



## History of the 10th SFG(A) HALO and ODA-8

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### Preface

On the night of 28th of November 1970 over the black skies of Laos a C-130 blackbird flew at 17,000 ft. On the ramp stood SFC Cliff Newman of MACV SOG Reconnaissance Team Florida waiting for the signal from his jumpmaster, MSG Frank Norbury, a dedicated HALO pioneer, who got out of bed battling malaria to be a part of this mission. With a green light from the pilot and a signal from his jumpmaster, Cliff Newman shuffled to the edge of the ramp and leaped into the darkness becoming the first soldier in military history to make a combat HALO Insertion. Both men, Newman and Norbury, also left their marks playing vital roles in the 10th SFG(A)'s early HALO program in the late 60's.

### Trojan Parachute Club

The HALO story of the 10th SFG(A) began in 1967 with COL Robert L Jones the Group commander. Other SF Groups had begun conducting training for HALO operations and COL Jones wanted to form his own HALO team. His plan was to organize a freefall parachute clubs where SF soldiers could learn the basics of freefall parachuting and where a cadre of instructors could be developed. Thus the Trojan Parachute Club in Bad Toelz, Germany was born. Some of those who were Trojan Parachute Club members included the likes of Gil White, Gordon Jackson and Cliff Newman.



Figure 1: Trojan Club Patch

The Trojan Parachute Club later proved to be invaluable in supporting the Group's HALO missions in Greece. Because of tensions between Turkey and Greece some of the essential equipment for the Greek Raiding Forces' training was purchased through the Trojan Parachute Club.

## ODA-8, The First HALO Team of the 10th SFG(A)

COL Jones wanted more than a freefall demonstration team he wanted a true operational HALO detachment. That vision became possible with the arrival of MSG Frank Norbury who in 1966 had run a HALO school in Panama with CPT Charlie Fry. The 7th Air Commando Squadron's liaison officer to the 10th Group at that time was LTC Joe Kittinger. Kittinger was already a freefall legend and the most famous high altitude parachutist in the world having set a record high altitude jump in 1960 that was to stand for over 50 years. Also in the 7th ACS was a trained and experienced HALO jumper SSG Jimbo Blakeslee. These men had the training, experience and know how to development a credible HALO program.



Figure 2: LTC Joe Kittinger (world record jump of 102,800 feet) at HARP testing in Zaragoza



Figure 3: Jimbo Blakeslee - 7th ACS Det at 10th SFG(A)

ODA-8 was designated to be the first HALO detachment in the 10th Group. MSG Norbury was named the team sergeant and 2LT Dale Sungy the team leader, other members of the team included 2LT Jeff Fuller, SFC Rudy Villarreal, SFC John McFadden, SFC Al Keating, SFC Dennis Adams, SFC Harold Stanley, SGT James Hensley, SFC Alan Hoe (attached from the British 22nd SAS), SSG Michael Mavris, SP5 James Joyce and SP5 Timothy Thrun.

In April of 1968, 34 officers and enlisted men were chosen to undergo physiological training at Wiesbaden AB in Germany and from that group the first HALO class members were chosen. In addition to the ODA-8 team members the class included SSG James Blakeslee (as an instructor) 2LT Michael Canavan, SFC Ralph Trout, SP4 J.P.

McConnehey, MSG Eugene Judd and SFC Royal Devers.

While this was going on, behind the scenes 1LT Reuben Siverling, 10thSFG(A) and COL Kittinger were scouting out possible locations to conduct the HALO

training. From a list of possible sites Zaragoza, Spain was deemed the most desirable and in May of 1968 a team of 10 jumpers headed up by LTC Kittinger and 2LT Jeff Fuller were sent there to make a definitive determination of the site and facilities. Zaragoza was considered ideal and the last piece of the puzzle was in place. Now only the dates and the final arrangements had to be made.

### Zaragoza Spain July 1968

The initial phase of the HALO training began in Bad Toelz, Germany. Ground classes were conducted to familiarize the students with the equipment and basic freefall techniques. The students then made 3 static line jumps from a CH-34 helicopter using freefall techniques under the watchful eyes of their instructors. They made their first actual freefall (a 5 second delay from 3200 ft) before departing Bad Toelz for Zaragoza.

Once the training began in Zaragoza students jumped from C-130 black birds. The first jump in Zaragoza was from 8,000 ft but from there the altitudes became increasingly higher. In a very short time students were jumping from altitudes requiring oxygen, making night HALO jumps and Jumping with full combat gear. On the 22 July



Figure 4: 2LT Frank McNutt (KIA) getting instruction at Bad Toelz by 2LT Fuller



Figure 5: First HALO Training at Zaragoza

just 1 week to the day after they made their first jump in Spain, the instructors and students made 3 high altitude jumps in one day of 21,000 ft, 25,000 ft and 26,000 ft becoming the first HALO class in the history of the U.S. military to make three jumps of over 20,000 ft in one day. In doing so this 10th SFG(A) class set unofficial mass exit and high altitude parachute records for Spain and logged 5 minutes and 15 seconds of freefall time.

Once the team returned from Zaragoza it concentrated on being a combat ready tactical unit. Equipment was tested and the Standard Airborne SOP was modified to meet the needs and requirements of HALO operations.

Even though COL Jones wanted the 10thSFG(A) to have its own HALO team he still remained skeptical, as did others, as to viability and capability of using this new technique in combat operations. Norbury, aware of the doubters in HQ, challenged the Commander to give ODA-8 a HALO infiltration mission on the Group's next Operational Exercise. Within a short time the team made a night tactical HALO jump from a C-123 with full combat gear including skis. The team members all landed within 100 yards of the "L" marking the drop zone, assembled and gave their chutes to the awaiting "guerillas". They skied off the DZ before the Group Commander could trudge through the deep snow to offer his congratulations. The team had proven not only it's capability but the viability of HALO as a method of infiltration. ODA-8 secured HALO as part of the 10th Special Forces Group's mission and capabilities from that time forward.

### **HALO Briefing to NATO Commander**

During this era General Goodpaster visited the SF Detachment Europe (following the move other the group HQ and two Battalions to Fort Devens, MA). 2LT Jeff Fuller and ODA Team members briefed the NATO Commander on the HALO mission and equipment.



Figure 6: HALO Briefing to NATO Commander

### **First Greece MTT February - March 1969**

Sometime in late 1968 the Commanding General of the MAAG mission in Greece approached the 10th SFG(A) about the possibility of training the Greek Raiding Forces in HALO techniques. This was an important mission since it was to be the first U.S. training mission to Greece since the April 1967 coup that overthrew the King and the former Prime Minister. ODA-8 team members Sungy and Norbury

were sent on a liaison mission to Athens to coordinate the training. While in Athens, Sungy and Norbury also made a successful HALO demonstration jump for the Greek military government and civilian dignitaries. This was the second time the 10th SFG(A) made a military freefall demonstration in Greece. In July of 1967 SP4 Wesley Fojt drowned while making a MFF demonstration with 1LT Charles Hughes & SFC John McFadden marking the first time in US history that a MFF parachutist was killed in the line of duty.

ODA-8 arrived in Greece in late February along with a few new 10th Group students and began training a small cadre of Raiding Forces personnel. The first jump took place on 27 February 1969 from 8,000 ft. Two different drop zones Thivia and Megara were used depending on weather (especially wind) conditions. Because of the high winds muster for training started at 4 am in order to get the jumps in before the wind conditions kicked up in the afternoon. Despite these challenges on 11 March 1969 this



Figure 7: ODA-8 before first Greece HALO MTT

class experienced a day that has never been seen before or since in U.S. military freefall. ODA-8 and its class members again made 3 high altitude jumps in one day. This time all 3 jumps were 25,000 ft or greater. The first two jumps were from 25,000 ft & 26,000 ft and the third jump was from 27,000 ft. Again ODA-8 set unofficial records for mass exit and high altitude for Greece and logged a remarkable 375 seconds or 6 minutes and 15 seconds of freefall.

This was also the first HALO Jumpmaster/Instructor Course ever conducted by the 10th SFG(A).

## Second MTT July - August 1969



Figure 8: 2nd HALO MTT to Greece with Students

Although the Second MTT class did not set any high altitude records it was historic nonetheless. A number of students from this class went on to make the first combat HALO jumps with SOG in Vietnam. Leonidas Fondas, James Bath, Jesse Campbell and James Hetrick all earned their HALO wings on this mission.

### Viet Nam & Iraq War Epilogue

In addition to the 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) veterans who made combat HALO jumps with SOG, on 10 May 2007 in Ninewah Province in Iraq ODA-074 3/10th SFG(A) was the first Special Forces A-Team to conduct a combat HAHO (High Altitude High Opening) operation. ODA-074 was the designated HALO team of the 10th SFG(A) and was part of the direct lineage and legacy of ODA-8.



Figure 9: Top Sgt Strohein (KIA) and below one of the six combat MFF Teams from the Viet Nam war

## History & Legacy of ODA-8

### History:

- 1968: Original HALO team of the 10th SFG(A)
- 1968: Conducted the first HALO training for the 10th SFG(A)
- 1968: First HALO class in U.S. military history to make 3 high altitude jumps of 20,000 feet or more in one day, 22 July.
- 1968: First HALO mass exit in Spain
- 1968: Set unofficial high altitude HALO record for Spain (26,000 ft)
- 1969: First HALO Jumpmaster/Instructor Course for the 10th SFG(A)
- 1969: Only HALO team or class to ever make 3 high altitude jumps of 25,000 ft or more in one day on 11 March logging 6 minutes and 15seconds of freefall time.
- 1969: First HALO mass exit in Greece
- 1969: Set unofficial high altitude HALO record for Greece (27,000 ft)

### Legacy:

- **Cliff Newman:** First soldier to make a combat HALO jump was a member of the 10th SFG(A)'s Trojan Parachute Club.
- **Frank Norbury:** was ODA-8's team sergeant and an early HALO pioneer. He was the static jumpmaster on the historic first combat HALO jump. Much later, Frank died at Fort Bragg doing what he loved as a civilian MFF Instructor on a jump from a C-47.
- **Joseph Kittinger:** the 7th ACS liaison to the 10th SFG(A) and who help found the HALO program held the world record for the highest parachute jump for more than 50 years at 102,800 ft.
- 4 ODA-8 students: **James Bath, Robert Castillo, Lee Fondas, and James Hetrick** went on to make the first combat HALO jumps with SOG in Vietnam. **CPT James Storter**, another combat HALO veteran, served with the 10th SFG(A) in 1968.
- **ODA-074 3/10th SFG(A):** the first A-Team to make a combat HAHO jump (Iraq 2007) is a direct descendent of ODA-8
- **Rudy Villarreal:** was a member of team that set a HALO record in Spain in November of 1977 of 37,500 ft.
- **Robert Walters:** (British 22nd SAS) attached to ODA-8 made a world record HAHO jump becoming the first person to cross the English Channel in a parachute.
- **Alan Hoe:** (also of the 22nd SAS and attached to ODA-8) became an internationally renowned historian and author and penned the book "The Quiet Professional" a biography of Special Forces legend Dick Meadows.

- **Michael Canavan:** retired as a Lieutenant General and was the Commanding General of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)
- 5 enlisted men from ODA-8: retired as Sergeant Majors **Norbury, Stanley, Villarreal, Collins, Lyons and Walters.** Stanley, Lyons and Villarreal were Command Sergeant Majors.
- 2 enlisted men: retired as Majors - **Dale Bulick and Alan Hoe**
- **James Bath:** served on the Army's Golden Knights
- **Charles Collins:** became NCOIC at the Army HALO School
- 2 team member's sons, **James "Jimbo" Blakeslee Jr. and Frank Norbury Jr,** followed in their father's footsteps and became Special Forces soldiers and MFF Instructors at the Army's HALO School.

### Other ODA-8 Missions:

- June 1968: Livorno, Italy, submarine infiltration and exfiltration & small boat training.
- April 1969: Norway combined U.S. and Norwegian Special Forces war game exercise
- 1969: Oberinntal, Germany, mountain climbing school
- 1969: Spain, mountain and cross country ski training

### HALO Demonstration Air Show Participation and Freefall Jump Fests

During this era, the Trojan Parachute Club conducted a number of demonstration jumps in Germany at air shows, including:

- March 1969: Athens, Greece Greek Raiding Forces Parachute Training Center
- May 1969: Schwaiganger, Germany
- May 1969: Rosenheim, Germany
- May 1969: Chiemsee, Germany
- June 1969: Hoppstaedten, Germany
- July 1969: Chiemsee, Germany



Figure 10: 10th SFG(A) Demo Team

In addition, The 10<sup>th</sup> SFGA hosted several freefall jump fests at the Flint Kaserne Golf Club, where a pea gravel pit was installed for teams to demonstrate their

capability to land Para Commander parachutes downwind, a technique thankfully overcome with the advent of square parachutes!

### **10<sup>th</sup> SFGA HALO Teams Reunion, Fayetteville 2013**

Dale Sungy, Jimbo Blakeslee, Jimbo Jr. and others organized a reunion in the Fall of 2013 at Fayetteville. This reunion was fully supported by the USAJFKSWCS and the MFF School and included briefings on current training and equipment and ambitious plans for the future. The early 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) jumpers were awarded MFF wings and the Instructors were awarded numbered MFF Instructor wings from the MFF School. Participants received 30 minute mission after action report briefings from each of the four HALO Teams that conducted combat jumps in the Viet Nam war and one from the Iraq war. The reunion was topped off fittingly with participation in the SF Association October Fest and a visit to the Memorial Plaza s at USASOC HQ.

### **The Mission Goes On**

After 45 years of HALO and then MFF, the original 10<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) HALO jumpers were most rewarded to see the élan, innovation and fearlessness of the current generation of MFF instructors and leaders; and the commitment of USAJFKSWCS and the Special Operations community to carry MFF into the future.



**Figure 11: MSG Frank Norbury on the Pea Gravel pit at the Flint Kaserne Golf course**



**Figure 12: Dale Sungy (R) with Contemporary warriors CW3 Patrick Joyce and LTC Steve Basilici at the MFF Mission Briefs**



**Figure 13: MFF Remains a viable infiltration technique**