

## 17<sup>th</sup> SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON



### MISSION

#### LINEAGE

17th Observation Squadron [Light] constituted, 5 Feb 1942

Activated, 2 Mar 1942

Redesignated 17<sup>th</sup> Observation Squadron, 4 Jul 1942

Redesignated 17<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron [Bombardment], 2 Apr 1943

Inactivated, 27 Apr 1946

17<sup>th</sup> Liaison Squadron constituted, 19 Sep 1952

Activated, 20 Oct 1952

Inactivated, 25 Sep 1953

17th Special Operations Squadron constituted on 11 Apr 1969

Activated on 1 Jun 1969

Inactivated on 30 Sep 1971

17<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron (Bombardment), 17<sup>th</sup> Liaison Squadron and 17th Special Operations Squadron consolidated, 19 Sep 1985

Activated, 1 Aug 1989

#### STATIONS

Providence, RI, 2 Mar 1942

Salinas AAB, CA, 2 Mar 1942  
Esler Field, LA, 24 Jan 1943  
Laurel AAFld, MS, 31 Mar–24 Sep 1943  
Milne Bay, New Guinea, 6 Nov 1943  
Dobodura, New Guinea, 22 Nov 1943  
Finschhafen, New Guinea, Mar–30 Jun 1944 (air echelon at Wakde, 25 May–10 Jun 1944, and at Biak after 27 Jun 1944)  
Biak, 29 Jul 1944  
Tacloban, Leyte, 2 Nov 1944 (air echelon primarily at Biak to c. 23 Dec 1944 and at San Jose, Mindoro, after 23 Dec 1944)  
San Jose, Mindoro, 7 Jan 1945  
Lingayen, Luzon, 4 Apr 1945  
Ie Shima, 29 Jul 1945 (detachment at Lingayen, Luzon, to Sep 1945)  
Yokota AB, Japan, 26 Oct 1945–27 Apr 1946  
McChord AFB, WA, 20 Oct 1952–25 Sep 1953  
Nha Trang AB, South Vietnam, 1 Jun 1969  
Phan Rang AB, South Vietnam, 15 Aug 1969–30 Sep 1971  
Kadena AB, Japan, 1 Aug 1989

#### **ASSIGNMENTS**

71<sup>st</sup> Observation (later, 71<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance; 71<sup>st</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance; 71<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance) Group, 2 Mar 1942  
V Bomber Command, 1 Feb–27 Apr 1946  
Western Air Defense Force, 20 Oct 1952–25 Sep 1953  
14<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing, 1 Jun 1969–30 Sep 1971  
353<sup>rd</sup> Special Operations Wing (later, 353<sup>rd</sup> Special Operations Group) 1 Aug 1989

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

91<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Wing, 21 Oct–9 Nov 1945  
V Bomber Command, 10 Nov 1945–31 Jan 1946

#### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

L-1  
O-46  
O-47  
O-52, 1942  
A-20C  
P-39  
P-40, 1942–1943  
B-25, 1943–1946  
AC-119, 1969–1971  
HC-130, 1989

#### **COMMANDERS**

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

None

### **Campaign Streamers**

World War II

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Air Offensive, Japan

China Defensive

New Guinea

Bismarck Archipelago

Western Pacific

Leyte

Luzon

Southern Philippines

Ryukyus

China Offensive

Vietnam

TET 69/Counteroffensive

Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969

Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970

Sanctuary Counteroffensive

Southwest Monsoon

Commando Hunt V

Commando Hunt VI

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

None

### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations

Dutch New Guinea, 8 Jun 1944

Philippine Islands, 26 Dec 1944

Presidential Unit Citation

Southeast Asia, 1–30 Jun 1969

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" Device

1 Jul 1970–30 Jun 1971

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

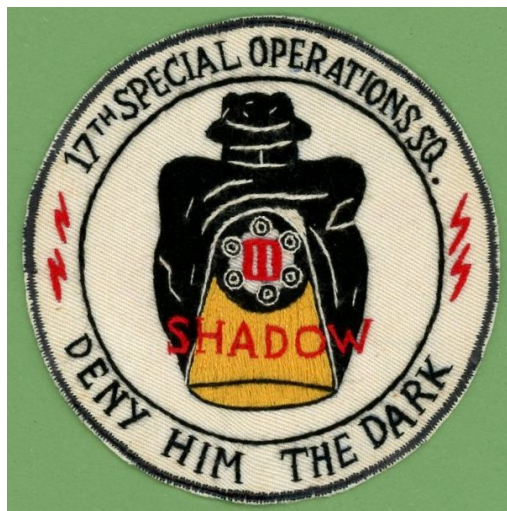
[1 Aug] 1989–5 Apr 1991

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (WWII)

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm

1 Jun 1969–30 Sep 1971

## EMBLEM



On a disc Azure, a jackal couped at the neck transverse Sable, langued Gules, armed Silver Gray and Argent, eyed Vert, three polestars, one in dexter, one in chief, one in sinister base of the fifth, all within a narrow border Yellow. Attached below the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "17TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQ" in Yellow letters. Attached above the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "NO MISSION TOO DEMANDING" in Yellow letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The fierce jackal reflects the fighting spirit and relentless and determined pursuit of goals. The jackal's nocturnal nature represents the Squadron's covert mission, normally conducted under the cloak of darkness. The stars represent operations, maintenance and support components of the unit. Azure, a jackal head couped and traversed Sable, garnished of the first, langued Gules, armed Argent and eyed Yellow between three mullets of four points White, all within a diminished bordure Or. (Approved, 19 Jul 1993; replaced emblems approved, 28 Jun 1990 and 4 May 1943)

## MOTTO

NO MISSION TOO DEMANDING. Approved on 31 Jul 1990.

## NICKNAME

## **OPERATIONS**

17th Special Operations Squadron flies the MC-130P Combat Shadow. The primary mission of this aircraft is to aerial refuel special operations helicopters. It is also capable of day and night low-level delivery of troops and equipment via airdrop or airland operations. Just as the aircrews of the Combat Talon, these crews are trained in NVG flying.

Antisubmarine patrols off west coast of US, May–Sep 1942; Combat in Southwest and Western Pacific, 28 Jan 1944–25 Jul 1945. Not manned, 1952–1953. Combat in Southeast Asia, 1 Jun 1969–30 Sep 1971.

The 17th Special Operations Squadron, activated on June 1, replaced the 71st SOSq which returned to Bakalar AFB, Ind., for inactivation. The 17th Squadron absorbed about two-thirds of the 71st's personnel. The remainder were reservists who departed South Vietnam for the United States on June 6 and reverted to inactive status by June 18, 1969. This drain of skilled men imposed stringent training demands. By the end of June, the 17th SOSq, commanded by Lt. Col. Richard E. Knie, had trained replacements and reestablished routine operations. With the two AC-119 squadrons in place, the Air Force inactivated the 3d and 4th SOSqs and transferred their AC-47s to the VNAF or RLAF.

In the last half of August 1969, the 17th Special Operations Squadron put in for relief from at least one AC-119G mission per night due to the strain on aircraft maintenance. Four Shadows incurred battle damage and on August 6 one more took, 50-caliber hits in the fuselage and one engine, producing an engine fire and extensive damage. Corrosion-control work, maintenance inspections, and disruptions in the supply of parts (owing to unit movements under the Nha Trang Proposal) aggravated the aircraft problems. The 17th SOSq lost its first aircraft on October 11—Shadow 76 crashed upon takeoff for a mission from Tan Son Nhut AB. Six crewmembers were killed and the aircraft was destroyed. Another AC-119G sustained severe damage on November 10 when its right gear collapsed on landing at Chu Lai AB. On April 28, 1970, the 17th Special Operations Squadron lost another aircraft. The gunship lost an engine on takeoff from Tan Son Nhut AB, crashed, and killed six of the eight crewmembers.

In the latter half of 1970, the commander of Cambodian forces at Kompong Thorn (north of Phnom Penh) reported that 17th Special Operations Squadron gunships played a prominent role in lifting the enemy siege of that provincial capital.

On December 7, 1970, the 17th Special Operations Squadron was ordered to fly night support for Laotian forces on the Bolovens Plateau. Three aircraft and four crews accordingly moved from Phan Rang to Phu Cat. Several Lima Sites were surrounded and the situation was deteriorating. Even so, U.S. and RLAF gunship support by night and other attack aircraft by day enabled the Lima Sites to reset their outer defenses in about five days.

Amid expanding AC-119 operations, plans were made to turn over the AC-119Gs to the Vietnamese Air Force, consistent with the Nixon administration push for Vietnamization of the war. This spawned proposals for a bigger and better VNAF gunship capability. A plan emerged

to activate the Vietnamese Air Force's 819th Combat Squadron at Tan Son Nhut AB on September 1, 1971. On that date the 17th SOSq would turn over the AC-119Gs and specified maintenance and supply support equipment. The VNAF would then schedule all AC-119G missions. The 17th Squadron was charged with VNAF combat crew training in the AC-119G. In Phase 1 at Clinton County AFB the VNAF pilots were checked out in the C-119. Phase II aircrew training would take place at Phan Rang: three crews to enter training on February 1, 1971; seven, April 3; seven, May 18; and the last seven, June 25. The goal called for the VNAF squadron having twenty-four crews operationally ready by May 1, 1972. As 1971 began, the 17th SOSq got ready to convert from a combat squadron to a training one.

Disaster relief missions in the Philippines, 16–31 Jul 1990.

A C-130 from the 17th Special Operations Squadron and an HH-3 from the 33d Rescue Squadron, both based at Kadena Air Base, Japan, responded to a call from the USS Blue Ridge in July, and medically evacuated a sailor from the ship to Okinawa for treatment. 1992

Kadena Bids Farewell to First of its Combat Shadows Members of the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Kadena AB, Japan, bid farewell to the first of the unit's MC-130P aircraft as the squadron begins its transition to the new MC-130J model. This MC-130P, aircraft number 69-5825, flew to Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., on July 17 to enter retirement in the Air Force's aircraft boneyard. The airframe had served for 44 years, amassing nearly 19,000 flying hours. "After having executed a wide variety of missions in the aircraft over the last 13 years, I have mixed emotions seeing her headed to retirement," said Lt. Col. Daniel Kobs of the 17th SOS. He said the eventual arrival of Kadena's MC-130Js would "usher in a new era" of special operations forces airmen and capabilities. Lockheed Martin delivered the Air Force's first MC-130J in September 2011 to Cannon AFB, N.M. 2013

Airmen with the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Kadena AB, Japan, paid honor to the venerable MC-130P Combat Shadow by conducting a final formation flight before the last of their MC-130Ps are retired. "Today's final four-ship formation flight was the 17th Special Operations Squadron's tribute to the heritage and legacy of this fine aircraft," said Lt. Col. Nathan Colunga, 17th SOS commander, of the Oct. 16 event. The MC-130P has served well in the Pacific, "but ultimately it is time to retire the fleet and bring out the MC-130J Commando II as its replacement," he added. The first of Kadena's MC-130Ps left the base in July 2013. The squadron's last remaining MC-130Ps are scheduled to start departing Kadena in October; all will be gone by April 2015. Kadena's MC-130Js are slated to arrive in the next year. "The Combat Shadow has proven its worth even at the end of its long career. That says a lot," said Capt. Matthew Davis, a 17th SOS pilot. 2014

The 353rd Special Operations Group at Kadena AB, Japan, began its transition from MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft to the new MC-130J Commando II in December. The first Commando II, which is replacing the 17th Special Operations Squadron's Combat Shadows, landed at the base Dec. 21. The new aircraft represents a big capability leap for the squadron's specialized air mobility and air refueling mission, said Maj. Michael Perry, the 17th SOS assistant operations

officer. There are currently around 10 MC-130 Combat Shadows at Kadena. The Air Force's projected final delivery date for the MC-130J fleet is in Fiscal 2017. The MC-130 recap plan began in 2011, when the first MC-130J arrived at Cannon AFB, N.M. The new J model Commando IIs have greater range, capacity, and speed, and will feature fleet-common technology with other C-130Js, reducing operational costs. 2015

The last two MC-130Ps stationed in Pacific Air Forces headed off to the boneyard at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., on April 15, making way for the standup of the new MC-130J Commando II fleet at Kadena AB, Japan. "These aircraft have executed every time we've truly needed them," said Lt. Col. Nathan Colunga, 17th Special Operations Squadron commander. The aircraft has served in more than a dozen operations from Afghanistan to Iraq and in humanitarian relief operations around the Asia-Pacific. The J model MC-130 features greater range, capability, and capacity in the specialized air-to-air refueling mission for helicopters and Special Operations Forces air mobility support, according to USAF and PACAF officials. Kadena began phasing in the new Commando IIs this past December, and will eventually host 10 of the new-build MC-130Js. 2015

Special operations aircrew from Kadena AB, Japan, deployed a large, rigid-inflatable boat from an MC-130J Commando II over the Pacific Ocean for the first time in an exercise last month. The simultaneous, formation Maritime Craft Aerial Delivery System drop with the MC-130H Combat Talon II also tested interoperability between the two types. "Our ability to execute this mission on either MC-130 aircraft exponentially expands the maritime intercept capabilities throughout the Pacific theater," 353rd Special Operations Group Commander Col. William Freeman. Since Kadena's squadrons operate both the MC-130H and the MC-130J that will eventually replace it, "it is essential that both units learn from each other and train together," said 17th Special Operations Squadron ops director Lt. Col. Matthew Bartlett. Kadena's 17th SOS received its first MC-130J last December, phasing out its last MC-130P Combat Shadow in April. 2015

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Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 19 Nov 2010

Updated: 28 Aug 2013

#### Sources

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The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.