

A SHORT HISTORY
OF THE

14TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING
NHA TRANG AB, RVN

Versatility in combat can best summarize the accomplishments of the 14th Special Operations Wing since its activation in the Republic of Vietnam March 8, 1966. Until Aug. 1, 1968, it was known as the 14th Air Commando Wing.

Colonel William K. Bush, Pasadena, Calif., is commander of this unique organization, which utilizes 9 different types of aircraft and operates from 10 major airfields throughout Southeast Asia.

The 14th is unique because its fighting units are the only Air Force ones of their kind in Vietnam. The only two AC-47 Dragonship squadrons, the only two psychological warfare squadrons, the only counterinsurgency helicopter squadron and only AC-119G gunship squadron are all a part of the 14th Special Operations Wing.

Needless to say, the 14th has a large, significant part in the fight against communism in Southeast Asia.

By mid-May of 1968, after only 26 months in country, the 14th Special Operations Wing aircrews surpassed the 100,000 combat mission mark, the first wing to accomplish this feat in Southeast Asia. In March 1969 the wing logged its 150,000th mission.

Flying an average of 175 missions every day, wing aircrews have participated in every major ground operation in the Republic of Vietnam since March, 1966. They have supported ground units throughout the Republic with deadly firepower and psywar leaflets in places such as Con Thien, Giao Linh, Khe Sanh, A Shau, Dak To, Loc Ninh, and many others.

True to its motto of "Day and Night, Peace and War," the 14th Special Operations Wing flies around the clock, seeking to destroy the enemy when he has attacked ground units and also, through psywar, urging him to rally to the side of the Government of South Vietnam.

An important unit under the wing during its first two years of operation was the 1st Air Commando Squadron, which flew A-1 Skyraiders out of Pleiku and Bien Hoa and produced the first Air Force Medal of Honor winner in the Vietnam conflict, Major Bernard F. Fisher.

In December 1967 the 1st ACS was transferred to the 56th Air Commando Wing in Thailand. Replacing the 1st was the 6th Air Commando Squadron, which came from the United States with its A-1s to continue the Skyraider operations of the 14th Special Operations Wing. On July 15, 1968, the 6th was transferred to the 633rd Special Operations Wing at Pleiku.

The 3rd and 4th Special Operations Squadrons fly the venerable AC-47 Dragonship, which is popularly called "Spooky" throughout Vietnam because of its call sign. Spooky aircrews and their 7.62mm miniguns have successfully

defended more than 4,000 hamlets, Special Forces Camps and outposts under night attack during the last three years. Spooky crew are proud of the fact that not one friendly outpost has been lost to the enemy as long as the camp was under Spooky's protection.

Each Spooky aircraft is equipped with three miniguns, each gun capable of firing 6,000 rounds per minute. The AC-47s also carry two million candle power flares to light up their target areas in the middle of the night.

A vivid example of Spooky's fire power unfolded last August during the defense of Duc Lap Civilian Irregular Defense Group Camp near the Cambodian border. During the four-day siege, 14th SOW Spookies poured more than 761,000 rounds of ammunition into enemy positions. The Air Force was later credited with killing an estimated 557 enemy during the battle.

Another addition to the versatile 14th Special Operations Wing is the 15th Special Operations Squadron, which flies C-130 Hercules aircraft equipped for unconventional warfare operations.

Newest unit to join the wing is the 71st Special Operations Squadron, which arrived in December 1968. The unit flies AC-119G gunships equipped with four 7.62mm miniguns and sensitive night observation equipment. The 71st flies a mission similar to that of the Spooky squadrons and has been given the name "Shadow."

On the peaceful side of the wing mission are the 5th and 9th Special Operations Squadrons, conducting psychological warfare operations throughout the Republic.

Psychological warfare pilots flying O-2s, U-10s and C-47s have carried the war to the enemy by the use of leaflets and aerial speakers. Last year they dropped more than six billion leaflets and broadcast more than 18,000 hours of tape messages urging the enemy to return to the side of the government of the Republic of Vietnam.

During major engagement such as Dak To and Con Thien, psywar crews have dropped as many as 30 million leaflets over the target area in a single day.

Rounding off the wing's combat capability is the 20th Special Operations Squadron, which utilizes the CH-53 "Big Charlie" helicopters and the UH-1F Iroquois. During the past two years the squadron flew civic action missions by airlifting teams to villages, hauling rice to hungry villagers and evacuating refugees. The unit also conducts combat counterinsurgency operations.

During the late January-early February 1968 TET offensive, the squadron was called to aid friendly forces in the Ban Me Thuot area and was credited with 56 killed by air by the forward air controller on the scene. Throughout six days of hard fighting, the "Green Hornet" choppers, firing their miniguns and rockets, struck the enemy successfully time after time.

Past commanders of the wing have been Colonel Gordon F. Bradburn, 47, of Clearwater, Fla.; Colonel Forrest L. Rauscher, 49, also of Clearwater; Colonel John M. Patton, 46, Oscoda, Mich.; and Colonel Conrad S. Allman, 45, Alexandria, Va.

A brief look at the wing's history shows that it was first activated Jan. 15, 1941, as the 14th Pursuit Group (Fighter). It was equipped with P-40s and P-43s and then later converted to P-38s, which were used to fly patrols off the U.S. west coast after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

In mid-1942 the group moved to Eighth Air Force in England and began flying escort for bombers attacking targets in occupied France. Then it moved to North Africa and three months later was taken out of combat until May 1943.

From May to November 1943 the Group provided dive bombing and strafing missions in support of the Allied assault on Pantelleria and helped prepare for the invasions of Sicily and Italy.

It was then transferred to Eighteenth Air Force in November 1943 and spent the balance of World War II flying long-range escort missions against Italy, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Rumania and Bulgaria.

The unit was deactivated in Italy Sept. 9, 1945. The Group was reactivated twice for short periods, once in 1946 and again in 1955 before being activated as the 14th Air Commando Wing March 8, 1966, at Nha Trang. The wing has been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for its first year of combat activities in Vietnam.

The citation, which was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, reads as follows:

"The 14th Air Commando Wing, United States Air Force, distinguished itself by extraordinary heroism, exceptional gallantry and outstanding performance of duty in action against hostile forces in Southeast Asia from 8 March 1966 to 7 March 1967. Flying thousands of widely diversified sorties, elements of the Wing caused many enemy casualties and destroyed or damaged more than 8,500 structures, 500 trucks and 60 fuel sites as well as numerous automatic weapon positions, radio stations, bridges and boats. Flying the venerable C-47 aircraft, one squadron of the wing helped abort a large number of night hostile operations against friendly forts and hamlets through flare drops and minigun saturation fire. Despite the often heavy and accurate enemy antiaircraft fire, the search and rescue missions of the wing recovered 91 skilled airmen during this period. In addition, the Wing's psychological warfare missions directly or indirectly influenced the surrender of thousands of enemy soldiers. Through their valorous acts and untiring devotion to mission accomplishment personnel of the Wing have equaled the highest standards of performance in the United States Air Force and their actions reflect credit upon themselves and the armed forces of their country."

Latest award earned by the 14th SOW was the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm. The wing is the only Air Force unit to receive this award.

The award cited members of the 14th SOW for their contributions in the allied victories at Khe Sanh, Dak To, Loc Ninh, Hue, Phu Bai, An Khe, Ashau, Con Thien and Duc Lap from Jan. 1, 1968, through Aug. 30, 1968.