

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

HADR

**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
AND DISASTER RELIEF**

**Air Commandos Respond
to Earthquake in Haiti**

**Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE:
Tsunami Relief in Southeast Asia**

**Operation DAMAYAN
Aid To Philippine Nation**

**Combat Aviation Advisors
Humanitarian Operations in Lebanon**



Vol 10: Issue 1

**Foreword by Norm Brozenick
and Dave Mobley**

Air Commando JOURNAL



Publisher

Norm Brozenick / info@aircommando.org

Editor-in-Chief

Paul Harmon / info@aircommando.org

Managing Editor

Richard Newton

Senior Editor

Scott McIntosh / bookrevieweditor@aircommando.org

Contributing Editor

Ron Dains

Contributing Editor

Joel Higley

Layout Editor

Jeanette Elliott / jeanette@aircommando.org

Public Affairs/Marketing Director

Melissa Gross / melissa@aircommando.org



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

Lt Gen Marshall “Brad” Webb
Former AFSOC Commander

(Used with permission by Lt Gen Webb)

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Air Commando Association

P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569

Telephone: (850) 581-0099

Fax: (850) 581-8988

Web Site: www.aircommando.org

Email: info@aircommando.org

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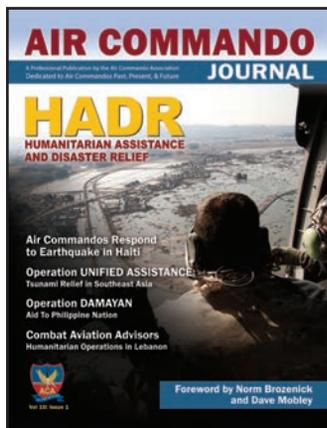
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ON THE COVER:

Maj John Traxler (center), 320th Special Tactics Squadron commander, and a joint team of US Air Force and Marine Corps search and rescue specialists photograph the disastrous aftermath of Japan's earthquake and tsunami near the Sendai Airport, March 2011. The images helped them plan future search and rescue missions. (USAF photo by SSgt Samuel Morse)



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FOREWORD

We hope this issue of the *ACJ* finds you and your family safe and well. Get ready. You're about to experience first-hand accounts of Air Commandos helping disaster victims who found themselves anything but safe and well.

First reports of a disaster travel fast. Some are accurate, some are not. Emerging eyewitness accounts, data from surface, subsurface, airborne, and satellite sensors, intelligence updates, and media reports help inform emerging realities. Extensive loss of life, insufficient response capacity, and mounting uncertainty often compel foreign governments to request emergency assistance from the international community.

Air Commandos are leaders among our nation's rapid responders for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief taskings at home and abroad. Air Commandos accomplish life-saving objectives and tasks without waiting to be told what to do or how to do it. Providers of specialized air power, they alleviate suffering by delivering water, food, medicine, medical care, and shelter regardless of environmental conditions. Masters of air-ground integration, Air Commandos return airfields to service, establish command and control nodes, find and relocate missing and displaced persons, and when requested, assist in recovering the dead. As respected leaders of multinational operations, Air Commandos pursue unity of effort between responders to optimize effects and mitigate hazards.

Air Commandos of every capability are made available to save lives. Medical expertise may include deployment medicine, expeditionary readiness, health care, and disaster preparedness. Mission support prowess may be comprised of force protection, communications, contracting, engineering, personnel, and transportation elements. While maintainers prepare to sustain deployed aircraft in austere conditions, "loggies" draft plans to increase throughput at forward locations. Operations personnel, including command and control, special tactics, aviation advisors, surgical, intelligence, and aircrew tweak plans and recheck gear. Public affairs officers stand ready. The Execute order comes quickly, "Launch! Upon arrival Air Commandos may find thousands of victims perished, missing, displaced, injured, or without life sustaining capability. Villages, cities, and critical infrastructure may no longer function or exist. Transportation nodes may be unusable. Fear of infectious disease outbreaks mount with every passing day. Time is of the essence; the expected death toll rises; the number of responders quickly grows. What must we do right now? Sequentially or simultaneously? Are we intentionally updating and mitigating risks? Who needs to know what's happening? How do we improve information-sharing and meaningful collaboration between the affected government, embassy country team, and a myriad of state-sponsored, non-governmental, private voluntary, and multinational corporate responders. Ask certain responders to cease disruptive "contributions." Transition relevant tasks to conventional forces and later arriving responders. Best inform the media.

Turn the pages to see how Air Commandos answered these and other questions during humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in Aceh Province, Indonesia; Bangkok and southern Thailand; Haiti; the Philippines; Afghanistan; and Beirut, Lebanon. We know you'll be immensely proud of what Air Commandos accomplished and how they found a way to get it done.

With great admiration and respect for our Air Commandos...patriots, warriors, and rapid responders.



Norm Brozenick
Maj Gen, USAF (Retired)
ACA Chairman



Dave Mobley
Col, USAF (Retired)
ACA Treasurer



CHINDIT CHATTER

Welcome to the Spring 2021 edition of the *Air Commando Journal*. As was highlighted in the foreword, this issue focuses on Air Commandos as America's first responders around the world when disaster strikes. The stories, written by those who were on the ground, truly



Paul Harmon,
Col, USAF (Retired)
Editor-in-Chief

shine the spotlight on our great country's humanitarian spirit. We hope to have similar articles in the future and also present articles on Air Commandos whose bravery and gallantry were recognized by the award of the Air Force Cross.

Since our last issue, our Air Commando community lost two of its iconic members: Lt Gen Leroy Manor and Lt Col Jerry Klingaman. Both men served in difficult times and rose to the challenge to achieve

success for our nation. You can read more about the lives and service of both General Manor and Colonel Klingaman, in the tributes on the ACA blog at www.aircommando.org.

Speaking of our website, last month the ACA launched

an optional 'members only' log-in for the site. As a member, you now have access to unique content on www.aircommando.org which is unavailable to non-members. You can also now view and update your contact information, search to find fellow members, peruse and comment on our members-only blog, view photos submitted by other members, and read first-hand personal stories from Air Commandos, plus a lot more!

As you know, our Air Commando Foundation works quietly behind the scenes to provide critically needed support and financial assistance to Air Commandos and their families, past, present, and future. As an update, last year the Foundation distributed \$32,835 to Air Commandos in need, and so far in 2021 the ACF has provided nearly \$21,000 in financial support to Air Commando families. Your support and continued contributions to this great effort are what makes this possible. On behalf of those families, Thank You!

The ACA's 2021 annual convention is still on track for 14-17 October 2021. The planning continues and a go-no go announcement will be made in July allowing time for you to make plans to attend. Hope to see you there!

Finally, as always, we appreciate your feedback and comments on the *Air Commando Journal*. You can drop us a line (or two) at info@aircommando.org to let us know how we are doing and offer your suggestions for articles and themes.

Thank you.



The *Air Commando Journal* wants to hear from you!!

Send in your comments for the HOTWASH.

Online blog at www.aircommando.org • Email: info@aircommando.org

HOTWASH

McCoskrie Threshold Foundation Article

I very much enjoyed your recent article in the *Air Commando Journal* regarding the Foundation and the role John Grove played in moving it along. I had the pleasure of flying with him at NKP in 1971. I also attended the “special” 21st SOS reunion he hosted during an ACA Convention some years ago.



John Grove

I did want to point out an error in the article, though. In the first paragraph of the article, it is stated that John was a helicopter pilot with the 606th Air Commando Squadron at NKP. In fact, he was a CH-53 pilot with the 21st Special Operations Squadron at NKP.

Bill Follette
Maj, USAF (Ret)
CH-3E Pilot
21st SOS 1971/2
302nd SOS 1977/1988

Editor's Note: Mr Follette is correct. In the first paragraph of McCoskrie Threshold Foundation, Humanitarian Arm of the ACA article, (Air Commando Journal, Vol 9-3), we made a mistake. In December 1970, John Grove was assigned to the 21st Special Operations Squadron flying CH-53s at NKP, Thailand and not the 606th Air Commando Squadron. Thanks for the feedback!

Support for MTF

I hope you are all having a good day! I'm writing to let you know that we received the last MTF check for the John Grove High School.

Thank you for sharing so much love and hard work with the children in the Mico Quemado Mountains. Your help will

continue on in their lives and hearts and will impact future generations for some long time to come. A new generation has been inspired to reach for better conditions in their lives through education. A great change has been brought about in the minds of these precious people.

Three cheers for so many accomplishments and lives bettered! In addition to the school, MTF and BTC have done so much good together for the thousands and thousands who have benefited from our 40-foot sea container shipments through so many years. Thank you.

We are honored beyond description to be part of the Air Commando Family and history. In addition to all this, on a very personal level, you all were there after John passed. You helped fill a hole of loss and grief and have lifted us up with your friendship, enthusiasm, and faith. You have helped us keep going and for that we thank you with all our hearts!

God bless you all!
Rebecca
Bless the Children

Great issue, cover to cover!

Hall of Fame Inductions of Maj Gen Kingsley, the model gentleman warrior/leader; Col Barnett—long overdue IMHO; and J.D. Walker, who proves you can prosecute AFSOC biz and have fun doing it, as well as Maj Gen Haddad and Col Frakes—congratulations and thank you for your service.

Leadership Awards honoring the current generation of warriors, sharing just how sophisticated their ops and actions are today, as highlighted by their commander, Lt Gen Slife. Fantastic WWII and Vietnam-era articles, bringing reality to some of the mythological campaigns and ops for us follow-on Air Commandos with lessons still resonating decades later.

The MTF—great work done by the usual suspects (Sambogna, Connelly, Connors, Poole, Freeman, and many others) but education on the historical vision, giving, and legacy of John McCoskrie and John Grove. Great men all. Finally, Anytime Flight info. I missed the memo on this initiative while building a campus for our furred, finned, and feathered friends these past 5 years, and I certainly appreciate the challenges of funding worthy non-profits. Check's enroute, sorry for my lack of SA here.

VR,
Wild Bill sends
Bill Andersen, Col, USAF (Ret)
Emeritus Director,
Emerald Coast Wildlife Refuge
ACA Life Member #4363

Frequent Wind Phase I

Much appreciation for the *ACJ* staff's comprehensive and concise summary of Combat Control's contribution during the chaotic waning days of the Second Indo-Chinese War. Your editorial note identifying CCT's omission in the official records is typical of the Air Force's neglect of one of its own, and must be said one of the world's most versatile and courageous communities. Happily (though much too slowly in this Air Commando's opinion) that narrative is changing. Thanks again and keep up the great work!

Dan Schilling, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)
ACA Life Member #4190

Address Update

I don't want to miss any issues of *Air Commando [Journal]*, it's a great connection to the historical and the current actions and accomplishments of the Air Commandos.

Regards,
Mike Dugan, Gen, USAF (Ret)
ACA Life Member #648

2020 Commander's Leadership Awards



Capt Charles Spencer

I would like to thank the Association for recognizing one of my outstanding Airmen, Capt Charles Spencer, with the ACA 2020 Commander's Leadership Award. Our Group Commander presented it to Capt Spencer today.

Thank you
Lt Col Mike Hackman, 193 SOS Commander

A Tribute to the Son Tay Raiders

As the BUFFs muttered in and the Spads thundered by, on a blacked-out ramp at Udorn, an F-105 Weasel... (one of MY Weasels!) ... without markings, gutted by a SAM, dripping her life-fluids on the ramp in a revetment. I was one of the three kids dispatched to begin the battle damage repairs on, "Firebird Three" unaware of what had transpired that night until several months later.

After I had rotated back Stateside and had separated from active duty, I remember what you performed fifty years ago. I hoist a toast to you and your comrades-in-arms. Thank you for your sacrifice and devoted service. What a magnificent feat of airmanship! What a night, exemplified by professionalism and resolute bravery! I will not forget, never. No... not ever.

With my most profound respect and admiration, God bless you and yours.

Dave Hansen,
Airframe Repairman.
432nd FMS, 432nd TRW, Udorn,
RTAFB, Thailand. November 21, 1970
ACA Member #2835

Proud Air Commando Member

My father, Lt Col James R. Galluzzi (deceased 09/17/2019) was an Air Commando Association member. He attended numerous ACA Reunions which he thoroughly enjoyed. His ACA artifacts / memorabilia were proudly displayed at his funeral, he was buried with full military honors. We were stationed at Hurlburt Field 1968-1971 with the 4407th. Please forward this info to the ACA reunion committee to post in the next ACA publication.

We are proud to be Air Force!
Jo Anne Galluzzi-Clarke

WWII CAA,

Your latest ACA journal is outstanding, particularly Dan Jackson's article on my dad's WWII CAA outfit, the CACW.

Clay McCutchan, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)
ACA Life Member #1846

Editor-in-Chief,

I particularly enjoyed the article in the latest *Air Commando Journal* about the Chinese-American Composite Wing by Daniel Jackson, Major, USAF.

John Scott, Major, USAF, (Ret) ACA #806



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HOTWASH CONTINUED

ACJ Vol 9, Issue 2

A friend e-mailed me a copy of your outstanding journal. I was attempting to go to bed when I opened it and as an SF veteran who served two tours of duty with SOG running



missions across the fence into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, enjoyed the 50th Anniversary of Son Tay Raid. Then read the frank article on maintaining the CV-22, which also has a remarkable lack of self-defense when landing on an LZ. The stories on early action in OIF and the HH-3 Jolly Green Giant were fascinating.

In light of your book review on Richard Shultz's "The Secret War Against Hanoi" I would like to offer a suggested follow-up book review for your readers on the secret war where the Jolly Green Giants lived up to their amazing motto, "That Others May Live." The classic mission was October 5, 1968, where a nine-man recon team came up against 10,000 NVA - according to the NVA commanding officer of that battle. Lynne M. Black Jr., wrote an account of that day in his book *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, and in chapter six of my own book, *Across The Fence*, details that engagement where one Jolly Green Giant was shot down and two others were severely damaged while retrieving the six survivors of that recon team.

Regardless, keep up the good work.

John Stryker Meyer
RT Idaho - 68-70
Past President Special Operations Assoc.
Past President Special Forces Chap 78

The Passing of Lt Gen Leroy Manor

Hello. I was reading about the death of the General recently who lived in Shalimar and the article mentioned the ACA. Thought I would join since I was part of the 56th ACW at NKP, 1966-67. Colonel "Heinie" Aderholt was our wing king then. Nothing but about 400 ft of PSP for a runway. Had O-1, A-26, C-123, Laotian T-28s. and Jolly Greens for SAR. Lost a good family friend, Warren "Willie Pete" Smith, an O-1 pilot shot down in Laos. I have a photo of his aircraft on the side of a mountain North of the 38th parallel.



Lt Gen Leroy Manor

Allen Dodson
Col, USAF (Ret)



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Rolls-Royce IRS: proving itself in combat every day.

Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE



Tsunami Relief in Southeast Asia

By Lt Col Shane Muscato, USAF, and Lt Col Joey Sullivan, USAF

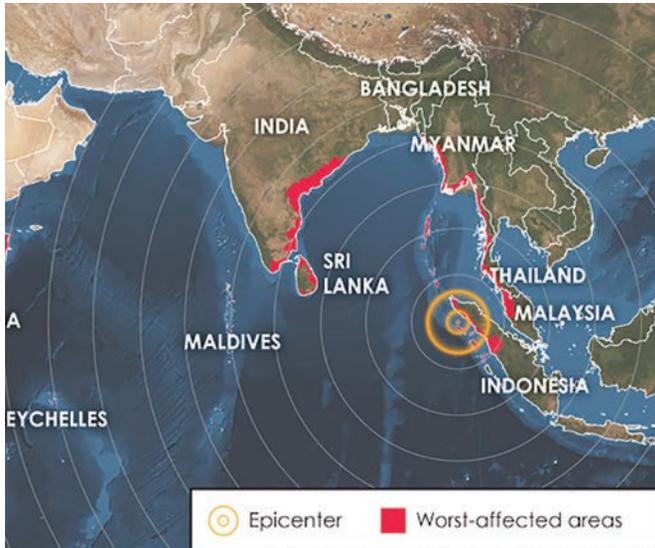
On 26 December 2004, a 9.3 magnitude earthquake struck under the Indian Ocean, about 160 kilometers from the west coast of Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The earthquake, the most powerful in over 40 years, caused the deadliest tsunami in recorded history. The tsunami's waves travelled more than 3,000 miles in six hours, leaving a trail of death and destruction as they made landfall. An estimated 5 million people across the region experienced the effects of the disaster, especially in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand. The resulting destruction badly damaged or destroyed entire communities, homes, businesses, tourist areas, and infrastructure (roads, bridges, power and telephone systems, and public buildings). For many, their means of livelihood and way of life were wiped out. In the hardest hit areas, social services were severely compromised or destroyed. In the face of this humanitarian crisis, the United States had to respond.

Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) personnel, led by the 353rd Special Operations Group (SOG) based at Kadena AB, Japan, played a key role in providing

humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) to Thailand and Indonesia as part of Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE—the US government response to the tsunami and its aftermath. This article focuses on the role AFSOC units played. Their rapid-responder capabilities—enabled by their speed, organic command and control (C2), unique mission sets, and the relationships they had established—were vital to the operation's overall success, but the operation did highlight shortcomings which would later need to be resolved.

Indonesia was the nearest country to the earthquake's epicenter, so it suffered the highest death toll and most damage to infrastructure. In less than an hour, the earthquake placed more than half a million people in need of lifesaving assistance. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) estimated over 150,000 people were dead or missing on the island of Sumatra alone. On that island, approximately 40 percent of municipal employees died because of the disaster, and in Banda Aceh, the closest major city to the epicenter, health facilities were destroyed.

Thailand suffered more from the tsunami's waves rather than the earthquake itself. The provinces of Ranong, Phang-Nga, Phuket, Krabi, Trang, and Satun were the hardest hit, with more than 8,000 people confirmed dead in the immediate aftermath and tens of thousands of people stranded or displaced. While most of its infrastructure



Tsunami effected areas.

remained intact, Thailand required the delivery of emergency relief supplies and mortuary services to its hardest-hit regions. The US ambassador to Thailand, Darryl Johnson, declared Thailand a disaster area the very next day.

On 27 December, the same day as the disaster declaration, Secretary of State Colin Powell pledged an initial \$15 million in relief aid and requested that the DoD deploy multiple HADR responders. Although the disaster impacted multiple countries, the DoD limited its support to Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka in what became known as Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. Within this operation, elements of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) and the Air Force's 613th Contingency Response Group (CRG) supported relief efforts in Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, while AFSOC units supported relief efforts in Thailand and Indonesia.

In support of the State Department's request, US Pacific Command (USPACOM, now USINDOPACOM) directed the III MEF commander, whose headquarters on Okinawa is within driving distance of the 353d SOG, to stand up a joint task force (JTF) at U-Tapao Royal Thai Naval Air Base (RTNAB), Thailand. JTF-536's mission was to provide assistance to the governments of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other affected nations to begin to mitigate the effects of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami in support of USAID, and in coordination with other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and partner nations. JTF personnel began to deploy to

U-Tapao, as did assessment teams to Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) provided a joint force air component commander (JFACC) and Special Operations Command-Pacific (SOCPAC) designated the 353d SOG commander as the joint force special operations component commander (JFSOCC). PACAF deployed five USAF C-130s to U-Tapao, which it later increased to eight, to provide airlift support.

Prior experience and relationships proved vital to the operation's success. The JTF commander's previous participation in COBRA GOLD exercises led him to pick U-Tapao for his headquarters. Similarly, AFSOC exercise programs with Thailand had built strong ties with the Thai military. Just prior to the disaster, the 353rd had completed one of these exercises so it was natural that the exercise's mission commander Lt Col Dave Mobley became the AFSOC element commander for the initial HADR response. On 28 December, just over 48 hours after the earthquake hit, forces started deploying. Although the SOCPAC commander ordered the 353rd SOG to deploy its MC-130s to U-Tapao, the SOG's Thai contacts, with their far greater localized knowledge, convinced the JFSOCC commander to divert his MC-130s to Bangkok. That same day, US Navy aircraft began arriving at U-Tapao. Later in the day, Air Force KC-135 tankers, also based on Okinawa, delivered JTF-536's forward command element to U-Tapao RTNAB and the JFSOCC's C2 element to Don Mueang Royal Thai AFB, a joint use facility with the Bangkok international airport. The SOG's Thai contacts' recommendations proved prescient; DoD supplies did not start arriving at U-Tapao until 29 December and required time to organize before distribution.

On 29 December, the first USAID disaster assistance



Airmen of the 353rd Special Operations Group and Theater Special Operations Air Component help move tons of cargo daily. (USAF photo by MSgt Michael Farris)

response team (DART) arrived in Bangkok, beginning an overall deployment of 14 such teams with a total of 55 members and an additional 100-plus field-based support staff. In addition to the USAID DART, three JTF-536 disaster relief assessment teams arrived in Thailand to help evaluate the situation. USPACOM's initial priorities



The CRG commander assigned four members of his unit to support AFSOC aircraft security. At the time, the 353rd already had four of its MC-130s flying relief missions out of Bangkok, while the Royal Thai Air Force's official request for US support in Bangkok continued to work through the reporting process.

On New Year's Eve, President George W. Bush increased the US's pledge of aid from \$35 million to \$350 million. At the time, six conventional Air Force C-130s were flying relief missions in Thailand. Simultaneously, AFSOF opened up two additional airfields in southern Thailand, at Trang and Ranong. Just five days after the disaster, four of the six worst hit provinces had JTF-536 airlift operations flying relief missions to them. The JTF-536 disaster relief assessment team reported that the air bridge between U-Tapao and southern Thailand was growing stronger and more efficient, and the JTF was exceeding Thai requirements for relief supplies.

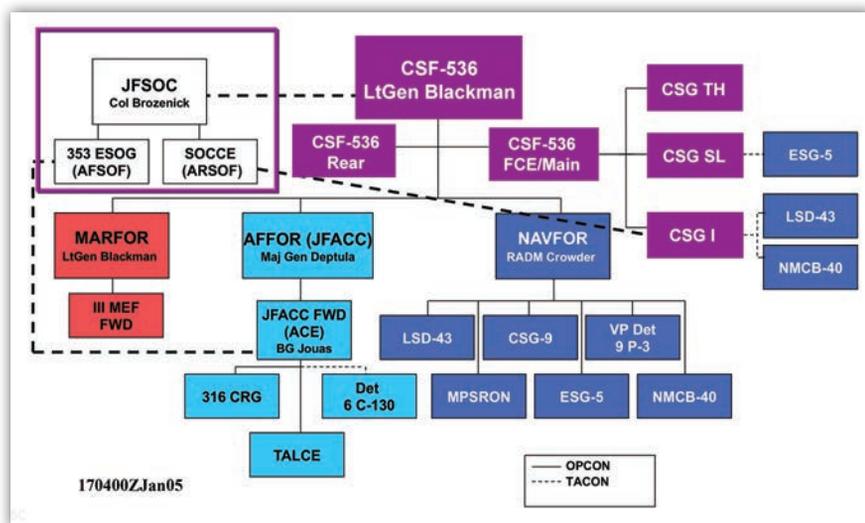
Simultaneously, in Indonesia, an inter-military cooperation meeting between the DoD and the Indonesian military created a plan for airlift operations into that country. The plan included cooperation between US and Australian operations in Aceh province. Recognizing the versatility of airlift support, JTF-536 requested that an Air Force ramp control team deploy to Medan, Indonesia, to support future airlift operations. SOCPAC also modified the AFSOF deployment order to allow the 353rd SOG to move anywhere in the region to best facilitate support to operations in Indonesia.

On New Year's Day, the Lincoln CSG arrived off the west coast of Aceh province. The Lincoln's helicopters began flying into Banda Aceh airfield that same day. Simultaneously, USAF C-130s began flying missions from U-Tapao to Banda Aceh and Medan. AFSOF also began to

focused on determining the extent of the damage, level of support required, and the command's capacity to support disaster relief efforts. Also on the 29th, USPACOM updated their priorities to damage assessment and marshaled all available theater airlift assets to provide support. With this change in mission, both the USS *Abraham Lincoln* Carrier Strike Group (CSG) and the USS *Bonhomme Richard* Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) deployed into the area of operations to provide additional support.

While conventional units were moving into position, two 353rd SOG MC-130s began flying relief missions within Thailand, just three days after the disaster struck and nearly two days before conventional Air Force units could start flying missions. On the first flying day, the MC-130s moved 13 casualties, 1,400 body bags, and 48,200 pounds of relief supplies. Further, the 353rd's MC-130s were the first US aircraft to arrive at Phuket International Airport and the Krabi Airport, both in southern Thailand and centrally located between the worst hit areas of Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Combat controllers from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron surveyed these airfields and opened them up to bring relief into previously unreachable areas and enable hub-and-spoke operations to outlying airfields and hard-hit areas.

On 30 December, the Indonesian government authorized JTF-536 overflight privileges to support HADR operations. On that same day, the JTF-536 disaster relief assessment teams arrived in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Despite international military and civilian organizations already operating at both Banda Aceh and Medan, Indonesia, USPACOM made landing a C-130 at Banda Aceh its top priority. Almost simultaneously, members of the 613th CRG landed in Colombo, Sri Lanka, U-Tapao, and Bangkok.



focus on operations in Indonesia as it flew its final missions in Thailand and began preparations to relocate to Langkawi, Malaysia. Over that first week of operations 353rd SOG units

transported 234,000 pounds of supplies, evacuated 32 casualties, delivered 155 relief workers, and opened 3 airfields in Thailand.

On 2 January, the 353rd SOG established its headquarters at Langkawi. When he arrived, the 353rd SOG commander Col Norm Brozenick assumed duties as the JFSOCC and began conducting integrated air operations in support of JTF-536 objectives in Indonesia. JFSOCC's goal was to provide specialized SOF capabilities such as surveying additional airfields, setting up and operating forward area refueling points, and special operations medical teams for increased casualty evacuation capability. The 353rd SOG also added its "slick" C-130 into the mix alongside the four MC-130s to increase the airlift capability.

On 3 January, JTF-536 was redesignated as Combined Support Force (CSF)-536 to reflect the now-multinational relief effort. This date also marked the arrival of the *Bonhomme Richard* ESG in Indonesia to begin supporting relief operations. The 353d SOG began flying operations into Indonesia on the 3rd; the first sorties included flights into Medan and Banda Aceh. Reflecting the MC-130 crews' special operations capabilities, the 353rd flew the "night shift" while the conventional C-130s flew daylight operations. This provided CSF-536 a 24-hour airlift capability into Banda Aceh and Medan. In addition to airlift, the JFSOCC deployed a two-man special tactics team into Medan and a seven-man special tactics team into Banda Aceh to assist the host nation with air traffic control and ramp operations.

The following day, the CSF-536 Air Component Coordination Element and JFSOCC worked to get an assessment of the Maimun Saleh airfield, on Sabang Island, just 10 miles north of Banda Aceh, and established a drop zone in Meulobah, Aceh's capital. An MC-130 completed a daylight survey and conducted a successful landing at Maimun Saleh, validating their findings. As assessors within Indonesia continued to identify ways to improve efficiency, Air Force intertheater airlift assets began flying missions from basing locations outside the area of operations.

By 5 January, the JFSOCC combat control team reported that the increased number of relief aircraft flying in the area were creating significant delays and congestion at both Banda Aceh and Medan. The SOF controllers recommended a more effective airspace management plan, increasing the number of forward operating bases, and improving material handling equipment. Additionally, Colonel Brozenick recommended opening aerial ports of debarkation in Malaysia and using the recently surveyed Maimun Saleh airfield.

The next day, USPACOM officially released the Execute Order for Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. It said, "The purpose of this operation is to provide immediate life sustaining support to devastated areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand to minimize loss of life and mitigate human suffering." USPACOM's end-state was defined as "the loss of life and human suffering of displaced persons minimized, the scope of the crisis no longer exceeds the capacity of the host nations, and all US personnel are redeployed to home station." To assist in meeting this end state, the USNS *Mercy*, a 1000-bed hospital ship, and the amphibious assault ship, USS *Essex*, were



USNS *Mercy*, hospital ship brings humanitarian aid.



Combat Controller TSgt Bruce Dixon and team arrive in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. (Photo courtesy of Norm Brozenick)



Survivors hurry to collect relief supplies.

deployed to support CSF-536 operations.

By 9 January, relief supplies arriving at Banda Aceh began to exceed the capacity of special tactics combat controllers to get them moved. Heavy rains didn't help the process. A JFSOCC situation report recommended standing down operations because air traffic control and the airfield and ramp situation at Banda Aceh had become untenable. There was no single authority over the variety of international and military organizations operating at the field. As a result, the JFACC temporarily suspended all night flights into Banda Aceh until the weather improved and additional airfield support teams arrived. The following



morning, a seven-member Air Force aerial port team arrived. Twenty-four hours later, the special tactics controllers handed-off operations at Banda Aceh. The weather cleared enough by 12 January and the 353d SOG's MC-130s resumed flying night missions.

Over the next few days, CSF-536 made significant headway in their airlift operation. The Indonesian armed forces commander authorized CSF-536 to fly operations into Maimun Saleh airfield. Despite the approval, the JFACC sent another assessment team to Maimun Saleh airfield, delaying operations into the airfield for a few days. On 13 January, a nine-person aerial port team arrived in Medan to take over ramp operations from the special tactics team. By 14 January, conventional and SOF airlift were maximizing relief efforts and cargo throughput into Indonesia.

On 15 January, the JFACC was given tactical control of all CSF-536 aircraft, except those organic to the USS *Lincoln* CSG and the USS *Essex* amphibious assault ship. The JFACC viewed integrating airlift under a single commander as key to unity of effort and improving efficiency of the relief operation. At the same time, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz was working with the Indonesian government to find ways to move forward from immediate relief to the longer-term challenge of reconstruction. Their goal was to find an appropriate way to allow the US military to return home and resume their normal missions. As a result of the discussions the World Food Program, USAID, and United Nations logistics representatives all discontinued the movement of HADR supplies to CSF-536, except for those already purchased or en route. The 353rd SOG and other SOF elements began redeploying forces to their home stations, while the JFACC coordinated for airlift to replace the special operations units in Langkawi.

The CSF commanders in both Thailand and Sri Lanka reported "mission accomplished" by 17 January and turned their focus to the redeployment of forces over the next two weeks. CSF-536 issued a transition and redeployment plan on the 18th, and the JFSOCC redeployed all of his forces and handed control of the operations and command center at Langkawi to the conventional Air Force.

As first responders, SOF is meant to go in early, provide initial help to get things going and then turn over efforts to the larger and more capable conventional forces. On the air side, SOF arrived and established the initial airflow, got the air relief effort moving, and then handed off to conventional airlift squadrons. During Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE, CSF-536 delivered more than 24.5 million pounds of relief supplies and equipment with 26 ships, 82 planes, 51 helicopters, and a significant presence on the ground. This was the largest US air relief operation since the Berlin Airlift following World War II.

Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE provided a number of lessons learned. The first was the value the 353rd SOG's previously-established relationships which were substantially aided by its forward presence in the USPACOM theater. Recent experience working with host nation militaries and in-country attaché teams enabled SOF air assets to be placed



320 STS personnel and Indonesian Army counterparts.

as rapidly as possible where they would be best suited. The SOG was further aided by its working relationship and collocation with the III MEF on Okinawa; this familiarity enabled smooth coordination that was simply not possible between the JTF commander and his JFACC which lacked the same history and proximity. The second key lesson was the value of the SOG’s organic first-response capabilities. The array of AFSOC personnel and aircraft the SOG owned—specialized airlift, battlefield airmen, organic command and control, logistics, etc.—enabled a faster and more integrated response than an ad hoc collection of the same capabilities from around the Pacific theater could have attained.

An unfortunate lesson learned throughout the operation was how unaware other military and civilian government agencies were of AFSOC’s inherent HADR capabilities. Despite the III MEF’s prior experience working with the 353rd SOG, the JTF the Marines did not fully utilize the special operations capabilities offered to them. Likewise, the JFACC seemed to misunderstand the value SOF air brought to the relief effort, focusing more on pounds of goods delivered rather than how many pounds of goods by conventional airlifters and civilian airlines were enabled by AFSOC’s ability to get into, restore, and operate remote, austere, and heavily damaged airfields. On a grander scale, USAID personnel did not appreciate what the military as a whole was capable of doing. The DoD did them no favors by failing to provide military liaisons to the USAID, even though the civilian agency was in overall charge of the

operation. Given the criticality of airlift and specialized personnel on the ground, it is especially noteworthy that no special operations liaisons were sent to work in the USAID headquarters. Despite challenges and shortfalls, the 353rd SOG-led JFSOCC staff was able to successfully integrate with the overall US government’s scheme of operations and enabled a level of success that would not have been possible without the unique capabilities AFSOC brought to the relief operations.



About the Authors:

Lt Col Shane “Shamus” Muscato is currently attending the National War College (NWC) at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington D.C. Prior to arriving at NWC, he was the Commander’s Action Group Director for AFSOC following a successful command tour at the 15th SOS (MC-130H Combat Talon II) till May 2019. Shane is a Master Navigator spending his entire career in the MC-130H assigned to Kadena AB with the 1 SOS and Hurlburt Field with the 15 SOS/1SOG where he supported Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE.

Lt Col Joey “HARM” Sullivan currently works at the US Air Force Safety Center as the Deputy Division Chief of Training and Force Development. Additionally, he is an instructor pilot on the MC-130J Commando II. He completed a successful command of the 415th SOS (HC/MC-130J schoolhouse) June 2020. Previous to the MC-130J, Joey flew the MC-130P Combat Shadow with the 17th SOS and 9th SOS, where he supported Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE and UNIFIED RESPONSE.

AIR COMMANDOS RESPOND TO HAITIAN EARTHQUAKE

By Buck Elton, Maj Gen, USAF (Retired)



JSOAC Headquarters aerial view.



Combat Controllers control all aircraft departures and arrivals at the Port-au-Prince airport in Haiti.

(Photo courtesy of AFSOC.)

On 12 January 2010, at 4:53 p.m., a massive earthquake hit fifteen miles southwest of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. The initial 7.0-magnitude shock was soon followed by 5.9 and 5.5-magnitude aftershocks, with yet more aftershocks over the following days. The damage was catastrophic: up to 300,000 people were killed, an estimated 1 million people were displaced from their homes, most of the nation experienced electrical and communication system failures, and many hospitals were rendered unusable. Haiti's president

immediately declared a national state of emergency and requested assistance from the United States and the rest of the international community. The 1st Special Operations Wing's (SOW) role in responding to the crisis would underscore its motto, "Any Time, Any Place." This is my account of the role we played.

Things moved fast. When the first quakes struck Haiti, the 1st SOW at Hurlburt Field, FL, was resetting from a local week-long Operational Readiness Exercise. The exercise enabled the wing to practice deploying

hundreds of Air Commandos to a remote airfield which required complete self-sustainment—security, logistics, communications, medical, air traffic control, and expeditionary billeting. We exercised employing a Joint Special Operations Air Component (JSOAC) headquarters to generate and control aircraft conducting special operations, which left us uniquely postured to assist with this crisis. Less than 24 hours after the first tremors, we deployed virtually the same team from the exercise to conduct a humanitarian assistance and



We operated nonstop, coordinating, integrating and assisting more than 30 nations, dozens of organizations, and the Government of Haiti.

disaster relief (HADR) mission in Haiti.

Col Greg Lengyel, the 1st SOW commander, directed me as his operations group commander, to lead the team. Lt Gen Donny Wurster, the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) commander, gave me simple guidance, “Go do some good, and let us know what you need.” The Special Operations Command-South (SOCSOUTH) commander, Army Brig Gen Hector Pagan, told us to, “Get ahead of requirements, fill voids, and be value added.” Our small team of Air Commandos was part of the massive international effort to provide relief to the government of Haiti. US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) formed a joint task force (JTF) in Haiti to support Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE. The 1st SOW team was designated the joint force special operations component, and US Agency for International Development (USAID) was designated the lead US government agency.

The mission started much like many scenarios in SOF—chaotic and uncertain. We launched three fully-loaded MC-130s from Hurlburt Field without knowing what to expect at the Port-au-Prince airport due to limited communications with anyone in Haiti. When we arrived over the airfield, we made a low pass to assess the runway’s condition and then landed just after dark. CMSgt Tony Travis from the 23d Special Tactics Squadron; TSgt Flint, the Security Forces Non-commissioned Officer in Charge; Lt Col Lee Anderson, 1st Special Operations Support Squadron commander; and I stepped off the MC-130H to engage with Haitian airport authorities, but we found none. Nobody was running the airfield, so we announced that we were in charge. We took control and responsibility for airfield operations until we were relieved by proper authorities. There were no objections. We started doing what we thought was our primary mission: control all aircraft departures and arrivals to enable the flow of humanitarian aid. Our combat controllers (CCTs) controlled their first departure just 28 minutes after landing. We didn’t realize just how much our mission would grow.

The first night was particularly busy. Some of our Security Forces Airmen and CCTs went right to sleep so they would be ready for their shifts 12 hours later. Some

slept in empty Delta Airlines baggage carts, which served as wheeled bunk beds with curtains. Many on the team didn’t sleep for the first 40 hours, though. We operated nonstop, coordinating, integrating and assisting more than 30 nations, dozens of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the Government of Haiti. On night one, our logistics and ramp coordinators hot-wired a local 6k forklift to offload our aircraft, as well as arriving foreign and other US aircraft. When we got our own 10k forklift from Hurlburt a few days later, we put the borrowed forklift back where we got it—with a thank you note and a full gas tank. Lacking the necessary cargo handling equipment, our loadmaster ramp coordinators and Air Terminal Operations Center (ATOC) personnel hand-unloaded wide-body civilian aircraft, including Airbus 330s and Boeing 747s.

Our learning curve was steep. Late on the first night, a large Chinese commercial aircraft landed and ignored our directions. They blocked most of the main ramp area and deployed a camera crew to video themselves running around, waving Chinese national flags in red jumpsuits. It was surreal, like watching a clown show. The crew then asked us for fuel, a flight plan, flight meals, and for their cargo to be offloaded. We laughed, then told them they wouldn’t get any of those things and that they needed to start breaking down their pallets in the aircraft so we could hand offload and daisy chain the aid

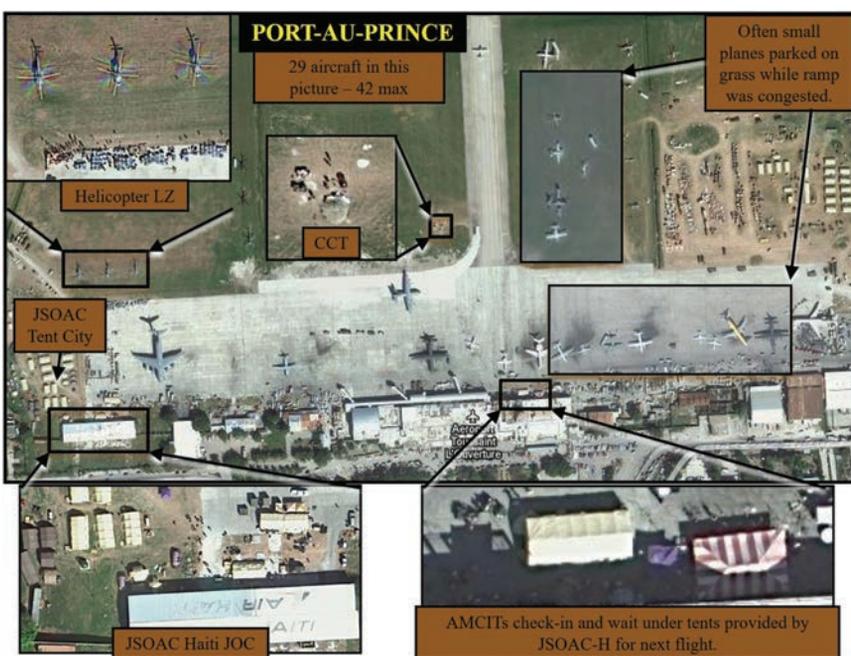


1st night billeting in baggage cart

onto empty pallets on the ramp. The aircraft departed seven hours later, and we devised ways to compel aircraft to park in the correct areas.

A few days later, as we cleared the far west end of the ramp of small aircraft and helicopters, we had a problem with arriving helicopters parking in an area more suitable for large aircraft. We wanted the helicopters to park on the grass, but they weren't using the air traffic control radios, so we tasked a young Airman to drive a small four-wheel ATV around the ramp to prevent the helicopters from landing in the wrong spots. He had a blast playing chicken with the civilian helicopters until they all figured out what was needed and complied with the new system.

Establishing a functional operations center was crucial. As the sun rose the first morning, we scouted for a suitable location. Many of the main terminal buildings were damaged and unsafe to enter, so we looked at a hangar on the southwest side of the airfield. An airfield worker told us in broken English the old Air Haiti hangar now stored materials confiscated by Haitian customs officials, but had not been



used in years. He told us the hangar made sense for us, but he had no authority to give us permission. We cut the locks off the doors and discovered a rat-infested pile of trash 15 feet high in the middle of the hangar. We opened the side doors, used a forklift to push the trash out of the hangar, and did our best to convince the rats to move somewhere else.

The 1st SOW's organic capabilities were vital to mission success. For the first week, we were virtually the only people in country who had the critical combination of communications, food, water, transportation, tents, medical capability, and security necessary to run an airfield. We ran the international airport with a small force organized, trained and equipped to command and control special operations air forces.

The Port-au-Prince airport needed air traffic controllers, an airfield manager, and cargo handling personnel due to the massive amount of humanitarian aid arriving by air. Most of the airfield workers were either dead, injured, or unable

to return to work; and most of the structures on the airfield, including the control tower, were damaged and unsafe to enter. The airfield presented several unique challenges for our CCTs. The 10,000-foot runway was fully operational, but the airfield's design limited the access to the runway from a single mid-field taxiway connecting the runway to the main ramp, requiring all traffic to wait in place for arriving or departing traffic. The main ramp normally held 8 small aircraft and the airfield handled just 15 flights a day. We soon realized the massive number of international relief flights would overwhelm the small ramp, so we physically pushed or towed many small aircraft and helicopters onto the grass and off the main parking ramp. We parked arriving small aircraft and helicopters in the grass and creatively parked cargo aircraft in any available spot.

The press was not always kind. We were criticized early on for the large number of international flights that we diverted due to the lack of available ramp space. Many aircraft arrived unannounced and lacked the fuel to hold for a few hours. Some arrived with only enough fuel to wait a few minutes before diverting. Forty to 50 aircraft diverted each day for the first few days, because there were no flow control measures to balance the number of arriving aircraft with our capacity to park and unload them. The most aircraft we had on the ramp at one time was 42. During the 12 days our CCTs ran the airfield, we controlled 1,675 aircraft. The pace was hectic; it was our version of a Berlin Airlift with one takeoff or landing every five minutes. Our combat controllers did all this without a single aircraft mishap, but we had several memorable incidents.

A Russian IL-76 military cargo aircraft landed, disregarded our instructions, and attempted to offload their humanitarian aid cargo, mostly tents and medical supplies, directly on the departure end of the runway. This would have effectively closed the runway and stopped the arrival of other much-needed aid. A combat controller rode out to the aircraft and displayed his "ingenuity" to quickly overcome the language barrier and compel the aircraft to follow our directions.

Also, a US commercial airliner stopped briefly on the mid-field taxiway next to where the combat controllers were working at their card table "office" so the pilot could climb down the stairs and deliver cold drinks to the team, saying, "This is the best we have ever seen this airfield controlled, thank you."

A French commercial airliner refused to depart for France until their aircraft was completely full with their citizens. After they blocked a large aircraft parking spot for seven hours, I informed the pilot he needed to leave, because they were causing us to divert aircraft with humanitarian aid. He told me his president directed them to wait until they were

full, which might require them to remain overnight. I told him he had one hour to depart, or I would force his hand. An hour later, with the help of an Air Commando and a forklift, I returned to inform the pilot we were going to drag his aircraft into the grass. When the pilot said, “You wouldn’t dare,” in a thick French accent, the Airman, perfectly on cue, lunged the forklift forward making plenty of noise and smoke. The pilot’s eyes widened briefly before he ran up the stairs and departed minutes later.

Our experience with running joint fixed and rotary wing operations came in handy. In addition to managing fixed wing movements, we took responsibility for coordinating the rotary wing airlift support to the humanitarian aid delivery. Twenty-five Navy and Marine Corps helicopters per day arrived from the aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* and the amphibious assault ship USS *Bataan*, but the JTF lacked a functional mission tasking process. The helicopter crews would land at the airfield in the morning with dozens of sailors to help move cargo, then look to our operations center for tasking. We started receiving mission requests from anyone who needed air transport. Word quickly spread that our air planners would match that requirement with the aid available on the airfield and the helicopter to deliver it. Our air planners took the details of the location and need, tasked our Special Tactics Teams to survey and secure landing zones, and developed specific mission tasking folders to give to the helicopter crews so they could then move cargo or evacuate patients.

We also coordinated for casualty evacuations. When a request came in for patients to be moved from place to place—a village to a hospital, or a hospital to the airfield, or the airfield to a hospital in the US—we would put together a mission tasking package, find a willing crew, and put our Special Operations Surgical Team and Special Operations Critical Care Evacuation Teams (SOST-SOCCT) on the aircraft to properly care for the injured during the air movement. We continuously prioritized our available lift and critical care evacuation team members in order to move the highest priority patients to an appropriate medical facility.

Our pararescuemen, better known as PJs, were a tremendous force multiplier. We teamed five PJs with the Fairfax County Urban Search and Rescue Team, the premier search and rescue team in the world. The PJs linked up with them at the embassy and provided them unique military rescue capabilities in equipment, technique, security, and communications, as well as medical capabilities the Fairfax team did not have. They complemented Fairfax very well, integrating with them continuously for the next 12 days. The PJs and the Fairfax team executed 14 complex confined space rescues in dangerous conditions. Many rescues required climbing over decaying bodies to rescue trapped victims, while more than 80 aftershocks rattled the buildings.

Our PJs helped rescue a Haitian woman trapped under four floors of rubble for eight days. It took them 28 hours to get to her, perform a life-saving amputation to free her from the wreckage, and finally hoist her into a Navy helicopter to evacuate her to our medical facility at the airfield. The rescue

teams accepted an enormous level of risk, so that others may live. Fortunately, none of the rescue workers were injured.

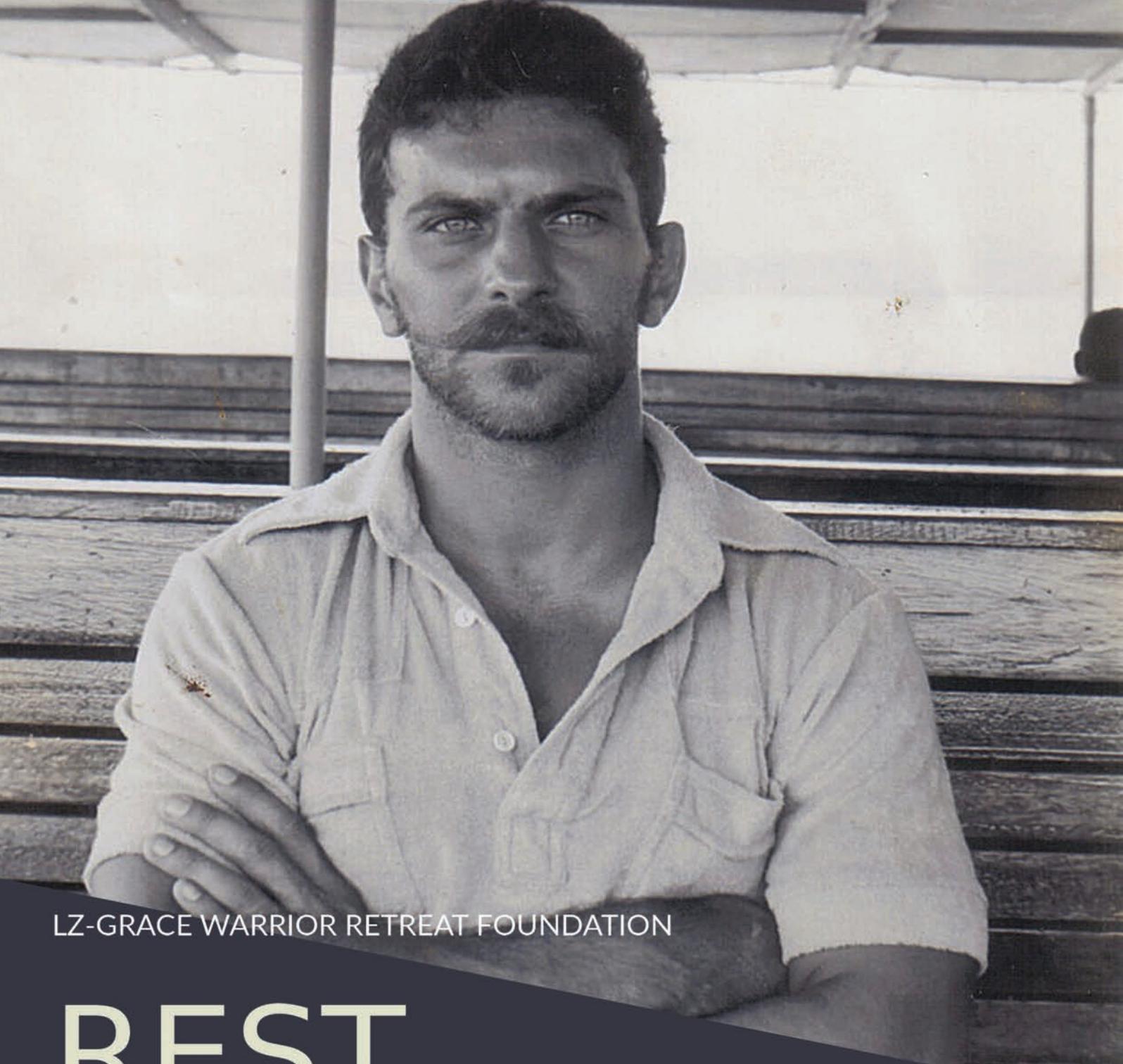
Our medical capability, with our SOFMEs, (Special Operations Forces Medical Elements), and the aforementioned SOST-SOCCTs, provided the JTF and airfield with the medical capability required to stabilize and evacuate patients. The JTF’s limited communications and transportation capabilities severely limited its ability to move critically injured patients out of the country. We assumed that role at the airfield by coordinating with the Global Patient Movement Coordination Center (GPMCC) at US Transportation Command to either bring in aeromedical evacuation flights, or to use our AFSOC aircraft or Air Mobility Command’s C-17s to conduct medical evacuation flights to appropriate medical facilities in the States. Our doctors, medics and nurses performed 30 surgeries, including 9 life-saving amputations; treated 362 US and Haitian patients; evacuated 167 patients to the US; and even delivered a baby at the airport field hospital.

Many times, our evacuation teams would transfer their patients to higher care in the US or other locations in Haiti, then creatively coordinate their own travel back to the airfield. We established two surgical rooms, one at the airfield and one in a small storage room in the American Embassy. They performed life-saving surgical operations on Haitian citizens, despite the initial guidance we got from the embassy and JTF surgeon. We were told we did not have the authority to provide medical care to Haitians, in order to preserve resources for US citizens. We carefully considered, but then ignored that guidance when it was the right thing to do to save lives. We processed the remains of two American citizens who died from suspected internal injuries while



A pararescueman from the 23rd SOS and members of various rescue teams search for a 25-year-old woman that had been trapped for seven days. (Photo by TSgt James L. Harper Jr.)

awaiting evacuation on the airfield. We established an ad hoc mortuary in one of our climate-controlled tents, evacuating a billeting tent and doubling-up in other tents, to use the air-conditioned tent as a morgue until we came up with an appropriate solution to relocate the remains back to the US. For the first week, we provided what I believe was the most robust medical and surgical capability in all of Haiti. Within 10 days or so, more medical capability arrived with the USNS *Comfort* hospital ship, an Israeli expeditionary



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hospital, a Colombian hospital, and a University of Miami hospital at the airfield.

Our expeditionary satellite communications initially provided the airfield's only beyond line-of-sight communications. We immediately established a communication link with USSOUTHCOM, SOCSOUTH, the JTF that was standing up in the embassy, and the Air Operations Center at Hurlburt (for reach-back support). Our comms team innovatively extended a phone line from our Joint Operations Center to the Haitian approach control facility, using six hundred feet of spliced-together wire. The combat controllers didn't have radar, so they used procedural control with old-fashioned paper arrival strips.

The controllers needed to be able to talk to Miami Center. Our satellite-enabled phone, connected to the tower via an ad hoc solution that never should have worked, allowed them to do just that. We put liaison officers, initially special tactics and later airspace officers, in the tower to assist the Haitians with the arrival and control functions. We thus provided the JTF, the airfield, and hundreds of international, civilian, coalition, and US government workers the only phone and internet connection available in Haiti. By the second day, we had 30 phone lines and 30 internet connections, which was significantly more than the 2 phone lines available at the embassy.

The Secret Service used our phones to coordinate visits by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former President Bill Clinton. Cell phone service was repaired after the first five days, so people could use their individual Blackberries, but for the first few days there was no cell phone and limited texting service available. We tasked a team from the 82d Airborne Division to provide security during the repair of key cell phone towers in Port-au-Prince. In return, the cell phone company donated 100 pre-paid local cell phones, which we gave to incoming personnel who needed them.

When AFSOC deploys, our contracting officers are critical to the fight. In uncertain environments, one must be able to buy what one needs but doesn't have. Within the first couple of days, we coordinated a Port-a-Potty service and water contract for the airfield. We contracted diesel fuel, gasoline, and fuel delivery trucks for the airfield to sustain every vehicle that the US government was driving. With few operable gas stations in town, virtually all vehicles driven by US government officials used the fuel we purchased. We leased 12 sport utility vehicles to provide motor pool transportation for the US embassy staff, medical personnel, US Army units, and the numerous arriving parties that lacked transportation. We also contracted local cell phones for communications, so we could give anyone leaving the airfield a working phone.

Shortly after our arrival, we realized we made a serious mistake in our planning by failing to bring caffeine. We needed coffee and we needed it fast. Early the second morning, I tasked our contracting officer to get us coffee in the operations center. After eight hours, I asked him for an update. Bureaucratic red tape prohibited him from purchasing coffee in Haiti so we exercised the reach-back plan we had established. Within hours we had a mission-critical coffee bar

that would rival the finest hotels in the world, with boxes of donated coffee from the Starbucks in Ft Walton Beach.

The 1st SOW's aircraft were tremendously responsive to our logistical needs. We were virtually the only source of resupply for Meals-Ready-to-Eat (MREs), bottled water, uniforms, personal hygiene items, flashlights, gloves, hats, reflective belts, radios, and cots—all the things a force needs to sustain itself. For the first five or six days, we provided MREs and water to anyone that needed it on the airfield, including Haitian citizens, US government, aid workers, media, and the international community. We kept a small 24-hour MRE reserve for our force, and we pushed everything else out as fast as we could. We became the "go to" people for being able to quickly resupply, at times receiving critical supplies only eight hours after the request was sent back to Hurlburt.

Every time we received cold soft drinks, snacks, and fresh fruit on our Hurlburt aircraft, donated by our families and squadrons, we would give most of it to the Americans waiting on the ramp. One time, when an Airman was passing out ice-cold sodas to the crowd, a US citizen asked, like only an American can, if he had any diet Cokes. He did have one, and he gladly gave it to her. Eventually, the JTF established a more robust logistics system to sustain the force.

Our Security Forces DAGRE (Deployed Aircraft Ground Response Element) teams provided invaluable service by accompanying the helicopters on landing zone surveys and humanitarian aid deliveries. They broke up into task organized teams, depending on the type of aircraft or vehicle, and provided security as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief supplies were delivered. The guidance we gave them was to protect our force, look professional, display weapons, but under no circumstances allow the situation to require the use of weapons. We were in Haiti to help, not shoot people. Our security forces performed magnificently, due to their professionalism, and the remarkable discipline, respect, and patience demonstrated by the Haitian people.

Our mission further expanded to include coordinating the American citizen (AMCIT) evacuation plan. Embassy leaders decided to not declare a formal non-combatant evacuation order (NEO), which limited our legal authority to use military aircraft to move civilians. Hundreds of Americans were injured during the earthquake and had been exposed to the elements without adequate food or water for four or five days. When Americans started dying on the ramp while awaiting commercial transportation, we knew we had to start moving them out more aggressively, on every available aircraft, and to any available location.

We moved 600 US citizens on our MC-130s and other C-130 aircraft, and we started the movement with the first AMCIT departure to Homestead Air Reserve Base in South Florida. We did this with limited communications, with hundreds of AMCITs waiting to depart from the terminal, and without an organized plan from the US government. We started putting as many of them on aircraft as we could. When I told the Ops Center at Hurlburt we were starting to fly US citizens to Homestead, they told us, "Homestead is not ready." I replied, "they are a lot more ready to help these

people than we are, so figure it out.” We floor-loaded citizens on C-17s, seating hundreds on the floor, 10 across, knee-to-back, with a cargo strap over the laps of people in each row. Our logistics personnel, maintainers, supply and ramp coordinators, and forklift drivers efficiently coordinated the evacuation of over 8,000 American citizens before we turned over responsibility of passenger movement from the terminal to the aircraft to the conventional Air Force Contingency Response Group.

I mentioned earlier the episode with a French airline crew trying to evacuate their citizens. I completely understood the captain’s motivation, but my responsibility was for the greater good in keeping ramp operations moving smoothly. During those first few days, we had a Belgian airliner divert to the nearby Dominican Republic in the middle of the night due to ramp congestion and limited fuel. A representative from the Belgian Embassy pleaded with my deputy, Col Ben McMullen, to allow the aircraft to land within the hour, because they needed to onload their citizens waiting on the airfield and return the contracted airliner to Belgium. We simply didn’t have the ramp space for the large aircraft, or the ability to unload the aircraft we had in time to make room before their mandatory departure time. So, we developed an Air Commando solution to the problem.

Although we were not authorized to move foreign citizens to the United States, we thought we were authorized to move them to the Dominican Republic. Since it was two



o’clock in the morning, and we didn’t have the time to secure a diplomatic clearance to land there, our MC-130 crew floor-loaded 117 Belgian citizens and departed Haiti. Once airborne, the crew quickly established communications with the Santo Domingo air traffic control tower explaining the situation and our plan, to land the airport. When the control tower asked, the crew told them it was a humanitarian emergency and they needed to transload evacuees to the waiting Belgian airliner. Fortunately, the control tower approved the plan, directed them to park next to the airliner, and they were all able to make their flight home. The next day, the Belgian ambassador to Haiti came by the Operations Center, thanked us for our efforts, and told us we didn’t have

to buy beer in Belgium anymore.

Haiti’s orphan problem underscored the operation’s humanitarian nature. On 21 January, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell arrived on a chartered aircraft to transport 54 Haitian orphans to Pittsburgh. Due to administrative delays and challenges, the embassy did not authorize the orphans to leave the country. National Security Council Chief of Staff Denis McDonough helped us obtain official approval, via text messages, from Washington DC to move the orphans to Florida on a C-17. During the final head count on the aircraft, Jamie McUtrie, a charity worker who cared for the orphans in Haiti, discovered one orphan named Emma was missing. She refused to stay onboard the C-17, which needed to depart because they were running out of flight crew duty day. Against the advice of her boss, Jamie went back to the camps near the US Embassy to look for little Emma, eventually finding her in a refugee tent near the embassy. Emma was hiding alone in a corner; someone had stolen her pants and shoes. Jamie lovingly grabbed her up and made her way back to the airfield. A few days later we were able to fly them up to Pennsylvania to rejoin the other orphans.

What the 1st SOW did in Haiti showcased AFSOC’s ability to respond quickly and to integrate into a complex international, US government, and Haitian effort to provide humanitarian relief. During a press conference on 13 January, President Barack Obama said, “I have directed my administration to respond with a swift, coordinated and aggressive effort to save lives.” Although we did not see this guidance from the President until after we returned home, we were well-suited to execute it. For 23 days, 224 Air Commandos controlled the Port-au-Prince airport, assisted with search and rescue, performed lifesaving surgeries and casualty evacuations, secured the airfield, ran ramp operations, coordinated humanitarian airdrops, commanded and controlled rotary wing operations, provided satellite communications, evacuated American citizens and Haitian orphans, and assisted US efforts to provide relief to the government and citizens of Haiti. We were aggressive, accepting risk to the force in dangerous situations, and accepting personal risk by doing the right thing while pushing the limits of our authorities.

It is in Air Commandos’ DNA to rapidly move to a crisis, thoroughly coordinate our actions with our partners, and to act decisively—especially to save lives. Our experience executing high-risk, classified special operations missions in training and in combat served us well during this humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mission.

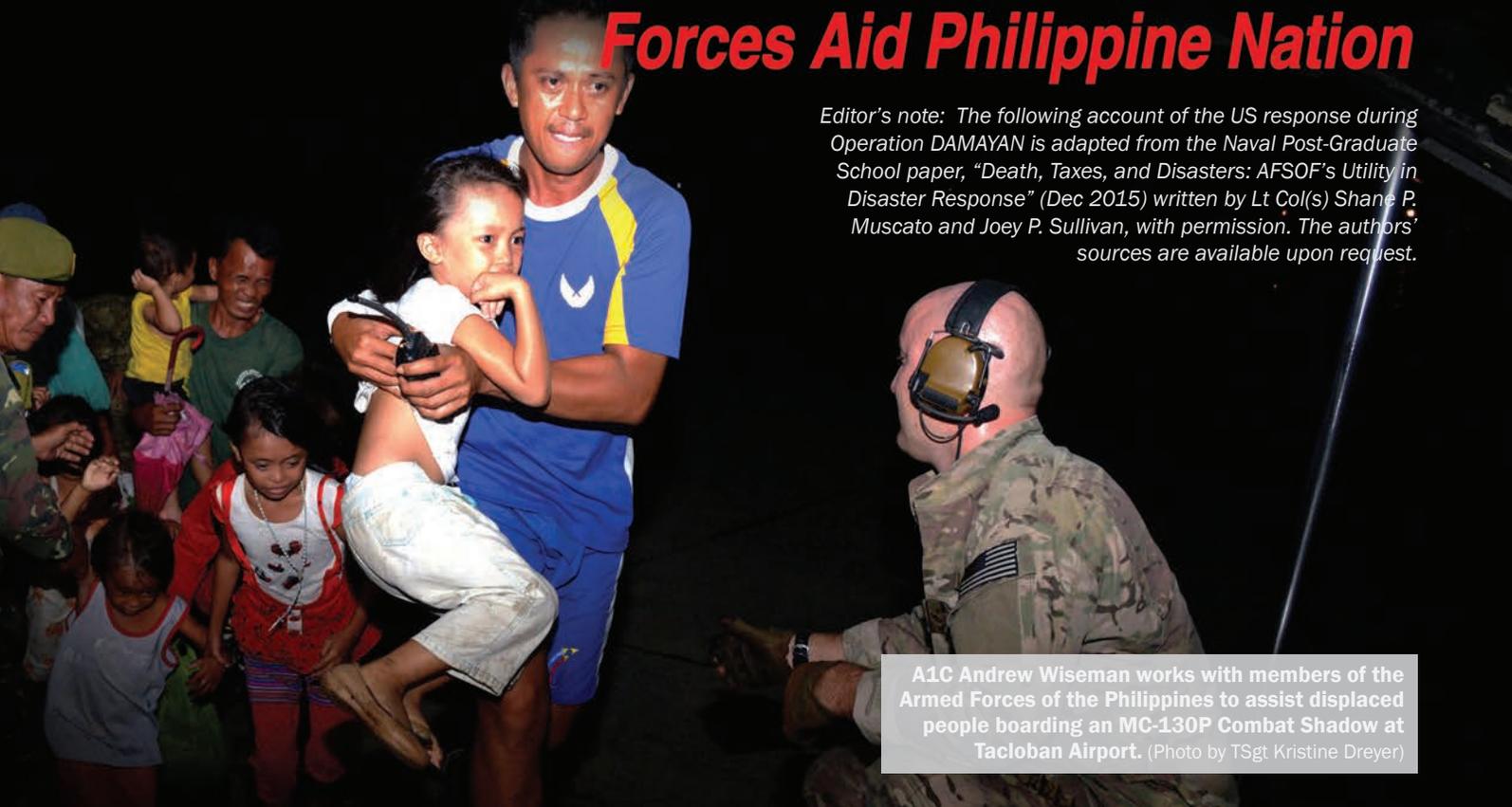


About the Author: Maj Gen Buck Elton retired in October 2020 after 31 years of service. He flew MC-130H, MC-130E and MQ-1s in AFSOC, commanded the 7th SOS at RAF Mildenhall, UK, the 1st SOG at Hurlburt Field, the 27th SOW at Cannon AFB, and the Special Operations Joint Task Force in Afghanistan. He also served as the Deputy Commanding General of Joint Special Operations Command, the Deputy Director for Special Operations and Counterterrorism on the Joint Staff, and the US Special Operations Command Director of Operations. He and his wife, Karen, live in Medford, Oregon.

Operation DAMAYAN

Air Force Special Operations Forces Aid Philippine Nation

Editor's note: The following account of the US response during Operation DAMAYAN is adapted from the Naval Post-Graduate School paper, "Death, Taxes, and Disasters: AFSOF's Utility in Disaster Response" (Dec 2015) written by Lt Col(s) Shane P. Muscato and Joey P. Sullivan, with permission. The authors' sources are available upon request.



A1C Andrew Wiseman works with members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to assist displaced people boarding an MC-130P Combat Shadow at Tacloban Airport. (Photo by TSgt Kristine Dreyer)

In the early morning hours of 8 November 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan made landfall in the Visayas region along the central east coast islands of the Philippines. The hurricane lasted 16 hours with winds estimated at 195 mph, with top gusts of 235 mph, and generating a significant tidal surge. Ultimately, Haiyan was the fourth most intense typhoon ever observed and the strongest typhoon to ever make landfall.

The path of destruction hit a large section of the Philippine islands and wreaked havoc on cities such as Guiuan, a small municipality on a remote island in Samar Province. Kenneth Stewart and Dale Kuska, two communications experts, described the immediate aftermath in Guiuan, "Minutes later, nearly every single one of its 50,000 men, women, and children had nothing... By the end of the day, Haiyan had met a broad swath of the central Philippines, and it had left incomprehensible devastation... Thousands had died, millions were homeless, and billions in damage had left the country in ruin." The nation's infrastructure also suffered significant damage, leaving areas with no running water or electricity.

The typhoon would prove to be the deadliest natural disaster in Philippine history, affecting over 10 percent of its 105 million people and damaging or destroying 65 to 90 percent of all structures in its path. Roads were blocked

with fallen trees and debris, and airfields, a vital link within the island nation, sustained significant damage. The number of dead remains estimated at 6,201, with nearly 5.6 million people requiring food assistance and 1.1 million homes damaged or destroyed. These staggering numbers represent the compounded result of both Typhoon Haiyan and a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that hit the region on 15 October, less than a month before the typhoon. Responding to the crisis, the US Department of Defense (DoD) launched Operation DAMAYAN — "helping each other" in Tagalog — on 10 November. The DoD supported this mission through USPACOM's (now US Indo-Pacific Command, USINDOPACOM) Joint Task Force (JTF) 505 with the III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) from Okinawa, Japan, 36th Air Force Contingency Response Group (CRG) from Andersen AFB, Guam, and Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) including Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) assets, such as the 353d SOG (Special Operations Group) from Kadena AB on Okinawa, among others.

Prior to the Typhoon Haiyan disaster the 353rd SOG had engaged in several humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) efforts that helped hone its disaster response capabilities. First, AFSOF learned valuable lessons from



The damaged area of an airport is seen after super Typhoon Haiyan battered Tacloban city, central Philippines. (Photo by REUTERS/Romeo Ranoco)

its contributions to disaster relief in the wake of the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Thailand and Indonesia. These lessons included making use of established relationships, establishing austere airfield operations to open an aerial port, and handing off operations when AFSOF assets no longer provided a unique capability.

Another of the more notable HADR operations that AFSOF participated in was Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, the multinational relief effort following the 2010 earthquake in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Specifically, AFSOF was instrumental in opening an airfield so that aid was arriving to help the victims 28 hours after the earthquake struck. Using its unique command structure, AFSOF provided air traffic control services, airfield security, search and rescue, critical care evacuation, austere surgical operations teams, aerial port duties, humanitarian aerial delivery zone assessments, command and control capabilities, and linguistics professionals to ensure clear communication. Extolling AFSOF capabilities, the commander of the Joint Special Operations Air Component—Haiti (JSOAC-H), Colonel “Buck” Elton, recalls that, “We landed at 7pm EST and had the Port-au-Prince airfield under our tactical air traffic control 28 minutes later.” This tactical control began the AFSOF mission of preparing the airfield for a massive international relief effort. (Editor’s note: Maj Gen Elton’s first-hand account of Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE is included in this issue.)

Lieutenant Colonel Travis Norton, an Air Force Fellow with the Institute of Defense Analysis, states in a review of the HADR mission to Haiti that by their very nature SOF are employed as crisis response force. They are not organized, trained, nor equipped for long-term, large-scale steady state operations. After the initial weeks of the international relief effort, command guidelines and the greater support infrastructure “began to gel.” As additional capability was brought in...[AFSOF] started pulling back from “enabling

the gaps” and focused on the primary job of taking care of airfield operations. In fact, after the first week the 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) planners began preparing for their redeployment. These same traits would be leveraged in the Philippines in 2013.

US GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO SUPER TYPHOON HAIYAN

The US government’s HADR response to Super Typhoon Haiyan benefited from advanced warning systems designed to monitor typhoon activity in the Pacific. Accordingly, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) prepositioned a Disaster Assistance Response Team or DART in Manila prior to the storm making landfall and began assessing damage immediately after the storm’s passing.

The day after the typhoon hit the Philippines, US chargé d’affaires Brian L. Goldbeck declared a disaster, setting in motion US government HADR mechanisms. Also, USAID’s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance secured funding for an immediate response, initially allocating \$20 million. The US Department of State formally requested assistance from the DoD after the host nation sought support and subsequently, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel directed the DoD to deploy appropriate assets to assist in providing relief efforts.

Further expediting the response, and based on reports of the typhoon approaching the Philippines, multiple DoD elements had begun preparations for the HADR mission before the storm made landfall. Within AFSOF, the 353rd SOG began tracking the storm as a tropical depression on 4 November. Simultaneously, the 353d SOG deployed an advanced team to Clark AB in the northern portion of the Philippines as part of a training exercise schedule for later that month. Beginning on 6 November, just days before the typhoon hit, US Pacific Command (USPACOM,

now USINDOPACOM) directed the 36th CRG to begin preparations for a possible deployment and directed US Marine Forces Pacific to begin planning response options to assist a possible HADR mission to the Philippines.

The III MEF crisis action team was already established and issued orders to prepare for deployment of its 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) by the time formal orders were received on 9 November. The Air Force CRG sent a liaison to Okinawa to imbed with III MEF and assist Marine Forces Pacific in understanding conventional Air Force capabilities. Anticipating further instructions, Pacific Air Forces ordered lead elements of the joint air component coordination element (JACCE) and the CRG to deploy to Camp Aguinaldo in Manila, where the Armed Forces of the Philippines headquarters resides.

The impact of AFSOF units was immediate. An aviation detachment of the JSOTF-P, a preexisting special operations task force that had been working with their host-nation counterparts to stabilize the southern Philippines, began conducting operations the morning after the typhoon made landfall. JSOTF-P, headquartered at Camp Navarro in Zamboanga, directed their aerial reconnaissance assets to concentrate on areas damaged by the typhoon, collecting valuable information on the status of airfields and key lines of communications, especially on the hard-hit islands of Leyte and Samar.

Shortly after reviewing the initial images, Special Operations Command-Pacific (SOCPAC) approved JSOTF-P to assist with HADR operations on 10 November. By early evening, JSOTF-P had successfully inserted a joint SOF team into Tacloban airfield, which would prove to be the lifeline of the HADR operation. The team consisted of a Special Forces officer, a medic, and a communications sergeant; two Civil Affairs soldiers; and an AFSOF special tactics combat controller.

Two days after the storm hit, lead elements of the JACCE and CRG personnel arrived at Villamor AB in Manila to embed with the 3rd MEB in their Combined Operations Center which was stood up that very day. This began the integration of US DoD services, including SOF, which stood up a special operations liaison element (SOLE) within the Combined Operations Center. Through the SOLE, AFSOF had a connection to III MEF, the host nation, non-governmental organizations, and other agencies providing relief to the Philippines. On 10 November, 3rd MEB deployed with aviation units from Okinawa, including 12 MV-22 Ospreys and 8 KC-130Js. These Marine Corps aviation units arrived at Clark AB and Villamor AB that day and became the hub of the operation while multinational forces concentrated at Mactan-Cebu International Airport. Aid flowed to Tacloban from Villamor, the airfield nearest the epicenter of destruction.

While other US and Philippine forces were still deploying, a USAF special tactics team provided the first US military “eyes on” Tacloban airfield. The team assessed that Tacloban, in its current state, could only handle daylight operations in clear weather. There was no road access to the

airfield or city and the current ground controller equipment did not allow for communication with Philippine Air Force C-130s supporting the operation.

Simultaneously, the 353rd SOG established an incident response team to assess options for providing assistance by building off the exercise plan already in place. The SOG determined it could provide special tactics teams to enable 24-hour airfield operations at Tacloban and specialized mobility aircraft to expand operations to other nearby fields. These assets deployed with equipment to communicate with



all aircraft operating into the airfield and enabled an around-the-clock flow of supplies to the field, thus overcoming the isolation from land routes. Additionally, the 353rd SOG deployed its organic logistics supply, maintenance, communications, medical, and security forces to sustain their effort.

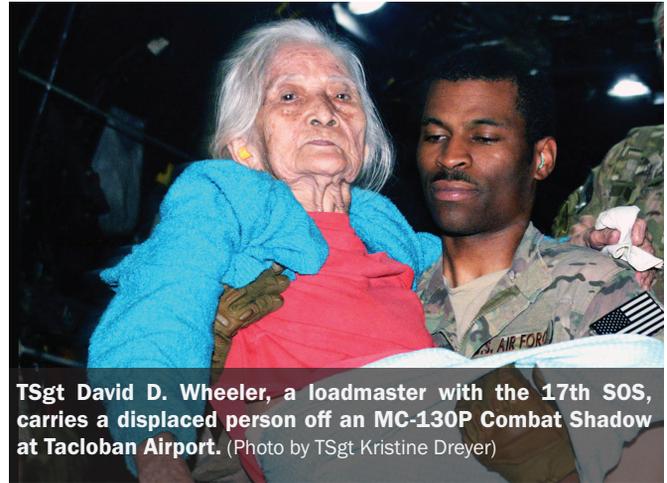
As the operation moved into its third day, the Philippine government placed seven provinces under a state of national calamity, further stressing the need for DoD assistance. In response, USPACOM issued an Execute Order on 11 November identifying USAID as the lead federal agency and making Marine Forces Pacific the lead command for the military response. The order directed US military forces “to enable relief operations in the Republic of the Philippines in order to mitigate further loss of life, additional suffering, and reduce the scope of the disaster.” USPACOM listed its requirements as providing USAID with damage assessments and intra-theater lift support, military-to-military

support to the Philippine military in affected areas, and support to transition other organizations in the recovery phase. Within this effort, SOCPAC published its AFSOF concept of operations, described as: delivering supplies, civilian evacuation, expanding the range of airlift assets, supporting HADR assessments with ground SOF teams, handing-off operations to conventional forces, and relocating assets for further HADR support. On this same day, AFSOF U-28 Dracos began flying reconnaissance missions over the disaster areas, providing dynamic, real-time assessments of critical population centers and lines of communication.

On 12 November, AFSOF's MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft arrived in the Philippines, bringing with them an all-weather day or night, fixed-wing mobility capability. These aircraft delivered special tactics teams comprised of weather, medical, and airfield control specialists, along with communications equipment and all-terrain vehicles. They arrived at Tacloban late in the afternoon and quickly established a night operations capability and improved communications with all relief aircraft. In less than 24 hours, the special tactics teams nearly doubled the operating window for available air support. The teams controlled Tacloban airport for two additional days before transferring overall responsibility to Marine Air Traffic Control Mobile Teams, providing background support while moving on to assess outlying airfields. During their time at Tacloban, the special tactics team controlled all rotary wing traffic, night fixed wing traffic, airfield management operations, and numerous medical functions.

On 13 November, USPACOM designated the Commanding General of III MEF, Lt Gen John Wissler, to lead JTF-505. On 14 November, the USS *George Washington* Strike Group arrived off the coast of the Philippines and began assisting HADR operations using its H-60 and E-2 aircraft. Special tactics controllers collaborated with helicopter assets from the *George Washington*, ultimately conducting 23 sling load deliveries—bundles secured to the bottom of a helicopter and delivered to remote clearings.

That same day, a 36th CRG airfield assessment team from Andersen AFB arrived at Tacloban. It completed its first assessment for C-17 operations within a few hours,



TSgt David D. Wheeler, a loadmaster with the 17th SOS, carries a displaced person off an MC-130P Combat Shadow at Tacloban Airport. (Photo by TSgt Kristine Dreyer)

concluding the field could only accommodate one C-17 at a time. Despite the lack of strategic airlift to date, the 3rd MEB Combined Operations Center was conducting 24-hour operations employing MC-130s, as well as Marine KC-130Js and MV-22s. Further, on 14 November a 353rd SOG MC-130 delivered special tactics personnel to Ormoc airfield and MV-22s delivered another special tactics team to Guiuan to establish operational airfields there. Guiuan and Ormoc would become important supply hubs for the remainder of the relief effort.

On 15 November, the first C-17 arrived at Tacloban with mission handling equipment, mission controllers, security forces, and aerial port personnel required by the 36th CRG. A second C-17 with 36th CRG personnel aboard landed at Clark AB to establish an aerial port there, as well. Two more ships, USS *Germantown*, LSD-42, and USS *Ashland*, LSD-48, prepared for a 17 November departure from Okinawa with additional elements of the MEU on-board to support HADR operations. They arrived three days later.

On 16 November, JTF-505 officially stood up and the JACCE began to coordinate airlift for 3rd MEB. That same day, three conventional USAF C-130s, with 80 Airmen aboard, landed at Clark AB, having just completed an HADR exercise in Bangladesh. As forces were coming together, the JACCE Commander, Brig Gen Hecker, used his authority “to coordinate scalable joint and multinational air assets...to augment the 3rd MEB’s established process supporting the Philippine government’s airlift mission.” Primary missions included delivery of aid and transportation of internally displaced persons. Additional high priority missions included tasks such as delivering mission critical refueling equipment to replace malfunctioning equipment at the supply node in Guiuan.

The JTF-505 (Forward) reached its initial operating capacity on 18 November. Its role was to coordinate the US military’s efforts with the Department of State and USAID to support the government of the Philippines-led response. As the JTF stood up in country, special tactics teams were turning over operations at Guiuan to a Marine Air Traffic Control Mobile Team, while simultaneously opening operations at Borongan.

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As the HADR response moved into its tenth day (19 November), an MC-130H filled a critical capability gap by flying a mission for the 3rd MEB, moving sanitation equipment out of Zamboanga to the disaster zone in Tacloban. Because of the terrible weather conditions in the area, only the Combat Talon could fly and accomplish this mission. The MC-130H crew used its terrain following radar and an internally calculated self-contained approach to deliver the equipment, a mission that AFSOF is uniquely qualified to perform. The MC-130s used this unique capability several other times during critical moments of the operation.

On 20 November, JTF-505 reached full operational capacity, four days prior to USAID terminating requests to use military airlift to deliver relief supplies. In the limited time remaining, the JACCE established air movement slot times, which provided known arrival times of aircraft at airfields to ensure available ramp space and improve the movement of the remaining supplies. This system replaced the previously established role of the 3rd MEB as the focal point for US airlift operations supporting the relief mission. That same day, Pacific Fleet began to redeploy forces and the *George Washington* departed the area of operation. By this time, the total cost of humanitarian funding for the DoD and USAID had exceeded \$47 million.

The following day, the 36th CRG considered potential redeployment options from Tacloban and drew up plans for turning over airfield responsibility to the Philippine civil authorities. In Ormoc, the special tactics team transferred control of operations to host-nation air traffic control, and also shut down its operations at Borongan because the airfield was no longer required. On 22 November, JSOTF-P personnel returned to their pre-typhoon mission within the Philippines, and 353d SOG personnel either completed the remainder of their exercise in Luzon or returned to their home base in Okinawa.

As AFSOF assets were redeployed from the HADR mission, DoD elements continued to support overall relief efforts. On 23 November, an Air Force C-130 delivered the final shipment of USAID-requested supplies to Tacloban Airport in a final surge of conventional relief sorties.

On 24 November, the DoD announced it would begin to draw down forces and the Philippine government and other humanitarian organizations would assume all HADR responsibilities. JTF-505 completed its mission on 1 December. The drawdown continued until 3 December, just over three weeks after the initial disaster, when JTF-505 ended the military operation.

Accounts vary, but at its peak, US military efforts included more than 13,400 military personnel, 66 aircraft, and 12 naval vessels delivering more than 2,495 tons of relief supplies and evacuating over 21,000 people, including 500 American citizens. Additionally, over 1,300 flights were flown in support of the relief efforts for Operation DAMAYAN delivering aid and equipment to approximately 450 sites. During this process, 353rd SOG MC-130 aircrews moved over 3,000 displaced persons and hauled 678,000

pounds of aid materials, while flying 155 sorties and logging 188 hours of flying time. AFSOF U-28 reconnaissance missions provided critical assessments of multiple sites, allowing forces to arrive and deliver aid. Additionally, special tactics teams made night operations possible at



Tacloban and opened three other airfields. These teams controlled over 650 flights which delivered over 1.8 million pounds of relief and moved 6,590 displaced persons. Further, their efforts supported fueling operations for rotary wing assets and 23 helicopter sling load operations.

CONCLUSION

Operation DAMAYAN lived up to its meaning, “helping each other.” The US response was rapid and efficient. The 353d SOG and other AFSOF assets from JSOTF-P played a pivotal part in the early days of the operation. Both organizations used their unique capabilities to react to this disaster rapidly, enabling support for relief operations at Tacloban, Guiuan, Ormoc, and Borongan. Air Commandos provided 24-hour capacity at Tacloban Airport, which was a critical aspect of the hub-and-spoke construct. AFSOF’s inherent rapid-response capabilities, unique relationships built on past lessons learned made them a critical force multiplier for host nation and conventional forces living up their Air Commando motto, “Any time, any place.”



About the Authors:

Lt Col Shane “Shamus” Muscato is currently attending the National War College (NWC) at the National Defense University. Prior to arriving at NWC, he was the Commander’s Action Group Director for AFSOC following a successful command tour at the 15th SOS (MC-130H Combat Talon II) till May 2019. Shane is a Master Navigator spending his entire career in the MC-130H assigned to Kadena AB with the 1st SOS and Hurlburt Field with the 15th SOS/1stSOG where he supported Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE.

Lt Col Joey “HARM” Sullivan currently works at the US Air Force Safety Center as the Deputy Division Chief of Training and Force Development and is an MC-130J Commando II instructor pilot. He completed a successful command of the 415th SOS (HC/MC-130J schoolhouse) in June 2020. Prior to the MC-130J, Joey flew the MC-130P Combat Shadow with the 17th SOS and 9th SOS, where he supported Operations UNIFIED ASSISTANCE and UNIFIED RESPONSE.

AFTER THE STORM

U-28s Provide Disaster

Relief in the Philippines



By Major Daniel Jackson, USAF

Super Typhoon Haiyan (known in the Philippines as Super Typhoon Yolanda) made landfall in the central Visaya Islands on 8 November 2013, with maximum sustained winds of at least 195 miles per hour. It would prove to be one of the most powerful tropical cyclones on record and the second deadliest in the history of the Philippines. The storm took the lives of at least 6,300 people and displaced as many as 4.2 million. Tacloban, the most populous city in the eastern Visayas and three miles from the beach where General Douglas MacArthur famously “returned” to the Philippines during the Second World War, lay completely eviscerated. A city administrator estimated the storm destroyed 90 percent of the metropolitan area. I landed in Zamboanga, on the island of Mindanao, 310 nautical miles to the south, 5 days later with 14 other members of the 319th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron (ESOS). We were there to support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES (OEF-P) with a detachment of Pilatus U-28A Draco intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft.

The U-28 was created for the express purpose of finding and fixing insurgents and terrorists. (See *Air Commando Journal*, vol. 8, issue 1, summer 2019, at www.aircommando.org) Disaster relief was not a mission we practiced nor one for which we had any written tactics, techniques, or procedures (TTP). Yet, as the United States government committed over \$37 million in aid and vast military resources—including the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade and most of a US Navy carrier strike group—we found ourselves caught up in the effort, improvising TTPs with our warplanes to fit a humanitarian mission. The US military called it Operation DAMAYAN, Tagalog for “helping each other.”

We arrived in Zamboanga to find Major John Belt and the 34th ESOS, whom we were sent to relieve, already beginning to grapple with the problem. Until the cyclone veered north into the Visayas, the squadron had their hands full preparing to evacuate. Two days

after the storm made landfall, the 34th ESOS launched their first tentative sorties in support of the disaster relief mission. The joint special operations aviation detachment (JSOAD) tasked them with surveying airfields and seaports throughout the affected region, starting at Tacloban and then working their way outward.

Combat control teams quickly moved to the useable fields and opened them up to bring in



The Filipino people communicated their needs with ground-to-air signals. (Photo courtesy of author)

desperately needed relief supplies and to evacuate refugees. Aircraft from over a dozen nations joined the

two-way aerial caravan, including our AFSOC brethren from the 524th ESOS who were flying the Dornier C-146 Wolfhound. By 23 November, US aircraft from all Services had evacuated more than 20 thousand people from areas devastated by the storm. The reconnaissance mission

or collapsed buildings and groups of refugees. Using this information, decision-makers would then be able to triage affected areas and maximize their resources by focusing on the worst damaged areas. During this phase of operations, we could cover a wide area so as to give a general idea

of the scope and severity before scrutinizing specific areas in more detail. Next, we could scan lines of communication to identify washouts, debris obstruction, and damaged or destroyed bridges. We

our mission to reconnoiter the eastern and southern coasts of Samar. We took off just after dawn, flying up the length of the Zamboanga Peninsula, over the Bohol Straits, and across Leyte to Samar. I flew offshore to give our cameras a view under the shelf of clouds covering the island. We saw little damage along most of the east coast. Matarinao Bay seemed to have protected the towns along its inner rim from the storm, but just to the south, we began to see appalling destruction. The typhoon had dealt moderate damage to the town of Salcedo; in Guiuan it had damaged or destroyed almost every single building. As we proceeded west along the south coast of Samar, we could clearly see we were following the path of the typhoon as it had churned toward Tacloban. Most of the communities lay in abject devastation. A few people picked through the smashed remains of their homes for anything they could salvage, but otherwise an eerie calm seemed to have descended on the island. We made it about halfway along the south coast before a massive thunderstorm barred our way. Air traffic control mentioned a tornado warning; north of the Tacloban airfield and since we were close to BINGO fuel anyway, I set a course for home.

The 319th ESOS officially took over operations on 15 November, under the command of Maj John Gilbert. After another day of unfocused and vague taskings, he had Capt



We saw the fruits of our labors as US Navy and Marine helicopters began delivering supplies to the helicopter landing zones we identified. (Photo courtesy of author)

proved far less straightforward than the humanitarian airlift. Our command and control structure, trained and fielded to hunt insurgents, struggled to adapt to the new context, and our taskings remained vague, unfocused, and unsystematic.

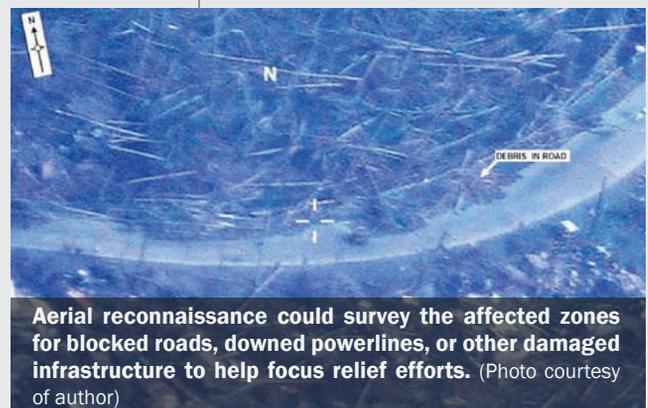
Because the storm hit as our team was preparing to leave the US, we guessed we would be involved in relief efforts and had a little bit of time to do some research. Looking through the archive of old after-action reports, we found a couple of typed pages detailing lessons learned from supporting the earthquake relief in Haiti in 2010. Unfortunately, the notes dealt primarily with the logistics of the deployment, rather than tactical employment of the airplanes and systems.

I contacted some friends who had done domestic disaster relief with the Civil Air Patrol and Bureau of Land Management, and they helped me develop a list of tasks we could offer. Essentially, our aerial reconnaissance could gather information from a bird's eye view to help decision-makers or relief teams on the ground—especially in remote locations. With our full-motion video (FMV), electro-optical (EO), and infrared (IR) cameras, we could determine the extent of the affected area, specifically looking for concentrated damage such as destroyed

would begin with major highways and then progress to secondary and then tertiary routes. With this information, relief teams could determine how best to move supplies and focus their efforts to clear priority lines of communication. Finally, we could look for downed power lines and cellphone towers or damage to water towers, reservoirs, and dams. This information could aid repair crews in quickly reestablishing essential services rather than having to spend valuable time surveying for damaged infrastructure themselves. In short, we felt our ISR capabilities could make the relief effort more efficient, more focused, more expeditious, and less dangerous.

I flew with a pilot from the 34th ESOS on 14 November for a "buddy ride." He met me and Capt Nate Ray, one of our combat systems officers (CSO) outside the mess hall at 0420 to pick up our flight meals and then walk out to the flight line. It was dark and humid, although an intermittent breeze brought some relief. MSgt Hanks, our weatherman, and Capt Mariko Dailey, our intelligence officer, briefed us on

of the scope and severity before scrutinizing specific areas in more detail. Next, we could scan lines of communication to identify washouts, debris obstruction, and damaged or destroyed bridges. We



Aerial reconnaissance could survey the affected zones for blocked roads, downed powerlines, or other damaged infrastructure to help focus relief efforts. (Photo courtesy of author)

Dailey submit the list of tasks we had come up with before leaving Hurlburt Field to the collections manager at the JSOAD. The next day we found our



Members of the 319 ESOS arrived in the Philippines just days after Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Visayas.
(Photo courtesy of author)

taskings updated word-for-word to what we had recommended. I found myself hard-crewed with Nate as my CSO and Kyle Byrd, a 6-foot, 4-inch, folksy Oklahoman as my copilot. Despite the heart-rending scenes of devastation, we all felt glad to be working on something constructive—instead of destructive—for a change.

Over the next few days, the US Navy began landing supplies in Ormoc Bay, on the less-damaged west coast of Leyte Island, intending to move them by truck to Tacloban and other affected communities. My crew scanned the lines of communication cutting a twisting, torturous route through the interior of the island. Most of the coastal region of Leyte consists of flat alluvial plains divided into small farming plots. Warm, light blue shallows fringe the coast, darkening to a deep, vivid blue stretching out to the horizon. A north-south spine of rugged, jungle-covered mountains rises to five thousand feet through the middle of the island. As we flew overhead, an easterly wind pushed warm, moist air from the coast up the mountain slopes, lending them a misty, mysterious aura. I thought of the men who had fought through those mountains in desperate battles 69 years before. I thought about Dick Bong and Tommy McGuire, the top two US fighter aces of the Second World War, rocketing aloft from nearby Tacloban to score their last kills in the Pacific War. Where, in October 1944, an American-led Allied fleet had sailed into Leyte Gulf to bring liberation from oppression. Now, through broken layers of clouds, we saw a modern armada of warships bringing relief from nature's awesome destruction. Navy and Marine Corps helicopters shuttled back and forth from ship to shore, landing at airfields or at helicopter landing zones (HLZ) we

identified.

The number of ground-to-air signals (GTAS) surprised me. Communities throughout the affected region communicated their needs in big, white, block letters spread across the ground, on rooftops,

or on roadways. "HELP US," read one near Burauen, on the east coast of Leyte. We saw "PLS HELP" on a rooftop about a kilometer away and an "H" in a field where the locals thought helicopters could land to bring them aid. I do not know if the Filipinos had any inkling of our reconnaissance planes overhead or if they merely assumed passing helicopters or transport aircraft would see their signs. Still, they clearly knew help would come from above and communicated with us through their block-letter messages. We recorded each of these and passed them on to the JSOAD. Throughout our support, the 34th and 319th ESOS recorded 116 GTASs and 38 suitable HLZs.

After each flight, I wrote up a summary of the mission and sent it, along with still images and video clips, to the collections manager. The JSOAD passed the products to a distributed ground system (DGS) in Hawaii for analysis and declassification and then published them to a website for ready access by all the agencies working on the relief effort. The Marines, USAID, and anyone who needed to see our most recent imagery or read our reports, could find everything on the website labeled by date and location. At a meeting discussing the relief efforts several days into our participation, the special operations joint task force (SOJTF) asked to return us to our counter-terrorism mission. The SOJTF commander suggested that other reconnaissance assets, such as US Navy P-3s, could handle the humanitarian ISR requirements. After a few moments of silence, one of the Marines spoke up, saying the products we were producing were the most

useful and had the best turnaround time. He argued to keep us on the job.

As the days wore on, we saw more aid stations popping up in rural towns. C-130s from Australia, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and South Korea joined those from the United States and the Philippines delivering supplies to Ormoc, Tacloban, and Guiuan. US Navy and Marine Corps helicopters and MV-22 Ospreys cruised beneath us to bring those supplies to remote communities whose messages we read from the sky. Between 10 and 21 November 2013, U-28 crews flew nearly 150 hours in support of Operation DAMAYAN. We reconnoitered over 150 towns, 350 miles of roadway, and 330 miles of coastline. We saw the fruits of our



On our last day of support, we found this message on a rooftop in Ormoc City, on the east coast of Leyte. (Photo courtesy of author)

labors as helicopters made use of HLZs that we had identified, and aid stations popped up in towns whose messages we had passed to the JSOAD. As my crew flew over Ormoc on the way home from our last mission, on 21 November, we saw a new message written out in big white letters on a green rooftop: "THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR HELPING ORMOC CITY." It was our honor.



*About the Author: Major Daniel Jackson is a combat aviation advisor in the 6th Special Operations Squadron, drawing from his years of tactical ISR experience in the U-28 "Draco" to train partner nation aircrews. He has a masters degree in history and has written three books, the most recent of which, *Fallen Tigers: The Fate of America's Missing Airmen in China during World War II*, will be published by the University Press of Kentucky in May 2021.*

Combat Aviation Advisors Support Humanitarian Operations in Lebanon

By Major (Dr.) Robert Tong, USAF



Aftermath of the explosion at the Port of Beirut. The ruined grain silos have become the iconic symbol of this man-made disaster. (Photo courtesy of Robert Tong)

In Beirut, Lebanon, on 4 August 2020, a warehouse at the port filled with 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate erupted in one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions in human history. The catastrophic blast affected more than half the city, obliterating entire neighborhoods and killing at least 204 people, injuring more than 6,500, and leaving over 300,000 homeless.

Combat Aviation Advisors (CAA) from the 6th Special Operations Squadron had maintained an enduring presence in the country for more than two years before the blast occurred. Our team, Operational Aviation Detachment (OAD) 621, had been in Lebanon for almost a month when the warehouse blew up. Thankfully no one on our team was injured.

This was my third deployment to Lebanon as a CAA flight surgeon. I had been focused on developing a nascent medical evacuation (medevac) capability within the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), but in the wake of the Port of Beirut explosion, my efforts shifted from advising the partner nation to assisting with the disaster response.

The Lebanese medical system had already been struggling even before the explosion. The ongoing economic crisis which began in October 2019 had made it increasingly difficult for hospitals to procure even basic medical supplies and an uptick in COVID-19 cases over the summer left stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE) dangerously low. Frequent street protests often left dozens injured. To

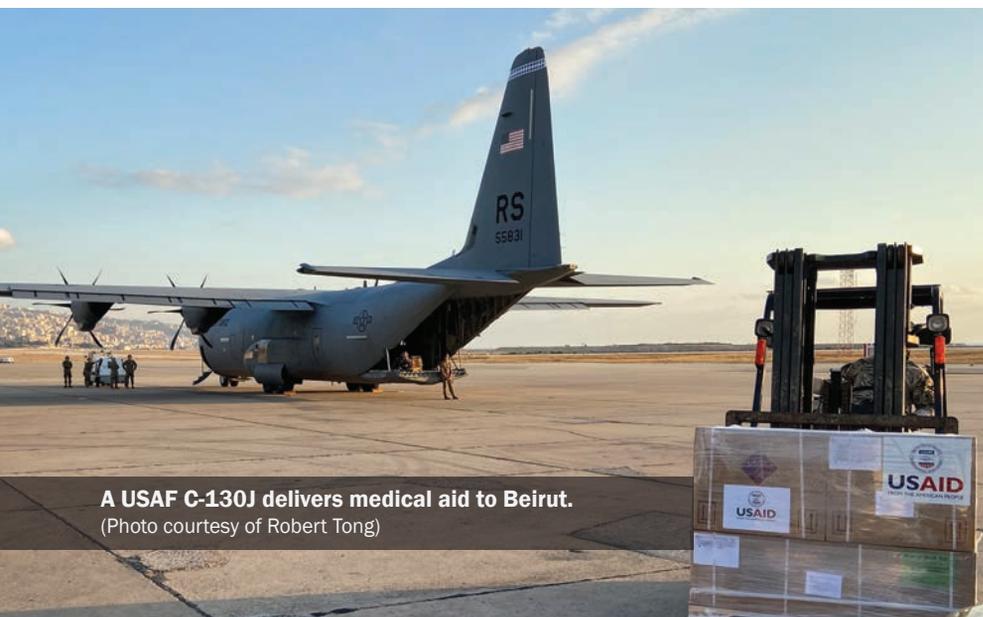
make matters worse, when the blast ripped through downtown Beirut, it demolished three hospitals, including Saint George University, one of the largest medical centers in the country. The city's remaining hospitals, the

AUBMC is the largest hospital in Lebanon. It is equivalent to a level-1 trauma center in the United States, with extensive subspecialty capabilities, residency programs, and fellowship training. The majority of

or strewn rubble across large sections of the main highway and numerous roadblocks had already gone up in anticipation of protests. Fortunately, he was familiar with routes that bypassed the worst of it. Five hours later, my contact at AUBMC confirmed they had finally received our supplies. "This is the first and only resupply to reach us in the 72 hours after the blast," he texted me.

During our team meeting that night, I reflected on the fact that no aid was flowing to the hospitals despite news feeds announcing the arrival of dozens of planes landing medical aid at Beirut International Airport. Dan Jackson, our team pilot, keyed into the fact that this was something we should bring to the attention of the task force commander. Over the next few hours, we composed a synopsis of what was happening on the ground in Beirut, corroborated by multiple sources I had within Lebanon's medical community. Although we did not know exactly what was happening to the aid arriving at Beirut International, we knew it was not reaching hospitals and that the situation had reached a crisis point. As a course of action, we suggested leveraging our relationship with the LAF to transport medical aid landed by US aircraft directly to hospitals and into the hands of the doctors, nurses, and medics providing a tenuous lifeline to the Lebanese people. We sent the memorandum to the task force operations officer at 2100 on the night of 7 August.

My phone woke me at 0200. It was the operations officer. She informed me that everyone in the chain of command, to include the task force commander, the defense attaché, and even the ambassador herself had read our synopsis and agreed with our suggested course of action. With that, the first US Air Force C-17 to land in Beirut had just dropped off two pallets of medical aid. Instead of releasing it through the regular channels, the operations officer assigned a team of US Marine Corps Raiders (special operations Marines) to guard the supplies overnight. She told me the Marines were under strict orders to secure the supplies until I arrived at



A USAF C-130J delivers medical aid to Beirut.
(Photo courtesy of Robert Tong)

American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) chief among them, absorbed the destroyed facilities' patients while simultaneously treating thousands of blast victims. In the course of one night, the remaining hospitals had depleted practically all their basic medical supplies, threatening their ability to provide for even rudimentary needs.

Thankfully, the international community responded swiftly and robustly. Countries from around the region and across the world rushed assistance to Lebanon, including hundreds of tons of much needed medical supplies. Paneloads of supplies arrived within 24 hours of the explosion. But despite the flow of aid into the country, many of my contacts in the Lebanese medical community informed me they had yet to receive any resupply. Seventy-two hours after the blast, I received a troubling message from an emergency medicine physician at AUBMC, their hospital had just run out of suture material and doctors were having to close wounds with staples. Soon, other basic medical supplies would give out as well.

To provide some perspective,

their staff receive some if not all of their training in the US or Europe. It was a grim indication of the state of Lebanon's medical system to see that a hospital like AUBMC was out of something as basic as suture material

As a physician, I cannot imagine what it was like for my colleagues in Beirut the night of the explosion and in the hours and days that followed. Knowing they were struggling to continue to provide care to their patients was especially troubling. In an effort to provide some assistance, I began to gather up any medical supplies the team could spare. I also called the civil affairs medic with whom I was colocated to see what he could afford to donate. Within an hour, we filled eight boxes with basic medical supplies to include IV fluids, surgical instruments, sutures, needles, syringes, gauze, and antibiotics. At the time we were under a stop movement order, but we arranged through a contact in the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) for a truck to pick up the supplies and deliver them to AUBMC. Our driver told us traffic in and out of the city would be extremely congested, as the blast had damaged



Left to right: The Task Force commander, Ambassador Dorothy Shea, and Maj Robert Tong at Beirut International Airport discussing US medical relief. (Photo courtesy of Robert Tong)

the airport. I was told we needed to put our direct delivery plan into motion by daybreak. As an added challenge, we had no access to large transport trucks with which to deliver the supplies, either from the LAF or the task force. We would have to arrange the logistics ourselves.

After knocking on Dan’s door and calling up our mission commander to advise him of the tasking, I called a trusted contact of mine from a Lebanese medical non-governmental organization (NGO). I knew if anyone could find a way to move multiple truckloads of medical supplies through a disaster zone on the eve of large-scale protests, it would be him. The 0200 wakeup surprised him as well, but he told me he would make a few calls. As I was loading gear into our SUV, I got a text, “The trucks would meet us at the airfield.” Though he would not be able to accompany us personally, his brother was getting married that day, he made sure to link us up with AUBMC staff to coordinate the drop off.

The drive through Beirut was eerily quiet. The roads, normally choked with traffic, were empty. As we sped along the highway, the sun began to turn the sky from pitch black to a deep, Mediterranean blue. At the embassy, we joined a small convoy that included the operations officer and a civil affairs team and then continued to the airport. I still did not know if the plan we pitched a mere six hours prior would work; there were so many possible points of failure, such as protesters blocking the roads, the

trucks not showing up, airport officials prohibiting the trucks from entering the flight line, or the violent extremist organizations known to operate in the city seeing us as a target of opportunity. We continued to drive and our convoy eventually made it through the gate on the military side of the airport. A few familiar faces from

the weary Marine Raider team greeted us at the pallets. Soon, the US Army Special Forces (SF) team that would be accompanying us to the hospital with their Lebanese partner force relieved the Marines. We began to breakdown the pallets of supplies and prepared to load them onto the trucks, which had yet to arrive. I dropped a pin on our location and sent it to my contact, who then forwarded it to the truck drivers. Just as we finished sorting the equipment, two Bongo trucks, a half van-half pickup truck that is very common in the Middle East, arrived. Everyone pitched in to help load the trucks, even the task force commander and the ambassador. It was a tight fit,

but when we finished our game of real-life “Tetris,” loading all the medical supplies into the trucks, there was not one square foot of extra space.

Prior to moving out, Dan and I briefed routes and contingencies with the SF team and their partner force. AUBMC was less than two miles from the blast site. By necessity, we would be traveling through parts of the city that were significantly damaged and where large-scale protests had raged overnight. I made sure everyone knew exactly where we would drop off the supplies and we did one last operational check before loading up in our vehicles.

Our convoy filed out from the airport and began to crawl through the city, which was still in a state of shock after the blast. Even in the afternoon, there was little activity on streets usually bustling with traffic. Broken glass and debris littered the sidewalks and roadways. Before, the shining glass of modern condos in the areas we drove through contrasted with other parts of the city that were pock marked and scarred by war. Now the two areas seemed indistinguishable.

We made our way through narrow, rubble-strewn alleyways to AUBMC and off-loaded three tons of medical supplies in a quiet logistics bay. There was no ceremony or special reception.



A Lebanese Armed Forces escort accompanies a delivery of medical aid to the American University of Beirut Medical Center, less than two miles from the blast site. (Photo courtesy of Robert Tong)



Aftermath of the explosion at the Port of Beirut. (Photo courtesy of Robert Tong)

The staff were working beyond the limits of human endurance to help these people. They did not have the emotional energy to spare and we were just doing our small part to help them.

The drive back to base took us right past ground zero. It was emotionally overwhelming. We saw the now iconic gutted grain silos rising eerily above a massive crater. We saw upturned ships, some half submerged, others blown ashore. We saw acres and acres of twisted metal and collapsed buildings. The historical Mar Mikhael and Gemmayze neighborhoods took the brunt of the blast. We saw entire walls torn off the sides of buildings, every window of every building shattered, exposing the places so many used to call home. But in contrast to the emptiness of the city elsewhere, cars lined the highway throughout the

disaster area, cars of Lebanese civilian volunteers, young and old, driving from all across the country and pulling their push brooms and shovels from the backs of their cars and helping their countrymen dig out from the rubble. Lebanese Red Cross volunteers wore vests and set up aid tents. Seeing the crowds of volunteers arriving as we left the outer rings of Beirut filled Dan and me with encouragement—a small consolation after seeing so much meaningless destruction.

We repeated this direct delivery operation with each arrival of US medical aid over the next month until finally transitioning responsibility for relief efforts to our civilian counterparts at the embassy and USAID. In total, we delivered 6.2 tons of medical aid directly to Beirut area hospitals and first responder units. I also helped collect indepth needs assessments from five major hospitals in the Beirut area to inform further US government assistance efforts. Ultimately, our team helped ensure US medical aid was the first to reach Beirut area hospitals in the wake of the blast. This aid was

crucial for at least two major hospitals maintaining clinical capabilities and first responder units providing life-saving care.

With that being said, Lebanon is hardly out of the woods. The country's economy continues to deteriorate amid a deepening recession and a failure to implement economic reforms required to secure loans from the International Monetary Fund and European Union member states. The government continues to lack popular support and many fear corruption will continue to plague Lebanese politics even after multiple government formations and cabinet shuffles. Many of the country's hospitals continue to suffer from shortfalls of PPE, basic medications, and chemotherapeutic drugs. Before we left, six of the biggest hospitals threatened closure for non-urgent services and elective procedures. As bleak as Lebanon's situation may seem, in the aftermath of the blast, aided by close, trust-based relationships from working closely with NGOs and medical personnel, as well as the perspective I had gained operating as a CAA and physician over two previous deployments our team helped address a need in a way our regional competitors could not.

Humanitarian assistance was not our original tasking, but if CAAs had not been in the country, timely and effective delivery of US aid may not have happened. The medical supplies we helped deliver directly into the hands of doctors, nurses, and medics who needed it most proved crucial to sustaining life-saving care for thousands. In Lebanon's darkest moment since its brutal civil war, the United States showed the Lebanese people they could count on our support as a trusted partner.



About the Author: Major Rob Tong, MD, is the Medical Director for the 6th Special Operations Squadron and the only physician in the Air Force currently qualified as a Combat Aviation Advisor. He is the Principal Investigator for "Operation Blood Rain: The Effect of Air Drop on Fresh Whole Blood," which will be published in the Journal of Special Operations Medicine this spring.



Scott
PHOTO WORKS

Scott Schaeffler
Photographer

Pavelow #220
www.scottphotoworks.com

(850) 803-0885
scott@scottphotoworks.com
217 Beachview Dr
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547

The OTHER FACE OF AIRPOWER

Afghan Rescue 705 Flight and Legitimacy in Northeastern Afghanistan

28-29 July 2010

By Forrest L. Marion, Ph.D.

with Lt Col Gregory A. Roberts, USAF



The flooded plains in and around Jalalabad.
(Photo courtesy of Col Gregory A. Roberts)

In March 2010, the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing (438th AEW) Commander, Brig Gen Michael R. Boera, offered his perspective on non-traditional roles of air power – “non-kinetic” in current military parlance – in the ongoing counterinsurgency in Afghanistan where he was then serving,

This other face of airpower carries balloting materials to outlying areas of Afghanistan, granting elections a chance to have broad credibility throughout the country. It affords battlefield mobility to indigenous groups, allowing confrontation with and defeat of insurgents. This kind of airpower provides mobility to Afghan citizens, filling logistical gaps that the budding commercial market struggles to meet. It welcomes young people into the service of their nation, giving them a reason to strive for excellence in working for government organizations that have awakened to new, promising days after three bleak decades of uninterrupted armed struggle.

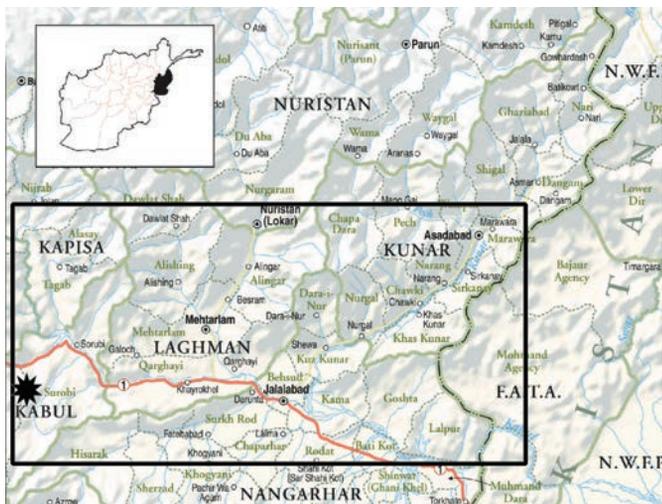
The excellent examples above notwithstanding, one aspect of this “other face of airpower” that went unmentioned, was humanitarian rescue in a combat zone. At the end of July 2010, four US Air Force Airmen, advisors to the Afghan Air Force (AAF) and assigned to Boera’s wing as well as to a NATO entity, the Combined Air Power Transition Force (CAPTF), which Boera also commanded – participated

in one of the largest two-ship helicopter rescue in US Air Force history. The fact that the mission was conducted in a highly-contested area of northeastern Afghanistan added to the significance of the humanitarian accomplishment: saving 2,000 Afghans from devastating floodwaters.

This mission did more than save lives, which was of utmost importance in humanitarian terms. In the context of the ongoing counterinsurgency in Afghanistan however, in which the Taliban and other antigovernment forces strove with Kabul for allegiance and control of the indigenous population, the mission lent legitimacy to the government in Kabul as well as to provincial, local, and nomadic government leaders who called upon the resources of the AAF and its US and NATO partners.

Since 2007, a combined US/NATO-led air advisory initiative in Afghanistan sought to rebuild an indigenous air force. With its air service roots in the 1920s, three decades later the small AAF became highly “Sovietized” as the government turned to the USSR to meet its security needs. By the 1980s’ Soviet-Afghan war, the AAF operated strictly Soviet-made aircraft. The factional warfare of the 1990s reduced the air arm of some four hundred aircraft to a few dozen ill-maintained fighters, transports, and helicopters in the hands of competing warlords. Most of the aircraft that remained were destroyed in 2001 during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

In 2007, the AAF had possessed barely twenty aircraft – mostly helicopters – but by 2010 the fleet doubled in size. Instructor pilots, flight engineers, maintainers, logisticians, communicators, engineers, personnel specialists, and others – from two dozen coalition nations – worked in partnership with AAF counterparts to reestablish an indigenous air capability. American and coalition leaders recognized that



Afghanistan’s forbidding mountainous terrain, lack of ground transportation infrastructure, and threats to ground travel placed a premium on developing an air capability both for the country’s security as well as governance. The exigencies of the Afghan insurgency meant that most of the flying was operational, often at the expense of training. By July, included among the 25 Afghan Mi-17 helicopters were the



Roberts and Willi briefing the mission five minutes prior to engine start. Brig Gen Barat in dark uniform is facing camera. An Afghan face on an Afghan mission, supported by USAF air advisors. (Photo courtesy of Col Gregory A. Roberts)

first two Afghan Air Force “V5” models with a “Western cockpit,” tail numbers 702 and 705.

The drama began on 27 July 2010. An early monsoonal system with embedded thunderstorms brought heavy rains to the provinces of northeastern Afghanistan. Jalalabad Airfield in Nangarhar Province received over eight inches of rain by the 28th. In the summer of 2010, the Taliban insurgency remained active in the area but appeared to be struggling. American and coalition officials believed the insurgency in the Kunar and Pech valley areas in southern Nuristan,

northern Laghman and most of Kunar Province to be supported largely by antigovernment elements that crossed Afghanistan’s northeastern border with Pakistan’s volatile Northwestern Frontier Province. But despite the insurgents, the Afghan government and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force made steady progress in the area. Thus, the monsoon rains occurred at a potentially strategic moment. They might demonstrate the inability of the governing authorities to provide relief – indeed, life-saving rescue – to hundreds of local residents endangered by floods.

The Kuchis called first. Several dozen of the nomadic group needed help as floodwaters rose rapidly in the area of the confluence of the Kabul and Laghman rivers. Receiving the request, the Afghan defense ministry quickly passed the mission to the AAF’s Kabul Air Wing Commander, Brig Gen Mohammed Barat. Barat in turn called the American air advisors with whom he flew regularly. Despite his seniority, he chose to participate personally in the mission as one of the Mi-17 pilots. The general selected another trusted Mi-17 pilot along with the Afghan flight engineers and crew chiefs.

The threat and weather scenario were complex. The requested survivor location in Laghman Province was ten miles from the nearest known threat, which the advisors considered low threat. More serious, however, was an area of well-armed insurgents situated along the straight-line course between Kabul and the Laghman survivor site. The weather made it likely that the crews would have to “scud-run” under the low ceilings and pick their way through the mountain ranges and valley floors to get to the survivors. General Barat’s advisor, Lt Col Gregory A. Roberts – a career Air Force Rescue helicopter pilot who commanded the advisory helicopter squadron at Kabul – recalled that at the airport the weather was “not too bad at mission notification time. But everyone knew the weather in the mountains surrounding Kabul would be treacherous.”

Arriving at the flight line, the Afghans and advisors quickly planned the mission. Barat selected his advisor, Roberts, to fly with him in the lead aircraft; Roberts, in turn, selected Lt Col Bernard M. Willi, another career-long Rescue veteran and the USAF advisory group’s deputy commander at Kabul, as the pilot of the second helicopter. Roberts, as aircraft commander, and Barat, as copilot, took Mi-17V5 #705; Colonel Willi, with an Afghan copilot, had tail number 702. Air Force MSgt Kevin R. Fife volunteered and was assigned as the hoist operator on Willi’s aircraft.



Lt Col (Doctor) Jimmy Barrow and Col Jan Ghir (AAF) during second refueling at Jalalabad on first day.

In the pre-mission brief, the American advisors reviewed the weather, crew members’ responsibilities, and combat search and rescue procedures including formation communications and the survivors’ locations relative to the known threats. Everything the advisors said was translated

by the Afghan interpreter-translators (ITs) from English to Dari to ensure effective communications.

Several others joined the helicopter crews. Barat requested two Afghan public affairs photographers to fly along and record any rescues, an astute counterinsurgency measure. Additionally, the 438th Wing's flight surgeon, Lt Col (Dr.) Jimmy L. Barrow, arrived just in time to jump into Willi's aircraft. The lead aircraft was already on its takeoff climb.

As Afghan Rescue 705 Flight departed Kabul, the weather immediately closed in around the formation. Just east of the capital, the crews nearly turned around because they could barely see the ground below them or the mountains nearby due to fog. Instead, Roberts climbed above the thicker part of the cloud bank and widened the flight's lateral spacing from the nearest terrain. In aircraft 705, Roberts flew as Barat navigated the familiar valley through which ran the ancient Kabul-Jalalabad Road. In the second aircraft, Willi tightened the formation to better maintain visual contact with lead. Descending under the lower clouds and overflying a series of small draws leading to the Kabul River, the clouds were so low as to afford only one passage to the east – the “Gorge of Silk” to Westerners – its mouth marked by the Surobi Dam in far eastern Kabul Province.

While the visibility improved in the area, the cloud ceiling remained low. The bottom of the gorge was full of rushing water and a lone cliff-side road. Roberts led the formation directly above its middle, as if “flying through a tunnel with no place to turn around and no way to respond to an enemy engagement.” The two helicopters passed through the gorge uneventfully. At a glance it was clear that the flooding was severe. The broad river valley was a disaster area. Unknown to the crews at the time, the scene below them was caused by the same floodwaters which several days later struck Pakistan, killing nearly 1,700 people.

Quickly, the two rescue helicopters went to work making the first pickups from the swollen Kabul River where the Laghman River joined from the north. The flooding had caused local farmers and nomadic herdsmen in the lowland area along the river to become stranded on tiny islands. The first rescues took place from the minuscule islands. The crews decided on a field near a village several miles away as a suitable drop-off point.

Convinced that all survivors in the area had been picked up and anticipating the possibility of additional rescue requests from downriver, the formation proceeded into Jalalabad, refueled, and met with an Afghan liaison officer, a colonel. Shortly thereafter, Nangarhar's governor and Jalalabad's mayor requested Afghan government assistance for flood victims northeast of the city.

Roberts led the formation just north of town in a renewed search for flood victims. Four weeks earlier his AAF flight engineer had been wounded in-flight by small arms fire not far away from where they were now flying. The search area was the confluence of the Kabul River which flowed eastward and the Kunar River whose waters traveled

from north to south. The weather remained rainy with low overcasts, visibility no greater than two miles, often less than one. After a quick briefing via the aircraft radios, Afghan Rescue 705 Flight again split the search and rescue scene between them and went to work. Willi and Roberts picked up additional stranded Afghans, some of whose earthen homes were threatened by rushing waters.

As the number of bystanders and rescued flood victims increased, the legitimacy of the Afghan government as well as the local governing authorities increased. Each time an Afghan helicopter with the AAF's roundel on the fuselage



appeared on the scene, and additional Afghans were delivered to safety, government legitimacy increased in the eyes of Nangarhar's populace. News crews gathered, and one crew rode onboard aircraft 705 for one trip to the flooded area; they helped in a rescue. The humanitarian and legitimizing work of Afghan Rescue 705 Flight was to be broadly disseminated.

Despite continued heavy rain and poor visibility, the advisors guided the Afghan crews into a sort of routine. As each Mi-17 landed or hovered just above the ground near a group of flood victims, the AAF crew chief, public affairs personnel, Fife and/or Barrow hopped to the ground, and with the help of the interpreters carried or assisted any children, women, elderly, and fathers with children over the flooded ground to the aircraft. Roberts described the rescue scene as having “an Afghan face, discreetly supported by American advisors towards a resolution of a volatile Afghan disaster.” The public affairs officers that Barat had requested were valued contributors, too, as they documented events and often left their cameras on the aircraft to keep them safe from the elements while they assisted with the survivors. The crews continued their rescue work until sunset, by which time the rain had stopped. Although the prospect of additional rescues the next day was as yet unforeseen, the weather conditions and crew fatigue made Roberts' decision to remain overnight in the local area a prudent one.

After a traditional meal including lamb and chicken kebabs provided by the Afghan colonel at Jalalabad Airfield, the US and Afghan crewmembers retired to the old Soviet control tower for some much-needed rest. The crews had conducted one of the largest single-event search and rescue

missions in history. But their work had just begun.

Early on the 29th, they awoke abruptly at the news of more villagers in need. The men quickly made their way to the aircraft in the fog and faint morning light. The formation was off the ground by 5:00 a.m., heading back to the area north of town. Using the same basic method as the previous afternoon, Roberts, Barat, and crew began picking up more survivors: 59 survivors in three trips. In aircraft 702, Willi



The flooded island in Konar. (Photo courtesy of Col Gregory A. Roberts)

and the Afghan major made one trip and saved 12, but it was on the ground during this pickup in which the mission's most memorable and heroic individual effort took place. As Colonel Willi described, MSgt Fife – who had deplaned to assist the villagers to board the aircraft – jumped into the water to save two children who had fallen and were starting to be swept down the river. Fife – who was untethered from the aircraft and so at risk himself – popped up from the water, grabbed the kids and “tucked them under his arms and trudged through the rushing river and rotor wash back to the helicopter and to safety. He saved their lives.”

After the survivors had been evacuated north of Jalalabad and seeing no others needing their help in the area, the crews turned their attention to refueling – and breakfast. Meanwhile, General Barat, who was eating elsewhere, had received two cell phone calls.

After eating, Barat called Roberts via cell phone. Through the IT, Barat asked the advisors to meet at the aircraft; they had a new mission, but where? Taking off quickly, the crews found 12 people needing evacuation in knee-deep water about a kilometer downstream. It was not yet 8:30 a.m. The weather “remained horrible,” Roberts recalled. The team began a final search of the area north and east of Jalalabad as Roberts broached the subject of the next rescue mission with Barat.

As Afghan Rescue 705 Flight conducted a final search of the washed out area five miles from Jalalabad, the ceilings had lifted slightly but it was still raining hard. The water appeared to be about a foot higher than the previous afternoon and faster flowing, covering nearly every patch of ground in the river bed. As the two Mi-17s flew low over the washed out river basin, Barat quietly told Roberts

through the IT, that Konar's governor had requested rescue for about 300 people. While listening, Roberts instinctively began calculating for the trip north: refueling options and fuel loads, pressure altitude for engine “power available” and “power required” figures, and weather. Checking the weather conditions with Jalalabad Tower, he noted the results on his kneeboard card: clouds at 500 feet (scattered), 3,000 feet (broken), and visibility 2 miles in fog and haze, with heavy rain.

Kunar – where 2,300 years earlier Alexander the Great received a severe shoulder wound from the ancestors of the present-day insurgents – was known to Afghans and Americans alike as “an insurgent hotbed.” In 2010, the valley was one of the most dangerous in Afghanistan. Only weeks earlier, Willi's aircraft had been fired on by a heavy machine gun in the area. Moreover, the two helicopters were completely unarmed. Barat and the American pilots understood that the Taliban and various insurgent factions were vying with each other and the legitimate Afghan government to control Kunar. The formation's destination was somewhere in the Kunar Valley bordering Pakistan's wild Northwest Frontier area. Barat had not specified the exact location, but wherever the rescue helicopters might have occasion to land they would scarcely be able to defend themselves if attacked.

With their job near Jalalabad completed, Roberts headed up the Kunar Valley, still very close to Jalalabad. He needed to brief his wingman on the radio, but they still didn't know specifically where they were going. As Roberts rearranged his formation with Willi he informed him that Barat had received a follow-on request.

Quickly, the formation discussed the request on the radio in both English and Dari. The advisors agreed with the Afghans on the single biggest issue: their helicopters were completely unarmed. Additionally, from the advisors' perspective, there would be pressure on the two instructor pilots not only to fly any demanding mission profiles – such as precise hovering for prolonged periods during a survivor pick up – but to help the Afghan pilots fulfill their roles in the cockpit given their unfamiliarity with search and rescue procedures and the new V5 model. As they climbed to the cloud base at 500-800 feet above the ground, Roberts conferred with Willi on his willingness to take on the new mission. Thirty seconds later, Willi replied, “Boomer, we're all in.” With a quick check on the fuel status of both aircraft, Afghan Rescue 705 Flight accelerated up the valley at the base of the clouds to minimize the chance of surface-to-air fire.

Mohammed Barat's bravery was unquestioned: he had earned multiple awards for valor as a helicopter pilot, under different Afghan regimes. But was it wise to risk losing not only an Afghan general officer but also two senior American rotary-wing advisors and their crews as well? If a helicopter was downed or even became stuck in the mud during a pickup attempt, the crewmembers had no way out of the situation and were entirely without backup. Quickly, Roberts and Barat discussed such concerns, and Barat declared, “No,

we go.” Roberts nodded and passed him the controls: “Fly us there.”

About ten miles south of Asadabad, Kunar’s capital, Barat began a descent and announced that the formation was in the right area. The river valley was much more channelized, but there was a large inhabited island in the riverbed. It was clear the floodwaters had completely swept over the island. There was also no doubt that Afghan Rescue 705 Flight was in “bad-guy land,” Roberts recalled. The road



General Mohammed Barat flying through the Tangi Abreshem. (Photo by Col Gregory A. Roberts)

within view led directly into Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province just a few miles away.

The formation descended and began searching the area for survivors while simultaneously looking for threats. The visibility had improved somewhat, but the rain still fell intermittently. The pilots noted the locations of several groups of survivors and assigned separate areas of responsibility for each helicopter.

As soon as the pilots had gained their bearings, the formation committed itself to the task at hand. Willi chose a group of people waving on the large island and began his approach just as the lead crew spotted on the aircraft’s left side a family waving frantically; a large chunk of their earthen house had just fallen into the rushing water. Quickly realizing that Willi had his hands full with the first group, Roberts performed an aggressive turning emergency-type approach so as to land in the water downstream from the family and perpendicular to the flow. That way his crew could intercept anyone who might be swept into the water. With rotor blades popping in the hot, humid air, Roberts rolled out on a fifty meter final approach as the helicopter transitioned through its normal approach shudder. He plunged 705 into the water. The helicopter landed in about three feet of water, at which point Barat began directing the Afghan crew chief to deplane and help the family aboard. This sequence set the tone for both aircraft for the next five or six hours. Upon landing near a group of flood victims, “all hands” – including flight engineer, crew chief, interpreter, photographer, and flight surgeon – sprang into action to assist

the survivors aboard.

After filling up their cabins with the first groups of survivors, the flight decided on several fields near the town of Dona as a suitable drop-off location. Meanwhile, Doc Barrow was busy checking the survivors’ injuries. Throughout the day he examined some four hundred survivors for life-threatening injuries. The security situation, however, also continued to concern the crews. The survivors’ nervousness was unmistakable; they appeared wary of insurgents or their sympathizers nearby. But without a better option, Roberts and Willi left the initial group of over thirty survivors on the hills near Dona. By the end of the day, 1,700 others joined them.

During the next ninety minutes, a couple of ambulances and some townspeople from Dona appeared on the hills followed by a vehicle-borne element of Afghan National Police. Armed with AK-47s, they formed a perimeter to secure the area. Some held rocket-propelled grenade/launcher sets (RPG-7s); some vehicles sported .50-caliber machine guns. With the help of the air advisors, the legitimate Afghan government – its air force and national police – were gradually increasing the security of the situation even as survivors

were still in extremis only a few miles away.

While the lead aircraft refueled quickly about six miles away at Asadabad, certain survivors had begun informing the police at Dona of Afghans that remained on the island. Whether some of them were insurgents or their sympathizers, or simply unfriendly toward the Afghan government in Kabul or the local province was unknown. Regardless, brandishing weapons and acting aggressively, they were a concern to those Afghans who supported the legitimate government. The shuttling of survivors continued for another two hours.

Soon after the first of two refuelings for both helicopters, the Taliban made their presence known. When making pickups, the crews observed them badgering survivors who lacked the Taliban’s required headgear, and they appeared to be attempting to control the situation on the ground even as desperate families made their way to the Mi-17s. The crews were shocked when they noticed to the northeast of town a large, white Taliban flag that appeared over several structures. That flag meant only one thing: the insurgents wanted the US-Afghan Airmen to know that they were there, eye-to-eye with them. The police at the drop-off site, who could also see the Taliban banner, became nervous and expressed their concerns to the crews as the survivors arrived just outside Dona. Passenger loads were bulging. Roberts and Barat on aircraft 705 averaged 39 passengers throughout the day with a high of 57. Willi’s aircraft 702 had a high of 64 passengers on one flight!

For the second time, Roberts and Barat cycled northeast to the forward operating base at Assadabad for fuel. This

time they shut down the aircraft for a quick lunch. When they returned, they found Willi engaged in what Roberts described as “the most incredible hover I ever saw in my life,” as aircraft 702’s crew worked to rescue about fifteen individuals stranded on what remained of a walking bridge abutment whose bridge had washed away. The bridge survivors’ rescue was the most challenging of the day. Within an hour the rescue crews started to return to Dona only partially filled. Soon after, they delivered the last survivors to the drop-off site. After landing at the (by then) well-secured site and bidding farewell to the police and survivors, the flight departed for Jalalabad to refuel, then on to Kabul. Their two-day rescue total was an astounding 2,080 – some 1,700 on the second day – saved from the dangerous waters. Within the first few days of August, as the raging waters continued downstream causing what BBC News termed the “worst floods in Pakistan’s history,” nearly the same number perished in Pakistan as were rescued by Afghan Rescue 705 Flight in Kunar Province on July 29.

Tragically, eight months after the saving of 2,000 Afghans in distress in Nangarhar and Kunar, in March 2011, two US and coalition airstrikes resulted in accidental civilian deaths in Kunar. The commanding general of US Forces-Afghanistan, General David H. Petraeus, personally apologized to the President of Afghanistan for the first of the two accidental killings, but even so, the two mishaps tended to bring the legitimacy of the Kabul government and, by extension, the assistance of its US and coalition partners into question in the eyes of some Afghans. Throughout its

history, USAF humanitarian airlift missions have saved countless lives and served as tools of diplomacy as well. In the case of Afghan Rescue 705 Flight, legitimacy should be included. In March 2011, an American ISAF officer, meeting with Kunar’s Governor Wahidi, listened carefully as the governor, on his own initiative, recounted the rescue effort. It was a beautiful spring day and a helicopter had just passed overhead, reminding him of the incident. Later, US Navy Commander Kyle W. Taylor paraphrased the governor who recalled that during the previous summer’s floods the “Air Corps [helicopters] moved the people quite swiftly and really made an impact on the community ... and it was the Afghan Air Corps that responded to the crisis.”

In 705 flight’s scenario, a dedicated team of Americans and Afghans worked together not only to pull off the largest single-event rescue mission conducted by two helicopters in US Air Force history, they also enhanced the legitimacy of the government in Kabul and of the capital of insurgent-ridden Kunar Province. At times during the mission, although not under Taliban fire, the aircrews found themselves eye-to-eye with the enemy – an enemy that lacked the capability to rescue those it sought to rule. As suggested by the rescues, as well as by the accidental killings of Afghan civilians in Kunar Province in 2010 and early 2011, the question of whether the residents of the historically volatile region of northeastern Afghanistan choose to side with the Kabul government, or against it, may well depend, in the end, as much on life-saving airlift as on life-taking air strikes.

Editor’s Note: This article was revised in December 2020; a longer version appeared in *Air Power History*, Spring 2012. Note that Colonel Roberts retired in 2019 as an O-6.



About the Author: Forrest L. Marion graduated from the Virginia Military Institute with a BS degree in civil engineering. He earned an MA in history from the University of Alabama and a doctorate in United States history from the University of Tennessee. Since 1998, he has served as a historian at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. In 2009, he deployed in military status to Afghanistan, as historian for the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing, and in 2011, he deployed in civilian status to the same position. Commissioned in 1980, he retired from the USAF Reserve in May 2010.

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POC
Michael C. Reynolds
3rd AFSOC Command Chief
VP, Business Development
mreynolds@ssaai.org
M: 478.335.1442
O: 478.328.8377 X2162

Support Systems Associates, Inc.
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THE POWER OF POLITICAL NATIONAL INTERESTS

...efforts leading up to Task Force Viking
during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

By Maj Gen O.G. Mannon, USAF (Retired)

After reading the excellent article, “Task Force Viking and the Ugly Baby Mission” written by Cory Peterson in *Air Commando Journal* volume 9, issue 2, I thought explaining some of the underlying actions leading up to the night of that mission might be interesting. My purpose behind this essay is to emphasize just how special the crews who flew the mission were and, of course, all the behind-the-scenes professionals: maintainers, logistic, and communications experts, as well as security and the “money” guys, who were so integral to mission success.

For a little background, my first experience of flying from Turkey was from September 1991 to November 1992, when I spent 172 days at Incirlik AB, Turkey, flying support missions with the CASA 212 airlift aircraft. Our primary mission was logistic support of the Special Forces (SF) teams and we also flew local training sorties to support quarterly currency requirements for parachute-qualified teammates. On numerous occasions, we were held on a taxiway to let fully armed Turkish Air Force F-5 fighters take off. When the fighters returned to Incirlik they would execute victory rolls, a series of aileron rolls down the length of the runway, to celebrate a successful mission. When the fighters landed, we could see their external stores were gone.

This is important background to understand the lead up to the Ugly Baby mission in 2003. Disputes between the Kurds and the Turks go back over two centuries, to the Ottoman Empire, and to the allies failure to recognize an independent Kurdish state after the First World War. The modern dispute between these two ethnically distinct groups began during the 1970s, with the formation of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey. Kurdish politics is complicated, so a very general and short overview is helpful.

Kurds are an ethnic Muslim population that generally lives in eastern Turkey, northeastern Syria, and northern Iraq and Iran. They are not united politically. In 2003, the PKK split off its Syrian branch, the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (PYD) and supports its armed wing, the YPG. Both the PKK and the PYD do not care for the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which happens to be run by the Iranian Barzani family. The PKK was designated a terrorist group by the US, UK, and Turkey in 1984. In 2014, though, after the Islamic State victories in Syria and Iraq, the PKK rebranded itself as freedom fighters and became one of the most successful fighting forces in the region. And just to make it just a bit more confusing, the Iraqi Kurds are split between the KDP and the Patriotic Union of

Kurdistan (PUK).

Alliances and disputes among these multiple sub-groups and nations in the region are constantly changing. In 1992, though, the government of Turkey was not about to allow the PKK to create an independent state in southeastern Turkey. They continue to use whatever means necessary to prevent this from happening to this day.

Jump forward to US planning efforts preceding Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in late-2002 – 2003. Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) needed a base of operations northwest of Iraq and we were asking the government of Turkey to use air bases to support the Peshmerga fighters (Iraqi Kurds) attacking Saddam Hussein’s forces on behalf of the US-led coalition. Because Turkey considers a sovereign Kurdistan to be an existential issue, they were not about to allow anything that strengthened or supported Kurdish fighting groups. As a result, they were reluctant and obstructionist in their responses to US basing requests.

While I was personally unaware of this backstory at that time, I surmise it was common knowledge among the diplomatic and national security leaders in Washington, DC. Meanwhile, US European Command (USEUCOM) was putting together a response cell to maintain a more

focused approach to growing Turkish and Iraqi issues and we, at the 352d Special Operations Group at RAF Mildenhall, UK, were invited to be a part of the joint element for planning discussions. A joint team of planners from the US was traveling to Stuttgart, Germany. When they landed at RAF Mildenhall to refuel and offered transportation for our planning and communications team, we accepted. Our communicators were struggling to get their large deployment cases up the forward crew ladder and through the door when I saw a set of air stairs parked adjacent to our location. I climbed down the ladder and with the comm team's help, we moved the steps to the aircraft and loaded the heavy deployment equipment. With the equipment safely loaded, we returned the air stairs to where we had borrowed them. I thought little of the action at the time as it was something we needed to do and we didn't break or damage anything.

When we finally arrived in Germany, we were met by members of the deploying cell and given our in-briefing. Brig Gen Banks (a pseudonym), who was leading the USEUCOM team heading to Turkey, had not worked with special operations components in the past, but I was under the impression our forces would "sell" him on their value as they began to prepare for the soon-to-come combat actions. At the same time, Brig Gen Gary Jones, commander of SOCEUR, was speaking with USSOCOM leadership regarding the upcoming offensive. General Jones stayed in Stuttgart to continue his efforts for upcoming actions in northern Iraq while we continued to Incirlik AB.

When we landed at Incirlik AB our hectic time of force arrival preparations began. The different US and international SOF elements continued building communications and intelligence networks, driven harder by the knowledge that ground forces would arrive soon. Late afternoon on the second day I tried to get some sleep to prepare for the upcoming long days and very short nights, but that was not to be. As I pulled off my boots, there was a knock at the door. It was General

Bank's executive officer letting me know that the general needed to see me immediately.

General Banks had just finished a base drive-around and saw our communications team stringing wire and setting up a remote broadcasting site. When I reported to the general, we had a one-way discussion that seemed to last a long time. When I returned to the billets, I reached out to my boss, General Jones, and asked if he had additional insight into USSOCOM's role in the upcoming push forward. I also told him we were getting extremely close to pulling the "SOCOM card" as to providing operational orders for all activities. Sleep was no longer an option at this point because it was nearing the time for aircraft to start arriving with lead elements of the 10th Special Forces Group who were going to spearhead the invasion of northern Iraq.

Thinking we had put the daylong command and control issue to bed, I went to the airfield to make sure our Airmen were getting what they needed to off-load people and equipment and to quick-turn the aircraft for their next missions. The MC-130s were in adjacent parking spots, all the troops and aircrews were wearing night vision goggles, and the normal beehive of activity inherent with engine running offloads (EROs) was ongoing. The next thing I knew, General Banks was right behind me, yelling into my ear over the engine noise to cease the activities immediately. At this point we were rapidly approaching jump-off time for the troops. As quickly as I could safely drive around the flight line, I contacted COMSOCEUR and asked him to have USSOCOM assume command and control of our operations. A short time later, we were notified by USSOCOM, on a discrete satellite communications frequency, that they assumed operational control of the mission and all forthcoming orders would be approved by them. We were optimistic that the "issue" had been resolved and turned all of our collective focus on air movements. Unfortunately, our Turkish Air Force hosts had other ideas.

One of the unresolved issues we had during all this was the site location

for a permanent command and control building. The Incirlik base leadership identified the starting location for the building with spray paint and told us to let them see the first digging effort before we proceeded. We dug the foundation start point and called them in for review. When the Turkish officer arrived at the location, he immediately said it was in the wrong place. We asked him and his team to mark the location where they wanted the building with a stake this time and an arrow in the build direction. I did not realize what they were doing until we had poured a third start point exactly where we were told and the Incirlik AB commander, a general officer, again told us that it was in the wrong location. Lightbulbs went off in my head and I realized that the Turks were not going to let us accomplish anything that might possibly support the Kurds.

While we were standing there, one of my guys mentioned that the 352d SOG had just returned from a training event with the Romanians and thought the airfield they had based out of would handle all of our deployment needs and activities. Further, since it was March, all the hotels at this European vacation location on the Black Sea would be hurting for business. So, we put together a site-survey team with appropriate security, logistics, and financial representatives, scheduled a flight, and quickly made our way to Constanta, Romania.

When we landed at Constanta, we were met by the base commander and he gave us a tour. He was very proud of his base and offered to support us in any way he could. Our team held a quick update meeting and we came to the conclusion that the air base would definitely serve our requirements. When we finished looking over the base facilities, we drove downtown with a liaison from the base to check on the lodging availability and looked at the security situation for any shortfalls. After a brief visit to all the locations, the team believed they met our needs with just a little tweaking to resolve some security concerns. On the way downtown, we passed a concrete pipe manufacturing plant and saw different sizes and types of



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culverts. My Command Chief and our contracting agent quickly negotiated a price for the purchase and delivery of some security barriers. We were also able to contract for meals and laundry services, as well. The prevailing sentiment heard throughout all our discussions in town was, “why did it take so long for you to come back to our country?” Our Romanian hosts continued with comments saying they had been waiting for us since the end of the Second World War and how much they hated the former Soviet Union. It was absolutely humbling for us to hear the exchanges and personal thoughts about being American citizens. It made our trip back to the air base pretty sobering.

All of these preparatory actions allowed the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-N) to establish its joint operations centers (JOC) at both Panzer-Kaserne, Germany, on 22 January 2003, and Constanta, Romania, on 2 March 2003. As a result, 20 SF Operational Detachments-Alpha (ODA) began moving their people and equipment to Constanta during 3 – 5 March. With the pieces falling into place, a launch window of 20 – 23 March 2003 was established to begin infiltrations and combat operations. We also arranged for billeting, latrine facilities, dining facilities, live fire ranges, and on/off load practice for the SF ODAs while we were waiting for the Execute Order. Just when we thought were tracking on a pretty true course for troop deployment, an incident occurred highlighting the dangers of our profession.

The Constanta base commander, a helicopter pilot, was involved in a fatal crash not far from the base. During our nightly changeover brief, I told the gathered shifts what had occurred. I also found out the Romanians did not have any of the survivor benefit plans we are accustomed to as US military members. I told the group if anyone wanted to donate a dollar or so, I would present it to the grieving widow as a token of our respect for her loss. Special operators being the kind who take care of each other, I quickly

accumulated almost \$1,800.00 in a matter of moments. The Command Chief and I walked over to the deceased base commander’s house and “made our manners” giving her the envelope. After a few minutes with the widow, we went back to work in the JOC. A short time later, I was called outside to meet a member of the base commander’s staff. He told me the commander’s widow requested that the Command Chief and I attend the funeral with her. We both said of course. We arrived early because we were not sure of the sequence of events. We were intent on finding a place to sit close to the window and were promptly ushered in to sit with the family. After the funeral, the widow gave us a hug as we left heading back to the JOC. The relationships we had built over the time we were there just became stronger and suddenly any limitations to our activities disappeared completely.

The title of this essay, “The Power of Political National Interest” comes to the forefront in understanding why we ended up operating from Romania instead of Turkey. We were asking permission to launch combat missions into Iraq that would assist the Kurdish Peshmerga. Even though the Peshmerga were Iraqi and not Turks, any support to a Kurdish group was considered as a threat to Turkish stability and sovereignty. And even though Turkey has long been a US ally and a strong member of NATO, during this tense time US and coalition political interests were in direct conflict with Turkey’s national interests. They viewed our efforts to support Peshmerga forces against Saddam Hussein as support for Kurdish desires for an independent Kurdistan. It was so much of a threat that the government of Turkey was willing to forego the economic rewards from allowing US forces to use Incirlik AB. In the geo-political world of diplomacy, US national goals do not trump another nation’s national goals.

This situation is not uncommon. All of our allies and partners, even long-standing traditional ones such as the UK, Australia, and Poland, always consider their national interests first

in political situations ... just as the US does when asked by other nations for assistance. A good example is found during Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, when the US, the UK, and other allies all had their own rules of engagement (ROE) for policing Iraqi airspace after Operation DESERT STORM. When planning target packages for the operation, coalition planners had to take into account each country’s national ROE when deciding which targets to assign to which force package and how to support those packages with aerial refueling, air defense suppression, command and control, and tactical reconnaissance.

As Cory Peterson pointed out in his article, when we finally kicked off operations from Constanta, the Turks initially refused us permission to overfly Turkey enroute to the landing zones in Iraq. This went on for a day or two until we received permission to launch missions from Jordan. During the Ugly Baby mission on 22 March, and after Harley 37 diverted to Incirlik AB after sustaining severe damage from Iraqi anti-aircraft fire, the government of Turkey changed its mind and allowed the coalition to use Incirlik AB for support operations.

In conclusion, the Ugly Baby mission and all the missions the 352d SOG flew during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM afterwards, were successful because Air Commandos overcame political and physical obstacles that few, if any, had considered and planned for in the years before March 2003. Rigorous and realistic training meant that when Turkey threw the team a “curveball,” we were ready and met the challenge.



About the Author: Maj Gen OG Mannon retired with 35 years of service. During his career he commanded at the squadron, group and wing levels. His joint assignments include: combat staff in JSOC, Deputy Commanding Officer SOCSOUTH, JTF Deputy Commander and Special Operations Air Wing Commander, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Deputy Director for Special Operations on the Joint Staff, and Chief of Staff, US Africa Command. General Mannon flew multiple aircraft during his career accumulating more than 4,400 flying hours.

USSOCOM



The Astounding Story of Its Origin

By Philip Kukielski

Fans of contemporary action movies – and students of classical mythology – know the purpose of an origin story is to reveal the motivating forces behind a hero or villain. Usually the story involves a traumatic, often tragic, event that provokes a fundamental transformation of the character. The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has such a tale; one that is every bit as compelling as any superhero saga ever offered on the big screen by Marvel Studios.

USSOCOM's backstory has gradually emerged from the classified shadows over the course of the 35 years since it was mandated into existence by an act of Congress on 14 November, 1986. Maj Gen Richard A. Scholtes, retired, the first commanding general of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), plays a major role in that historical narrative. The 1983 US-led invasion of Grenada, was the first combat test for his multi-service unit, which was secretly created by the Pentagon in 1980 in wake of the failed 1979 Iranian hostage rescue, Operation EAGLE CLAW. In 1986, a month after his retirement from the Army, Scholtes shared the "shocking" story of the special operation forces experience in Operation URGENT FURY in still-secret testimony before a Senate subcommittee. What he said shaped the legislative blueprint for USSOCOM, a much-augmented successor parent organization.

More recently, Scholtes has also been the source of new open-source details about USSOCOM's conception. Early this year, in response to a formal records request, the Army Center of Military History released to me an unclassified oral history interview that Scholtes gave to a military historian in 1999. In addition, in December 2019, Scholtes self-published a religiously themed autobiography, *God's Invisible Hand Upon An Unlikely Soldier*, which included a chapter about Grenada.

In both the 2019 autobiography and the 1999 interview, Scholtes recalled his role in the tumultuous events of mid-October, 1983, a period now regarded by scholars as the greatest foreign policy test of Ronald Reagan's first term as president. Two crises had suddenly erupted within days in disparate regions of the world, each begging a White House response. One event was the 23 October terrorist bombing of a Marine barracks in Beirut that killed 241 servicemen. The other was a power struggle within the ruling Marxist clique on Grenada that ended in bloodshed and the prospect of civil war. On 19 October, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and three of his most loyal ministers were executed by a firing squad of Grenadian soldiers, acting on the orders of an ascendant faction led by the Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard. To head off any counter-coup, the Coard-aligned military took control and imposed a temporary "shoot on sight" lock-down on the Caribbean island's population of

90,000. The volatile situation potentially threatened about 1,000 resident Americans on Grenada, most of them students and staff at an American-run, off-shore medical school.

The next evening, 20 October, the Pentagon diverted a Navy aircraft carrier battle group and a Navy amphibious squadron from the Atlantic toward the Caribbean in case an evacuation of Americans became necessary. At around the same time, Gen John W. Vessey Jr., the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, called Scholtes at his Fort Bragg headquarters. Vessey directed JSOC to prepare a plan to secure the safety of American citizens on Grenada, and also to restore democracy on the former British colony. Scholtes initially thought he would be conducting a unilateral operation under Vessey's direct command, as had been the case in previous clandestine operations that were never executed. A decade earlier, Scholtes had also served under Vessey's direct command for several years in the 4th Infantry Division, initially as his chief of staff and later as a brigade commander. Working all night, Scholtes' staff prepared an invasion plan exclusively using assault units available to him: Army Rangers, Navy SEALs and Army Delta Force. The draft JSOC plan called for SEAL Team 6 and Delta commandos to fly to strategic targets on Grenada on Army Blackhawk helicopters flown by Task Force 160 aircrews. Two understrength Ranger battalions would arrive separately by Air

Force MC-130 and C-130 transports, supported by AC-130 gunships from the 1st Special Operations Wing.

Unbeknownst to Scholtes, US Atlantic Command (USLANTCOM), a Navy-led geographic combatant command in Norfolk, VA, had been working separately on an intervention plan since 14 October, when Grenada's internal power struggle first became public knowledge. Norfolk had the inside track with the Pentagon because it had the Caribbean in its area of responsibility. Scholtes was essentially being asked by Vessey for a second opinion. On 21 October, Vessey officially designated USLANTCOM as the Pentagon's "supported" command for the operation. That meant Scholtes would operationally report to ADM Wesley L. McDonald, the USLANTCOM four-star. Scholtes was directed to be in Washington at 0700 on 23 October so that he and McDonald could jointly brief Vessey and the Joint Chiefs on what was now their merged invasion plan.

That Sunday briefing was conducted in a flag-festooned Pentagon conference room known as the "Tank." Gen Paul X. Kelley, commandant of the Marine Corps, objected to any intervention plan that did not involve the Marines, given the unanswered (but unrelated) terrorist blow that the Corps had just suffered hours before in Lebanon. "General Vessey, the Marines must be on the island or you will have destroyed the Marine Corps," Scholtes recalled Kelley saying. Kelley's lament was understandable, but Scholtes was shocked to hear this demand raised at such a late stage of the planning. He was even more surprised that the argument gained currency with Vessey. (The chairman was also separately under pressure from Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to double the invasion force, but for a reason unrelated to Marine honor.)

On the spot, the draft URGENT FURY plan was amended to reassign secondary targets on the less populous northeastern side of the island to Marines. This supporting assault would be conducted by a Marine infantry battalion that was aboard the diverted Navy amphibious squadron, now

steaming to Grenada. Vessey literally drew an imaginary east-west line with his finger across a map of the island to illustrate what became their defined sectors: Marines in the north and the Army in the south.

The involvement of the Marines effectively doubled the spearhead forces that would be used on D-Day, among other significant adjustments. H-Hour was moved from 0200, the dark of night preferred by special operations forces, to near dawn at 0500 so that the Marines would arrive on the island just before sunrise. The inclusion of the Marines also raised a nettlesome issue of who would be the on-scene commander of this now all-Services operation. Strictly by military rank, that should have been Scholtes. As a two-star, he was senior to Col James P. Faulkner, who commanded the embarked force: the 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU). However, Marine doctrine called for the commander of an amphibious task force landing to be the ranking Marine, in this case Faulkner. Vessey sought to finesse this tricky interservice issue by directing McDonald to "find someone of three stars," who could be on-scene invasion commander, figuratively playing a Navy trump card on an Army ace and a Marine king. After some thought, McDonald selected Vice Adm Joseph P. Metcalf III, the 2nd Fleet commander who was McDonald's subordinate and neighbor in Norfolk. The Joint Chiefs later defended these alterations at Congressional hearings as simplifying the invasion plan, but Scholtes saw them as complications, a view later shared by influential Senators.

As unsettling as these Sunday amendments were to Scholtes, they turned out to be mere prelude to the events of the next day. In his oral history interview, Scholes described 24 October 1983 as the "most astounding day" of his distinguished 35-year military career. That Monday began with an 0600 "all agency" meeting of commanders and key staff in Norfolk hosted by McDonald. Scholtes met Metcalf, his new boss, for the first time. The two flag officers immediately clashed over who was responsible for an initial failure of their commands to communicate. Scholtes was also

discomforted by what he heard from the CIA and State Department representatives at the meeting. The CIA reported they were unable to determine whether a new 10,000-foot runway under construction by Cuban workers on the southwestern tip of the island was able to land American military aircraft. Scholtes' SEALs had attempted to answer this question Sunday night by conducting a clandestine, by-sea reconnaissance of Point Salines. That mission had failed in foul weather with the tragic drowning of four SEALs. The CIA's disappointing news meant that another reconnaissance attempt would have to be made on the eve of D-Day by the depleted team of SEALs and Air Force combat controllers.

The principal State Department official present then further confounded Scholtes. He insisted the invasion plan be amended to include liberating political prisoners from the Richmond Hill Prison, located near the Grenada capital of St George's. Scholtes balked at the late change because, absent a list of names, the entire prison would need to be secured and held until the political prisoners could be sorted out from the common criminals. A shouting match ensued between Scholtes and the civilian which was eventually adjudicated by a McDonald order that the prison be taken. Scholtes then pleaded for a delay in the invasion for 24 to 48 hours. That too was rebuffed because the invasion forces were already assembling. "I left the briefing very upset," Scholtes recalled in his autobiography.

Adding the difficult prison assault to the JSOC task list had a deleterious effect on other priority missions. Initially Delta Force was to secure the 600 American medical students and staff, who were then believed to be gathered at a campus nearby the new runway. In the revised plan, they were directed instead to the prison, 6.5 miles from the runway. That left the students to be secured by the Rangers at the same time they were seizing control of the unfinished airport, including the work camps of about 600 armed Cuban construction workers.

This late change answers one of the most perplexing post-invasion questions

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about URGENT FURY. If the prime motivation for the intervention was to prevent Americans from being taken hostage, why did it take so long for the assault forces to secure the medical school personnel? The first Rangers did not secure the initial group of students until two and a half hours after the first Rangers parachuted onto the airfield. Scholtes suggests the explanation is that JSOC's specially trained hostage-rescue units (SEALs and Delta) were too busy with other missions involving Grenadian nationals that had higher Washington priority. James A. Baker III, then Reagan's chief of staff, recently acknowledged in an interview with a biographer that the danger posed to American medical students by the disorder on Grenada was exaggerated by the Reagan Administration. "It wasn't just manufactured," Baker said. "But it was important to knock down this little tyrant who appeared there (apparently Coard), it (sic) was of the same ilk as the Sandinistas and the Cubans."

The final invasion plan called for SEALs and Delta Force to arrive on island by air-lifted UH-60 Blackhawks, flying from a staging area at a civilian airport on Barbados. At 0500 Delta would assault the prison while SEALs broke off toward two other targets related to Sir Paul Scoon, the island's Grenada-born Governor General. As the resident head-of-state, Scoon was regarded as the key to forming a new government and restoring parliamentary democracy to the island. These three stealthy regime-change missions would coincide with a parachute or air-land assault by the Rangers on the unfinished Point Salines runway. Also, at H-Hour the 22nd MAU's Marine infantry would arrive by amtracks and/or helicopters on the other side of the island to seize the smaller Pearls Airport and the port town of Grenville.

Due to multiple factors, all the assault forces arrived separately, late, and in the most undesirable order. The nine utility helicopters carrying SEALs and Delta arrived last and after sunrise, instead of arriving first in total darkness. When their Black Hawks arrived over St George's at 0615, they were the target of withering cross fire from alerted Grenadian anti-aircraft artillery crews

who were positioned to defend the capital area. All six helicopters suffered damage. One Blackhawk was shot down, killing the pilot and wounding 11 others aboard. "Had the State Department representative not forced the seizure of the prison as a priority mission we could have avoided many wounded and damage to our helicopter fleet," Scholtes later wrote in his memoir. The SEALs on the two Scoon-related missions also became embattled and in need of rescue.

Scholtes monitored the D-Day failures from his airborne command center in an Air Force EC-130E ABCCC. When the Point Salines runway was secured later in the morning, he landed and set up a command post in an unfinished terminal building. The vanguard forces from the 82nd Airborne Division started arriving after 1400. The paratroopers were expecting to serve as an occupation force, but, instead, they air-landed into an active combat zone where multiple D-Day missions remained uncompleted. Maj Gen. Edward L. Trobaugh, the 82nd Airborne commander, successfully lobbied Metcalf to keep both Ranger battalions on the island for two more days, instead of them flying home at the end of D-Day as originally envisioned. Scholtes recalled Trobaugh saying to him, "My forces don't know how to do this door-kicking stuff that yours do, so I want to keep yours instead."

Rangers were shocked to learn on D-Day that only about one-third of the medical school students lived at the True Blue campus adjacent to the unfinished airport. It took another day for Rangers to reach the main campus at Grand Anse Beach by Marine helicopter. A later Ranger raid involved a chain-reaction collision between three of the 82nd's Blackhawk helicopters that killed three Rangers and wounded three others, plus three Army aircrew members.

Special operations forces ended up suffering a disproportionate number of the URGENT FURY casualties relative to the roughly 6,000 uniformed Americans who participated in the week-long period of hostilities. Of the 19 American fatalities, 13 were special operations personnel: 8 Rangers, 4

SEALs, and one Task Force 160 pilot. Three Marine Cobra pilots were killed in action providing unscripted air support for special operations missions. The number of special operation forces wounded in combat was more than 100: 69 Rangers officially reported and at least 3 SEAL, 18 Delta and 11 Task Force 160 unreportable as wounded.

Scholtes flew home to Fort Bragg with the first plane-load of his JSOC wounded at around 1300 on 26 October, after turning over control of the southern sector to Trobaugh. Back stateside, Scholtes waited for a call from higher authority for an in-person, after-action assessment of the operation. "URGENT FURY came so very close to being a complete disaster... one would think that CINCLANT (McDonald) would have scheduled a hot wash or an after-action review of the mission with every player present so we could learn from our mistakes. There was no hot wash by CINCLANT or the joint staff in

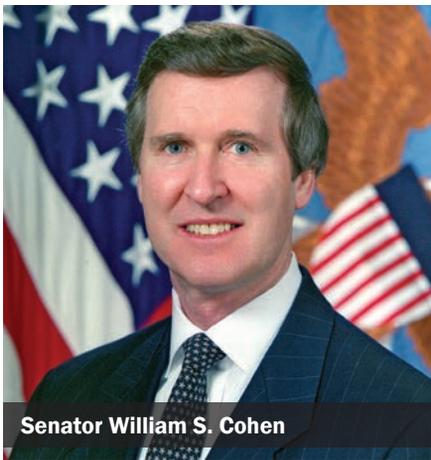


the Pentagon," he later wrote.

However, URGENT FURY did get pulled into a Beltway debate over Pentagon organizational reform that began 20 months before the Grenada intervention and continued for years after. Senator Sam Nunn (D-Georgia), a leading reform advocate, urged use of URGENT FURY as a case study because, unlike Vietnam or the Iran hostage rescue attempt, it avoided the sensitivities that surround a failure.

Scholtes eventually got a forum to speak truth to power about his Grenada experience one month after he retired from the Army as a major general. On 5 August 1986, he was invited to speak

as a civilian to a Senate Armed Services subcommittee that was considering a bill that would enhance the status of special operations forces within the Pentagon hierarchy. Just before Scholtes testified, ADM William J. Crowe, the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, tried to head off Congressional action. He offered to administratively create a new Special Operations Command Force headed by a three-star that could be functioning within six months. Scholtes was asked about Crowe's proffer when he later testified briefly in public session. Scholtes expressed doubt that a three-star would have the "leverage" to get the budgets that SOF needed, but he withheld his principal remarks for a closed session with the subcommittee. The transcript of that testimony is still classified, but Scholtes reportedly spoke mostly about how special operation forces had been misused during URGENT FURY. "Scholtes told the lawmakers how his forces were robbed of their unique capabilities by the conventional planners and chain of command," wrote William G. Boykin, a Delta Force veteran of



Senator William S. Cohen

the star-crossed Richmond Hill Prison attack, in a historical background paper.

Whatever he said, it had a kinetic effect on the senators. Scholtes was invited back to Capitol Hill hours later by Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Maine) to meet informally with other influential senators, including Nunn. Scholtes spoke and answered questions for two hours. A memorandum for the record later prepared by a Congressional staffer for Cohen indicates that what Scholtes told the senators then closely corresponds to the Grenada account

he offered in his oral history and autobiography. The next day, 6 August, Cohen introduced a revised bill that converted his draft bill from a "Sense of the Congress" resolution to more strongly worded "forcing legislation." The latest version also changed the form of the measure from stand-alone legislation into a hard-to-veto rider to the 1987 Defense Authorization Act. In introducing the revision, Cohen declared, "In my view, we have not been adequately organized to fight the most likely battles of the present or the future." Twenty-six senators joined him as bipartisan supporters of the rider, which was attached to the Senate version of the authorization bill by a voice vote the same day.

The Senate rider then went to a conference committee to be reconciled with a related House-passed bill that took a more radical approach to special operations forces reform. Ultimately a compromise version emerged as "Part B-Special Operations Matters, Section 1311" in the annual defense authorization legislation. That section later came to be colloquially known as either the Nunn-Cohen Amendment or Cohen-Nunn Amendment, depending on whether Cohen or Nunn's name then carried greater political weight inside the Beltway. Whatever the name, Public Law 99-661 was unenthusiastically signed by President Reagan on 14 November 1986. Neither Reagan nor the Pentagon hierarchy was happy with the forcing amendment; both felt Congress had infringed on their respective warfighting prerogatives.

The amendment had three key components. First, it created a new unified command for special operations forces (later to be called USSOCOM) that would be headed by a general or admiral of four-star rank. All special operations forces units of the four uniformed services stationed in the United States, both active duty and reserve, would be assigned to this command. The four-star was specifically empowered to perform such critical functions as training, development and procurement of special equipment, developing strategy and tactics, and "monitoring" promotions and assignments. Depending on the

circumstances, the new command would conduct missions reporting directly to the President or Secretary of Defense, or indirectly under the command of a geographic area commander, such as Atlantic or Pacific Command. Secondly, the command would report to the defense secretary through a newly created post of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict. Finally, and most uniquely, the new assistant secretary and four-star commander would be responsible for the preparation of a new "major force" budget category – Major Force Program 11 – specific to SOF needs. Together these provisions made USSOCOM something more than a sixth unified combatant command, but something less than a fifth Pentagon uniformed Service. One commenter aptly described it as a "new near-Service."

"The Pentagon was waging a frontal and rear assault in opposition to the creation of a special operations command," Cohen recalled 20 years later. "Without his (Scholtes) testimony it (USSOCOM) might not have happened, or we might have created a command with only two or three stars. Once he testified on what took place in Grenada – that was the pivotal point."

Scholtes was working in civilian life in the lumber business when USSOCOM was activated by the Department of Defense on 16 April 1987. According to his memoir, the next year he resumed his professional association with special operations forces by taking a job with Analytic Services (ANSER), a not-for-profit consulting company that was doing work for USSOCOM. Scholtes worked for ANSER as a consultant, project manager, and eventually a vice president for special operations until a cancer diagnosis forced his second retirement in 2001. Now 87, he lives in South Carolina.



*About the Author: Philip Kukielski is the author of *The U.S. Invasion of Grenada: Legacy of a Flawed Victory*, an historical reconsideration of Operation URGENT FURY and its aftermath. He also is a former writer and managing editor for *The Providence Journal*.*

BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Scott E. McIntosh

The Power of Awareness

By Dan Schilling

(Grand Central Publishing, 2021, 250 pp.)

“No plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force,” said Helmuth von Moltke the Elder in the 19th century. Later writers compressed the Field Marshal’s advice into “No plan survives first contact with the enemy.” I am certain that five minutes after he said it, some enterprising Prussian lieutenant asked why should professionals then do it. There is utility in a plan, though, even when reality knocks it off the rails. In *The Power of Awareness*, Dan Schilling specifically addresses this question when offering a tool kit for venturing out into a dangerous world to seek either business or pleasure.

The book presents six safety rules:

1. Be Situationally Aware
2. Trust and Use Your Intuition
3. Determine if You Have a Problem
4. Develop a Plan
5. Act Decisively
6. Regroup and Recover

It is inside his chapter on Rule 5, after he narrates both Carol DaRonch’s narrow escape from Ted Bundy’s Volkswagen and a perilous situation Schilling himself encountered in that massive firefight in Mogadishu, that he explains why planning is essential, “Once you have a plan, even a hasty one formed in a matter of seconds, there’s nothing more to think about. It’s time to take action.” Commit, he advises, with speed, audacity, and violence.

At first glance this sounds like bravado, but Schilling makes it clear in the Rule 6 chapter that he is not advocating running toward violence, but acting primarily to remove oneself from the harmful situation. As the flight attendant says in the mask-drop safety brief, and any combat first aid course instructor emphasizes—get yourself out of peril, then take stock and either put the mask on the child or treat the casualty. Taking stock of the situation is, after all, one of the main themes of the book. As I would tell my Anti-Terrorism and Force Protection classes, head-on-a-swivel is the best practice—whether you’re driving to work, be-bopping down the street in an unfamiliar city with your phone buzzing in your pocket, or taking your lunch at the mall food court.

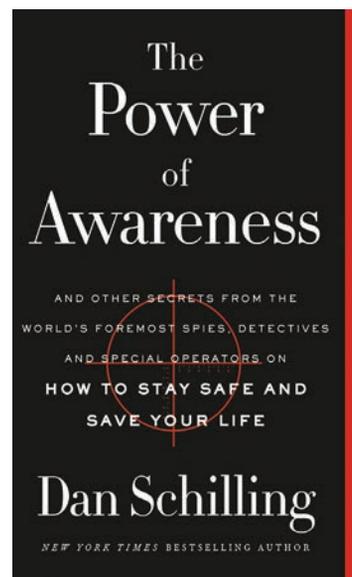
Schilling uses other effective examples and themes to make his points about awareness—not just Ted Bundy, but convenience store robberies, the Columbine shootings,

and a humbling theft he himself experienced in Baja California on a pleasure trip. He backs up his assertions with statistics and studies, too. It would be easy to argue, for example, that your walk and what you wear can make you a target, and leave it at that—but he brings in recent studies of “convicted violent psychopaths [on factors which] specifically identify a victim’s potential” and cites findings on “vulnerable body language” to support his assertions. These observations could be controversial, but the author has clearly done his homework before taking the risk of putting them before a mass audience.

He is no less courageous or candid in discussing mass shootings in an objective and well-supported manner. After all, if the reader’s purpose is to maximize the chance of surviving one of these awful events, it is essential to acknowledge the increasing frequency and violence of active shootings in America. Again, he states emphatically that escaping bad circumstances is paramount for survival. He then emphasizes communicating the situation to someone outside of it, and fighting for your life if the options run out. “Escape, evade, and defend,” he writes: “[U]ntil a police response can assist you, you are on your own and therefore you must take ownership.”

Sometimes, he points out, we find ourselves unexpectedly in dangerous situations—for example, in bank robberies or being followed down a dark street by nefarious characters—and the aforementioned hasty planning is essential to escaping them, too. Schilling, though, asserts that there are self-protection steps a reader can take right now, and the return on investment in time and thought could be huge.

Before going on a trip, for instance, he advises looking



for open-source intelligence on-line about the area in which you plan to stay, eat, and travel. Hotel and resort webpages are created, after all, to sell rooms, so a deep-dive into travel blogs and consumer reviews is a low-cost/no-cost preparation you can accomplish before leaving the safety of your home. It is also helpful to know both how to summon the local law enforcement and where the nearest US consulate is located before you touch down at the destination.

The book's focus is on education, not training. We train to react to likely events—for example donning a gas mask quickly in the midst of a chemical warfare exercise or reacting to a misfire on a weapons range. We educate, though, on the what-ifs and the whys of a situation, because the aperture can widen from pro-action to reaction in a nanosecond. Schilling advises that situational awareness in this case can make the difference between safety and catastrophe. We can train all day on the best ways to escape, evade, or defend—but it is education that prepares one for deciding which is most appropriate in a perilous situation. His approach is more cerebral than either the aforementioned chemical warfare exercise or range qualification, and he encourages the reader to maintain intellectual curiosity beyond *The Power of Awareness*. “Think for yourself,” he writes. “Apply what you’ve learned here and then modify it, shape it to fit your own circumstances and needs. Find other

sources of information and spend time thinking about how to apply them to your personal safety.” The book's appendices offer both helpful websites and checklists to enable this.

By the end of the journey, Schilling has provided the reader several real-world case studies, with after-action reviews from law enforcement, intelligence, and special operations experts to elucidate what went wrong and right as things played out. He discusses terrorist attacks, home invasions, identity theft, and on-line dating situations that go from zero to malicious in an instant. He highlights the importance of intuition—a defense mechanism honed by generations of survival and evolution. In only 250 pages, the book cannot cover every danger a reader can encounter in the modern world. Schilling's use of Bundy, Baja, and the boulevards of Mogadishu to advocate for his six safety rules, however, is a pretty effective method for educating his audience. Indeed, no plan survives first contact, but this book effectively argues that planning for bad actors and maintaining the awareness to effectively respond to them can make all the difference.



About the Author: Scott E. McIntosh is Assistant Professor of Business & Strategic Intelligence at Newman University, Wichita, Kansas, where he teaches classes on the Cold War, International Relations, and Critical Thinking in Intelligence Analysis.

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Air Commando embraces his wife upon his arrival home at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. (USAF photo/ Staff Sgt. Matthew Plew) (RELEASED)