

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

2018 HALL OF FAME

2018 Commander's
Leadership Awards

3rd SOS RPA Squadron
of the Year

WWII Carpetbaggers

John Chapman
Medal of Honor
Recipient



Vol 7: Issue 3

Foreword by Wayne Norrad
CMSgt, USAF (Ret)



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Air Commando JOURNAL



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“The *Air Commando Journal*...
Massively Successful! I save all mine.”

Lt Gen Marshall “Brad” Webb
AFSOC Commander

(Used with permission by Lt Gen Webb)

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FOREWORD

It's an honor to serve as your new president and introduce this Hall of Fame (HoF) issue of the *Air Commando Journal*. If you remember, the Air Commando Association (ACA) decided to cap the number of inductees into the HoF at five starting in 2011, but 2018 was different. Air Commando TSgt John A. Chapman, a Combat Controller, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor (MoH) by President Trump on 22 Aug 2018. This MoH was the first earned by an Airman since the Vietnam War -- some 47 years ago. It was also a long time in coming, some 16 years after his heroic actions took place. With the help of technology, Chapman's actions on Takur Ghar Mountain in Afghanistan on 4 Mar 2002, showed he was still engaging the enemy long after he was thought to be dead. The additional information led to his Air Force Cross being upgraded to the MoH. His selection into the Air Commando Hall of Fame was an easy exception to the five-person per year rule. You can read more about his extraordinary gallantry later in this version of the journal or wait and read *Alone at Dawn* written by Air Commando Dan Schilling and Chapman's sister, Lori Chapman Longfritz, to be released on 25 Jun 2019.

Without much hesitation, ACA decided to celebrate Chapman's induction separately and induct the other five selectees at another time. After all, it's hard to compete with a Medal of Honor recipient. So, in conjunction with AFSOC's local celebration of MSGT (posthumously promoted) John Chapman, the ACA hosted a special HoF Induction Banquet on Saturday, 27 Oct 2018, at the Emerald Coast Convention Center in Ft. Walton Beach, FL. This was the largest event ACA has sponsored, with more than 800 people in attendance, including Chapman's widow, both of his daughters, his mother, brother, both sisters, and other family members. Air Force Chief of Staff, General David Goldfein, was the keynote speaker, with Lt Gen "Brad" Webb, AFSOC commander, providing introductory remarks. Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth Wright also attended. Thanks so much to the many corporate sponsors who helped make this such an extraordinary event. The volunteers who assisted were awesome -- including active duty members contributing on their off-duty time. We couldn't have done it without them. Thank you!



With that behind us, we still had a Reunion/Convention to put on later in the year. Back to work we went. ACA hosted a memorable Heritage Seminar at the Soundside Club on 6 Dec 2018 featuring some of AFSOC's most talented female leaders. We honored AFSOC's Commander's Leadership Award winners at that breakfast event, too. At the banquet on Saturday evening, we honored the winners of ACA sponsored annual awards in special categories. Last, but certainly not least, the five 2018 Hall of Fame selectees were inducted. Please take the time to read their citations in this journal and offer your congratulations whenever you see them. The HoF is a prestigious honor with less than 200 total inductees -- taking into consideration that Air Commandos have been in existence for 75 years, that's a pretty elite group. I offer my personal congratulations to each of them. Enjoy reading the rest of the ACJ.

Any Time – Any Place.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne G. Norrad".

Wayne G. Norrad, CMSgt, USAF (Ret)
ACA President/CEO & Hall of Fame Member



CHINDIT CHATTER

2018 was a banner year for the Air Commando Association, culminated by two major events that are highlighted in this edition of the *Air Commando Journal* and described by our new president in the Foreword. As he noted, the first event was when AFSOC leadership honored the ACA in asking us to host the celebration of the award of the Medal of Honor to TSgt John Chapman for gallantry in Afghanistan by having a major banquet to induct him into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. As Chief Norrad noted, ACA could not have pulled it off without superb volunteer support from AFSOC Protocol, AFSOC Public Affairs, our own small, but diligent, staff, and most importantly, all of our Corporate and individual friends that stepped up to support our fundraising effort by sponsoring tables. (Please see that list later in this issue). We had a host of Air Commando volunteers who assisted as well.



At our own Convention in December, following along with the theme in our last edition of the ACJ, “Women in the Fight,” our Heritage seminar panel was made up of five very successful women officers and NCOs who have had a huge impact on the overall success of our Air Force Special Operations Command. It was superbly led and moderated by our former ACA VP, Col (ret) Dave Mobley. All of those events are highlighted in this version of the *Air Commando Journal* along with some other great accompanying articles.

It is always a humbling honor to play a role in highlighting these events in this Journal. The strength of our organization was tested with the two major events in close proximity. That strength lies in our great membership and we need more. In addition, active membership participation has enabled your Air Commando Foundation to continue to thrive and grow beyond our best hopes. In only a short six years of existence, we have been able to give over one quarter of a million dollars back. If you are reading this journal there is a very high probability that you, or others that you know, are eligible to join our ranks. ACA is truly the “Tribe of Tribes” of all Air Commandos and we need to grow our numbers so that we can continue to serve Air Commandos, Past, Present, and Future. Please enjoy this edition of the *Air Commando Journal*.



Any Time - Any Place

Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Ret)

ACA Chief Operating Officer and Editor-in-Chief

HOTWASH

Air Commando Hall of Fame Banquet Honoring TSgt John A. Chapman

Good morning ACA Ladies,

Jean and I were fortunate to be able to attend the Chapman MOH events last Thursday – Saturday. We came away feeling honored to witness, once again, the camaraderie that exists within the Special Tactics community of AFSOC. The events were exciting, respectful and very well organized. We appreciate the opportunity to be included as guests.

I know that I'm not including everyone that put the events together, so please feel free to share my message with others that were involved.

Best regards,
Jerry Williams
Eglin Federal Credit Union

Good Morning Melissa [Gross],

Just a short note to say "thank you" for allowing Deloitte to be a part of the ACA Medal of Honor Banquet ... always

touching to see our veterans and families recognized for the sacrifices they make / made ... well done ... and well deserved! Take care and please let me know if we can ever be of service!

v/r

Rich McClain
Deloitte Consulting LLP



Featured speaker, USAF Chief of Staff, General David L. Goldfein at the 2018 Air Commando John Chapman Hall of Fame induction banquet. (Photo by Tammy Norton)



The ACA has become a destination for those who have performed the SOF mission, shared the risks, celebrated the successes and honored the sacrifices of our fallen teammates. ACA maintains the history, the culture, the friendships and professional associations essential to sustaining the capability in the best of and the most trying of times. It operates as a trusted business and offers its members value: associations, education, exchanges and family and wounded warrior support. And, it remains small enough to offer all members a family-friendly venue through which alumni, those currently serving and those who will serve share the excitement and promise of the special operations warrior discipline.

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

Become a member today at www.aircommando.org

The appearance of military and government personnel is not meant to suggest an official endorsement by the Department of Defense of the Air Commando Association or its fundraising efforts.

Women In The Fight: ACJ Vol 7, Issue 2

Dennis, my old friend, you have done it again (you and your talented staff). Your October journal tells a story that needed to be told. Again, well done.

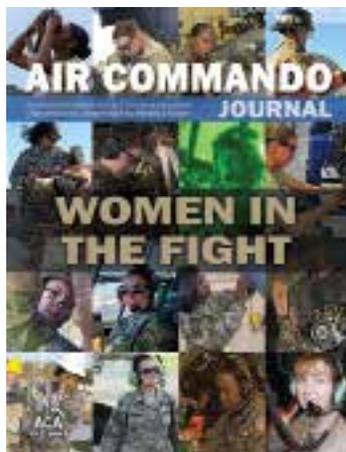
When I flew my first combat support mission in 1963 and my first direct combat mission over North Vietnam in '64 there were no Air Commandos. In 1980, when we launched a rescue attempt in Iran, there were Air Commandos, but no female air crew members.

In 1979, the entrance way to the 16th Special Operations Squadron had a large mural of a combat crew member, in full combat gear. Enroute to his (note his) aircraft. His sunglasses reflecting the afternoon sun. He obviously had a smile on

his lips and a swagger to his walk. Over his right shoulder were the words: "Because I fly I envy no man." I would not have allowed that to remain. After 1993, the words would have changed: "I am an Air Commando... I am proud... I envy no one."

Thank you ladies for joining us. Our apologies for being so slow.

Gallagher (Pappy)
16th SOS/CC, Col, USAF (Ret)



Dennis,

No other entity in our AF has done what ACA accomplished with this edition of the ACJ. Well done.

All the best.

Norty

Norton Schwartz, Gen (Ret) USAF
ACA Life Member #1457

Col Barnett,

A quick note to tell you how much I enjoyed Vol 7: Issue 2 of the *Air Commando Journal*. "Women in the Fight" was exceptionally well done. The articles were very well written; each woman told her story in an especially impactful way. I learned a lot.

Keep up the great work.
Louis D. Schindler
ACA Member #16

The latest ACA Journal is as always well written, but the latest issue is just WOW. "Women in the Fight" So glad to see how much women bring to the fight and the opportunities that are available in special ops. Very proud of our men and women in special ops. Very proud to be part of the ACA. Keep up the great work. Is there any way to get a couple of extra copies?

David Clark



AFSOC Director of Operations, Col Brenda Cartier (AFSOC's first female selected for Brig Gen) speaks during the Air Commando Association heritage symposium women's panel at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Dec. 7, 2018. Cartier spoke about her experiences with changes in the roles of women in service. Shortly after women were allowed to serve in combat aircraft roles, Cartier served as a gunship aviator. (Photo by Scott Schaeffler)

Air Commando Journal,

Thank you for highlighting outstanding AFSOC women in your last issue! Despite it being 2018, it is still important for the next generation to see that women can succeed in any capacity in the Air Force, especially in special operations. I'm currently serving at USAFA as an AOC and OIC for the Roslyn Schulte Assembly (a cadet affinity club). This issue has helped me mentor and inspire our future leaders towards AFSOC... Thank you!

Respectfully,
Maj Laura Easton

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

John Chapman, His Life

By Dan Schilling



NOTE: This article is adapted from the forthcoming book "Alone at Dawn" by Dan Schilling and Lori Chapman Longfritz.

John Chapman died violently. Given his chosen profession as an Air Force Combat Controller and his choice of assignment to the 24th Special Tactics Squadron (STS), the prospects of that outcome were highly probable while serving in the United States Air Force. However, it's not his death and the devastating trauma he experienced in his last hour of life that turned his mountaintop isolation into heroic self-sacrifice, but what he did in the 71 minutes after his SEAL team left him, believing he was dead, until the moment he was struck by the final bullet that ended his life. The first Air Force Medal of Honor in 47 years came about through his actions during that brief eternity, alone and forsaken.

It can be accurately stated John's decisions and actions were the result of thousands of hours of training and years of expertise understood by few individuals in or out of the military. The training may have determined his capabilities and martial accomplishments, but that is not what made John Chapman the man he was. In actuality, what delivered John to that frozen and fateful summit where he saved the lives of 23 comrades at the cost of his own was both humbler and more complex. John exhibited from the earliest years of his childhood, a commitment to defending others that foretold a life of selflessness.

Kindergarten is where most children experience the world of others for the first time and where John first chose to stand for someone who couldn't defend themselves. It was everyone's first day and Billy Brooks was confronted with a

double whammy, not only was it day one at Southwest Elementary, but he was the new kid in town. So, when he said the wrong thing to a classmate she punched him in the stomach, dropping the new kid to his knees. John saw the fray from nearby and stepped in front of Billy, facing down the assailant and holding up his hands as if to say, "Hold on, here." John Chapman was five years old. The friendship forged that day followed the two boys into adulthood.

That first stand for justice would repeat itself throughout his formative years. By 1979, John established himself as a young man possessed by an innate ability to tune into the feelings of others that transcended the attitudes of the times and ran counter the instincts of most teenagers. Some of his unconventional friendships in high school weren't looked upon with approval by other members of John's "jock squad," the student athletes and cool kids. As a standout athlete he blended easily with the "in" crowd, however, accepting those with disabilities was not part of the "in" social program. Those with special needs were shunned and harassed in the hallways, as often happens with teens, particularly in those days.

Cara was one such girl and knew John because he always took the time to say hello and ask how she was doing. One day, kids jostling her in the hall gave her a particularly cruel hazing. She escaped around a corner as John was approaching from the other direction. When he saw her, he gave his usual jovial, "Hi!" She was so rattled by the bullying that she lashed out, "F*** you,

Johnny Chapman!" and stormed down the corridor. In the hallway kids laughed or looked away in embarrassment, but John pursued her, matching her quick pace. She tried to make him go away, but he wouldn't. Instead, he calmed and comforted the distraught girl, sitting with her until after the bell rang and her tormentors had gone.

Later at Windsor Locks High School, freshman Kelly sat behind the school on the cold, cement base of a light pole. It was September 1980, several weeks into the new school year and it was Kelly's first day back after a two-week absence. Her father died, but she wasn't ready to be back at school, so she escaped to the solitude of the light pole. Her agony was overwhelming, and she sobbed uncontrollably and didn't hear someone walk up until he was beside her. She didn't want to talk to anyone and he didn't force it; he just sat next to her, put his hand on her arm, and let her cry. After a bit, he introduced himself, "I'm John, how can I help?" He was a sophomore, a year ahead of Kelly and did not know her, but she knew who he was. Even though he was just in his second year he was already a star on the school's diving team competing at the state level. Through halting sobs Kelly told him about her father and said she wanted to go home. She lived across town and it was still school hours, but he told her he would walk her home when she was ready. They talked for a while and instead of going home, he escorted her to the nurse's office, leaving her with a hug.

Twenty-two years later, at John's memorial service in Windsor Locks,

Kelly shared her story with his family. She'd never mentioned her encounter with John to anyone but felt his family, especially his mom Terry Chapman, needed to know how much he had impacted her life through that single act of caring. She told Terry, "I will *never* forget the kindness shown by this young man, actually still a boy, to a stranger that he saw in pain and couldn't just walk away from. John was someone who made an impression on me and affected my life in a way I don't think he ever realized. I will never forget him."

John's affinity for defending the defenseless and disadvantaged was offset by his fierce competitive nature. Tom Allen was the coach of the high school dive team in 1977 and John's older brother, Kevin, was a member. John was only in the eighth grade but he watched Kevin learn to perfect his dives from the one-meter springboard. Kevin was very aggressive in his training and that caught John's attention. John wanted to join the high school kids during their

In John's first year he became fast friends with sophomore teammate Michael Dupont. Over the next two years, they pushed each other to reach for bigger and better dives as they traded placing first and second during their meets. What Michael remembers most about John was, "His competitive drive and the inspiration he gave me while we were diving together. My favorite part about our friendship was during my senior year when we kept trading places on setting new diving records. He broke the record first, then I would beat his record, and back and forth. I believe he still holds the record for high score." John became the #1 ranked diver in Connecticut and the first in Windsor Locks High School history to do so.

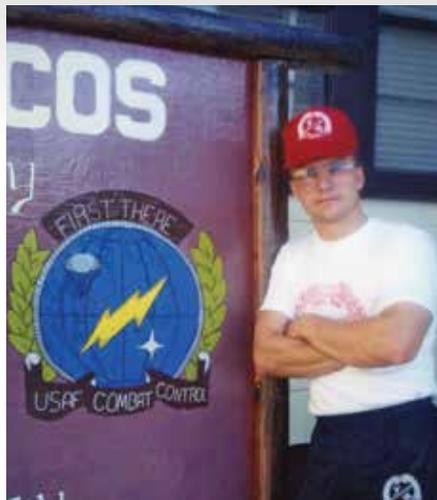
John graduated in June 1983 and immediately enrolled at the University of Connecticut, his life seemingly planned out. He chose engineering as a major and joined the UCONN Men's Diving Team. He was already ranked #1 in their division for the 1-meter board.

He thought he would compete throughout college, complete his degree, find the right woman, followed by the right job, and John Chapman's life would fall into place.

As with many young men entering college out of high school, things didn't turn out that way. By the end of his first semester his grades were so poor he was ineligible to compete on the dive team. John was a smart young man, but as his sister Lori recalls, "Studying wasn't his 'thing;' *doing* was his thing." So when John lost interest in college he returned home and got a job as a mechanic and tow truck driver. He also mullied over joining the Air Force. By August 1985, John made his decision and enlisted in the Air Force promising his mother, that he would try something "safe." He chose information systems specialist to start his career. His sister said he was more to the point, "I need to do something more than stay in Windsor Locks my whole life. I want to see the world; I can't stay here."

After enlisting, John went to Lackland AFB, TX, to begin Air

Force basic training. While there, he attended a Combat Control Team (CCT) recruiting briefing given to all male basic trainees. The video showed Combat Controllers jumping from airplanes, riding motorcycles, scuba diving, calling in airstrikes, and directing airplanes to assault zone landings. It struck John at the core with what he desired most, challenge and excitement. But he remained steadfast in his promise to his mother and left the road less traveled untrod.



John Chapman at Lackland AFB in 1989.

John finished tech school in February 1986 and went to Lowry AFB, CO, for his first assignment. He made the most of his new life and career, enjoying the Air Force, but soon the urge to do something more returned. Unfortunately, he was obligated to his job for a minimum of three years, but felt chained to a keyboard and a computer monitor. Nevertheless, John followed the Combat Control career field. He read about the attempt to rescue Americans held in Iran in 1980, better known as "Desert One," and Operation URGENT FURY in Grenada in 1983. He also researched the wars in Laos and Vietnam, vowing to learn everything possible while preparing for the CCT fitness test. When three years passed, he felt he kept his promise to his mother and he went ahead and submitted an application to cross-train into the CCT career field. All he wanted was a shot to prove he could do something so difficult it would elevate him to the top one percentile of military men.

John's application was approved



John Chapman competitive diving 1983.
(All photos courtesy of the author)

diving practices and asked Coach Allen, if he could. The coach spoke with John's father to see what he thought. His one-line response? "He's the best athlete in the whole crew," so Coach Allen unofficially incorporated John into the team practices. As a result, when John joined the team his freshman year, he had an edge over the divers from competing schools, even the varsity-level athletes.

in the summer of 1989 and he returned to Lackland AFB to attend the Combat Control Indoctrination Course—informally known as “Indoc.” Indoc is considered the toughest school in the Combat Control pipeline and it is where the vast majority of volunteers, almost 90 percent, wash out. Indoc was just the first of 10 Army, Navy and Air Force schools he needed to complete to become a qualified Combat Controller. It would clearly be a long year and a half.



John Chapman and Joe Maynor. (Photo courtesy of the author)

John’s training pipeline adhered to the pass/fail statistics exceptionally well. Of the 120 men who arrived at Lackland AFB to attend Indoc 70 were trying out to be Pararescue specialists or PJs, also an extremely difficult program. The remaining 50 men were CCT candidates. By the time the actual course started only 70 Airmen remained. Of the 50 aspiring CCT only two, John Chapman and his friend Joe Maynor, would see it to the end, making their success rate a mere 4 percent. After Indoc, John spent the next 18 months crisscrossing America to attend the Special Forces combat diver course, the Army’s parachute school, USAF air traffic control school, aircrew survival school, and the Combat Control School at Pope AFB, NC. Finally, on a sweltering night in July 1990, John and Joe, the only two survivors from Lackland’s Indoctrination Class 89-005, walked across the stage of the Pope AFB NCO Club, donned their red berets, and bloused their black leather paratrooper boots for the first time as the Air Force’s newest Combat Controllers. The next day both men reported to their first assignment, the 21st STS, also at Pope AFB.

August 2nd, 1990 was a momentous day in modern history. Two things happened. Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, setting in motion a string of events and conflicts that continue to affect AFSOC’s Airmen to last night’s POD (Period of Darkness). More importantly for John Chapman, he met a young nursing student from Windber, PA, by the name of Valerie Novak. According to the future Mrs. Chapman that night, “We went dancing and drinking...we drank *lots* of tequila.” By week’s end John Chapman, along with the nation of Kuwait, were toast, but the young couple, though separated by three states, became inseparable.

By Fall 1990, it was clear America was going to war, but for John it wasn’t meant to be. During a Thanksgiving horseback ride with Valerie he was thrown from a horse and ruptured his spleen, nearly dying in the process. This sidelined John for the next six months. For John the man, solace at missing America’s first big war since Vietnam came in the form of his proposal to Valerie that summer.

By November 1992, they were married and on their way to their first overseas adventure to the 320th STS at Kadena AB, Japan. For the young couple it was a dream assignment. Val worked at the base hospital while John trained with his fellow CCT and PJs. Off duty they explored Japan and other countries throughout the Pacific. Yet, while the training was good, it wasn’t combat. Forced to sit out the first Gulf War, John felt something was missing. There was, however, a unit that continued to get missions, real missions, not just training scenarios, during the interwar period. Some operations were splashed across headlines around the world such as Operation GOTHIC SERPENT in Somalia (popularly known as Black Hawk Down). Most of the others were masked in secrecy. The 24th STS was the only all volunteer assignment in the Combat Control community and it played a key role in these important missions.

As with everything else John did since Val came into his life, his approach to this new opportunity incorporated her. He told Val in early 1995, “I want to do this, but if you say ‘No’, I won’t.” Two decades later, Valerie remains convinced that had she said, “No,” the matter would have been dropped without resentment. “But I didn’t want to look back at age 80



John Chapman and Val’s wedding in 1992.

and realize I’d kept him from something he wanted so badly.” And he did want it badly, a necessary frame of mind, since assessment for the 24th STS is nearly as daunting as getting into CCT.

John successfully assessed and was selected for assignment to the 24th STS. He returned to Japan and announced the great news. Val was thrilled, not just for her husband, but also at the prospect of returning to North Carolina where they still

had friends at the 21st STS and would be closer to family. The latter an important consideration as she had joyful news of her own...they would be bringing home a small piece of Japan when they returned. Val was pregnant.

By October, the expectant couple was back in Fayetteville NC, happy for the overseas experience that so many service members enjoy, and even happier to be home again. They bought a house and settled in for what they believed would be the rest of John's career. On 13 May 1996, amid the high demand and steep learning curve in the 24th STS training, John and Valerie welcomed their first child, Madison Elizabeth. Valerie recalls the moment the three became a family, "The first time he held Madison, the spark in his eye was like nothing I'd seen before. It was like a kid in a candy store, he was so excited." In time Madison grew, the family collected evenings and weekends and settled into a rhythm revolving around his demanding job and travel schedule. In early May 1998, their second child, Brianna Lynn, was born, completing the small family.

By the time Brianna turned one, John had turned a corner. The girls had come to be his life and the allure of working with Delta Force and SEAL Team Six waned in the face of his new and true purpose. Val recalls, "When he was home, he was *home*." He preferred bathing the girls and tucking them in to having beers with the boys. "He could have killed 5,000 people at work and, when he walked in the door, you'd never have known," she reflects on how complete a transformation it was after the girls' arrival.

By the time the World Trade Center towers fell and America launched into the longest war in its history, John Chapman had already made another decision. It was time for him to offramp the military and Combat Control. He'd accepted that real combat experience was not something he would add to his personal journey. When 9/11 struck and America responded he was no longer even on a tactical team, instead working in the squadron's survey shop. This allowed him to be home with the girls more. The war changed everything for the 24th STS. When it emptied out in the first wave, John found himself attached to SEAL Team Six backfilling other deployed Controllers during the 2001 holiday season. *Maybe his chance at war was still a possibility*. Then his grandmother died and John knew his family needed him more than his nation, so he took emergency leave and returned home to help his folks with the crisis. Again, missing the opportunity to prove himself in combat.

Fellow Controller and CCT community legend Mike Lamonica recalls retrieving John from Virginia Beach and the long drive they shared back to Ft Bragg. "He had a lot on his mind, and I mostly listened," as Chappy recalled his time with Val in Kadena, living on a quiet cul de sac, sitting with other parents, watching their children play. He spoke of how he and Val approached raising the girls as a team. John contrasted his approach with that of many other Combat Controllers, who viewed family as something that came second to missions or career, and how it wasn't until Madison and Brianna were born that he recognized the error of that approach.

"My job now is to serve my country, but there's a greater

thing than that. When this war is over, I'm going to dedicate myself to my family," John declared.

"You could see the profoundness of the words he was sharing," Lamonica remembers. "It was intensely personal to him, and it was clear that he and Val loved each other deeply and had discussed those plans as partners." When asked his opinion on John, Lamonica adds, "He was rebellious against authority, but that doesn't make him unique in CCT. What really stood out was his humanity and the way he approached family."



Val and John and their two daughters at Virginia Beach 2001.

Yet it was clear that when John returned from tending to his family, he believed he needed to deploy. The chance came when he famously "Stood" on the desk of 24th STS commander, Lt Col Ken Rodriguez telling him, "With all due respect, I need to get over there now!"

Recalls Rodriguez, "I don't think we were about to 'throw down'," but it was clear the commander needed to send him to war. John now had his chance to prove himself if only circumstances would allow.

On his final morning at home, he kissed Madison and Brianna goodbye and Val drove him to the Joint Special Operations Command compound on Ft Bragg, dropping him at the gate. With a quick kiss and an "I'm out," John smiled and waved as he walked through the gate. Valerie needed to dash off to work so she turned the car and drove off. They were so used to him coming and going, and the hazards of CCT, "It was just business as usual for us. I didn't realize it was the last time I was going to see him." Sadly, it was.

On 4 March 2002, less than two months later, John passed from this world and into the annals of Air Force history. In his wake he left a legacy of kindness, compassion, devotion to duty and family. Most importantly to John Chapman would surely have been his two beautiful daughters and wife whom he loved above all else. Rest in peace brother, mission accomplished.



About the Author: Dan Schilling is a retired 30 year Combat Controller and Special Tactics Officer. His forthcoming book, Alone at Dawn, chronicles John Chapman and CCT and will be available June 25 from Grand Central publishing. Learn more or order at DanSchillingBooks.com

With your help, the children of fallen Air Commandos can achieve their dreams.

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

Steven Schmauss,
Texas Tech, C/O 2017



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



Special Operations Warrior Foundation ensures full college educations to the surviving children of Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps special operations personnel who lose their life in the line of duty. Special Operations Warrior Foundation also provides immediate financial stipends to severely wounded special operators.



2018 Air Comma



**TECHNICAL SERGEANT
JOHN A. CHAPMAN**
(Deceased)

Technical Sergeant John A. Chapman distinguished himself through outstanding service to the nation as a combat controller from 1989 to 2002. John developed a reputation as a very capable special operator while assigned to combat control and special tactics units at Pope Air Force base, North Carolina, and Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan. He was reassigned to Pope Air Force Base after volunteering for duty in the highly selective 24th Special Tactics Squadron. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, he deployed to Afghanistan attached to a Navy Sea, Air and Land (SEAL) team. On March 3rd, 2002, the SEAL team was tasked to conduct a reconnaissance mission atop Takur Ghar Mountain during Operation ANACONDA. On the morning of March 4th, 2002, he voluntarily accompanied the SEAL team on the mission. During the initial insertion attempt the team's helicopter came under intense small arms fire, and a teammate fell from the helicopter. During the second insertion the helicopter again came under heavy fire. Immediately after touchdown, with multiple teammates wounded, Sergeant Chapman led the charge into a bunker to kill enemy combatants engaging his SEAL teammates. Sergeant Chapman was hit by small arms fire multiple times. Although initially assessed as dead, he regained consciousness and continued to fight. Sergeant Chapman succumbed to his wounds while trying to protect a helicopter infiltrating a quick reaction force from enemy fire. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Technical Sergeant John Chapman reflect great credit upon himself, the United States Air Force, United States Special Operations Command and Air Commandos of every generation.

Commando HALL OF FAME



**COLONEL
WILLIAM ANDERSEN**

Colonel William D. Andersen distinguished himself through superior service as an Air Commando throughout his 24-year career. Colonel Andersen emerged from his early years, as an MC-130E Navigator with combat and contingency experience in Haiti, Bosnia and the Middle East, to deliver unprecedented SOF-airpower integration in AFCENT's SOLE during the dynamic first days of OEF. From combat, he moved to HQ USSOCOM, where he crafted the Commander's Congressional testimonies and televised remarks tied to the command's GWOt strategy, ultimately making the case for a growth of joint SOF by 11,000 members. While serving on the 1 SOW staff, he drove a series of projects directly tied to the post-9/11 expansion of AFSOC into the manned ISR and non-standard aviation missions. Colonel Andersen led the evolution and consolidation of disparate AFSOC units into a coherent training enterprise, ultimately re-designated the 492d SOW, to professionalize UW, COIN, language and air advisor training. On multiple occasions, he led in combat, including as a Provincial Reconstruction Team Commander in Afghanistan, and Vice Wing Commander of an Air Expeditionary Wing training the Afghan Air Force. As a survivor of IED strikes, a green on blue attack, and finally a catastrophic helicopter crash in Afghanistan, Colonel Andersen reinvested his personal stories for the benefit of all Air Commando combat survivors as he utilized multiple venues to share his story with AFSOC command teams. For his dogged commitment to the mission, at great personal risk and cost to himself, and for his devotion to the Air Commando ethos, Colonel Andersen stands as a proud inductee into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Colonel William D. Andersen reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and Air Commandos of every generation.



2018 Air Comma



CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT TOM BAKER

Chief Master Sergeant Tom L. Baker distinguished himself through outstanding service to the nation and Air Force Special Operations Forces throughout his military career. Chief Baker sustained exceptional performance as an Air Commando throughout his long and distinguished career culminating as AFSOC's Career Enlisted Aviator Functional Manager, A3 Chief Enlisted Manager and 23rd Air Force Chief Enlisted Manager. Chief Baker dedicated the majority of his 28 years of service to AFSOC and left a lasting impression on the Command's Career Enlisted Aviator community. He was qualified on multiple aircraft variants and mastered all of the many specialized mission qualifications used in the employment of the MC-130 Combat Talon. Always at the point of action, Chief Baker has deployed in support of numerous combat and contingency operations in Africa, the Balkans, Central and South America, Southwest Asia and the Pacific and filled key leadership roles in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. He and the crew of WHISK 05 were recognized with the Air Force's prestigious MacKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of 1997 after rescuing American citizens from the war-torn Republic of Congo. Additionally, Chief Baker's extraordinary efforts during a four-ship MC-130H infiltration into Afghanistan on 19 October 2001 ensured an on-target delivery of Army Rangers and timely refueling of a helicopter assault force enabling the first successful operation against Taliban leadership at the onset of the Global War on Terrorism. Testimony of his exceptional expertise was recognized when he was selected as the Air Force's top enlisted aviator earning the SSgt Henry "Red" Erwin award in 2001. The distinctive accomplishments of Chief Tom L. Baker culminate a distinguished career in the service of his country and reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and all Air Commandos.

Commando HALL OF FAME



**CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT
THOMAS GREEN**

Chief Master Sergeant Thomas G. Green distinguished himself through outstanding service to the nation and Air Force Special Operations Forces throughout his 25-year military career. Chief Green's long and distinguished career as an Air Commando included multiple combat tours in Southeast Asia in aircraft maintenance and as a helicopter aircrew member. He is combat proven and has accumulated over 430 combat and over 200 combat support flying hours and earned 3 Distinguished Flying Crosses, one for heroism, and 9 Air Medals. His career culminated as Superintendent of the 20th Special Operations Squadron where he again flew combat missions during Operation JUST CAUSE, the 1989 invasion of Panama. Chief Green personally authored the Special Duty Assignment Pay package which provided increased compensation for selected AFSOC enlisted aircrew. Since his retirement, Chief Master Sergeant Green provided critical support to Air Force Special Operations Command as a contractor, first as an MH-53 PAVE LOW Flight Engineer flying acceptance and functional check flights, then as a civilian flight simulator instructor, and most recently as a staff member in the Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command Weapons and Tactics office. Chief Green remains a strong mentor, leader and organizer within the PAVE LOW and Air Force helicopter diaspora, keeping alive the Air Commando spirit and rekindling relationships through periodic email and social media posts. His long and distinguished careers embody the Air Commando spirit and render him eminently qualified for induction into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Chief Thomas G. Green reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and Air Commandos of every generation.



2018 Air Comma



**COLONEL
MARK RACE**

Colonel Mark S. Race distinguished himself through renowned service to the nation and Air Force Special Operations Forces during and after his 30-year military career. Colonel Race's extraordinary service to our Nation, Joint and Air Force Special Operations began in Thailand in 1973. It continues today as he is responsible for working partnerships between the Joint Special Operations Command, the United States Special Operations Command, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to ensure that special operators have access to state-of-the-art real-time technology. As an EC-47 pilot in the 361st Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron, 56th Special Operations Wing, at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, he flew 86 combat missions over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. On his return to special operations, he was the first commander of an initial cadre of three new classified flying organizations providing very specialized, worldwide, passenger airlift support for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Next he became commander of the most sensitive, demanding, high risk joint air operation planning organization in the Department of Defense. During this assignment, he was the airborne senior SOF air commander for Operation JUST CAUSE and the air component commander for Joint Special Operations Task Force operations in DESERT STORM. Later as the Deputy SOCEUR he became known as "Mayor of Freetown, Leone," safely evacuating over 2100 people from 76 countries. After Air Force retirement, Colonel Race returned to the Joint Special Operations Command as a technology integration expert. His efforts put over 10,000 ROVER receivers in the hands of elite special operators. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Colonel Mark S. Race reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and Air Commandos of every generation.

Commando HALL OF FAME



**CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT
JOHN VARNER, JR**

Chief Master Sergeant John W. Varner, Jr., has distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Special Operations for over 36 years. During his service, Chief Varner served in a myriad of aircraft maintenance assignments, and was responsible for leading maintenance production and generation efforts on MC-130E Combat Talon, AC-130H Spectre, MC-130H Combat Talon II, AC-130U Spooky, MH-53 Pave Low, CV-22 Osprey, and AC-130J Ghost Rider Special Operations aircraft platforms. His uncanny ability to excel compelled his selection as the lead maintainer on numerous Joint training exercises and classified Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed missions. He is a veteran of an encyclopedia of Special Forces supported operations, including Operations BAT, JUST CAUSE, DENY FLIGHT, UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, UNITED SHIELD, DELIBERATE FORCE, JOINT ENDEAVOUR, INDY, JOINT FORGE, ALLIED FORCE, and UNIFIED RESPONSE. As the AC-130U Logistics Test Superintendent, Chief Varner was one of the cornerstone logistics architects for AFSOC's newest weapon system, the AC-130U Spooky—a 13 aircraft \$1.2 billion acquisition program. His concerted efforts on this cutting edge program proved essential in achieving “first flight” for the platform, first live fire for the 25-millimeter gun, and on-time delivery of the first production aircraft to Hurlburt Field, Florida. Chief Varner's current efforts as an Air Force Civil Servant earned him the 2014 Lieutenant General Leo Marquez Award for the best Civilian Aircraft Maintenance Manager in the Air Force. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Chief Master Sergeant John W. Varner, Jr reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and Air Commandos of every generation.

Hall

Medal of Honor Recipient Technical Sergeant John A. Chapman



MSgt John A. Chapman's family onstage at the Air Commando Hall of Fame Induction Banquet. (All photos by Tammy Norton)

2018 was an amazing year for the Air Commando Association, AFSOC and the United States Air Force with the awarding of the first Medal of Honor since Vietnam to TSgt John A. Chapman.

The ACA was proud to host a dinner banquet inducting TSgt John Chapman, Medal of Honor Recipient into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. John Chapman's family accepted the Hall of Fame award on behalf of TSgt Chapman.

The banquet concluded a three-day celebration honoring John Chapman. A portrait dedication ceremony at the AFSOC Headquarters building started things off on October 25th. Then, Air Commandos gathered



Featured speaker, USAF Chief of Staff, General David L. Goldfein.



Lt Gen (Ret) Michael Wooley Chairman and Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett President of the Air Commando Association, present John Chapman's widow Valerie Nessel and John's mother Terry Chapman the Hall of Fame citations.

at the 24th Special Operations Wing Headquarters for a building dedication ceremony. The following day hundreds of people enjoyed an all-day event on the Hurlburt Field flightline which featured aerial demonstrations, static displays, concerts, and fireworks. A Special Tactics Memorial unveiling ceremony at the Hurlburt Air Park was heavily attended on Saturday before the Air Commando Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

of Fame

“

Seventy-five years have passed since the first Air Commandos flew. Along with TSgt John Chapman there have been a total of six Air Commandos awarded the Medal of Honor. The faces have changed and the equipment has improved, but the courage and determination shown by the early Air Commandos to overcome and adapt remain the key ingredients to the success of today's Air Commandos.

—Paul Harmon, Col, USAF (Ret)

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Lt Gen Marshall "Brad" Webb, Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command addresses over 800 attendees.

Special thanks to our banquet sponsors:

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John Chapman's mother Terry Chapman and John's widow Valerie Nessel with numerous current Air Commando Hall of Fame members.



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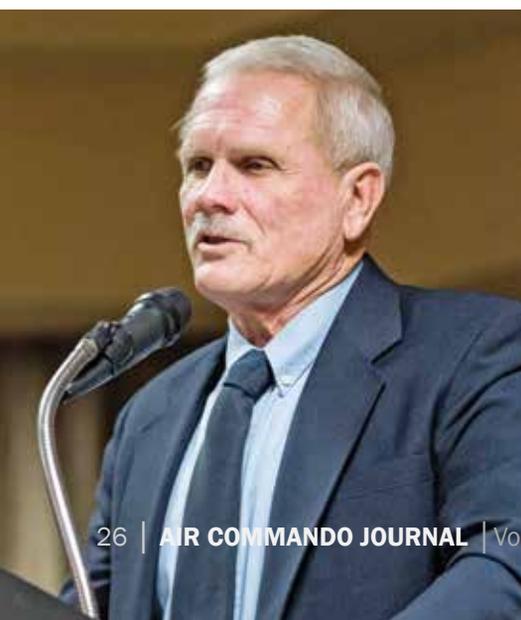




2018 ACA Awards Banquet

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2018 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 Nicholas M. Albert

Captain Nicholas M. Albert distinguished himself by meritorious service as C-146A Aircraft Commander, 524th Special Operations Squadron, 492d Special Operations Wing, Duke Field, Florida, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Captain Albert served as the Joint Special Operations Air Command, Africa Air Planner, where he oversaw ten aircraft and 260 million dollars' worth of contract and military assets. He personally directed 2,500 air support requests in support of 19 named operations spanning across 27 countries, thereby deterring multiple terrorist organizations' advances into the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Additionally, Captain Albert's leadership skills were instrumental in the execution of 3,000 casualty evacuation alert hours, enacting five time-sensitive exfiltrations from austere locations, expediting life-saving medical care. Furthermore, he integrated an eight million dollar aircraft casualty evacuation contract necessary to meet United States Africa Command's "golden hour" response in east Africa. At home as the Chief of Awards and Decorations, Captain Albert was key to the recognition of 173 personal medals and 11 wing awards, culminating in the wing's Squadron of the Year and Verne Orr award nominations. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Albert reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Geoffrey T. Barnes

Captain Geoffrey T. Barnes distinguished himself as Assistant Operations Officer and MQ-9 Evaluator Pilot, 33d Special Operations Squadron 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2017 and 31 May 2018. During this period, he fielded the first MQ-9 maritime search equipment which boosted radar range by 34 percent, enhancing combat search and rescue ability. Secondly, Captain Barnes was selected as mission commander to 29 kinetic strikes and provided oversight to 30 inexperienced crews resulting in 80 enemy killed in four areas of responsibility. He was also the joint air lead for a terrorist camp strike, coordinating a four-ship of B-1s and MQ-9s leading to 111 enemies killed. Furthermore,

Captain Barnes created a rapid rehearsal capability, coded two scenarios in 72 hours and prepared six crews to execute two operations. Also, he drove the squadron's first collaborative simulator install, and directed an on-call rehearsal for a national-level operation which led to the capture of a high valued target. Additionally, Captain Barnes was the Air Force delegate for an expeditionary site survey where he found limiting factors and drove infrastructure change. Finally, he co-authored special operations tactical development programs that paved the future for MQ-9 operations. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Barnes reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Anthony J. Belviso

Captain Anthony J. Belviso distinguished himself as CV-22 Mission Aircraft Commander and Flight Commander, 7th Special Operations Squadron, 352d Special Operations Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, he completed two combat deployments in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, transporting over 500 Special Operations team members and delivering 125,000 pounds of equipment to resupply the Task Force as they destroyed strongholds of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Also, Captain Belviso flew eight casualty evacuation operations over 200 miles inside the Syrian battlefield, launching within minutes of notification to save 16 soldiers with life-threatening injuries. Additionally, he led the 752d Special Operations Group executive staff, completing 250 tasks, winning over 200 wing-level or higher awards, and processing 64 medals. Furthermore, Captain Belviso was recognized with the Wing Safety Award after he safely recovered a 90 million dollar CV-22 aircraft following an in-flight electrical failure. Finally, he piloted a 1,300 nautical mile CV-22 mission to a remote site in North Africa, delivering a 29-member Special Operations team to conduct a sensitive site exploitation that recovered actionable intelligence on 12 additional enemy targets in the area and destroyed a cache of enemy weapons. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain



LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Belviso reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Jason B. Chase

Technical Sergeant Jason B. Chase distinguished himself as Aerospace Propulsion Craftsman, 919th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Eglin Air Force Base, Auxiliary Field 3, Florida, from 1 June 2017 through 31 May 2018. During this period, Sergeant Chase provided critical propulsion system experience while maintaining the C-146A Wolfhound. Sergeant Chase's contributions to United States Special Operations Command and Air Force Special Operations Command's theater airlift requirement was unparalleled. His technical skillset proved invaluable when he removed and replaced an auxiliary power unit generator, allowing the transport of specialized personnel who prevented a terrorist bombing in Trinidad. As a result of meeting critical time constraints, he ensured the capture of four high-value targets. Sergeant Chase designed a custom tool that allowed for the removal of a faulty propeller control unit by overcoming a broken detent pin inside the attached torque tube. His innovation saved the Air Force approximately \$101,000 in replacement cost and over 48 maintenance man-hours. While supporting Southern Command, Sergeant Chase's maintenance expertise resulted in a 100 percent mission capable rate, supporting 172 aircraft support requests and enabling transportation of 406 passengers and over 87,000 pounds of cargo during 302 successful sorties totaling 611 flight hours. Finally, Sergeant Chase's off-duty volunteerism contributed to 919th Special Operations Wing's overall mission success by solidifying ties with neighboring communities. While pursuing his degree in Emergency and Disaster Management, he repaired nature trails for the Florida Trail Association and improved marine life habitat conservation efforts by removing more than 500 pounds of debris from the beaches along the Emerald Coast. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Chase reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Kevin P. Connell

Technical Sergeant Kevin P. Connell distinguished himself as an AC-130W Evaluator Flight Engineer and deployed Squadron Superintendent, 16th Special Operations Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, New

Mexico, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Sergeant Connell deployed 120 days in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, flying 29 combat missions destroying 76 enemy personnel, 60 buildings and one high value target. During one sortie, Sergeant Connell's skill and situational awareness shepherded the safe return of his crew of nine. On that night, Sergeant Connell observed an anti-aircraft missile and commanded defensive, defeating the threat leaving his crew unscathed. As Squadron Superintendent, Sergeant Connell was responsible for the 105 airmen and two AC-130Ws. He managed the short notice redeployment of an at-risk airman, coordinated the logistics of 1800 pounds of mail delivery and reduced mail delivery time by 67 percent. Sergeant Connell facilitated construction of a 1.8 million dollar operations building and was sole liaison to the United States Army base support and selflessly saw to improvement of quarters and quality of life of 186 joint personnel. The distinctive accomplishments of Technical Sergeant Connell reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Cesar L. Fernandez

Technical Sergeant Cesar L. Fernandez distinguished himself as Flightline Expediter, 901st Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 1st Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Sergeant Fernandez deployed 120 days to Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait as part of the maintenance production team for the 15th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. His pivotal leadership of 36 maintenance personnel allowed more than 150 pilot reported discrepancy repairs sustaining a phenomenal 99 percent mission-capability rate clinching a 96 percent Quality Assurance pass rate. His efforts garnered the 1st Special Operations Maintenance Group's Maintenance Professional of the Quarter Team award. Additionally, Sergeant Fernandez's leadership and aircraft acumen contributed to the overall success of 347 combat missions, 30 aerial refuels, and 27 airdrops that enabled the capture of 30 high value individuals, elimination of 36 enemy combatants, and seizure of 13 high valued targets thwarting the advancement of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Finally, Sergeant Fernandez guided his team through 22 Time Change Technical Orders, 11 depot-level modifications, and over 2,000 maintenance repairs enabling 920 sorties that amassed 4,300 flight hours. His relentless



(Photo by Scott Schaeffler of scottphotoworks.com)

dedication to meet mission needs without sacrifice of quality, by the book maintenance cemented the 1st Special Operations Maintenance Group 2017 Secretary of Defense Field-Level Maintenance Excellence Award win. The distinctive accomplishments of Technical Sergeant Fernandez reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Master Sergeant Michael G. Guarino

Master Sergeant Michael G. Guarino distinguished himself as Superintendent, Recruiting, Assessments and Selection, Special Tactics Training Squadron, 24th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, expertly drove the wing's sole recruiting program for the Special Tactics enterprise, which was lauded by the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff. His 10-man team traveled to 65 sites nation-wide, reaching over 4,000 college students and in-service personnel to promote the Battlefield Airman profession. Additionally, Sergeant Guarino led an elite cadre of 112 military and civilians, tasked with the safe execution of 13 individual one week long selection events, which evaluated 155 candidates, and resulted in the selection of 48 future Air Force Special Operations Command operators. Under his superb leadership, his team built the first Special Tactics leadership course, providing five weeks of senior leadership

training, ultimately graduating and preparing 59 operators for joint ground force commander responsibilities. Furthermore, Sergeant Guarino coordinated with base civil engineers for a five acre campus renovation project, valued at 500,000 dollars, increasing Special Tactics selection capabilities 30 percent. Finally, he engaged with Hurlburt Field Airmen Leadership School students, organizing three rigorous obstacle courses for 230 future Non-commissioned Officers, building esprit de corps and executing the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force's initiative by developing exceptional leaders. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Guarino reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Erin E. Howell

Captain Erin E. Howell distinguished herself as 73d Aircraft Maintenance Unit Officer-in-Charge, 1st Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Captain Howell led 299 Airmen in 10 Air Force Specialties to stand up the first-ever AC-130J Aircraft Maintenance Unit and bring the Air Force's next-generation gunship to initial operational capability. As she shepherded the Ghost rider toward combat readiness, Captain Howell had to perform a delicate balancing act between training her maintainers and providing aircraft for



developmental and operational testing, aircrew training, and a vigorous upgrade and modification program. Additionally, Captain Howell postured her unit for future combat readiness by driving the development of the mobility readiness spares packages, which will eventually support contingency operations across the globe. At the same time, Captain Howell was twice required to generate her entire fleet for hurricane evacuations, protecting nearly 800 million dollars worth of critical special operations assets. In both cases, all of her aircraft were ready to launch in less than five hours, ensuring on time take-off to a safe haven location. Furthermore, when her squadron's operations officer deployed, Captain Howell was selected to backfill his position. She led the maintenance efforts of 730 Airmen in the command's largest unit, and balanced scheduled maintenance with flying requirements for two aircraft maintenance units with two different types of aircraft. She performed this daunting task with admirable skill. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Howell reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Aaron C. Jackson

Technical Sergeant Aaron C. Jackson distinguished himself as Test Director, 18th Flight Test Squadron, 492d Special Operations Training Group, 492d Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2017 through 31 May 2018.

During this period, Sergeant Jackson's leadership abilities were crucial as a test director for the Tactics Development and Evaluation of the AC-130W operational capabilities in a global positioning system-denied environment. During this test, he validated tactics, techniques and procedures which enabled sustained gunfire from operationally representative slant ranges. He choreographed five complex mission profiles while simultaneously developing the range safety procedures and parameters for the aircrews to safely test the capabilities of the AC-130W. Additionally, Sergeant Jackson was instrumental to flight test operations, flying 47 hours supporting test on six different Special Operations airframes. Finally, Sergeant Jackson completed the Defense Acquisition University Level II training for lifecycle logisticians, gaining a better understanding of suitability and maintainability of tested equipment in the engineering, manufacturing and developmental phase while mentoring fellow test and evaluation personnel. These distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Jackson reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Benjamin Larsen

Captain Benjamin Larsen distinguished himself as Flight Commander and MV-22 Evaluator Pilot, Detachment 1, 58th Operations Group, 58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May

2018. During this period, Captain Larsen proved instrumental in supporting the combined MV-22 Osprey Formal Training Unit flying operations, leading 24 joint officers and enabling the graduation of 155 pilots, ensuring combat readiness for 22 squadrons in the Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy and Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Additionally, he analyzed and revamped 12,000 training events, coordinating between maintenance, contracting, and operations to maximize the Joint Formal Training Unit's 60-million dollar, 4,750-hour flying hour program supporting 3,000 flight training events.



Moreover, Captain Larsen spearheaded efforts to establish the first Japanese Self-Defense Force V-22 squadron comprised of seven aircraft, becoming the first Formal Training Unit instructor to accomplish Japanese-language training and teach Japanese Self-Defense Forces members overseas. He used these skills to great effect by planning a joint training event with 24 personnel and two aircraft, bolstering United States and Japanese military foreign relations. In addition, Captain Larsen led efforts to innovate flying schedule implementation and coordinate training inputs for flights, shifting flying operations to maximize aircraft availability and decreasing training planning template action officer workload by 33 percent. Finally, he aaced the challenging night vision goggle evaluator pilot qualification upgrade, bringing valuable operations unit experience to the training of over 1,300 aircrew members and crew chiefs annually. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Larsen reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Casey W. Mathews

Captain Casey W. Mathews distinguished himself as a MC-130J Commando II Aircraft Commander and Chief of Current

Operations, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Captain Mathews served as Chief of Current Operations at the 17th Special Operations Squadron where he led the execution of a 13 million dollar, 2,400 hour annual Flying Hour Program for six MC-130J Commando II aircraft and 67 aircrew in the largest area of responsibility. Additionally, he was the group's lead planner for the largest Joint Chiefs of Staff directed exercise in the Republic of Korea ensuring special operations forces readiness with two nations and five services totaling more than 15,000 participants. Captain Mathews also served as the group's lead planner for a mission directed by the President of the United States in which he coordinated with multiple agencies to ensure continual combat search and rescue coverage using three MC-130J Commando II aircraft, passing 25,000 pounds of fuel to three HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters. Captain Mathews was hand-picked to be the group's liaison officer to Special Operations Command Korea where he facilitated special operations forces aviation integration between two nations and six services. Furthermore, Captain Mathews was a recipient of the 2017 United States Air Force Brigadier General Hoyt Award for his actions coordinating and directing the rescue of a downed United States Marine Corps MV-

22B Osprey, saving the lives of all five crew members. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Casey Mathews reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Matthew S. Mills

Technical Sergeant Matthew S. Mills distinguished himself by meritorious service as Flightline Expediter, 352d Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 352d Special Operations Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom from 1 June 2017 through 31 May 2018. During this period, Sergeant Mills showcased the Air Commando ethos by providing MC-130J combat maintenance support to the European and African theaters. His outstanding leadership was evident while deployed in support of a joint Greek and American training exercise. During this exercise, he led a team of 20 maintainers in the generation of 37 sorties totaling 118 flight hours. This enabled the 67th Special Operations Squadron to accomplish 66 percent of their annual mission essential task list training, as well as 431 static line and 104 military free fall jump qualifications for allied partners. Additionally, Sergeant Mills's technical expertise was evident while guiding

maintenance during a no-notice Air Force Special Operations Command Inspector General emergency deployment readiness exercise where he generated 6 aircraft and processed 138 personnel with no mobility errors. His efforts showcased unit capabilities and earned him praise from the inspection team. Furthermore, he was instrumental in authoring 56 technical assistance requests that provided alternate repair criteria, ultimately saving 1.2 million dollars and preventing over 2,000 non-mission capable hours. Finally, Sergeant Mills was pivotal in leading 260 personnel through the accomplishment of 26,000 maintenance actions that facilitated 735 missions totaling 2,600 flight hours. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Mills reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Technical Sergeant Matthew B. Moody

Technical Sergeant Matthew B. Moody distinguished himself as Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of Standardizations and Evaluations, 71st Special Operations Squadron, 58th Operations Group, 58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Sergeant Moody maximized an available Air Force Special Operations Command CV-22 aircraft, enabling four students to complete an entire phase of training in one week, which saved the Air Force CV-22 eight programed flight training days and 115 thousand dollars. Additionally, he diagnosed a critical inflight control malfunction and coordinated the necessary emergency actions that led to the safe recovery of five aircrew members and an 89 million-dollar aircraft. Furthermore, he showcased his managerial skills in the Standardization and Evaluations branch, reviewing 37 flight evaluation folders and processing 89 flight evaluations. Sergeant Moody upgraded to Evaluator Special Missions Aviator, completing seven evaluations and increasing the squadron's evaluation capacity by 25 percent. Moreover, he outflow his peers by 200 percent while instructing 54 hours in 20 training sorties, earning him the Red Erwin Award for the squadron. Sergeant Moody's ingenuity in developing an aircraft weapon system training plan proved crucial to an overall reduction of Air Force Special Operations Command's combat mission-ready training time by 20 percent. His efforts directly contributed to his unit winning the Air Education and Training Command Top Rotary-Wing Squadron Award for 2017. Finally, Sergeant Moody's drive for higher education and self-improvement led to a 3.9 grade point average through 69 credit hours and 93 percent completion of a Bachelor's Degree in Applied Science. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Moody reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Captain Kyle B. Oestreich

Captain Kyle B. Oestreich distinguished himself as Flight Commander, Combat Mission Support, Special Tactics Training Squadron, 24th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Captain Oestreich led the unit's largest flight, comprised of 30 personnel across 10 distinct functional areas

to support 117 five level upgrade training events; ensuring the successful graduation of 69 Battlefield Airmen. Additionally, he managed an 18 million dollar equipment inventory in support assets, encompassing 113 tactical vehicles, 1,300 weapons, 1.8 million rounds of ammunition, and 1,500 parachute systems. Furthermore, Captain Oestreich displayed superb leadership during a curriculum optimization, which integrated advanced skills training for four Battlefield Airman specialty codes, ultimately recapturing 23,000 training hours per year. Moreover, he drove the wing's support personnel development initiative, providing specific advanced skills training for five support specialty codes, leading his team to launch the first 200-hour training course for implementation across the Special Tactics enterprise. Finally, Captain Oestreich led the execution of the first Special Operations Command level manpower study of the unit in over 10 years. He directed three months of preparation for the study, spanning 139 positions, to address dire manning concerns threatening mission success. Captain Oestreich and his team were lauded by the manpower team and the wing; their efforts gained 16 manning authorizations and saved two million dollars in contracts. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Oestreich reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Senior Airman Michael G. Orozco

Senior Airman Michael G. Orozco distinguished himself as MC-130J Commando II Loadmaster, 17th Special Operations Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. During this period, Airman Orozco led the coordination for the infiltration of two long range High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, validating and increasing the Indo-Pacific Command's strike capability. Additionally, he deployed in support of operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL, where he led the planning and execution of ten mission support sites, delivering 157,000 pounds of fuel, 1,700 special operations forces, and 134,000 pounds of cargo where his expertise resulted in the capture of the number one high-value target and 59 enemies killed in action. Airman Orozco's decisiveness was showcased when he was faced with a catastrophic tire failure and directed his crew and passengers to egress the aircraft resulting in seventeen lives saved. Furthermore, he played a key role when the squadron was called upon to execute a mission directed by the President of the United States, extending combat search and rescue loiter time for 27 aircraft during the 96 hour operation. Finally, Airman Orozco pioneered the first-ever MC-130J Commando II aircraft to United States Marine Corps F-35B forward area refueling point, transferring 20,000 pounds of fuel to two fighter aircraft which established MC-130J tactics, techniques, and procedures and enhanced the premier joint fighter capabilities. Due to Airman Orozco's leadership inside and outside the aircraft, he earned Airman of the Quarter two times and Airman of the Year in 2017. The distinctive accomplishments of Airman Orozco reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.





Air Commandos: A proud history, a lineage of being called to action in peace and war, and a record of sacrifice.

(All photos by Scott Schaeffler of scottphotoworks.com)

Editor's Note: The following is the speech given by Col Harry Seibert, Jr at the ACA Memorial Ceremony on 9 December 2018.

General Webb/Dawna, General Wurster, General Holt/Jann, Colonel Curry, Chief Smith, distinguished guests and fellow Air Commandos, thank you for allowing me the honor of speaking to you today on such an important occasion.

It is not lost on me that historically, this speech is given by an operator. But



Col Harry Seibert, Jr, 1st SOMXG/CC and keynote speaker at 2018 ACA Memorial Ceremony.

I bring a different perspective of Air Commando service as a maintainer. When I look out across our air park, I see the planes that flew historic missions.

I also see the maintainers that came before me such as Heather Bueter, Bruce Brandewie, and John Varner, climbing inside the cowlings, covered in grease, fuel, and hydraulic fluid. I also see the support personnel...supply, POL, and personnelists. We may not fly the missions, but we have equally as much pride in facilitating them.

As I thought about my comments today, three things came to mind...a proud history, a lineage of being called to action in peace and war, and a record of sacrifice.

Prior to coming into the Air Force, I lived my entire life in Kentucky, same as my father and my grandfather. My grandfather served in the Army as a military policeman in North Africa during the First World War. When my dad left for the Army in 1966, my grandfather told my dad, "Don't forget your raisins." He wasn't referring to the kind you eat, he was referring to how my dad was raised. It was a reminder not to forget your values, your heritage, and the things that make you an honorable person. When I left for the Air Force in 1994, my dad told me that story and repeated those words to me. We as Air Commandos

must never forget our "raisins."

Our lineage can be traced back to Operation THURSDAY and the 1st Air Commando Group's first mission on 5



ACA Board Director CMSgt (Ret) Heather Bueter welcomes attendees.

Mar 1944. Air Commandos also served in Europe with the Carpetbaggers of the 492nd Bombardment Group, and again in Korea.

They fought and died in the skies over the hot, steamy jungles of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

They served in Lebanon, Operation Eagle Claw in Iran, Libya, Grenada, Nicaragua, and Panama.

Some laid down their lives in the searing desert heat protecting Saudi Arabia and liberating Kuwait.

Air Commandos were overhead protecting ground forces in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

They've fought and died in the villages and countrysides of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and on the African continent.

We gain strength from remembering our past and what our heroes have done .

We will never forget their service...we MUST NEVER forget their sacrifice!

One of our SOF Truths is that humans are more important



2018 Air Commando Hall of Fame recipient CMSgt (Ret) Tom Green, Tom Green, Jr., and Maj (Ret) Dave Freeman.

that hardware. Quite simply, it's not the capabilities of the hardware that make the difference...it's the capabilities of the people.

This year we've recognized some of tremendous accomplishments of our Air Commandos in combat. In January, SSgt Christopher Lewis, a Special Tactics operator with the 23rd STS, was honored with the Silver Star for his actions while deployed to Mosul, Iraq, during Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. During a 10-hour firefight, he secured the safety of his special operations team and more than 300 soldiers while directing airstrikes within 400 meters of his team to take out enemy positions and fighters moving toward them.

In May, we presented 24 Distinguished Flying Crosses to four AC-130U crews. Joint special operations teams were exposed and under duress as AC-130U gunship crews circled above, pushing the limits of gun barrels to the melting point and providing precision airstrike capabilities to the troops below. Four separate missions and each presented different and complex challenges. Day-time operations, low fuel, low ammunition, gun malfunctions, and emergency procedures pushed crews beyond normal measures to save lives on the ground.

But there is another side of the Air Commando spirit that exists...one that earns few trophies or medals. It's our compassionate side.

On October 2nd, a tropical disturbance formed in the southwestern Caribbean. After slow development the disturbance became a tropical depression on October 7th. By the next day, the storm had intensified into Hurricane Michael as it moved northward. The hurricane strengthened rapidly in

the Gulf, becoming a Category 4 storm on October 9th with sustained winds of 155 mph.

The storm was initially projected to make landfall very close to Hurlburt Field, but our amazing weather shop stood fast and said, "Trust us, it will turn." With only 12 hours to spare, it did turn, placing Tyndall AFB squarely in its crosshairs.

As the storm passed and daylight revealed the destruction, the Tyndall AFB commander knew he needed help. He called his leadership at Langley to inform them that his 84-person ride-out team was safe, but the base had no power, no running water, no phone service, and every building on base sustained damage. From a single satellite phone, he relayed his needs: communications, someone to open and control the airfield, food, and water. His leadership team began to accommodate his needs through normal channels, but they quickly discovered it would take time...days...to make this happen. Air Combat Command then turned to the 1st SOW.

Within 30 minutes of the call, Airmen from our wing sprang into action. Airmen like MSgt Aaron Gray from the Maintenance Group pulled 3 CV-22s out of the hangar, unfolded them, and had them ready for flight within an hour, while SrA Seth Parker readied multiple light carts to provide Tyndall with lights and power.

Within six hours of the call, CV-22s touched down at Tyndall AFB with Special Tactics Airmen to clear and open the airfield. Less than 20 minutes later MC-130Hs landed with relief.

Airmen like SSgt Donovan Washington and Major Zach Finney from the Medical Group ensured life-saving insulin was delivered within two hours of the request.

MSgts Derrick Trimmell and Cory Watts from the Logistics Readiness Squadron coordinated, tasked, and filled an inconceivable amount of logistics requests.

A few days later, the wing opened lodging for the ride out team, provided warm food, enabled airlift, and allowed all 84 people to get a warm shower and a trip to Target. Our spouses provided home-cooked meals and did the team's laundry. Every single flight that went to Tyndall had extra food from downtown or Airmen's homes, and whatever people could find to make their lives better.



Air Commandos Gene Traczyk and Marty Jester brave the cold weather to attend the memorial ceremony.

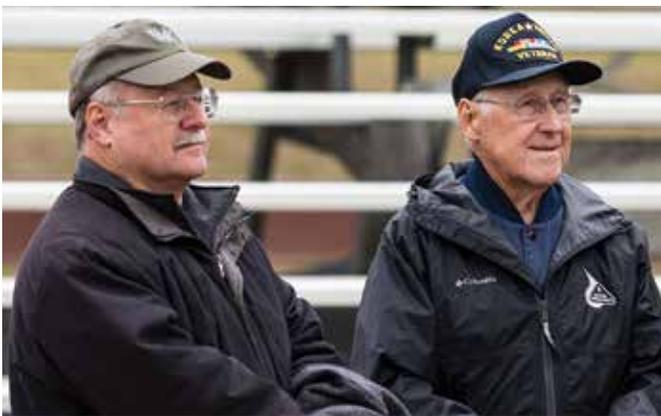
But let's not forget why we are here today...to remember those we have lost. Since World War II, we have lost 522 Air Commandos. 473 gave their lives in Vietnam, and we have lost 35 Air Commandos since 9/11. Today, we remember those Air Commandos who made the ultimate sacrifice throughout our



CMSgt Jason Andrews, 23 STS, Senior Enlisted Leader was among the many active duty Air Commandos in attendance.

historic past, in both combat and in preparation for combat.

Just over a month ago, we honored MSgt John Chapman's selfless and heroic acts which earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor. John's reconnaissance team was tasked to establish observation posts on the mountain of Takur Ghar and, when able, direct coalition airpower to destroy enemy targets. During insertion, his helicopter was ambushed causing a teammate to fall into an entrenched group of enemy combatants below. The severely damaged helicopter was unable to return for his teammate and performed a controlled crash landing a few miles from the mountaintop. Now on a second helicopter, John returned to the last known location of his teammate and again began taking heavy enemy fire. Upon exiting the helicopter, John immediately charged uphill through the thigh-



Eddie Williams and his father Paul Williams from Acworth, GA.

deep snow toward enemy positions while under heavy fire from three directions. Upon reaching the bunker, John assaulted and cleared the position, killing all enemy occupants.

With complete disregard for his own life, John deliberately moved from cover only 12 meters from the enemy and exposed himself once again to attack a second bunker, from which an emplaced machine gun was firing on his team. During this assault from an exposed position directly in the line of intense fire, John was struck and injured by enemy fire. Despite severe,

mortal wounds, he continued to fight relentlessly, sustaining a violent engagement with multiple enemy personnel before making the ultimate sacrifice.

Less than two weeks ago, we were again reminded of the price of freedom when on 27 November, we lost SSgt Dylan Elchin and three of his joint teammates when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan.

Dylan was a Special Tactics combat controller assigned to the 26th STS and had been deployed in support of Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL since August. His role was to advise the Ground Force Commander, direct close air support aircraft, and deliver destructive ordnance on enemy targets in support of offensive combat operations.

A Distinguished Graduate of Airman Leadership School, Dylan was described by his commander as having "an unusual drive to succeed and contribute to the team. He displayed maturity and stoicism beyond his years, and was always level-headed, no matter the situation."

Dylan, John Chapman, and the many fallen Air Commandos before them, laid down their lives so that my family...your families...and millions of other families across this great nation could live in freedom.



ACA President CMSgt (Ret) Wayne Norrad, CMSgt (Ret) Mike Ramos, and ACA Chairman Maj Gen (Ret) Norm Brozenick wrapping up the 2018 ACA Convention.

This coming March will mark 75 years of Air Commando heritage and sacrifice since Operation THURSDAY. From the Air Commandos of World War II to those executing missions around the world today, we remember and honor them all. Today's event is a memorial to celebrate the lives of these heroes, to say thank you and to remember their sacrifices. The foundation built by these heroes is as strong and resilient as ever. Thank you to all Air Commandos and their families past and present, for you have forged an unstoppable bond and commitment to the mission.

Your presence here today is a tribute to the Air Commandos we have lost over the years. It is a way to say, "We remember." I'll close with a quote from President Ronald Reagan who once said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction." Thank God we have Air Commandos who are willing to protect and defend those freedoms. Thank you for attending today's ceremony. God bless you and your families, God bless our Air Commandos, and God bless America.



2016 MacKay Trophy Awarded to AC-130U Crew SPOOKY 43

In 2017, the 2016 Mackay Trophy was awarded to the 4th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) AC-130U crew of SPOOKY 43: Maj Alexander Hill, Capt Aaron Hall, Capt Garrett Robinson, 1st Lt Zachary Hanley, 1st Lt Marshall Shefler, SSgt William Cody, SSgt Freddie Coffee, SSgt Cody Flora, SSgt Timothy Lewis, SSgt Alexander Skidgel, SSgt David Kerns, SrA Jonathan Russell, SrA Kellen Lloyd, and A1C Raymond Bourne for outstanding airmanship and bravery during combat action in Afghanistan.

The Mackay Trophy was first presented by Clarence Mackay in 1912 and later given to the National Aeronautic Association. The trophy is awarded for the “most meritorious flight of the year” by an Air Force person, persons, or organization. The United State Air Force selects the winner and the National



Aeronautic Association presents the trophy the following fall. Notable winners include Henry H. 'Hap' Arnold (twice), Eddie Rickenbacker, Jimmy Doolittle, and Chuck Yeager. The Clarence Mackay Trophy is permanently displayed at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC.

On 2 Nov 2016, the crew of SPOOKY 43 was providing close air support and armed overwatch for a 55-man US and Afghan special operations team conducting an urban raid on insurgent command and control nodes and senior leadership. After SPOOKY 43 arrived overhead the objective area, the combined special operations team was caught in a deadly ambush. The

team was surrounded by a large enemy force that was attacking with small arms, heavy machine guns, and grenades from multiple fighting positions. In the opening minutes of the battle the coalition ground force sustained 16 casualties, nearly 30 percent of the force, including the American commander and medic.

Sensing a victory, the enemy fighters pressed their attack and rapidly converged on the crippled friendly force. The enemy poured devastating fires on the team from multiple concealed and elevated positions at close range. The coalition force was surrounded and pinned down in a narrow alleyway, unable to either advance or withdraw. In dire straits, the Air Force joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) cleared SPOOKY 43 to fire the 40 mm cannon “danger close,” meaning the shells were landing just 40 meters from friendly forces. The gunship’s fires gave the coalition force enough cover to disengage and drag their wounded and dying comrades clear of the kill zone.

As the ground force attempted to withdraw, they continued to receive intense fire from all quadrants. The JTAC cleared SPOOKY 43 to adjust their weapons’ effects to within 25 meters of the friendly position. The aircrew then fired their 25 mm Gatling gun at enemy fighters within 40 meters of the friendlies and employed the larger 105 mm howitzer to neutralize those firing from structures in extremely close proximity to the friendly team. Within seconds, the crew of SPOOKY 43 destroyed several important enemy fighting positions.

SPOOKY 43’s accurate and intense fires on the insurgent positions enabled coalition forces to regroup and consolidate within a defensive structure, begin tending the wounded, and coordinate for evacuation, while continuing to defend themselves. During this time the aircrew delivered repetitive salvos with all three weapons through 18 more danger close engagements.

The aircrew kept raining rounds down onto the enemy positions, all the while knowing they might exceed the cooling requirements of the 105 mm howitzer and risk the detonation of a round while it was still in the barrel of the weapon. Such an explosion could take down their airplane, but with the

friendly forces still in grave danger the aircrew opted to accept the risk to their aircraft and themselves. To mitigate the risk the crew alternated firing between the 105 mm howitzer and 40 mm cannon.

To complicate the situation further, the aircrew handled five weapon malfunctions on the 40 mm, all the while continuing to engage the enemy with the other weapons. The aircrew overcame the malfunctions by using an in-extremis procedure to override the weapon’s electrical firing circuit and manually fired additional rounds from the weapon.

At this point, the firefight had been going on for nearly an hour without pause and the situation on the ground had become a life or death struggle. SPOOKY 43 had shot all their 105 mm high explosive rounds to level surrounding enemy structures. They had only eight rounds of air burst 105 mm ammunition left. An air burst round is designed to suppress enemy personnel who are in the open and is typically employed hundreds of meters away from friendly forces. When the round detonates it breaks into nearly 15,000 fragments, using shrapnel to shred its targets. The SPOOKY crew understood the danger of firing the round in such close proximity to the team, but they also knew the ground force might not survive if they did not shoot. With the embattled friendly forces in grave danger of being overrun and with no viable alternative they informed the JTAC who cleared the crew to shoot. The SPOOKY 43 gunners loaded an air burst round into the howitzer’s breach, targeted the closest enemy group, and fired. With a single shot the 105 mm round annihilated the advancing enemy group. Although the round exploded only 12 meters from friendly forces the calculated gamble provided much needed space from the insurgents.

As the fight continued the aircrew knew they would soon run out of ammunition. They radioed an urgent support request for a two-ship of Army AH-64D Apache attack helicopters and to launch the special operations quick reaction force (QRF) with reinforcements and transport helicopters to extract the coalition team from the area. With the QRF more than 20 minutes away, the SPOOKY crew coordinated multiple

strikes with the Apaches, directing the helicopters’ cannon and guided rockets onto multiple enemy positions. Almost “Winchester,” meaning out of ammunition, SPOOKY 43 called for another AC-130 with a full load of ammunition to support the movement of the QRF and began arranging for expedited support at their home base to land, rearm, and refuel the aircraft in order to rapidly return to the fight.

As the second AC-130U approached the objective area, SPOOKY 43 began directing the second crew’s sensors onto the friendly position and multiple insurgent locations so they could attack in formation while integrating the two Apaches’ firepower. In close coordination and precise timing, the four aircraft proceeded to decimate hostile fighting positions, enemy personnel, and their vehicles. When SPOOKY 43 became low on fuel and ammunition, the crew transferred control to the second AC-130 and returned to base.

After rapidly refueling and rearming their gunship, SPOOKY 43 returned to the fight. The sun was rising as SPOOKY 43 arrived back on station, resulting in a significant increase in risk to the crew whose orbit was now clearly visible to enemy gunners on the ground. SPOOKY 43 relieved the second AC-130U and remained on-station providing on-call fires and over-watch until all friendly forces and casualties were safely evacuated from the battle zone.

Overall, the crew of SPOOKY 43 engaged in two hours of ferocious combat, providing uninterrupted fire support to a ground team in dire circumstances. Despite full knowledge of the threat the aircrew faced in operating over a hostile city, at times in broad daylight, they methodically overcame multiple tactical challenges to save the lives of 50 special operators who would have otherwise perished. When the National Aeronautic Association presented the 2016 Mackay Trophy to the crew of SPOOKY 43 on 29 Nov 2017, they became the tenth Air Commando aircrew so honored.



NOTE: This article was adapted by the Air Commando Journal staff from the 4th SOS nomination package written by Maj Alexander Hill and Lt Col Derrick Q. Barton.



3RD SOS

USAF's Inaugural RPA Squadron of the Year



"Dragons" of the 3rd Special Operations Squadron stand in front of an MQ-9 Reaper at Cannon AFB, NM on 9 Apr 2018. (Photo by SSgt Michael Washburn, USAF.)

In 2016, the men and women of the 3rd Special Operations Squadron (SOS) were recognized with the inaugural USAF Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) Squadron of the Year Award. The award is sponsored by General Atomics, the manufacturer of the MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper aircraft. All US Air

of the 3rd SOS traveled to Washington, DC, for the Air Force Association (AFA) Air, Space, and Cyber Conference in Washington, DC. On stage with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, the Secretary of the Air Force, and the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, they were publicly recognized as the 2016 award winners and then presented the trophy to the 2017 recipient, the 89th Attack Squadron of Ellsworth AFB, SD.

The 3rd SOS is one of the oldest squadrons in the US Air Force. It was originally activated in April 1918, as Photographic Section No. 1, a photoreconnaissance unit that provided imagery of the Western Front to the Allies during the First World War. Over its 100-year history, the squadron has maintained a proud tradition of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), with occasional forays into other mission sets in the normal course of deactivation and reactivation. In 2005, the 3rd SOS was reactivated as USAF's first special operations RPA squadron, dedicated to the unique armed ISR requirements of the special operations enterprise. 2016 was a seminal year for the squadron as it transitioned from the MQ-1 Predator to the MQ-9 Reaper while simultaneously maintaining 24/7 support to combat operations.

Col Ben Maitre, the 27th Special Operations Wing commander at the time, wrote in his letter recommending the squadron for the award that the 3rd SOS "conducted around-the-clock operations, executing 1,590 combat missions from 4 different bases totaling 29,000 combat hours over 7 different nations. During this period, the 3rd SOS completed its planned two-year transition from the MQ-1 to the MQ-9 six months ahead of schedule. They repeatedly took action against our nation's most difficult and high-priority targets, executing 151 strikes with a near-perfect 99 percent crew success rate through



The USAF RPA Squadron of the Year Trophy. (Photo by SrA Luke Kitterman, USAF.)

Force RPA squadrons are eligible to compete for the award, including units from the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. Earned for 2016, the inaugural award was presented to the 3rd SOS in 2018, coinciding with the squadron's 100-year anniversary celebration. Later in 2018, several members



Members of the 3rd Special Operations Squadron encircle the USAF RPA Squadron of the Year Trophy during a banquet 6 Apr 2018.

the employment of 256 weapons.” Those words were echoed at the AFA ceremony in Washington, DC.

During 2016, the 3rd SOS cross-trained all its crews from MQ-1s to MQ-9s and bested the Air Force’s planned timeline for the transition by six months, despite lower-than-planned manning levels. Additionally, the 3rd SOS increased its combat missions by 75% at the end of 2016, thus becoming Air Force Special Operations Command’s largest of three MQ-9 squadrons. The unit carried out its high operations tempo with mostly junior aircrew, the majority of whom were first-term Airmen with less than two years’ time on station. These Airmen drove innovations in tactics, techniques, and procedures that have become the standards in remote special operations aviation for finding, fixing, and finishing targets as well as supporting friendly special operations forces on the ground.

The 3rd SOS also conducted operational assessments and fielding of three MQ-9 aircraft software upgrades and two advanced targeting system software upgrades in 2016. Early on, the AFSOC RPA mission set revealed unique systems requirements needed to best accomplish the mission. These requirements demanded rapid development of new operational software and equipment recommended by members of the AFSOC RPA enterprise including members from the 3rd SOS Research and Development shop. These expedited assessments and rapidly-fielded upgrades eventually led to USAF fleet-wide improvements to the MQ-9s flown by Air Combat Command and the Air National Guard.

In addition to the unit’s continuous 24/7 combat operations, the 3rd SOS successfully integrated into major joint exercises throughout 2016, including exercises JADED THUNDER, JADED CROSS, JADED EDGE, and EMERALD WARRIOR. These exercises provide rigorous training and pre-deployment spin-up for special operations forces from multiple Services and partner nations.

The 3rd SOS also leveraged these exercises as a platform for their continued integration of Air Force MQ-9s into the US National Airspace System (NAS). The 3rd SOS planning representatives continuously liaised with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to coordinate safe passage of MQ-

9s outside of military restricted airspace. The FAA currently requires remotely piloted aircraft to “see and avoid” other air traffic, which requires the use of a chase aircraft or ground-based observers. The 3rd SOS planning team helped remove these restrictions for specific routes, and thus opened up more of the country’s airspace for advanced training opportunities, including AFSOC’s first RPA support to RED FLAG in 2018. Each successful MQ-9 mission through the NAS further proved the safety and reliability of the aircraft and its crews, and brought remotely piloted aircraft closer to operating in the same way as manned aircraft.

2016 was a banner year for the 3rd SOS. At the Group and Wing levels, the squadron’s Air Commandos earned multiple individual awards, including RPA Pilot of the Quarter, Senior NCO of the Quarter, and Senior NCO of the Year. Two members from the 3rd SOS were also AFSOC’s nominees for the General Jumper Award in both the Pilot and Sensor Operator categories. The General Jumper Award is an annual award for individuals who show superior performance and make outstanding contributions to RPA aviation throughout the year. The squadron was also nominated by AFSOC for the AFA’s 2016 Citation of Honor, presented for the outstanding contribution of an individual or organization to the development of aerospace power for the betterment of mankind.

The “Dragons” of the 3rd SOS remain committed to the squadron’s core legacy of ISR and precision strike in the service of national defense. They provide 24/7 support to friendly troops on the ground who trust and rely upon their abilities. They consistently demonstrate near-perfect mission success rates, and they continue to strive each day to set the standard for remote precision attack in special operations aviation.



About the Authors: Capt Connor Hofmeister is a 2014 graduate of USAF Officer Training School. He is currently assigned to the 3rd SOS as the squadron’s Executive Officer.

1st Lt Mark Rednour is a 2013 graduate of Mount Vernon Nazarene University and received his commission through the USAF Officer Training School in 2015. He is currently assigned to the 3rd SOS as an MQ-9 Aircraft Commander.

USAF OUTSTANDING AIRMAN OF THE YEAR

Technical Sergeant Brett Laswell

AC-130U Evaluator Special Missions Aviator/Flight NCOIC 4th SOS

TSgt Brett Laswell was recognized as one of the USAF's 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2018. His award citation highlighted the Distinguished Flying Cross he earned his efforts in Afghanistan, after 10 hours of CAS, expending two combat loads of ammunition, killing 32 enemies, and destroying 23 buildings. On another occasion, he led a five-person gun crew during US Southern Command's largest CAS exercise, flying 21 hours, preparing 400 special operators for AC-130U employment, and was selected for upgrade to flight evaluator. As special missions aviator instructor, he flew 23 sorties and 105 flight hours, instructing lead gun, instructor, and evaluator training, training 22 special missions aviators for next level certification and qualifications. He completed 5 college classes, 40-hour Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education, and JSOU CEP-1 PME with a 4.0 GPA, earning two CCAF's in Aviation Operations and Maintenance Technology degrees. Additionally, he was selected for a Smithsonian Channel film where he provided aircrew reenactments, stamping AFSOC's AC-130U aircraft into the history books.

Adapted from Air Force Magazine, 30 Oct 2018




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Capt Michael C. Tolzien P.K. Carlton Award for Valor

This article was adapted by the Air Commando Journal staff from the Air Force Special Operations Command nomination to the Airlift/Tanker Association for the General P.K. Carlton Award.

Capt Michael C. Tolzien was presented the Airlift/Tanker Association's 2017 General P.K. Carlton Award for Valor during the October 2017 convention. At the time of the award, Capt Tolzien was assigned to the 67th Special Operations Squadron, 352nd Special Operations Wing, RAF Mildenhall, UK. He was forward deployed to the Middle East when he led his MC-130J Commando II crew during a daring, daylight resupply mission for a US special operations forces (SOF) team that was besieged by a determined enemy near the city of Marjah in Afghanistan's Helmand province.

The Airlift/Tanker Association's General P. K. Carlton Award for Valor is presented annually to identify and recognize an outstanding airlift or tanker aircrew member for demonstrated courage, strength, determination, bravery, and fearlessness during a combat, contingency, or humanitarian mission.

On 5 Jan 2016, the SOF team came under intense hostile fire and was cut off and isolated from reinforcements and ground resupply. Threatened with being overrun by enemy forces, the team's only chance of survival was an immediate combat airdrop of critical ammunition, water, and medical supplies. Capt Tolzien and his crew of five were alerted and completed their required mission planning. After 1,600 pounds of supplies were loaded onto their MC-130J, ARSON 56, they departed their operating location and flew through mountainous terrain enroute to the beleaguered team. When ARSON 56 arrived over the objective area, the Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) told the crew that the

team was under heavy fire and unable to give the crew clearance for an airdrop at that time. The JTAC advised ARSON 56 to reposition their aircraft to orbit away from the ground fire and to standby for further instructions. While ARSON 56 was waiting, Capt Tolzien and his crew reviewed objective area imagery to evaluate the surrounding terrain for an optimum drop altitude and a run-in heading to maximize airdrop accuracy, while also minimizing the aircraft's exposure to small arms and anti-aircraft artillery fire.

Because of the intense enemy activity and the fluid tactical situation on the ground the JTAC was forced to alter the desired drop zone multiple times. When it looked like the situation would finally permit a relatively secure drop, Capt Tolzien directed his Combat Systems Officers to recompute the calculated air release point. Minutes later, ARSON 56 was cleared for the airdrop, only to be turned away at the last minute due to hostile fire.

At this point the tactical situation on the ground was rapidly deteriorating and the anti-aircraft threat necessitated an armed escort for the MC-130J to mitigate the small arms and anti-aircraft artillery threatening the MC-130J. After establishing contact with an Army helicopter air weapons team, Capt Tolzien began the run-in for the resupply airdrop. At six miles from the release point, ARSON 56 was joined by the escort which laid down suppressive fires to mitigate risk from enemy anti-aircraft threats. Assisted by his crew, Capt Tolzien flew the MC-130J to a successful

airdrop at 800 feet above the ground, well within the range of enemy small arms. Immediately after the bundles departed the aircraft, both loadmasters informed the aircraft commander they were taking heavy enemy fire from multiple directions and began directing multiple threat maneuvers. At the same time, the JTAC radioed that he too observed heavy ground fire directed at the aircraft and that the bundles of supplies landed within 20 meters of the desired point of impact. All bundles were recovered by the SOF team.

After the drop the crew reconfigured the aircraft's ramp and flaps and began a rapid climb to maneuver away from the weapon engagement zone. With the primary mission complete, ARSON 56 was directed to land at a forward operating base and be prepared for casualty evacuation. After Capt Tolzien landed ARSON 56, the loadmasters did a battle damage assessment and found a medium caliber entry hole in the tail section and multiple entry and exit holes through the rudder.

The decisive actions of Capt Tolzien and the crew of ARSON 56 led to the successful, emergency resupply of life sustaining ammunition and medical supplies to the SOF team. Their efforts reduced further loss of life and preserved the \$72M MC-130J aircraft.

Capt Michael Tolzien has since been promoted to Major and is currently serving as an instructor pilot in the 415th Special Operations Squadron, 58th Special Operations Wing, at Kirtland AFB, NM. 🦅

PROJECT 9 AND Operation THURSDAY

75th Anniversary of the Air Commandos

By Paul Harmon, Col, USAF (Ret) and Dr Richard Newton, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)

Throughout the spring of 1942, Imperial Japanese forces were advancing west across Southeast Asia. Since their 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had invaded the Philippines, Malaya (now Malaysia), Thailand, Borneo, and Sumatra. In January 1942, they invaded Burma, captured Singapore in February, and invaded New Guinea and the Solomon Islands in March. With the fall of Burma in May 1942, the Allies' primary overland supply route into China was cut. This virtually isolated the Chinese Nationalist forces that had been fighting Japan since 1937. With Great Britain fighting for its survival in Europe, France and The Netherlands occupied by Nazi Germany, and the US not up to a wartime footing, the Allies needed to keep Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces in the war. If China fell because the Allies could not resupply them, the Japanese would be able to redirect forces against Australia, India, and the Pacific Islands. With all available land and sea routes to resupply China cut off, General Henry "Hap" Arnold, the commander of the USAAF, created Special Air Project 4, the strategic airlift of essential war materials, supplies, and reinforcements over the 21,000 foot section of the Himalayan Mountains (nicknamed the "Hump") from bases in northeastern India, 650 miles east, to Kunming, China.

In early February 1943, British Brigadier Orde Wingate, renowned for his experience in irregular warfare and guerrilla tactics in Ethiopia and Palestine, developed a plan to attack the Japanese forces in Burma. Operation LONGCLOTH was a long-range penetration (LRP) into Burma by British and Indian forces using hit-and-run

tactics to attack key Japanese road and rail supply routes in order to prevent the enemy from advancing into eastern India. The commandos became known as "Chindits," named for the mythical dragon that guarded Burmese temples and shrines.

To succeed, the Chindits' LRP tactics required routine resupply by air. Unfortunately, their aerial lifeline was untenable because of British shortages of cargo aircraft and unreliable because the Chindits moved mainly at night making it difficult for the British supply planes to always find the force. Wingate's last patrol limped out of Burma into India in late March, suffering severe losses: 883 out of the 3,000 soldiers who began the operation did not make it back. Despite the losses and mixed success, Operation LONGCLOTH was a psychological victory. It showed the Japanese that the Allies were going to fight for Southeast Asia and that European troops could successfully fight and survive in a jungle environment. Wingate was determined to convince the leadership in England that the LRP concept could work if properly supported by air power for close support, resupply, and medical evacuation.

In late August 1943, senior Allied civilian and military leaders met in Quebec, Canada, at what was known as the Quadrant Conference. President

Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill were the primary participants. Joseph Stalin from the Soviet Union was invited but could not attend. Churchill asked Wingate to give a report on Operation LONGCLOTH. Wingate detailed the Chindits' operation along with its successes and the shortfalls to the American President and military staff. Because of the environmental conditions in the Burmese jungle, Wingate stressed



Lt Cols Phil Cochran and John Alison regarded as the fathers of the American Air Commandos.

the critical need for reliable resupply and evacuation of the injured soldiers in order for the next LRP to be successful.

President Roosevelt agreed it was critical that China remain in the war and also to protect India and reclaim lost territories. To do this the Allies reaffirmed the need to continue the strategic airlift missions over the Hump and for Wingate to plan another offensive into northern Burma. Roosevelt promised the US would provide the air support for the new operation. The President directed Arnold to determine what was needed for close

British unit commander, LTC D.C. Herring, sent a message to Cochran saying, "Please be assured that we will go with your boys any place, any time, any where." The phrase, "Anytime, anyplace" became, and remains, the Air Commando motto. Encouraged by the trust placed in their "Air Commandos," Cochran and Alison continued the aggressive training into the first week of March when the order came down that the invasion plan was approved. The date set for the aerial invasion of Burma was 5 Mar 1944. Operation THURSDAY was a go.

At 1812 hours on 5 March, the Air Commandos departed their base at Lalaghat enroute to a landing zone (LZ), code name Broadway, north of the city of Katha and 200 miles behind Japanese lines. C-47 Dakotas lifted off into the darkening sky towing Waco gliders loaded with Chindit soldiers, engineers, and supplies, as well as bulldozers and pack animals to support the mission. A similar force was supposed to depart and land at a second LZ, code name Piccadilly, but that mission was scrubbed shortly before takeoff because last minute reconnaissance photos showed the clearing was littered with ruts and fallen trees making it unsuitable for landing aircraft.

There was nearly a full moon as the force flew east toward Broadway, but the moonlight was obscured by very hazy conditions near the ground. By 2200, the lead glider released from its tow plane and landed shortly afterward with a load of Chindits, who immediately established security for the LZ. The pilot, Captain Bill Taylor, ignited a green flare and ordered that smudge pots be lit to outline the landing area for the next wave of gliders. With the smudge pots as their guide, the next gliders cut loose from their tow aircraft at 1,000 feet above the ground. Because the gliders were extremely overweight, the pilots had to fly their approaches faster than planned, which in turn made the landings very dicey and dangerous. The second glider pilot was forced to crash land his aircraft to avoid Taylor's glider. Col Alison piloted the third glider and landed safely. Alison immediately took charge of the air operations on Broadway.

There were numerous natural obstacles in the landing area that were hidden by the tall elephant grass. The landing gliders bounced over ruts and tree stumps that ripped the landing gear off as they careened to a stop. Other gliders, trying to avoid the wrecked aircraft littering the clearing, overshot Broadway and crashed into the jungle. The landing operations became so chaotic that the senior Chindit officer, Brigadier "Mad" Mike Calvert, radioed the codeword "SOYA-LINK" to Brigadier Wingate and Col Cochran back at Chindit headquarters to halt the flow of aircraft.

SOYA-LINK was one of two codewords for the operation. PORK-SAUSAGE meant all was well. SOYA-LINK, a meat substitute that the British hated, was used if there was trouble. Unfortunately, the message back to HQ was passed through intermediaries with no clarifying information because the one radio available at Broadway failed after the code word was passed to the commanders. Wingate and Cochran, 200 miles away in Lalagath, did not know what to make of the message. They assumed the force on Broadway was under attack and Cochran ultimately decided to recall all the aircraft. All aircraft responded with acknowledgment of the recall, except one.

Back on Broadway, Alison was working to sort out the

chaos. He was informed that the chief engineer and most of his staff responsible for constructing the airstrip were killed in one of the crash landings. Brigadier Calvert and Alison had all available hands working to clear the airstrip when they heard another Dakota release its tow. Flight Officer Gene A. Kelly was at the controls and as he landed, he bounced the length of the strip crashing between two trees at the end of the clearing. Everyone on the ground feared the worst. Fortunately, Kelly had rigged the bulldozer he was carrying to the hinged nose of the glider. When they hit, the cockpit was raised up out of the way as the bulldozer shot forward from the back of the aircraft. All on board escaped without serious injury and the bulldozer was in fine working order.

As the sun came up Calvert and Alison began to assess the damage. After taking a head count, miraculously there were only 24 fatalities, most were from the gliders that crashed into the jungle. Of the 37 gliders at Broadway only 3 were flyable.



The night they landed at Broadway. L to R: Capt Bill Taylor, Cdr of American glider pilots; British Maj Walter Scott, Dep Cdr 77th Brigade; Col John Alison; and Brigadier "Mad" Mike Calvert, Cdr, 77th Brigade. (Photo courtesy of Paul Harmon)

Despite the losses that evening, 539 men, 3 mules, a horse and 29,972 pounds of stores were delivered to Broadway. The total glider payload was estimated in excess of 220,000 pounds.

By 0630, Calvert was able to get a message out requesting air evacuation of the most seriously injured men. Alison and the surviving engineer surveyed the rutted airstrip littered with damaged gliders. Alison turned to the young second lieutenant engineer and asked him how long it would take to make Broadway ready for C-47s to land? The lieutenant replied, "If I have it done by this afternoon, will that be too late?"

So, with all available hands, the work to make the airstrip ready got underway. By 1000, Calvert had established direct communications with Wingate back in Lalagath. This was the first time since the operation began that Wingate was able to speak with his subordinate commander. Calvert told Wingate and Cochran the airfield was secure and should be ready to receive aircraft by early evening. The engineers worked feverishly through the day to make Broadway usable. Meanwhile, Wingate and Cochran planned the next C-47 lifts

The PEOPLE The AIRCRAFT The SPIRIT of the AIR COMMANDO

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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 under the Journal tab, and at the Hurlburt Field library).

Submit files electronically to: 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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waiting on word from Broadway. At 1630, the code words PORK-SAUSAGE were received stating a 4,700 foot landing strip with lights was ready for operations.

The first wave of Dakotas took off at 1730 with Wingate aboard the lead aircraft. The airstrip was narrow, but usable for the C-47s. Troop Carrier Command, assigned to support the operation, sent 62 C-47s from Lalagath and Hailakandi into Broadway that evening. Alison reported Broadway was as busy as any civilian airport that night. At its peak of activities, a transport landed or departed Broadway every 47 seconds.

With the success of the efforts at Broadway, Wingate moved up his plans to open up a second landing strip, Chowringhee. This second LZ was to support operations south of Katha, Burma, to put additional pressure on the Japanese forces. On 7 March, Cochran launched C-47s with 12 gliders in tow to Chowringhee. All but one landed safely. The cargo of the glider that crashed was a bulldozer which was critical to getting the airstrip completed. There were delays in getting another bulldozer and by 2330 hours they only had 2,700 feet of approved lighted runway, putting the operation well behind schedule. The C-47s needed at least 4,500 feet for safe night operations. The next day, Wingate decided that Broadway had ample capacity and was a better operating area, so he ordered Chowringhee evacuated. By 0600 on 10 March, the evacuation of Chowringhee was completed. At 1300, the Japanese bombed the abandoned airstrip and the damaged Waco gliders that remained.

By 11 March, the invading force had created two 4,500 foot landing strips 200 miles behind Japanese lines. The air forces had delivered over 9,000 men, 500,000 pounds of supplies, and nearly 1,400 mules and ponies between the 5th and 11th of March. Operation THURSDAY was completed, but the Air Commandos' real work of supporting Wingate's Chindit LRP had just begun. Gen Arnold favored the moniker "Air Commando" and he made it official later in March when he renamed the 5318th PUA as the 1st Air Commando Group.



Author's note: Primary reference sources: "Any Place, Any Time, Any Where; The 1st Air Commandos in World War II" by R.D. Van Wagner; "Operation Thursday, Birth of the Air Commandos" by Herbert Mason, SSgt Randy Bergeron, and TSgt James Renfrow; and the article "The Aerial Invasion of Burma," written by General Hap Arnold appearing in the August 1944, issue of National Geographic.

About the Authors: Col Harmon retired from the Air Force in 2010 after 30 years of service. During his career, Col Harmon held several command positions in operations and training and also served as the Director, Special Operations Liaison Element in the Central Command's Combined Air Operations Center during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM.

Dr Rick Newton retired from the Air Force in 1999 after 22 years of service. During his career he served as a helicopter pilot, combat aviation advisor, and strategic-level planner. Since hanging up his uniform he has continued to serve as an educator, researcher, and author at the USAF Special Operations School, NATO Special Operations School, and Joint Special Operations University.

“Carpetbaggers”



Recognized by a Grateful Norway

By Erik Brun, President of the 99th Infantry Battalion Foundation

Eleven veterans of the famous “Carpetbaggers,” special operations airmen who served in the European Theater of Operations during the Second World War, were honored for their dangerous wintertime missions over Norway during the war. The veterans of the 801st/492nd Bombardment Group, nicknamed the Carpetbaggers, after an earlier operation of the same name, flew deep penetration missions to support resistance groups across Europe. In October 2018, the veterans gathered in Palm Springs, CA, for a reunion. Together with their children and friends they were honored by a country they helped to liberate.

I first met the Carpetbagger veterans during the presentation of the Congressional Gold Medal to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in March 2018. When I realized that these men might also qualify for a Norwegian award, I contacted my good friend Jens Inge Egeland, a Norwegian Veterans Advocate who has helped over two hundred Allied WWII veterans receive their well-deserved honors. On 31 Oct 2018, 11 of the surviving Carpetbaggers who flew special operations missions over Norway were recognized with the “Regjeringens Minnemedalje”, a commemorative medallion to honor their wartime service to the Norwegian people.

The CARPETBAGGER operations began in October 1943, when the US Eighth Air Force re-directed the Consolidated B-24D Liberators, aircrews, and support personnel of the deactivated 479th Antisubmarine Group from U-boat hunting. Because the bombers had been modified for low-level, extended overwater operations, they were deemed unusable for high-altitude strategic bombing. The aircraft and crews were offered to support the OSS prior to the D-Day landings in Normandy. Beginning in November 1943, the American crews were trained for night special operations by veteran British crews from the Special Duties Squadrons. A few pilots and navigators even flew combat missions into France as part of British crews. In February 1944, Operation CARPETBAGGER was designated the 801st Bombardment Group (Provisional) with two squadrons, the 36th and 406th

Bomb Squadrons. In August 1944, the 801st was redesignated the 492nd Bombardment Group (BG). The original 492nd BG, a high-altitude Bombardment unit, was disbanded after heavy losses and gave the Carpetbaggers a cover identify in the Eighth Air Force’s order of battle. They also flew C-47 Gooney Birds, A-26 Invaders, and British De Havilland Mosquitos. Carpetbagger veterans are still careful to identify themselves as the 801st/492nd Bombardment Group in respect the fallen and veteran members of the original 492nd BG.

Based upon lessons learned from their British counterparts, the Carpetbaggers’ bombers were further modified for special operations tasks. Most were painted glossy black in order to hide from enemy anti-aircraft gunners and night fighters. The nose guns were removed, allowing the navigator sit up in the all-glass nose for visual navigation. The bombers also had the waist guns removed and the windows covered in order to not show any light from the interior of the aircraft and the bomb bays were converted to allow the Liberators to drop British cargo containers. The belly turret was removed because it was unnecessary at low level and thus saved weight. The opening became the “Joe Hole,” like the SOE had done in their bomber-type aircraft. This allowed agents (Joes) and fragile supplies like radios and medicine to be precisely air dropped by parachute at very low level.

By January 1944, the Carpetbaggers’ were flying their specially modified B-24Ds on low-level night missions into occupied Europe. Navigation during their deep penetration flights was done by the light of the moon, which limited their flying to about two weeks each month—the weeks before and after a full moon. They would cross the English Channel at a thousand feet using celestial and terrain association and then navigate to the drop zones with basic dead reckoning, and primitive direction finding and electronic beacon systems. The resistance groups on the ground set up signal lights and fires to help the pilots find and confirm their drop zones.

In the spring of 1944, the Norwegian government-in-exile asked the Americans if they would fly supply drops

to the resistance groups during the summer months. The Carpetbaggers were led by the Norwegian-American Col Bernt Balchen. Col Balchen was quite the character. He was a pioneering Arctic aviator, a veteran of the 1918 Finnish Civil War, an Olympic boxer, and associate of Amelia Earhart. As a Norwegian Air Force pilot, he became the father of Little Norway, the Free Norwegian Air Force training bases in Canada in 1940. He was recruited by General Henry “Hap” Arnold in 1941 and joined with the rank of colonel, working on many classified Arctic and Scandinavian projects.

The British Royal Air Force (RAF) had been successfully supported the Norwegian Resistance for several years but were



Carpetbaggers attending their 2018 reunion display their medals which were presented by Michael Soroy, Norwegian Honorary Consul for Los Angeles, standing third from left and the author to the Consul's right. (Photo courtesy of Katie Sanders)

reluctant to divert resources from the upcoming Normandy invasion or to risk daylight missions resulting from the long summer days. The US Eighth Air Force agreed to support the requests, but with new aircraft, B-24Hs modified for low-level airdrops just like the Carpetbaggers', including the glossy black anti-searchlight paint. The 801st/492nd BG crews trained the new aircrews and by summer 1944, the new group was ready for special operations. After three months, though, responsibility for combat missions into Norway was given to the Carpetbaggers.

Operation OVERLORD, the Allied landing at Normandy was on 6 Jun 1944. By the fall of 1944, with the Allies' breakout from the Normandy beachhead, the Carpetbaggers' operations increased in scale. In addition to the insertion of Jedburgh teams and supplying the resistance groups, the Carpetbaggers were used to fly fuel to Gen George Patton's THIRD Army, delivering over 800,000 gallons of gasoline to US armored columns that had outrun their logistical chain.

After the Allied breakout, the Carpetbaggers' special operations payloads increased from single agents and 3-man Jedburgh teams to 10 – 20-man missions. These soldiers were parachuted up to 250 miles behind enemy lines into drop zones controlled by the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). This

was the culmination of an OSS program that envisaged highly trained soldiers who would operate in small uniformed groups, not only as saboteurs and liaisons to the resistance, but as trainers and mentors to FFI units, the Maqui, conducting direct action missions against the Nazis. These were the soldiers of the forty-man OSS Operational Groups (OG).

Half of the sixteen OSS OGs' men were drawn from two infantry battalions originally created as part of the US Army's "Foreign Legions" project. Proposed by the War Department's G-2, days after Pearl Harbor, these culturally distinct battalions were recruited from resident aliens and first generation Norwegian and Greek Americans. The Norwegian-American 99th Infantry Battalion had completed mountain and winter warfare training with the 10th Light Division (Alpine) at Camp Hale, CO, near Leadville, CO in 1943. That summer OSS recruiters selected 12 officers and 80 enlisted men to become the 2 Norwegian OGs that participated in 5 of the UK-based OG missions in France. In January 1945, these men made up half of the new NORSO (Norwegian Special Operations) group for planned operations in Norway. Its 50 members were led by Lt Col Gerhard Bolland, to be inserted into Norway in early spring 1945, to attack the German rail lines to tie up the 350,000 German personnel still in Norway as part of Operation RYPE (Norwegian for Grouse).

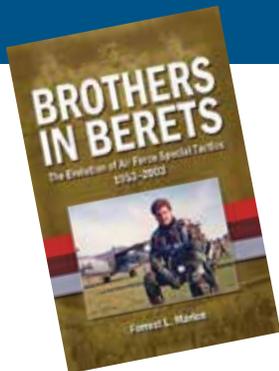
The first RYPE element to parachute into Norway was led by Maj William Colby, but winter weather and Nordic flying conditions were different from what the Carpetbaggers had been doing over France, Belgium, and The Netherlands. It was horrendous weather in mountainous conditions with a bright white carpet of snow that made visual navigation very difficult, especially in moonlight. Like the earlier Operation LAPWING, almost half of the aircraft dispatched to support Operation RYPE with additional personnel, supplies, and equipment had to turn back after multiple of attempts to find the drop zones.

Tragedy first struck when a Carpetbagger airplane, returning from an unsuccessful drop, crashed in the Orkney Islands due to ice accumulation in the carburetors. A second aircraft crashed two weeks later, on a Norwegian mountainside near the drop zone. The tragic loss of the two flight crews combined with the loss of 10 men from the NORSO group was staggering. Colby was able to rally the available men and with their supplies and the support of the Norwegian resistance fighters of MILORG, successfully attacked the Northland Railroad.

The sacrifices of the Carpetbaggers and the Norwegian OG men of the OSS have not been forgotten. In addition to a monument erected on the Norwegian mountainside in 1949, a new memorial was dedicated in their memory near Trondheim, NOR, in 2016. Their story is also told on the Norwegian Monument at Tennessee pass, near Leadville, CO. Their memory is celebrated twice annually in Colorado, during the 10th Mountain Division Association Ski-In each March and during Memorial Day celebrations every year.



Editor's Note: Air Commando Bernie Moore contributed a two-part article detailing the history and operations of the Carpetbaggers. They can be found in Issue 5, Volumes 1 and 3.



Brothers in Berets: The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics 1953-2003

By Forrest L. Marion Air University Press, 2018, 426 pages

When I received my copy in the mail from Air University Press, I pulled the cellophane off and cracked into a random section. Page 18 takes us back to 1952, when Tactical Air Command (TAC) and the 62nd Troop Carrier Wing were advocating for bolting an electronic suite to a lead aircraft in “the expectation that electronic navigational aids might preclude the need for ground pathfinders...” On the next page Army Airborne units—likely advised by leaders who hit the hedgerows at places like Carentan and Sainte-Mère-Église and had to rally widely dispersed paratroopers under fire there—are putting it in writing that TAC is “failing in Pathfinder development” and the Army is thus holding onto “Organic Pathfinder teams as an interim measure for meeting current requirements.” TAC ended up acknowledging that delivering people and equipment to a drop zone is a joint operation performed by the Army and the USAF both in the air and on the ground. The new Service therefore committed to developing its own pathfinder teams in May of that year. This random two-page section points to a recurring theme in the history (indeed, in 1977 the Army was again advocating for using its own pathfinders instead of combat controllers), but it also speaks to battle-tested concepts like inherent jointness and ‘Humans over Hardware’—a couple of concepts that in a perfect world wouldn’t demand constant repetition. In an imperfect world, though, Dr. Marion’s narrative is both interesting and necessary. I found the entire volume as compelling as pages 18 and 19.

There are, to be sure, other tried-and-true concepts in the work that go back to Cochran and Alison’s 1st Air Commando Group. Chapter 3, for instance, describes Southeast Asia as the combat control career field’s first wartime theater, and

provides stark examples of innovation and self-help—like Pilatus Porters dropping crates of beer bottles on the Ho Chi Minh trail in the attempt to take out barefoot North Vietnamese “logisticians,” and the “Send Me” types who performed admirably as unrated airborne forward air controllers or manned the tower and runways alongside Marines at Khe Sanh. It is rare to find a book that mentions that particular fight without the words Dien, Bien, and Phu somewhere nearby in the text, and the author—a staff historian at the Air Force Historical Research Agency—doesn’t disappoint. He cites Bernard Fall’s essential book on the 1954 French attempt to air-resupply its besieged paratroopers in that valley, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, to point out that there was plenty of parachute nylon and courage inside the shrinking perimeter, but that the region’s weather was every bit as nasty as the shells the Viet Minh were raining down on the French garrison. In this way, Dr. Marion masterfully introduces the concept and necessity for Special Operations Weather Teams. If you’re attempting to resupply some isolated folks by air, it’s good to have experts alongside them who can discuss concepts like wind shear, thermals, and wing icing with inbound aircraft.

There were plenty of lessons identified for the joint air/ground team in what the French went through at Dien Bien Phu, and that attention to international developments in a very technical skill set reveals the quality of research that has gone into this work. The author opens the fourth chapter: “Combat Control & US National Counterterrorism,” with the Israelis’ 1976 hostage rescue at Entebbe and the revelation that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen George S. Brown, USAF, was thinking about similar US capabilities months before the American embassy was seized in Tehran. This tees

up the catastrophic events at Desert One during Operation EAGLE CLAW, but it also serves to introduce the subsequent evolution of Combat Control Teams (CCT) from a capability “looked upon with indifference” toward the esteemed status it holds today. Starting with the distinctive scarlet beret, the late 1970s introduced more resources for training and equipment, as well as a greater esprit de corps in the career field. An actual officer Air Force Specialty Code—with opportunities for promotion—was also secured over the years, an implicit requirement for advocacy at the higher levels not only in the field but with Headquarters USAF.

There is, again, a historical continuity that Marion plugs into throughout the narrative. “In the post-Southeast Asia years of the late 1970s,” he writes, “US special operations had suffered considerably from budget cuts, lack of interest, and a persistent reputation as ‘snake eaters’ and ‘cowboys.’...The failure to rescue the hostages in Iran in 1980 highlighted the problems affecting joint and special operations and placed those concerns on the radar screens of the Pentagon and Congress.” On the eve of the Grenada operation, he cites Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger’s fears that it could be “another Tehran,” and in this way connects EAGLE CLAW to Operation URGENT FURY (where combat controllers managed to both open up the crucial 9,000-foot runway at Point Salines and to deconflict Grenada’s airspace when all four Service components were claiming it) as waypoints toward the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act. The acknowledged lack of battlefield trauma care expertise at that airfield also, of course, influenced the 1987 combination of combat controllers with pararescue professionals (PJs) into Special Tactics units.

The merger with pararescue, it is acknowledged, was not without its frictions. The book speaks of the “differing perspectives of supported versus supporting roles,” (italics in original) for instance. In a CSAR event, there is no doubt that getting PJs to a downed airman gets all the support—from the Combined Air Operations Center to the airframe making the delivery. Up to this point in history, though, the combat controller filled a supporting role, providing communications, navigational aids, and air traffic control assistance for C-130 aircraft conducting drops and landings at remote drop zones (DZ) or landing zones (LZ)... [T]he Air Force viewed CCT as part of the support mechanism for its aircraft and really did not understand that [Joint Special Operations Command]’s CCT detachment was fully integrated into the national counterterrorism ground force.

The arrangement, however, was mission capable in time for Operations JUST CAUSE in Panama and DESERT STORM in Iraq, and *Brothers in Berets* provides the highlights, from supporting the Rangers at Rio Hato airfield, to rescuing downed pilots and hunting SCUD launchers in Iraq. Special Tactics personnel also found a niche in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, vectoring in relief aircraft and administering

medical support to Kurdish communities throughout northern Iraq. As I tell my International Relations classes, though, all roads lead to Mogadishu, and Dr. Marion closes his chapter on it with a well-supported argument that that battle vindicated the decision “to bring together PJ and... (CCT) specialties with the expectation of achieving synergies on the battlefield... to a degree even greater than in Panama in 1989 or Iraq in 1991.”

Marion’s implicit point is that the Special Tactics community has experienced plenty of hardship, not just on the battlefield, but in the bureaucratic supporting/supported arguments at the macro level, too. He elucidates a conventional mindset that has traditionally placed combat controllers ideally in the role of support for “exercises and aircrew unilateral training.” Similarly, he points out that “for some time [Air Combat Command] had employed PJs mainly as helicopter gunners and scanners and, therefore, perceived a lesser requirement than the other commands for maintaining pararescue medical standards.” The training pipeline and consistent demand for these operators attests to their status as high-value/low-density assets. The book clarifies that the community has not only fought from its inception for the resources and top-cover to reach its potential, it holds the guidon streamers—

e.g., Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan—that prove it is worth the investment.

My one gripe with this volume, and it’s one I usually bring up, is the provided maps. There are some fine photos of noteworthy individuals from the community, which jibes with the biographical sketches at the ends of the chapters – personal photos from exemplars like Tim Wilkinson and Mike Lampe do supplement the narrative nicely. There are, however, only two maps provided—one of airfields in northern Laos and one of Bagram—and neither is readable. This, however, is a small issue in the internet age.

We have lost a notable number of Brothers in Berets since September 11th, and this small community of professionals has humbly kept its silence about where it has gone and what it has accomplished in every major fight since 1953. I think this particular history puts some of the details on what that community has survived—without being boisterous or indiscrete—and what these professionals bring to assail future national security challenges.



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