

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

Vol 10: Issue 2

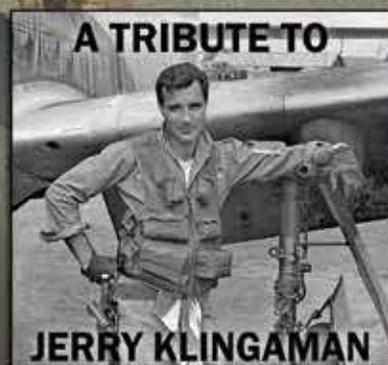
COYOTES OF KABUL

Air Mobility Advisors in Afghanistan

AC-27: The Gunship That
Almost Was...and Its Legacy

The Future of Airpower in
Irregular Warfare

Second Defense of Lima Site 36



Foreword by Mark Hicks, Maj Gen, USAF (Retired)
Former Commander, Special Operations Command Africa

Air Commando JOURNAL



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ON THE COVER:

Lt Col Steve Hreczkosij (on the right) stands with his Afghan counterparts in front of an AAF C-208.

Photo courtesy of Steve Hreczkosij



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FOREWORD

As this edition of the *Air Commando Journal* goes to press the world is settling into a new era of great power competition between the United States and liberal democracies on one side, and the authoritarian states of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea on the other. This lineup has similarities to the Cold War, but is fundamentally different because of less direct military competition offset by more governmental and economic competition. These authoritarian states pose an existential threat to the United States and her allies not because of their conventional or nuclear capability, but because they offer a competitive form of governance, with state-backed economic incentives, that are attractive to leaders across the developing world. Therefore, much of this competition will play out in political, economic, informational, and security spaces of the developing world. As Lt Gen Thomas Trask, USAF, retired and Dr. James Kiras point out in their article, much of that competition will likely come to pass in the developing world through irregular warfare, where special operations forces and Air Force Special Operations Command have much to offer.

Additionally, the United States has just ended the military evacuation of tens of thousands of American citizens and Afghans following the collapse of the Afghan government in the wake of the precipitous withdrawal of US and NATO military forces. Ending two decades of US military engagement in Afghanistan has not ended the ethnic and religious conflicts, or made the region or world any more stable, secure, or prosperous. It does provide a backdrop for necessary discussions about how the United States engages in an uncertain world, with imperfect partners, imperfect knowledge, and limited political will. The US military will need to learn quickly from both successes and failures to prepare for a complex and uncertain future.

This issue of the *Air Commando Journal* provides some thoughtful ways to learn from our shared history, with articles ranging in time from the Viet Nam War to the present day, discussing individuals and weapon systems. Additionally, if you look a little closer you will see some consistent themes that are worth noting. First, is that the story of airpower—despite common misconceptions—is never about the airplane or technology, it is always about the people who envision a different future and then invent, innovate, coordinate, and persevere to create capability that the nation needs, often despite prevailing acquisition trends. The story of airpower is about the humans who master their craft, teach and mentor the next generation, and continue to contribute beyond their active flying careers. Second, Air Commandos have filled, and continue to fill, a myriad of

roles from providing medical support or delivering effects on the battlefield, to mastering existing weapon systems, to advocating for the next generation of capabilities regardless of its appeal to the prevailing conventional military thinking. The diverse set of skills and capabilities across the AFSOC community is truly stunning and expanding almost every day. That diversity will ensure AFSOC remains relevant in a complex and uncertain future.

In this edition, Larry Ropka provides examples of the first theme and remind us that many individuals like Brig Gen Heinie Aderholt and Jerry Klingaman had outsized impacts on the development of Air Force Special Operations. Steve Hreczkosij also reinforces the centrality of people in developing airpower and provides an example of the diverse skills in the community with his article on combat aviation advisors in Afghanistan. Mike Brennan and Bill Walter provide some insight into the amount of effort required to create new capability in their piece recounting the unsuccessful effort to convert C-27s into gunships. Dr. Ron Dains clearly hits both themes with his submission on Operation GOTHIC SERPENT. Likewise, SrA Maxwell Daigle's story of SSgt Alaxey Germanovich reminds us that airpower is an intensely human activity requiring a broad variety of skills and courage. General Trask and Dr. Kiras remind us that great power competition is not only about conventional forces with their timely discussion about the future of airpower in irregular warfare. Dr. Rick Newton provides an example of both themes as well as the role of airpower in irregular warfare with his historical account of Lima Site 36. Finally, the look back at the U-10 Super Courier provides another example of how innovative individuals can create specialized airpower. Once again, the *Air Commando Journal* delivers on its mission to inform all Air Commandos on operations, issues, and developments within our Air Force special operations community.



Mark Hicks, Maj Gen, USAF (Retired)
Former Commander, Special Operations Command Africa



CHINDIT CHATTER

Welcome to the 32nd edition of the *Air Commando Journal*. With the inaugural issue published on 1 September 2011, we are celebrating our 10th year of providing interesting articles, interviews, and book reviews to inform current, past, and future Air Commandos on operations, issues, and developments within Air Force special operations. We thank all those writers who have contributed articles over the last decade and welcome anyone with an interest in sharing their stories and historical interests to help us keep the *Journal* interesting and informative over the next 10 years.

I'd also like to announce that the ACA launched its first publication under the Air Commando Association

Press banner. The monograph, *Valor Untold: Air Commandos During the Jonestown Massacre Recovery, 1978* by one of our editors, Dr. Rick Newton, tells the heretofore untold story of combat controllers, aircrews, and maintenance teams who worked for two weeks in the steaming jungles of Guyana to honorably recover the victims, demonstrating the attributes of selfless service, boldness, and humble professionalism

that are now synonymous with America's "Air Commandos." *Valor Untold* is available for purchase online at www.AirCommando.org.

Speaking of anniversaries — the Son Tay Raiders Association is having their 50 year Reunion (postponed from last year) in November. They are planning to meet beginning Tuesday, 16 November at the Four Points Sheraton in Fort Walton Beach. The fine details are being worked, but they plan to have events with the 7th Special Forces Group units from Hurlburt Field and Duke Field, culminating with their banquet on Saturday, 20 November at the Sheraton Hotel. Hopefully, the health environment will allow this celebration to go on.

An excellent book commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Son Tay Raid, *Who Will Go: Into the Son Tay Prison Camp*, written by Terry Buckler with Cliff Westbrook, was published last year by Palmetto Publishing. Buckler, a 20 year old Sergeant in November of 1970, was the youngest member of the Son Tay assault

force. There are a multitude of books written about the Son Tay Raid by historians, aircrew, and others, but *Who Will Go* is the first book written by one of the enlisted Special Forces soldiers who were on the ground in the POW camp at 0220 hours on Saturday, 21 November 1970.

Buckler's easy writing style details his experiences as a Missouri farm boy who enlisted in the US Army in 1969, just weeks before he was to be drafted, through basic training, Special Forces training, and the luck to have been at Fort Bragg when Col Bull Simons' staff was interviewing soldiers for what he (Simons) dubbed as a "moderately hazardous mission." Terry Buckler was selected despite having no combat experience!

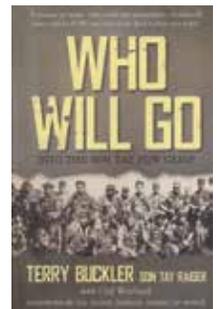
The foreword of *Who Will Go*, written by Colonel Roger Donlon, a Special Forces icon and Medal of Honor recipient, is the perfect beginning of the journey back 50 years to one of the "most daring missions in military history." The first half (144 pages) of the book details the operation from a junior soldier's point of view in short easy to read chapters. The second half of the book contains six appendices that provide "A 30,000 ft view of the mission," as well as memories of the event and reunions written by 40 of the raiders, airmen who participated, and POWs who were imprisoned at Son Tay. Other appendices have a large number of pictures of the raiders, the aircrews, aircraft, and diagrams that make this book very interesting for anyone who enjoys military history.

Of interesting note is co-author Cliff Westbrook's father,

retired Colonel Clyde "Neal" Westbrook, was aircraft commander of the HC-130P Lime 2 on the Raid. His aircraft, 65-0991 is on display at Cannon AFB.

Who Will Go, Into the Son Tay POW Camp by Terry Buckler and Cliff Westbrook received an enthusiastic endorsement from General Doug Brown, former Commander of USSOCOM. I've read a number of books on Son Tay, and I add my praise for *Who Will Go*, which looks at the mission from a whole different perspective.

Finally, I'd like to recognize the Class of 2021 inductees into the Air Commando Hall of Fame: Colonel (ret) Tim Hale, Maj (ret) Dan Turney, SMSgt JB Lackey (posthumously), CMSgt (ret) Calvin Markam, and Lt Col William Schroeder (posthumously). Congratulations to all the inductees and their families.



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

HOTWASH

Sam Takes His Final Flight

It is with heavy hearts, the Air Commando Association informs our readers that Felix (Sam) Sambogna, took his last flight west. Sam was instrumental in assisting the ACA's transition from a largely fraternal group, to what we are today. He served in all capacities, once he served as both President and Treasurer simultaneously. He was a great mentor and advisor to me personally.



Felix 'Sam' Sambogna

He was an active volunteer right up to his last days. He was the epitome of the quiet professional. He should have been in the Air Commando Hall of Fame but refused on several occasions. I am pleased that we were able to at least surprise him with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019, for which he was totally humble and self deprecating in his acceptance. RIP Sam. We will miss you dearly, friend.

Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Retired)
ACA President

Correction

In our Hall of Fame issue of the *Air Commando Journal* (Vol 9: Issue 3) this past February we made a terrible mistake



Roland "Mac" K. McCoskrie

in the article "McCoskrie Threshold Foundation, Humanitarian Arm of the ACA 1986-2020". Multiple times within the text and in the byline for the picture we mistakenly referred to Colonel McCoskrie using John as his first name. The colonel's name is Roland "Mac" K. McCoskrie.

We apologize to Colonel McCoskrie's family and the wider Air Commando community and promise to do a better job quality checking

our journal in the future. While we can't change the printed magazines, we went back and corrected our mistake in the *Air Commando Journal* online so the article now properly honors Colonel McCoskrie and the tremendous humanitarian work that he did.

Paul Harmon, Colonel, USAF (Retired)
Editor-in-Chief, *Air Commando Journal*

Air Commando Journal Vol 10 Issue 1

This is just a note to say that the subject issue is one of the best I've ever read. Each and every article is well written and very interesting. Thanks a lot.

Sincerely,
John O. Teague
ACA Life Member # 50

Good afternoon ACA,

Our team at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force is working on expanding and revitalizing our enlisted Airmen exhibits and text panels. As part of the team, and retired Air Commando, I've been tasked with writing content packages for a number of individuals with backgrounds in special operations and combat rescue. I'm looking for information on and pictures of: Wayne Fisk, Duane Hackney, Timothy Wilkinson (including Bray and Fales), Jeremy Hardy (including Ellis and Kubik), Anissa Shero, Scott Sather, Bruce Dixon, and Michael Lamonica.

I am already working with AFHRA, EHRI, and AFSOC/HO, and though there is no shortage of information on the individuals, there is a little bit of a stalemate with photos.

SSgt Anissa Shero was featured in your Oct 2018, Vol 7, Issue 2 edition and the TSgt Tim Wilkinson with team were highlighted in the article about Operation GOTHIC SERPENT in the Jan 2017, Vol 5, Issue 3 edition.

I was wondering if it is possible for you to send me hi-res photos of the individuals in the articles above and also if you have any pictures of the other individuals in your records.

Any help would be appreciated.

V/r
Bryan D. Carnes
ACA Life Member #4490
Curator, Research Division
National Museum of the USAF
1100 Spaatz Street
Wright-Patterson AFB, OH 45433

Thanks

First, I had all intentions to e-mail a note of appreciation for the newest edition, Volume 10, Issue 1 handling of HADR. Great articles from the teams who executed missions in four different areas. I thoroughly enjoyed each article. They represented the great Air Commando heritage, doing whatever it takes to make the mission a success. As always, I started at the front page and just finished all the HADR stories when Miss Barb indicated she was ready to make our normal second weekly post office box visit. Upon arrival, I found an envelope with three copies of the latest edition.

Puzzled, I looked through the magazine and found an article I had written in the spring. Our email conversation at the time indicated it was not quite what you guys wanted as, correctly in my opinion, you wanted to focus the magazine on operator actions. So, I appreciated the opportunity to complete the article as it brought back great memories of the time. Every person on the distributed joint team did all of us proud.

So, I just wanted to express my sincerest thanks to the entire *Air Commando Journal* team for their efforts making the article pertinent in Volume 10: Issue 1. I commend the entire team for all the hard work necessary to turn out outstanding magazines year in and year out.

Best regards,
OG Mannon
ACA Life Member #3949

Sir / OG,

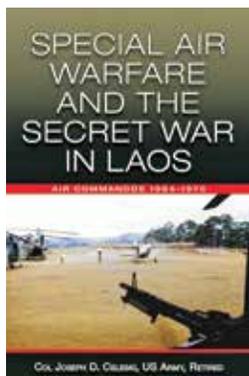
I, on behalf of the Air Commando Journal staff, thank you for your feedback and the kudos on the recent ACJ Humanitarian Assistance issue. Also, thank you for taking the time to contribute your article to the issue. I think the "Power of Political National Interests" gives our readers some great insight into the big picture and what it took to get the first 352d SOG missions into northern Iraq.

Thanks again for your comments and support.

*Paul Harmon, Colonel, USAF (Retired)
Editor-in-Chief, Air Commando Journal*

Donation

Please use this check towards my net payment of dues and keep the remainder for one of your scholarship or charitable causes.



I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for the tremendous assistance to get the book "*Special Air Warfare & the Secret War in Laos*" published, along with the great book review appearing in the Journal. Meeting and interviewing the Laos veterans during the annual reunions was the best time in my life. I hope

all of our efforts to make it the best capture of Air Commando history is a testament to the veterans and the community.

V/r
Joseph Celeski
Buford, GA
ACA Member #5760

Air Commando Journal Vol. 10 Issue 1 **Air Commandos Respond to Haitian Earthquake**

I was just reading through my latest copy of the ACJ, Vol. 10 Issue 1. My interest perked up when I saw an article: Air Commandos Respond to Haitian Earthquake. After reading through the entire article twice, I came to the realization that there was no mention of the 193rd SOW and the EC-130J Commando Solo aircraft.

I get the focus of the article was the "boots on the ground" and I enjoyed hearing that perspective. The author did mention our Pennsylvania Governor assisting with relocating orphans back to the state but no mention of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard's contribution to the relief efforts. Given that the article was written from an AFSOC perspective, I would have thought there would have been at least one sentence mentioning the Commando Solo mission providing hundreds of hours of broadcast time with news, information and public service announcements to the beleaguered population of Haiti.

From our perspective, the 193d SOW had just completed an 9 month deployment to Enduring Freedom in mid-December 2009. The unit launched (2) EC-130Js Commando Solo's to support Unified Response within 36 hours of notification directly from the US State Department and eventually following up with an EC-130J Slick aircraft flying humanitarian aid into Haiti as well. For an Air Guard just coming off a major deployment to pack up and respond to an international crisis in this short notice, is almost unheard of in this day and age. This does speak volumes about the volunteer spirit of the National Guard to support domestic and international crisis's on short notice.

Having personally participated in Operation Unified Response, I was a little disappointed that the 193d SOW as an AFSOC Total Force Integration partner wasn't even mentioned in the article.

Respectfully,
James B. Pace, CMSgt PA ANG
ACA Life Member #6445

Valor Untold: Air Commandos During the **Jonestown Massacre Recover, 1978**

Colonel Barnett,

My name is Mike Massengale and am a recent Life Member of the Air Commando Association and former FAC (O-2A), CCT, TALO & C-141B SOLL II pilot. I was part of the Combat Control Team package from Howard AFB on the initial deployment responding to the Jonestown, Guyana, incident.

I've just finished reading *Valor Untold* by Rick Newton



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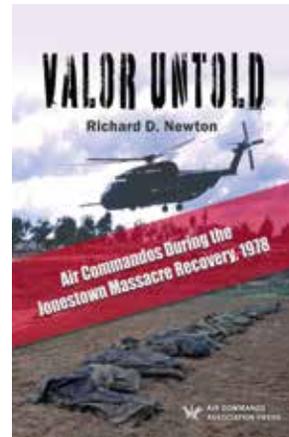
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HOTWASH CONTINUED

and published by the Air Commando Association Press. As an eye witness to much of what happened during the Jonestown operation, I followed what was reported in the press for years afterward. In truth, during the mission I had been so intently focused on putting out fires at our Georgetown Embassy, in Jonestown and at Timehri Airfield that I had little understanding of the effort underway to deploy the Rescue & Recovery assets to Guyana.



From the time we redeployed to Howard AFB in November 1978 until this week I've seen news reports, magazine articles and TV "Specials" about the mission that have been disjointed, inaccurate in part and mostly focused on the sensational aspects of the incident. All of that came to an end with the publication of *Valor Untold*. In Guyana I daily saw the rotors turning, aircrews sweating and all of the Rescue & Recovery assets at work. Little to none of

the previous reporting told that part of the mission story. *Valor Untold* tied all the disjointed aspects of the earlier reporting together into a coherent description of the Jonestown mission and nothing in Rick's monograph is contrary to my personal knowledge.

I contacted Rick to thank him for a job well done and he was quick to tell me your sponsoring of his effort made all the difference. This work is important to me and it records a long neglected part of Rescue & Recovery history. Thank you for everything you did to make it happen.

Robert M. Massengale
Lt Colonel, USAF (Ret)
ACA Life Member #6906

You can purchase *Valor Untold* online at www.AirCommando.org while supplies last.

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Online blog at www.aircommando.org

Email: info@aircommando.org

or write to **ACJ, P.O. Box 7, Mary Esther, FL 32569**



A Tribute to



Jerome "Jerry" Klingaman *The Quiet Air Commando*

By Larry Ropka Jr., Colonel, USAF (Retired)

In the early 1960s, "quiet" was rarely a term applied to the Airmen manning the fledgling and all-volunteer units that would become the Air Commando squadrons in Southeast Asia. Most of the volunteers were rough and tough as demonstrated by their regular "Friday Night Fights" at the Officers Club. Jerry was a family man, though, and he was rarely seen at the club.

Jerry was a unique personality, more like a professor of history than a typical hard-charging fighter pilot. He had a number of extracurricular hobbies and passions that entailed extensive research and effort, all in the interest of perfection. He was rarely anything other than "all in." One example was his quest for British and later Chinese

antiques and art. To him the full provenance of an item was much more important than the item itself. It was best not to admire one of the pieces in his collection if you did not have a few hours to spare.

After his retirement from federal service in 2008, Jerry took up astronomy. After years of study, he purchased a very expensive computer-controlled telescope which he housed in a small "observatory" in his back yard. He would take long hours of time lapse photography of distant celestial objects, then go through the painstaking process of turning them into stunning pictures and a number were published in major scientific journals.

These are just some of the traits that enabled Jerry to accomplish his

singularly important contributions in codifying numerous aspects of contemporary special air operations.

Before the Vietnam War, US special operations had no codified doctrine. What existed was a patchwork of ideas left over from the Second World War and the Korean War. As Vietnam and other insurgencies emerged during the Cold War, the military adapted whatever seemed to work with little thought to codifying doctrine and best practices. It was not a pretty picture and there was little to no cross-pollination between the Services...each pretty much did their own thing. That condition persisted until 1986 when Congress created what we now know as Special Operations Command and the subordinate



components in the four Services. Providence was planning a path for Jerry to make major contributions to the new order.

In the summer of 1965, Jerry decided to leave his career in the fast-jet Air Force to join the Air Commandos flying C-47 transports. A year later he was ordered to Wattay, near Vientiane, Laos as part of Project 404. From August 1966 to March 1967, he served as the air operations center (AOC) commander at Wattay, advising the Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) squadron flying strike sorties against communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces. He returned to Laos in September 1968 as an advisor and commander of a Royal Laotian Air Force AT-28 squadron at Pakse in Military Region 4, supporting General Vang Pao's guerrillas. He not only advised the Laotian pilots, but occasionally, against the rules, flew missions with them to demonstrate trust and confidence in their flying and fighting skills. Jerry also took advantage of Air America sorties to travel up-country and visit the different Lima Sites and familiarize himself with the battlespace. At Pakse he had a Cessna O-1D Bird Dog available for his use. He used it for reconnaissance and marking targets, eventually earning the Raven callsign.

Jerry was one of the most successful leaders Project 404. When he arrived at Pakse, the squadron was on its back. The previous AOC commander had been fired and the squadron pilots were only averaging

one sortie per week. Jerry completely turned the squadron around, to the point that they became one of the highest performing units in the RLAF. One of Jerry's trademarks was to gather the squadron together after a combat loss and he would play his guitar while they all sang Laotian songs. His experiences during that war,

seeing how native pilots without the benefits of Western education, could effectively employ air power inspired Jerry's lifelong quest to legitimize and ensure the growth and relevance of Air Force Special Operations.

In April 1969, Jerry left Laos and returned to the 1st SOW, then stationed at England AFB in Alexandria, Louisiana. From there he moved to HQ USAF Special Operations Forces at Eglin AFB, Florida, as the Project 404 staff officer.

A second inspirational moment for Jerry occurred in November 1973. Congress directed the US cease its air support of Cambodian defense forces. The halt began at the end of the dry season, giving the Cambodians six months of monsoon weather to prepare for the expected North Vietnamese

and Khmer Rouge offensive. At the Pentagon, Air Commando Richard (Dick) Secord had recently been assigned to Southeast Asia desk in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He established a close relationship with Erich Von Marbod, Controller for the Defense Security Assistance Agency that played a major role in funding for operations in Southeast Asia. As the wars in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia heated up Von Marbod sought Secord's help to get an Air Commando assigned as a special assistant. Col Johnny Johnson, an AC-47 pilot, was selected as the special assistant.

Secord, Von Marbod, and Johnson were troubled by the lack of support being given to the Cambodians. Secord and Johnson convinced Von Marbod that Air Commandos could restore the Cambodian Air Force (CAF) sufficiently to help ground forces, blunt the expected communist assault, but they needed to travel to Phnom Penh and survey the situation in order to develop a plan.

Both Secord and Johnson had high regards for Jerry who was at that moment signing his retirement papers from the Air Force. They stopped him at the gate and issued orders to come to Washington. A few days later Johnson, Jerry, and I, along with CMSGT Charlie Day, a super aircraft maintenance NCO, were on our way to Cambodia.

As expected, the CAF was in



Jerry Klingaman and three 4th Fighter Squadron pilots, Pakse Laos, 1968 (Photo courtesy of the author)

deplorable condition. Most of their T-28 pilots were from the royal family and had little training and no desire to fight. The maintenance status of their fighter-bombers was poor at best, and their Cessna O-1s were “flying coffins.” Their transports and other aircraft were in no better shape. The situation was dismal.

When Congress stopped the air support for Cambodia, they also mandated a “head count limit,” meaning no American could go into Phnom Penh unless an equal number came out. It was only the promise of resources from Von Marbod and the Defense Security Assistance Agency that allowed us to enter the country.

We spent three days touring the facilities and then flew to Bangkok, Thailand, where Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG) commander, Brig Gen Harry “Heinie” Aderholt provided quarters and a secretary. Because of his experiences in Laos, Jerry jumped on the forward air controller (FAC) issues. He proposed the radical idea of overhauling the O-1s and giving the best Cambodian T-28 pilots intensive FAC training. Everyone floated their ideas but Jerry, ever the perfectionist, collated and edited the products typed by the secretary Heine had loaned us. We flew back to the States and gave the report, *Tactical Air Improvement Plan Cambodia*, to Von Marbod. The next day, he gave it to Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger who then gave it to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Moorer with instructions to immediately implement the proposed program – Project FLYCATCHER. Ten days later Johnny, Jerry and I were on our way. The “end run” infuriated the US Pacific Command (USPACOM) and Pacific Air Force (PACAF) staffs, as well as the MAAG in Cambodia. but Von Marbod shielded us from the flak.

We had a team of eight Air Commandos in Phnom Penh led by Ben Kraljev, formerly a lead planer and operations officer for the Son Tay raid. We needed to give the CAF a complete overhaul and ideas were floated by the dozens from the team. Nearly all of

them were “outside the box” and it fell to Jerry to flesh out promising ideas and write plans to implement the ones worth pursuing.

Jerry only wrote on yellow legal tablets with a black felt-tip pen which meant four to six words per line. Even modest plans resulted in a veritable blizzard of yellow pages spread across his desk. We never learned how he kept them organized.

Although both USPACOM and PACAF had been severely critical of our effort at the beginning, within a few weeks the AT-28 sortie numbers began to climb and confirmed kill numbers rose significantly. That positive trend continued throughout the spring.

In April, with the onset of the dry season the CAF had turned itself around and was significantly contributing to the ground forces’ efforts. Later that month we received a message from ADM Noel Gayler’s office at USPACOM that a vice admiral would be arriving in two days and we were to have all of our team present.

When the admiral arrived at our office his opening statement was, “I am here on behalf of Admiral Gayler to apologize for the lack of confidence and support we initially had in your plan.” He then went on at some length noting our statistics and making favorable comments

Jerry retired from active service in 1976 and went on to inspire the next generation of Air Commandos with the amazing potential air advising efforts offered to US national security. In 1984, he became a senior research fellow at the USAF Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education (CADRE). There, he authored Air Force and joint doctrine publications on aviation foreign internal defense and low-intensity conflict. He coached and mentored a number of young officers who were writing about the air power’s role in

irregular warfare, sponsoring their work in the *Air and Space Power Journal*. Three of the first four papers published in Air University’s *Future of the Air Force* series were written by AFSOC majors under Jerry’s tutelage.

In 1993, Jerry and Alice returned to Hurlburt Field where he became a driving force in what is now the 6th SOS. Jerry never lost his faith in the mission or the men and women who resurrected and sustained the combat aviation advisory mission in AFSOC. At his retirement ceremony in 2008, he told the current and former CAAs who were present to honor his service, “I came back and I stayed so long because of you. I loved



being one of you.” That was Jerry, a quiet professional who disdained the spotlight, totally committed himself to the people he worked with, and was fiercely proud of what Air Commandos could do to help others defend their nations.



About the Author: Colonel Larry Ropka served 20 of his 28 years on active duty in Air Force special operations. Upon retirement he served another 3 years as a civil servant in the DoD in international security affairs. Larry and Jerry’s careers intersected on multiple occasions. Jerry provided a voice of reason, sound advice, and common-sense special air warfare doctrine during the formative years of US Special Operations Command and AFSOC.



THE COY

In 2011, Air Force Special Operations Command began what would be one of the longest security cooperation operations in the history of the organization. Through various units and partners, for nearly a decade AFSOC took on the task of training the Afghan National Army Air Force (ANAAF). While there were many other military advisory operations going on in that troubled nation, AFSOC's contributions to the development of the ANAAF were singularly unique and relatively successful.

This article is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all the security cooperation programs between AFSOC and the ANAAF. The goal is to offer a personal perspective of one partner capacity-building program that AFSOC's combat aviation advisors (CAA) supported, helping the Afghan Air Force develop their light- and medium-lift air mobility squadron. This unique AvFID program offers insight into how a few Air Commandos embedded into a conventional USAF organization were able to make a difference that belied their small numbers. What we learned was that the single largest obstacle to developing the ANAAF was not Afghan culture, nor a lack of education or motivation, but the reluctance among many US air advisors to trust and stretch the capabilities of their Afghan counterparts.

In July 2016, I arrived in Kabul to take command of the 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron (538th AEAS). I was a long time AFSOC CAA and recently had been the Director of Operations at the 6th SOS. Needing a career broadening assignment, AFSOC sent me to join a conventional USAF unit in a way that leveraged my advisor experience. The 538th AEAS was associated with the fixed-wing air mobility squadron of the ANAAF, based in Kabul at the Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA). The Afghan air mobility squadron operated four Lockheed C-130Hs for the Afghan version of heavy-lift and two dozen Cessna C-208B Caravans for light-lift, although they were

not yet ready to fully exploit the capabilities of each weapon system. The ANAAF wing at Kabul also had a rotary-wing squadron with Mi-17 Hips and MD-530Fs, as well as an attack squadron flying Embraer/Sierra Nevada A-29 Super Tucanos.

The primary Air Force advisory organization in Afghanistan was the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing, a conventional forward deployed wing mostly staffed with rotational personnel from Air Combat Command. The 438th AEW had two subordinate groups, the 438th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group (AEAG) with four squadrons at Kabul, and a second group located at Kandahar, the 738th AEAG with two squadrons. The Kandahar group was much smaller and provided air advising on ANAAF C-208s and helicopter units assigned there.

The 438th AEW was staffed with both air advisors as well as support personnel. Almost all of the air advisors were deployed for 6-month rotations, while leadership positions and a few other key personnel were on 1-year deployment orders. The general-purpose force Airmen were provided four weeks of air advisor training at the USAF Expeditionary Center's Air Advisor Academy at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. Upon successful completion of their training they were awarded the special duty title of "Air Advisor." Almost everyone was a non-volunteer who was randomly selected during their deployment availability window from the pool of eligible Airmen. Many of the air advisors were on their first or second deployment in their careers, and most expected to never return to Afghanistan again.

Crucially, almost none of the group or wing senior leadership or staff had any previous experience as air advisors. *Air Advising experience was not a pre-requisite for deployment in a command position in air advisor units.* This is nothing to diminish the significant experience and capabilities of the 438th AEW leadership team. They were among the best

COYOTE RULES OF KABUL

Air Mobility Advisors In Afghanistan

By Steven Hreczkosij, Lt Col, USAF, Retired, CAA #393

The author would like to express his enormous gratitude to all the men and women who deployed to Kabul in support of the 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron, and to the AFSOC Air Commandos who believed in the Afghans and their limitless optimism in air advising to conquer problems and bring a secure peace to Afghanistan. The title is a tribute to Lt Col (retired) Jerome "Jerry" Klingaman, whose Coyote Rules shaped the ethos of the 6th SOS.

Editor's note: This article was written and accepted for publication months before the August 2021 fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban and does not diminish the tremendous work of the Air Advisors.

**438 Air Expeditionary Advisory Group and Cessna C 208s
in Afghan Air Force.** (Photo courtesy of the USAF)

our Air Force had to offer: fighter pilots, USAF weapons instructor course graduates, and Air War College graduates whose careers and backgrounds were shaped in the crucible of wartime leadership over the previous 15 years. It was hard to design a better team to go into combat with. Security cooperation, air advising, and building partner capacity were not the missions these leaders and the Airmen they led had been trained and exercised to do. Both the command team and nearly all of the advisors on the ground and working with

together. While at the Air Advisor Academy, these nascent advisors learned the theories of cross-cultural communication and defense cooperation. They also received quite a bit of defensive skills training, learning how to respond to “green on blue” attacks. This focus on defensive combat skills had the unintended consequence that for many of these Airmen, Afghans were to be feared and never trusted. Learning how to balance the need to stay vigilant for personal defense while still finding a way to build genuine relationships and trust with the partner Afghans was extraordinarily challenging for many.



When I arrived in July 2016, much of the groundwork for building Afghanistan’s air mobility capabilities had already been laid by the air advisors who proceeded me. The challenge, at least as I saw it, was straightforward yet still challenging. The ANAAF possessed good pilots and experienced officers. The time was right to unleash their capabilities by transferring responsibility, trust, and ownership of the airlift mission to the Afghans. US air advisors had been acting as coaches and mentors to the ANAAF for nearly 10 years and it was time for us to take a step back. Their leadership and the C-130 and C-208 crews needed to transition to fully independent operations, capable of being a reliable Afghan partner to the Afghan ground forces without US help. We identified three areas that the fixed wing

their Afghan partners had no experience with this mission set.

There had been a few AFSOC individuals who had been assigned over the years to the 438th AEW. In 2016–17, the 438th AEW was fortunate to find itself flush with Air Commandos, including four former Combat Aviation Advisors: Col Thom Geiser, the Vice Wing Commander; Lt Col JD Detweiler, the Deputy Group Commander; and myself and Maj Chris Duke as the 538th AEAS Commander and Operations Officer. Maj Randy Stubbs of the AC-130W community also joined the 538th AEAS in early 2017. These five Airmen brought a combined 15 years of advising experience to the organization, in addition to the Air Commando spirit of having “the guts to try.” Over our 18 months of overlapping deployments, these Air Commandos sought nothing less than to refashion the ANAAF mobility squadron into a credible and professional fighting force.

Apart from AFSOC’s cohort, the men and women of the 438th AEW were drawn from across the Air Force. By and large, they were individual replacements, mostly from the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command. All were first-time advisors. Many of these Airmen had never even met an Afghan prior to arriving in Afghanistan. Because they were not deploying as units, few of the Air Guardsmen or Air Reservists had met, knew, or worked with each other before arriving at the Air Advisor Academy. This was very unusual for Airmen used to deploying as cohesive units

squadron needed to master: inter-theater operations, NVG operations, and combat airdrop.

During my inbrief with the 438th AEW wing and group leadership, the plan was considered overly ambitious. “Afghans could not be trusted with NVGs,” they said, and “Airdrop is probably too complicated for these folks, don’t waste your time.” According to AFSOC ethos, that negative perspective just meant the ante had been upped.

In the years before 2016, the ANAAF had suffered several cycles of preparation, resourcing, training, and disappointment. In 2012–13, the \$400 billion program to transition the ANAAF from Russian AN-32/AN-26 transports to C-27A Spartans had been cancelled by the USAF and the 16 aircraft at Kabul were sold for scrap. That experience left a bitter taste in the mouths of both the Afghans and the Americans. The Air Force decided to replace the Afghans’ C-27s with four excess C-130Hs. All four Herks were delivered by the end of 2014.

The first cadre of officers and NCOs were sent to the United States for initial C-130 training in 2013. From 2013 to 2016 the C-130 advisors focused on seasoning their Afghan counterparts, building flight hours, and advancing the brightest and most capable aviators through the higher qualification levels. By the spring of 2016, the ANAAF had half a dozen pilots qualified as aircraft commanders, with two instructors and one flight examiner. The ANAAF did

not use navigators on their C-130s, but occasionally a junior pilot would occupy the navigator's seat and assist with radios and checklists. The squadron also had one instructor flight engineer and an instructor loadmaster. From a basic training standpoint, the C-130 crews were almost fully matured. They could fly routine airlift and casualty evacuation missions with all-Afghan crews, and they could train their own junior aircrew members. However, their C-130 crews were not able to operate outside their country's borders.

The Afghan national government, like all such organizations, frequently needed to use military airlift when flying between Afghanistan and the neighboring countries. The ANAAF's inability to fly in international airspace often meant that opportunities were missed or that airlift had to be contracted out – an expensive option the government could ill afford. On one occasion, the government of a country bordering Afghanistan announced it was donating a large stockpile of rockets to the Afghan military, to be used on ANAAF attack helicopters. All Afghanistan needed to do was to fly to their neighbor's capital, pick up the donated rockets, and return home. The mission was not complicated nor was the pick-up location especially far away. The Afghan C-130 crews could have accomplished the entire mission in a single duty day. The ANAAF leadership had to tell their Ministry of Defense (MoD) they could not fly this relatively simple mission, though, because they did not have the training nor the staff capable of supporting a cross-border flight and into international airspace. More importantly, the airlift squadron did not have the backing of their American advisors. The US side thought the mission was too risky and too complicated to let an all-Afghan crew execute it, so they asked a coalition partner C-130 to fly the mission instead. As you can imagine, this was humiliating for the Afghans.

The 538th AEAS staff huddled with the ANAAF C-130 team and came up with a plan to change this shortcoming. The solution was a program where US advisors would travel with an Afghan C-130 crew outside the country, provide the training, and sign them off as ready. Furthermore, the ANAAF operations center needed practice as well. They need to learn how to get diplomatic clearances for their aircraft and the process of command and control when their aircraft were not in radio contact. Fortunately, a test case came available and it was a perfect fit. The ANAAF needed to transport one of their C-130s from their depot-level maintenance facility in Lisbon, Portugal, back to Kabul. Up to this point, the Afghan C-130s had been ferried back and forth by contract crews to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars for each ferry flight.

In late 2016, the ANAAF was notified an aircraft would be ready for pick up in the spring. That gave us time to execute the training plan and certify their crews. The Afghans took ownership of the entire mission, with air advisor assistance. They planned the routing, chose alternates, learned about foreign clearances, and all the possible challenges of flying internationally. Their MoD had to develop processes to approve itineraries, request overflight via the embassy networks, as well as figure out how to pay

for fuel, lodging, and per diem for the crews. It took almost four months of training, planning, and creating new ways of thinking, but ultimately their work paid off when, in April 2017, an Afghan crew transported their own aircraft home from Lisbon. It wasn't the smoothest trip, and the process had its share of mistakes, but the Afghans proved they could safely do the mission, that they would not defect as some had feared, and they were not overwhelmed with the complexity of the mission. The senior American advisors were impressed and the attitude towards the ANAAF airlifters began to change.

Another challenge we overcame was certifying the Afghans to fly with night vision goggles (NVG). Initially, the US leadership did not see a need for the Afghan pilots to use NVGs. All of the major airfields were well lit and the C-130s could overfly all of the mountainous terrain. However, I and the Afghan crews saw things differently. While it was true that the major airfields had runway lighting, it was frequently out of service. It was not uncommon, when an Afghan aircraft was on approach to an airfield at night, that the runway lights would be suddenly turned off by the tower controllers who were used to American pilots who preferred a lights-out tactical approach. Somewhat presciently, the US air advisors and the Afghans envisioned a future after the Americans departed where the need for unlit runway operations would be needed to protect the airlift crews from a resurgent Taliban. *(Author's Note: This capability was validated when the ANAAF C-130 crews used NVGs to*

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execute a nighttime combat evacuation of an Afghan SOF battalion from Kandahar in August 2021.)

As far as terrain avoidance was concerned, while the C-130 is capable of overflying Afghanistan's very high mountains during normal conditions, the loss of a single engine would suddenly put a crew in serious jeopardy at night, having to use valleys and saddles to navigate through the mountains to safety. Even more concerning were the Cessna 208s. The C-208 pilots often flew missions that extended into the night hours. The maximum basic altitude of a C-208 is around 12,500 feet, much lower than the high peaks of Afghanistan where there are more than a dozen peaks taller than 20,000 feet. When the C-208 pilots were asked how they navigated the valleys at night through the terrain, the Afghans responded that they just used the GPS, maintained perfect centerline on their avionics, and prayed for survival.

When the idea for Afghan crews to use NVGs was broached with the US leadership, it was completely rebuffed. There was no real need for NVGs in the ANAAF, said one US senior leader, since the Afghans had been doing just fine without them previously. Also, it was felt that NVGs were too expensive to give to the Afghans. Just the process of requisitioning NVGs and supporting equipment was considered a bridge too far by the US staff officers charged with supplying the Afghans. Another staff officer was sure the Afghans could never maintain inventory control of the NVGs and that goggles would be stolen and sold. All these assumptions proved to be incorrect.

The first stroke of good luck occurred during an audit of the ANAAF life support equipment. Several cases of brand new NVGs were discovered in an Afghan warehouse. They had been part of the cancelled C-27 program and had been kept in storage after the ANAAF divested itself of

those aircraft. The NVGs needed some maintenance and modifications to fit their current flight helmets, but these forgotten NVGs provided a solution to the first problem. While the Afghan NVGs were being refurbished, the squadron got permission to begin training the Afghans using equipment borrowed from the US. Training with US NVGs would allow the program to begin right away, so that they would be certified as soon as the Afghan NVGs were ready. The 538th AEAS jumped right into the NVG training mission, quickly adapting a syllabus of instruction, charting out progression rubrics, and figuring out how to train to NVG emergencies despite not having a simulator or ground-based training device.

Our plan was to take advantage of the winter season to conduct the bulk of the NVG training. This had two benefits. First, the periods of darkness were much longer, owing to the season, terrain, and northerly latitudes. Second, the fighting season in Afghanistan typically ended in mid-October, as Taliban fighters moved to their winter redoubts and reprovisioned for the next summer's fighting. Our goal was to train at least 4 C-130 crews and 16 C-208 crews on the basics of NVG air operations, and then to certify at least one NVG instructor crew for each airframe. Our analysis suggested it would take about six months to complete the training program. In fact it took almost 10 months, but the unit had achieved 100 percent success. The Afghan – US team met their training goals and by summer there were Afghan NVG instructors certified in every crew position on both aircraft.

In those 10 months, the aircrew flight equipment (AFE) air advisors made great headway with the Afghan NVG equipment, not just repairing the goggles, but also teaching the Afghans how to fix and maintain the devices. Beyond the challenges of storing and maintaining the NVGs, the AFE advisors encountered surprising resistance from the ANAAF bureaucracy. The process of how to issue and turn-in NVGs seemed to be an insurmountable challenge. Afghan culture is highly contextual, requiring group consensus and collaboration before decisions are made. Furthermore, a legacy of graft and corruption left a bitter shadow over the logistics force. Frankly speaking, the Afghan AFE troops who were responsible for the NVGs did not trust the ANAAF pilots to return their equipment, and approvals for check outs were frequently elevated to the O-6 level unless an American took responsibility. This proved to be an especially durable problem for the air advisor team. Multiple attempts were offered to build trust and communication between the aircrew and the AFE personnel. Our human intelligence team developed understanding of the cultural, ethnic, and tribal issues that existed between the individuals in each section. By mid-2017, we had only made partial progress on this challenge, with certain pilots being trusted to check out the NVGs but not others.

The third and most challenging program we had was developing a combat airdrop capability. The ANAAF had struggled to find its place supporting the larger Afghan National Defense Security Forces. The introduction of the

A-29 and MD-530 combat attack aircraft meant that Afghan troops on the ground finally had their own close air support capability. However, the Afghan National Army (ANA) struggled more with logistics than firefights. Keeping forward outposts supplied with munitions and food represented an extraordinary challenge for the ANA and many small units would simply abandon their positions once they exhausted their supplies. Rugged terrain and unsafe roads, coupled with shifting regional alliances, meant that the Afghan government did not reap any the benefits from a traditional defensive position with interior lines of communication and supply. Despite holding all the regional centers and major cities, the valleys and remote outposts were left to their own devices. These outposts would often be abandoned, recaptured, and then ceded over and over. Tactically, most of these forward outposts offered very little military advantage, but every time the ANA abandoned a post and the Taliban moved in they would leverage the victory in their propaganda war. The Taliban would often reoccupy the same abandoned post five times in six months, but reap untold gains in the information wars. The ANA had to find a way to keep and hold their forward outposts, and aerial resupply seemed to offer a solution.

The challenges associated with developing combat airdrop were legion. We quickly learned that the ANAAF C-130s would never be utilized as airdrop platforms. The Afghan politicians would never risk their strategic airlifter in a high threat environment, and none of the outposts needed airdrops of the size and magnitude that the Hercules could deliver. The C-208 was the right platform for the outpost resupply mission. Small and maneuverable, the Caravan had been used for decades as a parachute training aircraft by military and civilian organizations around the world. The Afghan pilots had become extremely proficient with the aircraft and many had previous airdrop experience with other aircraft. The C-208 has a side door that can be opened inflight and the cargo compartment floor had several high-strength attachment anchors for use with restraint straps. The Caravan was easily the best choice.

The challenges we faced while helping the Afghans create an airdrop capability could be roughly divided into three main areas. The first was developing the airdrop bundle. Any bundle had to be completely sustainable by the Afghans using locally available materials. The second was developing the training plan, compounded by the reality that Afghanistan does not have many training ranges or safe spaces to conduct airdrop training. The third was creating a request for resupply process within the ANAAF command and control system. The ANAAF had to create a new process from scratch to obtain requests from the ANA, prioritize them, create the

resupply bundles, and then execute the resupply missions. Maj Chris Duke, the CAA who was the 538th AEAS Director of Operations took on responsibility for the ANAAF airdrop program. Chris's spirit and dedication to this initiative was without equal.

The journey through the invention and development of the airdrop bundle could be its own separate article. Maj Duke assembled the 538th AEAS advisor loadmasters, their Afghan counterparts, and in a scene reminiscent of the movie *Apollo 13*, set to inventing a bundle with purely Afghan components. They used scraps and bits, and obtained old training parachute components, and ended up creating an ingenious airdrop system. The bundle could be used for training with repackable parachutes or deployed in actual resupply airdrops. The system was tested with water bottles, ammunition cans, MREs, and everything passed the survivability tests. As long as the bundle had sufficient time



under the canopy, it could be used to great effect.

The second challenge Maj Duke and his team faced was finding a range to test the systems and train the crews. Fortunately, our good friends in the Royal Air Force had established an outpost in a large flat plain near Kabul, with a short paved runway and lots of good visibility. The terrain was secure from the Taliban, yet away from the highly trafficked lines of communication where the training might be observed. It was a perfect site. The American advisors first developed and tested the airdrop procedures. The AFSOC cohort all had previous experience airdropping from non-standard airframes, including the C-208. Taking into account the terrain, the high altitudes, and the capabilities of the Afghan pilots, Maj Duke tested and proved a reliable airdrop procedure that would ensure safe and accurate delivery of

the bundle. Once the procedure was validated, we set about training the Afghans. The ANAAF leadership identified six of their best C-208 pilots and they performed quite well. One of their pilots, Maj K (a pseudonym), took to the mission like a fish to water. He offered several refinements to the procedure, and then set about developing a lesson plan to instruct his fellow pilots in their native language. He was a natural leader on the Afghan side and would prove invaluable on the final challenge.

Like the NVG development and the inter-theater operations, our toughest challenge was in the Afghan bureaucracy. We appealed to the American advisors who worked in the MoD, asking them to assist us with building these new processes. Unfortunately, our counterparts at MoD



Coyote Rules

By Lt Col Jerry Klingaman

1. **If you run with the pack, play by pack rules, but keep your options open.**
2. **When you hunt alone, stealth is your best hope. You may only get one try.**
3. **Know the terrain cold, especially the escape routes.**
4. **Do not depend on others for ideas; they are rarely available.**
5. **Have your own ideas and keep plenty of them in reserve. Develop instincts.**
6. **Where instinct fails, build plans. Define your objectives. Refine your methods.**
7. **Success has three phases: extensive planning, exhaustive rehearsal, and swift execution.**
8. **If you find yourself in a fair fight, you didn't plan it properly.**
9. **Don't take stupid chances. Surviving is a professional endeavor.**
10. **Consider the consequences of your acts. Survival of the pack may be at stake.**
11. **Have a back-up plan if things go wrong. Keep it simple.**
12. **Know your limits and when to quit. If you can't kill two geese, kill one and make it home.**
13. **Most of us come to grief because we want too much.**
14. **If you run with bad dogs, you get shot with them.**
15. **Most traps are set on trails that are already out of bounds.**
16. **If you suspect you're out of bounds, you probably are.**
17. **Give quarter where it's due. You may need it yourself someday.**
18. **Never assume that no one wants you dead.**
19. **Threats rarely announce themselves. Stay alert. Anticipate the unexpected.**
20. **Be ready to move on if the game gives out.**

met with little success. Our wing leadership approached the ANAAF leaders as well, and everyone agreed it was a very hard problem to solve. The core issue was a lack of trust between the ANA and the ANAAF. The Afghan military was very “stovepiped” and there was little trust between the branches. The reality of Afghan culture meant that decisions and requests had to be executed at the level of personal relationships and friendships, with little regard paid to formal procedures. This is where Maj K and his friends became invaluable. Combined with the access to the MoD the US advisors were granted, we leveraged Maj K and another Afghan pilot, Maj S, to build an informal network within the ministry. Maj K and Maj S had friends from decades of service in well positioned departments and they created an “Afghan way” of requesting, prioritizing, and fulfilling resupply requests from the ANA combat outposts. The last piece fell into place and Afghan combat airdrop had become a reality.

In the summer of 2017, several months after I departed Afghanistan at the conclusion of my tour, a garrison of Afghan soldiers huddled in a forward outpost, surrounded by the Taliban, cut off from resupply by surface vehicles, and running out of food, water, and ammunition. Like the mythical gryphon, the half-lion half-eagle, an ANAAF C-208 came hurtling above the valley floor and delivered three large resupply bundles, on time and right on target. The men at that outpost would live to fight and defend their village for a time longer. Thanks to the hard work of the Airmen of the ANAAF and 538th AEAS, and the unwavering belief of the Air Commandos advising them, the war became a little easier for some that day.



About the author: Lt Col, retired, Steve Hreczkosij was commissioned into the Air Force in 1998 from AFROTC. He flew conventional C-130s with Air Mobility Command for eight years before joining AFSOC and becoming a Combat Aviation Advisor at the 6th SOS. He was CAA for the next 13 years before retiring from active duty in 2019. After his retirement he was briefly employed as an airline pilot and also served in the legislative liaison office at HQ AFSOC. He resides in Niceville, Florida, with his beautiful wife and fellow Air Commando, Lt Col Amber Hreczkosij, their children, and one very spoiled French bulldog.

AC-XX

The Gunship that almost was... ...and its legacy



By Lt Col Michael J. Brennan, USAF (Retired) and
CMSgt William Walter, USAF (Retired)

From 2006 to 2009, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) sought to augment the capability of the AC-130H and AC-130U community by working to rapidly develop the AC-27J through the AC-XX program also known as “Gunship Lite.” Even though we do not have the AC-27J operating in theaters today, the concepts, requirements and diligent work by some very dedicated Air Commandos were carried forward to the AC recapitalization and the AC-130W and AC-130J that are currently continuing the extraordinary legacy of the side-firing gunship.

improve the “kill chain” between sensors and shooters. Maj Jim Wise (and you will hear that name again) and Capt John Trube worked through the short-term improvements study while SMSgt Bill Walter and myself engaged in the “unconstrained” future look of the gunship capability as part of Task Force Warlord. The efforts of Maj Wise and Capt Trube leveraged several short-term improvements in the interface between the AC-130U and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). In April 2002, Maj Wise took my place on TF Warlord and the unconstrained studies coalesced into the Initial Requirements Document (IRD) for the Persistent Surface Attack System of Systems, which formed the basis of the AC-XX/AC-27J, Dragon Spear/AC-130W and the AC-130J.

While the various staffs looked at options for future fire support platforms for both SOF and the Air Force, the wear and tear of a high operational tempo took a toll on the SOF Gunship fleet. By 2006, AC-130s were being flown to the point they were wearing out at a much higher rate than planned. The utilization rate was so high, the center wing boxes on the U-model would need to be replaced years ahead of schedule. HQ AFSOC Special Programs, led by Major Brian Strang, began researching options for providing additional fire support to ground forces and providing relief for the AC-130 fleet. Taking lessons learned from Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM (OEF and OIF), the Special Programs division examined options for arming aircraft smaller than a C-130. While evaluating several types of single

and twin-engine aircraft, the team discovered several low flight hour C-27A aircraft were in the Aircraft Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG), or “Bone Yard,” at Davis Monthan AFB, AZ. These aircraft were seen as potential candidates for gunship conversions. Although this



A C-27J Spartan aircraft taxis upon landing at Hector International Airport in preparation for a familiarization tour which helped unit members of the North Dakota Air National Guard get acquainted with their future aircraft and planned mission transition that began in 2013. (Photo by SMSgt David H. Lipp)

Leading up to the specific development of the AC-27J, the US Air Force Air Staff through the Checkmate division conducted two significant studies to look at what the next generation gunship would look like and what could be quickly integrated in the current gunship fleet to greatly

and several additional concepts were examined that showed promise, the concept of a non-C-130 gunship did not gain initial support.

In July of 2007, senior leaders at USSOCOM and AFSOC discussed the requirement for additional gunships to support SOF. The USSOCOM commander emphasized that he wanted something smaller, cheaper, and more expeditionary than the existing AC-130 fleet. Because of his experience in both AC-130Hs and AC-130Us and his involvement in the PSAS efforts in 2001 and 2002, Jim Wise, now a Lt Col, was selected by the AFSOC Director of Plans and Programs to lead the new gunship effort. Colonel Wise was given broad guidance by senior leaders regarding the new gunship development. Guidance was clearly articulated that the new gunship needed to be smaller and more expeditionary than the current AC-130s and Wise was directed to, "Make it fast and make it cheap." Colonel Wise set up a small, dedicated team to handle all aspects of the program including writing the concept of operations (CONOPS), developing and writing all requirements, arranging funding, developing basic programmatic timelines, and coordinating support at all levels. Colonel Wise was joined by Capt Bob Lyons in late August and the two of them spent the rest of 2007 developing the concept of a small gunship and socializing the idea at USSOCOM, Wright-Patterson AFB, and the Pentagon.

The CONOPS of the new gunship outlined a different type of gunship with a different mission focus than the existing AC-130s. The new gunship would be concentrating on supporting small groups of SOF in remote areas, operating from austere locations, with minimum support. The small gunship was envisioned to operate in places where the AC-130 could not go due to size, weight, and the large logistics and support tail. Also, the experience gained in Afghanistan and Iraq showed that AC-130s were often overkill for the missions they were flying. The small gunship would do most of the missions of the AC-130, but at a much lower cost. It would be more like the AC-47 than an AC-130. The concept of support to a small, remote team conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) or counterterrorism missions in austere locations had come full circle with the scattering of Al Qaeda cells throughout US Central Command, US Africa Command, and US Indo-Pacific Command.

A key aspect of the "smaller and more expeditionary gunship" was optimizing the weapons capacity of the aircraft based on cargo space available and the mission. Jim Wise and his team developed the novel idea of combining precision guided munitions (PGMs) with a precise small caliber weapon to provide ground forces the options of low collateral damage based on the gun while providing a hard target kill capability with the PGMs. The concept of the side-firing gun was not new to the gunship, but the ability to deliver precision guided munitions was something long talked about in the gunship community, yet never fully developed. Now there was an opportunity to fully develop and prove the concept of launching integrated precision guided weapons from the aircraft and it ultimately became

a reality. AFSOC and USSOCOM had already completed initial examination of the PGU-44/B VIPER STRIKE glide bomb as a dropped/launched weapon. Even though the concept was never tested on the AC-27J, the precision guided munition concept was fully implemented in the AC-130W and AC-130J.

During the fall of 2007, the concept went through several name changes including "Gunship Lite" and "Light Gunship" before settling on the name AC-XX. AC-XX was chosen because the new gunship was expected to be based on some kind of cargo aircraft, but we didn't know which aircraft would eventually be chosen. Also during this time, several key concepts were developed that would play a critical role in future gunship platforms.

The tactical systems that would change the basic aircraft into a gunship would be self-contained and not integrated into the aircraft's operation flight program. A single 30 millimeter (mm) gun would be the only gun on the aircraft. Although the gun was encountering serious problems on the AC-130U, Colonel Wise and CMSgt Bill Walter were convinced the gun was by far the best choice for AC-XX. The 30mm gun would be augmented by small, precision guided munitions. Dual electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) sensors would be the aircraft's only sensor system. The sensors would be identical to current sensors used on AFSOC aircraft to reduce the logistics requirements and minimize air and ground crew training. The AC-XX would fly with a five or six person crew versus the much larger crew needed on the AC-130U.

By limiting the equipment on the aircraft, not integrating the tactical systems with the basic aircraft systems, and having as small a crew as possible, it was envisioned that the new gunship's costs would provide the needed additional fire support while being affordable for the command. Many other traditional gunship options were considered for AC-XX, but ultimately rejected, including: strike radar, radio frequency countermeasures (RFCM), multiple guns, Gatling guns, dedicated defensive scanners, and others. The concept was to get the small gunship systems to work, then if, and when, a new full-size gunship was developed, additional systems could be added to the AC-XX's basic tactical package to provide a traditional gunship's full range of capabilities.

The C-27J emerged as clearly the best choice for aircraft for a new, smaller gunship. The aircraft's rugged design, powerful engines, and large generators made it ideal for an expeditionary platform when compared to other aircraft in its class. Colonel Wise and Capt Lyons travelled to AMARG to assess whether the C-27 could be a viable platform for the gunship and if the existing C-27As could be used in some way. While the assessment showed that the C-27J would most likely be an excellent candidate for a small gunship, it also revealed that the C-27As in the Bone Yard were not in flyable condition. The C-27As could, however, be used as ground test and development platforms if needed.

In December of 2007, the drive for a new gunship gained significant support when USSOCOM's internal force structure analysis revealed the need for far more gunships

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than the existing 25 AC-130s. USSOCOM's Program Executive Officer/Fixed Wing (PEO/FW) at USSOCOM, Col James "Hondo" Geurts, and his project officer, Maj Brady Hauboldt, began working with AFSOC to define the newly named AC-XX project and fully develop it as a program. At AFSOC, Colonel Wise assembled the needed expertise to develop a new gunship and selected Major (ret) David "Rock" Torraca and CMSgt (ret) Bill Walter, as DAF GS-13 Program Analysts. These three individuals at AFSOC would prove to be the core team for the next two years of gunship development. With each person having decades of gunship

to the Air Force requirements experts in Rosslyn, VA to write the CDD for the AC-XX. The A5KY team was augmented by several other people including Lt Col Steve Wiggins from USSOCOM, who had been helping with the project from the start, gunship crewmembers from both the AC-130H and the AC-130U communities, and maintenance personnel. Although the group did not know it at the time, the document written between 11-24 May 2008 laid the groundwork for the AC-27J, the AC-130W, and the AC-130J.

The group of authors benefited greatly from a shared vision. Seven years of continuous combat for the gunship crews guided the team to focus on what capabilities were actually needed versus what was simply nice to have. Collectively, the individuals in the group had years of combat experience to draw upon, not just in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo and applied their knowledge to the concept the AC-XX.

The team spent the first two days of their time in VA struggling on how to define the gunship that they wanted and needed. The first major decision that was made was to limit the requirements document to just the modifications that would be done to a host aircraft. This would allow the required testing to be limited to just the modifications instead of the overall aircraft, shortening development time and saving money. The broad requirements that emerged focused exclusively on what was directed by acquisition protocols and the tactical focus of a smaller, cheaper and more expeditious weapons system. This seemingly small decision would be critical to the future development of the Precision Strike Package

(PSP) concept and future gunship requirement documents.

After the team returned to Hurlburt Field, the AFSOC AC-XX team contracted for a formal Analysis of Alternatives (AoA). The AoA compared the C-130J, the C-27J, and the C-295 as the basis for the AC-XX gunship. Key discriminators between the three aircraft were weight, range, payload, electrical power, operational signature, logistics requirements, fuel consumption, and cost. The AoA identified the C-27J, which had recently been selected as the winner of the Joint Cargo Aircraft (JCA) competition, as the best platform to support small Special Forces teams. In addition to the AoA, the contractor also conducted an independent force structure analysis of gunships using the latest DoD guidance. The outcome of the analysis showed 54 gunships as the minimum risk number required, far above the number validated by USSOCOM the previous year. This force structure analysis was signed by the AFSOC Commander on 2 Jun 2008.

Even while the AoA was being accomplished and again assuming a manageable level of risk, efforts began to secure C-27J aircraft for the AC-XX program. Major Hauboldt

SrA Christian Somerville, 27th Special Operations Maintenance Squadron weapons load crew member, secures a munition to a AC-130W Stinger II during the 27th Special Operations Maintenance Group 4th Quarter Weapons Load Crew Competition at Cannon Air Force Base, NM. (USAF photo by SrA Maxwell Daigle)



experience, these individuals were able to provide a clear vision of what the gunship should and should not be. The AC-XX team became the Strike Requirements, Advanced Technology Demonstration (ATD) division resident in AFSOC/A5 and managed the AC-XX program for AFSOC.

The year 2008 was a busy time for both AFSOC/A5 ATD and USSOCOM PEO/FW. Colonel Wise committed to AFSOC leadership that the AC-XX CONOPS, Capabilities Development Document (CDD), Analysis of Alternatives (AoA), and program timeline would all be in place/complete by the end of June 2008. Assuming a significant amount of risk, key aspects of the program were conducted concurrently including writing requirements documents, conducting an AoA, developing the program schedule, securing program funding, coordinating for C-27J aircraft from both the Army and the Air Force, gaining military and political support, and developing a new gun mount and fire control system.

The AC-XX CONOPS was approved February 2008 by USSOCOM and then the focus turned to writing the CDD. Getting the requirements documents right the first time was a key to rapidly developing the new gunship so A5KY turned

and Colonel Wise made multiple trips to Washington DC, Huntsville, AL, and Dayton, OH, to coordinate with the Army and Air Force to procure C-27Js for AFSOC in a timely manner for use as small gunships. Unfortunately for AFSOC and USSOCOM, the JCA program was on a very tight schedule and both the Army and Air Force were hesitant to change anything in the JCA schedule to allow C-27Js to be diverted to SOF. Initially, the Army did not support changes in the C-27J program, but after multiple meetings between senior Army, Air Force, and USSOCOM leaders, a compromise for the new aircraft was reached. Both the Army and the Air Force would allow USSOCOM to have a number of their C-27Js early in the program which would be replaced by additional aircraft from later in the program. By exercising excess manufacturing capability, both services would receive all of their aircraft in the original JCA timeline. With a tentative aircraft delivery schedule in place, Major Hauboldt set about building a detailed AC-27J program to deliver new gunship capability within two to three years.

Recognizing the urgent need for additional gunships, Colonel Guerts set a challenging acquisition goal to field a capability to USSOCOM warfighters within two years. Hondo Geurts knew a creative, “out of the box” idea was needed to field a viable weapon system while at the same time speeding through the formal acquisition system. He planned to leverage the USAF to the maximum extent possible and divide the program into two parts. The aircraft itself fell under the JCA contract and was funded by the USAF in accordance with the USSOCOM/USAF memorandum of agreement as a baseline Air Force platform provided to USSOCOM for modification. USSOCOM was solely responsible for the “SOF unique” modification aspect of the program. Given the USSOCOM SOF unique modification focus, the total dollar amount of the modification program was qualified as an Acquisition Category II (ACAT II). This permitted HQ USSOCOM to act as its own acquisition and approval authority which allowed for a more efficient acquisition. While USSOCOM did realize efficiencies due to the ACAT II designation, that did not eliminate all acquisition challenges.

Fielding a new medium caliber gun for the AC-XX did not occur without drama. Bill Walter in AFSOC A5KY performed a medium caliber gun study outlining the pros and cons of nine candidate guns including two inventory guns already owned by AFSOC. Since the timeline to acquire a new gun was excessive for the fast moving project, AFSOC was compelled to use one of the two inventoried guns; the 40mm M2A1 or the 30mm MK-44. The MK-44 was a modern, lightweight, and powerful cannon, however, the recent failure of the AC-130U 30mm MK-44 gun integration was fresh in everyone’s minds. The 40mm gun was combat proven and favored by many people, but the gun was not without serious shortcomings. The 40mm was very heavy and required a dedicated crewmember to load. The gun had been out of production since the 1950s and was becoming increasingly difficult to

maintain. Finally, the vast stockpile of 40mm ammunition the gunships had been relying on for decades was running out. New ammunition for an obsolete gun system would be very expensive and contrary to the AC-XX development guidance.

While Jim Wise and Rock Torraca worked on the requirements, AoA, and arranging aircraft, Mr. Walter teamed with Mr. Charles “Mac” McClenahan from Air Force Research Laboratory or AFRL at Eglin AFB to modify the 30mm gun into a viable weapon system for gunships. Leadership would have to be convinced the 30mm would be acceptable for the intended role. This was no easy task for two reasons. First, AFSOC and USSOCOM leadership had serious doubts about the gun’s ability to accurately fire from a gunship following the failed integration attempt on the AC-130U. Second, the 30mm AFRL and AFSOC team needed to quickly overcome technical issues which were the root cause of the 30mm failure on the AC-130U.

The AoA and CPD were completed by the end of June as promised. On 3 July 2008, the USSOCOM Special Operations Requirements Board (SOCREB) formally validated the need for 16 AC-27Js. With a validated USSOCOM requirement and a combined USAF and USSOCOM funding strategy defined, AFSOC/A5KY and USSOCOM PEO/FW formulated a plan to convert the standard C-27J into an AC-27J as soon as possible. As the project gained momentum, AFSOC leadership directed the program be named “Stinger II” to honor the AC-119 gunships used in Vietnam. During the development of Stinger II, the team would face many obstacles, but through



Comparison of the GAU-23/A 30mm cannon and the 40mm M2A1 cannon in front of a C-27A fuselage at Eglin Air Force Base. (Photo courtesy of Bill Walter)

professionalism, determination, and persistence they systematically overcame them as a matter of routine.

With a validated requirement for AC-27Js, the USSOCOM/AFSOC team traveled to Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, to complete a field assessment of their proposed gunship layout. The trip was successful and received positive feedback from AFSOC and USSOCOM leadership. MSgt

(ret) Rick Smith and Capt Tim Forbes, both who had joined the A5KY team in the summer, were tasked to move an unflyable C-27A to Eglin AFB to be used as a Systems Integration Laboratory (SIL) for AC-27J development.

Active duty maintenance and logistic personnel from Robins AFB disassembled the aircraft, shipped it to Eglin AFB, and then reassembled it at a very low cost to the program. When the aircraft was reassembled it was painted the standard AFSOC gray paint scheme using leftover paint. The aircraft

A C-27A serial number 90-0170 undergoing initial firing tests of the 30mm gun on Eglin Air Force Base Range 22. Coincidentally, this is the same range the 20mm guns on AC-130A prototype 54-1626 were test fired on in 1967.



would be used in the upcoming months as both a development SIL and a static display for the planned AC-27J.

Colonel Wise briefed the Air Force Requirements for Operational Capabilities Council (AFROCC) on 21 August 2008, to gain Air Force support and a validated requirement for additional donor aircraft for gunship modification. The AFROCC fully supported the AoA's 54 gunship requirement. The only criticism was that the analysis used was too conservative and the actual gunship requirement was much higher.

As the development of the AC-27J began to accelerate in the summer and fall of 2008, the technical development of the program began to break into two parts. The first part was developing the various tactical systems that would go onto the AC-27J and ensuring they worked together as a standalone tactical package. The second part of the development was the integration of that tactical package into the C-27J aircraft. Occasionally during meetings, there was confusion about whether the team was talking about requirements for the tactical package or the aircraft. To minimize confusion and to separate the two efforts, the term Precision Strike Package (PSP) was used to refer specifically to the tactical package itself, independent of the C-27J "green aircraft".

During the fall of 2008, the AC-27J program needed a gun and the combined AFRL/AFSOC/contractor team had successfully solved the accuracy issues of the 30mm seen on the AC-130U program and were ready for a head-to-head

competition with the 40mm gun. Initial gun ground testing paired the 30mm MK-44 against the 40mm M2A1 resulting in the MK-44 coming out on top by a wide margin. The gun was then qualified within the USAF designation system as the GAU-23/A.

What followed was the development of a purpose-built gun mount designed to Mac McClenahan's specifications by AFRL engineers and built "in house" by machinists in AFRL's Model Shop. With initial ground testing complete, the entire C-27A fuselage was laser mapped and moved into position for gun testing. Test instrumentation was installed to collect blast over-pressure, recoil, and strain loads. Coincidentally, the Range 22 test ramp used on Eglin Air Force Base was the same location where 20mm testing on AC-130A gunship, 54-1626, occurred back in 1967.

Also during the fall of 2008, Dahlgren's work to develop a new fire control system now incorporated the 30mm gun and new gun mount, but although the Navy software engineers were experienced with shipborne guns and fire control systems, firing sideways from an aircraft was a new challenge to overcome. There were multiple meetings held

at both Dahlgren and in Florida to work through numerous issues. Many of the fire control variables on a ship simply did not apply to an airplane, chief among them was the need for the fire control system to provide guidance to the crew to steer the aircraft into an attack orbit and then maintain the aircraft in a firing position. The concept of gunship geometry in a pylon turn allowing the weapons to constantly point at the target in flight was a unique problem to be solved. It would not be until the summer of 2009, when their

fire control system was tested in flight, that the Dahlgren experts finalized the engineering solutions this critical gunship needed.

On 8 April 2009, the AC-27J program came to an abrupt halt. Although the C-27J was selected by the DoD for the JCA program in 2007 and the first two aircraft had been successfully delivered in the first year, the program was suddenly transferred from a joint Army/Air Force program to an Air Force only program and the number of C-27J's was cut from 78 aircraft to 38 aircraft by Resource Management Decision (RMD) 802. In addition to the drastic changes to the JCA program, RMD 802 also cut funding for AFSOC's 16 C-27Js. Although the AC-27J was one of USSOCOM's highest priorities and had gained wide support over the previous two years, the concept fell victim to programmatic funding issues.

Although funding for AFSOC's 16 C-27J aircraft had been cut, RMD 802 left in place USSOCOM's funding for the precision strike package (PSP) modifications of the AC-27J. This money was reallocated and used to modify 12 MC-130W aircraft for a new squadron being stood up at Cannon AFB, NM. Instead of putting the "gunship lite"



AC-27J Mk-44 30mm Bushmaster ground test team after conducting over-pressure testing.
(Photos provided by Bill Walter.)

version of the PSP on an expeditionary C-27J based gunship, it would now be installed on a multi-mission MC-130W in a program called Dragon Spear.

Even though the AC-27J was never completed. The tremendous amount of work associated with requirements development and unique concept of operations did not go to waste. The legacy of determined Air Commandos like Jim Wise, John Trube, Bill Walter, Steve Wiggins, Brady Hauboldt, "Rock" Torraca, Rick Smith and Tim Forbes and Hondo Guerts live on. These SOF warriors had a vision that impacts the battlefield today in the form of the AC-130W Stinger II and the AC-130J Ghost rider, neither of which could have been developed and fielded as quickly as they were without the groundbreaking work on the AC-27J.



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Chief Master Sergeant Bill Walter, USAF (Retired) is an AC-130 Aerial Gunner with 3,300 hours in AC-130H and AC-130U Gunships. He has been in the AC-130 community since 1978, and has served as Gunner, Instructor Gunner, and Tactician. His operational/combat deployments include Operations EAGLE CLAW, URGENT FURY, BIELD KIRK, BLUE FLAME, BLINKING LIGHT, JUST CAUSE, DESERT SHIELD/STORM, DENY FLIGHT AND CONTINUE HOPE. He currently works at HQ AFSOC, Gunship Requirements, as a Program Analyst.

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The views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not represent the official position of US Special Operations Command, Special Operations Forces Acquisition and Logistics or the Fixed Wing Program Executive Office, and AF Special Operations Command.



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OPERATION GOTHIC SERPENT

Self-reliance is the best defence
against the pressures of the moment.

— Carl von Clausewitz



By Dr. Ronald Dains

Mention of Mogadishu, Somalia often evokes a reflective “Ah, yeah, ... *Black Hawk Down*,” and discussion of tragedies related to the ill-fated mission to arrest the self-proclaimed President of Somalia, Mohamed Farah Aideed. Reflection is often based on having read or viewed Mark Bowden’s riveting account of the Battle of Mogadishu in *Black Hawk Down*, but sometimes stems from memory of vivid news footage of a deceased American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu and release of injured POW, CWO 3 Michael Durant. Many do not realize that those memorable events came near the end of a nearly two-year long diplomatic and military effort to curb starvation of Somalis and restore law and order to this failing state. Nearly always lost in the broad, public narrative of America’s involvement in Somalia is the tireless and heroic efforts of the highly skilled USAF Combat Controllers (CCT) assigned to the mission to capture Aideed or his lieutenants and turn them over to the UN. The ensuing essay illuminates the actions and importance of CCTs by first reviewing UN and American strategic efforts in Somalia followed by an account of CCT operational actions and tactical lessons

learned in Operation GOTHIC SERPENT which culminated in the *Battle of Mogadishu*. CCT performance in Somalia influenced subsequent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and should serve as a clarion call for continued emphasis on CCT capabilities as America grapples with the uncertain future of “strategic competition.”

Dr. Richard Stewart’s *United States Forces, Somalia: After Action Report*, Dr. Forrest Marion’s *Brothers in Berets*, and Dr. Clayton Chun’s *Gothic Serpent* offer insight into America’s long interest in the Horn of Africa and ably chronicle the deterioration in governance of Somalia through the 1970s and 1990s and resultant UN and US response. Somalia’s severe political and financial devolution prompted UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 751 in April 1992 establishing the United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM) peacekeeping and relief effort. It was obvious by December that a secure environment was unattainable and UNSCR 794 was passed allowing deployment of US combat forces to support UNOSOM under the title Unified Task Force (UNITAF) and authorization for use of force. UNITAF’s security and logistics support mission, Operation

The Critical Role of USAF Combat Controllers



RESTORE HOPE, was commanded by USMC Lt Gen Robert Johnston who worked closely with special envoy, Robert Oakley on the diplomatic side. Unfortunately, violence between UNITAF forces and warring clans in early 1993 caused Aideed to target the US embassy and UN peacekeepers necessitating passage of UNSCR 814 in March, a move that shifted UN actions from Chapter VI peacekeeping to Chapter VII peacemaking (peace enforcement). This UN action helped promote a “ceasefire” and stabilized the situation causing President Clinton to end RESTORE HOPE and shift responsibility for Somalia to the UN. Thus UNISOM II, Operation CONTINUE HOPE, began in May of 1993 with Turkish Lt. Gen. Çevik Bir in command and US Army MG Thomas Montgomery as deputy and with retired US Navy ADM Jonathan Howe replacing Oakley as US envoy. This operation buttressed UNOSOM’s original 40,000-member contingent from 23 countries with about 2,600 logistics troops and a 1,100 member SOF quick reaction force (QRF). The increased US military presence in Mogadishu emboldened Aideed’s Somali National Alliance (SNA) militia and violence increased from June into August.

Aideed’s militiamen killed 24 and wounded 44 Pakistani soldiers prompting US Central Command’s (USCENTCOM) commander, USMC Gen Joseph Hoar, to deploy additional airpower assets to support the USOSOM II mission. The SNA militia’s killing of 11 and wounding 21 Italian troops in July resulted in QRF helicopter gunships attacking Aideed’s compound; Somali militiamen killed four Western journalists in response. Subsequent attempts by QRF forces to “snatch” Aideed were eluded by the warlord. As revenge for QRF attempts, his militia killed four US military policemen with a roadside bomb. This caused Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin to direct US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to deploy a joint special operations task force (JSOTF) on 8 August. Thus, the shift from peacekeeping to peace enforcement was complete. By any measure, US forces were at war and CCT expertise would prove critical to their success.

USSOCOM assigned roughly 400 troops to Task Force Ranger (TFR) commanded by US Army MG William Garrison who reported to Gen Hoar at USCENTCOM rather than MG Montgomery; arguably a suboptimal command



structure although TFR actions were coordinated with the UNOSOM II deputy commander. TFR's SOF team was comprised of US Army Rangers, Delta Force troops, and a 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) battalion, and Army, Navy, and Air Force special mission forces who arrived in Mogadishu on 28 August. The USAF 24th Special Tactics Squadron (STS) embedded pararescuemen (PJ) Scott Fales, Timothy Wilkinson, and Rusty Tanner in TFR along with CCTs Ray Benjamin, John McGarry, Jack McMullen, Bob Rankin, Pat Rogers, Dan Schilling, and Dave Schnoor who was called home on emergency leave and replaced by Jeff Bray. Getting right to work upon arrival, Schilling surveyed TFR's area of operations (AO) during the first patrol. In *The Battle of Mogadishu* Schilling recounts that "Mogadishu had a smell about it that was unbelievable which contained within it a palpable desperation. You could feel it on your hands and face." Though repugnant to Western sensibilities Mogadishu was home to Aided's followers and, as with most Westerners, defense of home was paramount, a reality soon to confront TFR operators.

In *Brothers in Berets*, Dr. Marion captures TFR's operational preparation while awaiting firm intelligence on their target's location. MG Garrison's TFR performed several tactically successful missions through September, yet it was obvious the command-and-control (C2) structure was inadequate due, in part, to the enemy having a clear view of TFR's operating complex at the Mogadishu airfield. Garrison required up to 10 sorties per day to condition the enemy to frequent daytime flights and render them unaware of an actual operational mission against the primary target. A standard mission involved a special mission team deployed

by helicopter to a target building while Rangers fast roped to the street from helicopters to cordon off an area as a blocking force and an exfiltration convoy would arrive for the captives. The special mission team was responsible for what occurred inside the cordon and the Rangers blocked entry from outside with on-call support by a Ranger QRF at the airstrip. During an operational raid on 21 September, TFR forces captured an Aided advisor and were suddenly fired upon by Somalis with rocket-propelled grenades (RPG). Previously, on 8 September, Somali militia executed two attacks against US and Pakistani forces with 106 mm recoilless rifles, RPGs, and other small arms; about 1,000 Somali citizens participated in the second onslaught. Pakistanis lost an armored personnel carrier (APC), suffered nine injuries, and two killed in these attacks. Finally, on 25 September three US soldiers were killed when a Somali RPG took down an Army MH-60 Black Hawk helicopter; the stage was set for a similar attack in October involving US forces in a sustained, bloody firefight not witnessed since the Vietnam War.

Despite several setbacks during TFR's first weeks in Mogadishu, the general sense of concern was moderate since most missions were uneventful and Somali militiamen were regarded as poor shots with undisciplined combat tactics. At about 1200 on 3 October, a US vehicle struck a land mine and PJ Scott Fale's team jumped at the opportunity to tangle with the militia; they were called off because another team responded. Their dejection was short lived due to MG Garrison's receipt of intelligence on the location of two Aided lieutenants and his approval of a seizure mission in mid-afternoon. At about 1530, four CCTs began a mission that would last nearly 20 hours and test their operational prowess and tactical resiliency. CCT Jeff Bray, the sole USAF member with the primary assault force, fast roped into the "Black Sea" district in downtown Mogadishu with the primary assault force. CCT John McGarry was with the Ranger blocking group, Ray Benjamin was on the airborne C2 chopper as a communication liaison, and Dan Schilling was CCT for the exfiltration convoy. Despite heavier than expected gunfire the plan followed established TTPs – block external access, assault and capture, exfiltrate – resulting in the capture of 24 rather than two of Aided's closest supporters. As the assault team loaded detainees into convoy transports a 160th SOAR MH-60 helicopter, callsign Super 61, was downed by an RPG just a few blocks from the primary target and immediately killing pilots CWO3 Clifton Wolcott and CWO2 Donovan Briley, *The Battle of Mogadishu* was in full swing.

Benjamin radioed Bray to shift to Super 61's crash site and was later joined by McGarry to assist the CSAR team; taking heavy fire, both regretted not carrying more ammo. Schilling doubled as exfil convoy ground-air communicator and medic skillfully guiding his team to Super 61's location while simultaneously treating wounded convoy members. About a mile south of Super 61, a second MH-60, callsign Super 64, was shot down and the ensuing ground radio chatter caused Schilling to switch frequencies and request



vectors to the crash site. Not long after, Schilling realized he was not specific about which crash site; his team was heading in the wrong direction. The intense gunfight, heavy casualties, vehicle damage, and urban terrain negated the convoy's ability to reach Super 61, so they returned to the airfield to regroup. CCT Rogers with PJs Wilkinson and Fales were a CSAR team on Super 68, which was also hit by an RPG while hovering for the team's fast rope descent near Super 61's crash site. The PJs were following the Rangers out of the helicopter and were still about 40 feet above the road when their aircraft took the hit. Despite severe damage, CWO Dan Jollata and MAJ Herb Rodriguez held hover long enough for the PJs to clear the fast rope then piloted the helo to a "hard" landing in the TFR compound. The CSAR team fought their way to Super 61's wreckage and within an hour the PJs were caring for the wounded and recovering the dead, while Rangers laid down suppressing fire. CCT Rogers skillfully passed situation reports to TFR leaders while accurately directing AH-6 Little Birds to enemy targets despite communications problems caused by bleed-over interference from Super 61's emergency locator transmitter. At about 1730 the CSAR team heard calls for a medic coming from a courtyard about 45 meters away and across an intersection. Under heavy enemy fire from every direction, Wilkinson dashed across the intersection, with Rangers laying covering fire, reaching the courtyard where members of TFR's assault team were bivouacked while trying to join the downed Super 61 crew. The severity of one assault team member's injuries required Wilkinson to retrieve more fluids and bandages from the CSAR team's location necessitating a heroic three crossings of the extremely dangerous intersection. Wilkinson's actions and those of fellow PJ Scott Fales saved the lives of at least four soldiers. The PJs' actions were made possible with Ranger fire support and precision aerial attacks controlled by their CCT brothers.

Wilkinson treated the assault force members and recognized Jeff Bray as the CCT coordinating airborne fires and maintaining communication with ground forces, importantly a relief convoy supported by fellow CCT Schilling. Darkness had come and the fighting abated. TFR

and SOF are accustomed to night operations, but no one had brought their night vision goggles (NVG) thinking the mission would last only a couple of hours. NVGs stowed in the downed MH-60 were given to Rangers providing perimeter security, but would have helped the CCTs and PJs immeasurably; Fales' after-action report emphasized, "Always bring your goggles, always." The relative quiet was broken by Somali use of a 12.7 mm machine gun which was taken out by Bray's "danger close" strike request of an AH-6 Little Bird which was so close to Bray that he was burnt by hot shell casings. The PJs lauded Bray's "calm demeanor and professionalism over the radio" and the phenomenal job done by him and CCT Pat Rogers. Bray embraced the CCTs critical role – do whatever it takes to call fires for CAS, maintain air control, and secure communications – and was an improvisational force of nature. His skill as a CCT saved the lives of assault force members by guiding fire support as they moved from the "Black Sea" area to Super 61's crash site. He "talked steel onto the targets" by cutting formal TTPs to establish clear, simple fire control communications. He creatively used 1, 2, 3, and 4 infrared (IR) strobes on the roofs of buildings to mark the locations of the four separated groups of TFR soldiers he had mapped out in the dirt. He then used his weapon's IR laser beam to mark targets for the gunships knowing they could see TFR positions and avoid fratricide. He worked out a system to maximize fires from the eight AH-6s. Two helicopters would engage the enemy while two were stacked above for overwatch, then the four would swap positions and continue fighting while the other four were refueled and rearmed. In Bray's "danger close" position nearly 70 rockets were fired and tens of thousands of minigun



rounds shot. Though individually credited for the successful "danger close" activity, Bray acknowledged the efforts of all, especially the pilots: the mark of a true warrior brother.

The relief convoy reached Super 61's crash site at 0155 on 4 October, with CCTs Schilling and Rankin, to begin movement of US wounded and dead to the more secure Pakistani stadium for treatment of casualties and helicopter evacuation. Fighting to the end, Bray continued directing Little Bird strikes on Somali militia while walking the six

blocks to the stadium. The relief convoy safely reached the stadium about 0800 on 4 October, POW Michael Durant, the pilot of Super 64, was released by Aided on the 14th, and TFR returned stateside on the 21st as President Clinton announced US withdrawal from Somalia. By May 1994 all US forces had left Somalia.

Among the numerous medals bestowed upon members of Task Force Ranger, 24th Special Tactics Squadron members were recognized for their influence on successful mission accomplishment. MSgt Tim Wilkinson received the Air Force Cross, the second highest award for valor, and MSgt Scott Fales and SSgt Jeff Bray each received the Silver Star for gallantry. MSgt Jack McMullen, SSgt Dan Schilling, and Sgt Pat Rogers each received the Bronze Star with Valor. They were grateful for the honor, but asked that all would remember the 18 fallen comrades and their families.

Conclusion

USAF Combat Controller capabilities are often obscured by the collective efforts of larger conventional military forces and the SOF teams to which they are normally attached. However, their unique capacity for complex, individual actions are critical to success as shown in Operation GOTHIC SERPENT and *The Battle of Mogadishu*. Importantly, their individual and collective actions informed subsequent military training and operational efforts such as Operations IRAQI FREEDOM, NEW DAWN, ENDURING

FREEDOM, and FREEDOM'S SENTINEL. The 20-plus years of combat and precision control of airpower in Iraq and Afghanistan continues the 80-plus year legacy of combat controller acumen and valor further emphasizing the strategic, operational, and tactical importance of USAF Combat Controllers. The requirement for more and increasingly capable combat controllers will likely grow as America, our allies, and partners enter a new era of strategic competition, potentially resulting in peer or near-peer state-on-state conflict in anti-access environments. This scenario and the likely humanitarian crises that result, drives home Dan Schilling's reminder in *Alone at Dawn* that the USAF Combat Controller will be the "first to arrive, unsupported, to deliver salvation where no other first responders can. Their motto: 'First There.'"



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A Tribute to Persistence

By SrA Maxwell Daigle, 27th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs
Editors note: This article was published December 10, 2020 on AFSOC-AFIMI/News.



The father of SSgt Alaxey Germanovich, 26th STS combat controller, pins the Air Force Cross medal on his son during a medal ceremony Dec. 10, 2020, at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. (USAF photo by SSgt Michael Washburn)

SecAF Presents Air Force Cross to Special Tactics Airman

Snapped awake by the sound of belt-fed machine gun fire, then-Senior Airman Alaxey Germanovich, a 26th Special Tactics Squadron combat controller, surveys the compound he had dozed off in after several sleepless days of combat.

“I look around and I don’t see any of my American teammates,” Germanovich said. “(At that moment I said to myself) I need to find my friends right now.”

Grabbing his helmet and rifle, Germanovich bolted out of the compound and into the fight, where he saw several of the Army Special Forces Soldiers he was embedded with huddling for cover from behind a small rock.

“I knew then that I had to go get to my teammates and help them,” he said.

Germanovich’s base instinct would quickly turn into a grueling battle for survival, but it was those selfless impulses to save and protect his teammates that proved to be the difference between life and death for many of his teammates on that fateful day.

SecAF commends combat controller for valor

Secretary of the Air Force Barbara Barrett presented the Air Force Cross to now-SSgt Germanovich during a ceremony at Cannon AFB on December 10, 2020.

Germanovich was awarded the medal,

second only to the Medal of Honor, for his actions 8 April 2017, during combat operations against enemy forces in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan.

“This Air Force Cross is a tribute to your persistence (SSgt Germanovich),” Barrett said. “You risked your life and weathered blistering enemy fire to save the lives of others.”

In attendance were Col. Matthew Allen, 24th Special Operations Wing commander, the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) team Germanovich was attached to during the combat operations, and Germanovich’s family and friends.

Following the ceremony, Germanovich led those in attendance in memorial pushups to commemorate the event, the firefight, and the ultimate sacrifice paid during the clash by Army Staff Sgt. Mark De Alencar, a Special Forces Soldier assigned to 7th SFG (A) and a member of the team to which Germanovich was assigned.

“This battle was a case study in toughness and extraordinary competence,” Allen said. “But it was also a case study in love. The type of love that demands teammates fight for one another and give everything they have.”

Germanovich’s actions as the air-to-ground liaison for his special operations forces team were credited with protecting the lives of more than 150 friendly forces and the lethal engagement of 11 separate fighting positions.

Facing hell, calling for fire

A native of Boiling Springs, South Carolina, Germanovich enlisted into the Air Force in November 2012, with two goals in mind.

“I always knew I wanted a challenge,” Germanovich said. “I wanted to have a direct impact on the battlefield wherever I went.”

Five years later, both of those wishes would be granted when he deployed to Afghanistan and embedded with 7 SFG (A) Soldiers and their Afghan partners.

During his tour, the joint force was tasked with clearing several valleys in Nangarhar province of fighters. As the multi-day operation progressed and the coalition forces pushed the insurgents closer to the Afghan border of Pakistan, the fighting became more and more violent. It reached a head as Germanovich sprinted through heavy enemy fire to help the Special Forces Soldiers on that fateful day.

After reaching the rock where his teammates were pinned down, Germanovich began to call in airstrikes to try and suppress the attack.

“It was working to a degree,” Germanovich said, “but we were still receiving extremely effective fire, and one of our partner force members had gotten shot.”

To evacuate the wounded Afghan commando, Germanovich began to call for strikes extremely close to their position in order to create more separation between the coalition forces and the insurgents.

“As the bombs were falling out of the sky, I started screaming at everybody to run for cover,” Germanovich said.

After the partner force member was evacuated, the special operations forces team launched their counterattack. A separate unit from across the valley was able to pinpoint a key enemy bunker during the firefight, and Germanovich’s element, led by De Alencar, crawled their way towards the position.

Once the fire team reached the top of the bunker, Germanovich and De Alencar dropped grenades into its entrance. Then, as Germanovich secured the opening and De Alencar and the other Special Forces Soldiers began

to breach the bunker, insurgents ambushed the team from hidden positions to the south, mortally wounding De Alencar.

“The situation just became complete and utter chaos,” Germanovich said. “The team and I had expended all of our ordnance engaging enemy targets. We expended all of our grenades, there was no more pistol ammunition, and we were out of ammo completely.”

Lying prone with no cover from the attack, Germanovich put out a call to an AC-130W Stinger II gunship aircraft that was leaving the area in order to refuel.

“As they were leaving, I said ‘if you don’t come back, we’re dead,’” Germanovich said.

The gunship did return and began to fire on the enemy fighters, which gave Germanovich and the soldiers the opportunity to move away and evacuate De Alencar.

“All the while, we’re still taking effective fire from the enemy,” Germanovich said. “We began dropping ordnance and basically bombing up this mountainside until we got to safety.”

Germanovich’s actions proved decisive on that battlefield and demonstrated the enormous impact of Air Force Special Operations Command’s precision strike mission, which provides ground forces with specialized capabilities to find, assess and engage targets.

“You (Germanovich) told me earlier that you did what any one of your teammates would have done in the same situation,” Allen said. “But we don’t know that. We do know what you did that day: face and devastate a numerically superior enemy ... this is why America’s enemies do not take us head on.”

Germanovich’s ability to enable precision strike operations and his bravery in the face of hostile fire are incredibly courageous in their own right, but it was the reason behind his valiant performance that makes him an unquestionable hero.

“It was 100 percent my teammates,” Germanovich said. “If I’m in danger, I know without a doubt in my mind that my teammates are going to do everything in their power to make sure that I come back, and I would do everything that I could possibly do to make sure that they come back.” 🇺🇸



SSgt Germanovich leads the formation in pushups.
(USAF Photo)

The Future of Airpower in Irregular Warfare

By Lt Gen Thomas J. Trask, USAF (Retired) and Dr. James Kiras

Airpower functions in irregular warfare historically

Airpower has demonstrated its utility in irregular warfare (IW) since the dawn of powered flight and will continue to do so. This utility has been useful for those looking to counter irregular threats and those conducting unconventional missions. An American expedition conducted one of the first manhunts for border raider Francisco “Pancho” Villa across the border into Mexico for 11 months in 1916-17. Brigadier General John J. Pershing had the 1st Aero Squadron under his command. This squadron, with its JN-3 and R-8 biplanes conducted advanced scouting missions including photoreconnaissance. The renowned military advisor to irregular forces, T.E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, also took advantage of aircraft during the Arab Revolt (1916-18) in the Arabian Peninsula for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) to assist Bedouin guerrillas against Ottoman Turkish forces. Lawrence used fighters and bombers for resupply, command and control, and interdiction missions against fleeing Turkish columns. During the Palestine Campaign, Lawrence and the irregular Bedouins conducted an early form of unconventional warfare activities, in conjunction with British conventional

forces under the command of General Edmund Allenby, to drive Turkish forces out of Palestine and Syria during an earlier form of “great power conflict,” the First World War. In short, airpower has had connections to both IW and great power struggles since its inception.

While useful, early aircraft possessed limited capability, which in turn influenced their effectiveness in IW. These limits were imposed due to their fragility. Over a span of 25 years, however, aircraft evolved from canvas-covered, wood and wire biplanes to the first operational jet aircraft of stressed all-metal construction. In the course of this evolution, aircraft settled into four functions in IW: casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), mobility or airlift missions, ISR, and light strike. A fifth function, unacknowledged by most authors, is influence operations which includes psychological and information operations. These functions are easily recognizable in irregular and conventional campaigns ranging through the following: British colonial “air policing” activities in Iraq and what is now Pakistan (1918-1939); US 801st/492nd Bomb Group (Carpetbagger) and conventional

support to unconventional warfare missions in occupied Europe; 1st (and later 2nd and 3rd) Air Commando Group support to special operations forces (SOF) and conventional missions in the Pacific theater; and a host of others. Aside from more recent activities since 9/11 detailed below, airpower was indispensable during the “Golden Age of Counterinsurgency” (1945-1975) in campaigns including Malaya (1948-1960), Indochina (1945-1954), Algeria (1954-1962), the Philippines (1942-1954), and Vietnam (1955-1975).

The value and utility of airpower in counterinsurgency activities cannot



Douglas AC-47D (Photo courtesy of USAF)

be overstated enough. Airpower can be used in two ways: positively and negatively. Airpower’s positive contributions support host nation presence and governance activities,

such as flying leaders across the country to make them visible to people, particularly if they take action during visits to address local corruption as Philippine Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay did. Its negative contributions seek to create problems for terrorists and insurgents. Airpower offsets some of the traditional advantages irregulars possess: mobility, intelligence superiority, and

missions can provide direct support to ground maneuver forces, in the form of overflight. In addition to offering advanced warning of ambush, airpower can deliver responsive firepower support, provide crucial information updates, call on additional support, and rapidly transport additional resources through airmobile (helicopter) or airborne (parachute) operations to prevent irregulars from escaping. The

first three forms of direct support have been grouped into a single term today: “armed overwatch.” Although conventional airpower historically provided the bulk of support to ground maneuver, the unique qualities and characteristics of IW led the United States to develop specialized SOF airpower capabilities



OV-10 Bronco, Hurlburt Air Park (Photo by Paul Harmon)

maintaining the initiative through countless ambushes of government forces. Airpower’s speed and flexibility, combined with ability to observe the ground from the position of height advantage and ability to strike quickly, accurately, and responsively, limit the options of guerrillas and terrorists to mass, maneuver, and overwhelm government forces in campaigns. During the Vietnam War, for example, no Special Forces camp fell to overwhelming Viet Cong numbers so long as a gunship (AC-47 and its successors) was overhead. Often countries such as the United States help host nations develop their own airpower through advising and assistance missions, both rotary- and fixed-wing.

Closer to the ground, airpower is indispensable in protecting friendly forces. Host nation and friendly ground maneuver forces operate in contested areas. They do so to protect local populations, demonstrate government presence, and seek to come into contact with and destroy insurgent and terrorist groups. Airpower during these

to provide armed overwatch, as well as mobility and ISR, in forms recognizable today in Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC).

The question of specialized versus conventional airpower has revolved around related but opposing issues of capability versus cost. Technological developments in conventional aircraft and the means to oppose them, such as radars, interceptors, and anti-aircraft weapons, drives requirements to create newer, more capable platforms. Capability, however, comes with a high price tag. During the Vietnam War, the cutting-edge F-105 cost \$2.14 million dollars per aircraft in 1960, or under \$20 million today. The estimated cost of each F-35A today is \$80 million dollars in comparison. Expensive individual airframes, with equally pricey maintenance costs requiring specialized facilities, means you can buy fewer and fewer of them over time. Such costs also accompany increasingly precise munitions. The B-1B bomber averages \$70,000 for every hour it flies and carries up to 48 Joint Direct Attack Munitions, each

costing close to \$30,000. The capability of this aircraft and its weapons is undeniable. Effectiveness, however, is rarely efficient in terms of cost.

In IW, however, the combination of complex terrain and irregulars doing their best to avoid detection requires larger number of less costly airframes to assist distributed ground forces as the need arises. Insurgents and terrorists rarely pose a credible threat to aircraft, driving down the need for expensive capability to avoid it. During the Golden Age of Counterinsurgency, a ready supply of surplus Second World War and Korean War aircraft, considered obsolete by conventional standards such as the B-26 Invader and A-1 Skyraider, were readily available to fill the growing number of specialized air units created to conduct IW. The complex conditions and changing threat environments during the Vietnam War, however, shifted the need away from modified, surplus aircraft to specifically designed and developed ones, such as the OV-10 Bronco.

One historical trend related to airpower in IW historically is “boom and bust” periods, or “the Phoenix cycle.” This cycle follows a number of phases. First conventional air forces find themselves insufficiently prepared for irregular conflicts leading to an identifiable need for specialized capabilities and platforms, accompanied by Service resistance to change. Second, there is the initial demonstration of effectiveness of these capabilities to fill this need, leading to their validation. Third, validation is followed rapidly by expansion of capabilities and programs to meet seemingly endless requests for support from the field and following the adage of “more is better.” This expansion, it is worth pointing out, often occurs late in the irregular conflict. Fourth, and finally, the eventual scaling back of efforts and withdrawal from irregular conflicts, often accompanied by their less than satisfactory outcome politically and militarily, leads to a refocusing on conventional missions and wholesale reduction of specialized capabilities and units. The cycle is repeated once another irregular conflict



MQ-9 Reaper (Photo courtesy of USAF)

proves not to be the exception, but rather the rule to US engagements. Although the creation of US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in 1987 did much to limit the damage of the cycle, it is evident as the next section suggests.

SOF Airpower after 9/11

As usual, in September of 2001, the DOD and USSOCOM had built a military that was capable of fighting the last war. In this case, a force capable of executing peacekeeping operations and limited scale air strikes, as had been ongoing in the Balkans, Iraq, and Kuwait through the 1990s. The large conventional force that had invaded Kuwait and Iraq only 10 years earlier had been greatly diminished over the that decade as a “peace dividend” promised by President Clinton in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, one of the technical developments through those years that would change the nature of combat was the ability to push full motion video back to a C2 node. The ability to move high rates of data via secure links over the horizon would truly change the game. One of the authors was in the NATO Joint Operations Center in Sarajevo in 1997 when the very first live video was broadcast back to commanders. A Navy P-3 orbited the Olympic stadium that day as Pope John Paul II was scheduled to speak. The 12-inch screen in the JOC really did little to increase situational awareness that day, but the potential of this capability was evident immediately.

The Air Force brought the MQ-1 Predator into service in the

late 1990s and had about 60 aircraft in the inventory when the attacks of September 11 occurred. The Predator would struggle with the altitude, icing, and reliability in Afghanistan in the early days, but the value of that unblinking eye was immediately apparent, and commanders on the ground instantly demanded more and more. The Air Force eventually bought over 350 Predators and would expand the platform significantly with the MQ-9 Reaper. Armament was added and the ability to have a true armed reconnaissance platform became a tremendous tactical advantage. SOF on the ground were provided a large percentage of the Predator orbits available but they wanted more and wanted organic control of some of their ISR. They developed a manned ISR capability that had multiple crew and sensors and could stay right over the top of SOF targets, before, during, and after SOF raids. AFSOC searched airplane-trader magazines and bought a fleet of Pilatus PC-12s from rich doctors and rock stars and built the U-28, which has been an incredibly successful ISR

platform that has controlled the air battle over most of the biggest terrorist targets of the last decade and a half. The Air Force followed suit with the development of the MC-12W as a short-term boost in capacity. The advantage of

having a crew over the target that had participated in the planning and knew how the teams worked made a huge difference. SOF ground commanders lived and worked with the U-28 crews and learned to trust them implicitly as they learned what they could do. This platform when working with the mobility platforms SOF already owned, from MC-130s and CV-22s to Army SOF helicopters, created the ideal team to chase terrorist groups across the Middle East and Afghanistan. With the almost limitless stack of fighters and bombers with precision weapons and the advancements made in the AC-130, the focus of SOF firmly fixed on Countering Violent Extremist Organizations (C-VEO). The permissive air environment allowed for this teaming of ISR, mobility, and strike to operate across the theaters of operation in a dominant and highly effective manner.

The challenge became how to exploit the hours of video and reams of data taken from targets and turn it into actual intelligence that could be exploited. Processing, Exploitation, and Dissemination (PED) became the new term of military art and it required far more manpower than the operations of the “unmanned” aircraft. The tactics and techniques for PED teams were rapidly developed and improved while they supported the fight. They quickly became an indispensable part of the SOF team, and even today, USSOCOM is working hard to find artificial intelligence and machine learning tools to accelerate the process and identify targets more quickly and efficiently. Al Qaida and the Islamic State have



PC-12/U-28 Draco (Photo courtesy of USAF)

gone to ground, and are operating even deeper in the shadows, but will continue to pose a threat to the United States and its allies for years to come.

Shift to Great Power Competition

The publication of the National Defense Strategy (NDS) in 2018 heralded a shift away from IW to a focus on rising or revisionist state-based threats, such as Russia and China. The watchwords of this new approach were “great power competition” and “lethality.” Neither term was particularly well-defined across the national security enterprise. What followed in subsequent months and years was a level of confusion, followed in good military form by selecting a vector and moving out sharply towards it: preparation for future “great power conflict” in Europe and Asia. Other energies have been devoted to creating a sixth Armed Service: the Space Force. Seemingly lost in the shuffle was the continuing need to defeat terrorists and degrade their organizations, in order to protect the Homeland and our allies and partners in the Middle East and Africa. The publication of additional policy guidance for IW in 2020, as an annex to the NDS, was all but ignored in conventional circles.

IW remains a significant, if overlooked part of great power competition and potential conflict. Perhaps the easiest way to understand the range of activities within it is by objective and time scale. The IW mission with which SOF is most familiar recently, counterterrorism, will continue as partner nations and regions are threatened by persistent, evolving terrorist threats. Both the Philippines and Mozambique have faced surging terrorist threats of Islamic State, or ISIS-affiliated groups. Despite losing most of its territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIS is estimated to have between 5,000 to 10,000 remaining members and fighters in the area and its activities continue to increase in Africa. To help combat these threats locally, SOF and conventional forces will continue to

advise, assist, and build partner nation capacity. Other near-term IW activities consist of competing with states such as China and Russia for influence in areas of interest throughout the globe, including Latin America, Africa, and Asia, ranging from training with partners to conducting information operations backed by “big data.” Although near-term IW actions can have long-term effects, they accomplish national security objectives using small elements, operating in a distributed manner, in a cumulative manner in proactive, enduring campaigns. Steady-state, shaping activities will be the norm for IW activities and as the Summary Irregular Warfare Annex makes loud and clear in its central idea, conventional forces will have as much a role to play in them as SOF. While the current presidential administration has softened some of the language in various pronouncements, including dropping “great power” in favor of “strategic,” competition of the variety outlined above will be the norm for the foreseeable future.

In the mid- to far-term, both conventional forces and SOF are preparing for potential conflict with states such as Russia and China. Such preparations include rethinking operational concepts, refocusing existing capabilities, and designing new ones based on existing and anticipated threat capabilities. Each theater presents its own challenges but for future conflict they boil down to threat reach and density, population density, and limited geography in Western and Eastern Europe contrasted with threat reach and capability, expanded geography and ranges, and limited basing options in the Pacific. For these reasons among others, conventional forces and the Air Force in particular, are having to rethink their capabilities to guarantee their survivability, reach, and effectiveness. The challenges in both theaters, combined with increasingly capable Russian and Chinese anti-access, area denial and power projection forces, translates into Air Force investments in next-generation fighters (Next

Generation Air Dominance system) and bombers (the B-21 Raider), hypersonic missiles, and unmanned or even autonomous systems. As mentioned previously, significant improvements in capability come with costs: direct financial costs, and because of these, much more limited capacity in terms of numbers of platforms, a limited willingness to risk and ability to replace them.

The NDS and its Irregular Warfare Annex have a common theme: whether it is daily competition or future conflict, regular or irregular, neither conventional forces nor SOF will be able to tackle either without integrating together to a high degree. For SOF air specifically, near-term competition will translate daily into the functions that airpower has always performed against irregular threats: CASEVAC, mobility and airlift missions, ISR, armed reconnaissance or light strike, and influence operations. The distributed nature of irregular threats will require distributed forces to respond to them, driving the need towards greater numbers of less capable and much less costly manned or unmanned platforms. To address higher end threats possessing advanced detection and long-range, high speed area denial weapons, other SOF aircraft will need greater capabilities to survive, driving up cost and limiting their numbers. SOF air functions in high-end scenarios could consist of mobility, to insert, support, and extract direct action and unconventional warfare; light strike of either high value targets or in support of military deception operations; personnel recovery; and, influence operations, including specialized cyber activities. One characteristic likely absent from future SOF air operations is persistence, given anticipated threat environments and the cost of capability needed to operate and survive in them for any length of time.

SOCOM Armed Overwatch Program

As our conventional airpower shifts to peer and near-peer

competition, SOF will quickly find itself with a deficit of conventional close air support and airborne ISR. In order to fill that deficit proactively and not reactively, USSOCOM and AFSOC are planning to build a platform that takes the lessons and capabilities of the U-28 and meets the needs of future SOF operators from the outset. It must have a variety of sensors and weapons to provide just what the operator needs on the ground, wherever they find themselves, when there will not be nearly the same level of conventional airpower available that SOF has become accustomed to. USSOCOM believes it must be done now, otherwise they will have to react aggressively later to meet the need and likely end up with something less capable and more expensive.

Armed Overwatch (AO) is the program being proposed by USSOCOM this year with a request to begin procurement in FY22. The concept meets the needs of isolated small teams of SOF working in remote areas around the world. The focus of

the NDS rightly targets great power influence, but armed conflict in these scenarios will likely take place through proxies, militias, and partners of China, Russia, and to some extent Iran. These fringe areas, where great powers will compete for influence are, in many cases, the same areas SOF is already working in to keep pressure on terrorist organizations. The NDS keeps SOF operating in the Middle East, Africa, South America, and increasingly in the Pacific rim, and the workload will only increase for forces that have been the most heavily deployed in the military for the last two decades.

Conventional airpower, which has been fully engaged in the air over Afghanistan, Iraq, and other areas in the region will be brought home to rebuild readiness and focus on peer competition. The services cannot afford to keep fifth generation fighters over SOF units scattered in small teams across huge theaters like Africa. Conventional fighter and attack aircraft must be honed to meet the threat of modern peer air forces,

and with exceedingly small fleets, their deployments must be carefully metered.

Meanwhile, special operators will be engaged in areas with fairly permissive air environments, and will rely on airpower that can provide precision strike, close air support (CAS), strike coordination and reconnaissance (SCAR), and armed ISR. The AO concept describes a platform that can do each of these tasks well and must be able to shift from one to another quickly, even on the same sortie. It must be an aircraft that can operate from remote areas and unprepared surfaces. The footprint for munitions and maintenance must be minimal. It should be an aircraft that is affordable to SOF partners and simple to operate and maintain. Ideally, it should be able to go into the cargo compartment of a C-17 and move across the world quickly. USSOCOM executed a flying demonstration of five potential aircraft at Eglin AFB over the past summer and assuming Congress approves the initial year procurement

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funding, USSOCOM will pick the most suitable aircraft and begin building an initial fleet of 75 aircraft next year.

Some will argue that the A-10 can already provide this capability, but as great an aircraft as it has been for 40 years, and as much as any SOF operator would love to always have a 4-ship overhead all the time, it is not logistically possible nor reasonably affordable. Even if it were, the venerable Hog still could not meet the ISR and SCAR parts of the mission, and the 30mm cannon would be overkill in many situations, increasing the risk of collateral damage. Most importantly, in addition to being 40 years old, the A-10 still needs a significant airfield from which to operate with a relatively heavy support package for maintenance and armament.

Imagine if the small SOF element in Niger in 2017, that was ambushed with the loss of four American special operators, had a two-ship of AO aircraft based with them. Most of the team survived the initial ambush, and with their own organic AO teammates, the results could have been much different. Further imagine the reach of these small teams with routinely deployed AO detachments with them. This is a SOF air concept that will aid in the development of greater partnerships with allies in areas where the Chinese and Russians are pushing for influence. It is a concept that can be reasonably and affordably transferred to partners and will be

much more useful to them in providing their own defense than trying to acquire more expensive and complex fighters. Congress pulled funding for the program last year and ordered an independent study be conducted to determine whether the requirement is valid. This report was delivered early in 2021 and USSOCOM is now requesting the \$170M in funding that was included in the Presidential Budget Request for FY22 be approved. It is a modest investment that will have an inordinate return for the SOF that are most likely to continue be involved in this nation's armed conflicts. It is time to get them an aircraft purpose built for the mission and do it now before increased risk is incurred by special operators on the ground.

Conclusion

It is clear that SOF will continue to be critical to the successful execution the NDS, even as it will probably evolve in the years ahead. The focus will certainly become even more China focused. SOF will also be the most likely forces involved in active armed conflicts, particularly irregular ones, and those conflicts will be through proxies and partners rather than direct conventional war with China or Russia. They must be provided with organic air assets that will ensure their safety and success, and those assets must be able to perform the full host of necessary airpower missions. This does not mean that integration with conventional forces will not still be a stringent

requirement, particularly as the Defense Department focuses on direct confrontation with China and Russia. AFSOC is building the necessary force now by adding the Armed Overwatch program and is preparing the command to be ready for all future IW requirements.



About the Authors:

Lt Gen Trask retired from active duty as the Vice Commander, US Special Operations Command, Washington DC. He held command positions at the squadron, group, and wing, as well as Squadron Officers College, and 23rd Air Force. His staff assignments include the Joint Staff (J-3), US Special Operations Command, US Central Command, AF Special Operations Command, and NATO AIRSOUTH. General Trask is a command pilot with more than 3,000 hours having flown combat and mission support operations in Panama, Iraq, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

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Butterflies, Dragons

The Second Defense of Lima Site 36

By Lt Col Richard D. Newton, PhD, USAF (retired)

LS-36 came under heavy attack this morning, and one USAID worker has been killed. The enemy build up in the area has been taking place for some time. LS-36 is the forward staging area for helicopters engaged in SAR work; however, it is not a key base for operations in northern Laos. There is no intention of defending it against overwhelming odds.

- Cable from Ambassador Sullivan to SecState Vientiane, Laos, 5 January 1967

Introduction

After overwhelming and occupying Lima Site 36 (LS-36) in February 1966 with prohibitively high losses, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) gave up the strategic outpost to General Vang Pao and the Royal Laotian Army at the end of May 1966. As during the first defense of the site (*See ACJ 9/2, Summer 2020*), the threat to communist North Vietnam's war plans posed by allied forces operating out of LS-36 was so great that the communists were resolved to take the base again. In addition, there was the emotional desire to win back the outpost where so many North Vietnamese had died a year earlier, during the first assault.

In January 1967, Air Commandos on the ground and in the air directed air strikes and delivered deadly fires to defend the outpost and support the US's Laotian allies. Over the two-day battle, these Airmen showed extraordinary courage and bravery while saving the camp, and this time preventing the communists from taking it over.

Background

The Butterfly forward air controllers (FAC) were a unique, although short-lived, Air Commando program that ran from 1964 to 1967. It was originally created to control Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) close air support (CAS) sorties in northern Laos. The success of the program caused USAF planners to look at adding control of US jets to the Butterfly FACs' portfolio. A series of unfortunate incidents in early 1965, where US jets attacked friendly forces, forced the US ambassador to Laos to institute a requirement that all US strike sorties in Laos be controlled by US FACs. A shortage of qualified FACs in Southeast Asia – at the time, only fighter pilots were allowed to serve as FACs – opened the door for enlisted controllers from the 1st Air Commando Wing to begin controlling US jets. The Butterfly FACs were administratively TDY to the 1st Air Commando Wing's Operation WATERPUMP detachment at Udorn Royal Thai



CCTs in Thailand, May 1966. Four of the nine flew as Butterfly FACs. Ron Kosh is back row, first from the left. Don Carlyle is third from the right. (USAF Photo)

AFB (RTAFB), but they were assigned to and operationally controlled by the US Air Attaché at the embassy in Vientiane, Laos.

The original Butterfly FACs were enlisted combat controllers (CCT) from Hurlburt Field who had completed strike controller training at the USAF Air-Ground Operations School (AGOS) and were sent on six-month temporary duty (TDY) tours to Laos. Later, CCT officers, pilots, navigators, weather officers, and intelligence officers served as Butterfly FACs. The Butterfly call sign, though, was also used by Air Commando intelligence officers TDY to support the Air Attaché, and by Air Commando T-28D Nomad pilots advising the RLAF, but subsequently re-tasked to control CAS sorties. On occasion, USAF O-1 Bird Dog FACs sent TDY to augment the FACs in BARREL ROLL would also use the Butterfly call sign. There were no strict controls on who could come up on the radio as a Butterfly, and to make things just a bit more confusing, the CCT Butterfly FACs would add the numbers 22, 33, or 44 to their call sign to identify the area where they were working. On the odd occasion when more than one Butterfly FAC was working in an area the combat controllers would adopt girls' names, like Gladys and Grace, so the strike flights could distinguish which FAC they were talking to. This was different from the system all the other FACs in Southeast Asia used, where the number was assigned to a person. Even today, more than four decades later, the Vietnam-era FACs still recognize each other with their 1960s and early 70s call signs.

onflies, & Fireflies



And so, this is how Butterfly 44 and 22, two enlisted combat controllers, ended up controlling the air strikes that helped save LS-36 during the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) second attempt to overrun the camp.

Lima Site 36

LS-36 was a forward operating base in northeastern Laos near the town of Na Khang, strategically situated near the North Vietnamese border and the communists' transportation artery, Route 6, into South Vietnam. The outpost was the logistical and command center for Laotian operations in the region, and also served as both an air delivery hub for US Agency for International Development (USAID) assistance to Laotian refugees, and a staging and refueling site for USAF H-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopters sitting combat search and rescue alert for the strategic bombing operations, ROLLING THUNDER into North Vietnam and BARREL ROLL into northern Laos. The first rescue H-3s deployed to Southeast Asia (SEA) were CH-3Cs, modified cargo helicopters that were not configured for inflight refueling. The first refuellable HH-3Es did not arrive in theater until June 1967, so LS-36 became critical to extending the CH-3s' range and reducing the helicopters' response times.

Intelligence reporting in December 1966 and early January 1967 had identified another NVA and Pathet Lao buildup around Xam Neua (Sam Neua) in northeastern Laos, where Lima Sites 36 and 85 were located. Xam Neua was the capital city for the

communist Pathet Lao. By early January, between 600 and 800 communist troops had surrounded LS-36. Just before dawn on 6 January, the North Vietnamese attacked with three battalions. Their goal was LS-36's main command post, where the CIA liaison and USAID officers lived – documents captured after the attack revealed that the NVA leadership knew exactly where the Americans' living quarters were and were intent on capturing or killing them. One enemy battalion jumped the gun, though, and disrupted the planned coordinated attack from three sides. That mistake was just enough to prevent the camp from being overrun.

Mike Lynch was the CIA officer stationed at LS-36 during both the first and second communist assaults on the outpost. At the first sound of incoming fires during the second assault, a little after 04:00, Mike fired up a portable generator and turned on the radios. His first call for help was to the USAF command center at Udorn RTAFB. When it did not answer, he next tried the US embassy in Vientiane. It was too early, though, and he got no answer. Finally, he was



Americans' living quarters at LS-36, protected by sand-filled 55-gallon drums. (Photo provided by Mike Lynch)

able to reach an operator at USAID in Vientiane, who patched him through to the Air Attaché's home. Major Richard "Dick" Secord at Udorn energized the air support system to get the Americans the help they needed to survive. While Mike continued to work the radios, Don Sjostrum, the USAID case officer, who had also survived the previous year's NVA assault on the camp, grabbed a shotgun and ran out into a trench behind the building to protect the rear entrance and keep Mike, inside, apprised of what was happening during the battle.

Down at LS-20A, about 100 air miles southwest of LS-36 and halfway between LS-36 and Vientiane, Butterfly FAC AIC Ron Kosh woke early and turned up the volume of the Collins High Frequency (HF) radio. He heard Mike frantically calling, "London, London, London (LS-36) to Paris (LS-20A), attack has started, we need help."

Unfortunately, the weather over Na Khang that day was typical for December and January – terrible. The ceiling that morning was a solid overcast at 200 – 500 feet above the ground, with the surrounding mountain peaks shrouded in clouds. The enemy had been patient, waiting until the winter



LS-36 under attack. (Photo courtesy of Mike Lynch)

weather patterns provided a solid overcast of clouds that they hoped would negate the Americans' air power advantage. At LS-20A, the weather was almost as bad as at LS-36 and would have prevented taking off under most circumstances, but this was not a normal day. There were Americans in trouble who needed help, so the civilian contract pilot of a Continental Air Services Pilatus PC-6 Porter bent the rules and took off in spite of the morning fog and low clouds. Ron Kosh was in the copilot's seat. Kosh and the pilot were barely able to see the ground to navigate up to LS-36, so they climbed up through the weather and used the TACAN at LS-85 to find their way to Na Khang. When they arrived, the clouds were so thick that the Porter ended up orbiting overhead. Ron Kosh was fearful that the weather was so bad no fighters be able to get through the clouds to help the struggling outpost.

It was now about 06:30 and uniformed NVA troops had closed to within about 100 yards of the American's command post. Other enemy elements had broken through the outer

perimeter on the north side of the camp. Finally, with US air support on the way, Mike was able to go out back of the shack to check on Don, let him know the USAF was about 20 minutes out, and to see what was going on for himself. As he was approaching the trench, though, a blast went off nearby and he saw Don fall forward. The USAID case officer had been hit in the forehead. Mike could not find any vital signs. He tried dragging Don's body back to the house, but the small arms fire was too intense, so he was forced to leave the body and get back to the radios to coordinate the inbound air strikes.

Venom flight, four F-105 Thuds, were the first fighter-bombers to arrive on scene, having been diverted from an armed reconnaissance mission in STEEL TIGER. Hartford flight, also four F-105s, followed closely behind. Both flights checked in with Mike at the radios and were told what was going on at the camp and that help was desperately needed. The flight lead, Lt Col Eugene O. Conley, reported later that the American on the ground came across the radio as excited and describing the situation as "grim," descriptions that were confirmed by the seasoned CIA officer. Both Venom and Hartford flights unsuccessfully tried to get down through the layers of clouds above LS-36, but the "muck" was too thick. Finally, Conley asked Mike to confirm the minimum safe altitude (MSA) for the area because he intended to try and descend through the clouds to within 500 feet of MSA in hopes of finding a hole and making his way to the besieged site.

At LS-36, the CIA officer only had out-of-date and highly suspect French maps to work with. Conley, though, said he would look for a way down and eventually found a small hole in the weather some miles away from Na Khang. The pilot managed to thread his way down through the layers of weather and finally get below the clouds, a daring feat of airmanship and courage given that the huge F-105 was the largest single-engine fighter the US ever built, with a cruising speed around 680 knots! Complicating Conley's predicament was the fact that once below the clouds he was completely hemmed in by the mountains surrounding the camp.

Popping out below the clouds at only 200 feet above the ground and picking his way through the mountains and back to LS-36, Conley was too low to deliver any ordnance in the confined area he had to work in. Instead, he told Mike that he would "make some noise." The Thud pilot made a low pass down the runway and then lit the afterburner of his Pratt & Whitney J-75 engine at the end of the runway as he pulled into a near vertical climb to avoid the mountains. The J-75 had a very distinctive booming noise when the pilot lit the afterburner, known as a hard light, and typically causing those unfamiliar with the jet to duck or at least flinch.

On Conley's next try he brought his wingman down through the clouds with him. The pair of Thuds made another high-speed pass and afterburner climb which was enough to give the Vietnamese pause and break off the attack. The enemy had been counting on the weather negating the Americans' air power advantage. Venom flight's surprise appearance and their low passes proved the communists' assumptions wrong. Major Secord noted that there were many heroes during that second defense of LS-36, but it was Gene Conley's courage and determination to get his big fighter

down and into the fight during that initial stage that made the decisive difference. Mike Lynch called Conley “a true hero” and said Venom flight’s arrival and low passes broke the morale of the NVA attackers—the NVA knew they were not safe from US air power, contrary to what their leaders had promised. Lt Col Conley was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions that day. Sadly, the medal was delivered posthumously as Conley was killed two weeks later when a surface-to-air missile struck his Thud as he was leading a two-wing strike against heavily defended railroad yards near Hanoi, North Vietnam.

At this point, Venom flight went Bingo – minimum fuel necessary to get home or to a tanker – and departed. Within 15 minutes, however, a flight of Douglas A-1E Skyraiders, call signs Dragonfly 21 and 22, from the 602nd Fighter Squadron Commando (FSC) arrived on scene. The E-model Skyraiders were known as “fat faces” because the cockpits were configured for dual control, side-by-side seating, whereas the later H-model A-1s were configured for a single pilot and thus were longer and narrower. Pilots flying the E-models normally sat in the left seat and therefore had a difficult time looking down and below the right side of their aircraft. The 602nd FSC used three different call signs in 1967: Sandy for combat rescue escort missions, Firefly for armed reconnaissance and interdiction missions into northern Laos and North Vietnam, and Dragonfly for strike missions into the STEEL TIGER area. Dragonfly 21 and 22 had just finished striking a bridge in the Laotian panhandle and had been diverted to LS-36. Maj Robert Turner was the flight lead and Capt John D. Haney was Dragonfly 22. They contacted Mike for a briefing on the

tactical situation and were told the enemy had overrun three quarters of the compound, and that the CIA officer was inside the building with a shotgun ready to make a last-ditch stand. Anything the Air Commandos could do to help would be very much appreciated...to put it mildly!

The Dragonflies were facing the same weather Venom flight had encountered, so Major Turner left his wingman on top of the clouds in a holding pattern. Because the A-1 was much slower than the F-105, Major Turner was able to make a circling penetration using the signal off the US TACAN at LS-85 and then the Skyraider’s direction-finding antenna to home in on Mike’s radio and stay over the outpost. Turner, like Conley, showed incredible bravery flying his airplane down through the layers of clouds into a confined area without precision navigation aids or reliable maps.

Dragonfly 21 broke out about 1,000 feet above the ground, but still boxed in by the cloud-covered mountains. The pilot could see the communist troops on both sides of the airfield, in the fuel storage area, and more approaching the hill on the north side of the runway where the Americans’ living quarters were located. Checking in with Mike to ask where to put his ordnance, the pilot was told that anyone outside the compound was enemy and he was cleared to strike at will. Mike then went outside with a colored smoke grenade to mark his position and told Major Turner to not worry about inadvertently hitting the American’s hut. In spite of being exposed to enemy ground fire the entire time, Dragonfly 21 made several passes, firing rockets and strafing the enemy with his 20-mm cannon.

While the A-1s were pushing the NVA back, Mike got a call from Vientiane on the HF radio that a “special package”



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was on its way to Na Khang for him. Mike reminded them there was fight going on and the airstrip was closed. That didn't stop the Air America pilot in the Porter, though. He touched down on the far end of the runway and Jerry D, another CIA officer who had been out of the camp for the evening, tumbled out the paradrop hatch as the pilot slowly taxied. Once Jerry was clear, the pilot was airborne and on his way back to Vientiane. Jerry, in typical dry humor fashion, dusted himself off, looked at Mike, and said, "I thought I told you not to start this war without me."



Knowing the weather would preclude fast-movers from joining the battle any time soon, Turner's priority was to buy time until another flight of Skyraiders could get to Na Khang. Dragonfly 22 joined his flight lead under the cloud deck, and together they stayed overhead LS-36 for over an hour, firing single rockets instead of salvos and using short bursts from their 20-mm cannon to conserve ammunition. Their flight pattern was restricted by the low clouds and surrounding high terrain, compounded by the limited visibility on their right sides. The pilots had to pull up into the clouds at the end of their firing passes to avoid hitting the mountains. Mike noted in his report that the A-1s were so low that shell casings from the Skyraiders' cannons were falling on the tin roof of his shack and he could see the pilots in their cockpits. The Dragonflies' presence, persistence, and deadly fires kept the enemy away from the Americans' building, though, and the NVA were not able to regroup and mount another coordinated attack.

As Dragonfly 21 and 22 were making their last few firing passes over the camp, a second Pilatus Porter managed to get through the clouds and drop onto the landing strip. The pilot slowed down enough for Ron Kosh, Butterfly 44, to jump out of the barely-moving aircraft with his radios and weapon. With the Porter taking gunfire from enemy troops on the hill and in the treeline above the runway, the pilot took off as soon as Kosh was clear. With a slight lull in the fighting, Ron linked up with Mike and Jerry. They helped get Don's body to the airstrip where another Porter came in to take the USAID officer out. Mike then briefed Kosh on the enemy's most likely avenues of attack and retreat. Ron was now responsible for controlling the air strikes while Mike maintained

communications with Udorn, Vientiane, and Lima Site 98, where General Vang Pao was also monitoring the course of the battle. Mike also coordinated for additional air power and kept the US command posts at 7/13th Air Force and the embassy informed of the tactical situation. It was now mid-morning and the weather was finally starting to improve.

As Dragonfly 21 and 22 departed, another flight of A-1Es from the 602nd FSC, Firefly 11 and 12, arrived overhead. Another Pilatus Porter delivered a second Butterfly FAC, A1C Don Carlyle to Na Khang. Ron Kosh kept the call sign Butterfly 44 and Don took Butterfly 22. For the next hour or so, the Fireflies, joined by Royal Laotian Air Force T-28 Nomads, pounded the NVA forces with rockets, cannon fire, and white phosphorus bombs. By midday, the weather had improved enough to start bringing in fast-movers and so the airborne command post, "Dogpatch Control," began shuttling F-105s to the Butterfly FACs at LS-36, along with more Skyraiders and Nomads.

Where the slower, propellor-driven A-1s and T-28s could put down highly accurate fires from low level, the F-105s' higher speed, while keeping them safe from enemy ground fire, meant they were less accurate. Therefore, they were rarely used for close-in attacks. Butterfly 22, overhead in the Porter and directing the air strikes, had to lead the fast-movers to LS-36 and guide them to their intended targets. Still, the F-105s did great work attacking the NVA forces retreating from the camp.

When the fighting had died down sufficiently, Mike was able to open up the airstrip. General Vang Pao flew into LS-36 to take personal charge of the battle. The general was determined to avoid another evacuation of the outpost, as had happened 11 months earlier. Vang Pao sent out patrols to confirm the strength of the remaining NVA force, but the still intense enemy small arms fire from the treeline around the camp slowed the patrols' reconnaissance and prevented them from getting accurate assessment.

Vang Pao personally coordinated for reinforcement of the Laotian garrison and evacuation of the wounded. Throughout the afternoon, Air America and civilian C-123s brought troops, weapons, food, and ammunition into the camp and took the wounded and dead out. The airlift stopped at dusk because LS-36 had no night landing capability. The next question to address was how to defend the camp through the night against an expected NVA counterattack.

During the February 1966 defense of Na Khang, the ambassador had ordered the Americans to evacuate the camp before dark. When the Americans left, the Laotian troops also evacuated and gave up the outpost to the NVA. Mike's assessment after that first fight was that if the Americans left again, it would crush the Laotians' morale and they would be hard-pressed to exploit the gains they had made defending the camp this time. Ted Shackley, the CIA Station Chief in Vientiane, had initially ordered the Americans now at LS-36 to leave before nightfall. Ron Kosh, however, felt that if the enemy could be held off through the night, then the camp could be saved. USAID and the Attaché in Vientiane all concurred with Mike's request to stay the night and so the Station Chief took what proved to be a strong case to the ambassador. It helped that Lt Gen Momyer, the commander of 7/13th Air Force promised round-the-clock air support. The ambassador, knowing the consequences of the Americans being killed or captured, courageously gave permission for the

men to remain overnight. He did warn Shackley, though, "If they are gone tomorrow, then so are you."

Favorable weather ... the "superb action by Seventh Air Force," and Meo counterattacks have blunted and driven back the enemy drive on LS-36. ... Vang Pao has moved into LS-36 this afternoon to take personal charge of the defense. Ammo and supplies have been moved in. Sullivan has authorized Lynch to RON at the site because English-language capability is required to coordinate A-26s and flareships for night operations.

- Cable from Ambassador Sullivan to SecState
Vientiane, Laos, 6 January 1967

True to his word, General Momyer directed that C-130 "Lamplighter" aircraft divert from their normal mission in the Laotian panhandle to orbit overhead LS-36 that night. The Lamplighters dropped powerful illumination parachute flares all night long, making it possible for A-26 Invaders, call sign "Nimrod," from the 606th Air Commando Squadron to bomb and strafe NVA assembly points and also enemy units retreating from the camp. The night passed without incident for the defenders and just after dawn the next morning three flights of Air Commando Skyraiders, Dragonfly 21 and 22; Sandy 1, 2, 3, and 4; and Firefly 11 and 12, began attacking the treelines and enemy positions. Overhead in a Porter, Butterfly 44, Ron Koch, was controlling the aircraft and directing the fires. The NVA briefly fired rounds from an 82-mm mortar into LS-36, but it was quickly knocked out by one of the Sandies.

From documents and maps captured from enemy dead, the defenders guessed that the NVA units attacking the site were unfamiliar with the area and depended on local guides. Because the local guides had been killed during the previous day's air attacks, in order to withdraw they would be forced to retrace the same routes they had used to infiltrate the camp. General Vang Pao ordered Laotian observers to ride along with the Butterfly FACs and look for additional retreating forces. Just after noon, they found a group that appeared to be lost in a canyon about a kilometer from the camp, and carrying scores of their dead and wounded. Kosh called for an airstrike and Firefly 15 and 16 were diverted from their preplanned mission in STEEL TIGER, arriving at about 14:30 to support LS-36.

Captain John Roberts was the flight lead for Firefly 15 and 16. Butterfly 44 marked the target area with a smoke grenade and the Firefly flight went to work using cluster bombs, napalm, white phosphorous bombs, and cannon fire.



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The A-1s spent a little over half an hour attacking the site. By the time the Air Commandos departed, the canyon was ablaze, but from overhead, though, they had no idea if their attacks had been successful. A later report from a patrol on the ground let the Air Commandos know their airstrikes had decimated the enemy unit.

Conclusion

Lt Col Gene Conley and the F-105s of Venom flight were truly heroic in what they did with their F-105s to buy the defenders of Lima Site 36 precious time. If not for their courage, disregard for personal safety, and flying skills, Na Khang would have been overrun again. Colonel Conley allowed the Dragonflies and Fireflies of the 602nd Fighter Squadron Commando time to get on-scene and begin delivering the extremely accurate and deadly "danger close" fires that pushed the enemy back. Ron Kosh and Don Carlyle, the enlisted Butterfly FACs, finally got through the weather and into Na Khang where they organized the air attacks that finally crushed the attacking NVA units. And, that night the Nimrods from the 606th Air Commando Squadron ensured the communist forces could not regroup and reattack. Air power saved LS-36 in January 1967, and it was Air Commandos on the ground and in the air who provided the decisive elements.



About the Author: Lt Col (retired) Rick Newton volunteers as an editor for and occasional contributor to the Air Commando Journal and Air Commando Press, while also researching and writing about air power and irregular warfare.



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Photo by Paul Harmon

U-10A/B Super Courier

TAIL #62-3606 HISTORY

The U-10 on display in the Air Park served the Air Force from 1961-1971. In those 10 years the aircraft was assigned to Malmstrom AFB, Montana, in 1961; Fairchild AFB, Washington., in 1962; Goldman AFB, Kentucky, in 1962; Seymour-Johnson AFB, North Carolina, in 1963; and Hurlburt Field in 1964. In May 1971 the aircraft was dropped from the inventory and was dedicated in the Air Park on October 20, 1973.

The Air Force received the Helio-GAC L-28A Super Courier in 1958. Its large flaps covered three-fourths of the wing's trailing edge, giving the aircraft a short take-off and landing capability. The Super Courier accommodated a pilot, copilot and four passengers.

It wasn't the most famous war weapon of the Vietnam War, but the Helio U-10 Courier utility aircraft was among the spookiest and the man who transformed the Helio Courier from an oddity into a working combat aircraft was a cloak-and-dagger officer at the CIA was Air Force pilot Lt Col Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt. Aderholt despised desk work. He was intrigued by counterinsurgency warfare and loved to fly.

In 1958, Aderholt heard of a short takeoff and landing aircraft developed by Otto Koppen and Lynn L. Bollinger. Aderholt arranged for a demonstration and test-flew the high-winged, fixed-gear Helio. He knew immediately that the CIA needed to the aircraft to exfiltrate people from hostile territory and to support partisans behind enemy lines.

As a result of the efforts by Aderholt during his assignment at the CIA in the 1950s, the Air Force ordered three Helio H-395 Super Couriers (58-7026/7028) as L-28A liaison aircraft. Test pilots demonstrated the L-28As — with their inordinate number of spoilers, slats and flaps for short-field performance — at the Pentagon building and at the CIA "farm" at Camp Peary, VA. According to legend, an L-28A landed in the courtyard of the Pentagon. Military and civilian officials, pondering operations in the Congo and against Cuba, were impressed by the ability of the Courier to fit into small spaces.

Type:	Six-place utility/special operations aircraft
Powerplant:	One 395-horsepower Lycoming GO-480 six-cylinder horizontally opposed piston engine
Performance:	Maximum speed 180 miles per hour; cruising speed 160 miles per hour; rate of climb 1,150 feet per minute; ceiling 20,500 feet; range 1,100 miles; takeoff distance 342 feet
Weights:	Empty, 2,080 pounds; maximum takeoff
Dimensions:	Wingspan 39 feet; length 31 feet; height 8 feet 10 inches; wing area 231 square feet

Beginning in 1962, CIA operatives, Aderholt and Larry Ropka, introduced the Courier to Laos, where the US was increasing its military involvement. Aderholt's biographer Warren A. Trest wrote that the Courier could operate from crude airstrips where the De Havilland L-20 Beaver (redesignated U-6 that year) and Westland Lysander could not.

Aderholt demonstrated that the Courier could land and take off in a village that had no runway or road of any kind. Soon, a handful of CIA Couriers belonging to the agency's airline, Air America, were carrying out clandestine missions in the Laotian hinterlands.

Adapted from an article at www.defensemedianetwork.com by Robert Dorr and Fred Borch, Sept 29 2013.

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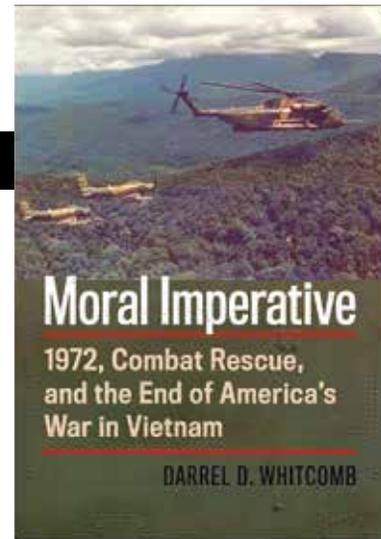
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BOOK REVIEW

Moral Imperative *1972, Combat Rescue, and the End of America's War in Vietnam*

By Darrel D. Whitcomb

(University Press of Kansas, 2021, 370 pages)



Reviewed by Bryant Macfarlane, ISG, USA (Retired)

Nearly every American is aware that part of the American way of war includes the idea that no man will ever be left behind. More than a part of the professionalization of the American military or a clever bumper sticker, it is part of an ethos stretching back at least as far as 1675, when Colonel Benjamin Church formed the first Special Operations unit in American history. Church realized that traditional European tactics were of little use against the enemy the colonists faced and assembled a group of frontiersmen and friendly Indians to use irregular tactics and range between villages and forts, raiding hostile camps in forests and swamps. Church's reflections in *Entertaining Passages relating to Philip's War* – often referred to as the first American military manual – demonstrated a clear standard of conduct. A mentality formed in units performing irregular operations along the American frontier grew into a fundamental truth for American society long before we were a nation.

Darrel D. Whitcomb's *Moral Imperative* reflects this fundamental truth as tested in rescue operations throughout Southeast Asia (SEA) during the American drawdown in 1972. Whitcomb, a 1969 Air Force Academy graduate, served three tours in SEA serving as a cargo pilot and forward air controller (FAC), and is a recipient of the Silver Star and two Distinguished Flying Crosses for his service. *Moral Imperative* is Whitcomb's sixth book in an effort to thoroughly document the role that the men and women conducting Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) missions have played in our nation's history. Whitcomb has also advised three pertinent television documentaries. Although not the first to record and evaluate the brave efforts to bring every man home, Whitcomb's treatment is distinctive. While Earl Tilford's *Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975* (2005) and George Galdorisi and Tom Phillips' *Leave No Man Behind* (2009) are both superb additions to every warfighter's library, they both lack the depth and the focus

on the unique culmination of circumstances that made 1972 a particularly trying year for American aviators of all services. As the United States has recently committed to a withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, the themes discussed in *Moral Imperative* are significant to consider in our contemporary conditions.

Whitcomb performs an excellent service in utilizing “a trove of rescue stories” uncovered in his research to relay both the human element and the mission set's challenges in 1972; this approach is likely to affect the reader on a more personal level than similar histories. On one level *Moral Imperative* is the story of the international and theater events of this focal year in the American forces' withdrawal from Vietnam. As *Moral Imperative* demonstrates, servicemen were well informed about the gravity of their situation in SEA in 1972: “We could listen to the English language broadcasts from China and the BBC and knew what was going on in Paris. No one wanted to be the last casualty or POW.” Whitcomb does a phenomenal job of demonstrating the frustrations and barriers of fighting a war with hands tied behind the back. After years of direct operations, the major US Army and Marine combat and support elements were withdrawn. American advisors, contract pilots, and special operations forces continued to support the Republic of Vietnam-led ground-air effort to maintain sovereignty below the Seventeenth Parallel. Even as air assets dwindled, 1972 saw several impressive and widely-discussed air campaigns – Operation Barrel Roll, Linebacker I/II, and Rolling Thunder I/II – that arguably influenced the North Vietnamese to sign the Paris Peace Accords. However, 1972 also saw Operation Lam Son 719, the Easter Offensive, and the hardening of North Vietnamese air defenses via the proliferation of anti-aircraft artillery, SA-2, and SA-7 systems, not to mention increased air-to-air interactions with MiG fighters.

However, where *Moral Imperative* truly shines is in

presenting the narrative as a chronological survey of the 1972 American withdrawal from Vietnam through the stories of rescue through seasons and months that frame the book's focus. Chapter one, titled *A Long War*, is an excellent primer for those unfamiliar with the particularities of Search and Rescue (SAR) across the American services, both in general development and in SEA in particular. Here Whitcomb outlines the direct equipment, organization, and fundamental tactics of the joint personnel recovery capacity in SEA and the development of post-immediate recovery capacity under Military Assistance Command, Studies and Observation Group (MACSOG) Operations Group – 80. This was a critical leap in recovery operations, as the fusion of these elements allowed the Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) to gain access to theater-wide all-source information as well as “some of the finest air and ground special operations forces in the world...who were trained to work in diverse and challenging environments across international borders”—to uphold the larger principle of the inherent value of each American life.

Whitcomb then presents through the following eight chapters the valiant efforts of Naval Helicopter Rescue Squadron (HC-7) – the proud “Orphans of the Seventh Fleet” – and Air Force Tactical Air Support FAC squadrons, as they conduct theater-wide rescue and recovery operations, at times aided by the intrepid contract pilots of Air America. While many of these stories are but a paragraph, a few – such as the evasion and recovery of Bat-21B/Nail-38B, Valent-03/04, and Jackal-33 – are deservedly much longer narratives. It is hard to understand CSAR without reifying the helicopter fully. As Igor Sikorsky would say, “[i]t would be right to say that the helicopter's role in saving lives represents one of the most glorious pages in the history of human flight.” Whitcomb, however, presents the helicopter as a member of a team that includes pilots, gunners, PJs, flight mechanics, A-1/A-7 Sandys, AC-130/119 Gunships, K/HC-130s, E-121 Discos, OV-1/OV-10 FACs, and F-100/F-104 Fast FACs, all operating in unison under the JPRC at great risk to themselves, their equipment, and at times to the conduct of ground combat operations.

But, as Whitcomb soberly reminds the reader, “[r]escue was not free. It carried its own ‘butcher's bill.’” As MACV Deputy Commander General John Vogt later recalled, “I had to decide whether we should risk the loss of maybe a half dozen airplanes and crews just to get one man out. Finally, I said to myself...the one thing that keeps our boys motivated is the certain belief that if they go down, we will do absolutely everything we can to get them out. If that is ever in doubt, morale would tumble...I didn't ask anybody for permission, I just said, ‘Go do it.’” All of this was necessary because “combat aviators of the US forces in SEA were ready and able to meet the enemy head-on and provide top cover for our ground forces as the nation withdrew from Vietnam. The rescue forces were their guardian angels. That was part of the American way of war.”

While Whitcomb does a real service to both the general enthusiast and the academic reader in his discussion, it does

come at an acknowledged loss to our understanding of the breadth and depth of CSAR in SEA; indeed, the number of rotary-wing and contract air losses, not to mention rescues of isolated personnel by assets other than USAF/USN, is largely unknown. The addition of translated North Vietnamese unit histories is a welcome addition to our larger understanding of the conflict. In summation, this is an important book that deserves serious consideration and reflection on the meaning of the moral imperative inherent in the American way of war.

About the Author: 1SG Bryant Macfarlane was the Senior Enlisted Leader of an Army Aviation Task Force in Afghanistan (2017-2018) and is currently a doctoral student in the Department of History at Kansas State University.



Moral Imperative

Reviewed by Michael Russell, Col, USAF (Retired)

Overview

Moral Imperative is a historical account of America's search and rescue efforts during 1972, the waning year of the Vietnam War. It describes, in detail, the forces that engaged in rescue and recovery operations through a generally chronological series of rescue vignettes derived from historical records and firsthand accounts in order to make the case that rescue and recovery of Bbrothers in Arms, suddenly thrust into harm's way, was not just a mission, but rather a deeply shared “moral imperative.”

Analysis

A typical Darrel Whitcomb project, this is an exhaustively researched and meticulously documented book that draws heavily from historical records, firsthand accounts, and the author's own experience as a forward air controller (FAC) during that specific period of the Vietnam War. It includes reflective comments from theater leadership, rescue force participants, and the subjects of both successful and unsuccessful rescue attempts. It is a comprehensive and authoritative workpiece filled with real stories about real Airmen performing selfless and heroic acts.

The author provides a brief, but effective, overview of the build-up and development of the rescue forces leading up to 1972 and discusses the various shapes, sizes, and effectiveness of U.S. and allied designated, non-designated, and ad hoc forces that engaged in rescue operations throughout the Vietnam theater during the year 1972. He provides a frank analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of those forces including: the leadership, the aircraft, the aircrew and/or ground forces, the organizational structure involved, and coordination and communication processes of the time. He also briefly discusses technological

advancements as well as missed opportunities that could have significantly enhanced rescue success.

To make his “moral imperative” case, the author uses what is probably the most complete compilation of actual rescue events during the last full year of the war. These stories are the meat of his book and are written with as much detail historical records and personal accounts can provide. Readers will be introduced to aircrew members, learn their names, know what aircraft they flew, what was their mission was, and the dates, times, and circumstances that put them in harm’s way. Some, if not many, readers will recognize the names of heroes with whom they may have served with or served under during their careers and gain a much better appreciation of their character and their heroic deeds. They will receive blow-by-blow descriptions of rescue efforts as events unfolded and discover that each rescue story is a

unique and, for the most part, compelling account of events that instantly intertwined the lives and shaped the actions of real people in life and death situations.

The stories are stitched together from historical records and participant accounts in a generally chronological order and are factually written without embellishment. They are as complete as those records and accounts allow and, because of that, sometimes end abruptly without resolution of the rescue event. It should also be noted that not all of the stories have happy endings, in fact, most don’t.

While rescue related statistics are presented occasionally throughout the book, the author notes that the data collection tended to be service-oriented, was not standardized, was often incomplete and therefore, could not provide a comprehensive picture of the total rescue effort and effect. Readers may find them useful but should keep in mind that they only tell a very small part of the story.

As a historical piece there is absolutely no doubt that the book provides the most complete and accurate account of combat and non-combat rescue and recovery events for the year. At the same time, the subtle thread of Whitcomb’s “moral imperative,” that is, ...the willingness of American and allied air and ground forces; demonstrated time and time again, to put themselves at great risk and to use every means possible to save their fellow combatants, ... effectively weaves its way through the rescue narratives.

Recommendation

The book is an easy and interesting read due mostly due to the rescue stories. It provides a comprehensive understanding and deep appreciation of the often understated, but indispensable, role Air Commandos played across the spectrum of seemingly never-ending rescue and recovery efforts during that last year of the war. It should be on every Air Commando’s and combat aircrew reading list and should probably be mandatory reading for designated Combat Search and Rescue aircrew members.

Equally important is the book’s discussion of the “moral imperative.”. The author specifically addresses it on at least three occasions and the selfless and heroic actions of virtually all of the rescue forces, U.S. and allied, clearly support his hypothesis. But, whether or not it is a “moral imperative” or a deep-seated need by combat forces to believe that help will come or military conditioning or simply our DNA that compels our forces to act selflessly is worthy of discussion and probably more importantly, deep personal reflection.



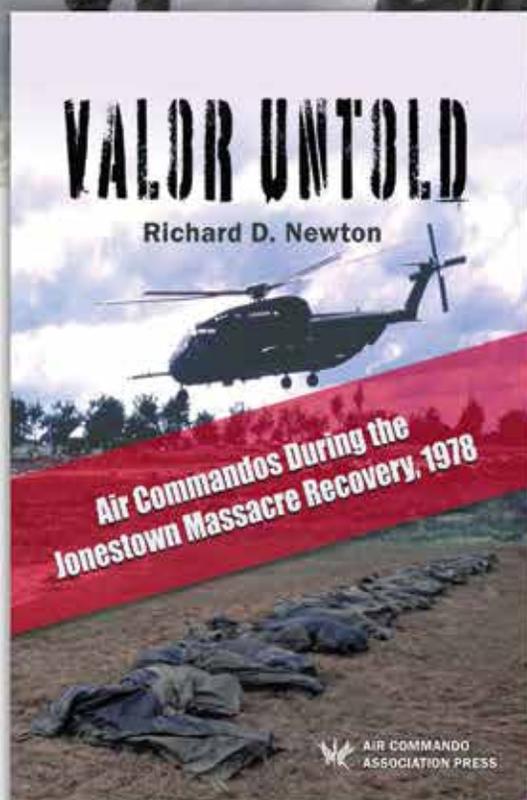
About the Author: Col Mike Russell is a retired Air Commando and USAF pilot. He flew as a Primary Jet Instructor Pilot (T-37), Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Pilot (HH-53B/C Super Jolly Green Giant), and Special Operations Helicopter Pilot (MH-53H/J Pave Low III). Colonel Russell also served as the Commander, 21st Special Operations Squadron, Deputy Commander, 16th Special Operations Group Deputy Commander, Commander of the, 66th Air Operations Squadron, and Deputy Commander of, Special Operations Command, Europe (SOCEUR).



The following books have appeared in past issues of the ACJ Book Review section:

- *Project 9: The Birth of the Air Commandos in World War II* by Dennis R. Okerstrom
- *Team of Teams* by Stanley McChrystal
- *Abandoned in Hell* by William Albracht & Marvin Wolf
- *Dragonfly: The Smallest Fighter The Fastest Gun A-37s Over Vietnam* by Henry Zeybel
- *Wings of Denial: The Alabama Air National Guard's Covert Role at the Bay of Pigs* by Warren A. Trest
- *Dick Cole's War* by Dennis R. Okerstrom
- *Rogue Heroes* by Ben Macintyre
- *A Very Short War* by John F. Guilmartin Jr.
- *Apollo's Warriors: United States Air Force Special Operations during the Cold War* by Michael E. Haas
- *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* by James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson
- *Brothers in Berets: The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics 1953-2003* by Forrest L. Marion
- *Alone at Dawn* by Dan Schilling
- *Development and Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships* by Jack S. Ballard
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- *None Braver* by Michael Hirsh
- *The RAF and Tribal Control* by Richard D. Newton
- *The Secret War Against Hanoi* by Richard H. Shultz
- *Special Air Warfare and the Secret War in Laos* by Joseph D. Celeski
- *The Power of Awareness* by Dan Schilling

For two weeks, in the steaming jungles of Guyana, the combat controllers, aircrews, and maintenance teams demonstrated the attributes of selfless service, boldness, and humble professionalism that are now synonymous with America's "Air Commandos."



FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER: The untold story of Air Commandos responding to the Jonestown Massacre

It has been 42 years since the tragic November 1978 mass suicide/murder of American citizens at the Peoples Temple Agricultural Settlement in Jonestown, Guyana. In the intervening four decades, so much has happened to US special operations forces and the US Air Force, brought about in large part by world events that demonstrated the unquestionable need for fully resourced, trained, and ready joint special operations forces.

This monograph tells the heretofore untold story of what the Airmen who would, a few years later, form the nucleus of Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), did to help recover the victims' bodies – a special air operation that pushed the limits of what their training and previous combat experiences had prepared them for.

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Valor Untold: Air Commandos During the Jonestown massacre Recovery, 1978 By Richard D. Newton
Published by: Air Commando Association Press, 2021, 38 pages
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As my brothers and sisters before me, I am proud to step into history as a member of the Air Force Special Operations Command. I will walk with pride with my head held high, my heart and attitude will show my allegiance to God, country and comrades. When unable to walk another step, I will walk another mile. With freedom my goal, I will step into destiny with pride and the Air Force Special Operations Command.



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