

# AIR COMMANDO

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

# JOURNAL

Vol 11: Issue 3

## HALL OF FAME

### 2022 INDUCTEES



# Air Commando JOURNAL



## Publisher

Norm Brozenick / info@aircommando.org

## Editor-in-Chief

Paul Harmon / editor@aircommando.org

## Managing Editor

Richard Newton / editor@aircommando.org

## Senior Editor

Scott McIntosh / bookrevieweditor@aircommando.org

## Contributing Editor

Ron Dains

## Contributing Editor

Matt Durham

## Contributing Editor

Joel Higley

## Contributing Editor

Mike Russell

## Layout Editor/Graphics

Jeanette Elliott / jeanette@aircommando.org

## Public Affairs/Marketing Director

Melissa Gross / melissa@aircommando.org

## ACA Photographer

Scott Schaeffler / www.scottphotoworks.com

## ADVERTISERS IN THIS ISSUE

ACA Press: Valor Untold .....	51
Air Commando Association .....	19
Air Commando Journal .....	50
Emerald Coast Harley-Davidson .....	42
Scott Photo Works .....	30
Special Operations Warrior Foundation .....	33
WANTED! USAF MILITARIA .....	30

This publication is for the information, interest, and enjoyment of our readers. Views and opinions expressed are of the author or source of material and do not necessarily reflect opinions, views, or endorsements of the ACA. Material in the *Air Commando Journal* may be reproduced provided the source is credited. *Air Commando Journal* is not sponsored by DoD, USAF, or AFSOC. ACA does not endorse any particular candidate or political action group. Individual members are asked to refrain from inferring or stating any such association of the ACA in their dealings with these type groups.



# Air Commando Association

## Air Commando Association Board of Directors

### Chairman of the Board :

Maj Gen Norm Brozenick, USAF (Ret)

### President:

Col Dennis Barnett, USAF (Ret)

### Vice President:

CMSgt Joe Mast, USAF (Ret)

### Treasurer:

Col David Mobley, USAF (Ret)

### Executive Director:

Maj Gen Rich Comer, USAF (Ret)

### Directors:

CMSgt Tom Baker, USAF (Ret)

CMSgt Matt Caruso, USAF (Ret)

Col Lloyd Moon, USAF (Ret)

CMSgt Louis Orrie, USAF (Ret)

CMSgt Rebecca Shelley, USAF (Ret)

Col Shelley Woodworth, USAF (Ret)

### Additional Positions & Advisors:

SES Bill Rone, (Ret) Executive Financial Advisor

Col Jerry Houge, USAF (Ret) Chaplain

CMSgt Mike Gilbert, USAF (Ret) Attorney

Sherri Hayes, GS-15, (Ret) Civilian Advisor

Mike Moore, Financial Development Advisor

The *Air Commando Journal* publication is free to all current members of the Air Commando Association.

Membership is open to persons who served with or supported USAF Air Commando/Special Operations units. To include Guard and Reserve Special Operators. Other interested parties may join as non-voting associate members with the approval of the Board of Directors. To join our association visit [www.AirCommando.org](http://www.AirCommando.org) and click the membership link or call our office Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

## Air Commando Association

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

Telephone: (850) 581-0099

Fax: (850) 581-8988

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

Email: [info@aircommando.org](mailto:info@aircommando.org)

# Inside This Issue

Foreword.....4

Chindit Chatter.....5

Hotwash .....6

2022 Air Commando Hall of Fame .....8

Commander’s Leadership Awards: 2022 .....13

2021 Mackay Trophy Crews of Shadow 77 & 78 Flight .....17

2022 AFSOC Awards.....18

ACA Convention Photos .....20

A Moment to Honor and Recognize Those Who  
Have Taken Their Final Flight.....22

Anytime Flight.....24

Merit 84: Antelope Island Tribute .....26

Bringing MH-60G Training To The Schoolhouse.....28

Operation Uphold Democracy: Haiti 1994.....35

Air Force SOF MH-60G Weapons Development & Training.....40

Rescue of Hammer 34.....43

A Military Spouse’s Perspective .....47

Book Review: Ghostriders 1976 - 1995 .....49

# FOREWORD

Welcome to the annual *Air Commando Journal* Hall of Fame issue. As in past years, we showcase the Air Commando Hall of Fame inductees for 2022, as well as all the winners of the Commander's Leadership Awards, and the annual AFSOC level awards all of which were introduced and recognized during the Air Commando Convention this past October—all outstanding and so deserving of these accolades.

Additionally, this issue continues with Part 2 of the tribute to the 55th Special Operations Squadron and the MH-60G Pave Hawk with firsthand accounts of the standup of the formal schoolhouse at Kirtland AFB, support of Operation Uphold Democracy, the extensive weapons development and testing that took place just prior to Desert Shield/Desert Storm, the heroic rescue of Hammer 34 in Serbia during Operation Allied Force, and finally honors the memory of the men lost during a joint training exercise on 29 October 1992.

I think at this point, after back-to-back issues of the journal, it becomes crystal clear the important role the 55th SOS "Nighthawks" played across the board in every contingency operation AFSOC was involved with from 1989 until the unit closed in late 1999. Moreover, over the past two years the Air Commando Association welcomed two former members of the 55th SOS into the Air Commando Hall of Fame - Maj (ret) Dan Turney and CMSgt (ret) Roger Maginel.

This past April, we had the incredible honor of dedicating MH-60G tail number 87-26009 into the Hurlburt Field Air Park. It has been a special time to say the least. I had the very good fortune to be a member of the 55th the day we were redesignated as a special operations squadron and the day the 55th was deactivated upon our return from Italy after the unit's two daring rescues during Operation Allied Force. From start to finish, the 55th was the total package - talented leadership, top notch training, unmatched aircrew members, support personnel and a great aircraft - all of which led to a unit that was an integral part of

what Air Force Special Operations brought to the fight.

As a fitting closure to the 55th SOS's chapter in AFSOC and Air Commando history, you'll read comments from Dawn Goldfein as she recounts the night her husband (General Dave Goldfein, CSAF #21) was shot down, really putting into perspective what our military spouses deal with day in and day out while they soldier on wondering what happens if we do not come home from the mission. The spouses are so critical to the team and we could not do what we do, as well as we do it, without this unwavering support on the home front. A big thank you to all the spouses across the force that make us better every day.



In closing, I want to personally thank everyone who had a part in making this two-edition tribute to the 55th SOS and Pave Hawk possible starting with Paul Harmon. The editor-in-chief determines content and this was Paul's idea from the start - from all of us to you THANKS! To all the people who wrote and contributed - thanks for the Herculean efforts in putting on your "way back" caps and sharing insights and details I am fairly certain have not been captured anywhere else on paper to date. Some of these events happened 30+ years ago. I hope you enjoy reading these articles as much as we enjoyed putting them together. I think I speak for the entire MH-60G community in saying that it was an honor and privilege to be a part of the AFSOC team...anytime, anyplace.



Major General Eugene Haase, USAF (Retired)  
Former 55th SOS Director of Operations  
and MH-60G Pave Hawk Evaluator Pilot



# CHINDIT CHATTER

Lt Col William O. Schism was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame this year. The citation for his, and the other four inductees, is contained within this issue. The citations are necessarily short, so I'd like to provide a little more information about Colonel Schism's post-military achievements included in the nomination letter written by Clay T. McCutchan, that secured the tremendously important military retirement benefit of Tricare for Life.

Nearly 20 years after Colonel Schism retired, his efforts to secure medical benefits would affect the lives of countless past, current, and future retired American military personnel. His legacy lives with the promised

lifetime healthcare benefits for twenty-year military retirees.

The United States government (USG) promised lifetime medical care as an incentive for officer and enlisted members completing a twenty-year military career since the WW II and Korean War time frame. In 1995 the USG announced that Tricare would provide the promised lifetime of healthcare for retirees.



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

Unfortunately, retirees over the age of 65 were excluded and were required to use Medicare as their promised lifetime care. As we senior citizens know, Medicare does not cover all medical costs.

Colonel Schism believed that Tricare, as it existed, did not satisfy the original promise of lifetime medical care. As a result, he decided to sue the USG for the promised lifetime medical care for military retirees. Schism worked closely with fellow Air Force veterans Brig Gen (ret) George "Bud" Day and Maj (ret) Robert Reinlie. During the long fight, Schism, Reinlie, and Day spent a significant amount of time, effort, and

personal treasure to correct what they and many others thought was wrong.

Colonel Schism was the primary plaintiff in the lawsuit, Major Reinlie also filed and was included in the case known as Schism v. United States. Bud Day was their attorney between 1998 and 2003. The Federal Circuit Court summarized the facts of the case as follows:

"The US sought to encourage people to join the armed services during the WW II and Korean War era and make service a career. Military recruiters, under the direction of superiors, verbally promised recruits that if they served on active duty 20 years, they would receive free lifetime medical care for themselves and their dependents. The government concedes such promises were made in good faith and relied upon. But the District court concluded that because no statute authorized these promises, no valid contract was formed between the government and plaintiffs. After the district court denied relief, the case was appealed to the United States Court of Appeals, and then went to the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court denied certiorari, thereby upholding the Federal Circuit ruling that any relief needed to come from Congress."

The team of Schism, Reinlie, and Day became known as the Class Act Group. They wrote countless letters to US congressmen and other government leaders as well as national and local media leaders as part of their strategy. These included President George W. Bush, Attorney General John Ashcroft, Senator John S. McCain III, Senator Bill Frist, Mr. Robert Pear from the *New York Times*, Governor Jeb Bush of Florida, and letters to the editor for *Air Force Magazine* and the *Northwest Florida Daily News*. The Class Act Group used billboards, letter writing, and sought national and local Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and Disabled American Veterans participation.

The results of the Class Act Group's tireless, efforts, the case Schism v United States led Congress to take action and to solve the issue passing legislation creating Tricare for Life in 2001.

Thank you Colonel Schism and the other members for the Class Act Group!

# HOTWASH

## Leading in the Shadows of Giants: Forging NexGen Commandos with the Air Commando Association

By SMSgt Jonathan Van Nevel

The 492d Special Operations Training Support Squadron is the largest formal training unit in Air Force Special Operations Command. Our “Blacksmiths” are 440 strong and consist of active duty, government civilians, contract employees, and reservists. We are responsible for administratively managing initial and mission qualification training for all AFSOC aircraft including the AC-130J, U-28A, C-145, C-146, and C-208. On average our student population exceeds 200 Airmen, each with an aspiration to make a difference in the world.

Forging the next generation of Air Commandos requires us to find the right balance between training and readiness. If training is too difficult, we risk overwhelming students, which could lead to poor performance and remedial training. Alternatively, if training isn’t challenging enough, we risk wasting time, money, and resources. Therefore, it’s essential to identify the right balance for each student, in essence – Blacksmiths must strike when the iron is hot!

As with any training unit, our student population varies between high and low performers. Some students are quick to exceed the standard, while others struggle to meet the standard. One noticeable character difference between those in the margins of this bell curve is intrinsic motivation. High performers are internally driven to do something difficult and come out stronger, sharper, and more resilient. For Airmen that are not intrinsically motivated, leaders ought to help them find a sense of hope, purpose, and inspiration and help them succeed in training, but we don’t have to do it alone.

The second Annual 492d SOTRSS 5K and Heritage event was held in September 2022. The Blacksmiths partnered with the Air Commando Association, so our students could hear firsthand accounts from veterans who didn’t just get through training, but took home a win - not for themselves, but for our nation! We heard about the difficulty of blacked out refueling operations on an MH-53; we heard about C-130 operations across the globe and the Fulton Recovery system; and we heard about Maj Bernard Fisher’s rescue of a downed pilot in in South Vietnam that earned

him the Medal of Honor. In all, nine veterans from the Air Commando Association volunteered to help us forge the next generation of Air Commandos:

Bruce Fister, Lt Gen, USAF (Retired)  
Steven Dreyer, Col, USAF (Retired)  
Alva Greenup, Col, USAF (Retired)  
Paul Harmon, Col, USAF (Retired)  
Billy Montgomery, Col, USAF (Retired)  
Larry Ropka, Col, USAF (Retired)  
David Lester, Maj, USAF (Retired)  
Dale Berryhill, CMSgt, USAF (Retired)  
Keith Bernarducci, MSgt, USAF (Retired)

A personal thank you to all the ACA volunteers for serving a tall glass of hope, purpose, and inspiration – it was refreshing for us all! I’m proud to be a part of an organization and community that formed an event, bridged



Photo provided by SMSgt Jonathan Van Nevel

generational gaps, and gave us all an opportunity to embrace our proud heritage – to learn from those who embodied the heart of our Airmen’s Creed - Honor and Valor! I applaud all Air Commandos within our community to continue to serve beyond their service and look forward to doing it again next year!



*About the Author: Jon Van Nevel is the Senior Enlisted Leader at 492 SOTRSS. He has 15 years experience in AFSOC and has accumulated 2,400 flight hours on the AC-130U Spooky Gunship.*



Assisting ACA in our mission to support Air Commandos and their families: Past, Present, and Future

## Air Commando Hall of Fame,

I just wanted to take a moment to say “thank you” to the entire ACA team for one of the most memorable events for me and my daughters.

What a first class event!!! I am humbled by the selection into the ACA Hall of Fame. If there is ever anything I can do to help the ACA, please don’t hesitate to ask.

From the bottom of my heart (and my girls’, too), I appreciated the professionalism and the thoughtfulness of the entire ACA team.

God bless...  
Respectively,  
Mike “RU” Rizzuto

## Hello ACA and Mrs. Jeanette Elliott,

As I explained by phone, I’m preparing a series of articles on the Air Commandos for a French military aviation magazine. My intent is to start with the Vietnam War era. All provided photos will be credited to the Air Commando Association and their owners.



Please let me know if I owe you anything for the photos. In any case, I will make a donation to the Air

Commando Association to thank you for your help. Thanks again for your support.

Best regards,  
Herve Bianzani

## Dear Fellow Patriots,

After 19 years of sending packages to our troops we are disbanding. It was truly an honor to send a little home to our heroes, so it is bitter sweet to be closing. We have been blessed over the years with so much love and support and would like to share some of it with you so you may continue your wonderful work that you do!

Thank you for your ongoing love and support for our heroes!

Your friends at Operation Care Package  
Manhattan, IL 60442

*Editor’s Note: The ACA was stunned when we received \$10,000! We are so very touched by this incredible donation to our ACA and send everyone involved in Operation Care Package a heartfelt thank you!*  
~Team ACA

## Guys,

Just read the Pave Hawk story. Great work. A really nice piece of history. I keep telling my vet friends, “History is not what happened, it is what is recorded.” You really nailed down this important story. And you delivered a super salute to Ed Reed.

Well done!!!  
Darrel Whitcomb

## PLATINUM

ARMA  
Bell Helicopter  
Eglin Federal Credit Union  
Elbit Systems of America  
GCC Technologies, LLC  
GEICO Military  
Knight Vision Strategic, LLC  
L-3 Harris  
Leonardo DRS, Inc.  
Northrop Grumman  
Ultra Electronics ICE

## GOLD

Boeing  
First Command Financial Services  
FSI Defense  
Raytheon Technologies  
Vertex Solutions, LLC

## SILVER

Berry Aviation  
Leonardo Helicopters  
R4 Integration, Inc.

## BRONZE

Bass, Byrd Group Merrill Lynch  
Collins Aerospace  
General Atomics Aeronautical  
The Hoplite Group  
Planned Systems International  
Rolls-Royce North America  
RDR, Inc.  
SoCoSix Strategies

## SPIRIT

Armtec Defense Technologies  
Support Systems Associates, Inc

Ready to join us and support today’s Air Commandos?  
Contact Melissa at melissa@aircommando.org or  
call 850-581-0099

# 2022 Hall of Fame



## Major General Stephen A. Clark

Major General Stephen A. Clark, Retired, United States Air Force, distinguished himself by exceptionally dedicated service to the Air Force and Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) from March 1987 to September 2018. General Clark made extraordinary contributions at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. In addition to flying combat missions in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti, he served in leadership positions in Afghanistan and Iraq. His legacy includes an unparalleled development of future AFSOC leaders, combat leadership during the opening salvo of the Global War on Terror, and a strategic vision in building the SOF force structure of the future at AFSOC, Joint Special Operations Command, and United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). He served as operations officer and commander of the 4th Special Operations Squadron from 2002 through 2005. This was a particularly challenging and historical time in the AC-130U unit's history. He commanded Combined Joint Special Operations Air Component-Iraq from July 2006 through August 2007. There he commanded all SOF aviation assets during this brutal period of fighting in Iraq. This period included insurgency against coalition forces and a full-fledged civil war. He is credited by many for bringing the Air Commando's "voice" to the front of the table. From 2009 to 2011, Maj Gen Clark served as the second AFSOC commander of Cannon AFB. Under his leadership, the wing more than doubled in size and grew to more than 5,000 personnel and 84 aircraft. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Major General Stephen Clark reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.

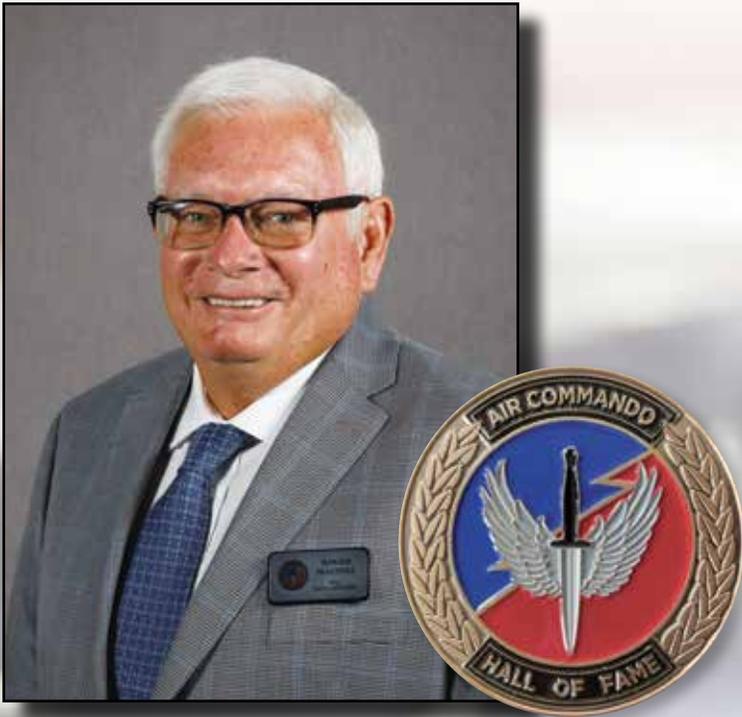
# Name Inductees



## Lieutenant General Eric E. Fiel

Lieutenant General Eric E. Fiel's significant contributions to Air Force Special Operations Forces and the United States Special Operations Command span more than four decades. He has commanded at multiple levels in the United States Air Force and the USSOCOM, culminating his service as the commander of Air Force Special Operations Command. At every level of command, in peacetime and in combat, he received the highest commendations from his commanders and the trust and respect of his superiors, peers, and subordinates. Through sense of duty, strength of character, personal fortitude, and unfaltering commitment to his people and the mission, he endeavored to make positive, lasting contributions to the defense of the United States of America. He airdropped Rangers on Point Salinas during Operation Urgent Fury and led AC-130Us in Allied Force. He was at the tip of the spear after 9/11, leading joint special operations forces during multiple tours of duty. Part of his enduring legacy left behind as the AFSOC commander was the stand-up of the 24th Special Operations Wing and pushing forward as much combat capability as possible to fight and win on the battlefield. To that end, he directed the first beddown of MC-130J Commando II and CV-22 Osprey in Europe. General Fiel inspired and empowered those around him to serve to their full potential and to not be afraid to take risks. He worked tirelessly for the nation, the mission, and Air Commandos and their families. He is exceedingly worthy of induction into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant General Eric Fiel reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.

# 2022 Hall of Fame



## Chief Master Sergeant Roger D. Maginel

Chief Master Sergeant Roger D. Maginel, United States Air Force, Retired, has served our nation with honor for almost 45 years, including active-duty, contractor and civil service. He distinguished himself during 25 years with the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) in squadron, wing, and headquarters positions and epitomizes the saying that “One Man Can Make a Real Difference!” Chief Maginel was an initial cadre MH-60 flight engineer in the 55th SOS, the first H-60 unit in the USAF. He played a critical role for all Air Force MH-60 flight engineers by developing initial qualification courseware and tactics, techniques, and procedures for all enlisted aircrew. He flew on the first NVG night water operation for the 55th SOS. He was also a vital crewmember on the first long-range refueling test of the MH-60G flying two MH-60s non-stop from Eglin AFB, FL to Peterson Field, CO. This ten-hour flight required three aerial refuelings and covered over 1200 nautical miles. Chief Maginel’s expertise was so critical that he was tasked to support HQ Air Rescue and the 542nd Operations Group before returning to HQ AFSOC as Chief Flight Engineer and Enlisted Aircrew Functional Manager. During this tour at HQ, he participated in Operations Allied Force And Enduring Freedom and was current and qualified as a flight engineer on the UH-1N and Mi-8 Hind for the 6th SOS’s foreign internal defense mission. After active-duty retirement, he excelled at HQ AFSOC as a unit deployment manager and air expeditionary force planner. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Chief Master Sergeant Roger D. Maginel reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.

# Name Inductees



## Senior Master Sergeant Michael Rizzuto

Senior Master Sergeant Michael Rizzuto, United States Air Force, Retired, served for over 33 years within the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). SMSgt Rizzuto's AFSOC career spanned 15 years as an active-duty enlisted member and 18 years as a Department of Defense civilian. A two-time formal training Distinguished Graduate, three-time Life Support Technician of the Year (1993, 1996, 2002), and four-time Special Tactics Squadron NCO and SNCO of the Quarter (1992, 1999, 2001, 2002). His career is highlighted by numerous awards, first-time initiatives, by-name selections, and selfless service. These accomplishments include establishing the first Navy-certified dive locker in the USAF and the first chemical, biological, radioactive, nuclear, and high yield explosives (CBRNE) capability in all of SOF. He was involved in numerous projects designing, building, and fielding equipment for special mission use, and was hand-selected support to support classified operations, including the first combat parachute jump since the Vietnam War. SMSgt Rizzuto directly supported every major force structure event, including initial stand up, of the 724th Special Tactics Group, ensuring each organizational change was operationally validated by the command. As his unit's unofficial historian he authored every Annual Historical Report since 2008, ensuring the preservation of the unit's story for future generations. He established a 501 (c)3 non-profit, providing merit-based scholarships and grants to current and former unit members, spouses, and children. This was also used to fund and build a permanent memorial to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our great nation. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Senior Master Sergeant Michael Rizzuto reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.

# 2022 Hall of Fame Inductees



## Lieutenant Colonel William O. "Sam" Schism

Lieutenant Colonel William O. "Sam" Schism distinguished himself as a 16-year-old flying as a US Navy seaplane radio operator in the World War Two Pacific theater. He further distinguished himself during a 25-year United States Air Force career by exceptional, competent and, professional service as a worldwide airlift, reconnaissance, photo-mapping, and special operations officer and pilot. A gifted leader and manager, he quietly and competently led crews, squadrons, and special projects with great success. During his 9,600-hour USAF flying career, he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Meritorious Service Medals and eleven Air Medals. He commanded AC-130A Spectre gunships during the Vietnam War and distinguished himself in combat flying operations. He then filled key management and leadership positions in the Air Commando community and was chosen as the active-duty lead for the conversion of the 919th SOG, into the gunship weapon system. Assembling a hand-picked team of active duty professionals, he provided excellent and positive leadership to active duty and Reservists alike and did an outstanding job successfully concluding a difficult conversion with decades of lasting impact. After his USAF retirement, the US Government decided not to honor its promise of lifetime medical care for 20-year military veterans. Lt Col Schism sued the Federal Government and along with Brig Gen Bud Day and Maj Robert Reinlie battled for five years until the promise of lifetime medical care for 20-year veterans was set up by Congress itself. As "one of the most important cases the court decided," Schism v United States led to Tricare for Life, for all services, all ranks, and all Air Commandos. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Colonel William O. "Sam" Schism reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos of every generation.



# 2022 Commander's

# Leadership Awards

## **Technical Sergeant Trayce T. Bias**

*1st Special Operations Civil Engineer Squadron*

Technical Sergeant Trayce T. Bias distinguished herself as the Air Force Special Operations Command, Command Chief Executive Assistant and the Engineering Flight Superintendent, 1st Special Operations Civil Engineer Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this period, Sergeant Bias skillfully managed the command's enlisted force management policy that impacted 20,000 Air Commandos. Additionally, she initiated key enlisted evaluation system updates across 10 Major Commands to address policy issues affecting more than 270,000 Airmen. Sergeant Bias was also instrumental to the successful fielding of the new Enlisted Force Structure and the Core Values handbooks. Furthermore, she led a 36-member flight with a one-billion-dollar construction portfolio across four wings, 46 tenant units, and 1,200 facilities. Furthermore, Sergeant Bias was critical to establishing Hurlburt Field's first ever Mission Sustainment Team, where she organized 29 Airmen, secured facility plans for 178 personnel, and adapted the Civil Engineer construct to the Secretary of Defense's number one priority. Finally, she developed the Air Force's first-ever hybrid shop concept for the engineering flight, combining three sections into one to enhance mission effectiveness. This effort is now being studied by Headquarters Air Force for implementation across the 3E5X1 career field. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Bias reflect credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

## **Technical Sergeant Jorge O. Brooks**

*492d Special Operations Training Group*

Technical Sergeant Jorge O. Brooks distinguished himself as Group Chief Command Executive Assistant, 492d Special Operations Training Group, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022. During this period, Sergeant Brooks orchestrated nine professional development events across three major commands, including seminars for 137 Airmen and civilians. Additionally, he served as the Detachment One Flight Chief, and Operations Superintendent. Sergeant Brooks led nine instructors and developed four continuous process improvements, streamlining training by two weeks. This improvement led to the on-time graduation of 303 aviators from the sole Non-standard Aviation training

unit supporting six geographic combatant commands. Furthermore, he led the security system acquisition for a new 6-million-dollar simulator, ensuring training for 409 aviators annually. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Brooks reflects credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## **First Lieutenant Daniel J. Canale**

*2d Special Operations Squadron*

First Lieutenant Daniel J. Canale distinguished himself as MQ-9 Aircraft Commander, 2d Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2021 through 30 June 2022. During this time, Lieutenant Canale executed a Secretary of Defense 365 day mobilization, enabling the squadron to accomplish 53,000 hours of combat operations in three areas of responsibility. He flew more than 440 hours and directly enabled the non-combatant evacuation of over 130,000 civilians, the elimination of Syria's top priority high value individual, and the return of American special operations forces to East Africa. Additionally, Lieutenant Canale became the youngest MQ-9 Aircraft Commander in the United States Air Force to obtain an Automatic Take-off and Landing qualification, significantly enhancing joint force capabilities and directly contributing to Africa Command's adoption of new MQ-9 emergency recovery procedures. Furthermore, he was hand-picked to represent the command in Exercise VALIANT SHIELD, during which he performed operational test of new MQ-9 software and directly contributed to the validation of Agile Combat Employment demonstrations in Pacific Command, and he also fired the first stand-off Hellfire missiles, achieving strategic competition objectives. The distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Canale reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## **First Lieutenant Cassandra Carvalheira**

*752d Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron*

First Lieutenant Cassandra D. Carvalheira distinguished herself as Assistant Aircraft Maintenance Unit Officer in Charge, 752d Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 352d Special Operations Maintenance Group, 352d Special Operations Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United

Kingdom from 1 June 2021, to 31 May 2022. During this period, Lieutenant Carvalheira masterfully led and guided 254 personnel and generated 39,000 mission capable hours—the best CV-22B mission capable rate in Air Force Special Operations Command for fiscal year 2021. Additionally, as a mission commander, Lieutenant Carvalheira led a team of twenty-three personnel to facilitate the international transfer of four aircraft for critical periodic maintenance. Due to her team’s innovative acceptance inspection techniques, she readied the outbound CV-22Bs seventy-two hours ahead of standard. Separately, Lieutenant Carvalheira managed seventy-two personnel and four aircraft in support of the largest North Atlantic Treaty Organization special operations exercise, during which she integrated aircrew and maintenance teams from two geographically separated locations to mobilize repairs for a disabled CV-22B in Lithuania, preserving valuable long-range vertical lift capabilities throughout the exercise. Finally, Lieutenant Carvalheira organized the maintenance support package and generated two CV-22Bs for a short-notice deployment in support of Afghanistan evacuation operations. This provided a continuous personnel recovery alert posture and ensured the safe departure of 1,000 Americans and 120,000 civilians. The distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Carvalheira reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

### **Captain Colton T. Cash**

*3d Special Operations Squadron*

Captain Colton T. Cash distinguished himself as Assistant Director of Combat Operations, 3d Special Operations Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this period, Captain Cash became the first 3d Expeditionary Special Operation Squadron mission commander on G-series orders, overseeing the pre-deployment training of 204 aviators and leading them through the inaugural squadron-wide dwell-to-combat transition and then commanding 142 of those combat-ready personnel in combat operations across two distinct areas of responsibility. Additionally, as the squadron’s weapons officer, he spearheaded four syllabus rewrites for 239 aircrew that cut a one-year training backlog by seventy percent, reducing wait times for new arrivals to start training by one-third. Captain Cash also authored the squadron’s upgrade roadmap, streamlining proficiency development and decreasing instructor upgrade time by 23 percent while improving the quality and motivation of the unit’s instructors. Furthermore, he guided the unit through a 235 percent flying hour program increase, propelling the combat readiness rate of the unit to its highest point in three years. Captain Cash was handpicked to represent the wing at a command-sponsored conference to overhaul mission essential tasks for 2,800 Airmen, bringing the enterprise’s formal training into alignment with the National Security Strategy. Finally, his leadership was critical to the efficacy of the command’s first MQ-9 external dwell initiative between two wings, thereby cementing the force generation model

as the new standard. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Cash reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Technical Sergeant Jeremy Clement**

*7th Special Operations Squadron*

Technical Sergeant Jeremy K. Clement distinguished himself as CV-22B Evaluator Special Missions Aviator, 7th Special Operations Squadron, 352d Special Operations Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this period, Sergeant Clement was the lead flight engineer for a proof of concept, six-ship CV-22B crisis response alert force, which postured for a 3,000-mile embassy evacuation mission spanning three geographic combatant commands. Additionally, as the lead flight engineer, he executed the first-ever CV-22B insertion and extraction of personnel and equipment to a submarine, which culminated in a night rendezvous full mission profile 1,500 miles from the departure location. This exercise expanded joint capabilities, which were briefed to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense. Furthermore, Sergeant Clement lead development for the squadron training plan in a new joint-combined French Naval Special Warfare casualty evacuation exercise and established it as an annual training event. Moreover, as operations section chief, he led the squadron through three Secretary of Defense-directed missions, driving the squadron’s 60 million dollar flying hour program as the only CV-22B squadron to fulfill allocated hours. Finally, Sergeant Clement’s ceaseless efforts earned him recognition as the squadron’s Special Missions Aviator of the Year, the Group’s nomination for the Lance P. Sijan Leadership Award, and Air Force Special Operations Command’s nomination for the Staff Sergeant Henry E. “Red” Erwin Career Enlisted Aviator of the Year Award. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Clement reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Technical Sergeant Joseph Milburn**

*1st Special Operations Squadron*

Technical Sergeant Joseph G. Milburn distinguished himself as Flight Chief of Squadron Future Plans, 1st Special Operations Squadron, 353d Special Operations Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this period, while assigned as the Senior Enlisted Leader, 9th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron, Sergeant Milburn led the closure and retrograde of four joint and coalition bases in Afghanistan. His exceptional leadership drove the successful airlift of six aircraft, 2,521 personnel, and over three million pounds of equipment, while also directing the relocation of squadron headquarters out of country to establish an over-the-horizon alert posture. Additionally, Sergeant Milburn provided key guidance and mentorship of junior personnel while executing 158 combat missions to include 18 casualty evacuations. During his time as Senior Enlisted Leader, his team received 39 decorations and 26 awards, ten of which won at the group level.

Furthermore, following his arrival at the squadron, Sergeant Milburn had immediate impact as the J3 Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge for a major Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed exercise. Finally, Sergeant Milburn was hand-selected by wing standards and evaluations to lead the development and integration of new techniques, tactics, and procedures for the MC-130J in conjunction with Naval Special Warfare partners. His leadership across the joint domain has immediately and quantifiably expanded the influence and efficacy of special operations forces throughout the Indo-Pacific theater. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Milburn reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Technical Sergeant Bradley S. Moore**

*27th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron*

Technical Sergeant Bradley S. Moore distinguished himself as MC-130 Expediter, 27th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon AFB New Mexico from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this time, Sergeant Moore was hand-selected to establish the squadron's self-assessment program. He effortlessly bridged the gap between two aircraft maintenance units, fostered connective relationships, and leveraged squadron leadership to deliver quick turn solutions. His steadfast guidance ultimately empowered stakeholders across 21 work centers to solve 170 discrepancies and earn an "Effective" rating in all vertical inspection categories. Additionally, Sergeant Moore's expertise as Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of the Electronic Warfare shop proved invaluable. He led 18 Airmen in the generation of the largest flying hour program in the command's history amassing 7,600 flight hours. Through his ongoing mentorship, his shop earned three below-the-zone promotions, nine monthly or quarterly accolades, and two expeditionary teams of the month. Furthermore, Sergeant Moore served as expeditor for 116 personnel across 16 specialties through the historic Afghanistan draw down. Once retrograded, he led a five-person maintenance team back into Afghanistan and supported two MC-130J aircraft as the sole casualty evacuation option for the few remaining service members. His actions culminated in the exfiltration of 750 special forces personnel, the closure of Bagram Airfield, and the evacuation of 154,000 American citizens from the capital city of Kabul. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Moore reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Captain Aaron Moreno**

*Detachment 1, 58th Operations Group*

Captain Aaron M. Moreno distinguished himself as Flight Chief, Chief of Standardization, and MV-22 Instructor Pilot, Detachment 1, 58th Operations Group, 58th Special Operations Wing, Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. As an instructor, Captain Moreno proved instrumental to the only Air Force V-22 training detachment charged with the first phase of training for multiple students ensuring a 100 percent on-time graduation rate. Additionally, Captain Moreno acted as the

on-scene commander for military support to a civil search and rescue mission. During this mission, Captain Moreno not only located a downed civilian aircraft but also guaranteed that first responders reached the scene. Further, Captain Moreno was the primary Air Force representative for the implementation of a new joint V-22 low visibility landing system. His efforts trained 25 joint instructor pilots on the new system that reduced the training time and overall risk associated for this challenging landing type. In addition, Captain Moreno integrated the Detachment with a maintenance training Operating Location-Alpha for three morale and additional training events. These efforts not only laid the foundation for CV-22 operations and maintenance relationships but highlighted this relationship to senior leaders not familiar with the CV-22 community. Finally, as a Flight Commander, Captain Moreno mentored twelve Air Force and 133 joint officers over 340 flights hours and 75 flight events that was critical to maintaining a 98 percent on time graduation rate for the squadron as a whole. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Moreno reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Captain Derrick Pee**

*320th Special Tactics Squadron*

Captain Derrick Pee distinguished himself as Flight Commander, Flight 1, 320th Special Tactics Squadron, 353d Special Operations Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. Captain Pee expertly coordinated a squadron validation exercise which culminated in the first continental United States highway landing of A-10 and C-146 aircraft which advanced Air Force Agile Combat Employment tactics. He pioneered the first recurring joint airborne readiness operation on Okinawa which streamlined and synchronized efforts from four airborne and three flying units. Additionally, he was hand selected to instruct joint fires employment to a regional Special Forces battalion staff during a high priority engagement in support of United States Indo-Pacific Command's priorities. Furthermore, he led an air operations subject matter exchange to set conditions for future engagements to strengthen partnerships and deter adversaries. Finally, he constructed a wing wide exercise to advance Agile Combat Employment tactics, techniques, and procedures to help ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Pee reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Staff Sergeant Christopher Peterson**

*919th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron*

Staff Sergeant Christopher A. Peterson distinguished himself as Aerospace Maintenance Craftsman, 919th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Duke Field, Florida, from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this period, Sergeant Peterson trained outside of his primary air force specialty code and completed the first C-146A Non-Standard Aviation MECH-TECH 2.0 engine cut-training course. His breakthrough training was headlined in the Air Force Reserve Command Citizen Airman Magazine, which led the way for

a new training program construct to minimize the group deployment personnel footprint by 35 percent. Additionally, Sergeant Peterson was instrumental in the troubleshooting and repair of a C-146A engine failure down-range. He quickly diagnosed the malfunction, coordinated the trans-Pacific parts delivery and replaced the engine prop in less than allotted time, allowing the aircraft to perform a tail-swap to support United States Pacific Air Command high visibility contingency operations in theater. Furthermore, Sergeant Peterson responded to an aircraft break pressure emergency on launch. His advanced mechanical skills led him to repair the discrepancy in less than 15 minutes, allowing for an on-time distinguished visitor special operations forces lift to support the funeral of a special forces group soldier. Finally, Sergeant Peterson displayed courageous heroism by extinguishing a highway vehicle fire after arriving first on scene. He quickly evacuated all personnel and cordoned off the area, ensuring the safety of all drivers. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Peterson reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Technical Sergeant William Sheridan**

*58th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron*

Technical Sergeant William A. Sheridan distinguished himself as CV-22 Expediter, 58th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this period, Sergeant Sheridan expertly fulfilled Production Superintendent duties when he directed 1,000 maintenance actions while coordinating five backshops and managing a 20-member shift resulting in the generation of 128 sorties and 388 flight hours. His efforts directly led to the successful execution of a programmed flight training surge, which graduated a 17-year history high, 86 students, and cleared a three-year training backlog in four months. Additionally, Sergeant Sheridan deployed 183 days in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, where he served as Flight Chief for 125 Airmen from 63 different Air Force Specialty Codes that protected a 52 square mile radius of the 380th Air Expeditionary Wing. His team was responsible for 18 sites that secured 4.2 billion dollars in assets and was critical to United States Central Command's missile defense operational plan. Sergeant Sheridan directly oversaw five sections, providing security for 42,000 other country nationals, 36 aircraft valued 3.7 billion dollars, and 2,400 warfighters that generated 1,500 combat missions. Finally, Sergeant Sheridan organized a wing-wide Six-Sigma course that awarded 66 certificates and led to his election as the Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge of Al Dhafra's Enduring 5/6 Professional Development Committee. During this time, he led a nine-member joint team, including members of the United States Army that organized 13 Professional Development Seminars for 70 warfighters across the installation. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Sheridan reflect upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Captain William C. Waters**

*73d Special Operations Squadron*

Captain William C. Waters distinguished himself as an AC-130J Pilot and Mobility Officer in Charge, 73d Special Operations Squadron, 1st Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022. During this time, Captain Waters provided 426 hours of close air support to the Afghanistan National Army as they fought to defend their nation from violent terrorist organizations. As aircraft commander, he flew 68 combat missions in defense of 3,500 friendly fighting positions protecting the lives of nearly 22,000 United States and Afghan service members. Additionally, Captain Waters was the sole joint liaison officer for offensive fires during the Bagram airfield retrograde where he synchronized the efforts of six units and two AC-130J crews to ensure American forces and assets were defended and safely evacuated. Furthermore, his leadership and planning acumen resulted in a significant reduction to the Wing's AC-130 launch timelines in response to a Secretary of Defense directed combat mobilization. Additionally, Captain Waters organized three separate humanitarian efforts supporting refugees worldwide, to include exiled Ukrainian citizens, over 76,000 Afghan evacuees, and families displaced by Hurricane Ida. Finally, Captain Waters developed 21 junior officers utilizing a self-crafted professional developmental program. For his efforts, he was recognized as Company Grade Officer of the Year and Pilot of the Year for the 73d Special Operation Squadron. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Waters reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

### **Major Owen-John Williams**

*492d Special Operations Training Support Squadron*

Major Owen-John Williams distinguished himself as the Ambulatory Care Unit Flight Commander, 492d Special Operations Training Support Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022. During this period, Major Williams created the formal training unit's first-ever Ambulatory Care Unit. Taking elements from all parts of Total Force Integration, he revolutionized student management and treatment at the formal training unit. Utilizing daily sick-call and 24-hour, seven-day-a-week telephone consults, Major Williams and his team reduced the return-to-fly status times by two weeks. Additionally, Major Williams leveraged his aviation psychology specialty to enhance training for over 550 students and enabled the success of 29 students who would have otherwise failed to complete training. The distinctive accomplishments of Major Williams reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



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

# 2021 MACKAY TROPHY



## *United States Air Force Crews of Shadow 77 and 78 Flight*

The National Aeronautic Association (NAA) is pleased to announce that United States Air Force crews of Shadow 77 and 78, 73d Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron, Joint Special Operations Air Component-Central, have been named the recipients of the 2021 Mackay Trophy.

The AC-130J crews, Shadow 77 and Shadow 78 crews distinguished themselves in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel when in August 2021 they alert launched from Al Dhafra Air Force Base, United Arab Emirates, for a close air support mission to protect the 2,000 Americans evacuating the embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. The crews skillfully maintained visual custody of all American personnel enroute to Hamid Karzai International Airport and provided full-motion video in real-time to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff as they watched the evacuation transpire. Overall, the crews of Shadow 77 and 78 flew the longest un-augmented AC-130J flight to date and their efforts to safeguard the embassy evacuation directly resulted in the successful rescue of 2,000 American diplomats with zero casualties. The professional abilities and outstanding aerial accomplishments of the crews of Shadow 77 and 78 reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.

### **CREW OF SHADOW 77:**

Capt Lawrence S. Bria  
Capt Sam B. Pearce  
Capt Aaron M. Rigg  
Maj Joshua T. Burris  
Capt Michael G. Shelor  
SSgt Daniel J. Mayle  
SSgt Kevin P. Heimbach  
SrA Denver M. Reinwald  
SrA Timothy J. Cisar

### **CREW OF SHADOW 78:**

Capt Culley R. Horne  
1Lt William A. Bachmann  
Capt Ryan M. Elliott  
Capt Benjamin A. Hoyt  
SSgt Dylan T. Hansen  
SSgt Andrew J. Malinowski  
SSgt Tyler J. Blue  
SSgt Gregory A. Page  
SrA Miguella B. Corpuz

The Mackay Trophy was first presented by Clarence Mackay in 1912 and was later decided to the National Aeronautic Association. Administered by the United States Air Force and NAA, the trophy is awarded for "...the most meritorious flight of the year by an Air Force person, persons, or organization." The Mackay Trophy is on permanent display at the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum in Washington, DC.

# 2022 AFSOC AWARDS



## **Operational Squadron of the Year**

*9th Special Operations Squadron*

The 9th SOS experienced one of the most demanding yet fulfilling years of accomplishment on record, according to squadron leadership. Most notably, the squadron executed three separate contingency operations: exfiltrating the final U.S. special operations forces and accomplishing the last four departures from Bagram Air Base; courageously participating in the largest Noncombatant Evacuation Operation in history during the “Kabul Airlift” mission; and ensuring specialized air mobility was in place and ready to execute a similar mission in Ethiopia if required. The squadron did this while simultaneously executing the only MC-130 constant combat deployment in the United States Air Force and embracing innovation by engaging in AFSOC pathfinding operations.

## **Chief Hap Lutz AFSOC Commando Medic of the Year**

*TSgt Marcus Quintanilla, 1st Special Operations Support Squadron*

Technical Sergeant Quintanilla mitigated a medical manning deficit by coordinating with 18 providers and three clinics which saved \$80,000 in civilian referrals and increased the wing’s access to care by 40 percent. He also filled in as Senior Enlisted Medical Advisor where he oversaw a 36-member team and \$4.3 million worth of war reserve material garnering eight awards from squadron to major command level in his time in the position. In addition, he orchestrated a rewrite of tactics, techniques, and procedures, reorganizing \$14.2 million worth of items and modernizing the damage control resuscitation capabilities for AFSOC deployment operations.

## **Special Tactics Operator of the Year (Officer)**

*Capt Corey Stengel, 321st Special Tactics Squadron*

Captain Stengel powered air asset control and management over six Forward Operating Bases, enabling 57 combat operations and 264 enemies detained. He was also the primary Joint Terminal Attack Controller for a five-day clearance operation resulting in the seizure of more than 500 enemy weapons and the securing of the largest ISIS prison. Captain Stengel led a unit Central Command deployment where he directed logistics and resources for 28 Special Operations Forces for six months, propelling sole Special Tactics capabilities across two different Areas of Responsibility.

## **Special Tactics Operator of the Year (Enlisted)**

*TSgt Patrick W. Edwards, 24th Special Operations Wing*

Technical Sergeant Edwards provided trusted counsel to the U.S. Central Command Commander and controlled the air

evacuation from Afghanistan during the largest NEO in the history of the United States. He also surveyed and controlled the helicopter landing zone during a perimeter breach and controlled the movement of 10 helicopters resulting in the protection of \$320 million in national air assets. Sergeant Edwards also led more than 40 fire missions, protecting two rural personnel recovery operations.

## **Deployed Aircraft Ground Response Element Member of the Year**

*SSgt David A. Steel Jr., 352nd Special Operations Wing*

Staff Sergeant Steel innovated a mission accomplishment report which was identified as a best practice and improved tracking. He also planned and designed subject matter expert exchanges which improved interoperability and reassured key Department of Defense allies. Finally, he developed what may become DAGRE’s first operational fires program, directly contributing to the flight’s ability to provide agile defense in the joint environment.

## **Heart of the Team Award**

*SSgt Rachael Meyer, 25th Intelligence Squadron*

Staff Sergeant Meyer overcame extreme emotional and physical diversity by battling an unknown illness for months on deployment in order to remain in support of her fellow Airmen in her role as sole ISR operator on the tactical operations floor. After returning home from deployment, she also saved multiple lives by taking control of a vehicle she was a passenger in when her friend had a seizure in the driver seat and lost control. Despite her adversity, she has maintained a “go-getter” attitude, according to her leadership, and spends her free time working on her bachelor’s degree and volunteering at a local animal shelter, and with non-profit fundraisers and local farmers’ market communities.

## **Senior Airman Julian Sholten Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Operator of the Year**

*SSgt Nicolas J. Long, 11th Special Operations Intelligence Squadron*

Sergeant Long executed nine thousand hours of ISR operations in support of two Operational Detachment Alpha teams thereby fueling counter-smuggling and ISIS clearing missions. Additionally, he operated as AFSOC’s sole Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Tactical Controller force generator where he managed 72 members’ currency and recertification, ensuring preparation for 36 ISR deployments. Finally, he was awarded the Combat Action Medal as the sole intel ride-out team member and survived complex near-peer Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks enabling zero casualties.

# AIR FORCE OUTSTANDING AIRMAN OF THE YEAR



Technical Sergeant Blake distinguished himself throughout the year as a team leader supporting Operation Allies Refuge in Afghanistan where his team cared for 71 wounded personnel and supported seven surgeries. Further, he led one of three medical teams on final lift of troops out of Afghanistan and led his medical team in largest mass casualty in 10 years where they treated 63 wounded and prepared the air evacuation of 55 patients. Additionally, Sergeant Blake was the primary planner for a two week, multi-national exercise where he designed 3 missions training 16 providers and validated 26 essential tasks and prepared six members for deployment.

A superior NCO, Sergeant Blake was assigned Detachment Superintendent duties where he was responsible for 25 personnel, 4 operational teams, and 4 flights with an inventory of \$1.5 million in equipment. As the acting superintendent, he optimized the key spouse program, revived the post-covid fitness training yielding a 100 percent pass rate. During this time, he was selected as NCO of the Quarter and nominated for the Lance P. Sijan Leadership Award.

Additionally during the year, Sergeant Blake assisted in the Covid pandemic battle at the US's 4th busiest hospital by leading four shifts during 48 hour trauma alert coverage providing care for 156 severely sick patients during the course of 768 acute care hours of service. Further while off-duty, Sergeant Blake responded to a vehicle accident rendering an emergent trauma evaluation and initial care to stabilize the severely injured patient for transportation to the hospital by local ambulance saving the person's life.

While attending NCO Academy, Sergeant Blake led his 12-member flight where they excelled as a team during the 196 hour/ 5-week course. Sergeant Blake earned Distinguished Graduate recognition and received the Commandant's Award.

Finally, in his spare time, Sergeant Blake completed a dual Master's program earning degrees in Healthcare Administration and Public Health and graduating with a 3.8 GPA. He also volunteered his time at a local animal rescue caring for the dogs and assisting in 718 pets adoptions. 🦅



**Technical Sergeant Brandon S. Blake**  
**720th Operations Support Squadron**

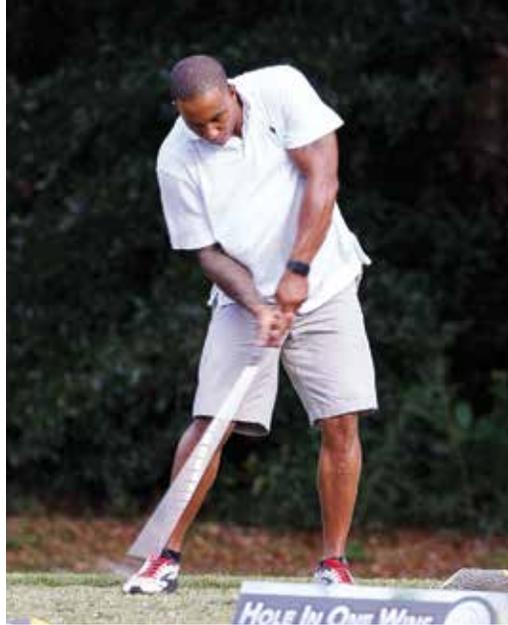
[Back to Table of Contents](#)



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

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

**Become a member today at [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org)**



# 2022 ACA CONVENTION

Visit [scottphotoworks.com](http://scottphotoworks.com) to see all the ACA Convention photos.

Proudly Sponsored by Emerald Coast Harley Davidson





[Back to Table of Contents](#)



# A Moment to Honor and Recognize Those Who Have Taken Their Final Flight

**Col Richard Greszler - 13 October 2022**

*Editor's Note: Col Richard Greszler gave the following speech during the 2022 ACA Memorial ceremony at the Air Commando Air Park. The sentiment it holds and the message it conveys capture the ethos of being an Air Commando. For those of you who may have missed the ceremony and in the spirit of the Hall of Fame issue, the editors of the ACJ have decided to reprint the transcript in its entirety. Enjoy.*

Good morning, everyone. It is my honor to be here surrounded by generations of Air Commandos, past and current so we all can take a moment to honor and recognize those who have taken their final flight and given the last full measure of devotion.

I want to thank the Air Commando Association for putting this event together to ensure we remember the hard work, dedication, and ultimately the sacrifice of our fellow Air Commandos. I especially want to honor the family members and friends of these warriors, leaders, mentors, and teammates. The price of freedom is well known to you through the myriad of small and large sacrifices. You know the cost of missed family events and long periods of separation, but you also know the impact of the ultimate sacrifice. My thoughts are with each and every one of you. Your loved ones exemplified the words of Isaiah Chapter 6 Verse 8, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." They did not look to others to make a brave choice, they looked within and found themselves up to the task.

The great heritage of moving to the sound of gunfire by Air Commandos began in the Second World War in every theater of that great conflict. It continued to the skies over Korea, the jungles of Vietnam, onto the desert of Iran, the peaks of the Balkans, the urban centers of Iraq, and the mountain passes of Afghanistan.

Every Air Commando started out as a motivated individual who brought unique perspectives and qualities to the fight. But in my time as an Air Commando, I believe there are several qualities that run through all of those who join our ranks since our inception in the Second World War.

The first of those qualities may seem a bit obvious, but it is courage. The courage to move forward into the fight even when the odds are known. This courage is exemplified by many of the events that the Air Commando Association works so hard to ensure we do not forget. The 1st Air Commandos in World War II supporting the British Long-Range Penetration Group getting behind Japanese lines. The Son Tay raid and its impact on the morale of those POWs still in Vietnam. The attempt to rescue Americans held by



**Col Richard Greszler addresses the attendees of the Air Commando Association's Memorial Ceremony.**

Iran in Operation Eagle Claw. Task Force Normandy and leading the way to open Operation Desert Storm. Operation Enduring Freedom initial stages led by combat controllers ensuring coordinated airstrikes against the Taliban. Task Force Viking opening the northern front in Operation Iraqi Freedom freezing 13 Iraqi Divisions from defending Baghdad. These specific operations, as well as innumerable others, were successful due to your loved ones and their courage.

The second quality your Air Commandos exhibited is persistence. They exhibited this both on an individual level as well as organizationally. Individually, they needed to raise their hand and make it through a rigorous selection process that has taken many forms over the decades. They were challenged physically, mentally, and spiritually. And since you are here today, we know they ultimately were successful. But they also did not allow the impact of special operations be forgotten due to lack of foresight by some within the armed services. After the successes of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, special operations was underfunded and devalued. The impact of Desert One and Operation Urgent Fury led to the establishment of Special Operations Command followed soon after by Air Force Special Operations Command. We may take these institutions for granted now, but they are here through the dogged hard work and effort by your Air Commandos.

A third key quality is one that may not be obvious to those outside of our ranks, but your Air Commandos consistently exhibited creativity. The 1st Air Commando group determined the use of gliders would allow for a large enough force to harry the Japanese. The Son Tay

raiders figured out how to penetrate North Vietnamese airspace and land in an area the size of a volleyball court in an effort to rescue their fellow Americans. Members of Task Force Normandy combined their new capabilities with conventional forces to clear the way for the air campaign of Desert Storm. Combat controllers looked for the best way to position themselves to bring conventional air power to bear in Afghanistan by using pack animals in some situations.

The final quality I have witnessed is mentorship from your loved ones. Air Commandos do not wake up one morning and possess all the necessary qualities to be a successful special operator. It is inculcated through years of experience, tough and realistic training, and the passing of lessons from one generation to the next through a deliberate effort.

One thing I have witnessed in my time in uniform is there are many ways of experiencing service in our Air Force. My experience in Air Force Special Operations Command as an Air Commando revolves around those great leaders of all ranks and specialties who made it a point to school me in our heritage, teamwork, and leadership, and challenged me to do the same. Those leaders were your loved ones and I thank you and them for being an integral part of that long line of Air Commandos and the culture of success bred over the last almost 80 years.

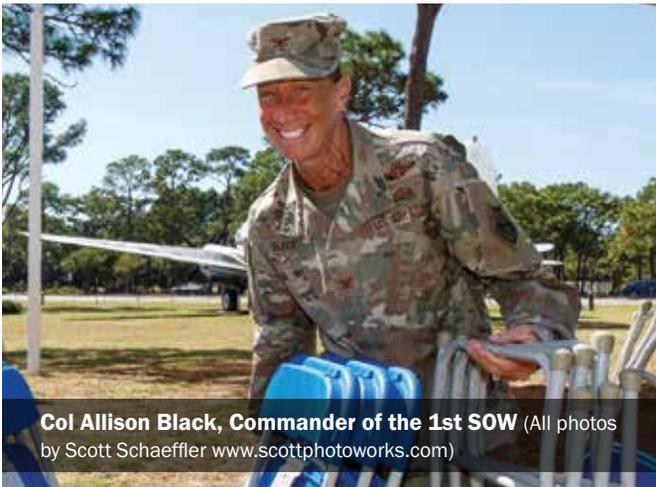
These are the qualities your loved ones exhibited across

their careers. It allowed for the building and sustainment of our culture of quiet professionalism through passing the torch from those who came before them to those that followed. As Heraclitus stated, “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.” Air Commandos like your loved ones took their lessons, added their own unique perspective, passed them on, and by doing so ensured the continued relevance of special operations into the future.

I would like to close by thanking all those, past, present, and future, who chose or will choose to serve. Whatever form that takes, it is those who step up that allow our Nation’s amazing Madisonian form of representative democracy to not only continue, but flourish. God bless all of you here today and God bless the United States of America.



*About the Speaker: Colonel Richard Greszler is the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command Operations Center, Hurlburt Field, FL which executes global command and control of joint special operations air and cyber operations, and allocates and tasks resources to develop and execute the special operations forces’s air-battle plan in support of USSOCOM and geographic combatant commanders. Colonel Greszler commanded at the squadron and group level and served in several staff positions at the task force, major command, and Air Staff levels.*



**Col Allison Black, Commander of the 1st SOW** (All photos by Scott Schaeffler [www.scottphotoworks.com](http://www.scottphotoworks.com))



**Hurlburt Honor Guard presenting the Colors at the Hurlburt Air Park.**



**Steve Nobel, CMSgt, USAF (Ret) hosts the memorial ceremony as ACA life member Les Matheson performs a tribute to those members who we have lost.**



**Jay Norton approaches Paul Williams and his son Eddie Williams under the tent.**



## Ensure ACA Mission Success

**Anytime Flight donations by current ACA annual or life members go towards ensuring the preservation of the Air Commando Association and it's mission to continue well into the future.**

Anne (Mrs. Harry C."Heinie")  
Aderholt  
Kenneth Alnwick  
The Alsid Family  
Jody Amerson  
Augie Archer  
Joe Arthur  
A. Dwight & Nancy Davis  
Susan Ault-Davis  
Dennis & Pat Barnett  
Juan Bazan  
Greg Bentley  
Rick & Linda Bethea  
Norman A Bild  
Tim Bischoff  
The Blom Family  
Hobart Ray Bower  
George Boyce  
Thomas Bradley  
Bob Brenci  
James Brickell  
Harry Bright Life Member #4040  
Bud Britain  
Craig Brotchie  
Charles Brown, Zorro 16  
Norm Brozenick Jr.  
Heather Bueter  
Kenneth Burton  
Mike Burton & Donna Young  
Herbert "Mac" Busby

Maile McCoskrie Busby  
Michael Byers  
Rory Cahoon  
Rick Carroll  
Brenda Cartier  
The Castlen Family  
Bobby Clark  
Stephen Clark  
Dave & Floreen Clark  
Travis Clovis  
Steve Connelly  
Jim Connors  
Philip Conran  
J R Cooper  
Rory Crews  
Gary E. Crowther  
Rick Crutchfield  
Erik & Mary Davis  
Pete & Mary Dawson  
Stephen Deranian  
Craig Dock  
Mike Dugan  
John Easley  
Kenneth N. Engleson III  
Young E Fitzpatrick & Sons  
Christopher Foltz  
Ted and Shara Fordyce  
Max Friedauer  
Ann Garcia-Lucas  
John Gargus

Mr & Mrs Arthur Gordon, Jr  
Tom Green  
Al Greenup  
In Memory of James Galluzzi  
The Hale Family  
Lifemember Richard & Christine  
Hallion  
Dave & Rachel Halvorson  
Paul & Ede Harmon  
Chris Harriman  
Paul Hastert  
Rich Heagwood  
Gary (GUNZ) Heinz  
Dan & Melissa Henkel  
Steve Herberth  
(Waterpump/Project 404)  
Lee & Ginny Hess - In memory of  
Col Jim Kyle  
William J. Houston  
Eddie M. Howard  
James Humphrey  
Jimmy & Jacque Ifland  
Lindsey & James Isbell  
Richard Ivey  
Randal 'Jake' Jacobson  
Martin Jester  
Stan Jones, 605th ACS & 5th SOS  
PJ Kendall & Family  
The Kersh Family  
Michael Kingsley

# Flight

**A heartfelt thank you to our members for their generosity and commitment to the Air Commando Association. We are proud to highlight the following Air Commandos are members of the ACA ANYTIME FLIGHT!**

Kisner Family  
Jack Krause  
Chris Lauderdale 7th SOS  
Phil & Stephanie Lawlor  
Micah & Eddie Lombera  
Dick MacLeod  
Brian A. Maher  
O.G. Mannon  
Andrew & Monica Maresh  
Will and Charity Markham  
Tom Markland  
Harry H Marklin  
Andrew “AM” Martin  
Rodney Martin  
Dann & Jean Mattiza  
Chainsaw & Ranee McCollum  
James McConnell  
John McCoskrie  
Clay McCutchan  
Carl McPherson  
Bob & Barrie Meller  
Ted & Carol Mervosh in  
memory of Rod Toth  
William V. Miller  
David Mobley  
Kenneth Moerscher  
Charles Mohrmann  
Larry Moore  
R. Wayne Moorhead  
Janice Morrow

The Mueller AFSOC Family  
Larry & Lida Munz  
Tom Nelson  
Rick & Kathy Newton  
Wayne G. Norrad  
Jay & Ellen Norton,  
Life Member #168  
Travis Norton  
Randy O’Boyle  
Albert Olsen Jr.  
Frank Orr Jr.  
Bill & Kathy Phillips  
Ken & Sarah Poole  
Mike and Ann Reynolds  
Destry Rogers  
Bill Rone  
Gene and Linda Ronsick  
The Ross Family  
Larry D. Rutledge  
Felix Sambogna  
Janice Sanborn  
Scott & Kathi Schafer  
Suzie & Norty Schwartz  
Richard Secord  
In loving memory of James  
‘Shaff’ Shaffer  
Dennie & Cathy Sides  
Terry & Janet Silvester  
Jim Slife  
Charles “Snuffy” Smith

John ‘Smitty’ & Charlye Smith  
Josiah ‘Josey’ Solberg  
Cat & Jack Spitzer  
Dennis & Cathy Stanley  
Michael Steinbeck  
Mike Stoico  
Wild Bill & Stormy  
John Taylor  
Russ Tharp  
Chris Tidwell  
Hollis Tompkins  
Tom & Karin Trask  
Dan & Barbara Turney  
Gregory Van Hyning  
Gregory L. Van Rossum  
David & Janice Weakley  
Jim Westfall 130th ACS WVANG  
AF 29372  
Manuel Wilson Jr & Family  
Steve & Susan Whitson  
Willie Wood  
Donny & Ronda Wurster  
Tony Youngblood  
In Memory of Ratchet 33  
In Memory of Jockey 14, Wrath 11,  
Spirit 03 & Eagle Claw  
In Honor of Wrath 11

\*Some members chose to remain anonymous.

# Merit 84



## ANTELOPE ISLAND TRIBUTE

*By Air Commando Journal Staff*

On Saturday, 29 October 2022, a memorial service was held on Antelope Island, within the Great Salt Lake in Utah, to honor the lives of 12 men, who 30 years to the day, passed away in an MH-60G helicopter mishap not far from the memorial site. The memorial was originally dedicated in 1994 to honor the seven Airmen and five US Army Rangers aboard Merit 84, but over time the seven foot granite wall with pictures of the fallen and inscriptions began to deteriorate. It took a team of teams to help restore the memorial as a fitting tribute to the men who gave their all.

On the night of 29 October 1992, four helicopters, two USAF MH60 Pave Hawk helicopters assigned to the 55th Special Operations Squadron from Eglin AFB, Florida and two US Army MH-60L Blackhawk helicopters assigned to 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, Ft Campbell, Kentucky departed from Hill AFB enroute to Michael Army Airfield, on Dugway Proving Grounds, Utah. The Airmen and Soldiers aboard Merit 84 were participating in an extremely vast and complex joint special operation

training exercise, known as Operation Embryo Stage, demonstrating our expertise to senior US government officials. The mission was to provide a tactical insertion of operators from 1st Battalion 75th Ranger Regiment and the 24th Special Tactics Squadron into the target area to control a follow-on parachute insertion of forces from the 1st Ranger Battalion and 24th Special Tactics Squadron. The mishap aircraft, Merit 84, was the number four aircraft in the formation with four crew members and nine operators on board flying in extremely challenging weather conditions enroute to Dugway. Seven minutes after departing from Hill AFB, Merit 84 impacted the Great Salt Lake, just 300 meters north of Antelope Island. Three crew members and all nine of the operators were killed instantly. One aircrew member, while seriously injured, survived the mishap and was rescued by three Rangers who were aboard one of the other helicopters in the formation. After the accident, additional Rangers were dropped off on Antelope Island where they started coordinating the initial rescue efforts and after 14

hours of working in frigid cold and rainy conditions all 12 members were recovered.

*The deceased Airmen and Soldiers honored with the memorial are:*

### US AIR FORCE

- Lt Col Roland E. Peixotto, Jr.  
Commander, 55th Special Operations Squadron
- Capt Michael L. Nazionale  
24th Special Tactics Squadron
- TSgt Mark Scholl  
24th Special Tactics Squadron
- SSgt Steven W. Kelley  
55th Special Operations Squadron
- SSgt Mark G. Lee  
24th Special Tactics Squadron
- SSgt Phillip A Kesler  
55th Special Operations Squadron
- SRA Derek C. Hughes  
23rd Special Tactics Squadron

### US ARMY RANGERS

- COL John T. Keneally  
Commander, 3/75th Ranger Battalion
- LTC Kenneth W. Staus  
Commander, 1/75th Ranger Battalion
- 1st SG Harvey E. Moore, Jr  
3/75th Ranger Battalion, Platoon Sergeant
- SGT Blain A. Mishak  
1/75th Ranger Battalion
- SPEC 4 Jeremy B. Bird  
1/75th Ranger Battalion

Sergeant Geoffrey Hitchcock, a retired combat controller, spearheaded the renovation project after a visit to the site and found it in disrepair. Sergeant Hitchcock reached out to friends and charitable organizations for funding. The organizations that participated in the restoration of the Merit 84 Memorial are: Combat Control Foundation, Air Commando Association, 75th Ranger Regiment Association, Three Rangers Foundation, US Army Ranger Association, Gallant Few, Sua Sponte Foundation, and Hardrock Charlie Foundation.

Lest we forget — Air Commandos/Quiet Professionals and Rangers Lead the Way.

All photos courtesy of Gina Cubero



[Back to Table of Contents](#)

# 1550TH COMBAT CREW TRAINING WING



## Bringing MH-60G Training To the Schoolhouse

*By Lt Col Eric Greenblatt, USAF (Retired)*

### INTRODUCTION:

In 1987 the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing (CCTW) was tasked to prepare for major changes in its role as the formal schoolhouse (FTU). It started in 1986, when HQ Military Airlift Command (MAC) training office (DOT) began the paperwork and taskings to the 1550th CCTW for what would become MH-60G FTU. The original concept was unconventional because there was no acquisition plan for the Pave Hawk in place at that time. HQ MAC/DOT was driven by the fact there was a general idea that in or about 1990, the schoolhouse needed to be ready for some level of MH-60 training. Due to the lack of a specific funded unit and aircraft beddown plan in 1986-1987, initial efforts were started “in-house” with minimal funding and no specifics on schedule. Much of what occurred over the next five years must also be viewed in context to the surrounding changes in Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and MAC (and later Air Mobility Command (AMC)

as reorganized) to changes in weapon systems and other upgrades.

For clarity, I divided this article into four major subsections: Preparation Phase, from 1987 to December 1988; Initial Cadre Training Phase, December 1988 to December 1989; Schoolhouse Startup, December 1989 through mid-1992; and Sustainment beginning in mid-1992.

The MH-60G integration did not happen in a vacuum. When the 1550th Aircrew Training and Test Wing (ATTW) relocated from Hill AFB in Utah to Kirtland AFB, New Mexico in 1975 they experienced just over a decade of relatively stable taskings with little change. The ATTW lost their formal test mission tasking and changed their designation to the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing (CCTW) and were formally aligned with MAC through the 23rd Air Force. The CCTW, at the time, was equipped with six HC-130s, eight HH-53s, eight HH/CH-3Es, six UH-1Ns, and six TH/UH-1Fs, but by 1987, that stability was about to change.

### PREPARATION PHASE 1987 to December 1988

In early 1987, major reorganizations within the Air Force special operations and rescue communities were rapidly occurring. US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) had been created, 23rd AF was moved to Hurlburt Field, and AFSOC was in the process of being established with a “dual chain of command” through HQ Air Force and USSOCOM. Additionally, Headquarters Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS) was reestablished at McClellan AFB. This was concurrent with massive changes within the 1550th.

In 1987 HQ MAC began developing a long-range plan for Kirtland to become the FTU for AFSOC, not only for MH-60G Pave Hawks, but the plan included transition of the rescue HH-53s to the AFSOC MH-53J Pave Low FTU, moved from Hurlburt Field. Additionally, the HC-130 FTU expanded to include the MC-130P Combat Shadow, and the

beddown of four MC-130H Combat Talon IIs began. The MC-130H buy and beddown was a traditional USAF acquisition program, meaning it would bring significant additional manpower, and support for their FTU, something the MH-60G and the MH-53J did not receive.

In late 1986, a series of HQ MAC and 1550th DOT meetings made it clear the MH-60G *Pave Hawk* was coming to Kirtland. Major Fred Madsen, the MAC/DOT representative, worked directly with the 1550th's Capt Joseph Falzone and began the process of establishing a formal school program. One of the first tasks was building local instructor experience in the UH-60 *Black Hawk*. Captain Falzone was sent to the US Army UH-60A Aircraft Qualification Course (AQC) and the US Navy HH-60H Qualification Course located at NAS North Island. Captain Falzone was the CCTW's H-3 Program Training Manager and a highly experience HH-3E instructor pilot. As things moved forward, it became more apparent, that this effort would not be a conventional weapon system "stand-up". Literally, all the program planning that accompanies a new weapon system that is normally provided by systems programs offices, MAJCOM training and logistics elements, and contractors, was to be accomplished, in-house at the 1550th CCTW. Due to the added workload and, more importantly, higher headquarters visibility, the 1550th CCTW commander, Col Jim Page, created a "Tiger Team" chaired by the CCTW assistant director of operations (ADO), Col Bob Pyeatt. Joe Falzone was the functional lead, and the Tiger Team met weekly with various "due ins" and due outs handled by the wing's senior leadership. Col Charles Holland was the wing's vice commander and Col Jim White was the deputy commander for operations (DCO). Col Steve Gemlich was the wing's deputy commander for maintenance (DCM) and a key player in leading one of the most flexible maintenance responses, I witnessed in 25 years of active duty.

A significant factor that caused a lot of guesswork in moving forward was the lack of a formal HQ MAC approved plan for the MH-60G beddown and transition. Multiple plans were discussed, but the program funding was being pursued in a non-conventional manner and that made planning for us at the bottom end of the chain very tentative. From our perspective at the 1550th, actual planning began to solidify in mid-1988. The schedule was put on the fast track for a couple of reasons; primarily because the unconventional procurement and beddown was beginning to be formulated adding significant aircraft buys occurring in 1988 and 1989 for Air National Guard (ANG) and Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC). Let's face it, it was very difficult to plan when you didn't know how many aircraft the Air Force was buying, how many the FTU was getting, how the overall beddown would be phased in and a host of other support issues that were put into "to be determined", category.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, a greater issue was the actual aircraft itself because the final configuration was also a moving target. By mid-1988, the physical building of the MH-60G aircraft had morphed into a three-phase process through the Warner-Robbins Air Logistics Center. The undertaking began with buying UH-60A/Ls through the US Army's multi-year program, then the aircraft were sent to the Sikorsky modification facility in Troy, Alabama where they added the refueling probe and plumbing for auxiliary fuel tanks. Finally, the helicopters were sent to the NAS Pensacola rework facility to add the cockpit and tactical navigation system upgrades. The first MH60G configuration was designated Block

102, which had the basic UH-60 cockpit, with original C-141/C-5 Carousel inertial navigation system, integrated with the original Army doppler navigation system. Additionally, a commercial Bendix 1400 color weather radar was installed. However, it would be another two years before the 1550th FTU would see any of these Block 102 aircraft.

While the planning was still fuzzy, the rubber was beginning to quickly hit the ramp. In late August 1988, the CCTW was notified that they had a month to get ready for the arrival of an airframe for the maintenance team, so



they could begin their training. UH-60 87-26014, the last 1987 model, arrived in late September, and was destined to enter the modification process to the MH-60G in late November 1988. In the meantime, the maintenance team was off to the races, conducting training with qualified maintainers sent TDY from the 55th SOS to support our efforts. Individuals who had been assigned to Eglin AFB and the 55th SOS were the first to get requalified and then turned around and conducted training for the rest of the initial cadre maintenance folks. The training and preparation made for a very long, 6-day week process. Further, this pattern that went on for more than a year was all "out of hide"; there was no increase in manpower and the H-1, H-3, and H-53 flying programs continued unabated.

Another question lurking in the background was, who were actually going to be the initial cadre instructors at the FTU? Surrounding the H-60 plus-up were changes to the other USAF helicopter communities. The UH-1F aircraft were retired in 1987, the 40th ARRS' seven detachments all closed and their UH-1Ns were redistributed to the missile site units. The H-3 community was also being scaled back as retirements were discussed, but the timing was not set in stone. Selection of both pilots and flight engineers for the Pave Hawk program began summer of 1988, and there was strong competition for both crew positions within the H-53 community, because, at the same time the 1550th was transitioning from rescue HH-53s to the special operations variant, the MH-53J Pave Low. A tentative list of 10 pilots and 10 flight engineers was drawn up by Colonel White. His process was fast paced and informal. I was told that I was on the list in late August and to stand by for further instructions. Those instructions came in early November 1988, when the first wave of four pilots and six flight engineers were sent to Ft Rucker, Alabama to attend the Army's UH-60 AQC. We went as a group, but only received academics and a few simulator rides. The flight

engineer's program was even more unconventional because the Army did not use flight engineers on their aircraft.

As an aside, while we were going through the AQC, the US Army Test Group received their first CH-3E from the 71st ARRS in Alaska. During our academic off periods the Army Test unit asked our H-3 instructor crew members to help get manuals and local procedures set up and, of course, we agreed to help out.

By the end of November 1988, it was execute time for the MH-60G flying operation. The 55th SOS, along with the Captain Falzone, ferried six brand new UH-60As from the Hartford, Connecticut Sikorsky plant to Kirtland in one week and with that the initial cadre training plan was about to begin. These 1988 model UH-60As would ultimately go to the three ANG units, in New York, California, and Alaska, but we got to try them out and break them in.

## INITIAL CADRE TRAINING PHASE

### December 1988 to August 1990

In December 1988, the training freight train was put onto the tracks and the next 18 months were a blur. Our training began two weeks after the aircraft hit the ramp. We hosted

three guest instructor pilots and two instructor FEs from the 55th SOS to get our training started. On Friday 9 December, I had just finished a dual engine change check flight on an H-3, and was met on the ramp by the wing ADO, Col Lou Glass. He he asked if I was ready to start my H-60 training, and I said, "Absolutely!" He then told me, "Be at the squadron at 0600, you start training in the morning." We were off to the races.

We began flying two-turn two every day until Christmas and Joe Falzone was the first to requalify with Jim Hamblin and myself checking out in less than a week. The training continued and the qualified pilots began flying with each other to build flying time. The FEs started their training as well, receiving their basic qualifications and flying with the pilots to build their time and experience on the H-60. One aspect that inhibited the original plan was the 1550th initial cadre was not granted any waivers for flying time in the H-60 MDS (mission design series). I believe this was more a factor of the lack of coherent upper-level MAJCOM direction between HQ MAC, and 23rd AF. The CCTW's response was typical for the situation — we blew past this minor issue by accumulating the time needed in relatively short order. Remember, all the initial cadre, pilots and FEs were highly experienced helicopter instructors and evaluators.

As we neared the end of January 1989, we had three pilots qualified as aircraft commanders up to remote

**www.scottphotoworks.com**

EVENTS  
DRONES  
REAL ESTATE

**Scott**  
PHOTO WORKS

Official Photographer for Air Commando Association

**WANTED!**  
**USAF MILITARIA**

**Buying:**

- Uniforms • Flight Jackets
- Helmets • Medals • Patches
- Insignia • Other USAF Items

Please contact: Daniel Miller, Collector/Dealer  
Phone/text: 202.841.3062  
Email: Militbuff@aol.com

Also buying items from other branches of the Armed Services.

area operations qualification, two other pilots qualified as copilots. Two new instructor pilots arrived to the 1551st FTS and two more initial cadre pilots went to Ft Rucker for the full AQC and returned in April 1989. As pilots and FEs qualified, the wing started to approximate a flying hour program to support a 2,800 hour per year schedule for calendar year 1989. It is a testament to the professionalism of the self-taught cadre of instructors who were gaining experience and populating squadron and wing positions to get the school ready for what was to come in 1990.

Another point to reiterate for this phase of training is the entire program was literally created internally in the CCTW. Anyone who participated in the CV-22 stand-up, or more recently the HH-60W stand-up, more than noticed that all higher echelons in AF management had input and control of many of the issues that 1550th dealt with for both MH-60G and MH-53J programs on its own. When it came to how to design a syllabus, determine a flying hour plan, logistics support for multiple variants of a supposedly single MDS, there were literally no inputs from HQ MAC or HQ USAF. The CCTW's Tiger Team remained in existence within the wing, and while some members changed through 1990, now Major Falzone remained in the lead, and fundamentally kept things on a fast-paced track with wing leadership.

At this point it is worth circling back to mention the leadership within the 1550th CCTW. The commander, Col Jim Page, and vice commander, Col Charles Holland, through deputy commanders for operations and maintenance, and 1551st squadron leaders all were primed to expect very significant changes in fleet mix and numbers, and taskings from multiple sources. Their trust in a group of young captains at this specific time to do the heavy lifting was both scary and laudable. To add to a streamlined leadership and distributed execution process, Maj Joel Schrimsher, an H-3 pilot, was designated as the H-60 Flight Commander. Others were

placed throughout the wing filling basic operations functions, I was the wing H-60 scheduler and Major Falzone continued to work both syllabi of instruction and course flow, and also began working tentative student flow for the ANG, AFRC, unit stand-ups and conversions, and active unit stand-ups and training requirements. Maintenance had a particularly hard challenge, supporting an airframe, that was not "owned" by any specific assigned unit, tail numbers were being shuffled — sometimes on a monthly basis, and the configuration was, in most cases, unknown until the actual aircraft arrived on the Kirtland AFB ramp.

This initial cadre phase continued at a fast-paced level for 18+ months until events in August 1990 tossed a few curveballs our way. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 was the major speed bump for the plan, but in many ways accelerated many change factors; more on that later. The remainder of the initial cadre phase was marked by continual change, turbulence from real world events, changes in directions, and aircraft modifications and movements. In my opinion, the 1550th CCTW team did a superb job of building out the cadre. Beginning in early 1990, the AF Personnel Center (AFMPC) began a significant movement of personnel into the 1550th. Individuals that had been in the 55th SOS from the start received assignments to Kirtland. Additionally, several O-4s, mostly from the H-3 community, that were proven instructor-level professionals, provided the next generation leadership within the H-60 community. Flight engineers were also drawn from the same communities to continue this transition.

By December 1989, the 1550th CCTW had a solid cadre of instructor pilots, and flight engineers that were tiered in their qualifications. The goal was to qualify a crew member to instructor level first and then add the other mission element qualifications, such as remotes, day tactical, night tactical/night vision goggles (NVG), and air refueling. By early summer

1990, the wing began receiving probed aircraft from Sikorsky's modification facility, and we began a pyramid qualification/requalification program for inflight refueling. In addition, the first Block 102, original 1981/82 model aircraft began to arrive at the same time. I clearly recall my first full up MH-60G instructional sortie in tail #671, call sign Ghost 38, along with a couple other experienced captains. The 55th SOS converted to the 1988 model year aircraft and sent five of the 1981/82 models to Osan AB Korea. By late summer 1990, the CCTW initial cadre was fully trained and began providing full up training to the first wave of students into the FTU pipeline.

## **DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM PHASE**

### **August 1990 to August 1991**

As mentioned earlier, we know the Iraqi Army invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The 1550th was not directly tasked to deploy any helicopter assets, but with the rapid pace of both MH-53J and MH-60G build-ups, and the deactivation and non-combat ready status of the MAC HH-3E assets, the CCTW was tasked to provide support to AFSOC forces throughout the next year. Several H-3 pilots, who had already started flying training in the MH-60, were pulled out to augment the 71st SOS, an AFRC MH-3E unit from Davis-Monthan AFB for Desert Storm. Several other pilots were sent to support the AFSOC forces remaining in the US. I traveled to Hurlburt Field twice to fly with 55th SOS pilots waiting for deployment orders and, on several occasions, supported the AFSOC team at NAS Pensacola with flight testing of MH-60Gs configured with various weapons delivery systems and navigation system upgrades.

With the continuing buildup of the MH-53J Pave Low FTU and the initial drawdown of the H-3 Jolly Green Giant school house, there were other changes coming. Funding and authorization to procure an MH-60G simulator and additional training

assets, such as a gunnery trainer were formalized at the wing level in the summer of 1990. The wing added a small office headed by Maj Ed Reed, who came from the Air Staff. Later, Lt Col Reed went on to command the 1550th Technical Training Squadron. His primary responsibility was to manage all these programs from concept to fielding. In August 1990, the MH-53J simulator began its acceptance test phase, and was, at that time, the most sophisticated weapon system trainer in the USAF. It included the most advanced visual simulation system available, an integrated radar simulator for terrain following and avoidance operations, fully integrated GPS navigation simulator, and an integrated electronic warfare simulator. The MH-60G simulator was put on contract that summer and like the Warner-Robbins lead aircraft modifications, was in trail behind the MH-53J. All simulator subsystems were modifications of the MH-53J simulators. As we progressed, Joe Falzone and I were both heavily involved in getting this program started and like most aspects of the MH-60G integration into the 1550th CCTW, it was very unconventional.

While one would think that a basic H-60 simulator would be an easy call—that turned out to be far from the reality. Joe Falzone and I made several trips to both Ft Rucker and NAS North Island flying UH-60A and SH-60F/HH-60H simulators. Ironically the Navy simulator had much better aerodynamic modeling, and a more open architecture, permitting easier installation of future upgrades. Subsequently with our input, the MH-60 simulator prime contractor, GE Aerospace, selected the Navy baseline simulator for the MH-60G Weapons Systems Trainer (WST) and was put on a firm fixed price contract of \$25M to deliver the simulator in approximately 21 months. The MH-60G WST was delivered in mid-summer 1992, and that provided a significant enhancement to training, while netting a slight reduction in the flying hour program. In late 1992, it became apparent through the normal

PFT planning process that the CCTW would need additional simulator capacity to support, not only the normal PFT, but more capacity for annual simulator refresher training for all the new units that transitioned to the Pave Hawk. The effort led to an additional \$10M contract with GE Aerospace and SBS Engineering for the MH-60G OFT (operational flight trainer), which was delivered in late 1993 and ready for training in early 1994. Included in the simulator effort, was the first effort by the USAF helicopter training program to move to a computer-based courseware training model. Major Falzone's work on his initial trip through the HH-60H schoolhouse, and our subsequent trips to NAS North Island for simulator evaluations included reviews of their computer based training (CBT) modules, and how they incorporated their instruction. This prompted the CCTW to begin this development as well. Not surprisingly, this remains the model to this day of how the USAF sets up its academic process, from the CV-22 to the HH-60W.

During the summer of 1990 another critical milestone in the development of the MH-60G occurred. There was ongoing work for additional sensor development for the Pave Hawk. This included working with the Pave Low community and AF Research Laboratories to integrate an advanced FLIR system into the Pave Hawk. The AAQ-16 FLIR was the selected and integration was complete from an engineering standpoint. What remained at the working group level was how to configure the cockpit in a mission effective manner. A small group of individuals, led by Maj Donny Wurster, grabbed some dinner at Billy's Longbar on San Mateo Blvd, near Kirtland one evening during the working group conference, and like all good ideas, literally on cocktail napkins, this group sketched out the MH-60G cockpit, known at that time as the Block 132, which included dual pilot display units for the FLIR and a mirrored cockpit design that was believed to be most effective for demanding missions.

At that time, night/NVG water operations were considered by many experienced pilots to be the most demanding mission and the key instrument for the pilot's scan, for flying close to the ocean at night, was the radar altimeter. So the group decided it was most effective for operations and safety to place the RADALT on the outside of the instrument panel, on both sides, so the pilots could easily see it flying from either seat. This became the final cockpit configuration that we essentially have today.

As highlighted at the end of the initial cadre phase, the 1550th had a multitude of tail number swaps, with new UH-60Ls being delivered directly to the CCTW as loaners and multiple other airframes with probes were designated as MH-60A/Ls depending on the year and engines installed. There were as many as 12 to 14 aircraft on the ramp at one time, and the flying hour program continued to grow approaching 330 hours a month or on track for 4,000 hours annually.

In early 1991, ANG students started coming through the FTU. The 210th RQS in Alaska was the first unit to receive aircraft and their first four pilots and four FEs arrived in the spring of 1991. Since it was a new unit, they also began to push through many initial qualification students. The CCTW also supported both the ANG and AFRC stand-up and conversions by periodically sending instructor pilots to the units for extended periods of time to provide unit level training. I supported the 304th at Portland IAP, Oregon and had two rescues in my first two days on duty, to include a night rescue from Mt Adams with the site above 8800' MSL.

## **SUSTAINMENT PHASE**

### **August 1991 to January 1993**

In the summer of 1991 a level of normality began to return to the 1550th CCTW. Desert Storm was over and there was a significant reorganization within the USAF under the leadership of Chief of Staff, General Merrill McPeak. While not directly impacting the 1550th CCTW, the Air Force

# SPECIAL OPERATIONS WARRIOR FOUNDATION

**In 1980, during Operation Eagle Claw, a courageous, but failed, attempt was made to rescue 52 Americans held hostage in Iran.**

**On that tragic day, eight Special Operations Forces lost their lives, leaving behind 17 children.**

In memory, an immediate enduring battlefield promise was made by their teammates to take care of those and subsequent surviving children by providing full educations, and additional educational opportunities, "cradle to career" (preschool - college), to the surviving children of Special Operations Forces lost in the line of duty. The feeling then was, and will continue to be, it is the least we can do to honor those who made, and unfortunately will make, the ultimate sacrifice.

In 2020, Special Operations Warrior Foundation enhanced eligibility to include children of all Medal of Honor Recipients. SOWF continues to provide financial assistance to severely wounded, ill, and injured Special Operations Personnel.

Honoring the fallen  
by taking care of their  
children... to ensure future  
happiness through  
academic success...  
it's the least we can do.

## Your Gift Encompasses:

Scholarship support, including tuition, books, fees, room and board, transportation and associated miscellaneous expenses at the student's school of choice.

**Our funded college educations and additional educational opportunities, "cradle to career," include:**

- Preschool programs for children ages 2 - 5 (up to \$8,000 per year)
- Private school tuition assistance (up to \$5,000 per student, per year, kindergarten - 12th grade)
- Educational programs specifically designed for students with disabilities
- Unlimited private tutoring for students of all ages (kindergarten through college graduation)
- Reimbursement for home school costs
- Access to online tools for ACT/SAT test preparation
- High school summer academic, leadership, & professional programs
- College planning conference (EPIC) hosted by SOWF for high school students
- Access to online college planning platform, College Success Academy
- College to Career transition program, including funds available for internship relocation and an opportunity to study abroad



To learn more, visit:

**specialops.org**

*If you, or someone you know, may be eligible for our programs, please email us at: [scholarships@specialops.org](mailto:scholarships@specialops.org)*

Contact Us

PO Box 89367  
Tampa, FL 33689

[warrrior@specialops.org](mailto:warrrior@specialops.org)  
(813) 805-9400



was experiencing turbulence, with the reorganization and downsizing within the HQ USAF and subordinate commands. The CCTW was realigned under Air Education and Training Command (AETC) through its 19th AF. In addition, AMC replaced MAC, and subsequently would divest special operations major force program 11 (MFP-11) funded endeavors back to AFSOC via USSOCOM cutting HQ USAF out of the loop on many significant efforts and programs. Ultimately in the late 1990s, this would affect the now renamed and reorganized 1550th CCTW, then 542nd CTW, and finally to the 58th Special Operations Wing. However, these changes did not have any real significant impact on the MH-60G formal training school at Kirtland. We just continued to press on.

Many of the earlier efforts were on track and reaching the sustainment phase. By the summer of 1991 the formal school had begun to follow a formal student flow using the developed syllabi, with a functional Programmed Flying Training (PFT) plan for requalifications, initial qualification training, and instructor upgrades. The flying hour program stabilized between 3,600-3,800 hours with a planned reduction to 3,200 when the simulators came online. Normal initial qualification student pilots and FEs were programmed to receive approximately 80 hours of training, broken down between simulator and aircraft. The MH-60G WST came on-line in late 1992, allowing the simulator rides to be added to the flying syllabi, in an approximate 60/40 split between aircraft and simulators. Multiple MH-60G rescue squadrons stood up in the US and around the world in late 1992 and early 1993 and student flow was a relatively normal mix as the units activated.

At the CCTW, formal organizational structures and positions at the wing-level down into the squadrons were populated with qualified instructors. The 1550th Technical Training Squadron (TTS), under Lt Col Reed's command became

the academic and simulator instructor squadron and the squadron and wing standardization and evaluation sections were fully staffed. New instructors arrived to the wing on a regular assignment schedule. Most of these individuals came with a lot of field experience from the 55th SOS and the 38th RQS. Finally, the CCTW's original cadre began to filter out to other units and staff assignments at either HQ USAF or other MAJCOM staffs.

Down on the flightline, the shuffle of aircraft tails continued. In mid-1991 the CCTW received its first full-up Block 132 MH-60G, 89-26198. Its arrival was a huge benefit to the FTU for a variety of reasons; it allowed validation of many specific issues of how the systems actually worked, allowed engineering validation work to, in many cases, be conducted locally specifically for simulator engineering, and provided courseware designers and instructors at all levels in the wing to effectively teach in the aircraft.

## POST 1993

As the MH-60G community matured and adapted throughout the 1990s, with major reorganizations under ACC, USAFE, and PACAF, the now 58th Special Operations Wing, and its 512th SOS (later redesignated 512th RQS) continued maturing and modernizing training. In late 1993, AFSOC began the process of divesting their 16 MH-60G aircraft, which was completed in 1999, after the 55th SOS participated in Operation Allied Force. HQ ACC assumed lead command responsibilities for the newly redesignated HH-60G Pave Hawk and began supporting theater commanders with trained and capable rescue forces to meet the challenges of the next three decades.

MH/HH-60Gs were fully engaged in literally every conflict from Operation Just Cause, through Desert Shield/Desert Storm, continuous deployments to support Operations Southern Watch, Northern Watch, and Allied Force, the 20-year war on terror, Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, and many other

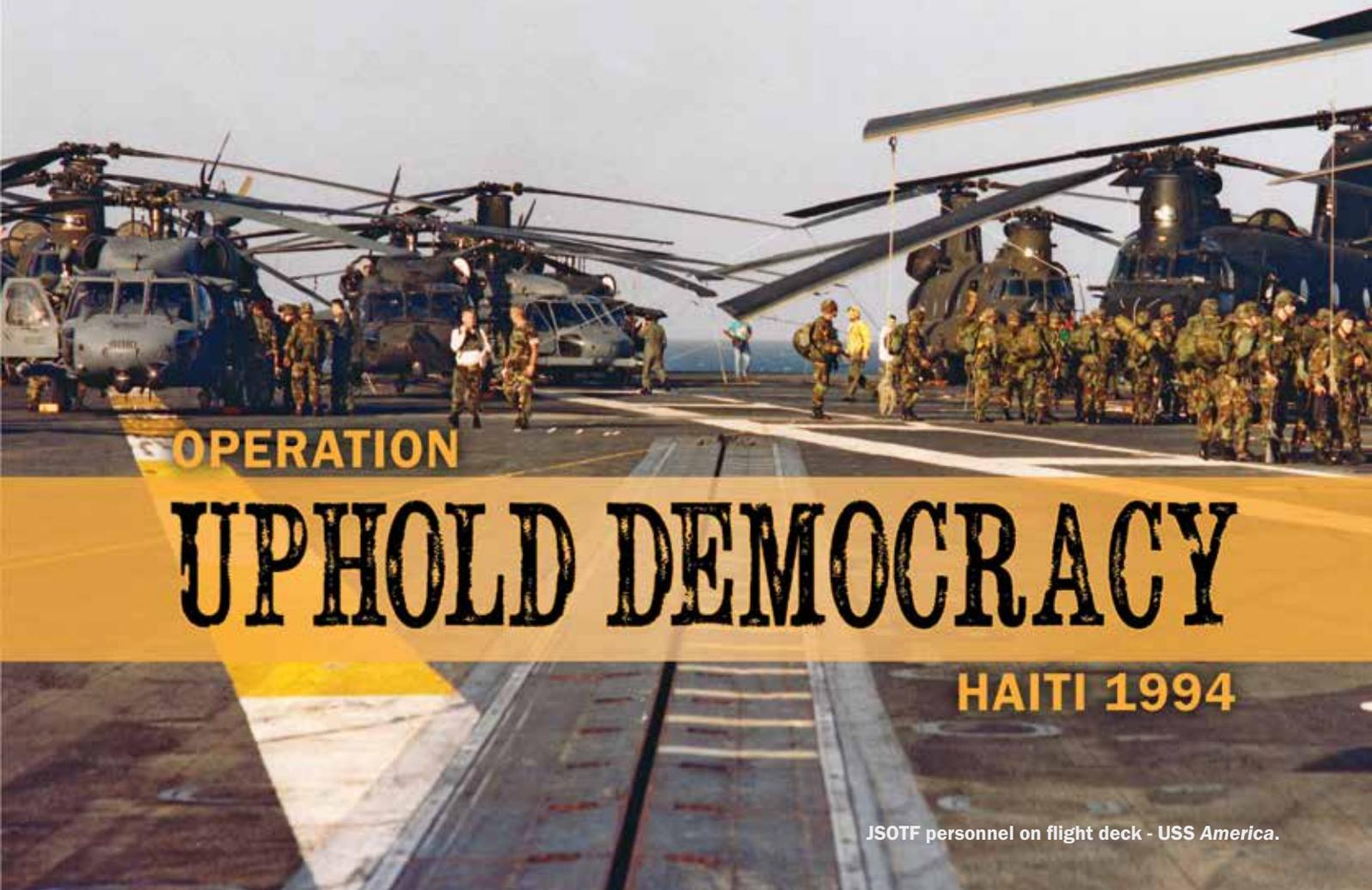
significant deployments around the world.

This sustained effort over 30+ years by the MH/HH-60G Pave Hawk community would not have been possible without the 1550th CCTW's bedrock startup in laying a strong foundation for a formal schoolhouse. Several individuals deserve special acknowledgements for their specific contributions to this effort. Those individuals, not in any specific order are listed in their rank at the time period of 1987-1993: Colonels Charles Holland, Jim White, Bob Pyeatt; Lieutenant Colonels John Folkerts, Donny Wurster; and Majors Fred Madsen, and Joe Falzone.

Finally, a special acknowledgement goes to Lt Col Ed Reed. Without his laser focus, knowledge of the acquisition business, and earth-shaking dedication to getting "er done, done right, done right now" many of the great achievements of the Pave Hawk and Pave Low would not have been possible. However, Colonel Reed's impact extends well past the MH-60G and MH-53J communities. His efforts and determination positively influenced the AFSOC training community, writ-large with his legacy, still being felt today!



*About the author: Lt Col Greenblatt served on active duty for 25 years. During his career he flew H-1s for missile site support, then transitioned to the H-3 for assignments in Iceland, Republic of Korea, and the 1550th at Kirtland AFB where he was both an initial cadre MH-60G instructor and an H-3 instructor. He served on the AFSOC/XP (A-5) staff as the Systems Acquisition Manager for all AFSOC aircrew and maintenance training systems, and augmented the 6th SOS as an H-3 evaluator pilot. He continued his H-60 flying career at Nellis AFB in the 66th RQS. In 1999 he returned to the 58th SOW as an HH-60G instructor, and finished his active duty career in 2006, as an initial cadre CV-22 instructor pilot with the 71st SOS. He continued his service as a contract FCF pilot in the MH-53J. He was a program manager with Ball Aerospace and subsequently an EMS pilot with Petroleum Helicopters Air Medical Division. He now is a contract instructor for CAE for the 58th SOW.*



OPERATION

# UPHOLD DEMOCRACY

HAITI 1994

JSOTF personnel on flight deck - USS America.

By Colonel John Zahrt, USAF (Retired)

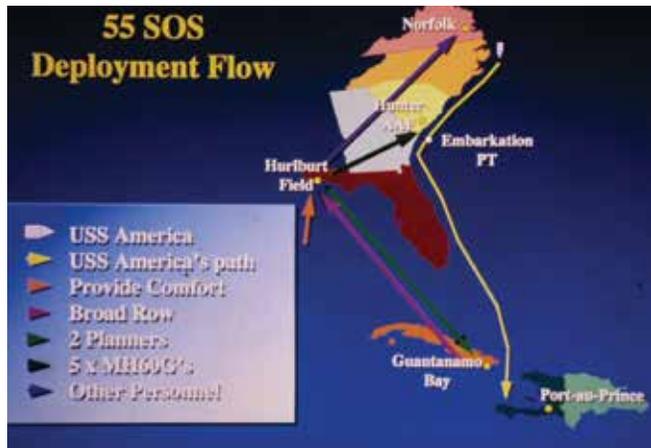
The 55th SOS squadron was in its third consecutive year providing combat search and rescue (CSAR) support for the combined forces of Operation Northern Watch over northern Iraq and, simultaneously, deployed to England for a combined special operations forces exercise Broad Row. When a new, urgent requirement emerged in the fall of 1994, President Clinton had just approved mission execution of Operation Uphold Democracy, a United Nations sanctioned, US led, combined-forces intervention into Haiti with nearly 25,000 military personnel. Its objective: to remove the 1991 dictatorship of General Cedras and reestablish the previous democratic government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide into Haiti. Our squadron swiftly responded by realigning our already heavily-tasked personnel and resources from overseas and the States. We deployed five USAF MH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters, combat crews, and maintenance, onto the US Navy aircraft carrier, USS *America* (CV-66), as part of the joint special operations task force (JSOTF) on that ship. The JSOTF was to become a sea-based enabling force for other joint forces supporting Uphold Democracy.

This was our squadron's first-ever combat deployment operating entirely from a naval ship at sea. It was also history-making for the USS *America* and the US Navy. In place of the aircraft carrier's usual carrier air wing, the *America* was tasked as a dedicated seaborne base-of-operations for the employment of an entire JSOTF, in the

first actual validation of a new employment concept called "Adaptive Joint Force." The embarked JSOTF consisted of 64 Army and Air Force special operations helicopters and roughly 2,300 personnel and equipment from elements of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). This included the 75th Ranger Regiment, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, US Army Special Operations Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and the Naval Special Warfare Command. Also embarked were the JSOTF's command and control element and its other support and maintenance personnel, equipment/spare parts, Humvees, and weapons and ammunition. Collectively, these forces enabled the JSOTF to employ its forces autonomously from the sea while maintaining a low visibility, stationed over the horizon from Port Au Prince, Haiti, for an extended period of time. Despite almost a year-long planning effort for the complex large-scale Uphold Democracy mission, world events dictated a short-notice deployment order that preempted the planned mission rehearsal between the *America* and JSOTF forces. Consequently, a myriad of remaining coordination hurdles between the JSOTF and the ship were tackled simultaneously while the joint forces were actually embarking on the ship and preparing for combat. The exceptional and swift teamwork between the ship's department heads and the JSOTF staff resulted in a remarkable melding of these two very different operational

cultures, enabling their mission success.

The mission of the 55th SOS in Uphold Democracy was to provide an organic CSAR capability to the JSOTF with its 5 MH-60G Pave Hawks, 6 combat aircrews and 25 maintenance personnel deployed aboard the USS *America*.



The other embarked JSOTF aircraft consisted of US Army AH-6, MH-6, MH-60 Black Hawk, and MH-47 Chinook helicopters. Most of the larger helicopters, MH-47s and MH-60s, were positioned on the flight deck throughout the deployment, with the smaller AH-6 and MH-6 "Little Birds" positioned below on the hanger deck. The Army Rangers, Special Forces, Navy SEALs, and other ground combat forces also staged from the hanger deck.

Preparing for a broad range of potential CSAR missions, the 55th SOS and its JSOTF counterparts established a robust and flexible SOF/CSAR mission configuration. This consisted of a CSAR package of two MH-60Gs, with flight lead carrying seven SOF team members and a partially-inflated zodiac rubber raiding craft. The second helicopter (Chalk 2) followed with eight more team members. Teams were typically a mix of Air Force pararescue specialists (PJs) and Army Rangers or Navy SEALs, who would provide organic armed security upon landing at the objective. These CSAR teams were designed to respond to a wide range of challenges.

The 55th's CSAR taskings began just two days into its deployment on the *America*. We provided 9 hours of over-water SAR coverage for more than 40 Army SOF helicopters as they shuttled the bulk of their forces, equipment, and munitions onto the ship. Then, while still adjusting and adapting to life on a ship at sea, 55th SOS aircrews shifted into final preparations for their role in the planned combined-force invasion of Port au Prince.

On 16 September, a few nights prior to the invasion, JSOTF forces on the carrier conducted a full-scale launch-sequence rehearsal to ensure that the plan, which had evolved over the preceding year, would actually work on mission night. Due to rotor clearance limitations, only 21 mission helicopters (MH-47s and MH-60s) were spotted for flight on the flight deck. The remaining helicopters needed for the invasion, including AH/MH-6 Little Birds

were staged on the hanger deck until the topside helicopters took off. Two 55th SOS MH-60Gs, Chalk 20 and Chalk 21, were assigned to the rehearsal's first launch from the ship, led by an MH-47. The helicopters on the flight deck took off and entered a box holding-pattern for one hour around the carrier while the remaining aircraft on the hanger deck came topside, got armed, and started up. When ready, they took off and joined the holding formation as it passed over the carrier. The entire formation then departed the ship's airspace, split up into smaller elements of four or five aircraft and flew to their individual preplanned holding locations for mission night. This completed the successful rehearsal and the helicopters all recovered to the ship.

Despite the successful rehearsal, the force would not need to execute the plan. On the evening of the planned mass invasion, shortly after the large US-based combined assault force was launched, with numerous C-5s and other combat-laden transports already in the air, with JSOTF forces on the *America* readied for combat, the invasion was suddenly cancelled! A diplomatic team, led by Former President Jimmy Carter, Senator Sam Nunn, and retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, convinced General Cedras to leave Haiti peacefully rather than face the onslaught of the huge assault force already headed his way. From that moment on, the mission of Operation Uphold



Democracy shifted from combat operations to peacekeeping and nation building.

Our squadron's first operational mission into Haiti took place early the very next day. Two MH-60G crews were tasked to fly CSAR support for two 160th SOAR MH-60s and one 10th Mountain Division UH-60 carrying

the Commander in Chief, Atlantic Command CINCLANT, and 10th Mountain Division commander. This was a reconnaissance mission to Cap-Haitien, a port city on the north coast where US Marines were establishing a forward operating location. This was the first of several sorties for the 55th SOS to provide CSAR coverage of JSOTF missions carrying key US leaders within Haiti. Later during Uphold Democracy this would include the Secretary of Defense and other senior civilian and military officials when security still remained uncertain. The 55th also provided CSAR alert for possible JSOTF hostage rescue missions throughout Uphold Democracy.

Concurrently, we were tasked to provide CSAR escort for Ranger reinforcement missions during Uphold Democracy. These missions were implemented to protect the small SOF assessment teams deployed in 22 villages across Haiti. Each team, usually made up of four soldiers (two SF, one Civil Affairs, and one Army civil engineer advisor), helped the villages restore their critical infrastructure such as running water and electricity. But in the absence of law enforcement, the villages were often controlled by local gangs. Soon these gangs tried to intimidate our assessment teams as well. But when signaled by the team, an MH-47 filled with US Rangers would suddenly land and the local gang member would back off. I recall one time landing our MH-60G near a village and being greeted by a happy and friendly crowd of villagers wearing colorful Caribbean clothes. All were singing and dancing, appearing joyful to see the US presence at their village. That is, except for the one gang member in the crowd, a solitary, straight-faced man, the only one wearing a suit, not moving and not smiling. Our aircrews had to constantly be on alert for these gang members and other possible close-in threats to our military personnel and aircraft on the ground.

Beginning with our first operational mission into Haiti and throughout Uphold Democracy, our aircrews often faced engine power limitations. Due to the hot temperatures in the Caribbean, the MH-60G (maximum gross weight of 22,000 lbs) was too heavy to hover out of ground effect, so we needed either forward airspeed or headwind across our rotor blades in order to safely take off and climb from the deck of the *America*, which sat high above the surface of the water. For example, on our first operational mission, escorting the CINCLANT flight, the winds were not favorable and our aircraft was so heavily loaded that the crew departed by hovering off the flight deck and then nosed down and accelerated toward the sea in order to gain the airspeed needed to climb. This maneuver didn't sit well with either the ship's Captain or the Air Boss, to say the least. But, it did

get them to head the carrier into the wind for all subsequent take-offs.

Even so, our mission-heavy Pave Hawks would often still descend below the flight deck on takeoffs while gaining the speed to climb. One exception however, occurred during the pre-invasion rehearsal night: The big advantage of being Chalk 21 was that the preceding aircraft had already taken off. With a clear flight deck in front, Chalk 21 made a rolling take off and was accelerating past 60 knots and in a solid climb before passing over the end of the flight deck! Rolling takeoffs also became the norm after getting gas at land-based forward area refueling points in Haiti, again due to heavy mission weights and engine power limitations. Another example of our power limitations occurred when one of our MH-60G's landed in a landing zone (LZ) in Haiti but was



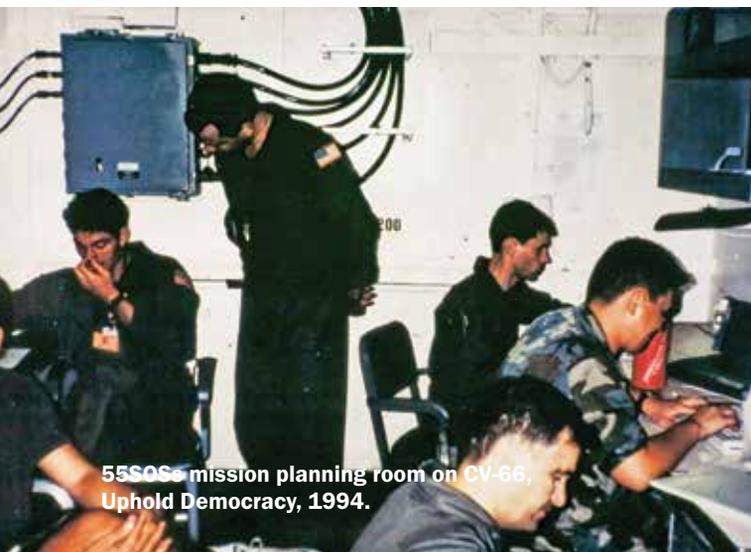
JSOTF personnel always on the Air Boss's flight deck - USS America, Uphold Democracy.

too heavy to fly out. The aircrew quickly off-loaded the team, flew away to dump some fuel, then returned to the LZ to pick up the team and continue the mission. We also learned to expect engine power limitation problems during aerial refueling: Our mission-heavy helicopters would often fall off the right hose before completing refueling, because at that weight we didn't have enough engine power to overcome the increased wake turbulence generated on the right side of the MC-130P aircraft providing inflight refueling.

Adjusting to extended sea-based operations was challenging for our personnel at first. Prior to this deployment, 55th SOS aircrews had for several years worked with smaller, "one and two spot" naval ships for day/night shipboard landing qualifications and training exercises. But we had never deployed onto a full-sized aircraft carrier to

conduct operational missions, much less on one loaded with the sheer mass of helicopters and forces that were filling both the *America's* flight and hanger decks. This was equally new and challenging for the *America's* crew as well. Fortunately, the Navy had this guy call the Air Boss to get things squared away on the flight deck!

It was quite a learning experience for us to learn that the Air Boss was THE MAN. Whenever anyone on the flight deck made a mistake or ignored his directions, he would shut down the entire flight deck ...no ifs, ands, or buts. Likewise, working with the JSOTF was perhaps more frustrating for the Air Boss than with his normal carrier air wing. JSOTF helicopters were all over his flight deck for the entire deployment. Aircraft constantly needed to be re-spotted for launch, recovery, and other reasons, all depending on the JSOTF's fluid and ever-changing mission needs. JSOTF personnel were also ever-present on his flight deck; Army



55SOS mission planning room on CV-66, Uphold Democracy, 1994.

and Air Force aircrews, maintainers, and SOF teams working on or at their aircraft and most all of whom were new to aircraft carrier operations, procedures, and regulations.

Every flight organization that deploys onto an aircraft carrier such as a Navy carrier air wing, assigns one of its flight officers to serve as its liaison to the Air Boss, a position referred to as the "Tower Flower." And while an embarked naval flight wing already knows shipboard flight operations, this liaison officer is still very important by giving the Air Boss a direct and immediate link to the aviation forces operating on his ship. But the JSOTF forces operating on his flight deck was a whole new can of worms for the Air Boss. And despite the fact that the JSOTF air liaison officer (Tower Flower) for Uphold Democracy was a highly experienced SOF helicopter pilot and field grade officer, he often bore the brunt of the Air Boss's ire for the various problems that occurred on his flight deck.

55th SOS maintainers deployed to the *America* in two elements, 15 boarded the ship directly at Virginia Beach, and the other 10 deployed with the 5 MH-60Gs flying from

Hurlburt Field to Wright Army Air Field (AAF) and then to the *America* the next day. On the first day, one of the MH-60Gs got a recurring engine chip light warning, so the crew flew it to Wright AAF on one engine. That night, our maintainers got a fresh engine flown in from home station and successfully changed it out in record time – only two hours! Passing the functional check flight (FCF) on the first try, all five MH-60Gs arrived aboard the carrier on time.

Once aboard, the entire 55th maintenance section quickly adjusted to the unfamiliar and occasionally dangerous work environment of the very large and crowded combat ship at sea. Given that our Pave Hawks were positioned on the flight deck for the entire deployment, they conducted most of their work out in the elements, day and night, on the flight deck, 73 feet above the sea, on a ship that was always underway. Ironically, the Navy prohibited aircraft maintenance on a flight deck at sea for safety reasons, but allowed it in this case since there was no room in the hanger deck. Navy regulations also required 24-hour observation of aircraft tied down on the flight deck to ensure moorings always remained secure, necessitating continuous 12-hour duty shifts. They took on the added task of frequently repositioning our helicopters on the crowded flight deck, including folding and unfolding the rotor blades due to space limitations, often at night and on a dimly lit flight deck, in response to the JSOTF's ever-changing launch and recovery preparations for upcoming missions. On one occasion, while the maintenance team was tying down rotor blades after a night flight and fresh water rinse, the crew chief noticed that the blades being guided into position by one of his team members had stopped moving. Next thing, the crew chief vaguely saw an arm reaching up over the edge of the flight deck. The airman who was guiding the rotor blades had fallen off of the edge of flight deck, but luckily was caught by the steel cat walk six feet below!

Another time our maintainers had to change a main rotor blade, requiring a track and balance and FCF on the flight deck during ongoing JSOTF shipboard operations. In another case, they needed to change a tail rotor gear box, but the ship would not permit the ground runs and FCF on or from the ship at that time. So, one of our aircrews flew the maintainers in the Pave Hawk to NAS Guantanamo Bay to perform the work, but enroute had to make a precautionary landing on a remote island due to a main gear box caution warning light. Their escort helicopter flying overhead, radioed down to let them know that locals were coming to the edge of the cliff to observe. The pilot laughing commented, "Well, if the locals [were] armed, who should we aim for first!" Eventually, they got to Gitmo, fixed the helicopter, and returned to the ship ... but not before spending a few very cold nights on a racket ball court in their sleeping bags while the helicopter was getting repaired.

Despite all the challenges and having only a fraction of our normally-deployed spare parts on the ship, our maintainers generated an incredibly high mission rate of 110 out of 111 tasked sorties, totaling 307 flight hours for the entire deployment. This enabled our Pave Hawk aircrews to

provide highly effective CSAR coverage for virtually every JSOTF mission during the deployment at sea. As squadron commander, I witnessed, with great pride, how well our 55th SOS personnel adapted to living and operating on the ship, and integrating with their JSOTF counterparts and the crew of the USS *America*, all with outstanding results.

Our personnel quickly adjusted to the reality of life at sea; cramped berthing, seemingly non-stop bells and whistles that constantly interrupted our ever-changing sleep and work cycles, finding our way around the very large and confusing ship and, for our maintainers who never left the ship, soon accepting what became their inescapable daily routine: Eat, Work, Eat, Sleep, Repeat! However, there were no complaints about the ship's food which was always great and always available, especially the self-serve soft ice cream dispensers. One of our Airmen mentioned how lucky he felt that one of his team mates had already been on the *America* with the advance team. He learned his way around the ship before the squadron embarked, and mastered complex things like how and where to get the laundry done!

Very early on the first morning aboard, we abruptly awoke to the voice of the Captain of the "Big Dog" (the *America's* nickname), loudly addressing the entire ship on the public address system. He welcomed JSOTF personnel to the ship and proceeded with his daily updates and announcements. While this was at first a rude awakening (literally) for JSOTF personnel trying to maintain a night schedule, the Captain gladly moved his daily updates to later in the morning. In fact, the Captain and entire ship's company were always very helpful to JSOTF personnel, especially given the dissimilarities and challenges the JSOTF brought aboard their ship. The Captain would ultimately finish his career as Deputy Commander, USSOCOM.

One Navy maneuver that us "Shrubs" (a term of endearment given to some of us JSOTF folks by our Navy friends onboard - because of the green camouflage uniforms we were wearing on the ship) found fascinating was the Navy's Underway Replenishment (UNREP) iterations: Throughout the deployment, the *America* maintained a holding pattern at a position it called, Voodoo Station just over the horizon from Port au Prince. Occasionally, a Navy replenishment ship would rendezvous with the *America*, steam in close formation aside her beam and pass necessary food and supplies. In addition to fuel hoses and other lines connecting the ships, two Navy CH-46 helicopters simultaneously performed highly synchronized flight maneuvers transferring crates of supplies to the *America*.

There was no alcohol aboard the ship during the deployment to our knowledge, ... Except for one time, late in the deployment, the leadership authorized a "beer call." Anyone wanting to participate was to go to the flight deck and receive no more than two cans of beer. However, all beer had to be consumed on the flight deck. No beer was allowed to be taken below. We were most grateful!

Five weeks into the mission, Haiti had stabilized and the former president had returned. Even though the JSOTF remained on the USS *America* for a short while longer,

three of our five MH-60Gs were released from the ship and repositioned to Guantanamo Bay, where the 55th stayed in a ready response posture for a week. They were then released to self-redeploy to our home base at Hurlburt Field. Our remaining two MH-60Gs stayed on the *America* providing CSAR coverage for the debarkation of all remaining JSOTF forces, which occurred near Jacksonville. The two remaining 55th SOS Pave Hawks were the last JSOTF aircraft to depart the USS *America* ... giving meaning to the saying, "First on - Last off".



Operation Uphold Democracy was a very successful and unique experience for our squadron due to the dedication, agility, and teamwork of all of our deployed personnel. The 55th SOS went on to win the 1994 AFSOC Squadron of the Year Award for this and many other significant events that year. As summarized in that award, "During UPHOLD DEMOCRACY the 55th flew 307 hours, providing direct, specialized combat recovery support to US Special Forces on the ground in Haiti. No special operations mission flew from the USS *America* without the 55th providing combat search and recovery (CSAR) coverage. The squadron operated five weeks afloat, validating at war the adaptive joint force concept proposed by the Commander-in-Chief, US Atlantic Command. Even after departing Haiti, the 55th SOS provided two geographically separated SAR coverages, one for all aircraft as they flew off from the carrier to Hunter AAF, and the other for aircraft remaining in Guantanamo, Cuba."



*About the Author: Colonel John Zahrt served in the Air Force for 29 years and participated in Operations Desert Shield/Storm, Provide Comfort, Uphold Democracy, and Allied Force (Kosovo). As 55th SOS commander he was also the deployed mission commander during Operation Uphold Democracy. Later, he served as 352nd SOG commander supporting EUCOM. Significant staff tours included HQ USAF, OSAF, HQ USSOCOM, and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Policy.*

*Contributors to this article are Colonel (Ret) Lee dePalo, Brigadier General (Ret) Billy Thompson, and Captain (Ret) Troy Kohler. Pictures courtesy of Colonel (Ret) Lee DePalo and USS America Public Affairs Office.*



# Air Force SOF MH-60G

## Weapons Development and Testing

*By Lt Col Jim Osborn, USAF (Retired)  
Chief, MH-60G Special Missions  
Operational Test and Evaluation Pilot, ISOW*

The 1980s were the formative years for development of our national response capability against ever-evolving terrorist groups. Helicopter air support for special operations forces (SOF) counterterrorism operations was jointly provided by both Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and the U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. The combined expertise resident in these two organizations provided joint special operations task force (JSOTF) commanders and contingency response planners a wide range of capabilities that could be quickly tailored to best meet a national mission requirement.

After the Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff Initiative 17, which directed that all responsibility for rotary-wing air support to SOF be transferred to the Army, USSOCOM and the Army provided increased funding and resourcing for the 160th SOAR. As was discussed in the previous issue of Air Commando Journal, "The True Story of the Pave Hawk," the point of transferring the rotary-wing mission to the 160th SOAR was a "turf grab" that was not based upon existing capabilities. Because it was going to take the Army years to recreate and replace AFSOC's fleet of inflight refuelable

helicopters equipped with all-weather, long range, precision internal navigation system, implementation of Initiative 17 was delayed almost 20 years. A frustrating dichotomy evolved, with JSOTF planners having to manage a bifurcated system of short-range 160th SOAR helicopters and the long-range helicopters from the 55th SOS.

The requirement to provide armed escort for infiltrating SOF helicopters and the ability to provide supporting fires for the customers on the target was one element of the plan for AFSOC's MH-60s. (Editor's note: Also in "The True Story of the Pave Hawk") The 160th SOAR eventually fielded an armed version of the UH-60, called the Defensive Armed Penetrator (DAP) out of deference to the Army's attack helicopter community, but in the beginning arming the AFSOC MH-60G Pave Hawks was seen as the fastest and surest way to fill the void identified in the Army's Operational Concept for Armed Escort for Special Air Operations.

In 1988, AFSOC directed that Warner Robbins Air Logistics Center and the 18th Flight Test Squadron accomplish armament feasibility studies and testing on the

MH-60G. That direction was understood as a requirement to do limited adaptive development and mission representative testing, in order to assess the potential of the newly enhanced Pave Hawks to fill the armed escort mission capability gap.

Technically, the test effort was far from a new start. AFSOC had previously operated armed UH-1 helicopters,

unit-level maintainers. The added bonus was that using the existing ESSS also met the requirement that AFSOC's MH-60Gs retain their ability to perform the full range of intended missions – lift, armed escort, and combat search and rescue.

We equipped the ESSS hard points with aircraft bomb ejector racks that retained the bore sight adjustments, thus eliminating the need to accomplish bore sighting during an operational configuration build-up. Our target timeline was to develop a system that could be configured or de-configured without specialized ground support equipment in less than one hour. All the weapons control panels we used were common across the Department of Defense and did not require any developmental testing. The guns we tested during this effort were 7.62 mm mini-guns in forward firing mode, ESSS- and floor-mounted .50-caliber machine guns, and an ESSS-mounted 20 mm cannon

Given the wide range of potentially feasible rocket powered weapons available and resource limitations, we decided to “bracket” the mission capable resources during this test, with the 2.75-inch rocket at the bottom end and the AGM-65E laser-guided Maverick missile at the top. The Maverick selection was not without precedent as it had already been

successfully integrated on the Army's Cobra and Apache attack helicopters.

Rockets launched from 7- and 19-tube pods mounted on the ESSS provided the data for the rocket firing compatibility and feasibility assessment. The 2.75-inch Folding Fin Aerial Rocket was given primary consideration as the Services were still using it and investing in upgrades to that system. These improvements included adding variable fusing and self-guiding seeker heads leading to the AGR-20 version still in use today. US Army testing had already proven the capability and compatibility of the AGM-114 Hellfire with their UH-60 Blackhawks.

Testing of the laser-guided Maverick was scheduled at the end of the planned firing trials; it did not go as planned, though. The news of our intent to test fire the Maverick from an MH-60 triggered a series of objections from multiple sources. Their point was that adding a Maverick capability to our helicopter was “not in our wheelhouse,” so the test sortie was cancelled.

On the positive side, the MH-60G's fully integrated cockpit navigation and sensor displays provided a readily exploitable means of precision weapons control. The integrated FLIR (forward looking infrared) cockpit display provided both true boresight cueing and enhanced target recognition capability. The virtues of having government



**Captain Jim Osborn and the MH-60G weapons test team, August 1990** (Photo courtesy of author)

and furthermore the weapons selected for feasibility testing already existed in the current Air Force inventory. Additionally, the 55th SOS, which operated the MH-60G, was assigned to Eglin AFB, conveniently co-located with the Air Force's Air Armament Center. That meant development and testing could be accomplished with ready access to the most extensive aircraft armament data in the world. The project also enjoyed enthusiastic technical and logistic support from Army, Navy, and Air Force aircraft armament support centers. On the non-military side, Sikorsky and the pertinent armament industry representatives offered technical consultation and test article resources. The potential combined effect of this serendipitous collaboration was that it would significantly reduce program costs and give the test team exceptional access to some of the best air armament and aircraft testing minds in the business.

As we began exploring options for arming the MH-60s, our conclusion was that mounting weapons onto the airframe, as had been previously done with AFSOC's armed UH-1s, would not work due to the proximity of the air refueling probe to the projectile trajectory during weapons firing. Instead we focused on the existing UH-60 External Stores Support System (ESSS), a piece of equipment that could be quickly installed or removed by

owned MH-60G source code also allowed us to easily add 7.62 mm, .50-cal, and 20 mm ballistic tables into the flight management system control display unit software, along with a range-adjusted impact aim point “pipper,” the center of the gunsight reticle. The same range-adjusted aim point pipper and boresight reference cues were also replicated in the NVG HUD (head-up display), providing a night head-up deployment option.

The ESSS-mounted .50-cal forward firing weapons proved to be very accurate and reliable. Both pod-mounted weapons, the Belgian FN single barrel and the GAU-19B three-barrel Gatling gun, performed flawlessly. They complemented and significantly extended the effective range of the organically mounted 7.62 mm mini-guns in the fixed forward mode. Employing the two systems sequentially gave the aircraft the capability of providing an impressive single pass quantity of precision fire on an objective target. A cabin floor mount for the M-2 .50-cal machine gun demonstrated the viability and utility of this proven crew-served weapon from the MH-60G cargo door, both with and without the ESSS installed.

Before we could evaluate the GPU-2A 20 mm gun pod we conducted ground tests and engineering studies to check for possible excessive reaction loads, the potential for structural cross talk during simultaneous firing of multiple weapons, and if there might be excessive blast effects to the aircraft and crew. All preliminary tests were concluded with positive results and confirmed the needed safety margins, so we proceeded with the planned evaluations. Two gun pods with magazine capacities of 300 rounds each were installed on the inboard ESSS wing stations, firing PGU-27 enhanced 20 mm ammunition throughout the trials.

The MH-60G’s integrated fire control and weapons performance produced unprecedented results at known distances with repetitive bursts during target engagements out to 2,000 meters. Due to the exceptional handling

characteristics of the MH-60G, pilots were able to stay on target during long duration bursts. In fact, during one of the test profiles this long duration burst capability resulted in a spectacular structural meltdown of a 1950s-era F-86 Sabre



**Captain Osborn in front of the fully weapons configured MH-60G Pavehawk.** (Photo courtesy of author)

being used as a ground target!

Day and night firing trials with the full weapons complement were flown, engaging targets in representative mission scenarios, including engaging targets designated by ground forces. The dual capability to both escort MH-53s and also provide supporting fires in a high drag configuration was evaluated and validated during live-fire tests. An extended range night profile – a 350-mile flight to the target with multiple inflight refuelings – validated the MH-60G’s ability to meet the need for long range armed escort. The armament configuration tested for suitability consisted of four forward-firing machine guns and two 19-tube rocket pods. The Pave Hawk easily handled the load and the test observers were impressed with the accuracy and system capability.

The test results and suitability trials confirmed that the MH-60G was a viable platform for the armed escort mission. The conclusions of AFSOC’s study were subsequently validated when the 160th SOAR and the Colombian and Turkish Air Forces successfully fielded very similar armed UH-60 helicopter. Unfortunately for AFSOC, USSOCOM killed the program because of the threat it posed to implementing Initiative 17 and all Air Force MH-60Gs were re-missioned and eventually transferred to Air Combat Command for combat search and rescue.



*About the Author: Lt Col Jim Osborn began his military career in the US Army serving 12 years, with a combat tour in Vietnam flying AH-1 Cobra helicopter gunships. He transferred to the Air Force and served an additional 26 years logging over 9,000 hours in H-53, H-60, and H-1 helicopters flying combat rescue and special operations, as well as flying counter-drug interdiction operations for the State Department’s International Law Enforcement and Narcotics Affairs in South America. Colonel Osborne is retired and lives in the Fort Walton Beach area.*



**EMERALD COAST  
HARLEY-DAVIDSON**

788 BEAL PARKWAY NW  
FT WALTON BEACH, FL 32547

EMERALDCOASTHD.COM  
850.937.7070

**Proudly Supports  
Air Commandos!**



# Rescue of Hammer 34



**55th SOS shortly before leaving Brindisi going back to Hurlburt.** (Photo courtesy of Bill Denehan)

*By Bill Denehan, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)*

The footsteps on the wooden planks that joined the alert cabins on Tuzla Airfield, Bosnia sounded more urgent than the normal foot traffic between the ‘Hooches’. Our cabin door opened and someone announced that an aircraft had been shot down over Serbia. It was 2 May 1999 at about 0215 local and I had just climbed into my sleeping bag. The Operation Allied Force bombing campaign began on 24 March and was estimated to last about a week before Serbia would sue for peace. Yet here we were at the alert facility in Tuzla five weeks later. Our CSAR force was composed of elements from Joint Special Operations Task Force-Noble Anvil (JSOTF-NA), which consisted of MH-53Ms from the 20th SOS, MH-60Gs from the 55th SOS, both out of Hurlburt Field, FL, and MH-53Js from the 21st SOS out of RAF Mildenhall, UK. Crews were rotated to Tuzla to stand alert for two nights then returned to Brindisi, Italy for other tasking in the air of responsibility or AOR. On this particular evening both MH-53 Pave Low crews were from the 20th SOS.

During mission planning crews from the three squadrons had requested a CSAR ‘package of just two aircraft, an MH-53 and an MH-60. However, BG Bargewell, the JSOTF-NA Commander, called for the force to include a 10-man Special Forces A-team based on his experience in Vietnam. This requirement demanded the inclusion of an additional MH-53. All three aircraft carried the same load of two PJs and a Combat Controller to provide continuity should one of the aircraft have to abort the mission or be shot down. The SF A-team was split between the two MH-53s, thus giving the CSAR force three dozen personnel aboard the three helicopters. In addition,

the mission commander Lt Col Steve Laushine, 55th SOS commander was in the lead MH-53M. As the alarm went up in Tuzla this cast of 36 men scrambled to plan, prepare aircraft and gather gear for the mission.

Capt Kent Landreth (Flight Lead), Lt Col Laushine, myself (MH-60G aircraft commander) and Lt Tom Lang (MH-53J Aircraft Commander) examined the wall map with the survivor’s coordinates plotted to determine the best ingress route into Serbia. The survivor, F-16 pilot Lt Col Goldfein, was the commander of the 555th Fighter Squadron out of Aviano AB, Italy. He was egressing off a target in Novi Sad when his aircraft was hit by shrapnel from an SA-3. Unfortunately, he could not glide the stricken aircraft over the border, and ejected about 16 miles west of Belgrade. The coordinates put the town of Loznica, Serbia in a direct line to the survivor and intelligence reports placed a mechanized infantry unit in and around the town. Because of this threat we decided the flight would divert to the south of Loznica and cross the border in what appeared to be a much safer area. The biggest factor to the success of the mission was time. Sunrise was only three hours away and given the robust Serbian air defenses a daylight rescue mission was not in the cards. Our standard operating procedure for the operation was that rescue missions would only be conducted during hours of darkness and given the amount of fire we received that night, a day rescue in Serbia could have proved disastrous.

With the survivor’s data and as much information as we could gather, we headed out to the aircraft to prepare Skat flight for the mission. The first indication that things were not

going to go as planned manifested itself on the runway before take-off. During the communications check we discovered that the only operational secure satellite communications (SATCOM) in the formation resided in the Chalk #3 MH-60G Pave Hawk. The aerial gunner sitting in the Pave Hawk's left window behind the co-pilot was responsible for the SATCOM, because the console was set up next to his seat. This left the responsibility of communicating with command and control agencies and relaying that information to the rest of the formation up to my gunner, TSgt Jack Gainer. Jack was a very experienced former Pave Low gunner and undeniably more than up to the task.

As we sat on the runway in Tuzla, we listened to AWACs and Airborne Command and Control (ABCCC) organizing a "Gorilla" package of fighters coming off targets in Serbia and "Sandy" A-10s in transit over Bosnia. From what we could discern, many of the fighters were in need of fuel and were enroute to the tankers. We then heard from ABCCC that the rescue mission would be delayed for two hours in order to refuel and organize the supporting aircraft. This information was relayed to Lt Col Laushine in the lead Pave Low, callsign Skat 11. Because of the fast approaching sunrise, we did not have two hours to wait and Laushine made the decision to



**Morning after Hammer 34 rescue. Left to right, Lt Col Steve Laushine (mission commander), Capt Tom Kunkel (co-pilot), SSgt Rich Kelley (flight engineer), Capt Bill Denehan (aircraft commander), TSgt Jack Gainer (aerial gunner).** (Photo courtesy of Bill Denehan)

launch Skat flight towards the border. The rescue needed to happen now or it would have to wait until the next night, leaving Goldfein an entire day attempting to evade capture by the enemy. Jack then informed ABCCC that Skat flight was departing Tuzla enroute to the survivor at 0348 local.

Blacked out, Skat flight headed southeast towards the border. We soon noticed that all the lights in the towns we overflew were being turned off. Our helicopters were definitely being tracked. This was no surprise since the media had published in depth information regarding the Vega 31/F-117 rescue, which had taken place on 27 March by our Task

Force. The articles described the location from which the rescue force departed, so the Serbians knew exactly where to look for us. In addition, this part of Bosnia was predominately Serb and sympathetic to their kin across the border.

As Skat flight approached the Sava River south of Loznica, which formed the border between Bosnia and Serbia, a blanket of fog could be seen covering the river valley though the surrounding hills were clear. The moon was full and the sky was cloudless, definitely not optimal conditions for a flight of helicopters attempting to slip into enemy territory undetected. The formation flew just above the fog bank and I felt very exposed to visual detection and possible AAA fire from the approaching hills, which lay just over the border in Serbia. When the formation reached the halfway point over the foggy river, two missiles were launched from hills at our twelve o'clock. In conversations with all of the crews after the mission, most of us initially thought that the missiles were meant for allied fighters. We quickly realized that the missiles were meant for us. The formation didn't have any terrain to mask in as we were just skimming the fog, so we deployed chaff and flares as we dashed to the safety of the terrain on the far side of the valley. The radar warning receivers in our Pave Hawk remained silent as crewmembers would later report seeing the SA-6 missiles pass overhead. It appeared that the Serbs knew where we were crossing, but were either unwilling to turn on their radars and risk exposing their positions to HARM equipped allied aircraft or maybe we were in a position that they could not lock on to us.

As we crossed into Serbian territory, crewmembers in the Pave Lows reported seeing some AAA coming from the valley. Because of the attention we were receiving at this ingress point, Kent Landreth turned the formation north as we entered the hills of Serbia. Just after completing the turn my flight engineer, SrA Rich Kelley, sitting in the right cabin window behind my seat, announced a missile launch at our 5 o'clock at close range. The terrain favored a left turn and I banked hard and launched a salvo of chaff and flares. The turn was quick and when I rolled out my gunner Jack called out the missile. As he made the call, I launched another salvo of countermeasures and dove for the ground to mask in the trees and terrain. I never saw the missile, though the Chalk 2 MH-53 tail gunner, SSgt Dan Weimer, later reported that the missile passed over us and behind his aircraft.

Kent Landreth and Steve Laushine then made the decision to cross back over the river into Bosnia to find a better ingress point. Passing back over the river more AAA drifted out of the fog but was unable to find us. Over safe terrain in Bosnia Skat 11 led the formation south. The MH-53M was equipped with an impressive avionics suite which included a digital moving map, common in modern helicopters, but state of the art in 1999. Using the moving map and data link information available to him, Kent picked another crossing point further south. This crossing point proved to be undefended and Skat flight safely reentered Serbia and turned toward the coordinates received for Hammer 34.

As Skat flight sped towards the survivor the formation stayed as low as possible using the terrain to mask us from

detection and ground fire. While scanning the terrain, Pave Hawk flight engineer Rich Kelley spotted tracers arcing towards Skat 14 from the second story of a building at our 3 to 4 o'clock. Without hesitation Rich returned fire with his GAU-17 7.62mm minigun and his 3-4 second burst silenced the ground fire. Pararescueman, SSgt Jeremy Hardy and Combat Controller SSgt Andy Kubick both later reported seeing the tracers approaching the aircraft, but Rich responded before they could alert the crew. As soon as Rich let off his trigger he called out the threat area and I banked away. Scanning the instruments, everything looked normal and I did not feel any feedback in the controls. Rich reported hearing a whistling sound and thought that we may have taken some rounds in the rotor blades. Given that the aircraft appeared to have escaped major damage, we continued following Skat 11 and 12.

Nearing the survivor's position, we could hear Hammer 33 talking to Hammer 34 on the designated frequency. We were somewhat surprised that we could only hear Hammer 33, but it was possible that we were still too far away to hear Hammer 34. Also, my copilot Capt Tom Kunkel checked the Personnel Locator System (PLS) to insure it was properly coded, but we were not receiving a signal from Hammer 34's PRC-119 radio. Something didn't seem right as we circled the area looking for signs of Lt Col Goldfein. Kent Landreth reported to Hammer 33 that we were over the location, but apparently Goldfein could not hear Skat flight's rotors. While the flight circled, exposing the helicopters to ground fire, there was a radio transmission from what I assumed to be Hammer 33 requesting that the survivor prepare a flare to signal the helicopters. Simultaneously, Jack Gainer called out that he had Hammer 34 in sight at 9 o'clock. I made a 90 degree turn and Jack gave vectors to a bright light about a mile away. The light appeared at the same moment of the radio transmission directing Hammer 34 to prepare a flare. I alerted Skat 11 that we had the survivor in sight and had broken formation. As we approached the bright light we quickly realized that it was a very bright floodlight on a building that had just turned on or was unmasked from behind another building as we flew by.

We quickly reported to Skat 11 that it was not the survivor and Jack got on the SATCOM to ask ABCCC for updated coordinates. As soon as Jack made the request on SATCOM the frequency blew up with traffic. It seemed that every agency listening simultaneously keyed their radios to offer assistance. Not being able to make any sense out of the cacophony and unable to get a word in edgewise, Jack did what gunners do and transmitted for all traffic on the frequency to "clear this f#@&ing net!" Instantly the radio fell silent. Jack then told ABCCC that the survivor was not at the original coordinates and asked for an update. Almost immediately, we received the new coordinates.

The reason for the confusion over Hammer 34's position was that his PRC-119 radio had a self-contained GPS that had not been initialized in theater thus making satellite acquisition difficult. The PRC-119s were new and the 555th Fighter Squadron had received their radios from the US just before the conflict started. I am not sure if the radio ever found its position throughout the course of the mission. The



**MH-53 crew Skat 11 taken the morning after the rescue.** (Photo courtesy of Bill Denehan)



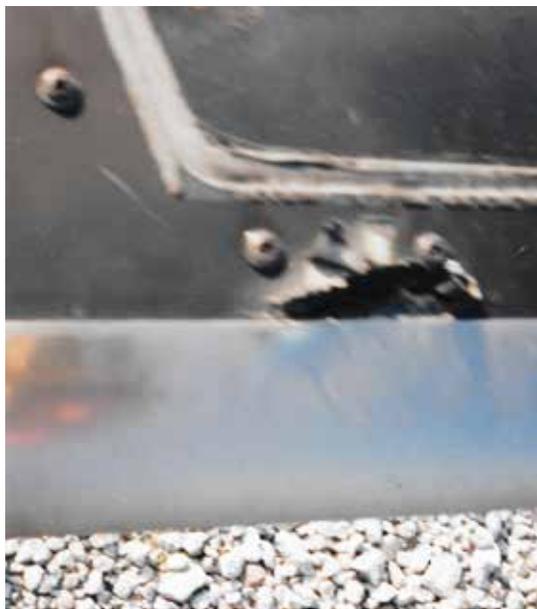
**MH-53 crew Skat 12 taken the morning after the rescue.** (Photo courtesy of Bill Denehan)



**Left to right Rich Kelley (flight engineer, DFC), Bill Denehan (aircraft commander, SS), Jack Gainer (aerial gunner, DFC), Tom Kunkel (copilot, DFC) after the awards ceremony.** (Photo courtesy of Bill Denehan)

coordinates that we were being given were from ellipses obtained from electronic warfare aircraft that used direction finding (DF) to triangulate Goldfein's position. I do not know if the final coordinates given were from DF or from another source.

Jack passed the new information to SKAT 11 and the formation continued further into Serbia towards Belgrade. Approaching the new coordinates, we began receiving Hammer 34's



**Exit hole of bullet in MH-60 main rotor blade looking from top down.** (Photo courtesy of Bill Denehan)

transmissions. Goldfein began to hear our rotors as we got closer and gave Skat flight very good vectors to get us within a mile of his position. As we passed to his south he turned on his infra-red strobe. Jack once again called the survivor in sight at the 9 o'clock and this time it was actually Hammer 34. I made another sharp 90 degree turn and saw the strobe dead ahead while calling Skat 11 that we had the survivor in sight. Lt Col Goldfein guided us all the way to the ground. The pick-up zone was sloped downward from the left to right so that the right landing gear strut was fully extended when we touched down. Hammer 34 crouched at our 1 o'clock. Hardy, Kubik and SrA Ron Ellis jumped out of the helicopter, accidentally knocking a box of MREs out the door as they departed. They ran to Goldfein who was on his knees in a

non-threatening posture.

Within a few seconds of interrogating the survivor, all four seemed to have heard something and began scanning the area. They suddenly stood up and began running to the helicopter. We later found out that they had heard gun fire in the area which was directed at Skat 11 and 12. After we had broken off from the flight, Skat 11 had directed Skat 12 to orbit east of the PZ while Skat 11 proceeded to our location in order to provide overhead support while we were on the ground and vulnerable.

When Goldfein and his guardians returned to our Pave Hawk they used the MRE box to assist in climbing into the aircraft as the cabin floor was at chest height because of the sloping terrain. They piled into the cabin with the PJs and combat controller lying on top of Goldfein. Rich Kelley and Jack Gainer assisted pulling them into the cabin. Once inside, they all began yelling "go, go, go" despite Goldfein's feet hanging out the door. I asked over the intercom if everyone was in the aircraft, but the crew was busy securing the precious

cargo and unable to respond. Given the urgency with which they ran back to the aircraft and everyone in the cabin yelling "go", I decided it was a good time to depart. As the helicopter rose to tree top level, I made the departure call as Skat 11 passed in front of us and we turned left to join up. Kent confirmed that we had Hammer 34 on board, then directed Skat 12 to rejoin and we sped towards the border with Skat 12 as chalk 3.

The sun was rising as we flew low over the Serbian countryside. I looked under the NVGs and determined that we could have flown unaided but the NVGs were providing some psychological comfort in that it still felt like we had the cover of darkness to conceal us. With the engines redlined, the Pave Hawk struggled to keep up with the faster Pave Low until we crossed the

border. Some of the crewmembers in the flight reported sporadic small arms fire while enroute and once again some AAA as we crossed the river. We dispensed the last of the chaff and flare crossing the river in case the AAA was radar guided.

When we landed in Tuzla the sun was bright as we shook Lt Col Goldfein's hand. He was quickly whisked away to an awaiting MC-130 for his less harrowing flight back to Aviano AB in northern Italy. We walked around the aircraft looking for damage and surprisingly enough were only able to find two bullet holes. One had punctured the tip cap on one of the blades which confirmed the whistling sound that Rich heard. The other round had entered the right side of the aircraft and came out in the left engine compartment breaking a bracket for the right engine cowl. This bullet could have easily ended the night for us as it was close to the engine combustion section. That could have been our "golden BB" but luck was definitely on our side that night.

The rest of the day was spent going over the night's action and already we were thinking of the lessons learned. There were things that definitely could have gone better, but overall the mission was a success because of the actions of countless Airmen. From the maintainers, air battle managers, and helicopter crews to PJs, CCT and fighter pilots all doing an outstanding job. And when things didn't go well, we fell back on training and experience to get the job done. Anytime, Anyplace.



*About the Author: Lt Col Bill Denehan is the former commander of the 23rd Flying Training Squadron, Pave Hawk instructor pilot, 6th SOS Combat Aviation Advisor and Aviation Tactical Evaluation Group staff officer. He joined the Army in 1986 and served as a CW02 flying the UH-1H in Desert Storm before earning a commission in the Air Force in 1994. He also served as a Royal Air Force exchange officer with 33 Squadron instructing on the Puma HC.1. After commanding the 23rd FTS at Fort Rucker, Alabama he retired to Colorado Springs, CO in 2014 where he is currently employed as a medevac pilot based at Memorial Hospital.*

# A Military Spouse's Perspective

## Dawn Goldfein's Remarks to the Jolly Green Association's 50th & Final Reunion 2019.

Dawn Goldfein thanks past and present members of the rescue community for their bravery as Air Force Chief of Staff Gen David L. Goldfein listens, during the banquet celebrating the 50th reunion of the Jolly Green Association, May 2019, in Fort Walton Beach, FL. (Photo courtesy of USAF, SSgt Janiqua Robinson)

What an honor it is to be here and honestly I am very humbled to be asked to speak. As a former school teacher, typically when I stand up in front of a group, I'm in a classroom and everyone in the room is shorter than me.

Lucky for me I have a husband who has given many speeches and he gave me some great advice when I asked him what I should say. He said, "Dawn, there is no such thing as a bad, short speech." So that's my number one goal.

Honestly, your community has held a special place in my heart for two decades now. Over the years I've heard the many names involved with Dave's rescue mission, but rarely had a face to match. That changed about 10 years ago when my husband was invited to officiate the promotion ceremony of Senior Master Sergeant Jeremy Hardy to Chief. When Dave received the invitation, he told me about it, and I didn't care if I had been invited or not, I was going to go. I finally got to hug some of the rescue warriors who were there on the night of my husband's shoot down. Airmen like Tom Kunkel, Andy Cooper, Jeremy Hardy, Chief Bean... it was a great ceremony. The party afterward was fantastic. There was a

barbecue on a deck over looking the Gulf in this area, surrounded by beautiful people eating delicious food...it was a great evening. A couple hours into it, Dave leaned down and said "Dawn, it's commander's departure time." That's when the commander leaves the party early...and that's when the party really gets started. I said, "Let's think about this...your the commander, I'm not." "Your the general, I'm not." You're driving, can you pick me up in a couple of hours? Just when the fun was subsiding, Dave and I got to go sailing on the Hardy's yacht. An impressive 47 foot sailboat. Oh my goodness what an experience, the boat was huge...it was gorgeous. We were served adult beverages in cute crystal-style glasses sailing around enjoying the company, the sun, the water...what a fabulous day. The euphoria stayed with us until we got back to Langley, which is where we were at the time. Some time later Dave said let's go sailing, so we did in our 1979 27 foot fixer-upper on the water... After sailing with the Hardy's, I felt like we were like three men in a tub with our knees up to our chins and our adult beverages were served in a red solo cup. The thought occurred to me. I said to

Dave, "You goofed." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "If you had been a Chief in a rescue squadron, we could have a boat like Jeremy!"

Tonight I want to share some things that you may not know about Dave and talk about your successful rescue on May 2 1999. I'll focus on the spouses perspective to fill in...as Paul Harvey used to say, "The rest of the story." As Dave said, we are high school sweethearts going back 43 years now. We've been married 36 years and as he said we are most proud to be brand new grandparents. We embraced the Air Force life because we actually grew up that way. Dave's father was Air Force and my step-father was as well. This is the only life we've ever known. When Dave took command of the "Triple Nickel" Fighter Squadron in July 1998, I couldn't believe he had gotten that old! It was actually a very interesting time back then because the squadron was preparing to go to war in Kosovo. You might remember (Slobodan) Milosevic and the genocide and the horrific things that were going on. The schedule was very grueling. Late nights, long hours, and on the weekends. I know you know what that is all about. It was really

difficult for some of the spouses in the squadron, particularly some of the younger spouses, so I told Dave it was wearing them down. He said, “Dawn I can’t tell you when we’ll get called to go into Kosovo...but what I can tell you, it might be a good night to have a potluck.”

Time went on, I was heading out the door to pick up our daughters from swim practice and the phone rang. It was Dave. He said, “Hey babe, tonight is good night for a potluck...gotta go.” Click! I thought, my goodness,



**Mrs Dawn Goldfein greets her husband at Aviano Air Base following his rescue.** (Photo courtesy of Steve Laushine)

this is it. I called a friend to pick up our daughters and then I called the DO’s spouse and said, “Sharon, I got a hankering for a potluck, I know its late. Let’s tell the ladies bring the kids, bring whatever you have in the refrigerator or whatever you’re making for dinner and come over to the house.” I looked at my watch and it was about 3:30 PM and thought none of the spouses will come...we did the old phone tree and between the two of us we contacted all the spouses. Do you think any of them came? A hundred percent of them came. They were hungry for news. We were fortunate that Dave was able to leave the squadron a little bit later that evening and he came in and gave a little pep talk. He told the spouses that the pilots were ready and the maintainers had maintained those aircraft...they were pristine. They were excited to be able to go into combat. It was the first night of combat and we spouses were actually thrilled be a part of it somehow. We walked out onto the front

lawn, with a glass of wine in our hands, and enjoyed the first launch of that campaign...24 F-16s in full afterburner and they flew over our house...it was awesome!

Several days into the campaign, this became our new normal. Dave would fly all night, come home eat dinner, just as our girls were eating breakfast. They would go off to school, he’d go to sleep. They’d come home from school, he’d eat his breakfast, they’d have dinner and then he’d go fly. That was the cycle for most of the pilots in the squadron. And for the whole time I never slept very well.

On day 39 (2 May), I woke at 1:45AM with a sick feeling, like something was wrong. I wasn’t worried about safety, but petty theft in Italy at the time was a problem. I walked around the house turning on all the lights and I walked outside. I thought somebody might be lurking around, but nothing was amiss. I went

back to bed, but not to sleep. At 5:30 AM the phone rings, it was the wing commander, Brig Gen Dan Leaf, at the time and he said, “Dawn Goldfein, it’s good news.” My wife and the team will be at your house in 10 minutes.” Click! In 10 minutes I got dressed, made coffee, ‘cause why wouldn’t you? I cleaned up the living room... ‘cause why wouldn’t you... there wasn’t a Barbie to be found after I was finished. It was the Tasmanian Devil act. The whole time I was praying because I knew the team was coming to get me to take me to another spouse...to her house to comfort her. I knew her husband was alive, but I didn’t know what shape he was in...and I prayed that I would say and do the right things for her. Then the doorbell rang, and at the door, when I opened it was the wing commander’s spouse, the Ops group commander and his spouse, the Med group commander, the chief of flight medicine, and this is what gave it away, our priest, Father Marty walked

up the sidewalk. I knew at that moment it was Dave. They said, “Dawn, Dave has been shot down over Serbia.” I asked what only any fighter pilot’s wife would ask, “How’s his jet?” I invited them in, or so I’ve been told, because I don’t honestly remember. I served them coffee, we sat in the living room, and we talked, I don’t remember what we talked about. I heard stories of other pilots who had to eject and it didn’t go well.

The call finally came. I told them I had to wake up our daughter. Our younger daughter spent the night with a friend. Our daughter was in the sixth grade at the time and I had to tell her that something had happened to her dad and we needed to get dressed and we were going to go meet him...meet the aircraft. We sat in Father Marty’s car and we prayed on the way to the flight line. When we arrived it was like, out of my peripheral vision, a sea of green, just floating around us. All these uniforms...maintainers, pilots, you name it. Everybody was coming to the flight line to see this aircraft land. When the C-130 finally landed, and the stairs were lowered, Dave walked down the stairs a muddy mess. It was the most beautiful site I had ever seen. After I hugged Dave, our very patient, and well disciplined daughter got to hug her daddy. After she hugged him she never left his side. An interesting fact that I learned later, and as God as my witness, Dave was shot down at 1:45AM that morning, the exact time I woke up.

I’ll never forget the first time I saw your motto of the rescue team, it was at the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron. It’s painted on the wall as you walk in “That Others May Live.” I can hardly wrap my brain around that. Your fearless history embodied in the motto “That Others May Live” has a far deeper meaning to me. “That Others May Live”, that a best friend may live, that a husband may live, that a father may live, that a grandfather may live. As just one spouse who benefitted greatly from your courage and your professionalism...from the bottom of my heart—Thank you!



# BOOK REVIEW

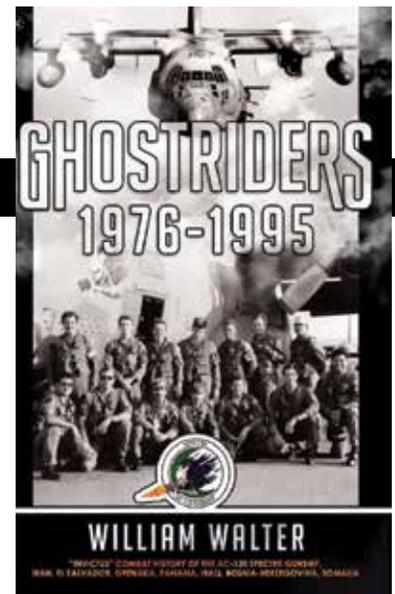
Reviewed by Lt Col Chay Derbigny and Dr. Ron Dains

## **Ghostriders 1976-1995:**

“Invictus” Combat History of the AC-130 Spectre Gunship, Iran, El Salvador, Grenada, Panama, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Somalia

**By William Walter, CMSgt, USAF (Ret)**

(Knox Press: Brentwood TN, 2022, 496 pages.)



CMSgt Walter’s second book provides unique insight into AC-130 Spectre gunship capabilities via a broad overview of special operations following the Vietnam conflict through the Cold War’s end. His stated purpose is to put “the reader in the aircraft as an **observer**, flying alongside a Spectre crew in combat?” **Observer** is emphasized because we believe there is a natural preference for “first person” accounts of exciting, often heroic military activities. Having to rely on declassified documents to weave the narrative, Chief Walter utilizes a “third-person omniscient” approach akin to *cinéma vérité* or “fly on the wall” documentation. The most current film example is Peter Jackson’s *The Beatles: Get Back*, wherein he compiled and edited archival footage of the band’s rehearsals and recording sessions to form the narrative without the aid of a “first-person” narrator. The insertion of direct, attributed quotes from mission operators often jolts the narrative, due to lack of transitional clues in the text. Though adding some richness to the chronicle, the reader is often forced to infer the connections, thus making an enjoyable read a bit daunting, especially for those with no personal, operational experience. Despite these shortcomings, Chief Walter presents a useful history of 15 operations

involving special operations forces that were inextricably linked to Cold War concerns, but misunderstood in both public and military communities due, in part, to intense focus on preventing a major war in the European theater. The following review highlights a few of these operations that did garner public and/or military attention, and thus collectively influenced future US national security approaches, US military structure, and foci on joint and multi-national operational capability.

The first three chapters cover Operation *Eagle Claw* (Iran), Operations in El Salvador, and Operation *Urgent Fury* (Grenada). Throughout these chapters the third-person omniscient approach is interrupted at times with quoted, first-person recounts of the missions, which pull the reader into them quite effectively. All three mission histories provide insight into the complexity of integrating disparate forces, yet the narrative is often difficult to follow, given the influence of too many and varying points of view. Regarding *Eagle Claw* specifically, the history reflects the resultant debacle in the desert, which led to many organizational reforms in the special operations community. When discussing *Urgent Fury*, Chief Walter inserts a portion of a Radio Free Grenada script that was a “call to

arms” to repel the American troops. Along with confronting a civilian “militia,” US forces were, once again, challenged by problems with technical and organizational interoperability. The author attributes passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act and Nunn-Cohen Amendment to *Urgent Fury*’s mission issues. While this mission played a role in passage of the act, common history presents several factors leading to it: the USS *Pueblo* and USS *Mayaguez* incidents, *Eagle Claw* or *Desert One*, bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut, and, most importantly, CJCS General David Jones’ testimony to Congress in February 1982 that “the system is broken.” Without the ability to check endnote or footnote sources in *Ghostriders*, it is difficult to follow up on Chief’s assertions.

Chapter 4 addresses Operations in Panama: *Elaborate Maze*, *Nimrod Dancer*, *Blue Spoon*, and *Promote Liberty* (which followed Noriega’s capture) along with the public and well-known Operation *Just Cause*. Chief Walter covers operations in this chapter from warning and execution orders through planning and execution with a deft handling of details. He provides the reader with an easy-to-follow chronology and exciting account of gunship crews conducting combat operations to fulfill relatively

clear political goals: bring Noriega to the US, protect Americans in Panama, restore order, minimize casualties, and promote democracy. Despite backlash on the political side, special operations forces acquitted themselves quite well and achieved mission success—a success that would prove crucial in the not-too-distant future.

Operations *Desert Shield* and *Storm* in Iraq are captured in Chapter 5, which is the shortest though most riveting chapter in the book. The USAF, writ large, learned from *Spectre* crews' collective struggle to integrate with fighter aircraft operations, due to communications and coordination gaps. The most obvious corrective measure was expanding USAF Fighter Weapons School to include all USAF aircraft – hence now it is USAF Weapons School. The author also acknowledges challenges AC-130 crews faced regarding the SAM and AAA environment. The most telling account is in Chief Walter's chronicle of tragedy in the early hours of January 31, 1991. The

rarely-heard accounts – from the crew members themselves – further entrenched the AC-130's established tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) mandating that it fly solely at night. The author presents a captivating story of AC-130 gunship operations in what most regard as a turning point in, and validation of, joint and multinational military operations.

Chapters 6 and 7 close the book with accounts of *UNOSOM II* operations in Somalia; and Operations *Deny Flight* and *Deliberate Force* in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These chapters tell a common, modern story of the adverse impact on military effectiveness caused by limited political objectives, restrictive rules of engagement, and politically-determined risk avoidance. Despite these operational constraints, Chief Walter documents the AC-130 gunship's effectiveness in combat operations, and equal impact when involved in the more nebulous and confusing humanitarian relief missions

that require military security for operational forces.

Due to classification issues, it is difficult for the public and most military members to recognize the complexity and impact of special operations missions, or the capabilities of platforms they use. Chief Walter offers both audiences a glimpse into that world, specifically that of the AC-130 gunship and the valiant crews who have performed courageously for five decades. However, the future will remain imagined as he ends his book by saying, "The story of *Spectre* continues to build under a cloak of darkness, even today."



*About the Reviewers: Lt Col Chay Derbigny is the ACSC Commander's Executive Officer and is an experienced T-53, C-146, and U-28 pilot. Dr. Ron Dains is the ACSC Dean of Educational Support.*

*The views presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of DoD or its components.*

## Calling All Air Commandos!



AIR COMMANDO



ASSOCIATION

Our goal at the ACJ is to tell the Air Commando and USAF Special Operations story, from our beginning to today. We need your help to do that. We seek quality articles, well written, factually based, and reflecting your experiences living the special operations mission in all of its complexities.

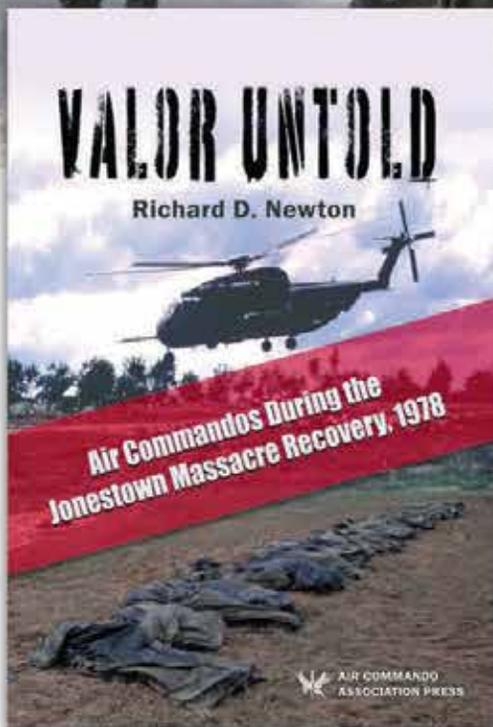
Submissions can be of any length, although 1500- 3000 words would be an average suggestion. All articles will be edited as per the Air University Style and Author Guide (please see the link online at [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org) under the Journal tab, and at the Hurlburt Field library).

Any articles written by active-duty members must go through an official Security & Policy Review process and must be submitted to your Wing Public Affairs staff prior to submission to the ACA.

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

Please visit our website: [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org) for more information

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.

**\$12** Order your copy today at  
**[www.AirCommando.org](http://www.AirCommando.org)**

Or call 850-581-0099 and order over the phone.  
Includes shipping & handling • Proceeds benefit ACA Press

*Valor Untold: Air Commandos During the Jonestown massacre Recovery, 1978* By Richard D. Newton  
Published by: Air Commando Association Press, 2021, 38 pages  
Limited Quantities Available • First Come - First Served



MH-60 Fini Flight • Hurlburt Field, Florida  
May 2021



**Supporting Air Commandos**  
**PAST • PRESENT • FUTURE**  
**Become a member today at [www.aircommando.org](http://www.aircommando.org)**