

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

**7th SOS First
Infil in OIF**

**16th SOG: Early
Action in OIF**



SOLE in OIF

**50th Anniversary
of Son Tay Raid**

**Maintaining the
CV-22 Osprey**

Heroism at Na Khang



Foreword by Larry Ropka
Colonel, USAF (Retired)

Air Commando JOURNAL



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Air Commando Association.....	52
Eglin Federal Credit Union	32
First Command Financial Services	14
GEICO Military	47
Special Operations Warrior Foundation.....	51
Ultra Electronics ICE.....	32
WANTED! USAF MILITARIA	32

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Foreword

By Col Larry Ropka, USAF (Ret)

4

Chindit Chatter

By Col Dennis Barnett, USAF (Ret)

5

Hotwash

6

SITREP

By Bill Rone, SES (Ret)

7

Recollections of the Son Tay Raiders

By Col John Gargus, USAF (Ret)

8

Honoring AFSOC's Last Son Tay Raiders

By ACJ Editorial Staff

14

Heroism at Na Khang: Air Commando Ramon Horinek & 1st defense of Lima Site 36

By Lt Col Dr Richard Newton, USAF (Ret)

16



ON THE COVER:

The lithograph "The Highlander" created by Mr Ryan Dorling depicts a 7th SOS MC-130H, 89-0280, passing over an Iraqi convoy en route to infiltrate US Special Forces into northern Iraq on 22 March 2003. The Highlander was hit multiple times causing severe damage and landed safely in Turkey. (Courtesy of the artist, Ryan Dorling, Military Litho Prints)



Special Operations Liaison Element in OIF

By Col Paul Harmon, USAF (Ret)

21

16th SOG: Early Action in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

By Col Randy O'Boyle, USAF (Ret)

28

Task Force Viking and the Ugly Baby Mission

By Col Cory Peterson, USAF (Ret)

34

Maintaining the CV-22 Osprey: A Crew Chief's Perspective

By MSgt Jason Jones, USAF

42

Hearing the Echoes of History

By Col Travis Hill, USAF (Ret)

45

Airpower Classics

HH-3 Jolly Green Giant

48

Book Reviews:

The Secret War Against Hanoi

49

FOREWORD

By Colonel Larry Ropka, USAF, Retired

On the night of 21 November 1970, a little after 2 a.m., 15 aircraft, led by 7th SOS MC-130E Combat Talons, converged on the Son Tay prison located 23 miles west of Hanoi. They were supported by another 100 Air Force and Navy aircraft fulfilling various roles in Operation KINGPIN, the mission to rescue American POWs.

By the fall of 1969, there were over 500 Americans being held by the North Vietnamese as prisoners of war. The air war over North Vietnam had progressed at a blistering pace and the sophisticated air defenses had previously precluded any serious consideration of a rescue attempt. The President had imposed a bombing halt that fall and by the spring of 1970, the pent up pressure of the “no soldier left behind” tradition led Brig Gen Don Blackburn, USA, Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with Brig Gen James Allen, Director of Plans and Programs on the Air Staff, to initiate an all-out effort to rescue some of the prisoners. Lt Gen Leroy Manor led the planning and execution of this challenging and historic effort and I was proud to be a part of his great team as a planner. John Gargus’ excellent article, “Recollections of the Son Tay Raiders,” is the lead story in this issue of the *Air Commando Journal* honoring the skill and courage of all the participants and marking the 50th Anniversary of the Son Tay Raid.

In his first meeting with a small inter-service team of planners in the Pentagon, General Blackburn had a DIA expert on POW matters present a briefing on the known POW camps and plight of the prisoners inside them. Following that, in an impassioned statement, Blackburn said “that the planners’ task was to develop a plan to recover some of the prisoners,” and he personally ensured that “whatever it takes” to get the job done would be provided. That attitude and commitment spawned a lot of incredible out-of-the-box thinking by the entire team of planners, aircrews, and SF operators to develop the tactics and

capabilities needed to give the mission the greatest possibility of success.

As history tells, we failed to rescue any of the POWs, but the operation deep into North Vietnam set in motion events that dramatically improved the lives and reversed the loss of hope that all POWs experienced while being held in captivity. One of those POWs was Air Commando, Capt Ramon Horinek from Atwood, KS, and in this issue we honor his courage and service as a Forward Air Controller and F-105 pilot flying missions over North Vietnam until his luck ran out on 23 October 1967 when he became a POW in Hanoi.

The same out of the box thinking, courage, and aerial skill exhibited by the Son Tay raiders in 1970 has transcended time and was displayed again by Air Commandos during the opening days of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in March 2003. Air Commandos from Hurlburt Field planned, coordinated, and flew multiple tough missions early in the war inserting US Special Forces into the Iraqi desert by helicopters and by MC-130s while AC-130 gunships flew top cover and interdiction missions. Our great Air Commandos from Europe planned their missions from the continent into northern Iraq, but due to an uncooperative ally air planners had to create a Plan B driving the mission into a two-night operation and testing the aircrews aerial skills and courage to deliver Special Operations Forces to their landing zones in northern Iraq, dodging heavy Iraqi AAA along the way. The long-range low-level infiltration mission led, coincidentally, by aircrews from the 7th SOS would become known as the “Ugly Baby.” Their story is also presented in this issue.

As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Son Tay Raid and last reunion for the Raiders, we also honor and remember our Air Commandos, past and present, who live up to the motto “Anytime, Anyplace” every day.



Colonel Ropka, a master navigator and special operations aircraft expert, was selected as one of the original operational planners in Washington DC. He led a small group of intelligence and operations officers for Operation KINGPIN, the raid on Son Tay prison to rescue American POWs. Colonel Ropka was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame in 1969.





CHINDIT CHATTER

This issue of the *Air Commando Journal* is a collage of articles about several very significant Air Commando operations and missions. First, we dedicate this volume to the 50th Anniversary of Operation KINGPIN, the attempted rescue of American POWs from Son Tay prison, 23 miles from Hanoi, in what was then North Vietnam. As mentioned in our last issue, your ACA intended to join the Son Tay Raiders Association and our annual convention to highlight that significant milestone during the Heritage Symposium. We had arranged a panel with some of the great Air Commandos and some of the POWs who were impacted by that operation. Unfortunately, 2020 and the COVID 19 pandemic had other ideas and we were unable to complete that plan. As you saw in the Foreword to this issue, we were very lucky to have Col Larry Ropka, one of the key Operation KINGPIN planners, pen that great introduction.



Additionally, John Gargus has provided us another article that allows us to gain further insight into that momentous mission.

From that mission over 50 years ago, Air Commandos have learned important lessons. From those lessons, combined with hosts of others have evolved capabilities that have been used literally, as the inscription says on the Air Commando Association coin, “From WWII till Tonight- Air Commandos Always

There.” This edition highlights many of those capabilities and teamwork that have led to successful mission accomplishments from WWII to the present. I know you will enjoy the variety and scope of the articles in this issue.

The second article I want to highlight is Col (ret) Cory Peterson’s story on the “Ugly Baby” mission. It is with no small bit of pride that we can say this is the first time that story has been told in its entirety or by the Air Commandos who flew the mission. For many reasons, what happened that night has remained a closed book – until now. Cory Peterson, who was the navigator on the Combat Talon II

forced to divert to Turkey, has provided a comprehensive story, extensively researched, and confirmed by the Air Commandos, Special Forces soldiers, and commanders who were involved with the planning and execution of that mission. As you will note in the epilogue, that mission produced dozens hometown heroes.

I do however want to give a bit of a personal backdrop to one of the articles “Heroism at Na Khang: Air Commando Ramon “Ray” Horinek and the 1st Defense of Lima Site 36,” researched and written by Lt Col (ret) Dr Rick Newton. I grew up on a small farm in northwest Kansas near Atwood, a town of about 1,800 people in those days. Our farm adjoined the farm of Anton Horinek. I had worked with and for Anton and one of his sons, LeRoy. That is what neighbors do in the Midwest. In the mid-to-late 1960s, I became aware that Anton had another son, Ramon, who had been shot down in an F-105 in Southeast Asia and was a POW in Vietnam. It was a great shock when about a year ago I discovered that before he was a fighter pilot, Ray was an Air Commando and had been awarded the Air Force Cross for his heroism. I found a couple of tidbits about his gallantry, but Dr Newton went well beyond that and produced the article on the mission that led to that award, using now declassified reports and an interview from another American who was also on the ground with Ray during the siege. Atwood, KS, is just like every other community in America that literally has heroes living among us. I hope Ray’s youngest brother, Anthony, and the rest of his family and the community back home will enjoy and appreciate learning a bit more about their local American hero.

Last, I want to give a shout out to all who have contributed to the *Air Commando Journal* over the years. We are coming up on our tenth year of publishing and another source of pride is that the majority of articles are written by people who were “there.” Without your willing contributions, and the work of our editorial team, also volunteers, and brought to life through the layout and graphic design magic provided by Jeanette Elliot, there would be no *ACJ*. The journal is truly a labor of love to highlight the commitment and capabilities of the women and men who call themselves Air Commandos.

Please enjoy this edition of your *Air Commando Journal*.

Any Time—Any Place



Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Retired)
ACA Chief Operating Officer and Editor-in-Chief



Assisting ACA in our mission to support Air Commandos and their families: Past, Present, and Future

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HOTWASH

A-37 Dragonfly

I enjoyed the article and picture of the A-37 in the *Journal*. This great little aircraft certainly served its purpose and was a great asset in the VN conflict and beyond. After the successful evaluation named Combat Dragon, the follow on training program was established at England AFB, with the 4532 CCTS. We trained replacement pilots for the US units at Bien Hoa and many Vietnamese pilots (former A-1 pilots).

Felix "Sam" Sambogna
ACA Life Member 0081

Scott,

I keep getting kudos for the work you did in developing the items we gave you into a one-of-a-kind piece of our history.

Scott, it was really something, and we in the association appreciate the time and labor you put into it.

On behalf of all of us Dragonfly's, WELL DONE!

Lon Holtz
President A-37 Association

CV-22 ACJ Vol 9, Issue 1

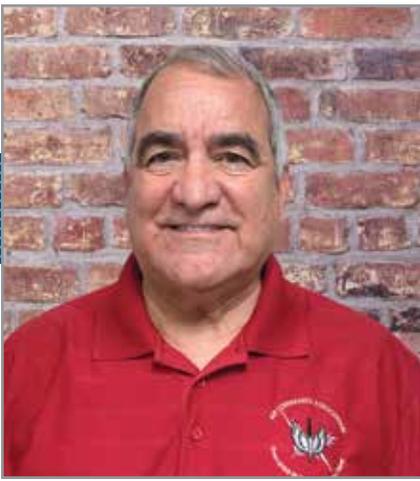
At the time of printing the 9/1 issue of the *Journal*, the production team did not know the pilot of the CV-22 that was shown on the back cover was Maj William Mendel



who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 2017. Mendel also co-authored the article "Ambush Over South Sudan" in the same issue. On a personal note, we would like to congratulate William, he is about to be promoted to a Lt Colonel.

ACA Production Team

Submissions may be emailed 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.



SITREP

Bill Rone, SES (Retired)
Executive Financial Advisor

Greetings Air Commandos,

I hope each of you are well and following smart Coronavirus guidelines as we struggle to return to more acceptable lifestyles. As CMSgt (ret) Bill Turner noted is his *Journal* SITREP, Air Commandos continue to be deployed around the world standing watch and engaging adversaries. There are few breaks in the Air Commando OPTEMPO.

As a DOD civilian comptroller for 42+ years, I was honored to serve Air Commandos as AFSOC's Comptroller my last 22 years--and now all Air Commandos as a volunteer advisor to the ACA. As each of you know funding is essential to keep any activity viable—government or commercial. Your Air Commando Association and Foundation are no different, but what they do is.

The ACA's non profit mission is to serve Air Commandos and families past, present, and future by educating all on the Air Commando and Joint SOF mission and people, honor Air Commando heritage, sponsor and recognize outstanding individual and team performance through unit programs, and provide scholarships for children and grandchildren of Air Commandos. At this time, there are over 3,800 ACA members around the globe. The ACA is blessed to have great community, corporate, and individual financial and volunteer support--and our world-class *Air Commando Journal* is a tremendous resource to all Air Commandos, supporters, and admirers.

The ACA is an extremely lean organization with only 2.5 employees operating out of a small facility west of Hurlburt Field. Annual revenues from

corporate and individual donations, dues, and net proceeds from fund raisers for the last three years were roughly \$300K. Operating costs for each of those years were roughly \$280. Those three "good" years followed four previous years of accumulated losses of \$69K. A revived energetic focus on increasing revenues and cutting lowest priority costs resulted in the positive bottom lines that have enabled the ACA to continue viable programs and build a Cash and Investment buffer of roughly \$200K to cover lean years like Covid-2020, and other unexpected cash drains. One major fund raiser initiated in 2019, the Anytime Flight, has been widely recognized and supported. Extremely limited funding for several years resulted in facility and HVAC problems needing immediate care. Anytime Flight membership requires a donation of \$600 that can be made in lump sum, or over a three year period. To date, this initiative has raised \$60K and we have funded over \$36K for a roof replacement and major HVAC repairs. In addition to delivering strong support to Air Commandos for the missions noted above, the ACA funds administrative costs for the Air Commando Foundation with no extra personnel and limited expenses.

The Air Commando Foundation is a tremendous success with a laser focused mission—funding unmet needs for Air Commandos and families, past, present and future. The ACF will consider any identified need that cannot be funded by the VA, DOD, USAF, USSOCOM, or major non-profit. Most needs are relatively small but require cash in hours or days directly to the individual or family in need. I've watched the ACA team validate, approve, and release funds in hours—amazing speed and efficiency from my perspective as a comptroller. Since its inception in 2012, the ACF has funded many crucial needs. The light,

lean and fast no-overhead approach has been recognized and universally rewarded with huge support. Annual revenues averaging almost \$80K have enabled the ACF to support all validated needs and a very special 2019 \$500K+ single donation has allowed the ACF to build Cash and Investment balances exceeding \$825K. The tremendous support of the ACF mission has enabled ACA leadership to initiate studies to identify the most pressing unmet needs of Air Commandos and become proactive to meeting these needs vs reacting to unmet needs passed to the ACA.

As noted earlier, the ACA and ACF depend on the benevolence of Air Commandos, industry, and community partners to serve Air Commandos and execute their missions. Regardless of obstacles, both missions must move forward and all donations are extremely appreciated. One donation opportunity I strongly recommend to donors over age 70½ is **Qualified Charitable Distributions** from Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA), especially when you are required to take **Required Minimum Distributions** from your non-Roth IRAs. Distributions directly to you are treated as ordinary income and taxed at your highest marginal federal income tax rate. If your distribution is made directly from your IRA custodian to a 501(c)3 nonprofit, which the ACF is, the distribution will not be taxed—huge extra "bang for the buck." The ACA BoD is currently considering converting the ACA from a 501(c)19 to a 501(c)3 nonprofit--more to follow.

It is an honor to serve Air Commandos. I am an enthusiastic volunteer willing to assist any Air Commando or potential donor—"Anytime Anyplace." Please text or call me at (858) 380-6202 or contact the ACA office. Standing by.



Recollections of the Son Tay Raiders

By Colonel John Gargus, USAF (Retired)

Almost fifty years ago a joint special operations task force conducted a raid into North Vietnam to rescue American prisoners of war who were believed to be incarcerated in a camp at Son Tay. The raiders executed a meticulously planned mission in the early morning hours of 20 November 1970 and were shocked to find the camp abandoned. It was a devastating experience for all, filled with anger, guilt, and apprehension for the wellbeing of the prisoners. Their remorse persisted until they learned about the positive impact their raid had had on the treatment of the POWs.

In early summer 1970, Brig Gen Donald D. Blackburn, Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities to the Chairman of the Joint Chief Staff (CJCS), ADM Thomas H. Moorer, proposed a joint feasibility study to study a possible rescue of American POWs from North Vietnam. After the Joint Chiefs were briefed on the results of this study a mission planning group from all Services assembled in July 1970. This joint planning group expanded and developed the most daring POW rescue mission, code named IVORY COAST.

When the Joint Chiefs of Staff received the IVORY COAST briefing they endorsed it with great enthusiasm and decided to execute it under their own authority. Consequently, this rescue became the first joint military operation in US history conducted under direct control of the CJCS. They established a special Joint Contingency Task Force (JCTF) to train for this mission in the US, without involving any of the commands that were conducting the war in Vietnam. The JCS designated Air Force Brig Gen

LeRoy J. Manor as its commander and Army Col Arthur D. "Bull" Simons as his deputy. Their first job was to staff their task force with the most experienced and

best qualified volunteers.

Col Simons' task was relatively easy. First, he selected Lt Col Elliott P. Sydnor, Jr. as his Ground Force Commander and



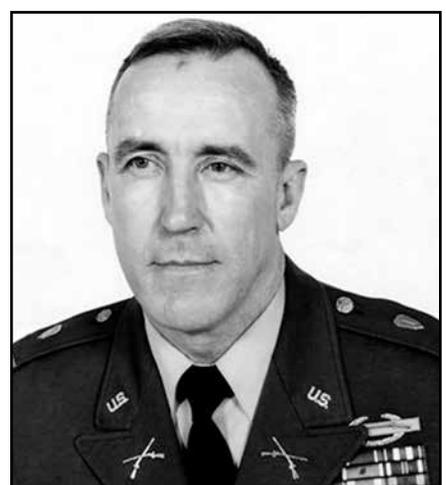
Brig Gen Donald D. Blackburn, Special Assistant for Counter Insurgency and Special Activities. (Veteran Tributes photo)



Brig Gen LeRoy J. Manor, Commander of the Air Force Special Operations Forces and Commander of the Joint Contingency Task Force. (Veteran Tributes photo)



Col Arthur D. Simons, Deputy Commander Joint Contingency Task Force. (Veteran Tributes photo)



Lt Col Elliott P. Sydnor, Commander of the Ground Force of the Joint Contingency Task Force. (Veteran Tributes photo)

Capt Richard J. Meadows as the Blueboy Assault Group Commander. Both of them came from the Ranger Infantry School at Ft Benning, GA. The rest of his recruits came from the Special Forces (SF) at Ft Bragg, NC. Simons posted notices on bulletin boards throughout the SF areas inviting men to volunteer for a moderately hazardous mission. Almost 500 responded to this first call. Fewer showed up for the follow-on interviews that reduced the number of selectees to 82 enlisted and 15 officers.

Brig Gen Manor had a more challenging task. As the Commander of the Air Force Special Operations Forces, he provided the training facility at Eglin AFB, FL. However, his required and readily available fighter, helicopter, and transport aircrews were spread out not only throughout the US, but also in Southeast Asia and Germany. He could not duplicate the personal selection process of Col Simons with everyone. Nevertheless, the USAF volunteers, once assembled, were the best and the most experienced crews he could have found.

The small number of planners who were briefed on the rescue mission after their arrival at Eglin AFB were stunned by the boldness of the proposal. They realized that the mission could become the most important event of their military careers. Planning and training for this unprecedented joint service operation went on simultaneously with many new approaches to getting to the camp without detection, freeing the prisoners, and then bringing them home safely. New air and ground tactics were tested and exercised repeatedly until each participant was completely enmeshed in his assigned role. It did not matter that the trainees did not know the location of their objective area. Many concluded correctly that they were preparing to rescue captives and that their lives depended on keeping utmost secrecy about what they were involved in. Overall morale of the ground troops was bolstered by the fact that three SF leaders: Simons, Sydnor, and Meadows had one thing in common, none of them had ever lost a man on their prior combat operations.

The Air Force contingent did not have airmen of such renown. They came from organizations that flew different aircraft

and were known for their excellence only within their respective circles. Still, their morale was equally high. They knew that they were led by the very best and that they were about to execute a mission that had no precedent in aviation history. Some of them lived at home because they were based at Eglin AFB or at its Hurlburt Field satellite. They lived normal daily lives except when they began to fly at night. The soldiers were isolated from the public at another satellite, Duke Field.

Just before deploying to Thailand, the pilots and navigators were briefed on the rescue mission and its new code name: Operation KINGPIN. The deployment base, Takhli, was closing down and we did not know what kind of facilities would be available to do the meticulous work of copying the master charts containing the flight routes to and from the target area. They crews needed the time and tools to customize their own maps and logs for the flight before arriving in country. We would be ready except for incorporating the air support package of defensive fighters, refueling tankers, and airborne command and control (C2).

Integrating the supporting aircraft into our carefully designed plan was easier than anticipated. The wing commanders in Thailand and South Vietnam were given letters from the Air Force Chief of Staff directing them to provide all needed aircraft and assistance without asking about the purpose for the unusual request. F-4s for MiG patrol came from Udorn, F-105 Wild Weasel Surface-to-air missile (SAM) suppressors and EC-121 airborne C2 platforms were from Korat, KC-135 tankers came from U-Tapao, HC-130 tankers for the helicopters were from Cam Rahn Bay. The only things they asked from us were the times they needed to be in positions in their designated airspace. The fighters had specific packages to support operations over North Vietnam and were confident they could protect the rescue package. They needed to coordinate with the EC-121 planners whose two aircraft would provide vectoring assistance against enemy MiGs. The KC-135s would orbit on their normal tracks over Laos and volunteered to send two additional tankers to Yankee Station, the US Navy patrol area in the Gulf of Tonkin, in case



Captain Richard A. Meadows, Commander of the Blueboy Assault Group. (Photo from "The Quiet Professional")



Captain Udo H. Walther, Commander of the Greenleaf Support Group. (Veteran Tributes photo)



Captain Daniel D. Turner, Commander of the Redwine Security Group. (USAF photo)



Lt. Col. Albert P. Blosch, Aircraft Commander of Strike Force formation Combat Talon from Det. 2, 1st Special Operations Wing at Pope AFB, North Carolina. (Veteran Tributes photo)



Maj. Irl L. Franklin, Aircraft Commander of Assault Force formation Combat Talon from the 7th Special Operations Squadron at Ramstein AB in Germany. (USAF photo)



Lt. Col. Warner A Britton, commander of the Jolly Green Giant helicopters from the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service at Eglin AFB, Florida. (Veteran Tributes photo)



Maj. Edwin J. Rhein, commander of the A-1E Skyraiders from the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field in Florida. (Veteran Tributes photo)

additional fuel was needed to recover the carrier based aircraft.

Earlier in November, Gen Blackburn, Gen Manor, and Col Simons made a quick trip to Vietnam to inform Gen Creighton Abrams, Commander of the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) and his staff that the JCS was deploying a task force to the war zone, whose mission was to rescue the POWs from Son Tay. Their task force would not require any Army support and needed only to borrow the Air Force's theater aircraft and normal MiG and SAM fighter protection umbrellas. The staging base would be located at Takhli and the raid would be commanded from the Monkey Mountain command post at

Da Nang. They would also require the Navy to stage a diversion in the Gulf of Tonkin to distract the enemy's attention from the actual target west of Hanoi. Gen Abrams and his staff were also stunned by the boldness of the concept and gave their unconditional and enthusiastic support.

After Saigon, Gen Manor and Col Simons flew to Yankee Station to visit VADM Frederick A. Bardshar. They needed the Navy to stage a diversionary attack in the Haiphong area. The admiral was most enthusiastic to participate in the effort. Hanoi and Haiphong would not get a presidential exemption, though, from the bombing pause, so the attack bombers were only allowed to drop illumination flares. The MiG patrol and

SAM suppressing fighters would be allowed to carry defensive armaments. To avoid compromising the raid Bardshar was not allowed to coordinate efforts with 7th Fleet headquarters in Japan or Pacific Fleet in Hawaii. RADM James "Jig Dog" Ramage would lead the Navy attack.

Gen Manor had to advance the time of the raid by 24 hours because Typhoon Patsy was headed toward Vietnam. We were ready for this contingency. Everyone went into crew rest which was followed by a gathering at the base theater. Gen Manor and his staff were already airborne on their way to Monkey Mountain command post and Col Simons was in charge. He aimed his short remarks at the soldiers who were finally going to learn exactly where they were going. "We are going to rescue 70 American prisoners of war, maybe more, from a camp called Son Tay. This is something American prisoners have a right to expect from their fellow soldiers. The target is 23 miles west of Hanoi." There was a silent pause until everyone caught their breath and then the whole theater erupted into spontaneous and thunderous applause. I stood on one side of the stage and saw their excited faces. They were men like no other I had ever seen before. However, a sobering and realistic thought invaded my mind. I stopped my cheering and wondered how many of them would not see the next sunrise. In the midst of all that cheering, it was time for a silent prayer.

There were more private prayers later as the aircraft made their way through the mountains into the Red River Valley to the unsuspecting target. Some pretended to sleep. All were as prepared as possible for what was to come. They knew the terrain and even the doors and windows of the buildings they would soon be assaulting. Our electronic warfare officers and radio operators monitored enemy radar transmissions and confirmed that our two flight formations, six helicopters led by an MC-130 and the other with five A-1E attack fighters led by the second MC-130, were still undetected. East of Hanoi, the Navy was diverting enemy attention from us. As we descended from the mountains into the Red River Valley, the cockpit crews saw

the lights of Son Tay City, Hanoi, and on the horizon, Haiphong.

Initially everything went well. The helicopters delivered the troops to the prison complex and once the radio silence was broken, we began to monitor the communications. Our MC-130's task was to orbit within the sight of Son Tay and record all radio frequencies used by the ground and airborne raiders. At first, we heard only sporadic shouts of code words with background gunfire. And then came the incredible transmission from Capt Meadows, "Negative items!" This meant that there were no prisoners. We did not believe it, thinking that there was no one only in the first secured building. The ground commander Sydnor asked for confirmation. That came again very clearly, "Negative items." We still refused to believe it. Men who assaulted the empty prison compound were devastated. "It was like getting an unexpected swift kick in the gut," claimed Joe Lupiak. Terry Buckler echoed the same sentiment. We heard Col Sydnor order his men to pull back for exfiltration and he called for the helicopters to come and get them.

Exit from Son Tay was orderly and very exciting. The disheartened soldiers were suddenly frightened just before boarding their helicopters by the sound of nearby SAMs that just began to launch. Then, once airborne, the "SAM, SAM, SAM" warning calls from A-1 pilots continued and many believed that the missiles were aimed at them. Our MC-130 crew heard repeated assurances from the electronic warfare officer, whose sensors detected every missile launch, that the missiles were not launched at any of them. Unfortunately, the helicopter crews could not hear his comforting assurances. Then someone reported a possible MiG. The RC-135 Combat Apple listening to enemy communications jumped to announce there were no MiGs threatening the task force. That did not prevent the helicopter pilots from descending and hugging the terrain until they reached the safety of the mountains, though.

Once everyone was safely in the mountains, we experienced another sobering moment. One lucky SAM ruptured a fuel tank on one of the F-105s. The crew attempted a refueling hookup with a KC-135 tanker over Laos.

Unfortunately, the fighter flamed out within the sight of the tanker and the two crew members bailed out after gliding as far into Laos as they could. They parachuted to safety and landed about one mile apart. Our MC-130 had the ability to pick up the two man crew by using the Fulton Recovery System. The Combat Talon crew completed a drop checklist for a two-man nighttime kit. However, it was unnecessary. The HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters in our task force were trained to recover downed crews. Both crewmembers were safe on the ground and communicating with the helicopters. The helicopters refueled from the HC-130 tanker, and they picked up the pilot and his back-seater at first light.

Skyraider pilot, Maj John Wares, was on the tarmac where the Army raiders came out of their helicopters. He recorded the scene in his memoirs, "The sun was coming up by then and we all wandered out onto the ramp. Sat down on the cement cross legged, Indian-style, in circles of about ten, us in our reeking sweat-soaked flight suits, and the grunts with their blackened faces, guns, grenades, and what-have-you hanging off them. They were bleeding from every square inch of exposed skin from dozens of cuts, scrapes, and bruises. We all just sat mumbling to each other. ... Then someone came out and handed a bottle to each of the circles. Everyone took a sip and passed it around and around and around, till it was empty. All of us were still just mumbling to ourselves and to each other. I can't attest to what was going on at the other circles but there wasn't a dry eye at ours. A tear running down every cheek; a gallant effort with nothing to show. To hell and back for naught."

Eventually we were summoned to come inside. We crowded into the entry hallway to hear Gen Manor and Col Simons try to lift our spirits. They thanked us for a well-executed mission, confirmed we had only two minor injuries, and reported that the Wild Weasel crew were back at Udorn in good health. They said all the right things, but even though they were very sincere about praising our effort, we took it as something our leaders were expected to

do. The only thing we felt good about was that we would be home with our families for Thanksgiving.

The F-4, F-105, KC-135, and HC-130 tanker crews also missed the debriefing. Their support packages were a part of their normal wartime tasking, except that the target area was located in North Vietnam. Only their units' planners knew about the rescue and they were not allowed to inform them. They knew only they were supporting a very special and highly classified operation west of Hanoi. Once in their designated orbits, they listened to intermittent radio chatter from the ground and even though they were preoccupied by dodging SAMs, some concluded correctly that the ongoing ground operation was designed to rescue the POWs.

The Navy airmen were also kept in the dark on the intent of their unusual flare dispensing attack. VADM Bardshar promised Col Simons and Gen Manor a credible mock attack. His aircrews, curious about flying into what had been forbidden airspace because of the bombing halt, sensed that something very important was about to happen. The Navy surpassed our expectations by launching 59 aircraft from Yankee Station and Da Nang. That was two more than the 57 aircraft flown by the Air Force. The diversionary attack drew 20 enemy SAMs in what turned out to be the largest naval nighttime operation up to that point in the war.

It was a long way home for the MC-130 crews and support personnel from Pope AFB, with stopovers in Okinawa, Hawaii, and California. The crews talked a lot about the failed rescue and feared that the raid would lead to even harsher treatment for the men they had hoped to bring home. They were ready to do it again in spite of realistic doubts that the JCTF could be reassembled without compromising any future rescue efforts. Not yet knowing what kind of news coverage would greet them at home, they were ready to deny participating in the raid if that became necessary. Some blamed faulty intelligence for this failure.

Those of us who had been the planners had to justify the intelligence isolation we employed during our preparations in Florida. In order to not

create suspicions that might compromise the rescue attempt, it became necessary to stop asking about the POWs at Son Tay. Capt Jacobs, our DIA photo interpreter, discovered three low altitude AQM-34 Buffalo Hunter photo-reconnaissance mission tracks formed a perfect six legged “X” right over the camp. He presented his discovery to his bosses, who suspended further overflights of the prison. Jacobs noted reduced activity in the latest photographs, but the SR-71’s infrared photography showed the camp as still occupied. On the night of the raid fresh SR-71 photos showed the same and they also revealed that the antiaircraft positions around the camp were unoccupied. This was the indication we needed to have as proof that our raid had not been compromised. Our security precautions were prudent, but they prevented us from accessing day-to-day information on the status of the prisoners.

We received heroic welcomes from our families and units once we returned home. The families were glad to have us back and our colleagues were curious about how we did it. Unfortunately, we were not free to talk about the aircraft modifications and new equipment, nor the joint tactics we developed for the raid. News articles about these topics were speculative and mostly inaccurate. Vietnam War critics had a field day questioning and attacking the political intent of the raid. Prominent members of Congress joined in on the fray and some resulting editorials were quite vicious.

Pete Hamill of *New York Daily News* wrote, “The North Vietnamese have been particularly stupid about giving information on the prisoners. Wives live on in some strange limbo, not knowing whether they are widows or still married to living human beings. But the one certain way to guarantee that there will be no further information is to pull dumb stunts out of ‘Buzz Sawyer’ and ‘Steve Canyon.’” And also, “It is of course typical of this whole disgusting war that we again treat a failure as if it were a victory.”

Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden of Washington Post, compared it to a popular TV series, Mission Impossible,

...the technology was perfect,
even down to the locks blown off

the empty cells – but as so often happens in real life, it failed. The question is, why was it attempted at all? ... In the opinion of one of the few Americans who has been involved in making this kind of decision, the effort represented “complete stupidity” if it was more than a political gesture. ... and it is expressed, if fancifully, at the beginning of this column. It is to make Mr. Nixon seem “tough” in Vietnam, thus protecting his right flank as he disengages. It may be smart politics, but it is dangerous business.

A favorable account by *Los Angeles Times* reporter Stewart H. Loory summarized the early positive outcomes of the raid. He pointed out that the attempted rescue put the POW issue on the front pages and informed the public about their state. The bold raid also showed the North Vietnamese that no part of their territory was secure from a military attack. And finally, Loory speculated that it boosted the morale of the POWs and their wives at home by showing how much we cared for them. However, there were also concerns among the POW families. Even though they approved of the raid and were grateful to the men who participated in it, they did not endorse repeats because of perceived lack of intelligence to ensure success.

With that kind of media scrutiny our concerns about the after-effects of the raid on the lives of prisoners continued to play on our minds. We got dispersed, going to follow on assignments. We even lost touch with each other and kept maintaining our silence. However, we knew all along that our raid succeeded in surprising the North Vietnamese defenders and caused confusion in their response to our presence. Because our raid was followed by an unrelated retaliatory bombing of targets north of the demilitarized zone on the following morning, their initial conclusion was that the long-standing bombing pause for the Hanoi-Haiphong area had ended. This was also the belief of the residents of Son Tay and Hanoi who were alerted to seek shelters. Relatives of Son Tay residents who visited them many years later

heard their stories that differ from our historical accounts. They were startled by the attack, and also by the revelation that there had been a camp for American prisoners of war west of their town. They knew only of a closely guarded facility on the other side of the bridge that was visited by trucks during the dark of night and believed that the place was used for storage of war materials.

We now know that as a result of the raid the Vietnamese moved all the prisoners to downtown Hanoi, where they were herded into crowded rooms to avoid possible repeat raids on other camps. We had convinced them we had the capability to try again. The raid was a rude awakening for their defense forces. Their leaders were critical of their performance, which is now recorded in their military histories. One account read:

Although we managed to shoot down two enemy aircraft, our air defense forces allowed six low-flying enemy helicopters to raid the detention camp for enemy pilots at Son Tay. This was a severe shortcoming on the part of our air defense-air force troops. The primary reason for this shortcoming was a low spirit of combat readiness and our failure to anticipate that the enemy would use helicopters supported by fighters to make such a deep penetration into our rear area to rescue their pilots.

Perhaps the best summary of how the raid affected the top echelons of the North Vietnamese military can be found in the memoirs of Col-Gen Phung The Tai (1920-2014) who claimed to be responsible for moving the POWs out of Son Tay. He served as the first commander of the Air Defense-Air Force Service from 1963 to 1967, and then as Deputy Chief of the General Staff from 1967 to 1987.

This may have been the most painful, most humiliating incident of my entire military career. For several days after the raid I could neither eat nor sleep. Sometimes I just sat in my office thinking about how almost one hundred American commandos had arrogantly swept

through the prison camp carrying pliers and hammers, knocking down walls and destroying rooms, and then had climbed back onto their helicopters and got away scot free – it almost drove me crazy. I gnashed my teeth and pounded my fist on my desk as I told myself, if we had just had some advance warning, we would have gotten all six of their helicopters and captured this entire team of their most elite commandos. We would have been so happy...

However, I told myself that at least it was fortunate that I had transferred the prisoners to another location so that at least Nixon had not been able to recover them. If I had not done this, then a thousand years would not have been enough time for me to get over my anger and my shame about this incident.

With all our concerns about probable harm we may have brought upon the prisoners, we hoped our government was making progress at the Paris peace talks where their treatment was a big negotiating issue. The rescue attempt made it very clear how much our country cared for their wellbeing. Despite the growing popular opposition to the war, people supported the POWs and urged the government to obtain their release. They bought POW/MIA bracelets engraved with names of missing soldiers and wore them on their wrists to show their sympathies. Wives of the missing formed the National League of POW/MIA Families and lobbied the government for action and even traveled to Paris to present their concerns to the Vietnamese negotiators. However, the government did not publicize what our intelligence agencies were able to glean about the state of their incarceration. If there was anything positive about their status, it was not advantageous to admit it. Their well-publicized inhumane treatment continued to be a good bargaining chip for our peace negotiators. Those who suspected that the prisoners' treatment might have improved were the ones who were aware that there was an increase in the exchange of letters and mailings of packages to the prisoners. We had to wait until the Operation HOMECOMING in

1973 when the returnees told us about the positive effects on their lives as a result of the Son Tay raid.

Dr Roger Schields, the Deputy Secretary of Defense for International Economic and POW/MIA Affairs from 1971 to 1977, orchestrated the POWs' repatriation and Operation HOMECOMING. He affirmed many of the raiders' conclusions about the POWs. Dr Schields confirmed that our government knew that the treatment of American POWs improved after Ho Chi Minh's death. There was no retaliation for the raid and the conditions of captivity improved even more. To avoid future raids, the North Vietnamese concentrated the prisoners in fewer and more secure locations where their ability to communicate improved immeasurably and where they were able to support one another. However, in spite of these improvements the US government remained cautious because the changes could be reversed. Dr. Schields commented that even though the intelligence pieces turned out to be remarkably accurate, there was no way to confirm that they were true until the POWs came home and confirmed their factuality. For that reason, the DoD was very careful about what favorable information was being provided, even to the families. The official policy was to continue holding the communists' feet to the fire.

We also learned from the repatriated POWs that they were able to form the 4th POW Wing in the Hanoi Hilton. Dr. Schields acknowledged that their ability to organize took a quantum leap forward after the raid when our men were gathered together in larger groups and their ability to communicate increased geometrically. However, this was one of the intelligence indicators that was not fully confirmed until after their repatriation.

The raiders were spread out across the world when the first of the 591 POWs departed from Hanoi on 12 Feb 1973. We were overjoyed and anticipated their stories that seemed to be coming too slowly. We also hoped to meet some of them. Thanks to Mr Ross Perot that moment arrived for some of us who were able to accept his all-expenses-paid invitation to the POW welcome home

celebration in San Francisco on April 27. It was a heroes' appreciation time by the crowd along a ticker tape parade with former prisoners and raiders in motorized cable cars with clanging bells and wailing sirens of escorting police motorcycles. The crowd pressed forward from the sidewalk to shake hands and give flags to the jubilant and very appreciative veterans of the just ended war.

As exciting as this parade was, it could not rival the eventual face to face get together between the raiders and their now free colleagues that took place in spectator free environment of the Fairmont hotel dining room. There they shared hugs, kisses, and many happy tears. It was an unforgettable sight. Here were men who had suffered so much during their imprisonment, serving their country faithfully under most difficult conditions and then those who had risked their lives by volunteering for a hazardous mission to free them from that captivity. The Son Tay raid finally ended in this hotel dining room,

We thank Mr. Perot for arranging this unforgettable reunion and regret that he will not be with us at the 50th anniversary of the Son Tay raid. We also thank him for devoting so much of his life and resources to support the raiders and the families of the former POWs, and for the kind words he wrote in the introduction of the first book about the raid that was authored by Heather David.

The men who participated in the Son Tay raid are excellent examples of unselfish courage to every citizen of this country. Each man's life was at stake on a mission whose purpose was humanitarian – not military. What other nation produces such men – men who will literally lay down their lives for others?... Each citizen in our country should think about the decision-making process each raider had to go through. We should be grateful that we live in a nation that produces men of such courage - men of such concern. Perhaps the best way to measure the courage of these men is to simply ask, "Would I go? Would I run risk of having my wife become a widow, my children fatherless?"

When Mr. Perot wrote these words for the introduction to Operation Rescue, he was obviously focusing attention primarily on those raiders. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands, more people were needed to support the training and execution of the raid in ways large and small. This article mentioned the supporting aircraft: MiG patrol, Wild Weasel, air refueling, airborne C2, combat rescue, and others, but there were so many more who played significant supporting roles who never got much credit. Without the contributions of the maintainers, armorers, intelligence analysts, weather forecasters, life support technicians, medical professionals, and the many other combat support elements, the joint task force would never have gotten off the ground – both literally and figuratively. Every one of us, whether on the aircraft or waiting at the recovery bases experienced great disappointment over the initial outcome of the rescue attempt. But we all felt a bit of relief when the POWs returned and it was confirmed that what had been done had not been for naught. Fifty years later, we will gather for the last time to honor our departed and reflect on the “most memorable mission of our careers.”

Editor's Note: Col (retired) Gargus has previously contributed to the Air Commando Journal providing in-depth descriptions of the tactical and technical challenges the Son Tay Raiders overcame to successfully execute Operation KINGPIN. For further reading we recommend "Combat Talons in the Son Tay Raid" in vol. 2, issue 4 (Fall 2013), at www.aircommando.org/journal.



About the Author: Col (retired) John Gargus served as a navigator in all USAF Combat Talon units: Combat Spear (1st SOS, Pacific), Combat Knife (8th SOS, CONUS), and Combat Arrow (7th SOS, Europe). While at Pope AFB he participated in flight testing of Mod 70 Combat Talons and wrote the manuals and training aids. In the 7th SOS he ran the Mod 70 ground school and with Cherry One pilot Bill Guenon checked out all the European MC-130 crews. He is the author of Son Tay Raid – American POWs in Vietnam Were Not Forgotten. Col Gargus was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame in 2003.



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HONORING AFS

By ACJ Editorial Staff

This year Air Commandos are remembering and celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Son Tay Raid. Officially known as Operation KINGPIN, it was a top secret mission to rescue 66 American POWs from a prison just 23 miles from Hanoi in North Vietnam. The mission, audacious in its conception, was meticulously planned and expertly executed by some of America’s finest Airmen and Soldiers. Devastated by the fact that the prisoners had been moved and were not at the prison, the Son Tay Raiders returned to their lives; many retired within a few years, while others continued their military careers. Some of the last to retire were the aircraft that carried the courageous Airmen and Soldiers to their targets and safely back to their bases. The Air Commando Journal staff would like to remember three of those aircraft that continued to serve on for another 40 years as a tribute to the men and women who fixed and flew them for thousands of hours over the years.

Cherry One – 64-0523



Photo courtesy of USAF

MC-130E Combat Talon 64-0523, callsign Cherry One on the mission to Son Tay, led the mission and now holds a place of honor in the Cannon AFB air park as the first airplane you see entering the base. At the time, most of the missions the Combat Talons flew they were by themselves, but on 20 November 1970, under the command of Maj Irl L. Franklin, Cherry One departed Takhli AB in Thailand and headed for a rendezvous with the six Jolly Green Giant helicopters that had departed from Udorn AB. Arriving at the rendezvous point over the Skyline TACAN in Laos at 12:45 AM, Maj Franklin began to slow Cherry One down to 105 knots and took lead of the helicopter formation from their HC-130P tanker and pressed on toward their target. Using the terrain-following radar, forward looking infrared system, and its sophisticated electronic warfare equipment, Cherry One flew at low-level skirting known early warning systems with

OC's LAST SON TAY RAIDERS

the six helicopters in close formation, three off each wing. At approximately 0215L, Cherry One had the helicopters within 3.5 miles of the Son Tay prison. Giving them a final heading, Cherry One accelerated to 130 knots and climbed to 1,500 feet to drop illumination flares over the prison. The helicopters descended to 200 feet above the ground and headed for their target. Cherry One flew a procedural turn pattern to drop additional flares and battle simulators and then descended to TF altitudes and headed for his orbit point in Laos to provide navigation assistance for the returning helicopters and A-1E attack aircraft.

Apple One — 68-10357



Photo courtesy of MSgt Keith Bernarducci, USAF (Retired)

HH-53C 68-10357, flying under callsign Apple One, was the lead helicopter for the mission to rescue 66 American prisoners of war from the Son Tay prison camp. Lt Col Warner Britton was in command of the six-helicopter formation that assaulted the prison and carried the operation deputy commander, Army Col Arthur Simons, and his team of Soldiers to the target. After Vietnam, #357 received multiple modifications and upgrades to its final MH-53M Pave Low configuration and served in multiple conflicts and contingencies around the globe. It is not well known that within a year and a half after the Son Tay mission, three of the five HH-53s that participated were lost. A fourth was lost in combat action in Afghanistan in 2002. As the last H-53 Son Tay raider, the AF intended to put 357 on display at the Wright-Patterson Museum, but it still was needed for combat duty. 68-10357 was deployed in Iraq and continued to fly the tough missions. During an operation, the crew over-torqued both engines and the main gearbox in an emergency go-around from a particularly horrendous brownout landing zone. Cheating fate one last time, #357 brought the crew safely back to base. After that mission, the AFSOC leadership decided it was time to bring her home. 68-10357 flew its final

mission and last flight supporting special operations forces on 28 March 2008 in Iraq, concluding 38 years of service for the country. Maintenance crews broke her down and #357 was airlifted from Iraq to the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, OH, where it is on display in the Cold War Gallery.

Lime Two — 65-0991



Photo courtesy of USAF

AFSOC's MC-130P, Combat Shadow, 65-0991, is on display at the Cannon AFB airpark and is a worthy representative for the entire Combat Shadow community. Over its nearly 50 years of service, #991 underwent multiple modifications, but it began its flying career in the late 1960s as an Air Force Rescue HC-130P with a mission to command and control combat rescues and refuel Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopters. 65-0991 usually flew under the King callsign, but on the night of 20 November 1970, she lifted off from Udorn AB, Thailand as Lime Two escorting and acting as the spare tanker for six Jolly Green Giant helicopters on the first leg of their mission to rescue American POWs. The formation flew for an hour and a half in silence and after topping off the helicopters with fuel, Lime One 66-0212, relinquished the lead to Cherry One, an MC-130E, to navigate the inbound leg to Son Tay. With the first refueling completed, Lime One headed back to Udorn to refuel and Lime Two orbited over Laos and refueled the five HH-53s on their homeward leg. During the mission one of the supporting F-105s was damaged and the crew ejected over the Plaine des Jarres in Laos. The crew on #212, hearing the radio traffic that a search and rescue effort was being organized departed Udorn, but changed their callsign to King 21 and acted as the airborne mission commander while HH-53s Apple Four and Apple Five re-covered both F-105 crewmembers.



HEROISM AT NA KHANG:

Air Commando Ramon “Ray” Horinek and the first defense of Lima Site 36



Lima Site 36, 1966. (Photo courtesy Kuhn Collection)

*By Lt Colonel, Dr Richard Newton,
USAF (Retired)*

Introduction

Capt Ray Horinek had been successfully and happily flying as an instructor pilot in Air Training Command for 10 years after gaining his pilot wings in February 1955. In 1964, with the war in Southeast Asia heating up, he volunteered for and was assigned to combat duty. Ray became an Air Commando in February 1965, flying Douglas A-1E Skyraiders with the 1st Air Commando Squadron at Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam.

After six months flying close air support (CAS) sorties to support US and South Vietnamese troops, Horinek volunteered to become a “Butterfly” forward air controller (FAC). This highly classified program, at the time, was how the US improved the efficacy of US and allied CAS in Laos, limited collateral damage, and ensured positive US control of munitions provided to anti-communist Royal Laotian government (RLG) forces. The US war in Laos was considered a “Secret War” because Laos had been declared neutral by the 1954 Geneva Accords that had ended the French Indochina War—a distinction the communist Pathet Lao, the US,

North Vietnam, and China collectively chose to ignore. On paper, the Butterflies were assigned to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) but were seconded to the CIA and controlled by the US embassy in Vientiane, the capital of Laos. The Butterfly FACs flew and flew in a hodgepodge of US propeller-driven aircraft and helicopters.

The Butterfly program originally began in Vietnam in 1963 with two, later expanding to six, enlisted combat controllers (CCTs). USAF regulations and procedures during the 1960s mandated that fighter pilots serve as FACs. But because the need for FACs in Southeast Asia (SEA) far exceeded the number of qualified FACs available, CCTs were quietly trained at Hurlburt Field’s Special Air Warfare Center as forward air guides to direct CAS sorties—a distinction that hardly mattered to the troops on the ground needing CAS. In addition to the CCTs, other Air Commandos serving as Butterfly FACs in Laos included T-28 pilots, navigators, officer CCTs, weather officers, and intelligence officers. All had been trained by USAF Air-Ground Operations School instructors at Hurlburt Field to control aerial fires. Non-rated

Butterfly FACs would fly in the copilot’s seat of the CIA aircraft or would control air strikes from the ground. In 1964, when the program moved into Laos, they were usually accompanied by a Laotian or Thai interpreter. The Butterflies controlled air strikes in support of Royal Laotian government forces, Laotian irregular forces, and US Special Forces.

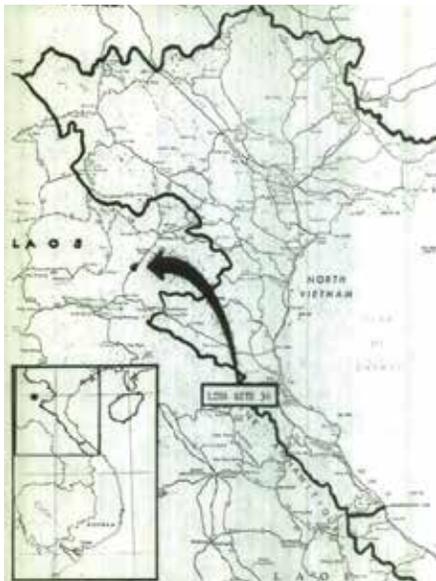
When, in the spring of 1967, Lt Gen William Momyer, the commander of 7th Air Force, was visiting the 56th Air Commando Wing at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, and discovered that NCOs and non-rated officers were controlling the air strikes, he “blew a gasket.” According to Col Harry “Heinie” Aderholt, the 56th ACW wing commander, the general “went about six feet up and hit the ceiling.” Gen Momyer had no intention of allowing NCOs or non-rated officers to control his fighters, even if there were not enough FACs in SEA at the time to meet all requirements. At that point, he directed fighter pilots take over the FAC role in Laos and the enlisted forward air guide program was phased out.

Ray Horinek reached the end of his 1-year combat tour in January 1966 and he could have returned to the US. Instead,

he chose to extend and continued flying combat missions with the Butterfly FACs. In mid-February 1966, Ray Horinek was the key player in one of the war's most storied missions, the defense of Lima Site 36. For his actions over two days, he was awarded the Air Force Cross for inspiring leadership and extraordinary heroism, in the air and on the ground.

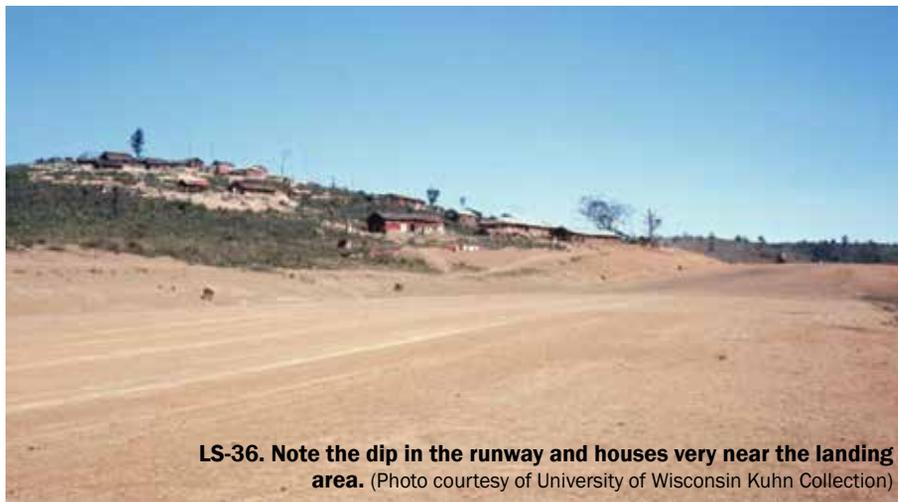
Lima Site 36 (LS-36)

LS-36 was located near the village of Na Khang, in northeastern Laos. It was one of a number of camps and associated airstrips in Laos that were used as transit points, refueling stops, bases for aerial navigation aids, and as alert strips for combat rescue forces. The airstrips were usually dirt, rugged, and short, thus most were limited to helicopters and short takeoff and landing (STOL) airplanes. Many were built on ridgelines by local labor, so they were rarely straight, level, or flat. One CIA study noted that some of the Lima Sites defied all aviation safety rules, even those for military aviation.



Courtesy of USAF Project CHECO.

The Lima Site at Na Khang was one of the two main camps in the region and thus had one of the better airstrips. LS-36 sat at 4,400 feet above sea level, near the North Vietnamese border, and about 150 miles west of Hanoi. A bulldozer had been air-dropped into the site and US engineers supervised the lengthening of the runway to 2,300 feet, making it possible for Fairchild C-123 Providers to



LS-36. Note the dip in the runway and houses very near the landing area. (Photo courtesy of University of Wisconsin Kuhn Collection)

deliver relatively large loads of supplies and people. STOL aircraft and helicopters would then ferry the people and supplies to remote outposts and advancing units. Laotian and US residents had built crude buildings by recycling wooden pallets, ammunition boxes, and petroleum barrels. Beginning in 1965, the USAF stationed Sikorsky CH-3Es from Nakhon Phanom RTAFB at LS-36 during daylight hours to sit combat rescue alert for ROLLING THUNDER strike sorties going into North Vietnam.

By aviation safety standards, LS-36 was “suicidally dangerous,” with no instrument approach to help pilots during monsoons or the burning seasons, and with high ground to the northeast that eliminated any opportunity for a go-around on fixed wing final approach. What made it valuable to the allies, though, was that it was in the best position to support friendly operations in northern Laos and against North Vietnamese supply routes into South Vietnam. The camp's strategic location also made it ideal to serve as Gen Vang Pao's forward headquarters. For these reasons, LS-36 was also a primary North Vietnamese target and became the focus of numerous communist assaults. Still, over time LS-36 transformed from an obscure guerrilla camp into a bustling hub for military operations, command and control, logistics, training, and humanitarian relief efforts. As the population of refugees and Hmong tribesmen grew, USAID built a school and hospital as part of the civic action program. Rice, ammunition, and aviation fuel were Na Khang's three main

imports.

In early February 1966, the 5th battalion, 168th Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), with their Laotian communist Pathet Lao allies, began an operation to assert North Vietnamese control over Route 6, a vital supply route that ran through northeastern Laos. LS-27, at Houei Thom north of LS-36, was overrun on 12 February and assaults against LS-36 began early in the morning on 17 February. Spooky 61, an AC-47 gunship, responded to provide fire support and illuminating flares for the defenders until dawn. The defenders repelled the initial attack but the North Vietnamese held the high ground to the southeast. The NVA regiment's orders were to take Na Khang no matter what the cost, reinforcing the strategic importance Hanoi placed on the camp and also explaining the horrific losses suffered by the North Vietnamese during the fight.

Defense of LS-36

Ray Horinek and an Air America pilot took off from LS-36 in a Pilatus Porter during a lull in the morning's fighting. Their mission was to direct allied strike sorties against the enemy forces holding LS-27. During their takeoff from Na Khang, the Porter was hit three times by small arms fire. Thinking that the shots had come from one of the “normal” harassing communist patrols, they paid the small arms fire little attention and continued to LS-27 to control the fighter-bombers headed there.

A couple hours later, when the pilots returned to LS-36 for fuel, the

camp was now under full mortar attack. Unfortunately, Capt Horinek had no way to contact the ground forces. But the defenders were able to mark targets for him using 75 mm smoke rounds. The FAC then directed USAF strike sorties onto enemy units and their artillery positions around the runway area. When the enemy fires subsided, Horinek directed the pilot to land and drop him off. Despite the danger, he felt the need for a FAC on the ground and with the defenders more than justified any small arms threats to the aircraft or by landing

mortar fires were stopped, but Horinek continued to direct air strikes by Laotian T-28s against the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao attackers. At nightfall, on the US Ambassador's orders, the Americans at Na Khang – USAF, USAID, and CIA – were evacuated to safety by an Air America helicopter, spending the night at LS-48A near Muong Hiem seven miles to the north.

Up to this point in the air war over Laos, one of the rules of engagement imposed by the US ambassador prohibited the use of napalm unless it was absolutely

necessary to prevent the loss of a major base. To date, napalm had never been authorized in Laos. With the loss of LS-27, the major assault ongoing at LS-36, and the imminent threat to LS-48A, General Vang Pao, the commander of all the Hmong irregulars, in conjunction with the Americans helping to defend LS-36, requested permission to use napalm to

against the NVA. With reconnaissance reports indicating that the enemy was concentrated in known positions, Ambassador Sullivan gave permission for the first the use of napalm in Laos. His restriction, though, was that the weapon could only be used if under the control of an experienced US FAC, in order to avoid inadvertently hitting friendly Laotian troops.

The communists renewed their attack on Na Khang before daylight the next morning, 18 February. In fierce fighting the NVA and Pathet Lao penetrated to within 25 meters of the friendly trenches. At daylight, the Laotian FAC in his T-28 was able to direct a flight of four F-105s to support the defenders at the southern end of the runway. Over 30 minutes, the Thuds dropped 12 750 lb bombs, expended 8 pods of 2.75-inch rockets, and fired 3,000 rounds of 20 mm cannon to help beat back the attackers. Visibility at LS-36 was becoming seriously degraded as dust and smoke from the air strikes filled the air. This was compounded by thick

black smoke coming from buildings on fire at the north end of the runway.

While all this was going on, Capt Horinek, the “experienced US FAC,” and two other Americans who had been evacuated the night before headed back to LS-36 in an Air America U-10 Helio Courier. Arriving overhead, the Air America pilot realized the runway was too severely damaged for his STOL airplane to land. He immediately returned to LS-48A where Horinek, his radios, and the other Americans were transferred to a waiting helicopter. A short while later the FAC was back at Na Khang and in the Laotian command post ready to direct additional CAS sorties. He needed information, though, on the enemy positions north of the airfield. The Laotian defenders were understandably reluctant to leave the safety of the camp after suffering through more than 24 hours of intense, often suicidal, enemy attacks. Capt Horinek therefore took it upon himself to lead the reconnaissance patrol and the Laotian soldiers followed.

According to Capt Horinek's report, as he was leading the patrol through the bush outside the camp perimeter an NVA soldier popped his head up over a pile of debris left over from when the airstrip was lengthened. With only a meter or so between them, both men were startled. The Vietnamese soldier fired wildly and Horinek ducked. Finally swinging his rifle around, the American killed the North Vietnamese soldier. Coming around the debris to investigate further, Horinek discovered three more NVA soldiers down in a hole. He killed two and took the third one prisoner. That prisoner, Nguyen Van Lohn, was the only enemy combatant captured during the February 1966 battle for LS-36.

During the fighting, a soldier inadvertently fired a white phosphorous incendiary round into the ammunition storage area, setting the grass afire. The fires blew towards piles of howitzer and mortar rounds stored in the ammunition dump. Capt Horinek had left some of his radios near the ammunition storage area during the reconnaissance mission. Recognizing that those radios would be critical if he was to continue directing CAS sorties, the FAC crawled up the slope and into the danger zone to retrieve



on the now cratered airstrip.

During its approach, the Porter was hit twice more by small arms fire. As soon as the aircraft touched down and slowed enough for him to jump out, Capt Horinek ran from the aircraft to nearby friendly trenches where he set up his portable radios. The Air America pilot then departed the area to save the aircraft from the renewed communist ground assault. Using a Laotian Air Force T-28 that was overhead as his “eyes” and to mark targets, Horinek spent the rest of that day directing air strikes to beat back the NVA attackers.

The first strike flight consisted of three Republic F-105s Thunderchiefs, more commonly known as “Thuds.” For over 20 minutes and during multiple attack runs, the Thuds dropped 15 750 lb bombs and strafed enemy positions. Next, Horinek directed a second flight of 4 F-105s as they dropped 12 more 750 lb bombs and expended 8 pods of 2.75-inch rockets and 1,700 rounds of 20 mm cannon against NVA units at the south end of the runway. The enemy



**UH-34D Choctaw
and O-1 Bird Dog.**
(US Army photo)

the equipment. Although one of the radios had been destroyed by an explosion in a nearby ammunition pit, he was able to retrieve the PRC-41 portable radio. From a rice paddy next to the runway, Capt Horinek used a red smoke grenade to mark his position and then called in multiple “danger-close” air strikes, often within 25 meters of his position, to beat back the NVA and give the Americans and Laotians time to withdraw.

Shortly after Capt Horinek and the reconnaissance patrol had returned to LS-36, Gen Van Pao arrived from Long Tieng on an Air America UH-34D Choctaw helicopter. As the general was discussing the tactical situation with CIA case officer and Capt Horinek, the communists resumed their assault. While the general and the case officer were standing on the helicopter’s landing gear to give instructions to the pilot, a couple 7.62 mm rifle rounds went through the pilot’s windshield. The pilot immediately applied power and began to take off. The general and the American jumped off the tires and the pilot flew around the hill, escaping to an alternate helipad on the other side of the command post area. Gen Vang Pao had been hit in the chest and his upper arm was shattered by the enemy rifle fire. The Americans helped the general get to the alternate helipad where he and the NVA prisoner were then evacuated to LS-48A. There, the general was transloaded onto a C-123 and flown to the hospital at Korat RTAFB,

in Thailand. Capt Horinek continued directing strike sorties in an attempt to save the base.

In early afternoon, a flight of four F-105s from Takhli RTAFB arrived overhead with 16 canisters of napalm available. Horinek, again using a Laotian airborne FAC as his “eyes” and to mark the targets, had the enemy positions

southwest of the airfield marked with smoke rockets. The Thuds dropped their napalm in the trees 200 meters from the airstrip. The Laotian FAC was reporting that the entirety of LS-36 was surrounded by NVA forces, with heavy smoke, dust, and debris obscuring the target area. A little while later, at about 1545, another flight of Takhli-based F-105s arrived on scene with a second load of napalm. Capt Horinek directed these drops to the northwest side of the airstrip to cover the evacuation of the Laotian troops. Fires set by these air strikes eventually overcame and destroyed the Laotian command post. The FAC then directed the fighter-bombers to continue strafing, specifically targeting the fuel storage area, until they reached “Winchester” (out of ammunition) or “Bingo” (minimum fuel). In the after-action-report, the Thud crews stated that the enemy continued their aggressive attacks on LS-36 despite highly effective and destructive air attacks.

At 1610, Capt Horinek informed the Laotian FAC that all friendlies had evacuated the living quarters and storage areas. An additional four F-105s were then directed to destroy all buildings



After retreating from LS-36 Capt Ray Horinek (standing) with comrades, Jerry and Mike at LS-48A North Laos, February 1966. (Photo courtesy Mike L.)

and fuel storage facilities in the camp to prevent them from falling into North Vietnamese hands. The battle damage report noted they destroyed 75 percent of all buildings and damaged the rest. Meanwhile, Air America helicopters were evacuating the Laotian forces. UH-34s and CH-47s were coming in and packing as many troops as possible into the helicopters. One CH-47 crew chief estimated he took multiple loads of upwards of 150 Laotians, packed in and standing as if on a crowded subway car, from Na Khang to LS-48A at Moung Hiem.

With the evacuation of LS-36 underway, Horinek and the airborne FAC continued their destruction of the camp's facilities. Another flight of F-105s came in to destroy what was left of the camp and the associated villages using 750 lb bombs and cannon fire.

As the other Americans helped evacuate wounded Laotian soldiers, Horinek used his PRC-41 to call in additional danger-close air strikes, including additional napalm. When the friendlies were finally safe, it was time for Horinek to withdraw. The FAC placed a series of air strikes in front of where he needed to go to escape. Then, picking up his portable radio and rifle he dashed through the smoke and debris to reach a line of friendly trenches. As he retreated to the evacuation point, he continued calling air strikes to within meters of friendly positions and destroying the position he had just abandoned.

Ambassador Sullivan again ordered all Americans to be out of the camp by dark. Capt Horinek was among the last people evacuated from LS-36 that day. The CIA case officer and a USAID officer were taken to the USAF command center in Thailand where they briefed the crews from two AC-47s scheduled to support the remaining defenders that night at Na Khang. The two men offered to fly with the gunships and provide situational awareness over the target. One of the AC-47s had to abort due to engine trouble so only one gunship arrived at LS-36. The USAID officer on board the AC-47 overhead spoke Laotian and helped the gunship crew identify targets and protect the remaining Laotian troops still in the camp. The last Laotian soldiers were

evacuated the next morning, 19 February.

On 19 February four more F-105s completed the destruction of the camp, dropping more napalm and strafing the area. The attacks left little for the enemy to exploit. Capt Horinek's after-action-report noted that refugees reported seeing enemy soldiers "laying around like dead tree stumps," and they estimated there were about 1,000 dead. So effective were the air attacks that it took two days for the NVA to finally occupy what was an abandoned camp. Friendly casualties, on the other hand were relatively light. While the NVA may have won, it was a pyrrhic victory—the cost being so great that it felt like a tactical loss.

For his actions that day, Capt Ray Horinek was awarded the Air Force Cross. His citation reads in part, "... from 16 February 1966 to 19 February 1966, he successfully directed air strikes which permitted the safe withdrawal of friendly forces and destruction of an evacuated site despite repeated machine gun hits on his light aircraft. While providing support for an attack against a second site his aircraft was again struck by hostile fire. Realizing the importance of his presence, he landed on the site airstrip, knowing that approaches were dominated by the enemy. On foot and under constant fire, he directed strikes which dislodged the enemy and permitted resumption of aircraft evacuation from the strip. Throughout the period, alternately in the air and on the ground, he continued to direct strikes while repeatedly exposed to fierce hostile fire, until the site was successfully evacuated. Captain Horinek's gallantry and professionalism permitted the safe withdrawal of many friendly troops and prevented the recovery of quantities of munitions and supplies by the enemy."

Epilogue:

LS-36 was retaken and rebuilt in May 1966, after Gen Vang Pao returned from the hospital. The camp was subjected to two more determined assaults by the North Vietnamese, in January 1967 and again in February 1969. Capt Horinek flew as Butterfly 44, an airborne FAC, directing air strikes against NVA forces during the January 1967 defense of Na Khang. LS-36 finally fell to the North

Vietnamese on 1 March 1969.

After the end of his second tour, Ray Horinek volunteered to fly F-105 Thunderchiefs. After completing combat crew training in August 1967, he returned to Southeast Asia, now as a major assigned to the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing at Takhli RTAFB. Two months later, in October 1967, while attacking the MiG airfield at Phuc Yen northwest of Hanoi his aircraft took a direct hit from



Lt Col Ramon "Ray" Horinek

enemy AAA. Maj Horinek continued his bombing run and destroyed two MiGs on the ground. His aircraft was too badly damaged to make it home, however, and he was forced to eject over North Vietnam. He was immediately captured and spent the next 5½ years as a prisoner of war. Upon returning from Hanoi in March 1973, he requalified as a pilot, attended Air War College, and served with the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath, UK. He retired from the Air Force at Hurlburt Field, FL, on 10 Feb 1983.

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About the Author: Dr Rick Newton is a lifetime member of the ACA and a retired helicopter pilot, combat aviation advisor, planner, and educator. He stays busy teaching and writing about special operations airpower, military history, and operational design.



Special Operations Liaison Element in OIF

By Colonel Paul Harmon, USAF (Retired)

SOLE PART II

My first deployment to the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB) in Saudi Arabia began shortly after the 9/11 attacks. The article, *The Special Operations Liaison Element, SOF's Link to Combat Airpower*, featured in the *Air Commando Journal*, Vol 8-3 provides a short history of special operations liaisons in the CAOC and related the experiences of AFSOC's SOLE deploying just three months after its inception. This essay builds on that initial experience and describes how the SOLE went forward to support Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003 and how the SOLE has evolved over the last decade and half.



In July 2001, the AFSOC vice commander, Brig Gen Rich Comer, created a AFSOC staff office to support special operations within an air operations center (AOC). Our job was to be a trained and ready core element of a Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) commander's liaison element in the CAOC and also to coordinate the operational plans for the employment of SOF with the air component commander's staff. According to doctrine, the coalition force air component commander (CFACC) will normally exercise operational control over US combat air forces made available by the contributing commands and over theater airspace. Anything and everything that flies within the theater of operations is coordinated in the CAOC.

After I returned from PSAB, I met with the new AFSOC Director of Operations (DO, now A-3), Brig Gen Bruce Burda, and his deputy, Col Tommy Hull, and gave them a rundown of the SOLE's efforts in the CAOC to date. My job on the DO's staff was the chief of the AFSOC SOLE, later redesignated Air Integration Division, and that work continued.

I had several key take-aways from my experience to share with the DO. First, the SOLE director needed to have met with his boss, the TSOC commander, and his staff before they deploy to be his representative to the CFACC. This crucial step did not happen in the very fast-paced days immediately following 9/11 for a variety of reasons. This hampered the SOLE's communications with the SOCCENT staff in Tampa, FL, and the Joint Special Operations Task Force Dagger staff in Uzbekistan. Task Force Sword, a separate SOF component reporting to the US Central Command commander, sent a liaison team to PSAB and worked for, and were known by, Col



Eric Fiel and his boss, Army Maj Gen Dell Dailey. This enabled very effective coordination within the CAOC.

A second take-away was the SOLE staff needed to do better at integrating special operations with the larger theater operations plan. Joint Pub 3.05, *Special Operations*, outlines the SOLE's duty is to "coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize special operations...with joint air operations." The coordination and synchronization foster deconfliction and helps avoid fratricide. In the previous article, I recounted a vignette from Operation DESERT STORM where two US helicopters narrowly avoided getting shot down by US fighters.

While the early operations in Afghanistan were an anomaly for many reasons, in general, special operations support the larger theater plan and supplement and complement everything else going on in the wider combat operation and are not (usually) separate and distinct.

Lastly, I suggested to the DO that the SOLE should have a couple of AFSOC Weapons Officers (aka “Patch Guys”)

within SOF.

There is a natural tendency for the squadrons to keep these Weapons Officers close to the tactical level of operations because they are usually the top flyers. The CAF has many more graduates from its various weapons systems and disciplines, and their philosophy was that the planners in the CAOC needed to be the best of the best because of their

developed a list of officer and enlisted Air Commandos who attended USAF Special Operations School (USAFSOS) JSOAC and SOLE training and participated in the BLUE FLAG and other C2 control exercises. Those Air Commandos then took a deployment to the PSAB CAOC for real world experience.

In the Fall of 2002, as the chief of the standing SOLE and a newly minted O-6, I wanted to mature the SOLE philosophy of coordination and synchronization of our SOF operations. To do that, I believed we needed to be interpreters of the SOF culture and language for the Airmen in the CAOC and translate Air Force ways of operating for SOF to ensure a better understanding and integration. It was a big change for an individual if they did not have experience working with the conventional Air Force which, at the time, most of our Air Commandos did not. Our experience in the ‘80s and ‘90s was more with our SOF partners than anyone else.

The USAFSOS training was good and the commandant usually asked an O-6 to come and speak with the class about their experiences working in the joint environment of the CAOC. Col Art Jistel was one such officer who served as the SOLE director during the Bosnian conflict and came to speak to a class. During his presentation, he encouraged all the attendees to make sure to get out and meet the CAOC staff and the other division chiefs, so they get to know you and can begin to overcome the negative perceptions of SOF and not stay behind a locked door. Exactly... sage advice, sir.

In 1991, the objective of Operation DESERT STORM was to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait, not to completely destroy its military or take down Saddam Hussein. By the Fall of 2002, there were discussions about Iraq and its support for terror groups and DoD war plans were being dusted off and refined. Col Ken Poole, now the AFSOC Deputy Director of Operations, and I attended a SOCCENT planning conference at MacDill AFB in Tampa. Colonel Poole wanted to ensure we got to meet the key SOF commanders that the SOLE would support in the event of combat operations in Iraq. This planning conference went a long way to correcting my first lesson-



CAOC Floor 2003. (Photo courtesy of USAF)

working on the staff in the AOC. During my two months at the CAOC, I noticed immediately that the staff officers who had the most credibility with senior Air Force leaders were graduates of the USAF Weapons School (USAFWS), clearly identified by the patch on their uniforms. The Air Force had created the 14th Weapons Squadron on Hurlburt Field a few years earlier and AFSOC had several classes of AC-130 graduates from which to draw candidates. The USAFWS curriculum focuses on the operational level of air warfare and within the Combat Air Force (CAF) community, the USAFWS patch carries special meaning and confers instant credibility. I thought that having a couple AFSOC Weapons Officers working in the SOLE would go a long way to breaking down artificial barriers between the CAF and AFSOF, much the same as someone wearing the Special Forces tab, the SEAL trident, or the Combat Control or Pararescue badge—it confers instant credibility

Weapons School education and greater understanding of the larger, operational picture—it made them a better fit to lead key divisions within the CAOC.

By January 2002, most of the AFSOC SOLE team was back at home, having been backfilled with other trained officers and enlisted from throughout the AFSOC staff and wing units. The CAOC and SOLE staffs were downsized because the workload was decentralized and distributed to subordinate elements within the Theater Air Control system (TACS). This allowed for the tailored command and control (C2) of airpower, primarily CAS, because combat in Afghanistan had evolved into counterland operations against irregular forces, that is, centralized control of airpower at the CAOC and decentralized execution of the sorties through the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC).

Throughout 2002, AFSOC’s SOLE team continued to train and participate in exercises. As the AFSOC staff, we also

learned from 2001. We were still “hired help”, but the relationships going forward were much improved.

In early December 2002, CENTCOM held an INTERNAL LOOK exercise, which reviewed the theater operation plan, 1003-V, and we had over 20 members in the SOLE at Shaw AFB, SC. Many of the CENTAF staff were from 9th AF at Shaw and were the same people we met in October 2001 during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. This exercise was a great trial run for the SOLE staff to integrate with the CAOC staff, and also work with the SOCCENT staff, several of whom we met two months earlier in Tampa. Finally, our SOLE team at Shaw AFB included a couple of AFSOC Weapons Officers—experts in AC-130 and in space operations. I had both working with the Combat Plans Division staff, but after the exercise Maj Rob Dougherty, our space expert, suggested his integration efforts could be more effective if he had a seat on the Combat Operations floor. As luck would have it, the CAOC in PSAB was undergoing a re-configuration and I called over to our SOLE lead there and asked him to ensure we had a seat for a space officer in the Combat Operations Division.

In mid-January 2003, I went back to Saudi Arabia to replace the SOLE Director who was winding down his tour. The CAOC and SOLE staffs were much smaller than they had been in November 2001— we had eight or nine members, including myself. The CAOC was more mature and reconfigured to operate more effectively. Over the next week or two I attended all the senior-level meetings and got the sense that combat operations against Iraq were likely going to happen. I called back to Colonel Poole and to my deputy, Lt Col Roland Sutton, and recommended we begin sending more of the SOLE team over to PSAB while airlift was available.

Over the next couple of weeks our numbers grew to nearly 40 members and included four AFSOC Weapons Officers

and a two Special Tactics Officers (STO). From a SOF credibility perspective, the STOs were equivalent to USAFWS graduates on staff. We placed an AC-130U Weapons Officer in Combat Plans, a STO and an AC-130H Weapons Officer in the Fires section in Combat Ops. Our Space Weapons Officer found his seat on the operations floor and AFSOC’s Intelligence Weapons Officer began interfacing within the Intelligence Division. Our final Airman from Hurlburt was a newly minted Combat Rescue Officer and he alternated 12-hour shifts with our SMSgt Pararescueman (PJ) in the Joint Search and Recovery Center.

The plan for the invasion of Iraq was massive and included a large contingent of Special Forces and Army special operations air support. We had a couple of SF planners in the SOLE, as we did in 2001, and Lt Col Sid Gray, a 160th SOAR pilot and USAFSOS instructor, came over to work the 160th interface. The commander of the Naval Special Warfare Task Group (NSWTG) sent us an E-6 SEAL to coordinate the maritime operations and our partners from Great Britain and Australia sent several air planners, as well as a Special Air Service officer to integrate their ground operations. Last, but not least, Task Force 20 (formerly TF Sword), sent its liaisons, led by a Navy O-5, to coordinate their missions and by early March the SOLE was nearly 60 strong, working throughout the CAOC.

Developing a cooperative environment with the CFACC staff, as well as the other component senior liaisons, was critical for the SOLE team. These relationships paid benefits

before Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) combat operations began. After DESERT STORM ended in 1991, the CFACC continued flying missions into Iraq under the Operation SOUTHERN WATCH to keep Iraq’s military in check, so the component senior leaders and I attended the daily targeting meetings in Combat Plans Division. The SOCCENT commander had a target request to get leaflets dropped on multiple Iraqi border stations in order to convince the Iraqi soldiers to abandon their posts and save their lives when combat began. The sticking point was that our MC-130s, located in a Western allied country, could not fly before combat operations began. After one meeting, US Navy Capt Bill “Shortney” Gortney and USMC Col Bill “Wiley” Post, directors from the NALE (Naval and Amphibious Liaison Element) and the MARLE (Marine Liaison Element), stopped by the SOLE with a plan to help with the leaflet drops. Their proposal was to fly a 4-ship of F-18s, outfitted with extra fuel tanks and two leaflet canisters, from the USS *Constellation* in the North Arabian Gulf (NAG) out over the western border posts to deliver the leaflets and return to the



Air Component Liaison Directors. (Photo courtesy of author)

ship. If necessary, the Hornets could land in Kuwait for fuel or if weather was poor over the NAG on their return. They acknowledged that it would not be a lot of leaflets, but it could satisfy the requirement. That mission was loaded into the ATO and was successfully flown just prior to start of OIF.

In January 2003, the US Army’s

4th Infantry Division was tapped to take part in combat operations transiting the Mediterranean Sea through Turkey and then into northern Iraq. But, Turkey's parliament refused to grant permission for the forces to flow through their sovereign ground and air space. After several days of negotiations, the US made the decision to reroute the 4th ID through the Suez Canal, Red Sea, and then Kuwait for entry into Iraq. The 4th ID's original mission to take on the Iraqi divisions arrayed along the "Green Line" (separation between Kurdish and Arab populations in northern Iraq) was tasked to Task Force Viking led by the 10th Special Forces Group.

While preparations continued in the south, a SOF advance team made its way by vehicle from Turkey into northern Iraq to link up with the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and survey a couple of airfields in the Kurdish region for future use. We tracked the team's location by their Blue Force Tracker systems and shortly after received their completed airfield surveys in the CAOC.

OIF began on 19 March 2003 (D-day) with airstrikes across Iraq and SOF infiltrations on the ground from the west, Saudi Arabia in the south, and from Kuwait in the east. The SOLE was extremely busy integrating plans, coordinating intelligence, and working operations on the CAOC floor.

From mid-March until late April 2003, the SOLE integrated and synchronized the combat operations of 11 military and other organizations that, combined, were flying more than 150 aircraft. The missions supported over 125 US and coalition SOF teams in a complex air and ground campaign. Our air and ground forces were integrated with the CFACC's air operations, where nearly 2,000 combat sorties were flown each day. On D+1, the SOLE planners coordinated and employed tactical surveillance and space-based capabilities along with pre-planned air strikes so that SEAL teams could secure strategic oil production infrastructure in the NAG and on the Al Faw peninsula to avert a repeat of the environmental disaster unleashed by the Iraqis in the first Gulf War 10 years earlier.

On D+2 and D+3, our planners

coordinated the infiltration of over 20 Special Forces teams by our MC-130s to the desert landing strip at Wadi al Khirr. The huge challenge, and a critical lesson learned, was the deconfliction of our MC-130 operations with over 350 cruise missiles en route to their targets. After the first wave of MC-130s had near misses with TLAMs on D+2, I received a frantic email from my friend Col Randy O'Boyle, the 16th SOG commander, in Kuwait expressing his concern. I let him know that I had my best guy on it and Maj Dave Kroeger and his combat ops team eventually found the guy with the "finger on the TLAM trigger" behind a couple of green doors. They worked out a deconfliction plan based on time for the second wave and for D+3 because altitude deconfliction just wasn't an

pre-position for the operation with six aircraft. The next night, 22 March, the heavily loaded Combat Talons, flying low over western Iraq through a hail of anti-aircraft fire, infiltrated the lead elements of TF Viking into Iraq. Due to the tremendous courage of the MC-130H aircrews from RAF Mildenhall and Hurlburt Field, the operation was a success and has gone down in history books as the "Ugly Baby" mission.

I mentioned that a SOF team completed several airfield surveys in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, but we weren't sure if the runways could support C-17 airlifters. The SOLE's airfield experts spent much of the day (27 March, D+8) working their contacts to ensure the runway at ASW was suitable for C-17 operations. This effort enabled



Lt Gen Moseley and staff OIF April 2003.
(Photo courtesy of the author)

option because, back then, the Combat Talons and the TLAMs needed the same airspace.

Additionally, on D+3 the vanguard of Task Force Viking was infiltrated into the airfields at Bashur and Al Sulaymaniyah West (ASW) in the Kurdish zone using six MC-130H Combat Talons. The mission was supposed to take place on the 20th, but the first flight of four was denied overflight of Turkey and returned to their forward operating base in Romania. The mission was denied overflight again on the 21st so the Talons, loaded with special operators, diverted to an allied country south of Turkey to

the timely delivery of critical combat equipment and supplies for the Kurdish militia forces who were supporting TF Viking in the north.

It was a great mission, but there were a few kinks in the coordination that got the CFACC, Lt Gen Moseley, quite engaged. We were sure ASW could handle the C-17 (check), the C-17s were in the ATO as GSO (ground alert for SOF), and had the correct IFF modes and codes (check). There were seven or eight C-17s on the ramp at PSAB to support TF-20 operations and nothing was scheduled for them (check). The SOCCENT commander, an Army brigadier gen-



One-half of the SOLE team April 2003. (Photo courtesy of author)

eral, the SOCEUR commander, also an Army brigadier general, and the TF-20 commander, an Army major general, all agreed the supplies were needed to support the impending TF Viking/Kurdish operation and this was the best way to get them there. The SOLE coordinated with the folks on the Combat Ops floor and I went into the Battle Cab to speak with the CAOC director and let him know what was going on. We worked the C-17 arrival time at ASW and deconflicted with our MC-130 missions that were also going into ASW to deliver additional forces. We thought we had all the bases covered and it was going to be a great op! I went to get some chow.

Shortly after I got back from the dining facility, I got a visit from the deputy Director of Mobility Forces (DIRMOBFOR), Brig Gen Kurt Cichowski, who had the C-17 mission commander, an AF lieutenant colonel, with him. General Cichowski said we had a meeting with the CFACC and on the way, we rendezvoused with the DIRMOBFOR, an AF major general, and were shown right in. General Moseley was eating his dinner and he was not his usual jovial self.

So, there we were, the four of us, standing at attention trying to field the CFACC's questions. One, "What is this mission all about?" Two, "Who authorized

the (C-17) mission?" And, three, "Why is it not routed through Turkey (versus over western Iraq) like your boss (SOCCENT) thinks it is?" I answered the first question, "Sir, it is lethal aid for the Kurds so they can support TF Viking and initiate combat operations from the north." I skipped question two and went to three, "Sir, Turkey requires at least 24 hours for the diplomatic clearance and Operation Viking Hammer is scheduled for tomorrow morning." That prompted a fourth CFACC question, "Why haven't the SOF guys started the operation yet, I've had to reschedule my air support a couple of times?" The answer was that the Kurds needed the equipment before the TF Viking commander could take them into combat. General Moseley wasn't happy and told us to leave because he had to call General Tommy Franks, the USCENTCOM commander, about the operation. He also told the DIRMOBFOR to figure out who he needed to send home.

In the mobility chief's office, I tried to explain what happened and what the SOLE did all day to coordinate the mission. Despite the confusion, he understood there was a genuine need to support the mission and authorized the C-17 to depart PSAB for a partner nation and to load the equipment, but not takeoff without his approval. Twenty minutes later General Moseley came in and said

General Franks needed the equipment delivered and told the DIRMOBFOR to personally plan the mission. With a sigh of relief, because I knew the two generals were not going home, and I couldn't let the C-17 mission commander take a hit, I went back to my office and banged out an email to the AFSOC Director of Staff to let him and the AFSOC commander know what happened. Bad news never gets better over time.

And so it went—the C-17 flew the mission and delivered the equipment to ASW, but the preplanned slot times for our MC-130s were delayed. As a result they had to fly around at low-level waiting for the C-17 to depart. The MC-130 lead was concerned about the extensive circling and queried the Combat Controller about the delay. The Controller called the C-17 and asked if they were ready to go and with an "affirmative," cleared them to depart. In short order our aircraft began their landing sequence. Unbeknownst to us, the empty C-17 was waiting for a departure time and I didn't find out why until the next afternoon when during CFACC's staff meeting, he asked me, "Why did 'your' C-17 take-off without its fighter escort?" Apparently, the CFACC had his planners send a couple of F-15Es to escort the big jet out of Iraqi airspace.

Early the next morning TF Viking, with the fully equipped Peshmerga

forces, launched an attack on a suspected chemical weapons factory and the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group. This was the first operation by TF Viking, supported by the Kurds, in an offensive campaign against Iraqi forces in the north. The operation contributed to the destruction or capitulation of 13 Iraqi divisions using airpower with no losses to US forces.

Over the next day or two I tried to lay low during the CFACC staff meeting. On the third day, after I gave my update, the CFACC told me that he had received an email from Lt Gen Hester, the AFSOC commander at the time, and I said, “Oh, how is General Hester doing?” The CFACC replied, “I told him that you are trainable.” Big laughs all around the room, a little red face from me, and everything went back to normal.

So, who “owned” those C-17s? The big airlifters were stationed at PSAB primarily to support TF-20 operations, which were different and separate from the normal C-5/C-17 missions moving people and supplies to, from, and within the theater. It was our understanding that the TF-20 commander could “lend” them to the SOCCENT commander for air mobility purposes when TF-20 wasn’t using them. Nope. Those aircraft were “owned” by the CFACC and were under his operational control (OPCON). The CFACC authorized their support to TF-20 under a tactical control (TACON) arrangement. As I mentioned earlier, we SOF airmen needed to understand the language of the CAOC, if we were to be effective. Aircraft provided under TACON are given for only the authorized mission, whereas under OPCON they can be re-tasked and reassigned. The lesson learned was that the CFACC and DIRMOBFOR “owned” the conventional resources and we needed to coordinate for support through them first.

As the conventional ground forces swept into Iraq and established their operating areas—Marines north of the Tigris River and Army forces south of the river—up to Baghdad, SEAL and SF operations were, by necessity, coordinated directly through the respective land component C2 nodes and consequently required less coordination at the CAOC level and the need for the SOLE assistance. As in Afghanistan,

with so many coalition forces on the ground, the CFACC’s mission evolved to supporting the counter-land battle and sortie requests were decentralized through the TACS.

By 14 April, major air combat operations were scaled down and the Saudis requested that the CAOC operation be moved from PSAB to the alternate CAOC at Al Udeid AB in Qatar. The facility at Al Udeid was built in 2002 as a command center on the sprawling military base as part of a larger, long-term deal with the Qataris. It was staffed and operated with the focus on missions in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In late January 2003, AFSOC sent Lt Col Curtis “Crittter” Reynolds, to Qatar and he led a downsized liaison element to support on-going special operations in OEF. To appease the Saudi government, operations were quickly ramped up at the Al Udeid and after an ATO cycle was planned and executed, the work at PSAB was discontinued. The Al Udeid SOLE picked up SOCCENT liaison responsibilities and most of us at PSAB returned to the US.

The SOLE experience in 2003 was greatly improved over the deployment in September 2001. Ideally, the SOLE Director should be known by and work for the SOF component commander regularly, if he is to be his liaison to the air component commander. Our attendance at the October 2002 planning conference and meeting all SOF element commanders, participation in the INTERNAL LOOK exercise in December, and attendance at theater conferences in Qatar went a long way to improve our communications with the SOCCENT commander and his staff. Further, the SOLE participated in the SOCCENT commander’s daily update meeting and the nightly SOCCENT/J-3 coordination meeting to ensure we had a solid understanding of what was coming and to address any concerns by either SOF or the air component.

Each SOF element sent representatives to the SOLE which contributed to smoother communications and coordination within the CAOC. This was especially true when supporting early NSWTG missions because we had an E-6 SEAL in our

plans shop and a E-8 SEAL supporting our efforts with the NALE in the CAOC.

Additionally, airspace experts were critical to success during the planning phases. Their successes included building specialized air refueling tracks for our C-130s and coordinating special air operations in real time within the CAOC combat operations section. We had four airspace professionals on our staff and found that the SOCCENT staff had none. The J-3 felt the CJSOAC should work the airspace issues, but this would have further burdened the CJSOAC staff and would bypass the SOCCENT staff. A day or so later, we sent our airspace management officer to Qatar to work issues from SOCCENT up to the CENTCOM and things leveled out after that.

Looking back, I felt we improved SOLE operations and our team was able to achieve several successes. Integrating and synchronizing special operations across the theater and ensuring senior leaders within the CAOC had full visibility on the major SOF activities. This included all missions clearly scheduled as SOF on the ATO and having AFSOC’s weapons officers working within the plans, space, intelligence, and time sensitive targeting cells. This ensured special operations were fully synchronized, integrated, and deconflicted with coalition military and other agency operations during the campaign.

In early 2007, I went back to the CAOC at Al Udeid for my final tour in the SOLE. The contingent of Air Commandos was small, about eight members, because the CFACC was supporting SOF and conventional forces on the ground through its ASOCs in Afghanistan and Iraq. SOF presence and representation in the CAOC was still needed to ensure the CFACC staff had awareness of any major operations, because he was still the provider for all conventional airpower.

A large portion of the CFACC’s airpower is provided by the Navy and when a Carrier Strike Group swapped out, the new commander usually made a courtesy visit to the CAOC for face-to-face meetings with the air component leadership. On one occasion, as the USS *Nimitz* Strike Group entered the Arabian

Gulf, a Navy O-5 from the NALE stopped by and asked me if Rear Admiral Blake could get on my calendar. As a “busy” colonel, I checked my calendar while the officer patiently waited. I finally looked up and asked him why the admiral wanted to see me? He said he wasn’t sure...I smiled at him and said, “Admiral Blake and I were classmates in high school, Class of 1971!” The Commander was quite surprised, mentioning that he was one or two years old in 1971. We had a good laugh and I had a nice visit with Admiral Blake when he arrived. While

with a big smile and a hardy handshake. It had been four years since I had last seen General Moseley and we had a nice chat for a few minutes. He introduced me to a Time Magazine reporter, who had flown on one of our AC-130 gunships earlier, and asked if I could answer some of her questions. I told him absolutely and thanked him for stopping by and saying hello. A few days later I did a hand-off with my replacement and headed home to Hurlburt Field.

In 2020, the SOLE at Al Udeid is different than it was during my time, for several reasons. Today, the CAOC, the SOCCENT-Forward headquarters, and the JSOAC are all collocated in Qatar, within a short distance of one another. The JSOAC commander, a colonel, is dual-hatted as the SOLE director, an arrangement that works because of proximity and they are not in a high tempo environment right now. The JSOAC commander works at the his own facility, but the deputy (SOLE director), an Air Force major or lieutenant colonel and Weapons School graduate, has his

area of responsibility with a large SOLE. Because combat operations in that region have evolved from the initial large scale efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq to a smaller, counter-land effort, the SOLE is relatively small right now. But, if a major combat operation, where initial access supported by major air operations is needed, the people currently assigned at the CAOC and SOLE in the AOR will hold down the fort while additional help from the US deploys forward. Today in AFSOC, command and control training is more deliberate and is also a mandatory requirement for our Air Commando leaders.

Many things have evolved in the nearly 20 years since 9/11 and 30 years since DESERT STORM, where Lt Col Randy Durham was the lone AFSOC liaison in the air operations center. I look back on the early experiences, of taking General Comer’s vision of ensuring CFACC support for special operations, and helping to create a SOLE organization in AFSOC, and am gratified. Today in the CAOC, we have senior SOF face-to-face integration and coordination with leadership in theater, backed up with reach-back to Hurlburt Field for combat support avoiding the need for a large force in theater. There is an AFSOC/A-3 policy mandating command and control training through USAFSOS and Joint Special Operation University for the leaders and key staff of JSOACs and SOLEs. These efforts are bolstered by the number of AFSOC Weapons Officers who are experts in their weapon systems and work in JSOACs and SOLEs, and have the full understanding of the operational-level employment of airpower. These Air Commandos understand how to access and leverage the full range of US and coalition airpower to support special operations, just as General Comer envisioned.



USS Nimitz Strike Group Commander visits SOLE 2007.
(Photo courtesy of author)

that visit was a huge coincidence, the point is all airpower: Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Army, coalition partners, conventional, and special operations operating in a theater is coordinated through the air component commander’s CAOC.

As I was nearing the end of my final tour, the Air Force Chief of Staff was scheduled for a visit to the CAOC. I was in my office and heard a commotion on the floor and assumed the Chief had arrived, so went outside to see him and maybe say hello. How often do you get to meet the CSAF, right? The Chief was shaking hands and chatting with a few folks and then saw me and came over

office in the CAOC. The deputy coordinates with the CAOC leadership and has two people working in the Combat Operations division coordinating airspace, air refueling, fire support, and other requirements for SOF. Because of modern technology, many other SOLE duties previously accomplished in the CAOC have been distributed back to the US. While I was interviewing a member of the AFSOC Operations Center for the latest information on the SOLE, several Air Commandos were in the next room working to support special operations in the theater.

The focus of this article has been my experience within the Central Command



About the Author: Colonel Harmon retired in 2010. During his career he held several command positions in operations and training, and served three deployments as the Director, Special Operations Liaison Element in the Central Command’s Combined Air Operations Center during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM.

16TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS GROUP



Al Faw mission brief in Kuwait.
(Photo courtesy of author)

EARLY ACTION in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

By Colonel Randy O'Boyle, USAF (Retired)

I had the honor of serving as the 16th Special Operations Group (SOG) commander from 2002 thru 2003. In late 2002, with forces deployed to support ongoing operations in Afghanistan and after multiple crisis action team meetings, it came down to a Mission Impossible-like scenario that went something like this:

Here's your mission: split your existing forces, many of whom just returned or were about to redeploy to/from a year-long, semi-max effort in Afghanistan to maintain capability to support special operations forces (SOF) engaged in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), while taking the other half of our forces to support a maximum effort takedown of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq as part of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). And of course, this deployment order will commence right before Christmas and you will be required to take this half of your force and split it again to support operations from both Kuwait and another partner nation. Please, just one more thing, you must also support a presence in the Horn of Africa (HOA) with the half-of-the-half of the

force in Kuwait. This is your mission, should you decide to accept it.

Well of course, we all know you don't get a choice. For the men and women of the (then) 16th SOW, commanded by Col Frank Kisner, this is what we got in late December 2002. Col Kisner had just recently redeployed back to the US Central Command area of responsibility to again command the Joint Special Operations Air Component (JSOAC) for SOCCENT. He commanded the wing, which had earned countless accolades for its efforts supporting special operations a year earlier in Afghanistan. Hence, this response fell to the wing, driven by the 16th Special Operations Group. Col Ray Kilgore, the vice wing commander, had the reins at home and directed traffic and support, while allowing the operations group to get on with the mission.

The warning order was classified Top Secret and the entire effort was cloaked in the normal 16th SOW security practices, making the initial planning stages a bit difficult. The most prominent remark heard as people were read into the plan

was, “You’ve got to be kidding me.” As always, the weary, but motivated Air Commandos answered the call. The planners planned, coordinating with the Reservists from the 919th SOW, which played a key role with the venerable MC-130E Combat Talon I, and the tremendous logistic machine was spun up. Massive support throughout the wing was laid-on and the 16th SOW was off to the races again.

Our overall mission was to support the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC), commanded by Army Brig Gen Gary Harrell, dual-hatted as the Special Operations Command Central commander. More specifically, we were under the operational control of Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Force-South (CJSOTF-South). I was in command of the Joint Special Operations Aviation Detachment (JSOAV) at Ali Al Salem AB in Kuwait, and Col Dave Harris led another JSOAV based in a partner nation out west. In Kuwait, we worked with US Navy SEAL teams and Special Forces (SF) from 3rd and 5th Special Forces Groups. Out west, Harris worked other elements of the 5th SFG, as well as British and Australian Special Forces teams.

As our forces arrived in Kuwait, we took over a brand-new hangar as the operating headquarters on the air base and fell in on a tent city. The US presence there was set up as a logistics support hub and radar site after DESERT STORM. It had been continually operated as a remote rotational base and had facilities for the permanent party, as well as a nice new chow

hall. Much to our hosts chagrin, we quickly overwhelmed their remote schedule. Initially, we stayed in plywood hooches that had been abandoned when the permanent party moved into modular trailers, but we quickly outgrew those and a tent city was set up next to the airfield to accommodate all the Army, Navy, and Air Force SOF flowing into the base.

Our mission set developed to infiltrate covert intelligence operatives and Iraqi expatriate personnel to liaise with indigenous personnel involved in the resistance to Saddam’s regime. We had 10 MH-53M Pave Low helicopters, 5 MC-130E Combat Talons, and 4 MC-130P Combat Shadows allocated for the operation.

As the plans gelled, it fell to 20th SOS commander, Lt Col Brad Webb and his operations officer, Lt Col Jim Slife, with their Green Hornet Pave Low crews to perform the first two critical mission sets. On D-day they were to insert 10 aircraft loads of covert teams behind the lines prior to the kick-off for conventional operations, and the next night, D+1, to secure the oil pumping facility on the Al Faw peninsula in

Lt Col Brad Webb addresses his airmen at the beginning of OIF.
(Photo courtesy Lt Gen Brad Webb)



order to preserve critical infrastructure. These missions were ambitious, daring, and risky, and the preparations and planning went forward accordingly.

One aircraft was lost during the rehearsal, with no serious injuries. During a brown-out landing a wheel went into a hole, tilting the aircraft enough for the rotor blades to contact a small outcropping; so, no, the desert is not flat. We had the crew back flying within a week and they performed heroically throughout. It was war and we acted accordingly.

Lt Col Jim Slife was the mission commander for the infiltration missions on D-day. Because we needed to launch the Al Faw oil terminal mission the next night, and the demand

an aircraft down in the LZ and we will advise if we need any assistance. It is critically important that you take a couple of breaths and transmit this calmly.” When we got the call, it hushed the JOC, but as intended, did not fuel anything but confidence. The attitude was: they have had some problems, we’ll wait and see what they need. Lt Col Slife got all the formation down and rendered support to the crew and team on the downed Pave Low helicopter. They were shaken, but healthy. With their vehicle stuck in the aircraft, the SOF teams offloaded all the equipment and supplies that they could – including a briefcase of money; reconfigured their men and loads; and off they drove into the night. We got the call in the JOC that the infil was complete and five of the six aircraft were inbound for reload. We blew up the downed Pave Low with a bomb from an F-16 – a tough, but necessary, choice.

I met Lt Col Webb on the ramp waiting for the formation to land. I asked him what he wanted to do.

He asked, “What do you mean?” I asked if he was still good turning the aircraft for the second mission.

His answer was an emphatic “Yes!”

My reply was, “Good, what do you need?”

Lt Col Webb said he needed the spare aircraft for the mission loaded, and off they went. There was no hesitation. One of the gunners from the wrecked aircraft had hurt his leg, but was otherwise unscathed. The second mission launched – this one farther into Iraq and worse weather.

Again, the LZs were miserable, both the primary and secondary. Slife’s merry little band hunted around and found

a suitable spot, landing one-by-one to insert the teams, and then going off to the tanker. Enroute to the rendezvous, the formation had to dodge thunderstorms, initially heading north to find a clear area to refuel. The MC-130P Shadows were magnificent, refueling the helicopters behind enemy lines in poor weather.

The helicopters were still coming home as the sun was rising. I got a call from the boss, Col Kisner, who had been following the mission. He was concerned about them still being out in daylight. It was funny – usually you worry about the “kids” being out after dark, but I told him that they were 30 to 45 minutes out. “We are good.” He might have called me back a couple of times, but they were indeed good.

The next night, the helicopters headed to Al Faw. Ten MH-53s would shuttle a combined force of British Royal Marines and US Navy SEALs to secure two critical gas and oil platforms in the North Arabian Gulf. The second phase was to reinforce and resupply the Al Faw peninsula with enough forces to hold it until the conventional ground forces relieved them late the next day. This second phase was flown by our



SEALs ready to go in the back of MH-53 for Al Faw mission. (Photo courtesy of author)

required more crews than we had, Webb and Slife decided to launch twice with the same crews over one period of darkness. This was a calculated risk, as both missions were max efforts, requiring two low-level air refuelings behind enemy lines, all on NVGs into remote, dust-prone sites. If all went perfect, the formation would cross back into Kuwait an hour before the sun came up.

As we all know, nothing is a given in war and things didn’t go perfectly, despite using all the intelligence support available to pick out dust-free landing areas suitable to the task. Various government agencies including the Defense Mapping Agency and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, used their tremendous capabilities to help us find suitable landing zones. The first infiltration, to a dry creek bed, kicked up quite a bit of dust, so Lead aborted the landing and went around. Chalk 2 had to adjust, but it forced Chalk 3 to maneuver excessively in the dust and he inadvertently hit a berm and rolled over.

In the joint operations center (JOC) we got a call. The formation lead had the presence of mind to tell the copilot, “Ok, I need you to make a call to the JOC. Tell them we have



AC-130U Gunship

Pave Lows and Royal Marine H-3 Sea Kings flying in separate formations.

The Al Faw operation was supported by 50 strike aircraft from the USS *Constellation* in the Gulf, USAF A-10s and F-16s, and two AC-130U gunships we borrowed from JSOAD-West. Capt Bill Holt from the 4th SOS led the gunship package. I was the mission commander on his aircraft, Dodge 85. My callsign was Woolley 01. We needed line-of-sight radios to coordinate two aspects of the mission—linking up with the Royal Marine H-3s and also with the US Navy strikers. The gunship, with its amazing communications suite, was the logical candidate.

Right from the start there was a weather delay that hampered the launches from the aircraft carrier. We used our combat weather team, out on the border, for updates, and put the helicopters in a holding pattern. Complicating matters during the delay, the targets picked by the SEALs all had southern California names and the Royal Marines used names based on London subway stations. I deciphered them, reshuffling times with a bifold made from a cut down refrigerator box. It seems funny now, 17 years later, but at the time it was one more “fog of war” element we had to deal with. We finally attacked the targets using Navy F/A-18s, and the USAF A-10s and F-16s.

Capt Holt and the AC-130U Spooky gunships, as always, were awesome. They provided security for the infils, taking out Iraqi reinforcements in trucks and armed vehicles. The only hiccup during the infils was when Lt Col Webb’s aircraft got stuck in knee-deep mud on the LZ with a SEAL desert assault vehicle on board. I could see his predicament on the gunship’s

infrared sensor and heard his situation report as the gunship worked targets heading in his direction.

I asked, “How’s it going? We need to get you out of there ASAP.”

His reply was something to the effect of, “Tell me something I don’t know,” or “You think?”

I realized as soon as I said it that I was not being helpful.

The crew eventually freed the SEALs’ vehicle from the muck and off they went, just as the Spooky whacked another inbound truck. On the gunship, we were rotating off the tanker when we got shot at by some SAMs (surface to air missiles). The electronic warfare officer called for the pilots to take evasive action and I was waiting for a yank and bank. Little did I know that on a gunship, loaded with gas and ammunition, evasive action is like 15 degrees right and 5 degrees nose up or down, not so impressive when compared to helicopter evasive maneuvering, but we survived to fight on.

The overwatch mission continued as the Royal Marines were shuttled into the Al Faw petroleum facilities for the next two hours. When that was complete we headed to Ali Al Salem to “pit-stop” the gunships and wait for the next missions. Col Brian Greenshields was the JSOAD-East deputy commander and Lt Col Mike Vilks, US Special Forces, the JOC commander. Both were brilliant in how they handled the multiple, complicated, and always changing coordination throughout this early OIF effort.

Another incredible mission, in the great tradition of Air Commandos, was an airfield seizure at Wadi Al Khirr on D+3.

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What we didn't know during the planning and coordination was that the Army was shooting their HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) and the Navy was launching TLAM cruise missiles, using the same airspace our SOF aircraft needed to fly through. Our aircraft were refueling helicopters from JSOAD-West when missiles started flying around them. The crews thought they were being attacked by SAMs, but they were our missiles!

This caused a starburst and much pucker in the JOC. I think a comment was made on the radio to please have our guys stop shooting at us. I sent a colorful email to our friends in the SOLE at the air operations center, which our trusted agent Col Paul Harmon intercepted and tirelessly ran down the folks to "turn off the switch" and have them stop launching the TLAMs. As Paul details in his article in this issue of *Air Commando Journal*, we eventually were able to deconflict our missions with the cruise missile launches in time for the second wave of MC-130 lifts into Wadi Al Khirr.

In those early days we watched a resupply mission to the Iraqi resistance unfold on the video feed from the MQ-1 Predator. It was just like in the movies—surreal! We watched a Pave Low full of weapons touch down to meet the resistance fighters in a remote desert LZ. We saw the Iraqi cars show up right before the helicopter landed. Everyone in the JOC was

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waiting for something to go wrong, but the gunner met the guy on the road, they traded business cards, and they loaded up the cars with weapons. As I said, the stuff of movies.

The search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was SOF's first-priority mission during this phase of the campaign. Navy CAPT Bob Harward, commander of all SEALs in Iraq, received intelligence that there was potentially a remote storage site in the tunnels of the Haditha Dam, in Eastern Iraq. There was also a concern that Saddam's remaining Republican Guards elements were attempting to blow up some key dams – one being Haditha. In light of all this information, a mission was laid on to assault the dam complex with eight Pave Lows full of SEALs and other forces to secure the complex and look

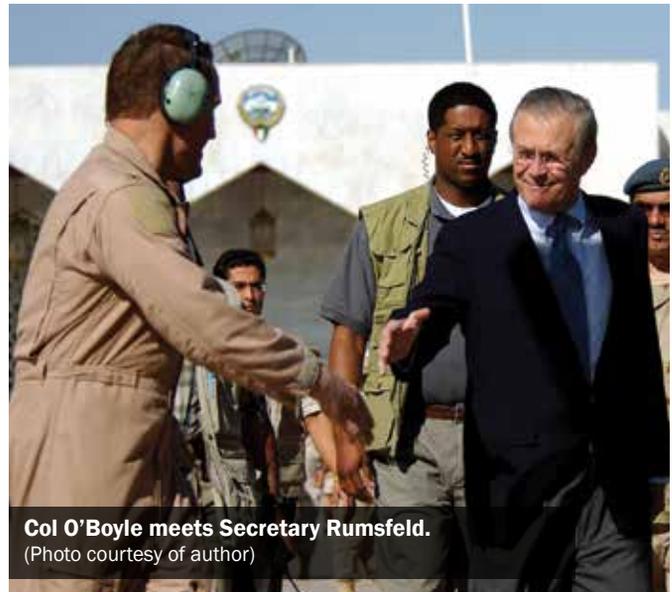


for WMDs. The mission went off as planned: simultaneous insertions, including to the roof of the power plant complex, off-loading vehicles, and a security cordon around the dam. The searches found no WMD and the dam operation was turned over to the civil affairs elements.

During the buildup for OIF, the threat of chemical warfare was real and we knew our mission required us to recover our special operators regardless of the conditions. One of our medics and our flight surgeon, Dr “Doc” Cunningham, collaborated to build a containment facility that could be carried in a Pave Low. They built it out of old rubber fuel bladders that they cleaned and installed over a PVC frame. They then glued in a couple of body bag zippers for the door and hooked up the contraption to an air handler made of air pumps from 30 gas mask respirators in line. It is funny now, but at the time dead serious – to make sure the system worked we tasked 15 folks to spend hours in there with the Doc checking their oxygen levels. Thank God we didn't need it.

Once it was cleared to do so, our combined forces moved quickly to reposition assets to Baghdad. The first aircraft to land at Baghdad International Airport was from the 919th SOW. On board was General (retired) Wayne Downing, along with NBC's Brian Williams. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had said the military was not going to be an airline for media rock stars and put out the word, but NBC was smart enough to hire Gen Downing, the former JSOC and USSOCOM commander,

as a consultant. Gen Downing showed up in Kuwait and talked with the troops. He secured clearance to bring Brian Williams out to do stories as part of a media blitz plan before the war. As things progressed, Downing said he needed to get Williams, himself, and a cameraman to Baghdad. Our conversation went



something like this, “Secretary Rumsfeld said no,” and he said, “I know.”

I said, “General Harrell and General Schoomaker will have my ass,” and he replied, “I can take care of them – you're good.”

Of course, I said OK, but I had Lt Col Pat Pihanna, the Special Tactics Squadron commander, meet them at the gate and made them stay in the vehicle until the Combat Talon was about to roll. That night Brian Williams broadcast the seizure of Baghdad from an airport rooftop while we laid low. Dan Rather from CBS and all the other media stars glowered since they were stuck reporting from Jordan or Kuwait.

During those chaotic, first days of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, there was so much more that the 16th SOG accomplished; it could fill a book—incredible flying by men and machines only made possible by our awe-inspiring maintainers, logisticians, communications team, and the myriad of other support professionals, without whom nothing is possible. There were heroics all around – business as usual for America's Air Commandos.



About the Author: During his Air Force career Colonel O'Boyle served as a MH-53 Pave Low evaluator pilot and commanded the 551st Special Operations Squadron and the 16th Special Operations Group. He held key positions on the Air Staff and was a member of USSOCOM's Legislative Liaison office where he garnered essential support for USSOCOM's budget and acquisition strategies from the Services and Congress. He is currently the President of Ultra Electronics ICE, Inc (Ultra-ICE) and lives in Manhattan, KS. Colonel O'Boyle is a member of the Air Commando Hall of Fame, Class of 2016.

Task Force Viking and the **UGLY BABY** Mission

By Colonel Cory Peterson, USAF (Retired)

The “Ugly Baby” infiltration was the key element that opened the northern front in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and was incredibly significant to the overall campaign in Iraq. While small advance force elements were on the ground in the KAZ, they lacked the combat power to accomplish the mission of fixing 13 Iraqi divisions (two thirds of the Iraqi Army) to prevent them from interfering with the main invasion force’s drive towards Baghdad. The audacious air maneuver successfully inserted the bulk of two battalions of Green Berets and convinced the Turks to allow subsequent overflight.

– Lt General Ken Tovo, USA, (Retired)



The US and its coalition partners began planning Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) months before the actual D-Day on 19 Mar 2003. The strategic plan for the initial invasion called for a two-pronged assault from the south on Baghdad by coalition forces, coupled with a simultaneous northern attack by the US 4th Infantry Division (ID) supported by US SOF partnered with Kurdish Peshmerga forces. The intent behind the northern assault was to fix 13 Iraqi divisions in place

and prevent them from moving south to oppose the main coalition effort, while also protecting the vital oil fields in the around Mosul. The 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), commanded by COL Charles Cleveland, was given the task to plan and lead the special operations in the north.

Before those northern operations could occur, the 4th ID and their equipment would need to disembark at Turkish ports on the Mediterranean Sea, move overland





to link up with additional equipment that had been pre-positioned in Turkey, and then enter the Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) in northern Iraq. The dilemma, though, was Turkey's internal political situation. Although Turkey was a reliable NATO ally and very interested in removing Saddam Hussein's destabilizing influence from the region, they feared that Kurdish participation in OIF might embolden the Kurds to renew their claims for an independent Kurdistan. The Turks' quandary was how to join and support the coalition without causing domestic political problems.

The 10th SFG(A) was chosen to be the nucleus of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-N) because (1) they were apportioned to USEUCOM and Turkey was a member of NATO and (2) 10th SFG had established relationships with the Kurds after almost 10 years of participation in Operations PROVIDE COMFORT and NORTHERN WATCH. Similarly, the 352nd Special Operations Group (SOG), commanded by Col O.G. Mannon, was designated as Joint Special Operations Aviation Detachment-North (JSOAN-N). After more than three decades of working together during training, exercises, and contingency operations, the 10th SFG(A) and the 352nd SOG had developed a solid partnership based on mutual trust and operational success.

The original plan for CJSOTF-N, nicknamed Task Force-Viking, was to establish a special operations base in Turkey from which to launch missions into the KAZ, establish forward operating bases (FOBs) in Iraq, and then link up with the two rival Kurdish factions. One battalion of the 10th SFG would partner with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the northern half of the KAZ and the other with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in the southern sector. It was a classic unconventional warfare operation – US special operations support to indigenous resistance movements supported by airpower.

Execution of the initial plan began with Col Mannon deploying to Turkey early with a team to begin the negotiations and encampment. Almost a year earlier, the Turkish government had fully intended to cooperate with potential coalition operations, at least by offering basing and overflight rights. But by New Year's Day, Turkey's internal politics had changed. Feeling intense domestic pressure, the Turks let it be known that they were unlikely to allow coalition operations from Turkey. They also cautioned that even if they did approve the use of their ports, roads, and bases, it would unlikely be soon enough to permit the timing needed for proper coalition force staging and preparation. Leaning forward, Special Operations Command Europe, TF-Viking and JSOAN-N began looking for alternatives. With USEUCOM's help, Romania offered the use of Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK) AB, near Constanta on the Black Sea. A team of 30 airmen from the 352nd SOG, led by Lt Col Timothy Brown and dubbed the "Dirty-Thirty" due to the conditions of the base upon arrival, arrived at MK on St Valentine's Day to prepare the base for future US operations, gambling that diplomatic negotiations would enable TF-Viking to infiltrate from MK by overflying Turkey. In late February, aircraft from the 352nd SOG: MC-130H Combat Talon IIs, MC-130P Combat Shadows, and MH-53 Pave Low helicopters, AC-130 gunships from the 1st SOW, plus Special Tactics teams, support units, and equipment deployed to disused conscript barracks and an off-season Black Sea hotel near MK. Unfortunately, on 1 March the Turkish Parliament voted to refuse staging from Turkey, transit through its territory, and overflight of Turkish airspace. The plan for OIF's northern assault had to change.

The Turks' refusal meant the 4th ID had to reposition from where it was waiting offshore outside the Turkish ports, through the Suez Canal, to Kuwait where it would eventually join V Corps in the assault from the south. The job of holding those northern Iraqi divisions in place now fell to solely Col Cleveland and the soldiers and airmen of TF-Viking. On 3 March 10th SFG deployed to MK, linking up with the Dirty-Thirty and aircraft from JSOAN-N.

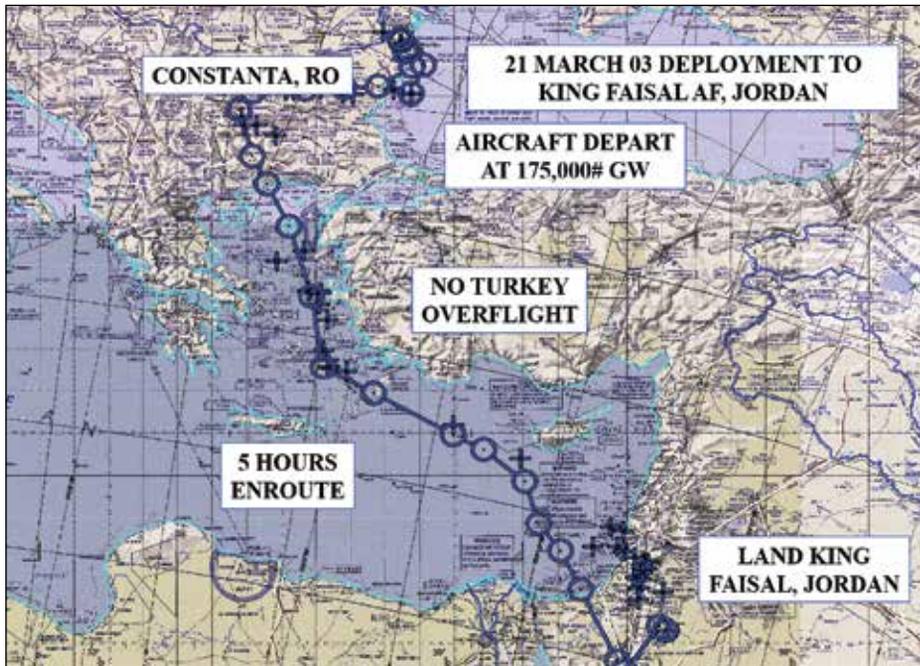
USCENTCOM and TF-Viking planners were left scrambling to develop a new plan for the northern front of the war. The resulting "Plan B" called for the Kurdish Peshmerga, backed by US Special Forces (SF) and coalition airpower to keep the Iraqi divisions from moving south to Baghdad and opposing the

southern assault until the coalition main effort could fight its way north from Kuwait. The 173rd Airborne Brigade, based in Italy, elements of the 10th Mountain Division and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit would later be added to TF-Viking, to increase the CJSOTF's combat power.

On 20 March, Turkey's parliament finally voted to allow the coalition to transit Turkish airspace for military operations in Iraq. Unfortunately, the Turkish military refused to comply. For two nights three-ship flights of MC-130Hs from the 7th Special Operations Squadron, commanded by Lt Col Mark "Mo" Alsid, launched from MK to deliver Special Forces teams to their destinations in northern Iraq. On both nights,

routing added hundreds of miles to the flight route which in turn reduced the load sizes the Combat Talons could carry due to increased fuel requirements. The number of aircraft needed for the initial infiltration grew, from three airplanes to six, one of which was flown by Maj Rich Dyer's crew from the 15th SOS. As this option was being briefed at the CJSOTF a member of Col Cleveland's staff muttered under his breath, "That's one ugly baby." The name stuck and the mission has become known by this unconventional moniker.

It then became the responsibility of Col Frank J. Kisner, the commander of the Combined/Joint Special Operations Air Component (CJSOAC) to convince Maj Gen Gary Harrell, the



the Combat Talons were intercepted by Turkish F-16s and told to return to base by Turkish air traffic controllers. The Turkish military was denying use of their airspace until the US agreed to allow Turkish forces into the KAZ, a condition that was completely unacceptable to both the US and the Kurdish leadership.

Meanwhile, a separate crew commanded by Maj Mark "Buck" Haberichter, was isolated from the current operations planners and tasked to develop an alternative route to get the CJSOTF into northern Iraq. The concept of operation they were given to work with was to find a circuitous route that would travel from Romania to Jordan where the force would rest overnight and the next day fly a 5-hour, night, low-level penetration of Iraqi airspace, and return along the same route. This alternate routing would take the Combat Talons through some very heavily defended airspace, not so affectionately nicknamed "Happy Valley" by Northern Watch intelligence professionals. The new routing required precise navigation just inside the Iraqi border, staying north and west of Mosul, all the while avoiding Iraqi air defenses and possible compromise by Syrian and Turkish air traffic controllers. The proposed

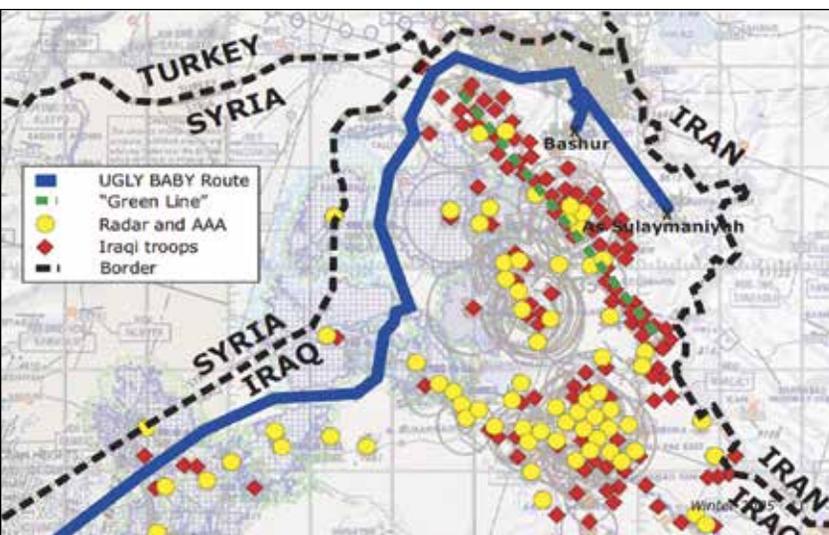
SOCCENT commander, of the validity of the plan. As Lt Gen Kisner now tells the story,

All airpower, with the exception of SOF, was restricted from low-level operations over Iraq, and he (Harrell) knew when he took the plan forward that a low-level infiltration, from south-to-north, transiting the entire length of the western border of Iraq, would raise some questions. I reviewed the facts with him—most of which we had already been discussing: it was critical to USCENTCOM's campaign plan to get Col Charlie Cleveland's 10th Special Forces Group into the north to hold down the Iraqi divisions that would otherwise reinforce Baghdad; a northern infiltration was politically denied; no other air platforms were available to infiltrate 10th Group; the amount of time it would have taken the heavily laden MC-130s to climb to altitude once they started to burn off gas along their route would have left them vulnerable to small arms and anti-aircraft fire for too great a time; therefore the only reasonable, albeit high-risk option was to have the force package execute the entire infiltration at low level. Was it an audacious

plan? Yes, but the crews and SOF air leadership had conducted detailed and intensive planning to reduce the risk as much as possible, and it was the only option available. I closed by recommending his approval of the infiltration plan.

The new plan was for three Combat Talons to carry elements of 2nd Battalion, 10th SFG (2/10 SFG) to Bashur LZ and the three additional Talons to transport elements of the 3rd Battalion (3/10 SFG) led by Lt Col Ken Tovo along the same route to As Sulaymaniyah LZ. A small advance force had been infiltrated by ground earlier and Air Force Special Tactics airmen from the 321st Special Tactics Squadron would set up infrared landing markings for the Talons at both locations. Almost 300 Green Berets would be inserted into northern Iraq by the six MC-130Hs taking off at pre-determined intervals and proceeding to each of the two LZs and landing with 20-minute spacing throughout the middle of the night.

As word of the approved mission was disseminated the SF teams and our loadmasters set to work adjusting load plans to accommodate new weight limitations. The SF teams were divided into split teams and redistributed among aircraft in case one of the Talons might be lost. All non-essential equipment



was removed from the aircraft and the mission-equipment was planned to be floor loaded with the soldiers using snap-link harnesses to attach themselves, via their belts, directly to the floor of the aircraft. The teams packed heavy not knowing what they would encounter—each operator’s rucksack averaged just under 200 pounds. The weights were carefully calculated as every spare pound equaled another pound of fuel that could be added. This careful planning and prudent cross-loading proved prescient—there was minimal impact to the mission when one of the MC-130Hs took heavy ground fire and had to divert from its planned objective.

According to Capt Joe Gelineau, Assistant S-3 for 2/10 SFG, “The fact that the mission was going was a total relief. For two weeks we had been trying to get into Northern Iraq to link-up with our Kurdish counterparts but had been literally turned back at every attempt. Any approved route, even if it

was called “ugly baby,” was very much welcomed. We just wanted to get into country and start our mission, regardless of how we go there.” Another huge consideration for the crews was fuel—we had to carry enough to make it in and out without a stop. The plan for exfiltration, after the Talons were light from offload, would be to fly to the maximum altitude possible and retrace our steps back out hoping that many of the air defense systems would not be able to reach us. Lastly, we would rely on the robust electronic countermeasures of the Combat Talons to protect us from any other threats.

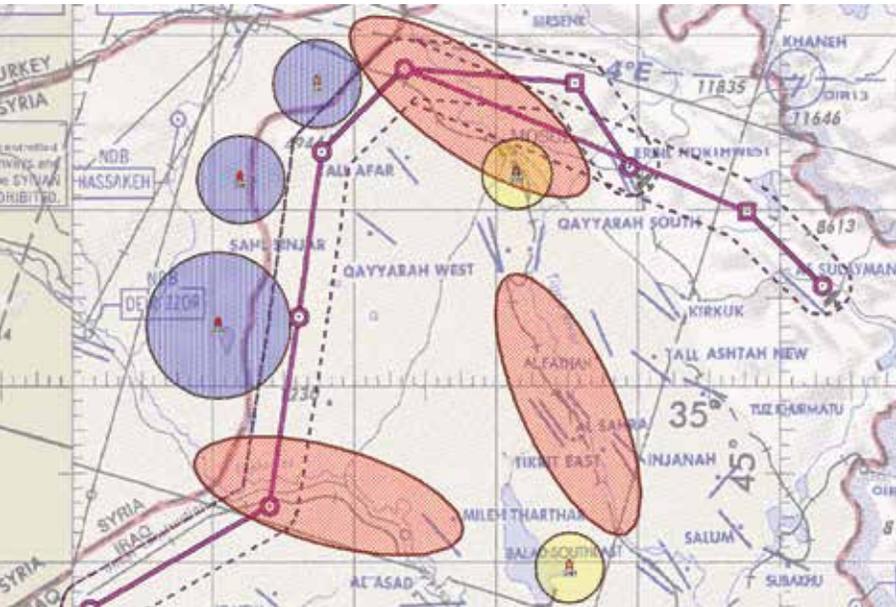
On 21 March, four heavily loaded MC-130Hs from the 7th SOS departed MK to join up with two MC-130Hs and one crew from the 15th SOS at King Faisal AB, Jordan, the forward staging base. Two MC-130Ps and a conventional C-130 followed, bringing additional loads and the extra 7th SOS Talon crew since this was not yet a “wartime” mission and the max weights were not yet allowed. After landing, all crews immediately began mission planning activities lasting well into the morning as coordination now had to take place between two squadrons who had not flown together in years. The 15th SOS crew did not have the benefit of the prior day’s planning and, thus, they were playing catch-up through most of the night.

As the sun rose all of the crews completed their planning and attempted to rest in the “transient-personnel” tents during the noise and heat of the day, but were woken only hours later with the notification that the alert time had moved up and the mission was “On.” They grabbed their gear, tweaked their plans for updated weather and intel and proceeded to their aircraft. Proving the age-old aircrew adage that “no plan survives engine start” the SATCOM system on the lead aircraft malfunctioned. This aircraft was planned to carry the Airborne Mission Commander, Lt Col Pat Dean, at the time the 7th SOS Director of Operations. Without a functioning SATCOM his ability to communicate with both the formation and headquarters elements would be significantly hampered and, thus, a bump plan was executed to move Col Dean to the #3 bird before the mission was even underway. The aircraft taxied out of parking to the parallel taxiway where the troops were marshalled and performed an engine-running onload of the SF soldiers. Men, gear, and equipment were strapped down and the crews ran final checklists. Within minutes, as the sun began to set, five Combat Talons, call sign “Harley,” flying at wartime maximum allowable gross weight, lifted off in into the darkening skies of the Jordanian evening. The sixth MC-130 with the SATCOM issue now fixed launched shortly thereafter and was able to continue.

According to one of the SF team leaders, the first hour or so of the flight felt about the same as any training mission from their home base at Ft Carson, CO. Things changed, however, when over the eastern desert of Jordan the MC-130 pilots cancelled their flight plans, made their last radio call to the E-3A AWACS, and declared they were “tactical.” All aircraft lights were switched off as part of the Combat Entry Checklist and with all aircrew on night vision goggles (NVGs), each aircraft descended on their terrain-following radar into the

pitch black night, preparing to blast across the border with Iraq at 250 feet above the ground at speeds nearing 300 kts.

While years of Operation NORTHERN/SOUTHERN WATCH had given our intelligence personnel fairly detailed information about the location and capabilities of Iraq's fixed air defense and early warning systems, along with Iraqi air defense fighters, what was unknown was how well manned



the border outposts were and the number and extent of mobile AAA and man-portable missile systems (MANPADS). As the Talons approached the Iraqi border, navigators and pilots focused radars, IR detection systems, and their NVG-shrouded eyes outside the aircraft searching for locations with the least build-up of people or defenses. Electronic Warfare Officers (EWOs then, now called Combat Systems Officers, CSOs) armed the aircraft self-defense systems and strained over the noise of the cockpit to listen for missile warning and launch indicators. Aboard Harley 37, the EWO, Capt Robert "Opie" Horton, was spiked by an air-to-air radar and "chaffed-off" what he later believed was a US F-15. With only a select few SOF aircraft operating at low altitude the action was probably a good one to let the US pilot know he had not locked up an enemy target.

Rocketing over the Iraqi border at altitudes of 100 ft AGL and maximum speed it seemed we had been successful in not raising alarms. Navigators had easily picked out the border-entry posts on radar miles out and routes were adjusted so as to take advantage of the gaps. For the first two hours, the six MC-130s passed unnoticed along the eastern Syrian border. This part of Iraq is sparsely settled, but we knew the tough part of the route was yet to come. With the anticipatory excitement past, crews settled into their routines. In the back of the airplanes, the SF teams were sleeping among their loads and tied-down equipment in the blacked-out cabins.

As we passed Anah, Iraq, and then headed north towards Tal Afar, the situation changed. According to Capt Jeremy Kokenes, the lead aircraft's navigator, he and Maj Eric Elam,

the EWO, began to notice horseshoe-shaped returns on their radar similar to our intelligence briefing description of "potential embedded AAA or other enemy fighting vehicles." After a short conversation they relayed these observations to the rest of the extended-formation via secure radio. Col Dean attributed a portion of the success of the mission to the efficacy of good inflight communications.

While crossing the first belt of Iraqi defenses the first of the MC-130s took the Iraqi defenders by surprise and quickly passed by drawing only sporadic small arms gunfire. The aircrew looking outside with their NVGs could see the Iraqi soldiers clustered around burn-barrels trying to stay warm on the cold desert night. Now, with the first Talon passing by at threat-penetration altitudes just above their heads, the Iraqis were alerted and moving to their guns. TSgt Mark Peters, one of the two loadmasters strapped into the paratroop door scanning for and alerting the pilot for threats from the sides and rear of the plane, saw an Iraqi gunner under camouflage netting run to his AAA piece with a cigarette in his mouth, something that can only be seen from closer than 100 ft on NVGs.

With the following MC-130s in trailing intervals, the Iraqis were waiting but their initial targeting solutions had them aiming too high. The tracers were mostly going over the tops of the aircraft. Aggressive evasive maneuvering by the pilots avoided any serious damage. By the time the following aircraft approached, however, the Iraqis had adjusted and were ready. This time the defenders were able to place effective AAA fire against the next group of Combat Talons.

Aboard the aircraft crewed by the 15th SOS, Capt Todd Fogle, the navigator, recounts having gone through three and a half minutes of continuous AAA from multiple directions



and five guys telling the pilot different things: jink-up/don't jink-up/jink-left/etc. and with the terrain-following system squawking at us, low altitude warnings blaring, and the copilot

saying, “They’ve got us,” as he saw tracer fire now coming at them but not moving from its relative position on the window. Fortunately, at that very moment they crossed over the shoreline of the Saddam Dam Lake and all was absolute calm—three and a half minutes of getting shot at, then complete peace. The flight culminated with the crew landing at Bashur and seeing coach-style tour buses ready to pick up the SF teams. It felt pretty strange to go through all that chaos and then cross a line into to what seemed like another world.

“Buck” Haberichter’s aircraft, tail number 89-0280, “The Highlander,” and call sign Harley 37, was the planned tail-end Charlie. We fully expected enemy defenses to be woken up by the time we entered the engagement zone. They opened fire on us with what we later believed to be 57 mm, 23 mm, 14.5 mm, and small arms fire. The initial engagement was from a 57mm proximity-round exploding outside the pilot’s window, which sounded like a pool-ball being thrown at the floor. We all looked at each other and then the engineer verified the pilot’s swing-window had been severely damaged by the explosion. That engagement then continued as we jinked and maneuvered the aircraft for the next four minutes. SSgt Eric Rigby, our flight engineer, reported that our number two engine had been hit and we were rapidly losing engine oil. We began the engine shutdown sequence just as we flew into a second hornet’s nest. AAA was everywhere. We began jinking again, this time on three engines, and maneuvering the plane through all dimensions. Threat calls were coming from all directions and at that moment the TF system failed, leaving us in the moonless night with no radar at 250 feet and under attack. AAA fire began to rip through the fuselage of the airplane and the smell of burning powder was evident in the cargo compartment. “Opic” Horton fought the urge to deploy preventative flares against potential MANPADS knowing they would illuminate us against the pitch back desert. In the back, the SF team leader said his men could hear the shrapnel hitting the aircraft and were just waiting for holes to start opening up in the sides of the airplane. The soldiers sat helplessly as the pilots tried to evade the firestorm and watched as bullets and shrapnel penetrated the cargo compartment.

Capt Gelineau, in the back of Harley 37, remembers hearing and feeling the effects of the enemy air defenses. The enemy gunfire sounded as if someone drove a metal rod into an industrial-sized fan...clack-ity, clack, clack, clack! He remembered seeing debris and insulation scatter inside of our MC-130’s cargo area due to the enemy gunfire. He also remembered seeing the loadmaster’s hand signal that one of the engines was dead and smelling the smoke enter the cargo compartment as the pilot repeatedly descended and ascended in order to maneuver to avoid additional enemy fire. Up front, “Buck” descended to below 100 feet AGL to try and avoid the AAA, but during that engagement a 23 mm round penetrated the skin of the aircraft forward of the right paratroop door narrowly missing the loadmaster, SSgt Dave Buss, scorching insulation, and starting a fire on the honey-bucket curtain. Buss distinctly

remembers the wild rollercoaster ride of the flight going from weightlessness to not being able to move because of the 60 pounds of body armor and the survival vest he was wearing. In the opposite door SSgt Ryan “Tico” Pentico called out the dead engine to the pilot while continuing the threat calls. One Special Tactics airman later relayed to me after we landed that he flipped down his NVGs to look out a side window and then flipped them back up, not wanting to see the end which he fully expected due to the massive amounts of tracer fire.

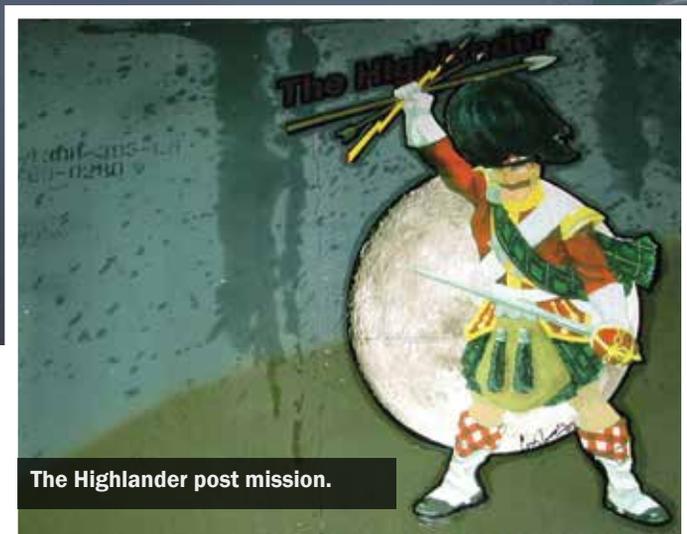
There were a significant number of Javelin missiles and boxes of fragmentation grenades loaded in the center of the aircraft, and the soldiers knew they couldn’t be far enough away from them to be safe. The second engagement lasted almost seven minutes and I remember thinking that our training scenarios never lasted this long. Happily, the only round that struck the floor-loaded cargo went straight into a box of MREs later found squished, but entirely intact in a ham slice (we knew they hated the pork MREs). Harley 37 was hit 19 times before we got past the high-threat zone. We were badly leaking fuel and had lost the #2 engine in addition to the damage to the pilot’s side window.

By that point each of the still heavy airplane’s engines had been over-tempered and over-torqued, and the entire plane had been over-G’ed with the massive load of fuel, people, equipment, and munitions we were carrying. After some quick calculations and assessment of the battle damage, we realized



we could not make it to Bashur, deliver the teams, and have enough fuel to return to King Faisal AB. Knowing that leaving an aircraft on the LZ would have disrupted the entire battle plan, Buck made the hard decision to abort the infiltration and divert. Despite the Turks’ prohibition against flying through their airspace and using their bases, the best option available was to declare an emergency and head to Incirlik AB where we knew there were American maintenance and support facilities and where the 7th SOS had staged out of for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM just two years earlier.

We made an immediate left turn to the north and began to climb to clear the mountains which separate the two countries



the whole plane. Once we came to a stop Buck called for an emergency shut-down of the engines and evacuation of the aircraft. For the SF soldiers who thought the excitement was over, the adrenaline spiked again. All of the crewmembers and SF teams sprinted from the aircraft onto the grassy infield to avoid the rapidly responding fire rescue vehicles which foamed the entire area and put out barriers to collect the thousands of pounds of fuel still spilling from the wings. Our Incirlik AB hosts took us and the soldiers to a reception area and less than 24 hours later we were on a C-17 back to MK via Ramstein.

Aboard what was now the last aircraft, Maj George Thiebes, the C/3/10 SFG(A) commander, sat with his troopers in the dimly lit cargo compartment. In the midst of the engagement he looked over at his supply sergeant whose eyes looked like giant saucers. At one point, Thiebes glanced at the Air Force Direct Support Operator (DSO) monitoring friendly and enemy communications from his suite in the cargo compartment, who looked up and shrugged. Thiebes climbed over the equipment to get near the DSO and asked what was up. He replied the plane had just run out of chaff and flares. Great! After many more gut-wrenching moments Thiebes' aircraft landed at As Sulaymaniyah and his team carefully slipped down the vomit-slickened ramp before a Kurdish Peshmerga hoard stormed the plane to assist with the offload. In a matter of minutes, the plane was empty, but accountability and redistribution took hours to sort out because of the "help."

without the luxury of a terrain avoidance radar. The copilot, 1st Lt Jon Cotton, declared an emergency and was contacted by the NATO AWACS crew, callsign Magic, which was flying just north of the Iraqi border to monitor the situation. A Turkish F-16 locked us up for an intercept, but Magic directed them away as we were an aircraft in distress. The F-16 "offered" to escort us to Incirlik but our Talon's ALQ-172 jammers were wreaking havoc on the fighter's radars and he quickly peeled off. Buck quoting from the movie *Airplane*, "Have you ever spent the night in a Turkish prison," didn't help defuse the mood. Magic relayed our position and status to Turkish controllers who allowed us to pass.

With the next two-hours spent gingerly dodging thunderstorms and doing triage of the damage, we finally began our descent into Incirlik AB. Buck made an incredibly smooth landing. During the ground roll the loadmasters reported fuel cascading from the wings. The pilot carefully applied the aircraft brakes and avoided reverse thrust per the engineer's direction and thus preventing fuel spray forward of three engines which could have ignited and destroyed



“Our historic infiltration was named Ugly Baby because of its low-level treacherous route, but I’d say it was far from ugly. People say it was a beautiful thing because when the sun came up the next morning, we were in the fight.”

-- Lt Gen Darsie D. Rogers



After landing at Bashur, the lead MC-130’s crew, assessed the ingress route, threats encountered and reported, and then discussed whether to fly an alternative low-level route home, or to fly at max altitude to avoid the now, definite small arms and AAA threat. While the 10 SFG(A) Command team, including Col Cleveland offloaded, the flight engineer calculated fuel, weight and balance, and determined that the five Combat Talons could step climb to be high enough to avoid the AAA and MANPADS threats, but it would put the aircraft in range of more capable surface-to-air-missiles. The decision was made to fly at altitude and let the EWOs and their defensive systems do their job. Each aircraft began a spiral climb to altitude over the landing zones and then continued along the return flight home. The view from these altitudes, some as high as 30,000 ft, highlighted the ongoing airstrikes on Mosul, Baghdad, and other key cities where coalition forces were smashing key targets.

As the crews crossed back into Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Combat Exit checklists were run and there were many sighs of relief and thoughts of gratitude. On a more comical note, many 7th SOS crews had never seen King Faisal Air Base at night and were somewhat unfamiliar with the taxiways, especially in poor lighting, with poor markings and on NVGs. It may or may not be true that one MC-130 that night shared a “road” with another American serviceman in a vehicle who was wondering if that was an actual C-130 he was nose-to-nose with.

That night, JSOAD-N successfully inserted 19 SF teams and 4 SF company headquarters at Bashur and As Sulaymaniyah. More importantly, though, the bold decision to take the high risk, circuitous flight caused Turkey to rethink its position on overflight of their territory. When the Turkish General Staff heard that one of the Combat Talons had almost been shot down with 37 souls onboard because of their obstinacy, they relented. This fact is often lost in the tactical retelling of the mission. On 23 March, the Turks allowed

coalition aircraft to use Turkish airspace and non-combat sorties were permitted to launch from Turkish bases. The air bridge from Europe to Iraq was open and JSOAD-N landed additional missions the same night to begin the flow of replacements and supplies to the northern front.

Epilogue

Following the successful infiltration of over 300 SF operators and many more support personnel, the expanded task force, along with their Kurdish partners, successfully held the 13 Iraqi divisions in-place on the northern front. The combination of coalition airpower and unconventional boots on the ground proved a powerful tool in the friendly arsenal.

For the Air Commandos, they continued to fly and fight for the duration of OIF. Harley 37, tail #0280, was grounded for a couple of weeks while she underwent battle-damage repair and was eventually returned to service.

The 22 March 2003 Ugly Baby mission is likely one of the most decorated in AF history. Arguably, the mission was the longest low-level, combat infiltration by US special operations aircraft since the Second World War. In recognition of the exceptional airmanship, bravery, and professional courage displayed during the mission, the Harley flight crews were awarded a total of 32 Distinguished Flying Crosses and 13 Air Medals. The 7th SOS also received a Gallant Unit Citation for their actions during OIF and the Secretary of the Army awarded the squadron the Bronze Arrowhead device to the OIF Campaign Medal for conducting the combat assault.



About the Author: Col Cory Peterson was the navigator on Harley 37. He retired after more than 26 years of service, having flown both conventional and special operations C-130s. He was part of the joint SOF faculty at the US Army Command & General Staff College and the international SOF faculty at the NATO Special Operations School. Col Peterson’s final assignment was as the plank-holding Chief of Staff at Special Operations Command North. He remains honored to have served with the 7th SOS, “The Finest Flying Squadron in the US Air Force.”

MAINTAINING TH

A Crew Chief's Perspective



By MSgt Jason Jones, USAF

When you hear “CV-22,” what comes to my mind is advancement in technology; an aircraft with the capability to both land and take off like a helicopter, yet fly like a fixed-wing turboprop aircraft. Though this is merely a simple explanation of a complicated aircraft and an even more complex program, it leaves much to the imagination about what an aircraft with these capabilities brings to the fight. The airframe’s speed and range alone are impressive enough to comprehend why the Osprey has become such a versatile and vital asset for our special operations community. Nevertheless, nothing this complicated comes without a price.

Since its inception, the V-22 aircraft has experienced more than its share of logistic hurdles: maintainability, inspection requirements, and constrained parts and pieces for repairs have made keeping this aircraft airworthy a grueling task for

maintenance crews. Yet, even with the continued difficulty in sustainability, we’ve made some strides over the past ten years to reduce the heavy burden on our Air Commando maintainers. Regardless of these efforts, a machine with the amount of moving parts and varied mission sets, like the V-22, requires nothing less than agile maintenance crews.

Anyone who has worked on, piloted, or ridden on a helicopter knows of the punishing vibrations helicopters produce. The CV-22 is no different. Vibrations created by the two huge prop-rotor heads create harness and fluid line chafing nightmares throughout the aircraft, not to mention countless airframe structural impacts. The most notable victims of these vibrations are the two nacelles that house the engines, gearboxes, and prop-rotor heads as well as a multitude of wiring harnesses, and oil and hydraulic lines. When these

E CV-22 OSPREY

A photograph of two military personnel in camouflage uniforms walking on a wet tarmac. They are in front of a CV-22 Osprey aircraft. The man on the left is carrying a yellow case. The man on the right is carrying a black case. The aircraft's rotors are visible in the background.

harnesses and lines are subjected to these relentless aircraft vibrations, they have a tendency to fray over time. When left unchecked, this results in countless electrical faults in the wiring harnesses or leaks from the fluid lines. Further, tiny sand and dirt particles from the austere takeoff/landing and low-level environments invade every crevice, grinding and nicking away at the harnesses and lines, only intensifying these chafing issues and causing a myriad of component faults and failures. These faults are quite difficult to troubleshoot at times, especially when attempting to find an electrical short in a harness that snakes its way through a nacelle packed with many components. Fortunately, over the course of the last decade, AFSOC's logistics team developed and put procedures in place to help mitigate these vibrations with the goal of minimizing the chafing.

The collective knowledge and experience cultivated in AFSOC's past and present CV-22 maintainers has led to two actions now being implemented to mitigate the issues in the nacelle area. The first is to replace severely chafed wiring harnesses within the nacelles during scheduled heavy maintenance, using abatement practices in order to mitigate further chafing. The second action involves a V-22 enterprise-wide approach with programmers, maintainers from both the USAF and the USMC, and a number of engineers and equipment specialists. This team is working to improve the nacelles to more effectively withstand the wear and tear of everyday flying operations. I believe incorporating these significant changes will lead to less maintenance down time for troubleshooting and repair, and that will translate to increased aircraft availability for crew training and operational missions.

Ten years ago, as a young senior airman, I started working



CV-22 Osprey maintenance crew. (Photo courtesy of USAF)

on the CV-22. I began my training by learning how each system on the aircraft worked and how to replace components. I learned through experience that when an aircraft comes back early from its scheduled mission, it will not be an easy feat getting it back in the air. In fact, in comparison to the other aircraft I have worked on, very few components could be quickly replaced to get the CV-22 flyable again. Engine replacements stood out the most to me. Working in the New Mexico desert, I saw the aircraft ingest a considerable amount of dirt and dust, causing what seemed like, at the time, an engine change every two weeks. Needless to say, we became efficient at changing engines. The same could be said of prop-rotor hubs, blades, and gearboxes. At any given time, it was not uncommon to see multiple aircraft on the flight line with engines or rotor heads removed. In fact, if there was not an engine or rotor head removed, it felt strange. However, over the last ten years, engine reliability is up and maintenance crews

have become quite adept at changing engines, prop-rotor hubs, and gearboxes. Despite all of the maintenance and logistic issues the CV-22 presented, we always rose to the challenge and as difficult as it may have been, if the parts were available we always delivered an aircraft.

In my experience, parts and hardware limitations at the flight line have been a persistent problem for the Osprey. In the early days, it must have been incredibly difficult to predict parts usage rates for an aircraft that had not yet been fielded. Whether it was early component failures or larger consumption rates because more aircraft were down for the same part, this issue was not uncommon, and it affected on-hand stock levels. One such instance was the pylon conversion actuator (PCA). The PCA allows the pilot to move the nacelles to the desired angle--vertical for helicopter mode and horizontal for airplane mode. In 2011, a large number of aircraft had conversion actuators fail, so we became proficient at replacing conversion actuators. During this time, we learned that it was not just an issue affecting our Air Force CV-22 aircraft, but the Marine Corps V-22 fleet as well.

We also found that it is not always the big components in short supply. Even consumable parts are sometimes unique to the CV-22 and therefore not immediately available on the flight line. For example, several years ago we started running low on screws to secure exterior panels to the aircraft. The particular type of screw was not common to any other airplane, so we ended up having to place high priority supply orders just to acquire these simple, but critical, screws to secure the panels. Incredibly, on multiple occasions we were forced to cannibalize—taking screws from one aircraft for another to make the flying schedule. These are just two instances where parts were hard to come by. Since then, parts availability has thankfully improved. It's not perfect, we still take parts from down aircraft to meet flying requirements, but the circumstances are not as dire as cannibalizing an entire aircraft for simple screws. More effective logistic planning is now one of the priorities for the V-22 community and is a top priority for AFSOC and the Air Force.

After working on, and being around the CV-22 for over ten years, it is easy to see how this aircraft earned a reputation for being tough. It is difficult to maintain...when it breaks, it breaks hard and often. Acquiring all of the parts required to make repairs is sometimes difficult. Yet, day in and day out, I am reminded of the strenuous and valiant effort our Air Commando maintainers make every day to keep the CV-22 in the air. Days that seem to never end, often in the worst conditions imaginable, culminate in the satisfaction of hearing the blades beating the air into submission and seeing the Osprey defiantly lift itself into the air.



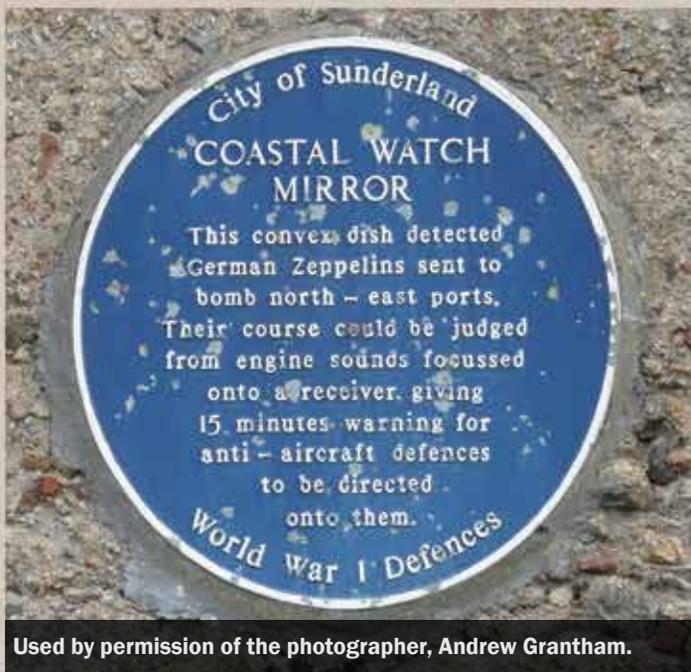
About the Author: MSgt Jones is from Norco, CA, and served as a helicopter/CV-22 crew chief and later held maintenance supervisory and leadership positions. During his 13-year Air Force career, he worked on the CV-22 in New Mexico and at Hurlburt Field, FL, on the flight line and in the phase maintenance division, as well as the command's CV-22 program office.

HEARING THE ECHOES OF HISTORY

By Colonel Travis Hill, USAF, Retired



Restored sound mirror in Sunderland, UK. Used by permission of the photographer, Andrew Grantham.



Used by permission of the photographer, Andrew Grantham.

After nearly 100 years of erosion, the Sunderland sound mirror was completely restored and quietly unveiled in June 2015. This massive structure was one of several sound mirrors placed around England and Malta to provide early warning during the Zeppelin raids of the First World War. The British built the Sunderland sound mirror after a German bomb killed 22 and left more than 100 citizens wounded during a surprise attack in 1916. It stands today as a forgotten piece of history and as a brutal reminder of the threats to Britain's home front during the First World War.

Strategically positioned along the coastlines, sound mirrors were specifically angled to provide up to 15 minutes early warning of a pending German attack. Most of these concrete structures measured six meters wide and four meters high, although some were larger, with the largest being 65 meters wide. They looked like giant satellite dishes tilted slightly upward, enabling them to collect sound waves from a significant distance. A dish would then focus the sound waves toward a microphone mounted in front of the disc where an operator listened to different tones through a headset.

In southern and northeastern England, sound mirrors were placed to provide a network of two or three structures together in sites. At times, this system allowed the operators to triangulate and determine a fixed position of enemy aircraft. It is not clear exactly how far it could hear the small engine of an inbound airship; but under certain conditions, the sound mirror could provide about 15 minutes of early warning, enough time to get people to shelters and focus anti-aircraft artillery.

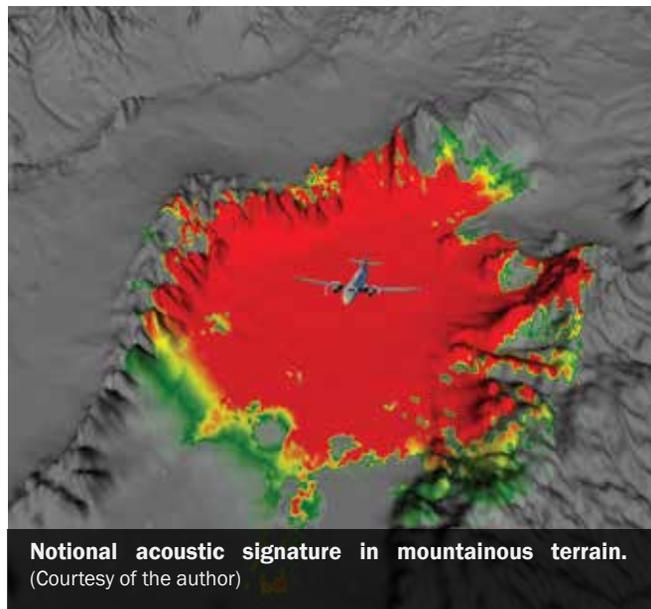


These sound mirrors at Fan Bay are unique in that they are carved into the White Cliffs of Dover. Used by permission of the photographer, Greg Mckenzie.

Before the end of the war, increased aircraft performance and technological advancements made the sound mirrors obsolete. Fifteen minutes of early warning quickly became irrelevant as aircraft speeds increased and new inventions like radar early warning emerged. Regardless of their short life span, sound mirrors were the first major attempt at exploiting the acoustic spectrum to gain a tactical advantage.

What's old is new again

Today, modern aircraft countermeasures and tactics permit deeper penetration into denied airspace, which permits acoustics to reemerge as the first indicator of aircraft detection. Until recently, acoustic signatures have not been a concern because aircraft were being detected first by infrared (IR) cueing, early warning (EW) radar, and visual acquisition, well beyond the range of acoustic detection. Our adversaries have made revolutionary leaps in IR cueing over the past few years, as we observed in the recent shoot-down of unmanned aerial vehicles over Yemen and the Russian Su-25 over Syria. EW operators can now “see” through jamming and electronic clutter as radars operate at hyper speeds due to advancements in computer technology and integration. And, the global proliferation of third- and fourth-generation night vision devices has extended visual acquisition to several miles beyond the range of the unaided eye. Countermeasures and tactics in these spectrums, however, have pushed aircraft closer to the threat, leaving the crews vulnerable to acoustic detection once again. As a result, acoustic signatures once again pose a threat to airpower, yet little effort has been placed on the study of



Notional acoustic signature in mountainous terrain.
(Courtesy of the author)

aircraft signatures, acoustic detection, environmental clutter, and counter tactics.

Acoustic signature and detection are more relevant today as it has extended standoff distances for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets and cued early warning to tilt- and rotary-wing infiltration. For ISR aircraft, most of the research addresses either reducing the noise of the aircraft, and consequently aircraft performance, or increasing stand-off distances, thus decreasing sensor fidelity. Similarly,

rotor/tilt-rotor aircraft are forced to land miles away from the objective to avoid early detection. This exponentially increases movement time from the landing zone (LZ) to the objective, exposing the ground force for longer periods.

New ideas, however, have laid the groundwork for innovative solutions to mitigate acoustic detection. Instead of modifying aircraft equipment and increasing stand-off distances, contrasting aircraft signatures against the sound clutter generated by everyday life provides an opportunity to exploit this environment and mitigate risk in the future.

Where do we go from here?

I propose two initiatives. First, we should test and analyze the acoustic signature of each aircraft in different scenarios. Second, we must understand the acoustic environment or acoustic intelligence (ACINT) of where these aircraft will likely be operating. Each of these efforts can unilaterally contribute to developing acoustic countermeasures and serve to further refine tactics. A better understanding of both, though, will open the door for the full spectrum of capabilities that will decrease standoff distances and drastically reduce risk in scenarios where mission success hinges on avoiding early detection.

As anyone who has read the book or seen the movie *The Hunt for Red October* knows, US Navy submarines live and die by their acoustic signatures – they must know when they are likely to be heard in order to avoid detection. Acoustic mitigation is to anti-submarine warfare as stealth is to airpower. Submarine crews compare the noise of their submarines to ambient ocean sounds, and when necessary, hide in the noise clutter of marine life and cargo ships to avoid detection. Similarly, aircrews must know their acoustic footprint and where to effectively hide in the ground clutter to avoid early warning.

One proposal is to use acoustic data on specific aircraft and build near real-time modeling that indicates a “probability of being detected,” much like missile warning system modeling helps predict spikes in acoustic signature based on aircraft parameters in certain environments. Accurate data, if integrated properly, will be an effective tool to help aircrews realize when they are vulnerable, to use tactics to mitigate acoustic signatures, and to approach even closer to their objectives.

Just as the Navy builds situational awareness under the water with sonobuoys, we should invest in developing ACINT of common operating environments. We also need better understanding of acoustic clutter to increase the effectiveness of any countermeasures. This intelligence serves two requirements. First, it will enable us to refine aircraft modeling based on specific environments in order to build a more predictable database. Second, we could potentially mask aircraft or develop offensive capabilities with low collateral damage by exploiting ground clutter, maximizing interference, and shaping the acoustic environment.

Conclusion

The Department of Defense has invested heavily to avoid detection in the electronic, infrared, and visual spectrums, but

we must maintain and balance full spectrum, multi-domain capabilities. Since the First World War, militaries have exploited the acoustic environment to warn of inbound aircraft and thus gain tactical advantage. The same holds true today as aural detection is a vulnerability that continues to both limit current operations and increase risk. Mitigation efforts in the acoustic spectrum have only resulted in quieter aircraft and tactical avoidance, however, refining acoustic data and building a database of collected ACINT will provide an opportunity to change the acoustic environment by manipulating the surroundings to our advantage. This concept attempts to provide tactical and operational context to existing technology that is available to mitigate acoustic signatures, shape the surroundings, and more importantly, the surroundings of our enemies.



About the Author: Col Travis Hill started his military career as an enlisted Airman and then commissioned from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University Reserve Officer Training Corps in 1994. He is a Command Pilot with over 5,000 hours, and has been mission qualified in various aircraft. He commanded the 9th and the 8th SOS, and the 1st JSOAC. He has multiple combat deployments to OEF, OIF, HOA, and other small-scale contingencies. Col Hill attended Air Command and Staff College, Air War College, numerous courses at the USAF Special Operations School, and served as Director J-5 Plans for Joint Special Operations Command, Ft Bragg, NC. He is recently retired and lives in Niceville, FL.

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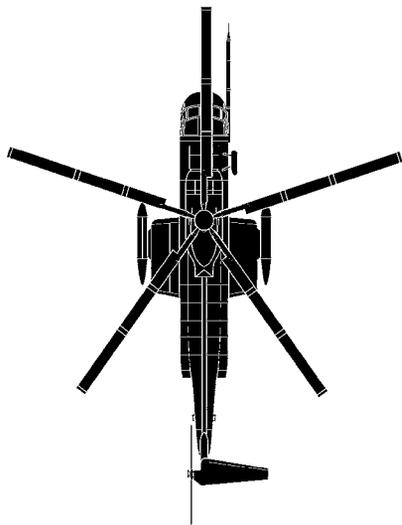
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HH-3 Jolly Green Giant



The HH-3 Jolly Green Giant was a long-range transport helicopter that performed key duties for the Air Force for 30 years. It served in both the Vietnam and Gulf Wars. In Vietnam, the HH-3E built a legendary rescue record, plucking hundreds of warriors from enemy territory. The powerful Jolly Green Giant often fought its way through intense enemy fire to snatch downed airmen. Few combat jobs were as dangerous.

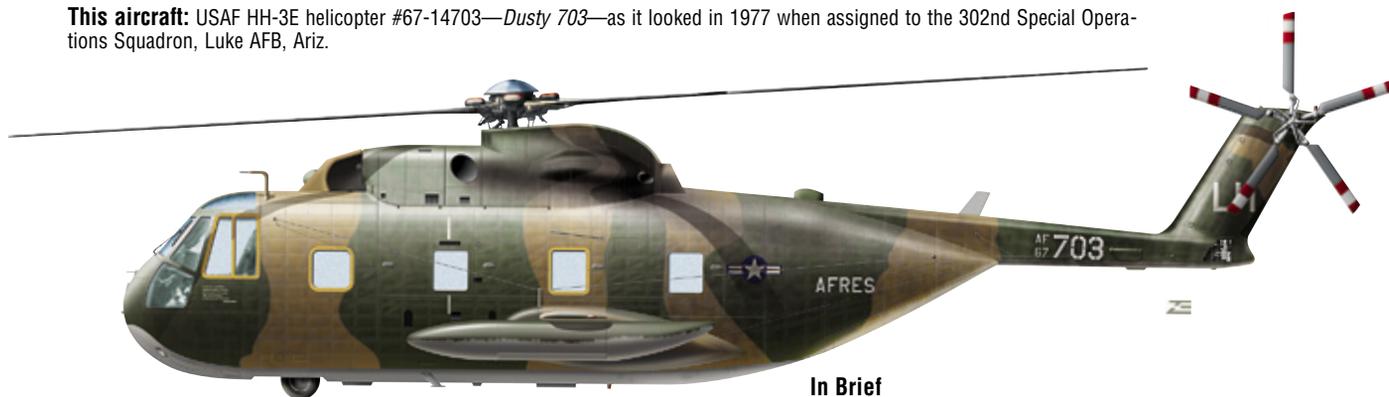
The Air Force HH-3 was an offshoot of the basic Sikorsky SH-3 aircraft developed for the Navy and first flown in 1959. The SH-3 was adaptable to a wide variety of duties. The initial USAF versions essentially were utility versions of the SH-3. The first USAF-specific version featured a redesigned fuselage, a rear cargo ramp, and tricycle landing gear. The Air Force ordered 51 and then 84 new

HH-3s designed specifically for combat search and rescue. Modifications included self-sealing fuel tanks, titanium armor plate, defensive weapons, external fuel tanks, jungle penetrator, and rescue hoist.

The first models, sent to Vietnam in 1965, were used mainly for clandestine missions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Flown by superbly trained and motivated crews, the HH-3s soon established a magnificent reputation for rescue operations under fire. They operated out of air bases at Da Nang, South Vietnam, and Udorn, Thailand. Their range and refueling ability allowed them to reach any point in North Vietnam and return to base. Jolly Greens were also used in a wide variety of other duties. In 1991, HH-3s flew more than 250 missions during Operation Desert Storm.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: USAF HH-3E helicopter #67-14703—*Dusty 703*—as it looked in 1977 when assigned to the 302nd Special Operations Squadron, Luke AFB, Ariz.



An HH-3E in action during the Vietnam War.

In Brief

Designed, built by Sikorsky ★ first flight (USAF model) June 17, 1963 ★ crew of 2 or 3 ★ capacity 25 troops or 5,000 lb cargo ★ two GE T58-GE-5 engines ★ number built 135 (USAF) ★ **Specific to HH-3E:** max speed 164 mph ★ cruise speed 154 mph ★ max range 760 mi ★ armament two GE 7.62 mm M60D machine guns ★ weight (max) 22,000 lb ★ span (rotor diameter) 62 ft ★ length 73 ft ★ height 18 ft 1 in.

Famous Fliers

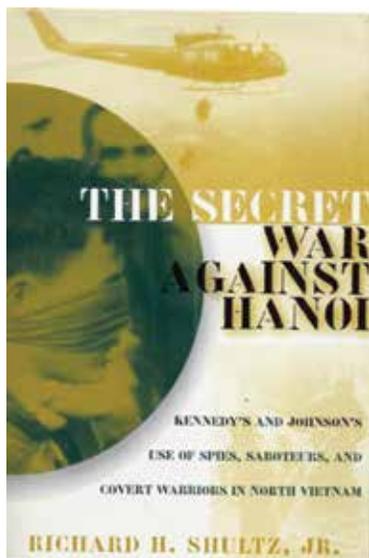
Medal of Honor: USAF Capt. Gerald O. Young. **Air Force Cross:** Capt. Ralph W. Brower, SSgt. Eugene L. Clay, CMSgt. Duane B. Hackney, Capt. Leland Kennedy, Sgt. Larry W. Maysey, TSgt. Donald G. Smith. **Notables:** Lt. Col. Royal Brown (32 saves); Lt. Col. Herbert E. Zehnder, pilot of HH-3 in 1967 trans-Atlantic flight and 1970 raid on Son Tay POW camp.

Interesting Facts

Flown in 496 of 980 aircrew rescues 1966-70 in SEA ★ rescued future generals Michael Dugan (later Chief of Staff), Charles Boyd, Robert Russ ★ boasted 1,000 lb of titanium armor ★ made first nonstop trans-Atlantic helicopter flight (1967) ★ brought down 17 times in Vietnam War ★ flew in 1991 Gulf War ★ used in 1980 rescue of 61 passengers from liner *Prinsendam* ★ developed as a US Navy anti-submarine warfare platform ★ nicknamed for distinctive green-and-tan camouflage scheme.

The Secret War Against Hanoi Richard H. Shultz, Jr. (Harper Collins, 1999)

A survey of the more well-known books on Vietnam—e.g., H.R. McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty*, Neil Sheehan’s *A and Bright Shining Lie*, or even Bernard Fall’s *Street Without Joy*—usually provides a picture of Ho Chi Minh’s strategic patience and conception of the long game against a foreign adversary. Indeed, he famously warned that, “You will kill ten of our men, and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who tire of it.” *The Secret War Against Hanoi: The Untold Story of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in Vietnam* implies



that the United States, by contrast, not only ignored the long game, but multiple presidential administrations failed to wield American instruments of national power—diplomacy, information, military, and economic (DIME)—against North Vietnam.

Diplomacy

Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACVSOG), was created and tasked to prosecute covert war against Hanoi by President Kennedy, and Dr. Shultz deftly discusses other

members of the cabinet (Robert Kennedy, Robert McNamara, etc.) to elucidate the administration’s drive to match North Vietnam’s unconventional actions against South Vietnam. MACVSOG’s principal missions, as explained in the history, were:

- Insertion and administration of teams into North Vietnam
- Psychological Warfare (PSYWAR)
- Covert maritime operations north of the 17th Parallel
- Cross-border covert reconnaissance operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail

Especially regarding the last of these missions, MACVSOG consistently collided with the Department of State (DoS) and its emphasis on the 1962 Geneva Accords, which stipulated no foreign forces would operate in Laos. Exemplified by Ambassador William Sullivan, DoS acknowledged that North Vietnam was running its logistic lifeline to South Vietnam through Laos, but repeatedly denied MACVSOG full freedom to assail it, restricting helicopter sorties, US personnel ground participation, or geographic proximity to the border. While MACVSOG was fencing with the diplomatic apparatus over concepts like ‘hot pursuit’ and ‘self defense’ in its drive to get into Laos and put eyes on the Trail, North Vietnam had expanded it into a conduit through which each month it pushed 10-20,000 soldiers with Soviet trucks and anti-aircraft artillery to support

the operation.

The reader is left to wonder why—if North Vietnam was so brazenly moving all this blood and treasure down the trail in violation of the Accords—State was so adamant about living up to its side of the agreement. There were other impediments as well—“the CIA was running its own covert war in Northern Laos” with General Van Pao; there was also persistent worry that US covert operations could be viewed as destabilizing sovereign nations in theater and entice Korean War-style Chinese or Soviet escalation. To recap, US diplomacy never fully supported these covert reconnaissance operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, even when US-led teams were permitted into Laos in the fall of 1965.

Information

Again, Korea loomed large over the endeavor, with each presidential administration tightly holding the reins to preclude US actions provoking North Vietnam’s powerful sponsors into intervention. In November 1968, Washington ordered MACVSOG “to stop all operations that involved crossing the border with North Vietnam.” With more kinetic options off the table, it’s easy to ask why the US did not emphasize the PSYWAR mission. After all, the Cold War was already exacerbated by robust Communist information operations against the West, but the superpowers had chosen since the Eisenhower administration to stay out of proxy fights in places like Jerusalem and Dien Bien Phu. Dr. Schultz, makes a compelling argument that stopping the other three aforementioned missions deprived MACVSOG’s PSYWAR effort of strategic purpose, “to provide information to the North Vietnamese population about their government and the war in the hopes that it would lead them to express distrust, disaffection, and even mild forms of dissent.” By 1964, however, Washington forbade SOG to exploit whatever these measures accomplished. “Encouraging members of the population to commit violent acts against the regime—killing North Vietnamese officials or sabotaging economic targets—was disallowed.”

Besides these limitations, Schultz cites other limiting factors. Rigid compartmentalization made coordinating an overarching plan with CIA information ops impossible. MACVSOG’s consistent problem acquiring personnel with pertinent expertise certainly applied to its PSYWAR shop. If anyone with experience or smarts on one of these four missions arrived, it was because he had been labeled non-promotable and ideal for a dead-end billet. The statisticians personnel did provide were tasked to measure operational success “principally in terms of items delivered and not in terms of North Vietnam reactions.” This “bean-counting syndrome” is analogous to tracking strike sorties generated or munitions dropped while ignoring intelligence on where the ordnance fell and what it accomplished. Emphasizing inappropriate success metrics, though, is a phenomenon often cited when discussing US military actions in Southeast Asia.

Military

It is now also commonplace for Vietnam War historians to mark Tet 1968 as the turning point, and this volume does, too. Schultz argues that despite the Johnson Administration's rigid control measures and arguable lack of explicit MACVSOG operational success, North Vietnam's ramped-up counterespionage measures and devotion of huge resources to protect the Ho Chi Minh Trail were the true metrics to study.

"The secret war against North Vietnam," he writes, "was beginning to have the impact that Kennedy had envisioned in 1961." After Tet, however:

...with the encouragement of many of his senior advisors, Johnson looked for a way out of Vietnam. For the remainder of his presidency, he sought to accelerate the Paris peace negotiations. As the basis for starting those talks, Hanoi irrevocably demanded cessation of US bombing raids and all other acts of war directed inside North Vietnam, including SOG's covert operations. By the end of October 1968, believing he had no alternatives, LBJ succumbed to Hanoi's terms.

The interagency review process had by this point blocked a long list of initiatives, such as unmarked aircraft striking lower-risk targets in North Vietnam and dropping mines in the country's major harbors. The political risk had been deemed too high for the options MACVSOG advocated.

Economic

Mining harbors and knocking out bridges would obviously affect military infrastructure, but there would also be repercussions for trade and agriculture. MACVSOG brought other, less kinetic ideas for attacking Hanoi's internal legitimacy in the economic realm.

According to the account, CIA could mass-produce "highly authentic replicas of North Vietnamese currency." Pushing it even into rural communities across the border could stress Hanoi's treasury. A government incapable of managing and protecting its money's value will likely look illegitimate to its citizenry. In the end, the amount inserted was minuscule, as international regulations forbid it and Washington did not want to risk explaining such an action in the UN.

Besides the Trail, North Vietnamese logisticians also moved food and material through the nation's fishing fleets, and SOG advocated for amping up danger and frustration in the waters along the coast. The legacy of the Korean war placed geographical limitations on this mission, which "not only circumscribed what [maritime operations] could accomplish, but made those operations more predictable and detectable."

When they entered Laos, MACVSOG's reconnaissance teams were increasingly finding large NVA rice caches; confiscating them was impossible and applying explosives only served to disperse them. General John Singlaub (Chief, 1966-68), after a long negotiation with LBJ's administration, secured permission to use contaminants to make them inedible, but concern about allegations of 'chemical warfare' was consistently voiced.

Washington was never comfortable with covert action against North Vietnam's economy, regardless of how it intertwined with logistic support for attacking Saigon. "Economic warfare was too politically sensitive and could

result in a charge of immoral behavior," an assertion one could argue did not factor into North Vietnam's strategy for executing its aims in Southeast Asia.

Summary

The idea of Hanoi's internal legitimacy, however, emerges throughout the book. It is frequently juxtaposed with the implied justification for President Kennedy's initiative countering Soviet support for guerrilla wars with a robust special operations capability. Dr. Schultz makes the case that the Hanoi regime was not only totalitarian, but paranoid, and such states

...worry excessively about internal security matters.

Wartime causes that apprehension to soar. The need for a secure home front was one of North Vietnam's strategic pressure points. Creating havoc there would affect Hanoi's capacity to foster the war in South Vietnam.

The rub is that MACVSOG since 1961 had applied pressure with all four implements in the national power toolbox—Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic. The narrative describes Washington's efforts to crimp these operations, and failures that occurred when they were approved and executed, as well as Hanoi's increasing countermeasures. After seven years, though, in Hanoi

...newspapers, radio broadcasts, and other security actions... revealed an increasing alarm over agents, spies, and espionage. Likewise, SOG's operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail had North Vietnam's attention. Hanoi knew it could not sustain its conduct of the war in South Vietnam without unfettered use of the trail. It instituted a number of measures to secure the trail's use.

The reader wonders how history may have turned out had more of MACVSOG's initiatives been approved or supported as President Kennedy intended, bypassing the obstruction it found amongst the national security apparatus in DC—to include what the author describes as "the corporate military" that tolerated, but never fully supported the organization. DoS had also placed powerful ambassadors in Laos and Cambodia, and neither wanted US covert activity in his area of responsibility.

Regardless of the 'what-ifs', history did utilize SOG leaders Don Blackburn (Chief, 1965-66) and his subordinate Arthur "Bull" Simons (who beginning in 1965 led SOG's largest operational section OP 35, prosecuting clandestine activity into Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail) who both held focal roles planning and executing the Son Tay Raid. Schultz draws a line connecting MACVSOG to Desert One, the Joint Special Operations Agency, and the Secretary of Defense's Special Operations Policy Advisory Group (which included not only Blackburn, but also General Leroy Manor). *The Secret War Against Hanoi* serves to talk through lessons learned and identified, but also acquaints the reader with focal characters in US SOF's subsequent development as a strategic asset in national security affairs—one with capabilities touching all four DIME components; one which should be tied into coherent strategic goals to approach its potential.



About the Author: Scott E. McIntosh is Assistant Professor of Business & Strategic Intelligence at Newman University, Wichita, Kansas, where he teaches classes on the Cold War, International Relations, and Critical Thinking in Intelligence Analysis.

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