



Nighthawks

Greetings fellow Nighthawks! With this being the final newsletter of this SFA administration, I would like to recognize the personnel and friends that have made this administration a success. They have worked long and hard on



Walker. He is always receptive to change and fluctuating deadlines (sometimes with flax) but always accomplishes his tasks on time. I cannot begin to convey the talent he processes. Good managers are available throughout the industry but it will be very difficult to find

their own time to bring all of this to you. I hope you have appreciated their efforts. Thank you for all of your support and hope to see you at reunion.

We hope that you have enjoyed the fabulous work that our Communications Director, Mr. Jay Tweed has accomplished by putting such an informative publication together for the past 6 years. Jay volunteered to help out for the 20th reunion and then we coerced him into staying for the duration of this administration. Thank you, Jay, for a great job. Next I would like to thank our SFA Secretary/Treasurer and also the 20th and 25th year Reunion Business Manager, Ms. Sherrie Bouché. Sherrie has managed to balance her responsibility as a Department Manager for Lockheed Martin, Secretary/Treasurer for the SFA and Business Manager for the reunion, all while successfully keeping me out of jail, which is not an easy task. Thanks Sherrie for a fantastic and commendable effort over the past 6 years - no, actually it has been 7 years, because Sherrie was also on the planning committee for the Flight Test celebration (Platinum Nighthawk) in Palmdale in 2001.

The next individual is our Graphics Director Mr. Dave Walker. Imagine every piece of artwork including invitations, photos, banners, signage, and logos, being developed by one person. One person of immeasurable artistic talent and that is Dave

anyone with his artistic talent and capability. Thanks Dave for all of your years of support.

Next I would like to thank our Webmasters Keith Pedersen and Tammy Ward for their extraordinary efforts to keep the website up and running. It is amazing to watch people make such a complex job look so easy. Keith developed the website in 2001, and continued to work on it until 2006, when his job no longer afforded him the opportunity of spare time. When Keith could no longer support the effort, Tammy stepped in. The transition was flawless... and for that we are forever grateful.

I would personally like to thank Jan Allison, who has been my eyes and ears and point of contact in Palmdale. She has made my job much easier by allowing me to rely on her and not have to travel back and forth.

Next is the reunion committee - Bill Lake as our returning Master of Ceremonies, Kat Smead for the Friday night Poolside function, Jan Allison, for the Saturday night banquet, George & Linda Garcia for the Golf tournament and the gentleman that has the toughest job of all, Alex Odekerken, for the hospitality suite. I also want to recognize the cast of volunteers that are there to support each and every function. The greatest thing about all of these people is that they accomplish all tasks on their own time and we should all be appreciative of

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SFA 2007 Reunion News

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this. Without their time and effort this reunion could not take place.

I would like to personally thank each and every one of them for a job well done.

Thank you all. It has been a pleasure.

David L. Wells 
President, Stealth Fighter Association

Fellow Nighthawks!

Below is the **Schedule of Events** for the **2007 Reunion**, June 21 thru 24 at Green Valley Ranch, Las Vegas. Facility maps, pictures and amenities can be found at:

<http://www.greenvalleyranchresort.com/>

The SFA WEB site is open for registration at:

www.f117reunion.org

Please register ASAP as we must close out Golf by June 6th. If you prefer to use regular mail, a copy of the registration form is on the next page.

Schedule of Reunion Events

| <i>Day & Date</i> | <i>Time</i> | <i>Activity</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Thursday 6/21/07 | 3:00 P.M. – 10:00 P.M. | Event Registration / Information Desk Open |
| | 6:30 P.M. – 12:00 A.M. | Hospitality Suites Open |
| Friday 6/22/07 | 6:00 A.M. | Golf Course / Transportation Bus Pickup |
| | 6:30 A.M. | Registration at Revere Anthem Golf Club |
| | 7:00 A.M. | Golf Tournament Shotgun Start |
| | 12:00 P.M. – 6:30 P.M. | Event Registration / Information Desk Open |
| | 12:00 P.M. – 6:30 P.M. | Hospitality Suites Open |
| | 7:00 P.M. – 12:00 A.M. | Event Registration / Information Desk Open |
| | 7:00 P.M. – 12:00 A.M. | Poolside Buffet at Whiskey Beach Cafe |
| Saturday 6/23/07 | 12:00 A.M. – 2:00 A.M. | Hospitality Suites Open |
| | 9:00 A.M. – 5:30 P.M. | Event Registration / Information Desk Open |
| | 10:00 A.M. – 11:30 A.M. | Stealth Fighter Association Business Meeting |
| | 12:00 P.M. – 4:30 P.M. | Hospitality Suites Open |
| | 5:30 P.M. | Reception Cocktails / Grand Ballroom Foyer |
| | 6:30 P.M. | Dinner / Green Valley Ranch Grand Ballroom |
| Sunday 6/24/07 | 8:00 P.M. | SFA Program / Distinguished Guest Speaker |
| | 10:00 P.M.–12:00 A.M. | Entertainment / Dancing |
| | 11:00 A.M. – 2:00 A.M. | Hospitality Suites Open |
| | A.M. | Meet with Friends “On Your Own” |

SFA Board of Directors

2002-2007

Dave Wells, President

Art Weyermuller, Vice President

Sherrie Bouché, Secretary/Treasurer

Mike Harris, Board Member

Doug Robinson, Board Member

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Tammy Ward

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SFA 2007 Reunion News (Continued)

25 YEARS OF THE NIGHTHAWK

Green Valley Ranch and Spa of Las Vegas at Henderson, Nevada
June 21 – June 24, 2007

First Name / Last Name _____

Bandit Number / Nickname _____ Affiliation _____

Street _____

City / State / Zip _____

Home Phone () _____ Office Phone () _____

E-Mail Address _____ Fax No. () _____

Dress Code: Poolside Buffet Party (Friday 6/22) is Cocktail / Casual Dress.
Reunion Banquet (Saturday 6/23) is Coat & Tie.

| EVENTS | Fri 6/22 Golf Match | Fri 6/22 Poolside Party | Sat 6/23 Reunion Banquet | Stealth Fighter Assoc. Dues | |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Cost per Person | \$90.00 <small>Reserve by 5/7/07</small> | \$42.00 <small>No Host Bar</small> | \$55.00 <small>No Host Bar</small> | \$25.00 | Total |
| SFA Member's Name | | | | \$25.00 | |
| Guest 1 | | | | | |
| Guest 2 | | | | | |
| Guest 3 | | | | | |
| Guest 4 | | | | | |

GRAND TOTAL \$ _____ .00

For your convenience, you can register on-line at www.fl17reunion.org
and click on the PayPal link or you can fill out form completely and send checks to:
Stealth Fighter Association, P.O. Box 902017, Palmdale, CA 93590

SFA 2007 Reunion News (Continued)

The SFA 2007 Business meeting is scheduled for Saturday, June 23 at 11:00 AM in the Estancia Room "D" Meeting room.

Items to be discussed include:

- 10:00 - Opening remarks and review of agenda by Dave Wells, President
- 10:10 - Review of financial status and changes to the SFA bylaws by Sherrie Bouché Secretary / Treasurer
- 10:15 - Current Membership Status
- 10:20 - Nomination of new Officers
- 10:30 - Election of new Officers
- 10:50 - Group Discussion
- 11:30 - Meeting Adjourn

Every member should plan to attend and participate in the discussions about the future of the SFA. The Board and the *membership* needs to determine what the future of the SFA will be.

Your participation in the business meeting will help assure a healthy organization with a clear path to the future.

Nominations for all positions will be accepted at the Business meeting, so please plan to attend.

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary / Treasurer
- Board Member
- Board Member

Missing Members

Our "LOST" Members —Please help to find them!!! Contact them and tell them about the reunion.

Robert Aguilar, Jr., Paul Amidon, Robert Anderson, Sam Archuleta, Jonathan Bachman, Arthur Baker, James Bannwart, Rochelle Barash, Ralph Barbee, Charles Barton, Rich Beavers, John Behymer, Serge Belanger, Gregory Beroldi, Raymond Bivans, Bob Bledsoe, Brent Bogue, Michael Bondar, Matthew Bonner, George Borjon, Bruce Botkin, Ken Bowen, Franklin Bruner, Samuel Bustillos, Gregory Butler, Linda Butson, Brad Carlson, Mason Carpenter, Kelly Caudle, Michael Chester, Sr., Harold Ciancio, Bruce Clemmer, Terry Cobb, Robert Cody, Dawayne Coleman, Joe&Judy Cortez, Roni Cox, Roderick Cregier, Alan Crocker, Robert Crooks, Mike Crowley, Patrick Cullumber, Lola Davis, Daniel Decamp, David Degeest, John Engleking, Mitch Epstein, Roger Fasulkey, William Fox, David Francis, Chris Frangos, Donald Gerecke, John Gibbons, William Gore, Theodore Gray, William Gray, Edward Green, Richard Groesch, Charlie Hainline, Dale Hanner, Rex Harris, David Heberer, Mark Heikkinen, Lou Henrich, Marijo Higginbotham, Gerald Higgins, Lennis Higgins, Ellwood Hinmani, V, Terence Hofer, A. Hollins, Cary Howard, Gill Howie, Kenneth Huff, Doug Huntley, Richard Ingraham, Keith Isenock, Michael Jarnegan, Frank Jasinskis, Greg Jaspers, Nick Johnson, Tim Johnson, Sharon Jones, Leslie Jonkey, Dan Jordaniiii, Roderick Kallman, Lee Kitten, Rado Kovachevich, Jerome Lake, James Lee, Kevin Leek, Albert Lenox, Solomon Levingston, David Linn, Michael Mangus, Larry Mankey, Andrew Mann, Sam Martin, John Massar, Richard Matthews, Jack Mayo, Tony McCleery, Stephen McFarland, Robert Mcgaughey, Alistair Monkman, Jeff Moore, Glen Moorhead, Arthur Moss, Charles Nance, Richard New, James Olschlager, Daniel Ourada, Denys Overholser, James Petrie, Ian Phillips, Charles Pinney, Margo Prescott, Teresa Prezgay, Jerald Quarfot, Margo Quarrel, Joseph Ralston, Dean Richardson, Aaron Roberts, Richard Rodeman, Marc Rogers, Paul Rolland, Gary Rowe, Joel Rush, Arvilla Sample, Ralph Schneider, Donald Schramski, Cole Seckman, Sandra Seefeldt, Philip Senna, Richard Serkowski, Sandy Sharpe, Jack Shaw, Dale Shigenaga, Roger Shweid, Stanley Siefke, Mark Singleton, Joe Slupski, Stephen Smetzer, Bruce Smith, Joseph Smyth, Barbara Spavin, Kevin Sprayberry, John Stanley, Timothy Street, Willis Strickland, Asa Sudderth, Ronnie Suko, Jr., Pamela Sulack, Brian Sullivan, Arthur Thomas, Ronald Thomas, Judy Timko, Aaron Tomsich, Victor Tony, Victor Toy, Charles Treadway, Mark Trufant, Robert Umstead, Jess Vancleave, Russ Vieira, Lynn Welch, Timothy White, Jerold Willey, Bryan Wright, Wes Wyrick

F-117 Program

F-117 retirement bittersweet occasion

by Senior Airman Terri Barriere
49th Fighter Wing Public Affairs office
3/13/2007 - HAFB, N.M.

It was a bittersweet occasion for many members of Team Holloman as the first six F-117 Nighthawks made their final flight into retirement March 12. More than 500 spectators from Holloman and the Alamogordo community showed up to sign the jets and say their goodbyes.

“With the launch of these great aircraft today, the circle comes to a close - their service to our nation’s defense fulfilled, their mission accomplished and a job well done,” said Brig. Gen. David Goldfein, 49th Fighter Wing commander. “We send them today to their final resting place -- a home they are intimately familiar with -- their first, and only, home outside of Holloman, Tonopah Test Range, Nevada.” General Goldfein, the last bandit, will fly the first F-117 out of Holloman.

“This jet is part of an American success story,” he said. “We should never let something like that fade away unnoticed. We need to send it off with class and style.”

Once the jets arrive at Tonopah, the wings will be



removed and the jets will be stored in their original hangars. For those who maintained and flew them for so many years, that is the saddest part.

“It’s the end of one era and the start of a new,” said Master Sgt. Michael Gann, 49th Fighter Wing Safety office. Sergeant Gann is a former crew chief for the F-117 and said though he hates to see it go, he understands the need to move on and keep up with new technology.

Former Operations Group commander and Col. (retired) Klaus Klause said he doesn’t want them to go but he knows he has to. “I had a tear in my eye when I heard about the jets retiring,” he said. “This is a bittersweet day and even though my jet is deployed, I signed all six of these.”

The colonel said he will be thinking about the first time he flew an F-117 as the jets fly out today.

“These jets fly like any other aircraft, but they have so much more ‘magic’,” he said referring to the jets stealth technology.

Though today’s ceremony marks the end of an era, the legacy the six jets leave behind will continue to live on.

All six of the retiring jets have taken part in the three major conflicts that occurred during the program’s lifespan - Operations Desert Storm, Allied Force and Iraqi Freedom, and represent more than 14,000 F-117 sorties since the first was delivered to the Air Force in November 1982.

“The Nighthawk story is truly one of vision, guts, passion, heroism, defiance and incredible risk taking. A story both uniquely American and, I believe, uniquely Air Force,” said General Goldfein. “How appropriate that we, the Nighthawk Team responsible for writing the final chapter in this story, gather here together to send the first six Nighthawks off in style.”



The first six F-117A Nighthawks are prepared for their final flight before taking off to Tonopah Test Range, Nev., March 12. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class John Strong)

Bunyaps inactivate with honor

by Ms. Laura London

49th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

12/21/2006-HOLLOMAN AFB, N.M.

The Holloman community gathered in Hangar 301 for the 7th Fighter Squadron's inactivation ceremony Friday. Col. Jack Forsythe, 49th Operations Group commander, Lt. Col. Chris Knehans, 7th Fighter Squadron commander, and Mr. Greg Stephens, honorary commander of the 7th Fighter Squadron, spoke at the ceremony.

"This was a big day," Brig. Gen. David Goldfein, 49th Fighter Wing commander, said after the ceremony. "Bittersweet, but exciting to the community because it marks the beginning of the F-22." The 7th Fighter Squadron, or "Screamin' Demons," has been training stealth pilots since Dec. 2, 1993, according to Colonel Knehans. Due to the drawdown of the F-117 Nighthawk, he said, there are enough qualified pilots to see the program through the phase-out. With no need for a formal training unit, the colonel explained, the 7th Fighter Squadron is being inactivated. Its official inactivation date is Dec. 31, 2006. General Goldfein said the first 10 Nighthawks to retire are no longer flying; they are waiting for the bed-down base to be prepared, then they will be parked. "This is not the



Col. Jack Forsythe, 49th Operations Group commander, and Lt. Col. Chris Knehans, 7th Fighter Squadron commander, roll the guidon of the 7th during the inactivation ceremony Friday. The inactivation of the 7th will be Dec. 31. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman Michael Means)

first and it won't be the last," General Goldfein said about the F-117. "You tend to look at this plane and love it. But, like every plane we've ever flown, it has a life cycle."

Colonel Forsythe praised Colonel "Hans" Knehans for producing 50 stealth pilots with zero flying accidents and for maintaining a positive atmosphere in the squadron. "Hans, the climate you set would be the envy of any commander," Colonel Forsythe said.

Colonel Knehans, during his speech, credited his wife for generating much of the squadron's positive atmosphere. Colonel Knehans mentioned the squadron has trained 273 Nighthawk pilots since 1993. Before that, the colonel said, the 7th made over 190 aerial kills during its history and was the first fighter squadron to fly sorties over the Korean Peninsula during the Korean War. "We're here to watch a page turn in history," said Colonel Knehans. "The closing of a fighter squadron that is older than the Air Force itself." "From World War II to combat today, the Bunyaps were there," Colonel Forsythe said during his speech.

The "Bunyap," which evolved over time into "Bunyap," was a new mascot chosen by the Screamin' Demons during the Pacific Campaign in WWII, according to 49th Fighter Wing historian Mr. Rick Shea. It is an Australian aborigine myth told to all new settlers about a strange creature which lived in a deep water hole, destroying everyone who camped nearby. "Many settlers to Australia believed the story and, besides never camping near a Bunyip hole, were careful not to disturb the monster when collecting water," said Mr. Shea.

Mr. Shea said the Screamin' Demons adopted the name and image of the death-dealing creature "because the outcome of awakening a Bunyip was the same as an aerial contest with the 7th Fighter Squadron. Thereby, it was only appropriate that the two go into combat as Wingmen."

"The 7th will continue as long as brave men and woman continue to serve honorably," said the 7th Fighter Sq. honorary commander Mr. Stephens. The 7th Fighter Squadron has been inactivated, but if needed by the Air Force, it will be activated again for another mission.

Holloman Airmen deploy to Pacific Theater

by Airman 1st Class Heather Stanton
49th Fighter Wing Public Affairs
1/10/2007 - HOLLoman AFB, N.M.

More than 300 Holloman Airmen deployed to the Republic of Korea for a regularly scheduled deployment this week. The 9th Fighter Squadron, 9th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, logistics and intelligence Airmen are deploying, said Capt. Michael Harmon, 9th FS.

On Monday, many Team Holloman members and members of the Alamogordo community bid farewell to six F-117 pilots headed for Korea. They were near the flight line waving American flags to show their support while the jets taxied to takeoff. "We are here to wish them the best from the community," said Mr. James Thompson, an ambassador for the Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce. "Holloman Air Force Base means a lot to Alamogordo and its a privilege to support them." Mr. Dwight Harp, member of the Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of 50 and a Holloman honorary commander, thinks of the Holloman and Alamogordo communities as one big family, also known as Hollomagordo.

"Being here is not only an opportunity, but its a responsibility and an honor," he said "It's an opportunity for us to say 'thank you' and 'we love you.' We go to church and soccer practice (with Holloman members), we see you at the grocery store and restaurants." Many of the Airmen who left Monday were deploying for the first time and had an attitude full of excitement. "I'm kind of excited to see what it's like," said Senior Airman Joshua Sharp, 49th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, about his first deployment. "When I found out we were going, I volunteered for the opportunity."

There are many aspects of a deployment that make it difficult for the Airmen, whether it's their first or eighth time deploying. "Being away from my family is hard," said Master Sgt. William Harrell, 49 AMXS. "But I'll maintain contact by e-mail, pictures, letters and phone calls."

Deployments are not only difficult on the Airmen

who are leaving, but the family and friends they leave behind.

"I know he has to go places and it's hard not seeing him everyday," said Mrs. Denise Tatum, wife of Lt. Col. Kenneth Tatum, 9th FS commander, who deployed Monday. "He was excited about going and we are proud of him. He is making our country a better place." Being away from family and friends is not the only aspect of a deployment that is difficult, however. "Getting prepared and making sure you have everything you need, ready to go is a difficult thing to do for a deployment," said Maj. Ronald Rae, 9th FS. Not only is this a big deployment for Holloman, it is also one of the last deployments the F-117 may go on.

"This is quite possibly the last stealth deployment," said Col. Jack Forsythe, 49th Operations Group commander. "But we are always on call, 24/7, to go out to deploy. We will stand ready until we are told to stop the F-117 mission."

Editors note: 4/5/2007 - HAFB N.M. -- Family and friends came to greet the first four F-117 Nighthawks returning home to Holloman April 4 from a routine deployment to the Republic of Korea.



Both Holloman Airmen and Alamogordo community members came to the flightline Jan. 8 to say farewell to the 9th Fighter Squadron F-117 pilots headed to the Republic of Korea for a preplanned deployment. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman Jamal Sutter)

Blast from the Past

Interview with Lt Colonel Dale Zelko, USAF



On the night of March 27/28, 1999, a Lockheed Martin F-117 Nighthawk Stealth Fighter, call sign Vega 31, went missing over Serbia. The next day, photographs showing exultant Serb soldiers and civilians clambering over the wreckage

were flashed on the worldwide news media.

The message was clear, the unthinkable had happened. A super secret invisible Stealth Fighter had been shot out of the sky. For years afterwards the details of that engagement over Belgrade remained one of the best kept secrets of modern aerial warfare. To this day, the US Air Force will not reveal the exact details of that operation, as F-117s are still an important part of its strike capability.

Much has been said about the aircraft and the significance of its loss. But little is known about its pilot, and the intense experience he went through from the instant he realized his fighter was doomed, to the moment when he was safely home after an against-all-odds Combat Search and Rescue operation.

In early July, Lieutenant-Colonel Dale Zelko, Vega Three-One, visited Brazil, at which time we were able to talk to him about his adventure. Dale Zelko joined the Air Force after picking up an Academy brochure in high school. After Undergraduate Pilot Training, he remained in Enid Oklahoma as a T-37 instructor before transferring to an A-10 squadron based out of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on a hardship tour as he jokingly describes it. After three years honing his skills as a mud-moving hog driver he was picked as a candidate for the black world F-117 community, whose existence had just been acknowledged by the Air Force, and joined one of two operational units at the Tonopah Test Range, located in the high desert of Nevada just 140 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

From there on he picks up the story.

Mr. Carlos Lorch, Director and Chief Editor of the “National Brazilian Air Force Magazine” “Revista Forca Aerea” (RFA)

RFA - What was the selection process for the F-117 like?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - The F-117 Program has been an incredible accomplishment for the U.S. Air Force. What was so impressive about it was how we were able to keep it so closely held. We not only tested and developed the aircraft but we had two fully operational squadrons of those planes as far back as 1983! The Air Force only acknowledged the existence of these aircraft in November 1988. To select new pilots the leadership at Tonopah would contact all the fighter units out there asking for candidates with a minimum of 1,000 hours in fighters and who possessed a special operational maturity that would allow him to fit into this very selective community. The group at Tonopah at that time was very senior, mostly Majors and Lieutenant Colonels. I was a mid-level Captain then and one of two in my particular training class.

And Wow what a Program! We had five retired Air Force Vietnam veteran fighter pilots as classroom and simulator instructors, for the two of us! They took great care of us. We all lived in the greater Las Vegas community area and we commuted from Nellis AFB every Monday via Key Airlines, a contract commercial airline. We had our own rooms up at Tonopah where we'd spend the next five days. It was almost like going remote every week. We would fly two waves Monday night, three on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights and then we would all head back home again on Friday.

RFA - You flew only nights?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Only nights for operational training missions. At that time we were really in the Vampire mode. I wouldn't go into work until about three-thirty in the afternoon and get done at work at about 3:30-4:00 in the morning.

RFA - So your first combat experience was in Desert Storm?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - One of our squadrons

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Blast from the Past (Continued)

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deployed to Saudi Arabia around September 1990. My squadron deployed for Desert Shield in December. We were based at Khamis Mushait down in the southwest part of Saudi only about 80 miles north of the Yemeni border, up in the high mountains, actually an area very similar to Tonopah. January 17, 1991 is when Desert Storm kicked off and as everybody knows, the F-117s dropped the first bombs. I was actually on the second wave on the first night, which was very ugly because they were awake after the first strikes. I flew combat missions in the F-117 throughout the War. There weren't many of us. In fact, to give you an idea of how small the F-117 community really is, a few years ago we had our 20 Years of the Nighthawk Reunion and we had just checked out the 450th operational F-117 pilot in 20 years. Also, at the end of Operation Allied Force, I became one of only three pilots who had flown the Black Jet into combat in two wars. There was a pilot who dropped bombs over Panama who was also at Desert Storm and two of us who flew in Iraq and over the Former Republic of Yugoslavia.

RFA - What was Desert Storm like from a pilot's point of view?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - In Desert Storm we did a real good job of shutting down, or at least severely crippling their IADS - Integrated Air Defense System. The Iraqis had great equipment capability and they were well trained, but we hammered them from the very first moments of the War. Our Special Ops forces were the first ones in country taking down the early warning radars on the borders. The Wild Weasels were really effective at keeping the heads of the Surface to Air Missile (SAM) operators down and that certainly made it easier for us low observable folks to operate and survive. Their integrated air defense system was greatly hindered early on, but the Triple-A was wicked, it was unbelievable. Most people likely assume we were well above that stuff. Far from it. We flew most of our combat target runs right smack in the heart of some of the worst Triple-A, 23 and 37mm mostly. And even when not vulnerable to 23 and 37mm, we

were operating well within effective reach of the low, medium, and higher altitude airburst Triple-A. Through the whole war it never got better.

Folks also may assume that Downtown Baghdad was the worst area. It was bad, but it was just as bad if not worse in other areas. For example, I remember targets in and around Al-Taqqadum and Tallil airfields where the Triple-A was just fierce. They were putting up barrage fire, curtain fire, sector fire and you just had to drive right through it. The best description of the Triple-A in Desert Storm that I've ever heard came from one of the pilots on my wave that first night. He said: "You know, it was like a little kid trying to run through a sprinkler and not get wet." I remember flying through that stuff and thinking: "There's no way I'm not going to get hit and downed by this stuff. Boy I hope I live! I just can't see how it's possible that I'm going to get through this target run and still be flying." We were amazed that we didn't lose a single F-117 pilot or aircraft on all of Desert Storm. It was truly a miracle.

RFA - And it was mostly Triple-A?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Triple-A was the most common. We saw SAM launches, but most of the SAM launches that I saw, even the ones that were fairly close, seemed like they were unguided shots. Almost as if they were shooting them off like rockets, trying to get lucky.

RFA - What happened after Desert Storm?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - I left Tonopah in early 1992, maybe 8 to 9 months before the Wing moved to Holloman AFB, New Mexico. I returned to the Academy as a Special Duty Commander, served in Headquarters Air Combat Command at Langley, and

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Blast from the Past (Continued)

(Continued from page 9)

then returned to the F-117. I was attached to the 8th Fighter Squadron, the Black Sheep of World War II fame. In between, actually in May 1998, I did deploy to augment the 9th FS at Ahmed Al Jaber in Kuwait.

RFA - And then Allied Force finally came up?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - As things were cranking up in Yugoslavia, the 8th deployed during the third week of February 1999. I flew a jet from Holloman to Aviano Air Base in northeastern Italy in a demanding nonstop 14 hour and 45 minute flight. It was the longest flight I have ever done. The most challenging part of that deployment sortie for me was over the Atlantic Ocean at nighttime. It was deathly black and I could not find a horizon line out there. I have never fought so hard against spatial disorientation before. And the F-117's cockpit is really very susceptible to spatial disorientation; it's a constant challenge not to get sucked into it. It was mentally and physically exhausting.

RFA - How would you compare Allied Force to Desert Storm?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Allied Force was a different story. The dynamics of the politics involved created many constraints, which prevented us from employing optimum tactics. I also felt that at the beginning of Allied Force there was an overall element of complacency in our attitude of seriousness. And boy, was that the wrong attitude. During the month or so that we were there getting ready for operations, I was really concerned about how we were planning on going into operations. The whole scenario was very confusing at first, the reason being, there were a lot of different operations going on directed by a variety of entities, such as NATO and the UN, and when we first started flying combat missions we still hadn't developed appropriate special instructions, having to rely on those being used by what were essentially peace keeping forces. So believe it or not, on those first few nights of the war, we were briefed and told that if we went down, and captured, we were to claim that we were not enemy combatants. This of course was ridiculous. All of that changed dramatically,

immediately after the Vega 31 episode. The F-117 downing and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) was a much needed wake up call.

In Yugoslavia, we did not go in there and pound their IADS. We essentially left it untouched, which was significant. There's a large difference, even for a low observable platform, if you're going in against a crippled IADS compared to a full-up very capable system. My experience with the triple-A was not nearly what I experienced during Desert Storm, but certainly the threat from the SAM systems, combined with the factors hindering us from operating in an optimum tactical way, as well as other elements, all came together opening the way for the shoot down.

RFA - How did you typically operate against FRY targets?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - We sort of divided up Yugoslavia into a northern and southern half. If we were going after targets in the north, we would fly out of Aviano across Slovenia, rendezvous with our tankers over Hungary, wait for our push time, and stealth up, drop off the tankers and away we'd go on our strike missions. There were either one or two targets depending on the target itself and on what kind of weapons we were carrying.

Traditionally, our weapons load consisted of two 2,000lb smart bombs. If our targets were in the south, we would fly down the Adriatic, refuel off the tankers maybe 2/3 of the way down, push through Montenegro, and go in that way.

RFA - So I guess that takes us to the night of March 27?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - I flew on the first wave March 24th, the first night of Allied Force. I flew again on the third night and then I flew on the fourth night. My objective that night was a critical, heavily defended target in and around Belgrade. I knew what I was up against. Serbia was defended by a superior IADS encompassing state of the art Russian equipment, and manned by highly trained, skilled and extremely motivated operators. My target had

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actually been on the planning board, and flown against before, unsuccessfully. So there was another attempt on the fourth night, this time successful, yet at what cost. It was a very challenging night, weather wise, and all other Allied Force strike packages had been cancelled. Only our eight ship of F-117's went out after targets in the northern part of the country. In fact, later on that night, maybe three to four hours later, there would be another wave of low observable aircraft coming through in the form of B-2 Bombers.

During the early portion of ingress, just as I was pushing into country, I was monitoring a primary strike frequency, listening to other events unfolding that were part of the strike mission. Even before stepping to the aircraft from my squadron life support shop, I had had a deep feeling and sense that if any night was particularly suitable for my aircraft being shot down, that this was it. I was well aware of my vulnerabilities, the risks and dangers of that mission that night. The information coming over the radio during ingress, simply increased my gut feeling that something bad was very likely to happen this night. So when it happened it didn't surprise me at all. As a matter of fact, I watched it happen!

RFA - You didn't even get a RWR tone?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - That gets into capabilities of the F-117. But I will tell you that I visually watched the surface to air missile engagement, and that even in its early stages there was no doubt in my mind that they had me. I did everything I could to



prevent it but it was just unavoidable. And remember, I had a front row seat throughout the entire engagement. So was it pilot related? No. Was it maintenance related? No. Was it a good shot? Yes, it was a good shot. I can't get into details about exactly how they were able to put a surface to air missile warhead into the same airspace as an F-117 low-observable aircraft because that's very sensitive, even today. But I can kind of give you a sense. You know it's not invisible technology. We have never said it was invisible technology, we've always said it was low-observable technology. You know the F-117 relies a great deal on its low-observable characteristics to survive.

So, just like anything, there are limitations and vulnerabilities. And if you give an adversary the opportunity to exploit them, they will. The Serbs are great war fighters and they certainly saw the opportunity. So essentially, we gave them the opportunity because of the way we were operating. They saw the opening, they took advantage of it, and it was just a good shot. Was it preventable by us if we had changed things? Yes, absolutely.

RFA - So you saw it coming.

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - There were two missiles that I saw; however, there may have been others. I started tracking them visually right after launch and I could tell immediately. I thought to myself, matter-of-factly: "You know what? This is bad. I don't think I'm going to skinny through this one." I had been shot at many times before, but that was the first time I'd ever felt so strongly that I wouldn't make it due to SAM technology.

The first missile went right over the top of me. So close, actually, that I was surprised it didn't proximity fuse on me. I could feel the shock wave of it buffeting the aircraft. As soon as it went over I quickly re-acquired the second missile visually and when I did, I thought: "It's goin' to run right into me." And it sure felt like it did.

RFA - So it was a direct hit?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - It may have proximity fused, I don't know absolutely. In theory, if it didn't

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have a warhead in it, if it was just a harpoon or a tree trunk would it have gone through my aircraft? I don't know for certain. But if you look at the photos of the wreckage, my entire left wing was missing.

RFA - And then what?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - The impact was extremely violent and it slammed the aircraft into a left roll, negative g tuck. I estimate seven, if not more negative Gs, which is enormous. Physiological training experts will tell you that 3.5 or so negative Gs, is the point of total incapacitation. I figure what that plane went through was double that. It was a miracle that I was conscious to begin with. Frank-36, a KC-135 tanker refueling F-16s in Bosnia-Herzegovina and with whom I later established contact, had a grandstand view of it all. He said: "We had just finished refueling and I was looking towards the Belgrade area when all of a sudden I saw a series of airborne explosions and then one really big one. Less than two minutes later I picked up Vega-31 making Mayday calls on the guard frequency." Even though I strap in extremely tight, because of the way the G forces were acting on the plane and ejection seat, my body was sliding out from underneath the lap belt. Normally, I like to sit with the ejection seat all the way up in order to better look outside the cockpit, so the clearance between the top of my helmet and the canopy is pretty small to start with. So I was pinned to the top of the shoulder straps, with my butt way out of the seat and my torso doubled over in the worst possible position for an ejection. I was immobilized in this awkward position by the 7 negative G force of the tumbling plane, trying to get my hands down to the side ejection handles. Despite the violence of the event, mentally and emotionally it was all very calm for me. I figured the only thing I could do was to push isometrically with my head against the top of the canopy which would perhaps straighten my spine somewhat once the canopy blew, and before the seat went up the rails. And I tried that move, almost like a wrestler who's pinned down on his back trying the bridge maneuver. I don't know if it had any effect. It was amazing to many that I survived at all.

I remember every fragment of the entire strike mission; shoot down, ejection, and CSAR. All, that is, except one. There's just one slice of this entire affair that to this day I just can't get a hold of. I can't recall it as if it never happened. And that's actually reaching the ejection handles and pulling. I may have been unconscious which makes me know even more strongly that I had some help from Heaven getting to those handles and pulling. And in that body position I probably barely got a fingertip in those handles. The next thing I remember is I'm in the seat out of the aircraft. I can see the cockpit falling away from me and I don't recall the 18g kick in the butt. I don't recall going up the ejection seat rails, none of that. As I was tumbling through the air, myriad thoughts went through my mind, all in a casual, light humorous sort of way. I even remember seeing a mental image of myself kicking the dirt with one foot saying: "Nuts, isn't this inconvenient. My Mom's not going to be happy with me and I might not be able to call my daughter tomorrow on her birthday", who would be turning ten. The good news is that I was able to call her.

RFA - All this while you were still in the seat?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Yes. Another thought that came to my mind had me imagining standing next to the Serbian SAM operator, enjoying a light conversation and congratulating him. "Real nice shot!" Then I remember saying to him, "But you're not going to get me!" Not in an arrogant or cocky way, but with a surge of determination flooding my mind. I realized immediately how important it was to deny the adversary the exploitation and propaganda potential of having a captured senior officer F-117 pilot. This remained a powerful source of determination for me. I estimate I was between 8 and nine thousand feet when I first got under canopy. It was 19:40 Zulu, 20:40 local time. From pulling the handles to a fully inflated parachute it takes 1.4 seconds. To me it seemed like hours. I instantly went from this extreme violence and chaos to absolute calm when the canopy inflated. All I could hear was a gentle swishing sound of the seat kit and life raft hanging below me on its 25-foot lanyard as the

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canopy went through its normal oscillation. So I looked down and quickly started getting oriented. Looking north, the first thing I could see was Belgrade off to my right.

RFA - Was it lit?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Oh yeah! Fully lit. And then underneath me, slightly south/southwest, I could see two little fires burning and I figured that was the aircraft. I looked down and saw the seat kit and life raft; I didn't even think to specifically check for injuries. The first time I realized I had an injury was about an hour and a half after ejection at my hole up site on the ground. The next thing I did was check my equipment. I still had my mask on so I disconnected it and tossed it away. My helmet was still on but the visor was gone. Then I looked up and checked the canopy, which I could see clearly in the nearly full moon night: "Perfect, no Mae West, no line-over's, no blown panels, no streamer..." and it was then that I noticed it. "You have got to be kidding me," I remember thinking to myself, still in a light humorous way, "an orange and white panel parachute!" It was glowing like a Chinese lantern. I patted one of my survival vest pockets with the signal flares and jokingly considered lighting one up to help the Serbians spot me even more easily! Of course that's not what I did. In fact, I knew that despite the presence of a large number of air breathing and non-air breathing NATO assets out there, there could still be a chance that nobody was aware of what just happened. I felt it vitally important to make good two way contact with a friendly as fast as possible. I reached into my g-suit pocket and took out my personal mini-maglite flashlight, which was fitted with a red lens cap. I was familiar with the settings on the top of the survival radio but I wanted to be absolutely sure I had the correct one selected when I started transmitting. I had SAR frequencies, or I could go to 243.0, which was the guard frequency. I could also activate the emergency locator beacon. I knew where all the settings were but I wanted no uncertainty. Funny, I was already transitioning my thinking and frame of reference from "pilot-in-cozy-cockpit", to the



attitude and actions of a high-speed special operations, special tactics covert and low-profile guy on the ground. So in order to prevent anyone seeing the tiny light from my flashlight, floating thousands of feet above the ground, I tucked my body around the light as best I could while I did a quick visual confirmation of the radio settings.

RFA - Was getting on the radio the right thing to do?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - At the time, officially, that was an anomaly. When I was repatriated and debriefed with the JPRA - Joint Personnel Recovery Agency team, they were surprised that I made radio contact while still under canopy because that's not how we were trained. We were adamantly not supposed to do anything other than take basic care of ourselves right after ejection. Maybe start to treat for shock or get a little orientation. But we should wait until we get on the ground, settle down, find an initial hold up site, treat oneself for shock and injuries, only then try to initiate radio contact. For this scenario, my reasoning was different, and I felt great physically and mentally with a very high state of situational awareness. JPRA asked me why my decision and actions, and here's why: First of all I had a basic radio with no secure voice and no over-the-horizon capability. I knew that the best chance to get two-way contact was at altitude. I also felt it very likely that I could be quickly captured after hitting

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the ground with no chance to get on the radio. I wanted to deny Yugoslavia the huge exploitation potential of having an alive-and-well F-117 pilot and our forces having no knowledge of my status. And overall, I sensed how crucial it was to get things going - to get the CSAR energized as fast as possible in order to have the best chance to deny the Serbians what I knew would be the ultimate prize in this whole episode: the F-117 pilot. So I started making my mayday calls, maintaining the best possible radio discipline. I realized how important it was to inhibit the adversary the ability to fix my position. There was no secure voice going on here so I assumed the Serbs were listening to everything, and I assumed the whole time they knew where every player was and what it was doing. I finally raised Frank 36, a KC-135 tanker refueling F-16s in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The information I passed to him was that my last known position in the aircraft was my point after target. So that gave them a rough idea of where I might be. Once I was satisfied I had made good two way contact, I tucked the radio away and got busy with many other things. All the while I was on the radio, though, I was orienting myself. I was coming down through layers of clouds. When I was out of the clouds I could see pieces of ground, so I tried to orient myself as best I could. I very quickly oriented myself with Polaris and north. As a backup I checked the magnetic compass which was in my survival vest pocket.

I estimate I broke through the bottom layer of clouds somewhere around 2,000 feet, giving me roughly two minutes remaining under canopy to better orient and make some initial plans and decisions. As soon as I was underneath the bottom layer of clouds I pulled the four-line jettison, giving me the ability to steer and some command over where I was drifting.

RFA - Were you able to discover where you were?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - The first thing I saw was a town about three and a half miles to the north. This was connected to another town about a mile and a

half behind me by a two-lane hardball road, running roughly north-south. There was quite a bit of traffic on the road. I was drifting north/northeast; I estimated 15 to 20 knots. As far as the eye could see the terrain was open, flat sections of farm fields separated by sparse shrub lines or irrigation ditches; not ideal for cover and concealment. There was also a major four-lane highway perhaps a mile to the north of my position running northwest to southeast. I later found out the town just north was Ruma. I knew where I didn't want to land so with some aggressive steering I was able to crab into the wind and land successfully on an open plowed farm field some 50 yards west of the hardball road I had seen, next to what seemed at the time to be a T intersection that led off to the east. Although I landed softly, there was a stiff 15-knot wind so I was getting drug a little bit. On my back I dug my heels in and reached up to pop both canopy releases, but on better thought decided against it, as the parachute would probably blow across the road. So I held on to the left hand riser, popped the right side, let the canopy deflate, and then popped the other one. Then I flipped over on my stomach and just lay there, motionless. I let about 45 seconds to a minute go by but nobody on the road stopped. I wasn't going to idle there in case someone had seen me come down and was at that moment driving into town to make a phone call. I needed to move, quickly.

Before I touched down I had picked out a spot just west of the road some 200-300 yards away, where I hoped to be able to use as an initial hold up site and keep my head down. It was an irrigation ditch of sorts. I got busy securing my landing area and first pulled in my parachute, then took off my helmet and harness as well as any "hardware" items that could catch some light and give my position away. I wanted to get away from that landing spot as fast as possible, and travel small and light. So I put all of this stuff in the bottom of a plowed furrow and then I put my dark green one-man life raft on top of that. I packed dirt around the edges and on top of the raft so that the wind wouldn't flip it over and expose everything. I was very cautious to minimize disturbing the top of the furrows. That would give

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away that there had been activity there, making it easier to spot from the road, particularly being illuminated by the near-full moon. As I moved towards my chosen initial hold up spot I was very careful to step only in the bottom of the furrows so that I wouldn't disturb the neatly groomed surface and give away my direction of travel. One of the first things I did in my hold up site was grab some of this moist dark Serbian soil and do a bit of expedient combat cammo to cover all the exposed skin and soften the glow of my face and neck. An hour later I took off my gloves to reapply "soil-cammo" to my wrists and hands. This is when I noticed that the back of my right hand was caked in blood. I shrugged it off.

RFA - That must have been a tough wait?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - The ambient temperature was just above freezing. It was a wet, bone-soaking cold, like what you find in New England.

Luckily I dress to egress and I had on four layers of clothes, with the top layer being my winter flight jacket, as well as three pairs of socks - two thin cotton and one high-quality thin wool ski sock. I also had an extra set of socks in my pocket. I was fairly comfortable throughout the night. I was extremely well hydrated before ejecting and had brought along at least 12 extra 4-ounce flex packs of water besides the 12 normally placed in my survival kit by the life support professionals. Water is so vital, helping to reduce potential shock; it raises your levels of alertness and provides overall strength and endurance to the body and senses. Before that evening's brief I had eaten my customary large bowl of Grape Nut cereal, with dried cranberries. That provided me with long-term complex carbohydrate energy. Almost like a marathon runner carb-loading before a race. I also had four power bars (Chocolate and Oatmeal Raisin) in my pocket. Even still, there were some rough moments throughout the night.

As soon as I was in my hole up site I made a quick inventory of all the equipment I had with me. I had a survival vest, my seat kit and a hit-and-run pack. The seat kit is kind of like a little backpack

containing survival/evasion equipment. If you land and don't have time or the means to take much, you can sling the hit-and-run pack over your shoulder and take off. It has the most essential items of equipment you may need to survive and evade and is shaped almost like a banana pack.

There is some redundancy of equipment between the vest, seat kit and hit-and-run pack. At my landing site, without much deliberate thought, almost automatically, I threw the seat kit on my back and grabbed the hit-and-run pack. I had everything in my hole up site. I did my inventory by feel and was satisfied and confident that I was familiarized with what I had.

Within the first hour after I had landed, still holed up in the shallow irrigation ditch, I detected and began monitoring enemy search activity very close to where I was. They knew that they had shot down an aircraft and were at the wreckage site extremely quickly, probably within 15 minutes of the crash. It certainly dawned on them that they had shot down an F-117, the ultimate aircraft. The next obvious conclusion was that they would do whatever it took to capture the pilot. So they unleashed a giant manhunt - I later found out - involving Army VJ, police, and villagers in the area. I didn't realize it at the time, but much later through study and analysis, I

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Dale on the ladder of F-117 #799, "Midnight Rider"
Photo was taken in Saudi right after DESERT STORM

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guessed that I was somewhere between one and two miles from the crash site, which is pretty close. I believe I was well within the most heavily concentrated area of search. I also experienced a little bit of the receiving end of our own actions when I was in my hold up site. At first I didn't quite know what it was, but remembering the Air Tasking Order, I quickly realized it was the B-2s that were to bomb targets in the general Belgrade area after us. Although a safe distance away, the bombs hit close enough that the compression and shock waves that went through the air over me in my hole up site was significant - it got my attention. I later learned and appreciated what those guys did as they actually flexed some of the targets which they thought would be close to the rough area I may have been.

RFA - Were you successful in making further contact from your hole up site?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - All through the night, I was trying to stick as close as possible to my pre-planned EPA, or Evasion Plan of Action. Of course, war fighting is fluid; it's moment by moment, routinely demanding flexibility and improvisation. One dilemma for an evader is how to be as predictable as possible for rescue forces and as unpredictable as possible for the adversary. As soon as I was relatively comfortable with my state of concealment, I took out my hand held GPS. Shortly before we deployed to Aviano, our squadron life support shop had bought, with our own squadron money, a series of basic and inexpensive hand held GPS sets. It came in extremely handy that night.

Before I turned it on, though, I made a rough guess of where I was. I had briefed extensively with our squadron Intel specialists, and familiarized myself with the area I'd be operating in before going into combat. I had a very good idea where I was. So I was facing north, and mentally visualized myself with my Intel folks in the squadron briefing room, standing in front of the Area of Responsibility - AOR - map. Before calling up the GPS, I guessed where I was in relationship to some predetermined references. Hunkered down, I couldn't raise enough satellites and had to expose myself somewhat to

where I could hold out my arm and a portion of my body over the shallow curve of the ditch to get the best line of site with the horizon. I had my guess of my position and wanted to confirm it with what the GPS indicated, ensuring the machine was giving me accurate information. It was essential that I not pass bogus information to our rescue guys. The GPS data was right in the heart of the window of what I had rough-guessed! The first time I made voice contact on the ground was about one hour and twenty minutes into the event. I passed my position to one of our Command and Control assets. That was the first and only time I talked to him.

Still, and I didn't realize it then, even after my immediate contact under canopy and this initial contact on the ground, there was a great deal of confusion and uncertainty throughout the night, as to my location and authenticity.

RFA - So it was back to your hold out?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Yes, and anytime I was not checking in on the radio, taking "tactical peeks" to update my situational awareness of the objective area, or using the "restroom", I minimized physical activity as much as possible. About three and a half hours into the event I detected what seemed like search dog activity south of me, and shortly afterward I had a visitor. Fortunately, at that particular moment, I had my floppy hat on, I was cammoed up with moist, dark soil, and I wasn't moving. Also, there was a wind out of the south. I was facing north when I heard some kind of creature approaching me from behind. I reached down slowly and grabbed my survival knife. It was a sort of hunting size dog, maybe 50-80 lbs, walking along very deliberately and purposefully, seemingly looking for something. Suddenly, he stopped and looked VERY interested in exactly where I had been when I was working my GPS, perhaps 20 yards away, so I figured he had my scent. The moon was now low on the western horizon and I could see him clearly as he approached my hiding place, silhouetted against the illumination.

Again, fortunately, just prior to his arrival and approach, I had not been active and was motionless

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and silent, with the wind in my favor. I could see him but he had trouble spotting me. I was a dark object, masked against the dark shallow slope of the ditch, with my head below the horizon line. He looked around and his gaze swept across me a couple of times, but it never stopped on me.

Finally he moved on and traveled south-southwest. I took several full breaths when he did and was grateful for no direct encounter, which would certainly have made some sort of commotion, compromising my position.

All along, I had thought that if it was my fate to be captured, I'd rather be found by police or Serbian military, rather than by villagers who would likely be less charitable during capture. During the few minutes of my dog visit, not only did I hope to not have to tangle with the dog, I also imagined, still in a light humorous way, what would happen to me if I harmed that dog and ended up captured by villagers who owned it! I had a 9 mm pistol with me but of course I never considered using it because of the noise. To this day I don't know if it was a military or police trained search dog, or perhaps a villager's dog sent out to try and alert on something.

RFA - While all this was going on, the CSAR assets were probably already on their way.

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Maybe two hours before pickup the moon had set and a dark mantle of blackness set in. To make matters worst, a thick overcast low weather deck rolled in and some pretty heavy rain started to fall. Of course, the extreme darkness and poor weather made everything more difficult for the CSAR Task Force. However, it certainly worked against the Serbs as well. Although it added a significantly large extra challenge for the CSAR Team, in the end, the darkness, thick clouds and rain were probably more of a help than a hindrance, providing some much needed cover and concealment.

The next time I talked to anybody after my initial contact on the ground, was a little over three hours into the event when the Sandy pilots arrived on scene (CSAR on-scene commander). I established and remained in radio contact with them for the

whole rest of the event. Throughout the night there had been much uncertainty as to my authenticity. Was I really Vega-31 or was this some sort of Serbian spoofing and laying an ambush?

Throughout the entire evening numerous different sets of coordinates were produced from various sources indicating Vega-31's position. These were filtered down and approximately six actual sets of coordinates made their way throughout the evening to the Sandys and helicopters. Those guys were getting yanked around emotionally, hour after hour, as they were trying to prepare to infiltrate to get me out. Actually, they had begun to execute and push in country several times and were called off. So there was repeated authentication throughout the entire evening, and the Sandy's were very skillful at managing that. Any aircrew member that can possibly be isolated behind enemy lines prepares some general and personal information about himself. This is kept closely-held and well guarded, to be used only in the highly unlikely probability of needing to someday covertly authenticate. Authentication that night was extremely effective and essential to the CSAR success.

So thirty minutes before pickup the Sandy's authenticated me once again, because at that point they didn't know if they were going to proceed with the mission, due to many factors, including deception, as well as our own contribution to confusion and uncertainty. At that moment they asked of me the hardest thing I had to do that night: "Vega-31, is it alright to come in there?" As soon as I heard that I thought to myself: "Ahhh, don't ask me that! Don't make me take that decision!" Over a minute went by and I still couldn't answer. Finally, one of the Sandy pilots came back on the radio, and this time he sounded just like a mom: "Now Vega-31, if you don't answer us, we're going to have to come back and do this a little bit later." Another 20 seconds went by until I finally said: "Ok. Go for it. Let's do it!" The reason it was so gut wrenching to make that decision was that due to poor pre-Operation Allied Force CSAR information sharing, and no secure voice capability during the CSAR, I had essentially no true idea of the nature of who and

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what capability would be attempting to come in; also, due to being at ground level with no night vision capability, other than what God gave me, and short effective hearing range, I had limited awareness of precisely the extent and nature of surrounding enemy activity, or their capabilities. There were search forces within several hundred yards of me, and had been for most of the night. I could not confidently assess the risk of bringing those guys into what could develop into a very harmful situation for them. I just could not answer them. The reason I ultimately gave the go-ahead was that I felt fully confident my situational awareness was high enough that if capture was imminent, I'd be able to call off the CSAR and take care of a few essentials that I didn't want compromised. Even though the Sandy traditionally would have solid awareness of the objective area and be the one to make the continuous assessments and decisions, I still had rehearsed, throughout the night, a radio call I'd use, as well as the actions I'd take, for calling it all off. It was unexpected to be asked if it was ok to execute. When they were fifteen minutes out the Sandy's authenticated me again, reaffirmed if OK to come in, and told me to prepare my infrared strobe - my only covert signaling device. And again, I had a tough time answering.

It wasn't until this point that I first started to think; "You know, they may actually try something tonight." Up until then, although I never gave up hope or backed off my fierce determination, I was also a realist and did not expect a rescue attempt to be tried that night, if at all. I thought; "These guys would be out of their minds to try and come in where I am." I was mentally and emotionally well prepared for capture. Those CSAR professionals are simply astonishing. Ten minutes after this authentication I started hearing a helicopter approach from the west - it wasn't until later that I realized there was more than one involved in the rescue attempt, in fact there were two MH-53s and one MH-60. I was prepared to try to get them to land on the Western field because that would have been a little farther from the hardball road.

The Sandy's had already established an

authentication code that would alert me to activate my strobe. I was busy tracking the helicopter sound starting to go a bit towards the north of my position when I heard the signal to activate the strobe, so I came out of my hole up site just enough to hold it slightly off the dirt. I remained low profile - my body was a little exposed, yet I thought that no matter how imminent the rescue seemed, I still needed to maintain as low a "signature" as possible as this was truly the most dangerous and risky moment of all, and things could instantly go bad again.

I activated the strobe; all while monitoring the radio, with time clicking by and no word from anyone. Then the Sandy came up and said: "We're not getting your strobe." When I heard that call I slid back down into the best hiding position possible, cautiously examined my strobe and determined it was not working. I had no backup covert device. "So now what", I thought to myself. I made a radio call that my strobe was inoperative then Sandy came up and said: "Well, can you see the helicopters? Can you give them a vector?" They were north of me by now so I radioed back: "Yeah, I think you guys are north of me a couple of miles, come right, come south." And it was then that I noticed that there was other airborne activity in the area. With a search light on! I visually saw the Serbian airborne search activity more or less in the same area where I was tracking the CSAR helicopter. That threw me off for a moment and it wasn't until I heard the sound of the helicopters moving away from where the slow-moving airborne spotlight was that I knew for certain the light was not from a friendly. I heard Sandy on the radio once again; "Vega-31, give us a pen gun flare." This device was developed in the Vietnam era to penetrate foliage. It shoots up 800 to 1200 ft and I hadn't prepared the one I had in my evasion kit, but my hand was on it in two seconds. It was extremely well packed and while I started to unwrap the packaging two thoughts came to mind...first, I wasn't comfortable firing a flare 1,000 ft up in the air because that was definitely going to compromise my position, and it would take me too long to prepare this item. I was getting very uncomfortable with the length of time the rescue guys were exposed in the

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objective area. I decided; “This needs to happen NOW, or they need to go away and try again another time.”

The co-pilot of the lead MH-53 must have had the same thoughts because right then he came up on the radio and said: “Hey Vega-31, if we’re this close, just go overt.” I replied: “How ‘bout a regular flare.” I had that flare out and prepped in about 4 seconds. I had two in my lower left survival vest pocket. These are the standard ones, with a day end and a night end. As I was prepping the flare, I was considering which side to use. The day end is smoke, the night end is a flame, yet with the day end, there’s a little flame as the smoke burns which could be picked up by the night vision devices those guys likely had on.

To be certain there would be no further delay, and so that they would acquire the signal without having to search, I opted for the night side and just popped that sucker. It probably lit up half of Serbia! Actually, I didn’t do the Statue of Liberty thing. I stayed at ground level with my body half protected by the sloping side of the embankment right where it was coming up to the flat part of the farm field. I held the flare just above the dirt and let it burn for about two seconds and then I snuffed it out in the soil.

The helicopters instantly saw the flare and had eyes on me. They made an immediate radio call for me to “put out the flare” because in that darkness it was “blooming” their night vision devices, making it harder to see the survivor. I didn’t receive that radio call because I was using the radio’s earpiece, which kept popping out with any head or arm movement. In fact, that was another of the many lessons learned, to fashion some sort of means to keep it in place. I wished I had a roll of duct tape - I would have strapped it to my head. Fortunately, I killed the flare quickly on my own anyway. They were probably a mile away from me when they saw the flare. At that moment they determined the MH-60 would try to make a quick grab and go. They were monitoring the considerable amount of Serbian search activity right there in the objective area, which was positioned nearly on top of me, and were still not 100% I was

the real Vega-31. I later found out that several gun sights were fixed at the center of my chest during pickup, and I don’t know if I really needed that information, after all, one of those guns fires 4,000 rounds a minute!

RFA - This whole thing was coming to an end.

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - Normally, even helicopters like to set up an approach, but that crew decided: “We just don’t have time.” God Bless ‘em! Their flying skills and nerve are just extraordinary. They auto-rotated into this black hole of nothing. In a situation like that there is no depth perception, there is no horizon, and they must have had an extremely difficult time even judging distance and closure rate to the ground. Without hesitation, the MH-60 peeled off and landed pretty much where I hoped they would. The helicopter came down just to the west of me, about a rotor arc away. It was so dark I couldn’t see them until they settled and the very top of the helicopter became barely illuminated by static electricity generated from dust hitting the rotors. The Pararescuemen (PJs) came out while I was waiting in a low crouch, non-threatening position. I saw two non-distinct shapes appear out of this blackness, approaching from my left. I didn’t see these guys until they were maybe 10 feet away. And they looked like aliens with their helmets and night vision devices and weapons. The PJ team leader came up to me, grabbed me in the upper left arm and pulls me in

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The MH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter lands picked up Zelko and was gone in 40 seconds.

Blast from the Past (Continued)

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to him. I didn't know what he was doing at first, but I could feel his breath on my face.

He was doing a visual identification of my profile. That was the final authentication. Finally they were absolutely certain it was Vega-31 and not a trap.

He yelled to me: "How're you feeling Sir?" and I yelled back: "Great! Let's get out of here!"

He gave me a tug and said: "Your PJ's are here to take you home." I followed them to the chopper, I suppose I was actually being escorted and they just made me feel like I was still in control! We jumped in and off we went. From eyes on the survivor, to auto-rotate into the black hole, PJ's out and all of us back in and flying, it took them 90 seconds. Forty-five seconds on the ground. Extremely fast, remarkably professional. From the time I pulled my ejection handles to five minutes out of the base in Bosnia, which is where the CSAR guys brought me after exfiltration, almost eight hours had elapsed. From a CSAR perspective, it was a very long time.

RFA - Were you injured in any way?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - I had some pretty severe lacerations to the back of my hand as well as a wicked contusion to my right leg. I also had some bruising to the back of my legs and butt, probably complements of the ejection seat, as well as some pronounced bruising to the muscles around my eyes, which the flight doctor thought might have been from the severe negative G's. All of these occurred some time during the shoot down or ejection. Other than the bloody hand already described, I didn't realize any of this until the flight doc gave me a once-over during my flight back to Aviano. It's amazing I didn't sustain any serious debilitating injuries.

RFA - Were lessons learned from this operation?

Lt. Col. Dale Zelko - There were numerous lessons learned. Too many to adequately discuss today, however, I can give you a sampler taste. As I mentioned earlier, the Vega-31 event was a wake-up call blessing for everyone involved in Operation Allied Force.

Overall communications were enormously frustrating for everyone, from very limited or no SATCOM capability, to almost non-existent secure voice capability. We had never rehearsed a CSAR Task Force Operation of that nature before. It was put together and executed ad hoc and on the fly. From the evader point of view, there was also a great deal learned. During my debrief with JPRA, they asked me what three things I would have liked to have had. Without hesitation I responded: "a STU-III phone, a night vision device, and a one-day shopping spree at LL Bean!" The idea of the STU-III comment is to have over-the-horizon, secure voice, giving the evader total situational awareness of what the CSAR was doing and what was the plan. The night vision device would have enhanced my situational awareness of the objective area. And the LL Bean remark was to emphasize that there is a lot of fantastic survival equipment out there in the civilian market. All these things would have greatly assisted me to be the best survivor/evader possible. The survivor/evader can be a vitally important part of the CSAR Team and can make tremendously valuable contribution, having enormous impact on the success, or failure, of the CSAR.

Another lesson learned: Training and Preparation. To me, this is all about Motivation and Determination. In this scenario there was not the luxury of time, there was no time to think about it or consider it, no time to reference the owner's manual. There was no time for uncertainty about what to do and how to do it. This event started very suddenly, unexpectedly (that an F-117 would go down), and violently - and for the next near 8 hours, until the helicopters were relatively safe (5 minutes out from the base in Bosnia), there was no time for hesitation; there was no time to flinch!

The last time I went through a SERE - Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape - course, was the summer of 1978, as a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy. I had not had any refresher Combat Survival Training in all those years. That has changed now. Dramatically. Now, every unit, every organization is very good at having a formal, structured Combat Survival refresher training at least

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Blast from the Past (Continued)

every two years for all aircrew members who could possibly be isolated behind enemy lines.

The initial SERE training and periodic Life Support and Intel refresher cannot provide the step by step solutions to every survival and evasion and CSAR situation - there are too many possibilities, too many combinations. But, if the training and preparation is paid attention to and taken seriously (the motivation part), it provides a tremendous foundation of skills, considerations and equipment familiarity. It gives an experience of how to think and what to do.

You know, technology and sophistication are so important and we should always continue to develop new and better equipment and capabilities. Yet, isn't it amazing that we pulled that CSAR off with a walkie-talkie, a road flare, and a hundred dollar GPS!

Again, certainly technology and sophistication are very important. But, what about the Human - the Operator? This Combat Search and Rescue was

successful because of: training and preparation - individual training and preparation that was taken seriously and paid attention to; because of trust and faith and confidence in fellow team member; because of fierce determination and drive, unfaltering discipline, and extraordinary situational awareness and airmanship. This Combat Search and Rescue was successful because in spite of the enormous risk and confusions and danger and complexity and uncertainty and hostility, there was: calm, and presence of mind; there was sound and sensible moment by moment decision making, improvisation, innovation, and there was a whole lot of GUTS!

An integrated and well rehearsed Search and Rescue capability is such an important part of our war fighting capability and day to day peacetime service. It has been such a pleasure sharing and visiting with all these wonderful professionals in Brazil. I've so enjoyed getting to know you some. Keep it light, stay loose, and God bless everyone

Here's the raw scoop on the article

By Dale Zelko
March 29, 2007

I was the Kick-Off Keynote Special Guest Speaker for the "LATIN AMERICA COOP INITIATIVE, BRASIL SAR SYMPOSIUM", August 4-6, 2004, in Brasilia, Brasil.

This was a BIG deal = over 350 attendees from US, UK, France, Israel, China (Beijing), Russia, Indonesia, Venezuela, and others....

The Symposium was opened by, and Chaired by, the Brazilian CSAF.

"Mr. Carlos Lorch, Director and Chief Editor of the "National Brazilian Air Force Magazine" approached me about doing interviews for a feature article in the magazine. The magazine is called "Revista Forca Aerea" ("RFA"). Even though by magazine standards it's a very comprehensive article - it still barely gives a taste and feel for the Event!"
Ultimately I agreed - only because I felt strongly that Carlos' intentions were pure, because he turned out to be a TOTAL PROFESSIONAL, and because he promised me full final-editing rights <<he was not

interested in doing some cheap, amateur, dime-store novel, hack-journalism fabrication piece>>. I didn't change any of his composition, style, presentation, or words = I ended up only correcting a few technical errors....actually, I was blown-away by how superb his draft was that he sent me for corrections - during 3 days of interviews he mainly went on memory and scribbled notes with only some of it being tape recorded....it was remarkable how few details needed adjusting.

The interviews were done in English (Carlos spoke and understood English better than most Native-English-Speaking folks), and the final written draft was done in English. The final draft was then translated into Portuguese for publication in the magazine. The entire article was published. What you sent me looks like the final draft I had edited and sent back to Carlos for publishing. I had sent it to a few high-speed Special Forces guys in the business and as do most good things, it has gotten around. From casual glance, what you have appears

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Blast from the Past (Continued)

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to be complete and preserved.

"I was/am EXTREMELY pleased with this article because it's 100% true, authentic, and actual - with nothing contrived, fabricated, or embellished. This was Carlos' motivation - to capture pure history, the

real story and lessons learned, and preserve/present to others so they could benefit - to help others with their own motivation, preparation, and training. This was the FIRST article I agreed to have my name used/associated with the Vega 31 Event.

Dale Zelko

In Memoriam



Philip K. Vollmoeller Jr. CMSgt., ret.

Philip K. Vollmoeller Jr., 64, passed away at Las Palmas Medical Center in El Paso, Texas on February 1st, 2007. He is survived by his wife Judy of the family home in Alamogordo, his son Scott

and wife Amy of Lynnwood, Washington, son Kurt, wife Lisa and grandsons Blake, Alec and Evan of Las Vegas, Nevada. He leaves a sister and three brothers and their families of Riverhead, New York as well as Judy's brothers and sisters and their families.

Phil was a retired CMSgt and leaves many friends and associates from his twenty six year Air Force and sixteen year Civil Service careers. He had many assignments over the years, but was most proud of being a member of the support crew of the USAF Thunderbirds from 1969 to 1972 and of being involved with the F-117 Stealth program from 1981 until his retirement in December of 2004.

A memorial service was held at the Holloman AFB Chapel on Saturday, February 17th at 10:00 AM. Burial will take place in the Veterans Cemetery in Boulder City, Nevada.

Memorial donations may be made to The Brain Aneurysm Foundation, www.bafound.org/donation, or a charity of your choice.



Program Awards



Award Stories

F-117 Program wins the 2003 Shingo Prize for Excellence in Manufacturing

In May, several members of the F-117 Nighthawk team accepted the 2003 Shingo Prize for Excellence in Manufacturing at an awards banquet hosted by Utah State University in Detroit, MI. This event culminated an effort lasting over a year, involving development of a complex achievement report that detailed the F-117 Program's Lean journey towards world class aircraft modification and sustainment operations, and an intense Palmdale site assessment by six Shingo examiners. The F-117 program is only the third entity within Lockheed Martin Corporation to achieve this distinguished honor, considered the "Nobel Prize of Manufacturing" by Business Week Magazine.

F-117 Total System Sustainment Partnership (TSSP) aka TSPR

LM Aero-Palmdale is now seven years into a landmark eight year, \$1.8B sustainment contract with the Air Force, providing technical, logistics and management support to the F-117 weapon system. To date, LM Aero has sustained very high Award Fee and Incentive Fee performance, a significant enabler to the 49th Fighter Wing achieving some of the best readiness rates in Air Combat Command.

Join The Stealth Fighter Association

For those folks reading this Newsletter who are not current members of the SFA, membership is open to all personnel currently or previously associated with the F-117 Stealth Fighter Aircraft program.

Additional info is available on the SFA web site, and hard copies of this newsletter are available for mailing to interested folks. Please ask a member or drop a line to:

Stealth Fighter Association
PO Box 902017
Palmdale, CA 93590

The F-117 Stealth Fighter Association was chartered as a non-profit corporation in the state of Nevada, to organize and coordinate periodic reunions celebrating key events in the history of the F-117 aircraft, by those individuals involved in the creation and operation of the F-117 Stealth Fighter aircraft.

Stealth Fighter Association Mission Statement
The Stealth Fighter Association is an affiliation of individuals brought together by the common bond of association with the world's first stealth fighter, the



Lockheed Martin F-117, produced by the Lockheed Martin Skunk Works for the United States Air Force. Our mission is to preserve the memory of our struggles to attain a stealth combat capability second to none, maintain the legacy of the F-117 "Nighthawk," maintain the bonds of brother and sisterhood between those who contributed to make the awesome combat capability of stealth a reality, and act as a governing board to oversee the planning and execution of periodic reunions at either five or ten year cycles.

Web Site Info

The Web Site has new graphics and info for the 2007 reunion including the schedule of events.

The **Registration page** will provide sign up info (effective Jan 15, 2007).

SFA News tells you at a glance what changes have been made recently.

Please remember to email us with your current address info in the **Membership Update** section, so that we may keep in touch.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Stealth Fighter Association website. At the top, there are three circular logos: the left one says 'STEALTH REUNION', the middle one says '20th ANNIVERSARY' with '20' in large numbers, and the right one says '25 YEARS OF THE NIGHTHAWK'. Below the logos, the text reads 'THE F-117A STEALTH FIGHTER' and '25 YEARS OF THE NIGHTHAWK'. In the center, there is a large graphic of a Nighthawk aircraft in flight over a desert landscape at sunset. To the left of the aircraft, there is a list of links: 'SFA Today', 'Home', 'About the SFA', 'President's Corner', 'SFA News', 'SFA Newsletter', '20th Highlights', 'SFA Membership', 'Membership Update', and 'Links'. Below this list, there is another list of links: 'Nighthawk History', 'F-117 Organizations', 'F-117 Site History', 'About The F-117', 'F-117 History', 'F-117 Today', 'Stealth Fighter Pictures', 'A Look Back . . .', and 'Nighthawk Over Iraq'. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for the 'Stealth Fighter Association' with the text 'SFA Update' below it. At the very bottom, there is a small red text line: 'Site Maintained by: webmaster "at" f117reunion "dot" org'.

<http://www.f117reunion.org>