

AIR COMMANDO

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

JOURNAL

HALL OF FAME

2015 Inductees

B-26s to the Congo

AC-130 Combat Operations Over SEA

Air Resupply & Communications Service in 1951



Vol 4: Issue 3

Foreword by Richard Secord
Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)

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ON THE COVER

Airmen from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron wait on the flight line for their aircraft to be ready for takeoff, at Hurlburt Field. The Airmen conducted freefall and static-line jumps.

(USAF Photo by SrA David Salanitri / RELEASED)



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FOREWORD



I am very pleased to offer a foreword to this issue of the *Air Commando Journal (ACJ)*. After finishing a total of seven years as Vice-President, President, and Chairman of the ACA, I believe the single most important achievement during that time has been the publication of the *ACJ*. I'll put its quality and content up against any institutional publication. Since September 2011, the past four years have seen the Journal cover heritage stories along with contemporary matters of interest to all Air Commandos, past and present.

This issue is no different, and the stories behind the five new inductees to the Air Commando Hall of Fame fit in perfectly. The Air Commando warrior spirit and no fail credo described herein demonstrate why our fame and importance to the nation continue to grow.

I hope you enjoy this issue as I did!



Any Time, Any Place
Dick Secord, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)



CHINDIT CHATTER

The term “Air Commando” is a treasured name that connotes a lot to those who recognize the significance of all that it entails. There are many qualities that one must embrace and demonstrate to ensure the sanctity of the title is maintained and the legacies that are generated by the actions of an individual or a group to maintain the traditions of the Quiet Professional force. Each and every operation which comes down the pike, is a challenge to ensuring that that tradition is upheld. There is a very applicable saying in the SOF arena “You are only as good as your last op!”



This issue of *ACJ* is dedicated to Air Commandos who have demonstrated a lifetime of excellence, commitment, and accomplishments that go into making that legacy stand out as a whole. These are the 2015 nominees inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame. (I always make note here that it is the Air Commando Hall of Fame, not the Air Commando Association Hall of Fame.) This year’s inductees are all truly deserving of this title and join only 170 other Air Commandos who have received this recognition of total excellence.

This edition also recognizes the younger members of the Air Commando and AFSOC community who are already making their marks at an early stage in their careers. These are the 20 recipients of the annual Commander’s Leadership Awards, which the ACA presents every year during our annual convention. The young officers and enlisted members are selected by their leadership for this prestigious award. (It is important to note that ACA plays no part in the selection process.) As you read their citations, I think you will see that these folks are carrying on the tradition of the Air Commando in grand fashion and the Air Commando legacy is in capable hands going forward.

Many of the *ACJ*’s are dedicated to particular platforms that Air Commandos have used to conduct the operations that established the legacy. These machines were critical and we all developed a great affinity towards the platforms. Our readers understand that without the PEOPLE who flew, maintained or supported the platforms, they were just sophisticated piles of complex machinery. I hope the recipients of all the awards represented in this issue would agree that while they have been singled out for their contributions, there are hosts of other Air Commandos who have enabled their successes and who are worthy of like consideration for the same recognitions—unsung heroes if you may. Therefore, while we highlight the 2015 award recipients, I believe I am safe in saying that we salute all Air Commandos that have served and are serving this great nation.

Any Time - Any Place!



Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Ret)
ACA President and Editor In Chief

HOTWASH

To the Air Commando Association,

Thank you for your support to the families of TSgts Marty Bettelyoun and Timothy Officer. Your financial support to the families and the continued aid in various forms in the days following the accident was tremendously helpful. The men and women of the 720 OSS are forever grateful. Please accept our many thanks for all you have done.

Hooyah!

Jake L. Miller, Lt Col. USAF
Commander

Dear Col (Ret) Dennis Barnett,

On behalf of the families that benefitted from your generosity, the Airman & Family Readiness Center staff, and the Hurlburt family at large, I extend a heartfelt thank you for your contributions to our holiday food basket distributions. MSgt Anthony Beasley and Ms. Jeannette Moore were deliberate, professional, and enthusiastic in ensuring that the ACA provided whatever request was made concerning the baskets. Not only did they deliver collected dry and canned goods, but MSgt Beasley also purchased any items required to complete the 27 gift baskets that were given and used the ACA's donation of an additional \$475.00 towards the purchase of 25, \$25.00 gift certificates from the commissary. These baskets served 100 people. It was an honor to share your gifts with military families who were extremely grateful for the support at this time of year. There were several who shed tears of joy as they received unexpected blessings. We thank you for considering us this year and wish your organization continued success in years to come.

Sincerely,

Debra LunBlad, GS-13
Chief, Airman and Family
Readiness Center

Combat Shadow Farewell Issue

Dennis,

A "BRAVO ZULU" for the GREAT November 2015 issue! I have just finished reading it word for word, page by page,

front to back cover. This volume will go into my "Keep" forever pile of military history books and articles! The efforts by all involved were "WELL DONE" in presenting a compelling narrative on this wonderfully tough and forgiving lady. I was very fortunate to have taken your advice several years ago to transition to that community as a colonel and become mission ready on the way to assuming Group Command. At the time, there were war clouds on the horizon and you were prescient enough to know the Shadow would play a critical role in the effort. More importantly, you knew the culture as succinctly related by various Shadow community members. They quickly welcomed me to the family and made all of us ready for war. I had the honor to fly several combat sorties with the team and always came back to the launching base with successful results. The one point I will emphasize is the concept that was consistently shown, "We will succeed together or fail as a team, period." That team included maintenance, aircrew, life support, admin, intelligence, and the administrative staff! In closing, I must reiterate how well the full magazine represented the Shadow culture. While the Shadow may have flown its last flight, the AFSOC community, writ large, continues to profit from everyone who served in the now legacy weapon system. Keep up the exceptional work on the magazine!

Respectfully,

Maj Gen O.G. Mannon

Sir

You are far too kind but it is VERY much appreciated. The "succeed together or fail as a team" mindset is ever present in the publication of Air Commando Journal. We have a great group of volunteer editors, a magnificent graphics designer that pays attention to every detail, a passionate Marketing Director and of course all our volunteer author/contributors that have thus far treated this effort as a truly "no-fail" mission....fits the Air Commando ethos.

Thanks again and best wishes for a great Christmas to you and your family.

vr Dennis Barnett

The ACA puts out the best magazine by far. Well written stories and the look and feel of the magazine itself indicates the highest quality. These magazines will last many generations. Wonderful production.

Joe Arthur,
ACA Life Member

Dennis,

I finally made it to the mailbox to find my copy of the *ACJ*. It's outstanding! Thanks for putting it together for us all and for honoring our heritage as you did in your editor's letter. I have not-so-fond memories of taping up the cockpit in absence of the SOFI mod while an IP or two sat there doing nothing but critiquing the work. Those IPs will remain nameless but are etched in my head as part of my proud Combat Shadow heritage!

Thanks to all those that contributed and I echo T. Hill's assessment that if our Talon brethren are squawking, then all is right with the world. It wouldn't be AFSOC without that background noise.

Thanks again, Sir. Not just for this issue but for all you've done for ACA.

Very Respectfully,
Shelley Rodriguez

Inaugural Edition

Fellow Air Commandos:

In the inaugural edition of the *Air Commando Journal*, Vol 1, Issue 1, page 11, there is a photo in the article titled "A Zorro Tale." In the photo in which Col Aderholt (at that time) is shown front row left. A Maj George T. Albright is shown at the far right. Does anyone have any information on Maj Albright? I was with him in Lopburi Thailand for quite some time at Kokethiem RTAFB. Maj Albright was the commander of our detachment of approximately 10 which were TDY out of NKP in 67/68. Thanks for any information you can share.

Sgt David (Mike) Ellis

To All You Grenada Raiders

Yes, it was a screwed up mess, but I doubt many of you know the half of it, and if I never go through another deal like this, it will be too soon. But what I can't say enough, as in any combat operation I've ever been in, they all get screwed up to one degree or another, and like every combat mission I've been in, the aircrews and troops on the scene always make the right calls to make things happen according to the commander's intent. All of you did this in spades and I could never thank you enough. But here is a story you all need to know about so that you understand what a difference you made that night and long day of Oct 25, 1983.

I'd been seeing a doctor at White Wilson for a couple of years since our return to Niceville in 2010. She speaks with a very British accent. One day I asked her where she went to medical school. Her answer, Saint Georges. I told her as the Air Component Commander for URGENT FURY, we had something in common. She went on to say that our friend Coard in Grenada was pulling people off the streets and killing them and that she was about to be forced into a communist military youth organization. My doctor must have been in grade school at the time. And then she went on to say, "If you had not come, I would not be here today."

We warriors rarely get this kind of feedback. So now you know the rest of the story. Thank you.

Blessings, Bruce Fister,
Lt Gen, USAF (Ret)

Air Commando Medic of the Year

Thank you for choosing me as the CMSgt Roland "Hap" Lutz Commando Medic of the Year recipient for 2015. I am sorry I was not able to receive the award in person. Unfortunately, the timing of the award ceremony and my obligations at home station didn't line up. At the time of the award ceremony I was teaching a paramedic refresher course. On top of that, I was the only paramedic

instructor for USAFE and I had other military paramedics from other EUCOM countries flying TDY into England for my course.

Thank you again for the recognition.

Joe Archangel

A Ranger's Thank You to C-123s

I volunteer each Saturday and Sunday at the Air Mobility Command Museum, Dover AFB, in Delaware. But this past October I had some Volunteer Fire Company events to attend on the 24th and 25th, so I worked on Friday the 23rd instead. I am the Operations Assistant for the Museum and can show visitors planes that normally aren't open to the public.

Two older gentlemen came in during the earlier part of the morning and asked about our C-133, and if they could look inside it. One fellow seemed attached to the aircraft, so I bent the rules a little and took them inside. The usual conversation took place, he tells me how he flew on the C-133 aircraft, was stationed at Dover AFB, and talked about some of the "missions" he flew. The other fellow stayed silent.

The C-133 guy asked me if I served, I told him yes, from September 15, 1967 to September 15, 1968, NKP, Thailand. He was surprised that I said Thailand and asked about the mission there. When I told him I was in Special Operations, and served with the Air Commandos, the silent fellow took interest in that. He said he was in the Army and was with a Ranger unit that did recovery operations into Laos, above the DMZ. Their job was to find and recover downed pilots. He asked me, "You were in the Air Commandos?"

I replied, "Yes, ground crew, maintainers."

"Did you work on C-123s?" He asked.

"Sure did, lots of them." I answered.

The man just stood perfectly still and looked at me with serious cold eyes. He then said, "I have been waiting 47 years to talk to an Air Commando. You are the only one I have ever met. You

guys, the guys that flew and worked on the C-123 airplanes, you saved the lives of my buddies and me more times than I can count. If it weren't for those planes dropping much needed supplies and ammo, we would have been killed. Those pilots flew just above the tree tops and dropped us stuff. I want to shake your hand and thank you and those Air Commandos for me and my guys. We owe you our lives." He takes an Army Ranger challenge coin out of his pocket and gives it to me. He said he had been carrying it with him for years, just for this moment.

I said, "Thank you, brother." I saw tears in his eyes.


After we exited the air plane, they mentioned they did not plan on visiting the museum, they didn't even know it was there. They had a fishing trip scheduled out on the Delaware Bay, but a weather front came in and the boats wouldn't go out. The charter boat captain suggested they visit the museum. They told me it must have fate that caused all this to happen so they could meet me. I told them I wasn't supposed to be there that day, and was making up for a missed day. That really got us thinking.

So, to all the C-123 crews and maintainers that did missions into Laos, day time and night time, Bright Lite and Leg Horn, and other mission names he didn't know, Army Ranger Fred Weiman, ASA, 1st/44th, thanks you.

Since my joining the ACA, and then extending my involvement to the A-26 Group and the Air Mobility Command Museum, I continue to meet the most interesting and amazing people.

Harry Bright, ACA for LIFE

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

A detailed illustration of a B-26 Superfortress bomber in flight. The aircraft is shown from a low angle, emphasizing its massive size and the complexity of its four-engine design. The wings are light green, while the fuselage and engines are a darker olive green. The aircraft is flying through a sky with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The title "B-26" is prominently displayed in the upper right corner in a large, bold, dark green font.

B-26

The story of the Congo is a long and bloody one. That vast chunk of real estate dominating central Africa was once a colony of the country of Belgium and known as Belgian Congo until independence in 1960, when it became the Republic of the Congo (République du Congo). At this point, the naming gets to be a bit confusing.

From 1960 to 1964, the country was commonly known by the name of its capital, "Congo-Leopoldville", to differentiate it from its western neighbor, also the Republic of the Congo, "Congo-Brazzaville." In Aug 1964 the name changed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From 1971 to 1997, the name changed again and the country was known as Zaire. Since 1997, the country has again been called the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and western neighbor remains the Republic of the Congo. For this article, we'll go with DRC because that is the country's current name and what it was during the time of this story.

S to the Congo

By Maurice Bourne

Editor's Note: The Cold War was at its apex during the 1950s and 60s. The United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in an ongoing series of proxy wars across Asia, South America, and Africa, some of which have been covered in this journal. Recently declassified State Dept documents revealed that US operations in the DRC between 1960 and 1968 was the largest single covert operation in US history up to that time. This article is a first person account of how Air Commandos adapt to their environment and find ways to hack the mission with minimal equipment and in dire conditions.

Painting of a B-26K Counter Invader by Harley Copic
donated to the Air Commando Association.

In the summer of 1964 the 1st Air Commando Wing unexpectedly became involved in the Simba Rebellion, a communist supported revolution against the DRC. Che Guevara led a Cuban contingent of advisors to assist the Simbas.

In January of that year the 602nd Fighter Squadron (previously the 6th Ftr. Sqdn.) was grounded when its Douglas B-26B Invaders were found to be structurally unsound and no

Squadron, the C-47 and C-46 arm of the 1st ACW. I soon checked out as a navigator on the C-46.

Meanwhile, the USAF decided to completely rebuild and upgrade the B-26s for counterinsurgency work. This remanufacturing effort was contracted to the On Mark Engineering Company of Van Nuys, California.

The pledge at the old stag bar became, "The Sixth Fighter shall rise again!"

available former B-26 crew members were informed that three of our new aircraft, now redesignated the B-26K Counter-Invader, needed to be delivered to the DRC immediately. At that time we had only one "K" on the ramp at Hurlburt. The second and third aircraft to make the trip had just completed the modification program in California and were to be ferried to Florida the next day.

Forty-eight hours after we were informed of the requirement, three brand-new B-26Ks lifted off from Hurlburt Field and headed to Africa. Phoenix-like, the old WWII B-26Bs had taken to the skies once more as "K Models".

During the modification, the aircraft were fitted with long range ferry tanks hanging from the bomb shackles in the bomb bay. This was an 800-gallon rectangular tank and was not part of the aircraft fuel system. A fuel transfer switch was mounted in the cockpit and we could pump fuel from the ferry tank into our 125-gallon bomb bay fuel tank that was standard part of the aircraft fuel system. On long flights we were managing fuel from a total of eight tanks. When the DRC-bound K Models lifted off from Hurlburt Field each carried over 2000 gallons of high-octane aviation fuel, enough fuel to keep a B-26 in the air for over 10 long hours.

The flight was commanded by the lead pilot, Maj Siegel Dickman. I flew with him as his navigator. The second aircraft was flown by Capt John Slawson and navigator, Lt Charlie Kuchai. The third aircraft was flown by Capt Maury Dow and navigator, Lt Jack Mezzo.

The route flown was as follows:

Day one: Hurlburt Field to Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico. RON

Day two: Ramey AFB to Suriname, one of the three Guyanas on the northern edge of South America.

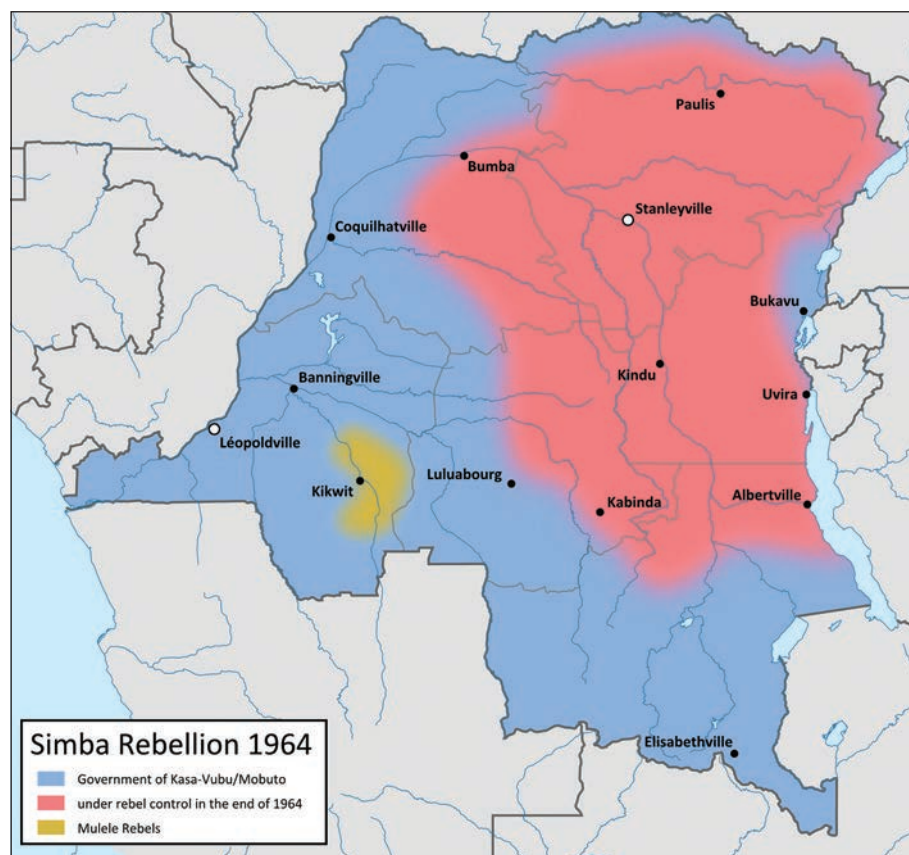
Day two (continued): Suriname to Recife, Brazil. RON

Day three: Recife, Brazil to Ascension Island, British Territory. RON

Day four: Ascension Island to Leopoldville (since 1966, Kinshasa), Congo. RON

Day five: Leopoldville to Luluabourg (now Kananga) airport for refueling.

Day five (continued): to Kamina Air Base, Katanga Province, Congo. Final



Map of Congo in 1964. (Courtesy of www.commonswikimedia.org)

longer airworthy. Tragically, it took the loss of an aircrew during a firepower demonstration on Range 52 at Eglin AFB to prove that the aircraft were old and tired. Stan Moore and Larry Lively, both Vietnam combat veterans and old air commandos died that night. The B-26s being flown by air commandos in Vietnam were grounded in April.

The 602nd became a skeleton squadron as the pilots and navigators found themselves to be aviators without airplanes to fly. Most of us were assigned elsewhere in the wing, but several went on to other commands within the USAF. I was assigned to the 319th Troop Carrier

One day a single, re-engineered B-26 appeared at Hurlburt Field. That lone aircraft underwent extensive evaluation by senior squadron pilots. It was rumored that new aircraft would soon begin arriving after being re-built in California.

It was generally assumed that as the new aircraft began to arrive the B-26 squadron would be reactivated. Although I enjoyed my new job as a C-46 navigator, I wanted to be one of those called back to the B-26. As a very junior 1st Lt, though, I was concerned that the B-26 squadron would be reactivated without me.

All that changed one morning. All

destination.

Thinking back over the years I have the following memories of that trip:

The Congo operation included far more people than I realized at the time. It included a maintenance team that had their own headaches regarding this new aircraft for which they had no manuals and few spare parts. These men were transported on a US Navy C-130 that was supposed to escort us out of Hurlburt, but did not show up. While I was busy packing, studying what little information we had on the new engines, navigation systems, fuel system, and armament systems, plus trying to get my last paycheck cashed (the rule back then was, “never leave home without cash in your pocket”), many of my fellow air commandos were busy planning the trip, arranging for landing rights, securing overflight permission from half-a-dozen countries, assuring that refueling requirements could be met, and countless other details.

Before departure the three navigators were handed flight plans that included all our required charts with the proposed flight paths drawn in and with all times, distances, and checkpoints clearly shown. All navigation aid frequencies and all enroute navigation frequencies, as well as tower frequencies, were listed. These flight plan packages included alternate routes, alternate airfields, emergency landing fields, weather information, and many other details. They proved to be not only essential, but extremely accurate.

The men who did all that work were as essential to the success of that mission as those of us who sat in the cockpits. Thanks, guys.

The six of us who were aircrew were told to wear only civilian clothes. This meant a quick trip to Sears and Roebucks to buy the work clothes favored by carpenters and bricklayers. On the aircraft we actually wore new flight suits that had no US markings. While we were in Africa, though, we wore the work clothes, jeans, and sport shirts we had tossed into our B-4 bags.

Before leaving Hurlburt we turned in our dog tags, our US driver licenses, our USAF ID cards, and the Geneva Convention ID cards we had carried in while in Vietnam. We were stripped

of everything that might identify us as USAF officers. This was all part of the State Department’s “plausible deniability” scheme that air commando crews often operated under back then. I did have the foresight, though, to pack a quart of Jack Daniels.

Later, while flying in central Africa with a Cuban exile pilot, I gave this “plausible deniability” business some thought. As far as I knew, there was not a US military rescue team anywhere on the African continent. I had no knowledge of the wars, armies, and revolutions taking place in that part of the world. It seemed to me it would be hard not to stand out. I quit thinking about it.

Maj Dickman was the commander of the 602nd. I had never flown with him, but I had been chewed-out by him. But that’s another story. He was clearly convinced that his flight of B-26s could fly anywhere on earth without a C-130

Maj Dickman’s position was that the C-130 was there to support the 602nd B-26 fighter squadron. The two officers disagreed.

There was talk of standing down the next day for crew rest. The B-26 crews had just completed a 14-hour flight and a rest day sounded good. But Dickman made it clear, the three aircraft under his command would be east-bound for Ascension Island at dawn, with or without a Navy escort. Dickman had been given clear orders by “Heinie” Aderholt, the wing commander. He intended to carry out those orders no matter what.

After a few tense moments, we all retired to our respective quarters.

The three B-26 crews had considerable experience on dive bomb runs over jungles, but launching out across 1400 miles of the Atlantic Ocean was a new game for us. My flight plan spoke sternly of a thing called a “point-



B-26K Invader in flight over South-East Asia, sometime between 1967 and 1969. (Photo courtesy of USAF)

serving as a pathfinder. The fact that it was a Navy C-130 did not help matters. I sensed from the first that there could be trouble. For starters, the C-130 was running late and did not catch up with the B-26 flight until we were approaching Recife on the second day and our maintenance support team was onboard the C-130.

When we first encountered the Navy crew on the Recife ramp it became evident that there was some question as to who was the boss of the operation. The Navy C-130 pilot, a Commander (Lt Col), outranked Maj Dickman. But

of-no-return”, an ominous sounding phrase that indicated the location on the flight path where we would not have enough fuel to return to Recife. Personally, the idea of a C-130 (even a Navy C-130) pin-pointing that speck on my chart labeled “Ascension Island” was rather comforting. But I knew when to keep my mouth shut.

The morning did not begin well. The bus that picked us up was running late. The C-130 crew was already on board, except one of their crewmembers was missing. The driver was directed to go to another location and the Navy

Commander got off to try and find his lost crewmember. Before getting off the bus the Commander looked straight at Dickman and said, "Hold this bus." The door had no more than closed than Dickman ordered the driver to proceed to the flight line.

At sunup we headed east out across the Atlantic. We were more than halfway to Ascension Island when the C-130 finally appeared on our wing.

The trip from Ascension Island to Africa was long and uneventful. At over 2,000 miles it was the longest leg of the trip. I was not overly concerned, though. I was pretty sure we could find Africa. We picked up the mouth of the Congo River and followed it inland.

Half-an-hour after making landfall we contacted the Leopoldville (Kinshasa) control tower. We were told that there was "action" on-going in the area and that the airfield was closed. That information didn't bother Dickman one bit. We flew to the airport and landed.

On the ground at Leopoldville all previous plans were thrown out the window. During the preflight briefing at Hurlburt we were told that our job was to deliver the three aircraft to Leopoldville

almost 800 miles into the interior, to an airfield called Kamina Base. It seems that the only way out of the increasingly dangerous Leopoldville airport was to fly out in the same airplanes we flew in on. But there was a bit of a problem.

It seems our flight planning kits did not contain any charts or aeronautical information east of Leopoldville. None of us had ever heard of a place called Kamina Base and had not the slightest idea where it was located. The navigators got busy walking up and down the flightline in search of somebody who had aeronautical charts for central Africa. Although Leopoldville had once been a busy air hub with lots of commercial traffic and with offices and maintenance facilities for several European air carriers, in the summer of 1964 it was deserted with armed soldiers everywhere and drunken revolutionaries with AK-47s rioting on the perimeter. There were no charts to be found. And as it turned out, there was no high-octane aviation fuel either.

During the search for charts, we finally got lucky. In one of the abandoned hangers there was still a local air service barely operating. A couple of Belgian pilots and mechanics were still in business. From them we got three geographical survey charts that had been made by mining companies several years before. These maps had no aeronautical information on them, but they did cover all of central Africa and showed the location of major towns, rivers, highways, railroads, mountain ranges, and the ground features we needed to find our way to Kamina Base. We were back in business!

There was JP-4 fuel available for the C-130, but little high-octane aviation gasoline. After much searching and some heated negotiations our pilots managed to buy a bit of fuel. I don't remember how much we put on but it was not enough to reach Kamina Base. Our new plan was to fly to Luluabourg (Kananga), about 500 miles to the east, where we were assured there was plenty of aviation gas. Thanks to our long-range ferry tanks we still had enough fuel to make the trip. We were also informed that Luluabourg was "no longer in rebel hands," a reassuring thought.

We departed Leopoldville at dawn after a bad night in shabby rooms with no water and bad food. The mining charts proved to be accurate, but the control tower at Luluabourg was unattended. Fuel was now an issue. We dropped the wheels and landed.

We were greeted by folks who spoke some English and we were assured that they had plenty of aviation fuel. They had been expecting our arrival (I think this was the US embassy at work) and were ready to supply us with all the fuel we wanted. There was a small problem—the pumps did not work and the only way to refuel our aircraft was for the locals to form a bucket brigade and load fuel over the wing. Each 5-gallon leather bucket of gas was carried up a rickety ladder and handed to the next man, who then carried across the wing to the refueling boss who dumped it into one of the large funnels placed in each fuel tank. The funnels were covered with a chamois skin to strain out any water and foreign matter from the gas. The pilots stood on the wing and watched this operation like hawks. They wanted to be sure that every gallon of gas was strained through the chamois skins. Our refueling crew worked quickly, but it takes a while to load several hundred gallons over the wing of a B-26 using 5-gallon buckets... and we had three B-26s.

With time on my hands I walked down the line a bit and checked out an old North American T-6 Texan that had been fitted with a single .30-caliber machine-gun pod under each wing. There was no way of knowing who was flying it. There was also a De Havilland DHC-3 Otter parked in the weeds. It was painted white and had United Nations markings. It looked like it had not been flown in a while.

We got out of Luluabourg late in the afternoon and headed south. We knew we would be arriving at Kamina Base after dark. There were no navigation aids working in the DRC. This was not new to B-26 crews since we had all seen service in Vietnam. Still, we got a little tight as a haze settled over the region and the sun dropped below the horizon. We were told that Kamina Base was an active airfield manned by Belgians and that the tower was equipped with Direction

Editor's Note: In 1966, then president, Mobutu Sese Seko, renamed many cities and towns with European names, giving them African names.

and turn them over to "a man." We all suspected this would be a CIA officer, but we really had no need to know for sure. The "man" was then to hand us tickets to depart Africa for Europe on a commercial airline. As it turned out, commercial air traffic had been discontinued several days before. There was a new plan and it did not include airline tickets to Europe.

When we met our support team on the ramp at Leopoldville the first thing they did was walk over to our three B-26s and start stripping the USAF insignia off the fuselage. "Just following orders," they explained.

We were informed that our new orders were to deliver the aircraft



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– Breanna Walters, daughter of Air Force Tech Sgt. Howard Walters who lost his life in 2003 while assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron.

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Douglas B-26K Counter Invader at the National Museum of the United States Air Force. (Photo courtesy of USAF)

Finding (DF) Steer capability. I had never heard of a DF Steer. Fortunately, our three pilots had all gone through pilot training in the early 1950s and remembered DF Steer from Flight Service stations as the “magic helper” that got many a lost aviation cadet home.

When we were about 50 miles out of Kamina, Dickman called the Kamina tower. We requested the DF Steer and were given a minor course correction. Soon after that we spotted the Kamina beacon. I cannot recall a time when I was as pleased to spot an airport beacon in the distance.

Memories of Kamina Base

Kamina Base was a whole new world. I had expected a sleepy little outback airport. In fact it had a long, wide, reinforced concrete runway that was worthy of a Strategic Air Command base in Texas. It may have been 10,000 feet long. Other than the runway and a couple of hangars, it was still a third world airport. It had once been an active base for the Belgian Air Force, and it was still manned by a small contingent of Belgian military personnel.

We were shown about by a Belgian sergeant who had stripes on his sleeve the size of a catcher’s mitt. The first rule was, don’t drink the water. The second rule was, don’t mess with the local girls.

For the duration of our Congo stay we drank no water and quenched our thirst only with Simba beer. We didn’t mess with the local girls either.

When we arrived, Kamina was the main base for a mercenary army being raised to take back the country from communist-supported revolutionaries. The operation had CIA support, and once again the air commandos were supporting the CIA. There were over 100 mercenary soldiers from all over Africa, Europe, and elsewhere who were in training there. This army of mercenaries was a mixed bag of former German, French Foreign Legion, perhaps some ex-convicts, and 19-year-old South African boys in need of a job. The size

of this force grew daily and in time would swell to over 500 mercenary soldiers.

Among the mercenaries was a contingent of ex-Cuban pilots and mechanics. These were the men who would fly our K Models for the next couple of years. The Cuban pilots had escaped to Nicaragua when Castro took Cuba. The men we checked out on the K Models were the same pilots who had flown the B-26Bs during the Bay of Pigs operation.

At that time I did not know what role we would play in Africa. It seemed to me that the situation was very similar to our experience in Vietnam. A developing nation was being threatened by a communist-inspired revolution, and America was supplying arms and manpower to help overcome our common enemy. Our job was to train the aircrews. In Vietnam we had learned that “training” foreign aircrews usually meant combat operations.

That was not to be the case in the DRC. Air commando operations there were limited, and our presence was short-lived.

We had limited printed information on the K Model. Our pilots flew regularly with the Cuban pilots to familiarize them with the new systems. Our navigators flew only a few flights with the Cubans to pass-on what little we knew about the new aircraft. Charlie Kuchai made one long reconnaissance flight to the northeast to the Lake Tanganyika area. As for me, I only made two flights out of Kamina Base. Both flights were with Gustavo Ponzoa, an ex-Captain in the Cuban Air Force. Those flights lasted for about an hour each and we just cruised around and looked at the countryside. Gus really liked the K Model. Gustavo Ponzoa and I became friends and I visited him in Miami a few years later. Gus is over 80 years old now and not in the best of health. He stills dreams of going back to Cuba.

It was about that time that I confessed something to Dickman I had avoided talking about. I was supposed to explain to Gus how the new bomb-arming system worked. The problem was that I did not know how it worked. I had never

used it, never read about it, and never been to ground school to learn about it. The truth was, I did not know very much at all about the new systems on the K-Model. The first time I ever became airborne in a K Model was the morning we left Hurlburt and headed for Africa. I was not hiding this, but no one ever asked me.

When the word had gone out for B-26 navigators I was still assigned to the C-46 squadron. I had walked over to B-26 ops and wrote my name down. It all happened pretty quickly. Not only did we not have flight manuals, we did not have airplanes. I know that all three of our pilots had checked-out in the single K-Model we had, and I'm pretty sure that both Charlie and Jack had had a couple of familiarization flights each—but not me. When I tried explaining this to Dickman a month and 10,000 miles later, he started to get mad. It didn't amount to much, though. I guess he figured that after flying halfway around the world together it really didn't make much difference.

As it turned out, Dickman, Slawson, Kuchai, and I remained at Kamina Base for a bit over a month. When we returned stateside Maury Dow and Jack Mezzo were left behind for another month or so to act as liaison between the Belgians, the mercenaries, and the Cubans.

Our quarters were run-down barracks with balky commodes and cold showers that produced bad water for a few hours on some days. We ate at the same mess hall with the soldiers. We ate a lot of weevil bread and blood sausage. Big chunks of the local bread were scattered about on all the tables in the mess hall. Pieces were torn off by hand or sliced off by whatever knife somebody was carrying on his belt. The bread was full of weevils.

As Americans we did not take well to eating weevil bread and blood sausage. But then we got hungry. There was an art to eating weevil bread. You sliced off a piece and just let it sit there on the table. Soon all the weevils would run out of it and could be brushed off onto the floor. This worked fine for several days until we discovered that if the piece of bread was allowed to sit on the table a second time just about as many weevils ran out of it as had come out in the first place. Third and fourth waiting periods continued to produce more weevils. After a while we followed the example of the soldiers—just eat your bread and don't worry about the weevils. It was pretty good bread—kind of crunchy.

All this time our maintenance crews were living at another area closer to the flight line. Unlike the officers, they did a lot of hard work. I think the training that went on in the maintenance hangar was a lot more serious than the training in the air.

At any rate, I know that after I had successfully managed to point a B-26 across the Atlantic Ocean and deep into the heart of Africa, I went on vacation. One of the best parts of being an air commando back then was that you got to see parts of the world most people never dreamed of.

The Congo was a primitive country in turmoil. Fierce looking men walked about in camouflage shorts and shower clogs. One would be carrying a spear. His partner might be carrying a sub-machinegun. We were told that these men believed that the patch of tiger skin on their weapons could

turn enemy bullets to water.

One day we went somewhere in a C-47 and ended up in a beer-joint where we bartered with local craftsmen for beautiful wood and ivory carvings. I bought a wood carving of three African deer. I also bought a carving of the head of a Congolese girl that was carved from a raw elephant tusk. Later, when I went through customs in Brussels, the customs officer informed me that it was unlawful to bring ivory carvings out of the Congo. I told him I didn't know that. He just shrugged and waved me through.

I have both of those carvings today. All these years later they mean far more to me than I ever could have imagined when I sat in a tumbledown beer joint deep in the heart of Africa and haggled price with a skinny old man in a loin cloth.

There was an H-21 Shawnee helicopter, usually called the "flying banana," based at Kamina. I had seen the H-21s in Vietnam. I'm not sure who flew it. It was supposedly for SAR, but it was used almost daily as a hunting platform. It seldom flew beyond the base perimeter and could be seen regularly swooping about wildly, hot on the tail of some deer-like African animal. Soldiers sat in the doors with machine guns and burned through boxes of ammunition. When they got a kill the carcass was tossed on board and the result was fresh meat in the mess hall.

There's nothing like a big meal of AK-47-riddled wild animal, weevil bread, and Simba beer to make an air commando feel like an air commando!

One day a USAF C-130 landed at Kamina Base. Dickman, Slawson, Kuchai, and I got on it. At Leopoldville some airline was making limited flights to Europe. When we got to Leopoldville somebody handed me a ticket to Europe. We flew to Brussels and spent a few days there before finally heading home to Hurlburt.

Almost half a century after we delivered those B-26K attack bombers to Africa, it seems very little has changed. The paramilitary armies have come and gone, and come back again. Country names have changed, and changed again. The rulers, chieftains, the despots continue to change. The savagery continues.

All three of our K-Models survived the DRC wars and returned to the US. By 1967 all three had been redeployed to Southeast Asia and assigned to the 609th Air Commando Squadron. They were based at Nakhon Phanom and flown by the Nimrods. None of the three aircraft survived that war.

I realize that this account may be read by many who were not air commandos in the 1960s. I do not want to leave the impression that we were a group of irresponsible adventurers. We were serious airmen, engaged in some of the most difficult work demanded by our country. Air commandos served for years at the point of the spear, living by our motto, "Any Time, Any Place."



About the Author: First Lt Maurice Bourne is a native of Texas. He was scheduled to return to SEA in the B-26K but was injured in an aircraft accident and removed from flying status. He was medically retired from the USAF in 1965. Today he lives on the farm where he grew up.



AC-130A firing 40mm guns (Photo courtesy of Spectre Association Inc. and Fred Gockel, Spectre Flight Engineer)

AC-130 COMBAT OPERATIONS

Over South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia

By William Walter, CMSgt, USAF (Ret)

1973-1975

Editor's note: This article is derived from the History of Gunships by William Walter, CMSgt, USAF (Ret). It is not all inclusive by any means and is designed to enable the reader to get a feel for the employment of the gunships in the final throes of the SEA conflict.

In January 1973, the 16th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) was assigned to Pacific Air Force's Thirteenth Air Force and the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW). Operating under the call sign "Spectre", the squadron was stationed at Ubon Royal Thai Air Base (AB), Thailand. The unit possessed nine AC-130A and five AC-130E gunships, with 528 personnel assigned. Crews were organized in numbered "hard crews" and essentially flew with the same personnel on every flight.

It was the height of the dry season and a "target rich" environment was evident. For the first three weeks of January, Spectre continued its primary role of Armed Reconnaissance (Armed Recce) hunting trucks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the "Steel Tiger" and "Barrel Roll" areas of Laos. The crews also worked interdiction and Troops in Contact (TIC) missions in the "Freedom Deal" area in Cambodia. Additionally, the AC-130A was also assigned the Saigon Combat Air Patrol (CAP) mission. Both models of aircraft were being modified in the field with the Gated Laser Illuminator Night Television (GLINT) to improve night imagery capabilities.

Though the AC-130E provided increased capabilities in comparison with the AC-130A, the heavy armor and equipment that made the E model more effective also pushed the edge of its performance envelope. All AC-130E take-offs were at max allowable gross weight. The high outside temperatures of the Ubon area were problematic and there was little room for error. The T56A-7 engine of the AC-130E was simply not powerful enough and everyone knew that the loss of an engine on take-off would likely cause a fatal crash.

Plans were already underway to replace the -7 engines with T56A-15 engines to mitigate the problem and in January, aircraft #6569 was the first AC-130E to undergo the Combat Required Operating Capability (CROC) modification that included installation of T-56A-15 engines. Missions proceeded as normal, regardless of the aggressive modification and maintenance schedule. Aircraft #55-0011 was prone to fuel leaks and rarely capable of flight. It became a source of spare parts to keep the other

AC-130As in service.

On 4 January, Spectre 15 was working truck targets in Steel Tiger with a flight of 8th TFW F-4s call sign "Clammy Flight." While attacking a target, Clammy 03 crashed. Both crewmembers ejected. Spectre 15 terminated its mission to assume on-scene-commander (OSC) duties for the SAR effort. They contacted the survivors and orbited over them until rescue forces arrived. On 15 January, Spectre 05 patrolled a main road section in Barrel Roll and spotted 21 enemy vehicles. Pushing their fuel beyond planned bingo, the crew destroyed 13 and damaged two trucks, while observing 79 rounds of "accurate" 37mm AAA.

On 17 January, Spectre 16 was sent to Steel Tiger to locate a suspected truck park. The crew located two armored personnel carriers (APC), and damaged one. They also discovered a truck park and enemy encampment 2,000 meters to the northwest. Working with their fighter escorts, they destroyed eight trucks and damaged five. Two days later, Spectre 05 and its F-4 escorts located and destroyed nine trucks on another Barrel Roll mission. They left the truck park and adjacent oil storage area in flames.

On 26 January, Spectre 01 was working in South Vietnam and detected 15 trucks. While working the targets, a round prematurely exploded in the #1 20mm gun. Fortunately the explosion did not damage the aircraft, and Spectre 01 continued to fire, ultimately destroying eight trucks and damaging seven.

The Vietnam cease fire went into effect at 2400 Greenwich Mean Time, 27 January 1973. Gunship cease-fire operations took effect the next day on 28 January. One AC-130 was to be on alert at Tan Son Nhut Airfield each night from 1700 to 0600 local time. One gunship per night departed Ubon for Tan Son Nhut to replace the alert crew there. These alert missions continued for several weeks.

During the month of February, the 16th SOS remained at Ubon, and mission focus was directed to Laos and Cambodia to support Cambodian forces fighting the Khmer Rouge. In the beginning of the month, Seventh Air Force directed that AC-130s, OV-10 FACs from the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron, and flights of fighters would operate as hunter-killer

teams for daytime patrols over Laos. The Spectres would be the hunters, and utilize their sensors to locate targets. The OV-10 FACs would mark the targets with white phosphorus rockets for F-4 fighters. If the fighters were carrying Laser Guided Bombs (LGBs), Spectre could illuminate the target to provide precision guidance for the F-4s.

These missions were successful for a few days because the enemy was surprised. They did not expect to see Spectre flying during daytime. On 2 February, Spectre 02 helped destroy 12 trucks and damaged one more using this tactic. The hunter-killer concept was finally abandoned when the AAA threat became too great. Flying during daytime, the slow moving gunship was easy to see and crewmembers could not see AAA coming up at them until the rounds exploded.

At the same time, modifications to aircraft continued and three of the newest AC-130Es #6575, #6576 and #6577, arrived with a new paint scheme called "The Dark Gray Ghost." Each aircraft had a slightly different shade of gray paint designed to determine the ultimate compromise between day, night, and infrared camouflage. All three of the new aircraft were fully modified AC-130Es, equipped with a GLINT, ALA-17 IR decoy flares in an ALE-20 flare launcher system, wing mounted SUU-42 flare and chaff dispensers, along with the newer more powerful -15 engines. The modifications changed the aircraft designation to AC-130E/H. The first "Dark Gray Ghost" combat mission was flown in 6576.

By mid-February, missions were concentrated in the western portion of Steel Tiger and directly supported allied forces. Most were troops in contact (TIC), with an occasional Armed Recce mission mixed in. On 22 February, all US forces were ordered to cease-fire in Laos, and the Spectres returned To Ubon to prepare to conduct sustained operations over Cambodia.

To deconflict aerial combat operations over Cambodia, the country was primarily divided into two sections northeast of Phnom Penh called "Freedom Deal East" and "Freedom Deal West". These areas were relatively

small considering the number of strike aircraft operating and several times gunship crews were pulled off target to allow B-52 and F-111 strikes. Crews routinely received tasking from Airborne Battle Command and Control Center (ABCCC) call sign "Moonbeam" and targeting information from many ground controllers and forward air guides like Hotel 263.

Combat missions were flown in Cambodia seven days a week with lots of targets available. In April for example, Spectres located 316 trucks, damaged 86, and destroyed 181. Crews attacked 63 boats, damaged 14, and destroyed 45. They also conducted nine close air support (CAS) missions and killed 473 enemy troops.

Also in April, the rules of engagement became significantly

Determining battle damage assessment (BDA) was another problem when working TIC missions in Cambodia. Because of terrain and foliage, neither the ground commander nor Spectre were able to actually see enemy casualties, so crews had to rely on ground commanders' estimates. Some of the ground commanders seemed to be in competition trying to "out-do" each other. Perhaps the most accomplished of them was "Hotel Takeo" a ground commander at the town of Takeo, south of Phnom Pehn. On 3 April, Takeo gave Spectre 08 an estimate of 80 killed in action (KIA), one machine gun destroyed, one 79 mm rocket launcher destroyed and one 57 mm cannon destroyed. On 16 April, he credited Spectre 03 with two B-40 rocket launchers, two 30 mm mortars, four 79mm grenade launchers all destroyed,

On 26 April, the 16th SOS received a message from the Commander of US Forces in Thailand (COMUSMACTHAI) directing AC-130 gunship support for Operation EAGLE PULL, the evacuation of American citizens from Cambodia. AC-130 crews were directed to be ready to provide long duration illumination missions over three primary and four secondary helicopter landing zones. Planning and training for the mission commenced forthwith, however, the actual evacuation operation did not occur until the following April, 1975.

As an interesting aside from normal USAF activities in 1973, the USMC had an interest in developing their own gunship fleet. USMC Maj Robert Mullins was assigned to the 16th SOS to become familiar with gunship operations. Maj Mullins upgraded to Aircraft Commander on the AC-130H gunship by August. He has the distinction of being the one and only non-USAF pilot to fly the AC-130 gunship in combat.

By late May, the rainy season was in full effect over Cambodia, causing many roads to be un-passable, so few trucks were moving. Gunships continued to execute their missions satisfactorily. Targets destroyed included personnel and oxcarts transporting supplies. On 1 June, a Spectre crew experienced a close call when a high altitude B-52 strike occurred about a mile off their right wing. On 24 June, a crew was fired at by three SA-7s while working for Hotel Sak Sam Peoy, southwest of Phnom Penh. They employed defensive maneuvers and expended flares. However, one missile exploded near the #1 engine requiring it to be shut down. The crew recovered to Ubon successfully.

When the weather was bad, armed recce was difficult. During these times the gunships shifted to convoy escort and direct support for allied ground forces. The Cambodian forces were given ground beacons that they could use to guide the gunships to specific targets. The AC-130s could also use their onboard vehicle ignition sensors to acquire targets that could not be seen with sensors or eyesight. On 2 June, Spectre 07 discovered 49 boats while enroute to support a ground unit. The boats ranged in length from 20-50 feet



On the history making crew were Maj William Hyde, Capt Michael Schoch, Lt Col James Smith, Lts Duane Walker, James Kyle, David Couchlin, Clive Manjo, SMSgt Frederick Brenner, TSgts William Patterson, Joe Jeter, Harvey Nelson, SSgts J.B. Moody, James F. West, and Russell Doers. SSgt Ronald Cook was the crew chief and SSgt John Melton was the assistant crew chief. (Photo courtesy of USAF)

more restrictive. On several occasions, gunships had to wait over target for extended periods of time before receiving clearance to fire. To make matters worse, enemy forces had compromised communications frequencies which created even more confusion about reception of clearance to fire. To fix this problem, crews developed a validation checklist of questions before proceeding with fire on targets.

5-50 bunkers damaged and 20-30 KIA. During this time, aircrews never really knew what they had accomplished on the ground. The BDA turned in by the ground commander was merely a yardstick of the results he thought Spectre was getting. This resulted in standard BDA calls of 20, 30, 40, 50 KIA, depending on how much pressure the Khmer believed had been taken off him, or a long list of guns and weapons destroyed.

and were located on the great Tonle Sap Lake in central Cambodia. The boats were validated as targets and the crew of Spectre 07 destroyed 18 boats and damaged 31.

Spectre crews continued to fly missions during July, but the rainy weather impacted overall mission success. Boats remained the primary target with few vehicles attacked. On 6 July, AC-130A (#014) landed after completing a USAF milestone of 1000 consecutive “abort free” combat missions. This was a testament to the professionalism of the crews who flew it, and especially the maintainers who cared for it.

Weather in August became very bad with continuous heavy rains and wide area flooding. Ground access to the Phnom Penh, Cambodian capital was becoming ever more difficult, so it was increasingly resupplied by water up the Mekong River. During the month many lucrative targets were discovered and destroyed on the river. It was all soon to come to an end, as on the evening of 14 August, Spectre 06 (#6574) commanded by the 16th SOS commander Col Harry W. Williamson, took off on a mission to support Cambodian ground forces. They landed at 0805 local time after conducting Armed Recce and direct support for allied ground units. Later that day, all US forces were directed by Congressional mandate to cease combat operations. The Spectres had logged a record of 1327 consecutive missions without an abort.

Though armed conflict had ceased,



The crew of Spectre 06, the last AC-130 combat mission flown during the war in South East Asia included; Col Harry Williamson, Majcs Paul Stenback, David Davis and Peter Traversa, Captcs Robert Connors Raymond Honacker and Cecil Weaver Jr., 1st Lts Bari Matherne, Harry Hudson and Gene Sawyer, 2nd Lt Robert Allmon, SMSgts Stanley Noret and Frederick Brenner, TSgts Roderick Gibbs Jr. and Robert Potts, SSgt William Krallis, Sgts Michael Tesch and Lawrence Ericson. (Photo courtesy of USAF)

the AC-130s were retained in Southeast Asia to assist in Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. On these missions, the gunships provided search, surveillance, on-scene command and control, and necessary fire support for rescue forces. AC-130 crews supported helicopter and A-7 crews using “Sandy” tactics developed earlier in Southeast Asia. Training exercises were complex and coordinating the many actors in them was a challenge. On 27 November, Spectre 65 was involved in a real-world SAR effort that played out the exact scenario they had trained for. While flying a routine training mission, Spectre 65 (#029) commanded

by Capt Tom Hebblewhite was diverted to a crash site of an A-7 south of Ubon. While there, Spectre performed the role of on-scene-commander (OSC) and ultimately escorted the rescue helicopter back to Ubon.

By the summer of 1974, Ubon was scheduled to close and the 16th SOS was scheduled to move to Korat AB, Thailand. The squadron had 17 aircraft assigned and was designed to provide 30 combat ready crews from the 435 people it brought from Ubon. In the midst of the move, the Ubon base paper, The Phantom Flyer, made a public announcement that the 16th SOS would be returned to the United States in July 1975, and transferred to an Air Force Reserve unit at Duke Field, FL.

As the SEA drawdown of US forces continued, a most unexpected problem arose. Local civilians began stealing items and even materiel from the bases. At Udorn AB, thieves stole the barbed wire protecting the perimeter. The thieves would approach the wire in the dark of the night to cut out lengths to use on their own farms or to sell to others. For them it was a win/win situation. They could work in the dark of the night, and when they saw the headlights of the security police vehicle coming around the perimeter, they merely fled into the cleared fields



Additional crew members of Spectre 06, the last AC-130 combat mission flown during the war in South East Asia. (Photo courtesy of USAF)



The 105mm gun proved very effective against trucks and personnel targets. (USAF photo)

and lay down in the high grass—where it was practically impossible for the security guards to find them.

The Spectres were directed to use their surveillance and sensory assets to help control this problem. Flying at night on training missions, and practicing interdiction or convoy escort along the roads, it was convenient for them merely to move along the road from Korat to Udorn doing that work. Upon arrival at each base, they would set up an orbit around the perimeter and establish contact with the security police. Gunship crews then had only to vector the police toward the thieves until they found them. The wire thievery soon diminished when the criminals correlated the propeller noise of the AC-130 with the quick actions of the security police teams. While not exactly their primary role it provided good training for the AC-130 crews.

Similarly, thieves started hijacking the base exchange trucks moving merchandise from the port on the Gulf of Siam to the bases at Korat and Udorn. Without any loss of training time, gunships escorted the trucks while in contact with the police. Even when the hijackers made off with a truck, Spectre could then follow it using their night sensors and guiding the police on the ground directly to the hideout. Somebody discovered that putting reflective tape (later called “GLINT tape”) on the top of the truck’s cab enabled the AC-130

sensor operators to identify the protected vehicle even in heavy traffic. The thieves quickly learned that when Spectre was overhead the work was dangerous and the risk of being caught was high.

The evacuation of Phnom Penh came in the spring of 1975, and the gunships were directed to provide fire support for the pull out. The capital was besieged early in 1975, and was sustained by airlift and water transport coming up the Mekong River. Sniper fire from the river banks shut down the river traffic which put an even heavier burden on the air transport. However, contract airlift from various commercial carriers sustained it. In general the traffic was from U-Tapao air base in Thailand to Pochentong airport in Phnom Penh. On 7 April, seven AC-130 crews were placed on alert at Korat. The evacuation was executed on 12 April, and gunships flew a constant air alert above Phnom Penh for several weeks. The Khmer Rouge responded to the evacuation flights by placing AAA guns at the approach ends of the runway. When AC-130 crews arrived overhead, the guns were quickly abandoned. It was apparent Cambodians feared the gunship as the mere sound of a C-130 overhead caused many of them to flee their positions. When one of the gunships maintaining orbit developed engine problems, the ABCCC aircraft was asked to come hold a loose orbit over the field where it could be seen while the

gunship went in to Utapao for repairs. The Khmer Rouge never knew the aircraft they thought was an AC-130 was actually unarmed. When the evacuation was complete, not a single round was fired by AC-130s and all objectives were met.

The evacuation of Saigon was a much larger operation, and AC-130 gunships were overhead to provide fire support. Spectre 21 took off on 29 April and flew over Saigon throughout the mission at an orbit altitude of 14,000 feet to avoid possible 37 mm AAA and the SA-7 portable missiles. The gunships were relieved on station as required throughout the night, and were fired upon many times but were never tasked to shoot at any ground targets. Thousands of people were evacuated by fixed-wing aircraft, but the last phases were done by helicopters moving refugees out to ships off shore. Vietnamese Air Force AC-119s did provide fire support as well and one of them was shot down.

Dozens of helicopters were flying over the city, many of them without lights because of the SA-7 threat. Notwithstanding the coming of daylight, Spectre 71 remained on station during the morning until the last helicopter left. The gunships flew a total of eight sorties for 46.9 flight hours but were never called upon to engage fire.

On 12 May 1975, Khmer Rouge gunboats captured the US merchant ship Mayaguez in international waters. The United States moved almost immediately to recover it and its crew. Spectre crews provided fire support, reconnaissance, and surveillance before and during the recovery. AC-130 crews flew four sorties during the night of 13 May. One of them fired its weapons in front of a speeding boat and caused it to run aground. Spectre flew six more sorties on the night of the 14 May, sinking several of the remaining Cambodian gunboats. But because of the uncertainty about the location of the prisoners, the US could not deliver preparatory fires for the landings to come.

On the morning of 15 May, US Marines were flown in aboard US Air Force HH and CH-53s. They boarded the ship to find the vessel unoccupied. But when they landed on Koh Tang Island, they found enemy forces larger than

anticipated. Meanwhile, the merchant sailors had been released and recovered and the destroyer USS Holt towed the ship away. Then the mission became the extraction of the Marines.

The insertion and evacuation were done with severe personnel and helicopter losses. During the morning landings, three helicopters were shot down, and fifteen Marines and airmen were killed. Along with the FACs and fighters, the gunships provided substantial fire support for the evacuation even in daytime—especially during the final evacuation. The Marines had lost their radios during the initial insertions, and fire control at the beginning was non-existent. However, they were able to contact gunship crews through recovered survival radios. Still the enemy kept up a withering fire throughout the day, and as darkness fell not all of the Marines had yet been evacuated. The A-7s could no longer provide fire in the darkness, but AC-130 crews were able to shoot almost continuously. The few remaining helicopters evacuated all but three of the surviving Marines.

Fortunately the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea had drawn close enough to serve as a recovery site enabling the now damaged helicopters to make multiple trips to the beach. One courageous helicopter pilot did not want to delay the twenty minutes to go even that far, and deposited his load of Marines on the tiny landing deck of the USS Holt, by then a bit closer than the carrier. Remaining HH and CH-53s shuttled onto the island to recover the Marines as the Khmer Rouge forces attacked them. Fortunately, an AC-130 was above firing 20 mm ammunition on the enemy while the extraction was being made. In all, 15 Americans were killed in combat action, three were missing, and 50 wounded. A CH-53 crash killed 18 security policemen and five helicopter crew members en route to Kho Tang, bringing the total of lives lost to 38—a greater number than the members of the merchant crew. The SS Mayaguez crew recovery was the Spectre's last combat action in the long war in Southeast Asia.

In March, 1975, the Thai Parliament elected Prime Minister Khurkrit Parmot. He soon declared that he favored the

departure of all US forces by the spring of 1976. Initial planning called for the AC-130As to be decommissioned, and the AC-130Hs to be moved to the Air Force Reserve at Duke Field, FL, as previously planned. Headquarters Air Force decided that it had to keep a squadron of gunships in the active inventory and decided to transfer the 16th SOS with its H Models, to Tactical Air Command at Hurlburt Field, FL, and the AC-130A gunships to nearby Duke Field in the Air Force Reserve.

The last AC-130A departed Korat on 28 June 1975, and flew to their new

Thus, the Wing had deliberately held back AC-130H #68-576, and named it "The Spirit of 76." On the nose just above the radome "576" was painted in red, white and blue and the phrase "The Spirit of 76" was painted on the fuselage just underneath the cockpit windows. The commander of the 16th SOS, Col Neil Eddins, handed the squadron guidon to the aircraft commander, and the crew scrambled aboard for the last flight from Korat. Passing back over the field after takeoff, the crew waved its wings farewell. The long war in Southeast Asia was officially over for Spectre. It



AC-130A co-pilot training for combat operations in Southeast Asia. (Photo courtesy of Len Johnson, 16th SOS Gunner, Ubon 1969)

home with the 711th SOS at Duke Field, reporting to the 919th Special Operations Group. Two aircraft were in such bad shape that they were retired, leaving the 711th SOS with ten AC-130As. On 30 June, 1975 Hurlburt's 415th SOTS was inactivated and its two AC-130H gunships (#6567 and #6568) were re-assigned to the 8th SOS.

At Korat, on 9 December 1975, all of the AC-130H gunships had their guns removed and the familiar "FT" tail code painted over for their long trip to their new home at Hurlburt Field. The resident 388th TFW Commander presided over a sendoff ceremony for the last gunship in Southeast Asia. It was the eve of the American Bicentennial Celebration.

left behind a legacy of providing fire support for US and allied ground force, destroying more than 13,000 enemy trucks and killing uncounted scores of enemy personnel. But the cost was high with six AC-130 gunships lost in the war, and 52 crew members killed in action. They will never be forgotten.



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LARRY KUTER, FUNCTIONAL COMMANDS AND AFSOF THWARTED:



The Establishment of the Air Resupply and Communications Service in 1951

Capt Herndon's Crew, 580th Air Resupply Squadron at Wheelus Field, Libya. (L-R) Capt William M. Herndon, A/C; Maj James A. Hester, IP; Lt John D. Laney, CP; Capt Guy A. Larson, Nav/B; Lt Winters, Nav; Lt Buchanan, VO; Lt James J. Mihalick, FE; TSgt Wilbur G. Meldrum, FE; SSgt Robert E. Fitzsimmons, RO; A1C Michael W. Ribnick, RO; A1C George J. Von Knipper, G; A2C Maxson, G; A1C Larry R. Coleman, SC. (Photo courtesy of Air Resupply and Communications Association)

By Lt Col Joel Higley, USAF

The history of early Cold War Air Force Psychological Warfare (PsyWar) units is reasonably well known, having been covered in excellent Air Force special operations histories such as Michael Haas' *Apollo's Warriors* and Orr Kelly's *From a Dark Sky*. Some of the backstory is missing, however. This article explores the initial conceptualization and buildup in 1951 of the Air Resupply and Communications Service (ARCS)—the independent Air Force's first PsyWar command—and suggests why this command started to fall apart before the Korean War even ended. Three underappreciated factors worked to prevent the ARCS from reaching its full potential: the far-reaching effects of low interwar Army Air Corps manning, senior Air Force leaders' low commitment to functional command relationships, and the decapitation of Military Air Transport

Service (MATS) leadership in the winter of 1951-52. These three combined factors led to the balkanized geographic distribution of ARC wings: the same construct that led to the dissolution of air commando units at the end of the Second World War also sealed the fate of the PsyWar units at the end of the Korean War.

Understanding the ARCS's conception, birth and subsequent failure to thrive necessitates reviewing four major areas: Air Force PsyWar prior to 1951, the long-term consequences of maintaining a small Army Air Corps through the interwar period, MATS commander Laurence Kuter's relationship with Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg and other key actors, and MATS history prior to 1951. Once armed with this background, it is not difficult to see how the

Air Force's first substantial foray into PsyWar (which is largely synonymous with special operations today) started to fall apart before the Korean War was even over.

PsyWar Prior to 1951

During the Second World War, the Army Air Forces (AAF) built up impressive covert air infiltration and resupply capabilities, but they evaporated when theater air commanders no longer needed such services. Special air units—the Special Flight Section in the Mediterranean theater, the Carpetbaggers in the European theater, and the Air Commandos in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theater—conducted similar missions, used similar tactics and equipment, and supported similar customers: particularly the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—forerunner to the CIA. By the end of the war however, no central AAF organization had been built to coordinate these units' disparate efforts, nobody in the service had more than perhaps two years' worth of experience with these missions, and theater air commanders had no clear need of them in the immediate postwar period. When wartime balkanization met postwar budget cuts, these air commando units were among the most obvious ones for theater air commanders to cut. This post-term abortion of air commandos' capabilities necessitated another wartime rebirth and further delayed AFSOF's eventual growth to maturity.

The nation's interest in PsyWar rose again as America's wartime allies became postwar enemies and the Cold War turned hot. The Air Force took a small but significant role in PsyWar planning shortly after it became an independent service. On 25 February 1948, Maj Gen Otto P. "Opie" Weyland established the PsyWar Division, with three officers and two civilians, within his Air Force Plans and Operations Directorate. The three officers were all full Colonels with essentially no PsyWar experience. Col Clyde K. Rich, who headed the division, was a fighter pilot and Vandenberg's 1923 West Point classmate. Col Orrin L. Grover, also a fighter pilot, headed the division's Plans and Training Branch and was Kuter's classmate (West Point '27). Col P.R. Hawes had less than ten years' commissioned service, and he headed the Tactics, Techniques and Evaluation Branch.

Internal and external pressure helped move the PsyWar project along. In April 1949, an "outside agency" requested that the Secretary of Defense provide overt and covert services similar to those provided during the war. Two months later, four new Second Lieutenants were appointed to start a ten-year PsyWar training program. A month after that, the PsyWar Division requested that just eight field-grade officer billets for PsyWar officers (MOS 9305) be created in the major commands. US Air Forces in Europe would get two, while the others (MATS among them) would get one each—by February 1950. By July of that year, fully 31 PsyWar billets had been authorized, but it is unclear how many of them were or could have been filled by fully-trained PsyWar officers.

Given the dearth of qualified PsyWar officers across the Air Force, it is unsurprising that no Carpetbagger-like unit existed when the North Koreans rolled across the 38th Parallel on 25 June 1950. Early in the Korean War, leaders like Henry

"Heinie" Aderholt took their own initiative and helped kickstart PsyWar's rebirth, but the Air Force was not organizationally configured to support such efforts. The CSAF, Gen Hoyt Vandenberg, first directed that new Air Force PsyWar units be built in January 1951—three years after the PsyWar Division was originally stood up, and over a year and a half after the SecDef was asked to provide Carpetbagger-type support.

The Interwar Army and AFSOF

The dearth of experienced air commandos would be a major hindrance to the effort. PsyWar's early struggles, and the same can be said for the entire Air Force, started with the stubbornly small interwar Air Corps. In June 1939, the Air Corps had just 1,600 officers and 22,000 total men. Most were First World War veterans, and PsyWar airmen and associated equipment did not yet exist in the Army. By the time the Carpetbaggers flew their first missions in January 1944, the Army Air Forces (AAF) had grown to 287,000 officers and 2.4 million total men: *the officer corps grew one hundred, eighty-five times larger and the AAF as a whole grew over one hundred times larger overall in just four and a half years.* In contrast, the ground Army (total Army minus Air Corps/Army Air Forces) grew much more sedately. In the same period, the Army's non-AAF officer corps grew merely twenty-one times larger, and the overall ground Army (officers, warrant officers and enlisted) grew just thirty times larger. Army Air Forces growth came at a terrible cost in men, equipment and ideas, since aerial warfare—much less special air warfare—was entirely new to the vast majority of World War II airmen. Between December 1941 and August 1945, the Army Air Forces lost 15,000 men and 14,000 aircraft in over 52,000 flying training accidents—stateside alone. Air combat was, of course, much deadlier still. Airmen suffered 122,000 battle casualties in the war. The B-24, one of the Carpetbaggers' primary aircraft types, had a role in those losses, due to its poor handling qualities and combat survivability. At the end of the war, the air arm did not demobilize, but rather simply fell apart. PsyWar air operations collapsed with it, essentially ceasing to exist as the service dropped to less than 306,000—an eighth of its wartime peak—by early 1947. The only education most airmen had was a real-world one in Clausewitzian fog and friction. What little professional military education most Air Force officers had received primarily came from other airmen who had little more experience than their students.

By 1951—as MATS built the ARCS in the midst of the Korean War—the Air Force officer corps numbered 104,000 and the enlisted corps totaled 679,000, having almost doubled in size from the previous year. The First World War veterans who had comprised the bulk of the officer corps in 1939 were (aside from a few senior officers) mostly retired or dead. In sum, as Korean War was still in its early stages and the ARCS was created, the number of Air Force officers who had at least a dozen years of military experience (the time in service of a current-day major)—and who had thus physically and professionally survived Second World War mobilization, combat and demobilization; the early Cold War; and the Korean War to that point—comprised a fraction of a percent of the total officer corps. Experienced, educated PsyWar airmen

comprised a small percentage of that fraction of a percent of the officer corps. In other words, the proportion of former air commandos who had gotten anything approaching the requisite technical, cultural and linguistic training—not to mention rank and experience—to occupy senior Air Force billets was infinitesimal.

Even those with the requisite education and rank had little PsyWar experience. Air Force PsyWar was arguably just two years old, since seven years had elapsed since the first Carpetbagger missions, but essentially no special operations were conducted in the five years between V-J Day and the start of the Korean War. It is no wonder that men like the early air commandos seem so peerless, for that is exactly what they were. With near-zero proportional PsyWar expertise within the whole service, much less at the ranks of colonel and above, three things are clear: senior-level Air Force PsyWar



Capt Braun's Crew: 582nd Air Resupply Squadron at Molesworth RAF Station, England. (L-R) SSgt Miners, RO; Sgt Louis A. Calderazzo, E; Lt Walter E. Jensen, VO; Capt Vaughn, N; Lt Donald S. Bengston, CP; and Capt Joseph M. Braun, AC. (Photo courtesy of Air Resupply and Communications Association)

advocacy had to primarily come from officers with little to no background in actual PsyWar operations, PsyWar capabilities would take a very long time to rebuild due to the lack of experienced officers to lead the process, and an organization dedicated to preserving Psywar skill sets during peacetime had to be created if such a crisis was to be avoided in the future.

Larry Kuter and MATS prior to 1951

Vandenberg needed a leader and an organization which were willing and able to rapidly build a PsyWar operation from scratch in the midst of a hot war. He chose Lt Gen Laurence S. "Larry" Kuter, an Air Corps Tactical School bomber mafioso who headed the Military Air Transport Service (MATS): a joint, hodgepodge island of misfit toys which is typically remembered as a military airline run by uniformed civilians. It seems an odd choice, given that Tactical Air Command, with its nonnuclear combat focus, would have been a more logical fit. Vandenberg, however, well knew one of Kuter's key strengths was designing and building new organizations. They

had known each other since at least 1934, when they were Air Corps Tactical School classmates, but Vandenberg should have expected Kuter to create an ambitious plan that the Chief would find objectionable.

Understanding Kuter is critical to understanding the ARCS experience under MATS. His reputation as a thinker and planner was well-deserved. The intellectual young bomber pilot graduated at the top of his ACTS class—ahead of Vandenberg, fellow bomber intellectuals Haywood Hansell and (future Vice Chief of Staff) Muir "Santy" Fairchild, Barney Giles (Hap Arnold's wartime deputy), and a host of other future general officers. Kuter led the ACTS bombardment instruction from 1935-39, when the High-Altitude Precision Daylight Bombardment Doctrine was being developed. In July 1941, Kuter was one of four primary coauthors of AWPD-1, the Air Corps' remarkably prescient bomber-centric prewar strategy and mobilization plan (which was written in nine days). From May to July 1943, Kuter helped secure Marshall's approval of Field Manual (FM) 100-20—airpower's "declaration of independence" (after having helped secure Rommel's defeat as Northwest African Tactical Air Forces deputy commander).

The young Kuter (he was six years younger than Vandenberg) outranked his future Chief for most of the war. Kuter pinned on Brigadier General in February 1942 (ten months ahead of Vandenberg) and earned his second star in February 1944 (this time only a month before Vandenberg); in other words, Kuter remained Vandenberg's superior until March 1945. Kuter earned his first star ahead of future CSAFs Hoyt Vandenberg and T.D. White; and future JCS Chairmen Arthur Radford, Nathan Twining, Lyman Lemnitzer and Maxwell Taylor—all of whom were older and commissioned earlier than Kuter. Kuter pinned on his second star ahead of future fellow four-star generals Curtis LeMay, Vandenberg, Earle E. "Pat" Partridge, Otto "Opie" Weyland, Benjamin Chidlaw, Lauris Norstad, T.D. White, Orval Cook and Ed Rawlings. All but LeMay, Norstad and Rawlings were commissioned before Kuter. Young Larry Kuter had no problem (tactfully) expressing his strong opinions to Vandenberg, his longtime peer and competitor.

Kuter rose quickly through the ranks in Washington because he was a staff officer, military diplomat and strategist par excellence, whom both Generals Marshall and Arnold deeply trusted. Kuter got his first star when Marshall handwrote him in to the promotion list; Kuter held the permanent rank of Captain, was a temporary Lieutenant Colonel for four weeks, and never served a day as a full Colonel. As Arnold's Plans Chief, Kuter "operated closer to the center of power than did any other parallel office" in AAF headquarters. He served as the primary Combined Chiefs of Staff air planner, participating in conferences in Quebec, Cairo and London. From 1943-45, he spearheaded plans for postwar service independence, establishing the Postwar Division within his directorate. In a letter to his son, Arnold referred to Kuter (and Lauris Norstad, who replaced Kuter as plans chief) as "the brains of the Air Force," and in his January 1944 efficiency report, Arnold ranked Kuter #8/300 general officers and identified him as "a potential Chief of the Air Staff and Commanding General of



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— LOCKHEED MARTIN —

the Army Air Forces.” Arnold so trusted Kuter that thirty-nine year old, two-star general Kuter represented fifty-nine year old, five-star general Arnold at the Malta and Yalta conferences in early 1945. Few if any others still on active duty in 1951 were more closely associated with Arnold’s vision for the Air Force.



Taken early in 1943, Kuter is pictured with British senior leaders in Northwest Africa. Left to right: Air Vice Marshall Broadhurst, Air Marshall Coningham, Gen Montgomery, Gen Alexander, Air Chief Marshall Tedder, and Brig Gen Kuter. (Photo courtesy Kuter Collection, Air Force Academy Library.)

The end of the Second World War and the resultant change in postwar AAF administration from Arnold to Spaatz likely did more damage to the future of Air Force special operations and conventional air transport than any other event in Air Force history. The AAF went from being run by Arnold, a global air war leader, to Spaatz, a theater air commander. Spaatz brought with him not only a different approach to Air Force organization, but furthermore took little time to start remaking the Air Force in his image. Arnold’s acolytes—strategic thinkers like Kuter, Charles P. Cabell and Lauris Norstad—found themselves displaced by operational doers—Vandenberg, Cannon, LeMay and the like. The process started before the war was even over.

Spaatz made room for his wartime lieutenants by moving Kuter into air transportation. While Kuter nonetheless proved successful, he was unmistakably moved far from the center of Air Force power. Kuter organized the first-ever airlift of Army troops into Japan following capitulation, commanded the Air Transport Command’s (ATC) Atlantic Division during the postwar drawdown, and then went to serve in the State Department (working for Marshall again) while retaining his Air Force rank. He served as the first US Minister to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) from 1946-48, as the postwar civil air transportation system was being built, and in January 1948 he almost became Civil Aeronautics Board chairman. The Senate—not wanting another uniformed officer serving in a civilian post—rejected the move.

In the end, it was Defense Secretary Forrestal who got Kuter wearing Air Force blue again. He designated Kuter as the first MATS commander—the test case for postwar unification, which for the first time combined Air Force and Navy units (Air Transport Command and the Naval Air Transport Service) into a single, integrated command. If air transportation could

be made more efficient, and hence cheaper, by combining the two commands into one, then perhaps the same could be done with other functions and commands. Kuter picked a Navy admiral as his vice commander and William Tunner—the airlift savant who had led the wartime “Hump” airlift—to be his operations deputy. Kuter and Tunner had known each other since at least 1926, when they were in the same company at West Point (Kuter was in his fourth year and Tunner in his third), with then-Maj George Stratemeyer as their tactical officer. No pair of Air Force officers had more combined air transport experience.

Early MATS History

Kuter—the bomber baron, turned global strategist and air transport advocate—returned to the Air Force fold to find two fighter pilots, Spaatz and Vandenberg (neither of whom had spent much time in Washington during the war or greatly understood global air transport), running the newly-independent Air Force as Chief and Vice Chief. In fact, the Air Force’s senior ranks were dominated by fighter pilots in early 1948. Kuter’s experience in establishing MATS foreshadowed the difficulties the ARCS faced years later. He saw in MATS the opportunity to satisfy the SecDef, while simultaneously expanding the Air Force’s portfolio. Spaatz, Vandenberg, and the other major commands, however, saw MATS as a threat to their prerogatives.

From the outset, Kuter tried to have all four-engine “strategic” transports assigned to MATS in order to fulfill the promises of centrally commanded, functional airpower. In other words, Kuter sought to do for global air transport what had been done for Pacific airpower under Spaatz during the war (using the same concept upon which SAC was based). If successful, this would have made for both a more-efficient Air Force transportation system, helped NATS wrest control of more four-engine transports from other Navy commands, and allowed the Air Force win control of the strategic airlift mission earlier than it ultimately did. As Kuter recalled, “I argued with Tooey Spaatz that every Air Force transport should be assigned to MATS—every single one. I told Tooey if he would do that, I would guarantee the United States Navy would be out of the air transport business permanently, forever, completely. On the contrary, if he adhered to his statement that SAC had to have its strategic airlift squadrons and every other command had to have their special air missions, the Navy would do exactly the same thing and so would the Marine Corps.” Kuter’s fears came true. Spaatz demurred, global military air transport remained balkanized, and the SecDef’s intent was thwarted.

Vandenberg replaced Spaatz in April 1948, but the die was already cast when Kuter took command in June. He would have to make his case to the new Chief through proven performance rather than argumentation. The opportunity came sooner than expected, when the Berlin Airlift started less than a month after MATS’ creation. US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE), and particularly the USAFE commanders, Curtis LeMay and John K. “Joe” Cannon, got much of the credit for the Berlin Airlift’s success, even though MATS did—literally and figuratively—much of the heavy lifting. During the Airlift, MATS: provided

a disproportionate share of aircraft and crews; supplied the bulk of the airlift expertise; trained Airlift crews from all commands at Great Falls Air Force Base, Montana—where they replicated Berlin’s Templehof Air Base; and overhauled all Berlin Airlift aircraft (MATS-owned or not) at its stateside heavy maintenance facilities. Kuter’s command did so while providing global: scheduled and on-demand strategic air transport, military air traffic control, VIP transport, air rescue, weather forecasting, aerial charting and Air Force film production, and aeromedical transport. It also had command jurisdiction over bases around the world—in Greenland, Labrador, Newfoundland, the Azores, Bermuda, Tripoli and Dahran. It did so through its three major geographic divisions and its functional subcommands: the Airways and Air Communications Service (predecessor to the Air Force Communications Command), the Special Air Mission (predecessor to today’s 89th Airlift Wing), the Air Rescue Service, the Air Weather Service (predecessor to the “Hurricane Hunters”), and the Aeromedical Transport Wing. The Air Photographic and Charting Service (elements of which folded into the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency) would be added to MATS after Kuter left.

In early July 1951, as the world remained unaware of the North’s intention to invade South Korea, Kuter tried again to centralize control of Air Force transports. He had a third star, MATS had proven the value of centrally controlled air transport, and Vandenberg had been in the Chief’s seat long enough to reverse some of Spaatz’s earlier decisions. Maj Gen Joseph Smith in the Plans Directorate, who Tunner had replaced as Berlin Airlift commander, spearheaded the resistance on the Air Staff. Smith was supported by former USAFE commanders John K. Cannon (TAC commander) and Curtis LeMay (SAC commander). Vandenberg not only denied Kuter’s recommendation, but in December 1950 upgraded TAC to a four-star major command. Cannon soon started operating his TAC air transports along overseas MATS routes.

The reason Vandenberg gave for allowing other commands to retain their own four-engine air transports was that TAC’s combat cargo units existed to

support combat missions, while MATS existed to fly routine airlift missions and support SAC. This thinking flew in the face of the interchangeability of combat cargo and air transport units (which Tunner had proven during the Berlin Airlift and Operation Swarmer after the airlift—and was continuing to prove through the Korean War Pacific Airlift), the SecDef’s push for unification and economy, and Vandenberg’s own wartime experience (under Spaatz) in proving the indivisibility of airpower in Northwest Africa. It was also a bit farcical to assert that MATS had no wartime mission, given that the first plane lost in the Korean War was a MATS C-54, the first B-29 strike from Japan against North Korea was led by a MATS Air Weather Service RB-29, and the MATS Air Rescue Service routinely executed missions that, even if not performed in combat, were often just as dangerous.

MATS Takes on Vandenberg’s Tasking

On 5 January 1951, Vandenberg inexplicably directed MATS to create seven psychological warfare wings (six overseas operational units and one stateside unit to train them), each with over 6,000 people. The mission had nothing to do with SAC support, and was the polar opposite of routine air transport operations. The first such wing was to be activated within two months, with subsequent wings to be activated every three months thereafter. Each wing would deploy after six months’ training. In other words, Vandenberg wanted MATS to create over 36,000 PsyWar operators from scratch, and within two years have them all deployed and operating—with the requisite training, equipment, doctrine and command relationships established—at six bases within two years. It was an aggressive timeline for a conventional unit. For wings tasked with aerial resupply behind enemy lines and producing psychological warfare material, something which required a panoply of hard-to-build specialties and close integration, the time constraints were unimaginable. Although the Chief’s timeline was questionable, his tasking seemed to make one thing clear: he wanted the Air Force to have a very big stake in the PsyWar mission.



Headquarters - Air Resupply and Communications Service emblem. (Photo courtesy of Air Resupply and Communications Association)



580th Air Resupply and Communications Wing emblem. The motto “*Libertas Per Veritatem*” means “*Freedom Through Truth*.” (Photo courtesy of Air Resupply and Communications Association)



581st Air Resupply and Communications Wing emblem. (Photo courtesy of Air Resupply and Communications Association)



582nd Air Resupply and Communications Wing emblem. (Photo courtesy of Air Resupply and Communications Association)

The ARCS is born

MATS, under Kuter, sprung into action so quickly that one wonders if Kuter—not his Chief—was the one driving the tasking. Kuter knew Vandenberg valued the CIA's national intelligence mission, since the Chief had served as the Director of Central Intelligence from 1946-47. Kuter also had a strong, respect-based relationship with Vandenberg's Air Force intelligence



Gen Laurence S. Kuter (Photo courtesy USAF)

chief, Maj Gen Pearre Cabell (who would later serve as the CIA Deputy Director), who could provide assistance in the project. He and the PsyWar division chief were West Point classmates. Warfighting commanders in Korea had an urgent operational need for Carpetbagger-type operations, and wartime expansion and associated funding enabled the creation of units that during peacetime were untenable. The mission to support the Central Intelligence Agency, in the midst of a global Cold War, lent itself to a centralized, global, functional organizational scheme. MATS had proven (and was continuing to prove) the value of global, functional air commands. MATS units already operated the same aircraft types—B-29s and helicopters—that the ARCS would use, albeit in different roles. Making the ARCS a functional reality meant a third chance for Kuter make his case for centrally-controlled functional airpower.

Just a month and a half after

Vandenberg's initial directive, on 23 February, MATS stood up its PsyWar command—giving it the innocuous moniker of Air Resupply and Communications Service (ARCS)—at Andrews AFB, Maryland. MATS then activated the first two ARC Wings on schedule, both at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho: the 580th on 16 April 1951 and the 581st 23 July of that same year. From thence forward, the timeline unraveled. The dilapidated conditions ARCS members found at the mothballed Mountain Home Air Force Base (where ARC wings organize, train and equip themselves before deploying overseas) did not help, but that was one of the easier problems to solve. The greater problem was that there simply were too few PsyWar operators in existence to flesh out ARCS units and not enough wartime left to create them.

Vandenberg's vision for the ARCS made rapid expansion vital, even as the dearth of pre-existing PsyWar officers rendered the task impossible. His staff point man was Col Orrin L. Grover, Kuter's classmate who headed the Plans Directorate's Psychological Warfare Division. Grover, a World War II fighter commander with no wartime PsyWar experience (another hint as to the Chief's interest level), was clueless as to these units' noncombat purpose. At a conference in March 1951, he stated, "I have no idea and no one in the Air Staff has any idea of what peace-time utilization will be. The Wing will be trained for war. As to the extent it may engage in peacetime activities will depend entirely upon the nature of the cold war – as it runs cold, the wing will run cold, and as it runs hot, the wing will run hot." Col William O. Eareckson, who coordinated ARCS affairs for MATS, saw the same confusion within the Air Staff. When he asked five different psychological warfare officers at Headquarters Air Force about the vision for the psychological warfare program, he got five different answers. If PsyWar was to have a future in the Air Force, the ARCS thus had to: come up with a clear wartime mission for itself, build itself up to execute the mission, and establish a successful wartime record (while proving the applicability of PsyWar capabilities

to noncombat operations)—all before wartime funding ran out.

While ARCS members struggled to build an operation at Mountain Home and scattered their personnel to various schools and bases around the country to get necessary training and education, Kuter and MATS laid the groundwork in Washington. Known prior Carpetbaggers, like Col Bob Fish, were pulled into Headquarters ARCS—sometimes against their wishes. The ARCS command and control scheme was designed to win the approval of the Air Force plans chief (Maj Gen Joseph Smith, who Tunner had supplanted in the Berlin Airlift and who had resisted Kuter's second attempt at airlift consolidation). The Psychological Warfare Division within Smith's Plans Directorate, not Headquarters ARCS (as one would normally expect) would be charged with "planning Air Force Psychological Warfare, Conventional Warfare and Special Operations."

For Kuter, giving the PsyWar division (PWD) ownership of the planning was reasonable. He had served as 20th Air Force chief of staff while simultaneously serving as Arnold's plans chief years before, so this scheme was not without precedent. Better still, he had a man on the inside, in the form of his West Point classmate, Col Grover. Clear guidance and direction from Grover was sparse and often conflicting, and resources were scarce, but again Kuter had dealt with far worse having worked directly for Hap Arnold for much of the Second World War. Grover's confusion buttresses the case that Kuter and his MATS staffers were the primary drivers behind the ARCS standup. If MATS was calling the shots, even as Grover nominally led the PsyWar project, Grover's confusion might have been expected. He was waiting for further guidance from the organization he was supposedly guiding.

Regardless, on 2 April, MATS proposed an Air Force regulation for itself, setting its mission as, "Provide world-wide air resupply and communications service for all Air Force and other US military activities requiring such service." It provided exactly the kind of flexibility AFOSF organizations needed. By June, Air Force headquarters forwarded its own version back to

MATS, having not substantially changed anything from MATS' original proposal. By August, MATS had established reasonably well-defined missions for its wings. What was left open was the issue of command relationships between MATS and theater commanders.

Kuter intended for MATS to retain administrative and technical control of overseas deployed units. The ARCS mission—with its specialized personnel, equipment, tactics and global scope—demanded this construct. The Air Force regulation, which MATS had proposed and headquarters Air Force accepted, included similar language. Kuter tried to assuage theater commanders' concerns, writing Maj Gen Truman Landon, the USAFE deputy commander, in August that, "I feel that the overseas commander must have the greatest latitude in developing and expressing requirements for organizational structure and operational use of these units with *centralized supervision of mobilization, personnel assignments, training, overall technical matters and continuing support including the provision of training replacements resting with Headquarters, Air Resupply and Communications Service.*" [emphasis added] In other words, Kuter sought command authorities for the ARCS which were very similar to those enjoyed by AFSOC today.

Kuter continued through September and October to advocate for the ARCS retaining administrative and technical control, but it was a losing battle. On 25 September, the tentative operating instructions for the first ARC wing to deploy—the 581st—still indicated this desired command structure. On 10 October, however, President Truman announced that Kuter was to become Vandenberg's Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel. Although the move came with no new rank, it was considered a promotion—one Kuter did not want, as he'd had enough of the Pentagon. Rather than Will Tunner, who was ideally qualified for MATS command, Vandenberg appointed Maj Gen Joseph Smith to replace Kuter. Larry Kuter had lost the fight for building the ARCS the way he envisioned it. On 1 November, the 580th's draft movement order relieved the ARCS of administrative and

technical control of overseas wings. On 15 November, Kuter handed command of MATS to Smith, while Tunner looked on. All wore smiles as the Vice Chief of Staff, Nathan Twining (not Vandenberg) presided over the change of command, but the public grins masked significant turbulence.

Before the change of command, Kuter told Smith he was "persona non grata" in his new command. Not only had Smith taken the command that many MATS officers felt Tunner should have had, but in resisting Kuter's airlift consolidation efforts, Smith had fundamentally rejected what many MATS officers thought the command was and should be. At the change of command, Smith almost missed his own ceremony when Kuter and his staff left the Officers' Club for the flight line without him. When he went to move into MATS commander's residence, Smith found that the Kuters had taken the government furniture with them, rather than leaving it in place as required. At his new headquarters, Smith found that Kuter had scattered key headquarters officers to field assignments, putting weaker substitutes in their places.

The above snubs seem grossly out of character for Kuter and appear only in an oral history interview with Maj Gen Smith. Given how strongly Kuter apparently felt about airpower—particularly airlift and AFSOF—consolidation and Smith's role in thwarting Kuter's efforts, Smith's description seems plausible. Smith wasted no time in taking charge at MATS. He got back the experienced staffers Kuter had scattered, got rid of Tunner within three months of taking command, slowed down the ARCS wings' deployment schedules, and relegated his ARCS headquarters to training and equipping ARC wings before wholly handing those wings over to theater commands. ARCS headquarters had an additional role of technically advising theater Air Force commanders, but that authority was not granted until June 1952. Only two ARC wings and one group ultimately deployed.

Epilogue

The 581st ARCW deployed—out of sequence—to the Philippines in June 1952 and built up a tremendous wartime

record. The 580th ARCW deployed to Libya in September 1952, despite still having no clear peacetime mission, but nonetheless acquitted itself admirably. Also in September 1953, Brig Gen Monro MacCloskey took command of Headquarters ARCS. MacCloskey, a former Carpetbagger, tried to energize Air Force support for the PsyWar mission, primarily via his "Operation Think" which generated various ways in which PsyWar could be employed. It was a losing battle, however. Both wings were shrunk and downgraded to groups in September 1953. The ARCS headquarters closed its doors in January 1954, just a month before the 582nd ARC Group deployed to England. All three groups were deactivated in October 1956. Maj Gen, and later Lt Gen, Joseph Smith commanded MATS through this entire period of PsyWar decline.

What happened?

The ARCS concept at first grew quickly in 1951 under Kuter, then died a long, slow death under Smith. Since Vandenberg seemed to enthusiastically support the ARCS, he remained CSAF until June 1953, and Smith was a loyal subordinate, this is a bit of a mystery. Vandenberg might simply have lacked the drive to make his vision a reality. Gen Frank F. Everest might have agreed; he once said that Vandenberg and Spaatz were two of the laziest men "that ever wore 4 stars." Given Vandenberg's overall list of accomplishments, however, this does not seem to ring true. Many historians have cited the overemphasis on bombers as the root of the early Air Force's woes, and the official ARCS history cites the need to fund bombers as a primary cause behind PsyWar's demise. This explanation is likewise unsatisfying, especially since the Air Force was at that point largely run by fighter pilots. TAC actually increased in stature during Vandenberg's administration, becoming a four-star major command in October 1951.

What really seems to have hindered the growth of the ARCS, and by extension AFSOF in the longer term, were three other factors. First, the paltry state of interwar Air Corps manning and equipment largely precluded prewar



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innovations that might have allowed for at least thinking about PsyWar airpower applications prior to the war and significantly retarded PsyWar's growth during the Second World War. This, in turn left the Air Force still largely bereft of experienced air commandos when the Korean War started, and further hindered airmen's rebuilding efforts during that war. Vandenberg could only do so much to reverse the legacy left by interwar Army chiefs Douglas MacArthur and Malin Craig.

Second, Vandenberg's decapitation of MATS leadership—removing both Kuter and Tunner within three months of each other—eliminated the command's two most powerful advocates for the ARCS. While Vandenberg solved one problem by removing those two malcontents—he could trust Smith not to keep lobbying to take control of other commands' transports—he also eliminated advocates for the kind of centralized command structure that would have better enabled the PsyWar units to survive after the Korean War was over. The transition to leadership under Smith would not have been as dramatic, however, if senior Air Force leaders—especially Vandenberg—were more wedded to functional command concepts.

In the end, it appears that the ARCS failed to thrive because key senior Air Force commanders subscribed to the same kind of thinking that they had soundly rejected eight years before in Northwest Africa. Airmen had rejected arguments from Patton and other ground commanders that airpower supporting ground commanders should be organic elements of those ground officers' commands. Airmen like Arnold, Spaatz, Vandenberg and Kuter won the argument for functional airpower. They believed—then proved—that ground commanders would be better supported by allowing airmen to run the air war using a functional command construct.

Even though the Air Force was organized by mission, as evidenced by the Air Force's division into SAC, TAC, MATS and other similar functional (vice geographically-defined) organizations, they apparently refused to consider the notion that air transport—and later PsyWar—units should be considered as anything other than organic support to their respective missions. With too few PsyWar officers to help make the case for centralized control, Vandenberg's removal of PsyWar's two most powerful advocates from MATS, and resistance from senior Air Force leaders who demanded total control of PsyWar units in their theaters, the logical result was the penny-packeting of ARCS assets to the geographic commands they supported. When the Korean War ended and the Air Force once again shrunk, ARCS units largely went the way of the Carpetbaggers before them. Fortunately, they did not totally disappear this time. Some capability survived, but the painful rebuilding process would have to be repeated all over again.



About the Author: Lt Col Joel Higley is a 1995 USAF Academy graduate and KC-135 Weapons Officer. He has over 3,800 flying hours, primarily in C-21, KC-135 and UV-18 aircraft. He is also a fully-qualified Joint Specialty Officer, having served a joint tour in Special Operations Command-Europe. He has flown in Operations Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in military history at The Ohio State University and is slated to teach in the USAFA Military and Strategic Studies Department.



Honoring Air Commandos

Past and Present

By Cory M. Olson, CMSgt, USAF
Command Chief, 1st Special Operations Wing

Editor's Note: The following is CMSgt Olson's speech during the Air Commando Association's annual memorial ceremony at Hurlburt Air Park, on 11 Oct 2015.

Good afternoon and welcome distinguished guests, air commandos, Gold Star families, ladies and gentlemen. Your presence here today is an honor to us all. Please let me start by thanking Chief Gordo Scott, a man I've looked up to for many years, for asking me and allowing me to be your guest speaker for this memorial. I need to state the obvious...we are in the presence of giants and I can't articulate how honored I am to be able to speak here to such a distinguished group of professionals. To the Air Commando Association, thank you for all that you do each and every day for our past and present

air commandos and their families. What you provide is simply awesome and you keep the torch lit and I have no doubt your untiring dedication and commitment will continue for our future air commandos as well.

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Air Force Special Operations Command and the Year of the Air Commando. Throughout 2015 we've highlighted many of our air commandos and their accomplishments and honored the 35th anniversary of Operation EAGLE CLAW. The Combat Talon Memorial was dedicated in this air park and we unveiled



AC-130A TAIL #56-0509 HISTORY

Aircraft #56-0509, named the “Ultimate End,” was accepted by the Air Force on February 28, 1957, and modified to the AC-130A configuration on July 27, 1970. The aircraft participated in the Vietnam conflict and the rescue of the USS Mayaguez. The “Ultimate End” demonstrated the durability of the C-130 after surviving hits in five places by 37mm anti-aircraft artillery on December 12, 1970, extensive left wing leading edge damage on April 12, 1971 and a 57mm round damaging the belly and injuring one crewmember on March 4, 1972.

“Ultimate End” was assigned to Duke Field on June 17, 1975, where it continued in service until retired in the fall of 1994 and transferred to Hurlburt Field’s Air Park. While assigned to the 711th Special Operations Squadron at Duke Field, “Ultimate End” served in Operations JUST CAUSE, DESERT STORM and UPHOLD DEMOCRACY. After 36 years and seven months of service, 24 years as a gunship, “Ultimate End” retired from active service October 1, 1994. (Photo by Scott Schaeffler of Scott Photo Works)



MH-53M TAIL #68-10928 HISTORY

The MH-53M on display at the Air Park was manufactured by Sikorsky Aircraft, Bridgeport, Conn., and delivered to the Air Force on July 2, 1970. It was a much traveled aircraft with assignments at various locations in Thailand, Germany, United Kingdom, Philippines, and South Korea. This helicopter took part in the May 1975 Mayaguez Rescue operation and sustained major battle damage to the engine, rotor blades, and instrument panel (refer to page 45 of PACAF’s report). The legacy of tail number 68-10928 came to a close in the hands of Maj. Frank Cooper, 20th Special Operations Squadron, who piloted the MH-53 on its final flight July 29, 2007 in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The aircraft was retired and put on display in the Air Park on December 3, 2007. (Photo by Scott Schaeffler of Scott Photo Works)

the Brigadier General Harry C. “Heine” Aderholt display at the fitness center which also is named in his honor. We cheered for our Air Commando Ruckers as they completed a 450-mile ruck march from MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa to Hurlburt Field. We also added two workhorses into the airpark with the AC-130H Spectre gunship and the MC-130P Combat Shadow. As we retired those venerable aircraft we added the AC-130J Ghost Rider to the combat inventory here at Hurlburt Field. 2015 has been a wonderful year but it hasn’t been without sorrow as we lost a true American treasure with the passing of Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force #9 Jim Binnicker. We also lost TSgt Timothy Officer, TSgt Marty Bettanyouil, SSgt Forrest Sibley and Capt Matthew Roland to name just a few heroes who’ve left our ranks in 2015. So today as we gather to remember 72 years of air commandos all made possible by courageous men and women who paved the way for where we are today I would be remiss if I didn’t encapsulate a thin slice of our air commando history and heritage. The air commando history and heritage which many of you here today witnessed first-hand and laid the groundwork for.

Beginning in World War II the Carpetbaggers, one of the first special operations missions using air assets, took place in the European Theater with the Office of Strategic Services and the British Intelligence Service. These heroes employed the B-24 to fly hundreds of low-level night paratroop airdrops deep behind enemy lines in France and Eastern Europe. In Korea, then Capt Aderholt and the C-47 missions behind enemy lines like Operation AVIARY. The men who flew with the 580th Air Resupply and Communications Wing. Jungle Jim starting with the Sandy Beach One Mission, to Mali, West Africa and then to Southeast Asia. The 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron was created by Gen Lemay with men like Gen Secord. They were part of President Kennedy’s vision to create an expanded cadre of special operators for the Jungle Jim mission... counterinsurgency.

The Ravens and secret mission in Laos, Project 404. Vietnam also saw the leaflet airdropping missions, close air support missions, the first use of the AC-47 and later the AC-130 gunships. Operation FARMGATE and Bien Hoa. Operation WATERPUMP where air commandos worked with Laotian and Thai pilots. Additionally, you cannot mention air commando experience in Southeast Asia without mentioning the Son Tay Raid. When it was said a rescue of POWs in North Vietnam couldn’t be done, Lt Gen Manor and his team said it could. Together they organized and carried out a daring, almost perfect operation.

After the Vietnam war the tradition continued with the Mayaguez Incident off the coast of Cambodia, no one can ever question the heroics of the aircrews involved in that recovery and rescue effort. In 1980, DESERT ONE and Operation RICE BOWL and even when things

didn't go as planned, it was the innovation and initiative of special operators who had the "Guts to Try".

In 1983, URGENT FURY with Hurlburt MC-130s and AC-130s, rescuing US citizens in Grenada. After that it was off to Panama, DESERT STORM, Turkey, Bosnia, Haiti, Liberia, and then the world changing events of September 11, 2001 which kicked off Operation ENDURING FREEDOM then Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Operation NEW DAWN, Operation INHERENT RESOLVE and many others. I didn't mention any specific missions since the attacks of September 11th because your air commandos have been engaged on the battlefield almost daily accomplishing things that at one time in our history would have been seen as extraordinary and are now nearly routine. Our men and women are highly trained and prepared because of the unbelievable air commandos who came before them.

Therefore, as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of AFSOC and say thank you to all of those who came before us I think it would only be fitting to let you know what kind of shape your air commandos are in from what you built.

Your AFSOC is in an incredibly dynamic place right now. The talents and abilities of the men and women, your commandos, is as high as I have seen it in my years in the command. Your air commandos are engaged across the globe encompassing five continents and in each location they bring a diverse range of talents to their missions. Your aviation wings and groups continue to make strategic impacts across the world in combat zones and training environments. You have the most decorated unit in the Air Force, the 24th Special Operations Wing. Many of your enabler specialties have won numerous Air Force-level awards, for being the best in the business. Each of the Air Force Crosses, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, Distinguished Flying Crosses, Bronze Stars, Meritorious Unit Awards and Gallant Unit Citations have stories behind them that pay tribute to all of your air commandos who have deployed into harm's way. Your air commandos have made meaningful contributions to the struggles of this generation and a great many of the stories will remain untold.

Today's event is a memorial to celebrate the lives of the heroes and their families who've come before us and say thank you and to remember their sacrifices. I want each of you to know that the foundation that was built by these heroes is as strong and resilient as ever. Your air commandos are the greatest this world has ever seen and will continue to give the blood, sweat and tears to keep it that way. Thank you to all air commandos and their families past and present for you have forged an unstoppable bond and commitment! In closing, I want to leave you with these words by Arthur Ashe:

"True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost." 🦅



**Combat Talon I (#64-0567) at Hurlburt Field Air Park, Florida.
1 of 14 C-130s modified for USAF Special Operations.**

(Photo by Scott Schaeffler of Scott Photo Works)



**Les Matheson of the Emerald Coast Pipes and Drums performs
Home Again at the ACA memorial ceremony.** (Photo by ACA staff)



Hurlburt Field's Honor Guard at the ACA Memorial Ceremony.

(Photo by ACA staff)



Why ACA?

An Interview with the Editor

Airmen stand at attention during the Air Force Special Operations Training Center Change of Command ceremony at Hurlburt Field, FL. (USAF photo by SrA Julianne Showalter)

Recently, the Air Commando Journal (ACJ) sat down with Dennis Barnett, Col, USAF (Ret) and president of the Air Commando Association (ACA). In the course of the interview, Col Barnett shared his thoughts on the ACA, membership, and the Air Commando Foundation. In the past, Col Barnett has volunteered as Air Commando Hall of Fame Committee Chairman, he served as vice-president of the ACA for four years, and is currently the president of the ACA. He retired from active duty after 30 years in the service. He flew the MC-130P Combat Shadow and served in several command and staff positions in AFSOC. He completed his career as the Director of Staff.

ACJ: You have been a life member of the ACA for a long time, you have seen a lot of changes in the organization over the years. You have spent countless hours building a stronger bond between the ACA and today's current Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), you were instrumental in creating a foundation to support Air Commandos in need, and you continue recruiting members. Would you share your thoughts on why someone should join the ACA?

Col Barnett: There are a number of reasons, and I think they fall into intangible and tangible categories. First, an intangible. If you are a member of the Air Commando fraternity because you serve with or have served in an Air Commando unit, the statement "once an Air Commando, always an Air

Commando" applies to you. All Air Commandos have a tribe (or association) they are a part of by the nature of their service in a particular weapon system or career field. I like to refer to ACA as a "Tribe of Tribes." It represents and recognizes that we all have our biases toward a subordinate tribe, but we ALL went to or are going to the fight as one team...organized as a joint "Tribe of Tribes." If you accept and embrace this premise, join the Air Commando Association and become a part of the only organization where members of all the tribes continue to support Air Commandos past, present, and future.

ACJ: It sounds like although membership is intangible, it provides an opportunity to support fellow Air Commandos long after someone separates or retires from the service. What are some tangible benefits or reasons for joining?

Col Barnett: If you are reading this, you have one of those tangibles in your hand—all members receive this journal free of charge. It is also distributed free of charge to every AFSOC unit. The ACJ delivers articles about Air Commandos: our heritage, our predecessors and—of course—our aircraft, which you can't find anywhere else.

Additionally, the Commando Store offers a wide variety of great SWAG that members can purchase at great prices, which shows the pride we all retain as Air Commandos. One of our most popular items is the Air Commando Bush Hat (Heritage

Hat) that you would be hard-pressed to find anywhere else.

We also provide an excellent venue during our annual convention to gather together with Air Commandos who span the spectrum of service chronologically and across different career fields. Members also have the opportunity to listen to exceptional leaders who have influenced all Air Commandos. Recent guests of honor include a former CSAF, SECAF, USSOCOM Commanders and a Chief of Staff of the Army. Not only do you get their insights at our Annual Awards Banquet, but members interact directly with these leaders at our Professional Development Heritage Seminars.

You also become a part of an organization which provides the means and the opportunity to recognize our heroes. Annual Hall of Fame inductions highlight the contributions these Airmen made to the Air Commando legacy. Plus, the ACA sponsors a host of active duty AFSOC-level awards throughout the year.

Additionally, there are local chapters at most AFSOC locations, as well as the Tampa area, the Colorado region and Washington, DC. Each chapter engages in local charity projects and supports base functions, such as Airman Leadership School graduations.

ACJ: It sounds like the ACA is an organization one would be proud to join and continue as a lifelong member. What about the other component of the association, the Air Commando Foundation (ACF)?

Col Barnett: The foundation has made quite an impact in the last few years. ACF is the philanthropic/charity arm of ACA and, depending on your present status, the foundation allows members to either “pay it forward” or “pay it back.” To gain a complete understanding of what ACF is about, I think it is important to provide a little background on how we arrived at this point in the development of the association.

The ACA was founded in 1969, at the height of the conflict in Southeast Asia, by some amazing Air Commandos led by then Col Harry C. “Heinie” Aderholt. Not to oversimplify it, the primary purpose of the organization was to ensure the preservation of the Air Commando heritage and legacy. It also served as a fraternal organization, which provided a venue for members to gather and celebrate their heritage. Scholarships were awarded to children of members. The association formed the McCoskrie Threshold Foundation (MTF) which supported various out-of-country communities and the people where Air Commandos recently served. The MTF is still a viable organization today and continues to support schools and children in Central America. The journal published an article highlighting the John Grove Memorial Fund in Vol 1, Issue 3, page 50. These were the primary roles the ACA performed until six years ago.

In 2010, ACA took on a new direction. We recognized that if the ACA was going to thrive as an organization, we needed to be more relevant to younger Air Commandos and encourage them to join. We began that effort by teaming with AFSOC to provide sponsorship for the Commander’s Leadership Awards (Annual coverage of these awards is on page 38). Then, the ACA began to sponsor other awards including the Squadron of the Year, the Commando Medic of the Year, and several

others. Through this team effort, it came to our attention that there were Air Commandos whose needs were outside the scope of the government’s ability to pay. ACA thus developed a relationship with the USSOCOM Care Coalition, which alerted us to opportunities to assist in meeting some of those needs.

In late 2011, it became apparent to the ACA Board of Directors that the number of requests for assistance was not decreasing, but rather increasing. It was obvious we needed to set up an element of the ACA designated solely to raising and providing funds necessary to meet these ongoing and ever-increasing requests. We were fortunate to have Pete DiMaggio as a member who had experience setting up charitable organizations. He led us through the various bureaucracies and the legal paperwork to establish the Air Commando Foundation as a certified 501(c)(3) organization, which allows donations to be fully tax-deductible. Unfortunately, Pete passed away suddenly, but not before we had successfully established the ACF. We will always be in his debt. The Board deliberately set up the ACF under the umbrella of the ACA, so the association would cover the administrative costs the foundation needed to function.

The official stand up of the ACF was in January 2012. In the subsequent four-year period, the foundation has given back over \$130,000 to Air Commandos, past and present, in times of unmet needs. Because the ACA covers all the overhead administrative costs, the foundation can declare unequivocally that “every cent of every dollar given - gives back.” There are a lot of great charities out there which operate with very low administrative costs; our friends in the Special Operations Warrior Foundation come to mind. But none can match the 100 percent give back.

ACJ: Can you highlight a few examples of the unique ways ACF has assisted Air Commandos and their families?

Col Barnett: When a young Air Commando suffered serious injuries, which resulted in the loss of three limbs, his wife went to be at his side at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC). Their situation was further complicated, because their first child was on the way. To provide comfort and boost morale, five fellow airmen’s spouses from his unit wanted to fly to DC and give the mother-to-be a surprise baby shower. That was outside the government’s capability, so ACF sprung into action and paid for their flights to DC. The foundation received the request on a Friday and the ladies left on Monday. Fast forward a few years. After outpatient rehab, the family was ready to move back to the Fort Walton Beach area, but another need arose. Even though they had been in Washington, DC for two years, the government could not pay to move two years’ worth of baby and necessary household items (the injured airman had not officially PCSd to Washington, DC). Again, ACF was notified and we provided a U-Haul truck and paid expenses for two squadron airmen who donated their time to assist in the move by traveling to DC and back. These requests were not for large amounts of money in either case, but not something the wounded airman, nor his family, should have to pay for.


Another example involving a family and their baby is when a young Special Tactics member suffered severe injuries at the hands of the Taliban in Afghanistan. He was stationed in Washington state, but was transferred to WRNMMC where his pregnant wife met him. ACF initially assisted the young family by funding travel for a non-immediate family member who the injured airman wanted at his side when he was moved to DC. The government can only pay for immediate family members. After several months in WRNMMC, it was determined that the airman would be transferred to the Tampa area for rehabilitation. The problem was, all the acquired baby items and the family vehicle were still in Washington State and the baby would be born in Tampa. The foundation paid for the transport of the family van, loaded with the baby equipment, from Washington State to Tampa. Again, not something the government was obligated to pay. Our chapter concept also came to the fore as the Tampa area ACA Chapter helped the family find an apartment, provided food, presented checks for \$1,500 from the Air Commando Foundation, and conducted several morale visits while the young man was rehabbing and after their beautiful daughter was born.

Recently, during a training exercise to take the fight to our enemies, tragedy struck two great Americans when they collided during free-fall. One of these young men was married with five children. The day after the accident, ACF delivered a check for \$5,000 to his widow to assist her with the immediate

needs that would arise in the aftermath of her husband's death. Unfortunately, that was not the first time ACF responded to a similar scenario. The foundation was there for the family of another great warrior who was killed and left a widow and six children.

ACJ: Based on the current Special Operations tempo, do you think there will be future requests for the foundation to provide assistance where the government or other charities with more specific charters are not able to provide help? How do the ACA and the Air Commando Foundation plan to meet future challenges?

Col Barnett: To paraphrase Lt Gen Heithold, the AFSOC Commander, "If you want to know what the next 15 years will look like, just look back at the last 15." In that regard, the requests for assistance to help Air Commandos will probably remain the same, and perhaps be even greater.

In order for ACA to continue supporting our Air Commandos, we need to expand our membership and continue our growth in order to meet the increasing requirements. I would like all Air Commandos to join; as a team, we will be here when the needs arise. We need more individuals and companies who want to "pay it back or pay it forward." Join now, if you haven't already, and donate at www.aircommando.org or call 850-581-0099. 1,500 new members in the last 6 years can't be wrong. Go for it! 





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VetJETS Inc is a Florida 501(c)(3) Non-Profit organization that exists for the purpose of transporting America's Wounded Warriors and their families. We are a company staffed by volunteers and funded by donations, operating a dedicated aircraft serving the Veteran's Airlift Command (www.veteransairlift.org.)

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Fully 100% of donations received goes toward operation and maintenance and of our aircraft. None of our staff receive compensation in any way. Donations will soon be accepted via our web site (under construction) and PayPal.



2015 Commander's Leadership Awards

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

TSgt Jhoonar A. Barrera II

Technical Sergeant Jhoonar A. Barrera II distinguished himself as Requirements and Modifications Flight Section Chief, at his unit from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. During this period, Sergeant Barrera's unparalleled leadership and knowledge were vital in his unit's execution of 1,868 flight hours, delivering 832,785 pounds of cargo and 4,550 Special Operations Forces across multiple politically sensitive regions worldwide. While deployed to a classified location as Air Operations Noncommissioned Officer, assigned to a Joint Special Operations Air Component supporting Special Operations Forces, he tirelessly planned and scheduled 396 Task Force sorties that transported 729 elite warriors and 254,000 pounds of critical cargo. Furthermore, Sergeant Barrera expertly executed a 36-hour short-notice classified mission that delivered 30 Special Operations Forces personnel and 20,000 pounds of crucial payload to an overseas location, preparing a Joint Task Force for imminent combat operations. While in garrison, Sergeant Barrera's unmatched expertise and innovation was integral to the configuration of a modified

aircraft communications system that proved essential to reviving a one-of-a-kind mission capability. Finally, his continued excellence earned this Air Commando recognition as Aircrew Noncommissioned Officer of 2014, fourth Quarter and the Higher Headquarters level Henry "Red" Erwin nomination, 2014. The distinctive accomplishments of Technical Sergeant Barrera reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Steven W. Bosch

Technical Sergeant Steven W. Bosch distinguished himself as Flight Chief, 27th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this time, Sergeant Bosch led 220 personnel from seven specialty codes for the largest aircraft maintenance squadron within Air Force Special Operations Command, ensuring the safe maintenance and sortie generation of ten MC-130Js valued at 670 million dollars. He deftly postured the unit for deployment taskings by creating

three MC-130J unit type codes, aligning maintenance assets with command directives. His expert management of four deployments and 89 personnel contributed to the completion of 677 combat missions with 93 enemy killed in action. Sergeant Bosch's actions led to 350 MC-130J sorties, 1,400 hours and a 98 percent maintenance scheduling effectiveness rate. His dedication to consistent superior results drove the unit to a 91 percent mission capable rate, making it the number one C-130 unit in Air Force Special Operations Command. Additionally, he recognized his subordinates by writing packages for winners of three Below the Zone Airmen, ten quarterly awards and five annual awards. Sergeant Bosch was handpicked as an integral advanced echelon team member, overseeing 41 personnel and establishing Africa Command's first ever MC-130J unit. With short notice, he coordinated his unit's forward movement and set the framework for the capture or kill mission of a high-value target. Back at home station he ensured the resiliency and sustainment of 220 Airmen as Additional Duty First Sergeant. Off duty he volunteered 128 hours coaching a youth football team. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Bosch reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Joseph D. Farinash

Captain Joseph D. Farinash distinguished himself as the Operations Officer, 1st Special Operations Security Forces Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. During this time, Capt Farinash fulfilled the squadron commander position for five months during the commander's absence, leading 283 defenders in the second largest Mission Support Group squadron. In addition, Captain Farinash oversaw the opening of a \$1.1 million commercial vehicle inspection area, eliminating the installations largest threat from the main gate and cutting traffic congestion by an estimated 23 percent. Additionally, Captain Farinash oversaw the Air Force's second busiest Combat Arms section, allowing for the safe and effective training of over 12,000 military members from more than three wings, two installations, and three service branches. Captain Farinash also influenced the installations illicit drug program by guiding 40 narcotic use and distribution cases, achieving a 95 percent confession rate. Furthermore, Captain Farinash secured \$1.6 million in funds to fill all outstanding logistic and equipment shortfalls for the squadron, bringing the squadron's deployed assets to become fully mission capable. Captain Farinash also trained, equipped and deployed four Deployed Aircraft Ground Response Element teams who in turn supported 17 mission areas, enabling 180 sorties and over 200 flight hours. Finally, Captain Farinash planned and executed 16 successful distinguished visitor events, in addition to two visits to Hurlburt Field by the Secretary of the Air Force. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Farinash reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Susan C. Frank

Capt Susan C. Frank distinguished herself as Director of Operations, 919th Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron, 919th Special Operations Wing, Duke Field, Florida, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this

period, Capt Frank oversaw operations in one of the largest and most diverse squadrons in the wing, ensuring that 117 military and 14 civilian personnel, encompassing nine job specialties, met training and operational objectives. Her attention-to-detail led her to quickly identify future critical shortfalls in the Commander's Support Staff due to projected personnel manpower reductions. To address these shortfalls, she initiated an Air Force Smart Operations event in order to streamline processes and seek out efficiencies within the workcenter. Furthermore, she initiated and facilitated a 3-day strategic planning event for the squadron leading to 15 Non-Commissioned Officers being identified and groomed for future leadership. Finally, Capt Frank's keen oversight of 73 self-assessment communicators encompassing 2,300 inspectable items within the Management Internal Control Toolset program has resulted in the squadron having one of the best managed self-assessment programs in the wing. The distinctive accomplishments of Capt Frank reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

SSgt John A. Gabel

Staff Sergeant John A. Gabel distinguished himself as an MC-130H Instructor Flight Engineer and Student Flight Non-Commissioned Officer, 550th Special Operations Squadron, Kirtland AFB, New Mexico, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Sergeant Gabel managed 49 aircrew students in 11 distinct crew positions where he oversaw 1,272 training events and 23 syllabi of instruction utilizing two dissimilar aircraft. As Plans Flight Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, Sergeant Gabel meticulously organized a short-notice African Command deployment with less than three weeks' notice. He led 16 aircrew members through briefings and training ensuring they were fully mission-capable despite the compressed timeline. Additionally, Sergeant Gabel planned 25 joint overseas exercises, programming 300 flight hours and 200 sorties supporting three Combatant Commands. As part of these exercises, he was the subject matter expert for three Special Operations Command Europe jump weeks which enabled combined Special Operations Forces in Europe to conduct 238 static line and 66 High Altitude Low Opening airdrops. Furthermore, Sergeant Gabel's expertise and attention to detail were pivotal when he identified a critical engine oil leak and then led the crew through emergency procedures, thus preventing an arduous off-station engine replacement. Finally, Sergeant Gabel deployed for 95 days in support of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM where he flew 152 combat hours in 70 sorties and delivered more than 339,370 pounds of cargo and 212 personnel. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Gabel reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Robert W. Gantz

Technical Sergeant Robert W. Gantz distinguished himself as an Instructor Loadmaster, 193d Special Operations Squadron, Middletown, Pennsylvania, 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. He expertly instructed a team of highly-skilled special operations loadmasters in one of the largest and most diverse Air

National Guard Wings within the Air Force Special Operations Command. He ensured the safe completion of 127 training sorties which led to the initial qualification of six student loadmasters. He organized and led a professional writing seminar that was instrumental in the professional development of over 95 Airman and Non-Commissioned Officers in the unit. His tireless devotion to the unit and the mission was apparent when he led the development of new EC-130J mission sets resulting in combat readiness for 10 crews. While deployed, he amassed 114 combat hours over 22 sorties, which provided critical Military Information Support Operations to special operations and international forces. During these sorties his expert systems knowledge was utilized to prevent an in-flight mishap caused by a leaking oxygen tank. His efforts prevented the loss of a \$120 million aircraft. His excellent contributions to the Air Force and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were acknowledged by his selection as the 193d Special Operations Wing Outstanding Ready Guardsman of the Year 2014, and the prestigious SSgt Henry E. "Red" Erwin Award for 2015. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Gantz reflect great credit upon himself the Air National Guard, and the United States Air Force.

SSgt Adam C. Hoyle

Staff Sergeant Adam C. Hoyle distinguished himself as Combat Control Craftsman, 321st Special Tactics Squadron, 752d Special Operations Group, RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period Sergeant Hoyle deployed twice and supported a major European exercise. First, Sergeant Hoyle deployed with the European Special Operations Commander's In-Extremis Force national alert team for four months. While attached, Sergeant Hoyle completed a 3,600 hour alert posture poised to support three geographically separated combatant commands, ensuring the team's ability to infiltrate semi-permissive and non-permissive environments utilizing any conventional or unconventional aerial platforms. On his subsequent combat deployment to Afghanistan, Sergeant Hoyle flawlessly led the way to 16 high-risk Special Operations Commando missions as the airpower expert. He monitored aerial surveillance, keeping aircraft sensors on target to capture four 'high-value' targets, clearing 12 villages of 42 enemy fighters and winning the hearts and minds of the local villagers in a known hostile area. Finally, his leadership was also extended into a Joint Chiefs of Staff directed exercise where Sergeant Hoyle was the sole US Air Force member attached to a US Army Special Forces team and four North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries. The combined team culminated 12 very successful events refining joint operational capability and the United States commitment to the European theater countering Russian aggression to the East. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Hoyle reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Laura A. Isaly

Captain Laura A. Isaly distinguished herself as Chief, Mission Systems Training Branch, Air Force Special Operations Air

Warfare Center, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. Captain Isaly led teams of highly-skilled engineers and software technicians to solve Air Force Special Operations Command's long-standing situational awareness and command and control shortfalls. Captain Isaly engineered a solution solving these deficiencies for the command's AC-130U, CV-22, and EC-130 aircraft as well as Air Combat Command HC-130 aircraft. Her solution, known as Specialized Automated Mission Suite-Enhanced Situational Awareness, provides critical threat position and communications capabilities enabling the command's aircrews to avoid enemy locations and complete the mission. Additionally, her teams developed and installed these modifications on aircrew training devices, allowing aircrews to achieve proficiency without flying the aircraft, thereby saving millions of dollars in flying hour costs. Captain Isaly also solved a critical deficiency for the CV-22 Osprey by providing the capability to receive line-of-sight full motion video feeds. Her team developed the solution, planned the equipment installation, conducted flight tests, and authored training materials, ensuring that CV-22 aircrews were fully prepared to employ this new capability. Capt Isaly developed these cutting edge solutions with zero dedicated programming dollars. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Isaly reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt James D. Kamphaus

Technical Sergeant James D. Kamphaus distinguished himself as Operations Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, Detachment 1, 23d Special Operations Weather Squadron, 1st Special Operations Group, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Sergeant Kamphaus expertly led a 12-man team providing weather support to the Army's elite 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), safeguarding seven thousand personnel and more than nine billion dollars in aircraft; he steered detachment operations during seventeen deployments, 20,000 forecasts, and more than 100 joint exercises, enabling 41,000 flight hours. In addition, Sergeant Kamphaus oversaw weather support to Special Operations Task Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq; his forward deployed teams supported fifty-one aircraft during more than 800 named operations, resulting in the delivery of six-hundred thousand pounds of supplies and 845 enemies killed in action. In garrison, Sergeant Kamphaus' team built 2,000 forecasts at three locales supporting the Regiment's training mission; this support enabled upgrade and pre-mission training for 119 special operations aviators. Finally, Sergeant Kamphaus directed support to our nation's most sensitive missions; his team supported two high-risk operations deep inside enemy territory under zero-illumination and harsh weather conditions, meeting high-level national security objectives. For his efforts, Sergeant Kamphaus was named Air Force Special Operations Command's Army Weather Support Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, 2014. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Kamphaus reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Timothy J. McDevitt

Captain Timothy J. McDevitt distinguished himself as an Intelligence Officer, Operations Support Flight Commander, and deployed Detachment Commander from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. Captain McDevitt commanded the unit's largest and most diverse flight in their execution of enabling a 3,000 flight-hour program supporting Secretary of Defense directed missions. He recommended risk mitigation techniques essential to the safe delivery of three million pounds of sensitive cargo and 6,000 passengers executing low-visibility overseas contingency operations in 27 nations. His efforts allowed senior government officials to complete key leader engagements with surrogate forces, critical to securing international support for United States' military operations and diplomatic missions. Additionally, he managed a one million dollar budget and a five million dollar equipment account, garnering four perfect inspections from the Air Force Audit Agency. While deployed, Captain McDevitt commanded a 60-member detachment for 120 days with responsibility spanning three combatant commands. He directed 3,000 combat sorties targeting 700 individuals and triggered kinetic strikes that removed 37 enemy combatants from five areas of responsibility. Further, he planned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions critical to the successful evacuation of an American embassy and the host country's President and family, a key ally in the war on terrorism. His leadership resulted in the removal of numerous high value individuals and denying the enemy sanctuary to plan attacks against the United States. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain McDevitt reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Morgan L. Musser

Captain Morgan L. Musser distinguished herself by outstanding performance and leadership as Mobility Flight Commander and MC-130J Aircraft Commander, 67th Special Operations Squadron and as Executive Officer, 752d Special Operations Group, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this time, Captain Musser successfully maintained mission readiness for 45 aircrew members and mobilized another 30 in support of contingencies in six nations, resulting in 100% mission effectiveness for Special Operations Command Europe. Additionally, Captain Musser flawlessly executed the first-ever SEAL maritime craft aerial delivery in Africa. Her actions culminated in the successful airdrop of two 20,000 pound boats and 19 Navy SEALs during a 13 hour, 3,200 mile flight, across three combatant commands, validating SOCAF's rapid response capability for counter piracy operations. Captain Musser was also the lead pilot for the exfiltration of 19 personnel and 11,000 pounds of cargo during joint combined cold weather training in Norway where her tireless effort resulted in increased NATO capabilities. As a final testament to her perseverance, Captain Musser was nominated for the AFSOC Mackay Trophy for conducting the first-ever MC-130J emergency three-engine airdrop in a combat environment, resulting in 20,000 pounds of critical supplies being delivered to special operations forces in a hostile area. Her heroic actions directly contributed to

her unit being awarded the 352d Special Operations Wing's Squadron of the Year. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Musser reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Ryan A. Perhala

Captain Ryan A. Perhala distinguished himself as MQ-9 Evaluator Pilot and Chief, Weapons and Tactics, 33d Special Operations Squadron, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Captain Perhala expertly led a team of 17 instructor pilots and instructor sensor operators as Flight Commander overseeing armed Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance sorties across four areas of operation, resulting in 218 organic kinetic strikes and 523 enemy combatants killed in action. As an aircraft commander, he executed four high-level precision airstrikes, employing 10 missiles and one laser-guided bomb resulting in 13 enemy combatants killed in action. Additionally, his unparalleled skill and leadership were crucial to the planning of the first Air Force Special Operations Command MQ-9 three-ship operation, including seven weeks of rehearsals resulting in the flawless execution of a direct action mission. His instructional abilities were vital in ensuring the tactical proficiency of his squadron while leading two week-long tactical verification planning exercises for six instructor candidates three graduate-level instructor certifications and, creating five Special Operations Forces Remotely Piloted Aircraft experts thereby mitigating enterprise risk during the 3d Special Operation Squadron's transition from the MQ-1 to MQ-9. Finally, Captain Perhala became the first Remotely Piloted Aircraft pipeline graduate in the United States Air Force to be selected for and graduate from the United States Air Force Weapons School, earning the academic award for his performance. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Perhala reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Edwardo J. Ramirez

Technical Sergeant Edwardo J. Ramirez distinguished himself as Group Assistant Chief of Fire Support, 24th Special Operations Wing, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Sergeant Ramirez's unmatched technical expertise and exceptional leadership had a staggering impact on US national security. He personally decimated the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant with airstrikes, and he trained nearly 96 other joint terminal attack controllers to do the same. Sergeant Ramirez was hand-picked to deploy in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, where he served as the Fire Support Officer for a Joint Task Force for six months. During that time he flawlessly directed 1,500 hours of close air support and controlled 215 air strikes against Islamic State targets resulting in the elimination of over 700 enemy combatants and the destruction of 450 enemy vehicles, 50 buildings, and 45 artillery pieces. Sergeant Ramirez controlled an additional 550 hours of close air support for 25 sensitive missions resulting in the elimination of 18 high-value Islamic State targets. During the six months he was not crushing our nation's enemies

overseas, Sergeant Ramirez served as the Group's Joint Terminal Attack Control Standards and Evaluations Examiner, where he directed training and certification of 96 joint terminal attack controllers in accordance with Air Force standards. Sergeant Ramirez also led five joint fires exercises, where he skillfully managed 300 aircraft flight hours and supervised 675 airstrikes. This training ensured the combat readiness 310 joint terminal attack controllers, fighter pilots, and aircrew. Finally, he expertly managed three million dollars in close air support equipment and served as the Group's alternate contracting officer's representative for a seven million dollar close air support contract. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Ramirez reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt John D. Rulien

Captain John D. Rulien distinguished himself as Assistant Flight Commander, 320th Special Tactics Squadron, 353d Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base Japan, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. Captain Rulien's decisive leadership propelled the 353d SOG's combat power throughout the Pacific as he led his 21-man team executing over 75 high risk missions, on 14 joint exercises spanning 8 countries. He led a recon team in Exercise FOAL EAGLE on a night freefall infil to control 15 airdrops and air landings of 150 Rangers yielding the 1st successful execution of a bi-lateral airfield seizure on the Korean peninsula in 10 years. A peerless mission commander, he led a 14-man team to the Philippines on Exercise BALIKATAN where he directed airborne and terminal attack guidance training, producing 7 new jumpmasters and increasing SOG kinetic employment capabilities by 30%. Also, he forged new relationships with Marine Force Recon teams as the architect and team leader behind OPERATION GUNSMOKE, an Okinawa-based joint Air Force/Marine marksmanship and rotary wing, high value target recovery, full mission profile which prepared 40 operators for imminent combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Training that he would later use as Joint Terminal Attack Controller deployed to Iraq with an Army Special Forces team, where he would be responsible for more than 20 enemy killed in action. Finally Capt Rulien authored a published leadership article on risk mitigation for AFSOC's safety magazine, earned the SOG's CGO of the Quarter and was a distinguished graduate of Squadron Officer School. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Rulien reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Addison M. Runels

Technical Sergeant Addison M. Runels distinguished himself by outstanding achievement while assigned to 919th Special Operations Maintenance Group, 919th Special Operations Wing, Eglin Air Force Base, Field 3, Florida, 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Sergeant Runels' outstanding leadership and devotion to duty contributed immeasurably to the successful accomplishment of the unit's worldwide mission. While deployed to the United States Africa Command's Area of Responsibility in support of

Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, his keen observation led to the discovery of an aircraft fuel leak. He repaired in less than one hour, allowing completion of a crucial food re-supply airdrop mission while averting a potential in-flight emergency. Sergeant Runels' persistent focus led to an astounding 181 safe sorties, movement of 270 passengers, and 36 cargo tons of supplies with zero mission aborts, which culminated in 23 Lord's Resistance Army members defecting. Furthermore, his personnel initiative and dedication as an elite C-145A cadre team member propelled him above all others by training 36 maintenance personnel, resulting in an increase of mission qualified personnel by 40 percent. Finally, Sergeant Runels' extraordinary technical skills and high degree of professionalism made him the number one choice to attend Cessna 208-B Grand Caravan Aircraft Ground Maintenance training school, in order to train and support current and future Aviation Foreign Internal Defense and Non-Standard Aviation missions, as a Combat Aviation Advisor. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Runels reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

A1C Houcemeddine Sandi

Airman First Class Houcemeddine Sandi distinguished himself as Cultural Advisor, United States Air Force Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field, Florida, from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. Airman Sandi was recruited under a special program sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense as one of only six Cultural Advisors in the Air Force. His impact has been felt throughout the tactical and operational environment where he has interfaced with United States and foreign military personnel during joint and combined exercises and training. Airman Sandi was essential to the success of Exercise FLINTLOCK, where on short notice he promptly translated 50 strategic documents which eliminated miscommunication between 20 African nations, French and United States military forces during the mission execution phase of the exercise. Airman Sandi taught over 200 students during intercultural panel discussions, supporting the Intercultural Competency Basic Course. He also developed and presented lectures on cultural intricacies on African nations, specifically concentrating on Tunisia. Through these lectures, he provided a unique cultural perspective for personnel operating with partner nations in the region. Additionally, due to his French speaking ability as well as five dialects of Arabic, he greatly contributed to honing language of special operations forces in over 30 role-playing scenarios. His diverse background and efforts were instrumental to the Air Force Special Operations School Language Center winning the 2014 Special Operations Command Language Institute of the Year. The distinctive accomplishments of Airman Sandi reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Salvatore Sferrazza

Captain Salvatore Sferrazza distinguished himself as Flight Commander, 24th Special Operations Wing, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Captain Sferrazza's extraordinary leadership, both in garrison and while deployed,

contributed immeasurably to US national security. Captain Sferrazza commanded a remote outstation in Africa for four months, where he directed a 35-man joint US team responsible for advising and assisting a 2,800-man partner-nation force in its fight against violent extremists in the region. He and his team enabled partner-nation operations on a massive scale to disrupt terrorist safe havens, and he personally led missions into hostile territory to support these efforts. Additionally, while in garrison, Captain Sferrazza led his 26-man Special Tactics Flight during preparation for two sensitive special operations missions approved by the President. These operations successfully targeted the leadership of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, resulting in the elimination of one Islamic State leader and 20 other fighters. For one of these operations, Captain Sferrazza deployed overseas to lead the Joint Task Force Personnel Recovery Cell. In this capacity he developed and implemented a superb personnel recovery plan that protected over 300 air and ground forces operating in a contested region. Finally, Captain Sferrazza led a 20-man joint team that provided over-water search-and-rescue coverage for 200 special operations personnel engaged in a two-week geographic combatant command exercise vital to regional security. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Sferrazza reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Capt Neil S. Spence


Captain Neil S. Spence distinguished himself as an EC-130J Instructor Pilot, 193d Special Operations Squadron, Harrisburg IAP Pennsylvania, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. His unparalleled dedication in numerous positions throughout the squadron exemplifies excellence and leadership traits that are essential to outstanding officership. He was selected by the 193d Special Operations Wing to be the pilot subject matter expert for an Air Force Material Command AC-130J Class A Safety Investigation Board. His expertise as a pilot and prior maintainer were invaluable to the investigation. His selfless dedication, exhaustive efforts, and high degree of professionalism contributed immensely to the overall Board findings and recommendations. His hard work will help prevent similar mishaps in the future, thereby preserving lives, aircraft, and our nation's combat capability. Due to his personal responsibility and leadership, he was chosen to lead multiple aircrews in support of exercise EMERALD WARRIOR simultaneously contributing to the unit's readiness as well as coalition and international partners combat capabilities. As the Field Training Unit's Instructor Pilot, he was responsible for the training and scheduling of over 20 students. His diligent work led to the qualification of these students and increased the unit's combat readiness. The distinctive accomplishments of Captain Spence reflect great credit upon himself, the Air National Guard, and the United States Air Force.

TSgt Michael R. Wilson

Technical Sergeant Michael R. Wilson distinguished himself as MC-130H Combat Talon II Evaluator Loadmaster and Flight Chief, Current Operations and Training, 1st Special Operations

Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Japan, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Sergeant Wilson expertly directed the movement of 265,000 pounds of war materiel and 460 personnel across 29 combat missions guaranteeing continued theater special operations for Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa. Sergeant Wilson showcased his leadership prowess during a daring Presidential-directed rescue mission providing 123,000 pounds of fuel. He enabled the insertion of a Special Operations team and recovery of 8 hostages, thus securing a United States strategic win. Additionally, as flight chief for current operations, Sergeant Wilson deftly prosecuted a 2,050 hour flying program for five MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft while ensuring the completion of 19,000 training items for 65 aircrew members. Sergeant Wilson's ability to effectively communicate was called upon during a Japan Air Self-Defense Force visit as he mentored a fellow loadmaster from a Japanese C-130 airlift squadron, scheduling flights, training, and squadron social events. His efforts proved superior to other mentors, and created a long-lasting relationship with our host nation. Finally, Sergeant Wilson's professionalism and operational expertise earned him squadron nominations for the 2014 Airlift Tanker Association Young Leadership Award and the 2014 Lance P. Sijan Leadership Award, and won him a MAJCOM Safety Award. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Wilson reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Lt Karlie E. Ziegler

First Lieutenant Karlie E. Ziegler distinguished herself as Fabrication Flight Commander, 58th Maintenance Squadron, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, from 1 June 2014 to 31 May 2015. During this period, Lieutenant Ziegler tackled a delayed Aerospace Ground Equipment corrosion prevention cycle, developing a paint and restoration plan for 134 assets. Her efforts reduced the projected timeline from 10 to 2 years, increasing the monthly output by 500 percent. Additionally, Lieutenant Ziegler restored dormant Wi-Fi connectivity on the flight line. She partnered with base communications to repair broken hardware and resolve connectivity issues, reactivating the system for the first time in four years. Furthermore, Lieutenant Ziegler championed Continuous Process Improvement initiatives for the maintenance group's consolidated tool kits. She identified 20 deficiencies, leading to the optimization of 14 support section processes group-wide. Finally, Lieutenant Ziegler's leadership and dedication to service were felt across the base and community. She coordinated monthly events for 71 members as Treasurer of the Logistics Officers Association's Leo Marquez Chapter, volunteered with a local girls' running club where she mentored 20 teenagers on healthy living and self-respect, and was a by-name request as a Summary Courts Officer, in which she worked tirelessly to ensure the accountability and proper allocation of a fallen Airman's property to his next of kin. For her stellar efforts, Lieutenant Ziegler was named the Wing's Company Grade Officer of the Fourth Quarter 2014. The distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Ziegler reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force. 



2015 Air Commando



BRUCE L. BRACKETT

Master Sergeant Bruce Brackett served with distinction for over twenty years in the United States Air Force. He served the majority of his career in Air Force and Joint Special Operations units where his contributions in the development of loadmaster tactics and procedures continue to be employed around the world against adversarial forces. Initially assigned to the 8th Special Operations Squadron, he mastered MC-130 Combat Talon specialized mission qualifications in minimum time. Sergeant Brackett assisted in "Project 46," the testing and evaluating of a Fulton extraction method designed to retrieve small teams in harms-way. During Operation JUST CAUSE, he flew into Rio Hato Airfield to help seize the airfield from the Panamanian Defense Forces. After a blacked-out landing, and while still under enemy fire, MSgt Brackett exited his aircraft and used an emergency crash ax to cut down two small trees obstructing the taxiway on which his aircraft had to reverse taxi to set up a

mission critical Forward Area Rearming and Refueling Point (FARRP). In subsequent Joint Special Operations assignments, he advised commanders and SOF "customers" on tactical aerial delivery capabilities involving the MC-130, and SOLL II modified C-141 and C-5 aircraft. His expertise was sought after once again when he was "hand-picked" for an assignment in a "data masked" unit. His work will remain untold, but the nation's most elite special operations forces are better able to conduct covert, clandestine, and direct action missions because of his dedicated service. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Master Sergeant Brackett reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.

CRAIG DOCK

Master Sergeant Dock's selfless duty to service and country represent the true embodiment of the ideals, standards and traditions of the Air Commando. Craig's operational combat experience included serving as a MH-53 Pave Low Aerial Gunner and later as an evaluator Flight Engineer flying combat missions with elite SOF units which spanned nearly two decades. These operations included DESERT STORM, UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, JOINT ENDEAVOR, ASSURED RESPONSE, ALLIED FORCE and culminated with ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. Sergeant Dock's most notable achievement was the combat rescue of a downed F-14 pilot behind enemy lines earning him both the Distinguished Flying Cross and Mackay Trophy. His individual contributions throughout his distinguished career have helped shape how our vertical lift crews are employed in combat to this day. He led the testing and certification of the alternating current drive GAU-2B 7.62

mini-gun system, Blade Pylon Fold System and most notably the Interactive Defense Avionics System/Multi-mission Advanced Tactical Terminal for the MH-53M Pave Low III. He was instrumental in training and certifying over 100 aircrew in the revised MH-53M. His loyal service and staunch advocacy as a US Civil Servant working within the CV-22 Requirements Office was instrumental and key to the development of the Mission Planning Tools and Aircraft/Weapons/Electronics. He also continues to serve as a volunteer for his church and the Special Operation Warrior Foundation. His selfless duty to service and country represent the true embodiment of the traditions of the Air Commando. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Master Sergeant Dock reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.

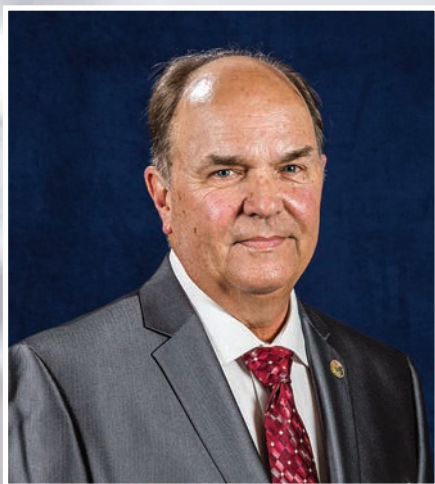


do HALL OF FAME

EMIL MAX FRIEDAUER



Lieutenant Colonel Friedauer earned his navigator wings in 1966 and served as a Navigator for 27 years. He trained as a MC-130E, Combat Talon navigator in 1977. His first Air Commando assignment was with the 7th Special Operations Squadron at Rhein Main Air Base, Germany serving as Squadron Chief Navigator and Chief of Plans, coordinating and directing the squadron's participation in Flintlock and other joint and combined exercises throughout Europe and North Africa. Max continued his special operations career at Headquarters 23rd Air Force, Scott Air Force, Illinois, as Chief of the Exercise Branch and as HQ Air Force Special Operations Command's Director of Current Operations. Max's efforts ensured Air Commandos received challenging and pertinent global training opportunities. As a government contractor he supported Air Commandos worldwide in the development of System Training Plans and for developing and executing the Command's Long Range and Strategic Planning Process. He is the founder, past president and motivational force of the 7th Air Commando Society. Without his presence, the 7 ACS would probably not exist. He also founded the Combat Talon Memorial Foundation to construct a memorial to fallen Combat Talon Airmen in the Hurlburt Memorial Air Park that was dedicated in April 2015. Max Friedauer doesn't know how to say no. If the cause supports Air Commandos, through the ACA, Air Force Association, or other local area charities, Max volunteers and makes it happen. His selfless duty to service and country represent the true embodiment and traditions of the Air Commando. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Lieutenant Colonel Friedauer reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.



ROBERT L. MELLER

Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Meller is the epitome of an Air Commando and distinguished himself over his more than 20 years in Special Operations while serving at all levels of operational and staff positions. Throughout his active duty military career Lt Col Meller has embodied the valiant spirit, pride, and unique attitude which personify an Air Commando. As an innovative leader and extraordinary aviator he has made monumental contributions to the Air Force and Special Operations community. Always at the forefront of Special Operations capabilities and actions, he accomplished a number of Special Operations aviation "firsts" in his distinguished career. He was the first Combat Talon pilot to be qualified in aerial refueling and first Combat Talon pilot to land an MC-130 wearing Night Vision Goggles in a totally blacked out environment. He was a key participant in the development of innovative night vision goggle capabilities for Operation Eagle Claw, the military mission to


rescue American hostages being held in Iran and was selected as the lead pilot for the airfield seizure operation on night two of the rescue. Following this failed rescue attempt he continued the refinement of these innovative night vision goggle capabilities in Project Honey Badger, preparing for another rescue attempt. As the 23rd Air Force Chief of Fixed Wing Aviation he continued to innovate, refine and standardize the revolutionary Night Vision Goggle capabilities for fixed wing operations. His significant contributions to the evolution of current day Special Operations exemplifies his dedication, service and sacrifice in the best tradition of the Air Commando. Lt Col Meller's outstanding contributions reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos.

2015 Air Commando HALL OF FAME



ROBERT L. RUSSELL JR.

Colonel Robert L. “Bob” Russell, Jr., distinguished himself as an Air Commando and Special Operations Force leader while assigned to multiple special operations organizations during his outstanding 27-year career. Colonel Russell served as the Wing Weather Officer to 1st Special Operations Squadron and later to the newly established 353rd Special Operations Wing at Clark Air Base, Philippines; Command Meteorologist for the Joint Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; along with Chief, Weather Plans and Readiness, Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command; Commander, 10th Combat Weather Squadron; and Chief, Operational Weather Division at Headquarters AFSOC, all at Hurlburt Field, Florida. Colonel Russell’s accomplishments are numerous and significant, spanning from tactical to strategic levels, however, his greatest success was his work to get the Special Operations Weather Team career field established. He gained AFSOC

and Air Force General-Officer advocacy and approval for a distinctive accession and training pipeline, and classification separate from conventional weather personnel. This resulted in the ability to recruit off the street; target specific personnel actions such as recruiting, promotion, retention, bonuses, and incentive pays; and most importantly, provide commanders’ with a “base-lined” combat ready operator. The result of this new and separate career field is seen in the significant increase in the number and capability of special operations weather operators executing missions across the globe. Colonel Russell’s extraordinary dedication, exceptional commitment and contributions reflect great credit upon himself, Air Force Special Operations, and all Air Commandos. 



AIR COMMANDO HALL OF FAME

**The Air Commando Hall of Fame Committee
is seeking candidates for 2016**

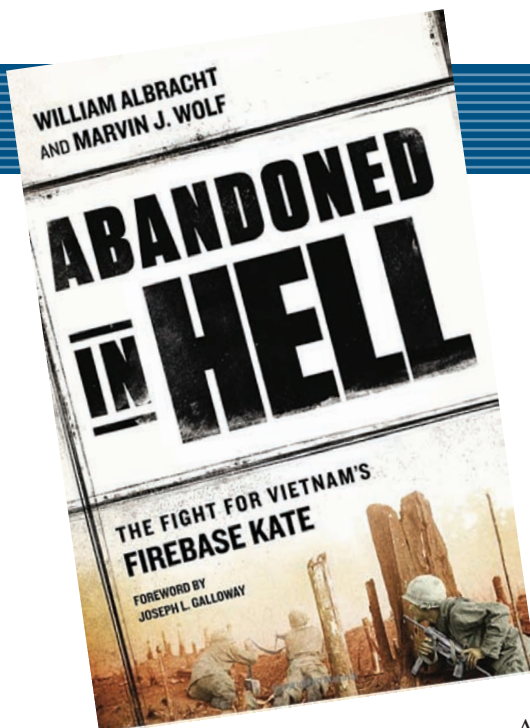
The Hall of Fame nomination criteria, along with a nomination form, is available online at www.aircommando.org. Please consider nominating worthy Air Commandos by submitting a strong award package for the committee’s review.

BOOK REVIEW

Abandoned in Hell

By Captains William Albracht and Marvin J. Wolf, US Army, (Ret)

Reviewed by Scott E. McIntosh, Maj, USAF



The common perception is that the natural evolution from Dien Bien Phu was the siege of Khe Sanh.

After all, Gen Giap brought in both anti-aircraft and field artillery guns to pound the garrisons at both airfields and he effectively tied down some of the best French and American forces in Southeast Asia. The common lesson learned from Khe Sanh, though, is that American airpower was the variable that broke the siege and ensured that 1968 would not recast the humiliating defeat of 1954.

Abandoned in Hell strengthens the aforementioned argument, but there is much more to this first-person narrative than a clinical assessment of variables and lessons learned from the emotional but critical military history of America's engagement in Vietnam.

When William Albracht—the youngest Green Beret captain in Vietnam—took command of Firebase Kate and its 180-ish defenders (27 American Special Forces and howitzer crewmen, plus around 150 Montagnard Civilian Irregular Defense Group strikers), he experienced the usual recognition of things that need to be done and the desire to get at it. In his words: “Long before completing my inspection of the perimeter defenses, I realized that I had been totally wrong: I had not been sent to Kate to sit on my ass. There was a lot of work to do...” His next reported act was, in my opinion, the right answer; he immediately conferred with his senior NCO about the situation and they quickly scraped a plan together. Albracht, as he does in this case, offers several lessons in the midst of his narrative on not only small unit leadership, but the role of the officer within it.

On the morning of 29 October, 1969, for instance, the People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) hit the base with a mortar and rocket barrage. Per SOP, when this lifted, the small arms sparked up outside the perimeter. Albracht took cover behind a mound of dirt and—in between radio transmissions—fell back to the advice he received at the Officer Candidate School:

You're young guys with no experience. We're training you to be infantry officers, leaders of men. When you become a new second lieutenant, you will be tested. You'll be the butt of

jokes about being green and inexperienced. But when your men hear their first shots fired at them, they're all going to look to you. Your privates, corporals, and sergeants, even your senior platoon sergeants, they will all look to you—that's how the Army works. They're going to look to you, and you'd better goddamn well be ready to make the right decisions.

During this episode one of the entities Albracht was communicating with on the radio, however, was an OH-6 Light Observation and Cargo Helicopter (LOACH), and herein lies another strength of this particular book. SOF is inherently joint, and the account makes it clear that the CAS, heliborne resupply, and overwatch Kate received was focal in its defense and successful evacuation; Albracht in fact devotes an entire appendix to his conversations with SPOOKY 41 (Capt Al Dykes) and SPAD ZERO TWO (Maj Gerald Helmich) during the siege.

The author spends some time on the evolution of C-47s and C-119s into gunships, taking breaks from the siege history to talk about the Phyllis Ann program (pulling aircraft from the Guard, Reserves, and storage to convert them to the EC-, HC-, and AC-47s for use in Southeast Asia); but most of Albracht's experience at Kate was focused on Spooky 41 orbiting overhead and orienting on the firebase perimeter via an IR strobe that the howitzer gunners had placed at the bottom of their 4-foot-deep generator pit. The book also speaks to the mandate that gunships be out of harm's way well before sun-up. On 31 October 1969, for instance, SPOOKY 41 violated that mandate in order to put 2,000 rounds of 7.62 into rocket and mortar positions outside the perimeter as the sun was coming up, and the squadron commander subsequently met Aircraft Commander Al Dykes on the tarmac at Phan Rang to threaten him with court-martial. The book cites Dykes' “Any Time, Any Place” response to this development, though, in his own words: “I don't know, I can't explain it, but [that morning] I got back to my base and I went in to the duty officer and I told him to put my name down to fly every night. As long as Hawk [Albracht's call sign] needs somebody over there, I'm going back...”

Even with consistent CAS, though, about a day later, circumstances compelled Capt Albracht to make the internal cost/benefits analysis of holding onto the firebase:

I would never surrender. I never even considered it. But now our artillery pieces had taken so many direct hits that they were little more than scrap metal. We were defending an impact

area, and nothing more. Again, ammo was dangerously low... [and] our water supply had dwindled to what remained in our canteens. Any chopper pilot bold enough to try resupplying us stood a better-than-even chance of being blown out of the sky. I had to begin thinking about if and how we could safely abandon Kate.

Moreover, the bunkers and hastily-contrived defensive works were collapsing; 15 of the 27 assigned US soldiers were out of the fight, and about a third of Albracht's CIDG irregulars were as well. It is here, though, that the history deviates from both Dien Bien Phu (where the non-French defenders disappeared, leaving the professional French military cadre to the mercy of the Viet Minh) and Khe Sanh (where the US defenders effectively attrited the NVA to the point that the besieging force

About the Authors:

William Albracht is a highly decorated Vietnam veteran and retired Secret Service agent whose twenty-five year White House career included the protection details of four American Presidents and numerous foreign dignitaries. Upon retirement, Albracht managed Executive Security Operations at the Ford Motor Company before returning to his hometown to open a security consulting business.



Marvin J. Wolf

Marvin J. Wolf is a decorated Vietnam veteran and the author or co-author of many nonfiction books, including *Where White Men Fear to Tread* and *Buddha's Child*.

chose to disengage and leave). The force at Firebase Kate left en masse and of their own accord with the support of not only SPOOKY 41, but 6th Special Operations Squadron Skyraiders from Pleiku as well. You can feel the tension in the associated radio traffic, which is again recorded in the book's appendix (e.g., SPAD ZERO TWO: "Okay, Hawk, this is Spad, you're going to have to talk slower if you want these people to talk to you.")

The narrative hits a variety of waypoints along the way to its conclusion in order to discuss North Vietnam's effective SIGINT apparatus, the fighting effectiveness of Army of the Republic of Vietnam's (ARVN) soldiers v_is-à-vis those from the North, and the truly awful-to-read loss of a UH-1 gunship to a flak trap right outside Kate's perimeter. Abandoned in Hell is, however, a book about re-examining this short block

of time and what occurred in it under the lens of hindsight and the broader timeline between 1969 and William Albracht receiving the Silver Star in November 2012 for his actions on Firebase Kate. The book argues that the Nixon administration, executing its Vietnamization policy, would have preferred the ARVN 23rd Infantry Division, rather than American forces, coming to Kate's rescue; the implication is that this is why the task was left to an Australian SAS Major with 2 companies of Mike Force Nung irregulars. In my opinion, though, the best assessment is from CW2 Ken Donovan, in the book's epilogue:

The meaning of our Vietnam experience lies within us. Not with the politicians. Not with the commanders. We were willing to step forward to serve our country when that wasn't necessarily the fashionable thing to do. I kept faith with my fellow soldiers, and I was courageous when I had to be, and I think that applied to all of us. I lost about twenty-six friends—flight school classmates and guys in my unit. Forty-some years after the fact, I feel bad because we lost their capability. These men were courageous, intelligent, aggressive, all the good things that we want in our citizens, and we lost that. If we look at most of the guys [that I knew] who survived, we had some doctors, a lot of attorneys, many successful businessmen. Contributing members of our society. We lost all that. My overriding emotion is a sense of loss.

This humans-over-hardware perspective is woven deep into the book, but the US hardware advantage wielded in this fight also deserves a look.

Robert Pisor, in his famous analysis of Khe Sanh, The End of the Line, wrote that "tremendous firepower"—delivered by both guns and aircraft, was the variable that made the difference. Gen Westmoreland, who started his career in the field artillery, "had fifty times the mincing power that the French had at Dien Bien Phu. He wanted the North Vietnamese to attack." Due to Vietnamization or not, the fleet of aircraft over Khe Sanh was unavailable to Albracht on Firebase Kate. The air support Kate did get, however, was exemplified by some pretty intrepid forward air control, rotary-wing, SPOOKY, and SPAD aircrews, one of which was always on-station overhead during the ordeal.

To conclude, Abandoned in Hell is, I think, a worthy contribution to American military history, but more precisely a good study of SOF and what it brings to the fight. The book emphasizes the aforementioned human element and that element's high degree of expertise—a level of quality that cannot be churned out by an assembly line but is instead the outcome of a long and uncommon process. The men who survived the siege were not only Green Berets, however, but comprised a wide range of military skill sets. Albracht and Wolf have effectively told a fine and true story, and hit on all the SOF Truths in the telling.



Maj Scott E. McIntosh is a Regional Affairs Strategist at Allied Air Command (NATO), Ramstein Airbase, Germany. He has served as a Warfare Studies and Leadership in Command instructor at Air Command and Staff College (2009-2012) as well as the S2 at the 712th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Center (CJTF 180), Afghanistan (2002).

Antlers are Christmas Tree

An Air Drop That Wasn't All Fun and Games

By AIC Bob Cutts, Stars and Stripes Staff Writer

THE MISSION: Fly an unarmed daytime flight over North Vietnam on Christmas Day 1965 to parachute containers of toys and candy to the North Vietnamese children.

Editor's Note: In the past, most Air Commandos came to Special Ops from another weapon system. While this story is not a mission flown by Air Commandos, it is truly a special mission flown by a future gunship icon. This article originally appeared in Stars and Stripes on April 16, 1967.

The jungle-matted mountains shimmered and danced weirdly through the heat waves rolling off the bone white concrete strip.

The plane lumbered out slowly to the runway's end, dragging its own carpet of superheated kerosene jet fumes. It stopped at the edge of the ribbon. Its crew systematically checked hydraulics, engines, safety systems, landing gear, helmets, and oxygen breathing equipment. Everything was ready.

The load to be dropped on this mission was carefully secured in the plane's belly, rigged for quick release. Precision delivery would be essential for this type of armament.

It was Christmas Eve at Da Nang AB, Republic of Vietnam, and the only United States Air Force plane to fly on a bombing mission that night was bound for North Vietnam.

The mission, cloaked in secrecy for weeks, could be one of the most important of the year if it was successful.

As Da Nang fell away from the plane's wheels, the crew, all swathed in anonymous gray flight suits, each had time to think about what lay ahead.

The mission would be a "tight" one.

They knew from the briefing what was expected from them: Weather in the north was bad; the drop would have to be flown low. Characteristics of the load required straight and narrow flying at low, low speeds for accurate delivery.

Two Marine counter-electronic intelligence jets would rendezvous and fly on their wing from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) northward, but the men knew they had little chance if the storm of flak suddenly sprang up around them. There was no room for maneuvering, and they were too fat a target if the ELINT birds failed to befuddle the North Vietnam gun radar.

To top it off, the strike, planned for midnight, had been switched to daylight hours because of the truce which took effect at 1800 hours that night. They had to pull it off fast.

Pilot John Gallagher sweated in the cockpit. Beneath his flight suit, he wore clothing not listed in any current Air Force dress regulations – a red and white Santa Claus suit. It fitted in with the mission.

"Reindeer, Reindeer, this is Panama over." Gallagher, circling over the South China Sea off the DMZ answered the 2d

Air Division command radio station. The bad news came over the channel clear and loud – "Antlers are Christmas Tree." Everyone in the cockpit took a deep breath. This was serious.

"Antlers are Christmas Tree" meant the two ELINT jets had both been grounded just before takeoff. No radar coverage would be available to Reindeer. That meant the plane would be wide open if gunners' radar locked on.

Panama asked Reindeer if it would still accept the mission. Gallagher looked around him, read the faces of the men who might have to die with him. He saw his answer. "Rog" was the reply. Reindeer was diverted to its secondary target and the plane flew over North Vietnam.

As the crew began "breathing up" on their oxygen masks, navigator Capt Dale Svarverud sent out a strange message over the intercom. He had carried aboard a tiny music box in his flight case, and he wound it up and laid an open microphone next to it on his small chart desk.

It took the crew a few minutes to figure out where the tinkling notes of "Jingle Bells" were coming from and for a few seconds it could have been Christmas at home for any of them – the



Above: SSgt David Torbush (standing) and Capt John Gallagher prepare some of the Santa chutes before a Christmas toy drop mission over North Vietnam. (Photo courtesy of Stars and Stripes)

Right: Original bag of toys saved by John Gallagher. (Photo by ACA staff)



laughter and “Merry Christmases” had a tinny sound on the intercom, but they were genuine.

As the three-minute signal went back to the crew, loadmaster SSgt Dave Torbush took one last check of the plane’s load. He pried open one of the cardboard boxes and pulled out a small bundle. The tiny cotton chute unfurled and Torbush smiled as the little brightly colored toys jingled and rattled inside the plastic bags.

The yellow slip of paper in the bag said, in Vietnamese, “To the children of North Vietnam from the children of South Vietnam.” Torbush was going to drop a whole plane load of Christmas presents on North Vietnam.

Torbush went back to adjusting his helmet and face mask. Loadmaster SSgt Archie Hall called “ready” and opened the C-130’s gaping ramp door. Flight engineer MSgt Bill “Yosh” Yoshida tied himself to the plane and got ready to feed the 200 40-pound crates of toys back to the exit ramp.

In the cockpit, Gallagher couldn’t help smiling. Funny

damn war. Spend all year blasting the hell out of a country from the skies, and now, Christmas Eve, drop a load of presents on the enemy.

Well it wasn’t the first time the 315th Air Division had been called on to drop a strange cargo load in this strange war.

Gallagher remembered the faces of the kids back at Da Nang, where he had bummed the Santa suit and rode around on a maintenance truck handing out BX candy to the youngsters that flocked around him.

What the hell – it’s Christmas, he thought. The kids down there are just the same as the kids at Da Nang. Their eyes were going to get just as big when the chutes – the same kind Gallagher used to drop off the garage roof when he was a kid, opened and little plastic bag of toys was revealed.

And there he was dressed up like Santa Claus himself, throwing presents out of the sky. “Where are you putting the antlers?” they had ribbed him back at home base, when he volunteered for the mission. “Gonna paint the nose red?” “With all that tinsel, you’ll jam the radar for sure.”

Gallagher focused his attention on flying. They were over the target.

Co-pilot Charley Heckman, watching his chart, flashed the green light on the jump signal in the back. Torbush, hooked to a long black overhead oxygen hose, like a strange fish caught on a line, sent the first case rattling out the back on rollers. The wind whipped it away with giant hands, and the static line hooked to the box bottom snapped taught like a whip.

It ripped the carton inside out, scattering a hundred ting parachutes all over the sky. The jump light flashed red, and Hall sent out another box.

From then on, for almost two hours the light flashed first red, then green, from 7 to 15 seconds apart, as Heckman measured distances between population centers. The gray flight suits on Hall and Torbush turned black with sweat stains.

The drop strip was 45 miles long, 10 miles wide. It was a big target zone but the chutes sprinkled down in almost every corner. Gallagher watched for tracers and flak, saw nothing. But it was daylight—he would not see them well anyway.

As the Hercules poked along at 15,000 feet, 120 miles an hour, Torbush got few chances to think about anything but push and shove. But once in a while, standing three feet from space and tie to the plane’s womb by an umbilical cord of white nylon, he peered out over the edge to check wind drift and chute deployment.

He couldn’t help thinking about the kids down there. What would they think, staring up into the sky, watching the white cotton snowflakes fall around them? They would be scared first, that’s for sure. The “devil Yankees” must have some new weapon. But then their curiosity would set them to collecting

and opening the bags.

There'd been a toy drop before, and Torbush knew what would happen on the ground. The local commissars would scream "germ warfare" and warn the people not to use the items.

But the Vietnamese would leave the packets in with their chickens and pigs and watch to see if they died. When they stayed healthy, the toys would be given to the youngsters. Then the commissars would scream again and send out the militia to try and collect them all. But, some how, they were never very successful.

At last, they were done. Back out to sea, and around the DMZ to Da Nang. It was 1805 hours when they crossed, five minutes after the truce began. The "toy bomber" was probably the last tactical aircraft over North Vietnam in 1965. Gallagher radioed the "mission completed" signal --"Santa Claus is Jingle Bells.

At Da Nang, Gallagher debriefed while his crew refueled the plane for the trip home. He had promised his tormentors that he would be home on Christmas Day by 2 a.m.


It was 2:30 a.m. when the yellow wooden wheel chocks wedged up to the landing-hot nylon tires at the Hercules' home base in the Western Pacific. It was Christmas Day.

Snapshot of John Gallagher's Career

In 1977, John Gallagher piloted an AC-130 non-stop from an air base in Florida to Guam. This was distance of about 8,300 miles and required four aerial refuelings. At the time, this was a record for the longest non-stop flight for an AC-130.

One of the proudest assignments of his career was participating in the "Freedom Flights" for repatriated POW pilots from the Vietnam War. As an Instructor Pilot, John provided returning POW pilots a welcome back to the cockpit and opportunity for them to requalify as pilots. For those who would not return to flight status due to physical problems, it was their last flight as the pilot of a jet fighter aircraft.

In April 1980, John participated in the attempt to rescue the Americans from the US Embassy in Tehran who had been taken hostage by Iran. The mission was aborted when two aircraft collided during a refueling accident that resulted in the deaths of eight American servicemen.

In 1988, John retired from active duty at the rank of colonel. During his career, he was awarded many medals and citations including the Defense Superior Service Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medal with 11 Oak Leaf Clusters, and Humanitarian Service Medal. After his retirement from active duty, he continued flying as a pilot for United Airlines for another ten years. 

The PEOPLE The AIRCRAFT The SPIRIT of the AIR COMMANDO

Air Commando Journal Article Submission Guidelines

Our goal at the *ACJ* is to tell the Air Commando and USAF Special Operations story, from our beginning to today.

We need your help to do that. We seek quality articles, well written, factually based, and reflecting your experiences living the special operations mission in all of its complexities. Submissions can be of any length, although 1500-3000 words would be an average suggestion. All articles will be edited as per the Air University Style and Author Guide (found online at www.aircommando.org under the Journal tab, and at the Hurlburt Field library).

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

Please see www.aircommando.org for more information under *Air Commando Journal* article guidelines.

AIR COMMANDO



ASSOCIATION

A man in a blue Air Commando uniform is saluting. He is wearing a blue cap with a gold star, white gloves, and a blue jacket with gold braiding on the sleeve. The sleeve also features a "BASE HONOR GUARD" patch and a pilot's wings. He has several ribbons on his chest. To his left is a floral wreath with white daisies, blue flowers, and red flowers, resting on a wooden base. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

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