



The four men with President Nixon were decorated for gallantry in the American raid on North Vietnam POW camp. They are

(l. to r.): Sgt. Leroy Wright, Sgt. Tyrone Adderly, Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor (commander of the mission), and Col. Arthur Simons.

America's Air Guerrillas— Will They Stop Future Vietnams?

by Donald Robinson

What is the full story behind the man being congratulated by President Richard Nixon in the picture above?

The man is U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor. His name appeared in headlines as the commander of the recent daring attempt to rescue American prisoners of war in North Vietnam. As people around the world know, the mission flew about 100 U. S. commandos in a gallant but futile effort to free POW's at the Sontay camp 23 miles from Hanoi.

Few people know, however, that this brand of daredevil military action is the

rule, not the exception, for General Manor and the hush-hush outfit of air commandos he commands, the Special Operations Force (SOF).

"If we can get into it early enough, we can probably keep any insurgency situation from expanding into another Vietnam-sized war," says General Manor, whose SOF has been active in 28 countries, such as Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Peru, Guatemala, Spain and North Korea.

Secretly established by President John F. Kennedy in April, 1961, the SOF has introduced a new dimension to guerrilla warfare. The hard-trained air

commandos use a diversity of aircraft and a fantastic assortment of deadly weapons to harass the enemy.

SOF goes into a friendly country with approval of the State Department, often in collaboration with the CIA or Green Berets.

Top secret missions

Here are several missions, some of them untold, which SOF has carried out:

VIETNAM—The air commandos tasted battle in the spring of 1962 when President Kennedy covertly sent them to the aid of the beleaguered South Vietnamese. Wearing civilian clothes and flying

planes with the markings of the South Vietnamese Air Force, the commandos attacked Vietcong concentrations in the jungles. It was too late, the Vietcong was already interwoven into the fabric of the nation.

SOF staff officers say without hesitation, "We should have gone into South Vietnam back in 1956 when the insurgency was beginning. Then we could easily have smashed it."

THAILAND — Here it's been different. When Hanoi-paid terrorists began infiltrating northeast Thailand in 1964, the Pentagon secretly dispatched a team of 32 air commandos, which has since

own into an entire wing, numbering many hundreds. They have kept the guerrillas on the run ever since, spilling out fires that turn jungle nights into day, then bombing and strafing the area. They've raced Thai troops from hot spot to hot spot near the Laotian border and given them fire support. They've destroyed guerrilla supply caches and cut escape routes.

They've given guerrillas a dose of their own medicine by forming six-man tracking teams who move as stealthily as American Indians. They can trail a guerrilla band through the jungle for weeks on end, even eavesdrop on their campfire conversations, and at the right moment call in an SOF plane for a surprise attack.

NORTH KOREA — The air commandos have undertaken some astonishing clandestine missions in North Korea. Details on the North Korean actions are top secret, but an SOF officer who served in the South during the mid-1960's remembers drawing up plans for commando missions into the North which would knock out some of the enemy's ability to infiltrate into the South.

TIBET — The United States trained a force of Tibetan peasants to counter the threat of Chinese aggression in the late 1950's, when the SOF was merely an unnamed collection of Air Force units working with the CIA.

Col. Fletcher Prouty, a now retired Air Force officer who helped organize the SOF in 1961, tells the story:

"We knew the Chinese were eventually going to come into Tibet, so we started recruiting a resistance force from among the natives. Up to 42,000 Tibetans were put under arms.

"We flew groups of tribesmen from Tibet to Saipan and from there to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, where the atmosphere is similar to the Himalayas, for combat training. In six weeks they were back in Tibet, and a fairly good ground force was built up. But then Gary Powers' U-2 was shot down in 1960, and President Eisenhower cut off all such missions."

SAUDI ARABIA — In 1963, a routine SOF training mission uncovered an Egypt-sponsored plan for revolution in Saudi Arabia. An SOF officer was flying with a Saudi Arabian Air Force pilot in an American plane over the desert, teaching him counter-guerrilla tactics, when he spotted some strange-looking bundles on the sands below. They landed and found 130 Egyptian parachutes with Czech rifles and ammunition. Cairo was trying to start an uprising against the pro-Western King Faisal, but the Egyptian pilots had missed the drop zone.

A squadron of USAF fighter-bombers soon arrived along Saudi Arabia's borders for a show of strength and President Nasser lost taste for the uprising.

LATIN AMERICA — SOF training of Latin American air forces has been extensive.

An SOF team trained and advised the Bolivian Air Force units that helped to track down the Castroite guerrilla chief Che Guevara.

I watched an SOF team instructing the Guatemalan Air Force in helicopter tactics. The Guatemalans had been employing small helicopters that couldn't fly above 10,500 feet. Any time the Guatemalan airmen pursued guerrillas into the towering mountains, the Communists climbed beyond reach and shot down at the "choppers" with impunity.

The SOF got them three big Bell helicopters from the U.S. that could soar higher than any mountain in Guatemala. Guatemalan pilots were taught how to maneuver the new "choppers" in the violent winds, how to land troops under fire, and how to attack enemy strongpoints.

Guerrillas disbanded

At last report, the guerrillas had been so weakened in many Latin American countries that they'd disbanded their armies. They were capable only of an occasional act of urban terrorism.

As Col. Harry G. Howton, USAF Ret., one of America's greatest experts on counterinsurgency, says, "Bombing a department store or kidnapping a foreign diplomat can make for bad, embarrassing propaganda, but it's never overthrown a government."

According to Maj. Gen. Thomas G. Corbin, a former SOF commander, "The standard line in guerrilla warfare used to be how many good guys did you need to beat how many bad guys, but the SOF has changed that. Through the imaginative use of air power, we can put guerrillas on the defensive with comparatively few men. We can keep them on the run, worried and unsure of themselves, until they're worn out and ready

to quit."

The air commandos can land huge, troop-carrying planes in jungle clearings behind enemy lines. They can snatch one of their own agents off the ground in enemy territory, without even landing. They scan the terrain below with remarkable infrared devices which can spot a single guerrilla stealing through the night. They take TV pictures in pitch darkness of enemy positions. They can harass guerrillas day and night with a fantastic assortment of deadly weapons:

- A miniaturized machine gun that can fire 18,000 little bullets per minute.

- An electronic gadget no larger than a king-sized package of cigarettes, which emits a noise inaudible to human ears and can be pinpointed by a listening device in an airplane 50 miles away.

- A large box dropped by parachute, which flushes guerrillas out of hiding by emitting sounds of machine guns, rifles, mortars and shouting voices.

- Eleven different types of aircraft, ranging from giant four-motor attack transports to toy-sized fighters that almost touch the ground as they fly.

Commandos go 'anywhere'

Today the SOF has close to 15,000 crack men, with headquarters at Elgin Air Force Base in Florida, training site for the raid on Sontay. One wing of air commandos is based in Florida, ready for deployment anywhere in the world on a few hours' notice. Two wings are operating in Vietnam and other sections of Southeast Asia, one wing is on the watch in Panama, and a fifth is in West Germany.

Tight secrecy requires that SOF men be carefully screened. An Air Force major entering the air commandos was asked: "Are you willing to fly old air-

craft?" "Are you willing to wear civilian clothes in combat?" "Are you willing to let your government disown you?" "Are you willing to die?"

To be accepted, he had to answer "Yes" to all four questions. Men assigned to SOF get intensive training in "U.W." (unconventional warfare) operations. In addition to aerial tactics, they learn karate, pistol-shooting close up, and knifeing. They practice how to live in a wilderness without food, water or shelter.

Fulbright skeptical

Some U.S. officials are worried by such secret military action. When told by PARADE of the SOF missions in North Korea, Thailand and both Vietnams, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright said he was "unaware of these activities, and as far as I know there has been no consultation with Congress about them. If what you say is correct, this kind of combat activity is provocative and could lead the United States to serious and dangerous involvements."

"Yes, we have to operate in secrecy," counters an SOF colonel now on duty, "but you can rest assured we do nothing indiscriminately. Any action we undertake has a damn good reason, and is done succinctly, on target, and with a minimum of waste."

The air commandos provide humanitarian services, as well as military. The SOF is flying medical teams to remote Thai villages that have never before seen a doctor. The American doctors live in each village three to five days, administer treatments and distribute free medical supplies.

The peasants are very grateful. One medical team flew a sick Thai child to a hospital. A week later, the child's father turned in a Communist guerrilla leader who'd been sought for months.

By parachute

The air commandos flew a six-room health center to a roadless village of Guaymi Indians in Panama. They dropped eight tons of reinforced steel, cement, lumber and other materials by parachute to the Indians along with instructions on how to erect the building. Recently, the SOF answered an emergency call from Saudi Arabia which was being overrun by locusts. Air commandos sprayed a million acres and saved the country from devastation.

This is the constructive side of the air commandos' efforts, but some critics say that the SOF, like the Navy SEAL (Sea-Air-Land), the Army Special Forces and the CIA, often props up foreign dictatorships in the name of defending democracy.

Says retired SOF Col. Leslie Minchew: "Our role is not to judge the government in power. Our role is to keep whatever government is in power out of the hands of the Communists."



Part of the SOF air commandos' inventory is the CH-3E helicopter, a workhorse for quick airlifts of supplies and men.