



**STRATEGY  
RESEARCH  
PROJECT**

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

**COALITION SPECIAL OPERATIONS:  
AN OPERATIONAL-LEVEL VIEW**

**BY**

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL PETER J. GUSTAITIS II  
U.S. NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
SSC Fellow  
United States Army**

**DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:  
Approved for public release.  
Distribution is unlimited.**

**USAWC CLASS OF 1998**

**U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5050**



Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

**UNCLASSIFIED**

**SENIOR SERVICE COLLEGE STUDY PROJECT**

**COALITION SPECIAL OPERATIONS:  
An Operational-Level View**

**By**

**Lieutenant Colonel (P) Peter J. Gustaitis II  
United States Army**

**Naval Postgraduate School  
Special Operations Curriculum  
Monterey, California 93943-5134**

**UNCLASSIFIED**



## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Peter J. Gustaitis II, LTC(P), USA  
TITLE: Coalition Special Operations: An Operational Level View  
FORMAT: Individual Study Project  
DATE: 01 June 1998 33 PAGES: Unclassified

This paper analyzes US special operations at the operational-level. The role of the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) is the focus. As envisioned by the authors of the Cohen-Nunn Amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1987, U.S. SOF were placed under one command, the U.S. Special Operations Command. Ten years later, the intent of the Cohen-Nunn Amendment (to ensure the readiness of this nation's special operations capability) has been achieved. Yet, the institutional separation between conventional forces and SOF creates a void in the knowledge of special operations at the operational-level. Despite the efforts and successes of the theater Special Operations Commands (SOC), this lack of knowledge risks misuse or under use of SOF in an environment where SOF possess a comparative advantage: coalition operations. Using recent coalition operations as illustrative case studies, the author details SOF's history, their comparative advantage in coalition operations, and the unique characteristics of the JSOTF. It is the author's intent to improve the level of understanding of future conventional force commanders and staff involved in the planning and execution of coalition operations.



*In regional crises, SOF [Special Operations Forces] will enable the geographical CINC to choose from a wide range of options to extend his strategic reach. SOF will serve as a force multiplier for conventional forces and country teams by providing a joint agile force able to rapidly integrate with other forces.<sup>1</sup>*

A decade ago, institutional separation of SOF and conventional forces was deemed necessary to end years of neglect inflicted on the nation's military special operations capability. As envisioned by the authors of the Cohen-Nunn Amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, institutional separation placed SOF on equal footing with the other uniformed services. Although, by allowing special operations to "promote interoperability among [SOF] assigned to the same command," the institutional separation of SOF and conventional forces created a void in the knowledge of special operations at the operational-level.<sup>2</sup> As a Major in 1988, Colonel Glenn Harned, Director of Doctrine at the United States Army Special Warfare Center, recognized this void:

"The strategic focus of SF has caused problems in the past, because conventional Army commanders have traditionally thought, trained and prepared for war, and fought at the tactical level –roughly corps and below. Neither SF nor the conventional Army was willing to bridge the gap between theater strategy and conventional tactics. The conventional Army saw SF as a theater asset beyond its influence; it considered SF to be a wasteful diversion of resources from the decisive land battle. [SF] resented the conventional Army for treating SF like a stepchild."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *SOF Vision 2020*, (McDill AFB: USSOCOM Special Operations Historical Office): 16. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Pub 1-02, (Washington DC: US Government Press), 23 March 1994 (as amended through 12 January 1998) II-2-II-3 defines the "operational level" as [linking] the tactical employment of forces to strategic objectives. Operational art requires broad vision, the ability to anticipate, and effective joint and multinational cooperation. Operational art is practiced not only by JFCs but also by their senior staff officers and subordinates." The focus of this paper is on the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), the subordinate special operations command of the JTF or CTF.

Over the last 10 years, extraordinary efforts were made at integrating SOF and conventional forces at the strategic and tactical levels. At the tactical level, SOF has participated in numerous conventional exercises, with emphasis on those conducted at the Combat Training Centers. The Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) was developed to provide tactical commanders, primarily at corps and division-level, with a special operations cell to integrate and de-conflict special operations on a non-linear battlefield. Special Operations Coordination Elements (SOCORD) were assigned to every Army Corps to integrate special operations into corps-level contingency plans.

At the strategic-level, USSOCOM revitalized the Theater Special Operations Commands (SOC). The evolution of the present day SOC is the true success story of special operations. These regional, sub-unified commands have developed into a standing joint task force (JTF) capability for the regional Commanders-in-Chief (CINC). Despite the successes of the SOC, a lack of understanding of SOF capabilities and limitations continues to impede their optimal use. Without an appropriate level of understanding and in the absence of SOF representation, conventional planners tend to write special operations into a plan in only a supporting role, or for inappropriate missions. Inevitably, special operations missions are forced upon existing plans and strategies, later than earlier in the process, creating a natural resistance to their employment.

“Schwarzkopf had other things on his mind besides Green Berets. His Central Command headquarters had become a “pressure cooker,” as he

---

<sup>3</sup> Major Glenn Harned, “Bridging the gap: Special Forces as a member of the Combined Arms Team,” Special Warfare Magazine, (October 1988): 4.

would later write in his memoirs. Never before had he dealt with problems so complex, for which decisions had to be made so quickly. He was in charge of the largest military deployment since the Normandy invasion...if Iraqi tank divisions massing at the Saudi border decided to attack before he was ready to defend, a bunch of Green Berets speaking Arabic weren't going to stop them. Schwarzkopf needed tanks and tank killers fast."<sup>4</sup>

This classic example of the "either-or" mentality exists from a lack of knowledge of SOF capabilities. The optimization of SOF dictates early deployment and employment to establish communications, facilitate entry, conduct reconnaissance and integrate coalition forces. Unfortunately, during the initial deployment of forces to Saudi Arabia in 1990, the early deployment of SOF was seen as coming with a price tag (e.g., using aircraft resources dedicated for the deployment of heavy forces). In reality, during Desert Storm, the early deployment of SOF into the theater could have optimized SOF's unique talents for coalition operations, particularly coalition integration and reconnaissance.

Coalition operations provide the greatest challenge for U.S. military planners. Because these types of operations normally arise in response to a crisis, they do in fact require "*a joint agile force able to rapidly integrate with other forces.*" If the future is anything like the past 10 years, and I believe it will be, these types of operations will continue to characterize the use of U.S. military power. Coalition operations are likely to occur anywhere, and most likely on terrain unfamiliar to U.S. forces. This will make it difficult, if not impossible, to rehearse, as time is of the essence and participants are usually not known until the last moment.<sup>5</sup> What is known is that SOF and conventional

---

<sup>4</sup> Douglas C. Waller, Commandos. The Inside Story of America's Secret Soldiers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 234.

<sup>5</sup> The definition of coalition as found in Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine For Multinational Operations DRAFT, Joint Pub 3-16, (Washington DC: US Government Press, 1997) separates coalition operations

forces together play a critical role.

This paper focuses on the operational-level of special operations during coalition warfare, specifically the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF).

The JSOTF commander (COMJSOTF) must be able to integrate into the overall U.S. contribution to a multinational campaign while, at the same time, merging and orchestrating U.S. SOF into the combined special operations environment. The tasks of coalition special operations are made more challenging if a lack of understanding of SOF and their capabilities exist among key decision-makers of the coalition effort.

Although a variety of coalition operations are studied and referenced in this paper, particular emphasis is placed on Operations DESERT STORM (Iraq) and JOINT ENDEAVOR/GUARD (Bosnia-Herzegovina). These two operations cover a spectrum of conflict from major theater war (MTW) to peacekeeping operations (PKO). Through the use of brief illustrative case studies, it is the intent of this paper to provide operational-level U.S. participants in coalition operations with an unclassified, broad perspective on special operations and their comparative advantages in coalition operations.

---

from other multinational operations due to its crisis nature.

## **SPECIAL OPERATIONS: A Brief History**

*SOF became a permanent part of the force structure in the late 1950s. Since that time, as a result of their mission profile, they have developed along organizationally distinct lines within DOD. They have specialized in different tasks and missions and, as a result, have developed a different organizational culture than GPF [conventional forces].<sup>6</sup>*

SOF, its organizational structure, and the missions associated with these elite units differ from conventional forces and missions. A fundamental understanding of why, and the history of SOF's growth in the last ten years, are the first steps to understanding the role of special operations during coalition operations. By definition, special operations differ from conventional operations. As stated in Joint Pub 3-05,

### **Doctrine For Joint Special Operations:**

“... the capabilities of SOF primarily are a function of individual and small unit proficiency in a multitude of specialized, often unconventional, combat skills applied with adaptability, improvisation, innovation, and self-reliance. The small size unique capabilities and often self-sufficient (for short periods) nature of SOF operational units provide the United States with feasible and appropriate military responses that do not entail the degree of political liability or risk of escalation normally associated with employment of necessarily larger, or more visible, conventional forces.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Christopher M. Bado, “Integration of Special Operations and Conventional Forces In Unconventional Warfare” (thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1996), 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine For Joint Special Operations, Joint Pub 3-05, (Washington, DC: US Govt. Press, 28 October 1992), I-3.

Unfortunately, prior to 1987, the difference in missions and unit profile led to a special operations capability weakened by service neglect and mis-utilization. This was best illustrated by the failed operation in 1980 to rescue American hostages in Iran. Operation EAGLE CLAW highlighted how an inadequately prepared special operations mission could quickly take on the “political liability or risk of escalation ...normally associated with employment of necessarily larger, or more visible, conventional forces.”<sup>8</sup> During the introduction of legislation in 1986, aimed at improving the nation’s special operations capability, telling testimony came from retired Army Major General Richard Scholtes. He “explained how, as commander of the joint special operations task force, his forces were misused during the Grenada operations and not allowed to use their unique capabilities by the conventional forces, causing relatively high SOF casualties.”<sup>9</sup>

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Act of 1986 had a profound impact on U.S. military power. Its impact was demonstrated by the superb results achieved in the Gulf War in 1990-91. A far reaching piece of legislation, Goldwater-Nichols was intended to correct shortfalls in nearly every area associated with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as with operational commands and the services.<sup>10</sup> With the passing of Goldwater-Nichols, “jointness” was

---

<sup>8</sup> The failure of this operation is largely credited with the downfall of then President Carter’s second term aspirations. See Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, Perilous Options: Special Operations as an Instrument of US Foreign Policy, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). 114-151.

<sup>9</sup> USSOCOM, United States Special Operations Command 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History (McDill AFB: HQ USSOCOM/SOHO), 3. See also Susan L. Marquis, Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> US Army Command and General Staff College, “Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986—A Primer,” Fundamentals of Joint and Combined Operations (Fort Leavenworth Kansas: USACGSC, 30 Jan 1990), reprint, Association of the United States Army, Arlington

moved to the forefront of professional development and operational execution.

Integrating the service's forces with a common intent and objective became the sole responsibility of the CINC of the geographical combatant commands.<sup>11</sup> It took the persona of General Colin Powell, and a major conflict like Desert Shield/Storm, to bring to fruition the intent of the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act. The fact that the Gulf War was such a success can be partly credited to a basic tenet of the Goldwater-Nichols Act: a clear chain of command which provided the Commander of Central Command (CINCCENT) the authority to command his troops regardless of their uniform or service affiliation.

During this same time period, two events occurred directly impacting SOF: the Cohen-Nunn Amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act and the re-building of the Theater SOC. The Cohen-Nunn Amendment, Public Law 99-661, passed despite the objections of the Department of Defense and the Reagan Administration.<sup>12</sup> For the first time, Congress had mandated that the President create a unified combatant command: the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). The legislation also promised to improve SOF in several aspects. A new Major Force Program (MFP 11) was designated for SOF, allowing the purchase of special operations specific equipment among other things. A four-star general-level command for all of SOF coupled with an office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity

---

VA), 236.

<sup>11</sup> The geographical combatant commands are European Command (EUCOM), Central Command (CENTCOM), Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), Atlantic Command (ACOM), and Pacific Command (PACOM).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed look into the background of the Cohen-Nunn Amendment see William G. Boykin, "Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict Legislation: why was it passed and have the voids been filled" (Individual Study Project, United States Army War College, April 12, 1991) or Marquis,

Conflict (ASD SO/LIC) was established to ensure proper emphasis on special operations within DOD.<sup>13</sup> Maximizing these initiatives, the leadership of USSOCOM and ASD SO/LIC has ensured SOF readiness and preparedness to conduct its assigned missions.

Understanding the perils of institutional separation, USSOCOM recognized the importance of the SOC and its relationship with the warfighting CINC. Ignored prior to the establishment of USSOCOM, the Theater SOC received much-needed attention in manpower, both in quality and quantity. At the same time, each SOC command position was upgraded to a flag officer-level position.

As stated above, the SOC, subordinate component commands of each of the regional combatant commands, provide a standing Joint Task Force capability for each regional command. Today, the SOC have become the force of choice, ready to deploy during the initial stages of a crisis. The SOC's ability to penetrate anywhere in the world, despite weather, terrain and, in some cases, the level of threat, allows the CINC a force structure adapted to joint planning, possessing key competencies, and the assets to deploy and sustain during the initial stages of a crisis. These same capabilities become more apparent during coalition operations, where interoperability issues are more acute. The ability of the Special Operations Command, Europe (SOCEUR) to quickly form a Combined /Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) during the initial stages of Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR (NATO operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina) is an example of the unique and relevant characteristics of the SOC. The C/JSOTF not only provided some of the first soldiers on the ground in Bosnia but also allowed the

---

Unconventional Warfare.

<sup>13</sup> USSOCOM, History, 6.

Implementation Force (IFOR) to meet its scheduled timeline for the transfer of authority (TOA) between IFOR and the United Nations. Meeting the timeline was critical for both IFOR and NATO credibility. Many other examples exist demonstrating the unique abilities of the SOC. The following is such an example:

“Reacting to a no-notice tasking order SOCEUR assembled forces at a staging area in Sierra Leone. The 352nd Special Operations Group from Mildenhall, England, [along with] Theater based conventional assets joined with Army Special Forces (SF), Navy SEALs, and Air Force special tactics personnel. The integration of joint SOF became apparent as personnel arrived at the field and were greeted by friends and acquaintances of long standing. Most SOCEUR staff members had served previous assignments with the operational units arriving in Sierra Leone, and virtually all the units involved had worked together. In the regionally oriented special operations community there are few strangers..... Upon completion of the evacuation operation, the SOCEUR commander transferred JTF responsibilities to a conventional commander and withdrew, thus completing a textbook case of modern SOF employment.”<sup>14</sup>

This operation came on the heels of another combined operation led by SOCEUR, and comprised of U.S., British, French, German, Spanish, and Croatian forces. The mission for the preceding deployment was to conduct recovery operations of a plane that had crashed carrying the U.S. Secretary of Transportation during the Spring of 1996.

The doctrinal roles of the SOC are to exercise operational control over joint SOF, act as a principal advisor on special operations, and be the special operations component commander.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the other component commands under a combatant command, the SOC's are manned with a joint staff. Figure 1 shows the functional alignment of the SOC,

---

<sup>14</sup> Henry H. Shelton, “Coming of Age: Theater Special Operations Commands,” Joint Force Quarterly, (Winter 1996-97): 51.

<sup>15</sup> Joint Pub 3.05, III-3.

vice the service alignments of the other component commands. Routine functional alignment versus service alignment is one of the characteristics found in special operations.

Currently, SOC in the European, Pacific, and Southern regions have forward based special operations elements, under their operational control (OPCON), from each of the services. These joint forces routinely train together. Coupled with the SOC and its JTF capability, the forward-deployed forces provide the combatant commander an instant response capability. This capability allows the CINC to react in accordance with his U.S. Code Title 10 responsibilities and precludes having to go through the time consuming process of requesting forces from CONUS or other regional commands; a critical consideration during the initial stages of a coalition operation.

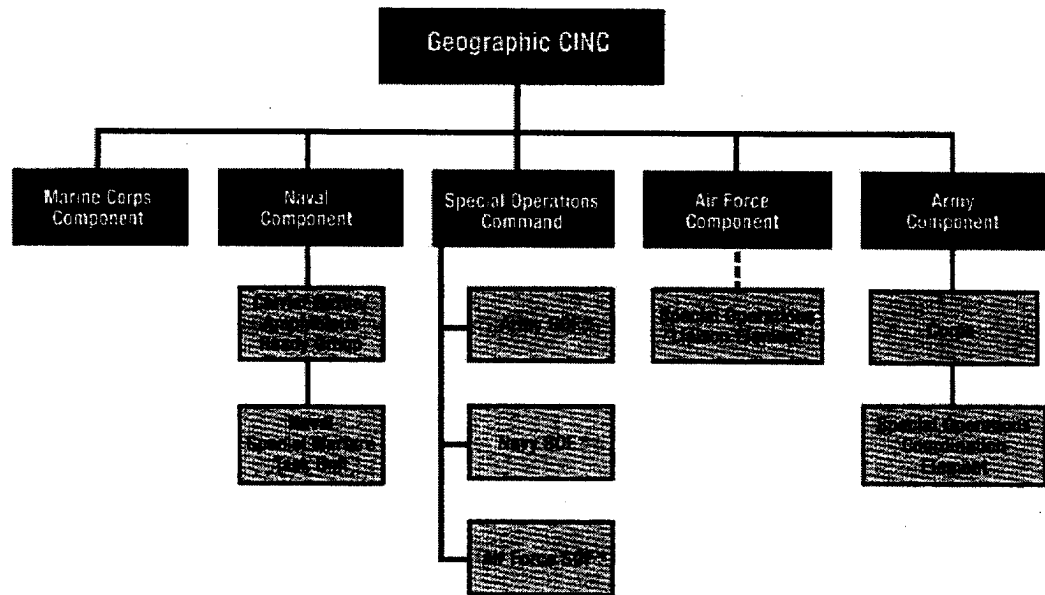


Figure 1

Since 1986, the majority of special operations have been part of an integrated

military strategy involving both conventional forces and multinational partners. This trend will continue as a result of a reduction in U.S. military force structure and the need to enhance political credibility and provide legitimacy for U.S. foreign policy through the use of coalitions. As the military is expected to do more with less, SOF possess certain comparative advantages during coalition operations. Maximizing these advantages is the challenge for future operational-level commanders.

## SOF's COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN COALITION OPERATIONS

SOF possess certain comparative advantages over conventional forces in relation to coalition operations. SOF's role as an integral part of every U.S. coalition effort punctuates this fact. At the core of SOF's comparative advantage are four competencies described by LTC Frank Bohle in his Strategic Research Project entitled "Special Forces: A Good Fit For Peace Operations:" maturity, language capability, cultural sensitivity, and information collection.<sup>16</sup> As described by LTC Bohle, the average Special Forces soldier is more mature, both in age and military experience, than the average Army soldier. Other SOF follow the same trend. Also, this level of experience is concentrated in a particular geographical region, a unique trait of SOF.

Most of SOF are assigned to a particular region usually with recurring tours of duty. Coupled with this regional knowledge, Army Special Forces soldiers specialize in at least one foreign language. Language proficiency is enhanced by repetitive tours of duty. Along with language proficiency, recurring tours help SOF develop extensive knowledge of the culture, region, leadership, and people. This level of knowledge is rivaled only by the Foreign Area Officer (FAO). Yet, different from the FAO, SOF combines host nation military capabilities at both the tactical and operational-level, observed first hand, with the socio-economic and political considerations of a particular country or region. Using, this resource as an intelligence source, early in both the planning and execution phases of a coalition effort can provide information not normally

---

<sup>16</sup> LTC Franklin C. Bohle, "Army Special Forces: A Good Fit For Peace Operations", (Strategic Research

available from other sources. During the combined military operations in Rwanda in August of 1994, SOF teams already deployed in neighboring African countries, quickly transitioned to the crisis in Rwanda and assisted in the development of the initial assessments provided to the JTF Commander. These "global scouts" proved to be critical operators and planners of the coalition effort. As envisioned by the current U.S. Commander in Chief, Special Operations Command, General Peter J. Schoomaker, "these 'global scouts' [SOF] can quickly transition [from peacetime engagement missions] to combat operations and spearhead decisive victory. As SOF engage in additional peacetime operations it is important to remember that they are-first and foremost-warriors."<sup>17</sup>

SOF are involved on a redundant and routine basis across the range of military operations. Although missions such as military to military contacts, security assistance and environmental operations are not the exclusive domain of special operations, SOF execute these missions in a different manner from conventional forces. Using a "power down" approach, SOF execute peacetime engagement missions at the lowest level within the force structure. This provides operator hands-on experience. The majority of engagement missions are conducted by the smallest common denominator: the Operational Detachment -A (ODA) or its equivalent. Each ODA is assigned a particular geographical country with the intent of developing cultural and language expertise. By design, any and all contacts with the country are accomplished by the designated unit or team. This includes initial contacts, site surveys, plan development, execution, and

---

Project, US Army War College, 1997), 4-6.

<sup>17</sup> GEN Peter J. Schoomaker, "US Special Operations Forces: The Way Ahead", Special Warfare

follow up. This low-density approach allows for long-term relation building between SOF and target host nations. A recurring presence by the same unit provides consistency and adds to the institutional knowledge of a particular location. This approach also allows the ODA more intimate observation regarding capabilities, terrain, intent and other information elements of a particular nation or region. Consequently, personal relationships develop and endure. The Hungarian Parliament, in 1995, approved the participation of Hungary in the Bosnia-Herzegovina international coalition effort. This approval was largely based on knowledge that a U.S. Army Special Forces team would be assigned to the Hungarian contributing unit as a Liaison Control Element (LCE). By design, the same Special Forces team that conducted numerous training events in Hungary, months prior, was assigned as the initial LCE.

Air Force and Army SOF deployed to Bosnia during the initial stages of Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR where, assigned to various coalition partner units including a Russian Airborne Brigade, acted as facilitators. The personal relationship between many U.S. SOF and the senior officers of the participating units quickly facilitated NATO and non-NATO integration during the critical first days of the operation. During Desert Storm, the same example of rapid SOF integration, as enabling forces, provided the operational-level commanders an integrated force structure despite the wide variety of unit nationalities. The inherently joint nature of SOF at the operational-level makes them a natural to spearhead initial coalition efforts. Using the SOC as links between the "global scouts" and the theater strategic planner will greatly facilitate theater operations. To provide this link in a crisis, the theater SOC will most

---

Magazine, (Winter 1998): 4.

likely establish a JSOTF. At the heart of the operational level, the JSOTF can be formed from the SOC or formed from a subordinate unit and augmented from other services. In any case, the JSOTF is normally the only joint component command of a Combined or Joint Task Force and will perform a variety of missions from initial lead element, gathering assessments, to an integral member of the JTF team during execution.

## JSOTF OPERATIONS

*“SOF’s ability to perform a wide range of operations comes not from the fact that we are elite, but from the fact that we have different missions that call for specialized skills and uncommon soldiers.”<sup>18</sup>*

Commanding special operations in a multinational environment provides challenges unsurpassed by other types of operations. Special operations by their very nature are complex. Planning requires exhaustive intelligence, unwavering operational security (OPSEC) and unfettered resources. Execution requires surgical precision and flawless timing. The headquarters responsible for linking the tactical execution to the strategic objectives is the JSOTF. At the operational level, this special operations component command organizes more like the CTF than other subordinate elements. A JSOTF Command and Control (C2) arrangement will always be functionally aligned much as the Theater SOC is depicted in Figure 1. This differs from the other component commands that may be functionally or service aligned depending on the particular mission and force structure.

Whereas, joint integration is avoided within the other components, it is emphasized by the JSOTF. As stated in Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms: “Most often, joint forces are organized with a combination of Service and functional components with operational responsibilities. Joint forces organized with Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force

---

<sup>18</sup> MG William Tangney, “From the Commandant,” Special Warfare Magazine, (Spring 1997): inside cover.

components will have special operations forces organized as a functional component.”<sup>19</sup>

A review of recent coalition operations shows that conventional components tend to form along service and national lines with operational responsibilities. Maintaining national and service integrity of the conventional forces assigned to the C/JTF makes sense. This configuration emphasizes combined operations versus coalition operations. Combined operations emphasize units operating side by side to accomplish the same mission. A national- and service-aligned force structure reduces the necessity to learn new doctrine and operating procedures. It also maximizes available time, a commodity during the initial stages of a coalition operation. During NATO’s first out of area operation, and despite fifty years of integrated training and exercises, forces below the level of the Implementation Force / Stabilization Force headquarters in Bosnia maintained a definitively national structure and orientation.<sup>20</sup> Likewise the Desert Storm command structure aligned along national lines and within the U.S. led Joint Task Force, mostly along service alignments. Special operations, on the other hand, require an integrated response.

Unlike other component commands of a designated JTF, the JSOTF may be required to execute missions at the strategic (both national and theater), operational and tactical levels in the same area of operation or theater. This is particularly true during Operations Other Than War (OOTW). At the national strategic level, SOF may be employed directly by the National Command Authorities (NCA) for a specific mission that may or may not affect theater strategy. Although in this case, a separate JSOTF may

---

<sup>19</sup> Joint Pub 1-02, II-15.

<sup>20</sup> NATO, Web site maps, [www.nato.int/mil](http://www.nato.int/mil)

be formed, the SOC derived JSOTF may be required to command and control these operations while concurrently conducting theater specific operational-level special operations missions. Directed by the NCA, with specific national strategic objectives (e.g., keep Israel out of the conflict with Iraq), the use of SOF to locate and destroy mobile SCUD delivery systems in northern Iraq during Desert Storm is an example of simultaneous special operations with differing strategic goals (national vs. theater).

A separate JSOTF, under the command of the SOC instead of the coalition force command, may be established to maintain national control over critical special operations assets. This is particularly important when national control of these limited assets is necessary to balance requirements and capabilities. The case of the AC-130 gunships is a good example. Recognized as an excellent fire support and reconnaissance platform, the AC-130 aircraft is in high demand. The requirement to respond to the global interests of the United States with this asset makes national control particularly critical.

At the theater strategic-level the CINC may employ SOF directly to achieve goals of a theater priority which again may or may not effect the operational-level commander's intent. During 1997, CINCEUCOM deployed U.S. Army SF teams into Bosnia-Herzegovina to conduct unilateral mine-clearing training for selected units of the warring factions. This operation had theater strategic implications with little near-term effect on IFOR operations, yet operated within IFOR's area of operation. As a unilateral operation, the mine-clearing training mission posed certain political risk for the coalition members.

Finally, the JTF commander may retain the authority to assign missions to SOF to meet his operational-level objectives. Although any of these operations may or may not

have a real or near time effect on the tactical commanders and their objectives, it is important that coordination is accomplished down to the lowest level. This is particularly true in the non-linear environment of OOTW. During these types of operations, the area of operation is compressed. This non-linear aspect of the operating area eliminates the traditional deep, close, and rear areas found in more traditional linear areas of operation. Bosnia-Herzegovina is a perfect example of this type of area compression. Members of the combined force physically occupy the entire area that encompasses the theater of operation. Consequently, every special operations mission, whether strategic, operational, or tactical in its objective is tactical in its execution requiring coordination down to the lowest level. Three areas of concentration, in regard to the JSOTF, that warrant discussion are command relationships, mission planning, and force protection.

#### Command Relationships

Not surprisingly, due to the ad hoc nature of coalition operations, each special operations task force is structured differently, based on the particular mission and operational environment. Like the command and control structure of the parent coalition headquarters, special operations task forces "will create the structure that will best meet the needs, political realities, constraints and objectives of the participating nations."<sup>21</sup>

Three recent coalition operations depict the different methods used to command and control special operations. Operation DESERT STORM employed a predominantly parallel structure. This form emphasizes clear national chains of command and close national supervision of special operations. Special operations can operate under a parallel

chain of command while the rest of the U.S. contribution to a coalition effort is integrated under the lead nation structure. JTF-Ranger in Somalia had a clear chain of command directly to CINCCENT, although informal coordination was conducted between the Task Force Commander and the U.S. Commander on the ground.

“Because it was a strategic asset, TF-Ranger, had its own chain of command that...extended directly back to CENTCOM without going through either the U.S. or UN channel. Although MG Montgomery [U.S. Ground Force Commander] did not have OPCON of this force [Task Force Ranger], he maintained a close working relationship that allowed tight coordination between Task Force-Ranger and the QRF [Quick Reaction Force].”<sup>22</sup>

The Military Observer Mission Ecuador-Peru (MOMEPE) provides a unique view at the “lead nation” approach.<sup>23</sup> This operation is unique because the U.S. is not the lead nation. A fully integrated combined staff highlights this type of operation. In the MOMEPE example, the U.S. provides a majority of the support and logistics but is not the lead nation nor occupies the commander’s position.

Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR/GUARD provides an example of combining these two approaches. While the execution of special operations is parallel in nature, the U.S. acts as the lead nation providing leadership and a majority of the equipment and personnel.

During Desert Storm, special operations were conducted for the most part unilaterally, with each nation maintaining its own capability. There were some examples of combining national special operations into a unified effort, primarily at the tactical

---

<sup>21</sup> Joint Pub 3-16,viii.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*, (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1995), 57-58.

<sup>23</sup> LTC Kevin Higgins, “Military Observer Mission Ecuador-Peru (MOMEPE): Doing a lot with a little,” (Strategic Research Paper: Army War College, 1997).

level. U.S. Special Forces conducted joint patrols with Arab Ranger elements along the Saudi - Iraq border in the initial stages of the conflict.<sup>24</sup> U.S. Navy SEALs conducted maritime special operations along with Kuwaiti frogmen in preparation for a U.S. Marine landing and for deception purposes. Within the context of the total special operations contribution to Desert Shield / Desert Storm, these operations had little impact on the conduct of special operations at the operational-level. At the operational level, special operations maintained a distinct national flavor. The U.S. maintained a dual chain of command for special operations in the form of Special Operations Command, Central Command (SOCCENT) and a separate JSOTF that answered directly to CINCCENT for specific special operations missions.<sup>25</sup>

The need to tie the parallel command structure together to de-conflict and coordinate operations between the Arab-led and non-Arab led units required a coordination center manned by representatives from the Arab coalition partners and the U.S. led chain of command. Initially devised at the Army Central Command (ARCENT) level on the guidance of General Yosock, the Command and Control Coordination and Integration Center (C3IC) quickly evolved into a joint center with representation from SOCCENT, ARCENT, NAVCENT, and MARCENT.<sup>26</sup> The SOCCENT desk utilized its area expertise and training to cement the two chains of command of the coalition. Maximizing on information received from the U.S. Special Forces Coalition Warfare Teams, assigned to each of the Arab elements down to battalion level, the SOCCENT

---

<sup>24</sup> Kevin Don Hutchison, Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm Chronology and Fact Book, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Actually a third JSOTF was established in Turkey with the responsibility for Combat Search and Rescue for the Northern Iraq area of operations.

<sup>26</sup> LTC Mark Yates, "Coalition Warfare in Desert Storm," Military Review, (OCT 1993): 46.

desk officers provided both the CENTCOM and Saudi chains of command with critical unit disposition information.<sup>27</sup> Gaining rapport with their Arab counterparts, facilitated by personal relationships developed over time prior to Desert Storm, the action officers at the SOCCENT desk of the C3IC provided the U.S. led Joint Operations Center with critical information on units assigned to Joint Force-East (the Arab-led contingent). This information was otherwise unattainable in a timely manner.<sup>28</sup> The effectiveness of the C3IC SOCENT desk clearly depicts the transition of those skills developed early in a special operations career and used successfully at the operational level. Maturity, interpersonal skills, familiarity with the host country and its culture and U.S. doctrine provide a winning combination available for exploitation by a regional CINC or Joint Force Commander.

Finally, the command relationship between the JSOTF and the other component commands of a C/JTF, or JTF for that matter, requires particular attention. Most conventional commanders do not feel comfortable with the standard SOF-conventional command relationship. The issue of tactical control (TACON) versus operational control (OPCON) must be addressed early in the planning of operations. Concern turning to frustration can result due to the operational or tactical commander's perceived lack of control.

SOF assets are limited in quantity and expensive to replace. Their ability to "tailor to task" provides the JTF commander a flexible and innovative resource ready to

---

<sup>27</sup> According to 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History, 33. "SF teams accompanied 109 allied units, from battalion to corps, providing close air support and liaison between forces."

<sup>28</sup> LTC Charlie King, telephone interview by author, 16 March 98. LTC King acted as the Army Special Forces representative to the SOCCENT desk of the C3IC during Desert Storm.

use when conventional forces are not appropriate or necessary. Designed as a strategic/operational-level asset, value added from the use of SOF is provided down to the tactical level when appropriate. This concept of information compression allows intelligence to flow quickly to maximize its impact on operations at both the operational and tactical level. This is especially important during OOTW. To facilitate the flow of information and to assist commanders with the application of special operations is the Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE).

It is through the SOCCE commanded by a field grade officer, assigned normally at the Corps or Division-level, that the commander can request missions that deviate from the TACON relationship. Other methods for requesting special operations support exist through the JSOTF or the CTF headquarters respectively. Once the C2 relationship is explained and the meaning and intent of TACON of SOF (maintaining theater flexibility of SOF assets and reducing the operational burden on the tactical commanders) is explained, it is the author's experience that there is never a problem.

The control of special operations as it operates in the strategic, operational and tactical levels, sometimes at the same time, is an issue that must be answered early in the establishment of a combined/joint task force. The arrangement must follow agreed upon standards in accordance with standing international agreements when applicable. Understanding the likelihood of a "compressed operational area" and the impact of special operations on both the operational and tactical-level commanders is essential to improving SOF interoperability.

### Mission Planning

One of the central differences between a JSOTF and the commander of the other component commands is the role the special operations commander plays in the Joint Operations Planning and Execution System (JOPES). Whereas the conventional component commander will receive a warning order, develop a plan and pass that plan down to subordinate units for implementation, the JSOTF will pass the warning order to the executing subordinate unit for planning and implementation. The subordinate commander usually obtains the COMJSOTF's approval or revisions by a process of "briefback" (a presentation of the implementing commander's concept or detailed plan) to the COMJSOTF.<sup>29</sup> As much as possible, special operations commanders implement their own plans, not the plans of a higher headquarters.

This "power down" planning process capitalizes on the unique characteristics of special operations. SOF are normally deliberate operation planners requiring detailed intelligence, thorough planning, and realistic rehearsals.<sup>30</sup> The use of SOF as a crisis action element has associated risk that must be weighed carefully prior to mission approval. It is the responsibility of the JSOTF or its subordinate SOCCE, assisting a task force or tactical commander respectively, to determine the appropriate use of SOF resources.

SOF are responsible for nine primary missions and seven collateral missions.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Joint Special Operations Forces Institute (JSOFI), Joint Special Operations Task Force Headquarters Master Training Guide, (CD-ROM Cubic Applications Inc)

<sup>30</sup> Department of the Army, Army Special Operations Doctrine, Army FM 100-25, (Washington DC: Department of the Army), 7-9.

<sup>31</sup> The primary missions are direct action, foreign internal defense, special reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, combating terrorism, Counterproliferation, information warfare, civil affairs, and psychological operations. The collateral missions are coalition support, combat search and rescue, counterdrug activities, countermine activities, humanitarian assistance, security assistance, and special activities. Association of the United States Army, "AUSA Background Brief: Special Operations Forces: An Overview," No. 78, March 1998, 1-2. As extracted from the USSOCOM Web site ([www.dtic.mil/socom/](http://www.dtic.mil/socom/))

SOF can “tailor to task and to operate effectively in any situation or environment.”<sup>32</sup>

Maintaining this ability to “tailor to task” SOF a deliberate planning process and the time available must be present.

Intelligence is key to properly executed special operations mission planning. As mentioned earlier, the level of detailed intelligence required of the JSOTF may differ greatly than that of other component commanders. Intelligence for certain types of special operations missions, such as combating terrorism or direct action, is often more detailed; while, for unconventional warfare or foreign internal defense operations, intelligence requirements are often more encompassing, including social, political, and economic information.

#### Force Protection

Force protection is a key consideration of any established JSOTF. Application of force protection measures may differ between conventional forces and SOF, yet the results remain the same: a protected force able to accomplish its mission. Force protection measures applied by SOF in Bosnia during the conduct of Liaison Control Element (LCE) or Joint Commissioned Observers (JCO) missions required an acceptable amount of associated risk in order to maintain effectiveness and accomplish the mission. Reviewed daily at the tactical level and weekly at the operational-level, force protection measures emphasized active and passive actions to ensure personal and unit safety. At the same time these measures allowed SOF to appear non-threatening, a key condition for success. While members of the Multinational Division – North (American sector)

---

<sup>32</sup> Schoomaker, “SOF: The Way Ahead,” 4.

required four-vehicle convoys, supervised movement and the wearing of body armor, SOF elements maneuvered in two man teams, used civilian vehicles, and wore soft cap and fatigues (without the body armament associated with U.S. forces in Bosnia). Each method was appropriate for each specific mission and based on a thorough understanding of the threat. The COMJSOTF is responsible for force protection measures and requirements. Analysis of the threat and its capabilities coupled with careful review of the intent of the SOF mission allows the commander to establish procedures that minimize the risk to an acceptable level while accomplishing the mission. When the calculated risk is not acceptable, the issue is elevated to the Commander of the SOC or the C/JTF for review and decision. This allows for a decision at the highest level possible where additional control measures can be approved and implemented or the mission can be altered or terminated.

Understanding the fundamentals of a JSOTF particularly in the key areas of command relations, mission planning, and force protection will facilitate the integration of special operations across the operational area.

## CJSOTF OPERATIONS

*“Political and strategic direction to the multinational force will likely be the ambiguous product of negotiation and compromise, augmented for its U.S. commander by guidance from his U.S. only chain of command and perhaps by policy input from a local ambassador or other U.S. authority. Authorities at each other nation’s seat of government will be given their own instructions to their national forces, thereby complicating operational and tactical direction by the field commander, who must work out, probably on his own, ways to weave together the myriad and diverse national contributions in a common effort.”<sup>33</sup>*

True integration of multinational SOF at the operational level is a relatively new concept. During Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR, members of American and British special operations units formed a CJSOTF. Initially commanded by a British General Officer, with an American SOF officer as his deputy, the CJSOTF today is led by an American Army Colonel.<sup>34</sup> Because the CJSOTF is a component level command, this depth of integration is unique. Normally, at the component level national, and or service, unity is traditionally maintained. The integration of SOF at this level provides the CTF (in this case SFOR) commander an orchestrated special operations capability. Because of long standing relationships built upon an alliance (NATO), SOCEUR was able to draw upon NATO members to contribute to the coalition effort. In reality, because of the ad hoc nature of most coalitions operations, this type of integration at the component level

---

<sup>33</sup> John H. Cushman, “Thoughts for Joint Commanders,” (Annapolis MD: Whitmore Printing, Aug 93). 52-53.

may not be possible. A more traditional (parallel) approach to special operations, as seen during Operation Desert Storm, will be the norm. Yet, this integrated approach to coalition operations at the operational level bears discussion.

It is imperative that both the capabilities and limitations of the CJSOTF command structure are known by not only the CTF command but also the other subordinate headquarters. The notional command structure in Figure 2 provides a glimpse of the first challenge to integrated coalition special operations: unity of effort.

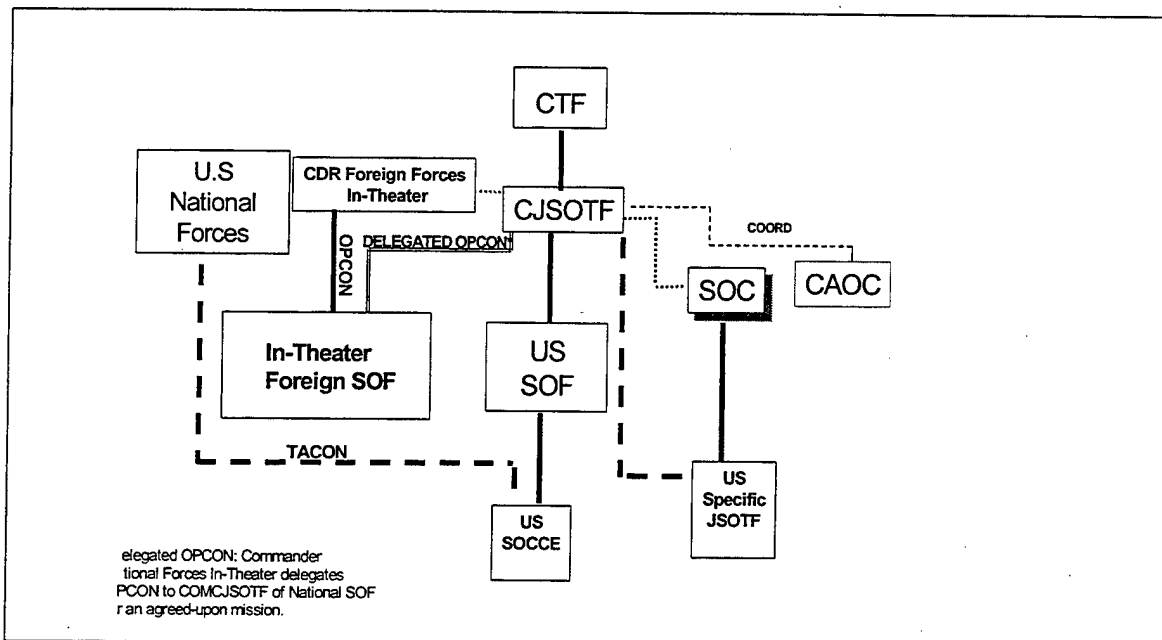


Figure 2. Notional CJSOTF

Most recent writings on coalition operations recognize difficulty in achieving unity of command.<sup>35</sup> As demonstrated in Figure 2, COMCJSOTF must master the art of compromise. Perhaps more so than conventional operations, special operations are considered the domain of national ownership. The political nature and symbolism of national honor most nations place on their military forces makes achieving unity of

<sup>34</sup> USSOCOM History, 53.

<sup>35</sup> For an example see Thomas Durell-Young, "Command In Coalition Operations," ed. Thomas J. Marshall, Problems and Solutions In Future Coalition Operations, (U.S. Army War College: Strategic

command difficult at best.

Sovereignty issues will be the most difficult issues for the multinational force commander (MNFC) to deal with.... Often, the MNFC is a "commander" in title only; the MNFC will accomplish the mission through coordination, communication, and consensus (leadership) rather than by traditional command concepts."<sup>36</sup>

In a situation where special operations are under an integrated command structure and the other components are not, it is important that all key players understand the nuances associated with a coalition effort at the operational-level.

Coalition special operations normally take on a tactical control (TACON) relationship, or as shown in Figure 2 a delegated TACON, which is more restrictive, allowing for those missions mutually agreed upon by the national coalition members. Unlike conventional operations, where visibility and support requirements preclude unilateral operations within the operational area of the coalition effort, a participating member to the CJSOTF may conduct unilateral special operations. This is particularly true in areas of operation where participating members have had a long-standing involvement. It is possible that special operations were actively conducted in an area before there was a crisis requiring a military coalition. These operations are likely to continue during and after the coalition ceases to exist. Operations of this type are maintained under national control and may not be coordinated through the CJSOTF. In most likelihood, the national representative on the CJSOTF staff will have knowledge of such operations and de-conflict when necessary.

Unlike conventional operations, the CJSOTF commander may be required to

---

Studies Institute, December 1997).

provide C<sup>2</sup> for myriad special operations with varying security classifications and sponsors. Although a separate JSOTF is normally established to separate the coalition effort from any unilateral operation, it is highly plausible that multiple special operations supporting the various objectives within the operational responsibility of the CTF commander are required. Coordination, de-conflicting, and force protection of all assigned forces becomes paramount concerns of the CJSOTF commander.

---

<sup>36</sup> Joint Pub 3-16, I-1.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Special operations play a key role in any coalition operation involving the U.S military. As shown in the preceding discussion, the application of special operations requires more than a rudimentary level of understanding. Special operations differ from conventional operations by design. These types of operations provide both the strategist and the commander options not available through conventional means. As discussed in this paper, SOF provide a standing, integrated, joint response to a crisis. With a force structure that links strategic planning with tactical execution, SOF can facilitate coalition operations by way of their regional expertise, language proficiency, and unique equipment. Coupled with traditional warrior skills necessary to conduct longer range reconnaissance and direct action missions than that offered at the Corps-level, SOF provide a small footprint with a significant impact. Early deployment of SOF increases their optimization and force multiplier effect.

The challenges associated with commanding a JSOTF are magnified when a lack of understanding of SOF, its missions, capabilities, and limitations exists at the key decision-maker level. Unfortunately, this lack of understanding is to be expected, as conventional officers, particularly on operational-level staffs, have not been exposed routinely to special operations. Institutional separation, explained earlier as a necessary result of the Cohen-Nunn Amendment, along with increased deployments and decreased combined arms training opportunities magnify this void in integration. Coupled with the asymmetrical nature of future military operations, here lies the risk of misuse or, at best,

under use of SOF.

Conventional officers must study special operations as an element of the Battlefield Operating System (BOS). SOF must target operational-level audiences in their effort to increased special operations awareness among the military services. Specifically, continued participation in strategic and operational-level exercises, which include Corps-level audiences, such as the U.S. Army Battle Command Training Program (BCTP), and the Strategic Crisis Exercises (SCE) at the Army War College will provide the correct focus. As critical as the SOC are to the theater CINC's strategy, they are equally critical to USSOCOM to educate other services and agencies on SOF capabilities. Primary officers, including the commanders of the five regional SOC, should be used extensively to teach at the appropriate levels. A case in point is the Strategic Crisis Exercise conducted annually at the U.S. Army War College. Designed to expose U.S. Army War College students to a national strategic problem-solving exercise, using a myriad of resources available to the U.S. Government, the SCE provides many scenario-based opportunities to exploit the use of SOF and the role of the SOC. A high level representative from the various SOC, possessing credibility and legitimacy, would have an enormous impact on the students. Rotating this requirement between the SOC would reduce the burden on any one organization and ensure adequate representation.

Emphasis should also be placed on the physical integration of special operations and the planning staffs of elements at corps-level and above. Although well represented in the operations directorates of various staffs, to include the Joint Staff, representation in the plans and policy directorates usually occurs by invitation-only at the onset of a crisis. Permanent representation, influencing the planning process prior to the execution of

operations, could ease the challenges normally associated with SOF integration.

Lastly, continued emphasis on the SOC in both manning and equipment will ensure the readiness of SOF to meet the requirements of the National Command Authorities and Combatant Commanders as envisioned by both Goldwater-Nichols and Cohen-Nunn legislation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Books**

Allard, Kenneth. Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned. Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1995.

Cushman, John. Thoughts for Joint Commanders. Annapolis MD: Whitmore Printing, 1993.

Hutchison, Kevin Don. Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm Chronology and Fact Book. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1995.

Marquis, Susan L. Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997.

Vandenbroucke, Lucien S. Perilous Options: Special Operations as an Instrument of US Foreign Policy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Waller, Douglas C. Commandos, The Inside Story of America's Secret Soldiers. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

### **Periodical Articles**

Harned, Glenn. "Bridging the gap: Special Forces as a member of the Combined Arms Team." Special Warfare Magazine (October 1988): 4.

Schoomaker, Peter J. "US Special Operations Forces: The Way Ahead." Special Warfare Magazine (Winter 1998): 4.

Shelton, Henry H. "Coming of Age: Theater Special Operations Commands." Joint Force Quarterly (Winter 1996-97): 51.

Tangney, William. "From the Commandant." Special Warfare Magazine (Spring 1997) inside cover.

Yates, Mark. "Coalition Warfare in Desert Storm." Military Review (October 1993): 43.

Durell-Young, Thomas. "Command In Coalition Operations." ed. By Thomas J. Marshall, Problems and Solutions In Future Coalition Operations, (US Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute (December, 1997).

### **Theses, Individual Research Projects**

Bado, Christopher M. "Integration of Special Operations and Conventional Forces In Unconventional Warfare." Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1996.

Bohle, Franklin C. "Army Special Forces: A Good Fit For Peace Operations." Strategic Research Project, US Army War College, 1997.

Boykin, William G. "Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict Legislation: why was it passed and have the voids been filled." Individual Study Project, US Army War College, 1991.

Higgins, Kevin. "Military Observer Mission Ecuador-Peru (MOMEPE) doing a lot with a little," (Strategic Research Paper: Army War College, 1997).

### **Military Publications**

Joint Chiefs of Staff. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms. Joint Publication 1-02, Washington DC, 23 March 1994.

Joint Chiefs of Staff. Joint Doctrine For Multinational Operations DRAFT. Joint Publication 3-16, Washington DC, 1997.

Joint Chiefs of Staff. Doctrine For Joint Special Operations. Joint Publication 3-05, Washington DC, 28 October 1992.

US Army Command and General Staff College. "Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986—A Primer." Fundamentals of Joint and Combined Operations. Fort Leavenworth Kansas: USACGSC, 30 Jan 1990.

US Department of the Army. Operations. Field Manual 100-5, Washington DC, 14 June 1993.

US Department of the Army. Army Special Operations Doctrine. Field Manual 100-25, Washington DC, 1993.

### **Public Documents**

Joint Special Operations Forces Institute (JSOFI). Joint Special Operations Task Force Headquarters Master Training Guide, Washington DC, CD-ROM.

United States Special Operations Command. SOF Vision 2020. McDill AFB, no date.

United States Special Operations Command. United States Special Operations Command 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History. McDill AFB, no date.

United States Special Operations Command. "USSOCOM Web Site."  
<http://www.dtic.mil/socom/>.

**Interviews**

King, LTC Charlie. USAPERSCOM SF Branch Chief, interview 16 March 98.