.

Later, I was summoned to Sarajevo to brief the incoming 1st Infantry Division Deputy Commander. The night after the briefing, I was contacted by my planners back in Brindisi tasking us to split our force (we only had two aircraft) and re-deploy one to Entebbe, Uganda. Seems the Hutus and Tutsis were fighting again. The US and Canada had sent a joint refugee survey team to Entebbe under the auspices of the UN, but these teams had two problems; they operated during the daytime so they couldn't observe the refugees' night migrations, and they

were being shot at. We would provide night reconnaissance and make the idea of shooting at survey aircraft uncomfortable. The first night of operations resulted in flight through volcanic ash and the crew chiefs being threatened by a pack of hyenas. While in Uganda we were also placed on alert for an embassy rescue mission into the Central African Republic, and after two weeks, the refugee crisis passed and the operation was folded.

We were relieved in Brindisi shortly before Christmas and I returned to a new position in AFSOC headquarters. However, my association didn't end there. Six months later I became the commander of the 19th SOS, responsible for training AC-130H, AC-130U, and MC-130E crews. Following that assignment, I retired and joined Lockheed Martin to help build the AC-130U simulator, and eventually became the Aircrew Training and Rehearsal Support Site Manager.

Eighteen months after our first operational deployment to Italy, the AC-130U finally fired its first rounds in combat under the command of Eric Fiel. But that story should be told by others... 

About the Author: Lt Col Timothy Shaffer (USAF ret) was qualified in the C-130E, H, WC-130B, E, H, AC-130H, and AC-130U, and has over 3,000 flying hours. He was the first operations officer of the 4th SOS (AC-130U), commanded the 18th Flight Test Squadron (Edwards AFB), and the 19th SOS (Hurlburt Field). Upon retirement, Mr. Shaffer went to work for Lockheed Martin assisting in the design and test of the AC-130U flight deck simulator, served as the 19th SOS Site Manager, and is now the F-35 Evaluation and Standardization Lead (Eglin AFB).



Your New Mission: A Challenging Career at CACI

CACI provides IT and professional services to the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and intelligence agencies around the country.

- Engineering
- Intelligence
- Logistics
- Cybersecurity
- Analysis
- IT & Communications

Continue to secure our nation's interests by making CACI your new mission.

Apply today.
www.caci.com



CACI is an Equal Opportunity Employer M/F/D/V
©CACI 2011 - A305_1107

We Support
Our Troops

www.eglinfcu.org

EGLIN FEDERAL CREDIT UNION



AC-130s and Iranian Hostage Rescue Attempt

(Operation Eagle Claw)

Part 1 of 2

By Lt Col Jim Lawrence (Ret.)

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

From an international relations standpoint, the year 1979 was the year from Hell, and November 4, 1979, was another day that would live in infamy. In Iran, there was a visceral hatred of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and his Savak secret police. Shah Reza was forced out and departed Iran in January, 1979, and Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile in France shortly afterward.

Angered by President Carter's decision to allow Shah Reza into America for cancer treatment, Iranian militants stormed the US Embassy in Tehran on November 4th and took 66 American personnel hostage, to include the US Ambassador to Iran, Bruce Laingen.

Six lucky Americans - Robert Anders, Mark J. Lijek, Cora A. Lijek, Henry L. Schatz, Joseph D. Stafford, and Kathleen F. Stafford - escaped Iran with assistance from the Canadian Embassy and Canadian passports.¹

Thirteen of the 66 detainees were later released, but 53 remained in captivity (one of which was released at a later date on humanitarian grounds after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis). The grinding hostage ordeal lasted 444 days and ultimately led to President Carter's defeat in his 1980 re-election bid. For the entire period, ABC television's news anchorman Ted Koppel led a nightly broadcast, "Nightline," showing the graphic pictures of blindfolded hostages and the hostage-takers, which helped to perpetuate an image of America paralyzed by ineptness.

The hostages would ultimately be released on the last day of Jimmy Carter's

presidency, but only after Ronald Reagan had been sworn in as the new president, closing out a difficult four-year term for President Carter. Many things happened in the interim that drove the lives and training of 16 SOS crewmembers.

The wheels turned slowly as the administration tried to craft a response to the 1979 taking of American Embassy personnel as hostages. There was great anger among the citizenry of Iran, incited by the militants who were running the revolution. One of the President's great concerns was what to do in the event the Iranian militants began executing hostages.

Initially, planners in the Pentagon looked for a way to demonstrate America's resolve should an execution occur. A reprisal strike by AC-130s on the holy city of Qum (pronounced "coom"), home of Iran's new leader Ayatollah Khomeini, was one of the earliest proposed response options. Qum had significance not only because of Khomeini, but it is also a historical city where Ibn Abd al-Wahhab studied at a religious academy in the early 1700's.² Striking the country's oil refining facilities was another option considered to send a strong message. I later learned that in the middle of the hostage crisis the Israelis had offered a novel idea to help the Americans solve the problem, "...in 1980, during the American hostage crisis in Tehran, Israeli planners in a training exercise proposed snatching Ayatollah Khomeini from the Iranian city of Qum and using him to barter the Americans' release."³

The Army's new counterterrorist unit, Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, known as "Delta Force" or more simply, "Delta," - had just completed a "validation" exercise that involved rescuing hostages from a building and

a hijacked aircraft. A special joint task force - JTF 79-1 - was quickly formed with then-Army MG Jim Vaught in command. Vaught was a grizzled veteran who had fought in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Delta Force then developed an emergency rescue plan for when or if Iranian militants began killing American hostages.

As COL Charlie Beckwith, commander of Delta Force described the first efforts, "General Vaught was briefed on the plan. It was straightforward - and suicidal."

Delta planned to move by aircraft to the vicinity of Teheran. There, east of the city, it would parachute in, commandeer vehicles and find a way through the city to the embassy compound, free the hostages, fight its way across the city to Mehrabad International Airport, and take and hold the airport until American aircraft could come in and airlift everyone out. In the event the weather turned sour, Delta and the freed hostages were equipped with small evade and escape kits. Each kit contained a Silva compass, a plasticized map, US dollars and Iranian rials, air panels, strobe lights, pills for water purification, antibiotics, and a Farsi essential phrase list. With these kits, Delta and the released hostages would attempt to escape overland.

Shortly after the hostages were taken in Iran, Col Tom Wicker, 1st Special Operations Wing Deputy Commander for Operations, was summoned to the Pentagon with AC-130 planner Capt Wayne Thom in tow, to meet with the planners and USAF General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Planners felt a surreptitious deployment to Guam would put our AC-130s in a position to back-door the Iranians, using Diego Garcia, an Indian Ocean island

and airfield controlled by the British, as a staging base later on.

With four of the AC-130 fleet then modified for in-flight refueling, the possibility existed to complete that tasking, despite the great distances involved. For the initial deployment, a stop short of Guam at Wake Island was discussed, due to length of mission and the fact that a flight that far would greatly exceed the standard crew duty day allowed for aircrews.

Foremost in the gunship operators' minds, however, was that if the AC-130s landed at Wake, there was a good chance some critical system could malfunction and prevent the aircraft from getting airborne again for several days. Getting spare parts to a broken aircraft at Wake could present a big hurdle. Planners made that point to the decision-makers and convinced them that the 1st SOW aircrews could fly non-stop the entire 8,300 mile route to Guam, though no C-130 had ever flown a flight that approached the time or distance required. Their insistence on going all the way non-stop proved to be a wise decision.

At the Pentagon, Wayne Thom worked on planning a strike on the Iranian oil facilities at Abadan as a punitive measure. He later described a conversation with Gen Jones, "I was working on the refueling tracks for the Abadan operation and happened to be alone in a planning room when someone said, 'Do you think we can do it, captain?' I turned around and it was Jones. He was in civilian clothes. My reply was 'Only if I'm on the lead aircraft.' He chuckled (at such hubris), we made a little small talk, and he left. That's the only time I saw him."

Thom continued, "After I left the Pentagon, I flew back to Hurlburt, and Wicker met me at the command post. He wanted a briefing on targets, etc., but I was under strict orders from Lt Col [Dick] Gadd at the Pentagon to only brief the 1st SOW commander, Col Dunwoody, who by this time was in Guam. So, we locked all the charts, maps and satellite pictures up in a safe in the command post, and the next day I left for Guam on a C-141 with all the maps. We flew to McChord AFB, changed crews, flew to Hawaii, changed crews again, and pressed on to

Guam. At Guam, Dunwoody met me at the aircraft. We drove around in his car on the flightline while I briefed him on the Pentagon's plan. D-Day was initially set for Nov 18. Dunwoody was raring to go!"²⁴

16th SOS navigators Capt Carlos "Svenson" Garcia and Maj Carl "Curly" Houston, back at Hurlburt Field, planned the trans-Pacific flights. Garcia described things as, "I flew over with 'Curly' Houston and I believe he was the one who was called in (I believe it was a Sunday afternoon) to help plan the thing. We weren't told a lot about the rationale...something about the Korean President [Park Chung-hee] having been assassinated [on 26 October] and wanting to show support, etc. Anyway, we planned it that afternoon and evening and then went home. There was a lot of confusion going on between the wing and higher headquarters, Tactical Air Command (TAC, now called Air Combat Command). Didn't seem anybody really knew the full story or wanted to share the story with us. After waiting around for a while after planning, we were told to go on home. At the time I didn't really think this was going to amount to anything more than a planning exercise. I remember even when we were on the airplane(s) getting ready to takeoff, I was still waiting for a radio call to come back in – exercise over!"²⁵

On 13 November 1979, our crews gathered in the briefing room of the 16th SOS at Hurlburt Field where Col Dunwoody gave a quick overview of what was to transpire; there were a lot of jaws that dropped when the details were announced.

I was thinking we're headed the wrong way to take care of the problem in Iran, if this mission has anything to do with that situation. We should be going through Europe, but I didn't know the overall game plan.

After the briefing, we all took a deep breath and got on with the business ahead as my crew and another crew led by Maj Mike Couvillon, briefed the flight particulars, filed an international flight plan, fired up the two aircraft, and taxied out together for the departure.

Once cleared for takeoff, we both took the runway with Couvillon in the lead on the downwind side and my crew

on the wing and upwind. At precisely 1600 hours local, Couvillon began his departure roll; 20 seconds later and as he was getting airborne, we began ours and we both were on the way to Guam as a two-ship formation flight. Our flight call sign was "Amado 61."

Over the Crestview VORTAC, we turned west and headed for California and our first rendezvous with KC-135 tankers. On our radio handoff to Houston Center, the controller looked at his flight information strips and quickly called flight lead, expressing disbelief that our flight was scheduled for 30 hours non-stop to Andersen AB, Guam.

Things worked perfectly on our first in-flight refueling over the Twenty-Nine Palms refueling track. The AC-130Hs could not be pressurized, so we flew no higher than 10,000 feet. As the time neared for the refueling, we put on our helmets and oxygen masks, climbed to 11,000 feet, and began flying a speed of 210 knots indicated airspeed, to await the rendezvous with a KC-135 tanker.

We were on time to make our air refueling control time over the refueling control point. The tanker came head-on toward our path, flew past us and made a U-turn to come past us at 1,000 feet above our altitude. We moved up into the pre-contact position, then on into a closer position for the boom operator to make contact and start passing fuel.

On my crew were pilots Capt Mike McClellan (an aircraft commander who was getting an aerial re-fueling checkride from me) and 1st Lt Mark Wildermuth (co-pilot). Having three pilots gave us flexibility to swap out seats and keep our alertness at a peak level. Col Dunwoody was with Maj Couvillon's crew. The second refueling track was planned for 500 miles west of Catalina Island. Calculations were such that if we had problems taking fuel, we could return to California. The navigators did a great job with the head-on rendezvous for the tanker hook-ups. Maj John Thomas and Capt Jim Braswell were navigating in the lead aircraft, and "Curly" Houston and "Svenson" Garcia were doing the same on my crew.

Our flight engineers, MSgt John "Sugar Bear" Schugmann and Sgt Gene "Mean Gene" Carter did a good job

topping us off with maximum fuel and keeping a close watch on all gauges and hydraulics. Our illuminator operators, MSgts Michael “Hosie” Hosenbacke and Bill Patterson scanned systems in the rear cabin looking for any malfunctions or fuel leaks, as well as monitoring the skies for any wayward air traffic.

Before the flight, we were very concerned with engine oil consumption on such a long-duration mission, but were pleasantly surprised on arrival Guam to find that we had consumed only 1-2 gallons for the duration of the non-stop flight. Lt Col William “Doc” Postles the flight surgeon was with me and had a plentiful supply of “uppers” should we need them to stay awake. I was having no trouble staying awake at the time, although at about the 22-hour mark, I hung a hammock over the rear ramp and tried to sleep, but to no avail.

All refuelings for the deployment phase were completed with full radio communications. The procedures would be dropped later when we arrived at Guam in favor of comm-out, lights-out procedures, as we planned to ingress Iran in the most surreptitious manner possible. The 305th Air Refueling Wing’s Col Jerry Barton deployed with his tankers and would later serve as Dunwoody’s deputy at the forward-based detachment established in Guam.

The third refueling was at night and overhead Honolulu. We had a birds-eye view of the dense Honolulu lights and other sparser lighting on Oahu Island.

We divided our attention between the tanker lights above and the city lights underneath until we topped off with what was needed.

En-route we switched formation leads several times to break the monotony and give the wingman a break from the hand flying. The fourth refueling was over Wake Island, with another five hours remaining into Guam after topping off with fuel. By the time we approached Andersen AB, Couvillon and Dunwoody were back in the lead. They checked the weather, it was good, and we planned for their crew to do an overhead pattern, with my crew extending out for a straight-in approach.

Our logged flight time was 29 hours and 43 minutes, and shattered all records

for C-130 non-stop flight, both time and distance.

The publicly recognized previous longest flight had been just over 25 hours for a flight from Okinawa to Scott AFB near St. Louis in a C-130 equipped with Benson fuel tanks inside the cabin, but without external refueling.

What was not publicly recognized at the time was a previous 27 hour and 45 minute non-stop flight in an 8th SOS MC-130 Combat Talon – flown by Hurlburt Field aircrew members - that began 7 February 1977 from North Island Naval Air Station (NAS), CA, and landed at Cubi Point NAS in the Philippines. After three en-route refuelings – one over Hawaii, one between Hawaii and Guam, and one directly over Guam – the crew followed up with a night, terrain-following, low-level mission that terminated with a 0200 hours SEAL team airdrop at Green Beach Drop Zone at Subic Bay, Philippines. That aircrew included Bob Meller, Jerry Nichols, Jack Holbein, Rueben Cole, John Davis, Terry Jahnke, Rick Bakke, and another as yet unidentified flight engineer from the 8th Special Ops Squadron.

That Combat Talon flight was conducted after the Israelis’ successful hostage rescue raid on Entebbe, Uganda in Operation Jonathan, and was spurred on at the behest of Pentagon who wanted to know if US special operations aircrews could support such a raid, if necessary. With such a long flight, the aircrew came up with a novel nickname for the flight – Special Operations Air Refueling and SEAL Support, or “SOAR-ASS,” which was certainly an appropriate name for such a long mission.

No doubt the flight of then-Capt Meller and his MC-130 crew in a pressurized aircraft was exhausting. The AC-130 could not be pressurized, though, so the fatigue effects on the crewmembers were increased by the requirement to fly at 10,000 foot cabin altitude and slightly higher during aerial refuelings. This can be quite tiring in a vibrating, slow-moving, aircraft on a 30 hour flight.

Crewmembers on our record-breaking flights were later awarded Air Medals, but would not receive the medal until almost a year later, and only after Lt Col John Gallagher and Capt Donn

Kegel worked up a classified nomination package at HQ TAC to get approval.

The flights were supposedly secret, but on arrival the base Information Officer took photographs, and the next day the Andersen AB paper had a headline that screamed “STRIKE FORCE ARRIVES GUAM.” So much for operational security, but I don’t think any Iranians were reading the Guam papers! We crew members had a few beers, celebrated a safe flight and a new world record, and repeatedly toasted our drinks to the special operations motto: “Anytime, Anyplace.” After a few too many drinks, a trio of 16th SOS aviators sang “Ghost Riders in the Sky” which is the unofficial theme song of the Spectres.

Once AC-130 local training began at Guam, new stealth procedures were needed to be able to penetrate Iranian airspace without drawing attention to the aircraft during ingress. There was nothing magical about what occurred; it was a trial and error process. A formation of two would fly, experiment with radio-silent, lights-out procedures (using flashlights with red lenses for signalling), then debrief, and put the amended procedures down on paper to be distributed to the other crewmembers for implementing during the next night’s flying.

I alternated shifts with Capt Herman “Bubber” Youngblood typing the revised procedures; we used a lot of paper and went through a lot of correction ribbon.

Aircraft lighting in the cockpit was kept to the dimmest position. Any warning lights that could come on in flight such as the Propeller Low-Oil Warning Lights or the Engine Low-Oil Warning Lights were covered with small squares of dark-colored duct tape. A warning light in a dark cockpit can cause loss of night vision at a critical time and wreak havoc, especially if the crew happens to be flying with the aid of night-vision goggles.

The goggles we experimented with were very rudimentary, the old AN/PVS-5 NVGs the Army had bought for ground or helicopter use only. Peripheral vision was non-existent without taking the NVGs off, which defeated the purpose of using them.

As techniques developed, equipment maintainers experimented with cutting away part of the NVG lower face plate

which allowed the crewmember to look forward through the goggles lenses, and downward, under the light tubes, to check cockpit gauges, navigation instruments, or other critical items. Later on, the Air Force would purchase the ANVIS-6 which was designed for aviation purposes. Litton Industries made those, and they sold for some 23,000 dollars per set – they were high dollar items, but critical for night time, lights-out flying.

We flew some live-fire missions on a water range 200 nautical miles northeast of Guam. We also flew some missions into South Korea where we honed our low-level skills. Communications were encrypted, using the KY-28 and KY-75 systems to assure security of communications on the FM and HF networks, respectively.

Approaching the fourth week of December, all but four aircrews returned home to Hurlburt for Christmas on a chartered DC-8. Those stay-behind aircrews were necessary for typhoon evacuation, should that situation arise.

At Christmas break and back at Hurlburt Field, Col Dunwoody decided to make a change in aircrew lineups. He called me in and asked if I thought I could train him adequately for him to command the lead crew on the mission into Iran, with me flying in his right seat. Of course, I said I felt I could.

By January 9th we were back in Guam with Dunwoody in the left seat and me in the right seat, teaching my wing commander to fly night formation, radio-silent, lights-out, in-flight re-fueling to prepare for one of the most hazardous missions imaginable. Results of the training at Guam yielded several innovations, to include developing blacked-out, radio-silent formation procedures, many of which are still in effect today. We also came up with procedures to fly low-level, accelerate to maximum AC-130 speed, then abruptly pull-up in a steep climb and fire on targets once reaching the top of ascent.

We trained to hit separate targets with two aircraft in concentric orbit, separated by 1000 feet of altitude. The trick was for the higher orbit aircraft to avoid shooting down the aircraft in the lower orbit. The low-light-level TV (LLTV) and Infrared sensor operators, navigator, and scanners

were critical in that endeavor. They sometimes had to call for a cease fire, if the lower aircraft cut through what would have been the downward trajectory of a fired weapon.

We even flew some live-fire missions with external fuel tanks mounted – this had previously been deemed too hazardous due to proximity of the gun barrels to the tanks, but these were trying times and circumstances, and we were determined to make the mission a success. A premature detonation – called a “boomer” – with a 105mm howitzer could possibly explode the portside external fuel tank and cause loss of the aircraft and crew, so planners did not decide to levy this type training without a lot of discussion beforehand.

On 31 January, I deadheaded on a flight from Andersen back to Hurlburt and prepared to fly on our first rehearsal over a mockup of the Tehran embassy located in the Nevada desert. On 2 Feb 80, Maj Couvillon and I flew a rehearsal mission on aircraft # 69-6567 with Delta Force – from Hurlburt Field to an area near Indian Springs Auxiliary Field (near Nellis AFB), NV, with a 55-minute overhead loiter time projected. There was a simulated American embassy compound with assault forces doing a run-through practicing their individually assigned objectives.

Maj Lewis H. “Bucky” Burruss, the Delta Force S-3, was on the ground to coordinate air-to-ground fire over FM radio.

Communications with the fire coordinator were always over FM radios keyed up to ensure secure transmissions. The American embassy in Tehran was huge: 27 acres with 14 buildings and over 90 rooms that would have to be cleared. The exterior walls that had to be breached were 12 feet high – a tall order, no doubt.

This was our first time to work with the Delta Force fire coordinator. The flight was a planned 15 hours and 15 minutes duration (including the loiter over the Embassy compound mockup), and some 3,770 miles round trip, but our butts were getting accustomed to long flights, and we managed to get back on the ground at Hurlburt after a mere 14.8 hours. Also, this was our first time to rehearse with a combination of the

assault team and helicopters. Code and beacon problems were abundant for the helos, many communication relays were required due to their radio problems, the #4 helo had many other problems, and to top it all, the helos were late.⁶

On February 9th we again flew from Hurlburt to Honolulu, then on to Guam on February 11th (logging a total of 30.2 hours on these two legs). We were becoming accustomed to “SOAR-ASS” missions by this time.

Col Tom Wicker (1 SOW/Deputy Commander for Operations) was aboard, and Capts Howard Solomon and Ron Lovett were my other pilots on that flight. We flew two additional local training missions at Guam, then came back stateside on March 1st and 2nd (a total of over 28 hours on the these two legs back to Hurlburt; my logbook was filling up fast at that pace).

In the next weeks back at home station, I flew 10 local sorties, mostly giving check-rides in the Eglin AFB/Hurlburt Field area to other squadron pilots, and sometimes thinking nothing would ever happen regarding the ongoing problem in Iran. Then out of the clear blue came the notice that the hostage rescue attempt was a go. 🕊

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

References

1. Jimmy Carter Library and Museum.
2. The Age of Sacred Terror, Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, Random House, 2002, pg 52
3. Crusade, The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War, Rick Atkinson, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, pg 279
4. Lt Col Wayne Thom, USAF (Ret), email with personal account, November 6, 2010
5. Lt Col Carlos “Svenson” Garcia, USAF (Ret), email with personal account, October 15, 2010
6. Author’s personal notes and de-briefing from the 2 Feb 80 rehearsal flight at compound near Indian Springs, NV

DEFINES THE TERM: BRING IT ON

When going into action, Special Operations teams only care about one thing — their “no fail” mission. The MC-130J Commando II is the right choice for any operation. Infiltration, exfiltration, precision airdrop, and air-to-air/rapid ground refueling. Lockheed Martin delivers the capability to complete every mission. Every time.

www.lockheedmartin.com/c130

100 YEARS OF
ACCELERATING
TOMORROW

LOCKHEED MARTIN



A year with the Afghan Air Force

By Maj Lee Baker



In the spring of 2010 I was tapped for a 365-day deployment, and through the efforts of my leadership, and with a little bit of luck, I was selected for training to become an An-32 Advisor Pilot. Notionally, I was to work as part of NATO Air Training Command – Afghanistan (NATC-A), but in practice would be embedded within the Afghan Air Force. We were charged to fly missions with Soviet-era trained aircrews to identify corruption and provide an “eyes-on” capability. Meanwhile, the rest of NATC focused on the bigger picture of building the new Afghan Air Force based around a fleet of Mi-17 rotary-wing and refurbished C-27A fixed-wing aircraft. Nothing could have prepared me for the adventure and challenges I would face.



Top Photo: Lee Baker at Fayzabad Airfield, Badakshan Province

Bottom Photo: Last flight on An-32 stopping for lunch downtown Chekcheran. From left to right: Abdul Gul the navigator, Lee Baker, and Pilot Anwar Hadeen.



Afghan crew on the bridge over Helmand River, standing on the border with Iran.

The first step in my adventure was simply Googling “An-32” to learn about the airplane. Turns out it’s a significantly upgraded version of the veritable An-26 light transport aircraft which is a common sight in most Eastern-Bloc nations. The An-32 was custom built for high mountainous environments such as South America, India and Afghanistan where the USSR had employed their Afghan fleet, along with numerous other Antonov transports and MiG fighters over the years. The aircraft was built in Kiev, Ukraine and I would be attending the National Flight Academy located in the small town of Kirovograd to get my check-out in the aircraft.

The training for the An-32 was surreal, particularly for those of us who joined the AF in an era dominated by the Soviet threat. Once a hallmark of the Soviet advanced flight training program, the Academy still taught aircrew and air traffic control courses for most of their former satellite nations. Although Ukraine is now a part of the EU and is working for entrance into NATO, signs of their former life as part of the Soviet Union were everywhere. Fading sickles and hammers still adorned the doors, pictures of former USSR commandants hung on the wall looking like characters from a Tom Clancy novel, even our hotel on Karl Marx Blvd looked like it was straight out of a movie. My instructors were mostly former Soviet pilots, many themselves veterans of their own Afghan war. I am grateful to those wonderful

instructors and translators who helped me manage through a course taught entirely in Russian (which I do not speak), to become checked out as an instructor in a plane I had never before seen, and whose instruments (written entirely in Cyrillic) I barely understood. At the conclusion of my course, former 6 SOS/CC Eric Huppert arrived to administer my evaluation on behalf of 19 AF, and suddenly I was an An-32 “Cline” instructor pilot ready for whatever might come downrange.

Before I could deploy, I had to attend a one month Air Advisor course at

Ft Dix, NJ. The course taught a variety of useful skills such as tactical driving, enemy weapons familiarization, convoy management, and most importantly of all, a crash course in Dari, the official government language of Afghanistan. As silly as I felt constantly shaking hands with my classmates and practicing simple greetings in Dari, looking back it was the best and most useful thing I got out of the course.

When I arrived in Kabul in Aug 2010, the Afghan Air Force consisted of 5 remaining An-32s, 1 An-26 and a dozen or so Mi-17 helicopters scattered between Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. The first two refurbished C-27A fixed-wing aircraft had recently arrived, and I was assigned to the newly commissioned and quickly growing 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron. Our mission was to train the initial cadre of Afghan C-27 pilots in an all-weather, day-night, tactical mission. I had little connection with the actual training mission, as my charge was to embed with their legacy folks, fly as much as we could (the Afghans flew roughly 50% of the missions by themselves), keep an eye on them and perhaps identify a select few who were ready to transition to the C-27. In summary, my job was simply to “build relationships” which I came to learn



In a small boat on the Helmand River with Afghan navigator and loadmaster.

involved more chai green tea than I ever thought possible for one man to drink.

Flying the An-32 was an amazing experience. The Afghans had flown the aircraft since the final days of the Soviet occupation, and the aircraft had been a key part of their force during the devastating civil wars of the 1990s which ultimately gave rise to Taliban control. The wreckage of dozens of these aircraft, brought down both by the dreaded Stinger missile as well as from exceeding their own aeronautical abilities, littered the airfields and surrounding mountains. The fleet had largely sat idle since the post-911 invasion, but were being reinstated on a temporary basis to provide some airlift capability while the C-27 fleet came online. The average age of our pilots was 46 and many were pushing 60 or more. The navigators were the most fluent in English, as they were the ones who operated the radios on the aircraft, yet they tended to follow the script they were taught, and any deviations requested by air traffic control completely threw them off.

The flight engineer and the loadmaster typically had zero English training. This made flying the aircraft particularly difficult as it was the engineer who ran the throttles during all movement in flight including through touchdown. The aircraft had zero navigational equipment

aside from the navigator's GPS units we had provided (as well as my own GPS formerly used for hiking the New Mexico mountains that I clipped into the windshield).

The missions for the An-32 were tasked directly from the Afghan Ministry of Defense and were basically a standard combination of passenger and cargo airlift missions, medevac, and human remains returns. Thankfully, a couple of previous deployments in the Shadow had made me somewhat familiar with most of the airfields. The An-32 program was predominantly a day, VFR-only operation, and was equipped with zero defensive systems. The tiny cockpit did not allow for any personal body armor, with the exception of my lucky Auburn baseball cap. The US provided parts and fuel for the aircraft, but were largely hands-off in the day-to-day operations and enforced few rules or standards beyond a 40-pax limit based on seatbelt availability, and even that was a "soft" number. I quickly learned that my role for the time being was to be little more than a copilot flying with them to learn the ropes of how they did business. Any "advising" I was going to be doing with these crews would be ad hoc at best, though during my last few months they did allow the remaining pilot and I to fly as aircraft commanders in order to keep their own copilots flying.

Trying to find where I was supposed to fit in on the spectrum of copilot, advisor, mentor and instructor pilot was an ongoing challenge.

When people ask me what flying combat missions with the Afghans was like, the closest thing I can relate it to is the three years I spent flying the T-1 at Columbus AFB. The Afghans don't treat the war in the same way we do; for them it's just another day at the office. During a normal mission, it was expected upon landing that we would shut down and have lunch and chai with the local officials and any passengers, medical patients or human remains would just have to wait. If that pushed the mission too late to return before dark then we'd just spend the night and finish it the next day. This was something that happened with such regularity that I got to the point where I could just glance at the next day's schedule and pretty much guess when and where we were going to get stuck out.

As with most cultures in that part of the world, socializing is everything, and who you know is considered far more valuable than what you know. Although I admired how diligently the C-27 guys were trying to instill western concepts of efficiency and timeliness like eating MRE's on the go and doing engine-running on-loads, I sometimes believed they missed the bigger picture of how





With crew downtown Herat. (interestingly the man on the right in the blue is named Hashim. He was a former Su-22 pilot and was a POW in Pakistan for 2 years during the 1990's.

important maintaining the social fabric and connection among the Afghans scattered around the country was to them. It is truly a delicate balance trying to create an Air Force that meets the needs of the government, yet respects their culture and is sustainable over the long haul.

Most of our outbases had an Afghan-run dining hall, or “tamhana,” that served a basic fare of goat meat, chicken, rice, soup and some incredible fresh fruit. It wasn't unheard of to just commandeer a vehicle or hitch a ride to the local provincial governor's house for lunch, or even a kabob stand in town. For me, this situation forced some real soul searching as how to balance personal force protection with the need to forge relationships with the crew when out on the road. Not all advisors handled it the same way, but I did what I thought was necessary to accomplish the mission and still protect myself. If I did it over, I wouldn't do it any differently, and my experiences are some I will remember and cherish forever.

In Feb 2011, an event happened, which even by the standards of the strangeness of my year, took it to an even stranger level. During a routine flight to a civilian airfield in the western border town of Zaranj, an unforeseen thunderstorm washed out our dirt runway stranding

myself, my American flight engineer and the rest of my Afghan crew. We remained cut off from all coalition support literally on the Iranian border for seven days. We took refuge in a local government safe-house and were stuck waiting on the weather to turn and the airfield to dry so we could depart. Normally when I flew, I was provided a translator who could help aid the communication within my crew, as well as with the Afghan officials we would deal with throughout our missions. But I had decided to depart that day without our late arriving translator. I also forgot my cell-phone charger, even further cutting off my contact with the outside world. There was really little we could do outside of attempt to “go native” with our crew and trust them to take care of us, which they certainly did. A conversation with the 80+ year old airfield manager “Omar,” an amazingly fluent English speaker, the day we left put things in a unique perspective for me. I asked him if there were Taliban in town and what danger we had truly been in. He replied yes, of course there were, but that Zaranj was a very small town that prided themselves on being free of both Afghan and coalition military presence, so the local Taliban knew that to harass us would be to bring sure condemnation by their local population as well as no doubt bring in the US military, which

they certainly did not want. Whether or not that's true I do not know, but in any case, it worked and I was never happier to go “gear up” and return to our own forces.

Another interesting experience took place one night in Herat while we waited to do an Afghan commando move back to Kabul the next day. The local Afghan commando commander invited me for dinner at the nearby Afghan SOF compound and treated me to a spectacular show-and-tell of his forces and equipment. He convinced me that whatever one may feel about the run-of-the-mill Afghan Army, their SOF were highly trained, extremely professional, and 100% dedicated to security needs of the national government. During an evening stroll through a local watermelon field to speak to some nearby shepherds herding their flocks, he explained that he was in charge of the regional security over the entire western quadrant of Afghanistan. As such, he could quickly assemble and respond via ground transport or air, from US helicopter support, to any emergency that presented itself. A local US Marine unit provided mentorship for his teams, and I began to feel that if we just had a few more guys like him, we'd be that much closer to being able to fully turn security over to the Afghans.

One common question people have asked me was about corruption. It's an issue for the US trying to modernize their military. I mentioned earlier that the US had placed a limit of 40 passengers on the An-32. To the western way of thinking of course, 40 means just that...40. To the Afghans, 40 means “about 40” so there was always an effort by local aerial port officials to load more passengers than we could legally carry. And what we learned was that in many of the smaller fields where there was no commercial airline traffic it was common for wealthy people to pay the local aerial port officer a bribe for a ride on a military flight. Usually there was a small stipend added for the aircraft commander as well. In the Afghan system that's a win-win because everybody makes a little money, the civilian gets a cheap flight and nobody really knows or cares except for the military members and families of course who are left stranded. But that

was considered inconsequential. That of course is obvious corruption as we'd define it, but trying to root it out was almost impossible. Since a great many of our passengers were men, women and children in civilian clothes, and as I didn't speak the language well, it wasn't very difficult to talk around me to accomplish whatever they wanted to do and then deny it when confronted. It was only a few trusted Afghans who would occasionally let me in after the fact on what had happened. I'd report it, but of course there was little anyone could do.

In April of that year, an event happened which made our efforts deeply personal for me. An Afghan rotary wing pilot turned on us, and walking into our command post in Kabul, pulled his weapon and killed eight Air Force advisors and one civilian contractor. Among the dead was one of my closest friends since our Undergraduate Pilot Training days, Maj Jeff Ausborn. The loss of him and the others made a difficult situation nearly unbearable for me and many of the US advisors working so hard to develop relationships and mutual trust among our Afghan allies. I realize that they are but a few of the thousands of sacrifices made in this war, but their loss hurt me deeply and made it quite difficult to move on and continue the mission we were assigned. Within a week, and after some force-protection changes, we were back up in the air continuing much as we had been.

In June 2011, I was honored to fly the very last An-32 mission for the Afghan Air Force, closing out 30+ years of Soviet era fixed-wing aircraft operations, and turning over the airlift mission to the growing C-27 program. I spent my remaining two months teaching instrument classes to the Afghans, helping the select few we'd identified as candidates for C-27 training, and helping mentor the Afghan leadership on reassignment for the 192+ officers and enlisted who made up the An-32 program.

I want to close this article with a brief mention of my personal feelings on the Afghans. I imagine few American servicemen have experienced the closeness that I developed over this last year with "my Afghan family" as I called them. Like most, I too am frustrated over



Kunduz Airfield marked on a fragment of the tail of an abandoned aircraft.

the difficulties of working with a culture that is so vastly different from our own, and often saw that trying to mentor a system so intrinsically ingrained in their ways seemed like pushing back the tide. But on a personal level I found the Afghans to be among the warmest and most sincerely genuine and kind people I have ever met, and that kindness was extended to me over and over again. What they may lack in formal education and training they have made up for over the years of struggle with a genuine caring for each other and a willingness to do whatever it took to support themselves and their families, and that is enviable. While corruption certainly exists alongside what often seems like an unwillingness on their part to take charge and stop it, most Afghans I knew were genuine patriots who loved their country and wanted a better life for their children. They were very grateful for the US-led effort to help them achieve that goal. The Air Advisor program in Afghanistan is an extremely complex and difficult mission for everyone involved. Although I was extremely relieved for my assignment

to come to an end, I shall remain forever grateful that I was given this unique chance to be a part of something so much larger than myself. I pray that my efforts to forge relationships and help achieve our collective goals was helpful, and that I completed my mission with honor.

Note: For an interesting and more detailed commentary on the challenges of working within the Afghan culture I highly recommend the outstanding and thought-provoking Air War College paper "Multiplying By Zero" by Lieutenant Colonel Michael C. Veneri (easily found via an internet search). Simply substituting the word "basketball" for "aircraft" in his article gives a pretty accurate description of the challenges we faced. 🦅

About the Author: Maj Lee Baker is a career special operator and currently an MC/HC-130P Evaluator Pilot in the 550th Special Operations Squadron, Kirtland AFB, NM. He has been named the 2011 Air Education and Training Command recipient of the Gen. Paul K. Carlton Award for valor. He lives in Albuquerque with his wife Ginger and their two daughters Emmalee and Madelyn.

SNC SIERRA NEVADA CORPORATION
Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

Providing World-Class C4ISR Systems and Services

- Custom C4ISR Systems and Services
- Wide-Area Airborne Surveillance

Empowering our forces for over 48 years with leading edge technical solutions

Providing unrivaled situational awareness and connectivity

11211 East Arapahoe Road
Centennial, CO 80112
Ph: 303-795-0604
www.sncorp.com
isr@sncorp.com

SSAI is a leader in supplying avionics systems engineering, program management and logistics for acquisition programs and aging aircraft DMSMS resolutions to Government and Industry.

"We proudly salute the Air Commando and their families."

SSAI is a proud sponsor of . . .

AIR COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

SUPPORT SYSTEMS ASSOCIATES, INC. **SSAI**

Michael C. Reynolds, Vice President
Air Force Business Development and Marketing
mreynolds@ssai.org
(478) 922-9987

www.ssai.org

CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS
708 S. HARBOR CITY BOULEVARD, SUITE 300, MELBOURNE, FL 32901-1942
(321) 734-5566 FAX (321) 734-6073

AIR COMMANDO ASSOCIATION Endowment Foundation

Providing assistance to wounded warriors and their families.

Support the foundation donate online at www.aircommando.org or contact the Air Commando Association at 850-581-0099

Email: endowmentfoundation@aircommando.org





193rd Special Operations Wing



From its inception as a pace-setting fighter squadron during World War II, to its present role as the only Air National Guard (ANG) Special Operations flying wing, the 193rd Special Operations Wing has remained on the leading edge, “Ready, Relevant, and Accessible,” quoting Brig Gen Weller (former Wing

Commander 2006-2012), to the needs of our nation.

On November 7, 1945, the 347th Fighter Squadron was deactivated as an active duty unit and on May 24, 1946, the mission was turned over to the newly allocated 148th Fighter Squadron, an ANG unit located at Spaatz Field (named after Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the United States Strategic Air Forces during World War II) in Reading, Pa.

The 148th Fighter Squadron was federally recognized February 27, 1947. As the first commander of the 148th, it was the job of Maj Richard B. Posey, an 8th Air Force veteran and seasoned combat pilot, to create a combat-ready force equal to any fighter unit in the world. Posey worked with the local news media to recruit area residents who met the personnel requirements established by the US Army Air Forces.

Following World War II, thousands of veterans of the war returned home to America. While the number of active-duty personnel decreased, the number of airmen in the newly formed Air National Guard units across the country increased. Within three months, the 148th grew to a total of 73 members (20 officers and 53 enlisted). The first aircraft assigned to the unit were two AT-6As, an advanced trainer aircraft flown during World War II. Within the first few years, the 148th reached its complement of 25 P-47D Thunderbolts, four A-26s, four AT-6As, one C-47 and one L-5.

“Starting practically from scratch in 1947,” recalls Posey, “Air Guard leaders were tasked to build up the Guard and to make it a combat-ready force. In the 148th Fighter Squadron, gunnery practice became the focus of training for the pilots in addition to fighter tactics and instrument training. For this, the squadron was able to secure the use of a ground gunnery range at nearby Indiantown Gap Military Reservation.”

In March 1950, Maj Ogan, commander, announced that the unit’s role was to change from “fighter” to “interceptor,” as the responsibility of the 148th was now to engage enemy aircraft attempting to penetrate US airspace. Originally, the 148th was scheduled to trade in its F-47s for jets, but because Reading’s longest runway was only 5,150 feet, the 148th changed from its familiar F-47 Thunderbolt to the F-51 Mustang aircraft. Although the Mustang’s technology was outdated compared to jet-engine aircraft, the 148th was told by the National Guard Bureau that it would have to extend its airstrip before receiving newer aircraft.

As the unit lobbied Congress for monies to extend the runway, US-backed South Korea was invaded by Soviet-trained and supported North Korea on June 25, 1950. On December 22, 1950, the 148th Fighter Interception Squadron was notified that it would be called to federal active duty the following year.

From February 1951 to October 1952, the squadron became attached to the 26th Air Division as part of the Eastern Air Defense Force assigned to Dover, Delaware. Its mission was to fill in for active duty personnel sent overseas and to defend the east coast of the United States against enemy invasion. While the majority of members remained at Dover for the duration of the Korean conflict, a number of Guard members, mostly pilots, were reassigned to units in Asia. Of those pilots, five never returned. Capt Charles E. Mack, 1st Lt. William M. Glaser, 1st Lt. Donald G. Grey and 1st Lt. David H. Morris were killed in action, and Lt Col Milton F. Glessner Jr., former senior



F-51 Mustang aircraft in 1957 at Spaatz Field at the Reading Airport, then home of the 140th Aeromedical Transport Squadron of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard. (Photo: www.193sow.af.mil)

instructor for the 148th, was reported missing in action after his F-51 crash-landed in Korea.

During the course of the Korean War, the Air Force gained fame for rapidly transporting wounded soldiers. Anxious to pursue the possibilities offered by this new idea of conveyance, the US Air Force began to change the missions of certain fighter units.

1956 marked the end of an era for the 148th. Propeller-driven fighters were rapidly being replaced by jets, and the runway at Spaatz Field still had not been lengthened. So on May 1, following a failed attempt to have the unit relocated to Admire Airport in York County, the 148th Fighter Squadron became the 140th Air Transport Squadron. The glorious days of fighter planes had ended. Capt Nicholas J. Bereschak, commander of the 140th, was given the enormous task of converting a fighter unit into a transport unit as the Mustangs were replaced with C-46 Commando transports. The pilots who had flown nothing but fighters, many of them since World War II, had to start from scratch to learn to fly the larger, slower and less maneuverable C-46. On January 27, 1957, the members of the 140th ATS launched the last of the Mustangs and waved good-bye to the 148th Fighter Squadron forever.

In 1957, less than one year after converting to a transport unit, the 140th Air Transport Squadron became the 140th Aeromedical Transport Squadron and learned that it would receive the Fairchild C-119 "Flying Boxcar" as the unit's new mission aircraft the following year. In addition to pilots, copilots and

flight mechanics, each of the unit's 20 aircrews was expanded to include one nurse and two medical technicians.

During peacetime, their mission was to provide immediate and medically acceptable air transport service for evacuations within the Commonwealth. In wartime, the 140th was to provide that service for all military personnel.

By late 1960, the 140th was notified that it would be converting aircraft again. This time the switch was from the C-119J, which was being phased out of the active force, to the much larger and faster C-121 "Constellation." Although only switching type of transport, this aircraft conversion had much greater impact on the unit than any previous conversion. The C-121s could not be based at Spaatz Field because of the airport's short runway and inadequate glide slopes.

Representatives of Headquarters, Pennsylvania Air National Guard, and the 140th visited Olmsted Air Force Base in Middletown where a 10,000-foot-long runway had recently been built. Discussions concerning the relocation of the 140th from Reading to Middletown were quite favorable, and negotiations with the National Guard Bureau and the Air Force were initiated. Olmsted's total runway length could easily accommodate the large, four-engine C-121s, and the Middletown base was sufficiently close to Reading so that the 450 Guard members and 90 full-time technicians could continue their assignments.

On February 1, 1961, the 140th Aeromedical Transport Squadron was officially relocated to the sprawling Olmsted Air Force Base, ending 15 years

in Reading and an important chapter in the unit's history. By early 1961, the 140th was flying ten C-119Js, two of which were internally modified and soundproofed to make transportation more comfortable for patients. The unit traded in its C-119Js for eight C-121 Super Constellations by the end of the year.

On February 16, 1964, the 140th Aeromedical Transport Squadron became a Group and was extended federal recognition as the 168th Air Transport Group. The mission of the 168th was modified to include transportation of material and supplies in addition to the aeromedical transportation mission.

In 1965, as active duty aircraft were assigned to transport troops and equipment to Vietnam, Air National Guard transport units were tasked with the airlifting of gifts, Christmas cards and letters to military personnel stationed in Southeast Asia. From November 20 through December 14, the men and women of the 168th ATG took part in exercise "Christmas Star." A total of 3 flights flown by the 168th airlifted 15 and-a-half-tons of supplies, gifts, cookies, Christmas cards and letters donated by central Pennsylvanians to the US service members in Vietnam – a 90-hour flight. Lebanon bologna and Pennsylvania-made pretzels, among the favorite items delivered as donations, were received from throughout central Pennsylvania.

On January 1, 1966, the 168th Air Transport Group was redesignated the 168th Military Airlift Group with an authorized strength of 900 members. The increased manpower was offset by an equally increased workload. Each of the 25 Air Guard units that participated in "Christmas Star" was tasked to provide three airlift missions per month from January 1966 through June 1967 to the combat zones in Southeast Asia. During that period, the 168th Military Airlift Group flew 19 cargo supply missions to Vietnam. It also participated in 19 aeromedical evacuation missions to countries including Germany, Spain, Australia, Greenland, Africa and Japan.

Since 1961 the 168th/140th had been a tenant unit located on an active duty base; however, in November 1964, it was announced that Olmsted AFB was



March 1957 of a C-46 Commando nicknamed "the Jug" at Spaatz Field Reading Airport Reading, Pennsylvania. (Photo: www.193sow.ang.af.mil)

scheduled to be closed in mid-1967. After two-and-a-half-years of negotiation, the federal government ultimately transferred 643 acres of land to the Commonwealth. On June 20, 1967, an additional 45 acres in the center of the complex, determined to be of a high industrial potential, was sold to the Harrisburg Area Industrial Development Corporation for \$700,000.

In 1962, the United States was threatened by a build-up of medium range ballistic missiles on the island of Cuba. As military leaders prepared for the possibility of war, provisions for psychological warfare were established as a military requirement. Since the threat came from the inhabitants of an island surrounded by water, the US Navy was considered the logical choice to carry out the mission of transmitting radio broadcasts from ships anchored a safe distance away. Once the emergency subsided, little effort was made to further develop this technology.

In April 1965, the United States airlifted military forces to the Dominican Republic, attempting to stabilize conditions on that island and prevent a takeover by Marxist rebels. A rebel-operated radio station that continually broadcast information to resistance forces hindered the efforts of US military forces, operating alongside Dominican Republic governmental troops.

Upon conclusion of this military action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff once again set their sights on psychological warfare. This time the Air Force was tasked to create a mobile broadcast station on an airborne platform that would include television transmission.

Air Force and Navy already operated C-121 aircraft, used for early warning and control purposes. They had proven effective in broadcasting information to American forces in Vietnam. Attention then shifted to the C-121 Constellations, or "Connies," as the airborne psychological warfare aircraft of choice.

By 1966, the Air Force was making progress in developing plans for a psychological warfare capability that it named "Coronet Solo." Though progress was made at a steady pace, the question arose as to whether the mission scope was large enough to justify the time and monies necessary to fund a full-time

active duty unit.

Threatened by the closure of their host base and by the downsizing of all conventionally powered transport aircraft in the active, Reserve and National Guard force, the National Guard Bureau volunteered the 168th MAG for the "Solo" mission.

Although the concept was widely accepted, the approval for this program change was held in abeyance by the Defense Department since the total cost of modifying four C-121s to the electronic warfare mission was in excess of \$8 million.

With the outbreak of the Arab-Israel War in June 1967, the need for psychological warfare and intelligence monitoring capability was once again a priority. Approval was given to convert the 168th Military Airlift Group to the 193rd Tactical Electronic Warfare Group in June 1967, as a Tactical Airlift Command unit. Although the "Solo" mission was to remain consistent over the course of the more than 30 years that would follow, the capabilities of the 193rd remained shrouded in secrecy until it was (partially) declassified in 1989 when budgetary concerns compelled the unit to market its unique capabilities.

As the transformation of Olmsted AFB to Olmsted State Airport reached completion, Lockheed Aircraft Company scheduled four C-121s for modification to EC-121 configuration. The first EC-121 was delivered to the 193rd Tactical Electronic Warfare Group in the summer of 1968. Along with it came a new mission, which has remained consistent to this day.

Initially armed with the ability to transmit radio and black and white television signals (US standard only) from its aircraft to the ground below, the 193rd was able to broadcast psychological information anywhere in the world. Being airborne allowed transmission to cover a much larger area than a Navy ship broadcasting from a coastal position.

The 193rd's real-world capabilities were first tested July 28, 1970, when two EC-121 Lockheed "Super Constellations" departed Olmsted State Airport for Korat AB, Thailand, 12,000 miles away. It was the beginning of Operation Commando Buzz, and the electronically equipped

EC-121s were to perform psychological operations in support of US forces in Vietnam. The 193rd returned home with a perfect safety record. In addition, it was presented the USAF Outstanding Unit Award and commended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for its dedication and professionalism.

As word of the 193rd's unique mission spread throughout military circles, the unit became involved in Air Force, Navy and NATO operations and exercises. Soon the 193rd was being tasked with as many as 10 deployments a year, more than any other unit in the Air National Guard.

In June of 1972, the 193rd was called upon to aid, in a less technical yet equally important capacity in its first domestic crisis. Hurricane Agnes, a tropical storm that experts predicted would lose much of its momentum as it traveled inland from the Atlantic Ocean, collided with a cold front moving in the opposite direction. The result was a flood like south-central Pennsylvania had never known.

Members from the recently named Harrisburg International Airport provided security, controlled pedestrian and vehicular traffic and relocated truckloads of food from local grocery stores to locations on higher ground. On base, all military aircraft had successfully been evacuated except for three of the Connies that were undergoing maintenance and were not flyable.

By the time the waters receded, the 193rd and the Air National Guard had proved to be valuable assets, not only to the security of the United States as a whole, but to the local population as well. During the flood, many of the same "citizen-soldiers" of the Pennsylvania Army and Air National Guard called upon to participate in war-time activities around the globe, worked alongside neighbors, friends and family members in response to this domestic emergency.

1977 was significant to the 193rd: it changed aircraft from the C-121 Super Constellation to the newer C-130 Hercules. This exchange marked the seventh and final aircraft conversion for the unit from 1946 to present.

Less than five years after the shock of Hurricane Agnes, the 193rd SOG was thrust into another civil crisis, again in



EC-121 Constellation on the flightline of the 193rd Tactical Electric Warfare Group at the Harrisburg International Airport in Middletown, Pa. in the late 1970's. (Photo: www.193sow.af.mil)

its own backyard. At 4 a.m., Wednesday, March 28, 1979, a combination of human error and mechanical failure started a chain of events that would make the words “Three Mile Island” synonymous with disaster. Pellets of enriched uranium fuel overheated and melted through the containers in which they were held. Small amounts of radioactive vapor from the uranium were released for the next three hours. By 11:30 a.m. the official word from the nuclear generating facility was that everything was under control and that there was no danger to public health.

However, as the extent of the damage was further investigated, the 193rd's disaster preparedness team was asked to perform hourly radiation readings. On Friday, March 30, Harold R. Denton, director of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, was flown into Harrisburg and driven to the site by Guard members. The 193rd Group Commander, Col Nicholas Bereschak, had authorized a 24-hour operation as materials, equipment and top nuclear scientists from around the world were flown to Harrisburg to prevent a possible meltdown. C-123s and 141s arrived with over 100,000 pounds of lead bricks to be used to build radiation shields, and a USAF C-5A delivered weather equipment to gather temperature, atmospheric pressure, and wind speed readings to calculate radioactivity

patterns. When President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn, arrived at Harrisburg International Airport on Sunday, April 1, they were shown to the commander's briefing room at the 193rd Special Operations Group headquarters building.

More than a month passed before the men and women of the 193rd returned to normal operation and could reflect on the events that transpired. As is the case with most major historical events, many members of the 193rd today can still recall where they were and what they were doing when they heard about “the accident.”

As technology continued to advance at an increased rate throughout the 1970s, televisions and radios became more common in the homes of people, not only in the United States, but throughout the world. As a result, the ability of the 193rd to effectively carry out its mission grew by leaps and bounds.

Rather than fly over their destination with linguists and rely on live broadcasts to spread their message, further modifications to the EC-130 allowed technicians to broadcast previously edited video and cassette tapes.

Known as “Volant Solo” while attached to Military Airlift Command and later “Commando Solo” under Air Force Special Operations Command, the 193rd adopted the motto “Never seen, always

heard.”

Once psychological operations information is gathered and processed by Air Force and Army officials, it is converted to audio cassette, 10-inch reel-to-reel tape, 1/2-inch VHS tape, 3/4-inch U-Matic tape or written as a script for live transmission. The chosen medium is then broadcast in the Medium Frequency, High Frequency, Very High Frequency and Ultra High Frequency ranges, FM radio, or color television in a format consistent with that of the receiving population.

While jamming an enemy radio or television signal on one channel, technicians then transmit their material on an adjacent channel. Once the listener becomes frustrated and changes the channel, he or she receives the PSYOP broadcast.

In October 1983, the unit supported Operation Urgent Fury as US forces entered the island of Grenada to rescue American medical students being detained by communist forces. Throughout the mission, the 193rd transmitted messages stating that all aircraft were to stay clear of Grenada airspace. Once ground radio stations were secured by US forces, the 193rd broadcast “Spice Island Radio,” which provided the island's inhabitants with information pertaining to US intentions and updates on the progress of clean-up procedures that followed.

In December 1989 during Operation Just Cause, the 193rd SOG disrupted President Manuel Noriega's ability to mobilize troops while urging the citizens of Panama to stay off the streets during the invasion.

In 1990, the 193rd joined the newly formed Air Force Special Operations Command, and the wing's aircraft were re-designated Commando Solo, with no change in mission.

In 1990-91, Commando Solo was deployed to Saudi Arabia and Turkey in support of operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Among the first units called upon to participate in Operation Desert Shield, the 193rd broadcast “Iraq the Betrayed,” a specially recorded program that urged Iraqi forces to surrender. More than 50 percent of the Iraqi POWs indicated that the message influenced their decision to throw down their weapons. In addition to their wartime mission, the

193rd became known as the “Voice of the Gulf,” broadcasting news and sports programs to Allied forces stationed in Saudi Arabia.

On July 5, 1994, the “Quiet Professionals” of the 193rd began a humanitarian mission to help curb the massive reaction by the people of Haiti to President Clinton’s safe haven policy. As thousands of Haitians took to the sea on makeshift rafts in an attempt to reach US soil, the unit broadcast messages in Creole stating that “no one will be allowed entry into the United States, so don’t take on the life-threatening journey.” The US Coast Guard reported the number of boats taking to the sea decreased steadily once the broadcasts started and soon fell to zero. Commando Solo was also used to broadcast radio and TV messages to the citizens and leaders of Haiti during Operation Uphold Democracy. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was featured in these broadcasts, which contributed to the orderly transition from military rule to democracy.

In 1995 the 193rd Special Operations Group was redesignated the 193rd Special Operations Wing. The men and women of the 193rd pride themselves on saving lives rather than taking them. While critics of the unit’s mission dismiss it as nothing more than “broadcasting propaganda,” it should be noted that the 193rd broadcasts information, often unavailable in closed societies, allowing the listeners to arrive at their own conclusions.

As technology continues to advance, the scope of psychological warfare has broadened. On June 16, 1997, a team of technicians from the 193rd was flown to Edwards AFB, CA, to collect data on the Phased Array Satellite Communication Antenna. Created for the purpose of live television reception by commercial airlines, the Phased Array was a prototype antenna able to receive satellite transmission while airborne. Arrangements were made to test this new piece of equipment – using Commando Solo as a platform to test the antenna for its potential to rebroadcast PSYOPS.

Continuing its tradition, in 1997 the 193rd SOW and Commando Solo supported the United Nations’ Operation Joint Guard with radio and TV broadcasts over Bosnia-Herzegovina in support of



An EC-130J Commando Solo aircraft prepares to land at an air base in Southwest Asia.
(US Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Tia Schroeder)

stabilization forces operations.

In 1998, the unit and its aircraft also participated in Operation Desert Thunder, a deployment to Southwest Asia to convince Iraq to comply with UN Security Council resolutions. The Commando Solo was again sent into action in 1999 in support of Operation Allied Force. The aircraft were tasked to broadcast radio and television into Kosovo to prevent ethnic cleansing and assist in the expulsion of the Serbs from the region.

In 2001, the Commando Solo aircraft broadcasted messages to the local Afghan population and Taliban soldiers during Operation Enduring Freedom, and from 2003-2006, Commando Solo was deployed to the Middle East in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror. Most recently, the EC-130J (CS) and the EC-130J (SJ) have been redeployed to the Middle East in support of overseas contingency operations.

Currently the 193rd Special Operations Wing is responding to the needs of their Major Command “STAYING RELEVANT.” Air Force Special Operations Command’s increasing mobility requirements for Special Operations Forces and equipment. The unit and its aircraft provide approximately 750 flying hours annually supporting this mission called SOFFLEX or SOF Mobility. For this mission, the 193rd SOW has been approved to train and execute Night Vision Goggle Air Land Operations, Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP),

Military Information Support Operations Leaflet Drops, and Military Freefall maneuvers such as High-Altitude/Low-Opening (HALO), High-Altitude/High-Opening (HAHO), among many other overt and covert maneuvers.

The 193rd Special Operations Wing is proud to be assigned to the Air Force Special Operations Command and is dedicated to meeting the needs and expectations with outstanding operational execution. In 1998, the 193rd assumed command of several outstanding geographically separated units making the wing the third largest Air National Guard unit in the United States. Regional Support units of the 193rd include the 201st RED HORSE Flight, 203rd Weather Flight, 211th Engineering Installation Squadron, 271st Combat Communications Squadron, 553rd Air Force Band of the Mid Atlantic, 148th Air Support Operations Squadron, and Detachment-One - Bomb Range at Ft Indiantown Gap, and the 112th Air Operations Squadron in, State College.

The 193rd is extremely proud of their 15 Outstanding Unit Awards. The wing is dedicated each day to demonstrating why they have earned these honors. The airmen who make up the wing are proud, dedicated volunteers that appreciate the relationship they have with their active and reserve counterparts, and the unit’s unique mission and aircraft continue to be a vital part of the total force of the United States military. 

About the Author: CMSgt Steve P. Hile is the Command Chief at the 193 Special Operations Wing.



Medal of Honor Recipient



MAJOR BERNARD F. FISHER

'An Air Force First'

By Harry J. Bright

The Situation

The A Shau Valley, South Vietnam, March 10, 1966. Tan Outpost, a triangular shaped fort with walls approximately 200 yards long with barbed wire around the perimeter, was under attack by communist forces. The camp was near a primary enemy route for infiltration into South Vietnam from Laos and was surrounded by mountains up to 1,500 feet high. It was defended by 17 US Army Green Berets, 210 South Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense Group troops (CIDGs), 149 Chinese Nung troops (Ethnic Chinese that immigrated from Yunnan Province of Southern China to Northern Vietnam. Several thousand resettled in South Vietnam after the 1954 conflict began) and 9 interpreters. They were dependent on air support for everything from food to ammunition.

They were in the second day of fierce, close quarters combat with approximately 2,000 enemy troops of the North Vietnamese Army. The camp had been overrun by the enemy and the defenders were holed up in mortar bunkers at the north section of the camp.

The Day Before

The initial attack on the camp the day before, March 09, 1966, resulted in a total

of 10 defenders killed and 60 wounded. An AC-47 gunship that had arrived on scene late the first morning was shot down after making a 2nd firing pass on the enemy outside the wire. While waiting for the rescue helicopter, the crew was attacked by North Vietnamese troops and the Pilot, Capt Willard M. Collins, and crewman SSgt Robert Foster were killed. The Co-Pilot, 1st Lt Delbert R. Peterson, successfully charged the enemy machine gun team with his M-16 rifle while the Air Force rescue helicopter picked up the remaining three crew members, leaving him and the dead behind. He would later be submitted for the Air Force Cross for his actions. Many searches were later conducted, but he was never found. He was declared dead on February 09, 1978.

A flight of two A1-E attack aircraft from the 1st Air Commando Squadron at Pleiku AB in South Vietnam were sent to Tan Outpost after the AC-47 was downed. Maj Bernard Fisher was the flight leader. The ceiling was 200-500 feet, with visibility of approximately 5 miles. Finding breaks in the cloud cover was a problem, and flying into the side of a mountain was a definite possibility. After finding a break in the low ceiling, Maj Fisher instructed his wingman to destroy the remaining parts of the AC-47

while he strafed the enemy around the fort. He called in additional A1-E/H aircraft to attack the enemy forces that were within a half mile of the camp, directed medevac helicopters to extricate the most seriously wounded, and flew above the ceiling to direct C-123 aircraft to paratroop much needed ammunition and medical supplies into the fort. After directing additional aircraft in the attack on the enemy forces, Maj Fisher and his wingman were dangerously low on fuel and returned to their home base. For his actions on this day, Maj Bernard Fisher would be awarded the Silver Star.

A total of 29 sorties by the Air Force, Marines, and Vietnamese Air Force had been flown during the day in defense of Tan Outpost. The weather conditions and low cloud cover prevented them from doing more. As night approached, the enemy fell back and regrouped for another assault later in the night. The remaining defenders prepared their defenses. At approximately 0200 hrs the morning of the 10th, the mortar attack was renewed with deadly accuracy. By 0330, a full scale attack was in progress. The ground command radioed the C-123 and AC-47 aircraft that had been flying over the camp and dropping flares during the night, informing them of the situation.

The Day

In the late morning hours of March 10, 1966, the defenders of Tan Outpost called for air strikes on the entire camp except the north end where they were located. The enemy occupied the south wall and part of the east wall. A flight of 6 A-1E/H aircraft were diverted from another mission to provide air support for the Tan defenders. Bernard Fisher, again, was flying lead for his 2-ship element from Pleiku. In another group, Maj Dafford Myers from the 602d Fighter Squadron at Qui Nhon was involved in strafing runs on the camp. The enemy had lined the valley with anti-aircraft guns and an overwhelming amount of automatic fire was directed at the defenders and the incoming aircraft. Myers received several hits, disabling his plane's engine. He radioed to the other flyers "I'm hit, and hit hard." Leaking oil was covering the windshield, leaking fuel was burning, and smoke was in the cockpit. His visibility was limited.

Dafford 'Jump' Myers was flying too low to bail out. His only option was to crash land on the PSP (perforated or pierced steel plank) runway which was damaged and full of ruts and holes. Myers brought his aircraft down on to the steel deck runway, gear up, to a belly landing. He slid along the decking until his belly tank, which wouldn't release from the aircraft prior to the crash landing, ignited and exploded. The plane then skidded to the right side of the runway and into an embankment. For a moment the fire blew away from the right side of the aircraft and Myers exited the plane with only minor injuries. He found shelter in a nearby ditch.

Maj Fisher was able to observe all of this as it was happening and followed Myers' plane during the crash landing. He contacted Command and notified them there was a plane down and the pilot could be severely injured. They assured him that a rescue helicopter would be there shortly. He then rejoined the fight. After about 10 minutes, he realized the rescue helicopter was not in the area. He decided to land on the runway and perform the rescue himself, as enemy troops were closing in on Myers. He contacted the command post and told them what he was going to do and they told him that the runway was 3,500 feet long. As the A1-E could land on 3,000 feet, this would have been excellent except for one thing. The runway was actually only 2,500 feet long. He landed and stood on his brakes as he ran out of runway, dodging the debris and holes in the decking. At the very end of the runway he was able to slow his plane down to a speed that enabled him to turn it around and taxi in the opposite direction. After taxiing down the PSP runway approximately 800 feet, Myers stood up from his hiding place and waved to Fisher. Fisher stood on the brakes and brought the plane to a stop and waited for Myers to come to him. He saw Myers run for the plane, but he didn't get there soon enough. Fisher thought he might have gotten hit by the enemy gun fire that was directed at them. Fisher disengaged himself from his seat belts and assisted Myers into the plane, straddling the cockpit side wall and pulling Myers into the plane head first. Other Skyraiders were flying cover for him during the rescue. Not taking time to strap into their seats, he released the brakes and full throttled down the remaining runway and was airborne, clearing the trees and mountains.



Maj. Fisher prepares for a mission with the 1st Air Commando Squadron. (US Air Force photo)

When they arrived at Pleiku, the ground crew counted 19 bullet holes in his A-1E Skyraider.

The First Air Force Medal Of Honor

For his successful rescue of Maj Dafford 'Jump' Myers in the face of enemy gun fire and working on a runway that was not designed for A-1Es to land on, Maj Bernard F. Fisher was nominated for the Medal Of Honor. It was presented to him on January 19, 1967, at the White House by President Lyndon B. Johnson. He became the first living recipient of the newly created (1965) Air Force version of the Medal Of Honor, and the first airman of the Vietnam War to receive it. Prior to Vietnam, the four Air Force recipients of the Medal Of Honor were given the Army version of the medal, all posthumously. There would be five more Air Commandos who would earn the Medal Of Honor during the Vietnam War.

Lesser Known Facts

- Although born in California in 1927, Bernard Fisher was raised and educated in Idaho. He spent the end of WWII in the Navy, was in the National Guard from 1947-1950, and commissioned into the Air Force in 1951 before graduation from the University of Utah.
- He was a jet fighter pilot in the Air Defense Command until 1965, when he and several other pilots in his unit volunteered for duty in Vietnam.
- He flew 200 combat sorties during his year in Vietnam.
- After Vietnam he returned to the Air Defense Command to fly jet interceptors.
- Named in his honor: Col Bernard Fisher Veterans Memorial Park, Kuna, Idaho; Fisher Park in Clearfield, Utah; A portion of Utah State Route 193 near Hill Air Force Base site; Bernard F. Fisher Room at 353rd Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan. In 1999 the Military Sealift Command named the vessel T-AK-4396 as the MV Major Bernard F. Fisher.
- In 1981 Bernard F. Fisher was a candidate for the office of Governor, State of Idaho.

REUNIONS

- On May 3, 2008, 57 years since last attending classes, he received his diploma from the University of Utah.
- After retiring from the Air Force as a Colonel, he and his wife lived on a farm in Kuna, Idaho, raised crops, and he served on the state's commission for Pardons and Paroles. He also flew part time for a freight airline. He now lives with his son and daughter-in-law.
- In 1985 and 2005 he was inducted into the Gathering of Eagles Program and shared his story with young military officers.
- In May of 2008 he was awarded the Distinguished Alumnus Award by Detachment 850 AFROTC, University of Utah.
- The A1-E Skyraider that he flew during the rescue mission at the A Shaw Valley was crashed in 1967. It was recovered and returned to the USA. and rebuilt. It is on display at the National Museum of the United States Air Force, Dayton Ohio. Serial number 52-132649/tail number 32649.
- Fisher retired to Kuna, ID and Myers retired to Newport, WA, about 450 miles from each other. They kept in touch over the years. Dafford Myers had been promoted to Lt Col the morning of his rescue.
- As a boy, Bernard Fisher liked to build model airplanes and fly them. 🛩️

Sources for this article:

Congressional Medal Of Honor Society
AMC Museum, Dover Air Force Base, Delaware
www: Battle of A Shaw; Untold Stories of Vietnam; Rescue at A Shaw; Bernie Fisher's Page; Nationalmuseum.af.mil; Bernard Fisher-Vietnam War-youtube.
Attempts to contact Col Fisher were unsuccessful, as he is in poor health.



Bless the Children

Unskilled and uneducated laborers in Honduras have no opportunities for a future without extreme poverty.

You can change this by supporting the John Grove High School and Trade School Scholarships.

You can positively change lives and exemplify John's legacy through education for the poor children high in the mountains of Honduras.

Donate today to Bless the Children and The John Grove Memorial Fund and make a real difference in the war against poverty.

www.blessthechildreninc.org
Help Today!

CFC # 10016

Spooky AC-47 Gunship Reunion

September 6 - 8, 2012

4th Annual Spooky Reunion in Las Vegas Nevada

We are still seeking all personnel that dealt with "Spooky" 1965-1969. Anyone who was involved with "SPOOKY" in Vietnam in 1965-1969 is invited, as well as any others who were with Spooky.

US Air Force, 14th Special Operations Wing (formally 14th Air Commando Wing)

Contact: Junior Skinner 12226 SE 99th Ave.

Belleview, FL 34420

Email: juncherski@embarqmail.com

Phone: 352-307-6564

Mike Acosta Email: vengaboys5@hotmail.com

Phone: 312-213-1038.

Spooky AC-47 Gunship Organization has authorized True Vegas VIP Services to handle all the arrangements concerning the "4th Annual, Spooky AC-47 Gunship Reunion" to make booking your Las Vegas trip as easy as possible.

Email: Booking@truevegasvip.com

Toll Free: 1-888-878-3834 ext. 4

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

6 SOS Combat Aviation Advisors Reunion & Rotary-Wing Stand-Down Ceremony

September 28 -30, 2012

A 6th Special Operations Squadron reunion and stand-down ceremony for rotary-wing operations will be held on 28-30 September 2012 at Hurlburt Field, FL.

Planned events:

- Rotary-wing stand-down ceremony
- Updates on recent operations
- Aviation-foreign internal defense discussions
- Past successes and ideas on future direction
- BBQ and Family Day

The centerpiece of the weekend will be a ceremony terminating rotary-wing operations at the 6 SOS. The divestiture of the rotary-wing mission will mark the end of a proud chapter in the squadron, and all 6 SOS members, past and present, along with their families, are invited to attend.

For more information on the reunion or the ceremony, please contact Diane Beck at diane.beck@hurlburt.af.mil

To submit your organization's reunion information please email the following information to info@aircommando.org

Please make sure your submissions have:

Event date, event time (if applicable), location, sign up information, point of contact information, and a brief description of what it is.



Caring for the Families of Fallen and Wounded Air Commando Warriors

EDUCATING THEIR CHILDREN

Providing full college educations to the children of fallen Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps special operations personnel since 1980. Funding provided for tuition, books, fees, room and board.

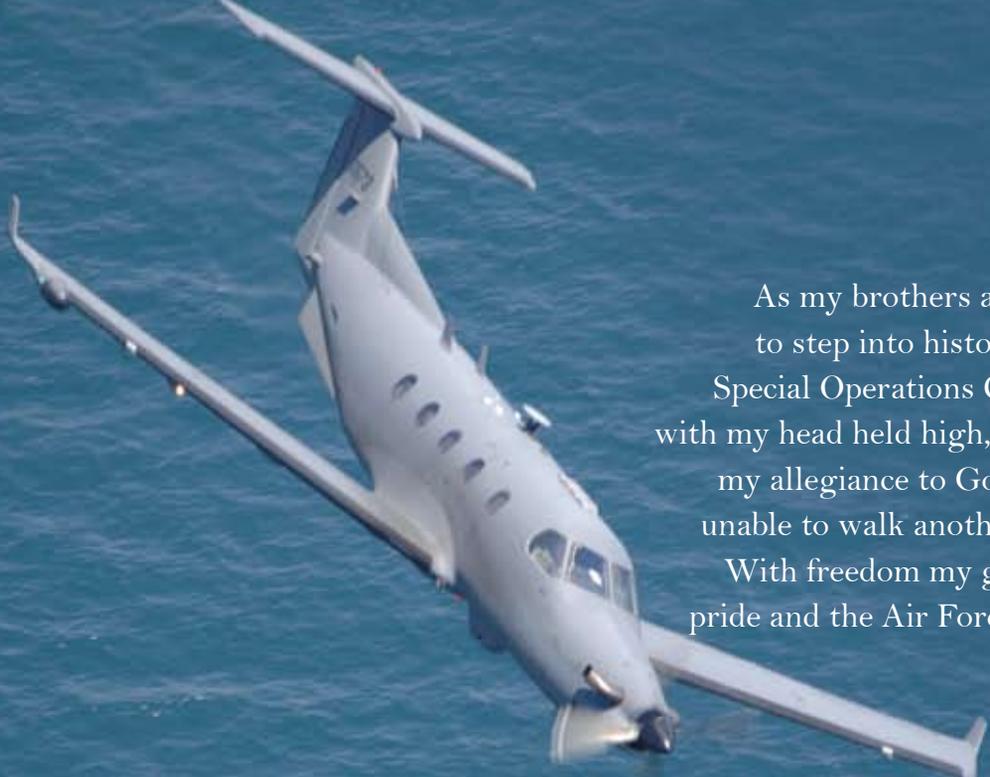
WOUNDED SOF WARRIOR SUPPORT

Providing immediate financial assistance to severely wounded special operations personnel. SOWF has provided over \$1.4 million in support of wounded SOF warriors since 2005.



CFC # 11455
www.specialops.org





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

Supporting Air Commandos



PAST • PRESENT • FUTURE

Become a member today at www.aircommando.org