

# AIR COMMANDO

A Professional Publication by the Air Commando Association  
Dedicated to Air Commandos Past, Present, & Future

# JOURNAL

## HALL OF FAME 2016 Inductees

Operation  
GOTHIC  
SERPENT

Commander  
Leadership  
Awards

Air Commandos  
In Cuba

Secret Wings of  
the OSS: Part 2



Vol 5: Issue 3

Foreword by Norm Brozenick, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)



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An Air Commando assigned to the 15th Special Operations Squadron watches the sunset from the back of an MC-130H Combat Talon II during Exercise Emerald Warrior 16, May 12, 2016, at Hurlburt Field, FL. (USAF photo by SSgt Matthew B. Fredericks)



A US Marine patrol travels through the bullet-scarred streets of Mogadishu.

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# FOREWORD

“Just doing our jobs.” That’s how the newest members of the Air Commando Hall of Fame described their contributions to the mission and people of special operations during the ACA awards banquet on October 15.

After carefully reviewing every nomination package last August, the Hall of Fame Committee unanimously recommended five Air Commandos for induction. With the unanimous approval of the Board of Directors, these warriors once again stepped into history, this time as members of the Air Commando Hall of Fame, Class of 2016.

Two pararescuemen, a maintainer, and two aircrew members “doing their jobs,” executing no-fail operations under the most demanding circumstances. Together, the Class of 2016 is responsible for contributions defining our special operations history in Afghanistan, the Bahamas, Cambodia, Iraq, Iran, Liberia, Panama, Somalia, and Zaire, as well as in undisclosed locations. Countless objectives achieved, enemies destroyed, and lives saved. Leaders to a man, this class includes a teammate awarded the Air Force Cross and a Purple Heart, and another awarded a Silver Star and a Purple Heart.

These five Air Commandos continue impacting our mission and people years after retiring from uniformed service. Our nation’s most elite forces are expertly supported by the development, testing, and fielding of new personnel recovery capabilities. A fully modernized, capable, and accredited Air Force training and rehearsal center graduates the world’s most capable SOF aircrews. The John Groves School in Honduras remains open to care for disadvantaged children. And the next generation of Air Commandos fully embraces a heritage shared by teammates past, present, and future.

There’s just one thing left to say to the Class of 2016’s John Easley, Scott Fales, Randy O’Boyle, Ray Turczynski, and Tim Wilkinson. From all of us across the ranks, thank you teammates, and a “job well done!”



Norm Brozenick, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)  
Hall of Fame Committee Chairman  
Former Vice Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command



# CHINDIT CHATTER

This is sort of an eclectic version of the *Air Commando Journal*. The range of articles are wide and diverse, but as is the case in all things Air Commando and SOF, the main focus is on the people that get the job done day in and day out. Just as ACA is proud and honored to support Air Commandos Past, Present and Future, this edition highlights the heroes of the past—the Hall of Fame inductees, and the present and future — 20 of AFSOC's finest Commander's Leadership Award recipients who represent what AFSOC brings to the fight now. With their expertise, leadership, commitment, and enthusiasm, the future is very bright for AFSOC and very dark for our enemies.



ACA is proud and honored to sponsor these awards, among several others at the annual Convention. This year we revised our format to accommodate our Active Duty friends and allow greater participation. We moved our Heritage Seminar to Friday morning and back on base at the Hurlburt Soundside Club. This gave us a larger audience for a superb interview of CMSgt (Ret) Mike Lampe led by our own CMSgt (Ret) Wayne Norrad. Chief Lampe was the first Air Commando selected as the Command Chief of USSOCOM and the highlights of his career were of great interest and an inspiration to all who attended. The Heritage Seminar has been extremely well received and ACA is presently working with AFSOC leadership to further expand it into numerous and larger symposiums in the future. It is not too early to mark your calendars for next year's extravaganza; 12-15 October 2017! I can promise you that we will continue to make it bigger and better every year. We have included highlights of the convention on pages 18 - 21 to show what you missed if you were unable to make it.

Lastly, I want to take this opportunity to thank our membership for all the great support over the last year. You are what makes this a unique organization that allows us to continue to grow and expand our support; both in the Association and the Air Commando Foundation which fills the gaps between what the government can provide and what is truly needed by our Air Commandos in times of needs. However, to continue our upward trajectory, we need to grow that base. If each of the members reading this would convince just one non-member Air Commando to join the ACA, we would number over 8,000 members in no time and our ability to support would be limitless. Many would argue that that is an impossible goal—Air Commandos have proven countless times missions were possible when others would not even chance them. I know we can find a way!

Any Time—Any Place



Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Ret)  
*ACA President and Editor In Chief*



Dear Gen Wooley and Col Barnett,

My name is Will Canova. I am the Newspaper and Periodical Projects Coordinator for the University of Florida Digital Collections. I am writing to you today in regard to the fact that the University of Florida is currently seeking publications for inclusion in the Digital Military Newspaper Library. We would be truly honored if you would allow us to include the *Air Commando Journal* in our Digital Collections. It is a really extraordinary publication in terms of broadening the scope of our collection.

DMNL acts as a repository of military news and culture from around the country. The Digital Military Newspaper Library's continuing goal is to archive and preserve military perspective by offering full geographical representation of historic through current issues of select U.S. Military publications. There are currently over 100 periodical titles in the collection.

<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/dmnl>

Please rest assured that there would be no cost to you and a major benefit would be increased readership and availability of this amazing resource to students, scholars and researchers.

Sincerely,

Will Canova, Newspaper and  
Periodical Projects Coordinator, Digital Production  
Services & Florida Digital Newspaper Library

### ACA Leadership

Dennis,

I am repeatedly impressed by the outstanding performance of the ACA. Under your leadership the ACA continues to provide superb support to veterans, the civilian community, and the active duty personnel associated with Air Force Special Operations. Good works don't just happen, they are made to happen. You and your associates have elevated the standard of excellence.

I am proud to be a member of the ACA and a friend of yours. In the early 1980s the 16th SOS had emblazoned on a wall in the entry way "BECAUSE I FLY..... I ENVY NO MAN."

Today I would change that to read: "I AM A PROUD AIR COMMANDO.....I ENVY NO OTHER."

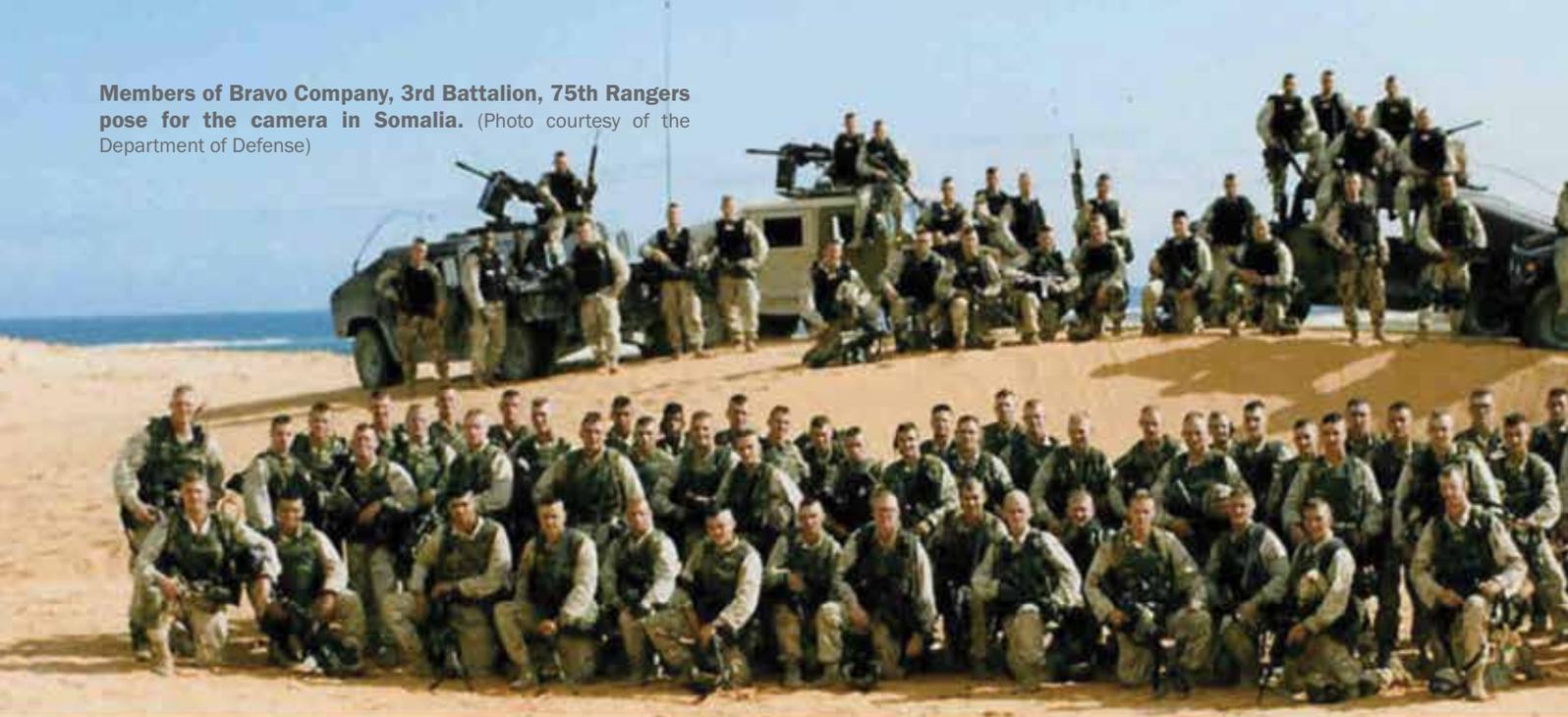
John "Pappy" Gallagher  
Life Member #1343, Berryville, VA

Submissions can be e-mailed to [info@aircommando.org](mailto: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*.

[www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org)



Members of Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 75th Rangers pose for the camera in Somalia. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense)



# OPERATION GOTHIC S

## Two Decades On, A Re

On a pleasant, breezy Saturday evening on 2 Oct 1993, I sat smoking a cigar with my good friend Pararescueman Tim Wilkinson and contemplating the growing darkness and constellations as they slowly materialized overhead. Sitting on a wall of sandbags outside the only hangar on the airport in Mogadishu, Somalia, it was an unusually calm evening. We were, as we often reflected, doing exactly what we wanted to be doing. We had spent the majority of our adult careers rising to the top of our professions, and this assignment was the culmination of that work.

The constant breeze off the Indian Ocean always brought welcome olfactory relief from the rank smells of Mogadishu. We were here at the request of the United Nations and by direction of the President to capture Mohamed Farrah Aidid, a renegade Somali warlord who had intentionally killed several US Marines and more than two score Pakistanis and Nigerians in the previous eight months. As a secondary mission, we were to dismantle his infrastructure by capturing his key personnel

whenever they could be located.

Our missions had gone well, at least from a military viewpoint. Politically, the situation had become mired in the mixed signals we received through the media and the White House. We were confident we were going to catch Aidid, but what then? According to the foreign policy of the day, we would then turn him over to UN authorities who would do... we knew not what. But that was not our concern. We were soldiers, sailors, and airmen, there to do a mission, nothing more.

And what missions they were. In the prewar years of the 1990s ours was the finest precision strike force the US had ever implemented in a real-world environment. There was no doubt that we were capable of forcing our way into the heart of a hostile city, ravaged by years of civil war, and teeming with over a million people. Operation GOTHIC SERPENT, known to the public through its deployment name as Task Force Ranger and later captured on celluloid as Black Hawk



# SERPENT

*By Dan Schilling, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)*

# Reflection

Down, was comprised of the absolute best US troops. Led by MG William Garrison, then the JSOC commander and spearheaded by Delta Force, it was shored up by a company of Rangers, a first since Eagle Claw/Desert One. Ferrying our lethal assembly on its missions via MH-6 and MH-60 helicopters was the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). Mixed in were a select few combat controllers and PJs from the 24th Special Tactics Squadron (including Tim and myself) along with four Navy SEALs. This was truly a joint endeavor, just as the designers of US Special Operations Command, then a mere six years old, had intended. No one could strike faster, hit harder or leave more devastation in their wake than us. By the evening of the cigar above, Task Force Ranger had successfully completed six previous

missions without a single serious US casualty.

Generally, our time was spent waiting between missions. Many days and nights were occupied devising ways to relieve the stress and boredom that accompany long deployments: TV in the hangar, volleyball, cards, calisthenics, or running. For Tim and myself, it was a cigar on the sandbags. We had a ritual.

Now, liquor was prohibited on this deployment; however, I had managed to obtain a smuggled bottle of Tanqueray gin via means I will not divulge here along with a jar of olives (it is one of the hardships of war eternal that men have often survived without ice). In the evenings, I would covertly mix a canteen cup of Tanqueray with a little olive juice and a couple olives. Then Tim and I would start from our cots at the rear of the hangar and as nonchalantly as possible saunter through its length, me with my hand over my canteen cup so that no one might catch the scent of gin.

Safely through the gauntlet, we'd settle on a short sandbag wall on the perimeter of the task force's compound. Back then my usual smoke was a Royal Jamaican Churchill Maduros and Tim typically enjoyed an H. Upmann or Punch. It gave us a chance to relax and forget about the distance home to loved ones, hostile Somalis outside our perimeter, and the likelihood that one of us might get wounded or killed in the coming days. Occasionally the Somalis would drop a few mortar rounds in the area just to let us know they were still out there. Still, it is one of my lasting memories that those evenings were filled primarily with calm feelings of serenity, good conversation, and wafting cigar aroma amid the sensations of a foreign land. That's how the world appeared on the evening of October 2nd.

Everything changed the next day. On October 3rd, in the afternoon, we launched what was for us a typical plan to seize two individuals from a covert meeting site. But this mission was different...it was to be in broad daylight and into the thickest concentration of enemy militiamen in the city. We were going where no one else dared to venture. The UN would not send forces anywhere near the area of Mogadishu known as the "Black Sea," nor had any US troops been there. The Somali rebels felt this area was an impenetrable labyrinth amidst the city's winding dirt streets, and were therefore immune to assault.

I sensed the difference as soon as we arrived at our target, a nondescript two-story building. Within minutes we were already engaged in a growing firefight. Several soldiers were shot by the time we were prepared to load our captives onto the helicopters. But we were managing and soon would be on our way back to the airport and the safety of our hangar. Meanwhile, the air was becoming unbelievably thick with



**Michael Durant's Super 64. Durant (far right) with his crew.**  
(Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense)

crisscrossing bullets and rocket-propelled grenades. Reports of casualties and calls for medics started to come frequently. I knew if we could get the Somalis loaded and the vehicles moving we'd make it out okay. Nobody had been killed yet.

Then the unthinkable happened: the Somalis shot down one of our MH-60s with a rocket propelled grenade, killing the two pilots on impact, and leaving the rest of the crew injured or dazed. The stricken craft crashed into the streets a few blocks from us. That single grenade changed all our lives. Shortly afterwards, the Somalis hit a second helicopter with another RPG. The second helicopter, piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Michael Durant, initially escaped the fate of the first and started for the airport. They never made it, crashing halfway between the battle developing around the first helicopter wreck and the airport.

For those of us in the convoy, the next few hours were a veritable hell in the streets. Our mission changed from an assault on the enemy to one of rescue and ultimately, to a struggle for survival itself. Easy targets and magnets for RPGs and small arms fire, our vehicles became deathtraps at each stop as we attempted to wind our way through the confused streets and reach our isolated comrades at the first helicopter crash site. I knew Tim was already there working on the injured, having been inserted via another helicopter with the rest of the CSAR crew which included two more buddies of mine, combat controller Pat Rogers and PJ Scott Fales.

Vainly our convoy attempted to reach our beleaguered friends surrounded by crowds of armed militia now outnumbering us by more than 50 to 1. For nearly an hour we pushed our way through streets hopelessly jumbled in an undecipherable maze, while casualties continued to mount in my convoy. I witnessed more selfless acts in that single hour than I have seen in the rest of my entire life. Men who were badly wounded were aided by fellow soldiers who were in no better shape. Men would take risks to help a friend that they would never attempt in their own self-interest. In my Humvee alone, three of the five of us had been shot. When two bullets came through my "bulletproof" door and hit me in the chest and foot, I realized in a moment of blinding clarity that I could very well die at any moment. Eventually, with over half the men in the convoy either dead or wounded and running dangerously low on ammunition, the decision was made to return to the airport with what we had while we still could. Disheartened, we turned for home leaving our friends behind, trapped in a hostile city.

At the second crash site things were going even worse. The crew of four had survived the impact, largely thanks to Durant's cool handling of the stricken bird, but they were now stranded on the ground. The other helicopters still flying overhead reported movement in the cockpit and cargo area. But there was a problem. No rescue or assault forces were left to

assist the downed crewmen. Everything had been committed to the initial assault and the first crash.

Two Delta soldiers, Sergeants Gary Gordon and Randy Shugart, would answer the highest call one can receive in life. On their own initiative, and despite repeated denials from our command, they requested, and eventually received permission to be inserted at the second crash site. Their reasoning being that two trained snipers might be able to hold off a hostile crowd of Somalis better than the injured crew.

The two operators went in on foot from where another helicopter dropped them off. They found Durant and his crew alive but in peril. Simultaneously fighting the growing number of Somalis and assisting the crew, they made a valiant effort to establish some type of defensible perimeter. It was not to be. Within twenty minutes both men were dead, overrun by hundreds of militiamen. For their willingness to risk their lives and fight overwhelming odds and with little hope of being rescued, both men were awarded the Medal of Honor.

For myself, once at the hangar I was relieved to be back in relative safety, but was distraught. I knew that 99 soldiers and airmen were still out there, waiting for us to come get them. While they waited the number of casualties increased and their ammunition, medical supplies, and water were getting critically low. The longer they waited for us, the more likely they were to be overrun. At the second crash only silence remained. We did not know it, but Durant had been captured and the others all killed, their bodies to be paraded through the streets by mobs with no respect for the dead in gruesome fashion for television viewers worldwide.

It was now evening and four hours had passed since the mission had launched. It seemed like an eternity, for some it was a lifetime. I sat in the hangar with a SEAL buddy, waiting to go back out. We slowly loaded ammunition into magazines for our return to the battle. Little was said between us. We sat silently and gazed at the ammunition as we loaded all we could carry. Or we just simply looked off into space. Occasionally, when our eyes would meet, we'd shake our heads and say things like, "Man, I do not want to go back out there." Or, "This is f@#%ed up." Then we'd go back to the task at hand, checking gear, rechecking gear, considering everything we might need and trying to think of every possible contingency. What choice did we have? Our friends were out there waiting, and possibly dying. As unpleasant as the thought of going back into that hell was, the reality was we had to go. We needed to go.

We went back into the city a few hours later, ready for anything the Somalis would throw at us. The mission now was to retrieve our friends regardless of cost, and any remaining restraint be damned. Opposition would be met with overwhelming firepower. When I got back onto the streets my anxiety dissipated; it was replaced with a fierce determination



**The Mogadishu airport, busy once again, after it became a center of operations for the UN and Task Force Ranger.** (Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense)

to get my friends back. I had no idea if Tim was alive or dead. I had not heard his voice on any of the radio transmissions, but that might not mean anything. Tim was a medic and chances were that he was busy patching people up, and telling the wounded guys everything was going to be okay. Occasionally, I heard the voices of other friends, but never Tim's.

We fought all through the night trying to collect all our comrades. In some cases, it was hopeless. At the second crash site, there remained no sign of the men who had gone down with the helicopter. There was just the dismal wreckage, silent and abandoned. We would not know the fate of some of those men for several days.

Shortly after dawn our now reunited force fell back to a sports stadium occupied by Pakistani troops; the airport being too far from the battle to function as a triage and evacuation site for our injured. We had collected all we could. Exhausted, covered in blood, sweat, and dirt, and somewhat dazed, I found Tim among the other survivors, but there was not time to express our relief at finding each other alive. There were injured to treat and load on helicopters for the ride to our medical facilities. For our dead, it was the beginning of their long, final journey home to their families.

Also, we still had to get ourselves back to the airport from the confines of our Pakistani safe haven. For some of our troops it was a two-minute ride by helicopter. For myself and many others it would be another run through the carnage of the streets in our vehicles. I offered Tim a ride back in my Humvee and to my surprise he accepted. We rode back to the airport together in the open back of the last vehicle in the convoy, just the two of us, tense and ready. Ours was the last vehicle to roll into the airport. It was noon the next day, we had been fighting for nearly 20 hours.

Eighteen of America's finest soldiers lost their lives that day, and 73 more were wounded in that terrible battle. Mike Durant would remain a POW for 11 days. The toll we exacted on the Somalis was far worse. Conservative estimates put the number of Somali dead at 500 with another 750-1,000 casualties. From a military standpoint the battle was a remarkable victory. For actions that day the men of the 24th STS would earn one Air Force Cross, two Silver Stars, three Purple Hearts, four Bronze Stars with valor, and eight additional Bronze Stars.

Politically it was anathema. Amid public outcry the Clinton administration ceased all US operations in Somalia. The entire task force was redeployed three weeks later without achieving its goal of capturing Mohamed Aidid. The events surrounding Task Force Ranger and its aftermath significantly influenced US foreign policy. The mantra among US policy makers for years after was "remember Somalia." As many who are reading this article are aware, we've returned to that windswept and desperate land on a recurring basis for some time. Ironic.

Tim and I smoked a cigar the next evening. The ocean breeze was there, the temperature comfortable, the sunset a bright crimson. But something had changed, for me at least. I no longer looked at my life the same, yet it defied description and would take years to comprehend. Reflections for another piece perhaps.

Even now, two plus decades later, I think of those 18

men regularly, or when something jars my memory. They are examples of the best this country can produce. Like all combat losses, they should be remembered by every American. Paid little, enduring long separations from their families and brutal living conditions, without say as to what they did or where they went, but go they did. These men excelled in a profession few attempt, let alone master. They were, and remain, America's best.



**(Left to right) SSgt Dan Schilling, then TSgt Tim Wilkinson and MSgt Scott Fales pose together in Somalia. A few days later on Oct 3, the trio and other members of a Ranger Task Force would be involved in an 18-hour firefight on the streets of Mogadishu. Schilling, a Combat Controller, was attached to the ground convoy during the mission and would earn a Bronze Star with Valor for his efforts during the firefight. Fales, a Pararescuer, would earn a Silver Star for his selfless actions. Wilkinson, also a Pararescuer, would be awarded the Air Force Cross for his heroic actions that day.** (Photo courtesy MSgt Tim Wilkinson)

Tim and I remain good friends and occasionally work together, sharing a drink and a cigar when the opportunity presents itself. There's a bond that only those who have gone before us and those who will follow in the hell that is combat can understand.

I try and take a day away from work every October 3rd and think and write, and smoke. When I reflect on the greatest men I shall ever know it sometimes gives me pause that this country should be so blessed to have men like these and they should be so easily forgotten. My taste in cigars has evolved over the years, but each October 3rd I have a Royal Jamaican and the flavor always takes me back to those days before that final raid. It's the only time I light that brand anymore. It's a bittersweet smoke.



*Author's note: This article is dedicated to my teammate, friend and former CCT, Jeff Bray. A veteran and Silver Star recipient of Operation Gothic Serpent, he passed away 24 Oct 2016. No finer warrior.*

*About the Author: Dan Schilling, Lt Col, USAF (Ret), is a 30 year combat control and Special Tactics Officer veteran and ACA life member. He retired to Utah in 2016 to write full-time and is currently at work on a biography of Air Force Cross recipient TSgt John Chapman. His first novel will be published in 2018.*



# 2016 Air Comma



**COLONEL  
JOHN L. EASLEY**

Colonel John Easley's outstanding service to our nation and Air Commandos was hallmarked by masterful leadership of maintainers across the globe. While assigned to the Pentagon, Col Easley's leadership proved vital to ensuring that AC-130H gunship modifications included digital age capabilities. His visionary efforts helped ensure the "new" AC-130-U gunship became operational with a supportable logistics tail. As the senior maintenance officer in the 16th Special Operations Squadron, he deployed to Djibouti and Kenya, establishing bare base maintenance facilities supporting Task Force RANGER's hunt for Somali Warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. Col Easley was the first maintenance officer selected as deputy commander of the 16th Operations Group, and was charged with synchronizing the efforts of assigned maintainers across all weapon systems. Col Easley then commanded the 352nd Maintenance Squadron, whose Air Commandos earned the Air Force Maintenance Effectiveness Award in 1994 and 1996. He led his squadron's move from Royal Air Force Alconbury to Royal Air Force Mildenhall, and planned and executed logistics operations enabling the successful evacuation of noncombatants from Liberia and Zaire. Later, as the 16th Logistics Group's interim commander, he superbly supported contingency responses and led the group through a demanding Operational Readiness Inspection, garnering an Outstanding rating for the group and an Excellent rating for the wing. Throughout his career, Col Easley's superior results resulted from inspiring his Air Commandos' passionate commitment to a unifying maintenance principle: fix broken aircraft, Any Time, Any Place. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Colonel John Easley reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.

# Commando HALL OF FAME



**MASTER SERGEANT  
SCOTT C. FALES**

Master Sergeant Scott Fales' extraordinary career serving our nation is highlighted by leadership of over 70 rescue and recovery missions, with 56 "saves" during scores of combat operations. MSgt Fales earned the Jolly Green Association's 1982 Rescue of the Year award and 1986 Mission of the Year honors. During Operation JUST CAUSE, he parachuted in with Army Rangers to seize Torrijos-Tocumen Airport. During Operation DESERT STORM he led multiple classified recovery missions in western Iraq. In 1992 he earned AFSOC Senior NCO of the Year honors, and was selected as an Air Force Top 12 Airman in 1993. While deployed to Somalia with Task Force Ranger, MSgt Fales authored search and rescue plans enabling high-risk missions in an attempt to capture warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. Responding to a United States helicopter downed in Mogadishu, he led his team's fast-rope insertion in the midst of intense enemy fire, rescuing five survivors. Though seriously wounded, he provided medical care for teammates while laying down effective covering fire, thwarting repeated enemy attacks. MSgt Fales was awarded the Silver Star for his courageous actions and a Purple Heart for wounds inflicted by enemy forces. After retirement, he developed personnel recovery capabilities supporting operations executed by our nation's most elite forces. MSgt Fales currently leads combat development for the 724th Special Tactics Group. Throughout 39 years of active duty and civilian service, MSgt Fales personally ensured the betterment of all with whom he served. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Master Sergeant Scott Fales reflect great credit on himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.



# 2016 Air Comma



**COLONEL  
THOMAS R. O'BOYLE**

Colonel Thomas “Randy” O’Boyle’s leadership hallmarked his exceptional career of service to our country and its joint special operations forces. Assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron when only seven MH-53 Pave Lows existed, he quickly qualified in one of the Air Force’s most demanding aircraft. As an Instructor Pilot and Flight Examiner, Col O’Boyle’s efforts proved central to building a Pave Low force of more than 20 aircraft and crews, which he led into combat during Operation JUST CAUSE. Recognized as the command’s Pilot of the Year in 1989, he was the Wing Plans’ Liaison Officer to Air Forces Central Command during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Col O’Boyle influenced the conduct of the coalition air campaign plan, ensuring the 1st SOW was prepared, selected, and postured to execute some of the most demanding missions of the war. As a member of USSOCOM’s Legislative Liaison office, Col O’Boyle won essential support for USSOCOM’s budget and acquisition strategies from the Services and Congress. His dedicated efforts ensured support from elected members of the Senate and House of Representatives, their committees, and professional staffers. As the 1st Special Operations Group Commander, Col O’Boyle led highly successful deployments supporting combat operations in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-AFGHANISTAN and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Upon retirement, Col O’Boyle’s leadership proved essential to the survival of the John Grove School for disadvantaged children in Honduras. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Colonel Randy O’Boyle reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.

# Commando HALL OF FAME



**COLONEL  
RAYMOND TURCZYNSKI JR.**

Colonel Raymond Turczynski's extraordinary service to our nation and Air Force Special Operations Forces began in 1973 in Thailand. It continues today through his active involvement in the Air Commando Association and Stray Goose International. As a staff officer, US. Support Activities Office, Nakom Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, Col Turczynski participated in the planning and execution of classified special activities, including MC-130 leaflet and high altitude container delivery system airdrops in Cambodia. While commanding the 1st Special Operations Squadron, Col Turczynski led his unit through a significant period of history, the planning and execution of Operation EAGLE CLAW, the attempted rescue of American hostages in Iran. He led the development of never before attempted tactics, including the conduct of airfield seizures and night vision goggle operations. Prior to retiring from active duty in 1989, Col Turczynski served in significant positions of responsibility including the 1st Special Operations Wing's Assistant Director of Operations, the 2nd Air Division Operations Director, and the 23rd Air Force Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. Col Turczynski's operational successes include leading a UH-1N operation known as OP BAT, supporting Bahamian Police efforts to disrupt Caribbean narcotics trafficking. As site manager, SOF ATS Aircrew Training and Mission Rehearsal Complex, Hurlburt Field, he helped transform the fledgling Central Training Flight into a fully modernized, capable, and accredited Air Force training and rehearsal center for SOF aircrews. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Colonel Raymond Turczynski reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.



# 2016 Air Commando HALL OF FAME



## **MASTER SERGEANT TIMOTHY A. WILKINSON**

Master Sergeant Timothy Wilkinson served our nation with distinction and valor while leading Air Commandos and joint teammates during numerous combat operations. During Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, MSgt Wilkinson skillfully supported 50 special operations missions, treating numerous injuries and wounds while searching for deposed dictator Manuel Noriega. He excelled as a combat search and rescue team leader during Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti, producing a masterful search and rescue plan that was instrumental to the success of Joint Task Force 180 missions. MSgt Wilkinson deployed to Somalia with Task Force Ranger to hunt down warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. He flew multiple high-risk missions with elite joint special operations forces as the primary personnel rescue and recovery specialist. Responding to a United States helicopter that was shot down in downtown Mogadishu, MSgt Wilkinson “fast-roped” into the crash site and provided life-saving treatment to wounded aircrew members and Army Rangers. While under intense enemy fire, he broke cover on three separate occasions and ran through the “kill zone” to recover medical supplies that were needed to save gravely wounded Americans. For his extraordinary heroism, MSgt Wilkinson was awarded the Air Force Cross and a Purple Heart for wounds he received during this 17-hour firefight. Later, MSgt Wilkinson’s personnel recovery knowledge and expertise led to advanced concepts including the use of robotics and unmanned aerial systems. After retirement from active duty, he continues to serve our nation’s most elite forces by leading the personnel recovery development and implementation office at Joint Special Operations Command. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Master Sergeant Timothy Wilkinson reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.

# Air Commando HALL OF FAME RECIPIENTS

## INDUCTED 1969

1. MAJ GEN GILBERT L. PRITCHARD
2. COL BENJAMIN H. KING
3. COL HARRY C. ADERHOLT
4. LT COL ROBERT L. GLEASON
5. COL CHESTER A. JACK
6. COL WILLIAM C. THOMAS
7. MAJ QUINTON H. EVANS
8. TSGT RICHARD L. FOX
9. MAJ JOSEPH W. KITTINGER, JR
10. LT COL HOMA B. STILLWELL
11. MAJ LEROY W. SVENDSON
12. MAJ GEORGE G. DUKE
13. MAJ JIMMY A. IFLAND
14. MAJ LAWRENCE ROPKA, JR
15. CMSGT JAMES A. CHERRY
16. SMSGT CHARLES LOKOTOS
17. CMSGT ROLAND H. LUTZ
18. MSGT CARLOUS L. CHRISTIAN
19. SMSGT CHARLES L. JONES
20. TSGT JACK KELSO

## INDUCTED 1994

1. CAPT CARTER HARMAN
2. COL PHILIP G. COCHRAN
3. MAJ GEN JOHN R. ALISON
4. CAPT JOSEPH A. BILLINGS
5. MAJ GEN LEVI R. CHASE
6. LT COL W. W. JOHNSON
7. MSGT ARTHUR E. BURRELL
8. COL W. ROBERT EASON
9. MAJ GEN JAMES L. HOBSON, JR
10. LT GEN LEROY J. MANOR
11. SMSGT CHARLES E. DAY
12. GEN MICHAEL J. DUGAN
13. MAJ DAVID E. HENRY
14. SMSGT VANCE M. HINCH
15. CAPT JOHN D. MITCHELL
16. MAJ BROOKS MORRIS
17. LT COL PHILLIP W. O'DWYER
18. CAPT JOHN L. PIOTROWSKI
19. MAJ GEN RICHARD V. SECORD
20. MSGT RAYMOND J. BOURQUE
21. MSGT JAMES M. FITZPATRICK
22. SMSGT DAREL L. McCOMBIE
23. CMSGT JAMES H. LAWRENCE
24. MAJ WILLARD ELLEDGE
25. MAJ EUGENE P. VALENTINE
26. SMSGT GAYLORD L. HALL
27. CMSGT JAMES A. HOWELL
28. MAJ BERNARD F. FISHER
29. LT COL WILLIAM A. JONES
30. LT COL JOE M. JACKSON
31. SGT JOHN J. LEVITOW
32. CAPT JAMES P. FLEMING

## INDUCTED 1995

1. CAPT JAMES H. AHMANN
2. LT COL ARTHUR W. CALLAWAY
3. LT COL H. JERRY CARLILE
4. COL JOHN T. CARNEY, JR
5. COL DREXEL COCHRAN
6. LT COL JOHN S. CONNORS
7. COL KENNETH E. HELLER
8. COL LEON E. HESS
9. SMSGT CLYDE HOWARD
10. CMSGT ROBERT JONES
11. CMSGT MICHAEL I. LAMPE
12. COL RAYMOND H. LAHMEYER
13. LT COL ROBERT E. MOIST
14. MAJ DONALD NICHOLS
15. MAJ WILLIAM E. POWERS
16. MSGT FRANK J. TOSSAS
17. COL LEONARD VOLET

## INDUCTED 1996

1. COL CHARLES W. BROWN
2. SSGT JOSEPH J. CONATY, JR
3. CMSGT ROBERT L. GABRIEL
4. COL KEITH R. GRIMES
5. MAJ JOHN W. GROVE
6. CMSGT MICHAEL J. HOSENBAKEZ
7. LT COL JEROME W. KLINGAMAN
8. CMSGT JOHN C. RODDICK
9. LT COL JAMES F. YEALY
10. MSGT STANLEY G. ZAJAC

## INDUCTED 1997

1. CAPT ALFRED G. PLATT
2. MAJ EDWIN J. RHEIN
3. LT COL EUGENE D. ROSSEL
4. BRIG GEN NORTON A. SCHWARTZ
5. LT COL THOMAS L. WICKSTROM

## INDUCTED 1998

1. COL PHILLIP J. CONRAN
2. COL JOHN A. DOONAN
3. CMSGT LAMAR H. DOSTER
4. MAJ RICHARD P. GERON
5. MAJ CORNELIUS L. GRAY
6. LT COL ROBERT T. SCHNEIDENBACH

## INDUCTED 1999

1. CMSGT JAMES E. ANO
2. CAPT GLENN E. FRICK
3. TSGT JOHN J. HYLAND
4. CAPT JOHN R. PATTEE
5. LT COL WILLIAM W. ROSS
6. CMSGT RICHARD SANCHEZ
7. CMSGT JOHN D. SELFRIDGE
8. CMSGT MICHAEL O. STEINBECK

## INDUCTED 2000

1. MAJ PETER R. BOWMAN
2. MAJ ALFRED A. BRASHEAR
3. MSGT GEORGE C. CELIS
4. COL GEORGE E. DAY
5. LT COL WILLIAM G. HARDEN
6. MSGT ROGER L. KLAIR
7. CAPT DON ROBERT LEWIS
8. SMSGT FRANCIS J. MATTHEWS
9. LT COL HOWARD PIERSON
10. SMSGT JAMES J. STANFORD
11. SMSGT FRED E. SANDERS

## INDUCTED 2001

1. LT GEN MAXWELL C. BAILEY
2. COL THOMAS P. BRADLEY
3. COL MICHAEL E. HAAS
4. LT COL WILLIAM P. HEATH
5. COL ELLWOOD E. JOHNSON
6. LT COL ROBERT B. MADDEN
7. CMSGT WILLIAM B. WALTER

## INDUCTED 2002

1. BRIG GEN ROBERT J. CARDENAS
2. COL MILTON FUERST
3. LT GEN WILLIAM H. GINN, JR
4. MSGT GEORGE D. McNAMARA
5. LT COL ROBERT W. MOORE
6. CMSGT MICHAEL C. REYNOLDS

## INDUCTED 2003

1. LT COL WILLIAM E. BROWN
2. COL ROBERT A. DOWNS
3. COL JOHN GARGUS
4. LT COL DONALD R. MOODY

## INDUCTED 2004

1. COL ROLAND McCOSKRIE
2. MAJ JOHN PLASTER
3. CMSGT WAYNE NORRAD

## INDUCTED 2005

1. MAJ JOE HOLDEN
2. SMSGT RONALD KELLERMAN

## INDUCTED 2007

1. CMSGT RAY C. DOYLE
2. COL ROBERT W. GATES
3. LT COL ROBERT E. MONROE
4. MSGT ANDREW I. MARTIN
5. COL JAMES REX ROBERTSON

## INDUCTED 2008

1. CMSGT PERCY C. VAUGHAN
2. COL WILLIAM E. TAKACS
3. COL ROLAND D. GUIDRY
4. CMSGT THOMAS E. DULEY

## INDUCTED 2010

1. CMSGT MICHAEL J. RAMOS
2. CMSGT A. EUGENE ADCOCK
3. CMSGT NICHOLAS S. KIRALY
4. COL RICHARD F. BRAUER JR
5. MAJ WILLIAM GROSVENOR JR
6. LT GEN DONALD C. WURSTER
7. COL JAMES B. CONNORS
8. COL KENNETH H. POOLE
9. COL WALTER K. SCHMIDT
10. COL RUSSELL E. RAKIP JR

## INDUCTED 2011

1. COL JEFFREY BUCKMELTER
2. MAJ GEN RICHARD L. COMER
3. CMSGT RICHARD W. CRUTCHFIELD
4. COL GEORGE C. FERKES
5. COL TIMOTHY R. MINISH

## INDUCTED 2012

1. COL STEPHEN R. CONNELLY
2. GEN CHARLES R. HOLLAND
3. COL CHARLES G. MCMILLAN
4. MAJ GEN ROBERT B. PATTERSON
5. CMSGT GORDON H. SCOTT

## INDUCTED 2013

1. COL JOSEPH D. BECKER
2. LT GEN FRANK J. KISNER
3. COL RONALD W. TERRY
4. COL GARY L. WEIKEL
5. CMSGT ATWELL L. WILEY

## INDUCTED 2014

1. COL JOHN ALVAREZ
2. CMSGT RANDY ANDERSON
3. COL CRAIG BROTCHE
4. COL AL GREENUP
5. COL GENE RONSICK

## INDUCTED 2015

1. MSGT BRUCE BRACKETT
2. MSGT CRAIG DOCK
3. LT COL EMIL MAX FRIEDAUER
4. LT COL ROBERT L. MELLER
5. COL ROBERT L. RUSSELL JR.

## INDUCTED 2016

1. COL JOHN L. EASLEY
2. MSGT SCOTT C. FALES
3. COL THOMAS R. O'BOYLE
4. COL RAYMOND TURCZYNSKI
5. MSGT TIMOTHY WILKINSON

TOTALS: OFFICER 123, ENLISTED 57  
TOTAL 180



Mike Wooley, ACA Chairman and Awards Banquet sponsor Jimmie Beaver of Arby's



# ACA Convention 2016

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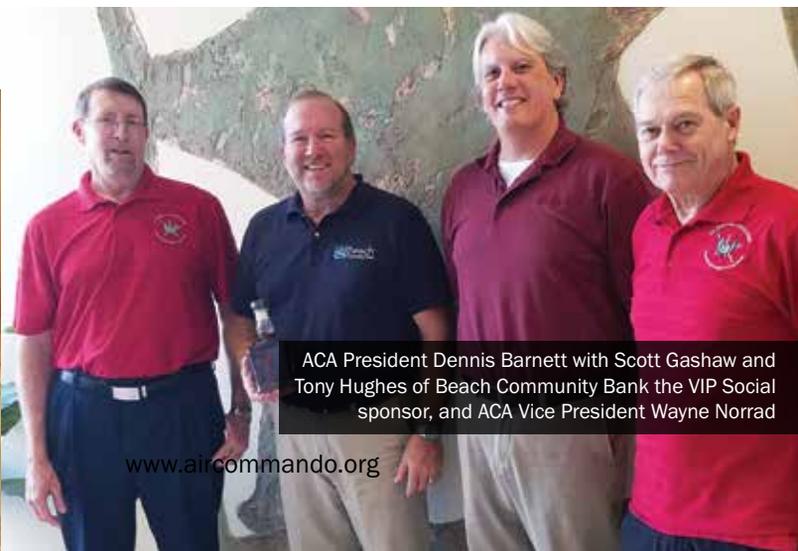


ACA President Dennis Barnett, Ross Shipley and Garrick Hatfield of ZT Motors the 2016 ACA Convention Title sponsors, and Mike Wooley ACA Chairman



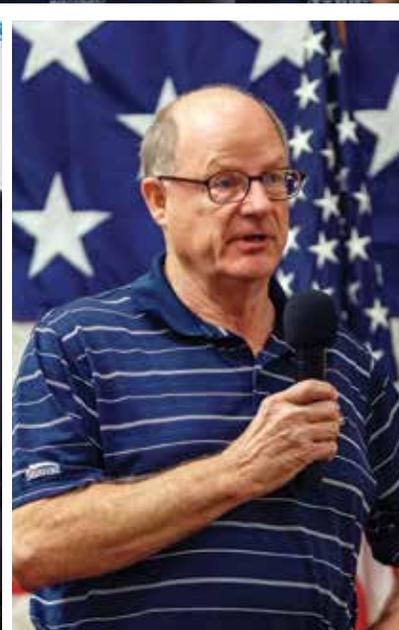
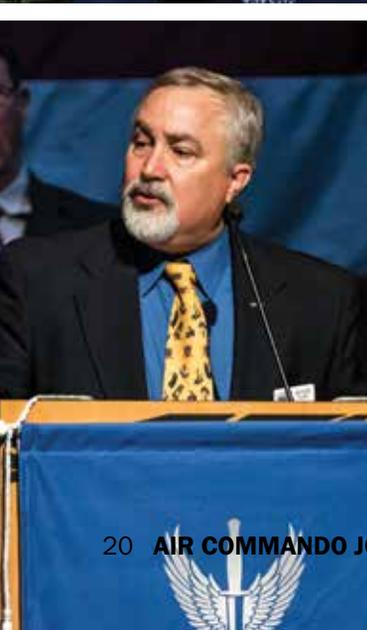
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ACA President Dennis Barnett with Scott Gashaw and Tony Hughes of Beach Community Bank the VIP Social sponsor, and ACA Vice President Wayne Norrad







2016 ACA Heritage Golf Tourney sponsor Lockheed Martin Corp. L-R: Eric Spragg, Jamie O'Connor, Sven Knutson, ACA President Dennis Barnett, John Glaze, Mark Fluker, Derek Franklin, Rich Brooks, and Dave Smith





# 2016 COMMANDER'S

*This award recognizes AFSOC's outstanding performers from any AFSC/career field who have made the most significant contributions to mission accomplishment as determined by their respective commanders. Their outstanding accomplishments make them truly deserving of this prestigious recognition.*

## **Captain Charles P. Anderson**

Captain Charles P. Anderson distinguished himself as a C-145A Instructor Pilot, 711th Special Operations Squadron, 919th Special Operations Group, 919th Special Operations Wing, Eglin Air Force Base, Field 3, Florida, from 1 Jun 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Captain Anderson successfully accomplished pilot upgrade in support of Special Tactics Squadron training, completing twenty-four airdrops and more than seventy night landings. As a result of his astute proficiency, Captain Anderson was selected as the subject matter expert for Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center where he chaired the Non-standard Aviation crosstalk with six Special Operations units, improving the tactical field exchange for Air Commandos. His expertise was critical in the development of Air Force Special Operations Command's first airborne network and datalink employment course and developing a new skillset across Air Force Special Operations Command. Additionally, he authored the tactical updates for Non-standard Aviation and Combat Aviation Advisors in the Air Force Special Operations Command Flying Operations and Combat Aircraft Delivery Instructions. Furthermore, his mastery and expertise of the C-145A was proven vital when he diverted a catastrophic engine failure by expeditiously performing Critical Action Procedures, saving four Airmen's lives and the \$12 million aircraft. Finally, displaying his commitment to absolute excellence throughout every facet of his profession, Captain Anderson completed over twenty hours of research for the International Diploma in Mountain Medicine, securing a slot as a future expert in austere medical treatment. Moreover, he aced the Medical College Admission Test on his first attempt, scoring in the top 95 percentile. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Anderson reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## **Captain Todd A. Bryan**

Captain Todd A. Bryan distinguished himself as Executive Officer and Director of Personnel Programs and Initiatives at his unit from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Captain Bryan managed daily command section operations

for the commander of a 513-member Special Access Program conducting sensitive operations across six areas of operation. Additionally, Captain Bryan was chosen to lead the stand up of Air Force Special Operations Command's first Satellite Personnel Activity, set to be a benchmark effort delivering first-class administrative support to Air Commandos. Furthermore, Captain Bryan was hand selected as the first Air Force member to deploy as the Deputy Operations Officer for an elite and highly-classified joint task Force. During his 120-day deployment, Captain Bryan coordinated clandestine missions during an historic time period, which gained approvals for over 40 American special operation forces in a politically sensitive area of operation. Captain Bryan was hand-selected and expertly performed as lead military liaison between a combined joint task force commander, the United States embassy team, and other interagency partners operating within the theater. Captain Bryan's diplomacy and discretion were crucial in the development of communications between the ambassador, his country's team and host-nation's local government leadership which expedited operational approvals during critical targeting windows against high value individuals. His consummate leadership resulted in the removal of numerous high value targets, and denying enemy expansion and safe haven to plan attacks against the United States. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Todd A. Bryan reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## **Captain Brian A. Collins**

Captain Brian Collins distinguished himself as MC-130H Combat Talon II Aircraft Commander and Deputy Flight Commander, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Captain Collins directed the movement of 460,000 pounds of war materiel and 430 personnel across 29 combat missions guaranteeing continued operations execution for Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. Captain Collins showcased his leadership prowess during the first ever C-130 airland infiltration into Syria. He commanded



# LEADERSHIP AWARDS

the insertion of a critical medical vehicle ahead of a key ground offensive, thus increasing the joint-allied casualty survival rate by 70 percent. Also, following a devastating typhoon on Wake Island, Captain Collins spearheaded recovery operations by enabling the airdrop of a runway clearing team to re-open the strategic Pacific island airfield. Additionally, as deputy flight commander he executed a record \$25 million, 2,188 flight hour program enabling the readiness of 6 combat crews poised for any National Command Authority tasking. Drawing on his effective communication skills, Captain Collins synchronized 4 major weapons systems and executed a joint air refueling plan that increased aerial refueling capabilities in the Pacific by 55 percent. Finally, his leadership and operational expertise earned him recognition as group Company Grade Officer of the Quarter and was lauded by the commander of 5th Special Forces Group for excellence in execution of the highest operations tempo in 18 months. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Collins reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## **Captain Sean T. Conrad**

Captain Sean T. Conrad distinguished himself as Chief of Current Operations and Instructor Pilot, 551st Special Operations Squadron, Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. Captain Conrad demonstrated superior airmanship and leadership in the command of 139 MQ-9 overseas contingency operations and combat support sorties. During these missions, Captain Conrad led the execution of two Presidentially-directed strikes that resulted in the elimination of top Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant leaders. He also commanded successful strikes against other high-value targets and additional enemy combatants, advancing the objectives of the United States and our partners. Captain Conrad's inspired leadership of 22 personnel across current operations, scheduling, and aviation resource management enabled the successful execution of 1,101 sorties and 3,491 flight training hours. Further, he provided 106 hours of flying

instruction and enabled the graduation of 45 mission ready remotely piloted aircraft crewmembers supporting geographic combatant commanders' objectives across 4 distinct areas of responsibility. These efforts enabled both the stand-up of an additional combat air patrols and the transition to a pure MQ-9 Reaper fleet, to meet the strategic objectives of Air Force Special Operations Command. Finally, he saved a \$17 million MQ-9 by expertly diagnosing a catastrophic electrical failure and immediately initiating a return to base with no margin for error, ensuring the aircraft's safe recovery. The distinctive accomplishments and leadership of Captain Conrad reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## **Staff Sergeant Lawrence Dabydeen**

Staff Sergeant Lawrence Dabydeen distinguished himself as an AC-130W Evaluator Aerial Gunner and Resource Advisor, 16th Special Operations Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. As a 16th Special Operations Squadron evaluator gunner, Sergeant Dabydeen flew 27 high priority combat missions in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, supporting Operations INHERENT RESOLVE and FREEDOM SENTINEL. These missions covered 239 combat hours, resulting in the judicious removal of enemy combatants from the battlefield, and the capture of 1 high value individual. On one particular mission, Sergeant Dabydeen identified anti-aircraft artillery accurately tracking his aircraft. He quickly directed maneuvers that saved the \$100 million aircraft and 8 Airmen on board. Sergeant Dabydeen was vital to the development of a \$one billion weapons modification program for all AC-130W aircraft, writing an Air Force Instruction for fellow aircrew in the squadron. As an advocate for advanced education, Sergeant Dabydeen finished nine credits towards his Aviation Operations degree and inspired three of his peers to pursue their own degrees. As a stalwart member of the community, Sergeant Dabydeen organized a Thanksgiving meal for 32 squadron members and their families, boosting the holiday spirit for all. He was vital to honoring the squadron's lineage, leading a 4-airmen team to remodel the Heritage Room, providing over 500 man-hours,

directly boosting the morale of all 169 squadron members. In the local community, Sergeant Dabydeen volunteered 50 hours to the Children's Home and raised \$5 thousand in donations, mentoring 23 orphans and greatly improving their quality of life. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Dabydeen reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### Staff Sergeant Jarred D. Degeyter

Staff Sergeant Jarred D. Degeyter distinguished himself as an Integrated Communication, Navigation and Mission System Craftsman, 901st Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. Sergeant Degeyter volunteered for a short-notice deployment while simultaneously completing all required training for his newly assigned airframe in less than three months. While deployed, he generated 178 combat missions supporting special operations forces. Additionally, Sergeant Degeyter led a maintenance team repairing a grounding radio discrepancy on the combat zone's sole EC-130J aircraft. By identifying a faulty transmitter, his actions restored emergency communications ensuring zero lapses in mission coverage. Moreover, Sergeant Degeyter led 11 volunteers during an Operation Homecoming event by transporting 10,000 pounds of gear his team enabled a smooth reintegration for 250

returning deployers. Furthermore, Sergeant Degeyter expertly led the squadron's mobility section through three successive deployment rotations in support of Operation INHEHRENT RESOLVE and Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT, directly contributing a collective 180,000 deployed man hours in 2015. Finally, Sergeant Degeyter was hand-picked to perform flightline expeditor duties for three months, a position normally reserved for a Technical Sergeant. He flawlessly led 40 Airmen from 12 Air Force specialties in maintaining 7 MC-130Hs. His actions proved pivotal to the squadron amassing an amazing 1,000 flight hours for the fourth quarter of 2015. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Degeyter reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Forces.

### Technical Sergeant Kathleen K. Easton

Technical Sergeant Kathleen K. Easton distinguished herself as Budget Analyst, 24th Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, she directed all aspects of executive support to 1,700 Special Operations Forces across 95 specialties at 24 sites in support of 300 deployed airmen, and maintained \$639 million in assets. Sergeant Easton managed a \$63 million budget as the wing's principal financial advisor and ran a key leader summit for 84 decision-makers, synchronized 2,000 engagements, and was host officer for 32 distinguished visitors. Additionally, she built 184 personnel records and implemented the Enlisted Evaluation System, which enabled an 11 percent wing promotion rate increase. Sergeant Easton completed the Financial Management Level 2 Certification course and volunteered her budget expertise to the Destin Charity Auction in support of a \$10 million fundraiser that reached over 60,000 children. She was 24th Special Operation Wing's Staff Top Performer, Non-Commissioned Officer of the Quarter, and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, while also being named as a representative to Department of Defense Women's Affairs Committee. Sergeant Easton was selected from among 1,000 nominees for the 2016 Federal Asian Pacific American Council Military Meritorious Service Award. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Easton reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

### Captain Kevin P. Epstein

Captain Kevin P. Epstein distinguished himself as a Flight Commander and Joint Task Force Ground Force Commander, 24th Special Tactics Squadron, 724th Special Tactics Group, 24th Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command, Pope Army Airfield, North Carolina, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Captain Epstein led his 26-man flight in the execution of special operations that resulted in the elimination of top Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant leaders. Additionally, Captain Epstein deployed for 4 months as a Special Operations Joint Task Force Ground Force Commander for a 32-man joint force in East



Africa, advising a 2,800-man partner nation force focused on dismantling and preventing terrorist networks and safe-havens in the region. There, he saved his forward operating base twice from imminent attack through first directing an air strike that destroyed an anti-aircraft artillery weapon mounted an enemy convoy approaching the base, and on the second occasion directing an air strike against enemy forces maneuvering to overrun the base. Finally, Captain Epstein led the employment validation to recover a new sensitive asset and exercised capabilities that were lauded by the Combined Forces Air Component Commander. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Epstein reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Staff Sergeant Alec J. Forester**

Staff Sergeant Alec J. Forester distinguished himself as a C-146A Special Mission Aviator, 859th Special Operations Squadron, 919th Special Operations Group, 919th Special Operations Wing, Duke Field, Florida, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Sergeant Forester volunteered for two deployments in support of Special Operations Command South, airlifting 102 passengers and 74,000 pounds of cargo. After identifying an air support request backlog during his first deployment, he led an effort to rapidly fulfill the requests and reduced the backlog by 57 percent. Additionally, Sergeant Forester expedited the movement of 10 SOCSOUTH Operational Detachment Alpha members for a time-critical tasking, ensuring the special operations warriors' mission success. At home station, Sergeant Forester created a dynamic Non-Standard Aviation Special Mission Aviator training plan guaranteeing 15 Traditional Reservists were qualified and mission ready. In this effort, he acquired 500 pounds in training cargo, which amplified Special Mission Aviator mission readiness with realistic ground training. Sergeant Forester also coordinated Army Ranger egress, infiltration, and exfiltration training; meeting vital currency requirements for 60 Army Rangers and validating joint task force tactics. His leadership, as the Unit Fitness Program Monitor, ensured 105 fitness tests were scheduled and administered with a 99.4 percent pass rate. Finally, Sergeant Forester was hand-selected to airlift the USSOCOM Vice Commander for the Warfighter Conference with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Forester reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Staff Sergeant Averill L. Jamison**

Staff Sergeant Averill L. Jamison distinguished himself as the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of Standardization and Evaluation, CV-22B Special Mission Aviator Evaluator, 7th Special Operations Squadron, 752d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Sergeant Jamison deployed for 142 days in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, where he engaged directly with America's enemies and flew 26 missions deep inside contested territory. In addition, as the

squadron's Lead Flight Engineer, Sergeant Jamison amassed 385 flight hours and 126 instructor hours executing joint training missions across 7 exercises spanning 18 countries. On one such exercise, Sergeant Jamison coordinated and executed a daring rescue of a foreign soldier, culminating in an expedited evacuation to medical personnel and saving the individual's life. Furthermore, Sergeant Jamison was selected as the squadron's initial cadre flight engineer for shipboard operations where he qualified 5 crews, increasing the squadron's capability by 250 percent. Lastly, Sergeant Jamison overcame a critical manning shortage in the squadron by running the standardization shop single-handedly for three months and developing an off-duty study program which was highlighted as a best practice by Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command. Sergeant Jamison's devotion to duty resulted in him garnering the Air Force Special Operations Command Tiltrotor Special Missions Aviator of the Year award for 2015. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Jamison reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Technical Sergeant Raymond A. Kessner**

Technical Sergeant Raymond A. Kessner distinguished himself as Operational Test Director, 18th Flight Test Squadron, Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2015 through 31 May 2016. During this period, he authored the syllabus of instruction for sensor operators on the first iteration of dedicated operational tests on Air Force Special Operations Command's newest gunship, the AC-130J. Additionally, he developed the training plan, and executed the instruction of two sensor operators assigned to the 1st Special Operations Group, Detachment 1. Sergeant Kessner's leadership was crucial as an airborne test director and scenario facilitator for the AC-130J Operational Utility Evaluation, leading a team of 4 testers on the aircraft and 15 opposing forces and friendly ground elements to successfully validate the AC-130J interoperability with SOF ground forces. Furthermore, as a Test Director, he oversaw an urgent AC-130U flight program block upgrade that enabled all weather strike capability on that gunship. Sergeant Kessner's rare dual qualification on the AC-130U and AC-130J and his precision strike package expertise were critical for defining the test strategy of the \$2.75 million AC-130J Block 20 Initial Operational Test and Evaluation. Also, he spearheaded the squadron's assistance effort for victims of the February 2016 Pensacola tornados, enhancing the lives of 36 victims and bolstering base and community relationships. Finally, Sergeant Kessner completed nine acquisition courses earning a Level 1 certification in under six months. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Kessner reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Technical Sergeant Zachary A. Nichter**

Technical Sergeant Zachary A. Nichter distinguished himself as an Intelligence Analyst and Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Intelligence Flight, at his unit from 1 June 2015 to 31

May 2016. Sergeant Nichter drove mission planning for a 3,300 flying hour program supporting Secretary of Defense-directed missions. He crafted risk mitigation techniques essential to the safe delivery of over 2 million pounds of sensitive cargo and 8,000 special operation forces personnel conducting low-visibility contingency operations across 27 nations. While deployed, Sergeant Nichter piloted threat analysis for a denied area, identifying a previously unknown surface-to-air missile system, which drove modifications to joint flight tactics and procedures for over 120 Air Commandos. His actions directly safeguarded the lives of 50 aircrew and 3 sensitive air assets valued over \$100 million. He steered 185 combat sorties during the execution of 1,343 combat hours, targeting terrorists across 6 areas of responsibility. He triggered kinetic strikes that removed enemy combatants, including high value targets located deep inside politically sensitive territory. Further, he managed route planning for contingency medical evacuations of 50 coalition forces forward deployed to an austere combat outpost. Finally, Sergeant Nichter spearheaded the standup of an intelligence fusion cell by conducting an intense 140-hour training program for an Air Force Special Operations Command unit executing an operational assessment of a new combat airborne rocket system, resulting in 20 successful kinetic strikes on Islamic State targets. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Nichter reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Captain Thomas J. Outlaw**

Captain Thomas J. Outlaw distinguished himself as Instructor Combat Systems Officer, Flight Commander, and Chief Resource Advisor, 318th Special Operations Squadron, as well as Section Commander, 27th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Captain Outlaw expertly led the program execution of the largest maintenance squadron within the Air Force Special Operations Command, ensuring the safe execution of 500 sorties, 4,100 flying hours, and 36 higher headquarters and base-level exercises. He demonstrated superb management by guiding his unit through 8 Air Expeditionary Force deployments and 115 individual mobilization taskings. Captain Outlaw's cradle-to-grave mobilization mentality ensured timely movement of 115 personnel, 23 aircraft, and 397 tons of cargo for the execution of 1,200 combat sorties and the elimination of numerous enemy combatants. His efforts were critical to the 27th Special Operations Maintenance Group earning the Clements McMullen Memorial Daedalian Trophy for 2015. Furthermore, Captain Outlaw showcased outstanding leadership under pressure by instructing U-28A Initial Qualification and Mission Qualification training syllabi, and deployment preparation training lines for 70 operators. His leadership successfully prepared young aviators for combat solidifying his unit as the 27th Special Operation Wing's Squadron of the Year. Finally, Captain Outlaw's sustained superior performance culminated in his receipt of the 318th Special Operations Squadron's Company Grade Officer Professional of the Year for 2015,

and Company Grade Officer of the Quarter. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Outlaw reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **First Lieutenant Seth M. Rodgers**

First Lieutenant Seth M. Rodgers distinguished himself as the Commander's Executive Officer, 58th Maintenance Group, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Lieutenant Rodgers developed and nurtured the Resource Alignment Working Group, enabling the effective management of 72 work orders, 95 work request forms, and over \$748 thousand in spending for the 58th Maintenance Group. Lieutenant Rodgers was further appointed the group lead for the replacement of Kirtland's HH-60 fleet, providing key maintenance insight to Air Education and Training Command throughout the beddown of 17 additional aircraft. Moreover, Lieutenant Rodgers was chosen to spearhead all the Group's Continuous Process Improvement efforts, driving the progression of 15 different ongoing initiatives across 2 squadrons. As a Language Enabled Airman, Lieutenant Rodgers proved himself a multicultural asset to the Air Force and United States government. During the Angola Partnership Event at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, Lieutenant Rodgers was the primary translator for nine Field Grade Officers, equipping our African allies with medical evacuation and search and rescue expertise. Finally, Lieutenant Rodgers went on to fill an O-4 billet at the United States Embassy in Mexico, serving as Assistant Army Section Chief for 30 days. His leadership was instrumental in coordinating the immersion of 116 Mexican General and Field Grade Officers at 6 bases across the United States. For his stellar efforts, Lieutenant Rodgers was the 2015 Wing Company Grade Officer of the Third Quarter. The distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Rodgers reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Captain Lorraine C. Rodriguez**

Captain Lorraine C. Rodriguez distinguished herself as Comptroller, 352d Special Operations Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, she served as the principle financial advisor for 2 groups and 6 squadrons and balanced the wing's \$134 million budget for both the current fiscal year and 5 upcoming fiscal years. Also, Captain Rodriguez was the key financial link with US European Command, securing \$1 million for 10 special operations exercises, ensuring the wing continued to strengthen relationships with partner nations and increase joint capabilities with allied militaries. Additionally, her diligent work and coordination earned the wing \$4.1 million for critical aircrew flight equipment storage, an aerial delivery crane, and information technology equipment, enhancing the wing's combat readiness capability. Furthermore, Captain Rodriguez's meticulous analysis of the flying hour program identified and recouped a \$1 million shortage in funding for aviation fuel bills. Her financial management of the wing's flying program enabled 1,900 sorties and over 5,000 flight



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-- NORTON A. SCHWARTZ, Gen (Ret) Former USAF Chief of Staff

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hours that led to the capture of a senior Al-Qaeda operative. Finally, Captain Rodriguez coordinated funding support to the largest North Atlantic Treaty Organization exercise in over 10 years, culminating in Special Operations Command Europe assuming Special Operations Component Command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Response Force for 2016. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Rodriguez reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

### Technical Sergeant Ryan E. Rutz

Technical Sergeant Ryan E. Rutz distinguished himself as a Loadmaster, 193d Special Operations Support Squadron, Middletown, Pennsylvania, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Sergeant Rutz demonstrated superior performance as an EC-130J Instructor Loadmaster and Group Tactician as demonstrated by winning the 193d Special Operations Support Squadron Non-Commissioned Officer of the Quarter three times during this period. He selflessly volunteered to deploy in support Operation INHERENT RESOLVE where he flew over 95 combat hours during 17 sorties broadcasting hundreds of hours of Military Information Support Operations messages in support of joint task force efforts throughout the theater. Additionally, during this deployment, he augmented active duty crews during critical joint airdrop inspections of ammunition and ensured success for a Presidential directed resupply mission. He was handpicked for the Advanced Airlift Tactics Training Course and completed a Bachelor's Degree with honors while supporting 206 flight hours during special operations air mobility and local training missions, including over 80 hours of instruction completing training for 5 new loadmasters. Sergeant Rutz generously gave back to the community this Memorial Day dedicating nine hours for an American Flag detail at Fort Indiantown Gap National Cemetery. Sergeant Rutz clearly personifies America's specialized air commando while at work and serving in the community. The distinctive accomplishments of Technical Sergeant Rutz reflect great credit upon himself, the Air National Guard, and the United States Air Force.

### Technical Sergeant Bon S. Strout

Technical Sergeant Bon S. Strout distinguished himself as Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape Operations, 353rd Special Operations Support Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. During this period, Sergeant Strout was instrumental in integrating special operations personnel recovery capabilities across the theater and with general purpose forces. Specifically, he incorporated the Republic of Korea's Special Operations satellite communications within Special Operations Command Korea's personnel recovery architecture. Sergeant Strout's efforts greatly enhanced the ability to report, locate, and recover isolated special operations personnel on the Korean peninsula. Additionally, he trained

25 members from the United States Army's 3-2 Ground Support Aviation Brigade to effectively support personnel recovery operations of special operations personnel within the Republic of Korea. Furthermore, Sergeant Strout developed the first employment of unmanned drone technology in support of the 353rd Special Operations Group's combat survival training program. He developed tactics, techniques, and procedures to employ unmanned reconnaissance of potential training areas and helicopter landing zones saving approximately 120 man hours while directly enabling realistic field survival training in 6 foreign nations and significantly lowering the training iteration's overall risk. Finally, he deftly integrated the drone to both educate students on emerging threats, but also to enhance training feedback by providing actual evasion video footage during the debriefs. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Strout reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **First Lieutenant Eric J. Tritch**

First Lieutenant Eric J. Tritch distinguished himself as an Aircraft Maintenance Officer, 193d Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Middletown, Pennsylvania, from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016. Lieutenant Tritch deployed as Officer in Charge with the 27th Expeditionary Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, where he led 208 Airmen supporting the maintenance and generation of 5 distinct weapons systems (AC-130U, AC-130W, MC-130H, EC-130J, and CV-22s) at 3 deployed locations in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. Over nearly 500 missions and 1,700 flying hours flown during this period, his significant contributions included the launch of 3 AC-130s providing armed overwatch to a coalition partners and joint forces raid resulting in the rescue of 73 hostages from enemy control. He was also instrumental in aircraft landing for a Presidential directed airdrop mission delivering 27,000 pounds of munitions to the Syrian Arab Coalition. Also, Lieutenant Tritch orchestrated 5 aircraft tail swaps to a new base, including 310 personnel, ensuring combat capabilities within 48 hours of "boots on ground." Immediately upon redeployment, he shifted his focus to improve home station squadron training. With an influx of new accessions, he devised a training plan which resulted in the timely completion of 5-level upgrade training for 11 crew chiefs in just under 3 months. This effort alleviated a shortage of qualified crew chiefs within the squadron. Additionally, he volunteered for domestic operations, led a combined Army and Air Force group of 18 personnel that supported security and transportation for the joint task force commander overseeing the Papal visit. The distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Tritch reflect great credit upon himself, the Air National Guard, and the United States Air Force.

### **Staff Sergeant Alexandra N. Salminen**

Staff Sergeant Alexandra N. Salminen distinguished herself as C-130 Electrical and Environmental Systems Craftsman, 58th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 58th Maintenance Group,

58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico. During this period, Sergeant Salminen's hard-charging leadership and devotion to duty resulted in her receiving shift supervisor responsibilities after only three months of being assigned to the unit. Consequently, her leadership proved vital when she identified a turbine overheat detection inspection that had not been completed during an engine change. Sergeant Salminen's attention to detail led to the re-training of 13 personnel and prevented future critical inspection omissions. Furthermore, Sergeant Salminen developed and implemented a unit daily schedule that consolidated three scheduling products and enabled increased accountability among six Aircraft Maintenance Unit elements. The re-designed schedule decreased missed appointments by 25 percent and enabled full visibility for 163 personnel across 3 shifts. Finally, Sergeant Salminen oversaw the repair and resolution of 57 pilot reported discrepancies. Her outstanding leadership and dedicated efforts to the wing's mission helped generate 3,822 flying hours in the production of 504 aircrew training graduates and was instrumental to the 58th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron's win of the Air Education and Training Command's 2015 Maintenance Effectiveness Award. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Salminen reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

### **Captain Dale L. Winters**

Captain Dale L. Winters distinguished himself as the Maintenance Operations Officer, 1st Special Operations Maintenance Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. During this time, Captain Winters impeccably served as the operations officer for 3 separate squadrons, leading 930 airmen completing over 5,000 maintenance actions for the command's largest Maintenance Group. His leadership stood paramount in the generation of 3,700 sorties, of which 42 percent directly supported combat operations. Additionally, Captain Winters designed an advanced cross utilization training program spanning across seven Air Force Specialty Codes. His ingenious proposal increased qualified crew chiefs in the maintenance unit by 40 percent in only 6 months. Additionally, Captain Winters brilliantly drafted the squadron's equipment shelter plan. His strategy securing 94 unique assets vital to the wing's critical mission was adopted in the overall sheltering instruction and postures the resources for rapid reconstitution after natural disasters. Furthermore, Captain Winters innovatively refined the wing's munitions routing process. His streamlined process enabled 22 percent faster munitions delivery times and decreased weather sortie cancels by 60 percent from the previous year. Finally, Captain Winters flawlessly drove the maintenance support for the US Special Operations Command's Emerald Warrior exercise. His efforts to synchronize 605 personnel in the safe delivery of 853 ground support and 130,000 munitions assets secured the successful training of 1,300 highly skilled special operations warriors. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Winters reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



# AIR COMMANDOS



Photo by Scott Schaeffler of www.scottphotoworks.com

## *A Tradition of Honor & Legacy of Valor*

*Editor's Note: The following is CMSgt Gregory Smith's speech during the Air Commando Association's annual memorial ceremony at Hurlburt Air Park, on 16 Oct 2016.*

Lt Gen Webb and Mrs Webb, Lt Gen Wooley, Col Barnett, distinguished guests and Air Commandos, thank you for allowing me the honor of speaking today.

Recently, Lt Gen Webb and I had the great fortune to spend a little time with Lt Col Dick Cole. We both learned that, in addition to being a Doolittle Raider, he was also part of the 1st Air Commando Group that launched Operation Thursday. This got me thinking about the tradition of honor and legacy of valor of our Air Commandos.

Our history can really be traced to Operation Thursday. On 5 Mar 1944, Colonels Alison and Cochran assembled a group of aviators and delivered the Chindits into Broadway LZ. These missions and the tremendous accomplishments of the 1st ACG in the China-Burma-India theater of operations is reflected, in part, by the street names

over in the new senior non-commissioned officers housing and the 91 names we see behind me today. The actions of these men, as well as the Carpetbaggers of the US Army Air Forces in Europe, set the stage for the next 72 years of Air Commando lineage and sacrifice.

Air Commandos were once again called to action during the Vietnam War. Daring operations such as Ranch Hand, Water Pump, Kingpin at Son Tay, and countless flights over the Ho Chi Minh trail furthered the "legacy of valor" we refer to today in our Airman's Creed. Tragically, Capt Robert L. Simpson was killed in combat when his T-28 was shot down. Capt Simpson was officially the first Air Commando combat loss in Vietnam. Simpson avenue here on Hurlburt is named after him. In all, more than 473 Air Commandos would give their lives for our nation in Vietnam.

On 24 Apr 1980, several 8 SOS

aircraft joined a task force package to rescue US citizens held in Iran. The tragedy at Desert One during Operation EAGLE CLAW resulted in the loss of Majors Richard Bakke, Harold Lewis, Lyn Macintosh, Capt Charles Macmillan, and TSgt Joel Mayo. All of which are remembered through several streets named in their honor here on Hurlburt Field. From WWII through EAGLE CLAW, we pause today to remember and pay tribute to these pioneers of our Air Commando lineage.

Air Commandos were active throughout the 1980s seeing extensive action in places like Grenada, Nicaragua, and Panama. As our nation's "sword and shield," we rose to action once again during DESERT STORM. I trust you've had the opportunity to read these stories in the most recent *Air Commando Journal*. I reflected on the incredible feats of airmanship and gallantry led by names

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like Kingsley, Pulsifer, Comer, Leonik, and Martin to open the operation. Enlisted leaders like Jeff Morrison and Bobby Jenkins, who withdrew his retirement to join the fight are all represented. PJs like Ryan Beckman, Bob Vaughan, and Steve West, with combat controllers, all under the leadership of Wayne Norrad formed the nucleus of what would become the way we deploy and fight in future conflicts. Our Guard and Reserve forces inserted into the force package and set the stage for true Total Force Integration. Legends from the 919th and the 193rd Special Operations Wings, joined by the 16th Special Operations Wing led strike, mobility and PSYOP missions that culminated in the total collapse of the Iraqi Army. Sadly, DESERT STORM was not without sacrifice. On 31 Jan 1991, the crew of Spirit 03 was lost during the Battle of Khafji. The loss of these 14 Air Commandos represents the largest single loss of the operation. We pause today to remember our brothers in arms and honor their memories.

The 1990s saw significant activity for our Air Commandos across Africa, the Pacific, the Middle East, and the Balkans in Europe. On 12 Mar 1994, an AC-130H, call sign Jockey 14 was lost over the Indian Ocean enroute to a combat mission over Somalia. Eight Air Commandos perished that day and these Spectres remind us of the inherently dangerous nature of our profession. The 90s was a coming of age decade for AFSOC as we refined our warfighting capabilities as USSOCOM's air component. These skills would be called to action in the coming years.

On 11 Sep 2001, our world changed forever. Nineteen terrorists hijacked and crashed four airplanes into the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Air Commandos, led by Lt Gen Webb were among the first responders over the crash sites in NYC. Simultaneously, Maj Gen Kingsley and I, along with MH-53, MC-130, AC-130, EC-130 crews, along with special tactics leaders like Eric Ray and Mike Flatten headed to Oman, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan for what would become Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. AFSOC's Air Commandos would play a central role in the efforts to

remove the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces from Afghanistan. Tragically, several incidents would once again demonstrate the nature of our profession. On 12 Jun 2002, an MC-130H Combat Talon II, Chariot 55 was lost near Bande Sardeh, Afghanistan. Two Air Commandos perished while conducting combat operations. On 23 Nov 2003, four more Air Commandos gave all when their MH-53 was lost supporting Operation MOUNTAIN RESOLVE. Finally, on 8 Apr 2010, a CV-22 was lost while infiltrating a ground SOF team near Qalat. Air Commandos Randy Voas and JB Lackey lost their lives in defense of our nation. Their sacrifices join the legacy of valor that links our past to our present... the willingness of the Air Commando to give all in support of our nation.

Across our special tactics formations, Battlefield Airmen gave all in support of our nation. Our minds are forever etched with names like Chapman, Cunningham, McDaniel, Jefferson, Servais, Davis, Duffman, Harvell, Zerbe, Brown, Sanchez, Forrester, Sibley, and Roland. We remember these Air Commandos today for how they lived and the sacrifices they made.

In Iraq, special tactics operators like Sather, Argel, Crate, Fresques, along with Major Brian Downs, a combat aviation advisor, gave their lives in support of a greater cause...these things we do.

On 17 Feb 2012, Cpts Ryan Hall and Nicholas Whitlock, Lt Justin Wilkens, and SrA Julien Scholten perished when their U-28 was lost while supporting combat operations in the Horn of Africa.

The monument to my right here in the Air Park displays the names of the crews of Talon 13 in Puerto Rico and Wrath 11 in Albania. Both MC-130Hs were honing the skills required to lead special operations. These crews, along with those I've discussed, represent the 34 Air Commandos lost since 9/11. Today, we remember these Air Commandos, those who gave all throughout our storied past, in both combat and preparing for combat.

In conclusion, I'd like to summarize what I've discussed here today by linking our current Airman's Creed to Air Commandos, past and present. If you look at the Airman's Creed, you'll find it fits perfectly so please bear with me. The

creed starts with the following lines: "I am an American Airman, I am a warrior, I have answered my nation's Call." In no other profession that I know does this ring so true. Our Air Commandos, past and present, have answered our nation's call in responding when they needed us the most.

The second verse states "I am an American Airman, my mission is to fly, fight, and win. I am faithful to a proud heritage, a tradition of honor and a legacy of valor." When you apply this verse to our Air Commandos, you'll find no greater tradition of honor...from Operation THURSDAY to Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere today, we have linked our past to our present and, through our shared sacrifices and feats of heroism, continued the legacy of valor.

The third verse states "I am an American Airman, guardian of freedom and justice, my nation's sword and shield, its sentry and avenger. I defend my country with my life." As we continue to deploy and employ, we do our nation's bidding as both sentry (protector of our ground SOF teammates) and avenger (our direct action role in special operations). We have covered countless examples of paying the ultimate price in "defending our country with my life." In all, approximately 521 Air Commandos have gone before us from WWII through today.

The final verse states "I am an American Airman. Wingman, Leader, Warrior. I will never leave an Airman behind, I will never falter, and I will not fail." By understanding the role of each Air Commando, we link our past to our present and set conditions for the future. I am proud to be a small part of this great team and I know, with the Air Commando Association as my teammate, we'll never lose that connection to our tradition of honor and legacy of valor. Together, I know we will not and cannot fail.

Thank you all for coming. I can think of no other place that I would rather be than right here, right now with each of you. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your team.



*About the Author: CMSgt Gregory A. Smith is the Command Chief Master Sergeant of AFSOC, Hurlburt Field, FL.*

This B-17F of the Special Flight Section flew USAAF's first special operations mission 19 October 1943. (Photo courtesy of the Moore Collection)



# SECRET WINGS OF THE OSS

**Special Operations of the US Army  
Air Forces in World War II**

*By Bernard V. Moore II, Col, USAF (Ret)*

## Part Two

During World War II the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) adopted the term “special operations” to identify top secret missions it was flying in support of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), America’s first central intelligence and clandestine warfare agency (and the direct forerunner of the CIA). USAAF missions flown for the OSS included parachuting secret agents deep behind enemy lines, infiltrating teams of guerrilla warfare specialists into enemy-

occupied territory, and air dropping thousands of tons of weapons, ammunition, and explosives to Resistance groups. This is the second part of a two-part article begun in the previous edition of the *Air Commando Journal* and provides a brief overview of the special operations flown by the USAAF during the Second World War, with an emphasis on the role played by the special units created by the Air Force specifically to fly these missions.



**Black B-24H of CARPETBAGGER at Harrington airfield, England, 1944.** (Photo courtesy of the Moore Collection)



**Loading B-24 with miscellaneous packages for airdrop.** (Photo courtesy of the Moore Collection)

## Maximum Effort for OVERLORD

In May 1944, with the allied landings in Normandy only a month away and the DRAGOON landings in the south of France scheduled to follow only two months later, the USAAF decided to quickly beef up the three-ship B-17 element of the 122nd Liaison Squadron which had been flying OSS missions into southern France from Algeria. Initially HQ Fifteenth Air Force added 8 B-24 Liberator bombers to the unit, but this was quickly increased to 12 Liberators. With this expansion the unit was redesignated as the 122nd Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), but was again redesignated (for the fourth but last time) in June 1944 to the 885th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) (Special). This was a rare case where the USAAF gave a special operations unit an overt special designation. Beginning in June, with its full squadron strength of 15 big, long-range aircraft on hand, the 885th Bomb Squadron began a maximum effort to infiltrate as many OSS intelligence and special operations personnel into southern France and many weapons to French Resistance groups as possible in order to support Operations OVERLORD and DRAGOON.

In the meantime, the same urgency to beef up the OSS effort in northern France was evident at HQ Eighth Air Force in England. In May 1944 the senior allied command decided to significantly expand its capability to support to the French Resistance forces. The Air Force was directed to double its existing CARPETBAGGER force of 36 B-24s by reallocating 2 more B-24 equipped bombardment squadrons (the 788th and 850th) to the special operations role. This gave Project CARPETBAGGER a total of 4 squadrons with 64 B-24s by Jun 1944. The CARPETBAGGER group was also given four C-47 transports for use in landing operations behind the lines in France.

When the Allies finally invaded Normandy on 6 Jun 1944, CARPETBAGGER went into high gear. In June the CARPETBAGGER squadrons completed 207 missions, in July 397 missions, in August 337 missions. (For the record, in Aug 1944 the CARPETBAGGER units, the 801st Bomb Group (Provisional) and its subordinate units, the 36th, 406th 788th and 850th Bomb Squadrons, were redesignated as the 492nd Bomb Group and 856th, 857th, 858th and 859th Bomb Squadrons, respectively) In Sep 1944, as the Allied armies completed the liberation of almost all of France, the number of completed CARPETBAGGER missions dropped to 268. After a few final missions were flown on the night of 16/17 Sep 1944 Project CARPETBAGGER was considered to be completed and officially came to

an end. During CARPETBAGGER operations from Jan to Sep 1944, 1,657 missions were completed to France, 102 were completed to Belgium, 9 to Denmark, and 6 to Norway. During these missions the "Carpetbaggers" dropped 20,562 containers of supplies, 10, 764 packages of supplies and inserted 415 personnel. On these missions the "Carpetbaggers" lost 18 B-24s.

Operation DRAGOON, the allied invasion of southern France from the Mediterranean Sea, was launched on 15 Aug 1944, later than initially intended but still in time to give substantial support to the OVERLORD forces. In its operations from Algeria into France in support of OVERLORD and DRAGOON the 885th Bomb Squadron flew 735 sorties of which 568 were successful, dropping 1,546 tons of supplies and infiltrating 198 personnel. The unit flew its last missions into France in Sep 1944. During its French operations the squadron lost an estimated six aircraft.

At the end of the French campaign General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, personally praised the part played by the French Resistance and the supporting secret agencies in OVERLORD and DRAGOON. The "Carpetbaggers" and the 885th together played a major role in making the success of the French Resistance and the secret agencies possible. The clandestine campaign in France was certainly just a piece of a grander joint effort, but it definitely helped seal the success of the decisive allied invasions of France in 1944.

By the fall of 1944 the Western allies had pushed the Germans out of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The German armies pulled back, retreating into Germany itself, with other German troops holding out in Denmark and Norway. With the demand for air infiltrations and resupply missions significantly dwindling, HQ Eighth Air Force believed it could drastically reduce the size of its special operations force in England and in Oct 1944, it was decided to retain only one of its four CARPETBAGGER squadrons (the 856th) for OSS airdrops. The other three CARPETBAGGER squadrons (the 857th, 858th, and 859th) began a painful and drawn out transition to a night bombing role.

In Oct 1944, after its French operations from Algeria had been completed, the 885th Bomb Squadron redeployed to Brindisi airbase in southern Italy in order to meet an increasing demand for special operations air missions to northern Italy, the Balkans, Austria, and Eastern Europe. In Dec 1944, the 885th Squadron was joined by the 859th Squadron after Allied Force Headquarters in Italy requested the transfer of the squadron from England. Together the 885th and 859th Bomb Squadrons flew special operations into northern

Italy, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans until the end of the war in Europe.

## Into Scandinavia

As noted earlier, the deliberately stated narrow purpose of Project CARPETBAGGER was to directly support OVERLORD by supporting OSS and Special Operations Executive (Britain's special operations agency) operations in France. But in the late spring of 1944, the Norwegian government-in-exile based in England made an unusual request to the American military. The Norwegians wanted US planes to conduct air drops to Norwegian Resistance groups during the coming summer months. The RAF, which had been conducting successful supply drops to the Norwegian Underground for several years, reportedly decided it could not risk missions into Norway because of the seasonal lack of darkness over the coming summer months. (Author's note: It could also be that the RAF wanted its special operations aircraft to concentrate strictly on supporting OVERLORD in France)

Since Mar 1944, the USAAF's Air Transport Command (ATC), which was normally responsible only for the Air Force's non-combat airlift mission, had become involved in flying special airlift flights from Scotland to civilian airports in neutral Sweden using unarmed civilian-marked "CB-24s" as transports. To get to Sweden from Scotland the ATC transports had to fly over German-occupied Norway. The threat of attack by Luftwaffe fighters was a constant hazard to these flights. The man running this highly irregular ATC operation, called Project SONNIE, was an American pilot of Norwegian descent named Bernt Balchen who had been a pioneer of Arctic aviation. Col Balchen convinced the USAAF commander in England that if he was given the airplanes for the job his ATC unit could also fly the resupply missions to the Norwegian Resistance regardless of the lack of darkness. The OSS in London agreed to coordinate these flights with the Norwegian Underground. Based primarily on Balchen's reputation as a near legendary expert in Arctic aviation and his success running Project SONNIE, Eighth Air Force agreed to his proposal. But it was made clear that airplanes and crews committed to CARPETBAGGER operations would not be diverted to the Norway effort.

ATC's operation to conduct airdrops to the Norwegian Resistance was designated Project BALL. For this project Col Balchen established an ATC detachment equipped with six B-24Hs which were modified exactly the same way as the CARPETBAGGER airplanes, including the all-black paint job. To shorten the distance to the Norwegian dropping areas, the

BALL detachment was based at Leuchars, Scotland, the same base used by Balchen for the SONNIE flights to Sweden. The flight crews assigned to Project BALL were put through a short training program run by veteran CARPETBAGGER crews at RAF Harrington and were ready to begin flying combat missions in mid-Jul 1944.

The first BALL mission was flown to a successful drop on 17/18 Jul 1944. Over the next 2 months the ATC crews flew 64 missions into Norway, completing 37 drops. Thirty-five of these missions dropped supplies to the Norwegian Resistance and two were special missions which infiltrated intelligence agents into northern Norway. Two B-24's were lost on Project BALL. One B-24 crashed into terrain in Norway and another B-24 was lost under unusual circumstances on the final BALL mission. The last BALL mission was flown on 27 Sep 1944 during which the aircrew completed its airdrop in extreme northern Norway, and then had to shut down an engine, forcing them to divert to Murmansk, USSR, for an emergency landing. Unfortunately the Russians were surprised by the unexpected arrival of the black B-24 and shot it down. The pilot maintained control until all of his crew had successfully bailed out, but the plane exploded before he could jump out. After this last mission the ATC detachment was shut down and responsibility for special operations airdrops into Norway was passed from ATC to Eighth Air Force and its CARPETBAGGER squadrons.

Although it was of relatively short duration, Project BALL was a unique chapter in the history of the USAAF's Air Transport Command in World War II. Under the very able leadership of Bernt Balchen Project BALL's ATC crews successfully supplied the Norwegian Resistance during the summer months of 1944, which allowed these units to stay intact until the special operations squadrons of the RAF and USAAF could take over the task.

For the last six months of the war in Europe the CARPETBAGGER squadrons of the 492nd Bomb Group continuously flew missions into Norway and Denmark until Germany capitulated on 8 May 1945.

## Infiltrating the German Reich

In the late fall of 1944, the OSS Secret Intelligence unit in London began making preparations for what had previously been thought impossible – the penetration of Nazi Germany with espionage agents. As the Western Allies closed in on Germany for the final battle Allied commanders wanted to know more about the situation on the ground in enemy territory. Were the Germans capable of more surprise offensives like they pulled off in the Battle of the Bulge? Was Hitler secretly



**CARPETBAGGER C-47 used for air-land missions in German-occupied France in July and August 1944.** (Photo courtesy of the Moore Collection)



**Containers loaded with weapons loaded in bomb bay of B-24 of 885th BS at Brindisi, Italy.** (Photo courtesy of the Moore Collection)

stockpiling weapons and building fortresses in the Bavarian Alps for a final stand? The OSS was keen to get its intelligence agents into Germany to determine the true situation.

One of the problems the OSS in London faced was how to safely communicate by radio with its agents once they made it into German territory. The Germans had a well-developed radio interception capability that could quickly pinpoint agent broadcasts. But the OSS had just developed a new radio – codenamed JOAN-ELEANOR – that transmitted its radio waves straight up, vertically, not out to the sides, horizontally. So if the OSS could orbit an airplane high over the location of its agent the plane could receive the agent’s reports, but the Germans would not be able to locate the agent. The challenge was that German airspace was protected by hundreds of radar-equipped Luftwaffe night-fighters and thousands of flak guns. Having a slow CARPETBAGGER B-24 set up a medium altitude orbit over Germany would have been nearly suicidal. OSS’s answer to this problem was to arrange to use some British-built Mosquito Mk XVI two-engine photo reconnaissance airplanes that were being operated by the USAAF’s 654th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) (Special) of the 25th Bomb Group (Reconnaissance) at Watton airfield, England. Mosquitos were able to fly higher and faster than any other operational Allied plane making them relatively invulnerable to German flak and night-fighters. After successful tests to an actual OSS agent operating in German-occupied Holland the agency arranged to have several Mosquitos equipped with the special radio receivers and recording devices. The 654th Bomb Squadron developed tactics whereby they could orbit over agents inside Germany, talk directly to the agents, and record their intelligence reports (this technology was so advanced it was not declassified by CIA until the late 1970s!)

For the actual infiltration of its agents into Germany OSS in London turned to the 492nd Bomb Group whose squadrons had been busy flying resupply missions in support of Resistance groups in Norway and Denmark and the occasional night bombing mission. But the “Carpetbaggers” were admittedly reluctant to fly repeated infiltration and resupply missions into Germany. It was one thing for fast, high-flying Mosquitos to penetrate the night skies over Germany; it was another kind of risk altogether to fly the much bigger B-24s lower and slower over the fierce and highly experienced German defenses. The “Carpetbaggers” pressed on anyway, completing a few agent infiltrations with their B-24s in the early months of 1945. But in the meantime OSS had come up with a better option.

In Jan 1945, OSS began putting pressure on HQ Eighth Air Force to provide A-26C Invader medium bombers to accomplish the agent infiltration and resupply drops over Germany. The A-26 Invader was a new twin-engine medium bomber that was both much faster and much more maneuverable than a B-24. Eighth Air Force acquiesced, and in Feb 1945 procured a few A-26s from Ninth Air Force. The Invaders were assigned to the 654th Squadron to operate alongside the Mosquitos, but on 12 March the OSS A-26s and Mosquitos were transferred to the 492nd Bomb Group in an effort to consolidate special operations capabilities in one unit.

The all-black A-26s began flying agent infiltrations into Germany on 1 Mar 1945 and, along with the Mosquitos, completed several successful missions before fighting in Europe ceased. One A-26C and crew was lost over Germany, but it could not be determined if it was shot down or crashed into terrain during its fast, low-level night mission.

Emplacing its intelligence agents inside Germany was a huge success for the OSS and the USAAF. And while specific, detailed intelligence reports were still difficult to produce, probably the most important result of these daring missions was to enable the OSS to report that Germany was in a general state of total chaos and collapse. In the spring of 1945, the Allies realized Germany was certainly incapable of launching any kind of significant defense, much less a surprise offensive against the Western allies. Germany signed an unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945.

## **USAAF Special Operations in Asia**

Compared to the large-scale campaigns of the OSS and their supporting USAAF air units in the war against Germany, the OSS campaigns in the war against Japan were of a much smaller scale, corresponding to the deliberately limited American “economy of force” strategies in China and Burma.

In the Burma campaign the OSS played a major role by employing its Detachment 101 agents deep inside Japanese-occupied territory where they organized, equipped, and directed a large force of native Burmese Kachin irregulars in guerrilla warfare. OSS agents also collected intelligence and scouted for other Allied forces operating in Japanese rear areas including the British “Chindits” and the American “Merrill’s Marauders.”

Throughout the Burma campaign, the OSS used regular troop carrier squadrons of the US Tenth Air Force based in India to support its operations. These C-47 crews flew airdrop missions in support of isolated OSS agents and Kachin guerrillas operating in the

jungle, and conducted a large number of landings on airstrips behind Japanese lines. Many of these missions were flown in daylight. Tenth Air Force pilots also used small, light, single-engine liaison planes to evacuate individual injured soldiers from the jungle.

For its operations in China, the OSS established a requirement for a small, dedicated USAAF special operations element for long-range agent parachute infiltrations. In Nov 1944, the OSS had arranged for the USAAF to dispatch one of its modified, all-black B-24s and a veteran crew from the experienced CARPETBAGGER group in England to fly all the way to India and China to familiarize the local OSS commands there with the capabilities of special operations aviation. After touring OSS bases in India and China, the CARPETBAGGER crew flew their B-24 back to England.

Three months later, in Mar 1945, the CARPETBAGGER group in England was directed to permanently transfer two of its fully-modified special operations B-24s and two trained crews to China where they were assigned to the 309th Bombardment Group (Heavy), Fourteenth Air Force, at Kunming airfield. The OSS in China used its B-24s for a few long range infiltration missions, to include some agent drops into Thailand and northern Indochina (now Vietnam). But by far most USAAF special operations missions in China were daytime airdrops of OSS-trained Chinese paratroopers flown by regular, C-47 equipped troop carrier squadrons of the Fourteenth Air Force.

## Conclusion

In Sep 1945, when World War II finally ended, the USAAF began an immediate and massive drawdown of its wartime forces. In this tidal wave of demobilization virtually every Air Force special operations unit in every theater was immediately disbanded. USAAF leadership saw special operations as a mission peculiar only to the circumstances of the recent World War, not a capability that was essential to be kept in readiness in the post-war era. Indeed, by the end of 1945, the OSS itself had been disbanded.

But all was not lost to history. A handful of veterans from the OSS and from USAAF special operations units in World War II played influential roles in a revival of US Air Force special operations that resulted in the creation of the Air Resupply and Communications Wings in the early in the early 1950s. Other USAAF special operations veterans played roles again in the resurgence of "Special Air Warfare" in the Kennedy/Vietnam era of the 1960s. Enough of these special operations forces

survived the lean era of the late 1970s to provide at least a basic foundation for what later evolved into modern AFSOC after the failed hostage rescue operation in Iran during 1980 (EAGLE CLAW).

Throughout World War II, the USAAF was a magnificent fighting organization operating at its maximum capacity. Its leaders were clearly focused on providing to the joint and allied war effort the war-winning effects of the core functions of wartime airpower: bombardment, pursuit (aerial combat), airlift, and reconnaissance. Air Force leaders fought hard to keep their focus, to strictly allocate their limited resources in men and planes, on these core functions. Strategic bombing in particular became the undisputed priority of the USAAF throughout the war. But when the time came to slice off some of this precious airpower for an unfamiliar, unconventional, and unproven kind of joint warfare called "special operations," the USAAF leadership came through. Despite their initial reluctance, historical records show that at critical points American Air Force commanders gave their support to the greater strategic effort by providing the planes and personnel, and their personal attention to the clandestine war against our enemies. Flying thousands of missions at night, by moonlight, at low altitude, parachuting hundreds of secret agents and guerrilla warfare teams into occupied territories, and dropping thousands of tons of rifles, pistols, machine guns, ammunition, grenades, explosives, and other supplies to Resistance groups, USAAF special operations made it possible for the OSS to create guerrilla wars in the enemy's rear areas, to directly support the campaigns of the conventional forces, and to provide the intelligence information needed to generate a quicker and less costly final victory against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.



*About the Author: Col Bernard V. Moore II, USAF (Ret), served in the Air Force 1977-2005. Bernie was a pilot who flew one tour in the C-130E SOLL, three tours in the MC-130E Combat Talon, and one in the MC-130P Combat Shadow. He did one assignment with the 7th SOS, two with the 8th SOS, and one with the 550th SOS, commanded the 8th SOS, 4411th Rescue Squadron, and 58th Operations Group. Bernie completed staff tours at HQ AFSOC, HQ JSOC, HQ USSOCOM, HQ USMACOM and HQ USAF. Operational deployments included the Bosnian War, Invasion of Panama, Southern Watch, and the Invasion of Iraq. He attended Air Command and Staff College, Armed Forces Staff College, Army War College, and the USAF School of Advanced Airpower Studies. As a civilian Bernie worked for USSOCOM as a contractor 2005-2009, and in Civil Service 2009-2015. He has a BA in History, an MS in Aeronautical Science, and an MS in Airpower Art and Science.*

# Air Commando



(MD2) MIAMI, FLA., Dec. 27--CUBAN BOMBER--This B-26 bomber was flown here yesterday by a Cuban Army pilot who was quoted as saying he flew the craft to the United States rather than bomb Cuban cities in the Caribbean country's current rebellion. An unidentified U.S. Customs guard stands by the nose of the plane, which carried machine guns but no bombs.  
AP Wirephoto es62120hld 1958

**Above: Cuban A-26 "C" model Invader.** (Photo courtesy of Martin J Simpson author/owner Douglas A/B-26 Invader <http://napoleon130.tripod.com/index.html>)

**Right: B-26 disguised to look like Cuban aircraft.** (Photo courtesy of Central Intelligence Agency website, [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov))

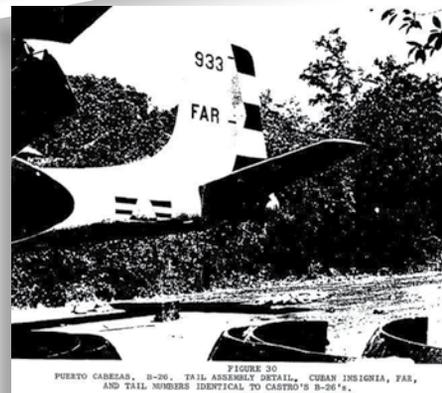


FIGURE 30  
PUERTO CARRIZAS, B-26. TAIL ASSEMBLY DETAIL, CUBAN INSIGNIA, FAR, AND TAIL NUMBERS IDENTICAL TO CASTRO'S B-26'S.

# Commandos in Cuba

By Dr Richard Newton, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)

**The contributions of American air commandos to the 1961 Bay of Pigs operation are relatively unknown. Their actions offer modern air commandos insight into the impact combat aviation advisors can have on the full range of special air operations.**

## Background

1959 – 1961 was a precarious time for the United States. In May 1959, the North Vietnamese Communist Party voted to “use force to overthrow the feudalist imperialist regime [in South Vietnam]” and in the fall of that year the Communist National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Viet Cong) opened an active guerrilla conflict in the South. In Laos, fighting between government and insurgent forces was increasing, with the Soviets openly providing equipment, arms, and training to the Communist Pathet Lao. Between June and October 1960, the Soviets delivered 40,000 tons of military hardware to Cuba. In 1961, the Soviet Union announced the creation of the “Casablanca Bloc,” an alliance of African nations – Algeria, Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Sudan, Morocco, and Libya – opposed to the West and the remnants of European colonialism. In Tibet, US Air Commandos were supporting local guerrillas resisting a Chinese Communist invasion (See Michael Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors*). And 90 miles to the south of Florida, in Cuba, Fidel Castro had overthrown the decaying and corrupt Batista government

On 20 Jan 1961, John F. Kennedy was sworn in as the 35th President of the United States, two weeks after Nikita Khrushchev gave his famous “wars of

national liberation” speech on Radio Moscow. In that speech, the Soviet Premier praised the Cuban Revolution and declared that armed conflict to overthrow colonialism and imperialism were “sacred wars” which deserved the full support of the Soviet Union. Premier Khrushchev was throwing the full support of the Soviet Union behind Fidel Castro’s earlier announcement that Cuba would export revolution across Central and South America in order to free all of Latin America from “Yankee imperialism.” The new President, who during the election campaign had been critical of the Eisenhower administration’s inability to contain Communist expansion around the world and the increasing number of proxy confrontations with the Soviet Union, quickly moved to change the America’s defense posture.

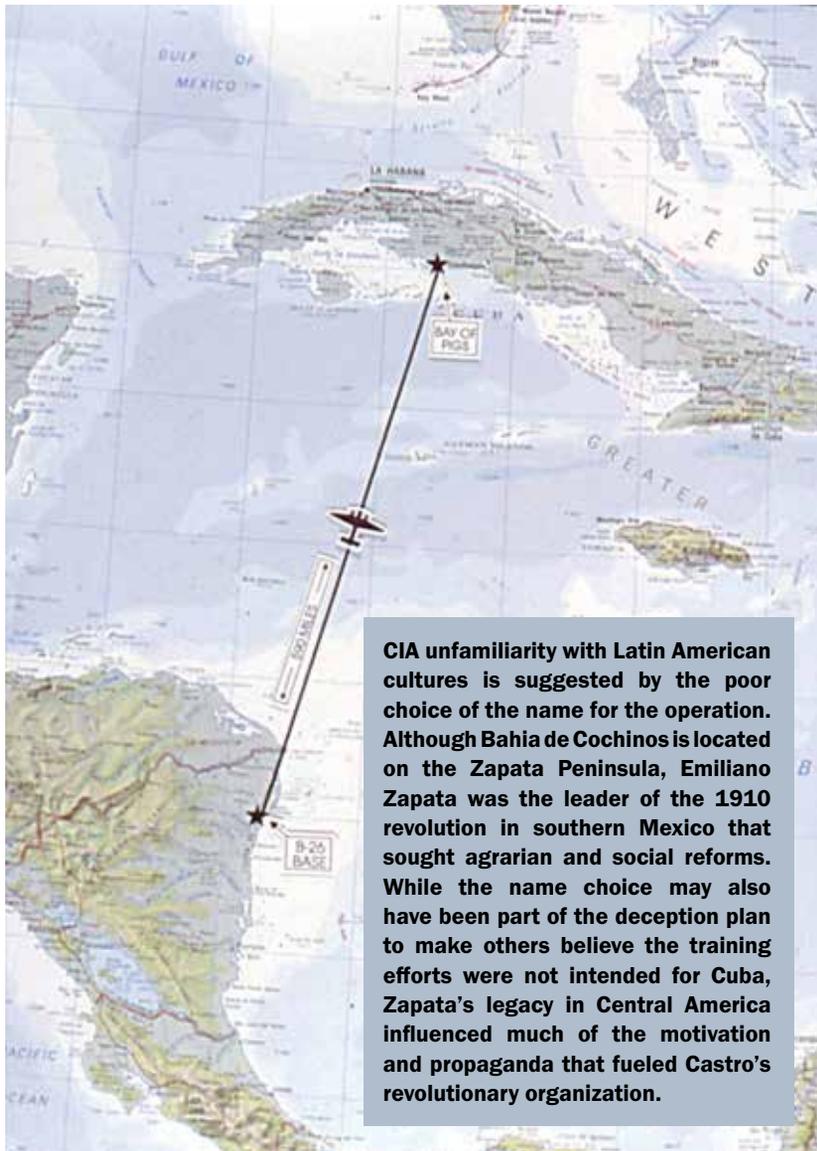
In the months between the Nov 1960 election and the January inauguration, the Eisenhower Administration had kept Kennedy informed of ongoing operations to oppose the Soviets in the developing world, including the CIA operation to train and support Cuban exiles planning an invasion of Castro’s Cuba. In his inauguration speech, President Kennedy pledged American support to indigenous efforts to resist aggression and oppose subversion—a direct counter to the

Soviets’ actions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Kennedy also sent translated copies of Khrushchev’s “wars of national liberation” speech to the new National



**December 1962, President Kennedy addresses the 2506 Cuban Invasion Brigade. L-R: Manuel Artime (saluting), former Cuban President Jose Miro Cardona, President Kennedy, Mrs. Kennedy. Miami, Florida, Orange Bowl Stadium. (Photo by Cecil Stoughton, White House, in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston)**

Security Council, telling them to, “Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest ... Our actions, our steps should be tailored to meet these kinds of problems.”



**CIA unfamiliarity with Latin American cultures is suggested by the poor choice of the name for the operation. Although Bahia de Cochinos is located on the Zapata Peninsula, Emiliano Zapata was the leader of the 1910 revolution in southern Mexico that sought agrarian and social reforms. While the name choice may also have been part of the deception plan to make others believe the training efforts were not intended for Cuba, Zapata's legacy in Central America influenced much of the motivation and propaganda that fueled Castro's revolutionary organization.**

As early as Apr 1960, the CIA had been recruiting Cuban exiles from around Miami, FL, to begin training off the west coast of South Florida and at US bases in Puerto Rico and Panama. The CIA was reporting that a large proportion of the Cuban population and the armed forces would support an attempt to remove the nascent Castro regime. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department did not support the CIA's plan for a paramilitary invasion near Trinidad, Cuba, nicknamed Operation PLUTO, President Eisenhower allowed the recruiting and training to continue.

During the summer of 1960, the CIA had a training camp and airfield built on the southwestern/Pacific coast of Guatemala, on a high mountain plain near the city of Retalhuehu. In July, what had been the primary anti-Castro training facility was moved from islands off the southwest coast of Florida to Guatemala. The US also transferred a dozen Douglas B-26 Invaders to the exiles and members of the Alabama Air National Guard (ALANG) were recruited to train the pilots. Eventually, a total of 16 B-26Bs were assigned to the invasion force and converted to attack configuration—

removing defensive armament, adding drop tanks and rocket pods, and changing the nose from a Plexiglas bombardier position to eight .50 caliber machine guns.

A week after President Kennedy's inauguration, he and his National Security Council were updated on Operation PLUTO. Operation PLUTO was intended to disable the Cuban Air Force (FAR, Fuerza Aérea Revolucionaria in Spanish) near Havana and at Santiago de Cuba, but the President forbade any large-scale attacks near these cities in order to avoid civilian and Russian casualties. When the President also rejected the plan to land the invasion force at Trinidad, near Havana, the CIA came back with Operation ZAPATA, after the name of the peninsula where Bahia de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) was located.

As training and planning continued, it became obvious that the Retalhuehu location in Guatemala was unsuitable as a launching point—it was on the wrong side of the isthmus for the invasion force's ships and was also too far from Cuba for fully loaded B-26s to fly a round-trip sortie. The CIA found a remote, former US landing field on the Caribbean side, at Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua. Although almost 500 miles from central Cuba, it met the range requirements for B-26 air support. In Dec 1960, the CIA's Western Hemisphere desk began negotiations with the Nicaraguan government to use Puerto Cabezas.

The CIA had originally wanted to equip the Cuban airmen with excess USAF P-51D Mustangs or Navy AD-4 Skyraiders from the "boneyard" at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ. The 1,000+ mile, over-water, round trip forced the

USAF planners to advise the CIA to opt for the twin-engine, longer-range, B-26 Invaders, an aircraft the US had been exporting throughout the world, including Cuba. The thinking was that because the FAR had B-26s, the Cuban population would think their own military was revolting against Castro. To contribute to that "story," an exile pilot would later fly a B-26 with FAR markings to Florida and claim he had defected. While the B-26 was a capable ground attack aircraft, it had no air-to-air capability which would make it a fairly easy target for FAR fighters should the Cubans fail to take out Castro's air force prior to the amphibious landings.

## Air Commandos' Role

In 1960, Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt was one of the few active duty airmen with experience in special air warfare. As the commander of Det 2, 1045th Observation, Evaluation, and Training Group, an intelligence unit on Okinawa, JA, Aderholt, was then responsible for supporting CIA operations in Asia, at the time in Tibet and Laos. Aderholt had been

supporting CIA air operations since the Korean War and had set up the CIA's first air training school in Williamsburg, VA. In Oct 1960, Aderholt was recalled from Takhli, Thailand, where he had been leading the MILL POND operation assisting the Laotians, to advise the CIA in Washington, DC, on the air support to Operation ZAPATA.

In order to train the mix of Cuban military and commercial pilots for combat in the B-26s, the CIA turned to the Air National Guard. The 117th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing of the Alabama Air National Guard (ALANG) in Birmingham had recently converted from B-26s to the Republic RF-84F Thunderflash, a photo-reconnaissance aircraft. The CIA needed American volunteers to train the Cuban pilots and maintainers, fly some of the airlift missions in CIA-provided C-46 and C-54 transports, and help arm and maintain the airplanes. Aderholt had been born and raised in Birmingham, AL, so he knew most of the ALANG pilots, and Aderholt's brother, Warren, had served with the ALANG after the Second World War.

Brig Gen George Reid Doster, known as "Papa," had been with the ALANG since returning from Southeast Asia at the end of the Second World War. When the CIA contacted Gen Doster and explained they were recruiting volunteers to train Cuban pilots and maintainers to fly and support the refurbished B-26s, the general replied, "Mister, you got yourself an air force. Nothing me and my boys would like better than to go down and kick Castro's butt."

Gen Doster asked Gov John Patterson's permission for the Alabama Guardsmen to train the Cuban exiles. Assured that the Guardsmen would remain in a supporting role and not take on any combat roles, the governor gave his permission. Doster assembled 80 volunteers, mostly from Alabama, but also from Air National Guard units in Arkansas and Georgia, to support and train the Cuban aircrews and maintainers.

In Oct 1960, Aderholt accompanied a CIA team that flew to Nicaragua to negotiate with the President of

Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza, for a training and launch site on the Caribbean side of the isthmus. After gaining Somoza's permission to use the old American ferry base at Puerto Cabezas, Heinie and Somoza's son, Anastasio Jr., flew a Nicaraguan C-47 to the cinder airstrip and surveyed the airfield to ensure it could sustain the planned air operations. Puerto Cabezas was austere but useable. Moreover, it was no less austere than the remote airfields American airmen had flown from in the Pacific Islands during WW II or in Korea during that war.

Upon returning to Washington from Nicaragua, Aderholt reviewed the CIA's invasion plans and argued for a larger air force to support Brigade 2506, the amphibious invasion force. According to US doctrine at the time, the key to a successful amphibious assault was to establish air superiority over the beachhead. This meant establishing air superiority by taking out Castro's air force. Because the invasion plan only called for seizing and defending a small area, and not attempting to break out of the lodgment until there was a general uprising against the Castro regime or overt military intervention by the US, the CIA affirmed Aderholt's assessment. "It is considered crucial that the Cuban air force ... capable of opposing the landing be knocked out or neutralized before amphibious shipping makes it final run in to the beach." Unfortunately, the administration rejected Aderholt's recommendations and Heinie returned to Thailand.

We now know that Castro knew of the planned invasion long before Aderholt traveled to Nicaragua. Miami newspapers and other US news outlets were reporting that forces were gathering in Central America to oust Castro. In addition, Castro was receiving regular intelligence about the exiles' training from his sources in the Miami area and from Guatemala. In Jan 1961, the *New York Times* published a front page article, "U.S. Helps Train an Anti-Castro Force at a Secret Guatemalan Air-Ground Base," and in Mar 1961, a *US News & World Report* story reported that invasion plans were in the final stages and that truckloads of volunteers



**Brigade 2506 Flag** (Photo courtesy of Central Intelligence Agency website, [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov))



**Cuban pilot Gustavo Ponzoa** (Photo courtesy of AFSOC History Office)



**A-26 Invaders on their way to Cuba.** (Photo courtesy of Martin J Simpson author/owner Douglas A/B-26 Invader <http://napoleon130.tripod.com/index.html>)



**Many Cuban pilots continued flying and working with the US after the Bay of Pigs. CIA contracted pilots flew B-26s for ground attack against Simba rebels in the Congo Crisis. L-R: Major Sigel Dickman, Cuban pilot Gustavo Ponzoa, and Lt Maurice Bourne standing in front of a B-26.** (Photo courtesy of Maurice Bourne)

had left Miami for training camps in the Caribbean. Castro did not need many spies with help like this from the media.

## The Training

About 40 pilots were chosen to form an air force from the Cuban exile community. These men were a mixture of former military and commercial pilots who had escaped Cuba. None had flown medium attack aircraft in combat, but some had been flying clandestine airlift missions supporting anti-Castro guerrillas in Cuba. All had to be trained to fly the B-26Cs and

learn air combat tactics: bombing, strafing, and defensive maneuvering.

In Jan 1961, the first Alabama Guardsmen began moving to Guatemala. The first contingent was heavily weighted towards maintenance and armament specialists. The instructor pilots arrived shortly thereafter. The Cubans took great pride in their efforts and the maintainers got to the point that they would insist the American advisors not assist with the maintenance. It got to the point that the Americans were assisting only when there were not enough maintainers to launch, fuel, arm, and recover all the sorties. By mid-March, the Guardsmen's assessment was that the aircraft and pilots were ready to go and that the pilots had flown more training hours and sorties than the average US pilot going into combat in WW II.

## Air Commando Journal Article Submission Guidelines

Our goal at the *ACJ* is to tell the Air Commando and USAF Special Operations story, from our beginning to today.

We need your help to do that. We seek quality articles, well written, factually based, and reflecting your experiences living the special operations mission in all of its complexities. Submissions can be of any length, although 1500-3000 words would be an average suggestion. All articles will be edited as per the Air University Style and Author Guide (found online at [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org) under the Journal tab, and at the Hurlburt Field library).

Submit files electronically to: [info@aircommando.org](mailto:info@aircommando.org). We use MS-Word. We also appreciate accompanying photos. Photos should be high resolution (300 dpi) and must indicate the source, have a release for use, and a brief description. If your submission is copyrighted, we will indicate that on the article.

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## What Happened

The original plan called for 16 B-26s to attack Cuban airfields for 2 days prior to the planned amphibious landings, with additional airstrikes on Cuban air bases at first light the morning of the invasion. The President and his advisors, though, were uneasy about the size of the air assault and kept asking if the air strikes were necessary. At the very end, when the President gave permission to launch, his instructions were to reduce the size of the air assault in order to give plausible deniability that the US was not the source of the invasion. Kennedy's advisors felt that 48 hours of continuous, sustained bombing would appear to be too US-like and they wanted the attacks to appear as if Cuban paramilitaries were conducting the air strikes.

During the flight crew briefings on 14 Apr, the Cuban pilots were informed that the strike force had been cut in half. Though they protested the order, there was no way to appeal to the President. To compensate for the lack of attack aircraft, the Cubans were promised fighter cover from US Navy jets flying off the *USS Essex* carrier battle group. Thus, on 15 Apr, eight B-26s, half the minimum number needed to establish air superiority over the invasion force took off from Puerto Cabezas. To add to the Cubans frustration, just before takeoff the pilots were informed that their fighter cover had been cancelled. While deeply disappointed, they elected to fly the missions anyway, knowing that the amphibious and airborne forces of Brigade 2506 were already enroute to the Bay of Pigs and needed any air support they could get.

The eight B-26s took off in three sections: the first section of two aircraft headed for Santiago de Cuba on Cuba's south-east coast, while the other two sections of three B-26s each headed towards Libertad, west of Havana, and San Antonio de los Baños, south of Havana. The initial strikes on the morning of 15 Apr took out half of the FAR, an extraordinarily successful attack. The remaining Cuban aircraft, a mix of Lockheed T-33 Shooting Stars and Hawker Sea Furies, could easily be destroyed by the second wave of attacks planned for that afternoon. But that attack never came. President Kennedy cancelled the air strikes intended to finish Castro's air force.

On the morning of Sunday, 16 Apr, Gen Charles Cabell, the deputy director of the CIA, decided he needed to ask the President for additional permission to launch the strategic

attacks that had been planned and approved for that day weeks before. The Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, though, had convinced the President to halt all subsequent attacks against Cuban airfields, so as the pilots at Puerto Cabezas prepared their aircraft to launch, the order came from the White House to shut down. The President's decision removed any chance the Brigade 2506 pilots might have had to destroy the FAR and establish air superiority over the landing beaches.

Fidel Castro was just as surprised by the lack of follow-up air attacks as were the Puerto Cabezas pilots forced to remain on the ground. Castro later wrote that he was puzzled by the exiles' failure to continue the bombing, but took full advantage of the lull to mobilize and move his forces, and to round up any dissidents—stark warning to Cuban citizens contemplating joining an effort to overthrow him. And because a popular uprising against the Castro regime was one of the indicators necessary for the US to openly support operations following the initial amphibious assault, cancelling the subsequent rounds of air strikes ensured the US would not support the exiles in their quest to remove Castro. And it was about to get worse.

To support the amphibious landings on 17 Apr, 6 air transports: 5 C-46 Commandos and 1 C-54 Skymaster, all flown by Cuban pilots, were to drop 30 paratroopers each on the roads surrounding the beaches at nearby Giron airport. The B-26s were permitted to accompany the transports and attack Cuban forces counterattacking the invasion forces, but they were not allowed to strike Cuban airfields or other strategic targets. Castro was ready for the amphibious and airborne landings and the FAR began attacking the beachheads, drop zones, and the transport ships offshore.

The B-26s were no match for the Cuban fighters, a situation made worse by the fact that the Brigade 2506 aircraft had to shuttle back and forth to Nicaragua, a 3-hour trip each way, while the FAR defenders only had to refuel and rearm at San Antonio de los Baños about 90 miles from Blue Beach, where the initial amphibious assaults were to

land. Without air cover, the assault ships were easy targets for the FAR fighters. By mid-morning two of the five ships had been sunk by FAR bombers and the others were forced to move out to sea before fully unloading all their troops and supplies. With only eight fighters and a dozen pilots, the FAR ruled the day. The FAR was able to launch over 70 sorties.

On 18 Apr, the CIA received permission for US contract pilots to fly the B-26s and relieve the exhausted Cuban exile pilots who had been flying nearly continuously the day before. The CIA also had four replacement B-26s flown to Nicaragua from Eglin AFB to replace the losses from the day before. Three flights of two B-26s each arrived over the beachheads that afternoon, at a time when the FAR fighters were not in the air to challenge the bombers, and the B-26s had great success attacking Cuban forces in the open and approaching Giron airfield and the beaches. By the time FAR fighters responded, the B-26s had expended their ordnance and were headed back to Puerto Cabezas. Airdrops to deliver ammunition and supplies to the brigade had limited success due to the Communist air defenses, but not for lack of trying.

The CIA Director also pressed the President to allow US carrier aircraft from the *USS Essex* to fly cover for subsequent B-26 attacks in support of the Brigade 2506 troops struggling on the beaches. Secretary Rusk continued to advise against supporting the exiles with US air power. On 19 Apr, the President finally allowed the *USS Essex* A-4D Skyhawks to fly a one-hour combat air patrol over the Bay of Pigs landing beaches to protect the B-26s from FAR T-33s. The US Navy pilots were forbidden to strike any ground targets or to initiate air-to-air combat. The Skyhawks were on-scene for the scheduled hour, but because of time zone differences they arrived as the B-26s were departing the area.

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During the B-26 attacks on the 19th, four ALANG airmen were killed when the B-26s they were flying to support Brigade 2506 on the ground were attacked by Cuban T-33s. Castro later used the bodies to feed his anti-US messaging. Over the course of the five days, seven B-26s and one C-46 were lost and five B-26s were put out of action. Ten B-26 crewmen and the crew of the C-46 died. Capt Edward Ferrer, a C-46 pilot in the liberation air force would later declare that the ALANG pilots who flew



**A downed A-26 being investigated by Cuban soldiers during the Bay of Pigs invasion.** (Photo courtesy of Martin J Simpson author/owner Douglas A/B-26 Invader <http://napoleon130.tripod.com/index.html>)

combat missions for Brigade 2506 were no longer advisors, but were brothers.

The ALANG airmen kept the secret of what happened at the Bay of Pigs for decades. The US government did not admit that the four pilots were shot down at the Bay of Pigs until May 1999, almost forty years after the fact.

Part of the legacy that resulted from the Bay of Pigs disaster was that President Kennedy directed the Services to develop forces and doctrine appropriate for conflicts short of major war. In Apr 1962, Gen Curtis E. LeMay, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, created the Special Air Warfare Center at Hurlburt Field, FL, then part of Eglin AFB, to formally address the role of airpower and to develop forces and tactics suitable for limited wars.



*About the Author: Dr Rick Newton is a lifetime member of the ACA and is a retired CAA from the 6th SOS. He currently resides in Tampa, FL, where he is on the faculty of Joint Special Operations University.*

## C-130 Hercules



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 any other airplane. It has been in continuous production for its first user—USAF—since 1954.

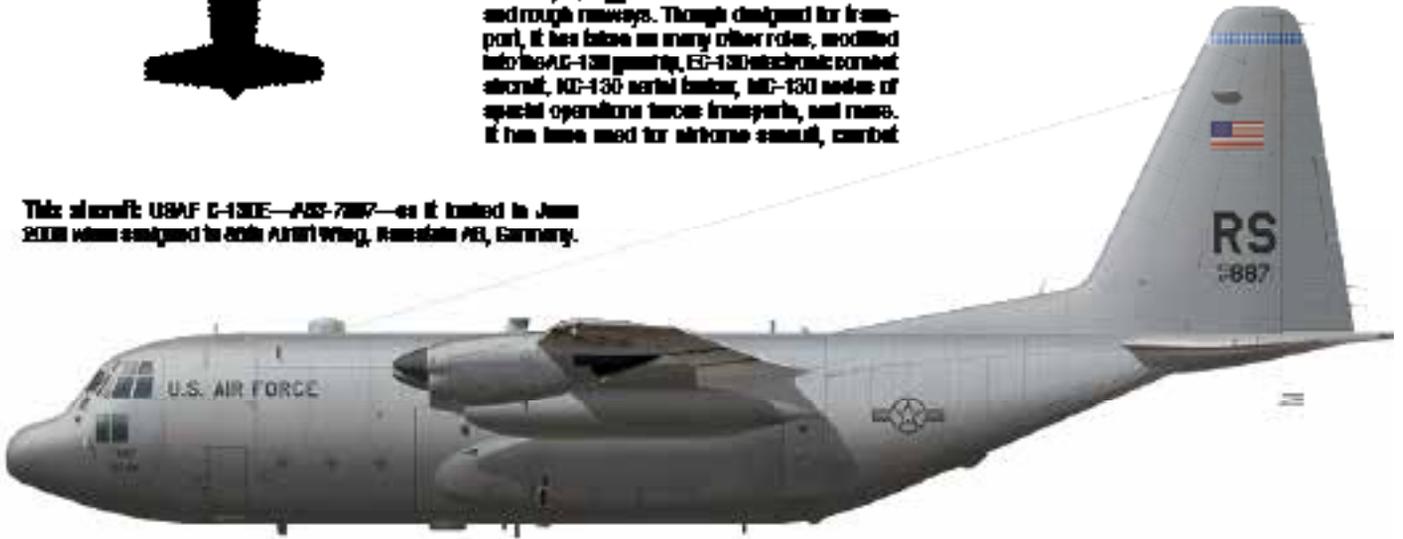
The four-engine turboprop Hercules was conceived as a simple, rugged tactical airlifter able to use short and rough runways. Though designed for transport, it has taken on many other roles, modified into the AC-130 gunship, EC-130 electronic combat aircraft, MC-130 aerial tanker, SO-130 leader of special operations forces transport, and more. It has been used for airborne assault, combat

search and rescue, humanitarian operations, weather recon, maritime patrol, and firefighting.

"The Hork" is widely 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. Dunbar with Walter J. Boyer

This aircraft USAF C-130E—452-7887—as it landed in June 2008 when assigned to 40th Airlift Wing, Ramstein AFB, Germany.



USAF/AFSC



A C-130 lands on a narrow landing strip in Afghanistan.

### In Brief

Designed, built by Lockheed \* primary use tactical transport \* first flight Aug. 23, 1954 \* number built 2,484 \* Specific to C-130E: crew of five (two pilots, navigator, flight engineer, loadmaster) \* two Allison T56-A-16 turboprop engines \* armament none \* max load 82 troops or six standard freight pallets \* max speed 388 mph \* cruise speed 368 mph \* max range 2,745 mi \* weight (loaded) 176,200 lb \* span 132 ft 7 in \* length 67 ft 9 in \* height 38 ft 3 in \* ceiling 33,000 ft.

### Former Flies

Air Force Crews: William Boyd Jr., Bernard Becker, William Caldwell, Howard Collins, Charles Shank. DFE: Clay McClellan (broke). 1950 Iran Rescue Mission: Harold Lewis Jr., Lynn McLaughlin, Richard Butts, Charles McMillan, Joel Myers (all KIA). Sunday Trophy: 1984—484th TDW; 1986—Daryl Cole; 1984—James Hobson Jr.; 1990—Crew of AC-130H; 1997—Crew of Whiskey Six MC-130H; 2002—Crew of Green 31 AC-130H; 2006—Crew of Train 08. Other USAF missions: Charles Hoffman, Morton Schwartz. Test pilots: Stanley Boltz, Roy Wimmer.

### Interesting Facts

Flown by USAF, USMC, USA, USCG \* longest longest continuous production run (1954-present) of any military aircraft \* classed, in first flight, by Lockheed designer Kelly Johnson in F2V \* featured in 1988 film "Green Berets" and 1997's "Air Force One" \* flew secret mission to Lop Nur, China's nuclear test site (1988) \* holds record as the largest and heaviest aircraft to land on aircraft carrier \* led thousands of B-57 bombers over North Vietnam \* used by Pakistan as heavy bombers in 1965 Indo-Pakistani War \* nicknamed "Hork," "Hokey Bird," "Fat Albert" \* dropped BDU-62 "Daisy Cutler" and GBU-43/B MCAF, world's largest conventional bomb, in 1991 Gulf War.

# A (*Fictional*) Interview with *Gen Curtis E. LeMay*

Gen Curtis E. LeMay served as the 5th Chief of Staff of the US Air Force from 1961 until his retirement from active service in 1965. He attended Ohio State University and in 1930 was commissioned a 2Lt in the US Army Air Corps. He took pilot training from 1931 – 32 and became a pursuit [fighter] pilot. In 1937 he transferred to bombers. Prior to the Second World War, LeMay was heavily involved with Army Air Corps' efforts to prove the strategic bomber could be an effective means of defending the United States and was instrumental in the testing and combat development of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress.

From Sep 1942 until May 1943 he commanded the 305th Bomb Group and led them in combat over Europe. Gen LeMay was transferred to the Pacific in Jul 1944, commanding first the XX Bomber Command in the China-Burma-India theater, and then the XXI Bomber Command on Guam. He completed his wartime service as the Chief of Staff for Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific, in charge of all strategic bombing operations of the Japanese home islands.

After the war, Gen LeMay was given command of US Air Forces Europe and initially commanded the Berlin Airlift. He quickly assigned operational control of that operation to an air mobility expert, Lt Gen Tunner. In 1948, LeMay was given command of Strategic Air Command (SAC) and turned it from a skeleton of the WW II bomber force into the nation's primary delivery force for atomic weapons. Gen LeMay commanded SAC until Jul 1957, when he became the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force. In Jul 1961, he was appointed the 5th Chief of Staff of the Air Force, succeeding Gen Thomas White.

Gen LeMay passed away on 1 Oct 1990 at March AFB, CA. He is buried at the USAF Academy cemetery in Colorado Springs, CO.



**ACJ:** General, we appreciate you spending time with us today to discuss the origins of the modern air commandos. Your efforts during the 1960s to create the all-jet Air Force and develop SAC into the primary deterrent to nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union are well known. But some might claim you were also the architect of the modern air commandos. In response to President Kennedy's call to create Service capabilities suitable for unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency operations, you directed that Tactical Air Command (TAC, now ACC) stand up the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Eglin AFB, FL (Field 9, Hurlburt Field) in Apr 1961. Can you tell about this episode, please?

**Gen LeMay:** Of course. I was the Vice Chief of Staff at the time. The biggest threat to the survival of our nation was the atomic threat posed by the Soviets. The President was dealing with the effects of aggressive Communist subversion around the world and needed to be able to do something that did not entail putting divisions of soldiers in harm's way in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, or limiting his air power options to only nuclear weapons. The Army and the Navy were creating forces for unconventional warfare, the Special Forces and the SEAL teams. Although it was my belief that air warfare is the same no matter if high intensity against Soviets, Germans, or Japanese or counterinsurgency operations, we had an order from the President to develop dedicated

capability for unconventional operations.

At the Air Staff, we looked at what Phil Cochrane and John Alison had done in Burma, a low priority theater during WW II, and realized that a small force of air commandos could have a major impact in guerrilla-type conflicts on the fringes of the developed world. So, we decided to reactivate the air commandos along the lines of that 1944 group in Burma, with transports, bombers, and fighters, and called for volunteers who would be willing to go to these backwater locations and train local airmen for air operations against insurgents, terrorists, and guerrillas. The new air commandos had to be able to operate overtly as the US Air Force and also in a clandestine mode when necessary.

One of the things I prided myself on was that I would pick good commanders, give them guidance, and get out of their way. I knew Col Ben King, a fighter pilot, from our love of skeet. He and I had competed in the national skeet shooting match. I was captain of the SAC team, Ben led the TAC team. If the 4400th CCTS was to succeed it needed a commander with a special operations mindset, one who could see possibilities where others might not and have the courage to explore those opportunities, even if faced with personal or professional risk. I knew Ben to be that sort of leader, one who would get the job done without lots of bureaucracy and oversight, protect the Air Force from the maneuverings of the CIA, and keep the air operations out of the public eye. I called Ben at Hurlburt where he was directing the test of the BOMARC missile, an air defense system and offered him the job. On 1 May he took command of the squadron.

Originally, the CIA had only wanted the Air Force to deliver sanitized, ex-WW II aircraft to friendly foreign governments so that those governments could fight the Communists and keep the US out of those sort of messy situations. But at that time, with the Soviets arming and flying in support of so many dissident groups around the world we discovered that the CIA did not have the ability to train the recipients of these aircraft or to develop the pilots and maintainers into effective combat air forces. We discovered early on that the Air Force was going to have to provide individual and unit-level tactical training in these aircraft. The Bay of Pigs fiasco (in Apr 1961) provided lethal evidence of the downside of giving combat aircraft to crop-duster and airline pilots and then asking them to fly combat missions against experienced air defenders. The Cuban exile pilots who flew those B-26s and C-46s were incredibly brave and not scared of a fight, but the truth is that America did not adequately prepare them for the jobs they were eager to do.

**ACJ:** Sir, throughout your career you were known for enforcing high standards of performance and rigorous training, but you also found ways to raise morale and esprit de corps. Did any of that happen as part of your association with the air commandos?

**Gen LeMay:** Men want to be part of a winning team. That's a basic truth of human nature.

I know the men called me "Old Iron Pants," but hard, realistic training is key to saving lives in a business like ours. Combat is brutal and in the 1940s we were still learning how

to conduct strategic air warfare. In 1942 our Air Force did not have fighters that could escort bombers from bases in England to targets in Germany and back. To that end we developed the combat box formation, 51 bombers overlapping the defensive fires of every bomber to protect the formation. In that situation, every crew had to be able to count on the other crews if they all were to get to their targets, drop their bombs, and safely return home. It took tremendous discipline and courage for those WW II bomber crews to sustain that effort, reinforced by constant, realistic, and strenuous training when they were not flying operational missions.

When I was commanding the 305th Bomb Group in England we had a problem with crews aborting prior to reaching their targets. I issued an order that I would lead every mission and if any airplane took off it would go to the target or the crew would be court-martialed. Our abort rate dropped significantly. Later, in the Pacific, the challenges of high-altitude daylight bombing over Japan meant that fewer than 5% of the bombs we dropped were hitting the targets. When we switched to nighttime low altitude bombing to overcome bad weather and a low, powerful jet stream pushing bombs and aircraft off course, strong Japanese air defenses were causing the crews were turning back from the targets. In that case I ordered that crews who successfully hit their targets would have their tours reduced and be sent home. Our success rate went up to 80%.

SAC, when I took command, was a ragtag bunch of B-29 bomber groups with only half their authorized number of aircraft, crews that could barely find, let alone hit, the targets, and security standards that were embarrassing. Three years after the magnificent job we had done as an Air Force during WW II, we did not have a single bomber crew who could do the job. It was my job to turn SAC around...and quickly. We began training and I held the crews to very high standards. I did not have the time to differentiate between the incompetent and the unfortunate. But I also made it possible to reward and push good people forward and turned every element of SAC into an elite force. We started using the term "special," as in special weapons, to let those men who met our high standards know that they were on the first team. When I left SAC [in Jul 1957] it had become the envy of the world with over 2,000 bombers and 800 aerial tankers. Although "special" came to be associated with atomic weapons during the Cold War, it also defined the people; they had passed the test, maintained our high standards every day, and believed they were truly part of a very special team.

Four years later, when we stood up the 4400th CCTS, we needed airmen who would feel called, who would join a unique and different sort of special team. Imagine, if you will, taking pilots, navigators, crew chiefs, maintainers, and security forces out of the mainstream, modern, all-jet Air Force and asking them to fly, maintain, and protect obsolete prop planes, and do it in Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. I admit that there are people who will jump at such a chance just because they want the thrill of dangerous and "secret" missions. But those were not the people we wanted to be air commandos. We needed mature, level-headed, and highly experienced airmen

who could transfer what they knew about air combat and unconventional warfare to enthusiastic pilots and maintainers who likely did not have much more than a 3rd or 4th grade education...but who had been at war since they were old enough to see over the dashboard of whatever aircraft were available.

So yes, Ben King had a tough task. I expected him to create air commandos to the same high standards we expected of all Air Force airmen. That initial force was comprised of about 125 officers and over 225 enlisted men, all volunteers. Unlike the rest of TAC, they flew C-47s for airlift because that was what many foreign governments were flying. We also gave them some Douglas B-26B Invaders for light attack and North American T-28 Trojans attack/trainers, again because those airplanes were readily available in the boneyard and many of the nations we expected to support were already flying these types. All aircraft were taken out of the "boneyard" in Arizona, reconditioned, and pressed into service. By Aug 1961, the Ben King's air commandos were ready to deploy their first contingent of aircraft, C-47s to Mali in West Africa, to train paratroopers to jump from the Gooney Birds.

To help prepare those men for the uncertain environment we expected them to face we gave the air commandos training not normally given to Air Force aircrews, such as weapons training in foreign weapons, unarmed combat techniques, and language training. Support personnel were given SERE (survival, escape, resistance, & evasion) training, something unheard of for maintainers, communicators, and armorers at the time. We issued them equipment not given to anyone else such as the AR-15 rifle (a lighter, shorter, civilian version of the M-16) and the backpack version of the single side band radio. When the squadron deployed to Vietnam, every pilot and maintainer was authorized to wear a sidearm, highly unusual for the Air Force in 1961, but absolutely important as we expected the air commandos to protect themselves and their base if attacked. A more interesting story is how Ben King started wearing a fatigue-colored, Australian-style bush hat with the side brim pinned up. Soon the entire squadron followed suit and thus the air commando hat was born. When the admiral commanding Pacific Command ordered them to stop wearing their "crazy cowboy hats," I signed a letter stating that the air commando hat was now official headgear for air commando units. I'm happy to see that that tradition continues today.

**ACJ:** Gen Lemay, in the 50 years since you retired from active service there have been tremendous changes in the air commandos. They have gone from a force intended to quietly transport, resupply, and train indigenous fighters resisting subversion and aggression to the best direct action and counter-terrorism force in the world. Would you care to share any closing thoughts with today's men and women who call themselves air commandos?

**Gen LeMay:** I do, and I will. The world our special operations airmen face today is not that same world that I and their fathers and perhaps their grandfathers dealt with 30, 40, and 50 years ago. The enemy is different, the social environment is

different, the political climate is different, and the expectations for their operational success are higher than they have ever been. Like SAC's bomber crews of the 1960s and 70s, special operations airmen are expected to succeed no matter what the odds. And, similar to when we were building up the nuclear bomber and missile forces to deter the Soviet Union, the nation is devoting tremendous resources and investing in leading



**President John F. Kennedy and Gen Curtis E. LeMay at the Swearing-In Ceremony of Gen LeMay as Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force.** (Photo by Abbie Rowe. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston)

edge technologies to ensure special operations forces keep Americans safe from international terrorism. The similarity ends there, though. The threat you are dealing with today cannot be counted, they do not have ships, tanks, bombers, and missile silos. Instead you face ideas and ideals that seek to destroy all that liberty, freedom, and reason have created. So, yes, I do have thoughts about the evolution of air commandos over the past five decades. What you have become is all for the good of our nation. Over 50 years, air commandos have shown amazing adaptability, flexibility, and perseverance in the face of uncertain budgets, changing missions, inter-service rivalry, crushing tragedies, and inspiring victories. Today's air commandos, in both the Air Force and the Army because you have become a joint force, are without peer. There is no one like you, and everyone else wants to be like you. So, you cannot rest on your laurels—what I said about threat, environment, climate, and expectations is real. The challenge is to maintain those high standards of precision, reliability, and quality that you and your predecessors have achieved, but continually evolve to address the new threats and environments that will always challenge freedom.

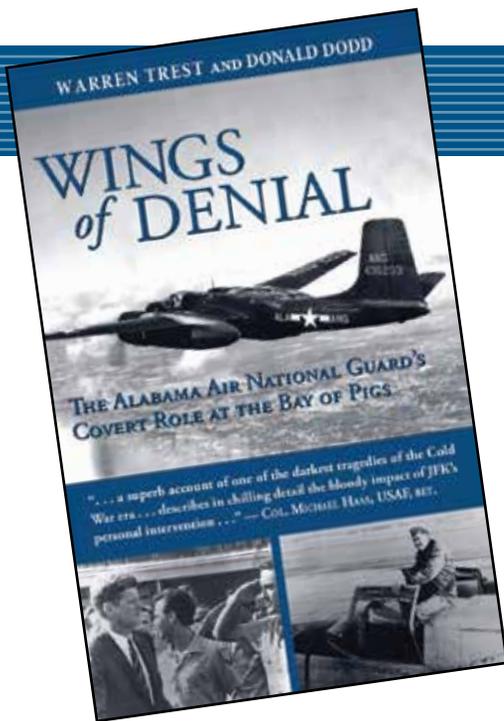
I would like to close by restating your Association's motto, "From World War II to Tonight...." I think that says it all. The men who were those first air commandos, how the force evolved over five decades to what it is today, and the amazing possibilities of what it may become in the future is testimony to the courage, tenacity, and professionalism of the men and women who embrace the air commando spirit. I'm proud of the small part I played in that evolution and salute those who continue to maintain the ideals which our nation has come to expect of its special operations airmen. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your heritage and I look forward to your future. 🦅

## Wings of Denial: The Alabama Air National Guard's Covert Role at the Bay of Pigs

By Warren Trest and Don Dodd

New South Books, 2001 (reissued in 2011) 160 pages.

Reviewed by Dr Richard Newton, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)



*Wings of Denial* is a fascinating story about an episode of contemporary American history that was kept from the public for decades because of classification. For air commandos that is to be expected—the nickname “quiet professionals” is intentional. One cannot help but wonder after reading this book, though, if the story was not also suppressed because it was a bit embarrassing for the national leadership? That said, interesting speculation does not detract from the value of Trest and Dodd’s research or the quality of the story they wrote.

Warren Trest was a long-time distinguished historian for the USAF, having been honored for his histories of the Air Force in Southeast Asia and serving as the senior historian with the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell AFB, AL. Dr Don Dodd is the assistant director of the Southern Museum of Flight in Birmingham, AL, and is also professor emeritus of history at Auburn University at Montgomery.

Their book was first published in 2001 as the US records related to the Bay of Pigs were declassified and made available to researchers. In 2001, the Cuban government also released almost 500 pages of documents, including Castro’s handwritten notes and directives. *Wings of Denial* was re-issued in 2011 on the 50th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs operation.

What *Wings of Denial* shows is that air commandos come in all forms, including fighter pilots. In the fall of 1960, 80 airmen from the Alabama Air National Guard were recruited to train and advise the Cuban airmen of Brigade 2506, Cuban exiles who intended to return to Cuba and remove Fidel Castro and the Communists. The Guardsmen were fighter pilots, maintainers, armorers, and specialists with families, jobs, and lives—for the most part normal guys, but they accepted the call to help the Cubans. They also accepted the fact that they could not tell anyone what they were about to do or afterwards, what they had done.

The narrative about the political and operational details leading up to and during the operation is nicely told. The authors’ use of the declassified records is balanced with the personal experience from the men and from their families,

making the dry, dusty official stuff come alive in an engaging story. As might be expected, the personal anecdotes sometimes offer a contrary perspective from the official version of what happened, again engaging the reader and helping modern air commandos understand the challenges these men and our nation faced in a time of difficult transition.

The Guardsmen and their families gave up a lot to serve their country and they kept the secrets they swore to maintain for decades afterwards. Officially, the men were never involved in the Bay of Pigs, although four of the ALANG pilots were shot down and killed on 19 Apr 1961 when they volunteered to fly two of the B-26s into combat alongside their brothers-in-arms, the Cuban exile pilots. Their families were told they died in the crash of a C-46 transport. Only one of the pilots’ bodies, that of Capt Thomas “Pete” Ray, was ever returned. In 1978 the family learned that Castro had kept Capt Ray’s body refrigerated for 17 years as a propaganda tool and evidence of the Americans’ invasion. In 1979, the Cuban government returned the body to his family, but it was not until 1991 that the CIA admitted the men had been shot down at the Bay of Pigs. In the late 1990s, the four ALANG airmen were posthumously awarded the Intelligence Star, the CIA’s second highest award, and their names placed on the CIA’s Wall of Honor.

This is a very readable book, but more importantly it is a valuable addition to any air commando’s library. It vividly describes an important and often overlooked piece of our history. And, it showed how 80 airmen demonstrated the special operations mindset through creativity, courage, and commitment to others’ freedom.



*About the Author: Dr Rick Newton is a retired combat rescue and special operations helicopter pilot, planner, and educator in the US and NATO. His most recent article, “SOF, Airpower, and Special Operations Airmen: Limited by Our Own Imaginations”, co-authored with Dr Tom Searle, was published by the Special Operations Journal.*



# Air Commando Association

Because of your support to the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, Catherine will fulfill her dream of a college education.



Catherine is the daughter of Air Force Tech. Sgt. James Henry, who lost his life in Albania in 2005 while assigned to the 7th Special Operations Squadron.

Thank you so much for everything you guys do for us! Because of you people like us get to attend college and succeed in life and that's all I could dream of. So thank you so much, we deeply appreciate everything!  
Catherine Henry.



The 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. The Special Operations Warrior Foundation also provides financial stipends to severely wounded special operators.



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