

ERRATA & ADDENDA for "Special Action Force Asia"

by Charles H. Briscoe

Adverse reactions from 1st Special Forces Group (SFG) veterans who 'lived' the Special Action Force (SAF) and Security Assistance Force Asia (SAF Asia) prompted this errata article and addenda. This could have been avoided if the USASOC History Office protocol had been followed by the original author. It is courtesy to submit draft articles to all quoted veterans for review, comment, and suggested fixes. Keeping the veterans involved from start to published product sustains their interest and continued support. The history is theirs, not ours. Thankfully, Army Special Operation Forces (ARSOF) veterans do not hesitate to speak up.

The purpose of this short article is to correct the errors in "Special Action Force Asia" in *Veritas*, Vol 13/No 1 (2017). It clarifies the origin and nucleus shift for the Disaster Assistance Relief Teams (DART). The switch from Special Action Force Asia to Security Assistance Force Asia was directly linked to the U.S. military drawdown in Vietnam and commensurate reduction of the American presence in Southeast Asia (SEA). Highlighting the successes of the SAF Asia DART Task Force in the Philippines in July 1972 will show how postwar adjustment to Foreign Internal Defense (FID) restored substance to the 1st SFG mission in the Pacific. The issues raised by veterans will be addressed in order.

First

The title should have been "Special Action Force Asia – 'Security Assistance' Force Asia" because the definition of 'SAF' was subtly changed after President Richard M. Nixon announced his policy of "Vietnamization" in November 1969. U.S. military forces would be reduced starting in 1970. Responsibility for fighting the war against the Communists would be transferred completely to South Vietnam.

The Senior Officer Debriefing Reports of Colonels (COL) John P. Geraci (14 August 1971–6 July 1973) and Elliott P. Sydnor, Jr. (6 July 1973–30 June 1974) specifically refer to SAF Asia as Security Assistance Force Asia.¹ The change of designation from Special Action Force Asia to Security Assistance Force Asia went largely unnoticed at battalion according to retired COL Jerry M. King, the B Company and 2nd Battalion commander until June 1973, and retired Sergeant Major (SGM) Harold Jacobson, C Company, 1st SFG until April 1972.²

Second

In their debriefing reports Colonels Geraci and Sydnor detailed these points which were misrepresented or absent in the schematic, "Special Action Force Asia" on page 3:

- » 1st SFG consisted of two SF battalions and a Support Battalion (A and B Companies became 1st and 2nd Battalion respectively, and C Company went away between April 1972 and 6 July 1973).³ 10th SFG was also down to two SF battalions in 1972.⁴
- » 1st Civil Affairs Battalion replaced the 97th CA Group (CAG).
- » 156th Medical Detachment was no longer assigned.
- » All other augmentation detachments remained the same.⁵

The two group commanders also emphasized that post-Vietnam reductions-in-force (RIF) impacted the ranks of combat-experienced captains and majors hardest; forming a third SF battalion was not viable. Additionally, the Army's plan to deactivate 1st SFG adversely affected the assignment of school-trained SF and CA officer replacements. To fill that void, COL Sydnor conducted an internal SF Officers Course.⁶

Third

The U.S. Army revised its campaign strategy [counterinsurgency (COIN)] in South Vietnam shortly after 5th SFG left country (March 1971). Foreign Internal Defense (FID) became the basis for the subsequent campaigns collectively labeled 'Consolidation.' Since twelve COIN campaigns had not defeated Communism in Vietnam, that acronym was deleted from the Army lexicon.⁷ Security assistance, a critical element of FID, would be discussed in forthcoming SF doctrine.

Fourth

Army Training Circular (TC) 31-20-1, *The Role of U.S. Army Special Forces*, 22 October 1976, officially changed the doctrinal meaning of SAF: "An SFG augmented as required with civil affairs, psychological operations, military intelligence, medical, military police, engineer, and Army Security Agency elements, possesses the highly specialized skills needed to assist a host country to develop internal defense. An SFG so augmented would be called a **security assistance force (SAF)** (*sic*)." ⁸ Field Manual (FM) 31-20, *Doctrine for Special Forces Operations*, April 1990, stated that "Internal defense and development (IDAD) is an overall strategy for preventing or defeating an insurgency... Successful IDAD programs eliminate problems before an insurgency can exploit them."⁹ This was further clarified: "The primary SF mission in FID is to organize, train, advise, and assist host nation (HN) military and paramilitary forces. The intent is to improve the tactical and technical proficiency of these forces" **so they can defeat the insurgency without direct US involvement.**¹⁰

Fifth

C Company and the 1st SFG 'Resident Detachments' on Taiwan and in Korea were left out of the "Special Action Force Asia" schematic without explanation. In retrospect the wire diagram should have been omitted as well as the map, "1st SFG (A) Unit Locations on Okinawa 1956-1974." The two graphics spanned critical transition periods that were affected by unit relocations, significant military RIFs that followed American withdrawal from Vietnam (unit deactivations, augmentation downsizing and manpower under arms), and the conversion of SF Companies [commanded by Lieutenant Colonels (LTCs)] to Army Military Personnel Center (MILPERCEN) board-selected battalion commanders in 1971.¹¹ The two schematics confused rather than clarified.

That said, there was a C Company in 1st SFG at least until April 1972. Its Self-contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (SCUBA) detachment, ODA-323, worked closely with the 97th CAG to survey harbors of four offshore islands surrounding Okinawa (Iheya-Jima, Kume-Jima, Aguni-Jima, and Yonaguni-Jima). The SCUBA team explosively removed coral formations to assure safe navigation in

and out of the harbors of the first three. A lack of industry on Yonaguni-Jima negated any coral destruction in that island harbor.¹²

As part of the deactivation of 1st SFG and SAF Asia, the 'Resident SF Detachment' on Taiwan was eliminated. The 'Resident SF Detachment' in Korea was reassigned to Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA). The SAF Asia coordinator (Civil Affairs) TDY in the Philippines at the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) was terminated.¹³ The elimination of its 'Advisory' role reduced JUSMAAG to JUSMAG.

Sixth

The statement on page 4, "Even though the 1st SFG continued to send ODAs to Vietnam during the 1960s to support the 5th SFG (A), it also deployed SAF teams throughout the rest of Asia to confront the noncombat elements of counterinsurgency" should have read, "While 1st SFG sent ODAs on temporary duty (TDY) to Laos and Vietnam in the early 1960s, it deployed SAF teams throughout Asia."¹⁴ 1st SFG augmented 5th SFG in Vietnam with TDY ODAs during the war. Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) went to South Vietnam in 1972 [CG (Friday Gap)] and [1-73 (Task Force MADDEN)] after 5th SFG had departed.¹⁵ 1st SFG was supposed to augment Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) search and recovery teams working throughout SEA when requested.¹⁶

Seventh

Retired SGM [not Master Sergeant (MSG)] Harold 'Jake' Jacobson rotated from Okinawa before the task force DART teams went into the Philippines in July 1972. He read the After Action Reports (AARs) later.¹⁷ The Pakistan mission in June 1971 was the last major DART organized and directed by the Civil Affairs unit augmenting SAF Asia.

Lastly

DART operations in the Pacific region directed by Special Forces proved to be significant 'enablers' that restored the SF reputation after the Vietnam War and helped to regain access and placement for training. While civic assistance had always been 'meat and potatoes' for the 97th CAG, SF had relinquished its SAF Asia leadership responsibility as its warfighting role in SEA dissipated.¹⁸ This was one of several problems facing LTC King when he returned to Okinawa to command in late 1970:

"Colonel (COL) Charles M. Simpson, the 1st SFG commander, called me up to the headquarters in January 1971. He was concerned that SF had lost ready access to most Pacific countries. As the company/battalion commander who had reported his ODAs as not operationally ready because they were being gutted to support civic action projects



The provinces assigned to the 1st SFG TF DART were Pangasinan, Tarlac, and Pampanga on Luzon. Northwest of Manila, two abut large bodies of water—Lingayen Gulf and Manila Bay.

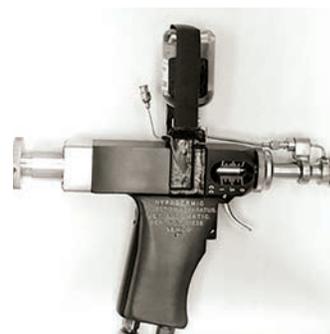
*arranged by the SAF augmentation elements, I got the task. I was told to find a way to reestablish SF presence throughout the region. Whatever we did in a country had to make us welcomed back. I knew that by simply following our doctrine SF could get 'back in the driver's seat.' I recommended making SF 'supported' instead of 'supporting.' With SF in charge of the DARTs doors could be reopened for training."*¹⁹

Typhoon Rita, which roamed the Western Pacific for a record-setting 22 days (5–27 July 1972), facilitated that changeover. Although its eye remained well away from the Philippines, massive circulatory winds increased the volume of monsoon rains over Luzon for several days. Two feet of rain fell on 17 July alone. Two hundred people were already dead and more than 2 million were left homeless in the countryside.²⁰ The JUSMAG Philippines in Manila asked the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) in Hawaii for help on 20 July 1972.²¹

Because the disaster covered an immense area, COL John P. Geraci alerted LTC King, the 2nd Battalion commander, to deploy a DART Task Force (TF) to the Philippines. A DART command and control headquarters to coordinate its six team efforts was to co-locate with the Air Force operations center on Clark Air Base (AB). Since it was the top PACOM priority, six Far East-based C-130 *Hercules* transports were so rapidly assembled at Kadena AFB, Okinawa, that the DART advance echelon (ADVON) simply boarded the lead airplane. Ten hours later, TF DART from SAF Asia was on the ground.²²

TF DART, under the staff supervision of U.S. Navy Captain Clark (no first name and middle initial available) from PACOM, was to assist the Republic of the Philippines government with humanitarian relief operations in heavily flooded Pangasinan, Tarlac, and Pampanga provinces. Extending in a wide swath northwest of Manila, two of the provinces abutted large tidal basins—Lingayen Gulf and Manila Bay—that exacerbated flooding. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was a close coordinating partner.²³

The top priority tasks set by the Philippine government were lifesaving and helicopter medical evacuations. These tasks were expanded to the distribution of food and relief supplies, inoculations to prevent cholera, typhoid fever, and waterborne diseases, and general medical treatment. The DART's rubber inflatable boats were augmented by local assets. Air Force helicopters at Clark AB and Marine helicopters from the USS *Tripoli*, a helicopter amphibious landing ship at Subic Naval Base, were made available. Every day Marines loaded food, water, and supplies aboard helicopters and the Landing Ship, Tank (LST) USS *Cayuga* and the HMS *Lincoln* for delivery or airdrop. TF DART brought a portable automatic jet hypodermic injection apparatus for mass inoculations.²⁴



The Automatic Jet Hypodermic Injection Apparatus or 'Jetgun' was state-of-the-art for mass inoculations to prevent epidemics during crises. It was regularly used to inoculate basic recruits of all U.S. military services well into the 1990s.

Six forward bases were established after LTC King and his teams conducted aerial and ground reconnaissance. The DARTs quickly split internally to cover more territory and expand their radio net.²⁵ As during any crisis, viable information was the key to managing and shifting resources—from boats to helicopters to medical teams.²⁶ “President Ferdinand E. Marcos, who visited almost daily, advised me early on to verify reports from the provincial governors because they were often highly exaggerated. The SF teams had to sort out reality. The folks in rural areas were told to display white flags if food was needed and black flags for medical support,” recalled King. “And, it never stopped raining. Thirty inches alone fell while we were there.”²⁷ Rescue and treatment of those stranded raised the need for food and fresh water. Unlike today, bottled water was a luxury for the wealthy in 1972. Engineer units purified water.

USAID modified the recipe of a popular meat-filled, steam-cooked bun called *siopao* to provide healthy food to the homeless. Bakeries all over Manila and on the U.S. military bases produced hamburger-stuffed rolls fortified with fish meal nutrients and other proteins. Millions of these ‘nutri-buns,’ sealed in watertight family-size plastic bags, were delivered or air dropped into water-soaked fields near the forward DART bases. The local village leaders daily reported food and fresh water needs and were supposed to arrange distribution when alerted that aircraft and/or boats were inbound.²⁸ While all five priorities were addressed simultaneously, lifesaving trumped everything.

TF DART successfully orchestrated the combined humanitarian relief effort because of the teams’ “ability to organize, direct, and advise others...within their areas.”²⁹ Using 1st SFG rubber boats, local watercraft, and Air Force and Marine helicopters nearly 3,000 people were rescued from rooftops and destroyed rural hamlets and evacuated to temporary refugee centers. The TF headquarters coordinated distribution of more than 500 tons of food. Medical treatment was given another 23,070 patients beyond those 375,926 personnel inoculated for cholera and typhoid fever by combined US/Filipino medical teams. The local doctors, nurses, and medical students were trained to use the state-of-the-art Automatic Jet Hypodermic Injection System to reduce the possibility of epidemics.³⁰ The orchestration of this huge humanitarian relief effort was accomplished by 123 SAF Asia personnel in less than 30 days.

Brigadier General (BG) James A. Grimsley, Jr., Chief of Mission, JUSMAG Philippines, said it best: “The training, organization, and professionalism of the SAFASIA personnel were immediately apparent to senior U.S. military personnel, their AFP (Armed Forces Philippines) counterparts and Filipino government officials...The DART TF has been more than justified, both in their contributions at a time of critical need for humanitarian purposes and in enhancing, in a most positive way, the professional image



(L to R) LTC Jerry M. King, 2nd Bn, 1st SFG and TF DART commander, 2/1st SF Bn SGM John T. Lockhart, and a USAF helicopter pilot confirm supply delivery points. A USMC rifle company supervised by SGM Lockhart loaded food and supplies aboard helicopters every day.

of the U.S. military. The best interests of the U.S. Army Pacific have been advanced by the SAF Asia DART Task Force from Okinawa.”³¹ BG Grimsley added that President Marcos and his wife, Imelda, praised the organization and effectiveness of the DART.³²

The 123 members of the SAF Asia DART Task Force were awarded the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for the humanitarian assistance in July and August 1972.³³ “Our success in the Philippines restored SF as the ‘lead’ for future DART missions,” stated COL King. “The SF rebuilt a positive image regionally. Our DART rehearsal project on Taiwan performed the month before paid big dividends.”³⁴

The USASOC History Office regrets that the original SAF ASIA article was incomplete, misleading, and begged further questions. Circulation of draft *Veritas* articles amongst veterans who contributed is now on our internal review checklist. Special thanks go to those who ‘fired red star clusters’ concerning the original article. Credibility goes hand-in-hand with our journal title, *Veritas*. ♣

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Endnotes

- 1 Department of the Army (DA), HQ, Security Assistance Force Asia (SAF Asia) , 1st Special Forces Group (1st SFG) [Airborne (Abn)], 1st Special Forces (SF) APO San Francisco (SF) 96331, SUBJECTS: Senior Officer Debriefing Report (Colonel John P. Geraci) RCS CSFOR-74 dated 29 June 1973 and Senior Officer Debriefing Report (Colonel Elliott P. Sydnor, Jr.) dated 9 July 1974 hereafter cited as SODR with name and page number.
- 2 Email, retired COL Jerry M. King to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, SUBJECT: Special Action versus Security Assistance Force, 24 October 2017, Classified Files, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC; email, retired SGM Harold 'Jake' Jacobson to Briscoe, SUBJECT: Special Action versus Security Assistance Force, 24 October 2017, Classified Files, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by email, sender, and date.
- 3 SODR-Geraci, 9; SODR-Sydnor, 2.
- 4 Retired MG James A. Guest, 7 June 2017, interview by Briscoe, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date. **U.S. Continental Army Command (CONARC) reactivated D Company, 1st SFG on 15 April 1966 at Ft Bragg, NC, for duty in Thailand. The unit flew directly from Pope Air Force Base (PAFB), NC, in October 1966. It was deactivated and reactivated as 46th Company at Lop Puri on 10 April 1967 by U.S. Army, Pacific (USARPAC). On 3 March 1972, 46th Company became 3rd Bn, 1st SFG before deactivation at Fort Bragg, NC on 3 March 1974.** Stephen Sherman, interview by Briscoe, 12 December 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Ft Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 5 SODR-Geraci, 11; SODR-Sydnor, 7, 9.
- 6 SODR-Geraci, 11; SODR-Sydnor, 7, 9.
- 7 DA. U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), "Listing of the Campaigns of the U.S. Army Displayed on the Army Flag" at <https://history.army.mil/html/reference/campaigns.html> accessed 11/17/2017. As late as 2010 General Martin E. Dempsey, the Training and Doctrine (TRADOC) Commander (later Chief of Staff, Army and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff) condemned the use of COIN. The term defined an Army task in terms of a type of enemy, rather than describing something that the Army does affirmatively. Spencer Ackerman, "Army Brains: Kill Power Point, 'Counterinsurgency'" at <https://www.wired.com/2010/09/army-brains-kill-powerpoint-counterinsurgency> accessed 10/24/2017.
- 8 HQ, DA Training Circular (TC) 31-20-1 *The Role of U.S. Army Special Forces* (22 October 1976), 30.
- 9 HQ, DA Field Manual (FM) 31-20 *Doctrine for Special Forces Operations* (April 1990), 10-1.
- 10 HQ, DA, FM 31-20, 10-2; **Ironically, FM 31-22 U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Forces (November 1963) that detailed the Special Action Force (SAF) concept, was the last counterinsurgency manual published during President John F. Kennedy's three-year administration. In the first year of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, the Army published one major counterinsurgency work—FM 100-20 Field Service Regulations (1964).** Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: US Army CMH, 2006), 249.
- 11 King, 39 March and 5 May 2016 interviews by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 12 Jacobson, email to Eugene Piasecki, Subject: Veritas dated 3 September 2017; Jacobson letter to Briscoe, subject: Company C, dated 11 September 2017.
- 13 SODR-Sydnor, 15.
- 14 Jacobson, email to Piasecki, Subject: Veritas dated 3 September 2017.
- 15 Company 'D', 5th SFG (Abn), 1st SF, APO San Francisco (SF) 96215, SUBJECT: TDY After Action Report dated 7 March 1967; HQ, 97th CA Group, 1st SFG (Abn), 1st SF, APO SF 96331, SUBJECT: After-Action Report, Special Action Force Asia Civic Action Project Tokashiki-Zamani dated 16 May 1967; HQ, SAFASIA, 1st SFG (Abn), 1st SF, APO SF 96331, SUBJECT: Civic Action After-Action Report dated 8 November 1967; SODR-Geraci, 7; Richard K. Kolb, "Last Days of the Infantry in Vietnam, 1972," *VFW Magazine* (August 2012) at http://digitaledition.qwinc.com/display_article.php?id=1112161 accessed 11/17/2017.
- 16 King interviews, 29 March and 5 May 2016.
- 17 Jacobson, email to Piasecki, Subject: Veritas dated 3 September 2017; Jacobson letter to Briscoe, SUBJECT: Company C, dated 11 September 2017.
- 18 King interview, 5 May 2016.
- 19 King interviews, 5 May 2016 and 28 September 2017.
- 20 "Typhoon Rita Causes Extensive Flooding in Philippines," *NBC Evening News*, Sunday, July 23, 1972 at <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/465233> accessed 11/16/2017.
- 21 DA. Task Force DART Philippines Report, SUBJECT: Summary from DART TF dated 13 August 1972 USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as DART Philippines Summary. **The 374th Tactical Airlift Wing at Ching Chuan Kang Airbase on Taiwan flew the mission.** "Typhoon Cleanup Mission: DART Teams on Target in Luzon," *Army Times (Pacific)*, 13 September 1972, 23-24.
- 22 DART Philippines Summary. **The 374th Tactical Airlift Wing at Ching Chuan Kang Airbase on Taiwan flew the mission.** "Typhoon Cleanup Mission: DART Teams on Target in Luzon," *Army Times (Pacific)*, 13 September 1972, 23-24.
- 23 DART Philippines Summary.
- 24 DART Philippines Summary; Technical Manual (TM) 8-230 *Handbook of Basic Nursing* (Washington, DC: Army Medical Department, November 1970), 6-27.
- 25 King interview, 5 May 2016. **More than half of the 1st SFG signal assets were dedicated to TF DART.**
- 26 DART Philippines Summary; "Typhoon Cleanup Mission," *Army Times (Pacific)*, 13 September 1972, 23-24. **TF DART was reinforced with an additional DART team and more augmentation. By 1 August the total strength of the SAF Asia task force in the Philippines was 123 personnel.**
- 27 King interview, 28 September 2017
- 28 "Typhoon Cleanup Mission," *Army Times (Pacific)*, 13 September 1972, 23-24; Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets: The First Thirty Years* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 187.
- 29 DART Philippines Summary; King interview, 28 September 2017.
- 30 King interview 5 May 2016; **President Ferdinand E. Marcos, Sr. attached the staff and students at the Medical School, University of the Philippines, to TF DART.** DART Philippines Summary; CHJUSMAG PHIL Message SUBJECT: Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART) Operations, Republic of the Philippines to CINCUSARPAC/GPCC/Honolulu, Hawaii dated 310710Z Jul 73; TM 8-230 *Army Medical Department Handbook of Basic Nursing*, 6-27. **A Jet Hypodermic Injection System was transferred to the Philippine Army after the TF DART mission ended in August 1972.**
- 31 CHJUSMAG PHIL Msg, SUBJECT: DART Operations, Republic of the Philippines to CINCUSARPAC/GPCC/Honolulu, Hawaii dated 310710Z Jul 73.
- 32 CHJUSMAG PHIL Msg, SUBJECT: DART Operations, Republic of the Philippines to CINCUSARPAC/GPCC/Honolulu, Hawaii dated 310710Z Jul 73.
- 33 King interview, 5 May 2016.
- 34 King, interviews, 5 May 2016 and 28 September 2017.

SGM John T. Lockhart helps a young girl board an Air Force helicopter for evacuation to Clark Air Base to be reunited with her parents. All had been stranded by the flooding.