



**Burma & Carpetbaggers  
to  
Air Commandos  
of Today**

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	ii
AFSOC Vision, Mission, Priorities.....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Birth of Air Force Special Operations Command .....	1
Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM .....	3
AFSOC Reorganizes .....	4
AFSOC Upgrades .....	5
Somalia .....	6
Haiti .....	7
The Balkans .....	8
Liberia .....	9
Congo .....	10
Foreign Internal Defense .....	11
Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM .....	12
Rescue .....	14
Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance .....	15
Arrival of the CV-22 .....	15
Cannon Air Force Base .....	16
Retirement of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopter .....	17
AFSOC's MC-130 Transformation .....	17
24 SOW Activation .....	18
352 SOW Activation .....	18
AFSOAWC Redesignated 492 SOW.....	18
John Chapman Medal of Honor .....	19
Conclusion .....	20
Current AFSOC Commander and Command Chief .....	20
Former AFSOC Commanders .....	21
Former AFSOC Command Chief Master Sergeants .....	22
Major Contingency Operations Supported by AFSOC .....	23



## VISION

Air Commandos ...  
Ready Today,  
Relevant Tomorrow,  
Resilient Always

## MISSION

Provide our Nation's specialized airpower,  
capable across the spectrum of conflict ...  
Any Place, Any Time, Anywhere

## PRIORITIES

- Ensure READINESS to execute global special operations today
- Transform our force and fleet to maintain RELEVANCE tomorrow
- Invest in the RESILIENCY of our force, family, and relationships

## Introduction

Following Operation EAGLE CLAW in 1980, the Iranian hostage rescue attempt better known as Desert One, the Pentagon convened the Holloway Commission to fully investigate what went wrong. The commission produced two major recommendations: First, the Department of Defense should establish a counterterrorism task force with a permanently assigned staff and forces; and second, the Joint Chiefs of Staff should consider forming a special operations panel. However, in the years immediately following, these recommendations the military and its predominantly conventional force continued to drag its feet and only provided a window dressing to the problem. For example, in 1983 the Air Force transferred special operations from Tactical Air Command



**Nine combat control team members at Wadi Kena, Egypt, before leaving for Oman and Desert One on the 1980 Iranian rescue mission.**



(TAC) to Military Airlift Command (MAC) and activated Twenty-third Air Force (23 AF) at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. Despite this move, 23 AF was not solely dedicated to special operations but also responsible for other missions as well. Frustrated the Services were not taking their unconventional capabilities seriously, Congress took matters into their own hands and pursued legislation that went much further than just forming a task force or advisory panel. In 1986, Senators William Cohen of Maine and Sam Nunn of Georgia, followed by Congressman Dan Daniel of Florida, introduced bills that directed the formation of a unified command responsible for special operations and created the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict.

## Birth of Air Force Special Operations Command

In 1987, the military activated the unified command as United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. Shortly after the activation, the Army and Navy established service components as major command equivalents and activated Army Special Operations Command (ARSOC) and Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM). Although the Air Force relocated 23 AF to Hurlburt Field, Fla., it did not create a separate major command for its special operations forces. In a conciliatory move two years later in 1989, the Air Force eventually divested 23 AF of its non-special operations units. However, later that year the issue quickly became contentious between Gen James J. Lindsay, the commander of USSOCOM, and the commander of Military Airlift Command (MAC), Gen Hansford T. Johnson. The issue was amplified when Gen

Johnson directed that 23 AF take its proportional share of manpower reductions occurring Air Force-wide as a result of the end of the Cold War—even as Gen Lindsay was in the midst of building the command. In early 1990, he took his argument to the Air Force chief of staff, and within a month, Gen Welch had agreed to redesignate 23 AF a major command.

On 22 May 1990, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Larry D. Welch redesignated 23 AF as Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). The new major command consisted of three wings—the 1st, 39th and 353d Special Operations Wings—as well as the 1720th Special Tactics Group, the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS), and the Special Missions Operational Test and Evaluation Center (SMOTEC). Air Reserve components included the 919th Special Operations Group (919 SOG) of the Air Force Reserves at Duke Field, Fla, and the 193rd Special Operations Group (193 SOG) of the Air National Guard (ANG) at Harrisburg International Airport, Pa.



## Symbolism in our emblem

- The black background symbolizes clandestine operations conducted during periods of darkness.
- The Fairburn-Sykes Commando winged dagger represents military preparedness and the swift and silent mobilization of forces.
- The blue disc with star depicts Gen Henry ‘Hap’ Arnold’s Army Air Forces and the birth of the Air Commandos.

## Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM

From early August 1990 to the end of 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 deployed to King Fahd International Airport, Saudi Arabia and Batman, Turkey.

The 1 SOW's AC-130s, HC-130s, MC-130s, MH-53s and MH-60s; the 193 SOG's EC-130s; the 919 SOG's AC-130s, and the 71 SOS' HH-3s, all deployed to Saudi Arabia.

The 39 SOW deployed to Turkey with its HC-130s, MC-130s, and MH-53s. Special Tactics (ST) personnel operated

throughout the theater on multiple offensive 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 refueling missions. Pave Low crews led the helicopter assault on radar to blind Iraq at the onset of hostilities, and successfully performed a rescue mission deep behind enemy lines that earned them the Mackay Trophy—a prestigious award presented by the National Aeronautic Association for the most meritorious flight of the year.

Combat Talons dropped the largest conventional bombs of the war and along with Combat Shadows dropped the most psychological warfare leaflets. The AC-130 gunships 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 an AC-130H from Hurlburt Field, call sign Spirit 03. All 14 crewmembers aboard were lost. Overall, AFSOC flew 5,000 sorties and 10,000 hours in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM.

Following the Gulf War, AFSOC continued to stand alert for personnel recovery and various other missions in support of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in Turkey and Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in Saudi Arabia. In 1994, 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. AFSOC units played significant roles in the search, support, and recovery operations.



**AFSOC dropped 11 BLU-82 Daisy Cutter bombs—15,000 pounds of massive destructive power that obliterated targets.**



### **AFSOC Reorganizes**

AFSOC identified lessons learned from the Gulf War and began a series of organizational moves. One move unintentionally made was the relocation of the 353 SOW from Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines, to Kadena Air Base, Japan, in June 1991 following the volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo—dubbed Operation FIERY VIGIL.

In January 1992, the 39 SOW relocated from Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, to RAF Alconbury, United Kingdom, and eventually inactivated and its personnel and equipment reconstituted to the 352 SOW. In December 1992, AFSOC redesignated the 352 SOW and 353 SOW as independent special operations groups (SOG). Further reorganization occurred on Hurlburt Field that included: in March 1992, the 1720 STG was redesignated the 720 STG; ownership of Hurlburt Field transferred from Air Mobility Command (AMC) to AFSOC in October 1992; and the 834th Air Base Wing merged into the 1 SOW and assumed host unit responsibilities—a year later the 1 SOW inactivated and the 16 SOW activated in its place. Meanwhile, in April 1994, the Special Missions Operational Test and Evaluation Center was redesignated the 18th Flight Test Squadron (18 FTS).



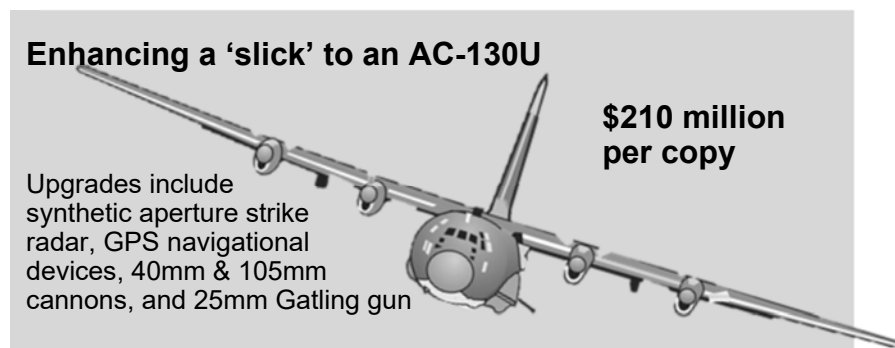
**Mount Pinatubo volcano near Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines, erupting in June 1991.**



**AC-130U “Spooky” Gunship, from the 4th Special Operations Squadron (4 SOS), takes off at Hurlburt Field, Fla.**

#### **AFSOC Upgrades**

In addition to a series of organizational changes, it quickly became apparent the wear and tear on the new command’s aging aircraft during Operation URGENT FURY in Grenada, Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, and Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had taken its toll and would need to upgrade its weapon systems. In December 1990, the AC-130U flew for the first time and AFSOC received the first one in July 1994. Meanwhile, the first MC-130H Combat Talon II arrived at Hurlburt Field, Fla., in 1991 and became initially operationally capable in 1993. Finally, in May 2002 the Air Force completed its conversion of 25 MH-53J Pave Low III helicopters to MH-53M Pave Low IVs. Basically the aircraft were modified with the interactive defensive avionics system and multi-mission advanced tactical terminal.





## Somalia

A prelude to AFSOC's preparation for Operation DESERT STORM was Operation EASTERN EXIT on 3 January 1991—the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Somalia. One AC-130H Spectre gunship departed from King Fahd Int Airport, Saudi Arabia, and performed close air support missions over the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu.

Two years later in December 1992, AFSOC Special Tactics and intelligence personnel again found themselves in Somalia under Operation RESTORE HOPE, followed by the return of the gunships in the spring of 1993 under Operation CONTINUE HOPE. By the fall of that year, the mission continued under OPERATION CONTINUE HOPE II. On 3 October 1993, AFSOC was part of a combat search and rescue effort when two UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters were shot down by Somali clan militia. TSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson supported Task Force Ranger during the longest sustained firefight by U.S. forces since the Vietnam War. For his heroic actions in Mogadishu, TSgt Wilkinson earned the Air Force Cross. In

March 1994, an AC-130H gunship crew, call sign Jockey 14, paid the ultimate price for freedom when they experienced an in-flight explosion, forcing the crew to ditch off the coast of Kenya while supporting Operation CONTINUE HOPE II in Somalia; Eight crewmembers were killed, while six survived. A year later in 1995, AFSOC returned to Somalia in support of Operation UNITED SHIELD.



**TSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson (front) was awarded the AF Cross, while fellow pararescueman, MSgt Scott C. Fales (middle) and combat controller SSgt Jeffrey W. Bray (rear) received Silver Stars for heroic action in Somalia.**



**MH-53J Pave Low helicopters enter Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in support of Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY.**

## **Haiti**

In the fall of 1994, AFSOC units spearheaded Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY and played an essential role in establishing security and assuring de facto public administration in rural areas of Haiti.

Most AFSOC aircraft operated out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and included the largest gathering of MH-53 Pave Lows to participate in one action. The operation was the last real-world deployment for the AC-130A gunships of the 919th Special Operations Wing (919 SOW) prior to their retirement. Also during Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, radio messages were broadcast by the 193rd Special Operations Group's (193 SOG) Commando Solo EC-130 aircraft. To help ensure that the radio messages would get to the target audience, 10,000 radios were air dropped into Haiti, in order to substantially increase the listening audience.

Messages from President Aristide were broadcast daily on three FM radio channels along with discussions by a panel of Haitian political experts. The purpose of these broadcasts was to educate the Haitian people on the basic theories and concepts of democracy and what benefits they could expect to see with the restoration of a democracy in Haiti. To further attract a listeners and to reinforce the credibility of the information, the radio broadcasts included current news stories, commentaries by popular local figures and played a selection of popular Haitian music.

## The Balkans

From July 1992 through June 1996, AFSOC units participated in Operation PROVIDE PROMISE—the U.S. portion of the United Nations humanitarian relief effort in Bosnia. Overall, more than 4,000 U.S. airland sorties delivered more than 60,000 tons of supplies to Sarajevo. Over 2,000 U.S. sorties airdropped nearly 30,000 container delivery system bundles and more than 1,000 tri-wall aerial delivery system bundles between February 1993 and August 1994.

From April 1993 through December 1995, AFSOC units participated in Operation DENY FLIGHT, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enforcement of a no-fly zone over Bosnia—over 40,000 U.S. sorties were flown, many of which were conducted by AFSOC units. From August through September 1995 AFSOC supported Operation DELIBERATE FORCE in the Balkans, NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serbs. Overall, Coalition Air Forces flew more than 3,500 combat sorties, and the attacks on more than 300 individual targets and 50 targeted complexes quickly led to the Dayton Peace Accords. Pave Low helicopter crewmembers 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 resulted in their receiving the 1995 Air Force Cheney Award. From December 1995 through December 1996, AFSOC supported Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe peace implementation force mission in Bosnia. Overall, more than 50,000 coalition sorties were flown, again many by AFSOC units.

In 1996, AFSOC aircraft and personnel were the first on scene when a CT-43 aircraft carrying U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown crashed near Dubrovnik, Croatia, killing everyone on board. AFSOC launched two MH-53Js and one MC-130P as part of the search and rescue effort. The efforts of these crewmembers,



**Green Hornet crews were involved in the search and rescue operations resulting from the CT-43 crash on 3 April 1996 in Croatia in which Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and 34 other people died, including six Air Force crew members**

during this highly visible event, resulted in them being awarded the Air Force Cheney Award for 1996.

In September 1997, three EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft from the 193 SOW deployed in support of Operation JOINT GUARD.

The stabilization force commander requested the deployment of the AFSOC-gained aircraft to Brindisi, Italy, to serve as a NATO resource to counter Serb radio and television broadcasts misrepresenting the Dayton Peace Accords.

Throughout 1998,

AFSOC maintained a constant combat search and rescue alert posture as part of Operation JOINT GUARD, with aircraft and personnel routinely rotating from the

16 SOW and 352 SOG to San Vito, Italy.

The role increased significantly in March 1999 during the crisis in Kosovo and Operation ALLIED FORCE. During the NATO air campaign to remove Serbian



**An MH-53J from the 21st Special Operations Squadron at the mountain village of Barjrum Currie on 10 April 1999 carries humanitarian daily rations.**

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 193 SOW to counter Serb radio and television broadcasts, while the MC-130H conducted extensive leaflet drops over Serbia, and the AC-130U provided armed reconnaissance. All told, AFSOC's special operators and aircraft played a significant role in bringing an end to the conflict in Kosovo.

## **Liberia**

The crew involved in the 1996 Secretary Brown rescue quickly participated in Operation ASSURED RESPONSE—a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) of nearly 2,500

people from Monrovia, Liberia. Operating in a hostile environment, AFSOC conducted dozens of evacuation flights using MH-53Js helicopters while AC-130H gunships provided fire support—

crewmembers earned the Tunner Award as an outstanding airlift crew of the year.



**From 9 April to 18 June 1996, AFSOC participated in the Liberia NEO Operation ASSURED RESPONSE in which nearly 500 Americans and 2,000 third-country nationals were evacuated.**



## **Congo**

Operation GUARDIAN RETRIEVAL was conducted in response to the unstable situation in the Democratic People's Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) from 17 March - 5 June 1997. Following factional fighting in Rwanda and the successful gains by Tutsi rebels, many Hutus fled in mass into Eastern Zaire. This large exodus resulted in massive refugee camps in Eastern Zaire creating regions of instability and increased tensions. Many non-government organizations (NGO) and private volunteer organizations (PVO) provided aid and assistance in an attempt to ease the suffering of the refugees. Continued fighting between the various factions led to looting and pilfering of many villages in eastern Zaire endangering U.S. citizens. During Operation GUARDIAN RETRIEVAL, a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) conducted to support the Department of State (DoS) in evacuating noncombatants and nonessential military personnel, an MC-130H from the 352 SOG delivered an American military assessment team and evacuated 30 Americans and 26 foreign nationals. The 21-hour flight by the crew included three in-flight refueling and earned them the Mackay Trophy.



**An MC-130H Combat Talon of the 352nd Special Operations Group takes off from England in support of a NEO in the Congo. The mission earned the crew the Mackay Trophy recognizing it as the Air Force's most meritorious flight for 1997.**



**Combat Aviation Advisors (CAA) with the 6th Special Operations Squadron fly with partner nation crews during a deployed mission in March 2016. A CAA deployment sends a small team of Airmen to assess, advise, train and assist friendly and allied forces with their own airpower resources. The 6 SOS performs this Foreign Internal Defense mission as part of Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center.**

### **Foreign Internal Defense**

In April 1994, the 6th Special Operations Squadron (6 SOS) returned to Hurlburt Field to perform the foreign internal defense (FID) mission. By 2000, the squadron had received qualification training on several dissimilar aircraft that included Russian MI-17 helicopters, AN-26s and AN-32 aircraft, while also seeing its core FID mission area expand.



FID is the participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their security. The focus of U.S. efforts is to support the host nation's internal defense and development which can be described as the full range of measures taken by a nation to promote its growth and protect itself from the security threats.

The squadron's mission assessed, trained, advised, and assisted foreign aviation forces in airpower employment, sustainment and force integration. Simply put, the 6 SOS supported the national security policy helping foreign friends and allies to defend their own countries and to function as viable coalition partners. The Republic of the Philippines has been one of the 6 SOS' frequent customers—AFSOC transferred several UH-1H helicopters to the Philippine Air Force.

Over the course of several years and numerous trips abroad, the crews from the 6 SOS trained the Filipino crews on visual flight rules, night-vision tactical insertion and extraction for combat operations, and casualty evacuations.



## Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM

On 11 September 2001, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., pushed the nation's special operations forces to the forefront on the global war against terrorism. Thirty-one days later, AFSOC forces deployed to southwest Asia for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to confront and remove the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, along with the Taliban-supported al Qaida terrorist organization headed by Osama Bin Laden who was responsible for the attacks. AFSOC airpower delivered Special Tactics (ST) forces to the battlefield and they in turn focused U.S. airpower to dispatch the Taliban and al Qaida from Afghanistan. In addition to its support in Afghanistan, AFSOC personnel also deployed in support of OEF to the Philippines and Horn of Africa to aid those region's efforts against terrorism.

From 1-17 March 2002, AFSOC participated in Operation ANACONDA, the first large offensive of OEF, in the mountainous Shahi Khot region in eastern Afghanistan. Over 2,000

Coalition and 1,000 Special Operations Forces infiltrated at altitudes of 12,000 feet and at temperatures of 15 degrees Fahrenheit. TSgt John Chapman, a combat controller, and SrA Jason Cunningham, a pararescueman, were killed-in-action—both were posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross for heroism.

In addition to Afghanistan, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM involved a global effort against terrorism to include the Horn of Africa, as well as the Republic of the Philippines. In January 2002, members of AFSOC

**TSgt Bart Decker, AFSOC combat controller, and the Northern Alliance, engage Taliban and al Qaida forces in Afghanistan.**



**A 20th SOS crew-member in an MH-53M Pave Low over ground zero.**

headed by Brig Gen Donald C. Wurster, commander of Special Operations Command Pacific, deployed as Joint Task Force 510 to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM – Philippines (OEF-P). AFSOC members joined their counterparts from the Southern Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), commanded by Lt Gen Roy Cimatu. Air Force special operations forces advised and assisted the AFP to help combat terrorism in the country. Much of the operation took place on the island of Basilan in the southern region of the Philippines—a stronghold of the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf. The group had terrorized the citizens of the beautiful island and wreaked havoc on its economy. By the end of the operation, the two forces had built 81 kilometers of road, improved an airfield and port facility, and dug fresh water



**Brig Gen Donald C. Wurster and Lt Gen Roy Cimatú led the fight in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM - Philippines.**

wells. In February 2003, AFSOC and Philippine forces again conducted combined operations against the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in the Southern Philippines in the Sulu Archipelago.

One month later, in March 2003, AFSOC participated in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM with deployed forces in support of Joint Special Operations Task Force -North at Bashur Airfield in northern Iraq. The combat phase of the operation quickly removed Saddam Hussein from power and liberated 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 1 May 2003.

So successful was SOF in OEF and OIF, that in 2004 President George W. Bush expanded United States Special Operations Command's responsibilities under the Unified Command Plan, "as the lead combatant commander for planning, synchronizing, and as directed, executing global operations against terrorist networks." Not only did the president and Congress make lasting impressions, so did the Office of the Secretary of Defense.



**In 2006, family and friends began welcoming home members of the Combined Joint Special Operations Air Component at Hurlburt Field, Florida.**

Greatly influenced by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld shifted emphasis away from conventional conflict, involving nation-states, to wars requiring special operations capabilities in combating terrorists, insurgents, and guerillas. This deep imprint on special operations was a legacy evident in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, which called for a 15 percent increase in SOF and clearly placed special operations as the now “dominant form of warfare.”

In April 2006, AFSOC consolidated the rotating personnel in support of OEF and OIF. As a result, an average of 115 people rotated in and out of Hurlburt Field each month—thus the monthly “rotator” had begun.

Operations ENDURING and IRAQI FREEDOM yielded impressive statistics from 11 September 2001 through 29 December 2014. During that timeframe, the command conducted an estimated 173,000 flying hours and 150,000 combat sorties in support of 21,000 named operations. Additionally, AFSOC moved more than 300,000 passengers, nearly 20,000,000 pounds of cargo and 20,000 vehicles. Those efforts directly contributed to over 20,000 detainees captured, 17,000 enemy killed-in-action (EKIA), and nearly 5,000

communication devices retrieved. On 17 February 2010, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that as of 1 September, the name "Operation IRAQI FREEDOM" would be replaced by "Operation NEW DAWN." Subsequently, the last U.S. combat troops withdrew from Iraq on 18 December 2011.



**SSgt David Orvosh, a combat controller, prepares for an operation in Najaf, Iraq, in 2007.**

## Rescue

In October 2003, while supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the globe, AFSOC welcomed the movement of the USAF's continental U.S.-based rescue forces from Air Combat Command (ACC). With this move AFSOC 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). However, in February 2006, Gen T. Michael Moseley, Air Force Chief of Staff, moved rescue back to ACC based on his experiences as the joint forces air component commander in Central Air Forces.

## Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)

Tracking down elusive enemies was harder than akin to finding ‘a needle in a haystack.’ In fact, it was like trying to find a needle among other needles. But in October 2005, AFSOC began the MQ-1 Predator unmanned aircraft mission with the activation of the 3d Special Operations Squadron (3 SOS). AFSOC began its



**The MQ-9 Reaper provides ISR to the special operators in the field.**

Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination (PED) mission in March 2006. The activation of the 11th Intelligence Squadron (11 IS) in August 2006 became an unblinking eye for special operations forces. In May 2007, the command’s ISR mission grew exponentially with the 3 SOS patch swap and the growth of the 11 IS. With the help of the Predator, the squadron followed an enemy’s patterns of life and found and fixed on them as special operators rode in on the back of AFSOC

aircraft and finished them off. Although the MQ-1 phased out in 2016, the ISR mission continued to grow with the more advanced MQ-9 Reaper that AFSOC originally acquired in July 2009.

## Arrival of the CV-22

In November 2006, AFSOC welcomed its first aircraft specifically built for Air Force Special Operations Forces—the CV-22 Osprey. After only two years of testing and training, AFSOC conducted the first operational deployment of four CV-22s in October and November 2008 to Mali, Africa. Ironically, the first ever operation of Air Force Special Operations Forces in October 1961, code named Sandy Beach One, involved training Malian paratroopers. The 2008 deployment was the first transatlantic movement of the CV-22, the first CV-22 deployment east of the prime meridian, the first CV-22 deployment to Africa, the longest CV-22 flight on record at 8.7 hours and 5,230 miles, and the first flight with strategic air refueling supporting tilt-rotor refueling by KC-135s and MC-130s tankers.



**The CV-22 Osprey makes its final descent in November 2006 as the tilt-rotor aircraft arrives at Hurlburt Field, Fla.**



## Cannon Air Force Base

Originally established in 1942 as Clovis Army Air Base, N.M., Cannon Air Force Base was named in honor of Gen John K. Cannon—former commander of Tactical Air Command (TAC).

On 13 May 2005, the base was placed on the Department of Defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) list. Political pressure was applied by then Senator Pete Dominici and Gov Bill Richardson that recommended Cannon be placed in an enclave status until 31 Dec 2009—finding a new mission for the installation became a top priority for the Air Force.

On 1 October 2007, AFSOC assumed host responsibilities of Cannon AFB. The transfer became effective with the activation of the 27th Special Operations Wing (27 SOW) and the arrival of the 73d Special Operations Squadron's (73 SOS) MC-130Ws. Soon other aircraft and units arrived to include the Pilatus PC-12 in January 2008 and the 318 Special Operations Squadron (318 SOS) in May 2008, the 3 SOS and its Predator aircraft in October 2008, the 16 SOS and its AC-130H Spectre gunship aircraft in June 2009, the 551 SOS and its training mission in July 2009, and the 33



**On 1 October 2007, AFSOC assumed host responsibilities of Cannon AFB, N.M., when Col Tim Leahy assumed command of the newly designated 27 SOW from Lt Gen Mike Wooley, commander of AFSOC.**



SOS and its MQ-9 Reaper aircraft also in July 2009. In 2011, AFSOC surpassed the original number of personnel assigned and increased its force to 5,100. By the end of 2011, the 27 SOW took possession of more than half of AFSOC's manned aircraft and all of its 50 unmanned platforms. Further expansion of the base took place on 18 January 2012 when the USAF accepted an 11,000 acre land gift—valued at \$3.2 million—from the state of New Mexico that drastically extend Melrose Air Force Range.

### **Retirement of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopter**

In September 2008, AFSOC retired the venerable Sikorsky MH-53M Pave Low IV helicopter after four decades of dependable service. Despite its outstanding flight safety record and unparalleled capabilities, the cost of maintaining and flying the aging fleet exceeded the potential benefits of keeping it aloft. On the night and early morning hours of 27 and 28 September 2008, AFSOC's remaining six MH-53s flew their final combat mission. The successful SOF logistical resupply and passenger movement took the Pave Lows on a final run through central and southern Iraq.



**In September 2008, AFSOC flew the final mission of the MH-53M Pave Low helicopter in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.**

### **AFSOC's MC-130 Transformation**

In early 2011, in preparation for transition to a new airframe, the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC) began its first MC-130J flight training program with the class practicing air drops, aerial refueling, and formation of the 193 SOW EC-130J Commando Solo at Harrisburg International Airport, Penn. Two months later, the first AFSOC MC-130J, nicknamed Combat Shadow II, rolled out of the Lockheed Martin facility in Marietta, Ga. Six months after its initial roll-out, on 29 September, the first MC-130J arrived at Cannon AFB, and the command's MC-130J's name changed to Commando II was approved in March 2012.

The Air Force decommissioned its MC-130E Combat Talon I aircraft during an official ceremony at Duke Field, Fla., on 25 April 2013, marking a significant step in AFSOC's continuing transition to a new Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AvFID) mission. The MC-130E entered operational service in 1966 and primarily provided infiltration, exfiltration, as well as resupply of Special Operations Forces



and equipment in hostile or denied territory. It featured terrain-following and terrain-avoidance radars and an extensive electronic warfare suite, which helped aircrews detect and protect the aircraft from both radar and infrared-guided threats in hostile environments. Extensively used during operations in Southwest Asia, including Afghanistan and Iraq, the Talon I was replaced by the MC-130J Commando II.

#### **24 SOW Activation**

The 24th Special Operations Wing (24 SOW) activated on 12 June 2012, at Hurlburt Field, Fla., and became AFSOC's third operational wing. It recruits, trains, develops and deploys Special Tactics (ST) operators to enable global access, precision strike and personnel recovery missions across the globe.



#### **352 SOW Activation**

The 352d Special Operations Group (352 SOG) was redesignated as the 352d Special Operations Wing (352 SOW) on 23 March 2015—the fourth wing assigned to the command. The 352 SOW includes more than 1,200 Air Commandos and provides support to the European theater as well as other combatant commands when necessary. The redesignation was necessary to reflect the increased responsibilities and capabilities of the units, people and assets—a tradition carried on by today's Air Commandos.



#### **Return of “Carpetbaggers”**

On 11 February 2013, AFSOC activated the Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center (AFSOAWC) at Hurlburt Field. Then on 10 May 2017, it was redesignated the 492d Special Operations Wing (492 SOW)—it became the fifth wing assigned to AFSOC with an historic lineage that dates back to World War II and Project Carpetbagger. The 492 SOW executes irregular special warfare missions and develops doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures for Air Force Special Operations Forces.





**Valerie Nessel accepts the Medal of Honor from President Donald J. Trump 22 August 2018 on behalf of TSgt John A. Chapman.**

### **Chapman Medal of Honor**

The first Air Force Medal of Honor since the Vietnam War-era was posthumously awarded to TSgt John A. Chapman on 22 August 2018. In a White house ceremony, President Donald J. Trump presented the medal to Chapman's widow, Valerie Nessel, recognizing the Special Tactics combat controller's conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity, sacrificing his life for those of his teammates.

During an insertion onto Afghanistan's Takur Ghar mountaintop in March 2002, the MH-47 helicopter carrying Chapman and a joint special operations reconnaissance team flew into an ambush. Intense enemy small arms and rocket propelled grenade fire damaged the helicopter, throwing Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Neil Roberts into a "hornet's nest" of enemies. Following a controlled crash landing a few miles away, the team volunteered to go back to rescue Roberts.

During the rescue attempt, Chapman's team received heavy enemy fire. He charged uphill through thigh-deep snow to assault an enemy position. He seized an enemy bunker, and killed the enemy fighters in it. Then, with complete disregard for his own life, Chapman attacked a second hostile bunker with an emplaced machine gun firing on the rescue team. During his attack, he was struck and temporarily incapacitated by enemy fire. Despite his wounds, Chapman regained his faculties and continued to engage multiple enemy fighters before paying the ultimate sacrifice when he, once again, stepped out from cover to defend the incoming helicopter carrying the quick reaction force.



## Conclusion

AFSOC employs a full range of special operations air power capabilities. However, if the command is to sustain operational readiness and remain relevant in the future it will need to modernize its force.

In order to accomplish that, AFSOC's number one priority is to recapitalize its aging fleet. Currently, after major redesignations and reorganizations, AFSOC's primary subordinate units include the 1 SOW, 24 SOW and 492 SOW at Hurlburt Field; the 27 SOW at Cannon AFB; the 352 SOW at RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom; and the 353 SOG at Kadena Air Base, Japan.



**Current AFSOC Commander**

Lt Gen James C. Slife  
28 Jun 19 - Present



**Current Command Chief**

CMSgt Cory M. Olson  
24 June 19 - Present

## Former AFSOC Commanders



Maj Gen Thomas E. Eggers  
22 May 90 - 20 Jun 91



Maj Gen Bruce L. Fister  
21 Jun 91 - 21 Jul 94



Maj Gen James L. Hobson, Jr.  
22 Jul 94 - 8 Jul 97



Maj Gen  
Charles R. Holland  
9 Jul 97 - 4 Aug 99



Lt Gen Maxwell C. Bailey  
5 Aug 99 - 15 Jan 02



Lt Gen Paul V. Hester  
16 Jan 02 - 30 Jun 04



Lt Gen Michael W. Wooley  
1 Jul 04 - 26 Nov 07



Lt Gen  
Donald C. Wurster  
27 Nov 07 - 23 Jun 11



Lt Gen Eric E. Fiel  
24 Jun 11 - 2 Jul 14



Lt Gen  
Bradley A. Heithold  
3 Jul 14 - 18 July 16



Lt Gen Marshall B. Webb  
19 Jul 16 - 28 Jun 19

AFSOC is a major command of the U.S. Air Force and the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command. AFSOC provides Air Force special operations forces for worldwide deployment and assignment to unified combatant commanders. The command has approximately 19,000 Total Force Airmen across six operational wings, one special operations group and a special operations center.



## Former AFSOC Command Chief Master Sergeants

Command Chiefs are the commander's key enlisted advocate and advisor on readiness, training, professional development, utilization of the force, operations tempo, standards, conduct and quality of life.



CMSgt James R. Robertson  
22 May 90 - 31 Oct 92



CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad  
1 Nov 92 - 31 Aug 95



CMSgt Michael C. Reynolds  
1 Sep 95 - 24 Jan 01



CMSgt  
Robert V. Martens, Jr.  
25 Jan 01 - 25 Aug 03



CMSgt Howard J. Mowry  
26 Aug 03 - 10 Aug 06



CMSgt Michael P. Gilbert  
11 Aug 06 - 19 Dec 10



CMSgt William W. Turner  
20 Dec 10 - 21 Mar 14



CMSgt Matthew M. Caruso  
25 Apr 14 - 4 May 16



CMSgt Gregory A. Smith  
10 Jun 16 - 20 Jun 19

**Major Contingency Operations Supported by AFSOC  
(Since 22 May 1990)**

<u>Year(s)</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Name of Operation</u>
1990-91	Saudi Arabia/Kuwait/ Iraq	DESERT SHIELD/STORM
1991	Somalia	EASTERN EXIT
1991-2003	Turkey/Iraq	PROVIDE COMFORT & NORTHERN WATCH
1991	Bangladesh	SEA ANGEL
1991	Saudi Arabia	DESERT CALM
1991-2003	Saudi Arabia/Kuwait	SOUTHERN WATCH/VIGILANT WARRIOR
1992-1994	Italy/Yugoslavia	PROVIDE PROMISE
1992	Somalia	RESTORE HOPE
1993	Somalia	CONTINUE HOPE
1993	Yugoslavia	DENY FLIGHT
1994	Haiti	RESTORE DEMOCRACY
1994	Haiti	UPHOLD DEMOCRACY
1994	Rwanda	SUPPORT HOPE
1995	Somalia	UNITED SHIELD
1995	Italy/Yugoslavia/Bosnia	DELIBERATE FORCE
1995	Italy/Yugoslavia/Bosnia	JOINT ENDEAVOR
1996	Liberia	ASSURED RESPONSE
1997	Albania	SILVER WAKE
1997	Republic of Congo	GUARDIAN RETRIEVAL
1999	Serbia/Kosovo	ALLIED FORCE
2000	Mozambique	ATLAS RESPONSE
2001 - 2014	Afghanistan	ENDURING FREEDOM
2003 - 2010	Iraq	IRAQI FREEDOM
2010	Haiti	UNIFIED RESPONSE
2010 - 2011	Iraq	NEW DAWN
2011	Japan	TOMODACHI
2011	Libya	ODYSSEY DAWN
2011	Pakistan	NEPTUNE SPEAR
2013	Philippines	DAMAYAN
2014	Iraq/Syria	INHERENT RESOLVE
2015	Afghanistan	FREEDOM'S SENTINEL





The future is  
being written

The challenges faced in the early days  
of Air Force special operations  
are still with us today.

The proud spirit of today's  
quiet professionals is best expressed in the Air Commando  
motto:

*"Any Place, Any Time, Anywhere."*

For more information on  
special operations heritage, visit:

[www.afsoc.af.mil/About-Us/AFSOC-Heritage](http://www.afsoc.af.mil/About-Us/AFSOC-Heritage)

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**AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND  
MISSION**

**PROVIDE OUR NATION'S SPECIALIZED AIRPOWER,  
CAPABLE ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF CONFLICT...  
ANY PLACE, ANY TIME, ANYWHERE**