

# AIR COMMANDO

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

# JOURNAL

Vol 8: Issue 2

# AIR COMMANDO

1969 - 2019

*th*

ACA

Anniversary

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# Air Commando JOURNAL



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“The *Air Commando Journal*...  
Massively Successful! I save all mine.”

**Lt Gen Marshall “Brad” Webb**  
**Former AFSOC Commander**

(Used with permission by Lt Gen Webb)

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Membership is open to persons who served with or supported USAF Air Commando/Special Operation Units. To include Guard and Reserve Special Operators. Other interested parties may join as non-voting associate members with the approval of the Board of Directors. To join our association visit [www.AirCommando.org](http://www.AirCommando.org) and click the membership link or call our office Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

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# FOREWORD

## What Is an Air Commando?

My first exposure to what I would come to know as an Air Commando came in 1986, when an eight-ship of Pave Low helicopters landed at my base — Hill AFB, Utah, where I was a 2LT — for an exercise. I had no idea what all those “things” hanging off the airframe were, nor did I know what these special operators did. And, these SOF Airmen weren’t very forthcoming when I asked about them. I learned nothing. But...it did pique my curiosity, and frankly, the experience absolutely convinced me beyond the shadow of a doubt that I HAD to be part of them. A year and half later, I was.

Of course, it took me years of developing my craft, tactically as a Pave Low pilot, and seasoning operationally and strategically as a senior leader in our Air Force before I appreciated the “bigger picture” of what an Air Commando is and why we are so vital to SOF, our Air Force, and our nation. We, Airmen, tend to gravitate to our machines and the various sub-cultures of our squadrons as rallying points. There’s certainly nothing wrong with this. It actually makes us a viable force on the battlefield. Still, as far as Air Commandos are concerned, there is another perspective we ought to acknowledge.

An Air Commando is a leader. She is unabashed with her perspective on mission contribution, always keeping in mind that her tactical mission will have strategic consequences. An Air Commando is a unifier. The air contribution to special operations missions...more than any other element in SOF, will require fusing disparate joint contributions together to ensure seamless synchronicity. Because SOF and Airpower (not to mention Space and Cyber) are inevitably thrust together, the Air Commando is routinely the key cog to success (and is often unheralded). Finally, an Air Commando is a quiet professional. He has a keen connection to the mission and has competence in spades. But, he is a humble warrior. Former Secretary of the Air Force, Dr Heather Wilson, coined the term “humble competence” when describing Air Commandos not long ago...I love this!

So, congratulations and thank you, ACA, for 50 years of stellar support to Air Commandos past, present, and future. What follows in the pages of this edition of the ACA journal will most certainly celebrate our past and simultaneously pave the path for Air Commandos to follow. For, while we stand on the shoulders of giants such as Phil Cochran, John Alison, Dick Cole, Heinie Aderholt, and on, and on...Air Commandos of tomorrow will marvel at, and take note of, the legendary exploits of TODAY’s Air Commandos. Because, Air Commandos, at our essence, are warrior patriots who continue to fundamentally shape our national security successes and further the blessings of liberty we hold so dear.



**Lt Gen Brad Webb speaks during a commemoration ceremony in honor of the 75th anniversary of Operation THURSDAY at Hurlburt Field, FL, in March 2019.** (Photo courtesy of AC1 Joel Miller, USAF)



*About the Author: Lt Gen Marshall “Brad” Webb has commanded Air Commando units at all levels including Air Force Special Operations Command and is now serving as Commander, Air Education and Training Command*



# CHINDIT CHATTER

As the cover of this issue of the journal indicates and General Webb highlights in the Foreword, this year is the 50th Anniversary of the Air Commando Association. This edition highlights key contributions of a wide array of Air Commandos over those five decades. The overall growth and improvement in capabilities of our Air Force Special Operations Forces during that period have been nothing short of phenomenal. That growth has led to great successes but has come through huge sacrifices and dedicated commitment to the mantra that “failure is not an option.” Air Commandos have been, and continue to be, some of the most sought out forces on the world-wide stage.



As AFSOC’s capabilities continue to grow and evolve, so does the level of commitment, risk, and demonstrated heroism. AFSOC has been, and still remains, the most highly deployed major command across the Air Force since 9/11. Since 1969, there have been 64 Air Force Cross recipients; 22 of those are Air Commandos. And of course, ACA was honored to help celebrate MSgt John Chapman’s Medal of Honor, the first awarded to an Airman for action since Viet Nam. Sadly, in the last 18 years, there have also been 35 Air Commandos killed in action and countless others seriously injured. Air Commandos and their families also have not been immune from the stresses wrought by almost two decades of continuous war and never-ending deployments. As you’ll read about in this issue, though, the Air Commando Association recognized a need and created the Air Commando Foundation to offer help where needed.

So, while we celebrate these last 50 years of continuous Air Commando excellence, we also reflect on all of those who have gone before us and especially those that made the ultimate sacrifice. This edition is dedicated to those that rest in honored glory. God bless them and their families and teammates. You are not forgotten.



Any Time - Any Place

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





Norm Brozenick  
Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)  
*ACA Chairman of the Board*



# SITREP

ACA members, Happy 50th Anniversary! On behalf of your Board of Directors, it is my privilege to introduce our first situation report—the “ACA SITREP.” The intent of SITREPs published in this journal is to improve awareness of how our members, Chapters, Board of Advisors, Board of Directors, and Corporate Sponsors accomplish our mission of serving Air Commandos past, present, and future. Together!

We have a great team. Our nearly 3,700 members selflessly devote time, talent, and treasure to forward mission activities in the U.S. and overseas. Our member-elected Board of Directors honorably guides us toward mission success. The ACA’s newly created Board of Advisors, comprised of hand-selected civilian associate members, augments the Board of Directors with talent needed to accomplish the mission. ACA Chapters help take best care of Air Commandos and families at seven locations (with more to come). And our generous Corporate Partners provide us financial resources needed for daily operations and special events.

Written by an ACA Officer or Director, SITREPs will spotlight the people and activities accomplishing the mission along our lines of operation (LOOs) and lines of effort (LOEs). Our core mission activity occurs along four lines of operation. We *educate*

all on the Air Force and joint special operations force missions. We *advocate* for elected officials, industry, and private entities to help resolve the unmet needs of Air Commandos and their families. We *honor* individual and team accomplishments of our Air Commandos. Through the Air Commando Foundation, we *serve* Air Commandos and their families by providing funds to help meet urgent needs. To set the conditions for mission success, we diligently work five lines of effort: *relationships, programs and services, marketing, finances, and infrastructure*.

This first SITREP will highlight people and activities advancing our lines of effort. In June, we welcomed Mr. Michael Moore to our Board of Advisors. Mike’s expertise building corporate *relationships* is helping us establish a new business development program. The Air Commando Store, chocked full of warrior swag, remains one of our most popular *services*. Pat Barnett filled orders for 410 Air Commando bush hats alone over the last 12 months. Yeah Pat! So far in 2019, ACA *marketing* efforts on-boarded or retained 44 Corporate Partners. Check out our new website, too. Great work by our staffers Melissa and Jeanette. Treasurer Jim Connors reports the state of our *finances* is “the strongest in years” and our “books are tight.” Thanks Rachel. A big shout-out to our Washington D.C. Chapter and Cannon’s Airman Leadership School for enabling our mission through fund-raising efforts. Special thanks to our 90 (and counting) members who joined the ANYTIME Flight and provide additional financial support. Your contributions are timely

as our *infrastructure* improvements list includes roof repairs and necessary technology upgrades.

Future activities. I hope you enjoy our golden anniversary celebration October 24-27 at the ACA Symposium and Convention in Fort Walton Beach. Symposium attendees will enjoy the Heritage Seminar interaction between an iconic panel of special operators and current day Air Commandos reflecting on the last 50 years of special operations history. New ACA and Air Commando Foundation budgets will be rolled out at our business meeting. You will also witness the induction of five extraordinary Airmen into the Air Commando Hall of Fame during our annual awards banquet. After the convention, our Board of Directors will consider how the Air Commando Foundation can assist resiliency programs, review the ACA’s 501(c)19 exemption status, update our strategic concept, and prepare to onboard new Hall of Fame Committee members and a Director. And we’ll cheer and support the stand-up of an ACA Chapter at Duke Field, as well as the Chindit Chapter’s new forward element at Yokota AB, Japan.

Team, thanks in advance for your next 50 years of selfless service to our beloved Air Commandos and Air Commando families. May God bless and keep them and all of you. Know that whether in harm’s way, on home station, or at home, if you’re an Air Commando, the ACA team’s got your back!

Our President and CEO CMSgt (Ret) Wayne Norrad will address lines of operation in the next SITREP. Norm sends.

## Correction

*The ACJ team, made up mostly by volunteers, is usually very adept at ensuring no stones are left unturned in going through all our articles and accompanying information for mistakes, typos etc. That is why, we stand red-faced and totally apologetic to Gary "Chainsaw" McCollum, the author of one of the great pieces in our last Journal for misspelling his name at the beginning of his article on p. 26. As the "Editor-in-Chief," I take full responsibility and will purchase a beverage (or two) of Chainsaw's choice at our next encounter.*

Dennis Barnett  
COO

## ACJ Vol 8 Issue 1

The most recent issue of the Air Commando Journal is an exceptional assembly of stories about Air Commandos who got the job done despite the obstacles they faced. The early startup of our ISR platforms and the PED behind it are remarkable stories of "can do".

The key ingredient in each of the challenges faced and overcome was leadership at the unit level. Committed commanders who saw beyond the difficulty and complications they faced and who inspired the (frequently new) Air Commandos in their unit to think and act beyond their station. These are some of our greatest successes, all of which were born in combat and faced the cries of More! More! More!

Everyone who had a part in these efforts has much to be proud of. Especially those in the trenches doing the job.

I especially liked Rancee McCollum's article. The spouse reality we all heard at home, in some form, but never saw written down.

Well done ACA! This organization has really become something to be proud of.

PS: You can count me in on your "Anytime Flight!"  
Donald "Donny" Wurster, Lt Gen, USAF (Ret)  
ACA Life Member #L2104

## Brought Back Memories

This issue of the Journal [Vol 8, Issue 1] was enjoyed greatly and was passed around the family as usual.

The article on early air commando ISR brought back some long-forgotten memories.

The first was the mention of the 130 co-pilot falling asleep as he was in the seat. To top that story many years prior, I was flying from Chateauroux to Nouasseur and over the Mediterranean the whole crew fell asleep. I awoke with a start and thought how am I going to keep this from happening again? I tuned in a North African radio station on the ADF. I got a lot of complaints about the weird music, but no one slept again on that flight.

At Det 2 Alpha in early '62 Bill Brown and I were fragged on a curious mission. We were told to stay in the cockpit and not come out until the flight was completed or we lost both engines. We took and flew over to the Black Virgin mountain

in Tay Ninh province near the Cambodian border. We flew around it for a couple of hours and returned to Bien Hoa. We never did see what was going on in the back. Pretty strange. Later we were told that several guys in civvies [civilian clothes] were seen getting on our bird and were carrying some large black boxes. The rumor was that the boxes contained something made in General LeMay's basement. Maybe, but it may have been the very first air commando ISR mission.

James 'Kit' Carson  
Naples, FL  
ACA Life Member #6

*Thanks Kit. Best to Marty and thanks for all you do for ACA!!*

Dennis Barnett  
Editor

## Col Barnett,

A quick note to tell you how much I enjoyed the latest Air Commando Journal. Volume 8; Issue 1 on ISR was informative, educational, and exceptionally well written.

I took advantage of an especially nasty day here on the shore at Lake Superior, hunkered down and read the Journal from cover to cover. I thoroughly enjoyed each article and learned a lot.

About now in 1963, I joined a newly formed C-47 crew, got checked out and headed for Vietnam on 15 November.

Lots of memories...

Thanks again for a great publication.  
Louis D. Schindler  
ACA Member #16  
Duluth, MN

## Great job ACA!

The ISR issue brilliantly captured first-hand accounts from trailblazers in the Air Commando's newest core mission.

I am reminded of how doggedly determined key members of the community were to answer the warfighting commander's urgent call to field these game-changing capabilities despite significant institutional inertia. Mike D'Argenio could easily teach PhD-level classes titled "Never take NO for an answer: finding a path to YES!" and "Orbit math: explaining ISR capacity to senior leaders." Today, the joint SOF community leverages its unique command structures, habitual relationships, and innovative culture to employ a mix of manned and unmanned (i.e. remotely piloted) ISR with persistence, lethality, and precision. This force isn't just an enabler; it is a rapidly deployable "find, fix, and finish" force unto itself.

But I was most struck by Rancee McCollum's heartfelt take on the impact that this laser-focused mission-first culture has on families. It was a blinding flash of reality to read her words,



"When the mission comes first, family doesn't, it can't." Now more than three years removed from our service, I owe my wife, Lori, an apology for not being more honest with myself, her, and our now grown children. Raneé is right, "There is no comfort in being told you are the most important thing when actions don't back it up."

Warmest regards,  
Kelly Passmore, Col, USAF (Ret)  
ACA Life Member #L4338

#### ACA Team,

I want to personally thank you and your foundation for the extremely generous support of the Collins family in their time of need. While I can't imagine the heartbreak they are dealing with, it's great to know they have fellow Air Commandos in their corner.

I'm proud to be a small part of such a great association and am thankful for all you continue to do for our Airman.

Thanks again,  
Mike Conley  
Commander, 1st SOW  
ACA Life Member #L4409

#### Anytime Flight Membership

Dear ACA,

I have sent a check for \$200. It represents my first of three annual installment contributions toward my commitment of \$600 toward the Anytime Flight.

I don't know how much it helps, but I have also set up my Amazon Smile account to automatically send a small contribution to the ACA from each purchase I make. It may not amount to much, but I'm betting most ACA members are not even aware of this way of contributing...

Thank y'all for managing the association affairs so well. Please do remind me on the anniversary of my payment to send the next check.

Regards,  
MSgt (Ret) Rick Carroll  
MC-130E Loadmaster,  
8th and 1st SOS (1989-1995)  
ACA Life Member #5390

Submissions may be emailed to [info@aircommando.org](mailto:info@aircommando.org) or mailed to Hot Wash c/o Air Commando Association, P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569. ACA reserves the right to eliminate those that are not deemed appropriate. Thank you in advance for your interest in the *Air Commando Journal*.



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# An Evening With The Chindits and Their Legacy

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

Not many of the old boys are left, but seven showed up to honor their colleagues' heroism at the 75th Anniversary celebration of the "Chindits" held at Denison Barracks in Berkshire, UK on the weekend of June 22nd. It was a tremendous weekend affair honoring the historic achievements of soldiers and airmen who stopped the Japanese advance on India through "daring-do" in the jungles and savannah of Burma in 1943-44. As previous Air Commando Journal articles have informed, the Chindits (named after a mythical winged lion that guards the temples in Burma) were the forefathers of today's Air Commandos. It was Colonels Alison and Cochran, who along with their Army Air Corps crew-mates and RAF colleagues flying C-47 Dakotas and Waco gliders, who were the lifeline for these storied soldiers. Dropping forces behind the lines to disrupt, confuse and defeat the enemy in their own lair is still a successful tactic today.

Most of the Chindits were 95 years old or more—they were engaging with great stories to tell. We had the pleasure of eating with Robbie Robertson attached to the 1st Queens, the lone RAF Chindit in attendance. He was their combat controller equivalent not unlike those of the 1st Air Commandos. He was delightful and engaging. Like many Airmen he told a good story and enjoyed a good pint. He sprang to his feet (maybe not so much sprang as uncoiled with assistance) for the toasts and regimental songs. His smile lit up the room.

I arrived in time for coffee and the static display on Saturday morning—I was greeted by Paul Shenton, a giant of a man and a lifelong detective at the NCO mess. Paul is the Chairman of the Chindit Society and one of the organizers. He was so very appreciative of having the ACA represented and was especially delighted to have Col Clay Freeman and CMSgt Jason Andrews from RAF Mildenhall's 352nd Special Operations Wing also joining us. We were most honored to meet Holly Wingate, Gen Wingate's daughter-in-law, and Alice Wingate, the General's granddaughter. They are the president and vice-president of the Chindit Society, respectively. Both were greatly appreciative of Col Freeman's and the Air Commando Association representation at the event.

They had laid out all the display boards for the two major Chindit operations.





(Editor's note: The 1st Air Commando Group was created to support the Second Chindit Operation.) After a buffet lunch we had a wonderful briefing by our host, Maj Paul Cordon of the 77 Brigade on the current activities of the Chindits namesake regiment, followed by a detailed presentation by Tony Redding, author of the *War in The Wilderness* (an excellent read for the military minded). Tony regaled us with stories of the Chindits' extraordinary exploits and sacrifices. He discussed the complicated and eccentric leader Maj Gen Orde Wingate who, in Billy Mitchell fashion, wouldn't take no for an answer regarding his plan to upset the Japanese front by causing chaos in their rear. Gen Wingate took leave and flew to England for a meeting with Prime Minister Churchill. Wingate was subsequently invited to travel to Canada with the Prime Minister and presented the plan to President Roosevelt, who blessed it with the aircraft resources to help the operation to succeed.

Spitfire. After a brief interlude we all reconfigured to coat and tie, with medals, for an evening at the officer mess.

In grand British military fashion, the 77 Regiment pulled out all the stops. We had a prayer service with poems read and stories told by Chindit family members. One poignant story was about how in desperation some expiring Chindits followed a water buffalo to a black swampy hole with water. They pulled out their tea kits and boiled up the water—their lives saved—only hours later to stumble upon a fresh running brook—after a soldiers laugh they carried on—the nature of this effort.

We had an absolutely elegant meal and afterwards remarks by Alice Wingate and Paul Shenton, a round of regimental songs with the respective members standing while the entire crowd clapped and pounded on the table in support. At the end, in a tried and true gesture of appreciation and spirit the band played a rousing version of the Air Force song which had everyone



**Shown L-R standing:** Maj Paul Cordon 77 Brigade, Col (Ret) Randy O'Boyle, Cololonel Clay Freeman, W01(RSM) Willy Russell 77 Brigade, CMSgt Jason Andrews Command Chief 352 SOW, and W02 Kevin Carter 77 Brigade. **Sitting:** Sqd. Ldr. Robbie Robertson RAF attached 2nd Queens Regiment, John Giddings MBE RAF served at Kohima but flew many times as a pusher to supply our Chindits, Sid Machin Kings Regiment, Horace Howkins South Staffordshire Regiment, John Hutchin South Staffordshire Regiment, Jim Clark Kings Regiment, Peter Heppell Royal Engineers attached Kings Regiment. (Photos by 77 Brigade official photographer)

Tony recalled many stories of heroism by the Chindits of blind machine gun fights along the trails. He talked of the anguish of Chindits having to be buried on the side of the trails, and of having to make the agonizing decision to leave the ambulatory wounded behind. He described the legendary pickup of nearly 100 men, after a last-ditch call in the blind on location, by a C-47 crew. The wounded Chindits, out of water, food, and ideas were heard, and after organizing an airdrop for life sustaining supplies, the stranded men used the parachute panels to spell out "Please Land Here, NOW," and were rescued by a courageous C-47 crew.

We looked at displays from Bren guns to mule back packs (and offspring from Chindit heritage mules). The original mules were flown from South America and Texas to London, then on to India for the operation. We had a tremendous fly over by a

thundering (it's a good thing because neither the Chief, Col Freeman nor I have any talent when it comes to singing). It was just a great evening.

They have a recognition every year and it is truly worth attending—you would all be most welcome. The Chindit spirit lives on both across the pond and with today's Air Commandos. How lucky we are to share such a legacy. Hopefully, we can entice them to the beaches of the Emerald Coast for an ACA reunion. Just as we were welcomed, they would be most welcome guests.



*About the Author: Col (Ret) Randy O'Boyle was an MH-53 pilot and former 16th Special Operations Group commander. He is now the President of Ultra Electronics ICE, Inc (Ultra-ICE) and lives in Manhattan, KS.*





# AN INTERVIEW WITH **JIM IFLAND**

FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE  
AIR COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

In honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Air Commando Association, the Air Commando Journal (ACJ) staff sat down with Col (Ret) Jim Ifland to talk about his non-traditional career as an Air Commando and his involvement with the association from its earliest days.

**ACJ:** Good morning, Jim, and thanks for spending some time with us. Can you tell our readers a little about your military career and how you got into the Air Commando business?

**IFLAND:** I joined the Army Air Force in 1948 as an enlisted man and received my first two stripes from the Army. My basic training was at Shepard AFB, TX, and then was initially assigned to a unit, 43rd Air Refueling Squadron at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, which was one of the first air refueling units. I was supposed to be a refueling hose operator on the KB-29. But as luck would have it, I did not pass the physical because of my eyesight so was reassigned to the photo lab as a photographer and that's where my Air Force career started—I loved every minute of it. The photo lab unit had about 50 people in it and we did motion picture, aerial photography and ground work. Because of my background as a photographer, I wound up flying a lot on the RB-25 with my face in the viewfinder. I also flew on the B-29s assigned there. I received a lot of great schooling in those first couple of years and was planning on getting out after my third year, but it was



1951 and the height of the Korean War, so President Truman froze all retirements and separations. Time went on and before I knew it I had eight and a half years of service. I was an E-6 at the time and didn't know where I was going to go, but I decided to get out. I was in SAC at the time and it turns out I had a critical specialty code and the Air Force wanted me to come back in. I told them I would only come back in if I could get a commission.

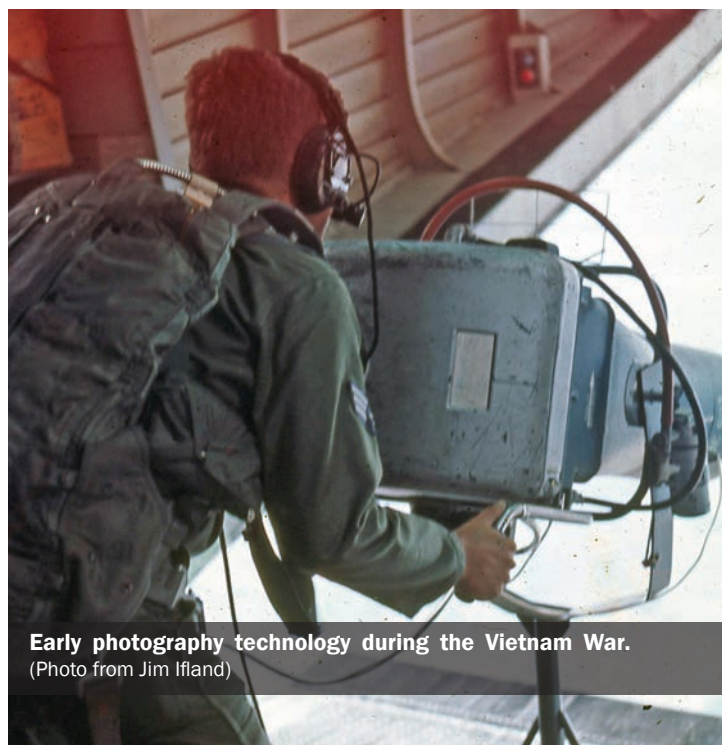
At the time the Air Force required a college degree for a commission, but had recently changed its policy allowing senior NCOs to take the test for officer candidate school. I said great, I'll take the test, but the catch was I had to reenlist first. I thought about it and believing that I could pass the test, I took the chance and reenlisted for six years. As it turned out, I passed and got into one of the first classes. My photography skills came into play immediately because I was asked to take pictures of all the classes for the year books. Then, I was sent to the Officers Photography Course and on graduation was assigned the 90th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Forbes AFB in Topeka, KS, where they were flying the RB-47H. The wing got a task from General LeMay to photograph all of Labrador and as a 2Lt they let me go as the project photo officer.

When I got back from Labrador, I was assigned to Okinawa as the base photo officer and after two years moved again to Shaw AFB's 363rd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. The mission was to fly photographic and electronic intelligence missions to support both air and ground operations. The 363rd also did combat crew training for reconnaissance aircrews. I was there for about a year and a half when one day I got the call from the wing commander. "Come to my office," he said. This was about 1961, as I recall. When I reported to the wing commander, he put a classified book in front of me and had me read and agree as I read each page. He told me that as long as I kept answering "yes" I could move on to the next page. I really didn't know what the program was, only that they were looking for specific AFSC's like pilots, navigators, maintenance people, and that it was very classified. I assumed they needed a photographer as well. I kept saying yes and so they sent me to Lackland AFB to do a whole bunch of psychological testing. I guess I passed all that because then they sent me to Stead AFB in Nevada for survival training and also special operations escape and evasion training. The program was very tough and the attrition rate was unbelievable. I passed all of that and then they gave me orders to Hurlburt Field. When I got there and looked at the mission, I was wondering what the heck did they need a photographer for? Today, most people would recognize the names JUNGLE JIM and FARMGATE from that time.

It wasn't long after I arrived that I got a call from Brig Gen Pritchard's office. He was the commander of the newly created Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC), and I was told to go see him. He was very enthusiastic about the special operations mission even though the leadership at Tactical Air Command (TAC) was not as keen. He called me in, a brand new captain, and told me he wanted a reconnaissance capability on every aircraft we flew—both overt and covert, on every airplane. We had B-26s, T-28s, C-47s, C-46s, and a few U-10s on the flightline at the time, mostly from the boneyard. A few of the aircraft had some degree of recce configuration and that was my starting point. Lt Col Mike Doyle was the operations officer and was clearly excited about the mission. I was really green on ordering systems and the costing, but Colonel Doyle told me not to worry about it because General Pritchard wanted the capability on



**Capt Jim Ifland in Vietnam.** (Photo from Jim Ifland)



**Early photography technology during the Vietnam War.** (Photo from Jim Ifland)



**Jim Ifland (far right) in the early days of his photo reconnaissance career.** (Photo from Jim Ifland)

the aircraft. This was where I first learned about the Big Safari acquisition program. The wing leadership made me section head and then they made it a squadron so I had all the recce system maintenance people working for me.

I was at Hurlburt about six months when one of our aircraft at Bien Hoa, Viet Nam had an entire rack of photo cartridges discharge right on the flight line. It was quite an explosion. General Pritchard was concerned that 5th AF was going to interfere with his classified unit, so he sent me over and got me on the safety investigation team. I was a captain and the rest of the board members were lieutenant colonels. The team made up their mind early on that human error caused the incident. I wasn't happy with their conclusions and explained to them how lightning and static electricity from a monsoon thunderstorm caused the rack of photo cartridges to discharge. I ultimately got them to agree with me.

Around 1963, there had been several wing failures on the B-26s (Editor's note: This story is told in Maurice Bourne's article in summer 2015, Vol 4, Issue 1) and it resulted in us getting 40 newer B-26Ks. I was told to work with General Dynamics to configure the newer aircraft and I was able to get better recce systems, ones similar to those installed on the RF-101 and RB-66.

While I was over there, I really began to realize how this recce capability could help the special operations mission. As a result, I was put in charge of training aircrews. This was difficult at times because the aircrews didn't want to be flying recce, they wanted to drop bombs and shoot bullets. I put the flight plan together and sometimes they would fly it and many times they did not. Even by this time, being a photographer by trade, I was not really read into the actual mission. But my job was to ensure that we had the best and most reliable systems on the aircraft, and that's what I focused on.

On my second tour to Bien Hoa the Air Force wanted me to evaluate and test the very first infrared (IR) system. It was called the Reconofax VI. Before I deployed, the Air Force sent me up to College Park, MD, quite a few times so I could become familiar with the system, how it worked and how we could use it. When we got to Vietnam with the Reconofax, the company's tech rep and I installed it on a RB-26 and then we had to flight test it. The tech rep wasn't allowed to fly so I wound up flying quite a bit. The IR system was having a problem with its cryogenic system that fed liquid nitrogen to cool the sensor, which was critical to determining the thermal contrast of the target. The cryogenic system was losing the liquid nitrogen prematurely, so I told the tech rep to give me a container of the liquid nitrogen and I would service it in flight. We took off and the system started to overheat so I decided to climb down into the bomb bay and add the liquid nitrogen to the system. It was real tight getting down there and I couldn't wear a parachute. I was servicing the system in the dark bomb bay and started smelling fuel. I looked down and saw about an inch or two of fuel puddled on the bomb bay doors. I told the crew about the fuel and they said they were transferring fuel and a second or two later they opened the bomb bay doors! I found myself staring at the ground and with a few choice words I asked them to close the doors. I climbed back up to my

seat and tried to get myself back together. We aborted the flight and returned to Bien Hoa. I suppose that wasn't the smartest thing I ever did, but I was just a captain. What did I know? When we got back on the ground the crew was very apologetic.

I came back from my second tour and they told me I had 52 combat missions. I guess with the test missions I flew over 100 sorties. The RB-26 did a lot more for the Air Commando mission than most people know. Looking back, we made great inroads into the ISR capability of the time, which I like to think was a precursor to what our aircraft do today.

After a few years I began to be concerned about my career. I had seventeen and a half years of service and was still a captain, I had recently married and the wing was going to be moved to England AFB, near Alexandria, LA. I was notified by the Air Force that I had a mandatory retirement at 20 years and wasn't to be considered for promotion or moved. I told my boss about the letter, but didn't hear any more about it. I guess they were left wondering who would take care of the photo/recon mission for them. When the new majors list was published, General Pritchard told me to get over there to take pictures of all the newly promoted majors. When I was done, General Pritchard said he had one more to give out. I was promoted to major—three years below the zone. Shortly afterwards, the wing was transferred to England AFB. This was around 1966.

I volunteered for a third assignment to Vietnam and got there in late 1967, just before the Tet Offensive (in January 1968). I spent a year in country, but was sent back to Ogden AFB in Utah several times. On one occasion I received TDY orders to the States, this time to Washington, DC, for special assignment interviews. One interview was for duty to Edwards AFB working on the U-2 program. Another briefing was for an assignment to DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency). The third interview was for an assignment with the CIA. The interviews were all because of my background in the photo reconnaissance business. All the jobs sounded exciting, but General Aderholt intervened and I went back to Hurlburt, was promoted to lieutenant colonel, and made commander of the 8th SOS [RT]. I departed Hurlburt in 1972, with just over 10 years in special operations, for an assignment to Germany and eventual promotion to colonel and command of a highly classified reconnaissance/intelligence group. I returned for my final assignment to SAC headquarters as Director of Collections for the U-2, SR-71, RC-135, and all satellites.

As I was getting ready to retire in 1978, I was contacted by a CIA recruiter. We spoke and a short time later I began a second career working for E-Systems, a company in Texas, but my office was at Ft Belvoir in VA. I worked with them for 15 years before finally retiring.

**ACJ:** You had a fascinating career. How did you become involved with the ACA?

**IFLAND:** I was involved in the formation of the ACA a few months into the early days. My card number is 107. Heinie Aderholt was the driving force in moving it along. He was in a senior position in the headquarters at the time. He was highly respected and was the only one who could have initiated



the “order” to move out on the issue. We met with a group of officers in the wing conference room. We usually met after duty hours to preclude any active duty involvement. Most of the people in the room wondered what the hell they were doing there...undoubtedly, as a result of Heinie’s position and influence on their commanders. After a few meetings most of the people disappeared and were replaced with others more interested in the purpose. This group wound up being the first board. There wasn’t a vote because of the limited membership at the time. I volunteered to start a newsletter since I was the photographer and had my photo squadron capabilities to produce a finished document. I contacted the Vitro company nearby to do the printing because I didn’t want to use the government equipment. I put out the very first newsletter and produced every one until my departure to Germany. It was a total of nine or ten as I recall. It was a very busy time for me because I was assigned to the CORONA HARVEST project and was TDY to Maxwell full time for six to eight months. I got home on Friday evening and headed back at O-dark thirty Monday morning. CORONA HARVEST was an ambitious effort by the Air Force to study and develop lessons learned from the ongoing Vietnam conflict.

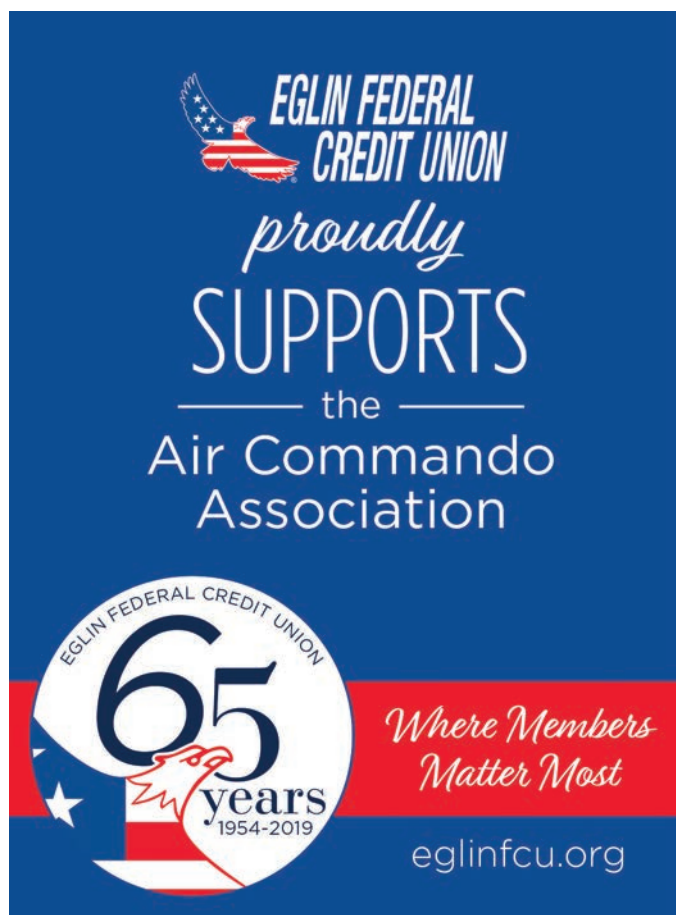
**ACJ:** Around 1968, it is reported that you and then Major Secord were tasked to write the first ACA by-laws by then Col Heinie Aderholt. How did that come about?

**IFLAND:** Besides the newsletter, Dick Secord and I wound up doing the charter, the constitution, by-laws, tax free status

with the State, reduced mail rate, and the development of the Hall of Fame criteria. As you can imagine, not too many people volunteered to take on these important issues. I felt that if I didn’t step up and accomplish these tasks, they wouldn’t get done any time soon. Besides, when you author these types of documents, they will pretty well reflect what you want in them and few people will challenge them for fear of getting stuck with the rewrite. Actually, I got a lot of help from somewhere unexpected. I wrote to several non-profit organizations for copies of their charters, constitutions and the like, and not many responded. My most significant response was from the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. I talked with the curator there on several occasions and used an awful lot of their documents as “guidelines” for my actual input for the ACA documents. It was a great fit because much of what the Baseball Hall of Fame did very closely matched what we needed and wanted to do within the ACA, so I relied on them heavily.

All this work took time and was for the most part uncharted waters for me, particularly at the State level for the Charter acceptance, which was necessary for the tax-free status. So, in short, the ACA’s original founding documents came from the Baseball Hall of Fame.

**ACJ:** The first big reunion was also was the occasion that the first Hall of Fame induction took place. Can you describe what Brig Gen Cardenas’ role in that first effort? What was his job and relationship with Air Commandos? What was the vision for the Air Commando Hall of Fame?



**IFLAND:** The AF Special Operations Hall of Fame was officially dedicated by General Cardenas, the Special Air Warfare Center's third commander, in April 1969. The induction ceremony was done in conjunction with the seventh anniversary of the SAWC standing up. Twenty Air Commandos were selected for the first induction for their leadership and dedication and their significant contributions to Air Force special operations worldwide. The final twenty selected came from a list of over 200 distinguished Air Commandos from air commando units from World War II, Korea, and up to the early Vietnam conflict. Everyone is familiar with the exploits of Phil Cochran and Johnny Alison supporting Wingate. Fewer people know that Tactical Air Command first entered the special operations field in 1961 with the activation of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Hurlburt Field. It was nicknamed, "JUNGLE JIM" and trained US aircrews in the varied and difficult skills in special operations. These Airmen became advisors and instructors to friendly foreign nations that were potential targets for communist aggression.



The Air Commando Hall of Fame was originally called the USAF Special Operations Force (SOF) Hall of Fame and was officially dedicated by Brig Gen Robert Cardenas, SOF's third commander in April 26, 1969. The Special Operations Force was formerly called the Special Air Warfare Center until its redesignation July 8, 1968. (Photo from ACA archives)

banquet and so he decided on lobster. He looked at the A-26 squadron commander and he scheduled a couple of airplanes for a training mission up to Maine—returning with the lobsters. A second training mission was sent out to California returning with a bomb bay full of wine. Needless to say, we did not run out of lobster or wine for the event. The Air Force was different back in the late '60s.

**ACJ:** You didn't mention it, but you were one of those initial inductees and you've continued to serve the ACA in a variety of ways. One of those is the Hall of Fame board in this room. When was that built and how did that come about?



Jim Ifland seated third from the left during the Special Operations Headquarters building dedication. (Photo from ACA archives)

**ACJ:** You have discussed the first big reunion that occurred in 1969. Please describe what you can remember about that gathering. How did the wine and main course of the banquet arrive?

**IFLAND:** Heinie and Cardenas really wanted the first Hall of Fame induction ceremony to be something very special. Phil Cochran and Johnny Alison were going to be there as well as Milton Caniff. Milt was inducted as an honorary member. He was the author of the action-adventure comic strip "Terry and the Pirates" and based one of the characters, Flip Corkin, on our own Phil Cochran and the exploits of the early Air Commandos. It was a very popular comic strip at the time. Anyway, we knew there would be a large crowd, so we chose the Eason hangar at Hurlburt for the venue. We prayed that it would not rain. Heinie also wanted a special meal for the



Several events were planned for 26 April 1969, including Maj Gen Johnny Alison along with other dignitaries addressing the crowds. The first was a formal dedication ceremony for the Hall of Fame at 1000 hours on Eglin AFB. An open house on Hurlburt Field was from 1400 until 1700 with aircraft and equipment on display. The day ended with a gala dinner held in the large hangar at Hurlburt Field where guests enjoyed the lobster dinner. (Photo from ACA archives)

**IFLAND:** After the initial 20 guys were inducted, General Cardenas wanted an 8"x10" photo and full writeup of their citation mounted and placed on the walls in the SAWC headquarters building. Shortly after that was completed the SAWC was downsized and they sent all the plaques to the ACA. When we came up to the second round of inductions





**Hap Lutz was among the first 20 Air Commandos who received the Air Commando Hall of Fame award from Gen Robert Cardenas on 26 April 1969.** (Photo from ACA archives)

it became obvious that we needed a board of some type with just the name on a brass plaque. I was good at wood working and wanted to make something special to honor all the HOF inductees. I started with a 4'x8' piece of red oak plywood to have the names listed, with plenty of room for future inductees, but the plain board was not enough. I had an old friend who had a statue of an Air Commando and thought that would add to the board. My friend had passed away and I couldn't get a statue like his, so I searched on the internet and found the statues of an aviator and a maintenance person. I wanted both because it represented all the people involved—aircrew, maintenance and all the ground support personnel without whose contribution Air Commandos would not have been successful.



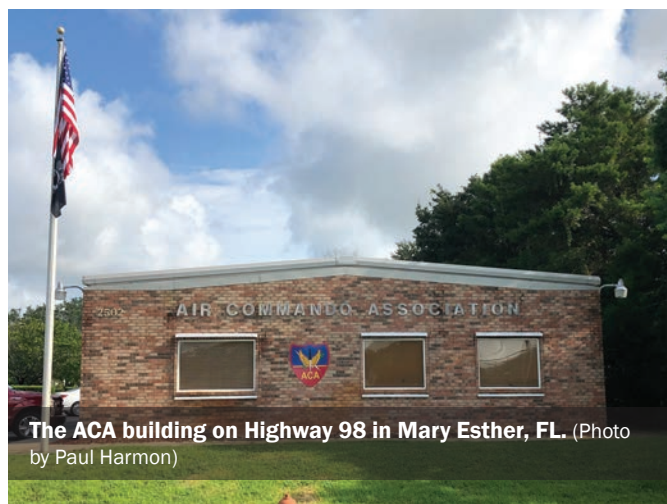
**The Air Commando Hall of Fame display built by Jim Ifland in the ACA building.** (Photo from ACA archives)

Back in the first discussions of the Hall of Fame, the idea was tossed around that it would just be for rated officers. Not being an aviator myself, I had a different perspective because I saw, every day, all the hard work put in by the ground support personnel as well as the aircrew guys. I made the decision to represent both. When you take on a project as the lead you get to influence the outcome. Adding the plaque of the only Air Commando unit at the time was a no-brainer and that left me with an extra space. I was always fond of the poem by John

Stuart Mill that begins with “War is an ugly thing...” and so I added it because I believed it represented our Air Commando community very well—so that was the beginning of the Hall of Fame Board you see there.

As time went on and as the ACA was doing a great job of honoring distinguished Air Commandos, I realized that we would run out of room on the original board—it took me a couple of years, but I finally convinced the ACA President that we needed to make additional boards. So, I made the boards on the left and right, same as the big one, which filled the entire space making it a “Wall of Honor” for our Air Commandos, past, present, and future.

**ACJ:** The HOF Boards are very beautiful addition for this building and they didn't hang anywhere but in this building. So, going back a little, can you recall how the early ACA members went about raising the money that covered the purchase of this land and building without a mortgage? How was it organized?



**The ACA building on Highway 98 in Mary Esther, FL.** (Photo by Paul Harmon)

**IFLAND:** We had a couple of significant donations. Charlie Jones made a large donation and I'm sure Heinie gave a lot of money, as well. But most significantly, Heinie was very influential—one might say that he twisted a lot of arms. He sent a letter to a lot of the key people on the staff with the clear inference that you will succeed. If you were on the officers' roster you'd better have your name on a brick and the bricks were a hundred bucks apiece. Those are the bricks you see throughout the building. There were also many other donations for the project that gave us this building.

**ACJ:** You also served as the Hall of Fame committee secretary for many years. Please give us your impression of how that selection process has evolved over the years.

**IFLAND:** I was the secretary for the Hall of Fame Committee for about 14 years. I would say I had some good influence on the committee chairmen along the way in the selection process, but after so many years I felt my opinion was carrying perhaps a little more weight than it should have so I stepped down. I felt there needed to be new blood and more current Air Commando representation on the committee. I had, and still have, some strong feelings about the process and the special operations

missions. I wanted to help make it fair and ensure it was representative of our entire community. Over the last 10 years or so we evolved the process. We spent a lot of time on the nominee lists and refined the criteria for nomination. Things like time in our special operations community and refining what the attributes of the individual must be. We used to get two or three typed pages and in the end was a lot of fluff and not specific details on the individual's accomplishments. So, we discussed it and boiled it down to a one-page submission of tangible contributions to our special operations business. Before the HOF committee overhauled the process, we had several years where didn't have a nominee. I am OK with that, and I thought it was a good thing because lots of people did some great work and that was reflected in the officer or enlisted performance reports. But, those people who go beyond great work and extend their skills and knowledge and fomenting special operations with unique capabilities are the ones that need to be identified. You know you have gunners out there that have done unique things that helped make the gunship what it is today. I think we have the process about right now and I think I can say that not a person could dispute the nominees we have today.



Jim Ifland (on the left) with Felix "Sam" Sambogna at the ACA 2017 Christmas Social. (Photo by ACA volunteer Megan Gossling)

**ACJ:** Jimmy, you have seen the ACA from its inception, 50 years ago. You have been with us all along and it has evolved quite a bit over the last few years to what we have today. You have served as a great confidant and advisor during that whole process. How do you feel it has changed?

**IFLAND:** I am enthused and excited about the way the ACA has evolved. There were times when I thought the organization wouldn't make it. We have had some very dynamic commanders (at AFSOC) who were very supportive of the ACA and spoke

about the association publicly and that has been great. I tried to stay involved and helped put together a mini-museum in the back—that needs some work, that I'll get to one of these days. I haven't been a director or anything for many years and I'm not in the decision-making business, but just staying involved has allowed me to stay abreast of all the great things that are happening today. I guess I'm in the process of reaping the rewards of a successful operation—that's what I call it...a successful operation. Even without us guys in this room the organization will flourish going forward.

**ACJ:** What do you think General Aderholt would think about where we are as an organization and where we are going now?

**IFLAND:** I think General Aderholt can rest comfortably in his grave seeing what the ACA and the Air Commando Foundation have become. Knowing Aderholt, if it would have failed, and we dug him up, he'd be spinning. There is no doubt in my mind, that his vision, even though I don't think he articulated it, is where we are at today. He knew in his mind where he wanted it to go. He was such a charismatic leader that he really didn't have to put things down in writing so that people would follow him and do what needed to be done.

**ACJ:** Jimmy you are one of the most humble guys that I know but the fact is you are one of the first 20 Hall of Famers, along with guys like Cochran and Alison, and I think that says a lot about you.

**IFLAND:** I was surprised and didn't know that I was being highlighted. When I, as a non-rated guy, sent the photo missions down to the squadrons all the pilots would piss and moan about it. It was a real honor to have been selected at that time.

One last story. When Bob Gates came on board he developed the Hurlburt golf course. He said, "Hey, Ifland I want pictures of the progress," I thought you can't take just one picture you had to take a mosaic of the thing, but because of the wing commander's emphasis I didn't have a problem with the aircrews when I sent the flight plans down to the units. I gave them headings, camera on/off/turn points and what I heard was, "Yes, sir." It was hilarious. We must have done that once a week until the golf course was completed, but those were very different times back then. Flying a B-26 to Maine for lobster or California for wine, you can't do those things today. Looking back on the ACA, we accomplished a lot with a slow start and maybe the slow start was beneficial. It allowed us to reflect on our accomplishments and our oversights and we got better. Some of the leadership had meetings, but the focus was more on keeping the association alive and planning the banquet. Heinie Aderholt had a bigger vision than that and I think we are doing meaningful things for Air Commandos and I think that's where Heinie wanted us to be.

**ACJ:** You gave us a tremendous insight into your incredible career and into the ACA over the years. I speak for all our members when I say, Colonel Ifland, thank you for your time today and thank you for your 50 years of service to the Air Commando Association. 🦅





# 50 Years OF THE ACA



# THEN & NOW

Col Phil Cochran and Gen Johnny Alison attend the then named Special Operations Force (SOF) Hall of Fame dedication with Brig Gen Robert Cardenas in April 1969.

The Air Commando Association was founded in 1969 by then Col Harry “Heinie” Aderholt with the assistance of some other great Americans. 2019 marks 50 years of supporting Air Commandos and their families. For the first 40 or so of those years, the ACA was largely a fraternal organization. However, during those first 40 years, significant accomplishments were achieved that today’s ACA is still building upon.

For example, the Air Commando Hall of Fame originated in a great event on Hurlburt Field. Additionally, the Association did a fundraiser led by Heinie Aderholt and Charlie Jones to buy land and build the building we are still using as our headquarters on US Highway 98. This was accomplished without a mortgage so there is no long term debt for our association.

Founding members Col (Ret) Jim Ifland and Maj Gen (Ret) Dick Secord wrote the original by-laws. While those have been amended several times over the years, the basic framework remains. Other stalwarts like CMSgt (Ret) Hap Lutz, Col (Ret) John McCoskrie and others formed the first humanitarian arm of ACA, the McCoskrie Threshold Foundation (MTF) to support many charities overseas. Maj (Ret) John Grove

[www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org)

*By Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Ret)*

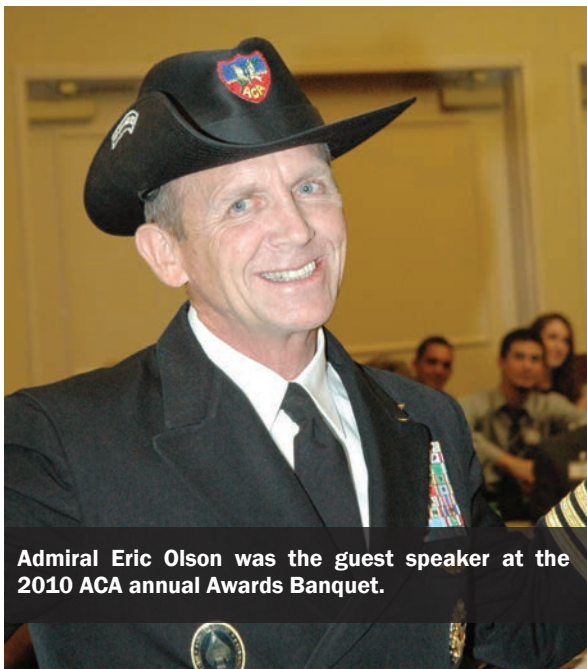
was dedicated to the MTF. Because of his extraordinary humanitarian efforts and accomplishments he was highly honored in events and news articles when he passed away in December 2008. He also received the CSAF Public Service Award. The ultimate reward for all his efforts was when the school he supported in Honduras was named after him. Several volunteer members, led by CMSgt (Ret) Bob White, are still collecting goods for the school and other projects and shipping them out periodically.

The early members ensured there has been an annual reunion in Fort Walton Beach every year since 1971, save one that was cancelled due to a hurricane. They also assured the Hall of Fame was carried forward and new inductions are made most years. Annual business meetings also led to scholarships awarded to Air Commando members’ children and relatives. Long-term volunteer efforts like Ray Bourque and his annual fish fry have continued to be mainstays of the reunion and





**CMSgt Chuck Keeler, Maj Gen Richard Secord, and Lt Gen Donald Wurster at ACA headquarters in 2010.**



**Admiral Eric Olson was the guest speaker at the 2010 ACA annual Awards Banquet.**



**In 2011, CMSgt (Ret) Hap Lutz presented the CMSgt Roland "Hap" Lutz Commando Medic of the Year award to MSgt William Ward.**

convention.

Additionally, the early founders created and sent out a quarterly newsletter. This was of course before the onset of computers. So it was done the old fashioned way via manual typewriters and mimeograph machines. Dee Roberson highlights these early efforts in her accompanying article. Maj (Ret) James Boney picked up where Dee left off and assembled the newsletters for years until finally, the decision was made to hire the ACA's first employee, Jeanette Moore, to start working these efforts with new technology. Up to that point, the office was manned and the newsletters published solely by volunteers. This, along with several other tasks that kept the organization going, included long-time Commando store manager, Joyce Harrington.

In 2010, the AFSOC Commander, Lt Gen Donny Wurster, was invited by then Vice-President of ACA, General Secord to attend a briefing at the ACA building. During that visit, Gen Wurster indicated that he was concerned that ACA was not embracing the newer Air Commandos in AFSOC nearly enough. He worried that the future of ACA was in doubt without recognizing the contributions of today's Air Commandos. He offered several ideas about possible changes the ACA might consider. One suggestion he made was to establish annual Commander's Leadership Awards that ACA would sponsor. His words did not fall on deaf ears.

Later that year, the ACA was saddened by the sudden loss of its president, CMSgt (Ret) Chuck Keeler. General Secord stepped up to become president and appointed this author to serve as vice-president. Thus began what we like to call the rise of the new ACA. Several efforts were started to not only embrace the "new" Air Commandos at AFSOC, but to ensure we served all Air Commandos and their families. The rest of this article will highlight some of the changes we made and new ideas that would be used to enhance an already great organization led by the Air Commando pioneers mentioned above.

The ACA could not have accomplished what we did without the tremendous support of Hap Lutz, Jim Ifland, Felix "Sam" Sambogna, and many others who generously offered not only their unconditional support and time, but also great advice along the journey. Additionally, Jeanette was a great source of knowledge and support, and for a couple of years served as an assistant to manage the office and all our records while continuing to assist with the quarterly newsletter. At that point in time we had approximately 2,400 members world-wide. One of our objectives was to significantly increase that number. Changes were beginning.

It was in 2010 that ACA made its first major modification to the banquet during the annual reunion. ACA board member and former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Jim Binnicker, was our evening's master of ceremonies. Admiral Olson, the USSOCOM Commander, was the guest speaker. 2010 was the first year the ACA presented the Commander's Leadership Awards. They are sponsored by ACA but awardees are selected by the various unit commanders and ACA assists the AFSOC Commander and Command Chief with their presentation.

As the Commander's Leadership Awards have evolved, we have added a host of AFSOC-level awards that are presented each year at what is now called the Annual Awards Banquet. One of the first new awards, was the AFSOC Commando Medic of the Year, named in honor of CMSgt Hap Lutz. Hap was able to make the first couple of presentations in person. Since then we also present the annual Operational Squadron of the Year award, the Julian Scholten ISR



Operator of the Year award, two Special Tactics Operators of the Year awards, and the annual DAGRE award, honoring members of our Security Forces community. Additionally, though not presented at the annual awards banquet, ACA sponsors the quarterly Levitow Awards that go to the top graduates of Airman Leadership Schools at both Hurlburt Field and Cannon AFB, and the annual Red Erwin Award that is presented to the top AFSOC enlisted crewmember by the AFSOC Director of Operations.

Another major change was incorporating a Heritage Seminar during the annual convention. Initially, we continued our tradition of having the annual gathering over Columbus Day weekend and the seminar was held on Saturday. We determined that moving away from the holiday weekend and having the seminar on Friday would allow more active duty Airmen to attend. Additionally, the AFSOC commanders have graciously agreed to have the fall COMMANDO RALLY coincide with our annual gathering. COMMANDO RALLY is a biannual event where AFSOC leaders gather for command updates and guidance. Having our awards banquet and seminars during that week facilitates the leaders' ability to share in recognizing their units' award winners.

Recent Heritage Seminars have included discussions with former CSAF, Gen (Ret) Norton "Norty" Schwartz, former Commander of USSOCOM and Army Chief of Staff Gen (Ret) Pete Schoomaker, former USSOCOM Senior Enlisted Leader, CMSgt (Ret) Mike Lampe, and a panel with Gen (Ret) Charlie Holland and Maj Gabe Brown that discussed battle at Roberts' Ridge, which occurred during Operation ANACONDA in Afghanistan in 2002. In 2018, we had a very well received panel of five renowned AFSOC active duty female officer and enlisted leaders. Col (Ret) Dave Mobley has served as our moderator on each and has done a superb job. Our goal is to grow the Heritage Seminar into an annual symposium format so that young AFSOC attendees can gain professional development credit. That is a part of our Long-term Strategic Plan.

2011 was a seminal year for the ACA. We decided to explore two very new concepts. First, in order to expand the ACA "brand" and support the recognition programs we needed an additional funding stream so we decided to partner with defense industry companies as a form of fund raising. We invited several local industry leaders to the ACA building for an informal briefing laying out how it would be mutually beneficial for them to partner with the ACA. Unfortunately, Highway 98 raised its ugly head that evening with a traffic accident that snarled traffic to a snail's pace and several of our invitees were unable to make it. However, several that did make it signed up that evening and wrote checks on the spot! That effort has led to our Corporate Partner Program which has served as our lifeblood for the last several years and we could not serve Air Commandos and their families without their very generous support. The list has grown to over 40 corporate partners who are highlighted elsewhere in this edition. (If you know some of these folks personally, please pass along your thanks).

One other decision we made about this time was that we need more permanent help in manning the office and managing the day to day needs of our membership, so we hired our very capable second employee, Shannon Pressley. Shannon was a dedicated and passionate employee until she departed during the summer of 2016. Her replacement, Melissa Gross, is just as dedicated to helping Air Commandos. We also diversified with a part-time assistant financial



**2016 Commando Rally at Hurlburt Field, FL.**



**Gen (Ret) Pete Schoomaker speaks at ACA Heritage Seminar moderated by Col (Ret) Dave Mobley as Gen (Ret) Charles Holland looks on.**



**CMSgt (Ret) Mike Lampe addresses a mix of active duty and retired military attendees at ACA Seminar.**



**Col (Ret) Jim Connors, Lt Col (Ret) Rick Newton, Col (Ret) Steve Laushine and Lt Col (Ret) Corby Martin attended the second Corporate Partner Social held in Fort Walton Beach, FL in 2012.**



manager, Rachel Halvorson. We still relied then, and to this day, on a great set of volunteers who assist us with fundraising efforts and also managing the Commando Store by Pat Barnett.

The second new concept we decided to pursue was even scarier than the Corporate Partnership program. We decided to publish a professional journal focusing on Air Commandos. We had no real experience with how to go about this. We researched what it took to create and sustain a journal and also spoke to the former Commandant of the Air Force Special Operations School, Col (Ret) Dick Brauer, who had entertained the idea of publishing one and had collected a lot of

research along the way. We sought advice about how to solicit advertising from people who were in the advertising business. We also, of course, had to find a printing company that would accommodate our needs. Most importantly, we already had Jeanette, who among her many talents, is graphics designer. Lastly, we leaned on a core group of volunteer editors who developed the editorial standards, coached and mentored aspiring



**The 2011 inaugural issue of the Air Commando Journal.**

authors, and developed the themes to make the dream a reality. Our first edition was also enhanced by a guy that took a chance on us and agreed to pen the first Foreword, then the still on active duty CSAF, Gen Norty Schwartz. His contribution gave us instantaneous credibility and we cannot thank him enough!

The rest, as they say, is history. Since those first humble beginnings, we managed to make this issue the 24th edition. Along the way the ACJ has been picked up by several educational institutions, including the Air University, the Air Force Academy, and others as a reference document. We were also profoundly honored when we were approached by the Library of Congress to be archived there. We initially published four volumes per year, but found that our very small, mostly volunteer, staff was meeting itself coming and going. We have scaled back to printing three issues per year. Readers can look at the front masthead and see how our volunteer editorial staff has grown. We cannot thank all of them, our partners, advertisers, and most importantly, the volunteer authors enough!

While 2011, was a great year in our evolution, 2012 brought forward another new concept. The country had been at war constantly for nearly 11 years (some would say we've been at war since 1991 and Operation DESERT STORM). The ACA noted that there were several young Air Commandos coming back with injuries and unfortunately, some of their needs were going unmet by government services. ACA established a good relationship with the USSOCOM Care Coalition who in turn

approached the ACA with some of these cases. Our Board of Directors decided to assist, but quickly came to the conclusion that there were more Air Commandos needing assistance than we had resources at the time. We required a new vehicle to help us meet those requirements. It was determined that a separate endowment fund would more fully enable these efforts. Fortunately, the ACA had a member, Lt Col (Ret) Pete DiMaggio, who had experience establishing these types of Foundations and knew how to work with the IRS to gain 501c3 tax exempt status. It also helped that Pete became an attorney after retiring from the military. He, with administrative help from Shannon Pressley, led us through the process, wrote the initial charter, and filed the paperwork to make it all a reality. The Air Commando Foundation (ACF) was established.

Pete also came up with our initial fundraising effort, called "\$20 for 12 in 2012," and our members re-ponded magnificently as we raised nearly \$35,000 to get us going. The Board also determined that it was important to keep the Foundation as a separate entity from the ACA, but with the ACA covering all overhead expenses. That means every dollar going into ACF is reserved to assist Air Commandos and none



**ACA Board members, led by ACA president CMSgt (Ret) Wayne Norrad present a check to a young Air Commando family that tragically lost their baby.**

is spent on administrative or overhead costs. Since that humble beginning in 2012, the ACF has donated over a quarter million dollars to Air Commandos and their families in times of unmet needs. For several years we maintained a comfortable balance in the ACF account, but this past year we surpassed a couple



**ACA Board of Directors and staff join Step One Automotive Group in Fort Walton Beach to accept a donation to the Air Commando Foundation. The Subaru dealership donated over \$11,000 in 2017.**



of huge milestones.

One big factor in making these milestones a reality is we convinced former AFSOC Financial Manager, SES (Ret) Bill Rone, to join the Board as the financial advisor. Bill also had a huge amount of experience serving for several years as the treasurer of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. He has helped us in many ways. First, we crossed the \$100,000 threshold around mid-year through a variety of donations and membership in the Combined Federal Campaign. Towards the end of the year we surpassed the \$200,000 mark. More importantly, though, Bill helped us start a Planned Giving Program and solicited some long-term commitments. One of those great Americans unfortunately passed away recently. In true Air Commando fashion, his son said that he wanted to maintain the quiet professional ethos and stay anonymous, but he was faithful to his commitment and we deposited a check for over \$500,000 in our investment account! Your Foundation now has nearly \$800,000 in reserves. This will serve Air Commandos for a long time to come. Unfortunately, Pete DiMaggio passed away shortly after he helped us get this going and he did not get to see what a great legacy he left behind. All Air Commandos owe Pete DiMaggio a huge debt of gratitude.

One other major event occurred at the banquet in 2010. After the awards had been passed out and the dinner was adjourned, CMSgt Matt Caruso, then the 27th SOG Chief Enlisted Manager, approached ACA leadership and excitedly exclaimed, "This is great! Can we start a chapter at Cannon?" Our response was that we had not thought of that before, but why not? We now have active chapters at Cannon, Hurlburt, Washington DC, the Rocky Mountain region, Tampa, and have begun to resurrect efforts at Mildenhall, Kadena/Yokota, and Kirtland, as well as one that is set to launch this fall at Duke Field.



**Lt Gen (Ret) Michael Wooley and Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett present John Chapman's widow Valerie Nessel and John's mother Terry Chapman the Hall of Fame citations.**

I have highlighted the major accomplishments over the last nine plus years. None of these efforts would have become reality without the great leaders and members who have served on our Board of Directors. General Second led the way as President and continued to serve several years as Chairman, handing that off to Lt Gen Mike Wooley, who led us through more growth, development, and maturation as an association. One of the fruits of that growth was when the then AFSOC

Commander, Lt Gen Brad Webb, entrusted ACA to host the culminating event in a week-long celebration of AFSOC's first Medal of Honor recipient since the Viet Nam era, MSgt John A. Chapman's Air Commando Hall of Fame induction dinner. That was a major undertaking attended by the CSAF, Gen David Goldfein, and CMSAF Kaleth Wright. We were joined by over 800 participants and with a great team effort we pulled it off without a hitch. Shortly thereafter, General Wooley handed the Chairman reins to Maj Gen (Ret) Norm Brozenick.

The ACA is not remaining in a holding pattern. Largely through the vision of General Brozenick, we now have a published a long-term strategy and formalized a "way ahead" document that sets long-term objectives out to 2025. Brig Gen (Ret) Gwyn Armfield also introduced the ACA to Mr. Michael Moore who wants to assist us in our continued growth. Mr. Moore

has extensive experience in assisting non-profits establish significant fundraising efforts. We recently established our new AnyTime Flight membership and you can see already the initial success of that effort in another portion of this journal.

Lastly, if you look at the front of this edition, you will see a very diverse set of leaders serving as board members with a great cross section of Air Commando experience. We added Ret AFSOC Deputy Director of Personnel Management, Mrs Sherri Hayes, to advise us on how we can better interface with the AFSOC staff. We also received concurrence from the AFSOC Commander to add a special liaison with AFSOC Public Affairs, Ms Dawn Hart, as an advisor.

As stated at the beginning of this article, the foundation and framework for this great organization were laid out by some great Americans and patriot Air Commandos in the very earliest years. In 2010, we committed to take the ACA to new heights beginning with 2,400 members. We have grown to nearly 3,700 members now and all of you members who make up that number, remain our greatest asset. We need all eligible Air Commandos, not just you who are currently members, to help us continue to grow and to serve Air Commandos, past, present, and future!

It has been a great 50-year ride. Together, we begin an even greater and more productive next 50! Any Time—Any Place.



*About the Author: Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett retired from HQ AFSOC as the Director of Staff after 30 years of service with over 4,800 flying hours. He has served ACA as Hall of Fame Committee Chairman, Vice President, and President. He continues to serve as ACA Chief Operating Officer and Editor in Chief of this publication.*





Hurlburt Field's main gate during the 1960s. (Photo courtesy of Jim Ifland)

# Hard To Believe It

By Dee Roberson

Hard to believe it's been over 50 years since newly-promoted Col Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt came to the 1st Air Commando Wing (ACW) in February 1964 like a whirlwind as the interim commander while waiting for the more senior Col Gordon Bradburn to arrive in June. After realizing that he was only getting a secretary and not an aide, and drastically

expanding the duties in my job description, I think we became a great team. Heinie was only interested in the planes, the maintenance, and the personnel of the wing. He didn't like paperwork.

In the few months that Heinie was commander, his impact was immeasurable.





He was on the flight line every morning at about 0600 talking to the maintenance people and assuring them that if they had any issues, his door was open—and he meant it! I remember one time that after his flightline tour, he came back and asked me go to the BX and buy a baby gift. It seems he had talked to an Airman who told him that he had a newborn. Can you imagine the three-striper going home to his wife and telling her that the WING COMMANDER bought their baby a gift? And, when there was nothing going on during the weekend, it was not unusual for him to be knocking on our front door wanting to run with my husband Billy ‘Robby’ Roberson and our doberman.

It’s no wonder that when Col Bradburn arrived, most of the office traffic was already geared to Heinie’s office who became the vice commander. He told the squadron commanders he wanted to give a wing endorsement to the Airman’s Performance Report of the Airmen whom they deemed worthy. Looking back, I’m thankful that the commanders took him up on his offer even though I was inundated with a lot more paperwork.

About six months into his job, he came to me and said (and I remember it clearly), “Dee, we have to set up an association for these guys...we have to give them a home they will always come back to.” So, sometime in 1964 at a staff meeting, he announced to the squadron commanders that he was starting an association; gave them some background, and told them that they should come by my desk and give me 10 dollars which would be the yearly dues. I took a yellow legal pad, and numbered the lines. Heinie was number one and my husband, Robby, was number two. He hadn’t really discussed the mechanics with me at this point, but that was typical of Heinie. However, having set things in motion to create the Air Commando Association, Heinie then asked for volunteers to come up with an emblem for the new 1st Air Commando



**Col Harry C. “Heinie” Aderholt** (Photo from ACA archives)



**Air Commandos along with four USAF Academy cadets on Hurlburt Field in 1964.**  
(Photo from ACA archives)



Wing. (Editor's note: The 1st ACW was reactivated on 1 June 1963.) I believe a Capt Williamson, from the Intel Office, came up with the winning design. I say winning, but I don't remember any "prize." After that, a myriad of details had to be accomplished: we needed a checking account, a mailbox, membership cards, letterhead, and last but not least, a board of directors. FYI, PO Box 7 has been our address since 1964. Seems like we should own at least a brick at the Mary Esther Post Office.

Most of you are too young to remember, but there were no computers back then. I don't think I got my first electric typewriter until 1965! No spreadsheets, no automated mailing lists—just paper ledgers. You probably can't imagine that today.

Once a board of directors was established, more requirements unearthed. We needed someone to oversee the bank account. We needed a newsletter and articles for the newsletter. As I mentioned previously, no computers. I typed the newsletter on legal-size paper and it was collated and prepared for mailing around my dining room table. Many a wonderful evening with CMSgt Hap Lutz, Robby and me... along with a few Jax beers.

Speaking of Hap Lutz, most of you are too young to remember (I repeat myself) this humble medic. He spent at least nine tours in Southeast Asia (SEA) and worked with World Medical Relief to bring healing to SEA. Robby and I first met



**Hap Lutz with Vietnamese medical personnel.** (Photo from ACA archives)

Hap when Capt Scott, the headquarters squadron commander, was questioning him regarding a BBQ picnic that was held the previous weekend that had turned into a disaster. People arrived and there was nothing to eat or drink. Seems like the organizers got carried away and drank everything and burnt all the meat. You

have to picture this to appreciate it. In any event, Hap was being questioned about the details and Robby convinced Col Chester Jack, the wing current commander (and future first President of the Air Commando Association), that Hap had nothing to do with the disaster, but was only trying to help. Col Jack directed Capt Scott to send

Sgt Lutz back to his squadron. Hap then invited Robby to the next medic get together and they then became good buddies.

As things got more sophisticated, Capt Dick Secord and Capt Jimmy Ifland prepared the articles of incorporation so that we could be legal.

The reunion agenda for the first few years included a Friday "stag" night (no women), a Saturday banquet, a Sunday memorial, and then a picnic buffet at the O'Club. But it didn't take long for the fellows to realize that us girls were having a much better time at our get together, so the stag evening was eventually replaced with a traditional social.

In 1965, Heinie was reassigned to Clark AB and then to Nakon Phanom as the 56th ACW Commander. During the next several years, the association had little or no growth and the original members either did not renew or went west. During the 1980-90s, membership continued to drop. Heinie was extremely upset and felt like the organization was dying. He mentioned several times that the young special operations



**Heinie Aderholt and Dee Roberson.** (Photo from ACA archives)

personnel didn't seem to have the commando esprit de corps, and he was at a loss to find a way to change that. But, thanks to Maj Gen (Ret) Dick Secord and Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett and their awesome, innovative efforts and ability to bring them to fruition—the membership now stands at 3,700 worldwide.

Heinie would be so proud.

And as Paul Harvey would frequently say, "that's the rest of the story".

Any Time, Any Place.



*About the Author: Dee Roberson came to the 1st Air Commando Wing in October 1963 as Secretary to the Wing Commander, and served in that position for over 12 years. Heinie Aderholt and Dee worked on the formation of the ACA when Heinie assumed the position of Wing Commander, and she continued to serve the association in many capacities until she and her husband, Robby, were transferred to MacDill AFB in 1981. Robby & Dee are now enjoying retirement in Brandon, FL.*

*Ed note: The articles of incorporation were started in 1968 and formalized in 1969 with the first Hall of Fame induction as described in Col (Ret) Ifland's interview.*



# ACA History At A Glance

Compiled by Felix "Sam" Sambogna

Static display at Hurlburt Field during the Vietnam Era. (Photo courtesy of Jim Iffland)



- 1964-65 Col Harry "Heinie" Aderholt was commander of the 1st ACW at Hurlburt Field. Heinie, Dee Roberson, then the current wing commander's secretary, and others discussed the need for an Air Commando Association. Before anything was accomplished, Aderholt was transferred to Clark AFB in 1966. He then became commander of the 56 ACW, NKP, Thailand in 1967.



Hurlburt Field main gate and Bomark Missile Squadron to the right. Note the Air Park had not been created yet. (Photo from ACA archives)

- When Gen Aderholt returned in 1968 to AFSOF at Eglin AFB, he decided it was time to establish the ACA. He got a team together to make it happen that included Richard Secord, Bill Thomas, Bob Block, Jim Iffland, Hap Lutz, and Dee Roberson.

- In 1969, a 56th ACW (NKP) reunion was held at the Hurlburt Field Officer's Club. This was the predecessor to the ACA annual reunions.

- In 1969, the Hall of Fame (HOF) was formed at AFSOF Headquarters by Gen Robert Cardenas. On 26 Apr 1969, 20 Air Commandos were inducted in a ceremony in a hangar at Hurlburt, followed by a dinner. The inductees' pictures were placed in the AFSOF HQ building at Eglin AFB.

- Jim Iffland and team then accomplished the necessary paperwork to establish the ACA as a 501c (19) Veterans Organization.

- In 1971, the first ACA Board of Directors was formed, headed by Chester Jack, it consisted of: Bill Thomas, Pete Casella, Dick Secord, Bob Cochnauer, Hap Lutz, Carlos Christian, and Al Russell. When the Board met for the first time it decided to start the annual reunions, membership drive, etc.

- Also in 1971, the first newsletter was produced. There were 133 members when the first and second newsletters were published in January and April. Lt Gen Leroy Manor was the speaker at the first ACA reunion in 1971.

- Frank Gorski designed the ACA patch in 1971.

- The Hurlburt Field Air Park was established in 1971.

- 1979, the first donation in the amount of \$115 was received to establish a building fund. Chuck Keeler was tasked by President Geno Valentine to start the process to build an ACA building.

- The ACA scholarship fund was reestablished in 1981.

- 1986, the McCoskrie Threshold Foundation (MTF) was incorporated as 501 c (3) Humanitarian Organization.

- Various ACA offices included private homes, business locations, Hurlburt Club, a rental location, even an office in Gen Harry "Heinie" Aderholt's business location until the ACA building was constructed. The country store operated at the various locations until it was established in the new building.

- The ACA building was dedicated in 1998.

- 2009, the ACA web site [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org) was established.



# Ton Le Chan

Republic of Vietnam

## An Event That Changed My Life

By Roger Newall

It was 8 September 1967, the day that changed my life. It started as a normal 19th Air Commando Squadron (ACS) C-123K Provider airlift-resupply mission—get up, get dressed, pickup our flight gear, pre-flight and then load the aircraft. This day we were taking new Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) troops and their Special Forces (SF) advisors to support the Ton Le Chan SF Camp. The camp was about 47 miles NNW of Saigon's Tan Son Nhut AB, making it very close to the Cambodian border area known as the "Fish Hook." After loading 35 CIDG soldiers, 3 SF advisors and their gear,

uneventful landing into the dark narrow area.

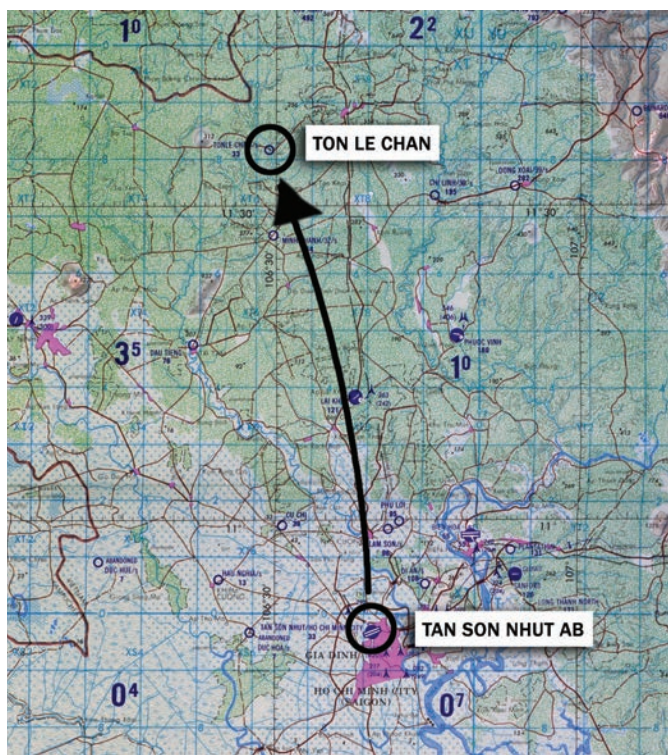
We rolled out and as we started to turn the aircraft around to taxi back to the approach end of the strip to unload the troops, there was a series off loud noises of the right side of



The Ton Le Chan landing zone. (Photo courtesy of Roger Newall)

the plane. I looked out the cargo cabin door window and the ground was going vertical and horizontal at the same time. One of the flight engineers opened the top hatch for normal ground taxiing operations and said "What the hell is this?" to which the pilot, Capt Jimmy Williams, answered, "Those are mortars and we are getting the hell out of here."

While the pilots and engineers had their hands full up front, in the cargo area, I needed to get our passengers under control. They were not used to being attacked in a very small area which was roughly 12' x 24' foot cargo compartment. There was shrapnel coming through the aircraft, with some pieces finding new homes, including in me. My first task was to assess the situation and then to get the troops back on the pallets to allow the plane to take off. This was a very hazardous situation, and creating an immediate controlled environment to allow the pilots to make a safe takeoff was my primary concern. This would have been impossible with the panicked troops and gear moving around uncontrolled within the cargo area and changing the center of gravity balance of the aircraft. If the troops moved forward the plane would have been too nose heavy to take off. If they moved to the rear on to the cargo ramp, the plane could have sat on its tail and would not fly very well.



TPC chart. (Map courtesy of Roger Newall)

on two 10' x 10' cargo pallets, our flight crew: pilot, co-pilot, two flight engineers and myself, the loadmaster, tookoff for a short one-hour flight. It was sunny, warm, and clear—a great day to fly. The Ton Le Chan landing zone (LZ) was about 2,000 feet long and 75 to 100 feet wide, not a lot of playroom for mistakes. On approach to the LZ, I was able to take a picture of where we were going to land. It was a standard dirt road, widened to make it a small airstrip when needed. We made an



When we landed back at Tan San Nhut, we unloaded the CIDG troops, who were very willing to get off the aircraft. We cleaned the cargo area out with a high-pressure hose and looked at the holes from the mortar shrapnel. We were all saying thanks to each other, when the engineer commented that my pants were wet—not that kind of wet. They took me to the 377th Medical Hospital on base to get checked out. I had sustained a shrapnel wound to my lower abdomen, but not grave enough to have me stay there. So, after getting fixed up, we went back to 19th ACS to check in.



**C-123K right wing with holes from the mortar barrage at Ton Le Chan.** (Photo courtesy of Roger Newall)

On a side note, the CIDG troops were taken back to Ton Le Chan that afternoon without any further problems.

Later that evening, as the crew unwound with a beer or many, our operations officer came to join and check up on us. He asked how I was feeling after being treated. I said I was “FEELING GREAT, READY TO GO.” The beer had nothing to do with this statement. He said good, you will be back in the air shortly. Which I was a day later, so much for “crew rest.”

A *Stars & Stripes-Pacific* article published a month later described the events of our flight:

He was making his turn-around to taxi down the runway when the first mortar shell went off 10 yds from the right wing of the aircraft. It was followed by another in front of the aircraft. After the second round went off, we were surrounded by mortar fire.

The Special Forces soldier, who had gone to the other end of the runway to meet the aircraft, said later that he had given the plane and crew up – he knew they had been destroyed, and then he heard a loud roar and out of the smoke came the C-123 down the runway and rose into the air. After the attack, he went down to the runway and there were craters right where the aircraft had been.

Charlie (US nickname for Viet Cong) must have been zeroed in on the field and was just waiting for an

aircraft to land – but thank God, he was a bad shot and his ammunition couldn’t keep up with us, Capt Williams said later.

A survey of the damage showed that the aircraft had taken over 180 hits from the estimated 15 rounds of 60mm mortar ammunition.

As the Provider raced down the runway, with approximately 2,000 feet of runway left, the pilots made a quick pre-flight inspection of his flaps, landing gear, and etc. (With only the two piston engines available) they approached the end of the runway when the aircraft lifted off. At 100 feet of altitude, the right jet auxiliary engine started and at 1,000’ the left jet started to work allowing the plane to climb out of danger.

In a ceremony later that Fall, the crew: Capt Jimmy Williams, pilot; Capt Gustavo Arellano, co-pilot; SSgt John Batista, flight engineer instructor; MSgt. James Cook, flight engineer; and I, A1C Roger Newall, loadmaster, were awarded Distinguish Flying Crosses for actions on 8 September 1967. I also received the Purple Heart medal.

Over my tour, this was not the last time I was on the receiving end of “Greetings from Charlie.” Interesting note on the day of this mission, I had been in country for 30 days and was 5 days from finishing my second year in the USAF.

During my year in Vietnam, August 1967 to August 1968, I flew 1,165 sorties accumulating 820

combat hours and “All the fun we could have.” From this event and the time I served in combat, I learned how quickly life could be snatched from you and the importance of knowing your job so well that when the time comes, you react with your skills and knowledge not having to stop and ask, “what do I do now?”



**Author was awarded the DFC and Purple Heart medal.** (Photo courtesy of Roger Newall)



*About the Author: Roger Newall served seven years in the Air Force, evenly split between active duty and ready reserve before leaving as a technical sergeant. During that time, he was a flight evaluator and instructor loadmaster on the C-124C, C-123K, and AC-47D gunships with 2,300 flight hours and 1,180 combat sorties. While in the Air Force Reserve, he completed a Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in Physical Education for Handicapped. After teaching, he worked as a professional ski patroller, IT systems manager and veterans liaison for the Mayor’s Office, City of Albuquerque, NM. He is a member of several veteran organizations and a “Team Kirtland Wingman”, at Kirtland AFB, NM, a very select appointment. Currently, he is retired and deeply involved with helping our veterans.*





# AIR COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

## Anytime Flight Members

Anne (Mrs. Harry C. "Heinie") Aderholt

The Alsid Family

Jody Amerson

Augie Archer

Susan Ault-Davis

Dennis and Pat Barnett

Juan Bazan

Greg J. Bentley

Norm Bild

Hobart Ray Bower

Thomas Bradley

Robert L. Brenci

James D. Brickell

Bud Britain

Norm Brozenick Jr.

Heather L. Bueter

Mike Burton and Donna Young

Herbert "Mac" McComb Busby

Maile McCoskrie Busby

Michael B. Byers

Rick Carroll

Brenda Cartier

Bobby L. Clark

Stephen Clark

Dave and Floreen Clark

Travis Clovis

Steve Connelly

Jim Connors

Philip J. Conran

J R Cooper

Rory C. Crews

Gary E. Crowther

Rick W. Crutchfield

Erik and Mary Davis

Craig Dock

John Easley

Christopher Foltz

Max M. Friedauer

Anna Garcia-Lucas

Arthur and Mrs. Gordon

Tom G. Green

Al Greenup

Dave and Rachel Halvorson

Paul and Ede Harmon

Chris Harriman

Paul Hastert

Rich Heagwood

Gary "Gunz" Heinz

Daniel Henkel

Eddie M. Howard

James Humphrey

Jimmy and Jacque Ifland

Richard P. Ivey

The Kersh Family

John Krause

Chris Lauderdale, 7 SOS

Micah and Eddie Lombera

O.G. Mannon

Andrew and Monica Maresh

Andrew Martin

Rodney Martin

James "Bob" McConnell

John H. McCoskrie

Clay T. McCutchan

Bob and Barrie Meller

In Memory of Jockey 14, Wrath 11,

Spirit 03, and Eagle

Kenneth Moerscher

Charles Mohrmann

Larry Moore

Janice M. Morrow

Larry and Lida Munz

Rick and Kathy Newton

Wayne Norrad

Randy O'Boyle

Albert Olsen Jr.

Frank B. Orr Jr.

Bill and Kathy Phillips

Destry Rogers

Bill Rone

Felix "Sam" Sambogna

Janice Sanborn

Scott and Kathi Schafer

Suzie and Norty Schwartz

James Slife

Charles Smith

Russell Tharp

Hollis Tompkins

Dan and Barbara Turney

Donny and Ronda Wurster

*\*Some members chose to remain anonymous.*

### Are you willing to step up to a new membership level – the ANYTIME FLIGHT?

To date we've relied on traditional membership dues and corporate partner sponsorships to fund staffing, facilities, and operational costs. We've now identified and validated several additional requirements. The headquarters building roof needs repairs, the HVAC (heating and cooling) system needs to be replaced, decade-old computers and printers need upgrading, and the list goes on. Bottom line, the cost of doing business has grown to almost \$250K a year.

"ANYTIME FLIGHT" is a teaming opportunity to raise

funds for mission needs. The goal is for members to pledge \$600 over a 3-year period. You can submit your contribution by monthly payments (\$20 a month), three annual installments of \$200, or \$600 lump sum -- cash, check or credit card. When members make a pledge to contribute \$600 and make their first installment, we'll add their name to the "ANYTIME FLIGHT" roster. We'll recognize contributors via our website and in the Air Commando Journal.

*If you haven't heard of the ANYTIME FLIGHT we probably do not have your email address on file. Please send it to us at [info@aircommando.org](mailto:info@aircommando.org). We will ensure you will be included in all the ANYTIME FLIGHT information.*

**For more information visit [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org) or call the ACA at 850-581-0099 Monday-Friday, 9am-4pm**



# The 39th Anniversary of Operation EAGLE CLAW

## *Reflections from Arlington National Cemetery*

By Tom "Doc" Livingston, Col, USAF (Ret)

The bugler's last note of taps sounded and the four men dropped their salute and moved together in formation back to the launch point for presenting the wreath to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Solemnly they shook each other's hands, passed along best wishes, and vowed to be here again next year. An RH-53 crew member approached me with brimming eyes and said earnestly, "Thanks to your group for doing this."

Every year on 25 April, the John R. Alison Chapter of the Air Commando Association ("the DC Chapter") conducts a memorial ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. This annual memorial ceremony was previously conducted by the charity group No Greater Love. When their sponsorship ended the DC Chapter took on the event. Some call the 1980 hostage rescue mission in Iran RICE BOWL, some call it DESERT ONE, and some call it EAGLE CLAW. Regardless, the intent and gravity of the moment is the same. The anniversary is a time to reflect on those who paid the ultimate price during the mission and appreciate what the Holloway Commission report noted, "... the American Servicemen who participated in this mission—commanders, planners, crewmen, or troopers—(who) deserved to have a successful outcome. It was the ability, dedication, and enthusiasm of these individuals which made what everyone thought was impossible into something that should have been—and came close to being—a success."

IN HONOR OF MEMBERS OF THE  
UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES WHO  
DIED DURING AN ATTEMPT TO RESCUE  
AMERICAN HOSTAGES HELD IN IRAN  
25 APRIL 1980

★ U.S. MARINE CORPS ★

JOHN D HARVEY, SGT 22 MAY 1958  
GEORGE N HOLMES JR, CPL 20 JULY 1937

DEWEY L JOHNSON, SGT 19 MAY 1948

★ U.S. AIR FORCE ★

RICHARD L FAYNE, MAJ 12 MAY 1948  
HAROLD E LEWIS JR, MAJ 26 FEBRUARY 1945

JOEL C MAND, TSG 26 OCTOBER 1948

LYN D MINTOSH, MAJ 11 OCTOBER 1948  
CHARLES T MCILLIAN, CAPT 4 OCTOBER 1951



As a young captain entering the AFSOC community decades ago, I attended the Introduction to Special Operations Course at the USAF Special Operations School. Over the span of two days, a couple of grizzled retired colonels, Jim Kyle and John “Coach” Carney, gave us their recounting of the planning, execution, and outcome of that ill-fated mission. I also had the privilege of having the likes of EAGLE CLAW crewmen Russ Tharp and Sam Galloway as instructors for Talon II mission qualification. With the right amount of prodding, they would recall their memories of the mission. I also did two assignments with the 1st SOS in Okinawa whose unit patch included the squadron motto, “With the Guts to Try.” Every Stray Goose knew the genesis behind that mantra. And so, as a matter of habit, in the weeks and days leading up to our annual memorial ceremony, I make it a point to refer back to Kyle and Carney’s books, *The Guts to Try*, and *No Room For Error*, to get myself in the right state of mind, to appreciate the gravity of that seminal event, and to reflect on the heroism associated with it. Any Air Commando worth his wings will have read these books, along with Col (Ret) Jerry Thigpen’s Eagle Claw section in *The Praetorian Starship*.

As a member of the ACA’s DC Chapter, I’ve been in on the planning and coordination for this event for the last five years. Our memorial is unique in several ways. Foremost is the fact that it’s conducted at Arlington National Cemetery. There is an all encompassing solemnity one experiences walking up the hill to the Iran Hostage Rescue Memorial. All around you are the nation’s heroes. All of us have comrades laid to rest on these grounds. The rescue mission monument is positioned between the memorials for the space shuttles *Challenger* and *Columbia*. Often a tour group from younger generations will come to see those and subsequently get a history lesson about EAGLE CLAW.

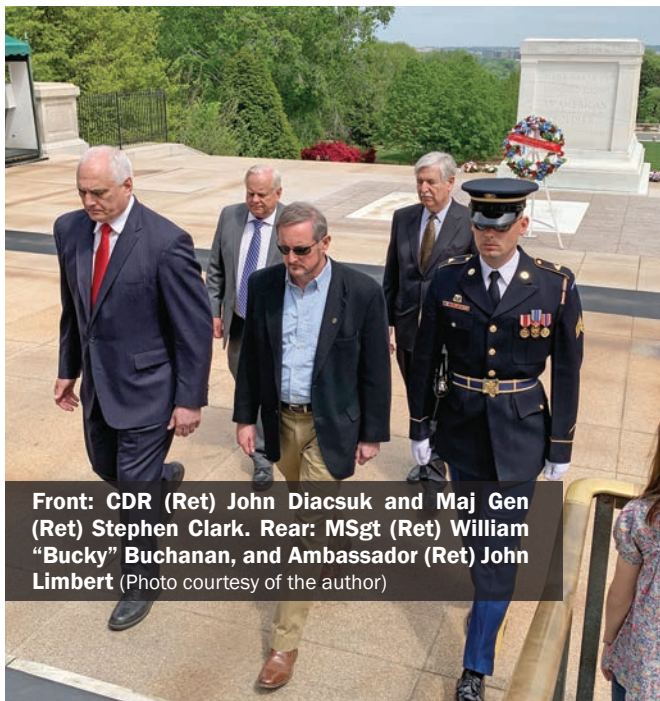
Our ACA ceremony is held in an open-air forum not far from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and visitors looking for that site stand in the rear of our venue and take in the proceedings. Though it is a somber moment, I’m glad the communal setting creates a shared awareness for this public crowd. The ceremony is always attended by a contingent of the RH-53 crews and some Army Special Forces veterans. Whereas ceremonies at Hurlburt Field and USSOCOM HQ are attended by mission survivors near monuments or in air parks, it’s worth reflecting that these men are standing just a few feet away from the grave of the men of EC-130E “Republic 04.”

The ceremony is a rain or shine event. There have been wonderful sunny days, blowing rainy days, and even a memorial conducted as the snow was coming down. In an effort to get uniformed attendance, we make a point of inviting the active duty Air Commandos assigned to the Pentagon to attend the ceremony. Yet, it’s tough for them to reach escape velocity from that sucking black hole. In conversation with an O6 friend he lamented there was a meeting he just couldn’t miss. “There will always be meeting in the Pentagon,” I said, “miss it and honor these men.” Nevertheless, there is a great sense of appreciation by the survivors when they see active duty in the audience.

Planning for this year’s memorial took a different

approach. By way of some Air Commando Association interaction we contacted a network of surviving hostages, their spouses, and their families. Discovering this hostage network led me to read Mark Bowman’s book, *Guests of the Ayatollah*. It brought to my mind a whole new perspective of the seizure of the American embassy and the perception of the rescue mission attempt as seen through the eyes of the hostages. Bowman’s book is not a good study for those looking to dissect the military planning. The military narrative is very Beckwith and Delta Force centric with perfunctory attention given to the men, mission, and machines that made up the air component. Nevertheless, Bowman’s recounting of the storming of the embassy and subsequent seizure of the hostages is very insightful. An Airman would do well to read this and wonder if their training at SERE would have prepared them for the interrogation, beatings, isolation, and degradation that these hostages suffered.

One hostage I met told me he still couldn’t bring himself to talk about it. It is all still very real. In another case, the son of former hostage Col Thomas Schaefer (USAF) told me how, when his father passed away in 2016, he was buried at his family’s request near the Iran Rescue Mission Memorial at Arlington to honor the men who lost their lives attempting to rescue him and his colleagues.



**Front: CDR (Ret) John Diacsuk and Maj Gen (Ret) Stephen Clark. Rear: MSgt (Ret) William “Bucky” Buchanan, and Ambassador (Ret) John Limbert** (Photo courtesy of the author)

We’ve been lucky to have had several notable speakers at our memorial including former US Ambassador to Iran and hostage Bruce Laingen, USSOCOM commanders, AFSOC commanders, and mission veterans such as Wade Ishimoto and JQ Roberts. This year we had Lt Gen (Ret) Tom Trask, former USSOCOM Vice Commander, and Ambassador (Ret) John Limbert as speakers. Ambassador Limbert is one of the central figures in Bowman’s book. Rather than try and summarize his words, they are provided on the following page.



## Ambassador John Limbert's Comments

### EAGLE CLAW COMMEMORATION

25 APRIL 2019

Good afternoon, dear friends. Thank you so much for being here.

Let me first recognize Steve Kirtley, one of my fellow hostages from Tehran. Mr. Kirtley and his group of Marine Guards saved our lives on that terrible day. Thanks to their discipline and training, I am able to speak here today.

Today we recall tragedy, honor, courage and self-sacrifice.

But thirty nine years ago I and my Tehran Embassy colleagues were not in a good place. What had begun on November 4, 1979 as a 70s-style student sit-in had become an international melodrama that would eventually ruin a beautiful

country, destroy an American presidency, and – tragically – end the lives of the eight brave men we remember today.

Looking back at those days, for us and our families things were very bleak. We had been in captivity for over five months, and could see no prospect of freedom. In late February and early March, a United

Nations plan for our release had fallen apart. From our cells we could hear crowds demonstrating in front of the embassy on Taleghani Street, and they were becoming more and more hysterical.

We had no access to news from anywhere, but it was obvious we weren't leaving soon. I had received a package from home, including some books. They were "War and Peace", "The Brothers Karamazov," and "Middlemarch". Average length 1000 pages. That package told me, "You're not going anywhere for a while. You will have plenty of time to read all these."

In late April, about two weeks after visits from Swiss International Red Cross delegates and from Ali Khamene'i, the then supreme leader of Iran, one evening we were told suddenly, "Pack your things. You're moving. Be prepared for a long trip." No mention of where or why.

We were handcuffed, blindfolded, and shoved into cars. The late Col Lee Holland—Jumper, as we called him—later told me, "I didn't mind anything else they did to me. They pushed me around, yelled at me, and threatened me – none of that bothered me at all. What really got to me was being handcuffed and blindfolded in the back of what I knew was my own car. The bastards had stolen it and were now using it to drive me around."

A few days later I was in a house in Isfahan and had a chance to shower. In the shower our guards had lined a shelf

with newspapers to keep it dry. For us newspapers of any kind were a prize bit of contraband. I stuck the paper inside my pants and read it when I was back in my room.

The bones of the story were there. There had been a military rescue mission. It had ended somewhere in Iran's central desert. Americans had been killed and injured. That's all I knew, but it was a revelation. I was in solitary at the time, but shared the story with whomever I could communicate.

With all the hurt of loss and failure, it was—in its own manner—the first good news to come our way in a very long time. Now we knew that, despite the efforts of our captors to convince us that no one cared, our compatriots had not forgotten or abandoned us. We knew that they were willing to put their lives on the line in a longshot attempt to rescue us. I cannot begin to describe both how sad and proud I was at that moment.

Just how brave those men were came home to me about 15 years later when the mission members invited me to a reunion at Ft. Bragg. There I learned—for the first time—the details of their plan. Hearing what they were expected to do, I was amazed at their courage. I asked Wade Ishimoto, one of the



**Ambassador John Limbert**  
(Photo courtesy of the author)



**Col (Ret) Ed Seiffert, MAJ (Ret) Steve Kirtley,  
CPT (Ret) Wade Ishimoto, Ambassador (Ret)  
John Limbert.** (Photo courtesy of the author)

Army on the mission, "Did you realize how hard it was going to be?" Ish answered simply, "We expected that many of us would die."

Those of you who went—and the eight of you we remember today who did not return—will always have our admiration and gratitude. I share the sentiment of the British contingent on Masirah Island who said on your return simply, "You had the guts to try."

To paraphrase President John F. Kennedy, you went "because it was hard." And you went because you were willing to risk everything to help your fellow Americans in trouble.

Here in this beautiful place, we find thousands of testimonials to the fact that freedom can have a heavy cost. So

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please let me end by quoting the words of Ambassador Bruce Laingen, our Chief of Mission in Tehran.

“While no day hurts more than the day when these brave men lost their lives in an attempt to reach us, no day makes us more proud, because of the way in which they stood for the cause of human freedom. For that all of us former hostages—and our families—will forever be grateful.”

I wish Bruce Laingen could be here with us today.

Finally, may the souls of these eight men be blessed and may we always remember their sacrifice and devotion. Thanks to all of you for coming here today to share these proud memories.

Following Ambassador Limbert’s words, Master of ceremonies MGySgt (Ret) John Sigman, mission survivor, called the roll of the names of the eight fallen comrades. As each name was read, a bell tolled, and a single yellow rose was laid for each.



*About the Author: Col (Ret) Tom “Doc” Livingston is the president of the John R Alison Chapter of the Air Commando Association. He is a former Talon II Navigator and 1st Special Operations Squadron Commander.*

*Editor’s note: The 40th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony of Operation EAGLE CLAW will be held by the John R. Alison Chapter of the Air Commando Association on 25 April 2020 at 1200, Arlington National Cemetery. All Air Commandos are invited and encouraged to come and honor the sacrifices made that day.*

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# Reflections on the What Happened After EAGLE CLAW

By O.G. Mannon, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)

The recent anniversary of DESERT ONE caused me to reflect on actions taken by Air Force leaders attempting an immediate mediation of "first look" issues. Additional measures were fully expected upon Holloway Report completion. The Holloway Report identified numerous failures in the entire event chain leading to the debacle. It also directed the stand up of a specialized joint force headquarters with lower echelon operators from all services except the Marines and Coast Guard (Marine Special Operations Command is now a full partner).

The report also included guidance on methods of air transportation and aircraft capabilities. Military Airlift Command (MAC) was already tasked to provide strategic and tactical airlift. They addressed this challenge by tasking the C-130 community at Pope AFB with tactical responsibilities and Charleston AFB based C-141s with the strategic lift portion. As one might expect, air mobility capabilities at the time did not include the required aircraft nor aircrew skill sets. Special Operations Low Level I (SOLL 1) and later Special Operations Low Level II (SOLL 2) were created to fill the airlift gaps until all the other tactical airlift requirements directed as a result of the Holloway Report could be developed and fielded.

MAC established a special operations office providing oversight and direct air-lift coordination with the primary users. This office directed new training standards while funding the modification of the six newest Pope AFB C-130s. We started training flights at 500 feet AGL modified contour. Initially, crews were all evaluator qualified, but this requirement transitioned quickly to first instructor, then highly experienced aircraft commanders. As demand for this capability grew rapidly, the specially trained aircrew requirement exploded.

As those of us who were young guys then and are now old retired guys, look back, we did not have the same risk assessment in place as we do now. We were fortunate we did not lose aircraft and aircrews, but the training proved difficult enough to give proficiency in night low level. We started out with AN/PVS-5, night vision goggles. Looking through these tubes was like placing toilet paper tubes up to your eyes and flying close to the ground. Clarity improved with the arrival of ANVIS-6s, then ANVIS-9s arrived, giving better clarity still, and some actual definition of objects in the front 40 degree cone. Then, the first really effective

goggle, 4949s, arrived and we thought night low-level capability had finally arrived!

Of course, risks were mitigated as much as possible through crew procedures and frequency of training flights. There were many weeks when I flew only night low-level missions and approaches. In addition, we always flew with two loadmasters, a safety pilot, radar navigator and map navigator. It was almost normal to have an extra pilot on board helping with overall crew coordination and providing another set of eyes for clearing.

In retrospect, MAC leadership leaned forward providing a stopgap capability for the primary user, proving successful in several combat operations. These were exciting times for a young pilot and made all of us resolute to provide professional airlift to our joint users. We were successfully providing needed combat capability to our nation and the joint special operations community. I think it is safe to say we built a trust that continues today with our very specialized users and the national leadership. May God bless this wonderful country and the warriors serving in harm's way!



*About the Author: Maj Gen (Ret) O.G. Mannon is a command pilot with over 3,400 hours flying 7 types of aircraft. During his 20 years as an Air Commando, he commanded the 352d SOG and 1st SOW, and was the Vice Commander, AF Special Operations Command. He served in multiple joint staff positions and retired in November 2014 with over 34 years of service.*

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# OPERATION DESERT STORM



## SCUD HUNTING

WITH  
COMBAT CONTROLLER  
BRUCE BARRY

**B Squadron in Ar'ar with Bruce Barry standing at left in foreground.** (Photo courtesy of Dan Schilling)

*By Dan Schilling, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)*

Bruce Barry was exhausted, and the Combat Controller's mission hadn't even officially started. He'd been up for nearly three days packing and planning with his 20-man Delta Force team and was now crammed in the back of one of the Army's Task Force-160 MH-47 helicopters along with four Delta Force B Squadron troopers, including their Sergeant Major, a man known as "Taco." The date was 20 February 1991, and it was Bruce's first mission of Operation DESERT STORM.

In the dark, slicing through Iraqi airspace was the perfect opportunity for the 25-year-old Iowa native to catch some rack time. Only, as they flew towards their insertion point in the western Iraq desert adjacent to the Syrian border, they were

already under fire. The flight of four helicopters, three 160th MH-47s and an MH-53 Pave Low from the 20th Special Operations Squadron guiding the entire package across the wastelands, were jinking and diving to avoid the onslaught. Each helicopter had an almost identical payload, five Delta operators and a German-manufactured, six-wheeled Pinzgauer long range patrol vehicle stuffed with enough food, water, fuel, and ammunition to support their planned two-week mission: sneak behind enemy lines in advance of the pending ground war, find Saddam Hussein's SCUD missile launchers and destroy as many as possible.

The SCUDs were the greatest threat to President George



H.W. Bush's international alliance. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and the predictable American-led international response manifested itself shortly thereafter, US troops began deploying to Saudi Arabia. In the new year the Iraqi dictator began firing SCUDs into Israel in the hope that their entry into the fray would shatter the coalition. He'd taken the prudent measure of dispersing them in the western desert in an area that came to be called SCUD Alley.

Shortly after the first launch, the British Special Air Service had begun trolling the desert with little in the way of results, forcing the Coalition Forces commander, US Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, to reluctantly bring the Joint Special Operations Command into the picture in the hopes that somehow it could begin finding the "needles in the sand-strewn haystack." On 28 January 1991, JSOC deployed a 400-man task force to Ar'ar, a tiny Saudi airport along the western Iraqi border. By 6 February, Delta had inserted its first long range patrol, to include an embedded Combat Controller from the 24th Special Tactics Squadron (STS) named Mike Snyder.

Two weeks later, it was Bruce's turn, and despite the exhaustion, he was now fully awake as anti-aircraft and small arms fire arced across the night sky around the Americans. The four helicopters passed through the gauntlet remarkably unmolested. In the remote desert, the helicopters set down in a self-induced sandstorm and waited as the men drove the vehicles off the ramps and into the desert in a frenzy of well-rehearsed activity. When the trucks were safely on the sand and their heavy weapons were operational, the unburdened aircraft leapt into the dark for the return flight to friendly lines.

It was after midnight on 20 February, and as the four vehicles moved off toward a hide site to wait out the coming day, a depleted Bruce fell into a black sleep, stuffed into the middle of the open vehicle. To ward against the cold, he was hunched down inside his "goat coat", locally procured heavy goat skin calf-length jacket. Ubiquitous among goat herders and Bedouins, they were perfect in the event the men were forced to E&E (escape and evade) on foot. Bruce recalls, "They reeked. When we first got them you almost couldn't stand to wear them. But once we got on the ground, I never took it off."

Bruce Barry was an unlikely CCT. Raised among six boys in an Iowa Irish Catholic family, he'd entered the military under court edict: join or go to jail. In the fall of 1985, he'd taken a car and crashed it into a house before dumping the evidence in the Mississippi River. Not surprisingly, the teenager got caught. The choice between 30 days in the hole accompanied by a felony conviction or military service was an easy one. A recruiter told him to select CCT. "What is it?" asked the almost felon from Dubuque. "It's like air traffic control, but outdoors."

At basic training, to his surprise, his orders listed not only airborne school, but combat diver school and a handful of other schools. When he arrived at his first school, air traffic control, he announced to his CCT sergeant, "You've got the wrong guy. I've never even been in a plane." But he was the right guy. He graduated and spent one tour in Germany before applying

to the 24th STS. Now he was in the Iraqi desert with the best special operators in the world—hunting the current number one threat to world stability.

The Pinzgauers stopped abruptly waking him up. In the distance was a desolate highway with an overpass and the lead Pinzgauer had spotted vehicles parked within the recesses of the overpass. When Bruce put his eyes on "it," he couldn't



**Second night in Iraq behind enemy lines.**  
(Photo courtesy of Dan Schilling)

determine if it was a SCUD TEL (transporter, erector, launcher), but the troop commander wanted it hit. For the SCUD hunting missions, Bruce and the other CCTs with Delta were supposed to have a dedicated pair of A-10s during the day and F-15 Strike Eagles at night, yet nothing was on call when he put in his request via radio. Instead, he received a diverted flight of two F-111 fighter-bombers, perfect for the team's first strike.

When the F-111s arrived, Bruce found he couldn't understand them through their oxygen masks, but managed to get the target relayed, until he heard them clearly state they had the laser target spot, concluding the transmission with, "We're in from the east." Shit! Bruce and his Delta teammates were west of the target, which meant the aircraft weren't seeing the laser energy reflecting off the target, but the energy source itself.

"Abort! Abort! Abort!" Bruce's calm but urgent relay crackled over the air. All Coalition aircraft were limited to strikes from above 10,000-feet, called the hard deck, to reduce the chances of aircraft loss to anti-aircraft fire and SAMs. This made it difficult for both pilots and Controllers to identify or even see one another. He called them in again, this time from the west and their bombs went straight under the overpass, setting off explosions and a huge fireball as detonations shot out the other side. They didn't dare investigate and drove on toward morning. When they stopped for the day in a low wadi (dry stream bed) the men slept, keeping only a three-man observation post for safety.

Bruce was taking his turn sleeping when he was awakened by the sound of bells. He opened his eyes and was greeted by an odd sight, a herd of goats sauntering across the open desert

directly toward their hide site, with a tiny, weather-beaten 85-year-old Bedouin on a burro following sleepily behind. When he was nearly upon them, Bruce and two Delta troopers flipped up their camouflage net, weapons drawn, and startled the ancient goat herder so thoroughly the man fell off his burro, which, along with the goats kept walking. “We took him into the hide site, he’s on his knees, ten Delta dudes standing around him with weapons pointed at him while his goats walk off in the distance. It was a bit comical.”

They decided they had to let him go and find another hide site, taking their chances with a dicey daylight movement. But before they moved out, the troop commander wanted Bruce to hit a power station they could see. He called in two A-10s that were supposed to be flying CAP (combat air patrol) for SCUD hunting, who proceeded to miss the target three times. The hard deck continued to make it difficult for the pilots to identify targets in the endless desert. That didn’t stop the Delta operators from expressing their opinions to Bruce. “The Delta guys would give me shit every time the Air Force missed.”

Power station still intact, the Pinzgauers moved out onto a flat desert plain. In the featureless expanse, Bruce was the only one with a GPS or the knowledge to utilize it. Primitive and monstrous by today’s standards, his Texas Instruments handheld device was the size of a small ammo can and only provided coordinates in latitude and longitude. As a result, “I was the only one who ever knew where we were. The Delta guys couldn’t do lat/long anyway.” Whenever the team stopped in the desert, the need to determine their location was a top priority. So, “Ten guys are standing around me while I’m on the ground with my JOG [map], figuring it out.”

At their next stop, Bruce, who’d yet to really get any sleep

finally dropped off. Moments later he was roused by Taco, the troop Sergeant Major. “Something’s coming,” he stated simply. Trying to come fully awake, Bruce joined his troopers who were passing a couple of binoculars back and forth. When Bruce got his turn, he saw a bus and some Toyota land cruisers, perhaps four miles off in the distance.

“We’re standing in a line, looking at these guys. And through the scope I can see these guys doing the same f-ing thing we were, passing their binos down the line. It was comical. Well, now, but at the time it wasn’t good.”

The next thing Bruce and Delta knew, the Iraqis piled into their vehicles and started for them. The men hastily threw their equipment into the Pinzgauers and made a desperate run for it. “We’re going maybe 40 miles per hour, bouncing all over the place, trailing huge dust clouds.” The slow-paced running standoff continued throughout the morning until the bus appeared from the dust cloud, no more than 100 yards away. Bruce, in the trail vehicle, watched as, “The Iraqis began rolling down the windows, like little kids on a school bus, trying to get their windows down, and start shooting at us.”

Bruce lifted his weapon and had managed to fire a few rounds at the enemy when the .50 cal machine gun mounted on his vehicle opened up. Taco, amidst the now close quarter running gun battle, calmly says to Bruce over the din, “Hey man, you better start doing some of that Air Force shit.”

Right, he thinks, and tried calling JSOC but the radio equipment available at the time didn’t allow him to reach them on the fly. So, he tried calling the daily A-10s but couldn’t get them either. While he’s talking, he watched, mesmerized, as his .50 cal gunner trains his sights on a pickup truck and starts knocking Iraqis out of the back. It was the first time he’d seen



The ACA has become a destination for those who have performed the SOF mission, shared the risks, celebrated the successes and honored the sacrifices of our fallen teammates. ACA maintains the history, the culture, the friendships and professional associations essential to sustaining the capability in the best of and the most trying of times. It operates as a trusted business and offers its members value: associations, education, exchanges and family and wounded warrior support. And, it remains small enough to offer all members a family-friendly venue through which alumni, those currently serving and those who will serve share the excitement and promise of the special operations warrior discipline.

-- NORTON A. SCHWARTZ, Gen (Ret) Former USAF Chief of Staff

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**Bruce Barry works on the .50 Cal on the Pinzgauer to the right.** (Photo courtesy of Dan Schilling)

men shot in combat and the power of the M-2 machine gun was stunning as it literally punched men out of the back.

Desperate for air, he switched to the “Guard” emergency frequency and began calling the most magic words of the modern battlefield. “Any aircraft, this is Charlie Seven Six (Bruce’s callsign), we are US troops in contact.” Two F-16s respond, miles away and at 25,000 feet. In the back of the bouncing Pinzgauer, under fire, he managed to use his signal mirror to identify his location. This is going to work, he thought. But as the F-16s headed his way the lead pilot stated, “Charlie Seven Six, authenticate Alpha Bravo.” Authentication tables are used by Coalition forces to verify they are not the enemy. But Bruce and Delta had departed friendly lines before these were issued. “Uh, I don’t have authentication tables,” the desperate CCT tells the pilot. There was a pause, and then the pilot, no doubt thinking quickly, came back with, “Who won the Super Bowl?”

“I don’t know, standby.”

In the weeks leading up to his mission, he hadn’t followed anything back home, much less NFL standings. He doesn’t even know who played. “Hey, who won the Super Bowl?” he shouts to his crew and the other Pinzgauers, as they’re exchanging fire with the Iraqis. No one knows. The gunfight is not going to go their way if he doesn’t do something.

“Hey, listen mother\*\*\*\*er, we’re US troops down here. And none of us know who won the f-ing Super Bowl. Are you going to come down here and help us or what?”

The F-16s, convinced of Bruce’s nationality by his string of expletive laden American slang, swooped in. The planes, low on fuel, only managed two runs. Yet it did the trick and in the face of American air power the Iraqis broke off. Later, ensconced in a wadi, they cleaned weapons and checked their vehicles. Remarkably no one had been injured and the vehicles were all intact.

In the morning, the security on duty tell the others, “We’ve got some weird coloring on the side of those hills in the distance.” It became obvious they’d stumbled onto a heavy concentration of Iraqi military. Bruce called in his A-10s. To his chagrin, “They missed. Again.”

The decision was made to vacate. Low on ammo from their previous gunfight and without resupply it was the prudent course of action. As they moved slowly away from the Iraqi forces huge clods of dirt began flying into the air in front of the lead Pinzgauer, only then did the reports of heavy weapons fire catch up to the men. From under camouflage netting the Iraqis were firing anti-aircraft cannons at them. What Delta and Bruce had actually stumbled onto was a battalion sized force of Russian BTR armored personnel carriers, trucks, and numerous anti-aircraft guns, SAMs and SCUDs, the largest concentration of the war.

As the drivers hit the gas (no sense in masking their position now) Bruce was busy trying to recall the A-10s he’d just used, who immediately returned to assist.

The vehicles pulled into a low spot between some hills with just enough defilade to mask against the cannon fire. As soon as they rolled to a halt Bruce was over the side of the vehicle. “I ran up the hill with my JOG and GPS but left my weapon in the Pinz.” So focused on trying to prevent a repeat of the day before and the targets right in front of him he’d forgotten it. Ten minutes into his next “troops in contact” the lone CCT, suddenly the most important man on the ground of the entire coalition, is surrounded by his troop and the question comes, “What can we do to help?”

“Uh, get my weapon,” replied the distracted Combat Controller. In front of him huge multi-wheeled BTRs were rolling on them. The A-10s swooped in, and Bruce cleared them “hot” as early as possible in their dive, as both planes broke the hard deck knowing they’re the only chance the

isolated men on the ground had. They were ready and committed; this was the mission they'd waited their entire lives to fly in tank killing "Warthogs." The closest BTR took a direct hit and Bruce watched as a giant and heavy-duty wheel flew through the air and landed with a "whump" 50 feet from the stunned men. Every Delta operator behind Bruce cheered. "It was impressive. The entire thing was reduced to a smoking hulk by that single missile."

However, Bruce was too busy to be captivated. He was now on the radio working an overhead AWACS plane, to

#### **Firing on the fly during training near Ar'ar.**

(Photo courtesy of Dan Schilling)



coordinate the complex air situation. Airplanes were being diverted from all over Iraq to this one man, Bruce Barry. Surface to air missiles were spitting from the ground. His radio warnings of "SAM! SAM! SAM!" became common place. Still, the aircraft came.

Finally, the next set of A-10s called a visual sighting on SCUD launchers. Bruce was reaching information overload, talking on his SATCOM as well as airstrike radio, but there wasn't any way to distribute the tasks among his teammates. And because he couldn't provide aircraft a precise location, he resorted to flashing his pocket signal mirror to identify the only friendless for miles in any direction. "I had 23 aircraft stacked from 15,000 to 25,000 feet. I'm writing furiously on the borders of my map, trying to keep them all straight." It became a matter of which planes had how much fuel and types of munitions. He was calling on every bit of his air traffic control expertise to choreograph an airstrike ballet, the planes wheeling and swooping like bomb laden dancers with Bruce Barry in the wings, moving them about the three-dimensional stage. "I was putting them into holding, just like at an airport."

The battle raged for hours, the Iraqis desperately launching everything they had at the swarms of aircraft in the sky and the Allies diverting planes from as far away as the Red Sea. Taco remained at the Controller's side the entire time. Secondary explosions and impacts revealed the devastation wrought by this one man. Eventually, the explosions and targets petered out and the Delta mission commander decided it was time to pull out as well. As they drove off, an exhausted Bruce sank gratefully into his stinking goat coat and slept.

The team stayed out another handful of freezing days,

striking more targets, some of which were likely SCUDs, but finally, with little ammo left the team was pulled from the field. Of the handful of Delta SCUD hunting missions (each with a 24th STS Controller) Bruce Barry's remained the most effective. The total number of SCUDs destroyed by CCT remains classified and the assessment of the missions' impact remains a source of some debate. Barry's patrol confirmed at least two destroyed SCUDs, the aircraft involved many more from their advantageous view of the battlefield. One estimate had the number at 27. But regardless of how many SCUDs were destroyed by JSOC, what is clear was that the number of launches dropped off precipitously during the period of Delta patrols during 6-28 February.

To put this in perspective, there were a total of 30 SCUDs launched by Iraq toward Israel between 17 January and 25 February. However, during the peak of Delta's patrols between 18-28 February, only four launches took place. Israel did not enter the war, despite repeated SCUD impacts within its borders. Israel's Minister of Defense, Moshe Arens, was briefed on a daily basis by US Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney on the efforts of Bruce and the other teams. The sole purpose of JSOC's 400-man task force had been accomplished. It came down to one 20-man patrol. And that patrol came down to one man, a Combat Controller armed not with a gun, but two radios, an antiquated GPS, inadequate map, pocket mirror, and a wooden ruler.

When they landed safely at Ar'ar the 24th STS commander, Lt Col Craig Brotchie was waiting for Bruce as he stepped off the MH-47 ramp. The bear of a man not known for effusive praise, put his arm around the lowest ranking man on any of the Delta missions and told Bruce how proud he was of a job well-done. Bruce recalls, "After our debrief, I slept for three days. They'd wake me up for chow, that was it."

When General Schwarzkopf flew in to congratulate JSOC, Brotchie grabbed the young CCT from his Delta tent to have lunch with the Coalition Forces commander. "He sat me down right next to him. As Brotchie is making the introduction he tells Schwarzkopf that I'm the guy who destroyed the multiple SCUDs and SAMs."

"So, this is the guy who kept Israel out of the war," says the hero of America's DESERT STORM campaign as he regarded another, and unknown, hero of the coalition.

One other thought remains with the now retired Combat Controller, even 28 years after the war. As he lay on the hillside, calling in the most critical airstrikes of the entire war, fatigued, his mental faculties stretched to the breaking point, an epiphany struck him. "All I did was hit a house with a car and then dump it in the Mississippi. And this is where I'm at."

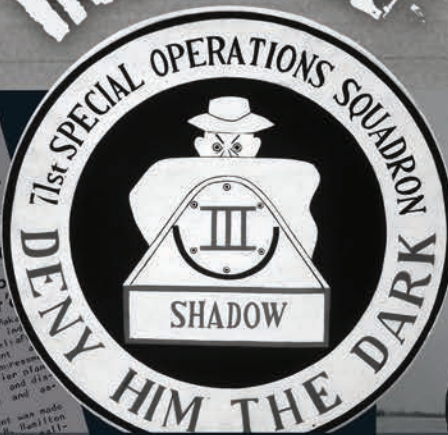
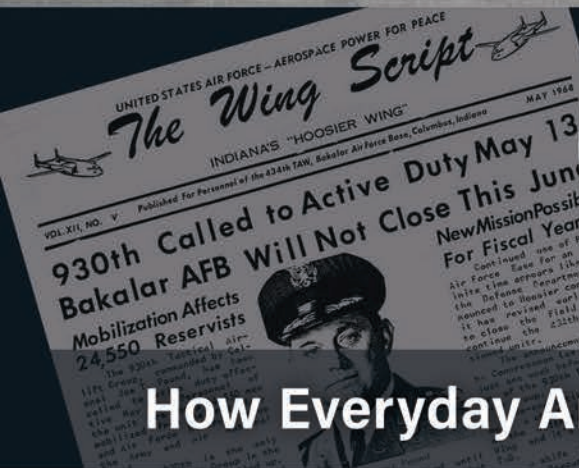


*About the Author: Dan Schilling is a retired 30-year Combat Controller and Special Tactics Officer. His latest book is the New York Times bestseller *Alone at Dawn* which chronicles the heroic actions of Combat Controller and Medal of Honor recipient MSgt John Chapman.*





# EVOLVING INTO THE SHADOWS



## How Everyday Americans Became Air Commandos



*By Lt Col Matt Shrull*

Since reactivation in 2005 as the CV-22 Formal Training Unit, the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) has maintained a close relationship with former members of the 71st SOS who served in Southeast Asia. They graciously invited me, as the incumbent squadron commander, to the 50th anniversary reunion of their homecoming from Vietnam, held at the Columbus Municipal Airport, Columbus, IN, the former Bakalar AFB. The event was organized by Dixie Wall, one of the proud spouses. Attending the reunion gave me the opportunity to learn more about our squadron's heritage and to hear their stories firsthand, many of which I weaved into this tribute. Approximately 150 people attended the homecoming reunion, including 75 of the original 71st SOS Air Commando Reservists.



They were everyday Americans... college students, mere weeks away from a degree, farmers in the middle of planting corn and soybeans, sole breadwinners of families in the American heartland. They were also more...they were the men and women of the Air Force Reserve 434th Tactical Airlift Wing, 930th Tactical Airlift Group, 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS), at Bakalar AFB, IN. On the morning of 11 April 1968, these 300 Airmen received a surprising, unexpected curveball, a 30-day notice to get their affairs in order and to pack up for an unforeseen deployment to Vietnam. One month later, on 13 May 1968, these courageous Airmen reported for duty. A short time after that, the 71st TAS was reflagged as the 71st SOS.

Unbeknownst to the Reservists, their deployment had been initiated the year prior. In 1967, the 7th Air Force in Vietnam had requested extra gunships for base defense. By early 1968, the conflict in Vietnam had escalated drastically as a result of the Tet Offensive and Cold War tensions were escalating in the Pacific because of the capture of the US intelligence vessel, USS *Pueblo*, by North Korean forces. HQ US Air Force selected the C-119 for gunship conversion as the Gunship III project. The Gunship I had produced the AC-47 and Gunship II the AC-130. To expedite the deployment of AC-119Gs into the Southeast Asian theater, the Air Force had decided to convert aircraft and personnel from the Air Force Reserve, specifically the 71st TAS.

The original plan called for the 71st SOS to deploy on 27 July 1968, 10 weeks after being designated a special operations squadron. Re-designating the squadron proved the easiest of many challenges which lay ahead. The Gunship III program faced many problems that delayed the squadron's deployment, an overweight aircraft, poor smoke evacuation air scoops, delayed funding, and delayed/changing decisions between the four involved headquarters, just to name a few. Finally, on 11 October 1968, the Air Force accepted the AC-119G and ordered the 71st SOS to South Vietnam about a month later, on 27 November 1968.

The delays, in fact, served as a blessing. The transition from a pure airlift mission to aerial gunship proved to be a stretch for maintainers and operators alike. With the delay, aircrew members and maintainers had more time to learn gunship technology, combat tactics, and the Air Commando mentality. These aircrew members, familiar with hauling personnel and cargo at altitude, had to learn how to use sophisticated electronic gear in a much more dynamic environment. The novice gunship aircrews trained to fly at low altitude, threading a battlefield

before executing their mission in combat.

The maintainers knew how to maintain a C-119, but learning the complicated gunship systems maintenance with limited spare parts challenged them daily. Amazingly, they maintained an 88 percent aircraft mission-capable rate.

With the AC-119G accepted and ordered to Vietnam, the planners now had to determine the best way to get it there. The maintainers removed all four mini-guns and mounts to save weight and to provide space to install a 500-gallon Benson auxiliary fuel tank in the cargo area. The unpressurized AC-119G required the aircrew to fly at altitudes below 10,000 feet MSL resulting in a circuitous island-hopping route across



the Pacific Ocean. Many aircrew members remembered the anxiety of hoping to see a small island off the nose in the next few moments as the fuel gauges indicated a quickly dwindling reserve. Thankfully, all their navigators successfully steered the aircraft to those postage-stamp islands.

The first squadron aircraft arrived at Nha Trang AB, Vietnam, on 27 December 1968, with all 18 aircraft arriving in theater by 1 March 1969. The 7th Air Force declared the 71st combat-ready on 11 March, following two months of operational flying while conducting the unit combat evaluation. The evaluators concluded the close air support role was the "most effective" for the AC-119G.

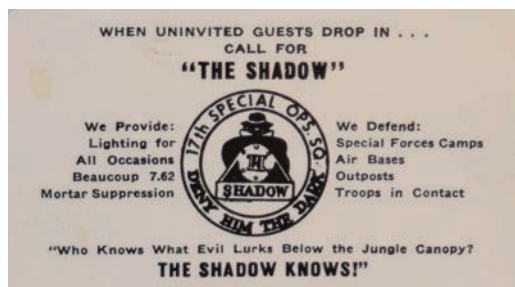
The squadron organized into three flights, each operated from a different location: Phan Rang AB, Tan Son





Nhut AB, and Nha Trang AB, all in Vietnam. Under their watch, the 71st SOS, call sign “Shadow,” defended friendly ground forces in danger of being overrun, secured air bases and outposts from breaches, engaged in search-and-destroy missions for enemy vehicles, and conducted battlefield illumination and mortar suppression operations.

Initially, gunship tactics and capabilities were new to the Soldiers and Marines on the ground. Back then, when US ground forces made a troops-in-contact call they expected a fighter to provide a strafing pass or two to give the ground unit a few moments to reposition. When Soldiers and Marines found out they could have constant, accurate and suppressive fire all at once, they became the Shadow’s biggest fans. The 71st SOS updated the Spooky Calling Card to reflect the Shadow’s battlefield capabilities and distributed the business cards to ground forces around the theater. Their tag line, “... The Shadow Knows,” was a play on the most famous line in a popular comic book, series of novels, and radio mystery series, *The Shadow*.



Jack Ballard, in his book, *Development and Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships 1962-1972* noted that when Shadow gunships joined the AC-47s protecting outposts, Special Forces camps, district towns or other military positions under enemy assault, the Spooky count became the “Spooky/Shadow Count.” The 2 gunship types defended 1,296 friendly positions in the first 3 months of 1969. Not one position fell while the gunships circled above. By December, the Shadows had entirely replaced the Spookies.

Though some missions appeared routine, for example, searching for targets of opportunity, others boiled with fierce intensity. One Air Commando vividly



described a duel between a Shadow and .50 caliber ground sites—the Shadow won. Another vignette shared with me related how a Shadow crew provided airborne illumination while a doctor operated on a badly wounded soldier after the outpost had lost power. One crew saved many lives by calling off a B-52 bombing run in an area brimming with friendly troops. The list of stories these veteran Air Commandos told went on and on. They also remembered the kind words from the ground forces thanking them for saving their buddies.

The normal AC-119 tactics directed the aircrew to fly as low as 500 feet above the ground enroute, then climb to 2,500 – 3,500 feet AGL while firing 2 of the 4 miniguns. This allowed them to rearm and perform maintenance on the other two machine guns. These Air Commandos remember vividly when all four miniguns ‘went hot’ at the same time. The thrill of the fight was evident.

Col Al Heuss related one such story,

One of the most exciting missions I flew occurred in March 1969. Upon arrival at our position near the Cambodian border, we immediately tried to contact Silent 15, a long-range patrol team on the ground. After several attempts at contact, Silent 15 came up on FM radio, but was difficult to understand. The team was being pursued by a hostile force and was on the move. The team took cover

and we located their position. Silent 15 asked us to fire a short gun burst to orient our fire. The burst was within 50 meters of their position. He advised us that the hostiles were within 20 meters of their position. He requested that the burst be moved closer. As the IP on the flight, and the crew being inexperienced, I got into the left seat and continued the mission as the aircraft commander. Silent 15 moved again and after re-establishing their position, I continued firing and moving closer and closer to Silent 15. The fire was effective for an hour or so, but then he asked for more fire and announced the he needed bursts within 15 meters and then down to 5 meters. We were able to protect Silent 15 until the hostiles broke off the pursuit and Silent 15 was able to set up a protective perimeter. We left the area at first light with a hearty “thank you” from Silent 15.

Over 50 years after this battle, the pilot clearly remembers the stress of putting rounds exactly where needed knowing that one bump of the yoke would have killed friendlies on the ground. He also remembers the pride as they successfully saved their fellow Americans.

The guys also got emotional as they talked about their feelings after saving lives on the ground. One memorable exchange in particular, ended with the ground unit, Hotel 4 Bravo, saying, “Thank you much...you made DEROS





(return date from overseas assignment) possible.” Those seven simple words, packed with meaning, comprise the essence of the Shadow mission, and numerous ground parties made similar utterances on many different engagements.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the love and support waiting for these men back home. Spouses in the 1960s didn’t have easy email, internet, or video connectivity. They closed ranks and

in on each other, and managing their lives stateside. They too, sacrificed for the country, and are just as integral to this story as the Air Force members, just as our spouses are today.

Fifty years puts a lot of miles on one’s body. Canes and walkers abounded during the reunion, and many grasp arms for support and lean in to hear the stories. But the camaraderie is ever present—they came through this trial by fire together.

The 71st TAS/SOS was the only Air Force Reserve unit activated to fly combat missions in Vietnam. After six months of constant combat operations, the Air Commandos of the 71st SOS left a legacy of zero unit fatalities, zero aircraft crashes, 1,206 missions, 6,251 combat hours, 14 million rounds of 7.62mm fired, 10,281 flares dropped; 682 enemy troops killed with 1,104 probables, and 43 vehicles destroyed with 8 probables.

The 71st SOS developed sound techniques and procedures on AC-119G employment in support of troops on the ground and rained punishing firepower on the enemy. As their time in Vietnam drew to an end, they began training the Airmen of the active duty 17th SOS. The 17th SOS absorbed about two-thirds of the 71st personnel while the remainder returned to Indiana on 6 June 1969, the 25th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Shortly after their homecoming, the Air Force inactivated the 71st SOS on 18

June 1969.

For service performed in Vietnam, the unit received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Citation. Unit members were also submitted for 143 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 751 Air Medals, 18 Bronze Star Medals, and 47 Air Force Commendation Medals. Two men received Purple Hearts for injuries sustained on missions. Additionally, Indiana Governor Edgar D. Whitcomb, himself a WWII B-17 navigator and POW, presented each Reservist with a Service Recognition Certificate from the State of Indiana—the first such award ever given by the State.

In May 2005, the USAF reactivated the 71stSOS as the CV-22 Formal Training Unit at Kirtland AFB, NM. Similar to the 71st SOS plank owners, current 71st SOS instructors teach an aircraft and mission, but more importantly, we begin the process of turning Airmen into Air Commandos. Today’s Airmen of the 71st SOS embrace their proud heritage and warmly acknowledge the brave Air Commandos who paved the way.



*About the Author: Lt Col Matt Shrull is a command pilot, currently serving as the commander of the 71st SOS at Kirtland AFB, NM. He is a career AFSOC pilot, flying the MH-53M before transitioning to the CV-22 in 2008. He would like to dedicate this article to his loving family.*



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# 3RD SOS

## CHALLENGES OF MOVING TO CANNON AFB NM

*By Paul Caltagirone, Col, USAF (Ret)*

### BACKGROUND

When Cannon AFB was selected as the western home of the Air Commandos, the 3rd Special Operations Squadron (SOS), nicknamed the “Dragons,” was scheduled to be the first AFSOC squadron to move to the base near Clovis NM. Due to the newness of the weapon system, all of the SOF remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) expertise was at the squadron level, and that was where the plan would have to be conceived and executed.

We had a template, though. The 8th SOS had just executed Lt Col Dan Zook’s brilliant plan to transition that squadron from MC-130E Combat Talons to CV-22 Ospreys and send nearly 100 people to their next assignment less than a month removed from simultaneously flying combat and contingency operations in four different theaters. Only four of those crewmembers stayed with the squadron and headed to the CV-22 schoolhouse at Kirtland AFB in central New Mexico. But, the challenge to move the 3rd SOS’s 200 people and 6 combat air patrols (CAPs) from Nellis AFB to Cannon AFB

without dropping a single, CAP was an order of magnitude more difficult.

The idea of moving to Cannon AFB was not generally popular. It was even less so to the over 150 Air Combat Command (ACC) RPA crewmembers who became AFSOC personnel on 31 May 2007. As the 15th Reconnaissance Squadron (RS) stood down, the 3rd SOS tripled the number of 24/7/365 CAPs overnight by absorbing the ACC aircraft, equipment, and personnel. Those with families were generally in favor of the move, but the single Airmen were definitively not. Our challenge, in part, was NOT to convince them that Cannon was great, but that the mission was worth the move. We really did not want disgruntled people being forced to move if we could avoid it.

### “PATCH SWAP” AND CULTURE

The reason for the massive transfer of personnel, equipment, facilities, and aircraft from ACC to AFSOC, was also the key to making people want to stay with the squadron. This was colloquially referred to as the “patch

swap,” but the change was much more significant than the term implies. It all started with the callsigns of the 3rd SOS MQ-1 Predator CAPs flown every day supporting combat operations. In short order, the squadron had become so good at the mission and at working with our primary supported unit (SU), a joint special operations task force, that having a 3rd SOS operated RPA overhead became a go/no-go criteria for their missions. The Air Force promised US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) it would deliver SOF-organic CAPs by 2007, but in actuality less than half of the agreed number were being provided. The other CAPs were being flown by ACC or Air National Guard (ANG) crews. The special operations task force leadership discussed the issue with the USSOCOM commander, and in turn he went to the Secretary of Defense to try to close the gap. The SU did not want dedicated CAPs flown by ACC, but wanted dedicated CAPs flown by AFSOC, the special operation air component. By SECDEF direction, the 15th RS, the ACC squadron responsible

for multiple CAPs at the time, transferred their organic CAPs and nearly all their people to AFSOC. The USSOCOM commander did not necessarily want to own more of the RPA enterprise, but felt he had to take it on in order to ensure the level of support the special operators on the ground needed.

In the process of affecting the patch swap, we violated two SOF truths by (1) mass producing SOF forces and (2) creating them rapidly after the crisis had begun. The squadron would need to work incredibly hard to ensure the SU saw no degradation of support resulting from the squadron's literal overnight increase in tasking, tripling the number of CAPS. This effort started at 0315 on Day 1 (31 May 2007) as the squadron leadership walked through the compound passing out new patches and welcoming our newest Air Commandos to the family. Over the next 16 months the AFSOC commander, Lt Gen Wurster, flew out to Nellis AFB three times simply to spend time with the Dragons and let them know how much their work was appreciated by the command and USSOCOM overall.

How well did we maintain quality, execute the mission, and maintain our culture while more than doubling in size? The unit plaudits tell the story. The 3rd SOS Dragons were awarded the Air Force Association Citation of Honor for 2007 and were cited as USSOCOM's "single most valuable squadron in the Global War on Terrorism." Further, the 3rd SOS was recognized as the "model" RPA squadron by the Secretary of Defense (OSD). In 2007, the 3rd SOS was also selected as AFSOC's Squadron of the Year. Most importantly, understanding and supporting the mission, and love of the squadron were nearly universal among the rank and file by the time came to move to Cannon AFB. The Dragons simply wanted to keep doing the mission.

Led by the Director of Operations, Lt Col Daniel Turner, the most seasoned AFSOC veterans were everywhere in the months that followed the massive personnel transfer, constantly changing shifts to fly with everyone, moving from ground control station (GCS) to GCS on their limited off days to talk with everyone and maintain presence, and doing everything it took to improve

morale and form a family out of this thrown together unit. The culture that had been built by the plankowners was strong enough to absorb and convert this mass influx of people.

The SOF culture was reinforced by the special operations task force we supported. We almost always had a liaison officer forward with the unit. Members of the SU had been coming to Nellis AFB to work with the Dragons as part of their pre- and post-deployment timelines. Before they deployed we would show them what had changed in our mutual tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) in the months since their last deployment, and they would meet as many of the crews as they could, even flying along in the GCS on some lines. On deployment, we routinely debriefed operations with the forward command and control element and often debriefed with the team involved—the same special operators we had worked with pre-deployment. Post-deployment visits were after-action reviews or "hotwashes," where we discussed any unresolved issues and reevaluated mutual TTPs. It didn't hurt that the SU

AFB. He got the maintenance areas overhauled and then set up the hangar so we could use it as a warehouse to receive all the shipments of equipment that would arrive while building the Dragon Operations Center (DOC). He set up the mobile maintenance CONEXs and these became the model the rest of the MQ-1 community would adapt in Iraq and Afghanistan. Will Barnwell was one of our assigned weather professionals and seemingly never took a day off, even when not on shift. Will even trained and flew as a mission intelligence coordinator or MIC (and quite a good one!) in our darkest manning days. Danny Bouchee was the greatest First Sergeant any squadron could ever hope to have. By force of personality and will, if there was an issue that affected one of our Dragons being able to execute the mission, the Shirt would find a solution.

One final aspect of the culture was to create the esprit de corps that all great AFSOC squadrons share. Surprisingly, this was not as hard as expected. A strong camaraderie existed among the plankowners which the new arrivals noticed before they joined the



GCS being lowered by crane onto the newly poured concrete pad at Cannon. (Photo courtesy of Scott Forn)

representatives got a couple of days in Las Vegas after coming back home.

It is impossible to overstate the impact of the Senior NCOs on the squadron's success. They were unquestionably the heart and soul of the Dragons. Three of them were not aircrew: Jason Munz, Will Barnwell, and Dan Bouchee. Munz was our maintenance officer at Cannon

squadron. The shared experience of the mission and working 12-hour shifts, six days a week brought us even closer. We relied immensely on our seven flight commanders and their flight chiefs to build that spirit and sense of family within their flights, and replaced those who could not. Members of each flight were kept on the same schedule as much



as possible so they could be together. Since most of our personnel were single, the flights also tended to hang out together during their limited time off. Every one of our flight leadership teams deserves a massive amount of credit, all exemplified by Capt Megan White and MSgt Eric Card, who built a strong cohesive unit out of a group of near-total strangers. Squadron leadership took definitive actions to ensure every Dragon knew they were appreciated and were shown this at every possible opportunity, be it chili cook-offs or five 22-inch pizzas being delivered to the operations center on a semi-regular basis at 0200. To this day, an extraordinarily strong bond exists among those early Dragons.

### INITIAL MOVE PLAN

The initial plan followed the 8th SOS template and was designed around the existing manning, augmented with our share of graduates from the RPA schoolhouse over the following year. At some point, those graduates would cease to be assigned to Nellis and start moving to Cannon with temporary duty back to Nellis until all the CAPs transferred to Cannon. The plan was challenging, but executable within a slightly compressed timeline. We planned for members to be off the schedule for up to three weeks to take care of everything related to their move.

### SURGE AND NEW MOVE PLAN B

This original version of the plan went out the window as the Air Force

responded to extreme pressure from OSD, Joint Staff, and the other Services to provide significantly more full motion video (FMV) ISR coverage. The 15th RS was supposed to take a year to reconstitute and start flying again, but that timeline was cut by more than half as they heroically built a combat squadron with a commander, a DO, a Senior Enlisted Sensor Operator, and everyone else being fresh schoolhouse graduates. The two active duty Predator squadrons at the time, the 3rd SOS and ACC's 17th RS, were required to add CAPs as well. Due to continuously increasing demand, a new CAP was being stood up in the RPA enterprise as soon as there were new graduates from the schoolhouse. At various points, the manning in the 3rd SOS dropped critically to the point where nearly everyone was flying six days a week. Even when crews had a day off, they were actually on standby alert in case someone else could not fly the mission. The squadron continued to grow its number of CAPs. Nearly all the guest help was diverted to Creech AFB outside Las Vegas to help stand up the new ACC CAPs there. Clearly, the original move plan was not going to work if the squadron was still going to move in 2008.

There was some preliminary discussion about slipping the move to 2009, but the surges did not look like they would let up anytime soon, and the overall advantages to AFSOC outweighed the disadvantages to moving on schedule. The Cannon transition "Plan B" allowed

for three days off the flying schedule to pack out in Nevada; one day to move, and two days to set up at Cannon before starting to fly again. The first couple of CAPs at Cannon would be flown by those recent schoolhouse graduates who had already arrived at Cannon and were on temporary orders to Nellis. They only needed one day to travel back to Clovis and therefore could fly the line the next day. Movement of the last CAP's crews would work in a similar way, with the limited number of personnel who were not making the move flying that CAP at Nellis, then taking a day to travel to Cannon and flying the following day in a temporary duty status. Transferring the CAPs in the middle was where all the risk to mission success lay.

### CONSTRUCTION

Manning was not the only risk. No Predator Operations Center (POC) had ever been stood up on-time (or on-budget). The DOC at Cannon was already on a more compressed timeline than any previous POC. It was also the first test of the acquisition and contracting system at Cannon and the first test for the local contractors to show AFSOC that they could turn this base into the western home of the Air Commandos. For at least a decade before AFSOC took over, very little money had been spent on the facilities at Cannon as the Air Force waited to find a suitable re-placement for the fighter wing that had been realigned during a round of base closures. The base was in poor condition. Significant power and communications infrastructure improvements were needed to support an RPA squadron. An old F-16 squadron operations building was selected as the squadron's new home and an F-16 simulator building was selected to host the DOC. Much credit goes to the on-scene project manager, Maj Scott Forn, for getting both buildings ready ahead of schedule despite a continuous series of challenges.

The civil/military relationship at Cannon was in an evolutionary state as the base shifted from an ACC mindset to the Air Commando culture. Community leaders were just getting used to the transition. The squadron's aggressive, time-sensitive building projects would



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be a test of the ability of the local business community to support the new mission of the base.

We were concerned that the large number of simultaneous construction projects at Cannon would greatly exceed

operations building. She was also very adept at pulling future money forward for the sake of our Airmen. Quality of life at Cannon was tremendously improved by the early arrival of a new dining facility and fantastic new dorms.



**Final communications checks being completed on the new Dragon Ops Center at Cannon. Each of the monitors with blue displays are above a MIC station and would show the video from that CAPs feed. (Photo courtesy of Scott Forn)**

the capacity of local firms to accomplish the work. Our prime contractor, Raymond Copeland, cast a wide net across eastern New Mexico and northwest Texas to find the construction capabilities needed to completely refurbish not only our two buildings, but much of the rest of the base as well. Mr. Copeland and his deputy, Clayton Stallings, were constantly on site and worked closely with the government representatives, usually going above and beyond the initial requirements to ensure the projects stayed on schedule in spite of hundreds of unexpected challenges.

Mr. Bill Montgomery led the Cannon AFB civil engineering team and was the main link between our operational requirements and the contractors. Had it not been for Bill, we might not have been successful. Shortly after AFSOC took over Cannon in October 2007, we brought Bill to Nellis AFB to show him what we needed, and just as importantly, what we did not want, so that he could put eyes on the scope and scale of the task. Maj Rhonda Crawford was our HQ AFSOC contracting officer and later the 27th Contracting Squadron commander. She did an incredible job ferreting out unexecuted funds from other projects and put the money to work to meet the myriad of unexpected challenges, for example the \$1M to remove asbestos from the

Those who remember Cannon in 2007 would not recognize it today. A series of wing commanders and Command Chiefs ensured quality of life issues were prioritized and completely rebuilt all of the housing and support facilities on base.

## HOUSING

Housing for our Airmen was a significant limitation in moving to the base and Clovis area, in general. For a squadron of 300 people, 75 of them first-term Airmen, off-base housing was limited, poor, and over-priced. Before the arrival of the new dorms, on-base dorms were little better. All of the options seemed bad, either forcing our junior Airmen to live off-base or scattering them into open beds anywhere available within existing dorms. An alternative presented itself with a condemned dormitory building that had not yet been demolished. While AFSOC and SOCOM rushed to pull MILCON money forward within the fiscal plan for dormitories, the squadron took on the condemned dorm as a self-help project and proceeded to turn it into our Airmen's new home.

## PLAN EXECUTION

Thankfully, the execution of move Plan B wound up being nearly flawless. Each of the CAPs moved

precisely on schedule, and the squadron flag transferred in October 2008. The leadership at Nellis AFB understood the priority of our mission and the challenge of the move, and supported us with priority out-processing and moving company scheduling. USSOCOM leadership and the AFSOC commander, Lt Gen Wurster, gave us all the support we needed, including temporary help from across the headquarter's staff. The 27th SOW commander, Col Tim Leahy and our group commander, Col Mike Plehn, continuously knocked down obstacles. But the majority of the credit goes to the Dragons. For over two years more was asked of these Air Commandos than could possibly be expected, and they never failed. Even during the most trying time, no CAP was cancelled for operational reasons, and when asked to move with only seven days between flying missions, the Dragons delivered yet again.

In closing, praise and credit for the positive cultural shift and incredible mission success goes to DJ Turner, senior AFSOC pilots Mike Mitchell, Jim Roughneen, Dave Peck, John Graham, Chuck Gray, Scuba Pursley, Rusty Allison, Chad Pit-Og, Steve Beattie, Ryan Derzon, Dillon Patterson, and Chris Milner (special mention to A-10 crossover Travis Norton who instinctively understood the AFSOC culture), senior AFSOC Sensor Operators (SOs) Bobby McDonald, Eric Tate, Bobby Stump, John James, Greg Carrico, Roger Justice, Eric Card, and Andy McDonald, and a group of outstanding Mission Intelligence Coordinators (MICs) led by Eric Bernkopf, Dave Citrin, Adam Young, Mike Belair, Dave Kormanik, Tom Barriere, Steve Goodrich, and other Dragons too numerous to mention here. If space allowed the naming of all 95 pre-patch swap Dragons, they would all be here.



*About the Author: Col (Ret) Paul Caltagirone had the honor of commanding the 3 SOS from the Patch Swap in May 2007 until the flag transfer in October 2008. He first came to AFSOC in 1992 and has never left. He is the founder and President of SOF Intelligence Solutions, LLC.*



# The Year of the Dragon

## PART II

By Lt Col Mike Burton, USAF

In spring of 2012, the Air Commando Journal published an article by Colonel Rob Ma-saitis entitled, “The Year of the Dragon, Part I.” His article detailed the high demand for AFSOC’s legacy AC-130 fleet in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the subsequent need for a “family of precision strike systems” to meet the needs of the combatant commanders. The story detailed USSOCOM’s formation of the Joint Acquisition Task Force DRAGON SPEAR (JATF

hours of arriving in theater they were flying missions in combat. By using a capability release (CR) cycle in pre-dictable 90-day increments, they enabled



MC-130W Test Crew



Loading PSP Weapons



Crew Chief Marshalling

DRAG-ON SPEAR) and the parallel approach its team of combat acquisitions detachments (CADs) conducted in the acquisition, testing, and fielding of the precision strike package (PSP) on the MC-130W Combat Spear. His article concludes in 2011, as the “Whiskeys” conducted daytime mobility, ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance), and CAS (close air support) in Afghanistan while the DRAGON SPEAR team in garrison took feedback from the field and continued to refine the PSP. Their goal? Fielding a 30mm cannon on a C-130 by the end of 2011 and small diameter bombs (SDB) the following year.

By 2011, the DRAGON SPEAR team had amassed a lengthy list of accomplishments. They had transformed the MC-130W from primarily an air mobility aircraft into a precision strike platform at 20 percent of the flyaway cost of a legacy AC-130U. They had deployed the weapon system into combat in less than 16 months after delivery, and within 24

rapid development and integration into the CONUS fleet without interrupting combat operations in Afghanistan. Over the next year, the team tested and fielded the GAU-23/A 30mm gun, as well as the first iterations of the GBU-39 SDB series.

This sequel to that original article aims to briefly describe the 30mm gun development and document some of the challenges overcome by the operations, maintenance, and test teams. It borrows heavily from an early draft of “Part II” written by Col Masaitis and Lt Col Kav Crum, and from an unpublished manuscript written by CMSgt (retired) Bill Walter. The goal of this ar-ticle is to leave the reader with an appreciation for the humans who overcame significant chal-enges to evolve and prove the AC-130W as a weapon system. It was the young Air Comman-dos, officers, NCOs, and civilians behind the scenes eight years ago that we have to thank for the tremendous capability standing watch over disparate battlefields around the world this evening.

Fielding the 30mm gun proved to be one of the most challenging milestones in the conversion of the MC-130W to the AC-130W. The two primary hurdles the DRAGON SPEAR program had to overcome were proving the gun was capable of doing the job, the hardware element, and training the aircrew in the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) required to appropriately employ the Whiskey, the human element. Fortunately, the team benefited from early hardware development efforts the AC-27J program had done to incorporate the GAU-23/A into that weapon system prior to its abrupt cancellation in April 2009.

Prior to the DRAGON SPEAR program, USSOCOM had sought a family of precision strike systems and intended to install a medium caliber, side-firing weapon on a fleet of 16 C-27J Spartans and designate them AC-27J Stinger IIs. For a variety of reasons, but predominantly time, the team had to choose between the 40mm M2A1, a proven weapon, and the 30mm MK-44, which AFSOC had unsuccessfully tested on four AC-130Us in 2007. Since the 40mm was heavier and increasingly difficult to maintain, the 30mm was selected for the AC-27J program. In 2009, Mr Bill Walter from AFSOC A5 teamed up with Mr Charles “Mac” McClenahan from the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) at Eglin AFB, FL. Their

Dahlgren, VA, was recruited to incorporate ballistic modeling of the GAU-23/A into the new fire control system designed for the AC-27J.

In April 2009, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) issued Resource Management Decision 802 to take effect on 1 October. One of the results of this resourcing decision was a decrease in the total DOD acquisition of 78 C-27s to 38 (and subsequently 21) aircraft that were to be used by the Air National Guard. Additionally, the RMD reassigned lead acquisition authority for the program from the Army to the Air Force. AFSOC’s programmed 16 C-27Js were cancelled by this realignment of resources, but USSOCOM’s funding for the tactical modifications remained. Within a month, senior leaders at USSOCOM and AFSOC decided to modify 12 MC-130Ws with the PSP originally planned for the AC-27J. It was this head start in the design of the GAU-23/A and the PSP that allowed the DRAGON SPEAR team to deliver an aircraft with a 30mm gun to the operational squadron as early as August of 2011.

Once the hardware was in the operators’ hands, they began the more nuanced task of training air mobility crews in side-firing aerial gunnery techniques and 5-Line, “friendly centric” CAS. This was the human element. While many of the seasoned



November 2010 First Deployment of Dragon Spear



Emerald Warrior Training 2013

aim was two-fold. They first had to convince leadership that the 30mm could be accurate at high slant ranges. Second, they had to overcome the technical issues that caused the gun to fail to meet specifications when it was installed and tested on the AC-130U in 2007.

Mr McClenahan and Mr Walter began a systematic evaluation of the 30mm gun system. They tested various ammunitions and conducted an “apples-to-apples” comparison of the MK-44 and the M2A1 in hard stands. The result was empirical evidence that the 30mm was the more accurate weapon. Additionally, the tests revealed that the MK-44 gun barrel was too light. The final weapon system would need a new heavier and stiffer barrel. The new gun was qualified within the USAF designation system as the GAU-23/A. The icing on the cake was a new gun mount built to Mr McClenahan’s specifications by AFRL engineers and machinists “in house.” Additionally, the team at Navy Surface Warfare Division in

operators of the MC-130W were deployed to Afghanistan conducting a mix of mobility, ISR, and CAS utilizing precision guided munitions (PGMs), the 73rd and 551st SOS assembled an initial cadre of experienced crewmembers. The initial cadre’s mission was to develop and implement a training program that quickly and safely trained the rest of the unit in the employment of the GAU-23/A 30mm gun system. Acknowledging that the principles of side-firing weapons remained constant, the new weapons, situational awareness, high definition sensors, and fire control system the PSP brought to the fight were vastly different from those fielded on previous gunships. This leap in gunship technology required an adaptation of new and legacy AC-130 fire control principles and the operations and maintenance teams found themselves on a tight timeline.

Outside of the Whiskey community there were doubts about the MC-130W (then still carrying the “MC” designation) and the ability to field the GAU-23/A in a short timeframe.



Naysayers cited nebulous concerns about the variety of weapons, the squadron's prior mobility background, and the cultural friction that naturally accompanies anything new. Inside the Whiskey community, though, the concerns were far more unemotional. Crews meticulously tracked training events, developed best practices for the division of crew duties, finalized their checklists, and documented TTPs with remarkable efficiency and focus. Their attention to details was not only motivated by the weapons system they were fielding, but many knew that the checklists, target confirmation, and gun arming verbiage, and TTPs would be used by the next generation's gunship as well. Their stated task was clear, but the implied tasks were difficult. The Whiskey team had to mature into a gunship and fast. It only made sense to put those with gunship experience at the helm.

The training was grueling. In the summer of 2011, the new AFSOC commander, Lt Gen Fiel, indicated he wanted the 30mm gun fielded in October—almost three months sooner than the original schedule. In true Air Commando fashion, the combined 73rd and 551st SOS initial cadre immediately re-wrote the training schedules to reflect the new timeline and got after it. JATF-DRAGON SPEAR was keyed-up and as the training program was put into practice it became clear that weekend flying would be a necessity until relief was given or until a gun was fielded... whichever came first. It would not be a fair or complete account of the success of the Whiskey program without acknowledging the burden placed on the aircrews, maintainers, and their families during that period. The squadron flew almost 450 hours in one month, more than double a typical month's programmed flying hours, to get the initial 12 crews trained.

The list of Air Commandos that poured their hearts into the program is long and everyone interviewed has in their own way reflected on this time of their life as the most rewarding work they ever accomplished. Additionally, accounting for overlap but never omission, every person interviewed cited the same four operators as having been critical to getting the 30mm gun fielded: Captains Brad Roundtree, John "Dipper"

Waddell, Chris Beattie, and Matt Wilson. They of-ten flew seven days per week. In garrison, their 30/60/90 time was riding the crest of a flying hour waiver. They developed TTPs on the white board in Dipper's garage. They filled out their students' training folders and post-mission reports while carpooling home so that they would have crew rest to fly the next day. They learned, adjusted, and documented, but they did not bring old ways of doing business with them unless it made sense to do so. They were uncommon, forward thinking Air Commandos and their work ethic and conviction made success a foregone conclusion.

The emerging Whiskey community was a blend of previous gunship experience and strike/mobility backgrounds. Innovation thrived. Old assumptions were questioned, and when it made sense, new tactics were devised that played to the strengths of the new PSP, in no small amount due to the mandate that the crew size of the MC-130W would not increase for the precision strike mission. For those new to gunship ways, airdrop, and infil/exfil gave way to reactive fires, 5-Lines, PGMs, and orbit geometry. It was a natural and necessary evolution, but not one wholly unfamiliar to those who had seen the MC-130P Shadows join AFSOC's fleet five years prior.

In 2006, the 73rd SOS started as a diverse group of mobility crews assembled in support of the combat loss replacement (CLR) program—purchasing 12 MC-130Ws to offset the past and potentially future losses of MC-130Hs in the Global War on Terror. Even then, crewmembers did not describe themselves as a "Talon pilot" or a "Papa Nav," nor did they indicate their past experience. No longer was one a "U-boat," H-model, MC-130H. or strike crewmember. They were all Whiskeys, and those in the Whiskey community knew to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, and to commit to the mission, whatever that may be.

With an incredible workload and constant schedule adjustments the DRAGON SPEAR team institutionally learned how to be responsive and adaptive. One such example occurred during a training sortie during which much of the crew was undergoing various upgrades and/or 30mm gun

instruction and qualification. The crew fired at a target on the JOCKEY impact area of the Melrose Range Complex and experienced a "substantial" miss as a round hit the edge of the impact area. The crew immediately terminated the live fire and returned to base. During the days following the mission, the engineering team pieced together the data to find the culprit: lines of software code that permitted the gun to fire even though it was aiming a fraction of a degree off from where the calculated aiming solution said it should be pointing. The pace of the program was only able to keep momentum because of the organizational structure and mindset of the JATF and squadron leadership that made the Fly-Fix-Fly attitude so prolific. From this, the team was able to find and fix the software bug and get the aircraft flying again in a matter of days rather than the weeks or even months it would have taken a traditional test program. The speed at which the JATF was able to communicate, contract, fix, or troubleshoot was uncommonly fast. In traditional organizations or acquisition programs this problem could have been a critical failure, for this team it was a speed-bump.

Overall, the speed of development and fast-paced training for this program increased the risk, and leadership wanted to be sure it was mitigated. Leadership was concerned with the crews' gunship-maturity, not necessarily their gunship-ability. History has shown that vague descriptions, ambiguous situations, and fog of war have all led more than one Air Force aircraft to engage something other than an intended target. To assist in building tacit knowledge and maturity, the unit sent crewmembers to joint fires schools to learn strike basics and to interfly with MC-12W ISR aircraft to learn other methodologies. All of this was in an effort to increase the overall "strike DNA" among the crews. In order to develop the maturity and situational awareness required to safely employ weapons in combat, Whiskey flight training – led by legacy gun-ship experience – specifically incorporated extremely challenging missions into their local training scenarios. The self-imposed and intense training regimens were designed to challenge the TTPs, mature the crews, increase understanding

of the new technology, and ultimately, mitigate the risks associated with new aircraft. The effort paid off.

In the midst of a seemingly unending training sprint, materiel delays, testing at an unprece-dented pace, and development and validation of new TTP, the first 30mm-equipped MC-130W deployed to Afghanistan during the first week of November 2011. The crews began flying com-bat missions within 24 hours of arrival, but were not allowed to use the gun as they waited for the requisite legal approval. On 19 November, the fielding and deployment release was signed by USSOCOM J8 and the crews knew they would not have to wait much longer for authorization to employ the GAU-23/A in combat. For approximately two-and-a-half weeks, the crews remained limited to PGM employment. On 8 December 2011, Capt Charlie Lanks and his crew launched on a pre-planned mission to provide armed overwatch of an Australian special operations team conducting a daylight raid. Shortly after launch, the crew got a radio call from their mission commander, Lt Col Masaitis, informing them that the legal authorization they had been waiting for had arrived...the 30mm was approved for use in combat. Not long after, on that same mission, the friendly ground forces began taking heavy fire from an enemy machine-gun located on an elevated position. When asked about the details later, the Combat Systems Officer who fired the first rounds stated, "they had a problem, we solved it."

When reflecting on when the first 30mm rounds were "fired in anger" members of the squadron who continued to conduct training back home remember where they were when they first got the news. Since the Whiskeys were flying daytime missions, the approval for use and the actual fire-mission both happened during the night for the Air Commandos at Cannon AFB. The following morning, then 73rd SOS commander, Lt Col Donny Purdy, announced to the squadron that the 30mm was approved for use...and that it had already been used in combat. This was a significant morale boost to the team.

That first use may have been the best validation for the unit's training program. The first aircraft commander to employ the 30mm in combat was also the one aircraft commander de-ployed

at the time who did not have any prior gunship experience. Capt Lanks started out his career in rescue HC-130s and joined the 73rd SOS as a SOF mobility pilot when the unit re-activated. He underwent conversion training for the CR-2D (capability release-2, deployable) ISR/strike configuration, and amassed several hundred hours before beginning training with the 30mm gun. Charlie's navigator on this mission was Lt Scott Lacey who was originally trained in air mobility until strike conversion. The person pulling the trigger was a previous gunship fire control officer from the 4th SOS, Capt Matt Wilson, who had been developing the TTPs for em-ployment of the 30mm gun since it was first delivered to the unit.

Momentum was building. The paperwork to change the MC-130W to an AC-130W had been going through the Pentagon's organizational labyrinth for some time. The official change came in May 2012, shortly after the first gun deployment. After years of impermanent labels and missions, the weapon system was officially an AC-130 Stinger II. Although the unit needed no paperwork to prove itself, it felt good to have a name and a lineage. Despite the distractions, im-pediments, and risks, the Stinger II team earned their success. Keeping true to Air Commando form, they congratulated each other then immediately returned to work on the next mission. It was a new chapter in an already lengthy gunship tome. The guns and PGMs had been used in combat with amazing success. Knowledge and familiarity were building among ground units, and trust began to build in the crews, weapons, and concepts.

By 2012, the Stinger II team had met their stated objective, but now had to provide stability and sustainment. Rapid acquisition is not a long-term sustainment strategy. The Whiskey was beginning to appear permanent and the AC-130J was just around the corner. Stability in this case meant providing repeatable, predictable, and lethal operations through solidified TTPs that enabled both the deployed warfighters and the instructors at home. Sustainment meant finding balance in resources. It did not necessarily mean slowing down. There was too much to be done so the throttles remained forward – this time accompanied by more concrete

documentation and development plans. The plans included firmly published checklists, technical orders, Air Force Instructions, standard operating procedures, and 551st SOS training and flying support. Out of necessity, the 90-day CR cycle morphed into a 6-month and then 1-year software development and release cycle that eventually incorporated the 105mm howitzer, laser and GPS guided SDBs, advanced threat receivers, single sensor dual target attack, GPS hardening, helmet mounted targeting, small glide munitions, and PGMs from the orbit, to name just a few capabilities. The future of the gunship promises to be just as exciting as the past.

According to the Chinese zodiac, 2012 was the year of the dragon. By 2012, the DRAGON SPEAR/Stinger II team had proven exactly why it was their year. The team overcame countless obstacles, trained at a breakneck pace, fielded a new PSP to combat in record time, fielded a new 30mm gun system, designed a new and advanced operator console, developed a three-year software roadmap, generated 13 combat ready crews, deployed with the small diameter bomb, demonstrated four successful Hellfire launches, and started the proof of concept for the 105mm gun weapon system. But this story should come as no surprise to anyone in the community. If it sounds familiar it's because history seems to repeat itself.

You may recall that in one particular year in the mid-20th century, and in spite of organiza-tional impediments, gunships were born at the Eglin AFB test ranges -- pushed through by then Capt Ron Terry. He had no previous gunship experience, but refused to be denied. Through rapid acquisition and modification, Capt Terry and his team turned a C-47 cargo aircraft into an AC-47 gunship. Capt Terry and his cadre flew both night and day operations, and drove fear into the hearts of America's enemies. That year was 1964, and according to the Chinese Zodiac, it was also the year of the dragon.



*About the author: Lt Col Mike Burton was the commander of the 16th SOS—the operational squadron now employing the AC-130W. He is currently a student at Air War College. His inter-est in the Whiskey program stems from his admiration and respect for the Air Commandos that had the guts to make it happen.*



# REFLECTIONS FROM

Just over two years ago, my family and I received orders to the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida. As a career Security Forces Defender with 25 years of service at the time, I had had the privilege of serving in several major commands all over the world, and thought that I knew quite a bit, even, dare I say, more than most, about the Air Force mission and its arsenal of resources. There is a quote that is often attributed to Socrates, “The more I learn, the more I learn how little I know.” For me, this was never more true than when I came to AFSOC. My short time in that amazing place significantly altered so much of what was once the bedrock of my service and I have often wished that I could infuse every Airman I meet with what I came to understand as the SOF mentality.


As my wife and I sat in the Newcomers’ Brief, neither of us anticipated learning anything really new or unique. She had worked for Airman and Family Readiness at a previous assignment, had been a Key Spouse, and understood the struggles of military life. She was born into the military, joined the military, and then married it, so she’s been a dependent longer than...well, for a long time. The first time we heard the phrase “Big Blue,” we were pretty confident that we understood the meaning from the context, but somewhat dumbfounded and even slightly offended by its use to refer to the “rest” of the Air Force. Our initial offense was quickly and fiercely tempered as we came to understand that while it was likely not meant as a compliment, there was a difference between the decades of Air Force experience we had between us and that to which we were now being introduced. My wife had never seen nor heard of a “gunship,” but after our immersion with the 4th SOS, left a mission brief in tears and rather aggressively embraced an Air Force Cross recipient whose story we had just heard and who just happened to be walking down the hallway, minding his own business...poor guy. To see the humility with which he met this unexpected and probably a little scary, demonstration of appreciation and adoration, was just the beginning of one of the best assignments of my career.

If the average American understood what was being



# A COMMAND CHIEF

By CMSgt David R. Wolfe, USAF



done on a daily basis to protect their lives and liberties, this country would look very different. I had not imagined that my patriotism to my country or love of the Air Force was wanting. I have loved what I do and the country I serve for so long that it took the 1st SOW to make me realize I had become rather complacent and unappreciative. Wearing the uniform made me feel like I was actively engaged in the fight and somehow lessened my appreciation for those things that do not, and should not, make headlines. If Americans understood what was being done every hour of every day....

There were so many days I felt like I was going to burst at the seams with pride and excitement for what I was learning about special operations. The more I came to understand the sacrifices of Air Commando Airmen and their willingness to risk everything for their country and their team, over and over again, the more I came to realize how incredibly blessed I am to live in a nation where freedom is the highest priority and a mission about which we must never become complacent. My wife cannot recall hearing a single spouse complain during that entire assignment about the high operations tempo, including frequent deployments that are sudden and sometimes, without knowing where they are going or when they will be back.

All of this has created a community that is family and transcends barriers in ways that is not captured on any media platform. There are only three things that matter – are you trustworthy, are you competent, and will you do your best at all times to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all Americans, even the ones that may not appreciate it?

While I learned about the unrivaled capabilities and logistical expertise used to combat terrorism, I also learned a great deal about humility. AFSOC rests on the tip of the spear, the sharp edge where critical capabilities are honed and sharpened to ensure joint partners can conduct operations wherever needed at a moments' notice. Yet the vast majority of these activities are conducted quietly, without much public knowledge or press. These are not often the Airman winning awards or receiving recognition because they do not talk about what they do, partially



# THOUGHTS FROM DONIEL WOLFE

During our time at Hurlburt, the debate over kneeling during the national anthem was raging. I have my own opinions about that, but what hurt most was knowing that when our Air Commandos downrange got the opportunity to engage with the world, many would be checking sports scores. I cannot imagine how it must feel



**CMSgt David Wolfe and his wife, Doniel Wolfe.** (Photo courtesy of CMSgt David Wolfe.)

to be risking your life for others to kneel in the name of the very thing for which you are fighting. I cannot say that I was mad, just deeply saddened by the lack of understanding and ingratitude for the country that has made the success and undue influence of celebrities even a possibility. If Americans only knew what was being done on their behalf, we would have staff sergeants and captains with multi-million dollar athletic shoe contracts and people lined up around the block for a selfie and a chance to say “Thank you.” In a place where heroism and humility are the status quo, I began to understand what Admiral Chester Nimitz meant when he said, “Uncommon valor was a common virtue.”



**CMSgt David Wolfe, loads 105mm rounds onto a transportation cart at Hurlburt Field, FL, May 30, 2018.** (USAF photo courtesy of SSgt Marleah Cabano)

because they cannot and partially because they do not, even when they can.

In the world of USSOCOM, there are truths that are sacrosanct to Special Operations. Three of which became particularly meaningful during my time in AFSOC:

1. Humans matter more than hardware. Or rather, hardware means nothing without people. The culture and climate of any organization rests entirely upon the people, not the tools or equipment. This concept is alive in AFSOC unlike any other. People who do the work have a real ability to impact positive change in the way business is done in AFSOC. When a person has an issue, the team has an issue. This pack mentality breeds confidence in taking smart risks and pushing the boundaries of the mission where innovation can be a life and death proposition.

2. Special operations forces cannot be mass produced. The training pipeline is nothing short of remarkable, it is not a process as much as it is an investment. For example, the rates at which our aircraft are available to train our newest Air Commando operators borders on miraculous. The mission aircraft are not on the flight-line to be admired. They are flown, broken, fixed, and flown ad mortem. World class maintainers ensure this with long hours that extend well beyond the typical work day, across weekends and holidays, and through frequent deployments. The demand for specialized airpower means that AFSOC aircraft are frequently off station, ever in the company of the maintainers that keep them flying!

3. Most special operations require non-SOF assistance. Assistance is a bit of a soft word to describe what our support career fields provide for the SOF fight. Everyone in AFSOC is an Air Commando. It's not a title but an attitude, and you can feel it as soon as you enter base. People feel differently about the mission. Many of the Airman assigned to Hurlburt Field will go to their next assignment, most likely outside AFSOC, and continue to do their military service as civil engineers, defenders, medics, and logisticians. I have an immense amount of respect for those in the background, providing essential support for SOF missions! This is another group of individuals that is too often unrecognized for their vital role in our continued success.

One last thought—As my wife, Doniel, and I look back on this amazing opportunity, we want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for welcoming us into your family. You truly and fundamentally changed the lens through which we see the world. Our America is now viewed through the lens of AFSOC – and the people of the 1st Special Operations Wing have become our standard for excellence. What an honor to serve with you then and forever – Any Time, Any Place. 🇺🇸

## General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper

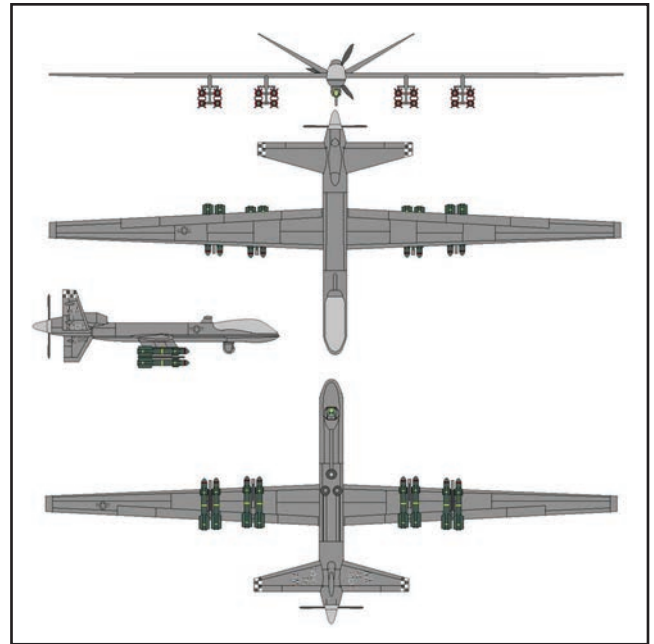
The MQ-9 Reaper was a newly designed armed ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) remotely piloted, multi-mission aircraft. Because of its extended loiter time, diverse suite of sensors, and precision weapons, it is particularly useful against high-value and time sensitive targets. Although larger than its cousin, the General Atomics MQ-1 Predator, the MQ-9 is quieter and has a lower radar profile than the Predator.

The Reaper weapon system consists of several RPAs, a ground control station, the satellite uplink, aircrews, and ground support personnel. The basic crew consists of a pilot and an enlisted sensor operator. When needed, an intelligence coordinator may be added to the crew.

The MQ-9 carries the Multi-Spectral Targeting System, which has a suite of visual sensors for targeting. The MTS-B integrates an infrared sensor, color/monochrome daylight TV



**MQ-9 Reaper 8-0084 from 33rd SOS, Cannon AFB, NM.**



camera, image-intensified TV camera, laser range finder/designator, and laser illuminator. The full-motion video from each of the imaging sensors can be viewed as separate video streams or fused.

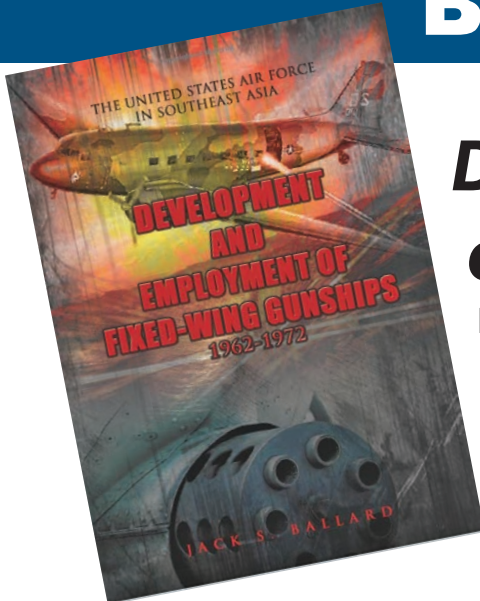
The unit incorporates a laser rangefinder/designator, which precisely designates targets for employment of laser-guided munitions. The Reaper is also equipped with a synthetic aperture radar to enable GBU-38 JDAM targeting. The MQ-9 can employ four laser-guided AGM-114 Hellfire missiles which provide highly accurate, low-collateral damage, anti-armor and anti-personnel engagement capabilities

**Flown by: USA, United Kingdom, Italy, and France.**

### FACTS IN BRIEF:

- Crew (remote): two (pilot and sensor operator)
- Wingspan: 66 feet (20 meters)
- Length: 36 feet (11 meters)
- Height: 12.5 feet (3.8 meters)
- Max Speed: 240 knots
- Range: 1,150 miles (1,000 nautical miles)
- Ceiling: Up to 50,000 feet
- Armament: combination of AGM-114 Hellfire, GBU-12 Paveway II, GBU-38 Joint Direct Attack Munition, GBU-49 laser-JDAM
- Power plant: Honeywell TPE331-10GD 900 shaft-horsepower turboprop engine
- Sensors: High definition EO/IR video, multi-mode radar, signals intelligence system





## Development and Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships

By Jack S. Ballard

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By 13 March 1954, the French Far East Expeditionary Corps had an estimated 20,000 of its best soldiers locked up in the shrinking perimeter at Dien Bien Phu, and eventually that outpost up in the northwest corner of what would later be North Vietnam would be overrun by the Viet Minh forces under General Giap. There are a number of good accounts available of the outpost's last days, and also the last days of the French presence in Indochina, but the best is arguably Bernard Fall's *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*. In it he implies that the siege would have been a lot shorter without airdropped relief and resupply, which peaked on April 15:

In a steady drone of American-piloted C-119s, and civilian and military C-47s and 46s flown by French Air Force and civilian crews, nearly 250 tons were dropped into the valley, almost as much as the daily maximum reached by the German Air Force at Stalingrad. Even though at least 15 per cent... fell into Communist lines, it permitted the hard-pressed fortress to replenish its reserves at the following levels: two days of food, five days of 105-mm. shells, and six days of 120-mm. mortar shells. With the air drops now being so large and so vital to the survival of the fortress, the communists made it a habit to register machine guns on some of the most conspicuous parcels and to await the dark of night in silence until some movement on the French side showed that an attempt was being made to collect them. Then the enemy machine guns would open up on the collection crews...

The perimeter held for about another three weeks—until May 7—with an estimated 62 aircraft lost and 167 damaged in the attempt to save it. In the passage, Fall alludes to the similar doomed attempt at Stalingrad; and he died in the field with U.S. Marines a year before witnessing the successful application of air relief and resupply at Khe Sanh (a siege, ironically, also commanded by Giap). To recap, in 1954, a besieged airfield/firebase was kept alive by C-47s and C-119s, to the chagrin of a Vietnamese Communist force active at night.

*Development and Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships* describes the night-time application of revolutionary side-firing aircraft to the defense of similar earthbound forces in Southeast Asia, not only for besieged installations, but convoys and medical evacuation missions as well. In Chapter II—Gunship I (AC-47)—Jack S. Ballard describes that concept's successful application by the USAF on the “Spooky” platform:

[The] stream of minigun fire dealt attackers deadly blows and lifted defenders' spirits. Spooky could loiter over and illuminate an area [via its flare capability] then strike with pinpoint precision, proving the predictions of its originators that it was well-suited for counterinsurgency situations. The Spooky count and the Airmen's boast that no outpost or village was ever lost while under gunship protection reflected Spooky's great contribution... It is clear that from 1965 on Spooky countered the enemy's previous advantage of picking out friendly positions to strike and overrun at night.

There were, however, performance limitations in the C-47—its age, cargo capacity, the low wing that impeded both gun placement and target visibility, low maximum speed, and a takeoff weight that limited ammunition and flare capacity—and USAF was soon considering other airframes for the mission. The limited number of available C-130s for conversion was a consistent issue, so C-119 Flying Boxcars were converted to AC-119 G/K models in the attempt to maximize the gunship capability in the theater. These Combat Shadows thus became the most numerous of the Air Force gunships in the conflict.

The book describes in detail the rigors of launching and nurturing the gunship concept over a decade using these three battle-tested airframes, as well as the “resourceful, persistent, and imaginative men” who kept the passion and momentum high enough to do so. There were fiscal and physical roadblocks, as well as bureaucratic opposition at high levels in the Air Staff. A lot of improvisation and “self-help” were necessary for the effort, because “modifying existing aircraft was surely the best way to secure new weapon-system capabilities from the standpoint of both time and money.” Advanced AC-130 versions, the book argues, were developed and produced “on schedule and below projected expense,” a testament to the evolution and improvement of the concept

over the decade. A significant enabler was communication between the development teams and the ‘customers’ in the air and on the ground in Southeast Asia. As the French learned during their effort, the enemy was also evolving its anti-aircraft capability—and the introduction of SAMs (surface to air missiles) to augment Vietnamese air defenses made gunship missions even more perilous as the war moved forward—so USAF development teams were constantly bolting on new sensors and countermeasures to cope with the enemy’s evolving air defenses.

Gunship missions and tactics evolved, too, as the author elucidates. The AC-47 was superlative at defending fixed installations at night—often launching under fire to orbit its own base and take down enemy mortar and other attack positions. These defense tactics were key to enabling the “oilspot” counterinsurgency model, where secure, fortified villages multiplied “outwards to eventually extend the Republic of Vietnam’s rule to the borders of Cambodia and Laos.” In Vietnam, the US was good at getting the beans and bullets into ports, airfields, and firebases. The North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong forces, however, were also subject to the demands of logistics, and *Gunships* devotes a lot of ink to the Ho Chi Minh Trail and ways in which gunships were employed to interdict the flow of supplies southward. By 1969, this 1,700-mile logistics artery was composed of trucks, bicycles, porters, and even boats. Air defenses were concentrated at key nodes, and road repair units ranged the Trail to mitigate the damage from US airstrikes. November to May featured the best flying weather over Laos, and the USAF would schedule aircraft maintenance and modifications to coincide with the rainy season in the remainder of the year—when air operations were limited and the monsoons washed the roads out. The common denominator, though, was nocturnal movement—the Trail was most active at night, so the airborne interdiction effort was, too. In the final chapter, Ballard says it is in this interdiction role that “gunship tactics changed from strikes by a single aircraft on armed reconnaissance missions to a complex team effort”—and by 1969, the team included not only fighter escort, but covert road watchers, aerial reconnaissance, forward air controllers, and captured North Vietnamese personnel providing “target generation, strike control, and damage assessment.” The author provides a stand-up analysis of why the supplies continued to get through in the Gunship II (AC-130) chapter, but it is in the subsequent chapter that he confronts measuring success in the endeavor. These metrics were an important factor in what he later describes as “top-level debate over the ‘optimum’ gunship force and its place in a ‘balanced’ air force.” The number of trucks destroyed, he argues, was not an ideal statistic when Soviet-model replacements were rolling into the theater unabatedly and offsetting the truck-kill assessment. “Several intelligence analysts,” he writes, “argued for more attention to through-put of supplies rather than the number of trucks destroyed or damaged. It proved far harder, however, to assess through-put than results of the attacks.” Given the nocturnal missions assigned the gunships, though, in the limited war

scenario of Southeast Asia, the book makes the case that these airframes proved ideal, whether the success metrics were reliable or not.

To circle back, then why not consider the counterfactual of the French employing this technology in C-47 and C-119 airlifters a decade earlier over Dien Bien Phu, given the impressive performance in these respective airframes later converted to gunships over Vietnam and Laos? Ballard’s book describes successful gunship proliferation to the South Vietnamese and Laotian air forces under the Nixon Administration’s Vietnamization program, so the idea of non-USAF crews flying these missions is not fantastic. There were opportunities for the base defense role, to be sure, at Dien Bien Phu, but the Viet Minh also famously put a lot of effort into logistic support for the siege—someone, after all, had to porter the mortars, anti-aircraft guns, and shells up into the hills surrounding the fortress. As Fall recorded it:

Day after day, until the last day of the battle... the exhausted Navy and Air Force pilots dived into the flak corridor of roads 13 and 41, spraying coolie columns and the rare trucks that could be spotted through the camouflage. At certain points the Viet-Minh had actually tied the tall treetops together until they formed a tunnel of vegetation. We shall never know how many thousands of coolies and mountain tribesmen impressed into the dan cong died under the strafing, the napalm, the delayed-fuse bombs, and the hail of “Lazy Dogs,” [unguided kinetic missiles dispersed from the air via under-wing cluster adapters] but Giap’s siege force never ran out of ammunition. As Giap was to say later to a French visitor: “We did construct our supply roads; our soldiers knew well the art of camouflage, and we succeeded in getting our supplies through.”

Thus, the opportunities for air interdiction were also in place. What was not around in French Indochina were the innovators, the improvements, or the implementations described in this comprehensive history of gunships tested and employed over similar installations, jungles, and trails in Southeast Asia. The history ends, of course, in 1972, so the volume does not describe the AC-130’s further evolution and performance over locales as diverse as Panama and the Middle East. The book effectively tees up those events, however, without mentioning them. What it does describe is the USAF, from places like the Pentagon, Warner-Robbins AFB, Wright-Patterson AFB, and the theater itself, doing the heavy lifting to perfect this acknowledged capability for diverse terrain and demands today.



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