

How EW Became the Quiet Force Behind Special Operations

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This German propaganda photo shows Wehrmacht soldiers manning a Würzburg radar somewhere along the channel coast in France in 1943.

Electromagnetic warfare (EW) debuted in World War II when the Royal Air Force (RAF) sought to counter German radars, which could locate RAF bombers on their night bombing missions. The Würzburg radar was excellent and a raid was planned to dismantle one and bring it back to the United Kingdom.

Operation Biting (OB) involved the infiltration at Bruneval on the French coast. The mastermind behind OB in terms of justification was Dr. Reginald V. Jones. OB was a great example of jointness, as the British Army paratroopers were parachuted in at night by RAF bombers. They numbered 119

troops, landing in the snow 600 yards from the radar station. They eliminated the sentries, then the radar operators, then began dismantling the Würzburg radar for transport back to Dr. Jones. Eventually, the jig was up and they found themselves in a firefight with responding German reinforcements as they retreated slowly to the beach where they were to be exfiltrated by Royal Navy landing craft. It was a nail biter, as the Royal Navy had a little run-in with a German destroyer and two enemy patrol boats and were late. In the end, the British commandos made it onto the landing craft and the Würzburg radar parts made it to England.¹

The Würzburg radar was eventually shipped to Hurlburt Army Air Force Base in Florida, where it was tested by EW Test & Evaluation (T&E) expert Ingwald "Inky" Haugen. Inky passed the torch of EW T&E to AOC Past President Ken Mathiasmeier at Eglin AFB in the late 1960s.

EW support for special operations also played a role in the Vietnam War. According to Old Crow Sam Roberts, the CIA got the US Air Force to drop leaflets from the cavernous bomb bay of a B-52D using EB-66E aircraft to provide EW support both in front of and trailing behind the B-52D.

Fast forward to 1989 and Operation Just Cause (OJC) in Panama. The plan for OJC called for a quick, massive invasion by US forces, which began in the early hours of December 20. The US deployed 24,000 troops, including 3,300 that would be air dropped, to simultaneously attack 27 separate objectives inside Panama.² Among the top objectives was to find and capture Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega and seize control of four main air fields used by the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF). Denying communications between PDF leadership and its units was essential, as was discouraging the PDF from fighting at all. To accomplish these specific goals, the US deployed EC-130H Compass Call aircraft to jam PDF communications, as well as EC-130E Volant Solo aircraft, which broadcast Spanish-

language radio messages in support of the OJC psychological operations campaign. In addition, the US Army's 525th Military Intelligence Brigade provided SIGINT support to XVIII Airborne Corps throughout the operation.

The EC-130H Compass Call achieved initial operational capability in 1983, and OJC represented its initial combat deployment. "The fog of war descended on the PDF at 12:45 a.m. local time as two EC-130H Compass Call aircraft began a precision jamming attack against all PDF radio communications – confusion reigned ... even Noriega, the so-called 'Maximum Leader,' fled to Vatican Embassy where he eventually surrendered to US SF. Within 24 hours, all objectives of OJC were under US Control."³ EW operations were so successful in OJC that GEN Carl Vuono, Army Chief of Staff from 1987 to 1991, said at the time, "The Army will never again go to war without COMPASS CALL."⁴

Fast forward to 2003 and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). A series of US Army SF, Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs), needed to secure critical Karbala Gap routes that would be used by US conventional forces en route to Baghdad. They were infil'd at an abandoned airfield at Wadi al Khirr, Iraq. It provided good access to the Karbala Gap and Najaf. How to get there? USAF MC-130 Combat Talons, of course. Not only did the USAF infil the ODAs and other SF, but also HMMWVs and other critical gear. What was the only MC-130 protection? Its EW gear and its onboard EW0 who would operate it. Without this EW protection, the SF may not have been able to get into Iraq and secure key pathways for the main invasion forces.⁵

Bottom line? The invasion for OIF was successful. The synergy of EW and special operation continues today.

¹ Price, A. (2017). *Instruments of Darkness: The History of*

Electronic Warfare 1939-1945. Frontline Books. pp. 71-75.

² Bonham, G. (1991). "Airfield Seizure – The Modern Key to the Country," DTIC Archive:
<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA233189.pdf>

³ Author unknown. (2014). 2014 Calendar. Celebrating More Than 50 Years of EW Excellence. BAE Systems. USA.

⁴ Maday, James. (2017). EC-130H Compass Call presentation. Offutt AFB Web site,
<https://www.offutt.af.mil/Portals/97/EC130%20Industry%20Visit%20Unclass%20Brief%20CA0%2017%20JUL%2017%20v1.pdf?ver=2017-08-24-110342-530>

⁵ Robinson, L. (2004). *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*. Public Affairs. p. 254.