THE DEFENSE OF ATTOPEU

The use of the AC-47 for the night defense of isolated hamlets and forts has become a common practice throughout the South Vietnam area. It has been credited with the major role in recent engagements at Plei Mei and A Shau. In these circumstances, however, the defended areas were under ground attack and conventional flares were used to attain and strike enemy forces. On 4 March 1966, an AC-47 pioneered a new concept in night air support at Attopeu, Laos.

Utilizing a recent development for improving night vision, the Starlight Scope, the AC-47, "Spooky 41", was able to engage and immobilize a large Communist force without the use of flares or other types of illumination. This action stopped the Communist take-over of the airstrip and city of Attopeu and enabled Laotian forces to retake positions on the original defense line.

Three Laotian Force Armee Royale (FAR) had all but given up the task of stemming the Communist advance on this strategic city. On 3 March 1966, General Thao Ma, the Commander of the Royal Laotian Air Force, was greatly concerned with the overall Attopeu situation. This concern was evidenced in a conversation with the Assistant U. S. Air Attache, Captain John Ryan, at Savannakhet, following Ma's return from Pakse where he had talked with General Phasouk, Commander of the IV Military Region. The towns of Muong Cau and Fangdeng, east of Attopeu, were partially destroyed and firmly in Communist hands. The enemy soldiers were well dug in, showed little fear of air strikes, and appeared to be well
everything else just strewn along the roads and...well, everybody was feeling pretty bad and they felt for sure that the field was going to be run over within the next night, or possibly the next night, so they had called for some air support that day, and Captain Dalton's airplane had broken down, and that was the reason he had asked for us to come down. So, we went up and spent about a half hour getting familiar with the area, each of us, Captain Cool and myself were each in a different aircraft, and we had Captain Dalton in one airplane and Schenkel in the other one, and they took us around and showed us the town, which had been taken over by the Viet Minh, which was located six or seven miles to the east of Att-speu, and there was evidence that there had been an airstrike there, and there were entrenchments, foxholes, around the perimeter of the town, and we flew over it at a moderately high altitude of about 1500 feet, and didn't see anything, so we just progressively started getting down lower and lower, and we didn't see a trace of anything there. This was around the outskirts of it and everything else. Nothing. We were under the impression that they'd all pulled out, but we had the aircraft coming in, so we decided to work over the most likely areas of refuge and that, so I went up and Captain Schenkel - I believe that was his rank - was in the rear seat, and flew around, and the fighters came in, and when we saw a suspicious looking spot, well we poured everything in there, and I never saw a trace of anything and never received any ground fire, so I kind of thought this was more of the...uh...Vietnamese Intelligence, you know, two battalions out there and...uh...they never seemed to show up. So that after...after all the aircraft were through, we went back and retired to the quarters they had set up, one of their wooden native-fashion type huts, and sat on the porch, and about that time we received
You can imagine, in theory, there are many places that the universe can go, but that doesn't mean you've expanded it. I've always been the sneaker squeak thought, but the other people at work. The first time I heard the sneaker squeak was when they started playing music in the room. They were still playing music, but now it's different. I was thinking about all the things they said. So the next day, I decided to find out what they were about. And then I thought, I was thinking about all the things they said. So the next day, I decided to find out what they were about.
ground fire. So, we figured...this was like most missions, we figured they
were shooting at shadows again. This morning about seven thirty, Captain
Cool and Roy Dalton went up in the airplane, and flew around there, and by God
they look in a rice paddy and there's a bunch of bodies laying there. They fly
down and look, and they count 26 bodies! Laying right out in the open there.
Men in uniforms - rather nondescript uniforms - but they were there. So they
came back, and I had my camera - and they just hadn't taken a camera along -
so, Captain Cool and I went up, and we went around and we found the original
26 bodies, and then by God we found another 26 bodies, all laying out in a
relatively open area, in a paddy. ...uh...these paddies are kind of divided
up by small shallow canals, and of course in the dry season they were all dried
up so they were just like ditches, and these people were strung out in the
ditches, and that's where they apparently had been spotted, and they were all
laying there, in all the grotesque positions you'd expect them to be in, and
about a half dozen were right in the open in the paddies, sprawled out, and
in several places you could see spots where obviously a body had been laying,
and bled a lot, and then they pulled it away...but...we got the camera out and
I shot the rolls of film and the black and white, we got 'em from all altitudes,
some close-up and some distant (unreadable question)...uh, yeah, I've got my
own personal camera. It's got a real big lens on it, so, we should have some
pretty good pictures. When they're developed. It was quite a scene. And I
think the people in the gooney bird would be very happy to see it, because
this is living proof that their bird can do a good job. And everybody speculated
afterwards that...uh...these people had advanced, apparently, from entrenchments
in a wooded area and they were advancing in the direction of the base, and
everybody feels that they were probably gonna attack the base, and this...uh...probably discouraged them. And if we counted 52 bodies there, I feel that the estimate Spooky made of 200 men in one spot and 150 in another, is quite moderate, really. 'Cause I'm sure that if there were 52 dead, there's probably twice as many wounded. (Background: The number that are generally carried off by the.....) Captain Witterman: And then, Lord knows...uh...how many were carried off. But they're laying right out there in the open. You go back tonight and they'll probably still be there. (Question: You see any around the pagoda or the other areas?) Captain Witterman: We flew over the pagoda, but we couldn't see anything there, but the roof of the pagoda had a lotto holes in it. And...uh...trouble is, nobody will go into the area to count...All we saw was in the open, Lord knows what's in some of the wooded areas around there. But we flew around there for 45 minutes at sitting-seat altitudes, and never heard a shot. That's about the extent of it. We felt...everybody was real pleased with the performance of the guys who did, they really put their heart and soul into it.....(Question: When did you leave, over there?) Captain Witterman: I left about 1330 this afternoon. (Question: Was General Ma down there before you left?) Captain Witterman: No sir. (Question: Did any of the locals witness what you saw?) Captain Witterman: Yes, we took up one of the colonels, and I took up another SAS type, and showed it to him, and he shot a roll of film himself... (Question: How high were you flying when you were shooting the film?) Captain Witterman: Oh, Christ, I...(Question: 900 feet?)Captain Witterman: 90 feet to 300 - we started off 300 to get area coverage, and then we went right down - I betcha we got some taken like this, eye to eye...(Question: With that camera...)Captain
the best part of it.

the other person looked up and that could have been a dramatic moment because to go

and be put a bunch of art there, and then to go back into town again,

captain banker went up to the north, and looked over several square

where for them, and that may have been a dramatic moment because to go

over a number of people to do some other work for them, and to thank

and another reason that the money had done in these and reporter from television that day about how or they didn't... there

as so what happened to communicate exactly how... there

captain walker... hope. (cigarettes) hope. (cigarettes)

(photographs) hope on the photographs...
SECRET

ATTOPU

SECRET NOFORM, AIRA SVRT to 2AD/13 AF Thai, Cite M. AO0176, dated 4 March 1966, 2350Z.

For Capt Webb (AIRA). Received a call from Dalton at Attopu and he reports Spooky 41 did an outstanding job. A conservative estimate is 100 KIA. However he also reports, the enemy is now bombarding the area with mortar. He says that enemy is well dug in and he requests all the air support possible during the next 72 hours. The friendlies have been pretty badly mauled and are quite demoralized and need all the help they can get. General Na once again this evening emphasized the morale building effect that USAF support has on the friendly ground troops.
SECRET

SECRET NOFORN, Dep Comdr 2AD/3AF to MACS USN SVN, dated 8 March 1966, 1700Z.

For Commander from General Bond. Outstanding airmanship, personal bravery and hard work of your AC-47 crews (Spooky 41 and 43) no doubt saved Attopeu from probable capture night of 4 March 1966 and dealt a devastating blow to attacking enemy battalions. A review of reports of the action indicates a minimum of 100 killed by air and actual number was probably over 230 with many more wounded. My personal congratulations on a most effective display of tactical airpower.
SECRET NOFORN, AAIW BNIT to 2AD/13AF Thai, Cite No. A00179, dated 5 March 1966, 0915Z.

USAF PAC at Attopo used the words "delirious with joy" in describing the ground troops reaction to the performance of Spooky birds near Attopo last night. They requested Major Jensen and his crew of Spooky 41 be sent back for a repeat performance tonight, using the same time and procedures. They feel one aircraft can provide all the support required for tonight. General Ma however says hold off on sending aircraft until further notice. He will be in Attopo today and will evaluate the requirements for tonight and advise.
And here is the rest of what I wrote:

And now, after all these years, I want to tell you about this experiment that we conducted in the mid-1970s. We were trying to test the hypothesis that...
show up very very good; I think even better than in the daytime. The main thing the scope has developed for me, is that it picks up beams of light on the ground. Even a small beam of light on the ground comes up much like a spotlight. Magnifies it. The co-pilot mentioned spotting many campfires - these were big campfires that everyone on the crew could see, and you could tell they were campfires. But looking through the scope, you could see ten times as many small campfires. Very very minute and detailed, but you look with the naked eye you couldn’t see, and they were among the trees and all. This thing takes a very very small amount of light and picks it up and I believe it’s going to be very effective in road reconn work, catching trucks with their - what do you call those lights - headlight lights or blackout lights on - even if they’ve got a light inside the cab on, it’ll pick this up. Just any kind of light at all, it really magnifies it, I think this is where it’s going to show its greatest effectiveness. I think with a few modifications, working in coordination with the AC, if some techniques and procedures are set up it ought to be great. I suggest that so far, it hasn’t really been tested that much - nobody’s got a lot of time with the scope, or used it that much, in a tactical operation. It might be a good idea to set up some kind of an evaluation program in an actual usage situation, to find out how it can be used most effectively, and possibly a few suggestions from the people who are using it, come out with a real good program, makes it a real good item to work with the gun system, possibly even use in other aircraft. Colonel Carter (question: “How is the field of vision with the scope? Is it adequate?”) I think probably it is. Sort of like standard back by the back door and looking out, and your vision is probably a 150 or so degrees, and any movement,
The following is a transcript of a taped interview between Captain Melvin P. Porter, CHIEC Team SEA, and Captain Benn H. Witterman, tape extract, extracted 11 March 1966.

"I'm Captain Witterman and I just returned from a mission down at Attopeu, Laos, and I believe we saw and photographed some rather interesting stuff...The likes of which I haven't seen in any publication in the last six months or so. It all started yesterday which is the 4th of March (66)...0530 in the morning, I had just gotten up and I had scheduled myself and Captain Coel for the first mission in the morning...and about that time we got a call from "Straw Tick" here, and they told us they wanted to send two airplanes down to Attopeu, and I didn't know where it was so they gave me the coordinates, and he said he'd like to have us take off by six o'clock, and well, we did the best we could and got off at a quarter to seven, and two hours and forty minutes later we were in Attopeu, and it's quite a trip, believe me. So, we landed there and were met by Captain Roy Dalton, and an intelligence type named Al Schenkel, and I guess they were serving the role of advisor there. Well, the situation was that there were two or three battalions of friendly troops deployed around the airstrip, and they had been under siege by an unknown size Viet Minh battalion. We had estimates of all the way from one battalion to ten battalions at one time. (Question: Viet Minh?) Captain Witterman: Viet Minh, yes sir. (Question: How did they know that?) Captain Witterman: They didn't elaborate. They just said Viet Minh. (Unreadable question from the background) Captain Witterman: They'd had contact with them the day before and 60 friendly troops had been killed and everybody was...the morale of the friendly troops was extremely low - as a matter of fact they had bugged out of their positions, and in the area when we flew over it later you could see their field packs and...
for it. I think - dollar-wise - even if you discount the tactical
advantages we'd gain, should sell itself.
device which you could look at night - telescopic type thing - that you could
look at night with some magnification, some light intensity device, to see
things on the ground. This particular scope had been tried by some Forward
Air Controllers in Vietnam, but had received 'unfavorable' criticism about its
use. It just wasn't working for the Forward Air Controllers in South Vietnam.
And, I felt that there was still an application for this thing, and I wanted
to give it a go - wanted to try it, fairly and honestly. And hopefully come
up with some sort of an angle, or use, a little technique that could be used
up here to spot trucks on the LOCs. So, I got on down to Saigon and made con-
tact at JRATA Joint Research and Testing Agency - at the Air Force test unit
at JRATA - to talk with Colonel Frank Fisher down there - the Air Force repre-
sentative, to borrow one of these. Well, Frank wasn't in, there was only one
Air Force man in that I was able to talk with, and he didn't have one, but
he located an Army Lieutenant Colonel by the name of Kennedy. I apparently
had an honest face, because he very willingly, after I explained what I wanted
it for, very willingly gave it to me on a hand receipt - it costs only $2500 -
and he was willing to sign it over to me, and gave me a kit with a spare
battery, and off I went.

So I brought this back up to Udorn and had the idea of checking it out
first in an O1E - or the O1F, we have at Nakhon Phanom - this I did with Major
Skinner, who is a very qualified Forward Air Controller from the old Rung Sat
area - south of Saigon - whom I had great confidence in. He used the scope,
but it so happened on the night that he used the scope, out of Nakhon Phanom,
that he had an overcast, indeed there was no light, on the ground. As a result,
he could see very little. But he explained to me that it was a completely
black, void, night and he didn't think it was a fair test. He further indicated
that it was difficult for the Forward Air Controller in the C-47 to operate, with this scope, because of the smallness, and the airplane's not too stable, and the restrictions you have in the airplane.

At this time I decided that the open door of the C-47 would be a better place to do this. So we started using the open door of the C-47, with an experienced man in the back, looking through the scope down at the ground. And we initially encountered some rather encouraging reports from the C-47 people that, yes, indeed they could see somethings on the roads, and could see the trees and see the road itself.

But the real test came on this particular 4th of March, down at Attopeu. And for this occasion, I made sure that Major Jensen - AC-47 pilot - took the scope when he went on down because this was in protection of a city that was more or less 'open', with rice paddies and open areas around it, as opposed to the complete jungle cover that exists east of Nakhon Phanom. I have confidence in Jensen. Jensen's a fighter pilot from the Korean War days - an F-86 pilot, motivated, enthusiastic, a knowledge of gunnery, a knowledge of sighting.

He left for Attopeu in response, actually, to General Ma's request that for the past few days we'd been giving them close air support - and he felt that this night that Attopeu was coming under serious threat. So we launched two AC-47s, one covering the first part of the night, and the second covering the last half of the night - Jensen, as the aircraft commander of the first one. Now the airstrikes had been conducted with the Forward Air Controllers furnished out of Nakhon Phanom. One of them that I spoke with had indeed conducted some air strikes in the vicinity of Attopeu in the last two days, and had, that same afternoon done a very thorough job of visual reconnaissance
immediately east of Attopen and in his words, he said, 'I would have bet twenty bucks there wasn't anybody there.' He said, 'I put some air strikes in certain suspect areas, but I'd bet there wasn't anybody there.'

So, Jensen arrived on the scene just after dark, no lights on the airplane, and he eased around awhile. And he and I had talked this thing over, about having one - either the pilot or the other pilot - the co-pilot - or the navigator in the back door with the scopes, doing the searching for him. And then, you'd just have to play it by ear from that point. Sort of 'talk him in'.

Well, shortly after arriving there, after dark, the navigator in the back and located, at one point, approximately 200 troops crossing an open area. He coached Jensen into the - into shooting at them, without using any flares. And again, another instance, a hundred and fifty, and again, about a hundred troops moving into an area. Jensen fired - in the dark - on the instructions of the navigator. Sometimes he would talk to him about a particular landmark that was visible under the moonlight, to Jensen, and other times he'd talk in terms of 'steepen the bank up', or 'roll it out a little' or 'make a ten degree turn to the left' or 'take up a heading of so-and-so'. Just whenever the circumstance demanded, the navigator was able to translate into usable instructions, to the pilot. And in many cases during the attack the guns were jamming, and they were working frantically to clear the gun jams so they could continue to shoot.

The next morning, the pictures that were taken by the Forward Air Controller, Captain Witterman, attest to the accuracy and the ability of the man in the back to translate into usable instructions what he sees. And indeed they counted some 52 bodies in the open! They made photographs of them. I don't think
we have any idea - at this time - how many more they killed in the wooded area, or in a pagoda area that they strafed [by] Lao Army direction.

But, the airplane was sent down at the request of General Ma. He was indeed worried about that Attopeu might fall. The morale was down, refugees were on the move. It looked as though Attopeu would be taken within the next couple of days.

One of these questions speaks about 'Has there been any comment in regards to the AC-47 action over Attopeu?' The only one I've read was in a wire from the AIRA, talking in terms of 'deliriously happy' about the results of the AC-47 down there. In fact, we were all a little bit surprised when, the following night, when General Ma said, 'No, there's no need in sending the AC-47 back there.' We all thought, 'Well, I don't understand this.' But now it's apparent that this mission of these two AC-47s that night literally broke the back of the attacking enemy force, to such an extent that they completely withdrew, and today, the friendly troops have moved back into the area to the east of Attopeu as a result of this action. The Ambassador has seen the pictures, as has the Air Attaché, and he's - I don't recall any specific comment that he made, and I was at a meeting here recently, which was attended by the Ambassador from Laos as well as the Ambassador from Thailand, as well as General Westmoreland, and General Moore. And, these colored slides were shown which show this graphic evidence of the - uh - the bodies that were not hauled away. The 52, I'd better clarify the point, were bodies that had been left there, and there was much evidence that other bodies had been taken away, in the usual habit and style that the VC have of trying to remove all their dead, and certainly all the rifles and arms that they had carried.

Now this question is, 'Has this created a new concept for night operations?'
Well, in talking to Captain Porter, I told him that it was more or less of a new idea, but he insists that he thinks it is a new concept. But, I think it would enable us - if we took this idea and refined it more - it would enable us to have night surveillance in a passive manner, and could watch the roads and the LOCs, and either attack them with the AC-47 or call in airstrikes on these targets. And as the - let's say the F-4s - are called in, as they approach within a few miles of the area, the AC-47 could light the target with a flare, the fighters make an immediate strike on it, and thus have that element of surprise that is ordinarily lacking in night support where you have to throw out many many flares. But the idea of being able to see these people at night, and then making an operational decision is a fair 'breakthrough'. The VC from South Vietnam use darkness as a very strong advantage on their part, and if we are able to take this particular cover away from them by having this passive piece of equipment to detect the movement on the ground, then I think that we'll make things that much more difficult for them. I can see that this concept could very very readily be applied 'In-Country' in South Vietnam, as a protection of outposts. And this is really what the AC-47 has as its mission in South Vietnam, outpost protection. In the IV Corps, and III Corps area, they're on night alert, airborne alert. Ready to respond instantly to any outpost under attack, and in fact they have great numbers of outpost that are attacked every night, generally in the III and IV Corps, more particularly in IV Corps. This system would afford them the capability of detecting, and locating, the force that is attacking the outpost.

Let's see, this says, 'What are the chances for good follow-up with it?' I think that being able to locate, seeing what's on the ground, once a strike
is made by the fighters it essentially marks the target - the bombs and rockets. And an airplane flying high, with an improved version of the Starscope, could continue to coach these people in, FAC the strikes in, drop additional flares, and continue the operation chasing the intruders even after they try to move out, say in sampans or across open fields. I think there is much capability.

"The modifications suggested by the crew for better in-flight communications?" Well, I don't think there's too much to be done, other than a helmet and a microphone, but I can see that a seat could be devised for individual in the open door, where he's strapped down, tied in, and perhaps the Starscope on some kind of gimbal arrangement, where he sits looking out the open door, and at one position the Starscope - as he's sighting and maneuvering it around - would fall into a detent position. This detent position would be the same as harmonization of the guns and gunsight of the airplane. If a further arrangement of a foot-pedal, a trigger, so that the man in the back door could alternately fire the guns. That is he could fire those or fire on command to the pilot in front, we could have some better sighting and firing arrangement that way. And you could swap positions, so that, say you've got three pilots aboard, they could take turns this way. Sighting through this thing is sometimes tiring on the eyes, and you could - they could be relieved, and I think you'd have a fresher approach each time a new man went on the scope. You still need to have a man on the right side up front, to act as a safety pilot, flying instruments because the man on the left side is trying to follow instructions and perhaps looking out the left window there when the strafing's going on. And I guess he could get into problems of vertigo - I guess we call it now 'spatial disorientation' - and you need that man on the right side to act as a safety
pilot. There was considerable jamming of the guns during this particular encounter and I feel that much improvement can be made in that regard.

And this question - the next question - 'Does it fit well into the TACC concept?' I think 'yes' is the answer to this. In particular, in Korea, we had very poor night operation. We did some very small fighter - fighter bomber effort at night, with the 8th Wing. Otherwise, the B-26s and the B-29s were about all we used, in Korea during the Korean War. And I think that this would enable us to - particularly in a counter-insurgency operation - to keep people on surveillance above the enemy and their logistics lines, and cause them to stop movement 'period' for fear of being brought under air attack.

Next question, 'Is it responsive enough to spread out into an air alert posture as opposed to pre-planned missions, or to be effective for road recon, area recon, etcetera?' Well, I think this is two different problems.

The case in the northern Panhandle of Laos, it should be preplanned to act as a surveillance and attack aircraft, running the roads and at the same time making contact with the various roadwatch teams, to correlate the information they see from the ground, into an immediate reaction on that information and destroying trucks or personnel that are moving.

I think we were talking about whether a pre-planned or alert. We were speaking about; that we could have a pre-planned air surveillance of a road net, and still be responsive to intelligence information that might come in with regard to movement along the LOCs. And I think it would have a very important application, as I said back in the tape at another point; in the defense of outposts in South Vietnam, particularly where you could indeed respond to an immediate air requests. Where you had airborne alert, and
go on out to the locale, make contact with the ground, and seek out with the scope and find the people and bring action against them.

Now, the scope, in addition to intensifying light, is capable of picking up infra-red. So that, say, a mortar tube had been firing, and firing at an outpost, and it's located out in the bush somewhere. And that mortar tube gets hot, or a gun gets hot; this would be picked up, even though there's no light down there at all. Just the heat from that mortar tube would be visible in the scope. Perhaps it might even give enough light off to enable you to see the crew around it. It's rather an amazing piece of equipment. And I understand - and I haven't looked at it in reference to a river, but - to look down at a river at night with this scope, there is enough reflection, as a result of the mirror effect of the river, so that sampans are very easily seen.

This next card has some statements. One: 'I feel right now that the study on Attopeu will probably emphasize the following points, in whichever order they most naturally fall.' The first one: 'The responsiveness of air support, when nothing else but massive injections of ground troops would do, to a ground situation.' Well this [Attopeu] was a classic example. There were allegedly about eight companies of VC...(Porter: In background, said, 'Battalions')...battalions? I think it was probably more like eight companies - eight battalions would be, 24-2500 people. At any rate, I think the odds were something like eight to two, four to one, some such odds, and it would have required a massive injection of ground troops to save this day. Unless air was available and on the spot - and air was available. And, I can recall in South Vietnam a great number of occasions when - uh - the 1st Cav, with one of their battalions, or two of their battalions, faced a battalion of VC and in one overnight action,
if they got 30 VC they thought it was a very successful engagement. And in this case, I think conservatively, there were 200 VC killed. Very conservative, and broke the back of the VC, and the odds were completely against the friendly Laotians in this case. Without air, there's no doubt about it, the Laotians would have been overrun and the place occupied. It was important because it sits astraddle of a fairly important tributary of the Mekong River, that ends up in the upper highlands of II Corps. It would have offered a good means of moving supplies on into the area above Kontum. And - uh - you could have seen additional action in that area - additional pressure being put upon northern II Corps by the VC. The real evaluation of this thing - in terms of the enemy versus the friendly - was that here we have conservatively 800 enemy troops being opposed by a 30-year-old airplane with six men and three machine guns, and they literally decimated the capability of those 800 people both physically and - uh - the morale, with no losses to themselves at all. Six against 800. Pretty good odds, with pretty good results.

'The professionalism of the aircrew involved, and their experience.' As I said previously in the tape, I have great confidence in this major-fight pilot by the name of Jensen. And the confidence really stems from my knowledge of what he did and what he was in the Korean War. I know that he was motivated from the very job he had, flying F-86s in the Korean War. And - he, although flying a tour in F-86s where you're dependant a great deal upon yourself and upon your wing man, had organised and trained this C-47 crew as one integrated operating outfit. He said he hadn't had such an experience before, of having to work with such a large number of people as a team, but I think the results attest to the fact that this team did work, and worked well. With the man in
the back door giving directions, and the man in the left seat following them, and the man in the right seat acting as a safety pilot, and the armorers and the engineer and crew chief working frantically over the guns to keep them functioning. Sometimes they had to almost rebuild the entire gun to get it back operating again. But, using the great amount of ingenuity, calling upon experience and coming up with results that were rather revolutionary in this kind of warfare.

I think that we may have come across - come upon - a system of operating here that may have a rather startling effect on counterinsurgency. And the next question fits into that; 'The unique capability of the weapons system - AC-47-Minigun-Starscope.' It doesn't have to be the C-47, it could be any type of airplane that is similar in capability - that is, in terms of endurance, simplicity, in size, capacity. And the minigun - it's not necessary to be a minigun, but it affords in three small guns the capability of producing as much firepower as ten old .30 caliber machine guns were able to. And the Starscope can be improved upon, and its position in the airplane with relationship to the boresight and harmonization of the guns.

There's one thing I wish we had done in this particular instance, and that was - I think we should have picked up a couple of these bodies - put them on ice. Ice them down and do some pathology on them, and determine whether we overkilled these people or not. And the next time this opportunity comes along, we're going to - if at all possible - get a - even a chopper from rescue - on the ground to police up one or two bodies, so as to do some studying, as to what exactly that weapon does when it hits these people. We may be able to improve the weapon - the projectile - based upon that. Maybe we're overkilling them;
maybe we're underkilling the... But I think we need to research this particular area. Also, it appears now that we have too many tracers in the system, for using the Stalkscope. The navigator spoke of being blinded occasionally by the tracers going out and seeing them through the scope.

'Live we saved by using air instead of ground.' I think this is obvious; I think this is the essence of Tactical Air Power, in the close support and interdiction role. That we can indeed destroy from air instead of losing American lives on the ground. I think the whole essence of the U.S. operation is not to fight a war of attrition - infantry man versus infantry man - but to let the airpower destroy the enemy once the ground had identified them and has put his finger on it; always keeping contact, but with a long enough arm so that we can give close air support and destroy the enemy. To do this, the ground people have to be mobile, and that includes their so-called artillery. It would have to be much more mobile than it is, to enable them to move with the enemy both forward and backwards. To float with them, keep in contact as the enemy retreats, or fall back and keep in contact as the enemy exerts too much pressure on them, but always using air power to deliver the mail. Because we're the ones in position to do this.

I think this then is the real essence of close air support; to kill the enemy, at the same time saving American lives. The real proof of the pudding is protecting American lives - not necessarily killing the enemy - but the object is to save American lives, with the by-product being killing the enemy. And air power, not necessarily can do it cheaper - but this is assuming that we can attach a price to human life - an American life - which I find very difficult. It's a unique thing. You can't reproduce another American life exactly like
the one that was lost, and - uh - it's irreplaceable. So, the object is to save the Americans; our object while in doing it is to kill the enemy.

As far as future concept - or the future of the concept - I think that we've only begun to explore the capability of the American scientist to come up with some kind of a light-intensifier. Perhaps we can furnish light from the airplane, i.e. active infra-red illumination of the ground with a - some kind of a Starescope affair or a light scope that will then look at what you see on the ground. Perhaps infra-red illumination from the airplane - large lights under it - can be of such a frequency that - uh - would be very very difficult for the human eye to detect it. And, I know right now we have a C-123 with batteries of lights under it, that from 12,000 feet of altitude, will illuminate an area as well as one of the modern flares, and will do it on a continuing basis. And getting down to a lower altitude it's just exactly like daylight under where the 123 flies. But I don't think we've even challenged our scientists with this sort of an idea. For years they've had 'sniper-scopes'. Most of them have operated in the infra-red spectrum. But they've always been more or less a - a novelty, rather than something that we truly need, taking care of the long night hours. And if we can deny the enemy the use of darkness - of cover - and at the same time have the capability of destroying him at night, I think we'll have a system that will make interdiction truly something that will deny the enemy movement, and thereby achieve the goals of shopping him off from his supply and then shopping him up where he is. And with that, that's about all I've got to say in regard to these cards. Now, if you have any conversation, we can continue from this point.
The following is a transcript of a taped interview between Captain Malvin P. Porter, 5618 Team 81A, and the crew of Spooky 41, Tape extract, extracted 11 March 1966.

"As Major Jensen, Aircraft Commander on Spooky 41." "I'm Captain McLean, I'm the Co-Pilot on the aircraft." "Stilf Thompson, Navigator on Spooky 41." "Sergeant Lack, Flight Engineer." "Sergeant Colson, Gunner." "Sergeant Preston, Loadmaster."

(Major Jensen speaks) The mission actually began for us about 1330 on 4 March 1966. The commander, here at Nakhon, of the 4th Air Commando Squadron came in and announced that we had a special mission for that day, and we had a 1330 briefing by Colonel Carter [Director of Operations at 2AD/1AF Thailand, Nakhon]. We got the crew together and proceeded over to TACO where Colonel Carter gave us a very thorough briefing of the tactical situation, he briefed my crew, and Captain Farr and his crew, who was going to fly the second spooky aircraft. After the briefing I obtained Colonel Magurstrom's starlite scope. In fact, I stood by until we could locate the scope, and this delayed my take-off about 20 minutes. But, subsequent events of the evening proved that those 20 minutes were well worth being spent, waiting for it. We took off at 1530 and proceeded to Savannahhot, over in Laos. We landed there at 1705, and we were met by quite an impressive party. A Captain Ryan, USAF, and General Ho, of the Laos Air Force. We proceeded up to the General's headquarters where he gave us a very thorough briefing, very similar to the one we had obtained from Colonel Carter. Incidentally, while we were in the area, just as we deployed, Captain Ryan and General Ho briefed us that there was a Russian Air Attack, there, who was taking pictures, and it was very fortunate..."
out, because, there's a huge drop right on the lip of the runway, and then there's a huge rise down the road where we landed.

To the left of the runway, there are two huge boulders, the one closest to the road is a little smaller than the other. Just off the road to the left there is a little house or barn, or something similar.

The road to the left of the runway is the one that leads to the airport's control tower. The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's maintenance area.

To the right of the runway there is a small house or building, possibly a control tower.

The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's main entrance.

The road to the left of the runway leads to the airport's main exit.

The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's main parking area.

The road to the left of the runway leads to the airport's main hangar.

The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's main terminal.

The road to the left of the runway leads to the airport's main runway.

The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's main taxiway.

The road to the left of the runway leads to the airport's main runway parking area.

The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's main runway maintenance area.

The road to the left of the runway leads to the airport's main runway control tower.

The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's main runway maintenance area.

The road to the left of the runway leads to the airport's main runway parking area.

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The road to the right of the runway leads to the airport's main runway maintenance area.
were a little anxious that I get over that. We were not there by five Americans and a quite a few Laos Air Force, and mostly Laos Army Officers. There was a Captain Sebenkel, and Captain Dalton of the Air Force. A Colonel Turner of the Army - U.S. Army - and then there were five other Americans - I didn't get their names. Among the Army Colonels [Laos] there was the Regional Field Commander. I set up a security around my aircraft - had all my personnel get out their M-16s, and immediately set up a guard around the aircraft, and Captain Dalton requested that we take the guards away, store all our weapons, and give the impression that we were completely satisfied with the security that they could furnish our forces, our aircraft. With reluctance, but feeling that this was the diplomatic thing to do, we did store all our weapons on the aircraft. My entire crew got into two jeeps; again this was at the request of one of the Air Force Captains there, and we proceeded up to the land office which was taken over as the Laos Army Command Post. Just prior to our leaving the aircraft area, I double checked that we had adequate Laos guards around our airplane. I was a little nervous about leaving the airplane sitting there, but again, it seemed like the proper thing to do at the time, especially since we'd been requested to do it. We received a very, very detailed and up-to-the-minute briefing by several Laos Army Officers. They outlined the exact positions of the friendly forces, the exact front as they knew it of the Viet Cong - and they called them Viet Cong. They said they'd come in from Vietnam, that they'd been badly beat up over there, that they'd come back into Laos to reorganize, re-equip and retrain, that they'd gathered quite a few new troops. I'm not sure how they'd enlisted them, but they had a lot of new recruits that they were training. Apparently it was a two-pronged effort - they were giving
then field training under combat conditions without having the Air Force bom-
ing them up too much, that they were enjoying themselves at night because
things were real fun - the Air Force wasn't hitting them at night, and they
hoped that we could surprise them. They also had another objective - they were
in there to secure the area at Attapan, to use the tributaries of the Nakung
to take supplies down through Cambodia to Southern Laos and the delta area.
As an alternate supply route, down into South Vietnam. So, it seemed like a
very critical situation. They told us they (VC) had upwards of 3,600 men there,
with only 1,600 friendlies defending Attapan. It was apparent to me that the
Laos Army personnel were quite nervous about the situation and not too happy.
They seemed pleased that we were there. I think the impression we made by
just landing, showing them that we weren't worried, did a lot of good for
their morale, showed them that we were interested. Incidentally just prior
to our take off, we took the colonels out and showed them the aircraft, de-
scribed the gun, and our tremendous fire power. Also we showed them our star-
lite scopes. I think that impressed them more than the weapon. They under-
stood weapons, but to be able to see in the dark, that really impressed them.
At this briefing - as I said it was quite detailed - they had a one-to-five-
one to fifty thousand scale map - where they had all the forces deployed - wh...n
actually worked out the coordination with the stereoscope between the pilot, yourself, and the navigator in the back of the airplane who is looking through the scope."

Maj. Jensen: Well, the navigator, when he would identify an item on the ground, he would call me and request immediately the heading of the aircraft; and we're normally in a left-hand orbit, this would give him a frame of reference on the compass. Then he could give me directions on the clock positions of the aircraft, compass headings, he'd triangulate from fixes on the ground that I, as pilot sitting in the left seat could see, and well, he just did a fantastic job — he was my eyes and I think only once all night long did he have to correct the fire, because he did such an effective job of guiding us in on the target. Actually, you had to use a great deal of imagination at times, but it worked out real well. (To the navigator) Have you got any comments on that, Joe? Navigator: The target area was pretty easy to describe because you had three main factors, the town, which is a very easy reference point; you had numerous rice paddies which were of different sizes and shapes; and you had the wooded areas, all three of these contrasted quite easily, and it was very easy to give references on the clock position to the aircraft commander just by describing the different type of area such as rice paddy or large wooded area. We had about six or seven hours on a previous mission, doing some read room work, using clock system, coordinating between myself and the aircraft commander using the stereoscope. And actually it sort of falls into place real quickly. It's a real simple system, works out real well. I think it's going to be real effective." Maj. Jensen: Incidentally, we'd also coordinated in advance on the ground as to terminology to be used, particularly in references to distances from the aircraft. We always
I'm alive here. In fact, I'm positive, that some 2,000 rangers...
...
to fire on the pagoda, and we immediately gave up firing on the road, and proceeded over to the pagoda and expended some 3000 rounds into the pagoda. And this pagoda, incidentally, was well within the area controlled by the Viet Cong. Understand that the FAC was unable to observe any bodies in this area, and that doesn't surprise me a bit, because since they control this area so well, they would have removed any of the dead or wounded, or at least hidden them from aerial observation. The reason the bodies were observed in that open rice field was that that was no-man's-land, and spooky 43, that came in behind, they kept firing all through the area that night, out into the forest areas and up the different roads, and I'm sure that, between the two aircraft, that kept them interested in survival, and not too much interested in going out into the no-man's-land area where they'd already been mopped once, to bring in their dead troops. I've said that we had many gun malfunctions - I'd say we had between 15 and 18 major gun malfunctions, with innumerable minor malfunctions which were corrected within a matter of a minute or two. The major gun malfunctions took ten, 15, and 20 minutes, apiece. We had three guns on the aircraft, and by the end of the mission we had no gun operational. At one time we had all three guns out, and our gunners were doing a magnificent job in the rear, reasoning at least one gun out of those three. During this period we went back over the corrected area where the troops had first retreated to, and dropped four flares. This was only for the psychological purposes and nothing else, because we found that the star scoope was more effective than the flares were. But there's quite a psychological effect by having the area illuminated with flares. After the guns were repaired we
proceeded to the east end of town to two other targets that had been outlined for us. We fired up along a road and a dry creek bed. In one of these target areas we received another secondary explosion - there was quite a flash with this one - and again, white billowy smoke. We could not identify any ground fire; we could not observe any moving targets, with our stereoscope in this area, but we did - as I indicated - get a secondary explosion and the smoke out of that. Sometime during this period of operation - oh I'd say the last half hour or so - we developed electrical troubles in the aircraft. I don't want to say that I ignored them, hoping they'd go away, but I felt that the effectiveness of our weapons system warranted that we stay on target as long as we had a serviceable aircraft, as long as we had guns that would work. I think that we managed to milk more out of these guns than - than the manufacturer intended, because some of the parts that we put in to make these guns fire the last 3000 rounds never came out of general electric. They came out of a tool box, there's a couple of pieces we used instead of pins that had been designed by S.E., that we got 3000 more rounds out of the guns before we ran out of pins. We departed the area at 2235. Our guns were definitely out of commission. We had expended 13,500 rounds. Unfortunately we still had 12,000 rounds left, and I was kind of sick about that. We had 42 flares. I wished I hadn't even taken off with them. On this mission I didn't need them. We proceeded to them, where we landed in an emergency condition - actually, we declared an emergency, because if we had a complete electrical failure, which I anticipated I wanted somebody to know that I was coming in without lights and communications. We flew back about half the way with all electricity off, using flashlights. If it had been anything besides the
gooneybird, with its vacuum instruments, attitude gyro, etc. I think we'd have been in serious trouble, but being the goon, real reliable aircraft, having vacuum instruments, as long as the co-pilot quite shining the flashlight in my eyeballs, and on the instruments, we maintained a good heading and good altitude. I was relieved though to see the Mekong River came along and knew that I was over Thailand instead of over Laos.

Some of the things, reapplying, because the guns were malfunctioning on us, we lost a great deal of surprise - a factor that's so important. Colonel Hagerstrom: "I think if you could explain a little bit, just what's involved when the guns malfunction, to what extent you can repair them, and what is involved in those repairs that you carry out in flight, I think it would help."

Jennc: Well, I have Sergeant Celstein, Sergeant Madison, explain this part of it - in general though we have two gun-pods on this aircraft. It's designed for three guns - we have only two mounted on the aircraft. We carried with us, however, a spare gun and a spare feeder, hoping that there'd be adequate parts to last out the whole mission and expand the full 25,000 rounds that we had on board. It was from the spare feeder and the spare gun that most of the parts were obtained to correct the malfunctions, however, Madison went into almost depot-level type of maintenance, when he was in the rear of that aircraft, and I'd like him to explain just what he did.

Madison: I'm Sergeant Madison, gunner on the aircraft. In our first period of fire, we put one complete pod into the area. On our second - when we put the second pod into it, we got one burst out of it and sheared a rotor pin. ***He goes on with technical explanation of the equipment***

Hagerstrom: "What is the general reason for - is this extent of mal-