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 **Remembrances of VQ-1 Involvement**

**Son Tay Raid - Background:**

In 1970, the US had identified the names of over 500 American POWs who were being held by the North Vietnamese. Sources reported that these prisoners were being held in atrocious conditions and were being cruelly treated by their captors. That June, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, authorized the formation a fifteen-member planning group to address the issue. Operating under the codename Polar Circle, this group studied the possibility of conducting a night raid on a North Vietnamese POW camp and found that an attack on the camp at Son Tay was feasible and should be attempted.

**Son Tay Raid - Training:**

Two months later, Operation Ivory Coast commenced to organize, plan, and train for the mission. Overall command was given to Air Force Brigadier General LeRoy J. Manor, with Special Forces Colonel Arthur "Bull" Simons leading the raid itself. While Manor assembled a planning staff, Simons recruited 103 volunteers from the 6th and 7th Special Forces Groups. Based at Eglin Air Force Base, FL, and working under the name "Joint Contingency Task Group," Simons' men began studying models of the camp and rehearsing the attack on a full-size replica.

While Simons' men were training, the planners identified two windows, October 21-25 and November 21-25, which possessed the ideal moonlight and weather conditions for the raid. Manor and Simons also met with Admiral Fred Bardshar to set up a diversionary mission to be flown by naval aircraft. After 170 rehearsals at Eglin, Manor informed the Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, that all was ready for the October attack window. Following a meeting at the White House with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, the raid was delayed until November.

**Son Tay Raid - Planning:**

After using the extra time for further training, JCTG moved to its forward bases in Thailand. For the raid, Simons selected 56 Green Berets from his pool of 103. These men were divided into three groups each with a different mission. The first was the 14-man assault group, "Blueboy," which was to land inside the camp compound. This would be supported by the 22-man command group, "Greenleaf," which would land outside, then blow a hole in the compound wall and support Blueboy. These were supported by the 20-man "Redwine" which was to provide security against North Vietnamese reaction forces.

**Son Tay Raid - Execution:**

The raiders were to approach the camp by air aboard helicopters with fighter cover above to deal with any North Vietnamese MiGs. All told, 29 aircraft played a direct role in the mission. Due to the impending approach of Typhoon Patsy, the mission was moved up one day to November 20. Departing their base in Thailand at 11:25 PM on November 20, the raiders had an uneventful flight to the camp as the Navy's diversionary raid had achieved its purpose. At 2:18 AM, the helicopter carrying Blueboy successfully crash landed inside the compound at Son Tay.

Racing from the helicopter, Captain Richard J. Meadows led the assault team in eliminating the guards and securing the compound. Three minutes later, Col. Simons landed with Greenleaf approximately a quarter mile from their intended LZ. After attacking a nearby North Vietnamese barracks and killing between 100-200, Greenleaf re-embarked and flew to the compound. In Greenleaf's absence, Redwine, led by Lieutenant Colonel Elliott P. “Bud” Sydnor, landed outside Son Tay and executed Greenleaf's mission as per the operation's contingency plans.

After conducting a thorough search of the camp, Meadows radioed "Negative Items" to the command group signaling that no POWs were present. At 2:36, the first group departed by helicopter, followed by the second nine minutes later. The raiders arrived back in Thailand at 4:28, approximately five hours after departing, having spent a total of twenty-seven minutes on the ground.

**Remembrances of VQ-1 involvement**

You mentioned about the Son Tay prison raid.  I have some information and a paper back book that describes the raid in detail.  It was executed on November 21, 1970. I was still on the CTF-77 staff at that time and the navy was tasked to support the raid by providing a diversionary force in the Gulf of Tonkin to hopefully get the North Vietnamese to look towards the gulf rather than towards Laos where the army special forces were coming from in their helos.

There were three carriers in the gulf that participated in the diversion effort, the Ranger, Oriskany, and the Hancock. We were required to have at least 30 aircraft in the air from 2:00 AM until about 3:30 AM in the Haiphong area as the army Special Forces were coming in at 2:30 AM. There was a bombing halt at this time against North Vietnam as negotiations were taking place in Paris.  This was a tough one to send our pilots in possible harms way without weapons but it was done.  They carried flares that lit up the whole sky around Haiphong and in the harbor.  EKA-3B's provided jamming of any radar that came up.  F4's made threatening moves towards the airfields near Hanoi and in general I think we caused confusion for the North Vietnamese defenses.

How much confusion? It’s hard to say but, the army Special Forces got in and out without losing a man or helo.  Its just unfortunate that there were no POWs there. VQ-1 had an EA3B in that area and we asked them to also send an EP-3 because of its greater capability and the expected increase in North Vietnamese activity.  So, if there are any of those crews who remember those flights I would think that they collected a lot of data and probably had an exciting flight. The name of the book is "THE RAID" and the author is Benjamin Schemmer.  It mostly covers the army special forces planning and the raid but there is some coverage of the navy diversionary mission.

Robert E Morrison, Naval Security Group

Putt, after reading your general e-mail calling for history stuff, did a little research re the POW camp raid.  Actual date was 20 Nov 1970, and you’re right, the Son Tay OPORD called for an EP3 on station starting about 3 hours before the raid.  The Navy’s role in the whole thing was to create a massive diversion by launching a fake air strike.  This turned out to be the largest of the war, but there were no bombs dropped, only flares and chaff (to simulate mining Hai Phong).  In addition to the EP-3, an EA-3B was positioned overhead the carrier, and the Willy was on standby at Da Nang should the EP-3 for some reason abort.  Our mission of course was the same as always, MiG and SAM warnings, and to communicate with carrier based EKA-3B’s should jamming support be desired.

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