

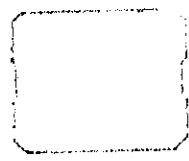
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End of Tour Report
Lt Col Rex K. Stoner, Jr., USAF

11 Sep 68 - 8 Sep 69

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SUBJECT: Project CORONA HARVEST End-of-Tour Report

TO: ASI (ASD-IR)
Maxwell AFB, Ala 36112

The following end-of-tour report is submitted in support of Project CORONA HARVEST:

A. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.

Name: STONER, REX K., Jr. Rank: Lt Col
Duty Station in SEA: Bien Hoa AB
Job Title: Commander 12th SOS Duty AFSC: 1055C
Inclusive Tour Dates in SEA: 11 September 1968 - 8 September 1969
Current ZI Address: Hq TALC, Pope AFB, N. C.

INTRODUCTION

I commanded the 12th Special Operations Squadron (Ranch Hand) from 21 December 1968 until 6 September 1969. During my September 1968 to September 1969 tour, I flew 307 defoliation missions and 89 airlift sorties.

The 12th is a unique organization in that it is the only defoliation squadron in the Air Force. During the first quarter of my assignment, it was a 25 aircraft U.E. squadron. It was reduced to 18 U.E. in the spring of 1969. At no time was the squadron up to strength as a 25 U.E. unit and only toward the end of my tour did we enjoy owning 18 aircraft.

The squadron was organized along conventional lines with some additions. See Figure 1.

The targeting Section was staffed by four officers. They were the planners. When Hq MACV would send new targets to the squadron, the planners would prepare target folders, maps, etc. Secondly, it was their function, in coordination with the operations officer and commander, to prepare frag order requests which were then transmitted to Seventh Air Force TACC. The frag requests were submitted to TACC ten days prior to the proposed mission. This was a very interesting facet in the operation of the squadron in that we did plan as well as execute each mission. The major planning factor was a target priority list which Hq MACV furnished on a monthly basis. Other factors included weather, the ground situation, aircraft availability, fighter availability, type of herbicide required and, finally, any guess that we could make on last minute ground commander and Seventh Air Force target disapprovals. During the last three months of my tour, Seventh Air Force denied us many targets because they were considered "high threat to herbicide".

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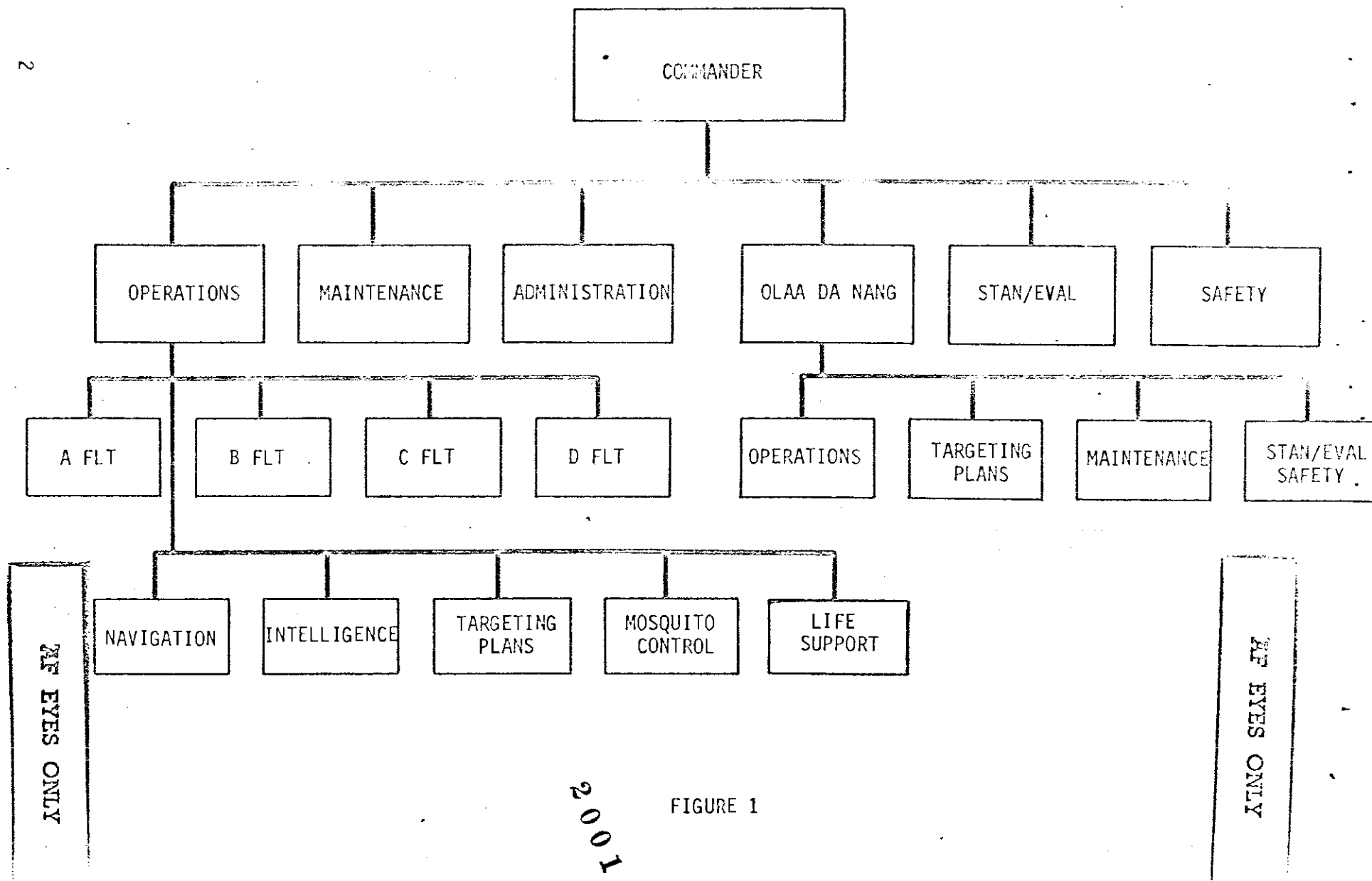


FIGURE 1

Each day four missions were flown or planned, two from Bien Hoa and two from Da Nang.

The squadron detachment at Da Nang (OLAA) was permanent. It was commanded by a lieutenant colonel who reported directly to the squadron commander, and staffed with a targeting section, maintenance, operations and one member of Stan/Eval and Safety. During the northern monsoon season, three to four aircraft were positioned there. As the weather cycle revised as many as eight would fly from Da Nang. The detachment was manned with thirty to thirty-five personnel PCA from Bien Hoa. When the detachment was augmented, additional air crew and maintenance people were sent on TDY normally for a thirty-day period. All major maintenance and phase inspections were done at Bien Hoa. The rotation of aircraft was a continuing thing and the Da Nang aircraft were never down for excessive periods due to maintenance, except the occasional battle damaged one which could not be flown to Bien Hoa for repairs.

Finally, in order to insure full country coverage and to maintain tactical flexibility, herbicide was available at Phu Cat and Nha Trang as well as Bien Hoa and Da Nang. This allowed three ship missions to depart from either Bien Hoa or Da Nang, spray II Corps targets, recover at either of these bases, refuel and replenish the herbicide tanks, then spray a second target before returning to home base. 2001

The insecticide flight consisted of two unpainted aircraft, three flight crews and two maintenance crews. The flight responded to the MACV Surgeon General's Office and was blanket fragged through Seventh Air Force TACC. Targets were seldom changed, and each target was sprayed at eleven-day intervals. The schedules required the aircraft to be on TDY most of the time and it was unusual to have both aircraft on the ground at Bien Hoa for over three or four days during any given month. Malathion was available at Bien Hoa, Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang. The flight was commanded by a major with two captain aircraft commanders. These people were normally assigned to this mission for about 50% of their tour. Copilots were rotated on a 30 to 45 day schedule.

B. RESUME OF DUTIES AND ACTIVITIES.

Squadron Commander - Responsible to Hq MACV and Seventh Air Force to plan and execute defoliation missions on approved targets in SVN and Southeast Asia. The squadron was a tenant unit at Bien Hoa with a three to eight aircraft detachment at Da Nang. So the scope of my activities was a great deal wider than those of the squadron commander, co-located with his Wing Headquarters.

C. BRIEF DISCUSSION OF MAJOR TASKS.

(U) The major task which was the responsibility of the squadron was to spray herbicide on approved targets from the DMZ to the Delta and such other areas which were sometimes directed. The squadron was also equipped with two insecticide aircraft for mosquito control. Additionally, a secondary mission was to covert to an airlift role when necessary. Fortunately, the squadron was not tasked for airlift during my tenure as commander, so the subject will only be addressed in Part E of this report.

(U) The squadron met or exceeded all commitments during my tour.

(U) There were three basic types of missions which were flown. Each of these required varying tactics and varying numbers of fighter escort and FAC aircraft.

(U) Heavy Suppression Missions were those which required fighter pre-strikes before the spray run was made. The majority of these missions were flown in IV Corps with a few in I Corps and special missions. The number of fighters varied with each target. Some missions required as few as four aircraft, while others required as many as sixteen. Fighter aircraft employed for heavy suppression missions were only those assigned to the 3rd TFW at Bien Hoa (F-100's) and the 466 TFW at Da Nang (F-4). There were two reasons for this. One, to insure that the people involved could have face to face briefings and determine ordnance loads and tactics to be employed for the next day's mission. Two, the complete confidence that we had in these squadrons. They were real professionals who had a consuming interest in our mission.

(U) The second type of herbicide mission was that which was flown against the majority of our targets, i.e., those in II, III and some I Corps targets which did not require pre-strikes. Fighter escort consisted of two aircraft which either flew parallel dry passes along the spray run or held high. On 90% of these missions, fire for fire clearance was granted which enabled the fighters to expend their ordnance if the spray aircraft took ground fire.

(U) Finally, the mosquito control aircraft had a psychological warfare aircraft in company with them. The nature of the mission would be announced prior to the aircraft actually spraying. This tactic was very successful in that the "mosquito flight" aircraft never took ground fire.

(C) Sorties MACV. The long involved process which was required to get a target approved (3 to 4 months) is not appropriate for this report. It was apparent to me, however, that in the past there had

been no true measure of mission accomplishment because the squadron had neither a sortie rate nor a gallons delivered goal to be used in planning. After study, MACV came up with a figure of 390 productive sorties per month. At this rate, 60% of all targets could be completed in a year's time.

(C) During the period 1 January 1969 to 1 September 1969, 3878 productive sorties were flown. Tactics employed varied and formations had as little as two to as many as twelve aircraft. Additionally, 277 insecticide sorties were flown.

(U) The squadron directly supported Army and Vietnamese ground commanders. This then was the military objective which was accomplished.

(U) I feel that the tasks performed were quite timely. To express our mission to "Visiting Firemen" (Many of whom were civilian scientists obviously opposed to defoliation) I would say that our primary mission was "to save American and other Free World Forces' lives".

(U) Visibility was made possible in the jungle, ambush points were cleared, and Viet Cong crops were destroyed. Naval vessels were able to penetrate rivers and canals where, prior to defoliation, it was virtually impossible. The squadron had so completely defoliated the main entrance channel to Saigon from the sea, that attempts to harass shipping came to a standstill. Finally, after defoliation of War Zone D (The Iron Triangle), Army units could move on the ground which was unheard of before.

(U) There were several constraints placed on the mission.

(U) Weather: To insure a successful "burn", the temperature had to be less than 85°F, wind ten knots or less, and no rainfall within two hours before or after the spray run. These parameters required before dawn takeoffs for the first mission of the day and very rapid turn arounds for the second mission. There were numerous occasions when the second mission would have to abort for temperature, especially in I Corps during the dry season. We investigated spraying at dusk and decided it was not feasible because temperatures were slow to drop and the maintenance day would be excessively long.

(C) Ground commanders would deny missions at any time that was in close proximity to friendly troops. More times than not, we would get this information when our frag arrived at the squadron just before briefing. Although an alternate target was planned for each mission it was normally one with lower priority.

(U) Finally, Seventh Air Force TACC began denying us targets in June, July and August at an alarming rate. During one ten-day period

2001

in August, I moved all except one airplane out of Da Nang because the entire I Corps became "high threat to herbicide", a new term which was coined in the Headquarters after we took a great deal of battle damage in April, May and June. The high damage was received on four of the then sixty current targets we were working. We knew they were hot and they were flown in response to pressing military needs. While it's true one aircraft was lost, it was little price to pay for the military gains which were made as a direct result of these missions. At the risk of being facetious, 100 feet altitude, 130 knots is high threat at any time in SVN.

(U) These then were the constraints. Some of which I felt were unnecessary due to staff overreactions. Expected results and actual results were the same. In my view, all were tasks to defoliate a number of targets on a continuing basis and productive missions flown exceeded those scheduled throughout the period. Periodic survey flights and inputs from our "customers" indicated the herbicide was properly placed and effective.

(C) At this juncture it may be appropriate to mention in passing, the Cambodian incident, which is still under investigation. In a word or two--we didn't do it. I led the one mission which is charged with violating Cambodian air space to the extent of two twenty kilometer penetrations with accompanying fighters. To coin an expression, "there was no way". Both ground and air photographs showed fantastic results. Sections were "burned" along lines and perfect quadrangles were defoliated. We would have been delighted with such accuracy. In my view, it was done with ground equipment probably by the Cambodians in a land clearing scheme which probably backfired on them.

(U) Alternatives to the allocation of the spray tasks vary. The Army has six helicopters with spray equipment. These aircraft are ideally suited for small inaccessible areas. Some plows have been used with good results along some road ways.

(U) Hardware: The UC-123K was used for the defoliation mission. These aircraft were modified with special plumbing in the wings and spray booms were fitted under each wing outboard of the reciprocating engines. A third boom was fitted under the tail just aft of the cargo ramp door. The cargo compartment housed a 1000 gallon herbicide tank, spray engine pump and an armor plated flight engineer position. The total weight of the equipment with a full tank of herbicide was approximately 10,000 pounds. Total aircraft weight for takeoff was in the order of 60,000 pounds which was design gross weight for the aircraft.

(U) When I arrived at the squadron, there were four UC-123B models still assigned. In December we stopped using them on missions and all were enroute to K modification by the end of

January. It is interesting to note that on six occasions after using the K model, had they been B's they would have been lost. Each of these instances were propeller domes punctured which prevented feathering with the engine freezing shortly thereafter.

(U) I suspect that this airframe was selected because it was available. I further suspect that the size and weight of the herbicide equipment was designed to fit the aircraft.

(U) No aircraft has been designed specifically to do the military defoliation mission.

(U) The results obtained convinced me that the aircraft was used properly. Airlift people would disagree since it was not employed in an airlift role but that is not germane to this report.

(U) The aircraft exceeded all expectations, not only from the standpoint of delivering on the target but also from the tremendous amounts of battle damage which it survived.

(C) Every aircraft has its deficiencies. The UC-123K is old and tired. On-target airspeeds were low, between 130 and 140 knots. With the jets at 100%, spray runs could be made at speeds up to 190 knots. We investigated spraying at the higher speeds, and at the time I left the results were inconclusive. At no time did we get a complete "burn" at 190 knots. A second consideration is the air frame. At the higher speeds during mountain contouring and taking enemy ground fire, it was easy to over stress the aircraft. This occurred on one mission and resulted in wing damage.

(C) A few missions were flown out of Da Nang by F-4 aircraft with 250 gallon tanks. They made their runs at 500 knots. I never learned the results of these missions which will, no doubt, be addressed in other reports.

(U) People: As an attention step, I will say that I had enough people. I shall qualify that statement later on.

(U) Aircrew: No problem, crews were arriving on schedule and they were well trained. During the last four months the ratio of Lieutenant U.P.T. graduates increased. This was a problem because their average flying time was in the order of 400 hours. This was in itself a big morale problem because we were required to bring them up to 750 hours total time before upgrade to aircraft commander. The 750 hour rule was one applied for the airlift role but not appropriate to our basic mission because all of our recoveries were made at Category III fields, (Bien Hoa, Da Nang, Phu Cat, Nha Trang, and Phan Rang).

(U) The very best a crew could fly was 30 hours per month. It then was easy for any of the new lieutenants to see that they would spend their entire tour as a copilot. This was quite a blow to them when their peers in the host fighter wing were flying their own airplane and the airlift squadrons in the wing could easily provide their copilots 60 to 80 hours per month.

(U) We took two courses of action. One, the promising "Chargers" were assigned to the mosquito flight for periods of time. (The "bug birds" flew 60 hours per month.) Two, as each new lieutenant completed his theater indoctrination training, he was scheduled for a left seat combat mission with an instructor pilot. He then flew a mission with me. I was very impressed not only with their outstanding motor skill but the coolness under fire that each of the 30 young officers demonstrated. I requested and was granted a waiver to upgrade two to aircraft commander at the 500 hour point in August. Each of these new ACs was doing a superb job when I left.

(U) If anything, we were over manned with aircrews. The reason for this was our never achieving a full UE of 25 aircraft, but we were being manned for it. Toward the end of my tour this started to change and was reflected in fewer inputs and the loss of our Administrative Officer space.

(C) Maintenance: We were authorized 135 people in the maintenance area and averaged 120 to 125 assigned. I enjoyed having two superior captain maintenance officers and a staff of top notch senior non-commissioned officers in maintenance management. The crew chief level and lower positions were more often than not manned by young inexperienced airmen. Five-level crew chiefs were the rule, not the exception. I cannot speak highly enough of these dedicated young men. Working under the worst possible conditions; poor living quarters, having to walk to the line, and no hangar or revetment facilities, to name a few, they never failed to produce. During April 1969 heavy battle damage on two targets cut total available aircraft to 12. During that month 806 sorties of all types were flown! Maintenance worked around the clock, damaged nacelle fuel tanks were swapped to make one good aircraft out of two. In one instance the right wing of one aircraft was changed with another. As a final example, one aircraft flew 38 consecutive sorties before it missed a mission because of maintenance. It was crewed by a five-level sergeant with two airman first class assistants.

(U) In most cases they were adequately trained. It must be pointed out, however, that the training and experience levels were becoming lower with the passage of time. This is a fact of life when the service is living with a one-year rotation cycle.

(U) Administration: A tenant squadron of 300 people, which receives no "across the street" help from wing or a sister squadron and further maintains a large detachment at another base, requires a strong administrative staff. This we did not have.

(U) In addition to processing one-sixth of the total organization each month (1/12 incoming and 1/12 outgoing) and administering to the routine needs, there was a great deal of traffic between the Da Nang Detachment and Bien Hoa. Many of these people were PCA while others went TDY for mountain training or at other times when the military situation required "crash" augmentation of either the detachment or the home squadron. The host wing would not permit after the fact orders. This policy, in effect, kept one of three clerks employed full time. A second clerk was engaged full time with awards and decorations while the third did the remaining squadron administrative tasks.

(U) In April 1969 the slot for the administrative officer suddenly disappeared. I questioned this and was told the reduction from 25 U.E. to 18 U.E. caused the loss of the slot. I pointed out that each 16 U.E. fighter squadrons as well as each of the four 16 U.E. airlift squadrons were authorized an administrative officer. When my professional administrative officer left, I replaced him with a 1st Lt pilot who, despite no previous experience, was getting a grip on the orderly room by the time I left.

(U) As was the case with the maintenance effort, administration was being accomplished, admittedly on a crash basis, because the people involved were working, without exaggeration, in the order of 85 hours per week.

(U) Intelligence: One officer and one noncommissioned officer were authorized and assigned. Both were real professionals and in my opinion knew more about our targets than did the higher intelligence community. There were numerous examples of this when high threat areas came down on targets which we regularly and frequently flew with little or no enemy opposition.

(U) I feel that there were no major personnel deficiencies. To offset the influx of younger and less experienced people we pursued a vigorous OJT program which was producing excellent results.

(U) The morale and esprit de corps was the highest in South Vietnam. The "Ranch" was famous for this. A proud mission coupled with a deep sense of personal satisfaction for all members is a hard combination to beat.

(U) I will address housing in the support section of this report.

(U) Finally when talking about people, I feel that I would be remiss if I did not give my views on the rotation program.

(U) The one year policy without a second involuntary tour policy was a good one, I suspect, at the onset of hostilities. However, at this juncture it is a real penalty to effectiveness in the present day operation of the conflict. The disadvantages outweigh any advantages the present system may have. As one example, weather: Each day is a new experience because of the monsoon cycle. I realize the "older heads" can brief on this, but in our operation, and I'm certain in others, one has to see it. I left just as the wet season was starting in the South. While it's true that I went through it once, it was during the theater indoctrination portion of my tour. As Commander and mission planner, I feel that I could have made a greater contribution by directing and planning operations into an area in which I was familiar. My operations officer and detachment commander at Da Nang were scheduled to leave three weeks behind me. Weather is a small example. It just seems to take too long to learn the "ropes", so to speak in that environment. A minimum of three months is required to really become expert on all facets of planning and leading a combat mission.

2001

(U) Then there are many people who counted every day. I was surprised to find that the average man considered himself "short" with 99 days remaining because he was down to two digits. The 99 day period was more than 25% of his tour!

(U) Without beating a dead horse, I previously mentioned that as time goes on the experience level is getting lower. I recommend that the management level, i.e., squadron commander, operations, flight commanders, maintenance officers and top NCOs, most of whom are career people, be assigned for a period of two years. Replacements should be so earmarked that a three months' overlap takes place. All other squadron personnel to be assigned for an eighteen months, extendable to a two year tour.

(U) Support: Facilities - Bien Hoa.

(U) At Bien Hoa the squadron maintenance facilities were sub-standard. The entire maintenance section was located on the far west end of the flight line in the VNAF area. We had one small unairconditioned room in a large hangar. The remainder of the effort was in the open.

(U) Tanks, pumps and spare booms were stored in the open. Efforts to get any space were fruitless and large equipment was left to the mercy of the elements.

(U) On any given day, if it was normal, and there were few of these, to have three aircraft out of commission; one for maintenance, one for battle damage, and the third in phase inspection.

(U) The "phase dock" was a normal exposed parking space and the phase crew, in order to meet schedules, normally would accomplish the inspection starting at 0400 hours and completing after dark. The only shelter they had for paper work, etc., was an empty conex container where tools and the like were stored.

(U) All major maintenance was accomplished in the open in all types of tropical weather. It was difficult to have the aircraft as clean as desired and much was lost in maintenance paper work as far as neatness was concerned. This to the chagrin of our zealous Quality Controllers who would arrive on the scene straight from a good CONUS base. The in-commission rate was, however, the highest in the Wing.

(U) Herbicide was loaded from large tanks which were located at the edge of the ramp. Three aircraft could be serviced at one time. For turn arounds, aircraft would reherbicide with engines running, move out and three others then backed in. This procedure was not only dangerous because as many as 12 aircraft would have engines running at the same time and moving about the ramp, but also time consuming.

(U) The only bathroom facilities available were located in the hangar. It was maintained by the Vietnamese and was in a complete state of disrepair. The wing C and E people would not repair the system and neither would the Vietnamese. I placed it off-limits and the closest facility was then at the Aerial Port or in the quarters area, each about a mile away. This overburdened the poor transportation system in the squadron.

(U) In December 1968, the Command Section and all of operations moved into a new airconditioned building with a second building designed for maintenance. A ramp was under construction adjacent to these buildings. Construction of the ramp was well behind schedule and it had not been completed before I left. Unfortunately these buildings were in the center of the base some four miles from the aircraft.

(U) The Squadron was billeted in the "Contonement" area about midway between the maintenance and operations areas. Unlike the fighter people who had new airconditioned aircrew quarters and new unairconditioned accommodations for the rest of their people, we lived in unairconditioned very dirty hutches. Through a very

vigorous "self help" program we had made them quite comfortable. Aircrew officers were airconditioned. The airconditioners were obtained from several sources through barter trade and two were actually purchased. Unfortunately I found myself in a running contest justifying these so called "Maverick" airconditioners. Flight engineers and all enlisted people were in unairconditioned quarters.

(U) I do not quarrel with this because we could have easily lived in tents. Everything is relative, however, and since the squadrons in both the parent wing as well as the tenant wing were going first class I felt that we who were seeing considerably more combat should not have been "poor country cousins".

(U) Transportation: In my view the ground transportation situation in South Vietnam is a disgrace to the service. Not only are all vehicles in a poor state of repair but there are not enough of them to fill even austere authorizations.

(U) The squadron headquarters/operations was authorized a jeep, two pickup trucks and a crew van.

(U) The jeep used by the Commander was in a good state of repair. This in spite of 20,000 miles per year usage. It was maintained by the squadron maintenance people because the local motor pool was overloaded and I had no idea how long it would stay "deadlined". One pickup of two authorized was available for Life Support and the Orderly Room. It ran and only that. It too was maintained by squadron people because it was well past due for salvage and would have been if turned in for maintenance. The crew panel van was out for maintenance for well over half of the time that I commanded the squadron. During one period it was "deadlined" for well over a month for universal joints.

(U) Maintenance was authorized six vehicles. They had three, one which was in some form of repair most of the time. Fortunately, the VNAF "loaned" us two new jeeps and they were put to good use in the squadron maintenance area.

(U) The problem as I saw it was twofold. First as a tenant unit we were fairly low on the priority list; second, the procurement of off the shelf commercial vehicles without military stock lists for spares and putting these vehicles into an environment for which they were not designed is asking for trouble. It seems to me that Mil Specs should be specified, as in the case of the jeep, for all rolling stock. Each vendor then should manufacture to the same specifications. Parts then would be readily available and the vehicle would also stand up in the military environment.

2001

(U) Facilities at Da Nang were good. The detachment was housed to the same standard as everyone else. There were eight revetments available, each with permanent lines to service herbicide. Operations and maintenance were co-located adjacent to the ramp in two airconditioned quanset huts. During periods of augmentation of the detachment it became somewhat crowded but was adequate even though somewhat austere. Four vehicles, all fugitives from the salvage yard were used.

(C) Logistics: Poor. It's difficult to believe aircraft NORS G for spark plugs. It happened on a number of occasions. Our major overriding problem during March, April and May was the lack of nacelle fuel tank bladders. As indicated in Appendix 1, during the first quarter of calendar 1969 we received 95 hits on 46 sorties. In the second quarter we took 437 hits on 111 sorties. The disturbing aspect of these hits was that the majority of them were around the cockpit and engines, whereas in the past most were in the rear of the aircraft. During one mission seven nacelle fuel tanks were punctured. Bladders were simply not available. We resorted to unbelievable cannibalization. It seemed as if we were continually swapping tanks from one aircraft to another. Some aircraft were on the ground for as long as 100 days. The policy of the host wing D.M. was to report these aircraft as NORS, M. After his departure, his successor agreed to NORS G and parts began to come in.

(U) Weather: In the main the weather forecast we received were unsatisfactory and we didn't use them. Our procedure was to wait for FAC weather reports in the target area. There were times when, because of the distance out to the target, we would take off before the FAC who was usually restricted to day light because of local airfield security. Usually we would lose about one out of ten of these "gambles" to the primary target and have to either hit the alternate or return to base.

(U) Communications: Air to air no problem. Each aircraft was equipped with UHF, VHF, FM and HF. Many sorties were saved because we had this capability. Land lines were insecure. I had no end of trouble in communicating on a daily basis with Wing Headquarters at Phan Rang and the Detachment at Da Nang. During the last six weeks of my tour a direct dial system was in being and although not secure was a great help. Reliable, secure communications are a must in the environment. I'm certain that many of our missions were compromised because of a lack of it. Example: Quad mounted 50 calibers positioned just outside of the artillery box at both ends of a run happened more than once in one particular area.

(U) Plans as such were not available. Our authority to operate was an operations order known as the "Trail dust" operations order. A great deal of historical paperwork is in the squadron. The lack of complete

documentation was a problem because the majority of the staff people of higher headquarters did not understand our mission.

D. PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS.

(U) Command and control left a great deal to be desired. The squadron was assigned to a wing in Phan Rang. The primary mission of the five squadron wing was airlift.

(U) The Wing Staff's total frame of reference was airlift and there were times when policies were made which hurt our operation.

(U) We were fraggged by 7th AF TACC while the rest of the Wing was fraggged through the ALCC.

(U) Further, MACV-J-3 (09) Chemical Operations, was the sole agency which had mission control over the squadron by virtue of assigning targets on a priority basis. The priority list which we at the squadron level coordinated on was issued each month.

(U) There was a hot line from the squadron to TACC. We talked with them many times a day. The phone line to MACV was reliable and telephone traffic with them was reasonably heavy on the order of six calls per day.

(U) Because these lines were not secure it was not unusual to fly to Saigon for a short conference with either of these two agencies frequently. During one period I flew down five times in a week's time.

(U) Further, I flew to Phan Rang about twice a month in an attempt to keep the Wing up to date.

(U) Finally, I flew with the Da Nang Detachment on an average of eight to ten missions per month.

(U) This short dissertation which I pitched in the first person is only to illustrate the many masters which we served. Operations, Safety and Stan/Eval were constantly on the move to administer flight checks and so on.

(U) The major lesson to be learned is that you can't serve five masters, i.e., MACV - 7th TACC - Parent Wing - Host Wing at Bien Hoa and Host Wing at Da Nang. Each of these agencies has policies and more important personalities.

(U) One Base Commander felt discipline was poor and reacted accordingly, yet his assistant told me we had the best discipline

2001

on the base. The Da Nang Commander, a general officer, pointed to the detachment with pride. Hq MACV used the term "best led and best disciplined Air Force Unit", TACC "highly professional with top air discipline". Parent Wing "one of the most effective combat units in SEA". A small point perhaps, but in all areas of our operations we were continually having to react to outside action from all directions and I'm certain that we didn't get the "word" on many occasions.

(U) The only rationale for assigning the squadron to the 315th Wing that I could discern was like type of aircraft. The similarity stopped at that point. We were a special operations squadron engaged in direct combat. There were several sensitive operations that only the Parent Wing Commander was made aware of, usually by me after getting directions from TACC.

(U) If indeed Air Force organizations are to be grouped or formed to perform in functionally related areas, it seems to me that the squadron should have been assigned to a true special operations wing like the 14th. The command lines would have been cleaner and I believe that the mission, although no better performed, would have been a great deal easier to manage.

(U) Airlift: Before my day, during TET 68, the squadron was relegated to an airlift role. This set a precedent which I think was unfortunate because the thinking became that ours was an airlift qualified and trained organization. Not so! When I arrived in country I went to Phan Rang for a 30 day theater indoctrination. I flew 80 hours and became a theater qualified "airlifter". I was the last pilot to receive this training. Further, my class at Hurlbert was the first short course and we did not receive Phase II airlift training. Effective then on my departure there is not one airlift qualified pilot in the squadron. This then means that the required 30 day in country training is necessary for each pilot assigned. Although the squadron has a secondary role of airlift in its mission statements, crews are no longer qualified. It is not feasible to order X numbers of aircrew and aircraft into an airlift role starting the next day.

(U) In October 1968 six aircraft were ordered on a Sunday into airlift to start the next day. Tanks, booms, etc., were removed in a panic around-the-clock operation and the airlift started. It lasted for 45 days and one minor pilot error accident occurred. This error nearly cost an absolutely superior captain his career and in my view it was not his fault. He was put into an unfamiliar environment and damaged the aircraft at a small field which he had never seen before.

(U) The 45 day operation disrupted the herbicide up grade training (lead pilot, L.P. and some a/c upgrades) to the extent that it took four months to get back to any kind of a crew balance.

(U) Awards and Decorations: On 6 September 1969 the 12th Special Operations Squadron was awarded the Vietnamese Presidential Unit Citation in the form of the Vietnamese Cross for Gallantry with palm. This was the first time an individual squadron had been so honored by the Vietnamese. This was quite gratifying to us all because so many deserving awards were disapproved from March 1969 onwards. I realize that there were iniquities in the past and perhaps in the past many received awards that were not earned. A sudden stoppage as occurred certainly isn't the way to correct such a condition.

(U) I was amazed at the numerous disapprovals. A classic example was a target at Truc Giang. We went there six times and suffered extensive battle damage each time. One aircraft was shot down on 7 April 1969 during a second run. All seven aircraft had taken fire on the first run and each crew could easily have not made the second run. I submitted lead for a Silver Star (downgraded to DFC). All others for DFCs which were downgraded to Air Medal. The crew of the downed aircraft received a Vietnamese award. On 1 May 1969 we made our last run on the target. Fifty caliber tracers were observed at 800 feet on the descent, lead had his rudder cable shot out and all aircraft were battle damaged before the run. Each remained in formation throughout the run and the ground fire was unbelievably intense. In my view it was the hottest target we ever attacked, and this includes some "specials" we flew. Again, I submitted lead for a Silver Star, and each aircraft commander for DFCs. The Silver Star was downgraded to DFC with all other recommendations disapproved. I was able to get Vietnamese Crosses for Gallantry for these crews later on. When I left, there were several experienced combat qualified crew members with little time remaining who had not received a DFC. One officer had been submitted on five occasions.

(U) I want to stress that I maintained a very strong control on awards and sent my recommendations forward only after testing each to 100% of the criteria covered in regulations. I feel that the hard policy which came into being was one of the major reasons why most of the junior people were submitting applications to leave the service.

(U) It would be inappropriate to conclude this paper without saying that to have commanded the most shot at and hit squadron in the Vietnamese conflict was the highlight of my Air Force career. The people were 150% all the way. I would not hesitate to take the organization into any battle situation. Had I been younger I would have made every effort to stay longer than I did and I remain convinced that a longer tour is a necessity.

REX K. STONER, Jr., Lt Col, USAF

OPERATIONAL STATISTICS

(C) First Quarter 1 January - 31 March 1969. For the period 1 January 1969 through 31 March 1969 the 12th SOS flew 1543 combat sorties, dispensing 1,237,525 gallons of herbicide and 17,835 gallons of insecticide. In accomplishing these combat operations the Ranch aircraft received 95 hits from hostile ground fire.

(C) During the first quarter of the year, there were 18 available aircraft: 14 at Bien Hoa and 4 at Da Nang AB. The chart below gives a complete rundown on maintenance for the quarter:

	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u>
(1) Average Possessed Aircraft	18.3	17.7	15.9
(2) Total Sorties	642	576	842
(3) Average Sorties Per Aircraft	35.1	32.5	52.9
(4) Sorties Per Day Per Aircraft	1.1	1.2	1.7
(5) Sortie Length	1.7	1.7	1.6
(6) Average Flying Hour Utilization	60.8	55.2	84.2
(7) Average NORM Rate	13.1	13.8	12.5
(8) Average NORS Rate	0.6	2.3	0.0
(9) Average OR Rate	86.3	83.9	87.5
(10) Cannibalization Per 100 Sorties	1.7	0.7	1.2
(11) Manhours Per Flying Hour	27.4	18.5	20.2
(12) Abort Rate	3.7	1.2	2.1
(13) Total Flying Time	1113	977	1339

(C) Statistical Breakdown of the 12th SOS for the period 1 January through 31 March 1969:

a. Sorties

- (1) Defoliation 1,485
- (2) Insecticide 58
- (3) Non-productive Air Aborts 240
- (4) Survey and Coordination 10

Meetings

(5) Test Hops 31
(6) Rotation of Aircrews
Between Bien Hoa AB and Da Nang AB 142

b. Gallons Dispensed

(1) Herbicide 1,237,525
(2) Insecticide 17,835

c. Flying Time

(1) Defoliation 2,501.45
(2) Insecticide 119.30
(3) Airlift 0.0
(4) Others 400.0

d. Hits

(1) 95 on 46 sorties

2001

(C) Second Quarter 1 April - 30 June 1969. For this period the 12th SOS flew 1,562 combat sorties, dispensing 1,198,100 gallons of herbicide and 43,505 gallons of insecticide. During these operations, the ranch aircraft received 437 hits from hostile ground fire and resulting in one aircraft lost.

(C) There were 14 aircraft available for ranch missions during the second quarter. The following chart gives a maintenance breakdown:

	<u>Apr</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>
(1) Average Possessed Aircraft	12.4	14.3	16.6
(2) Total Sorties Flown	806	595	453
(3) Average Sorties Per Aircraft	65.0	41.6	27.9
(4) Sorties Per Day Per Aircraft	2.2	1.3	0.9
(5) Sortie Length	1.6	1.3	1.4
(6) Average Flying Hour Utilization	103.7	53.4	39.0
(7) Average NORM Rate	13.3	6.4	11.9
(8) Average NORS Rate	0.0	0.6	1.2
(9) Average OR Rate	86.7	93.0	86.9
(10) Cannibalization Per 100 Sorties	0.9	2.7	2.8
(11) Manhours per Flying Hour	20.8	26.2	35.4
(12) Abort Rate	2.8	3.4	1.3
(13) Total Flying Time	1286	764	648

(C) Statistical Breakdown of the 12th SOS for 1 April through 30 June 1969 is as follows:

a. Sorties

(1) Defoliation	1,427
(2) Insecticide	135
(3) Non-productive Air Aborts	193
(4) Survey and Coordination	15
Meetings	

(5) Test Hops 14

(6) Rotation of Aircrews Between
Da Nang AB and Bien Hoa AB 143

b. Gallons Dispensed

(1) Herbicide 1,198,100

(2) Insecticide 43,505

c. Flying Time

(1) Defoliation 1,971

(2) Insecticide 256

(3) Airlift 0

(4) Other 165

d. Hits

(1) 437 on 111 sorties

2001

(C) July and August Statistics.

	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>
a. Sorties		
(1) Defoliation	484	424
(2) Insecticide	49	45
(3) Non-productive Air Aborts	60	125
(4) Survey and Coordination	8	9
Meetings		
(5) Rotation of Crews Between Da Nang and Bien Hoa	23	6
(6) Test Hops	5	13
b. Gallons Dispensed		
(1) Herbicide	401,900	297,175
(2) Insecticide	16,020	18,475
c. Flying Time		
(1) Defoliation	670	634
(2) Insecticide	80	106
(3) Airlift	0	0
(4) Other	67	63
d. Hits		
(1) 153 on 43 sorties - July		
(2) 171 on 44 sorties - August		

2001

PERSONNEL STATISTICS

(C) The following is a breakdown of the 12th SOS manning:

<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>AUTH</u>	<u>ASSIGNED</u>
Pilots	78	69
Navigators	13	11
Maintenance	2	2
Administration	1	1
Intelligence	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	94	84

<u>ENLISTED</u>	<u>AUTH</u>	<u>ASSIGNED</u>
Flight Engineers	38	35
Maintenance	135	, 123
Administration	5	8
Life Support	5	4
Operations	3	3
Intelligence	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	187	174

A listing of personnel holding key positions through the first quarter follows:

Lt Col David F. Stockton, Operations Officer
Lt Col Vergene W. Ford, Chief, OLAA
Lt Col Joseph M. Cesario, Assistant Operations Officer
Maj Richard O. Robinson, Chief Stan/Eval
Lt Col Lawrence L. Waite, Chief Nav Sec
Maj Anorus Kibodeaux, Chief Insecticide Flight
Maj Dennis Deluchi, Awards and Decorations Officer
Maj Lewis F. Downey, Safety Officer
Captain Richard R. Wagnor, Squadron Information Officer

2001

For the period of 1 April through 1 July 1969 these positions were held by the following personnel:

Lt Col Joseph M. Cesario, Operations Officer
Maj Allen L. Trott, Assistant Operations Officer
Lt Col Vergene W. Ford, Chief OLAA
Maj Richard O. Robinson, Chief Stan/Eval
After 1 July - Maj Charles F. Renner, Chief Stan/Eval
Maj Frank E. Wencel, Chief Nav Sec
After 1 July - Maj Rinaldo Fucchi, Chief Nav Sec
Maj Elmer I. Hagloch, Chief Insecticide Flight
Maj Dennis Deluchi, Awards and Decorations Officer
Maj Lewis F. Downey, Safety Officer
After 1 July - Maj Jack Firda, Safety Officer
Capt James G. Murphy, Squadron Information Officer

Awards and Decorations: (1969)

I. January - General Brown Presiding

A. Presidential Unit Citation

B. Silver Star

1. Lt Col Slay
2. Maj Gentry

C. DFC

1. Lt Col Langhorne
2. Maj Rayment
3. Maj Kibodeaux
4. Lt Chandler
5. SSgt StPierre

D. Purple Heart

1. Lt Col Langhorne
2. Maj Rayment

2001

II. March - Col Pauley Presiding

A. DFC

1. Maj Hull
2. Capt Speight
3. SSgt Cruz Aponte (2)
4. SSgt Leroy Hill

III. April - Col Pauley Presiding

A. DFC

1. Capt Duggan

B. Purple Heart

1. Capt Nehrig

IV. June - Lt Col Ford Presiding

A. DFC

1. Capt Nehrig

V. July - Lt General Edmundson Presiding

A. Silver Star

1. Lt Col Stoner

B. DFC

1. Maj Martini
2. Maj Meekins
3. Capt Claud
4. Lt Col Stoner

VI. August - Col Campbell Presiding

A. DFC

1. Lt Britton
2. Maj Cruts
3. Maj Renner

2001