

353rd SPECIAL OPERATIONS GROUP



MISSION

The 353rd Special Operations Group is the focal point for all air special operations activities throughout the Pacific. Under the operational control of the Commander, Special Operations Command Pacific, the 353rd SOG plans and executes general war and contingency operations using advanced aircraft, tactics and air refueling techniques to infiltrate, ex-filtrate and resupply special operations forces

LINEAGE

3rd Air Commando Group established, 25 Apr 1944

Activated, 1 May 1944

Inactivated, 25 Mar 1946

Disestablished, 8 Oct 1948

553rd Reconnaissance Wing established and activated, 9 Feb 1967

Organized, 25 Feb 1967

Inactivated, 15 Dec 1970

3rd Air Commando Group reestablished and consolidated with 553rd Reconnaissance Wing.

Consolidated organization redesignated 353rd Reconnaissance Wing, 31 Jul 1985

Redesignated 353rd Special Operations Wing, 21 Mar 1989

Activated, 6 Apr 1989

Redesignated 353rd Special Operations Group, 1 Dec 1992

STATIONS

Drew Field, FL, 1 May 1944

Lakeland AAFld, FL, 5 May-Oct 1944
Leyte, 1 Dec 1944
Mangaldan, Luzon, c. 26 Jan 1945
Laoag, Luzon, 19 Apr 1945
Ie Shima, c. 8 Aug 1945
Chitose, Japan, c. 27 Oct 1945-25 Mar 1946
Otis AFB, MA, 25 Feb-Oct 1967
Korat RTAFB, Thailand, 31 Oct 1967-15 Dec 1970 (operated from U-Tapao, Thailand, 30 Jan-28 Feb 1969)
Clark AB, Philippines, 6 Apr 1989 (operated from Okinawa, Jul 1991-4 Feb 1992)
Kadena AB, Japan, 5 Feb 1992

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Alachua AAFld, FL, 21 Aug-5 Oct 1944

ASSIGNMENTS

III Fighter Command, 1 May 1944
Fifth Air Force, 1 Dec 1944
V Fighter Command, 13 Dec 1944
86 Fighter Wing, 18 Dec 1944 (under operational control of 308 Bombardment Wing, 26 Jan 1945)
V Fighter Command, 11 May 1945-25 Mar 1946 (remained under operational control of 308 Bombardment Wing through 28 May 1945; under operational control of 309 Bombardment Wing, 29 May-8 Aug 1945 and 27 Oct 1945-25 Mar 1946)
Air Defense Command, 9 Feb 1967
First Air Force, 25 Feb 1967
Thirteenth Air Force, 31 Oct 1967-15 Dec 1970 (under operational control of Seventh Air Force entire period)
Twenty-Third Air Force (later, Air Force Special Operations Command), 6 Apr 1989

ATTACHMENTS

Thirteenth Air Force, 19-30 Oct 1967

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-40, 1944
F-6, 1944
C-47, 1944-1945
CG-4, 1944
P-51, 1944, 1945-1946
L-5, 1944, 1945
UC-64, 1944, 1945
EC-121, 1967-1970
YQU-22, 1968-1969
QU-22, 1970

MC-130E/H, 1989
HC/MC-130P/N, 1989
CH/HH-53, 1989-1990
MH-53, 1990

COMMANDERS

Maj Klem F. Kalberer, 1 May 1944
Col Arvid E. Olson Jr., 1 Jun 1944
LTC Walker M. Mahurin, 2 Sep 1945
LTC Charles H. Terhune Jr., 20 Nov 1945
Unkn, 18 Feb-25 Mar 1946
None (not manned), 9-28 Feb 1967
Col Gus Weiser, 1 Mar 1967
Col Henry L. Timmermans, 8 Jul 1968
Col Ted H. Ostendorf, 1 Jul 1969
Col John W. Mitchell, 7 Dec 1969
Col Robert M. Slane, 11-15 Dec 1970
Col James P. Nance, 7 Apr 1989
Col Leon E. Hess, 6 Sep 1990
Col Robert M. Stankovich, 6 Sep 1991
Col Jerry L. Thigpen, 25 Jun 1993
Col Thomas M. Beres, 8 Aug 1995
Col Jerald L. Folkerts, 2 Sep 1997
Col Michael B. Byers, 19 Apr 1999
Col Douglas P. Salmon, 17 Nov 2000
Col Mark P. Transue, 30 Jul 2002
Col Norman J. Brozenick Jr., 25 Jun 2004
Col Raymond J. Chapman, 15 Jun 2005
Col David A. Mullins, 8 Jun 2007

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

World War II
Leyte
Luzon
Western Pacific
Air Offensive, Japan
China Defensive
China Offensive

Vietnam

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

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

None

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device

1 Apr 1967-31 May 1968

1 Jul 1968-15 Apr 1969

2 Sep 2004-1 Sep 2006

1 Oct 2006-30 Sep 2008

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

6 Apr 1989-5 Apr 1991

1 Jun 1993-31 May 1995

1 Sep 1995-31 Aug 1997

16 Oct 1998-31 May 2000

13 Oct 2000-1 Sep 2002

2 Sep 2002-1 Sep 2004

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (WWII)

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm

1 Apr 1967-15 Dec 1970.

EMBLEM



553rd Reconnaissance Wing emblem: Or, in dexter chief a plate over three lightning bolts one in bend and two in saltire celeste charged with the ancient sign for sulphur gules, issuant from base a demi-sphere argent rimmed and gridded sable and overall in pale a batcat proper (azure shaded sable, eyes, teeth, lower lip and claws argent, tongue gules), all within a diminished bordure or. (Approved, 19 Jun 1967)

THE 553RD RECONNAISSANCE WING INSIGNIA WAS DESIGNED BY THE WORLD FAMOUS CARTOONIST, MILTON CANIFF. MR. CANIFF IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS COMIC STRIP, "STEVE CANYON".





"The device shows an aggressive jungle cat-like creature, facing forward, airborne on gigantic bat wings. The entire area of the beast is colored midnight blue, but the eyes glow white against the nocturnal' shading. The mouth is red. The right front paw of the animal appears to be touching a representational design of the top of a globe marked with latitudinal and longitudinal lines. In the upper left corner of the yellow field are shown jagged lines in the configuration of the ancient navigator's lines of position for a star "fix". The point of impact is indicated by a white circle within which is the ancient sign for SULPHUR. This is drawn in bright red. The white eyes of the BAT CAT make clear the reconnaissance mission of the organization, while the deep blue signifies the secrecy surrounding the effort. The red mouth highlights the heat of the striking power implicit in the BAT CAT. The midnight blue and the golden yellow of the field further emphasize the day and night capability of the Wing, whether flying blind or not. The tiger-like cat creature denotes the militant attitude of the personnel involved in the assigned task. The bat wings signify the sensitivity of the classified equipment issued to the 553rd and its application. The representation of the globe denotes the worldwide potential of the Wing and its mission. The SULPHUR sign at point of the "fix" dramatizes the enormity of the power which can be delivered to such a place as a result of the skill of the Wing. "

Or, in dexter chief a plate over three lightning bolts, one in bend and two in saltire Celeste, charged with the ancient sign for sulphur Gules; issuant from base a demi-sphere Argent gridlined Sable and overall in pale a batcat of the last highlighted of the second, eyes, teeth, lower jaw line and claws of the fourth, tongue of the third; all within a diminished bordure of the first. **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 jagged lines of the lightning bolts as a star fix signify the electronic means used in shooting the stars in present day warfare. The sulfur sign at the point of the fix on the disc historically dramatizes the enormity of the power which can be delivered to such a place as a result of the skill of the group. The demi-globe represents the unit's ability to perform its functions anywhere in the world. The in dark and light coloration of the batcat suggests the day and night flying capabilities of the Group.

MOTTO

CAVETE CATTAM--Beware of the Cat

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Activated on 1 May 1944, the 3rd Air Commando Group trained to establish and maintain an airstrip behind enemy lines, providing for its own supply and air defense, meanwhile attacking targets in the enemy's rear areas and furnishing air support for ground operations. The group headquarters, the liaison squadrons, airdrome squadrons, medical dispensary, and the ground echelons of the 3rd Fighter Squadron and 318th Troop Carrier Squadron sailed from the west coast on 7 Nov 1944, arriving on Leyte on 1 Dec 1944. The ground echelon of the 4th Fighter Squadron sailed a week later and arrived on Leyte in early Jan 1945.

The flying personnel of the 3rd and 4th Fighter Squadrons, as well as some enlisted members of their engineering sections, were air transported to Nadzab, New Guinea, where they received the group's new P-51 aircraft. They flew patrol missions in New Guinea until joining the group on Leyte in Jan 1945.

The 3rd Commando Group began combat in the Philippines by bombing and strafing airdromes on Mindanao. Later, on Luzon, the fighters continued bombing and strafing missions, provided air ground support to ground forces, flew fighter sweeps to Formosa, and escorted heavy bombers on bombing missions to Formosa and the China coast. The air echelon of the 318th Troop Carrier Squadron flew C-47s across the Pacific, arriving at Nadzab, New Guinea, in late Oct 1944. The squadron carried cargo and passengers and air evacuated wounded soldiers to Australia until it moved to Leyte in mid-Jan 1945.

On Luzon, it dropped supplies to ground forces. The liaison squadrons received their L-5s in late Jan 1945, and thereafter evacuated wounded from advanced points, flew courier, search and rescue, and reconnaissance missions, spotted for signal aircraft warning battalions, and dropped supplies to allied and guerrilla forces.

In Apr 1945, the group, less the liaison squadrons, moved from Mandaldan, on the Lingayen Gulf, to Laoag, in northwest Luzon, in recently captured territory 150 miles behind enemy lines. The group operated the base, and the 318th Troop Carrier Squadron provided most of the resupply. The group set up air-ground support stations to direct aircraft to targets and placed tactical radio ground stations with U.S. and guerrilla ground forces.

In June 1945 Laoag became the staging field for flights to Okinawa. In Aug, the group moved to Ie Shima, in the Ryukyus, and the fighter squadrons flew surveillance missions over Japan. The 318th TCS participated in the evacuation of allied prisoners of war from Japan. By the end of Oct 1945, the group moved to Chitose AB, Japan. By February 1946 the squadrons were reduced to paper strength, and the group inactivated on 25 Mar. Beginning in Feb 1967, the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing trained to support a special electronic reconnaissance mission

utilizing EC-121G and EC-121R aircraft.

Moved to Thailand in increments beginning mid-Sep and began day and night unarmed reconnaissance missions over Southeast Asia on 25 Nov 1967. A wing detachment at Nakhon Phanom Aprt, Thailand, performed combat evaluation of YQU-22A aircraft and associated equipment, Dec 1968-Aug 1969. From Jul to early Sep 1970 the wing provided combat evaluation of the QU-22B aircraft, and on 1 Oct 1970 the QU-22Bs were placed in full operation, reducing the need for EC-121s.

Strength of the wing was reduced in both personnel and equipment until inactivation in mid-Dec 1970, leaving the two reconnaissance squadrons active under other USAF wings. The 353rd Special Operations Wing activated in Apr 1989 in the Philippines to train for unconventional warfare and special operations activities in the Pacific area of operations. Maintained capabilities by participating in joint/combined and other theater exercises and training opportunities.

Also maintained helicopter air refueling operations and supported humanitarian and disaster relief operations, as well as performed some search and rescue and aeromedical evacuation missions. Following the destruction of Clark AB during the volcanic eruptions of Mt Pinatubo in Jun 1991 the group temporarily operated from bases on Okinawa, then officially relocated there in Feb 1992, with one squadron (31 SOS) moved to South Korea.

In Feb 1996 developed Taegu AB in South Korea as a special operations training base. Gained a weather flight in Apr and began providing weather support for U.S. Army special forces at Torii Station, Japan. From Dec 1996 periodically deployed aircraft and personnel to Italy to support NATO operations in the Balkans and to Southwest Asia to support allied operations against Iraq.

US Special Operators Train with Thai Forces: Air men of Air Force Special Operations Command's 353rd Special Operations Group at Kadena AB, Japan, on the island of Okinawa recently teamed with Royal Thai military forces for Exercise Teak Torch. The US airmen traveled to Udon Thani Air Base., where pararescue jumpers and combat controllers conducted airdrops from a 353rd SOG MC-130P Combat Shadow. Some of the Thai jumpers had never jumped at night or into water. "Normally we jump twice a month., with this exercise we jump every day and are able to correct our mistakes/1 said Thai Maj. Surapond Apitachapan. Language barriers proved not to matter much because "in the end, we all do the same job/' said Thai PJ Flight Sgt. 1st Class Nathaphun Dunkeeree. The exercise also included emergency responders from both nations. SSgt. Sarah Valdovinos, a 353rd SOG security forces airman, called the event "a unique opportunity for us to demonstrate our specialties and train with Thai forces/' and added that "it's good to know that we can all work together."

The Air Force announced in late November that the 353rd Special Operations Group at Kadena AB, Japan, has earned the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor for its "exceptionally meritorious service" from Oct. 1, 2006, to Sept. 30, 2008. This is the 10th time that the group, Air Force Special Operations Command's only unit based in the Pacific, has won the award, and

the fourth time the award has come with the "V" device for valor. "This award is a small representation of the tremendous efforts of the air commandos during the past two years," said Col. David Mullins, 353rd SOG commander. He continued, "The contributions the men and women of the group have made to operations in multiple areas of responsibility truly deserve this recognition." Among their numerous activities during this period, airmen of the group conducted combat missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, supported Republic of Philippines security forces in their fight against terrorists, and participated in numerous joint training events. In September, pararescuemen of the group also saved the lives of two injured crewmembers onboard a commercial freighter out at sea about 750 miles from Guam.

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

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

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

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.