FINDING APOLLO'S WARRIORS:

THE FUTURE OF THE AIR COMMANDO HERITAGE

BY

PATRICK V. WNETRZAK

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF

THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

AIR UNIVERSITY

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

JUNE 2013

APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

_____

JAMES D. KIRAS (Date)

_____

THOMAS A. HUGHES (Date)

DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Patrick Wnetrzak received his commission as a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy (B.S. in Aeronautical Engineering) in 1999. Graduating from Undergraduate Pilot Training at Columbus AFB, Mississippi in 2001, he went on to fly B-1Bs at Dyess AFB, Texas, as co-pilot and aircraft commander. Maj Wnetrzak then went on to serve as an instructor and evaluator pilot at Pensacola Naval Air Station, Florida, flying the T-6A Texan II. Maj Wnetrzak was then accepted into the 319th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida, serving as a PC-12 and U-28A instructor and evaluator pilot. Maj Wnetrzak is a senior pilot and has flown in support of special operations forces during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Maj Wnetrzak is a graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University with a M.A.S. in Aviation/Aerospace Operations and the Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would especially like to thank Dr. James Kiras for his constant guidance and wisdom as my thesis advisor. I could always count on receiving valuable advice and mentorship, as well as terrific anecdotes that allowed his Clausewitzian "genius" and understanding of irregular warfare to illuminate the path for my thesis. Dr. Kiras has truly been an inspiration both as a scholar and as a confidant. I would also like to thank Dr. Thomas Hughes for his attention to detail while reviewing my work. Without exception, his suggestions made my work a better read.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge several people who assisted in the completion of this work. In particular, I would like to thank Majors Chris Jennette and Evart Outlaw for their insights into AFSOC's personnel requirements and assignments process. I would like to extend my appreciation to Mr. Randy Bergeron, AFSOC Historian, for providing his valuable perspective on the growth of AFSOC since 9/11. I want to also thank Mr. Akhil Kadidal for permitting the use of his remarkable illustrations of Operation THURSDAY. I would also like to thank the exceptional staff at the Air University Library and the Air Force Historical Research Agency for their valuable assistance.

Most importantly, I want express my sincerest appreciation to my wife and our children. Without their endless love, patience, and encouragement this endeavor would never have been possible. Anything I may have accomplished, it is because of my family.

ABSTRACT

Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) have responded to the significant challenges of the post-9/11 security environment by rapidly creating unique air capabilities specific for this context. In order to develop these new capabilities, significant increases in numbers of personnel and platforms were required. Instead of relying on the Air Commando heritage to guide this sudden growth, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) has conformed to normal Air Force Personnel Command (AFPC) assignment processes. The abandonment of a personnel selection process within AFSOC has led to some internal and external observer's perceptions that Air Commandos are not truly special operators.

This study analyzes the Air Commando heritage and the intrinsic character attributes associated with it, specifically intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity. An examination of historical AFSOF reactions to specific combat environments provides the foundation for this study. Three specific case studies have been selected: the 1st Air Commando Group in the China-Burma-India theater during World War II, the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron or "Jungle Jim" during initial phases of Vietnam, and AFSOC from 9/11 to the present. Analyzing how AFSOF have responded to, organized for, and accomplished the missions they were tasked with reveals the significance of selecting personnel with specific characteristic attributes. These fundamental attributes differentiate Air Commandos from conventional Airmen.

Ultimately, this study argues that a reinvigorated selection process will ensure that tomorrow's Air Commandos are capable of accomplishing AFSOC's future missions. Ensuring that future Air Commandos possess the fundamental attributes will enable them to be successful regardless of the specific tasks or conditions. In essence, a rigorous personnel selection process focused on the fundamental attributes will directly translate into creating and sustaining the unique capabilities AFSOC will require to accomplish its missions.

CONTENTS

Illustrations

Chapter 1

Introduction

If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.

—Sir Isaac Newton, Letter to Robert Hooke, 5 February 1676

I am a Commando. As my brothers before me, I am proud to step into history as a member of the Air Force Special Operations Command. I will walk with pride with my head held high, my heart and attitude will show my allegiance to God, country and comrades. When unable to walk another step, I will walk another mile. With freedom my goal, I will step into destiny with pride and the Air Force Special Operations Command.

—Air Commando Creed

The Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) lineage originated with a few groups of unique airmen during World War II (WWII). These special airmen, known as the Carpetbaggers in the European theater and Air Commandos in the Pacific theater, achieved success because they were capable of undertaking very specialized and unique missions outside of normal operational supervision and control. The success of both organizations in WWII provides the foundational heritage that all Air Force special operators, or Air Commandos, have built upon throughout their proud history. The difficulty, however, is to ensure future generations of Air Commandos possess the attributes necessary to continue this heritage.

Background

The United States faces an international environment that is rapidly changing. New security threats are emerging continuously while existing threats are varying strategies and tactics constantly to exploit perceived gaps in the nation's security. In 2004, the complexities of this environment led then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to designate US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) as the lead agency for the planning and, when directed, the execution of all counter-terrorism operations.[1] In essence, US Special Operations Forces (SOF) has become the primary means used to solve the complex security challenges facing the nation. These increasing responsibilities required USSOCOM as an organization to expand, which likewise required its subordinate organizations to expand.

[1] Harold Kennedy, "SOCOM Creates New Hub for Fighting War on Terror," *National Defense Magazine* (February 2004), http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/archive/2004/February/Pages/SOCOM_Creates3654.aspx.

Air Force Special Operations Command's (AFSOC) requirement to meet the near-term combat obligations of Operations IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) as well as increasing its ability to support global counter-terrorism operations required a rapid and massive increase in personnel, equipment, and capabilities. AFSOF's role, evolved from the small, unique teams operating in the shadows to the large counter-terrorism force of today. AFSOC enabled this growth through the abandonment of most selective manning processes that historically ensured incoming personnel possessed the essential character attributes necessary for success.[2] The removal of these processes allowed the floodgates at Air Force Personnel Command (AFPC) to open and personnel were rapidly assigned to billets within the expanding Air Force special operations community. Although the short-term quantitative increases in personnel were achieved, minimal guidance was given toward reducing the risk associated with an open assignment system that does not qualitatively select personnel.

The AFSOF community has continually adapted and shaped itself to meet the requirements of the combat environments it has faced. Recently, however, AFSOC may have done so at a detriment to its ability to shape itself adequately for future missions. AFSOC's reaction to the current operational environment, through its growth, reveals two distinct perceptions concerning the characteristics of today's Air Commandos. First, some within the community believe that the Air Commando heritage has been lost through the abandonment of most personnel selection and assessment programs as AFSOC strove to increase rapidly its ability to meet current mission demands. Second, the lack of a selection process in combination with a perceived overlap of missions with the conventional Air Force has led others to conclude that AFSOC's uniqueness to the conventional air force (CAF) has diminished. AFSOC has been reactive rather than proactive in its approach and must change this trend or risk the enduring loss of its "SOF uniqueness."

Statement of the Research Question and its Significance

As the United States seeks to minimize its military presence in Afghanistan, the conventional forces deployed to the region will subsequently be reduced and enter a period of reconstitution. It is unlikely, however, that SOF will experience a similar respite as the National Command Authority (NCA) continues to leverage SOF's capabilities to counter the "violent extremists [who] will continue to threaten U.S. interests, allies, partners, and the homeland."[3]

---

[2] Currently, only three organizations within AFSOC still maintain a more traditional, rigorous selective manning process—combat controllers (CCT), pararescuemen (PJ), and the combat aviation advisors (CAA) of the 6th Special Operations Squadron.

[3] United States Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," January 2012, 1, http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf.

More specifically, the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance declares SOF's "global counter-terrorism efforts will become more widely distributed," requiring a continuing effort to "build and sustain tailored capabilities appropriate for counter-terrorism and irregular warfare."[4] Consequently, AFSOC must not only organize themselves to fulfill the NCA's top priority missions, they must also ensure this transformation will lay the foundation for success against future ambiguous threats. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to answer the following primary question: what attributes must future Air Commandos possess?

As Sir Isaac Newton's statement in the epigraph suggests, the key to any future achievement is to not forget the lessons of previous experiences, but instead to use those as the underpinnings of all future endeavors. An organization's ability to achieve is related to their heritage. If this heritage is either founded on flawed qualities or is lacking the proper character attributes, continued success is impossible. Therefore, the continuing success of SOF's counter-terrorism and irregular warfare missions requires that the correct capabilities are developed and sustained by the right personnel. Stated more succinctly, AFSOC's future success hinges upon the selection of its personnel. It is often difficult, however, for a casual observer to grasp the distinction between conventional force operations and special operations and how this translates to personnel.

Dr. Robert Spulak, an associate fellow with the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) Strategic Studies Department, asserts that it is the personnel and their character attributes that differentiate SOF from conventional forces.[5] While he makes this delineation about the SOF community as whole, he quickly contends that AFSOF, and its aviators in particular, are "defined more by special platforms than by special operators."[6] According to Spulak's logic, the significant difference between Air Mobility Command (AMC) C-130J aviators and AFSOC MC-130H aviators are the specialized aircraft they employ—the aviators themselves are not the critical components. In other words, unlike the other services' SOF, Air Force special operators are unique because of their equipment, not because of their personnel's intrinsic qualities. This logic is entirely incorrect as it not only discounts the Air Commando heritage, it also increases the risk to mission accomplishment, particularly when the personnel do not possess necessary traits to differentiate themselves substantively from their platforms. The fact that this rationale not only resides with outside observers, but is also perpetuating itself within the current AFSOC

[4] United States Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership," 4.
[5] Robert G. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF* (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2007), 13–14.
[6] Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 12.

assignment process, compels the Air Force special operations community to transform its process of selecting the character attributes their future Air Commandos must posses.

Methodology

In order to determine what essential attributes future Air Commandos require, an analysis of the Air Commando heritage is necessary. Specifically, the analysis of how these unique airmen reacted to their differing combat environments will help discern the fundamental traits sought by the primary research question. Three particular operational contexts have been selected: the 1st Air Commando Group in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theater, the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron or "Jungle Jim" during initial phases of Vietnam, and AFSOC's evolution from the September 11th attacks to the present. Each context will be examined through the use of a task-condition-standard framework. More specifically, what was the task assigned to each particular AFSOF unit; under what conditions were these tasks to be accomplished; and lastly, what standards of performance did these units attain? In essence, this framework identifies the fundamental attributes of each specific Air Force special operations forces unit's personnel; thereby revealing whether fundamental SOF attributes are sufficient or are additional specific attributes required with respect to particular operational requirements.

Limitations

The terms "Air Commando" and "Air Force special operations forces" (AFSOF) are often used interchangeably, particularly in regards to the historical origins of these entities. The activation of US Special Operations Command as a unified combatant command in April 1987 organized all service-component SOF with a single commander.[7] Therefore, all Air Force special operations forces are under the command authority of USSOCOM, regardless of the subordinate command to which they belong. Air Commandos on the other hand, are those Air Force special operators subordinate to AFSOC. This distinction is key, as this research will focus solely on those Air Force special operators under the purview of AFSOC, otherwise referred to as Air Commandos for the remainder of this paper. In essence, there are AFSOF outside of AFSOC channels that will not be included as part of this research due to the sensitive nature of their missions and all conclusions and recommendations are applicable only to the Air Commandos of Air Force Special Operations Command.

Additionally, the term Air Commando is an all-inclusive term with the AFSOC community as well. An Air Commando is not just a special operations pilot, or a combat

[7] United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command" (United States Special Operations Command History and Research Office, March 31, 2008), 7, http://www.socom.mil/Documents/history6thedition.pdf.

controller, or even aircrew in general. An Air Commando is any person involved in making a special operations mission a success within AFSOC—aircraft maintenance personnel, crew chiefs, logisticians and so on. As Brig Gen Harry C. "Heine" Aderholt once said about the Air Commandos in Vietnam, "there wasn't any talk of AFSCs—if there were airplanes to be moved, medics and maintainers moved them together…it was always a tight team."[8] While no one person in the success chain is more important than the other, this research will focus solely on the aircrew personnel selection process as they are most often the primary operators of Spulak's "special platforms."

Overview

One problem with the existing literature is that historical examples of AFSOF in action are plumbed without analysis. This thesis uses a methodology based on evaluation criteria and comparative case study analysis. Providing a baseline knowledge of what makes SOF "special" is important before determining what character attributes future Air Commandos require. Chapter 2 provides this foundation as it develops a general understanding what a SOF selection process is and what it is designed to accomplish. This chapter next explains what makes the SOF air component unique from the land and sea special operations components. These unique attributes suggest the necessity for an AFSOF personnel selection process. From this explication, the characteristic attributes of an Air Force special operator are highlighted. The next three chapters use these Air Commando attributes as one part of a method to explore three distinct operational contexts using framework based on three evaluation criteria: the task to be performed; the conditions which influence performance; and, the standard of mission execution.

Chapter 3 provides the contextual analysis of the 1st Air Commando Group (ACG) during CBI campaign of WWII. This chapter emphasizes the historical significance of the first Air Commando's informal selection process and its role in defining the specific attributes that enabled the 1st ACG's success. Chapter 4 examines the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) during Vietnam. More precisely, this chapter explains the effects a rigorous, formal personnel selection process had on the fundamental character attributes of these Air Commandos. Chapter 5 assesses the Air Commando attributes during the evolution of AFSOC after the September 11th attacks. This chapter discusses the effects that AFSOC's abandonment of most formalized personnel selection processes has on the attributes of today's Air Commandos and the implications this has for the future of AFSOC. These chapters will identify the unique challenges each era faced within their operational combat environments and how these tasks, conditions, and standards defined the essential character attributes associated with the Air Commando ethos.

[8] Timothy Bailey, "Air Commando! A Heritage Wrapped in Secrecy," *Airman*, March 1997, 11.

Chapter 6 will conclude by recommending how future generations of Air Commandos can remain unique and build upon their heritage. In other words, this section will explain how Air Force special operators will not only remain distinct from the other service's SOF components, but also from the increasingly capable conventional force. In essence, this chapter will provide the ways that will ultimately ensure AFSOC meets its desired ends—"any place, any time, anywhere."[9]

[9] Herbert A. Mason, Randy G. Bergeron, and James A. Renfrow, *Operation Thursday: Birth of the Air Commandos* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1994), 25.

Chapter 2

The Selection Process

A vigorous and extensive selection process ensures that only mature, dependable, and self-reliant individuals join SOF. The selection and retention of high-quality, motivated, and dedicated personnel are most important as SOF operate in circumstances where the reputation of the United States may rest on the successful completion of the mission. Given the unique nature of special operations and the often isolated environments, it takes a discriminating selection and assessment process and hard work to find the right person. But it is important to learn up front whether a person has the qualities and will necessary to perform to highly demanding standards.

—United States Special Operations Forces 1998 Posture Statement

1. *Humans are more important than hardware.*
2. *Quality is better than quantity.*
3. *SOF cannot be mass produced.*
4. *Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur.*
5. *Most special operations require non-SOF support.*

—The SOF Truths

Senior political and military decision-makers have increased their reliance on the special operations forces' capability to combat global terrorism. This reliance has developed in part from SOF's well-publicized accomplishments, beginning with the opening stages of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM through their successful mission against Osama bin Laden. The 2011 National Military Strategy (NMS) attempts to respond to these increased mission requirements while still maintaining SOF's unique capabilities. The NMS states "Joint special operations forces will . . . maintain a wide range of capabilities to support our nation's counter-terrorism efforts and other missions require their *unique attributes* [emphasis added]."[1] Likewise, AFSOC's 2012 Strategic Vision openly acknowledges the importance of maintaining AFSOF's unique character attributes while responding to the increased demand for AFSOF's specialized capabilities by stating "the challenges we face require a Joint Force that is flexible, agile, and adaptive, it *emphasizes people* as much as platforms. It recognizes that the *unique character* of our service members [emphasis added]."[2] Ensuring the selection of the right personnel is the first

[1] United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2011: Redefining America's Military Leadership" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 8, 2011), 21, http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.
[2] Air Force Special Operations Command, "Air Force Special Operations Command 2012 Strategic Vision," February 2012, 5, USAF Historical Records Agency.

and most important step towards developing a special operations force capable of meeting the nation's security needs.

This chapter examines one crucial difference between SOF and conventional forces: a more rigorous selection process. Selection processes for SOF are "fundamentally concerned with the prediction of job performance."[3] The selection process seeks to identify the specific predictors, or intrinsic character attributes, of each individual SOF candidate. Possession of these specific attributes directly enables the future development of the unique capabilities required by SOF personnel. An explication of the uniqueness of the air component from the other SOF components further emphasizes the importance of a selection process for future Air Force special operations aircrew. This air-specific selection process hinges upon the identification of the few, yet very specific, character attributes that will ensure future Air Commandos are not only unique from their conventional Air Force brethren, but also from their SOF counterparts. The chapter then closes with the introduction of a conceptual framework that will analyze the specific attributes of the Air Commando heritage. Before identifying these attributes, however, the uniqueness of special operations forces requires explanation in order to understand the relationship between character attributes and the employment of unique combat capabilities.

What Makes Special Operations Forces "Special"

Military history is replete with tales of men and women in elite units conducting unconventional operations. Many authors of these tales, however, only considered the men and women special because they either belonged to an elite unit that conducted the operations, or they were so successful on the battlefield they became legends.[4] In essence, military personnel often have been erroneously considered special simply because of their mission. While the purpose of SOF's mission is a significant factor, this rationale neither adequately nor appropriately describes what makes them special.

Special operations missions are frequently envisioned to curb an adversary's ability to exploit their previous success or to minimize a perceived capability gap in order to create a strategic or operational advantage.[5] The key concept here is the purpose of these missions is defined by the context of the situation—each mission attempts to solve a specific problem. However, as contexts continually change, special operations cannot be bounded by a set of

[3] Mike Smith and Ivan T. Robertson, *Advances in Selection and Assessment* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1989), 25.
[4] For historical examples of elite units, see Nigel Cawthorne, *Fighting Elites: From the Spartans to the SAS* (London, U.K.: Quercus Publishing, 2009).
[5] Roger A. Beaumont, *Special Operations and Elite Units, 1939-1988: A Research Guide* (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1988), 1.

unchanging tasks or conditions. Colin Gray asserts the tasks associated with these operations require very unique capabilities beyond the range of conventional forces.[6] In other words, the nature of these missions often precludes successful accomplishment by larger conventional forces that lack the necessary and sufficient capabilities. James Kiras furthers this reasoning by stating that special operations can be defined by both their strategic or operational intent as well as the unique characteristics of the forces that conduct these operations.[7] The last portion of this definition is paramount.

While it is obvious a lack of special operations precludes the need for a special force, it is the special operators themselves—not their tasks—that define the "specialness" of SOF.[8] Because special operations require unique capabilities, they consequently require a unique force consisting of personnel who are specifically selected, highly trained, and specially equipped to accomplish these tasks. In essence, the qualities of the personnel in SOF enable them to accomplish the tasks conventional forces could not, would not, or cannot do by themselves.[9] Furthermore, Spulak emphasizes that the characteristic attributes of SOF serve as the main distinction not only from conventional forces, but also from "other narrowly defined military organizations."[10]

The perceived lack of distinction between SOF and conventional forces by some outside observers has led to a mischaracterization of SOF's unique character attributes. Once these attributes are perceived as trainable qualities—not intrinsic character qualities—they become behavioral traits.[11] In other words, behavioral traits do not offer predictions on future abilities or actions as they can be trained or learned through a variety of different means.[12] Therefore, if SOF's unique character attributes were truly behavioral, the only distinction between special operators and conventional forces would be the amount and type of training. Consequently, any conventional force could theoretically, with enough rigorous training, become "special." Why then, if a conventional force can be trained exclusively for a specific task to increase mission success, do special operators need to be specially selected, trained, and equipped?

---

[6] Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 149.
[7] James D. Kiras, "The Role of Special Operations Forces: Past, Present, and Future," *Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces* 37, no. 2 (2011): 81.
[8] Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2008), 8.
[9] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value*, 8.
[10] Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 14.
[11] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value*, 14.
[12] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value*, 14.

The answer does not reside solely with each force's ability to accomplish a mission; it is centers on their respective limitations. Every force, special and conventional alike, has limitations in its capabilities, but it is the ability to overcome limitations that differentiates SOF from conventional forces.[13] Kiras identifies three important areas where SOF are specifically able to overcome the limitations of conventional forces: assumption of risk, problem solving, and the standards and conditions of the mission.[14] Any mission undertaken by military forces involves risk, but the strategic nature of special operations missions involves risk levels well above those that can be undertaken by conventional forces. Gray agrees special operations are inherently risky as "the basic nature of this kind of warfare ensures that the potential for awesome danger is always present" and it is the apparent smoothness of their missions that leads some observers to disregard the level of risk involved.[15] The efficiency of these missions is a direct result of the split-second decisions made by the operators as well as the experience levels of those involved. In other words, SOF is able to mitigate these increased risk levels because its personnel possess the requisite maturity and judgment that is often displayed through their unique problem solving abilities.

SOF do not simply disregard the risk associated with their missions, they develop unique solutions to the problems that mitigate this risk and subsequently overcome the limitations of conventional planning. Spulak contends that SOF are able to solve the strategic problems that conventional forces cannot because they can better mitigate the Clausewitzian friction of uncertainty and unpredictability through the attributes of creativity and flexibility.[16] Although he briefly acknowledges creativity and flexibility are traits required by SOF, his definitions focus more on the capabilities and processes employed by SOF rather than on the intrinsic characteristics of special operators.[17] What Spulak overlooks with his capability enabling attributes is that they are both fundamentally a function of intellectual flexibility. In other words, while SOF are required to craft creative solutions to their unique tactical, operational, and strategic problems, it is their intrinsic intellectual flexibility that enables these operators to innovate, improvise, and adapt rapidly to overcome perceived limitations. This flexibility, in

[13] Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 13.
[14] Kiras, "The Role of Special Operations Forces," 82.
[15] Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, 147.
[16] Robert G. Spulak, *Innovate or Die: Innovation and Technology for Special Operations* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: JSOU Press, 2010), 77.
[17] Spulak defines flexibility as the tactical innovation required to change or modify the capabilities of SOF while creativity is the operational innovation required to change SOF's capabilities to something other than what conventional forces offer. In essence, he views both traits as necessary only to change the capabilities of SOF in order to adapt to the current context of the strategic situation. Spulak, *Innovate or Die*, 5-7.

conjunction with the maturity and judgment needed to mitigate risk, directly enables SOF to maintain the highest of standards while executing the most difficult missions in adverse conditions.

While achieving and maintaining a high standard in and of itself is not unique to SOF—conventional forces can train extensively to conduct a specific mission with a high likelihood of success—it is the ability of SOF to maintain this exacting standard across a wide range of conditions that set them apart.[18] These conditions are many in nature and most cannot be directly manipulated or influenced by military force.[19] This has often caused many military leaders to focus solely on the technological or specific platform capabilities their forces can employ to counter potential adverse conditions at the cost of ignoring the personal qualities needed to accomplish these missions. In other words, the uncertain, unpredictable, and often ambiguous conditions that encompass special operations require personnel that are mature enough to comprehend the entirety of the situation; possess the judgment necessary to make the right decisions in spite of the conditions; have the intellectual flexibility required to exploit the existing conditions; and, tenaciously persevere despite the conditions. It is not the technology that mitigates the risk associated with the solutions crafted in response to the conditions surrounding the mission; rather people with specific, inherent character attributes enable the high standards of mission success—"the secret to success is always people."[20]

The fundamental SOF character attributes of maturity, judgment, intellectual flexibility, and tenacity are not found in every military member. While many conventional service members may possess one, two, or even three of these qualities, it is quite difficult to find an individual with all four. Yet, the strategic importance and nature of special operations missions require these types of personnel in increasing numbers. If the personnel are what makes SOF not only successful, but indeed special, their recruitment, assessment, and selection must remain paramount.

---

[18] The task-condition-standard framework is utilized across all the military services. The task is the singular action that must be accomplished—it drives the requirement of specific military capabilities. It should both be observable and measurable. The conditions delineate what variables are to be encountered during the performance of the task. Although only the known conditions are often outlined, it is the unknown or ambiguous conditions that adversely impact task accomplishment. The standard is the expected or desired level of performance to be achieved while accomplishing the task. Kiras, "The Role of Special Operations Forces," 83.

[19] This concept is derived from the joint definition of conditions, which defines it as the numerous variables that affect the ability of forces to conduct operations in a particular environment. United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC, 2012), 61, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf.

[20] John D. Gresham, "General Bryan D. Brown Interview" (Defense Media Network, October 15, 2009), http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/interview-gen-bryan-d-brown-usa-ret/.

The Selection Process

During his testimony to the Committee on Armed Services House of Representatives on 31 January 2007, then-USSOCOM commander General Bryan D. Brown was asked explicitly if the dramatic increases in SOF personnel numbers had lowered the selection process requirements. Gen Brown replied that the requirements "are actually higher than they were before…[and] quite frankly, if anything, the standards are much, much higher than they were throughout history."[21] Gen Brown further asserted that strengthening the SOF ranks with "junior personnel [just] to meet the aggregate numbers" should not happen, as "the hallmark of Special Operations Forces is their skill, experience and maturity."[22] While there is little doubt that special operators have been effective in their missions over the past decade, SOF should also prepare for the conditions of future missions. In order to preserve these SOF hallmarks for the future, the design of the selection process Gen Brown to which alludes to must adequately recruit, assess, and select the required personal attributes.

Although SOF are distinct from the conventional force, most special operators are generated from the conventional force. In other words, most special operators begin their career in the conventional force before they are selected for acceptance into a SOF unit.[23] The selection process necessary for identifying potential special operators, however, is more than simply picking the best individuals from the collective conventional force. Merely being the top performer in a conventional unit does not guarantee possession of the four fundamental SOF attributes. This method may be effective for a highly *specialized* conventional unit (such as an Air Force F-15C fighter squadron), but it will not work for a *special operations* unit. Therefore, a special operations selection process must specifically recruit individuals, assess their potential for acceptance, and select only the most promising personnel. In essence, this competitive process is necessarily concerned with acquiring the "raw material" by differentiating the personnel with the

[21] Quintin V. Ervine, *Special Operations Forces* (New York, NY: Nova Science, 2009), 90–91.
[22] Ervine, *Special Operations Forces*, 89.
[23] Most special operators begin their development in a conventional unit, gaining experience and honing their inherent attributes before they are recruited into special operations. More frequently, however, special operators are recruited straight from their initial training—such as pilot training for AFSOF—or from direct accessions into the service. For instance, an individual may now enlist into the Army and proceed directly to the Special Forces selection and training process (assuming the individual meets stringent entry requirements). In this instance, these special operators have minimal experience in the conventional force and must gain and hone their attributes while conducting special operations. For more information on direct accessions into Army SF units, see "MOS 18X - Special Forces Enlistment Option," *Army-Portal.com*, May 10, 2011, http://www.army-portal.com/jobs/special-forces/18x.html#requirements.

essential SOF attributes from those that do not.[24] The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) provides one of the best examples of a competitive personnel selection process.

The OSS was created shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor to "plan and operate special services as may be directed by the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff" and served as the nation's primary unconventional warfare and secret intelligence gathering service throughout WWII.[25] Although the OSS' rigorous selection process is widely considered as the foundation of most modern-day SOF selection processes, it did not have a formalized or standard process in its first year of existence. Men were recruited from all walks of life, both military and civilian and included criminals from the infamous Philadelphia Purple Gang and the Murder, Inc., gang from New York.[26] As was the case during WWII, many military members today perceive the recruitment phase of the selection process as the most easily accomplished step of the entire process—especially in the face of increasing manpower requirements in a wartime situation.

While all special operators must volunteer to join SOF, very few of these "self-selectors" will possess the essential SOF character attributes. Spulak depicted this phenomenon through visualization of bell curves where the distribution of SOF personnel lies near the 95th percentile of all conventional force personnel. Therefore, the number of SOF-capable personnel—those with the necessary character attributes—is not only less than the total number of available conventional personnel, SOF must attempt to recruit significantly more personnel than needed to meet their minimum personnel number requirements. Stated another way, in order for SOF to meet their growing personnel requirements during a reduction in overall numbers of the nation's conventional force personnel, the recruitment process is especially important. Continued rapid SOF growth will either drive recruiting efforts towards members who may not possess all the necessary character attributes, or the growth will stagnate until more qualified conventional personnel become available.

The results of the OSS' haphazard recruiting were evident with the increased reporting from the battlefield that their agents were not able to respond effectively to the conditions they

[24] Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups: Why SOF Are the Way SOF Are* (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2010), 46.
[25] For a brief background of the OSS see also Joint Special Operations University, *The OSS Model and the Future SOF Warrior* (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2011), 3. MacKinnon, Donald W., *How Assessment Centers Were Started in the United States: The OSS Assessment Program* (Pittsburgh, PA: Development Dimensions International, 1974), 2, http://www.ddiworld.com/DDIWorld/media/white-papers/HowAssessmentCentersWereStarted_mg_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf.
[26] MacKinnon, Donald W., *The OSS Assessment Program*, 3.

were facing.[27] After a late 1943 trip to London, an OSS agent recommended that the organization adopt a psychological-psychiatric assessment program similar to Britain's War Office Selection Board (WOSB).[28] Senior leaders of the OSS realized that simple recruiting practices did not ensure their personnel would possess the necessary attributes that would translate into success under complex and ambiguous conditions—a formal psychological assessment is as essential today is it was to the OSS.

Although the group of professional psychologists that ran the assessment program for the OSS did not know the exact missions or tasks the recruits were to undertake overseas, they were able to develop a $3^1/_2$-day program that would assess each individual's "general structure of his being, and his strengths and weaknesses."[29] In other words, the OSS assessment process was able to identify effectively the general character attributes they believed would reliably predict the recruits' ability to succeed in their strategically important missions.[30] The character assessments were based on a battery of psychological tests, analysis of performance during ambiguous, complex, and challenging field exercises, and multiple interviews. Essentially, the OSS recruits' character was assessed through their every word and action during their stay at "Station S."[31] The "man as a whole" assessment concept continues to be used by SOF today. This assessment concept is essential in identifying those individuals who have been recruited but are sufficiently and reliably predicted to be unsuitable for the mission.[32] The importance of the assessment cannot be understated given the risks inherent in most special operations.

---

[27] Joint Special Operations University, *The OSS Model and the Future SOF Warrior* (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2011), 5–6. See also Donald W. MacKinnon's *The OSS Assessment Program* and United States Office of Strategic Services' *Assessment of Men.*

[28] United States Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men: Selection of Personnel for the Office of Strategic Services* (New York, NY: Rinehart, 1948), 4.

[29] MacKinnon, Donald W., *The OSS Assessment Program*, 3.

[30] The OSS identified seven general attributes they thought were most vital to success and are still relevant as the four fundamental attributes discussed in this thesis are derived from them. See pages 30-31 for a discussion of the general OSS attributes. United States Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men*, 8.

[31] John Whiteclay Chambers II, "Office of Strategic Services Training During World War II," *Studies in Intelligence* 54, no. 2, Getting Ready for Conflict (June 2010): 7, https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol.-54-no.-2/pdfs-vol.-54-no.-2/Chambers-OSS%20Training%20in%20WWII-with%20notes-web-19Jun.pdf. Station S was the name of an OSS assessment center established in 1944 and located at a large, country estate in Fairfax, Virginia. The primary purpose of Station S was to "determine not only [the candidates] mental and physical aptitude but their judgment, independence, emotional stability and their ability to act effectively under pressure." Chambers 7.

[32] The OSS' developed list of general attributes and several specific attributes based on perceived mission requirements and conditions, served as the characteristic predictors of future behavior. In other words, those recruits who demonstrated possession of these attributes were predicted to perform up to standards during performance of their missions. The OSS did note, however, that some individuals did make it through the recruitment, assessment, and selection process and still failed to perform as predicted. In other

The strategic implications of most SOF missions and their associated "high risk-no fail" nature require the highest standards of performance. Although the assessment portion of the selection process is very important, it does come at a cost—the higher the expected personnel standards of performance are, the more thorough an assessment process must be. Therefore, personnel assessment is most costly in terms of resources as well as in relation to the potential costs to mission success. For each unsuitable recruit who slips through the assessment, it "costs the organization a good deal of time and money, lowers the efficiency and reputation of one of its units, and, by taking the place of a competent man, prevents the attainment of certain goals."[33] In other words, an assessment is critically important because potential special operators will have a significant amount of time, money, and effort expended in their training. Once the recruits complete their training, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify their deficient attributes and replace them. The detriment these deficiencies pose increases as the operators will more than likely be placed in situations that will considerably impact not only their own unit's security, but also the security of the nation.[34]

The selection portion of the process is not necessarily about selecting *in* the best possible candidates, it is more about selecting *out* those who do not possess the necessary character attributes and can occur at any point during the process.[35] In other words, an overall SOF selection process must include assessing the recruits' character to ensure only the most suitable candidates are left at the end of the selection.[36] Any personnel selection process that recruits and

---

words, no selection process is infallible. United States Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men*, 8–9.

[33] Additionally, the OSS described the conceptual cost-benefit process they used to rationalize their assessment program. This concept was based on calculations of the amount of resources saved by the earlier detection of unsuitable attributes and subsequent removal of the individual from further training; the amount of harm prevented in relation to mission success through the elimination of unsuitable candidates; and, the most difficult calculation, the amount gained—the "average difference between the positive accomplishments of a failure and of a success." United States Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men*, 9.

[34] The OSS recommended assessment programs particularly when the quality of the selectees was extremely important. Furthermore, the OSS recommended their version of an assessment program when only four hundred to one thousand recruits were processed and in specific instances when missions required collaboration—both as a leader and as a cooperative team member. United States Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men*, 465.

[35] Anna Simons, *The Company They Keep: Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1997), 58.

[36] In fact, the majority of special operators undergo continual assessments throughout their career—each and every training cycle, exercise, and mission is a means to assess the operator's continued suitability for SOF. Assessments are found in the forms of evaluations and reviews from both supervisors and peers alike. For an explanation of how the OSS peer reviews were instrumental in their assessment program see Joint Special Operations University, *Irregular Warfare and the OSS Model: Report of Proceedings, Joint Special Operations University and Office of Strategic Services Society Symposium.* (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2010), 3; United States Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men*.

subsequently selects personnel based merely on a set of minimum entry requirements or standards—especially when they are not based on characteristic attributes—should not be considered a necessary and sufficient selection process for SOF personnel.[37]

One of the key difficulties with the SOF selection process, however, is the length of time it takes from start to finish. For instance, the US Army Special Forces selection program, the Special Forces Qualification Course ("Q Course"), lasts slightly longer than one year.[38] While the length of the selection process ensures that only "the most suitable persons" emerge highly trained and equipped for their missions, it is therefore, difficult to increase or accelerate the growth of SOF in terms of personnel numbers.[39] As a larger SOF community is not necessarily better, any increases in personnel size should be undertaken only if the integrity of the selection process is upheld.[40] National policymakers increasingly rely on SOF because they are able to achieve results while using relatively few resources. SOF, however, are placed in increasingly difficult circumstances as they are routinely accepting more and more tasks even though they are a finite resource. SOF typically responds to the policymakers' increased demand by creating additional forces through the lowering of its personnel selection standards.[41] SOF growth is permissible, even advisable, if the selection process maintains its rigorous nature and high standards.[42] Therefore, adherence to a rigorous selection process for all SOF personnel is the

[37] A SOCOM sponsored symposium recommended that not only do special operators need a rigorous selection process; SOF enablers should be subjected to a similar selection process as well. The panel argued that, "these support personnel are absolutely critical to mission success, and yet SOF generally accepts whoever the services provide." The panel also acknowledged the difficulty in realizing this concept as the "services may not provide enough candidates to allow a rigorous selection, but there should be some system to evaluate a support person's potential for serving in a SOF unit." Joint Special Operations University, *The OSS Model and the Future SOF Warrior*, 18–19.

[38] Terry White, *Swords of Lightning: Special Forces and the Changing Face of Warfare* (London, UK: Brassey's, 1992), 33–34.

[39] United States Office of Strategic Services, *Assessment of Men*, 462.

[40] Gen Brown admitted that SOCOM needs an increase in personnel end-strength numbers, but warned against "random acts of growth." He argued for a comprehensive analysis of future requirements in order to ensure not only the right people were recruited, but also the appropriate numbers of people were selected to avoid overpopulating the SOF community. Gresham, "Gen Brown Interview."

[41] Ervine, *Special Operations Forces*, 90–91. Although Gen Brown testified that SOF selection standards were still high by 2007, the Army was criticized for its perceived lowering of standards in the early phases of OEF. For an example of policymakers advocating for expanding SOF through lowering standards, see W. Todd Akin, "Special Forces Too Critical; Kerry Willing to Lower Standards to Expand," *Washington Times*, November 3, 2004, http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-124002915/special-forces-too-critical-kerry-willing-to-lower.

[42] A potential during any rapid increase in growth—particularly for the SOF community—is for selection standards to decrease allowing those who, previously, would have been considered unsuitable. Kiras, "The Role of Special Operations Forces," 85.

only method that guarantees future special operators will continue to be "the best that have ever gone out of Special Operations Command."[43]

Air Force Special Operations Forces Selection

Air Force special operations forces serve primarily as USSOCOM's aviation assets.[44] The special operators of Air Force Special Operations Command, however, are not comprised solely of aircrew; special tactics airmen, or "battlefield airmen," are also members of the AFSOC community and are organized under the Special Tactics Group.[45] Currently, only the special tactics airmen and the combat aviation advisor (CAA) personnel assigned the 6th Special Operations Squadron (6th SOS)—the USAF's only aviation foreign internal defense (avFID) unit—undergo a selection process similar to those outlined above. In other words, only a very small percentage of the over 15,000 personnel within AFSOC actually undergo a formalized selection process.[46] Instead, the majority of airmen in AFSOC are assigned through the standard Air Force assignment processes and could have just as easily been assigned to Air Mobility Command.

The lack of a formal selection process for most Air Commandos does not mean that personnel are not high quality, particularly in terms of their basic flying abilities. What it does mean, however, is that the majority of airmen assigned to AFSOC have not been recruited, assessed, nor selected based upon their possession of the essential SOF attributes of maturity, judgment, intellectual flexibility, and tenacity. Although some of the airmen in AFSOC undoubtedly possess one or more of these character traits, very few will possess all four attributes outside of those few AFSOF operators that have gone through a selection process. This lack of an institutionalized selection process for all Air Force special operators has led many within the community to "question the legitimacy of the SOF designation for these positions."[47]

As Air Force Special Operations Command looks to "modernize, recapitalize, and balance the force to provide specialized airpower capabilities in irregular and traditional environments," it must not focus solely on its platforms as the only means to realize this vision.[48] While the aircraft in the Air Force special operations inventory are highly specialized, if personnel are what truly make the Air Commandos special, AFSOC cannot solely rely on the

[43] Ervine, *Special Operations Forces*, 93.
[44] Turnley, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups*, 39.
[45] These special tactics airmen include combat control (CCT), pararescue (PJ), special operations weather teams (SOWT), and select tactical air control party (TACP) units. United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05: Joint Special Operations* (Washington, DC, 2011), II–2.
[46] Air Force Special Operations Command, "AFSOC 2012 Strategic Vision," iii.
[47] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value*, 25.
[48] Air Force Special Operations Command, "AFSOC 2012 Strategic Vision," 14.

"rigorous Air Force training and evaluation standards for basic aircrew training [to] provide initial screening."[49] With no other assessment or selection criteria—other than having candidates volunteer for a special operations assignment and subsequently complete their weapon systems training—AFSOC's reliance on specialized undergraduate pilot and navigator training to provide its fundamental assessment and selection does not differentiate potential AFSOF aviators from the conventional Air Force aviators. When viewed from an outsider's perspective, the Air Commandos—other than those in the 6th SOS—are not selected any differently than aviators in either the mobility or combat air force and it is only AFSOF's missions and aircraft that are distinctive.

The four essential SOF character attributes of maturity, judgment, intellectual flexibility, and tenacity should continue differentiate future Air Commandos from the rest of the conventional Air Force, not just their missions and platforms. These future special operators must not only display "above-average flying and navigation skill, problem-solving abilities, and a knack for working with individuals…in hostile combat environments," they must be adept at operating varying conditions with minimal operational supervision while accomplishing strategically important missions.[50] While these attributes ensure AFSOC will remain unique and distinct from the conventional Air Force at large, they do not describe what make them unique from the other SOF aviation assets—namely the US Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (160th SOAR), which employs specialized Chinook, Black Hawk and Little Bird helicopters.

Besides the obvious differences in platforms—the 160th SOAR does not have fixed-wing capability while AFSOC's only rotary-wing capability is the tilt-rotor capability of the CV-22 Osprey—the 160th SOAR has an institutionalized competitive selection process that actively recruits, assesses, and selects their aviators.[51] They ensure each and every aviator not only demonstrates basic airmanship abilities, but also possess the fundamental SOF attributes. The significant difference, however, between the two SOF aviation units is the specialization of AFSOC's aircraft and the combined range of capabilities they possess. In other words, the flexibility inherent in every AFSOC platform provides the Air Commandos with a range of unique capabilities. For example, the precision strike and persistence of the AC-130s and the

[49] Adrian Bessette, ed., *Special Operations Forces: Background and Issues for the U.S. Military's Elite Units* (New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 250.
[50] John C. Fredriksen, *Fighting Elites: A History of U.S. Special Forces* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 217.
[51] "160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)," accessed February 22, 2013, http://www.soc.mil/160th/160th%20Overview.html.

low-level long-range infiltration into denied environments of the MC-130s, and the medium range infiltration into medium- or low-threat environments of the CV-22s. The unique capabilities of AFSOC's specialized platforms distinguishes them from the other SOF aviation units while the Air Commando's characteristic attributes distinguish them from conventional USAF Airmen.

Framework for Contextual Analysis

The following chapters will analyze three specific historical contexts of the Air Commandos: the 1st ACG, the 4400th CCTS, and AFSOC since the 9/11 attacks. Each chapter will begin with a brief background of the specific context with respect to the mission, or tasks, the Air Commando's were to undertake; the conditions they faced; and, the standards they were expected to achieve. Additionally, the background will discuss what selection processes, if any, were used to organize, train, and equip the respective Air Commando units paying particular attention to the personnel characteristics they required. The remainder of each chapter will analyze whether, and more importantly, to what degree, the fundamental SOF attributes were present in the unit's personnel. If the four specific attributes are absent from the Air Commandos, ascertaining why this was the case is necessary. For example, a unit's personnel may have simply required different characteristic traits to accomplish their missions. Or, the missions themselves did not require any attributes other than those that already reside within every airman, both special and conventional alike. In essence, each chapter will provide the foundation to either validate that the essential character attributes found in the Air Commando heritage are both necessary and sufficient for future AFSOC aviators, or will a selection process need to incorporate different attributes into their assessment.

Chapter 3

The Air Commando's Genesis

> *Nothing you've ever done, nothing you're ever going to do, counts now. Only the next few hours. Tonight you are going to find your souls.*
>
> —Col Philip G. Cochran, 5 March 1944

Often referred to as the "forgotten theater" of the war, the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater became home to some of the greatest accounts of individual and organizational wartime innovation. Some of these accounts have received more attention recently, such as US airlift efforts flying over the Himalayan "Hump."[1] Others, particularly those of the 1st Air Commando Group (1st ACG), have received scant treatment. This chapter shines light on the 1st ACG to help redress this imbalance; it has three central objectives. First, it describes the unique and captivating historical origins of the Air Commandos from their beginnings as a simple concept to the completion of their landmark first combat operation. Second, it illustrates the special attributes or qualities in the personnel that were necessary to create and sustain this distinctive organization. Finally, the chapter concludes by emphasizing the heritage the 1st ACG established for future Air Commandos.

Strategic Setting

Although most Americans identify the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as the beginning of WWII for the United States, the war in Asia actually began with a Japanese attack from Manchuria on northern China in July 1937.[2] By 1940, the Japanese were unable to achieve the quick victory over the Chinese Nationalists they had envisioned, in part due to the British aid to the Nationalists over the Burma Road in the south and Soviet aid funneling in from the north.[3]

---

[1] John D. Plating, *The Hump: America's Strategy for Keeping China in World War II* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2011), 1.

[2] Plating, *The Hump*, 14–15. This conflict began the Second Sino-Japanese War. The First Sino-Japanese War at the end of the 19th Century created lingering tensions and distrust between the two nations that led to Japanese occupation and puppet rule of Manchuria. The increased presence of military forces by both sides that culminated with the Marco Polo Bridge incident on the night of July 7, 1937. After the Pearl Harbor attack, China became a significant front in the overarching context of WWII.

[3] John W. Garver, "The Origins of the Second United Front: The Comintern and the Chinese Communist Party," *The China Quarterly* no. 113 (March 1988): 57–58. Although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) were engaged in a fierce struggle for control of China prior to the Japanese invasion, the Soviet Union feared that overt assistance to the CCP would drive the KMT to Berlin for support. Through Soviet pressure and the desire of both parties to expel Japan from China, the Second United Front was signed by the CCP and KMT. This agreement placed a temporary armistice between the Chinese parties in order to focus their efforts on the Japanese occupation. Soviet aid could now flow freely into China.

The US began a program of informal aid to China in the form of money and Claire Chennault's American Volunteer Group (more commonly known as the Flying Tigers for the standardized nose art and unit patch), but the Pearl Harbor attack solidified President Franklin D. Roosevelt's commitment to aid the Chinese Nationalists as a way of occupying Japanese forces while the Allied powers concentrated on the war in Europe first. With Russian aid dwindling by early 1942, Japanese leaders recognized the importance of severing China's sole remaining supply routes in the south to seal off China from the remaining Allied aid.[4] Burma was the gateway through which Imperial Japan would attempt to accomplish this objective.

Burma, the buffer between Britain's "crown jewel" of India and the Japanese-occupied portions of China, offered the Japanese enormous strategic opportunities. Capturing Burma would allow the Japanese to not only secure China and its southwestern flank, but also provide the staging area needed to drive the British out of India and the region.[5] With this accomplished, Imperial Japan could then reallocate its forces to solidify their positions throughout the greater Pacific theater.[6] The subsequent invasion of Burma by the Japanese 15th Army successfully drove the Allies back into India and severed the Burma Road supply route by the spring of 1942.[7] The Allies desperately needed to develop a strategy that would keep materiel flowing into China or risk losing the CBI Theater completely.

Attempting to keep China in the war, the initial US solution was to fly fuel and other essential materiel into China from bases in northeastern India until the Burma Road was reopened.[8] While the attempt was audacious in its own right, the air-bridge between India and China was an inefficient method of providing enough materiel to the forces in China so they could remove Japanese forces from Burma and reopen the Burma Road quickly. British leaders within the theater, realizing they could not mount a large-scale frontal attack against Japanese

[4] Plating, *The Hump*, 21. Soviet aid began to dwindle as the Soviets focused on the German invasion of Russia.
[5] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 1.
[6] Michael E Haas, *Apollo's Warriors: US Air Force Special Operations During the Cold War* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1997), 7.
[7] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 3–4. The Japanese initially began with air attacks on the capital and port city of Rangoon on 23 December 1941. The retreat and withdrawal of Allied troops from Burma into India was complete by mid-May 1942. The troops included British, Indian, and Burmese soldiers under command of British Maj Gen William T. Slim as well as Chinese forces under the command of American Lt Gen Joseph W. Stilwell.
[8] Col Philip G. Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, interview by Dr. James C. Hasdorff, October 20, 1975, 177–178, USAF Historical Records Agency. The most dangerous airlift missions of the era were flights that had to cross the world's highest mountain range—the Himalayas, or "the Hump." The missions, referred to as "flying the Hump," transited this dangerous route because northern Burma was considered too risky for interception given increasing numbers of Japanese airfields and aircraft.

positions in Burmese jungles, opted instead for the unconventional concept of a "broad-shouldered, uncouth, almost simian officer."[9]

British Brigadier Orde C. Wingate, an irregular warfare specialist with field experience in Palestine and Ethiopia, proposed the use of mobile long-range penetration (LRP) forces operating behind the enemy's front lines to attack and disrupt communications and logistics routes. Although the Imperial Japanese Army was widely believed by the Allied forces to have mastered the art of jungle warfare, Brigadier Wingate thought otherwise.[10] The Allied forces by 1942, however, had not been properly trained, equipped, supported, or psychologically prepared to conduct such operations. After careful preparation and training, Wingate launched his first LRP attack against the Japanese forces in Burma.

Brigadier Wingate's first attempt during the spring of 1943, Operation LONGCLOTH, experienced heavy casualties but was considered a psychological success for the British as it proved Western forces could successfully operate in a jungle environment against the numerically superior Japanese army.[11] The many casualties were due to the simple fact that the LRP columns relied solely on ground movement and, therefore, casualties were not evacuated so as to not slow down the speed of the columns. Instead, the wounded were left behind with rifles, ammunition, and basic supplies. Leaving these men behind, including friends and close colleagues, and knowing that the same fate could await them, played heavily on the surviving LRP soldier's morale.

The significant time required to march into position, the lack of consistent resupply, and the inability to evacuate wounded not only hampered morale and effectiveness, but also proved to Wingate that air support was necessary for the next operation.[12] Although Wingate's LRP force, nicknamed "the Chindits,"[13] achieved a degree of tactical success during Operation

---

[9] Louis Allen, *Burma: The Longest War, 1941-45* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 120.

[10] Simon J. Anglim, *Major General Orde Wingate's Chindit Operations in World War II*, Historical Case Study for Hte Operating Without a Net Project (University of Reading, UK, March 2009), http://www.academia.edu/647651/Major_General_Orde_Wingates_Chindit_Operations_in_World_War_II_-_Historical_Case_Study_for_the_Operating_without_a_Net_Project. Wingate asserted that Japanese inflexibility and predictability were to be overcome by the British soldier's key characteristics of "intelligence in action, i.e., originality in individual fighting, and, lastly, on the morale side, great self-reliance and power to give of his best when the audience is smallest." In other words, when properly trained, equipped, and supported the British could be successful against the Japanese army. Anglim, 9.

[11] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 6–7. The operation began on 8 February and continued through early June 1943. Of the 3,000 men that embarked upon this mission, 883 did not return.

[12] William T. Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," *Air Power History* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 5.

[13] The name "Chindit" is a bastardization of "Chinthe," a mythical lion-like creature that appears on many temples in Burma to a symbol of protection. The Chinthe was the symbol that appeared on patches for Wingate's LRP units.

LONGCLOTH, the potential strategic effects of future LRP raids were evident to senior British leaders including Winston Churchill. As a result of his advocacy of the LRP idea to Churchill during the Allies' strategic level Quadrant Conference in the autumn of 1943, Wingate was promoted to the rank of Major General.

The Initiation of Project 9

Wingate believed he needed greater support for his next LRP operation, both logistically and politically. The Quadrant Conference in Quebec, Canada provided Wingate, with the backing of Churchill, the necessary venue to present his ideas to the other Allied leaders. Wingate desperately needed this opportunity because General Joseph W. "Vinegar Joe" Stillwell, the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command and the senior US general in the CBI Theater, was adamantly opposed to Wingate's LRP concept. Stillwell believed the path to victory in the CBI required the reestablishment of a ground supply route, which could be accomplished only through increasing support to US and Chinese forces in the theater, not to Wingate's Chindits.

Wingate, however, convinced the leaders, which included General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Commander of the US Army Air Forces (AAF), that his plan for another unconventional LRP offensive into northern Burma would be even more successful than LONGCLOTH if sufficiently supported by air assets, particularly those of the Americans.[14] If the Allies could recapture northern Burma, flying over the Hump would become unnecessary as the Air Transport Command aircraft could now fly over the lower elevations of Burma until the reopening of the Burma Road.[15] Arnold, who had already envisioned a self-contained "Air Blitz Unit" composed of multiple types of aircraft offering a wide-range of capabilities, met privately with Wingate and assured him of the AAF's support.[16] Gen Arnold quickly seized the opportunity to promote American airpower in general, but also to advance his concepts of a distinct air unit that offered highly specialized capabilities that no other AAF unit could. Upon returning to the US, Gen

[14] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 5.
[15] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 178. While the US wanted to deny the Japanese control of mainland China, the British wanted Singapore opened but would need American support to accomplish it. Cochran believed that the British eventually relented to US desires, particularly after the briefing by Wingate was well received by the leaders and staff at the conference.
[16] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 5. Arnold's vision for the composition of the "Air Blitz Unit" included a squadron of fighter aircraft, a bomber squadron, two airlift squadrons, and ancillary support groups. In essence, Arnold foresaw the composite wing concept that would provide the foundation for the 1st ACG and the USAF's composite wing concepts of the early 1990s.

Arnold immediately embarked upon creating a new unit of "Air Commandos" to support Wingate's Chindits.[17]

Gen Arnold instructed Gen Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, to identify and present to him five men who could develop and lead this new and unique organization. Arnold stressed that the man he would personally select out of the five to lead the new unit would need to "have a flair for novel ideas, enough imagination to want to use airpower in ways hitherto untried. He must be an innovator with the courage of his convictions. He must be tough."[18] With that, Arnold established the first selection process for the Air Commandos—the prospective candidates had to be personally recommended by Arnold's staff, accepted by the other staffers, and finally interviewed and selected by Arnold himself. With Arnold's selection of Lieutenant Colonels Philip G. Cochran and John Alison, both of who were fighter pilots, the Air Commando concept—labeled Project 9—was brought to life.[19]

Gen Arnold's vision for Project 9 was not to merely support the Chindits, but to conduct an "aerial invasion of Burma."[20] With Cochran as the commander of Project 9 and Alison as his deputy, Arnold gave them highest priority within the USAAF to get whomever and whatever they needed to spearhead the proposed operation.[21] Two days after meeting with Gen Arnold, Cochran left to meet with Wingate in England to determine firsthand what the "eccentric Chindit" expected of this new project.[22] From this meeting, Cochran was able to establish a personal relationship with those he would be supporting and garner a keen insight into the unique conditions encompassing the mission. Within a few weeks of this crucial meeting, the first Air

[17] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview, 151. In order to honor British Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had led British commando raids across the English Channel earlier in the war and was now the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command, Arnold coined the phrase "Air Commandos" as the name for the unique unit he envisioned to support Wingate's Chindits. See also Bailey, "Air Commando," 8.

[18] Lowell Thomas, *Back to Mandalay* (New York, NY: Greystone Press, 1951), 29.

[19] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 144–149; Maj Gen John R. Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, interview by Maj Scottie S. Thompson, April 22, 1979, 346–347, USAF Historical Records Agency.

[20] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 347.

[21] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 6. Gen Arnold ha given Project 9 the highest priority within the US Army Air Force at that time in order to acquire the personnel and equipment necessary for success.

[22] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 151–152. Based on his meeting with Gen Wingate, Cochran was able to realize what "he was doing on the ground was what we did in the air." Cochran was also able to meet with a few of the men who were on Operation LONGCLOTH, would be on this operation and were therefore, able to present Cochran with a "pretty good working knowledge about what [Wingate] did and what was going to be required." Additionally, Cochran was able to meet with Mountbatten who had expressed great gratitude towards Arnold for supporting the Chindit mission. Cochran had in effect, met with the essential strategic, operational, and tactical leaders of the proposed operation allowing him to understand the entirety of the unique mission. Cochran, 151-152.

Commando leaders had developed a distinctive Air Commando Task Force plan that called for an assault force of fighter and bomber aircraft, an airlift force of transport and glider aircraft, and a light plane force that was tailored exclusively for the Chindit operation.[23]

Cochran and Alison presented their plan to Arnold knowing it "was going to do a job that no one had ever seen or tried before, but it would work."[24] Their confidence was due in large part to the confidence these leaders had in themselves and the decisions they had made in regards to the plan. Arnold was convinced by the two leaders' confidence in their plan and simply stated, "All right, do it."[25] Under the explicit understanding that they would report directly to Arnold himself, the two Air Commando leaders immediately set themselves to obtaining the personnel and equipment needed to make Project 9 operational.[26] Using only a single room in the Hays-Adams Hotel as their temporary office and armed with Arnold's blank checks, the two leaders selected 523 men and acquired more than 300 aircraft within thirty days.[27] The significance of these acquisitions, however, laid not only the specific aircraft Cochran and Alison choose for the project, but more importantly, in their personnel selection process.

Project 9 Aircraft Procurement

The resources available for Project 9 were scarce during the fall of 1943 as the US production of war materiel had yet to reach its peak output. Further adding to the leaders' difficulty was that no "table of organization and table of equipment [existed] because there was no precedent for a unit of this kind."[28] Cochran and Alison had to transform their concept of attack, transport, and light aircraft into a reality using only aircraft that were readily available, as no new or specialized aircraft would arrive in time for their mission in the spring of 1944.[29] They

---

[23] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 159; Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 12. Cochran half-jokingly admitted that if they designed this unit so that it was overly ambitious and big, "General Arnold will get mad and kick us out. Then we wouldn't have to go." Cochran added that he and Alison were very serious in determining the capabilities that would be required for the operation. They had to design everything in the unit including details normally left to subordinate planning staff, including numbers and types of aircraft, numbers of pilots, and how much ammunition was required.

[24] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 162.

[25] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 163.

[26] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *History of the 1st Air Commando Group* (New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, August 31, 1944), 1, USAF Historical Records Agency.

[27] R. D. Van Wagner, *Any Place, Any Time, Any Where: The 1st Air Commandos in World War II* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1998), 26; Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 8.

[28] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 348.

[29] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 352. The newest "aircraft" available was the YR-4 helicopter, of which there only six in existence and each already assigned to different services. Alison and Cochran had the foresight, however, to realize the potential impact this aircraft could have in a jungle environment particularly to resolve the problem of casualty evacuation and its impact on the morale of LRP forces. Both leaders were convincing enough in their argument to acquire the highly desirable, but as yet operationally untested helicopters. The timeline of acquisition for all the aircraft was

had to decide which available aircraft would be able to perform unique missions successfully under jungle warfare conditions. The aircraft would need to operate on small, unimproved landing strips potentially surrounded by Japanese forces, in close air support and resupply missions for the independently maneuvering LRP columns. In addition some aircraft also needed the capability to transport and resupply three brigades of men, their ammunition, and other miscellaneous supplies into their initial jungle-battlefield positions while simultaneously defending against enemy aircraft.[30]

Considering the necessary evacuation of the wounded Chindits from the hazardous jungle conditions, the two leaders opted for the L-1 Vigilant which needed only a 500-foot unimproved airstrip to get 3 litters into the air.[31] Additionally, the Air Commandos needed the newer, yet slightly less effective L-5 Sentinels, because there were not enough L-1s available.[32] Through the selection of these aircraft, Cochran and Alison had created a casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) system. The aircraft enabled the Air Commandos to perform immediate personnel evacuations from the jungle through transportation of casualties to long-term care facilities.[33] The CASEVAC system developed by the Air Commandos solidified the Chindits morale because they now believed that no matter when or where they were wounded, they would not be left behind and now had a better chance of surviving. This simple system enhanced the Chindits confidence in the feasibility of their mission as well as their confidence in the Air Commandos' capabilities and eagerness to support their mission.

With the essential mission of casualty evacuation resolved, Cochran and Alison turned their attention toward fulfilling Arnold's objective of transporting the Chindits completely be

---

extremely short as the unit had to be in place to complete the operation before the next monsoon season that would be at the end of spring 1944. Additionally, Gen Arnold wanted the unit conducting operations in theater by early February 1944. This target date left approximately four months to create, procure, train, and deploy the unit into the CBI Theater. With the operation planned to only last 90 days, Project 9 was to remain a relatively small, self-contained unit.

[30] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma* (New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, March 29, 1944), 8, USAF Historical Records Agency. The original plan for Operation THURSDAY has the 77th and 111th Brigades of Wingate's 3rd Indian Division to be flown into Burma while the 16th Brigade would march through the jungle into position in northern Burma. The Air Commandos, however, would be responsible for resupply of all three brigades.

[31] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 14.

[32] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 14–15. Although the L-5 was a newer and smaller aircraft, it required 900 feet for takeoff and could only carry a single litter.

[33] The incorporation of the YR-4, the first helicopters, would provide the immediate recovery and evacuation from the dense jungle while the L-1s and L-5s would evacuate casualties from the short, unimproved LZs in the theater. The C-47s would provide the transportation of the Chindit casualties to the long-term care hospitals. The CASEVAC system developed by the Air Commandos would provide the model for future USAF operations.

air.[34] This undoubtedly would require the heavy airlift workhorse of the era, the Douglas C-47 Skytrain. Although the C-47s were highly capable, being rugged, stable, and forgiving of pilot error, they could not deliver the Chindits to the battlefield. The reason for this limitation is that C-47s were simply too large, and required far too much runway, than the small jungle strips envisioned by Wingate during the initial infiltration of Chindit forces. To get Wingate's men on the ground in Burma, both Cochran and Alison seized upon the idea of using gliders. The men realized that the Waco CG-4A cargo gliders could "land in an area, secure it, prepare a landing strip, and then [they] would move in the bulk of the forces with C-47s."[35] Afterwards, the C-47s could then use the innovative technique of "glider snatching," pioneered by the Air Commandos to, "snatch the glider back into the air and bring the glider home."[36] Additionally, Cochran and Alison selected a Canadian commercial bush plane pushed into service, the UC-64A Norseman that had incredible short takeoff and landing capabilities, as their medium-lift aircraft to fill the gap between the larger C-47s and the light-lift capabilities of the L-1s and L-5s.[37]

Once air forces had delivered Chindits to the ground the latter would move independently to conduct hit-and-run raids behind Japanese lines. Movement on the ground in jungle warfare precluded the Chindits to provide their own medium to heavy artillery, as the weight of such support would slow down their movement considerably. One way to offset this capability was for fighter and bomber aircraft to provide ground forces with a form of flying artillery. Both

---

[34] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 348. Alison quoted Arnold's instruction to his new Project 9 leaders as "The next time [Wingate] goes in, I don't want him to walk. I want him to go by air. I want to demonstrate that we can use ships in the air just like we use ships on the sea."

[35] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 357. Both Cochran and Alison had received a demonstration of gliders and discussed the utility of gliders in transporting men into unprepared landing sites with the Pentagon's resident glider expert, Richard du Pont. Du Pont was a special assistant John R. Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview, 357. Both Cochran and Alison had received a demonstration of gliders and discussed the utility of gliders in transporting men into unprepared landing sites with the Pentagon's resident glider expert, Richard du Pont. Du Pont was a special assistant to Gen Arnold while directing the USAAF's glider program until his death (in an experimental glider accident) just a few weeks after his meetings with Cochran and Alison. See also "R.C. Du Pont One of Four Killed During Glider Test for the Army," *New York Times*, September 12, 1943, http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70B16FC3F5C167B93C1A81782D85F478485F9.

[36] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 356–357. The technique was proposed during the Project 9 leaders' glider demonstrations and developed further by the Air Commandos. The system would operate a "reel on board the airplane, the C-47, would come down and with a long fishhook on a pole underneath the airplane, engage a loop in the nylon rope and actually snatch the glider." The reel system underneath the tail section of the C-47s inspired so many inquisitive looks that the question mark symbol, one which is highly prized and used by Air Force special operators today, was painted on the tails of the aircraft.

[37] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 7. See also Jeffrey Michalke, "Commando Heritage" (Office of History, 1st Special Operations Wing), 7, accessed March 1, 2013, http://www2.hurlburt.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-070323-045.pdf.

Cochran and Alison opted for the modified attack versions of the North American B-25H Mitchell bombers, armed with a battery of forward firing fixed machine guns and a 75mm light howitzer.[38] Although such modified aircraft were unavailable in the US to train pilots or to send over with the Project 9 contingent, the Air Commandos received the improved B-25s upon their arrival into theater. The Project 9 leaders had promised Wingate fighter support, and although they had not requested the North American P-51A Mustang specifically, staff officers within the Pentagon fortuitously assigned them thirty aircraft.[39] While the initial batch of P-51 aircraft, the A model, were very capable in their own right, Cochran and Alison had heard of a new technology that had yet to be used on any US aircraft. Rockets slung underneath the aircraft, launched in conjunction with the P-51's six .50 caliber machine guns, would give these fighters an even heavier firepower punch. The two leaders immediately foresaw the importance of attaining and employing these new weapons and began to have the aircraft modified with brackets for the new launchers, a practice subsequently copied by other Allied units and in other theaters.[40]

Although the aircrew of Project 9 would accomplish unprecedented missions in conditions unimaginable by pre-war AAF planners and pilots, neither Cochran nor Alison imposed a requirement for specialized aircraft for the unit. They made due with equipment they had at hand. Cochran and Alison's intellectual flexibility allowed them to envision creative solutions to the problems they faced in successfully completing their unique mission. They were able to use the available aircraft from the standard AAF inventory and quickly innovate new ways to employ them. Cochran and Alison understood that specialized aircraft with unique capabilities, suited to the tasks of Project 9 and the conditions of Burma, required a selection process for those who were to fly the aircraft.

Project 9 Selection Process

From the outset, the Project 9 leaders wanted not only the best equipment available, also desired the country's top aviators and support personnel for their unprecedented mission. They knew Arnold's direction had given them the ability to get anybody they needed from anywhere in

[38] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 348. The modified B-25s had eight forward firing .50-caliber machine guns and a 75-millimeter cannon mounted in the nose section. Additionally, the B-25H gunsight and yoke-trigger mechanism were nearly the same as those in fighter aircraft of the time. See also Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 13, 21.
[39] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 7. The Project 9 leaders had actually requested the Lockheed P-38 Lightning initially but were denied. Next, the Pentagon also denied their request for the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, but this time, the Pentagon substituted the P-51 without Cochran or Alison asking for it.
[40] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 174; 1st Special Operations Wing History Office, "Operation Thursday," accessed January 22, 2013, http://www2.hurlburt.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=3387.

the world, but they did not want the current AAF assignment process to direct the personnel selections.[41] The leaders first focused on choosing the leaders for the different squadrons (fighter, bomber, etc.) in the unit. Cochran and Alison knew each potential section leader personally; they knew each individual's capabilities, personalities, and potential.[42] As the section leaders quickly joined the unit, they likewise recommended and recruited individuals they knew personally.[43] Both Cochran and Alison initially thought they would have some difficulty finding enough volunteers for their unit, as the strict classification of Project 9 allowed them to only promise prospective members that they "would have plenty of excitement and hard work."[44] They need not have worried.

For the pilots of Project 9, Cochran and Alison demanded that each prospective candidate not only had to be a highly skilled aviator but they must have had prior combat.[45] In their estimation, combat experience was vital. The extremely short timeframe to train and prepare for the special mission necessitated personnel who had already proven they could handle the mental and physical rigors of dangerous combat missions. Although neither Cochran nor Alison state it specifically in their postwar interviews, it seems likely they concluded that such experience would prevent the typical drain of additional time or resources associated with bringing an inexperienced aviator up to an acceptable level of combat readiness. Combat experience also builds upon and enhances foundational special operations attributes such as, specifically maturity and judgment, which in turn increases the aviator's effectiveness by improving their situational awareness, assessment, and decision-making in a combat environment. Simply stated, combat experience increases an aviator's ability to survive and successfully complete the mission. This

[41] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 160–161.
[42] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 171.
[43] Van Wagner, *Any Place, Any Time, Any Where*, 25-26. Cochran and Alison selected Lieutenant Colonel Arvid Olson, who had served previously with Alison as a section leader in the Flying Tigers, as the unit's operations officer. He further recommended personnel for the fighter section. As more fighter pilots entered the unit, they in turn recommended others. The transport section leader, Major William T. Cherry, recruited for his section specifically from personnel he knew at the 724th Training Group assigned to Baer Field, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and the 5th Troop Carrier Squadron at Lawson Field, Ft. Benning, Georgia. Captain William H. Taylor, Jr., the Glider section leader personally selected all his personnel from Bowman Field in Louisville, Kentucky. See also William T Y'Blood, *Air Commandos Against Japan: Allied Special Operations in World War II Burma* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 1; and Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, March 29, 1944, 1, USAF Historical Records Agency.
[44] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 1. Additionally, Cochran informed each candidate that an assignment to Project 9 would not necessarily enhance their promotion prospects, which is often a fear of highly qualified candidates.
[45] Y'Blood, *Air Commandos Against Japan*, 1.

experience requirement, however, was applied to every potential member of the unit, not just aircrew.[46]

Gen Arnold's direction to the leaders of Project 9 was to streamline it, given the resource requirements of other active theaters of operation, while still retaining a high degree of self-sufficiency that the austere conditions of the CBI Theater demanded.[47] To follow Arnold's directive, Cochran and Alison ensured that every member of this unit, including pilots and support personnel, was critical to the mission and able to take on more than just their normal duties. Each member of Project 9 selected personally by Cochran and Alison had to have "double talent so that [they] could double up. We didn't need a number of men."[48] In other words, the unique mission of this small unit required each member to be experienced and therefore, also capable of performing additional duties outside of his normal area of expertise.[49] In all, only 523 men were finally selected to form the initial nucleus of the unit that included not only aircrew and maintenance personnel, but also a communications detachment and a mobile medical contingent.[50]

Establishing the Project 9 selection process, which was driven by the creation of a distinctly unique unit from scratch, was not a simple procedure.[51] When Cochran departed for India in early November 1943 to begin the unit's forward movement, Alison had to remain behind to complete the selection process as well as finish any last minute training requirements.[52] They had established a selection process that built "quite a unit, all volunteers, [with] highly

[46] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 171–173. Everyone of the initial unit was experienced and it was not until arriving in theater that they began to receive inexperienced personnel that they had not selected themselves.
[47] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 172–173.
[48] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 172.
[49] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 351. Alison described how Project 9 did what is unthinkable or inconceivable today: pilots had to perform the duties of mechanics on their own aircraft, particularly the light aircraft, as they were manned at almost a one-to-one ratio of men to aircraft. With slightly over 500 men and more than 300 aircraft, it was contingent that every individual in the unit, aviator and support personnel alike, took on and mastered a significant number of additional duties.
[50] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 3. Of the initial group of 523 men, 87 were officers and 436 were enlisted. During this time period of WWII, enlisted men often piloted the L-1 and L-5 aircraft, which was the largest aircraft section in unit next to the gliders. Each of these sections had approximately 100 aircraft assigned to them.
[51] Donald C. Tulloch, "Annual Report" (Office of the Surgeon: 1st Air Commando Group, January 16, 1945), 1, USAF Historical Records Agency. The importance of experienced personnel is highlighted in nearly every report from every section of the organization. The surgeon's annual report stressed the difficulties that Cochran and Alison encountered in selecting members under severe time constraints. "It was no meagre [*sic*] task. Due to the time element involved only highly skilled personnel could be utilized. There was no time to train people in their jobs."
[52] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 18; Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 3.

experienced people."[53] To do this, they focused on the "abilities and personalities of the individualists [*sic*]."[54] Although Project 9's selection process is not the exact equivalent of today's SOF selection process, it does provide valuable parallels.

The selection of Project 9 personnel did not follow the sequential process common to today's recruitment, assessment, and selection of SOF. Project 9's personnel selection process was much more informal, which reflected the urgent time and resource requirements that drove the need to create an unprecedented, specialized air capability. The process intuitively created by Cochran and Alison was based on four main factors: everyone must be a volunteer, each recruit must be personally known and accepted by the leaders, each recruit must have combat experience, and each recruit must be capable of performing significant additional duties.[55] Each factor was significant in that each focuses on the four attributes identified earlier: judgment, maturity, intellectual flexibility, and tenacity.

Major Robert Page, the unit's medical officer, offers a particularly interesting observation of the personal character traits of the different men while they were assembling for their overseas departure from Goldsboro, North Carolina. He noted:

> The quiet, self-assured arrogance of the fighter pilot; verbose, reckless demeanor of the glider pilot; sallow, resentful indifference of the C-64 pilot; questionable enthusiasm of the helicopter pilot; the reassuring stability of transport pilots; the efficient, regulation-offending activity of ground personnel. Common to the entire group was a great enthusiasm; overwhelming eagerness to be about the business of performing what had been told them was a dangerous mission. Psychologically they were adapting themselves for whatever course of events they might find themselves contesting. [56]

Although Project 9's selection process did not explicitly identify specific character attributes, it focused nevertheless on the personal character traits of prospective candidates of the unit. As the next section makes clear, the accomplishment of the Air Commandos during Operation THURSDAY and their support of the Chindit columns highlights the fundamental character attributes of all Air Commandos, past, present or future, as well as the importance of the selection process.

---

[53] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 351.
[54] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 4.
[55] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 171–173. Cochran described the entirety of their selection process but highlighted the importance of personally knowing every recruit, the voluntary nature of the assignment, the requirement of combat experience, and the necessity of each member taking on more than just an assigned job.
[56] Robert C. Page, "The Medical History of Project #9, 5318th Provisional Air Unit, 5318th Air Special Unit 1943-1944," 12, USAF Historical Records Agency, accessed January 23, 2013.

In-Theater Preparation and Training

By mid-November 1943 (less than ninety days from Cochran and Alison's initial interviews with Arnold), most of the personnel and equipment from Project 9 had arrived at Karachi, India.[57] Temporary hangars were assembled by the men at a local airfield to begin the reassembly of the aircraft that had been shipped overseas so that the unit could proceed as quickly as possible to their bases in northeast India.[58] Each man's dual skills were exemplified during this process as pilots, mechanics, and support personnel alike did whatever was necessary to ensure every aircraft was brought up to combat mission ready status.[59] With the remainder of the unit in theater by December and ready to begin final training and preparation for their mission, Project 9 was renamed the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air—5318th PU[A]) and moved to its forward bases.

The 5318th PU[A] split its forces between two forward airfields in the Imphal Valley near the India-Burma border. The fighters, bombers, light aircraft and unit headquarters were stationed at Hailakandi while the transport and glider aircraft were based approximately ten nautical miles to the south at Lalaghat.[60] Regardless of rank or specialty, every man was required to maintain the aircraft and construct the basic roads and buildings at the austere airfields.[61] The unit received little support from the other AAF units in theater because they were geographically

[57] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 2.
[58] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 175. Cochran and a small contingent with him had arrived into theater first and met with Wingate who was already in theater. They began to discuss the operation further to include the terrain, logistical nodes, as well as inspect potential airfields to be used by the Air Commandos. Cochran eventually picked two airfields that had been previously built by the British.
[59] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 2–3. As previously noted, there were not enough aircraft mechanics in the unit to handle all the required duties. This was particularly evident during the initial deployment to India as, "There were not enough enlisted men to perform their jobs in the time allotted so the officers worked side by side with their men, assembling gliders, helping on the fighters, C-64s etc."
[60] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 3–4.
[61] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 4. The men were so busy they barely had time to maintain their personal appearances within regulations and were growing beards. While Cochran and Alison were not especially bothered by following such regulations, so long as the endless tasks for 5318th PU[A] personnel were accomplished, more hidebound and conventional visiting senior officers did not understand everything that was occurring and took offense with the seemingly bedraggled and scruffy appearance of the men. For example, Maj Gen William D. Old, US Air Corps Troop Carrier Command, instructed Cochran to have his men shave off their beards as they looked "like a rabble" and not a military organization. Cochran acquiesced and posted a memorandum to his troops informing them to shave as if they were going out "in Jersey" but it was not to interfere with their duties. He closed with the famous quip, "Ain't it tough?" See also Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 351.

far removed the other units, but more importantly because of their unique command structure.[62] The 5318th was under the tactical control of Wingate with operational control by Gen Arnold. In other words, the 5318th PU[A]'s chain of command circumvented the traditional command hierarchy of the theater and gave other American commanders the misguided impression the unit was Wingate's "private air force."[63] This compressed command structure, however, provided the 5318th leadership the autonomy required to use their intellectual flexibility and judgment in deciding how best to employ their forces to support the upcoming operation.

January 1944 began with intensive training and planning between the 5318th and their Chindit counterparts for the impending operation. The 5318th PU[A]'s pre-departure training in the US lasted only a few weeks and the aircrew worked diligently on perfecting the new techniques that would be required for their missions. One such technique was using the C-47s to tow not one but two gliders. This was a very difficult task for both the C-47 and the glider pilots, as each had to synchronize continuously their respective aircraft's movement with each other, which proved even more difficult when attempted at night without any aircraft lighting in use.[64] It was the experience and skills of the pilots that enabled such novel but potentially dangerous and disastrous tactics to be successful, but their maturity and judgment in discontinuing these tactics after the initial infiltration would prove even greater during the operation.[65]

The aircrew of the 5318th continued to hone their airmanship skills while they

---

[62] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 4. The 5318th continued to receive "piecemeal detachments" such as the 900 Airborne Engineers Company. Although these detachments eventually brought the unit's total personnel count close to 1,000, these additional personnel were "theater replacements" and did not undergo the selection process the original 523 men did.

[63] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 194–197. Maj Gen George E. Stratemeyer, commander of the USAAF in the India-Burma sector, understood the 5318th autonomy from the normal chain of command. Generals Joseph Stillwell, SEAC deputy commander, and Frank Merrill, leader of a specialized ground force nicknamed "Merrill's Marauders" (officially titled for cover purposes the 5307th Composite Unit), were opposed to the notion of American aircraft and resources being used to only support a British force. The generals believed the 5318th resources were best used in support of forces under US command. Lord Mountbatten, who was struggling to defend the unit's autonomy to the other theater commanders, received a "Dear Dickie" letter from Gen Arnold via Col Cochran that under no circumstances will the 5318th be dispersed to support anyone else other than Wingate's Chindits. Cochran acknowledged that Gen Arnold exercised tight operational control over the unit, as he did not want the special project to fail. Cochran believed that the unit was initially named Project 9 because Arnold's previous eight special projects had all failed. Neither man was going to allow Project 9 to fail.

[64] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 417–418. Alison, an experienced glider pilot himself, described the intricacies of piloting a glider and attempting to maintain formation with the C-47 while not breaking the towrope. A broken towrope often resulted in the glider crashing into the jungle below as suitable landing areas were far and few between.

[65] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 417. Alison stated that the Air Commandos "felt that our C-47 pilots were a cut above all the rest. If the rest could pull one, ours could pull two without any difficulty, and they did quite well." The skill of all the pilots, however, would be put to the test during Operation THURSDAY.

simultaneously increased the rigor of training exercises and coordination with the Chindits. This training, considered "joint" by today's standards, began slowly by focusing on the loading and unloading of the gliders while on the ground and progressed to fully loaded glider tows and snatches in both day and night conditions.[66] The difficult and dangerous training regimen created a strong relationship between the Air Commandos and the Chindits, fostering a greater understanding of each unit's unique capabilities. Cochran emphasized the importance of the relationship building in the following unique way:

> As I say, our association became one where we began to realize the capability of the other. The air began to realize the capability of the ground, and what their project was, and what their aims were, and what they were about, and what they were going to do. We saw that more clearly; therefore, knowing what their plans were and what their capabilities were, and how they could inflict trauma on the enemy, we began to match what they could do with our air capability, and see how we could improve their effectiveness by the use of air. Conversely, they began to learn what we could do, and what we were capable of doing, then they could see how that would enhance their capabilities on the ground and even expand their power and their effectiveness. So I guess what I'm saying is, we began to form a good working team. We didn't overmatch ourselves. We didn't overextend our capabilities. We kept ourselves within bounds, even though many of the things were new and were a bit audacious. They might have looked audacious, but like many things that are well planned, they might look audacious, but they are pretty doggone well-thought out. We used to say, "If you know your way in, and you especially know your way out, you're ahead of the game. If you don't know your way out, don't go in."[67]

Cochran's statement about the training relationship also highlights the importance of each of the four fundamental character attributes necessary for every Air Commando. First, intellectual flexibility facilitated the Air Commando's ability to innovate and develop the unique capabilities of each unit, maximizing their effectiveness in accomplishing the high-risk mission. Second, maturity enabled the Air Commando's comprehension of the environment and their ability to respond by learning as much from the Chindits as they could while not closing themselves off to new ideas. Third, judgment enhanced the Air Commando's ability to mitigate increased risks associated with the demanding mission training. Fourth, the Air Commando's tenacity worked against distraction or hinderence by anything as they focused all their energy on accomplishing the mission. The attributes of the Air Commandos, evident during the selection

[66] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 11. On one such training exercise, two gliders collided killing several Air Commandos and Chindits. Hearing that the Air Commandos were fearful that the Chindits would lose their confidence with the glider tactics, the commander of the Chindits that were killed sent a simple note to alleviate those fears. It stated, "Please be assured that we will go with your boys any place, any time, anywhere." This motto has been associated with the AFSOF heritage ever since. See also Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 25.
[67] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 229–232.

process, became more apparent as the 5318th rigorously trained with the Chindits in preparation for an unprecedented aerial invasion.

Operation THURSDAY

The Air Commandos had attained combat-ready status and began combat operations on 3 February with a single fighter mission, led by Col Cochran and Lt Col Arvid Olson, which reconnoitered northern Burma.[68] Throughout the remainder of the month, offensive combat operations continued in an effort to harass and sever the Japanese communication and supply lines.[69] The Air Commandos' tenacity and intellectual flexibility enabled the vital innovation of aircraft modifications and tactics. One such tactic involved using P-51s with an extended cable to cut telephone and telegraph wires in mid-air.[70] Another example involved the L-5s, which were also used as target markers and small item airdrops in addition to its intended evacuation role.[71]

[68] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 4; Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 175.
[69] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 4; Thomas, *Back to Mandalay*, 180–182. The air campaign at this point was also intended to confuse the Japanese as to where the location of the pending invasion was to occur.
[70] Thomas, *Back to Mandalay*, 286. Observers described the cable-cutting invention as a steel cable attached to the bomb racks so it could be released in-flight if necessary. Weights were added to the cable and it became a pendulum of sorts that would snag the telephone line ripping them loose.
[71] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Supplemental Report on First Air Commando* (New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, April 1, 1944), 5, USAF Historical Records Agency; Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 16. The L-5s, manned by an Air Commando pilot and a Chindit, would identify a target and then overfly the target while dropping smoke to identify the target to other aircraft and ground forces. Additionally, Maj Rebori, the light plane leader, led the development and implementation of "bomb racks" under the wings of the L-5s to drop small resupply items to the Chindits. Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview, 270-271.

Operation THURSDAY was planned for early March, with the specific date dependent on the weather, and the Air Commandos and Chindits began to select the potential landing sites for the invasion. Two primary sites, named Broadway and Piccadilly, were located between the Indaw rail line to the west and the Irrawaddy River to the south.[72] A third site, Chowringhee, was located to the south of Broadway and Piccadilly and was south of the river. All three sites were more than 200 nautical miles from the Air Commando's bases at Hailakandi and Lalaghat.[73] The selection of the landing zones (LZs) coupled with the demonstrated effectiveness of the Air Commandos during the previous months gave Wingate the impetus to release the operational order for Operation THURSDAY on 29 February. The order identified the Air Commando's primary tasks for the operation: "facilitate the forward movement of the LRP columns, the supply and evacuation of these columns, [and] providing a small covering and striking force in support thereof."[74]

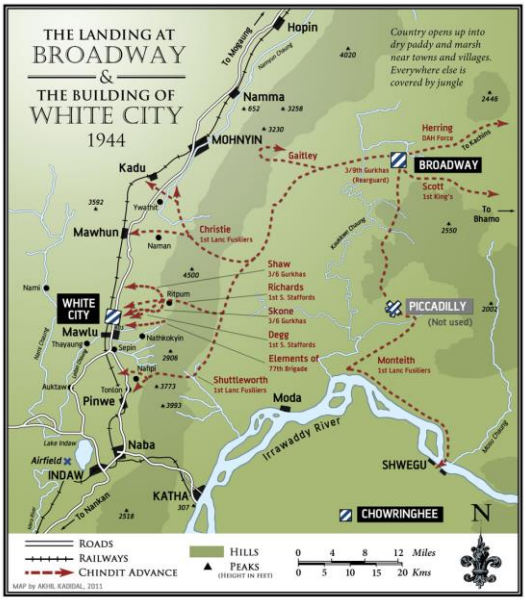

Figure 1. Operation THURSDAY Landing Zones
(Source: Hermes' Wings, https://chindits.wordpress.com/2011/10/06/the-art-of-mapmaking/)

Operation THURSDAY commenced on the night of 5 March. Three days of fighter and bomber missions had saturated the area to soften the Japanese defenses and observe any activity along the lines of communication into Broadway and Piccadilly.[75] Although Wingate had ordered that none of the missions actually overfly the intended LZs, Cochran could not wait any longer.[76] On the afternoon of 5 March, just hours before the invasion was to launch, Cochran ordered a single B-25 to make a photoreconnaissance mission over the sites to ensure they were

[72] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *History of the 1st Air Commando Group*; Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 26. Piccadilly was located approximately 40 nautical miles southeast of Broadway while Chowringhee was approximately 58 nautical miles southwest of Broadway.
[73] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *History of the 1st Air Commando Group*. Distances were taken from a hand-drawn planning sheet attached to the back of the report. The three sites were named after famous streets in the US, Britain, and India respectively.
[74] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 8.
[75] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, 7.
[76] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 28. Wingate feared that any flight over the landing sites would alert the Japanese forces in the area so he banned flights in the vicinity for two weeks prior to the invasion.

still usable. The crew flew immediately back to develop and deliver the photographs to Cochran, who was about to begin his final crew briefings.[77] What he saw threatened to cancel the entire invasion.

Piccadilly's LZ was strewn with teak logs rendering the site completely unusable.[78] The natural assumption among the leaders was that the Japanese had discovered their plans, obstructed the LZ in an effort to drive the landing forces to the unobstructed Broadway, and were "on the ground waiting."[79] With the original plan of 40 gliders each to Broadway and Piccadilly in jeopardy, Wingate consulted with the Air Commando leaders and reached the conclusion that all 80 gliders would proceed to Broadway.[80] Cochran quickly gathered the tow and glider plane crews and briefed them on the decision, stating that "the decision was easy; really, there was none, that if those British soldiers had that kind of guts, and that kind of heart, that they were going forward and going in there, it was up to us to take them in."[81] The first C-47 towing two gliders, with Alison piloting one of the gliders, departed at 1815 in the evening, a little more than an hour after the planned departure time.[82]

With the decision to proceed to Broadway, the Air Commandos demonstrated all four of the fundamental Air Commando attributes. Cochran attested to the fact that "any military

---

[77] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 11–12. The crew saw the obstructed landing site and rushed to get back to Lalaghat where the Air Commando and Chindit leaders were gathered for the invasion. Unfortunately, the airfield was so overcrowded with aircraft for the invasion the B-25 crew was forced to divert to Hailakandi. 1Lt Russhon, the photographer on the crew, immediately attempted to phone Cochran and Alison upon landing but could not reach them. A P-51 that was to have landed at Lalaghat mistook Hailakandi as his intended arrival base and had landed when Rush ran the photographs over to him and asked him to deliver them to Cochran. The pilot complied and when Rush arrived a little while later, all the invasion leaders were gathered around the photographs staring at them intently. Wingate was so irate with Cochran's blatant disobedience that he threatened punitive action. Cochran's maturity allowed him to accept responsibility for his actions and his charm eventually disarmed Wingate with the simple statement that "he had felt a hunch."

[78] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 374. Alison describes how, after the war, the Allies realized it was not the Japanese that scattered the teak logs over the LZ, it was in fact Burmese loggers. The logs were scattered over the field to dry them before the monsoon season arrived.

[79] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 395.

[80] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 239–240. Cochran describes the timing intervals on takeoff that were planned to ensure adequate landing separation at the LZs. The landing intervals were critically important as each glider would need time to unload its cargo (soldiers, donkeys, supplies, etc.) before the glider could be pushed off the LZ to make room for the other incoming gliders.

[81] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 231. Page, "The Medical History of Project #9, 5318th Provisional Air Unit, 5318th Air Special Unit 1943-1944," 71. Additionally, it was noted during the brief by Maj Page that the "unusual an extraordinary [conditions] of this entire endeavor" would not change the remainder of the planned invasion.

[82] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 8. The planned takeoff time was at 1700, just after dusk. Alison and Cochran both wanted to fly on the initial wave of gliders into Broadway, but Alison convinced Cochran, as the commander of the Air Commandos, that he should stay behind with Wingate. Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 395.

engagement, or any military plan, is always fraught with unexpected difficulty…[and] you will get it done with some adjustment and with some quick thinking, some adaptability."[83] His statement identifies the importance of intellectual flexibility within the leader to adapt through creative alternative courses of action. Additionally, the crews displayed the same intellectual flexibility in order to quickly adapt to the new plan and mitigate the potentially disastrous consequences that could result. In a matter of a few hours, the Air Commandos had adjusted from receiving photographs that could cancel the operation to pursuing a more dangerous course of action to accomplish the mission—a pure application of tenacity. Of course, the attribute of maturity to comprehend the costs and benefits associated with each alternative as well as the judgment to understand the importance of knowing when, where, why, and how to push the limits of the aircrew in accomplishing the mission were prevalent among the Air Commando leaders.[84]

The first gliders arriving at Broadway carried assault troops to secure the LZ perimeter, engineers to expand the LZ for later C-47 landings, and LZ lighting and communication gear to guide in the remaining gliders.[85] Every member aboard the aircraft was crucial in ensuring the LZ was secured and operational as quickly as possible in order to transport the Chindit forces to the battlefield within a week. The men arrived to find the LZ in worse shape than it looked from the air. Although it did not have the teak logs obstructing the LZ, deep ruts were concealed by the tall grass that prevented the gliders from being moved off the LZ prior to the next wave of arrivals.[86] Gliders were strewn all across the field unable to be moved, creating one accident

[83] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 231.

[84] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 245–246. Cochran described his thought process upon learning of Wingate's decision to proceed to Broadway and is easily demonstrative of the Air Commando's "can do" attitude. "If they decided they were going in, and they were going to battle for that landing strip, there was just no doubt. We couldn't say, 'No, we won't take you in.' Now you say, 'Okay, let's go,' even in adversity. If the invading forces say, 'Let's go on ahead,' the transporters of the invading force don't say, 'No, I won't take you.' Cochran's humbleness prevented him from taking sole credit for the decision to proceed to Broadway as it "was kind of a conclusion, a foregone conclusion, when the British said, 'No, we're going in.'"

[85] Philip D Chinnery, *Any Time, Any Place: Fifty Years of the Usaf Air Commando and Special Operations Forces, 1944-1994* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 19–20. The first glider to land at Broadway was piloted by Capt William Taylor, glider section leader. His copilot, Jim Woods, the first person to set foot on Broadway described his duties in the following: "We were on a double tow and were the first to land, closely followed by Colonel John Alison. After landing, my mission was to assemble the US crews into a separate fire team and take station under the orders of the British ground commander." Col (ret) Woods' double duty as pilot and ground fire team leader highlights the dual skills that every Air Commando needed to ensure mission success.

[86] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 8. The Burmese loggers created the ruts when they would drag the teak logs across the field. Many of the ruts were several feet deep, completely obscured by the grass, and would rip the wheels off the landing gliders.

after another.[87] The Air Commandos on the ground realized the dangerous situation and frantically shifted the landing lights around the LZ to provide the incoming gliders with as clear a zone as possible.[88] The tenacity and intellectual flexibility displayed by the Air Commandos illustrates how these attributes lead to quick adaptation while overcoming tremendous adversity and risk to accomplish the mission.

A flare was eventually launched from the LZ to prevent more gliders from being released at Broadway and a radio communication was sent via an airborne C-47 to halt further arrivals until the LZ could be cleared.[89] The engineers began to clear the LZ at first light the next morning and, due to their tremendous determination, reopened the LZ later that afternoon. After the code word for mission success, *Pork Sausage*, was radioed back to Lalaghat, C-47s loaded with supplies to improve the LZ began to land at Broadway that evening.[90] A steady flow of aircraft into Broadway continued throughout the night totaling 100 C-47 arrivals and departures, an incredible feat that could only be achieved by the highly skilled and dedicated Air Commandos. The overwhelming success achieved at Broadway by the Air Commandos led Wingate to commence the next phase of the invasion with further troop insertions into the Chowringhee LZ the next night.[91]

The infiltration into Chowringee followed on the night of March 7 followed the same tactics as were used at Broadway. The glider carrying arguably the most important equipment, the engineer's bulldozer, was destroyed when the glider transporting it crashed. This caused minor delays as another bulldozer had to be transported into the LZ to begin elongating the

---

[87] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 257. Until radio communications were established between the LZ controllers and the tow aircraft, there was no way to warn or stop the incoming gliders. Once the gliders released the towrope, they were committed to landing no matter what shape the LZ was in.

[88] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 257.

[89] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 260–263. Unfortunately, the radio operator at Broadway mistakenly sent the message as *Soya-Link*, the code word for catastrophe. When the C-47 relayed this back to Cochran and Wingate at Lalaghat, they assumed the worst—the initial waves had met the supposed Japanese ambush. Cochran immediately wanted to launch all available aircraft to get the ground forces into the LZ to turn around what was thought to be a rescue mission by this point. Wingate fortuitously denied that plan and instead launched a L-1 first thing in the morning to fly a tree-top arrival into Broadway and find out "what the hell is going on in there."

[90] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 264. Cochran humorously recalled Alison only requesting three C-47s on the initial landings at Broadway, but Cochran instead sent 12, asking Alison, "How about that?"

[91] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121. The initial forces into Broadway suffered relatively light numbers of casualties considering the conditions the Air Commandos faced. Only 28 men were killed with another 60 wounded. Alison stated only three of the 52 gliders that landed at Broadway were still intact. All told, the Air Commandos delivered 500 troops into Broadway on the first night and over 1,000 more the next night. See also Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 11–12.

landing strip to allow the larger C-47s to land.[92] Surprisingly, the Japanese had yet to launch an attack, which allowed transport operations at Broadway to continue unhindered while the Air Commandos simultaneously improved the Chowringhee LZ.

Providing protective air cover during for the operations at the LZs, Air Commando P-51s were conducting fighter-sweeps along central Burma on March 8 when they spotted a Japanese airfield filled with aircraft at Anisakan. Loaded with 500-pound bombs, the Air Commandos attacked the parked Japanese aircraft destroying all 17. On their return flight the fighters noticed approximately 60 Japanese aircraft at Shwebo airfield and radioed back, "that's the Japanese Air Force."[93] Lt Col Grant Mahoney, the fighter section leader, instructed his flight to strafe the bombers that were refueling on the airfield and to ignore the circling Japanese fighters. The P-51s commenced their attack destroying 38 aircraft at a cost of a single P-51 before having to return to base to refuel and rearm.[94] Cochran and Alison were both listening to the attack over the radio in the operations hut and immediately ordered the B-25s to be refueled and loaded with fragmentary bombs. The P-51s returned and the P-51 pilots switched to the bombers and returned to decimate the remaining vestiges of the Japanese Air Force at Shwebo airfield.[95] The fundamental attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity helped the Air Commandos to recognize and seize an opportunity to surprise and destroy the Japanese aircraft with a decisive strike.

The Air Commandos' tenacity in the destruction of the enemy's air force directly enabled the continuing infiltration of the Chindit forces into the battlefield. Operations at both LZs were in full motion by the night of 8 March with 85 C-47s landing at Broadway and another 78 landing

[92] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Wingate Report on Airborne Invasion of Burma* (New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, April 15, 1944), USAF Historical Records Agency, 5-6. Alison had arranged for the bulldozer at Broadway to be flown aboard a glider to Chowringhee instead of awaiting a replacement to arrive from India. The engineers immediately began preparing the LZ upon the bulldozer's arrival and a message stating that the LZ was open to C-47s was transmitted to Lalaghat late that night. Cochran immediately launched the first wave of C-47s. However, only 2,700 feet of usable landing distance was available and a fully loaded C-47 required a minimum landing distance of 4,000 feet. Cochran was able to recall all but seven of the aircraft when he finally received this critical piece of information. The seven undeterred aircraft later landed safely at Chowringhee.

[93] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 397.

[94] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 13.

[95] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 397–399. The P-51 pilots flew multiple sorties a day, often switching back and forth with the B-25, as there were not enough experienced bomber pilots. A single pilot often flew the B-25 because the gunsights and weapons controls were similar to that of the fighter aircraft. The multiple attacks at Shwebo airfield are credited with destroying more than 40 percent of the Japanese Air Force in the CBI Theater for the month of March 1944. See also Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 13.

at Chowringhee.[96] By the night of 9 March, Broadway increased its C-47 traffic to 95 aircraft while the 40 C-47s at Chowringhee completed the Chindit infiltration and was abandoned the following morning. The remaining Chindits were flown into Broadway over the next two nights completing the infiltration of two Chindit brigades into Burma.

Operation THURSDAY officially ended on the night of 11 March 1944. In a week's time, the Air Commandos delivered on their promise to transport the Chindits into battle. Cochran, cognizant of the importance this feat, sent a cable to Gen Arnold declaring, "The aerial invasion of Burma was strictly an air show."[97] Broadway would remain open throughout the remainder of the Air Commando's mission and serve as a forward staging area for resupply and refueling. The 5318th PAU continued to support the constantly moving Chindit columns with air evacuation, close air support, reconnaissance, and airdrop and resupply missions.

On 29 March 1944, Gen Arnold's Air Commandos lost their "provisional" status and were renamed the 1st Air Commando Group. The arrival of the monsoon season in May slowly brought a close to the Air Commando's ability to support the Chindits as the forward airfields quickly began to turn into muddy pits. Although the Air Commandos were to have been withdrawn from the mission by 1 May, the Chindits still required their assistance. The 1st ACG began to experience its first serious bouts of malaria at this point as the men had worked themselves to exhaustion.[98]

The 1st ACG struggled throughout the campaign to receive competent backfills for the men that were lost in combat and then to disease. Unlike the original contingent of Project 9, all of whom were hand-selected, the new replacements were randomly assigned from the theater reserves. The new replacements were unlikely to posses the same level of skill and character as those they were replacing. The lackluster performance by these new personnel highlighted the importance of selecting only the personnel that possessed the fundamental character attributes. Col Alison stressed it was the quality of the personnel that made the 1st ACG special:

---

[96] Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *Report of Troop Carrier Command Participation in "Thursday Operation."* (New Delhi, India, April 1, 1944), 3–4, USAF Historical Records Agency. The 5318th PU[A] only had 13 C-47s that were used to tow the gliders during the initial assaults on the LZs and as transports when the fields were lengthened. The Air Commando C-47s could not transport the entire Chindit force by themselves and required the assistance of Troop Carrier Command's C-47s from India after the LZs had been secured, explaining the large daily numbers of C-47s arriving and departing from the LZs. This is no different from the support today's SOF forces require as the fifth SOF truth states the necessity of non-SOF support.

[97] Cochran, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876, 203.

[98] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 352. The aircrew had been averaging six sorties a day for the past three months without a break. Although they had been flying past the point of exhaustion, the Air Commandos' support to the Chindits never waivered.

> We got replacements, but the replacements we had to take from the theater pool, and we began to get replacements who really had no experience. Then an elite unit doesn't work. You start off with 500 and some odd elite people, and in the course of your operation, maybe 20 percent of them are lost for one reason or another, and you replace them with 20 percent of ordinary people, they just can't carry the load their predecessors carried. Then the organization begins to become inefficient.[99]

The Air Commandos overall performance throughout the campaign, however, had been quite impressive. The 1st ACG's unprecedented success in its unique mission drove Gen Arnold to recall Alison back to Washington, DC, to begin organizing the next Air Commando Groups. Arnold's vision was for another four groups to be formed, but only two—the 2nd and 3rd ACGs—would come to fruition.[100] Meanwhile, the monsoon rains intensified over Burma and eventually forced Cochran to withdraw the Air Commandos back to India with a UC-64 as the last departure from Hailakandi on 23 May 1944. The 1st ACG reassembled at Asansol and many of the original members were rotated back to the US. At this point, Col Cochran relinquished control of the 1st ACG to Col Clinton B. Gaty and eventually joined Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower's staff in Europe.

Japanese Lieutenant General Mutaguchi Renya, the 15th Army commander in Burma, was caught off guard by Operation THURSDAY and later stated the Allied operation was "a major factor in the disaster which befell his forces."[101] Operation THURSDAY "had a decisive effect" by drawing the entire Japanese 53rd Division and most of the 15th Division, forces which could have prevented the Allies from repulsing the Japanese counterattacks on Imphal and Kohima.[102] Instead, the Japanese 15th Army suffered tremendous losses during the Imphal-Kohima battle, losing nearly 50 percent of its strength, which enabled the remainder of the successful Allied offensive in Burma.[103] In essence, during Operation THURSDAY and beyond, the small Air Commando force provided critical air capabilities enabling first the Chindit special

---

[99] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 352.
[100] Alison, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121, 422. Gen Arnold's vision was to use the new Air Commando Groups to "take Burma from the air." Arnold believed the British would want to move their army into Burma and finish what the Chindits had successfully began. The British, however, were not planning on sending an army back in to Burma. The lack of another British invasion did not stop the 2nd and 3rd ACGs from activating and participating in the remainder of the war. The 2nd ACG proceeded to India to complement the 1st ACG. The 3rd ACG was sent to New Guinea to plan and take part in the recapture of the Philippines as part of the Mindanao invasion force, but the plan was changed as the invasion was accelerated by six weeks and went to Leyte instead.
[101] Anglim, *Major General Orde Wingate's Chindit Operations in World War II*, 37.
[102] Anglim, *Major General Orde Wingate's Chindit Operations in World War II*, 37–38. The redirection of the 53rd and 15th Divisions from the Imphal-Kohima battle, removed the potential Japanese reserve force of nearly 20,000 personnel. Instead, only 85,000 Japanese soldiers were available to face the 58,000 British and Indian soldiers at Imphal and Kohima.
[103] Anglim, *Major General Orde Wingate's Chindit Operations in World War II*, 37.

operations force, and later the Allied ground campaign in Burma, to "smash for ever [*sic*] the legend of the invincibility of the Japanese Army."[104]

The Significance of the 1st Air Commando Group

Although the 1st ACG was inactivated on 3 November 1945 as the country's first aerial special operations force, it established the foundational legacy for all American Air Force special operators who followed. America's first Air Commandos were created as a solution borne of operational necessity, formed by personnel with specific attributes, and performed the impossible beyond anyone's expectations. Along the way the 1st ACG compiled some impressive operational statistics. During Operation THURSDAY alone, the Air Commandos transported 2,083 troops, 16 horses, 16 mules, and 104,681 pounds of supplies.[105] By the end of the campaign, the Air Commandos had fulfilled their primary task for the Chindits by evacuating over 2,000 wounded soldiers from the battlefields in Burma. The transported quantities are even more astounding considering this was all accomplished by 13 C-47s, 175 gliders, 12 UC-64s, and 100 light planes. The Air Commandos were described as a 1,000-person unit that was accomplishing the tasks normally associated with a comparable unit five times its size, thanks in no small part to the dedication, sacrifice, innovativeness, and flexibility of its personnel.[106]

At the Air Commandos' inception, each member of the unit was chosen specifically because they possessed the necessary character to perform a distinctive and highly dangerous mission. Airpower had never before been used as the sole means of transporting, sustaining, and supporting ground combat forces operating well behind an enemy's front lines in such forbidding terrain. The Air Commandos "never knew where, when, or what they would be called upon to do. Yet they responded [to the] changing needs and situations with a 'can do' attitude."[107] Although the AAF did not provide the Air Commandos with specialized aircraft for their unique mission, they were able to creatively transform those aircraft and combine them with innovative new tactics to provide unique combat capabilities. Through maturity, judgment, intellectual flexibility, and tenacity of it personnel, a reflection in part of an informal selection process created out of thin air, the 1st ACG were able to consistently overcome the daunting challenges presented by the Chindit mission and prevail *any time, any place, anywhere*—or as the tasks demanded in exceptionally challenging conditions where the risks were high and failure would have spelt disaster.

---

[104] William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1956), 369.
[105] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 36. See also Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*, 3.
[106] Y'Blood, "Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II," 7–8.
[107] Mason, Bergeron, and Renfrow, *Operation Thursday*, 44.

The 1st ACG established the foundational attributes for all future Air Commandos. Unfortunately, the unit was disestablished after WWII and the newly created US Air Force painfully relearned the lessons of the 1st ACG as the USAF struggled to create new AFSOF organizations at the beginning of the Korean War, scarcely five years later. In a pattern seemingly destined to repeat itself until the signing of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986, and the Nunn-Cohen Amendment the following year, the USAF again disbanded most of its SOF units after the Korean and Vietnam wars. The heritage and legacy of the 1st ACG, however, was useful in the creation of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron during the early 1960s as the next chapter demonstrates.

Chapter 4

The Air Commando's Resurgence

Too many people in our world have forgotten what freedom is. My loss is very great, but your loss is greater. Continue to handpick your men and choose them well, they are the men who still possess a devotion for peace, while the rest of us stand in our corners and cower. God bless these men whose strong shoulders our whole country leans upon.

—Letter by Captain Condon H. Terry's widow to the commander of the 1st Air Commando Wing, 30 June 1963

Our value depended on our quality, not on our quantity.

—T.E. Lawrence, *The Evolution of a Revolt*, 1920

Less than 20 years after the 1st Air Commando Group's proven success in the Burmese jungles, the US once again required the specialized capabilities of a small, unique group of handpicked personnel. The new mission in South Vietnam, however, drove a different set of airpower requirements for the USAF. This chapter discusses creation of another Air Commando unit, the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (4400th CCTS) and its significance by answering two principal questions: first, what were the meaningful differences between the establishment of the 4400th CCTS and the creation of the 1st ACG in WWII? Next, why were there differences between the two units? Answers to these questions reemphasize the special characteristic attributes of the earliest Air Commandos from WWII through Vietnam and beyond.

Strategic Setting

The origins of American intervention in Vietnam can be traced to the conclusion of World War II and the fear of the nation's leaders of growing Soviet expansion and influence. The fall of China in 1949 to Mao Tse-tung's communist revolutionaries, immediately followed by the Korean War, heightened American anti-Communist sensitivities while solidifying US adherence to the Truman Doctrine.[1] The doctrine, which guided US policy throughout the Cold War, committed the US to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."[2] To prevent the next domino from falling in Asia, the

[1] James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 236.
[2] Christine Compston and Rachel F. Seidman, eds., *Our Documents: 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 194.

Americans openly assisted the French government fighting Communist insurgency and reinstituting its control over French Indochina (Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam).[3]

The fierce struggle between the French forces and Ho Chi Minh's Communist guerilla forces, the Viet Minh, culminated with the decisive defeat of the French army at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954.[4] The defeat effectively ended French attempts at recolonization in the region and forced their withdrawal, leaving only the Americans to ward off the advancing Communists. By July 20th, a ceasefire negotiation between the French government and the representatives for the Viet Minh, with American assistance in the negotiations process, was signed.[5] Additionally, the 1954 Geneva Conference established a demilitarized zone (DMZ) along the 17th parallel, separating the Communist-backed Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the north from the Western-backed Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in the south. This division was meant to be temporary, as the Geneva Conference mandated an election to unify the nation within two years.[6]

Although the US leaders believed they had to stop the Communist tide from engulfing the whole of Vietnam, the Geneva Conference prohibited direct military action by the US. Instead, American leaders focused the country's efforts on "helping that country [South Vietnam] become viable, develop its capability to resist internal subversion, and to assist it in its rehabilitation following the eight years" of war.[7] Furthermore, the US publicly stated it would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb the Accords . . . [and] would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security."[8] The US had to find a way to partner with the

[3] Philip D. Chinnery, *Any Time, Any Place: Fifty Years of the USAF Air Commando and Special Operations Forces, 1944-1994* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 60; Donald F. Martin and Carl O. Clever, *Summary, Oct 1961-Dec 1963*, Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, May 31, 1964, 6, USAF Historical Records Agency.

[4] Chinnery, *Any Time, Any Place*, 1994, 61. The French army had retaken the garrison and airfield in late November 1953 and quickly increased their forces to 10,000 men. Over the ensuing months, the Viet Minh painstakingly moved artillery and anti-aircraft weapons into the valley, laid siege to the garrison, and decimated the surrounded French forces. After sustaining over 7,000 casualties and unable to successfully resupply their forces, the French surrendered to the Viet Minh. Only half of the surrendered men eventually returned to France. For details of the battle see Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley* (London: Cassell, 2005).

[5] Martin and Clever, *Summary, Oct 1961-Dec 1963*, 6.

[6] Martin and Clever, *Summary, Oct 1961-Dec 1963*, 6.

[7] Ambassador G. Frederick Reinhardt, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #292, interview by Maj Richard B. Clement, June 30, 1970, 2, USAF Historical Records Agency. Reinhardt states that these specific objectives were agreed upon by talks among the United States, Great Britain, and France. The main area of disagreement, however, occurred over supporting South Vietnam's first prime minister, Ngo Dinh Diem. France believed the prime minister had already served his purpose and would not be useful in resisting a Communist takeover. Senior American leaders were not entirely enamored with Diem either but determined that he was the best of a number of bad options.

[8] Vietnam Task Force, "Part III: The Geneva Accords 1954," D–18.

South Vietnamese forces to stop Communist expansion in Southeast Asia.

The French military completely withdrew from Vietnam by 1955 and left the fledgling Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) with only two transport squadrons, two light liaison squadrons, and one composite tactical squadron.[9] Over the next six years, the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) began to strengthen the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) with the aid of US military advisory personnel and monetary assistance.[10] During this same period, the Viet Minh in the north were transformed into the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and their guerilla counterparts in the south, now renamed the Viet Cong (VC), increased their infiltration and attacks on the RVN.[11] The tensions between the DRV and RVN became openly violent in September 1959 when an ARVN force was annihilated in the Plain of Reeds, southwest of Saigon, by a large Viet Cong force.[12] The US realized more must be done to increase the ARVN's ability to counter the "communist military-political-economic campaign aimed at overturning the Government of Vietnam."[13]

The Initiation of the 4400th CCTS

In the spring of 1960, the US government realized its military assistance efforts to the RVN had failed to create an effective counterinsurgency (COIN) force capable of eradicating the Communist insurgents and provide for the external defense of the nation.[14] Later that spring, the US deployed its first US Army Special Forces (SF) teams to assist and train the ARVN.[15] Up to this point, little thought had been given toward training the VNAF because the South Vietnamese

[9] Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 235. As the French removed themselves from their training roles with the VNAF, the Americans began to replace the French aircraft with mostly older WWII-era aircraft. The L-19s, T-28s and U-17s helped the VNAF to transition their tactical and light liaison squadrons.

[10] Vietnam Task Force, "Part IV: US Training of the Vietnamese National Army, 1954-1959," in *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969), 1.1, http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/. US documents state that "more than $2 billion in aid flowed into Vietnam, and more than 80% of that assistance went toward providing security for the Government of Vietnam" during this timeframe. Vietnam Task Force, 1.1.

[11] Maj Gen Edward G. Lansdale, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #220, interview by Capt Richard B. Clement, September 9, 1969, 88, USAF Historical Records Agency. According to Maj Gen Lansdale, the NVA and VC initially sent agents, military leaders, and small numbers of soldiers into the South to prepare for larger insurgent operations in the future. They also began to establish a logistical supply network through neighboring Laos and Cambodia, circumventing the DMZ. See also Chinnery, *Any Time, Any Place*, 62.

[12] Chinnery, *Any Time, Any Place*, 1994, 62. The ARVN defeat, shockingly close the South Vietnamese capital city and stronghold, was one of the first signs of how strong the communist insurgency had grown within the South's borders.

[13] Vietnam Task Force, "Part IV: US Training of the Vietnamese National Army, 1954-1959," 1.1.

[14] Vietnam Task Force, "Part IV: US Training of the Vietnamese National Army, 1954-1959," 2.1-3.1.

[15] Martin and Clever, *Summary, Oct 1961-Dec 1963*, 6.

army was thought to be the most effective force for COIN within the RVN.[16] However, US involvement would shift dramatically after an inflammatory speech by Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev.

Khrushchev's 6 January 1961 speech before the Communist Party Congress outlined Moscow's strategy for a Communist-dominated world, which included supporting "wars of national liberation."[17] Two weeks later, during his inaugural address, US President John F. Kennedy vowed to assist any nation that was fighting against outside aggression.[18] Kennedy backed the words of his speech with concrete action by signing the National Security Action Memorandum 2, which directed the "armed services to develop a counterinsurgency capability."[19] In essence, each service would have to quickly and greatly expand its counterinsurgency capabilities.[20]

General Curtis E. LeMay, the USAF Vice Chief of Staff in early 1961, responded to Kennedy's COIN request and instigated the creation of the US Air Force's counterinsurgency

---

[16] Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *SETUP: What the Air Force Did in Vietnam and Why* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1991), 61–61. The US had delivered a squadron of old Navy Douglas AD-6 Skyraiders to the VNAF to create their first fighter squadron by early 1961. The general perception among Army leaders was these aircraft, in addition to what the VNAF already possessed, was sufficient. These leaders, however, greatly overestimated the VNAF's capabilities to support ground forces engaged in COIN warfare. See also Skyraider Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 67.

[17] Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 237. Corum and Johnson outlined Khrushchev's plan in three primary categories: "general war, which he rejected as too dangerous; local, or limited wars, which he feared because of their potential to develop into general war; and wars of national liberation, which he endorsed as inevitable and desirable." Third World countries were seen by the US leaders as highly susceptible to a Communist-backed insurgency and would require US assistance in preventing Soviet exploitation. Corum and Johnson, 237. For the entire transcript of Khrushchev's speech, as well as a detailed US analysis of the speech, see United States 87th Congress, 1st Session, "Analysis of the Khrushchev Speech of January 6, 1961," Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate (Washington, DC, June 16, 1961), 64, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/16/1961-06-16.pdf.

[18] Compston and Seidman, *Our Documents*, 222. President Kennedy openly confronted Soviet-backed insurgencies by declaring, "To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right." Compston and Seidman, 222.

[19] "Urgent National Needs: Special Message of the President to the Congress," *Department of State Bulletin 44,* (June 12, 1961): 906, cited in Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, n. 35, p. 472.

[20] Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 238. The almost exclusive reliance of Eisenhower's New Look policy on nuclear weapons led to the decimation of most of the service's special operations capability after the Korean War, particularly with respect to irregular and unconventional warfare. The USAF created three UW wings for the Korean War, only to deactivate them less than five years after the signing of the armistice. By this point, the Army had three SF groups with limited UW capability, as they were focused on operating behind the Soviet front lines after a European invasion. The Navy's Sea, Air, Land teams (SEALs) and the Marines were likewise minimally trained in COIN tactics.

capability.[21] Headquarters Air Force (HAF) directed Tactical Air Command (TAC) to "form a small, elite, volunteer unit" that would form the nucleus of the USAF's irregular warfare (IW) force. On 14 April 1961, the 4400th Combat Crew Trainings Squadron was activated at Eglin Air Force Auxiliary Field Number 9 (Hurlburt Field), Florida and was assigned under the command of the 9th Air Force at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina.[22] The newly created unit was to be fully operational by the end of the summer with the understanding that "they absolutely, positively must produce results *now* [emphasis in the original]."[23] Similar to the creation of the 1st Air Commando Group in WWII, the 4400th CCTS would require airmen with the right characteristic attributes paired with the right composition of aircraft to ensure success in their unique mission.

Jungle Jim Aircraft Procurement

Colonel Benjamin H. King, a WWII ace, assumed command of the 4400th CCTS on 1 May 1961. Tasked with a primary mission of training and advising VNAF aircrew in counterinsurgency operations, the Air Force's newest Air Commando unit was also tasked with conducting covert combat operations within the borders of South Vietnam.[24] The secrecy dictated by the 4400th's covert mission led to a cover name for the unit, "Jungle Jim."[25] Although the concept of Air Commandos flying combat operations in support of ground forces was not new, the intended covert nature of these missions was novel. In addition, Air

---

[21] Tilford, Jr., *SETUP*, 62. Although more commonly associated with Strategic Air Command's (SAC) nuclear bomber force and strategic airpower, LeMay was truly a staunch advocate for airpower in general. Then-Secretary of the Air Force (SECAF) Eugene M. Zuckert believed LeMay's enthusiasm for developing COIN capabilities was more a function of his desire to prevent the Army from developing its own air component to support its COIN operations. See also Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia*, 79. Futrell states that LeMay still advocated for an overpowering response by airpower that could prevent a lengthy war. Futrell does concede, however, that LeMay realized this type of application of airpower was not politically viable and opted to pursue a more subtle, yet effective, application of airpower. See also Edward B. Westermann, "Relegated to the Backseat: Farm Gate and the Failure of the US Air Advisory Effort in South Vietnam, 1961-1963," in *Military Advising and Assistance: From Mercenaries to Privatization, 1815-2007*, ed. Donald J. Stoker (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 128.

[22] Tsgt Robert J. O'Neill, "History of the United States Air Force Special Air Warfare Center (Tactical Air Command): 27 April - 31 December 1962," December 31, 1962, 5–6, USAF Historical Records Agency. By the time 4400th deployed to South Vietnam, it was placed under the direct command of Headquarters, Tactical Air Command at Langley AFB, Virginia.

[23] Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 220.

[24] Message, CINCPAC to PACAF, "Concept of Operations and Control for Jungle Jim Unit in South Vietnam," December 28, 1961, 1, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Secret) Excerpt Unclassified.

[25] Message, CINCPAC to CHMAAG, "Jungle Jim Det 2 - Security Classification," November 22, 1961, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Message classified SECRET, excerpt Unclassified). The covert combat mission of the 4400th CCTS was classified Top Secret while any detailed information concerning the VNAF training program itself was classified Secret. The only information considered unclassified, was the acknowledgement that the training of the Vietnamese Air Force was a portion of the ongoing Military Assistance program.

Commandos had never before been tasked with training foreign aircrews while developing the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to provide a new capability. The 4400th CCTS' overseas operational environment, however, closely resembled that of its predecessor, the 1st Air Commando Group.

Both units operated in a very austere, inhospitable jungle environment with minimal outside support or existing infrastructure. While the 1st ACG's area of operations concentrated on the jungles of Burma, Jungle Jim's focus was to be anywhere communist insurgencies existed, including the jungles of Asia and Latin America. The majority of the airfields in South Vietnam were short and unimproved, rendering the modern US jet aircraft useless for Jungle Jim's combat and VNAF training missions. The 4400th would have to rely on antiquated WWII propeller-driven aircraft, which were virtually the same aircraft the original Air Commandos employed almost 20 years earlier. The venerable Douglas C-47 Skytrain was once again chosen as the Air Commandos multi-use transport aircraft. The multi-role Douglas B-26 Invader was chosen for the ground attack and reconnaissance roles while the North American T-28 Nomad was picked as the light attack, close air support (CAS), and primary VNAF training aircraft.[26] The first aircraft to arrive at Hurlburt Field in Florida, Jungle Jim's new base of operations, was a lone T-28 on 5 May 1961. The remaining T-28s arrived by 1 July. The full complement of Jungle Jim aircraft was 16 C-47s and eight B-26s and T-28s, each backed by a similar number of crated aircraft ready to be exported to host nations.[27] Although the decision to use older aircraft was driven by the geography and infrastructure in South Vietnam, it would become a fortuitous decision.

During the period of French advisory assistance, backed largely with American equipment transferred through the MAAG, the VNAF concentrated on learning the fundamentals of flying as well as employing its airpower in order to create an air force.[28] The VNAF possessed a few pilots who had gained a significant amount of experience under the French advisors, but the vast majority of the aircrew and maintenance personnel were technically and

[26] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 7-8.
[27] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 7–8. The aircraft available in temporary storage were able to rapidly deploy to other worldwide contingencies or for transfer to other friendly foreign nations. The aircraft storage idea is commensurate with the USAF's development of a responsive COIN and IW capability
[28] Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #229, interview by Capt Richard B. Clement and G. Berquist, October 30, 1969, USAF Historical Records Agency, 4. Maj Gen Loan of the South Vietnamese Air Force stated that the VNAF training under the French was more akin to non-combat, peacetime training. The VNAF focused mainly on reconnaissance missions in support of the ground forces as the French handled the bulk of the tactical combat missions. By the time the French withdrew from Vietnam, the VNAF had recently received their initial AD-6 fighter aircraft.

technologically inexperienced.[29] The ruggedness and relative simplicity of the 4400th's old aircraft provided the ideal training platforms for a developing air force, which are notoriously rough on their training aircraft.[30] The aircraft were capable of operating from minimally prepared airfields, they were easy to learn how to fly and maintain, and their low cost meant that they could be based throughout the countries in large numbers.

The vintage aircraft selected for use by Jungle Jim provided the necessary cover for its combat support missions because the aircraft would have VNAF markings and would not be directly linked to the US.[31] The US did not want to publicly acknowledge a combat role for its air advisors for fear of inciting responses in kind from either the USSR or China.[32] As Gen LeMay noted, the US "had to use B-26s, or C-47s, or an airplane that could be found on a junk heap in any country in the world. They [the 4400th CCTS] thought if they used that kind of equipment then you couldn't blame it on the United States. So you couldn't use the tools that were at hand and available. We had to dig up something off the junk heap, rebuild it, so it would fly, and then put the junk into action."[33] The appearance of new jet fighters with US markings in South Vietnam would make it virtually impossible for the Americans or South Vietnamese to deny allegations of the US participating directly in combat operations. The older, unremarkable WWII-era aircraft would enable VNAF training missions to occur simultaneously with combat operations.[34]

---

[29] Lt Col Charles E. Trumbo, Jr., Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #271, interview by Joseph W. Grainger, July 13, 1963, 2, USAF Historical Records Agency. Lt Col Trumbo, the 2nd Advanced Echelon (ADVON) director of plans in 1961, stated that the VNAF had less than 200 pilots when Jungle Jim was tasked with the training mission. Although Trumbo asserted a few VNAF pilots possessed upwards of five to seven thousand hours in combat, the majority of those hours were is light liaison aircraft or the C-47 transport as the VNAF possessed only 28 F-8F fighter-bomber aircraft (which had entered into the VNAF inventory only four years earlier).

[30] Aircraft designated as initial pilot trainers needed to be rugged as the aircraft is exposed to repetitious activities, such as multiple landing patterns that increase wear-and-tear of the aircraft not normally associated with most tactically employed aircraft. When basic pilot training is accomplished in the same aircraft that is used for combat operations, the increased missions add to the ruggedness requirement of the aircraft.

[31] Gen Curtis E. LeMay, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #592, interview by Robert F. Futrell, Thomas G. Belden, and J. Van Staaveren, June 8, 1972, 42–43, USAF Historical Records Agency. Gen LeMay believed the capacity of the VNAF aircrews in early 1961 was not conducive to learning how to fly and employ jet aircraft. Additionally, he stated that "if they [the Communists] ran into the shiny airplanes with US markings on them, why we would have to face the world." LeMay, 42-43.

[32] Gen Curtis E. LeMay, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #593, interview by Thomas G. Belden, March 29, 1972, 2–3, USAF Historical Records Agency. Gen LeMay said the US knew Chinese Communists were supporting the North Vietnamese but the US could not explicitly attack them. LeMay, 2-3.

[33] LeMay, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #592, 2–3.

[34] Maj Walter G. Harris, *End of Tour Report* (1st Air Commando Squadron (Composite), May 10, 1965), 1, USAF Historical Records Agency. Harris asserts the simultaneous training and combat support missions

As was the case with the 1st ACG's aircraft, the aircraft chosen for Jungle Jim provided the required basic capabilities but needed to be modified before entering combat. The T-28s, mostly procured from excess US Navy stocks, were modified to carry .50-caliber machine guns, bomb and rocket mounts, external fuel tanks, and light protection from ground fire in the form of armor plating for the cockpit and self-sealing fuel tanks.[35] The B-26s underwent similar armament modifications to include adding more .50-caliber machine guns in the nose (for a total of eight) as well as mounts for bombs, napalm, and air-to-ground rockets.[36] Radio and navigational upgrades were included as well as converting four of the aircraft into reconnaissance platforms through the addition of cameras and airborne flares for enhanced nighttime capability.[37] The C-47s were the most heavily modified aircraft in the entire unit and were redesignated as SC-47s. The aircraft received radio upgrades that included high frequency (HF), very high frequency (VHF), and frequency modulation (FM) radios as well as cables and systems for personnel and equipment airdrops, loudspeakers for broadcasting propaganda, jet assisted take-off (JATO) systems, and litter supports of medical evacuations.[38] In essence, the aircraft were specifically modified to provide highly specialized, combat capabilities to support friendly ground forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations while also providing training assistance to a foreign air force.

Although the aircraft selected for Jungle Jim were antiquated by the technological standards of their day, they were the most capable aircraft available for the ongoing counterinsurgent war in the jungles of Vietnam. The crews of the 4400th would use their intellectual flexibility to innovate new TTPs for employing the aircraft in both a COIN combat role as well as a basic aircrew-training role. The unique blending of missions required personnel with the appropriate characteristic qualities to be successful in the USAF's first counterinsurgency campaign. The distinctive mission in Vietnam, combined with the experiences

---

were not an effective way to train the VNAF. He further adds that maintaining proficiency in both mission sets is very difficult to schedule because a pilot must fly each type of mission frequently to become proficient and effective in the particular mission.

[35] Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 221. Although the T-28 was not strictly a US Navy aircraft, their aircraft modifications for carrier operations (stronger landing gear and larger engines) were precisely what Jungle Jim commandos would require for the austere conditions they would encounter in Vietnam.

[36] Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 221. Such modifications had already been done to the airframe at the close of WWII, to turn the medium bomber (B-26) into a devastating close air support attack aircraft (A-26).

[37] Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 221. The reconnaissance versions of the aircraft were eventually labeled RB-26s.

[38] Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 221. The FM radio would become one of the most valuable radios in all the Jungle Jim aircraft, as it is the primary radio employed by the US Army. For a discussion on the necessity of FM radios in SOF aircraft, see Rano E. Leuker, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #193, interview by Paul Skinner, June 30, 1971, 13, USAF Historical Records Agency.

from the creation of previous SOF units, drove a more formalized personnel selection process for the 4400th CCTS.

Jungle Jim Selection Process

The 1st Air Commando Group personnel selection process during WWII was an informal, non-sequential process where candidates were volunteers, was known personally by one of the unit's leaders, were combat experienced, and were capable of performing more than their primary assigned duties. Through this informal process, the 1st ACG selected personnel who possessed the fundamental attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity that aided the 1st ACG's success. Similarly, as Chapter 3 noted, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in WWII began the first American informal personnel selection process, but its leaders soon realized that a more formal, rigorous one was necessary to select individuals with specific character traits for operations in complex and ambiguous conditions. Although each type of selection program, informal and formal, ultimately selected personnel with the necessary character attributes, a formalized process would constitute the Jungle Jim personnel selection process.

The selection process for Jungle Jim mirrored the 1st ACG's informal selection of personnel with knowledge, experience, and dual skills but also blended in the rigorous psychological assessments from formal OSS process. In other words, the personnel selection process for the 4400th CCTS combined the best features of both previous processes. Similar to the genesis of the 1st ACG, the future leader of the 4400th was interviewed personally by the USAF commander. At 0200 one Sunday morning, Col King, who was already stationed at Eglin AFB close to Hurlburt Field, received a phone call ordering him to report to his commander.[39] After answering some preliminary questions he was told he had only 30 minutes to decide and report to LeMay at the Pentagon whether or not he would volunteer for a new assignment.[40] Although King responded immediately that he would volunteer, he was not informed of his selection as commander of the 4400th CCTS until the following Monday. Missing from this notification, however, was any additional guidance as to the mission of the squadron.[41] With

[39] Brig Gen Benjamin H. King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, interview by Maj Samuel E. Riddlebarger and Lt Col Valentino Castellina, September 4, 1969, 1–2, USAF Historical Records Agency.
[40] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 2.
[41] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 3. King states the lack of guidance for the unit's proposed mission was the most serious mistake made in the creation of the organization. King believes that the lack of guidance was not from the willful negligence or withholding of information by his leadership, it was simply that his immediate supervisors did not know themselves. The only information King received was that he would have approximately 300 highly qualified and experienced men with a certain number of aircraft.

King's selection as leader of Jungle Jim, the next task to turn the unit from concept into reality was to select the remaining personnel.

Unlike the 1st ACG's Colonels Cochran and Alison, Col King did not have the luxury of selecting his key staff. A special Pentagon-based staff thoroughly screened many highly qualified candidates, and after conducting reviews of personnel files and interviews, Jungle Jim's key staff was selected and assigned, arriving at Hurlburt Field less than a week after King's assignment.[42] With the squadron leadership and staff now in place, the task turned toward selecting the remaining personnel to establish the Air Force's newest Air Commando unit. Now an independent service, the Air Force by 1961 had become large enough that the 4400th's leaders did not personally know every member recruited to join the unit, which was markedly different from the USAAF of Cochran and Alison. Though King and his staff recruited a few individuals they knew, they were not enough and the 4400th would have to rely on the Air Force personnel system to initiate a larger recruiting effort. The initial criterion used to sort potential candidates was the amount of flying time, performance evaluations, and type of previous experience.[43] These few initial screening criterions had, in essence, established the requirement that potential candidates possess the attributes of maturity and judgment. Once the initial sorting was accomplished, the next step was to contact the potential candidates.

Once the candidates were identified through the personnel system, they were sent notices stating they were to report to their respective base commanders. Upon arrival, the candidates were then asked the following series of questions with no other explanatory information:

> Would you be willing to serve for prolonged periods under austere conditions? Would you be willing to serve for prolonged periods separated from your family? Would you be willing to engage in dangerous operations fighting for a friendly foreign government at the request of the USAF? Would you fly and fight in situations where you could not wear the U.S. uniform? And finally, would you be willing to fly and fight on behalf of the U.S. government, and agree to do so knowing that your government might choose to deny that you were a member of the U.S. military, or even associated with this nation?[44]

The candidates were to respond with either a yes or no; a single "no" answer ended the interview

[42] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 6–7. The following individuals were selected to key staff positions at the 4400th CCTS: Deputy Commander Lt Col Chester A. Jack, Operations Officer Lt Col Robert L. Gleason, Supply Officer Major John L. Downing, Administration Officer Capt Warren V. Trent.
[43] Robert L. Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles: Untold Tales from Vietnam, Latin America, and Back Again* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 2000), 2.
[44] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 2.

immediately.[45] Answering "yes" to all the questions placed the candidates record in front of the Pentagon staff who would review each candidate and choose those they wished to send on to the next phase of the selections process, the psychological screening.

The initial cadre of candidates was then sent to Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas to meet with a team of Air Force psychologists.[46] The psychological evaluation was conducted over the course of five days as psychologists evaluated each candidate's underlying motivation for the assignment.[47] The written and oral psychological tests attempted to determine the emotional stability of the candidates. This was often conducted through the asking of seemingly benign questions such as, "Who are you?" Candidates answering with their basic information such as name, rank, and serial number were subsequently asked, "No, who are you?"[48] This line of questioning and testing would go on for some time, as the candidates would begin to reveal whether or not they possessed the character attributes necessary for their success in the newly created unit.[49] Those "super patriot" candidates that displayed the required attributes progressed

[45] Lt Col Roy C. Dalton, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #671, interview by Maj Ralph Rowley, Riley Sunderland, and Maj Victor Anthony, February 8, 1973, USAF Historical Records Agency. Dalton, who interviewed for the Jungle Jim unit in January 1962, states he was recruited through a verbal notification. He had been informed that if he wanted to "volunteer for a special assignment . . . [he] should contact the base commander's office." Dalton admits when he volunteered he was specifically asked, "Would you like to volunteer for a special unit that would be going overseas? We can't tell you any more other than that you would be away from your family on a TDY (temporary duty) basis." Specific information about the unit or its mission was purposefully withheld from the candidates so when candidates answered 'No' they would know "absolutely nothing more than that." Dalton, 1.

[46] Lt Col M. M. Doyle, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #269, interview by Joseph W. Grainger, February 16, 1963, 6, USAF Historical Records Agency. Subsequent psychological interviews were conducted at Hurlburt Field by the same team of psychologists. See also Col Ira L. Kimes, Jr., Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #696, interview by Lt Col Ralph A. Rowley, November 26, 1973, 1, USAF Historical Records Agency.

[47] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*. Gleason stated the psychological testing was to identify "unstable personalities and to isolate those who were more motivated by running away from their present assignment or a bad family situation, than by being inspired to serving their country under the most extreme conditions without any qualifications whatsoever." Gleason, 24.

[48] Kimes, Jr., Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #696, 1. Kimes was one of the initial candidates for Jungle Jim and would go on to become a T-28 pilot and armament officer in the unit from October 1961 through February 1962. During his interview, Kimes recalled that the "who are you" question caused him the most difficulty but still did not quite understand the purpose behind such questions.

[49] Dalton, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #671, 1–2. Dalton describes some of the testing which often merged the psychological tests with minor physical discomforts. For example, "we were asked to stand in a bucket of crushed ice, and anybody that stepped out, for some reason was out of the program." During another test, Dalton describes an interview with a psychologist that was conducted by "holding two books in our hands, with our arms out stretched, and palms up. He [the psychologist] said that you can lower your arms any time you want to, but he said that he just wanted to talk, and we talked for about ten to fifteen minutes. If your arms began to sag, he would say very politely—can you raise your arms again?" A few candidates would become frustrated with this type of testing and removed themselves from the program. Dalton, 1-2

to the next stage of the selection process while those that did not were returned to their previous assignments without any negative consequences.[50]

The next phase in the selection process was a specialized survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) training course at Stead AFB, Nevada, located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The course was specifically designed to further test the Jungle Jim candidates' mental flexibility and tenacity as well as impart valuable prisoner of war training to those who would become part of the unique unit.[51] The training was made to be as realistic as possible, which meant that most of the restrictions placed upon the instructors to avoid excessive mistreatment were removed for the Air Commandos' training. Focusing on training the candidate's conduct as a prisoner, the harsh techniques used to break down the candidate's resistance broke emotionally a number of prospective candidates, who were then returned to their previous units.[52] As an indication of how difficult this phase of selection could be, one class entered SERE with 170 candidates and finished with only 98.[53] The remaining candidates completed the final selection process for the 4400th CCTS, and, without yet knowing the mission of the unit, received their orders to Hurlburt Field.

The selection of Jungle Jim personnel followed a more formalized recruitment, assessment, and selection process than the 1st ACG. The unique COIN missions and the specialized air capabilities of the 4400th CCTS required a personnel selection process that was much more formal. The Jungle Jim Air Commandos would not be simply participating in a single air operation supporting a specific ground unit; they were required to build a foreign air force while simultaneously fighting the Communist insurgency that surrounded them in South Vietnam. Similar to the process created by Cochran and Alison, the Jungle Jim process required that each candidate was a volunteer and possessed the four attributes identified earlier: judgment, maturity, intellectual flexibility, and tenacity. The addition of a psychological assessment helped to identify the prospective candidates with the necessary attributes. Further mental evaluations during the rigorous SERE training eliminated those candidates without the mental tenacity to

[50] Doyle, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #269, 6. Doyle recalled specifically asking the psychologists what they were looking for in an Air Commando. Their simple response was "a super patriot that is emotionally stable."
[51] Harris, *End of Tour Report*, 2. Harris states that an American pilot was one of the most sought after prisoners by the Viet Cong, who offered more than $5,000 for a captured pilot.
[52] Doyle, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #269, 6. Doyle stated that the Jungle Jim SERE course was much rougher than the typical course attended by all aircrew at the time. The instructors at the course could "take grown men and in a 72 hour period in their simulated prisoner of war situation can make them sign papers. They will renounce their citizenship rights and sign statements derogatory to the United States within 72 hours." Doyle, 6. For additional techniques used by the SERE instructors in this course, see also Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 24-25.
[53] Doyle, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #269, 6.

handle the rigors of the unit's mission.[54] Although Jungle Jim's selection process did not explicitly identify specific character attributes, it focused nevertheless on the personal character traits of prospective candidates of the unit.[55]

Training and Deployment

At the conclusion of the 4400th CCTS initial selection process, 124 officers and 228 enlisted airmen gathered at Hurlburt Field to begin their training. They still did not know precisely what their mission would be or where it would take place. The only guidance the unit had received was similar in nature to that of the 1st ACG's, as Jungle Jim was to "develop an organization that could fly and fight and exist on its own, both in the air and on the ground."[56] The members of Jungle Jim decided they were supposed to be an Air Force version of an unconventional warfare unit, much like the Army's Special Forces (SF) or "Green Berets," that would be operating deep behind enemy lines, infiltrating and exfiltrating other special operators, and would never be part of a conventional military operation.[57] The Air Commandos were to be the Air Force's sole unit that would have "no markings, nothing, anywhere, civilian clothes, no passports, high rate of risk . . . [that] could be put in anywhere in the world to do this specialized kind of job."[58] With the general consensus among the Air Commandos as to the nature of their mission, they turned their attention to their initial flight training in their "new" aircraft.

The 4400th CCTS received the majority of their initial complement of aircraft by the

---

[54] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 7. The candidates for the 4400th were required to possess the skills to fly in combat, but were also required to be able to instruct foreign air force personnel. The latter often was the most difficult for Jungle Jim personnel as language barriers, frustration and confusion over which was the primary mission, and basic motivation prevented some Air Commandos from becoming effective instructors.

[55] Doyle, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #269, 6. While the formalized selection process attempted to eliminate unsuitable candidates, Doyle attested to the fact that some unsuitable candidates were able to slip into the unit, such as those individuals that were unable to instruct or work alongside Asian airmen. See also Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia*, 79.

[56] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 12. In essence, Jungle Jim was to be a self-sustaining organization capable of operating in austere conditions.

[57] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 6–7. King states that within the first month of Jungle Jim's existence, both TAC headquarters and the 9th AF at Shaw AFB informed him the unit's "job was to get current and proficient and qualified, and develop a capability to instruct foreign nationals. And this was the advertisement, the cover up, that was put out for the organization—that we would be teaching foreign students to fly and perform combat-type missions in the obsolete aircraft." King states that the LeMay gave him a different direction in that Jungle Jim's primary mission "was to be able to conduct combat operations with the aircraft that we had assigned, under extremely austere conditions anywhere in the world, and be a responsive force, either overtly or covertly, to support United States policy." Although King admits LeMay's directions were never explicitly stated, it was "always inferences or innuendos," King would ensure the 4400th CCTS was combat mission ready before the unit would focus on preparing to instruct the VNAF. King, 6-7.

[58] Trumbo, Jr., Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #271, 12. Trumbo admits that, regardless if Jungle Jim's actual mission in Vietnam would be unconventional warfare or not, it still needed highly qualified and professional personnel to perform its COIN mission.

beginning of July 1961.[59] Unlike their predecessors in the 1st ACG, most of the new Jungle Jim Air Commando's had either never flown a propeller-driven aircraft, or it had been many, many years since they had last flown one. As a result the Air Commandos had to first teach themselves how to fly these vintage aircraft before they could begin to instruct VNAF pilots how to fly them in tactical combat conditions.[60] As was the case with the 1st ACG, the nature of the missions and the operating environment dictated that Air Commandos had to be proficient in a wide range of tasks beyond flying. As King noted, the initial training of Jungle Jim personnel was difficult because they had to "learn how to fly and maintain and operate the airplanes ourselves . . . we did what we thought we ought to do, in our own mind and this was…trying to learn how to survive and stay alive under the conditions that we assumed that we might be called upon to operate in."[61] This issue was made even more difficult because there was a general lack of operational manuals for the aircraft and, similar to the 1st ACG, many pilots would need to be trained to fly multiple aircraft. The fundamental attributes, particularly intellectual flexibility, were required of the new members of Jungle Jim to overcome these obstacles and develop an efficient training program for the Air Force's first ever COIN mission.

The development of the Jungle Jim flight training programs fell on the shoulders of the respective flight commanders. They were tasked with not only building training programs for initial flight orientation in the aircraft, but also to develop the TTPs they anticipated employing in both an irregular and unconventional warfare environment. For instance, the attack aircraft pilots were required to learn how to fly at extremely low altitudes without any navigational aids, often flying as low as 50 feet above the ground.[62] Although training to fly at altitudes that low was a tactic that rarely, if ever, was used in Vietnam, it did enhance the pilots ability to use terrain features to navigate and later allowed the Air Commando pilots to accomplish dangerous missions in conditions that conventional air forces could not. For instance, Lt Col Roy C. Dalton described a RB-26 reconnaissance mission where he flew under a 400-foot cloud ceiling the

[59] Herbert H. Kissling, "Air Commando & Special Operations Chronology 1961-1991," 5, USAF Historical Records Agency, accessed March 19, 2013. The Air Force did not have the time to pull each Jungle Jim aircraft from the aircraft boneyard and instead sought to find aircraft that had been overhauled enough to make them flyable, aircraft already missing markings were of particular interest. See LeMay, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #593, 3.
[60] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 8.
[61] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 8..
[62] Dalton, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #671, 7. Dalton describes a brief introductory flight intended to acclimate pilots to low-level flight beginning at the more comfortable altitude of 2,000-4,000 feet.

entire sortie as he overflew three different targets areas.[63] The ability of the Jungle Jim aircrews to undertake such high-risk training and later adapt their training to the combat conditions they encountered in Vietnam was a direct result of the Air Commando's attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, and judgment.

Unconventional training was not limited to just the attack aircraft, the C-47s also trained to "treetop level" flights with the added difficulty of attempting the flights at night.[64] The C-47 aircrews would also concentrate on supporting ground forces in a similar fashion as their Air Commando predecessors when a small contingent of six Army Special Forces soldiers arrived at Hurlburt Field to help them develop blacked-out landing capabilities. In a similar fashion to the 1st ACG's use of lighted pots at the Broadway LZ, the SF soldiers taped paper cups over their flashlight lenses, split into two teams to mark the edges of the LZ, and then pointed their flashlights in the direction of the approaching aircraft.[65] The Air Commandos also gained a better understanding of these unconventional tactics by viewing them from the SF soldier's perspective. Most Jungle Jim aircrew would take turns holding the flashlights side-by-side with the soldiers and eventually, the loadmasters would take over these duties as the SF soldiers returned to Fort Bragg.[66]

The C-47 loadmasters would also develop techniques to improve the aircraft's airdrop capabilities during their training program.[67] Such innovations included tactics that prevented airdropped sacks of rice from breaking open upon exiting the aircraft as well as techniques for

---

[63] Dalton, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #671, 7. In addition to flying with the Jungle Jim unit, Dalton would later deploy with a detachment from the Special Air Warfare Center in support of Project Water Pump. This highly classified mission was based in Udorn, Thailand and would fly missions into Laos to attack the Communist insurgents. For an informative summary of Project Water Pump, see Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 175-178.

[64] Orr Kelly, *From a Dark Sky: The Story of U.S. Air Force Special Operations* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1996), 132. Wade Everett, a C-47 pilot, describes the harrowing flights while also disregarding conventional airspace regulations such as flights through restricted areas, air defense identification zones, and control areas. While breaking airspace restrictions is not typically a recommended training technique, it did allow the Air Commandos the opportunity to train in the types of environments they would encounter in Vietnam.

[65] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 18-19. Gleason said that the SF soldiers were really the ones with the difficult job as they had to remain in place as the aircraft attempted to land in a confined LZ, at night, and in low illumination. A slight misjudgment on the landing by the pilot could grind the soldiers in the propellers or crush them with the landing gear.

[66] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 19.

[67] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 10. King asserted that the unit's enlisted force was remarkably adept at developing innovative TTPs in spite of the minimal guidance they were given on the unit's potential mission. King stated that he was "amazed at the good ideas that came from the enlisted personnel we had on what a load master [*sic*] ought to do, and how he ought to be prepared, and what an old time crew chief ought to do—he ought to know how to change brakes and change engines and all this sort of thing—and these boys pitched in and did it, and did it well." King's statement highlights the continuing importance of the dual skills that every Air Commando should possess. King, 10.

releasing canisters of white phosphorous flares.[68] The use of the flare tactics during night attack missions provided a capability that only the Air Commandos possessed during the initial stages of US combat operations in Vietnam. The innovation demonstrated by the Air Commandos did not end with their training, but rather their intellectual flexibility would ensure the Air Commandos continued to solve creatively the problems they faced in an irregular warfare environment.

As Jungle Jim continued to train at Hurlburt Field, a small contingent of two C-47s and associated personnel deployed to Mali, West Africa on 15 August 1961.[69] Arriving at Bamako Airfield two weeks later during a severe storm, Detachment 1 of the 4400th CCTS began Operation SANDY BEACH on September 2.[70] The mission for Detachment 1 was to train Malian paratroopers and would become one of the first documented foreign training and assistance missions for the US Air Force.[71] The Air Commandos began this mission with great energy and enthusiasm, dropping 55 Mali paratroopers the first day.[72] In addition to paratrooper missions, the Air Commandos demonstrated the potential for aerial resupply missions and established a strong relationship between the two nation's forces.[73] The Air Commandos honed their operational and instructional skills during the two-month deployment and gained valuable experience that would prove vital during their next deployment. While Detachment 1 was completing the 4400th's first foreign training mission in Mali, the rest of the squadron was subjected to an Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) in September.

Standard administrative practice in the USAF requires every combat unit to pass an ORI before it is considered combat mission ready. The key difference between the 4400th and other USAF units was that Jungle Jim had been able to train for less than two months prior to the inspections because its aircraft had not even arrived until the beginning of July. In other words,

---

[68] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 35. The flares would become invaluable in illuminating ground targets during night attack missions.
[69] Kissling, "Air Commando & Special Operations Chronology 1961-1991," 5.
[70] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 10; Herbert H. Kissling, "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 30 June 1989, Volume 1," December 7, 1989, I–5, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Report classified SECRET, excerpt Unclassified).
[71] David J. Dean, *The Air Force Role in Low-Intensity Conflict* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1986), 89. The Air Commandos realized the importance of their COIN mission as Soviet transport aircraft were parked on the other side of the runway from the American's C-47s. The Soviet aircraft and their Czechoslovakian pilots were "a stark reminder that superpower rivalry was beginning to occur in some very obscure places." Dean, 89.
[72] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 10.
[73] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 26. Establishing habitual personal, training, and working relationships between US SOF advisors and the partner nation is vitally important. While habitual relationships increase the partner nation's capacity to provide for its own internal security and external defense, they also improve the interoperability between partner nations and US SOF for future combat operations.

the personnel's character attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity would the unit be able to pass the ORI.[74] The TAC inspectors, however, did not know the true nature of its mission and could only grade the unit based on what they thought would be the unit's general mission.[75] Although the 4400th CCTS easily passed the inspection and was now officially ready for its first operational combat deployment, the unit's leadership still did not know when or where this deployment would transpire.

Farm Gate

The Jungle Jim personnel did not have to wait long before they received word about their first deployment in force. On 11 October 1961, a detachment of the 4400th CCTS was authorized by President Kennedy to deploy to South Vietnam and assist the MAAG by training the VNAF.[76] Col King immediately departed for Southeast Asia to meet with the commanders Jungle Jim would be supporting as well as to gain a first-hand look at the conditions the unit would be facing in Vietnam.[77] With King's recommendation to base the detachment's operations at Bien Hoa Air Base, only 15 miles north of Saigon, the 4400th's deployments orders were finalized.[78] Detachment 2 of the 4400th CCTS was ordered to deploy to Bien Hoa Air Base on 6 November 1961 to "conduct training operations for the Vietnamese Air Force in the conduct of offensive operations utilizing tactics and techniques developed by the 4400th CCTS."[79]

Detachment 2 of the 4400th CCTS, now using the operational code name of "Farm Gate," departed Hurlburt Field immediately with a contingent of 156 personnel (41 officers and

---

[74] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 19-20. Gleason states that the primary reason the unit passed the ORI was because of "the high caliber of our personnel." Gleason, 19.

[75] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 19.

[76] Westermann, "Relegated to the Backseat," 129. The training mission, however, would remain a point of contention with Col King as he contends that he was never officially given direction to pursue training the VNAF and was only instructed to "act as a force responsive to the Ambassador and to the other U.S. military in the country. That was our sole job—to be a combat-capable force. I was told that our job would be to be a combat force responsive to USAF direction." King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 20–21.

[77] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 35–36. Upon returning to the US, King was required to brief Gen Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., commander of TAC, who would ask how quickly the 4400th could get to Vietnam. Gen Sweeney promised King that he would handle any bureaucratic details that would prohibit Jungle Jim's expeditious arrival into theater. CINCPAC also pressed the USAF to rush the detachment into theater. See also Message, CINCPAC to COFSAF, "Project Jungle Jim," November 3, 1961, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Message classified SECRET, excerpt Unclassified).

[78] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 19–21. King stated that Bien Hoa was ideal because of its "central location and its ease of covering more of Vietnam, the fact that it was more politically stable at Bien Hoa, and we [the 4400th detachment] were closer to the fountain head of command at Saigon." Additionally, Bien Hoa was approximately 200 nautical miles southwest from the Nha Trang Air Base where VNAF conducted the majority of its pilot training missions. King, 19-21.

[79] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 11. TAC Operations Plan 72 directed the 4400th CCTS to deploy for 179 days while Pacific Air Force Operations Plan 222-61 ordered the unit to Bien Hoa for its mission. See also Message, CINCPAC to COFSAF, "Project Jungle Jim."

115 enlisted men), four SC-47s, four RB-26s, and eight T-28s.[80] The movement of the unit's aircraft to the Southeast Asia Theater demonstrated the intellectual flexibility and tenacity of the Air Commandos. Col King had requested depot assistance from TAC headquarters to disassemble and crate the T-28s to ship them over to Vietnam. The TAC staff informed King they would not provide help with this issue and that the unit would have to figure out a way to get the aircraft into theater on its own. Many creative ideas were brought forward by the Air Commandos to solve this problem, including reconfiguring the T-28s to tow them behind a large transport aircraft similar to the gliders of the 1st ACG.[81] Of course, once the TAC headquarters learned of the unique methods proposed by the Jungle Jim unit, they conceded and provided airlift support for the 4400th's T-28s. While Farm Gate personnel and equipment were enroute to their destination at Bien Hoa, Admiral Harry D. Felt, the Commander in Chief of Pacific Command (CINCPAC), issued a message declaring Farm Gate's primary objective as getting "VNAF pilots checked out and combat ready in the T-28s."[82] In other words, when Farm Gate personnel and equipment completed their arrival at Bien Hoa on 24 November, they were to prepare immediately the VNAF for combat operations, further solidifying in King's mind that the unit's primary mission was combat.[83]

While waiting for official guidance on Farm Gate's combat mission and objectives, the personnel began to adapt to the conditions in South Vietnam and realized they were truly on their own. Similar to the 1st ACG in Burma, Farm Gate personnel had to provide for their own search

[80] Kissling, "History of the 1st SOW," I–5; Kissling, "Air Commando & Special Operations Chronology 1961-1991," 5–6; O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 12–13. Although reports vary as to the exact number of personnel that deployed initially with Farm Gate, most classified sources place the number around 150. All agree, however, to the number and type of aircraft that were initially deployed.

[81] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 27. Gleason described the innovative glider idea which would have required replacing "the props on the TF-28s with counterweights and have them towed in pairs behind a C-124. A pilot or two would fly in each TF-28, and they would be cut loose over each scheduled base to make a no-power landing. Each TF-28 would be equipped with an air-driven generator hung out in the slipstream to provide electrical and hydraulic power." Upon learning of this concept, the TAC staff directed the T-28s to be dissembled and they were airlifted to Clark Field in the Philippines where they would be reassembled and flown into Bien Hoa Air Base. Gleason, 27.

[82] Message, CINCPAC to CHMAAG, "Jungle Jim, Det 2," November 16, 1961, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Message classified SECRET, excerpt Unclassified).

[83] Message, CINCPAC to CHMAAG, "Status of Actions," December 13, 1961, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Message classified SECRET, excerpt Unclassified). Col King continued to believe that the true mission of Farm Gate was combat operations as directed by Gen LeMay and that any messaging was a simple cover story. King further stated that he could not discuss the unit's mission with any other commander because LeMay "was very specific in his instructions to me, that if the time came for him to give instructions, that they would be from him, and not from anyone else." In other words, King was under the impression that he answered directly to LeMay. King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 27–28.

and rescue (SAR) capability and airfield security by posting guards around the air base at night.[84] These additional tasks never caused the men to compromise their performance during their primary mission or to lose sight of why they were there in the first place.[85] The maturity and tenacity of the Farm Gate personnel directly enabled their operational self-sufficiency. After waiting for nearly a month, on 20 December 1961, Farm Gate received its operational mission and objectives from CINCPAC.[86]

The essence of the message placed combat operations on par with training responsibilities. The first lines of the message state, "Jungle Jim is an experimental unit whose bas*ic* mission is to work out tactics and techniques. Det 2, 4400th CCTS will confine its aces to do so [*sic*] Vietnam in training and operational tasks. Fulfillment of these tasks is means of helping to fight the Viet Cong."[87] Additionally, the message approved "all kinds of conventional combat and combat support flight can be flown in SVN [South Vietnam] by Det 2, 4400th CCTS provided a Vietnamese is on board for prupose [*sic*] of receiving combat or combat support training."[88] Armed with the official description of its missions, a pair of Farm Gate's T-28s flew the first USAF combat mission in South Vietnam on 26 December 1961.

Farm Gate staff were prepared for many contingencies and had placed a pair of T-28s and its aircrew on alert status since the unit's arrival at Bien Hoa.[89] Around midday on 26 December, the order to launch came from the 2nd Advanced Echelon (ADVON), the command and control element for USAF personnel in Vietnam.[90] Within an hour of notification, two Farm Gate T-28s

---

[84] Gleason, *Air Commando Chronicles*, 32.

[85] Lansdale, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #220, 19. Lansdale states that the characteristic attribute of maturity is what allowed American advisors to remain focused on their mission despite operating with minimal guidance in austere conditions.

[86] Message, CINCPAC to PACAF, "Concept of Operations and Control for Jungle Jim Unit in South Vietnam". CINCPAC divided Farm Gate's tasks into training and combat operations. For PACAF's recommendations on Farm Gate's operational missions and objectives, see Message, PACAF to CINCPAC, "Concept of Employment of Farm Gate," Message, 6 Dec 61, USAF Historical Records Agency.

[87] Message, CINCPAC to PACAF, "Concept of Operations and Control for Jungle Jim Unit in South Vietnam."

[88] Message, CINCPAC to PACAF, "Concept of Operations and Control for Jungle Jim Unit in South Vietnam."

[89] Kimes, Jr., Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #696, 5. The alert aircraft were loaded with full magazines for the 50-caliber machine guns, two 500-pound general-purpose bombs, and full pods of 2.75-inch air-to-ground rockets.

[90] Maj Gen Rollen H. Anthis, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #415, interview by Maj Dean S. Gausche and Joseph W. Grainger, August 30, 1963, 6–8, USAF Historical Records Agency. The 2nd ADVON, later renamed the 2nd Air Division, was commanded by then-Brig Gen Rollen H. Anthis. As commander of 2nd ADVON, Gen Anthis was dual-hatted as the MAAG Air Force Section Chief. Operational control of all "Farm Gate operational missions flown with USAF crewmembers aboard through CINCPACAF, Commander 13AF, and Commander 2nd ADVON. Operational missions are defined as those performed in support of RVNAF actions against the Viet Cong within the borders of SVN." Control

departed Bien Hoa and rendezvoused with two VNAF AD-6s enroute to the target area. The pre-deployment training of the Farm Gate aircrew enabled the first mission to proceed flawlessly as the T-28 pilots "bombed, strafed, fired [their] rockets, and returned to the bases" without a scratch and successfully engaged the target.[91] This initial success further fueled the Farm Gate Air Commando's desire for combat action and they would put their intellectual flexibility and tenacity toward this end.

Even though Farm Gate's combat and combat support missions continued to increase over the course of the next few months, it was plainly evident that every mission was to be a daylight-only operation. The VNAF did not have a night attack capability and the 2nd ADVON staff had erroneously assumed the same for Farm Gate. They were not aware of Farm Gate's flare modifications to the SC-47s and the development of night attack TTPs for both the T-28s and B-26s. Col King's tenacity would not allow him to sit idly as potential missions for Farm Gate, not to mention Viet Cong guerrillas, silently slipped away in the night. He flew to Saigon and met with the 2nd ADVON operations officer to inform him of Farm Gate's night attack capabilities and to announce that a Farm Gate reconnaissance mission had discovered a potential supply depot on an isolated island in the Mekong Delta.[92] Intrigued by the notion of another specialized air capability, the 2nd ADVON staff requested a visual reconnaissance of the proposed target before approving a Farm Gate night attack mission. A C-47 piloted by both King and Gleason flew the reconnaissance mission and reported the target was various "supplies stacked up on this little island with a bunch of sampans hooked up in there."[93] Upon receiving confirmation of the order to attack from the 2nd ADVON staff, a mixture of Farm Gate SC-47s, T-28s, and B-26s commenced the unit's first night combat attack and "completely wipe[d] this little island out and destroyed all the sampans and destroyed all the goods . . . we completely wiped it out."[94] The aircrews of Farm Gate demonstrated a night attack capability that would provide invaluable fire support to SF camps throughout Vietnam in the future. The foresight of

---

of the unit's training and assistance missions would be through the MAAG. In other words, Brig Gen Anthis would be involved in the control, operational or training, of every Farm Gate mission. Message, PACAF to CINCPAC, "Concept of Employment of Farm Gate," 5.

[91] Kimes, Jr., Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #696, 5; Anthis, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #415, 8. Anthis states that only Farm Gate aircrew flew the T-28 mission because the 2nd ADVON could not relay the VNAF aircrew requirement before the aircraft departed Bien Hoa. Anthis further asserts that the requirement was followed for the remainder of Farm Gate's operations.

[92] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 52.

[93] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 52–53.

[94] King, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219, 54–55. After the successful night attack, Farm Gate would place a flare-equipped SC-47 on night alert with the T-28s in order to provide for a quick reaction night attack force. The night missions would remain a Farm Gate core capability because the VNAF would never progress to that point.

these Air Commandos to search for unique capabilities was enabled by their intellectual flexibility. It was the Air Commandos traits of maturity, judgment, and tenacity that further helped them develop the specialized night capability while still maintaining the high performance standard of "destroy[ing] one shack with one bomb."[95]

By 7 January 1962, Farm Gate had flown 59 missions, including airstrikes, reconnaissance, airlift, and airdrop missions.[96] The early success of Farm Gate's Air Commandos prompted the Air Staff at the Pentagon to authorize a dramatic 100 percent increase in the size of the unit.[97] The rapid increases in personnel and aircraft for the 4400th CCTS prompted TAC headquarters to reorganize the unit as the 4400th Combat Crew Training Group (CCTG) with the 4400th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 4400th Air Transportation Squadron Light, and 4400th Air Material Squadron organized beneath it.[98] The USAF continued the growth and reorganization of its irregular warfare capability by establishing the Special Air Warfare Center on 27 April 1962, and the redesignation of the 4400th CCTG as the new 1st Air Commando Group.[99]

Although the 1st ACG [Vietnam] and its units continued to increase their personnel numbers, every individual assigned to the group was still required to "undergo extensive psychological testing, both written and oral, to determine his compatibility for counterinsurgency type of operations and to predict his actions in a moment of stress."[100] The 1st ACG [Vietnam] was able to continue the stringent selection process for a little while longer, but in following years the attrition rate through personnel washouts within this formal selection process became too high to sustain the unit's desired growth rate. To meet its personnel requirements, the 1st ACG [Vietnam] lowered the personnel standards as its predecessor had done in WWII.[101] The process of growth and expansion of the 1st ACG [Vietnam] continued to require reorganization, with the establishment of the 1st Air Commando Wing on 1 June 1963. The attributes of intellectual

---

[95] Message, PACAF to TAC, Message, February 28, 1962, 2, USAF Historical Records Agency. The required proficiency in bombing was directed because the jungle environments prevented area targeting. The message also included requirements and areas for increased proficiency for each aircraft of Farm Gate.
[96] Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 246.
[97] Kissling, "History of the 1st SOW," I–6.
[98] Kissling, "History of the 1st SOW," I–6. The total personnel authorized for the new 1st ACG was 221 officers and 581 airmen, more than double the size of the Jungle Jim unit.
[99] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 18–19.
[100] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 139-140. The unit history states that 107 personnel were assigned to the 1st ACG during the period of July 1 through December 31, 1962. Each individual reporting for the assignment received the psychological evaluation as part of the final selection process for the 1st ACG.
[101] Doyle, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #269, 7. Doyle states that when the unit began rapidly "expanding the program they could not take this fall out rate, so it is easier to get into the commandos now. However, we are sticking to the patriotism and stability requirement."

flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity, however, continued to aid the Air Commandos in performing "a job that requires great skill and knowledge, [while] producing such excellent results."[102]

By the end of 1962, the nearly 200 Farm Gate personnel had trained enough Vietnamese pilots to establish a second VNAF fighter squadron at Nha Trang Air Base.[103] Although the Farm Gate training mission increased the VNAF's capabilities significantly, Gen Anthis asserted the primary obstacle to further "expanding the Vietnamese Air Force—a precondition to removing the USAF elements—was the shortage of pilots."[104] For instance, during June 1962 the VNAF flew just 412 of the 1,029 airstrike requests.[105] The shortage of VNAF pilots increased the demand for combat air support sorties from the Farm Gate pilots. The escalation of American involvement in the Vietnam War from 1964 had a significant impact on advisory efforts. Advisory efforts took a back seat to direct US combat actions on the battlefield. Farm Gate, as well as efforts to develop conventional air capabilities for the South Vietnamese, were expanded quickly in the belief that "once these crises had passed and peaceful conditions existed, USAF forces could be withdrawn, leaving an evenly proportioned VNAF."[106] Farm Gate was irrecoverably altered in its scope and character rendering future advisory efforts incapable of achieving this objective.

Significance

The establishment of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron on 14 April 1961 revitalized the Air Commando heritage. The Jungle Jim unit was created as an answer to a geostrategic challenge, built by personnel with specific attributes, and developed highly specialized air capabilities that became enduring requirements. By the end of 1962 alone, the Air Commandos of Detachment 2, 4400th CCTS, had flown more than 4,000 sorties, expended more than 508,000 pieces of ordnance, destroyed or damaged more than 4,100 structures, caused more than 3,800 enemy casualties, and trained 37 VNAF pilots.[107] The significance of these

---

[102] Capt Francisco Machado, Jr., *End of Tour Report* (315th Air Commando Group (TC), August 10, 1965), 1, USAF Historical Records Agency.
[103] Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia*, 151. By mid-August 1962, US military personnel in Vietnam totaled 11,412—2,282 Air Force, 7,946 Army, 643 Navy, and 541 Marine Corps.
[104] Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia*, 152.
[105] Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia*, 152. Although the VNAF was only able to fly 412 sorties in June 1962, this was a significant increase from the 150 sorties they were able fly six months prior.
[106] Capt E. Vallentiny, *VNAF FAC Operations in SVN*, Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, January 28, 1969, 7.
[107] O'Neill, "History of the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (TAC): 1962," 151–159. Of the 1,853 T-28s sorties for the year, over 90% were flown at night. The ordinance expenditure numbers included those of rockets, general-purpose bombs, napalm, fragmentary clusters, and machine gun ammunition.

achievements, however, belies Farm Gate's primary VNAF training and capacity building mission. In other words, the Air Commandos focused on performing the combat missions themselves rather than on the training the host nation air force. These remarkable achievements continued to increase each year as the personnel of Farm Gate voluntarily embarked upon dangerous, high-risk missions in antiquated WWII-era aircraft.

President Kennedy had challenged each military service to develop a counterinsurgency capability to attack the Communist-backed wars of liberation. Although American airpower in previous conflicts had been used in unconventional ways, it had never before been used as a means to combat an insurgency or to train foreign air forces. The Air Commandos of Jungle Jim were able to develop unique capabilities in irregular warfare through their maturity, judgment, intellectual flexibility, and tenacity, resulting from its rigorous and formalized personnel selection process. The Air Commandos of Jungle Jim, and subsequently of Farm Gate, were able to ingeniously revolutionize the "junk" aircraft they were given by the USAF and exploit each aircraft's flexibility through innovative development of unique tactics to provide distinctive irregular warfare capabilities.[108]

Although the 1st ACG of WWII established the foundational attributes, the Air Commandos of the 4400th CCTS perpetuated their necessity. Unfortunately, the high personnel standards established by Jungle Jim's formal selection process succumbed to the unit's increased demand for more personnel to meet increasing global mission requirements. Although a formalized personnel selection process remained a requirement for only a select few Air Commando units, the pattern for easing entrance into an Air Force special operations unit during times of increased demand had been established. In the wake of 11 September 2001, however, the Air Commandos would require the heritage and legacy of the 1st ACG [Burma] and Jungle Jim, as they were thrust to forefront of the Global War on Terror.

[108] LeMay, Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #592, 42.

Chapter 5

The Air Commando's Evolution

Our special qualifications and capabilities more often make AFSOC assets the solution to the problem. Our heritage is long, distinguished, and hard-earned. We've evolved, improved our technology, learned from past experience, matured as a command and yet, we are the same as our forefathers; we are Air Commandos.

—Maj Gen James L. Hobson, *AFSOC Strategic Plan: A Step Ahead*, 1999

Our airmen must possess the mental agility, resilience and cultural awareness to overcome challenges posed by shifts in the human terrain and operating environment. Our AFSOC warriors must remain ready and capable of defeating America's current and future adversaries. I challenge all Air Commandos to find the next "magic" for when our nation calls on us again and to actively engage in our pursuit of a responsive, relevant, and flexible warfighting force.

—Lt Gen Eric E. Fiel, *AFSOC 2012 Strategic Vision*

The fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975 officially ended the Vietnam War for the US. The end of that war began a new chapter in the Air Commandos saga. This chapter opens with the near extinction of Air Commandos. Air Force special operations forces struggled over the next quarter-century to retain, rebuild, and improve their specialized air capabilities until the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11) thrust the Air Commandos into another irregular conflict. The Air Commandos were the first SOF elements to respond on 9/11 to New York and Washington, and they continue to be at the forefront of each successive Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO). This chapter discusses the evolution of the Air Commandos since 9/11 and the significance that AFSOC's rapid growth has had on their fundamental character attributes. The importance of the possible changes in Air Commando heritage is better understood in the examination of how AFSOC's personnel selection processes have evolved in response to the requirements of the post-9/11 security environment.

AFSOF's Post-Vietnam Struggle

The Vietnam experience largely contributed to the overwhelming belief by military leaders that they would "never again" send forces into a war, particularly low-intensity conflicts, without the "full support" of the American public.[1] US military leaders were frustrated and their forces largely broken after its experience in the Vietnam War. In addition, American public opinion toward the US military had deteriorated. These frustrations led to the reduction in size, or

[1] Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1997), 34.

in some cases, the eventual elimination of most SOF units from the Department of Defense, as they were seen by the conventional forces "as less than professional."[2] The Air Commandos were nearly eradicated as the Air Force emphasized and subsequently funded conventional capabilities to counter the Soviet and Warsaw Pact threat to Europe and the major conventional operations of a potential Third World War. The resulting deterioration of specialized capabilities throughout the 1970s left AFSOF severely undermanned, underequipped, and nominally effective. However, the need for AFSOF's specialized air capabilities would be tested sooner rather than later.

Iranian radicals overran the US embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979, seizing 53 Americans as their hostages. While US political leaders immediately began diplomatic efforts to secure the release of the American hostages, military leaders in the Pentagon began planning a military rescue of the hostages, Operation EAGLE CLAW, from deep inside Iranian territory. The significant degradation to the capabilities and force structure of American SOF was revealed by the lack of a joint hostage rescue capability and long-range helicopters.[3] The plan for Operation EAGLE CLAW required significant airlift support in the form of AFSOF MC-130Es and EC-130s, Air Force C-141s, and Navy RH-53D Sea Stallions to infiltrate Army Rangers as well as specialized counterterrorism soldiers.[4] The ambitious rescue operation contained

---

[2] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 35.

[3] Paul B. Ryan, *The Iranian Rescue Mission: Why It Failed* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 41–43. The Navy possessed the only helicopters with sufficient range to conduct the planned operation, but they were not special operations helicopters. Army Maj Gen James B. Vaught, the Task Force commander, initially wanted to use Marine pilots in the pilot's seat and Navy pilots in the copilot's position. Vaught believed the Marines would be better suited for operations over land while the Naval pilots were most familiar with the flight characteristics of the RH-53D Sea Stallion. The first mission rehearsal revealed that a majority of the pilots were incapable of performing the special night, low-level formations required for the mission. Vaught sought to remedy this by requesting "twenty of the best pilots in the armed forces." Over two hundred pilots were screened and 18 Marine pilots, two Navy pilots, and one Air Force pilot were selected. The post-mission report acknowledged that AFSOF helicopter pilots were available and in particular, H-53 pilots. Although the USAF's H-53 was a different variant of the Navy's platform, the report stated that "Jungle Jim had demonstrated that a pilot could transition with relative ease to an aircraft of similar design and performance. But this same pilot would find it much harder to learn the novel, unique, skills required for covert missions. That is to say, a pilot could learn to fly another helicopter model more easily than he could acquire a new psychological attitude to cope with the dangers of special operations." AFSOF pilots would have already possessed the character attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity required for this operation whereas the Marine and Navy pilots probably did not. Ryan, 42-43.

[4] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 1; James H. Kyle, *The Guts to Try: The Untold Story of the Iran Hostage Rescue Mission by the On-Scene Desert Commander*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Orion Books, 1990), 39. Air Force Col (ret) Kyle was the on-scene commander at Desert One and was intimately involved throughout the planning process, execution, and post-mission reporting. During the planning process, Kyle describes the USAF's "pitifully small" special operations force structure, of which there were only seven MC-130s with the air refueling modification available worldwide for the operation—four were in PACAF and the remaining three were at Hurlburt Field, FL. Kyle, 39.

significant operational risk as it "depended on its personnel and equipment operating to extreme limits of their capabilities."[5] Operation EAGLE CLAW tested the operational limits of SOF post-Vietnam.

On 24 April 1980, two EC-130s and four MC-130s departed Masirah, Oman, and eight RH-53Ds departed from the USS Nimitz enroute for Desert One.[6] Upon arrival at Desert One, only five of the minimum required six helicopters were operational and could continue with the mission. In addition, the remote landing site was discovered and compromised by Iranian commercial road traffic. Army Col Charlie A. Beckwith, the counterterrorism force commander, and USMC Lt Col Edward R. Seiffert, helicopter flight commander, debated whether the mission could continue with either fewer soldiers or reduced fuel loads on the helicopters to carry the additional soldiers, but eventually concluded that the mission should be aborted.[7] After USAF Col James H. Kyle, the on-scene commander, relayed the decision and President Jimmy Carter approved the recommendation, the helicopters and MC-130s began to maneuver for departure.

One of the helicopters positioned behind a parked MC-130 began to lift off and was immediately enveloped in a cloud of dust.[8] Due to the reduced visibility, the pilots became disoriented and allowed the helicopter's main rotor to contact the rear of the parked MC-130, causing a violent explosion that killed three of the Marine crewmen aboard the helicopter and five of the MC-130 crew.[9] All told, five helicopters were abandoned at Desert One and the remaining personnel were loaded aboard the remaining MC-130s and flown out of Iran. Within days of the incident, news of the operation's failure spread across the world as the Iranians broadcast images of the crash site to further embarrass the United States and President Jimmy Carter while the U.S.

[5] Joel Nadel and J. R Wright, *Special Men and Special Missions: Inside American Special Operations Forces, 1945 to the Present* (London, UK: Greenhill Books, 1994), 93. A report after the failed operation concluded that the mission only had a 60-70 percent chance of success from the outset and that "essentially, there was little or no margin for error and somewhere along the line, inevitably, error occurs." Nadel, 93.
[6] Kyle, *The Guts to Try*, 235–240. The EC-130s were transferred from Military Airlift Command to AFSOF for use in EAGLE CLAW and were subsequently flown by special operations pilots. The plan called for the MC-130s to lead the EC-130s into Desert One at night in a low-level trail formation for a blacked-out landing. The EC-130s were to be used as the "Bladder Birds" with each aircraft configured to carry two 3,000-gallon fuel bladders for refueling the helicopters at Desert One. Kyle, 150.
[7] Kyle, *The Guts to Try*, 292. The only options were to reduce the helicopters weight by dumping 1,500-pounds of fuel to carry the Delta soldiers, or Col Beckwith would have to assault the Iranian compound with 20 less soldiers.
[8] Kyle, *The Guts to Try*, 295. The helicopter, Bluebeard 3, was unable to ground taxi because its nose wheel was damaged while landing and had to air-taxi the helicopter to maneuver clear of the parked MC-130 in order to take off. It was during the helicopter's initial lift-off from parking that it struck the rear of the MC-130 in front of it.
[9] Ryan, *The Iranian Rescue Mission*, 87–90.

public clamored for an explanation.[10]

The explanation for this arrived via an official enquiry, the Holloway Commission. This commission, chartered by Joint Chiefs of Staff and chaired by the Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James Holloway, investigated the causes of the tragedy and concluded there were "serious shortcomings in the ability of the United States to equip, employ, and command special operations forces effectively in complex, high-risk operations."[11] The members of the commission made two key recommendations in their report: the DOD should establish a Counterterrorist Joint Task Force and a Special Operations Advisory Panel.[12] While these reforms were eventually implemented, two more highly visible incidents prompted Congress to press for more far-reaching SOF reform.

On 23 October 1983, the Islamic Jihad (later known as Hezbollah) detonated a car bomb outside the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 237 Marines. Two days later, the US launched Operation URGENT FURY in Grenada to rescue American medical students from a military coup that had toppled the local government. The success of the terrorist attacks in Lebanon, as well as the apparent and highly publicized command and control problems in Grenada, "refocused Congressional attention on the growing threat of low-intensity conflict and on the issue of joint interoperability."[13] The DOD's initial response created the Joint Special Operations Agency (JSOA) on 1 January 1984, but it was not granted command or operational authority over any SOF.[14] The JSOA did not address or correct the fundamental command and control issues that had continued to plague SOF since the EAGLE CLAW catastrophe.

US Senators Sam Nunn and William Cohen were not satisfied with the DOD's response and they drafted the Nunn-Cohen Amendment. The Amendment called for the creation of "a unified combatant command headed by a four-star general for all SOF, an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD [SO/LIC]), a coordinating board for low-intensity conflict within the National Security Council, and a new Major Force

[10] Ryan, *The Iranian Rescue Mission*, 105. Within minutes of President Ronald Reagan's inauguration on January 20, 1981, all of the American hostages were released by the Iranians.
[11] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 72-73. The conclusions of the Holloway Commission focused on the poorly defined command and control relationships in addition to the fact that a joint, comprehensive mission rehearsal was never conducted. The findings and recommendations from the Holloway Commission were the first steps in the reformation and rebuilding America's SOF capabilities.
[12] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 73; Nadel and Wright, *Special Men and Special Missions*, 93.
[13] United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 5.
[14] United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 5. The Joint Special Operations Agency did not address the fundamental issues of SOF preparation or capabilities.

Program (MFP-11) or specific funding stream for acquisition for SOF."[15] The unified combatant command, US Special Operations Command, was activated on 16 April 1987 to oversee the interoperability and command and control of all SOF while also providing SOF with control of its own resources through MPF-11. Now under the control of USSOCOM, SOF would not have to be created on an ad hoc basis in response to an operational necessity and then deactivated or destroyed when their capabilities were no longer needed. In essence, the Nunn-Cohen Amendment institutionalized SOF.

Gen Larry D. Welch, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, established Air Force Special Operations Command, the Air Force component to the USSOCOM, on 22 May 1990. The formal establishment of AFSOC was acknowledgement that "unique, specialized equipment operated by specially trained pilots and crews" was required for the complex, high-risk missions now under USSOCOM's command.[16] What the Air Force component was missing, however, was the recognition that specialized training was not sufficient and that a selection process was necessary to ensure AFSOC personnel possessed the fundamental character traits. The importance of having some type of personnel selection process, as evidenced by the Air Commandos in WWII and those of Jungle Jim during Vietnam, was largely forgotten after Desert One until a few fatal training accidents following Operation DESERT STORM reinvigorated AFSOC's interest in personnel selection.

The resounding success of Operation DESERT STORM in early 1991 provided many AFSOC aircrews with valuable combat experience. This success, however, also began to instill a state of recklessness in some of the crews. By 1992, several aircraft mishaps began to concern the AFSOC Operations Officer, Col Lee Hess. The aircrew's lack of maturity and judgment had begun to manifest itself in their flight performance and Col Hess realized that more needed to be done in selecting personnel into the AFSOC community, particularly for the MH-53 Pave Low. The Commando Look selection program was initiated by Col Hess to remove the community's "cowboy image" and to provide a selection process similar to the other components of USSOCOM.[17]

---

[15] United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 7.
[16] Nadel and Wright, *Special Men and Special Missions*, 217. Although Nadel and Wright acknowledge that a lesson learned from EAGLE CLAW was the importance of having specialized aircrew to conduct special air missions with specialized aircraft, they contend that conventional aircraft and crews undertook most special operations prior to the failed operation. In other words, the authors have fallen into the trap of linking special air capabilities solely to specialized aircraft without recognizing that its aircrew require specific character attributes, in addition to specialized equipment and training, to provide the required capabilities.
[17] Darrel D. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride: A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2012), 355.

The Commando Look program recommended a four-day orientation at Hurlburt Field that included a psychological evaluation, underwater helicopter egress training, a night vision goggle (NVG) flight on a Pave Low, and informal meetings with other Pave Low crewmembers.[18] Col Norton Schwartz, the 1st Special Operations Group (1 SOG) commander, approved the recommendations and suggested the program be considered for other AFSOC aircraft as well.[19] The Commando Look selection program was nearly identical in structure to its Jungle Jim predecessor. It was a formal process that actively sought to identify recruits with the fundamental attributes but also combined informal personal associations to identify a recruit's "acceptableness" to personnel already in the community.[20] The Commando Look selection program remained relatively unchanged for the rest of the Pave Low's existence, but its expansion to other AFSOC aircrew was never fully realized.

The majority of the remaining AFSOC crews were "selected" simply based upon their experience, often requiring at least one operational tour in another conventional aircraft.[21] Although the formal selection program of the Pave Low community and the screening criteria for the remainder of the aircrew enabled AFSOC to successfully mature its capabilities throughout the remainder of the 1990s, the Command was still relatively small in terms of its personnel.[22] In

---

[18] Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 356.
[19] Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 356.
[20] At one of the initial Commando Look evaluations, recruits were told, "Being in special operations requires a total commitment . . . we need people who accept risks and sacrifices as well. Special operators have to have candor in knowing that when needed, they'll respond . . . Special operations is high-risk, high gain, the most demanding [missions]." This statement emphasized the importance of the Air Commando attributes, particularly tenacity, maturity, and judgment. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 373-374.
[21] The experience levels required by most AFSOC platforms only required previous flight experience without actually stating minimum flight hours or years of experience necessary. The MC-130H, however, was one notable exception as pilots and navigators were required to have obtained tactical low-level experience. For an interesting comparison of MC-130H and the Army's MH-47E selection and assessment programs, see Matthew A. Powell, "Keeping the Dagger Sharp: A Comparison of MC-130H and MH-47E Selection and Training Methods" (US Army Command and General Staff College, 2005), http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA437057&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf. Additionally, because of the experience requirement most AFSOC communities would not accept lieutenants into their organizations. It was believed they did not possess the requisite experience or maturity to handle special operations missions. Although Col James Slife was one of the first Lieutenants accepted into the Pave Low community, he had served as a first assignment instructor pilot (FAIP) at Fort Rucker, AL, and had gained valuable experience. For more information on the Pave Low selection process see James C. Slife, Transcript of Oral History Interview #53, interview by Darrel D. Whitcomb, January 20, 2010, USAF Historical Records Agency; Matthew A. Powell, "Keeping the Dagger Sharp: A Comparison of MC-130H and MH-47E Selection and Training Methods" (US Army Command and General Staff College, 2005).
[22] In 1999, AFSOC personnel totaled 9,702 of the 360,590 total personnel in the Air Force (this includes active, reserve, national guardsmen, and civilians). Therefore, AFSOC accounted for only slightly more than two percent of the total USAF personnel. Likewise, AFSOC personnel only accounted for 21 percent of all the SOF personnel in USSOCOM. Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, *United States Air Force Statistical Digest Fiscal Year 1999* (Washington, DC: Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Financial

other words, the pool of potentially qualified and experienced AFSOF recruits ensured basic screening criteria were sufficient as a selection process for most AFSOC communities without detrimentally affecting their mission. The availability of experienced personnel, however, quickly evaporated within a few short years as the Vietnam generation retired and their replacements had little or no combat experience after 1980.

A Different Kind of War

The 9/11 hijackings and crashing of four commercial airlines by al Qaeda-backed terrorists was the most historically significant terrorist attack on US soil. No one in the defense community was prepared for a domestic attack on the scale of 9/11, but many Americans responded immediately to assist with the rescue and recovery effort. As US fighter aircraft raced to get airborne to prevent further airborne attacks, MH-53s from Hurlburt Field were the first military aircraft to respond to both the rescue efforts at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.[23] The specialized capabilities of the AFSOC crews were instrumental in performing rescue missions that were impossible for any other aircraft or crew to accomplish. By the time the Air Commandos began their return to Hurlburt Field a week later, planning had already begun to forcibly remove al Qaeda and their Taliban supporters in the desolate and hostile terrain of Afghanistan.

Congress responded to the events of 9/11 by passing a joint resolution authorizing the use of force against the terrorists on September 14th.[24] A few days later, in a speech to Congress on 20 September, President George W. Bush demanded justice for the recent acts of terrorism and directed the course of action that has guided the US military for more than a decade:

> This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat. Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen.[25]

Management and Comptroller of the Air Force), 2000), 34; United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Forces 1998 Posture Statement* (Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, 1998), 17.

[23] Pave Low crews, support personnel, and aircraft were already positioned at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to support a scheduled joint exercise. Within hours of the attacks in New York and Washington, DC, the crews were alerted and airborne enroute to McGuire AFB, New Jersey eventually arriving at 11:00 p.m. that night. Over the course of the next week, the Air Commandos supported several organizations to conduct search and rescue (SAR) missions. For more information on MH-53 missions immediately following 9/11, see Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 494–499.

[24] Tom Lansford, *9/11 and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: A Chronology and Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 210.

[25] George W. Bush, "Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress," in *Selected Speeches of*

President Bush's "long struggle" commenced on 7 October 2001, with the bombing of targets in the heartland of Afghanistan, officially named Operation EDURING FREEDOM (OEF).[26]

Long known as the "graveyard of empires," Afghanistan presented US Central Command (CENTCOM) planners with a difficult and complex challenge, as there was no operational plan built for major contingencies in the country.[27] Conventional forces could not be ready to in time to launch a quick offensive and the terrain prohibited infiltrating large military formations until the airfields and surrounding areas could be secured. Additionally, US political leaders wanted to respond quickly while minimizing the amount of troops on the ground. In response, Special Operations Command, Central (SOCCENT) planners devised a SOF-led unconventional warfare campaign that was briefed to Gen Tommy Franks, CENTCOM commander, who replied, "Okay. Do it."[28] The specialized air capabilities of AFSOC's Air Commandos were to be instrumental in spearheading the initial drive into Afghanistan and were heavily tasked for the remainder of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Unlike their predecessors in WWII and Vietnam, the Air Commandos of 9/11 did not have to be created in response to the crisis. They did not have to select aircraft and modify them while simultaneously developing new tactics to provide unique and specialized air capabilities. The majority of the initial OEF Air Commandos, however, were not subjected to a rigorous formal or informal selection and assessment process but were screened through normal Air Force personnel processes. These Air Commandos did have the important benefit of time but did not have to develop rapidly their specialized capabilities in a combat environment as did the Air Commandos of the 1st ACG in Burma or Farm Gate in Vietnam. The newest Air Commandos

---

President George W. Bush 2001 – 2008 (Washington, DC, 2009), 69, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf. Also in his speech, President Bush famously announced that "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime." This speech would become the catalyst for the Global War on Terror. Bush, 69.

[26] Bush, "Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress," 69; United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 88.

[27] Lansford, *9/11 and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq*, 41. Both the British in the 1800s and the Soviets in the 1980s embarked upon military operations aimed at seizing control of Afghanistan due to its historic importance for the Silk Road. Although both nations were significantly stronger than the warring tribes of Afghanistan, neither the British nor the Soviets could secure a decisive victory, suffering many casualties during the fighting.

[28] The first SOF team into Afghanistan was an Army SF Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) team, ODA 595, on 19 October 2001. The 12-man team was augmented by two AFSOC CCT members and rendezvoused with Afghan Gen Abdul Rashid Dostum and his Northern Alliance forces. Over the course of the next six months, SOF concentrated its operations on seven major areas: Mazar-e Sharif, Konduz, and Taleqan in the north; Kabul, the Shah-i-Kot Valley, and the Tora Bora mountains in the east; and Kandahar in the south. United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 87.

were able to develop their capabilities and personnel through numerous training exercises, peacetime engagements, and various theater-level conflicts.[29] The OEF Air Commandos were trained, ready, and "ideally suited for this type of mission where there is no margin for error."[30] The Air Commando's preparation and experience allowed them to overcome the considerable challenges of the initial OEF plan and directly enabled the first success of the new Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

By December 2001 Al Qaeda camps were destroyed and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan ousted. By 11 December an interim government for the country was established with Hamid Karzai as the Prime Minister.[31] SOF's preparation and opening of Bagram Airfield (approximately 30 nautical miles north of Kabul) in November enabled the flow of additional forces and supplies into the country. By the conclusion of Operation ANACONDA in March 2002, the focus of SOF began to shift toward "enhancing the security institutions of the interim government, mainly through training and advising Afghan forces."[32] AFSOC's precision fire support, specialized air mobility into hostile and contested environments, terminal guidance of CAS strikes, combat search and rescue (CSAR), and psychological operations missions contributed significantly to the early success of SOF missions in OEF. The Air Commandos' success, however, was not simply a matter of specialized aircraft or capabilities but was based also on the Air Commando characteristic attributes.

The success of the Air Commandos in the early stages of OEF was due to the fact they overcame the daunting challenges of operating in a hostile and austere environment while

[29] Since the establishment of USSOCOM, Air Commandos have participated in numerous and varied types of operations. Air Commandos were significant participants during Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, Operation DESERT STORM in Iraq, Operation UNITED SHIELD in Somalia, and Operation ALLIED FORCE in Kosovo. While the operations listed are by no means all-inclusive, they do represent the broad experience Air Force special operators received prior to missions in OEF. For more information on SOF operations from 1987 until the present, see United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command."

[30] United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Forces 1998 Posture Statement*, 1998, 11.

[31] The unconventional warfare mission slowly began to give way to a foreign internal defense (FID) mission. Although the overarching mission of SOF may have changed, they still accomplished countless special reconnaissance and direct action missions to locate and remove high-level al Qaeda and Taliban leaders that were still operating inside of Afghanistan. Operation ANACONDA was a joint force comprised of Afghan militia, US and coalition SOF, and conventional forces to destroy one of the last remaining major concentrations of enemy combatants. The operation into the Shah-i-Kot Valley began on 2 March 2002 and concluded on 19 March. US and coalition forces destroyed a significant number of the enemy force but the "less than desirable" outcome of the operation has received numerous criticisms. For more information on SOF actions during ANACONDA, see United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 88–94.

[32] United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 106.

providing unique air capabilities in support of other SOF.[33] Although the majority of the Air Commandos were not specifically selected according to the fundamental attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity, the majority of the Air Commandos possessed some combination of these traits. The fact that the Air Commandos were able to achieve significant results without a comprehensive selection process often masks its importance to some SOF leaders. What their success proves, however, was the concept introduced in Chapter 2 that asserted individuals could be trained to achieve high levels of performance through rigorous and extensive training. The Air Commandos entering into OEF had been able to train and prepare considerably for the types of operations they performed in Afghanistan, but the next conflict would not allow the same luxury.

While operations in OEF were still in early stages during January 2002, the CENTCOM staff developed operations plan (OPLAN) 1003V for an invasion of Iraq.[34] The OPLAN conceived attacks across five different fronts with SOF infiltrating into two separate areas—the Kurdish Autonomous Zone in northern Iraq and in the western desert—while conventional forces were to drive in from Kuwait with air support flowing in from the Saudi Arabian border and Persian Gulf.[35] Information operations (IO) constituted the fifth front in an effort to bombard the Iraqis with messages encouraging their surrender. A key difference in the new OPLAN from previous versions, however, was that SOCCENT's vision of an unconventional warfare campaign in southern Iraq to motivate anti-Saddam forces was removed in favor of CENTCOM's plan for a rapid drive and capture of Baghdad.[36] In other words, unlike the SOF-led operations that were ongoing in OEF, the Iraq plan was primarily a conventional effort with SOF securing key terrain

[33] Specific missions of the Air Commandos in early OEF are not included in this document as they are largely still classified. For more information see Air Force Special Operations Command, "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2002" (Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2002), USAF Historical Records Agency, (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt Unclassified).

[34] United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History: 20th Anniversary* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: United States Special Operations Command History and Research Office, 2007), 113.

[35] The Army's 3rd Infantry Division and the USMC's I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) led the drive from Kuwait. Navy SEALs supported the conventional forces out of Kuwait by seizing the oil fields on the Al Faw peninsula near the Iraq-Iran border. The SOF insertions into western Iraq were intended to search and destroy Iraqi SCUD missile systems in the desert. The northern SOF units were intended to conduct an unconventional warfare campaign with the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History: 20th Anniversary*, 113.

[36] For more information on the political and military strategy that influenced the development of the OPLAN and the initial results of the OIF campaign, see Catherine Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 28, 2008), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34387.pdf.

and providing targeting information to enable and support the main effort into Baghdad.[37]

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) began on the night of 19 March 2003 with the initial airstrikes and the insertion of SF ODA teams far into the western desert and the southern interior of Iraq. The first mission to launch was a seven-ship flight of MH-53s from the 20th Special Operations Squadron (20th SOS) that delivered elements of the 5th Special Forces Group (5th SFG) ODA teams into south-central Iraq.[38] While attempting to land at their designated LZ, the helicopters encountered brownout conditions, causing one of the helicopters to crash.[39] Only minor injuries were sustained, and the remaining helicopter crews finished delivering their teams and returned to Kuwait to refuel quickly and load the last ODA elements into the remaining six helicopters in order to complete the infiltration by dawn. This opening mission of OIF demonstrates the importance of the four fundamental character attributes—tenacity in particular—as the MH-53 crews were able to overcome witnessing the crash and remain focused on the larger, strategic mission they were to accomplish.[40]

Other SOF missions were conducted three days later, on 22 March, when MC-130H Talon IIs flew the first ODA teams into northern Iraq. This mission was critical to the overall campaign as the ODA and Peshmerga were to fix the Iraqi divisions north of Baghdad to prevent them from turning to the south and engaging the US main effort.[41] The mission was considered very risky and dangerous because of the heavily defended airspace and long-range infiltration.[42] Only the Air Commandos possessed the specialized air mobility capabilities to conduct this

---

[37] United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History: 20th Anniversary*, 114. US and coalition SOF support to the conventional forces included special reconnaissance missions and protecting critical infrastructure and logistics nodes while also directly attacking Iraqi forces.

[38] Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 556.

[39] Slife, Transcript of Oral History Interview #53, 66–67. The helicopter's nose gear collapsed during the landing, which pitched the helicopter violently and caused the main rotor blades to strike the ground. The helicopter was destroyed and the crew was recovered by another MH-53.

[40] Slife, Transcript of Oral History Interview #53, 69. Col Slife, then the 20th SOS DO, described the return landing in Kuwait as chaos for the crews. Although behind schedule and nearing dawn, the crews were determined to continue with the mission. Out of the original six crews for the mission, only one had to be replaced by another crew prior to commencing the second sortie because they were emotionally unfit to continue.

[41] The term *fix* is a commonly used tactical term by most US and NATO ground forces. Fix is a mission task that directs a ground unit to prevent an enemy from maneuvering any portion of his force from a specific location. For more information, see United States Department of the Army, *Field Manual 1-02: Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2004), I–81, http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm1_02.pdf.

[42] United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History: 20th Anniversary*, 115. The mission was made considerably longer as Turkey had emplace airspace restrictions that prevented US and coalition aircraft from transiting Turkish airspace into Iraq. These restrictions forced air mobility assets to transit through heavily defended Iraqi airspace in the initial stages of the operation while coalition airpower quickly attempted to destroy the Iraqi air defenses.

mission, known as "Ugly Baby."[43] The MC-130 crews flew through heavy anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) and inserted the ODAs into Kurdish territory. Although the mission was ultimately successful, one aircraft suffered significant AAA damage and was forced to divert into Turkey.[44] The ODAs began calling in airstrikes to destroy the Iraqi defenses, enabling subsequent missions to be flown over the next several days delivering additional forces into the area. Although the MC-130 crews demonstrated the same character traits as the Pave Low crews mentioned earlier, the difference between the two instances was the lack of a selection process for the former. Through extensive training and preparation, however, the MC-130 crews were able to mitigate the risk caused from a lack of selection process and perform these difficult and dangerous missions. Undoubtedly, a majority of the MC-130 crewmembers possessed the fundamental attributes, but those that did not would become increasingly difficult to manage, especially as the GWOT would increase the demand for the Air Commandos capabilities.[45]

The speed of advance of US and coalition ground forces, backed by overwhelming air and sea power, led to the fall of Baghdad on 9 April 2003 and signified the end of Saddam Hussein's regime. President Bush announced victory in Iraq from the deck of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* on 1 May. The conflict was not over, however, as the dismantling of the Iraqi military and government created a power vacuum in the nation as various sects struggled for control, often resorting to violence to settle their disputes. Additionally, a growing anti-coalition insurgency further exasperated the Bush Administration's vision of a quick victory and withdrawal from the region. By late 2003, SOF leaders finalized their plans to provide their special capabilities in OIF for the indefinite future. In addition, the requirements for SOF in the continuing combat operations of OEF would also increase to counteract a resurgence of Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents while also providing additional training and assistance to the growing Afghan National Army.

President Bush had declared that the US and its allies would utilize every available

---

[43] Randy G. Bergeron, "A Look at Air Force Special Operations: 2001-2011," in *New Operational Paradigms and Innovations in Air Force Special Operations* (presented at the Air Force Historical Foundation Symposium, Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2011), 23. The mission received this name after an Army non-commissioned officer (NCO) saw the flight plan and remarked, "Boy that is an ugly baby." The mission was the longest airborne infiltration since WWII. Bergeron, 23.

[44] United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History: 20th Anniversary*, 115.

[45] A traditional method of mitigating risk on a mission is to selectively manage aircrew composition. In other words, to prevent an overly weak crew from flying a particular mission, a strong or experienced pilot is paired with a weak or inexperienced copilot, or vice versa. The offsetting of crew performance is relatively acceptable until the experienced or strong performing aircrew is depleted. The high-risk, no fail nature of special operations requires that every member of the crew is a strong performer and a personnel selection process is the most appropriate method to achieve this.

resource to find and remove terrorist cells from the world, including islands in the south Pacific as well as in Africa. The Philippine government had been battling an al Qaeda-affiliated Islamist terrorist organization, Abu Sayyaf, over control of the southern portion of the country since the late 1990s. By early 2002, the US deployed a contingent of 1,200 SOF to the island nation to assist the Philippine government under Operation ENDURING EAGLE, later changed to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Philippines (OEF-P).[46] The primary mission for SOF during OEF-P has been foreign internal defense (FID), but SOF have also conducted numerous humanitarian missions. The 6th SOS, the Department of Defense's only combat aviation advisory unit, has been instrumental in assessing, training, and advising the Philippine Air Force.[47]

The 6th SOS was also a key component to CENTCOM's FID activities in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA). In late December 2002, CENTCOM established the Joint Special Operations Task –Horn of Africa (CJSOTF-HOA) tasked with "conducting FID with host nation units across HOA, supporting theater security cooperation, monitoring terrorist groups, and supporting other elements as required."[48] The Air Commandos of the 6th SOS and various other AFSOC units have deployed in support of OEF-HOA consistently since its establishment. Many of these same units have also deployed to the Trans-Saharan region of Africa to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS). These units are tasked with "significant advisory assistance in Civil Affairs, Information Operations, and other activities to improve physical and human infrastructures . . . to separate the terrorists from the population."[49] The expansion of OEF's theater of operations, in combination

[46] Lansford, *9/11 and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq*. The Philippines has long been a host to insurgent and extremist activity with a multitude of groups vying for control. By early 2001, Abu Sayyaf was believed to have 1,000 fighters. The group focused mainly on kidnappings for ransom, particularly Westerners. For example, the group attacked a beach resort on the Palawan Island on 27 May 2001 and took 16 people hostage, three of which were Americans. Abu Sayyaf beheaded one of the Americans while another was killed during the rescue attempt by the Filipino security forces.

[47] The development of the Philippine Air Force's capability to fly its first NVG tactical helicopter sortie was a key example of the 6th SOS success in OEF-P. This capability had far reaching effects for the Philippine Armed Forces because they could now engage the terrorist organizations anytime, any place while also providing rapid medical evacuation to wounded soldiers, which dramatically increased their morale. United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command 2007 Posture Statement* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL, 2007), 12, http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/socom/posture2007.pdf.

[48] United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 140.

[49] United States Special Operations Command, "History of United States Special Operations Command," 138. OEF-TS was initiated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a response to the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorist Initiative of 2005. The initiative was proposed as a long-term commitment to the "African Pan-Sahel region to deny physical and ideological sanctuary to terrorist organizations

with the increased reliance on SOF by national leadership to combat the global spread of terrorism, quickly began to place a strain on the special operators including those of the US Air Force.

The Expansion of AFSOC

SOF, and in particular the Air Commandos, were stretched thin by 2006 as they had increased their overseas commitments to satisfy the requirements of multiple theaters while simultaneously participating in two major combat operations over the previous five years. Senior military leaders acknowledged this simple fact in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Report (QDR) stating, "SOF will increase their capacity to perform more demanding and specialized tasks."[50] In short, the 2006 QDR directed AFSOF to increase significantly the number of its personnel and capabilities to include doubling the size of the 6th SOS (to slightly more than 200 personnel), enlarge the number of dedicated intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, and "enhance capabilities to support SOF insertion and extraction into denied areas from strategic distances."[51] USSOCOM responded to these calls for growth with limited enthusiasm stating, "USSOCOM's growth, although important to the GWOT, must be tempered with an understanding of the SOF Truths. These four principles define the tenets of Special Operations that preserve the quality and capabilities required for success."[52] In other words, USSOCOM understood they needed to grow, both in terms of capabilities and personnel, but a rapid expansion would increase operational risk significantly.

Although AFSOC had been well-prepared for the initial phases of OEF and OIF, the expansion to meet the expanding requirements of the GWOT exposed more capability gaps than was described in the QDR. More specifically, AFSOC required additional ISR platforms, light and medium-lift mobility aircraft, and additional fire support platforms. AFSOC leaders recognized it would become "a force that [would] look substantially different from any force

---

affiliated with al Qaeda." Most Air Commando missions are in conjunction with the Joint Combined Exchanges for Training (JCETs) in the region to build partner nation military capacities in the region. United States Special Operations Command, 138.

[50] United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2006* (Washington, DC, February 6, 2006), 44, http://www.defense.gov/qdr/report/report20060203.pdf.

[51] United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2006*, 44; United States Special Operations Command, *USSOCOM Posture Statement 2007*, 12. Additionally, the QDR directed increasing the numbers of Army SF soldiers, Navy SEALs, Civil Affairs and psychological operations (PSYOP) soldiers, and the establishment of the USMC's component to USSOCOM, the Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC).

[52] United States Special Operations Command, *USSOCOM Posture Statement 2007*, 1. When this particular SOCOM Posture Statement was written in 2007, there were only four SOF truths. In 2009, Admiral Eric T. Olson, then-USSOCOM commander, reinstituted the fifth SOF truth: *Most special operations require non-SOF support.*

fielded in the past" and the command responded quickly.[53] Leaders within the Command, however, focused on closing the capability gaps and recapitalizing its fleet of rapidly aging aircraft, and did not change its personnel selection standards during this process.[54]

At the start of OEF, AFSOC had approximately 100 aircraft and slightly more than 9,500 military personnel in its ranks. By the beginning of fiscal year (FY) 2011, AFSOC had increased to more than 160 aircraft and nearly 13,000 military personnel.[55] While at first glance the increases do not seem staggering, the growth actually occurred within the last five years at an average rate of approximately 1,000 personnel and 10 aircraft per year.[56] Without any form of selection process to ensure the quality of personnel entering into the command, however, Air Force Personnel Command (AFPC) began to flood AFSOC with personnel.[57] Although the fourth SOF truth states that *competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur*, AFSOC leaders felt the new Air Commando accessions were building forces for the next conflict and not

---

[53] Air Force Special Operations Command, "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2003 Volume III" (Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2003), 1, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt Unclassified).

[54] The average age of an AFSOC aircraft in 2001 was over 40 years old. In addition, the utilization rate of the aircraft, the AC-130s in particular, was three to four times greater than originally planned. Recognizing that the combination of aging aircraft and increased usage would rapidly deplete AFSOC's future capability, recapitalization was one of AFSOC's highest priorities. Recapitalization was not new for the command, as USSOCOM was focused on recapitalizing as early as 1996. For more information on aircraft usage rates, see Bergeron, "A Look at Air Force Special Operations:," 1–2; 1st Special Operations Wing History Office, "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 31 December 2009" (Office of History, 1st Special Operations Wing, 2009), 3, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt Unclassified).; United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Forces 1996 Posture Statement* (Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, 1996), 6.

[55] In 2003, then-CSAF, Gen John J. Jumper, directed all stateside CSAR assets to move under the control of AFSOC. This move immediately increased AFSOC's personnel numbers by a third. By February 2006, however, Gen Michael T. Moseley, the next CSAF, directed the CSAR units to move under the control of ACC. Air Force Special Operations Command, "Heritage of the Combat Search and Rescue Professionals" (Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command), accessed April 15, 2013, http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/afsocheritage/afsoccsarheritage.asp.

[56] Air Force Special Operations Command, "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2006" (Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command), 27, USAF Historical Records Agency, accessed April 3, 2013, (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt Unclassified). AFSOC historical records state that AFSOC's total number of military personnel in December 2006 was 8,987. The number of AFSOC personnel in 2006 is nearly identical to the number of personnel just prior to 9/11.

[57] In 2007, the Air Force initiated the Transformational Aircrew Management Initiatives for the 21st Century (TAMI-21). The rationale for the program was based on the fact that the Air Force had decreased the number of fighter aircraft in the inventory but increased the numbers of special operations and remotely piloted aircraft. The TAMI-21program "allow[ed] fighter and bomber pilots with limited experience to volunteer for long-term reassignment to special operations and UAS [unmanned aerial systems] mission areas." There were no selection processes to direct which aircraft the "volunteers" would fly. SSgt Monique Randolph, "Changes on the Horizon for Air Force Pilots," *The Official Web Site of the U.S. Air Force*, May 29, 2007, http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?storyID=123054831.

merely in response to the current conflicts.

With the decommissioning of the MH-53s in FY08, the command's sole remaining aircrew selection process resided in the 6th SOS. The Air Commandos of the 6th SOS, in a similar manner to the Army's SF, operate as small teams to assess, train, advise and assist a partner nation's air force. The operational aviation detachments (OADs) will deploy with relatively little to no outside logistical support while they attempt to build the partner nation's capacity in a multitude of mission areas. Operating in austere conditions while conducting strategically vital missions requires the personnel in the squadron to be specially selected. The squadron's selection process, which has remained virtually unchanged since the squadron's activation in April 1994, requires recruits to submit a single-page explanation of "why [they] want to join the 6 SOS, and why [they] are uniquely qualified for the job."[58] The recruits must also submit their last five performance reports, career history, an official Air Force photograph, and copies of their flight evaluations. The recruits' applications will be judged and those that are determined to be "the best qualified" will be offered an invitation to a one-week assessment program at Hurlburt Field, Florida.[59] In a similar method to the process used by Jungle Jim in Vietnam, the recruits are selected based upon the fundamental characteristic attributes. Although the 6th SOS' selection process continued throughout this period of growth, the decreasing personnel experience levels across the command began to significantly impact every unit in AFSOC.

The massive influx of personnel into AFSOC dramatically affected the overall crew experience levels with many of the squadrons noting a "steadily diminishing personnel experience base. Although the unit[s] continued to receive new personnel in the ranks of Airman, Lieutenant, and junior Captain, these relatively inexperienced Airmen deployed very quickly after arrival and as a result could not acquire much additional experience."[60] In fact, one particular squadron requested to decrease the length of a scheduled deployment because squadron leaders feared that a longer deployment would increase the probability of a mishap from non-mission essential task list (non-METL) events.[61] In other words, AFSOC squadrons no longer had the

[58] Col Mark B. Alsid, "Combat Aviation Advisors and Air Force Special Operations Command," Memorandum, December 18, 2009, 4, http://www.afsoc.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-110301-058.pdf.
[59] Alsid, "CAA and AFSOC," 5.
[60] 1st Special Operations Wing History Office, "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 31 December 2006" (Office of History, 1st Special Operations Wing, 2006), 31, USAF Historical Records Agency, (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt Unclassified).
[61] 1st Special Operations Wing History Office, "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing 2006," 31. A mission essential task list (METL) directs the flight activities that are determined to be vital to a crew's capability to accomplish a mission. The METL is used to organize and manage flight training schedules

benefit of time to train inexperienced crewmembers as they had prior to the GWOT, and a lack of a personnel selection process only exacerbated this issue.

Another AFSOC squadron recognized the importance of countering dwindling experience levels with personnel possessing the Air Commando attributes by stating, "Due to the complexity of aircraft and [the] mission's strategic importance, squadron leaders requested a personnel screening process."[62] In October 2008, AFSOC established the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC) to "recruit, assess, select, indoctrinate, train and educate Airmen for the Air Force Special Operations Command."[63] While AFSOTC's mission statement reflects the elements of a formalized personnel selection process, it was only applicable to the 6th SOS, recruits whose selection was now handled by AFSOTC rather than the squadron. The rest of the incoming personnel were accepted into the Command with little to no additional screening criteria other than being on active flying status.[64]

The number of inexperienced personnel continued to rise dramatically as AFSOC increasingly added recently graduated student pilots and navigators. According to the 19th SOS history, which is the AFSOTC's primary training squadron, "nearly 70 percent of Airmen came directly from undergraduate pilot school and basic training."[65] Without a selection process, AFSOC was relying on the minimum graduation requirements for the initial training pipelines to serve as the screening function, or as the *initial assessment*, of its incoming personnel. Assignments to AFSOC aircraft for initial flight training graduates were not controlled any differently than they were for the other conventional aircraft assignments. Essentially, the only requirement for students to join AFSOC after graduation was that they be volunteers. While volunteering is a necessary and important foundation for any SOF selection process, it is not

---

and events. Non-METL events would include those unanticipated activities that occur during combat operations and require a high level of experience to handle appropriately. Air Commandos who possess the fundamental character attributes would effectively respond to the same situations with a lower level of experience than those crewmembers who did not posses all four traits.

[62] 1st Special Operations Wing History Office, "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing 2006," 35.

[63] "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office, July 2012), http://www2.afsoc.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=14252&page=1.

[64] Every aircraft in the Air Force inventory has a dedicated training course announcement page that lists the minimum prerequisites to enter into training, including AFSOF aircraft. The majority of AFSOC aircraft that only require potential students to be on active flying status with the C-130-base platforms require a basic C-130 qualification. The only aircrew that currently require additional minimum requirements are the AC-130H Fire Control Officers (FCOs) who require a minimum of 500 total flight hours, and the MC-130H pilots and navigators who require one year of tactical low-level experience. "Education and Training Course Announcement," accessed April 12, 2013, https://etca.randolph.af.mil/.

[65] Air Force Special Operations Command, "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2010" (Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command), 106, USAF Historical Records Agency, accessed April 3, 2013, (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt Unclassified).

sufficient on its own.

Although the schoolhouse unit for AFSOC, the 19th SOS, had increased its student output from approximately 900 students per year in 2000 to almost 4,000 students by 2010, there was not a commensurate rise in the number of instructors.[66] Instructors were consistently pulled out of the 19th SOS to assist in creating and establishing new squadrons and developing their air capabilities.[67] This left the remaining instructors at the 19th SOS to have to double up on their assigned duties. Subsequently, the 19th SOS staff made a concerted effort with the training staff at AFSOC to streamline their training programs to prevent a backlog of students.[68] Thereafter, students accomplished "five to six months of training . . . [and were] ready for combat within weeks of graduating from the class, graduates did not have time to exercise or go into joint operations gently."[69] The new training programs at the 19th SOS optimized student throughput while producing the newest generation of Air Commandos. Although most SOF units had begun to streamline their training programs and were accepting recruits straight out of basic training, such as the Army's 18X program for SF mentioned in Chapter 2, they still retained a rigorous selection process while AFSOC did not.

AFSOC leaders understood they were accepting "increased operational risk by accessing inexperienced aviators," but declared that while the "Air Force training system turned out quality Airmen . . . only AFSOC, via the culturally seasoned SOF personnel assigned to AFSOTC, could reasonably produce the individuals prepared for the SOF mission—Air Commandos. In a nutshell, only Air Commandos produce Air Commandos."[70] While the belief that only SOF

---

[66] Air Force Special Operations Command, "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command 2010," 106.

[67] 1st Special Operations Wing History Office, "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing 2006," 32, 37. Units such as the 73rd SOS, the first MC-130W unit, and the light and medium-lift squadrons required highly experienced Air Commandos to develop the training, tactics, and procedures that would provide unique capabilities to the SOF community.

[68] USSOCOM acknowledged AFSOC's attempt at streamlining its training programs in an effort to meet required manning levels by FY2009. USSOCOM stated that AFSOC's steps to shorten the training pipeline were similar to the other SOF components, but that the high standards of SOF operators must be upheld. See United States Special Operations Command, *USSOCOM Posture Statement 2007,* 14.

[69] 1st Special Operations Wing History Office, "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing 2006," 106. In most Air Force initial major weapon system (MWS) training programs, students graduates proceed to their initial operational squadrons. After arrival, the new crewmember typically undergoes several more in-squadron training sorties as a part of a Mission Qualification Training (MQT) syllabus. These programs are an effort to bring new crewmembers from the basic qualification level they attained at the flight training unit (FTU) up to a combat mission ready (CMR) crewmember. AFSOC squadrons, however, do not have an MQT-like program.

[70] Air Force Special Operations Command, "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command 2010," 4, 108–109. Although the establishment of AFSOTC was an effort by AFSOC leadership to remain focused "on the command's most valuable resource—its people," the lack of a comprehensive selection process does not ensure the right people are being focused on. Rigorous training will accomplish only so

personnel can adequately train new SOF personnel is accurate, creating new SOF personnel from recruits who were not selected for the characteristic attributes requires significantly more time and might not produce the same results. The impact of a lack of selection process coupled with a rapid development of a unique combat capability was most evident during AFSOC's establishment of a non-standard aviation (NSAv) fleet.

AFSOC's NSAv fleet consists of modified commercially available aircraft consisting of: Pilatus PC-12s, highly modified PC-12 variants labeled U-28As, Dornier 328s variants labeled C-146As, and Sikorsky M-28 variants labeled C-145As. Maj Gen Michael J. Kingsley, AFSOC vice commander, states NSAv aircraft enable SOF "to reach smaller, more remote areas, and place teams where they are needed."[71] The newest additions to the AFSOC inventory accomplish missions that the larger MC-130 aircraft do not. Ironically, just as most conventional Air Force pilots viewed the antiquated aircraft of Jungle Jim with disdain, most of the NSAv aircraft were not considered as "high-tech" as the more traditional AFSOC aircraft, leading some AFSOC staff to declare them "the simplest and easiest airplanes to fly."[72] While the commercially-procured aircraft are "easy to fly" from the perspective of civilian, straight-and-level, point A-to-point B flights, the NSAv squadrons fly these aircraft in combat conditions that are significantly different from the basic flying envisioned by outside observers. The U-28, the first of NSAv aircraft in AFSOC, characterizes the NSAv units' development of unique capabilities while experiencing rapid growth without the benefit of a selection process.

The establishment of the first U-28 squadron in AFSOC, the 319th SOS, involved almost an identical process to that of Col Cochran's 1st ACG in WWII. The 319th SOS was activated on October 2005 at Hurlburt Field without having any aircraft. The initial cadre of slightly more than 30 pilots were hand-selected by the commander, in a similar manner to the informal selection process of Col Cochran's process during Project 9. A few months later, the unit received its first unmodified PC-12 to conduct its initial flight training in the midst of developing TTPs in anticipation for the arrival of the first operational U-28. The 319th SOS received its first operational U-28 approximately one month prior to its first-ever combat deployment in May

---

much, as it is the personnel's character attributes that will ensure AFSOF's strategic success. Air Force Special Operations Command, 4.

[71] Scott R. Gourley, "AFSOC Highlights Organizational and Equipment Changes" (Defense Media Network, July 20, 2012), http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/afsoc-highlights-organizational-and-equipment-changes/.

[72] Richard Comer, "AFSOC Year in Review: 2011-2012," *Year in Special Operations: 2012-2013 Edition*, 2012.

2006.[73] Initially designed to be short-term capability stopgap measure, the 319th SOS' performance during its initial combat deployments led to increased demands for more by USSOCOM leaders.

The squadron initially began to grow by the fall of 2006 when its personnel authorization was raised to approximately 90 pilots. Training was accomplished entirely in the squadron without any outside assistance. Unlike the growth that other AFSOC units were experiencing, the 319th SOS' commander was still conducting informal interviews with potential recruits in an effort to select only those individuals he felt possessed the required qualities for the mission. This soon changed, however, as the squadron was directed to grow by more than 150 percent by the end of 2008.[74] The informal selection process that had established the squadron's personnel foundation and had contributed to its early success was discarded and contract instructor pilots were brought into the squadron to meet the production demands.[75] Within a year of the rapid increase of personnel, the squadron experienced several aircraft training mishaps, most of which occurred with an experienced crewmember onboard.[76] Although some of the crewmembers were experienced and informally selected into the unit, the accidents suggested the importance of a personnel selection process for all new Air Commandos because they must know the limits of their own capabilities and that of the aircraft when performing strategically important missions that push the very edge of those limits. In other words, each Air Commando must posses the fundamental attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity because those that do cannot overcome a tremendous influx of personnel who do not.

During this period, AFSOC leaders realized the diminishing crew experience levels were significantly impacting the performance of many Air Commando units resulting in several mishaps. In 2007, senior AFSOC leaders gathered to discuss what they felt best embodied the success of an Air Commando. The result was a list of 13 critical attributes that included: adaptability, family strength, integrity, intelligence, judgment, leadership, maturity, perseverance,

---

[73] "319th Special Operations Squadron," in *History of the 1st Special Operations Wing 2007*, 1st SOW Squadron of the Year Submission (Hurlburt Field, FL, 2007), 2.
[74] "319th Special Operations Squadron," 6. The squadron was continued its growth towards a final total of 200 pilots and 100 combat systems officers (CSOs).
[75] "319th Special Operations Squadron," 1. Over 90 percent of the squadron's new crewmembers were deployed within two weeks of completing initial training at the 319th SOS.
[76] One significant factor in these mishaps was that every aircraft's cockpit was different. The cockpit instrumentation was different from one PC-12 to another and was significantly different from the U-28. In other words, a crew would fly one version of a cockpit one day and a different version the next. This is acceptable as long as the crew are experienced, but it presents significant risks when accomplished by an inexperienced aircrew.

physical fitness, self-discipline, selflessness, self-motivation, and skill.[77] While this list intended to differentiate what makes an Air Commando, most of these "critical attributes" are not really attributes at all. Skill, fitness, self-discipline, and selflessness are all learned behaviors. Likewise, family strength is not an inherent characteristic trait but a function of social interaction. The attributes of intelligence, self-motivation, leadership, and integrity are intrinsic traits but do not differentiate an Air Commando from a conventional Air Force member. Only when an Air Commando possesses the attributes of adaptability (intellectual flexibility), judgment, maturity, and perseverance (tenacity) are they necessarily and sufficiently distinct from the rest of the conventional Air Force. In other words, the "critical attributes" of the Air Commandos are not something that can be given to someone or learned in a classroom, the fundamental attributes form the foundation of Air Commando identity.

By the fall of 2009, the U-28 training pipeline had transitioned out of the squadron and was placed under the control of the 19th SOS, with AFSOTC overseeing the accession of new personnel. The other NSAv aircraft training programs were also subsequently placed under AFSOTC's control in an effort to provide oversight and assistance in training the new Air Commandos. Just as the 1st ACG in Burma was forced to accept new personnel to replace original members without the use of a selection process, so had the NSAv fleet of present day AFSOC. The significant difference between the present generation of Air Commandos and the 1st ACG after WWII and Jungle Jim after Vietnam, is that today's Air Commandos will not be deactivated or be afforded a significant period of reconstitution to train new personnel extensively. In other words, a selection process for future Air Commandos will ensure that each new accession possesses the fundamental attributes and will ensure the strategic success of our nation's most important missions.

Significance

If the experiences of the wars of the past dozen years have led AFSOC leaders to view the future security environment as one of an increased prevalence of irregular warfare with an "emphasis on irregular challenges and issues at the subnational level," then Air Commandos will continue to be in high demand.[78] The future threats to our nation's security will offer no reprieve for the Air Commandos who must and will remain persistently engaged. Tightening fiscal constraints and an inability to stand down operations, as "our global counterterrorism efforts will

[77] Lt Gen Eric E. Fiel, "Commander's Message on the 13 Critical Attributes of an AFSOC Air Commando," *The Official Website of Air Force Special Operations Command*, accessed January 23, 2013, http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/criticalattributes.asp.
[78] Donald C. Wurster, "Mastering the Art of the Possible: The Air Force Special Operations Command," *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 56 (2010): 81.

become more widely distributed and will be characterized by a mix of direct action and security force assistance," will not allow AFSOC units the time to train exhaustively every individual joining the Air Commandos.[79] It is imperative that every Air Commando recruit is subjected to some form of a selection process that screens for the fundamental character attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity.

The current method of relying on basic Air Force flight training programs as the first screening process and AFSOC flight training programs as the final assessment is not sufficient. While each program judges and assesses individual flying skills and decision making ability in the aircraft, neither program assesses the individual's fundamental character traits required by Air Commandos. These inherent attributes enable Air Commandos to accomplish high-risk, strategically important missions under the most difficult conditions that push both the individual and the aircraft to the limits of their capabilities. In essence, Air Commandos with the fundamental attributes are uniquely capable in accepting risks that conventional forces cannot by mitigating those risks with their maturity and judgment. Experience gained from extensive training alone does not create maturity and judgment in an individual, experience can only enhance what is already present. To be successful in the uncertain future, AFSOC must not focus solely on the capabilities of its aircraft, ensuring the selection of the right individuals to become the next generation of Air Commandos is of paramount importance.

[79] United States Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership," 4.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 21st Century SOF Warrior—selectively recruited and assessed, mature, superbly trained and led—will remain the key to success in special operations.
—US Special Operations Forces 2003-2004 Posture Statement

While SOF capabilities are not in danger of degradation now, we must and will continue to look for ways to mitigate potential problems in the future.
—Adm William H. McRaven

We've always lived by the SOF truth that humans are more important than hardware, and now we're getting ready to make even more investments in our personnel.
—Lt Gen Eric E. Fiel

Conclusions

This thesis sought to determine what characteristic attributes are required by all Air Commandos to accomplish future high-risk, strategically important missions. Today's Air Commandos have adapted and expanded their capabilities considerably for more than a decade in order to meet the requirements of the GWOT-era conflicts. This rapid expansion has resulted in substantial increases in numbers of aircraft and, most significantly, in numbers of personnel. One important problem with the growth of the Air Commandos is determining how they can remain sufficiently unique from the conventional Air Force and other SOF aviation assets while still maintaining the high standards of performance required of any SOF. The common misperception of many outside observers is that SOF is distinctive or special simply because of its unique missions, capabilities, or its platforms. These observations are incorrect because the personnel are what truly makes SOF special and, more specifically, it is the inherent characteristic attributes of the personnel that enable them to "operate in circumstances where the reputation of the United States may rest on the successful completion of the mission."[1] For all special operators, Air Commandos included, a rigorous personnel selection process is essential to ensuring every operator possesses the fundamental character attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity.

Although every Air Commando must be a volunteer, not every volunteer will possess the fundamental attributes that make SOF unique. Therefore, the selection processes for Air Commandos should include the key elements of effective recruitment, psychological assessment,

[1] United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Forces 1998 Posture Statement*, 11.

and selection to select only those individuals possessing the required attributes. The selection process established within the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during WWII provides a foundational model for any contemporary SOF selection processes. The OSS experience revealed the inherent difficulty in any SOF selection processes in that few individuals actually possess all the required attributes. An added difficulty with a personnel selection process is that it cannot guarantee a recruit's future behavior. In other words, the characteristic attributes are reliable predictors of behavior, but even the most rigorous selection process cannot positively identify every unsuitable recruit. As the OSS was forced to grow to meet the operational requirements of WWII, its leaders opted to increase the number of locations for their selection process rather than lower the performance standards of its personnel. In today's context, rapidly increasing the number of Air Commandos requires AFSOC leadership to choose between lowering performance standards or removing the competitive selection process. A thorough examination of the Air Commando heritage, however, has shown that the specific selection of fundamental character attributes is a critical aid to the successful creation of specialized air capabilities.

Chapter 2 explored the beginning of the Air Commando heritage with the creation of the 1st ACG under the leadership of Cols Phil Cochran and John Alison. The 1st ACG was built to provide a critical and unique operational capability through the use of an informal personnel selection process. Those accepted into the unit were handpicked according to the following criteria: everyone must be a volunteer, each recruit must be personally known and accepted by the leaders, each recruit must have combat experience, and each recruit must be capable of performing significant additional duties. Although the 1st ACG's selection process was informal, it contained the key elements of recruitment, assessment and selection. The relatively small size of the USAAF at the time facilitated the 1st ACG leadership's personal knowledge of every recruit and consequently, the elements of the unit's selection process were easily combined to enable the rapid selection of personnel with the required characteristic attributes. Although the 1st ACG was created and combat operational in less than seven months, the selection of its personnel focused on the fundamental attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity.

The characteristic attributes of the first generation of Air Commandos enabled them to solve creatively the operational challenges associated with executing a no-fail mission in a remote jungle environment deep inside enemy-occupied territory. Although the aircraft procured for the 1st ACG's mission were conventionally available, the Air Commandos' characteristic attributes helped them to develop innovative TTPs, which in turn produced the specialized air capabilities.

The 1st ACGs leaders were able to select aircraft best suited to the environmental conditions of jungle warfare and then creatively modify the aircraft to develop these unique capabilities. The 1st ACG's specialized air capabilities were essential to infiltrating Brigadier Orde Wingate's long-range penetration soldiers, the Chindits, into the jungles of Burma during Operation THURSDAY. The Air Commandos successfully supported the Chindits throughout the operation by consistently overcoming every challenge and exceeding everyone's expectations through their intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity. The 1st ACG's success, founded upon the selection of personnel with fundamental attributes and combined with aircraft selected to meet the conditions of the operational environment, served as the motivation for the senior military leaders' decision to create additional Air Commando units.

The creation of the 2nd and 3rd Air Commando Groups, however, did not follow the same methods as their predecessor. In an effort to rapidly field the additional Air Commando units, senior leaders suspended the informal selection process instituted by Cochran and Alison. Personnel were directed to the new units solely based upon the normal personnel assignment procedures of that era, which enabled rapid increases in manning for the new units. Although the new ACGs were able to provide unique air capabilities during the closing months of WWII, they were not able to perform to the same level as the Air Commandos of the 1st ACG. The Air Commandos were disbanded after WWII and with them, the specialized air capabilities they developed. However, the Air Commando heritage and processes established by the 1st ACG were essential in the creation of 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron during Vietnam.

The creation of the 4400th CCTS in 1961, operating under the code name of Jungle Jim, very closely paralleled the establishment of its predecessor. Both units were created as a means to address an urgent combat capability shortfall. The 1st ACG solved the challenges associated with transporting, sustaining, and supporting ground combat forces operating well behind an enemy's front lines in a jungle environment. But unlike the 1st ACG, the Jungle Jim unit was not executing a single air operation in support of a specific ground force. Instead, its personnel were required to conduct FID in combat conditions while simultaneously establishing the Air Force's COIN capability. The creation of both units, however, necessitated the focused selection of its personnel to ensure their success.

The Jungle Jim unit, however, was one of the first Air Force special operations units to incorporate a formalized and rigorous personnel selection process similar to the OSS selection process during WWII. Jungle Jim recruiting focused its efforts on individuals identified by AFPC as having met minimum screening criteria that included total flight time, performance evaluations, and types of previous experience. The potential recruits were then contacted about

volunteering for an assignment to the Jungle Jim unit for a secretive mission about which they could not be told. The assessment phase included personal interviews with senior commanders, psychological testing, and advanced SERE training. The recruits remaining after the rigorous assessment phase were subjected to a final selection period where senior leaders evaluated their performance and selected only those recruits they felt best exemplified the four characteristic attributes. In essence, the goal of the Jungle Jim selection process was similar to other formal personnel selection processes. The objective of the Jungle Jim process was not necessarily to select *in* the right personnel, but to select *out* the incompatible personnel.

The Jungle Jim selection process focused most importantly on selecting recruits who possessed the fundamental characteristic attributes. The minimum screening criteria for recruitment provided the initial selection for the fundamental attributes, specifically maturity and judgment. The rigorous assessment phase tested every recruit to determine whether they possessed all four attributes. Those that did not, either self-eliminated or they were not selected by the final committee. The nearly 50 percent personnel attrition rate was an acceptable level for the creation of a unit designed to develop a specialized air capability, but it would later be considered too high to support AFSOF's rapid expansion after the initial success of Jungle Jim.

During the personnel selection process for Jungle Jim, senior Air Force leaders procured the aircraft the unit utilized in Vietnam. The unique conditions surrounding Jungle Jim's mission in South Vietnam precluded the selection of contemporary jet aircraft in favor of antiquated WWII-era propeller driven aircraft. Similar in fashion to the 1st ACG, the Jungle Jim Air Commandos utilized their characteristic attribute of intellectual flexibility to develop TTPs for the vintage aircraft that would produce highly effective and unique combat capabilities for the jungle conditions of South Vietnam. Although Farm Gate, the Jungle Jim detachment deployed to South Vietnam in the fall of 1961, eventually focused on the COIN combat mission rather than on the FID training and capacity building mission, these Air Commandos demonstrated that personnel with the right character attributes equipped with the appropriate aircraft can create innovative solutions to provide unique air capabilities.

Similar to the effects the 1st ACGs success created, Jungle Jim's success led to senior leaders' decision to double the Air Force's burgeoning irregular warfare capabilities. Although the new units were being established, such as the Special Air Warfare Center among others, the personnel assigned to the Jungle Jim unit were still subjected to the formalized selection process for a short while longer. The attrition rate associated with the formal selection process, however, prevented the rapid growth desired by senior leaders. Standards of performance were lowered to grow the Jungle Jim capability just as they were for the 1st ACG after the success of Operation

THURSDAY. The Air Commandos of Jungle Jim, however, continued to provide unique irregular warfare air capabilities, but the pattern had now been set for meeting increased personnel requirements by lessening selection standards. Just as the 1st ACG was forced to abandon their informal selection process, Jungle Jim was forced to cancel its formal selection process and with it, the ability to establish an enduring capability after the unit's deactivation following the Vietnam War. Following the Vietnam War only a few AFSOF units retained a formal selection process to ensure their personnel possessed the fundamental attributes demonstrated by the 1st ACG in Burma and validated by the 4400th CCTS in Vietnam, but even these modest selection criteria were strained under the massive requirements to expand Air Force special operations for the GWOT.

All of the SOF service components fell into disrepair after the Vietnam War and it took the tragedy of Desert One to rekindle the national policymakers' interests in reforming and rebuilding the nation's SOF. The establishment of USSOCOM in 1987 and AFSOC in 1990, was a substantial effort to prevent the *ad hoc* creation of SOF in order to provide enduring special mission capabilities. Unlike the special operators in other SOF service components, however, the Air Commandos of AFSOC were not subjected to either a formal or an informal personnel selection process. At the time, this may not have been necessary as AFSOC was a relatively small organization that had the benefit of time to train extensively its crews to achieve high levels of performance on highly specialized aircraft to provide very specific capabilities. In other words, without a selection process to ensure the Air Commandos possessed the fundamental attributes, the missions and the aircraft of AFSOC were special, but not necessarily the personnel themselves. This does not mean that some Air Commandos did not possess the fundamental attributes, nor does it imply that the Air Commandos were unprofessional or unskilled because of the lack of a selection process. It simply indicates how the perception—that AFSOF is only special because of its specialized aircraft—by some outside observers originated and still endures to this day.

The Air Commandos, now sufficiently trained, were ready and responded immediately to the tragic events of 9/11. They were among some of the first SOF units to conduct combat operations in both OEF and OIF. As the Global War on Terror rapidly expanded its scope, the resounding success of SOF led national leaders to demand an increase in SOF, both in terms of their capabilities and in the numbers of their personnel. For the Air Commandos, this period of rapid growth began in FY2006 at a rate of approximately 1,000 persons per year. Although AFSOC did not want to accept a decrease in performance standards, they nonetheless did not incorporate any form of a personnel selection process. Instead, the vast majority of new aircrew

joining AFSOC was newly graduated student pilots and navigators. The AFSOC "selection process" for these new Air Commandos relied simply on the basic flight training programs as the initial assessment with the aircraft-specific flight training at the 19th SOS functioning as the final assessment and selection. In essence, the new Air Commandos were not to be chosen based upon their inherent possession of intellectual flexibility, judgment, maturity, or tenacity. Some squadrons in AFSOC began to note the rapidly declining crew experience levels prompting some squadrons to request shortened deployments to minimize risk while others requested the institution of some type of personnel selection process. Undeniably, some of the new accessions did indeed posses all the required attributes while others possessed a few, but the streamlining of the training programs and the requirement to deploy these new Air Commandos immediately following the completion of their training did not permit them to develop the experience or expertise to compensate for the missing traits.

The creation of the 319th SOS, however, sought to reverse these trends and modeled their efforts on those of the Cols Cochran and Alison. The 319th SOS instituted an informal selection process similar to Project 9s in that it required everyone to volunteer, be personally interviewed and accepted by the leaders, be experienced, and be capable of performing significant additional duties. The informal selection process ensured the initial accessions into the 319th SOS possessed the fundamental attributes and was critical to enabling the rapid development of a new and unique air capability. The 319th SOS' dramatic success led it to the same fate as the 1st ACG in Burma and the established pattern of easing entrance standards into AFSOC. The 319th was directed to increase rapidly in size and subsequently forced to abandon its informal personnel selection process to achieve this growth. Likewise, other NSAv units in AFSOC were created using this all-to-familiar pattern while attempting to develop specialized air capabilities that were required to solve operational combat capability shortfalls.

Recommendations

Throughout their turbulent and cyclical history, Air Commandos have transformed themselves to meet the operational challenges and requirements of the conflicts they faced. The Air Commandos accomplished these feats through the development of specialized air capabilities founded upon the specific character attributes of intellectual flexibility, maturity, judgment, and tenacity. A personnel selection process was the essential method for ensuring every Air Commando possessed these attributes, and it remains so today. The very nature of special operations drives the necessity of "a discriminating selection and assessment process" to "find the right person . . . it is important to learn up front whether a person has the qualities and will

necessary to perform to highly demanding standards."[2] Although the institutionalization of a personnel selection process by AFSOC is important, the implementation of a selection process is especially important to the growth of future Air Commandos.

Whether potential Air Commando recruits hail from basic flight training pipelines or are transfers from other operational platforms, a true initial assessment stage is required. This stage, arguably the most important, should assess each recruit for the four fundamental attributes through a psychological evaluation and a personal interview with potential commanders. While the psychological assessment should be thorough, it does not necessarily have to be as rigorous as the OSS model. It should, however, be similar in nature to psychological assessments of the Jungle Jim selection process in order to identify the recruits that posses the fundamental attributes associated with the Air Commando heritage. Furthermore, the interview portion of the initial assessment should be conducted to identify the acceptableness of the recruits to their potential communities within AFSOC. In other words, just as Cols Cochran and Alison interviewed recruits during WWII and more recently during the Commando Look program, future Air Commandos must be acceptable to their future commanders and the communities they represent. The recruits identified as possessing the fundamental attributes and who are also deemed acceptable to their future communities should be selected to continue on to the last assessment stage of the selection process at the applicable AFSOC advanced flight training unit. In essence, this initial assessment stage seeks to identify incompatible recruits earlier in the selection process to preserve training resources, ensure high standards of performance, and to make the next assessment stage more effective.

The recruits not selected to continue during the initial assessment stage should be returned to the conventional Air Force without any negative repercussions to their careers. These unsuccessful recruits should be allowed to reapply at a future date (similar to other SOF selection programs) as they may need time to develop their attributes to become more suitable to the Air Commando community. The method to returning unsuccessful recruits to the conventional Air Force without denigrating them (such as proceeding with a Flight Evaluation Board) results in several positive outcomes. This method returns aviators that can still be of great value to the conventional Air Force because they are not embittered by their experiences during the Air Commando selection process. Removing the fear of a Flight Evaluation Board and simply returning aviators to operational assignments also improves recruiting efforts by encouraging individuals who would otherwise not apply for fear of losing their flight status. Most

[2] United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Forces 1998 Posture Statement*, 14.

importantly, returning unsuccessful recruits reinforces the high standards of character and performance expected of those who wish to become Air Commandos.

The next assessment stage occurs at the formal AFSOC flight training schools where the Air Commando recruits begin their flight training on the highly specialized aircraft. The recruits are continuously assessed as they develop the skills necessary to transform their characteristic attributes into specialized air capabilities. These recruits are assessed not only for their flying skills, but also to ensure they can effectively utilize the fundamental Air Commando attributes in the performance of both flight and ground duties. Although recruits at this stage should possess the fundamental attributes, there may be some recruits that cannot translate them into the specialized flight skills required of Air Commandos. Those recruits that cannot make this transition, however, should be offered the choice to return to a conventional Air Force platform or to remain within AFSOC to perform a non-operational duty. The recruits that can successfully complete this assessment stage, however, earn the privilege of becoming Air Commandos. In essence, these new Air Commandos will not be special simply because of their specialized aircraft. They are special because their specialized platforms *and* fundamental attributes combine to generate truly unique air capabilities—any time, anywhere.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Academic Papers

Banks, Louie M. "The Office of Strategic Services Psychological Selection Program." US Army Command and General Staff College, 1995.

Boltz, Richard W. "Phil Cochran and John Alison: Images of Apollo's Warriors." The School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2001.

Childress, Timothy W. "Improving US Air Force Performance in Irregular Conflict: Reestablishing a USAF Special Air Warfare Center." The School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2007.

Koskinas, Ioannis. "Black Hats and White Hats: The Effect of Organizational Culture on the 23rd Air Force." The School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2004.

McRaven, William H. "The Theory of Special Operations." Naval Postgraduate School, 1993.

Napier, John Hawkins. "The Air Commandos in Vietnam, November 5, 1961 to February 7, 1965." Auburn University, 1967.

Powell, Matthew A. "Keeping the Dagger Sharp: A Comparison of MC-130H and MH-47E Selection and Training Methods." US Army Command and General Staff College, 2005. http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA437057&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf.

Saier, William E. "An Assessment of Assessment: Is Selective Manning Right for USAF Special Operations Aircrew?" Air University, 1995.

Articles

"160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)." Accessed February 22, 2013. http://www.soc.mil/160th/160th%20Overview.html.

1st Special Operations Wing History Office. "Birth of the Air Commandos." Accessed January 22, 2013. http://www2.hurlburt.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=3386&page=1.

———. "Operation Thursday." Accessed January 22, 2013. http://www2.hurlburt.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=3387.

"2011 USAF Almanac: The Air Force in Facts and Figures." *Air Force Magazine,* May 2011. www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/.../0511facts_figs.pdf.

"Air Force Special Operations Command - Critical Attributes." Accessed February 25, 2013. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/criticalattributes.asp.

"Air Force Special Operations Training Center." Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office, July 2012. http://www2.afsoc.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=14252&page=1.

Air Force Special Operations Command. "The Heritage of the Special Operations Professionals." Accessed January 24, 2013. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/afsocheritage/index.asp.

Akin, W. Todd. "Special Forces Too Critical; Kerry Willing to Lower Standards to Expand." *Washington Times*. November 3, 2004. http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-124002915/special-forces-too-critical-kerry-willing-to-lower.

Alison, John R. "Phil Cochran: The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met!" Accessed January 31, 2013. http://www.specialoperations.net/ColCochran.htm.

Ambinder, Marc. "SOCOM at 25 - Part IV: The Future." *Year in Special Operations: 2012-2013 Edition,* 2012.

Anglim, Simon J. *Major General Orde Wingate's Chindit Operations in World War II*. Historical Case Study for Hte Operating Without a Net Project. University of Reading, UK, March 2009. http://www.academia.edu/647651/Major_General_Orde_Wingates_Chindit_Operations_in_World_War_II_-_Historical_Case_Study_for_the_Operating_without_a_Net_Project.

Bailey, Timothy. "Air Commando! A Heritage Wrapped in Secrecy." *Airman,* March 1997.

Bergeron, Randy G. “A Look at Air Force Special Operations: 2001-2011.” In *New Operational Paradigms and Innovations in Air Force Special Operations*. Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2011.

Chambers II, John Whiteclay. “Office of Strategic Services Training During World War II.” *Studies in Intelligence* 54, no. 2. Getting Ready for Conflict (June 2010). https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol.-54-no.-2/pdfs-vol.-54-no.-2/Chambers-OSS%20Training%20in%20WWII-with%20notes-web-19Jun.pdf.

Comer, Richard. “AFSOC Begins a Long War: Special Operations Forces and Operation Enduring Freedom.” *Defense Media Network,* September 23, 2011. http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/operation-enduring-freedom-the-first-49-days-7/.

———. “AFSOC Year in Review: 2011-2012.” *Year in Special Operations: 2012-2013 Edition*, 2012.

Dale, Catherine. *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 28, 2008. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34387.pdf.

“Education and Training Course Announcement.” Accessed April 12, 2013. https://etca.randolph.af.mil/.

Feickert, Andrew. *U.S. Special Operations Forces: Background and Issues for Congress*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 6, 2013. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS21048.pdf.

Fiel, Lt Gen Eric E. “Commander’s Message on the 13 Critical Attributes of an AFSOC Air Commando.” *The Official Website of Air Force Special Operations Command*. Accessed January 23, 2013. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/criticalattributes.asp.

Garamone, Jim. “Mullen Says Conventional Forces Must Learn From Special Ops Personnel.” *American Forces Press Service*, April 2, 2008. http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=49451.

Garver, John W. “The Origins of the Second United Front: The Comintern and the Chinese Communist Party.” *The China Quarterly* no. 113 (March 1988): 25–29.

Gourley, Scott R. “AFSOC Highlights Organizational and Equipment Changes.” Defense Media Network, July 20, 2012. http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/afsoc-highlights-organizational-and-equipment-changes/.

Gresham, John D. “General Bryan D. Brown Interview.” Defense Media Network, October 15, 2009. http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/interview-gen-bryan-d-brown-usa-ret/.

———. “Interview: Adm. William H. McRaven, USN, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command.” Defense Media Network, June 29, 2012. http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/interview-adm-william-h-mcraven-usn-commander-u-s-special-operations-command/.

Jennings, Gareth. “Special Needs: Picking Through AFSOC’s Assorted Toolbag.” *Jane’s International Defence Review*, February 2013.

Kennedy, Harold. “SOCOM Creates New Hub for Fighting War on Terror.” *National Defense Magazine* (February 2004). http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/archive/2004/February/Pages/SOCOM_Creates3654.aspx.

Kiras, James D. “The Role of Special Operations Forces: Past, Present, and Future.” *Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces* 37, no. 2 (2011): 80–95.

MacKinnon, Donald W. *How Assessment Centers Were Started in the United States: The OSS Assessment Program*. Pittsburgh, PA: Development Dimensions International, 1974. http://www.ddiworld.com/DDIWorld/media/white-papers/HowAssessmentCentersWereStarted_mg_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf.

Malos, Raul. “Leadership Trait Theories.” *Annals of Eftimie Murgu University Resita, Fascicle II, Economic Studies*. Business Source Complete (January 2011): 215–220.

Michalke, Jeffrey. “Commando Heritage.” Office of History, 1st Special Operations Wing. Accessed March 1, 2013. http://www2.hurlburt.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-070323-045.pdf.
“MOS 18X - Special Forces Enlistment Option.” *Army-Portal.com*, May 10, 2011. http://www.army-portal.com/jobs/special-forces/18x.html#requirements.
“Operation Jungle Jim.” *Time* 79, no. 26 (June 29, 1962): 17.
“R.C. Du Pont One of Four Killed During Glider Test for the Army.” *New York Times*. September 12, 1943. http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70B16FC3F5C167B93C1A81782D85F478485F9.
Randolph, SSgt Monique. “Changes on the Horizon for Air Force Pilots.” *The Official Web Site of the U.S. Air Force*, May 29, 2007. http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?storyID=123054831.
Richard, Col London. “AFSOC Critical Attributes: A Renewed Perspective.” *The Official Website of Air Force Special Operations Command*, September 26, 2011. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123273549.
Sacolick, Bennet S. “SOF Vs. SOF-Like.” *Small Wars Journal*, April 30, 2009. http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/sof-vs-sof-like.
Sanchez, Raquel. “AFSOC Stands up Air Warfare Center.” *The Official Website of Air Force Special Operations Command*, February 12, 2013. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123336024.
Weede, Maj Gen R. G. “Operational Restrictions on U.S. Aircraft in South Vietnam.” Headquarters United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam, November 24, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
Wurster, Donald C. “Mastering the Art of the Possible: The Air Force Special Operations Command.” *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 56 (2010): 80–84.
Y’Blood, William T. “Any Place, Anytime, Anywhere: The 1st Air Commando Group in World War II.” *Air Power History* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 4–16.

Books

Allen, Louis. *Burma, the Longest War, 1941-45*. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1984.
Beaumont, Roger A. *Military Elites*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974.
———. *Special Operations and Elite Units, 1939-1988: A Research Guide*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1988.
Bessette, Adrian, ed. *Special Operations Forces: Background and Issues for the U.S. Military’s Elite Units*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010.
Carney, John T, and Benjamin F Schemmer. *No Room for Error: The Covert Operations of America’s Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2002.
Cawthorne, Nigel. *Fighting Elites: From the Spartans to the SAS*. London, U.K.: Quercus Publishing, 2009.
Chinnery, Philip D. *Any Time, Any Place: Fifty Years of the USAF Air Commando and Special Operations Forces, 1944-1994*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994.
Collins, John M. *America’s Small Wars: Lessons for the Future*. 1st ed. Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1991.
Compston, Christine, and Rachel F. Seidman, eds. *Our Documents: 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003.
Conboy, Kenneth J. *Spies and Commandos: How America Lost the Secret War in North Vietnam*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000.
Corum, James S., and Wray R. Johnson. *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003.
Dean, David J. *The Air Force Role in Low-Intensity Conflict*. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1986.

Drew, Dennis M. "Air Theory, Air Force, and Low Intensity Conflict: A Short Journey to Confusion." In *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1997.
Ervine, Quintin V. *Special Operations Forces*. New York, NY: Nova Science, 2009.
Fredriksen, John C. *Fighting Elites: A History of U.S. Special Forces*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012.
Futrell, Robert F. *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1961-1984*. Vol. II. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1989.
———. *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965*. Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981.
Gleason, Robert L. *Air Commando Chronicles: Untold Tales from Vietnam, Latin America, and Back Again*. Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 2000.
Gray, Colin S. *Explorations in Strategy*. Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.
Haas, Michael E. *Apollo's Warriors: Us Air Force Special Operations During the Cold War*. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1997.
Joint Special Operations University. *Irregular Warfare and the OSS Model: Report of Proceedings, Joint Special Operations University and Office of Strategic Services Society Symposium.* Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2010.
———. *The OSS Model and the Future SOF Warrior*. Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2011.
Jolly, Randy. *Air Commandos: The Quiet Professionals, Air Force Special Operations Command*. Garland, TX: Aero Graphics, 1994.
Kelly, Orr. *From a Dark Sky: The Story of U.S. Air Force Special Operations*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1996.
Kyle, James H. *The Guts to Try: The Untold Story of the Iran Hostage Rescue Mission by the On-Scene Desert Commander*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Orion Books, 1990.
Lansford, Tom. *9/11 and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: A Chronology and Reference Guide*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012.
Marquis, Susan L. *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1997.
Mason, Herbert A., Randy G. Bergeron, and James A. Renfrow. *Operation Thursday: Birth of the Air Commandos*. Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1994.
Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2008.
Nadel, Joel, and J. R Wright. *Special Men and Special Missions: Inside American Special Operations Forces, 1945 to the Present*. London, UK: Greenhill Books, 1994.
Plaster, John L. *Secret Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines with the Elite Warriors of SOG*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004.
———. *SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
Plating, John D. *The Hump: America's Strategy for Keeping China in World War II*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2011.
Romanus, Charles F., and Riley Sunderland. *United States Army in World War II China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Command Problems*. Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1956.
Ryan, Paul B. *The Iranian Rescue Mission: Why It Failed*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985.
Simons, Anna. *The Company They Keep: Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces*. New York, NY: Free Press, 1997.
Slim, William. *Defeat Into Victory*. London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1956.
Smith, Mike, and Ivan T. Robertson. *Advances in Selection and Assessment*. New York, NY: Wiley, 1989.

Spulak, Robert G. *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF*. Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2007.
———. *Innovate or Die: Innovation and Technology for Special Operations*. MacDill Air Force Base, FL: JSOU Press, 2010.
Taillon, J. Paul de B. *The Evolving Requirements of the Canadian Special Forces: A Future Concept Paper*. Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2005.
Thomas, Lowell. *Back to Mandalay*. New York, NY: Greystone Press, 1951.
Tilford, Jr., Earl H. *SETUP: What the Air Force Did in Vietnam and Why*. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1991.
Trest, Warren A. *Air Commando One: Heinie Aderholt and America's Secret Air Wars*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.
Tucker, David, and Christopher J Lamb. *United States Special Operations Forces*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007.
Turnley, Jessica Glicken. *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups: Why SOF Are the Way SOF Are*. Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2010.
———. *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream*. Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2008.
United States Office of Strategic Services. *Assessment of Men: Selection of Personnel for the Office of Strategic Services*. New York: Rinehart, 1948.
United States Special Operations Command. *United States Special Operations Command History*. 6th ed. MacDill Air Force Base, FL: United States Special Operations Command History and Research Office, 2008.
———. *United States Special Operations Command History: 20th Anniversary*. MacDill Air Force Base, FL: United States Special Operations Command History and Research Office, 2007.
Van Wagner, R. D. *1st Air Commando Group: Any Place, Any Time, Any Where*. Military History Series 86-1. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1986. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-051227-003.pdf.
———. *Any Place, Any Time, Any Where: The 1st Air Commandos in World War II*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1998.
Westermann, Edward B. "Relegated to the Backseat: Farm Gate and the Failure of the US Air Advisory Effort in South Vietnam, 1961-1963." In *Military Advising and Assistance: From Mercenaries to Privatization, 1815-2007*, edited by Donald J. Stoker. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.
Whitcomb, Darrel D. *On a Steel Horse I Ride: A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace*. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2012.
White, Terry. *Swords of Lightning: Special Forces and the Changing Face of Warfare*. London, UK: Brassey's, 1992.
Y'Blood, William T. *Air Commandos Against Japan: Allied Special Operations in World War II Burma*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008.
Yancey, Madonna. *United States Air Force Air Commandos: Any Time-Any Place*. Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 2000.

Briefings/Memos/Messages

Alsid, Col Mark B. Memorandum. "Combat Aviation Advisors and Air Force Special Operations Command." Memorandum, December 18, 2009. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-110301-058.pdf.
Message, CINCPAC. Letter to PACAF. "Concept of Operations and Control for Jungle Jim Unit in South Vietnam," December 20, 1961. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
———. Letter to CHMAAG. "Jungle Jim Det 2 - Security Classification," November 22, 1961. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).

———. Letter to CHMAAG. “Jungle Jim, Det 2,” November 16, 1961. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
———. Letter to COFSAF. “Project Jungle Jim,” November 3, 1961. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
———. Letter to CHMAAG. “Status of Actions,” December 13, 1961. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
———. Letter to CHMAAG. “VNAF Pilot Training,” December 13, 1961. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
Message, CSAF. Message to PACAF, September 19, 1964. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Message, HQ PACAF. Message to SECOND ADVON. “USAF ALL ZI COM Msg AFPMP 8/62, 30 Jan 62, Quoted for Info.” Message, 30 Jan 62. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Message, PACAF. Letter to 13AF. “Concept of Employment Farm Gate,” December 4, 1961. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
———. Message to CINCPAC. “Concept of Employment of Farm Gate.” Message, 6 Dec 61. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. Message to TAC. “Crews for Farm Gate and Mule Train.” Message, March 1, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. Letter to CSAF. “Farm Gate Armed Recce Missions,” December 27, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
———. Letter to 13AF. “Psywar Mission in South Vietnam,” March 8, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Message classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
———. Message to AFSEC JUSMAG. “Transcript of Message Sent to CINCPAC.” Message, 6 Dec 61. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. Message to CINCPAC, January 26, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. Message to TAC, February 28, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. Message to COFS USAF, March 2, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency.

Doctrinal Publications

United States Department of the Air Force. *Air Force Doctrine Document 1*. Washington, DC, 2011. http://www.e-publishing.af.mil/shared/media/epubs/AFDD1.pdf.
United States Department of the Army. *Field Manual 1-02: Operational Terms and Graphics*. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2004. http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm1_02.pdf.
United States Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Publication 3-05: Joint Special Operations*. Washington, DC, 2011.
United States Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. Washington, DC, 2012. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf.

Government Documents

“319th Special Operations Squadron.” In *History of the 1st Special Operations Wing 2007*. 1st SOW Squadron of the Year Submission. Hurlburt Field, FL, 2007.
Air Force Special Operations Command. “AFSOC Strategic Plan: A Step Ahead.” In *History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 1999 Volume III*. Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 1999. (Document FOUO, excerpt unclassified).
———. “AFSOC’s Way Ahead.” In *History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2003 Volume II*. Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2003. (Document FOUO, excerpt unclassified).
———. “Air Force Special Operations Command 2012 Strategic Vision,” February 2012. USAF Historical Records Agency.

———. “Heritage of the Combat Search and Rescue Professionals.” Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command. Accessed April 15, 2013. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/afsocheritage/afsoccsarheritage.asp.
“Official Biography of Brigadier General Benjamin H. King,” March 15, 1969. http://www.af.mil/information/bios/bio.asp?bioID=6063.
United States 87th Congress, 1st Session. “Analysis of the Khrushchev Speech of January 6, 1961.” Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate. Washington, DC, June 16, 1961. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/16/1961-06-16.pdf.
United States Department of Defense. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2006*. Washington, DC, February 6, 2006. http://www.defense.gov/qdr/report/report20060203.pdf.
United States Department of Defense. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2001*. Washington, DC, September 30, 2001. http://www.defense.gov/pubs/qdr2001.pdf.
———. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010*. Washington, DC, February 2010. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.
United States Joint Chiefs of Staff. “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2011: Redefining America’s Military Leadership.” Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 8, 2011. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.
United States Special Operations Command. “United States Special Operations Command Factbook 2013.” United States Special Operations Command Public Affairs, 2013. http://www.socom.mil/News/Documents/USSOCOM_Fact_Book_2013.pdf.
Vietnam Task Force. “Part III: The Geneva Accords 1954.” In *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force*. Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969. http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/.
———. “Part IV: US Training of the Vietnamese National Army, 1954-1959.” In *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force*. Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969. http://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/.

USAF Oral History Interview Transcripts

Alison, Maj Gen John R. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #1121. Interview by Maj Scottie S. Thompson, April 22, 1979. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Anthis, Maj Gen Rollen H. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #415. Interview by Maj Dean S. Gausche and Joseph W. Grainger, August 30, 1963. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Cochran, Col Philip G. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #876. Interview by Dr. James C. Hasdorff, October 20, 1975. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Cochran, Lt Col Drexel B. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #217. Interview by Lt Col B. L. Bonwit and Capt Richard B. Clement, August 20, 1969. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
Dalton, Lt Col Roy C. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #671. Interview by Maj Ralph Rowley, Riley Sunderland, and Maj Victor Anthony, February 8, 1973. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Doyle, Lt Col M. M. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #269. Interview by Joseph W. Grainger, February 16, 1963. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Kimes, Jr., Col Ira L. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #696. Interview by Lt Col Ralph A. Rowley, November 26, 1973. USAF Historical Records Agency.
King, Brig Gen Benjamin H. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #219. Interview by Maj Samuel E. Riddlebarger and Lt Col Valentino Castellina, September 4, 1969. USAF Historical Records Agency.

Lansdale, Maj Gen Edward G. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #220. Interview by Capt Richard B. Clement, September 9, 1969. USAF Historical Records Agency.
LeMay, Gen Curtis E. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #592. Interview by Robert F. Futrell, Thomas G. Belden, and J. Van Staaveren, June 8, 1972. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #593. Interview by Thomas G. Belden, March 29, 1972. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Leuker, Rano E. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #193. Interview by Paul Skinner, June 30, 1971. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Loan, Nguyen Ngoc. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #229. Interview by Capt Richard B. Clement and G. Berquist, October 30, 1969. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Pettigrew, Col Paul. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #248. Interview by Maj Samuel E. Riddlebarger, 1965. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
Pritchard, Maj Gen Gilbert L. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #218. Interview by Maj Samuel E. Riddlebarger, Capt Richard B. Clement, and Col Robert L. Gleason, August 21, 1969. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
Reinhardt, Ambassador G. Frederick. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #292. Interview by Maj Richard B. Clement, June 30, 1970. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Slife, James C. Transcript of Oral History Interview #53. Interview by Darrel D. Whitcomb, January 20, 2010. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Smith, Franklin L. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #167. Interview by Maj Dean S. Gausche, February 1, 1964. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Trumbo, Jr., Lt Col Charles E. Transcript of U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview #271. Interview by Joseph W. Grainger, July 13, 1963. USAF Historical Records Agency.

Unit Histories

16th Special Operations Wing History Office. "History of the 16th Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 31 December 2004." Office of History, 16th Special Operations Wing, 2004. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
———. "History of the 16th Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 31 December 2005." Office of History, 16th Special Operations Wing, 2005. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
1st Air Commando Association. "Unit History of the First Air Commando Force," n.d. USAF Historical Records Agency.
1st Special Operations Wing History Office. "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 31 December 2006." Office of History, 1st Special Operations Wing, 2006. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
———. "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 31 December 2007." Office of History, 1st Special Operations Wing, 2007. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
———. "History of the 1st Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 31 December 2009." Office of History, 1st Special Operations Wing, 2009. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
353d Special Operations Group. "History of the 353d Special Operations Group: 1 January 2007 - 31 December 2008." Office of Histrory, 353d Special Operations Group, 2008. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
Air Force Special Operations Command. "History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2002." Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2002. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).

———. “History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2003 Volume III.” Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2003. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
———. “History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2005.” Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command, 2005. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
———. “History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2006.” Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command. USAF Historical Records Agency. Accessed April 3, 2013. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
———. “History of the Air Force Special Operations Command: 1 January - 31 December 2010.” Office of History, Air Force Special Operations Command. USAF Historical Records Agency. Accessed April 3, 2013. (Report classified SECRET//NOFORN, excerpt unclassified).
Joint Intelligence Collection Agency. *History of the 1st Air Commando Group*. New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, August 31, 1944. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. *Unit History of the First Air Commando Force*, March 29, 1944. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Kissling, Herbert H. “Air Commando & Special Operations Chronology 1961-1991,” n.d. USAF Historical Records Agency. Accessed March 19, 2013.
———. “History of the 1st Special Operations Wing: 1 January - 30 June 1989, Volume 1,” December 7, 1989. USAF Historical Records Agency. (Report classified SECRET, excerpt unclassified).
O’Neill, Tsgt Robert J. “History of the United States Air Force Special Air Warfare Center (Tactical Air Command): 27 April - 31 December 1962,” December 31, 1962. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. “History of the United States Special Air Warfare Center (Tactical Air Command): 1 January - 30 June 1963,” June 30, 1963. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Page, Robert C. “The Medical History of Project #9, 5318th Provisional Air Unit, 5318th Air Special Unit 1943-1944.” USAF Historical Records Agency. Accessed January 23, 2013.
United States Special Operations Command. “History of United States Special Operations Command.” United States Special Operations Command History and Research Office, March 31, 2008. http://www.socom.mil/Documents/history6thedition.pdf.

Reports

Assistant Secretary of the Air Force. *United States Air Force Statistical Digest Fiscal Year 1999*. Washington, DC: Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Financial Management and Comptroller of the Air Force), 2000.
Harris, Maj Walter G. *End of Tour Report*. 1st Air Commando Squadron (Composite), May 10, 1965. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Harvey, Capt Jack B. *End of Tour Report*. 1st Air Commando Squadron (Composite), April 1, 1965. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Joint Intelligence Collection Agency. *First Air Commando Invasion of Burma*. New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, March 29, 1944. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. *Report of Troop Carrier Command Participation in “Thursday Operation.”* New Delhi, India, April 1, 1944. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. *Supplemental Report on First Air Commando*. New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, April 1, 1944. USAF Historical Records Agency.
———. *Wingate Report on Airborne Invasion of Burma*. New Delhi, India: JICA/CBI, April 15, 1944. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Martin, Donald F., and Carl O. Clever. *Summary, Oct 1961-Dec 1963*. Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, May 31, 1964. USAF Historical Records Agency.
Metcalfe, Capt Robert B. *End of Tour Report*. 1st Air Commando Squadron (Composite), February 2, 1965. USAF Historical Records Agency.

Tulloch, Donald C. “Annual Report.” Office of the Surgeon: 1st Air Commando Group, January 16, 1945. USAF Historical Records Agency.

United States Special Operations Command. *United States Special Operations Command 2007 Posture Statement*. MacDill Air Force Base, FL, 2007. http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/socom/posture2007.pdf.

———. *United States Special Operations Forces 1996 Posture Statement*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, 1996.

———. *United States Special Operations Forces 1998 Posture Statement*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, 1998.

———. *United States Special Operations Forces 2000 Posture Statement*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, 2000.

———. *United States Special Operations Forces 2003-2004 Posture Statement: Transforming the Force at the Forefront of the War on Terrorism*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, 2004.

Vallentiny, Capt E. *VNAF FAC Operations in SVN*. Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, January 28, 1969.

Speeches

Bush, George W. “Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress.” In *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001 – 2008*. Washington, DC, 2009. http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf.

McRaven, Admiral William H. *2012 SOCOM Posture Statement*. Washington, DC, 2012. http://www.socom.mil/Documents/2012_SOCOM_POSTURE_STATEMENT.pdf.

Olson, Admiral Eric T. *2008 SOCOM Posture Statement*. Washington, DC, 2008. http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/socom/posture2008.pdf.

———. *2010 SOCOM Posture Statement*. Washington, DC, 2010. http://democrats.armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=7e7090cb-6be2-4d46-b880-73cfad8f6bc5.

———. *2011 SOCOM Posture Statement*. Washington, DC, 2011. http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2011_hr/030311olson.pdf.

Rumsfeld, Donald H. “SOCOM Change of Command.” MacDill Air Force Base, FL, September 2, 2003. http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=518.