

Congo History re: Air Rescue Service

KJ; Your list is correct except that Hawkeye, unless he came TDY between 7/1962 at the end of the operation, was not at the 58th during my tenure as a PJ (Oct '58-July 1962) and as a civilian downtown and later in Benghazi and elsewhere from July 1962-Aug-'54. The NCOIC when all hell broke loose was Earl Maple replaced about 11 months later by "Marty" Juback when Earl rotated. Marty was replaced by "Pappy" in, I believe early 1962, and would know some of this stuff.

The Congo Operation humanitarian operation (there is another example for John Cassidy's list of non SAR functions by PJs) was instituted by the UN, thru NATO and USAF Europe.

It may have begun, for Rescue, as early as 4/7/60. My memory is a little hazy but on 4 July we were having a section beach party and Robert F. Johnson T/Sgt and myself (A1C) were on alert when the APs showed up and yanked us back to Squadron Ops. This is the unclear part. Bob and I flew three missions back-to-back. The first was a routine U-2 flight cover out of Incirlik. We came home to an empty nest PJ wise, two had replaced us in Turkey and two others were committed somewhere else. That night ARS scrambled out on the shoot down, by the Russians, of an RB-47 surveillance bird about 100 miles North of Hammerfest, Norway over the Barents Sea, in international Airspace.

We staged out of a beautiful, but deserted, (except for housekeeping squadron) NATO air base on Bodo Island, Norway. The SC-54 crew stayed there for eight days before the Russians admitted that they had had two live crew members and one body, since two hours after the incident occurred.

Prestwick also had a crew up there and the 58th an SA-16 with crew in case we found anything on the water. It was four hours to the search area and four hours back so the HU-16 did not have the "lingering time" to participate in the actual search. The rest of us spent 19 hours in the air TO to TD and we passed the Prestwick guys coming and going but never met on the ground in the entire eight days.

To go adrift for a minute: The body was turned over immediately. The Russians held on to the two warm ones and already had Powers in a Moscow prison. I believe that the RB-47 crew was part of the package, including Powers, that was exchanged for Russian Col. Rudolph Abel.

Anyway, our crew pulled two-day R&R in Ramstein on the return to Wheelus and, I believe, that was a Friday on the weekend of the 4th. The beach party took place on the next day, a Saturday, and we actually had the whole team at home, all six of us.

Bob and I were on alert because I didn't drink and Bob volunteered to pull alert for one of the others as he had somewhere scrounged up a date for that night. We launched for Leopoldville somewhere around 1500 direct for Leopoldville and with a refueling stop landed somewhere in the mid-morning of the following day (Sunday). If my calendar is

correct that would have been July 3rd and the 4th a Monday. It was "Black Sunday" for me personally but that's another story which I'll send along later.

There were already three Sabena World Airways 707's on the ramp at Leopoldville. These were regular commercial airliners configured for something like 200-220 paying passengers. The political situation was so hot and there were so many people, that the crews threw half of the seats out onto the ramp and seating folks on the floor, were loading upwards of 300 plus people on every bird. Mothers were holding infants in their arms, sons sitting between their father's knees and all of their baggage, none was allowed aboard due to weight restriction, was piled up like so much trash on the ramp.

After the first flight of three 707s left it was about six hours before the second three arrived. SABENA had cancelled all of their "World Wide Service" commercial flights, added a fresh four pilot crew to aircraft landing in Brussels and sent the birds directly down. They landed, kicked off more seats, refueled, loaded another 300 plus and were gone again; sometimes in less than an hour. Most of those White-Belgian-Congolese, as they referred to themselves, were fourth and fifth generation settlers and they left behind whole cities, towns, businesses as well as farms and plantations which were, in essence, their whole lives. They and their ancestors had civilized the country, established a Democratic government within and apart from the Belgian Monarchy, established the Civil Service, educated the Black Congolese to run it

Meanwhile our crew commander, Capt Gene C. Tyner (poor guy always seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time) he had dropped me and Dale Eric on a mountain peak in Italy on March 15th, 1960 on eight-day mission and also took Bob and I to Norway) and had a talk with the SABENA Station Manager. He gave us the full possession, temporarily as it turned out, of one of their 707 maintenance hangers.

About ten days into our deployment the other side of the hanger became the Command Post for a battalion of Belgian "Force d' Frap" (read Commandos) who had finally arrived in country to lead the loyal balance of the Congolese Army against the revolutionary movement who, I failed to mention, were the cause of all of this mayhem.

We pulled the into the hanger, borrowed some desks and African Navigation and sectional charts from SABENA and became HQ ARS EF of Central Africa (just kidding about that last part). We had no communication with anybody, not even HF using an SABENA radio tower. This problem was solved, again by SABENA. WE would send our traffic via their company TT System to Brussels who would pass it by commercial land line to HQ ARS in Ramstein and from there either via Command Com Radio or encrypted TT back to the 58th at Wheelus. "Ops Immediate" traffic took about three-four hours, routine stuff twelve to twenty-four. This problem was solved on day four with the arrival of a C-130 and a five man Comm Team. The "Herky Bird" was from the 322nd AD based at Châteauroux,, France. The Comm Team came complete with brand new, state of the art Collins Single Side band radio transceivers, fresh from the factory. They

were with the 5th USAF Mobile (MOB) Communications Squadron also from the same French base.

It took the MOB about an hour to get a couple of tables set next to ours, place their neatly packed radios, run power and string a simple dipole antenna on top of the hanger and we were talking directly to Ramstein. By the next day we were talking directly to 58th Ops at Wheelus who, likewise, had been augmented by a MOB Comm Team with their magic (for those days) Collins radios. Everybody set about making up shopping lists for the next crew to bring down from Wheelus. The Crew-Chief suggested a spare engine for the HC-54, the RO suggested better HF radios and antenna system w/towers, Bob and I suggested, typical PJs, asked for a chest freezer w/ice-maker for everyone's use as well as extra chutes and some jungle gear, an SH-19 would have been nice and also practical but of course, out of the question.

USAFE established a weekly supply run by C-130 out of France and the first bird in carried all that we had each requested and more. They had even filled the freezer with meat , included loads of rations (C-10s mostly), 5-gallon jugs of water filled a whole pallet, although SABENA again had another hanger full of the stuff and I cannot remember what else. The C-130 also carried a replacement team for "the MOB" even though they had only been there for about ten days.

Bob and I stayed through the first rotation of about three weeks and were replaced by, I believe Marty and Eddie Moak. SABENA had reduced the backlog to a manageable figure of about four single bird flights per day but were still going out with as many people per aircraft as in the beginning. They had made arrangements to begin a refueling stop at DAKAR, French West Africa which later would become Senegal where they would also take crew break and split their loads into other AC and then return to Leopoldville or Stanleyville where they had started the same frantic operation the second week in July.

The AF guys had accumulated some very odd items. One crew chief who was helping the SABENA ground crews load passengers was given a set of car keys by a departing refugee and when he went searching for the car found out that he had inherited, for the crew's use, an open Rolls Royce, staff car. Out of pity I gave one of folks a US \$20 bill, all the green money I had. He led to the baggage pile and dug out a matched pair of six foot carved ivory tusks mounted on solid mahogany bases. US Customs confiscated my elephant tusks at Wheelus and Bob, myself and the rest of the crew were given five days to relax at the beach. That worked fine for everyone but Bob and myself because we had nine complete aircrews but only three PJ teams. Three days later I was at Incirlik and Bob was in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The rotating crews continued to pass the Rolls along to their replacements until, in about mid-September when, with the SABENA flights now going into Dakar and over water, the rescue part of the operation along with another "MOB Team" were moved to Accra, Ghana on the Atlantic coast and replaced the HC-54s with SA-16s (HU designation had not been born yet). That put us ideally positioned about half way along the two

SABENA OLs new route. The same old six PJs, Maple (until he rotated) "Marty", Hennessey, Johnson (he also rotated during the period of the operation) Hollis, and Zontini kept up the rotation. Delbert Ray came in as did Tony Gargano in, mid 1961 while we, the original sexy six, managed to also get the whole team through SCUBA school between September 1960 and February 1961. A totally unqualified A/3C Howard Hadley also joined the team in mid-1961 and was in, more or less, an OJT status for his entire tour. We had a mostly unknown PJ by the name SSgt Robert Macklin from September 1960 until September 1961. Bob was former Airborne and had been a Flight Surgeon's Assistant before coming into rescue. He pulled a couple of rotations each to Turkey and our FOL in Deep Africa but withdrew from Pararescue due to perforated ear drum in September 1961 because he could not go to Key West and went back from whence he had come at the base hospital.

Eddy Moak went CONUS in mid or late 1962, a great guy as were they all, who really shouldered the load during their tour. We quit using our own SC-54s for NASA support sometime in early 1962 and drew C-130s for the Nairobi, Kenya deployment as well as for Mauritius Island out in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Marty and I drew that one on the first deployment. Delbert and myself drew Nairobi on the second shot in April of 1962.

On that mission we left Wheelus as a flight of three C-130s an hour apart for Nairobi but only two made it safely. See the PJ awards wall under "Airman's Medal" Ray and Zontini for the status of the third or, again, ask "Pappy" as by now he was the new honcho, a great one he was and so remains. He tells it better than I from a Command Post point of view.

That was also either the first or, maybe, the second time that we had SF NCOs and junior officers, SCUBA trained, who augmented our PJs because of our low census figures and high mission requirements. We were still in Turkey and by now Kano, Nigeria for about a year (that too is a hell-of a-story) on the Congo evacuation.

I think that we also took a couple of those Bad Tolz SF pukes (I really should not say that because when we used them they were really eager and helpful and it was a blast having SF E-6s and 7s, O2s and O3s) gladly placing themselves under Air Force E-5s and E-6s to learn something new) with us to Nigeria once or twice.

Sincerely yours in Service,
Bob Zontini

The "Pappy" reference in my report on the Congo Operation was indeed TSgt James H. "Pappy" Lacasse and he did pull rotations to the FOL at Kano just like his troops did. All four of the, in today's jargon "Supers", NCOICs at Wheelus during my tour MSGts David "Scotty" Melville, MSgt Earl Maple, TSgt Martin J. "Marty" Juback and most all TSgt James H. "Pappy" LaCasse did their turn "in the barrel". "Marty" and "Pappy" especially served as a great inspiration to me in my later career when I had my own team.

I failed to mention, but I believe that you know, our work in The Congo earned some of us a star for our ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY MEDALS and played a great part in our award of THE AIR FORCE COMMENDATION MEDAL to the 58th. Truth be known, if it had ever been declared an actual combat operation, there would have been a couple of PURPLE HEARTS awarded as well.

I am glad that Bob Macklin is finally getting some credit also. I just received a not from Charlie Hoell verifying that Bob also served on the Team at Hamilton. It's too bad that his ear problem kept him out of SCUBA training as, and am sure others will agree, he would have otherwise had a great future as a PJ.

Lots of luck (LOL).....Bob Z

From: Bob Zontini [mailto:zontinib@tampabay.rr.com]

Sent: Saturday, January 05, 2008 10:49 AM

To: Robertson, Patsy H CIV USAF AFHRA/ACC

Subject: 58th Air Rescue Squadron, Wheelus AB, Libya

Dear Ms Robertson;

I think that we had a misunderstanding and I apologize for my part in it. The purpose of my original email was to file a correction to the L&H card of the 58th Air Rescue Squadron, Wheelus AB in the following areas. I freely admit that during my service with the squadron that there was a reorganization within Air Rescue Service world wide. During the period 18 March 1960 - 18 September we went from being a separate unit to being Det 2 of our sister squadron the 57th ARS squadron. You originally stated in your email of 11/21/2007 and it was stated also on the L&H that the 58th was formally inactivated on 9/18/1960. This is one point that is in error. On 9/18/1960 we were dropped as Det 2 of the 57th and resumed our former identity as the 58th ARS squadron with LtCol Jack Knight as our CO under HQ Air Rescue Service Europe, Air Rescue Service, Orlando AFB, FL, MATS, USAF. It continued as such until the 40 ARRWg became our next major command sometime later. I now see that the card reflects most of that information correctly. The card does not, however, acknowledge that at any time our subordination to HQ Air Rescue Service Europe before we came under the umbrella of the 40th Wing.

My second point has not been addressed at all. At no time did Det 1 (aka Det 10) 58th ARS squadron, Aviano AB, Italy exist nor did Det 2 (aka Det 11) 58th ARS squadron, Incirlik AB, Turkey. I draw your attention to excerpts of your own card file at www.h43-huskie/Atlantic-page1.htm and the "Pedro" Historical Site which clearly shows that both were Dets 10 and 11 (or 1 and 2) were subordinate to the 40 ARRWg vis the 58th ARS squadron, Wheelus AB, Libya as is still stated on the 58th's L&H card. This should clarify once and for all the fact that at no time did the 58th have any subordinate units detachment of otherwise.

I also will forward to you an email that I received from the Unit Historian of the "PEDRO ASSN" that I hope that we can put this case to rest and delete the item regarding Detachments on the 58th's L&H card at long last. As to the MATS Orders that you cite I can assure you that no one, including Col Knight has any knowledge of their existence or purpose.

I remain, Sincerely yours in Service

BOB Z

"PJs ARE ONE AND FOREVER"

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This I would like to keep closely held because I have never been sure that either AF, the State Department or the United Nations wanted it generally known. Plus, all three AF individuals involved were "carrying", two of us in strict violation of The Geneva Convention Red Cross stamped on our ID Cards (remember the times). Bob never went anywhere without a broken down Grease Gun and three loaded mags and a M1911 .45 pistol. It concerns events mentioned in my previous report on day 3 of our involvement in the evacuation of Leopoldville.

PJs nor the ARS in general were not involved in Stanleyville at all until it became a Rescue Operation conducted by Belgian AF C-130s and Commandos with PJ medical support late in 1962.

There had always been a battalion of Belgian Commandos and regular army elements stationed in The Congo, part of The Belgian Advisory Group to the "Black Congolese Army" which was officered by the "White Belgian-Congolese" We had found similar all white officer and NCOs in the Rhodesian Air Force on an earlier deployment to Salisbury in Jan. of 1960) who had made The Belgian Congo their home for generations. The Commandos wore **maroon berets** and the Regular Army wore **OD Colored Kepis** that closely resembled the "Ridgeway Caps" favored by PJs of the time.

On the morning of our third day in country Bob Johnson and I, along with our TSgt crew-chief named Zak, decided to have breakfast at the Sabena passenger cafeteria that was still in operation and located on the second floor mezzanine of the terminal building. The building was constructed of mortared stone block as were the interior walls and the banister of the staircase. The crew-chief was couple of steps above me and I was two steps above Bob. Bob was forever scanning for sweet looking tail and for, what I thought was no good reason, suddenly knocked my legs from under me and dropped onto the steps behind the stone banister just as I heard the distinctive clatter of an AK MG cutting the otherwise relative quiet of the terminal building. This was followed immediately by someone above us on the mezzanine firing an FN sub-machinegun. When the firing stopped, we were all covered with dust from the twenty or so rounds that had hit the stone wall just above our heads. Our crew chief was down on the steps and had a bloody left sleeve in his fatigues and Bob and I ripped his fatigue jacket off to find that he had a through and through in his left bicep. I took off his belt and used it as a tourniquet, applied a pressure dressing and Johnson had just given him MS, a quarter, when he was pushed aside by one of the four commandos who had been the source of the second round of fire from above us.

Bob and I were both carrying our jump medical kits as we each had a five syrette pack of morphine in them. With Zak stabilized anyway, Bob and I went to see if the shooter was, somehow, still alive. He had somehow worked himself into the terminal past the Belgian Security Troops, even wearing a fatigue uniform with the distinctive green ribbon of The Revolutionary Army wrapped around his arm and concealed himself behind a door way until he spotted us and started shooting. He was very, very DOA. More commandos arrived and we were all, the shooter included, "escorted/taken". Who's going to argue with about eight, heavily armed, Commandos; who were in a large room off the main terminal where the Belgian Army had set up an ER for the departing refugees.

The Army doctor on duty seemed more interested in me than the poor dead Katangese Rebel lying on his table. I had felt a "sting" just as Bob had knocked me down and figured it was a piece of flying masonry. The doc took a pair of scissors to my blood soaked right sleeve, which I had not even noticed, and opened it to the neck. This revealed the back end of a nearly spent round, probably a ricochet, embedded over my right clavicle. Hell, it was still numb and I didn't even know it was there. Anyway, he extracted the round, examined the wound, sterilized it, sewed it up and applied a bandage. He followed this with a tetanus shot, about 800,00 units of penicillin and orders to Bob to bring me back the next day for a check and a bandage change.

Meanwhile some other Commandos had brought in Zak. The doctor removed the tourniquet and the pressure bandage. By now his bleeding had mostly stopped but, due to the morphine Bob J. had given him, he was one happy TSgt. The doc ran a probe completely through his arm and pulled it out the back. "No Damage" he said loudly and put three sutures in the front of the arm. He packed the exit wound with something like Iodoform gauze tape, put a drain in, a bandage on both ends and again "Bring him back tomorrow". Hell, for all he knew we would be gone tomorrow. Noting

that Bob and I both wore Red Cross armbands and our weapons, he cautioned us that "this did not happen and ditch the bloody weapons".

With jackets supplied by a Belgian medical tech and Zak feeling no pain, Bob and I helped him up to the cafeteria where we had our, well earned, breakfast courtesy of Sabena. It was "anything that you want" according to the Sabena employee who had escorted us. We settled for the usual ham, eggs, toast and several cups of coffee. Bob and I tried to analyze what had happened and why us. Bob J. thought he had the answer in two parts. A) We were preceded on the stairs by three Belgian soldiers complete with their Kepis. B) He pointed to our "Ridgeway Caps" laying on a chair and concluded that the Katangese guy had probably, due to our caps, mistaken us for Belgian GIs and acted accordingly. It seemed like a logical answer so we finished our meal and walked/carried Zak, Bob and I had taken turns feeding him his breakfast, back to our hanger and our bunks where we all passed out.

Our crew remained on that deployment for, I believe, twenty-four days. The day after the above cited incident we received a by from some dudes from both the US Embassy and the White Local Government CID who insisted that our aircraft commander also sit in. After taking our statements they did some talking amongst themselves and concluded the following. A) No lasting harm had been done, B) Zak was a known heavy drinker anyway, and C) it would go easier on everyone concerned if knowledge of the previous days events were kept amongst the three principals and the aircraft commander.

Zak and I were followed up on a daily basis, complete with more penicillin for both, by the Belgian doctors until our sutures and his packing and drain were removed which was about a week later. During following days Zak began to heal and was able to do his job with somewhat limited use of his left arm. Bob and I held crew and later, sick call, redid our equipment and generally, just killed time helping out where we could. The sick call medics showed us how to use their radios and we pulled "listening watch" with them right up until we all left.

As far as I know there are now, as of your reading of this replay, only six people who know about this event in PJ history. Four of us were, more or less, ordered to keep quiet about it. Subject to that statement, my VA Medical Records do not show any reference to what might in fact be classified a combat wound. All I have to show for it is a small scar on my shoulder.