

forward observer July - Sep 1981

Air Force AC-130 trains at Camp Guernsey

By Cadet Harold White

The drone of an aircraft can be barely heard over the din of battle. As the fire fight continues, the forward observer calls to the aircraft above, "Dragon Fly, this is Marketplace; request immediate CAS, over."

The pilot responds, "Marketplace, this is Dragon Fly, roger, immediate CAS, over," and so begins the process of calling for an air strike.

Recently at Camp Guernsey this scenario was acted out by an Air Force AC-130 and a fire support team (FIST) from the 2nd Ranger Battalion of Ft. Lewis, Wash. In battle, CAS, or close air support, would be provided primarily by the Air Force to help destroy enemy targets through the use of aircraft being directed from troops on the ground. Air strikes are the actual missions conducted by the aircraft.

In the case of the Guernsey mission, the CAS was flown by an AC-130 from the 16th Special Operations Squadron of the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) stationed at Hurlbert Field, Florida.

The ground control was provided by a FIST section from Company B, 2nd Ranger Battalion and the Air Liaison Officer (ALO) from the battalion's headquarters.

Air Force Capt. Keith Shafer, 2nd Battalion ALO, said, "The 1st SOW contacted the 153rd Airlift Group (Air National Guard) in Cheyenne looking for a suitable range, and they recommended Camp Guernsey; now we're here."

An AC-130 Spectre gun ship is a specially modified C-130 that is heavily armored and equipped with a 105-mm howitzer and 20-, 30- and 40-mm cannons.

The aircraft also carries an extremely sensitive target acquisition system that allows the crew to deliver large amounts of firepower to a specific target.

Special equipment allows the gun ship to operate during hours of limited visibility.

The purpose of the Spectre gun ship is to provide CAS in low intensity/low threat areas, especially the rear area battle.

Staff Sgt. Dennis Banach, FIST section chief, said, "This aircraft will work very well in the rear area battle on the European continent."

While in Wyoming, the Spectre gun ship performed three missions. Two of the missions were live fires at Camp Guernsey; the third was simulated drop of equipment and personnel.

ALO Shafer said, "We're giving these guys a chance to clear their throats, so to speak."

While conducting the live fires at Guernsey, the air crew and the FIST section did some extra training on communications.

Banach said, "Their squadron placed someone on the ground near the impact area to jam their commo and force them to work through it."

The simulated airdrop was conducted in coordination with the 153rd Tactical Airlift Group and was held at Lodgepole drop zone near Cheyenne.

Shafer said: "This aircraft will go in and simulate prepping the drop zone. Then it will provide security for the actual drop."

For this training 153rd only dropped door bundles full of equipment.

According to Shafer and Banach, the training went very well.

Shafer said: "These guys have never seen this range before so it posed two problems. First they have to find it, and then we can direct them on new targets."

The exercise provided an unique opportunity for the Army, Air Force and the National Guard to work together.

Shafer said, "We were impressed with the facilities at Camp Guernsey and wouldn't mind working here again."