

History of the 353rd Special Operations Group



CAVETE CATTAM



Mission

Focal point for all air special operations activities throughout the Pacific. Under the operational control of the Commander, Special Operations Command Pacific, the 353rd Special Operations Group (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.

World War II

The 353rd Special Operations Group traces its origins to the 3rd Air Commando Group (3rd ACG) activated on May 1, 1944. The 3rd ACG was one of three Air Force special operations units created during WWII to operate independently deep behind enemy lines. The group flew a mixture of aircraft: P-51 Mustangs, C-47 Dakotas and L-5 Sentinels. The 3rd ACG moved to the Philippines in December 1944. The group's fighter squadrons (3rd and 4th Fighter Squadron Commando) made raids on Japanese airfields and installations and performed close air support missions for ground forces on Luzon. The Group's 318th Troop Carrier Squadron was the lifeline of the 3rd ACG, transporting personnel and supplies to both the group and to guerrilla forces throughout the Southwest Pacific. The group's liaison squadrons (157th, 159th, and 160th) evacuated casualties from the frontlines and adjusted artillery fire for ground forces. The group moved to the Ryukyu Islands in August 1945 and flew supplies from the Philippines to Okinawa. On March 25, 1946, the 3rd ACG was inactivated at Chitose, Japan.

*North American P-51D Mustang of
the 3rd Air Commando Group*



Southeast Asia

During the Vietnam War, the predecessor to the 353rd Special Operations Group was the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing. The 553rd RW organized on Feb. 25, 1967, at Otis AFB, Mass. The wing began combat operations from Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base Nov. 25, 1967. The unit had a unique mission: to monitor and relay information concerning troop activity along the Ho Chi Minh trail. The mission was later known as IGLOO WHITE, utilizing seismic sensors to detect enemy ground forces. Batcat crews continuously monitored the Ho Chi Minh Trail 24 hours a day utilizing highly modified Lockheed EC-121R aircraft. A detachment from the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing located at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, provided combat assessments of the Beechcraft YQU-22A. The detachment also evaluated and flew combat missions in the QU-22B. The wing was inactivated in December 1970.



Lockheed EC-121R



Beechcraft QU-22B Pave Eagle IIs



An MC-130E from the 1st Special Operations Squadron



Mount Pinatubo eruption, 1991

353rd SOW

April 6, 1989, the U.S. Air Force activated the 353rd Special Operations Wing at Clark Air Base in the Philippine Islands. The activation was a major milestone in the USAF effort to enhance and upgrade its special operations forces capability. The activation brought together United States Pacific Command-assigned AFSOF units (the 1st and 31st Special Operations Squadrons) under one parent organization.

In 1989, the wing gained a third flying squadron with the activation of the 17th Special Operations Squadron located at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa. On June 12, 1991, Mount Pinatubo erupted, sending a cloud of ash 80,000 feet into the air. All aircraft assigned to the 353rd SOW located at Clark AB were evacuated in less than three hours. Reclamation and recovery of both personnel and government property became an equal priority with operational duties. In July 1991, the wing began recovering and repositioning over \$30 million worth of property and equipment to Kadena Air Base.

353rd SOG

In 1992, the U.S. Air Force radically reorganized in order to drawdown the size of headquarters staffs. During the restructuring process, the 353rd SOW was re-designated the 353rd Special Operations Group. The three flying squadrons and consolidated 353rd Maintenance Squadron were soon joined by the 353rd Operations Support Squadron. The maintenance, operation support squadron, and two of the flying squadrons were located at Kadena Air Base. The 31st Special Operations Squadron was geographically separated from the group, operating out of Osan AB, South Korea.

The 1st Special Operations Squadron flew MC-130E/H Combat Talon II aircraft, the 17th Special Operations Squadron operated the MC-130P Combat Shadow, and the 31st Special Operations Squadron flew Sikorsky MH-53J Pave Low III helicopters.

An HC-130N Combat Shadow from the 17th Special Operations Squadron providing aerial refueling for an Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter.



New Capabilities

On Jan. 1, 1993, the 320th Special Tactics Squadron was officially assigned to the 353rd SOG. The 320th STS personnel added unique and extremely vital capabilities to support the 353rd SOG mission. The squadron's highly trained combat controllers established drop zones, landing zones, and established assault zones with Air Traffic Control capability in non-permissive environments. Combat control teams (CCT) also established recovery zones (for surface-to-air recovery of personnel and equipment), and provided ground based fire control for AC-130 gunship operations. In addition, CCTs provided vital command and controls, surveying capabilities, limited weather observations, and were qualified in demolitions to clear obstructions and hazards. The pararescuemen assigned to the squadron administered emergency medical care, evacuated injured personnel, and were trained to act as aircrew gunners from both fixed and rotary wing aircraft.



Augmentation

Squadrons assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Group were utilized to augment forces for multiple operations during the nineties. In July of 1995, the 17th Special Operations Squadron deployed one Combat Shadow crew to Dhahran Saudi Arabia in support of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH. On December 24, 1996, a crew from the 353rd Special Operations Group volunteered to deploy in support of Operation JOINT GUARD/JOINT ENDEAVOR (Bosnia) to assist Combat Shadow crews from the 67th SOS. The event marked the first time the 17th Special Operations Squadron had logged combat time since the Vietnam War.

The new millennium brought with it the end of vertical lift special operations capabilities within the 353rd Special Operations Group. On 15 June 2001, the 31st Special Operations Squadron inactivated at Osan AB, South Korea. The Black Knights of the 31st Special Operations Squadron had a long and illustrious history with the 353rd SOG. During their tenure with the 353rd Special Operations Group, the 31st Special Operations Squadron performed countless rescue and humanitarian missions. Upon the squadron's inactivation, the U.S. Army assumed that mission.



Historical Humanitarian Aid

The 353rd has responded to countless emergencies throughout Asia and abroad. In 1990, the 353rd SOG came to the aid of their host country, the Republic of the Philippines, after a 7.7 earthquake hit the island of Luzon. The epicenter of the quake occurred in the town of Cabanatuan, causing severe damage and a large number of casualties. The relief effort lasted over three weeks in which 353rd SOG aircrews evacuated over 1,000 patients and delivered over 110,000 pounds. All three flying squadrons participated, performing medical evacuations, supply movements, and establishing forward area refueling points.

Members from the group deployed three MC-130s and one C-130E to Bangkok International Airport, Thailand, in the wake of killer tsunamis that devastated the region Dec. 26, 2004. The group's role as first responders aided the larger relief effort, Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. Combat controllers from the 320th STS rapidly surveyed airfields to allow more humanitarian aid to be received and eased congestion. The 17th SOS and 1st SOS flew nearly 1 million pounds of cargo. The flying squadron's ability to land on short unprepared strips helped distribute over 600 aid workers into some of the hardest to reach areas.



Recent Humanitarian Aid

In 2009, members of the 353rd SOG became the first foreign military aircraft to deliver humanitarian aid to western Indonesia after a 7.6 earthquake and 6.8 aftershock struck Sept. 30 and Oct. 1.

A MC-130P Combat Shadow from the 17th SOS delivered more than six tons of relief supplies and 25 international relief workers. More than 65 members from several of the 353rd SOG's specialties supported a wide variety of relief efforts. Communications personnel established communications capabilities at four locations. Pararescue and medical personnel joined a five-person Indonesian rescue team and treated patients at multiple locations while aiding the team's search and recovery efforts.

MC-130P Combat Shadow aircrews flew 38 flights that transported approximately 130 people and more than 216,000 pounds of cargo, food, medical supplies and miscellaneous equipment. Combat controllers assigned to the 353rd SOG assisted Indonesian military forces in surveying and opening Tabing Airfield, which was directly responsible for the movement of more than 140,000 pounds of relief supplies and more than 500 personnel supporting relief efforts.



A combat controller assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Group points out damaged aviation navigation aids during a meeting at Tabing Air Field Oct. 7. Indonesian and U.S. Airmen met to discuss the restoration of aviation navigation aids to facilitate flight operations supporting humanitarian relief efforts in Padang.

Recent Humanitarian Aid

Airmen from the 353rd SOG played an important role in Operation TOMODACHI. With their host nation, Japan, they helped open and manage airfield operations at Sendai Airport from March 16 to April 5, 2011.

In response to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011, Airmen from the group provided air traffic control services for more than 250 relief aircraft from multiple nations; received 167 humanitarian cargo missions; processed 517 aid workers; received and off-loaded more than 2.5 million pounds of humanitarian relief supplies and more than 109,000 pounds of fuel. Airmen from the 353rd SOG opened Matsushima Airfield, Sendai Airport and provided fuel to establish a Forward Area Refueling Point at Yamagata Airport.

Airmen from the 353rd SOG also conducted surveys of Tohoku University Hospital and Hanamaki Airport. Pararescuemen from the group's 320th Special Tactics Squadron flew Search and Rescue missions while aircrews from the 1st and 17th Special Operations Squadrons flew 161 relief sorties, delivered 878,000 pounds of relief supplies, transported 534 relief personnel and offloaded 185,000 pounds of fuel.



Overseas Contingency Operations



The 353rd Special Operations Group's experience with fighting terrorism can be traced to the first month of the organization's existence. On April 20, 1989 the 31st Special Operations Squadron was tasked to recover the body of Army Col. Nick Rowe after he was fatally shot by terrorists in the Philippines.



Today, the 353rd SOG fills the need for special operations forces in the nation's largest theater while simultaneously supporting the Republic of Philippines security forces in their fight against terror, and conducting combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The group consistently deploys aircrews and personnel to serve in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Whether working as advisors for partner nations or operating throughout CENTCOM and PACOM, the 353rd Special Operations Group continues to produce strategic victories for overseas contingency operations.

Today





MISSION:

The 1st Special Operations Squadron operates the MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft in support of joint and allied special operations forces. This aircraft is capable of delivering troops and equipment into denied areas during adverse weather conditions at night by airdrop or landing. Air crews are specially trained in night, low-level flying using night vision goggles.



MISSION:

The 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 air-land operations. Just as the aircrews of the Combat Talon, these crews are trained in NVG flying.



MISSION:

The mission of the 320th Special Tactics Squadron (STS) is to employ combat control (CCT), pararescue (PJ), combat weather, and mission support personnel to control the air-ground interface during contingency and wartime operations.



MISSION:

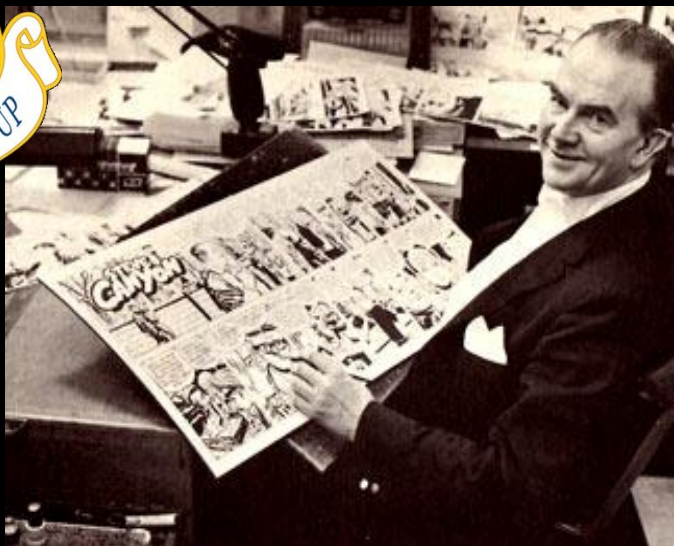
The 353rd Special Operations Maintenance Squadron provides the majority of off-aircraft and “back shop” maintenance for the assets of the 353rd SOG. The diversity of aircraft and missions in the 353rd creates unique challenges for the personnel of this squadron. The SOMXS also contains the majority of the supply function for the group.



MISSION:

The 353rd Special Operations Support Squadron contains and operates the logistics and operations planning support functions for the entire group. The squadron also contains and maintains all of the communications assets assigned to the 353rd SOG. The squadron also contains the intelligence function for the group. In contingency operations and wartime actions, the SOSS becomes the group commander's combat staff.

Emblem



World-renowned cartoonist Milton Caniff



The 353rd Special Operations Group's emblem was created by world-renowned cartoonist Milton Caniff ("Steve Canyon", "Terry and the Pirates") for the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing in 1967.

EMBLEM 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.

UNIT MOTTO:

Cavete Cattam — "Beware the Cat."

Lineage & Honors

- **Lineage:** Established as 3 Air Commando Group on 25 Apr 1944. Activated on 1 May 1944. Inactivated on 25 Mar 1946. Disestablished on 8 Oct 1948. Reestablished, and consolidated (31 Jul 1985) with the 553 Reconnaissance Wing, which was established and activated on 9 Feb 1967. Organized on 25 Feb 1967. Inactivated on 15 Dec 1970. Redesignated 353 Reconnaissance Wing on 31 Jul 1985; 353 Special Operations Wing on 21 Mar 1989. Activated on 6 Apr 1989. Redesignated 353 Special Operations Group on 1 Dec 1992.
- **Stations:** Drew Field, FL, 1 May 1944; Lakeland AAFld, FL, 5 May-Oct 1944 (deployed at Alachua AAFld, FL, 21 Aug-5 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 UTapao, 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-present.
- **Commanders:** Maj Klem F. Kalberer, 1 May 1944; Col Arvid E. Olson Jr., 1 Jun 1944; Lt Col Walker M. Mahurin, 2 Sep 1945; Lt Col Charles H. Terhune Jr., 20 Nov 1945; unknown, 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, Col Robert P. Toth, 10 July 2009, Col Brad M. Sullivan, 05 Aug 2011-Present.
- **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.
- **Decorations:** Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor "V" Device: 1 Apr 1967-31 May 1968; 1 Jul 1968-15 Apr 1969, 2 Sep 2004-1 Sep 2006, 1 Oct 2007-30 Sep 2008; Air Force Outstanding Unit Award: 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; 1 Oct 2008-30 Sep 2010. Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm: 1 Apr 1967-15 Dec 1970. Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (1945), Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (2002).