

From: Robert Zontini [mailto:zontinib@earthlink.net]

Sent: Tuesday, April 04, 2006 1:52 AM

To: John Cassidy

Subject: Beret; 301st jumps the gun.

John;

Some of the mid 1960s PJs know this story but, as Roger Porter points out, it's news that some of the post 1967 troopers might find interesting.

Back in April of 1965 I had a team inspection by Marty Juback and Paul Jenkins from ARRS in Orlando. Paul was carrying a maroon beret which I borrowed and modeled for our Ops Officer Major David Stanford. His only comment at the time was "that sure looks neat, you guys should try to get it made part of your uniform as it sure beats that cunt cap and patch.

Well in September, when I was officially team NCOIC, I was having lunch with Stanford when he brought up the beret. He told me to write him a letter requesting permission for all reserve PJs to wear it as official uniform. I wrote the letter; he endorsed it as "RECOMMEND APPROVAL" and got Col. Mark West (our CO) to endorse it and fired it off to CONAC HQ along with a photo of me under a beret with jump Wings.

I figured that was the end of that but we received a TWIX about ten days later that "BY ORDER OF THE CG, CONAC" all fully qualified CONAC PJs would wear the Beret with jump wings, Bloused trousers into Jump Boots as part of all AF authorized uniform combinations to include Class A. I had to run down Paul Jenkins to find a source. He was a little upset because ARRS was just getting started fighting with HQ USAF to get authorization for "ALL" fully qualified PJs to wear the beret and we were afraid I might have screwed the pouch for everyone.

Anyway, Col West told me that he had all the go ahead he needed and to get the team under maroon effective 15 November 1965 per CONAC. I ordered a dozen from Dorathea Mills in Montreal on a squadron funds purchase order at \$9.00 each. About two weeks later, I got a call from the base post office to come sign for a package and bring a certified check to the US Customs Service for \$11 in import duty.

Major Dave Stanford, the operations officer started us on our road to "jumping the gun" with the beret, went on active duty in late 1966 and many of you older guys may have met him during inspection visits to your teams. He was a hell of a patron for Pararescue. He ended up a Major General, deputy commanding officer of 23rd AF and supported Pararescue well after retirement.

When the five reserve rescue units were formed, PJ Air Reserve Technician (ART) slots were hard to fill. CONAC, the HQ Command for reserve units of all types had to amend the personnel regulations to staff certain AFSCs. Retirees were, under the original regs prohibited from filling Air Reserve Technician (ART) slots. CONAC in order to staff the slots had to waive their prohibition for retirees in Pararescue Technicians and started looking at retiree files.

Bob Seale was hired on a waiver to staff the 301st at Homestead.

Raleigh Curtis went on board at the 302nd at Luke

Dennis Jackson (a SSgt) assumed the 303rd at Burbank CA and the military grade of MSgt.

Eugene Engram was hired at Portland for the 304th

Udo Fischer the 305th at Selfridge

Bob Seale got lucky from the git-go. He Shanghaied a fully qualified Army Special Forces (SF) E-5 from a local Florida National Guard Special Forces unit. When the guy showed up for his first drill, he brought 6 of his team members with him. So, Bob had 7 fully qualified (minus SCUBA) troops out of his allotted 11. I joined the unit in July 1964 fully qualified and that made the team of 11 complete.

On New Years Eve 1964-65 Bob was admitted to the base hospital for tummy cramps with a BP of something like 76/30. They opened up his gut on Jan 1st and found that he had an old (very old) ruptured appendix and that about five feet of his small intestine was one big knot of adhesions.

I got a call from our First Sergeant on Jan 2nd to see if I was available to take Bob's slot as NCOIC for 90 days, which I did. Bob was in the hospital for five months so I was given an extension for 90 more days. Bob was still on Duty to Not Include Jumping (DNIJ) in September. The commander asked for and received from CONAC a second ART Slot. So, I went permanent. I was an E6 (TSgt). Bob Seale though still DNIJ was still in the MSgt slot. I asked Bob if we could do a records check on our people and get everyone up to an active-duty level of preparedness. He approved and we immediately:

1. Started sending guys to Ft Sherman, CZ for Jungle School
2. One new guy Mike Coontz to Portland to Jump School
3. And slots for everyone else to SCUBA school at Key West, Florida. I had already graduated SCUBA school.

Our first two SCUBA grads were A1C Gene "Buzz" Nardi and A2c Jim Wilson. Next came TSgt Joe Davis and SSgt Bob Monroe. Like the 58th in 1961 was the first 100% SCUBA qualified active duty team. The 301st had the (except for Seale) the first 100 percent fully qualified, in all areas required for active-duty teams, reserve PJ Force. The photo on page 121 of "Pararescue 50

Years" was taken in January 1966 and shows, left to right TSgt Joe Davis, NCOIC Bob Zontini, A1C Gene Nardi and SSgt Bob Monroe. On page 46, top right photo back and third row end, are A2C Jim Wilson and A1C Gene Nardi respectively.

That ends this note which seems to have become a small book.

My best to all members of the Brotherhood, present and future.

Bob Z.

Dear Bob and Kevin;

The 301st ARSS (Reserve) was formed in August 1965. Bob Seale (as well as 4 other retired or former active-duty PJs, Raleigh Curtis of the 302nd Luke AFB, Arizona. Dennis Jackson of the 303rd in Riverside, California. Eugene Enghram, of the 304th, Portland, Oregon, and Udo Fischer of the 305th, Selfridge Michigan) were the first 5 PJ Air Reserve Technicians. I was the 6th. All 5 units (except the 301st after I was hired full time in January 1965) had a manning authorization when they were formed of 11 PJs. It including 1 full time Air Reserve Technician (ART) and 10 reservists; with the ART slot an E-7. This manning remained until the early 1970s when the 301st was raised to 35 PJs total with three ARTs one of whom was a GS-12 and a Woman Air Force (WAF) slot for maintaining training records.

When the 301st moved to Patrick following the destruction of Homestead by Hurricane Andrew, it remained the 301st and was co-based with the 902nd Air Rescue Wing, an all HC-130 unit, that drew it's PJ support from the 301st.

From January 1, 1965 to August 12, 1968, we had a fully staffed team which included the following:

1. BOB SEALE MSgt Civil Service GS-9... (Off Status DNIJ but still employed for pay).
(Retired active-duty PJ)
2. BOB ZONTINI TSgt Civil Service GS-9 (NCOIC & Stan Board PJ beginning 1 January 1965
(Former active-duty PJ.)
3. JOE DAVIS TSgt Asst NCOIC (Former SF)
4. FRED KEMPER TSgt (Former SF.)
5. CLIFF PITTARD TSgt (Former SF.)
6. BOB MONROE SSgt (Former SF.)

7. BOB CANOULS SSgt (Former SF.)
8. RON COLEMAN SSgt (Former SF)
9. MIKE COONS A/2C
10. EUGENE NARDI A/1C (Cross-Trainee into PJs from aircraft engine mechanic).
11. JIM WILSON A/2C Trainee PJ (Former SF.)

We did, of course, have a few ins and outs, including Gene Nardi's going on active duty in 1967, where he stayed until he retired following several volunteer tours in Vietnam. The 301st PJ team accomplished a lot. Our 1964-67 First Sergeant, Troy Gay ended up as Director of Personnel for Air Force Reserve.

Best of luck living "BY THE MOTTO",

BOB Z

About the 302nd at Riverside:

At the time in 1962 thru 1964 there were no formal PJ Classes as we know them today. The airborne, medical, SCUBA, and others were at other services Army and navy schools. So, we were trained as well as any active-duty team at that time. I was in med school with Pitt and the NCOIC of 302nd at Gunter AFB, jump school with Pitt at the Brick Yard at Hamilton AFB just before their deployment to South East Asia.

I will contact all of the team that are still with us. Dennis the last time I heard was not in good shape. Nick David is close by, Sam Jeromn, Bob Watkins, Jim Murphy, Keith Chaney and other.

Keep in contact I'll help if I can.

Kindest regard.

GF (George Lee)