



Heritage of the Special Operations Professionals

World War II in North Africa and Europe

In the European theater of operations, regular Army Air Force (AAF) units were used to conduct special operations in high-threat areas under the direction of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and British intelligence services.



The earliest AAF special operations involved the Special Flight Section of the 12th Air Force's 5th Bombardment Wing in North Africa. In October of 1943, this small, ad hoc unit operated highly modified and mission-unique B-17, B-24, and B-25 bombers from North Africa into France and other parts of occupied Europe. The Special Flight Section later became known as the 885th Bombardment Squadron and flew B-24s out of Brindisi, Italy.

Along with conventional AAF troop carrier units, the special operations transports and bombers flew 3,769 successful sorties into the Balkans (79 percent to Yugoslavia). They dropped 7,149 tons of supplies to resistance groups while C-47s landed 989 times behind enemy lines, bringing in another 1,972 tons. These special operations units also assisted in the evacuation of thousands of Allied airmen and wounded partisans between 1944-1945.

The largest AAF special operations effort in Europe was conducted by the 801st Bombardment Group (BG), nicknamed the "Carpetbaggers," based in England. The Carpetbaggers specialized in the delivery of supplies, agents, and leaflets behind enemy lines using highly modified, mission-unique, B-24s painted black.

Prior to and during Operation OVERLORD, the 801st BG and African based units dropped specially trained three-man Jedburgh teams behind enemy lines in France. Once in place, the Jedburgh teams coordinated Free French and partisan "Maquis" operations.

Special operations crews became proficient in night, low-level, long-range navigation and flying; often conducted in poor weather and in mountainous terrain.

During early June 1944, the Carpetbaggers dropped six teams into strategic locations in Brittany, France, where they relayed vital intelligence critical to the success of the invasion of Normandy. Later, Carpetbaggers airlifted fuel to facilitate General Patton's armored drive out of France and into Germany.

World War II in the Pacific

In August 1943, General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold met with British Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten to discuss plans for American air support of British commando expeditions in the China-Burma-India theater of operations. General Arnold coined the term "Air Commando" to honor Lord Mountbatten.



After the meetings, General Arnold directed veteran fighter pilots Lieutenant Colonels Philip G. Cochran and John R. Alison to build a self-reliant composite fighting force to support British Brigadier General Orde C. Wingate and his "Chindits" on long-range penetrations into Burma against the Japanese. Originally referred to as Project 9, the Air Commandos first took shape in the latter half of 1943. The highlight of these efforts culminated in early March 1944 during a mission to build an airfield behind Japanese lines called Operation THURSDAY during which the Air Commandos helped insert 9,052 troops, 1,458 pack animals, and 509,083 pounds of supplies over 150 miles behind Japanese lines. By the end of March 1944, this force was officially designated the 1st Air Commando Group (ACG).

The Air Commandos flew over hazardous mountains and jungles to find and resupply the highly mobile British ground forces operating in hostile territory. From these missions, the 1st ACG earned its motto of "any place, any time, anywhere" - variations of which have gone down in United States Air Force (USAF) special operations lore. The 1st ACG's success eventually led to the creation of two more Air Commando groups, the 2nd and 3rd ACGs. Today, the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) draws its lineage and honors from the 1st ACG, the 352nd Special Operations Group (SOG) from the 2nd ACG, and the 353rd SOG from the 3rd ACG.



Air Commandos in the Pacific performed a variety of conventional and unconventional combat and support missions deep behind enemy lines. They used an array of aircraft including C-47 transports, P-51 (and later P-47) fighters, B-25 bombers, UC-64 utility aircraft, and a glider force of CG-4As and TG-5s, augmented by YR-4 helicopters.

Air Commandos are credited with the first combat aircrew rescue by helicopter, and the first combat use of air-to-ground rockets. They destroyed multiple ground targets and shot down a number of enemy aircraft.

Enlisted pilots were an essential part of the 550-man force, flying resupply and medical evacuation missions with L-1 and L-5 liaison aircraft. Not only did the enlisted pilots fly but they also had to maintain aircraft as mechanics.

The medical evacuation flights were extremely successful and proved to be critical to the morale of the Chindits.

Huk Insurgency in the Philippines

Special operations capabilities were mothballed by the United States military during the demobilization of forces immediately following World War II. These capabilities were resurrected in the late 1940s as a means to help eliminate the communist Huk insurgency in the Philippines.



The airpower used to defeat the communist movement was organized along unconventional lines. Using United States assistance under Lieutenant Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, who in turn employed a Foreign Internal Defense (FID) mode of operation, the Philippine Air Force flew C-47s, P-51s, L-5s, AT-6 armed trainers, and a mixture of liaison aircraft against the Huks.



In addition, Lansdale initiated a successful psychological warfare campaign comprised of leaflets and airborne speaker operations. Psychological warfare, combined with air and ground attacks, kept the Huks on the defensive and led to their defeat in 1954.

Korean War

Early in the Korean War, U.S. Army intelligence and the fledgling Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), successor to the OSS, deployed intelligence teams and supplies via short and long-range, low-level penetration missions into North and South Korea.

Initially, the United States Air Force (USAF) provided these ad hoc special air missions multiple forms of air, land, and sea assets to support United Nations Command operations. This involved the use of C-47 and C-119 transports, B-26 medium bombers, and Air Rescue Service crash boats.

The USAF then activated, equipped, and trained the 580th, 581st, and 582nd Air Resupply and Communication Wings specifically for unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency operations. These wings possessed tremendous capabilities using a variety of aircraft such as C-46, C-47, C-54, C-118, C-119 transports, B-29 bombers, SA-16 seaplanes, and H-19 helicopters. This revitalization of special operations included the ability to recover downed airmen and encompassed the full spectrum of covert air operations. However, while three wings were activated, only one, the 581st Air Resupply and Communication Wing, saw action in Korea. After the war, all three were inactivated by late 1953.

Cold War Era

Throughout the rest of the 1950s, the air resupply and communication mission was assumed by four Air National Guard (ANG) units: Maryland, Rhode Island, West Virginia, and California. However, the U.S. used Air Force active duty and Reserve assets for secret operations in Tibet, Iran, behind the Iron Curtain, in French Indochina, and during the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba. In the 1960s, these methods of operations changed dramatically when Air Force active duty special operations units were created to counter Soviet support of "wars of liberation" across the globe.



General Curtis E. LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, directed the establishment of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) in April 1961. Nicknamed "Jungle Jim," the CCTS based at Hurlburt Field, Florida, held a two-fold mission: counterinsurgency training and combat operations. Aircraft such as U-10s, C-46s, C-47s, B-26s, and AT-28s soon showed up on the Hurlburt flight line.

The CCTS devised FID tactics and techniques for building a counterinsurgency capability in countries from Latin America to Africa, and from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. The first Jungle Jim operation, code named SANDY BEACH ONE, involved training Malian paratroopers. Then, in November 1961, the 4400th CCTS deployed a detachment to Bien Hoa, Republic of Vietnam under the code name FARM GATE. Thus, Air Force special operations forces (SOF) flew some of the first U.S. combat missions in Vietnam.

Southeast Asia War (Second Indochina War)

As the Vietnam War expanded, the USAF increased its counterinsurgency capability. The 4400th CCTS became a group in March 1962, and the next month became part of the newly activated Special Air

Warfare Center (SAWC) at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

The SAWC obtained additional assets in the mid-1960s, to include O-1 and O-2 observation planes, A-26, A-37, and A-1 attack aircraft, C-123, and later C-130 cargo aircraft, along with several types of helicopters. In addition to being an outstanding short-field tactical transport, the C-123s were also modified as aerial sprayers for the Operation RANCH HAND defoliant missions in Vietnam.



In 1964, Air Commandos deployed to Laos and Thailand under the code name WATER PUMP. This FID-like operation involved training Laotian and Thai pilots and supported the Royal Lao Army against insurgents. Also in late 1964, the USAF introduced the first fixed-wing gunships into combat with the deployment of AC-47s to Vietnam.

By 1966, USAF special operations forces deployed to Vietnam reached their high watermark with a total of 10,000 people, 550 aircraft, and 19 squadrons.

Additional Air Commando deployments worldwide to other countries included Malaysia, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Iran, and the Congo Republic. The following year, AC-119 gunships joined in combat and by 1968 the first AC-130 gunships entered the Vietnam conflict.

In the summer of 1968, the USAF redesignated the SAWC as the USAF Special Operations Force (USAFSOF) which became the equivalent of a numbered air force. Subordinate units were redesignated as special operations wings and squadrons, thus eliminating all reference to Air Commandos in unit names. At this time, the Vietnam War was at its peak and consumed virtually all of the Air Force's special operations efforts.

One of the most notable missions supported by USAF special operations was Operation KINGPIN, the Son Tay prisoner of war (POW) camp raid conducted in 1970. The Son Tay raiders trained for the mission at Hurlburt and Duke Fields, near Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. The raid, executed in the early morning hours of Nov. 21, 1970, involved over 116 aircraft from the USAF and U.S. Navy, with the main assault element being comprised of one HH-3 and two HH-53s carrying 56 U.S. Army SOF personnel. Although no prisoners were found in the North Vietnamese compound, the resulting boost in morale and improved treatment of U.S. POWs by their captors made the mission worth the effort.



As the Vietnam War began winding down, SOF capability gradually declined. In June 1974, the USAFSOF was redesignated the 834th Tactical Composite Wing (TCW), effectively bringing to a close the most aggressive, far reaching effort by the USAF to support unconventional warfare up to that point.

In May 1975, during the dying embers of hostilities in Southeast Asia, the Khmer Rouge, a Cambodian communist faction, seized the crew of the shipping vessel S.S. Mayaguez in international waters. During a four day long engagement, USAF SOF personnel provided infiltration and exfiltration with CH-53s, close air support with AC-130s, and forward air control with OV-10s. The mission ultimately concluded with the successful recovery of the S.S. Mayaguez and her crew due in large part to actions taken by the USAF, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Navy.

In July 1975, the USAF redesignated the 834th TCW as the 1st SOW, and by 1979 it was the only SOF wing in the Air Force. The wing possessed AC-130H Spectre gunships, MC-130E Combat Talons, and CH-3E Jolly Green Giant and UH-1N Iroquois helicopters. Two MC-130 Combat Talon squadrons remained overseas and the Air Force Reserve (AFRES) maintained an AC-130A gunship group and one HH-3E Jolly Green Giant squadron.

Operation EAGLE CLAW

Operation EAGLE CLAW, the attempt to rescue American hostages from the United States embassy in Iran, ended in disaster at the Desert One refueling site in April 1980 with eight American service members killed. As a result, the Holloway Commission convened to analyze why the mission failed and recommend corrective actions. This led to the gradual reorganization and rebirth of United States special operations forces.

TAC to MAC

Meanwhile, in December 1982, the USAF transferred responsibility for Air Force special operations from Tactical Air Command (TAC) to Military Airlift Command (MAC). Consequently, in March 1983, MAC activated the 23rd Air Force (23rd AF) at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. This new numbered air force's responsibilities included worldwide missions of special operations, combat rescue, weather reconnaissance and aerial sampling, security support for intercontinental ballistic missile sites, training of USAF helicopter and HC-130 crewmen, pararescue training, and medical evacuation.

Operation URGENT FURY

In October 1983, 23rd AF participated in the successful rescue of Americans from the island nation of Grenada. During the 7-day operation, centered at Point Salines Airport, 23rd AF furnished MC-130s, AC-130s, aircrews, maintenance, and support personnel. An EC-130 from the 193rd SOG of the ANG played a significant psychological warfare role. During this crucial combat test of reemerging SOF capabilities, a 1st SOW Combat Talon crew earned the Mackay Trophy and a Spectre crew earned the Lt. Gen. William H. Tunner Award.

Birth of U.S. Special Operations Command

In May 1986, legislation led to the formation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Senators William Cohen and Sam Nunn introduced the Senate bill, and the following month Congressman Dan Daniel introduced a similar measure in the House of Representatives. The key provisions of the legislation formed the basis to amend the 1986 Defense Authorizations Bill. This bill, signed into law in October 1986, in part directed the formation of a unified command responsible for special operations. In April 1987, the Department of Defense established USSOCOM at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, and Army General James J. Lindsay assumed command. Four months later, 23rd AF moved to Hurlburt Field.



In August 1989, General Duane H. Cassidy, MAC Commander in Chief, divested 23rd AF of its non-special operations units. Thus, 23rd AF served a dual role--still reporting to MAC, but also functioning as the air component of USSOCOM.

Operation JUST CAUSE

From late December 1989 to early January 1990, 23rd AF participated in the re-establishment of democracy in the Republic of Panama during Operation JUST CAUSE. Special operations aircraft included active and AFRES AC-130 Spectre gunships, EC-130 Volant Solo psychological operations aircraft from the ANG, HC-130P/N Combat Shadow tankers, MC-130E Combat Talons, and MH-53J Pave Low and MH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters. Special tactics combat controllers and medics provided important support to combat units during the operation.

Spectre gunship crews of the 1st SOW earned the Mackay Trophy and Tunner Award for their efforts, a 919th SOG Spectre crew earned the President's Award, and a 1st SOW Combat Talon crew ferried the captured Panamanian President, Manuel Noriega, to prison in the United States. Likewise, the efforts of 1st SOW maintenance personnel earned them the Daedalian Award.



Birth of Air Force Special Operations Command

On May 22, 1990, General Larry D. Welch, Air Force Chief of Staff, redesignated 23rd AF as Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). The new major command consisted of three wings--the 1st, 39th and 353rd SOWs--as well as the 1720th Special Tactics Group

(STG), the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School, and the Special Missions Operational Test and Evaluation Center (SMOTEC).

The 919th SOG of AFRES stationed at Duke Field, Florida, and the 193rd SOG of the ANG at Harrisburg International Airport, Pennsylvania held associate relationships with AFSOC.

DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM

From early August 1990 to late February 1991, AFSOC participated in Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM; the protection of Saudi Arabia and liberation of Kuwait.



Active duty, AFRES, and ANG components of AFSOC deployed to Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The 1st SOW with its AC-130s, HC-130s, MC-130s, MH-53s and MH-60s; the 193rd SOG with its EC-130s; and the 919th SOG with its AC-130s, and 71st SOS's HH-3s, all deployed south of Kuwait. The 39th SOW deployed north of Iraq with its HC-130s, MC-130s, and MH-53s. Special tactics personnel operated throughout the theater during multiple combat control and combat rescue missions.

Special operations forces performed direct action missions, combat search and rescue, infiltration, exfiltration, air base ground defense, air interdiction, special reconnaissance, close air support, psychological operations, and helicopter air refuelings. Pave Low crews led the helicopter assault on radars to blind Iraqi forces at the onset of hostilities, and they also accomplished the deepest rescue behind enemy lines for which they received the Mackay Trophy.

Combat Talons dropped the largest conventional bombs of the war and, along with Combat Shadows, dropped the most psychological warfare leaflets. The AC-130s provided valuable fire support and armed reconnaissance, but they also suffered the single greatest combat loss of coalition air forces with the shoot down of Spirit 03. All fourteen crewmembers aboard were lost.

AFSOC -- All The Time, Everywhere

Following the Gulf War, AFSOC aircraft stood alert for personnel recovery and various other missions in support of Operations PROVIDE COMFORT and SOUTHERN WATCH. During July 1992, AFSOC units began participation in Operations PROVIDE PROMISE and DENY FLIGHT, the humanitarian relief effort and no fly zone security in the Balkans.

In December 1992, AFSOC special tactics and intelligence personnel supported Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, followed by the AC-130H Spectre gunships in the spring of 1993 under Operations CONTINUE HOPE and UNITED SHIELD in Somalia. In late 1994, AFSOC units spearheaded Operation

UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti, and did the same in 1995 during Operation DELIBERATE FORCE in the Balkans.

AFSOC Reorganization

The number of deployments following Operation DESERT STORM were only exceeded by the number of organizational changes. The more significant ones included the 353rd SOW relocation, under Operation FIERY VIGIL, from Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines, to Kadena Air Base, Japan, in June 1991 due to the volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo. The unit was supported by temporary duty personnel under Operation SCIMATAR SWEEP for more than a year.



In January 1992, the 39th SOW relocated from Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, to Royal Air Force (RAF) Alconbury, United Kingdom (UK). Later that year, the 39th SOW was inactivated, and then consolidated with the 352nd SOG on 1 December 1992; the same date AFSOC redesignated the 353rd SOW as the 353rd SOG.

More reorganization occurred at Hurlburt Field to include the 1720th STG becoming the 720th STG in March 1992; the transfer of ownership of Hurlburt Field from Air Mobility Command ((AMC); formerly MAC) to AFSOC in October 1992, followed by the merger of the 834th Air Base Wing and the 1st SOW, which assumed host unit responsibilities. A year later the 1st SOW became the 16th SOW in a move to preserve Air Force heritage.

Meanwhile, the SMOTEC, which filled the unique role of exploring new heavy lift frontiers in special operations capabilities, while pursuing better equipment and tactics development, was also reorganized. In April 1994, the USAF, in an effort to standardize these types of organizations, redesignated SMOTEC as the 18th Flight Test Squadron (FLTS).

Concurrent to changes made to active duty units, AFRES redesignated the 919th SOG as the 919th SOW on June 1, 1992. Subsequently, on Oct. 1, 1995, the ANG redesignated the 193rd SOG as the 193rd SOW.

AFSOC High Operations Tempo

In March 1994, a 16th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) AC-130H gunship, call sign Jockey 14, paid the price of freedom and high operations tempo. Jockey 14 experienced an in-flight explosion, forcing crewmembers to ditch off the coast of Kenya while supporting Operation CONTINUE HOPE II in Somalia. Eight crewmembers were killed, while six survived.

Soon afterwards another tragedy for the Air Force occurred when a pair of U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters were shot down in a tragic friendly-fire incident during Operation PROVIDE COMFORT III in Iraq. The 9th SOS, 55th SOS, and 23rd Special Tactics Squadron (STS) played significant roles in the search, support, and recovery operations.

In the fall of 1994, the U.S. decided to send forces into Haiti. The 16th SOW, 919th SOW, and 193rd SOW led formations of fixed and rotary winged aircraft to conduct Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY. Air Force special operations helicopters flew from Navy aircraft carriers during this massive deployment. Most of the AFSOC aircraft operated out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This deployment also included the largest gathering of MH-53 Pave Lows to participate in one action, and the last real-world operation for the AC-130As of the 919th SOW prior to their retirement.

Also in 1994, the war in Rwanda, and the number of people victimized because of it, led to AFSOC forces of the 352nd SOG becoming involved in a humanitarian effort known as Operation SUPPORT HOPE. It was also referred to as QUIET RESOLVE or PROVIDE RELIEF.

In early 1995, AFSOC received taskings to support a number of peace keeping and humanitarian missions. These included Operation PROVIDE COMFORT III (Turkey and Iraq), plus PROVIDE PROMISE/DENY FLIGHT, which evolved into DELIBERATE FORCE and JOINT ENDEAVOR (out of Italy and into Bosnia Herzegovina-Croatia). Pave Low helicopter crewmen received combat wounds while flying as part of a force trying to rescue two French aviators who had been shot down near Sarajevo during Operation DELIBERATE FORCE. The efforts of the Pave Low flight crew during this attempted rescue effort resulted in their receiving the 1995 Air Force Cheney Award. Units assigned to AFSOC also supported Operation CONTINUE HOPE III (Somalia) which evolved into UNITED SHIELD.



In 1996, AFSOC aircraft were the first on the scene when the CT-43 aircraft carrying U.S. Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown crashed near Dubrovnik, Croatia, killing everyone onboard. The 352nd SOG launched two MH-53Js and one MC-130P as part of the search and rescue effort. Crews of the 16th SOW and 20th SOS also participated. The efforts of these crewmembers during this highly visible event resulted in their being awarded the Air Force Cheney Award for 1996.

The crews involved in this mission were quickly rotated into Operation ASSURED RESPONSE, which provided support to the emergency noncombatant evacuation operation of more than 2,100 U.S. and foreign citizens from Monrovia, Liberia. Operating in a hostile environment, SOF personnel conducted dozens of rotary wing evacuation flights using MH-53Js and overhead fire support sorties in AC-130H Spectres, often vectoring friendly aircraft through small arms and rocket propelled grenade fire. For their efforts, the Pave Low crews were presented the Tunner Award as the outstanding strategic airlift crew of the year.

AFSOC Matures

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, AFSOC began changing its readiness posture from one geared to

countering the Soviet threat to one of cooperative engagements and peace enforcement activities, for which AFSOC forces' capabilities remained in constant demand. As part of Commando Vision, which started in 1994, the 919th SOW would not receive the AC-130Hs from the 16th SOW as had been planned. Instead, the 919th SOW stationed at Duke Field, retired its AC-130A gunships and gained MC-130P Combat Shadows, flown by the newly stood-up 5th SOS, along with MC-130E Combat Talons, flown by the 711th SOS. In the midst of change, the 919th SOW deployed to Brindisi Air Base, Italy in the winter of 1995 to support Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR. The 919th SOW successfully completed the conversion in 1997.

In February 1997, AFSOC captured the "triple crown" of Air Force Safety Awards for 1996, a feat accomplished only once before by a major command. The command took the Secretary of the Air Force Safety Award for the best overall mishap prevention program in Category I, the Major General Benjamin D. Foulois Award for best flight safety program, and the Colonel Will L. Tubbs Memorial Award for the top ground safety program.

Later in the year, the 16th SOW received the Colombian Trophy for military flight safety achievements in 1996. This marked the first time in the 62-year history of the award it was presented to a non-fighter unit.

In April 1997, AFSOC units on temporary duty to Brindisi in support of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) missions in Bosnia took on a key support role during the evacuation of Americans trapped by Albania's civil war. Supporting Operation SILVER WAKE, they assisted State Department officials in the processing of more than 1,000 evacuees, including about 450 Americans, rescued from the warring nation.



In June 1997, fighting raged in the Republic of Congo's capital as a result of that nation's civil war. An AFSOC MC-130H Combat Talon II from the 352nd SOG delivered an American military assessment team; then evacuated 56 people from Brazzaville. Crewmembers earned the Mackay Trophy for their efforts. September 1997 saw three EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft from the 193rd SOW deploy in support of Operation JOINT GUARD. The stabilization force commander requested the deployment of the aircraft to Brindisi to serve as a NATO resource to counter Serbian radio and television broadcasts misrepresenting the Dayton Peace Accords.

Two 4th SOS AC-130U Spectre gunships flew to Taegu Air Base, South Korea, Oct. 24, 1997, on a 36-hour nonstop mission from Hurlburt Field. The mission brought members of the 4th SOS to participate in FOAL EAGLE 1997, an annual Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise held throughout South Korea. Members of the 6th SOS also participated in the exercise.

Throughout 1998, AFSOC maintained a constant combat search and rescue alert posture as part of Operation JOINT GUARD, with aircraft and personnel rotating from the 16th SOW and 352nd SOG to San Vito, Italy, on a routine basis. This role increased significantly in March 1999 during the crisis in Kosovo and Operation ALLIED FORCE. During the NATO air campaign to remove Serbian forces from Kosovo, special operators conducted two successful combat search and rescue operations to rescue downed

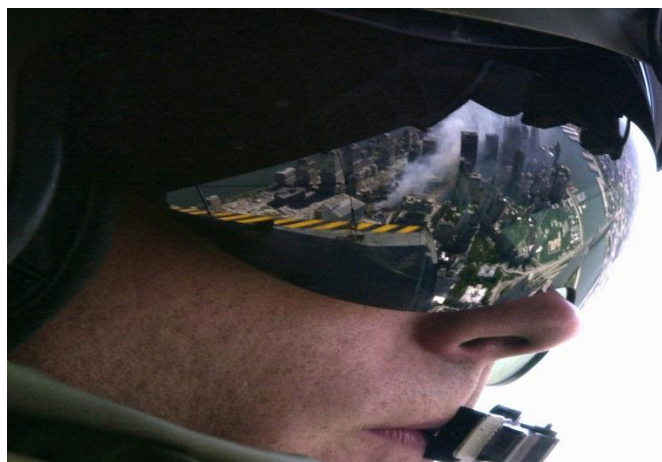
American pilots (one F-117, one F-16) in the area of conflict.



In addition, Operation ALLIED FORCE witnessed the employment of the EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft from the 193rd SOW to counter Serbian radio and television

broadcasts, use of the MC-130H to conduct extensive leaflet drops over Serbia, and application of the AC-130U to provide armed reconnaissance. All told, AFSOC's special operators and aircraft played a major part in bringing the conflict in Kosovo to an end. Following the conclusion of ALLIED FORCE, special operations units entered a period of reconstitution, while also supporting humanitarian operations such as Operation ATLAS RESPONSE in Africa.

By the year 2000, the 6th SOS received qualification training on several dissimilar aircraft to include Russian made MI-17 helicopter, AN-26 and AN-32 aircraft, while also having its core mission area expanded.



The beginning of 2001 proved relatively quiet by special operations standards. The command's special operations units used this valuable time for reconstitution, training, and a variety of other events that the high operations tempo tended to impact.

Global War on Terror

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., on Sept. 11, 2001, pushed the

nation's special operations forces to the forefront of the war against terrorism.

By the end of September 2001, AFSOC deployed forces to southwest Asia for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to help confront and remove the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, along with the Taliban-supported al Qaida terrorist organization headed by Osama Bin Laden, who were responsible for the 11

September attacks on the United States.

Airpower provided by AFSOC delivered special tactics forces to the battle ground and they in turn focused U.S. airpower and allowed Afghanistan's Northern Alliance ground forces (pro-U.S.) to significantly diminish the Taliban's and al Qaida's capabilities in Afghanistan. In addition to their support in Afghanistan, AFSOC personnel also deployed to the Philippines, and later to the Horn of Africa, Trans-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean and Central American regions to help aid partner nation's efforts in combatting terrorism.

Operation ENDURING FREEDOM is still an ongoing mission and AFSOC personnel continue to protect the United States and its allies against those who use terror and violence as a means unto their end.

In March 2003, AFSOC again deployed forces to southwest Asia, this time in support of what would become Operation IRAQI FREEDOM - the removal of Saddam Hussein and the liberation of the Iraqi people from his ruthless Baathist regime. The command's personnel and aircraft teamed with SOF and conventional forces to quickly bring down Saddam Hussein's government by May 2003. AFSOC forces continued to conduct operations throughout the rest of the decade and beyond in support of the new Iraqi government against insurgents and terrorists, whose aim it was to destabilize the country. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM officially concluded in 2011.



While supporting the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and operations in Iraq, personnel assigned to AFSOC continued to participate in other missions around the world. After a devastating earthquake and resultant tsunami ravaged countries spanning from the South Pacific to the Indian Ocean on Feb. 26, 2004, the 353rd SOG quickly responded to the crisis while supporting Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. From Feb. 28, 2004 to Jan. 18, 2005, the 353rd SOG delivered 796,500 pounds of humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) supplies, conducted 32 casualty evacuations, and opened four airfields rendered unusable by the natural disaster, thus enabling further humanitarian assistance to be delivered to Indonesia and Thailand once AFSOC personnel departed the area.

Effective Oct. 1, 2003, AFSOC welcomed the movement of the USAF's continental U.S.-based rescue forces from Air Combat Command (ACC). With this move, the command inherited the 347th Rescue Wing and 563rd Rescue Group, while also gaining oversight responsibilities for the 920th Rescue Wing (AFRC), 106th Rescue Wing (ANG), and the 129th Rescue Wing (ANG).



The command's newly attained rescue units were soon pressed into action close to home after Hurricane Katrina wrought catastrophic devastation along the Gulf Coast shorelines of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama after making landfall on Aug. 29, 2005.

Led by the 347th Rescue Wing, AFSOC personnel supported a massive humanitarian relief operation under the auspices of Joint Task Force Katrina.

The 347th Rescue Wing, later established as the 347th Expeditionary Rescue Wing during the operation, worked tirelessly day and night to rescue those put in peril by the storm. From Aug. 30, 2005 through Sept. 17, 2005, the 347th Expeditionary Rescue Wing amassed a staggering save count of 4,283 individuals while flying 528 sorties in 1,677 hours.

On Sept. 1, 2005, AFSOC stood up its WarFighting Headquarters (WFHQ) as part of an Air Force wide initiative to provide enhanced warfighting capabilities to achieve the nation's military objectives and to support unified combatant commanders' (UCC) strategic objectives across the full range of military operations.

On Feb. 25, 2006, General T. Michael Moseley, Air Force Chief of Staff, announced his decision to move the USAF's rescue assets from AFSOC back to ACC. General Moseley's decision centered on his vision of rescue's present position and where he envisioned its future.

Despite the movement of U.S.-based rescue forces back to ACC, AFSOC entered a period of growth in other mission areas. On June 20, 2006, the Department of Defense approved the transfer of Cannon AFB and Melrose Range, New Mexico to AFSOC. This transfer became effective on Oct. 1, 2007 with the activation of the 27th SOW.



Additional mission growth continued throughout 2006 and 2007 to include: U-28 aircraft in April 2006, assigned to the 319th SOS; the activation 11th Intelligence Squadron on Aug. 1, 2006; and assumption of Predator unmanned aerial vehicles on May 31, 2007 from ACC, assigned to the 3rd SOS. Additionally, on Nov. 16, 2006, AFSOC returned to its rightful heritage by redesignating the 16th SOW back to the 1st SOW. On that same day, AFSOC received its first CV-22 Osprey at Hurlburt Field.

From July to October 2006, the 352nd SOG, flying MH-53M Pave Lows and MC-130P Combat Shadows combined to transport American citizens from Lebanon to Cyprus due to hostilities in the Middle East. The group moved a total of 502 Americans during the noncombatant evacuation operation.

In July 2008, Operation WILLING SPIRIT ended with the successful extraction of three American hostages held hostage by the FARC in Colombia since 2003. For six years AFSOC personnel supported the effort to locate and eventually free the hostages.

The MH-53 Pave Low helicopter flew its last combat mission on Sept. 27, 2008 during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. As AFSOC divested from its rotary wing assets, the command remained poised to respond to threats and crises on a global scale.

Overseas Contingency Operations

While counterterrorism remained a top priority for the nation and for AFSOC, the capability was only one of many the command possessed heading into the next decade. In 2010, AFSOC's rapid reaction capabilities were highlighted again after an extremely strong earthquake centered off the coast of Haiti decimated the country. In just over 24 hours, AFSOC had boots on the ground and within 30 minutes of landing, Air Commandos began controlling aircraft inbound to Haiti. During the first twelve days of Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, combat controllers controlled 2,222 fixed wing and 800 rotary wing aircraft (representing 50 nations) from a card table set up next to the single runway at Port Au Prince Airport using handheld radios. Meanwhile, AFSOC pararescuemen executed 14 high risk collapsed structure rescues and treated 25 patients.



During Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, the 1st SOW, 27th SOW, 193rd SOW, and the 919th SOW

delivered 414 passengers and 396 short tons of supplies and humanitarian aid to Haiti. The 193rd SOW's Commando Solos broadcast humanitarian assistance messages across four radio frequencies; further enabled by 100,000 hand cranked radios delivered throughout Haiti by SOF aircraft. Special tactics teams surveyed landing sites and controlled multiple aerial delivery operations which amounted to 150,000 pounds of humanitarian aid being dispersed to the Haitian population.

Additionally, AFSOC provided security forces, medical triage, stable communications, and full motion video products which allowed governments and humanitarian aid organizations to plan and organize their efforts in a more informed and efficient manner.



In March 2011, AFSOC once again found itself responding to a humanitarian crisis stemming from a natural disaster. On March 11, 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake with an epicenter near Sendai, Japan occurred. The extremely violent quake triggered a massive tsunami that inundated large swaths of northeastern coastal Japan. On March 13, 2011, AFSOC personnel began conducting aerial assessments of air fields in the affected areas. The 353rd SOG used MC-130Ps, MC-130Hs, and a PC-12 during Operation

TOMODACHI. On March 16, 2011, an MC-130P assigned to the 17th SOS arrived at Matsushima Air Base carrying two special tactics teams assigned to the 320th STS. One team stayed behind and assessed and subsequently cleared a runway at Matsushima and within two hours began controlling aircraft into and out of the air base.

The other team from the 320th STS set out in a convoy bound for Sendai Airport. Upon arrival, the team began working with Japanese citizens already clearing a 5,000 foot runway and within an hour declared the runway open. A couple of hours later an MC-130H assigned to the 1st SOS became the first aircraft to land at Sendai since the tsunami and offloaded equipment, supplies and a second special tactics team to bolster the contingent already in place. By April 2, 2011, 320th STS personnel had controlled 170 relief flights carrying a total of 2,500,000 pounds of supplies and 618 passengers to Sendai alone.

The effort to assist the Japanese with their recovery efforts continued through the end of March. In addition to clearing airfields and controlling aircraft, AFSOC personnel provided much needed communications support as well as forward air refueling capabilities. The PC-12 crew proved to be an invaluable asset as they flew 37 hours, hauled 70 passengers, and ferried 2,160 pounds of cargo. The aircraft relieved strain on the MC-130Ps due to its ability to quickly get in and out of airports of all sizes in Japan. On April 2, 2011, the handover of the airfields to civilian control began and AFSOC's participation officially ended on April 6, 2011.

The symbiotic effort between AFSOC personnel and their Japanese hosts proved to be a sterling example of international cooperation. As one Japanese official later put it, the efforts of AFSOC in hard-hit places such as Sendai provided hope during a very bleak time.

Given the global reach required by AFSOC's mission sets, the command continued to focus on Non-Standard Aviation (NSAv) capabilities. These NSAv capabilities allowed AFSOC to help partner nations build aviation capacity and gave Theater Special Operations Commands light and medium mobility capacity.

Throughout 2011, AFSOC further augmented its NSAv fleet. Originally brought into the AFSOC inventory in 2009 as M-28 Skytrucks, the C-145A has remained continuously deployed since March 2011. To further bolster the NSAv mission, the C-146A Wolfhound (a modified version of the commercial Do-328) entered the AFSOC inventory in the same month as the C-145A first deployed. By the end of 2011, the C-146A Wolfhound had deployed in support of overseas contingency operations. With the retirement of the last MC-130E Combat Talons from the Air Force inventory imminent, AFSOC leadership identified the 919th SOW for a re-missioning to include a primary NSAv role.

In conjunction with United Nations Resolution 1973, passed on March 17, 2011, AFSOC supported Operation ODYSSEY DAWN. In partnership with a large contingent from the international community, AFSOC helped enforce a no-fly zone in an aim to protect civilians during a civil war in Libya.

On June 12, 2012, AFSOC activated the 24th SOW. The 720th STG and the 724th STG realigned under the new wing. The activation of the wing was brought about in an effort to better differentiate strategic and operational concerns.

On Feb. 11, 2013, AFSOC activated the Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center (AFSOAWC) at Duke Field. Upon activation, the 919th SOW began an active associate relationship with the AFSOWAC. The AFSOWAC reported directly to AFSOC and assumed command of USAFSOS, the 6th SOS, the 18th FLTS, and other various units. On March 28, 2013, AFSOC inactivated the 23rd Air Force. On April 1, 2013, the 6th SOS moved from Hurlburt Field to Duke Field. Later that month, the last MC-130E Combat Talons were retired from the Air Force inventory. These organizational changes reflected AFSOC's continued commitment to FID as well as the growing importance of the NSAv mission.

On Nov. 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda came ashore in the Philippines and left behind a trail of ruin in its wake. Once again AFSOC responded to a natural disaster in a quick and professional manner. From Nov. 10-23, 2013, AFSOC personnel participated in Operation DAMAYAN. Personnel from the 353rd SOG initially performed aerial assessments of the affected areas utilizing U-28As in order to decide the best course of action in response to the crisis.



The 353rd SOG utilized MC-130Hs, MC-130Ps, and C-146As during the humanitarian mission with which they delivered over 700,000 pounds of HA/DR supplies to those in need and evacuated 3,278 displaced persons. Personnel from the 320th STS opened and controlled multiple airfields and relief points which ultimately allowed another 6,590 displaced persons to be evacuated and millions of pounds of relief supplies and equipment to be offloaded.

From the beginning through today, Air Commandos have displayed an unwavering ability to adapt and execute the missions presented to them. The unique culture, command relationships, and specialized equipment employed by AFSOC affords Air Commandos the opportunity to provide dynamic and enterprising responses to challenges faced by the United States and partner nations. Air Commandos remain at the tip of the spear serving as force multipliers for the American military. Today, AFSOC truly is a global tactical air component.

23rd Air Force Commanders

Maj. Gen. William J. Mall, Jr.1 Mar 1983 to 19 Sep 85
Maj. Gen. Robert B. Patterson.....20 Sep 1985 to 6 Sep 1989
Maj. Gen. Thomas E. Eggers.....7 Sep 1989 to 21 May 1990

AFSOC Commanders

Maj. Gen. Thomas E. Eggers.....22 May 1990 to 20 Jun 1991
Maj. Gen. Bruce L. Fister.....21 Jun 1991 to 21 Jul 1994
Maj. Gen. James L. Hobson, Jr.22 Jul 1994 to 8 Jul 1997
Maj. Gen. Charles R. Holland.....9 Jul 1997 to 4 Aug 1999
Lt. Gen. Maxwell C. Bailey.....5 Aug 1999 to 15 Jan 2002
Lt. Gen. Paul V. Hester.....16 Jan 2002 to 30 Jun 2004
Lt. Gen. Michael W. Wooley.....1 Jul 2004 to 26 Nov 2007
Lt. Gen. Donald C. Wurster.....27 Nov 2007 to 25 June 2011
Lt. Gen. Eric E. Fiel.....26 June 2011 to 2 July 2014
Lt. Gen. Bradley A. Heithold.....3 July 2014 to present

23rd Air Force Vice Commanders

Brig. Gen. Philip N. Prince.....1 Oct 1983 to 16 Nov 1983
Vacant.....17 Nov 1983 to 1 Jul 1984
Brig. Gen. Richard J. Trzaskoma.....2 Jul 1984 to 25 Sep 1985
Col. Rolland F. Clarkson, Jr.25 Sep 1985 to 26 Mar 1986
Brig. Gen. Floyd E. Hargrove.....27 Mar 1986 to 10 Jul 1987
Col (later Brig. Gen.) Hanson C. Scott.....13 Jul 1987 to 22 Jun 1989
Brig. Gen. James L. Hobson, Jr.23 Jun 1989 to 31 Dec 1989
Brig. Gen. Hanson C. Scott.....13 Jul 1987 to 22 Jun 1989
Brig. Gen. Dale E. Stovall.....3 Mar 1990 to 21 May 1990

AFSOC Vice Commanders

Brig. Gen. Dale E. Stovall.....22 May 1990 to 10 Jul 1991
Col. George A. Gray III.....1 Jul 1991 to 13 Sep 1991
Brig. Gen. C. Jerome Jones.....16 Sep 1991 to 1 Oct 1993
Brig. Gen. James L. Higham.....15 Nov 1993 to 31 Dec 1995
Brig. Gen. Howard J. Ingersoll.....9 Dec 1995 to 30 Jun 1997
Brig. Gen. Michael W. Wooley.....27 May 1997 to 30 Jul 1998
Brig. Gen. Edward L. LaFontaine.....2 Aug 1998 to 11 Jun 1999
Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson.....30 Jun 1999 to 13 Jul 2000
Brig. Gen. Richard L. Comer.....27 Jul 2000 to 20 Sep 2002
Vacant.....20 Sep 2002 to 27 Apr 2003
Brig. Gen. John H. Folkerts.....28 Apr 2003 to 19 Jan 2006
Maj. Gen. Donald C. Wurster.....27 Feb 2006 to 27 Nov 2007
Maj. Gen. Kurt Cichowski.....28 Nov 2007 to 7 Nov 2010
Maj. Gen. Otis G. Mannon.....8 Nov 2010 to 20 April 2012
Brig. Gen. Michael J. Kingsley.....15 May 2012 to 21 Jan 2013
Vacant.....22 Jan 2013 to 20 Jun 2013
Maj. Gen. Norman J. Brozenick.....21 Jun 2013 to Present

AFSOC Command Chief Master Sergeants

CMSgt. James R. Robertson.....22 May 1990 to 31 Oct 1992
CMSgt. Wayne G. Norrad.....1 Nov 1992 to 31 Aug 1995
CMSgt. Michael C. Reynolds*1 Sep 1995 to 24 Jan 2001
CMSgt. Robert V. Martens, Jr.25 Jan 2001 to 25 Aug 2003
CMSgt. Howard J. Mowry.....26 Aug 2003 to 10 Aug 2006
CMSgt. Michael P. Gilbert.....11 Aug 2006 to 19 Dec 2010
CMSgt. William W. Turner.....20 Dec 2010 to 21 Mar 2014
CMSgt. Paul J. Henderson II**22 Mar 2014 to 24 Apr 2014
CMSgt. Matthew M. Caruso.....25 Apr 2014 to Present

*First AFSOC Chief Master Sergeant to serve as Command Chief following the renaming of the position from Senior Enlisted Advisor.

**Interim

AFSOC Medal of Honor Recipients

Maj. Bernard F. FisherA-1E.....earned 10 Mar 1966
Lt. Col. Joe M. JacksonC-123.....earned 12 May 1968
Lt. Col. William A. Jones IIIA-1H.....earned 1 Sep 1968
1st Lt. James P. FlemingUH-1F.....earned 26 Nov 1968
A1C John L. LevitowAC-47.....earned 24 Feb 1969

Contingency Operations of the United States Supported by AFSOF since Vietnam

1975.....S.S. Mayaguez and Kong Tang Island
1975.....Operation EAGLE PULL, Evacuation of Cambodia
1975.....Operation FREQUENT WIND, Evacuation of South Vietnam
1976.....Operation FLUID DRIVE, Civilian evacuation, Lebanon
1978.....Zaire Airlift
1980.....Operation EAGLE CLAW, Iran
1981.....Army General Dozier kidnapping, Italy
1981.....Gulf of Sidra Incident, Libya
1983.....Operation URGENT FURY, Grenada
1983.....Operation BIG PINE, Honduras
1983-1985.....Operation BAT, Bahamas, Turks and Caicos
1983-1988.....Operation BIELD KIRK, BLUE FLAME, BLINKING LIGHT, El Salvador (Central America)
1984.....President Duarte's daughter kidnapping, El Salvador
1985.....TWA Flight 847, plane hijacking, Algeria/Lebanon
1985.....Achille Lauro, ship hijacking, (Mediterranean Sea)
1986.....Operation EL DORADO CANYON, Libya
1986.....Pan Am Flight 73, plane hijacking, Pakistan
1987-1988Operation EARNEST WILL, Operation PRIME CHANCE I, Persian Gulf
1988.....Operation GOLDEN PHEASANT, Honduras
1989.....Operation SAFE PASSAGE, Afghanistan
1989.....Operation POPLAR TREE, El Salvador
1989.....Philippines Coup attempt against President Aquino
1989.....Operation JUST CAUSE, Panama
1990.....Operation PROMOTE LIBERTY, Panama
1990.....Civilian evacuation, Liberia
1990-1991Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM, Saudi Arabia/Kuwait/Iraq
1991.....Operation EASTERN EXIT, Somalia
1991-2003.....Operation PROVIDE COMFORT I-III, NORTHERN WATCH, Turkey/Iraq
1991.....Operation SEA ANGEL, typhoon relief, Bangladesh
1991.....Operation FIERY VIGIL, Philippines
1991.....Operation DESERT CALM, Saudi Arabia
1991-2003.....Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, Kuwait
1992.....Operation SILVER ANVIL, civilian evacuation, Sierra Leone
1992-1994Operation PROVIDE PROMISE I-II, Italy/Yugoslavia
1992-1993.....Operation RESTORE HOPE, Somalia
1993-1995.....Operation CONTINUE HOPE I-III, Somalia
1993.....Operation DENY FLIGHT, Yugoslavia
1993.....Operation SILVER HOPE, Ukraine
1994.....Operation RESTORE DEMOCRACY & UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, Haiti
1994.....Operation SUPPORT HOPE, Rwanda

1995.....Operation UNITED SHIELD, Somalia

1995-1996.....Operation DELIBERATE FORCE, JOINT ENDEAVOR, JOINT GUARD,
Italy/Yugoslavia/Bosnia

1996.....Search and Rescue support for Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown CT-43 crash,
Croatia

1996.....Operation ASSURED RESPONSE, civilian evacuation, Liberia

1996.....Operation GUARDIAN RETIEVAL, Uganda

1996.....Operation PACIFIC BRIDGE, Republic of Palau

1996.....Operation GUARDIAN ASSISTANCE, Rwanda (Central Africa)

1997.....Operation SILVER WAKE, civilian evacuation, Albania

1997.....Operation GUARDIAN ANGEL, Yugoslavia

1997.....Operation FIRM RESPONSE, civilian evacuation, Republic of Congo

1997.....Operation HIGH FLIGHT, Namibia (Atlantic Ocean)

1998.....Operation DESERT THUNDER, (Persian Gulf)

1998.....Operation DESERT FOX, Iraq

1999.....Operation ALLIED FORCE, Serbia/Kosovo

2000.....Operation ATLAS RESPONSE, flood relief, Mozambique

2000.....Operation FIERY RELIEF, volcano relief, Philippines

2001.....Operation VALIANT RETURN, China

2001-PresentOperation ENDURING FREEDOM/GWOT

2002.....Operation AUTUMN RETURN, civilian evacuation, Côte d'Ivoire

2003.....Operation SHINING EXPRESS, civilian evacuation, Liberia

2003-2011.....Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

2003-2008.....Operation WILLING SPIRIT, Colombia

2004.....Operation ATLAS SHIELD, Greece

2004.....Operation SECURE TOMORROW, Haiti

2004-2005.....Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE, (Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia)

2005.....Task Force Katrina, hurricane relief, United States

2006.....Civilian evacuation, Lebanon

2008.....Operation ASTER SILVER, civilian evacuation, Chad

2008.....Operation ASSURED DELIVERY, Georgia

2008.....Operation OLYMPIC TITAN, (Pacific Ocean)

2010.....Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, earthquake relief, Haiti

2011.....Operation TOMODACHI, earthquake and tsunami relief, Japan

2011.....Operation ODYSSEY DAWN, Libya

2013.....Operation DAMAYAN, typhoon relief, Philippines

*The preceding list is an extensive but not an exhaustive compilation.