

Eyes Wide Open

I want to thank Mr. Armstrong, NORAD, the 113th Fighter Wing, and Mr. John Tirpak for November's article "Noble Eagle Flies On" [p. 52], and I would like to expand upon the in-depth information presented.

The Continental United States NORAD Region (CONR) is one of three regional commands, subordinate to NORAD, that defend the skies of North America and execute Operation Noble Eagle. We provide the operational command and control structure, sustainment of the aerospace control alert (ACA) forces, and continually focus our efforts to both reduce tracks of interest (TOIs) and streamline any required response. The 601st air operations center at Tyndall AFB, Fla., is CONR's key command and control node, integrated with the Eastern and Western Air Defense Sectors, which acts in conjunction with the Federal Aviation Administration to safely integrate military aviation response with civilian airspace. The goal is to defend North America from air attack but balance that no-fail mission against the efficient and effective use of resources the American people provide. We have instituted TOI reduction efforts through outreach programs to airfields that operate next to both permanent and temporary flight-restricted airspace. The National Capital Region (NCR) airspace and the airspace surrounding the venues of national special security events (NSSE) are key areas to focus our air defense efficiency and effectiveness efforts.

While the 113th FW and ground-based air defense batteries provide the eyes and ears as well as response in the NCR, the use of the USCG MH-65 helicopters have proven to be a key asset that has effectively reduced the number of 113th's F-16 scrambles. The number of F-16 scrambles has not only dropped over the years due to NORAD's effective initiatives, but we typically see a reduction in scrambles

after an election year when NSSEs decrease. Although scrambles and other tactical actions fluctuate due to TOI mitigation initiatives and quantity of NSSEs, they do not directly correlate with a threat reduction.

Defending the skies of North America is an ongoing, no-fail mission. As potential threats evolve, acquiring the right resources to outpace that threat is a commitment our nation has chosen to make, and it is our responsibility to make the most effective and efficient use of those resources. The air defense of North America, its people, and critical assets is a military, civilian, and bi-national team effort subject to constant improvement. We take this responsibility to execute with the utmost pride and professionalism. America's Airmen ... on the Watch!

Lt. Gen. William H. Etter,
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Ranch Hand

The pictorial article was good, but the effects of Agent Orange on the Reserve units wasn't addressed and simply is not well-known in military and veterans' circles [*"Ranch Hand in Vietnam,"* October, p. 56].

The UC-123Ks, once reconfigured back to standard C-123Ks, were assigned to four Air Force Reserve tactical airlift squadrons—two at Rickenbacker ARB, the 901st at the Pittsburgh Airport, and the 731st TAS initially at Hanscom AFB and later Westover ARB. The 901st and 731st were parts of the 439th Tactical Airlift Wing. With the exception of one squadron at Rickenbacker, the squadrons were used chiefly for standard airlift support, Army exercises, and airlift support of US SOUTHCOM.

Air Force Reservists who were not deployed to Southeast Asia are excluded from any VA benefits for medical problems typically related to Agent Orange (AO). VA benefits are restricted to those who were "boots

on the ground" in SEA. Many of these individuals flew/maintained their C-123s for the 10 years they had the airplanes. They were exposed to the AO that the Air Force itself confirmed as contaminating their C-123s despite Air Force and VA assurances that the dioxin did not remain in the airplanes. "Heavily contaminated on all test surfaces," read the reports. "A danger to public health" was the testimony of the military toxicologists.

Nevertheless, many of these personnel—pilots, navigators, flight mechanics, loadmasters, and aeromedical evacuation flight crews—are now exhibiting the medical AO problems covered by law for those of us who were "boots on the ground."

As a C-123B/J/K pilot/instructor pilot for 16 years/6,600 hours, I do know a little about the airplane. I took the first Mule Train rotational flight to Saigon in March 1962. During our orientation, I was ordered to take my crews to the Ranch Hand area for a briefing on the AO equipment and use, as we were to be backup for Ranch Hand if their crews were overscheduled. We were told to never get the AO on our skin or to let it spill on the airplane floor—no one knew what the effects would be on either. We were required to smell the AO so we'd recognize the smell if there was a leak.

In 1972, I was assigned as the Active Duty C-123 advisor to the Air Force Reserve's 731st TAS. The squadron had

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several ex-spray airplanes, including the famous "Patches," AKA tail #362. During my four-and-a-half years with the 731st, I had many flights that I had to terminate early due to crew illness. These flights were either after a heavy rain or during periods of high humidity—those occasions seemed to draw the AO dioxin out of the airplane metal. The crew members in the airplane became nauseous due to the smell that I recognized from my 1962 introduction to AO.

When Patches was assigned to the Air Force Museum in 1980, it eventually had to be cleaned by commercial decontamination personnel wearing HAZMAT suits. The first workers had become ill trying to clean the airplane for display. Entry even now is restricted to special events. The decontamination resulted in the reduction in hazardous levels to just 1/54th of the toxicity before decontamination—and the Reserve crews flew for years at the higher, extremely hazardous level.

The Air Force, after surveys of the airplanes, decided to get rid of the remaining 19 airplanes at Davis-Monthan as toxic waste. Acting in 2010, the airplanes were melted down into scrap aluminum ingots due to the lingering dioxin. But the VA still refuses to acknowledge that individuals who flew/maintained the airplanes—eight to 10 times longer than those who were actually in SEA—are worthy of AO benefits.

Ranch Hand is not over!

Lt. Col. Roger D. Haneline,
USAF (Ret.)
Savannah, Ga.

Thank you for your article on this unique combat operation. While informative, I must tell you there are several misleading statements. Additionally, I must consider your article incomplete because you omitted mention of the most significant element of the ongoing controversy surrounding the Ranch Hand mission.

That omission concerns the Air Force Health Study (AFHS). This distinguished study was conducted from 1982 until 2003 at two of the best civilian research clinics in the country. The study involved 1,150 volunteers from the total 1,269 Ranch Hand veterans who flew these missions from 1962 until 1971. This group, including pilots, navigators, flight mechanics, ground servicing, and aircraft maintainers, all had direct daily exposure to all of the tactical herbicides without benefit of any protective gear other than a flak vest and purple scarf. One pilot flew this mission daily for 42 months. Over 50 percent had one to three Purple Hearts in my year as commander.

This 20-year, double-blind cohort study, with 15,000 Vietnam veterans serving as comparisons with no known exposure to Agent Orange, is considered by the Institute of Medicine as the premier epidemiological study of the potential effects of Agent Orange and its associated dioxin contaminant. In the final AFHS report, the analysis of over 300 health-related end points in 12 clinical areas was assessed and reported. An appraisal of the study, including scientific peer review, indicated that the results of the AFHS did not provide evidence of disease in the group with the most documented exposure, the Ranch Hand veterans caused by their elevated exposure to Agent Orange and the associated dioxin.

This was a great iconic study, but the scientific/medical findings are viewed to be contrary to the agenda of some veteran groups. That agenda of ignoring scientific results led Congress to enact the Agent Orange Act of 1991 and the "presumed exposure" dilemma. The Department of Veterans Affairs has acknowledged that the Agent Orange Act of 1991 remains a compromise between the desire for scientific certainty and the need to address the legitimate health concerns of veterans. However, the standard of "cause and effect" established by the scientific community has been replaced by a far less stringent standard, namely that of an association and, hence, a presumption. Without a presumptive service connection, Vietnam veterans would find it difficult if not impossible to receive any such compensation. This political decision meant to help the Vietnam veterans is now "out of control" when we see that more than 1.1 million VA claims for Agent Orange exposure have been filed!

Many groups are now lobbying to be included in this largesse including: "Blue Water" Navy veterans, veterans' spouses, children, grandchildren, and Vietnamese civilians. Moreover, I have never heard that the "US government admitted the long-term toxic effect of the chemical" as stated in your article without explanation.

"Patches" was one of the original UC-123Bs sent to Ranch Hand in 1962. It flew daily defoliation and crop destruction until about October 1968 when it was converted to a UC-123K. It was then decamouflaged and dedicated to the insecticide mission over cities and troop areas—ours and theirs—to control malaria. These missions using only the insecticide Malathion caused many to falsely claim exposure to Agent Orange. The red and yellow stripes and white star seen on Patches' side were the ROE required VNAF markings for crop destruction targets.

Thanks for the opportunity to tell "the rest of the story."

Col. Ralph C. Dresser,
USAF (Ret.)
San Antonio

The Value of Humint

"Focusing ISR," by Maggie Ybarra, October [p. 46], was an excellent summary of where Air Force ISR is at currently and where it needs to be 10 years from now. She notes that "AF must decide, however, whether it wants the system (Distributed Common Ground System/DCGS) to be all-source—meaning inclusive of space, cyber, and airborne technology—and if so, how to best achieve that goal in an organized and streamlined way." Actually, "all-source" also implies the integration and use of human intelligence (Humint), whether it is collected by the Air Force, other US forces, other government agencies or coalition forces. A viable tactical wartime Humint capability can provide eyes on the ground to identify or verify targets, such as weapons, forces, or warfighting supplies under cover, in movement, or in encampments. Humint sources would include friendly forces in contact, displaced civilians, legal travelers, private business people, contracted collectors, and captured enemy forces. The Air Force needs to develop Humint collectors, collection managers, and all-source analysts who can rapidly integrate and use Humint within the DCGS.

Lt. Col. Russel A. Noguchi,
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No Offense Taken. I Guess.

I am responding to the letter in the November 2013 issue, "No Offense Intended, Ladies" by Lieutenant Colonel Lupa [*Letters*, p. 10]. I wasn't exactly offended—disgusted is more apt.

There are legitimate concerns about opening certain combat career fields to women, but the debate needs to be limited to real problems, namely physical capability and managing social complications. It's unfortunate that this is an emotional issue for so many people, but the promotion of personal views as facts is counterproductive. Lieutenant Colonel Lupa states, "Women are by nature nonviolent, caring, loving, life-giving, and nurturing" and bases this statement on his "undergraduate studies at a Catholic university, where [he] minored in the philosophy of human nature, ethics, morality, human sexuality, and the psychology between the sexes." For readers who might be inclined to think that this background qualifies as expertise, let me point out that philosophy is not a science and that a minor in any field doesn't mean much.

I am a physicist, not a psychologist, but I try to stay reasonably informed about research in other fields. I'm pretty sure one would have a hard time finding much peer-reviewed scientific research to support Lieutenant Colonel Lupa's assertion. Regarding human personality, I think it's safe to say that there's far more variation within the sexes than there is between the sexes, and no one has yet answered the nature vs. nurture question. Also, in science it only takes one counterexample to disprove a theory: I will put myself forward as empirical evidence that not all women are, by nature, nonviolent, caring, etc., and will add that I'm hardly unique.

Also, as a product of the Catholic educational system from preschool through my undergraduate degree, I am very concerned that readers might think all Catholic schools promote outdated views as currently relevant. My education was broad and solid, both the Victorian era and Freud were kept in perspective, and my teachers did nothing but encourage and support my desire to become a scientist and an Air Force pilot. Please do not be afraid to send your kids to a Catholic school.

Finally, for those who are dead set against women in combat roles, let me point out that the pool of eligible male candidates is declining precipitously. If the statistics aren't bad enough for you, try to find a kid to help you with farm work. It's an uncommon teenage boy who is physically fit, can follow directions, can think for himself if necessary, is willing to work in uncomfortable conditions, and is in the least bit attentive to detail. Can you imagine a 19-year-old-male unashamed that a woman in her mid-30s can carry more and work harder, better, and longer? I've seen it, and the situation didn't make me feel proud of myself: It made me fear for the future of our nation. Automatically disqualifying women from some or all of the positions in question might be a luxury we can no longer afford. This isn't just an issue of fairness to women who have both the desire and the capability to perform in these positions, it's a manpower issue. Which—if any—jobs and under what conditions? I don't have enough information to enter the debate, but I do know that the decision can't be made based on how some men wish all women to be.

Lt. Col. Catherine A. Newell,
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You Think the C-17 Is a Bad Boy?

I found this article very interesting, as I have seen the "end of the line" for a few of the Air Force's inventory [*"The C-17 Reaches the End of the*

Line," November, p. 58]. However, here is where I take some exception to the article citing the merits of the C-17.

"The C-17 was being asked to do things a giant airlifter had never done before, such as land on unimproved airstrips, land on short fields, taxi in a tight space and even back up on a runway, all while delivering superheavy, outsize cargo at strategic distances."

Before the first C-141A rolled off the assembly line at Lockheed over 50 years ago, the aircraft was designed to operate from unimproved runways. The Engineers Flight Manual C141A-1-1 has specific charts for calculating the acceptable landing and takeoff distances and tire pressures for "unimproved taxiways and runways." The general rule for short field landing and takeoff was 3,500 feet, based, as any engineer will tell you on your gross weight and the atmospheric conditions (pressure altitude and temperature). Taxing the aircraft in tight places (Guam, Clark, Kadena, with all the B-52s and their KC-135 tankers nose to tail) was always tricky, but with the second engineer as scanner, with a little help from the loadmaster, it always got through. These crowded conditions almost always included a back up to hang the tail out over the grass as much as possible but still clear the loading ramp. Many times at Guam we backed our C-141A up as close as we could to the tail of a waiting B-52 and offloaded our cargo of iron bombs right into the armorer's inspection and arming lines for loading onto the B-52. Three-engine takeoffs due to small-arms fire cutting holes in the cowlings and the pneumatic engine start valve were common at Da Nang and other low approach bases.

There is probably not a record of this feat but I was present at an unfortunate situation at Clark AB where a C-141 had inadvertently taxied off the taxiway in a torrential downpour and got its nose wheel stuck in the Philippine mud. The ramp tractor could not get enough traction in front of the aircraft with the tow bar hooked up to the nose wheel to move the plane back onto the taxiway. The tail of the aircraft was sticking out over the taxiway and the tower was screaming for it to be moved before another aircraft ran into it. The solution was to taxi another C-141 up to the rear of the one stuck in the mud, connect cables to both aircraft main gears, and back up the aircraft, pulling the stuck airplane out of the mud and back on the runway.

Needless to say there were beers all around at the stag bar that day.

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