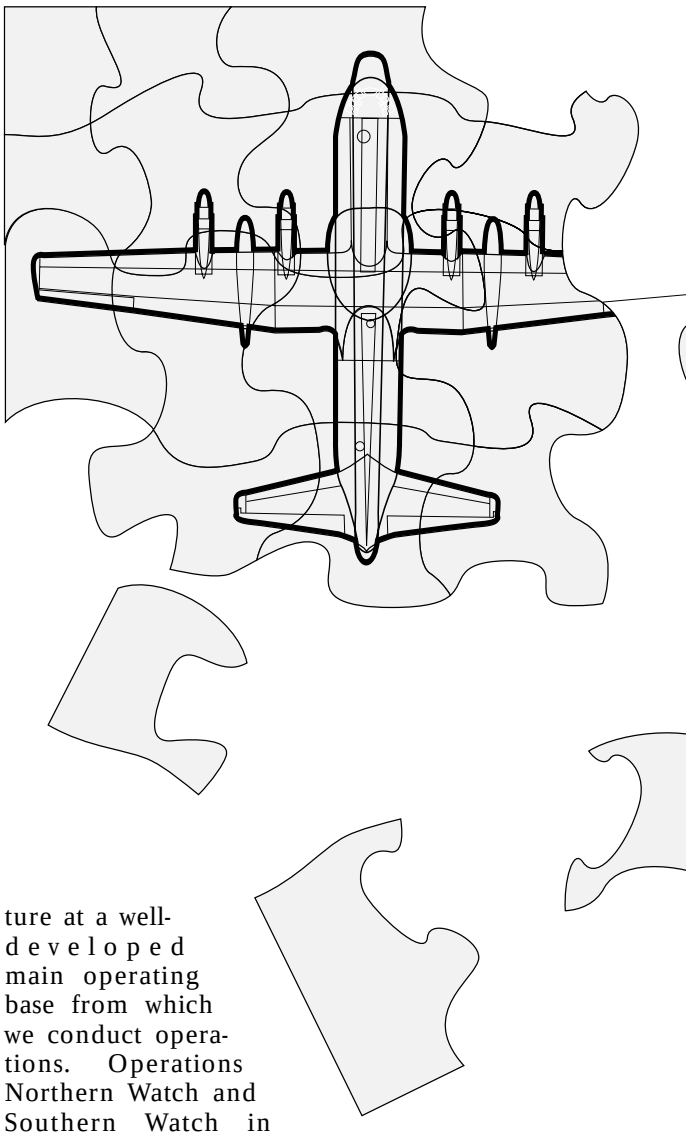
Building and Commanding Expeditionary Units

Lessons from Kosovo

MAJ GEN ROGER A. BRADY, USAF



THE RECENT AIR CAMPAIGN over Serbia and Kosovo has provided the latest chapter in the story of the deployment, employment, and redeployment of expeditionary aerospace forces (EAF). Although it reconfirmed many lessons learned in other efforts, this experience included some new challenges from which we should learn as we mature our expeditionary concepts and prepare for the next inevitable conflict. Obviously, the lessons learned from this conflict will be multifaceted—covering the entire spectrum of logistical support, force application, and political intrigue—and voluminous. However, this article looks at a small but important piece of the EAF puzzle—the creation and control of expeditionary units during a crisis. It addresses how and why the expeditionary force was organized for Operation Allied Force, responsibilities of an expeditionary-unit commander, lessons learned, and implications for the future.

I should acknowledge at the outset that this was certainly not the first large-scale deployment of expeditionary air forces. The United States Air Force and the Army Air Corps before it have a rich history in the use of expeditionary airpower. In the decade since our deployments to Southwest Asia began, our expeditionary concept has reflected what might be called the Central Command model. In this construct, forces deploy to an already established wing structure at a well-developed main operating base from which we conduct operations. Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch in Iraq are similar in that regard. The experience of forces deployed to Aviano Air Base, Italy, to support operations in Bosnia is much the same. In contrast, Allied Force provided a wider range of expeditionary experiences. As we formed the units of the 16th Aerospace Expeditionary Task Force (ASETF), aircraft were deployed to existing main operating bases, contingency bases, allied air bases, and one international airport.

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Organization

Organizing the units of the 16th ASETF was an iterative process, as was the buildup of forces in the theater. The forces initially deployed were attached to three air expeditionary wings (AEW) (fig. 1). Aircraft at Aviano AB, Italy, were assigned to the 31st AEW. All other aircraft south of the Alps but not at Aviano were attached to the 16th AEW (headquartered at Aviano), an expeditionary wing already operating in support of the Stabilization Force in Bosnia. The aircraft deployed north of the Alps (primarily tankers and reconnaissance aircraft) were attached to the 100th Air Refueling Wing at Royal Air Force Base Mildenhall, United Kingdom, and then designated as the 100th AEW. It is important to remember that at the outset of the conflict, there was no clear idea of how large the force would eventually become. The reinforcement plan continued to evolve after the conflict was under way. Consequently, beddown decisions for the initial flow of forces did not take into account what might be needed later. As you will see, the iterative nature of the force flow would cause some deployed units to relocate as more forces deployed to the theater.

As the air conflict intensified and more forces flowed into the theater, more bases were required. By the end of the 78-day campaign, the number of AEWs had increased from three to 10 (fig. 2). As the deployment of forces continued, the availability and location of bases had a strong influence on how wings were organized. These figures, however, do not show the numerous iterations in between as we moved units from one base to another or reattached them to a newly formed AEW. This chain of events was certainly not planned but was driven by the dynamic nature of the contingency and the decision process regarding what forces would be deployed.

For example, the 52d Fighter Wing (FW) initially deployed squadrons to Italy, where they were attached to the 31st AEW. As Aviano AB filled to capacity and more forces deployed to the theater, the 52d AEW formed at Spangdahlem AB, Germany. However, they were not all Spangdahlem units. A squadron of F-117s from Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, had deployed to Spangdahlem. So a

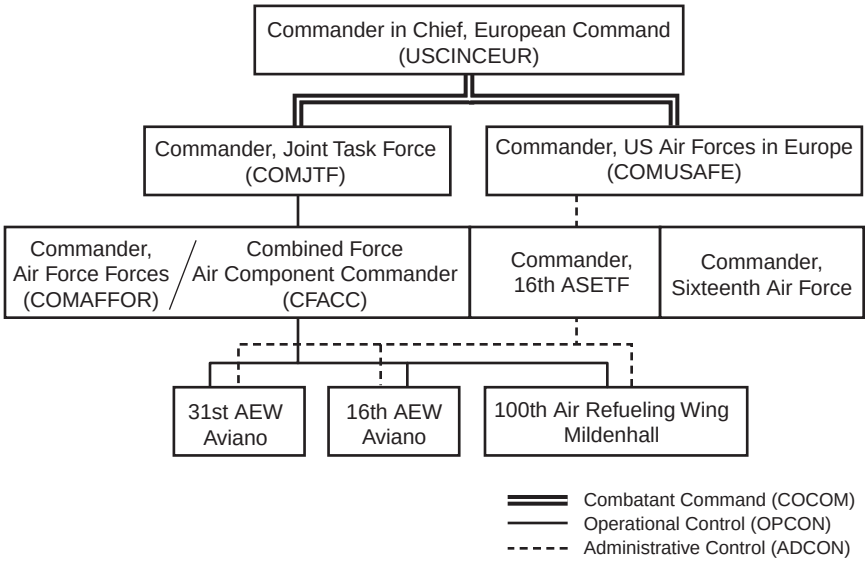

Figure 1. Initial Command Relationships

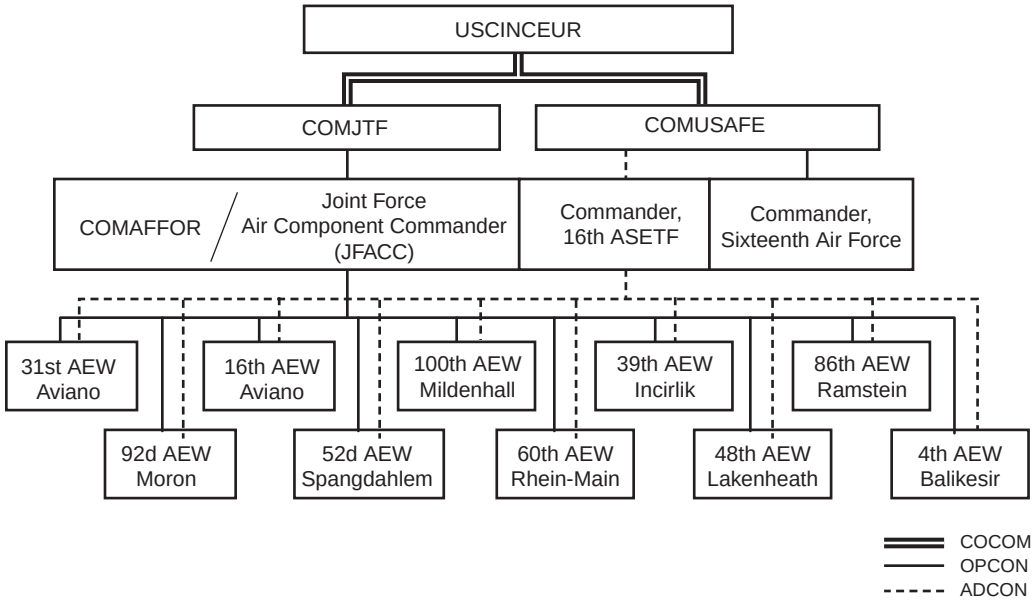

Figure 2. Final Command Relationships

peacetime wing commander flowed his own forces forward, and an AEW later stood up with units from the continental United States (CONUS) at his own main operating base. This AEW would eventually consist of groups at Spangdahlem and at Trapani and Gioia del Colle in Italy.

A similar chain of events occurred with the 48th FW. Two of its fighter squadrons had deployed early in the conflict: one squadron of F-15Es to Aviano and one squadron of F-15Cs plus an air base support squadron and a logistics squadron to Cervia, Italy. The latter units were attached as an expeditionary operations group to the 31st AEW at Aviano. Later, additional forces required the use of RAF Lakenheath, making it necessary to stand up the 48th AEW. The 48th units now at Cervia were reattached from the 31st AEW to the 48th AEW, reestablishing the unit integrity of the 48th. Some of the fighter units that had deployed to Italy returned to their home bases of Spangdahlem and Lakenheath and flew missions from there. This beddown adjustment put like aircraft types together at their home units, making support easier but increasing the distance to the fight. At the same time, it made room for more of the same fighter types at Aviano.

As the deploying force increased, it was necessary to find more bases for both fighter and tanker aircraft. Bases close to the combat area that could accommodate large numbers of tankers were particularly scarce. Since most North Atlantic Treaty Organization and former Warsaw Pact bases were built for fighters, they typically do not have the length of runway, parking space, or fuel supply required for tanker operations; nor are they stressed to handle the heavier tanker aircraft. This situation required reliance on such old standbys as Moron, Spain; Istres, France; Sigonella, Sicily; Souda Bay, Greece; RAF Fairford, United Kingdom; RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom; and Rhein-Main, Germany. In addition to these locations, we were able to secure use of RAF Brize Norton in the United Kingdom, Mont-de-Marsan in France, and Ferihegy International Airport in Hungary. In addition to needing more bases close to the combat area, the ability to attack from all axes was also important. Bases in western Turkey

Deployment and redeployment of EAFs require logistical planning.

offered this advantage. The 4th AEW, with fighter units from Shaw AFB, South Carolina, and Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina, formed in Turkey at Bandirma and Balikesir. Deployed tanker units attached to the newly formed 108th Expeditionary Operations Group under the 39th AEW at Incirlik provided their tanker support.

This description of the creation of the AEWs may make the process appear somewhat haphazard. Although complete foreknowledge of how the conflict would develop may have yielded a different organization and beddown of forces, these decisions were based on a dynamic operational situation, an application of Air Force doctrine, and the judgment of theater air commanders. The authors of Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power* (28 September 1998), could not foresee the exact circumstances we would face, but their instruction to "apply sound professional judgment to tailor . . . organizations and operations for the task at hand and for the requirements within differing theaters" (p. 31) provided exactly the flexibility needed.

The organization of the 16th ASETF was significantly influenced by the availability of bases meeting requirements for fuel, weapons storage, adequate runways and ramps, and the ability to support our personnel. There were also political issues, with the nations surrounding the area of conflict offering to contribute in various ways, based on the character of their bases and what their publics would support. For example, some nations were eager to support tankers but not armed combat aircraft. Another important consideration in the locations of the AEWs was the ability to support aircraft at multiple locations. Some bases that were offered would support only a few tankers, increasing the overall requirement for support personnel and services. Although some locations did have only a few tankers, the USAFE staff (functioning as AFFOR Rear) made a concerted effort to find bases that could accommodate 10 or more aircraft, making the most of our support capability.

Having determined that locations were logistically and operationally acceptable and that political support was likely, the USAFE staff proposed locations and an organizational structure to the 16th ASETF commander. As the deployment continued, the USAFE staff proposed expanding the organization beyond the 10 AEWs in an attempt to limit the wing commanders' spans of control. However, Lt Gen Michael Short, triple-hatted as the 16th ASETF commander, the JTF Noble Anvil JFACC, and the Allied Force CFACC, quickly realized that his vast responsibilities required him to limit the number of wings. This resulted in some wing commanders having a rather large span of control with significant geographic separation of some wing organizations. For example, the 92d AEW commander at Moron AB, Spain, had groups at Sigonella, Italy; Mont-de-Marsan, France; and Souda Bay, Greece. Similarly, the 100th AEW commander had groups at Mildenhall, Fairford, and Brize Norton in the United Kingdom and at Geilenkirchen in Germany. However, this command challenge was significantly mitigated by the availability of operational-support airlift, usually C-21s, for wing commanders to maintain contact with their geographically separated units. The USAFE staff also coordinated with the commanders of Air Mobility Command, the Air Force Reserve, and the Air National Guard on the organization and location for deploying units. When combat operations were suspended, units making up the 10 AEWs were operating from 27 locations in 10 countries.

Commanders' Responsibilities

As is the case in all military operations, the need to adapt rapidly to a changing environment was a challenge to all commanders involved. The wide variety of situations confronting our forces in the Kosovo campaign highlighted some responsibilities of unit command that are peculiar to, and sometimes magnified by, the expeditionary environment. These include determining whom and what to deploy, getting on-site as soon as possible, establishing a relationship with the host-nation commander, making the mental adjustment to the expeditionary environment, and, when the conflict ends, ensuring that redeployment is accomplished in an efficient, effective manner.

Deciding whom and what to deploy is critical. Take too little, and the mission may suffer. Take too much, and we waste valuable resources, including the lift required to get it there. In this contingency, units essentially brought whatever support forces and management overhead they wanted. Some brought logistics squadrons; others just brought logisticians embedded in their operations squadrons. Some brought an air base squadron and a command master sergeant; others did not. The War Mobilization Plan provides some guidance regarding the size of management overhead for deploying units, but that guidance can and must be tailored to meet the situation at hand.

As mentioned earlier, some commanders found themselves in situations not unlike those at Northern and Southern Watch. At Aviano, for example, a robust main-operating-base structure provides most base operating support. Typically, units deploying to Aviano brought only operations and logistics units. Other units like those at Moron and Rhein-Main, which might be called "permanent contingency bases," were supported by permanently assigned Air Force air base squadrons. Units at locations such as Bandirma, Balikesir, Trapani, Mont-de-Marsan, and Budapest, Hungary, found themselves in a very different situation. No US host was present, and the units either had to deploy or contract for base support. A tent city was required in the case of Balikesir, a Turkish air force fighter base, making this location perhaps the most purely expeditionary. This large support requirement and the geographically separated operating locations, Balikesir and Bandirma, dictated a more robust management structure to support the 4th AEW commander in carrying out his duties. In all cases, a thorough analysis of the deployed location and the organiza-

tions, as well as the people and equipment required to support operations, is the first step in a successful deployment. And this important analysis will require close communication among the deploying unit, the unit's major command, and the theater air component.

Having determined what and who should be deployed, the commander should proceed to the expeditionary base as soon as possible. This is extremely important in expeditionary operations, particularly when base operating support is not available and there are no US host units to establish relationships with the host-nation officials. Again, the 4th AEW deployment to Turkey is a good example. Anticipating the varied aspects of the Bandirma and Balikesir deployment, the USAFE staff arranged for the early arrival of Brig Gen Norm Seip, the wing commander. We gained a distinct advantage by having him arrive well before the aircraft. It allowed time to establish a relationship with the two host commanders—both brigadier generals—and to begin discussions on some of the more important issues of force protection, contracting with local vendors, and so forth. Although some may consider these details better left to subordinates, establishing the right relationship at the right level in the host country is critical. Deployed commanders must appreciate the importance of rank when dealing with officials of another nation. Whereas we may typically have a major or lieutenant colonel leading an advance team and making key decisions, a host-nation wing commander who reserves those decisions for himself may be uncomfortable or even unwilling to discuss those issues with more junior personnel. The advance team of subject-matter experts is obviously important, but having the commander on the ground will aid immeasurably in setting the right tone with the host. In addition, early arrival gives the commander time to focus on all the important aspects of base operating support before operations begin.

Command in the expeditionary setting also requires some adjustment in thinking for both the deployed commander and for the commander who remains at home but deploys forces forward. Units will always deploy into the area of responsibility of a theater CINC, and there will always be a theater air component commander. In accordance with AFDD 2, there will be an Aerospace Expeditionary Task Force commander (who will usually also be the COMAFFOR), and expeditionary wings, groups, and squadrons will stand up under that structure. As the Kosovo experience showed, some wings will deploy complete with commander and staff and be designated as expeditionary wings under the ASETF. Other units may come as squadrons or groups and be attached to AEWs commanded by wing commanders already in-theater. And still others may be a "rainbow" of wing staffs and squadrons from multiple in-theater and CONUS-based units. So what responsibilities does the deployed commander have, and what does the commander "back home" do? Put another way, which strands of the umbilical cord need to be cut, and which ones remain intact? During the Kosovo experience, these questions were raised in two particular areas—personnel management and sustainment.

EAF commanders must plan inbound flights while expanding the ground infrastructure for their units.

Early on in the conflict, theater clearance requests arrived at Headquarters USAFE from CONUS-based commanders and command chief master sergeants who needed to "come make sure my troops are being taken care of." But was this really necessary? When units deploy and become part of an expeditionary unit, in many ways they are no longer

EAFs require careful and comprehensive medical preparation to speed worldwide deployments.

"my troops." If they are attached to an AEW at a main operating base, there will be a commander, command chief master sergeant, and so forth, to take care of those troops. If the deployed location does not have a leadership structure in place, the leadership management team to be deployed forward must be part of the predeployment planning. Every unit needs a commander and a command chief master sergeant or first sergeant, *but it needs only one, and he or she should be in-theater with the troops.*

Another situation highlighted the need for commanders—and the Air Force corporately—to adjust for the deployed environment. During the contingency, a noncommissioned officer promotion list was released. Locally based commanders notified their troops, but long-standing personnel system procedures that make the home-station commander responsible for notification of deployed personnel precluded notification of the deployed personnel at the main operating bases. This means the expeditionary unit commander can dispense bad news (he has Uniform Code of Military Justice authority) but not good news, such as promotions. Not surprisingly, some of our people felt momentarily "forgotten." Deployed commanders felt awkward, and some home-station commanders worried that their turf might be trod upon. The USAFE staff, in cooperation with the affected commanders and the personnel system, was able to resolve the issue. However, it illustrated the need to reexamine the suitability and feasibility of our policies in the context of expeditionary operations.

Expeditionary commanders may also have to adjust their thinking somewhat in regard to sustainment. Many commanders have developed a habit of "home unit reachback" to sustain their aircraft and provide supplies when they are deployed. This desire to use the "good ol' boy" net is very understandable. We all like to work with people and processes that are familiar. This method is often effective in the short term for individual units, but it is not an effective way to ensure long-term sustainment of multiple units in a large contingency. It also makes it impossible for the ASETF commander and his staff to stay abreast of the health of the fleet being deployed. As the contingency unfolded and the sustainment task grew to proportions that could not be managed by the logistics staff of a very small numbered air force, the 16th ASETF commander dual-hatted Brig Gen Terry Gabreski, the USAFE director of logistics, as his A-4 to handle all sustainment matters. She and her staff became the focal point for sustainment, and the flow of parts and supplies into the theater was directed from Ramstein AB, Germany. She established contact with logistics staffs at Air Mobility Command, Air Combat Command, Air Force Materiel Command, and the Air Reserve components to ensure the sustainment flow. The result was a reliable sustainment system; timely, accurate information on fleet health to the 16th ASETF commander; and a mission-capable rate that would be the envy of any peacetime air force. Expeditionary unit commanders need to understand that the route taken by sustainment may be different from that at home station, but it is one which will provide the best support to forces in the theater. Early and frequent communication between the A-4 staff and wing logisticians will get sustainment started on the right track and keep it there.

Expeditionary command responsibilities in Kosovo were different from those in most recent contingencies in one other important aspect. Unlike commanders in Northern and

Southern Watch, many commanders in the Kosovo conflict had complete responsibility for redeployment—not just aircraft and people but *everything* that had been deployed to the expeditionary location. Before the Kosovo deployment was complete, it became apparent that redeployment would soon begin. Senior commanders largely agree that redeployment needs improvement. Often cited are examples from Operation Desert Storm, in which units deployed with too much of some things and not enough of others—and left a lot of it in the desert. Gen John Jumper, commander of USAFE, was determined that we would do it better in Operation Allied Force and made it an issue for the expeditionary wing commanders. He placed particular emphasis on how units handled the disposition of supplies and equipment and how commanders ensured continuity of supervision as units redeployed.

Over the last few years, deploying forces have learned that they can significantly reduce the amount of lift required for a contingency by acquiring many items in-theater. Vehicles, fitness equipment, air conditioners, housing units, and even karaoke machines can now be leased or purchased at many locations to which we deploy. But what do you do with these items when it is time to redeploy? Take them home? Give them to the locals? Abandon them? The blindingly obvious lesson here is that there must be a plan. When Allied Force began, there was no plan for disposition of equipment and for redeployment. All expeditionary commanders were directed to develop a plan. Concurrently, the USAFE staff wrote a plan to guide the effort and published it in approximately one week. The process was quick and ugly, but unit commanders responded and planned for disposition of the very substantial amounts of equipment and supplies that had been acquired. Some items were redeployed to the home unit, some were retained in USAFE for use in future contingencies, and some were transferred appropriately to host-nation units.

This process is extremely important for many reasons. Because we have limited resources, they must be used wisely. Commanders must make important decisions considering cost of redeployment, utility of supplies and equipment for future use, legal and environmental issues, and our relationship with our host nations. By leaving a deployed location in a condition as good as or better than we found it, we improve current and future relations with our hosts, reinforcing with them and our own people that we are a professional military force from start to finish.

Finally, disposition and redeployment are tasks that expeditionary-unit commanders must personally see through to the end. Expeditionary units are established by the publication of a set of G-series orders, and those units exist until such orders are officially rescinded. From deployment to disposition and/or redeployment of supplies, people, and equipment, expeditionary units are living, functioning organizations with a commander responsible for all activities of the unit. In contrast to deploying and employing forces, which are pretty exciting, disposition and redeployment are just plain, hard work. And they come at a time when everyone, including the commander, just wants to "get outta Dodge." However, this is a time when the commander must be "present for duty" and intimately involved. For all who have had the opportunity to be operational commanders, we inevitably think of ourselves as operators. Consequently, during a redeployment there may be a tendency to focus on getting the aircraft home—and even to deploy back with the aircraft. Although the commander may not be the very last person to leave a deployed location, it is a basic command responsibility to oversee people, supplies, and equipment as redeployment continues. As Operation Allied Force wound down and units began to redeploy, COMUSAFE required that all deployed commanders receive clearance to leave the theater. The ticket home was an approved disposition and redeployment plan and an appropriate plan to ensure continuity of supervision at the deployed

location as he or she departed. All commanders, working with the various functional directorates on the USAFE staff, completed the task of disposition and redeployment, provided appropriate oversight over the last remaining elements of their units, and were cleared for return to their home units.

The following are the bottom lines for expeditionary commanders: prepare for the location to which you are going, take the right people and equipment, get there early to oversee the establishment of base support, build rapport with host-nation commanders, work within the theater command structure for personnel issues and sustainment of forces, and give redeployment the same attention as deployment.

Lessons Learned/Implications

As in all operations, the Kosovo experience yielded many important lessons with implications for how we prepare ourselves to organize and command expeditionary organizations in future contingencies. Those presented here are not intended as an exhaustive list, but are illustrative of crucial lessons learned:

1. One of the earliest lessons learned in Operation Allied Force did not involve command of expeditionary units. However, it uncovered a significant shortfall in our ability to quickly and accurately determine appropriate locations from which to support and operate expeditionary air forces. The process by which we conduct site surveys needs to be improved. Considerable progress has been made in developing equipment for use in conducting surveys and developing base-support plans, but we still need to develop and maintain a worldwide database of information on potential expeditionary locations. Various communities within and outside the Air Force may protest that the accomplishment of site surveys is among their core competencies. However, the Kosovo experience indicates that relevant information on potential deployment bases, even when available, is either dated or dispersed in so many agencies and in so many formats as to be virtually unusable in a rapidly developing contingency. Although such a database would not remove the requirement for an advance team, it could reduce the size of the team (currently about 25) and eliminate those bases clearly not suitable. Both would significantly reduce the cost and time required to make the beddown decision.
2. Host Air Force units at deployed locations should be designated "expeditionary" whenever appropriate. When units are deployed to contingency bases with permanently assigned air base units or squadrons (e.g., Moron, Fairford, and Rhein-Main), those commanders should be dual-hatted, and their units designated as expeditionary units attached to and working for the expeditionary commander. This arrangement provides unity of command and leaves no doubt that the efforts of that base are to be focused on supporting the expeditionary unit in the contingency. Similarly, support-unit commanders at main operating bases (e.g., Spangdahlem, Aviano, and Mildenhall) who are directly involved in support of the deployed forces in the contingency should be dual-hatted, and their units designated as expeditionary. Again, this arrangement provides unity of command and engenders a sense of pride in, commitment to, and ownership of their role in the expeditionary effort. It helps ensure the success of the operation, and it also helps ensure that the units and individuals who contributed to that success are appropriately recognized when the contingency is concluded.
3. We need to formally establish the process by which we determine the makeup of units being deployed to expeditionary locations. Even though commanders should retain the author-

ity to form their units, the theater air component is best positioned to advise commanders on what resources are available at the deployed location and what should be brought forward from CONUS. More definitive guidance in War Mobilization Plan volumes (currently oriented to scenarios for major theater war) and extensive predeployment discussions with the theater air component are both required to ensure the best use of limited lift resources and more effectively manned and equipped expeditionary units.

4. We need to educate our present and future commanders regarding the unique nature and responsibilities of expeditionary command. As the Kosovo experience showed, some commanders will find themselves in an unfamiliar command environment. In addition to the peculiarities of the deployed location, some commanders will find themselves responsible for oversight in areas, principally support, with which they have little or no experience. Commanders of operations groups and squadrons may find themselves serving at the next higher echelon of command, or they may become deployed-location commanders geographically separated from their wing commander. We need to approach this education process in two ways. First, we need to ensure that our doctrine is as clear on these responsibilities as it should be. Second, we need to take every opportunity to present the information when and where it is needed.

Brig Gen John Barry, my predecessor as USAFE director of plans and programs, wrote "Who's in Charge?"—an excellent article on service administrative control—for the fall 1998 issue of *Airpower Journal*. It is "must read" material for expeditionary commanders and planners. General Barry explains that wing commanders have ADCON and asserts that "we need to develop and standardize the degree of ADCON (call it 'specified' ADCON) that we want the expeditionary commander to exercise" (p. 36). The most recent version of AFDD 2 contains an expanded discussion of "complete" and "specified" ADCON, but we need to clarify and distinguish those gray areas in which responsibilities seem to overlap. For example, we need to be more specific, in either doctrine or policy, about what management and sustainment responsibilities belong to expeditionary commanders and the theater component, and which belong to the home-based commanders and CONUS commands. Operation Allied Force reconfirmed that the efforts of the entire Air Force team are required for success. It also revalidated the principle of unity of command, demonstrating that the efforts of the entire Air Force are used to best advantage when directed through and in support of the theater component and the ASETF commander. Having gotten the message right, we must deliver it at the right time to prospective expeditionary commanders. Although we could appropriately present such information in professional military education at all levels, it should also be particularly emphasized in the curricula of major commands as they conduct their required precommand courses. Further, commanders destined to be in charge at a deployed location need to be provided and to actively seek out opportunities to familiarize themselves with all the functions required to sustain deployed operations.

The expeditionary experiences gained during the Kosovo contingency will be invaluable to the effectiveness and efficiency of future expeditionary air operations. Operation Allied Force was extremely successful because our expeditionary commanders and their people performed magnificently. As in every great endeavor, we also learned there are things we can do better. It is important that we now take the time to remember and codify those lessons, make them part of our expeditionary culture, and use them to ensure success in the next conflict. □