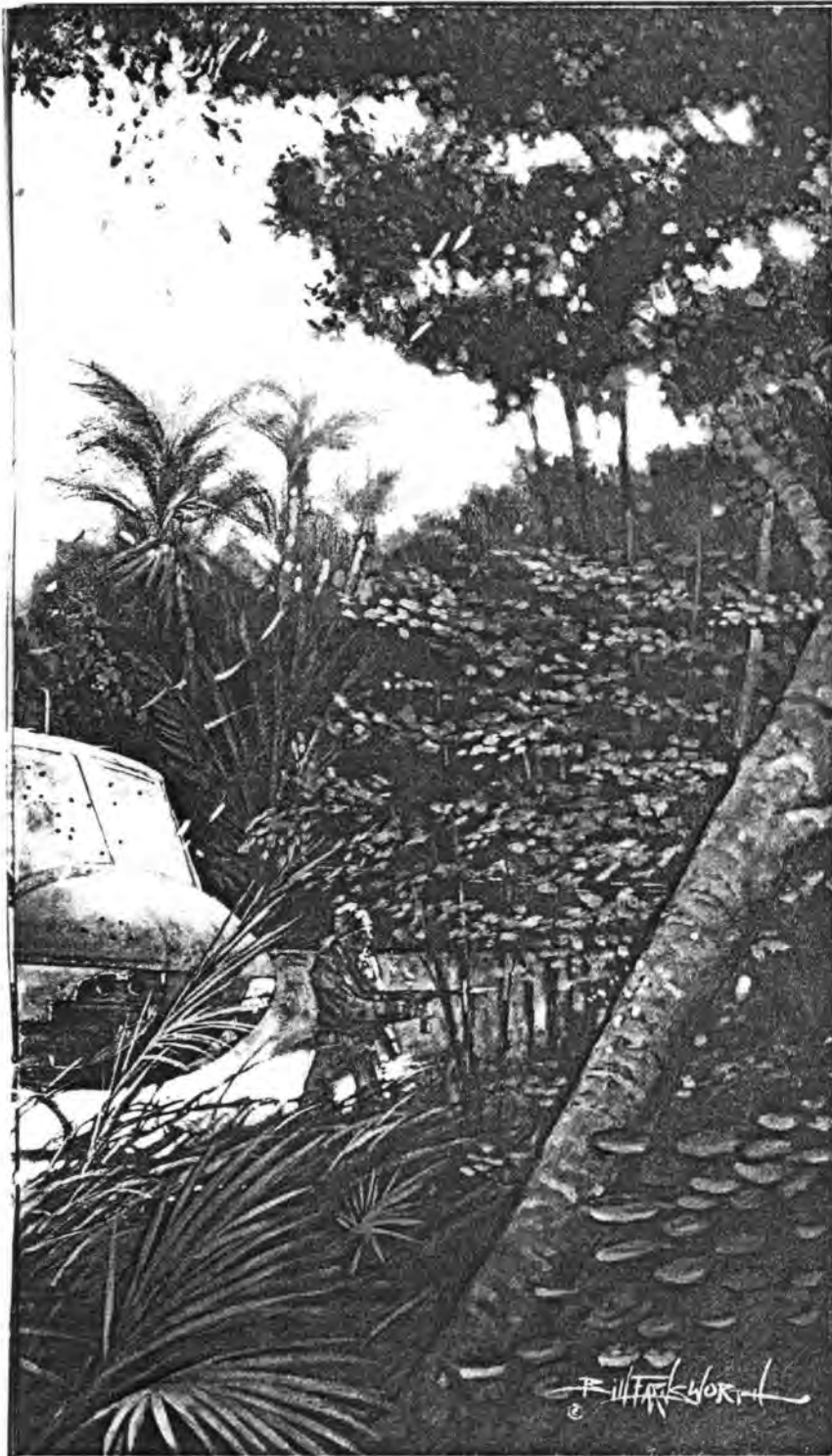


20th Special Operations Squadron

AIR COMMANDOS

When Army Special Forces were in trouble, it was the Air Force's Green Hornet and Pony Express helicopters to the rescue.

By Tech. Sgt. Dale K. Robinson, U.S. Air Force (ret.)



First Lieutenant James P. Fleming hovers his Bell UH-1F Huey over a riverbank in November 1968 as a Special Forces team struggles to reach him, in Bill Farnsworth's "Not Today." Fleming was later awarded the Medal of Honor.

The "Green Berets" of the Army Special Forces are perhaps the best known of the U.S. military's several special operations forces, followed by the Navy's SEALs. But the Air Force was there at the beginning as well. Among the first such special forces was what is today the Air Force's 20th Special Operations Squadron.

On October 8, 1965, the 20th Helicopter Squadron (later redesignated the 20th Special Operations Squadron) was formed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, outfitted with 14 Sikorsky CH-3C helicopters. The 20th's primary mission was considerable in scope—to augment combat search-and-rescue forces, perform casualty evacuation, support communications sites as well as airfield construction and the tactical air control system, transport air liaison officers and engage in counterinsurgency. The squadron's secondary mission was to support MACV.

Later, the CH-3Cs would be replaced with more powerful CH-3Es and Bell UH-1 "Hueys."

The 20th began combat operations in December 1965. By March 1966 the squadron was flying an average of nearly 1,000 sorties per month from Tan Son Nhut (home base to A Flight, with five aircraft), from Da Nang (B Flight, with three aircraft) and from Nha Trang (C Flight, with six 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. During the two-month operation, a combined force of the 2nd and 22nd ARVN Infantry divisions, U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division and U.S. Marines of Task Force Delta blocked the region south of Quang Ngai in an attempt to round up elements of the 325th NVA Division. It was the largest amphibious assault against hostile forces since the Korean War, and the 20th committed eight aircraft and crews to the effort. Its CH-3Cs airlifted 105mm howitzers as well as personnel and supplies to forward locations, and crews and aircraft often came under hostile fire.

In other combat action, the 20th was called on to evacuate wounded troops from the Special Forces camp in the infamous A Shau Valley on March 9, 1966. A Marine Sikorsky CH-34 and a 20th CH-3C were dispatched. As the CH-34 made its approach into the camp, it was hit by enemy fire. The crew managed to land safely inside the camp, but the chopper was then unflyable. Braving heavy enemy fire, the CH-3 crew then landed in the camp, recovered the crew of the first aircraft and evacuated 35 wounded troops. During that same battle another air commando, Major Bernie Fisher, earned the Air Force Medal of Honor for his daring rescue of Douglas A-1E Skyraider pilot Major "Jump" Meyers (see "Personality" in December 1991 *Vietnam*).

Eventually, the defenders abandoned the camp, at a cost of five Americans and 75 South Vietnamese killed, 33 South Vietnamese wounded and 15 missing. The toll for the North Vietnamese attackers was much higher. Out of a regiment-sized force of 2,000, at least 800 NVA were killed and an unknown number wounded.

As a result of requests by the government of Thailand, two aircraft and crews had been deployed to Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand, from Tan Son Nhut to form D Flight the month before the Special Forces camp evacuation. In April the entire flight at Nha Trang was transferred to Udon Air Base in Thailand. In May operations at Da Nang halted and that flight moved to Udon as well.

At their new home base, the 20th's CH-3Cs transported Thai military and police for counterterrorist and counterinsurgency operations. The large helicopters enabled Thai forces to rapidly respond to Communist activities. The 20th became known as the "Pony Express" and used the radio call sign "Pony."

By June 1966 only a single 20th flight, based at Tan Son Nhut, remained in Vietnam. The squadron headquarters moved to Nha Trang, but with the bulk of its assets in Thailand, the 20th began to concentrate on an unconventional warfare role. Missions into Laos soon took precedence for the Pony Express. The 20th's crews supported the Laotian forces of Lt. Gen. Vang Pao and performed a variety of refugee relief and civic action missions. CH-3Cs were used to transport explosive ordnance disposal teams and crash investigators and to provide logistics support for isolated mountaintop radar and communications sites.



The choppers delivered rice and indigenous troops to a friendly outpost on top of a 5,000-foot mountain in Laos. They inserted indigenous "road-watch" teams at points along the Ho Chi Minh Trail from the Mu Gia 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 under cover of darkness between two branches of the trail and later extracted from the same area. Team members brought back valuable intelligence from that operation.

In two other separate missions, "road-destruct" teams were dropped near the trail and left overnight to mine the trail and destroy any vehicles caught using the infiltration route. The teams also raided Pathet Lao villages. 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 20th CH-3Cs, flying from South Vietnam, inserted a combat team into the North, just above the DMZ. CH-3 crews flew a total of 315 inserted sorties during that year.

Flying from Thailand in 1967, the Pony Express was able to penetrate farther north into enemy territory. Of the 37 penetration missions scheduled, eight were successful. Most of the unsuccessful missions had to be aborted because the chopper crews failed to make contact with the deployed Special Forces teams. The successful recovery of a team in September 1967 boosted morale of the teams and the Pony Express crews.

In June 1967 15 Bell UH-1F/P Huey helicopters, originally assigned to the 606th Air Commando Squadron at Nakhon Phanom, were transferred to the 20th Helicopter Squadron in South Vietnam when their services were no longer needed by the Thai government. As part of the 606th, the Huey section had 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 its many civic action missions. The 606th crews also flew missions for the CIA's Air America, often wearing civilian clothing so that U.S. military involvement could be denied if the crews were captured during missions.

The Air Force originally chose the Bell UH-1F to perform support duties for missile sites. The F model was based on the civilian Bell 204B but was equipped with the same powerful General Electric T-58 turboshaft engine used on the CH-3C. The T-58 produced more than 1,200 shaft horsepower, driving a 48-foot main rotor. UH-1F "Slicks" were 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.

Flown by the "Green Hornets," the 20th's UH-1Fs were UH-1Fs that had been modified to accept a pair of GAU-2B/A miniguns, one in each cargo door, and two LAU-59/A 2.75-inch rocket pods mounted to hard points. The miniguns were mounted on a pintle and could either be locked to forward fire positions and fired by the pilot or aimed and fired by gunners in the cabin. The P-model Hueys were used as gunships, flying escort missions for the Slicks. Since many of the 20th's F models were modified to accept additional armament, the difference between the F and P models became blurred, and the designations came to be used interchangeably.

In 1967 and 1968 the Green Hornets lost four UH-1s to enemy fire. Six crewmen from the 20th received the Air Force Cross in 1967-68, and six Silver Stars and 11 Purple Hearts were awarded to 20th aviators in the last half of 1968.

By the beginning of 1968, all the 20th CH-3Cs had been moved to Thailand. They were organized into Flights A, B and C, all located at Udorn Air Base. The mission at Udorn included support of a classified operation in northern Laos, support of the clandestine MACV-SOG, logistical support of Tactical Air Navi-



gation System (TACAN) 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 Lt. Col. Shirrel G. Martin, was called upon to rescue a downed Skyraider pilot in central Laos. The Skyraider had been escorting a pair of helicopters when it was hit by enemy fire, and the pilot had parachuted into tall trees. Although Martin and his crew knew that there was a 37mm anti-aircraft weapon in the area, they hovered over the downed fighter pilot in an effort to locate him, encountering continuous small-arms fire. They eventually managed to rescue the pilot using a hoist that was equipped with a forest penetrator seat.

On April 3, 1968, a reconnaissance team under attack by the enemy required assistance from the 20th's Green Hornets. Aircraft left Ban Me Thuot and headed for the team's position, some 15 miles southwest of the base. Gunships provided fire suppression during the mission, while a Slick flown by Major Norman F. Eldridge searched for a landing site to extract the team. When he could find no suitable site, Eldridge hovered near a hole in the tree canopy and dropped a rope ladder. By then, darkness had settled. Without regard for his own or his crew's safety, Eldridge held his aircraft in position with the aircraft lights on while the recon team scrambled up the rope ladder. The whole team was successfully recovered.

Crews from the 20th flew several insertion and extraction missions from a forward operating location in June 1968. At the first landing zone, two teams were to be inserted and one extracted. The first CH-3C went into the LZ to drop the lead team and load the team being extracted while the second aircraft orbited overhead, waiting its turn to land the remaining team. The orbiting chopper drew small-arms and automatic-weapons fire and 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, but both aircraft returned safely to the forward operating location and then to Udorn.

By July 1968 the Pony Express was down to only 10 CH-3Cs. 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. However, they did not have sufficient range for cross-border operations.

The Pony Express was called upon to perform rescue work again in July, 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, recovering a 12-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 crews completed the mission without problems and the aircraft were heading 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, landing uninjured in the top of the tree canopy. A CH-3C piloted by Captain Walter W. Martin hovered over the thick



JOE VIVIANO VIA ROBERT F. COHR

jungle, lowered the rescue hoist with forest penetrator seat and recovered the pilot. The entire rescue operation took less than a minute.

UH-1F Huey pilot 1st Lt. James P. Fleming was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in rescuing a six-man Special Forces team on November 26, 1968. The team had 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 when they encountered a large enemy force. The team commander requested extraction, and 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 enemy troops.

The gunships made a pass to lay down covering fire with their miniguns. Enemy machine-gun fire hit one gunship, which was forced to autorotate into a small clearing. The lead Slick followed the crippled aircraft down and rescued the crew only minutes before more enemy soldiers arrived.

The second Slick, low on fuel, had 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 riverbank to a small clearing. Meanwhile, the gunship positioned itself between the enemy and the Slick flown by Lieutenant Fleming. Fleming attempted to get his chopper into the clearing, holding its nose over the riverbank and its tail over the river. But the team was pinned down by enemy fire and could not reach the Slick.

Fleming backed the chopper out as his door gunners kept the enemy troops at bay. Once in the clear, he nosed the Huey over and circled. Despite heavy enemy fire—and knowing he was dangerously low on fuel—Fleming headed back for the clearing. He skimmed the water, hoping that the riverbanks would screen him somewhat from the fire concentrated on the clearing.

The Special Forces team had set up a series of Claymore mines around their position to cover their escape. As the team members raced for the chopper, pursuing enemy troops tripped the Claymores, setting off a series of blasts. Fleming's Huey hugged the river's edge, again with the front of his skids on the shore and the tail boom extended out over the river. The door gunners helped the team members aboard, then Fleming backed the

Opposite, top: 20th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) flight gear included flak jackets—vital for the low-level missions in which the squadron specialized. Opposite, bottom: A UH-1F Huey of the 20th "Green Hornets" at Nha Trang in 1967. Above: A UH-1F—modified to carry additional armament—is readied for an escort mission at Ban Me Thuot in 1968. Note the 2.75-inch rocket pod mounted on its side.



The 20th's Sikorsky CH-3C "Pony Express" choppers handled a variety of counterinsurgency roles and were mostly based in Thailand by mid-1966. Here, a CH-3C inserts a "road-watch" team in the jungle.

chopper out over the river once more. As they climbed away from the river, gunfire shattered the windshield, but luckily it missed all of the chopper's occupants. Fleming safely landed his shot-up Huey at a friendly base a short time later.

In January 1969 the Pony Express evacuated more than 5,000 people in 539 sorties from a village on a 4,700-foot-high mountain in northern Laos, where they had been cut off by Communist forces. The mission, which required hauling drums of fuel to the site so that helicopters could be refueled at the pickup point, was made even more difficult by morning fog and hazardous terrain. Although the operation was carried out deep in an area controlled by the enemy, the unarmed and unescorted choppers successfully transported the villagers to a safe area 14 miles away without loss of life or damage to any of the Pony Express aircraft.

The 20th lost one CH-3 that same month during a mission to support a TACAN radar navigation site in northern Laos. Three crew members and three passengers died when the chopper crashed on January 17, 1969. Two crew chiefs and one passenger survived and were transferred to Clark Air Base in the Philippines for hospitalization.

In February 1969 Sergeant Isidro Arroyo, Jr., was a crew member on one of eight Green Hornet Hueys supporting a Special Forces unit in South Vietnam's Central Highlands when word came in that the team was surrounded by enemy troops and involved in a firefight. Two gunships and one Slick headed in to recover the team while the other five choppers stayed out of range.

The Huey Arroyo was aboard was hit by small-arms fire, and the fuel tank began to burn. The crew attempted to make a distress call, but a bullet had disabled their radio. Although the chopper was heavily damaged, the crew managed to make a controlled landing. After they destroyed equipment and data aboard the Huey that might have been used by the enemy, the crewmen made

contact with the other Green Hornets via survival radio.

Trees around the downed crew's position made it impossible for the other choppers to land. While a rescue helicopter hovered over their position with rope ladders dangling, gunships raked the surrounding trees with minigun fire. Sergeant Arroyo was the second man up the ladder, but he went back down again when his co-pilot fell from the ladder and was unable to make the ascent. Arroyo started back up the ladder, holding onto the co-pilot.

With gunfire raging all around them, the co-pilot—who was in shock at that point—struggled with the sergeant trying to help him. When Arroyo had climbed halfway up the ladder, he felt his grip on the co-pilot slipping. The Huey then lowered Arroyo and the co-pilot into a tree, where the sergeant was able to get a better hold on the other man and then managed to hoist him aboard the hovering chopper.

The following month, while Pony Express Hueys were flying a support mission for a communications site, they rescued the crew of a U.S. Army Grumman OV-1 Mohawk that had been hit by AAA, one of a flight of two planes on a reconnaissance mission in southern Laos. The two-man crew tried to return to base, but their crippled aircraft could not maintain altitude, and they had to bail out. The remaining OV-1 circled overhead, vectored the two Hueys into the area and provided close air support. Under constant heavy fire from small arms and a .50-caliber automatic weapon, the Hueys managed to successfully recover the two Army pilots.

In late March, 18 helicopters, including CH-3Es and UH-1Fs from the 20th, inserted a 230-man assault force into a landing zone. The infiltration was successfully accomplished, but the recovery was delayed for opera-

U.S. Air Force Unconvention

The U.S. Air Force established the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Hurlburt Field (Eglin Air Force Base Auxiliary Field 9), near Fort Walton Beach, Fla., in April 1961. This small unit, known by the nickname "Jungle Jim," was charged with establishing a training cadre for counterinsurgency forces. They would provide close air support for American and allied forces behind enemy lines and train friendly forces in Third World countries to cope with Communist insurgencies.

The unit consisted of 352 men and 32 aircraft, including 16 Douglas C-47 cargo planes and eight Douglas B-26 Invader light bombers of World War II vintage. By November

1961 the first men and aircraft from the 4400th had deployed to South Vietnam as part of Operation Farmgate. They became the first U.S. Air Force unit to engage in combat operations in Vietnam.

Over the next couple of years, the Jungle Jim concept was refined under the term "air commando," and the 4400th became the 1st Air Commando Wing, which revived the name of an unconventional warfare unit from World War II. Air commando involvement in Southeast Asia continued to grow, and by the mid-1960s there were two air commando wings in Southeast Asia. The 56th had its base at Nakhon Phanom Air Base in Thailand, while the

tional reasons. As the aircraft began their approach to pick up the troops, they came under fire. Three Pony Express CH-3Es and one UH-1F were hit. One aircraft was hit 15 times and lost an engine. Three 20th pilots were wounded in that action. The exfiltration was aborted and the aircraft returned to Thailand.

Almost a month later, the Pony Express took part in another infiltration—this time involving a 215-man force to be picked up from a forward operating location and inserted near a strategic position overlooking an enemy-controlled road. Five CH-3Es and three UH-1Fs were escorted by eight A-1 Skyraiders and a FAC in a Cessna O-1. The A-1s used the call sign "Hobo," while the FAC used the call sign "Raven." As the helicopters approached, the FAC directed four of the Hobos to suppress groundfire around the LZ. While the A-1s attacked a nearby hill, the first wave of helicopters touched down and unloaded. When the first two choppers took off from the LZ, they encountered more groundfire. The next wave turned to the right as they took off, to avoid the fire. With the first half of the infiltration complete, the helicopters were returning to the pickup point for the remaining troops when Raven reported that the LZ was under mortar attack.

A site a short distance away was selected as an alternate LZ. The first two aircraft landed, deplaned their men and equipment and took off without incident, but the next two CH-3Es came under fire as they approached. They aborted the attempt, and the Hobo Skyraiders rolled in to suppress enemy fire. After that, the choppers inserted the remaining members of the assault force, and the Pony Express crews and aircraft returned safely.

In the early months of 1969, the 20th encountered some of its heaviest combat to date, losing five more



JOE VIVIANO VIA ROBERT F. COHR

Hueys, this time to groundfire. On January 3, a UH-1F attempting to recover a beleaguered Special Forces team near Duc Lap was downed by enemy fire. Sergeant Ronald P. Zenga died in the crash. Then on April 13, while extracting a recon team, a Green Hornet flight was fired on after it picked up troops. A gunship flying escort for that extraction mission was hit by groundfire, which killed the co-pilot and seriously wounded the aircraft commander. Although he was hovering on the verge of unconsciousness due to loss of blood from a wound in his left leg, the pilot managed to land in a nearby clearing. The aircraft came to rest with its tail boom broken and its skids ripped from under it. Aboard—serving as the gunner—was the same Sergeant Arroyo who had been shot down two months earlier. This time, he was wounded in the back. The other Hueys in the flight turned back to pick up the downed crew.

Arroyo moved the dead co-pilot and the wounded pilot to the Slick while the other gunner cleared out the gunship. Since there was not enough room for him on the Slick, Arroyo waited on the ground for another chopper to come to his aid. He was soon picked up and carried to safety and medical care. The gunship was destroyed to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. Sergeant Arroyo was later awarded the 1969 Cheney Award for distinguishing himself "on two separate occasions while participating in aerial flights as a UH-1P gunner in Southeast Asia."

On April 21, a reconnaissance team stumbled into a large force near an enemy base camp. The team had been without fresh water for a day and a half and was exhausted and dehydrated. Hornet gunships came in and laid down suppressive fire, making repeated passes. When a Slick went in to attempt an extraction, it was shot down. In a battle that lasted nearly 7½ hours, Green Hornet crews fired some 200,000 rounds of minigun ammunition and 500 2.75-inch rockets at the surrounding enemy forces.

A door gunner mans a GAU-23/A 7.62mm minigun—a high-speed machine gun capable of firing up to 6,000 rounds per minute—aboard a 20th SOS chopper.

Warfare

14th was situated at Nha Trang in South Vietnam.

The 20th Helicopter Squadron was assigned to the 14th Air Commando Wing in 1966 to undertake unconventional warfare missions. Until the 21st was formed in 1969, the 20th was the only Air Force combat helicopter squadron in Southeast Asia, the Jolly Greens and Pedros of the Air Rescue Service notwithstanding.

Rumors abounded that the 20th would become the 20th Air Commando Squadron, but that never came to pass. In 1968 the term "air commando" was abandoned in favor of the less-threatening term "special operations," and the 20th changed names as well, becoming the 20th Special Op-

erations Squadron (SOS). What began as Jungle Jim is now the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) with some 9,000-plus people. Part of AFSOC, the 20th SOS now flies the most sophisticated helicopter in the world, the Sikorsky MH-53J Pave Low III.

The 20th SOS, still known as the Green Hornets, saw action in Desert Storm, where it led U.S. Army Apache attack helicopters against Iraqi radar sites in the first combat action of the Gulf War. The 20th was also responsible for the successful rescue of U.S. Navy F-14 pilot Devon Jones during a daring mission in broad daylight and under the guns of the Iraqi army. Today the 20th is one of the Air Force's premier special operations units. D.K.R.



Top: The SOS operations and maintenance building at Tuy Hoa Air Base, home to the 20th after September 1969. **Above:** Personnel of the 20th SOS display a captured VC flag at Nha Trang Air Base in late 1968. Captain Joe Viviano is in the center.

U.S. Army gunships provided additional support while the Hornet UH-1Ps returned to base to refuel and rearm. Finally, three Army light helicopters managed to extract the team and the crew members of the 20th's downed Slick.

That May a Pony Express crew came to the aid of an Army UH-1 whose engine had failed some 60 miles southwest of Nakhon Phanom. 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 12 aboard the UH-1. The remaining crew members stayed behind to guard the aircraft and make repairs before returning to base.

On August 1, the CH-3s and the Pony Express mission were transferred to the 21st Special Operations Squadron. Soon the 20th was left with only 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 failure in July and August. The crews suffered only minor injuries when they crashed, but their aircraft were destroyed. The Huey fleet was grounded for approximately 30 days while the incidents were studied. Then in September, the squadron moved from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa Air Base, South Vietnam.

As 1970 rolled around, the Green Hornets continued to participate in unconventional warfare, psychological warfare and logistical support missions for Air Force units in Southeast Asia. They also provided

gunship support for Army Slicks carrying long-range reconnaissance patrols of the 5th Special Forces Group.

On March 14, 1970, another Huey was lost near Duc Lap, with enemy groundfire the suspected reason. The pilot, Captain Dana A. Dilley, was killed in the crash, while the instructor-pilot and both gunners were injured. Five days later another Huey was shot down near Ban Me Thuot, this time killing both pilots, Captains Clyde W. Enderle and Carlos A. Estrada, Jr., and gunner Tech. Sgt. James W. Greenwood.

In May the 20th received an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, and in May and June it provided gunship support to VNAF CH-34s during operations in Cambodia. The 20th SOS continued its support of VNAF operations, conducted out of Duc Lap, throughout that summer, and the squadron moved its operations from Tuy Hoa Air Base to Cam Ranh Bay.

On July 29, a Huey was lost due to groundfire while on a training mission near Tuy Hoa. The five-man crew all received injuries, but there were no fatalities. Another Huey was lost when it crashed after avoiding a midair collision with a Vietnamese CH-34. Instructor pilot Captain Jackie P. Heil and gunner Master Sgt. Gerald A. Cooper were killed in that incident.

In late November 1970, the first of the twin-engine UH-1N Hueys began arriving in-country. The 20th continued to support VNAF operations with the 5th Special Forces Group, although Vietnamese tactics and the language barrier presented many problems. For example, VNAF pilots liked to come in high and spiral down into a landing zone marked with smoke. That tactic often drew attention in the form of groundfire from enemy forces, negating the advantage of surprise.

By the end of 1971, the 20th had replaced all its UH-1F/P Hueys with the twin engine UH-1N and was still flying gunship and unconventional warfare missions. The UH-1N Twin Huey was fitted with two Pratt & Whitney PT6T-3 engines mated to a reduction gearbox, which produced 1,800 shaft horsepower. The N-model Huey had a larger cabin, allowing a passenger load of 13 plus a pilot and co-pilot.

N-model gunships of the 20th were armed with GAU-2B/A miniguns and the LAU-59 rocket system. The N models could mount XM-94 40mm grenade launchers in place of the miniguns. Green Hornet N-model Hueys often sported a 40mm grenade launcher in the right door and a minigun in the left. Like the F and P models, 20th N models had no markings other than the aircraft serial number and the hornet stenciled on the tail.

The 20th's primary mission in 1971 continued to be support of VNAF H-34 operations with the 5th Special Forces Group. The Green Hornets also flew search-and-rescue missions for downed aircrew members. Following the deactivation of the 14th Special Operations Wing in 1971, the 20th was reassigned to the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing.

In March 1972 as the U.S. involvement in Vietnam began to wind down, the 20th was deactivated. By that time, some 19 Hueys had been lost in combat, 13 due to enemy fire. ☆

A Special Operations veteran of the Persian Gulf War, Dale K. Robinson is the co-author of Air Commando! 1950-1975: Twenty-Five Years at the Tip of the Spear, published by the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School. Further reading: Special Men and Special Missions: Inside America's Special Operations Forces 1945 to the Present, by Joel Nadel with J.R. Wright (Greenhill Books).