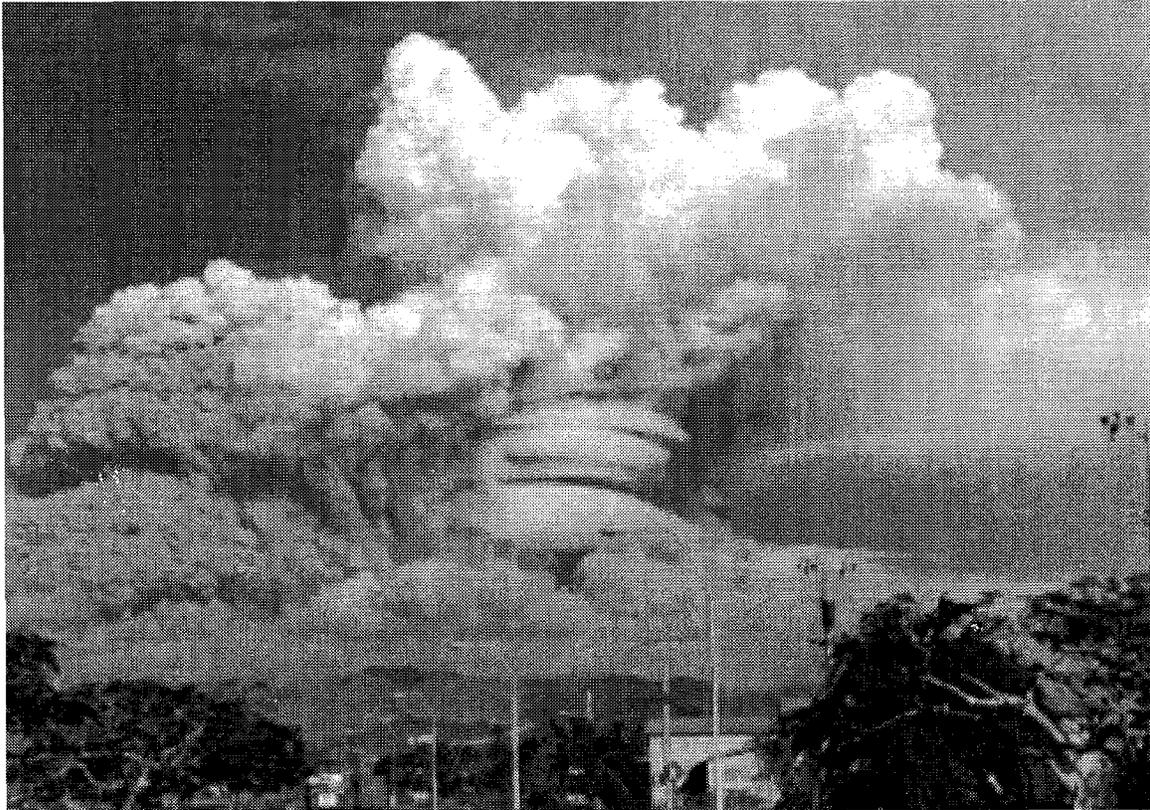


ASH WARRIORS:

The Relocation of the 353d Special Operations Wing
June-December 1991



by
Major Forrest L. Marion, USAFR
HQ Air Force Special Operations
Command History Office

Preface

(U) This study is a worthy edition of an episode that changed the lives of hundreds of individuals who experienced the wrath of mother nature's fury in the Philippines in the summer of 1991. It was a horrendous period for these people and we felt it necessary to document this story for historical purposes.

(U) Major Forrest L. Marion, United States Air Force Reserves, spent relentless hours researching, interviewing, and documenting this occurrence. We feel it is important to the unit, currently assigned personnel as part of their heritage, and the personnel who were a part of this change in history in the early 90's.

(U) I want to thank Major Marion for his dedication and contribution to the United States Air Force Historical Program. If anyone has anything they would like to contribute to this publication for inclusion in the next print phase, please write to HQ AFSOC/HO, 229 Cody Ave, Hurlburt Field, Florida 32544.



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Command Historian

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**Ash Warriors: The Relocation of the 353d Special Operations
Wing, June–December 1991**

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On 16 July 1990 the worst earthquake in the Philippines in fourteen years hit the island of Luzon near Baguio City. The quake registered 7.7 on the Richter scale and was disastrous to most areas within 80 miles of the epicenter. The number of fatalities was roughly two thousand, with several times that number of injured. Within hours, the 31st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) of the 353d Special Operations Wing (SOW) was the first flying unit to respond, launching their H-3 helicopters in support of the victims of the quake and carrying critically needed personnel and supplies to Camp John Hay near Baguio. In the days that followed, 353 SOW personnel searched for survivors; evacuated the injured and provided them medical care; resupplied remote areas with food, water, and medical supplies; and transported relief supplies to thousands of Filipinos. The H-3s of the 31 SOS were scheduled to be replaced soon with MH-53s. In that light, 353 SOW Commander, Colonel (Col) James P. Nance, remarked that "there couldn't be a better way for the H-3s of the 31 SOS to exit. They got the opportunity to shine one more time and they did it brilliantly." Ironically, just 11 months

later, many of the 353 SOW personnel who had *provided* relief in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake would find themselves the *recipients* of similar assistance following the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in June 1991, an event which may have been precipitated in part by the 1990 quake.¹

Volcanologists had been watching Pinatubo closely for several months prior to the eruptions in June 1991, which drove thousands of American military personnel and their families from their homes and from the Philippines. The volcano, located approximately 10 miles west of Clark Air Base (AB), had been dormant for hundreds of years, but scientists considered it dangerous, and for good reason: most of the world's worst eruptions in the last two centuries have been produced by long-dormant volcanoes. In the spring of 1991, Pinatubo gave the first signs of impending danger, following a blast in early April, which spewed ash several miles away. Philippine volcanologists placed seismic sensors on the mountain and detected tremors indicating that molten lava was rising toward the surface. In late April, a United States Geological Survey (USGS) team arrived to render assistance, and upon further testing, concluded that a major eruption was most likely to occur within a year. Seismic activity continued to increase throughout May, and by early June the scientists expected a major eruption at any time. In Pinatubo's case, the danger was not from flowing lava, but from "pyroclastic

flow, a ground-hugging cloud of superheated gas and rock that forces a cushion of air down the mountainside at up to 100 miles per hour (m.p.h.), incinerating anything in its path."²

At that point, 13th Air Force Commander, Major General (Maj Gen) William A. Studer, initiated evacuation plans, including the distribution of evacuation pamphlets to United States (U.S.) households, detailing "what to do, what to bring, and what to leave behind." On 9 June 1991, in conjunction with General Studer, 3d Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) Commander, Col Jeffrey Grimes, and Col Leon E. Hess, the 353 SOW Commander—who probably possessed more years of Pacific experience than any other special operator



Figure 1: Evacuation Day: Clark Air Base flightline assembly area, 9 June 1991

at that time—initiated the relocation of wing aircraft still at Clark. Crews from the 1 SOS and 31 SOS flew their aircraft—MC-130 Combat Talons and MH-53 Pave Lows, respectively—to Naval Air Station (NAS) Subi Point, but two aircraft stayed behind. One Pave Low had already begun an inspection, and a C-130H from Elmendorf Air Force Base (AFB), Alaska, was undergoing refurbishment in the 353 SOW's facilities. Working around the clock, maintenance crews had both aircraft flyable the next day.³

By the night of 9-10 June 1991, the USGS volcanologists were convinced the major blast would take place within 24 hours. At that point, General Studer ordered the evacuation of Clark, during which approximately 15,000 Americans drove their privately-owned vehicles (POV)—loaded with family members, pets, and personal belongings—50 miles from Clark to Subic Bay Naval Base, collocated with Subi. Among the thousands making the bumper-to-bumper journey in sweltering heat and humidity through the mountains were personnel and families of the 353 SOW. The wing's Detachment (Det) 2, 1723d Special Tactics Squadron (STS)—who would remain very busy in the days ahead—provided medical and communications coverage for 353 SOW personnel and their families during the evacuation, treating at least 14 patients for heat-related disorders. Due to the threat to Americans posed by local criminals and terrorists, helicopters flew overhead for protection. By late day on 10 June 1991, all evacuees were at Subic, many of them

staying with Navy families who graciously opened their homes to their Air Force neighbors—despite not having been notified that their guests were en route. As Colonel Hess recalled, at that time no one expected a *permanent* evacuation. The general expectation was that people would be away from their homes for only a few days, and since the prevailing winds in the area were from east to west, whatever ash was generated by a volcanic eruption would be blown over the South China Sea. With that in mind, some individuals—who would never see their Clark homes again—left the base with only minimal personal belongings.⁴



Figure 2: Leaving home behind: Angeles City, 14 June 1991

Approximately 1,500 “mission-essential” personnel were to remain at Clark, about one-half of who were security personnel. Among those remaining was a 14-member 353 SOW “stay-behind” team headed by Col Robert M. Stankovich, the

353 SOW Vice Commander. The primary purpose for the team was to protect wing assets, but its members also performed "humanitarian" functions on behalf of wing personnel-such as rescuing the dogs of one 353 SOW individual who had been forced to leave his animals inside his quarters when he evacuated.

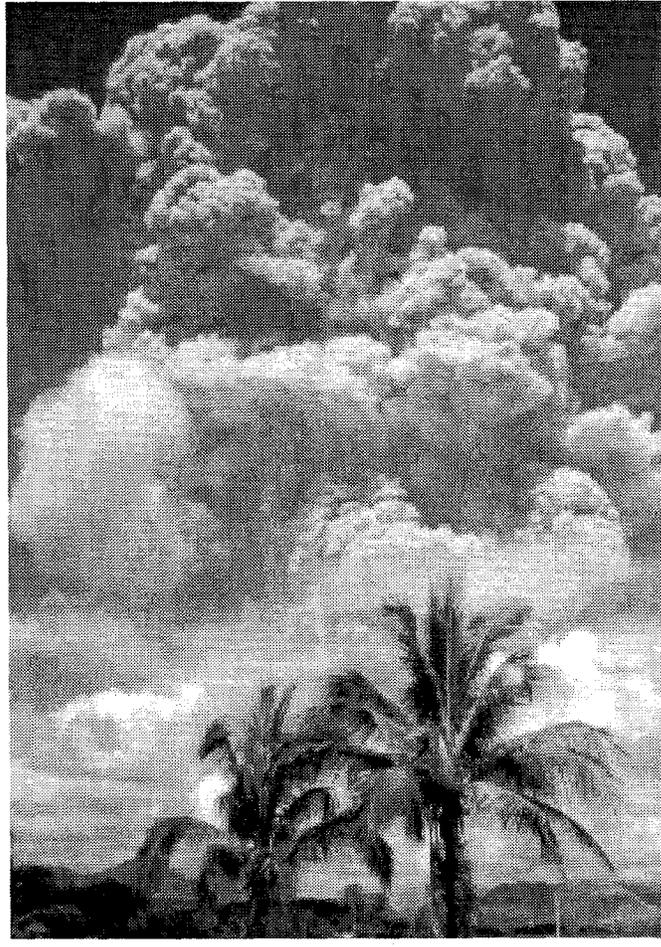


Figure 3: The first big one:
View from Clark ramp, early AM,
12 June 1991

On 12 June 1991, the first of several major eruptions began in mid-morning, the volcano spewing smoke and ash

some 40,000 to 60,000 feet into the air. The 353 SOW stay-behind team evacuated to the east side of Clark for approximately 2 hours before receiving the "all-clear" signal. Meanwhile, the wing's fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft dispersed from Subi to Vilamore AB at Manila International Airport, but returned to Subi upon receiving the all clear. That evening, the Clark team followed the same evacuation procedures when a second major eruption took place while the wing's aircraft flew holding patterns in the Subic Bay vicinity to avoid volcanic ash. Also the same day, the U.S. (Embassy) Country Team's decision to evacuate all Air Force dependents to the U.S. proved significant, for it "allowed the Navy to steam fleet assets to Subic Bay a full 24 hours before the eruption caused the loss of all support services there."⁵

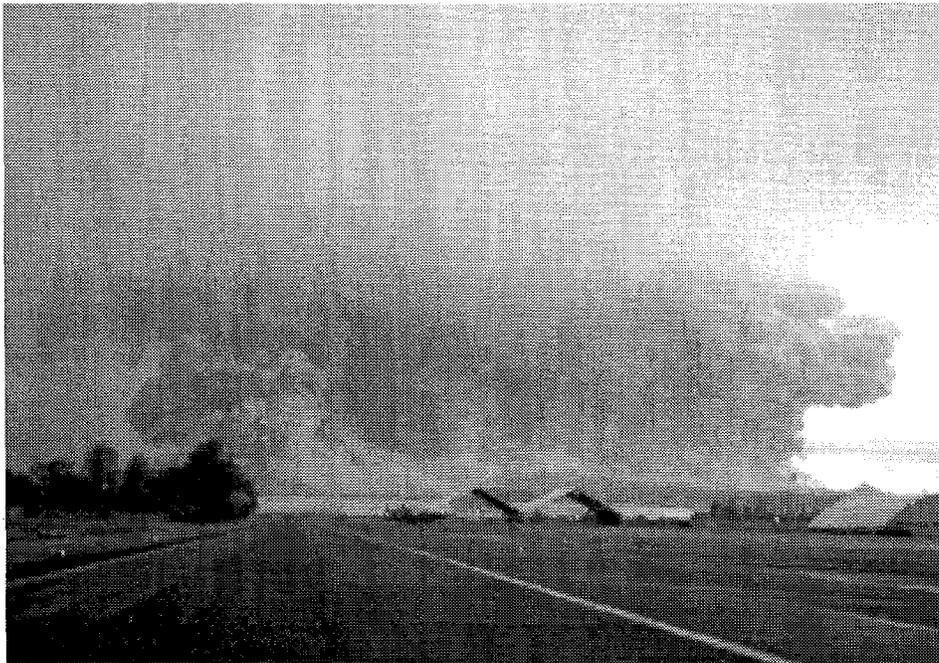


Figure 4: First eruption, 12 June 1991, Clark AB

Early on 13 June 1991, Pinatubo erupted a third time in approximately the last 24 hours. Hearing the air-raid siren used to signify eruptions, personnel at Clark executed the now routine evacuation procedures to the east side. The wing's aircraft remained on the ground due to the lack of crew-rested aircrews. The MH-53s were hangared while the C-130s received "a slight amount of ashing."

On Friday morning, 14 June 1991, Clark personnel evacuated to the east side of the base due to high levels of seismic activity, although the volcano did not erupt until later in the day. In the afternoon, two eruptions occurred. Increasing the already dangerous situation, a typhoon was expected to pass abeam southern Luzon on Saturday afternoon. In the evening, two more eruptions took place. By late in the day, all 353 SOW fixed-wing aircraft had been evacuated to Kadena AB, Okinawa, while the helicopters remained hangared at Subi for protection from Typhoon Yunya.

"Black Saturday," 15 June 1991, began with two eruptions early in the morning and a third at approximately 0600. By that time, the volcano had been transformed "from one single shaft into a 2-kilometer fissure line with the entire area erupting." Ash flew to over 80,000 feet in elevation. Clark personnel evacuated to the Philippine Agricultural College near the base of Mt Arayat, roughly 10 miles to the northeast. By 1600, the combination of heavy ash and rainfall from the tropical storm "caused a total obscuration of sunlight." The 14-member team of Colonel

Stankovich established communications with Joint Task Force Fiery Vigil and procured quarters for the night. At Subic, ash and rain caused a total obscuration of sunlight by noon. Even more serious was the accumulation of heavy, wet, ash, from which a number of buildings began to collapse. Among the collapsing buildings were two off-base hotels in which 353 SOW personnel and dependents had taken refuge. At that point, American personnel and family members evacuated from off-base locations to sturdier, on-base buildings. Over two hundred 353 SOW personnel and dependents relocated with only two minor injuries sustained. Throughout the day and night of the unforgettable 15 June 1991, earthquake tremors at 5-to-15 minute intervals accompanied the volcanic ashfall and

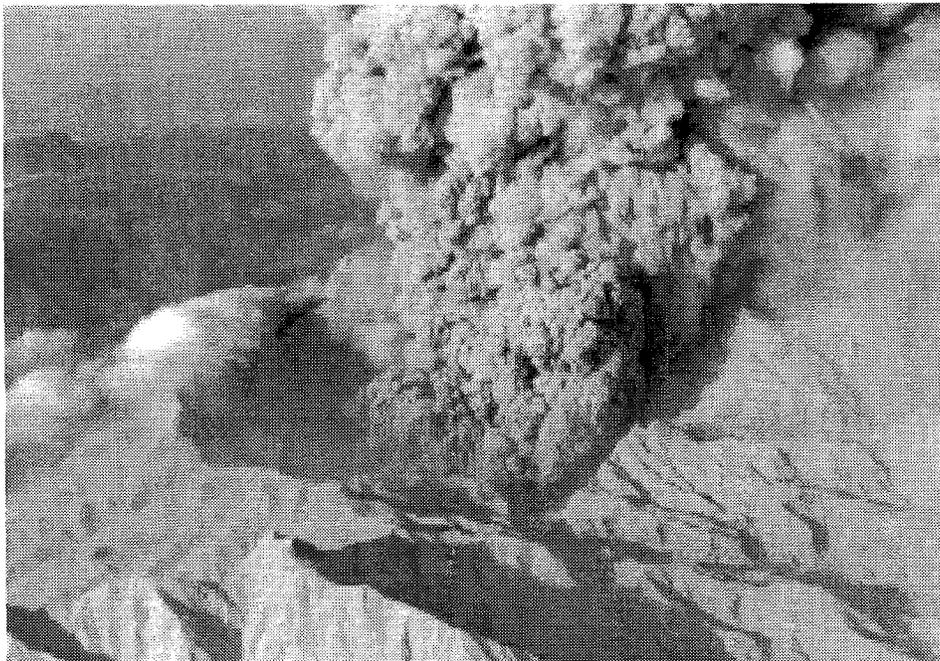


Figure 5: Center of destruction taken from UH-1N helicopter morning of 15 June 1991

heavy rain, the combination of which felt something like "cat-litter." Although difficult to comprehend, the USGS estimated the amount of material Pinatubo sent heavenward to have been over twenty times that of the 1980 Mt St Helen's eruption.

The day after the "big one," Colonel Stankovich's team remained at the agricultural college. Meanwhile, about two dozen Air Force security police returned to Clark in an effort to deter looting. At Subic, clean-up work began, with top priority being the removal of up to 10 inches of ash from the roofs of critical buildings to minimize structural damage or the possibility of collapse.

On 17 June 1991, about one-half of the stay-behind team returned to Clark to assess the damage and to reestablish command and control. Pinatubo erupted repeatedly throughout the day, but the volcanologists determined the "big one" to have been on 15 June 1991 and that there was little danger of continued, life-threatening, pyroclastic flow. For that reason, personnel remained at Clark during the day's eruptions. At Subic, the evacuation of United States Air Force (USAF) dependents began with over 3,000 family members boarding the aircraft carriers *USS Abraham Lincoln* and *USS Midway* and their support ships.

Between 18 and 20 June 1991, the remainder of the 353 SOW stay-behind team returned to Clark to continue damage assessment and initiate clean-up work. Additionally, all

remaining USAF dependents evacuated from Subic. On 20 June 1991 shifting winds caused ash to fall on most of Clark, hampering the clean-up, which became a daily occurrence for the next 2-to-3 weeks.



Figure 6: Evacuation from Grande Island Subic Bay Naval Station, 19 June 1991

Colonel Hess headed a five-member team, which returned to Clark on 21 June 1991 to assess damage to 353 SOW facilities. Clean-up operations focused on the base operations area and on key wing facilities. At Subic, the helicopters remained hangared while Navy Seabees began digging out ash from the runway at Subi to clear a 5,000-foot assault strip for rotary-wing and C-130 operations.

Between 22 and 24 June 1991, electricity and water were restored for some limited areas of Clark, making conditions somewhat better. At Subic, the assault strip

was ready for aircraft operations. By that time, a temporary beddown for the wing at Kadena had been established--thanks to the timely coordination of (then) Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Brian A. Maher, 17 SOS Commander, and Colonel Hess with the 313th Air Division Commander, Brigadier General (Brig Gen) Joseph E. Hurd. Meanwhile, work began on two new issues, the funding of "Safe Haven" dependent travel to the States and the temporary duty (TDY) costs for personnel on Okinawa. The wing estimated it would cost approximately \$750,000 per month in per diem to operate out of Kadena, above normal TDY expenses, just one of the issues to which the Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command (HQ AFSOC) Director of Personnel, Col Carl L. McPherson, devoted himself to resolving in the months ahead.



Figure 7: Grey storm, Clark AB housing area late June 1991

The date 25 June 1991 marked a watershed for the 353 SOW. Ten days after "Black Saturday" the immediate crisis was over. Wing aircraft and personnel were safe. Family members, though separated from their loved ones and with only a few personal belongings, were out of harm's way and were arriving stateside to begin the slow and painful process of putting their lives back together again. Though far from ideal, a temporary beddown for the 353 SOW had been established at Kadena. Clark AB had some basic utilities again, and buildings were being cleared of the sticky mud-like substance consisting of ash and water. Most wing facilities at Clark, though damaged to varying degrees, were reparable.



Figure 8: Mud flow—the house is next. Clark AB officers' housing area, June 1991

In the next few days, Colonel Hess planned to relocate the 31 SOS's MH-53s to Okinawa via the *USS Midway*, at which point all of the wing's aircraft and the vast majority of its personnel would be located on the island. The commander would maintain the wing flag at Clark along with a small staff until a decision was made on whether to relocate or to return to Clark. Although the Clark option was ruled out in July 1991 by the decision of the Government of the Philippines (GOP) to refuse the renewal of the U.S. lease for the base, no one at the time realized that the decision on a permanent beddown location was still over 6 months away--long after the 353 SOW and American flags had been lowered at Clark for the last time.

By the end of June 1991, three of the wing's four MH-53s had arrived on Okinawa via the *USS Midway*, the fourth Pave Low making the trip by air on 2 July 1991 after resolving an engine problem. Meanwhile, Colonel Stankovich surveyed Futenma Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS), located 5 miles from Kadena, as a possible temporary beddown for the Pave Lows. Due to Okinawan and Japanese political sensitivities, 313th Air Division (AD) did not favor seeking a Kadena beddown option. As Colonel Maher--who did much to facilitate the wing's temporary beddown at Kadena--recalled, even in the absence of Japanese political opposition the 313 AD *may* not have favored the SOW's move to Kadena. Fortunately, Futenma was a feasible option and the Marines "bent over backwards to help us out" in

establishing a 353 SOW MH-53 forward operating location (FOL) there. By 8 July 1991, the Pave Lows were located at the Marine air station.⁶



Figure 9: 20-foot mud flow on the base.
Mitchell Highway, Clark AB, late June 1991

In early July 1991, signs of the gradual return to life at Clark as it had been a month earlier—despite apprehensions of flooding and mud slides which remained potential problems—appeared in such steps as the reestablishment of long-distance telephone service and the return to base quarters by those military members still located there. Colonel Hess then turned the 353 SOW's attention to the task of recovering wing assets such as communications equipment and aerospace ground equipment (AGE) power units, of which the wing possessed over 60. Even more arduous, however, was the job of packing-out the

household goods (HHG) of hundreds of wing members and their families who had evacuated. Household goods were to be packaged in plywood crates and shipped stateside to non-temporary storage until determining the future assignments of Clark military members. Also, Colonel Hess established a policy of allowing those 353 SOW members with the most difficult family problems to take a 2-week permissive TDY stateside to take care of their dependents. For those remaining at Clark, insurance agents had arrived to begin assessing damages, making on-the-spot payments to claimants. However, mail service was and remained unreliable, and became a morale issue for many of the troops. As Colonel Hess put it, "The postal service may have conquered rain, snow, and dark of night, but they still need some work on mud and ash." A morale boost, however, was a free "pack and wrap" mailing operation for members, enabling them to send high-value or sentimental items stateside.

Another aspect of the 353 SOW's experience during that period was the providing of assistance—food, water, and basic medical supplies—to a number of Filipino evacuees. Having resided, in some cases, on Mt Pinatubo, the evacuees had fled from their homes and had settled just beyond the Clark AB perimeter, existing there under squalid conditions and with few personal belongings. Many 353 SOW personnel took it upon themselves to give whatever items they could spare to the evacuees, which became an important aspect of



Figure 10: Shoveling the roof at Clark AB ramp operational helipad, 1 July 1991

daily life for the Americans, emotionally, and for the Filipinos, materially, in the weeks ahead.

To facilitate the HHG pack-out, the first group of 353 SOW personnel who had gone to Kadena returned to Clark for the purpose of packing their own HHG and driving their POVs from Subic back to Clark. Thirty members returned who were to be rotated out as soon as their belongings were taken care of so the next Kadena group could do the same. Regarding the disposition of POVs, the GOP decided to allow U.S. military members to sell one POV each to local Filipinos. Base clean-up work continued at Clark, focusing on ash removal and clearing drainage ditches. The ditches were a major concern, which if not cleared beforehand, could result in flooding on base in the event of heavy rains. Even a dry period early in the month had its drawbacks, however, as a number of Clark personnel

experienced respiratory problems from the heat, dust, and blowing ash.

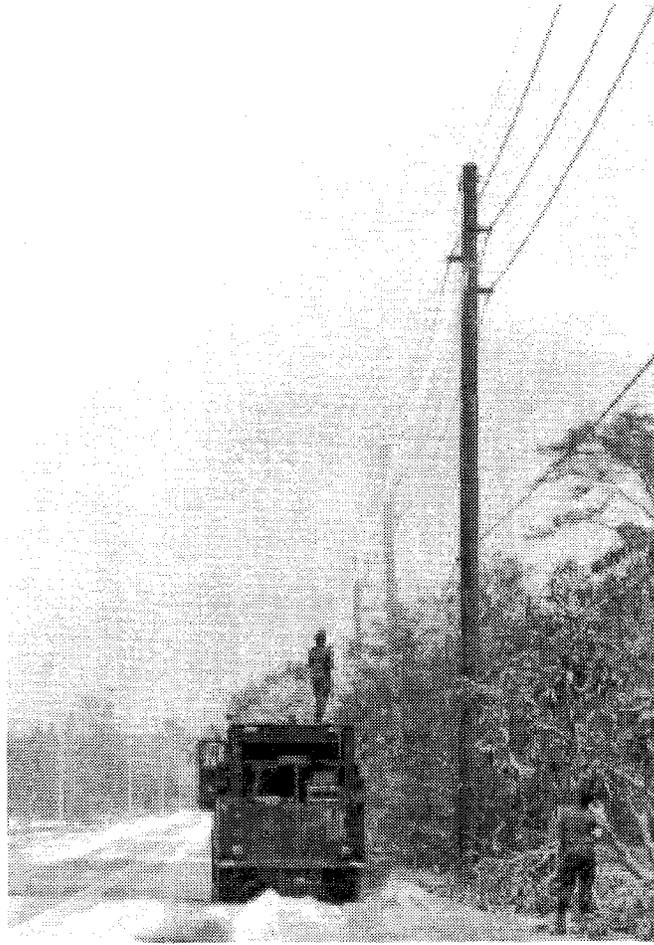


Figure 11: Short circuit
essential power line, Clark AB,
28 June 1991

Away from Clark, 353 SOW aircrews began training again. On 9 July 1991, exactly one month after the initial relocation of aircraft from Clark, two MH-53s and one HC-130 deployed from Kadena to Osan for an exercise, TEAK KNIFE. Colonel Hess recalled the dual benefits of returning to a training mode as quickly as possible: not only did it ensure the wing's capability to perform its

mission, but it also helped individuals to focus on their jobs instead of on the turmoil surrounding family dislocation, possible loss of personal belongings, and uncertainty concerning the future.

On 10 July 1991, HQ Pacific Command (PACAF) announced it would host a conference designed to begin the process of identifying new homes for the Clark-based units in the event reconstitution was not feasible. At that early point, HQ PACAF tentatively planned to beddown the 353 SOW and its HC-and MC-130s at Guam, with the MH-53s operating out of Subi Point. Meanwhile, Colonel Hess expressed concern to HQ AFSOC over the command's ability to replace mission-essential personnel upon their rotation to new assignments.⁷



Figure 12: Black sky, grey earth: Clark AB housing area, early July 1991

In mid-July, following the GOP's refusal to renew the American lease of Clark, the 353 SOW received word that the U.S. would vacate Clark no later than September 1992. However, the unofficial local goal was set for 31 December 1991. For Colonel Hess, the decision to vacate was particularly disappointing. Though many had expected the GOP to force the 3d Tactical Fighter Wing (FTW) to leave Clark, some, including Colonel Hess, had hoped that an agreement might be worked out to allow the 353 SOW to remain. Still, an option of sending personnel to the Philippines in a "TDY for training" status held open the possibility of maintaining a MH-53 forward operating location at Subi. Unfortunately, while allowing the Pave Lows access to the excellent training areas nearby, such an arrangement would be prohibitively expensive in an era of budget cuts and would create hardships for personnel and families due to excessive TDY rates. Furthermore, as Colonel Hess observed, a *permanent* location in the region was essential for maintaining familiarity and trust between the U.S. and our allies in that part of the world. Even a "permanent FOL," no matter where it was located and how well it was manned, would not provide the same, perhaps intangible, advantages as a permanent beddown location in the region. Thus, the de facto loss of Clark was a serious blow. According to Colonel Hess, "The loss of Clark, with its central location and the Philippine training area,

can't be overcome. There really isn't another well-suited location."

In the next several months a number of possible locations were suggested, but none of them met all requirements for the 353 SOW. Korea, Guam, Thailand, Hawaii, Alaska, and the West Coast of the U.S. were considered—among others—but for one reason or another, all were unsuitable. Colonel Hess recalled, "By default, Kadena became the right choice." While offering a central location in the Western Pacific, excellent quality of life factors, long-tours, and political stability, its only drawback was the lack of training areas. Even so, Kadena was close enough to Korea to do a significant amount of the wing's training there. In any case, it was months before



Figure 13: There's plenty more. Angeles City, early July 1991

the "Kadena/Osan" beddown option was finally resolved—primarily due to Japanese political sensitivities to the stationing of more U.S. troops on Okinawa.

On 20 July 1991, Maj Gen Bruce L. Fister, AFSOC Commander (COMAFSOC), arrived at Clark for a first-hand look at conditions and to assure the troops that the command was working the beddown issue. Pinatubo has just erupted again, sending ash to 60,000 feet and resulting in ashfall and flooding at the base.

Meanwhile, the pack-out continued in the midst of nature's onslaught. On 22 June 1991, Typhoon Brendan hit Luzon and the accompanying rain produced some ashfall and flooding on Clark. As precautionary measures, base officials evacuated the housing areas and restricted travel temporarily. Three days later over 70 of the 353 SOW households had been packed, but a new typhoon, Caitlin, was approaching and was expected to bring with it 100-knot winds. On 26 June 1991, 18 personnel arrived from Kadena to augment the pack-out team and were greeted with an "entertaining"—but relatively harmless—4.5 earthquake.

Colonel Hess planned to increase the pack-out team to approximately 100 personnel at Clark and to rotate them roughly every 30 days. Meanwhile, the wing drolly contemplated a new acronym for mud and ash—dubbed "mush."

Clark personnel were not the only ones subjected to potentially dangerous conditions, however. On 28 June 1991, Caitlin, having turned away from Luzon, passed near

Okinawa and brought with it 9 inches of rain and 90-knot winds. By the next day, Kadena had received *14 inches of rain in the last 72 hours*, in sharp contrast to the dryness which had led to water rationing on the island and which was still in effect at that time.



Figure 14: Abacan walking bridge. The real bridge is gone, Angeles, July 1991

Meanwhile, Det 2, 1723 STS personnel employed their skills and equipment to assist the volcanologists. Each day, two personnel accompanied volcanologists conducting ground operations on Pinatubo, providing them radios to use in the event emergency evacuation was required and using global positioning equipment to locate sensor emplacements.

By the end of July 1991, 353 SOW's beddown location was becoming a hot topic for discussion at the headquarters of AFSOC, PACAF, and Southern Command (SOCPAC). On 30 July 1991, General Fister informed General Carl W. Stiner, Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USCINCSOC), of the AFSOC recommendation to locate the HC- and MC-130s at Kadena and the wing headquarters and Pave Lows at Osan. Of four options, General Fister favored Option 3 (Kadena/Osan) because it "maximizes position in the theater, proximity to users, personnel stability, and proximity of training without constant deployment." Well aware of the political issues involved, General Fister observed, "Raising the wing flag in Korea, where it appears the 353 SOW is welcomed, avoids the political obstacles and ill will associated with a Kadena beddown. . . ." At the same time, a Kadena/Osan arrangement precluded the possibility of the 353 SOW being "subsumed into the Korean War plan."⁸

On the same day, 30 July 1991, General Jimmie V. Adams, Pacific Air Forces Commander (CINCPACAF), toured Clark, viewing the damage and meeting with personnel. General Adams "praised the 'ash warriors' at Clark for keeping their shoulders to the wheel." The next day, the general provided Admiral Charles R. Larson, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command (USCINCPAC), with a status report on the relocation of U.S. forces in the Philippines.

First and foremost, a PACAF survey team had visited five bases to determine their suitability for U.S. Philippine-based units. At that moment, General Adams' inclination was to support 353 SOW operations at Osan, Kadena, or Andersen AFB, Guam.⁹

While General Adams contemplated the 353 SOW's beddown, on 2 August 1991 Brig Gen George A. Crocker, Commander of Special Operations Command Pacific (COMSOPAC), seconded General Fister's recommendation to locate the MC- and HC-130s at Kadena and the wing headquarters and MH-53s at Osan. But regardless of the location, he felt that "a robust training presence at Subi Pt . . . is essential to provide full mission readiness in one of our most likely areas of employment. . . ."¹⁰

Also on 2 August 1991 the 3 TFW announced a "strawman" base closure plan for Clark calling for the 353 SOW to vacate by D+75. Since D-Day was 1 August 1991, the plan required the 353 SOW to have its personnel and equipment out of Clark by 15 October 1991.

While the 353 SOW drew closer to vacating Clark, the beddown issue remained unresolved. On 3 August 1991, General Adams still reported three primary options for the 353 SOW, involving Guam, Osan, and Kadena. Additionally, CINCPACAF identified a "TDY manning assistance requirement" to support the 353 SOW for 60-90 days. That issue had become critical for the wing because when the 353 SOW initially identified "mission-essential" personnel in the

wake of the evacuation, it had done so with *short-term* rather than long-term requirements in view.¹¹

At the same time, Colonel Hess reported military "leave" as a morale issue for many 353 SOW personnel. The Clark evacuation and the need for concentrated effort to meet base closure deadlines had exacerbated an existing problem. Over the proceeding several years, travel restrictions and security risks in the Philippines had made it difficult for personnel to take leave, and with the end of the fiscal year approaching, many were in a "use or lose" leave situation. For that reason, Colonel Hess requested—and received—a waiver allowing personnel to carry more than 60 days of leave into the new fiscal year, a decision which boosted morale.

On 9 August 1991, General Adams narrowed his 353 SOW beddown options. His first choice was a "Guam/Korea split" with fixed-wing aircraft, headquarters, and 1723 STS at Guam, and the MH-53s at Osan. His second choice was a "Kadena/Osan split," with all Guam assets from the first option at Kadena instead, and the MH-53s at Osan. With the exception of the location of wing headquarters, CINCPACAF's second choice was the *same one already identified* by Generals Fister and Crocker. General Adams acknowledged General Fister's preference for the Kadena/Osan option, but expressed concern that the "political risk may be too great and would aggravate Kadena's housing problem."¹²

The packing at Clark progressed so that, on 11 August 1991, Colonel Hess reported, "We have reached the point in our drawdown process . . . where most of the remaining wing staff activities can be moved to Kadena." However, the commander planned to maintain the wing flag and the command section at Clark until the announcement of the 353 SOW's permanent beddown location.

On 14 August 1991, General Fister reiterated his concerns and recommendations to General Stiner regarding beddown of the 353 SOW. Acknowledging that no proposed location was fully satisfactory, he recommended basing the wing headquarters and fixed-wing aircraft at Kadena and the Pave Lows at Osan. The option would provide a long-tour environment for MC- and HC-130 crews, greater proximity to training areas than with a Guam beddown, forward presence, and greater proximity to users than Guam offered. General Fister's 14 August 1991 proposal represented a revision of his recommendation two weeks earlier in one key respect. On 30 July 1991, COMAFSOC had recommended that 353 SOW headquarters be located at Osan rather than Kadena, due to the "political obstacles and ill will associated with a Kadena beddown." While still acknowledging those difficulties, he thought the revised option to be the best "near-term" solution. Looking ahead, General Fister's "long-term goal" was the collocation of the 353 SOW at a base in Southeast Asia—perhaps in Thailand, Singapore, or

Malaysia—which would meet all of the wing's beddown requirements and satisfy USCINCPAC strategic goals.¹³

Much more mundane, however, was the work at Clark of cleaning up and packing HHG. By mid-August, the 353 SOW reported "good progress" on the pack-out. To date, 35 percent of wing household shipments had been packed: 68 percent of on-base households, 13 percent of dormitories, and 1 percent of off-base households. Unfortunately, 60 percent of off-base households were not recoverable, due to flooding, looting, or houses simply being carried off by the rushing water from the 15 June 1991 "volcano-typhoon-earthquake" combination.

At the same time, the wing was experiencing stress related to personnel shortages. For example, in mid-August, 1 SOS reported "a critical problem in loadmaster manning," while that unit and 31 SOS were being "forced to rely on 17 SOS for support in preparing TDY orders and other routine admin functions." Furthermore, 17 SOS personnel were maintaining the MC-130s of the 1 SOS in addition to their own HC-130s, a task they performed admirably for many months and with minimal personnel. On the other hand, 17 SOS was "experiencing critical difficulties" in radio operator (RO) manning. The squadron had requested RO manning assistance for 90 days from HQ AFSOC, but the lone RO currently on loan was due to return stateside shortly.

Personnel shortages were not the only source of concern, however. On 17 August 1991, 7 inches of rain in the Subic area in the last 48 hours led Colonel Hess to express concern over the possibility of being cut off from the airfield at Subi due to potential flooding of critical river crossings en route. "On the brighter side," he added, "seismic activity around Mt Pinatubo seems to be declining gradually and we are now only experiencing 2 to 3 low-level earthquakes each day." Clearly, the "ash warriors" had long-since become accustomed to circumstances well beyond the comprehension of any except the veterans of "Black Saturday."



Figure 15: Pinatubo stroll: USGS personnel on lower slope, August 1991

On 22 August 1991, HQ PACAF reiterated General Adams' recommendations on the relocation of Philippine-based units. Describing the Kadena/Osan option in detail--on which the headquarters of AFSOC, SOCPAC, and PACAF all had reached agreement--the latter emphasized the "potentially severe political sensitivities" regarding Kadena basing. Headquarters PACAF warned that both Japanese and local Okinawan governments "can be expected to oppose addition of any missions, particularly one not defensive in nature such as the SOW."¹⁴

At the same time, activities at Clark presaged the end of the long-standing American presence there. A PACAF assignment team visited the base to work assignments for the remaining mission-essential personnel. The 353 SOW reported that most people were "getting the assignments they want" and that morale had improved noticeably. The movement of wing supplies and equipment continued, too. By 28 August 1991, Lt Col William I. Latham, 353 SOW Director of Logistics, had orchestrated the relocation of 69 pallets and 30 pieces of rolling stock to Okinawa. At the same time, roughly 85 pallets and 62 seavans containing government equipment still required movement. On the negative side, however, "perimeter intrusions" were "rapidly rising" at Clark, requiring increased security at 353 SOW facilities.

In early September 1991, some 45 manning assistance personnel arrived at Kadena from Hurlburt/Eglin, and

Colonel Stankovich assumed command of the 353 SOW. The departing 353 SOW Commander, Colonel Hess, in summarizing the wing's performance during the period from mid-June to the change-of-command on 6 September 1991, recalled, "I had not seen that kind of cohesion in a group ever before." In spite of the unanticipated, sudden evacuation from Clark and the tremendous stresses experienced by many 353 SOW families, he felt that the *best* part of the wing's story during these months was that "we were still prepared to respond to a contingency." Colonel Stankovich agreed with that assessment, adding that the interest Admiral Larson showed in the 353 SOW during several visits to Kadena was helpful in smoothing the relationship between the 313 AD and its ash-laden tenant, the SOW. As Colonel Stankovich recalled, the admiral recognized the 353 SOW as a "relatively key element in his theater strategy that didn't cost him very much," a point not lost on either the 313 AD at Kadena or the Marines at Futenma.

At Clark, intrusions continued, however, and on the night of 7 September 1991, intruders broke into the 353 SOW's secure area and stole personal and military equipment. On that occasion, three of the four individuals were caught and most of the equipment recovered. But the next night, intruders broke into a hangar and escaped with \$80,000 of the wing's palletized communications equipment. The 353 SOW responded by initiating two-man, unarmed night security patrols at Clark.

Also in early September 1991, General Adams brought the 353 SOW beddown issue to the attention of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), General Merrill A. McPeak. While listing four options, General Adams reiterated his recommendation for the Kadena/Osan split. One difference from earlier proposals was his view that the MH-53s would have to remain at Futenma MCAS, Okinawa, temporarily until the necessary housing could be made available at Osan. But overall, political concerns were uppermost in his mind. Commander in chief PACAF warned, "Key Japanese political leaders are eagerly looking for a means to mobilize political pressure against the existing U.S. presence and have already denounced the current airlift augmentation," a warning borne out by the 12 September 1991 protest of some 800 Okinawans—including 13 mayors—against the possibility of the U.S. relocating Clark assets to Kadena. According to General Adams, the improved relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union had produced expectations among Japanese political and business leaders for U.S. force reductions—not increases—on Okinawa. In that light, the general favored placing the desired force-increase on the island in the context of "a broad realignment of U.S. forces in the Pacific."¹⁵

Later that day, 20 September 1991—while impassable roads in the vicinity of Clark hampered drawdown efforts there—Admiral Larson "endorsed" General Adams' recommendation for the "Kadena/Futenma-Osan" 353 SOW

beddown option. The American Embassy in Japan had notified USCINCPAC that the beddown option was "difficult but workable as an interim fix." Fortunately, the length of time considered "interim" was unspecified.¹⁶

By late September 1991, the American drawdown in the Philippines was entering its final stage. At Clark, all on- and off-base HHG shipments at least were packed, if not shipped. Twenty-five percent of 353 SOW cargo had been shipped out, and the wing's first seavans had arrived. But the remaining wing cargo was being held in the naval supply depot at Subic Bay "pending determination of a final unit destination," an example of the negative impact upon the wing resulting from the unresolved beddown issue. On the

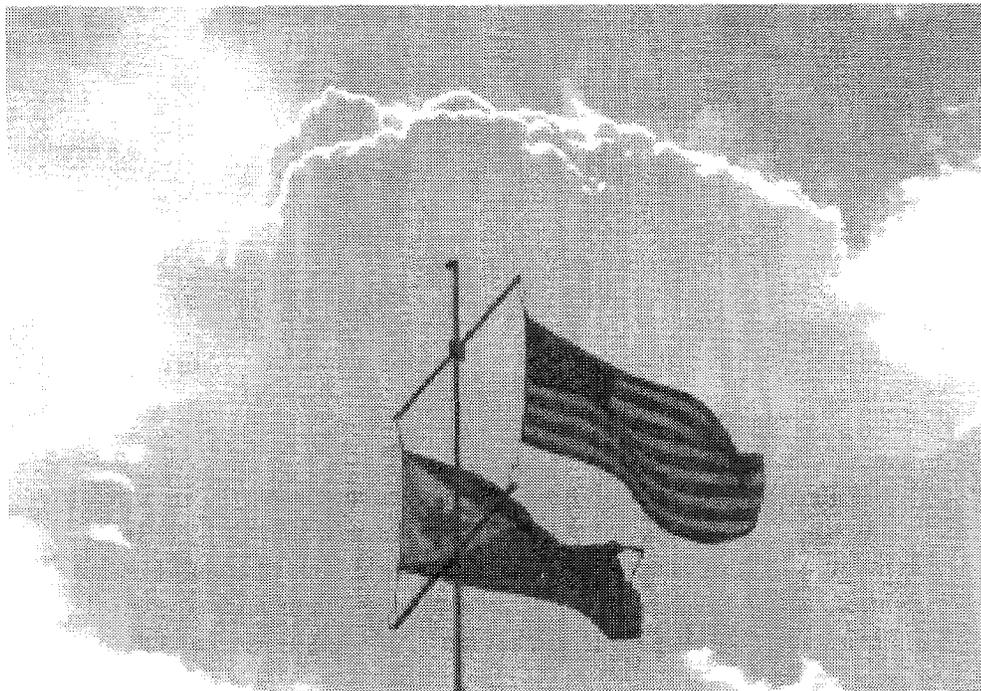


Figure 16: 2 flags, 2 countries, 1 volcano

morning of 23 September 1991, the American flag was lowered for the last time at Wallace Air Station and Camp O'Donnell and then handed to Ambassador Wisner.¹⁷

Since early July 1991 the wing's fixed- and rotary-wing crews had continued to train and to deploy for exercises in the midst of the drawdown at Clark and uncertainty regarding their future home. The "brainchild" of Col David A. Miles, 353 SOW Director of Operations, and Col Terrence L. Casteel, 353 SOW Deputy Commander of Operations, the exercise program was essential to maintaining both the wing's "signature" throughout the Pacific and its readiness to perform wartime missions. TEAK TORCH was one of many such exercises in which two Pave Lows, one MC-130, and one HC-130 participated at U-Tapao, Thailand, during mid- to late-September 1991.

While the U.S. prepared to vacate Clark, the new 353 SOW Commander, Colonel Stankovich, pressed for a beddown decision. On 30 September 1991, he queried General Crocker on the issue, and—undoubtedly voicing the thoughts of many—remarked,

We understand there is no clear-cut choice and sympathize with all who are struggling with the decision. However, our people have been through a long extraordinarily stressful time. Families are hurting. We cannot expect our people to maintain their dedication and proficiency indefinitely. We ask for a quick, clear-cut decision so we can rebuild and get on with our mission.

Unfortunately, a beddown decision still was not forthcoming. In early October 1991, General Adams voiced his consideration to Admiral Larson of a base in Thailand or Taegu AB, Republic of Korea (ROK), as a potential beddown location. Almost simultaneously, General Stiner recommended to Admiral Larson any of several bases, of which Kadena represented his third choice. On 24 October 1991, General McPeak expressed support for the "latest" USCINCPAC proposal--identical to General Fister's 14 August 1991 recommendation--to beddown the 353 SOW's headquarters and MC- and HC-130s at Kadena and the Pave Lows at Osan.¹⁸

The lack of a beddown decision exacerbated the personnel situation for the 353 SOW. On 6 November 1991, Colonel Stankovich requested that HQ AFSOC allow some TDY augmentees to remain until 13 December 1991, five weeks beyond their original return date.

As the beddown issued dragged on, Colonel Stankovich pursued arrangements to facilitate Pave Low operations at Osan, in November 1991 procuring--with the aid of (then) Lieutenant General Ronald R. Fogleman, Commander of the ROK/U.S. Air Component Command--a hardened operations facility formerly used by F-15s on air defense alert. Air Force officials in Korea also were looking for potential housing for Pave Low personnel. At the same time, General Stiner stated that "efforts to crack the diplomatic problems with [Department of] State now need a full-court press. . . ."

At the end of November 1991—as the American flag was lowered at Clark AB for the last time—the 353 SOW brought up a “potential funding problem.” The wing had “lots of equipment” stored in seavans at Subic awaiting a beddown decision. To that point, PACAF had been paying the storage bill but the funds were almost depleted. The 353 SOW anticipated needing assistance from HQ AFSOC since the announcement of a beddown still had not come.

When the beddown decision was finally made—over six months after Pinatubo hastened the American withdrawal from Clark, and after seemingly endless rounds of recommendations ranging from the West coast to Southeast Asia basing options—the 353 SOW relocated to Kadena and Osan air bases. As General Fister had proposed in mid-August 1991, the wing headquarters and its MC- and HC-130s were established formally at Kadena AB and the Pave Lows at Osan AB.

Finally in early 1992, after months of “refugee hardships” including evacuations, clean-ups, and pack-outs; turmoil, uncertainty, and fear; family separations and morale issues—all the while maintaining an operational capability in the Pacific—the 353 SOW had a new home. Unsung heroes abounded, but none more so than the maintainers who kept the wing’s HC- and MC-130s and MH-53s flying under some of the most trying circumstances. Overall, the difficult, painful, and prolonged process—in many ways, unprecedented—by which the men and women of AFSOC’s 353 SOW relocated in 1991 suggests a twist on

Clausewitz's famous dictum. Not only is all warfare a continuation of "politics" by other means—sometimes "politics" influences one's ability to station forces in the locations best suited for their employment in warfare.

ENDNOTES

¹ Msg (U), 353 SOW to COMSOPAC, "Philippine Earthquake-Final Action Report," 071100Z Aug 90; (S) "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida, 1 January 1990- 31 December 1991," Vol I, 187-96 (info used U).

² (U) Peter Grier, "Last Days at Clark," *Air Force Magazine*, February 1992, 58; Jeffrey Kluger, "Volcanoes with an Attitude," *Time*, February 24, 1997, 59. According to Kluger, individual volcanoes produce either lava flow or pyroclastic flow, but not both.

³ Grier, "Last Days at Clark," 58. Msg (U), 353 SOW to HQ AFSOC, "353SOW SITREP 9 Jun-24 Jun 91," 250925Z Jun 91. The above SITREP is one of the most important documents pertaining to the activities of 353 SOW in the days preceding and following Mt Pinatubo's eruption on 15 Jun 91. Discussion (U), Col Leon E. Hess (USAF, Ret), with Maj Forrest L. Marion, HQ AFSOC/HO, 9 Sep 97. Because much of my study is based upon information provided by the above SITREP and the discussion with Colonel Hess, I chose to refrain from citing them individually hereafter. (U) "History Report of Three Fifty-Third Special Operations Wing . . . 1 January 1991 to 30 June 1991," vol V, 8. Note that prior to the relocation of 353 SOW aircraft on 9 June, the HC-130s belonging to 17 SOS already were operating from Kadena AB, Okinawa.

⁴ Grier, "Last Days at Clark," 58-59. Discussion (U), Col Robert M. Stankovich (USAF, Ret), with Maj Forrest L. Marion, HQ AFSOC/HO, 16 Mar 98 (interview not cited individually hereafter).

⁵ Matthew T. Robinson, "Operation FIERY VIGIL: Philippine Relief Effort," *Marine Corps Gazette*, November 1991, 110. Msg (U), 353 SOW to USCINCPAC, "353SOW First Impression Report-JTF Fiery Vigil," 280823Z Jun 91; (U) *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, 11 Jun 91; Kevin M. Mukri, "Fiery Vigil: Out from the Ash," *Naval Institute Proceedings*, May 1992, 117.

⁶ Discussion (U), Col Brian A. Maher (USAF), with Maj Forrest L. Marion, HQ AFSOC/HO, 10 Dec 97.

- ⁷ Msg (S), CINCPACAF to HQ AFSOC, "Site Survey for Movement of Clark AB Units (S)," 102350Z Jul 91 (info used U).
- ⁸ Msg (U), HQ AFSOC to USCINCSOC, "353 SOW Beddown," 301400Z Jul 91.
- ⁹ Msg (S), CINCPACAF to USCINCPAC, "Philippine Relocation Status Report Number 1 (U)," 310530Z Jul 91 (info used U).
- ¹⁰ Msg (S), COMSOPAC to USCINCPAC, "353SOW Basing Location (U)," 020200Z Aug91 (info used U).
- ¹¹ Msg (S), CINCPACAF to USCINCPAC, "Philippine Relocation Status Report Number 2 (U)," 030500Z Aug 91 (info used U).
- ¹² Msg (S), CINCPACAF to CSAF, "Philippines Reconstitution (U)," 092110Z Aug 91 (info used U).
- ¹³ Msg (S), HQ AFSOC to USCINCSOC, "353 SOW Beddown (U)," 141400Z Aug 91 (info used U).
- ¹⁴ Msg (S), HQ PACAF to HQ USAF, "Philippines Reconstitution (U)," 220200Z Aug 91 (info used U).
- ¹⁵ Msg (S), CINCPACAF to CSAF, "353 SOW Beddown (U)," 5 Sep 91 (info used U); Msg (S), CINCPACAF to CSAF, "353 SOW Beddown (U)," 200045 Sep 91 (info used U); (S) "History of the 313th Air Division and 18th Wing, January-December 1991 (U)," vol I, 143 (info used U).
- ¹⁶ Msg (S), USCINCPAC to CJCS, "Philippine Reconstitution (U)," 202045 Sep 91 (info used U).
- ¹⁷ Msg (S), CINCPACAF to USCINCPAC, "Philippine Relocation Status Report Number 7 (U)," 232315 Sep 91 (info used U).
- ¹⁸ Msg (S), HQ PACAF to USCINCPAC, "Permanent Beddown for 353 SOW (U)," 050030Z Oct 91 (info used U); Msg (S), USCINCSOC to USCINCPAC, "Permanent Beddown for 353d Special Operations Wing (SOW) (U)," 072010Z Oct 91 (info used U); Msg (S), CSAF to USCINCPAC, "Philippine Reconstitution-353rd SOW Relocation (U)," 241930Z Oct 91 (info used U).

Appendix 1¹

Listing of 353 SOW Aircraft as of 25 Jun 91

Aircraft	Tail #	Unit	Location
MH-53J	68-10924	31 SOS	Subi Point NAS*
MH-53J	68-10928	38 SOS	Subi Point NAS
MH-53J	68-10932	31 SOS	Subi Point NAS
HC-130P	64-14858	17 SOS	Kadena AB
HC-130P	65-0986	17 SOS	PDM at Birmingham AL
HC-130P	65-0992	17 SOS	PDM at Kuala Lumpur
HC-130P	65-0994	17 SOS	On loan to 9 SOS
HC-130P	66-0215	17 SOS	Kadena
HC-130N	69-5821	17 SOS	Osan AB
HC-130N	69-5822	17 SOS	Kadena AB
HC-130N	69-5825	17 SOS	Kadena AB
MC-130E	62-1843	1 SOS	Ontario for SOF-I upgrade
MC-130E	63-0571	1 SOS	Kadena AB
MC-130E	63-0572	1 SOS	CONUS for modification/on loan from 8 SOS
C-130E	63-7842	1 SOS	Kadena AB

*Three MH-53s were transported to Okinawa via the *USS Midway*, arriving on 29 Jun 91; after receiving needed parts, the fourth MH-53 flew to Kadena AB, Okinawa, on 2 Jul 91.

¹ (U) "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida, 1 January 1990-31 December 1991," Vol I, 486; Msg (U), 353 SOW to HQ AFSOC, "353 SOW SITREP 9 Jun-24 Jun 91," 250925Z Jun 91; Msg (C/OADR), 353 SOW to HQ AFSOC, "353 SOW SITREP, as of 280400Z Jun 91 (U)," 280822Z Jun 91, (info used U); Msg (C/OADR), 353 SOW to HQ AFSOC, "353 SOW SITREP, as of 290400Z Jun 91 (U)," 290822Z Jun 91, (info used U); Msg (C/OADR), 353 SOW to HQ AFSOC, "353 SOW SITREP Number 6, as of 020800Z Jul 91 (U)," 021100Z Jul 91 (info used U).

Appendix 2¹

Listing of 353 SOW Key Personnel as of 30 Jun 91

353 SOW/CC	Col Leon E. Hess
353 SOW/CV	Col Robert M. Stankovich
353 SOW/DO	Col David A. Miles
353 SOW/ADO	Col Terence L. Casteel
Det 1, 353 SOW	Col John Henley
353 SOW/LG	Lt Col William I. Latham
1 SOS/CC	Lt Col Terrance J. Mallon
17 SOS/CC	Lt Col Brian A. Maher
31 SOS/CC	Lt Col Lee T. Massey
353 SOMS/CC	Maj Charles Williams
OL-A, 353 SOW	Maj Roger Goodman
353 SOW/CCC	CMSgt Floyd W. Showalter (Senior Enlisted Advisor)

¹ (U) "History Report of Three Fifty-Third Special Operations Wing...1 January 1991 to 30 June 1991," Vol V, App 3.

