

# The 20<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron The Green Hornets 1944-1994



**TSgt Dale Robinson, USAF (ret)**

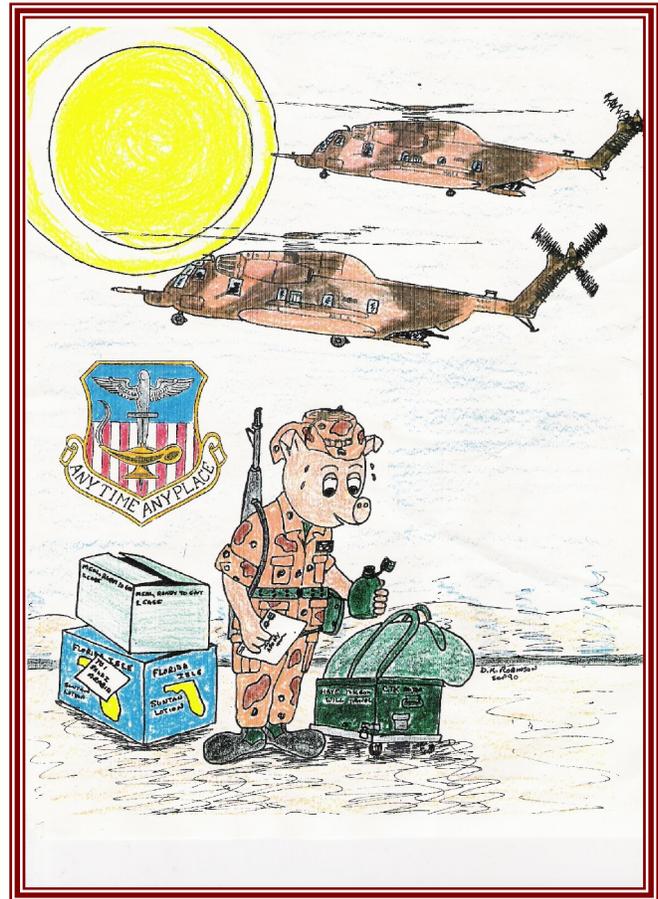
## Author's Note

This history covers the origins of the 20<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron from its creation as the 20<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron in World War II, through the mid 1990s. I was commissioned by the 20<sup>th</sup> SOS commander at the time, Lt Col Russ Rakip to compile this history before I retired from the service in 1995. I am indebted to Lt Col Rakip and his successor, Lt Col Donald Hoover, for their support in this endeavor.

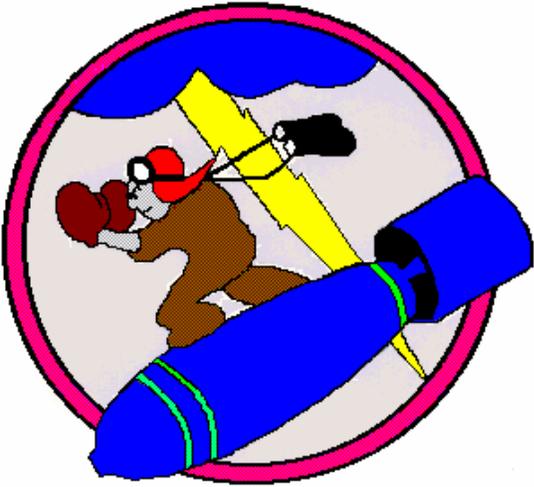
Members of the unit served bravely and honorably through out the decades and I'm afraid that this short missive does not do them justice. There are many more stories that need to be told, many stories of bravery and sacrifice that have occurred since I originally penned the words that follow. I hope one day someone will tell those stories; maybe it will be me.

The 20<sup>th</sup> has a rich history of service and I am proud to have contributed at least just a little to that service.

Dale Robinson, TSgt, USAF (ret)  
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## THE 20th TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON WORLD WAR II



The 20th Observation Squadron (Light) was constituted on 5 February 1942 and activated on 2 March 1942 at Savannah Army Air Field, Georgia. Assigned to the 76th Observation Group on 12 March 1942, the 20th moved to Pope Field, North Carolina on 28 March and remained there until it moved again to Vichy, Missouri on 14 December 1942. On 2 April 1943, the squadron was redesignated as the 20th Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter) and on 08 May 1943, the 20th moved to Morris Field, North Carolina. On 11 August 1943, the squadron was again redesignated and the 20th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron moved to Key Field, Mississippi on 31 August in preparation for deploying over seas. In early November 1943, the squadron began to deploy to the China-Burma-India theater. On 26 December 1943, the 20th arrived in Bombay, India. The squadron relocated to Guskhara, India on 4 January 1944. For the remainder of the war, elements of the 20th operated from various locations throughout India and Burma. From 26 December 1943 to 17 January 1944 the 20th was attached to the 5306th Photographic and Reconnaissance Group (Provisional) and then to 10th Air



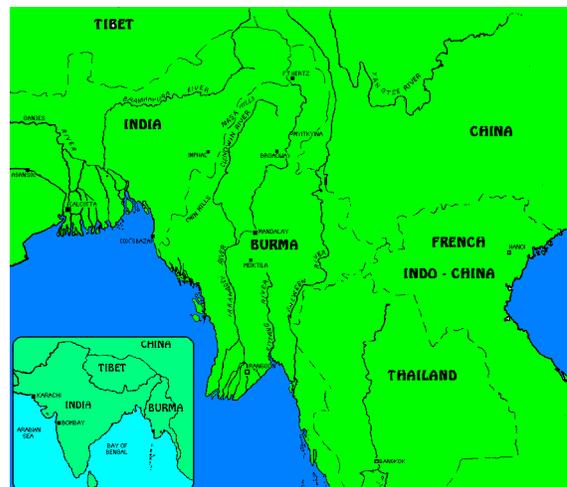
North American F-6C Mustang; photo recon version of the famed P-51 Mustang fighter.

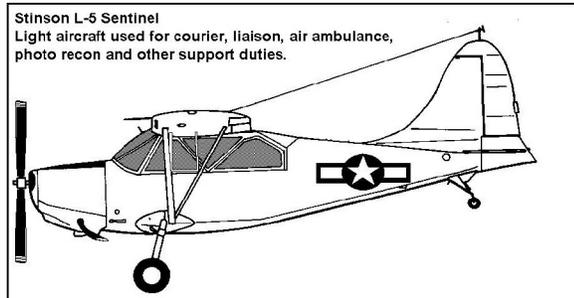


Curtiss P-40

Force until 7 March 1944. Between March and May, the squadron was attached to the 5320th Air Defense Wing (Provisional), although the squadron was assigned to the 8th Photographic Group from 25 April 1944 until the squadron returned to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and was deactivated on 27 November 1945.

During World War II, the squadron flew the A-20, B-25, DB-7, L-1, L-4, L-5, P-40, P-51 and the F-6. Combat operations had the goal of reopening surface routes to China through Burma, which was held by the



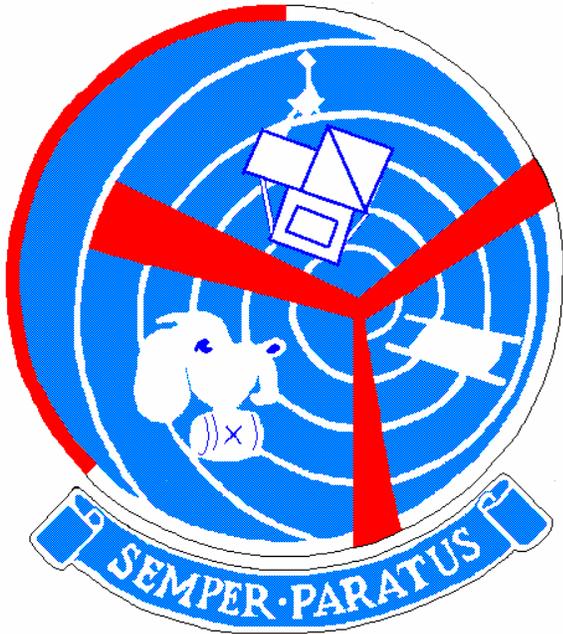


Japanese. In the course of the war, the 20th flew 21 missions in support of the 1st Air Commando Group. The 20th's tasks included photographing possible landing sites for airborne glider assaults, including the airborne assault of Operation THURSDAY, the first major combat action undertaken by the 1st Air Commandos in support of British Major General Orde C. Wingate's 2nd Chindit Campaign.

In addition to reconnaissance, the 20th flew leaflet drops, patrols, and escort missions. They also flew bombing and strafing missions, supporting the Allied forces under command of General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell in the Hukwang Valley Campaign to reopen the infamous Burma Road. In 1944 alone, the 20th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron flew 2179 missions, processing nearly a quarter of a million photos while logging 3,999 sorties and 10,040 flying hours.

The 20th was awarded campaign streamers for the India-Burma Campaign, the Central Burma Campaign, and the China Defensive, and a service streamer for the American Theater of operations.

## THE 20th HELICOPTER SQUADRON 1956-1960



The 20th Helicopter Squadron was activated at Sewart AFB, Tennessee on 9 July 1956, assigned to the 18th Air Force and attached to the 314th Troop Carrier Wing. The 20th was formed by absorbing the personnel, aircraft, and equipment of the 345th Troop Carrier Squadron (Assault, Rotary Wing). The activation of the 20th, as well as its sister squadrons, the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd Helicopter Squadrons, was the result of the inactivation of the 516th Troop Carrier



CH-21B Workhorse. Army variants were called "Shawnee."

Group (Assault, Rotary Wing). The 516th had been a victim of an Air Force and Army dispute over control of assault helicopters.

The 20th was reorganized several times in 1956, but by the end of the year, was authorized 16 H-21 helicopters, 41 officers and 124 enlisted personnel. The squadron concept called for a squadron headquarters with four flights, three of which could be dispersed or deployed. The 20th's mission was to conduct aeromedical evacuation from forward combat zones, air evacuation within the theater of operations, provide airlift support of assault or retrograde operations by airlanded delivery of units or equipment into or from forward combat zones, provide air evacuation and specialized airlifting in support of combat operations as directed by the commander in chief, Tactical Air Command.

Although the 20th had recently been activated and was undergoing organizational changes, they were extremely busy in the last half of 1956. Between July and August, the 20th supported the gunnery range at Wendover AFB, Utah, where 20th crews conducted three rescue missions. Two aircraft and crews were deployed to Ardmore AFB, Oklahoma for rescue support between July and November. Two aircraft were broken down for air transport aboard a C-124 Globemaster in July, with the first aircraft's teardown completed in only six hours. The 20th also provided manning assists to sister squadrons in July. Eight aircraft and crews were committed to an exercise entitled Operation Pine Cone in August, while a 20th aircraft was cannibalized to provide parts for sister squadrons overseas. In October, the squadron provided two crews and aircraft to support the Civil Air Patrol at Allentown, Pennsylvania in Operation Hi-Water.

On 6 November 1956, one H-21B aircraft and crew deployed to Ream Naval Air Station, California for a highly classified mission. The mission involved a series of tests to determine the H-21's ability to take a vessel at sea under tow. Specialized equipment was installed and a number of vessels were taken under tow. The tests were successfully concluded when the H-21 took a Navy LST displacing 3000 tons under tow at a speed of four and a half knots. The 20th flew a total of 54 hours in support of this test.

In early 1957, the 20th was tasked with an unusual mission to sling load a 1957 Studebaker automobile weighing more than 2800 pounds. The mission was flown in support of the Chicago Land fair and involved moving the vehicle a distance of six miles from Meigs Field to the Navy pier. It was the 20th's heaviest sling load to date.

In May 1957, the first two of four H-21s and crews deployed to Frobisher Bay in the Canadian Northwest Territory to support a joint Canadian - U.S. navy Hydrographic Survey Team. The team's mission was to accurately chart the bay. The deployment was accomplished by teardown of the H-21s and shipment by C-124s.<sup>14</sup> The mission was successfully concluded in early September 1957.

On 4 July 1958, the squadron again deployed for cold country, this time Sondrestrom Air Base, Greenland. The deployment of two aircraft and thirteen personnel via C-124 transport was to support construction of a site on the eastern end of the Distant Early Warning radar system, better known as the DEW Line. Because the squadron lacked authorization for Arctic gear, the gear was borrowed from other units. Two more aircraft and additional personnel joined the deployment in August. By the time the deployment returned home in November, the squadron had flown 500 hours, airlifted 2,038 personnel, and moved nearly 295,000 pounds of cargo in support of the mission.

In October 1958, 20th aircrews also were supporting missions in Nevada and Florida. At Indian Springs Auxiliary Air Field some fifty miles from Las Vegas, the 20th supported radiological safety monitoring. Closer to Las Vegas, at Nellis AFB, 20th crews flew missions in support of the 1958 WILLIAM TELL competition. They also supported WILLIAM TELL at Tyndall AFB, Florida, where they were tasked with recovery of target drones.

The squadron earned a plaque on 31 December 1958 for Meritorious Achievement in Flight Safety. The plaque was awarded for more than 8,000 accident-free flying hours between 1 January 1957 and 31 December 1958.

The squadron opened Detachment 1 at Myrtle Beach AFB, South Carolina on 1 March 1959 to prepare for the move of the entire squadron later in the year.

In June, the 20th assisted the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio with the unveiling of a new display. Hovering over the display at a hundred feet, the 20th H-21 hooked onto a large parachute covering the display. When the signal was given, the H-21 lifted the shroud off, unveiling the museum's latest acquisition, an Atlas Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. The museum forwarded a letter of appreciation to the squadron in recognition of their assistance.

On 16 July 1959, the 20th completed its move to Myrtle Beach AFB, South Carolina, where it was attached to the 354th Tactical Fighter Wing. The 20th Helicopter Squadron was inactivated on 8 March 1960.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA 1965 - 1972

### The Pony Express & Green Hornets



In June 1965, the 2nd Air Division in South Vietnam initiated a request for 25 Air Force CH-3C helicopters and aircrews. The helicopters would provide airlift support for forward locations like Army Special Forces camps. They also would be used for transporting combat control teams and airfield survey teams, for casualty evacuation, and for resupplying sites that were otherwise inaccessible.

On 8 October 1965, the 20th Helicopter Squadron was reactivated at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam with fourteen CH-3Cs. The 20th's mission was to augment combat search and rescue forces, perform casualty evacuation, to support communications sites, airfield construction, and the tactical air control system, to transport air liaison officers, and to perform counterinsurgency operations. The squadron had a secondary mission to be responsive to the priority requirements of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV).

Later, the squadron would replace the CH-3Cs with the more powerful CH-3E and Bell UH-1 Hueys would join the unit. On 1 August 1968, the squadron would be

redesignated as the 20th Special Operations Squadron.

The 20th began combat operations in December 1965. By March 1966, the 20th was flying an average of nearly 1000 sorties per month with flights at Tan Son Nhut (A Flight with five aircraft), Da Nang (B Flight with three aircraft), and Nha Trang (C Flight with 6 aircraft). When the 14th Air Commando Wing was activated in March 1966, the 20th was assigned to the new wing.

Between January and March, the 20th supported Operation DOUBLE EAGLE for the U.S. Marine Corps. DOUBLE EAGLE was the largest amphibious assault against hostile forces since the Korean War. The 20th committed eight aircraft and crews to the effort. The 20th's CH-3Cs were used to airlift 105 millimeter Howitzer cannon to forward locations, as well as personnel and supplies. Crews and aircraft often came under hostile fire.

In other combat action, the 20th was called on to evacuate wounded troops from a Special Forces camp in the infamous A Shau Valley. On 9 March, two aircraft were dispatched. As the first aircraft made its approach into the camp, it was hit by enemy fire. The crew was able to land safely inside the camp, but the aircraft was unflyable. Braving heavy enemy fire, the second aircraft managed to land in the camp, recovering the crew of the first aircraft and carrying out 35 wounded troops.

Earlier, in February, two aircraft and crews were deployed to Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand from Tan Son Nhut to form D Flight. In April the entire flight at Nha Trang was deployed to Udorn AB, Thailand. In May, operations at Da Nang halted and that flight moved to Udorn as well. The moves were the result of requests by the government of Thailand. The 20th's CH-3Cs were utilized



to transport Thai military and police for counter-terrorist and counterinsurgency operations. The large helicopters enabled Thai forces to respond rapidly to communist activities. The 20th became known as the "Pony Express" and used the radio call sign "Pony".

By June 1966, only a single flight remained in Vietnam, based at Tan Son Nhut. Although there were no aircraft based there, the squadron headquarters moved to Nha Trang. With the bulk of its assets in Thailand, the 20th began to concentrate on the unconventional warfare role. Missions into Laos soon took precedence for the Pony Express in Thailand as the 20th's crews were tasked to support the Laotian forces of Lieutenant General Vang Pao, and perform refugee and civic action missions. The CH-3Cs transported Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams and crash investigators, and provided logistics support for isolated mountain top radar and communications sites. They delivered rice and friendly troops to San Nuia, a friendly outpost on top of a 5,000 foot mountain in Laos. They inserted indigenous "road watch" teams to points along the Ho Chi Minh Trail from Mu Guia Pass south to the Cambodian border. Several missions were flown in the vicinity of the heavily defended enemy stronghold of Tchepone in central Laos. In April 1966, a 47 man team was inserted between two branches of the trail under cover of darkness. A month later, the

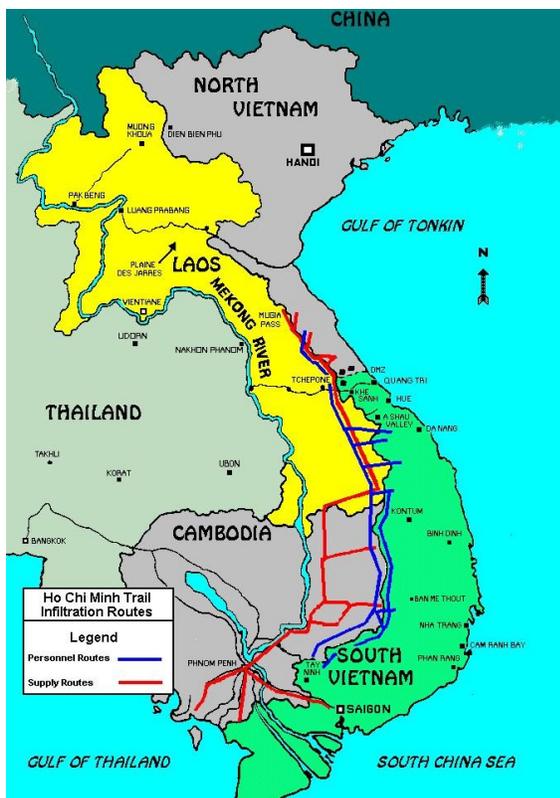
team was extracted from the same area, bringing back valuable intelligence.

In two separate missions, "road-destruct" teams were dropped near the trail. They were left overnight to mine the trail and to destroy any vehicles caught there. The teams also raided Pathet Lao villages before being extracted. A total of 388 friendly troops were flown into or out of Laos in the first five months of operations in Thailand.

In June 1966, the 20th's CH-3Cs, flying from South Vietnam, infiltrated a combat team into North Vietnam, just north of the DMZ. In 1966, the CH-3 crews flew a total of 315 infiltration sorties.

Flying from Thailand in 1967, the Pony Express was able to penetrate farther north into enemy territory. Thirty seven penetration missions were scheduled and eight were successful. Most aborted missions were because the chopper crews failed to make contact with the deployed Special Forces teams. A successful recovery of a team in September 1967 boosted morale of the teams and the Pony Express crews.

In June 1967, fifteen UH-1F/P Huey helicopters joined the 20th. The Hueys had originally been assigned to the 606th Air Commando Squadron at Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand. As part of the 606th, the Huey section performed missions in Laos and Thailand in support of the Thai Army and Border Patrol Police. A 606th Huey with a three man crew lifted 34 flood victims from danger in Thailand, one of many civic action missions performed by the Huey section. They also flew missions for Air America, often in civilian clothing so U.S. military involvement could be denied. The 606th's Huey section was transferred to Vietnam and the 20th Helicopter Squadron after it was decided that their services were no longer needed by the Thai government. The 20th's Huey section was known as the "Green Hornets" and used the radio call sign "Hornet".



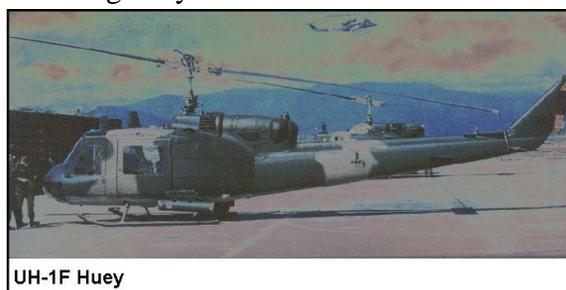
The Bell UH-1F was originally chosen by the Air Force to perform support duties for missile sites. The F-model was based on the civilian Bell 204B, but equipped with the same powerful General Electric T-58 turboshaft engine used on the CH-3C. The T-58 produced more than 1200 shaft horsepower, driving a 48 foot main rotor. The Green Hornet UH-1Fs were known as "slicks" and used as troop carriers, delivering



Special Forces teams both inside the borders of Vietnam and across the border into Cambodia. They were usually armed with "free 60s", infantry model M-60 machine guns suspended on "bungee" cords.

The 20th's UH-1Ps were UH-1Fs modified to accept a pair of GAU-2B/A mini guns, one in each cargo door, and two LAU-59/A 2.75 inch rocket pods mounted to hard points. The mini guns were mounted on a pintle and could be locked

to forward fire positions and fired by the pilot or could be aimed and fired by gunners in the cabin. The P-model Hueys were used as gunships, flying escort missions for the "slicks". As more of the 20th's F-models were modified to accept armament, the difference between the F- and P-models became blurred and the designations were used interchangeably.



In 1967 and 1968, the Green Hornets lost four UH-1s to enemy fire. 20th aviators earned six Silver Stars, and eleven Purple Hearts in the last half of 1968. The Air Force Cross was awarded to six 20th crewmen in 1967-68.

By the beginning of 1968, all the 20th CH-3Cs were located in Thailand. They were organized into three flights (A, B, and C), all located at Udorn Air Base. The mission at Udorn was support of a classified mission in northern Laos, support of MACVSOG (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam - Special Operations Group), logistical support of TACAN navigation facilities in Thailand and Laos and support of Special Forces training in Thailand.

While returning from a successful road watch team infiltration in the spring of 1968, a Pony Express CH-3C flown by Lieutenant Colonel Shirrel G. Martin was called upon to rescue a downed A-1E pilot in central Laos. The A-1E had been escorting a pair of helicopters when hit by enemy fire. The pilot was able to escape the aircraft and parachuted into tall trees. Although a 37 millimeter anti-aircraft weapon was known to be in the area, Martin and his crew hovered over the downed pilot, encountering continuous small arms fire. Utilizing the rescue hoist equipped

with a forest penetrator seat, the fighter pilot was rescued.



Several insertion and extraction missions were flown from a forward operating location (FOL) in June. At the first landing zone (LZ), two teams were to be inserted and one extracted. The first CH-3C went into the LZ to drop the first team and load the team being extracted. The second aircraft orbited overhead, waiting its turn to land the remaining team. The high chopper drew small arms and automatic weapons fire. The aircraft took five hits, including one in a main rotor blade and two through the cockpit. Pilot Major Jay R. Oberg was injured by flying plexiglass. Both aircraft returned safely to the FOL and then to Udorn.

By July 1968, the Pony Express was down to ten CH-3C aircraft. Maintenance problems reduced the actual number available to perform missions to no more than five or six at any given time. As a result, the CH-3s were augmented by a flight of four UH-1F Hueys. The Thailand-based Hueys also used the Pony Express nickname and the "Pony" call sign. The Hueys, however, did not have sufficient range to perform cross-border operations.

On 3 April 1968, a reconnaissance team under attack by the enemy required assistance from the 20th's Green Hornets. Aircraft and crews launched from Ban Me Thout and headed for the team's position some 15 miles southwest of Ban Me Thout. Gunships provided fire suppression while a slick flown by Major Norman F. Eldridge searched for

landing site to extract the team. No suitable site was found, but Major Eldridge found a hole in the tree canopy and hovered there, dropping a rope ladder. By now, darkness had settled on the battle. Major Eldridge, without regard for the safety of himself or his crew, held his aircraft in a hover with the aircraft lights on while the recon team scrambled up the rope ladder. The team was successfully recovered.

The Pony Express was called upon to perform rescue work again in July 1968 when an A-1E pilot bailed out over North Vietnam. Two CH-3Cs, accompanied by two A-1E escorts were performing a routine road watch infiltration/exfiltration (infil/exfil), recovering a twelve man team and deploying a nine man team. The target area was about 120 miles east of Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, near the North Vietnamese border. The infil/exfil went off without problems and the aircraft were enroute home when one of the A-1Es experienced a propeller malfunction. The A-1E was vectored to a "safe" area in North Vietnam, where the pilot bailed out. The pilot landed in the top of the tree canopy, uninjured. A CH-3C piloted by Captain Walter W. Martin hovered over the thick jungle. The rescue hoist with forest penetrator seat was lowered and the pilot recovered. The entire rescue operation took less than a minute!

Green Hornet pilot 1st Lieutenant James P. Fleming, flying a UH-1F Huey, was awarded the Medal of Honor for bravery under enemy fire when he rescued a six-man Special Forces team in November 1968.

The team had only just been inserted by a Green Hornet flight of five Hueys, three UH-1F slicks and two UH-1P gunships, into a heavily forested area near Duc Co on 26 November when they came across a large enemy force. The team commander requested extraction. The Hueys, low on fuel and heading home, turned around.

They arrived to find the team trapped with their backs to a river and surrounded by the enemy. The gunships made a pass to lay down covering fire from their miniguns. One gunship was hit by enemy machine gun fire and was forced to autorotate into a small clearing. The lead slick followed the crippled aircraft down and rescued the crew only minutes before enemy troops arrived.

The number two slick, low on fuel was forced to withdraw, leaving only the third slick and the remaining gunship on the scene. The Special Forces team was ordered to move 20 yards down the river bank to a small clearing. The gunship positioned itself between the enemy and the slick flown by Lieutenant Fleming. Fleming attempted to get into the clearing, holding his nose over the river bank and his tail over the river.

Enemy fire had pinned the team down, keeping them from reaching the chopper. Fleming backed the chopper out as his door gunners kept the enemy at bay. Once in the clear, he nosed the Huey over and climbed out of there, circling to make another attempt. In spite of facing the heaviest enemy fire he had ever seen and being dangerously low on fuel, Fleming brought his aircraft back around and headed for the river bank clearing, skimming the water. He hoped that the river banks would provide some measure of safety from the enemy fire that was concentrating on the clearing.

The Special Forces team had set up a series of Claymore mines around their position to cover their escape. As they raced for the chopper, the enemy forces tripped the Claymores, setting off a series of blasts. The Huey hugged the river's edge, again with the front of the skids on the shore and the tail boom extended out over the river. The team was helped aboard by the door gunners and Fleming backed the chopper out over the river once more. This time, as the UH-1 climbed away from the river, gunfire shattered the windshield, but missed Fleming,

his crew, and the team. Lieutenant Fleming landed his shot up Huey safely at a friendly base a short time later.

In January 1969, the Pony Express evacuated more than 5000 persons in 539 sorties from a village in northern Laos, where they had been cut off by communist forces. The effort required hauling fuel in drums to the site for refueling the helicopters at the pickup point. The evacuation was hampered by early morning fog and hazardous terrain. The pickup point was in the mountains at the 4700 foot elevation. The unarmed and unescorted choppers transported the villagers to a safe area fourteen miles away. Although carried out deep in an area controlled by the enemy, the six-day operation successfully concluded without loss of life or damage to aircraft.

Unfortunately, a CH-3 was lost that same month while supporting a TACAN site in northern Laos on 17 January 1969. Three crew members and three passengers died in the crash. Two crew chiefs and one passenger survived and were transferred to Clark AB, Philippines for hospitalization.

In early March, the Pony Express Hueys performed a rescue in Laos while supporting a communications site. An Army OV-1 Mohawk, one of a flight of two on a reconnaissance mission in southern Laos was hit by anti-aircraft fire. The Army crew tried to return to safety, but their crippled aircraft could not maintain altitude and the two-man crew was forced to eject. The remaining OV-1 circled overhead and vectored the two UH-1F Hueys into the area. The OV-1 provided close air support to halt advancing hostile forces. Under constant heavy fire from small arms and a .50 caliber automatic weapon, the Hueys went in for the pickup. The two Army pilots were successfully recovered from certain capture or death at the hands of the enemy.

In late March, eighteen helicopters, including CH-3Es and UH-1Fs from the 20th,

were utilized to insert a 230-man assault force into a landing zone. The infil was successfully accomplished, but the recovery was delayed for operational reasons. As the aircraft began their approach to the pickup point, they came under fire from hostile forces. Three Pony Express CH-3Es and one UH-1F received battle damage. One aircraft suffered fifteen bullet holes and lost an engine. Three 20th pilots were wounded in the action. The exfil was aborted and the aircraft returned to Thailand to recover.



Almost a month later, another infiltration of a 215-man force from a forward operating location was scheduled. The team was to take a strategic position overlooking an enemy-controlled road. Five CH-3Es and three UH-1Fs were escorted by eight A-1 Skyraiders and a forward air controller (FAC) in an O-1. The A-1s utilized the call sign "Hobo", while the FAC utilized the call sign "Raven". As the helicopters approached, the FAC directed four of the Hobos to suppress ground fire around the LZ. As the A-1s attacked a nearby hill, the first wave of helicopters touched down and unloaded. As the first two choppers took off from the LZ, they encountered ground fire. The next wave turned to the right as they took off and avoided further small arms fire. With the first half of the infil completed successfully, the helicopters returned to the FOL for the remaining troops. As they returned to the LZ with the rest of the assault force, Raven reported that the original LZ was under mortar attack. A site a short distance away was selected as an alternate LZ. The first two

aircraft landed and de-planed their men and equipment. They took off without incident, but the next two CH-3Es were fired on as they made their approach to the new LZ. They aborted the attempt and the Hobo Skyraiders rolled in to suppress the enemy fire. The remaining members of the assault force were successfully inserted and the Pony Express crews and aircraft returned safely.

In the early months of 1969, the 20th encountered some of its heaviest combat yet, losing five more Hueys, this time to ground fire. On 13 April, while extracting a recon team, the Green Hornet flight was fired on after successfully making the pick up. A gunship flying escort for the extraction was hit by ground fire. The co-pilot was killed and the aircraft commander seriously wounded. Although on the verge of unconsciousness due to loss of blood and a wound in the left leg, the pilot managed to land in a nearby clearing. Two slicks rescued the crew, but the aircraft was left behind and destroyed to prevent it from falling into enemy hands.

On 21 April, a reconnaissance team had stumbled into a large force near the enemy base camp. The team had been without fresh water for a day a half and was exhausted and dehydrated. Hornet gunships came in and laid down suppressive fire, making repeated passes. A slick went in for the extraction, but was shot down on the attempt. In a battle that lasted nearly seven and a half hours, Green Hornet crews fired some 200,000 rounds of minigun ammunition and 500 2.75 inch rockets. Army gunships provided additional support while the Hornet UH-1Ps returned to base to refuel and rearm. Finally, three Army light helicopters were able to extract the team and the crew members of the 20th's downed slick.

Forays into Cambodian airspace all but ceased in the spring of 1969, but the 20th Green Hornets continued to fly gunship support for Vietnamese H-34 helicopters.

In May, a Pony Express crew came to the aid of an Army UH-1 that suffered from engine failure some sixty miles southwest of Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. An airborne rescue control plane pinpointed the Huey's location and directed the CH-3E into the area. The CH-3 crew rescued nine of the twelve aboard the UH-1. The remaining crew members stayed behind to guard the aircraft and effect repairs.

Infil/exfil missions and rescues continued to be the order of business for the Pony Express in June and July. On 1 August 1969, the CH-3s and the Pony Express mission were transferred to the 21st Special Operations Squadron.

By mid summer, the 20th was left with only the UH-1 Hueys. The Pony Express UH-1Fs and crews based in Thailand returned to Vietnam and joined the Green Hornets. Three UH-1Fs were lost due to engine failures in July and August 1969. Crews received only minor injuries, although the aircraft were destroyed. The Huey fleet was grounded for approximately 30 days, while the incidents were studied.

In September, the squadron moved from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa Air Base, South Vietnam. Living quarters and squadron facilities were cramped at the new location. Enlisted quarters housed 72 men in a facility designed for 54. Latrine and shower facilities were more than a hundred yards from the quarters. Officers were billeted three to room at the location. Squadron offices were all located in a single room that had been the briefing room for the 308th Tactical Fighter Squadron.

In 1971, the 20th replaced its UH-1F/P Hueys with the twin engine UH-1N, still flying gunship and unconventional warfare missions. The UH-1N Twin Huey was fitted with two Pratt and Whitney PT6T-3 engines mated to a reduction gearbox and producing 1800 shaft horsepower. The N-model Huey had a larger cabin, allowing a passenger load

of 13 plus a pilot and co-pilot. 20th N-model gunships were armed with GAU-2B/A mini guns and the LAU-59 rocket system. The N-models could mount XM-94 40 millimeter grenade launchers in place of the mini guns. Green Hornet N-model Hueys often sported a 40 mm grenade launcher in the right door and a mini gun in the left. Like the F- and P-models, 20th N-models were devoid of any markings other than the aircraft serial number and the hornet stenciled on the tail.

Following the deactivation of the 14th Special Operations Wing in 1971, the 20th was reassigned to the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing. In March 1972, the 20th was inactivated as the U.S. involvement in Vietnam began to draw down. By the time the 20th was inactivated, some 19 Hueys had been lost in combat, 13 due to enemy fire.

## THE 20TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON



The 20th Special Operations Squadron was reactivated at Hurlburt Field, Florida on 1 January 1976 as a part of Tactical Air Command's 1st Special Operations Wing. The 20th's mission was to fly the UH-1N and CH-3E in the unconventional warfare role.<sup>28</sup> The next two years saw the unit grow to its full strength of six Bell UH-1N Hueys and four Sikorsky CH-3Es.



In January 1978, the 20th became involved in a program called J-CATCH. J-CATCH, for "Joint Countering Attack Helicopters", was to develop tactics to counter a growing threat from attack helicopters.<sup>29</sup> Concern over the increased helicopter firepower and numbers in potential adversary nations led Tactical Air Command to outfit 20th UH-1Ns and CH-3Es

as aggressors, creating a force that simulated Soviet attack helicopter capabilities and tactics. Scenarios included helicopter-to-helicopter tactics, and helicopter-to-fighter tactics. The J-CATCH helicopters were configured with chain guns mounted under the fuselage, which were aimed by the co-pilot's hand controlled sight. The 20th's aggressor force was known as "Red Force" and adopted a red scarf, which is still worn by the unit today. The red star on the unit patch today is a reminder of the J-CATCH mission, which successfully concluded in 1979.



After the failure of the Iranian hostage rescue attempt in late April 1980, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force ordered the reassignment of nine HH-53H Pave Lows from the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service to the 1st SOW on 14 May 1980. By 17 May, eight of the aircraft had been transferred from Kirtland AFB, New Mexico to the 20th SOS at Hurlburt Field. The ninth aircraft was still undergoing modification at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida.

The HH-53H Pave Lows, which had become operational only a few months earlier, were the result of a number of upgrades of the old HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopter. The modification program was code named "Pave Low" and the name stuck on the helicopter. The Pave Low program had actually begun in the late 1970s to augment combat rescue forces with

an all-weather, nighttime, low level capability.

The transfer of the Kirtland Pave Lows, including Kirtland aircrews and maintenance personnel to special ops, began the 20th's transition out of the H-3. The sudden transfer of rescue aircraft and personnel to Tactical Air Command created a lot of hard feelings in the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service and its parent Military Airlift Command.

Almost immediately, the Pave Lows and their crews, along with AC-130 gunships and MC-130 Combat Talons were deployed for Operation HONEY BADGER, which was a rehearsal for a possible second rescue attempt for the hostages in Iran. The new wrinkles in the problem: the Iranians had dispersed the hostages to hamper further rescue attempts and the Soviets had stepped up surveillance of U.S military movements in the U.S. and in the Middle East. Still, after nearly five months of training and the loss of an HH-53H in a tragic crash at Dugway, Utah, HONEY BADGER was ready to go. Plans to press with the rescue were put on hold because estimates put potential losses of rescuers and hostages at an unacceptable 30 percent. The force remained on standby, however, until the hostages were released in January 1981.

While the Pave Low section awaited orders to deploy to Iran, the 20th's UH-1N flight was pressed into rescue duty while deployed to Nellis AFB, Nevada for a RED FLAG exercise. Early on the morning of 21 November 1980, fire broke out in the MGM Grand Hotel in downtown Las Vegas. Within the first thirty minutes after the fire was spotted, a Las Vegas police helicopter, augmented by three civilian helicopters, had rescued between 250 and 300 hotel patrons from the building's roof. Many more were still trapped in the building, perhaps thousands, when a call went out to the Nellis AFB command post for help. Nellis' 57th Tactical Fighter Wing maintained a detachment of UH-1Ns at Indian Springs

Auxiliary Air Field, which soon joined the rescue effort. Nellis command post, realizing the dire need for helicopters, also notified the 20th's deployed crews and the 302nd SOS, an Air Force Reserve unit flying CH-3Es deployed to RED FLAG from Luke AFB, Arizona.

Within forty minutes of the call, the 20th's three UH-1Ns were airborne. They joined the three CH-3Es from the 302nd and three UH-1Ns from the 57th's Detachment 1. They began to ferry fire, medical, and rescue personnel and supplies and equipment to the roof of the hotel, returning with exhausted rescue personnel and firemen. 20th crews transported around 150 emergency personnel to or from the roof, along with five survivors. The UH-1N crews from Det 1 pulled 57 survivors from the roof, while the CH-3E crews from the 302nd pulled 17 survivors from balconies with their rescue hoists and



forest penetrators.

When the blaze was finally brought under control and extinguished, 84 lives had been lost and nearly 700 persons had been injured in the second deadliest hotel fire in U.S. history. Undoubtedly, many more would have lost their lives if not for the actions of the crews from the 20th, their comrades in Det 1 and the 302nd, and their civilian counterparts. After the rescue, all three Air Force helicopter units were recognized on the national television program "That's Incredible". Co-host John Davidson honored all the Air

Force members involved in the rescue, saying "They are truly American heroes."

Following the tragic Iranian hostage rescue attempt, a Special Operations Review Group was commissioned and the Air Force began to take a look at its future needs with the Air Force 2000 Study. As a result of the studies, special operations gained new emphasis. Active duty Air Force special operations forces were still aligned under the Tactical Air Command and consisted of the single wing at Hurlburt Field, and two squadrons overseas.



The Air Force 2000 Study recommended that special operations be placed under HQ USAF as a Special Operations Agency or in a major command as a numbered air force. Military Airlift Command, originally opposed to consolidation, was now a proponent of consolidating special ops and combat rescue forces. MAC argued that placing these assets under MAC control would be the most efficient way to manage both special operations and rescue forces. Since MAC already controlled most C-130 and helicopter aircraft and personnel anyway, MAC argued that it was only logical that MAC should control the special ops assets. The logic of the argument finally convinced TAC commander General Wilbur Creech and in September 1982, TAC agreed that Military Airlift Command should be the sole manager of Air Force Special Operations Forces.

In March 1983, MAC established the 23rd Air Force at Scott AFB, Illinois. Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service and the newly reactivated 2nd Air Division at Hurlburt Field fell under the new numbered air force. The 2nd Air Division was to manage all Air Force special operations forces, including the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt, the 1st Special Operations Squadron at Clark AB, Republic of the Philippines, the 7th SOS at Sembach, Germany, and a special operations detachment at Howard AB, Panama, along with all Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard units with special operations missions. The 1st Special Operations Wing consisted of three flying squadrons, the 8th SOS, flying MC-130E Combat Talons, the 16th SOS, flying AC-130H Spectre gunships, and the 20th SOS, still flying UH-1Ns and HH-53Hs.

In May 1983, the 20th SOS UH-1N flight was tasked for drug interdiction in a mission code named Operation BAT. The purpose was to stem the flow of illegal drugs from the Bahamas, Antilles, and Turks Islands in co-operation with the Drug Enforcement Agency and the government of the Bahamas. The 20th's UH-1Ns continued to fly Operation BAT missions until October 1985, when the UH-1Ns and the BAT mission were transferred to Homestead AFB, Florida, and the 48th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron.

On 4 July 1983, Operation BAT missions resulted in the capture of a Cessna 404 aircraft, its pilot, and 863 pounds of cocaine, plus the capture of a 70 foot motor vessel and more than 3,000 bales of marijuana, weighing more than 30 tons.

A UH-1N crashed during an Operation BAT mission in January 1984, killing three of the four crewmen aboard. Dead were Captain Dyke H. Whitbeck, First Lieutenant Thomas L. Hamby, and Staff Sergeant Edgardo L. Acha. Staff Sergeant Paul B. Cartter was seriously injured.

A 20th SOS UH-1N worked with a U.S. Customs aircraft in December 1984, chasing a drug smuggler aircraft from the Bahamas to Seabring, Florida. Two smugglers were arrested and the aircraft and its load of marijuana was seized.

During Operation BAT, the 20th had flew more than 3,000 sorties which lead to the capture or destruction of more than \$1.5 billion in drugs, and the aircraft, vessels, vehicles and equipment used to smuggle them.

In February 1988, Panamanian strongman General Manuel Noriega was indicted on drug trafficking charges by a U.S. court. Political and economic sanctions against Panama were tried in an effort to force Noriega from power. Americans living and working in Panama became victims of threats and violence. By May 1989, the discord between the U.S. and Panama reached a new height when Noriega's hand-picked presidential candidate was defeated by a landslide vote. General Noriega declared the election null and void. Panamanians rioted in protest, but the Dignity Battalion, Noriega's personal army, put down the riots with force.

In October 1989, General Noriega survived a coup attempt and began to consolidate his power through more aggressive elimination of his opponents. Relations between the U.S. and Panama rapidly worsened.

On 15 December 1989, the Panamanian National Assembly rubber stamped Noriega's declaration of war against the United States. The next night, the Panamanian Defense Force killed a U.S. Marine Corps officer and arrested and beat a U.S. Navy officer and his wife. The Navy officer and his wife had witnessed the killing.

Back at Hurlburt Field, the 1st Special Operations Wing and the 20th SOS had just completed a major training exercise when they were tasked for a real world mission: Operation JUST CAUSE.

On 20 December, in the early hours of the morning, paratroopers and equipment from the 75th Ranger Regiment were airdropped on the airport near Panama City by MC-130E Combat Talons from the 8th Special Operations Squadron. 20th SOS Pave Lows, after a 1500 mile flight over water, positioned special forces in and around Panama City. Joining the 20th helicopters were the 55th SOS MH-60G Pave Hawks.

Captain Thomas O'Boyle was selected as Military Airlift Command Pilot of the Year for leading a flight of four MH-53Js in a nighttime urban assault in Panama City, for his efforts in a night assault on Noriega's beach front home, and for leading an eight-ship assault to secure a Panamanian prison camp.

Major Jeffery Walls earned the Lance P. Sijan Award for his coolness under fire. Major Walls flew his Pave Low into harm's way to rescue a U.S. Army Ranger team which was pinned down by enemy fire in the opening hours of Operation JUST CAUSE.

The 23rd Air Force had committed 26 aircraft to Operation JUST CAUSE. AC-130H gunships from the 16th SOS and AC-130A gunships from the 919th Special Operations Group (AFRES) from Duke Field, Florida, provided tactical support for the Rangers and attacked PDF positions. Air Force special operations forces were crucial in neutralizing pockets of resistance in the country over the next few days.

Noriega, having sought asylum from the Vatican representative in Panama City, found himself trapped in the residence of the Papal Nuncio. U.S. forces ringed the compound and blocked all avenues of escape. Noriega surrendered on 3 January 1990 after failing to negotiate safe passage to a neutral country. An Army helicopter transported Noriega to Howard Air Base, where agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency arrested him. An MC-130E Combat Talon then flew Noriega to Homestead AFB, Florida. From there, he was

taken to Miami where he was booked and charged. He was eventually tried and convicted for his crimes.

In Panama, the duly elected president took power, ending years of dictatorship and tyranny.

Between 17 December 1989 and 14 February 1990, Air Force special operations aircraft flew 796 missions in direct support of Operation JUST CAUSE. It was the largest U.S. military operation since Vietnam and the airdrops on the morning of 20 December constituted the largest nighttime parachute assault in history.

## Air Force Special Operations Command



On 22 May 1990, the 23rd Air Force was replaced by the Air Force Special Operations Command as Air Force special operations gained major command

status. AFSOC became the Air Force component of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), controlling the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt, the 39th SOW at Rhein Mein AB, West Germany, the 353rd SOW at Clark AB, Republic of the Philippines, the 1720th Special Tactics Group, the Special Missions Operational Test and Evaluation Center, and the USAF Special Operations School, all at Hurlburt, plus the 193rd Special Operations Group (ANG), the 919th SOG and the 71st Special Operations Squadron (AFRES).

Hurlburt Field came under control of the 834th Air Base Wing, which still belonged to Military Airlift Command. AFSOC headquarters, the 1st SOW, and all other AFSOC organizations at Hurlburt became tenants of the 834th ABW.

Although the Air Force special ops transitioned from a numbered air force to a major command, the mission did not change. The mission was still to infiltrate special forces teams, resupply them, and then extricate them once their mission was complete, all clandestinely, and in all weather conditions. AFSOC was not just a fighting force in USSOCOM, but the focal point for all Air Force assets to do the job, whatever that asset might be and regardless of what organization controlled it.

As America's specialized air power, AFSOC trained for unconventional warfare,

direct action, special reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance, psychological operations, personnel recovery, and counter-narcotics missions.

The fledgling command was just a few short months from its first major challenge when it was established in May. Less than three months later, U.S. armed forces would mobilize for the largest troop deployment since the Vietnam War. AFSOC units would be among the first to deploy, the first to fight, and the last to come home.

In early August 1990, Iraqi troops crossed the border into the tiny nation of Kuwait on the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi forces seized the nation, brutalizing its citizens and plundering its wealth. Fearing it might be the next victim of Iraqi aggression, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia asked for assistance from the United States. In short order, MH-53J Pave Lows, aircrews and maintenance personnel and equipment were loaded aboard C-5 transport planes, bound for the Saudi desert in Operation DESERT SHIELD. Over the next four months, the 20th trained for desert warfare, developing tactics and practicing possible scenarios.



While U.S. and allied forces built up in Saudi Arabia, diplomatic efforts to secure the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait were stalemated. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was given an ultimatum and a deadline: withdraw from Kuwait by 15 January 1991 or face the

combined military might of more than 30 allied nations. The deadline came and went and Iraqi forces remained in Kuwait.

At 0220 on the morning of 17 January, four 20th Special Operations Squadron MH-53J Pave Low helicopters crossed the Iraqi border, leading two formations of U.S. Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. Operation DESERT STORM had begun.

With the Pave Lows' state of the art navigation systems to guide the way, the Apaches' targets were two Iraqi early warning radar sites. Taking out the early warning radar sites was crucial. U.S. and allied warplanes were twenty minutes behind them; their target was the city of Baghdad, the heavily defended Iraqi capital. If "Task Force Normandy" failed to destroy the radar sites before they could warn Baghdad, the Allied warplanes would fly into a wall of waiting anti-aircraft artillery.

Zigzagging around Bedouin camps and hugging the ground in the desert wadis, the Pave Lows relied entirely on their computers and sensors to weave unseen and unheard around Iraqi observation posts. The 20th Special Operations Squadron Pave Low crews and their Army Apache counterparts had practiced in secret for such a mission since arriving in Saudi Arabia in August 1990.

Timing and the element of surprise was crucial as the Pave Lows and Apaches slipped under the Iraqi radar net. The sites were electronically linked and had to be knocked out at exactly the same time. If the Iraqi defenders at either radar site managed to get a warning off to Baghdad, the attack on the Iraqi capital would be in jeopardy. Anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile batteries would take a heavy toll on the coalition fighter bombers.

The helicopter attack force arrived on the Iraqi doorsteps undetected. Painting their targets with laser target designators, the Apaches' Hellfire missiles knocked out the

radar sites before they could warn Baghdad. The attack force suffered no losses.

The code word "CALIFORNIA" was beamed back to U.S. Central Command Headquarters at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The first battle of DESERT STORM had been a complete success. Coalition fighter bombers swept in through the hole in the radar net and on to Baghdad in the first of many nights of devastating air raids on the Iraqi capital.

The Pave Low's job was far from being over, however. With DESERT STORM under way, the huge choppers were assigned to combat search and rescue operations. It certainly wasn't a new job for the giant Sikorskys since the MH-53J Pave Lows were high-tech modifications of the Vietnam-era HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopters. Many of the choppers were combat veterans of Southeast Asia.

In a dramatic daylight mission on 21 January 1991, a Pave Low dashed 180 miles deep into Iraq to rescue a downed U.S. Navy F-14 pilot. It was the second attempt to locate and rescue the Navy flier. Earlier that morning, the crew had searched unsuccessfully until forced to turn back to the Saudi Arabian border to refuel. As the Pave Low was being refueled at the Saudi airfield at Arar, two A-10A Thunderbolts assigned to the search had established radio contact with the F-14 pilot. The A-10s were to provide close air support if Iraqi ground forces tried to prevent the rescue.

The Navy pilot's position was pinpointed, but near the far end of the Pave Low's range and across a heavily traveled four-lane highway. After refueling, the Pave Low crew took off, hugging the ground to avoid being detected by Iraqi radar. The huge chopper was being tracked by the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) E-3A Sentry, which was orbiting out of danger.

At 160 miles per hour and less than ten feet off the ground, the huge Pave Low raced across the four-lane highway between Iraqi

convoys, startling the Iraqi drivers and passengers.

The E-3A called a warning to the Pave Low. A Soviet-built SA-8 missile radar was tracking the chopper. The helicopter turned east as the AWACS controller ordered to avoid the threat. Turning south, the chopper waited for the A-10s to join up with the chopper. Running low on fuel, the ground attack fighters had left the area to rendezvous with a tanker.

Finally, with the fighters refueled and back for fire support, the Pave Low crew established radio contact with the downed pilot and began to close in on him. So were the Iraqis.

A canvas topped truck was racing across the desert, was headed straight for the pilot's position. The Pave Low crew ordered the A-10s in. They opened up on the truck with their cannons and the truck exploded into flames.

Using the burning truck as a visual reference, the Pave Low crew still did not have the survivor in sight. Suddenly, less than 150 yards from the smoking enemy truck, the flier popped up from a hole he had dug in the sand. Half a minute later, the chopper was climbing away with a tired and dirty but grateful Navy pilot aboard. Captain Tom Trask and his crew were awarded the MacKay Trophy for the Most Meritorious Flight of the Year for their rescue of Navy pilot Devon Jones.



The 20th's primary mission, of course, was special operations. On 19 February, Pave Lows from the 20th, accompanied by MH-3Es of the 71st SOS (AFRES), were tasked to infiltrate 13 members of a U.S. Navy SEAL Team onto Kubbar Island in the Persian Gulf, about 17 miles east of Kuwait City. The area was heavily patrolled by Iraqi gunboats, but the insertion was made by the four choppers without detection. Poor weather forced the crews to rely on the Pave Low's terrain following radar to stay low and avoid detection by Iraqi radar.

The SEALs were to use the island as a base for a reconnaissance of the Kuwaiti coast. While the SEALs secured the island and performed their recon, the helicopter crews stood by for possible emergency extraction or for gun support. The island was secured at 1800 hours and the SEALs began their reconnaissance at 1900 hours, slipping undetected from the island to the Kuwait City coast. After probing the Iraqi defenses, the team began their return, encountering an Iraqi patrol boat a few miles from the island. The SEAL team, certain they had been spotted, called for close air support against the boat, but the strike aircraft could not locate the patrol boat. The Iraqis failed to fire on the SEALs and they made their way back to the island and the waiting choppers. It was now 0530 on the 20th of February. The helicopters extracted the SEAL team at 0620 and returned to the safety of Saudi Arabian airspace without being detected. The intelligence gained from the reconnaissance by the SEAL team was invaluable in planning the tactics and strategies used when the ground war against the Iraqis kicked off a few days later.

In support of other intelligence gathering efforts, 20th aircraft and crews were tasked to insert teams from the U.S. Army's 3rd Special Forces Group into Iraq and Iraqi-held territory to observe enemy troop movements prior to the beginning of the ground war. On

23 February, flying in low visibility due to smoke and rain, relying heavily on the terrain following radar and night vision goggles, the MH-53Js delivered their "customers" on time and on target. The targets were surrounded by Iraqi Republican Guard forces and anti-aircraft and surface-to-air missile batteries. The real-time intelligence provided by the 3rd SFG teams was crucial to the ground war planners.

On 27 February, five Pave Lows, accompanied by 55th SOS MH-60G Pave Hawks as gunship escorts, launched into Kuwait to secure the U.S. embassy there. They were carrying U.S. special forces troops and Kuwaiti soldiers.

The special forces troops rappelled from the hovering Pave Lows onto the roof of the embassy, entering from above to search for booby traps. Other U.S. forces, in fast attack vehicles, raced around Kuwait City in search of Iraqi hold outs.



When the aircraft returned to King Fahd IAP, they were nearly black, covered with a film of soot and oil droplets from the oil well fires started by the retreating Iraqis.

That same day Iraqi troops moved 26 Scud missile launchers close to Iraq's western border in a futile attempt to draw Israel into the war. Special operations teams dropped into Iraq by the Pave Lows weeks earlier scrambled and the A-10s launched. Hidden in the dunes, the commandos "painted" the targets with laser illuminators for the A-10s.

The A-10s' laser guided weapons successfully wiped out all 26 launchers before they could launch.

On 28 February, after 42 days of pounding the Iraqi war machine, President Bush declared a cease fire. Operation DESERT STORM was over and Kuwait had been liberated. 20th SOS crews had logged more than 2,800 landing in zero visibility, dust-out conditions.

20th Special Operations Squadron personnel and aircraft, along with other AFSOC forces, remained in the Persian Gulf area until early 1993, providing support for Operations PROVIDE COMFORT and SOUTHERN WATCH.



While the 20th was deployed to Middle East, in other parts of the world, events were shaping the 20th's future. In June 1991, the Mount Pinatubo volcano in the Philippine Islands forced the evacuation of Clark Air Base and the relocation of the Air Force assets there. The 353rd SOW relocated to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa.

In Europe, the Soviet block was crumbling. The Berlin Wall was coming down, the Communists were out of power in the Soviet Union and the United States was emerging as the world's only remaining superpower.

The downsizing of the Air Force and reorganization of Air Force units under the objective wing concept resulted in a number of changes through out AFSOC.

Under the "objective wing concept", the 1st SOW reorganized. The 1st Special Operations Group was created to control all the 1st SOW flying squadrons, replacing the

Deputy Commander for Operations function. The aircraft maintenance personnel of the 834th Aircraft Generation Squadron were transferred to the flying squadrons, putting the people who fly the squadron aircraft and the people who maintain them under the same commander. The MH-53J maintenance personnel were transferred to the 20th SOS in June 1992, bonding the flyers and maintainers into one organization.

In October 1993, the 1st Special Operations Wing was redesignated as the 16th Special Operations Wing as the result of an Air Force effort to eliminate duplicate



numbered units and preserve the history of older units.

20th SOS aircraft and personnel, flyers and maintainers alike, finally home after more than two years in the Persian Gulf, deployed to Italy in 1993 in support of the 21st Special Operations Squadron tasking to provide combat search and rescue (CSAR) capability for Operation PROVIDE PROMISE. PROVIDE PROMISE was the humanitarian effort to ease suffering in the



war-torn region that was once Yugoslavia. More personnel and aircraft deployed to Europe to support the new tasking in early 1994 when the 20th assumed responsibility for the CSAR mission. The 20th mission included support of U.S. and NATO forces supporting Operation DENY FLIGHT. DENY FLIGHT was the name for the United Nations operation to enforce no-fly zones and safe-havens for refugees in Bosnia-Herzegovina.



## APPENDIX 1

### AIRCRAFT

Designation	Name	Manufacturer	Remarks
A-20	Havoc	Douglas	World War II
B-25	Mitchell	North American	World War II
DB-7			World War II
F-6	Mustang	North American	World War II; photo recon version of the P-51.
H-1	Huey	Bell Helicopter	Vietnam, 1967-1972 (UH-1F, UH-1P, 1967-1970; UH-1N, 1970-1972)
H-3	Sea King	Sikorsky	Hurlburt Field, 1976-1985 (UH-1N) Vietnam, 1965-1969 (CH-3C, CH-3E) Hurlburt Field, 1976-1980 (CH-3E, HH-3E) H-3s were given the nickname <i>Jolly Green Giant</i> during the Vietnam war.
H-21	Shawnee	Piasecki-Vertol	1956-1960
H-53	Super Jolly, Pave Low	Sikorsky	1980- present. (At various times, flew CH-53C, HH-53H, MH-53H, MH-53J, and MH-53M. H-53s modified to the -H, -J and -M versions were known as <i>Pave Lows</i> . Also flew TH-53As.
L-1	Vigilant	Stinson	World War II. Light planes used
L-4	Grasshopper	Piper	for courier and liaison duty;
L-5	Sentinel	Stinson	also for photo-recon and air-evac of casualties.
P-40	Warhawk	Curtiss	World War II
P-51	Mustang	North American	World War II

## APPENDIX 2

### ASSIGNMENTS

LOCATION	DATES
Savannah AAF, GA	02 Mar 42 - 28 Mar 42
Pope Field, NC	28 Mar 42 - 14 Dec 42
Vichy, MO	14 Dec 42 - 08 May 43
Morris Field, NC	08 May 43 - 31 Aug 43
Key Field, MS	31 Aug 43 - 26 Dec 43
Bombay, India	26 Dec 43 - 04 Jan 44
Guskhara, India*	04 Jan 44 - 27 Nov 45
Camp Kilmer, NJ	27 Nov 45
Sewart AFB, TN	09 Jul 56 - 16 Jul 59
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC	Jul 59 - 08 Mar 60
Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN**	08 Oct 65 - Jun 66
Nha Trang AB, RVN	Jun 66 - Sep 69
Tuy Hoa AB, RVN	Sep 69 - Mar 72
Hurlburt Field, FL	01 Jan 76 -

\* Operated from various forward locations throughout Burma until deactivated.

\*\* Operated detachments from various locations in South Vietnam and Thailand.

## APPENDIX 3

### COMMANDERS

NAME	DATES
MAJ James M. Fowler	09 Jul 56 - 28 Aug 56
LTC Oscar M. Tibbetts	28 Aug 56 - 07 Oct 58
MAJ Gregg D. Hartley	07 Oct 58 - 25 Jan 59
CPT Bennie F. Lemoine	25 Jan 59 - 08 Mar 60
LTC Lawrence R. Cummings	09 Dec 65 - 10 Dec 65
LTC Charles O. Smith	10 Dec 65 - 24 Nov 66
LTC Johnny T. Williams	24 Nov 66 - 25 Nov 66
LTC John W. Amidon	25 Nov 66 - 01 Feb 67
LTC John M. Steen	01 Feb 67 - 01 Oct 67
LTC William B. Skinner	01 Oct 67 - 01 May 68
LTC James A McMullen	01 May 68 - 14 Nov 68
LTC Frank A. DiFiglia	14 Nov 68 - 01 Dec 68 Killed in UH-1F/P crash
LTC David K. Sparks	01 Dec 68 - 26 Mar 69
LTC Stephen Von Phul	26 Mar 69 - 18 Nov 69
LTC Alexander G. Edgar	18 Nov 69 - 03 Jan 70
LTC Harmon M. Brotnov	03 Jan 70 - 06 Nov 70
LTC Alfred G. Houston	06 Nov 70 - 31 Aug 71
MAJ Alan L. Taylor	31 Aug 71 - 13 Oct 71
LTC Meredith S. Sutton	13 Oct 71 - 24 Nov 72
LTC Robert Mayo	01 Jan 76 - 01 Jan 78
LTC John R. Roberts	01 Jan 78 -
LTC Wayne D. Corder	-
LTC Lou E. Grant	01 Jun 84 - 01 Jun 86
LTC Horace Johnson	01 Jun 86 - 01 Jun 88
LTC Gary L. Weikel	Dec 89 - 01 Jun 90
LTC Richard L. Comer	01 Jun 90 - 08 Jun 92
LTC Russell E. Rakip, Jr.	08 Jun 92 - Jul 94
LTC Donald L. Hoover	Jul 94 -