

## 20 SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON



### MISSION

The 20 Special Operations Squadron primary mission is to conduct day or night low-level penetration into hostile or denied territory to accomplish clandestine insertion/extraction and resupply of special operations forces. These operations include tactical low-level navigation, night vision goggle operations, ground extraction techniques and over-water operations.

### LINEAGE

20 Observation Squadron (Light) constituted, 5 Feb 1942

Activated, 2 Mar 1942

Redesignated 20 Observation Squadron, 4 Jul 1942

Redesignated 20 Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter), 2 Apr 1943

Redesignated 20 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 11 Aug 1943

Inactivated, 27 Nov 1945

20 Helicopter Squadron constituted, 24 Feb 1956

Activated, 9 Jul 1956

Discontinued and inactivated, 8 Mar 1960

Activated, 24 Sep 1965

Organized, 8 Oct 1965

Redesignated 20 Special Operations Squadron, 1 Aug 1968

Inactivated, 1 Apr 1972

Activated, 1 Jan 1976

20 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron and 20 Special Operations Squadron consolidated, 19 Sep 1985. Consolidated squadron retains 20 Special Operations Squadron designation.

## **STATIONS**

Savannah AB, GA, 2 Mar 1942  
Pope Field, NC, 28 Mar 1942  
Vichy AAB, MO, 14 Dec 1942  
Morris Field, NC, 8 May 1943  
Key Field, MS, 31 Aug–8 Nov 1943  
Camp Anza, CA, 11–c. 17 Nov 1943  
Bombay, India, 26 Dec 1943  
Camp Deolali, India, 28 Dec 1943  
Guskhara, India, 5 Jan 1944 (flight operated from Kisselbari, India, 6–25 Mar 1944)  
Kisselbari, India, 26 Mar 1944 (operated from Dinjan, India, 1 May–20 Jun 1944; detachment at Tingkawk Sakan, Burma, 21 May–20 Jun 1944; operated from Tingkawk Sakan, Burma, 21 Jun–10 Nov 1944; detachment at Myitkyina, Burma, 10 Jul–25 Aug 1944)  
Myitkyina, Burma, 9 Nov 1944 (flight operated from Akyab, Burma, 12 Apr–22 May 1945)  
Nagaghuli, India, 20 Apr 1945  
Dergaon, India, 6 Jul 1945  
Piardoba, India, Sep–4 Nov 1945  
Camp Kilmer, NJ, 26–27 Nov 1945  
Sewart AFB, TN, 9 Jul 1956  
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 16 Jul 1959–8 Mar 1960  
Tan Son Nhut AB, South Vietnam, 8 Oct 1965  
Nha Trang AB, South Vietnam, 15 Jun 1966  
Tuy Hoa AB, South Vietnam, 5 Sep 1969  
Cam Ranh Bay AB, South Vietnam, 25 Sep 1970–1 Apr 1972  
Eglin AF Auxiliary Field No. 9 (Hurlburt Field), FL, 1 Jan 1976

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Air Force Combat Command, 2 Mar 1942  
Army Air Forces, 9 Mar 1942  
76 Observation (later, 76 Reconnaissance; 76 Tactical Reconnaissance) Group, 12 Mar 1942  
III Reconnaissance Command, 23 Aug 1943  
Army Air Forces, India-Burma Sector, 26 Dec 1943  
Tenth Air Force, 7 Mar 1944 Group, 25 Apr 1944  
Army Air Forces, India-Burma Theater, Oct–27 Nov 1945  
Eighteenth Air Force, 9 Jul 1956  
Ninth Air Force, 1 Sep 1957–8 Mar 1960  
Pacific Air Forces, 24 Sep 1965  
2 Air Division, 8 Oct 1965  
14 Air Commando (later, 14th Special Operations) Wing, 8 Mar 1966  
483 Tactical Airlift Wing, 1 Sep 1971–1 Apr 1972  
1 Special Operations Wing, 1 Jan 1976  
1 Special Operations (later, 16th Operations) Group, 22 Sep 1992

## **ATTACHMENTS**

5306 Photographic and Reconnaissance Group [Provisional], 26 Dec 1943–17 Jan 1944, and to Tenth Air Force, 17 Jan–7 Mar 1944  
5320 Air Defense Wing [Provisional], Mar–May 1944)  
8 Photographic (later, 8 Reconnaissance)  
314 Troop Carrier Wing, 9 Jul 1956–16 Jul 1959  
Tactical Fighter Wing, 16 Jul 1959–8 Mar 1960  
6250 Combat Support Group, c. 10 Dec 1965–8 Mar 1966

## **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

A-20B  
DB-7  
L-1  
L-4A  
P-43, 1942–1943  
P-40K  
P-40N, 1942–1945  
L-5, 1942–1945  
B-25, 1942–1945  
P-51/F-6, 1945  
H-21, 1956–1960  
CH-3, 1965–1969  
UH-1, 1967–1972  
UH-1, 1976–1985  
CH-3C, 1976–1980  
HH-53C  
MH-53, 1980

## **COMMANDERS**

Unkn, 2 Mar 1942  
Capt Thomas H. Verdel Jr., 20 Apr 1942  
Capt Kenneth T. Rooney, 2 May 1942  
Maj Andre T. McMillin, 24 Aug 1942-unkn  
Maj William R. Fornof, Aug 1943  
Maj John D. Reid, Apr-Aug 1945  
Maj James F. Fowler, 9 Jul 1956  
Maj Gregg D. Hartley, 28 Aug 1956  
Lt Col Oscar N. Tibbetts, 7 Oct 1958  
Maj Gregg D. Hartley, 25 Jan 1959  
Capt Bennie F. Lemoine, 25 Jan-8 Mar 1960  
None (not manned), 8 Oct-9 Dec 1965  
Lt Col Lawrence R. Cummings, 10 Dec 1965  
Lt Col Charles O. Smith, Nov 1966  
Lt Col Johnny T. Williams, 25 Nov 1966

Lt Col John W. Amidon, Feb 1967  
Lt Col John M. Steen, Oct 1967  
Lt Col William B. Skinner, May 1968  
Lt Col James A. McMullen, 14 Nov 1968  
Lt Col Frank A. DiFiglia, 1 Dec 1968  
Lt Col David K. Sparks, 26 Mar 1969  
Lt Col Stephen Von Phul, 18 Nov 1969  
Lt Col Alexander G. Edgar, 3 Jan 1970  
Lt Col Harmon M. Brotnov, 6 Nov 1970  
Lt Col Alfred G. Houston, Aug 1971  
Maj Alan L. Taylor, 13 Oct 1971  
Lt Col Meredith S. Sutton, 24 Nov 1971-1972  
Lt Col Robert E. Mayo, Jan 1976  
Lt Col John R. Roberts, 1 Jan 1978  
Lt Col G. E. Borinski, 1 Jan 1980  
Lt Col W. E. Takacs, 18 Aug 1980  
Lt Col W. D. Corder, 10 Aug 1982  
Lt Col W. W. Grant, 16 Jul 1984  
Lt Col H. E. Johnson, 2 Jul 1986  
Lt Col G. L. Weikel, 10 Jul 1988  
Lt Col Richard Comer, 11 Jun 1990  
Lt Col Russell E. Rakip, 8 Jun 1992  
Lt Col Donald L. Hoover, 10 Jun 1994  
Lt Col Michael C. Homan, 26 Jun 1995  
Lt Col Thomas E. Hull, 30 Aug 1996  
Lt Col John S. Hester III, 30 Jul 1998  
Lt Col Thomas J. Trask, 16 Jul 1999  
Lt Col Michael J. Kingsley, 1 Feb 2001  
Lt Col Marshall B. Webb, 27 Jun 2002  
Lt Col Richard Williams, 30 Jun 2003

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

World War II American Theater

### **Campaign Streamers**

World War II

India-Burma

Central Burma

China Defensive

Vietnam

Vietnam Defensive

Vietnam Air

Vietnam Air Offensive  
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II  
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III  
Vietnam Air/Ground  
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV  
TET 69/Counteroffensive  
Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969  
Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970  
Sanctuary Counteroffensive  
Southwest Monsoon  
Commando Hunt V  
Commando Hunt VI  
Commando Hunt VII  
Vietnam Ceasefire

Southwest Asia  
Defense of Saudi Arabia  
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

Panama, 1989–1990

### **Decorations**

Presidential Unit Citations  
(Southeast Asia), 8 Mar 1966–7 Mar 1967  
21 Jun 1968–30 Jun 1969

### **Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device**

10 Jan–12 Mar 1966  
1 Nov 1966–1 Apr 1967  
16 Jun 1967–20 Jun 1968  
1 Jul 1967–30 Jun 1968  
1 Jul 1970–30 Jun 1971  
1 Sep 1971–31 Dec 1971  
1 May 1982–30 Apr 1984  
1 Jun 1997–31 May 1999  
1 Jul 2003–30 Jun 2005  
1 Sep 2006–30 Jun 2007

### **Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards**

1 Jan 1976–31 Mar 1977  
6 Nov 1978–2 Mar 1979  
15 Jul 1979–15 May 1980  
16 May 1980–30 Apr 1982

1 May 1985–30 Apr 1987  
1 May 1988–30 Apr 1990  
16 Apr 1992–15 Apr 1994  
1 Jun 1995–31 May 1997  
1 Jul 1999–30 Jun 2001  
1 Jul 2001–30 Jun 2003  
1 Sep 2004–31 Aug 2006

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Crosses with Palm  
1 Jan–30 Aug 1968  
16 Jun 1967–1 Apr 1972

Gallant Unit Citation  
6 Oct 2001–30 May 2003

## EMBLEM



20 TRS On a disc white, bordure light magenta, a blue cloud formation in chief, emitting a stroke of lightning orange to sinister base; a caricatured figure wearing work clothes brown, boxing gloves tan, aviator's helmet red, and goggles white, black binoculars on string around neck, flowering to rear; astride a large aerial bomb blue, banded light green, falling diagonally across base to dexter. (Approved, 31 Oct 1942)



20 Helicopter Squadron patch



20 SOS: Sable, a bend sinister Azure, charged on the sinister with nine mullets in bend sinister, eight Or above one Gules, debriused by a hornet Vert; each segment fimbriated of the third; all

within a diminished bordure of the first. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Blue background represents the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The black disc denotes the night sky, which is the theater of operations of special operations units. The band represents the unit's heritage when organized in 1976 in tri-service support of an unconventional warfare mission. The stars reflect the nine primary functions of the unit and the nine aerospace employment principles of war. The red star signifies the unit's participation in Operation J-CATCH. The green hornet symbolizes the hovering capabilities of the rotary wing aircraft that the unit utilizes in a low-level environment. The hornet's "stinger" denotes the gunship weaponry. (Approved, 9 Dec 1993; replaced emblems approved, 7 Jul 1958, 22 May 1957)

## **MOTTO**

GREEN HORNETS

## **OPERATIONS**

Trained in aerial reconnaissance, Mar 1942–Dec 1943.

Combat in CBI, 31 Jan 1944–5 May 1945.

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

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

Although the 20 had recently been activated and was undergoing organizational changes, they were extremely busy in the last half of 1956. Between July and August, the 20 supported the gunnery range at Wendover AFB, Utah, where 20 crews conducted three rescue missions. Two aircraft and crews were deployed to Ardmore AFB, Oklahoma for rescue support between July and November. Two aircraft were broken down for air transport aboard a C-124 Globemaster in July, with the first aircraft's teardown completed in only six hours. The 20 also provided manning assists to sister squadrons in July. Eight aircraft and crews were committed to an



exercise entitled Operation Pine Cone in August, while a 20 aircraft was cannibalized to provide parts for sister squadrons overseas. In October, the squadron provided two crews and aircraft to support the Civil Air Patrol at Allentown, Pennsylvania in Operation Hi-Water.

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

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

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

On 4 July 1958, the squadron again deployed to cold country. This time two aircraft and 13 personnel deployed to Sondrestrom Air Base, Greenland via C-124 to support construction of a site on the eastern end of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line chain of radar stations. In August, two more aircraft and additional personnel deployed to Sondrestrom. Because the squadron was not authorized Arctic gear, it was forced to borrow clothing and equipment from other units.

By the time the mission was completed and aircraft and crews returned to Sewart AFB, the 20 had flown 500 hours and airlifted more than 2,000 passengers and nearly 295,000 pounds of cargo.

20 crews and aircraft supported radiological safety monitoring at Indian Springs Auxiliary Air Field, Nevada and the annual William Tell fighter competition at both Nellis AFB, Nevada and Tyndall AFB, Florida in the fall of 1958. The mission at Tyndall involved recovery of Firebee target drones from the Gulf of Mexico.

As a result of its outstanding flying safety record, the 20 was awarded a plaque for Meritorious Achievement in Flight Safety on 31 December 1958. The squadron had logged 8,000 accident free flying hours between 1 January 1957 and 31 December 1958.

The squadron activated Detachment 1 at Myrtle Beach AFB, South Carolina on 1 March 1959, in preparation for the movement of the entire squadron later that summer.

On 21 June 1959, the squadron participated in the unveiling of an Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. The 20 crew hovered their H-21 at 100 feet above the erect missile shrouded in a huge parachute. On command, the helicopter lifted the parachute to unveil the museum's latest addition.

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

A U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam planning paper of September 1 stated that CH-3s, if sent to Southeast Asia, would be used for hauling combat control teams, airfield survey teams and casualties, and for supplying sites lacking suitable drop zones.

Upon approving the use of CH-3Cs on September 15, Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. Vance noted that the stated mission appeared to be an Army function, and he qualified his decision as contingent on further clarification of the matter or transfer of the CH-3C unit to the Army. A week later, McConnell replied on behalf of the Joint Chiefs. He advised that the CH-3C unit would be used to support Air Force activities and to supply remote sites in Laos, and he omitted any reference to conventional ground force support. McConnell also informed the Air Staff that he had reached "an informal understanding" with Vance that the Air Force would not attempt to deliver supplies to the Army by helicopter. The concession was made in the interest of preserving accord with Vance and McNamara, since the latter opposed an Air Force helicopter arm and had been twice challenged in force and budget actions earlier in the year. Thereafter, the Air Force advocated a limited helicopter role, although it continued to hope for the development of a vertical-flight, fixed-wing craft. The Air Force's interim objectives included the development of new delivery modes for fixed-wing transports such as a low-altitude parachute extraction system and the improvement of assault strip construction capability. Requesting the purchase of additional CH-3s in November, the Air Force omitted reference to possible use of this aircraft in air supply operations for ground force support.

The outcome of these discussions was the official creation of the 20 Helicopter Squadron at Tan Son Nhut on October 8, 1965. The unit was authorized a complement of fourteen CH-3s (the number reduced from twenty-five because of limited resources) and the aircraft were drawn mainly from the TAC unit at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, and from new production. The unit's mission, according to the Seventh Air Force, was: To support various Air Force combat activities, such as the communications sites, Tactical Air Control System, air liaison officers, airfield construction, aeromedical evacuations, counterinsurgency operations, and to support/augment search and rescue forces in SEA if required. The unit will also be responsive to priority requirements of MACV.

Airlift activity commenced in December, and sorties increased to a monthly average of 990 during the first three months of 1966. The CH-3s operated from the main base at Tan Son Nhut and from operating locations at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay. Operational control was initially vested in the local base support unit at each site, but shifted to the 14th Air Commando Wing at

Nha Trang in early 1966. Planning and staff supervisory control was centered in the airlift branch of the 2d Air Division. Control by the 315th Wing or within the airlift system was thus entirely absent, which was consistent with the clarification of roles.

The unit was soon occupied in tasks beyond its mission statement. Responding to a Marine request in January 1966, the 20 enlarged its Da Nang detachment to eight craft. For two months the Air Force helicopters performed medium lift support for Marine operations south of Chu Lai, completing nearly six hundred varied cargo and troop lifts. Six of the Da Nang craft returned to Nha Trang in March, promptly commencing extensive support of U.S. Army operations west of Tuy Hoa. Tasks authorized by the 2d Air Division were limited to displacement and resupply of artillery elements, loads beyond the capability of available Army helicopters, and the transport of heavy items such as ammunition, rations, and water. The Nha Trang flight flew nearly four hundred sorties in March in behalf of the Army including retrieval of two downed UH-1s. Meanwhile, the Tan Son Nhut CH 3s served successfully in Operation Mastiff, and in April MACV arranged with the Seventh Air Force that first priority for use of these ships was to be for support of ground force operations, pending arrival of additional CH-47 Chinooks. In June General Westmoreland requested a specific allocation of CH-3 flying hours for the same purpose.

The critical shortages of Chinooks temporarily ended doctrinal rigidity. The trend toward using them in air supply and troop movements with the Army ended, upon transfer of the 20 to Nha Trang in June and employment of the unit in unconventional warfare roles. Guidance from Air Force headquarters at the beginning of 1967 reconfirmed the Air Force position that its helicopters should not compete with Army helicopters, but should plainly establish their role in special air warfare.

Cross-border infiltration work by the Air Force's 20 Helicopter Squadron was the result of an agreement which acknowledged that Air Force helicopters had a role in "special air warfare." With much of its strength based in northern Thailand in early 1966, the 20 in Vietnam made only routine lifts. An exception was a temporary mission at Kontum in January 1967, where CH-3s assisted in transporting patrol teams being staged from that point. The squadron acquired fifteen UH-1s in June 1967 and reopened its detachment at Kontum, shifting it soon afterwards to Ban Me Thuot. Each of the UH-1s was equipped with armored self-sealing fuel tanks and door-mounted, hand-operated machineguns. Some ships were further modified to carry rockets and 7.62-mm miniguns. These Air Force Hooeys joined Vietnamese Air Force and Army choppers as troop carriers and gunships for reconnaissance forces, both in-country and cross-border.

Rapport between members of 20 Squadron and the Special Forces was excellent. Mission assignment was by a command element of the MACV Studies and Observations Group (SOG): four gunships, one command vehicle, an emergency recovery craft, and one plane carrying the reconnaissance team. The force flew in loose formation, the gunships to either side and slightly to the rear. Teamwork was vital as were fast execution and measures to avoid detection. Withdrawals were similar except that secrecy was not essential, and the gunships orbited the

landing zone prior to pickup to attract and suppress enemy fire. Night infiltration and pickup missions were extremely dangerous and were performed only in emergencies, when possible aided by flareship illumination. Technical developments included the "McGuire Rig" consisting of triple ropes, each with trapeze wrist locks, and a sling arrangement to lift teams out of jungle areas. Protective equipment too was effective. This was proven when two persons

The unconventional warfare operations in Southeast Asia confirmed the superiority of the helicopter over parachute drops in most team infiltration and supply tasks, and the advantages of the helicopter for troop removal was indisputable. Contrasted with overland travel, the ease of movement by helicopter multiplied the efficiency of combat teams and vastly reduced troop hardships. Unconventional helicopter duties among the Air Force, the U.S. Army, and the Vietnamese Air Force, were reasonably well coordinated, and the distinguished work of the 20 in Southeast Asia strengthened the Air Force's entitlement to future special air operations roles.

The belief that Vietnamese Air Force helicopter crews lacked skills in night, instrument, and low-level flying discouraged attempts to penetrate North Vietnam by helicopter. Vietnamese H-34s operated successfully into southern Laos, and in late 1965 two Vietnamese Air Force crews from Khe Sanh flew Team Romeo into North Vietnam just north of the DMZ. Air Force CH-3s resupplied the team using low-level contour flight techniques. In June 1966 the CH-3s of the 20 Helicopter Squadron landed their first team in the same area.

Authority to fly from Thailand in January 1967 made possible penetrations further north. During 1967 the 20 Squadron's Pony Express CH-3s completed eight of thirty-seven scheduled missions from Nakhon Phanom into North Vietnam. Penetration missions were ordinarily screened by strike aircraft and sometimes included refueling stops inside Laos. Resupply deliveries could be parachuted, free-dropped, or lowered by cable. Most resupply aborts resulted from failures to make contact with teams. The first successful team recovery in September 1967 boosted the morale of all team members.

65-07932 UH-1F 31 Mar 67 14th ACW, Nha Trang Laos Robert L. Baldwin D. E. Lyall The helicopter was hit by ground fire over a landing zone in the Lima Site 6 area during an attempt to exfiltrate friendly forces.

64-14236 CH-3E 23 Aug 67 20 HS, 14th ACW, Udorn Laos Pony Express Patterson J. P. McCollum C.W. Paugh acft lost rotor RPM short of landing zone and struck ground.

CH-3C helicopter 63-09678: Assigned to the 20 Helicopter Squadron at Udorn, "Pony Express 30" was on a mission to Lima Site 85. During landing, the crew approached from the wrong direction, hitting trees and crashing near the landing zone. 30Dec67

Tail No.: 65-07942 Model: UH-1F Date of Loss: 27 Nov 68 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot

Country of Loss: Cambodia Call Sign: Green Hornet

Crew Chief: Gene P. Stuijbergen

On 27 November 1968 SSGT Gene P. Stuijbergen, Flight Engineer, and a native of Augusta,

Michigan, was aboard a UH-1F slick on a combat mission over Phu Nhai Village; Rotanokiri Prov., Cambodia, 10 miles west of Duc Lo, SVN. On this mission, his crew attempted to infiltrate a combined 6-man U.S. Army Special Forces and South Vietnamese Forces Team into an enemy bivouac area situated in a deep ravine and surrounded by heavy jungle. As the heavily laden Huey began its steep approach into a ten foot hover, it immediately came under a fusillade of enemy anti-aircraft and small arms fire. During the melee, an enemy round ripped through the flight controls, causing the aircraft to crash into the landing zone and burst into flames. The pilots, a gunner, and two American team members escaped the inferno, but SSGT Stuijbergen and the remainder of the team were hopelessly trapped; apparently dying underneath the burning wreckage. Only five of the ten onboard were rescued. Several desperate attempts were made to rescue and recover SSGT Stuijbergen and the remainder of the team but became futile due to stiff enemy resistance. SSGT Stuijbergen is presently listed officially in the "Presumptive status of Dead, Body not recovered," and is the first 20 SOS enlisted crewmember to perish in combat operations.

Tail No.: 63-13164 Model: UH-1F Date of Loss: 03 Jan 69 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Cambodia Call Sign: Green Hornet  
Gunner: Ronald P Zenga

Aircraft was shot down near Duc Lap while attempting to rescue a Special Forces patrol. The aircraft The aircraft was struck by intense ground fire while coming to a hover to attempt a McGuire Rig extraction. After taking eight hits the aircraft departed the area and the gunships suppressed the ground fire. A second approach was made. As they came to a hover above the trees enemy fire struck the fuel cells setting the aircraft on fire. They were able to accelerate the aircraft and attempted a landing in a small jungle clearing less than 500 meters from the enemy forces surrounding the Special Forces patrol. The engine failed just short of the clearing and the helicopter crashed into the trees. Sgt. Zenga was pinned under the aircraft and died in the ensuing fire.

During January 10-15, 1969, the 20 Squadron lifted over five thousand persons, cut off by enemy forces near Samneua, in a total of 539 sorties. Each morning, 20 crews hauled drums of helicopter fuel into the region for refueling during the rest of the day. Precipitous terrain and early morning fog hampered the effort, already made difficult by the 4,700 foot ground elevation at the pickup point.

Tail No: 62-12582 Model: CH-3C Date of Loss: 17 Jan 69 Unit: 20 SOS, Udorn  
Country of Loss: Laos Call Sign: Pony Express 20  
Pilot: Walter W. Martin  
Co-Pilot: Richard A. Fleming  
Flight Engineer: Albert J. Davis  
Location of Loss: 20 02'N 103 28'E  
Helicopter was hit by small arms fire while hovering, no further information on this loss; mission was TACAN site support.

64-15492 UH-1F 13 Feb 69 14th SOW, Nha Trang Near Duc Co, SVN Vulture 02 Ronald Andrews

Ronald N. Guy Jesse C. Bowman Isidro Arroyo Shot down while trying to suppress ground fire to allow the rescue of a Special Forces patrol. The aircraft burst into flames but was able to land without injury to the crew. Crew was picked up by another Green Hornet.

CH-3C helicopters 63-09682: Assigned to the 20 SOS at Udorn, "Pony Express16" landed in Laos during a mission, due to oil system failure. When a repair crew returned later, the helicopter was found burning. 20Feb69

Tail No.: 63-13158 Model: UH-1F Date of Loss: 26 Mar 69 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot

Country of Loss: Khanh Hoa, SVN Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Frank A. DiFiglia 20 SOS Commander

Maintenance Officer: Walter C. Booth

Flight Surgeon: Robert W. Fields

Gunner: Jesse C. Bowman

Gunner: Antonio L. Alho

Aircraft crashed and burned near Duc My, SVN, 12 minutes north of Nha Trang SVN. The crash sequence began at 4,000' when a severe vibration or beat began. Auto-rotation was initiated. During the descent control of the aircraft was lost causing subsequent destruction of the main rotor which in turn severed the tail boom. First the severe beat, then the uncontrollability, followed by the separation of aircraft access doors, subsequently the main rotor underwent violent stresses and the severing of the tail boom. The sequence began with the catastrophic failure of the tail rotor which was possibly caused by hostile fire impacting on a critical component causing an unbalanced condition or failure leading to a severe beat or vibration.

Tail No.: 65-07937 Model: UH-1F Date of Loss: 13 Apr 69 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot

Country of Loss: Pleiku, SVN Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: James O. Lynch

Shot down by ground fire attempting to extract a reconnaissance team. Captain Lynch was killed by hostile ground fire.

63-13152 UH-1F 21 Apr 69 14th SOW, Nha Trang SVN Shot down while attempting to extract a reconnaissance team. All of the crew members and the team were rescued.

63-13151 UH-1F 19 May 69 14th SOW, Nha Trang SVN W. D. Boyd Lost due to a fuel control malfunction. All personnel rescued

65-07929 UH-1P 14 Jul 69 14th ACW, Nha Trang SVN The helicopter was being flown on a FCF when the engine lost power. Autorotation was initiated but the aircraft landed on a slope, rolled to the right and the main rotor blades struck the ground

66-01217 UH-1P 25 Aug 69 14th SOW, Nha Trang SVN Green Hornet 217 W. Bradley During a test flight at Nha Trang, at 300 feet, 60 KIAS, the aircraft lost power and auto-rotated to the ground. Impact caused one skid to fold and the aircraft rolled and pivoted over the left front corner of the fuselage, coming to rest on the top left side.

Tail No.: UNKNOWN Model: O-2A Date of Loss: 13 Sep 69 Unit: 20 SOS, Ton Son Nhut

Country of Loss: SVN Call Sign: UNKNOWN

Captain Thomas W. Norman

Captain James F. Cameron

Jim Henthorn Page 18 12/20/2007 USAF Helicopter Crew Losses - Vietnam War

The two 20 SOS pilots were killed when they were shot down by ground fire when their O-2A Skymaster sustained battle damage and crashed on the morning of 13 Sep 69.

63-13155 UH-1P 21 Oct 69 14th SOW, Tuy Hoa SVN R. B. Swenck M. R. Loper R. G. Davis The aircraft lost power and autorotated into 5 foot high elephant grass. Upon landing it rolled onto it's side. Fire completely destroyed the helicopter.

65-07935 UH-1P 8 Dec 69 14th SOW, Tuy Hoa SVN McCallist Rochell J. Sanchez D. Delahoy Shot down while covering an exfil of a reconnaissance team in contact with the enemy. The engine took hits and the aircraft crashed into the trees. Crew was rescued by a US Army UH-1 slick.

Tail No.: 64-15491 Model: UH-1P Date of Loss: 14 Mar 70 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot

Country of Loss: Duc Lap, Quang Duc, SVN Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Dana A. Dilley

Crashed in the jungle while flying in support of a LRRP mission due to suspected enemy ground fire. An Army slick also on the mission landed near the crash and transported the injured to the hospital at Cam Rahn Bay.

Tail No.: 65-07944 Model: UH-1P Date of Loss: 19 Mar 70 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot

Country of Loss: Darlac, SVN Call Sign: Green Hornet

Pilot: Clyde W. Enderle

Co-Pilot: Carlos A. Estrada

Gunner: James W. Greenwood

Shot down by enemy ground fire southeast of Ban Me Thuot, SVN. Second gunner was thrown clear and survived. This occurred during a training flight consisting of a two ship formation.

65-07944 UH-1P 19 Mar 70 14th SOW, Tuy Hoa SVN Green Hornet 944 Clyde W. Enderle (IP) Carlos A. Estrada, Jr. James W. Greenwood John N. Visnesky The aircraft was hit by enemy ground fire while on a training flight and spun into the ground. The aircraft subsequently burned and was completely destroyed.

65-07930 UH-1P 29 Jul 70 14th SOW, Tuy Hoa Tuy Hoa, SVN John R. Clapper (IP) Marion J. Messenger Roby J. Farmer Ronald W. Clark Bryan R. McGregor While flying local gun training the aircraft was autorotated into the trees. Recovery of the aircraft indicated numerous bullet holes and possible engine failure. Aircraft was a combat loss due to the extensive damage and was not repaired.

Tail No.: 64-15484 Model: UH-1P Date of Loss: 25 Sep 70 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Quang Duc, SVN Call Sign: Green Hornet  
Pilot: Jackie P. Heil  
Gunner: Gerald A. Cooper

The lead gunship in a flight of two on a combat mission hit trees while turning to avoid a mid-air collision with a VNAF CH-34 and subsequently caught fire after it came to rest, destroying the aircraft. The IP and one gunner were killed, the pilot and the other gunner were injured in the impact. MSgt Cooper was a door gunner. The Blackbird picked up the crews from Tuy Hoa in the early morning for Bam Me Thout. The rest of us later that day either drove to Cam Ran Bay in a convoy or flew on other flights as this was the move day for the 20 to Cam Ran. We got the news later in the day that Capt Heil and Cooper had been killed. An ARVN King Bee came out of the hole the wrong way as Heil flew over the ridge. My good friend Scott Schneck was a gunner on the other bird. He saw the rotor hit the trees and it went in hard.

Tail No.: 69-6621 Model: UH-1N Date of Loss: 04 Dec 71 Unit: 20 SOS, Ban Me Thuot  
Country of Loss: Gia Dinh, SVN Call Sign: Green Hornet  
Gunner: Thomas E. Fike

Tim Fike was the last Hornet lost. It was his last mission before rotating home; it was to be a milk run out of Saigon and back. His crew was shot down as they were returning to Saigon. The pilot thought that they had seen a rocket launcher set up in a rice paddy. They went in low level to check it out flying a slick, and a bad guy popped up and raked the bottom of the chopper. Tim Fike was killed; shot in the back. The other gunner: King, was seriously wounded and at least one of the pilots was wounded in the leg.

Upon reactivation in 1976 at Hurlburt Field, the unit mission remained unconventional warfare and special operations using UH-1N gunships and CH-3Es. The HH-53H Pave Low replaced the CH-3E in 1980, providing a long range, heavier lift helicopter capability. The crews used the Pave Low avionics to arrive over target on time and undetected, where they performed terminal operations wearing night vision goggles.

1 May 83 – 1 Dec 1983 The Twenty-Third Air Force was tasked through 1 Dec 83 USAF and Military Airlift Command (MAC), by the Vice President's South Florida Task Force on Organized Crime to participate in Operation Bahamas and Turks (BAT). Two H-1s and aircrews from the 20 Special Operations Squadron (SOS) were deployed to the Bahamas to cooperate with the Bahmian police to apprehend aircraft and aircrew engaging in drug trafficking. Aircraft and aircrew rotated periodically to and from the Bahamas as this tasking continued. By 31 December 1983 Operation BAT aircraft had flown 959 sorties and 964 flying hours. Cocaine worth an estimated Lt Col63 million and marijuana worth an estimated Lt Col132 million was seized. Operation BAT continued until 30 September 1987.

In 1986, the Green Hornets flew the specially equipped and highly capable MH-53H Pave Low and started flying the upgraded MH-53J Pave Low III in 1988.

In December 1989, members of the 20 SOS were mobilized as part of a joint task force for



Operation Just Cause, successfully restoring democracy in Panama.

Among the first units to deploy to Operation Desert Shield in August 1990, 20 SOS crew members and aircraft led U.S. Army AH-64 Apaches in the air strike, opening the air war in Operation Desert Storm. A 20 SOS crew rescued Navy Lt. Devon Jones, logging the first successful combat rescue of a downed Airman since the Vietnam War. The crew deservedly earned the MacKay Trophy for their accomplishments.

Squadron personnel deployed in support of Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti, providing support to a National Command Authorities resolution. Members of the 20 SOS, participating in operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, went into harm's way in attempting a rescue of two downed French crewmen, receiving two Purple Heart Medals and the coveted Cheney Award.

Green Hornet crews were also involved in the search and rescue operations resulting from the CT-43 crash in which Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and his party lost their lives. These same crews deployed shortly thereafter to support the American Embassy evacuations in Monrovia, Liberia - airlifting more than 2,000 evacuees to safety. The squadron deployed crews and aircraft to Southwest Asia in support of Central Command and Operation Desert Thunder in February 1998. The Pave Low gave the theater commander a night, all-weather personnel recovery capability, unparalleled in the U.S. inventory.

In 1999, the Pave Low III's were upgraded to the MH-53M Pave Low IV. The M model brought more technology and vastly superior avionics to the mission, furthering the capabilities and resources available to the crews flying the world's most sophisticated helicopter. These new technologies were battle tested during Operation Allied Force when the Green Hornets rescued downed pilots from an F-117 and an F-16, earning two Silver Stars and numerous Distinguished Flying Crosses.

In 2001, terrorism brought great tragedy to our nation and the Green Hornets were quick to respond in the initial recovery efforts at the Pentagon and Ground Zero in New York City supporting Operation Noble Eagle. But our work did not stop there. The 20 rapidly deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, engaging in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan with continuing endeavors into Iraq as the Global War on Terror continues.

On 23 November 2003, at 1227 GMT (1657L), an MH-53M helicopter, serial number 70-1625, Call Sign Beatle 12, assigned to the 20 Special Operations Squadron, 16th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, crashed adjacent to a river in high mountainous terrain 9 miles East of Bagram, Afghanistan. The helicopter was destroyed. Four of six aircrew and one US Army passenger died in the accident. The remaining two aircrew and six passengers sustained injuries ranging from minor to severe. The mishap aircraft (MA) was number two of a two-ship formation conducting Infiltration/Exfiltration operations supporting the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF). The formation was on their third round-robin sortie of the day, climbing to clear mountainous terrain, when the mishap sequence occurred. Approximately five minutes after takeoff from Bagram, Beatle 12 experienced a compressor stall in the number

two engine causing engine failure. Reversing course, the mishap aircrew (MC) attempted to jettison the auxiliary fuel tanks without success. Dumping fuel to reduce weight and unable to maintain single engine flight, the MC set up for a precautionary landing. During the landing phase, at 150-200 feet AGL, the remaining engine lost power and the helicopter landed fast on a level, rocky river bank, subsequently ran into a 3-foot-high embankment that severed the tail boom, rolled left and came to rest inverted. A post-crash fire rapidly consumed the aircraft. Beatle 11 landed adjacent to the crash site within three minutes and provided immediate recovery and security efforts. All injured aircrew and passengers were recovered and immediately transported to Bagram airfield. By clear and convincing evidence, the Board President determined the causes of this mishap were failure of the number two engine due to compressor stall, failure of the auxiliary fuel tanks to jettison, and the uneven terrain of the landing area. Contributing factors include the subsequent failure of the number one engine when the demands of the high altitude and high gross weight caused an over-temperature and compressor stall; and insufficient written guidance on checking the auxiliary fuel tank jettison system.

On 13 February 2003, at 11:50 p.m. Arab Standard Time, an MH-53M helicopter, tail number 68-10930, crashed near Ali Al Salem Airbase, Kuwait. The MH-53M was assigned to the 20 Special Operations Squadron, 16th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, FL. The mishap crew consisted of the pilot, copilot, flight engineer, right scanner, left scanner, and tail scanner. Also on board was an 11-man special operations team and desert patrol vehicle. There were no fatalities and only minor injuries as a result of this mishap. The aircraft sustained substantial damage valued at over 15 million dollars in repair and replacement costs. The crash site was located on the Udairi Range, and there was no other damage to property or injury to other personnel. The planned mission was a night tactical 4-ship, supporting special operations teams training for impending combat operations in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The mishap aircraft departed as chalk 4 and proceeded on a 12-minute tactical navigation route to an initial point, where the flight took spacing for simultaneous landings at proximate helicopter landing zones. Previously unfamiliar with the landing site other than by map study, the mishap pilot, flying from the left seat, executed a dust-out approach and landing within established parameters. Upon touchdown, the nose landing gear (NLG) collapsed, intruding upon flight control tubes, causing uncommanded movement of the flight controls. This caused the rotor tip path to dip excessively, resulting in main rotor blade contact with the ground and failure of the tail structure. The primary cause of the mishap was a combination of inadequate mission preparation and aircraft design deficiency. Due to insufficient pre-mission study of the planned landing site and accepted landing accuracy tolerance, the pilot landed on terrain that did not accommodate his touchdown profile. At the same time, the deficient NLG design and unprotected flight control components turned an otherwise acceptable landing into a catastrophic mishap.

On 22 May 2003, at 1635 local time [1335 Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)], an MH-53M helicopter, serial number (S/N) 73-1648, sustained damage to its main rotor system and associated dynamic components just prior to landing at an overseas operating location. The MH-53 helicopter was assigned to the 20 Special Operations Squadron, 16th Special Operations

Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida. The mishap aircraft (MA) was returning to its staging base after completing a classified mission. No personnel injuries or damage to private property resulted from the accident. The MA departed the deployed location at 0955 local time (0655 GMT) to conduct an operational mission. According to witness interviews, all phases of the mission were uneventful until final approach to the staging base. The MA was the second aircraft in a four-ship formation of U.S. Air Force and Marine Corps helicopters. At approximately 20 to 30 feet above ground level, with the aircraft commander at the controls, a loud bang was heard. Almost immediately, the crew felt a moderate lateral vibration in the aircraft and noticed that a cockpit Blade Pressure warning light was illuminated, telling the crew there was a problem with one or more main rotor blades. The crew landed the aircraft and reduced the power setting. The lower power setting eliminated much of the lateral vibration, and the crew determined it was safe to taxi the helicopter to their designated parking spot and shutdown the engines and rotors. Once the aircraft was shutdown, aircrew and maintenance personnel inspected the aircraft and found two damaged main rotor blades. After a more in-depth inspection of the aircraft, maintenance crews discovered that one set of main rotor head balance weights and the associated mounting bracket and bolts was missing. Maintenance personnel went to the landing area and found the missing weights, bracket and bolts. By clear and convincing evidence, the cause of this mishap was the failure of the mounting bracket bolts, which allowed the bracket and weights to break: away from the aircraft and strike the main rotor system, resulting in damage to the aircraft.

7 September 2005— A Sikorsky MH-53M Pave Low IV, 69-05794, of the 20 Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, crashes near Duke Field, Eglin Auxiliary Field 3, just before midnight when it suffers tail rotor gear box failure while in a hover. The helicopter was practicing a rescue extraction near a landing zone surrounded by trees more than 90 feet (27 m) tall and had just been brought into a hover at 150 feet (46 m) and was beginning to lower the rescue apparatus when the aircrew felt a shudder. Aircraft commander Lt. Col. Eugene Becker realizes that the tail rotor gears are failing, takes control of the aircraft and prepares to land. Once out of hover, it takes about 45 seconds to return to the LZ, and due to the confined space, Becker drops the chopper vertically but the shuddering worsens. "We knew something was very, very wrong", stated Becker. "all of the gear boxes were surging up and down and making quite a bit of racket." When the MH-53 is 20 feet (6.1 m) above the ground Becker pushes what is left of the rotor's power to the maximum in order to cushion the landing. As soon as the Pave Low hits the ground, the tail rotor fails and the chopper starts spinning and rolls to port, but the sponson fuel tanks keep it from rolling over. Of the seven crew, only two are injured: Col. William Nelson, a flight surgeon from the Air Force Special Operations Command Surgeon General's Office, receives a head injury but walks away from the accident; MH-53 aerial gunner A1C Bradley Jordan suffers a leg fracture. Both men are released from hospital the following day. Lt. Col. Becker is awarded the Koren Kolligian Jr. Trophy, one of the Air Force's top safety awards, in July 2008. According to the award nomination, a landing any more forceful could have been fatal to the crew.

10/23/2008 - HURLBURT FIELD, Fla. -- Five decades of Green Hornet history came to a close amid a sea of red scarves when the 20 Special Operations Squadron was inactivated during a

ceremony at the Air Park here Oct. 17. But while the chapter is closed for now, the squadron will be activated once again in the near future at Cannon Air Force Base flying CV-22's. "The interesting thing about today is this culture is not going away," said Col. Brad Webb, commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing. The squadron began as the 20 Helicopter Squadron in 1956 flying H-21 cargo helicopters for Tactical Air Command performing traditional helicopter missions. The H-21s were replaced by the CH-3Es, also known as "Jolly Green Giants", and the squadron deployed to Southeast Asia in 1965 conducting unconventional warfare and special operations missions. In Southeast Asia, they were augmented by UH-1F light utility helicopters and UH-1P gunships, allowing them to not only hover, but to also "sting," whereupon they adopted the nickname "Green Hornet" that still sticks today.

A 20 Special Operations Squadron CV-22 Osprey aircrew was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with Valor for a combat rescue mission last year in the US Central Command area of operations. Pilots Capt. Jonathan Seagle and Capt. John Vandembenden, and flight engineers SSgt. Spencer Seymore and SSgt. Daniel Teel were decorated by Air Force Special Operations Command boss Lt. Gen. Bradley Heithold in a ceremony at Cannon AFB, N.M., Oct. 16. On Dec. 5, 2014, the crew, which was on a "presidentially directed" nighttime mission, responded to an urgent evacuation request from special operations forces under intense fire. The crew successfully maneuvered the tilt-rotor into a severely restricted landing zone with minimal visibility, during an ongoing firefight in a "dangerous insurgent-held village." Seymore exited the CV-22 despite enemy fire to assist in loading the critically injured special operations troops. The crew flew low-altitude evasive maneuvers to safely exfiltrate the area and fly the casualties for medical treatment aboard a Navy vessel. The unplanned landing was the CV-22's first combat shipboard operation. 2015

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USAF Unit Histories  
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