

From: Robert Zontini [mailto:zontinib@earthlink.net]
Sent: Tuesday, April 04, 2006 1:52 AM
To: John Cassidy
Subject: Beret; 301st AF Reserve PJs

John;

Some of the mid '60s PJs know this story but, as Roger Porter points out, it's news that some of the post '67 troopers might find interesting.

When the five reserve rescue units were formed (exact dates I don't know but the 301st has there 50th Reunion scheduled at Patrick for April 10-13. PJ Air Reserve Technician slots were hard to fill. CONAC, the HQ Command for reserve units of all types had to amend the personnel regs to staff certain AFSCs. Retirees were, under the original regs prohibited from filling ART slots. CONAC in order to staff the slots had to waive their prohibition for retirees in C124 flight engineers and loadmasters as well as Pararescue Technicians and start 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 although I don't know exactly when.

Bob Seale got lucky from the git-go. He Shanghaied a fully qualified 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. Would you believe that every one of them were full time cops from 3 units in the Metro area.

Robert Zontoni 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 stomach 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 SMSgt Troy Gay our First Sgt and personnel guy 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 DNIJ in Sept so the commander asked for and received from CONAC a second ART Slot. So I went permanent. I was an E6 (TSgt) and the base personnel shop cut orders to MSgt which they had to rescind 2 weeks later as Bob Seale though still DNIJ was still in the MSgt slot and CONAC would not authorize another. No sweat, Bob and I both carried the same GS Grade. 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 started sending guys to Ft Sherman, CZ for Jungle School, one new guy Mike Coontz to Portland to Jump School and slots for everyone else to Key West.

Back in April of '65 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 Sept, 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" I 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 w/ 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. 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 11/15/1965 per CONAC. I ordered a dozen from Dorathea Mills in Montreal on a squadron fund 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 to bring a certified check to the U.S. Customs Service for \$11.00 in import duty.

Our first two SCUBA grads were A1C Gene "Buzz" Nardi and A2C Jim Wilson (real job a fire Lt for Dade Metro). Next came T/Sgt Joe Davis and SSgt Bob Monroe (both detective Sgts for Florida States Attorney's office). Like the 58th in 1961, we were the first 100% SCUBA qualified active duty team. The 301st had the first 100 percent fully qualified, in all areas required for active duty teams, reserve PJ Force. The photo on Pages 121 of "Pararescue 50 Years" was taken in January 1966 and shows, left to right T/Sgt Joe Davis, NCOIC Bob Zontini, A1C Gene Nardi and SSgt Bob Monroe. Page 46 top right photo back and third row right end are A2C Jim Wilson and A1C Gene Nardi respectively.

Major Dave Stanford, the Ops Officer who started us on our road to "jumping the gun" on the beret went on active duty in late 1966. Many of you older guys may have met him during inspection visits to your teams. He was a hell of a patron for pararescue. Assignments included deputy for operations, SAC Deputy Commanding Officer 23rd AF. He retired as a Major General to Key Largo.

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

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

John, thanks for putting up with my rantings.

Bob Z.

Dear Bob and Kevin;

The 301st ARS Sqd, (Reserve) was formed in Aug 1965. Bob Seale as well as 4 other retired or former AD PJs, Raleigh Curtis of the 302nd, Luke AFB, AZ. Dennis Jackson of the 303rd, in Riverside, CA. Eugene Enghram, 304th, Portland, OR, and Udo Fischer of the 305th, Selfridge MI) 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.

That included 1 full time ART (Air Reserve Technician) and 10 reservists with the ART slot an E-7 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 WAF slot for maintaining training records.

There was a unit (reserve or otherwise) designated as the 308th. 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. It had an all C-130 unit, that drew it's PJ support from the 301st.

During my time as NCOIC from Jan 1 1965 to Aug 12, 1968 we had a fully staffed team which included the following:

NAMES

1. BOB SEALE
2. BOB ZONTINI, NCOIC
3. JOE DAVIS
4. FRED KEMPER
5. CLIFF PITTARD
6. BOB MONROE
7. BOB CANOULS
8. RON COLEMAN
9. MIKE COONS
10. EUGENE NARDI
11. JIM WILSON

We did, of course, have a few ins and outs including Gene Nardi's going on active duty in 1967. He stayed active duty until he retired following several volunteer tours in Nam. The 301st as a Squadron and also as a team accomplished a lot. Including our ops officer Maj Dave Stanford. He was a great PJ supporter who got us permission to go into berets a full year before the active duty troops. He ended up a Major General, Deputy CO of 23rd AF and supported Pararescue well after retirement. Our 1964-67 First Sgt, Troy Gay ended up as Director of Personnel for Air Force Reserve.

I see that I have strayed from our subject, THE WANNABE. He needs to be careful as there a whole bunch of the real PJs in and around Titusville. He may run into an errant fist or two if he continues his line of lies.

If I can help you guys in any way you've got my email and my phone number is below.

Best of luck living "BY THE MOTTO",

BOB Z

About the 302nd at Riverside:

At the time in 1962-63-64 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. We were trained as well as any active duty team at that time. The OJT does not apply to us as the only training we

received. Even today Our PJs are continually doing training. You never stop learning and if you do you are dead in this game. Again, I was in medical school with Pitt, and the NCOIC of 302nd at Gunter AFB. I jump with Pitt at the Brick Yard at Hamilton AFB CA, just before their deployment to Southeast Asia. The 303rd ARRS March AFB, CA was closed in 1985.

Well, I need to go. 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)