

THE HISTORY OF THE
16th SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON
"SPECTRE"

1 OCTOBER - 31 DECEMBER 1972

Unit is assigned to:

8th Tactical Fighter Wing

13th Air Force

Pacific Air Forces

Unit is stationed at

Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand

PROJECT CORONA HARVEST

DO NOT DESTROY

No. 0581582

Robert W. Allen, Jr.

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Captain, USAF

Historian

John E. Davis

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Colonel, USAF

Commander

CLASSIFIED BY Capt R.W. Allen, Jr.
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULES APPLICABLE FROM 1988
AUTOMATICALLY DECLASSIFIED AT TWO
YEAR INTERVALS
DECLASSIFIED ON 31 DECEMBER, 1980

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Spectre 17. (46)

(1) Early in the evening of 21 December, aircraft 56-0490 took off from Ubon with the call sign of Spectre 17. The mission that night was to do armed reconnaissance in Steel Tiger areas VR 5 and 6. No F-4 escorts were provided due to higher priority commitments elsewhere.

(2) Spectre 17 destroyed two trucks early in its Time Over Target (TOT) in spite of fairly accurate AAA. They were about to attack a third truck when a 37mm AAA gun began firing on them. The pilot decided to attack the gun and called for the 20mm guns to be armed. Before the gun site could be attacked, however, at least two more 37mm sites opened fire from the 7 and 9 o'clock positions. The aircraft was hit before the Illuminator Operator (IO) had time to tell the pilot to break orbit.

(3) At least five 37mm shells hit the aircraft in the fuselage and left wing according to the survivors. The pilot immediately turned towards Ubon, and checked that all crewmembers were all right. All four engines were still turning although the utility hydraulic system was out, fuel and hydraulic fluid were rushing into the cargo compartment, and the interphone worked only intermittently. The flight deck and booth personnel did not seem to be fully conscious of the desperate situation in the cargo compartment since no bailout preparation signal was given, and all booth personnel except the student Infrared (IR) operator remained in the booth.

(4) Approximately ten minutes after Spectre 17 was hit, Lion Ground Control Intercept (GCI) at Ubon reported losing radar contact with the aircraft between Pakse

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and Saravane in Laos. "Baron", a nearby EC-47, reported seeing a huge fireball erupt from the gunship. The survivors reported that the wing broke off, and the aircraft spiraled into the ground, preventing some of the personnel on the ramp from escaping. Meanwhile, several HH-53C ("Jolly Green") helicopters and A-7 fighters, as well as two AC-130s, had been called to conduct a Search and Rescue (SAR) mission. A ten-mile radius of Spectre 17's last known position was searched.

(U) TSgt Williams and Sgt Stevens were rescued by the Jolly Greens and were on their way to Nakorn Phanom Air Base two hours after their bailout. Spectre 07 had been of particular assistance in locating TSgt Williams through the use of its infrared (IR) sensor. No contact was established with the other crewmembers, and the concentrated SAR effort was called off later in the morning. OV-10 Pave Nail FACs continued to search the area the next day with no results. The rest of the crew is now listed as MIA. A ground party picked up some unidentified human remains, and some area surveillance continued until 24 December, when the entire SAR ended due to negative results.

(U) Spectre 17 Crew List

| | | | |
|----|--------------------------|-----|-------|
| AC | Capt Harry R. Lagerwall | MIA | 16SOS |
| CP | Capt Stanley N. Kroboth | " | " |
| TN | Capt Thomas J. Hart III | " | " |
| TV | 2/Lt George D. Macdonald | " | " |
| IR | Capt Delma E. Dickens | " | " |
| BC | Capt Joel R. Birch | " | " |

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| | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-----------|---------|
| FCO | Capt Robert L. Liles, Jr. | MIA | 16 SCS |
| FE | TSgt James P. Fuller | " | " |
| AG | Sgt Robert T. Elliot | " | " |
| AG | AIC Charles E. Fenter | " | " |
| AG | AIC Rollie E. Reaid | " | " |
| IO | TSgt John Q. Winningham | " | " |
| IR | Maj Paul O. Meder | " | " |
| ACM | Maj Francis A. Walsh, Jr. | " | 497 TFS |
| AG | TSgt Richard M. Williams | Recovered | 16 SCS |
| IO | Sgt Carl E. Stevens | " | " |

(U) Col Humphreys ordered a thorough review of Spectre tactics. Major Carl Brown was put in charge of this review program which was still in progress at the end of the quarter.

(U) Some specific comments on the Spectre 17 story came from the survivors. They felt that the entire crew should have bailed out, but that perhaps faulty communications prevented full crew realization of how badly damaged the aircraft was. Both said their survival training aided them greatly. It should also be mentioned that although the rescues were fairly rapid, thanks to full moonlight and Spectre 07's help, an Electronic Location Finder (ELF) on the Jolly Green would have cut its 35 minutes on-scene time to much less. Overall though, the SAR went well, thanks to the professionalism of the rescue forces and the Spectre crews that aided them.

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