



## **Blue Light: America's First Counter-Terrorism Unit**

Jack Murphy

On a dark night in 1977, a dozen Green Berets exited a C-130 aircraft, parachuting into a very different type of war. Aircraft hijackings had become almost commonplace to the point that Johnny Carson would tell jokes about the phenomena on television. But it was no laughing matter for the Department of Defense, who realized after the Israeli raid on Entebbe, that America was woefully unprepared to counter terrorist attacks.

This mission would be different. The Special Forces soldiers guided their MC1-1B parachutes towards the ground but their element became separated in the air, some of the Green Berets landing in the trees. The others set down alongside an airfield, landing inside a thick cloud of fog. Their target lay somewhere through the haze, a military C-130 aircraft that had been captured by terrorists. Onboard there were no hostages, but a black box, a classified encryption device that could not be allowed to fall into enemy hands.

Airfield seizures were really a Ranger mission, but someone had elected to parachute in an entire Special Forces battalion for the operation. The HALO team was an advanced element, inserted ahead of time to secure the aircraft prior to the main assault force arriving. Despite missing a number of team members at the rally point, the Green Berets knew they were quickly approaching their hit time. They had to take down the aircraft and soon.

Armed with suppressed Sten guns, they quietly advanced through the fog. Using the bad weather to their advantage, they were able to slip right between the sentries posted to guard the aircraft. Storming the plane, they quickly secured the black box. Seizing the initiative, the Team Leader decided to assault the barracks next. It wasn't part of the plan, but their fellow Green Berets were due to jump onto the airfield in minutes. The enemy resting in the barracks would almost certainly come out and start shooting at the para-troopers once they realized what was happening.

The HALO team began their assault on the barracks, when suddenly, a second assault element appeared, attacking the target from another angle. It was the rest of their advanced element that had landed in the trees, who had exactly the same idea that they had. The two elements converged on the barracks and secured the objective as Green Berets began falling from the sky, dangling under their static line parachutes.

Afterwards, an evaluator sent down to South Carolina to oversee the training exercise from Readiness Command (REDCOM) named Larry Redmon told Mark Boyatt, the Special Forces Team Leader, "I don't know how you pulled it off but the force was with you," referencing George Lucas' Star Wars films which had recently come out in theaters. The two pronged assault looked like it had been planned, coordinated, and rehearsed, but Boyatt and the evaluator both knew that he had gotten lucky this time around. As the military attempted to grapple with terrorism, a new and emerging threat, having luck on your side was more than welcome.

The aircraft take down and airfield seizure exercise had been conducted by 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces group as a part of the Army's yearly Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercises (EDRE). 5th Group's third battalion was assigned as the D-pack, part of a rapidly deploying force assigned to the 18th Airborne Corps to respond to emergency situations. At this time, the military had no dedicated counter-terrorism unit, so Rangers and Special Forces were tapped to respond to terrorist attacks and other contingencies.

Terrorism was a quickly escalating threat in the 1970's. Black September, the Red Army Faction/Baader Meinhof gang, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and other Marxist inspired groups had committed a rash of hijackings and murders across the world. In June of 1976, PLO terrorists hijacked a Air France airliner, capturing over 100 hostages, many of them Jews and Israeli citizens. The flight refueled in Libya and then flew on to Uganda, where then President Idi Amin had recently had a falling out with the Israeli government. Amin had reached an pre-arrangement with the PLO, who then turned the hostages over to the Ugandan military, forcing the Israeli government to deal with a combination of state and non-state actors.

On the night of July 3rd 1976, Israeli Special Forces executed a bold hostage rescue operation. Using speed, surprise, and violence of action, the Israeli counter-terrorist force stormed the terminal in Entebbe where the hostages were held, killed dozens of terrorists and Ugandan soldiers, then flew back to Israel with the newly liberated hostages. The raid stands as a high water mark in the history of Special Operations to this day.

A few days later, General Jack Hennessey, the commander of REDCOM, at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, received a phone call from the Pentagon asking if REDCOM could accomplish what the Israelis did in Entebbe. General Hennessey replied that he had the men, but they were not properly trained or equipped (Lenahan, xi). The previous year, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) had hashed out a concept plan to deal with a range of potential terrorist activities but nothing ever came of it. At the time, there was wide spread skepticism about Special Operations Forces, an lackadaisical attitude that terrorists couldn't hit the United States by some officials, and bureaucratic infighting amongst military commanders as to who got what and what was in it for them (Crippled Eagle, 1). After Entebbe, the 1975 counter-terrorism plan was given a second look.

This led to the establishment of two contingency task forces, JTF-7 and JTF-11, the first focused on the Middle East and Africa while the other covered Asia and the Pacific. Training missions for these task forces were rolled up into the five-year cycle of JCS world wide training exercises which put the US military through its paces in a multitude of potential future warfare scenarios. These were the EDRE training missions that Rangers and Special Forces participated in.

Assembling a rapidly deploying Special Forces element to respond to terrorist attacks came just in the nick of time. In March of 1977, the Green Berets assigned to third battalion, 5th Special Forces Group up on Smoke Bomb hill at Fort Bragg were in for surprise, one that came in the form of terror that is almost forgotten today: black militancy.

After staking out the house located at 7700 16th Street, Washington DC, seven black men made two phone calls to the house from their motel. In the first call, one of the men pretended to be a handyman looking for work. The residents of the house said he should come by around noon to fix the lock on their basement door. Soon after, the men called the house again, this time pretending to be interested in literature for sale by the occupant's organization. He was told that he could swing by later in the day to purchase some pamphlets (King, 18).

The seven men then drove to the train station to pick up an eighth member of their team. Piling into two Cadillacs, they then drove to the house at 7700 16th street to commit the greatest mass murder in Washington DC history. First, two of the seven men approached the front door asking about the pamphlets. One of the residents answered the door, then asked them to wait while she retrieved them. When she came back, a third man was present, claiming to be the handyman. All three men pushed her aside, and entered the premises, pulling out pistols and sawed off shotguns. The other five associates emerged from the Cadillacs and entered the house behind them (King, 19).

The men burst into the kitchen, waving their weapons around. A young woman feeding her eighteen month old daughter her lunch screamed. "One of the men yelled at her to shut up, then he yanked her daughter from her arms, taking her out of the kitchen" (King, 19) and bringing her upstairs. The seven intruders were upset because the target of their attack was not at home.

"Why are you all doing this to us? What did we do to you?" one of the women asked. "Ask your leader," one of the gunmen replied. "He knew we would come calling on him, ask him about that letter" (King, 20).

The gunmen upstairs heard other children crying and calling for their mommy. One of the gunmen found them in their room, in addition to the eighteen month old girl, there were her cousins, a one year old girl and her three year old brother. A nine day old infant also lay in a bed wrapped in a blanket. Hearing a cries from the other room, the gunmen searched the closet and discovered an 11-year old boy.

Meanwhile, the four adults in the household, two men and two women, were taken down to the basement, laid on the floor, and executed. The gunmen upstairs became irritated as the children cried louder as gunshots sounded from below. Removing the infant from the bed, he disappeared into the bathroom (King, 21). One by one, he came back and retrieved each of the children, and took them to the bathroom until they stopped crying.

On the ground floor, the house patriarch, Khaliffa Hamaas Abdul Khaalis, and his wife returned home. There was a brief altercation at the door and Khaalis had his wife run next door to a neighbor to phone the police. When the intruders realized what was happening, they bolted out the back door. Khaalis ran after them for half a mile until they fired a shot at him. Unarmed, and realizing that these men had been ransacking his home with his family inside, he quickly ran back.

When he got back to the house, the police had arrived and began searching the premises. The basement was covered in blood, the two men dead. By some miracle, the women were unconscious but alive. Radioing for an ambulance, one of the policemen searched the second floor with his pistol drawn. In the bathroom, he found three children floating in the bathtub and the infant floating belly up in the sink. In one of the bedroom closets they discovered the body of an 11 year old boy, murdered with a gunshot to the head (King, 24).

Before going into surgery one of the women identified the killers to a police detective telling him that they belonged to, "Elijah Poole's cutthroat gang" (King, 29) referring Elijah Muhammad, the leader of Islam Nation. The killings were in response to a schism between Khaalis who had broken away from the Nation of Islam and the form of Sunni orthodox Islam now practiced by Khaalis and his followers called Hanafi Madhab. The rift began with a letter that Khaalis mailed to the Nation of Islam in which he insulted their leaders and faith. Among other insults, he wrote, "Followers of Muhammad [Islam Nation's leader] are eaters of their brothers flesh, and black Muslims have polluted minds and will burn forever in a violently hot flame" (King, 33).

Following up on some leads, a black detective from Washington, DC infiltrated the Islam Nation temple in Philadelphia, many members of which also belonged to the so-called "black mafia" which ran drugs and conducted contract killings. Ironically, while the members of Temple #12 in Philadelphia claimed to believe in a form of black liberation, they were actually selling heroin in black neighborhoods, shaking down legitimate black business owners, and murdering members of the black community. The detective, Remus Williams, began hearing rumors about a group in temple #12 referred to as "the death squad" (King, 38). Going undercover, he got one of the killers to admit to the murders and out his cohorts by name while he was wearing a wire.

The killers were eventually rounded up by the police and trial dates were set. When Khaalis himself was called to the stand to testify during the Hanafi murders trial, he had to be removed after screaming, "You killed my babies! You killed my babies, and shot my women" (King, 74). When one of the murderers was acquitted, Khaalis snapped. In March of 1977, twelve Hanafi followers, including Khaalis stormed three buildings in Washington, DC. The Hanafi followers laid siege to the B'nai B'rith center, firing weapons into the air and brandishing machetes. A hour later, other Hanafi followers took over a local Islamic Center. Then, that afternoon they hit the district building where the mayor and city council's offices were located.

Back at Bragg, an alert went out to a select members of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group to form up on Smoke Bomb hill. The Battalion commander, Rod Paschall, briefed the men on the basic situation surrounding what became known as the Hanafi siege. When the gunmen broke into the district building, they immediately opened fire, killing a 24 year old reporter named Maurice Williams. A ricochet then severely injured Marion Barry, a junior city councilman. The Hanafi gunmen had seized three buildings, taken nearly 150 hostages, and had demonstrated their intent to kill. The Green Berets were to begin conducting rehearsals for a hostage rescue mission on American soil.

While many think that posse comitatus excludes military operations within the United States, there is actually a office in the Pentagon that handles requests from state and federal agencies for military support. Usually this takes the form of civil support, for instance, the deployment of 82nd Airborne soldiers to New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Even for direct armed military intervention, all that is required is a signature from the president. With DC police quickly overwhelmed and no one at hand prepared to conduct the hostage rescue, Special Forces was the only option.

"The 12 gunmen had several demands. They wanted the government to hand over a group of men who had been convicted of killing seven relatives -- mostly children -- of takeover leader Hamaas Abdul Khaalis. They also demanded that the movie "Mohammad, Messenger of God" be destroyed because they considered it sacrilegious," the Washington Post reported.

The Green Berets on Smoke Bomb hill began conducting marksmanship training and repelling from helicopters. A full operations order had yet to come about, but there was some thought that they would repel down onto the roofs of the three buildings being held by Khaalis and his followers. This probably would not have worked because of the amount of antennas on top of structures in DC.

The concept was rudimentary to say the least. "We were to kick in the door, shoot all of the bad guys, and hope that not too many good guys got shot in the process," Mark Boyatt recalled of the incident. In the end, it was all over within 24 hours after the Special Forces soldiers were alerted. The Special Forces element was never deployed and never left Fort Bragg in response. Three Middle Eastern ambassador's intervened to negotiate with Khaalis. Ashraf Ghorbal of Egypt, Ardeshir Zahedi of Iran, and Sahabzada Yaqubkhan of Pakistan talked to Khaalis on the telephone and were able to get the Hanafi members to surrender themselves to the police.

"Even if we deployed it could have been just as advisors. There would have been ton of lawyers, especially if we deployed with weapons," Roger (not his real name) remembered. He was one of the 5th Group soldiers spun up in response to the siege along with Boyatt. "If we were used there would have been a very specific ROE," or Rules of Engagement.

Later that year, in October, a Lufthansa commercial airliner was hijacked by members of the PLO. After refueling in several different countries, the hijackers finally landed in Mogadishu, Somalia. The German police counter-terrorism unit, GSG-9, raided the aircraft as it sat on the ground in Somalia. Thirty commandos rescued the hostages, including 70 German citizens, in what had been dubbed Operation Feuerzauber.

Back in the United States, REDCOM was once again asked if they could do what the Germans had just done, the same question which had came after the raid on Entebbe. The answer was clear: absolutely not. "In the Pentagon that day, the shit hit the fan" (Beckwith, 116). That type of, "surgical take down (undetected assault and rapid penetration of a commercial airliner) required specialized knowledge and equipment, constant training, and dedicated personnel" (Lenahan, 8).

A Colonel named Charlie Beckwith thought he might have the solution, but so did some men in 5th Special Forces Group. In November, a month after the GSG-9 operation, the Army green lit two dedicated counter-terrorism units.

Another EDRE training mission came as policy makers struggled to find a force capable of dealing with aircraft hijackings. One CT-EDRE was called End Game and took place in the fall of 1977. Colonel Mountel told some of the Green Berets in 5<sup>th</sup> Group to pack for the tropics. The Special Forces alert force grabbed their gear and flew down to Hunter Army Airfield where they linked up with First Ranger Battalion. The Rangers shrugged into their T-10 static line parachutes and boarded the aircraft. The Green Berets didn't feel like wearing their parachutes for the entire trip so the Special Forces Sergeant Major asked the flight crew to give them a thirty minute warning when they were approaching the drop zone.

When they got closer to the target location, the Green Berets donned their parachutes and the flight crew opened the door of the C-130 aircraft. That was when they realized that Mountel had played a little joke on them by saying they should pack for the tropics. They could see nothing but white below them. The Rangers and Green Berets were about to jump into Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. The troops jumped into the exercise and drove on with the mission.

Once on the ground, a pop flare shot up into the night sky. One of the Ranger Lieutenants froze right in the middle of a road, so the Special Forces soldiers moved away from the infantrymen. Next, the Rangers decided to slog their way through a frozen swamp on the way to the objective. This was the last straw for the Green Berets, who separated from the Rangers and walked around the swamp.

Soon, Green Berets had the target in sight. It was the President's Boeing 707, which technically speaking, becomes Air Force One once the President is on board. Of course, President Carter was not on board this night. Inside the aircraft were role players pretending to be hostages and terrorists. The Special Forces team infiltrated the target area and penetrated the aircraft, coming right up into the cockpit using an ingress technique that the pilots of the plane did not even know existed.

The aircraft take down was just another test shot as the Pentagon tried to figure out how they were going to deal with hijackings in the future.

Coming back from an exchange program with the British Special Air Service (SAS) in 1962, Special Forces officer Charlie Beckwith realized that America was missing a certain special operations capability. The idea that America needed an elite force of commandos who were more than Airborne Light Infantry, like the Rangers, or trainers, like Special Forces was something that stuck in Beckwith's mind.

"We have never been able to do special operations well," Beckwith wrote. "Special Forces-yes, they teach and train, but we've never been able to do special operations very well." At the time terrorism was just a side show in the larger geo-political context of the Cold War.

America's main threat was the USSR, and the terrorism was not really on the US government's radar. Guerrilla or revolutionary warfare, yes, but not terrorism.

Originally, Beckwith envisioned a unit based upon the SAS structure which would conduct unilateral direct action missions with a highly trained permanently assigned force. The capability that Beckwith pitched to the Pentagon was a unit that could conduct POW rescue

missions like the Son Tay raid in Vietnam. Instead of assembling a rescue force on an ad hoc basis, America should have a permanent, professional force to execute such missions. He encountered resistance to his concept for years until terrorism reared its ugly head in full force during the 1970's.

The Son Tay raid, officially known as operation Ivory Coast, was a mission led by Bull Simmons to recover 61 American POWs held in North Vietnam. With Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) hopelessly infiltrated by communist spies, the US military put together an ad hoc force of Green Berets to carry out the rescue. To avoid having the mission compromised, they conducted their training and rehearsals at Eglin Air Force base in Florida. The Special Forces soldiers launched from Thailand in helicopters to the POW prison on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1970. The POWs had been recently moved, and the mission ended in failure, however the Son Tay raid led to the development of new tactics, techniques, and procedures needed for a strike force designed to rescue imprisoned American soldiers.

"A single factor that sold the future of Delta Force more than any other was terrorism...one of the weaknesses in other organizations is that they are only part-timers in this field. Semiprofessionals or gifted amateurs, no matter what their individual abilities or potential are, can be no match for international terrorists," Beckwith wrote (Beckwith, 104).

The idea for a standing unit within Special Forces that could conduct such operations had been kicking around since an Infantry Conference at Fort Benning, Georgia in 1976. One of the men at that conference was Charlie Beckwith, but others in Special Forces felt that the capability could be developed in-house using lessons learned from the Son Tay raid.

In 1977, the post-Vietnam draw down had not been kind to the Army. "It was not popular to be in or to stay in," one Special Forces soldier remarked as he recalled this era. Due to personnel shortages in other Special Forces groups, 5th Group was really the only group that could possibly be tapped to establish a dedicated POW rescue team which also drew inspiration from the Vietnam War era MACV-SOG and Bright Light missions.

Charlie Beckwith was still working with General Kingston and General William De Puy to create a unit altogether separate from Special Forces styled after the British SAS model. Beckwith had undertaken the long painful process of putting together and pitching the unit proposal, but the Pentagon was dragging their feet, up until GSG-9 executed their aircraft take down in Mogadishu in October of 1977. Once he got the green light to form what would become known as SFOD-D (Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta) or Delta Force, "Charlie said he needed 24 months to screen and properly train a force, and lots of money" (Lenahan, 9).

After Delta received activation orders, Beckwith gave a brief to the REDCOM commander, General Hennessey in which the General said, "I want to make it very clear to you, Colonel, that if something of a terrorist nature goes down in my area of responsibility, and I'm directed to respond, I'm going to call you!"

"Well, that won't do you any good," Beckwith replied. "Because I don't have anybody at this time. We're just getting started, sir. It's going to take two years to build this force."

"You weren't listening, Colonel. If I have a problem, I'm going to call you" (Beckwith, 119).

"General Hennessey wanted a group trained for such surgical missions as urban hostage barricade and aircraft recovery situations now, not eighteen months down the road," (Lenahan, 10). With Beckwith needing two years to select and train Delta Force, an interim unit needed to be created, a stop-gap to respond to acts of terrorism until Delta would be activated in a few years later. This task fell to General Mackmull who had been at the brief with Beckwith and General Hennessey. General Mackmull assigned responsibility for this interim unit to Colonel Mountel, the commander of 5th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg.

Jim Morris, who served in Special Forces with Colonel Mountel in Vietnam described him as, "one of the finest soldiers and men I ever worked with or for. He was smart, calm, incisive, and insightful." When SOFREP asked SEAL Team Six founder Richard Marcinko about Mountel, the first thing he did was hold his hand up to his mouth like he was smoking a pipe. Sure, enough Colonel Mountel smoked a pipe periodically and was nick named "black gloves" by some because he often wore a pair of black driving gloves. More often, he was known as RAM, for Robert Anthony Mountel. Mark Boyatt said that Mountel, "knew the troops, trusted the troops. He had total confidence in his people and their full respect."

Mountel quickly set about establishing the 5th Group counter-terrorism unit, recruiting enlisted men via the good old boy network, all of them Vietnam veterans known to be, "good in the woods." The only members of the new unit who had not served in Vietnam were a few of the officers. Roger was of those brought into the fold, and came into work one morning to receive quite a shock. "Get your ass down to the Green Light building," he was ordered.

Roger was assigned to a Green Light team which was a very serious business. Highly classified at the time, Special Forces soldiers assigned to Green Light were trained to parachute deep behind enemy lines with atomic devices which could be detonated by Special

Forces teams to halt enemy advances by dropping bridges, closing mountain passes, and generally creating large obstacles along high speed avenues of approach which would delay if not halt Soviet advances.

"What the fuck is this?" he thought as he walked into the building and saw who was there. "Half of these motherfuckers are Green Light, is this an alert mission?" He thought this was another quick alert EDRE exercise. Major Kline Williamson who was the Group Operations Officer gave the men a mission brief once they were all seated. From there they were instructed to get on a deuce and a half truck which would drive him out to Mott Lake on the other side of Fort Bragg.

Mark Boyatt was the HALO Team Leader of ODA 572 at the time and had already heard about Blue Light. One morning he was walking along on Smoke Bomb hill when Colonel Mountel asked him if he wanted to join the unit. When he replied in the affirmative, Mountel told him, "then get your ass on over there tomorrow."

Master Sergeant Jake Jakovenko jumped into Bragg following a training exercise. Getting picked up at the drop zone, he was told that he needed to go to 5th Special Forces Group Headquarters. When he got there he was told that he was being assigned to something called, "Blue Light." He was shown a roster of his ODA on Blue Light, but the only name he recognized was his own. "I will come but I have an A-Team," Jake said. "I don't go if my team is not included." Colonel Mountel must have really wanted Jake, who had been on the Son Tay raid in North Vietnam, and allowed him to take his entire ODA with him over to Blue Light.

A 5<sup>th</sup> Group Sergeant Major was called in Colonel Mountel's office. "Look, we got a mission and I want you to put together a force," the 5th Group commander told him. "You can have anybody you want out of 5<sup>th</sup> Group. Once you put this program together how long would it be before you can have this unit shooting?" The Sergeant Major, a Son Tay raider himself, told the Colonel that he could do it in a week. Mountel didn't believe him but the Sergeant Major made it happen.

The enlisted men brought into Blue Light were seasoned to put it mildly. At least ten percent of the men had participated in the Son Tay raid, men like Tiny Young and Frank Row, or in MACV-SOG such as Lowell Stevens and Larry Kramer. The remaining 90% were men who had served in Special Forces assignments in Vietnam including Project Omega, Project Delta (which Charlie Beckwith had commanded in 1965), Project Sigma, and Mike Force. Another Son Tay raider, John Ward, was in charge of Blue Light's flight detachment.

Blue Light's compound was established out at Mott Lake, the buildings most recently used as 7<sup>th</sup> Group's isolation facility. What the compound had been used for before that varies depending on who you talk to. Some say it was a power station for a transmission facility for Voice of America. Others say it was where Cubans were trained for the Bay of Pigs. One way or the other, it was Blue Light's new home, and America's first counter-terrorism unit was now in business.

Blue Light, America's first counter-terrorism unit had found its home out at Mott Lake. Their compound was sparse, but served its purpose. There were four buildings, a combatives pit, and RAM drop zone, which stood for Robert A. Mountel. It is said that Mountel got \$25,000 of funding earmarked for Blue Light from a friend at the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but that was all they were getting. Ultimately, the money came out of the same stream of Pentagon funding that was used for Delta Force. Otherwise, the Blue Light members practiced a tried and true Special Forces tradition: scrounging.

"One of our guys stole a jeep from the Military Police," Blue Light's Sergeant Major laughed. When Colonel Mountel came out, the Sergeant Major asked him not to inquire as to where the jeep had originated from.

"We were always ready to go, always concerned about the fact that we were out there in the boonies and if there were any bad guys who wanted to get us they could," Boyatt said. "We walked around locked and loaded all the time, carrying .45s with the hammer back with the grip safety taped down. We operated like that for a long time."

Blue Light was a nickname for the classified project name which no one ever actually used. This followed the non-classified naming convention used at the time as was used for Green Light as well. This was similar to the non-classified names used for Special Forces projects in Vietnam which used letters of the Greek alphabet like Sigma, Omega, and Delta.

Around 75 men had been recruited for Blue Light, which was now organized into three assault teams which were still structured as 12-man ODAs with one exception. One team was led by Mark Boyatt, another by McGoey, one by "Dutch" Herman, and the final team was a plussed up 24-man element led by Roger which also had an intelligence collection mission. Two of these ODAs came from 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group. The other two teams were drawn from 1st and 2nd Battalions, also in 5th Group. They also had a sniper/observer team led by Master Sergeant England.

The Blue Light arms room contained an assortment of suppressed Sten guns, .22 pistols, 1911s, CAR-15s, M14s, and Remington 700 bolt action rifles. Additionally, HUMINT and SIGINT support was attached to Blue Light. Captain Tim Casey was a 35A (Military Intelligence) who led a team from 801st MID. 400th Special Operations Detachment (SOD) was assigned to run SIGINT support.

Down Plank road, a few miles away from Mott Lake, Master Sergeant Wesley Stevens and Larry Kramer helped construct what became known as S&K range. The edge of Blue Light's range actually crossed into an adjacent McPherson impact area and it was not uncommon to find shrapnel laying around. One time Roger even found an unexploded shell on the range which had not detonated because the shipping plug had not been removed before it was fired.

Stevens supervised the construction of a shoot house made out of old tires filled with sand in which the Blue Light members could conduct live fire training, including the use of hand grenades. Because S&K range ran into an impact area, they could get away with things that simply were not done at Army ranges when Blue Light was activated in November of 1977 such as mixing mortars and small arms fire, or fragmentation grenades and smoke grenades. S&K was also unique in that they could conduct 180 degree live fire exercises, like the Australian peel technique used when breaking contact with the enemy. "We had the desire to be the very best we could be and push ourselves. Almost nothing was too bizarre to try," Boyatt recalled about his time at Mott Lake.

Blue Light also built a replica of a Pan Am airplane fuselage and a train car, all in a short amount of time. At S&K range, assaulters would shoot around each other and snipers would fire over the heads of assaulters, techniques that no one was doing at that time. "We had a real rough time with the .45s because we shot them so much that we were wearing them out so fast. It was nothing to shoot 500 rounds a day and the same amount with the Sten," Boyatt told SOFREP.

In the shoot house, they would, "shoot with 25mm bb guns and then transition them to .45s," Earl Bleacher said. For the first time, Blue Light was using the pistol as an offensive weapon. When climbing onto the wings of a airplane or conducting a tubular assault, Blue Light would use the 1911 pistol as their primary weapon. Techniques, like drawing from the holster and shooting, conducting combat reload drills, or transitioning from your primary weapon to your secondary were unheard of in 1977.

Bob Kelly was assigned to Blue Light and also served as their senior pistol instructor. Previously, he had been assigned to the Army marksmanship unit. He was known as a great shooter, but only shot with his weapon already out of the holster and did not practice rapid reloads.

Roger took some permissive TDY (Temporary Duty) and spent his own money to go to Jeff Cooper's Gunsite, which was the only place that was teaching practical marksmanship techniques at that time. Coming back from the course, Roger demonstrated the weaver stance instead of the usual isosceles stance as well as rapid reloading drills, but these were greeted with skepticism at the time. Why would you need to reload when you already have seven shots in the magazine and one in the pipe? However, Blue Light did secure the Army's entire stockpile of match grade ammunition that year which upset the Army Marksmanship Unit to no end.

With weapons, ammunition, and training facilities on hand, it was a usual event for Blue Light assaulters to draw their weapons, don their kit, and jog down to S&K range, conducting a type of stress shoot. Also, with RAM drop zone right there the Mott Lake compound, they could conduct HALO parachute jumps on a regular basis.

There was one problem though, Colonel Mountel had given Blue Light a flag with unofficial unit insignia on it but Roger took one look at it and said, "this is butt ugly." It looked like a cartoon skull with crossed bones behind it. Roger then went to Greg Daily, who in Blue Light and was also a talented artist and asked him to redesign the Blue Light flag. He also asked Daily to figure out something other than the skull and cross bones because the last thing they wanted was something that might look like the infamous Waffen SS emblem.

Daily pulled it off, replacing the crossed bones with crossed arrows, which are present on the Special Forces distinguished unit insignia worn on the green beret. The skull was changed, angled off to the side, and the motto "Nous Defions" was stitched below, which roughly translates into, "we defy." Today, this motto and symbol is used throughout Special Forces, but few know that it originated with Greg Daily and Blue Light. Daily also designed the HALO parachutist wings which are worn by qualified jumpers to this day.

Blue Light had been stood up at Mott Lake and had begun their training as an interim counter-terrorist unit while Charlie Beckwith took his eighteen to twenty four months to stand up Delta Force. Room clearing techniques and innovative marksmanship drills were conducted at S&K range while Blue Light was on standby to be America's go-to element to deal with the terrorist threat. This was a new type of war, and Colonel Mountel, the 5th Special Forces Group commander, knew that Blue Light needed to enhance their capabilities, utilizing unconventional tactics.

One day Mountel approached Roger, a Blue Light assaulter, and told him that a young lady from 5th Group's intelligence support section would be joining their team.

"I wonder how the guys will adjust to this?" Roger asked.

"That's what you're there for," the Colonel replied.

Katie McBryer was a Specialist (E-4) 96B, an intelligence analyst, and should not be confused with the controversial Katie Wilder.

Katie became perhaps the only woman to ever serve on a Special Forces ODA. Initially, the Blue Light men were hesitant but soon saw what she could bring to the table. "Having a woman was a big deal because she can do things I never could. She was switched on, a sharp lady," Roger said.

"She proved to be a hell of a asset," Blue Light's Sergeant Major stated. "We were all somewhat protective of her. For instance, we thought she wouldn't like a .45 so we drew out a [Browning] Hi-Power from the armory. She was HALO qualified, she could out shoot the men!" In the end, Katie didn't care for the Browning Hi-Power so she carried a 1911 like the men.

Of Asian descent, Katie stood at about 5'2 or 5'3 but was in good shape and did physical training with the men. "We could dress her like a nurse or whatever to go on the plane and see where the bad guys were," Earl said. "She was one of the boys."

Although Special Forces is a male dominated world, the Green Berets do have a different relationship with women than other military units as they trace their lineage back to the World War II era Office of Strategic Service (OSS). Today, the Special Forces Association headquarters off of Doc Bennet road in Fayetteville is named the Frenchy Amundson building. Rolande "Frenchy" Colas de la Nouye Amundson was part of the French resistance and became a member of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) during World War II. Parachuting into Nazi occupied France numerous times on intelligence gathering missions, she was eventually captured by the Nazis. The Gestapo used rape as a form of torture against her, until she was liberated by allied forces in 1945. In 1977, the same year that Blue Light was created, Frenchy was made an honorary Green Beret.

But by 1977, warfare had changed. During the cold war stand off between the USSR and the the United States, nations leveraged proxy forces against one another. The Soviets sent military advisors to North Vietnam during the war, and America retaliated by sending proxy forces to fight the Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980's. Guerrilla warfare had swept across the third world as communist forces made advances, attempting to box in western democracies. By this time, communist insurgents were closing in on Rhodesia and were stirring up trouble in South West Africa. The latest form of proxy warfare was terrorism.

Wadia Haddad was one of the most dangerous and vicious terrorists of the day as the, "mastermind behind countless terrorist operations, including the 1970 hijacking, and later destruction, of four jetliners in one of the most ambitious terrorist operations of all time" (Livingstone, 126). He also had a hand in the 1968 hijacking of an El Al flight, as well as the Dawson's Field hijackings of three airplanes in Jordan in 1970.

Haddad had been a member of George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) which competed with Arafat's Fateh party. In the mid-70's Habash became too moderate for Haddad's taste as he began to seek reconciliation with Arafat. Haddad then split off, forming his own faction, PFLP-Special Command (PFLP-SC). PFLP was alleged to receive funding from Libya's Colonel Qaddafi, and Haddad ran his terror organization out of Baghdad, Iraq. It is important to note, that the players at this time were not Islamists, but Marxists.

The PFLP-SC was behind the hijacking of, "an Air France A-300B Airbus by a transnational terrorist force that included two West Germans, one Iranian, and a Palestinian" (Livingstone, 127) who then flew the plane to Entebbe, Uganda and turned it over to the Ugandan military in a pre-arranged agreement. The hostages were eventually freed by Israeli commandos in July of 1976, a catalytic event which forced the United States to start taking terrorism seriously.

When Haddad died in East German in 1978 (some say poisoned by Mossad) his organization split into three factions which conducted terrorist attacks around the world. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of archives belonging to the Soviet Union, it was revealed the Haddad was a highly valued KGB asset.

Abu Nidal was another notorious terrorist of this era who, like Haddad, split off from Arafat's Fateh to found the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO). Nidal and his terrorist group were responsible for dozens of terrorist attacks from Rome to Vienna, to Pakistan, Kuwait, and beyond. Another thing he had in common with Haddad was flirting with Libyan dictator, Omar Qaddafi and like Haddad he placed his headquarters in Saddam Hussein's Iraq at one point. In a interview with Der Spiegel, Nidal proved himself to be no stranger to theatrics, stating that he was, "the evil spirit of the secret services. I am the evil spirit which moves around only at night causing them nightmares" (Livingston, 137).

Nidal was also known to have close ties to Warsaw Pact intelligence services. Through Polish and East German cut outs, ANO trafficked in weapons and cash, banking with the notorious Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI). "The Soviets don't run him or control him," former CIA director Bill Casey said. "But they use him and his group for their own purposes" (Livingstone, 243).

"These national liberation fronts are classic communist organizations. They create big tent for the disenfranchised who are controlled by the communist party. The control features are secretly communist, but they present themselves as national liberation groups," Roger said. "After the revolution is over, they do what they do. They start knocking off the other liberation fronts and you get nothing but Bolsheviks, Castros, and Gaddafis."



Even if they did not have ideological bonds, groups as diverse as the Bandaar Meinoff gang, the IRA, and the Red Brigades had to repay the Palestinians for the training which they had received at their camps, and they did this by staging surrogate terrorist attacks. East German Stasi and the Bulgarians were also used as proxies. At the time, the USSR spread a propaganda narrative that America was an imperial power and Israel was simply its puppet.

Blue Light now found itself on the front lines of a proxy war being staged to destabilize the West by the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, Charlie Beckwith was attempting to get his own counter-terrorism unit off the ground. The first three people in Delta were Beckwith, his secretary named Marion, and Sergeant Major William "Country" Grimes. After working out of an office on Smoke Bomb Hill at the corner of Reilly and Gruber road, Delta then moved to what had been Fort Bragg's stockade, Building A-3275 off of Butner road. Beckwith ran back to back selection courses in Uwharrie national forest and then put the candidates into the Operator Training Course (OTC), seven days a week, 15 hours a day, for a total of 776 hours of instruction.

Although Delta Force had been funded, Charlie knew how to scrounge as well, perhaps a product of his own Special Forces background and procured .45 caliber M3 grease guns which he had the sights sawed off of. "We were to learn to shoot instinctively...Beckwith wanted us to shoot 3x5 cards," Sergeant Major Michael Vining said. "I think he hated 3x5 cards." Sergeant Major Vining served as an explosive ordnance technician with the 99th ordnance detachment in Phuoc Vinh, Vietnam. After a break in service, he returned to the Army and was accepted into Delta Force in 1978 and graduated from Operator Training Course (OTC) #1. As a Delta operator, he participated in numerous operations such as Eagle Claw and Urgent Fury.

It was not uncommon to spend half a day shooting in Delta, and the unit armorer, Terry Hall, even invented the idea of using rubber from an inner tube cut and fitted to the bolt of the M3 to deaden the sound of the open bolt sub-machine gun when it was fired.

In the mornings, Beckwith would start the men off with brick PT in which all events were done with a brick in each hand. NCO bricks had holes in them and officer bricks were solid. A former college football player, Beckwith would then stomp around with a whistle being a coach while the men played football.

"Our unclassified mission was POW rescue. We wanted to have a standing force that could do a Son Tay type of mission. During Son Tay they put together the people, training, rehearsals, and conducted the mission. We hoped to eliminate the first two steps," Vining told SOFREP. "We did not know what the next threat would be to our nation's security."

Beckwith's Delta Force model was based off of the British SAS, and so were their tactics. In this regard they were a little bit ahead of where Blue Light was. The SAS had already been dealing with terrorism in urban environments such as in Northern Ireland. Techniques taken for granted today, such as drawing and shooting from the holster, were commonplace in the SAS at this time.

"In the beginning we had a guy from 22 SAS, Ginger Flynn, that helped us with our shooting program," Vining recalled. Flynn taught the operators shooting techniques like the double-tap. However, in OTC class #1, the operators essentially trained themselves. They would sit down together and figure out what they wanted to train on, then weapons men would train them on weapons, EOD guys would train them on improvised explosive devices. They would practice vehicle ambushes and aircraft take downs, figuring out what worked and what didn't.

"At the time, the thing everyone was concerned with was hijacked airplanes and barricaded hostage situations," Roger said, reflecting on Blue Light's training. These were tubular targets, which include buses, the type that the National Command Authorities (POTUS and SECDEF) were the most concerned about. "Because we were so focused in Blue Light on the most likely primary threat, tubular targets and hostage barricade, that we didn't get into the other mission profiles."

"We view aircraft take downs as nothing more than a linear target on wheels," Vining said. "We went to experts and they taught us about aircraft systems, we learn the various airport jobs, baggage handling, refueling, emptying the toilets, restocking the aircraft, and so on so we could pass as a worker." Delta snipers also learned how to shoot through the glass windows of an airplane cockpit. Simultaneously, Blue Light was developing some of these same capabilities with their assault/intelligence team, including Katie.

One of Blue Light's Team Sergeants, Jake Jakovenko recalls when he flew into, "Tampa airport and met the engineers," of various aircraft, "and learned easiest way to penetrate them."

Roger elaborated on Blue Light's perspective, "We didn't have the advantage to be exposed to the SAS. They had transitioned long before that because of what they were doing in Northern Ireland, which was one of several urban terrorist scenarios that they had dealt with such as Kenya, Aden, and Malaysia. They had been dealing with this for a long, long time. The SAS knew they had to rapidly extract a semi-automatic pistol from a holster or concealed carry. It was the SAS that used the double tap and the modified isosceles. The unit [Delta] had been introduced to those other mission profiles early on, but not true with Blue Light, aside from one team which had a pre-assault

collection mission in which team members might be dressed to look like ground crew members or airport staff."

"The overwhelming focus from the National Command Authorities was embassies and domestic facilities, overseas bases, or the hijacking of a US flagged aircraft," Roger continued. Both Delta and Blue Light trained for permissive and non-permissive environments but realistically the only permissive environment that either unit might have operated in would be within the United States if the President signed a waiver on posse comitatus. Even if terrorists took hostages on an overseas US military base, it would have been surrounded by Military Police and then host-nation counter-terrorism units would have executed the mission as stipulated in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

Master Sergeant Jake Jakovenko was known as a hard man amongst the Green Berets of 5th Special Forces Group. When asked about what type of soldier Jakovenko was, retired 7th Special Forces Group Warrant Officer Jim "Smokey" West simply replied, "No bullshit." Born in what he describes as a "no name village" in Dombass province, Ukraine, to a coal miner mother, Jakovenko was introduced into the same rough life that his family lived in Eastern Europe.

Speaking of his mother, Jakoveko told SOFREP that, "When she was 16 in 1933-34, Stalin tried to starve Ukraine out, like the Germans did to the Jews. Someone, for a loaf of bread, said her brother had a pistol. The Bolsheviks came even though no pistol was found. They tortured and murdered her whole family. She was sitting, leaning against a fence, too weak to move from hunger and watched the horror. Two Bolsheviks came over to her, one pointed a pistol at her head. The other said, 'why waste a bullet? She will be dead by sundown.'"

Her neighbors stepped in after the Bolsheviks left, taking Jakovenko's mother in and helping her recover. In 1941, the Germans invaded Ukraine, were defeated, and retreated back to Germany. Ukrainians who had worked with the Germans had to retreat with them or face retaliation. "We ended up in Berlin, Pop was a fireman and Mom worked in a factory sewing German Army uniforms," Jakovenko said. "We left Berlin in May 1945, again the Russians were only blocks away, and again it would be death or Siberia. "We ended up in a displaced person camp in Hanover, England. Pop died in 1946, Mom married my Stepfather. It was easier to immigrate to America as a family unit. We arrived in USA in November of 1950."

After working on a ranch in Idaho, Jakovenko moved to Jersey City, New Jersey where he soon dropped out of school and tried to join the Army. The first time he was turned down because he was too young and not a US citizen. In 1958 he volunteered for the draft and became an American citizen in 1961. During the Cuban missile crisis he was deployed to the Dominican Republic with the 2nd Airborne Division and when he came home he volunteered to go to Vietnam. Hitting the ground in January of 1966, Jakovenko served in the infantry before becoming a member of the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRPs) which were rebranded as Ranger companies later in the war. Running six man recon patrols, he saw plenty of action.

Back in the United States, he volunteered for Special Forces, graduating the Q-course in June, 1968. He again volunteered for service in Vietnam and then volunteered to participate in the Son Tay raid in 1970. Suffice to say that Jakovenko was about as seasoned as they come, but he was far from alone in 5th Special Forces Group. He was in good company amongst other Son Tay raiders, MACV-SOG, and Mike Force veterans up on Smoke Bomb hill.

In 1973, Jakovenko was sent to Mott Lake, which was then an isolation facility for Special Forces teams to conduct mission planning. This particular mission was to infiltrate into Iran and recover sensitive CIA monitoring equipment which had been installed along the border. Briefers from the State Department told the Green berets that Russian Spetsnaz was also getting this mission. The Cold War showdown between Green Berets and Spetsnaz looked like it might actually happen for a moment.

Incredibly, the State Department briefers told the Special Forces team that they were to shoot to wound if they made contact. "I asked if the Russians were getting the same briefing, and being told not to kill anyone," Jakovenko said. The mission was cancelled and the Russians got ahold of some of the most modern eavesdropping equipment that the CIA had at the time. Master Sergeant Jakovenko was spun up again with the group of Special Forces men who were to execute a hostage rescue mission during the previously mentioned Hanafi siege in 1977.

Colonel Mountel clearly wanted Jakovenko on Blue Light, so when Jakovenko demanded that his entire ODA be allowed to come with him into the unit, his request was granted. Jakovenko then became the Team Sergeant of one of the assault teams, his men the assaulters. "Blue Light was ready to launch 24/7, any where American interests were threatened. Delta was still selecting and training," he said about the disposition of the two units.

Kenny McMullin was another Team Sergeant in Blue Light. Like Jakovenko, he was a Son Tay raider. He made a combat jump in Vietnam and also served in Thailand during the war.

"As everyone knows, my dad loved to read and never stopped learning his craft. He filled his shelves with military history. But I know his prized books were about his friends, many of you here today... All of his books signed, all marked with favorite pages and passages. The

names once redacted are penciled back in, to celebrate his friend's achievements," his son, Steven McMullin who is also a Green Beret said at a ceremony after his father passed away.

Roger remembers McMullin as being a, "very intelligent guy who really understood the nuances of his business. Not just running recon but about unconventional warfare and unconventional theory. The theory of the practice of terrorism and revolutionary warfare." McMullin continued to serve with distinction after his time in Blue Light as well, serving as a company Sergeant Major in 7<sup>th</sup> Group and a battalion Sergeant Major in 3<sup>rd</sup> Group.

Both Blue Light and Delta were also busy consulting with foreign counter-terrorist units to develop tactics and improve their performance. Colonel Wegener, the German commander, who led the successful raid to free 70 German hostages from a hijacked aircraft in Somalia, from GSG-9 came out to Mott Lake. "He liked what we were doing and offered some advice," Blue Light's Sergeant Major said.

A Special Operations general in the Israeli Army came out to Blue Light's compound as well. "Here is what you have to look out for," he told the Green Berets. "You have a counter-terrorist force you train every day, but you have to watch out for burn out." In Israel they had a practice of rotating their counter-terrorist troops to the police force so they could have a recovery period as the intense training and constant alerts causes a lot of stress for those assigned to these types of units. Unfortunately, the US Army did not have that luxury.

At Delta, they were often seeking advice from the same units. "From my observations there was no counter-terrorist forces that were totally complete at the time. The concept was hostage rescue units. Counter-terrorism was the label the unit was formed under but initially there was no idea that we were formed to track them [terrorists] down and kill them in their beds. GSG-9, SAS, and GIGN had some experience formed based on past terrorist actions and active groups such as the Red Army Faction, the PLO at the Munich Olympics, and we got help from them and other organizations. We attended training at special schools and gained access to technical specialists and applied what we learned to what we developed internally," Jim (not his real name) said, who joined the Delta Force in the early years and later served as a Squadron Commander.

"A lot of it was on the fly. Target analysis, mission analysis, integration of intelligence and an understanding from the beginning that you had to have a stand alone intel and analysis capability to that can deploy to a crisis site," Jim said, which dovetails with Beckwith's views. "I had learned that from the SAS. They taught me if I was going to do something unique, something very dangerous, then I better have all my own horses. When your life and those of your people are the stakes, you don't want to have to depend on strangers" (Beckwith, 77).

"No one, including our intelligence agencies had organizations with the specific capabilities we developed," Jim said about the late 1970's and early 1980's.

Blue Light participated in a number of major training exercises that were run by the REDCOM staff and in conjunction with the Ranger Battalions. These were called CT-EDREs. These training missions took place across America, some of them including multiple objectives within the target area, but all of them including a aircraft take down because this was the biggest terrorist threat facing America at the time, or at least this was the perception of policy makers.

The basic template used was for a Ranger Battalion to static line parachute into the area of operations and silently form a security cordon around the target aircraft. Then a Blue Light team would conduct a High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) free fall jump and land inside the security perimeter created by the Rangers.

General Hennessey, the REDCOM commander, had given his staff a directive to put together a comprehensive study of all aircraft hijackings, particularly the PLO's mass aircraft hijacking in 1970. Another case study was the French Foreign Legion and Belgian Para-Commando rescue mission undertaken in Zaire in May of 1978, in which 2,250 expats were evacuated during the course of a seven day gun battle.

In February of the same year PLO terrorists hijacked a plane in Cyprus. Egyptian commandos attempted to storm the plane, only to come under fire from the Cypriot National Guard. REDCOM's analysis was that, "Egyptian emotions overcame logic and good planning" and that Cypriot authorities were sympathetic to the PLO to the point that they quietly moved their National Guard into concealed position to ambush the Egyptians if they attempted to intervene (Lenahan, 12). The tail number of the aircraft was 777, which became the numbered designation of the counter-terrorist unit subsequently created by the Egyptian military.

One of the CT-EDREs took place in Indian Springs, Nevada where Mark Boyatt and his men executed the first nighttime HALO mass-tactical jump, meaning that they put out a large group of 25 free fall jumpers off the ramp of a C-130 at once. When preparing for the exercise, one Special Forces soldier expressed skepticism saying, "this will never work."

Colonel Mountel simply smiled at him and replied, "want to bet money?"

Mountel had supreme confidence in his Green Berets, placing a special trust in them which in turn inspired a lot of loyalty in his men.

Second Ranger Battalion, led by Lt. Col. Wayne Downing jumped into the exercise first. Moving quietly through the night, the Rangers walked several miles before forming a donut shaped security perimeter around the target aircraft. The 2/75 Rangers showed a lot of stamina, one of them even moving to the target area with a broken leg. The 25 man Blue Light element then jumped in, guiding their MC-3 parachutes inside the security position before taking down the aircraft. They jumped wearing tennis shoes, since that was the preferred type of footwear when climbing up on the wings of an airplane without sliding around or making too much noise. In most cases, an actual Boeing 727 or 737 was used as a training aid, so no explosive breaches were permitted, not that those techniques had even been developed yet.

With RAM dropzone right outside the Blue Light compound back at Mott Lake, the Special Forces soldiers were particularly adept at free fall jumps, contradicting in action the wide spread belief at the time that HALO jumps were an unreliable insertion technique because it was difficult to attain a tight grouping of jumpers or land on a small drop zone.

Another training mission occurred on a small Hawaiian island, in which Blue Light air landed on the runway and then walked overland to where terrorist role players were holding hostages on board a 707 aircraft in the hanger. The airplane actually belonged to Pacific Command. Blue Light came up to the fuselage with ladder, infiltrated into the rear of the aircraft and quickly captured it. One of the Sergeants then activated the emergency inflatable evacuation chutes at the door for them to make the exfiltration, sliding down to the ground.

It is probably nothing more than a military myth that Blue Light and Delta were placed in competition with one another, with the winner becoming the Army's permanent counter-terrorism force, because Blue Light was never designed to be more than a interim unit from the beginning. However, there is another interesting side bar in which Delta was brought down to Blue Light's S&K range during their validation process.

Blue Light was put through a shooting exercise the same month that Delta shot at the same range, leading some to believe that even if they were not being compared to see which would become the permanent counter-terrorist unit, that someone was trying to validate training techniques. At the time there was no data available for shooting drills as new marksmanship methodologies related to counter-terrorism were still in their infancy. When shooting, how fast is fast? How accurate is accurate enough? Certainly, you need to be faster than the enemy, but where is the baseline? What does right look like?

The Army needed to draw up their task, conditions, and standards for counter-terrorism operations. Perhaps that is why they tested Blue Light and Delta out at the same range in the same month, to see what their standards should look like. After all, Blue Light and Delta consisted of basically the same type of Special Forces soldiers, aside from the one or two Rangers in Delta during the early years.

Meanwhile, Charlie Beckwith was feeling some pressure as he tried to get Delta up and running. He was struggling to get soldiers through his selection course, the Ranger Battalions were not allowing their men to attend, and significant tension had developed between Beckwith and General Mackmull (Beckwith, 128.) In January of 1978, Beckwith rightly or wrongly felt that Mackmull was beginning to throw his clout and resources behind Blue Light instead of Delta.

There had always been a rivalry between the Colonel Beckwith and Colonel Mountel at 5th Group. There was a difference in ideas in that Mountel used the good old boy network to recruit men for Blue Light while Beckwith favored the SAS model of having a selection process, which was used to identify those who were most likely to succeed in the field and who could work independently. Mountel's reasoning, according to Beckwith, was that, "Delta really belongs in Special Forces but Beckwith doesn't want it there. Blue Light is in the community. Come out and look at what we are doing" (Beckwith, 129).

And come they did. Blue Light put on numerous demonstrations for VIPs and guests. Blue Light held demonstrations for FBI director William Webster, CIA director Stanford Turner, the director of the transportation authority, handfuls of generals, and Charlie Beckwith himself. When the Army Chief of Staff, General Bernie Rogers, came down to visit Blue Light they had him stand on the back of a flat bed truck on S&K range. As he held onto the railing, two snipers positioned three hundred meters away shot two balloons filled with red koolaid on either side of the General.

"What!?" the General exclaimed, just about ready to jump out of his skin.

"Those were our snipers, shooting about four inches over your head," Blue Light's Sergeant Major announced. The shots were actually a bit higher than four inches, but the Sergeant Major got his point across.

Training also continued at S&K range for the men (and one woman) of Blue Light. They conducted simulated building and warehouse takedowns in "Hogan's Ally" a simulated urban environment featuring building facades. Cardboard silhouettes would pop up in the windows and doors that Blue Light assaulters had to engage with their 1911 pistols. Other times they would stage targets inside the

structures, some of them simulated hostages, and others simulated terrorists holding guns. The Blue Light members had to storm the building and engage in target discrimination as they fired on the enemy silhouettes.

In July of 1978, Major L.H. "Bucky" Burruss divided his Delta Force Squadron in half at the assembly area. Bucky had served in Mike Force during Vietnam and had also attended SAS selection at Beckwith's request (Burruss, 252). First Troop moved out to take down an aircraft while Second Troop was assigned to breach a building and rescue hostages being held by "terrorists" inside. There was a lot riding on this one as this was Delta Force's final validation exercise. Both targets were hit around 4 AM on Camp Mackall.

Approaching from the tail end of the decommissioned National Guard AC-121, first troop silently moved up to the two hatches they had decided to breach. "Padded ladders were softly laid on the fuselage. Two hatches had been selected. In the time it takes to suck in your breath, both doors were blown and the plane taken" (Beckwith, 160). Meanwhile, Second Troop breached the windows of their target building, clearing away the glass with steel pipes, and flooded the structure with operators. "Within seven seconds the terrorists had been taken out and the hostages freed" (Beckwith, 160).

Although there were some hiccups with the validation, recall that the Army had no idea how to evaluate counter-terrorist operations at this time, Delta passed the test receiving high praise from General Mackmull and General Meyer, the later being the deputy chief of staff of operations and plans for the Army.

"Blue Light seemed now, after our evaluation, to be redundant. Delta Force had filled the gap and we could be put on alert. If anything went down, we were ready to handle it" (Beckwith, 163). "General Meyer agreed and Blue Light was deactivated shortly thereafter" (Lenahan, 16).

Blue Light's Sergeant Major was again called into Colonel Mountel's office in August of 1978.

"I want you to send all of your people over to Delta for a briefing," the Colonel said.

"They don't want to go," Blue Light's senior NCO replied.

"I just gave you a direct order."

"We were told we had a mandatory meeting with Colonel Charlie Beckwith," Jake Jakovenko remembered. "Fifty of us attended."

Others have written that there was a massive amount of animosity between Blue Light and Delta, but drilling deeper into this subject it becomes apparent that the rift was not between the two units but rather between the enlisted members of Blue Light and Charlie Beckwith personally. In order to understand why these sentiments existed, you have to go back in time to 1965 when Beckwith was the commander of B-52 Project Delta, a Vietnam war project unrelated to Delta Force aside from the name.

*Nha Trang, Vietnam 1965:*

"What kind of god damn war are we fighting over here?" Major Charlie Beckwith asked as he drove down the streets of Nha Trang. He had just been assigned as the commander of Project Delta. His soldiers had been living in the town all weekend, hanging out at the beach, in the bars, and "getting their ashes hauled by the Vietnamese gals" (Beckwith, 54). Outraged, Beckwith grabbed one of the Project Delta sergeants and told him to gather up the men in a formation behind their compound.

"He read them the riot act...he further told them that they were there to kill the enemy, not to make money, and anyone who could not embrace his philosophy had better leave" (Carpenter, 81). Out of the thirty men assigned to Project Delta, all but seven walked out. He was nicknamed 'Chargin' Charlie' for a reason and, "the consensus is that you either loved the guy or you hated him. A lot of that had to do with his aggressive nature in attacking situations, a style that some considered reckless and self serving" (Carpenter, 81).

To recruit more men to replace the ones he just lost, Beckwith created a flyer that read, "Wanted: volunteers for 'Project Delta', will guarantee you a medal, a body bag, or both" (Beckwith, 55). Major Beckwith wasn't kidding either. Recruits came streaming in.

Beckwith would command the unit into 1966 when it was asked to perform recon missions in the Lao Valley, known to be a Viet Cong stronghold, in what was called Operation Masher. "This operation proved to be one of the darkest in Project Delta's history" (Carpenter, 96). Seven Special Forces men were killed during the operation. Major Beckwith decided to fly into the valley in a helicopter, believing that if he was on the ground it would incentivize the 1st Cavalry Division to provide support that Project Delta had not been getting.

Forced to fly low because of cloud cover, the helicopter made an easy target. "Almost at once a .51-caliber machine gun bullet comes through the helicopter. It goes in one side of my abdomen and comes out the other" (Beckwith, 80).

Major Beckwith was then evacuated and spent a long time in recovery. Because of the casualties taken during Project Delta operations led by Beckwith, many of the Special Forces soldiers held a grudge against him, one that they carried with them into Blue Light in 1977. "Some of the rumors out at Mott lake were true, some were not, but I cannot confirm anything from personal knowledge," said Jim, a

Green Beret who had served in Project Delta later during the Vietnam War. Years later he went on to become an officer in Delta Force.

When addressing the widely held beliefs that many in the Special Forces community had about Beckwith, he said, "Some guys said they shouldn't have gone on the Lao Valley mission because the weather was bad but sometimes you have to do things you don't want to do," he added. "There are some guys who served in Special Forces and Project Delta who blamed Beckwith for the tragic loss of some recon personnel during an operation into Lao Valley. His personality and aggressive nature created enemies as well."

*Fort Bragg, August 1978:*

Colonel Beckwith stood up and began giving the men of Blue Light his recruitment speech. Beckwith, "gave us the opportunity to join Delta, most of us would have joined," Jakovenko said. Everything seemed to be going okay, until he told the group of Special Forces Vietnam veterans that they would have to go to Delta's section and assessment course if they wanted to become members of the unit. This caused a stir amongst the men. Who was Beckwith to re-assess a group of men who had fought and bled on Special Forces missions in Vietnam?

One of the Blue Light Sergeants asked Beckwith as much. To para-phrase his reply, Beckwith answered: "we gotta know that you're not gonna fold when you gotta kill someone." Suffice to say, this was the wrong thing to say to a group of battle-hardened Green Berets. The attitude of many Blue Light sergeants was one of, why do you need to assess me when you know where I've been and what I've done?

Furthermore, there were Blue Light members who had served with Beckwith in Project Delta, and would not try out for Delta Force as long as Beckwith was with the unit.

Another Blue Light sergeant, who happened to be a MACV-SOG veteran, stood up and asked Beckwith, "You call this unit 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, so is this a Special Forces outfit like the one you destroyed in Vietnam?" The briefing did not go as well as he would have liked. Beckwith then took them down the hall at the stockade to show them a few things and then Blue Light departed. No one in the brief volunteered for Delta selection.

Several books have been published stating that Blue Light was never invited to try out for Delta Force and none of them ever served in Delta. Both claims are false. As you can see here, Beckwith did invite all Blue Light members to selection, even if he did not show much tact in how he went about it. Down the line, at least four Blue Light members went on to serve in Delta Force.

Blue Light was deactivated that same month, in August of 1978.

Blue Light had been disbanded, and Delta Force continued to train to respond to terrorist threats across the globe. They would soon get their chance in beginning in November of 1979 when Iranian students broke into the American embassy in Tehran and seized the Americans working there, kicking off a hostage crisis which lasted for 444 days. For Delta, the hostage situation would culminate in Operation Eagle Claw, another devastating growing pain for America's counter-terrorism efforts.

Back in 5th Special Forces Group, the members of Blue Light were a bit disappointed. Looking back on his experience in Blue Light, the unit's Sergeant Major said, "It was fun but frustrating to be told, we don't need you anymore." However, Special Forces was not bowing out of counter-terrorism completely. Out at Mott Lake, a new course run by 5th Special Forces Group was established called Special Operations Training (SOT) which was not really a counter-terrorism course but an advanced weapons course. For a long time it was run by 5th Group but was later absorbed by the Special Forces school house, the JFK Special Warfare Center. Colonel Mountel, "was trying to capture the application of precision force developed by Blue Light," Roger said, which was based on lessons learned from the Son Tay raid.

Regional commanders expressed a desire for an *in-extremis* force which would be forward deployed to respond to emergency situations. Det-A, a 10th Special Forces Group element forward deployed to Germany was given a counter-terrorism mission on top of their normal responsibility, to conduct unconventional warfare behind enemy lines in the event that the Soviets came charging through the Fulda gap into Western Europe. Later, Charlie Company, 1st battalion, of 7th Group stationed in Panama and 1st Group stationed in Okinawa also received the *in-extremis* mission. Today, each Special Forces Group has a company assigned the direct action mission called the Commanders In-extremis Force (CIF) which can conduct counter-terrorism missions.

Colonel Charlie Beckwith and Colonel Bob Mountel might have been rivals while they were in the military, but both officers left a powerful legacy to today's Special Operations soldiers, and gave America the beginnings of a very robust counter-terrorism capability.

Over the years terrorism has changed, and counter-terrorist units have had to adapt. "Today aircraft hostage situations are almost passe," Roger said. "The west has gotten much better at countering them, and like any good guerrilla, as you and I are trained to be, you will change your tactics," he said, referring to our Special Forces training. Marxism was beginning to fail in the 1980's and by the early 1990's the Marxist terrorist organizations eventually gave way to Islamists groups such as Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Jim, a former Delta Force Squadron Commander has reservations, "The western world had a thing about predicting future terrorist acts, a field where we seldom have success. The enemies have the advantage of time, many potential targets, and methods of attack. Some groups copy others so past actions may reoccur in similar guises, for example on one occasion the Delta and 22 SAS commander said we should quit training for aircraft hijackings as they did not expect anymore hijackings because such techniques have gone by the wayside. Terrorists use terror as political theater and different terrorist groups are at different levels of maturity. However, terrorist organizations did not all emerge at the same time or under the same conditions. Different groups have different audiences, different goals, and are not at the same level of organizational maturity. Emerging groups may copy others and put their own twist to similar actions. Some recent aircraft hijackings were in Asia and were less sophisticated than those conducted in the middle east in the 70s.

After a day of training we used to sit around and have open discussion of techniques, equipment, and related matters. We also had a cold beer and surmised what the bad guys might do next. We developed tactics that might meet those threats and developed some plans that have never seen the light of day, matters of which we don't discuss," the retired Delta officer said.

Delta Force continued to evolve, developing not as an off-shoot of British Special Operations, but as a distinctly American unit which had more in common with the OSS than the SAS. The British influence has always been there though, largely due to Beckwith.

Beckwith believed in big boy rules and individual self discipline, something he picked up from his time with the SAS. "He learned a lot over there," Jim said. "In the stockade we trained a lot with live fire. Operators would go about their business in and out of the main building walking around with loaded guns in their holster all the time, in condition one. If you had an accidental discharge you were out of the unit before the sun went down. You were gone."

"We went by internal nick names and call signs, not rank. However, even with the apparent lack of formal rank titles and common first names used between seniors and juniors in the operational elements, I never saw a break down in the internal discipline because in Delta it was there. We had freedom to offer opinions, and bring up solutions to problems from everyone. Some major improvements came from the most junior personnel. They were hardcore professionals. They went through selection and this whole process to weed out those without the right stuff. We recruited from almost the entire army with a few exceptions, so these volunteers brought in a lot of non-Special Forces skills. As far as I knew in Blue Light they all came from Special Forces," Jim said, believing that the good old boy network is not a good enough selection process for that type of unit.

Which was true and it wasn't. A board is held at the end of Delta selection to make a final decision as to whether the candidate should be accepted into the unit. During Delta's first few selection courses, Beckwith was known to blow off the recommendations of others, including the unit psychologist named Doc Turner, and take anyone who made it through and was a Vietnam veteran. Beckwith had better methodology but Mountel commanded the respect and loyalty of his men in a very different way.

Perhaps this was the biggest difference between the two, and why the issue remains an emotional one for many retired Green Berets to this day. Beckwith was a polarizing figure, but it took a hard charger to push the proposal and creation of a dedicated counter-terrorism unit through the bureaucracy of a highly skeptical Pentagon. They called him Chargin' Charlie for a reason. Drive and motivation were two traits that he was not lacking. "It took a person like Colonel Beckwith to get the unit off the ground," Sergeant Major Vining said. "Of course he also made enemies."

On October 22nd, 2015 Delta Force conducted a hostage rescue mission in Hawija, Iraq, working alongside host-nation counterparts, the Kurdish STG. The American and Kurdish soldiers assaulted an ISIS prison and recovered 70 Kurdish Peshmerga and civilian prisoners, "who were soon to be summarily executed." Tragically, a Delta operator named Master Sergeant Joshua Wheeler was killed during the mission. This operation saw Delta performing exactly the type of mission that Charlie Beckwith had envisioned, a surgical raid to rescue Prisoners of War.

In 2016, 5th Special Forces Group reverted back to the flash worn on their green berets that their predecessors had worn during the Vietnam war. In the 1980's, when the Army wanted to distance itself from the Vietnam conflict the flash was changed from a black field with yellow and red strips, symbolizing the flag of the Republic of Vietnam, to a solid black flash. The yellow and red stripes signify the contribution to the war effort by 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Groups, while the black field represents 5<sup>th</sup> Group, the colors arranged in a way to resembled the Vietnamese flag. Resurrecting the old flash shows that 5th Group has not forgotten its roots, that today's Special Forces soldiers stand on the shoulders of so many good men who served in Vietnam, especially the ones who gave it all.

Today, Blue Light lives on as a fond memory with those who served in the unit, but its contribution to today's counter-terrorist forces has largely been forgotten and unrecorded aside from a few sentences in obscure books. America owes a debt of gratitude to the men of Blue Light, they were our first counter-terrorism unit, and at the time was the only force trained, equipped, and on call to deal with terrorist

threats to US national interests and citizens. Blue Light showed us the way forward, a way to strike back against terrorism, and developed innovative tactics, techniques, and procedures that would be vital to US national security in the events that transpired after September 11th, 2001.

“You know what the worst case scenario is?” Roger asked rhetorically. “It isn't mission failure, as bad as that is. The worst thing would be if we were too chicken to even try.” Thanks to the foresight of Colonel Mountel and Colonel Beckwith, American citizens today know that their military stands behind them in their darkest hours, and that as a country, we won't take no guff sitting down.

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**Jack Murphy** is an eight year Army Special Operations veteran who served as a Sniper and Team Leader in 3rd Ranger Battalion and as a Senior Weapons Sergeant on a Military Free Fall team in 5th Special Forces Group. Having left the military in 2010, he graduated from Columbia with a BA in political science. Murphy is the author of Reflexive Fire, Target Deck, Direct Action, and numerous non-fiction articles about Weapons, Tactics, Special Operations, Terrorism, and Counter-Terrorism. He has appeared in documentaries, national television, and syndicated radio. He is the editor-in-chief of SOFREP.com