

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

SEA

Air Commandos

Farm Gate: B-26s in Vietnam

Jungle Jim

C-123s

Photo Recon

Laos: Part 4



Foreword by Richard Secord, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)

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Project Big Eagle

A-26As deployed to Nakhon Phanom with Detachment 9, 1st ACW after being redesignated from the B-26Ks in 1966. The aircraft could carry over 6,000 lbs of napalm, high explosive bombs, plus 1,600 rounds for each of the 8 machine guns. (Photo donated to the Air Commando Association)



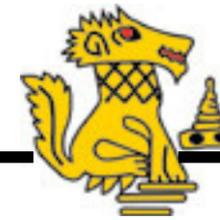
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It is my pleasure to introduce our readers to this 13th issue of the *Air Commando Journal*. Presented here are stories of little known special operations, principally in Southeast Asia (SEA), as we focus this quarter on air commandos in Indochina.

Although the Vietnam War is almost “ancient history” for most Americans, this long war saw a great expansion of air commando organizations and capabilities in South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, along with similar growth in the US, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. These seven stories give one a good sense of the range and scope of operations from which our modern AFSOC forces have evolved.

It is true that the Eagle Claw (Desert One) disaster in 1980 was the catalyst that kicked off the resurgence of US special operations capabilities. But the air commandos of the 1960s and ‘70s provided a sizeable foundation for today’s special operations air forces. At the height of the war in SEA, USAF air commando strength reached nearly 100,000 men and women, organized into 5 wings and with numerous smaller units deployed around the world. The articles in this issue of *ACJ* were written by men who at the time, were at “the tip of the spear.”



Their stories cover a wide range of air commando activities, beginning with Project Jungle Jim in 1961, which restored our modern USAF special operations force. Look for articles in upcoming issues that talk about Air Force SOF in another “forgotten” war, Korea, and how the capabilities and spirit of the air commandos were kept alive during the 1950s. We also promise articles on the US Army Air Forces “Carpetbaggers” from the Second World War and how those airmen pioneered air commando operations.

Always controversial in the all-jet US Air Force, air commandos again find themselves at the center of a classic conventional vs. unconventional capabilities debate—similar to the quality vs. quantity issue air forces have faced after every conflict since the end of the First World War. That debate continues today as our nation looks beyond over a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. My crystal ball is no better than anyone else’s, but every indication seems to be that air commandos and USAF SOF will continue to be key to our nation’s future security.

These articles offer insight into aspects of the war/post-war and quality vs. quantity debate, and how earlier air commandos “played the hands they had been dealt.” Things are changing, but the good news is that the leadership is working hard to create the optimum force mix—mobility, ISR, strike, and air-ground integration, plus active, Reserve, and Guard forces, to ensure the current and future air commandos are in the best position to deal with the unknown challenges that will undoubtedly come our way. It probably won’t be easy, but there is much to be optimistic about.

I trust you will find this issue to be a good read—I did. And as always, we welcome your comments and recommendations to improve our association and our journal.

Any Time, Any Place.



Richard V. Secord, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)
Chairman, Air Commando Association

Air Commandos have been doing the nation’s bidding quietly and without a lot of fanfare since WWII. We trace our roots back to when Cochran and Alison set the stage for what was to come over 70 years hence. There have been many milestones in developing capabilities since. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the evacuation of Saigon and it could be argued that the foundation upon which modern day Air Commandos operate was set in the early 1960s and into the mid-70s during America’s involvement in Southeast Asia. It was there that many of the basic tenets of covert use of airpower were established in a myriad of mission sets. In the early 1960s, foreign internal defense



became a basic mission set for air commandos in SEA, and also in Latin America and Africa. Today, the modern term for that mission is combat aviation advisors. It was also in SEA that the first use of modern side-firing gunships took place with the AC-119s, AC-47s, and finally AC-130s became close air support workhorses. Based on lessons learned by the WW II Carpetbaggers in Europe and the Air Resupply and Communications Squadrons during the early years of the Cold War, basic C-130s were modified into special operations platforms that became the MC-130 Combat Talons. Additionally, air refueling of helicopters was pioneered by the Air Force Rescue forces, which laid the groundwork for the evolution of the Rescue HC-130s into the latter day MC-130P Combat Shadows. Also, the Rescue workhorse helicopters, the HH-3E Jolly Green Giant and the HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant, evolved into the MH-53 PAVELOW with all of its added, special operations unique capabilities. Along the way, during the long war in SEA, the tactics, techniques, and procedures for these platforms and others were created and refined. Many are still employed today.

Of less importance in terms of combat capability, but significant in its own right, the veterans of these new aviation capabilities returned from

SEA and decided there needed to be an association that recorded and maintained the heritage of the Air Commandos. This group, under the leadership of “Heinie” Aderholt and others, formed the Air Commando Association in 1969. While the ACA was largely a fraternal organization in its early years, with an annual reunion and some modest charitable works, it has now evolved into an association with a much larger and very robust mission set. This publication is one way we have expanded our aperture and our outreach. More importantly though, the Air Commando Foundation is now a formidable force in carrying out efforts to meet air commandos’ unmet needs outside the realm of what is possible through government support programs.

Thus, both in terms of the critical development of the extremely viable and capable AFSOC in its 25th year, and the evolution of the Air Commando Association, air commandos owe a huge debt of gratitude to those veterans and pioneers who served in SEA. Therefore, we dedicate this edition of the *Air Commando Journal* to those brave and Quiet Professionals. We hope you find this edition educational and enjoy learning from the exploits of some great Americans who were dedicated to mission success.

Any Time—Any Place.



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

Continue Hope

I've enjoyed reading every issue of the *Air Commando Journal*, but I particularly liked the summer edition that featured the AC-130H. The article detailing Continue Hope operations in Somalia brought back a lot of memories.

I was the mission commander of the



two-ship strike package for the 16 June mission in Mogadishu and I was on Capt Forlano's aircraft for the two-engine out landing. I'd like to add a few details about the mission.

Both aircraft uneventfully flew into Mogadishu Airport to refuel for the night's sorties. Just after lift off, with a full combat load, the number 3 engine bleed air system on Forlano's aircraft failed. We were still getting some power out of it, so we let it turn until getting to a safer altitude before shutting it down. The disintegration of number 3 ended up jamming the controls to the number 4 engine. The copilot (Ferraraccio) had the foresight to place his hand on the fire handle, as he had to immediately use it to shut down the engine when the condition lever wouldn't go to FEATHER.

There was gunfire reported at the city end of the airport, so we elected to land from over the water despite a tailwind. The airport's navigation aids were inoperative that night. The navigator gave

us a rock-solid airborne radar approach... not the easiest feat with an APN-59 radar.

We did not want to close the runway, so after coming to a stop at the end, we taxied to the ramp even though the brakes were toasted. The egress on the ramp was uneventful.

I was able to hop on board the sister ship for their portion of the mission. After "Winchester," we landed back at Mogadishu. By then, the brakes on Forlano's aircraft had cooled. We transloaded the ammo onto the sister ship in the dark as we didn't want to leave a fully loaded gunship on the ramp. Forlano's crew (with the exception of the flight engineer who was left to mind the airplane) hopped on Timpson's aircraft and we returned to Djibouti.

All in all, it was an interesting evening

Take care and thanks to everyone working at the Journal...it's a first-class publication.

Mike Byers

Mike,

That is a great "rest of the story" rundown of a great mission and tremendous feat of crew coordination and airmanship! Thank you for sending and thanks for the great words. We have a great group of volunteer editors and Jeanette Moore is a master at designing a layout that is aesthetic, informative, and readable. We also owe our volunteer authors a great deal for all their hard work.

Thanks again and all the best!
Dennis Barnett

"Virtually" Unknown VN Air Commandos

The latest issue (Vol 3, Issue 4) is outstanding. I read it avidly.

The coverage of the 2014 ACA Hall of Fame inductees; "Finding History" by Patrick Charles; "Laos: the Secret War," Part 3, by Lt Col de Arrigunaga; and the book review of "Project 9 The Birth ..." are amazing revelations to me, and I expect to many other ACA members. Regarding the 2014 Hall of Fame honorees, particularly to me, CMSgt Anderson and LtCol Cole are amazing.

As are all the other honorees. "Any Time, Any Place."

I'd like to put in a pitch for more coverage of the virtually "unknown" — or in fact much less known — Spooky, Shadow, and Stinger Air Commandos of all ranks from the Vietnam War.

We're passing away rapidly. I've lost ten VN-era USAF Special Ops comrades in just the last two years. Even as among the rest of us, memories fade.

Then after Operation EAGLE CLAW in 1990 and the ramp-up of Air Force Special Ops integrated with our other Services' special ops after the post-Vietnam draw down, most eyes have been on our post-Desert Storm history.

I flew 207 night combat missions in Vietnam (and a few in Cambodia), in just a single tour, 1969-70, in piston-powered AC-119G gunships, flying 1500-3000 ft above the black night terrain, with few navigational aids. We saved countless Army, Marine, surface specials ops, firebases, and other groups out in the bush, sunset to sunrise.

Although the AC-119 lasted only 6 years in service, we had the pioneering starlight scope of any size, a pneumatic flare launcher, and a big xenon-arc spotlight that troops on the ground loved. In the shoulder-fired missile era of today, 10,000 ft above terrain is basic.

Vietnam-era special ops night pilots flew stick-and-rudder VFR, aiming fixed miniguns manually, no computers. And we often flew low-alt in "free-fire" zones at night on our own, with open pre-clearance from Saigon HQ for anything we saw.

None of that is to subtract a whit from today's great USAF Special Ops crews and their complex operations! We old boys often wish we could join them.

Just don't let our contributions fade as our memories fade.

William "Bill" L. Withuhn
Maj, USAF (Ret) ACA Life #3584
71 and 17 SOS, 7th AF
2 DFCs w/ "V," Bronze Star
Curator Emeritus, Smithsonian
Institution
Lake Camanche, CA

Dennis,

Another great journal. The compliment from John Correll, former editor of the *Air Force* magazine, says it all. I have read many of his articles.

It is so impressive and quite amazing the way you and your staff have made the ACA such a professional association. For so many years, we were content to have a friendly veterans' organization that was the result of our experiences in VN. You have made it special and Gen Aderholt would be proud.

Cheers,
Felix "Sam" Sambogna

Sam,

Wow! Thanks for the compliments, but you had a great hand in making the "transition" and deserve a bunch of the credit. Jeanette and the volunteer editors deserve all the kudos for the Journal. We are lucky to have dedicated employees that share the passion.

Dennis Barnett

Submissions can be e-mailed to info@aircommando.org or mailed to Hot Wash c/o Air Commando Association, P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569. ACA reserves the right to eliminate those that are not deemed appropriate. Thank you in advance for your interest in the Air Commando Journal.



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JUNGLE JIM

At the Tip of the Spear

Editor's Note: Excerpt used with permission from "Apollo's Warriors: US Air Force Special Operations during the Cold War," Published by Air University Press.

By Michael E. Haas, Col, USAF (Ret)

Generals don't lie. But at the very least, General LeMay's response stretched the truth like a bungee cord wrapped around the city of Los Angeles... twice. Only months earlier, the general had, at the urging of President John F. Kennedy, directed USAF's Tactical Air Command to establish a counterinsurgency (COIN) unit so secret that even the name of the program was classified. It was called "Jungle Jim."

In sharp contrast to the secrecy that surrounded the establishment of Jungle Jim in April 1961, the political impetus that drove its establishment burst forth on the world stage only four months earlier with all the garish publicity and fanfare accompanying a public hanging. And the would-be executioner, red-faced and puffing with righteous indignation, was none other than Soviet premier Nikita ("We will bury you!") Khrushchev.

In his televised speech to the Twentieth Communist Party Congress that January, a boastful Khrushchev had publicly told the West exactly how he would direct the spread of communism throughout the Third World, "Wars of national liberation are justifiable

and inevitable. . . . Communists support wars of this kind wholeheartedly and without reservation." Significantly, one of those who believed the Soviet premier was dead serious was the President of the United States.

Almost immediately, Kennedy responded with what subsequently became National Security Council Memorandum (NSCM) 56, the administrative vehicle by which all military Services (save the Marines) were tasked to form their own COIN forces. Existing Army Special Forces were expanded, while the Navy established its SEAL teams. For its part, the Air Force resurrected what would become known as the air commandos, a specialized, composite-type force not seen since World War II. So fast, in fact, did the military respond that these individual service initiatives were well underway before NSCM 56 was finalized in June 1961.

At General LeMay's instruction, Headquarters TAC directed its subordinate command, the Ninth Air Force, to activate the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Eglin AFB, Florida, on 14 April 1961. Within weeks its original mission to train USAF personnel in COIN air operations, was expanded to include the training of foreign air force personnel in similar tactics. Four months later, Headquarters TAC withdrew the 4400th from Ninth Air Force supervision to assume direct operational control of the unit, a highly unusual step for a major command headquarters like TAC. This move reflected both the growing sense of urgency attached to the Jungle Jim program, as well as the greatly expanded role and organization the concept was about to undergo.

The 4400th began with an authorized strength of 124 officers and 228 airmen. It was an all-volunteer force in which every individual had completed stringent physiology testing at the Air Force's medical complex in San Antonio, Texas, as well as USAF's rugged survival training school at Stead AFB, Nevada.

All-volunteer units such as the 4400th are relatively expensive to organize and always a drain of high-caliber talent from the ranks of existing forces. The activation of such units is one practice that every military tries to avoid

if suitable alternatives can be found. And it is precisely for these reasons that when these units are created, they are inevitably driven by urgent demands that they "absolutely, positively" must produce immediate results.

But what results could the Air Force expect from a group developed from scratch for a mission never before tried by the still young USAF and equipped with aircraft older than some of the pilots who flew them? Equally important, when would these results be produced? In April 1961, it was still too soon to tell.

The aircraft initially issued to the 4400th totaled 16 C-47 transports, 8 B-26 medium attack bombers, and 8 T-28 trainers. To fulfill the foreign advisory/

SC-47. The modifications included installation of HF, VHF, and HF radio sets, a parapack system (external, belly-mounted, container deliver system), an exhaust flame damper, JATO (jet assisted take-off) racks, loudspeakers for airborne broadcasting, anchor cables for personnel and equipment drops, and strap supports for litters.

The eight World War II-era B-26s, a type which first entered active service in 1941, came from the Ogden AMA, Utah. These were updated with UHF, VHF, long-range aid to navigation (LORAN), radio compass, radio altimeters, a solid nose with .50-caliber guns, 2.75- and 5-inch high-velocity air-to-ground rockets, napalm, and bomb racks, and a



C-47 aircraft shown dropping leaflets.

training mission, an equal number of aircraft by type were placed in storage for eventual transfer to designated foreign air forces. Unlike the stringent selection of the airmen, the aircraft were selected simply because the Air Force had no better alternative on hand for the kind of "bush warfare" described vaguely in military directives as "sublimated warfare and guerrilla operations." Could these old aircraft produce the required results? As was the case with the still untried airmen, it was still too soon to tell.

The 16 C-47s were heavily modified at the Warner Robins Air Materiel Area, Georgia, after which USAF changed the designation of the transports to

chemical capability; four were further modified for aerial reconnaissance cameras and a paraflare capability.

The T-28Bs came from Navy depots, as this two-seat trainer was still in active use at the Navy's flight school. They came to Eglin modified for the ground attack role. Modifications included installation of six armament pylons capable of carrying a combination of .50-caliber heavy machine guns, 500-pound bombs, 2.75-inch air-to-ground rockets, ferry tanks, self-sealing fuel tanks, and armor plating for pilot protection.

Clearly intended to fly in harm's way, this heavily armed COIN force was equipped to help take a bite out of

Khrushchev's ambitions for Communist-supported insurgency in the Third World. But before biting, they first needed training in this odd assemblage of aircraft, and it had to be done in complete secrecy. To help assure this secrecy, the group assembled at one of the many small airstrips on Eglin's vast reservation. Officially known as Eglin Auxiliary Field No. 9, the airfield would soon become much better known by its name, Hurlburt Field.

Though the Jungle Jim men and equipment were only beginning to sort themselves out during the early summer months of 1961, plans were already in place to begin their Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) early the following year; by USAF standards, a very short-time fuse indeed. Then HQ TAC cut the fuse shorter still, scheduling the ORI "graduation exercise" to begin 8 September, less than four months after assembling this experimental composite force! From the beginning, pressure from the highest levels to produce quick results never let up on the young group at Hurlburt.

Hurlburt Field became a pressure cooker with heat coming from every direction. President Kennedy's obvious interest, the growing clamor from the Army for its own air arm to support its Special Forces troops, and the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam, all drove the training pace for the 4400th CCTS. Fortunately for the Air Force, the "stew" in this pressure cooker was the 350 "Type A" personalities it had so carefully handpicked for Jungle Jim.

Pitting this high-performance group against an impossible schedule in the sauna-like summer of the Florida Panhandle created an astounding spectacle. Snarling piston engines reverberated around the clock, as did bursts of heavy machine-gun fire, rockets, and bomb explosions conducted all over the Eglin reservation. Parachutes blossomed over remote drop zones day and night from low-flying C-47s as new tactics were discussed, cussed, and finally agreed upon by the sweating aircrews and combat controllers on the drop zones. The scene in the maintenance hangars wasn't any prettier, of course. But a backbreaking, 24-hour-a-day effort

succeeded in doing what it had to do. It kept this "junkyard air force" in the air and on schedule.

In July the C-47s exceeded their flying hours during the already demanding training schedule by 47 percent; the T-28s by 35 percent. The following month, the C-47s and their crews were pushed to 65 percent over the flying schedule; the T-28s an incredible 72 percent. Only the B-26s suffered, their tired airframes kept down for lack of spare parts as the bombers flew 21 and then 5.5 percent under schedule for July and August, respectively.

Without notice and at random intervals, aircrews returning from exhausting missions were taken straight from the post-flight debriefing room into the nearby swamps for three-day escape and survival treks. After the first such surprise, a sharp increase was noted in the



T-28 aircraft

number of airmen wearing their aircrew survival vests as required by regulation.

Training for the 4400th stopped on 8 September, allowing the unit a short, deep breath before the all-important ORI was launched three days later. All the effort, all the team spirit, and all the work over Eglin's ranges would amount to nothing if the ORI team declared the unit and its airmen "not operationally ready." And nature, as an unofficial member of the ORI team, added a thoughtful touch to the realism by scheduling an especially heavy downpour just as the exercise kicked off.

In the ensuing six days, the 4400th

demonstrated everything it had learned and how well it had been learned. Four times, the old C-47 "Gooney Birds" were flung into the skies as if out of a slingshot to the roar and smoke of the multiple JATO bottles strapped to their fuselages. Meanwhile, the B-26s and T-28s thrashed nearly every blade of "enemy" grass on Eglin's gunnery ranges with a mixture of machine-gun, rocket, and bomb attacks. Problems—stemming primarily from malfunctioning of old equipment—were noted, but the ORI credited the 4400th with "maximum training in a minimum amount of time." More importantly, the new unit won the coveted "operationally ready" designator. From this date forward, life for the 4400th airmen divided into those remaining at Hurlburt to develop and advance COIN concepts and tactics, and those deploying overseas to execute those concepts.

From the beginning, the 4400th had conducted much of its training with US Army Special Forces troops deployed to Eglin from their base at Ft Bragg, North Carolina. To support this joint COIN training, the Army had even provided a Special Forces liaison officer to the Jungle Jim program to assist with paratroop missions. In return, selected airmen from the 4400th were sent to Ft Bragg to attend Special Forces Indoctrination School, while others participated in "survival training" missions with Army Rangers.

On 26 Mar 1962, the Army took this joint training effort a step closer by establishing the Remote Area Conflict



Air Commandos assigned to Det 2 and Vietnamese pilots during Christmas 1962 at Bien Hoa. (Photo courtesy of AFSOC History Office and George Lattin)

Office near the 4400th headquarters. It was an investment that would pay off handsomely in some of the most desperate battles soon to take place in faraway Southeast Asia (SEA). Still other investments would pay off even sooner.

In Mar 1962, the 4400th was expanded from squadron to group status. Within another 30 days, it expanded yet again—this time to become USAF's Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC). And with the activation of the SAWC came the concurrent reactivation of a subordinate unit, this one boasting the colors, heraldry, and proud heritage of one of World War II's most famous combat units—the 1st Air Commando Group. Clearly this frenetic expansion rate was being driven by some very serious political clout. Despite the obvious signals, however, already there were rumbles of discontent coming from some equally serious players in the Pentagon, ones wearing US Army uniforms.

The Army had long recognized air support as the key to expanding the number of Special Forces units it could support in remote locations, especially those in South Vietnam. To provide this air support, it purchased several twin-engine C-7 Caribou short takeoff and landing (STOL) transports, aircraft approximating the performance of the

Air Force's C-123 Provider transports. During this same period, Army helicopter companies began expanding to a size that would reputedly give the US Army the world's fourth largest air force by the late 1960s. And finally, the Army began arming its twin-engine OV-1 Mohawk reconnaissance aircraft with air-to-ground rockets to conduct armed reconnaissance missions over hostile territory.

To the Army's proponents of an organic air force, the newly activated Air Commando Wing appeared a direct competitor for funds pouring into the Department of Defense for the hottest politico-military game in Washington in 1961—counterinsurgency. Flying from areas in which the "all jet" Air Force did not routinely operate, the air commandos could be viewed fairly, if crudely, as a "propellers in the weeds" air force whose mission seemed to take them a long way from the "wild blue yonder."

On the other hand, the Army's ambitious air initiatives clearly jolted some Air Force nerve endings concerning the always sensitive interservice debate over control of air support. Helicopters were one thing, but multiengine fixed-wing aircraft were another. And strapping guns and rockets on the Mohawks proved the final straw. In the end, the Army

eventually gave up its Caribous and took the weapons off the Mohawks, while the Air Force chose not to challenge Army supremacy in the employment of helicopter forces.

In retrospect, it is interesting to note the catalyst that brought the two services close to bureaucratic blows was the simultaneous expansion of their respective "elite counterinsurgency forces." Given other circumstances, neither the Army nor the Air Force would likely have selected these tiny COIN forces as sufficient justification for a major, interservice, missions-and-roles fight. But in 1962, the circumstances were such that the mere presence of the air commandos and the Green Berets made just such a fight inevitable.

The stateside air commando organization proved as restless as the airmen who manned it. Like birds of prey unleashed from their mount, the Hurlburt airmen were already deploying straight into harm's way less than 60 days after their successful ORI.

Such was the pressure on the 4400th for quick results that not all its airmen were present at Hurlburt Field to celebrate their ORI "graduation." Some of the birds had in fact already been deployed for COIN duty in faraway Africa. A month before the ORI, this deployment

had taken place as a joint Army–Air Force mobile training team (MTT), dubbed “Sandy Beach.” Sandy Beach deployed two C-47s and an Army Special Forces team to the Republic of Mali, in western Africa. The Air Force element of the MTT, Detachment 1, 4400th CCTS, provided the aircraft necessary for the paratrooper training requested by the Malians. Flying through a terrible rainstorm and landing without airfield control tower assistance, the air commandos became a big hit among all the locals who came to watch the training “show.”

The only exception to this enthusiasm came from Russian and Czechoslovakian aircrews already at the airfield, flying their aircraft from the same ramp as the C-47s, while conducting their version of COIN with the Malian Air Force! Following their redeployment to the US, the air commando leader concluded, “We thought it was an interesting touch. . . . We didn’t bother them and they didn’t bother us.”

Unfortunately, this example of an uneasy, but still civilized, coexistence was seldom repeated elsewhere.

Leaving Hurlburt nearly two months to the day from their ORI, nearly half the 4400th CCTS deployed to the Republic

them that their erstwhile communist adversary, the Viet Cong, were the least of their problems. For openers, the Detachment 2A airmen were not happy to discover that training the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) was their primary mission. As one TAC historian noted, “They [air commandos] had landed at Bien Hoa AB all heady with the cloak and dagger, super secret bit, and they bitched and yelled like the devil at having to do a standard job.”

Perhaps the air commandos could be forgiven if from the cockpit of a T-28 or B-26 on a strafing run, their job looked, at least to them, very “nonstandard.” Few air-to-ground gunnery training ranges in the US featured burning villages and enemy gunners trying to kill instructor and student pilots. The most aggravating problem encountered by the air commandos, however, was the lack of American-style aggressiveness demonstrated by most of their “students,” many of whom were in fact already seasoned pilots in other types of aircraft. Many Americans, themselves on six-month rotational tours to Vietnam, found it difficult to understand the caution that developed within Vietnamese pilots. But unlike their American advisors, the Vietnamese understood they would never rotate out of combat until they were killed or the war ended.

Air commando aggressiveness turned to frustration as they watched villages overrun, convoys ambushed, and airfields mortared without an effective VNAF response. A particular event in South Vietnam’s southern delta region highlighted the dilemma faced by the Farm Gate aircrews in the early days.

During the night of 10 Sep 1963, the Viet Cong attacked the Soc Trang airfield with a mortar barrage, pinning down the VNAF T-28s stationed there, while the main attack took place against two small towns 70 miles to the southwest. Running through the mortar fire, four air commandos scrambled two armed T-28s to help town defenders drive off the Viet Cong attack. The four airmen later received commendations for their initiative and courage—and reprimands for engaging in combat without a VNAF “student” in either T-28. *C’est la guerre!*

When fighting the Viet Cong, the air commandos at least had the satisfaction of viewing the devastating results achieved when their lethal skills were brought to bear on the enemy. Using those same skills against the US Army, however, was obviously out of the question, whatever the frustration. And in 1962, the frustrations coming from their khaki-clad Army brethren in Vietnam were plenty.

Driven mainly by the desire to meet increasing Army requests for air support, Headquarters PACAF requested in Oct 1962 a substantial increase to the air commando force in Vietnam. The SAWC argued against the request, quoting the low monthly utilization rates for the T-28/B-26 strike force already in Vietnam as evidence the Army wasn’t effectively using the air commandos already in country.

On the one hand, the Army eagerly used all the C-47 airlift it could get. The Farm Gate C-47s flew 2,500 sorties in support of the 5th Special Forces Group in 1963, tripling its support to the Green Berets from that of 1962. But when it came to close air support, it seemed to some that the Army was deliberately ignoring the strike aircraft as a bureaucratic tactic to validate its requests for more helicopter gunships.

The SAWC argument was bolstered by Maj Gen Rollen H. Anthis, commander of USAF’s 2nd Air Division based in Saigon. His reports detailed the Army’s desire to “rely solely on its own aircraft . . . unless it ran into trouble.” In the end, however, the PACAF-requested increase was approved, with the rationale that “PACAF did not want to be placed in a position of refusing [Army] requests regularly and thereby opening the opportunity for Army aviation to fill the gap.”

There was another, darker factor that favored the augmentation request. The air commandos flying these T-28/B-26 strike aircraft were being stalked by an unexpected enemy, one who would ultimately win regardless of the valor and skill of the airmen. Without warning, this unseen predator ripped entire wings off the aircraft in flight or caused catastrophic failure of major components during combat maneuvers against the Viet Cong below. Old age was finally catching up with these veteran airframes.

In Feb 1964, all USAF B-26s were grounded after a wing failed in flight during a night demonstration at Eglin AFB, Florida, before an audience that included 19 journalists. The following month, a wing sheared off a Farm Gate T-28 during a bomb run. Less than a month later, it happened again. Replacing General Anthis as 2nd Air Division commander in Saigon, Maj Gen Joseph H. Moore observed, “The 2nd Air Division is practically flat out of the [strike] business.” The proud US Air Force was reduced to borrowing nine T-28Bs back from the Vietnamese to keep a viable strike capability in Vietnam. It did so, but air commando morale dropped to its lowest point yet.

Having received its marching orders to augment Farm Gate, the SAWC shelved other plans and concentrated on supporting the augmentation. On 1 Jul 1963, the 1st Air Commando Squadron (Composite) was activated at Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam, with 275 officers and men, 18 B-26s, 10 SC-47s, and 13 T-28s. The temporary duty tours that rotated individuals in and out of the Farm Gate deployments were terminated, as was SAWC “ownership” of the Vietnam-based air commandos. Newly arriving personnel came with orders for one-year tours, and PACAF assumed operational command of the unit.

It was hard to believe all this had happened in just the first two years of the air commandos’ existence. Without question,

the continued high visibility support coming from the air commandos’ senior political mentor was a key factor in their growth. The previous May, President Kennedy had visited Eglin, ostensibly to view an Air Force firepower demonstration. Once on the base, however, he made clear his principal interest in the development of the air commando concept. The COIN airmen responded with a full blown “dog and pony” show that evidently left the commander in chief well satisfied that the Air Force had indeed responded to his encouragement.

Only a month before the President’s visit to Hurlburt, the



Vietnamese and American pilots on ramp with T-28 aircraft. (Photo courtesy of AFSOC History Office)

of South Vietnam between 5–10 Nov 1961. The airmen flew 4 of their C-47s across the Pacific, while 8 T-28s and 140 personnel were airlifted by USAF’s Military Airlift Transport Service. The four B-26s included in this deployment package were not 4400th CCTS aircraft, but were instead pulled from storage in Okinawa, refurbished in Taiwan, then sent to join the air commandos at Bien Hoa Air Base, a major Vietnamese airfield on the outskirts of Saigon. The deployment itself was codenamed “Farm Gate,” while the deployed force was designated Detachment 2A, 4400th CCTS.

For the record, the air commandos became the first USAF airmen to conduct combat operations in Vietnam. Off the record, they ran into so many problems it frequently seemed to



B-26 aircraft

air commandos had launched Bold Venture, another major overseas deployment, this time to Panama. Like the earlier Farm Gate deployment, these airmen were given a detachment designation: Detachment 3, 1st Air Commando Group. And with nearly half the old 4400th already in Vietnam, this deployment was limited to two each T-28, L-28, B-26, and C-46 aircraft. Interestingly, Bold Venture was led by Lt Col Robert L. Gleason, the same officer who led the original Farm Gate airmen to Vietnam.

Detachment 3 became the 605th Air Commando Squadron in Nov 1963. Flying from Panama, the unit honed its bush-flying skills in numerous civic action programs throughout South and Central America. Later transferred to the Air Force component of the US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), it was redesignated the 24th Composite Wing in 1967 and remained so until its deactivation in Apr 1972.

Even before the Panama detachment became a squadron, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved a similar deployment to Europe. Thus, Detachment 4, 1st Air Commando Wing, deployed to Sembach AB, West Germany, in Jan 1964 under the code name “Gold Fortune.” From the beginning, the European-based detachment (it became the 7th ACS that July), was different in two key aspects from all other air commando

units.

One of the most easily spotted differences was the absence of propeller-driven strike (T-28, B-26, A-1) and UH-1 helicopter aircraft in the squadron. The 7th ACS was equipped only with C-47, C-123, and U-10 airlift. This odd configuration was largely influenced by the needs of the 7th ACS' primary "customer," the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG), also based in West Germany at the time.

Like the 7th ACS, the 10th SFG was unlike the other COIN forces of its parent service. Its wartime mission had still not been "converted" from insurgency to counterinsurgency warfare, as had the other SF groups by the early 1960s. What the 10th SFG needed was airlift to carry its A-teams behind enemy lines into eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, to support anti-communist partisans should general war between the US and the Soviets erupt.

In addition to major deployments such as Farm Gate, Gold Fortune, and Bold Venture, the air commandos supported dozens of smaller efforts throughout the world. A Special Air Warfare Center fact sheet of the period describes the scale of these deployments:

Such deployments, lasting from 6 weeks to 90 days, were made to Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Peru, Venezuela, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Portugal, Iran, Ethiopia, the Congo, and Saudi Arabia.

Needless to say, the cost of this furious operational pace resulted in enormous (for the size of the force) requirements for men and materiel. Like a skinny teenager asking for a third cheeseburger, the air commandos demanded still more personnel and materiel to feed their growth, putting continuing pressure on USAF's personnel system. In early 1961, the initially small Jungle Jim cadre had been selected from an all-volunteer pool. Only 12 months later, the rapid expansion of the force led the Air Force to direct that only the 1st Air Commando Group within the SAWC would be manned on an all-volunteer basis. It did not have much choice, since Headquarters USAF had just announced its intention to expand the force still

further, from the current 795 to 5,000!

But if the demand for more personnel continued unabated, so did the line of volunteers trying to get in the door. When HQ USAF established a COIN officer career specialty code and publicized its recruiting program, the personnel system was quickly awash in applications. Overwhelmed, the Air Staff was soon forced to ask the major field commands to defer accepting volunteer applications for a period. Observing this administrative upheaval from their editorial desks, *Air Force Times* journalists noted in their 9 Jun 1962 issue that "special air warfare apparently appealed to many more airmen than did the scientific impersonality of the space age."

By early 1965, the original 352-man Jungle Jim program had expanded to 11 active duty squadrons: 6 in South Vietnam, 3 at Hurlburt Field, and 1 each in Panama and West Germany. In addition, National Guard air commando units were activated in California, West Virginia, Maryland, and Rhode Island.

Learning and continually adapting from field experience gained in its worldwide deployments, the air commandos recruited medics, combat controllers, combat weather teams, and forward air controllers, many of whom were put through US Army parachute training at Ft Benning, Georgia. To consolidate and build on this hard earned wealth of operational experience, a Special Air Warfare School was established at Hurlburt Field in 1966; it was subsequently redesignated the USAF Special Operations School in 1969.

Impressive as the Air Commando expansion was, the force still represented far less than one percent of USAF strength. More impressive still was the individual talent that continued flowing into Hurlburt Field. One measure of this talent can be gauged by the fact that between 1962 and 1965, airmen from this small fringe group were recognized by Headquarters USAF with the presentation of the Aviator's Valor Award (1962), the Mackay Trophy and Cheney Award (1963), and the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (1964).

The recognition continued in 1965, when the 1st Air Commando Squadron,

flying the rugged A-1 Skyraiders, introduced to the Air Commandos just the previous year, won a Presidential Unit Citation for its combat in South Vietnam. It was the first USAF unit to win this level of recognition since the Korean War. But the price for flying and fighting "at the tip of the spear" was proving expensive for those who dared. Forty Air Commandos died during this period, the majority as might be expected, in Southeast Asia.

Still further expansion lay ahead for the air commandos, along with a 1965 shift in mission emphasis from training indigenous personnel to direct combat. Demonstrating an incredible diversity of capabilities, they fought with distinction throughout Southeast Asia from the beginning to the end: close air support, interdiction, civic action, psychological operations, defoliant operations, and much more.

In Jul 1968, all air commando units were redesignated "special operations." Throughout the incredible kaleidoscope of combat operations in America's longest war, the air commandos, whatever their name, could always be found . . . anytime, anyplace.



About the Author: Col Michael E. Haas, USAF, Retired, began his military service as a private in the infantry, subsequently moving through eight years of duty in Special Forces, Ranger, airborne, aviation, and psychological operations units. He fought in the Republic of South Vietnam as a flight platoon commander and assault helicopter pilot, completing 968 combat hours.

After entering the Air Force, he served in special operations aviation and special tactics units, commanded the pararescue squadron, and completed tours on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Headquarters Air Force staffs.

*Col Haas earned his first master of arts degree in management and a second master's degree in national security affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School. His previous publications include the book *Air Commando! 1950-1975: Twenty-five Years at the Tip of the Spear*, as well as numerous magazine-length articles on special operations theory and practice. He is the advisor on special operations to the Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict at Texas Tech University.*

C-123s

So Much More than Trash-Haulers



The C-123 Provider, with jet pods for added performance, was used extensively for cargo and troop airlift in Vietnam. (Photo by USAF 600th Photo Squadron)

It is quite possible that many *Air Commando Journal* (ACJ) readers can relate to the following conversation:

Two pilots meet for the first time and very quickly the question surfaces on what each flew in Vietnam. Proudly one pilot states, "I flew F-4s," and the other says, "Oh, you were a fighter pilot." Next, the fighter pilot asks, "And what did you fly?" The second pilot states that he flew C-123s, which draws the remark, "Oh, you were a trash-hauler."

Even today, pilots who flew C-123s are still responding to the "trash-hauler" designation. It is likely that the connection stems from the fact that many in the Air Force didn't know what an air commando mission contained during the 1964-65 buildup of military forces for the war in Vietnam.

Some 50 years have passed since the following two pilots began training at Hurlburt Field for a C-123 assignment with the 309th Air Commando Squadron, based in Saigon. Recently the ACJ had the opportunity to interview them about their air



While building Cam Ranh Bay runway Provider unloads aluminium planking as C-130E lands long. (Photo courtesy of R.C. Weaver)

commando experiences.

“Van” Van Inwegen, Brig Gen, USAF (Ret) graduated in the second class of the Air Force Academy and was an instructor pilot flying Convair C-131 Samaritans on medical evacuation (medevac) missions.

R. C. “Doc” Weaver, Lt Col, USAF (Ret) graduated from San Jose State University; when assigned to Vietnam he was a KC-135 instructor pilot flying tanker missions with Strategic Air Command (SAC).

ACJ: Van, you and Doc were assigned to Vietnam during the 1964-66 buildup. Both of you came from different major commands. What can you say was the biggest difference in flying daily missions in a war zone from what you had previously experienced with other major commands?

Van: Prior to my assignment to Vietnam I was flying medevac missions from California. C123s and C-131s are in many respects quite similar, so the transition checkout was quite comfortable for me. What was different was that medevac missions were mainly centered on patient delivery, where the missions we flew in Vietnam were spread over many different aspects such as flare missions, parachute missions, and low altitude cargo drops. Looking back, I believe one of the most satisfying aspects of my C-123 assignment was that once we left the home base I was expected to make

many different decisions which directly resulted in mission accomplishment and crew safety.

Doc: Volunteering for what SAC called “worldwide reassignment” was a major change for me. I felt in SAC that every activity was tightly controlled to ensure mission success. In the war zone that kind of control wasn’t possible. For me this was refreshing. First, let’s consider what the difference was between crew makeup in some major commands and what the crew composition was in an air commando squadron. In SAC we might fly for several years with the same personnel on a crew. In Vietnam, each day the squadron operations officer brought together three or four crew members who were assigned to fly as a crew for that day. Normal in-country flights usually consisted of two pilots and a loadmaster. Additional augmentation could be a flight engineer, and on special missions and overwater flights a navigator was included. Flare missions also had two flare kickers who were usually maintenance personnel who volunteered to fly these missions.

When crews were scheduled to fly day missions, the usual reporting time was before daybreak. A fragmentary (frag) order was issued for the first leg of the day and this order identified the crew by name, type of mission, and specific landing fields pertinent to the day. C-123s were capable of landing at over 110

airfields in South Vietnam. Many of these were dirt and were less than 2,000 feet in length. Additionally, we flew missions to Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore.

ACJ: Since you both were assigned to Vietnam prior to the war build-up, were there any special missions that you can recall for us?

Van: One special mission I remember was a flight to Duc Co, a small village on the Cambodian border. We had landed at Pleiku and learned that Duc Co, 37 miles to the southwest, was under heavy attack. Our mission was to deliver ammunition and pick up the wounded and take them back to Pleiku. As we approached from the east, we received heavy ground fire, but managed to land to the east on a “wide spot” on a dirt “runway.” As we later learned, it was actually part of a road leading to the hamlet. While we were offloading ammunition and loading wounded soldiers, we kept the engines running to hasten our departure. A mortar detonated under our left wing, throwing dirt and dust into the cockpit. The ground “crew” indicated that our nose tire was damaged, but we managed to take off and we headed to Saigon as there was a greater hospital capability there. During the flight to Saigon an Army lieutenant came to the cockpit with a .50 caliber “slug” that he picked up off the aircraft floor. I asked if I could have it and he replied, “BS, it came closer to me than to you!” We managed to land at Saigon with both nose tires flat and some 20 “holes” in our aircraft from ground fire. We nicknamed our aircraft the “Punctured Provider” as “Provider” was the assigned nickname of the C-123. As a result of our mission, the entire crew were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses.

Doc: Before I begin describing some of my missions, I’d like to add to the narrative on Van’s flight to Duc Co. An American Army major was in charge of 3,500 Army Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) [soldiers based] at Duc Co, a very remote location. Upon witnessing the events that Van and his crew performed, the major stated, “I have never in my career seen a greater display of heroism as this crew displayed in supporting my troops under such a hostile firefight. This Army major

later wrote a book upon returning to the United States and mentioned these acts of heroism. The author’s name was Norman Schwarzkopf.

Van: There are many missions I can remember, and I think part of the reason is because I was in Vietnam at a relatively early time. Those of us who were there in 1964-66 timeframe were on the front edge of the big build-up. Each morning we woke to the cry of Adrian Cronauer’s “Good morning-Vietnam” on Armed Forces Radio. Before daybreak we would leave our living quarters in Saigon and report to Operations on Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

The airport was divided—with the civilian arrivals and departures on one side of the airport while the military operations were on the other side. Our squadron’s operations office was located next to the old French base operations building. On the other side of us was the Graves Registration Service mortuary. This American mortuary was one of two in the country, with the other located in Da Nang. Each day aircraft brought body bags to the Saigon mortuary; and thus began the long trip home for many of the approximately 58,000 troops who lost their lives during the war.

Reporting for duty was where we first learned just what type of missions we were going to fly that day. Breaking the missions into different categories—one might be resupplying Special Forces outposts with food or ammunition. Transporting people and animals was another category. Just about anyone who needed a ride could climb on board.

Many of the missions involved moving ARVN troops from one battlefield to another. We also flew civilian reporters and photographers whenever we could. Occasionally our squadron commander would say there would be someone like the chief correspondent from *Time/Life* who would be flying with us. One of our aircraft was a VIP C-123, and Gen Westmorland flew in it quite often. This plane was also the aircraft that flew Bob Hope and his Christmas Show to remote locations. On several occasions we flew Viet Cong prisoners and I often wondered what went through their minds since they most likely had never flown before.

Doc: Flare missions were a big part of our life. If we weren’t flying in the daytime we were flying at night. In the beginning of my tour the rules of engagement required a Vietnamese navigator be on board for flare missions. C-123s scheduled for flare missions had flash suppressors installed over the exhaust stacks on each engine to reduce nighttime exposure. Exterior identification was changed from the United States to Vietnamese insignia. Once airborne, a typical flare mission would consist of having an aircraft fly in circles over, for example, Saigon, and continue this until directed to a hamlet under siege. Arriving over a hamlet at 3,500 feet, we would circle, dropping flares to illuminate the area below. Those protecting the hamlet could then determine just where the attack was coming from. As we circled a firefight we would also see enemy tracers by the hundreds following behind the tail of the aircraft. One night, as we circled a hamlet, my Vietnamese navigator called me and said, “Pilot I’m



Gen William Westmoreland, Commander, MACV with Henry Cabot Lodge the Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam, and Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense finish presenting combat medals to members of the United States Armed Forces. (Photo courtesy of R.C. Weaver)



After a hard landing a Vietnamese Army captain made this his office. (Photo courtesy of R.C. Weaver)



Many POWs were flown from remote areas to larger holding facilities. (Photo courtesy of R.C. Weaver)



Dau Tieng (Michelin Rubber Plantation) upon landing with 24,000 lbs of ammunition aircraft sank into the runway. (Photo courtesy of R.C. Weaver)

talking to ground.” I said, “What’s the ground saying?” Vietnamese navigator responded, “Ground says, ‘Climb, climb, climb.’”

Van: Night missions sometimes involved coordinating with forward air controllers (FACs), fighters, and gunships. Observing an AC-47 gunship spraying an area was an awesome sight at night. One night on a flare mission over Tay Ninh the forward air controller (FAC) directed a gunship to just spray a building through the roof as the Viet Cong insurgents had taken refuge inside. When the gunship began to fire it absolutely looked to us like a dragon spraying a fiery breath, as the bullets ricocheted off the walls and everything within the building was destroyed.

Doc: I suppose that at one time or another, flying the C-123 had some aspects of being a trash hauler. What was one man’s trash was another one’s treasure. The time I was in-country our pilots came from all kinds of backgrounds. Out of SAC came KC-135, B-52, B-58, and T-39 pilots. Other commands provided us pilots qualified in [both] C-131s and C-123s. A new pilot arriving in the squadron spent the first month with a qualified pilot-in-command, learning short field landings on unimproved runways, cargo drops, Vietnamese parachute drops, and flare drops.

Also at that time there were a handful

of missionary schools throughout the country and in early 1965 our unit began evacuating all the children and faculty from the country.

Van: During 1965, when I flew into such places as Tuy Hoa, Cam Ranh Bay, An Khe, and Tay Ninh, there were hardly any troops there that we ever came in contact with. One day, I had a flat tire at An Khe upon landing. While we were waiting for a replacement tire to arrive, an Army Caribou landed with three Generals on board. The one general mentioned that within 30 days there would be over 25,000 Army troops based where we were sitting. True to his word this is exactly what happened. Cam Ranh Bay was a place where our squadron flew day after day, carrying pierced steel planking (PSP) from Saigon. At first we landed on a dirt strip along the beach. The engineers laid the PSP into a new runway, and when 2000 feet was in place, we began landing on the new runway. When the runway was long enough for C-130s to land, common practice was for a C-130 to land over a C-123 while it was offloading more PSP to lengthen the runway.

Doc: Probably one of the most interesting aspects of flying air commando missions in Vietnam was the dynamic nature of our air mobility taskings. After taking off on the first flight of the day you were almost guaranteed that it would quickly change to a completely different mission. On 18 Jun 1965, we were on our

way to an isolated ARVN outpost named Ben Cat, located about 65 kilometers northeast of Saigon. Our mission was to carry food to the soldiers. Nothing too special about this mission, except that as we approached the dirt strip, the jungle erupted in front of us. Just beyond the airstrip we could make out hundreds and hundreds of bombs raining down on a section of jungle which was approximately one mile long and two miles wide. We could see the bombs falling, however, it was impossible to see the B-52s above who were dropping them. Since we were on a low priority mission we turned around and returned to Saigon.

We parked and were met by the squadron operations officer, Maj Bob Horsky. Bob told us that this was the first B-52 raid in South Vietnam and due to the security of the mission no one was notified of the bombing ahead of time. He then ask me if I would take another plane and fly an Air Photo & Charting Service photographer over the bombed area as higher headquarters wanted pictures of the devastation. I agreed and a sergeant with a huge camera met us to document this event. While flying back to the target area the loadmaster and engineer strapped the cameraman into a harness and placed him on the open ramp where he was safely tied to the aircraft. From the cockpit I could see he was stretched out on his stomach with the camera positioned just over the edge of the open ramp. I could also see that his legs were straddled so he could balance himself on the ramp. While flying back to Ben Cat and approaching the target area, I contacted the forward air controller (FAC) and told him what we were going to do and requested his permission to enter the area.

The plan was to dive from 5,000 feet and fly that old C-123 as fast as it would go across the bombed target area. The FAC gave us permission and warned that we most likely would receive enemy fire. Onward we went and when I got to the edge of the target area I proceeded to go below the jungle canopy into the destroyed forest. As I approached the end of the target area I pulled up to avoid the trees and the first thing I heard was

the loadmaster was calling telling me that the photographer advised that he had enough photos. As it turned out, incoming fire from the ground had struck the aircraft and penetrated between his hands holding the camera and a second hit struck just between his legs. When we got back to Saigon I asked the visibly shaken photographer if he could get me a copy of what photos he had taken. However, after all these years and never receiving any photos, I still don’t believe he took any photo shots. More importantly though, he wasn’t injured on this mission.

Van: Due to the ‘unique’ character of many of the “landing areas” we supported, “field” folders were prepared listing the runway length, width, runway composition (concrete, dirt, sand, asphalt, PSP), photos (if available), etc. Then, as now, major airfields were listed in published aeronautical documents called Enroute Supplements. These were carried in all aircraft and depicted approach and tower frequencies, runway length, and composition. One day a C-130 crew from Kadena AB, Okinawa, came into our operations room in Saigon to ask us if we had a field folder or any data on the runway at Da Nang, Vietnam, where they were scheduled to go on their next mission. We told them to look it up in the Enroute Supplement as it was a major international airport!

Van: The Vietnam War provided the research and development people back home all kinds of aerial platforms for testing new weapon systems and missions. Eighteen months before my arrival in Vietnam the Department of Agriculture people got together with the Ranch Hand (Agent Orange) people and tested out a new warfare idea. Ranch Hand operations defoliated large areas approximately 30 miles northeast of Saigon. Since the jungle consisted of three layers of trees in a canopy, it required several defoliation missions over 18 months to kill the vegetation. On the day of the mission to burn the treated area, we had 26 aircraft lined up on a taxiway ready to go. Located on each aircraft were eight pallets of 55-gallon drums filled with gasoline. On top of each pallet was attached a flare. All aircraft flew over the designated area and dropped one half of their load in a straight line. When the pallets left the aircraft a lanyard triggered the flare to light. When this concoction hit the ground there was a massive explosion and fire. The aircraft proceeded onward, making heading changes to prepare to launch the remaining pallets in a straight line, in order to form an arrow pointing into the prevailing wind. As predicted, the fire and smoke rose skyward in a perfect mushroom cloud that formed a thunderhead, which produced a large rainstorm that extinguished the fire. Thus ended the Boi Loi Woods experiment.



Editor’s Note: We wish to thank Van and Doc for their C-123 contribution to the Journal. Another important C-123 mission in Southeast Asia was the Ranch Hand defoliation mission. Although this much-publicized mission wasn’t discussed in this article, it will be covered in a subsequent issue of the Air Commando Journal.



FARM GATE

By Maurice Bourne

B-26s in South Vietnam

In the early 1960s the USAF was well-prepared to fight a global nuclear war. We had a fleet of intercontinental bombers, transports, and fighters superior to any other air force on earth. But we were not prepared to fight a guerilla war in a third world country.

By 1961, President John F. Kennedy had committed American counterinsurgency forces to prevent the fall of third-world countries to communism. The 1st Air Commando Wing was reactivated to fill the requirement for air support in those countries fighting against communist guerillas. In the coming years air commandos would serve world-wide in many countries and in many different circumstances, but our greatest challenge would prove to be the war in Vietnam.

The 1st ACW was a great outfit. It was all-volunteer, from the colonels in command to the young enlisted men working as mechanics, medics, clerks, and bomb loaders. We had air commandos serving all over the world as advisors and trainers, often on the edge of combat, and sometimes right in the middle of it. Most of those operations took place in secret, and from the start the 1st ACW operated in the shadows—little more than a rumor even within other branches of the USAF.

In guerilla warfare the primary requirement for strike aircraft is as close air support (CAS). In the 1960s, this need was usually met by slow moving aircraft capable of making visual contact with friendly ground units and working closely with those units to strike enemy positions in close proximity to friendly troops. In the 1960s, the aircraft most suitable for this type of work were leftovers from WWII and Korea. The Douglas B-26 Invader and the North American T-28 Trojan were selected to fulfill the CAS role for the air commandos. Both of those aircraft were old and no longer operated by the USAF. B-26 and T-28 airframes were available from the “boneyards” and once overhauled they could be sent off to war. In 1960, the B-26 and the T-28 operated as the 6th Fighter Squadron.

The 6th Fighter Squadron (FS) was the original home of the B-26s, and all following B-26 squadron designations, the 602nd, the 605th, and the 609th were all descendants of the original 6th FS. The B-26Bs became the early workhorses in Vietnam.

I enlisted in the aviation cadet program in 1960 and was one of the last of the young men given the opportunity to win a commission and a flight rating in the USAF with only



Two Farm Gate B-26Bs on alert at Bien Hoa AB. (Photo by Maurice Bourne)



B-26 dropping napalm. (Photo by Maurice Bourne)

Editor's note: The Douglas A-26 was not the same airplane as the Martin B-26 Marauder. Once all Martin B-26s were retired from USAF service in 1947, the Douglas Invader inherited the "B" designation, until becoming A-26s again in 1966 because of sensitivities by the Thai government about basing "bombers" on Royal Thai air bases.



Charlie Holder before he was shot in the foot. Later, Charlie a navigator, became an F-100 pilot. (Photo by Maurice Bourne)

a high school education. In the spring of 1963, I arrived at Hurlburt Field (Eglin AFB Aux. Field #9), the “Home of the Air Commandos.” I was a 23 year old navigator with the rank of first lieutenant and assigned to the 6th FS (now the 6th SOS).

When I first climbed into right seat of an Invader, my flight experience consisted of about 40 hours in the back seat of an F-89 Scorpion and about 700 hours over the Pacific Ocean as a navigator on RC-121 Warning Star early-warning aircraft. Nothing in my previous experience had prepared me for this new job.

Every B-26 pilot I ever flew with was older than me, had more flight experience than I had, and outranked me. About 75% of the navs were 1Lts and younger than 27, while 75% of the pilots were captains and older than 28. A few of our pilots had flown in the Korean War.

Most of us were teamed together as crews, but from time to time crewmembers changed. It was common to fly with several different pilots over time. I don’t remember any intentional effort to form hard crews. From the start, crews would team up and over our training period pilots and navs just naturally found partners to fly with.

We deployed to Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam in the summer of 1963. Bien Hoa was designated Detachment 2 and our code name was “Farm Gate.”

Bien Hoa AB was located about 10 miles north and east of Saigon. We lived in structures called “hooches” that

usually housed six men. A hooch had a wooden floor, a corrugated iron roof, screen-wire walls, and four overhead fans that ran night and day. We slept on GI cots with a mosquito net over every cot. Concrete walks connected the hooches and led to the latrine, showers, chow-hall, and officers club. I don’t remember ever seeing an air conditioner in Vietnam.

At that time our total fixed-wing strike capability consisted of about a dozen flyable B-26s, a handful of T-28s, and a very limited number of A-1 Skyraiders flown by the Vietnam Air Force (VNAF). Between us we covered



Capt Mike Styer and navigator Lt Maurice Bourne. Capt Styer flew the U-2 before coming to the commandos. After Farm Gate he flew an additional combat tour in F-4s. He was lost in a freak accident on his return flight home. His Phantom was hit by a B-52 on take-off. (Photo by Maurice Bourne)

the air attack requirements from one end of South Vietnam to the other. At night, only the B-26s were deployed.

My first pilot was Capt Dick Fields. Dick had come from an F-101B Voodoo squadron and was a fighter pilot to the bone. We got along well from the start. Dick made it plain to me, “I’ll do the flying, you do the navigation.” That proved to be a good plan. We had our encounters, though. One of the secrets of successful two-man crews is their ability to fight, argue, and yell at one another, and still remain friends. That just seems to be natural behavior of alpha males when you strap them into a cramped, hot, and noisy attack bomber, send them off to war, and instruct them to do their best not to get killed.

The B-26B Invader was a great airplane. It carried lots of fuel, lots of ordnance, and flew like a fighter. We carried six cans of napalm under the wing, a dozen bombs in the bomb-bay, and had six .50 cal machine guns in the nose. We flew right on top of our targets, usually in direct radio contact with friendly forces. The navigator served as navigator, copilot, flight engineer, and radio operator. One of his primary jobs was to look out the window and take note of anything the pilot might have missed. I soon found that my biggest challenge was to constantly harangue pilots who



Rosie was a typical Farm Gate B-26. Little was known of her history. She was just a tired old veteran of several wars, in need of a wash job. Here she takes time off for an engine change and never-ending maintenance to her .50 caliber machine guns. (Photo by Maurice Bourne)

seemed to be determined to die young and take me with them. That was probably an overreaction on my part, but at the time it was the dominant thought in my life. Dick Fields often complained that his right shoulder was chronically bruised from my beating on him during low-altitude pull-ups. In time I learned to ride easy in a B-26. I learned to trust the men I flew with, grit my teeth, and just hang on for the ride. Sitting in the right seat of a B-26 in combat is a scary job.

The biggest problem with the B-26B was that they were old. As an old armorer sergeant recalled, “The B Model was a maintenance nightmare. It would be just sitting on the ramp with no one around and suddenly decide to start dropping bombs on the ramp. We considered it a minor miracle if all six guns fired during a mission.”

It was common to turn on the master switch and smell the musty smell of overheating electrical circuits. The vacuum powered flight instruments were old and uncontrolled gyros were fairly normal. Devotion to needle, ball, and airspeed kept many a pilot right side up

and brought many a B-26 crew safely home.

Because our aircraft had been flown by so many different air forces in so many different roles, no two were alike. Mystery antennas, odd switches, and unexplained circuit breakers were common. Chopped-off cable bundles and strange placards were also commonplace. The legendary Pratt and Whitney R-2800 Double Wasp engines were tough, but nothing lasts forever. Non-flyable aircraft littered our ramp, and any non-flying aircraft was always in danger being cannibalized for parts to keep another aircraft in the air. Spare parts for these old aircraft were always in short supply, and every B-26B I ever saw had at least one empty hole in the instrument panel awaiting a part.

Communication between the pilot and navigator on intercom was always difficult and on some aircraft impossible. The rubber gaskets that normally sealed the clam-shell canopy had long ago rotted away on most aircraft. The canvas curtain between the gun bay and the cockpit was usually torn or missing. Having a chart sucked out of the cockpit

was a common experience. There was so much noise in the cockpit that screaming directly into the ear of the man sitting next to you was usually a waste of time. But with an experienced crew a lot of talking was not needed. If the navigator paid attention and stayed on “the same page” as the pilot, cockpit requirements were usually evident. Hand signals were common.

Our VHF radios were vintage WWII. They were push button and crystal tuned, and had only five channels. They were full of static when they worked at all and picked up engine ignition noise constantly. Communications were not the best.

Our navigation aids were nonexistent. A single, low frequency Automatic Direction Finder (non-directional beacon on the AM band) was standard equipment on the B model, but there were no ADF radio stations in Vietnam. The ADF could pick up commercial radio stations, but our inability to identify the location from the music and the strange language made the system useless. None of our aircraft had VOR receivers. There was a radar



VNAF Skyraider at Bien Hoa 1963. (Photo by Maurice Bourne)

site at Tan Son Nhut AB, near Saigon, but it was of little use outside the local area. It was no use at all when we were working at low altitudes. The pilots I flew with seldom, if ever, talked to them.

My personal experience was that I had very little problem when we flew to the south of Saigon. The flat delta country, with several rather large towns made map-reading relative easy. I thought that going south in good weather was even easier at night. The moonlight on the Mekong and Saigon Rivers, the well-defined coastline on the South China Sea, and the lights of Me Thou, Can Thou, and Soc Trang, made navigation easy.

Going north up into the Central Highlands was an entirely different story. North of Saigon the mountains began to rise and towns became few and far between. At nighttime, very few towns in the interior were large enough to give positive identification.

My preferred navigation plan when we left Bien Hoa and headed up anywhere north of Da Lot was to pick up a heading of about 070 degrees as soon as we got airborne. This would put us on a nice long leg and hit the coast about Phan Rang. Following the coast north was easy, particularly in the moonlight. The trick was to pick an easy-to-identify point on the coast that was abeam of your target area. From that firm position a carefully

flown compass heading to the west of no more than 40 or 60 miles would usually put you very near the target. Of course, everything we did was complicated at night, particularly in bad weather. But for the most part we found our targets by dead reckoning and very little else.

We did not have what could be described as “good targets.” My idea of a good target would be a locomotive pulling a dozen freight cars loaded with war materials or a truck convoy. On rare occasion we did have trucks, boats, gun installations, or hard structures as targets, but for the most part our targets were only glimpsed fleetingly, and strike effectiveness was usually based on crew judgment or by verbal evaluation from the forward observer. In Vietnam we usually placed our ordnance in locations that were verbally described to us by an observer on the ground or in a small spotter plane. The phrase “hit my smoke” became one of the working day instructions given to close air support crews. Often the instruction was on a static-ridden radio and was something like, “You see smoke? You drop bomb 4 clicks north smoke.”

At night, flares were used to mark targets. A flare would give off a bright glow and was easy to spot. It was usually orange, but sometimes white, red, or random other colors. The communists

were not dumb. They avoided scheduling their attacks on sunny days when aircraft held a clear advantage. Consequently, B-26s were regularly called out on the darkest nights and the foulest weather to defend the Special Forces camps protecting Vietnamese villages. Some of my most vivid memories from that period of my life are of night scrambles in bad weather to defend a strategic hamlet. The Central Highlands seemed to be our most frequent destination on those nights, and locating an obscure village in a mountainous area with scattered thunderstorms was a next to impossible task. Nonetheless, we usually managed to blunder onto the scene, often after considerable time searching.

Often we would be assisted on these nights by flare ships. Flare ships were either C-47s or C-123s also flown by air commandos. Flare ships would operate at higher altitudes than B-26s, and often had VOR or TACAN navigation capability. Of course, flare ships also had their navigation problems and would often be attempting to locate the target area with no more help than we had. But as a rule, a flare ship on location was a blessing to B-26 crews. Even if contact with the village could not be made, a flare dropped at almost any location within several miles would give the observer on the ground a marker from which he could

direct the aircraft to his location.

On many occasions, I experienced this wonderful system at work when the flare ship was operating above an overcast and the B-26 was operating below that same overcast. Few things are as memorable to me as desperately searching along a long mountain valley beneath the weather and experiencing a soft orange glow slowly pushing into the darkness. Suddenly, a flare would pop out of the overcast and appear wondrously in an adjacent valley a few miles away. Such a randomly dropped flare would enable the ground observer to direct the flare ship directly over the battle area, and enable the B-26 to follow happily behind. Flares were a wondrous sight, illuminating vast areas of countryside and in fact, turning night into day. Few things were as comforting to a B-26 navigator as seeing a flare pop out of an overcast a mile or two in the distance. I’ll always have a special place in my heart for the men who dropped flares over the valleys, jungles, and rice fields of South Vietnam.

As always, radio communications were difficult. The Vietnamese defenders of fortified villages devised a practical and very effective way to direct strike aircraft toward enemy positions. This became known as the “fire arrow.” A fire arrow was a long board that could easily and quickly be moved about by two men. Four or five flare pots were placed on this board and it was positioned to point directly at the location from which the attack was coming. An additional two flare pots could be quickly positioned on either side of one end of the long board to complete the fire arrow. Once a fire arrow was in place a B-26 pilot knew to deliver his ordnance at some point into the darkness to which the arrow pointed. Once in place, the only information a pilot needed was a distance, usually expressed in “clicks.” Even this information was of secondary importance. Napalm delivered into the night along the shaft of a fire arrow anywhere beyond the perimeter of the village was usually a good thing to a village under attack. In the course of a battle the fire arrow often would be repositioned several times, and on at least one occasion, I remember the use of two fire arrows in the same village. One thing

notable about night attacks- it was easy to see the gunfire arcing up at us. This gunfire was usually small arms fire aimed at the sound of our aircraft. On occasion, we would encounter fire from heavier guns, but the use of modern antiaircraft weapons in South Vietnam was still in the future.

As often as not, we would make two or three strikes, go into an orbit for 15 – 30 minutes, and be called back to begin the attack all over again. This was the beauty of the B-26, we had enough fuel to hold in the target area, and plenty

rumors, followed by suspicion. B-26 combat losses continued to be attributed to other causes. A kind of cynical humor grew among the flight crews. Our daily conversation, our jokes, our bar room songs, took on a darker tone. Our bonding became stronger. Our plans for the future became more focused. But the fact was that the wing spars were failing. In time we all came to understand that truth. For some of us, it was too late.

We continued to fly in spite of all. We flew day and night. We flew between rain squalls and without navigation aids.



Capt Cleve Gordon shown in front of the officers quarters. Capt Gordon died in the last B model lost in South Vietnam. (Photo by Maurice Bourne)

of ordnance to deliver when the need arose again. Even without any radio contact at all, a fire arrow was perfectly easy to understand and a far better way to communicate than garbled and unintelligible radio traffic.

When I first came to the air commandos pilots bragged that the B-26 was “built like a railroad bridge.” The one thing we had total faith in was the structural strength of our aircraft. But in fact, the B-26B had been over-stressed for many years by heavy pull-outs and rough runways. Maintenance had been sparse and inspections of aircraft structure had been limited. Unknown to the men who sat in the cockpit, the aircraft was starting to come apart in high-speed, high-G bomb runs. That stark truth was not evident at first. At first there were

We flew with rough engines and ground fire, and with aircraft systems that were chronically inoperative, leaking, smoking, malfunctioning and failing.

Those of us who flew the B-26B in Vietnam under the code name “Farm Gate” were proud beyond all reason. That was the most invigorating period of my lifetime. I still get goose bumps, just remembering those days. I would do it all over again.



About the Author: First Lt Maurice Bourne is a native of Texas. He was scheduled to return to SEA in the B-26K but was injured in an aircraft accident and removed from flying status. He was medically retired from the USAF in 1965. Today he lives on the farm where he grew up.

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

A-26 Invader



The A-26 Invader served America well in three official wars and quite a few unofficial clandestine ones. Fast and able to carry a heavy bomb load, the Invader was easily the best US light bomber of World War II. It was later, though, that it made its bones as one of the best of all time. The Invader went on to serve extensively in Korea and Vietnam, and was also a favorite of CIA-backed forces in small wars around the world.

The Invader was designed to replace the A-20, B-25, and B-26 bombers. It was a major advance, featuring a laminar flow airfoil, electrically operated double-slotted flaps, and two remotely operated power turrets. The "solid-nose" B model could be converted to a "glass nose" C model (and vice versa) just by changing the nose section. It had growing pains, requiring 28 months of post-first-flight development. Still, it entered

combat in 1944 and compiled an admirable record in Europe and Asia. In Korea, the sturdy Invader (now named B-26) saw heavy action, flying 55,000 bomb sorties. It is credited with destroying 38,500 road vehicles, 3,700 railcars, 406 locomotives, and seven aircraft.

As jet powered aircraft became available, the B-26 was taken out of service, only to be recalled to duty in 1960 with the 1st Air Commando Group in Vietnam. It was used in Operation Farm Gate. Then, USAF had some 40 rebuilt into B-26Ks, called "Counter Invader" to highlight the counterinsurgency role. Not long after that, the Invader was redesignated A-26A. The last was withdrawn in 1969, after chalking up successes not only in a world war but also in the hottest conflicts of the Cold War—a claim that can be made for few, if any, other aircraft.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: USAAF A-26B-51-DL Invader—# 44-34323—as it looked in the late 1940s in the Far East.



In Brief

Designed, built by Douglas Aircraft Co. ★ first flight July 10, 1942 ★ crew of three (pilot, nav/bombardier, gunner) ★ two P&W R-2800 engines ★ number built 2,452 ★ **Specific to A-26B:** max speed 355 mph ★ cruise speed 284 mph ★ max range 1,400 miles (loaded) ★ armament (typical), 10 .50 cal. machine guns, up to 16 rockets ★ bomb load, up to 6,000 lb ★ weight (max) 35,000 lb ★ span 70 ft ★ length 50 ft ★ height 18 ft 6 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: Capt. John S. Walmsley Jr. (Korean War) **Other notables:** Maj. Gen. Reginald J. Clizbe, Brig. Gen. James D. Kemp, Col. Joseph Kittinger, Lt. Gen. Eugene B. LeBailly, Maj. Gen. William C. Lindley Jr., Maj. Gen. Nils O. Ohman, Brig. Gen. Luther W. Sweetser, Brig. Gen. Virgil L. Zoller.

Interesting Facts

Fastest piston-engine bomber of WWII ★ redesignated B-26 (1948) and re-designated A-26A (1962) ★ last airplane designated "attack bomber" ★ flew first (June 28, 1950) and last (June 27, 1953) US bombing missions in Korea ★ seen in 1989 Steven Spielberg film "AI-ways" ★ used by Cuban exiles in 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion ★ flown by CIA-backed mercenaries in the Congo in early 1960s ★ operated by 17 foreign air forces ★ SAC RB-26 recce aircraft for two years.



A World War II A-26C on the ramp.

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“When you’re given a job to do, you do your best with whatever talent and tools you have available.”

An Interview with: Lieutenant General Leroy Manor

On 6 Apr 2015, *ACJ* spent some time with Leroy Manor, Lt Gen, USAF (Ret). In the course of the interview, Gen Manor shared his thoughts on leadership, air commandos, and organizing for success. The general has commanded Air Force units from the squadron through the Numbered Air Force level. As the commander of the US Air Force Special Operations Force (AFSOF) at Eglin AFB, the predecessor of Air Force Special Operations Command, Gen Manor commanded the joint task force that attempted to rescue American prisoners of war from the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam—Operation Kingpin. In April 2014 Gen Manor was inducted into the US Special Operations Command Hall of Honor. In March 2015 the general was presented Ordre National de la Légion d’Honneur (Legion of Honor) for his contributions to the liberation of France in 1945.

ACJ: Over the past seven decades you have led men and women in combat and during humanitarian operations. As the picture of the Misty FACs (F-100 Super Sabre forward air controllers) highlights, you commanded others who went on to the highest pinnacles of our Air Force. You have also been a civic and social leader, giving selflessly of your time and talents to the community and to those who have served. Would you share with us, please, your thoughts on leadership, specifically those attributes that define a good leader?

Gen Manor: One of the key things you need is confidence, confidence in your own abilities and in those people who are on your team. When we were preparing for the Son Tay mission Col [Arthur “Bull”] Simons and I had the luxury of hand-picking the team who would do the mission. There was no shortage of volunteer soldiers and airmen, but you don’t always get that situation. Normally, the team is already formed and a leader is expected to succeed with the team provided. This is where good leaders can distinguish themselves. When you’re given a job to do, you do your best with whatever talent and tools you have available.

When I took command of Air Force SOF [Feb 1970 – Feb 1971], we were under Tactical Air Command [now Air Combat Command]. Gen Momyer was the commander of TAC [1969 – 1973] at the time. While he was a superior tactical airman, he was not a great supporter of SOF. Gen Momyer was moving the tactical air forces away from props to jets, even though he previously had been the 7th Air Force commander in South Vietnam [1966 – 1968] a time when we were creating more special operations squadrons to meet the needs of that war. But he had enough confidence in me to give me command of a fighter wing in combat.

I was a fighter pilot and had always been a fighter pilot. During Son Tay, my job was to make the most of everyone’s strengths, give them clear guidance about what was expected



Misty FACs in 1969. First from left is Col. Wilbur “Bill” Creech, who became commander of Tactical Air Command from 1978-1984. Standing second from the left is Maj. Tony McPeak, who became the USAF Chief of Staff from 1990-1994. Standing third from the left is Capt. Ron Fogleman, who became USAF Chief of Staff from 1994-1997. Kneeling second from the right is 1st Lt. Charles Lacy Veach, who became an astronaut and logged more than 400 hours in space. Lt Gen Leroy Manor is standing on the far right. (US Air Force photo)

of us, get them the tools they needed to do their jobs, and then trust them to do the right thing. This is may be where my fighter pilot background helped me. Back then a wing commander could not be “in the cockpit” with every sortie. We did not have the technology we have today—we had to trust our people. We were sending people into some very dangerous situations. My job as the wing commander was to make sure they were trained and ready, had the tools they needed to do their jobs, and then trust them to make the right decisions when applying air support when they got into a fight. The same was true when I was the joint task force commander for Son Tay.

Later, when I was chosen to lead the Son Tay operation, I was given complete authority to make tactical decisions—something Gen Vaught did not have 10 years later during the Eagle Claw [Desert One] operation. During Son Tay, Simons and I had complete confidence in each other and we had good staffs we trusted to work together to solve the problems we were facing. Simons and I also realized we needed to develop a level of confidence among the ground and air elements of the task force. We were going deep into North Vietnam, at night [before crews flew with night vision goggles and before the Combat Talons were equipped with FLIR], to do an important mission. When the launch decision was delayed from October to November, that delay gave us the opportunity to fit the Talons with experimental FLIRs. During the preparations for Son Tay we exercised every part of the mission over and

over again, from the individuals to the entire joint task force, including contingencies. We trained together and we debriefed every mission together. By the time we deployed, the ground teams and the aircrews had complete trust in each other.

ACJ: Thank you for sharing your perspective on trusting your people and the commander’s role in how that confidence in your team is developed. It seems to us that there was more to the success of the Son Tay operation than clear guidance, confidence, and rigorous rehearsals. As your lectures and interviews have shown, Son Tay was a complex operation: the most sophisticated air defense system in the world at the time, developing new tactics, techniques, and procedures to enable C-130s, A-1E Skyraiders, and two kinds of helicopters to fly formation, and getting Army and the Air Force units to work together before jointness was commonplace. What did you and Col Simon do to solve that problem?

Gen Manor: Something Simons and I did when we were given the mission was to find some very creative people who could look at the problem and see possibilities, not limitations. Brig Gen Don Blackburn, the special assistant to the Chairman for spec ops and special activities, Larry Ropka and John Gargus, the air planners, and Keith Grimes, a combat weatherman, were among those creative leaders. One of the things that made Son Tay different from Desert One was what I was just talking about—confidence and trust in subordinate

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In May 1968, Lt Gen Leroy Manor assumed command of the 37th Tactical Fighter Wing at Phu Cat Air Base in the Republic of Vietnam where he completed 275 combat missions, in F-100s primarily. (Photo courtesy of Lt Gen Leroy Manor)

leaders. I had a letter from the Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] giving me permission to use anything we needed to accomplish the mission. That allowed the Son Tay planners to really exercise their creativity and see possibilities outside the normal boundaries. The men who flew the Eagle Claw mission overcame some very difficult tactical problems [for example, landing the C-130s while using night vision goggles]. But when I served on the Holloway Commission that reviewed what happened during Eagle Claw, it was obvious to me that the Eagle Claw leadership did not have the freedom to be creative that we had had.

When leading people, you also must understand when creativity is needed and when it is not. The men on the Son Tay mission did something completely unexpected by the North Vietnamese, using the equipment we had at the time. We combined AFSOF MC-130s and A-1 Skyraiders with Rescue HC-130s, HH-53s, and an HH-3 aircraft and crews to successfully penetrate the most heavily defended airspace in the world. The Navy flew over 50 sorties off of Haiphong as a distraction and deception to enable us to fly in from the west. 7th AF flew MIGCAP and SEAD for us. As Simons

and I briefed the leadership in Pacific Command, Military Airlift Command (now Air Mobility Command), Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, 7th AF, and CTF-77 (the US Navy task force off of Vietnam), everyone offered us contributions, which allowed us to explore a large range of possibilities. At the end of the day though, we had the authority to build the team and fly the mission as we saw it needed to be done.

ACJ: Sir, we appreciate the time you gave to talk with us today. Are there any parting thoughts you would like to pass on to the young airmen who will build on the legacy of air commandos past?

Gen Manor: As many of you know, I began my career during the Second World War. I was teaching school in upstate New York, very near to where I had grown up. When the war began, like so many others I volunteered to serve, but I wanted to fly. In 1941, the Army Air Corps was not accepting married men into the aviation cadets, so I went

across the border to Canada to see if the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) would take me. I took the tests and they accepted me on the spot. I had signed a contract to teach school though, and asked the RCAF if I could wait and come in after the school year was over. By the time school ended things had changed in the US and we were accepting married men as pilots. So I joined our Air

Force and flew the P-47 from D-Day to the end of the war. My original goal had been to serve until the end of the war and then return to New York, my family, and teaching school. But I liked the Air Force, so I stayed. My wife, Delores, encouraged that decision. She was my partner for 72 years and she helped me be a better commander and leader.

During my three and a half decades in uniform, I learned that good units are good because of the people. Leaders make a commitment to take care of

their people. After Eagle Claw, Ben Schemmer (former owner and editor of *Armed Forces Journal International* and author of *The Raid*, the 1976 book detailing the Son Tay operation) and Ross Perot contacted me about doing something to take care of the families of the men who had died during the tragedy at Desert One. Eight men died that night and they left behind 17 children. That was the beginning of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. You can read the history of SOWF online, but the point is that we made a commitment to take care of our people and their families. Commitment goes beyond focusing on the mission. Good leaders commit themselves to the mission, the people, and those families who stay behind and make it possible for us to serve.

The Son Tay mission was only a few months of my career, but it was the highlight. We were given the mission in August and we executed it at the end of November. The success of Operation Kingpin was due to the courage,



Lt Gen Leroy Manor being decorated by President Richard Nixon in 1970 (AP/Wide World Photos)

commitment, and creativity of the men who volunteered for and executed a mission we could not tell them much about. Those men were heroes and I continue to hold them in very high regard.

I think that is the message I want to leave you with. Leadership is many things, but in my experience it is about confidence in yourself and your people, creativity in how you look at problems, and committing to the success of the whole team—the aircrews, the support team, and the families. Thank you. 🇺🇸



Bombs explode on a truck park near the Mu Gia Pass, the key crossing between North Vietnam and Laos. The US Air Force bombed key points on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. (US Air Force photo)

*By Ramon E. "Ray" de Arrigunaga, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)
Doctor of Public Administration*

In Laos, the period between the 1954 and the 1962 Geneva Conferences was extremely complicated and confusing. In Parts 1, 2, and 3 of this series, these geopolitical events were discussed in some detail. ("Laos: The Secret War. Prelude to US Involvement," *ACJ*, vol. 3, issue 1; "Laos: The Secret War. US Involvement Begins," *ACJ*, vol. 3, issue 3; and "Laos: The Secret War. Combat Training and Logistics," *ACJ*, vol. 3, issue 4.)

This last part of the story begins with the 1962 Geneva Accords. In general, the US, the USSR, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) had agreed that Laos should remain neutral. However, in order for this to happen, a neutral Laotian government needed to be formed. Delegates agreed that Souvanna Phouma would be the head of the new government, but they were deadlocked as to the staffing of the various ministries. Finally, on 11 Jun 1962, these details were agreed upon, and on 23 Jul 1962, the Geneva Accords were signed.

However, by October 1962, major disagreements evolved within the Kong Le – Pathet Lao military coalition regarding

the distribution of Soviet-provided supplies and equipment. The Pathet Lao were concerned about US-provided supplies and equipment to the rightist army of Gen Phoumi Nosavan, as well as supplies and equipment being provided by the CIA to Vang Pao and the Hmong guerrillas. Souvanna Phouma then requested the US provide supplies and equipment directly to Kong Le and his neutralist army on the Plaines des Jarres (PDJ). An Air America C-46 that was delivering supplies to Kong Le was shot down by Pathet Lao gunners, and this action exploded into a series of armed clashes and assassinations in Vientiane and on the PDJ. Kong Le and his neutralist army moved to the western edge of the PDJ. The coalition government of the 1962 Geneva Accords was disbanded, while the neutralists and rightists developed a de facto alliance against the Pathet Lao. This political union was confirmed in May 1964 by Souvanna Phouma.

By July 1962, Ho Chi Minh had been in complete control of North Vietnam since the Geneva Accords of 1954 partitioned the country and created a demilitarized zone

(DMZ) between North and South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh was obsessed with re-unifying Vietnam as a nation. While the short, 40 mile border between North and South Vietnam could easily be blockaded, the North Vietnamese needed to ensure access to South Vietnam in order to provide troops, supplies, and equipment to the Viet Cong guerrilla forces operating in South Vietnam. Plans had also been made for elements of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to operate in South Vietnam, and these forces would require massive logistics support, as would the Pathet Lao forces in eastern and north-central Laos.

In December 1958, elements of the NVA occupied several villages in the Tchepone District of Laos, located east of Savannakhet and west of the DMZ at the 17th Parallel. This was the beginning of the creation of the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT).

The Pathet Lao and the NVA conducted military operations in northern and northeast Laos in the vicinity of the Plaines des Jarres. The purpose of these operations was to put continuous pressure on the Laotian government situated in the

TIGER-TIGER HOUND would become the AO for the COMMANDO HUNT air interdiction campaigns, 11 Nov 68 – 29 Mar 72.

Towards the end of 1964, operations against the HCMT began. Initially, all operations in Laos were considered to be part of BARREL ROLL, including those in the STEEL TIGER and TIGER HOUND areas. However, in April 1965, when OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER began, BARREL ROLL was separated from STEEL TIGER, and TIGER HOUND was created. STEEL TIGER and BARREL ROLL would continue under the control of the US Ambassador to Laos, but because of its close proximity to South Vietnam, operations in TIGER HOUND would be under control of Commander, US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (COMUSMACV). That same month, the USAF began systematic B-52 bombing of the Trail. Between 1964 and the end of 1967, some 103,000 tactical sorties were flown against the Trail, supplemented by some 1700 B-52 strikes.

Then came the January 1968 TET Offensive in South Vietnam. This was a tactical military victory for the US and South Vietnamese forces, but a political disaster for President Johnson. Through skillful manipulation of the media, the North Vietnamese were able to turn tactical defeat into strategic victory. In addition, OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER was terminated in November 1968 in an attempt to get the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table. With ROLLING THUNDER aircraft (some 500 attack aircraft) now free to be used elsewhere, the number of attack sorties available in STEEL TIGER increased by an order of magnitude. In October 1968, some 4700 attack sorties were flown. The next month, the total climbed to 12,800 sorties—a 200% increase.

The downside to this turn of events was that the North Vietnamese were able to relocate hundreds of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) pieces from North Vietnam to strategic locations along the Trail, especially at the main transit points on the route from North Vietnam into Laos: Ban Karai pass, Mu Gia pass, Bathelemy pass, Ban Raving pass, and Nape pass. Seventh/Thirteenth Air Force estimated that there were over 700 23 mm and 37 mm anti-aircraft artillery pieces (mostly radar-guided) defending the Trail in southern Laos, as well as radar-guided 85 mm and 100 mm AAA. By January 1972, North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems also began to appear in Laos.

One of the problems associated with the interdiction campaign was the lack of accurate bomb damage assessment (BDA). Invariably, the number of trucks reported destroyed far outweighed the actual number and, in some cases, outnumbered the total number of trucks possessed by the NVA.

Attempts were made to resolve the BDA shortfalls and inaccuracies. There were two separate clandestine operations

taking place on the Trail. One group comprised CIA Roadwatch Teams, inserted onto the Trail from the Laotian-Cambodian border north to the Mu Gia pass. At any one time, there were about 80 – 100 teams actually on the Trail, preparing for deployment, or returning from deployment. Their job was to evaluate conditions on the Trail, provide BDA, and determine the strength and direction of movement of enemy troops, supplies, and equipment.

Military reconnaissance teams from MACV-SOG (Military Assistance Command-Vietnam: Studies and Observation Group) had a similar mission. To prevent interference and to minimize overlap, these units would meet periodically to deconflict their planned operations.

Although virtually every type of ordnance-delivery and attack aircraft in the USAF inventory in Southeast Asia was used on the Trail, arguably the most effective was the AC-130 Spectre, with its side-firing weapons. It possessed a highly-sophisticated and technologically advanced fire control and navigation system, which allowed it to deliver ordnance accurately against the trucks at night. Bernard C. Nalty, in “The War Against Trucks: Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1968-1972,” indicates that four AC-130As alone in January 1969 were credited with 28% of the trucks destroyed that month on the HCMT. Similar statistics are recorded in other sources. (NOTE: Col Harry C. “Heinie” Aderholt, 56th SOW commander, on many occasions expressed his extreme pride and satisfaction in the outstanding performance of his AT-28 and A-26 flight crews in truck interdiction efforts, in spite of the fact that those aircraft did not have the technological advantages of the AC-130s).

Another major operation involved with monitoring Trail activities was IGLOO WHITE, or Task Force Alpha, located at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. By 1966, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was not pleased with the inability to slow the flow of supplies, equipment, and troops on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. McNamara and his staff were comfortable with technology, so they envisioned an electronic barrier that could determine movement of personnel and vehicles and, through the use of computers, provide near real-time information to attack aircraft in order to destroy the targets. Movement detection would be provided by air-dropped and hand-emplaced acoustic and seismic sensors implanted on the Trail. The hand-emplacement would be accomplished by the CIA Road Watch and the MACV-SOG teams. The sensors would send out radio signals which would be picked up by orbiting aircraft, then amplified and re-transmitted to a central computer system at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. The computer system would then process the signals and send them to an airborne command post which would then direct strike aircraft to the targets. The COMBAT SKYSPOT (MSQ-77) radar system would be used to supplement strike directions to attack aircraft during inclement weather. Unfortunately, while the truck detection system seemed to work, the personnel detection system had some flaws. In early 1968, IGLOO WHITE went operational.

Of real interest is the fact that with the passage of time, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which started out as a series of primitive and not-very-well-connected or maintained trails, soon began

to evolve into a highly sophisticated transportation system. It had improved all-weather roads capable of handling trucks, truck parks, storage areas, maintenance facilities, bypasses, rest stops, and medical facilities. Eventually, the North Vietnamese create an oil pipeline that became an integral part of the Trail! In 1968, the CIA estimated that there were 20 bulldozers, 11 road graders, 3 rock crushers, and 2 steam rollers on a road network that completely camouflaged and concealed from aerial observation in many places. It was estimated that as many as 40,000 to 50,000 laborers worked on this transportation system.

Most historians, academics, and students of the conflict in Southeast Asia are of the opinion that the most important action of the Vietnam War not taken was a comprehensive attempt to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. American politician had avoided this effort due to international and domestic political concerns. By early 1971 however, pressure to cut the Trail were growing. Military intelligence indicated that the North Vietnamese were building up a huge reserve of supplies and equipment in the Tchepone area of Laos, possibly as a prelude to a major spring offensive. The time for striking this concentration was fast expiring because US forces were in the process of leaving Southeast Asia.

From 8 Feb – 25 Mar 1971, OPERATION LAM SON 719 was conducted to capture Tchepone and cut the HCMT. Approximately 20,000 South Vietnamese troops crossed the

OPERATIONS GLOSSARY: *This inset is helpful...a good explanation, especially for younger air commandos.*

BARREL ROLL: Area of Operations (AO) in northeast Laos. Combat operations in this AO were under the control of the US Ambassador to Laos. (See map on page 33)

STEEL TIGER/TIGER HOUND: Areas of Operations in the eastern Laotian Panhandle, where the Ho Chi Minh Trail was located. Combat operations in Steel Tiger were controlled by the US Ambassador to Laos. The Tiger Hound AO was under control of the Commander, US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV). (See map on page 33)

COMMANDO HUNT I-VII Campaigns: Combat operations which took place in the Steel Tiger/Tiger Hound AOs from Nov 1968 – Mar 1972.

ROLLING THUNDER: The bombing campaign against North Vietnam which took place from Mar 1965 – Nov 1968, designed to force the North Vietnamese government to cease its support for the insurgency in South Vietnam.

LINEBACKER II: The bombing of North Vietnam (18 – 29 Dec 1972) to force the North Vietnamese government back to the negotiating table in Paris.

administrative capital in Vientiane, and on the royal capital at Luang Prabang in hopes of causing its collapse. If the Laotian government collapsed, North Vietnam’s effort to subjugate South Vietnam would be greatly facilitated, and North Vietnam would gain an invaluable ally in a Communist-controlled Laos.

After the Geneva Accords of 1962, the war in Laos would eventually evolve into two main AOs. STEEL TIGER operations would be primarily USAF air interdiction efforts, with some Navy involvement, in order to cut the HCMT and stop the flow of support from North Vietnam. Ground combat forces were virtually non-existent in these interdiction efforts. STEEL TIGER had a sub-element, TIGER HOUND, which encompassed a small area adjacent to South Vietnam. STEEL



border into Laos. A successful operation would prove the validity of the US' Vietnamization policy, would increase the morale of the ARVN, would provide a major setback for the North Vietnamese, and would prove that the ARVN could defend its sovereign territory. The invasion force would be accompanied by some 10,000 US support troops, none of them infantry forces, though. These support troops would include aviation, logistics, and artillery units.

Sadly, LAM SONG 719 turned into a disaster. There was poor security all around, political and military leaders in the US and South Vietnam who did not face military reality, and the overall execution was poor. This was indeed a dark day for the US and South Vietnam troops. The US suffered almost 1400 casualties and had over 700 helicopters lost or damaged. The ARVN suffered over 7,000 casualties.

By 1973, when the US quit the war, the US had dropped over 3 million tons of ordnance on the Trail, with little to show for it.

The northern AO, referred to as BARREL ROLL, would be primarily concerned with ground combat operations in north and northeastern Laos, and in vicinity of the Plaines des Jarres. Gen Vang Pao would be in overall command, leading his Hmong guerrillas (some 10,000 troops by December 1963), and supported by the CIA, and Thai mercenaries with infantry



and artillery. Tactical air support would be provided by Raven FACs, the USAF, Air America, and the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF).

A unique feature of combat operations in BARREL ROLL was the impact of the weather. The dry season lasted from November through May, when the road networks would be usable and the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Army (PL/NVA) could depart the Sam Neua/Houaphan area and proceed west toward the PDJ. This stretched their lines of communication (LOC) thinly, inviting a counterattack. During the wet season (June through October), Vang Pao and the Hmong would do just that using a combination of tactical air strikes, air mobility provided by Air America, and guerrilla tactics—effectively pushing the PL/NVA back to their starting positions.

This pattern would continue for three years, from 1965 through 1968, but each year, the PL/NVA would increase in size, requiring the US to increase its support to Vang Pao. The air strikes would be provided by A1-Es and T-28s from the 56th SOW at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, as well as T-28s from WATERPUMP (air commando training team in Laos), and the RLAF. Generally, there was a contingent of AT-28s deployed to Long Tieng under the operational control of Vang Pao and using the call sign Chao Pha Khao. Some 40 Hmong had undergone AT-28 training through WATERPUMP, and many of these were part of the Chao Pha Khao contingent. On occasion, Thailand-based F-105s and F-4s returning from missions further north with unexpended ordnance would be diverted to BARREL ROLL to provide opportune airstrikes as needed.

Electronic navigation facilities in BARREL ROLL were an absolute necessity because of frequent inclement weather and multiple jagged mountain peaks. These facilities were lucrative and vulnerable targets because of the remoteness of their locations. Lima Site 85 at Phou Pha Thi for example, was a combined TACAN/TSQ-81 radar bombing facility that provided radar guidance for 55% of the ROLLING THUNDER airstrikes, and 20% of the strike sorties in BARREL ROLL. On 11 Mar 1968, Lima Site 85 came under attack, and was eventually overrun. (Editor's note: See the article in the ACJ vol.1, issue 3, "Tragedy Strikes Laos Site 85.")

1968 represented a turning point in BARREL ROLL. PL/NVA forces were displaying unprecedented determination to maintain pressure against Vang Pao's forces, notwithstanding the weather. To accompany Vang Pao's traditional 1969 wet season offensive, the Air Force successfully executed two major bombing campaigns against the PL/NVA: Operations RAINDANCE and STRANGLEHOLD. Nonetheless, the PL/NVA still managed to capture Muong Soui in the western PDJ. In August 1969, Vang Pao launched a broad attack against communist positions throughout the PDJ, as well as against Xieng Khouang. The attack was successful, and for the first time since 1961 all of the PDJ was under government control.

In September 1969, the PL/NVA in the PDJ were heavily reinforced by regular NVA troops. In February 1970, the newly reinforced PL/NVA began a comprehensive offensive throughout the PDJ, and 10 days later the entire PDJ was under

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AIR COMMANDO



ASSOCIATION

PL/NVA control. For the first time in its history, Vang Pao's headquarters in Long Tieng was threatened. To counter this threat, Washington approved—also for the first time—the use of B-52 bombers against the PL/NVA. On 18 Feb 1970, the first such B-52 sorties were flown; and by 25 Apr 1970, the PL/NVA threat had greatly diminished, to the point that they withdrew.

In February 1971, the PL/NVA again launched their dry season offensive, again capturing the entire PDJ, surrounding Long Tieng, and camping within sight of Luang Prabang for the first time since 1962. When the rainy season came, these forces did not withdraw to North Vietnam because this time they had been able to stockpile large quantities of supplies and equipment in the PDJ.

Resources available to support Vang Pao were rapidly diminishing and were not being replaced. Vietnamization was the order of the day for the US and assets throughout the whole of Southeast Asia were being turned over to the South Vietnamese or returned to the United States.

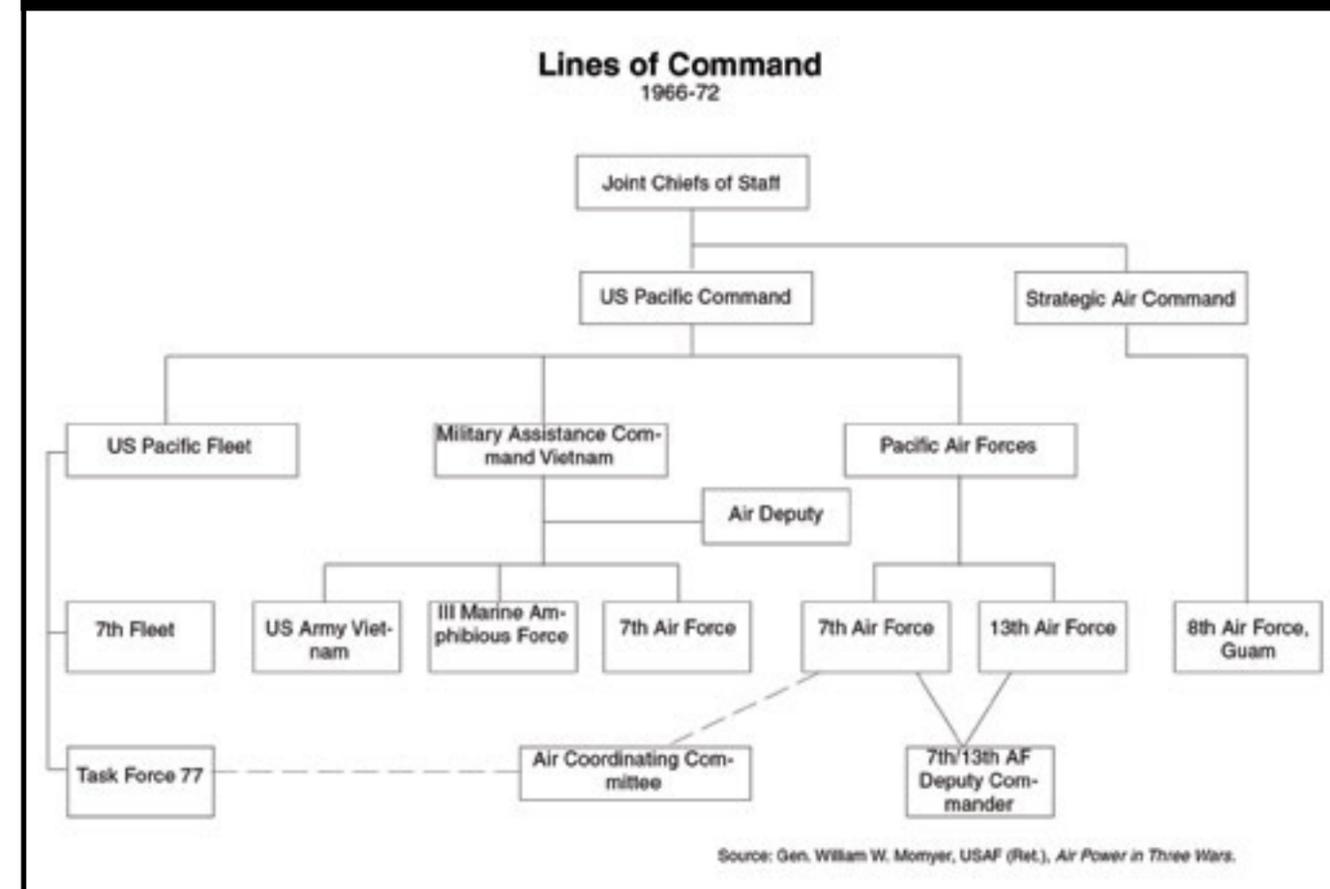
The war was having a huge negative impact on Vang Pao's forces. Combat casualties were eroding his manpower base and to make up for this shortfall mercenary units were imported from Thailand. By 1972, some 17,800 Thais, organized into 27 infantry and 3 artillery battalions, were fighting alongside Vang Pao's Hmong army.

The end was in sight. In June 1971, Vang Pao's rainy season offensive did not have all the resources necessary for success and a month later the offensive fizzled out. Over the next two years it would become more and more difficult for Vang Pao to muster enough resources to conduct offensive operations. The Americans were pulling out of Southeast Asia as quickly as negotiations with the North Vietnamese would let them.

The Linebacker II (18 – 29 Dec 1972) campaign against North Vietnam was meant to force the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. Shortly after the termination of the bombing campaign, on 27 Jan 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed. The ceasefire in Laos went into effect on 22 Feb 1973. On 4 Jun 1973, all US and Thai military personnel left Laos.

On 5 May 1975, Vang Pao was summoned by Souvanna Phouma and told to cooperate with the Pathet Lao. Vang Pao took off his general's stars, threw them on Souvanna Phouma's desk, and stormed out of his office. Four days later, the official Pathet Lao newspaper warned that the Hmong would be exterminated. Jerry Daniels, Vang Pao's CIA case officer, was still at Long Tieng trying to determine how to evacuate some 3,500 Hmong leaders and their families. Heinie Aderholt was able to find additional aircraft and successfully evacuate these people. Nonetheless, tens of thousands of Hmong were left behind. By the end of 1975, some 40,000 had made their way on foot to Thailand. Eventually, some

ORGANIZATION



54,000 Hmong were settled in the US.

On 2 Dec 1975, Laos officially became the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The war in Laos was over.

As we have seen, there were two areas of operations in Laos: STEEL TIGER/TIGER HOUND and BARREL ROLL. To control the combat operations in both of these AOs, the basic framework was constructed as shown in the organizational chart below. All USAF operations not involving Strategic Air Command B-52s and KC-135s were controlled by the 7th AF Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) at Tan Son Nhut AB in Saigon. A problem did arise since 7th AF commanded and controlled all air assets in South Vietnam, but air assets in Thailand belonged to 13th AF headquartered at Clark AB in the Philippines. The solution to this dilemma was to create an intermediate headquarters at Udorn RTAFB called Headquarters, Deputy Commander 7/13AF. The incumbent would be dual-hatted as the deputy commander of both 7th AF and 13th AF. In this manner, tactical orders would emanate from the 7th AF TACC to the Deputy Commander, 7th AF, who would then put on his 13th AF Deputy Commander hat and pass the fragmentary or air tasking orders to 13th AF units based in Thailand. This process seemed somewhat awkward,

but it worked. Requests for tactical air support (strikes or reconnaissance missions) could be originated by the US Embassy in Laos, the Royal Lao government (usually through the embassy), the CIA, or MACV.

Additionally, to provide near-real time command and control over the air wars in both AOs the EC-130 Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC) was deployed. These aircraft and their controllers, based at Udorn RTAFB, provided two orbits, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Monitoring BARREL ROLL was "Cricket" during daylight hours, and "Alleycat" at night. In STEEL TIGER, "Hillsborough" was the daytime ABCCC, and "Moonbean" the night flight. Time on station generally was scheduled from 0600 to 1800, and 1800 to 0600. The aircraft were all equipped with state-of-the-art secure, long-range communications that enabled each ABCCC to maintain continuous, secure communication with the current operations branch of the 7th AF TACC ("Blue Chip").

Each EC-130 ABCCC had a complete 12-member battle staff aboard, and could quickly react to a rapidly-changing air battle environment. The 12 members represented the command, operations, intelligence, and communications functions.

SAC kept operational control of its B-52 bombers, KC-135 tankers, and strategic reconnaissance aircraft. Obviously, they

would coordinate bombing and aerial refueling activities with 7th AF, but command and control of their aircraft remained firmly with SAC headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska. Likewise, Navy assets remained under control of Task Force 77, afloat with the carrier task force in the Gulf of Tonkin. They, too, would coordinate operations with other military units, but they would not relinquish control.

Inasmuch as the ambassador to Laos was the commander of all US military and intelligence activities in Laos (excluding operations in TIGER HOUND), and in charge of all embassy-related activities, it was obvious that he had his hands with a multitude of diplomatic and economic, as well as military, issues. The ambassador made it clear that he would be the approval authority for all military and CIA activities in Laos, and the parameters were codified into detailed rules of engagement (ROEs) for US military and CIA personnel and units operating within, over, or through Laos. Some of these ROEs were extremely complex and they could only be waived by the ambassador himself.

Note: Almost immediately after I arrived at Long Tieng in March 1970 to begin my 6-month tour as a Raven FAC, I was handed a loose leaf binder with 15 - 20 pages of ROE applicable to the Raven FACs. I was overwhelmed as I started reading these ROEs. Over the next several days, I spent several hours communicating with former FACs, the air intelligence officer at the air attaché's office, seeking sensible answers to some of the convoluted, exasperating, confusing, and mostly unintelligible policy statements. Finally, I received enough clarification to where I felt comfortable enough to fly combat missions without violating any major ROE.

Other major components of the system were the air operations centers (AOCs) located at the major airfield of each military region. The AOCs were usually headed by a TDY combat veteran, usually a senior captain or major, generally from the 1st SOW, and responsible for all USAF-related activities at the AOC. These personnel provided communications, aircraft and munitions maintenance, and intelligence expertise. The AOC commander was also responsible for coordinating operational matters with CIA field units.

Each AOC had a number of Raven FACs assigned to it. In the spring of 1970, there were 10 Ravens at Long Tieng, 2 at Vientiane, and about 3 each at Luang Prabang, Pakse and Savannakhet. The AOC commanders were under the control of the embassy, through the air attaché's office.

At the beginning of the war, in BARREL ROLL, it became obvious rather quickly that some means of control for airstrikes would be necessary. In early 1966, the Air Force sent combat control teams (CCT) to Laos from US-based CCTs. Among these were Bob Farmer, Charlie Jones, Jim Stanford, and John Lee. They were joined by Bill Keeler, AOC commander in Vientiane and John Garrity, air intelligence officer at the air attaché's office. They would fly in the right seat of Air America short takeoff and landing aircraft. They used the call sign "Butterfly" and they would direct USAF airstrikes according to USAF doctrine, as well as those strike

sorties flown by Thai pilots in AT-28s with RLAF markings. Sometimes the Butterfly FACs would use smoke grenades to mark targets. Things went well until December 1966, when Lt Gen William Momyer, 7th AF commander, discovered that non-fighter pilots were controlling USAF airstrikes. Gen Momyer terminated the Butterfly program immediately and the Raven program was created in its place.

Maj Richard Secord worked hard to convince his CIA superiors and the ambassador that the Ravens needed to be co-located with the CIA field units at Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Long Tieng, Pakse and Savannakhet in order to enhance the fusion of intelligence that had evolved during the Butterfly program. In this manner, intelligence gathered by CIA assets could be shared with the Ravens and other operational units to enhance the overall intelligence gathering and dissemination process, increasing the effectiveness of combat operations.

Hereafter, only fighter pilots with combat experience as FACs could control airstrikes in Laos. Thus was born Project STEVE CANYON. FACs in Vietnam were recruited as volunteers and, if accepted into the program, would be sent to Laos. Once there, they would store their uniforms, carry US Agency for International Development identification, and don civilian attire. The normal tour of duty was Six months in Laos, although many volunteered to extend. At no time did the Raven roster consist of more than about 22 FACs.

There were times when the Raven flying workload was overwhelming, with some periods when Ravens routinely flew 11 to 12 hours per day. Working as a Raven FAC was generally an exhausting, high-stress, high-risk job. But, for those that survived, it was also one of the most rewarding jobs anywhere.



About the Author: Ramon E. "Ray" de Arrigunaga retired from the Air Force as a Lt Col in 1982 as a command pilot after 20 years of service. His flying career was mostly in special operations aircraft (C-47, B-26K/A-26A, U-10, OV-10, O1-E, O-2A). He has 707 hours combat flying time in Southeast Asia, where he flew the OV-10 in support of the US Army 1st Infantry Division in South Vietnam, and as an O-1E "Raven" FAC in northern Laos. He was awarded the Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, and 11 Air Medals. After retirement, he was a government executive for 19 years. In 1992, he was awarded the Doctorate in Public Administration. In 2002, he became a faculty member of the Political Science Department at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, FL, where he taught courses in counterinsurgency and guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and international relations.

References and Bibliography

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Space does not permit the inclusion of a bibliography in this article. However, for those interested in the complete bibliography, please contact the author at: rdarrig@bellsouth.net, and a comprehensive bibliography will be provided.

Photo Reconnaissance for Special Operations...



...the way it was

By Jimmy A. Ifland, Col, USAF (Ret)

Editor's note: As we know, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities have become an increasingly important role for AFSOC (and the Army's 160th SOAR, if truth be told). Jim Ifland shows us this is not a new idea. And, as with most things associated with special air warfare, the technology may change but the spirit of the air commando to accomplish the mission despite the obstacles remains.

Top photo: A B-26 delivering napalm on a target.
Top left: KA-1, 36 inch "Big Eye" forward oblique camera installed.
Middle left: Author Jim Ifland, shown third from the left, with reconnaissance crew members in front of an RB-26C.
Bottom left: An "A-Team" Lt briefing Rahade Tribe on upcoming mission.
 All photos taken or provided by author Jim Ifland, Col, USAF (Ret).

Like most of the Jungle Jim volunteers, my initial “secret” interview was conducted by a wing commander. In late 1961 I was newly promoted to captain and my assignment at the time was as officer-in-charge of the photo lab of the 363rd Reconnaissance Technical Squadron (RTS) at Shaw AFB, SC. As the pages of the interview book advanced, I continued to answer “yes” to each level of commitment. Shortly after the new year, I received orders to proceed to the 6750th Personnel Lab at Lackland AFB, TX, for psychological evaluation. That was several days of really weird stuff to ensure we were not nuts or suicidal. In Mar 1962, I was sent to Stead AFB, NV, in the Sierra Nevada mountains, for what is now known as the Survival, Escape, Resistance, and Evasion training course. When I arrived those mountains were sporting 14 feet of snow.

I did not know it at the time, but my group was the second class of Jungle Jim candidates. When I reported in to Hurlburt Field on 18 April, my thoughts were clearly on what could possibly be in store for a Photo Officer in the 4400th

I was blessed with some outstanding personnel. TSgt John Roddick (later, CMSgt and Air Commando Association Hall of Fame recipient) and his team of photo maintenance technicians were assigned directly to me, much to the chagrin of the wing director of maintenance. Several of our aerial photographers were gained when we took over the base photo lab and its mission. The rest were assigned when the Jungle Jim volunteers arrived.

In broad terms, the mission of the Special Air Warfare Center then was three fold: first was to train USAF special air warfare units in Southeast Asia (SEA), Panama, and Germany. Second, it supported the theater commanders with military training teams to instruct indigenous military forces in special air warfare. And third, we maintained a rapid reaction force to meet contingencies within the unified command areas for counterinsurgency (COIN) and unconventional warfare (UW) operations. It was envisioned that the dominant role would be COIN, and we assumed it would always be conducted in a permissive environment, that is, without the threat of enemy air or sophisticated ground-to-air defenses.

Our reconnaissance tasks in the COIN role were to provide military equipment and advisors to train indigenous forces in the use of aerial reconnaissance equipment and methods of employment. We thought that this would aid in knitting more closely together the political and economic structures of the host nations using reconnaissance as a vital nation-building link between psychological operations and civic action programs. The goal was to assist developing nations so they could better cope with their own internal security programs.

During UW, our reconnaissance capability was essential to the various facets of guerrilla activities, escape and evasion, and subversion. In view of the total impact of intelligence to our overall mission and the great variety of reconnaissance tasks, it became necessary to divide our reconnaissance efforts and capabilities into two separate and

distinct categories, one focused on simplicity and the other on sophistication. In the simplicity category we had inexpensive, simple equipment which was readily adaptable to all aircraft having standard 14-inch ordnance shackles, or in some cases when minor sheet metal work permitted cameras mounted below the floor boards.

Inexpensive and simple were also key to the success of the military assistance programs (MAP). The technology had to be consistent with capabilities of the indigenous forces. Under our concept we developed designs, techniques, and procedures utilizing both hand-held and pod installed cameras.

An excellent example of a pod-mounted capability was the modification of a P-2 aerial camera (Fig. 1) that could be used in any type of aircraft either using the aircraft electrical system or a battery pack. TSgt Roddick and his team developed



Fig. 1

Combat Crew Training Group. I soon found out that we were already a “year behind” in developing an aerial reconnaissance program. I recall the direction given to me by the Special Air Warfare Center commander, Maj Gen Pritchard, “I want a photo reconnaissance capability in every SAWC aircraft, both overt and covert.” And, he wanted much more—the ability to process, print, reproduce, and interpret aerial reconnaissance products, as well as a deployable capability to support the mobile training teams (MTTs).

Our immediate task was to modify the assigned aircraft—Douglas B-26Cs, Douglas C-47s, North American T-28s, and Helio U-10Bs. Once we finished those, we modified the C-123s, A-1s, and special operations aircraft already deployed to Detachment 2, Farm Gate, at Bien Hoa, Vietnam, and Detachment 3, Bold Venture, at Howard AFB in Panama.



Fig. 2

the E-3 Strike Reconnaissance Pod, nicknamed “Snoopy,” consisting of three P-2 cameras mounted in forward and aft oblique positions and in a vertical shooting position. This pod was used extensively on the T-28, B-26, and later on, the A-1E, for general reconnaissance missions, as well as for bomb damage assessment (BDA).

TSgt Roddick’s team needed an airworthy pod for the Snoopy concept and “snuck” over to Brookley AFB, in Mobile, AL, the depot for photo equipment at the time, and obtained several airworthy pods which were then modified with nose and tail cones to accommodate protective glass for cameras, the camera mounts, and the wiring for the pod and the aircraft camera controls. (Fig. 2 & 3) Years later this proved to be an embarrassment when several governments in Central and South America placed orders for the pods through MAP to Hill AFB, UT, then the depot for photo equipment. Of course, Hill AFB had no clue about the pod or its source and “blasted” SAWC for bypassing the system. We quickly provided all the information on the pod, mounts, cameras, etc. so that they could get the pod into the procurement system.

I might add at this point that Gen Pritchard had little patience for the time necessary for bureaucratic involvement in the design, testing, and approval needed to modify aircraft and develop camera installations. “Ignore the depot and press-on” was the guidance we received. We received tremendous support from SAWC’s 1st Combat Applications Group, whose mission was the research and development of unique systems, particularly aircraft, armament, and navigation systems for COIN and UW. Col George Finan headed up this group and had an excellent engineering staff that included Capt Jerry Carlyle, project officer for the C-123K, and Capt John L. Piotrowski, later the USAF Vice Chief of Staff, to mention just a few.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Light aircraft such as the Helio U-10B Couriers were ideal reconnaissance platforms. Low and slow, they proved to be outstanding aircraft for the FAC role, as well as visual and photo reconnaissance. Using the same P-2 aerial cameras, a vertical and left oblique camera installation was mounted in the door panel just behind the pilot. (Fig. 4) To provide the pilot with a reference point for aiming the left oblique camera we discovered that the pilot's sighting device installed in the McDonnell RF-101C worked perfectly in the U-10B and was readily available from the depot.

The need for 9" x 9" format cameras for large area coverage, mapping, and aircrew target briefings, as well as BDA, led to the installation of K-17 cameras in the vertical and left shooting oblique for the U-10B. (Fig. 5) By removing the left and right doors behind the cockpit we could install a 12-inch focal length left shooting oblique and a 6-inch mapping camera, hanging out in the slipstream. It was very breezy for the pilot, but functional if no other photo reconnaissance capability was available.

For assault and cargo aircraft, we continued with the theme of versatility and simplicity by developing photo systems capable of both oblique and vertical photography. In the case of the C-123 aircraft, a K-17 camera with either a 6-inch or 12-inch lens was mounted in the forward bailout hatch. A K-38, 9" x 18" format camera with a 36-inch focal length lens could also be tripod-mounted on the aft ramp of the aircraft. (Fig. 6) The C-123 required no modification and installation was accomplished in less than 30 minutes.

The photo reconnaissance capability for the C-47 was



Fig. 6

essentially the same as the C-123, however, minor sheet metal work was required in order to provide a port in the skin of the aircraft for the vertical camera. (Fig. 7) When mounted beneath the floor boards this provided a covert reconnaissance capability if needed in a denied area of interest. The tripod mounted K-38 camera lens was mounted in the C-47's doorway and provided excellent oblique photography, but required the mission to be flown with the door removed. (Fig. 8)

In order to provide the essential processing, printing, interpretation, and dissemination of our photo reconnaissance products, the section operated out of the base photo lab. We were assigned to the 6th Fighter Squadron (FS), commanded by Maj Leroy "Svede" Svendsen. Although squadron status had been proposed and approved by Tactical Air Command, final activation of the 5th RTS did not take place until Nov 1964. We received great support from the 6th FS as well as the other squadrons, although a number of pilots were not keen on flying recce, much preferring strike mission and delivering ordnance onto targets.

To support deployed operations, we developed a modular photo processing cell (PPC). It was composed of the necessary personnel and equipment tailored to support various contingencies. We developed several of these PPCs—one went to Vietnam with Farm Gate and another went to Panama as part of Bold Venture. We could not assume that a photo lab or a building suitable to meet our needs would be available at a deployed location, so our planning was strictly for bare-base operations. We planned to be as close to the flight line as possible to assure quick response to recce missions and rapid aircraft turn-around. Essentially, the PPC was made up of WW II and Korean war vintage mobile processing units, consisting of Jamesway shelters (Fig. 9), portable darkrooms (Fig. 10), processors, printers, PI equipment, aircraft film, printing materials,

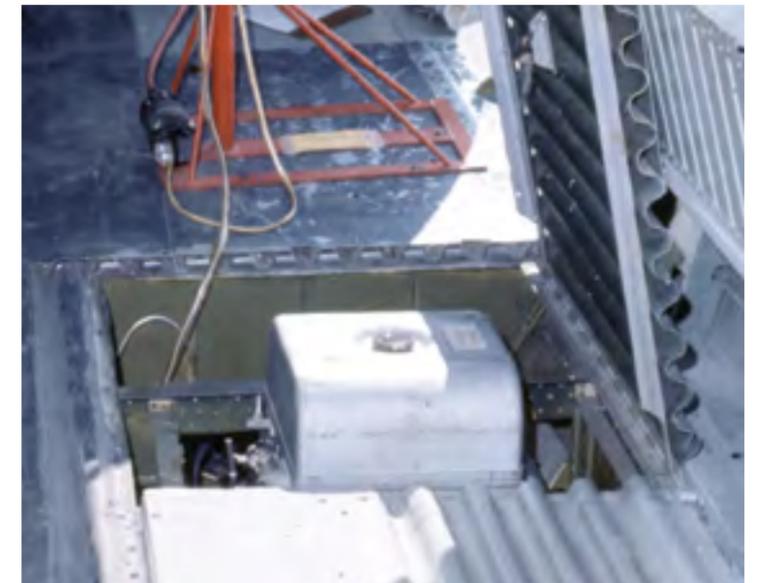


Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

chemicals, and other essentials. We carried our own power unit, water pumps, and storage tanks to ensure we were self-supporting.

The other half of our capability, the technologically sophisticated reconnaissance assets, were not normally considered for MTT use or MAP provisioning. Our level of reconnaissance sophistication was not the same as the USAF's premier RF-101, RB-66, and the RF-4C capabilities. Still, the capabilities of the Douglas RB-26L "Sweet Sue" and the B-26K Nimrods was every bit as good as TAC recon aircraft of that era. Two RB-26s were assigned to the Farm Gate operation in Apr 1962. The Farm Gate crews used these aircraft for both recon and strike missions, adding to the wear and tear on the aircraft. They could carry up to four internal cameras—forward oblique, split verticals, and a vertical mapping camera.

Most of the B-26C aircraft assigned to Farm-Gate came from another CIA

44-35813, on 10 Oct 1962. The camera crew was uploading photo flash cartridges for a night photo mission. Although the aircraft was properly grounded, all 50 of the 4-second delay cartridges ejected from their dispensers during the camera preflight check and exploded on the ramp under the aircraft. This created quite an explosion and eye witnesses claimed the aircraft was lifted off the ground two or three feet. The two camera maintenance technicians, Sgt Percy Vaughn and Sgt Oscar Gonzales, both of whom were in the cockpit running the preflight checks, jumped out of the cockpit, onto the wing, and leaped to the ground. Injuries were a broken ankle and a broken wrist, if I recall correctly, but obviously both had the scare of their life. The saga does not end here, though.

5th Air Force in Japan decided they had jurisdiction for this "accident" and sent an investigation team to Bien Hoa. Gen Pritchard was very concerned about the interference with his detachment and

that this was personnel error, which we challenged repeatedly. The true reason for the accident was never fully established, but was thought to be stray voltage across the flash cartridge firing pins due to lightning and thunderstorms in the area at the time. I'm not sure if the 5th Air Force team was totally satisfied, but did finally agree on the finding. Gen Pritchard, though, was pleased with the findings. The aircraft was patched up for low level, wheels down flight to Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam, for maintenance work before flying to Clark AB, Philippines, for refurbishing. We never saw that aircraft again.

I returned to Hurlburt Field from Vietnam on 23 Jan 63 and was sent TDY to the Eastman-Kodak Company in Rochester, NY, to pick up infrared imaging equipment for operational testing in Vietnam. Of equal importance, I was able to scrounge up a photo trailer with color and black and white motion picture processors to satisfy a critical need at Farm Gate. All of the equipment and the photo trailer were loaded aboard a Douglas C-124 Globemaster II transport and we departed for Vietnam on 5 Apr 63. (Fig. 11)

This 6-month tour at Bien Hoa AB was probably the most rewarding, yet most frustrating, assignment I experienced during my 10 years in special operations. There was great pressure on SAWC to produce imagery of air strikes, enemy forces in contact, and KIAs. A SAWC briefing team was established to produce upbeat presentations to visiting VIPs, headquarter staffs, and operations and intelligence staffs. Unfortunately, the desired "eye-watering" combat imagery was not forthcoming or easily obtainable. The Viet Cong insurgents operated mostly at night. Infrequent daytime attacks took advantage of the jungle canopy to conceal transportation and attack routes. The Snoopy strike reconnaissance pods only gave us marginal BDA. Other problems included aircrews forgetting to turn on the power to the pods, plus a few "accidental" jettisons of the pods. Col Finan, the Farm Gate commander, was hard pressed to satisfy the SAWC's photo requirements. He ordered us to bolt the pods to the shackles and to hard wire the pods to the armament systems.

the potential to expose a highly classified operation. His instructions were clear, "Capt Ifland, get over to Farm Gate immediately and get this resolved." Gen Pritchard had me placed on orders as a member of the accident investigation team. I arrived in Vietnam on 18 Oct 62.

The team spent a full week investigating the incident, convinced



Fig. 10

program in Laos called Mill Pond. Flying out of Takhli RTAFB, the program was headed up by then Maj Harry "Heinie" Aderholt. These aircraft were a big challenge to the Farm Gate maintenance people and the pilots because each aircraft was configured differently. An example of the problems that could impact us was an incident with an RB-26, serial number



Fig. 11

This provided immediate results with the pods' coverage of ordnance delivered from the guns, wing racks, or bomb bays.

One area of particular concern was the need for pictures of Farm Gate personnel, particularly the combat control teams (CCTs) in their various work areas and illustrating the bare base working conditions. The CCTs were usually in the field working with Army Special Forces teams searching for Viet Cong and defending the fortified hamlets throughout the area. (Fig 12) We decided that the best way to provide photo coverage of their operations was to join a team in the field. I joined a two-man CCT headed up by Sgt Charlie Jones and half of a Special Forces "A- team" and headed up to the Central Highlands, to an area near Ban Me Thuot, northwest of Nha Trang. We were to provide assistance to a hamlet in the Montagnard region that had been under repeated Viet Cong attacks for several weeks. The A-team, along with our CCT, organized the indigenous fighters and equipped them with weapons, radios, ammunition, and grenades for a night time search and destroy mission. (Fig. 13 on next page) The large quantity of high quality color slides I provided because of this operation made me bit of a hero.

An interesting event took place one night in July 1963, when we were testing the IR system and photo-flash missions. I

was on a night mission aboard an RB-26C aircraft with Capt Ken Alwick, pilot, and Capt Miles Tanimoto, navigator. We received communications that a hamlet with a Special Forces team was under attack and calling for help. The hamlet was fairly close to us and Ken decided to divert and take some pictures. I said

the flaming arrow, a collection of lights or flares mounted on a platform, in the shape of an arrow, that could be rotated to direct a pilot where to drop air-to-ground ordnance. Neither the C-47 flare ship nor the alert strike force had arrived yet. Ken circled the hamlet, lined up on the "flaming arrow," and did a high speed



Fig. 12

taking pictures would probably not show much of the attack, but recalling the impact of the photo cartridge explosion on the flight line at Bein Hoa, I suggested that perhaps we could hold them off until the relief arrived.

We approached the hamlet and saw

pass at about 500 feet. I hit the salvo switch on Tanimoto's call and all 52 photo flash cartridges ejected as we passed over the flaming arrow. From the ground the noise must have been deafening and the brilliant light momentarily blinded observers. The feedback from the hamlet



Fig. 13

was one of great excitement for our “new weapon system.” More importantly, the Viet Cong broke off their attack and disappeared in the jungle. That was my first and only strike sortie in the RB-26.

In November 1964, the 5th RTS was activated. At about the same time the construction of the recce technical building was completed and the entire squadron was under the same roof with the space and equipment to meet its mission requirements. Unfortunately, I lost Sgt Roddick and his group of great technicians to wing maintenance in compliance with TAC regulations. Our close relationship remained, however, and they were always available to support our operations missions and develop photo capabilities for an aircraft.

With the operations in Vietnam and South America settling down to some degree of normalcy, attention focused on developing a comprehensive recce training program for the



Fig. 14

aircrews and the expanding RTS. Typical training “targets” for the B-26 and C-123 crews would be oil refineries and shipping docks in Louisiana, ship yards in Pascagoula and Mobile, Navy bases in New Orleans and Jacksonville, and military or industrial installations within 500 mile radius of Hurlburt Field. Night time flights utilizing the IR sensor were also

scheduled. Nighttime photo flash missions could not be flown in the US except over certain weapons release ranges. The emphasis was on aircrew performance of the recce mission and most importantly, gaining, and maintaining the skill of the assigned photo-interpreters. Equally important to the training were the yearly joint special operations wargames with the Army at Camp McCall, NC. These joint exercises coincided with the Army Special Forces graduation field exercises.

January 1964 brought an unusual reconnaissance requirement, Project Moose Count, and the target area was Isle Royale National Park located in the upper reaches of Lake Superior. This was to be the first operational deployment of the RB-26L Sweet Sue aircraft using all the cameras and infrared sensor. The 10-day mission stretched out to over three weeks because of the cloud cover and the severe weather during that time of the year. Maj “Johnny” Johnson, Capt Tanimoto, Sgt Roddick, a crew chief, two maintenance technicians, and I were dispatched to K.I. Sawyer AFB, MI, to accomplish the mission. (Johnson, the author, and Tanimoto are pictured in Fig. 14) The objective was photographic and IR coverage of the island in one mission to obtain an accurate count of the moose and the number of wolves that preyed on the moose, in order to determine “who was winning.” The snow on the island appeared to be two or three feet deep, which provided great contrast between the snow and the animals. Many flights proved invalid part way through the flight as weather invariably moved in and the animals relocated before the next flight. After 21 days we finally had a successful mission and delivered the film to Rome Air Development Center in New York for processing and analysis.

In November 1965, the increasing demands for special operations capabilities and aircrews exceeded the ability of Hurlburt Field to both train crews and support worldwide operations. The 1st Air Commando Wing and the operational mission moved to England AFB, near Alexandria, LA, leaving the training mission and its aircraft at Hurlburt Field. This had a tremendous impact on the RTS since we had barely settled into our new building. We took over the base photo lab at England AFB, which was totally inadequate for our needs. Several Jamesway shelters were erected next to the squadron to accommodate the people and equipment. Also, our unit designation was changed from 5th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron to the 8th Air Commando Squadron, Reconnaissance Technical (ACS-RT). It was a struggle at first, but we were soon back on track.

In mid-1964, the On-Mark B-26K Counter-Invaders were starting to come off the production line. The first went to the Air Force Test Center at Edwards AFB, CA, in Jun 1964. The first production K-model arrived at Hurlburt Field in July. The next five aircraft were delivered directly to the Congo for use in a CIA program. Seven of the next aircraft went to the 605th Air Commando Squadron in Panama, and the last of the 40 aircraft were delivered to Hurlburt Field in Apr 1965. All of these aircraft were redeployed to England AFB with the relocation of the 1st Air Commando Wing, which assumed the training mission for the RB and B-26K aircrews. About one year later, SAWC deployed eight B-26Ks to Southeast Asia



Fig. 15

for use in Project Lucky Tiger. These aircraft departed England AFB in June 1966 with the code name “Big Eagle” for an initial six month TDY and were staged out of Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand for operations against the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. I was disappointed that the RB-26K was not included in this deployment, but clearly recognized that the aircraft could not survive in the classical reconnaissance role with the formidable anti-aircraft guns protecting the Trail. Further, if you did observe a truck on the Trail you had to have ability to kill it the moment you saw it—the RB-26K did not have this ability. Taking a picture of the target and flying back for processing and interpretation and then sending a strike aircraft back would just confirm that the target was no longer there.

I departed England AFB in September 1967 for a year-long tour with the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, arriving in Tan Son Nhut AB just in time for the Tet Offensive. About two-thirds of the way through my tour I received orders to proceed to Washington, DC, for interviews for a special assignment. Col Aderholt, now Director of Operations of the newly designated Special Operations Forces Headquarters at Eglin AFB, intervened with a by-name request and I came back to SOF. Maj Dick Secord was assigned as Col Aderholt’s executive officer at SOF HQ when he was notified he was to be commander of the 603rd SOS at Hurlburt Field. The 603rd SOS flew A-26As and also a reconnaissance version of the A-26A, when a USAF decision was made to remove the aircraft from the Air Force inventory. On 10 Nov 1968, all but one of the remaining A-26A aircraft departed for the “boneyard” at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ in a great formation fly-by. The remaining A-26A was installed on a pedestal in the Hurlburt Field Air Park.

The A-26As were replaced with Cessna A-37B Dragonfly aircraft with no photo reconnaissance capability. The Dragonfly did have a panoramic camera internally installed for strike assessment and BDA, though. In October 1969, I was designated to be the commander of the RTS at England AFB and began preparing the squadron for relocation back to Hurlburt Field. The move was fairly painless because we returned to the specially designed building at Hurlburt Field that we vacated several years before. The squadron was now designated the 8th

Special Operations Squadron, Reconnaissance Technical.

Unfortunately, mission requirements were constantly changing and AFOSOF did not have the same emphasis on the reconnaissance mission it had had in earlier years. The primary photo aircraft was the C-123K. The 8th SOS-RT stayed very busy with myriad operational requirements—mapping, installation photos for construction programs, reconnaissance in support of exercises and wargames, and training sorties kept the capability alive. In addition, we absorbed the base photo lab mission when we moved back into our building. We were responsible for photography of public relations, accidents, awards and decorations, and other routine requirements throughout the base. One day, I received a call from Maj Secord requesting that I provide photo coverage of a very special event in his squadron. The squadron was going to fly its very first air-to-air refueling of the A-37B. (Fig. 15) Maj Dave Henry would be the pilot for the photo coverage of the refueling, formation flying, and hook up to the tanker. We spent two days recording the event with photography from the A-37 and from the tanker. This was my last “special” photo reconnaissance operation. In mid-1972, I was reassigned to the 497th Reconnaissance Technical Group in Wiesbaden, Germany, essentially ending more than 10 years in special operations. I will always be grateful for the honor of being an air commando and the distinct honor of being selected to the Air Commando Hall of Fame in 1969. This was an exciting time in my career and these honors remain very dear to me to this very day. Any Time – Any Place.



About the Author: Jimmy A. Ifland, Col, USAF (Ret) enlisted in the Air Force in 1948 as a photographer; still, aerial and motion picture, achieving a rank of TSgt when commissioned in 1956 as a 2/Lt through the Officer Candidate School at Lackland, AFB. He was selected for Jungle Jim in 1961 and finished special ops training and assignment to Hurlburt Field in early 1962. As a recently promoted captain he was assigned as the Wing Photo/Recon Officer, Squadron Commander and special photo adviser to Special Air Warfare Center and 1st Combat Applications Group. He retired from SAC Headquarters in 1978 as Director of Collections. After Air Force retirement he worked for the CIA at the Imagery Satellite Ground Station for 15 years until 1993 when he retired for the second time.

Intellectual Warrior

Captain John Frederick Shiner

By Wayne G. "Jesse" Martin

Capt John F. Shiner, known as Fred to his friends, graduated from Capitol University with a Bachelor's Degree in Education in 1964 and received his commission in the USAF through the ROTC program. He went on to the University of Maryland and attained his Master's degree in History in 1966. Active duty began with Air Force Flight School, and as a newly trained pilot he was assigned to KC-135s in a Strategic Air Command (SAC) unit. From SAC he was assigned as an aircraft commander flying C-123K's at Phan Rang AB, RVN, and it was here that I first met Capt Shiner.

My assignment out of tech school was to C-130E aircraft out of Langley AFB, Virginia, attached to the 4th Aerial Port Squadron (APS). This squadron supported combat controllers, loadmasters, riggers, and air freight. Most of the guys, including such luminaries such as CMSGT Joe Orr, had served with the air commandos in Vietnam and I was no exception. I volunteered for service in Vietnam and was assigned to C-123Ks with the 310th APS at Phan Rang, RVN.

I first arrived in Vietnam at 19 years of age and immediately reported to duty at Phan Rang. It took about two weeks to "process in" and get my "in country check out." I was assigned to an aircraft

commander, Capt Fred Shiner. There seemed to be two kinds of pilots at Phan Rang. First were pilots who loved to be there and fly this older type of bird, and the pilots who thought they were being punished by being cruelly assigned to an aircraft furthest from the capabilities of a fighter aircraft. Capt Shiner was clearly of the first group.

At first glance I didn't quite get the captain. He was short and his hair cut was close to the skin. He had a rotund physical build, but a smile that lit up a room. He smoked a pipe and reminded me more of a kind uncle than the man I would be working for in coming months. He was first to introduce me to the rest of the crew. With each introduction he would verbally describe the importance of each man's role as it pertained to the team and the mission. He then told me how happy he was to have me on the crew and to come to him if I had any problems. You just knew that his words of encouragement and kindness were genuine. To better bond the crew he had us eat breakfast together when we were available to do so.

The following morning was still dark when I arrived at the chow hall for breakfast. While standing in line I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was our copilot and he pointed to a table where Capt

Shiner sat with the engineer. I looked around the seating area and noticed tables of officers and tables of enlisted but our table was only our crew. That



Capt John "Fred" Shiner (Photo courtesy of Wayne Martin)

made a huge comforting impression for this nineteen-year-old in my first combat zone. The captain went over the day's mission...a passenger run. Then he said something that stunned me for sure. He looked directly at only me and said, "Only the Air Force makes sure your last meal is so good." I was sitting there staring at him with my mouth open when everyone started laughing. I was

the new guy and the joke was on me. Fortunately, following that first breakfast with my crew the jokes were always on the rotating copilots in training.

Over the next few months we, as a crew, became very close and even spent time together on our days off. We flew five days on and one day off. The better



Capt John Shiner (Photo courtesy of Wayne Martin)

I got to know Capt Shiner the more I realized that this intellectual would be as comfortable as a college professor as he seemed to be as an aircraft commander. He spoke with us every day about the history of Vietnam and the indigenous people. He would go on in detail about the French colonizing the country, its part in World War II, and even the Geneva Accords in the 1950s. He was the first person to ever tell me that Ho Chi Minh was a great man and why—about how he had helped us in WWII and how Eisenhower had let the French back into the country after the war. In doing my own research later at college and under the guidance of Professor Stephen Ambrose, I was able to verify everything Capt Shiner told me. He would enlighten us with facts on how much the war was costing per day and a myriad of other bits and pieces of information that made him one of the most interesting men I have ever met. Flying was a joy for Capt Shiner, but history was without a doubt his real passion.

Only once did I experience him being really angry. The squadron had an older Lt Col from the Pentagon assigned as an executive officer. He was an administrative-type leader operating in a "flying officer's" environment. He

was often known to harangue guys about their haircuts, for example, and at times the squadron commander would take him into the office for a good talking to. These talks seemed to have no meaningful effect on the exec. The event in which I observed Capt Shiner visibly angry came when this Lt Col issued orders for our crew to perform a list of general maintenance tasks on our day off.

Upon Capt Shiner's arrival to operations that day, he saw what we were doing, asked me what was going on, and I told him. This is when he became angry. Capt Shiner immediately relieved us of these duties and stated he would handle the situation. With the squadron commander beside him applying a stare that would kill a normal man he enthusiastically told this Lt Col to never under any circumstances "mess" with his crew again. We were never issued orders for this type of work again. Capt Shiner was thereafter my hero.

Our crew had normal everyday missions, where contacts with the enemy were few and far between and being diverted to another mission was a common occurrence. If it was a "CE" or combat essential mission, things would be a bit more intense. One of the CE missions we did included picking up a fully-equipped and dressed all in black, Navy team and then flying them into North Vietnam. On a normal day we would fly into Da Nang and pick up these Navy teams and their equipment, "get feet wet," and fly then into North Vietnamese air space. The C-123 aircraft had no on-board navigational technology, so it was all VFR navigation through the mountains to a cut in the jungle. We would land, insert a team, and at times extract another. The one variable to be considered with each mission was the weather. One day we attempted at least three times to enter the jungle to insert a team, but because of the weather we could not navigate into the mountains far enough. Capt Shiner had gone up and out to "feet wet" and was preparing

to give it another go when the leader of the team said to tell the pilot that they did not have to get there today. It was a disappointment for the crew but clearly the right call. If circumstances had been different and the team was badly needed there Capt Shiner would not have stopped till he got the job done. This was the type of leader and American serviceman he was.

Toward the end of our tour the US military was handing over airplanes and the overall mission to the South Vietnamese. Unfortunately we gave them our planes but we were still flying most of the missions. An example of Capt Shiner's ability to lead and compassion for his fellow serviceman emerged when we flew to a base that was in the process of closing, to pick up and fly out cargo. There were not supposed to be any American personnel to be also flown out. While loading the cargo an American airman showed up and begged to fly out with us. Whoever had been in charge had intentionally left this young airman behind, ordering him to drive a forklift through a pass over to a larger base about 30 miles away. But the Viet Cong "owned" that pass and everyone knew it. Capt Shiner was understandably appalled. He got right on the radio to operations in



Capt John Shiner and Loadmaster Sgt Wayne Martin (Photo courtesy of Wayne Martin)

Saigon in regards to the situation. He told them that he was taking the young man with him and if they wanted that forklift, to send a C-130 to get it.

I did not hear a reply because he then turned off the radio, came back, and instructed that young frightened airman that he was going with us. I've never in my life seen anyone as visibly grateful

as that young man was at that moment. And for myself, also a young serviceman, I respected Capt Shiner over all other men. No matter what the mission or the problem at hand, Capt Shiner was always steady. The crew never heard fear in his voice nor saw it in his eyes. He was brave, but low-key and quiet in his actions. I give him most of the credit for my surviving that war.



Sgt Wayne Martin, Capt Fred Shiner, engineer Sgt Jim (Cincinnati Kid) Springfield, and one of our Co-pilots, name unknown. (Photo courtesy of Wayne Martin)

We had hours of time in the air together and would discuss the war and how it was progressing. Capt Shiner was well-versed in counterinsurgency and knew much about Col Aderholt. He in fact told us that if Col Aderholt was in command of the war we would be winning in a different way and that we would all be trainers, with the South Vietnamese flying all of the missions. The captain told us that this kind of flying was like the Wild West of the Air Force-- planes of all descriptions literally fighting a jungle war. We would make spontaneous decisions, act on them, and then complete each mission. Soon these missions were to be absorbed by a major command and these tactics would cease to exist. There would then be risk assessments instead of spontaneous actions and 10 planes to drop a bladder of fuel on a dirt field. I have lived long enough to witness this come true.

After our time in Vietnam I returned to the States, still in active service, and was injured in an aircraft incident. My discharge came in May of 1974. Capt Shiner got the assignment of his dreams

as a history professor assigned to the Air Force Academy. He then attained his PhD in history from Ohio State University.

Capt Shiner rose to acting department head at the Air Force Academy. Since then I have read most of his writings. Capt Shiner and I not only shared so many missions in Vietnam together, but also a love and study of history. I studied history as mentioned under the supervision of another great historian, Steven Ambrose. Mr. Ambrose would say "history is what it is, it is not right or wrong, and it does not matter how you feel about it. The job of the historian is to document what happened, how it happened, and who was involved." I could easily see Capt Shiner standing there nodding his head in agreement with Mr. Ambrose. The history of Vietnam Capt Shiner told me at such a young and impressionable age gave birth to my passion for research and love of history. Steven Ambrose then taught me how to move forward as a historian.

I eventually read Capt Shiner's book, *Foulois and The US Army Air Corps 1931-1935*. Then I knew that I had once been in the presence of one of America's premier military historians. Later, I read an article Capt Shiner had written for the *Air University Review* entitled "Reflections of Douhet." The following quote for me sums up how Capt Shiner felt about the USAF and America, "As military professionals responsible for protecting the nation and its vital interest, we know that the conduct of war is our business. Should an adversary seek to harm the United States, we must carry out effective combat operations and defeat his forces. Our fellow Americans rely on us to do this. They have placed their trust in our capabilities and professional competence."

Fred Shiner went from the Air Force Academy to Washington D.C., where he rose to Deputy Director of the Pentagon's Office of Air Force History and Professor of Strategy at the National War College. In the early 80's Fred Shiner was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He fought gallantly against this

terrible disease for 13 years. Gen (ret) Mike Dugan summed up this fight in an article for *Inside MS* in the fall of 1995, "For nine years Fred never missed a day of work and led a full life, even coaching soccer and baseball for his children. Then MS attacked the section of the brain that controls memory and he began a very different kind of struggle. After a time he was no longer able to leave the VA nursing home care unit. Air Force friends and colleagues visited him weekly. His wife Beverly stated that these visits were uplifting and assisted him in coping with the horrific toll MS was taking on him. He bravely endured his plight just as he had always walked in life and war with great poise and a quiet steadiness." In March 1995, our crew's Capt John Fredrick Shiner died of complications from multiple sclerosis.

Fred Shiner retired as a colonel in 1991. His books will without question stand the test of time—not only from a historical standpoint, but as strategy teaching tools for future air warriors. His articles on air warfare are actively quoted to this day. With Col Shiner's passing America lost one of its premier military historians. He showed himself to be a man of courage in battle and in life, an influential military historian, and a superior air commando. I owe him a debt I shall never be able to repay. His timely influence had a life-changing effect on this 19-year-old loadmaster in an Asian jungle war, so many years ago. He indeed was my hero.

Col John Frederick Shiner authored *Foulois and the Army Air Corps 1931-1935*

Col Shiner co-authored *With Courage: The US Army Air Forces in WWII*

Capt Shiner's articles on military aviation history and defense policy have appeared in publications such as: *Aerospace Historian, Military Affairs, Modern Warfare and Society, Air University Review*



About the Author: Wayne G. "Jesse" Martin served in the USAF From 1969-1974. He worked as a private contractor for the US government for several years. He has owned several businesses and does independent historical research as a consultant.

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