

22Feb2002 PJs KIA Philippines



An MH-47E "Chinook" helicopter, similar to the one pictured above, has crashed in Philippines on Thursday, 21 February 2002

A U.S. Army special forces helicopter with 10 American troops aboard crashed in the Philippines on Thursday and no survivors were found, as U.S. forces backed a thrust by Manila's military against Muslim rebels as part of Washington's war on terrorism.

"A total of 10 U.S. military personnel, including eight crew members, were on board," Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman explained.

The Pentagon said no hostile fire was reported when the crash occurred and that the big, twin-rotor MH-47E chopper crashed into the sea in darkness while flying from Basilan Island to Mactan Air Base.

The air base at Mactan is a logistics base for the anti-terrorist training operation being conducted by U.S. forces on Basilan.

Two Chinook helicopters delivered the last of 160 U.S. special forces troops to Basilan about 3 1/2 hours before the crash, Colonel Alexander Aleo, commander of the Philippine military's 103rd brigade headquarters on Basilan, explained.

Davis said he did not know if the helicopter that crashed was part of that mission. "No survivors have been found," he said. "There were no reports of hostile fire."

MH-47Es are upgraded versions of CH-47 "Chinook" troop carrying helicopter and are configured for night operations and other work by elite soldiers. Dozens of such troops have been sent to the Philippines to train Manila's forces.

A total of 22 American troops have already died in or near Afghanistan in a four month old U.S. military thrust there - the first leg of a U.S war on terrorism sparked by the 11 September 2001 attacks on America. Few of those deaths have been in military action. The U.S. Pacific Command said the helicopter went down about 150 miles northeast of Zamboanga City in the southern Philippines at 2:30 a.m. local time on Friday, 22 February 2002 (1:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time [EST] Thursday, 21 February 2002). The MH-47E "Chinook" helicopter was flying a routine resupply mission from the island of Basilan in the southern Philippines to the tiny islet of Mactan near the city of Cebu, Davis said. It crashed in a gulf north of Basilan.



Above, a photograph of sister ship Boeing MH-47E Chinook [92-00470](#) taken in the Philippines a few days before the fatal accident.

U.S. AIRCRAFT SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS

The Hawaii-based command said that another "Chinook" helicopter was flying with the chopper that crashed and remained in the area to conduct a search. A U.S. Navy P-3 "Orion" aircraft and an Air Force C-130 had joined the effort.

The incident occurred as a growing number of American forces were arriving in the Philippines to take part in training exercises in which Manila's military is conducting a stepped-up battle against Muslim rebels in the Asian nation.

Some 6,000 Philippine troops are on the southern Philippine Island of Basilan and 160 U.S. special forces will be there until June to train them. Another 500 U.S. support personnel will be in the nearby city of Zamboanga and in the central city of Cebu.

Sparked by the attacks on America, the United States launched a major military effort against Taliban forces and the al Qaeda guerrilla network in Afghanistan in October. It recently began a build-up of up to 600 troops in the Philippines.

U.S. special forces troops moved into the southern Philippines last month for joint exercises with the Philippine military aimed at wiping out Abu Sayyaf guerrillas, linked by Washington to fugitive Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network.

Bin Laden is blamed by Washington for masterminding the September attacks using hijacked airliners on Washington and New York's World Trade Center that killed more than 3,000 people.



Members of the U.S. Special Forces and their Filipino counterparts board a U.S. Army MH-47E "Chinook" helicopter under tight security inside a military base Sunday, 17 February 2002, in Zamboanga, southern Philippines. The Special Forces will be stationed in Basilan Island to train Filipino soldiers as part of the joint military exercise between the Philippines and the United States aimed at wiping out the Muslim group, the Abu Sayyaf.



Two U.S. MH-47E Chinook helicopters prepare to land to pick up members of the U.S. Special Forces at a military base on 17 February 2002 in Zamboanga, southern Philippines.

Search operations have been launched for a U.S. Army MH-47E "Chinook" helicopter with 10 U.S. troops on board which crashed in the sea in the southern Philippines on 22 February 2002, a local military spokesman said. The helicopter was flying from the island of Basilan, a Muslim guerrilla stronghold where U.S. special forces have been deploying, to a base in the central city of Cebu. A U.S. Army MH-47E helicopter, a close relative of a CH-47, takes off after unloading U.S. troops in the Philippine Army's Tabiawan camp near the town of Isabela, on Basilan Island in this 17 February 2002 photograph.



Two U.S. Special Forces stand guard with their firearms as other members board a U.S. MH-47E "Chinook" helicopter at a military base Sunday, 17 February 2002, in Zamboanga, southern Philippines. Air Force Staff Sergeant Juan M. Ridout is person on the right.



A U.S. Army special forces helicopter crashed in the Philippines with 10 American soldiers on board 22 February 2002 and radio and television stations said fishermen had plucked up to three survivors from the sea. The helicopter came down in the Bohol Sea during the night on a flight

from the southern island of Basilan, where U.S. forces are working with Philippine troops hunting Muslim rebels in the latest extension of Washington's war on terrorism.

Thursday, 21 February 2002, 8:44 PM ADST

MANILA - At least three of the 10 American soldiers on board a U.S. special forces helicopter which crashed in the sea in the southern Philippines on Friday were killed, police said.

□

A US army helicopter involved in anti-terrorism exercises in the Philippines exploded in mid-air and crashed into the sea Friday, a Filipino military spokesman said.

A senior police official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said three bodies were washed up on a beach near the crash site in the Bohol Strait, 410 miles south of Manila.

Television stations said at least three others were believed rescued by fishermen, but there was no independent confirmation of the reports. "Fishermen in the area heard a loud explosion and saw the helicopter plunge into the sea on fire," local military spokesman Captain Enrico Canaya said in a radio interview.

There was no immediate word on what happened to the others. Eight crew and two passengers were on board Chinook MH-47E helicopter, tail number [92-00471](#).

Friday, 22 February 2002, 6:23 AM ADST

APO ISLAND, Philippines - A U.S. Army helicopter participating in anti-terrorism exercises with Philippine troops crashed into the sea early Friday with 10 Americans aboard, a U.S. official said. Three bodies were recovered.

The cause of the crash was unknown, however the MH-47E Chinook helicopter appeared to be burning when it went down, witnesses said. U.S. and Philippine officials say it was not hit by rebel fire. It was carrying eight crew and two passengers.

"We have found no survivors from the mishap aircraft," said Brig. Gen. Donald Wurster, head of the U.S. contingent. "We, of course, hope they are alive and we are doing everything with our Philippine friends to find them."

Officials said the helicopter had finished three night flights between Zamboanga, home to the Philippine military's Southern Command, and nearby Basilan, an Abu Sayyaf stronghold.

The ill-fated helicopter left Zamboanga with another chopper at 12:53 a.m. (11:53 a.m. EST) for a two-hour flight to Mactan, an islet near the city of Cebu where the United States has a supply base for the Basilan mission, Lt. Col. Danilo Servando said.

Wurster said the first indication that something was amiss came at 2:34 a.m. (1:34 p.m. EST). Seven minutes later, two crewmen from the second helicopter jumped into the tropical waters to search, unsuccessfully, for survivors.

Fishing boat skippers Ricardo Zamora and Joel Lasola said they were about seven miles away when the helicopter went down.

"At the time of the incident, they saw a big fire that fell into the sea, and as the fire touched the water, there was an explosion," said a police report based on their account.

Some debris and an oil slick were spotted five nautical miles from tiny Apo island in the Bohol Sea in the southern Philippines. Coast Guard Lt. Armand Balilo said one of the helicopter's rotors had been found.

Friday, 22 February 2002, 7:11 PM ADST

FORT CAMPBELL, Kentucky - The eight Army soldiers presumed dead Friday after their helicopter crashed into the sea in the southern Philippines were members of an elite special forces regiment depicted in the new film "Black Hawk Down."

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, based at Fort Campbell, slips special forces commandos behind enemy lines aboard Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters. The regiment earned the nickname "Night Stalkers" because of its ability to strike undetected in the darkness.

"The 160th has specialized training with night vision and flying in all kinds of weather," said 1st Lt. Marie Hatch, spokeswoman for the 160th. "They were going in to assist in the operation that is going on in the Philippines."

The other two members aboard were Air Force para-rescue jumpers, said Major Paul Fitzpatrick, an Army spokesman at Fort Campbell, which is 50 miles north of Nashville, Tennessee.

Air crews from the 160th are trained to operate 30 feet above water, at night, using night vision goggles in a hostile environment, according an Army publication.

A 1993 mission in Somalia involving the 160th is the subject of "Black Hawk Down." Eighteen American soldiers died before the mission was aborted.

The regiment was formed in 1981 to focus on low-level, night operations in response to the failed hostage rescue mission in Iran the year before.

The 1,500-member force was first used in hostile conditions in Grenada in 1983 and has since participated in missions around the globe in nations such as Panama, Iraq and Bosnia.

Colonel Richard Polczynski, commander of the 160th, said Friday the eight crew members lived up to the regiment's motto: "Night Stalkers don't quit."

"Night Stalkers believe in our mission and recognize the volatile nature of our world. Our mission as soldiers is inherently dangerous and accidents occur," Polczynski said. "It does not make our loss easier, but it is a reality that each of us faces daily."

The cause of the crash was unknown, but early suspicions focused on mechanical failure; the Philippine military ruled out hostile fire.

Friday, 22 February 2002, 8:13 PM ADST

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Army has released the names of the missing.

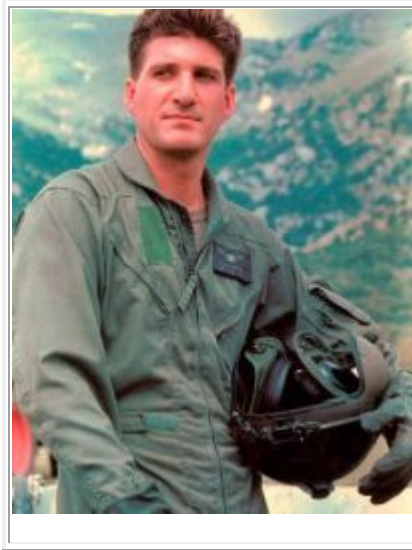
From the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky:



MAJ Curtis D. Feistner

CPT Bartt D. Owens

CWO Jody L. Egnor



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. James P. Dorrity, of Goldsboro, N.C., shown in an undated handout photo. Dorrity was 37.

SSG Kerry W. Frith

SSG Bruce A. Rushforth, Jr.

SGT Jeremy D. Foshee

SPC Thomas F. Allison

From the 320th Special Tactics Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Group, United States Air Force, located at Kadena Air Base, Japan:

Master Sgt. William L. McDaniel II



Staff Sgt. Juan M. Ridout (Right)

Saturday, 23 February 2002, 9:00 AM ADST



A Philippines Navy patrol boat continues a 24-hour search and rescue mission to find seven missing U.S. military soldiers from a downed helicopter, Saturday, 23 February 2002, off the southern Philippines island of Apo, 241 kilometers (150 miles) north of Zamboanga island.

ABOARD GUNBOAT 370, Philippines - Search teams scanning a deep sea in the southern Philippines for a second day Saturday found little debris and no survivors from a U.S. military helicopter that crashed with 10 American servicemen on board.

A U.S. statement said a special team of investigators from the United States Army Safety Center, located at Fort Rucker, Alabama, will arrive soon to help determine what went wrong. U.S. and Philippine military officials said the helicopter was not hit by hostile fire.

The helicopter's emergency beacon was believed to be about 600 feet under water. Parts of the sea floor in the area are twice that deep, local residents say.

The search extended Saturday to several miles in every direction from the crash site two miles southwest of Apo island, a marine reserve renowned for diving. A command post was being established on Negros island, three to five miles from the crash site, officials said.

A sailor on a small Philippine gunboat scanned the turquoise waters Saturday as a search helicopter flew over beaches where foreign tourists frolicked.

The search amounts mostly to looking at the water surface, scanning beaches from the air and talking to fishermen for reports of debris sightings among the coral, rocks and white sands of the region sprinkled with hilly, palm-studded islets.

By late Saturday, the search had yielded a rotor, a fuse box, the fuselage, a pilot's helmet, a seat and the landing gear. Powerful currents and tides can shift wreckage for kilometers miles overnight.

Saturday, 23 February 2002, 10:55 PM ADST

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines - All 10 U.S. servicemen aboard a military helicopter that crashed two days ago in the southern Philippines are believed to be dead, an American general said Sunday.

"We have determined that there is no chance to find survivors," said Brig. Gen. Donald Wurster, head of a U.S. military contingent involved in a counter-terrorism exercise in the southern Philippines.

He said the rescue effort had shifted to a recovery mission at the crash site in the Bohol Sea off Negros island.

At least three bodies were recovered during a search that includes three Navy ships, a Coast Guard vessel, six helicopters and nine motorized outriggers.

More than 200 rescue workers shifted the search to 120 miles from the crash site as debris reached the open sea and dispersed in strong currents and brisk southeasterly winds, officials said.

Philippine air force Brigadier General Marciano Ilagan said rescue forces - including 10 U.S. Navy SEALs, 7 U.S. Army personnel, a P-3 Orion surveillance plane and a U.S. C-130 transport plane - have covered 1,125 square miles of ocean and coast.

No decision has been made on whether to salvage the wreckage because of the deep water.

Memorial services for the 10 Americans are to be held on Tuesday on the central Philippine island of Cebu, where other U.S. military personnel are deployed to provide logistics support for the planned six-month exercise.

Monday, 25 February 2002, 05:33 AM ADST



A member of the Mactan Air Force Base ground crew walks behind one the two remaining MH-47E Chinook helicopters used in the U.S. and Philippines joint exercises in the southern Philippines, Monday, 25 February 2002, outside of the southern Philippines city of Cebu.

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines - The U.S. military will try to salvage the wreck of an Army Chinook helicopter that crashed into the sea last week while taking part in a counter-terrorism training exercise, a senior Philippine official said Monday.

The bodies of three of the 10 servicemen on the MH-47E helicopter were recovered shortly after it crashed before dawn Friday off the southern tip of Negros island in the southern Philippines. The seven other crew members have been missing since.

"There will be an effort to recover parts of the aircraft, or maybe the whole aircraft, and hopefully the remaining bodies, not only because of the technical findings that could be achieved to determine the cause of the accident, but also for the benefit of the families of those still missing," National Security Adviser Roilo Golez said Monday.

Tuesday, 26 February 2002, 06:19 AM ADST

FORT CAMPBELL, Kentucky - Eight members of an elite Army regiment who died when their helicopter crashed in the Philippines were remembered Tuesday as heroes who followed their unit's motto: "Night Stalkers don't quit."

"They represented all that was good in life and the tremendous cost associated with ensuring our freedom," said Maj. Dean Heithamp, acting commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

In honor of the soldiers, dark green flight helmets sat atop assault rifles placed next to black combat boots. The soldiers' dog tags were attached to the rifles. Below were portraits of each soldier. A 21-gun salute followed the ceremony.



Members of the E Company, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), 1st Special Operations Group who lost 10 of their company in a helicopter crash bow their

heads in prayer during a memorial service, Tuesday, 26 February 2002, at the Mactan Airbase in the southern Philippine city of Cebu. The service was held for ten US soldiers who were killed when a MH47E Chinook transport helicopter went down in the Bohol Sea 240 kms (150 miles) north of Zamboanga Island where the US military is training Philippine troops fight Muslim extremists. Seven bodies are still unaccounted for as search and recovery missions continue.

Friday, 28 March 2002, 05:55 AM ADST

ZAMBOANGA CITY – A team of U.S. soldiers and civilian contractors arrived in Negros Oriental to recover the wreckage of a Special Forces Chinook helicopter that crashed into the sea last month.

The aircraft crashed off Apo island in Negros Oriental on 22 February 2002, killing all 10 American military personnel on board.

Only three bodies have been recovered and the cause of the crash has not been established.

In a statement, the U.S. military said *Jon Steen*, a Dutch-owned search and rescue ship based in Singapore and contracted by the U.S. military, arrived at the crash site last Monday to begin salvage work.

"This effort is to determine the cause of the mishap as well as to prevent similar mishaps in the future," read the statement. "We will take the time needed to accomplish the mission."

Major Cynthia Teramae, spokeswoman for the U.S. Special Operations Command Task Force 510, said the search and rescue experts are using the latest technological advances like the Deep Drone Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) and the Shallow Water Intermediate Search System (SWISS).

"Both are owned by and operated by the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) based in Washington, DC," she said.

The approximately 9 foot 3 foot long Deep Drone ROV has auto control functions for complete freedom of movement. The SWISS measures 3 by 6 and has a dual frequency side scan sonar that, when towed behind a vessel, it produces detailed images of the ocean floor, Teramae added.

Saturday, 30 March 2002, 06:08 AM ADST

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines - A U.S. led salvage team has recovered the bodies of five of seven U.S. crewmen missing since their special forces helicopter crashed at sea in the southern Philippines last month, a U.S. official said on Saturday.

Eight Army and two Air Force personnel were on board the helicopter when the accident occurred on 22 February over the Bohol Strait, about 410 miles south of Manila. Bodies of three of the 10 were recovered soon after the crash.

"Five crewmen from the U.S. Army MH-47 Chinook helicopter that crashed at sea in the Philippines in February have been recovered during ongoing salvage and recovery operations," Major Cynthia Teramae told reporters in the southern Philippine city Zamboanga.

Teramae, spokeswoman for U.S. forces conducting joint military exercises with Filipino troops, said recovery operations to locate the two remaining crew members were continuing.

Monday, 1 April 2002, 09:08 AM ADST

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines - A U.S. team has recovered the flight voice recorder from an Army helicopter that crashed in February and hope it may help determine the cause of the accident that killed 10 American servicemen, a U.S. official said Monday.

The two engines of the MH-47E Chinook helicopter also were recovered over the weekend at a depth of about 65 meters (200 feet) off the central Philippine island of Negros, U.S. Maj. Cynthia Teramae said. Eight bodies have been retrieved, including five found on Friday.



Photographed upon their arrival in Cebu, Philippines, on 3 April 2002, officials from the United States - onboard the salvage ship Jan Steen - discuss the wreckage found of the U.S. Army MH-47 Chinook helicopter that crashed at sea in the southern Philippines.



Wednesday, 3 April 2002, 07:08 AM ADST

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines - The U.S. military called off search-and-recovery operations Wednesday for a crashed Army helicopter with the bodies of two American soldiers still missing.

After exhaustive efforts, officials "made the decision that they have done all they could," said Air Force Major Richard Sater.

Los Angeles Times

Army Helicopter Crashes in the Philippines; 10 Aboard

By AL JACINTO, ESTHER SCHRADER and RICHARD C. PADDOCK

Feb. 22, 2002 12 AM PT

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines — A U.S. Army helicopter carrying 10 troops crashed at sea early today, U.S. military officials said, resulting in the first casualties in Southeast Asia in the expanding war on terrorism.

Philippine Gen. Roy Cimatu, chief of the Southern Command, said three people were rescued, apparently by fishermen, and the bodies of three others were recovered.

U.S. military planes and Philippine vessels were searching the shark-infested waters in the southern Philippines where the helicopter went down, but by midmorning Philippine coast guard Lt. Arnold Valino reported that there were no signs at the crash site of the wreckage or any more survivors.

Before the crash, the MH-47 Chinook had just finished ferrying dozens of Special Forces troops to the island of Basilan, where they are assisting and training Philippine troops combating the Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic rebel group whose hostages include two American missionaries.

It was unclear what caused the crash, but there were no reports of hostile fire, the Pentagon and Philippine military officials said. Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff Diomedio Villanueva blamed the crash on a systems malfunction, according to television reports.

“There were no hostilities; there was no hostile ground fire,” said Col. Danilo Servando, spokesman for the joint U.S.-Philippine exercise in Zamboanga on Mindanao island. “It would be more of a technical problem.”

The aircraft crashed in darkness en route to Mactan air base, a Philippine facility in the central part of the country being used by U.S. forces in the anti-terrorism campaign.

The helicopter went down about 150 miles northeast of Zamboanga at 2:30 a.m., U.S. Army Maj. Cynthia Teramae told reporters here. A second MH-47 also returning to Mactan remained in the area, joining other aircraft and ships to conduct a search, Teramae said, fighting back tears.

The Pentagon withheld the names of the victims until relatives could be notified. Among the dead were the Army crew and members of other services flying as passengers, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Davis said in Washington. Philippine officials said the helicopter had an eight-man crew.

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About 660 U.S. troops are to participate in the U.S.-Philippine exercise aimed at destroying the Abu Sayyaf on Basilan, where the group has been holding missionaries Martin and Gracia Burnham of Kansas since May.

The exercise, known as Balikatan, or “Shoulder to Shoulder,” which is just getting underway, is scheduled to last at least six months and could be extended up to a year.

About 160 Special Forces troops will operate on Basilan island, sometimes joining Filipino troops on patrol. Another 500 U.S. support personnel will be in nearby Zamboanga and in the central city of Cebu. About 6,000 Philippine troops will take part in the operation.

Today’s crash was the third of a U.S. military helicopter this month. On Feb. 14, two Marines from Camp Pendleton were killed and two were injured in a crash in the Chocolate Mountains of Imperial County during a training maneuver.

The UH-1N Huey helicopter crashed at the southwestern end of the mountain range, often used for training.

Four days earlier, a Florida Army National Guard AH-64A Apache attack helicopter with a crew of two crashed in northern Florida while on a training mission, killing one crew member and injuring the pilot.

Times special correspondent Jacinto reported from Zamboanga. Schrader reported from Washington and Paddock from Jakarta, Indonesia.

Night Stalkers in the Philippines

Tragedy and Triumph in Balikatan 02-1

By [Kenneth Finlayson](#)

From [Veritas](#), Vol. 2, No. 1, 2006

he post-9/11 Global War on Terrorism brought U.S. Special Operations Forces into action around the world. Among the far-flung islands of the Philippines, Army Special Operations Forces units from the 1st Special Forces Group (SFG) focused on the Islamic insurgencies in the southern islands of the archipelago, supported by the Night Stalkers of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). Recently established on the Korean peninsula, E Company, 160th SOAR was the Army Special Operations Forces aviation element for the Pacific Command, and consequently drew the Philippines mission. The mission proved to be both tragic and triumphant for the unit.

The three MH-47E Chinook helicopters assigned the Philippines mission self-deployed from Taegu, Korea, on 22 January 2002, with aerial refuel support from the Air Force's 351st Special Operations Wing. The eleven-hour flight was E Company's first transoceanic self-deployment, as well as the unit's first real-world deployment outside Korea. When one of the MH-47Es hit the refuel basket too hard and locked the probe plunger, preventing refuel, the flight diverted to Kadena Air Base in Japan for fuel. Despite the unscheduled diversion, the unit managed to stay on schedule. The second refuel, about two hundred miles from Manila, Philippines, proceeded uneventfully. Two C-17 Globemaster IIIs, carrying the unit's equipment and support personnel, preceded the helicopters into Clark Air Base near Manila.[1](#)



Flight Path of Wild 41 and

Wild 42

Shortly after their arrival, the MH-47E aircrews performed a Combat Search and Air Rescue mission with 1st SFG personnel. They then supported B Company, 1st Battalion, 1st SFG, at Fort Magsaysay, where the company was training with the Philippine Army's Light Reaction Company

as part of Joint Combined Exercise Balanced Piston 01. Following this training, the MH-47Es relocated roughly four hundred miles south to Mactan Air Base, on the island of Cebu. During this period, air missions gradually shifted from daylight to sunset departures in preparation for the night flights necessary to support Exercise Balikatan (meaning shoulder-to-shoulder in Tagalog), which was a major component of the Cobra Gold exercise series. They staged out of Edwin Andrews Air Base (EAAB) at Zamboanga, on the southern island of Mindanao. The 350-mile round-trip flight from Mactan Air Base to EAAB took over six hours and required aerial refueling en route. The focus of E company's mission was to give aviation support to the Special Forces (SF) elements on Basilan Island, south of Mindanao.[2](#)



A primary mission of E Company, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, was the transport and resupply of the Special Forces soldiers during Exercise Balikatan 02-1.

With the advanced elements already in place, the remainder of the 1st SFG Advanced Operating Base and Operational Detachment-A (ODA) personnel began deploying to Basilan on 17 February 2002. Having flown from Okinawa, Japan, on blacked-out MC-130s and arriving in Zamboanga at night, many of the ODAs were expecting to conduct an unconventional warfare mission with the normal accompanying security measures. Thus, it was quite a surprise to the soldiers when the first sortie of MH-47Es landed on the floodlit Camp Tabiawan landing zone northeast of the Basilan capital of Isabela, and a contingent of the local press was on hand waiting to take pictures. Media scrutiny of the event was intense and the teams made every effort to escape the spotlight. But before all the ODAs had time to get out to their respective Philippine Army units from Isabela, disaster struck the Night Stalkers.[3](#)



160th SOAR DUI



E Company,

160th SOAR, logo

On the night of 21 February 2002, E Company's mission required them to insert the last group of ODAs onto Basilan as well as deliver supplies to the Special Forces elements already in place. The two MH-47Es, code named Wild 41 and Wild 42, formed the two-ship mission from Mactan to Zamboanga, and flew their programmed route to the objectives at 150 feet above the water. Two MC-130P Combat Shadow refueling aircraft from the 351st Special Operations Wing accompanied the Chinooks and orbited in separate aerial refuel tracks—one on the east side and the other on the west side of Basilan Island—in the event the helicopters needed additional fuel after completing their insertions and supply runs. At the last minute, the late addition of a VIP contingent to accompany the insertion changed the load configurations of the two helicopters.[4](#)

Brigadier General Donald Wurster, the commander of Special Operations Command, Pacific Command, and a photo news team boarded Wild 41 at Camp Navarro, Zamboanga, for the initial leg into Basilan. The general and the news team got off at Isabela, along with the 160th SOAR Maintenance Contact Team. Wild 41 and Wild 42 then flew three sorties into the interior. The three Basilan sorties included carrying the last of the ODAs to Isabela and delivering supplies to remote interior sites, which required sling-loading of the materials. Sling-loading is not a routine mission for the Night Stalkers and the use of night vision goggles compounded the difficulty. The aircrews were all aware of an incident on a previous sling-load mission when one of the crewmen positioned on top of the load to hook the sling ring to the MH-47E lift pintel was blown off the load by the heavy downwash of the rotors, dislocating his shoulder. The sling-load operations to Basilan, while successful, added considerably to the already high stress levels inherent in the night flight operations.[5](#)

When the insertions were complete, General Wurster, the press team, and the Maintenance Contact Team were picked up and returned to Zamboanga. With the General back on board Wild 41, Major Curtis Feistner, the E Company commander and air mission commander, shifted to Wild 42. That move precipitated another; after the General departed in Zamboanga, the Maintenance Contact Team with its John Deere Gator was shifted to Wild 41 for the return flight to Mactan.[6](#)

The flight of the two MH-47Es, Wild 41 leading with Wild 42 in trail, left EAAB about 0100 hours and once offshore, climbed to meet the MC-130P Combat Shadow to aerial refuel. Because of turbulence, the refuel took a little longer than normal as Wild 42 had problems “hitting the hose.” With the refuel accomplished about 0155 hours, the two Combat Shadows turned south, climbing to get around approaching inclement weather, while the two Chinooks descended into the light rain, leveled off at 150 feet, and headed directly for Mactan Air Base.[7](#)

Staff Sergeant Ron Mason*, an avionics mechanic on the Maintenance Contact Team, was sitting by the left bow window on Wild 41, watching out the window through his night vision goggles. He noticed Wild 42, the trail aircraft, approach close and then seem to start a “crossover maneuver,” climbing up and over as is performed during an aerial refuel. Wild 42 flew out of his line-of-sight, only to reappear fifty meters away, and then bank sharply left with the aircraft nose down. Mason did not have his headset hooked up, and he initially wondered why the door gunners began awakening the two U.S. Air Force Para-Rescue Jumpers (PJs) and telling them to get suited up. When Wild 41 slowed, turned around, and flew into a cloud of smoke, Mason saw several hundred small fires on the water below.[8](#)

Having watched the erratic maneuvers of Wild 42, hearing the warnings from the troops on the ramp, and seeing the fireball of the impact, flight engineer Sergeant John Peters*, on Wild 41’s right-side minigun, told the two PJs to get suited up, and began to get the hoist and jungle penetrator ready. Flight lead Chief Warrant Officer 3 Dale Fargo* witnessed the catastrophic crash from the left pilot seat. Fargo called in the emergency on the radio and immediately started Combat Search and Rescue. Hearing the emergency call for assistance from Wild 41, the two refuel Shadows (Juice 71 and Juice 72) went into two distinct orbits over the crash site—one at a thousand feet and the other at nine thousand feet—to act as a communications relay.[9](#)

Chief Fargo hovered about eighty feet above the water, searching the area for emergency strobe lights, then sweeping the crash site with his white light before the first PJ was lowered to the surface on the jungle penetrator. The airman stayed down less than fifteen minutes, getting dunked several times in burning JP-8 fuel, before being hauled back aboard. The second PJ, Senior Airman Andrew Brown*, quickly replaced him. In the midst of the small fires, Brown noticed that almost every chemlite aboard Wild 42 activated on impact. He spotted a life preserver just below the surface of the water and recovered the body of the first Wild 42 crewmember; Brown ultimately recovered three bodies at the crash site. No other bodies from the ten-man crew were found, though Fargo and the crew scoured the crash site until forced to break off the search to climb and refuel. “This time the aerial refuel was really hairy because the weather was pretty bad. Visibility dropped to zero/zero when we were on the probe,” recalled Mason. “At times you couldn’t see the lights on the tanker.”[10](#)

After refueling, Wild 41 verified the crash site coordinates via GPS because the six-knot current moved the fire and debris away from the impact site. Wild 41 continued the search, even doing a third aerial refuel at five hundred feet in order to maintain observation of the crash scene.

Shortly after daybreak, with a U.S. Navy P-3 Orion and an Air Force C-130P on station, Wild 41 left the crash site and headed for Mactan Air Base. By then, the Wild 41 aircrew had been flying over thirteen hours straight.

With the coming of daylight, Philippine naval personnel in Zodiac inflatables and Philippine surface vessels moved into the crash area. Later in the day, an inflatable lifeboat from Wild 42 was recovered by a passing tanker. Over the next several days, around-the-clock searches by air and surface vessels failed to locate any of the seven missing personnel from Wild 42.[11](#)

The reality that E Company lost eight of its original members, including the company commander and executive officer, as well as two Air Force personnel, hit the unit when the lone MH-47E landed at Mactan Air Base the next morning. The Maintenance Operations Center noncommissioned officer set up the traditional Night Stalker honors formation, with all personnel in two rows standing at attention, when the helicopter landed. Everyone was very concerned about Operations Security since CNN announced the crash less than two hours after it happened. The source of the news leak that alerted the 160th families in Korea of the disaster was never established, although it most likely originated with the local media. At any rate, the local news was waiting expectantly just outside Mactan Air Base when Wild 41 landed.[12](#)

Once the aircraft shut down, Captain Gordon Malcolm* and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Ron Redmond* debriefed the Wild 41 aircrew before a Joint Task Force Crisis Action Team spent some time with them and the rest of E Company.

As Joint Task Force-510 started planning a memorial to honor the lost airmen, the HH-60G Pave Hawks from the Air Force's 33rd Rescue Squadron at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan—originally planned for use during Phase II operations—were alerted for movement to the Philippines to back up the Chinooks on the Quick Reaction Force and casualty evacuation missions. This decision gave the Joint Task Force team better helicopter coverage, with Chinooks working at night and the Pave Hawks covering the daylight requirements, instead of the MH-47Es trying to do both.[13](#)

General Wurster officiated at the formal memorial for Wild 42 in the 160th hangar at Mactan Air Base on 25 February 2002. Before that memorial, E Company conducted a private service where friends answered for their comrades during a final “roll call” before taps was played. More personal goodbyes were done over the crash site. On 26 February, while en route to Zamboanga to support the Special Forces teams on Basilan, the 160th SOAR airmen said their last farewells at the Wild 42 crash site. The MH-47E flight lead hovered while individual wreaths were dropped on the water and friends said final words, dropping small gifts favored by each person—a tin of Copenhagen, cigarettes, a small bottle of liquor, soft drink bottle caps, cans of beer, and bread. To conclude the ceremony, a C-130P Shadow dropped low—“down on the deck”—and slid a wreath off the tailgate into the water as a final salute to its fallen comrades. With the Special Forces teams now on the ground advising and assisting the Philippine infantry

battalions, Phase I of Exercise Balikatan was officially underway. The Night Stalkers continued to drive on—there were other missions to complete.^{[14](#)}

Under the tutelage and encouragement of their Special Forces counterparts, the Philippine commanders became more amenable to conducting serious operations and the requirements for support from the 160th grew. As the Armed Forces Philippines began preparations for launching Operation DAY BREAK, a large counter-terrorism operation, the 160th SOAR experienced an aircraft breakdown while doing a night resupply on Basilan. Recovery of this aircraft severely tested the ingenuity and skill of the 160th personnel.

Having relocated their element from Mactan Air Base, Cebu, to Edwin Andrews Air Base at Zamboanga, Mindanao, in March 2002, the Night Stalkers were determined to avoid having an aircraft remain overnight on Basilan Island. This strategy changed in May 2002, when an MH-47E suffered a serious mechanical failure during a night resupply mission into the interior. As the new Wild 42 (recently arrived from Korea) approached the landing zone, the pilots noticed the aft rotor head of Wild 41 glowing bright white. The pilots aboard Wild 41 experienced heavy rotor vibrations even as the Wild 42 crew warned them that their aft rotor head glowed even brighter as the aircraft flared for landing. Fortunately, the aircraft landed and shutdown in time to avert a catastrophic rotor head meltdown. As it was, the aft rotor head seized up. Monitoring the situation on the radio, the Maintenance Contact Team at Isabela quickly alerted the unit's maintenance operations center at EAAB to get a recovery operation organized.

At both Clark Air Base and Mactan Air Base, the maintenance personnel had planned and rehearsed a real-world recovery of a downed MH-47E. When the message came in about the downed aircraft, the maintenance platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Fred Randolph*, formed a Downed Aircraft Recovery Team (DART). Within an hour the team began loading individual ammunition, water, rations, portable light sets, generator, fuel, and the spare aft rotor head. It took all six members of the DART (including the medic), to manhandle the rotor head aboard another Chinook. Test pilot Chief Warrant Officer 3 Arnold Gardiner* was with the team to return the repaired aircraft to EAAB. While the DART maintenance crew was en route, the Special Forces ODA on the site of the disabled aircraft organized Philippine Special Forces soldiers to pull security around the perimeter of the landing zone.

The initial technical inspection was performed in the dark as soon as the DART arrived. At daybreak, according to Sergeant Randolph, the DART members, “were on that Chinook like ants on a Twinkie,” making preparations to pull the rotor head.^{[15](#)} Because E Company's only rotor head sling was back in Korea, Sergeant Randolph devised a replacement with three heavy cargo straps. He learned to use cargo straps as a field expedient head sling several years previously during a field exercise in Germany. The Night Stalker “maintainers” proceeded to “jig” the seized rotor head out with the cargo straps and to install the new one. The high humidity and heat took its toll on the team; by the time repairs were completed at 2100 hours, the medic had

administered all his IV bags of rehydration solution to the dehydrated soldiers. After a full day's effort, the new rotor head was in place.[16](#)

Less than twenty-four hours after the Chinook's rotor had seized, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gardiner started up the repaired Chinook and flew it back to Zamboanga. To perform a major component replacement of this magnitude in field conditions in a potentially hostile environment speaks highly of the dedication and expertise of the DART. In the morning, the team conducted another technical inspection to double-check the work and found no flaws in the field maintenance. After that exciting night in the jungle, E Company, once again at full strength, continued to support the Special Forces ODAs until the primary casualty evacuation mission for Operation DAY BREAK passed to the MH-60L Black Hawks of 3rd Battalion, 160th SOAR, which replaced the 33rd Rescue Squadron HH-60Gs Pave Hawks in May 2002.

In its first mission off the Korean peninsula, E Company, 160th SOAR acquitted itself with distinction during operations in the Philippines. A long self-deployment and a mission that tested every aspect of the unit organization, from the pilots and crews to the maintenance teams, validated its value in the theater. The tragic loss of Wild 42 cast a pall over the mission, but the remainder of the unit continued to function at a high level, in keeping with the organization motto, "Night Stalkers Don't Quit."

ENDNOTES

1. Staff Sergeant Donald Mason (pseudonym) interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 25 July 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
2. Major Gordon Malcolm (pseudonym) and Sergeant First Class Fred Randolph (pseudonym) interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 September 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Francis L. Marion, "Opening the Second Front: Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines, January–August 2002," USSOCOM classified draft history of Joint Task Force-510, USSOCOM History Office Classified Files, MacDill Air Force Base, FL.
3. Sergeant John Peters (pseudonym) interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 September 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
4. Sergeant John Peters (pseudonym) interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 September 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
5. Mason interview.
6. Peters interview.
7. Peters interview.

8. Mason interview.
9. Staff Sergeant Donald Mason (pseudonym) and Staff Sergeant John Simons (pseudonym) interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 25 July 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Staff Sergeant Clark Keltner (pseudonym) interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 26 July 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
10. Mason interview.
11. Marion, "Opening the Second Front."
12. Mason and Simons interview; Keltner interview; Marion, "Opening the Second Front."
13. Mason and Simons interview; Keltner interview; Peters interview; Marion, "Opening the Second Front."
14. Keltner interview.
15. First Sergeant Fred Randolph (pseudonym) interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 13 September 2003, Fort Campbell, KY, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
16. Randolph interview.



U.S. Army helicopter crashes in Philippines

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ZAMBOANGA, Philippines — A U.S. Army helicopter carrying 10 Americans crashed into the sea early Friday after ferrying troops in a counter-terrorism exercise with the Philippine military, U.S. and Philippine officials said.

No survivors were found in hours of searching after the crash, lowering hopes of retrieving anyone alive from the water. Both U.S. and Philippine military forces were searching the southern Philippines waters.

Philippine television stations, however, said at least three survivors were believed rescued by fishermen

The helicopter wasn't brought down in an attack. "There was no hostile ground fire," Philippine military spokesman Lt. Col. Danilo Servando said.

The U.S. Pacific Command said the MH-47 Chinook was carrying eight crew members and two passengers. Officials said earlier that 12 Americans were aboard.

Some debris and an oil slick were spotted at the crash site five miles from tiny Apo, a tiny island in the Bohol Sea off the larger island of Negros. Coast Guard Lt. Armand Balilo said searchers found one of the helicopter's rotors.

Apo was transformed into a staging area for the search-and-rescue effort. Some U.S. and Philippine forces involved in the joint exercise were being pulled away to help.

Police said rain was falling and visibility was poor at the time of the crash, but the weather had improved several hours later.

Officials said the helicopter had just made three night flights between Zamboanga, a major Philippine military base, and nearby Basilan island, parts of which are a stronghold of the Muslim extremist group Abu Sayyaf.

The rebels are holding an American missionary couple and a Filipino nurse.

Along with a second MH-47, the ill-fated helicopter left Zamboanga shortly after midnight for a two-hour flight to Mactan, an islet near the city of Cebu where the United States has a supply base for the Basilan mission, Servando said. It crashed around 2:30 a.m. (1:30 p.m. EST Thursday) in deep water.

The second MH-47 conducted an aerial search and was joined by a U.S. Navy P-3 and a U.S. Air Force C-130 airplane, as well as Philippine aircraft and ships.

Col. Alexander Aleo, commander of the Philippine military's 103rd brigade headquarters on Basilan, said "everything looked normal" as the choppers dropped off the last of 160 U.S. special forces and supplies that have been arriving over the last two weeks.

The Americans have been operating under extremely tight security, with transport planes landing at night with all of their lights off. Aleo said the two helicopters used a system in which one landed — never turning off its engines — while the other hovered above as a defensive measure.

"There was no mechanical trouble reported or any rebel activity that might have affected their flight," Aleo said.

Aleo said the American troops were monitoring developments by radio while preparing to deploy to outlying military camps from the main military base on Basilan. Col. David Maxwell, head of the U.S. contingent in Basilan, said those plans would not change.

The U.S. soldiers who arrived overnight were packing bags, cleaning their guns or trying to catch a quick nap.

With its distinctive tandem rotors, the MH-47 is the special forces version of the CH-47 heavy transport helicopter that has been in use since 1962.