

Only Unit of its Kind in Europe 7th Special OPS Sq. is ready for anything

In the event of an emergency, send an SOS. In Europe, the SOS ready to be sent in an emergency is the 7th Special Operations Sq based here. This unit of specialized U.S. airmen are trained in unusual aspects of 20th century combat in the area of special air operations.

Since its inception five years ago, it has claimed the distinction of having the only special air operation capability in Europe. Much of the 7th SOS's mission is classified, but it can be said that the squadron is civic action oriented, and the men frequently train with military units of friendly Western European countries.

"We have capabilities to do what conventional forces can't do, in other words, we catch unusual warfare actions," said Col. W.A. McLaughlin, squadron commander.

The main unit of the dual-based 7th is at Ramstein, whereas this offspring is housed at Otis AFB, Mass. The units recently completed a joint exercise in Europe.



Both units use the C47 Skytrain, more affectionately known as the "Gooney Bird." The versatile "Gooney" is used for air dropping small loads of cargo; parachute exercises; assault landings and to unload or pick up supplies.

For heavier loads, the Europe-based end of the 7th relies on the four-engine turbo-prop C130 Hercules. The unit at Otis also uses the UH-10, a light, short, takeoff and landing aircraft.

Left; S. Sgt. Robert R. Brown readies a parachute for repacking.

McLaughlin said his men were trained for all types of climate — from the cold of the northernmost regions to the desert's heat.

"Some of our men are experienced mountain climbers, expert skiers, and many are jump qualified, but all are experts on the rifle range," the 7th SOS commander proudly commented.

About 95 per cent of the flight crews and combat support team are Southeast Asia returnees who performed Jobs similar to what is expected of them here.

Working with both ground and air elements, the 7th is in constant training. Much of this is with the Army's 10th Special Forces Det, Europe located at Bad Toelz, and the 557th Quartermaster Bn (Airborne) at Mainz, both in Germany.

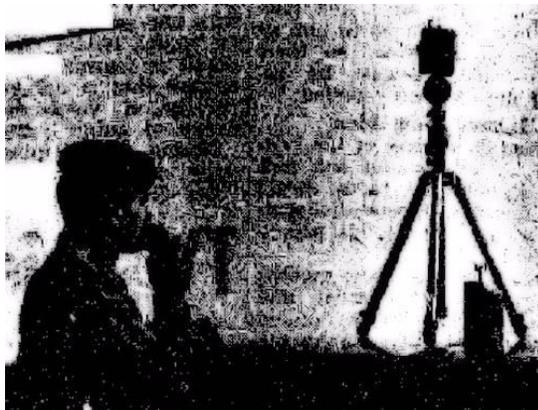
Every time a team goes on a mission, the medics take along their "bag." Only thing is, their "bag" is an air-transportable dispensary weighing about 1,400 pounds.

Even their own "wrench turners" (aircraft mechanics) takeoff with the squadron on missions. These mechanics often put more than 80 hours a week to keep the planes flying.

Men of the 7th are easily recognized by the unusual green rimmed bush hats they wear when in uniform, or by the yellow and blue patches worn on their civilian blazers.

Blue berets distinguish members of the 7th SOS'S Combat Control Team. Combat Controllers are the "First In and Last Out," going into an area from 20 minutes to two days before an assault.

Their Job is to set up the drop or landing zone and establish navigational contact to direct aircraft. Using a steerable-type parachute to allow them to be group-landed in a specified zone, each team member takes 90 pounds of food and equipment with him.



They are able to operate up to 30 days with this food and equipment. These "Blue Berets" have no trouble making their necessary number of jumps to qualify for special pay.

Left; A Combat Controller of 7th Special Operations Sq. talks one of Ills planes in for a training landing on a short field.

M. Sgt. Stanley P. Williams, NCOIC of the team, has made 320 Jumps during his military career, while team member S.Sgt. Robert R. Brown has parachuted 13 times in the last three months. The average team member has 75 jumps.

Combat Controllers go through lengthy and arduous training that begins with jump school at Ft. Benning, Ga. This is followed technical training at Keesler AFB, Miss.

They are then assigned to a team at one of 16 locations and then it's back to school.

An unusual capability of the 7th's C130s involves the Fulton Aerial Recovery System, often referred to as "Skyhook." It enables a rescue crew to pick up a man or cargo from the ground while their aircraft is in flight.

Skyhook is to pickup and rescue operations what the parachute is to delivery and bail-out operations.

"We can complete a skyhook rescue in 10 to 15 minutes," said M. Sgt, William J, Patton Jr. flight engineer, who explained how Skyhook works: "A kit with instructions is dropped to a downed pilot. All containers are then uncoiled and he puts on a harness suit which he attaches to a balloon also found in the kit.

The balloon is inflated by using the helium bottles provided and then sent aloft.

The line attached to the balloon is hooked by a specially structured aircraft and then the downed pilot is pulled into the aircraft.

Sent by Patrick Aguilar