U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet
353 SPECIAL OPERATIONS GROUP (AFSOC)


**Operations.** When activated, the 3rd Air Commando Group trained to establish and maintain an airstrip behind enemy lines, to provide for its own supply and air defense, to attack targets in the enemy's rear areas, and to furnish air support for ground operations. The group's headquarters, liaison, and airfield squadrons, as well as its medical dispensary and the ground echelons of the 3rd Fighter Squadron and 318th Troop Carrier Squadron sailed from the west coast in early Nov 1944, arriving on Leyte on 1 Dec 1944. The ground echelon of the 4th Fighter Squadron sailed a week later and arrived on Leyte in early Jan 1945. The flying personnel of the 3rd and 4th Fighter Squadrons, as well as some enlisted members of their engineering sections, were air-transported to Nadzab, New Guinea, where they received the group's new P-51 aircraft. The separated squadrons flew patrol missions in New Guinea until joining the group on Leyte in Jan 1945. Began combat in the Philippines by flying bombing and strafing missions against airfields on Mindanao. Later, on Luzon, the fighters continued bombing and strafing missions. In addition, the group provided air support to ground forces, flew fighter sweeps to Formosa, and escorted heavy bombers on bombing missions to Formosa and the China coast. The air echelon of the 318th Troop Carrier Squadron flew their C-47s across the Pacific, arriving at Nadzab,
New Guinea, in late Oct 1944. The squadron carried cargo and passengers and air-evacuated wounded soldiers to Australia until it moved to Leyte in mid-Jan 1945. While on Luzon, this squadron also para-dropped supplies to ground forces. The liaison squadrons received their L-5s in late Jan 1945, and thereafter evacuated wounded from advanced points, flew courier, search and rescue, and reconnaissance missions, spotted for signal aircraft warning battalions, and dropped supplies to allied and guerrilla forces. In Apr 1945, the Group, less the liaison squadrons, moved from Mandaldan, on the Lingayen Gulf, to Laoag, in northwest Luzon, in recently captured territory 150 miles behind enemy lines. The group operated the base and the 318th Troop Carrier Squadron provided most of the resupply. The group set up air-ground support stations that directed aircraft to targets and tactical radio ground stations situated with U.S. and guerrilla ground forces. In June 1945 Laoag became the staging field for flights to Okinawa. In Aug 1945, the group moved to Ie Shima, in the Ryukyus, from where the fighter squadrons flew surveillance missions over Japan. The 318th TCS participated in the evacuation of allied prisoners of war from Japan. By the end of Oct 1945, the group moved to Chitose AB, Japan. By February 1946 the squadrons were reduced to paper strength and the group inactivated the next month. Beginning in Feb 1967, the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing trained to support a special electronic reconnaissance program utilizing EC-121G and EC-121R aircraft. Moved to Thailand in increments beginning mid-Sep 1967 and began day and night unarmed reconnaissance missions over Southeast Asia on 25 Nov 1967. A wing detachment at Nakhon Phanom Airport, Thailand, performed combat evaluation of YQU-22A aircraft and associated equipment, Dec 1968-Aug 1969. From Jul to early Sep 1970 the wing provided combat evaluation of the QU-22B aircraft and on 1 Oct 1970 the QU-22Bs were placed in full operation, reducing the need for EC-121s. Strength of the wing was reduced in both personnel and equipment, and in mid-Dec 1970 the wing inactivated, leaving its two reconnaissance squadrons active under other USAF wings. The 353rd Special Operations Wing activated in Apr 1989 in the Philippines to train for unconventional warfare and special operations activities in the Pacific area of operations. Maintained capabilities by participating in joint/combined and other theater exercises and training opportunities. Also maintained helicopter air refueling operations and supported humanitarian and disaster relief operations, as well as performed some search and rescue and aeromedical evacuation missions. Following the destruction of Clark AB during the volcanic eruptions of Mount Pinatubo in Jun 1991 the group temporarily operated from bases on Okinawa, then officially relocated there in Feb 1992, with one squadron moving forward to South Korea. Redesignated to group level in Dec 1992, but continued operations as before. In Feb 1996 developed Taegu AB in South Korea as a special operations training base. Gained a weather flight in Apr 1996 and began providing weather support for U.S. Army Special Forces at Torii Station, Japan. From Dec 1996 periodically deployed aircraft and personnel to Italy to support NATO operations in the Balkans and to Southwest Asia to support allied operations against Iraq. After a killer tsunami devastated Thailand on 26 Dec 2004, the group quickly deployed three MC-130s and one C-130 with personnel to relieve the disaster victims, furnishing early response as part of Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. Augmented special operations forces participating in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**Service Streamers.** None.

**Campaign Streamers.** *World War II*: Leyte; Luzon; Western Pacific; Air Offensive, Japan;
China Defensive; China Offensive. *Vietnam*: Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II; Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III; Vietnam Air/Ground; Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV; TET 69/Counteroffensive; Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969; Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970; Sanctuary Counteroffensive; Southwest Monsoon; Commando Hunt V.

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers.** None.


**Lineage, Assignments, Components, Stations, and Honors through 13 Jan 2009.**

**Commanders, Aircraft, and Operations through 13 Jan 2009.**

**Supersedes** statement prepared on 6 Feb 2006.

**Emblem.** Approved on 19 Jun 1967; modified on 13 Mar 1995.

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