

*This is the original text of my article that was published in three installments of the online **Naval History** magazine in June 2022.*

The publisher's staff edited my text by adding numerous appropriate subtitles and used only their archived photographs instead of the ones that appear in this original article.

The Greatest Naval Deception of the Vietnam War



By Colonel John Gargus, USAF (Ret)

Early after midnight on 21 November 1970, the U.S. Navy in the Gulf of Tonkin executed what should be lauded as the greatest special operations deception in modern warfare by assisting the Army and the Air Force in their attempt to rescue American POWs from Son Tay in North Vietnam. Perhaps the main reason why this unique deception is not regarded as such by our military historians is because Vice Admiral Frederick A. Bardshar, Commander of Task Force 77, its principal creator, ordered his subordinates to destroy all copies of this diversion plans and prohibited publicity about its execution. Now, more than 50 years later, this joint service operation is recognized by historians as a tremendous tactical success and the Navy deserves due credit for its critical role in it. The raid did not rescue anyone, however, it saved lives of many suffering prisoners and resulted in more humane treatment for all who remained captive in North Vietnam.

Naval diversion for the raid was first suggested only as a post script when the proponents of the POW rescue plan briefed the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) on 10 July 1970. Because the Navy was not included in the air and ground operation plan named “Polar Circle”, they suggested that available carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin could participate by launching some aircraft to divert attention of North Vietnamese air defenses from the objective area west of Hanoi. This briefing took place at a time of major realignment in the top leadership of the U. S. Navy. Navy’s Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Thomas A. Moorer, was designated to become the new Chairman of the JCS. His successor was Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt who attended his first JCS meeting. Perhaps because of his newness as the CNO, he deferred the level of naval participation to the Commander of Task Force 77 in the Gulf of Tonkin, Vice Admiral Frederick A. Bardshar.ⁱ



ADM Thomas H. Moorer

ADM Elmo R. Zumwalt

VADM Frederick A. Bardshar

The JCS endorsed the plan with enthusiasm and authorized formation of a special task force to execute it. Brigadier General LeRoy J. Manor, Commander of the Air Force Special Operations Forces, became the Commander of this Joint Contingency Task Group. This JCTG became operational under the JCS, with special direct channel that bypassed all other service commands, which, for security concerns, did not have the need to know about the purpose for its existence. Brig. Gen. Manor was instructed to work out naval diversion requirements directly with V. Adm. Bardshar.ⁱⁱ

The next phase of the POW rescue mission consisted of U. S. Army and the U. S. Air Force operational planning and training at Eglin AFB in Florida. Its new code name was “Ivory Coast”. It did not have any U. S. Navy participants, however, Captain William M. Campbell from the CNO’s office, was designated as the liaison officer between the JCTG and Adm. Zumwalt. He gave him weekly briefings on the progress of activities at Eglin AFB.

Admiral John S. McCain, Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Pacific Command in Hawaii was in Washington on 25 September. While there he received a briefing on the planning and

training that was already ongoing at Eglin AFB. He endorsed the plan with even more enthusiasm and assured maximum security for it within his Pacific command. He promised that only his own Chief of Staff, Army Lt. Gen. Charles A. Corcoran would be read in on the POW rescue plan.



ADM John S. McCain



BG Donald D. Blackburn



Brig Gen LeRoy G. Manor

The next encounter between Adm. McCain and Brig. Gen. Manor occurred in Hawaii on 2 November when the JCTG was ready for deployment to Takhli Royal Thai Air Base. Along with him was Army Brig. Gen. Donald D. Blackburn, Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) who coordinated the operation with the JCS and Army Col. Arthur D. “Bull” Simons, who was Brig. Gen. Manor’s deputy. Also present was Lt. Gen. Corcoran. They briefed McCain on the newly written, execution phase of the raid plan named “Operation Kingpin”. McCain stressed that only the five of them present should know about the operation. He told his three visitors to coordinate directly with V. Adm. Bardshar at the Gulf of Tonkin’s Yankee Station and that Vice Admiral Maurice F. Weisner’s Seventh Fleet at Yokosuka, Japan should be kept in the dark about the plan for desired security reasons. That was a very unusual order because Weisner was Bardshar’s boss.ⁱⁱⁱ However, the number of commands between the JCS in the Pentagon and the combat ready JCTG had to be limited.

Next on the agenda for the three was to fly to Saigon to brief General Creighton Abrams and his U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) staff about what they were about to do inside their war zone. He was astonished at the boldness of the rescue plan and very eager to participate in it. They informed him that the ready to go task force would not be working for him because they operated directly under the JCS. Col. Simons also told him that his Army contingent did not need any theater support. His Green Berets would bring everything they needed with them. However, Brig. Gen. Manor needed Air Force fighters and helicopters for the Florida trained air crews and high flying F-4s and F-105s to provide anti MIG and surface to air missile (SAM) protection for the low altitude operations in the target area. Helicopters and jet aircraft would also

require appropriate refueling tanker support. This tasking was for the equally amazed and supportive Air Force Gen. Lucius D. Clay. He was Abrams' deputy who also served as the Commander of the 7th Air Force.^{iv} He eagerly promised his commands full support.

After the MACV briefing, Brig. Gen. Blackburn had to return to Washington and Brig. Gen. Manor and Col. Simons flew to V. Adm. Bardshar's flag ship the *USS America* at Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin. Carrier's log records their arrival on 5 November and also identifies their greeters as V. Adm. Bardshar, his Chief of Staff Capt. Jack S. Kenyon and Cdr. P. D. Hoskins, who was the TF-77's intelligence officer.^v They briefed them on the "Operation Kingpin", which at that time had only the following two sentence paragraph on naval participation:

"Just prior to the appearance of the force from the west, diversionary penetrations by Navy air, consisting of two staggered thrusts toward the coast by squadron-sized forces beginning at H-20 minutes, are expected to trigger conventional air attack response by the North Vietnamese. The real effort will then be competing for resources and attention."^{vi}

Manor and Simons were extremely pleased by their reception and Bardshar's eagerness to participate. Manor recalls that Bardshar volunteered more than just a diversion. He has him saying: "How about letting me help you in the objective area?" Manor's polite answer was: "I don't need your help there. I've got everything all set up for the objective area, but if you will put this feint raid against North Vietnam, it'll be a tremendous help. This will be on the night of the 21 November."^{vii}

Very enthusiastic Bardshar did not volunteer any details about what his TF-77 would do to assist in the POW rescue, but he promised that he would deliver a very credible diversionary force toward the mainland of North Vietnam that would overwhelm their air defense capability. He understood Adm. McCain's concern for maximum security and said that his planning for the diversion would assure it. He did not tell his visitors that the *USS America* was about to return to the USA and that he would go ashore at Subic Bay in the Philippines where he would wait for the arrival of her replacement the *USS Kitty Hawk* and that his staff would do all the planning for the diversion at the Fleet Intelligence Center, Pacific Facility. Manor and Simons spent the night on the *USS America* and departed the next day gratified that the Navy was totally committed to their Operation Kingpin.

We will never know what must have gone through Bardshar's mind. "How can I do this?" would be the best guess. It was one of the worst timing for his TF-77 command because of existing scheduled carrier rotations. At that time there were only two of normally three carriers at Yankee Station. They were the *USS America* and the *USS Oriskany*. His flag ship, the *USS America* was departing the station on 8 November and the *USS Oriskany* was due to leave during the 5 day window for the raid's execution. Replacement carriers the *USS Hancock* and the *USS Ranger* were not due at the Yankee station until after the planned rescue date. His own replacement flag ship,

the *USS Kitty Hawk* would not arrive until early December. How could he get three carriers on station to deliver a credible fake attack on the target date?

The first thing he did was to extend the station time for the *USS Oriskany* until 29 November. Then he departed from the Yankee Station on 8 November in the *USS America* for Subic Bay. This left the skipper of the *USS Oriskany* R. Adm. James D. ("Jig Dog") Ramage in command of TF-77. All planning for the diversion would be done at Subic Bay by the staff Bardshar brought along with him. Initially this staff consisted of the intelligence officer P. D. Hoskins and a few qualified air operations planners who were never let in on the reason for the unusual mock attack they had to orchestrate. When Capt. Allen E. "Boot" Hill, Bardshar's operations officer, returned from temporary duty in Washington he was immediately put in charge of planning.



RADM James D. Ramage RADM Allen E. "Boot" Hill CAPT Perry D. Hoskins

During the time at Subic Bay Bardshar maneuvered to have the *USS Hancock* and the *USS Ranger* arrive at Yankee Station in time for the diversion. He acquired control of both carriers once they crossed the international dateline and then accelerated their arrival by limiting their port time at Subic Bay for pick-up of needed supplies. He also cut off their usual time consuming en route flying training exercises. He also directed them to leave Subic Bay without reporting their departure times and instructed them not to submit normal move reports on their way to the Yankee Station. This was in keeping with Adm. McCain's directive to keep his boss V. Adm. Maurice F. Weisner, Commander of the 7th Fleet in Japan out of the loop for security reasons. More than 30 years later I discussed these events with retired V. Adm. Weisner. He was still upset over being kept in the dark within his own command, but understood McCain's reasoning for doing so. Shifts in schedules and move reports would have attracted unwanted questions at his headquarters. ^{viii}

Meanwhile, as retired R. Adm. Allen "Boot" Hill related to me, the planning at the Fleet Intelligence Center, Pacific Facility moved along. Bardshar encouraged them to orchestrate a very

credible diversion from three carriers that would shake up the North Vietnamese who had enjoyed immunity from bombing north of the 20th parallel since 31 March 1968. Their mock attack plan turned out to be the largest nighttime naval operation of the Vietnam War that excited even the Chinese at whose doorsteps it took place. It was much bigger and more aggressive diversion than the Air Force planners anticipated. They underestimated TF-77's resolve to contribute to the POW rescue effort.

Operations plan for the diversion was an amazing piece of planning art work. It consisted of only 13 double spaced pages of text that was so precise and clear to all who were asked to implement it. Because its drafters did not know the reason for the unusual operation they orchestrated, their plan mentioned only that it would provide a diversion for a special operation conducted by a Joint Contingency Task Group in the near future. The JCTG's mission was never explained. However, the mission of TF-77 and its utmost secrecy was very clearly stated.

On mission objective:

1. U. S. Navy Operations. CTF-77 was briefed and tasked by COMJCTG to carry out a diversionary effort without going through the usual chain of command for security reasons....

1. c. Concept of Operations. The primary purpose of this operation is diversion. It is therefore doubtful that political considerations will permit the expenditure of air-to-ground ordnance other than flares. Within these limits, the objective is to create as much confusion in the NVN Command and Control System as possible.^{ix}

On security considerations:

1. Once this plan is opened by designated addressees, disclosure of such portions as necessary to accomplish your assigned mission is authorized. Such disclosure will be restricted to those with an absolute need to know and will be accomplished as late as possible in order to minimize the chances of compromise. Once this plan has been opened, no personnel will leave your unit and personnel will be transferred only in emergency cases until the operation has been terminated or cancelled.

3. No public statements regarding this operation are permitted even after its completion, unless specifically authorized by CTF-77 IAW directives received from higher authority.

8. Upon termination of this operation, this OPORD will be destroyed. Message report to originator stating that destruction has been accomplished is required.^x

The OPORD provided very detailed tasks for each participating model aircraft, most of which would fly in pairs. It gave them precise departure times over common start of attack point which was NSAR (North Search And Rescue) position of a ship with TACAN transmitter (Tactical Air Navigation). Thereafter, pairs of A-7s on tracks Alpha and Bravo and A-6s on Track Charlie were given their air speeds, track headings with geographical turning points and start flare drop times at prescribed intervals in seconds. All other aircraft had their departure times, altitudes and arrival times at their designated orbit points. Sea borne radar aboard the *USS Wainwright*, Navy's

air traffic control ship “Red Crown”, would monitor all aircraft over the Gulf of Tonkin. This included six Air Force aircraft whose orbit points and altitudes were not included in the OPORD. Red Crown also had the capability to monitor MIG activity, furnish MIG warnings and provide friendly fighters with vectors to intercept hostile aircraft. In addition, the Navy would launch two E-1B airborne radar aircraft which performed essentially the same functions as Air Force’s two “College Eye” EC-121Ts.

The OPORD provided geographical coordinates for all aircraft tracks and times on target allowing me to plot everything on a navigational chart more than 35 years later. I could also reconstruct the sequence of actual diversion from times given to me by some of the 30 naval participants whom I was able to contact before I authored my book. Most of them simply responded that they remembered to be right on time on their departure from NSAR and that they never had to divert from their flight planned routes, air speeds and orbits because of enemy threats.

Weather was always a potential problem for the carefully orchestrated JCTG’s Operation Kingpin plan. All indications were that typhoon Patsy could place the naval mission execution on the morning of November 22 in serious jeopardy. The typhoon was moving in from the Philippines casting serious doubts on Navy’s ability to execute the diversion as planned on the target date. This development troubled Brig. Gen. Manor. Patsy would soon be moving over the Gulf of Tonkin and most certainly would jeopardize planned TF-77 operations. At 4:11 P.M. on 19 November, Manor notified the National Military Command Center in Washington, McCain in Hawaii, and Bardshar at TF-77 that a five-day mission delay due to weather was possible. All this time Manor and his staff did not know that Bardshar had gone to Subic Bay in departing *USS America* and believed that he had remained in the Gulf of Tonkin aboard *USS Oriskany*. While this was transpiring at the JCTG’s staging base at Takhli Royal Air Force Base in Thailand, Bardshar flew to the *USS Oriskany* in a C-2 COD from NAS Cubi Point with his plans and intelligence officers “Boot” Hill and P. D. Hoskins to deliver his OPORD for the diversion. Ship’s^{xi} deck log shows them arriving at 12:39 P.M., recording that: “*Commander Attack Carrier Striking Force Seventh Fleet, VADM Bardshar, USN broke his flag in this ship*”.

This is how R. Adm. Ramage remembers that day:

During 1970, as Commander Carrier Task Group 77.0, I was in tactical command of strike operations from Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin. VADM Fred Bardshar, Commander Striking Force Seventh Fleet (CTF-77), was not in the Gulf. He landed aboard USS Oriskany (CVA-34) in a C-2 COD originating from NAS Cubi Point, Philippines. He immediately followed me down to my cabin accompanied by his operations officer, CAPT Allen "Boot" Hill, and his intelligence officer, CDR P.D. Hoskins. I hadn't the slightest idea why ADM Bardshar was on board, but I knew that whatever he had on his mind had to be of extreme importance. After he closed the door, he began by saying that what he was about to tell me was so highly classified that it had to be passed to me in person. There was to be no electronic communication on the subject. He continued: "We are going to cover an

attempt to rescue some prisoners in North Vietnam." I was elated. We really hadn't done much in the North since President Johnson had placed the northern and most vital parts of NVN off limits in 1968. All I could comment was, "It's about time!" Fred then said that the raid was to take place after midnight that night. Task Force 77's job was to operate aircraft east of Hanoi, mainly around Haiphong to keep the attention focused to the east and draw off any enemy reaction to the prisoner recovery operations in the Son Tay area. We would have authority to return fire against enemy opposition—another bit of good news.

Fred then added, "Unfortunately, this operation is so highly classified that you can't tell your aircrews what it's all about." I responded, "What kind of nut do you think the pilots would take me for when I order about a hundred planes out at night without giving them a good reason?" Fred then said that he understood my position clearly, and that I could use my own judgment—which I did. I then pointed out that since he was senior and on station that perhaps he might want to take tactical command. Bardshar said, "No, it's your show, run it." ^{xii}

At the time of this surprising encounter, Ramage had not yet seen the OPOORD which was written by Bardshar's planners for his execution. Once he reviewed it, he found the following Command and Signal paragraph on page 10:

- (1) Commander, Joint Contingency Task Group, under the operational command of the CINCPAC, and located at Monkey Mountain has overall authority for the conduct of this operation.*
- (2) CTG 77.0 is CCD-7 in USS Oriskany*
- (3) CTF 77 located in USS Oriskany will exercise overriding authority for the conduct of the diversionary effort as directed by the CJCTG.*

Individual in (1) is Brig. Gen. Manor. In (2) is the Carrier Task Group commander R. Adm. Ramage. Then in (3) is V. Adm. Bardshar who would exercise overriding authority if directed by Manor from the Tactical Air Control Center-North Sector at Monkey Mountain. That is not an unusual special operations command arrangement. Officer of one star rank was in overall command. Two star officer (Ramage) was in charge of the diversion, while his boss (Bardshar), a three star officer, was only an observing guest on the *USS Oriskany*. Bardshar, who devoted his best efforts to plan the diversion, intended all along to sit back and have his friend "Jig Dog" implement it. He must have known that this mission would be up to that date the largest naval nighttime operation of the Vietnam War. Thirty five years later, when I met Ramage, he informed me that as far as he knew, there had not been a night carrier operation of that magnitude launched since the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944. He also added that at this time in 1970 all of the carrier pilots were night qualified.^{xiii}

To confirm that air mass movement influenced by the approaching typhoon was indeed occurring, Manor arranged for a special afternoon RF-4 weather reconnaissance flight to scout the area over Laos. This flight confirmed that the earlier weather briefing received by him was correct. Consequently, at 3:56 P.M. (at 3:56 A. M. on Friday morning in Washington), he notified Blackburn in the Pentagon and McCain in Hawaii that he was advancing the rescue mission by 24 hours. Thirty minutes later (at 5:26 P.M. at Yankee Station) he sent the final “go” message to Bardshar.

Without any delay, Capt. “Boot” Hill and Cdr. Hoskins got very busy. R. Adm. Ramage, who became just the sixth man in PACOM to be informed about the POW rescue and was also given the task to conduct the diversion, needed a lot of help. He had less than 9 hours left before launching the first aircraft. Because electronic transmissions of the OPORD were not permitted, they had to fly by helicopter from one carrier to another to brief hurriedly assembled skippers and deliver them paper copies of the OPORD they were to conduct that night. Someone had to take the OPORD to the land based carrier tankers at DaNang and then deliver a copy of it to Brig. Gen. Manor. As retired R. Adm. Hill related to me more than 30 years later, they were all surprised by the short notice to respond and had the same unanswerable questions about what was happening. Was this the end of the long standing bombing pause? Why no ordnance and only flares? He would say the same thing to all. Retired Rear Admiral Bruce Boland, who commanded the VF-24 squadron on the *USS Hancock*, remembers: “*Hill told us that he could not say why we were doing this operation but when it was over we would all be proud of being involved in it. He was right!*”^{xiv}

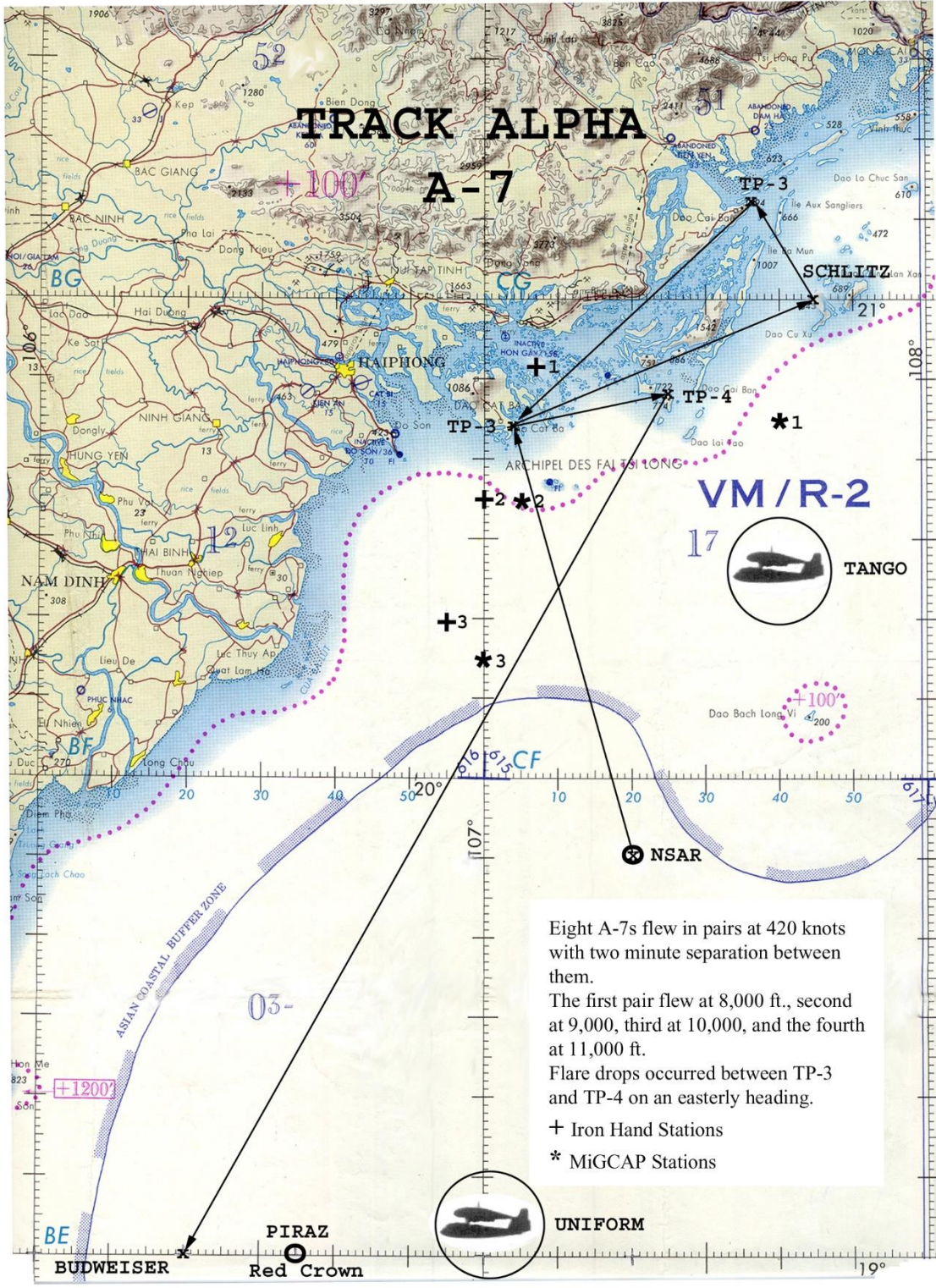
Carrier skippers and flying unit commanders were not the only ones that needed to be notified in person about the mission that would unfold that night. There were several support ships that needed to participate. One of these was the *USS Wainwright* which arrived on station on that day from her prior mission off the coast of Korea. She was a sophisticated, technologically up-to-date floating air traffic control center of the Vietnam War era with capability to control and direct air combat operations. She was a cruiser armed with Terrier missiles and served as a PIRAZ ship (Positive Identification Radar Advisory Zone). She was linked with other ships through Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS) which provided carrier Combat Information Centers with real time displays of covered airspace. PIRAZ ship’s basic function was to provide positive identification and tracking of any aircraft within her radar coverage and from the air when tied-in with airborne surveillance radars on E-1Bs. More than a dozen radar operators with computer consoles could maintain around the clock vigilance to provide advisories to as many as 150 aircraft. These could vary from normal flight following to attack warnings and vectoring of friendly fighters for intercepting and destroying enemy aircraft. They could assist aircraft by steering them to tankers for airborne refueling and provide vital inputs for rescue of downed crewmembers. Any ship equipped with NTDS could selectively monitor any activity in real time while it was happening with updates from each new sweep of Wainwright’s radar antenna.

There would be significant congestion during aircraft launches and recoveries. Each carrier needed air traffic control services equal to a relatively busy mainland airport. That night there would be three such airports within a one-degree square box that comprised the Yankee Station. (At the 19th parallel one-degree of longitude measures 60 nautical miles and one degree of latitude is 56.5 nautical miles.) Obviously the maneuverable air spaces of carriers would overlap and vary with their changing locations relative to each other. They would be moving within Yankee Station, sailing into the wind at about 15 nautical miles per hour during aircraft launches and recoveries. Once all of the aircraft were off their decks, they would have to turn around so that they could sail into the wind again when their aircraft returned to their decks. That would be a lot of carrier and aircraft movement confined to a small geographical space. Furthermore, each carrier had a flotilla of supporting ships that would also be on the move. All would have to participate in a carefully choreographed water ballet taking place inside of a sixty square mile box.

Newly arrived Wainwright's radar controllers would earn their pay that night. During a period of more than two-hours they would track unprecedented numbers of blacked out and radio silenced Navy and Air Force aircraft that would fly multiple tracks overland north of Haiphong and over the Gulf of Tonkin. Their tracks would have time and altitude separations, but they would cross over each other in various congested locations. They would have to be alert to monitor them across their radar scopes and pay close attention to coded altitude data squawked by each aircraft's IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) transmitter.

The first Navy aircraft in the air at 1:00 A. M. 21 November was *USS Ranger's* KA-3B tanker land based at Da Nang Air Base in South Vietnam. Following it there were three pairs of EKA-3B ECM (electromagnetic countermeasures) tankers which belonged to each one of the carriers. They were too heavy for normal operations from carrier decks. Besides being fully loaded with fuel, they performed a dual mission. Their primary one was to engage the enemy in electronic warfare with sophisticated electronic countermeasures equipment. They flew on a 42-mile long track spread out at altitudes of 21, 23, and 24,000 feet just outside of lethal range of surface to air missiles and jammed all detected radar and radio frequencies of the enemy. Their secondary role as tankers was to provide fuel for any Navy aircraft in need. In addition to these seven tankers there were six more. Four were A-7s launched from the *USS Oriskany* and two A-6s from the *USS Ranger*.

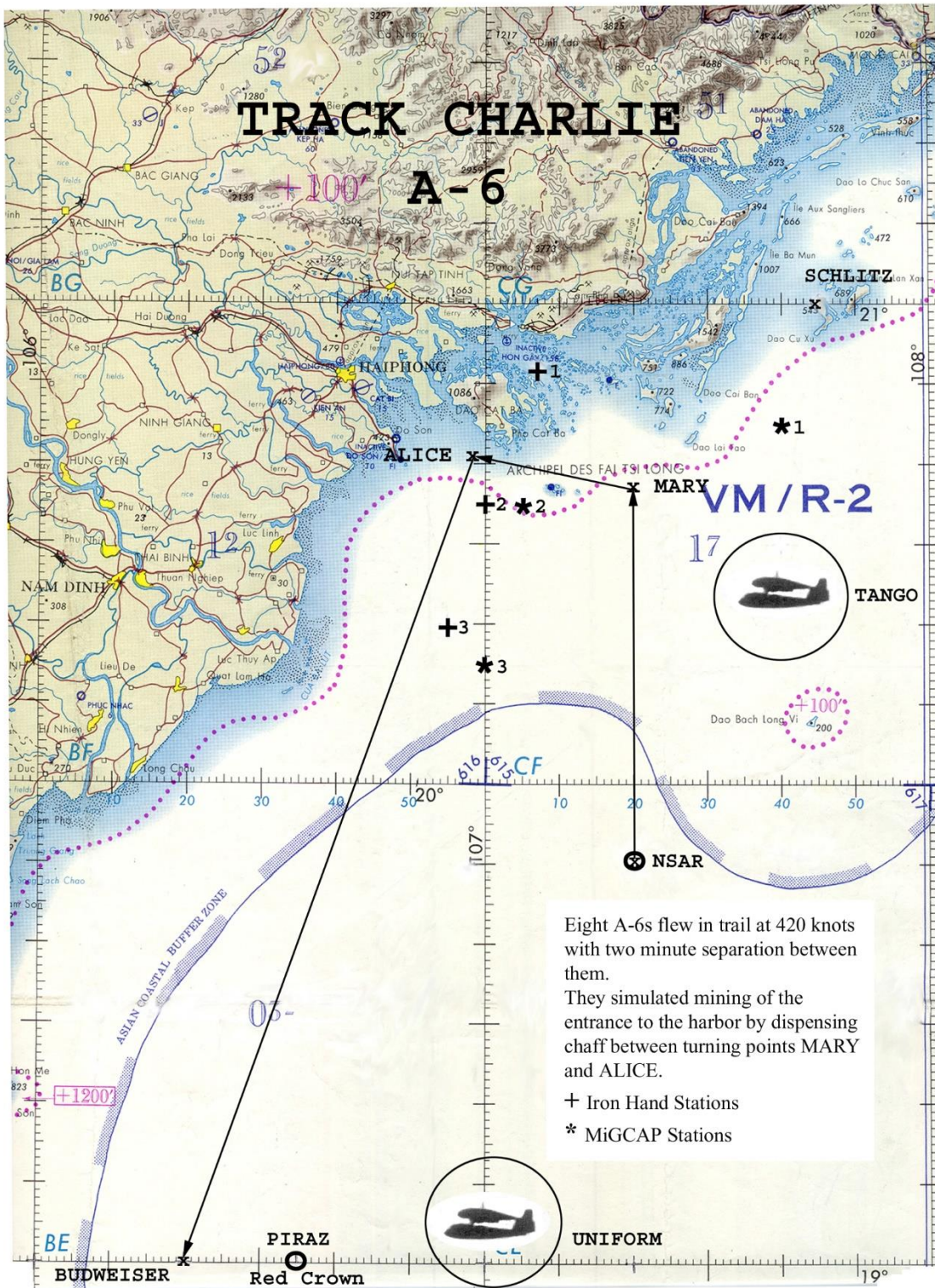
The first attack aircraft were six A-7s from the *USS Oriskany*. They departed NSAR in pairs on track Bravo at two minute intervals starting at 1:30 A. M. They flew inland north of Hanoi to the vicinity of Kep Air Base, turned around and heading east, began dropping flares. Each one carried 8 two million candle power Mark 24 flares and began launching them at 15 second intervals starting at 1:52 A. M. The second wave of attack aircraft, eight A-7s, also from the *USS Oriskany*, departed NSAR on track Alpha at 1:32 A. M. with the same two minute time separation. This track took them flying a triangular pattern over the islands east of Haiphong. They started dropping 64 more flares at 1:56 A.M. These illuminated area east of the land lit up by the 48 flares from the A-



Eight A-7s flew in pairs at 420 knots with two minute separation between them.
 The first pair flew at 8,000 ft., second at 9,000, third at 10,000, and the fourth at 11,000 ft.
 Flare drops occurred between TP-3 and TP-4 on an easterly heading.

+ Iron Hand Stations
 * MiGCAP Stations





There were twenty four more naval aircraft in this diversionary attack. All had specific defensive assignments and all but three were armed for defense against the enemy. Two were airborne radar platform E-1B “Willy Fudds” for monitoring air traffic and for assisting in MIG detection and vectoring. One belonged to the *USS Oriskany* and the other to the *USS Ranger*. The third one was P-3 Orion with Big Look long range surveillance radar. Orion’s home base was in Guam, but this one was launched from its forward staging base at Da Nang.

CT-77 OPORD required four F-4s from the *USS Ranger* to conduct MIGCAP (MIG Combat Air Patrol) to protect the unarmed twenty two attack aircraft. Next came five A-7 “Iron Hand” anti-surface to air missile site (SAM) suppressing fighters, along with four A-7s for RESCAP (Rescue Combat Air Patrol). Finally, from the *USS Ranger* came two more F-4s to provide TARCAP (Target). The *USS Oriskany* was tasked to launch two F-8 fighters for BARCAP (Barrier) to protect Air Force’s two RC-135 Combat Apples, one RC-135 radio monitor and relay aircraft and two KC-135 tankers. The *USS Oriskany* also launched four more F-8 FORCECAPs to protect the entire force.

Not counted among the 59 specified aircraft in the OPORD were rescue helicopters that normally watch over the carriers during aircraft launches and recoveries. The OPORD listed 22 various standby alert aircraft that had to be ready to replace anyone who dropped out of their assigned routes and orbits for any reason. Eight were ready on the deck of the *USS Ranger* and seven each on the *USS Oriskany* and the *USS Hancock*.



RADM Lawrence C. Chambers

None of the pilots and air crew members who flew in Navy’s aircraft in those early hours of 21 November knew that their mission was designed to support a POW rescue. Neither did Cdr. Lawrence C. Chambers, the Air Boss of the *USS Oriskany*, who launched and recovered 24 of her aircraft. Fifty years later, as retired R. Adm., he recalled: *"We knew it was big when we launched every flyable F-8, the A-6's & the A-7's plus the Willy Fudd for a night hop in the middle of the night with marginal weather in the Gulf of Tonkin. But we didn't know the mission until after the recovery when Captain Frank S. Haak, skipper of Oriskany informed us."*^{xv}

Brig. Gen. Manor’s mission planners, (I was privileged to be one of them) were not aware of the enormity of this naval operation. We did not learn about its size and success until we reassembled at Eglin AFB for a detailed post raid debriefing. Not knowing much about carrier operations, we anticipated just a few aircraft to drop flares somewhere in the vicinity of Haiphong. V. Adm. Bardshar’s CT-77 did not have a representative at the debriefing and did not provide a written after action report. We heard only praises from those members of Manor’s staff who were

with him at the Monkey Mountain command post. They had a very good view of naval activity on big display screens which showed aircraft movements in real time by Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS) from PIRAZ ship the *USS Wainwright*. None of us had seen the CTF-77 OPORD because after the decision to execute the mission 24 hours early, there was no time for it to reach us prior to Air Force's aircraft launches from Thailand. We did not know that Bardshar had gone to the Subic Bay to prepare the OPORD in departing *USS America* and that he tasked his subordinate R. Adm. Ramage to execute the diversion.

Manor violated Bardshar's instructions to destroy his copy of the FT-77 OPORD he received just before assuming command of the entire operation at Monkey Mountain. He brought it with him to Florida where we could see it for the first time. It became an attachment to his "Commander, JCS Joint Contingency Task Group Report on the Son Tay Prisoner of War Rescue Operation." His comments summarized naval participation on a single double spaced typewriter page. It was based on what he and his staff learned at the command post while they monitored activities over the Gulf of Tonkin and on a brief summary of the OPORD.

In his commander's comments at the beginning of the report he devoted the following paragraph to praise the Commander of TF-77 for the diversionary operation.

5. The diversionary actions performed by Carrier Task Force 77 were vital to the overall success of the mission. The results of this effort were exactly as foreseen during the planning phase. It caused the enemy defense authorities to split their attention and concern thereby contributing greatly to the confusion and chaos which resulted. In short, it served to deny the option of concentrating his attention to our true and primary mission. The timing of the Navy diversion was precisely according to plan. The U. S. Navy planning and mission execution was superb in every respect. I am deeply grateful for the wholehearted and enthusiastic support received from the Commander of Carrier Task Force 77.^{xvi}

Based on observations from the Monkey Mountain command post he documented the following:

d. NVN reaction was initially slow, reaching a peak of intensity as the second wave was over the Haiphong Harbor. To the degree observable, the principal objective of the Navy diversionary effort was achieved. The density of Navy operations in the Gulf of Tonkin was the most extensive Navy night operation of the SEA conflict. Considering that two of the carriers arrived in theater just prior to this operation, the precise execution of this mission without incident is commendable.^{xvii}

Benjamin F. Schemmer wrote the first comprehensive book on the Son Tay raid in 1976, more than five years after the event. At that time he was the editor and publisher of the *Armed Forces Journal*, and had many contacts in Washington with officials from the Pentagon as well as

from some key individuals of intelligence agencies. They provided him with some fill in details about what went on in our nation's capital. Then he had the two volume text of the three volume report by Brig. Gen. Manor which provided him with declassified information about the raid. However, he had difficult time getting personal inputs from dispersed raid's planners and participants. They were scattered throughout the world on other military assignments and were still reluctant to provide operational information which they believed was still classified. Naval participants were even more reticent. The few key individuals, who learned about the diversion's purpose before its execution, headed Bardshar's orders that only he could approve news releases about the operation and destroyed the OPOD. It was only one Top Secret event for the flying participants, in which they got involved on one night in the Gulf of Tonkin without being informed about its purpose. Some learned about it after their return to the carriers and the rest from the military radio or from the *Stars and Stripes* news reports.

The few key officers from the JCTG who began lecturing about the Son Tay raid did not have sufficient information about the Navy's diversionary role. Consequently, appropriate credit for the naval contribution was not fully expressed. In 1977-78 I had several opportunities to hear presentations about the Son Tay raid to students of the USAF Special Operations School at Hurlburt Field in Florida. It was given regularly by retired Col. "Bull" Simons and one raid helicopter pilot from the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service at Eglin AFB. Whenever a helicopter pilot was not available, school's Commander, Col. Richard Dutton, former inmate of Son Tay, invited me to provide Air Force's input. On those occasions both of us complemented the Navy for outstanding support. However, I don't recall any questions about naval operational details. Audiences were satisfied with hearing about Navy's flying 59 aircraft compared to USAF's 57 and that 20 SAMs were fired east of Hanoi and 16 over Son Tay. It was the same after I began my solo lecturing about the raid. American public did not learn much about the Navy's involvement in the raid from the media. News stories about the raid focused on the Army and the Air Force, the two services that were in Brig. Gen. Manor's JCTG. Initially much of that publicity was critical and political. Some depicted it as a failure and a military adventure of unpopular President Nixon. There was no criticism of the Navy. Navy was not a part of the JCTG's elaborate preparation for the raid and its support for it was viewed only as a part of its normal wartime duty.

A very good account and analysis of the special operations aspects of the raid came from a well-known Admiral William H. McRaven, who organized and oversaw Operation Neptune Spear that killed Osama bin Laden. As a student at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California in 1993, he wrote a Master of Arts degree thesis on "The Theory of Special Operations" It was later published as a book *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*. In it he gave an excellent evaluation of Operation Kingpin, however, he mentioned the naval diversion only three times.

This is not at all surprising. There wasn't much more information about the

diversion at the time he wrote his thesis. V. Adm. Bardshar did not allow press releases and his personnel did not advertise their participation in that one night's event. Also as a student, McRaven did not have the time to make contacts with still living TF-77 participants. It took me more than three years of phone calls and e-mails to accumulate sufficient information to present the Navy's story in my book.

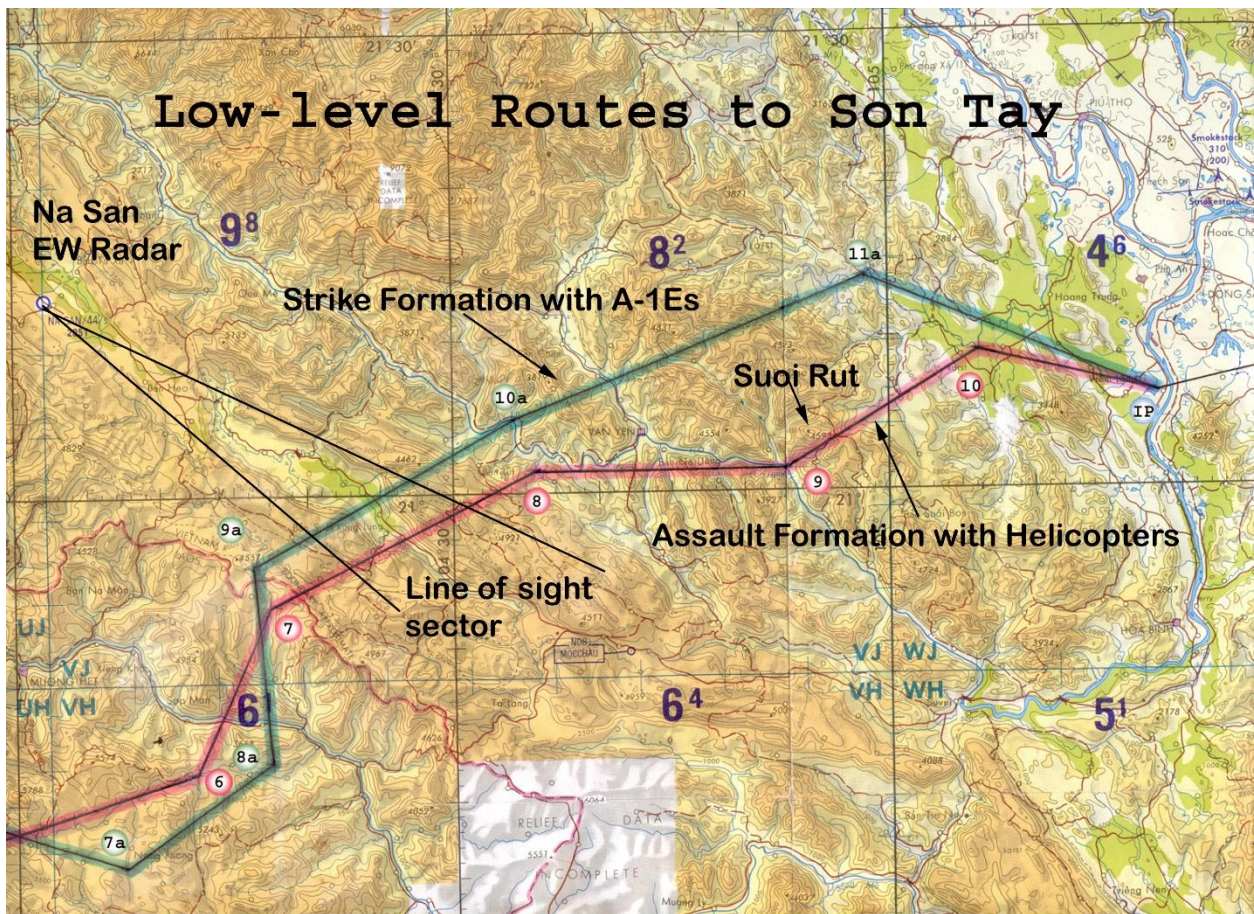
This lack of historical documentation for the Navy's role in the Son Tay raid troubled me a lot. So, some 30 years later, I began to look for still available TF-77's personnel to gather details about their participation.

My first, and the very best contact was retired R. Adm. "Boot" Hill. He provided me with many addresses, e-mails and phone numbers of key people with whom he still maintained contacts. The best one of these was his former intelligence officer, retired Capt. P. D. Hoskins, who remembered everything about the genesis of their OPORD and how it was executed. "Boot" Hill also read some drafts of stories I was able to collect from individuals who began referring me to other participants. "Boot" wanted me to get a better grasp on carrier operations, and arranged for me to fly to the *USS Constellation*. She was off the coast of California preparing for her last operational deployment to the Persian Gulf. I spent three memorable days and two nights as her sole VIP guest. My escorts showed me everything I wanted to see and were glad to answer all my questions about carrier operations. "Boot" Hill also arranged for me to meet R. Adm. "Jig Dog" Ramage in San Diego for a very productive encounter. That is when he promised me to give me his unpublished story "Carrier Task Force – 77 and the Son Tay Raid". With all that help I produced my story about the "U. S. Navy in the Son Tay Raid" for distribution to attendees of the Son Tay Raiders Association reunion in Las Vegas in 2003. I donated that article to Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell AFB in Alabama.

After that I continued with my still available 40 naval contacts to produce the first detailed published account about the diversion in my book *The Son Tay Raid – American POWs in Vietnam Were Not Forgotten*. It was well received by all who had assisted me in telling the Navy's story and helped to generate more interest in my subsequent lectures on the effects of the diversion on the tactical success of Operation Kingpin.

To appreciate the greatness of Navy's contribution we must go beyond V. Adm. Bardshar's enthusiastic support to deliver a convincing mock attack to test the NVN' air defense network. We need to share his secret manipulation to get the three carriers on station in time for the raid and then the hurried preparation for launching the aircraft within less than 9 hours of notice. We need to mesh the Air Force and Navy execution minute by minute to see the genius of Bardshar's planning staff.

The most critical time for the JCTG's Combat Talon escorted formations of Jolly Green Giant helicopters and A1-E fighters occurred between 1:41 to 1:54 A. M. when they flew within the line of sight of early warning radar at Na San, west of the mountain range. Helicopters were exposed for more than four minutes and the fighter formation for more than three. Meanwhile, eight A-7s from the *USS Oriskany* began their flare drops at 1:54 on track Bravo and the other eight at 1:56 on track Alpha. Electronic warfare officers (EWOs) in each escorting Talon monitored the rotating scan of this radar during this crucial passage and assured them that they were passing by undetected. Perhaps the crew which operated this early warning radar was already interested in monitoring the appearance of ten KC-135 tankers in their normal Laotian refueling orbits and the arrival of the first F-4s and F105s which were beginning to top off their fuel tanks. We were hoping that this is what would occur. Such congregation of aircraft signaled impending high altitude attack. The formations were as low as they could be within the margin of safety and they would not pose the same threat as the high flying jets.



*Line of sight exposure of aircraft formations to the Na San's early warning radar.
Suoi Rut with suspected mountain top listening post at 4,593 ft.*

Rear Admiral Ramage on the *USS Oriskany* moved between the bridge and the flight deck overseeing aircraft launches. V. Adm. Bardshar stayed out of the way, but he monitored what was happening in the air. He had an ideal and technologically up to date set up with Wainwright's PIRAZ coverage and the NTDS communications tie in. That gave him a complete picture of the Gulf area and of the North Vietnamese landmass all the way to the mountains past the Black River. He could see big screens with real time displays of airborne aircraft and follow them as they moved through the skies from one planned turning point to another. He could monitor aircraft radio frequencies and listen to radio transmissions of naval air crews. He also had access to what the enemy was saying over the airwaves. Interpreters on airborne EP-3, would translate commands generated by the North Vietnamese defense network and provide timely inputs on enemy responses to the attack.

The *USS Wainwright's* radar information was also displayed on big screens at the Monkey Mountain's Tactical Control Center – North Sector where Brig. Gen. Manor and his staff could see the start of the diversion. At first glance, the greenish glow displays appeared to show a disorganized group of small semi-circles that represented friendly aircraft moving in every possible direction. But a prolonged look at each screen would reveal that there was a precise order to each aircraft's movement. Each had a definite air space to go to and then depart from it at a predetermined time. Bardshar knew the battle plan layout with its numerous geographical points that were identified by numbers, letters of alphabet, proper names like "MARY" and "ALICE", or even favorite beers like "SCHLITZ" and "BUDWEISER". He observed the screens with satisfaction as the naval forces moved in for their carefully staged mock attack. Everything was unfolding as planned. All aircraft were transmitting IFF that identified them to the PIRAZ radar controllers, giving them their speed, direction and altitude. Aircraft were crossing their predetermined positions and the eavesdropping interpreters reported that the North Vietnamese radars were already hot.

Then, in the west, at about 2:05 A. M., when the Air Force formations crossed the last mountain range into the Black River Valley, crew cockpit occupants of all 13 aircraft witnessed an incredible view of the far horizon east of Hanoi that was illuminated by still burning parachute flares jettisoned by Navy A-7s on tracks Alpha and Bravo. The EWOs focused their attention on all known radars they had plotted on their maps of the river basin west of Hanoi. All radar signals were coming from where they were expected to be. None were targeting our low flying formations intruding into their air space. It was clear that the NVN Air Defense System had not received or failed to respond to operators of the early warning radar at Na San. That radar site must have detected and reported flights of five F-105s and five F-4s heading toward Hanoi. Diversion by the Navy in the east must have generated such confusion at the command level that they neglected to pay attention to what was developing in the west. This is exactly what the Air Force air operations planners wanted. They also wanted to ensure that the NVN would keep the MIG interceptors down and opt instead for using surface-to-air missiles. Their support role was not only to protect the low

flying formations but also to present the enemy antiaircraft defenses with inviting targets for SAMs. The Air Force had eight high flying jets in the air throughout the ground operation. They were four F-105 Wild Weasels and four F-4 MIG killers. Each foursome had one spare aircraft in orbit west of the Black River, ready to take over for any one that got shot down or disabled. Similarly, we had four A-1Es flying at up to 3,000 feet over Son Tay providing close air support for the ground troops. These also had one spare in orbit west of the river. The Wild Weasel F-105s and MIGCAP F-4s arrived unopposed and untargeted at their respective defensive stations at about 2:08 and 2:10.

Brig. Gen. Manor's report on the NVN defenses differs only by several minutes from the times recorded in NVN's histories. His is based on reports of radar activity detected and recorded by electronic countermeasures equipment in both formation leading aircraft. It reads: "*From 2:04 until 2:24 A. M. local time the NVN Air Defense System was in the process of increasing alert and establishing targets.*"^{xviii} Emissions from detected surveillance radars were coming from known locations and there were no indications of air defense alertness. It was obvious that the NVN were either not alerted by Na San's early warning radar west of the mountains, or ignored its reports of refueling tankers in orbit over Laos and then heading toward Hanoi.

The NVN report reads: "*At the 361st Air Defense Division, after receiving the reports of enemy activity, Deputy Commander Dinh Dinh Sanh ordered the entire division to Condition One on an immediate basis. This was done at 2:18 A. M. At 2:26 A. M., the entire division was ready for battle.*"^{xix} Our records show that the first SAM targeting occurred at 2:28 A. M. This suggests that their time of 2:18 is not correct. Time of 2:08 A. M. corresponds to the arrival of the F-105 Wild Weasels. Normally, it took NMV defenses about 20 minutes to get ready to launch missiles after first aircraft detection. Wild Weasels recorded first targeting by SAMs at 2:28 A. M. There is also something very curious about this cited source. It contains periodic statements about SAM battalions targeting aircraft beyond 20 kilometers without launching their rockets. It suggests that all launches in the west occurred when the aircraft were inside of a 20 kilometer (or 12.5 mile) distance.

There must have been disorientation in their air defense network because they also failed to respond to a report from a mountain observation station about sound of helicopters heading to the east. Our helicopter formation flew a 14.7 mile dog leg between 1:56 to 2:04 A. M. descending from 5,500 ft. to 4,000 ft. The highest peak, measuring 4,593 ft., was 2 miles north of this track. It was the likeliest location for this facility that we did not know about. Their air defense historians recorded the following about the sound of eastbound helicopters: "*Our visual observation station at Suoi Rut identified the sound of their engines and quickly reported this fact to command headquarters at all levels.*"^{xx} Again, the previously referenced NVN *History of the Air Defense Service* records that the 361st Air Defense Division did not respond until 2:18 A. M.

Navy's attack aircraft on three flare dropping tracks were not the only ones that provided targets for the SAMs. Cdr. Weston "Ham" Byng, led the "Iron Hand" A-7s from the *USS Ranger*. His paired off wingman aborted on the deck and he ended up in his SAM suppressing orbit at 32,000 ft. by himself. Consequently, he had no one protecting his back when he flew eastbound on his assigned track. He was continuously scanned, but that was no problem. The site which targeted him was too far away and he felt safe. He observed several SAMs rise high to their burn out altitudes and then self-destruct. All naval aircraft were on tracks and orbits that were out of harm's way. "Ham" Bing observed one SAM burn out at about 30,000 feet when he headed inland. He considered that enough of a threat that he launched one of his Shrike missiles even though he knew that it was outside of its effective range, hoping to get someone's attention.^{xxi} His was one of the only three Shrikes fired by the Iron Hands. Twenty NVN missiles that were launched against the Navy detonated without reaching their out of range targets.

Lt. "Bull" Durham, VF-194 squadron's safety officer from the *USS Oriskany*, flew BARCAP mission in F-8. He was also well out of range of any NVN defenses. He was never targeted in his orbit and commented: *"It was quite a show from my vantage point: hundreds of flares up north, non-stop SAM launches. Nobody was anywhere near the SAM sites, so the NVN launched them straight up in barrage mode. Still, it was more hostile fire in two hours than I had seen in two cruises,"*^{xxii}

Lt. James H. Oliver had a different angle view of this one sided air battle. He flew on track Bravo which dropped flares over land northeast of Hanoi. His flare dispensing A-7 was also well out of harm's way. He was so bothered by the intense strobing of his electromagnetic equipment that he turned it off and watched the lit up scenery below him.^{xxiii}

There is only one answer as to why the NVN defenses were not ready for the Air Force aircraft over Son Tay. They were thoroughly confused and preoccupied by what the Navy was doing just outside of the effective kill zones of their AAA and SAM defenses. Senior Colonel Le Co, former air defense missile combat training officer, is perhaps the highest ranking official who expressed his recollection of what had transpired at their air defense command post in Hanoi. He is credited to be one of the authors of the "Red Book" (the manual for shooting down B-52s), in which he predicted directions from which the aircraft would make their attack and came up with plans to fight back.^{xxiv} His tactics were successfully employed during Linebacker II. He posed as a retired Lt. Col. who acted as a tour guide for retired USA Special Forces Major Solomon V. Binzer during his escorted visit to the Son Tay POW camp in 1994. Binzer was not aware of Le Co's true identity as a retired Senior Colonel who was spying on him. Le Co pretended to be delighted to learn that Binzer had background in anti-aircraft missile defenses. As retired veterans they shared some of their military service experiences. This is how Binzer recorded the event in his memoirs:

“As we walked and talked, Le Co told me he was on duty at his SAM site headquarters in the Hanoi area on the night of the raid. He said it was a very confusing situation. He told me that his headquarters could not get any other regional headquarters on the telephone. That in one of the freakish things, the fog of war, the telephone system around the country was being repaired that day and communication was difficult. So when the US Navy began to fly over the port of Haiphong that night and not drop bombs but just drop flares nobody could figure out why. He said they could see the flares but could not talk to the Haiphong area because the phone lines were out. And, they did not know about the raid at Son Tay.”^{xxv}

North Vietnamese histories of the war, as well as our own intelligence sources make no comment about the telephone repairs and the confusion in communications, but here is one highly decorated North Vietnamese air defense officer, who admitted that as Lt. Col. he was in the midst of the confusion brought about by the naval convincing show of force. Their historians did not address the bewilderment and confusion the Navy caused them. Instead they focused on the shortcomings of their air defenses in the Son Tay area.

“The primary reason for this shortcoming was a low spirit of combat readiness and our failure to anticipate that the enemy would use helicopters supported by fighters to make such a deep penetration into our rear area to rescue their pilots. It was for this reason that, when the situation developed, our commanders at all levels reacted passively and clumsily to engage enemy forces in the air, and we had no specific plan to engage enemy forces on the ground. Our commanders lacked flexibility in their handling of the situation; we did not utilize our air force fighters to engage the enemy; our communications arrangements proved to be weak; our combat effectiveness was low; and we failed to shoot down any enemy aircraft on the spot.

This raid provided our air defense-air force troops a profound lesson in many different areas, and especially in preparing for and then implementing plans to combat enemy forces landing from the air deep in our rear areas in North Vietnam. After this incident, the Air Defense-Air Force Service Party Committee and the Air Defense Command conducted self-criticism and directed all headquarters staffs and units to hold sessions to review this experience, to derive lessons learned, to conduct stern self-criticism of each element's performance, and to take concrete corrective action.”^{xxvi}

There was a big difference between the two air battles. None of the Navy's 59 aircraft had to take evasive actions while they flew in assigned routes and orbits. There were seven active SAM sites and unknown number of AAA batteries in the Son Tay area. AAA Firecans and SAM Fansongs radars had eight fast flying jets and four slow flying prop planes within their effective kill zones. AAA batteries were ineffective and did not score a single hit. Their tracer rounds were bothersome sights, but they appeared to aim at the sounds of the aircraft overhead of their locations. It was much different with the SAMs that started launching at 2:35 A.M. By that time the ground operation at the POW camp was over and the raiders were boarding the helicopters. Safe exit from the active overhead hornet's nest became everyone's concern. Fortunately the enemy was still

focusing on the high flying F-4s and F-105s. At 2:40, Wild Weasel Firebird 3 was damaged by a SAM and was able to land at Udorn. Spare Firebird 5 replaced it and was promptly hit by another SAM at 2:46. Exploding missile ruptured its fuel tank and Firebird 5 had to exit and head for C-135 tankers loitering in refueling orbits over Laos. Unfortunately, it flamed out before it could reach an alerted KC-135 tanker. Its two man crew had to abandon it. Fortunately, they parachuted safely and were rescued by two of the returning HH-53 helicopters.

Lt. Col. Robert J. Kronebusch, who commanded the Wild Weasels from Firebird 1, lost two of his five planes in 6 minutes. He immediately ordered the remaining three to move west out of the kill range. *“I called Firebird flight to move westward 5 miles. My reasoning was that SAM sites did not appear to fire at us when we 15 miles or more, although 15 miles was in their range. Only when we reduced the distance to less than 15 were we fired on.”*^{xxvii} Kronebusch was the last Weasel to depart from the area at 2:55 A. M. He headed for the Plain of Jars in Laos where Firebird 5’s pilot Maj. Donald W. Kilgus and his EWO Capt. Clarence T. Lowry awaited their rescuers.

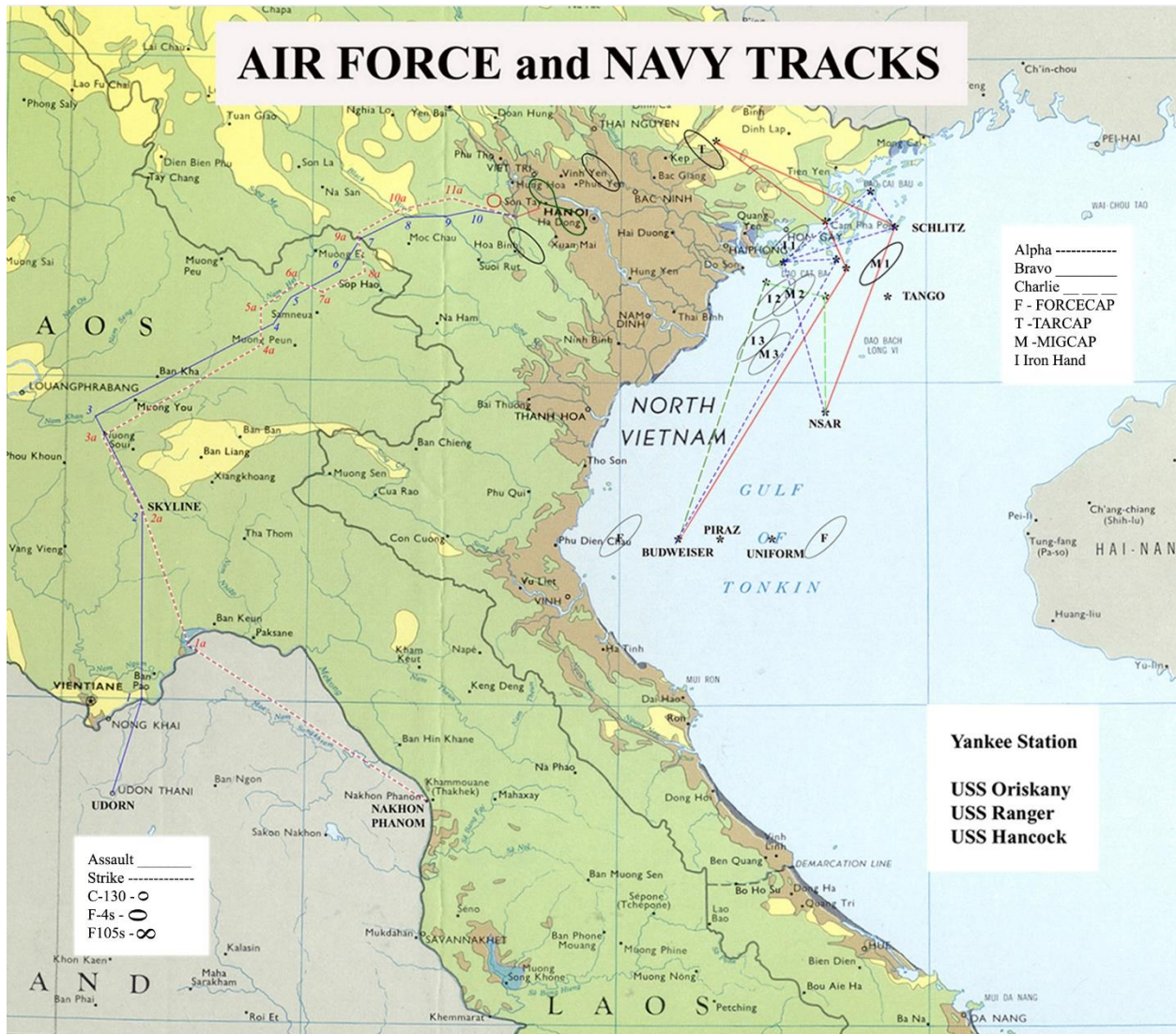
Much has changed in Vietnam since the end of the war. In 2020, Soha newspaper published a victorious story about the attempted rescue of American prisoners. Its title is “Vietnam’s Air Defense Missiles Shatter the Son Tay American POW Rescue Mission: An Outstanding Combat Achievement.” NVN’s air defenses defeated American air power by shooting down two F-4 jet aircraft. These two victories were credited to the 43rd and the 44th Missile Battalions of the 263rd Missile Regiment. For its high state of combat readiness, the 263rd Missile Regiment was awarded a floral wreath for its performance and the Air Defense - Air Force Service Command Headquarters awarded the regiment two banners commemorating this especially outstanding achievement!^{xxviii} Even though this Soha newspaper story did not report the type of shot down aircraft correctly, it contains the following admission:

Before the helicopters landed at the Son Tay prison camp, the U.S. Navy sent four flights of aircraft to operate off the coast of Haiphong. They dropped flares in the areas of Van Hoa and Long Chau Islands to divert our attention, and many jet aircraft flew at medium altitudes, circling in the Hanoi area, to force us to disperse our defensive efforts.

The air situation at that time was complicated and very tense. In the black of night alarm sirens sounded in the provinces and cities of North Vietnam, accompanied by the roar of engines from flights of jet aircraft and the constant explosions of bombs and anti-aircraft shells.

Fighting at night was harder for our air defense troops because the enemy was equipped with many types of modern night-fighting and night reconnaissance instruments that enabled the enemy to make rather accurate attacks. As for our side, except for our missile troops, our anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) and anti-aircraft machine-gun forces could not see their targets, so they were forced to fire barrages aimed at the sound of aircraft engines or to put a curtain of fire at certain ranges and certain altitudes to protect vital installations. This meant that their efforts were not very effective.^{xxix}

We must wonder what could have happened to the five Wild Weasel F-105s and ten MIGCAP F-4s, without the magnificent distraction staged by the Navy. The North Vietnamese 361st Air Defense Division did not receive report of enemy activity until 2:18 A. M. That was when Combat Talon Cherry One broke radio silence by calling “Alpha, Alpha, Alpha” and dropped four flares to light up the prison camp. The diversion not only allowed the low flying aircraft to arrive at the target undetected, but also gave our air cover jet aircraft precious minutes of survivability.



The timing of the diversion was excellent. It couldn't have been better. The raiders can never give V. Adm. Bardshar's planners enough credit for the excellence of their OPORD. Likewise, the most credible diversion Bardshar promised was just that. Air Force planners did not expect such number of aircraft. Performance of naval aviators was flawless without any incidents.

All carrier personnel who participated rose to the occasion without being aware what this very short notice operation was all about.

The Navy performed brilliantly. This was never lauded enough after the raid. The real heroes were the Green Berets. They did the work on the ground and faced the enemy's bullets. The Air Force got them safely there and brought them back. Accolades and high decorations went to them. Navy's participation that contributed so valuably to the Air Force's ease in getting the raiders in and out fell into the category of a routine operation. Part of it was due to Bardshar's order about publicity of this event even after its occurrence. Task Force 77 did not have a representative at the detailed post mission debriefing at Eglin AFB that could have provided fresh accounts of how the diversion was conducted. JCTG submitted award recommendations only for those individuals who were on temporary duty orders to it. Recommendations for supporting units, not on orders to the JCTG, were left up to the commanders of their respective units.

The Navy was very humble about its participation in the raid on Son Tay. What became the largest nighttime operation of the Vietnam War was recorded only as a significant operation in the 1970 Command History Reports for campaigns spanning the entire presence of carriers and their wings, groups, and squadrons at Yankee Station. All carriers and assigned air units received Meritorious Unit Commendations (MUCs) for the period of their service in the Gulf of Tonkin. MUC citations for the USS *Hancock* and the USS *Ranger* have specific references to the diversionary strike. Citation in CHNAVPERS letter PERS-p53-IBP/kmc of 17 Nov 71 for the USS *Ranger* states: "*Ranger arrived in the Tonkin Gulf on 18 November 1970 and participated in the diversionary action of the Son Tay Prisoner of War operations as well as Operation Freedom Bait.*" MUC Citation for the USS *Oriskany* does not even mention the raid. Only the following flying squadrons made specific references to the Son Tay raid diversion in their Command History Reports:

USS *Hancock* with VAW-111-Det 19.

USS *Oriskany* with VF-191, VA-153, Va-155, and VAQ-130-Det 1.

USS *Ranger* with VF-21, VF-154, VAQ-134, and VAW-111-Det 6.^{xxx}

Rear Admiral James D. Ramage, who commanded the Task Force-77 during the diversion for the Son Tay raid from his flag ship the *USS Oriskany* was honored to do so and shared it with his principal subordinates with the following words:

For those of us in the carriers, we were proud to be able to carry out an extremely difficult night mission without any rehearsal or warning. The preparation by Bardshar's staff was superb and the execution by Air Wing 19 under CDR Doug Mow, Air Wing 2, commanded by CDR J.E. McKnight, and Air Wing 21 led by CDR G.H. Palmer, carried out the mission in an absolutely professional manner. It was an honor to be associated with them.^{xxxi}

59 U S Navy Aircraft

27 A-7; 10 A-6; 6 F-8; 6 F-4; 6 AKA-3B; 2 E-1B; 1 KA-3B; 1 EP-3



57 U S Air Force Aircraft



2 MC-130E 12 KC-135 2 HH-3
1 HH-3 10 F-4 4 A-1E
5 HH-53 5 F-105 3 C-130
5 A-1E 2 RC-135M 1 T-39
2 HC-130P 1 RC-135
2 EC-121T



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- ⁱ Benjamin F. Schemmer, *The Raid*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 60, 66.
- ⁱⁱ Schemmer, *The Raid*, 132.
- ⁱⁱⁱ LTGEN LeRoy J. Manor, USAF-Ret, "U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview, 26-27 Jan. and 9 May 1988", 130.
- ^{iv} Manor oral history, 130.
- ^v Ship's Deck Log, *USS America (CVA-66)*, 1 Jan 1970 – 31 Dec 1970, Thursday, 5 Nov. 1970.
- ^{vi} Operation Kingpin, 3.
- ^{vii} Manor, oral history, 132.
- ^{viii} Author's phone conversations with VADM Maurice F. Weisner in 2003.
- ^{ix} TF-77 OPOD, Nov. 1970, 1.
- ^x TF-77 OPOD, 12
- ^{xi} E-mail message from Modern Military Records, National Archives and Records Group, College Park, MD.
- ^{xii} RADM. James D. Ramage, USN (Ret.), "Carrier Task Force 77 and the Son Tay Raid", 2-3.
- ^{xiii} Ramage, Carrier Task Force 77, 4.
- ^{xiv} RADM Bruce Boland, USN (Ret.) e-mail to author, 2 April. 2001.
- ^{xv} RADM Lawrence C. Chambers, USN-Ret, e-mail to author, 15 December. 2020.
- ^{xvi} BGEN LeRoy J. Manor, USAF, "Commander, JCS Joint Contingency Task Group Report on the Son Tay Prisoner of War Rescue Operation, Part I", 70
- ^{xvii} *Ibid.*, iv.
- ^{xviii} *Ibid.* 12-13.
- ^{xix} Sr. Col. Ho Si Huu, Sr. Col. Chu Thai, Col. The Ky, Lt. Col. Dinh Khoi Sy. and Lt. Col. Nghiem Dinh Tich. *History of the Air Defense Service, Volume II*. People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi, 1993 341.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.* 341.
- ^{xxi} CAPT. Weston H. Byng, USN (Ret.), e-mail to author, 21 Apr 2003.
- ^{xxii} "Bull" Durham, e-mail to author, 24 Dec 2002.
- ^{xxiii} CDR. James H. Oliver, USN (Ret.) e-mail to author, 19 Jan 2003.
- ^{xxiv} Saigon Giai Phong [Liberated Saigon] newspaper, 16 December 2012, <https://www.sggp.org.vn/huyen-thoai-viet-nam-mau-va-hoa-107938.html>.
- ^{xxv} MAJ Solomon V. Binzer. USA (Ret.). "My Visit to the Son Tay POW Camp", 4.
- ^{xxvi} Huu et al, *History of the Air Defense Service, Volume II*, 343.
- ^{xxvii} COL Robert J. Kronebusch, USAF (Ret.) "Wild Weasel after Action Report", 2.
- ^{xxviii} "Vietnam's Air Defense Missiles Shatter the Son Tay American POW Rescue Mission: An Outstanding Combat Achievement," *Soha* 17 May 2020 <https://soha.vn/ten-lua-pk-viet-nam-be-gay-cuoc-tap-kich-son-tay-giai-cuu-phi-cong-my-chien-cong-dac-biet-xuat-sac-20200516230711775.htm>
- ^{xxix} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxx} Letter from the Naval Historical Center to the author, May 16, 2001.
- ^{xxxi} Ramage, "Carrier Task Force 77 and the Son Tay Raid," 6.