

An old word gets new meaning as "COIN" becomes USAF's designation for its growing counterinsurgency tactical air capability. The Air Force prepares for its expanding role in an era when the Communists are emphasizing "wars of liberation"—their term for armed subversion and guerrilla warfare. President Kennedy had a look at the new Special Air Warfare Center and the 1st Air Commando Group last month. Their mission: to teach our distant allies how to put down Communist aggression during the "decade of the guerrilla." Meanwhile USAF sharpens its skills for:

- ★ Close air support.
- ★ Fast deployment of ground forces.
- ★ Interdiction raids against guerrillas.
- ★ Low-level drop techniques for airborne commandos and cargo.

USAF Polishes Its New COIN

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Here are samples of some of the firepower capability President Kennedy saw last month at Eglin AFB, Fla., demonstration. At right, Republic F-105D unleashes salvo of air-to-ground rockets. Below, Napalm attack wipes out "enemy" communications.





THE USAF effort for President Kennedy's early-May visit to Eglin AFB, Fla., was billed as a firepower demonstration and, indeed, included the strafing, bombing, and scramble exercises that have gone into that kind of show for many years. Yet presidential interest and the headlines, such as there were, centered on a new and different kind of Air Force readiness that features jungle fighters equipped for the most part with aircraft of World War II vintage.

Mr. Kennedy had his initial look at the 1st Air Commando Group and the 1st Combat Applications Group of the new Special Air Warfare Center, set up at this base in response to his own requirement for improved counterinsurgency tactical air capability. In USAF's ever-growing jargon, counterinsurgency now is desig-

nated COIN. There is no firm COIN doctrine and no final definition of COIN requirements. The Air Commando operation is only a year old and already has been getting its feet wet in the jungles of South Vietnam, where tactics and techniques are being tested and improved. But there is a long road ahead on which the traditional USAF talents, backed by science and American industry, must be tested and proven.

Within a week after the President's visit at Eglin there was fast-growing evidence that the United States is plunging into heavier and heavier commitments in Southeast Asia, determined to ensure the credibility of our power in that part of the world. The trend of events, particularly the apparent reversal of Russia's intentions of agreeing on a neutral Laos plus the situation in South Vietnam, lend almost critical importance to USAF's efforts in the area of COIN warfare.

Formal announcement that USAF had established the Special Air Warfare Center was made in late April with prime emphasis on the fact that Air Commandos are being trained to *instruct*. Their mission is to help other people fight their own war, not to fight it for them. If this mission has an official origin it could lie in a speech made by Nikita Khrushchev in January of 1961. The Soviet Premier at that time divided wars into three categories: world wars, local wars, and wars of liberation. He said Russia rejects local wars and world wars as impracticable but endorses wars of liberation and said the Reds will continue to help people engaged in this kind of conflict.

Premier Khrushchev did not say openly that nuclear-armed airpower suffices to deter the outbreak of a major

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USAF's Chief of Staff, Gen. Curtis LeMay, was host to his Commander in Chief, President Kennedy, at Eglin AFB for a demonstration of airpower capabilities. Chief Executive showed prime interest in activity of new Air Commandos.

conflict, but that fact remains. The emphasis that is being placed on COIN is no bid on our part for relaxation of the deterrent, although such relaxation would be a welcome dividend for Nikita.

USAF has made it clear that its COIN capability is being developed and must be developed over and above its traditional strategic power, which must continue if the United States is to retain its freedom to cooperate with nations under Communist pressure in COIN warfare.

The Special Air Warfare Center, assigned to the Tactical Air Command, is headed by Brig. Gen. Gilbert L. Pritchard. His Air Commandos take their name from the Air Commando groups which fought in the China-Burma-India theater and in the Pacific in World War II, where they supported behind-the-lines fighting by Allied guerrilla forces.

The new Commandos of 1962 are being trained at Eglin in Florida and at Stead Air Force Base in Nevada. They are prepared to instruct allied forces in the field in all kinds of airborne operations. This includes low-level drop techniques for personnel and cargo, close air support for day and night operations, fast deployment of ground forces, and reconnaissance, including the use of flares and other devices to uncover guerrilla movements in darkness. Other techniques include the use of special weapons to cut off retreats, interdiction raids, raids on supply dumps, and psychological warfare.

At the Eglin demonstration Mr. Kennedy saw B-26 light bombers fitted with weapons for support of Commando operations, ancient C-47 and C-46 transports, L-28 and T-28 aircraft fitted for bush missions. On review, the USAF combat unit displayed rugged new uniforms of dark jungle green with wide-brimmed campaign hats of the type made famous by Australian and New Zealand troopers. All of the Commandos learn survival techniques at Stead. They also are taught the skills of hand-to-hand combat. Many take the US Army jump course for paratroopers.

In equipment, training, and organization the Commandos are concentrating on the unique peculiarities of COIN warfare. COIN is an internal effort to put down an undeclared war, a rebellion in the bush. It differs from other types of limited war in that a state of war is not acknowledged between two recognized governments, and at least one faction is subversive in nature. COIN, in addition, involves a type of combat that can't be won by the usual techniques of air warfare. The essentials are high mobility, quick reaction, good reconnaissance—all under difficult conditions of terrain and visibility. The strategic objective, in most cases, is not to destroy a military target in the usual sense but to win support from a civilian populace that is easily intimidated, sometimes capricious in loyalty, always subject to attack by error because guerrillas dress and behave like peasants.



COIN warfare bosses are (left) Gen. Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., Tactical Air Command Commander; Brig. Gen. Gilbert L. Pritchard, Commander of the Special Air Warfare Center located at Eglin AFB, Fla.; and Col. Benjamin H. King, designated the Commander of the 1st Air Commando Group.

In addition, the fight against guerrillas is complicated by poor communications. In most cases, there are no roads. Peasant villages have no direct way of reporting or learning of guerrilla actions, a fact that has led the US to order 500,000 radio sets for distribution in South Vietnam alone. At Eglin the President saw demonstrated one device to alleviate this situation when a C-47, equipped with external loud-speakers, circled his reviewing stand at low speed, broadcasting a message of the type that would be used to instruct villagers in a remote bush area.

There are few things about insurgent warfare that favor the use of airpower, but one of them is that jungle rebels are not equipped with ack-ack or interception capability, so that air superiority is practically assured. On the other hand, the targets are fleeting, hard to locate, and are not subject to pattern bombing attacks. The aircraft require accurate weapons and good marksmanship, and they must be capable of loitering for long periods at low altitudes.

These are some of the reasons why COIN warfare is highly specialized. USAF recognizes these unique factors. They are the absence of enemy airpower, the enemy's relatively crude armament, and the fast-moving nature of the targets. In addition, these wars usually take place in relatively undeveloped nations, and US policy is that we do not provide forces to fight, offering only equipment and instruction in its use. It

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Air Commandos travel light. Combat team here stands by parachutes and gear the men would carry for airdrop starting action against guerrillas. B-26 light bomber, standard in days of World War II, has special weapons. Below, C-123 will be loaded with jeep and variety of radio equipment.



Combat control team of 1st Air Commando Group crouches in grass on training exercise. Manning field radio is TSgt. Joseph G. Orr, Jr., of Baltimore. SSgt. Clifford H. Larimer of Bloomington, Ind., scans area for signs of enemy. Similar forces already are in training in South Vietnam.



follows that the equipment must be simple and highly reliable, as far as possible from the complexity of modern weapons for more conventional warfare. In COIN warfare reconnaissance and assault airlift become more important than the delivery of munitions. Most of the wars run for many years. In Indochina, Malaya, and Algeria they lasted from eight to ten years. In Malaya, according to British military experts, it required 6,500 hours of patrol or ambush time to see a single Red terrorist. Of those finally spotted, only one out of ten was killed or captured.

One of the functions of the 1st Combat Applications Group is to generate ideas and requirements for improved equipment for COIN warfare. Leaning heavily on reports from such areas as South Vietnam, where the first Air Commandos already are on the job, this group will utilize both USAF and Army capabilities in the research-and-development area. The communications problem is high on its list of priorities. Cheap transmitters are needed to sound the alarm when quick reaction forces are needed. Light ground-to-air radios—they should weigh not more than thirty pounds—are essential for control. So far V/STOL aircraft are not available, but COIN puts new urgency on their rapid development. Two-place aircraft are favored because eyes are better than cameras for finding the target and hitting it. Two engines will be equally popular with the Commandos, and propellers are preferable to conventional jets, which fly too high and too fast.

Air Commandos are working against the USAF trend in training as well as equipment. There are no specialists in the corps. There are no cooks, air police, drivers, or ordnance and aircraft maintenance personnel. Cross training has become a specialty, and each man is prepared to do a variety of jobs. This adds to flexibility and cuts down substantially on the logistics problem.

There are 900 men in the Commando groups but the force will grow to about 5,000 in another year as more USAF volunteers take training at the Special Warfare Center. Air Commandos have been in South Vietnam since last October but only in small numbers, giving instruction to native COIN forces in the use of T-28, B-26, and C-47 aircraft.

USAF does not believe that COIN wars can be won by airpower and airpower alone. It does believe COIN wars can be lost *without* airpower. The challenge for the Air Commandos of 1962 is like that which faced Air Commandos in the C-B-I two decades ago. The problems are in the areas of concepts, doctrine, tactics, and hardware. It is significant that USAF is again engaged in an activity with so many unknowns, in which nobody has defied the value of military experience or suggested that all the possibilities can be fed into a computing machine.—END

AIR FORCE/SPACE DIGEST's special report on guerrilla warfare and what we're doing to counter the threat continues on page 53, where AF Col. Wilfred J. Smith reviews a group of five current books on this increasingly important subject.