

Vietnam

Operation Safe Side (The AIRMAN)

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(Submitted by Russell L. Harrell)

Combat Security Police Squadrons: 1041st, 82nd Wg / 821st, 822nd, and 823rd



“ JOINED to Fight! Joined to Fight!”

The words echoed over Hawaii's Schofield Barracks as the Air Force's elite 1041st USAF Security Police Squadron double-timed smartly down the road.

The 1041st is unique. It is the heart of an Air Force test program called Operation Safe Side. Its purpose? Form, equip and train a US Air Force Security Police force with the ability to secure air bases located in hostile environments against all forms of enemy ground action.

With greater mobility, more advanced detection equipment, reinforced training, and heavier fire-power than is normally found in a security police squadron, the 1041st, currently 200 men strong, is undergoing six months of field evaluation.

The idea for the unit was conceived in 1965 as a result of Air Force experience in Vietnam where heavily guarded air bases were being attacked by the Viet Cong. Obviously, new procedures for internal base security were needed. Although Air Force Security Police plans against sabotage were basically sound for most bases throughout the world, a study in Vietnam proved that no single existing system or technique provided sufficient security to thwart the Viet Cong guerrillas in their own environment.

Based on the situation in Vietnam a new base security concept, unlike any in Air Force history, was designed. Evolved under the supervisory eye of Lt. Gen. Glen W. Martin, Air Force Inspector General

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In the lush Hawaiian countryside, air policemen practice combat tactics. Crew fires a .50 caliber machine gun at a simulated enemy target.

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until February 1967, the proposal was presented to and accepted by Chief of Staff, General John P. McConnell and the Air Staff. The name Safe Side was assigned to the development of the new concept.

Because of his experience in the field of internal security, Lt. Col. William H. Wise was appointed project officer for Operation Safe Side.

Discussions were held with the US Army, Marine Corps, and Royal Air Force regarding ground combat training courses which would best suit the needs of this new program. The US Army Ranger Course at Fort Benning, Ga., was selected. In addition to being realistic and tough, it also developed the individual's self-confidence, and leadership abilities, as well as his skill in ground combat tactics.

A training plan was written, based on Army Ranger experience, and a number of Air Force Security Police officers and NCOs were screened for instructor duty. Twenty-three were finally selected for Ranger training.

Next, the call for volunteers went out to security policemen. The requirements were stiff. Not only did applicants have to be highly motivated, but their last five proficiency reports had to be in the top 10 percent! Naturally, applicants also had to be in near-perfect physical condition. One hundred seventy men were chosen.



Trainees are schooled in the art of camouflage. Properly garbed, they are almost impossible to spot. See the M-16 aimed directly at you?

The 1041st USAF Security Police Squadron was activated in September 1966. It then had 225 men, including trainees, instructors and support personnel. All its combat members were, and still are, volunteers. Virtually all had been Air Force Security Policemen.

"During the first few weeks, trainees were given a lot of physical conditioning and many hours of drill," said a training NCO. "We had to get them in shape as quickly as possible. The drills were good for their coordination. We wanted them to see everything, think quickly and clearly, to react instantaneously and to shoot straight. All of these are important in combat," explained the veteran security policeman.

Schofield Barracks in Hawaii was selected as the training site because of its terrain, housing, and other facilities. An obstacle course was not available at Schofield, but the instructors built their own, patterning it after the one at Fort Benning.

Training was in a jungle environment, and included night infiltration tactics. Scout dogs were included in the program. Air Force personnel conducted all phases of training.

This is the first time a complete Air Force unit has been trained for defensive ground combat.

"Local base security forces are responsible for the internal protection of air bases," Colonel Wise stated. "They have been very effective against attempted penetrations by saboteurs. But when hostile groups overtly attack our base perimeters in large numbers, it's too late!

"With units such as the 1041st on the scene, the enemy would have a rough time getting in close enough to the base without being detected," he continued. "We are equipped with modern electronic devices and scout dogs to alert us when someone penetrates our area of responsibility."

Personnel of the 1041st are highly trained in all phases of ground combat, with special emphasis on tactics relating to perimeter and internal security protection. Their basic weapon is the M-16 rifle, but they also have, and are highly skilled in the use of, a wide variety of other weapons which make the unit fit a high firepower organization.

The dogs of the 1041st are unique within the Air Force. They are scout dogs trained primarily not to attack an enemy, but to detect his presence, even when he's hiding in water.

A comparatively new system of hand-to-hand combat measures is used by the unit. It includes self defense with and without weapons. It is designed to kill or incapacitate an enemy whenever physical con-

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tact is made. All assigned Air Force Security Policemen are skilled in hand-to-hand combat.

To check on physical and combat proficiency, periodic tests were given. These included the 40-yard low crawl, horizontal ladder, dodge run and jump, grenade throw, and one-mile run. Trainees were required to score a minimum of 300 for all five events.

When training began, the average physical condition score per student was 311 points. Six weeks later the average score had jumped to 381 — indicating the significant improvement in physical conditioning. More than 20 of the men clad in fatigues, combat

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boots, web belt, and canteen were able to run the mile in six minutes or less.

Midway through training the men were subjected to escape and evasion tactics. After being "captured" by the instructors, trainees were marched to an "enemy" compound. The students were held "captive" overnight — about 20 hours in all. "It was a harrowing experience," explained one of the men. "I'll never be taken prisoner," stated another.

"It was all made very realistic," said CMSgt. Robert C. Frink, squadron sergeant major. "We harassed them, insulted them, and did all the things we think

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the enemy would do to humiliate them. They were very uncomfortable. I don't think they got any sleep at all that night. Now, they have a better idea of what it means to be captured."

Sergeant Frink speaks from experience. During World War II he was captured by the Germans, but escaped 18 days later.

During their 16 weeks in Hawaii, ending in mid-December, the men went through combat training as rough as any ever taken by an Air Force unit. Their day began at dawn and ended long after dark. Many of the veteran instructors who completed the Army

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Ranger Course at Fort Benning rate Safe Side training as tough, and in some respects tougher than that at Benning.

Highlight of training came at the end of the ninth week. At this point the students received the unit's distinctive symbol, the "blue beret." General Martin, who had seen the project through from its beginning, presented the berets. From then on the trainees and instructors worked as a unit to form a flexible, highly mobile security police force. The men who had "Joined to Fight" were now "trained and ready to fight."



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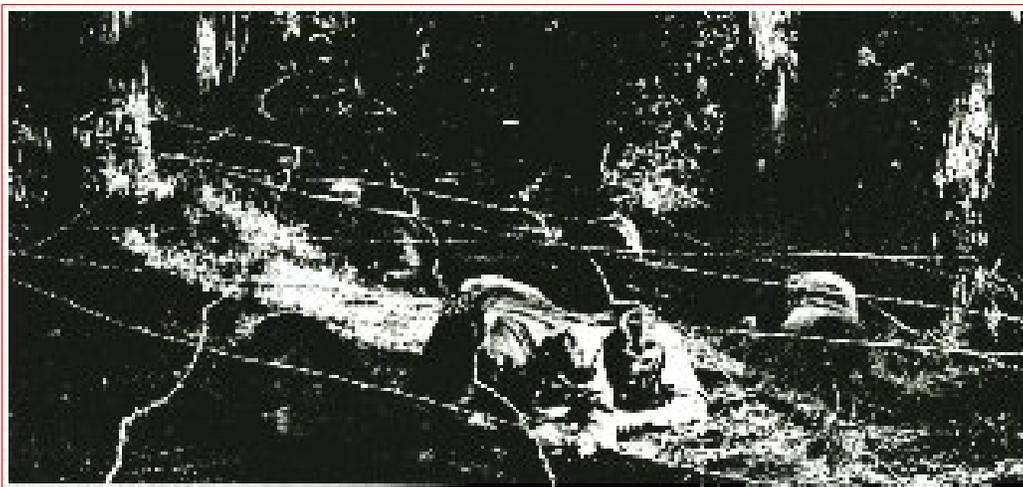
Many obstacles must be negotiated at a dead run. Course is like Ft. Benning Ranger School.

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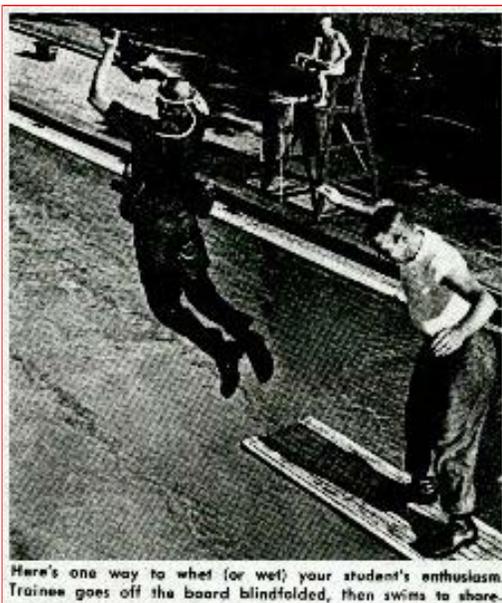
Trainees hit this chest-high log under a full head of steam; somersault over it with weapons in hand. This obstacle is called, appropriately enough, the "belly buster."



When students become proficient at crawling under the barbed wire at this height, it's lowered a little. This is only one of 14 challenges in the tough obstacle course.



Combat members of the 104th Security Police Squadron must be ready to surmount any obstacle they meet. Here they span a 20-meter river using a single rope technique known as the Swiss seat. A slip here means a refreshing dip in the stream.



Here's one way to whet (or wet) your student's enthusiasm. Trainee goes off the board blindfolded, then swings to shore.



Finally through their training, these air policemen are ready for combat. Unit uses M-16 and heavier weapons.

Safeside History
or
Safeside Stories

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