

Det 1 Report, yearbook supplement for the people who fly
and support the C-130E Hercules aircraft of the 374th TAW
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Controlling The Situation

Sgt. Brian Sawyer is one of the US Air Force's elite Combat Controllers, but he looked very innocent and defenseless asleep near the end of the runway at Son Trang, Republic of Vietnam.

For nearly two days he and two other controllers had been providing air traffic control information to C-130 Hercules pilots who were shuttling troops and gear of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in and out of the short 3,100 foot runway.

After months of comparative quiet, the Republic of Vietnam was faced with a massive invasion by North Vietnam. This time the ARVN and other Republic of Vietnam forces were doing the fighting on the ground, but once again many of the ground troops were being moved by US tactical airlift.

The "control tower" was a jeep parked just off the end of the runway. The man sitting in the left seat of the jeep had a good view of the incoming aircraft; therefore he functioned as "tower operator", providing weather and runway information to the pilots and advising of aircraft in the area.

The man in the right seat operated the radios. He passed flight following information to the control center at Tan Son Nhut and to offload base, Bien Hoa.



Waking up, Sergeant Sawyer downed a canned spaghetti breakfast and further explained. “We work three hours in the left seat, switch over to the right for three more, and then sleep for three.”

Left; Sgt. Brian Sawyer attempts to light a heater for his C-ration canned spaghetti. He was unsuccessful and after toasting his hand, ate the spaghetti cold.

Sleeping accommodations for the controllers were relatively plush - a cot near their jeep at the end of the runway. The guys in the loading crews just used metal pallets.

Sergeant Sawyer said that the secret smooth operation was the cooperation of the pilots and their crew.

“We can only park two at a time, so we sometimes have to call them to hold for a while until we can clear the birds out. They call on the radio while they’re still a long ways out and ask us what the load is going to be so that they can have the aircraft all ready for it. This saves time. It’s a big help.”

The aircrews turn the praise around and give it to the controllers. One co-pilot commented, “These guys are great. Real sharp. Without them we couldn’t hack the mission.

Vietnam troops load up C-130

