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## Chief of Staff presents citation to Commandos 41 years after their last mission

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1st Special Operation Wing Public Affairs

10/16/2009 - **10/09/09 HURLBURT FIELD, Fla.**, -- As he walked around and shook the hands of attendees at the Stray Goose International Air Commando reunion at Hurlburt Field Oct. 9, former Capt. Richard Sell caught up with fellow veterans, including some he had not seen since serving in Vietnam.

A C-130 pilot with Det. 1, 314th Troop Carrier Wing from 1967-1968, Mr. Sell has made the trip from Phoenix for many of the group reunions, but knew this one would be special for two reasons.

First, members of his detachment would receive the Presidential Unit Citation for their mission in Vietnam more than 40 years ago. Second, it would be presented by Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz.

Det. 1 members in attendance were recognized for their support of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group during the Vietnam War, but only after Mr. Sell undertook a six-year campaign to include them in the citation's original orders.

In April 2001, the Presidential Unit Citation was awarded to MACVSOG and its supporting units for combat actions during the Vietnam War from January 1964 to April 1972. However, Det. 1 was not included as a supporting unit in the award's original orders.

"I looked at that and said, 'That's not right.' I researched MACVSOG, and I knew we had worked for them and found out that several Air Force units were recognized for this citation, but ours was not named," Mr. Sell said.

Det. 1 members flew the four original MC-130E Combat Talons during the Vietnam War from October 1966 to March 1968 in support of MACVSOG missions including logistics flights, air rescues and leaflet drops over enemy territory.

"I wrote to the Army Awards Board, and they said they would research it. It took six years of mostly cutting through red tape," he said.

In June 2009, the military awards branch amended the 2001 orders to include the members of Det. 1. While the clarification does not constitute the addition of a unit to the citation, it now entitles Mr. Sell and fellow members to wear or display the citation's ribbon. One of those Airmen is retired Col. Douglas Forsythe, who was a captain when he served with Det. 1.

"It was only because of his initiative and his 'stick-to-it-ness' and the ability to overcome an administrative oversight that we were able to get this done today, and it's really a moment we cherish," Colonel Forsythe said.

General Schwartz, who served three tours at Hurlburt Field, took the time to greet veterans and pose for pictures with members he had known for years.

"It's great to be here for a reunion of one of the great squadrons in special operations business over the years. That spirit and commitment to mission still lives, and it's something to be proud of," the general said.

While addressing the audience and specifically the 13 attending members from Det. 1, General Schwartz highlighted Mr. Sell's determination.

"Dick Sell committed himself to get this done. The Presidential Unit Citation is the rough equivalent of an Air Force Cross for an individual. This is serious business. Det. 1 was left off, and he fixed that," General Schwartz said.

The audience stood at attention while the citation was read aloud. As members posed with General Schwartz for a group photo, the unmistakable roar of a C-130 was overheard as it took off from the runway at Hurlburt Field.

Colonel Forsythe described the chief of staff presenting the award as "the icing on the cake."

"It has to be a unique situation to have such a low ranking unit as a detachment with such few people to get awarded the Presidential Unit Citation initiated by the U.S. Army, and to have the chief of staff of the Air Force here to present it. It is an amazing thing and something we all appreciate," he said.

When the ceremony was over, Mr. Sell said he was pleased by the turnout and the chance to meet with old friends. But his thoughts were with those who couldn't be there.

"I'd like to dedicate this (award) to the ones that couldn't make it, because they're gone or they couldn't get here," he said.

The Presidential Unit Citation is awarded to units of the Armed Forces for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy. The unit must display such gallantry and determination accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions so as to set it apart from and above other units participating in the same campaign.

### Photos



Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz, right, presents retired Col. Douglas Forsythe, with the Presidential Unit Citation for Det. 1, 314th Troop Carrier Wing at the Stray Goose International Air Commando reunion at the Soundside on Hurlburt Field, Oct. 9, 2009. (U. S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Julianne M. Showalter/Released)

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Dick Congratulations on a job well done. You always looked out for your buddies.

Satn Morris, Cortez CO

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