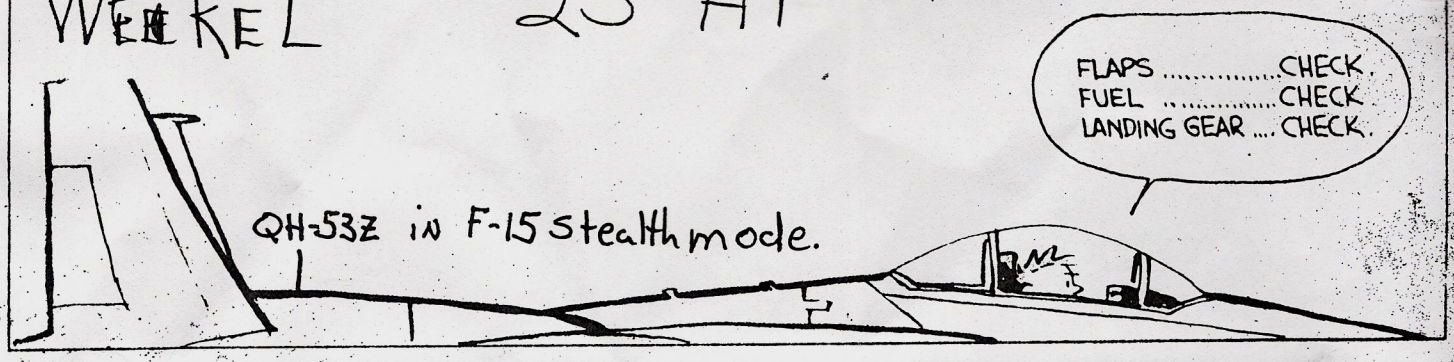
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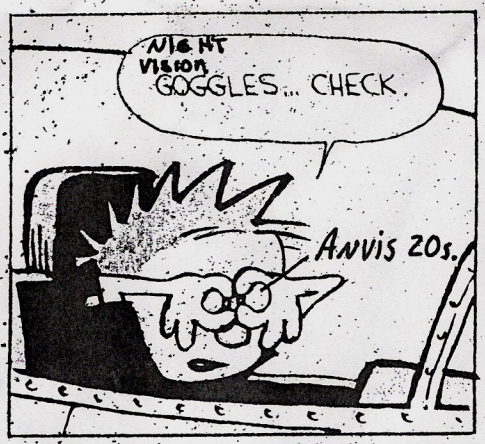
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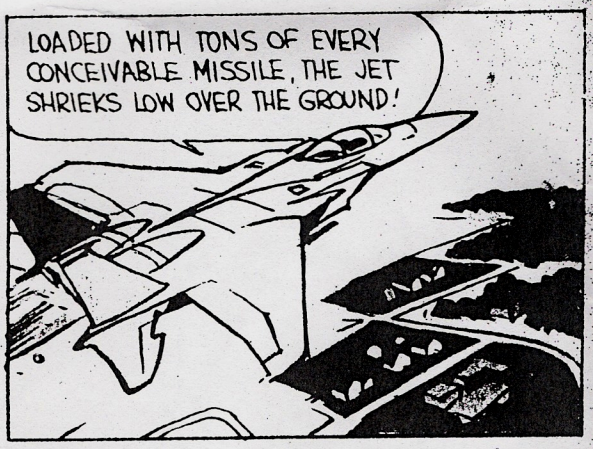
Wickel and 23rd AF

by WATTERSON

















Col. Gray deserves praise, not criticism

Mission importance shown in signature

You recently published three letters critical of the commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field. It is obvious those writers know little about the military and absolutely nothing about this outstanding commander of one of the most important organizations in the military.

They were upset because the commander mentioned that Gen. Manuel Noriega had signed a flight map as he was being flown to Miami from Panama by a crew for the 1st SOW.

Obviously, they did not understand the commander's intent. After much necessary secrecy about Hurlburt's role in the military action in Panama, the commander was attempting to be cooperative with the press by explaining Hurlburt's part in the mission.

He explained that aircraft from Hurlburt led the mission, and the personnel from Hurlburt conducted their portion of the mission almost to perfection.

While explaining that a C-130 from Hurlburt conducted the important mission of transporting Noriega, he revealed that Noriega had even signed the map. This was a way of showing the press that Hurlburt personnel had indeed been entrusted with such an important task.

It was not, as the three letters would lead one to believe, a case of airmen obtaining an autograph from a celebrity. How could anyone believe that airmen who had risked their lives in Panama — to restore democracy, protect Americans, and capture such a tyrant as Noriega — would think of this murderer and dope lord as a hero celebrity?

We at Hurlburt, who know the man who leads the 1st SOW, know him as a modest, brave, outstanding military leader who cares for his country and the airmen in his command. He should receive tributes and medals — not criticism from people who don't know what they are talking about.

It would seem to me that your paper should be doing an in-depth story on the 1st SOW, its commander, and its personnel for their outstanding victory in Panama. Everyone has a right to an opinion, but it would seem to me that a story in your newspaper could explain to those without knowledge just what this great man and his people have accomplished in missions all over the world.

DICK ROBEEN
Fort Walton Beach

What did Col. Gray do to earn attacks?

OK, let me get this straight: A man has served his country with great distinction for 23 years. He takes command of the 1st Special Operations Wing and leads his forces into combat (in an operation historians are already calling one of the most complicated in the annals of military history). His forces spearhead the entire operation, achieve unparalleled success and subsequently return all 1st SOW personnel safely back to their families.

And he deserves to be attacked? He deserves to be ruled out for a star? He deserves to be ridiculed by some of the local folk? Is there something wrong with this logic or did I miss something? The president's late for a meeting and we impeach him — OK, I got it now. Isn't democracy great!

I'm sure most of us don't feel the letters from Spearman, Tomasek and Turner worthy of a reply. Yet to those readers who feel an explanation might be in order, try this one on.

We were there. We left our families over the holidays without a word. We flew through treacherous weather to get there and carry out the will of our nation. We were shot at. Some of our brethren were killed. We didn't sleep for nearly three days. When we did have time we slept on cots, ate out of tinfoil and showered with a hose — and Col. Gray was right there with us.

We have suffered more than anyone over the last two years of continuous alerts, exhaustive life-threatening training, missed birthdays, anniversaries, Little League games, etc. So if an autographed flight chart hanging in a memorabilia room is enough to make up for all that hardship, hadn't you ought to bite your tongue lest the deal of the century pass through your claws?

If any of us have offended one of our fellow Americans by our actions — whether it be the crew member who merely solicited an autograph on a flight chart or the wing commander who tried to share his excitement with the local populace that not only did his troops perform with great distinction, they all came home alive — well, gosh, I guess we're sorry.

If any of your readers are concerned about role models for their children, I can think of about 5,000 folks at the 1st SOW who would be outstanding examples — and Col. Gray ought to be No. 1 on the list!

RANDY O'BOYLE
Navarre

1st SOW success excited Col. Gray

Col. Gray's actions contemptible? He acted like a squealing schoolgirl? Ms. Spearman, Mr. Tomasek, open your eyes! The signed flight map was nothing more than a souvenir of a brilliantly executed military operation.

Col. Gray's actions were of excitement, and justifiably so. How would you have felt sending 500 airmen that you are responsible for into a life-and-death situation? Col. Gray did. I am sure he had more than schoolgirl excitement knowing that none of the people he directed into this leathal situation was killed or injured.

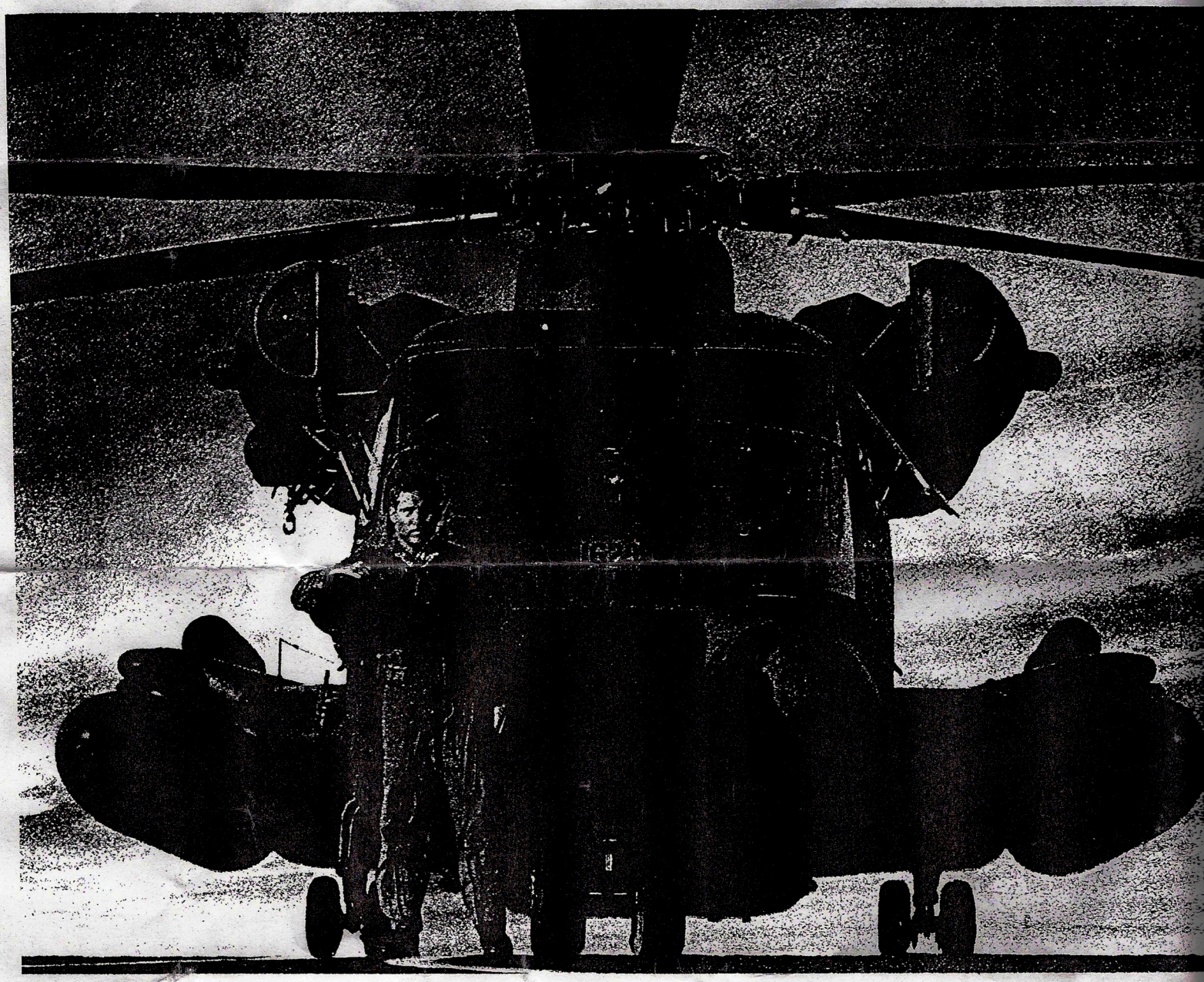
Manuel Noriega a hero? An idol? As far back as I can remember in the history of America, I can't find reference to welcoming our heroes to our country in manacles, nor can I remember having to pursue them with automatic weapons in fox-and-hound fashion.

Has this simple map clouded your eyes to the reality of what transpired in Panama? Has this simple immaterial item let you forget the sacrifices that were made? Have you forgotten how much cocaine has stopped entering this country due in part to the efforts of Col. Gray and the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field?

Col. Gray didn't change a thing! First SOW, your "anytime, anyplace" is a proven motto!

PATRICK MURRAY
Fort Walton Beach

This high tech, state of the art fighting machine is mission ready. So is the helicopter.





COMPU-SCENE MISSION GENERATOR IMAGERY FROM MH-53J WST.

In combat, the more you see, the more you win. Sharpening that visionics edge in training and mission rehearsal is what we do well. What that means to us is direct input from combat crews operating everything from tanks to helicopters to fixed wing aircraft. We sit in the seats they sit in. We see things their way before we even attempt to see things our way. And then we provide the very best training solutions, from state-of-the-art COMPU-SCENE image generation technology, to full mission simulators.

The United States Air Force took delivery of a GE built MH-53J Pave Low Weapons System Trainer in early 1990. This was the first true mission rehearsal trainer ever fielded and is described by the United States Air Force as the most sophisticated simulator delivered to the Department of Defense. Follow-ons will include a combined Weapons System Trainer and Mission Rehearsal System for the MH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter.

If you want to know more about customer commitment and leading edge training technology