HALL OF FAME
2019 Inductees
Commander Leadership Awards

Evolution of The JSOAC in a Non-Linear War
AFSOC SOLE’s First Deployment

Foreword by Brig Gen Robert Cardenas, USAF (Ret)
Assisting ACA in our mission to support Air Commandos and their families: Past, Present, and Future

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2019 Air Commando Hall of Fame Inductees at the Saturday Night Awards Banquet  
(Photoby Scott Schaeffler)
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The idea for an Air Commando Hall of Fame pre-dates the formation of our Air Commando Association. In January 1968, “Heinie” Aderholt, then my Deputy Commander for Operations at the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC), proposed the idea in order to recognize outstanding Air Commandos past, present, and future. Well, as Jim Ifland noted in a previous edition of this journal, if someone has a good idea the commander is likely going to tell you to run with it … and that was exactly what I did.

Heinie put the committee together and they received 200 nominations from Air Commando units around the world. They then created a ballot and sent those ballots back out to the units so that individuals could vote for the most deserving candidates. It was a very democratic process. In April 1969, 20 Air Commandos from the Second World War through the beginning of the Vietnam War were inducted into the first Hall of Fame class. I was transferred that summer and for many reasons, including changing priorities, loss of personnel, and resource constraints, the Hall of Fame went inactive after that first class. It took 25 years, but again it was Heinie who took the initiative and resurrected his original great idea. In 1994, we started recognizing Air Commandos again in the Hall of Fame.

Because of the 25-year hiatus, there was some catching up we needed to do. For a few years we had some pretty big HoF classes, but now we’re in a good place and operating at “steady state.” A few years ago, Wayne Norrad described the new updated rules for nominating some to the HoF. He also explained why, in 2010, the ACA Board of Directors decided to limit class sizes to five per year. Theirs was a good decision and fully in keeping with what Heinie intended back in 1968, when he suggested we needed a way and a place to recognize our most outstanding Air Commandos.

Since that first class, way back when in 1969, almost 200 Air Commandos have been inducted into our Hall of Fame. All have made meaningful contributions in the service of our nation and to Air Force Special Operations. As you will read in this issue, in October your Air Commando Association inducted five more outstanding Air Commandos into these distinguished ranks. I urge you to read their stories and think about the examples they have set. They carry on our association’s proud traditions of service, achievement, and valor. Any Time, Any Place.

Robert Cardenas, Brig Gen, USAF (Ret)
Commander #3, USAF Special Air Warfare Center
ACA Life Member #0174
This is always one of my favorite issues. It is truly gratifying to honor our new Hall of Fame inductees along with some outstanding young active duty Air Commandos. A great mix of past and present. This year’s is even more special in that regard as we have our foreword from Brig Gen Robert Cardenas—essentially the founder of the Air Commando Hall of Fame and a member of that elite group himself. He will celebrate his 100th trip around the sun in March. We want to thank him sincerely for assisting us in this edition. He was also recently honored by the San Diego Chapter of the Air Force Association by changing their name to the Brigadier General Robert Cardenas San Diego Chapter…truly a huge honor. Congratulations, sir, and Happy Birthday!

Along with the Hall of Fame and other award write-ups, we have two great articles on SOF command and control issues and the evolution of same beginning in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. This is an area that deserves more attention and we will look to the future for more articles in that realm. Additionally, another mission set that deserves more credit and coverage is AFSOC’s medical capabilities. In that regard, we have a great article on Special Operations Surgical Teams that serves as an introduction to most of our readers’ about just how far our medical Air Commandos have come over the last few years.

Lastly, 2020 is a year chock full of key anniversaries. First this is the 30th anniversary of Air Force Special Operations Command. Second, it is the 40th anniversary of Operation Eagle Claw. And last, it is also the 50th anniversary of the Son Tay Raid, Operation Kingpin. Your Air Commando Association will definitely perform a role in each. For example, ACA will assist AFSOC in the 30th celebration by hosting a banquet at the Emerald Coast Convention Center. Additionally, the Alison Chapter of ACA honors the Eagle Claw warriors that made the ultimate sacrifice at Arlington National Cemetery every year. The chapter has laid out plans to make this year’s event even more special. And last, but not least, our annual convention this year will be themed around the Son Tay Raiders and will help them celebrate their 50th and last reunion. More to follow on all of these events on our website, newsletters, and other social media.

As always, we hope you enjoy this edition of the Air Commando Journal.

Any Time - Any Place

Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Ret)
ACA Chief Operating Officer and Editor-in-Chief
Happy New Year everyone! I trust those who made it to the annual Air Commando Association (ACA) 2019 Reunion/Convention had a great time. We appreciate your attendance and hope you’ll join us in 2020 where our theme is the 50th Anniversary of Operation Kingpin, better known as the Son Tay Raid.

Our Chairman, Maj Gen (Ret) Norm Brozenick, wrote the first “SITREP” in the last Air Commando Journal (ACJ) and mentioned that I would address our lines of operation (LOOs) in this edition. Our LOOs focus us on achieving our core mission of serving Air Commandos -- past, present, and future. Our LOOs are to educate, advocate, honor and serve.

Recently added leadership positions have given us a new dimension on how we carry out our LOOs. For example, 10 years ago we didn’t have a chairman, last year we added the chief operating officer (COO) position, and several civilian advisors. Previously, the President theoretically did the work of all three, the chairman, president/chief executive officer (CEO), and COO – glad I wasn’t the President then.

The chairman is the highest appointed position in the ACA. In conjunction with the Board, sets the strategic direction and is the senior executive committee member and senior director for all official Association proceedings. The duties include the Association’s business partnership initiatives, fundraising, and strategies for both the Association and the Air Commando Foundation (ACF). Chairman Brozenick initiates and maintains strategic communications at executive levels with US government and military officials, industry executives, and state and local community leaders.

As president/CEO, I oversee daily operations, set the agenda for Directors meetings, and preside over them. As CEO, I work directly with Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett, our COO, who runs daily operations while providing guidance and supervision to Melissa Gross, our executive assistant, and Jeanette Elliott, our media coordinator. Now, if you asked the ladies how it works, they’ll probably tell you that the chairman, president, and COO all give them work and it’s never ending! Our vice president (VP), CMSgt (Ret) Bill Turner, backs me up and fills in when I’m not available. Bill also has additional duties as chairman of the Nomination and Governance Committee. Col (Ret) Jim Connors, continues to serve (third term) as our treasurer and keeps our finances in good order – and Rachel Halvorson makes sure of it.

Going forward, we’ll enhance our pursuit of LOOs by putting more responsibility on the committees. The executives will continue to work on daily issues while the committees work on short- and long-term goals and plans. We’ve talked about having the committees meet once a month and hold Directors meetings quarterly where committees will brief their progress.

One of my goals is to build closer relationships with our chapters to better service all of you, regardless of where you live. Our LOOs with some of our chapters have been good, while others, not so much. We’re encouraging Kirtland, Mildenhall, and Kadena to get their chapters operational again. I’m traveling to San Antonio to make a pitch at starting a new chapter there and our Air Force Reserve members are talking about starting a chapter at Duke Field. There will be more to follow on our chapters -- especially after our website is upgraded giving each chapter their own page to post information including their calendar of events. That upgrade and an individual member “sign-in” option will give members the ability to update their contact information and opt to let other members see their information or keep it private.

Recently, the Special Tactics community had a tragic accident. SSgt Cole Condiff, a combat controller assigned to the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, Hurlburt Field, experienced an unplanned parachute departure from a C-130 south of Hurlburt into the Gulf of Mexico. During recovery efforts, the ACA bought and delivered 75 pizzas and soft drinks to feed those involved in the search operations. Unfortunately, SSgt Condiff’s body was never recovered. Through the ACF, we purchased airline tickets for members of his family so they could attend his memorial service at Hurlburt Field. To the Condiff family, his teammates, and his friends, we send our most sincere condolences.

By virtue of the ANYTIME FLIGHT program we are now able to replace the roof on the ACA headquarters building. We can keep our LOOs going at 100 percent by using ANYTIME FLIGHT donations and not have to dip into our normal ACA operating funds. Thanks to everyone who contributed!

On notice is VP Bill Turner who will write the next SITREP. Have a great 2020! Norrad sends.
HoTwaSH

**Washington DC, ACA John Alison Chapter**

Dear HQ ACA,

On behalf of the Washington DC, ACA John Alison Chapter, please find enclosed proceeds from our first ever ACA Golf Tournament. The enclosed sum is $3,500. Please allot $500 of this amount to help with the staffing and operations of the Headquarters. The remainder is to be applied to the Air Commando Foundation.

I would like to personally thank the ACA for their support providing memorabilia to include as prizes for this tournament. Moreover, this event could not have been possible without the diligent efforts of our Secretary, Col (Ret) Jim Piel.

Thank you for all you do for our Air Commandos and their families.

Best regards,

Tom “Doc” Livingston, Col, USAF, (Ret)
ACA, President of Gen John Alison Chapter
ACA Life Member #L5871

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**Hall of Fame Induction at 2019 ACA Convention**

Melissa,

I wanted to express my sincere thanks to you and the entire team at ACA for this honor and the wonderful job you did. It was an amazing experience for an old Pave Low pilot and his loved ones. It was also great to see a lot of old friends. I hope you and the entire team have a great holiday season and all my best!

Ed Reed, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)
Hall of Fame 2019
Orlando, FL
ACA Member #6713

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**Donation**

Dear Air Commando Foundation,

Attached you will find a check made payable to your organization. We at the Hurlburt Spouses’ Club (HSC) admire your work in the community and your diligent efforts to improve the world around us. The HSC is honored to present you with this contribution and hopes that it will provide you with the resources you need to continue your endeavors.

Sincerely,
Hurlburt Spouses’ Club
www.hurlburtsousesclub.com

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**Journal Vol 8, Issue 2**

What an incredible journal – the best ever. Wonderful and informative articles and graphics. The front cover is very special. Although I have been a member for a long time and know several of the authors, I learned so much. Many thanks and congratulations to the editorial staff, the authors, and all who made this journal so great. Graphic designer Jeanette does a wonderful job. I agree with the comments that General Aderholt would be so proud of the progress of the ACA.

Felix “Sam” Sambogna
Fort Walton Beach, FL
ACA Life Member # L0081

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**K2 (Kharshi Khanabad) Veterans**

We are fortunate to have an article by Lt Gen (Ret) Frank Kisner in this edition of ACJ on Command and Control early in Operation Enduring Freedom headquartered at Kharshi Khanabad (K2). Many veterans who served at K2 have identified health concerns to the US Congress House Committee on Oversight and Reform’s national security subcommittee, which has asked the DoD for further information on K2. We understand the VA has reported they “will work with the Department of Defense to study this issue further.”

ACA will provide information on Congressional, DoD, and VA responses when available.

Any Time - Any Place,
Air Commando Journal Editors

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Submissions may be emailed to info@aircommando.org or mailed to Hot Wash c/o Air Commando Association, P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569. ACA reserves the right to eliminate those that are not deemed appropriate. Thank you in advance for your interest in the Air Commando Journal.
Air Commando Association’s
Lifetime Achievement Awards

The Air Commando Association is pleased to present the Lifetime Achievement Award to Mrs Dee Roberson and Felix “Sam” Sambogna, Lt Col, USAF (Ret).

Dee Roberson was instrumental in the formation of the ACA with then Col Harry C. “Heinie” Aderholt. Dee continued to be a valued asset to the ACA for decades to come. For more details visit www.aircommando.org/ACAblog.

Felix “Sam” Sambogna, Lt Col (Ret) has been a mainstay of the leadership in the ACA for many years. Sam never forgot the past as he embraced the changes needed for the ACA to move into the future. (Photo by Scott Schaeffler: www.scottphotoworks.com)
Senior Master Sergeant Maurice D. Kunkel distinguished himself through over 23 years of outstanding service to the nation and Air Force Special Operations Forces. He expertly served as an instructor teaching weather observation procedures to new students, but his primary forte was “just getting stuff done.” This was best displayed serving for many years in special operations assignments, including serving in Laos for six years where he set the standard for special operations weather reporting. His procedures laid the groundwork for successful weather missions in every conflict from the war in Southeast Asia to today’s modern battlefields. He was assigned to the 10th Weather Squadron at Udorn RTAFB in Thailand, but spent most of his time in Laos while engaged in support of air operations against an opposing armed force. This entailed dealing with military and paramilitary personnel and frequent exposure to danger from hostile forces. He established, operated, and maintained clandestine weather observation sites in austere, hostile environments and trained weather observers throughout the country. He was fluent in Thai and Lao and could also write in totally fluent upper class Thai, thus earning the complete confidence and trust of both the Central Intelligence Agency and indigenous personnel providing him unparalleled access for mission accomplishment. He obtained numerous advanced skills and among his many awards and decorations are the Master Parachutist Badge, Bronze Star, seven Air Medals, Joint Services Commendation Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Vietnam Gallantry Cross, Vietnam Service Medal with eight Oak Leaf Clusters, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, and numerous other awards. SMSgt Kunkel’s extraordinary dedication and professionalism in the service of his country and reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.
Lieutenant Colonel Edward T. Reed distinguished himself through outstanding service to the nation and Air Force Special Operations Forces throughout his military career. Lt Col Reed’s remarkable career included extensive operations as a Pave Low pilot including Operation Honey Badger when US special operations forces came into their own as a joint organization in the early days of modern SOF. He is Pave Low pilot #21, and was qualified in the HH-53C NRS (night recovery system), MH-53H, and MH-53J Pave Low helicopters, while serving in the 20th SOS and 1st Special Operations Wing. Following his assignment to Hurlburt Field, he was stationed at Military Airlift Command headquarters and later at the Pentagon where he dramatically reshaped the force with aggressive modifications efforts including the MH-53J, MH-60G, MC-130P Combat Shadow, C-141 SOLL II, and EC-130J. His ability and reputation to find money, execute quickly, and produce real value for combat aircrews is well known and highly respected. Additionally, Lt Col Reed served at the 58th Special Operations Wing where he envisioned and fielded the most sophisticated mission rehearsal, simulation, and training architecture in the entire Department of Defense. His vision of fully networked simulators flying in congruent data bases, with full interoperability, while employing realistic terrain following and masking, utilizing space-based intelligence and highly detailed data bases of actual enemy targets and target areas was unparalleled. Lt Col Ed Reed’s selection is testimony of his clear vision, unwavering commitment, and tremendous creativity in many roles worthy of emulation. The distinctive accomplishments of Lt Col Edward T. Reed highlight a distinguished career in the service of his country and reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and all Air Commandos of every generation.
Colonel David H. Sammons distinguished himself through superior service as an Air Commando throughout his 28-year career. He commanded at the group, squadron, and detachment level. A master navigator with over 4,600 hours in MC-130E/H, C-130E/H, and EC-130H aircraft, Colonel Sammons commanded the 15th Special Operations Squadron at the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom. During OEF, he oversaw the first joint/combined SOF combat assault missions and the first MC-130H airfield seizure establishing a forward area refueling and rearming point operation and executing a dry lakebed landing in combat. Under Colonel Sammons’ command, the 15th SOS valiantly flew daring combat missions, setting the conditions which hastened the end of Taliban rule. His 15th SOS tenure was punctuated with award of the Gallant Unit Citation and recognition as AFSOC’s 2001 Squadron of the Year. Additionally, Colonel Sammons earned the Bronze Star Medal and Distinguished Flying Cross and won USSOCOM’s 2001 Special Operations Low Intensity Conflict Achievement Award for significant contributions to the special operations mission. As a member of the 7th Special Operations Squadron, Colonel Sammons served as mission commander on the USAF’s 1998 USAF Lt Gen William Tunner Award-winning mission delivering USEUCOM in-extremis forces to stem American bloodshed in Liberia. Also with the 7th SOS, Colonel Sammons orchestrated the largest, most successful psychological operations campaign since WWII during Operation Allied Force, delivering over 100 million leaflets to 81 Serbian targets in the former Republic of Yugoslavia from altitudes as high as 30,000 feet, drop altitudes heretofore not used by AFSOC aircraft and aircrews. He personally executed 11 OAF leaflet missions, earning the Air Medal. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Colonel David H. Sammons reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.
Master Sergeant John A. Smith has dedicated a lifetime of service to the Air Force Special Operations Command. For 46 years, Sergeant Smith has supported Air Force Special Operations as an aircrew gunner, pararescueman, instructor, evaluator, and mentor. Initially Sergeant Smith served as a gunner on the AC-130A/E/H gunship, eventually cross-training to become a pararescueman. Sergeant Smith was instrumental in the development of the rigging alternate method Zodiac (RAMZ) delivery package allowing the deployment of pararescueman far away from the standard rescue profile. Additionally, Sergeant Smith was vital to the development of the modern day Special Tactics Training Squadron. He was on the ground floor of the initial recruiting, assessment and selection phase of Special Tactics Airmen. Sergeant Smith also forged the way for the initial advanced skills training models; assisting AFSOC move from vision to application. Furthermore, after retirement from active duty, Mr. Smith continued to coach, train, and mentor Air Commandos. He served as an initial cadre member helping to stand-up the AFSOC intelligence formal training unit, where he reshaped the air-centric intelligence focus into a ground and maritime focus for special operations intelligence professionals. His operational expertise developed the sharp focus of intelligence Airmen supporting combat operations around the globe. Finally, Mr. Smith continues to serves as a senior intelligence analyst to the AFSOC Director of Intelligence, providing operational credibility to intelligence products relating to Russia, the Baltics, and the Levant. The distinctive accomplishments of Master Sergeant John A. Smith reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command and Air Commandos of every generation.
Colonel Ira D. “Donnie” Williams Jr. distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Special Operations for over 25 years. During his service, Colonel Williams served in a myriad of operational, aircraft maintenance, and logistics assignments culminating as the Deputy Director of Logistics, Engineering, and Force Protection for Headquarters, Air Force Special Operations Command. As a line pilot on HC-130Ps, Colonel Williams was hand-picked for several classified missions with national level impacts. After suffering a near-fatal medical emergency, he returned as an Air Commando maintainer in the 55th Special Operations Squadron, garnering an “Excellent” rating during the operational readiness inspection and generated 100 percent of his assets to support simultaneous joint training and operational plans in USEUCOM, USCENTCOM, and USSOUTHCOM. He was hand-picked to be the Director of Logistics for a data-masked unit leading the logistics effort for six perfectly executed national-level contingencies. After two conventional assignments, Colonel Williams returned as the 16th Aircraft Generation Squadron Commander, AFSOC’s largest squadron, just months prior to September 11. He led the unit to new heights earning four AFSOC and one Air Force level Maintenance Effectiveness Awards as the best maintenance unit in the command and the Air Force. Upon completion of highly successful deployments in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM, Colonel Williams retired from active duty. In 2007, he rejoined the HQ AFSOC team where he continues to serve Air Commandos today. The distinctive accomplishments of Colonel Ira D. Williams reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.
With your help, the children of fallen special operators are achieving their dreams.

“If it wasn’t for SOWF I wouldn’t be the teacher that I am today. Every success that I made and continue to make in my life SOWF will be there at the top of the list for all of the thanks and recognition that they deserve for helping me carve my future.”

Steven Schmauss, Texas Tech, C/O 2017

Steven is the son of Air Force SSgt. Mark J. Schmauss, who lost his life in Kuwait in 1991.

Special Operations Warrior Foundation ensures full college educations to the surviving children of Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps special operations personnel who lose their life in the line of duty. Special Operations Warrior Foundation also provides immediate financial stipends to severely wounded special operators.
Staff Sergeant Marisol Burfield
Staff Sergeant Marisol Burfield distinguished herself as Noncommissioned Officer of the Simplified Acquisition of Base Engineer Requirements Element, 1st Special Operations Civil Engineer Squadron, 1st Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this period, Sergeant Burfield completed a facility renovation project valued at $590,000 which enabled the stand up of Hurlburt's first active duty remotely piloted aircraft squadron and boosted Air Force Special Operations Command's Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities. Additionally, Sergeant Burfield was key to the successful design of a 3,000 square foot command and control center renovation project valued at $180,000 which supports the training of 25,000 personnel and 20 joint exercises per year. Furthermore, she designed a launch pit for maintenance personnel valued at $98,000 which reduced weather exposure for Airmen launching and recovering aircraft in high temperatures. Finally, Sergeant Burfield's leadership was critical in completing a $300,000 remodel of Hurlburt's Deployment Control Center which enhanced the mission of a 120 member logistics flight and enabled the deployment of 1,400 Hurlburt Airmen annually directly contributing to Air Force Special Operations Command's 2018 Air Force Civil Engineer Squadron of the Year Award.

Technical Sergeant Luke Cavanaugh
Technical Sergeant Luke Cavanaugh distinguished himself as Section Chief, 23d Special Tactics Squadron, 720th Special Tactics Group, 24th Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this period, Sergeant Cavanaugh deployed in support of Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL. Sergeant Cavanaugh was the sole Joint Terminal Attack Controller for an Army Special Forces team conducting one of the largest joint operations since 2001. During the operation Sergeant Cavanaugh directed close air support missions employing over 4,000 pounds of ordinance and 2,230 rounds of ammunition that resulted in 33 enemies killed in action. Sergeant Cavanaugh also orchestrated eight resupply airdrops delivering 63,000 pounds of food, water and ammunition sustaining 605 American and coalition forces. Upon redeployment, Sergeant Cavanaugh was selected by leadership for instructor duty. In this capacity, Sergeant Cavanaugh helped qualify four Joint Terminal Attack Controllers for his flight, increasing the squadron's total capacity by 18 percent. Additionally, Sergeant Cavanaugh was handpicked to be a cadre member for Special Operations Tactical Air Control Party assessment and selection. In this capacity he hired eight Airmen who will soon execute the nation's most sensitive and arduous missions. Furthermore, Sergeant Cavanaugh completed Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education and two Joint Special Operation University courses, honing his ability to lead in the joint environment. Finally, Sergeant Cavanaugh's exceptional leadership earned him distinction as squadron Non Commissioned Officer of the Year. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Cavanaugh reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Jordan Churchill
Technical Sergeant Jordan Churchill served as 352d Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron's Flying Crew Chief Program Manager. His leadership was vital to the deployment of 37 personnel, ensuring the successful completion of 291 combat mission tasking's within two Geographical Combatant Commands. Additionally, his technical prowess was displayed when he led two heavy maintenance teams to complete a hard landing inspection and an engine over torque inspection. Sergeant Churchill drove each team to complete a total of 321 maintenance actions, ensuring both aircraft were mission capable in less than 96 hours. Furthermore, Sergeant Churchill revitalized the units Dedicated Crew Chief program by training 16 new Crew Chiefs and guiding the maintainers through 12 Isochronal Inspections. His accumulated efforts ensured the completion of 9,500 maintenance tasks, which cut
the average delayed discrepancies per aircraft from 23 to 12 and reduced the inspection time line by 30 percent. Finally, Sergeant Churchill’s maintenance expertise was demonstrated when he led a team of 10 maintainers to replace a cracked windshield in 14 hours, crushing the established standard by 22 hours. His team’s efforts gleaned praise from the 352d Special Operations Wing Commander for enabling the wing’s first-ever twelve-ship formation flight in support of the 75th D-Day Anniversary commemorative ceremony fly-over.

Technical Sergeant Eric Denman
Technical Sergeant Eric Denman distinguished himself as Non-Commissioned Officer-in-Charge of Current Operations and CV-22 Evaluator Special Missions Aviator, 71st Special Operations Squadron, 58th Operations Group, 58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 January 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this period, Sergeant Denman led a 26 million dollar-Flying Hour Program with nine aircraft worth 801 million dollars by maximizing Total Force Integration. This initiative enabled a 33 percent Programmed Flying Training increase in spite of a 50 percent aircraft maintenance attrition rate. Additionally, he synchronized six off-station training sorties to occur over 12 Air National Guard weekends in order to fly 215 additional training hours, decreasing the student backlog from 27 students to one. Additionally, the Secretary of the Air Force and Air Force Chief of Staff lauded Sergeant Denman for executing an Air Force Corona demonstration at the United States Air Force Academy as Lead Special Missions Aviator, which showcased 11 aircraft from three Major Commands to inspire 4,400 future Air Force leaders. Furthermore, he served as the 58th Training Squadron Program Manager overseeing 37 syllabi servicing three Major Commands and three Mission Design Series aircraft, which enabled a 50 percent increase in training capacity equating to an incredible 241 mission-ready aircrew members sent to 15 operational units. Finally, Sergeant Denman led a seven–NCO student management team to orchestrate training for seven Mission Design Series aircraft, 12 simulators, and 244 million dollars in assets to graduate 739 aviators. His efforts directly contributed to the 71st Special Operations Squadron winning the 19th Air Force’s Top Rotary-Wing Squadron Award, 2018. The distinctive accomplishments of Technical Sergeant Denman reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Major Brandon Downey
Captain Brandon Downey distinguished himself as Flight Commander, Chief of Staff, and U-28A Instructor Pilot, 19th Special Operations Squadron and 492d Special Operations Training Support Squadron, 492d Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. As Flight Commander, Captain Downey single-handedly ran the U-28A student section, consisting of 97 students and encompassing all formal PC-12 and U-28A training programs. As a U-28A combat subject matter expert, Captain Downey led a massive 90,000 dollar U-28A weapons school support exercise, accomplishing 42 syllabus events during 140 flight hours. He also single-handedly orchestrated two first-of-their-kind exercises in support of partner combat units, enabling never before seen real-world combat training for over 1,110 joint special operations personnel. Captain Downey’s exceptional leadership ability and organizational skills were lauded when he helmed the 492d Special Operations Training Support Squadron activation ceremony. As the new squadron’s Chief of Staff, he crafted the command section’s processes and coordinated all of the squadron’s officer and enlisted evaluation reports. He also managed hundreds of student training reports, dozens of awards and decorations, and over one hundred delegated taskers. As a dedicated schoolhouse instructor, Captain Downey conducted 128 training flights, totaling over 450 instructor hours and 72 hours of academics, earning him three squadron quarterly awards. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Downey reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Christopher Hanson
Captain Christopher Hanson distinguished himself as Chief of Tactics and MC-130J Instructor Pilot, 415th Special Operations Squadron, 58th Operations Group, 58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this period, while stationed with the 17th Special Operations Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Japan, Captain Hanson responded to a midair collision between two United States Marine Corps aircraft. He assumed critical on-scene commander duties controlling five United States aircraft while simultaneously searching an area of over 2,000 square miles and providing on-call aerial refueling for two CV-22 aircraft. Throughout three sorties,
Captain Hanson flew 28 hours and passed 29,000 pounds of fuel ensuring six lives were not forgotten. Additionally, Captain Hanson participated in three Joint Combined Exchange Training exercises. First, in Korea, Captain Hanson showcased precision high-altitude resupply by executing the first-ever operational two-stage container delivery system airdrop. Secondly, in Australia, Captain Hanson strengthened interoperability with a key regional ally as the formation commander for a four-ship flight interfly with the Royal Australian Air Force. Lastly, Captain Hanson increased partner-nation operability in Thailand by teaching formation low-level tactics, techniques, and procedures to twelve Royal Thai Air Force pilots. Subsequently, as Chief of Tactics, 415th Special Operations Squadron, Captain Hanson tirelessly worked to overhaul formal student training by integrating intelligence personnel and Direct Support Operators into flying training, and successfully developed a virtual-reality cockpit checklist trainer for the H/MC-130J which was key to enhancing aircrew training. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Hanson reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Joaquin Hernandez

Technical Sergeant Joaquin Hernandez distinguished himself as Combat Aviation Advisor and Aircraft Maintenance Technician, 711th Special Operations Squadron, Eglin Air Force Base, Auxiliary Field 3, Florida, from 15 January 2019 through 20 May 2019. During this period, Sergeant Hernandez's outstanding leadership and performance as a Combat Aviation Advisor and Aircraft Maintenance Technician was instrumental in the execution of Operational Aviation Detachment-Alpha (OAD-A) 7B791 Teak Torch JCET. As the handpicked ground team lead, while deployed to Prachup Khiri Khan, Thailand, TSgt Hernandez expertly fulfilled his critical task as lead aircraft mechanic while also organizing and integrating the diverse 17-man OAD's intelligence, loadmaster, medical and small unit tactics functional areas into a multi-national 45-day special operations training event. His leadership and years of experience in Force Protection, aviation advising and aircraft maintenance culminated in the flawless execution of 6 Royal Thai Air Force Military Free Fall (MFF) drops, 5 Low Cost Low Altitude (LCLA) airdrops and 11 total sorties. Sergeant Hernandez's expertise, leadership and advise safeguarded 6 AFSC aircrew and over 40 Thailand Partner Nation (PN) commandos by directing the airworthiness assessment and maintenance of Thailand's 6 AU-23 Peacemaker aircraft. His actions produced a 100 percent incident and accident free SOCPAC-Thai joint training event. He also coordinated the worldwide shipment, on-time delivery and recovery of $500,000 of mission essential special operations equipment critical to success of the training. Lauded by PACOM and the 501st Royal Thai Air Force, his actions ensured a successful complex special operations joint exercise, promising a strong future relationship with PACOMs number one priority country. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Hernandez reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Amber Kaufman

Staff Sergeant Amber Kaufman distinguished herself by meritorious service as a C-146A Loadmaster, 524th Special Operations Squadron, 492d Special Operations Wing, Duke Field, Florida from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this time, Sergeant Kaufman was selected to serve as Non-commissioned Officer in Charge of Operations for Special Operations Command Africa’s Forward Aviation Detachment – Burkina Faso. She supported 22 special operations units by providing 457 mobility sorties, moving 1,200 personnel and 159,000 pounds of cargo across the Department of Defense’s largest area of responsibility. Sergeant Kaufman planned and executed the first graded joint casualty evacuation exercise, and thus validated a new 12 million dollar casualty evacuation contract, while identifying limiting factors critical to mission support. To fix these deficiencies, she coordinated the resupply of 181,200 dollars of medical equipment, ensuring expeditious delivery of critical care to special operations forces across Africa area of operations. Finally, while serving as lead Loadmaster Instructor for the C-146A formal training unit, Sergeant Kaufman developed the first C-146A Loadmaster Initial Qualification syllabus – her work was later incorporated the use of Air Force Special Operations Command’s newest 23 million dollar flight simulator. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Kaufman reflect credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Ramiro Leenen

Captain Ramiro Leenen distinguished himself as an MC-130H Combat Talon II Combat Systems Officer and a Flight Commander Executive Officer, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this period, Captain Leenen showcased his outstanding leadership as the mobility cell lead for the largest annual combat air forces exercise, working closely with 1,657 personnel from five nations, sustaining Joint Force military advantages in the Department of Defense Indo-Pacific area of responsibility. He further demonstrated his operational prowess as the lead air planner and primary navigator for a Joint Combined Exchange Training, preparing the Royal New Zealand Air Force for worldwide deployment. As Chief of Tactics, Captain Leenen became the subject matter expert on AFSC’s newest two-stage equipment airdrop capability, penning a tactics and procedure change projected to increase the bundle's accuracy by thirty-five percent. Additionally, while serving as acting Flight Commander of Plans and Tactics, Captain Leenen enabled the execution of three Joint Chiefs of Staff exercises, strengthening Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships to ensure stability and free access to common domains. Finally, professionalism and his ability to lead earned him recognition as the AFSC 2018 National Defense Industrial Association Special Operations/ Low-Intensity Warfare Superior Achievement Award nominee, 353d Special Operations Group 2018 Tactician of the Year, and the 1st Special Operations Squadron 2018 Company Grade Officer of the Year. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Leenen reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.
First Lieutenant Christopher Locke, II
First Lieutenant Christopher Locke distinguished himself as the lead programmer and MILCON program manager, 1st Special Operations Civil Engineer Squadron, 1st Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida from 1 June 2018 through 31 May 2019. During this period, Lieutenant Locke led a $415 million SOF MILCON program where he managed four construction projects and coordinated twelve design projects which added 4.2 million square feet of airfield pavement and 406,000 square feet of new facility space to Hurlburt Field. Additionally, as the lead programmer, Lieutenant Locke led a three member team that prepared 257 projects and posted $390 million in future infrastructure requirements, sustaining four wings, 970 facilities, and $10 billion in SOF assets. Furthermore, Lieutenant Locke authored a four year Base Comprehensive Asset Management Plan where he coordinated with twenty-five squadrons and validated 320 projects, enabling the base to receive $16 million in Facility Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization funding in fiscal year 2020. Finally, Lieutenant Locke was selected by the 1st Special Operations Mission Support Group Commander to plan and execute a five day bivouac exercise where he led 68 Airmen accomplishing 4,000 hours of training and executing 20 Mission Essential Task Lists in support of the DoD’s largest joint SOF irregular warfare training exercise.

First Lieutenant Jedrick Lyon
First Lieutenant Jedrick Lyon distinguished himself by the performance of outstanding leadership as Flight Commander, Cyberspace Operations Support, 352d Special Operations Support Squadron, 352d Special Operations Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this period, Lieutenant Lyon commanded seventy-seven personnel from seven Air Force Specialties that employed in three areas of responsibility. He oversaw equipment valued at over 130 million dollars delivering support to twelve hundred special operators. Additionally, he implemented a cross-utilization plan fusing three training programs which doubled the skillsets of thirty members. Furthermore, Lieutenant Lyon deployed twelve personnel for Special Operations Command-Europe’s first airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operation that sustained the sole data link delivering one-hundred and fifty hours of video to an exploitation cell. Finally, Lieutenant Lyon led a team of twenty for a Joint Chiefs of Staff directed exercise. His team established nine networks, three operations centers, and supported 185 personnel. Under his leadership, the flight won the command’s Information Dominance small team for a second consecutive year. The distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Lyon reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Staff Sergeant Aaron Matulac
Senior Airman Aaron Matulac distinguished himself as Air Terminal Function Supervisor, 27th Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019. During this period, Airman Matulac rigged and recovered 852 airdrop bundles weighing 468,000 pounds, facilitating 187 combat training sorties directly contributing to the certification of 135 aircrew personnel on airdrop resupply flights for special operation forces. Additionally, he was the lead movement specialist for the Joint Special Operations Forces Support Detachment-Kuwait at Camp Sparta, Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, where his expertise was evident in the movement of 700 tons of equipment across multiple theaters. Furthermore, his efforts expedited the deployment of two MQ-9s by moving 71 cargo tons and 115 warfighters to provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, resulting in 100 enemies killed in action. Airman Matulac’s superior leadership produced two squadron quarterly team awards, earned him the command’s Logistics Readiness Airman of the Year Award for 2018, and ignited the unit’s selection as the command’s Major General Warren R. Carter Daedalian Logistics Effectiveness Award winner for 2018. The distinctive accomplishments of Senior Airman Matulac reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Jefre Potterbaum
Captain Jefre Potterbaum distinguished himself as Director of Operations, 919th Special Operations Communications Squadron, Eglin Air Force Base, Auxiliary Field 3, Florida, from 1 June 2018 through 31 May 2019. During this period, Captain Potterbaum provided critical backfill serving as the Special Operations Communications Squadron Commander where he led nine work centers consisting of 97 personnel and $32 million dollars’ worth of equipment. He also served as the Company Grade Officers Council’s Vice President where he led council meetings and coordinated morale and fundraising events. His leadership capabilities led to a by name request to fill the Movements Officer in Command for SUPCEN-Q Special Operations Command Central’s busiest movements division. He managed a team that facilitated 1,532 intra-theater movement requests for 2,586 personnel and 19 million pounds of cargo. Additionally, he coordinated the movement of 2.1 million pounds of munitions in support of the Syrian Defense Force, providing assets that destroyed 165 hostile targets and killed more than 500 enemy combatants. Furthermore, Captain Potterbaum’s logistical expertise proved vital in overseeing the recovery of 10 million dollars’ worth of lost Marine Corps Special Forces assets. He then traveled to Africa to expedite the delivery of the equipment and accompanied the assets to their destination; his actions directly led to two successful capture/kill operations. Finally, his communication skills were key in the successful exfiltration of six Task Force members supporting 127E operations, during Tropical Cyclone Mekunu. This effort was the capstone that led to his team being coined by the Special Operations Command Central’s Commanding General and his award of Air Force Reserve Command’s Outstanding Logistics Readiness CGO of the Year. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Potterbaum reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.
Captain Daniel Sullivan

Captain Daniel Sullivan distinguished himself as Chief of Tactics and U-28 Weapons Officer, 27th Special Operations Group, between 1 June 2018 and 31 May 2019. As Expeditionary Operations Officer, Captain Sullivan leveraged his training and experience to lead 26 personnel in the accomplishment of 340 sorties and the support of 56 strikes, 36 direct action raids, and 227 enemy combatants eliminated. He flew 50 missions and supported 17 airstrike missions and two direct action raids that resulted in the removal of 32 high value individuals. He supervised a 15 percent expeditionary manning reduction with zero loss to combat capability. In garrison, he authored the squadron’s six month combat readiness training plan, established objectives and requirements for 434 sorties, and mobilized 27 aircrews across five forward operating bases in four areas of responsibility. Furthermore, he defined datalink simulation requirements, liaised with seven organizations, and is procuring $400,000 of equipment to establish an interface to join existing datalinks with injected simulations advancing the integration and training capability at Cannon Air Force Base. Finally, he revamped combat integration standards with six special operations teams that increased high value target prosecution by 220 percent over a 30 day period. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Sullivan reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Rylan Tanner

Captain Rylan Tanner distinguished himself as Assistant Director of Operations, 23d Special Tactics Squadron, 720th Special Tactics Group, 24th Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida from 1 June 2018, to 31 May 2019. During this period, Captain Tanner deployed to West Africa as the Operations Officer for an Army Special Forces Bravo team. Captain Tanner’s exceptional leadership enabled the successful command and control of multiple joint special operations maneuver elements, who conducted 138 train, advise, assist, and accompany missions with partner forces from six African countries. Following this deployment, Captain Tanner served as the squadron’s lead planner, and exercise director for Air Force Special Operations Command’s premier annual exercise EMERALD WARRIOR. Captain Tanner deftly synchronized six full mission profile events that increased the combat readiness for a combined 130 Special Tactics and Special Operations Surgical Team personnel, 56 aircrews across eight mission design series, and 15 inter-agency organizations. Additionally, Captain Tanner served as the acting Director of Operations for a 220-member combat operations squadron for five months, wherein he expertly coordinated, resourced, and managed risk for over 100 pre-deployment training events for five tactical troops. As the acting Director of Operations, Captain Tanner also led the squadron’s planning, resourcing, and response to United States Southern Command’s requests for support to establish air infrastructure across three South American countries. His efforts enabled the projection of United States aid to support contingency events in South America. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Tanner reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Staff Sergeant Lindsey Vaillancourt

Staff Sergeant Lindsey Vaillancourt distinguished herself as a Financial Analyst, 353d Special Operations Group Staff, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 June 2018 through 31 May 2019. During this period, Sergeant Vaillancourt led a team of 12 resource advisors across six squadrons in support of 1,015 personnel and 15 aircraft. She not only executed the group’s 23 million dollar annual budget, but she secured an additional $200,000 to safeguard aircraft during seven typhoon evacuations. Additionally, she coordinated funding to enable Operation Wild Boar, the underwater cave rescue of a 13 member soccer team in Thailand and recouped $375,000 or 100 percent of the mission costs from the Department of State. In addition to managing the budgets of 15 joint combined exercise training and Joint Chiefs of Staff exercises, Sergeant Vaillancourt deployed as paying agent and sole financial manager to a Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise, validating US command and control operations in the Korean peninsula. While supporting 270 personnel and managing a $500,000 budget, she filled a logistics support role where her efforts were lauded with an outstanding performer award. Finally, Sergeant Vaillancourt supported the Secretary of Defense priority stand-up of a CV-22 Osprey detachment at Yokota Air Base. She helped secure and allocate $4.7 million for critical requirements, while training permanent party resource advisors. As a direct result of her leadership, the four-person office won Air Force Special Operation Command, United States Special Operation Command and Under Secretary of Defense Comptroller Financial Analysis Team of 2018. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Vaillancourt reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.
CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE LANCE P. SIJAN UNITED STATES AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP AWARD FOR 2017 TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL MARTIN J. O’BRIEN

Lieutenant Colonel Martin J. O’Brien distinguished himself as Commander, 4th Special Operations Squadron, 1st Special Operations Wing Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. During this period, Colonel O’Brien commanded 259 highly skilled and experienced aviators, charged with effective training and employment of the $3.4 billion AC-130U program. He commanded Air Force Special Operations Commands largest flying squadron and expertly led their $76 million flying program, all while earning Accident Free and Distinguished Aircrew Safety awards. Colonel O’Brien’s exceptional leadership and vision ensured the current and future success of the AC-130U program and its Airmen by instilling resiliency projects to address the squadron’s high ops tempo and reinforce Special Operations Command’s initiatives. The distinctive accomplishments of Colonel O’Brien reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE LANCE P. SIJAN UNITED STATES AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP AWARD FOR 2018 TO FIRST LIEUTENANT JASON A. QUADROS

First Lieutenant Jason A. Quadros distinguished himself as Officer in charge Air Force Special Operations Command Centralized Repair Facility, 1st Special Operations Maintenance Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2017 to 3 Jun 2018. Lieutenant Quadros led over 200 personnel in the maintenance repair cycle of T-56 engines, propellers, unique avionics and electronic warfare components, and the performance of Isochronal inspections for all Special Operations Command C-130 platforms. While deployed in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, Lieutenant Quadros coordinated the generation of 460 sorties, 2.4 million pounds of cargo, and 26 airdrops. He launched two higher headquarters missions providing aerial refuel for eight helicopters resulting in two high value targets captured and over 600 sensitive items recovered. The distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Quadros reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.
FOREWORD

There have been many after action reports and justifiable critiques of the command and control (C2) arrangements during the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). All those thoughtful works are valid and are important to understand for future operations. However, as with any assessment of actions taken in an emerging combat environment one must ensure the questioning is executed with complete objectivity and doesn’t solely focus on an evaluation of “what differed from doctrine.” Rather, analysis must be expanded to consider: should the decision have been to use conventional, and strictly doctrinal constructs, or was it advisable to adjust parameters and employ options which were better suited to the execution of operations in the dynamic environment in which forces were engaged?

This was a SOF and airpower war, an unconventional war that was a nonlinear war—one in which forces were executing in a fluid and dynamic battlespace, without the traditional planning timelines, or lines of control that would normally separate forces. In the words of Col Pat Pihana of Task Force Dagger, who deployed forward with his command, the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, “We weren’t trying to fit SOF under a conventional/doctrinally correct C2 structure; we were trying to scale and match a conventional C2 structure and all the associated components to a SOF fight. The JSOTF/JSOAC spent a significant amount of resources trying to reverse engineer much of what we knew about traditional relationships and processes while the bullets were flying. This was, I believe, our 5-meter target throughout the war.”

There would be no straight lines of advance to march in linear fashion across a nation, maneuvering to take the “traditional” objective of the nation’s capital to expedite the capitulation of a government. Rather it was a war for the people, fought within the construct given us of dealing with inter- and intra-tribal relations…and conflicts. It was impacted by channelized mountain terrain, shifting alliances, and continuous adjustments for newly identified, and oftentimes, competing indigenous leaders. More importantly, it was fought with the imperative that prioritization, timing, and identification of objectives were to be made by those tribal leaders—predominantly the Northern Alliance, but also other
identified regional/geographic/tribal elders—within that country, and with simultaneity against a myriad of objectives and competing key targets. And it was prosecuted by some of the most amazing men and women with whom I have ever had the honor of serving.

Notwithstanding those dynamics, it is imperative that we capture lessons, and, more importantly, that we apply lessons learned to operational art. Further, we must also consider both those learned lessons and resultant adjusted employment constructs when determining if it is necessary to establish a new “point of departure” for future operations. The analyses and adaptation of observed and learned lessons is critical to our continued studies and warfighting evolution. On the battlefields and in the wars of the past 19 years, the improvements to C2 coordination and synchronization have served us well, as AFSOC continues to play a pivotal role in hybrid warfare, in which SOF is routinely leading the fight, fighting alongside conventional forces and certainly in support of, or supported by, the Combined Forces Air Component Command employing the [to quote from Col Philip S. Meilinger, USAF (Ret)] “ubiquitous nature” of airpower.

As a nation, we were united to overcome every challenge thrown at us in those days of first response. Ironically, with the exception of 20th SOS Pave Lows conducting search and recovery operations in New York and at the Pentagon, the 16th SOW was grounded immediately after the attacks, just like most of America. It would be the end of that week before we got back in the air to resume training flights—arguably “mission preparation” flights. Our nation was definitely behind us—as highlighted in probably no better way than by events at a Friday night football game, when play stopped and all present

“We will not tire, we will not falter and we will not fail...”

--President Bush, 20 September 2001

Those words, better than any other, capture our nation’s resolve after 9/11 and how we as a nation and our nation’s armed forces united to overcome every challenge thrown at us in those days of first response.
listened intently to the sound of AC-130 Gunships pounding targets on the Eglin Range complex—and when the game announcer said, “Hear that folks, that’s AFSOC getting ready to strike back,” the entire stadium spontaneously erupted in a tremendous cheer!

As President Bush delivered his words to America on 20 September, I was in an MC-130 deploying east to the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR). Here are my recollections, with references to other observations from key players—all of which should be read together to fully appreciate the success of the opening days of OEF. This essay is a “supporting/supported essay” for similar recollections and justifiable critique by Col Paul Harmon on the SOLE and its relations with the JSOAC and Combined Force Air Component commander’s (CFACC) staff in the air operations center (CAOC) in Saudi Arabia.

In the hours and days immediately following the attack on America, we spent a lot of time looking at assumptions and making initial mission preparations—one of those assumptions was that we would fall underneath an established force structure, just as we had during numerous quarterly exercises. That assumption proved to be partially correct, as the 16th SOW commander deployed with a force in support of Task Force Sword, but I, as the operations group commander, was to lead another force in the north and south, with an initial assumption was that we would fall underneath an established and making initial mission preparations—one of those on America, we spent a lot of time looking at assumptions and building a force structure, just as we had during numerous quarterly exercises. That assumption proved to be partially correct, as the 16th SOW commander deployed with a force in support of Task Force Sword, but I, as the operations group commander, was to lead another force in the north and south, with an initial mission of personnel recovery (PR). Our follow-on mission was to evolve into Task Force Dagger.

We always experienced exceptional support from HQ AFSOC, but for this mission, perhaps even more so than normal, everybody wanted to do whatever they could to support the strike back against the enemies that had hit America. To truly appreciate the support we received from COMAFSOC Lt Gen Bailey, his deputy, Maj Gen Rich Comer, and the entire AFSOC staff, I recommend reading General Comer’s reflections penned in September 2011 for Defense Media Network, and titled AFSOC Begins a Long War—Special Operations Forces and Operation Enduring Freedom. I will include a couple of my own vignettes into this work.

In those first couple of days anything and everything we could’ve asked for was offered to us as we built our deployment construct upon parameters from AFSOC guidance, Special Operations Command, Central (SOCCENT) intent, and an “on-the-shelf” plan. Using that plan as a point of departure, we were able to craft the proposed force structure to our initial plans. Our initial force structure would be minus some key assets we diplomatically could not get for a while, and, of course we continued to evolve.

With specific tasking unknown, we pooled our experience, and built a staff from the 16th OSS, and wing and group agencies, while having to go a little lean, because we were pushing out force packages to multiple locations. Also, there was an expectation, since proven, that we would need to have forces—staff, aviators, maintainers, enablers—available for future rotations into the fight.

I left the Hurlburt/Eglin area on Thursday night, 20 September, and arrived at NAS Rota, Spain on the 21st. Those deploying MC-130Es with whom I had flown continued south. On the 23rd Lt Col Mike Kingsley, 20th SOS commander, with his MH-53s and Lt Col Lloyd Moon, 8th SOS commander and his MC-130Es landed at Masirah Island, Oman and began setting up operations.

As Colonel Moon was standing on the ramp at Masirah, his thoughts bounced across two decades of time. Looking north, he was thinking about the significance of the moment as an MC-130E squadron commander. In his words, “All I could think was: we’re back and we’re ready this time—this time Team SOF is going to kick your ass!” His reflections continued as he wondered who else realized that some 21 years prior, many of these same MC-130E aircraft had operated from Masirah for Operation Eagle Claw in Iran. He asked himself “What had changed since then?” and his own experiences of two decades in Air Force special operations led him to answer his own question. Sure, he had personally seen technological advances and resultant significant improvements in aircraft systems over those years. But of greatest significance was SOF being organized, trained, and equipped for the fight before them, built upon the bedrock of years of joint/combined training which cemented strong relationships and resting on a foundation of SOF C2 that would bear the fruit of success for SOF airpower. The reason USSOAC and AFSOC had been created was about to be tested…and resoundingly proven sound.

On that same day, 4,000 miles northwest of Masirah, I left Rota and arrived at Incirlik Air Base where I spent 11 days waiting on country clearance to Uzbekistan before departing on the 4th of October.

During those 11 days I was granted unlimited access to secure communications and current updates from the intelligence organizations at Incirlik. I also spent time discussing current threats and insights with the resident OSI detachment. A significant amount of my secure calls were back to Hurlburt and HQ AFSOC, while also exchanging information and receiving updates from Colonel Harmon working in the SOLE. Paul and I had great relations from our time as commanders at RAF Mildenhall, and when I had less than good communications with Masirah, it was Paul who synchronized and coordinated our on-going activities.
Finally, country clearance was received, and I arrived at Karshi-Kanabad “K2” Airbase, Uzbekistan, on 4 October. SOCCENT had designated me the JSOTF commander and JOSAC commander for the initial stages of OEF (which, rather conservatively, had been estimated as 30 days). For the initial stage, SOF’s primary role was to establish a PR capability north and south of the Hindu Kush mountains.

Both bases were required because of the Hindu Kush’s imposing terrain that, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, has a peak at 24,580 feet, while near Kabul the average heights are between 11,500 to 13,100 feet. From Kabul the terrain very gradually diminishes in height as the Kush extends further south and west.

My stay at K2 (October 4 to 16 January 2002), from which the JOSAC and Task Force Dagger would operate, had not been approved by the President of Uzbekistan when we left CONUS in September. Our use of K2 was, in part, the result of concerted effort and reliance on on-scene expertise from members of the 6th SOS. Those actions deserve credit and evaluation.

Two members of the 6th SOS—then Captain Tim Childress and MSgt Dan Coday, who were already present for language/cultural immersion, provided invaluable insights on the host-nation geo-political standing, force structure, proposed bed down locations, and leadership. And Captain Billy MacMillan followed that initial “eyes-on” by assisting me immeasurably with invaluable language-aided air base and host nation liaison.

Almost presciently, SOCCENT and AFSOC had already established a relationship with the Uzbek Air Force commander and key members of his staff, and had even hosted Secure facility at K2 surrounded by mud.

US Central Command (USCENTCOM). They also advised the ambassador on the size and capabilities of the proposed JSOTF that he was negotiating with the government of Uzbekistan to bed down and also interface with the US Transportation Command Tanker/Airlift Control Center (TACC) during the final stages of the basing agreement. When our forward operating base was narrowed down to K2, they later traveled there to meet with the base leadership. At K2, they finalized the agreement, and then received the SOCCENT ADVON team… duty which included being the communication interface between the air traffic controller (who only spoke Russian) and our inbound MC-130P.

One of those early liaison issues worked at K2 with Uzbek Air Force and host-nation government agencies was deconfliction of cross-border operations. We had to work through an initially-proposed restriction that mission ingress/egress and refueling orbits remain the same every night. Through concerted efforts, we got this restriction removed as it was incompatible with our requirements for mission operational security and force protection and constrained our ability to overcome weather variables.

With limits placed on the “footprint” we were allocated at K2, anchored on the need that maintenance be in hangar space, and with relatively little hard surface not required to remain either a taxiway, revetment, or roadway, the solution for a JSOTF headquarters was unique. We cobbled together, end-to-end, a number of metal-frame-supported tents, and planted this impromptu structure in the dirt, between taxiway and revetments. Of course, as the winter rains and snow fell, that dirt very quickly became mud, with any drained liquid constantly replenished by runoff water.

Working coordination in the Snake sometimes felt like living in a long tunnel...or perhaps this is what submariners experience on every cruise. You could not get anywhere without...
traversing multiple work areas—there were no shortcuts...just pass through and agile dodging of personnel and workspaces. But the synergy of everyone on the staff working under one "roof" was greatly enhanced by this unique adaptation of on-hand equipment. Eventually, with the arrival of more tents, the various flying units were able to carve out individual work and mission briefing space.

Under the JSOTF/JSOAC, I had “JSOAC-North” commanded by LTC John Buss, commander 2nd Battalion, 160th SOAR, and “JSOAC-South” commanded by Lt Col Mike Kingsley, commander 20th SOS. While I was still working to build up a force at K2, Colonel Kingsley and Colonel Moon had further deployed their forces from Masirah to Jacobabad in Pakistan. They accomplished closure of forces on 7 October 2001, just hours before the air campaign was to begin.

JSOAC-South stood alert for the first and ensuing nights of the air campaign for CSAR coverage for the south with MC-130E and MH-53 aircraft and crews. The repositioning of the MC-130E and MH-53 force to the north occurred without airlift support, and they operated in true SOF fashion at Jacobabad. There, they lived and worked out of a single hangar—redefining, or perhaps placing an exclamation point, on the term “bare-base force.” Further highlighting the independent nature of SOF since the days of Air Commandos operating under Orde Wingate in WWII, they overcame the total lack of airlift support, and, although it would take over 30 days for the MC-130Es to complete self-repositioning of maintenance and support gear from Masirah, Oman, to Jacobabad, Pakistan, they did it on their own, living up to our core identity of ANY TIME, ANY PLACE.

Meanwhile, at K2 we were to lose a day available to the 160th SOAR for helicopter build-up, maintenance check flights, and mission prep when the directed force-flow had only four C-17s arrive on the first day after receiving country clearance. Those initial C-17s were loaded with Theater Airlift Control Element (TALCE) expandable-shelters, tents, vehicles, and other TALCE equipment. Arguably, that capability needed to be in place to receive our required combat power and relieve the logjam of personnel and equipment which was backed-up from K2 all the way to America. But, the delay cost us time and mission capability. However, tireless efforts and incredible tenacity of the 160th SOAR resulted in heavily armed MH-60s being available to provide the CFACC a nascent combat search and rescue (CSAR) capability from the north, until the MH-47Es were certified mission ready.

In those chaotic first days at K2, I was incredibly grateful we had resident medical capability within AFSOC...and an established relationship that augmented our deployment with additional forces. The 16th SOW pushed out three SOFMEs (Special Operations Forces Medical Elements), two in K2 and one in Jacobabad. Because we didn’t then have any surgical teams in the command, we deployed with a conventional forward surgical team (which had one-each general surgeon, orthopedic surgeon, ER doctor, operating room nurse and anesthetist). We also deployed with a conventional CCATT, (Critical Care Air Transport Team) which had one-each critical care doctor, critical care nurse, and respiratory technician. When an accident occurred with a soldier, crushed between a truck and pintle hitch on a trailer, it was this medical team that kept him alive and medevaced him out.

Later, when we received battlefield casualties at K2, this combined medical team was again delivering life-saving care. I would also note that part of that “life-saving care” was resident in the chaplains who deployed to all our operating locations.

Also, early-on in our establishment of K2 as a base of operations, I reached-back to, and received incredible support in the form of the AFSC Civil Engineer, Colonel Rich Parker. He briefly joined us at K2, drew upon his expertise and REDHORSE experience, and provided recommendations that allowed us to overcome many obstacles.

By 8 October, after herculean efforts by maintainers and logisticians in both locations, and enabled by “organic” Weather, Intel, and Comms—which would receive exponential expansion when the Army’s signal battalions flowed in—and led by an exceptionally well trained and tested joint combat force, we had a full-up CSAR capability in the JSOTF. JSOAC-North joined JSOAC-South in declaring “fully mission ready” with both 60s and 47Es. The CFACC was prosecuting the air campaign, but other missions were already in the works. The specifics of these “other missions” are described as follows in Dwight Zimmerman’s Operation Enduring Freedom: The First 49 Days - Part 4: “21st Century Horse Soldiers – Special Operations Forces and Operation Enduring Freedom.”

The original plan [for OEF], proposed in the immediate wake of the 9/11 attacks, called for a conventional force invasion of Afghanistan with 60,000 troops. In his briefing to President George W. Bush and then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, General Tommy Franks … told them that it would take six months to launch the campaign. Rumsfeld angrily rejected this plan, saying, “I want men on the ground now!” The following day Rumsfeld had a new plan on his desk, one using teams of Special Forces operators...as the lead ground element. They would both advise Northern
Alliance warlords who had been fighting the Taliban for six years and assist them with logistical support and coordinated American air strikes...the Special Forces teams would have the primary role at the start of the operation. This second plan was quickly approved. On September 18, in the White House Cabinet room, Bush said, “The war starts today.” The air campaign against the Taliban, which included bombing military targets and airdrops of humanitarian supplies for the civilian population, began 19 days later, on Oct 7.

Colonel John Mulholland, 5th Special Forces Group commander, arrived at K2 on 10 October. Having just been informed by SOCCENT commander, RADM Bert Calland, that insertion of ground elements into Afghanistan was on an accelerated timeline and was to be the main effort, and that Colonel Mulholland would take command of the JSOTF, we executed a “change of command” at the evening battle staff update meeting. As a result of this new command structure, I became deputy commander, Task Force Dagger, and overall JSOAC Commander—with the exception of forces dedicated to TF Sword, as fully described by Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp in Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, [hereinafter “WoC”].

The role as deputy commander took priority over many issues during the time Colonel Mulholland moved forward to Kabul. As a result of our command structure, I was required to receive morning and evening battle staff updates, attend the nightly USCENTCOM VTCs, work task force issues with multiple entities, receive and approve mission pre-employment brief-backs from ODAs prior to their deployment into Afghanistan, and address emergent issues associated with forces in combat. I benefited greatly from and relied on the JSOAC-N and S commanders, and at K2, benefited from having Lt Col Scott Schafer’s leadership as the JSOAC/J3. Scott’s rotary-wing background and ability to patiently synchronize diverse opinion was invaluable in merging the weather, mission, maintenance, battle management (crew rest) requirements of Army and Air Force aviators, and Special Tactics (ST) operators. I also benefited greatly from calls with Maj Gen Comer, and routine updates with the Director of Staff, Col Dennis Barnett. Colonel Barnett let me “think out loud,” while also asking probing questions such as the intriguing, “have you been officially appointed by AFSOC as the JSOAC commander and granted waiver authority commensurate with that appointment?” A question which highlighted that my “assumptions” in the fog and friction of war definitely needed to be confirmed as “facts,” and which demonstrated the value of having a mentor who had served as the JSOAC commander during multiple rotations to San Vito AB, Italy, in the 1990s.

The Northern Alliance needed to trust the forces with whom the US proposed to partner them, and the training, qualifications, reputation and courage of United States special operations forces, and predominately the reputation of US Army Green Berets, was how we “got our foot in the door.” After making this inroad, it was the continuously adapted and accelerated pounding by air power that really made this team work together.

Perhaps the most critical principle associated with partnering with indigenous forces in an unconventional war is that those indigenous partner forces have got to see value associated with your continued association with them. Therefore, the influence that you’re able to wield is also associated with what you bring to the fight. In Afghanistan, in addition to the synchronization of disparate forces, and battlefield resupply, what America brought to the fight was relentless air power.

It is somewhat of an academic discussion to try to figure out if SOF was the “supported” or “supporting” command and those discussions remain relevant when asking that same question of air—however, the answer is “YES” depending on the time in the fight and the time in the mission. When, upon the advice and recommendation of Colonel Pihana, we obtained Colonel Mulholland’s approval to integrate ST operators into his A-Teams, we did so because that is what the Northern Alliance wanted. The fact that it was complementary to what the CFACC needed for positive target identification (PID) was synergy and adaptation on the fly—both the Northern Alliance and CFACC got what they wanted. Eventually, both Combat Controllers and JTACs would be synchronizing and employing the effects of combat air power across the battlespace. However, the question carries with it an imperative for a “Lesson Learned,” and the analysis of supporting/supported command relations by SOJFCOM will be addressed later in this work.

On 12 October, Colonel Mulholland let LTC Buss know that an execution order was impending for the infiltration of his ODAs into Afghanistan by SOAR helicopters.

On 16 October, nine days after the air campaign began, TF Dagger forces—MH-60s supported by Lt Col Kivi’s MC-130Ps, successfully inserted a pilot team with a few SF and “others.” For infiltration route deconfliction, Afghanistan had been overlaid with a “grid system,” and the ingress/egress flight paths and ODA locations became No-Fire-Areas. More analyses of this construct by SOJFCOM later in this work.

Fully understanding the imperative of “boots on the ground,” two MH-47Es flew a full infiltration mission on 17 October, but had to weather abort in the Afghanistan mountains just short of the LZ. The next night, we had to weather cancel prior to takeoff due to a severe sandstorm and low ceilings; an occasion upon which, despite emphasis at the highest levels to “GET additional forces into Afghanistan,” Colonel Mulholland fully supported my and LTC Buss’s recommendations that we do not launch. His acceptance of our professional recommendations immediately sealed that bond of trust which would serve us well on this battlefield, and others in the years to come.

On 19 October a flight of two MH-47E’s inserted an ODA into one LZ and a single MH-47E inserted another ODA into a different LZ (one ODA with Fahim Kahn and one to Dostum). The mission summary of these inserts highlights the tremendous challenges of flying in the Hindu Kush, where the planned insertion route was routinely modified after aircraft encountered the ever-present adverse weather conditions for which Afghanistan is known. It also highlights the trust and
teamwork that had already been established between 2nd Battalion and the 9th SOS. This night was fully chronicled in gripping detail in WoC. For the purposes of this work, it also identifies a challenge we presented the SOLE, when premission, deconflicted routes were altered due to operational constraints, and real-time updates were not available to provide to the SOLE and CFACC staff.

On that same night, 19 October, other 16th SOW operators assigned to Task Force Sword were executing airfield seizure operations with the 75th Ranger Regiment on Objective Rhino.

When we started employing 9th SOS and 160th SOAR assets from K2 and 20th SOS and 8th SOS assets from Jacobabad to infiltrate the ODAs, Combat Controllers, and TACPs into Afghanistan, there were some in the CAOC who expressed concern that “their CSAR assets” were being used for a different mission set. In addition to citing the orders of SECDEF and the USCENTCOM commander to “Get Boots on the Ground,” we also patiently worked to emphasize our position at the JSOAC that when you’re operating over an area that is roughly analogous to the size of the entire state of Texas or the combined size of the states of Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama…and toss in eastern Tennessee for good measure, being in-country with recovery assets would significantly decrease response time, if and when it were to be required. And when not required for infiltration missions, we always had assets on CSAR alert.

Infiltrations of augmented ODAs and ODBs would continue for the next month and a half and would be conducted by both JSOAC-North MH-60s and 47s and JSOAC-South MH-53s. On the night of 2 November, events would unfold that have since become legendary and are intensely described in the 2013 Air Commando Journal, article, “Rescue of Knife 03,” when the crew of Knife 03 was rescued by their wingman, after they launched to exfil a critically ill soldier. The courage and airmanship demonstrated by all involved that night—Knife flight of MH-53s and Chain flight of MC-130Es—deserves a “full read.”

As a Lesson Learned by the JSOAC, the CAOC was better equipped to C2 a CSAR if additional assets (CAP/CAS/Refueling/AWACS) and communications are required. I would recommend the CAOC take CSAR, if something beyond “SOF self-PR” is required. Of note, on that night having Sandy 01 overhead to relay comms with Jaguar 03 (Knife 03 CCT) while 04 was battling weather to air refuel was critical to the successful mission outcome. The CFACC also pushed a Predator overhead for additional situational awareness had other assets been required.

A significant number of the missions flown by JSOAC-South in November were associated with the movement and resupply of men and material to both Hamid Karzai and the Dagger forces partnered with him on a push to Kandahar. An impressive man, few realized he would later become President of Afghanistan.

On 5 December, there was another testament to courage in the face of extreme adversity. For the first time JSOAC-South forces flew daytime low-level missions, including helicopter refueling, over Afghanistan…with an audacious sprint across hostile Kandahar city, en route to recover US and Afghan forces injured by friendly fire. Regrettably their heroic actions could not alter the tragic loss of three Green Berets.

It is almost as if SECDEF Rumsfeld had foreknowledge of that event, when on 2 December he had conveyed [paraphrased] guidance that “…we may lose some…it is possible…if and when it happens, we don’t pull back, WE STRIKE BACK…I expect you to have a plan in place.”

Within the lexicon of missions flown were airland missions into Bagram by JSOAC-S MC-130Es, and, when not flying Dagger missions, or providing CSAR alert, JSOAC-S fixed and rotary-wing assets conducted missions in support of TF Sword.

US Army Colonel Mike Findlay and his team at SOCJFCOM, many of whom deployed into K2 to assist the battle staff, did an outstanding job of capturing lessons learned from the integration of SOF and air power in their “Fires and Maneuver—Challenges on the noncontiguous battlefield” analysis in the Joint Center for Lessons Learned Quarterly Bulletin, Volume V, 2 March 2003.

Because I will only touch on a few points they make, I highly recommend that entire publication be reviewed. Their methodology of listing “key challenges” and the “field solutions” employed to overcome the challenges highlight two significant take-aways. First, is that SOF continually evolved to overcome the challenges they faced in combat, and the SOLE worked coordination with the CFACC staff to develop set procedures based on these battlefield imperatives. The second take-away is that some [but not all] of those challenges might never have risen had task organization and doctrinal command and control, with associated liaison nodes, been established prior to ground combat. It should also be evident that every point highlighted below was an issue/action that required support from the SOLE and resolution within the CAOC.

The following paragraphs are quoted extracts from the JCLL Bulletin:

During the first months of operations in Afghanistan, there was very little battlespace geometry, no designated JSOAs or ground AOs, only the use of fire support coordinating measures (FSCMs) such as no-fire-areas (NFAs), restricted-fire-areas (RFAs), and later killboxes. By definition, an FSCM is not a “control” measure; it is a coordinating measure for
expediting or restricting fires support. Thus, one could argue that the CFACC was the supported commander throughout Afghanistan based on no established ground AO or JSOA.

The CFACC was indeed responsible for conducting interdiction and strategic attack throughout Afghanistan, and very likely (especially early in the war) viewed SOF (and the Northern Alliance) as key “sensors” on the ground supporting CFACC fires. This perception and use of SOF as an important human sensor has longstanding precedent; SOF and the Air Force have developed numerous tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) to enhance these types of “sensor-to-shooter” operations.

However, in Afghanistan, the role for SOF was very different. SOF (with their Northern Alliance partners) was a maneuver force requiring joint fire support, just like any other friendly conventional ground force.

Thus a key challenge was, absent a designated area of operations, how fires and fire support would support SOF as a maneuver force.

In the fall of 2001, many saw JSOTF-North as a “de facto” ground commander conducting maneuver and requiring fire support. In fact, several documents specified the special operations component as the “main” effort during some of the early phases. However, this designation as the “main” effort speaks to priority, and is not a command relationship as is the designation as a “supported commander.” The documents never directed when or where the JSOTF was the supported commander relative to other components of the joint force (specifically the CFACC). This had significant implications for the JSOTF’s relationship with the CFACC. Additionally, despite being a “de facto” ground commander, the JSOTF Commander may not have known the extent of his arguable authority to “designate the target priority, effects, and timing of fires” within his operational area. And, bottom line – nothing in terms of orders or directives expressly granted that authority; JSOTF North had neither a designated AO nor was it designated a “supported commander.”

As the war progressed, the CFACC and SOF quickly developed the GDI concept [ground-directed interdiction (GDI)] in addition to normal CAS. The CFACC supported SOF requirements for interdiction of enemy forces that SOF could see and provide mensurated targeting data, but with whom they were not yet in direct contact. In this concept, the CFACC generated interdiction and CAS sorties for Afghanistan without designating specific targets.

The aircraft then flew to the area, and received their targets as ground teams found and reported enemy forces. Ground elements were able to direct a great number of strike platforms, including many nontraditional platforms such as B-52s. The JSOTF and the CFACC used killbox techniques to reduce possibilities of fratricide with this GDI. The JSOTF also established a more robust ASOC-like capability similar to that of an Army corps ASOC.

…GDI was beneficial and successful for two principal reasons: most targets at this point were moving forces, not stationary facilities; and positive identification (PID) was often required in accordance with USCENTCOM rules of engagement.

With so many teams in the field, limited access to resupply, limited resupply assets, and constrained by the requirement for low-level missions to be conducted during the hours of darkness, we needed reinforcements. I asked for and received support from the adjacent combatant command, USEUCOM. Specifically, Commander SOCEUR, US Army SF BG Les Fuller supported our request that MC-130H Combat Talons from the 7th SOS, 352d SOG, deploy to Incirlik, Turkey—in the USEUCOM AOR—and conduct long-range resupply missions.

During that fall of 2001, crews from the 7th, 15th SOS, and Kirtland’s 550th SOS all deployed to Incirlik and executed 130 combat sorties, flying 14-hour missions totaling 1,723 combat hours, and delivering 900 tons of supplies to the widely dispersed forces of Task Force Dagger. These long-range missions to fixed locations resembled more traditional SOF tasking and timing, but still increased the burden for overall mission deconfliction, scheduling of air refueling assets and tracks, and inclusion in the Air Tasking Order; adding another coordination node with whom the SOLE had to deal.

Due to the resupply requirements and onset of winter weather, and as the single JSOAC able to move assigned forces through the AOR, I made the decision to swap the JSOAC-North MC-130Ps at K2 with the JSOAC-South MC-130Es at Jacobabad to increase our options with “zero/zero” (ceiling/visibility) airdrops. While it was, I believe, a prudent decision on employment of finite resources, it was not enthusiastically supported by either the 9th SOS or the 160th SOAR, who had truly bonded into a cohesive unit, based on trust and proven mission execution. And, of course, the Knife rescue mission had forged that same bond of trust between the 20th SOS and 8th SOS crews.

Efforts to get gunships into K2 finally succeeded late in November of 2001. While the 4th SOS U-models had been attached to TF Sword since the beginning of combat operations, the government of Uzbekistan had been reluctant to advertise their support to combat operations by having gunships parked on the ramp, and flying missions into Afghanistan. By late November, just as the moon was getting full, the 16th SOS arrived with AC-130Hs, and immediately commenced flying combat missions.

One of the dynamics associated with gunship employment, and which plagued us when missions were flown at aircraft service ceiling, but relatively close to the imposing terrain of the Hindu Kush, was moon illumination “restrictions.” However, when CIA Operations Officer, Johnny Michael “Mike” Spann was killed in the fortress of Qali-Jangi at Mazar-e Sharif, on 25 November 2001, the gunships launched. Again, because it is far better covered in the Summer 2014 Air Commando Journal
As more ground forces entered Afghanistan, we did develop sharing of “excess CAS” with other than SOF units. We maintained the integrity of our maintenance programs, and did not unduly surge assets, but if a gunship and crew were not required for a SOF mission (which always had priority), they would remain OPCON to the JSOAC, but would execute a TACON mission under CFACC control. In communications between the JSOAC the CAOC and, I believe, within SOLE-CAOC discussion, the difference between OPCON and TACON was an on-going “refresher course.” I know Col Kenny “Redman” Poole was brilliant at educating and “running interference” for us on a number of issues, as he worked to inform the AFSOC/DO—in the middle of all he had on his task-lists—for help. The 16th had found a model of civilian boots they believed would provide better protection from the cold, and almost before I could get the request in, Col Jim Connors had approved the request and the non-standard procurement, all while in the midst of a worldwide fight. No-nonsense leadership at its finest.

One other issue associated with gunship employment was the extreme cold temperature in the vicinity and flying in an unpressurized H-model, which proved to be a huge detriment to the crews during combat operations. Winter flying in Afghanistan is brutal by any measure. While no one ever aborted a mission, I asked the AFSOC/DO—in the middle of all he had on his task-lists—for help. The 16th had found a model of civilian boots they believed would provide better protection from the cold, and almost before I could get the request in, Col Jim Connors had approved the request and the non-standard procurement, all while in the midst of a worldwide fight. No-nonsense leadership at its finest.

As the situation on the ground continued to change, so too did competing mission priorities and requirements. Taskings to identify and deconflict suitable drop zones (DZs) to receive food bundles from high-altitude humanitarian assistance (HA) drops became a nightly requirement. Actions associated with those DZs, and eventually the certification of landing zones for ariland missions by non-SOF aircraft, to include coalition partners, required Colonel Pihan to apportion our limited Combat Controllers to a myriad of missions. Our relations with the DIRMOBFOR (Director, Mobility Forces) at the CAOC remained solid, but deconfliction of those drops added another dynamic to our mission planning and we couldn’t always give everybody everything they wanted on their timeline. And, since the enemy always “gets a vote” in any plan, emergent combat or movement of our in-country forces sometimes meant that “drop results” were unable to be confirmed.

One final footnote is to recommend the review of the paper written by then-Major Denis Doty, C2 of SOF for 21st Century Contingency Operations. Denis was a member of the JSOAC and had first-hand knowledge of the challenges when he wrote his “compare and contrast” paper within one year of his JSOAC experience…unlike this work, which is slightly influenced by the 18-plus-year gap between experiencing and writing.

It would be naïve for me to conclude this brief narrative by observing that the American Embassy was re-opened on 17 December 2001, with Colonel John Mulholland being one of the invited guests and participants to witness the American flag once again flying on a long-abandoned flagpole within its walls. That re-opening heralded neither a cease in operations, nor cessation of combat. I was to remain at Task Force Dagger for another month before being required to redeploy in order to honor the then-required USAF 120-day rotation policy.

During my last month there, combat missions continued to be flown, Battlefield Airmen continued to prosecute missions and targets, all of our incredible enablers continued to tirelessly support the on-going mission, and theater C2 continued to evolve. Lessons continued to be “observed,” and documented, to hopefully, become later “learned.” And over the course of these last 19 years, these same activities are still occurring, and still being prosecuted by incredible professionals.

My key take-aways are three…and, over the ensuing almost two decades that AFSOC has been engaged in continuous combat, have become inculcated into operations. First, establish excellent command relations with superior and subordinate commanders as early as possible. Second, retain a single JSOAC and embrace Air’s “centralized control/decentralized execution” core principle. Third, ensure seamless integration with the SOLE and into the CFACC staff in the CAOC structure to fully exploit the “ubiquitous nature” of airpower.

For those who participated in the myriad of missions, operations, and exploits which I didn’t cover in this brief overview, my regrets for being unable to afford them and you the recognition so well deserved. I would, however, invite you to pen an article from your own perspectives—one which I would look forward to reading in the ACJ.

About the Author: Lt Gen Frank Kisner was the Joint Special Operations Air Component commander during the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom. During his 33 year career, General Kisner held multiple command and staff positions within our joint special operations community. Most notably, he was the commanding general for Special Operations Command, Europe and later, the first commander of the NATO Special Operations Headquarters. General Kisner is a member of the Air Commando Hall of Fame, Class of 2013.
First Mission of AFSOC’s Standing SOLE

By Paul Harmon, Col, USAF (Ret)

Over my thirty year career as an Air Force officer, one of the most satisfying opportunities I was given was to make General Comer’s vision a reality—to create and lead the AFSOC’s “standing SOLE” or Special Operations Liaison Element in July 2001.

So what is a SOLE? It is a liaison team that works for Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) commander within a US Air Operations Center (AOC). The SOLE’s job is to coordinate the TSOC’s operational plans and missions with the Air Component Commander’s staff inside the AOC. The designated Air Component Commander (usually a 3-star Air Force officer) has operational control (OPCON) authorities and responsibilities over US and coalition air forces and airspace and he is the Combined Force Air Component Commander or CFACC and his domain is the combined AOC or CAOC. Anything and everything that flies within the combat theater is coordinated there.

To be clear, I was neither the first, nor the last, officer to work as a SOF liaison in an AOC. Many others served in this important role during combat operations. The SOLE pioneers, like Lt Col Randy Durham and Col Ken Poole, shared their experiences and gave me critical advice and mentorship which helped immensely during my three tours as the deputy and then Director of the SOLE in the US Central Command CAOC.

When I arrived at Hurlburt Field in June 2001, I reported in to Colonel Connors, my boss and AFSOC Director of Operations, and then went up to see General Comer, where he outlined his vision for the AFSOC “standing SOLE.” In 2000, the Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF), General Michael Ryan, announced that going forward AOCs would be identified as a weapon system—meaning, the people who worked in the AOC needed to be trained and qualified, same as a pilot, logistician, or aircraft crew chief. The Chief of Staff wanted trained professionals, top to bottom, running an air war. The Command and Control Training and Innovation Group (C2TIG) at Hurlburt, now the 505th Command and Control Wing, was designated as the formal training unit for officers and enlisted members who would be going to work in an AOC. As an Airman, General Comer wanted to make sure we had a group of highly trained Air Commandos to
work alongside our fighter and bomber teammates in order to access all forms of air power—strike, mobility, intelligence, reconnaissance, logistics, space, etc.—for our special operation forces in the air and on the ground. On the 1st of July, after moving 15 manpower positions from across the command, General Comer formally established the staff office, AFSOC/DOH, as the standing SOLE. My job was to get us trained and equipped.

Up until this point, AFSOC staffed the SOLE in an ad hoc fashion—when an exercise or crisis came up a handful of Air Commandos, typically flyers, were pulled together and tasked for special operation liaison duties. Combat operations in Grenada and Panama notwithstanding, Operation Desert Shield in August 1990 was the first major combat deployment of US forces since Vietnam. Shortly after Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990, Lt Col Randy Durham was sent by AFSOC to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to work unconventional warfare doctrine issues in the nascent Tactical Air Command and Control Center (TACC). The Special Operations Command, Central (SOCENT) commander sent a Special Forces A-Team captain for the same purpose. Durham told me he really did not have any specific direction, but once he got there and saw how the war plan was evolving, leaning initially toward combat search and rescue, he requested a helicopter air planner from AFSOC. Capt Randy O’Boyle, an MH-53 evaluator pilot, and a pararescue jumper (PJ) were sent to work with Durham to coordinate the combat search and rescue plans. As the enemy order of battle and subsequent size and scope of Coalition response plan became more apparent, Durham requested more help. His team ultimately grew to about 20 members and working from a blank sheet of paper, Durham began to assign his growing team to key divisions within the TACC.

Captain O’Boyle was assigned to the top-secret planning cell where, after several iterations, the plan for 20th SOS MH-53J helicopters to lead 101st Airborne Division AH-64 Apache helicopters in an attack against two early warning radar sites inside Iraq to begin the war against Iraq was formed.

(Editors’ note: see Air Commando Journal issue 5/2, “25th Anniversary of Desert Storm” online at aircommando.org for more information.)

One of the most critical aspects of conducting a major operation, with a multitude of players, is for the generals running the air war to know what SOF was doing and where they were operating in the deep battlespace. Regardless of how they got there, (helicopter, C-130, or truck), it is critical the CFACC know about all the moving parts in his operational area to ensure he doesn’t allow a friendly aircraft to get shot down or SOF teams on the ground to be attacked by coalition aircraft. This almost happened during Desert Storm.

One of the key duties of the SOF liaison in the TACC was to make sure that all the SOF aircraft were included in the CFACC’s Air Tasking Order and be assigned discreet IFF (identification, friend or foe) codes for their aircraft’s transponder so they could be identified by airborne AWACS and other friendly radar systems. On 6 February 1991 two Army special operations helicopters were tasked to insert a Special Forces team into Iraq for a reconnaissance and surveillance mission. As they crossed the border into Iraq, the pilots put their transponders into standby mode believing they could not be tracked by enemy radars. The result was they were detected by AWACS, who thought they were enemy helicopters because they were not squawking the proper modes and codes. The long and short of it was a pair of US F-15s were tasked to shoot them down. Durham and his team became curious and concerned and ultimately determined they were US SOF helicopters and raced to the operations floor to call a “knock it off” just seconds before the F-15s began their attack to destroy them. It was a VERY close call and near catastrophe. The incident was briefed in multiple forums decrying the importance for all aircraft to be identified in the ATO and airspace control order and to be transmitting the proper IFF codes.

After the war, Durham gave a briefing on his experiences to a group of officers at the US Army Command and General Staff College. When he was done, as fate would have it, he was approached by a Soldier who said that he was the A-team leader on the helicopters that night.

Colonel Durham began his assignment to the TACC with a blank sheet of paper, but during his tour of duty filled a tablet notebook with lessons learned from his experience. When he returned to his “day job” in AFSOC’s doctrine shop, he began working with his USSOCOM counterparts to develop doctrine. The efforts led to the inclusion of a Special Operation Liaison Element, as well as Navy, Marine, and Army component liaisons, into US joint and service doctrine.

Over the next couple of years the USAF Special Operations School (USAFSOS) commandant, Col Brian Maher, began to work on developing courses to address some of these command and control issues. Air Combat Command had the C2TIG at Hurlburt Field and several USAFSOS instructors attended its courses. Colonel Maher tasked his staff to figure out what the SOLE was, how it needed to work, and then develop a program as a means of training Air Commandos. A USAFSOS instructor at the time (1997), Rick Newton, told me that the SOLE documents were really little more than a proposed manpower document and that it was obvious that AFSOC C2 did not equal USAF C2. He said, “There were lots of good and not so good reasons why,
but processes, people, training, culture, and equipment were incompatible.”

As mentioned, the training in AFSOC was ad hoc, one Blue Flag command and control exercise was enough to qualify an Air Commando to work in the AOC, and we were struggling to bring TBMCS (Theater Battle Management Core System, the means to enter aircraft into the ATO) into the command. Back then, most AFSOC aircrew had no idea what the ATO and targeting cycles were, much less why they needed to care or how they could use them to get what the teams on the ground needed (strike, ISR, air mobility, etc.). “Very much a case of not knowing what they did not know” was what Newton assessed at the time. Soon the USAFSOS cadre began putting themselves into the exercise rotation to take on some of the C2 commitments, serving as the SOLE in Blue Flags and other exercises. Newton said, “We’d deploy 4-6 people to serve in Strategy, Combat Plans, and ISR divisions and the USAFSOS courses were built because of those experiences.”

Doctrine evolved and Joint Pub 3-05, Special Operations, describes the SOLE as a joint team provided by the senior Special Operations Component Commander to the CFACC to work within the CAOC to coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize special operations air, surface, and subsurface activities with joint air operations. The SOLE director, usually an Air Force O-6, works directly for the senior SOF commander, usually a JSOTF or TSOC commander, as his liaison and has no command authority. The SOLE director places special operations air, ground, and maritime liaison members throughout the major CAOC divisions. The SOLE coordinates special operations missions in the air tasking order and the airspace control order. The SOLE also provides liaison between the CAOC and the senior SOF headquarters to help build fire support coordination measures which minimize the risk of friendly fire.

During Operation Allied Force, the 1999 air campaign against Serbia, the state of the SOLE was similar—a few enthusiastic Air Commandos, with little training. In a 1999 unpublished paper, Major Jim Slife, a planner and mission pilot during the conflict, opined that the SOLE did not have the manpower or training to enable full integration with the CAOC staff in Vicenza, Italy for truly effective coordination and communication. He discovered, most of their time was spent at computer terminals entering the JSOTF 2 air missions into the Contingency Theater Automated Planning System for IFF modes and codes rather than coordinating SOF missions, primarily CSAR at the opening of the air campaign, which caused great consternation before, during, and after the successful rescue of a downed F-117 pilot.

In June of 2001, one of the key tasks General Comer gave me was to make sure my team was trained to work in the AOC. One or two guys had deployed with Colonel Poole to Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Fox (1998), so they had some idea of what to expect. I had no experience or training other than a JFACC course at Air War College, so with my deputy, Lt Col Roland Sutton, we started to work training issues. Roland secured several positions with the C2TIG for formal AOC training. I, with the urging of Lt Col Terry Sykes, volunteered for SOLE duties in the upcoming Ulchi Focus Lens exercise in Korea. Terry convinced me it would be the best training, because he spent a year working at the Osan AB HTACC (now AOC) as the SOF liaison. My boss, Colonel Connors, ultimately agreed it would be great training and so we deployed in August for almost 30 days. When we got back, we took a few days off for the Labor Day weekend. A week later someone interrupted the DO’s staff meeting and said airplanes hit the World Trade Center towers in NY. Ten days later we deployed to Prince Sultan AB (PSAB) near Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia.

After 9/11 we knew the US would do something to retaliate and we, in DOH, anticipated that we would be some of the first go. Since we only had 15 members assigned, we expected augmentation from the AFSCOC staff. Over the previous two months, our team updated all our mobility training and worked to gather the equipment we thought we would need to operate in a deployed environment; laptops, STU III phones, basic supplies, as well as personal kit. Our most experienced SOLE member, Major Bill Andersen, knew we would need PFPS (portable flight planning system) laptops and got two signed out for our deployment and our air space officer, Captain Eric Shafa, made sure he had everything he needed for the mission.

We departed Hurlburt Field on 21 September via a 15th SOS Combat Talon en route to BWI. The Talon crew was taking a helicopter engine up to McGuire AFB for the 20th SOS, who was supporting FEMA at ground zero in New York City. They delivered us to the BWI ramp and we moved to
a hotel to await the government contract flight to Saudi Arabia via Frankfurt Airport in Germany. At BWI we met up with two Special Forces soldiers, who were assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group at Fort Campbell, and an aviator from 2/160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment (SOAR) bringing our number to 26. We landed at PSAB on Sunday, the 23rd.

The in processing at PSAB went about as well as it could when you are dealing with lots of people. The Saudi’s made it a little more complicated by searching all bags and holding some of our equipment. We hesitated when they wanted to search our COMSEC box, but eventually let them inspect the contents that included an Iridium phone which they weren’t real happy about. After about four hours we finally got to our rooms for some rest.

In the afternoon, several of us went over to the CAOC to see where we could setup. The PSAB CAOC was minimally manned because it only opened six weeks prior and the folks there spread out into other units’ assigned workspaces, but we eventually worked it out to get at least our few assigned seats. Most of the workspace was designed for a coalition environment and there were very few SIPRNET (US secret level) computer terminals in the workspaces.

On September 24th, with our team mostly settled in, we began working with the CAOC staff. The SOLE was allocated four seats with the Combat Operations Division and our comm officer coordinated to get our equipment up and working. We also were given an area to use as our planning area. We eventually took over the nearby conference room which had a door so we could have a more private area to work the myriad of special operations coordination issues. We focused on establishing relationships within the CAOC and reached out to the SOCCENT Forward element which was located at Camp As Sayliyah in Qatar and back to SOCCENT headquarters at MacDill AFB in FL.

By the 29th we were pretty much working as a SOLE and our main effort was assisting the AFSOC Detachment (AFSOD) at Masirah Island in Oman get settled down. Lt Col Mike Kingsley, the 20th SOS commander, was in charge of getting the 16th SOW contingent of Pave Lows, Combat Talons, Special Tactics, and support elements organized.

My first conversation with the SOCCENT Forward deputy commander, Lt Col Brett Rider, was about the AFOSOF forces and Kingsley running the base at Masirah. As the senior US officer there, the Omani officials turned to him to run things and Rider was concerned that Kingsley was rapidly getting overwhelmed. Mike had little visibility into all the inbound aircraft because the wing’s TDC (Theater Deployable Communication) system was not yet up and working. This was the beginning of a two-week ordeal where Colonel Kingsley wound up working ALL base issues, in addition to the care and feeding of his Air Commandos. What was needed, and done at the other theater locations where the USAF was lead, was for an AF O-6 to arrive and become the base commander to work the issues with the locals. I spoke with several of the Air Force forces (AFFOR) O-6s in the CAOC to no avail. I was only an O-5 at the time… and a SOF guy to boot. Kingsley and I spoke several times a day and I was getting the sense he was being over tasked coordinating with the Omanis and with all the new arrivals, which included a couple of military working dogs. Lieutenant General Wald, the CFACC, told me that the Omanis did not want any dogs on the island and they needed to stay on the transport. I called Mike to relay the CFACC’s guidance when he said, “Too late, they’re already here.” Mike said he’d keep the canine teams out of sight until they moved on. Eventually, I spoke with General Wald’s Chief of Staff, an O-6, about the growing issues at Masirah and he told me, with a finger in the chest for emphasis, “You F-ing SOF guys will just have to suck it up.” To be fair, stress levels were running high as the CFACC was simultaneously standing up multiple bases across the Central Command theater. As time went on, the SOLE team cultivated solid relationships with the CAOC director, Maj Gen Dave Deptula and other key O-6 directors, which garnered trust and support going forward.

As in Desert Storm and Allied Force, SOF was initially assigned the combat rescue/personnel recovery mission and Masirah Island was just too far away from Afghanistan. General Wald’s staff was working through diplomatic channels and the US embassy team in Pakistan to get a forward staging base. There were many considerations with force protection being high on the list. Quetta was closest to the Afghan/Pakistan border, but had a very high concentration of Taliban sympathizers in the area. Dalbandin in the southwest part of the country was considered, but ultimately, Shahbaz AB in Jacobabad was selected. It was an air base and local airport that
was built to support Pakistani F-16s, but the US suspended deliveries when Pakistan exploded a nuclear weapon in 1998. There were many infrastructure issues, but the airfield would serve as an expeditionary base for a short period of time.

The driving consideration behind the move to Pakistan was the distance to travel by the CSAR force from Masirah—the helicopters would have nearly a 10-hour trip just to get to southern parts of Afghanistan, which was not practical in getting to an isolated person(s). An interim plan was to get the helicopters aboard a ship in the north Arabian Sea. The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), aboard USS Peleliu and other ships, was moving up into the northern part of the Arabian Sea and getting the MH-53s onto the amphibious ship would save multiple hours of flying time. Pakistan basing would cut another several hours. The plan to move, at least the helicopters, forward was coming together and on 3 October, four MH-53s departed Masirah for the Peleliu while basing in Pakistan was being finalized.

Over the same time period I also spoke with Col Frank Kisner, the 16th Special Operations Group commander, multiple times a day. He, along with his MC-130P Shadows and Special Tactics team, was held up in Turkey pending diplomatic negotiations for a base north of Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush mountains. Finally, Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in Uzbekistan was made available for use and Kisner and his force began moving forward to establish a base of operation. When he landed at K2, Colonel Kisner was the senior AFSOC Airman and SOF commander in theater.

Helicopters and support teams from the 160th SOAR started to flow into K2 to support the initial CSAR mission shortly after. By mid-October, elements of the 5th Special Forces Group, with their commander, Col John Mulholland, arrived and became Task Force Dagger and their mission was to infiltrate Afghanistan from the north. Interestingly, the AC-130H Spectres were not included in the initial flow for political reasons, but arrived at K2 later in November.

On 5 October, we updated the CFACC on the status of the MH-53s and the rest of the CSAR team at his staff meeting after which we went into a VTC with the USCENTCOM commander, General Tommy Franks. By the end of the meeting, General Franks said he wanted the rescue forces, along with a contingent of Marines from the MEU, in Pakistan by Sunday morning. Mike called me around 0900 and said they had arrived at Jacobabad and that the conditions were austere, to put it politely, and said the helicopters were doing shuttles from the ship to get people and equipment in place. Later that afternoon Kingsley called me back with the status that he had three MH-53s mission ready and full of gas, and that two MC-130Es were up on the tanker topping off because the fuel at Jacobabad had not yet been tested safe. Kingsley also told me he had good comms with the USCENTCOM Joint Search and Rescue Center (JSRC) and that his force was settling into a large hangar with the Marines securing a perimeter around the airfield. The conditions were abominable, but his Air Commandos were ready for whatever tasking came down.

A short time later we went into the CFACC’s staff meeting and his first questions were, “Where are the B-2s,” (which had taken off from Whiteman AFB the day before) and “What is the status of CSAR?” I relayed the information from Kingsley and said SOCCENT’s helicopters were ready for tasking in the southern part of Afghanistan, but due to delayed access to K2, the MH-60/47 helicopters were not maintenance ready after their long flight over from the States.

After the CFACC staff meeting we went to the VTC with the USCENTCOM commander, who was in Tampa, and Navy, Marine and Army component staffs. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and CIA Director Tenet were also on the VTC from Washington, DC. When asked, General Wald gave the staff a run-down of the air forces and said that CSAR capabilities were ready in the south. With all questions answered, SECDIF relayed that the President of the United States authorized combat action against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. A few hours later, in response to the attacks of 9/11, Operation Enduring Freedom began with air strikes from a mix of land-based
bombers, carrier-based strike aircraft, and Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from US and British warships and submarines.

The next day I sent a long email to General Comer and Colonel Connors giving them a run down of the previous few days. I concluded with:

Bottomline: You and General Bailey can be very proud of our people. AFSOC folks have been living in awful conditions and have been doing a tremendous job. We talk constantly to all squadrons and the leaders there are doing great work. They endured austere conditions in Masirah and just when life started to improve, the helicopter guys were told to go to the ship. They were aboard only two days, when the USCENTCOM commander wanted the CSAR force up in Pakistan virtually overnight. So all our folks (ops, mx, support, ST) jumped through their butts to make it happen. The ST guys immediately moved into the tower to control the inbound airlift into Jacobabad. They did all this on very short notice and were in place on CSAR alert for the strike force when operations began. General Wald was proud to report that fact up to the SECDEF and General Franks during the decision VTC three hours before the start of combat operations.

With the reward for good work, being more work, the SOLE continued coordinating and preparing for Colonel Poole to arrive to take on the role as Director of the SOLE. While things were going well, the battle rhythm was about to accelerate with more complex missions and an O-6 in all the senior-level meetings was critical.

On 13 October, I received an email from the SOCCENT J-3 Director of Operations because he was concerned that the SOLE was assuming the command and control authority of a SOCE (Special Operations Command and Control Element) without authorization. He felt that the SOCCENT commander was being left out of the decision process and had serious concerns that the AFSOD-S, forces at Masirah, were moved to Jacobabad without the commander’s approval. The J-3 was also concerned that the coordination for the TF Sword infiltration into Afghanistan was being planned without the commander’s knowledge. He felt that the potential TF Sword operation, could impact SOCCENT’s ability to conduct the CSAR mission they had been tasked to do.

Taking a step back, so who was TF Sword? Task Force Sword was a second, separate special operations component with its own mission of hunting down high value targets and did not work for the SOCCENT commander, but would share the use of the same AFSOF forces, i.e. AC-130, MC-130E/H/P, and MH-53 assets that SOCCENT needed as well. I wrote a long email back to the J-3 explaining all that we were doing and assured him that we did not assume command authority over the forces, but that things were moving fast and we were keeping SOCCENT Forward and the staff back in Tampa apprised of everything going on.

Colonel Poole landed at PSAB shortly after, and at about the same time the SOF planners from TF Sword arrived for liaison duty. The SOLE team now numbered over 40 people and were aligned with key CFACC staff functions (Strategy, Combat Plans, Combat Ops, Intel) with an O-6 as Director to more equally interface with the senior staff in the CAOC.

The bombing of key targets in Afghanistan began on 7 October, but US ground forces had not been fully committed to combat since Operation Gothic Serpent (Blackhawk Down) in October 1993. As many will remember, those US forces were withdrawn shortly after that operation, and from that time it was perceived the US was hesitant to commit forces in ground combat. Operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, in the mid/late 1990s, were primarily air operations. That perception changed on 16 October when President Bush gave the go ahead for TF Sword to begin Operations Rhino and Gecko, putting first military boots on the ground raiding targets in and around Kandahar searching for high ranking Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership. The operation was supported by the CFACC with the delivery of over fifty 2,000 pound JDAMs (joint direct attack munitions) on the nearby ridge line just minutes before the Rangers began their operation. Many will remember seeing the dramatic nighttime video of US forces parachuting into the landing zone.

Task Force Sword had several planners integrated within the CAOC, as mentioned, and this was due in large part to the leadership of Col Eric Fiel. Colonel Fiel commanded the joint special operations air component from Ft Bragg and understood all the facets of air power and how to get them for the SOF forces he was supporting. The addition of these liaisons was key to successful TF Sword operations.

While the Rhino/Gecko operations were taking place, TF Dagger helicopters from K2 negotiated the high mountains and inserted an advance team, comprised of a few SF soldiers and others, into Afghanistan beginning operations in the north. On the 17th, dismal weather caused two MH-47s to abort their infil mission just shy of the LZ and drove mission cancellations on the 18th. Finally on 19 October, the weather cleared enough for helicopter flights and two A-teams were successfully inserted into Afghanistan and began working with CIA liaisons and the Northern Alliance factions to fight the Taliban and their Al Qaeda partners. These missions were classic SOF, 12-man A-teams along with an Air Force Combat Controller, aligned with indigenous forces to advise and assist. The primary assistance came in the form of air power. The exploits of these Soldiers and Airmen is well documented in the books, Horse Soldiers by Doug Stanton and Alone at Dawn by Dan Schilling and Lori Chapman-Longfritz.

Assisting and coordinating the early operations in the north was a challenge for the SOLE, because it was difficult gaining insight into TF Dagger’s future plans. The desire for secrecy and security of infiltrating the SF teams was paramount and we in the SOLE understood that, but it made helping them a little problematic. While the mountains and the weather were factors, I believe it came down to not fully understanding what the SOLE, and by inference, the CAOC staff could do to help. Recall Dr. Newton’s comment from earlier, “Very much a case of not knowing what they did not know”. This could also be said for the SOLE’s understanding of TF Dagger’s mission,
as well.

It became clear during a planning meeting with the Combat Plans Division (CPD) staff while building the master air attack plan or MAAP. Our SF liaisons in the SOLE explained that the infiltrating helicopters were getting shot at each night during their missions and wanted the fighters to target the areas and they provided general area lat/long coordinates for the targeting. The CPD chief was Lt Col Mark Altobelli, an F-16 pilot and USAF Weapons School graduate (aka “Patch Guy”) who just days prior coordinated the aforementioned JDAM strikes supporting TF Sword at Rhino. Altobelli looked at the coordinates and said they could not target the points with JDAMS, especially in poor weather; they needed much more refined data. Sensing the frustration, Altobelli suggested that if he and his team knew the helicopters’ routes they could probably figure something out to assist. The SF liaison looked at the coordinates and said they could not target the points with JDAMS, especially in poor weather; they needed much more refined data. Sensing the frustration, Altobelli suggested that if he and his team knew the helicopters’ routes they could probably figure something out to assist. The SF liaison said that the routes needed to remain very close hold for security. Pausing for a second, Altobelli replied, and I paraphrase, ‘Well the helicopters are getting shot at every night, so the bad guys already know where you are going…if we can be clued in, we might be able to help’. The comment stuck with me—the people working on these key CAOC staffs were every bit the professional war fighters as the operators on the ground, just a different medium; but in order for the CFACC to assist the SOF operations, his key staff needed to be trusted with their mission information.

Over the next day or two, Major Bill Andersen worked with Altobelli and the 160th SOAR planners to coordinate spider routes to assist the fighters in the threat search. In short, fighters were tasked to sweep the identified spider route for the night to try to eliminate any threat. While this is a good lesson for discussion and coordination, no one was really satisfied because finding and eliminating highly mobile threats, like the Taliban “technicals” (pickup trucks with heavy weapons mounted in the bed) was virtually impossible. The end result was we tried, the fighters tried, but in that environment, the helicopters still took fire.

Several days later there was a SOF helicopter mishap and when the recovery was concluded, I reached out to the JSOAC J-3 in K2 to resolve some coordination issues. In the course of the emails it was mentioned that, “The JSRC showed us tonight that they have much too much insight in our SOF missions, did someone read them in? How do they know about our SOF missions?” The email went on to say that the JSOTF commander, “Treats every nugget of information like the lives of his soldiers depend on its sanctity…this causes natural friction between us…but the Army guys here really think you guys are nuts!” Clearly, we had work to do, to better understand what each entity was dealing with in order to foster effective communication to get the mission done successfully.

A couple days later, on 3 November, there was a mission to medevac a Soldier from a site in northern Afghanistan. Initially, the K2 based MH-47s were going to do the mission, but the weather on the north side of the Hindu Kush was poor. Colonel Kisner, the JSOAC commander, gave Mike Kingsley and his crews at Jacobabad the go-ahead to retrieve the Soldier. Two MH-53s and two MC-130Es launched and headed into Afghanistan for the pickup.

As the mission was unfolding Maj
Gen Dave Deptula, the CAOC Director, and others asked who had control of the medevac assets. The JSRC director, Lt Col Keith Sullivan, and I went up to discuss it with General Deptula and he was surprised to see us in complete agreement that TF Dagger owned the mission until relinquished—SOF assets going to support a SOF mission. As the medevac mission progressed the weather began to deteriorate and one of the MH-53’s terrain following radar broke. The second aircraft’s radar was working well, so the pair continued north into the mountains, when the weather got worse.

As the two MH-53s entered into a mountain pass the weather closed in around them. One was able to turn around and exit the pass, but the lead helicopter was less fortunate and made a hard landing on an outcropping at 10,200 feet MSL (above sea level) and we lost communication with them for a while. The medevac mission had just turned into a search and rescue operation and the question of who was in charge of the rescue went back and forth between the CAOC director and the TF Dagger commander. In the mean time, a Navy fighter, tasked by CFACC, arrived overhead the area and established communications with the Combat Controller on the mountain confirming the crew was more, or less, in good shape.

After initial confusion and discussion between the senior leaders, they decided that the CAOC was in the best position to command and control the CSAR because of all the additional assets (airborne C2, strike, tankers, space-based intel capability) directly available to the CFACC. Of course, opinions are driven by where you’re sitting and some will dispute my assessment; but at the time, I had no doubt that when things get that complicated the C2 needed to be in the CAOC because the CFACC has direct and immediate access to everything needed to prosecute a CSAR mission. (Editor’s note: see “Rescue of Knife 03” in the Air Commando Journal issue 2/2 online at www.aircommando.org.)

Several days later, I returned to the US on emergency leave and the rest of the standing SOLE team filtered back by the end of the year. They were backfilled with other trained officers and enlisted aircrew from throughout the AFSOC staff and subordinate units.

By January 2002, the war in Afghanistan evolved to the point where US and Coalition ground forces were conducting counter-land operations countrywide. Virtually all air strikes had to be coordinated directly with the land force commander’s staff and were decentralized to lower echelons of the Theater Air Control System. The lower tiers tasked and controlled the distributed airpower through its airborne and ground elements for the tailored C2 requirements of the close air support requested by the forces on the ground. As a result, the workload within the CAOC was much less and the CFACC and SOLE staffs were downsized commensurately. The SOLE staff was reduced to eight or nine people with an O-6 as the director.

The SOLE team at home continued to train and participated in exercises, and also worked lessons learned with ACC’s C2TIG and USAFSOS. As part of the AFSOC staff, DOH also tracked the officers and enlisted Air Commandos who attended USAFSOS SOLE and JSOAC training and participated in Blue Flag and other command and control exercises. These Air Commandos then took deployments to the PSAB CAOC for real world experience. That experience would prove key as war clouds began to form over Iraq during the Fall of 2002. But, that is for another issue of the Air Commando Journal.
DEPLOYMENT DAY 77 OF 150
MISSION DAY 6 OF 6

Fifty degrees — a welcome temperature from the below-freezing nights we had a month before. My Texas blood desperately attempted to maintain my body temperature. In my cold-weather sleeping bag, I looked through the tiny hole I created around my nose, and saw a slight fog pulsing in time with my breath.

My bladder tried to wake me up and I resisted. Dressing and walking 100 meters to the outdoor “restroom” wasn’t a priority at the moment.

I had been manning comms until 2 a.m. and it was only 6 a.m. You’ve held your bladder for hours in the emergency department, you can wait a little bit longer. The longer I slept, the closer I would be to our departure back to base. This mission was almost complete. We were about to finally get some refit/rekit time back at base.

A small contingent of the Operational Detachment -Alpha (ODA) had departed at 4 a.m. to set up for a special mission about 1 kilometer toward the forward line of own troops (FLOT). The house where we had set up camp was quieter than usual—almost too quiet.

I was able to postpone the bathroom break and start drifting back to the black hole where my brain went while I slept. I had not dreamt in months. The pulsing fog at my sleeping bag opening took a slower rhythm.

Footsteps echoed from somewhere. They had an urgent pace and the sound of fine sand sliding under them with each step was amplified off the walls. Someone was coming down the stairs.

“Sir!,” It was Chief; he was waking up the ODA commander. “…[something, something]…counterattack.”

I was sucked from the black hole of sleep and my eyes sprung open. I exploded out of my sleeping bag and began dressing and checking my necessary accessories: pre-filled pain medication syringes, pulse oximeter, combat trauma shears, scalpel—check! I was straightening my “SOST” patch while kicking (gently, of course) my respiratory therapist. “Get up. We are about to get busy. Counterattack.”

His simple response said it all: “Shit.”

No one had announced patients coming, but we knew.

A month before, ISIS’s counterattack had collapsed the FLOT, sent my six-person team over 20 patients, and threatened our location. This wasn’t our team’s first rodeo, but we were about to advance to the championship and didn’t even know it!

The armored vehicle that sat in front of our compound’s only entry point turned over, and the hydraulic brakes disengaged. A short, loud “Whoop, whoop” from a local ambulance was heard on the other side of the wall.

My team had assembled in our make-shift trauma bay and operating room. It had one surgical “bed,” a litter on a set of stanchions. Two other “beds” in the...
The room were made out of 105mm mortar round canisters and mattresses we acquired from nearby abandoned houses.

We were silent and waited. The first mortar of hundreds that day went off only 25 meters from the trauma bay wall. The walls shook off some of the fine dust as the silence was broken.

The ambulance crew brought four local national patients. The most serious was a male in his thirties pointing to his mouth. He was spitting blood on the floor. The back of his mouth had a hole in it from where a bullet had exited. He certainly needed medical attention, but didn’t need damage control surgery or resuscitation. His friends had minor wounds and also did not require our services. We gave them all pain medications and antibiotics, finished their patient cards, and immediately sent them out of our trauma bay.

We are quickly overwhelmed if we do not appropriately and expeditiously disposition patients. Previous experience indicated we would get more patients, and we needed the space to work.

As the four patients left, a pick-up truck arrived with three more patients. One had a gunshot wound to the abdomen and a quick assessment and ultrasound identified that he was in shock from internal bleeding. The team surgical element had their first case.

The nurse turned on our generator, set our sous-vide cooker to 105 degree farenheit, and placed it in the large pot of water outside. Two units of blood were thrown in the water to begin heating.

The armored vehicle never moved back to the gate. Pick-up trucks, “bongos,” and ambulances were continuously entering with injured fighters. Each vehicle brought a handful of patients.

While the surgical element worked to save the fragile life on the table, the respiratory therapist and I were triaging patients. We assessed for life threatening injuries, addressed their pain, and maintained accountability.

As the emergency physician, I would occasionally go to perform advanced life-saving procedures such as chest tubes, leaving the respiratory therapist with the minor patients and patients awaiting triage. The nurse stayed close to the surgical element and critical patients in the trauma bay, managing blood transfusions and resuscitations.

By 7:15 a.m., we had 24 patients. We all had headaches and ringing ears from the mortars as they continued to fire. One patient was on the table, another was awaiting surgery, two were getting chest tubes (one by the nurse and one by a communications sergeant from the team). I was ultra-sounding a patient with a fragment wound to his abdomen to see if he required the surgeon’s services. The ODA commander came up to me as I was scanning. “Hey—how’s it going?”

How’s it going!?!? “We’ve got 24 right now. Two for surgery.”

“How do you need resupply?”

My heart sank and I could feel my eyes welling up behind my sunglasses. I felt that I was barely keeping my head above water, and what was keeping my mind in the game was that our rotation replacements were going to be here soon. That question implied otherwise.

How long are we going to be here?? How long do I have to keep this up??? I’m not going to be able to save everyone, if we keep going at this pace. I focused back on the small ultrasound screen in front of me…Negative scan. The tears were reabsorbed before they fell.

“If we keep this up, yes we will need resupply. Have them send our speedball. And I need someone to help coordinate evacuation of these patients…a bongo, a truck, or something. Their injuries are minor and don’t need a medic with them, but they have to go.”

The commander ran off to continue managing the mortar mission and relay the need for a speedball. A few minutes later the intel sergeant reported in to help with evacuation. I gave him quick instructions, and he ran with it.
The rest of the morning was a blur. My memory has flashes of ultrasounds, chest tubes, bloody limbs, treating pain, yelling at truck drivers, updating the commander, notifying the surgeon of another sick patient...It was a Hollywood movie montage with mortars, a generator, running engines, and yelling patients as the background music.

At 12:30 p.m., my bladder finally got a break. The counterattack had been halted, but not before causing a significant impact on our partner force...and on my team.

In about six hours, our six-person team had received 51 patients: 6 friendly KIA, 3 back-to-back damage control surgeries, 5 damage control resuscitations, 24 delayed, and 11 minimals. It was the largest mass casualty to date within the theater, and miraculously, our team secured a zero percent mortality rate for patients arriving with a pulse.

**SPECIAL OPERATIONS SURGICAL TEAM (SOST)**

Fulfilling the 4th line of effort for the 24th Special Operations Wing (“Battlefield Surgery”), the SOST brings damage control resuscitation and surgery to forward, austere locations in support of the full spectrum of special operation missions. Teams work out of a range of air, ground, and maritime platforms in any environment found within permissive, semi- and non-permissive locations. The flexibility and diverse capability of the teams enable operational forces to execute missions which fall outside of acceptable medical evacuation times.

Each SOST is composed of six Air Force medical personnel. The surgical element is composed of a general surgeon, anesthesia provider (anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist), and surgical technician/first assist. The resuscitation element is composed of an emergency physician, critical care or emergency registered nurse, and respiratory therapist.

To ensure the teams function cohesively in the most stressful and extreme scenarios, SOST is a completely volunteer force, taking only individuals who have applied for a position on a team through a selection process. Applicants must be qualified and fully trained in their scope of medical practice prior to starting an assignment with SOST. An initial board conducts a review of applications, and those meeting minimum requirements are invited to selection, a week-long, in-person “interview” conducted by the Special Tactics Training Squadron. While medical knowledge is important and observed, selection is a chance to evaluate an applicant’s ability to integrate as a team member and adapt to different environments. At the end of the week, the applicants who score well overall will be invited to join the ranks.

In order to meet operational expectations, SOST members require training not typically expected of medical personnel. The initial pipeline is about six months in length, covering marksmanship, communications, navigation, small unit tactics, tactical driving, advanced employment techniques, mission planning, Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape training and advanced operational medicine courses. Once members complete the pipeline, they join their assigned team in the deployment training cycle. Each team manages its own training and exercise schedule and conducts training as a unit. Over the course of several months of pre-deployment, mission-specific training, six individuals find their groove and begin functioning as a cohesive unit until it becomes natural to anticipate each other’s next moves. In the most stressful and intense situations, the team will become more silent, giving way to more efficient, poignant communication.

Over the course of 10+ years, SOST has evolved into a team which brings a light, fast, mobile strategic asset to the battlefield. Through its development and implementation on the battlefield, it has changed the doctrine of medical teams being looked at solely as medical support to being considered as and its own line of effort. The SOST has supported operational teams from all services within US Special Operations Command in a multitude of environments. Through these unique, austere missions, SOST has not only helped further battlefield and expeditionary medical practices, but has also influenced civilian trauma practices as well. As operational constructs and mission requirements continue to change, the flexibility and adaptability of SOST will help mitigate risk to operational commanders and ensure combat casualties reach surgical care within the “golden hour”.

**About the Author:** Major Regan Lyon is an Emergency Medicine Physician for the 720th Special Tactics Group at Hurlburt Field. In 2014, she deployed as the medical director and flight surgeon of the 83rd Rescue Squadron at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan. She deployed again as a SOST’s emergency medicine physician in 2017. She deployed in 2019 as SOST Team Leader in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. Prior to assuming her current position, Major Regan was the flight commander/medical director for the Emergency Department, 51st Medical Operations Squadron, Osan AB, Korea. Major Lyon is the recipient of the 2018 Military Health Service’s Air Force Female Physician Leadership Award and the Air Force Medical Service FGO Physician of the Year Award.
In October 2019, the Combat Aviation Advisors (CAAs) of the 6th SOS celebrated 25 years of conducting special operations by, with, and through foreign aviation forces. Although the squadron reactivated 25 years ago, not everyone in the USAF or joint special operations force (SOF) are aware of its capabilities. The 6th SOS is home to AFSOC’s CAAs, who are Air Commandos that serve in Operational Aviation Detachments (OAD) capable of helping partnered air forces develop their airpower capabilities, to include specialized air mobility (SAM); intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); precision strike (PS); and agile combat support (ACS), all focused on air-to-ground integration (AGI) with indigenous land forces. An OAD’s strength is that its CAAs are able to help partners develop, employ, and sustain the airpower resources (people, equipment, and doctrine) they already have to mitigate threats to US and our partners’ national security across the world. OADs are cross-functional teams comprised notionally of 16 culturally astute, multi-lingual Airmen to include pilots, combat system officers, special mission aviators, air liaison officers, tactical air control party, survival-evasion-resistance-escape (SERE) specialists, security forces, aircrew flight equipment, aircraft maintenance, intelligence, aerospace medicine, and communications. Overall, the OAD can enable partnered air forces and provide the joint force with airpower advantages where US aircraft cannot operate, thus significantly reducing operational risk during joint and multi-national operations.

In order to develop, organize, and equip OADs, AFSOC takes a Total Force Integration (TFI) approach that includes the 6th SOS under the 492nd Special Operations Wing and the 711th SOS under the 919th Special Operations Wing. Under this relatively new organizational construct, the CAA enterprise flourishes. Last year, HQ USAF formally established a cross functional authority for its Air Advisor community to develop the larger community’s human capital. This means that all CAAs now have a Special Duty Identifier (SDI) that will enable the Air Force to maximize the potential of experienced CAAs through deliberate professional development opportunities across the Air Force and the joint world. In order to maximize the potential of our CAAs, they also maintained their air mobility skills by flying C-145 Skytrucks and DHC-6 Twin Otters, their ISR capabilities by flying modified C-208 Caravans and AT-802 Longswords, and PS capabilities with the A-29 Super Tucanos. CAAs also expanded their air-to-ground capability by establishing a Joint Terminal Attack Control (JTAC) Fires program that enables OADs to unilaterally operationalize partners’ Close Air Support (CAS) capabilities for the first time in its 25-year history. In summary, the CAA enterprise increased its developmental potential by Lt Col Andrew Bruce and Combat Aviation Advisors Past and Present.
and capability to ensure we are part of the ‘AFSOC We Will Need’ to face the full-spectrum of threats facing our nation now and in the future.

While the current incarnation of the 6th SOS stood up in 1994, the squadron’s heritage extends beyond the 1994 inception. The 6th SOS “Commando” lineage began during the Second World War, when it was constituted as the 6th Fighter Squadron (Commando) in 1944, flying P-47 Thunderbolts and P-51 Mustangs under the 1st Air Commando Group during the China-Burma-India campaign. Since then, the unit has been reconstituted, reactivated, and reorganized multiple times. In the 1960s, the 6th SOS began to train foreign air forces as part of the foreign internal defense (FID) mission.

The squadron’s original aviation foreign internal defense (AvFID) mission was in response to the lessons learned from the Detachment 6, WATERPUMP operations conducted in Laos. During Operation WATERPUMP, US Air Commandos secretly trained Lao, Hmong, and Thai airmen to fly CAS using the T-28 Trojan, and to plan and control air strikes from the air or from the ground. By 1967, all the squadron’s T-28s had been transferred to the partner nations and the squadron re-equipped with A-1G/H Skyraiders. The unit’s mission also changed from FID to direct action, specifically special air operations in support of US forces. With the establishment of an Adaptive Precision Strike program and programmed addition of light attack aircraft, the 6th SOS is reactivating a small piece of its Vietnam-era heritage.

Since 1994, the 6th SOS has been active in every theater of operations and a key contributor to what has at different times been called the Global War on Terror, the Long War, and Countering Violent Extremism. As the vignettes below show, CAAs’ efforts to build partner nations’ aviation capabilities and capacities over the past 25 years provide outstanding examples of why strategic patience and deliberate development of our key partners has been so valuable an investment.

**Poland:** From 2000-2018, CAAs from the 6th SOS and 711th SOS trained Polish special operators to integrate specialized capabilities into their operations. AFSOC CAAs helped Poland develop an organic specialized rotary-wing capability, the 7th Special Operations Squadron. They also helped create special operations capabilities within Poland’s C-130 and M-28s squadrons. This made it possible for Polish SOF to support NATO, European Union, and United Nations tasks and operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and West Africa. CAAs trained Polish combat rescue and air assault helicopter pilots to operationally employ their Mi-17s, helped Polish airmen develop airdrop and low-level tactics, and then trained alongside their Polish counterparts during joint/combined exercises. As a result of the predeployment training the 6th SOS delivered, Polish ground and air special operations forces were better prepared for coalition operations. The squadron’s efforts reduced USSOF footprints by improving the capabilities and confidence of partnered aviation units and ensured an enduring, trusting partnership with one of Special Operations Command Europe’s priority partner nations.

**Afghanistan:** From 2014-2018, CAAs deployed to Afghanistan to stand up the Afghan’s fixed-wing ISR capabilities in their Special Mission Wing (SMW). This
operation demonstrated how CAAs armed with the appropriate authorities are able to achieve immediate combat effects (first operation within 72 hrs) while building and integrating a partnered SOF capability. Squadron pilots and sensor operators led and mentored young Afghan pilots and sensor operators flying combat operations to provide life-saving and risk-mitigating tactical overwatch, mobility, and CASEVAC support to helicopter and ground assault forces engaging the enemy. While achieving immediately-required combat effects, CAAs and Afghans devised a 3-year plan to develop a professional and sustainable Afghan aviation unit. Capability, placement, and access go hand-in-hand. With an enduring presence, CAAs built trust and lasting relationships with US, coalition, and Afghan leaders. The CAAs’ ability to build and integrate objective capabilities with and adaptive eye toward Afghan means to develop capacity was a critical element of success. Over three years and as many fighting seasons, SMW crews alongside CAAs went from zero qualified crews and 5 airplanes, to 3 squadrons, 27 qualified crews, and 18 airplanes supporting over 15,000 Afghan commandos partnered with US SOF. Lessons learned from SMW’s success are still applied today by CAAs to grow air-ground integration capabilities in several other AORS.

Panama: Since 2014, CAAs have been working with the Panamanian military to grow their specialized air mobility and aerial ISR capabilities. Spanish-speaking OADs working with the Panama Public Forces were able to quickly establish rapport with their counterparts. CAAs were trained alongside Panamanian pilots and flew with their counterparts on active missions. Operationally-oriented advice and assistance expanded the learning environment for both the Panamanians and the CAAs. After developing trust based upon shared experiences, CAAs advised Panamanian pilots as they developed an indigenous pilot training syllabus and program. This gave Panama the ability to train its own military pilots and aircrews. Five years of mutual training and exercises has resulted in a strong and committed partnership with a key nation in a region of strategic importance to the United States.

Philippines: Since 2002, CAAs have maintained a strong working relationship with the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Post 9/11, then Maj Gen Wurster, the commander of Special Operations Command Pacific, called upon the 6th SOS, a unit that was “organized, trained, and equipped to do exactly what [he] needed,” to begin advisory missions with the Philippines’ helicopter units. Although the first OAD deployment was prematurely terminated, CAAs adapted and later successfully grew the mission set to advise and assist the Philippines’ rotary wing, fixed wing, flight medicine, personnel recovery, and strike capabilities over the years. At least one CAA has deployed to the Philippines each year since the first engagement almost 18 years ago as the air liaison to the Philippines military. Most recently, CAAs helped establish a C-208 based ISR capability. In summary, CAAs have helped to improve this key ally’s security forces and the level of trust established has been invaluable to maintaining and strengthening the relationship between the US and the Philippines.

Niger: From 2001-2018, the 6th SOS has been engaged with Nigerien Armed Forces (FAN, in French). Through aerial ISR and air-ground integration training events, CAAs developed the FAN’s capability to counter terrorist operations within and just outside of their borders. Culturally and language competent CAAs help the FAN develop tactics for both air and ground forces. In the ongoing fight against Boko Haram, Nigerien pilots have specifically credited CAAs for the success of host nation ISR operations. AvFID activities have helped Niger remain a relatively secure and stable nation in what has become a rather dangerous locale for violent extremist operations on the African continent.

These vignettes offer a few examples of how, over the last 25 years, CAAs have influenced the development, refinement, and employment of indigenous aviation capabilities in support of the partner nations’ national security needs across the world.

Like all organizations, the squadron has evolved over time based upon changes in the strategic environment, resourcing fluctuations, and USSOCOM priorities. Between 1994 and 2005, the squadron doubled in size—from 47 to 109 members—executing missions in 26 different countries across 4 Areas of Responsibility (AORs). The 6th SOS continued to expand its capabilities and outreach until 2012 when budget restraints and the transfer of the rotary-wing AvFID mission to US Army Special Operations Command changed the squadron mission to providing non-standard aviation (NSAv) support to the Theater Special Operations Commands. However, in 2014, the 6th SOS began rebuilding and expanding its ability to achieve joint operational effects. Since then, the 6th SOS has continued to grow and conduct special operations by, with, and through foreign aviation forces to deny, degrade, or defeat threats to US and partner nations’ security.

Twenty-five years ago, the 6th SOS reactivated and began launching Air Commandos across the globe to develop and operationalize partnered airpower to meet Geographic Combatant Commanders’ (GCC) objectives. We have quietly supported every GCC with aviation-oriented foreign internal defense, security force assistance, and unconventional warfare operations. To summarize the squadron’s actions, we have operationalized partnered airpower to liberate the oppressed from the kind of fear that stifles human potential.

For the next 25 years, our squadron will increase its repertoire and build relationships, partnerships, and alliances that will ensure our nation’s success in this new era of great power competition. We are creating by, with, and through aviation capabilities that were little more than concepts drawn on paper napkins and whiteboards a decade ago. During this next phase, we will create the most professionalized and effective Combat Aviation Advisors this world has ever seen. Through selfless service, dauntless spirit, and relentless action the 6th SOS stands ready to serve our nation.

Deditissimus Vincit—The Most Committed Wins.

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About the Author: Lt Col Andrew Bruce is the 16th Commander of the 6th SOS and is CAA #502. He was assisted by CAAs #55, #408, #518, #524, #613, and #776 from the 6th SOS and 711th SOS during the writing of this article.
We Honor the Sacrifices of the Fallen and Their Families

ACA Memorial Speech - 27 October 2019

Editor’s Note: CMSgt Corey Fossbender from the 19th SOS gave the following speech during the 2019 ACA Memorial ceremony at the Air Commando Air Park. The sentiment it holds and the message it conveys capture the ethos of being an Air Commando. For those of you who may have missed the ceremony and in the spirit of the Hall of Fame issue, the editors of the ACJ have decided to reprint the transcript in its entirety. Enjoy.

By CMSgt Corey Fossbender

I am proud to be here today in this special place to remember with you those who gave the last full measure of devotion. Like you, I have a tremendous amount of love and admiration for our military Air Commandos, and I am deeply honored by the sacrifice of our men and women in uniform who have paid the ultimate price in the defense of freedom.

I appreciate the Air Commando Association giving us this moment to pause and remember. They are our nation’s leaders, military members, teammates of the fallen, and peoples of nations whom we have protected. However, the most important among those who honor our departed warriors are the family members who have sacrificed more than all. They are the mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, and friends of the fallen. They know full well the price of freedom. And my personal thoughts are with them as we remember our Air Commandos brave souls. The loss of a teammate is tough for any organization, and for the family, the sacrifice of a loved one is even more devastating.

President Abraham Lincoln, penned the following eloquent message to a bereaved mother who had lost five sons during the American Civil War. And in doing so captured the sorrow of a Nation torn apart by civil conflict.

Dear Madam: I have been shown in the files of the War department that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Although this missive was written more than one hundred and fifty years ago, the words still carry the same powerful meaning and echo the sentiment of anyone who has lost a loved one in battle.

In this great command of ours...every Air Commando has moved to the sound of gunfire, and answered our nation’s call. From the freezing cold skies over Nazi occupied Europe in B-24s, to the jungles of Burma, to the flight lines of the Philippines and South Korea, the unforgiving skies of North Vietnam, to the deserts of Iran, the beleaguered cities of Iraq and the mountain passes of Afghanistan, our Airmen, have stood elbow-to-elbow with their comrades in arms, put themselves into harm’s way, and met the enemy face-to-face to defend the freedom we cherish so intensely.

The price of our independence has come at the cost of tremendous sacrifice. Air Commandos have died serving our nation during conflict, training and in garrison. And while we mourn their loss, they did not die in vain. They died defending...
the freedoms we all cherish. America is known as the land of opportunity…the home of the free and the brave. The liberties we enjoy as Americans have been paid for largely with the blood of the military service member.

These Airmen, these heroes…served this nation in the pursuit of something bigger than themselves, and they did so willingly and proudly. They defended their country with their lives. We are honored by their service and their sacrifice and we honor their memory today during this solemn gathering.

As our military forces draw down in certain areas, our service members remain committed to the mission. I wish I could tell you that our teammates will no longer be in harm’s way, but the fact remains that they will continue to train, and to serve, at great personal risk. And while I would like to say that no more lives will be lost on the battlefield, I cannot, for wherever freedom is challenged, our men and women will be there to answer the call. And as long as our citizens raise their right hand and swear to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic and step into the breach, there will be American bloodshed and lives lost.

Moreover, as a nation, we must continue to support our military…and we must remember the many sacrifices our Air Commando men and women make on behalf of our great Nation. No matter their motivation for joining, our Air Commandos serve in the pursuit of something bigger than themselves…often knowing the dangers. We don’t do it for glory…we do it because we feel compelled to serve! We must also remember that serving this great country is a shared sacrifice. Behind every person in a military uniform is someone who loves them. These family members, friends, and neighbors pray for their loved one and hope no harm comes their way. However, freedom isn’t free, and many of our Air Commandos answer our nation’s call with the last full measure of devotion and sacrifice their lives for freedom. We mourn their loss…and we remember!

We can never allow politics or personal beliefs to diminish our commitment to what has made America the great country that it is. The story of our nation is written in the blood of heroes…and those heroes wore the fabric of our United States and proudly carried the Stars and Stripes into battle and gave their lives for us…and we must remember.

Lastly, to those here who once wore the uniform or continue to serve…thank you for raising your hand, to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. And so, today as we honor the sacrifices of the fallen and their families, we should also find solace in the knowledge that this was not their final journey…nor is it ours. God bless all of you and may God continue to bless this great nation of ours. Thank you.
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General Norton Schwartz, 19th Chief of Staff, United States Air Force, is essentially a “one off.” Aside from Generals Thomas White (Observation) and Duncan McNabb (airlift and “acting” CSAF), he is the only US Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF), chosen from the airlift “tribe” and special operations community. While many memoirs of senior military leaders offer a nod to the enterprising nature of our enlisted corps, only Schwartz can provide readers with first-hand, operational accounts of the truly indispensable professionalism of Senior NCOs, NCOs, and Airmen, while simultaneously offering insights into the political machinations at the highest levels of military and government service. Journey: Memoirs of an Air Force Chief of Staff addresses his service in three intertwined areas—family, military, nation—and offers pithy axioms as “lessons learned.” It is highly recommended that those who peruse this review obtain a copy of General Schwartz’s memoir and discern their own “personal” takeaways.

General Schwartz’s memoir offers insight into his childhood, adolescent years, cadet life, marriage, and military career, yet it is written in an unpretentious manner. The seemingly self-effacing narrative may stem from his advice to “Leave it to others to toot your horn.” Italicized entries by his wife, Suzie, offer insight to “Norty’s” aversion to self-promotion and extol the virtues of his nearly 40 years in uniform. Throughout her narratives and his recollections, one is struck by the intense focus on mission accomplishment via team effort; a critical attribute of those in the special operations enterprise as well as pilots of multi-crew aircraft—and one that served him well as CSAF. Early in his military career, General Schwartz learned two important lessons that we would all benefit from embracing: “Never assume the other guys aren’t as smart as you are,” and “Good advice has no rank.” General Schwartz’s personal reflections on myriad operational, staff, and command experiences bring to life similar situations current military members face day-to-day, and offer sage insight for future leaders and followers to consider. “If you’re not trusted, you can’t be effective,” sums up the “self” of Norton Schwartz, and is a mantra he evidently holds dear in every aspect of life.

Nearly every person entering military service reaches a point when awareness of self is diminished and recognition of a “greater good” takes over; General Schwartz is no exception. In one of the book’s opening segments he reflects on his youth absent a mother in the home and a less than supportive, though demanding father. For many, such an experience might portend a rather ignominious life. “Norty” did not succumb, and offers reflections that probably mirror the lives of a good number of military men and women: “But sometimes family dysfunction leads to unexpected outcomes—exciting uncharted paths—and that’s exactly what happened in our case. The Air Force became my home; it gave me a sense of community and purpose and a sense of worth that might have come from family but different, because of circumstances.”

General Schwartz’s initial development in the Air Force’s airlift community, followed by transition into the fledgling special operations environment, brought into focus via the Iran Hostage Crisis. He further developed flying skills while embracing the challenges of joint operations. Schwartz writes that experiences with enlisted members and officers from all branches of service “gave me some insights into how people perceive the Air Force in a way that few other of my contemporaries enjoy.” Though not in the mainstream of career paths, his experiences greatly benefitted the greater DoD, Joint Force, and Air Force as his tenure as the J-3 (Joint Operations), and CSAF coincided with the post-9/11 “wartime” operational environment. He reflects on his development as serendipitous, yet acknowledges one of the sad truths concerning service parochialism. General Schwartz writes, “In many ways, I was better accepted by the Army than I was by the Air Force because my credentials as a trusted special operator were recognized and appreciated by people of reputation in the Army. I was a known commodity by much of the Army leadership, but it sent up red flares in the minds of many Air Force peers.
and seniors.” His selection to serve in both capacities was largely driven by senior civilian leaders and, perhaps, demonstrates less of a service-parochial view of national security than that held by some senior military officers.

_Journey_ is a memoir replete with reminiscence of success and failure in a tumultuous time in American history and, by all indications, General Norton Schwartz epitomizes the adage: _Luck is where preparation meets opportunity_. With the advantage of hindsight, our nation was fortunate to have someone of General Schwartz’s capability at a truly tumultuous time in history. When being considered for the J-3 position, he was given a 30-minute tasker by the VCJCS under then Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld: “It’s 2:10 a.m. and you are now the J-3. You’ve been asleep for hours when you’re jarred awake by the bedside red switch phone. … It’s the NMCC DDO [National Military Command Center Deputy Director of Operations] advising you that there has just been a confirmed UBL sighting in the Kunar province of Afghanistan. So what I want you to do now is prepare a briefing sheet for the secretary, along with your recommendations on potential course of action.” Successfully passing such an “examination” is based on many variables, but professional development and operational experiences are, arguably, most important. Not only was Schwartz eminently qualified for the task from an operational perspective, his command and staff positions allowed him to recognize limits to military decision making. He reminds us that “Every order to transfer forces and change command relationships must be signed by the secretary of defense. It’s the very essence of civilian control of the military.” Similarly, when reflecting on his confirmation process, he reminds us that “Members of Congress have very long memories” and that “It’s not always about the facts; it’s about influence and position.” The upshot of these few snippets and the book writ large regards honor. He offers that “Reputations are hard to earn and easy to lose,” which is a notion broadly recognized and, from all appearances, serves as the cornerstone of General Schwartz’s life and career.

_Journey_ is an appropriate read for all military members, spouses, families, and the American people. It is a story about an average American who embraced opportunity, married a soulmate, followed with pride, and led with honor. Most importantly, it reflects on the CSAF who believed “A promise given is a promise kept” and that “Public service is a noble endeavor, and America needs good people to do such work.”

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About the Author: Ron Dains, PhD, is on the faculty of the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB, AL.

www.aircommando.org
The legendary C-130 Hercules is one of the—if not the—most successful military aircraft of all time. This versatile Lockheed-built workhorse has performed more kinds of missions, by more air arms, in more wartime and peacetime operations, for more years, than has any other airplane. It has been in continuous production for its first user—USAF—since 1954.

The four-engine turboprop Hercules was conceived as a simple, rugged tactical lifter able to use short and rough runways. Though designed for transport, it has taken on many other roles, modified into the AC-130 gunship, EC-130 electronic combat aircraft, KC-130 aerial tanker, MC-130 series of special operations forces transports, and more. It has been used for airborne assault, combat search and rescue, aeromedical evacuation, weather recon, maritime patrol, and firefighting.

“The Herk” is vividly associated with Vietnam. It has, however, flown in virtually all US military and humanitarian operations of the past six decades. Its service life is nowhere near an end; USAF plans to keep acquiring the C-130J-30 for years to come.

—Robert S. Dudney with Walter J. Boyne

In Brief

- Designed, built by Lockheed
- Primary use: tactical transport
- First flight: Aug. 23, 1954
- Number built: 2,484
- Specific to C-130H:
  - Crew of five (two pilots, navigator, flight engineer, loadmaster)
  - Four Allison T56-A-15 turboprop engines
  - Armament: none
  - Max load: 92 troops or six standard freight pallets
  - Max speed: 366 mph
  - Cruise speed: 353 mph
  - Max range: 2,745 mi
  - Weight (loaded): 175,200 lb
  - Span: 132 ft 7 in
  - Length: 97 ft 9 in
  - Height: 38 ft 3 in
  - Ceiling: 33,000 ft.

Famous Fliers


Interesting Facts

- Flown by USAF, USMC, USN, USCG
- Boasts longest continuous production run (1954-present) of any military aircraft
- Chased, in first flight, by Lockheed designer Kelly Johnson in P2V
- Featured in 1968 film “Green Berets” and 1997’s “Air Force One”
- Flew secret mission to Lop Nor, China’s nuclear test site (1969)
- Holds record as the largest and heaviest aircraft to land on aircraft carrier
- Led formations of B-57 bombers over North Vietnam
- Used by Pakistan as heavy bombers in 1965 Indo-Pakistani War
- Nicknamed “Herk,” “Herky Bird,” “Fat Albert”
- Dropped BLU-82 “Daisy Cutter” and GBU-43/B MOAB, world’s largest conventional bombs, in 1991 Gulf War. 
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