

AIR COMMANDO

JOURNAL

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



A Zorro Tale:
AT-28D Efforts in Thailand

**Casting A New
Shadow**

MC-130J: A New Era

PAVE LOW Leaders

The Kickoff of Desert Storm

27th SOW

AFSOC's Newest

Fall 2011



Vol I: Issue I

Foreword by Gen Norton Schwartz

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FOREWORD

With genuine anticipation, I am privileged to contribute to this inaugural issue of *Air Commando Journal*. Given the examples of courageous leadership, gritty determination, bold innovation, unparalleled competence, and quiet professionalism, the heritage of air commandos has long deserved a dedicated publication to chronicle the many substantial contributions of special operations Airmen.

That time has arrived. With operational accounts and thoughtful analyses that both inform our many ongoing operations and inspire us toward future success, this journal represents the intersection between operations and plans, and will serve well as a platform for debate and discovery—where theory meets practice, and where we can capitalize on the many valuable lessons from our experiences. Our operations in the past decade alone offer enough material for a lifetime of study; and, now that the voices of many of the founding fathers of Air Force special operations—including the likes of Air Commando One Heinie Aderholt and the legendary John Alison—have gone silent, it is incumbent on us to recount and remember the teachings of the past as we explore today’s lessons learned.



Air Force special operations has never been more prominent in our overall national security effort than it is now; and, as special operations professionals, we must pursue continual improvement. I therefore call on the entire Air Force special operations community to maintain and advance our professionalism through thoughtful and candid debate in this forum. This means that both celebrating our successes and reflecting on our missteps are in order. In doing so, I anticipate that future editions of *Air Commando Journal* will contain, from time to time, much of our trademark candor. Reflection and self-criticism have always served us well, and indeed, they will propel us forward, with common cause and a shared vision of operational excellence. With this effort, we will hold true to our proud tradition in helping to provide for our Nation’s security—through unique and often game-changing contributions, but with little fanfare. Such is the hallmark of the United States Air Force’s *Quiet Professionals*.



NORTON A. SCHWARTZ
General, USAF
Chief of Staff



CHINDIT CHATTER

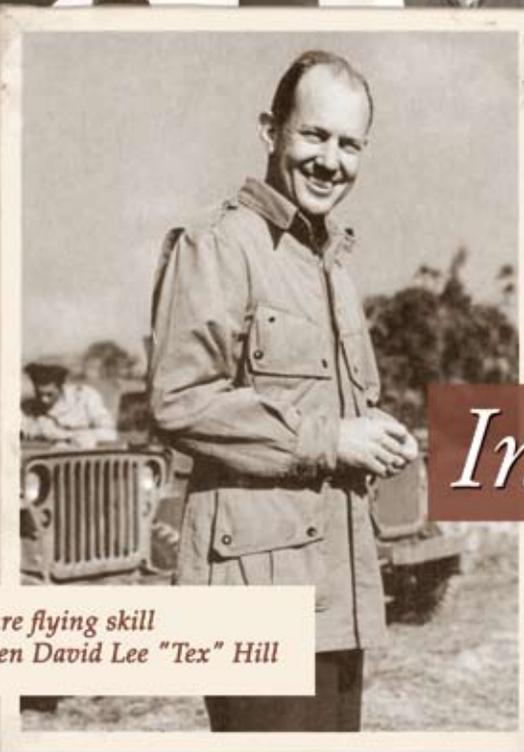
This is the first ever professional military journal that is dedicated solely to Air Force Special Operations. This magazine is intended to serve Air Commandos past, present and future. As our newly minted coin says “From WWII till tonight---Air Commandos always there.” This journal will cover that gamut. We will explore heritage and the lessons that can be gleaned from those that have preceded today’s Air Commandos. We will also look at the modern day force structure to include acquisition of new assets, capabilities and missions. In addition, we will highlight our most important asset-- our great people and have a look at a specific unit or specialty every quarter. Our friends from the US Air Force Special Operations School and other AFSOC agencies will provide case studies of various operations, professional development articles targeted at Air Commandos and articles related to ongoing missions.



We will also attempt to have at least one “I was there” personal account of an operation or battle. In addition, we will include an Air Commandos Heroes page to highlight the exploits of our Medal of Honor recipients and other highly decorated individuals. As we continue to expand our horizons we will look to the readers to provide letters to the editor for further enlightenment regarding the various readings we provide. We will suitably entitle that forum “Hot Wash”. We are very excited to delve into this unfamiliar realm and recognize that we will find ways we can improve at every juncture. We look to you, the readers, to help us achieve the best publication possible.

And of course, the Air Commando Association wants to take this opportunity to thank our corporate friends that have chosen this venue to advertise their companies. Without their participation, none of this would be possible. Lastly, but certainly not least, we extend a special thanks to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Norton A. Schwartz, himself a member of the Air Commando Hall of Fame, for taking the time from his incredible schedule to write the foreword to this first edition. Enjoy the inaugural edition of the Air Commando Journal.

Col Dennis Barnett USAF (ret)
ACA Vice President and Editor in Chief



"John Alison had the greatest pure flying skill of any pilot in the theater..." BGen David Lee "Tex" Hill

In Memoriam

Major General John R. Alison

"Consummate Quiet Professional"

By Clay T. McCutchan

Air Armament Center Historian, Eglin AFB, FL

Major General John R. Alison passed away on 6 Jun 2011 and will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery, VA, on 3 October 2011. He was 98.

General Alison, was born in Miccanopy, Florida, 21 November 1912, and grew up in nearby Gainesville. He received an engineering degree from the University of Florida in 1935 and then attended US Army Air Corps pilot training and got his commission and wings at Kelly Field, Texas.

As a pursuit pilot in the late 1930s with the 8th and 57th Pursuit Groups, he played a major part in the buildup of fighter forces and development of fighter tactics for the World War Two

cal performance, particularly in an airplane. He made a legendary reputation as a P-40 aerobatic demonstration pilot to Claire Chennault and the Nationalist Chinese. In the spring of 1941, he served in England as a military attaché, again demonstrating the P-40 and studied Royal Air Force lessons from the Battle of Britain. There, he experienced the German Luftwaffe air raids and met Winston Churchill. Along with Captain Hub Zemke, he served as military attaché to the Soviet Union and accompanied Harry Hopkins to Russia where he assisted in the P-40 fighter lend lease program and instructed Russian pilots in the P-40, A-20, and B-25.

manding the 75th Fighter Squadron.

He was chosen in 1943 by Gen Henry "Hap" Arnold, head of the Army Air Forces, to serve with Lieutenant Colonel Phil Cochran as deputy commander of the First Air Commando Group in the China-Burma-India theater. The 1st Air Commandos supported British General Orde Wingate's "Chindit" Commandos, and successfully pulled off Operation THURSDAY, the first nighttime, behind enemy lines, airfield seizure. Alison led the glider assault as the senior air officer present for the landings. He also flew the Air Commando B-25s, P-51s, C-47s, and the light planes. He was also responsible for the Air Commandos obtaining the first helicopters for combat. He personally briefed General Eisenhower on combat glider operations prior to D-Day in Europe.

During the last year of the war, he served in the Pacific theater again as the deputy chief of staff for the 5th Air Force and directed B-29 bomber operations against Japanese forces in the Philippines and Okinawa.

General Alison left active service as a colonel in 1946. He joined the Air Force Reserve and commanded the

This inaugural edition of the Air Commando Journal is dedicated to the memory of Maj Gen John Alison

Army Air Force. He knew Lieutenant Colonel Carl Spaatz and Lieutenant Curtis LeMay and served alongside Lieutenant Phil Cochran. Quiet, moral, humble, intellectual, unassuming, his 5 foot, 5 and 3/4 inch frame packed an aggressive fireball of mental and physi-

Requesting transfer to China, he served under General Claire Chennault and Major David "Tex" Hill with the Army's 23rd Fighter Group "Flying Tigers." General Alison scored the first air to air night kills for the "Tigers", and later achieved "Ace" status while com-

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452nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. He flew F-80s, B-26s and later crewed transports such as the C-46, C-119, and C-123. He served through the Cold War, the Korean War, and the South East Asia War. He retired from the Reserve in 1971 as a Major General having served as the special assistant to the 15th Air Force Commander.

On the civil side of his career, he served as Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics for two years under President Truman. He worked to improve airline operations and served alongside Orville Wright while working in the aeronautics department.

He served as president of Transit Van Corporation, a cargo airline engaged in research and development of transportation equipment. In 1953 he joined Northrop Corporation and spent 26 years with them. He retired from Northrop as vice president of customer relations in 1984. He maintained an office in Washington DC and worked business projects after the "9/11" terrorist attacks and into his mid 90's before he closed it.

In 1954, General Alison was selected president of the Air Force Association.

His awards include the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air medal, the Purple Heart and the British Distinguished Service Order.

In 1984, 2004, and 2009 General Alison served in the "Gathering of Eagles" program at Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. In 1994 he was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame, Fort Walton Beach, Florida and in 2005 he was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame, Dayton, Ohio. On 27 October, 2010, General Alison was inducted into the United States Special Operations Command, Commando Hall of Honor at MacDill AFB, Florida.

MGen Alison is survived by his spouse, Kathleen "Pen-ni" Alison, sons John R. Alison III, David Price Alison, and grand children Christopher, Elisabeth, and Peter Alison. 🇺🇸

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A Zorro Tale



By Noah E. Loy, Brigadier General, USAF (Retired)

(VNAF T-28C's arming at Bien Hoa)

FOREWORD

When I began writing this story about my AT-28D flying experiences in Southeast Asia it was intended to become a short chapter in a personal biography I was writing to my two sons. As I searched for references to provide some dates and history concerning my association with North American AT-28D operations in Thailand I found considerable information about the 56th Air Commando Wing (56th ACW) and 606th Air Commando Squadron (606th ACS) activities in Thailand, but little was written about specific AT-28D night air interdiction operations in Laos. Almost all official references to AT-28D combat air operations in Laos from mid-1966 through December 1967 related to Royal Laotian Air Force operations in northern and central Laos.

The 56th ACW web page contains a section titled "The Zorros" with pictures and text contributed by Felix "Sam" Sambogna, Lt Col, USAF (Retired).

He tells about AT-28D aircrew training and deployment from Hurlburt Field, Florida to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand (NKP), the early 606th ACS challenges of keeping its pilots current until arrival of their aircraft, and their subsequent employment in night interdiction operations. Due to the absence of written material describing other than very general Zorro flying activities I decided to write "A Zorro Tale" to honor those who flew these dangerous and demanding missions and to assure the scope of their individual efforts would be recorded by a fellow pilot who participated in these Laotian air operations

I fully understand that my story does not represent all of the stories and experiences of every AT-28D pilot who served during this 18 month period. However, I write my tale hoping that anyone who reads this account will appreciate the brave efforts of AT-28D

pilots who performed some of the most daring night air interdiction operations of the Vietnam War.

How I Became a Zorro

The most surprising assignment of my 30-year career was when I received orders to report to NKP in northeast Thailand in March 1967. I had completed three months of duty as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) with the 2nd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division (2-4ID) and was expecting a different assignment in about six weeks which would have returned me to an F-100 fighter unit for the second half of my tour in Vietnam. As in most unexpected military assignments, there was a story and purpose.

The 606th ACS was deployed to Thailand as an operations element of the "Lucky Tiger" program. Its operations with three different types of aircraft included an AT-28D section that flew

combat sorties to support Laotian army units in central Laos and operated training sites at various Thai air bases to help train Laotian and Thai AT-28D pilots to fly night attack missions. The squadron was assigned to the 56th ACW. Under its newly formed parent wing the 606th ACS would continue to support AT-28D combat crew training for Laotian and Thai pilots, but its NKP-based pilots would primarily fly night-time air strikes to support Steel Tiger and Tiger Hound air interdiction operations on roads and rivers in Laos and on the Ho Chi Minh trail. During early March 1967, the 606th ACS lost two of its AT-28D aircraft and pilots, leaving it short-handed and unable to meet the increased night interdiction taskings it was receiving from 7th Air Force. In an effort to remedy the situation quickly, the squadron commander put a special request into the personnel system that resulted in my short notice move from FAC and ALO duties with the 2-4ID near Pleiku, South Vietnam, to the AT-28D and the 606th ACS at NKP.

I flew my 77th and last FAC combat mission on March 29, 1967. The brigade was repositioning some battalion elements to support Operation Francis Marion in the central highlands of South Vietnam. On 30 March the Division ALO, Lieutenant Colonel Dwight Hillis, told me to return to Pleiku AB to receive orders for a new assignment. I arrived at the Pleiku AB early the next morning and received orders to report to NKP as soon as possible. I had heard about the secret air wars that NKP units were flying in Laos from 1st ACS pilots stationed at Pleiku, and told the personnel officer that I would like to remain with my current US Army unit rather than go fly as a FAC in O-1s at NKP. The personnel officer told me that I had been selected by name for the new assignment and I would not be flying O-1s. A special supplement to my orders instructed me to travel light: two flight suits with flight helmet and boots, two changes of civilian clothes, and my personal care kit. I was to travel in civilian clothes and would depart Pleiku AB that afternoon on a C-123 going to Nha Trang AB. I decided to leave some personal items at Pleiku that I would catch up with later.

I flew to Don Muang AB, Bangkok, Thailand that afternoon on a C-130 and was told I would be met by a representative of the 606th ACS and continue to NKP later that evening. My contact turned out to be Colonel Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt, who would become the 56th ACW Commander when the wing officially stood up on April 8, 1967.

Col Aderholt introduced himself and said we would be flying to NKP in about an hour. We went to the flight line and boarded a U-10 aircraft and flew to NKP, arriving just before midnight. We were picked up by a jeep and I was taken to the Bachelor Officer Quarters (BOQ). Col Aderholt told me to get some sleep and he would meet me the next morning for breakfast at the base's Officers Club which was next door to the BOQ trailers. It had been a long two days and I was exhausted. Still, I had difficulty sleeping that night, even in one of the air conditioned trailers that were provided for aircrews at NKP. In less than 72 hours I had gone from sleeping on a hard cot in a tent that was surrounded by sand bags inside the 2nd Brigade's base camp perimeter to an air conditioned trailer with a bed having a mattress and pillow. I was eager to learn about my new unit's mission and was awake very early the next morning.

I met Col Aderholt at the Officers Club the next morning where he introduced me to my new squadron commander, Lt Col Joe Price, Jr, who told me about 606th ACS, its mission and what I would be doing. After breakfast I went to the squadron and started the in-processing routine. At about noon I met Capt Tom Deken, who had been an Air Commando all his career and flown both the A-1E and AT-28D in a previous Southeast Asia tour. Tom was one of the squadron's instructor pilots and its weapons officer. He would mentor me through an accelerated aircraft qualification and 56th ACW mission orientation program. I spent the next two days reading the AT-28D flight manual and reviewing aircraft systems operations "hands on" with ground maintenance personnel. Tom and I took our first flight together on 4 April after which he told Col Aderholt and Lt Col



NOAH E. LOY, Brigadier General, USAF (Retired)

Price that I was highly experienced in the T-28 and qualified to fly the aircraft. It had only been 12 months since I had last flown the T-28 as an instructor pilot in the Military Assistance Program at Randolph AFB, Texas and I had not lost my basic T-28 flying skills or general aircraft knowledge.

I qualified in all the necessary weapon events in two flights. During the next week I studied maps of Laotian terrain, intelligence reports, monitored weapons loading and arming procedures, and observed mission debriefings of pilots returning from night attack missions. I flew my first two night combat missions from NKP on 14 and 15 April with Tom, and he certified me for AT-28D pilot and FAC duties on 16 April. I was also designated an instructor and maintenance functional check flight (FCF) pilot for the remainder of my tour at NKP. My 1300 hours experience as a T-28 Military Assistance Program (MAP) instructor pilot, combined with my F-100 weapons training and O-1 FAC experience with the Army helped make my accelerated in-theater aircraft qualification possible and successful. I was proud to have become an Air Commando and a Zorro.

During the next eight months I would fly 162 combat sorties responding to Steel Tiger/Tiger Hound taskings in the AT-28D, with 139 of those sorties flown at night. Of the night sorties 31 were flown in the two southern air strike areas referred to as Route Packages 1



and 2. The primary targets on these night sorties were trucks moving on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and roads in Laos to South Vietnam. Secondary targets were truck parking areas and the anti-aircraft gun emplacements along the route that defended trucks and their temporary parking and supply storage areas. Although Zorro pilots would not intentionally duel with an anti-aircraft gun emplacement, well executed defensive tactics while dropping various combinations of bright illumination flares, M-47 Plasticized White Phosphorous (PWP) bombs, CBU 14 dispensed incendiary and anti-personnel cluster bomblets, BLU-10A napalm bombs, and M35 fire bombs reduced both their numbers and their willingness to engage us in the immediate attack areas. Our tactics would improve and truck count would increase as the squadron's night interdiction effort became more focused from June through October 1967. By November, the Department of Defense's (DoD) Igloo White advanced technology sensors and supporting communications



Author completing forms after night interdiction mission on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

systems had started arriving at NKP. In March 1968, AT-28Ds would be replaced by A-1H aircraft, and the Zorro call sign and mission would be transferred to the 22nd Special Operations Squadron (SOS).

I flew my last night combat sortie from NKP on December 2, 1967.

Zorro Operations

During my tour of duty at NKP all 606th ACS day and night interdiction operations were classified. Even today, almost nothing has been written about Air Force AT-28D or 606th ACS operations during the 18-month period spanning from October 1966 through March 1968. Almost all references to T-28D operations in Laos tell of air operations performed by Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) T-28Ds. Officially, AT-28D aircraft were not used for combat by the Air Force in Vietnam air operations after 1964. Air commando operations from NKP using AT-28Ds supporting secret air operations in Laos were not officially recognized or discussed in unclassified documents until much later.

A Zorro's night combat sortie during good weather and high truck activity periods lasted between 1½ to 2 hours. During the wet season and low truck activity flight time would normally be 2½ hours, and we would carry an external fuel tank for the extended flight time. My normal recovery time at NKP would be between 04:00 and 05:30 AM. After debriefing aircraft maintenance and intelligence personnel I would go to the Officers Club at about 07:00 AM to unwind with other early morning flyers and have breakfast before a second scheduled flight or going into crew rest. I would wake up late that afternoon and return to the Officers Club for a second breakfast, and then go to the intelligence section to review pictures or road team reports of the previous night's strike results and be briefed on where the expected truck traffic action would be for the coming night's mission. After my mission preparation I would return to the Officers Club for dinner.

Every pilot had additional duties to perform during the day, but flying night combat missions was our primary task

and crew rest requirements were always the top priority. Even those days we were scheduled off we normally stayed within our sleep pattern. My additional duties included squadron flying safety officer and flying maintenance FCFs to assure airworthiness of aircraft systems after heavy engine, structural repairs or flight control maintenance was completed. When the original group of pilots started leaving in July and August, I became heavily involved in getting the new arrivals checked out on NKP procedures and flying with them on their initial night combat flights.

The AT-28D-500 Ground Attack Aircraft

The T-28s flown by the 606th ACS were the most modified T-28A trainer aircraft flown during the Vietnam War. They had many structural, engine and armament improvements over earlier T-28D conversions and were therefore re-designated as AT-28Ds. They were equipped with an APR 25 homing capability and a transponder beacon enabling Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) and radar guided "Combat Skyspot" bombing when weather conditions prevented visual night operations. Armament aiming was accomplished through a simple gyro stabilized, depressible gun/bomb sight and good accuracy was achieved due to the relatively short slant ranges and steep dive angles from which weapons were released.

NKP aircraft were armed with two .50 caliber machine guns permanently mounted in a pod flaring attached to the wing leading edge with ammunition being supplied through internal wing tracks. There were 3 external stations on each wing providing capabilities to carry various combinations of 750 pound class (2 inboard stations) and 500 pound class weapons (center and outboard stations), however maximum external stores weight was generally limited to combinations weighing no more than 3,500 pounds with a total aircraft gross weight not to exceed 10,500 pounds. The aircraft were certified to employ many types of munitions: M-117 (750 pound class bombs), MK-81 (250 pound class bombs), MK-82 (500 pound class

bombs), M35 and M36 cluster bombs (750 pound class), CBU 14 bomb dispensers (500 pound class), M-47 Plasticized White Phosphorous (PWP) bombs (100 pound class), SUU-25 flare dispensers (500 pound class), BLU-10A napalm bombs (500 pound class), mini-gun pods (500 pound class), LAU 3 and LAU 19 rocket pods (250 and 500 pound class), and had capabilities to carry 55 gallon external fuel tanks on each wing center station.

The aircraft structure had been reinforced to withstand 6.5G pullouts with symmetrical wing loadings and 4.5G pullouts with asymmetrical loading, a condition resulting when we released weapons from a single station or carried mixed loads for mission flexibility. Normally Zorro pilots would try to limit their recoveries to 5.0G pullouts with symmetrical and 4.0G pullouts with asymmetrical loads. Small armored panels had been added to the interior on each side of the cockpit to provide small arms protection. During the wet season we carried an external fuel tank which induced asymmetrical loading as long as it contained fuel. All NKP aircraft were painted flat green, tan and black to minimize light reflection at night.

It was the survivability issues,

driven by increasing numbers and accuracy of anti-aircraft weaponry in Laos that caused the AT-28D to be withdrawn from night interdiction operations when it was. However, the aircraft continued to serve with distinction in close air support of Laotian ground troops in north and central Laos through 1970.

Zorro Mission Profiles

In October 1967, the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) published a T-28 Tactics and Techniques Bulletin that described operations, doctrine, tactics and techniques employed by 606th ACS pilots in their night armed reconnaissance missions supporting Steel Tiger and Tiger Hound operations in central and southern Laos. The following summarizes the content of that bulletin.

Day-Time Strike, Armed Reconnaissance and Armed Escort Missions

Day-time strike missions against planned targets or armed escort missions protecting slow speed fixed wing or helicopter infiltration operations were tasked, planned and flown as two-ship flights following procedures prescribed

in TACM 55-28 to maximum extent possible. After departing NKP the two-ship Zorro flight would rendezvous with the aircraft or helicopters to be escorted at a pre-briefed TACAN fix. Once visual contact was established, we would start flying figure eight or progressive moving orbit flight patterns along the escorted aircraft's flight path to assure that we could observe terrain near the escorted aircraft with at least one escort aircraft always being in position to provide immediate fire support should hostile ground fire be detected. Altitude for ingress and egress to a landing zone (LZ) depended on weather conditions, and the escorted aircraft or helicopter cell leader was responsible for determining if the prevailing ceiling and visibility would allow adequate fire support during ingress and in the LZ area. When weather conditions were marginal, the cell leader was responsible for determining if the mission would continue or abort. The escort aircraft flight leader was responsible for assuring strike coverage until released by the mission cell leader. Munitions for these day missions included CBU-14 cluster bomb dispensers, M47A4 PWP bombs, BLU-10B napalm bombs, MK-82GP bombs and MK-81GP bombs.

Other Squadron members the author would fly with but not in this picture were:

Major John Pattee,

Major Billy Mobley,

Major Felix Sambogna,

Major John Westphal,

Major K. T. Hale,

Captain Jack Drummond,

Captain Charlie Brown,

Captain Crocker and

Lieutenant Larry Harwood.

They had either departed

before picture taken or

would arrive after picture

taken in September.



Front row from left: Col Harry. C. "Heine" Aderholt, Major Brian B. Ward, Major Donald "Don" Gephardt, Captain George Williams, Captan Terry Koonce, Major Roland M. Vernon, and Major George T. Albright.

Back row from left: Major William C. Lestor, Major Phil Harris, Captain Harry C. Powell, Captain Noah E. "Ed" Loy (Author), Major Huffman, Captain George T. "Tom" Deken, Lt Colonel George Miller.

When ground fire was encountered the escort aircraft would provide sufficient fire support to permit the cell to withdraw, and then disengage. Strafing was the most accurate response and could be brought to bear against a hostile position very quickly. CBU attacks were also effective, but care had to be taken when delivering the high yield bomblets near friendly forces. M-47 bombs were excellent to use against defensive gun positions because they provided smoke and fire screen cover to support withdrawal from the hostile area. If the distance between the cell and enemy was insufficient for a safe bomb delivery, the hostile fire would be suppressed by strafing the observed position. As a last resort we could drop our external tanks, if they still contained fuel, near the hostile positions and then ignite them by strafing.

I flew several early morning day-time missions that involved escorting helicopters delivering Laotian road watch teams to a mountainous area south of the Ban Lo Boy ford where Route 565 crossed from North Vietnam into Laos. One of these missions, flown with Tom Deken in late June, still stands out in my memory because of the secondary target that we struck while returning to NKP. During the mission we joined up with two Udorn-based helicopters south of NKP and escorted them to a small airport to pick up a Laotian road watch team. We escorted the helicopters to an LZ on a small mountain south of the Ban Lo Boy ford where one team was dropped off and another picked up for return. The mission went as planned and briefed, with no hostile fire received.

After being released from our escort duties, we reported our mission results to the command center at Vientiane, Laos. The command center then tasked us to fly to an area approximately 45 miles east of NKP near Na Hi and see if we could see signs of NVA troop movements that had been reported by Laotian ground teams observing the area. We arrived over the area and immediately received sporadic 14.5mm and 37mm anti-aircraft fire through the tree canopy below us. Tom requested authorization from the Vientiane command center to strike the area. The command center issued us a Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) mission task number and we set up to attack the target. Tom quickly briefed that we would make 3 passes with each of us approaching the target from opposite directions, and we would change each of our follow-on target approaches 90 degrees. We first dropped our M-47 bombs at the anti-aircraft gun positions, then delivered CBU bomblets in an X-crossing pattern between the four M-47 impact points. We next dropped our napalm on the edges of the CBU smoke and strafed the target area on each pass. Our whole attack sequence lasted about eight minutes. We departed the area reporting to Vientiane the time that we had struck the target, the types of ordnance used, the probable destruction of two 14.5 mm and one 37



NKP AT-28D loaded with 2 guns, 4 MK-82s, and 2 M-47 PWP bombs on a day-time strike mission.

mm anti-aircraft guns, and the numerous secondary explosions we observed. We returned to NKP, debriefed our mission to intelligence, and went into crew rest to be ready for the night mission to come.

It would be almost six weeks before a Laotian ground reconnaissance team would revisit the target area and provide observed results of that mission through the operations reporting (Oprep) system. With only two AT-28Ds being at the right place and time, we had inflicted significant losses to an NVA regiment moving through Laos.

Night Armed Reconnaissance Missions

Night attack missions were always tasked and flown as single-ship armed reconnaissance sorties. Night sorties were configured with various combinations of weapons described in the foregoing AT-28D fighter-bomber



AT-28D in evening combat dress. NKP AT-28D loaded and prepared for a night sortie. Aircraft configuration includes: two .50 Caliber machine guns (wing pod flaring), two BLU-10A napalm bombs (inboard stations), two SUU-25 flare dispensers (center stations) and two M-47 bombs (outboard stations).

description and included at least one SUU-25 flare dispenser and an external fuel tank on the center wing stations during the wet season. The extra external fuel was used to safely extend the mission when highly lucrative targets were available, or either bad weather or search and rescue efforts required increased time in the target area.

The night-time environment during most of 1967 permitted flexible tactics because our adversary employed only manually operated anti-aircraft guns and the operators had difficulty visually detecting and tracking targets because of the lack of depth perception and sense of direction when looking into the night sky. When defending in a flare illuminated sky the air defense gun operator was generally blind to the space on the other side of the flare. This made dropping a flare over or between you and the air defense position a good tactic as long as you kept the flare between you and gun sight. Until the North Vietnamese started using radar directed anti-aircraft guns the AT-28D could survive and be effective in its truck killing role. This would change during November when the NVA started deploying more capable air defense systems protect to the supplies being convoyed down the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Once the target was identified we would normally establish our attack pattern so as to approach the target from a position opposite the moon during clear weather or moonlit overcast skies, and adjust our dive angle and minimum altitude to match existing weather conditions and visible terrain features. On dark, moonless nights we would normally align our attack pattern to be parallel to the road to help maintain orientation, as well as to get the most effectiveness out of our CBU 14 ordinance. We also considered the height of the flare illumination because air defense gunners could see our aircraft once we flew between the flare and the defending gun site(s). Generally we avoided working under the flares because they back lighted our position and could be blinding and disorienting during our dive recovery. In hotly defended areas we would have the flare ship adjust flare settings to illuminate below our planned

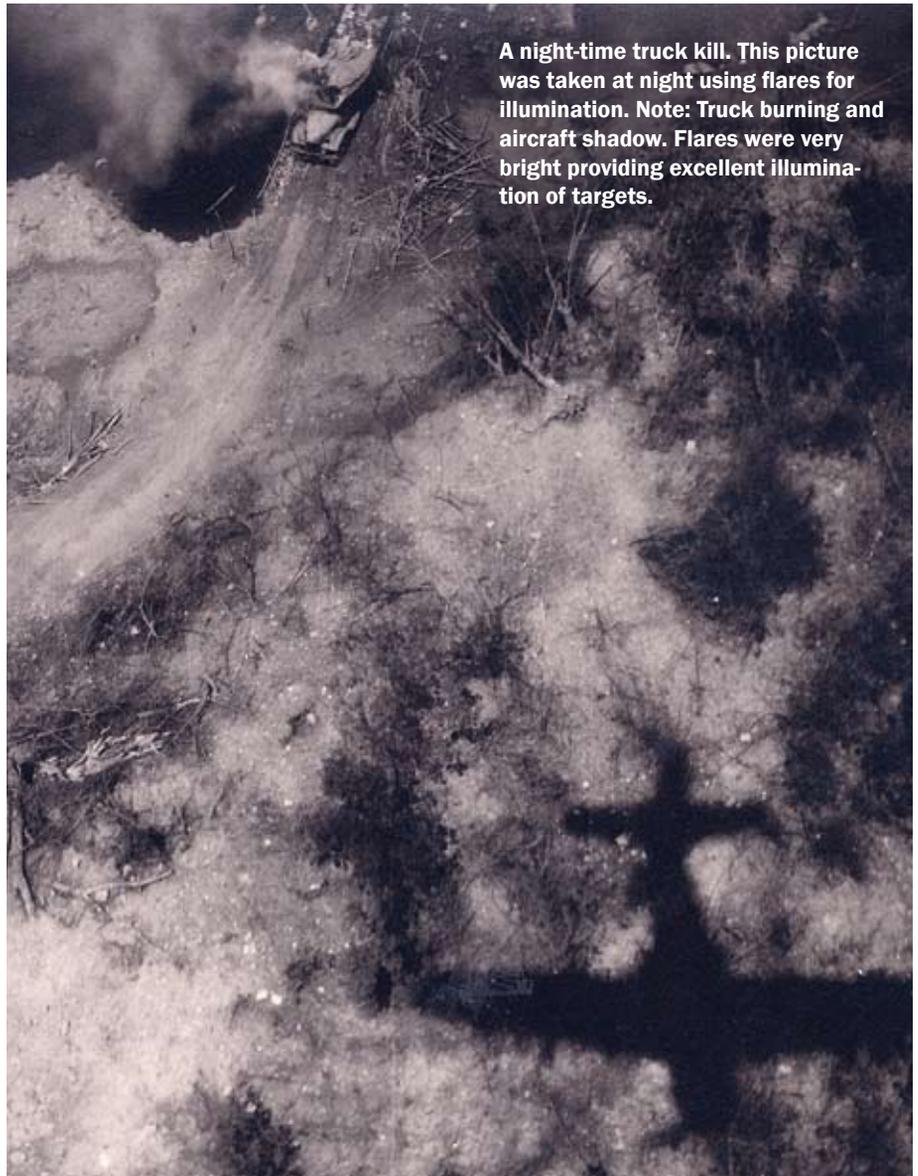
minimum altitude or we would drop our own flares. To assure illumination over the target to be attacked we would normally release two flares at a time so that the possibility of a dud did not negate the attack.

On some clear nights with full moon illumination it was possible to attack an observed target without flares to preserve the element of surprise. However, such an attack would only be attempted when optimum conditions prevailed: clear skies, a good naturally back-lighted horizon, visible target(s) and recognizable terrain features. In every case, existing natural light had to be sufficient to fully illuminate the target and surrounding terrain features, and the pilot had to be absolutely sure of his position and target location. Normally,

weapons would be delivered using shallow dive angles to preclude high rates of descent and steep climbs during recovery. Flares would be used at any time where safety demanded.

One of the most successful methods of executing night air interdiction operations during my tour at NKP was using hunter-killer teams which employed one O-1F FAC aircraft with a starlight scope as the hunter, and one AT-28D as the killer. Each hunter-killer team was assigned a specific route segment by the Steel Tiger Task Force command center. Continuous surveillance was tasked for route segments showing the most recent signs of traffic or greatest numbers of vehicles observed and reported during

Continued on page 26



A night-time truck kill. This picture was taken at night using flares for illumination. Note: Truck burning and aircraft shadow. Flares were very bright providing excellent illumination of targets.



We deployed to Operation DESERT SHIELD in August of 1990. At the time, I commanded the 20th Special Operations Squadron, flying the MH-53 Pave Low helicopter, and roughly half of the squadron deployed while half of the squadron stayed home for other possible missions.

PAVE LOW LEADERS

By Maj Gen Richard Comer (ret)

The split of the squadron in this way was not a healthy thing as half of us were living in the desert heat and in tents, far away from home and fearful that they might be there a long time with no real war to fight. Half were home and wishing to be in the desert in case there was a war. It was tough on bonding a squadron together, especially after about three months when family strains were showing for some and not others.

Our squadron had two primary missions as we trained in the desert. Combat rescue alert and a special ops mission to attack two radar sites just north of the border with Saudi Arabia. These radar sites were far away from Kuwait, west of where we were stationed in Saudi by about 400 miles and straight south of the Iraqi capital city, Baghdad. We began training for these missions, and any other special operations missions which might come up, by late August. We had established our living conditions in tents and had endured the extreme heat of summer. We were getting used to it by October when the weather cooled off significantly.

Early in November the President made a decision to deploy most of the troops in order to have offensive capability. My wing commander saw it as a two month delay before any action would occur. As most of the wing was split in the same way as was my squadron, he ordered all of the commanders home for a month. In my case, I attended a Commander's Training Course in Missouri, then a training exercise at my home base at Hurlburt Field. While I was there, Master Sergeant Bobby Jenkins came into the office and asked for some time to talk.

Bobby had set up his retirement the previous summer and had begun terminal leave at the beginning of October. I was sitting at my desk working on 4 months of back-logged paperwork. I looked up to see Bobby looking at me around the doorway. His hair was already pretty long and he had a nice looking, full moustache. The home half-squadron had given a hail and farewell in mid-October where Bobby had received his medal and his plaque he had told everyone that his family needed him to get out of this business. I invited him in. I congratulated him on his now completed career. I remarked that the recent announcement of "Stop Loss" would have caught him if he had not already been on terminal leave. He told me that he had come to talk to me about just that. He asked me if I thought the squadron needed him and, if so, what could he do to help.

I had an immediate answer for him, despite my surprise at the offer. I told him that we did need him, that the squadron's helicopter gunner force certainly needed another master sergeant for leadership, and that I would like to see him in uniform to work things here in the states for another month or so, then I would send him over to Saudi Arabia by Christmas. The currently deployed lead gunner spent four months in the desert and I couldn't give him any relief without another six-striper. Bobby looked at me for a couple of seconds and said he'd go over to the base personnel office and see what he had to do to come in off terminal leave. By two o'clock that afternoon a clean-shaven and short-haired Bobby Jenkins was sitting in the ops superintendent's office working over the schedule of training the new gunners in the .50 caliber machine gun. Bobby looked into my office to tell me he had also stopped off at home

to get back into uniform. He told me then that his wife, Dottie, might be a little upset at me since I had recalled him from terminal leave and officially prevented his retirement. I consented to taking the blame as long as Bobby didn't think his wife was a violent person.

As expected, we were allowed to trade some people at the beginning of December and Bobby Jenkins came over and became the ranking helicopter gunner of the deployment. We still did not know if we were going to really have a war or whether we were going to sit in the desert and keep training for months to come. We knew the war plan, continued to train hard, and had a desert Christmas. We also watched the debates at the UN and in Congress on authorizing the President to use



force and setting the 15th of January as the deadline for the Iraqis to leave Kuwait. The diplomacy and the Congressional debates made our training and preparation more urgent in our minds. The UN set the deadline for Iraq to leave Kuwait, so we also had a date set to ensure our readiness.

We trained hard the next four weeks, making sure all the newly rotated crew members were integrated into the existing crews and rehearsing what was to be the first mission of the war several times. On 12 January 1991, we received orders from our Wing Commander, Colonel George Gray, to move to our forward operating base for the war plan; this was a call to battle stations. We moved on January 14th to Al Jouf, a small airfield in western Saudi Arabia. It was a 6-hour flight from King Fahd International Airport where we were stationed. We organized air refuelings and the movement of essentially our entire squadron in a day and a half. When there, we were given a fairly large dormitory style building to live in—it was actually an improvement over the tents we had occupied at King Fahd airfield since August.

The war plan gave our helicopter operation the first mission of the war to cross the border into Iraq. We teamed with an Army Apache helicopter battalion, commanded by LTC Dick Cody, whose unit also moved to Al Jouf. Everyone was in place by the night of the 14th and the machines were all serviceable. We spent the 15th getting the house in order, erecting a tent to serve as a planning/briefing facility on the flight line, establishing communications, ensuring security, and configuring the

aircraft. Waiting for further instructions, we planned some local flights on the 16th to plot a dispersal location and to ensure all the aircraft remained ready.

At about 2 o'clock on the afternoon of the 16th I was at the base HQ with Colonel Orrell who was the commanding officer at Al Jouf. He got a secure phone call from Colonel Gray at King Fahd. Col Orrell told me then the war was to begin that night and H-hour was set for 0300 local time. I asked him if he meant that we should be prepared to go at that time or if we're really going. He assured me that we were going in that night, not just preparing a possibility. I know it was a dumb question, but I found it hard to believe. I did some quick calculations and told him the briefing for the crews should be set for 2230 local and the takeoff for our formations would occur around 0100. With H-Hour at 0300, our time for the Apaches to open fire on the two radar sites was 0238, or 22 minutes prior to H-Hour. We went out to the flight line to inform Dick Cody, to cancel all the afternoon flights, and ensure the maintenance folks started preparing aircraft for flights that night.

Dick was working at his aircraft, talking to his maintenance guys, and checking his aircraft forms. He came over to our car and we told him the timing of H-hour. All he said was, "S--t Hot!" and said he'd meet me at our hootch at 2130 with all of his crews. I then went over to the 53's and told the guys to finish configuring the birds and to go back to quarters for a 1600 meeting.

At that meeting, I informed everyone about the mission that night. I told them to write a letter, get a nap, and be dressed and ready at 2100 for another short meeting. The guys were quiet about the news, but obviously excited and apprehensive. They knew they were ready and that the war was probably the only way home, but they also didn't know how much resistance all this would encounter. The war planning had a worst case of 2% losses of the strike fighters going into Iraq. So, up to 6 to 10 shoot-downs could happen in the first days, meaning our guys doing rescue would probably spend a lot of time flying around in hostile territory trying to pick people up. Since for every 50 Iraqi soldiers there was expected to be an SA-7 or SA-14, we anticipated some real danger and possible losses of our MH-53s. The crews scheduled to go to Rafha to stand rescue alert, Capt Minish's and Capt Trask's, really were faced with the greatest uncertainty. The four crews (Martin's, Pulsifer's, Kingsley's, and Leonik's) planning to lead the Apaches on the two radar sites would not face such uncertainty until they completed that mission and took up rescue alert posture at Ar'ar.

SSgt Jeff Morrison and MSgt Dick Pinkowski had engineered a set-up to use our fuel dump tubes and some fire hoses with some nozzles procured off the local economy to dump fuel through the hoses and refuel the Apaches. The guys worked up and verified this method would work, but it was far from a certifiable safe operation, but if we had to use it we had the helicopters configured. We had the kits, hoses, everything, on board if we had to use them. We also had a lot of refueling equipment set-up at Ar'ar so the Apaches could be refueled

and get moving as soon as they landed.

Dick Cody, in trying to prepare for the mission, had restructured his helicopter loads. He could carry an external auxiliary fuel tank on each Apache in place of one of the racks of missiles. In so doing, he wrote new procedures on how to configure and load his helicopters so they had enough fuel to execute the mission. Still, each tank was new to his helicopter while shooting and hopefully they would all work and feed fuel. If any of them were unable to feed fuel, we were going to have an Apache in trouble. We had all the back-up plans in place to get them out of the desert if anybody got low on fuel



for any reason.

As it turned out, the tanks worked and all of us guys flew really quite well on the mission. It went perfectly that night. We had our briefing and we stood there and we said "here we go." We tried not to tell all the maintenance guys what we were up to, but everybody knew it was our job to start the war. There wasn't much to say, except we were the right people for the job and we knew we had gotten ready for the job properly. We knew we were poised on the point of history of starting a pretty significant war for our country. We had nothing left to do but go fly the mission. It went exactly as planned.

We crossed the border 12 minutes after 2 in the morning for the first formation. Corby Martin's flight had the western most target, the east target was led by Mike Kingsley's crew and Bob Leonik's as the second helicopter on their wing. I flew as co-pilot with Leonik. We had Ben Pulsifer and his crew as number two behind Corby. The 1/101 battalion commander, LTC Cody, flew the trail helicopter in the formation led by Kingsley.

We were tensed and on the lookout as we flew the 40 minutes in Iraq before the war was to start. We were listening and looking for something to happen, nothing did. No one seemed to notice, no tracers of ground fire, and nothing we could hear on the radios. It was anti-climatical, really. Both formations crossed the release point for the Apaches to get in the firing position within five seconds of their established time on target, and both formations of Apaches (based on what we believed our timing was) laid Hellfire missiles on the communications

vans at each of the two radar sites within 5 or 10 seconds of each other. Within about three minutes, the rest of the radar sites had taken fire and the buildings were in flames. The mission was a perfect success. The Iraqis now had no eyes to see with over a large portion of their border and a coalition air armada streamed into the country above our two helicopter formations. I do not believe anybody detected our initial wave of fighters going into Iraq.

We had no hits against our helicopters; however, we did take some fire, Corby Martin's formation did have a couple of SA-7's fired at them. The SA-7's seemed to be fired accurately. The crew members of the Pave Low called out the inbound missiles. Berrett Harrison and Terry Null made the call for the helicopters to break and to jettison some flares to decoy the missiles. The flares did not seem to be effective as the missiles did not swerve at all toward them. The jinking of the helicopters plus the IRCMs, seemed to be what made the missiles miss the helicopters. Everybody returned, although a little bit frightened by the experience, safely.

Kingsley's formation went to Ar'ar to refuel and stood by for search and rescue operations, while Martin's formation refueled in the air and returned back to Al Jouf. Tom Trask and Tim Minish took their crews and airplanes over to Rafha to stand by for search and rescue operations, out of Rafha into central Iraq. We were very surprised that there were no shoot-downs reported to us the first night. We learned later that one Navy plane went down under fire with the wingman reporting it exploded and no expectation of a survivor. My expectation was two percent losses among the fighters. These were realistic expectations that I think all the generals had signed up to. Also, the strike aircraft achieved an almost perfect success rate on hitting their targets. That made for a lot of success down the road in the war plan. We like to think, and we do believe, that the first mission against those radar sites had something to do with the great success that air power enjoyed in our strike and fighter operations over Iraq.

This history remains incomplete until I finish the story of the part played by Bobby Jenkins who had volunteered to come in from his retirement to try to help. Well as I said previously, Bobby arrived in Saudi a little later than I'd promised; he got there after Christmas on the 28th of December instead of before Christmas. He briefed in on all the ways we were doing business with Larry Hunter and Dick Pinkowski. I went into the month of January with Ski and Bobby as the ranking flight engineer and the ranking gunner. They worked over the training schedule for classes on the threats, how many gun training flights, and how many

desert landings and air refueling we needed before the UN deadline in the middle of January. Also, they ensured that all the tent areas were cleaned up, including the snack bar which was seeing a lot of traffic during the cold weather of winter.

When the war began I flew into Iraq, crossing the border about 45 minutes before the first bombs would fall on Baghdad. I was watching the helicopter in front of me; piloted by Mike Kingsley, it was the first coalition aircraft to cross the border. Among those in Kingsley's six man crew were Ski and Bobby Jenkins, leading the way as we finally got onto the road which would get us home. I couldn't help but pause in my work as Leonik's co-pilot and think of Bobby, the most voluntary of volunteers, and of Dottie. I said a short prayer for his safety.

The next day when I finally had done all my debriefs and reports, I left the offices back at Al Jouf and I drove to our barracks after about 39 hours without sleep. Upon arriving in the parking lot, I pulled up beside Bobby who was standing beside a barrel stirring burning trash. I asked him if he'd slept any. He said a little, but the hootch was getting dirty and he needed to get rid of the trash. He said he liked to have a fire on cold winter days and the warmth felt good. Although he hadn't felt it during the flight the night before, he said he really had a chill when he got back, said he couldn't sleep much when the place was dirtied up and needed cleaning. I walked around the corner toward the door and ran into Ski, carrying a bag of trash. He said we had only been in this new barracks for two days and the place needed a GI Party to clean it up. He said the guys will be waking up soon and all the enlisted crews not taking up the rescue alert tonight will be assigned detail duty to get things cleaned up. I walked then into the kitchen area and MSgt Mike Lael was sitting at the table writing out the detail assignments. He left a blank in there for an officer to be assigned to participate each day on cleaning up the kitchen. He said that the pilot schedulers had agreed to put a name in on each day to have the officers help out with the housework.

Things being under control, I went to bed. 🦅



All photos of Pave Lows courtesy of the Pave Low community and Vince A. DePersio



The Rise of Air Comm

The First Four 27th Special O

By Brig Gen Stephen Clark, former 27 SOW/CC

A “west coast” option for America’s Air Commandos has been a vision of AFSOC commanders since the early part of the 90s. With a global mission, and an understanding that the command would have to expand to match the growing reach of USSOCOM, it was quickly acknowledged that Hurlburt Fld could not expand enough to accommodate the required growth. After many attempts, it was the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) of 2005, and the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,

which created an opportunity to realize the vision. While Cannon AFB is not exactly as far west as had been contemplated, it incorporates many of the desired features that has allowed AFSOC to expand and meet its unique training requirements: high, hot, isolated range, and lots of airspace. Now that we are finishing our fourth year at Cannon, like all great SOF operations, our Airmen are finding and creating more opportunities and capabilities than originally envisioned. With an original plan that assumed an



the Western ando Base



r Years of the operations Wing

end-strength of 4400 personnel by 2014, we have now passed the 5100 mark enroute to a new-end state of 6148 by 2015. We have stood up eight operational flying squadrons, an intel squadron, a flying training squadron, and an operational support squadron; deploying all of them into combat at IOC. These units average over 5k combat and 70k combat support hours per year. By the time this article is printed we will have taken possession of half of our 90 manned platforms and all of our 50 unmanned

platforms. We will also be executing the heart of what is the Air Force's second largest military construction program at over \$1B of investment in infrastructure, housing, ramp space, facilities, hangars, clinic, and massive communications and power upgrades. And we will have earned an "Excellent" rating on our first ORI. We are transforming a base, developing visionary combat capability, and delivering specialized air power in support of special operations forces in every theater, all ahead of schedule.

*With contributions by:
Col Jim Slife, former 27 SOG/CC
Col Steve Kimball, former 27 SOMSG/CC
Lt Col Dan Guinan, 27 SOCES/CC
Lt Col Mark Sudduth, 27 SOW/IG
Mr. Rick Shea, 27 SOW/HO*



Western Basing Requirement and the Decision to Accept Cannon

In the mid-1990s, Maj Gen James L. Hobson, then AFSOC Commander, championed an initiative to establish a wing in the western CONUS. Program Change Request 94-05 or Commando Vision (informally) directed the command to meet SOF requirements and global challenges by consolidating its forces, to include those stationed overseas, with the singular intent of providing SOF aviation assets to theater combatant commanders when needed.

Commando Vision outlined a two phased approach. The first involved the restructure of the active duty and reserve component mix in which the 919 SOW's mission changed from flying AC-130As to MC-130Es and Ps. The second phase proposed the restructure of AFSOC forces in which it created a west coast SOW, to be based at Beale AFB, CA. While never formally stated, it remained an unwritten, as well as understood, portion of Phase II that once the west coast base became a reality the overseas units would relocate back to the CONUS. In their places AFSOC planned on instituting two forward operating locations.

By 1995, Phase I of Commando

Vision was well into implementation. Phase II, however had been placed on hold. Two reasons stood at the forefront to implementation of Phase II. First, US Ambassador to Japan, the Honorable Walter F. Mondale, opposed any force withdrawals from the Pacific, particularly Japan, citing mission/theater needs. The second reason came from within AFSOC, which, when factoring in the changing commitment climate in Europe, that the temporary duty requirements would present too much of a burden on crews and support personnel.

Fast forward to late 2005, after the BRAC announcement and at roughly that same time General Mosley reached the decision to move rescue back to ACC. The rescue relocation meant the transfer of Moody AFB back to ACC. General Wooley took that opportunity to suggest to the CSAF that AFSOC should not be a "one base command." General Wooley's argument against a "one base command" dealt with AFSOC's unplanned mission growth as it pertained to the Quadrennial Defense Review and Hurlburt Field's limited expansion potential. General Mosley agreed, and proceeded to give AFSOC one week to develop a short list of basing options. AFSOC identified Davis Monthan AFB, AZ and Cannon AFB, NM.

The BRAC recommendation to

close Cannon, DoD's Global SOF Positioning initiative and the time limitations involved in moving a new mission into the base proved fortuitous for AFSOC. Cannon offered an almost perfect solution to AFSOC in terms of a training range (MRR), ramp space, and year round favorable weather. AFSOC finished its base comparisons in late 2005, and presented their findings in early January 2006. During the comparison process it became apparent to AFSOC leadership that Cannon and MRR were as close to exactly what the command required; Cannon offered 329 days of good flying weather; the ability to partner with the 58 SOW; only 30 minutes from mountains which provided excellent training scenarios; lastly, the varied terrain in the local area mimics that of areas where SOF aviation has been or could be employed and as such provides an outstanding training area. The cost of establishing a new wing proved to be the most significant aspect of reaching a decision. Estimates placed Cannon at between \$150 and \$255 million, whereas Davis Monthan approached \$1.43 billion.

Without a doubt, Cannon's greatest allure generating the most excitement within the command was the training range. Cannon provided access to 14,000 square miles of military operating airspace, 350 square miles of restricted airspace, and 66,000 acres of range space (Melrose Air Force Range (AFR)). Moreover, Melrose supported most SOF munitions and obtaining 105mm and Hellfire munitions approvals were mere formalities. All factors considered, Cannon AFB stood as the command's obvious choice for western basing. On 1 October 2007, AFSOC activated its newest wing; the 27 SOW at Cannon AFB, NM, the Western Home of America's Air Commandos.

The Build - Military Construction and Infrastructure

In 2007, The Air Force Special Operations Command assumed ownership of Cannon AFB and Melrose AFR and launched a massive \$500M



Simulator facility for MC-130 and CV-22 training.

military construction effort to beddown incoming SOF forces. In addition to the military construction program, an average of \$50M per year was invested in operations and maintenance projects and \$3-5M per year in housing and dormitory projects. When considering the massive scope of the changes from a fighter wing to a special operations wing, the physical properties of the installation itself required a radical change. Existing facilities could not support the backbone of the special operations fleet, the AC- and MC-130s. The aircraft could not fit in the existing hangars, which proved problematic for the SOMXG during periods of extreme cold and hot temperatures with winds consistently above 25 mph. Eventually three C-130 airframe capable hangars were able to support the initial beddown, one requiring extensive modifications for full enclosure. The SOG also experienced shortages in squadron operations facilities. The majority of facilities were undersized and poorly located with relationship to aircraft parking plans. Additionally, the unique requirements of the new remote piloted aircraft (RPA) mission drove the need for enhanced security, communications, and infrastructure upgrades to existing facilities.

Additional review of the infrastructure identified shortfalls in almost all areas. Existing water lines were aged and degraded from the extremely hard water drawn for the Ogallala aquifer. Sewer systems have proven to be unreliable and collapsed in places, driving additional funding requirements for nearly every repair, renovation, and new construction project. New technologies and information systems placed an extreme stress on aging heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems and electrical distribution systems. All of these areas require significant investment and compete for limited facility sustainment, restoration, and modernization funds. Power redundancy and physical security were initial concerns that had to be tackled quickly. In early 2010 a winter storm swept through the area causing the 1940s-era substation to fail when snow and ice infiltrated the structure forcing the base to use emergency generators for nearly 10 days. New substations



Ribbon cutting ceremony for the newly completed 33 SOS operations building.

were required along with the capability to establish looped and redundant power across the base. Eventually, these needs will be met with a planned “smart grid”. The base perimeter, originally three strands of barbed wire, was replaced with a chain-link and reinforced with anti-ram cabling and a \$7M security sensor project was launched to detect, track and react to flightline incursions.

Compounding the challenge was a massive shortage in qualified personnel. The 27th SOCES Programs Flight, charged with planning and programming all base construction, was manned at approximately 35% of authorized strength. Of that 35%, roughly 85% percent of the staff had less than two years of experience in Air Force engineering. The Contracting squadron was similarly undermanned with the majority operating at the “Journeyman” skill level. These professionals did yeomen’s work in executing the initial program, with the added workload of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act requiring rapid project execution. As these experts continue to execute the plan, challenges remain with the local construction capacity. The communities of Clovis and Portales continue to grow alongside Cannon. Regional projects such as the “Tres Amigas” power grid, construction of wind farms, and the Portales cheese factory expansion continue to draw on the same construction

firms that provide the skilled labor for Cannon’s \$500M+ effort. A second order effect is the competition our Airmen face for affordable housing (especially rentals) with the growing regional construction workforce and the expanding student population at Eastern New Mexico University. In CY 2010 rental availability decreased to less than one percent and rental rates increased by twenty percent.

Significant challenges exist for housing Airmen and their families while establishing a viable community for incoming Air Commandos. The BRAC drawdown eliminated several dormitories that are now required as the base population grows past the original 4400 program of record enroute to over 6000 and demographics shift to a younger force. BRAC also ended a previous housing privatization effort and caused the rapid decay of existing homes thus leaving a significant amount of work to remake suitable homes for our families until we could restart and accomplish the privatization effort. Lack of suitable military family housing, an extremely small local rental market and high-priced homes in Clovis and Portales are extreme stressors to our Airmen. Through the efforts of the NM Congressional delegation, SAF/IEI, AFSOC A7, and 27 SOW/CE, housing privatization is now on track for a formal closing in spring of 2012. Later this year we will open

our new Child Development Centers more than doubling our child care capacity. Other community needs were programmed and constructed including a new dining facility, postal service center and First-Term Airmen Center. Other major community needs are either planned or programmed in the FYDP including additional dormitories, a new fitness center, base pool, MWR facilities, and clinic.

As with any undertaking of this size we have faced and conquered many challenges. In nearly every renovation effort we have been faced with challenges from asbestos, vermiculite, collapsed sewers, antiquated water and electrical distribution systems, inadequate communication systems, and other base infrastructure issues. In areas of new construction we have discovered debris from previous building sites or realized

the interoperability between sites and functions requires additional engineering analysis. Despite the rapid pace of the effort we have been able to overcome these challenges and get ahead of others. We have successfully adjusted our Southeast Area Development plan when it came to light we could maximize our efficiency by reconfiguring the aircraft parking ramp and shifting several facilities, a potential \$40M+ savings to the Air Force and USSOCOM. We have significantly enhanced the dormitories by providing multiple major renovations to existing facilities and advocating/receiving three new 96-Airmen dormitories. We resurrected 60 housing units slated for demolition and restored them for occupancy starting in spring 2011. Our Mission Support Group proudly stands by the motto, "Solve for yes".

Going Operational: Fielding Operational Capability and Deployments

From an operational perspective, the unique challenge facing the 27 SOW over the last four years has been the combination of standing up squadrons to fly new types of aircraft in new mission sets, moving squadrons to Cannon while engaged in combat, and conducting rapid mission changes in response to the demands of ongoing conflicts. This effort culminated in April when Cannon activated its final programmed flying squadron, making our Operations Group the largest and most diverse in AFSOC. Our eight flying squadrons operate eight different types of aircraft (and will be gaining a ninth type in August). All this capability is underpinned by our Operational Support Squadron, which runs the Melrose Air Force Range and a Radar Approach Control facility, functions unique within the command.

Cannon's operational growth began on 1 October 07, the day Cannon became an AFSOC installation. On that day, we activated the 27th Special Operations Support Squadron, which runs the airfield, the airspace, and the Melrose Air Force Range, among other things. The 73rd Special Operations Squadron also transferred from Hurlburt to Cannon along with the first of its MC-130W Combat Spear aircraft. On 2 May 08, we activated the 318th Special Operations Squadron, operating AFSOC's fleet of small non-standard aviation platforms, the PC-12s and M-28s. On 1 June 08, the 27 SOW achieved a milestone when the 3rd Special Operations Squadron transferred to Cannon from Nellis AFB without a disruption in its operational mission flying the MQ-1B Predator remotely piloted aircraft RPA. On 19 June 09, the Spectres of the 16th Special Operations Squadron brought their AC-130H gunships to Cannon. Like the 3 SOS, the 16th moved to Cannon without interrupting their combat operations. On 31 July 09, we activated the 33rd Special Operations Squadron to fly the MQ-9 Reaper RPA and conducted combat operations that same day. On

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2 October 09, we activated the 524th Special Operations Squadron to operate AFSOC's fleet of medium non-standard aviation aircraft, the DHC Dash 8, initially, and now the Dornier 328. On 15 January 10, the 20th Special Operations Squadron reactivated to become AFSOC's newest CV-22 Osprey unit. Finally, on 7 April 11, we activated the 522nd Special Operations Squadron, AFSOC's first MC-130J unit.

While we continue to grow these units to full operational capability, we've also activated a trio of partner units. On 28 November 07, the 25th Intelligence Squadron activated a detachment at Cannon to provide specialized airborne intelligence support to our aircraft. On 24 July 09, the 551st Special Operations Squadron activated at Cannon to conduct much of our initial qualification and upgrade training. Lastly, on 29 July 10, a detachment from the 11th Intelligence Squadron grew into the 56th Intelligence Squadron to conduct processing, exploitation, and dissemination of intelligence products from airborne platforms.

In less than four years, Cannon's operations grew from a guidon into the largest operations group in AFSOC. And

in the process, we've fielded a number of platforms and capabilities not seen elsewhere within the command. For instance, our MC-130Ws came off the battlefield in 2009 as a SOF mobility platform and underwent a rapid modification (sensors, small missiles, and 30mm cannon) to provide increased armed overwatch capability to our supported forces. This new capability was deployed in late 2010, only a year after the unit had returned from its mobility role. Meanwhile, we have rapidly expanded our RPA capabilities in the 3 and 33 SOSs. We are now at our long-term steady-state posture in those units after years of "surge" operations. Additionally, we've fielded the command's non-standard aviation capabilities globally in support forward-deployed SOF. In fact, even before its first deployment, our M-28 fleet underwent a rapid mission change and is now conducting tactical short-field and airdrop operations in a demanding combat environment. This rapid capability development and fielding speaks to the flexibility and responsiveness of today's Air Commandos.

As these capabilities have grown, so has our ability to effectively command

and control our forces in the field. Every day, the wing has Air Commandos deployed on five continents, conducting as well as commanding and controlling air operations. As we've developed our command and control capabilities, we've pioneered new ways to execute global RPA operations. Our robust communications infrastructure and resident expertise in RPA operations now make it possible for us to partner with theater commanders around the world and support their operations with a command and control node at Cannon.

We've Arrived: First ORI - "Excellent"

In the middle of all the planning, building, organizing, resourcing, training, and deploying, the AFSOC Commander, Lt Gen Wurster, directed we prepare for and execute an ORI... "but don't break the force". While daunting, an ORI was the only way to formally validate the arrival of the 27 SOW as a combat capable unit to the rest of the Air Force and USSOCOM. However, we did not just want to get



27 SOW leadership, led by Col Stephen Clark, greet Air Commandos returning from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

ready for an ORI, we needed to teach the 27 SOW to be Air Commandos and instill the ethos and subculture of our SOF community. Our challenge was that over 80 percent of our people were on their first tour in SOF.

Organizationally we had to understand the intricacies of the units of the 27 SOW. The complex capabilities they are tasked with, the UTCs they were manned against, and the training and equipment they use to execute their missions. These were far more diverse than initially understood. For example, the 27th Special Operations and Special Operations Maintenance Groups house a collection of old and new aircraft with both well known and newly emerging capabilities that do not necessarily fit together in a traditional airfield seizure scenario. The 27th Special Operations Mission Support Group, while encompassing a “normal” collection of Base Operations Support (BOS) units, is not manned or equipped to be the self-sustaining force needed in order for the 27 SOW to deploy and fight as a wing. Nor are they tasked as SOF enablers. Rather they are organized, trained, and equipped for conventional AEF taskings. Additionally, the AFSOC command and control capability,

normally incorporated in a 9AA UTC, was not only not completely tasked to the 27 SOW, but the few pieces of the 9AA that were tasked, were not yet manned or equipped appropriately.

The original plan was a traditional, two week, off-site evaluation where the entire wing would deploy to another state-side base and execute its mission. However, after several OREs, it became evident that “traditional” did not apply to the 27 SOW. We were creating too many false processes and simply making stuff up in order to function as a lead wing. This was sucking the already limited resources away from our other responsibilities and threatened to “break the force”. Working with the AFSOC IG we developed a hybrid evaluation comprised of a near simultaneous AEF / SOF deployment for the Position the Force (PTF) phase one and a modular, Employ the Force (ETF), Sustain the Force (STF) and Ability to Survive and Operation (ATSO) phase two that took place at a newly constructed exercise facility at Cannon AFB, a Silver Flag national training site in North Carolina and in theater performing real world operations while AFSOC inspectors looked on.

The modular ORI phase two

concept is not new but has been gaining popularity throughout the Air Force as more and more wings grow away from being a “Lead Wing;” wings that deploy as single units and completely self-sustain themselves organically. A modular evaluation is basically a series of mini ORIs executed near simultaneously. It allows diverse units within a single wing to be evaluated using individual, realistic scenarios tailored to each unit or capability.

Commanders note:

The ORI was a crowning achievement for the fledgling 27 SOW and proved to all our young Air Commandos that attitude can overcome a lot of other challenges. By being assertive, taking risks and flat out just making things happen, the Airmen of the 27 SOW have firmly established themselves as key members of the Air Force and USSOCOM community. That they accomplished this all while fully engaged in combat is nothing short of heroic. Their audacity and selflessness, their ability to persevere under extreme pressure, and the exceptional support from their families, makes the Airmen of the 27 Special Operations Wing true Air Commandos. 🇺🇸

Ribbon cutting at the 551 SOS, with Lt Col Dwight Davis, and Colonel James Cardoso Below: Secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable Michael B. Donley, walks with Col. Stephen Clark, 27 SOW/CC, during a visit to Cannon



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the tasked period. Other less traveled routes were given random coverage. If no vehicles were observed during the armed reconnaissance portion of the flight over the assigned route segment, a pre-selected truck park or storage area was assigned as the alternate target and struck before recovery to NKP.

On these hunter-killer missions the FAC took off 30 minutes prior to the AT-28D and was positioned over the assigned route segment by the NKP MSQ-77 radar which tracked the portable radar beacon installed on the O-1F. TACAN was the primary AT-28D navigation aid with the NKP Ground Controlled Intercept (GCI) radar site being used to help find the FAC aircraft during periods of bad weather. To complete rendezvous with the FAC during good weather conditions the AT-28D homed in on the FAC aircraft's UHF tone using the ARA-25 until visual contact could be made. The AT-28D joined the O-1F in the target area 1000 feet above the O-1F, because the shielded navigation lights on the O-1F could only be seen from above the aircraft. Once joined up in the target area the FAC began reporting truck traffic he was observing through the starlight scope. (Note: The O-1F aircraft carried a crew of two. The back seat observer would be hooked to the aircraft with a strap and literally hang "waist-up" out the window and used a starlight scope to observe truck traffic or storage area activity.) The AT-28D pilot would position for an attack pattern that would keep him at a safe distance from the FAC during weapons delivery and recovery. If moon and natural starlight were not sufficient to illuminate terrain features and trucks in the star light scope, the FAC aircraft observer would drop a ground marking flare which would burn about 40 minutes and could be seen for about 15 miles. This marking flare would provide a point of reference from which target location could be described and attack operations could be oriented.

FAC vehicle reports included

direction of travel, number, interval and separation, and specific location relative to identifiable terrain characteristics so the attack pilot could easily identify both the target and terrain/route features surrounding the target(s). About 30 seconds prior to flare release by the FAC, the AT-28D began descending from his perch position, using a 360° turn or a 90/270° pattern, to set up a head-on attack situation on the first pass, whenever possible. The FAC would start climbing after the AT-28D descended through his altitude and reported clear. When required the FAC fired a smoke rocket to help the attack pilot pinpoint target location. The attack pilot first tried to make a disabling pass using .50 caliber machine guns or CBU-14 bomblets within one minute of flare ignition to catch the trucks before they could escape the flare lighted area or into a near-by road side truck park. Strafing from a head-on to quartering approach would normally assure hits on the driver compartment, engine and fuel tanks. CBU releases during the strafe recovery would inflict further damage and burn the target if fuel tanks had been ruptured. Napalm or white phosphorous bombs were used to assure total target destruction. Flares were released as needed to keep the target(s) illuminated during the attack passes. Attack patterns and target approaches were adjusted to neutralize enemy defensive positions and to avoid the mountainous Karst formations which paralleled the roads and rivers. When possible the attack pilot tried to stop or bottle up convoys by destroying the lead or trail vehicles at route points where passage was difficult and traffic was slowed. Additional fire support would be diverted into the target area by the airborne command center when necessary to complete destruction of a large number of trucks.

Every one of the combat missions I flew from NKP turned out to be different from the planned format once I crossed the Mekong River. Although most of the missions, especially hunter-killer team

missions, proceeded as planned until target contact was made, tactics in the target area would change once the team received anti-aircraft fire or the target moved off the road.

Flying with "Air Commando One"



Brig Gen Harry C. 'Heinie' Aderholt

In late August 1967 I had the honor of flying with then Colonel Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt on a night mission. I must start by saying that everyone who ever knew Col Aderholt at NKP will attest to him being a "hands on" leader who involved himself with every aspect of 56th ACW operations. He was available and visible to wing personnel in their work places and he worked tirelessly to improve the working and living conditions on the base. People who were close to him will tell you that he did not need much sleep and he monitored air operations and base support activities day and night. He believed in the wing's mission and was the leading advocate for expanding its combat role into night interdiction operations. If anything unusual occurred on base it was a good bet that he was present providing his brand of active leadership and wisdom. He was liked by the people who worked for him and they were at ease in his presence. He took every loss hard and spent

many years after his retirement accounting for airmen he lost and helping Laos' native Hmong people through the Air Commando Association's McCoskrie Threshold Foundation he helped found. He truly was "Air Commando One".

On this particular August night he was in the wing intelligence and operations section observing aircrew mission preparation activities because early post-mission reports indicated the 56th ACW was having a busy and successful night on the trail. He listened in on my mission intelligence briefing and observed my flight preparation and subsequent briefing with the FAC who would be part of our assigned hunter-killer team that morning. After completing mission preparation I went to the Officers Club for dinner and then went to the squadron to pick up my flight gear and proceeded to the flight line. I completed the aircraft forms review and talked to the crew chief about the flawless aircraft status and high drag asymmetric munitions load: two flat nosed M-35 fire bombs hung on the inboard stations, a SUU-25 flare pod and external fuel tank loaded on the center stations, and two CBU-14 dispensers loaded on the outboard stations. During my pre-flight walk around of the aircraft Col Aderholt arrived and told me he would be flying with me on the mission. Although I was surprised that he had decided to fly with me that evening, I was not uneasy with his presence because I had about five months experience flying these night missions as both a pilot and instructor pilot. After briefing him on the aircraft status and weapons load, I gave him a short aircrew briefing on emergency and bail out procedures should we be hit by anti-aircraft fire. We strapped in and I started the aircraft, taxied to the arming area and made an on-time takeoff. Shortly after crossing the Mekong River we observed some 37mm anti-aircraft fire from a site south of our flight path that I referred to as "Check Point Charlie", because the site seemed to always fire a harmless volley of 37mm rounds toward

us early morning flyers to let us know he was still awake and we did not want to come his way. Approximately 20 minutes later we joined up with the FAC at our assigned route check point and received his target briefing. After about 15 minutes the FAC located some trucks moving along the road, described their position, confirmed our visual contact with the targets and cleared us to attack.

It was a dark, star lit night with only a few scattered clouds which did not prohibit a discernible horizon, so I elected to make the first attack from a shallow dive without flare illumination. I positioned the aircraft to meet the small convoy head on and when in range I started firing the machine guns at the visible headlights and dropped CBU when I passed over them during the pull off. We immediately received anti-aircraft fire from two directions and I released two flares as we climbed to position the aircraft for a steep dive angle from which we would drop our M-35 cluster fire bombs. The convoy stretched along the road for about one quarter mile and we made a bomb delivery pass at each end of the convoy, released a second set of flares to keep the area illuminated and turned the remaining truck targets back to the FAC, who was already coordinating with the airborne command center for another attack aircraft. The whole sequence of events lasted approximately ten minutes. We received sporadic anti-aircraft fire throughout most of our attack sequence, but it was aimless and harmless because the gunners were blinded by the bright flare light and could not see us as we

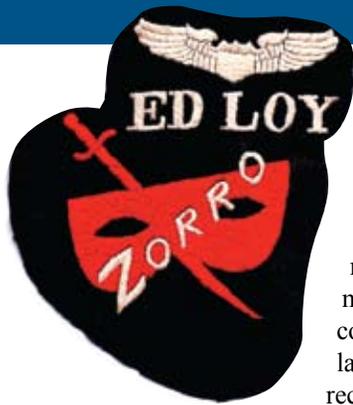
maneuvered to keep the flares between them and our position.

Colonel Aderholt was quiet except for one "get the b-----" comment as we rolled in on our first attack pass, and very helpful calling out the two directions from which we were receiving anti-aircraft fire. He confirmed four trucks were burning or stopped on our final bomb delivery pass and told me that some trucks appeared to have driven off the road into the trees. We made several circles above the FAC while waiting for a near-by, redirected A-26K



to arrive, and retained our unexpended machine gun ammunition to help the FAC escape from the area if needed. The A-26K arrived in about five minutes and we watched his first two attacks on the remaining targets before we departed for recovery at NKP.

After landing Colonel Aderholt and I debriefed maintenance and intelligence personnel and listened to some debriefing results from other areas along different segments of the trail. During breakfast Colonel Aderholt asked me where I would like for my next assignment to be when I departed NKP. I told him that I wanted to return to jet fighters and go to the 20th TFW in the United Kingdom, an assignment that I was heading to before being diverted to Southeast



Asia. I am sure that he played a big role in making my assignment desires come true. In late October I received initial notification that

my next assignment would be to the 55th Tactical Fighter Squadron in the 20th TFW at Royal Air Force Wethersfield, United Kingdom. That news made this flight with "Air Commando One" my most memorable flight at NKP.

Colonel Aderholt would retire from the Air Force in December 1972. Because of his theater expertise, close relationships with both the leaders of Thailand's government and officials in Bangkok, and Laos' Hmong leader, he was recalled to active duty as a Colonel in October 1973. He returned to Bangkok as the Deputy Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Thailand and Deputy Chief of the Joint United States Military Advisory Group. He was promoted to Brigadier General in May 1974 and became Commander, USMAGTHAI, and Chief, JUSMAG in May 1975. He was the last American general on the ground in Southeast Asia, helping assure safe exit of remaining American forces and managed to find aircraft and resources to evacuate more than 2000 Hmong tribesman from Long Tieng, Laos before it fell to the North Vietnamese. General Aderholt returned to the United States as a hero to all air commandos and retired in the grade of Brigadier General on 1 August 1976.

The Zorro Call Sign

The "Zorro" call sign was assigned to the 606th ACS AT-28Ds when the squadron became part of the 56th ACW. The wing had requested "Sabre" for its AT-28D call sign, but the request was denied. An F-100 squadron at Tuy Hoa Air Base, South Vietnam had already been allocated the "Sabre" call sign and the wing was offered a list of alternatives which from which it could select another call sign. The list included

"Zorro".

Tom Deken and I were in the wing operations/intelligence mission planning and briefing area when the denial message was received. During this planning session a communications sergeant told Captain Deken 7th Air Force had denied the squadron's call sign request and showed him the list of possible alternatives. When Lt Colonel Price, the squadron commander, and Colonel Aderholt, came into the building to review the night's mission activities, Captain Deken told them that "Zorro" would be a great call sign because it represented a hero who performed good deeds fighting bad guys at night. They both agreed and a message was sent back to 7th Air Force requesting "Zorro" to be the 606th ACS AT-28D call sign. The 7th Air Force approval arrived the next night and "Zorro" became the permanent NKP AT-28D call sign.

During the next month an iconic "Zorro" patch was designed and approved by Colonel Aderholt for wear on our flight suits (See original "Zorro" patch on this page). The design was a simple red eye mask with a red sword (the sabre we originally wanted) crossing behind the mask from its upper left corner to its lower right corner with white "Zorro" lettering crossing in front of the mask from its lower left corner to its upper right corner. Most of the Zorro pilots sent two flight suits with our deployed detachment to Ubon RTAFB to have them embroidered and dyed black at an Ubon tailor shop. The flight suits came back quickly to NKP and we started wearing black the following week.

What I Left Behind at Pleiku AB, South Vietnam

When I departed Pleiku I left some of my personal items in my locker in the open bay barracks building where we made our primary quarters when we were on crew rest at Pleiku AB. These were collected by my friends with whom I worked and brought to me by 1st ACS aircrews that regularly flew into NKP to refuel and rearm following some of their night missions in Laos. It would also be through them that I would be able to

convert the script that I carried out of South Vietnam on my flight to Bangkok. I did not have the chance to cash the script I had accumulated back into dollars prior to leaving South Vietnam due to my rapid departure from Nha Trang on 1 April. Script or "monopoly money" as it was commonly referred by the troops was used in all legal financial exchanges by United States military and civilian personnel while in South Vietnam to keep dollars from undermining South Vietnam's fragile and propped up economy. Although using script kept dollars of American servicemen from flowing easily into the black market for hard to get goods and services, it did not stop illegal transactions. I had saved most of the script that I received during my three months at Pleiku AB with the intention that I would purchase something nice for my wife from the Base Exchange.

By my departure date in March I had accumulated \$490.00 dollars worth of script and that was a significant amount of on-hand cash to me during that period of my life. I found out upon reaching Thailand that I could not convert the script into dollars and therefore I had a lot of "monopoly money" with no purchasing power at NKP. During breakfast one morning about a month after my arrival at NKP I was joking with a 1st ACS friend, Major William Weiger, about my personal hoard of "monopoly money" and that it looked like I had a worthless \$490.00 souvenir of the war that I would take home to my wife. Major Weiger told me to give him the script and he would try to get it converted into dollars and bring it back to me on one of his future missions. To make a long story very short he did get the script converted and I was able to use the dollars he brought back to buy my wife a gift that summer. I don't know how he got the script converted to dollars and never asked. There were very stiff rules governing the amount of script that could be converted when a person transferred from South Vietnam so I let his secret be his secret and it remains so today.

Epilogue

To only say that my tour at NKP was exciting and rewarding would

be understating the sum of the activities that helped educate me during an Air Force career that would end in August 1990. Every flight, day or night, had boring, exciting, frightening and dangerous moments. There is nothing more boring to a fighter pilot than droning through the sky at 180 knots on a straight and level course between two points on a map at 6000 to 8000 feet altitude. However once arriving in an intended target area, it was exciting to visually attack a target at night in a steep dive and release bombs from approximately 2500 feet above the ground. A frightening moment can occur when you make a hard turn during recovery and momentarily lose sight of the air defense gun fire you were trying to avoid at airspeeds that hardly ever exceeded 250 knots. That airspeed is just slightly faster than the speed of an F-100 as it begins its final approach for landing. Even when I had all aspects of a flight situation seemingly under control, good luck was always welcome. There is an old pilot saying that "flying is many hours of boredom punctuated by moments of panic". Flying night armed reconnaissance missions from NKP in an AT-28D during 1967 fit that description.

There has been some debate about whether this small group of AT-28D pilots contributed any effective disruption to NVA movement of personnel and supplies through central Laos. Given the political decision to not attack the points of origin in North Vietnam with our most capable aircraft, I would say the Zorros did the best they could with the equipment they were provided, especially since there was never more than 12 aircraft at NKP

This tale could not be complete without adding my praise for the strong and positive leadership General Harry C. Aderholt provided the 56th ACW during 1967. He was already a legend among our small group of Zorro pilots, and his continuous sparring with higher headquarters over the effectiveness of vintage aircraft versus jet fighters instilled a sense of pride in all the units under his command. He mentored us well and I used many of his leadership techniques later in my career as commander of both a combat support group and wing. His leadership would be appropriately recognized 44 years later when the enlisted men and women of the Air Force Special Operations Command presented him with the "Order of the Sword".

It was an honor to serve my country with this outstanding and dedicated group of Americans.

I was proud to be a Zorro. 



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Blanchard Family Wine has created the official wine of the Air Commando Association. These wines will be introduced at the 2011 ACA Annual Reunion in Fort Walton Beach, FL. 20% of the sales of these wines will be donated to the ACA.



Wines can be tasted and ordered in the reunion hospitality room throughout the ACA reunion.

Additional wines, as well as the MH-53 tribute wine - the *Red Scarf Blend*, can be pre-ordered by calling James Blanchard at 303-328-1732 or e-mailing james@blanchardfamilywines.com. More information and our entire wine line-up can be found at Blanchardfamilywines.com.

Casting a New Shadow



*By Col David Mobley
Deputy Commander, 1st Special Operations Group*

On 29 March, 2011, Lockheed-Martin rolled out the first four of (hopefully) 37 total MC-130J Combat Shadow IIs for AFSOC. The first one took to the skies on its maiden flight on April 20th, 2011. Lockheed will deliver the first one to the command in September 2011. These airplanes will replace 23 MC-130Ps and 14 MC-130Es being retired from service. On first glance, many will think the new MC-130J Combat Shadow II is simply a new version of the same 45+ year-old MC-130P Combat Shadow. But it won't take long to convince Airmen and "old timer" Herk crews that the MC-130J is a definitive leap forward in SOF MC-130 aviation.

A Proud Lineage: The MC-130P Combat Shadow

The first two decades of the MC-130P's 45+ years of history were quite different than the most recent 23 years. Lockheed delivered the Air Force a fleet of about 100 HC-130 "King" search and rescue aircraft between 1964 and 1969. Its improved Allison T56-A-15 engines gave the HC-130 better high altitude/hot weather performance than similar-year C-130Es with Allison T56-A-7 engines. These new HC-130s were built to take on the busy mission of Combat Rescue in

Vietnam. Initially, they were to use the Radio Directional Tracker located in the tracker radome (aka, "the piano bar") on top of the aircraft to find emergency locator beacons of downed aircrew. But in 1965, Harry Dunn and Don Eastman were proving that a CH-3 could refuel behind a C-130 using helicopter air refueling (HAR) pods. In June, 1967, Wright-Patterson AFB proved that the HH-53 could also refuel behind the Herk. HC-130s refueled Jolly Green HH-3/53 helicopters rescuing downed aircrews throughout most of the conflict in Southeast Asia. Combat Rescue in Vietnam was a gallant mission with no shortage of heroic action.

In the post-Vietnam 1970s, HC-130s continued to serve with distinction in peacetime search and rescue roles, but with few weapon system changes. Nevertheless, rescue HC-130 crews racked up thousands of civilian and military saves/assists alongside their Jolly Green counterparts. The late 1970s were somewhat stagnant for the Air Force and the HC-130. The glaring result of this came to light during the rehearsals and attempt to rescue the Americans held hostage by Iranian extremists. In April, 1980, America found out the hard way that deploying a large contingent of helicopters over long distances, using C-130 support and refueling, cannot be an ad hoc endeavor. To be successful, crews have to train regularly as

a unified team in specific mission areas to meet the intense demands of special operations.

“Operation RICE BOWL, the attempt to rescue American hostages from the United States Embassy in Iran, ended in disaster at the Desert One refueling site in April 1980. As a result, the Holloway Commission convened to analyze why the mission failed and recommend corrective actions. This led to the gradual reorganization and rebirth of United States special operations forces.”

By 1984, after lessons learned from RICE BOWL, a few MC-130Es were being modified with helicopter air refueling capability for use in special operations. But the small fleet of Combat Talons could not keep up with the growing number of in-flight refuelable special ops HH-3 and MH-53J helicopters. Thus, in August, 1989, when 23d Air Force became an official component of US Special Operations Command, 28 HC-130s shifted from Air Rescue and Recovery Service to Military Airlift Command’s 23rd Air Force. 23rd Air Force then officially became Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) on May 22nd, 1990. The AFSOC HC-130s remained un-named for several years; no longer “Kings,” yet assigned no other official moniker. Regardless of re-naming initiatives, aircrews had certainly started the transition to flying special ops missions with AFSOC HC-130s. For example, as the only HAR pod-equipped C-130s in the Pacific in 1989 (when the 33rd ARRS HC-130s became the 17th SOS), the HC-130s became essential as an air refueling platform for the newly-arrived 31st SOS MH-53J “Pave Low” helicopters in that theater. A similar set of events was unfolding in Europe and at Eglin/Hurlburt, so HC-130 aviators had to adapt quickly. Working with SOF teammates meant that CSAR methodologies were no longer relevant.

In the early 1990s, with the help of numerous young, energetic officer and enlisted aircrew, AFSOC leaders started reshaping the HC-130 force from a conventional “rescue” mentality into a special operations NVG low-level infil/exfil weapon system. There were a few

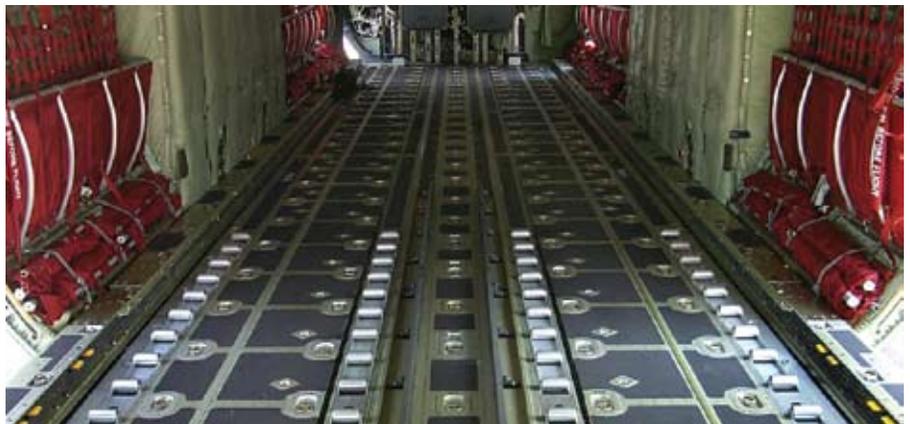
hold-out personalities who wanted to maintain the “search and rescue mission” status quo, but most Airmen eagerly took on the new special ops mission.

In the early days, USSOCOM invested in new Center Wings for the (then) 25-year-old MC-130E and HC-130P aircraft. As a result, they had an improved life expectancy. (This smart decision paid off big dividends 20 years later, in 2006, when most Air Force C-130Es were grounded due to cracked Center Wings). 23rd Air Force had also initiated a major upgrade program for the HC-130 with improved self-contained navigation systems, an integrated Infrared Detection System (FLIR), an improved radar and situation display, Radar Warning Receivers, IR and RF Countermeasures, and NVG compatible lighting. These block-modifications, dubbed “SOF-I” for SOF-Improvements, would vastly improve operations when flying on NVGs to conduct low-level flight to helicopter air refueling. It also improved airdrop and airland accuracy. The new SOF-I aircraft arrived at the

9th SOS for Operational Testing in late 1993; it would soon become a force multiplier for the command at a critical time in history.

By this time, the new SOF mindset for the former rescue aircrews had already taken hold. DESERT STORM had clinched that ethos for the crews once and for all. 23rd Air Force had successfully recruited a number of talented “Honey Badger,” C-130E SOLL II, AWADS (All-Weather Aerial Delivery System), and other qualified aircrews to take these squadrons into a new era. By 1995, the availability of SOF-I modified HC-130s caught up to the aircrews’ capabilities and solidified the mission. As a result of all these factors, the HQ AFSOC/DO and XP, were finally successful in re-designating the AFSOC HC-130 into a no-kidding SOF variant; the MC-130P “Combat Shadow.” It was about time too; the aircraft was a different weapon system and its aircrews were, by then, an integral part of the joint SOF team.

Superb leadership, combined with



Top: MC-130J cargo compartment looking forward. Bottom left: Heads-up display on a C-130J displays significant information. Bottom right: Loadmaster Control Panel
(All photos courtesy of Lockheed-Martin)

an updated aircraft and even better aircrew, led to two decades of increasing capabilities for the MC-130P. Combat Shadow Airmen have proven their success, and earned accolades and medals for combat and other operations on a regular basis: Operation JUST CAUSE, DESERT STORM, Operation ALLIED FORCE over Bosnia/Kosovo, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan, Operation PUMA in Iraq, OEF-Philippines, tsunami relief operations for Thailand, Indonesia, and Japan, just to name a few. But this is not supposed to be a history lesson; it is an account of how AFSOC plans to put the Combat Shadow warrior ethos into an airplane with even more capability; the MC-130J Combat Shadow II.

A Radically-Improved Weapon System: The MC-130J Combat Shadow II

It's not often that a Herk crewmember gets to set foot on a new C-130 (it actually smells good). Seeing an MC-130J on the flight line, the most noticeable difference from the old Herk comes from its six-bladed composite props. They are not just an updated

look to the old prop...they produce 25% more power on a hot day even though the J-model Rolls-Royce engines have been dialed back to nearly the same shaft horsepower as the P-model's Allison T56-A-15 engines. That would measure approximately 24,500 lbs of torque vice the current 19,600 lbs max...if MC-130J pilots worried about torque. Instead they simply use engine horsepower settings. This power improvement means faster cruise speeds at altitude (340+ vs. 290 TAS) while the new engines are more efficient at the high power settings. The average tactical fuel burn rates go from over 6,000 lbs per hour in the P-model down to around 4,500 lbs per hour in the MC-130J. This equates to longer flight durations, more fuel for CV-22s and MH-47/60s, and/or more cargo. Another subtle yet noticeable difference on the outside of the plane, especially to a Herk aficionado, are the "longerons" along each side of the ramp and door. These strengtheners allow the ramp and door to be opened at 250 knots for high-speed airdrop operations. One piece of external equipment that does not look any different is the HAR pod; the MC-130J still uses an updated version of the Sargent Fletcher pod.

Walking through the crew entrance door, C-130 Airmen immediately notice the old Technical Order (T.O.) publications bin has been replaced with a loadmaster workstation and computer. This is not simply a PC...it takes the place of multiple T.O.s, weight and balance books, and calculators. Even more remarkably, the system provides a graphic depiction of the Enhanced Cargo Handling System (ECHS) cargo compartment. This is an upgrade from a simple, legacy, "dual-rail" system. The computer controls and monitors electronic lock conditions and issues Caution, Advisory, and Warning System (CAWS) messages. It calculates weight and balance (based on LM input), remotely controls the electronic locks, and is used to actuate locks during heavy equipment airdrops and combat offloads. Essentially, it simplifies operations by validating load plans prior to actual aircraft loading, remotely controlling electronic locks to be preset before loading operations, and increasing crew safety during airdrop operations by having the loadmaster positioned far from the load with electronic control of the airdrop process to include extraction drogue/jettison capability. Unfortunately,





C-130J Pilots' Flight Deck (photo courtesy of Lockheed-Martin)

it doesn't weigh each pallet as it is loaded. But it is quite a leap in technology from the old Dash-1 and Form F calculations. Best of all, like Capt Joey Sullivan said during a speech at the roll-out ceremony, "at 164,000 pounds [operating weight], nine thousand pounds more than a typical P-model, its takeoff-roll distance is 1300 feet less...with six versus five pallet positions."

The ECHS cargo floor is also unique to the MC-130J compared to its older sibling. The floor rollers simply flip over to create a number of configurations, seats are ready to fold down, and the side-rail locks are centrally controlled by the computer. It can be reconfigured to nearly any set-up (slick floor or rails/rollers) in about five minutes compared to a minimum of 25 minutes for the legacy dual-rail system (that, incidentally, was only added to the MC-130P starting

in 2008!). Even the high-tech, weight-sensing (crews can't overload it) winch is installed in the cargo floor.

The flight deck...is almost too "clean" for a Herk! First, there is a noticeable absence of one seat that was critical in the MC-130P; the Flight Engineer (FE). Originally developed as a commercial variant C-130, Lockheed computerized the J-model Flight Management System to the point of taking over the FE's job. Systems management tasks are "digitally" presented, circuit breakers are electronic, and there are few actions for a crewmember to take when something goes wrong. Second, there are also no condition levers, few circuit breakers or flight instruments, and mostly rectangular glass screens on the instrument panel. Regardless of these advances, we will miss our highly-professional FEs and the enhanced

situation awareness they provided to the crew. We hope they can stay in AFSOC in other weapon systems as we value their SOF spirit and warrior mentality.

Another noticeable feature is the Heads-Up Display (HUD) at both pilots' stations. This is not just an attempt to emulate a fighter-pilot; otherwise there would be a "stick" for the flight controls like the C-17! To reduce heads-down pilot workload, relevant flight information is presented holographically while pilots continue to scan through the windscreen. Other than standard flight parameters, the HUD projects threat indications/reactions, and aircraft flight limitations. Cross-checks of the instrument panel are almost a thing of the past. When the HUD is in-use, the Avalex® monitors don't normally display an ADI or HSI. Pilots only go heads-down to look at the radar, moving

map, FLIR imagery, or to alter autopilot, emergency procedure and communication settings. If desired, even the throttles are automatic through the autopilot. This level of automation for the “slick” C-130J may, arguably, have been enough to overcome challenges normally handled by the FE and Navigator (“slick” C-130J crews typically fly with an extra pilot during Joint Precision Air Drop System operations). However, special operations missions call for high workloads and greater en route flexibility. Mission changes and added equipment are commonplace on SOF aircraft, so the MC-130J retained one critical crew position; the Combat Systems Operator or CSO (yes, formerly, the “Nav”).

Noticeable on the MC-130J flight deck are two seats at the former Navigator’s, now the Combat Systems Operator’s (CSO) panel. Only the left side has instrumentation. It is indeed a CSO requirement because the CSO will perform the functions of Nav, EWO, FE, and Radio Operator. As a Nav, he or she will work en route NVG low-level radar scope interpretation, terrain avoidance, mission plans, route changes, and incorporate unique MC-130J equipment like the Raytheon MTS-A Forward Looking Infrared system. As EWO, the CSO will coordinate with the pilots on threat warnings, work countermeasures, and re-route the mission while allowing them to remain heads-up. As a part-time FE, the CSO will manage fuel and, most uniquely, transfer fuel on-loads from KC-135/KC-10 tankers and off-loads to CV-22s and helicopters. Finally, the CSO will work much of the communications with ground forces and Command and Control (C2). In AFSOC, we’ve had some legendary Radio Operators who taught a few aircrews what good comm is all about. Like the FEs, we hope that AFSOC can retain these skilled aviators in other special operations roles. This is another case where a smaller, smarter aircrew is going to have to adapt, overcome, and rely on technology to free them up for other duties.

The unpopulated second CSO seat is ideal for airborne mission commanders, added operational aircrew, or other C2 personnel. It could also be an accommodation for future baseline needs; think MC-130x “Talon 3” or AC-130J replacement

aircraft and the requirements/equipment that would come with those missions. There are a number of possible options and AFSOC is ahead of the typical special ops modification requirement just by having the provision and sheet metal installed during aircraft production vice post-delivery.

No doubt, the new, more powerful MC-130J climbs higher quicker, flies farther faster, carries more cargo, can loiter longer or refuel more receivers, and is all around a much-improved Combat Shadow. Those traits alone should be enough justification to recapitalize the 45-year-old MC-130P. But there is more to it than that. Combat Shadow II crews will now be equipped with a high-resolution, 21st Century radar. They’ll get Laser-based Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) to defeat surface-to-air missiles. They’ll have an on-board processor that takes off-board software/hardware and integrates it for the aircrews without having to dig into the basic flight-director/management system, thus increasing situational awareness and facilitating improved (and additional) SOF missions. The MC-130J is a new standard and the baseline for future SOF C-130 MDSs. This author believes it will become the “Gold Standard Herk” that other US and international C-130 customers will want to own. So, a new Shadow is cast; the best way to wring out all its potential is to hand it over to the AFSOC aircrews and maintainers. Because it is, and has always been, the AFSOC Airman who makes SOF unparalleled...without equal. This tradition will continue for the Combat Shadow II in ways us “old-timers” can’t imagine.

Col David Mobley is currently the Deputy Commander, 1st Special Operations Group, Hurlburt Field, FL and an MC-130P Combat Shadow Navigator 

MC-130J SPECIFICATIONS

Length	97 ft 9 in.
Height	38 ft 9 in.
Wingspan	132 ft 7 in.
Horizontal tail span	52 ft 8 in.
Maximum takeoff/landing weights	164,000/162,000 lb
Maximum fuel offload at 1,000 n.mi radius	21,000 lb
Landing/takeoff ground roll (maximum effort)	1,500 ft
Maximum cruise speed	335 KTAS
Power plant	4 Rolls-Royce AE2100D3 4,591 pshp engines, Dowty R391, 6-blade propellers, all composite



MC-130J CSO Station (photo courtesy of Lockheed-Martin)



AFSOC Total Force

In Desert Shield/Storm 1990/91



*By Clay T. McCutchan
Air Armament Center Historian, Eglin
AFB, FL*

In the summer/fall of 1990 and winter of 1991 AFSOC Total Force warriors left their homes, families and civilian careers to answer the call to arms during Operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM. Many deployed and some even shut down small businesses or one person shops at personal loss in order to serve their nation. Many stayed close to the home units without deploying but provided strong and constant support for their deployed wingmen and nation's needs. The Air Reserve Component operators and maintainers, older than most of their active duty counterparts, deployed and then employed some of the oldest airframes in the USAF inventory.

After Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990, a number of individual personnel of the AFSOC units of the Air National Guard, and the Air Force Reserve, and individual mobilization augmentees of HQ AFSOC immediately volunteered and left for duty stateside and overseas.

On 28 August, the 193rd Special Operations Group, Air National Guard, at Harrisburg International Airport, PA, self deployed to Saudi Arabia with two EC-130E Volant Solo mission aircraft and two EC-130E en-route support aircraft with 72 unit personnel and 21 personnel from the 4th Psychological Operational Group (US Army). The 193 SOG was designated an AFSOC resource and bedded down at AFSOC's base at King Fahd International Airport, but it came under USCENTAF control once in place. The 193rd flew its first familiarization mission on 2 September and then its first actual psychological operations broadcast mission on 22 November. It aired "Voice of America" into the Kuwait Theater of Operations. This psychological operation meant that AFSOC was the first major command to support

a wartime mission in the area of responsibility. Several field modifications to the broadcasting equipment were accomplished in minimum time using locally redesigned and produced equipment. The 193rd participated in an extensive series of psychological operations broadcasts and other direct support of the air campaign and final ground activity that were major contributors to the overall success. The ANG Air Commandos flew a total of 1348.8 hours in DESERT SHIELD/STORM, of which 845.6 were logged as combat time with the highest hours of broadcasting activity over a sixty day period averaging 14.1 hours per day. They were lauded for their participation by AFSOC Commander MGen Thomas Eggers and CSAF Gen Merrill A. McPeak.

The 919 SOG, Air Force Reserve at Eglin Aux #3, Duke Field, FL, was the parent unit for the 71st Special Operations Squadron and its HH-3 helicopters at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ. The 71 SOS was activated on 21 December 1990 and began an immediate upgrade in personnel and equipment for combat. Augmented with personnel from active duty air rescue units, the 71 SOS arrived on 12 January 1991, at King Fahd. The older HH-3s of the 71st replaced MH-60s that had to return to the United States for required upgrades and modifications. The HH-3s started operational missions on 17 January and totaled 367 hours in 251 sorties by the end of combat. The Reserve Air Commando helicopters pulled alert for night over-water combat rescue, and flew environmental damage assessment and medical evacuation missions. They also performed night NVG water landings and sensitive missions in support of Army and Naval SOF.

The 711 SOS of the 919 SOG was recalled on 17 January 1991 and five of their AC-130A gunships arrived at King Fahd on 7 February 1991 with five crews. Support staff and an additional three crews also arrived by airlift. Meanwhile at Duke Field, C-130A slicks of the 711 SOS supported a USA east coast airlift with vital cargo and personnel hauling seven days a week, for six weeks without a break. Once in country, the 711 SOS gunships began flying within two days of arrival. Besides providing airborne on call fire support, they also participated in the search for AC-130H gunship "Spirit 03" which had been lost earlier in the war. On the night of 26 February, three of the AC-130As crossed the border and attacked Iraqi vehicles and troops on the



Al Jahra/Basra Road (Road of Death) northwest of Kuwait. Approximately 34 vehicles of all sorts were destroyed and along with a number of personnel. The AFRC Air Commando gunship crews encountered and evaded small arms fire, anti aircraft artillery fire, and surface to air missiles. General Charles Horner, CENTAF commander, later authorized the award of Distinguished Flying Crosses to all members of two crews (30+) and Air Medals (14+) to all members of the remaining crew for the mission. The 711 SOS gunships finished the in country war with 180 hours, and 59 sorties. 



Operation Kaitakusha “Pathfinder”

By Col Rob Toth, Former 353d SOG/CC

The mission to open Sendai International Airport, Matsushima Air Base, and establish the Helicopter Expedient Refueling System (HERS) Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP) site at Yamagata Air Base



This is the story of the 353 Special Operations Group's response to the Great East Earthquake, subsequent tsunami, and nuclear accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station. The mission to open Sendai International Airport is a great example of how the inherent capabilities of Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF), when partnered with host nation civil and military personnel and our joint partners, can provide immediate response to aid our allies around the world during a humanitarian crisis.

At 1446L on 11 March 2011, a massive earthquake registering 9.0 on the Richter scale struck 81 miles east of Sendai on Japan's main island of Honshu. The earthquake triggered a 30 foot high tsunami that came ashore approximately 45 minutes after the quake and ravaged nearly 350 miles of coastline on the East side of Honshu Island. The tsunami swept across cities and villages along the Pacific coast of the Tohoku district, causing tremendous human suffering and structural damage. The Prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima are severely impacted. As the tsunami retreated back to the sea, over 500,000 persons were displaced, 15,729 were killed, 5,719 injured and 4,539 remain listed as missing as of 18 August 2011. The tsunami swept over both Matsushima Air Base and Sendai International Airport (IAP) rendering them unusable. Sendai IAP remained under 7 feet of water for several days and both fields suffered significant damage to infrastructure and were strewn with hundreds of vehicles, aircraft, trees, houses, and human remains. On the evening of 11 March 2011, Japan's Foreign Minister Matsumoto formally requested United States Ambassador Roos for the assistance of United States Forces Japan. (USFJ). Large-scale humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) activities were conducted under Operation Tomodachi, which is the Japanese word for Friend.

At the time of the Great East Earthquake and subsequent tsunami, the 353 Special Operations Group (SOG) had 3 x MC-130H, 3 x MC-130P aircraft and 346 personnel deployed to Daegu Air Base, Republic of Korea

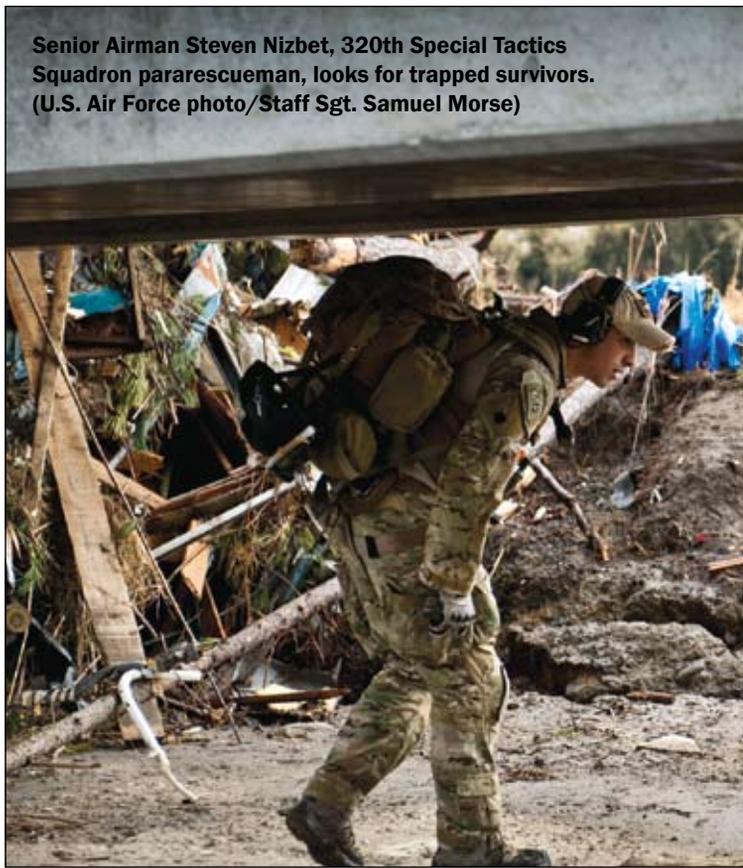
(ROK) participating in Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise FOAL EAGLE in support of United States Forces Korea (USFK). Deployed SOG forces were under the Operational Control (OPCON) of the Commander, Special Operations Command Korea (COMSOCKOR) executing command and control of all combined SOF aviation forces through a Joint Special Operations Aviation Center (JSOAC).

Within minutes of the tsunami coming ashore, the men and women of the 353 SOG had begun an accountability recall of all personnel and dependents, then began preparations to provide aid to the people of Japan. Initial planning and course of action (COA) development was conducted by the 353 Expeditionary Special Operations Group located at Daegu AB and presented to both COMSOCKOR and COMSOCPAC for decision. On the morning of 12 March 2011, the 353 SOG received a verbal command (VoCo) order from United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) to deploy a command element, 3 x MC-130Ps and a special tactics team to Yokota Air Base under the tactical control (TACON) USFJ in support of Operation Tomodachi. The first MC-130P carrying advance forces and special tactics personnel arrived on 12 March 2011. The remaining two MC-130Ps and command element closed at Yokota AB on 13 March 2011.

Within hours of arriving on 12 March 2011 at Yokota AB, members of the 320th Special Tactics Team led by Major John Traxler began aerial and ground site assessments of the affected area. Utilizing MH-60s flown by the 33d Rescue Squadron, STS personnel conducted aerial reconnaissance of Yamagata Airport, Hanamaki Airport, Matsushima Air Base, and Sendai

International Airport.

On 13 Mar 11, Colonel Toth held a video teleconference (VTC) with all of his squadron commanders, the JSOAC-K staff located at Daegu, the JSOAC-J staff located at Yokota AB Japan and 353 SOG rear at Kadena AB Japan. The VTC provided a commander's update brief (CUB) focused on the humanitarian and nuclear crisis unfolding on the Japanese mainland caused by the tsunami. At the conclusion of the VTC, Colonel Toth directed detailed mission planning to develop concepts of operation (CONOPS) for operating HA/DR missions into Miyagi Prefecture's



Senior Airman Steven Nizbet, 320th Special Tactics Squadron pararescueman, looks for trapped survivors. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse)

three main airfields of Yamagata Airport, Matsushima Air Base, and Sendai International Airport.

Colonel Toth repositioned to Yokota AB on 14 March and stood up JSOAC-J under the operational control of SOCPAC and tactical control of USFJ. Immediately upon arrival, Colonel Toth received an update brief from Lt Colonel Carroll, JSOAC-J Battle Staff Director and then attended the USFJ CUB. Following the USFJ CUB, Major

John Traxler presented his analysis of Yamagata Airport, Matsushima Air Base, and Sendai International Airport. Yamagata was not impacted by the earthquake or tsunami however, it was ruled out as a primary field due to its location on the West side of a mountain range prone to bad weather and limited navigational aids. Additionally, ramp space at Yamagata was limited and we believed the joint force would quickly MOG out the airfield's small military ramp. Matsushima AB had two runways of which, the main runway was under water and covered with a significant amount of debris. The shorter, C-130 capable, run-



way appeared relatively clear of debris and possibly useable. Since Matsushima AB was a main Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) F-2 base, we did not believe this would be a viable long term operating base. The unknown status of the wing's aircraft also led us to assume the base would resume normal operations and not allow United States forces to use the airfield as a central hub for HA/DR operations. Aerial photography and satellite imagery taken on 13 March

11 made it appear that Sendai IAP was not suitable for any fixed-wing flight operations without significant runway clearing operations. Suitable helicopter landing zones were identified for possible use to insert STS teams for clearing and survey operations.

During the USFJ CUB on 14 March, senior leaders discussed the shortcomings of Yamagata Airport and Matsushima AB as strategic hubs. Sendai IAP was identified as the most strategic airfield for USFJ to utilize as the central hub for HA/DR missions into the Tohoku region however; US and Japanese leaders were convinced that Sendai IAP could not be re-opened due to the extensive damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami. Following the USFJ CUB, Colonel Toth directed Major Traxler to develop a CONOP for inserting a team of combat controllers, pararescuemen, and support personnel into Sendai IAP utilizing MH-60 helicopters. Their mission would be to survey and clear 3,500 feet of runway in order to allow MC-130s to infil heavy equipment required to clear the airfield and open it for humanitarian relief operations.

Colonel Toth briefed the CONOP for Operation Kaitakusha (Pathfinder) to Lt Gen Field, USFJ/CC on the evening of 14 March 2011 and received approval to execute. The approved mission was to utilize three MH-60s to insert a team of pararescuemen and combat controllers from the 320 STS onto Sendai IAP. Once on the airfield, the team would coordinate with the Sendai Airport Authority for permission to clear at least 3,500 x 60 feet of runway for MC-130 ops, survey the field, and open the field for MC-130 operations. Colonel Toth directed the mission to be launched at 0800L on 15

March 2011 in order to complete infiltration before a fast approaching weather system closed helicopter routes between Yokota AB and Sendai IAP.

On 15 March 2011, Operation Kaitakusha commenced. Approximately 20 minutes after departure, all three MH-60s were recalled to Yokota AB in order to pick up dosimeters due to the emerging radiation threat from the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station. It took nearly six hours to locate the dosimeters and issue them to the aircrews and special tactics personnel. Once the crews had dosimeters in hand, the mission to open Sendai IAP resumed. However, helicopter crews ran into a line of severe weather 80 miles from Sendai IAP and aborted the mission.

Upon landing back at Yokota, the team received an updated weather briefing that forecast similar conditions over the next four days. Based on the forecast, Colonel Toth directed CONOP development for a fixed-wing option.

Quickly Lt Col Zimmerman, 17 SOS/CC, and Major Traxler, 320 STS/CC, gathered planners and began CONOP development. After a careful examination of overhead imagery and aerial photos of Sendai Airport, it was determined that neither runway at Sendai IAS was suitable for C-130 operations without accepting high risk. Colonel Toth determined that without additional clearing, risk to force and mission of landing at Sendai IAP was too high to accept. As such, he directed the team to plan an infiltration of the team with two HMMWVs into either Yamagata Airport or Matsushima AB in order to execute an overland movement to Sendai IAP.

Due to its close proximity to Sendai IAP, our planning focused on Matsushima AB. Aerial photographs of runway 15/33, a 4,900 foot strip, at Matsushima AB looked very promising. We contacted JASDF officials at the base to confirm the status of their two runways. The JASDF official stated that the airfield was closed due to loss of power which shut down the tower and navigational aids. Additionally the main runway was unusable due to large amounts of debris on the runway. They confirmed the 4,900 foot runway 15/33 was sound with little debris on the



By 23 March, the board had established a road map for opening Sendai IAP with a target date of 14 April 2011. The initial schedules of milestones were:

- VOR/DME Operational – 25 Mar 11
- Crash Fire Rescue restored to Level 9 capability – 28 March 2011
- Airfield Lighting restored – 28 Mar 11
- Jet A-1 Fuel Supply re-established – 29 Mar 11
- Clear Runway 12/30 – 30 Mar 11
- Mobile Tower operational – 30 Mar 11
- ILS/ASR Operational – 14 Apr 11
- Open to commercial traffic – 14 Apr 11



surface. We offered assistance to survey damage at the field, provide air traffic control services until power was restored, and deliver immediate life sustaining items such as food, water, and blankets. We also asked if the air base could clear runway 15/33 of debris that may be dangerous to aircraft, requested permission to land, and requested an escort to Sendai IAP. They agreed to all three requests and in turn, provided a request for assistance of water and other HA/DR supplies which we forwarded to USAID and J4. After securing permission to land at Matsushima AB, we coordinated our plans with Japan's Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) through the United States Embassy and received permission to assist with re-opening Sendai IAP.

Following our coordination with the JASDF at Matsushima AB and the CAB, we briefed our fixed-wing CONOP to Lt Gen Field, USFJ/CC, who approved the plan for execution. We immediately placed crews into crew rest while special tactics personnel finished detailed planning of ground operations. We set a takeoff time of 0445L on 16 March 2011 to allow us to fly over the airfield at sunrise and verify the runway was clear, and then land on the second approach. Landing at sunrise mitigated safety concerns over debris on the runway while also allowing the longest period of daylight for the entire operation.

On the morning of 16 March 2011 at 0445L, one MC-130P (Jackal 17) flown by Captain Chris Stewart and his crew carrying two HMMWVs and two teams totaling 21 personnel led by the JSOAC-J Deputy Commander Colonel Dwayne Lott and Major Traxler departed Yokota AFB Japan for Matsushima AB. Captain Stewart's crews arrived at Matsushima AB at 0530L and executed a Self Contained Approach (SCA) in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) below the cloud deck allowing them to visually clear the runway of obstacles. Following a second IMC SCA, they landed on Matsushima AB's runway 33 at 0550L. Immediately upon rollout, the two HMMWVs and two special tactics teams down loaded their gear from the aircraft. One team led by Captain Ianacone immediately linked up with JASDF personnel to begin conducting a contingency airfield and FARP

survey for Matsushima AB. By 0700, his combat control team had surveyed the runway and established air traffic control services. The second team led by Colonel Lott and Major Traxler linked up with their JASDF escort and departed in a convoy to Sendai IAP.

Upon arrival at Sendai Airport at 0830L, Colonel Lott (Senior US Official at Sendai IAP) and his team were pleasantly surprised to find Japanese construction crews conducting recovery operations on the airfield. Using the assistance of his JASDF escort, Colonel Lott was able to identify Mr Testsuro Ikeda as the senior Japanese official on the airport. Mr Ikeda was the senior planning officer for Airport Safety Engineering, Airport Department, Civil Aeronautics Board who was sent to provide an assessment of the airfield's damage. Colonel Lott discussed our CONOP to re-open Sendai IAP for use as a hub for humanitarian relief operations. Following their discussions, Mr Ikeda coordinated approval through the CAB to land an MC-130 at the airport and also coordinated for removal of large debris and vehicles from the first 5,000 feet of the main runway.

At approximately 0930L, less than one hour after arrival, Japanese construction workers and 353 SOG personnel completed clearing large debris from the first 5,000 feet of runway 27. At 1000L combat controllers had established air traffic control communications and declared Sendai IAP open for C-130 operations.

While the runway was being cleared, Colonel Lott and Mr Ikeda developed a list of immediate humanitarian relief supplies. Mr Ikeda stated that his most urgent need was for diesel and gasoline. He stated that he would not be able to power his generators or vehicles being used for recovery more than 24 hours without additional fuel. He also requested drinking water, generators, and lighting for night operations. Colonel Lott relayed the list of requirements back through the JSOAC who relayed the request for assistance to USAID representatives and the J4.

By 1000L the initial pallets of water, food, and blankets for Matsushima were delivered planeside and by 1100L,



An MC-130H Combat Talon II lands March 16, 2011, at Sendai Airport, Japan. This is the first fixed-wing aircraft to land at the airport since an earthquake and tsunami crippled much of the Japanese eastern seaboard March 11.



Captain Stewart's crew (Jackal 17) had departed Yokota for their second trip to Matsushima AB. At 1158L Jackal 17 landed, following an IMC SCA, to deliver the first HA/DR supplies into Matsushima AB since the tsunami on 11 March 2011. After a short time on the ground Jackal 17 departed for Yokota arriving at 1400L, mission complete.

Soon after arriving at Yokota AB from Daegu AB, one MC-130H flown by Maj Helton's crew (Goose 56) was loaded with a 10K forklift required to download cargo at Sendai IAP. At 1430L Colonel Toth and Goose 56 departed Yokota AB for Sendai IAP. At 1500L, 10 hours and 15 minutes after the mission began, Goose 56 becomes the first aircraft since the tsunami to land at Sendai IAP. The crew quickly downloaded the

10K forklift and Colonel Toth, and then departed for Daegu AB, ROK arriving at 2110L, mission complete.

While on the ground, Colonel Toth linked up with Colonel Lott and Mr Ikeda to discuss setting up a logistics hub for USFJ humanitarian relief operations at Sendai IAP. The three discussed a plan for dividing the responsibilities of controlling and recovering the airfield. Mr Ikeda stated that his primary focus was on cleanup operations and then gave Colonel Toth and Colonel Lott priorities for US forces. Those priorities were: (1) maintain positive control of US aircraft operating at Sendai IAP and physical control of US personnel operating on the airfield; (2) coordinate all logistics requirements for HA/DR operations; (3) assist with clean up when



JFSOCC Team



The Bi-lateral Team (Photo taken on 3 Apr 11)

not performing the other two duties. It was this bilateral division of labor and mutual agreement that made re-opening Sendai IAP possible.

At 1740L the second MC-130P crew (Jackal 18) led by Captain Robino departed Yokota AB and arrived at Matsushima AB at 1848L with additional HA/DR supplies. From Matsushima AB, Jackal 18 flew to Sendai IAP to deliver 450 gallons of diesel and gasoline required to operate recovery vehicles and fuel generators. Additionally, the aircraft carried water, generators, light-alls and equipment to sustain SOG personnel operating at the airport in field conditions. Shortly after touching down at 1924L, Jackal 18 offloaded the first humanitarian supplies at the crippled airport since the tsunami struck on 11 March 2011. While Jackal 18 was downloading its supplies at Matsushima

AB, the fourth MC-130 from the SOG departed Yokota AB for Yamagata Airport to deliver 32,000 pounds of aviation fuel into the USMC's recently delivered helicopter expedient refueling system (HERS). By 2105L the fourth MC-130 had completed the offload of fuel and declared the Yamagata forward area refueling point (FARP) established. Shortly thereafter, Jackal 18 departed for Yokota, landing at 2145L, mission complete.

Over the next three days, 353 SOG aircraft delivered HA/DR supplies while Japanese and SOG personnel worked around the clock to clear the remaining 4,500 feet of runway, removing aircraft, thousands of cars and over 300 tons of debris.

On 19 March Col Toth and the Joint Force Land Component Commander (JFLCC), Major General Mark Brilakis

(USMC), and Colonel Mike Brassaw, MAG 31/CC (USMC) traveled to Sendai IAP to meet with Col Lott's team. While at the airport, Col Lott identified requirements for logistics support and additional help clearing debris from the field. Shortly after returning to Yokota, Major General Brilakis arranged for Task Force (TF) Fuji commanded by Colonel Kozenieski (USMC) to deploy forward to Sendai IAP with heavy equipment to assist with clean up operations. At the same time, Colonel Toth contacted Colonel Lance Koenig, Commander, 10th Support Group and requested his assistance in providing logistical support. As a result, Colonel Koenig deployed his Logistics Task Force 35 commanded by Lt Col Townsend (USA) to provide base operating support for US personnel at Sendai IAP. Additionally, Colonel Toth and Colonel Brassaw contacted Colonel James Rubino, Commander, Logistics Command Element, 3d Marine Logistics Group (USMC) to provide a logistics command element (LCE) to command and control HA/DR logistics distribution at Sendai IAP.

By the end of the day on 19 March, Col Lott's team announced that the entire length (9,500 feet) of runway, 90 feet wide was cleared and open. Additionally, the team estimated the entire length and width (9,500 x 150 feet) would be open by noon on 20 March 2011.

Just before noon on 20 March 2011, Col Lott's team proudly announced that Sendai IAP's main runway was fully clear and open for C-17 and C-5 operations. Shortly thereafter at 1429L, the first C-17 arrived at Sendai IAP. In less than 22 minutes, the Air Force Special Operations team downloaded all 18 pallets of HA/DR supplies. By 1534L, less than 65 minutes after arrival, the first C-17 into Sendai IAP departed for Yokota AB. A second C-17 would arrive a few hours later to close out the first day of C-17 operations at the airport. By midnight on 20 March, only 4 days after the first MC-130 landed at Sendai IAP, 141 pallets of life-saving HA/DR supplies had been delivered into Sendai IAP. Additionally, a 5-man advance team from TF Fuji arrived at Sendai IAP to coordinate support requirements with

Col Lott.

The following day, 21 March 2011, Colonel Toth was designated as the Joint Force Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC) by CDR USPACOM. Additionally, the Joint Support Force Commander, ADM Walsh identified JFSOCC as the supported commander for all JSF HA/DR operations at Sendai IAP and placed TF Fuji and Logistics Task Force 35 (LTF 35) in direct support of the JFSOCC. On 22 March, Colonel Rubino (USMC) and his 35th Logistics Command Element arrived and established the Sendai IAP LSA. At the peak of operations, nearly 270 airmen, soldiers, sailors, and marines were working side by side with over 100 Japanese civilians and military personnel to operate and restore the airport.

Key to the success of operations at Sendai IAP was the creation of a Bilateral Crisis Action Team (BCAT) for Sendai IAP. This team was led by Colonel Makoto Kasamatsu (JGSDF), the Bilateral Crisis Action Team (BCAT) Commander of Sendai IAP and Colonel Lott, the US Commander of Sendai IAP. Together, Col Kasamatsu, the four US commanders (Lott, Rubino, Kozenieski, and Townsend) along with members of the Japanese Civil Aeronautics Board and Sendai Airport Authority held daily bilateral coordination meetings. The meetings scheduled daily activities of US and Japanese personnel, set milestones and tracked progress towards transitioning full control of the airport back to the Sendai Airport Authority and re-opening the airport to commercial traffic.

Through careful planning and close cooperation of this bilateral team, air traffic control services were transferred from Air Force combat controllers on 1 April 2011. On 3 April 2011, the 353 SOG began repositioning personnel from Sendai IAP to Yokota AB. Two days later, Japan Self Defense Force Lieutenant General Eiji Kimisuka, Commanding General of Joint Task Force Tohoku, visited Sendai IAP and oversaw the final transfer of airport operations from US military personnel led by Colonel Lott to the Sendai Airport Authority. As Sendai IAP opened on 6 April 2011, the airport returned to the state it was on 11 March – fully operated

by the people of Japan. At 8am on 13 April 2011, the first commercial aircraft landed at Sendai IAP since the tsunami on 11 March 2011. By the 25th of July, domestic schedules had normalized and international air travel had resumed at Sendai IAP.

From 11 March 2011 to 4 April 2011, the 353 SOG simultaneously operated one JFSOC and three JSOACs at Kadena, Daegu and Yokota to execute command and control of 4 x MC-130Ps, 3 x MC-130Hs, and 1 x PC-12. Together the group flew 161 humanitarian relief missions, logging 245 flight hours in support of Operation Tomodachi. In all, the group's aircrews transported over 511 relief personnel, 878,300 pounds of relief supplies and transferred 185,000 pounds of fuel into the center of the

crisis. Additionally, 353 SOG personnel conducted search and rescue missions; provided all communications support to the USMC's Logistics Command Element at Yamagata AB; conducted medical surveys of Tohoku University Hospital; and fueled the USMC's Helicopter Expedient Refueling System to establish a FARP site at Yamagata Airport. Finally, members of the 353 SOG at Sendai IAP led over 270 US airmen, soldiers, sailors, and marines to clear the airfield and manage logistics while controlling over 250 coalition aircraft operating at Sendai IAP. Their efforts enabled the delivery of over 517 relief personnel, 2.5 million pounds of relief supplies and over 15,000 gallons of fuel into Sendai IAP and restored hope to the people of Japan. 



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Turning Airmen

into

AIR COMMANDOS

Lt Col Paul F. Geehreg, USAF Special Operations School



AFSOC proudly bestows the title of Air Commando to its members, but what does it mean to be an Air Commando? How are we “made,” and what makes us so special? The last two Quadrennial Defense Reviews’ (QDRs) have emphasized growing SOF-like capabilities in the general purpose forces (GPF). Plus an increasing percentage of AFSOC accessions come straight from the Air Force’s initial entry pipeline. Therefore, these questions are drawing considerably more attention in recent years. While the SOF Truths remind us that we cannot mass produce special operations forces¹, AFSOC is in the process of absorbing 60% growth since 2005². With these factors pulling on the command’s core identity, we must identify and, more importantly, instill the essence of being an Air Commando into the next generation to assume that mantle.

In 2006, AFSOC published the 13 Critical

Attributes to capture some keys to SOF success³. While these characteristics are useful traits to encourage, they don’t quite sum up the nature of SOF that sets us apart from the GPF. Others point to specialized tools and training that make the difference. Again, I would argue these are critical foundations but only the beginning of building an effective Air Commando. Through numerous discussions with AFSOC squadron commanders and other SOF leaders, I would emphasize a couple significant distinctions: attitude and inherent joint mindedness⁴.

The attitude to which I refer is one of confidence and dedication to the mission. It has nothing to do with career field and everything to do with getting the job done, no matter what it takes. Rather than look at a difficult mission task and list reasons why it cannot be accomplished, an Air Commando will seek out ways in which it can.

This attitude has sometimes been mistaken for arrogance or disregard for the rules, but it is the Air Commando's skills, maturity, and judgment which allow him or her to independently analyze the situation and determine the acceptable level of risk. When Air Commandos are asked to perform a mission, they know it is important enough to have been sent their way in the first place. With full knowledge of the limits of personnel, equipment, and regulations, Air Commandos seek, construct, and present creative solutions to the appropriate level of command authority for execution. Simply put: Air Commandos apply tough critical thinking to evaluate the problem set against actual limitations rather than constraining themselves to procedures established for common denominator type situations.

It was this no-fail attitude that led to some of the most innovative missions in U.S. military history. Even before General Hap Arnold coined the term "Air Commando" in reference to the air support Lt Cols Cochran and Alison provided the Chindits in Burma, American Airmen answered the call to go above and beyond the normal line of duty. Lt Col Jimmy Doolittle displayed this attitude when he launched B-25s off the deck of an aircraft carrier to conduct his famous direct action against the Japanese mainland during World War II. This important mission carried strategic benefits for the nation – reward outweighed the risk. As the plan came together, many skeptics surely pointed out the limitations of launching 16

A no-fail attitude doesn't mean there aren't failures of course. As illustrated at Desert One and the raid on Sontay, no-fail missions don't always produce the expected outcome. Air Commandos' ability to recover from unexpected setbacks and continue the mission stems from the extensive training and education they receive. As its motto states, the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC) "turns Airmen into Air Commandos" by minimizing uncertainty and maximizing confidence for this very reason. Make no mistake, though, this is career-long education. Starting with lengthy initial qualification training in their respective weapon systems or specialty fields, Air Commandos begin building a knowledge toolkit to reach into during challenging operations. Expanding on training and operational experiences, the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS) provides the strategic context – the "why" and "when" to complement the "what" and "how." As Air Commandos gain experience on the battlefield, they return to AFSOTC for upgrade training and intermediate-level education to deepen and broaden their critical thinking and perspective beyond the tactical realm. Operational and academic experiences build an upward spiral of expertise, enhancing the Air Commando's confidence to make informed choices at critical moments in the joint operating environment.

This can-do attitude leads directly into the second Air Commando distinction: a deep personal connection to the joint special operations team. AFSOC's sister components within USSOCOM share this same attitude to get the job done. All bring distinct skills to the table and none wish to be the weak link. AFSOTC indoctrinates this attitude into new accessions within their first six months in the command through the USAFSOS Introduction to Special Operations Course (ISOC). The course explores the composition, capabilities and mission sets of each SOCOM component and their reliance on one another to accomplish national taskings. The ISOC provides the starter kit for credibility in the joint SOF community.

Training, education, and operational experience all build on each other. Chances are, soon after initial qualification, young Air Commandos will find themselves training, fighting, and living alongside their joint SOF brethren. Common experiences such as Joint/Combined Exchange Training (JCET) or other bilateral/multilateral exercises build the bonds that at some point down the road, in a non-descript compound in a remote hinterland, will pay dividends through well-rehearsed teamwork. In contrast, the GP Air Force supports joint missions in a far more generic fashion, whether as a unit or with "any Airmen" deployments – no repetitive relationship is built. AFSOF operators, on the other hand, typically know the SF, SEAL, or other SOF unit they



ground-based, medium bombers from a ship – for one thing, the crews couldn't turn around and land! However, limitations couldn't confine the imaginations of Doolittle's crews. Focusing on what the crews, the aircraft tech orders, and the regs said could be done, Doolittle's Raiders boosted American morale and drove the Japanese leadership to withdraw forces from other fronts to defend the home islands.

support down to the individual – e.g. C Company, 1/1 SFG with MAJ So-and-so commanding — because of the habitual working relationship they’ve forged with the members of those units. The greatest result of this relationship is trust in each other’s skills and knowledge which encourages a greater willingness to go the extra mile for the joint team to succeed.

In truth, the joint-minded nature of SOF goes beyond the DoD, and increasingly includes other agencies within the US government. As Admiral Olson, the USSOCOM Commander, recently stressed, today’s special operators must embody the 3-D Warrior concept – that is, to be proficient not only in defense, but in development and diplomacy as well. These skills require a solid working knowledge of the “interagency.” For instance, the Haiti earthquake relief operation was officially run by USAID and the hit on Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan was officially run by the CIA. It is entirely appropriate for civilian agencies to direct operations in their fields of expertise. However, no other organization can provide the rapid, decisive, and – when necessary – lethal elements that SOF delivers at a moment’s notice. It’s therefore critical for special operators to fully understand their dynamic operating environment and all the players involved.

Again, building on experience in the field, AFSOTC draws Air Commandos back to the classroom to deepen their awareness with intermediate-level USAFSOS courses on topics such as regionally tailored theater engagement, air command and control, and insurgent warfare. More than the average Airman, Air Commandos realize the potentially strategic impact of every tactical action. With this depth of operational context, Air Commandos display a savvy flexibility to adjust between defense, development, and diplomacy as the mission dictates. Whether in a high-stakes direct action or the patient, strategic indirect approach, the no-fail attitude and joint interconnections go hand in hand.

Clearly, making an Air Commando takes more than handing someone an AFSOC patch. In fact, training, indoctrination, and education alone are not sufficient to build the proper mind set of success in special ops. It takes months, if not years of building on that foundation with operational experience as part of the joint SOF team, along with cycling back through the training center at the right times to expand one’s spiral of expertise. When you wake up feeling the unquenchable desire to take on a new mission, no matter the cost, you’ve become an Air Commando! 



¹The SOF Truths:

1. Humans are more important than hardware
2. Quality is better than quantity
3. Special Operations Forces cannot be mass produced
4. Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur
5. Most Special Operations require non-SOF assistance

²HQ AFSOC/A1

³AFSOC’s 13 Critical Attributes: Integrity, Self-Motivation, Intelligence, Self-Discipline, Perseverance, Adaptability, Maturity, Judgment, Selflessness, Leadership, Skilled, Physical Fitness, and Family Strength

⁴While these conversations were too numerous to list individually, I must give particular credit to two PME theses: Lt Col Mike Jackson, “AFSOF, Integration, and Joint Warfighting: Closing the Training Loop to Force Multiply and Succeed,” Joint Advanced Warfighting School, 4 Apr 2008; and Lt Col Mark “Buck” Haberichter, “How to Make An Air Commando,” Air War College, 16 Feb 2011

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2011 Air Commando

JEFFREY BUCKMELTER

Colonel Jeffrey Buckmelter distinguished himself throughout a challenging and brilliant career in Air Force Special Operations assignments. Several of the tactics, techniques and procedures that he personally developed during his time as special tactics officer, Commander of the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, 24th Special Tactics Squadron and the 720th Special Tactics Group have had both operational and strategic impact on the special operations community. Demonstrating remarkable leadership he not only planned combat operations, but led his teams in daring combat operations. In this regard, then Lt Col Buckmelter was the senior controller on the ground during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada. Parachuting in to Point Salinas from 500 feet above ground, he controlled the air operations for 36 hours until relieved. Grenada was just one of the many classified contingency operations that Col Buckmelter participated in response to terrorist actions during his remarkable career. Detailed to the CIA in 1999 for a unique 6 month covert operation found him deeply involved in the continent of Africa. Col Buckmelter's outstanding leadership and vast experience in special tactics built an organization of battlefield airmen ready to respond to the call of 9/11 and the fight against violent extremist organizations in the 21st century. Among

his many decorations and awards is the Defense Superior Service Medal with 1 OLC, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal with "V" device, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal with 1 OLC, the Meritorious Service Medal as well as a Master Parachutist badge with over 850 military jumps. Col Buckmelter's outstanding contributions reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.

RICHARD L. COMER

Maj Gen Richard L. Comer distinguished himself through outstanding sustained performance as an Air Commando throughout his long and distinguished career. Several tactics, techniques and procedures he developed during his time as an Assistant Operations Officer, Operations Officer and Commander of the 20th Special Operations Squadron are still used by Air Commandos prosecuting the global war on terror in combat today. As the 20th SOS Squadron Commander, then Lt Col Comer teamed with Apache Helicopters from the United States Army and using the unique capabilities of the MH 53 PAVE LOW helicopter, led them across the Iraq border to destroy enemy radar sites and create a corridor for the ensuing air campaign that began OPERATION DESERT STORM. As a leader, Gen Comer is unsurpassed as

he commanded at the Operations, Group and Wing levels and served as the Deputy Commanding General Joint Special Operations Command. After these demanding assignments Gen Comer was assigned as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy

and Missions in the office for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict. Following that key assignment, Gen Comer was Vice-Commander of the Air Force Special Operations Command during the extremely critical period immediately after 9/11 where his vast experience was crucial to ensuring the right forces were deployed on time and with the right assets and mission skills to take the fight to Al Qaeda. Additionally, Gen Comer has served as a key mentor to many Air Commando flag officers today. The singularly distinguished accomplishments of Gen Comer have had far reaching and lasting impacts on Air Force Special Operations and reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.

RICHARD W. CRUTCHFIELD

CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield distinguished himself by exemplary performance throughout his twenty six years of outstanding service in the United States Air Force. Chief Crutchfield moved very quickly upward through every level of enlisted ranks seeking greater responsibilities and training opportunities. A former 720th Special Tactics Group Chief Enlisted Manager, he was directly responsible for worldwide organization, training and equipping Combat Control and Para rescue forces for augmentation and permanent manning for the Joint Special Operations Command. Chief Crutchfield has led his men on countless overt and covert combat and humanitarian missions throughout the world. Early in his career his exceptional leadership and combat experience was evident as he led his teammates in combat and training missions in Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Okinawa, Japan, Taiwan and the Republic of the Philippines. While earning several victories in Volant Rodeos competing against worldwide combat control units from both United States and friendly nations combat



Hall of Fame Inductees

control forces, he simultaneously led his squadron to earn outstanding ratings during major command Readiness Inspections. Among his many decorations and awards is the Bronze Star, the Meritorious Service Medal with 6 OLC's, the Air Medal with 1 OLC and the Air Force Commendation Medal with 4 OLC's. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of CMSgt Crutchfield reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.

GEORGE C. FERKES

Colonel George C. Ferkes is the epitome of an Air Commando and is revered for his character, integrity and outstanding commitment to special operations. As a distinguished leader, extraordinary commander and highly decorated Vietnam combat veteran, Col Ferkes has made monumental contributions to the Air Force and special operations community. Throughout his 30 year active duty military career he has embodied the valiant spirit, pride and unique attitude that personify an Air Commando. Always at the forefront of special operations capabilities and actions, he was a key participant and primary crewmember in Operation Eagle Claw, the military mission to rescue American hostages being held in Iran. Following this failed rescue attempt he was selected and flew in Project Honey Badger preparing for another rescue attempt and while there, made significant contributions to the fixed-wing night vision goggle procedures. While assigned to the Joint Special Operations Command in Ft Bragg as a joint air operations staff officer, he was deeply involved in planning the invasion of Grenada and supported operations associated with the 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847 as well as the 1985 Achille Lauro cruise ship hijacking. From his heroic efforts during the trying times of Desert One to the numerous memorials, projects and

boards he is involved with today, Col Ferkes exemplifies sacrifice and service. Among his many decorations and awards is the Silver Star, the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished flying Cross, Defense Meritorious Service Medal with 1 OLC, Meritorious Service Medal with 2 OLC's and the Air Medal with 8 OLC's Col Ferkes' outstanding contributions reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.

TIMOTHY R. MINISH

Colonel Timothy R. Minish distinguished himself while assigned to multiple Air Commando organizations during his outstanding twenty-five year military career. In each, he left a legacy of successful leadership and improvements in helicopter combat tactics and mission planning. Early on he greatly improved and refined helicopter gunnery, multi-ship formation, electronic-countermeasures tactics and mission planning. Many of these tactics were used by helicopter crews during Operation JUST CAUSE in 1989 and continue to the present day War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. Colonel Minish's defining achievement was his spider route mission planning. In 1990 as the squadron's lead planner, Colonel Minish capitalized on the MH-53J's new enhanced navigation system and developed a network of over one hundred data points allowing Pave Low crews to rapidly execute a combat mission. Early in Operation DESERT STORM, these spider routes assisted 20th Special Operations Squadron aircrews in the successful rescue of a United States Navy pilot and other

joint special operations missions. Eight years later during the Kosovo conflict, Colonel Minish guided his team of Plans Officers in building spider routes into Serbia where again, special operations aircrews successfully recovered United States Air Force pilots averting their capture. Later as Commander of the Joint Special Operations Air Component, he led the application of specialized airpower supporting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among his many awards and decorations are the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal with 1 OLC, the Meritorious service Medal with 4 OLC, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, and the Air Medal with 3 OLC. Colonel Minish's outstanding contributions reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations and the United States Air Force.



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2011 Commander's Leadership Awards



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 commander. Their outstanding accomplishments make them truly deserving of this prestigious recognition.

*The Air Commando Association is proud to sponsor these annual awards.
Presentation is at the annual reunion banquet.*

Captain Michael H. Baird distinguished himself as Flight Commander and Evaluator Pilot, 34th Special Operations Squadron, 1st Special Operations Group. While deployed to Afghanistan and Africa, he commanded 102 combat missions and accumulated 541 combat hours. As Mission Commander during three separate deployments, Captain Baird led 85 personnel through 722 combat sorties and 3,943 combat hours, directly resulting in the capture of 120 high-value enemy personnel and the death of 197 enemy combatants.

Technical Sergeant Christopher R. Bowser distinguished himself as Special Tactics Squadron Element Leader. While deployed to Iraq, he masterfully integrated and controlled more than 185 aircraft in support of 20 direct action raids that led to the capture of 15 high-level al Qaeda operatives.

Staff Sergeant Robert W. Calhoun distinguished himself as Military Working Dog Handler, 1st Special Operations Security Forces Squadron. While deployed to Iraq, Sergeant Calhoun and his dog Rony accumulated more than 1,000 hours outside the wire searching and clearing more than 2,000 miles of dangerous convoy routes laced with explosive pressure plates and roadside bombs. In all, they discovered and neutralized over 200 improvised explosive devices planted along the roadsides.

Technical Sergeant Clint T. Campbell was attached to a US Army Special Forces Team as the primary Joint Terminal Attack Controller conducting combat operations in Kandahar Province. Following a helicopter assault, his team began clearing their objective while engaged by the enemy for 10.5 hours. As friendly casualties started mounting, he moved into the kill zone and called in close air support within danger close proximity to friendly forces to neutralize the enemy. His bravery and aggressiveness resulted in the successful extraction of 3 wounded, the breaking of a merciless ambush and the killing of 20 enemy fighters.

1st Lieutenant Jared B. Davis distinguished himself as a Flight Systems Officer, 193d Special Operations Squadron. Since receiving his initial Flight Systems Officer qualification in October 2010, Lieutenant Davis' extraordinary efforts included flying more than 450 hours, including 24 combat sorties and 181 combat hours in support of OPERATION UNIFIED PROTECTOR in the EC 130J model aircraft.

First Lieutenant Susan C. Frank distinguished herself by exceptionally meritorious achievement as J4 Deputy Director, Combined Joint Special Operations Air Component, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command, in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM, and NEW DAWN. She superbly managed movement to forward locations for 2,000 special operations personnel, thus enabling capture of 1,800 detainees and killing of 475 insurgents.

Staff Sergeant Jay D. Galea distinguished himself as an Instructor Sensor Operator and Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of Weapons and Tactics, 33d Special Operations Squadron. Sergeant Galea flew over 90 combat missions and collected more than 194 hours of full motion video. The actionable intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance he provided enabled the kill or capture of 101 Joint Task Force targets.

Captain Phillip M. George distinguished himself as a Special Operations Air Liaison Officer, 17th Air Support Operations Squadron, Fort Benning Georgia. Captain George expertly led his flight of nine highly-skilled joint terminal attack controllers through two combat deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq. During this time, his men supported seven joint task forces where they executed over 150 direct action missions resulting in 199 enemy killed in action and 428 enemy captured. Captain George was selected as the U.S. Air Force ALO of the Year for 2010.

Technical Sergeant Gary L. Gessendorf distinguished himself as Evaluator Flight Engineer, 550th Special Operations Squadron, 58 Operations Group, 58 Special Operations Wing, Kirtland AFB. Sergeant Gessendorf augmented the 9th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan as Operations Superintendent and Mission Flight Engineer. Sergeant Gessendorf flew 50 combat sorties, and personally moved 300,000 pounds of cargo, 531 passengers, and 7 vehicles in support of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force.

Technical Sergeant Jason P. Lemke distinguished himself as MC-130H Evaluator Loadmaster, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan. While supporting Operation NEW DAWN he instructed three loadmasters, enabled 193 combat sorties, and delivered 1,074 Special Forces personnel and 270 tons of critical equipment to multiple combat locations. In the wake of a devastating earthquake and tsunami that rocked mainland Japan, he efficiently airlifted more than 30,000 pounds of fuel and 5,600 pounds of food and water supporting Operation TOMODACHI, saving countless lives.

Captain Joseph D. McCane distinguished himself as Aircraft Commander and Security Flight Commander at his Data Masked unit. Captain McCane was deployed 188 days in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation NEW DAWN, where he flew 161 combat sorties, 668 combat hours, and facilitated the capture of 43 enemy personnel including Foreign Fighter Facilitators, Al Qaeda high value individuals, and a vehicle born, improvised explosive device cell leader.

Captain Jeff D. McMaster distinguished himself as Chief of Plans and Tactics, and AC-130H Instructor Pilot and Weapons Officer, 16th Special Operations Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base. While deployed, Captain McMaster served as the first Combined Joint Special Operations Air Detachment-Alpha Strike and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Operations Officer, where he directed the operations of eight aircraft in three locations. Captain McMaster also successfully led a 14-member crew on 68 combat missions in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, resulting in 81 insurgents killed in action.

Captain Eli G. Mitchell distinguished himself as Director of Operations, 321st Special Tactics Squadron, 352d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom. He astutely employed 17 joint terminal attack controllers to fulfill combat taskings in Afghanistan and Iraq, resulting in the execution of 121 combat operations and removing 127 insurgents from the battlefield. His support enabled Joint Task Force 10 to prosecute 35 combat missions, take 19 detainees, and further stabilize the Afghan region. Captain Mitchell also integrated five pararescuemen into an elite joint task force which saved 19 coalition personnel and salvaged 2.5 million-dollars-worth of critical helicopter parts.

Captain Cary D. Mittelmark distinguished himself as Chief, Current Operations, 551st Special Operations Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. As mission commander, he led a team of 14 personnel executing 56% of Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines total air support, flying 188 missions, delivering 42,000 pounds of cargo, and 420 passengers. As aircraft commander, Captain Mittelmark piloted 51 sorties including flawless execution of two close air support evacuation sorties delivering two Armed Forces Philippine soldiers with gunshot wounds to life saving care facilities.

Captain Brent W. Murrell distinguished himself as Chief of Weapon and Tactics, 919th Operations Support Squadron, Duke Field. Captain Murrell expertly led the SOF tactics community by bringing together three geographically separate tactics shops with three different weapon systems to form a SOF tactics symposium. This symposium resulted in a more cohesive and well rounded program providing effective training to all of AFSOC. He also built new theater specific scenarios combining simulator and aircraft which trained over 125 aircrew members for worldwide high-threat combat operations.

Captain Justin W. Norton distinguished himself as Chief of Mobility, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan. Captain Norton synthesized the efforts of his flight to ensure the seamless deployment of twenty squadron personnel in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Philippines. Captain Norton's superior flying ability was evident during Operation TOMODACHI when he launched on thirty minutes notice and flew the first relief mission into Sendai airport, enabling critical supplies to flow into tsunami ravaged Japan.

Technical Sergeant Joshua M. Ort distinguished himself as Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Weapons and Tactics, 11th Intelligence Squadron, Twenty-third Air Force, Hurlburt Field. While deployed, he skillfully managed 1,400 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance requirements for 23 joint terminal attack controllers enabling 682 combat operations in Regional Command-South, Afghanistan. As a result, 3,800 hours of full-motion video were exploited to facilitate air superiority enabling the abrupt kill and capture of 160 enemy combatants.

Technical Sergeant Jared J. Pietras distinguished himself as Combat Controller and Chief Joint Terminal Attack Control Instructor, 321st Special Tactics Squadron, 352d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall. Sergeant Pietras' demanding regimen prepared 12 Joint Terminal Attack Controllers for combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq ultimately leading to the prosecution of 99 combat missions that carved 82 insurgents from the battlefield. As a perfect illustration of his all-encompassing superb performance, Sergeant Pietras earned the Noncommissioned Officer Academy's Commandant Award for leadership ahead of 134 peers.

Captain Matthew M. Savage distinguished himself as the Director of Operations, Data Masked unit. During this time, Captain Savage expertly led the Air Force's most elite ground special operations force for Presidential and Secretary of Defense directed operations. Despite his junior rank, Capt Savage was selected as the Operations officer for a deployed Joint Task Force, where he planned and executed a United States and United Kingdom joint operation resulting in the capture of one of Britain's most sought after terrorist suspects. Captain Savage was responsible for briefing US Ambassadors, State Department officials, interagency senior leaders and combatant command officers on Advance Force Operations, human intelligence and a 300-man surrogate force integration plan that resulted in full concurrence for combat execution.

Technical Sergeant Howell M. Simpson distinguished himself as an EC-130J Commando Solo Dedicated Crew Chief while assigned to the 193d Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. He represented the Aircraft Maintenance Squadron in the development of the initial Consumable Readiness Spares Packages which supports the Commando Solo Narrowband/Baseband (NB3) modification and evolving missions with EC-130J "Super-J" aircraft. He has unselfishly deployed numerous times. Also, Sergeant Simpson was a lead trainer for the 27th SOAMXS/522 AMU for Cannon AFB maintenance Crew Chiefs as they prepare to receive the new MC-130J aircraft.

Technical Sergeant Jason S. Weiss distinguished himself as Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge at his Data Masked unit. Sergeant Weiss deployed to Afghanistan filling a physician billet for a select joint medical unit. He provided unmatched care to a 1,300 member Task Force and certified 125 Afghan citizens for airlift. During his tour, Sergeant Weiss encountered an individual on the camp who had lost consciousness. He immediately began CPR, coordinated transport, and continued care in the Emergency Room. His decisive action and outstanding care saved a valuable teammate's life. Additionally, Sergeant Weiss garnered Distinguished Graduate honors at the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy.

Captain Benjamin G. Williams distinguished himself as Flight Commander, Twenty-third Air Force, Cannon Air Force Base. Captain Williams powered a team of 15 highly skilled Total Force Airmen to build 247 analytical intelligence products for 437 Joint Special Operations Task Force targets in the command's newest Distributed Ground Station squadron supporting two major combat areas of operations. The team's intelligence analysis during 9,843 hours of persistent surveillance drove 12 airstrikes, kept 725 elite special operations forces safe during 37 direct action missions, and resulted in 109 enemy killed or captured, including the elimination of a senior Taliban suicide vest facilitator.

Airman First Class FNU Winarto distinguished himself as Cultural Advisor, United States Air Force Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field. As Hurlburt Field's only active-duty native Indonesian speaker, Airman Winarto seized the opportunity to mentor 42 combat aviation advisors in pre-deployment cultural and linguistic immersion, including in-flight training. Additionally, he translated over 240 pages of Indonesian technical documents, saving over \$7,000 and accelerating deployment preparations by two weeks.

Senior Airman Justin T. Woolie distinguished himself as Electrical and Environmental Systems Journeyman, 27th Special Operations Maintenance Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base. Airman Woolie displayed natural leadership ability when he led MC-130W pressurization testing after an in-flight gun boot failure while deployed in support of Operation NEW DAWN. His dedication to the mission ensured the high demand aircraft was promptly returned to service which contributed to 281 combat sorties and 156 enemies captured. His maintenance actions also led to the first MC 130W Dragon Spear successfully firing munitions in combat and recording the first enemy killed in action from that aircraft.





Medal of Honor

Recipient

**John
Levitow**

By Harry J. Bright

In times of life threatening danger, ordinary people will perform extraordinary acts of bravery. The story of John Levitow exemplifies this statement completely.



Airman First Class John L. Levitow was a loadmaster on one of the C-47 gunships flying out of Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. As part of his loadmaster duties, John would set the ejection and ignition controls on the Mark-24 Magnesium Flares. He would then hand the flare to the gunner to be tossed out the cargo door after releasing the safety pin. These flares were used for night time illumination for the ground troops; for incoming fighter planes to see their targets; and to allow the pilot of the gunship to see his target area. The flare was three feet long, weighed twenty seven pounds, burns at approximately 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and gave illumination of 2,000,000 candlepower. When they were tossed out of the cargo door an attached parachute would open, and

then the flare would ignite giving up to three minutes of illumination.

On the night of February 24, 1969, after flying a four and a half hour mission, Spooky 71 was directed to the Long Binh Army Base, a few miles northeast of Saigon. The base was under a heavy mortar attack from enemy forces and was in need of fire support from the gun ship. Major Kenneth Carpenter, the pilot of Spooky 71, flew in and engaged the enemy with the aircraft's three 7.62 mini guns. He was flying in at 1,000 feet altitude, low enough to inflict maximum damage. An enemy 82-mm mortar hit the plane's right wing and exploded, leaving a large hole approximately two feet in diameter in the wing. Over 3,500 pieces of shrapnel went

through the fuselage of the plane, wounding each of the five crewmen in the cargo area.

At the moment the plane was hit by the mortar, John had just handed a flare to Airman Ellis Owen, the plane's gunner. Airman Owen had his finger through the safety pin ring waiting for the command from the Major Carpenter to throw it out the cargo door. Once the safety pin was removed, there would be a 10 second delay before the parachute would open, then another 10 second delay for the magnesium to ignite. The impact from the mortar explosion caused Spooky 71 to fly out of control, banking at about 30 degrees to the right. This, along with his injuries, caused Airman Owen to drop the Mark-24 Flare, releasing the safety pin and activating the arming sequence. The flare was now into the 20 second activation phase.



Levitow's heroics saved Spooky 71, but it was shot to pieces. At top, a sheet-metal repair crew patches some of its 3,500 bullet holes. (Photo courtesy Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute/Enlisted Heritage Hall)

John had received over 40 shrapnel wounds in his side, back, and legs. He was bleeding heavily. The gunner was wounded and had fallen to the floor dangerously close to the open cargo door. Even with his injuries, John managed to reach that crew member and pull him away from the open door to safety. At that moment he saw the activated flare rolling freely inside the cargo area amongst the several thousand rounds of live ammunition for the mini guns and the remaining flares. John tried to grab the flare but was unable to reach it. With severe bleeding from his wounds, and his right leg almost paralyzed from injuries, John managed to throw himself onto the flare and push it to the open door. There he shoved it outside just before it ignited safely away from the plane. A short time after that John fell into unconsciousness. A blood trail gave evidence of his path of actions.

Major Carpenter was able to regain control of the airplane and land it back at their home base. Ambulances and medical personnel were waiting for the injured. John and one other crewman, who was also severely wounded, were flown to a

hospital in Japan where John spent over 2 months recovering from his injuries.

It was only after landing the plane that Major Carpenter learned of the actions of Airman Levitow. Seeing the damage and hearing the statements from the crew describing the heroic actions of Airman Levitow, Major Carpenter realized that certain destruction and loss of life of Spooky 71 was prevented by the actions of John. The blood trail also told the story. Major Carpenter would promptly submit John for the Medal of Honor. This was the first mission John and Major Carpenter flew together. John was returning a favor to the regular loadmaster who had flown a mission for him earlier when he had been ill.

This mission was number 181 for John. After recovering from his injuries, he returned to Vietnam and flew 20 additional missions. After completing his SEA assignment he returned to the States and finished out his military obligation as a loadmaster on C-141 aircraft at Norton Air Force Base, California at the rank of Sergeant. He returned to his home town of Glastonbury, CT, and entered into the civilian work force with the State of Connecticut in the field of veteran's affairs. This work consisted of developing and designing veteran's programs with the Department of Veteran Affairs. John was Assistant to the Commissioner.

On Armed Forces Day, May 14, 1970 President Richard M. Nixon conducted a special ceremony at the White House to honor 12 Armed Service members with the Medal of Honor. Five were Army, three were Navy, two were Marines, and two were Air Force. John L. Levitow was one of the Air Force recipients. What makes John Levitow stand out from the others is that he is the only loadmaster, and at that time, the first and only enlisted Airman to receive the Medal of Honor.

In less than twenty seconds on the night of February 24, 1969 Airman John L. Levitow performed acts of bravery that have become legend in the U.S. Air Force. For those actions the Air Force has recognized him in several different ways.

- He has been included in the Air Force Professional Fitness Exam Booklet.
- There is the Levitow Honor Graduate Award presented to the top graduate in the Airman Leadership School; the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy; and the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Academy.
- The 737 Training Group headquarters building at Lackland AFB was named in his honor.
- In 1998 a C-17 Globemaster III was named in his honor by the Air Mobility Command, the first aircraft to be named for an enlisted person. 'THE SPIRIT OF SGT. JOHN L. LEVITOW'. John was present for the dedication and unveiling in California.
- Also in 1998 he was added to the Hurlburt Field Walk of Fame, which was established to recognize Medal of Honor recipients.
- He was the Airlift-Tanker Association's "Hall of Fame" inductee in 1998.

• The Air Commando Association has sponsored the leadership school awards in his name at both Hurlburt Field and Cannon Air Force Base.

In 1988 John was invited as the guest speaker at the Leadership School graduation at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. While there he visited the Air Mobility Command Museum and was impressed with the displays and the people that he met. He later donated his service ribbons, aircrew wings, name tag, and several of his photographs which are now on display in the Hallway of Heroes.

In 1999 John was diagnosed with cancer. For over eighteen months he fought a gallant battle, but died on November 8, 2000. He was fifty five years old. He was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, section 66, site 7107 on November 17, 2000.

Lesser Known Facts

John started his Air Force career in the 438 Civil Engineering Squadron at McGuire AFB, New Jersey, as an Electrical Power Line Specialist. He cross trained to Loadmaster in October 1967 and crewed C-130 Hercules transports in the 45th Military Airlift Squadron at McGuire AFB.

When John arrived at the White House for the Medal of Honor ceremony he was in civilian clothes as he was no longer in the Air Force. They wanted him in a uniform, so they collected uniform parts and had him in a make shift uniform for the pictures and ceremony. They did not have a name tag for him. In the oil portrait of him that was later commissioned, and painted from the official photograph taken at the White House, the artist added the name tag. Both pictures are on display at the AMC museum.

His house was burglarized and only three items were stolen; a bottle of scotch, a piggy bank, and his Medal of Honor. This made headline news in the local media. His medal was never recovered. Another medal was made for him, but it never had the significance of the original.

There are a total of eighteen Air Force personnel that received the Medal of Honor. John was the sixteenth. William H. Pitsenbarger was the seventeenth, and Chief Master Sergeant Richard Etchberger was the eighteenth for his actions at Lima Site 85, where he was killed on March 11, 1968. The medal was awarded to him posthumously on September 21, 2010.

John made it a personal mission to have the Air Force Cross that had been awarded to A1C William H. Pitsenbarger upgraded to the Medal of Honor for his actions and life sacrifice as a pararescueman on April 11, 1966 at Cam My, Vietnam while aiding Army troops under

attack. This was finally done on December 8, 2000 making Pitsenbarger the second enlisted Airman to receive the Medal of Honor, but sadly he had been killed in action.

John reportedly stated "I will give them back my medal if they will award it to William Pitsenbarger". A1C William H. Pitsenbarger became the 17th Air Force recipient of the Medal of Honor on December 8, 2000. This was one month after John had died.

John L. Levitow, born November 1, 1945 in Hartford Connecticut

Entered United States Air Force, June 6, 1966

Honorable Discharge from the Air Force, April 3, 1970

Medal of Honor Recipient, May 14, 1970

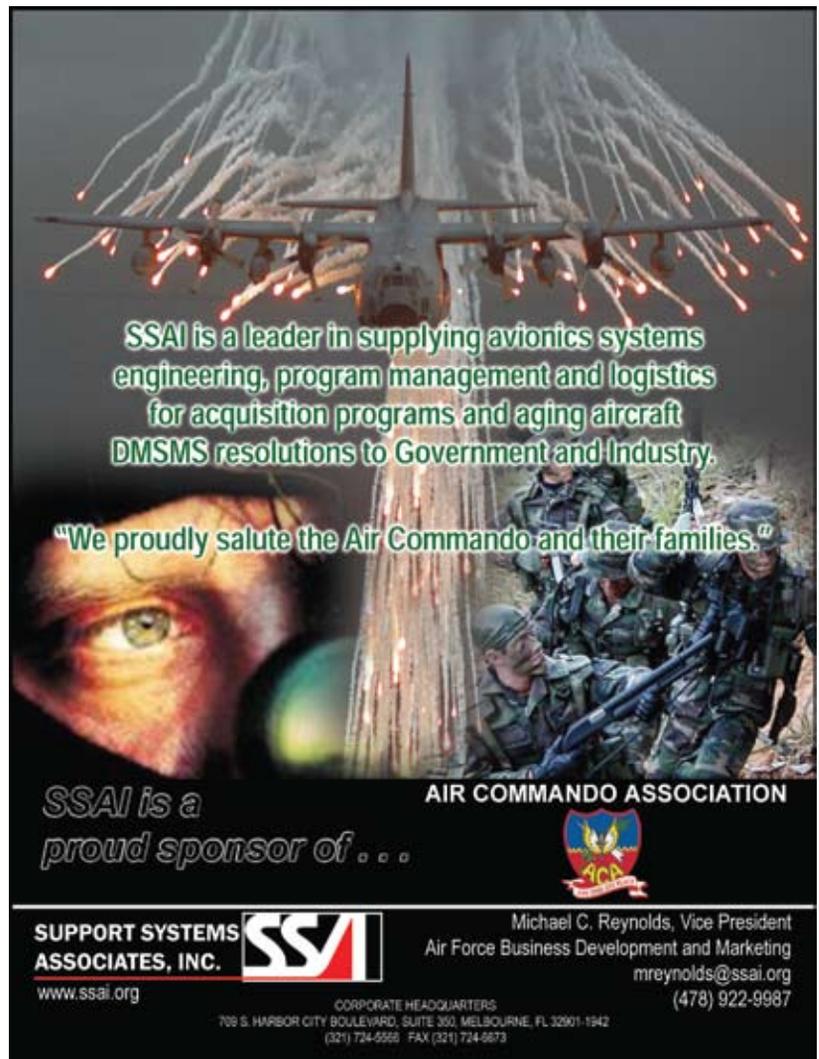
Died November 8, 2000

Sources for this article: World Wide Web

Ron Gough, personal friend of John Levitow

Air Mobility Command Museum, Dover Air Force Base, DE

Researched, compiled, and written by Harry Bright 



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As my brothers and sisters before me, I am proud to step into history as a member of the Air Force Special Operations Command. I will walk with pride with my head held high, my heart and attitude will show my allegiance to God, country and comrades. When unable to walk another step, I will walk another mile. With freedom my goal, I will step into destiny with pride and the Air Force Special Operations Command.