

21st TACTICAL AIR SUPPORT SQUADRON



LINEAGE

Constituted 21st Bombardment Squadron (Very Heavy) on 28 Mar 1944

Activated on 1 Apr 1944

Inactivated on 10 May 1944

Activated on 1 Jun 1944

Inactivated on 10 Jun 1946

Consolidated 19 Sep 1985 with the 21st Tactical Air Support Sq as the 21st Tactical Air Support Sq.

STATIONS

Dalhart AAFld, Tex, 1 Apr-10 May 1944

Dalhart AAFld, Tex, 1 Jun 1944

Harvard AAFld, Neb, 23 Aug 1944-7 Mar 1945

Northwest Field, Guam, 14 Apr 1945-10 Jun 1946

Shaw AFB, SC, 1 Jul 1974

ASSIGNMENTS

16th Bombardment Group, 1 Apr-10 May 1944

501st Bombardment Group, 1 Jun 1944-10 Jun 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-29, 1944-1946

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Japan

Eastern Mandates

Western Pacific

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation

Japan, 6-13 Jul 1945

EMBLEM

None

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Apparently not manned, 1 Apr-10 May 1944. Combat in Western Pacific, 16 Jun-14 Aug 1945.

MacDill AFB, FL, 31 Aug 1973-1 Jul 1974

The 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron converted back to the OV-10A Bronco In October 1988. The squadron had been flying T-37s, which were returned to the Air Training Command for the undergraduate pilot training program. [Below] The 20th TASS was activated April 1,1990, also flying the OV-10A Bronco.

21st TASS

On 8 May 1965, the 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron was activated, although it did not become operational nor was it attached to a higher headquarters until 1 August 1965. At this

time it became attached to the 6250th Tactical Air Support Group (PROV). Becoming operational one month prior to its target date meant that 21st TASS was able to take part in one of the largest battles of the Vietnam conflict to date, the Battle of Duc Co. the following is a chronological chain of events experienced by the 21st TASS during this reporting period.

Although the Squadron Commander and his Operations Officer and staff did not arrive from Bien Hoa until 15 August 1965, the new 21st TASS FAC's played a key role in saving the US Special Forces Camp at Duc Co, from 3 to 17 August 1965. Relatively new to the country and the job, five 21st TASS FAC's (three from Pleiku and two from Kontum) provided continual air cover in O-1 type aircraft from dawn to dusk throughout the battle, and rode in C-47 flare ships at night. They directed 127 air strikes killing 528 PAVN Regulars and destroying ten 50 caliber machine guns, two 30 caliber machine guns, one anti-aircraft emplacement and twenty-one mortar positions. They also provided air cover for continuous medivac missions into the camp, and their presence and ability to effectively direct air strikes in support of the ground force definitely kept a sizeable relief column from being decimated.

During this time period, 21st TASS FAC's took an active and significant part in thirty-nine major engagements with the Viet Cong or their PAVN allies. These actions occurred throughout the II Corps area. 21st TASS played a key role in the largest engagement with the Viet Cong in the history of the conflict up through October, 1965, the siege of Plei Me. On 18 August, 21st TASS initiated its VR program. This program became so effective at spotting Viet Cong targets that hand held camera program was established in early December to capture the VR targets on film. The Battle of Dak Sut, which was actually the repulsion of three separate VC attacks on the large but remote ARVN complex, was participated in by 21st TASS FAC's located in Kontum. Shortly there after, from 25 August to 10 September 1965, Operation Quin Thang 165 (Ramrod) was held. 21st TASS FAC's from Quin Nhon supported this road clearing operation by directing fifty A1-E strikes, four F-100 strikes and one B-57 strike, against constant ground fire, ambushes and automatic weapons fire for sixteen days. During "Ramrod", 21st TASS FAC's from Nha Trang were supporting Operation Than Phong III, a major effort to open Highway 21 to Ban Me Thout from Nha Trang. Within the six-day operation, 28 August - 3 September, one hundred and thirteen air strikes involving every type of strike aircraft belonging to Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, were directed by the three Nha Trang FAC's. The conditions were equally as hostile as those encountered by the "Ramrod" FAC's.

Other major operations involving 21st TASS FAC's followed closely: "Tam Thang 118" on 6-9 September with FAC's from Ban Me Thout, "Than Phong 4" on 10 September with FAC's from Qui Nhon, Operation "Don Tre" on 22 September with FAC's from Tuy Hoa, and Operation "Gibraltar" from 19-21 September with FAC's from Qui Nhon. These were merely preludes to the Battle of "Bong Son" and Phu Cu Pass", which lasted from 23 September to 1 October and netted over 650 KBA, 300 of which were netted on one day, 25 September. On that same day one 21st TASS OIE, flown by a 21st TASS FAC received four hits from the continuously intense ground fire. The battle started when the Viet Cong overran the US Special Forces Camp at Bong Son and continued as relief forces were ambushed both at night and during the days to follow. The battle grew in such proportion that FAC's were called in from other 21st TASS operating locations as far away as Pleiku to augment the overworked FAC's from Qui Nhon. Constant air cover was flown by these FAC's, in O-1E aircraft during daylight and in C-123

flare ships at night. Time and again ground commanders praised the FAC's for directing strikes so accurately that the ground forces were saved from being overrun. During the Battle of Bong Son, the flexibility of 21st TASS was shown by the fact that the FAC's at Tuy Hoa were augmented in their operation 48th Quang Truh, held on 28 September.

Once again the Qui Nhon FAC's were tested in the Battle of "Phu Mi" on 4 October. Then Tuy Hoa FAC's responded once again in Operation "P.Y. 06/65" on 5 October. Two days later the 21st TASS FAC at Cheo Reo combined political psychological warfare and air strikes to effect the return of hundreds of Viet Cong sympathizers to the Government and by so doing, saving many friendly lives. He accomplished this by convincing the Province Chief to allow him to show the sympathizers a display of force by airpower and, afterwards, convinced them of the validity of the "Open Arms" policy by the use of psy-way aircraft.

On 11 October, 21st TASS began providing FAC's and O-1E aircraft to the US 1st Air Cavalry Division, engaged in two bloody battles east of An Khe. This program was so effective that the 1st CAV decided to employ 21st TASS facilities and instructor pilots to train its FAC's at Pleiku to engage the PAVN in the Siege of Plei Me and allow the 1st CAV FAC's to carry the battle on to the Ia Drang Valley. The concept was so sound that 21st TASS was chartered by Field Forces Vietnam to instruct its FAC's in O-1E flying and strike direction. As of 31 December, 30 Field Forces Vietnam FAC's, which consisted of the 1st CAV (airmobile), 101st Airborne Brigade, ROK Tiger Division, and ROK Marine Brigade, had successfully completed this program, a program designed and directed entirely by 21st TASS personnel.

(Transcribers note: The copy of this historical report was at some time read by someone at the Alfred Simpson Air Force Historical Library at Maxwell AFB that was familiar with this following battle. The parenthetical comments in the following paragraph are provided by that unknown reader/editor).

Immediately prior to or during the Siege of Plei Me, several operations were underway using FAC's from other 21st TASS operating locations. 'Quan Duc58/65', and '52/65', supported by FAC's from Gia Nghia, netted tremendous gains for the ARVN forces of that area. In two of those operations, quick response by the FAC's literally saved the lives of all the US Army Advisors and prevented massive slaughters of the ARVN by the Viet Cong. One strike netted 50 KBA; another two strikes netted 120 KBA. Another four-strike inuendo (underlined and !) netted 55 KBA, while yet another immediate air strike netted 100 KBA. During the same time period, on 19 October, the FAC at Bao Loc directed a single air strike, which netted 64 KBA with four F-11 aircraft. The major battle of this period, however, was the Siege of Plei Me. It lasted from 15 (19) October to 1 November (29 October) and netted over 860 KIA, the great majority by air strikes directed by 21st TASS FAC's both during the day and through the night. Again the FAC's from one 21st TASS operating location were augmented from those other locations. In this instance FAC's from Qui Nhon, Kontum, and Ban Me Thuot were brought into Pleiku. Over 600 strikes were directed by 21st TASS FAC's. The PAVN fought so fiercely that they were chained to trees with their automatic weapons. (undocumented) Seven (No!No!No!) strike aircraft were shot down, and an additional 13 aircraft suffered battle damage, during the 16 (10) day battle. This was the largest battle of (webmaster note: text missing) Plei Me will be documented as the turning point of the Vietnamese conflict. 21st TASS

FAC's were instrumental in keeping both the camp and relief force from being overrun. Several times the fighters were directed to strafe and bomb immediately adjacent to or on the perimeter fence of the camp.

During the Siege of Plei Me, the FAC's at Tuy Hoa fought a sustained battle with the Viet Cong in Operation 'Phu Yen' 7 to secure the area's rice harvest. During this operation involving three 21st TASS FAC's , 465 KBA were counted, 238 by actual body count. The one crew chief attached to the 21st TASS at this operating location managed to launch 16 O-1E sorties per day for five straight days with three aircraft. Such support by crew chiefs and radio operators assigned to the 21st TASS cannot be neglected.

From 19 October to 8 November the FAC's at Phan Thiet netted 136 KWBA in nine widely scattered air strikes. Again two of the FAC's at Tuy Hoa distinguished themselves by halting a determined enemy offensive on 23 November, during the battle for the Tuy An District Headquarters. One Army O-1E was shot down and three damaged. Both Air Force observation aircraft also received battle damage. Although the weather was poor and the ground fire intense, these FAC's escorted and directed the movements of friendly ground forces in such a way that their relatively small force could be employed against the VS in the most effective manner.

On 30 November air strikes directed by 21st TASS FAC's from Qui Nhon in Operation 'Binh Khe' resulted in 32 KBA.

On 4 December, 21st TASS FAC's began directing air strikes at night from A-1E aircraft in support of "Fire Dragon", and on 6 and 7 December the Qui Nhon FAC's netted 160 KBA from two separate air strikes controlling F-11 aircraft. Unfortunately luck turned against the 21st TASS for the first time as two 21st TASS FAC's from Dalat were shot down on 14 December in an operation in Tuyen Duc Province in support of a ground operation.

In Lam Dong Province the two FAC's from Bao Loc netted 271 KBA in ten widely separated air strikes, between 19 October and 21 December. 21st TASS began supporting Operation "Tiger Hound" on 22 December, when sixteen of its FAC's were sent to Da Nang. Actually this operation had been supported out of Kontum and Pleiku by 21st TASS FAC's several weeks before, with varying success. On 28 December, 21st TASS FAC's from Pleiku began directing strikes from FC-47 and AC-47 aircraft in support of "Tiger Hound".

The last major action of 1965 taken part in by a 21st TASS FAC was Quang Duc 67/65. Out of Gia Nghia, this FAC directed air strikes in support of a reaction force attempting to relieve the Bu Prang outpost in Quang Duc Province. He also flew air cover, acted as a radio relay, and adjusted artillery, flying sixteen hours in 7 missions and controlling six strikes involving nineteen sorties during the first day of the operation in pursuit of two Viet Cong battalions. The mere presence of the 21st TASS FAC over the besieged outpost caused the VC to break contact and retreat, leaving 88 KIA and 45 weapons behind. Although the unit, newly formed and inexperienced, had some very difficult problems to overcome, the numerous battles and the tremendous number of enemy casualties inflicted by air could certainly indicate that the 21st

TASS has become a battle seasoned organization capable of performing its assigned mission in an outstanding manner.

Three different wings have operated A-10s at Shaw AFB, South Carolina. The 507th TAIRACW/ACW operated OA-10As from early 1991 until the A-1 Os transferred to the 363rd FW on April 1, 1992. The 363rd Wing operated OA-1 Os from April 1, 1992, until inactivated on December 13, 1993. The 20th Fighter wing moved from RAF Upper Heyford to Shaw on January 1, 1994, replacing the 363rd FW. The A-10s left in summer 1996, with the 55th FS converting to F-16C/Ds.

507th Air Control Wing

21st Tactical Air Support Squadron (Ravens)

The 507th Tactical Air Control Wing (TAIRACW) was made up of two OV-10 Bronco squadrons - the 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS), inactivated on December 31, 1991, and the 21st TASS which converted to OA-10s in October, 1991. The 507th became an ACW on October 1, 1991. The 21st TASS inactivated on November 1, 1991, and was replaced on the same day by the 21st FS from George AFB, California. The 21st FS transferred to the 363rd FW on April 1, 1992, and the 507th ACW inactivated on June 15, 1992. All 507th A-10s were painted in European I camouflage. The OA-10s carrier SF tail codes, standing for Shaw FAC. The 21st TASS's tail stripe was blue with white borders, two white lightning bolts, and a white script word - Raven.

81-0964 "STEAL YOUR FACE" is marked as the 507th Air Control Wing (ACW) flagship, with the unit call sign RAVEN painted on the 21st FS (formerly the 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron) blue tail stripe.

21 TASS

21 FS

SF

810964

810947

800140

790170

800206

800157

BLACK STRIPE WITH A RED LIGHTNING BOLT

HIT MY SMOKE

BLACK PANTHERS

RAVEN ON BLUE TAIL STRIPE



Air Force Order of Battle
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Sources