

AFEHRI File 100.074

Research Materials/Source Documents  
STUDENT PAPERS

FILE TITLE: OPERATION SAFE SIDE: An Historical Review of the 1041st Security Police Squadron (Test)

AUTHOR: SMSgt Dana R. Tretheway, SNCOA Student, Dec 1991

Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative G.R. Akin date 30 Dec 97

EPC Representative Jed A. Che date 14 Jan 98

Scanner Operator [Signature] date 16 Jan 98

APPROVED BY: Gary R. Akin

GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF  
Director  
Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

File 19-8-69  
B

USAF SENIOR NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER ACADEMY

OPERATION SAFE SIDE: AN HISTORICAL REVIEW  
OF THE  
1041st SECURITY POLICE SQUADRON (TEST)

by  
DANA R. TRETHERWAY  
Senior Master Sergeant, USAF

ENLISTED HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
DECEMBER 1991

AIR UNIVERSITY  
GUNTER AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

## INTRODUCTION

In 1964, as insurgent activities increased in Vietnam (RVN) the U.S. Air Force realized that air operations would have to be flown from air bases located in hostile environments (1:11). Throughout 1965 Air Force operations escalated and more aircraft were being positioned in RVN. The Air Force Chief of Staff had previously pointed out to the JCS that this build-up of resources would eventually become a prime target for the enemy (1:12). This observation rang true during an attack at Ben Hoa Air Base where 22 aircraft were damaged by enemy mortars and artillery (10:--). Increased protection for our airfields was in great need. However, as pointed out in August 1965 by the USAF Inspector General, the security police of that day were not properly organized, trained or equipped to provide the increase in security required in an insurgent environment (1:14). Making the matters worse was General Westmoreland's unwillingness to commit combat forces to the static defense role of protecting airfields (1:15). The Air Force needed a plan of attack to deal with this new dimension of insurgent activity. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief historical review of an Air Force unit designed and developed to help resolve our Air Base Ground Defense dilemma. To do this I will first examine the Air Force's initial response and then a more thought out reaction by introducing the "special" unit, it's development, training, deployment and some general results.

*516 line*

## DISCUSSION

As I pointed out General Westmoreland was not of the mind set to provide combat troops to static positions for the protection of airfields. Thus, Air Force commanders had to fend for themselves. In early 1966 security police manpower in RVN expanded from 148 to 2890. However, not until this large manpower pool was properly trained, equipped and provided sufficient facilities did it become a competent force. By March 1966 the close-in security at our four original bases, Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, Da Nang and Nha Trang, had greatly increased. (1:14) Still plaguing our installations was the threat of small hostile forces penetrating our perimeters and attacking priority resources, as well as stand off attacks (1:15).

With hostile forces still able to penetrate our perimeters, the Air Force needed answers. Answers that would enable us to fully protect, or at least better protect, valuable mission resources. In April 1966, the Air Force Chief of Staff directed a special security police unit to be formed to help find the answers. This unit was to be trained and equipped to be employed in a combat role. (1:15) Special orders dated 18 July 1966 activated the 1041st Security Strike Force Test Squadron (SSFTS) and gave birth to Operation Safe Side (8:--). As an extension of the USAF Inspector General and under the control of USAF, Director of Security Police, the 1041st SSFTS was to evaluate the adequacy of the concept, training, equipment and tactics of the security police organization providing security for resources in

an insurgent environment (1:16). Additionally, the unit was to train for operational deployment to South East Asia (SEA) to acquire the experience necessary to develop Air Force doctrine of base defense in that theater of operation (8:--).

Keeping their mission intact and still heading for Phang Rang as the original orders directed, amending orders were issued changing the units designation to simply the 1041st Security Police Squadron (Test). (9:--) Apparently someone felt the original title was a bit flashy and did not give a true picture of the units goals and mission. Additionally, Lt Col William Wise of the USAF Directorate of Security and Law Enforcement was charged to take the helm of this new unit (2:3).

Lt Col Wise, Maj Ralph Fisher and CMSgt Robert C. Frink along with their staff (2:1.4) had a phenomenal task. Establish, train and deploy the unit with a starting date of July 1966 and to report to Phang Rang by January 1967. After-burners had to glow to get this project under way and completed. The seemingly simple task of finding people was made difficult due to stringent physical fitness standards and the requirements of special qualifications for the instructor cadre. Messages flowed to and from the 1041st recommending, qualifying and disqualifying potential members of this elite unit.

As the people issues were being worked so were plans for a training site. Schofield Barracks, Hawaii was the best suited

location, therefore, negotiations with the Army, Navy and the Agricultural Department (for military working dog importation) were under way. Towards August it appeared all the details were worked out, however the advance cadre of Maj Ross, Project Training Officer, and Chief Frink along with some instructors found that final approval to use Schofield had not been given (2:4.1). Two weeks went by before the approval came down from the Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Army.

The Cadre did, however, take advantage of these two weeks. The "Ranger" trained instructors visited local army units to begin an inventory of available training aids. The two weapons specialists on the cadre "scoped" out the local firing ranges to be used to train the 1041st. (2:4.1) Both scouting missions proved to be helpful in getting a sound start to training.

The training started in September with 229 personnel in attendance this number had a 25 man overage for attrition during training. Building combat skills and confidence in the way of the Rangers was the goal of this sixteen week training session. (2:6.2) The course was extremely demanding, however only twelve members were found to be physically disqualified and seven were washed-out because of motivational problems. Another five left training for disciplinary or humanitarian reasons. (2:6.2) The training system was designed to weed out the underbrush and let the healthy unit grow stronger through training.

Adequate training rested on the shoulders of a training

cadre which was short on manning and lacked some critical skills. The instructor cadre was originally set at forty-five personnel; however, the most Operation Safe Side could get was thirty-five. Twenty-three of these instructors had completed the U.S. Army Ranger School. To get this many "Rangers" was quite a feat; the Air Force sent sixty-two security police to the school to get the original nineteen on the cadre, the other four came to the cadre later in October. (2:2.2) Six of the instructors had attended Ranger school but somewhere along the way were injured and removed from the school. (1:35) Recycling the injured was probably out of the question with the time restraints levied on Operation Safe Side. There were also two instructors who were graduates of the Army Special Infantry Weapons Course. Rounding off the cadre were two language specialist and two weapons instructors. This seemed to be a strong instructor force, unfortunately only four of the thirty-five had received formal instructor training. Adding further to the complications of the cadre is that senior NCO's were in supervisory positions limiting their availability as instructors. The shortage of instructors, the lack of academic instruction training and equipment shortfalls posed a serious problem. It is certain a more efficient, better organized and more professional training program would have been possible with a larger group of well qualified instructors. However, as proven in the operational phase, the training program was satisfactorily presented. (1:38)

In preparing the 1041st for their operational deployment the

instructors used a three phase training program. The first phase, an eight and a half week block, consisted of weapons/demolitions training, tactics and counter guerrilla operations. The second phase was unit field training which lasted five and a half weeks. Finally, phase three was local orientation which was a one week block. (2:27) This course was extensive and somewhat brutal. As indicated earlier not everyone cut the mustard of the "Rangerizing" process.

While training was under way at Schofield, a team headed by Lt Col Wise went to the RVN to conduct an Operational Base Survey. The 1041st was originally tagged to go to Phan Rang AB. However, upon the recommendation of the 7th Air Force commander, the unit would establish operation at Phu Cat Air Base. There was a much higher level of enemy activity at Phu Cat presenting a greater need for base defense. Additionally, this base would provide a more austere bare base environment for the 1041st. (2:2.7)

Trained and motivated with a "ready to fight" attitude, the 1041st deployed to Phu Cat in January 1967. (A list of the 199 enlisted member and 8 officers is attached to this paper.) The unit was placed under operational control of Lt Col John F. Hunter, Installation Director of Security Police for the 37th Combat Support Group. The tasking for the 1041st was to provide surveillance and protection in depth along specific sectors of the base perimeter. To fulfill this mission, the unit deployed tactical security support equipment, established observation and

listening posts, conducted recon patrol and ambushes, and provided a mobile response force. All of this within the vast perimeter of Phu Cat Air Base. (11:--)

With both the task and operating rules outlined, the 1041st set out to do the best they could. During a four and a half month period they conducted forty-two tactical operations. Fourteen of these operations involved security positions or patrols being fired upon by the enemy. Several of the incidents revealed how dangerous the environment was upon discovering VC booby traps within the perimeter of the base. Through concerted efforts of perimeter observation, internal patrols and response teams, the 1041st repelled or deterred many attempted penetrations. (2:Atch 38)

Their successful and efficient results were noted by Col F.C. Keish, Commander 37th Combat Support Group. Col Keish stated that the units active defense concept furnished a workable solution to the security problem at Phu Cat AB. The presence of numerous rice paddies, dense undergrowth and rolling terrain posed a difficult situation which could not be solved by usual static posts and vehicular patrols. By actively seeking intruders, conducting patrols and ambushes and providing reaction forces for varying contingencies, the 1041st was highly instrumental in preventing and countering enemy activity. (12:--)

Additional recognition was given by Lt Col Hunter. He complemented the 1041st through emulation. After the departure

of the 1041st he formed a special security police flight to patrol, ambush and operate mortars. This flight also had ground intelligence capabilities. All of this, based on the 1041st. (4:--)

The 1041st indeed received favorable comments and accolades from all levels of command. However, the unit also had it's critics. Col Milton Pollen, Director of Security Police, 7th Air Force from May of 1968 to May/Jun 1969, was certainly one of those critics. He believed Operation Safe Side

"has been misoriented from the very outset. This misorientation stems from two unsound assumptions and an evaluation test of questionable validity. First we assumed that the desired combat capability should be tailored to the defense needs of a bare base with little or no consideration being given to any other operational environment. Second, we assumed that this objective could best be attained by Ranger training even though such training is designed to support highly specialized missions of the U.S. Army and has little relevance to the solely local base defense requirements of the USAF." DS

Col Pollen went as far as to say "...this unit did a poor job for us in Vietnam." (5:--)

Even though Operation Safe Side and the 1041st had critics, their basic concept of base defense was accepted by many within the security police. The report prepared by the 1041st provided valuable evaluations on tactics, weapons, sensor systems and communications. Additionally, the report provided sound guidance on the continuation of the Operation Safe Side. Most of the advice was developed from "lessons learned". (2:--,3:--)

The lessons learned and Operation Safe Side settled to the

bottom of someone's priority list for a few months. Priorities changed when we were faced with the TET Offensive. Interest was quickly regenerated in Operation Safe Side. At the request of the commander of 7th Air Force and directed by the Chief of Staff, the security police once again initiated Operation Safe Side for deployment to the RVN. (13:1) Using suggestions made by the 1041st, the program was redeveloped under the 82nd Combat Security Police Wing. (3:19.1) Colonel Leslie Caskins was selected to be the commander of this new wing. Because of the efforts of the officers and enlisted men of the 1041st, Col Caskins had a much shorter distance to run than Col Wise to prepare a unit for deployment. In fact his unit, both the training cadre and operational force, consisted of alumni from the 1041st. He did, however, begin changing the "Ranger" concept held by the 1041st when he stated "The Ranger attitude is no longer in vogue." (6:--) With or without the Ranger attitude his squadrons continued to successfully defend U.S. air bases in RVN.

#### CONCLUSION

As conflict escalated in Vietnam more Air Force resources were stationed in theater and became a more lucrative target for insurgent activity. In response to a 7th Air Force request for increased capabilities to protect our aircraft Operation Safe Side was established. This program directed the activation of the 1041st Security Police Squadron (Test). The mission of this unit was to train, equip and deploy to SEA to acquire combat experience in order to develop Air Force doctrine on air base

ground defense. In a twelve month period from 1 July 1966 to 4 July 1967, this mission was executed. A sixteen week Ranger type training program took place at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii with the deployment phase taking place at Phu Cat AB, RVN from January 1967 to July 1967. The results of this operation received mixed reviews. Local commanders praised and emulated the 1041st, while some criticized the "Ranger" attitude of the members. Nonetheless, what the 1041st Security Police Squadron (Test) did in 1966 and 1967 has influenced the way security police has done business for the last twenty-four years. Today we still deploy sensor systems which are descendants of those tested at Phu Cat. We still use basic tactics and concepts developed and tested by the 1041st. Our leadership continues to believe the Army is the best learning resource for air base ground defense training, thus all security specialists attend training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Additionally, because it must have some merit, we still send selected security police to the U.S. Army Ranger School. The 1041st SPS(T) and Operation Safe Side was as important to our defensive capabilities in Vietnam as it was to the professional development of the security police of today.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Hq USAF AFISP, "Operation Safe Side Final Report: General Findings and Recommendations of Safe Side Test 1 Sep 66-11 Aug 67"
2. 1041st Security Police Squadron "Operation Safe Side Final Report Vol I" 11 Aug 67
3. 1041st Security Police Squadron "Operation Safe Side Final Report Vol II" 11 Aug 67
4. Hunter, John F. LtCol, USAF. Corona Harvest Project Questionnaire. "Air Base Ground Defense in South East Asia
5. Pollen Milton, Col, USAF, Director of Security Police Seventh Air Force. Letter to Col Caskins, Leslie, Commander, 82 CSP Wing, dated 7 May 1969.
6. Caskins, Leslie Col, USAF, Commander, 82 CSP Wing. Letter to Col Pollen, Milton, Director of Security Police Seventh Air Force, dated 19 May 1969
7. -----, Deputy Chief Installation Security Division, Director of Security Police, Hq USAF. "South East Asia Trip Report" Oct 1967
8. Special Orders 6-42 Headquarters, Headquarters Command, Bolling Air Force Base
9. Special Orders 6-62 Headquarters, Headquarters Command, Bolling Air Force Base
10. AFISP, "Air Base Security Attack Data, 28 May 1969
11. AFISPSA. "Safe Side Operating Rules" Letter to 1014st SPS(T) dated 10 Mar 1967
12. 370SG/BC. "Evaluation of Perimeter Defense Provided by Project Safe Side" Letter to 1041st SPS(T) dated 25 May 1967
13. Searles, DeWitt R., BG, USAF, etal. "SVN Trip Report 17-27 Sept 1968"

ROSTER OF INITIAL PERSONNEL

GRADE	LAST, FIRST MI	GRADE	LAST, FIRST MI
LtCol	Wise, William H. Sr.	SSgt	Kern, James H.
Maj	Fisher, Ralph E.	A1C	Brown, Jimmie L.
Maj	Evans, Joseph B.	SSgt	Foster, Lawrence
Capt	Olsen, Ben	SSgt	Cooper, Glen A.
CMSgt	Tannahill, Donald R.	SSgt	Rowland, Marvin
TSgt	Butler, Graham F.	SSgt	Fields, Jink
SSgt	Holmes, Richard L.	SSgt	Fenstermacher, David
A1C	Ruge, Carl R.	SSgt	Burnett, William L.
A1C	McKenzie, Kenneth C.	SSgt	Rafield, Roy L.
MSgt	Elrick, Robert H.	SSgt	Owings, John D.
SSgt	McIntosh, Julius C.	SSgt	Rodriguez, Jesus Jr.
SSgt	Carbullido, Jesus C.	SSgt	Cobb, Charles H.
A1C	Coles, James T.	SSgt	Wallace, Larry F.
SSgt	Hart, Donald D. C.	A1C	Burbey, Michael, P.
SSgt	Cook, Joseph P. Jr.	SSgt	Dykes, R. L.
A1C	Brady, Carl L.	SSgt	Todd, Kenneth E.
SSgt	Adams, Ben I.	SSgt	Carroll, Elton R.
TSgt	Tossas, Franklin J.	SSgt	Elliott, William E.
SSgt	Maples, James R.	SSgt	Benge, Kenneth L.
A1C	Hughes, John K.	A1C	Gibson, Benton Jr.
Capt	Geisler, Richard P.	A1C	Vinesett, Ossie B. Jr.
1Lt	Lindley, Theodore T.	A1C	Miller, Jerry L.
1Lt	Clower, Richard E.	A1C	Twiggs, Joseph E.
1Lt	Heubusch, Charles J.	A1C	Middleton, Edwin L.
2Lt	Guran, Claude P.	A1C	Sparks, Robert L.
CMSgt	Frink, Robert C.	A1C	Whitt, Robert L.
MSgt	Hockanson, Robert D.	A1C	Gibson, Garland F.
TSgt	Carmichael, William W.	A1C	Ely, Don M.
TSgt	Keyser, Glenn M.	A1C	Savory, Ronald C.
TSgt	Sebastian, Edward F.	SSgt	Cook, Orin B.
TSgt	King, Robert G.	A1C	Mundon, James P.
TSgt	Hopkins, Kenneth	A1C	Edwards, Oliver D.
TSgt	Fox, Tommy L.	A1C	Scammerhorn, William R.
TSgt	Dickson, Charles E.	A2C	Wright, Teddy R.
TSgt	Anderer, Arthur J.	A1C	Smith, William
SSgt	Hester, Gerard R.	A1C	Redding, George N.
SSgt	Dorrance, James L.	A1C	Hammer, Gary W.
SSgt	Casbarro, Emidio	A1C	Ribera, Richard E.
SSgt	Hall, James F.	A1C	Barkley, Luther I.
SSgt	Johnson, Billy R.	A1C	Lasko, Joseph A.
SSgt	Lunsford, James W.	A1C	Glover, Calvin A.
SSgt	McLaughlin, Thomas	A1C	Hargrove, Louis C.
SSgt	Revell, William H.	A1C	McElfish, William N.
SSgt	Seay, Walter G.	SSgt	Maze, Joe W.
SSgt	Yingst, Carlos D.	A2C	Tillman, Lawrence
SSgt	Cude, Leroy E.	A1C	Williams, Lewis F.

GRADE	LAST, FIRST MI	GRADE	LAST, FIRST MI
A1C	Whittaker, Eddie L.	A2C	Goolsby, Billy A.
A1C	Bigelow, Robert L.	A2C	Gupton, Vollie D.
A1C	Gaughan, William G.	A2C	Headrick, Wayne O.
A2C	Tweedy, James A.	A1C	Howze, Donney G.
A2C	Baxter, James D.	A2C	Jones, Horace L.
A2C	Myers, Bernard J.	A2C	McNeil, Willie D. Jr.
A2C	Mitsuka, Robert N.	A2C	Mills, Ernest E.
SSgt	Uhlenkamp, Joseph F.	A2C	Rawlings, Kenneth H.
A3C	Minton, Benny G.	A2C	Romero, Louis
A1C	Paquette, Robert C.	A2C	Sheeley, Larry G.
A1C	Ricketts, Bradford R.	A2C	Smith, David A.
A1C	Robertson, David R.	A1C	Potts, Billy L.
A1C	Arthur, Edgar L.	A2C	Studebaker, Richard K.
A1C	Kannas, David W.	A2C	Williams, Lester M.
A1C	Monk, Raymond J.	A1C	Pazul, Frank J.
A1C	Dagenhart, Olin C.	A2C	Greene, Thomas W.
A1C	Wright, Charles E. Jr.	A2C	Jones, Nathaniel
A2C	Hunter, Harry E.	A2C	Riley, James H.
A2C	Fisher, William E.	A2C	Simpkins, Charles P.
A3C	Donato-Fitz, Ernest G.	A2C	Abram, Wilmer C.
A2C	Murry, Thomas O.	A2C	Manning, John
A2C	Kelsey, Jay C.	A2C	Leeds, William N.
A3C	Berry, Wayne E.	A2C	Layfield, Benjamin D.
A2C	Baker, Everett W.	A2C	Ivy, Jeffie L.
A2C	Powell, Marshall N.	A2C	Smith, Terry V.
A2C	Linscott, Allen L.	A2C	Wagoner, Lamar E.
A2C	Kimbrell, Thomas H.	A2C	Webster, John P.
A2C	Parker, George P.	A2C	Aldridge, Vernon W.
A2C	Dewaters, Ernest Jr.	A2C	Brown, Everett
A2C	Wenger, Michael V.	A2C	King, Everett D. Jr.
A2C	Glines, Michael P.	A2C	O'Neal, Thomas
A2C	Kelley, Dennis K.	A2C	Palmer, Geoffrey L.
A2C	Kruk, Kenneth A.	A2C	Fescina, Terrance A.
A2C	Vaughn, Robert J.	A2C	Sanders, Van A.
A1C	Sargent, Foy J.	A2C	Blersch, John F.
A1C	Gentry, Thomas F.	A2C	Austin, Ellis
A1C	Jones, Hobby D.	A2C	Doswell, Edgar A. III
A1C	Griffin, Willie R.	A2C	Howard, Jackie W.
A1C	Chandler, Joseph M.	A2C	Conley, Fredrick D.
A1C	Green, Wilbert A.	A2C	Hughes, Robert A.
A1C	Axe, Barry N.	A2C	Purdy, James D.
A1C	Blevins, Carl J.	A2C	Skunda, John A.
A1C	Hill, John W.	A2C	Brown, Martin C.
A1C	Arffman, Albert P.	A2C	Barber, Elroy
A1C	Sparkman, Tommy W.	A2C	Stephens, Charles E.
A2C	Turner, Tom E.	A2C	Griffith, John J.
A2C	Deberry, Mac L.	A2C	Erickson, Lester E. Jr.
A2C	Hendren, Brady L.	A2C	Mitchell, Robert L.

10-11-55 Final Report  
ATTACHMENT 5

GRADE	LAST, FIRST MI
A2C	Cummings, Gary E.
A2C	Goetz, Jack N. Jr.
A2C	Stone, John A.
A2C	Fowler, Thomas A.
A2C	Kiley, John M.
A2C	Freeman, William D.
A3C	Calkins, William R.
A3C	Holt, Rowland Jr.
A3C	Lyle, Richard L.
A3C	Spear, Henry G. Jr.
A3C	Pastor, Joseph R.
A3C	Silva, Gary J.
A2C	Green, Herbert E.
A3C	Peckinpaugh, Stephen B.
A3C	Baker, Don
A2C	Koziolek, Eugene L.
A3C	Huber, Charles E. II
A3C	Brown, Frederick A.
A3C	August, Wilbert
A3C	Kersten, Richard L.
A3C	Fite, Thomas A.
A3C	Karraker, Harold E.
A2C	Glasscock, Ronald J.
A3C	Phillippi, Richard A.
A2C	Marrazza, Donald T.
A2C	Davis, Frederick A.
SSgt	Green, Otis L.
A1C	Hurlbert, Richard G.
A2C	Hayes, Jackie H.
TSgt	McCarthy, Charles I.
TSgt	De Angury, Leos L.
A1C	Turbeville, Thomas T.
A1C	Gross, Earl J.
SSgt	Meikle, John R.
A2C	Fisk, Thomas M.
A2C	Bice, Edwin W. Jr.
A2C	Kriny, John W.
A3C	Partlow, Vernon D.
A3C	Lipscomb, Stallian M.
A3C	Adamowicz, Robert S.
A2C	Siegfried, George D.