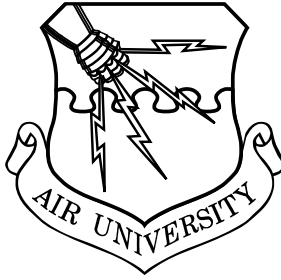


BROTHERS IN BERETS

**The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics
1953-2003**



Forrest L. Marion



Brothers in Berets

The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics, 1953-2003

FORREST L. MARION, PHD
Air Force History and Museums Program

In Conjunction With
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Foreword

In the late 1990s, my predecessor, Gen Mike Ryan, initiated the US Air Force's transition to a largely "expeditionary" air force. The horrific attacks of 11 September 2001—during my first staff meeting as the new chief of staff of the US Air Force—validated that foundational decision. During my tenure, our Air Force's response to the attacks furthered that transition. Under the leadership of a visionary secretary of the Air Force, Dr. Jim Roche, our service adopted a new term befitting its expeditionary warriors who, in an evolving post-9/11 conflict environment, had to be prepared to carry the fight to the enemy not necessarily in the air, but on the ground. That term evolved into *Battlefield Airmen*. While the Battlefield Airmen concept encompassed several specialties under the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and others found in conventional units, this book narrates the evolution and contributions of the former; hence, the title, *Brothers in Berets: The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics, 1953–2003*, refers to the Battlefield Airmen assigned to special tactics units.

This work originated at the Combat Control Association reunion in 2002. While attending the event, I asked legendary combat controller Charlie Jones if there was anything I could do for the association. He replied that the history of combat control teams (CCT) had not been written and suggested a 50-year anniversary volume (1953–2003). This work is the result of Charlie's request, though, sadly, he passed away in 2006—just one week after being interviewed.

The AFSOC special tactics community—a small brotherhood of highly-trained and equally-dedicated warriors, consisting of special tactics officers and combat controllers, combat rescue officers and pararescuemen, and officer and enlisted special operations weathermen—has proven itself as a force multiplier time and time again throughout its history in places like Somalia, Serbia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Their story deserves telling within the US Air Force and to the general public. I am pleased to endorse this comprehensive and well-researched work as one step in that direction. I expect Charlie would be proud.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John P. Jumper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "P".

Gen John P. Jumper, USAF, retired

Preface

In late April of 1980, when word came of the disaster at Desert One, I was three weeks away from commissioning in the US Air Force (USAF) with orders to Fort Rucker, Alabama, for helicopter training. From that moment on, the mission to rescue the hostages in Iran held great interest for me, even more so two years later when I reported to an air rescue unit flying Sikorsky HH-53 long-range combat search and rescue helicopters. A quarter century later, to have the opportunity to research and write on that very topic as part of a broader story—the evolution of US Air Force Special Tactics—has been a most providential and rewarding experience. There have been other points of convergence personally with the story at hand: flying with an HH-53 instructor pilot in 1981 who earned the Silver Star for the S.S. *Mayaguez* mission six years earlier; serving with pararescueman and Air Force Cross-recipient Joel Talley in a combat rescue squadron during 1982; interviewing—on 10 September 2001—the mission commander for the two combat rescues in Serbia two years earlier; and deploying to Special Operations Command–Pacific in 2002 as the historian covering Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines. In 2006, I received the “baton” for the present study from Jeff Sahaida, who conducted the research and wrote the World War II portion of chapter 1. As I proceeded, it became clear to me that chapter 4—the centerpiece of which was the Iranian hostage rescue attempt—was the watershed chapter in terms of the genesis of the US Air Force’s combat control contribution to a US national counterterrorism capability. As John T. Carney’s select combat control team continued to mature in the mid-1980s, a small number of pararescuemen joined his team, thereby initiating what became known as Air Force Special Tactics. A decade later, following several reorganizations, in the mid-1990s special operations weather team personnel joined the Special Tactics community, whose organizational home was the 720th Special Tactics Group at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

In Sicily and Italy in 1943, the US Army began employing small teams of personnel known as “Pathfinders” on the drop zones intended for use in Allied airborne operations against the Axis powers. The Pathfinders’ role was to set up their equipment shortly before the arrival of the first paratrooper-laden aircraft over the drop zone in order to guide the aircraft to the proper location. This early system met with mixed results. Shortly after the US Air Force was established

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in 1947, it gained the Pathfinder mission from the Army, but it was 1953 before the first Air Force combat control team (CCT) was formed (chapter 1). For most of the 1950s the Eighteenth Air Force, headquartered at Donaldson AFB, South Carolina, served as the nucleus for Air Force combat control. However, the USAF—and even the Eighteenth Air Force leadership—anticipated a not-too-distant future with electronic aids to navigation rendering the men on the ground unnecessary for guiding aircraft to their targets. The small Air Force specialty survived the decade even as the US Army sought to recapture the Pathfinder function that it viewed as properly its own (chapter 2). From the early 1960s to 1975, the Southeast Asia conflict gave CCTs their first combat experience, furthering several legendary careers in the process (chapter 3). In the wake of Israel’s dramatic hostage rescue in July 1976 at Entebbe, Uganda, the US government began developing its own national counterterrorist capability. At that point entered a hard-charging, charismatic, and visionary combat control officer, John “Coach” Carney, whose small CCT played a key role in April 1980 at Desert One. Carney’s team almost certainly prevented a greater loss than what took place in the desert that night. The failed operation’s silver lining was the Pentagon’s decision to develop joint special operations capabilities (chapter 4). The brief Grenada operation in 1983 showed that much work remained to be done and served as the catalyst for Special Tactics, initiated in the mid-1980s with the merging of combat control and pararescue specialists in the unit later designated the 24th Special Tactics Squadron. The year 1987 also witnessed the formation of US Special Operations Command and the first USAF Special Tactics group, later designated the 720th Special Tactics Group (chapter 5).

In combat operations in Panama (chapter 6) and in Somalia (chapter 8), and in both combat and humanitarian operations in Iraq (chapter 7), Special Tactics teams validated the Special Tactics concept and demonstrated their capabilities alongside fellow special operations forces (SOF) operators on the ground—whether Rangers, Special Forces, or SEALs. The remainder of the 1990s witnessed the consolidation of the USAF combat control specialty under the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and the merging of special operations weather teams into Special Tactics in addition to participating notably in contingencies in the Balkans, including Serbia in 1999 (chapter 9). The US/coalition response to the attacks of 11 September 2001 led to deployment of Special Tactics teams to Afghanistan, the

Philippines, and Iraq—resulting in highly successful tactical outcomes tempered with difficult losses (chapter 10). Although relatively unknown even within its own service, the Air Force Special Tactics community has earned a place alongside its older, better-known sister service SOF operators.

From its outset, this work focused on those CCT members that performed special operations—or prior to the 1980s the type of work that in later years fell generally under “special ops.” From the mid-1980s, Special Tactics-assigned pararescuemen (PJ) were included and, from the mid-1990s, Special Tactics-assigned special operations weather team (SOWT) personnel. Those three specialties, including mostly enlisted personnel and a few officers, comprised the Special Tactics community during the period of this work.

Beginning in 2006, I was privileged to attend several Combat Control Association reunions, where I met a number of combat controllers and witnessed the special brotherhood of that community of berets. Not all the excellent candidates could be interviewed, for various reasons; but I appreciated every Airman who expressed interest in and support for this project. I have sought to use each interview—whether CCT, PJ, or SOWT—appropriately and with discernment. I am grateful to each of you.

As in all such projects, I have incurred many debts to individuals and to history offices and archives without whose support the book could not have been completed. At Hurlburt Field—home to AFSOC and the 720th Special Tactics Group (720 STG)—the indefatigable Herb Mason (AFSOC’s command historian from 1991 to 2016) and his excellent staff provided a warm welcome, temporary office space, and assistance with historical materials on numerous research trips conducted by the entity unofficially dubbed AFSOC/HO OL-M (“M” worked for either Maxwell or Marion). Next door, Col Marc Stratton and Col Brad Thompson served as the 720 STG commanders during most of the period of research for the book. Both strongly supported the project, allowed me the use of the conference room for interviews, and made themselves and their personnel available. Three retired chief master sergeants, Rick Crutchfield, Mike Lampe, and Wayne Norrad, were instrumental in this project, providing continuity, contacts, and an incredible store of personal knowledge of nearly every CCT and Special Tactics issue and operation from Southeast Asia to the present. When the publishing effort was revived in 2016, Chief Norrad’s assistance was indispensable, from countless fact-checking

PREFACE

exercises to gaining permissions for more names to appear in print. My sincere thanks go to Air University Press's acting director Dr. Ernest Rockwell, who revived the manuscript and saw it through to publication; and to Mr. Daniel Armstrong, for his unexcelled front cover illustration and timely handling of several late changes.

SMSgt. Clyde Howard and SMSgt. Jim Stanford were especially helpful in covering the story of CCT in Thailand and Laos, respectively; Jim especially so after the passing of the beloved Charlie Jones, whom I interviewed a week before his death. Sadly, Clyde and Jim also passed away during the book's writing.

This work relied largely on oral history interviews. My sincere thanks to one Guardsman, SrA Jason Aplin (908th Airlift Wing), and to those individual mobilization augmentee reservists who transcribed the nearly 70 interviews: TSgt Steve Blair, Lt Col Tommy Carpenter, TSgt Joe Culpepper, SrA Matt Dearth, Capt Nicole Dubnicay-Wellen, MSgt Craig Mackey, Maj Jessica Menasco, Lt Col Mark Nelson, and Maj Tony Sibert, and others at the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) and Air Force Historical Studies Office. Without Nicole's and Craig's transcripts, the book might not have been completed. I also appreciated the support of retired CMSgt Gene Adcock, who shared his research, including an important document from 1945; Ron Brown of the Combat Control School, Pope AFB, North Carolina, who granted me access to the school's files and also shared a key document with me; my boss, the AFHRA director, Dr. Charlie O'Connell, for his sustained leadership and support; AFHRA coworkers Peggy Ream, who shared her research on the 1996 Ron Brown recovery, and Sam Shearin, whose years in the 24STS facilitated several excellent contacts and various fact-checking and other considerable helps in addition to sitting for an interview; and Darrel Whitcomb of the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, whose research and writing crossed many delightful paths with my own. Six subject matter experts reviewed the manuscript: one special operations weatherman, Lt Col Joe Benson (USAF); four combat controllers, Col John Carney, CMSgt Rick Crutchfield, Brig Gen Robert Holmes, and CMSgt Wayne Norrad (all four were USAF, retired); and one pararescueman, MSgt Tim Wilkinson (USAF, retired). My heartfelt thanks go to them for giving their time and lending their expertise to this project. Lacking any tech-savviness, I relied heavily upon the technical expertise of AFHRA professionals such as Randy Anderson, Jerome Bendolph, Robert Brown, Thomas Rehome, and Sean Wenstrup. A special

thanks to Jerome and Robert for their outstanding work on the book's photographs and to Thomas for copying and preserving the interviews in AFHRA's collection.

Archie DiFante provided security review of each chapter at AFHRA, and AFSOC History and AFSOC Public Affairs also reviewed the entire manuscript for release. I have made every attempt to include only those surnames of individuals assigned to sensitive entities who gave specific permission for their names to appear in print in this work. However, individuals whose names had previously been published in open sources regarding a particular operation could be included without obtaining a second permission, but only for the specific operation. Of course, any errors in that area, or in fact, or in interpretation, are mine.

My family supported me as well, and I especially thank my incredible wife for her understanding and support all the way through this lengthy project, which although a labor of love, felt unending at times. My prayer is that the Special Tactics community will agree the wait was worth it.

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10 October 2011 (amended 1 August 2017)

Chapter 1

From Pathfinders to Combat Controllers, 1943–1954

Jeff Sahaida and Forrest Marion

World War II

Nearly a year after the official entry of the United States into World War II, the Allies began ground operations in northwest Africa as an initial step toward regaining Axis-occupied Europe. Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of French northwest Africa, began in early November 1942. Within weeks, as the US and British offensive slowed in the muddy terrain of Tunisia, Allied planners started looking at other areas in which to advance. Among several initiatives considered were the US-favored incursion into France and the British-supported Sardinian assault. However, at the January 1943 Casablanca Conference, US president Franklin D. Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill selected Sicily as the next Allied objective.¹

Operation Husky, the July 1943 invasion of Sicily, Italy, was important for a variety of reasons. As a strategic target, it not only offered airfields and staging areas that could be used as a stepping stone into southern Europe but also the possibility of expediting the surrender of Italy. Moreover, the Sicilian campaign proved itself the testing ground for the US airborne technique. Although the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion saw action during Operation Torch, it became part of the larger 82nd Airborne Division, for Husky.

While Allied Headquarters for the invasion, known as Force 141, continuously revised various operational aspects of Husky, planners deemed the employment of paratroopers essential to the operation's success—constituting an integral part of contingency options from the beginning. As these airborne techniques remained untried in combat, Sicily became the primary campaign in which US airborne troops tested their new theories and tactics of warfare. The lessons learned over the skies and on the ground of that battlefield had a lasting impact on the employment and use of airborne forces in future campaigns.²

As a result of the Germans' decisive use of airborne and glider troops during their blitzkrieg into Norway and the Low Countries, in July 1940 the US Army Air Corps (USAAC) shifted its air infantry project into high gear with the initiation of a test parachute infantry platoon. The military considered parachuting so dangerous that it only allowed unmarried enlisted men to volunteer for such duty. To account for expected injuries and losses, 48 men were selected to fill the 39 enlisted slots. After selection, the infantry board put the volunteers through eight weeks of parachuting, small unit tactics, and physical training. The parachute test platoon learned the technique for parachute landing falls, practicing first from moving trucks and, later, from a pair of 150-foot parachute towers. In their final week, test platoon members strapped into their new T-4 static line chutes, made five qualifying airborne jumps, and established the tradition of yelling 'Geronimo!' upon exiting the aircraft.³

Even before the test platoon completed its training, bureaucratic infighting sparked over the control of the parachute troops. The USAAC argued its case stressing the aerial delivery of the force; Army engineers emphasized the paratroopers' demolition training; and the infantry called attention to the use of jumpers as ground troops. Army chief of staff, Gen George C. Marshall, sided with the infantry.⁴

Amid the frenetic initial paratroop development came revolutionary changes within the command structure. On 9 March 1942, the Department of War reorganized and created three autonomous US Army commands: Army Ground Forces, Services of Supply (later Army Service Forces), and the Army Air Forces (AAF). This reorganization led to major changes in the commands responsible for airborne operations. On 17 March, Lt Gen Lesley J. McNair, commander of the newly created Army Ground Forces, proposed forming an airborne command to direct and coordinate the training of those forces.⁵

Days later, the Department of War established the Airborne Command, and as a natural correlation to the increasing number of airborne troops, established the Air Transport Command at the end of April, which was quickly redesignated Troop Carrier Command. The newest command was tasked with organizing and training air transport units for all types of aerial transport with "special emphasis on the conduct of operations involving the air movement of airborne infantry, glider troops and parachute troops." To aid in this mission, on 15 August 1942 the Department of War redesignated the 82nd Infantry Division the 82nd Airborne Division. Augmented with existing

airborne units, the 82nd was split into two parts—one designated the 82nd Airborne Division and the other the 101st Airborne Division.⁶

The Sicilian invasion plan called for Maj Gen George S. Patton's US Seventh Army to lead an amphibious assault against the south coast of Sicily. The 3rd Infantry Division was to land at Licata, the 1st at Gela, and the 45th at Scoglitti.⁷ British Army general Bernard L. Montgomery anticipated leading two and one-half divisions of the British Eighth Army in an assault against the Pachino area, south of Syracuse. The air staff of Force 141 originally planned to employ paratroopers to support both US and British operations to neutralize beach defenses prior to the main Allied assaults. This might prevent the Germans from pinning down the invaders before they could establish a foothold. Eventually, both British and US planners lost enthusiasm for this scenario.⁸

The assault force's artillery commander, Brig Gen Maxwell D. Taylor, stated in several letters to Patton's headquarters that the mission against beach defenses was an inappropriate task for paratroopers, who were lightly armed and could only neutralize a limited area. Furthermore, such an employment threatened to subject them to naval bombardment and reveal the exact location of the impending amphibious assault. Staffers at the US Seventh Army concurred and instead agreed to drop a reinforced parachute combat team, from the 82nd, northeast of the port of Gela, to block the movement of enemy reserve forces on the 1st Infantry Division beachhead.⁹

At the end of May 1943, the Northwest African Air Forces (NAAF) Troop Carrier Command (Provisional), a component of the Allied Mediterranean Air Command, formed two months earlier to handle Husky troop-carrier preparation and execution, announced its lineup for the first Husky mission (Husky 1). D-Day was set for 10 July. On the evening of 9-10 July, the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing (TCW)—aided by the 64th and 316th Troop Carrier Groups (TCG)—planned to dispatch more than 200 C-47 Skytrain transport aircraft to drop the 505th Parachute Combat Team (PCT) (reinforced) into the Gela area.¹⁰ On the same night 100 C-47s from the 51st TCW, assisted by the British 38th Wing, expected to conduct a manned glider assault, dubbed Ladbroke, southwest of Syracuse to aid the advance of the British Eighth Army.¹¹

With only three weeks allotted for training, airborne and troop carrier units of the 82nd Airborne Division and 52nd TCW, respectively, initiated maneuvers on 1 June 1943, at Oujda, French Morocco.

Even an experienced command with full operational knowledge of the participating units and possessing overall authority ought to have been hard pressed for time. Unfortunately, no such command existed. Although the NAAF Troop Carrier Command possessed practical experience with airborne operations, its authority extended only to troop carrier units. Furthermore, it held no command authority over the airborne division and had no firsthand knowledge of the 52nd Wing. Part of the problem was that Brig Gen Paul L. Williams, who assumed command of NAAF Troop Carrier Command in mid-May 1943, had been absent from the troop carriers the previous four months while commanding the XII Air Support Command. His lack of contact with troop carrier experiments in airborne pathfinder tactics and the use of navigational aids perhaps explained why these techniques were overlooked in the preparations for Operation Husky.¹²

The airborne meaning of *pathfinders* was twofold: pathfinders were advance planes sent out ahead of a mission but also were specially trained teams of paratroopers deposited at either a landing zone (LZ) or a drop zone (DZ) by these advance planes. Once on land, the pathfinders' mission was to set up navigational aids for the inbound troop transport aircraft, which could then lock on to the ground signals to accurately drop their elements, or 'sticks,' of paratroopers.¹³ The radar navigational aid used was known as the Rebecca/Eureka system. The AN/PPN-1A transmitter beacon, known as Eureka, was a radar beacon pack carried by a parapathfinder who jumped into the DZ. Once emplaced, its Rebecca counterpart, an APN-2 (SCR-729) receiver installed in the airborne pathfinder troop carrier aircraft, homed in on the beacon, allowing for the accurate drop of paratroopers on the DZ.¹⁴

Although planners at the Fifth Army airborne training center in Oujda experimented with pathfinder tactics and new techniques, they held no authority over either the troop carrier or airborne units. However, the issue appeared moot. According to a report by a British squadron leader, the question of whether or not to use the Rebecca/Eureka navigational aid during operations had been discussed by staffers at Force 141, but its employment was rejected six weeks prior to General Williams's arrival.¹⁵ Fundamentals formed the basis for premission training; cross-country navigation and formation flying for the 52nd Wing; and ground training, bayonet fighting, scouting, and hand-to-hand combat for the paratroopers. After experiencing several casualties in practice jumps, the 82nd Airborne was reluctant

to risk more men in training. However, two nighttime practice missions simulated Operation Husky's conditions. The first, carrying the 505th PCT, was scattered, while the second—with the 504th PCT—proved deceptive in that the flight formation held together and arrived on target. However, the latter jump included dropping only token loads to check for pilot accuracy. No full-scale dress rehearsal occurred, and no time was allotted for training in the pathfinder techniques developed at the airborne training center.¹⁶

In addition to being the first major nighttime airborne operation, Husky 1 was the largest operation of its kind undertaken until the Normandy invasion in June 1944. A major endeavor, it employed more transport aircraft than had been in the AAF inventory at the time of Pearl Harbor. In its final form, Husky 1 involved a total of 250 transports—including 227 C-47 aircraft from the 52nd Wing, whose mission was to drop an intended 3,405 paratroopers of the 505th PCT northeast of the port of Gela shortly before midnight on 9–10 July. The troop carriers took off from the Kairouan area in Tunisia intending to fly over the Kuriate Islands to the southeastern tip of Malta and then to the eastern end over the south shore of Sicily. However, a large part of the expedition strayed from the assigned route and schedule. Visibility proved to be the biggest problem. The sun had set as the formation departed from North Africa, and the quarter moon provided little light. Flying below 500 feet to avoid enemy observation, the planes' crews were blinded by salt spray. Procedures called for strict radio silence; the only way to assist stragglers was Aldis lamps flashing backward through the dome. Coupled with the darkness was a 25- to 35-mile per hour wind that pushed the rear groups of the formation well off course. As a result, the force strayed from the intended flight path over Malta. Rather than approaching the southern coast of Sicily with landfall anticipated to their right, most of the troop carriers arrived on the east coast of Sicily with landfall appearing to their left.¹⁷

The only aids available to the pilots attempting to locate the DZs were the quarter moon and certain geographic features, namely a large lake just off the shoreline. Unfortunately, the moon set as the first planes reached the drop areas, leaving the rest of the formation to find its own way over Sicily in near-total darkness. Further complicating the situation, the majority of the flight groups reported problems in finding the DZs as dust and haze from the preinvasion bombing obscured most of the area. Many of the paratroopers said that they

stood in their aircraft—hooked up and under the weight of 100 or more pounds of equipment—for 30 to 50 minutes while their carriers searched for the drop areas. The operations of the five troop carrier groups over Sicily varied widely, but none went as expected.¹⁸

Blown by the wind, the 61st TCG, carrying one 504th battalion, flew over Malta 12 minutes ahead of schedule with a number of stragglers trailing. Two aircraft went so far astray that they reached Calabria, the ‘toe’ of Italy. The group commander’s plane and nine others managed to reach their objective but badly dispersed their paratroopers. Aside from these, the group scattered most of the rest of the 504th over an area 50 miles from the objective.¹⁹

The 314th TCG’s main body, transporting one 505th battalion, failed to recognize the proper checkpoints and circled out to sea for another attempt. On the second attempt the group managed to drop 85 men of one company on the DZ, but the main body again missed the checkpoints and scattered their men 10 to 15 miles away from the objective.²⁰

The 313th TCG, carrying another paratrooper battalion, was blown far off course. Most of the group made landfall over the east coast of Sicily; 23 planes dropped their troopers around the British sector of Avola, 50 miles east of the objective.²¹

The 316th TCG, carrying various personnel—including Col James M. Gavin, task force commander—fared the worst. Driven by the wind, the group made landfall on Sicily’s east coast near Syracuse. The 316th’s commander realized his error and cut across the southeast corner of Sicily to get back on course. Once over Sicily, the group again lost its way, and aircraft dispersed their loads all over southeastern Sicily. When he landed, Gavin was not certain he had landed on Sicily, so unfamiliar were his surroundings.²²

Bringing up the rear, the 64th TCG also missed the beacons off the coast of Malta and dropped its paratroopers en masse some 25 miles east of its DZ. In all, less than one-sixth of the troopers arrived near their intended DZs.²³

As the planning for Operation Husky 1 had neared completion, staffers conceived a new airborne mission employing the remaining two 82nd regiments. The objective of the parachute operation, Husky 2 (also called Mackall White) was to drop the 504th PCT on Farello airstrip, east of Gela, to reinforce and support the 505th. However, to reach their objective, the troop carriers had to fly over Allied troops and heavy convoy traffic. Aware of the naval attitude toward overflight of convoys, General Ridgway, with General Patton’s support,

reached an agreement with the Western Task Force commander to withhold his naval fire over the prescribed flight corridor during the time set for the mission.²⁴

On the evening of 11 July (D-Day plus 1), 144 C-47s of the 52nd TCW took off for their objectives in Sicily. With a clear night and a bright moon, the first flight of the lead group, the 313th TCG, made its drop of the 504th PCT over the Farello airfield five minutes ahead of schedule. All appeared well until one gunner opened fire, triggering an onslaught of machine gun fire, both ashore and afloat, across the entire length of the invasion beaches. The 313th attempted to fly out of the corridor, but it had to make a premature exit over Licata, where it encountered heavy fire from Allied ships.²⁵

The first flights of the 61st TCG had just entered the corridor when the barrage began. The rear two squadrons, still five to 10 miles offshore, were hit hard by naval fire regardless of the recognition signals employed. As might be expected, the incessant fire disrupted the 504th's jump. The first few sticks landed safely near or around the airfield, and the 313th managed to drop the rest of the paratroopers reasonably close to the objective. However, the other groups dispersed before reaching Farello, and many prematurely dropped their men between Vittoria and Acate in the area of the 45th Infantry Division. The 45th, inexperienced in combat and tense after a hectic day, opened fire as the paratroopers descended. One paratrooper related, "We jumped into a steady stream of AA [antiaircraft] fire. . . . 4 men killed and 4 wounded from my Platoon. . . . one was killed on the ground because he had the wrong password. After landing we found out this had been changed to 'Think'—'Quickly.'"²⁶

Of the 144 transports that set out, 23 were destroyed and 37 badly damaged. Fortunately, only six were shot down before releasing their paratroopers, but the airborne force suffered more than 400 casualties. In light of this incident, Force 141 canceled the reinforcement glider lift scheduled for 12 July. "Husky 2 was a costly and demoralizing failure," noted one official study, "not in the casualties, but in the dispersal of a crack unit just when it was needed."²⁷ Six weeks later, one paratrooper whose plane had been shot down as he was about to drop recalled, "I was standing in the door of the aircraft and was thrown clear. Before leaving the scene of the crash, I ascertained that all other passengers and every member of the crew . . . were killed in the crash. I was carried away from the aircraft by Italian farmers who returned me to the aircraft the following morning. . . . The farmers

told me I was the only one left alive.”²⁸ One pilot summed up the mission: “Evidently the safest place for us tonight while over Sicily would have been over enemy territory.”²⁹

While certain factors—poor weather, haze, smoke over the DZs, and friendly fire—contributed to difficulties in both Husky operations, the most striking lesson learned was the demonstrated need for beacons and signals manned by pathfinder units to guide formations to their targets. On 23 July 1943, a board of allied officers examining airborne operations concluded that “specially trained ‘pathfinder’ aircraft should precede the airborne flights to the dropping zone and drop marking lights for the guidance of troop carriers and gliders.”³⁰ Simply put, the current method of navigation, namely map reading or reliance on specific geographic features to find the drop zone, was inadequate. In addition to thorough training in night flying, the use of some form of a radio guide beacon, like the Rebecca/Eureka, was essential for large-scale, accurate, airborne operations. The main problem with this solution was ensuring that units operated the beacons at the right place and the right time.³¹

After the war, General Gavin, who led the paratroopers in Husky 1, wrote that following Sicily “pathfinding was initiated and teams were trained to go ahead of the troop transports, jump, and set up radar and visual signals accurately in the drop zones to guide the transports in.”³² Ahead of the mass formation, specially trained pilots navigated their pathfinder aircraft to the DZ, where their pathfinder paratroopers were dropped. These specially trained paratroopers then set up the beacons and homing devices to guide the main assault force units to the DZ.³³

By late July 1943, the Sicilian campaign was winding down. Of greater import, a coup d’état had removed Italian dictator Benito Mussolini from power. With these favorable developments, the Allies continued with tentative plans for the invasion of Italy while also entertaining hopes of a separate peace with the new government headed by Prime Minister Pietro Badoglio. On 27 July, the Allies decided to supplement their original plans for the invasion of Calabria with an amphibious assault in the Naples area. The Allies selected the coastal area of Salerno, 30 miles south of Naples, as the best location for the operation, dubbed *Avalanche*. The 82nd Airborne Division was made available to US Army general Mark Clark, whose Fifth Army carried out the amphibious operation.³⁴

Meanwhile, the Badoglio government offered to surrender its forces, even placing them in the service of the Allies, as long as the latter pledged to protect Rome from German retaliation. Badoglio's government was concerned that should it surrender, "the Germans would undoubtedly take over the country within two hours after learning of the effort." Agreeing with Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower's plan to send an 82nd Airborne Division task force to assist in defending the city, on 3 September the Italians signed a secret treaty. However, General Eisenhower postponed the mission upon learning that, not only had the Germans increased their troop strength in Rome, the Italians might be unable or unwilling to provide logistical support to the airborne task force. The result was that during the first critical days of the Allied invasion of Italy, the much-needed 82nd was not involved in the action.³⁵

Although the Allies recognized the need for joint training and rehearsal prior to an airborne operation, their forces received little of either before the Italian invasion. On 30 July, General Ridgway had called for at least three weeks of joint training, but it was mid-August before the NAAF Troop Carrier Command alerted the 52nd TCW for tactical training. The carrier command's directive that training take place in Tunisia required the 82nd to pull out of Sicily and move back to North Africa. Because of the abbreviated time schedule, no mass jumps could take place, for there was no time to repack the parachutes. Most importantly—and particularly commendable given the limited number of troop carrier crews and airborne teams available in North Africa at the time—the NAAF Troop Carrier Command implemented a pathfinder training program. Fortunately, it took these teams only 10 to 14 days to accomplish the training. Despite only having the last week of August available for joint training, troop carrier and airborne planners introduced these new methods in the final exercises.³⁶

The British had experimented with pathfinder techniques, as had a few Americans at the Fifth Army airborne training center in Oujda, but the method was still little known. When the British asked officers at the 52nd TCW if they had practiced pathfinder tactics in their training exercises, they responded negatively but added, "we would welcome any opportunity to further study this phase as it applied to Troop Carrier delivery of Airborne Units."³⁷

While the 52nd TCW took up the coordination and training of paratrooper operations, the 51st TCW bore responsibility for the

glider training program. Troop Carrier Command held full-scale rehearsals on 28 and 31 August. In both exercises, it employed two beacons at the drop zones, the 5G and the Eureka. The 5G was a 33-pound British radio beacon that required delicate adjustment and proved quite unsatisfactory. The Eureka radar beacon that worked in conjunction with the Rebecca airborne interrogator, proved more effective. However, the Troop Carrier Command possessed only 16 Rebecca-equipped aircraft and only 28 trained men to operate it, all of whom served in the 52nd Wing. On the 28th, participating aircraft detected the Eureka beacon at ranges of 15 to 20 miles and overflew it but did not attempt drops or landings. On 31 August Troop Carrier Command employed three pathfinder planes for the final exercise and dropped a team carrying a Eureka beacon. After hitting the intended DZ, these troops had the beacon operational within five minutes. Despite only token follow-on drops, planners hailed the exercise as successful and ordered the use of both Eureka and the 5G for the forthcoming operation. Furthermore, in keeping with critiques of the Sicily missions, each 52nd TCW combat crew received at least 15 hours of night formation flying training prior to the upcoming operation, *Avalanche*.³⁸

On 9 September 1943 the Fifth Army, without airborne support, hit the beaches at Salerno and initiated one of the most bitterly contested amphibious landings of the war. After the Rome mission fell through and other missions were discarded, on 11 September higher headquarters informed Gen Mark Clark that airborne and troop carrier forces were now available for his use. He proposed that these forces immediately be deployed in missions northeast of Naples and at Avellino. General Williams, commanding the Troop Carrier Command (TCC) and the 82nd's commander, General Ridgway, agreed. Within hours, they had planned a jump mission for 13 September: 100 planes of the 52nd TCW were to drop two reinforced battalions of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) to destroy the Volturno River crossings at Capua.³⁹ The generals also detailed 40 planes of the 51 TCW to drop one battalion of the 509th PCT near Avellino on 15 September. However, on 13 September a German counterattack threatened the Fifth Army's position and General Clark requested immediate reinforcements. With the center of the Allied line at Salerno beginning to crumble, Ridgway and Williams acted upon General Clark's plea to drop a regimental combat team inside the beachhead, south of the Sele River, on the night of 13 September.⁴⁰

The Sele operation, involving the 61st, 314th, and 313th TCGs, began at 8:45 p.m. when three pathfinder planes took off from 52nd Wing headquarters at Agrigento, Sicily.⁴¹ Favored with fair weather and light winds, the pathfinders had no trouble finding the DZ, located south of the river. As they approached the drop area, the Airmen spotted flashlight signals and a flare from a Very pistol. As the first pathfinder plane initiated its drop, a fiery 'T' with its stem pointing upwind ignited on the drop zone. Fifth Army engineers had constructed the T and a separate row of flares on the south side of the zone to assist the pathfinders in locating the drop area. These five-gallon cans filled with gasoline-soaked sand were highly effective; pilots reported observing them up to 17 miles away.⁴²

Though the pathfinder teams had operated together for barely one week, most of the men had received previous training and several participated in the rehearsals in Tunisia. Their training was so thorough that the men could set up their equipment blindfolded. The first stick of pathfinders landed directly among the gas can flares. They jumped with a 5G radio transmitter, a blue Krypton light (for use in assembling the paratroopers), and a Eureka beacon. In British fashion, a pathfinder secured his beacon in a kit attached to his leg; the cords attaching the kit's bag tore loose when the trooper's parachute jerked open. Sgt Regis J. Pahler, the first stick's pathfinder tasked with carrying the Eureka, recalled that instead of the bag breaking free, "I hit the ground with silk in my hand and the Eureka still attached to my leg. Momentarily, I thought that I had a broken leg, but such was not the case. I set up the Eureka immediately."⁴³

The first pathfinder team had its Eureka operational within three minutes of hitting the drop zone. The team's 5G broke loose, however, and was smashed in the landing. The second team landed in a ditch across from the DZ. Its Eureka and Krypton light landed safely but by the time the team made its way to the DZ the first Eureka was up and running. The pathfinders held the second Eureka in reserve. The third pathfinder plane dropped combat troops to secure the drop area.⁴⁴

The use of the Eureka radar proved most successful. The incoming aircraft from the main formation picked up the radar signals on their Rebecca counterparts at ranges of seven to 13 miles. The pilots found the beachhead, with their aircraft arriving from all directions. It was evident to those on the ground at Sele that without the Eureka and the flares, considerable dispersion might have resulted. The formation that followed encountered no enemy flak or fighters but ground

troops extinguished the gas can flares during intervals between incoming aircraft so as not to provide the enemy with a direct fix on their position.⁴⁵

In all, the troop carriers dropped the bulk of 1,300 troops from the 504th PIR within one mile of the DZ. Only one company missed the intended area, and they reported in the following day. No troop carriers were lost and only one paratrooper suffered serious injuries during the jump. Pathfinders had jumped with “handie-talkies”—early hand-held radio receiver-transmitters to aid in troop assembly, but because the jump was so highly concentrated, the flares and Krypton lights proved sufficient. As the enemy was dangerously close to breaking through at the beachhead, these airborne reinforcements were badly needed. Within an hour of the last jump, the troops assembled and set out for the front.⁴⁶

The success of this mission ensured another one. On 14 September, NAAF and Fifteenth Army Group informed Troop Carrier Command and the 82nd Airborne Division, respectively, that the Avellino mission was set for that evening and that a second Sele drop was planned to make use of the maximum number of paratroopers available. For the second Sele mission, 131 planes of the 52nd TCW were to drop about 2,100 men of the 505th PCT, including a company of engineers. Preceding the main force, pathfinder planes planned to drop at midnight, simultaneous with the Avellino jump.⁴⁷

As on the previous night, the three pathfinder planes departed uneventfully, bound for Sele. The evening was calm with a bright moon, though somewhat hazy. As the pathfinder troop carriers neared the DZ, they saw the blazing T to guide them in. Men of the 504th PIR had a Eureka beacon operational, but the pathfinder aircraft were not equipped with Rebecca receivers. Nonetheless, at 11:38 p.m. the pathfinder force jumped from 700 feet, all of them landing safely on the DZ with another Eureka set. Within minutes they had the second Eureka up and running which they kept in reserve along with two Krypton lights and a 5G. The 5G went unused so as not to interfere with the 5G the Avellino pathfinders were using.⁴⁸

The pathfinders again proved their worth. Despite the haze, most of the pilots spotted the T and nine of the 11 Rebecca-fitted aircraft successfully picked up the Eureka radar signal at an average range of 10 miles. Of the 130 planes that departed from Sicily, all but five succeeded in delivering their loads, and 123 aircraft dropped more than 1,900 paratroopers within one-and-a-half miles of the drop zone. In

most cases, the men landed within 200 yards of the intended area, and nearly all were within 500 yards. Pilots and paratroopers agreed that radar was the main reason for their success, and one observer stated that “without a doubt it was the most successful jump the 505 [PCT] has ever made.” Within 45 minutes of the last jump, the men of the 505th loaded into trucks and headed out to protect the southern beachhead. The Fifth Army’s crisis was averted; even better, it consolidated and extended its position.⁴⁹

The airborne mission to Avellino was a far more difficult undertaking than the two Sele reinforcement drops. The town of Avellino was 20 miles north of Salerno and enclosed by mountains more than 4,000 feet high, the most difficult terrain encountered by airborne troops in the European theater. It was more than 15 miles behind enemy lines and surrounded by heavy German troop concentrations whose positions were unknown. However, it was a key objective. By interdicting the road traffic, the paratroopers might successfully staunch the flow of German reinforcements to Salerno and Naples. The mission, as planned on 12 September and revised a day later, called for the 64th Troop Carrier Group of the 51st TCW to drop 598 paratroopers of the 2nd Battalion, 509th PCT, plus 40 engineers three miles southeast of Avellino. Unfortunately, on 13 September changes to the flight route deprived the troop carriers of photographic coverage of the new routing. While photography of Avellino itself was available, on the mission the pilots of the 64th TCG found that one mountain valley looked much like another.⁵⁰

On the night of 14–15 September 1943, fifteen minutes ahead of the paratroop-carrying transports, a single pathfinder plane carrying 11 pathfinders (two officers, nine enlisted) took off from Comiso Airfield, Sicily. Antiaircraft fire rocked the plane as it passed over the German lines at Salerno, but it flew on. Pathfinder team lead Lt. Fred Perry stood at the door frantically searching for landmarks. Though the moon lit the night sky, the target was not sufficiently distinctive. However, as they passed over a crossroads, the green jump light came on, and the team went out at 11:30 p.m. They descended safely but discovered they had jumped onto the wrong crossroads, one mile south of the intended DZ. Feeling there was no time to spare, the pathfinders had their two Aldis lamps and the 5G transmitter up and running within 10 minutes. They did not bring a Eureka beacon because the 51st TCW was not equipped with Rebecca receivers. That deficiency, coupled with the 5G’s poor quality, contributed to

the ineffective navigation, and the incoming troop carriers widely scattered their loads.⁵¹

Of the 39 planes bringing in the main force, only two aircraft reported receiving a signal from the 5G transmitter, at five miles out and with weak reception. The mountains may have caused interference, but in any case the pilots condemned the 5G as useless. The pathfinder team might have caused the problem because they had only received a few minutes of instruction in setting up and tuning the 5G. About eight pilots, half of which came in range, found the Aldis lamps useful.⁵² Whatever the source of the difficulty, one squadron missed the entry into the mountains above Salerno and had to return to the coast for another attempt.⁵³

A dozen planes dropped their sticks between eight and 25 miles from the drop area, another eleven dropped their troopers ten miles away. Only 15 aircraft—less than one-half—placed their troops within four to five miles of the intended zone. In addition, because of the surrounding terrain, the troops jumped from heights between 1,500 and 2,500 feet above ground. Although the weather was calm, the greater-than-normal vertical distance allowed for dispersal of the force. For several days, the 509th could not piece together a single group of more than 80 men. Most of their equipment was also lost. The airborne troops expected a speedy relief, but units of Fifth Army did not capture Avellino until 30 September, more than two weeks later. By 8 October, 118 men of the 598 who had jumped three weeks earlier were dead, wounded, or missing. Noted historian Martin Blumenson concluded, “Too small a force and too dispersed to be more than a minor nuisance to the Germans, the battalion had no effect on the battle of the beachhead.”⁵⁴

The main cause of the Avellino mission’s failure was difficult to pinpoint. Inadequate training, a difficult route, and poor pathfinder equipment all contributed a share. In contrast, the troop carriers and airborne units executed the two Sele missions almost perfectly, helping to secure the entire southern flank of the Salerno beachhead when there was no other way for the Fifth Army to reinforce it. Despite Avellino, the two successful missions ensured that the airborne units were included in subsequent operations.⁵⁵

By the end of 1943, planners and fighters within the Allied troop carrier and airborne units held a much better grasp of their capabilities than earlier that year. Many problems had been addressed and recommendations made for future operations. The XII Troop Carrier

Command (TCC) recognized that the employment of pathfinder aircraft and men resulted in the overall success of the Sele operations.⁵⁶ They recommended that pathfinder air and ground crews train and work together as a unit, and that the pathfinder ground troops be composed of specially trained personnel “reserved for this purpose alone.”⁵⁷ After the Salerno and Avellino operations, the Allied airborne troops fought as ground forces. A number of plans were conceived and disregarded as the US Fifth and British Eighth Army fought their way up the Italian boot. Addressing the legacy of the Mediterranean airborne operations of 1943, a postwar study stated that despite “all their limitations and misadventures the success of the missions was sufficient to win the support of the Allied commanders for bigger and bolder airborne ventures in northern Europe.”⁵⁸ As events unfolded the airborne units did not jump again until the invasion of France in June 1944, where they again proved their worth.⁵⁹

As the war in Europe drew to a close, on 24 March 1945, nearly 3,000 US and British troop carrier aircraft and gliders participated in Operation Varsity, a major assault by the Allies across the Rhine River into the heartland of Germany. The operation succeeded in establishing bridgeheads on the east bank of the Rhine extending up to 10 miles in certain places. Varsity’s plan included the use of two Troop Carrier Glider Combat Control Teams per airborne division, a total of eight five-man teams. The role of only two of the combat control teams (CCTs) was mentioned in the IX Troop Carrier Command’s history. Gliders carrying two CCTs—each consisting of four glider pilots and one enlisted man—landed at either end of one of the troop-carrier LZs. The most experienced pilot on each team functioned as a “flying control operator,” while the other pilots handled the radios. The enlisted team member served as radio operator and mechanic. As soon as the glider infantry cleared the LZ of enemy forces, the CCTs and infantry unloaded the gliders. The SCR-499 jeep radio set sustained damage beyond use, but most of the combat controllers’ equipment remained in good condition.⁶⁰

Team members at opposite ends of the LZ could not make contact with one another until 6:00 p.m. on D-Day. After the team’s equipment was moved to a more concealed position in the woods, at 8 a.m. on D plus 1 the team went on the air to begin controlling traffic. At 10:50 a.m. on D plus 2, with no more DZs or LZs to mark or messages to send, the XVIII Corps (airborne) instructed the CCTs to evacuate. During their time on the air, the combat controllers also transmitted

a small number of weather messages. One unusual duty assigned to the CCTs in Operation Varsity was receiving downed aircrew members who landed in the vicinity, providing them with food and bedding until they could be routed to a pilot evacuation center. In a sort of foreshadowing of the special tactics community that was still four decades away, during Varsity the CCTs not only controlled air traffic but transmitted weather messages and supported downed aircrew members, broadly encompassing the three main functional areas of special tactics (combat control, weather, rescue) and the scope of the present work.⁶¹

In April 1945, the IX Troop Carrier Command deployed eight CCTs to forward airfields to control the movement of transport aircraft. However, with the end of the fighting in Europe, the limited wartime work of the troop carrier CCTs was soon forgotten. The Army and AAF recognized the need for a system of accurately marking landing and drop zones as an integral part of airborne operations. Still, questions such as which service provided the ground pathfinders (or CCTs) and whether the use of airborne electronic devices might make the men on the ground unnecessary remained unresolved.⁶²

Post-1945 Developments

Two years later, following much groundwork on military reorganization, Pres. Harry S. Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947. The legislation established a single National Military Establishment, later renamed the Department of Defense, and provided for an independent air force, a measure long sought by air power leaders. However, despite the change in military reorganization, limited defense budgets became normal during the late 1940s as Americans and the administration returned to a peacetime mindset. But the onset of the Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union and its allies set the stage for new hostilities.

In June 1950 the United States was surprised when the North Koreans, apparently with Soviet acquiescence, attacked south across the 38th parallel and quickly threatened to overrun the entire Korean Peninsula. Many feared that the attack was only a ruse to embroil the United States in an Asian ground war prior to a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Nonetheless, the United States again found itself engaged in a major war overseas that required many critical military assets in greater volume,

including airlift. In March 1951 the activation of a large troop carrier unit—the Eighteenth Air Force at Donaldson AFB, South Carolina—provided a focal point for developments in air-to-ground operations, including the pathfinder/combat control function.⁶³

During September and October 1951, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the Eighteenth tested a technique borrowed from the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) for dropping paratroopers. Although the Eighteenth decided against recommending the adoption of the RCAF technique, it wanted to further evaluate the “B-3 Drift Meter” some believed could lead to more accurate drop missions. Participating in the test, Col Hoyt L. Prindle, the 314th TCW commander, proposed that the development of a “sighting device for determining the point of air release” in conjunction with “an all-weather system of dropping personnel and equipment by parachute utilizing electronic devices,” might solve the problem.⁶⁴ In the six years since 1945, Army and Air Force leaders had done little to increase the accuracy of Troop Carrier pathfinder missions. Moreover, they had failed to resolve the larger issue of whether new technology available to pathfinder planes, or ground pathfinders, or both, should be relied on. At Eighteenth Air Force in 1951, assault helicopter testing appeared to be of higher priority than pathfinder development.⁶⁵

The year 1952 proved to be a turning point in the pathfinder/combat control evolution. In February, Headquarters Tactical Air Command (TAC) directed the Eighteenth Air Force “to designate a minimum of four lead crews, in each troop carrier group, for the purpose of specialized training in pathfinder techniques,” a measure the Eighteenth viewed as “the first step in establishing pathfinder teams” organic to the wings.⁶⁶ Although pathfinder planes had been employed in concert with ground pathfinder teams during World War II, recent developments in electronics led some to consider eliminating the ground teams altogether. At about the same time, a 62nd TCW (Heavy) study recommended establishing a separate pathfinder plane unit that could “concentrate on electronics . . . standardize techniques, and perform more efficient maintenance on specialized electronics equipment.”⁶⁷ The wing study contradicted TAC’s initiative to designate lead crews partly because it considered the navigational expertise required of (air) pathfinder teams more likely to flourish in a separate unit dedicated to that function than in units with other pressing missions. But in either case, the future of *ground* pathfinders was uncertain. Later developments demonstrated that if the state of

electronic navigational aids had been advanced enough to enable pathfinder planes to locate intended DZs accurately on their own, the ground pathfinders would have been eliminated.⁶⁸

In May 1952, Eighteenth Air Force hosted a two-day conference to discuss issues pertaining to pathfinder techniques, personnel, and equipment. The conferees produced three recommendations, the first two of which were of the utmost significance to the future of Air Force combat control:

1. The ultimate aim of Troop Carrier Pathfinder is to guide the aircraft, by use of electronics, to the Drop Zone without the aid of pathfinder teams, physically present at or on the Drop Zone. At this time, electronic devices are not sufficiently developed to perform this function. Therefore, the utilization of Army Field Forces Pathfinder Teams [shall] be continued until 1 January 1953.
2. That, during the interim, action [shall] be instituted to provide Air Force Troop Carrier Pathfinder Teams to replace these Army Field Forces Teams by 1 January 1953.⁶⁹

Shortly thereafter, Eighteenth Air Force called “wishful thinking” the expectation that electronic navigational aids might preclude the need for ground pathfinders in the near term. Accordingly, TAC—led by the Eighteenth—committed itself to establishing Air Force pathfinder teams by the start of 1953. The decision was prudent considering that, in 1952, Eighteenth Air Force aircraft were “not equipped with electronic devices other than the Rebecca Set” used during World War II.⁷⁰

Much work remained to be done, however, and events proved the command slow to assume its responsibilities for the pathfinder function. In fact, TAC was already two years behind schedule. In 1950 TAC and the chief of Army Field Forces had published a joint instruction in which the former accepted “responsibility for establishing and maintaining ground-to-air communications and navigational aids on the drop zone” for incoming troop carriers.⁷¹ TAC delayed assuming its new responsibility in hopes of developing the airborne electronic devices to make the men on the ground unnecessary. The Eighteenth Air Force position was hardly one to promote aggressive procurement of the needed personnel even after issuing, shortly after activation of the first USAF combat control unit in January

1953, a memorandum to the TAC commanding general addressing the procurement of Army pathfinder personnel. The endorsement from Maj Gen Robert W. Douglass flatly stated, “Electronic devices are currently under development, which, it is contemplated, will eliminate the necessity for Pathfinder teams. The duration of the requirement for utilizing Army Pathfinder personnel will be determined by the availability of these devices.” Apparently, even the Eighteenth’s commanding general did not foresee more than a short-term requirement for Army pathfinder personnel in his command.⁷²

Not surprisingly, an Army memorandum between commands complained that TAC was failing in pathfinder development. The air service had not yet provided ground pathfinder teams, and as a result, Army airborne units had been forced to continue to perform that role. As the Eighteenth Air Force historian acknowledged, “[T]he air borne units retained organic Pathfinder teams as an interim measure for meeting current requirements. The practicability of this action could not be questioned as the air force, in July of 1952, had no Pathfinder elements and army parachute troops were required for implementation of Exercise Test Drop.”⁷³

In May 1952 TAC had committed to developing pathfinder teams by the beginning of the next year so the Army acquiesced to the Air Force request to begin sending its personnel to the Army jump school. In October the Air Force received 10 slots in the airborne course at Fort Benning, Georgia, with a projection of two per week for the next three months. In the meantime, Army pathfinders carried the ball for the Air Force throughout 1952.

During a series of Test Drop tactical exercises, elements of the Eighteenth Air Force and the XVIII Airborne Corps occasionally disagreed over “the loading, lashing, and ejecting of cargo.” These disagreements highlighted the sometimes contentious nature of air-to-ground operations which, by their nature, were joint operations involving both Air Force and Army elements. Some incidents involved the Air Force’s 1st Aerial Port Operations Squadron (APOS) which was activated in January 1952 and stationed at Donaldson AFB, South Carolina, to handle the preparation and loading of cargo for airlift and airdrop missions using US Air Force troop carrier aircraft. By early 1953 the 1st APOS included Air Force combat controllers and became party to other interservice disagreements pertaining to the pathfinder function.⁷⁴

In addition to the Test Drop exercises in 1952, studies conducted that year by the Air Proving Ground and Wright Air Development Command “proved one definite fact” according to the Eighteenth Air Force historian: “existing navigational equipment had marked potentialities but none possessed all the capabilities required to eliminate the need for pathfinder personnel [on the ground].” Reluctantly, the Air Force pressed forward with preparations that some referred to as “lip service” in assuming the ground pathfinder mission on 1 January 1953.⁷⁵

Lip service or not, on 15 January 1953 Eighteenth Air Force activated a Pathfinder Squadron (Provisional) at Donaldson AFB, to begin implementing TAC’s responsibilities for pathfinder activities. Since the only source of trained personnel for the new unit was the US Army, it was natural that Airmen looked to their sister service for a small number of highly experienced personnel to transfer into the Air Force as pathfinders.⁷⁶ Initially, the Eighteenth sought one officer and 13 enlisted men for the provisional squadron. Except for the team leader and two radio repairmen, all others were to be radio operators.⁷⁷

However, Headquarters Air Force had other ideas. Instead of a lone pathfinder squadron for which it considered a unique table of organization to be inappropriate, in March 1953 the headquarters recommended forming six pathfinder teams under an existing manning authority, a decision that led to the discontinuance of the Pathfinder Squadron by the end of the month. The combat controllers were thus assigned to the 1st APOS at Donaldson.⁷⁸

In the midst of the Air Force’s reluctant decision to accept the combat control mission, in addition to organizational and other uncertainties of 1952 and early 1953, the Army had good reason to maintain its hope of regaining the pathfinder function. Furthermore, Eighteenth Air Force acknowledged that the fundamental problem was the Air Force’s “relative inability to assume full responsibility” for the combat control function, perhaps demonstrated most clearly by its inability to provide its CCTs with parachutes, which were borrowed from the Army. As a result, the Eighteenth’s historian believed that the Air Force had “left itself vulnerable to loss” of the pathfinder/ combat control function, especially in light of the Army’s “conviction that this function is its . . . inborn responsibility.”⁷⁹



Figure 1.1. Members of the first USAF Combat Control Team (1953) with Maj Gen Robert W. Douglass. Two team members were not shown: SSgt James A. Howell and SSgt William L. Swope. General Douglass's name was misspelled in the photo. Captain Baker was the Eighteenth Air Force Pathfinder recruiter, not a combat control officer. (Photo courtesy of the Air Force Special Operations Command [AF-SOC] History Office.)

Such conviction, fueled by the USAF's inability to handle the combat control mission with its own resources, made Army–Air Force differences concerning troop carrier/airborne operations all the more alarming. During mid-1953 the 82nd Airborne Division experienced an undue number of casualties during training jumps, leading to an Army request for troop carrier aircraft to use a wind dummy in training. The dummy provided current wind direction and velocity, enabling the aircrew to make final adjustments prior to the training jumps. However, the improvisation required an initial pass over the DZ prior to live drops. Although some in the Eighteenth Air Force were reluctant—the practice could not be used operationally without surrendering the element of surprise as well as increasing the danger to troop carriers—its leaders agreed to the procedure for training

purposes, temporarily. The Army, however, soon wanted the technique written into standard operating procedures, something the Air Force refused to accept.⁸⁰

An even more serious difference of opinion stemmed from Army concerns over excessively high drop airspeeds by the troop carriers as a possible factor in jump casualties. Accordingly, the XVIII Airborne Corps requested permission to place an airborne trooper in the cockpit of each troop carrier aircraft to record the airspeed during drops. Eighteenth Air Force interpreted the request as “identical to questioning the integrity of the pilot” and it therefore “could not be subscribed to by this headquarters.” Though these and other incidents were of little consequence when taken individually, the Eighteenth viewed them collectively as forming “a concerted attempt” by the Army to usurp Air Force responsibilities, one of which was combat control.⁸¹ In August and September 1953, several incidents of paratroopers landing in trees beyond the DZs led to an October joint conference on troop carrier/airborne operations.⁸²

In addition to Army/Air Force differences that touched indirectly upon combat control, the new career field also suffered from personnel and morale issues internal to the USAF. Combat controllers were not authorized a badge identifying their specialty, nor was there a process whereby they could earn senior and master parachutist badges. That deficiency, coupled with the lack of a provision for advancement in grade or rank within CCT, constituted an “acute morale problem,” according to the Eighteenth’s historian. Lastly, the Air Force lacked a source of trained combat control personnel.⁸³

By July 1953 Eighteenth Air Force formed the six CCTs authorized by Headquarters Air Force four months earlier, but they were undermanned in both officers and enlisted personnel. Still, the teams were adequately manned to place detachments on temporary duty status at the Army’s most important airborne troop locations: Pope AFB, North Carolina; Lawson AFB, Georgia; and Campbell AFB, Kentucky. Extended temporary duty posed certain challenges to both administration and morale; so, when one CCT was assigned permanently to Sewart AFB, Tennessee, as part of the 2nd APOS, the detachment temporarily located at Campbell AFB was withdrawn. Elements of four of the six CCTs remained assigned to the 1st APOS at Donaldson AFB.

Also in July, higher headquarters established the worldwide requirement for CCTs to be 12 operational teams, in addition to three

teams in training or projected to enter training. As part of the increasing emphasis on troop carrier/airborne operations, in November 1953 higher headquarters activated two new aerial port operations squadrons, the 4th and 5th APOS, under the Eighteenth. Both were stationed at Donaldson AFB, clearly the nucleus for Air Force combat control at that time.⁸⁴

The year 1954 witnessed slight progress in terms of the myriad manning, administrative, training, and personnel issues involved in building a combat control capability. In April, for instance, one aerial port squadron reported that it had neither any personnel attending jump school nor any others inbound to the unit, although its current CCT manning was “totally inadequate.” Problems continued with finding acceptable administrative devices for qualified personnel to volunteer for CCT duty, an issue exacerbated by the lack of a distinctive Air Force specialty code (AFSC) for combat controllers. Other concerns included the management of jump and flying status for CCT members and providing career progression for the small numbers of combat controllers. Consequently, the Eighteenth Air Force historian acknowledged ruefully, “the period has not produced any particularly strong implementation of combat control activities.”⁸⁵

Meanwhile, incidents mounted that seemingly stemmed from the Army’s unwillingness to accept the pathfinder function as an Air Force responsibility. From the Eighteenth’s perspective, the Army “continually infringed upon” the combat control function “under the guise of fieldmaster training” by deploying its own pathfinders to DZs where Air Force CCTs operated. Army fieldmasters provided security for the combat controllers at the DZs. In late 1954 during a joint training mission at Fort Campbell, fieldmaster parties deployed to the DZs with electronic devices with no use other than to take over the Air Force CCT function. The Air Force members objected to the intrusion, but, disturbingly, they were informed that “Army teams were being reactivated to ultimately assume the Air Force’s combat controller function.”⁸⁶

While the Air Force complained, the Army bolstered its arguments to regain the pathfinder role. In July one CCT had deployed to a DZ lacking equipment such as the proper ground-to-air radios, a compass, and an anemometer for determining wind velocity. Fortunately, no injuries occurred on the jump. But as the Eighteenth Air Force confessed, “These mistakes only add fuel to the problem and provide

the Army with additional ammunition as to why it should regain the Pathfinder function.”⁸⁷

Such difficulties provided the context for looking at the roles of three of the early Air Force combat controllers who lived and worked through that era: Alcide S. “Bull” Benini, James A. “Jim” Howell, and Charles L. “Charlie” Jones. Their personal accounts, of which the first two included trials few have borne, are noteworthy.

Three Pioneers

Alcide S. “Bull” Benini

Alcide S. Benini enlisted in the US Army in May 1940 and reported to the island of Luzon, Philippines, where he served in the 31st Infantry Regiment. Expecting to return stateside at Christmas-time 1941, the Japanese attack on 7 December changed his plans, and much more. Benini helped defend the Philippines for the next four months. Upon the surrender of the American–Filipino force at Bataan in April 1942, Benini was among the more than 70,000 prisoners captured by the Japanese and forced to endure the infamous Bataan Death March. Eventually, Benini ended up in Camp Murphy, Philippines, as a prisoner of war (POW), where he cut wood for a time and, later, worked on runways for the Japanese. Their treatment brutal and food pitifully inadequate, he and other POWs supplemented their starvation rations with frogs, snails, peanut oil, and the edible parts of banana trees. In September 1944, as American forces threatened to recapture the Philippines, the Japanese evacuated Camp Murphy. The POWs boarded a vessel bound for Japan but were diverted to China after American aircraft sank a number of ships in their convoy. In January 1945 Benini was again transported by ship, this time arriving in Japan. For the remainder of the war, he labored under hazardous conditions in a lead and zinc mine near Sendai, north of Tokyo. Returning to American soil on his birthday, 15 October, Benini was sent to Virginia to complete his recuperation following more than three years of captivity.

In February 1946, with his health and strength restored, Benini volunteered for the Airborne School at Fort Benning. Earning his long-desired jump wings, Benini was assigned overseas with the 11th Airborne Division in Japan but returned stateside after being injured on a training jump. It was at that point that he discovered the pathfinder

career field. Assigned in 1947 to the Pathfinder Platoon, he attended Pathfinder School at Fort Benning, and for the next five years Benini mainly marked DZs for airdrop training missions. For day drops, pathfinders generally used colored panels to mark the DZs; at night, they relied on lanterns. Normally, smoke grenades were used to indicate the winds.⁸⁸

In 1952 Alcide Benini separated from the Army. His experience as a master parachutist, radio operator, and pathfinder made him an ideal recruit for the Air Force's new combat control career field. Capt Richard Baker, pathfinder recruiter, convinced Benini to transfer into the Air Force as a member of its provisional pathfinder unit—in essence, the first CCT.⁸⁹ Benini enlisted as an Airman first class with promotion to technical sergeant effective on the day of enlistment. Based on his experience, he was promised a promotion to master sergeant within six months with the backing of Col (later Brig Gen) Glynne M. Jones—who in late 1952 served as the Eighteenth Air Force's deputy commander for development.⁹⁰



Figure 1.2. SMSgt Alcide “Bull” Benini (ca. late 1950s–early 1960s). (Photo courtesy of Mike “Sgt Mac” McReynolds.)

Benini recalled that the early months of the Air Force's first CCT were marked by untrained personnel, lack of equipment, and occasional conflicts with the Army. By April 1953 at least 25 members of the 1st APOS were qualified parachutists who were to take on pathfinder—or combat control—duties. Besides Benini, few if any were actually qualified pathfinders; a number were former truck drivers, cooks, and guards who had been through jump school but lacked any additional training in the techniques of marking DZs and controlling aircraft. Initially, the Air Force failed to provide equipment to its CCT, forcing the men to rely on cast-off Army items, such as panels for marking DZs, SRC-21 radios, and MRC-20 trucks—not to mention parachutes.⁹¹

Relationships with the Army were contentious, and at times Benini threatened to cancel training jumps when Army personnel pressured him to alter his panel arrangement on the DZ. Within a year, new—and at least somewhat qualified combat controllers—began to fill the authorized billets, allowing for the activation of several new units.⁹² In November 1953 the 4th APOS was activated at Donaldson AFB, with most of its initial members transferring from Donaldson's 1st APOS. Six months later, combat controllers in the 4th APOS became the first to deploy overseas, when they departed for a new permanent station in France. Initially planning to go to Toul-Rosières AB, France, the 4th APOS was redirected en route to Châteauroux Air Depot, where, on 19 June 1954, it assumed command and control responsibility, thereby beginning the overseas history of Air Force combat control.⁹³

James A. “Jim” Howell

Born in 1929, James A. “Jim” Howell's upbringing in southwest Texas easily reminds one of stories of the Old West. As a young boy growing up in the border town of Shafter, Howell regularly “witnessed Mexicans on horseback coming in and robbing the stores” and the Border Patrol chasing them back to Mexico. His father owned the Howell Package Store, one of three bars in town, in which fights, broken furniture, and shootings were not uncommon. Late one night toward the end of 1939, his father was shot in the doorway of his place of business, receiving “buckshot . . . all over his back,” and falling to the floor. As in the traditional Western movie, several shelves of pies and dishes behind the counter were wiped out in the process. Ominously, the town's deputy sheriff, with a reputation for arbitrary

violence, was one of his assailants. The deputy had beaten a drunk serviceman in an earlier incident in Howell's bar, which chilled the once friendly relationship between the two men.⁹⁴

Howell's wounds were treated, and he returned to his business. On a busy New Year's Day, 1940, the deputy returned to Howell's bar. He had been drinking and reportedly told several people he was going to "kill Bill Howell" that day. At 5:00 p.m., as the whistle of the local mining company sounded the end of the work day, young Jim walked into his father's bar. His father told him to get out, a directive his son knew to obey. Moments later, shots rang out. The deputy, a former Texas Ranger, fell dead from multiple .32-caliber rounds from the pistols Bill Howell kept under the bar's counter for self-defense. The hapless deputy's .45 caliber weapon landed on the floor in a pool of blood.⁹⁵

The next six years were trying ones for Jim Howell. His father, after nearly being lynched by local vigilantes, lost his business as a result of the shooting and was forced to move. When his parents later divorced and his mother remarried and moved to Indianapolis, Jim was left largely on his own by the age of 15. Remaining in Marfa, Texas, where his mother had lived before moving east, Jim supported himself by working on a ranch doing hard labor. He also worked in a furniture store and washed dishes in a restaurant. Near the end of World War II, a friend invited him to move to Artesia, New Mexico, to work there as a sharecropper. In 1946 Jim Howell, not yet 17, enlisted in the Army. His friend's father signed the form the service required for the underage recruit.⁹⁶

Howell volunteered for jump school at Fort Benning after basic training and then reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Shipped to Italy in 1947, he served as a guard—first at Caserta and later in northern Italy at a stockade housing German, Italian, and even American prisoners. When the detention center closed, Howell returned stateside in anticipation of serving in Japan with an airborne unit. Instead, he ended up at Fort Ord, California, again guarding prisoners. Dissatisfied, Howell volunteered for the military police and, in early 1949, traveled to Fort Riley, Kansas. Displeased with the available duty options and prevailing negative attitudes toward enlisted men, Howell separated in August and went to live with his mother in Indianapolis, Indiana. For the next two years, he worked at a local jet engine plant.⁹⁷

In 1951, at the suggestion of his neighbor, he joined the Air Force Reserve, performing well as a drill instructor, despite his tendency to

refer to the Army's *platoon* instead of the Air Force's new term, *flight*. However, still not satisfied with the work, Howell accepted a job his wing commander offered him in the parachute shop. In early 1952, at about the time he reported as a parachute rigger in the 434th TCW at nearby Atterbury AFB, Indiana, the unit received orders relocating it to Lawson AFB, Georgia. Moving south with the troop carriers, Howell volunteered for combat control duty at Fort Benning. Accepted into the first (informal) Air Force class of pathfinder/combat controller students, Howell graduated in the spring of 1953. Next, he completed jumpmaster school at Fort Benning. Contemporary jumpers must shudder at the regularity of malfunctioning parachutes in the discipline's infancy. Howell recalled that, typically, they went to the drop zone and "bet, put fifty cents in a kitty. 'Okay, there will be ten malfunctions [today]' . . . 'There [will be] five,' and whoever won took the money."⁹⁸ Surviving jumpmaster training, Howell returned to Donaldson AFB, the first home of Air Force combat controllers by virtue of the short-lived Pathfinder Squadron and the aerial port operations squadrons stationed there. It was the start of a legendary career in combat control that continued until his retirement from active duty in 1978.⁹⁹

Charles L. "Charlie" Jones

Less than two years later, another early Air Force combat controller, Charles L. Jones, entered the new career field. As a young boy, "Charlie" watched his older brothers leave home to fight in World War II. Enlisting in the Air Force in 1950, Jones recalled years later that the newly independent service was still using the Army's ranks at that time. He recalled the sense of pride he felt upon his promotion to the noncommissioned officer ranks as a corporal. Assigned to a troop carrier squadron in the Far East, Jones remembered hauling ammunition to forward airstrips in Korea and transporting casualties from the fighting there back to Japan and the Philippines. Returning stateside following his overseas tour, Jones separated from the service for a brief period before entering the career field. He recalled, "When I reenlisted, God had a hand in this. He sent me to Donaldson Air Force Base. There was a new outfit there that I had never heard of. And [they were] called combat controllers and it began in 1953. And they were only in existence for about a year when this good old boy showed up at the very end of 1954. I have never been so happy . . . in my life."¹⁰⁰

However, being new to the unit and not having a parachutist rating was not to Jones's liking. "I had to wait months, to my chagrin, to go to jump school. And there was no way around it. I was the new guy and had not been to jump school," he recalled. For a time, his duties on training jumps included driving a deuce-and-a-half truck to the parachute shop, then picking up and issuing the parachutes to the jumpers. "I had to get onboard the plane, and after the jumps I had to pull in all the dang ropes and all, and here I am what they call a 'straight leg' [unqualified as a jumper] . . . and I can't stand this."¹⁰¹

Reaching the limit of his patience, Jones devised a plan to get his first jump. Having noticed on previous missions that the crew chief kept a tool box in the aircraft cabin compartment, Jones managed to slip a helmet and a standard T-10 parachute into the box prior to a training mission. He recalled,

We jumped frequently, most frequently even from distances like Donaldson to Pope Air Force Base. There were thousands and thousands of acres, and you could try to miss that DZ and couldn't miss it. But I hid my parachute in there [in the crew chief's tool box]. I waited until the last minute and I put that parachute on all sorts of ways but I got it on. . . . I put that helmet on with no helmet liner and strapped it down. And Sergeant Harold Eaves was "pushing the stick" and . . . [at some point] they just looked the other way and finally the loadmaster said, "Stand in the door!"¹⁰²

His heart pounding wildly, Jones "snaked in" behind the last man in the stick. At that moment, "Eaves turned around and looked me right square in the eye and said, 'Are you going to jump?' And I said, 'Yes,' and he said, 'Turn around.' He turned me around to make sure I [wasn't going to] kill myself, never gave me any information, and out the back door I went." Once on the ground, Jones remembered that his hands were shaking, but the experience was unforgettable—and worth it.¹⁰³

After rolling up his parachute and loading it onto the deuce-and-a-half truck, Jones and his fellow jumpers began the drive back to the base. Expecting to be disciplined for his unauthorized jump, Jones felt sure that was the reason for an unexpected stop after they had driven only a short distance from the DZ. Instead, Lt James K. Lowman, the first known qualified CCT officer, stood up in the back of the truck and said, "Do you men know that one of your buddies fell out of that airplane a while ago?" Jones recounted that he and his enlisted mates replied, "Yes, sir, we know that!" To which the lieutenant responded, "That is good, just as long as we have our stories

straight, that is fine.” Lowman climbed back into his seat, and the enlisted men broke into hearty applause. Half a century later, in 2006, and only a week before his death from cancer, that anecdote was “just precious” to Charlie Jones.¹⁰⁴

As the stories of these early combat controllers—Al Benini, Jim Howell, and Charlie Jones—suggest, the passion and commitment of a small number of men dedicated to the mission of jumping from aircraft into contested areas to provide the interface between friendly ground and air elements in military operations, goes far toward explaining how the Air Force’s CCT career field managed to survive years of institutional neglect and even hostility. That was a phenomenon to which the following chapters bear witness, and one integral to the rebuilding of the Air Force’s special operations capabilities after 1980.

Notes

1. John C. Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean, 1942–1945*, USAF Historical Study 74 (Maxwell AFB, AL: USAF Historical Division, Air University, 1955), 21.

2. James M. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare* (Washington, DC: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 1; Leroy Thompson, *The All Americans, The 82d Airborne* (New York: David & Charles Publishers, 1988), 25–27; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 21.

3. Thompson, *All Americans*, 16–18; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 1.

4. Thompson, *All Americans*, 19.

5. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope, 1939–1942* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 295–96; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 2–3.

6. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 2–3, including quote; History, Headquarters First Allied Airborne Army [1944–1945], unnumbered page, subtitled “82nd Airborne Division,” AFHRA call no. 168.7045-45; Study, 82d Airborne Division, subj: 82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 9 July 1943–22 January 1944, 1, AFHRA call no. 585.082-2; and Thompson, *All Americans*, 22.

7. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 1; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 21–22.

8. Albert F. Simpson, “Sicily and Southern Italy,” in *The Army Air Forces in World War II, vol 2, Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943*, edited by Wesley Craven and James Cate (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 442; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 21–22.

9. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 22.

10. The 505th Parachute Combat Team (PCT) (reinforced) consisted of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment; 3d Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment; and several other elements, totaling some 3,400 troopers: Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 1–2; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 29. Note Warren referred to the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (reinforced) rather than the 505th Parachute Combat Team (reinforced). The wartime study, 82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, however, referred to the 505th Parachute Combat Team [it omitted the descriptor,

“reinforced”]. **NOTE:** For simplicity, hereinafter I will use 505th PCT. I will follow the same practice in the text for the 504th PCT except for the September 1943 Salerno/Italian campaign. This is to avoid confusing the reader with references to the parachute infantry regiment corresponding to each PCT, of which it was the main component.

11. Simpson, “Sicily and Southern Italy,” 442-46; Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 1-2; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 24, 26, 29. Note that initially the operation was called “Husky,” and, later, “Husky 1”: Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 24.

12. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 5; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 26, 28.

13. The term, *stick*, referred to the line the paratroopers formed as they prepared to jump, normally from either side of the troop-carrying aircraft. Often two sticks jumped at the same time, one from each side of the aircraft.

14. Jeff Moran, *American Airborne Pathfinders in World War II* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 2003), 10-11; and Report, Headquarters Thirteenth Air Force, subj: Report on Field Operations Involving Rebecca-Eureka, 10 October 1944, AFHRA call no. 750.908-2. Sources varied on the actual weight of the Eureka beacon. Moran stated it weighed 75 lbs; Thirteenth Air Force’s report stated Eureka was “a thirty (30) pound paratrooper carried beacon which is jumped from a Pathfinder aircraft in order to locate the dropping zones for the great majority of the succeeding airborne troops.” A wartime report stated Eureka weighed “approximately 55 lbs.”: Report, Headquarters XII Troop Carrier Command (Prov), subj: A Report of TCC [Troop Carrier Command] Activities including the Italian Invasion (1 August-30 September 1943), 93, AFHRA call no. 613.01.

15. Report, Northwest African Air Forces Troop Carrier Command (NAAFTCC), subj: Report on Use of Rebecca in ‘Husky’ Operations, 19 July 1943, 4, AFHRA call no. 611.902; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 26, 28.

16. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 5; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 27-28; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 28.

17. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 13; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 6; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 24, 29, 33, 36.

18. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 13; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 6; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 33.

19. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 34. The battalion was 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

20. *Ibid.*, 34-35. The battalion was 3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

21. *Ibid.*, 35. The battalion was 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 36. The 64th TCG transported the 2d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

24. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 15; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 7; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 39. The 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (minus the 3d Battalion) constituted the main element of the 504th PCT: 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 6.

25. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 15; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 7; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 39.

26. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 15-16; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 7-8, including quote; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 39-40.

27. 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 7–9; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 40–41, including quotes.

28. Report, 1st Lt Mack C. Shelley, 504 Parachute Infantry, subj: Certificate, 21 August 1943, including quote, in Papers, 61st Troop Carrier Group, subj: Additional Group History Papers, July 1943, AFHRA call no. GP-61-SU.

29. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 41, including quote.

30. Report, subj: Proceeding of Board of Officers Considering Airborne Operations, 23 July 1943, 5, including quote, AFHRA call no. 505.06-2; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 54.

31. Report, NAAFTCC (Provisional), subj: Report on Operations and Activities, Troop Carrier Command (Prov), including Operation Husky, 18 May 1943–31 July 1943, 105–106, AFHRA call no. 613.01; Report on Use of Rebecca in ‘Husky’ Operations, 4; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 54.

32. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 18, including quote.

33. Ibid.; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 54.

34. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 18–19; Thompson, *All Americans*, 43; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 41–42; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 56.

35. Albert N. Garland and Howard McGaw Smyth, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1965), 443–44, 483–84, including quote; Thompson, *All Americans*, 44–46; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 56–58. For the details of the Italian surrender, see chapters 25–27 of Garland/Smyth’s work.

36. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 58–59.

37. Ibid., 59; and History, Headquarters 52nd Troop Carrier Wing (TCW), August 1943, 3, including quote, AFHRA call no. WG-52-HI (TR CARR).

38. History, HQ 52 TCW, August 1943, 3–4; Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 5–6; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 59–60.

39. Sources referred to the 504th as “Parachute Infantry Regiment,” “Parachute Regiment,” or “Airborne Regiment.” For simplicity, I have elected to use 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the context of the Salerno assault and Italian campaign.

40. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 28; Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 92; Thompson, *All Americans*, 46; Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 524; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 60.

41. Various groups referred to the Sele mission by different codenames, including Giant III and Giant I (revised). See Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 65.

42. Moran, *American Airborne Pathfinders*, 31; Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 93; Thompson, *All Americans*, 46; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 61–62. Warren stated the T had its “stem pointing up wind”: Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 61. The XII Troop Carrier Command report stated the *plan* was to place “the vertical stroke of the T pointing down-wind”: Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 93. In any case, the direction in which the T’s stem pointed was intended to assist the troop carriers with wind direction in the vicinity of the DZ.

43. Moran, *American Airborne Pathfinders*, 31, including quote (Pahler quoted by Moran); History, HQ 52 TCW, September 1943, 4, and Part III, 1; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 62.

44. Moran, *American Airborne Pathfinders*, 31; History, HQ 52 TCW, September 1943, Part III, 1; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 62.

45. Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 97; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 62 (copy at AFHRA has many pages out of order, and it appears to be missing pg 63).

46. Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 98; 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 49; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 65, including quote.

47. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 65.

48. *Ibid.*

49. 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy, 90, including quote; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 65–66. Two aircraft dropped their paratroopers more than 15 miles to the north: Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 66.

50. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 31–32; Thompson, *All Americans*, 48; History, 64th Troop Carrier Group, September 1943, 1–2 (pages unnumbered), AFHRA call no. GP-64-HI; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 66, 68.

51. Moran, *American Airborne Pathfinders*, 32–33; History, 64th TCG, September 1943, 5 (page unnumbered); Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 98–99; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 68.

52. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 69.

53. *Ibid.*, 68.

54. Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1970 [1969]), 132, including quote; Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 32; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 68–69.

55. Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 69.

56. *Ibid.*, 62, 65–66, 69; and Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 34–35. Note that on 1 September 1943, NAAFTCC (Provisional) was redesignated XII TCC (Provisional).

57. Report of TCC Activities including the Italian Invasion, 126, including quote.

58. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 32; and Warren, *Airborne Missions*, 113, including quote.

59. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 32–33, 36.

60. History, Headquarters IX Troop Carrier Command, March–April, 1945, tab II (Narrative), 9–10, tab IV (Combat Operations), 31–37, 46–47, 82, including quote, AFHRA call no. 546.01.

61. History, HQ IX TCC, tab IV (Combat Operations), 82–83. In an action apparently unrelated to the combat control teams (CCT), the troop carrier command's signal section had deployed "communication and navigational aid parties," which installed route markers used by the transport pilots (tab II, 14). I am indebted to CMSgt Gene Adcock, USAF, retired, for bringing the above historical data to my attention. Whether the CCTs were involved in controlling the air transport of "a supply of lipstick, which, in the absence of any other suitable marking equipment, was used to mark casualties showing the injury, [and the] time to loosen tourniquets," was unknown: History, HQ IX TCC, tab V (Non-Combat Operations), subtab 10 (March 1945), 3 (marked as pg 2), including quote.

62. History, HQ IX TCC, tab V (Non-Combat Operations), subtab 10 (April 1945), 1.

63. History, Eighteenth Air Force, 28 March–31 December 1951, vol. 1, v, AFHRA call no. K490.01. Note that all Eighteenth Air Force histories cited herein are located at AFHRA under call number K490.01.

64. *Ibid.*, 182–84, 193, including quotes. The 314th TCW was based at Sewart AFB, Tenn.

65. *Ibid.*, 179–81.

66. History, Eighteenth Air Force, January–June 1952, vol. 1, 206–207, including quotes. Readers should note that in this context the pathfinders were the advance planes sent out ahead of a mission rather than the specially trained teams of paratroopers dropped at landing zones or drop zones by the pathfinder planes.

67. *Ibid.*, 207.

68. *Ibid.*, 207–209.

69. *Ibid.*, 209.

70. History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1952, vol. 1, 125, including quote 1; and History, Eighteenth Air Force, January–June 1952, vol. 1, 216–17, including quote 2.

71. History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1952, vol. 1, 125.

72. *Ibid.*, 125; and History, Eighteenth Air Force, January–June 1953, vol. 2, part 1, ltr, Eighteenth Air Force to Commanding General, TAC, 26 January 1953, subj: Procurement of Army Pathfinder Personnel, 2d Ind, 24 February 1953, under Annex “Organization and Administration” tab, including quote.

73. History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1952, vol. 1, 125–26.

74. *Ibid.*, 125–27; and History, Eighteenth Air Force, January–June 1953, vol. 1, 169–73, including quote.

75. History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1953, vol. 1, 214–17.

76. *Ibid.*, 218–19; and History, Eighteenth Air Force, January–June 1953, vol. 2, part 1, General Orders Number 5, Eighteenth Air Force, subj: Designation of Pathfinder Squadron, Provisional, 15 January 1953, under Annex “Organization and Administration” tab.

77. History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1953, vol. 1, 218–19.

78. *Ibid.*, 219.

79. *Ibid.*, 220–21.

80. *Ibid.*, 221–23.

81. *Ibid.*, 223–24.

82. *Ibid.*, 225–26; and CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield, USAF, retired, discussion with the author, 8 December 2010. According to Crutchfield, excessive drop airspeeds contributed to a problem known as “squidding.”

83. *Ibid.*, 221.

84. *Ibid.*, 286–89. I found no evidence that in the early 1950s Eighteenth Air Force leaders drew upon the brief CCT experience in 1945 by HQ IX TCC. The earlier experience appeared to be largely forgotten.

85. History, Eighteenth Air Force, January–June 1954, vol. 1, 105–10.

86. History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1954, vol. 1, 128–33.

87. *Ibid.*, 129–30.

88. Benini, interview; and Benini, biography.

89. The acronym “CCT” is used in two ways: first, to refer to a Combat Control Team consisting of two or more members; and, second, to refer to an individual combat controller. Normally, the context indicates which reference is intended.

90. CMSgt Alcide S. Benini, USAF, retired, interviewed by Jeff Seiken, (staff historian, ACC/HO), 9 January 2007; CMSgt Benini biography (copy at Air Force Historical

Research Agency [AFHRA]); Brig Gen Glynne M. Jones, biography, <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/Biographies/Display/tabid/225/Article/106592/brigadier-general-glynne-m-jones.aspx>; History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1952, vol. 1, v; and History, Eighteenth Air Force, July–December 1953, vol. 1, 218–19. According to CMSgt James A. Howell, Lt James K. Lowman “was the first *qualified* combat control officer” (emphasis added). See CMSgt James A. Howell, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21–22 May 2007. Although Baker preceded Lowman in his assignment to combat control duties, Baker appeared not to have been formally qualified as a combat controller.

91. Benini, interview; CMSgt Benini, biography, in AFHRA files; and Special Order Number 56, 15 April 1953, Headquarters 1st Aerial Port Operations Squadron, Donaldson AFB, Greenville, SC, in AFHRA files.

92. Benini, interview.

93. History, 4th Aerial Port Operations Squadron, January–June 1954, 1–4, AFHRA call no. K-SQ-SUP-4-HI (PORT).

94. Howell, interview, including quotes; Howell family documents (copy at AFHRA); and William G. Howell, “Shootout at Shafter,” *TexasEscapes.com* (website), n.d., accessed on 14 June 2017, <http://www.texasescapes.com/TexasGhostTowns/ShafterTexas/Shootout-At-Shafter-Texas.htm>.

95. Howell, interview, including quote; and Howell, “Shootout at Shafter.”

96. Howell, interview.

97. Howell, interview.

98. *Ibid.*, including quote; and Organizational record card, 434th TCW, in AFHRA files.

99. Howell, interview; and CMSgt Howell, biography, in AFHRA files.

100. CWO Charles L. Jones, USA, SF, retired, interview with the author, 16 November 2006. Jones served in the USAF for 17 years before transferring to the Army.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*

Chapter 2

Combat Control, 1955–1964

Electronic Devices or Combat Control Teams?

The US Army expected to regain the pathfinder function from the Air Force. The Tactical Air Command (TAC) and the Eighteenth Air Force anticipated that new electronic devices would make men on the ground unnecessary for safely guiding the Air Force's transport aircraft to their drop zone (DZ) objectives. By 1955 those objectives could be found almost anywhere in the world, as the Eighteenth's theater of operations became "global in nature," according to Maj Gen Chester E. McCarty, the Eighteenth's new commander. The unit served as "the major tactical troop and cargo carrying organization" in the Air Force. With the expectation of forthcoming technological advancements eliminating the need for combat control teams (CCT), it was no surprise that Air Force CCTs often lacked equipment to perform their work in the field. This deficiency fueled the Army's plans to recapture a role it viewed as properly belonging to the land service.¹

In addition to institutional and logistical deficiencies, personnel issues challenged the new career field. In January 1955 a conference hosted by the Eighteenth's 63rd Troop Carrier Wing (TCW) at Donaldson AFB, South Carolina, addressed what it considered "a critical personnel problem" with the CCTs—one that stemmed from the lack of a unique Air Force specialty code (AFSC). Not having the code meant that Airmen assigned to CCT duty could not upgrade in their primary AFSC, the 29 Communications Operations field, and could not get promoted. A personnel officer linked the upgrade and promotion issue with the CCTs' morale problems. "Morale of airmen in these units is declining. Those being discharged are not reenlisting for duty with the Combat Control Teams," Maj W. T. Stovall wrote.²

The conference attendees considered several options, including keeping CCTs in the 29 Communications Operations specialty or establishing "an exclusive career field (28)." However, the 29 field's demands in radio knowledge and operation and the ongoing inability to obtain training slots for the basic radio courses made that option inadvisable. The second option, establishing a new 28 combat control field, also appeared impractical due to the length of time required for

approval. A third option, aligning CCTs with the 27 career field—Aircraft Control and Warning (AC&W)—appeared as the “most practical solution” based on the similarity of functions.³



Figure 2.1. Combat control team (CCT) maneuvers with Piasecki H-21 Shawnee helicopter at Sewart AFB, Tennessee, 1955. (Photo courtesy of Eighteenth Air Force.)

Conference discussions revealed that CCT responsibilities were similar to control tower specialist duties except in three specific areas: the locations from which they operated, the method of getting to those locations, and the fact that CCTs controlled only military aircraft. CCT duties also required members to maintain jump status. Every jump held the potential for a career-ending injury—or worse. Conference participants surmised that if a combat controller was removed from jump status, he could qualify as a control tower specialist with minimal additional training. Accordingly, the Eighteenth Air Force proposed realigning the CCTs to the 27 AC&W career field. The teams’ personnel authorization continued to be a single officer and 13 enlisted men. Formerly, each CCT leader held the communications officer code. The proposed change called for an air traffic controller to lead each CCT. Another conference proposal included adding a “J” prefix to all CCT specialty codes, indicating jump status. With the exception of the J-prefix, higher headquarters readily accepted and implemented the proposed changes.⁴

The implementation of a new table of organization for aerial port squadrons was another welcome development for the career field. Beginning in July 1955, the new table authorized a specific number of CCTs in each aerial port squadron (APS). The Eighteenth Air Force asserted that the “establishment of a definite requirement for [combat] controllers was the impetus necessary in procuring airmen/officers for training as combat control team members.”⁵ Manning challenges could be resolved through earmarking Airmen in basic training for assignments in the undermanned career fields. The requirement for jump status meant that such duty was strictly voluntary for CCTs. So, General McCarty sent a letter to all Eighteenth Air Force wing commanders asking them to screen the records of their Airmen for possible CCT candidates. The screening process was critical due to the presence of an unacceptably large number of “[inept] and unsuitable personnel” in the ranks. Also, in late 1955, members of three of the Eighteenth’s APSs were detailed to El Centro, California, to assist in operational testing of the aerial delivery system of the USAF’s newest transport, the C-130 Hercules.⁶

In 1956 a realignment affecting Eighteenth Air Force APSs resulted in “a more economic and practicable dispersion” of CCTs. Combat control teams were integral to both medium and assault troop carrier groups “because of their aerial delivery capability and ability to land at forward landing strips.” At the time, the majority of combat control missions in the continental United States trained in the vicinity of “Fort Bragg, North Carolina or Fort Campbell, Kentucky . . . because of their proximity to Army Airborne units.” In comparison, heavy groups (operating the C-124 Globemaster) had less need of CCTs because they generally provided logistical airlift to *established* air bases. However, the alignment of CCTs within the APS did not reflect that reality. Of the 11 active duty CCTs at the time, the 2nd and 3rd APS were each authorized three teams. The CCTs were attached to two medium troop carrier wings, the 314th and 464th, respectively. Meanwhile, the 1st APS, with five CCTs, was attached to the 63rd TCW, Heavy. In early 1956, the deputy chief of staff for operations at Headquarters (HQ) Eighteenth Air Force proposed increasing the number of CCTs in the 2nd and 3rd squadrons from three to four each and reducing the number of CCTs from five to three in the 1st squadron. The command anticipated considerable savings in time, money, and effort from the realignment that was approved first by TAC and then by the Air Staff in early July. The total number of CCTs remained at 11.⁷



Figure 2.2. Paratroopers jumping from C-119s, 1955. (Photo courtesy of the Eighteenth Air Force.)

Ironically, at the same time the above improvement took place within Eighteenth Air Force, the command sought to eliminate altogether the need for ground pathfinders. In a detailed presentation to a scientific group headed by Gen Idwal H. Edwards and the long-serving president of the California Institute of Technology, Dr. Lee A. DuBridge, an Eighteenth Air Force representative addressed the command's mission

requirements in six categories including: aircraft, navigation equipment, communications, and all-weather flying equipment.⁸ Under navigational equipment, the air force representative stated:

It is the responsibility of Troop Carrier to accurately deliver troops . . . and their supplies and equipment into combat. The ultimate proficiency in troop carrier operations is to provide combat crews and units, employed in either single aircraft or mass formation flights, capable of accomplishing their missions during daylight, darkness, and all types of weather. . . . It is necessary to provide the units with reliable navigation aids. These aids must provide for navigating long range, low altitude, over water, within pin point accuracy to a drop or landing zone without recourse to land based electronic aids in [hostile] . . . territory, and then return to base.⁹

The speaker acknowledged that the lack of adequate navigational aids made it necessary to parachute pathfinder teams into the drop or landing zones (LZ) approximately 30 minutes ahead of the main airborne force—for the purpose of setting up ground navigational aids and marking the zones. He noted, “This is hazardous, uneconomical in the use of personnel,” and perhaps most significantly, “an unrealistic means upon which to base the success of a mission of such magnitude and importance.” The loss of the element of surprise was another drawback to the current system. Quite clearly, the command viewed ground pathfinders (or CCTs) as an interim solution, a ‘necessary evil’ of sorts.¹⁰

The command sought electronic, infrared, or visual aids capable of being airdropped accurately and that emitted signals or light, allowing for “homing by troop carrier aircraft to within pin point accuracy.” The bottom line followed: “With navigational aids of this capability parachute [pathfinder] troops would not be needed.”¹¹

The Eighteenth’s representative discussed the Eureka (AN/PPN-2) beacon equipment and the corresponding Rebecca (AN/APN-2) component then in use. Like its World War II antecedent, the Eureka beacon was dropped with the pathfinder troops and emitted a signal upon which the airborne Rebecca receiver homed in on, thereby guiding the troop-carrying aircraft to the DZ. However, the system was limited to a range of 20 miles and was susceptible to “jamming, equipment failure, saturation, [and] capture.” Optimistically, the command felt the development of “X-Band beacons (AN/PPN-12)” offered real hope for a “droppable, automatic, unattended beacon for pathfinder use.” The speaker reiterated, “If this is successful, the use of parachute pathfinder troops can be eliminated.”¹²

In late 1956, Eighteenth Air Force again addressed the problem of maintaining adequate combat control manning. The command historian acknowledged, "It is not easy to influence young airmen in a career requiring jump status." It was even more challenging to find senior noncommissioned officers (NCO) and officers. The historian recalled the mind-set, with its roots in World War II, that "combat controller and expendable are synonymous." He explained that "this has an historic background as the Army Pathfinder during World War II was airdropped on the Drop Zone long before the main airborne element was brought in by troop carrier. His chances of survival were relatively slim. Today, however, the Eighteenth Air Force envisions that the combat controller . . . will go in with the initial assault, thereby having infantry protection during the airborne operation."¹³ With further development of "assault airlanded operations," he expected paratroop deployments to become less frequent, thereby increasing CCT members' chances of survival.¹⁴

Regardless of the expectations, in 1956 the combat control pipeline appeared satisfactory. Candidates underwent initial training at Keesler AFB, Mississippi, and achieved the three-level proficiency rating. Apparently, many prospective recruits could not meet the entry requirements for the basic course at Keesler, although no specifics were mentioned. Despite that and other issues, the Eighteenth Air Force's 1st, 2nd, and 3rd APSs maintained the authorized 11 CCTs consisting of 14 men each, with one exception: officer manning. Of 11 authorizations—one officer per CCT—the command had only five qualified officers.¹⁵

In December 1956, the Eighteenth Air Force's chief of staff, Col Harry S. Bishop, transmitted an important concept paper to TAC. Bishop addressed CCT operations and proposed an operational concept covering 1957 to 1961: "The advent of assault landing aircraft, such as C-123 and modernized airborne tactics (dispersal versus mass), have dictated a change in the concept of Combat Control Team operations," he noted.¹⁶ The paper, one of the most historically significant writings on CCT operations from its first decade, offered guidance "in planning, training, equipping, and development of tactics and techniques applicable to [CCTs] in support of Army assault and theater logistical airlift operations" for approximately the next five years. Reflecting the decision in 1955 to align CCTs with the AC&W career field, the document defined a combat control team and stated its mission:

A small team of highly trained and skilled Air Force Air Traffic Controllers, all qualified parachutists, with the mission of establishing and operating navigational, air traffic control, and limited tactical communications facilities in support of assault operations.

The primary mission of [CCTs] is to provide and operate air traffic control facilities and navigational aids within the airhead during the assault phase of airborne operations and, in the early stages of the operation, to establish and maintain communications between the airhead and the rear area.¹⁷

The paper affirmed the difficulty of envisaging a tactical situation in which a CCT deployed prior to arrival of the lead Army assault forces. Thus, CCTs could expect to be protected by those forces while setting up their navigational, air traffic control, and other equipment in order to assist “the maximum number of troop carrier serials.” As soon as the airhead was secure enough to permit deployment of Airways and Air Communications Service (AACS) elements, the CCT redeployed to the rear for regrouping and resupplying in preparation for later missions.¹⁸

CCTs might perform as many as 13 tasks as directed by the troop carrier commander operating the airhead, and to whom the CCTs were attached. The first eight were the most important tasks:

- a. In a tactical or training situation, deploying into the DZ/LZ areas by the most feasible means.
- b. Identifying and marking the DZ/LZ areas with appropriate markings and navigational aids.
- c. Establishing ground-to-air communications in the airhead.
- d. Relaying advice and information to include weather observations to incoming serials as to conditions in the objective area.
- e. Establishing point-to-point communications with Air Operations Center, Troop Carrier Rear CP [Command Post] . . . as appropriate.
- f. Providing communications aid to Forward Air Controllers in directing close air support missions, if required.
- g. Exercising Air Traffic Control (route control . . . separation . . . and letdown) for all aircraft operating within the airhead.
- h. Exercising Air Traffic Control (tower functions . . .) at all landing zones in the airhead under Air Force control.¹⁹

Antarctica

Occasionally, combat controllers undertook roles beyond those documented above. In the mid-to-late 1950s, Antarctica was one of the Eighteenth Air Force's several theaters of operations. During 1955–56, in a largely Navy-run operation known as Deep Freeze I, a party of Eighteenth Air Force specialists assisted in the reconnaissance and surveys of potential sites along the Antarctic coast, helped deliver supplies and equipment, and constructed two “International Geophysical Year” stations at Little America V and McMurdo Sound exploration stations. One specific requirement was to build an ice strip for C-124 aircraft at McMurdo Sound. A year later, in Deep Freeze II, the Eighteenth provided the personnel, aircraft, equipment, and supplies required to airdrop hundreds of tons of supplies and equipment at several installations, including South Pole Station, South Pole Site, and Marie Byrd Station. The first of these was to be situated exactly at the geographic South Pole.²⁰

An Eighteenth Air Force officer, Col Horace A. Crosswell, commanded the Air Force Task Unit (AFTU) formed to accomplish the mission. Because of the extreme and prolonged cold weather conditions in one of the world's most remote areas, only those volunteers who passed careful screening in terms of “experience, training, physical fitness, and temperament” were accepted. One of those selected was a combat controller, TSgt Richard J. Patton, of the 1st APS.²¹

On 20 October 1956, Colonel Crosswell deployed from the staging base at Christchurch, New Zealand, in the first C-124 to land on the “very rough” ice runway at McMurdo Sound. Two other Globemasters landed without incident, but the fourth airlifter sustained a nose wheel failure due to the extreme roughness of the ice strip. Inspectors identified a portion of the runway suitable for landing, and the C-124s continued airlifting supplies from New Zealand to Antarctica. In early November extremely low temperatures, some as low as -50° F, forced a two-week break in the airlift operation. When the temperatures warmed somewhat, the work resumed to locate the exact geographical South Pole.²²

On 19 November, following the five-member advance party's landing near the South Pole in a US Navy aircraft, a C-124 airdropped a Studebaker M29 Weasel, a tracked (or treaded) motor vehicle designed to operate in snow-covered areas. Unfortunately, mechanical problems soon put the Weasel out of business, forcing the advance

party to revert to dog teams and sleds to conduct surveys to determine the South Pole's precise location. Meanwhile, as C-124 aircraft delivered precious supplies through airdrops, the 100-foot parachutes used for heavy load drops malfunctioned. After five drops, much of the needed materiel had been damaged or lost entirely. The ground party lacked a qualified airdrop specialist, so "no constructive suggestions were forthcoming as to a means of correcting the difficulty." At that point, "Sergeant Patton, an experienced airdrop specialist and parachutist, [with 31 jumps to his credit] volunteered to jump at the Pole site and see if he could determine what was wrong and come up with suggestions" to rectify the problem. The Eighteenth's historian noted:

At exactly 0154 hours, Greenwich Meridian Time, Sunday, 25 November 1956, Sergeant Patton stepped out the jump door of the "State of New Jersey," a C-124 of the AFTU, and about one minute and 2,000 feet later became the first individual to make or even attempt a parachute jump at the South Pole. . . . As soon as he was on the snow Sergeant Patton began a study of the problem and relayed his findings to a circling aircraft via radio. His suggestions resulted in close to 100 per cent efficiency on future drops.²³

For his jump and the corrective measures he suggested, Patton earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and a presidential citation. As has often been proven over the last 50 years—from Antarctica to Afghanistan—a single enlisted US Air Force combat controller, employing his unique skills, "made a very valuable contribution to the success of the entire project."²⁴

Late 1950s: Mainly External Threats

During the latter half of 1957, as the Department of Defense and the Air Force experienced increasing budgetary restraints under Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower's policy of "massive retaliation," the Eighteenth Air Force prepared for inactivation. From its inception in 1951, the Eighteenth served as the Air Force's primary troop and cargo carrying command, conducting operations worldwide. In August 1957 the Eighteenth Air Force headquarters relocated from Donaldson AFB, South Carolina, to Waco Field, Texas. On 1 October the Eighteenth received a new mission and new units as a day fighter, fighter bomber, and aerial tanker command. On 31 December the

Eighteenth was inactivated, with TAC's Twelfth Air Force assuming its personnel, equipment, and supplies on 1 January 1958.²⁵

Inactivation not only ended an important period in the Eighteenth's history but also affected the combat controller career field. Since the beginning of the first CCT in early 1953, the Eighteenth had been the organizational home for all Air Force CCTs. Since 1956 the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd APSs had been authorized three, four, and four CCTs, respectively, accounting for all 11 teams in the Air Force. With the changes affecting Eighteenth Air Force, on 1 September 1957 the 1st APS at Donaldson, the 2nd squadron at Sewart, and the 3rd at Pope AFB, North Carolina, were reassigned ("without change in location") to TAC's Ninth Air Force, headquartered at Shaw AFB, South Carolina.²⁶

Several months after Ninth Air Force gained the three APSs, the command defined the mission of aerial port units: "loading, unloading, and/or air ejection operations incident to the movement of traffic in troop carrier aircraft; providing combat control teams to locate, identify, and mark drop or landing zones; and establishing and operating navigational aids, air traffic and command communications within an airhead."²⁷

Unfortunately, the transfer of aerial porters and combat controllers to Ninth Air Force did not alleviate the interservice disagreements regarding pathfinder/combat control functions. In May 1958, in a tactical air exercise called Strong Arm, Ninth Air Force provided troop carrier and visual reconnaissance aircraft as well as one CCT in support of troop testing and field training in the vicinity of Fort Polk, Louisiana.

As the Ninth's historian observed, it was the combat control function "that proved vexing." He continued, "For the past decade there has been a bone of contention between the Army and the Air Force on the use of [Army quasi-pathfinder] control teams in the DZ area. The loss of the Pathfinder mission to the Air Force's combat control teams has been consistently fought by the Army and, in almost every maneuver, either joint or unilateral . . . special ground rules have been devised."²⁸

One of several disagreements in Strong Arm occurred when the deputy exercise director, an Army major general, requested that the drop at a particular DZ be performed on signals from Army pathfinders. The air liaison officer denied the general's request on the grounds that it violated existing doctrine.²⁹

Only two months later, the 2nd APS "censured Army Fieldmasters for attempting to usurp the USAF prerogative for the combat control function." Ninth Air Force supported the squadron, stating that "no

aircraft will precede the main element for the purpose of dropping any force, Air Force or Army, which may be designated to perform duties associated with the 'pathfinder' or fieldmaster functions." The dangers of dropping paratroopers in unpredictable wind conditions constituted another issue requiring Army–Air Force negotiations. The Army favored the practice of dropping "live wind dummies" in advance of the main body to determine whether the winds were safe at the DZ. Although Ninth Air Force acknowledged the need for a better anemometer for its combat controllers, it was adamantly opposed to the Army proposal, which could be used to insert pathfinder or fieldmaster personnel. An exercise in which five paratroopers died and more than 100 were injured underscored the importance of determining DZ wind conditions.³⁰

In 1959 Ninth Air Force provided a historical summary of what continued to be one of the thorniest interservice issues, the role of CCTs. The command recalled that prior to the start of the Korean conflict, the pathfinder function was performed by men that deployed into the DZ prior to arrival of the main airborne force. Ground personnel emplaced visual and electronic aids to guide incoming troop carrier aircraft to their objectives. However, with the development of the Computed Air Release Point (CARP) delivery method, the requirement for prepositioned navigational aids was eliminated. The CARP system called for releasing the combat controllers from the aircraft at the calculated point in space to enable them "to land on a predetermined impact point (IP)." CCTs expected to deploy with the main body of airborne forces, albeit as one of the first elements to jump into a DZ.³¹

Despite the publication of joint directives by the mid-1950s, Ninth Air Force considered the guidance to be "somewhat nebulous with regard to the missions of the CCT and [Army Assault Teams (AAT)] as mission commanders were left to work out details to their mutual satisfaction." The less-than-clear doctrinal publications usually resulted in a commander making arbitrary arrangements with his counterpart for the sake of expediency if not always harmony.³²

Ninth Air Force headquarters remained adamant that in order to preserve the element of tactical surprise in an operation, no personnel—either Army or Air Force—should be placed at a DZ in advance of the assault force. But commanders held differing opinions. In Exercise Dark Cloud/Pine Cone II, the Army's commanding general directed the troop carrier commander to deploy two CCTs, one in advance of

the lead troop carrying aircraft, the other with it. The Ninth felt that the request amounted to the Army “again opening the controversial Pathfinder issue, seemingly hopeful that it would one day regain this responsibility.” The fact that the Army criticized the CARP method of aerial delivery but neglected to provide either an alternative or documented evidence of the procedure’s supposed deficiencies added to Air Force suspicions.³³

Another Ninth Air Force concern was that CCTs, although manned by fully-qualified air traffic controllers, lacked the communication and navigational gear to establish an airhead air traffic control center (AATCC) during the early stages of an airborne assault. In fact, no single unit in the Ninth Air Force was equipped for that role. The command considered reassigning CCTs to its 507th Communications and Control Group, which possessed modern communication and navigational systems, but decided against it when the group expressed its misgivings. Although TAC regulations required an AATCC establishment during any airborne operation, Ninth Air Force argued that the Air Force commander in an operation should decide whether one was needed. The Ninth reasoned that in some cases an AATCC was not a realistic tactical requirement. Furthermore, “If there were no AATCC, there would be no area for disagreement” over which service should control it.³⁴

Early 1960s: Mainly Internal Threats

Obsolescent communication and other types of equipment continued to plague the Ninth’s combat control function into the early 1960s. In February 1960 Col Albert V. Endress, the 839th Air Division commander, expressed his concerns for CCT equipment in a letter to Ninth Air Force. Endress wrote that his CCT “combat mission capability is seriously jeopardized with the present equipment.” He observed that while significant improvements had been made in troop carrier aircraft design and performance in the previous decade, the communication equipment originally authorized for CCTs “is not capable of keeping pace.”³⁵ Meanwhile, the combat control officer in the 3rd APS, Capt John L. Nightingale, conducted a study that confirmed Endress’s perspective. Nightingale wrote that the aircraft “the combat control teams are supporting are becoming more and more advanced with modern electronics equipment, while the [CCTs] are controlling

these expensive aircraft with obsolete equipment which is very limited in capabilities.”³⁶ Endress agreed with Nightingale’s conclusion that the most practical option was to identify modern “off-the-shelf” equipment to replace what the command viewed as the “woefully inadequate” AN/MRC-20 mobile radio.³⁷

Due to the long lead time required for the development of new equipment, obtaining gear currently in use as an interim solution made sense. Endress and the 3rd APS sought to delete the MRC-20 from the CCT inventory and authorize the AN/VRC-30 radio set in its place. Although not portable, the VRC-30 was air deliverable and met aerial port requirements for the short term. The air division commander’s most pressing issue was that the troop carrier function was “being hindered and . . . continually embarrassed by the U.S. Army on the landing and drop zones due to failures of present equipment utilized by the combat control teams.” Since the inception of the first Air Force CCT in 1953, countless Airmen had shared Endress’s frustration. He was not the last to voice those concerns.³⁸

The 3rd APS also took action to obtain an improved anemometer, as TAC had declared the ML 433 anemometer “unsuitable.” Subsequent tests determined the US Navy’s AN/PMQ-5 to be much more accurate and adaptable to troop carrier use, and the APSs wanted it. When the Rome Air Materiel Area, New York, proposed developing a new device, which meant a wait of several years, Ninth Air Force stated its CCTs “were not in a position to experience further delay in the development of wind instrumentation; they needed equipment as soon as money could be made available for purchase.”³⁹

Combat control operations also suffered from a lack of night lighting and DZ/LZ marking equipment. Specifically, CCTs had a pressing need for a rotating beacon light for marking drop and landing zones at night. The year 1960 witnessed a flurry of studies, reports, and recommendations on how to rectify the many deficiencies in CCT equipment. One of the best single expressions of command-level concern took place in August, when Maj Gen Daniel W. Jenkins, Ninth Air Force commander, wrote to TAC addressing CCT equipment deficiencies. “The urgent need for adequate combat control team communications equipment has been the subject of numerous correspondence to Hq TAC since June of 1957. To date, however, the [CCTs] have received no new equipment,” Jenkins said. “This lack of adequate communications/navigational aid equipment continues to seriously affect the troop carrier mission, especially during night/low visibility missions.”⁴⁰

Simply put, Jenkins felt his CCTs did “not possess adequate equipment to properly perform the mission.”⁴¹ Commanders were not the only ones concerned. Capt Tom Eggleston, the CCT officer-in-charge in the 3rd APS, wrote to the Rayovac Company explaining his need for a small, lightweight rotating beacon and a lightweight dry cell power pack for night operations.⁴²

While Ninth Air Force sought major improvements in CCT equipage, each team remained at 14 personnel each. In late 1960 the Ninth’s deputy for operations, Brig Gen Thomas R. Ford, proposed forming a new APS at Dyess AFB, Texas, to support the C-130 wing there. The proposed unit manning for the Dyess CCT as well as for the existing 2nd and 3rd APSs (of three CCTs each) comprised 14 duty positions (table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Proposed unit manning for Dyess AFB CCT, 1960–61

Title ⁴³	Grade	AFSC Strength
Air Traffic Controller	Captain 1634	1
Control Tower Technician	Master Sergeant B27270	1
Control Tower Technician	Technical Sergeant B27270	2
Control Tower Operator	Staff Sergeant B27250A	3
Control Tower Operator	Airman First Class B27250A	4
Approach Control Tower Operator	Airman Second Class B27270A	1
Ground Comm Equipment Repairman	Staff Sergeant B30452	1
Ground Comm Equipment Repairman	Airman First Class B30452	1

Reprinted from History, Ninth Air Force, July–December 1960, vol. 2. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency), SD 83. CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield, USAF, retired, noted the table included one mismatched grade and AFSC: an Airman second class was not authorized to hold the 7-level rating (Crutchfield, discussion with the author, 8 December 2010).

Aside from a myriad of equipment challenges, CCTs faced other issues. In 1961 one Air Force Reserve CCT consisted of an officer and eight Airmen who “had no intention of going to jump school.” Ninth Air Force noted that “obviously, a non-jumper was of no value to a CCT.” An advisory team captain recommended the recalcitrants be given one more opportunity to sign a volunteer statement for jump training.⁴⁴

Occasionally in joint exercises certain reserve CCTs, although manned by jump-qualified personnel, were found lacking in particular aspects of training. In a tactical air exercise named Lava Plains, a reserve CCT failed to put out the smoke in an impact area, thereby contributing to an unacceptably large circular error on the airdrops. A year later, during another exercise, a group of viewing stands were set up by the Army “precisely on the point identified to the aerial delivery aircrews as the heavy equipment impact point.” Thankfully, there were no known injuries from the drop. The Air Force combat control officer, Air Force DZ control officer, and the Army DZ safety officer had not been informed.⁴⁵

In August 1961 six troop carriers from the 314th wing conducted a goodwill mission in the Peruvian Andes in what Ninth Air Force believed to be the first operational use of the C-130B on unprepared dirt strips. Airlifting a total of nearly 300 tons of road construction equipment over a six-day period, the results showed “the effectiveness of the C-130B to operate in relatively undeveloped regions of the world and to maintain effective combat support,” a capability that, together with that of combat control, was soon tested in Southeast Asia.⁴⁶

In February 1962 an article in the *Airman* magazine highlighted the combat control business. The article, which borrowed from a Marine Corps tradition, intended to recruit potential candidates by emphasizing the unique challenges that only a few could meet. CMSgt Edison T. Blair wrote that 45 Airmen at the Air Traffic Control School at Keesler AFB volunteered for combat control duty but only three passed the initial screening and none qualified for CCT duty. Combat controllers must be either qualified control tower operators or ground radio mechanics, the chief wrote, but “getting to their duty station and setting up operations” was the toughest part of the job. “They may get there by crawling on their bellies through enemy lines guided only by guts, a map, and a compass. Sometimes they may be landed from a submarine, small surface craft, or a rubber boat,” Blair continued. “More often they parachute ahead of, or with, the first airborne troops. Or they may be airlanded from the first assault transport plane.”⁴⁷

The last two means of getting to work were, in fact, the ones nearly always employed by CCTs. When parachuting with the initial airborne troops, an AAT accompanied the CCT and set up a perimeter defense to allow the controllers to do their job. “The AAT jumps out one side of the aircraft, the CCT out the other,” Blair wrote.⁴⁸

At that time, the Air Force maintained six active duty APSs: three in TAC, one in the Military Air Transport Service, and one each in Europe and the Far East. Three CCTs were under the 3rd APS at Pope, thereby comprising the nucleus of the CCT force of less than 100 men. Although the Air Force Reserve had six APSs with CCTs, Blair hinted that their level of training could not be counted on for operational use. He neglected to mention whether all of the reserve CCTs had attended jump school.⁴⁹

In late 1962 and into 1963 CCTs participated in exercises in Panama and Honduras, with the Army requesting the assistance of Air Force combat controllers during the airdrops. A small number of CCT personnel deployed from Dyess (Twelfth Air Force), employing day and night DZ marking equipment and one MRC-87 jeep. Subsequent rotations involved CCT personnel from Sewart and then Pope (Ninth Air Force).⁵⁰

One of the Sewart CCT members was a young E-3 (Airman second class [A2C]) named Richard W. “Rick” Crutchfield, who had been recently accepted into combat control following his first assignment as a control tower operator at Larson AFB, Washington. Years later, Crutchfield recalled that an “old chief” at Larson “had taken good care of me and gone to bat for me.” The chief made sure his young Airman was promoted even though he left the organization for a new assignment about the time Crutchfield was eligible for promotion. The old chief evidently knew what he was doing. Under the tutelage of SMSgt Frank J. Betty at Sewart AFB, Crutchfield learned how to be “a good [noncommissioned officer] NCO.” Rising to E-9 (chief master sergeant) in just 14 years, his long service in the top enlisted grade enabled Crutchfield to mentor more young combat controllers, including his son Chris, than any other chief in the history of the career field.⁵¹

In January 1963 the 2nd and 3rd APSs were discontinued and inactivated and their CCTs reassigned to the 651st Communications Squadron of the 507th Communications and Control Group. The reason for the change was not immediately apparent to Ninth Air Force and created certain problems. Maj Gen Richard T. Coiner, Jr., Ninth Air Force commander, addressed his concerns with his boss, Gen Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., writing that the recent, unexpected transfer of CCTs from the troop carrier wings to the 507th group had “created many unnecessary problems and is cumbersome for the commanders in the field.” Coiner felt administration, training, and

maintenance were “complicated out of proportion” due to the necessity of dealing with another agency. “The loss of the [CCTs] deprived the troop carrier commander of direct control of one of the primary elements necessary for the successful conduct of troop drop or air-landed missions. The [CCTs] perform duties for the troop carrier commander,” he continued. “They mark the drop/landing zones, establish ground-to-air communications, relay advice and information to incoming aircraft, and score and record statistical data concerning drop/landing activities.”⁵² Coiner requested reassignment of his CCTs to the TCWs at Sewart and Pope.⁵³

The changes affecting combat control occurred during a period of increased command-and-control and organizational turmoil. In 1961 the activation of US Strike Command to deal with contingencies worldwide created numerous challenges for TAC’s numbered air forces (Ninth and Twelfth) regarding operational control of the units they commanded. A year later, the Ninth reacquired a fighter mission along with its troop carrier and reconnaissance duties, leading the historian to note the command “had gained, lost, and regained organizations in sometimes seemingly capricious succession.” In 1964 APSs were activated (or reactivated) at several TAC bases—Dyess AFB; Forbes AFB, Kansas; Langley AFB, Virginia; Lockbourne AFB, Ohio; Pope; and Sewart—representing higher headquarters’ response to the problems created by inactivating the command’s APSs one year earlier. The units included the 1st APS at Lockbourne, the 2nd at Sewart, and the 3rd at Pope—all assigned to the 1st Aerial Port Group at Langley. Thus, Coiner’s request to have combat control elements restored to the TCWs they supported was fulfilled some months after his departure from Ninth Air Force. Coiner moved to the Pentagon on 22 November 1963, the day of Pres. John F. Kennedy’s assassination.⁵⁴

During the years in which the status and the organization of Air Force CCTs seemed most unsettled, combat controllers sometimes ended up in unique assignments outside their chosen field. Jim Howell’s stint with the 6511th Test Group (Parachute) was one example. In 1958 Howell returned from Tachikawa AB, Japan, where he worked in the 7th APS’s CCT. He reenlisted for six more years, but due to confusion over his AFSC (combat controllers still lacked their own specialty code), Howell was directed to cross-train into another career field. With the ad hoc assistance of a colonel he met, Howell chose the test group and in May 1958 reported to Naval Air Station El Centro,

California. At the time Sergeant Howell had over 200 jumps plus five “free falls” he had completed on his own during his tour in Japan.⁵⁵

Howell became the noncommissioned officer-in-charge (NCOIC) of the “Man Carry Section,” a term that designated parachutes men carried rather than those used for equipment drops. Over the next four-and-a-half years, Howell tested parachutes and aircraft ejection systems, setting (or sharing) at least four altitude records, including becoming one of the first military members to qualify as a high-altitude, low-opening (HALO) parachutist. In his most famous jump on 6 June 1961 at Holloman AFB, New Mexico, Howell became the “volunteer human subject” in the “first premeditated live ejection test of the upward rotational supersonic ‘B’ ejection seat.”⁵⁶ In a test requiring “the highest degree of physical and mental conditioning,” Howell ejected successfully from a Convair F-106B Delta Dart all-weather interceptor aircraft at an altitude of 22,060 feet and a speed of 560 knots indicated airspeed. In 2007 the retired chief and legend in the combat control community recalled that he stayed with the cockpit capsule until reaching 14,000 feet, which took about 43 seconds. At that point, the sequencing was such that the headrest fired, then “the headrest pulls out a drogue, the drogue yanks out of the seat [and] at the same time it pulls two cables, releasing you from the stirrups, lap belt, and the harness, and it jerks you out.”⁵⁷ A moment later, the drogue is cut away “and the pilot takes over and opens the parachute.”⁵⁸ Two days after the historic feat, the military announced that “the test was an unqualified success and was the climax to a 4 1/2 year program to develop a safe pilot escape system for high speed aircraft.” Moreover, all F-106 pilots in Air Defense Command squadrons were soon to “enjoy this added margin in safe escape.”⁵⁹ As a young boy, William B. “Billy” Howell watched his dad jump at El Centro. Influenced by his father, Billy Howell enlisted in the Air Force in 1972 and served in CCT for years. He finished his career as commandant of the Combat Control School, retiring as a senior master sergeant (E-8) in the early 1990s.⁶⁰



Figure 2.3. James A. Howell suits up for the “human subject” test of the F-106B ejection seat, 6 June 1961. Howell “jumped” from an altitude of over 22,000 feet and indicated airspeed of 560 knots. (Photo courtesy of James A. Howell.)



Figure 2.4. High altitude record holders. *Left to right, back row:* Capt Charles J. Corey, USAF; SSG Tisdale, USA; SP5 William W. Bohringer, USA; SSG Wilfred J. Charette, USA; Sgt James W. Hauck, USA; and Capt John W. Garrity, USAF. *Left to right, front row:* SSgt Vernon Morgan, USAF; SSgt George D. MacLean, Jr., USAF; MSgt James A. Howell, USAF; and 2nd Lt James E. Garvey, USA. (USAF photo.)



Figure 2.5. TSgt James A. Howell immediately after a test jump from 25,000 feet, 30 July 1962. Howell had tested the FTL-232 experimental multistage parachute. (Official US Navy photograph, courtesy of James A. Howell.)

By 1964 Air Force combat control had a full decade of experience. Combat control had survived repeated *external* threats to its existence stemming from the Army's desire to recapture the pathfinder function. Moreover, CCTs survived *internal* threats created by serious equipment shortfalls, organizational instability, and the Air Force's penchant for the anticipated electronic wizardry expected to render the men on the ground unnecessary. As early as 1961, a small number of combat controllers deployed to Southeast Asia. Many more followed in the next decade and a half. Their operational employment again offered the simple, enduring lesson that men are more important than machines.

Notes

1. History, Eighteenth Air Force (18 AF), January–June 1955, vol. 2, Supporting Document (SD) 83 (Pers & Mgt section); Maj Gen Chester E. McCarty, Commander, 18 AF to Commander, Tactical Air Command (TAC), draft memorandum, subject:

Establishment of Troop Carrier Air Divisions, Operational, no date, including quote 1; and History, 18 AF, January–June 1957, vol. 1, 1, including quote 2.

2. History, 18 AF, January–June 1955, vol. 2, SD 24 (Pers & Mgt section), Maj W. T. Stovall to PDP, subject: Combat Control Teams, 27 January 1955.

3. History, 18 AF, January–June 1955, vol. 1, 126–27.

4. History, 18 AF, January–June 1955, vol. 1, 126–27, including quote; and History, 18 AF, January–June 1955, vol. 2, SD 24 (Pers & Mgt section).

5. History, 18 AF, July–December 1955, vol. 1, 53–56.

6. History, 18 AF, July–December 1955, vol. 2, SD 21 (Personnel section); and Maj Gen Chester E. McCarty, commander, 18 AF to Commander, 63d Troop Carrier Wing, Heavy, subject: Discharge Proceedings under AFR 39-16, 20 December 1955.

7. History, 18 AF, January–June 1956, vol. 1, 19–22, including quotes; and History, 18 AF, July–December 1956, vol. 1, 143–44.

8. The General Edwards referred to was probably Lt Gen Idwal H. Edwards, USAF, who retired in 1954. During World War II, DuBridge's team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology greatly improved the system known as radar. Between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, the author's father, the late Dr. Jerry B. Marion, worked as a research physicist at "Cal Tech" during DuBridge's tenure. For more on DuBridge's work during the war, see Neils Bohr Library and Archives, oral history interview with DuBridge, 5 September 2012, <https://www.aip.org/history-programs/niels-bohr-library/oral-histories/4583>.

9. History, 18 AF, January–June 1956, vol. 2, SD 5 (Operations & Training section), unnumbered pg. 7, 18 AF to General Edwards, untitled presentation on troop carrier aviation, no date.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. History, 18 AF, July–December 1956, vol. 1, 82–83.

14. Ibid., 83.

15. Ibid., 83–84.

16. History, 18 AF, July–December 1956, vol. 2, SD 33 (Operations & Trng section); and Col Harry S. Bishop, Chief of Staff, 18 AF, to Commander, TAC, subject: Concept of Combat Control Team Operations (Approximately 1957–1961), 5 December 1956, including quote.

17. Ibid., Enclosure 2.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. Even 50 years later, most of these tasks still constituted the bread-and-butter of CCT—although, since the early 1990s and particularly since 2001, operational requirements have led combat controllers into the roles of directing air strikes themselves (instead of working through forward air controllers) and even performing direct action against adversaries.

20. History, 18 AF, January–June 1957, vol. 1, 140–46.

21. Ibid., 143–49.

22. Ibid., 147–48.

23. Ibid., 9, 148–50, including quotes; and Ellery D. Wallwork and Kathryn A. Wilcoxson, *Operation Deep Freeze, 50 Years of US Air Force Airlift in Antarctica, 1956–2006* (Scott AFB, IL: Office of History, Air Mobility Command, Oct 2006), 13.

24. History, 18 AF, January–June 1957, vol. 1, 150, including quote; and Wall-work and Wilcoxson, *Operation Deep Freeze*, 13.

25. Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *Setup: What the Air Force Did in Vietnam and Why* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, June 1991), 26, including quote; and History, 18 AF, July–December 1957, vol. 1, ii, 1–10.

26. History, 18 AF, July–December 1957, vol. 2, General Order (GO) 33, Headquarters (HQ) TAC, subject: Reassignment of Certain USAF Units, 12 August 1957, including quote; and History, 18 AF, July–December 1957, vol. 1, 6.

27. History, Ninth Air Force (9 AF), January–June 1958, vol. 1, 9, including quote.

28. *Ibid.*, 123–24.

29. *Ibid.*, 124–25.

30. History, 9 AF, July–December 1958, vol. 1, 228–30.

31. Blair, “Men and a Man-Sized Job,” *Airman* 6 (February 1962), 25.

32. History, 9 AF, January–December 1959, vol. 1, 234–35.

33. *Ibid.*, 236.

34. *Ibid.*, 237–38.

35. History, 9 AF, January–June 1960, vol. 3, SD 84, Col Albert V. Endress, Commander, 839 AD, to 9 AF, subject: Combat Control Equipment, 1 February 1960.

36. History, 9 AF, January–June 1960, vol. 3, SD 85, study by Capt John L. Nightingale, 3rd APS, subject: Communication Equipment for Combat Control Teams, no date, 3.

37. *Ibid.*, 5, 6; and History, 9 AF, July–December 1960, vol. 1, 148–49.

38. History, 9 AF, January–June 1960, vol. 3, SD 84; Col Albert V. Endress, Commander, 839 AD, to 9 AF, subject: Combat Control Equipment, 1 February 1960, including quote; and History, 9 AF, January–June 1960, vol. 1, 167–68.

39. History, 9 AF, January–June 1960, vol. 1, 169–70, including quotes; and History, 9 AF, July–December 1960, vol. 1, 150.

40. History, 9 AF, January–June 1960, vol. 1, 170; History, 9 AF, July–December 1960, vol. 1, 150–51; History, 9 AF, July–December 1960, vol. 2, SD 80; and Maj Gen Daniel W. Jenkins, Commander, 9 AF, to TAC (TOOT), subject: Combat Control Team Equipment Deficiencies, 6 August 1960, including quotes. Note that during the first 15 days of August 1960, Jenkins commanded Ninth Air Force. See History, 9 AF, July–December 1960, vol. 1, 49; GO 31, 9 AF, 1 August 1960.

41. History, 9 AF, July–December 1960, vol. 2, SD 80.

42. *Ibid.*, SD 82; and Capt Tom Eggleston to Ray O Vac Company, no subject line, 21 December 1960.

43. *Ibid.*, SD 83, Brig Gen Thomas R. Ford, Deputy for Operations, Ninth Air Force, to Director of Manpower and Organization, Ninth Air Force, subject: APSs, 25 November 1960.

44. History, 9 AF, January–June 1961, vol. 1, 122, 148.

45. History, 9 AF, January–June 1961, vol. 1, 168–70; and History, 9 AF, January–June 1962, vol. 1, 140–42.

46. History, 9 AF, July–December 1961, vol. 1, part 1, chronology (page unnumbered), 141–52, 285.

47. Blair, “Men and a Man-Sized Job,” 23.

48. *Ibid.*, 24.

49. *Ibid.*, 24, 26.

50. History, 9 AF, July–December 1962, vol. 1, 135–39.
51. CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 9 February 2007, including quotes; and author’s personal observation based on Crutchfield’s many assignments as an NCOIC—a copy of his biography is in AFHRA files.
52. History, 9 AF, January–June 1963, vol. 1, 31–32; History, 9 AF, January–June 1963, vol. 2, SD 5, Maj Gen Richard T. Coiner, Jr., Commander, 9 AF, to Gen W. [Walter] C. Sweeney, Jr., Commander, TAC, no subject line, 8 February 1963 (draft), including quotes; and Organizational record card, 3rd APS, AFHRA/RSO, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. The 507th group reported directly to TAC.
53. History, 9 AF, January–June 1963, vol. 2, SD 5.
54. History, 9 AF, January–June 1964, vol. 1, 3, 17, 20–21, including quote (pg. 17); Organizational record card, HQ, 1st Aerial Port Group, AFHRA/RSO, Maxwell AFB, Alabama; and History, 9 AF, July–December 1963, vol. 1, iii, 18.
55. CMSgt James A. Howell, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 21–22 May 2007.
56. Ibid.
57. James A. Howell interview.
58. Citation, Membership in Air Force Systems Command Aerospace Primus Club, James A. Howell, copy in AFHRA files.
59. Document, “B’ Seat Press Release Data,” 8 June 1961, copy in AFHRA files.
60. AF Form 5b, “Individual Jump Record,” James A. Howell, sheet no. 20, copy in AFHRA files; and SMSgt William B. Howell, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 December 2007, including quote.

Chapter 3

The Conflict in Southeast Asia, 1961–1975

Combat Controllers, Forward Air Controllers

In spring 1967 the Seventh Air Force commander, Lt Gen William W. Momyer, visited the Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) at Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand. Momyer wanted to see the Seventh Air Force and Thirteenth Air Force units that supported the war effort against North Vietnam, which included the operations in Laos. One of the units, the 606th Air Commando Squadron (606 ACS)—commanded by Col Harry C. Aderholt—paved the way for the 56th Air Commando Wing (56 ACW), which Aderholt soon led. By April 1967, the wing, under the operational control of Seventh Air Force but supported by Thirteenth Air Force, consolidated the various Thailand-based elements involved in special air warfare activities—including those of a small number of combat controllers and special operations weathermen.

Aderholt recalled talking about forward air controllers (FAC) with Momyer. Up to that moment, Aderholt assumed the general knew that nonrated, primarily enlisted FACs (actually, Air Force air commando-trained combat controllers) had been controlling USAF/allied fighter aircraft in strikes against North Vietnamese and Laotian communist (Pathet Lao) forces—part of the so-called “Secret War” in Laos. But Momyer didn’t know. Upon learning the truth, Momyer “threw one of the more impressive temper tantrums of the war,” according to *The Ravens*’ author, Christopher Robbins.¹

Air Force policy at the time required FACs to be experienced fighter pilots that had undergone formal FAC training, but manning shortages had forced the Air Force to compromise the policy. However, Momyer “had just assured General [William C.] Westmoreland that all FACs assigned to U.S. Army units would be jet fighter pilots.”² The episode occurred at a time when the Army was questioning the Air Force’s commitment to the support of ground forces. And, the Army was pushing for its own FACs rather than relying on the Air Force. As an Air Force historian noted, anything that added to the perception that “the Air Force was further diluting its standards” in the FAC business strengthened the Army’s case.³ Whether justified or

not under the circumstances, the Momyer–Aderholt incident perhaps became the most memorable one relative to the combat control team (CCT) experience in Southeast Asia during more than a decade of warfare.

The “Butterfly” program was the name of the airborne FAC operation in Laos. In 1961 the new administration of Pres. John F. Kennedy placed renewed emphasis on counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare as a means of countering Soviet influence in the Third World. Accordingly, Gen Curtis E. LeMay, the Air Force chief of staff, initiated the so-called “Jungle Jim” program—the forerunner to the Air Force’s air commandos. An earlier version, formed by Gen Henry H. Arnold during World War II in the China-Burma-India Theater, had languished after the war. The flying operations of the new group involved mainly vintage, propeller-driven aircraft working out of remote, primitive airstrips located in potentially hostile areas.

Adventurous, independent-minded, capable, and motivated volunteer combat controllers were needed to complement the flying units. These men provided what they had available—usually limited airfield lighting, radio communications, and navigational and weather assistance—to facilitate the commandos’ flight operations. Unlike the traditional ground role of CCTs, however, in Southeast Asia a handful of combat controllers also directed the air strikes *from the air*, flying in light utility aircraft such as the O-1 Bird Dog, several short takeoff and landing (STOL) liaison types, and helicopters such as the H-34 Choctaw. Charlie Jones, one of the best-known combat controllers and a Butterfly FAC for six months in 1966, hinted at the primitive nature of their work. He recalled that early in the war, controllers typically used flashlights with Styrofoam coffee cup cutouts as beacons to direct incoming air commando airplanes.⁴

South Vietnam

In August 1962 air commando combat controllers TSgt Richard L. Foxx and Staff Sergeant Jones received temporary duty (TDY) orders to Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam. There they learned that their job was to support an Army special forces (SF) team operating in South Vietnam’s central highlands. The two worked in both a ground and airborne FAC role, controlling air-to-ground strikes against Viet Cong and other enemy combatants. Foxx and Jones, equipped with combat

gear and a radio jeep, lived in a grass house with their SF counterparts in the village of Boun Enao. They quickly became accepted by the villagers and supervised the construction of a primitive airstrip where the FACs caught their flights. A third CCT, Charles Luckhurst, soon joined them. Jones remembered Luckhurst as “very fine on the radio,” despite the abysmal quality of much of the hand-me-down communications equipment available, including an “old raggedy Mark-20” three-quarter ton truck with mounted radios. In Jan Churchill’s *Classified Secret*, Luckhurst described probably the earliest FAC system in Vietnam in which any CCTs participated:

To control air-strikes, we had a system set up where, if an outlying village was under attack, they could call up to Boun Enao where we had a radio and beacon set up, and give the pilots a heading out of there. Each village had marker flares in all corners of the village and a fire arrow, usually made of a bamboo frame overlaid with thatched palm fronds, in the middle. They would turn the fire arrow in the direction of the attack and ignite it. The aircraft would then go in that direction to hit the target.⁵

Sadly, on 15 October 1962, Foxx became the first of seven Air Force combat controllers to die in Southeast Asia, when his L-28 Helio Courier aircraft was hit by ground fire and crashed near Ban Me Thuot, South Vietnam. Churchill noted that Foxx “became the first Combat Controller in history to earn the Purple Heart; the first ever to be killed in action, and the first to receive combat decorations for heroism.”⁶ Upon Foxx’s death, Jones was promoted to technical sergeant and became the noncommissioned officer-in-charge (NCOIC) of the air commando combat controllers in South Vietnam. Another combat controller, Charles Cody, quickly deployed to fill Foxx’s position.⁷

Most combat controllers in Southeast Asia served in conventional rather than air commando units. While this study’s parameters required omitting the vast majority of conventional operations in Southeast Asia, there were a number of occasions in which conventionally-assigned CCTs worked alongside units or elements that were considered, informally, “special operations forces” (SOF) or engaged in activities generally performed by SOF. Thus, they deserved attention. In particular, a number of combat controllers belonging to conventional units served with Army SF teams in remote parts of South Vietnam, often near the borders of Cambodia and southern Laos, such as Katum and Khe Sanh. Several earned medals for valor, especially the Silver Star, the third-highest medal for combat valor. One

was Billie W. Slayton, who as a staff sergeant earned the Silver Star in September 1968.⁸



Figure 3.1. On 14 October 1965 at Bong Son Special Forces Camp, Republic of Vietnam, TSgt Stan Williams (in radio vehicle) and TSgt Gene Adcock provide air traffic control for a stream of C-123s delivering troops and equipment in the highlands north of Saigon. (Photo courtesy of Gene Adcock.)

In 1968 Slayton volunteered for war service in Southeast Asia. Unlike the post-9/11 era, there was little predeployment training in those days. After completing air traffic control school, radio training, and survival instruction, “there wasn’t really anything . . . that we didn’t already know. Well, we thought that until we got over there,” he recalled. Slayton arrived in February and reported to the 8th Aerial Port Squadron at Tan Son Nhut AB, Republic of Vietnam, for a 12-month tour of duty—all permanently assigned combat controllers were officially assigned to the base, but they forward deployed to field locations. The base was hit by an enemy mortar and rocket attack on the day he arrived, which according to Air Force historian Ray Bowers was the “single most destructive shelling” at that airfield. One C-130 was destroyed, while nine other transports, a warehouse, and the control tower were

damaged. Three days later, Slayton went out to the field to begin working air traffic, which in Vietnam typically consisted of C-7 Caribou, C-123 Provider, and C-130 Hercules transports. He soon realized that the skill of providing artillery advisories to aircraft was, indeed, “one thing we should have learned before we left the States.”⁹



Figure 3.2. England AFB, Louisiana, Air Commando CCT (1966). *Standing, left to right:* John Watts, Joe E. Donahue, Vince Campisi, Bob Mahaffey, Tom Kinder, George Maxwell, Juan Rodriguez, Jim Stanford, Ron Duvall, Tom Drinkwater, Dean Stafford, Dustin V. Brock, Robert E. Pechtold, Bill Jerkins, Bob Annis, and Bob McCollough. *Kneeling, left to right:* Bill Frankenberger, John Stryker, Buddy Bowden, and Charlie Jones. (Photo courtesy of Mike McReynolds.)

In late September 1968, a three-man CCT consisting of one captain and two enlisted members, Slayton and Rudy Elizondo, flew into the SF camp at Katum, South Vietnam, located 50 miles northwest of Saigon and four miles from the Cambodian border. More than 18 months earlier, US military planners had selected the site for a command post and artillery fire support base during Operation Junction City. The objective of the operation was “a massive entrapment of enemy forces in Zone C including northern Tay Ninh Province.”¹⁰ On 22 February 1967 a battalion of the 173rd Airborne Brigade conducted “the first American parachute assault of the war” at Katum.¹¹

An Air Force CCT accompanied the brigade, jumping onto the drop zone (DZ) and marking the intended impact point with smoke. Two days after the assault, Army engineers began construction of an airfield, clearing the jungle for a 2,900-foot strip they surfaced with locally available laterite. Within a week, C-130 aircraft began operating at Katum airfield.¹²

Typically, the CCTs deployed from Saigon for one to two weeks with three- or four-man teams of at least two combat controllers and one radio maintenance man. While the volume of air traffic at some airstrips warranted a CCT at all times, others—such as Katum—only required the presence of combat controllers during surge periods. The CCTs rotated in and out of the various camps in South Vietnam, some of them manned by SF and others by conventional forces, interspersed with short respites at Tan Son Nhut for a shower, clean clothes, a hot meal, and a few beers.¹³

At Katum, a small number of SF soldiers—about half of the 20 to 25 Americans—held the inner berm, which included the all-important US chow hall. The second berm consisted of the indigenous forces and their families as well as mercenaries. Slayton recalled many Cambodians among the latter. A US artillery outfit manned the third berm, which also included family members of the indigenous forces—“a lot of kids and dogs.”¹⁴

During the CCT's late-September deployment, its main role was to control the low-altitude parachute-extraction system (LAPES) deliveries performed by C-130s in support of the American forces. After a LAPES delivery, the combat controllers derigged the load and rolled up the parachute to be flown out by a CH-47 Chinook helicopter. “We had to get those chutes out of there because the indigenous forces . . . would take those parachutes and cut them up and use them for shelter and stuff inside the compound,” Slayton said.¹⁵ The fact that thick jungle growth reached almost to the airstrip on all sides, and there were rumors—never substantiated—that the enemy had dug tunnels under the runway added to the sense of insecurity.¹⁶

On the night of 23–24 September 1968, a determined enemy force made repeated attempts to overrun the camp at Katum. After the attacks, Slayton recalled that American intelligence personnel surmised it was “the graduation for the infantry class,” because so many brand-new AK-47s littered the area.¹⁷ Slayton had never experienced the effectiveness of the AC-130 Spectre gunship, but that night “they put their power where they needed to” to save their comrades on the

ground.¹⁸ At one point, Slayton manned an M-60 machine gun during a probe that brought the enemy within 70 yards of his position. The next morning, Slayton and Elizondo cleared the runway of unexploded ordnance prior to coordinating the day's resupply airdrops. Elizondo recalled pulling bombs out of the ground, a hazardous undertaking. They also noticed a number of enemy prisoners of war (POW), several horribly wounded and missing arms or legs, the grim result of the previous night's unrelenting attacks. Elizondo offered one a cigarette, which the wounded man refused with disdain.¹⁹

Positioned near the runway, the combat controllers relied on their portable radio to maintain communications with aircraft in the vicinity. There, they were exposed, as Slayton's Silver Star citation read, to "hostile ground fire while controlling incoming resupply aircraft bringing vital munitions and supplies to the beleaguered camp."²⁰ Slayton and Elizondo accounted for two of the 22 Silver Stars earned by combat controllers during the Southeast Asia conflict. Maj Bob Barinowski, the CCT's officer-in-charge in Saigon, spoke of Slayton years later: "You could believe what he said . . . a good ole Tennessee boy. . . a farm boy that had a lot of guts."²¹ Perhaps it was to Slayton's advantage that his former boss did not recall an incident in which the staff sergeant used his farm boy experience to bust open a new lock on the CCT maintenance warehouse in order to grab the portable radios needed for a mission.²²

The CCT had experienced combat prior to Katum when months earlier, Slayton volunteered to go to Khe Sanh Combat Base in an attempt to escape squadron administrative duties. For several months in early 1968 Khe Sanh, situated in the hills of South Vietnam approximately 10 miles south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and five miles from the Laotian border, became the dramatic focal point of the US military effort in Southeast Asia. US forces established the base in 1962 for use by Army SF and South Vietnamese irregulars operating mainly in the Laotian panhandle. Later, American engineers built a 3,000-foot runway to handle C-130 traffic. The enemy was active in the area, and by late 1967 Khe Sanh depended entirely upon aerial resupply. While the enemy intended to capture Khe Sanh, US Army general Westmoreland, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) commander, was equally determined to hold the base. Pessimists compared Khe Sanh with Dien Bien Phu, where 14 years earlier the Vietnamese had ended France's colonial empire in Indochina.²³ Bowers summarized the struggle for Khe Sanh:

Airlift made possible the allied victory of Khe Sanh in 1968. For eleven weeks early in the year, the defenders of this post were exclusively resupplied by air and withstood the attacks of four North Vietnamese regiments. The campaign bore comparison with the classic combat airlifts of Stalingrad, Burma, and Dien Bien Phu. The success at Khe Sanh reflected the application of lessons drawn from past campaigns, the improved technology for tactical airlift now at hand, and the absolute allied air superiority. The outcome of the struggle was a triumph of tactical defense used in intelligent combination with heavy firepower and air lines of communication.²⁴

On the role of Air Force personnel stationed at Khe Sanh, Bowers said, “These men shared the miseries of the Marine garrison enduring dirt, rats, chill, and shelling. Tasks which normally took one hour often became all-day projects in the primitive and dangerous environment at the camp. . . . Most [USAF personnel] were enlisted men whose personal courage and resourcefulness earned unfailing praise from their officers.”²⁵

Combat controllers at Khe Sanh directed taxiing aircraft on the airstrip and assisted Marine Corps personnel in the control tower with air traffic. On the drop zone, which was left open to the enemy each night, CCTs daily set out panel markers and smoke to assist inbound aircraft.²⁶

Normal Air Force rotations at Khe Sanh were two weeks. On the sixth day of Slayton’s deployment, while raising himself out of a fox-hole to observe a C-130 preparing for a container drop, he was hit in the left shoulder and arm by fragments from an enemy mortar. Fortunately, his injuries were not permanent. However, years later Slayton felt that his time at Katum had been of greater personal significance than Khe Sanh. “I had been in Vietnam awhile, but I grew up a whole lot in Katum,” he said in his Tennessee drawl.²⁷

Thailand and Laos

Thailand—bordering Laos to the north and east and Cambodia to the south—became an important staging area for American military operations throughout Southeast Asia. The United States deployed air assets to several Royal Thai air force bases that supported allied activities in the region. At one time or another, some Air Force combat controllers worked solely in Thailand; others deployed from there into Laos. All air commando combat controllers based in Thailand belonged to the CCT under the 606 ACS, one of the two primary mission

units of the 56 ACW when it activated at NKP in April 1967.²⁸ The 606th team was all enlisted, and at times was led by an E-5 (staff sergeant). The squadron's mission encompassed many special air warfare responsibilities, including combat and psychological warfare missions with PC-6 Pilatus Porter single-engine STOL utility aircraft, U-10 Helio Courier liaison aircraft, and UC-123 Candlestick transport aircraft; civic action and logistics/maintenance advisory programs (in Thailand); and CCT and COIN operations (in Thailand). Specifically, the air commando unit's task was increasing the Royal Thai Air Force's capabilities outlined in the Thailand Interdefense Plan, supporting and training Royal Laotian Air Force personnel and "conducting combat operations as directed to fulfill U.S. Air Force requirements in Southeast Asia."²⁹

In May 1966 the first permanently-assigned members of the 606th's CCT flew into Thailand. A1C Clyde Howard and four other combat controllers—SSgt John L. Johnston, the NCOIC; A1C Donald M. Carlyle; A1C Leslie L. Hall Jr.; and SSgt John A. Webb—arrived on a C-141 Starlifter transport bound originally for Udorn AB, Thailand, but diverted to Bangkok. The following day, the newest members of the 606 ACS were shuttled to NKP via C-130 Hercules. By October 1966 Carlyle and Webb transitioned to the Butterflies in Laos, replacing Jones and Jim Stanford, who returned stateside after a six-month TDY. In July three more men joined the CCT: SSgt Morris M. Harris, A1C Ronald Kosh, and TSgt Danny Pike, who took over as the NCOIC of the eight-man team.³⁰

Howard recalled that his arrival at NKP coincided with the start of the annual southwest monsoon. The base was "a mud hole." Navy Seabees had carved the base out of the jungles and swamps three years earlier, but little progress had been made. The Air Force's Rapid Engineers Deployable Heavy Operations Repair Squadron, Engineers (Red Horse) were busily building facilities to get base personnel out of the mud. The communists were active on both sides of the Mekong River, which was only eight miles from the base. Although Laos had technically remained neutral since the 1962 Geneva accords, US personnel understood that Laos was enemy territory. Howard heard of "a lot of [communist] activity that was happening."³¹

One of Howard's first duties was the sobering task of collecting the personal effects of a fellow combat controller reported missing in action (MIA) on 18 May. Like other CCTs, A2C Andy Guillet performed observer duties in the back seat of an O-1E Bird Dog liaison

and observation aircraft belonging to the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron. He volunteered for the deployment when another CCT, Chesley Bowden, became unavailable due to his wife's pregnancy. When on the 18th Guillet was scheduled with another pilot, and Stanford with Harley, the CCTs swapped pilots. Sadly, Harley and Guillet were shot down in the vicinity of Phou Lolout Mountain near the Laotian–Vietnamese border, 25 miles south of the Mu Gia Pass in southern Laos. When Bowden's daughter was born, he named her Andrea in honor of his friend and fellow combat controller who had taken his place.³²

General Westmoreland estimated that about 75 percent of all truck traffic into Laos transited Mu Gia, making it a primary target for aerial interdiction. In 1967 the 56 ACW historian wrote of “an almost continuous line of Southbound supply trucks” passing through Mu Gia except during the June through September rainy season when the roads were unusable.³³ Not surprisingly, the enemy went to great lengths to defend the strategic pass. By June 1966 Seventh Air Force listed 302 antiaircraft sites in and just south of Mu Gia, making it the most heavily defended point along the Laotian–North Vietnamese border.³⁴

Neither the US Army nor the Thai military seemed interested in protecting the NKP air base. As a result, the small Air Force CCT conducted perimeter patrols at night, its first real mission as a team. They began conducting two-man patrols around the outside of the fence while watching for snakes and other jungle “critters,” Howard called them—perhaps as much as watching for enemy fighters. “The biggest problem was cattle [and water buffalo] . . . setting off . . . a [trip] flare,” he said. Vehicle use was not an option because of jungle growth and swamps around the base, so patrols were strictly on foot. By summer 1966, the acquisition of starlight scopes—a forerunner to night vision goggles—for nighttime observation allowed the patrols to be replaced with reconnaissance flights by an Air Force CH-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopter carrying security policemen, a welcome relief to the foot-weary combat controllers.³⁵



Figure 3.3. CCT members at NKP AB, Thailand, May 1967. *Left to right:* Howard Harris, Dave Reikofski, Les Hall, Danny Pike, Ron Kosh, Don Carlyle, Frank Anthony, Johnny Johnston, Clyde Howard, Bob Bartlett, and Roger Huffman. (Photo courtesy of Mike McReynolds.)

The combat controllers patrolled by night and ran a physical training (PT) course by day. To boost morale, the squadron commander offered airborne training slots to his non-jump qualified personnel, which meant a trip to Fort Benning, Georgia, for the three-week course. Flooded with volunteers, he assigned his CCT to develop a physical conditioning course to identify the best candidates. Howard described what happened: “We ran that program doing PT every day, and we got them narrowed down because the heat was terrible . . . and we were new in-theater, and the sweat would just pour out of you. . . . It was through the mud and what not. It was tough running because of the heat.” A couple of weeks later, of nearly 40 volunteers only three remained. One master sergeant stayed with it and was sent to the airborne course, which he completed, while enjoying his time in the United States.³⁶



Figure 3.4. In May 1966 an air commando team prepares to board a helicopter and head to their home base in Thailand. Three combat controllers are identified by their berets. *Left to right:* SSgt Jim Stanford, Lt Bob McCollough, and A1C Andy Guillet. Two weeks later, Airman Guillet was shot down in an O-1 aircraft in Laos and is still listed as MIA. (Photo courtesy of Gene Adcock.)

The 606th ran a civic action program that included medical, dental, sanitation, veterinary, and public works projects. The air commandos worked closely with the local populace, establishing good relations with them and helping them to improve agricultural practices, economic opportunities, and health and schooling options. One initiative involved distributing “surplus wooden bomb and rocket crates to schools,” which were quickly transformed into students’ desks and benches. In response, the locals generally provided valuable human intelligence to the foreigners whom they knew and trusted.³⁷

The commandos at NKP, part of a relatively large civic action section that included medics and doctors, set up village health centers as well as a 75-foot medical boat, the *Nitnoy Hope*. The boat plied the Mekong River weekly, serving Thai villages inaccessible by road, especially during the monsoon season. Normally, 606th medical teams consisted of

two medics, one doctor, and a combat controller that deployed to different villages in northeast Thailand for two weeks at a time. The CCT member provided security for the team that assisted the Thai government's "war for the minds of its Northeastern people."³⁸ The team members wore civilian clothes, but regardless of their attire, most Americans clearly stood out in a village of several hundred Thais.³⁹

As again proved to be the case in places like Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Iraq after 2001, cultural sensitivities of an indigenous people could be a challenge for pragmatic Americans. Rabies killed hundreds of Thais annually, and USAF officials sought to implement a rabies eradication program. However, eliminating stray animals came up against Buddhist sensitivities concerning the taking of life. In a creative solution agreeable to both parties, the Americans put out both poisoned and unpoisoned bait. "The stray animal could then decide its own fate. If it chose the unpoisoned bait, it would live," the 56th historian observed.⁴⁰ Colonel Aderholt added that the Thais were "very impressed that their government is trying to protect them from this terrible disease."⁴¹

The combat controllers performed various oddball jobs, including minor medical treatment, passing out vitamins, and pulling teeth. The Americans sought to remain in the background as much as possible to enhance the confidence of the villagers in their own government. The intent was for the Thais to perceive their own government—not the United States—as the one primarily responsible for providing the various types of assistance to the populace. Anything less lent credence to the standard claims of communist insurgents that the host nation's government was merely a "puppet of American imperialists."⁴²

The CCT also worked with the Thai border patrol police (BPP), whose primary responsibilities consisted of intelligence collection and COIN operations along the Laotian border. Some Thai BPP and US soldiers developed good relationships based on their mutual interest in parachuting, one of several skill sets in which CCT members trained their hosts. Previously, unethical behavior on the part of certain BPP members had soured relations with the local populace. But the presence of the air commandos—some of whom accompanied the BPP on operations—facilitated the increased professionalism of Thai border police, at least for a time.⁴³

In one combined operation during the cooler winter months (1966–67), Howard deployed with a BPP platoon to execute a nighttime strike against a small village that the enemy was using as a holding area.

When platoon members took up ambush positions and gave Howard the signal, he called the supporting T-28 Trojan light attack aircraft for flares. By the second flare drop, nine individuals started to flee from the village, and the BPP quickly cut them down. On another occasion, communist insurgents killed nine BPP who took refuge for the night in a Buddhist temple east of Udorn.⁴⁴

A special subunit of the BPP, the Parachute Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU), was “the absolute elite of the elite,” Howard said.⁴⁵ Headquartered south of Bangkok, near one of the king’s palaces, the PARU’s function was to protect the king of Thailand at all costs. Howard felt that parachuting, the thrill of “floating through the sky . . . is one of the greatest tools in the world to connect people” regardless of ethnicity or religion.⁴⁶

The man ultimately responsible for the unconventional and unique work of the 56 ACW was Aderholt. Noted Air Force historian Warren A. Trest documented Aderholt’s standing among the air commando community, which stemmed from his seeming ability to be everywhere—almost “omnipresent”—around the flight line.⁴⁷ Aderholt’s personal leadership philosophy was simply to *be seen* by the troops. Aderholt rarely slept more than three or four hours a night, constantly checking on the troops at the flight line and attending off-duty gatherings with his NCOs. “[H]is troops would follow him anywhere. They were devoted to him,” a colleague of Aderholt’s stated. Many combat controllers agreed.⁴⁸ Clyde Howard added that “General Aderholt, he loved CCT. [We were] the jack-of-all-trades and he called on us frequently, and he had a great relationship with the enlisted troops.” They felt that Aderholt “walked on water,” Howard stated.⁴⁹

The wing history for late 1967 provided a snapshot of CCT activities. During the period, the 606 ACS’s eight-man team participated in leaflet and loudspeaker missions, parachute jumps for training, and A-26 Invader combat sorties flying as starlight scope operators. The CCT maintained one man at each of two other bases in the country, Ubon and Udorn, where they worked with local Thai BPP members. Combat controllers averaged 21 total sorties a week flying on A-26s and UC-123s.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, on 29 December 1967, combat controller Paul L. Foster was killed in Laos when his A-26 was shot down. He remained MIA until repatriation in 1995.⁵¹

Several months later, the wing’s 606 ACS underwent a transition from T-28s to A-1 Skyraider aircraft, while continuing to operate the U-10s and UC-123s. While the T-28/A-1 served primarily in air-to-

ground and escort roles and the UC-123 as a FAC/flare aircraft or leaflet-dropper, the U-10 was employed in diverse roles. As the “U” designation for “utility” aircraft suggested, in 1968 and 1969 the air commandos employed the versatile STOL airplane as a FAC and, in psychological operations, as a leaflet-drop or loudspeaker platform.⁵²

The 606th combat controllers played an integral part in the leaflet mission directed at the Steel Tiger area of southern Laos, working as both packagers of the leaflet bundles and as bundle kickers from the U-10 aircraft. The squadron’s intelligence office designed, shaped, and worded each leaflet; then production took place in a warehouse before the leaflets were bundled. A typical bundle or box was approximately 12 inches in height, width, and depth; normally a U-10 carried about 15 such boxes. Combat controllers cut the boxes into four sections, secured them with a waxed cord, and then attached a fuse and detonator to the excess cord; the detonator burst open the box at the desired altitude. Normally, two U-10s using the call sign “Litterbug” flew together for mutual support, escorted by T-28/A-1 aircraft depending on the target’s distance from NKP. Howard described the leaflet-drop procedure from the squadron’s aircraft:

We [direct the pilot] and we throw one box out. It doesn’t have to be [over] the target, it could be any reference point. . . . Then we watch it open when it gets to a specific altitude. . . normally five hundred feet above the ground [depending] on the coverage that we want. It opens up and we watch the wind drift with all the leaflets and [it] looks like a flock of . . . white birds . . . seagulls.⁵³

Observing the impact point in relation to the reference point enabled the kicker to make the necessary adjustment and inform the pilot to offset by the proper distance and direction. He added that typically the squadron flew a pair of U-10s two to three sorties a day when conducting leaflet drops. Howard said some of the combat controllers who flew on Litterbug missions got a fair amount of time on the flight controls, a precautionary measure in case the U-10’s pilot was shot.⁵⁴

The CCT was glad to have volunteer kickers from other sections in the 606th, whereby intelligence personnel, security police, cooks, and others participated in the Litterbug missions. Normally, the results of such drops remained unknown, but a few showed clear results. In one case in late 1967 or early 1968, 30 Pathet Lao soldiers surrendered with recently dropped leaflets in their possession; several months later, a North Vietnamese colonel serving in Laos reportedly surrendered “by presenting a free pass dropped by the Litterbugs.”⁵⁵ The Litterbug

leaflet operations continued until the fall of 1969, when the squadron's U-10 section inactivated and the aircraft were shipped to Korat RTAFB.⁵⁶

By 1968 many Americans at home had wearied of the war, especially after the surprise of the North Vietnamese-inspired Tet Offensive. Perhaps attempting to appear less belligerent, the Air Force redesignated its air commando units. Thus, the 56 ACW was redesignated the 56th Special Operations Wing (56 SOW). Combat controllers in the 606th (redesignated the 606th Special Operations Squadron [606 SOS]) performed varied duties. In 1968, those duties included training Thai BPP students on parachute rigging/packing, all phases of parachute training (including jumpmaster procedures), CH-3 helicopter loading/drop procedures, and STOL landing/drop zone construction and U-10 procedures. Squadron personnel, including CCTs, also packed and airdropped psychological warfare leaflets from U-10 and UC-123 aircraft, flew combat sorties on A-26 aircraft, and flew on U-10 loudspeaker (call sign "Loudmouth") sorties.⁵⁷

At Udorn, Howard worked with the BPP in Military Region 4 (northeastern Thailand), whose Thai commander he admired and with whom he got along very well. Howard supervised Thai personnel in clearing several 1,000-foot airstrips, after which the U-10 pilot opened the strip with an informal air show, including a parachute jump, to the delight of the villagers. In a few cases, Howard supervised the extension of existing airstrips to 1,800 feet for UC-123 operations.⁵⁸

The CCTs also trained the Laotians how to direct air strikes, with or without using radios, for when a FAC aircraft either was unavailable or ill-suited to the situation. Each class lasted roughly two weeks. Known as the forward air guide (FAG) program, the initiative involved a single combat controller providing classroom instruction and ground training on how to mark targets for allied aircraft, especially the Laotian T-28s. Over a period of several years, up to 10 combat controllers, including Charlie Jones, developed the techniques and procedures that went into the guide (later revised), which Headquarters Tactical Air Command approved. Combat controller Gene Adcock, later a chief master sergeant, and who served three tours in Laos, was one of the instructors of Laotian forward air guide students.⁵⁹

Training aids were primitive but effective, including hand-drawn maps and charts and what Howard called "little Cracker Jack toys" for classroom targets. Field training included the use of a bombing range west of the base at Udorn. The Americans taught the Laotians how to use sand-and-gasoline-filled smudge pots or lights for marking targets

at night. For fixed targets, Howard recalled that smudge pots were preferred but lights were better for mobile targets. Different colored beanbag lights indicated certain distances from the target—a red light for a 500-meter marker and a white light for a 100-meter marker. The use of one red and one white light indicated a target 600 meters away. Three green lights formed an arrowhead to point toward the enemy. For daylight targeting, the controllers preferred brightly-colored panels in lieu of the smudge pots and lights.⁶⁰

Late in 1969, as the U-10 leaflet mission ended at NKP, the 606 SOS moved its CCT to Udorn under Detachment 1, 56 SOW (called Project Water Pump). There the combat controllers focused on their primary role of FAG training for Laotian personnel. The detachment's primary mission was to "create a Laotian air arm and enable it to function independently without outside assistance," which included training T-28 pilots, maintainers, and FAGs. The training took place both in and out of Laos. The six CCT members at that time were Michael Fremming, Howard, Frederick James, Norman Lutz, Nolan Stafford, and Donald Swearingen. Because the CCTs wore a blue beret, the 606th team selected a tactical call sign based on the popular commercial advertisement for margarine that seemed to fit: "Blue Bonnet," with the NCOIC using the call sign, Blue Bonnet 01.⁶¹

The 606 SOS's UC-123K Candlesticks provided FAC and/or flare support for air-to-ground targeting, often involving a FAG. In typical interdiction missions over northern Laos in support of Operation Barrel Roll, the UC-123 worked solely as a flare ship, in a scenario such as the one below:

Candlestick Aircraft Commander: Good evening Alleycat [ABCCC, Airborne Command and Control Center], Candlestick 30, mission number 1520, at the fence [either the bomb line or the Mekong River], estimating point Charlie at 1312 Zulu, standing by words.

Alleycat: Good evening Candle, copy all, proceed in to point Charlie, I'll have further words for you there. We have Spud 12 working the PDJ [Plain of Jars] at 8.5, Spooky 09 working 013 for 48 miles off Channel 108 at 9.5, and Zippy enroute to Channel 89 at 11.5.

The Candlestick proceeded as directed to point Charlie (090 degrees, 20 nautical miles from Channel 108). Five minutes out of point Charlie the Candle again contacted Alleycat:

Candlestick Aircraft Commander: Alleycat, Candle is five minutes out of Charlie, requesting words.

Alleycat: Roger Candle, you will be working with Wildcat [FAG] at 066 degrees 17 miles off 108. Contact him initially on 122.4 and work him on 124.3.

The table navigator then gave a heading to the position of Wildcat, the Laotian FAG [controller] and computed a flare setting for use [by] the loadmasters. . . . About two minutes out of the [FAG's] position, the initial contact call was made:

Candlestick Aircraft Commander: Wildcat, Wildcat, Candlestick 30, how do you read?

Wildcat: You're loud and clear Candlestick, I hear your motors to the south.

Candlestick Aircraft Commander: We are about two minutes out of your position, request you give us the authenticator, your UTM [Universal Transverse Mercator] coordinates, and your situation, over.

Wildcat: Okay Candle, Alpha Uniform, my position is Uniform Golf 210125, and we have TIC (troops in contact) many many bad guys 200 meters to the south. Copy?

Once positive contact was established with the FAG, one of three methods of dropping flares was employed. . . . In all cases, the object was to provide continuous and accurately placed flare light for the FAG as long as possible.⁶²

Typically, the UC-123 provided up to two and one-half hours of continuous flare light, and, as the 56th wing historian noted, "many times enemy action ceased with the appearance of the Candlestick."⁶³ In another case, in early 1971 one Candlestick crewmember observed that his aircraft "almost had to RTB [return to base] early and leave the area with no light for the good guys, which would have been disastrous."⁶⁴ Another wing member equated the standard radio call by the forward guide, "Thank you, Candlestick," as one that often equated to "Tonight you saved our lives."⁶⁵

In summer 1970, combat controller Rick Crutchfield arrived at Udorn as the new NCOIC of Detachment 1's CCT. The detachment was assigned administratively to the 56th wing, but the det's operational taskings "came from the Capital Hotel in Bangkok" [via the US Embassy in Vientiane, Laos] through Army colonel Lewis L. Millett,

who in 1951 learned the Medal of Honor for leading a bayonet charge in Korea.⁶⁶ Crutchfield quickly realized that he needed Howard's assistance to get oriented to his new job. "Clyde indoctrinated me to his contacts in the theater and introduced me to people and took me to the operating sites. He took me up to Laos to get me 'signed in' for stuff that I would be doing," Crutchfield said. "He was very helpful."⁶⁷

In Laos, the US had designated several dozen remote airstrips used mainly for special operations and rescue-and-recovery missions as "Lima Sites" (LS), each of which had a number associated with it. A shortage of CCT personnel at the Lima site near Pakse, Laos, led Crutchfield to fill that slot for a month, flying with the O-1 Raven FACs and handling the radio communications. Because of the secretive nature of the war in Laos, the number of US personnel in country was tightly controlled. Crutchfield, the CCT boss, probably was one of the few combat controllers with authorization to travel to Laos freely. Of course, the unofficial nature of the US presence in Laos was the basic reason Detachment 1 was stationed in Thailand. During his tour, Crutchfield managed to get all his combat controllers on flying status, which meant extra pay for the hazardous missions over Thailand and Laos.⁶⁸

On 28 January 1973 the long-sought ceasefire agreement in Vietnam ended US offensive operations in that country. Three weeks later, a ceasefire agreement took effect—at least for the United States—in neighboring Laos. Howard, serving his fourth tour with the 56th wing in Southeast Asia, recalled ground controlling a flight of F-111 Aardvark medium-range, tactical attack aircraft over Laos in the final moments before the ceasefire began.⁶⁹

With the ceasefire agreements in effect—in reality only on the US side—in both Vietnam and Laos, the priority for military operations shifted to Cambodia. Detachment 1, 56 SOW, had already begun training Khmer Republic air force (Cambodian government) T-28 pilots in Thailand. Within a few months, the detachment's combat controllers dispersed around Thailand and Cambodia. The number of special operations combat controllers assigned to Thailand at any given time never exceeded about 10 enlisted men, including, in about 1973, Mike Brown, Mitch Bryan, Rex Evitts, Clyde Howard, John Koren, Mike Lampe, and Stu Pressey. Several relocated to Ubon AB, near the border with Cambodia, to support operations in that country. Two or three deployed into Cambodia; two others moved to NKP to support US joint efforts to locate and repatriate Americans who had died in Southeast Asia. CCT personnel also conducted a survival school

for Khmer Republic pilots and aircrew members, supported by special operations CH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters. In December 1973, Detachment 1 inactivated at Udorn, and its personnel transferred to the US Military Assistance Command, Thailand, the US training and logistics detachment for that country. But the CCT personnel stayed at Udorn through May 1975.⁷⁰

Laos

A significant portion of combat control activities in Thailand related also to Laos, where a secret war started in the early 1960s. The unofficial nature of the fighting in that landlocked, mountainous kingdom necessitated that Thailand serve as the forward base for much of the American military effort in Laos. Otherwise, the facade of Laotian neutrality would be compromised beyond the abilities of the governments of North Vietnam and the United States to ignore the realities on the ground. The arrangement lasted until 1970, when a story on American military activities in Laos appeared in the armed forces' *Stars and Stripes* newspaper.⁷¹

As early as 1962, Colonel Aderholt had begun preparations for an air commando detachment in Thailand to train allied aircrews in support of the Laotian war effort. In northern Laos, the communists violated Laotian neutrality apparently to gain, as Trest wrote, "a strategic advantage by disrupting Vang Pao's [the ethnic Hmong, or Meo, general of the Royal Lao Army] guerrilla operations and expanding the areas under Pathet Lao control."⁷² At the same time, the North Vietnamese took advantage of the Ho Chi Minh Trail's Laotian corridors to move men and supplies southward.

Several months prior to President Kennedy's assassination, he approved modest increases in US military aid to Laos. However, it was March 1964 before Project Water Pump deployed to Thailand. The initial deployment was small, consisting of about 40 personnel and four T-28 trainer aircraft modified for a ground attack role. It was the start to "one of the most successful and most durable U.S. military operations in Southeast Asia," according to Trest, and one of the last American military elements to depart in the 1970s.⁷³

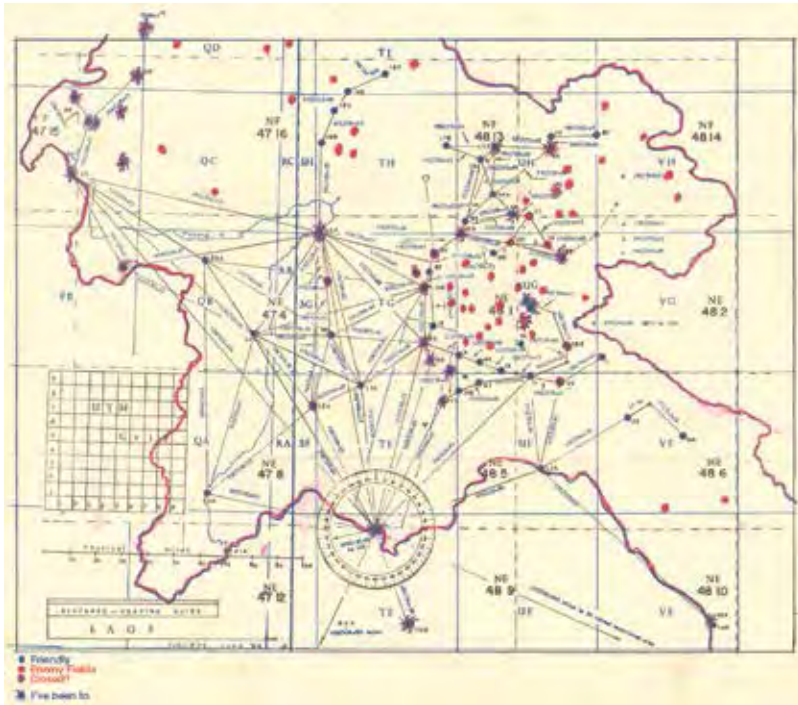


Figure 3.5. Map of Laos used by “Butterfly” CCT Jim Stanford, May to October 1966. Stanford marked enemy and friendly airfields on the map as well as airfields he had visited. (Map courtesy of James J. Stanford.)

The situation in Laos worsened within weeks of the Water Pump deployment. First a coup attempt and then a Pathet Lao offensive across the Plain of Jars in the north occurred. Named for the ancient stone jars left there by an unknown people, the plain was the most strategic locale in northern Laos. In response to the communist offensive, Water Pump personnel established a forward operating location at Wattay airport outside Vientiane, Laos, and began training indigenous pilots in the T-28. Additional T-28s arrived at Udorn for combat missions in support of forces under the Laotian government as well as Vang Pao’s Hmong guerrillas. Because of the need for official governmental denials of ongoing combat in Laos, the direction of US military activities inside the country rested with Amb. William H. Sullivan. Retired Air Force colonel Mike Haas aptly described the situation: “Stripped of all its cover, Water Pump’s primary mission

was to provide an American ambassador with a private air force to fight a secret war.”⁷⁴

Water Pump T-28s, in addition to the training mission, also provided fighter cover for any American helicopters downed over Thailand or Laos. Trest noted the Thailand-based 56th wing “was the closest thing to dedicated air support” that Sullivan had during his four years in Laos.⁷⁵ Although very little has been recorded concerning combat controllers’ activities in Laos between early 1964 and early 1966, Churchill wrote that beginning in May 1964 a few combat controllers “surreptitiously served in Laos for short assignments.”⁷⁶

CCT Butterfly FACs in Laos

In 1966 three nonrated officers—Maj John Garrity, Capt Bob Farmer, and 2nd Lt Robert McCollough—participated in FAC missions over Laos. Charlie Jones acknowledged Garrity’s leadership in the genesis of the Butterfly program and his role as a FAC, but Garrity’s primary duty was in intelligence; he was not a formally trained combat controller. Farmer and Jones deployed together and flew their first sortie over Laos in early May 1966 (along with Garrity), but Farmer was soon directed to the US embassy in Vientiane. For a brief period Farmer directed air strikes on targets in Laos, using the call sign of “Butterfly.” Two months later, McCollough deployed for temporary duty, and used the same call sign. The two best-known Butterflies, Jones and Jim Stanford, considered Farmer and McCollough members of their historic and exclusive group (table 3.1).⁷⁷

Aderholt was no stranger to controversies and unorthodox approaches to solve operational problems. Although he was not with the air commandos when enlisted combat controllers began airborne FACing in Laos, from the time of his arrival in Thailand in December 1966, Aderholt strongly supported their work. The reasons were not a matter of personal relationships but of personnel resources—both his and the Air Force’s. On the one hand, Aderholt needed qualified individuals over Laos capable of “talking” friendly fighters to their targets from slow-moving, low-flying aircraft and, in some cases, actually marking targets hidden in the jungle-covered, extremely mountainous terrain. Commanders viewed combat controllers as jacks-of-all-trades, so they were good candidates for the job. On the other hand, Aderholt viewed the use of CCTs as a prudent use of limited USAF manpower. “Hell, it made no sense to use up the Air Force’s

jet pilot resources when we could train sergeants to be FACs,” he said.⁷⁸ Later in the war the Air Force experienced a shortage of fighter pilots attributable, at least in part, to the policy of requiring FACs to be pilot-qualified.⁷⁹

Table 3.1. “Butterfly” forward air controllers (FAC), May 1966–May 1967

Name	Time period known as “Butterfly”	Remarks
Robert A. Farmer	May 1966	Transferred to Vientiane
Charles L. Jones	7 May–18 October 1966	Last mission, 18 October 1966
James J. Stanford	May–October 1966	Replaced Farmer; departed Laos, October 1966
Robert B. McCollough	25 July–ca. late August 1966	Departed Laos, 11 September 1966
Donald M. Carlyle	12 October 1966–May 1967	Transferred to “Raven” program, May 1967
John A. Webb	12 October–9 December 1966	Last mission, 9 December 1966
James A. Howell	Spring 1967	Used “Butterfly-39” call sign

Adapted from CWO Charles L. Jones, USA, SF, retired, interview with the author, 16 November 2006; Air Force Form 7, *Airman Military Record* (Charles L. Jones); SMSgt James J. Stanford, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 22 December 2006; CMSgt James A. Howell, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21–22 May 2007; and Jan Churchill, *Classified Secret: Controlling Airstrikes in the Clandestine War in Laos* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1999), 43, 78–89, 106–13.

Before Momyer discovered that a few nonrated enlisted men were controlling his fighters (from the air) and ordered a halt to the practice, the Butterfly FACs performed what Robbins called a “remarkably effective” program in the skies over Laos.⁸⁰ The enlisted Butterflies this study identified were Don Carlyle, Jim Howell, Charlie Jones, Jim Stanford, and John Webb; the only two officers were Bob Farmer and Bob McCollough. In *The Ravens*, Robbins described the Butterflies as “half a dozen sheep-dipped, nonrated Air Commandos, who flew with Air America pilots in Pilatus Porters and marked their targets with smoke canisters dropped out of the window. Often they did not mark the targets at all, but talked fighters onto the target by describing the scenery: ‘Drop your bombs two hundred yards north of that gnarled tree.’”⁸¹



Figure 3.6. England AFB, Louisiana, Air Commando CCT (1968). *Standing, left to right:* Bob McCullough, Jim Sampley, Jim Charvat, Jim Howell, Dave Cavanagh, unidentified support member, Pete Larkin, Gene Adcock, Pete Smith, Jay Widman, and Bob Farmer. *Kneeling, left to right:* George Jones, Charlie Gomez, Leroy Boykins, Tom Allen, and Travis Dixon. (Photo courtesy of Mike McReynolds.)

Charlie Jones was one of the first two of seven known Butterflies (Farmer was the other). In April 1966 Jones and Farmer deployed from England AFB, Louisiana, on six-months' temporary duty, expecting to serve in Laos. Although they both worked up-country (in northern Laos) briefly, Farmer was pulled back to work at the embassy in Vientiane. Jones remained in the north and, at times, worked independently as Gen Vang Pao's Hmong guerrillas took back territory previously lost to the Pathet Lao. Jones, in an interview 40 years later and in the last days of a terminal illness, recalled, "I had two flights of jets a day. I had 'Bango-Alpha' in the morning and 'Bango-Bravo' in the afternoon at my disposal. And you are talking about a happy master sergeant."⁸² Vang Pao's forces had started out at the western edge of the Plain of Jars and were working their way eastward.

In one particular battle that lasted two or three days, Jones explained:

I had air [fighter aircraft] stacked to the stratosphere. I had Navy planes, I had two or three squadrons from Thailand stacked up, and [while airborne himself] I was managing them like an old airport. I had them refueled. . . . I worked all day long on that. I won't forget my faithful allies, the air commando Skyraiders [A-1E aircraft]. . . . I said [to a Skyraider], "How long can you stay with me?"⁸³

“When is your DEROS [date of estimated rotation/return from overseas];” the A-1 pilot replied, a comforting response to any FAC regardless of time or place (the A-1s often had up to three hours’ loiter time).⁸⁴

Jones added that the Skyraiders flew “right alongside of my wing,” a practice in Southeast Asia that helped ease the worries of many air rescue helicopter crews as well as Butterflies, and later, the Raven FACs. On some sorties the Butterflies threw “hand [smoke] grenades out the cockpit window” of their Pilatus Porters to establish reference points for friendly fighter aircraft, Jones said.⁸⁵ The system worked well, regardless of its “low-tech” solution to the problem, and in the battle Jones described, Vang Pao’s men—supported by allied airpower directed by Butterfly-44—prevailed against the Laotian communists. From that day until his departure in October 1966 with over 400 aerial missions to his credit, Jones used Butterfly-44 as his call sign, regardless of what part of the country he was working in.⁸⁶

Jones also was tasked to write an air commando supplement to the Tactical Air Command CCT manual. He used the opportunity to introduce highly-desired, specialized training, particularly in FAC, high-altitude, low-opening (HALO), and SCUBA qualifications as requirements for the career field.⁸⁷

Jones was joined by another enlisted air commando combat controller, Jim Stanford, who arrived in May 1966. Stanford—serving a tour at NKP, Thailand, where he was flying as an observer in O-1s—was directed to Laos just prior to Farmer’s relocation to Vientiane. Although Farmer spent just a short time as a Butterfly, Stanford’s six month TDY marked him as the third of seven Butterfly FACs. Stanford soon found himself on a PC-6 Pilatus Porter en route to Vientiane, Laos. Shortly thereafter, he travelled to northern Laos where Jones was recovering from dengue fever at a secret air base known as LS-20A, or “Alternate.”⁸⁸ Robbins described “Alternate” in the early 1960s, known locally as Long Tieng:

The CIA base of Long Tieng became one of the most secret spots on earth and developed into the largest Agency [CIA] field HQ in the world. It was second in size only to the Agency’s urban mission in Saigon and, after Vientiane, was the largest city in Laos. From the air its thousands of aluminum roofs gave it the look of an American urban sprawl, while on the ground it was crammed with sophisticated electronic gear. A macadam airfield was built, the only one in northeastern Laos capable of handling jet aircraft in trouble, and the USAF conducted secret bombing missions into North Vietnam and eventually all over Laos itself. CIA men . . . working in the field with Army units, were directed from the base. Journalists called it Spook Heaven.⁸⁹

“Raven” O-1 FAC aircraft operated from 20A in support of Gen Vang Pao’s forces. Of the warrior-leader Vang Pao, Robbins wrote:

Courageous, corrupt, a formidable and stoic warrior, adept opium dealer and furiously active family man (he collected six wives and twenty-five children). From the very beginning of the secret war in Laos, Vang Pao was the sort of man the CIA needed; a soldier with stamina who was prepared to bite the bullet and take casualties. VP, as the Americans called him, had his first taste of war in 1945 at the age of thirteen when he worked as an interpreter for French commandos who had parachuted into the Plain of Jars to organize anti-Japanese resistance.⁹⁰

Rising quickly to major in the Laotian army, Vang Pao became the commander of Hmong troops in the Plain of Jars and was recognized, as Robbins said, as “the most effective military leader in Laos, the opposite of an armchair general.”⁹¹ Most of the Americans at Long Tieng, including the Butterflies, worked for Vang Pao, who personally selected his primary targets or areas of interest at his nightly staff meetings.⁹²

General Vang Pao’s headquarters was next to the middle of the airstrip, tucked within a secluded mountain valley. Stanford’s hooch (hut), equipped with a cot and mosquito netting, was at one end of the runway, next to a sharply-rising karst peak known to the US personnel as the “Vertical Speed Brake.” The wreckage of various aircraft nearby attested to the origin of the nickname. In addition to Air Force O-1 aircraft, two unofficial, contracted air services at Long Tieng operated a dozen or more Pilatus Porters.

Equipped only with very high-frequency radio, the Porters’ lack of an ultrahigh-frequency capability required creative innovations on the part of the Butterflies to enable them to communicate with Navy/Marine Corps aircraft, including H-34 helicopters operated by the CIA’s contractors. In one case, Jones secured several unauthorized (to him) antennas and had them mounted in the FAC aircraft. Besides controlling the T-28s flown by American or allied pilots, Stanford recalled working with F-105 Thunderchief and F-4 Phantom II fighter-bombers, A-4 Skyhawk attack aircraft, A-1 Skyraider fighters, and anything else he could get from the C-47 Skytrain airborne command-and-control ship. Mission planners preferred the Skyraiders over other fighter aircraft types for their unusually long loiter time in addition to a heavy and varied ordnance load. The Butterflies regularly requested that any fighters over North Vietnam that diverted due to the weather be directed to Laos where the FACs sought to put their bomb loads to good use.⁹³



Figure 3.7. LS-20A or “Alternate,” in northern Laos, mid-1960s to early 1970s. The base was considered one of the most secret airfields in the world. Several combat controllers operated from 20-A, including “Butterflies” Charlie Jones and Jim Stanford, and, after the Butterfly program ended, Mike Lampe. (Photo courtesy of James J. Stanford.)

When Stanford arrived at Long Tieng, Jones had devised the call sign “Butterfly.” The new combat controller FACs had needed a distinctive call sign; one suggestion, “Wetback,” received a cool reception by the embassy in Vientiane since the term was linked to illegal border crossings. The off-duty habits of the Americans in Vientiane led to a better idea. The Americans barhopped at night, and the bar girls referred to them disapprovingly as *butterfly* in reference to their flitting from place to place. When the embassy asked Jones to come up with an acceptable call sign by the next day, he suddenly realized he had the perfect call sign for airborne FAC duty: Butterfly.⁹⁴

In many cases the Butterflies did not actually *mark* their targets. Rather, they learned to describe the nearby scenery and predominant landmarks to the fighters and *talked* them onto the targets. Or they asked the pilot, in as innocuous a manner as possible, to point the aircraft’s wing in the direction of a landmark or reference point while attempting to transit an area. Porters were used for humanitarian purposes in Laos, such as delivering rice and evacuating wounded. If the

same type of aircraft was seen marking targets for fighters, the Porters might lose their relative acceptance as a humanitarian aircraft—and thus their relative safety. That was a real concern for a slow, low-flying, slow-climbing, and unarmed aircraft. The airplane's weight of 2,800 pounds was 400 pounds above design specifications, making any consideration of protective armor-plating untenable. In any case, the FACing techniques employed depended on the individual pilots; some marked targets, but others refused to do so.⁹⁵

The willingness of the FAC pilot and the Butterfly to follow the rules of engagement (ROE) contributed to the admiration of an F-105 pilot whose flight serviced targets in northern Laos. Ed Rasimus, a lieutenant in the 421st Tactical Fighter Squadron, recalled a four-ship mission to a location north of the Plain of Jars. His flight lead contacted Butterfly 44 about 40 miles from the target area. Rasimus heard the reply over his radio: "I'm on the ground now refueling. I'm standing on the wing pumping gas in the airplane, but I should be airborne in about three more minutes. The target isn't very far away." The lieutenant mused, "If I was stealing hubcaps, this guy was a full-fledged car thief. He's on the ground in the midst of heavily contested Indian country, pumping his own gas, and he doesn't seem overly concerned." The Thud flight (as F-105 missions were often referred to) descended to 14,000 feet and circled, awaiting Butterfly's instructions. A few minutes later, Butterfly came on the radio with the target area's description—a valley approximately four miles by two miles containing an estimated 1,500 Pathet Lao regulars.⁹⁶

Butterfly radioed, "I've got about two hundred Royal Laotians on the hilltops to the south. I need you to put your napalm in the valley, and we'll try to spread it around. Can you give me multiple passes dropping pairs?" The PC-6 pilot executed a left-hand orbit at 6,000 feet. The Thud flight responded, "Okay, Butterfly, Whiplash Lead has you in sight," and then requested Butterfly to mark the target. The scenario continued:

Butterfly: Whiplash, I'm afraid I can't mark for you. The ROE don't allow me to carry ordnance. But if you've got me in sight, I'll point out the target area with my left wingtip [a white airplane against the dark jungle]. Call the target area, and call in from the east.

Whiplash Lead: Roger, Butterfly. Whiplash Lead's in from the east.

Butterfly: Cleared hot, Whiplash. I'm holding off to the north.

Butterfly: Nice hit, Lead. Two put yours just west of Lead's smoke. Three, step it further west, and Four, finish off the end of the valley. Two's cleared hot.⁹⁷

Butterfly cleared Whiplash for multiple passes flying their own pattern. Rasimus continued his narrative:

We circle, dropping the napalm and coating the valley floor with fire. . . . As I pull off the target area [on a strafing run] . . . I can see the outline of people on the top of the ridgeline. They're waving and jumping up and down. It's the small contingent of the Royal Laotian army who've been watching our air show. They know now that they won't have to enter the valley today and won't have to fight a force many times larger than their own.⁹⁸

When they had finished, Butterfly 44 radioed, "Thanks a lot guys. I've got you on the target at 16:40, off at 17:12 with 100 percent of ordnance on target. I'll forward some BDA [battle damage assessment] when our guys walk through there tomorrow, but right now all I can say is thank you. You've saved the fort for another night."⁹⁹

Rasimus added his personal thoughts:

I can't imagine his situation. I can't conceive being in the jungle with a tiny airplane and a hugely outnumbered ground force. I can't believe that he lives there and controls an air war in which he isn't allowed to shoot back. As I cruise back to my safe air base with my air-conditioned room, white sheets, hot shower, and cold beer at the Officers' Club, I wonder what kind of a man is this. What could I possibly have to complain about? The mission hasn't been a counter [the war in Laos was secret], but I'm feeling damn good about it.¹⁰⁰

More than likely, Rasimus and his flight mates were unaware that Butterfly 44, rather than a fellow fighter pilot, was an *enlisted* combat controller.

The combat controllers' work also involved air rescue missions for downed US and allied pilots. Rapport between the Butterflies and the Air Force H-3 rescue helicopter crews that worked in Laos was important. At times, the Butterflies and helicopter pilots worked together at LS-36 north of the Plain of Jars, where the H-3s stood alert during daylight for possible rescues of US or allied aircraft damaged in sorties over North Vietnam. On other occasions, the H-3 crews spent the night at Long Tieng. Jones and Stanford used those opportunities to talk with the crews, to get to know them, and to share a drink. The two also shared radio frequencies with the crews in case the need to work together should arise. In rescue work, timeliness is critical; on at least one occasion, an H-3 crew launched a rescue in

northern Laos without the approval of air rescue authorities, based instead solely on the Butterfly's word that he had reliable information on "a live body and it was safe." According to Stanford, "They launched because [of] our rapport with the Jolly Green pilots. [They saw] us every day up there." The rescued pilot gratefully awarded Stanford his .38-caliber pistol.¹⁰¹

The Butterflies sought to build rapport with the Laotians as well. Stanford got to know one of the Laotian officers well enough that he gave him the .38 pistol he had received from the rescued American pilot. To the Laotian, the possession of a pistol was a huge status symbol. Furthermore, Stanford demonstrated friendship by eating the same food as his hosts. At times, he had no idea what he was eating, and he didn't want to know. Lacking refrigeration, the local practice was simply to hang fresh hunks of meat outside on a string where flies soon discovered the feast. Stanford's wife, Helen, sent cases of Tabasco sauce to him monthly, so he covered the meat with liberal amounts of the hot sauce. He may not have tasted much, but he was able to eat without embarrassing his Laotian friends.¹⁰²

Stanford spent part of his time in Laos northwest of the Plain of Jars, at LS-118A, where he served as Tony Poe's air advisor and used the call sign, Butterfly 22. *Air America* author Christopher Robbins described Poe—whose real name was Anthony A. Poshepny. A former Marine Corps NCO wounded on Iwo Jima in 1945, Poe remained in Asia at the end of the war and became involved in secretive, anti-communist military schemes in the region, eventually going to Laos to train the Hmong in their fight against the country's communists. A "hard drinker and an authoritarian," Poe operated "on the ground in the remotest parts of Laos for months at a time. Ruthless in battle, he was also inhumanly brave and was wounded a dozen times when he insisted on going into combat with his guerrillas."¹⁰³ Some viewed Marlon Brando's portrayal of an Army SF colonel-gone-rogue in the 1979 movie, *Apocalypse Now*, as based on Poe.¹⁰⁴

Innovative measures, even by Laotian standards, were called for at the remote 118A site because it was too far to the west for most fighter aircraft flying missions over North Vietnam to lend assistance. As a remedy for the limited air support, Stanford invented an ingenious device that he called "the poor man's CBU" (cluster bomb unit). Taking several rounded tubes of three or four inches in diameter, he lashed the tubes above the bomb bay, stacked hand grenades (with pins pulled) inside them, and secured them with tape. Over the target area

“you’d open the bomb bay and you’d have anywhere from 100 to 150 hand grenades coming out of that bomb bay at one time,” Stanford said.¹⁰⁵ Two other adaptations comprised even “poorer men’s” CBUs. One consisted of a wooden box built above the PC-6’s bomb bay and filled with rocks. When released, the damage that a load of rocks could produce was impressive. The second helped solve the problem of what to do with the empty beer bottles at NKP’s officer and NCO clubs. The crew chiefs loaded the bottles into the bomb bays of the A-26s, and the pilots dropped them on the Laotian sections of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network. The effect of broken bottles on the rate of movement of the barefooted North Vietnamese carrying supplies along the trails was unknown. According to Stanford, the rocks, hand grenades, and traditional iron bombs (the Porters carried up to seven 100-pound bombs) constituted the main ordnance loads at LS-118A.¹⁰⁶

One of Stanford’s sportiest missions took place in mid-1966 when flying out of LS-59, north of the Plain of Jars. He explained the site’s significance: “Of all the targets that we had in Vietnam, [LS-59 is] the one that probably put more airplanes on the targets in that [part of North Vietnam] than any other” Laotian site except one.¹⁰⁷ On the day in question, site 59 was in danger of being overrun. The pilot depleted the Pilatus Porter’s fuel on final approach and dead-sticked the aircraft into the site, rolling up to a 55-gallon fuel drum. With the battle raging close by, Stanford recalled that it seemed to take an unusually long time for them – Jones was with him that day – to pump the fuel. In their frenetic pace, the Butterflies worked “one too many” fighters, Stanford said, resulting in a second flame-out at the site that day.¹⁰⁸

Another memorable mission for Stanford was not one in which he controlled fighters, was fired upon, or ran out of fuel, but where his Pilatus Porter inadvertently dropped surrender leaflets over communist China. At the time, US policy required dropping leaflets prior to bombing in a civilian area in Laos. In late summer or fall 1966, Stanford and his pilot were assigned a leaflet drop close to the Chinese border. The weather was poor, and navigation was more difficult than normal. Breaking out of some clouds and believing they had found their drop area, they released their leaflets and returned to the Lima site. When major newspapers around the world reported the Red Chinese had complained that surrender leaflets were dropped 20 miles inside their border, Helen Stanford rightly suspected that her husband had been involved.¹⁰⁹

Written communication with Stanford's family was limited; the covert nature of duty up-country in Laos meant there was no regular mail service. The best option for getting a letter home was to give one to someone who was about to fly to Thailand and to have it mailed from there. While Jim was in Laos, the Stanfords' shared air traffic controller experience offered keener understanding between them than most couples enjoyed, although it was years before he and others who served in the secret war were permitted to share their experiences openly—even with spouses and children. Readers should keep in mind that, unlike most covert operations that required secrecy for years after the fact, the war in Laos was no short-term event such as a Son Tay or Desert One, but, rather, a conflict that dragged on for years. Many, like Jones, Stanford, the Raven pilots, and others, served for several months or longer at a time; some served multiple tours. In an interview, the sense of relief that Jim Stanford, and probably others of his peers, felt at being able to freely discuss his Laotian experiences was almost palpable. The sense of relief was most likely impossible for anyone to appreciate who had not experienced something similar.¹¹⁰

Stanford, speaking for himself and his late friend and fellow Butterfly, Charlie Jones, summarized his experience in Laos. "What the combat controllers are doing today . . . being able to control B-52s, B-1s, B-2s, you name the fighters . . . [and] controlling massive airlift from the ground . . . I think Charlie and I were the advance of that."¹¹¹ Founded in 1953, the USAF's combat control career field experienced its first war-time theater in Southeast Asia. The exigencies of the fighting in that remote region gave men like Jones, Stanford, and a handful of others the opportunity to perform the role of an (unrated) airborne FAC. That opportunity was a watershed event—and one that in some ways foreshadowed the work of the next generation's combat controllers.

Special Operations Weathermen in Laos

Although the combat control career field supplied the bulk of special tactics personnel from the 1980s onward, contemporary special tactics teams sometimes included special operations weathermen, whose predecessors served in Yugoslavia during World War II. In *Beacons in the Night*, former Office of Strategic Services officer Franklin Lindsay described how agents working with the anti-Axis Partisans tailored their weather reports to increase their chances of receiving supply drops by air.¹¹² "As we were always eager to get supplies, we

soon fell into the habit of reporting ‘one-tenth clouds’ for a sky at least half cloudy. Any time we caught only a single glimpse of the sun during the day the weather was reported as ‘five-tenths clouds.’ But I doubt we ever fooled the base weather officers very much,” Franklin said. No doubt, the air commando weathermen 20 years later readily understood their predecessors’ challenges, despite any misgivings regarding the integrity of such reports.¹¹³

In the decade before the first air commando weatherman arrived in Laos, weather played a role in setting the strategic conditions leading to the US military involvement in the region after 1960. After World War II, the French government had sought to reestablish control of its former colonies in Southeast Asia (French Indochina), which comprised Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In early 1954, as French and Viet Minh forces prepared for a showdown, French meteorologists knew that one particular valley in northern Indochina often received 50 percent more rainfall than other valleys in the region. For nine days during late April and early May, heavy monsoon rains made the airdrop of personnel and supplies for a French garrison besieged by the Viet Minh almost impossible. Prominent historian Bernard B. Fall noted that the monsoon rains forced men to live “in a constant agony of two feet of mud, dripping and slippery trench walls, and collapsing waterlogged dugouts.”¹¹⁴ Reports told of men forced to fight up to their waists in water and wounded that lay in holes “filled with mud and devoid of any hygiene.”¹¹⁵ The weather had only added to the miseries of the French legionnaires during the siege at Dien Bien Phu, where France’s Indochina empire ended. In a concluding description of the siege, alluding to the paradrops of supplies in the garrison’s final days, Fall wrote that “parachute nylon, like courage, was one of the common items at Dien Bien Phu, and on both sides.”¹¹⁶

During the decade and a half of US military operations in Southeast Asia after 1960, weather significantly affected air operations in Laos and throughout the region. The southwest monsoon, roughly mid-May to mid-September, brought about 70 percent of the annual total of 50 to 100 inches of rainfall, accompanied by overcast skies, high humidity, and tropical temperatures at all but the higher elevations. The northeast monsoon from mid-October to mid-March brought the dry season, with relatively clear skies and lower humidity and temperatures. The seasonal burning of croplands, which produced smoke and haze, combined with the weather, led Air Force colonel Jack Broughton to coin the term “murk. . . like somebody painted

your sunglasses white,” to connote the visibility that typically varied from “poor to dreadful” in the region.¹¹⁷ In *Thor’s Legions*, Air Weather Service historian John Fuller noted that during the dry season in late 1964 and early 1965, about one-third of Laotian T-28 sorties “aborted or were rendered ineffective due to weather.”¹¹⁸ In 1966 nearly 19 percent of scheduled US and allied sorties over Laos were affected by weather, either experiencing a diversion or cancellation.¹¹⁹

Among the air commando weathermen that served in Southeast Asia, one name stood above the rest. Keith R. Grimes’s career became legendary not only among meteorologists in the Air Force but also in the special operations community. As a captain in 1963, Grimes helped establish Detachment 75, 2nd Weather Group, at Hurlburt Field, to support the Air Force’s COIN program known as Jungle Jim. Over the next two years, Grimes and his men trained and participated in maneuvers, including a deployment to the Dominican Republic during a crisis in early 1965. Grimes’s team, jump qualified and capable of operating behind enemy lines, “became experts in the exotic but little understood area of weather support to special forces involved in unconventional warfare,” wrote Fuller.¹²⁰ When Grimes learned that T-28 sorties in Laos were suffering from adverse weather and that the Laotians had virtually no weather service, he deployed two air commando weathermen to see what could be done. When his men were refused entry into Vientiane, Grimes decided to go himself. Arriving at Udorn, Thailand, on 14 June 1965 he obtained permission to travel to Vientiane and there conferred with Ambassador Sullivan. Although Grimes discussed what his men could do in terms of weather support for Vang Pao’s T-28 air arm of about a dozen aircraft, Sullivan sent him up-country for a different purpose: “You get these guerrillas to where they can use air support . . . then come back . . . if you’re still convinced you need weather support we’ll talk about it.”¹²¹

Grimes took the ambassador at his word. Flying north to LS-36 the next day, he met and developed a quick rapport and mutual respect for General Vang Pao. For the next month Grimes did no weather work, but, as Sullivan had charged him, he set up an air support network. Grimes personally directed attacks by T-28s and, on occasion, F-4s and F-105s—his directed air strikes probably accounting for at least 1,000 North Vietnamese killed. Working alongside Vang Pao’s guerrillas, Grimes had several close encounters with the enemy.

When he returned to the embassy in Vientiane, Grimes convinced Sullivan to allow him to establish a primitive weather reporting system

using indigenous personnel. Grimes then returned north and began training Laotians to man about one dozen weather stations, one located at Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng. Before returning stateside in December, Grimes brought three more air commando weathermen to Laos: MSgt Thomas M. Watson, A1C Andrew V. Wilder, and SSgt Maurice D. Kunkel. From then until the United States withdrew from Laos in 1973, roughly three to five air commando weathermen operated in Laos at any given time. By the end of 1966 Air America contractors and 20 air-commando-trained Laotians manned five sites. For the most part, the sites provided hourly surface observations during daylight hours. Until 1969, by which time the Laotian government operated several weather stations, the rudimentary system Grimes set up provided the only weather reports from Laos.¹²²

Between late 1968 and the end of 1970, Peter Morris, NCOIC of the 10th Weather Squadron's Special Warfare Weather Team (SWWT), served as one of Grimes's air commando weathermen. Morris enlisted in the US Air Force in 1963 and immediately entered the weather career field. He served as a weather observer at Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, before going to Ubon AB, Thailand, in 1966. In 1968 Morris entered the ranks of the air commandos as a SWWT member. Although administratively assigned to the 10th squadron at Udorn, Thailand, the special ops weather mission took place in Laos; the unconventional weathermen had no mission in Thailand.¹²³

By that time, the major cities in Laos, including Luang Prabang, Pakse, Savannakhet, and the capital of Vientiane maintained contract weather stations operated by US personnel. Special ops weathermen did not need to be there because the Laotian government controlled the cities. Rather, the SWWT's mission was obtaining weather data from denied areas, which meant the remote, Laotian up-country. During Morris's time in Laos surface observations were generally the most useful, followed by pilots' weather reports, and on occasion, data from satellites. Morris considered the last to be highly perishable data, and of limited use, however, because satellites *looked down* and could not report what a man saw horizontally on the ground. Morris described the covert nature of the fighting in Laos "a give-and-take war to try to tie up as many of their troops as we could, to interdict as many of their supplies as was possible with the limited manpower that we had, and not to make it overtly known that Americans were there doing it or were behind it."¹²⁴ Generally, the enemy advanced during the wet season when the effectiveness of the US and allied air

power was limited; the allies often recaptured the same territory during the dry season.

Morris enjoyed several advantages over most of his fellow air commandos in Laos. During his earlier tour in Thailand, he learned to speak Thai and Lao, which are closely related languages. Sgt Frank W. West, a fellow Detachment 75 member “who fell in love with the Lao and Meo,” was fluent enough in Lao that he taught it to the special ops weathermen. The language proved helpful to Morris. He had a medium build, dark complexion and hair, and sported a moustache; in civilian clothes—worn by all Americans in Laos—Morris could easily pass for a French Laotian. He could go anywhere without getting a second look, clearly beneficial when working in remote areas of the country where Americans were unknown.¹²⁵

In his first Laotian tour, Morris worked mainly in Military Region-3 (MR-3) and MR-4 in the southern panhandle. He hopped rides on Pilatus Porter, H-34 helicopter, or DHC-6 Twin Otter aircraft, which regularly flew into the remote villages. Morris worked with indigenous personnel and taught them how to obtain and record weather observations, which were usually taken hourly during the day. He showed the Laotians how to encode their observations, including the use of classified station identifiers. The Laotians transmitted the data to the contract station at Pakse using their own radio call signs. The data were retransmitted by teletype to NKP for dissemination to US and allied pilots to use in mission planning. The Laotians received a small cash payment for each weather observation. Before redeploying to the United States, Morris added to their remuneration by giving his closest counterparts a personal gift of a briefcase, sunglasses, or a bottle of Scotch in appreciation of their work.¹²⁶

In early 1972 Morris returned for a second tour with the SWWT. Laos appeared to be a more dangerous place the second time around. The North Vietnamese had advanced, and the damaging effects of the years of war were more apparent. Morris recalled that MR-2, in the north around the Plain of Jars, was the most active in 1972–73, and he spent most of his time there and in MR-1 in the extreme northwest.

Following the February 1973 cease fire, leaders in the Military Airlift Command initially ordered the weathermen out of Laos. After the US embassy in Vientiane requested they be allowed back into the country, the Air Staff granted a 60-day reprieve. In September Capt Warren L. Nielsen and SSgt John R. Sturgeon, along with TSgt Peter Morris, returned to Laos in order to help establish a national weather

service. They turned over equipment such as rain gauges, wind anemometers, and radios to their hosts, Morris said. By December the departure of the last weatherman closed “the door for the last time on a nine-year weather endeavor . . . in Laos.”¹²⁷

Other Combat Control Missions in Laos

More than a decade had passed since the US military had begun operations in Laos, and combat controllers still traveled up-country from Vientiane to the Long Tieng airfield to control air strikes among their other duties. However, after 1967 they no longer performed airborne FAC duty. On some occasions, controllers flew into LS-20A for one day, at other times for several days or weeks at a time. Aside from the other-government-agency personnel they worked with, each of the roughly six US military members had a particular specialty. A 22-year-old NCO at the time, in spring 1972 Mike Lampe was selected to replace a CCT who had been injured on a jump. Recalled from leave, Lampe underwent the required predeployment training and reported to Vientiane. Upon his arrival and learning what the mission up-country entailed, Lampe realized that a couple years earlier as a young Airman assigned to Clark AB, Philippines, he had handled message traffic for the base commander—oblivious to its connection with the operations in Laos. Typically, whenever Lampe traveled to Long Tieng, he handled the air traffic control and flight following at the airfield.¹²⁸

Between 1972 and 1973, Lampe and John Koren were part of the CCT at Udorn, Thailand, which consisted of about nine controllers. An unusual feature of Det 1, 56 Special Operations Wing, was they had no officer; MSgt John Wood was the ranking NCO. In addition to Sgt Koren (Lampe joined the team in mid-to-late 1973), in September 1972 the det's roster included TSgts Bill Fitzgerald and Kay Duncan, SSgts Howard and Herb McGee, and Sgts Gordon Berney, Mitch Bryan, and Cass Seymore. That month, as during others, the Udorn CCT had authorization to travel to several locations (only those in Thailand were printed on the order), performing one round trip per week, to provide operational support. Several months later, the team—still totaling nine—included SSgts Rex Evitts, Jim Moffett, and Clyde Wales. The det's varied support included the bombing-beacon offset targeting system that enabled F-111 aircraft to hit communist targets in northern Laos and a different beacon used by B-52s that bombed

over northern Laos and Cambodia. The beacons provided updates to the navigation systems of strike aircraft by transmitting a signal to them from a known location. Sometimes the two beacon types were collocated. For F-111 missions, team members implanted the beacons (radar transponders) at offset locations at known distances and azimuths from nearby targets. The combat controllers also maintained the beacons, which included changing batteries periodically. Several beacons were placed around the highly-contested Plain of Jars.¹²⁹

An advanced fighter-bomber, the F-111 had the capability to bomb using offset techniques from the ground beacons, and it could do so in inclement weather. Air Force combat controllers and the mostly Thai volunteers (supported by US other-government-agency personnel) and Hmong radio operators they trained directed highly effective air strikes that amounted to a new, evolutionary bombing system.¹³⁰ A CIA veteran of the war in Laos, James Parker, commented on the “magical relationship between the Hmong talkers [FAGs] at Red Dog Control and the F-111 pilots.”¹³¹ He continued, “They never met. They used a total of about 150 words that communicated volumes—the mountain men and the astronauts.”¹³² Parker paraphrased another observer as saying in effect, “The F-111s were worth everything else we had put together.” The training provided to the Hmong talkers by the Udorn-based combat controllers was indispensable to enabling the mountain men and the “astronauts” to work together effectively.¹³³

In order to monitor their students’ performance and their interactions with US/allied aircrews supporting friendly forces, combat controllers flew aboard AC-119 gunships on missions out of Thailand over Laos. Clyde Howard recalled there were times, especially with troops-in-contact, when the Thai or Laotian radio operators “were jittery and nervous [and] you would hear it on the mike.”¹³⁴ In those cases, the US controllers, using the call sign Blue Bonnet, got on the air and calmed their students and obtained the required target information. On one such mission in mid-1972, TSgt Frank Palmer’s AC-119 took enemy 37-mm antiaircraft artillery fire. Palmer was wounded in the chest and shoulder area. The attack had rendered the aircraft’s primary communications inoperative, but the aircrew managed to land the gunship safely by using a survival radio to talk with the Udorn tower. Palmer, the most seriously wounded-in-action CCT casualty during the Southeast Asia conflict, was evacuated to the US for treatment and survived. Besides Howard and Palmer, other CCT members who

flew the AC-119 missions included Bryan, Fitzgerald, Larry Hicks, Egbert Jones, Koren, McGee, and Seymore.¹³⁵

Combat controllers also continued to train indigenous forward air guides in close air support techniques until the Laotian cease fire on 22 February 1973. US offensive operations continued right up to the final seconds but ceased at the agreed-upon hour. With the United States observing cease fires in both Vietnam and Laos, its military effort shifted to the aerial supplying of neighboring Cambodia and the training of Khmer Republic airmen.¹³⁶

Cambodia

Cambodia bordered South Vietnam to its west, Laos to its south, and Thailand to its south and east. Thus, Cambodia had no chance of avoiding the regional conflagration in neighboring countries. In an attempt to support the anticommunist government in Cambodia, the US Air Force flew tactical airlift missions into the country prior to the cease fires of January and February 1973 in Vietnam and Laos, respectively. In late 1972 the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing (374 TAW) historian noted that stepped-up enemy activities necessitated the establishment of four new DZs in Cambodia. One DZ was situated near a city that was completely surrounded by communist forces, and friendly units in the city of Kompong Thom were “constantly subjected to enemy probes, attacks by fire, and unit engagements.” Not surprisingly, most of the airdrops at Kompong Thom during that period consisted of ammunition.¹³⁷

Three months later, the situation there had deteriorated drastically. Air-to-ground aircraft and gunships were needed to suppress enemy ground forces in the area. Enemy forces, fixed on the capital of Phnom Penh, pressured government troops throughout south-central Cambodia. Ominously, fully two years before the final collapse in Cambodia, the communists overran areas where C-130s previously had delivered supplies to government forces. At more and more locales, airdrop became the only reliable and relatively safe means of resupply. The US Congress, displeased with the bombing of Cambodia and tired of the war, forced a halt to military operations as of 15 August 1973. The only exception was unarmed reconnaissance and aerial resupply sorties.¹³⁸

Twenty months later, on 17 April 1975, and with the airfield surrounded by the enemy, a Cambodian weather observer transmitted

the Khmer government's last known communication to his American counterparts. In the interim, between July 1974 and early 1975, air commando weatherman Keith Grimes demonstrated the technical competence and leadership for which many remembered him. Named to command the 10th Weather Squadron at NKP, "Grimes was off and running the minute his feet hit the ramp" in Thailand, according to Fuller.¹³⁹

Grimes quickly assessed the country's worst drought in decades, developed a briefing on the drought's cause, and presented it to the American ambassador to Thailand, William R. Kinter. Impressed and aware that the drought also affected the flow of supplies to Cambodia via the Mekong River, Kinter sent Grimes to Phnom Penh to present the briefing to John Gunther Dean, the US ambassador there. Grimes managed to visit each of his weather detachments in July, taking immediate steps to improve morale by instilling a sense of purpose and challenging his people to greater performance. The new commander's leadership turned the 10th squadron around; his men saw themselves as war fighters, not support "weenies."¹⁴⁰

At the same time, Grimes recognized and acted on opportunities to improve the capabilities of US and Cambodian weather personnel. He initiated new procedures to improve ballistic wind forecasts, including greater reliance on weather reports from C-130s and increased pilot balloon (Pibal) "runs" to produce more integrated forecasts.¹⁴¹ The improved accuracy of US supply drops of rice and ammunition within the shrinking perimeters of Cambodian strongholds testified to the effectiveness of Grimes's procedures. He took pains to build a Cambodian weather service almost from scratch. The 10th squadron provided training and equipment to the Khmer Republic air force's weather service, and by late 1974 indigenous weathermen at Phnom Penh and NKP produced weather observations 24 hours a day. Additionally, Khmer Republic weathermen at Pochentong airfield provided regular six-hour and 24-hour forecasts.¹⁴²

In the final two years of the Khmer Republic, CCT members supported the Cambodian government's C-123 transport program. As the communists captured provincial capitals and territory from government forces, the aerial resupply of Khmer Republic strongholds became the only means of delivering to them the weapons, ammunition, food, medicine, and other materiel necessary to their survival. In that increasingly critical mission, CCT members trained Khmer Republic airmen on C-123 air-land delivery as well as cargo drop (in-

cluding high-altitude) procedures and techniques. John Koren recalled traveling to Sattahip, Thailand, to attend a US Army rigging course so that he and other combat controllers could train the Cambodians. CCT members conducted cargo training drops with their students at a drop zone at Nam Phong, Thailand. They also held search-and-rescue training classes for the Khmer Republic pilots. In addition to several detachment members mentioned elsewhere, the combat controllers included Harold Adams, Dick Brawley, Rex Corbin, Teddy Hurt, Jim Moffett, and Robert Taylor.¹⁴³

However, by the start of 1975, the end was near for the Khmer Republic government. In a final US effort to stave off a communist takeover of Cambodia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff initiated a stepped-up aerial resupply operation designated Support Cambodia Out of Thailand–Contract Expansion (SCOOT–CE). At the recommendation of Aderholt, Col James I. Baginski, the 374 TAW commander, led the operation, using 374th wing aircraft piloted by contract “Bird Air Inc.” crews and a few commercial DC-8 airliners. Baginski deployed immediately from wing headquarters at Clark AB, Philippines, to the forward operating location at U-Tapao AB, Thailand. For the next nine weeks, he oversaw the massive tactical airlift operation between Thailand and Cambodia in an attempt to keep the Khmer Republic government’s armed forces supplied with rice, ammunition, weapons, and fuel for its fight for survival against the communists. By late January, the enemy shelled Pochentong Airport, near Phnom Penh, with rocket attacks daily.¹⁴⁴

Combat controllers from Detachment 6, 6th Aerial Port Squadron (APS), played a vital role in the ground activities at U-Tapao, Thailand, and Pochentong. Although Cambodian controllers ran Pochentong’s tower, the Americans monitored the tower’s communications when US aircraft arrived or departed. CCTs also assisted in offloading all arriving aircraft, maintained ground-to-air communications, and established and ran a warning system for rocket attacks at the airfield. Following airfield attacks, CCT personnel cleared the runway areas of debris so the airlift operation could continue and assisted corpsmen in transporting the wounded to medical care. While deployed at Pochentong, combat controllers underwent daily mortar and rocket attacks from the Khmer Rouge. During those final weeks, CMSgt Jim Howell, already renowned in the CCT community for his test parachute and F-106 ejection capsule experience, added to his reputation.¹⁴⁵

On 22 March, Howell's CCT supported resupply missions into Po-chentong airfield. At the start of SCOOT-CE, in-country restrictions on the number of US personnel meant that CCTs were unauthorized to remain in Phnom Penh for more than one or two nights at a time, necessitating a constant shuffling of teams between Thailand and Cambodia. On the 22nd, a C-130 landed with a load of ammunition; the crew remained aboard during off-loading. At about that time, an enemy rocket attack began. The C-130 was hit and sustained major damage. Summarizing Howell's role, Maj Gen Thomas A. Aldrich, the Twenty-Second Air Force commander, wrote that the combat controller "left his bunker and began to assess the damage, even though the rocket attack was continuing. He realized that the crew was in considerable danger, and led them to another aircraft; the crew was safely evacuated minutes later."¹⁴⁶

Howell moved back toward his bunker, and then he noticed a rocket had struck another aircraft. Shrapnel had pierced the left wing and auxiliary fuel tank, causing a fuel spill and a fire that threatened to engulf the command bunker. "Sergeant Howell relocated the Command Jeep away from the fuel spill, evaluated the aircraft damage, then boarded the aircraft and briefed the crew. He supervised the evacuation of the crew, and was the last person to leave the burning aircraft," Aldrich continued.¹⁴⁷ For the next 30 minutes, the CCT fought the fire, "during which time the burning aircraft was moved twice to avoid the burning fuel on the ramp." After putting out the fire, the combat controllers cleared the area of shrapnel and reestablished the command radio net at the airfield. In an interview years later, Howell recalled attempting to treat the wounded after the attack: "I couldn't find a thing for tourniquets . . . [so I] took my knife and I started cutting . . . the telephone wire for tourniquets."¹⁴⁸ Two were killed and 14 injured in the attack, but the outcome might have been much worse without the actions of Howell and his CCT.¹⁴⁹

The chief's memorable experiences in Cambodia were not finished, however. In early April, only days before the final evacuation of Phnom Penh, Howell's CCT spent the night at the US embassy because the deteriorating conditions at the airfield made it too dangerous to remain there overnight. After driving through blacked-out streets in the unfamiliar metropolis, the CCT reached their destination, and a local family treated them to a sumptuous dinner prepared from the food supplies left by the recently departed embassy personnel.



Figure 3.8. Pictured left to right are: SSgt James D. “JD” Burch, SSgt Guy T. “Tom” Fagan, and SSgt John E. Lebold. (Photo courtesy of Wayne G. Norrad.)



Figure 3.9. Pictured more recently, left to right: SSgt John Lebold, SSgt Tom Fagan, MSgt Lew Brabham, and SSgt James D. Burch. (Photo courtesy of Wayne G. Norrad.)

Commandeering several shotguns from nearby buildings—amazingly, CCT members were not authorized to carry weapons in Cambodia—Howell’s team settled down for some rest. Howell chose an upstairs bedroom with a cot and lay down with his shotgun at his side. “In the middle of the night, I saw the doorknob turn,” he recalled.¹⁵⁰ With a round already in the shotgun’s chamber, he called out, “You better be friendly, otherwise you are going to ‘buy the farm.’” The intruder replied, “It’s me, Mr. Howell.” Howell said, “It’s another mystery, nobody

ever called me Howell, they called me chief. And nobody knew we were going [to be] there to begin with. So I got out real quick.”¹⁵¹ He and his teammates moved downstairs and drove back to the airfield early the next morning.¹⁵²

On 11 April 1975 SCOOT-CE operations ceased, having been the largest sustained airlift since the Berlin Airlift in 1948–49 and triple the tonnage in support of Khe Sanh in 1968. Washington acknowledged the Khmer Republic’s impending collapse. The long-anticipated evacuation known as Operation Eagle Pull took place the next day. A four-man CCT—Lew Brabham, Jim Donaldson, Bob Lanier, and Juan Rodriguez—deployed from Thailand on an HH-53 to the embassy’s helicopter landing zone to assist in the evacuation sorties. “CCT personnel were the last Air Force personnel departing the landing zone,” Aldrich said.¹⁵³ Within 60 seconds of their helicopter’s clearing the pad on its takeoff, enemy rockets impacted the very spot. In a unit award package submission, Aldrich wrote,

During the period 27 January 1975 through 11 April 1975, Detachment 6, 6th Aerial Port Squadron Combat Control Teams (CCT) provided four to eight-man teams within Cambodia operating at Pochentong Airfield. . . . Tasked to provide flight-following and air traffic control support to C-130 and commercial contract aircraft, CCT personnel initially were required to depart and return to U-Tapao Air Base daily. [later, the policy changed, allowing CCTs to remain overnight] Toward the conclusion of SCOOT-CE, personnel were not only subjected to attack at the airfield but in downtown Phnom Penh itself, where they were quartered.¹⁵⁴

Despite Baginski’s leadership of the resupply effort, the Khmer Republic’s forces crumbled before the communist onslaught, which was followed two weeks later by the Republic of Vietnam’s fall to the North Vietnamese. In the final days before the fall of both allies, US forces focused on airlifting out vital assets to keep them from falling into enemy hands. “We were trying to retrograde as much out of there as we possibly could before they lost the whole damn thing,” Baginski recalled years later.¹⁵⁵ The Americans intended to turn over as much equipment as possible to the Thais. What could not be airlifted to Thailand, Baginski said, “We thermited most of the stuff . . . rather than letting it fall into [enemy] hands.”¹⁵⁶ In the last days of the US presence in Cambodia, Air Force combat controllers assisted in providing air traffic control as well as thermiting the items that could not be lifted out.¹⁵⁷

Soon after the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon, another crisis erupted. On 12 May Khmer Rouge naval forces seized a US merchant

vessel, the SS *Mayaguez*, as it traveled from Hong Kong to Thailand. Pres. Gerald R. Ford's administration initially attempted to use diplomacy to secure the crew's release, but the next day the Cambodians moved the ship to the offshore island of Koh Tang. President Ford, through the Joint Chiefs of Staff, directed military preparations for a possible rescue operation of the ship's 39-man crew. On 15 May, the crew returned to US control after a fiercely-fought, day-long battle on Koh Tang—termed “a very short war” by John F. Guilmartin in his excellent work on the *Mayaguez* operation.¹⁵⁸ The rescue mission suffered moderate American casualties but gained its objective even though it was marred by poor intelligence and other operational issues. One bright spot in the planning was the weather, which Fuller notes “turned out to be very much as forecast” by Keith Grimes and his team at NKP.¹⁵⁹

The operation demonstrated that despite the US government's withdrawal from Southeast Asia, it still intended to defend US interests and protect its citizens in the region. Although Air Force combat controllers were prepared to participate in the operation, to their disappointment, they were not called upon. Guilmartin noted that as the assault began on Koh Tang, it took *40 minutes* for A-7 Corsair II fighters over the island to establish radio contact with the Marines on the beach. This fact alone made the argument that a single combat controller could have made a huge difference in the operation.¹⁶⁰

Final Withdrawal

In what was perhaps the final act of the US military in the Southeast Asia conflict, in July 1975 Air Force combat controllers deployed to air bases in Thailand—where the United States had operated for over a decade—in order to close down the facilities. With the control tower closed at NKP, Bud Gonzalez and Lampe handled the remaining air traffic control duties from their MRC-108 jeep and participated in turning over the base to Thai authorities or to individuals intending to sell items on the local black market. “We basically [cleared for takeoff] the last aircraft and we drove out by jeep, out of Nakhon Phanom back to Bangkok, down to Don Muang [Air Base],” Lampe recalled. From there, they flew out of the country, heading east.¹⁶¹ The long and painful US military experience in Southeast Asia was over. Air Force combat controllers had served notably to the end.

“Airman First Class Airborne”

During the Southeast Asia conflict, a few combat weathermen (later known as special operations weather team personnel) served with the 606th ACS. Clyde Howard recalled one of them who typically did training jumps with the CCT. Together they decided to adopt a mascot—a mutt—but a good dog, Howard remembered. Airman First Class Airborne had been found at a local pub and brought back to NKP. The team took a 12-foot parachute normally used for a flare and rigged it onto a harness for “Airborne’s” personal chute. “After a couple of jumps he loved it,” Howard said.¹⁶² “I didn’t have to throw him out; he would just jump out on his own and would follow me out.”¹⁶³ Sadly, a local municipal truck ran over Airborne and killed him. The CCT took him out to the DZ, did a jump in his honor, and buried him with a military funeral using a .50 caliber ammo canister for Airborne’s casket. “It was a very good ceremony and we put him to rest,” Howard recalled.¹⁶⁴

CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield

In summer 1970, Rick Crutchfield arrived at Udorn AB, Thailand, as the new NCOIC of Detachment 1’s CCT. Born in 1941 in Portland, Oregon, Crutchfield grew up on the West Coast and graduated from high school in 1959 near Seattle, Washington. A year later, he was robbed and lost the “whole poke of money” he had been saving for college. He decided to, in his words, “beat the letter from the draft board and exercise my options” by joining the Air Force.¹⁶⁵ Crutchfield enlisted in September 1960 and chose the air traffic control field. After technical training, he was sent to Larson AFB, Washington. He got to know a fellow tower operator who had previously served in combat control and who encouraged Crutchfield to apply. By the end of 1962, Crutchfield received orders for airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and then reported to Sewart AFB, Tennessee, for his first assignment in combat control. Initially, Crutchfield was the lowest-ranking combat controller at the base, but he rose quickly. Six years later, at McChord AFB, Washington, Crutchfield was promoted to master sergeant. In the next 21 years on active duty, he never again worked for another NCO, only officers. During those years, most of them as a chief master sergeant, Crutchfield supervised and mentored more young combat controllers than any other chief in the combat control career field.¹⁶⁶

The Legacy of Andre R. Guillet

At the annual Combat Control Association (CCA) reunions from 2006 to 2008, the author observed firsthand the association's genuine respect and heartfelt kindness Andy Guillet's sister has come to know and appreciate 40 years after his loss. Because of the secretive nature of the war in Laos, it was the 1980s before Guillet's family learned where he had died. Until then, they were told that he had perished in Vietnam. In 1992 Guillet's sister contacted Jim Stanford, who had served with her brother at NKP in April–May 1966. Stanford invited her to attend the CCA's reunion that year; she has attended nearly every year since. Whether remembering the loss of a fellow combat controller who died many years ago in the jungles of Southeast Asia, or recently in the mountains of Afghanistan, or the deserts of Iraq, the association's leadership and members make a concerted, respectful, and touching effort to reach out to the families of those who have been lost, acknowledging the contributions of their loved ones to the US Air Force and the nation. It is one example of what makes the combat control/special tactics community the special brotherhood it is. In 2008 a beautifully-restored O-1 Bird Dog was placed on display outside the new USAF Combat Control School at Pope AFB, North Carolina, in honor of combat controller Andy Guillet—the lone combat controller still listed as MIA.¹⁶⁷

SMSgt Clyde Howard

Born in 1942 and reared in the hills of Magoffin County in eastern Kentucky, Clyde Howard was the eighth of 16 children. Many local young people headed north to Ohio for jobs following high school, but a number of young men chose the military. Howard, who rose to the rank of senior master sergeant, recalled that the Army was the most popular service, but he chose the Air Force instead. One influential incident for him was seeing a massive formation of bombers on a training flight: "The sky was full of airplanes and it was really impressive to me . . . that was one of the things that steered me toward . . . the Air Force," he said years later.¹⁶⁸ Enlisting in 1961, he first served in the 41st Air Rescue Squadron at Hamilton AFB, California, where he became acquainted with a number of pararescuemen including Bill Pitsenbarger, who was killed in Vietnam on a rescue mission and posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross (later upgraded to the Medal of Honor).

Howard worked as an administrative specialist for the squadron's director of operations. He sent and received various messages pertaining to operations and at one point noticed a request for volunteers for combat control. The duty description sounded appealing, so he volunteered and in 1965 attended the several schools required for combat controllers. Assigned initially to the new CCT at Travis AFB, California, within a year Howard volunteered and was accepted for duty with the air commandos. Completing several weeks of so-called "Swamp Rat" training at Hurlburt Field, Florida, he and four other combat controllers were soon on a C-141 Starlifter bound for a classified, and to them an unknown, destination with the air commandos. It was the start of the first of Howard's four tours in Thailand between 1966 and 1973 where he spent more time than any other air commando combat controller.¹⁶⁹

SMSgt James J. Stanford

Jim Stanford enlisted in the Air Force at Los Angeles, California, in 1955, partly because he wanted to be done with school. Little did he know that once he was in the Air Force, "I never quit going to school!"¹⁷⁰ Completing air traffic control training, Stanford served tours at Travis AFB, California, and Thule AB, Greenland, before returning to Mather AFB, California. There he met his wife, Helen, also an air traffic controller, who served three years in the Marine Corps and two in the Air Force before separating from active duty when expecting their first child. The couple first met when "he came to work in the tower, and I had the shift," Helen recalled.¹⁷¹ During their wedding in 1957, Mather's control tower was shut down temporarily so its personnel could attend the event that Mrs. Stanford referred to as "quite a party!"¹⁷²

From Mather, the couple moved to Germany, where Stanford joined a sport parachute club to overcome his fear of heights. It worked. In his next assignment, he responded to a request for volunteers for the Air Force's counterinsurgency entity based at Hurlburt Field, Florida, and was quickly accepted for air commando combat controller duty. In April 1966 Stanford shipped out to NKP, Thailand, for six-months' TDY. Within a month, he found himself on a PC-6 Pilatus Porter en route to Vientiane, Laos. Stanford soon joined Charlie Jones, who was recovering from dengue fever, at LS-20A in northern Laos.¹⁷³

Mrs. Helen Stanford, CCT Wife

Helen Stanford was better prepared for the rigors of maintaining the home front than most spouses, partly because she knew about where her husband was located during his service in Southeast Asia. Knowing the air traffic control business from her personal military service certainly helped. While Stanford was forbidden to disclose his location in his communications back home, he could say something along the lines of “I’m 360 [degrees] at 76 [miles] from my last site.”¹⁷⁴ Helen could easily figure his position. Furthermore, with five young children, all born between 1958 and 1964, and her husband gone for months at a time, she needed to run a tight ship. Undoubtedly, her service in the Marine Corps came in handy. Approaching their 50th anniversary at the time of our interview, Jim Stafford put it this way, smiling: the kids “thought they were in boot camp every day growing up!”¹⁷⁵ Indeed, four of the Stanford’s five children eventually served on active duty, no doubt well-prepared for the rigors of military life from their early years at home.¹⁷⁶

CMSgt Michael I. Lampe

Mike Lampe, a future chief master sergeant and the second command chief of US Special Operations Command, was another young combat controller who deployed to Laos. Drafted in 1968 after finishing high school in Washington State, Lampe found his way to the Air Force recruiting office while looking for the shortest line at the Seattle military induction center. Lampe entered the administrative specialty after finishing basic training in early 1969. He discovered the air commandos halfway through his tour at Clark AB, Philippines, while going through Air Force manuals on possible career fields. Managing to get to the air commandos’ home base at Hurlburt Field for his next assignment, Lampe was thwarted initially in his attempt to leave administration.

However, with the help of his former boss at Clark, Lampe met Chief Jim Howell, who briefed him on CCT and showed him what forms to fill out. Howell recalled his initial impression of Lampe as “an impressive guy, a young guy and ‘gung ho’ and he looked like he was fit . . . for a Personnel ‘weenie!’ And he was a very friendly person, like he is now, always the [distinctive, booming] laughter.”¹⁷⁷ With Howell’s assistance, Lampe was accepted into combat control, completed the basic schools, and was taking leave in the spring of 1972 when he received an unexpected phone call from the chief. Lampe

had wanted to get into Project 404, the classified program of in-country US military activities in support of the clandestine war in Laos. A combat controller had been injured in a jump and could not deploy, and Howell gave Lampe the chance to fill in. Shortly thereafter, Lampe found himself at LS-20A in northern Laos.¹⁷⁸

SMSgt Billie W. Slayton

Born in 1941 and reared among the picturesque farms and rolling hills of southern middle Tennessee, Slayton graduated from Elkton High School in a class of 14. Blessed with a caring family, including his parents and two sisters, he had what he called “a good life” growing up but had not travelled farther than Nashville, less than 100 miles away. Although he returned to the family farm some 20 years later, Slayton wanted to see the world after high school; so upon turning 18, he “jumped into the Air Force ‘cold turkey’” to get off the farm.¹⁷⁹

Initially, he worked in supply but found it unsatisfying. After marrying in England and working next at Grand Forks AFB, North Dakota, he saw an article in the base paper about combat control and decided to volunteer. In 1964 Slayton, accompanied by his wife and baby daughter, reported to Keesler AFB, Mississippi, for air traffic control school after completing the airborne course at Fort Benning, Georgia. The family then moved to Sewart AFB, Tennessee, where Slayton went through the newly established Combat Control School as a member of the second class.¹⁸⁰

Slayton was then assigned to the 2nd APS at Sewart, serving there until 1968. In those days “we didn’t have any support people at all,” he said.¹⁸¹ Combat controllers packed their own parachutes and handled all other administrative and supply matters. Slayton made the tactical error of being seen typing a travel voucher. “Oh, you know how to type,” an observant squadron member said. “So guess who was the operations NCO and the administrative NCO?” Slayton recalled.¹⁸² Even though the squadron lacked full-time support members, it had radio maintenance personnel who “were the cream of the crop.” Several key members of the 2nd APS at that time were Frank Betty, David R. Hughes, L. V. Lewis, and Tim McCann.¹⁸³

Betty was a senior master sergeant and helped select Slayton for combat control. Captain Hughes was the team’s officer-in-charge and loved to jump, but, more importantly in Slayton’s view, he was instrumental in the CCT career field. Chief Lewis, one of the few African-

Americans in CCT, went from Sewart to service in Vietnam, and McCann, a former Marine who became Slayton's mentor and close friend, deployed to Vietnam with him and was later promoted to chief.¹⁸⁴

Notes

1. Christopher Robbins, *The Ravens, The Men Who Flew in America's Secret War in Laos* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987), 49–50, including Momyer "tantrum" quote 2; "The Secret War, Combat Controllers in Laos," *Combat Control Historical Foundation*, vol. 1, no. 1 (30 October 2007), 1–2, including quote 1, copy in AFHRA files; Warren A. Trest, *Air Commando One, Heinie Aderholt and America's Secret Air Wars* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 146, 182, 192–93; Jan Churchill, *Classified Secret, Controlling Airstrikes in the Clandestine War in Laos* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1999), 111; and Michael E. Haas, *Apollo's Warriors, United States Air Force Special Operations During the Cold War* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1997), 217. Sources varied on the timing of General Momyer's visit to Thailand and his decision to end the Butterfly program, but Churchill indicated 1967; Robbins and Haas referred to 1966; Trest stated "early 1967." Note that Aderholt did not arrive in Thailand until 9 December 1966: *Air Commando One*, 191–92. Note the follow-on "Raven" program began in May 1967: *Classified Secret*, 111, although the "Raven" call sign may not have been used until later in the year. The 56th Air Commando Wing (56th ACW) was activated on 8 April 1967: History, 56th ACW, 8 April 1967–30 June 1967 [note that all 56th ACW histories cited herein are located at AFHRA under call number K-WG-56-HI].

2. Victor B. Anthony and Richard R. Sexton, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, The War in Northern Laos, 1954–1973* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993), 221–22.

3. *Ibid.*, 222.

4. Timothy Bailey, "Air Commando! A Heritage Wrapped in Secrecy," *Airman 41* (March 1997), 6–11; and Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 212–17, 220–21. Note that the call sign Butterfly was employed specifically in Laos. Nonrated, mainly-enlisted CCTs also performed airborne FAC duties in Vietnam as early as 1962 (Charlie Jones was one), but they did not use the Butterfly call sign. Since that mission was more-or-less conventional in nature, it was not covered in the present work.

5. Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 14–23, quote 3 on 16; CWO Charles L. Jones, USA, SF, retired, interview with the author, 16 November 2006, including quotes 1–2 on Luckhurst and Mark-20; and Air Force Form 7, Airman Military Record (Charles L. Jones), copy in AFHRA files, Maxwell AFB, AL.

6. Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 17–18. Later, the L-28 was called the U-10. The CIA's Air America airline operated the Helio Super Courier. Several CCTs did not recall using the name "Super Courier," leading to the conclusion that the special warfare community employed strictly the Helio Courier: CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: Fwd: U-10 aircraft, 23 June 2017.

7. *Ibid.*, 18–20; and Jones, interview.

8. “Citation to Accompany the Award of the Silver Star to Billie W. Slayton”; and “Silver Stars decorate 2 NCOs,” *Traveller* 11 (23 April 1969) [RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk, England], copy of each in AFHRA files, Maxwell AFB, AL.

9. SMSgt Billie W. Slayton, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 March 2008, including quotes 1, 3; and Ray L. Bowers, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, Tactical Airlift* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 242–43, 330, including quote 2.

10. Slayton, interview; and Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 269–70, including quote.

11. Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 270. This was the only such mission of battalion size during the conflict: Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 269.

12. *Ibid.*, 274–79; and Slayton, interview.

13. Slayton, interview; SMSgt Billie W. Slayton, USAF, retired, conversation with the author, 15 December 2008; CMSgt Rudolph A. Elizondo, USAF, retired, conversation with the author, 9 December 2008; and Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 243.

14. Slayton, interview.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 293.

17. Slayton, interview.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*; Silver Star citation for Slayton; “Silver Stars decorate 2 NCOs”; Slayton conversation with the author; and Elizondo conversation with the author.

20. Silver Star citation for Slayton, including quote; and “Silver Stars decorate 2 NCOs.”

21. Lt Col Robert E. Barinowski, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 28 July 2008, including quote; and MSgt Ronald Brown, USAF, retired, telephone conversation with the author, subject: number of Silver Star recipients, 17 December 2008. Of the 22 known Silver Stars earned by CCT personnel in Southeast Asia, including those of Slayton and Elizondo, four others were earned by the combat controllers—Lew Brabham, James D. Burch, Guy T. Fagan, and John E. Lebold—that evacuated the embassy at Saigon on 29–30 April 1975: CMSgt James A. Howell USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21–22 May 2007.

22. Slayton, interview.

23. Slayton, interview; and Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 290–96.

24. Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 295.

25. *Ibid.*, 296–305, quote on 305.

26. *Ibid.*, 305.

27. Slayton, interview, including quote; and Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 305.

28. SMSgt Clyde Howard USAF, retired, interview with the author, 5 February and 12–13 April 2007; and History, 56th ACW, 8 April–30 June 1967, v, 11–14. The other primary operational unit of the wing was the 602nd Fighter Squadron (Commando), which operated A-1E “Sandy” aircraft from NKP and Udorn.

29. Howard, interview; and History, 56th Special Operations Wing (56 SOW), 1 October–31 December 1968, vol. 1, 46–47, including quote. By June 1967, the 606th squadron phased out the PC-6 STOL aircraft in lieu of U-10s.

30. Howard, interview; Jones, interview; SMSgt James J. Stanford USAF, retired, interview with the author, 22 December 2006 (Mrs Stanford attended the interview and commented on several occasions); and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 26–27.

31. Howard, interview, including quotes; and Jacob Van Staaveren, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960–1968* (Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1993), 8–9. At the time, the communists were often referred to as communist terrorists, or CTs: History, 56th ACW, 1 July–30 September 1967, iv. The annual southwest monsoon lasted from about mid-May to mid-September: Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, 8.

32. Howard, interview; Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 79; and CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, e-mails to the author, subject: Re: Father & Son, 13 July and 17 July 2017. A number of sources incorrectly identified Guillet as a member of the 606th ACS; rather, he was on temporary duty from the 1st Air Commando Wing, as were Charlie Jones and Jim Stanford.

33. Howard, interview; Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 79; Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, 61, 135; and History, 56th ACW, 1 July–30 September 1967, iv, including quote. Stanford expressed no preference on which pilot he flew with and readily acceded to Guillet's request: CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, telephone discussion with the author, 29 June 2017.

34. Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, 147. Harley/Guillet's O-1 aircraft was one of nine Bird Dogs downed in combat over Laos between February 1962 and 1 February 1968: Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, Appendix 4.

35. Howard, interview. Originally developed by the Army for use by infantrymen, the starlight scope functioned by taking light from the stars or moon and magnifying it several thousand times to spot targets on the ground at night. The image was quite clear, although green-tinted: History, 56th SOW, 1 January–31 March 1969, vol. 1, 50; and Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 205.

36. Howard, interview.

37. *Ibid.*; History, 56th ACW, 8 April–30 June 1967, SD 9, 606th Air Commando Squadron history; and History, 56th SOW, 1 January–31 March 1970, vol. 1, 89–90, including quote.

38. Howard, interview; History, 56th ACW, 8 April–30 June 1967, SD 9, 606th Air Commando Squadron history; and History, 56th ACW, 1 July–30 September 1967, v, 8, 11, including quote.

39. Howard, interview. Vain attempts to blend into the local populace seem to be characteristic of US military operations; for a somewhat humorous example in October 2001, see Calvin Markham's account in chapter 10.

40. History, 56th SOW, 1 April–30 June 1971, vol. 1, 126–27.

41. History, 56th ACW, 1 July–30 September 1967, SD 10, Air Force Civic Action Program and Reports. This was a rich, 20-page document covering civic action in detail.

42. Howard, interview; History, 56th SOW, 1 April–30 June 1971, vol. 1, 122–31, quoted by 56th SOW historian on 124; and Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 242–45. There have been clear parallels to the 56th wing's civic action program in Thailand since 2001 with respect to US/NATO operations in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Iraq.

43. Howard, interview; and History, 56th ACW, 1 April–30 June 1968, vol. 1, 82–83. In the post-2001 era, there were parallel concerns with the treatment of Afghan civilians by Afghan police elements that received assistance from the US/coalition. Often, the populace and local police were of different ethnicity and language.

44. Howard, interview.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Ibid.
47. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 137.
48. Ibid., 154, 203, including quote; and Howard, interview.
49. Howard, interview.
50. History, 56th ACW, 1 October–31 December 1967, vol. 1, 35–36. The Thai BPP was organized by military regions: Ubon was located in Military Region–3, Udorn in Military Region–4: History, 56th SOW, 1 January–31 March 1969, vol. 1, 55.
51. Ibid., 36; SMSgt Paul Leonard Foster, *TOGETHERWESERVED.COM*, <https://airforce.togetherweserved.com/usaf/servlet/tws.webapp.WebApp?cmd=ShadowBoxProfile&type=Person&ID=80196>, accessed 22 June 2017. Note that Foster's remains were returned to US control in 1993, but the official announcement upon verification of his identity was not until 1995. Foster operated the starlight scope on the A-26.
52. Howard, interview; and History, 56th ACW, 1 April–30 June 1968, vol. 1, 68–74, 80–83. According to Howard, the camouflage paint scheme was used only on T-28s piloted by Americans; those piloted by Laotians or Thais were painted gray. The last recorded T-28D strike sortie was in June 1968: History, 56th ACW, 1 April–30 June 1968, vol. 1, 72–73.
53. Howard, interview, including quote; History, 56th ACW, 1 April–30 June 1968, vol. 1, 71; and History, 56th SOW, 1 July–30 September 1968, vol. 1, 58–60.
54. Howard, interview; and Howard unofficial bio, copy in AFHRA files. When outside the local area, the U-10 aircraft normally flew in a flight of two for mutual support.
55. History, 56th ACW, 1 January–31 March 1968, vol. 1, 53; History, 56th ACW, 1 April–30 June 1968, vol. 1, 80, including quote; and Howard, interview.
56. History, 56th SOW, 1 October–31 December 1968, vol. 1, 53; History, 56 SOW, 1 October–31 December 1969, vol. 1, 151–53; and Howard, interview.
57. History, 56 SOW, 1 July–30 September 1968, vol. 1, 58–60; History, 56 SOW, 1 October–31 December 1968, vol. 1, 56; and Howard, interview.
58. Howard, interview; History, 56th SOW, 1 July–30 September 1968, vol. 1, 60; and History, 56th SOW, 1 October–31 December 1968, vol. 1, 56.
59. Howard, interview; pamphlet, "Syllabus Of Instruction Forward Air Guide," n.d., provided to the author by Howard, copy in AFHRA files; Jones, interview; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 46–47, 52–54, Appendix, "Forward Air Guide Pamphlet."
60. Howard, interview, including quote; and CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: Re: smudge pots used by CCTs, 22 June 2017, copy in AFHRA files.
61. History, 56th SOW, 1 October–31 December 1969, vol. 1, 164, including quote; Howard, interview; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, chapter 4. The CCT's designation in 1964 was Detachment 6, 1st Air Commando Wing: Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, 24.
62. History, 56th SOW, 1 October–31 December 1970, vol. 1, 70–72.
63. Ibid., 72–73.
64. History, 56th SOW, 1 January–31 March 1971, vol. 1, 133–34.
65. History, 56th SOW, 1 April–30 June 1971, vol. 1, 153.
66. CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 9 February 2007.
67. Ibid.

68. Crutchfield, interview; and Trest, *Air Commando One*, 119, including quote. The American ambassador to Laos, William H. Sullivan, controlled the number of US personnel in-country. Then-assistant secretary of state William Bundy, stated during the war, “there wasn’t a bag of rice dropped in Laos that he didn’t know about”: William Branigin, “William H. Sullivan dies at 90: veteran diplomat was last U.S. ambassador to Iran,” *Washington Post*, 22 October 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/william-h-sullivan-dies-at-90-veteran-diplomat-oversaw-secret-war-in-laos/2013/10/22/f13e628c-3b2f-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html?utm_term=.ff0381dc5dbb, accessed 22 June 2017. In June 1960, the US government sent covert, two-man survey teams into Laos for the purpose of identifying potential airfields there: Thomas J. Saxon, “Laos: A Postscript,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 1992, 72–73.

69. Howard, interview.

70. History, 56th SOW, 1 April–30 June 1973, vol. 1, 50; History, 56th SOW, 1 October–31 December 1973, vol. 1, 3; Howard, interview; and CMSgt Michael I. Lampe, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 3 November 2006.

71. Robbins, *The Ravens*, 240–41; Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors*, 176, 179; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 3.

72. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 139.

73. *Ibid.*, 139–41, including quote; Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors*, 177–78; Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America’s Clandestine War in Laos* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 1996), 132; and Stanford to the author, letter, subject: Review of Chapter Three Draft, January 2009. Trest cited 38 personnel in the initial deployment; Haas listed 41. The initial deployment was planned to last six months. In 1966 Water Pump transferred to 606th ACS at NKP: Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors*, 188. Later, Water Pump fell under Detachment 1, 56th SOW. Water Pump was also rendered Waterpump in some sources.

74. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 141–42, 191; Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors*, 179, including quote; Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, 23–24; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 79. According to Haas, it was May 1964 when the first five Air America pilots began training in Water Pump’s T–28s: Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors*, 180–81.

75. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 191.

76. Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 79.

77. Jones, interview; Stanford, interview; Churchill, *Classified Secret*, chapter 7, 106–8; and Robbins, *The Ravens*, 87. Col Bill R. Keeler, USAF, retired, served in Vientiane in 1966 as air operations center commander and identified Garrity as an intelligence officer, as did Charlie Jones: Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 38, 42–43; and Jones, interview. In a letter to the author, Jim Stanford affirmed that both Farmer and McCollough had been formally trained as combat control officers and were on temporary duty from the CCT at England AFB, Louisiana. In July 1966 McCollough accompanied Stanford into Laos from NKP, Thailand, where Stanford had been taking a few days off. Stanford recalled that McCollough, after working with Charlie Jones at Long Tieng for a time, was directed to Vientiane (like Farmer in May). Churchill’s account quoted McCollough as indicating his tour in Laos ended on 11 September 1966. The date of his transfer to Vientiane, however, was not provided, but late August 1966 appeared a reasonable estimate in my opinion: Stanford, interview; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 106–8.

78. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 145–46, 193, including quote, Aderholt quoted by Trest; Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 216–17; and Brig Gen Aderholt official USAF biography, <http://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/107887/brigadier-general-harry-c-heinie-aderholt/>, accessed 26 June 2017. Aderholt's command of 56th ACW began in December 1966, whereas the Butterfly FAC program began in May of that year.

79. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 145.

80. Robbins, *The Ravens*, 49. Trest's assessment was similar to Robbins': Trest, *Air Commando One*, 146. In spring 1967, it appeared to take about two months to transition from the Butterfly program to the Raven program of fighter pilot-qualified FACs in Southeast Asia. However, the Butterfly call sign may have remained in use until later in 1967.

81. Robbins, *The Ravens*, 49, including quote; Trest, *Air Commando One*, 146; Churchill, *Classified Secret*, chapter 7. Robbins noted,

Sheep-dipped: A complex process in which someone serving in the military seemingly went through all the official motions of resigning from the service. The man's records would be pulled from the personnel files and transferred to a special Top Secret intelligence file. A cover story would be concocted to explain the resignation, and the man would become a civilian. At the same time, his ghostly paper existence within the intelligence file would continue to pursue his Air Force career: when his contemporaries were promoted, he would be promoted, and so on. Sheep-dipped personnel posed extremely tricky problems when they were killed or captured. There would be all sorts of pension and insurance problems, which was one of the reasons the CIA found it necessary to set up its own insurance company.

Carlyle and Webb replaced Jones and Stanford when the latter two prepared to depart Laos in October 1966. Shortly after Stanford's arrival at LS-20A in May 1966, Bob Farmer moved from northern Laos to the US embassy in Vientiane: Stanford, interview; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 80, 109–11. Although the Raven FACs apparently used the Butterfly call sign briefly in 1967, they were properly considered Ravens rather than Butterflies. For example, Capt James Cain indicated he used the Butterfly call sign between May and July 1967 before transitioning to the Raven call sign.

82. Jones, interview.

83. *Ibid.*, including quote; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, chapter 7. One week after this interview, Charlie Jones passed away, beloved by the CCT community he had served faithfully for many years. In my separate interviews with Jones and Stanford, both men specifically included Farmer as a Butterfly. As Farmer apparently was directed to the US embassy in Vientiane shortly after his arrival in-country, the popular view of Jones (alone) as "the first Butterfly" was certainly understandable, but it was an honor he shared with Farmer. Farmer and Jones flew their first FAC sorties in Laos on the same day (13 May 1966), and both worked at LS-20A briefly in May 1966. Certainly, Jones was the first enlisted Butterfly: Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 79–80, 83.

84. Jones, interview.

85. *Ibid.* Jim Stanford pointed out that while some pilots did not mind their Butterfly FACs using smoke grenades to mark targets, others did not want items to be dropped or fired from their aircraft so as not to risk compromising the Pilatus Porter's reputation as a purely humanitarian aircraft: Stanford, interview.

86. Ibid.; Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 215–17; and Air Force Form 7, Airman Military Record (Charles L. Jones). Originally, Butterfly–44 was intended for use in the vicinity of the Plain of Jars south to the Mekong River, Butterfly–22 to the west/northwest, and Butterfly–33 to the north and east: Jones, interview; Stanford, interview; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 80–81, 85. The Butterfly call sign was used only in Laos. Stanford recalled sometimes using Butterfly–44 when working as the lone FAC in the Plain of Jars vicinity: Stanford, interview; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 100.

87. Jones, interview.

88. Stanford, interview; Stanford unofficial bio, copy in AFHRA files; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 79–80.

89. Christopher Robbins, *Air America* (New York: Avon Books, 1979), 104.

90. Stanford, interview; and Robbins, *Air America*, 110–11, 127, including quote. Production of the OV-10 Bronco observation aircraft began in early 1968: Trest, *Air Commando One*, 215.

91. Robbins, *Air America*, 128. The parallels between Vang Pao and, 30 years later, another charismatic and effective military leader of an ethnic group, supported by the CIA, who relied in part on drug smuggling to finance his operations—Ahmed Shah Massoud—were intriguing, to say the least.

92. Jones, interview; Robbins, *The Ravens*, 39; and Stanford, interview.

93. Stanford, interview; SMSgt Stanford unofficial bio; and Stanford to the author, letter, subj: Review of Chapter Three Draft, January 2009; Jones, interview; Robbins, *The Ravens*, 37, including quote.

94. Robbins, *The Ravens*, 49, including “Wetback” quote; Stanford, interview; and Stanford to the author, letter, subj: Review of Chapter Three Draft, January 2009. In a slightly different account, Jan Churchill quoted retired Col Bill Keeler as indicating that the call sign of Wetback was used for a time: see Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 44.

95. Robbins, *The Ravens*, 49; Stanford, interview; Stanford to the author, letter, subj: Review of Chapter Three Draft, January 2009; and Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, 112.

96. Ed [Edward J.] Rasimus, *When Thunder Rolled, An F-105 Pilot over North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 150–52.

97. Ibid., 152–53.

98. Ibid., 153.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

101. Stanford, interview.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid.; and Robbins, *Air America*, 125–26, including quotes.

104. “Apocalypse Now: The man who was “Colonel Kurtz,” <http://www.soldiers-of-misfortune.com/history/apocalypse-now.htm>, accessed 27 June 2017.

105. Stanford, interview.

106. Ibid. Robbins provides a similar description of primitive ordnance employed by the Ravens, including “large rocks” and “primed hand grenades in mayonnaise jars”: Robbins, *The Ravens*, 126. Warner also provides an example whereby hand grenades were placed in glass jars and tossed from small aircraft: Warner, *Shooting at the Moon*, 107.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.; and author's observation.
111. Stanford, interview.
112. The Partisans, officially the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, were Marshal Broz Tito's anti-Axis resistance fighters during World War II.
113. Franklin Lindsay, *Beacons in the Night: With the OSS and Tito's Partisans in Wartime Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 93.
114. Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1966), 271, including quote; John F. Fuller, *Thor's Legions: Weather Support to the U.S. Air Force and Army, 1937–1987* (Boston, Mass.: American Meteorological Society, 1990), 272.
115. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, 366.
116. Ibid., 449.
117. Jack Broughton, *Thud Ridge* (Friendswood, TX: Baxter Press, 1996), 242, including quotes; Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, 8–9.
118. Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 322.
119. Ibid., 301, Table, "Weather Effects On Air Operations In Southeast Asia, 1966."
120. Ibid., 310. For Grimes's key role in the Son Tay raid in November 1970, see pages 310–12.
121. Ibid., 322, including quote, Sullivan quoted by Fuller; James E. Parker, Jr., *Codename Mule: Fighting the Secret War in Laos for the CIA* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 103.
122. Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 322–23.
123. Ibid., 325; and CMSgt Peter Morris, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 October 2005; and Morris unofficial bio, copy in AFHRA files.
124. Morris, interview, including quote; Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 323.
125. Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 323, including quote; and Morris, interview.
126. Morris, interview.
127. Ibid.; and Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 325, including quote.
128. Lampe, interview; and Lampe official bio, copy in AFHRA files.
129. Ibid.; Howard, interview; Koren, interview; Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, e-mails to the author, subject: Re: Fwd: paragraph [including atch, subject: Inputs to Dr Marion-070517], 24 June and 5 July 2017, copy in AFHRA files; travel order (number and date illegible), provided to the author by Koren, in Koren interview folder, AFHRA files; and Gene Adcock, *CCT: The Eye of the Storm* (N.p.: Combat Control School Historical Foundation, 2009), 145. For more details on the F-111 beacon bombing mission, see pages 145–60. The PPN-18 beacon was used with the F-111; the SST-181 X band beacon was used with the B-52: Koren, e-mails, 24 June and 5 July 2017. Note that three members of the Udorn CCT—Bryan, Koren, and Lampe—served on the CCT for the hostage rescue attempt in Iran in 1980 (see chapter 4).
130. Most of the Hmong radio operators had not completed forward air guide training; Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: Re: paragraph 2, 6 July 2017, copy in AFHRA files.
131. Koren, interview; Koren, e-mails, 24 June and 5 July 2017; Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: Re: Thai volunteers – FAGs, 6 July 2017,

copy in AFHRA files; Lampe, interview; and Parker, *Codename Mule*, 167, including quote. Accurate bomb damage assessment was critical to evaluating mission effectiveness, and assessments required considerable resources including those of CCT.

132. Parker, *Codename Mule*, 167.

133. *Ibid.*, 167.

134. Howard, interview. He stated further that in 1969–70 about one-third of AC-119 forward air guides were Thai volunteers, and the rest were Laotian, including Hmong, rightists, or neutralists.

135. *Ibid.*; and Koren, e-mails, 24 June and 5 July 2017.

136. Lampe, interview; Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 5 October 2006; and Churchill, *Classified Secret*, 47–48. Regardless of the ceasefire agreement, the communists continued fighting in Laos just as they had in Vietnam.

137. History, 374th Tactical Airlift Wing (TAW), 1 October–31 December 1972, vol. 1, 24–25 [note that all 374th TAW histories cited herein are located at AFHRA under call number K-WG-374-HI].

138. History, 374th TAW, 1 January–31 March 1973, vol. 1, 30–31; and Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 329.

139. Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 330, 334–35.

140. *Ibid.*, 330.

141. *Ibid.*, 332. Pilot balloons were used to determine wind speed and direction at altitudes above about 15,000 feet: “Pilot Balloons (PIBAL),” Kaymont Consolidated Industries, 2017, http://kaymontballoons.com/Weather_Tracking.html, accessed 29 June 2017.

142. *Ibid.*, 332–33.

143. Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: More Udorn CCT – re FAG Documents, 28 June 2017, copy in AFHRA files; Koren, e-mail to the author, subject: Re: Fwd: paragraph [including atch, subject: Inputs to Dr Marion-070517], 5 July 2017; Koren, e-mail to the author, subject: Re: Fwd: paragraph, 6 July 2017, copy in AFHRA files; History, 374th TAW, 1 July–30 September 1974, vol. 1, 15; and History, 374th TAW, 1 October–31 December 1974, vol. 1, 33–34.

144. Maj Gen James I. Baginski, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 20 March 2007; History, 374th TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 1, 27–32, including quote on 31, and vol. 2, SD 2, 5; and Trest, *Air Commando One*, 246–49. Regarding the acronym, SCOOT-CE, the term “Civilian Expansion” was sometimes used in lieu of Contract Expansion.

145. History, 374th TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 1, 31–32, and vol. 2, SD 2, 5–6, 19–20. For Howell's test parachute and F-106 ejection capsule experience, see chapter 2. The Detachment 6 personnel were on temporary duty from Clark AB, Philippines.

146. History, 374th TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 2, SD 2, 7, including quote; Howell, interview; and Norrad, interview.

147. History, 374th TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 2, SD 2, 7.

148. *Ibid.*, including quote 1; and Howell, interview, including quote 2.

149. History, 374th TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 2, SD 2, 7.

150. Howell, interview.

151. *Ibid.*

152. *Ibid.* As the city was without electricity and Howell's CCT was unfamiliar with embassy row, it was possible they may have ended up at an embassy other than

the US. Perhaps the anonymous intruder was the local “papasan” who had helped with the dinner, but Howell did not mention that as a possible explanation.

153. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 250; History, 374th TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 2, SD 2, 20, including quote; Howell, interview; and Norrad, interview. The HH-53 was the rescue version of the H-53 and was equipped with aerial refueling probe and rescue hoist.

154. Norrad, interview; and History, 374th TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 2, SD 2, 19–20, including quote. In the interview, Norrad referred to comments made to him by combat controller Jim Donaldson concerning the rockets at the helicopter pad.

155. Baginski, interview. Phnom Penh fell to the communists on 17 April 1975, Saigon on 30 April.

156. *Ibid.*

157. *Ibid.*; History, 374 TAW, 1 April–30 June 1975, vol. 2, SD 2, 20.

158. John F. Guilmartin, Jr., *A Very Short War: The Mayaguez and the Battle of Koh Tang* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 143, including quote; and Fuller, *Thor’s Legions*, 336.

159. Guilmartin, *A Very Short War*, 29–30, 60–61, 156–57; and Fuller, *Thor’s Legions*, 336, including quote.

160. Guilmartin, *A Very Short War*, 149–50; and Howell, interview. One caveat is that two combat controllers were, in fact, participants to a slight degree. They were aboard a helicopter flight that picked up the crew of another helicopter that had been damaged in the assault on Koh Tang; Howell, interview; and Maj Manuel L. Gonzalez, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 February 2007.

161. Lampe, interview.

162. Howard, interview. Although the CCT performed HALO jumps from the UC-123s for training, presumably their dog, Airborne, was restricted to lower altitude jumps.

163. *Ibid.*

164. *Ibid.*

165. Crutchfield, interview.

166. *Ibid.*; and Crutchfield unofficial bio, copy in AFHRA files.

167. Author’s personal observations at the annual Combat Control Association reunions in 2006, 2007, and 2008; Stanford interview; and “The Secret War, Combat Controllers in Laos,” *Combat Control Historical Foundation*, 1–2. SMSgt Paul L. Foster, killed during an A-26 mission in Laos on 29 December 1967, was listed as MIA until repatriation in the 1990s. Five other combat controllers lost their lives in South Vietnam (see Table 1, Chapter 10), four of whom died at Bao Loc, South Vietnam, on 4 September 1967. Guillet’s pilot, Capt Lee Harley, also has been honored in the display at Pope.

168. Howard, interview.

169. *Ibid.*

170. Stanford, interview, including quote; and SMSgt Stanford unofficial bio.

171. Stanford, interview, comments by Mrs Stanford.

172. *Ibid.*

173. *Ibid.*

174. *Ibid.*

175. *Ibid.*

176. Ibid.

177. Lampe, interview; and Howell, interview, including quote.

178. Lampe, interview; and Howell, interview.

179. Slayton, interview.

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid.

182. Ibid.

183. Ibid.

184. Ibid.

Chapter 4

Combat Control and US National Counterterrorism, 1976–1981

Terrorism Concerns and Entebbe

US military participation in the Southeast Asia conflict ended with completion of the flawed yet successful operation on Koh Tang Island on 15 May 1975. However, new threats began to emerge as the nation sought to put the painful Vietnam experience behind. One year later, on 8 May 1976, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a memorandum with a one-word subject line, “Terrorism.” He acknowledged, “There is increasing concern within the Government over the difficult problem of terrorism.” With prescience—especially noteworthy in the light of Rumsfeld’s second tour running the Pentagon beginning in 2001—he warned that “the implications of this problem for the Department of Defense could be far reaching, should terrorism become more widespread.”¹

Within two months, a daring hostage rescue by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) at Entebbe, Uganda, captured the world’s attention. On 27 June 1976, terrorists from a branch of the Palestine Liberation Organization seized an Air France Airbus A300 en route from Athens to Paris. They ordered the pilot to fly to the Ugandan capital of Entebbe, where the country’s brutal dictator, Idi Amin, offered his cooperation to the terrorists. All non-Israelis were released except the Air France crew who courageously refused release apart from the other hostages. The hijackers demanded the release of 53 convicted terrorists held in several countries, including Israel, and threatened to kill the hostages if their demands were not met. The Israeli defense minister, Shimon Peres, stated bluntly, “If we don’t rescue the hostages from Entebbe, Zionism and the concept of a sovereign state of Israel become pointless.” In order to gain time for planning a military option, the Israeli government took the politically risky step of entering into negotiations

Portions of this chapter appeared in Forrest L. Marion, “Air Force Combat Controllers at Desert One: April 24–25, 1980,” *Air Power History* 56, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 46–55, <http://www.afhso.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-120803-027.pdf>.

with the terrorists through the French government, and the terrorists extended the deadline for their ultimatum to 4 July.²

Several developments provided the Israelis with desperately needed intelligence for planning a rescue. First, the released non-Israeli passengers provided information to authorities about the number of terrorists, their weapons, clothing, and locations, and the disposition of the Ugandan soldiers. Second, an Israeli firm had constructed the Entebbe airport. Obtaining the blueprints, Israeli planners studied the layout of the old terminal where the hostages were held. Third, a covert reconnaissance flight over Entebbe on 2 July provided photographs of the existing infrastructure and airfield layout. With this information and a plan for refueling C-130 Hercules transports on the ground at Entebbe, a military option seemed viable by 2 July. Rehearsals, including the use of a sandbag mock-up of the old terminal, extended late into that night.³

A force consisting of 200 elite IDF volunteers, four C-130, and two Boeing 707 airliners secretly departed from Israel on “Operation Thunderball” on the afternoon of 3 July. Seven hours later, at 2303 (local), the lead Hercules touched down undetected at Entebbe, only 30 seconds off the scheduled landing. Breaking radio silence for the first time during the mission, the pilot “turned on his radio to say four words: ‘I am on Yuval’” (code word for the Entebbe runway). Even before the C-130 rolled to a stop, a freshly-painted black Mercedes and two Land Rovers loaded with soldiers drove down the ramp and raced across the tarmac toward the old terminal.⁴

Although the IDF did not employ “combat controllers” at Entebbe, certain tasks involving runway lighting, the control tower, and the refueling of aircraft required a combat control team (CCT) in any similar US military operation. That fact, and the likelihood of airfield seizures becoming integral to many counterterror operations, led to the US Military Airlift Command’s (MAC) decision to create a special CCT in 1977 as part of the US national counterterrorism effort.⁵

In *Entebbe Rescue*, the authors described the beginning of the ground operation upon the rescuers’ landing at the airport:

The lead Hercules was still taxiing slowly along the runway as a dozen soldiers leaped out and dispersed, several yards apart, on either side. Each of them turned to a nearby runway beacon and placed mobile flashlights alongside them—a precaution in case the control tower shut off the power before the other three planes landed. More soldiers charged out of the belly of the plane as it stopped moving, taking positions around it to combat any possible Ugandan reaction.⁶

Within minutes, other IDF soldiers took control of the control tower. Four Ugandan air traffic controllers had abandoned their posts, apparently after shutting off the airfield's lights.⁷

Within 18 minutes, the IDF killed six of the terrorists, while several others fled the scene; rescued 104 hostages, all of them except 75-year-old Dora Bloch, who had been taken to a Kampala hospital (she was later executed on Amin's order); and began the evacuation. Abandoning the planned ground refueling operation that took longer than expected, at 2343 (local), 40 minutes after the first plane had landed, it climbed into the night sky with its precious cargo, bound for Israel. Israeli losses were few, three hostages and two IDF members, but they included the heroic and inspiring ground commander at Entebbe, Lt Col Jonathan "Yoni" Netanyahu, who was shot in the back from the control tower during the opening moments of the assault. After its conclusion, the raid was renamed "Operation Jonathan" in his honor. The brilliant, daring, and successful IDF rescue led Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, to write, "This was one battle in a protracted war, the end of which is not in sight—but we do not for a moment doubt that we will be victorious."⁸

Genesis of the Delta Force and Brand X CCT

Officials in Washington reacted speedily. Eleven days later, on 15 July, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Gen George S. Brown, USAF, addressed the topic of rescue operations in a top secret memorandum. In what one senior combat control officer later termed "confusing enthusiasm with capability," Brown stated, "US military forces have the capability to conduct rescue operations similar to the Israeli raid on Entebbe Airport, Uganda."⁹ The chairman acknowledged that "several days of planning and rehearsal" were needed "to insure a high probability of success." Despite the demands of tight security, compartmentalization, and rapid planning and execution, Brown viewed the Army Rangers, Navy SEAL teams, certain Marine Corps units, and Air Force special operations forces as fully capable of handling hostage crises involving terrorists.¹⁰

Not everyone high in US military circles was as sanguine as the chairman. A month after Entebbe, Gen William E. DePuy, US Army, initiated a discussion of the British elite counterterrorist unit, the Special Air Service (SAS), at an Army conference held at Fort Benning,

Georgia. Depuy, the commanding general of the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command, asked, "How come we don't have a unit like the British Special Air Service?"¹¹

A US Army colonel named Charlie Beckwith, who had served with the SAS and knew more about them than any other American, attended that conference. He had tried in vain for years to interest the Army in developing such a unit. As DePuy acknowledged his concerns over the US Army's ability to conduct special operations and expressed support for examining the SAS model, Beckwith nearly burst. He wrote later, "I'd like to hug this beautiful general. He's got it all in one sack." Soon after, DePuy directed Beckwith to develop a proposal for the Army chief of staff (CSA). Beckwith and another colonel worked on that proposal tirelessly for months. Finally, in May 1977, Beckwith took the briefing to Washington. Several years later, Beckwith wrote:

A single factor that sold the future Delta Force more than any other was terrorism. The unit was dedicated to coming to grips with it. One of the weaknesses in other organizations is that they are only part-timers in this field. Semiprofessionals or gifted amateurs . . . can be no match for international terrorists. It takes full-time professionals who spend as much time on the subject as the enemy does.¹²

On 2 June Beckwith presented his Delta Force proposal to the CSA, Gen Bernard Rogers, who requested a study on how to build the unit and how much it cost. Beckwith credited Lt Gen Edward "Shy" Meyer, US Army, with having "made it all happen" in gaining the chief's support and the tasking for an implementation study fell to Charlie Beckwith. Meyer succeeded Rogers as CSA in 1979.¹³

Although Rogers expressed support for Delta, over the next several months Beckwith became frustrated with the little progress made. The future commander of Delta noted "the greatest danger, in this kind of situation, is that one may get caught in a hostile or indifferent environment." This hostility and indifference as well as jealousy in some Army circles threatened to derail Beckwith's long-held dream.¹⁴

Perhaps it was ironic that while the Army's Delta remained in the concept stage in mid-1977, the Military Airlift Command had already begun to organize and train a CCT for the national counterterrorism effort. If an Army counterterrorist team required airlift, a MAC transport was committed to providing it, and the leadership insisted that a MAC-qualified CCT provide the air traffic control, navigational aids, and runway lights.¹⁵

Retired SMSgt John “Jack” Hughes, assigned in 1977 as the first-ever Headquarters (HQ) MAC noncommissioned officer-in-charge (NCOIC) of CCTs, recalled, “[You] . . . have to understand the climate between the Army and MAC in early 1977. The Army . . . without saying so officially, [was] trying to replace CCT with Army Pathfinders. There was a constant stream [from the Army of], ‘You cannot go in first and we do not have positions for you to go in with the first wave.’”¹⁶

Such expressions—harkening back to the 1950s—revived old tensions between the Air Force and the Army. However, the Army’s attitude had some justification. To the Air Force’s discredit, prior to 1977 Airmen occasionally failed to keep up physically with the Army units they supported or they demonstrated tactical ineptness in the field. As the late Gen Wayne A. Downing, US Army, described,

We’d . . . had bad experiences with people coming into the Rangers and going into operations with us, because generally they weren’t physically fit, they couldn’t hang in there, and they weren’t competent. An exercise we’d run about 2–3 months before [in spring 1977] we’d actually had some Air Force guys accidentally fire some blank ammunition before a raid, which compromised our position. So, we were . . . very wary of outsiders, especially Air Force outsiders who we didn’t know.¹⁷

Such disagreements aside, it was probably either December 1976 or May 1977 when a classified meeting of select MAC personnel took place at Scott AFB, Illinois to establish a CCT designed to support the national counterterrorism mission. The small gathering included Col Keith Grimes, USAF; combat control officer Capt John Carney, USAF; at least two senior enlisted combat controllers; and several others. Grimes was highly regarded in the special operations and weather communities for his work in Southeast Asia, especially for establishing a primitive but effective weather reporting system in Laos that used indigenous personnel. In 1970 he had served as the weather officer for the famed Son Tay raid.¹⁸

Grimes described a message from the CJCS that outlined the elite-classified-counterterrorist units that the president had directed to be formed. “Grimes told me that MAC needed a [classified CCT] to deploy with the units, and he asked me if I would volunteer to lead the team. I jumped at the chance,” Carney recalled. By June 1977, the team known as “Brand X” began to participate in emergency deployment readiness exercises (EDREs) with its Army counterparts. One of the first exercises was with Downing’s 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment.¹⁹

Downing had experienced difficulties with Air Force members augmenting his Rangers and initially declined Carney's offer of support. Downing recalled,

The reason we did this is because we didn't know who they were and what they did, because our experience with CCT was they were [administrative personnel]. . . . So when John [Carney] showed up with the CCT and said they were going to go on this operation . . . my first reaction was, "Thank you very much, do the coordination, and why don't you stay back here on this nice base where we've got these sheets and pillow cases and the Officers' Club."²⁰

The EDRE's scenario involved terrorists holding a stolen nuclear weapon and some hostages in a remote compound in Alaska. Downing's Ranger battalion, undergoing validation as a counterterrorist unit, was expected to locate and neutralize the terrorists, rescue the hostages, and recover the nuclear weapon. Following the planning session in which Downing declined Carney's support, the CCT leader contacted his boss, the MAC director of operations. In short order, a senior officer called the Rangers, relaying the word that "if the Rangers wanted to use MAC aircraft to get to their target area, they absolutely *would* have a MAC combat control team with them."²¹

Downing soon appreciated the change of plans. On 28 July 1977 Carney's CCT jumped from a C-141 Starlifter into Malamute Drop Zone near Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. There the team established three pickup zones, one for each of three helicopters scheduled to recover one of the Ranger platoons after they secured the terrorists' compound. "But one of Downing's platoons became disoriented due to the large magnetic deviation between true north and their magnetic . . . compasses," Carney wrote. Two NCO combat controllers, Billie W. Slayton and John A. Koren, "conferred with the Ranger second lieutenant, and . . . guided his men back to where they were supposed to be. It was just one example of our special tactics troopers taking the initiative and not being inhibited by rank," he continued.²²

That was only the beginning of CCT assistance to the Rangers. An AC-130 gunship scheduled to support the Rangers arrived early and alerted the terrorists that something was awry. The bad guys took off down the road in a vehicle. Meanwhile, "Downing was having [communications] problems, his [helicopters] had left, and his Rangers were on foot. . . ." ²³ Carney, taking a suggestion from Slayton, told Downing the CCT could relay to the gunship to keep the bad guys' vehicle in sight. At the same time, the helicopters could be called back to pick up the Ranger platoons. "Each of Downing's platoons had one

of our combat controllers with them, and we had our own radios, which *always* worked,” Carney said. “We had a cardinal rule: Be able to communicate, or we are worthless.”²⁴

Downing agreed with the improvised plan. “We got on the horn to our controllers,” said Carney, “who passed the word to the Rangers, who clambered back aboard their helicopters and, following cues from the gunship, flew ahead of the vehicles, landed, and set up an ambush.”²⁵ The plan worked. Downing recalled, paraphrasing his after-action report: “I gave those guys big kudos. I said, ‘The success of this operation really rested on these CCT guys.’ I turned to John [Carney] and said something like, ‘John, you’re my brother, I’ll go with you; I’ll take you and your guys with me wherever we go.’ And I . . . passed that word around the Ranger community—and, of course, the reason we did was because John’s guys performed, as John did.”²⁶ Downing was as good as his word. From then on, Brand X, the unofficial designation of the Air Force’s counterterrorist CCT, accompanied the Rangers “wherever they went.”²⁷



Figure 4.1. Left to right: John Koren and Dick West preparing for a HALO jump in the Philippines. (Photo courtesy of John A. Koren.)

In September 1977, General Meyer gave Beckwith the go-ahead to begin working on the manpower and funding issues for the Delta Force, a daunting task for a novice in the inner workings of the Pentagon. Furthermore, Beckwith needed a facility for Delta somewhere on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He wrote,

We started looking very hard at the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] buildings. Meeting after meeting was held. Finally . . . Brig. Gen. James J. Lindsay,

the XVIII Airborne Corps' chief of staff . . . said, "Colonel Beckwith, this doesn't make any sense to me. Here we've got a nice Stockade facility [military jail] where we're keeping eleven bad guys. On the other hand, you want to use it with a bunch of good guys. Why don't we take the eleven and put them downtown in the Fayetteville jail? Your use of the Stockade is better than the use it's being put to now. Colonel, you've got it!" I was impressed. I said to myself, "This general will never get promoted again. He's too practical. He solved my moving problems in less than four minutes."²⁸

In this case, it was inspiring to note that the shrewd and usually correct Beckwith was quite wrong. Lindsay *was* promoted again—three times in fact—and in 1987 he became the first commander in chief of the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).²⁹

In October 1977 another major terrorist incident occurred overseas, leading to Delta Force's activation. Beckwith recalled being interrupted at work with word of a hijacking in "some place called Mogadishu. We looked it up. It was in Somalia."³⁰ Terrorists had seized a German commercial airliner and forced the pilot to fly there. The West Germans' counterterrorist unit, Grenzschutzgruppe 9 der Bundespolizei (GSG-9), succeeded in storming the plane, taking down the four terrorists, and rescuing all the hostages. Shortly after the news broke, Beckwith found himself in General Rogers's office, where the CSA offered his help in getting Delta off the ground. "Afterward, General Meyer was euphoric. Not only did we now have the CSA's blessing, but his active participation as well," Beckwith wrote. The next month, on 19 November 1977, Delta's long-awaited activation order was signed, another big step in the long and arduous process.³¹

In June 1977, Rogers had supported Charlie Beckwith's Delta proposal at the Pentagon. But until Delta's validation, no one knew whether the Army's counterterrorist force was to be comprised of Rangers, Delta, or another entity known as "Blue Light." Headed by the 5th Special Forces Group commander, Col Bob Mountel, Blue Light filled the gap in the country's counterterrorist capability prior to Delta becoming operational.³²

In April 1978, Blue Light participated in a counterterrorist exercise called "End Game," which was scheduled to be observed by Vice President Walter Mondale, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, and the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. A number of Army leaders favored Blue Light, which remained within the Special Forces (Green Beret) community, to be given the counterterrorist job rather than Delta.³³

In August and November 1979 Delta successfully completed two validation exercises. This accomplishment proved Beckwith's men were ready for operational missions and established Delta Force as the nation's sole counterterrorist unit. Delta completed its final validation on the night of 3–4 November, only hours before Iranian radicals took over the US embassy in Tehran.³⁴



Figure 4.2. An early Brand X physical training session, 1977. *Left to right:* Ron Newstrom, John Koren, Jim Moffett, Davy Wilson, Jim Howell, and Jim Keen. (Several other Brand X members are hidden in photo. Photo courtesy of James E. Keen.)

From its start, Brand X was a “pickup” team because when Grimes asked Carney to form the special CCT of up to 18 men, the latter was not given any manpower or equipment allocation. Carney's CCT did not even have an official designation. He simply borrowed combat controllers from other teams to support the Army's exercises. He needed only top-notch controllers, but because of necessary secrecy, he could not say what he needed them to do.³⁵

The lone officer accompanying Carney was a lieutenant, James E. Keen. A former Army Special Forces soldier who later entered combat

control, Keen was the 62nd Military Airlift Wing CCT's assistant officer-in-charge at McChord AFB, Washington. Tapped by Carney in 1977 to participate in Brand X—although he remained stationed at McChord—Keen later described how the CCT supported the deployment exercises in the early months:

We would link up with our Ranger counterparts and we would plan and go into isolation, and the Brand X folks would come from six different locations, [including] Little Rock [AFB, Arkansas], Dyess [AFB, Texas], Charleston [AFB, South Carolina], McChord [AFB, Washington] and maybe three from each location. . . . For every event there were always a few that were in a different capacity. They were pulled out due to injury. So we had a few extra members trying out with us to back fill for the ones that might have been hurt or ill. So we had this ongoing “minor league” system, where we called on a few players that were not in the original [Brand X] organization. I . . . like to think of it as a baseball team that [had] its core players and a few that were brought up from the minors.³⁶



Figure 4.3. CMSgt James A. “Jim” Howell in an ejection seat, 7 May 1977. The first live test ejection with the Convair-designed seat took place when Tech Sergeant Howell ejected safely from an F-106B piloted by Maj James Hendrix on 6 June 1961. (Photo courtesy of Mike “Sgt Mac” McReynolds.)

The stress on Brand X members in the early months was high, exacerbated by Grimes's death in the September 1977 crash of an EC-135 near Albuquerque, New Mexico, during a training scenario. Prior to

his loss, Grimes had worked for the MAC deputy chief of staff for operations plans providing “top cover” for the Brand X CCT.³⁷ Jack Hughes felt that if it had not been for Grimes, Brand X “would have never happen[ed].”³⁸ Retired CMSgt Jim Howell agreed, saying Grimes “was the guy, the force behind the Brand X.”³⁹

When Delta began training at the start of 1978, Carney experienced additional frustrations as he tried to gain acceptance as part of Beckwith’s inner circle. Carney wrote,

We still weren’t part of Charlie’s team. How could we be? My “team” didn’t exist. I’d show up with a different bunch of guys almost every time we worked with Delta. Atop that, wing commanders were getting tired of me robbing their best combat controllers for so many last-minute emergency exercises; they had missions, too, and drop zones to look after. So I had to call combat control teams or send messages to wing staffs all over the United States and often overseas to scarf up the needed people. It was an exhausting, divisive, unworkable setup.⁴⁰

At some point, Carney approached HQ MAC. “I gotta have a team that I’m training constantly. We can’t be playing with the best people . . . [they’ve] got in the Army to do these missions, and here I am with a ‘pick-up’ team. . . . This is going to fail eventually if we don’t get our act together,” he said.⁴¹

In fall 1978 Carney obtained authorization from HQ MAC for six full-time combat controllers stationed at the same base. Although certain exercises called for more than six controllers, Carney was overjoyed. After many months of cobbling together a different CCT on short notice for each exercise, from bases all over the country, Carney “practically had carte blanche to choose people from anywhere in the Air Force, no questions asked.” From then on, he enjoyed a small cadre of permanent combat controllers.⁴²

Relieved “that at last Brand X would have some identity,” Carney selected his six permanent combat controllers: Michael “Mitch” Bryan as his NCOIC, along with enlisted controllers John Koren, Pete Holt, David Wilson, Ron Holder, and Manuel “Bud” Gonzalez. One unique aspect to the enlisted combat controller career field has been that a fair number of men—there are no women—have transitioned to the officer corps in the same field. The extremely demanding physical and training requirements for both enlisted and officers, the small size of the career field, and the all-male camaraderie—indeed, a strong, enduring brotherhood—have promoted the unusual phenomenon. Three of Carney’s original six controllers later became officers. Bryan,

Koren, and Gonzalez were all commissioned in 1980 and ultimately attained the rank of major or lieutenant colonel.⁴³

The team members had colorful backgrounds or personalities. Bud Gonzalez grew up in southern Pennsylvania, working with his uncle's livestock and riding in rodeos along the East Coast. Before enlisting, he seriously considered a professional rodeo career.⁴⁴ John Carney described Holt—who garnered at least two nicknames, “Agent Orange” and “Shoe Phone Pete”—as one who “broke a lot of bureaucratic rules to get the job done.” Holt also was credited with coming up with the unofficial designation of “Brand X.”⁴⁵

Along with authorizations for permanent controllers, Carney obtained permission to station his team closer to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where Delta trained. Maj Gen Thomas M. Sadler, the Twenty-First Air Force commander and the officer to whom Carney officially reported, decided on Charleston AFB, South Carolina. Years later, Sadler quipped that because of the secrecy of Carney's work, “no one in the Air Force had the foggiest notion” of what the tall, engaging Irishman did.⁴⁶ The C-141 Starlifters, the designated airlift for Brand X, were stationed at Charleston. A conventional CCT also was based there to support the 437th Military Airlift Wing, providing a cover for the classified Brand X that moved into an adjacent facility. Holt, assigned to the 437th wing CCT, upon being recruited simply walked next door to join Brand X. Although Carney preferred Fort Bragg in order to mesh with Beckwith and Delta on a day-to-day basis and to gain their “full confidence,” the South Carolina base was a definite improvement.⁴⁷

Retired colonel Carney described the missions his select team conducted:

Every mission given to Brand X involved some new, “special” tactics. We had to land planes with minimum lighting, infrared lights, and little or no communication. Compared to regular combat control work, everything had to be expedited: The whole idea was to use military airlift to deliver a select, small strike force anywhere in the world in the dark of night on the threshold of battle. Brand X was . . . “the air-to-ground interface”; we were the ones communicating with both the ground force and air component commanders. We handled not only the command and control but also the air traffic control, close air support, gunship firing, the drop zones, and the clandestine pickup zones. Without us, the operations simply were not possible. The use of air power in counterterrorist missions was primarily an airlift job; we made that work.⁴⁸

Football had been a big part of John Carney's life. He had played in high school in Groton, Connecticut, and at the University of Arizona. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, as a young Air Force officer he worked as an assistant football coach and physical training instructor at the US Air Force Academy. Understandably, Carney viewed much of life, including the combat control business, through the lens of the game he loved.⁴⁹ He described the origin of his nickname, "Coach":

Obviously, my whole life was athletics prior to going into combat control. And the team concept has got so many analogies it's amazing. . . . When I started into my first team at Dyess [AFB, Texas], on the call signs normally on the radio you say your first and last initial. Like "Carney" is "Charlie-Yankee." Well, there was a "Casey" on the team and there was another "C-Y." . . . These initials were just mind-boggling, [and] when you're out there on the airfield you've gotta make split-second decisions. Send the airplane around . . . and you've gotta know who you're talking to.⁵⁰

Not wanting to risk confusion with initials any longer, Carney ditched them in favor of code names. He continued,

So then mine naturally fell to "Coach." And it stuck over the years, it never went away. . . . I was really close to the team members. . . . I would always get the guys together and we'd go out afterwards and have a beer somewhere. . . . and of course I didn't want them calling me "Major" . . . in the bar, so they just referred to me as Coach. We still kept the protocol, but we enjoyed one another . . . trusted one another. So, that's the reason for Coach.⁵¹

The Coach applied football lessons in other ways as well, especially in training and physical conditioning. He was determined for his team to gain acceptance by Beckwith's Delta Force, increasing the jump and dive qualifications for his controllers, working on their shooting skills, and making sure "we were in shape." As he described,

We were determined that we would never fall behind on Ranger road marches or cross-country runs. So we started doing a lot of extra physical training on our own. Falling back on my days as a physical education instructor at the Air Force Academy, I introduced periodic aerobics and strength training. We didn't want to embarrass anybody; we wanted to be part of the team. . . . We were in shape, we could shoot, and Delta knew we were serious about helping where we could.⁵²

The Iranian Hostage Crisis and Rescue Attempt

Coach Carney's two years of hard work with Brand X soon paid off. At the beginning of 1979, Iran was in the midst of an Islamic

revolution. After his 37 years of rule—characterized by many Iranians as secular, immoral, and repressive—growing instability in Iran led Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi to flee to Egypt. Soon after, two million cheering Iranians welcomed the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, returning from exile, to become the country's new ruler. In late October, Pres. Jimmy Carter decided to allow the shah to enter the United States for medical treatment, and on 4 November 1979 Khomeini-inspired radicals stormed the US embassy in Tehran, taking some 60 US citizens hostage. The resulting hostage crisis preoccupied Carter. As then-White House chief of staff, Hamilton Jordan, described, "There were two White Houses," he recalled, "one working on the hostages, the other working on everything else."⁵³

The crisis served as the backdrop for a dramatic rescue attempt resulting in tragedy at a desolate Iranian desert site and helped end Carter's chances for a second term. Much ink has been spilled over the mission but little has been written on the role of the MAC CCT at Desert One.⁵⁴

Within days of the embassy's seizure, an ad hoc joint task force (JTF) began forming in the Joint Chiefs of Staff's (JCS) Special Operations Division. Maj Gen James Vaught, a highly decorated Army officer, commanded the task force, while his deputy, Col James Kyle, USAF, possessed a wealth of experience in special operations C-130s. Beckwith, the ground force commander, expected his elite counterterrorist force to enter the embassy and rescue the hostages. Planners added Navy RH-53D minesweeping helicopters to provide airlift for both the counterterrorist ground force and the hostages.⁵⁵

In another iteration of the long-running Army–Air Force controversy over combat control, in the rescue's early planning the Rangers were tasked to handle CCT-type duties. After one mistake-ridden exercise, Maj Gen Philip C. Gast, USAF, declared unequivocally a phrase with long-term consequences: "Airmanship will be handled by *airmen*."⁵⁶ That point proved to be a recurring challenge, but, from then on Carney's Brand X team trained with the JTF to provide air traffic control and remote landing zone navigational systems as well as lighting and marshaling of the aircraft in the desert.⁵⁷

Many authors addressing the hostage rescue attempt have mentioned the term "compartmentalization," the practice of denying information to those without a specific need-to-know, including the participants in an operation. Combat controller Rex Wollmann's experience verified that aspect of the operation. In the winter of 1979–80, he was a young

staff sergeant assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing's CCT at Hurlburt and received a call from Carney, whom he had never met. The major asked him to bring a wet cell battery for a tactical aid to navigation (TACAN) for an exercise in Yuma, Arizona. Wollmann recalled,

It was basically, hey, you're coming here, bring this battery to help support us. I actually brought the wrong [battery] because I didn't understand him, but it worked out anyway as far as what we were doing. And that's when I started seeing everything kind of tying in together. Even though I wasn't briefed on what was going on . . . I think at that time I realized that this [was] for a bigger purpose than just training aircrew.⁵⁸

Wollmann became a frequent participant in the exercises, and after one scenario, he cornered Colonel Kyle, the JTF deputy commander and the Air Force component commander, and said, "I know what's going on . . . and if this thing's going to go, I want in!"⁵⁹ Kyle remained noncommittal, and it was some time before Wollmann was designated a participant in the operation.⁶⁰

There were five-and-a-half months between the seizure of the embassy compound and personnel and the execution of the rescue operation. One reason for the delay was that the JTF had to be ready to conduct the mission as best it could if the Iranians started executing the hostages. That gave the task force a short-term perspective on training. There were also several occasions when diplomatic initiatives appeared close to bringing the hostages home. Each time that happened, the JTF lowered its expectations for the approval of the rescue mission. That was the case when higher headquarters directed the task force to stand down for two weeks for Christmas as in normal peacetime training.⁶¹ Combat controller Koren quoted another member of the task force who put it this way: "We didn't have five months to get ready one time. We had one month to get ready *five times*."⁶²

The final, approved plan was complicated and required some 40 hours over two nights from start to finish. On the first night, six C-130s (three MC-130 Talons and three EC-130E aircraft) were to fly from Masirah Island, Oman, into Iran and land at a semiprepared site (Desert One) well southeast of Tehran; eight US Navy RH-53s—piloted mostly by Marine aviators—were to launch from the deck of the USS *Nimitz* and land at Desert One. The helicopters would refuel, after which the C-130s would return to Masirah; the helicopters would then airlift Beckwith's ground force to a hide site about 50 miles from Tehran. There, US agents would meet the troopers and lead them on foot to a remote hilly area where they would hunker down for the day.

Meanwhile, the helicopters would fly another 50 miles to a remote hideout where they were to remain camouflaged during the upcoming daylight hours. The JTF planned to monitor communications throughout the day to determine whether or not the rescue force had been detected. On the second night, assuming all had gone well, MC-130s and AC-130s were to launch from Wadi Kena, Egypt, to secure the Iranian airfield at Manzariyeh, south of the US embassy, and provide close air support in the Tehran vicinity, respectively. Two C-141s were to fly into Manzariyeh to await the arrival of the ground rescue force and the hostages. The Starlifters were to evacuate the rescuers and the hostages and provide medical care as needed. Meanwhile, the agents were to load Beckwith's men into several vehicles and drive them into Tehran for the assault on the embassy. Once Beckwith gave the signal to begin the attack, an AC-130 was to position itself overhead and the RH-53s would fly to the soccer stadium to receive the rescued hostages and take them to Manzariyeh. There, abandoning the H-53s, the C-141s were to evacuate the hostages, ground force, and helicopter crews out of Iran.⁶³



Figure 4.4. CCT members, Operation Eagle Claw (aka Desert One). *Left to right:* Mitch Bryan, John Koren, Mike Lampe, Bud Gonzalez, Dick West, John “Coach” Carney (on bike), Bill Sink, Rex Wollmann, and Doug Cohee. In 1973, Bryan, Koren, and Lampe had served together at Udorn, Thailand. (Photo courtesy of Mike “Sgt Mac” McReynolds.)

Six enlisted combat controllers and Carney expected to enter Iran. Mike Lampe, Koren, and Gonzalez had the marshaling duties on the North landing zone (LZ) of Desert One, where three of the six C-130s and six of the eight RH-53s were to land. On the South LZ, West and Wollmann were to place the TACAN next to the dirt road and marshal the other three C-130s and the remaining two helicopters. Carney and Bryan, collocated with Colonel Kyle, had the job of establishing the control point next to the TACAN and handling the air traffic control duties from there. Two other combat controllers, Bill Sink and Doug Cohee, were to remain at Masirah to support the JTF, and they were not happy about it.⁶⁴

When Carney's team arrived at Wadi Kena on 20 April 1980, operational details remained to be worked out. Prior to a covert reconnaissance mission several weeks earlier—during which Carney was flown into Desert One—all planning had been based on a single LZ. The reconnaissance mission, flown in a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Twin Otter, was piloted by Jim Rhyne, who had worked with Mike Lampe on Project 404 in Laos. Carney had one hour on the ground to take soil samples and emplace newly devised, remotely activated lights in the traditional “box-and-one” pattern that were to guide the first Talon to a safe landing. If caught by the Iranians, his cover story was that he was a geologist and had gotten lost—definitely not a story that Carney was anxious to test.⁶⁵

Returning safely with Iranian soil and without having to resort to any fabrications, Carney was confident that a dual runway operation was feasible. But it could not be practiced in the final rehearsal on 11 April. The road next to where he had buried the “pop-on” light-emitting diodes (LED) separated the two LZs. Koren summarized the CCT's role at Desert One: “The biggest thing . . . was laying out runways, parking the aircraft [for refueling], and getting the TACAN up and running—which was a fairly heavy piece of equipment and emitted a lot of power.”⁶⁶ To assist in moving up and down the LZs, the team had acquired two motorcycles—an innovation later adopted by the Rangers—and part of their time at Wadi Kena was spent practicing with their Kawasaki bikes.⁶⁷

Finally, the mission was a “go.” Departing from Masirah Island at dusk on 24 April, Carney's seven-man CCT flew into Desert One on the lead Talon, piloted by Bob Brenci. Two other Talons and three EC-130s followed, along with the eight RH-53 helicopters. En route, Brenci's crew encountered large areas of powdery, suspended dust

associated with distant thunderstorms. Known as a *haboob*—Arabic for “strong wind”—the condition had not been forecast and proved harrowing for the helicopters. Four hours after takeoff and nearing Desert One, Brenci’s MC-130 finally passed through the haboob. The night air was now crystal clear and the weather perfect at the landing site.⁶⁸

Undoubtedly, one of the tensest moments for the CCT was when Bryan activated the LED lights that Carney had planted in the ground nearly four weeks earlier. Kyle described those moments:

We were now five miles from the desert landing zone (LZ), and Mitch flipped the switches that would activate the lights. Would they work? They’d been out there at the mercy of the elements for almost a month. All eyes were straining to catch a glimpse of them. . . . “There they are! Off to the right!” It was Carney. A cheer went up and John was on the receiving end of some good-natured back-slapping and kidding about his “Flash Gordon” device.⁶⁹

Within minutes of Brenci’s landing, two unsettling interruptions took place. First, an Iranian tour bus drove into the middle of the site. Beckwith had planned for such a possibility, but its occurrence at the start of ground operations must have tightened a few stomach muscles. Ground force members exited the aircraft, stopped the bus, and secured its terrified driver and more than 40 passengers. Wollmann recalled that he and West were so intent on carrying the TACAN off the Talon’s ramp that they didn’t even see the bus until they were almost the only ones left standing there. “When we saw the bus,” Wollmann said, “it was . . . oh, we shouldn’t be doing this just yet.”⁷⁰

Only a few minutes later, a fuel truck followed by a small pickup rumbled down the same road. A ground force member fired a warning shot that the driver ignored, after which the ground force fired on the truck with one or more light antitank weapons. The truck burst into flames—ruining the night vision of everyone in the area—but the driver managed to jump out and escape in the second vehicle. Kyle asked Beckwith what to make of the situation. Beckwith quipped, “Let’s don’t get excited until we get eight or ten vehicles in here and have to establish a parking lot.”⁷¹ Shrewdly, he surmised that the fuel truck was part of a smuggling operation and that the driver was unlikely to report anything to Iranian authorities. In any case, the driver had neither seen the Talon nor heard American voices.⁷² In the meantime, the CCT set up both landing strips, north and south of the road, using basically a “compass-and-pacing” technique, turned on the lights, and was ready for the rest of the force to arrive. The mission continued.⁷³

It was no easy task to assist in the landing and parking of aircraft under the conditions at Desert One. “Once somebody landed we had to marshal them into their parking position because this was not a definable area,” Koren said. “We only had the box-and-one, coupled with the obscuration with the dust and the sand, we had to . . . hand marshal . . . with our night-vision marshaling wands into parking positions.”⁷⁴ The controllers aimed for only 20 feet of separation between C-130 wingtips and the rotor sweep of the H-53s, largely because of the limited length of the EC-130s’ fuel bladder hoses needed to refuel the helicopters. “And that’s very close, at nighttime under night vision goggles [NVG] in a dust environment in a combat zone,” Koren added.⁷⁵

Although the lead Talon had perhaps the most challenging landing, the nearest occurrence to a mishap *upon the landing* probably involved Hal Lewis’s EC-130. After Brenci’s arrival on the South LZ, Marty Jubelt’s Talon was the next to set down, landing on the North LZ. Three minutes later, Steve Fleming landed his MC-130 on the southern strip. Lewis was next on the North side, piloting the first of the three tankers. Working on the northern strip, Lampe described the scene: “We’re moving like molasses in January in the sand, with our rucksacks and our weapons. . . . we’ve got a bike [motorcycle] that’s pretty much useless to us in the soft sand, so . . . we’re doing everything on foot.”⁷⁶

The sand slowed the CCT and the ground force members as they off-loaded equipment from Jubelt’s Talon. “I keep looking at my watch, knowing the time [for aircraft landing] sequence. I didn’t know if Mitch [Bryan] was giving [Lewis] a go-around. . . . I’m . . . realizing the next aircraft is supposed to land in this LZ [and] is probably just turning final. . . . So I keep trying to call Mitch, I can’t get a hold of him,” Lampe continued.⁷⁷ Finally, Lampe decided to move Jubelt on his own. “I could see the . . . Delta guys were still off-loading and so I finally made a decision and . . . got the aircraft’s attention,” he said.⁷⁸ Turning around with his marshaling wands, Lampe moved as quickly as he could to get Jubelt’s aircraft away from the LZ. As Jubelt’s Talon turned out of the way, Lewis’s aircraft came right past him. “I just made an independent decision to move that aircraft at that time based on knowing what the time sequence of the next landing was, and I’m glad I did,” Lampe said.⁷⁹

Russ Tharp and Jerry Uttaro piloted the last two EC-130s. Tharp’s landing meant there were five C-130s on the ground. It was time to

launch Brenci and Jubelt on their return to Masirah to make room for Uttaro and the inbound helicopters. As soon as the dust settled from Tharp's touchdown, the CCT marshaled Brenci into position and launched him from the South LZ, followed by Jubelt on the North LZ. Uttaro's landing a few minutes later placed two EC-130s on the northern strip with one tanker and the remaining Talon to the south.⁸⁰

Following the arrival of the C-130s, Lampe, Koren, and Gonzalez established the standard "Y-lighting pattern" in preparation for the helicopters' arrival. Two of the original eight helicopters failed to arrive at Desert One, one abandoned by its crew in the desert with a blade warning light. The second crew that aborted returned to the USS *Nimitz* with multiple instrument and navigational system failures. That left six helicopters, the absolute minimum required to complete the mission.⁸¹

Arriving late, at different times and from different directions, the six remaining RH-53s had separated under the near zero visibility conditions created by the unexpected haboob. Approaching the haboob, one of the helicopter pilots described it as "a wall of talcum powder."⁸² When the first helicopter finally touched down, its rotor downwash kicked up sand and debris that knocked out one of Lampe's NVG lenses and one of Gonzalez's as well. The two worked together slowly and carefully to get the H-53 parked. When all six had landed, four were positioned to the north behind two of the EC-130s (Lewis and Uttaro); the remaining two were parked to the south behind the third tanker (Tharp).⁸³

The mission, although well behind schedule, continued to that point. But en route, "Helo-2" had lost one of its hydraulics systems, creating a serious flight control situation. The pilot had continued to the landing site in hopes the condition might be rectified on the ground. It could not, which reduced the helicopter force to five. Much earlier, leadership had decided that six helicopters were required to complete the mission. The on-scene leadership quickly conferred and agreed they now faced an abort situation. That decision was relayed to the JTF commander and the White House. With a heavy heart, President Carter accepted the decision of his field commanders.⁸⁴

The force faced a withdrawal from the Iranian desert, and at that point disaster struck. On the north side, Hal Lewis's tanker was so short on fuel that he needed to launch immediately to make it back to Masirah, but Helo-3 and Helo-4 were parked behind him. Lewis could not move until they were out of the way. Helo-3, unable to

ground taxi, picked up to a hover and encountered a brownout—a serious reduction in the pilot’s visibility that obscures outside visual references necessary for aircraft control. The pilot drifted sideways into the left side of the tanker, resulting in a tremendous explosion and casualties.⁸⁵

Of the several environmental factors that challenged the CCT at Desert One—the darkness of a NVG landing zone, the temperature hovering around 90 degrees, and the bone-rattling noise from C-130 and H-53 engines that made communications extremely difficult—the ever-present dust may have been the worst. Wollmann described it as powdery, so fine that just walking through it created dust clouds.⁸⁶ Koren added, “It was very hot. We didn’t have much of a crosswind, we had a lot of suspended dust . . . it was not a nice place.”⁸⁷ The C-130 propellers and H-53 rotors only made the dust situation worse, so visibility was extremely limited. Operating with just one NVG lens each, Lampe and Gonzalez probably had less than 50 feet of visibility—and that with only one eye.⁸⁸

Published works on Operation Eagle Claw suggested the CCT erred in two specific actions in the desert. In *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America’s War Against Terrorism*, the authors stated that Maj James Schaefer, the pilot of the helicopter involved in the collision, “lifted off and turned 10 degrees to the left, keeping his eyes fixed on the sergeant [the CCT marshaler]. . . . But the sergeant backed away from the 100-mile-per-hour blast of Schaefer’s rotors. What Schaefer thought was a stationary object was now moving; Schaefer believed he was drifting left when in fact the sergeant was moving right.”⁸⁹ So readers were led to believe the marshaler was partially responsible for the tragic mishap. This scenario’s problem was that as soon as the RH-53 lifted off, the ever-present dust that plagued every movement of men and machines at the site that night engulfed it. Even if the pilot expected to use his marshaler as a hover reference, he could not have kept “his eyes fixed on the sergeant” after lifting into a hover and thereby creating a dust storm with the powerful downwash of the rotors.⁹⁰

The second action was the CCT’s retrieval of the LED lights during the evacuation following the mishap. “When the CCT removed the runway lights and replaced them with chem-lites, they did not realize that the pilots could not see the dimmer [chem-lites] that outlined the runway,” retired Air Force colonel and Talon pilot Jerry L. Thigpen wrote.⁹¹ As a result, when Russ Tharp and Steve Fleming started their takeoff runs from the South LZ, each rammed his C-130 into

the roughly three-foot-high sand berm marking the road, leading their passengers and crews to wonder if they were going to make it. “A catastrophe was avoided thanks to the durability of the tough C-130 aircraft and the superior flying skills of their crews,” Thigpen continued. While Thigpen’s words were correct, they left the reader with a wrong impression of the CCT’s role.⁹²

In *The Guts to Try*, retired colonel Kyle wrote that after locating John Carney in the aftermath of the helicopter/C-130 crash, he directed Carney to “make sure you have all your runway lighting and navigation gear collected.” Carney did so. If the CCT was at fault, the Air Force component commander who directed the retrieval shared the responsibility.⁹³

The single CCT action that Carney regretted appears not to have been addressed. In an interview, he stated, “The only thing I can think of is that nobody should have left that control point, and that’s what I told combat controllers day in and day out after that. You don’t leave the control point. You stay there, and that’s where everything is controlled from. Every decision that goes on at that airfield is made from that control point. . . . You never let that happen again.”⁹⁴

Carney was referring to the fact that he allowed Mitch Bryan to leave the control point to deal with a radio problem just prior to the decision to reposition Helo-3. The outcome of any different course of action, though, is unknown.⁹⁵

Several of the CCT experienced the explosion from close quarters. Lampe, positioned near Lewis’s tanker at the time, said that he turned his back to avoid the rotor downwash. The next thing he remembered was the heat and “huge fireball from the explosion” that almost knocked him down. Lampe felt that the egress training the operators practiced at places like Yuma, Arizona, and Indian Springs, Nevada, was partly responsible for enabling them to get out of the burning C-130 as well as they did.⁹⁶

It was perhaps remarkable that no operator or crewmember remained trapped inside the cargo compartment of Lewis’s aircraft. Indeed, two operators saved Lewis’s radio operator, Joseph Beyers, when they reentered the burning aircraft and pulled him out. Several others caught in the cargo section suffered burns but survived. Tragically, five crewmembers trapped inside the EC-130’s cabin perished, as did three of the crew of Helo-3.⁹⁷

Following the explosion, the seven CCT members, working with the C-130 loadmasters, distributed and loaded the passengers on the

remaining three C-130s and accounted for all personnel. Kyle was adamant that after all that had gone wrong that night, the JTF was not going to leave someone behind. Minutes later, Uttaro's EC-130, the last aircraft on the ground at Desert One, departed. The last two men to board were Kyle, then Carney.⁹⁸

Post-Desert One Developments

The events that unfolded in the Iranian desert on the night of 24–25 April 1980 were marked indelibly in the minds and hearts of all participants. The “miracle” on ice that a dedicated team of Americans had pulled off in February at the Winter Olympics was not to be repeated by another equally dedicated team in April in the Iranian desert. “It was a national mission and we let the country down,” one CCT member recalled.⁹⁹ Another said, “You had America’s best out there, and it didn’t work.”¹⁰⁰ A third felt “a whole lot of disappointment, disappointment in a lot of ways,” coupled with uncertainty over the fate of the hostages once the Iranians realized what had taken place.¹⁰¹

Despite mission failure, Operation Eagle Claw served as a catalyst. First, for the United States, the event signaled the undeniable need to rebuild the nation’s special operations capabilities—a work that began with the establishment of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), far more appreciated since 11 September 2001.

Bull Simons Award

The loss of eight special operators that night—five Airmen, three Marines—and one who remained incapacitated left 17 young children in need of educational assistance. In response, SOF advocates established the Bull Simons Award to provide for the children’s education. In 1998, Simons award officials joined with another SOF-oriented fund to form the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, which Carney led for the next 15 years. Hundreds of children of SOF warriors lost in operations or training have benefited from the foundation’s work. Among the college graduates was the son of Air Force captain Hal Lewis, who perished at Desert One.*

*CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, to the author, e-mails, August 2007; and Norrad, discussion with the author, 9 December 2010. Norrad also noted that after 2001 the foundation’s mission statement changed to include the children of severely wounded special operators.

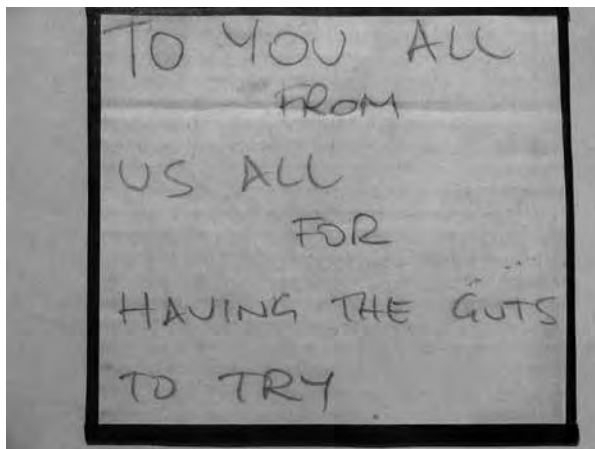


Figure 4.5. British personnel at Masirah, Oman, wrote this inscription on a case of beer and delivered it to the Americans just after the attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran (April 1980). (Photo courtesy of Roland Guidry and AFSOC History Office.)

But there was little time for dwelling on the failure in the desert. Within two weeks, planning at the Pentagon resumed for a possible second rescue attempt. Any second try was going to be even more difficult and costly than the first, as the Iranians immediately dispersed the hostages to discourage that very thing.¹⁰²

A large training program known as Honey Badger took place throughout the summer and fall of 1980. The program was intended to develop specific capabilities, such as airfield seizures, but was not tied to any particular scenario for Iran. Still, many operators from the April raid, including CCT members, participated in Honey Badger. Combat controller John Koren called the program's training "very intense."¹⁰³ The newly formed JTF achieved a milestone in late July at Reese AFB, Texas, when it conducted the first successful dual-runway seizure. From 9–16 October, Carney's CCT participated in another combined exercise that included Delta Force and Rangers and utilized fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft. In late November Exercise Storm Cloud—the final JTF exercise—took place.¹⁰⁴

One of the most unexpected decisions during this period stemmed from the helicopter-related failures in the Iranian desert. In May 1980 the Air Staff diverted nine HH-53H Pave Low helicopters from MAC to the Tactical Air Command. The Pave Lows, under development for

a decade, had been slated to enhance MAC's combat rescue capability. Instead, they formed the backbone of the Air Force's SOF rotary-wing force for almost the next three decades. The sudden decision also signaled the beginning of a lengthy period of decline in the status and capabilities of Air Force "Air Rescue," a trend that affected the evolving special tactics community to some degree as well.¹⁰⁵

Fortunately, a second rescue try was not required. The Iranians feared president-elect Ronald W. Reagan, who shortly after his election referred to them as "barbarians" for their harsh treatment of the hostages, stating he "did not bargain with such people."¹⁰⁶ Taking no chances, on 20 January 1981—the day of Reagan's inauguration—the Iranians released the remaining 52 US hostages. Not only was Carter denied a second term in the White House, in part because of the prolonged hostage crisis, he was also denied the opportunity to welcome the Americans home while still serving as the president of the United States.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, 1981 witnessed another development Carney had sought for several years: the stationing of his CCT near Delta's home at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In late 1980, as the planning and training for a second rescue attempt in Iran ended, Carney and the combat controllers received permanent change of station orders to move to Pope AFB, bordering Fort Bragg. Most of the original 16 combat controllers in the unit had settled into their new surroundings by early 1981. Their designation changed to the innocuous but sharp-sounding "Det 1, MACOS" (MAC operations staff)—by far the favorite of several unit designations in the 1980s.¹⁰⁸

After the Southeast Asia conflict and the "hollow force" of the Carter administration, the drawing down of the nation's special operations forces in addition to Air Force combat control career field issues brought on especially hard times in the late 1970s. Jump pay, career progression, and the controllers' beret comprised three significant issues for combat controllers. First, in the 1970s Air Force parachutists were authorized a monthly hazardous duty pay—\$110 for officers and \$55 for enlisted members—but for a time the service discontinued jump pay for some enlisted personnel. Because all combat controllers—the vast majority were enlisted—were jump-qualified and performed jumps regularly to stay combat-ready, the loss of enlisted jump pay for two months constituted a serious morale issue.¹⁰⁹

Second, through the 1970s the Air Force neither organized nor managed combat control to facilitate career progression and combat readiness. Because CCTs lacked a squadron-based organization, officers had

no opportunity for squadron command. For a time CCT fell under mobile aerial port squadrons (or aerial port squadrons). Later, operationally, CCTs fell under the deputy commanders for operations of the respective airlift wings. With such an organizational structure, combat control officers were forced to leave the career field to have any chance for promotion beyond the rank of major. Just at the time that an experienced mid-career officer might begin to do something significant in his career field, he departed. In several cases, enlisted members were glad to see officers leave who had demonstrated less than stellar performance or character. “Combat control had become a dead-end career field, suffering from neglect, downsizing, and budget cuts. . . . We were looked upon with indifference,” Carney said, referring to the mid-to-late 1970s. Air Force culture simply didn’t have a place for the community now admiringly termed Special Tactics. “In essence,” he wrote, “we were ground warriors, and there was an institutional Air Force reluctance to embrace a ground warrior ethic.”¹¹⁰

The fact that combat controllers spent the vast majority of their time handling local DZs and retrieving training bundles for their airlift wings demonstrated that attitude. In most cases, the wings allocated only two weeks of the year to accomplish realistic wartime training for the CCTs. “We were not organized, trained, equipped, or funded to go fight,” Carney said.¹¹¹ A long-time enlisted combat controller who retired in the early 1980s recalled a typical self-deprecating reference to controllers as “human training bundles.”¹¹² As the joke went, “Training bundles they throw out the back of airplanes, but combat controllers have legs and can walk back in . . . training bundles you have to go out and find.” Kiraly recalled the term for the Pope AFB combat controllers— “Manchester Roadrunners”—on account of their daily trips out Manchester Road in support of Fort Bragg’s drop zones.¹¹³

Third, the Air Force leadership allowed combat controllers’ coveted navy blue beret to be granted to a second, much larger career field. The beret thereby lost its uniqueness and appeal. In 1974–75 Brig Gen Thomas Sadler commanded the airlift wing at Charleston AFB, where he was impressed with the sharp look of the combat controllers in their berets and bloused boots. After Charleston, Sadler went to the Pentagon as the Air Force’s chief of security police (SP). Wanting to improve the look and esprit of the SP career field, he granted permission for the SPs to wear a beret—the same navy blue beret the combat controllers wore.¹¹⁴

Rex Wollmann graduated from Combat Control School in the spring of 1978. His class was awarded the traditional navy blue beret, but his may have been the last class to receive it. In the mid-1970s, CCT morale plummeted by the fact that by sharing the same colored beret with Air Force SPs, most people on base mistook them for “cops” rather than combat controllers.¹¹⁵

Wayne Norrad and fellow cadre members Mike Steinbeck, Steve Horvath, Ron Holder, and John Lebold were assigned to the Combat Control School at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas, from 1976–79. Nearby, in Cabot, Arkansas, the Bancroft factory produced berets. The CCT staff at HQ MAC directed Norrad to buy several different colored berets and send them to the CCT Division at Scott AFB, Illinois. The scarlet red beret was selected by both the school cadre and HQ MAC. Combat controllers switched to the scarlet beret in 1978 and it remains their distinctive headgear today.¹¹⁶

Another change was the authorization to wear the beret with all uniform combinations. The blue beret adorned with jump wings could be worn with the utility type uniform and flight suits but not with the service dress uniform. In addition to selecting a new color beret, a “flash/logo” device was designed because jump wings/badges were not allowed to be worn on service dress headgear. Jack Hughes and Gene Adcock designed the flash and, with the help of Gene’s spouse, wrote the heraldry. Effective 6 May 1978 CCT members were authorized to wear the scarlet red beret and bloused trousers with combat boots and all uniform combinations, both on and off base.¹¹⁷

In September 1981, Norrad was one of the last of the original 16 “plankholder” controllers to arrive at Pope AFB as part of Det 1, MACOS. In 1966 Norrad and an American Legion baseball teammate enlisted under the “buddy plan” and went through boot camp together. Following several assignments, including a tour in Thailand and a 10-month break in service, Norrad returned to active duty in 1970 and a year later cross-trained into the combat control career field. Following tours at Pope and in Southeast Asia, where he saw combat action in the final phase of US involvement in the war, he returned stateside, quickly becoming the superintendent of the Combat Control School at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas. From 1979 to 1981 he served on the MAC Inspector General’s team, where he inspected Carney’s CCT. After the two met and got to know one another, Carney was impressed with Norrad’s capabilities and asked him to join Det 1, MACOS, recently established at Pope. A master sergeant at the

time and wanting to go where the action was, Norrad accepted. There he rejoined fellow controller and friend Mike Lampe, with whom he had completed Air Traffic Control School and Combat Control School in 1971–72.¹¹⁸

In the early 1980s, Norrad and Lampe led the Silver and Blue CCT teams at Det 1 in support of the newly formed JSOC. A decade later, the two again worked closely together when Norrad served as Air Force Special Operations Command's (AFSOC) senior enlisted advisor at the same time Lampe held the top enlisted position at USSOCOM.¹¹⁹

The chief purpose of Det 1, MACOS, was to support the nation's newly-developed counterterrorist capability, of which Delta was the core. But the recently designated Det 1 operated for some time on equipment that was anything but new. Nicholas Kiraly, Det 1's first chief master sergeant, recalled that when the unit formed at Pope, "All the different combat control teams' excess radios were given to us, to start up this new high-speed [outfit] working with the SEAL teams and . . . Delta . . . and we had all the hand-me-down equipment. That's how we started up the unit."¹²⁰ Similarly, Carney wrote that while the Army's Delta and the Navy's SEAL Team Six enjoyed strong funding, "I was begging for two hundred dollars to buy six Casio SCUBA diving watches. To scrounge up even that amount of money, I had to appeal to a staff officer at wing level."¹²¹

Rarely did HQ MAC "throw money" in the direction of its combat controllers, but Det 1, MACOS, eventually managed to tap into the largesse of JSOC's funding for a new building. Promised some space in the planned new facility—eventually, they got "real offices and real showers," Lampe recounted—while the new facility was being constructed Carney got by with doublewide trailers just outside the JSOC compound. In essence, despite Det 1's national counterterrorist mission, in the early 1980s scrounging and 'getting by' remained the order of the day. Unit members skilled at carpentry, especially Rex Evitts and Fran Oster, built parachute tables, team lockers, and other items. "Anything that we had to put in the trailers, we didn't [acquire it] through the military supply system. We ordered pallets of plywood and . . . when we weren't out training we were helping build stuff," Lampe recalled.¹²²

Det 1, MACOS, worked with other "high-speed" entities focused on countering terrorist threats, Kiraly said.¹²³ But in such an arena, mishaps sometimes occurred. One such tragedy in September 1981 illustrated the difficult transition from Desert One-type tactics, techniques, and procedures to newer ways of operating. Norrad recalled

his first major exercise with Det 1, MACOS, three weeks after his arrival. The exercise called for a night airfield seizure by the Rangers at Indian Springs Air Force Auxiliary Field, Nevada:

The drop was actually pretty much on target. I landed almost perfectly where I wanted to be at the intersection of the runway and one of the taxiways. Put my parachute in the bag, dragged it off to the side, put my [chemical] light . . . so we could police [the area], and got to the control point. We had 30 minutes from the time we jumped before the first aircraft would land. So you basically had about 20 minutes to get out of your parachute, get to where you were supposed to be for your control point, for our [three-man CCT] to get to the end of the runway, clear it, make sure there was nothing on the runway, put the box-and-[one] light pattern out, get the radios up, talk to the command-and-control bird . . . and then in those days . . . it was you clear *the first lead aircraft* to come in and land.¹²⁴

Norrad's team, wearing NVGs, accomplished their tasks, contacted the lead MC-130, and cleared it to land. According to the procedures then in use, clearing the lead aircraft also constituted clearance for follow-on aircraft to land. Norrad noticed that when the fourth or fifth aircraft landed, it rolled well past the intended turnoff point. He watched the errant "130" for several moments and then saw a flash of light that came from the next aircraft in the flow. One C-130H from the 463rd Tactical Airlift Wing at Dyess AFB, Texas, crashed about a mile short of the runway during its blacked-out approach to landing. In the ensuing fire, the crew and most of the 58 Rangers aboard escaped unharmed, but seven Rangers died and 19 were hospitalized. Among those killed was Lt Col William Powell, the 2nd Rangers' battalion commander. When he died, Powell was 42 years old and had young children. Years later, his son and daughter graduated from college, their tuition paid for by the Special Operations Warrior Foundation.¹²⁵ In the aftermath of the crash, Gen James R. Allen, MAC commander, suspended all special operations low level-II (SOLL-II) operations until the command reviewed its procedures. Five months passed before SOLL-II operations resumed. Later, Norrad expressed his dislike of the established communications procedure in those days:

How can you call a guy . . . an air traffic controller when you give an aircraft [clearance] to land, but you're actually clearing the whole file behind him? . . . There's got to be more positive control than that. . . . What we need is . . . some way to know that the aircraft has our box-and-[one] visually located and we need one of our controllers to visually locate him and find out if he's on course or not.¹²⁶

Until that time, the Entebbe–Desert One mind-set of “you can’t communicate because that gives off the intelligence” dominated the tactics, techniques, and procedures of the national counterterrorist community, Norrad recalled. However, in part as a result of the Indian Springs mishap, the technique of rarely talking on the radio to limit one’s signature changed shortly thereafter.¹²⁷

At the close of the war in Southeast Asia, Air Force combat control had been a neglected and poorly managed career field, even “a dying art.” At the same time, the United States lacked a national counterterrorist capability. But by the early 1980s, significant change was evident in both arenas. Air Force combat control still had far to go, but visionaries at HQ MAC, coupled with John Carney’s leadership, produced a small, elite unit capable of supporting the nation’s counterterrorist assets. At Desert One, Carney’s CCT supported the nation’s foremost counterterrorist unit, the Army’s Delta Force. Though the operation failed, the CCT’s performance may well have prevented a worse catastrophe from occurring. As Air Force combat control continued to mature, other conflicts and challenges lay just ahead.¹²⁸

Notes

1. Secretary of defense to secretaries of military departments, memorandum, subj: “Terrorism,” 8 May 1976, in Papers of CJCS Gen George S. Brown, NARA (Archives-II, College Park, MD), box 7 of 128, file 010-OSD, 1 Jan 76–31 Jul 76, including quotes.

2. Yeshayahu Ben-Porat, Eitan Haber, and Zeev Schiff, *Entebbe Rescue* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977), 253.

3. *Ibid.*, chapters 14–15 and 22–24.

4. *Ibid.*, 302–03. The now-famous Mercedes was purchased at a Tel Aviv used car lot, restored, and quickly painted to resemble the staff cars used by many Ugandan officers.

5. *Ibid.*, 271; Col John T. Carney, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 November 2006; and Gen Wayne A. Downing, US Army, retired, interview with the author, 19 March 2007.

6. Ben-Porat, Haber, and Schiff, *Entebbe Rescue*, 305–06.

7. *Ibid.*, 312–13.

8. *Ibid.*, chapter 28 and pg xii.

9. Col Craig F. Brotchie, USAF, retired, discussion (not part of interview, same date) with the author, 21 July 2007. Among several who expressed similar views, Gen Wayne A. Downing stated that in 1976 the United States lacked the counterterrorist capability of the Israelis: Downing, interview.

10. CJCS to secretary of defense, memorandum, subj: “Rescue Operations,” 15 July 1976, in Papers of CJCS Gen George S. Brown, NARA (Archives-II, College Park, Md.), box 2 of 128, file CM-1047-76, including quotes.

11. Charlie A. Beckwith and Donald Knox, *Delta Force* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1983), 94–95.

12. Beckwith and Knox, *Delta Force*, 95–104. Brown, the CJCS, agreed with Beckwith’s assessment when he stated in a memo to the secretary of defense, “It must be recognized that the Rangers are not organized solely for counter-terrorist operations. . . . To improve further our capability, the Army is developing a specially trained small force . . . of experienced and mature personnel with a wartime special operations mission and a capability for the prompt and successful execution of those counter-terrorist missions for which no other DOD force is specifically trained or structured to execute”: CJCS to secretary of defense, memorandum, subj: “Military Forces Counter-Terrorism Capability,” 25 October 1977, in Papers of CJCS Gen George S. Brown, NARA (Archives-II, College Park, Md.), box 15 of 128, file CM 1676–77. Retired Air Force colonel Jerry Thigpen wrote, “It was surprising that the United States had not developed a joint counterterrorist capability by late 1979”: Jerry L. Thigpen, *The Praetorian Starship: The Untold Story of the Combat Talon* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, Dec 2001), 183.

13. Beckwith and Knox, *Delta Force*, 107–08.

14. *Ibid.*, 109.

15. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 43–47, 60; and Maj James E. Keen, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 30 August 2006. Beginning in 1953, when the first US Air Force CCT was formed, the Army at various times attempted to recapture the “pathfinder” function. See chapters 1 and 2 of this work.

16. SMSgt John “Jack” Hughes, USAF, retired, to the author, e-mail, 18 January 2007, including quote; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 82.

17. Downing, interview, including quote; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 46.

18. Carney, interview; and John F. Fuller, *Thor’s Legions: Weather Support to the U.S. Air Force and Army, 1937–1987* (Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1990), 310–12, 322–23, 329–34. The number of attendees at the meeting at HQ MAC is unknown, but Carney (who at one point recalled the meeting as being held in late 1976 or in 1977) remembered there were less than 10 present. The actual date for the start of Brand X appeared most likely to be either in December 1976 or May 1977. Even if the December date is correct, there may have been later classified meetings held on the same or related matters. Mrs. Patricia Grimes recalled that on Easter weekend 1977 (9–10 April) her husband was called to Washington suddenly for a meeting. The family had planned a trip to the beach, so she acknowledged that upon learning Col. Grimes had to fly to Washington, she “was not a happy camper”: Patricia Grimes, with the author, telephone conversation, 22 March 2007. Moreover, SMSgt Jack Hughes stated to the author that Grimes returned from a trip to the Pentagon with authorization to form the CCCT, and he recalled the initial meeting at Scott AFB as probably in late May–June 1977. Because Hughes also recalled that the first EDRE in which Brand X participated was a “Cabin Butterfly” exercise, which was held in June 1977, I suggest that *if* the initial meeting at Scott AFB was *not* held in December 1976, then the most likely month was May 1977 (not June). A May 1977

meeting (following a possible preparatory 9–10 April meeting recalled by Mrs. Grimes) allowed sufficient time for the CCT to train for several weeks prior to its first exercise: Hughes, e-mails to author. Mitch Bryan also stated that Brand X began in 1977: Maj Michael R. (Mitch) Bryan, email to author, 23 February 2007. Arguing for the earlier date, however, an evaluation form completed on 1Lt James E. Keen covering the period 16 Nov 1976 through 31 Jan 1977 referred to his participation in a “high priority project.” Keen recalled the reference was to the classified CCT project soon known as Brand X: AF Form 77, 1Lt Keen, 16 Nov 76–31 Jan 77, copy at AFHRA. Based on the evidence for December 1976 and the evidence for May 1977, equally compelling in my view, I am unwilling to go beyond concluding that Brand X most likely began in *either* of those two months. For details on Grimes’s role in Southeast Asia, see chapter 3 of this work.

19. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 43–44, 46, including quote; and Carney, interview.

20. Downing, interview.

21. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 46–47 (emphasis in original).

22. *Ibid.*, 47, including quotes; and Downing, interview.

23. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 47.

24. *Ibid.*, 47–48.

25. *Ibid.*, 48.

26. Downing, interview.

27. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 48.

28. Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 111–15.

29. Lt Col James Burns, Cristin Daniel, Commander James Fossa, et al., *United States Special Operations Command History, 20th Anniversary Edition* (MacDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM/SOCS-HO, 2007), 8, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/socom/2007history.pdf>.

30. Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 116.

31. *Ibid.*, 116–18, 133.

32. Downing, interview; Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 120; and “Robert A. Mountel,” *Fayetteville Observer*, 27 Jun 2014. The time period of Blue Light’s active role has been difficult to track down. It seems likely to have been roughly between 12 and 18 months. Carney and Schemmer recorded an exercise in December 1978 that may have been one of the last in which Blue Light participated: Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 57.

33. Office of CJCS to Gen [David C.] Jones, memorandum, subj: “SCC Principals’ Visit to Counter-Terrorist Exercise ‘END GAME,’” 7 April 1978, in Papers of CJCS Gen George S. Brown, NARA (Archives-II, College Park, MD), box 15 of 128, file 035 – Nuclear Terrorism Working Group; Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 120–22, 128–29, 133–42; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 57. Note that attached to the above memo was a routing slip containing a comment from General Jones who said, “I question going to Hunter – a long day. Also seems to be a *conventional* approach to counter terrorist problem” [emphasis added].

34. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 24–26, 29, 64; and Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 180–86.

35. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 25–26, 44–45, 58, including quote; and Keen, interview.

36. Keen, interview, including quote; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 29, 45, 59; and Keen officer evaluations, copy in AFHRA files. Brand X participants also came from the CCT at Pope AFB, North Carolina: CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield, USAF, retired, discussion with the author, 9 December 2010.

37. "Scott Man Dies in Crash," *Belleville News Democrat*, 16 September 1977, 1; and Carney, interview. According to the March 1977 staff directory, Col Grimes was "director of concepts and special and technical services plans" (XOZ); see History, MAC, Jan–Dec 1977, vol 2, staff directory (AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, Ala.). Grimes was admired greatly in the SOF community, as attested by the response of many who attended his funeral. Retired USAF colonel Wayne L. Golding recalled the honor guard at the funeral: "He [Carney] allowed me to wear a gray [combat weather] beret that I had with me. We did the ceremony. There wasn't a dry eye there": Col Wayne L. Golding, USAF, retired, interview with Gerald A. White, Jr., Air Force Weather Agency historian, 25–26 March 2003, copy in AFHRA files.

38. SMSgt John "Jack" Hughes, USAF, retired, to the author, e-mail, 18 January 2007.

39. CMSgt James A. Howell, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21–22 May 2007.

40. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 59.

41. Carney, interview, including quote.

42. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 59–60.

43. *Ibid.*, 60, including quote; and Koren, interview.

44. Maj Manuel L. Gonzalez, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 February 2007; and Gonzalez resumé, copy in AFHRA files.

45. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 28, 45, 60.

46. *Ibid.*, 51.

47. *Ibid.*, 57–61, including quote. Carney's AF Form 922, "Individual Jump Record," indicated he performed a jump on 25 October 1978, presumably shortly upon his being stationed at Charleston AFB, copy in AFHRA files. Koren also reported to Charleston in October 1978: Koren, interview with the author, 5 October 2006. Bryan reported to Charleston in November 1978: email to author, 28 February 2007.

48. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 56.

49. *Ibid.*, 31–42; and Carney, interview.

50. Carney, interview.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 55, 61–62.

53. Peter G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 459, including quotes; and Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1985), 76, 175.

54. Paul B. Ryan, *The Iranian Rescue Mission: Why It Failed* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 6–12; William J. Daugherty, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah: A CIA Hostage in Iran* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 94; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room For Error*, chapters 6 and 7; and Charles G. Cogan, "Desert One and Its Disorders," *Journal of Military History* 67 (January 2003), 201–16.

55. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 15–32.

56. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 82, including quote (emphasis in original); Carney, interview; and CMSgt Michael I. Lampe, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 3 November 2006. Kyle recounted one or more cases in which aircraft marshaling problems occurred, especially a rehearsal on 18 December 1979: *Guts to Try*, 113–16.

57. Carney, interview; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 82–83.

58. CMSgt Rex V. Wollmann, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 24 May 2007.

59. Wollman, interview.

60. Ibid.

61. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 117–18; and Koren, interview.

62. Koren, interview. Koren attributed the original quote to Col Roland Guidry, USAF, retired (emphasis added).

63. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 178–85.

64. Lampe, interview; Koren, interview; Gonzalez, interview; Wollmann, interview; Carney, interview; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 86–88, and CCT photograph and caption (page unnumbered).

65. Carney, interview; Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 145, 167–68; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 71, 75–79; and Lampe, interview.

66. Koren, interview, including quote; and Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 174, 186–91.

67. Carney, interview; Lampe, interview; Koren, interview; Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 219; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 77.

68. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 235–56.

69. Ibid., 257.

70. Ibid., 258–60; Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 269; Wollmann, interview, including quote; and Koren, interview.

71. Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 269–70, including quote; Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 262–63; Lampe, interview; and Koren, interview. While Beckwith stated that he fired at the bus's tires, Kyle said the driver stopped in response to warning shots. Though differing, the two accounts did not necessarily contradict one another.

72. Ibid.

73. Lampe, interview, including quote; Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 261–64; Koren, interview; and Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 271.

74. Koren, interview.

75. Ibid., including quote; and Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 114–15.

76. Lampe, interview, including quote; Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 258, 273; and Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 222–23.

77. Lampe, interview.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., including quote; and Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 273.

80. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 273–75; and Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 223–24.

81. Lampe, interview; Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 249–50, 268–71, 279–82; and Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 225.

82. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 253, 278–82.

83. Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 225–26; and Lampe, interview. The third MC-130 was positioned just to the south of Tharp and the two helicopters on the south LZ.

84. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 176, 287–90, 293–94; and Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 224–25.
85. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 294–95; and Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 225–26.
86. Wollmann, interview; and Beckwith, *Delta Force*, 275–76. Wollmann estimated he carried 85 pounds of equipment, not counting the TACAN. Koren noted that CCT members wore aircrew-type headsets that were not noise reducing and were not very good. Kyle noted the temperature as being above 90 degrees: *Guts to Try*, 289.
87. Koren, interview.
88. Lampe, interview.
89. David C. Martin and John Walcott, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 24.
90. Martin and Walcott, *Best Laid Plans*, 24, including quote. For two more recent works that borrow the basic mishap description of Martin and Walcott, see Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding US Special Operations Forces* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 71–72; and Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 459. A different view is presented in Ryan, *Iranian Rescue Mission*, 87. Ryan quoted an eyewitness who stated, “The helo pilot could not see.” Carney reported that Schaefer experienced “complete brownout”: e-mail to author, 14 August 2007. Referring to Schaefer’s (Helo-3) planned movement, Kyle noted, “The controller was there as an observer, since this was basically a straight-ahead maneuver and once the dust was churned up he wouldn’t be seen anyway”: *Guts to Try*, 295. As an Air Force helicopter pilot, the author flew H-53’s in 1981–82 and so is familiar with the aircraft’s severe rotor wash.
91. Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 228.
92. Ibid.
93. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 301, 304–305.
94. Carney, interview.
95. Ibid.
96. Lampe, interview.
97. Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 294–99.
98. Lampe, interview; Koren, interview; Kyle, *Guts to Try*, 301–5; and Bowden, *Guests Of The Ayatollah*, 466. One interesting fact is that on the way out of Iran, the CCT’s motorcycles were thrown out to lighten the aircraft. Carney’s identification “dog tags” were attached to one of the motorcycle’s keys and so were lost: Gonzalez, interview; and Lampe, interview. Later, Carney stated, “To go on with five [helicopters] would have been foolish”: Carney, interview.
99. Koren, interview.
100. Wollmann, interview.
101. Lampe, interview.
102. Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 238.
103. Ibid.; and Koren, interview, including quote.
104. Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 241, 246; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 103–104; Koren, interview; and Lampe, interview.
105. Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 239; Darrel D. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride: A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace* (Maxwell AFB,

AL: Air University Press, September 2012), 151–52; History, Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS), 1 Jan–31 Dec 1980, vol. 1, 18–20 (AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL); and author’s personal observations as an ARRS helicopter pilot, 1982–84. For the impact on the evolution of special tactics, see chapter 5 of this work.

106. Daugherty, *Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 196–97, including quotes (quote 1, Reagan quoted by author); and Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 164.

107. Daugherty, *Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 216–18. Carter and Vance, his former secretary of state, met with the hostages in Germany shortly after their release, but they did so as private citizens.

108. CMSgt Nicholas S. Kiraly, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 19 September 2006; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 103. The original 16 members are considered the “plankholders” of the 24th Special Tactics Squadron. In addition to 16 controllers (two officer, 14 enlisted), there were about three to five support personnel. Carney’s jump records, copy in AFHRA files, indicated that he was assigned to Pope AFB no later than 12 February 1981. Since 1992 the unit’s designation has been the 24th Special Tactics Squadron.

109. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 33–43; Thigpen, *Praetorian Starship*, 184; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 54–55; Benjamin F. Schemmer and John T. Carney, Jr., eds., *U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Hong Kong: Special Operations Warrior Foundation, 2003), 134; and Howell, interview. Marquis provides an excellent overview of the hollow force of the 1970s.

110. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 40–42, including quotes; Robert B. Patterson, “USAF Combat Control Team Requirements for the Future,” Air War College professional study, no. 6026, April 1976, 26–29; and Maj Gen Robert B. Patterson, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 18 September 2006.

111. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 45, including quote; and Carney, interview.

112. Kiraly, interview.

113. Ibid.

114. Norrad, interview; and Maj Gen Thomas M. Sadler, USAF, retired, official biography.

115. Wollmann, interview; Norrad, interview; and Kiraly, interview.

116. Norrad, interview; Norrad, personal recollection, provided to Dr. Richard I. Wolf, AF/HOH, late 2014; and Norrad, telephone discussion with author, 20 March 2017.

117. Norrad, personal recollection, provided to Dr. Richard I. Wolf, AF/HOH, late 2014.

118. Norrad, interview; and Norrad, official biography, copy in AFHRA files.

119. Norrad, interview; Norrad, biography; Lampe, interview; and Lampe, official biography.

120. Kiraly, interview, including quote; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 63.

121. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 63.

122. Lampe, interview, including quotes; and Kiraly, interview.

123. Kiraly, interview.

124. Norrad, interview (emphasis added).

125. Norrad, interview; Norrad, e-mails; and History, MAC, January–December 1981, vol. 1, 185, 187, 240, and vol. 6, SD 2–188 (AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL). It might have been that the crash actually prevented a worse mishap on the runway, because the preceding C-130 had missed its turn-off and remained on the runway longer than expected.

126. Norrad, interview, including quote; and History, MAC, January–December 1981, vol. 1, 187, 240. The traditional airfield lighting configuration was also referred to as a “box-four-and-one” or “box-four” because there were four lights forming the corners of the box: Norrad, telephone discussion with author, 21 March 2017.

127. Norrad, interview. At Entebbe in 1976, the Israeli C-130s had conducted the rescue mission in radio silence; see Ben-Porat, Haber, and Schiff, *Entebbe Rescue*, 295–96.

128. Carney, interview, including quote; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 40–42. Another improvement in the career field was that, in 1981, Air Force combat controllers received their own Air Force specialty code. Previously, they shared the same code with air traffic controllers: see “Combat Air Controllers Given Separate AFSC,” *Air Force Times*, 23 November 1981, 7.

Chapter 5

From Grenada to Special Tactics, 1981–1987

Coach Carney's Combat Control Team

In the early 1980s, only four USAF combat control team (CCT) elements claimed a special operations role: the small CCTs assigned to the two MC-130 Combat Talon squadrons in Europe and the Pacific, the team belonging to the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida, and John Carney's CCT detachment at Pope AFB, North Carolina. Although Carney's CCT often called individuals from other units for augmentation, his detachment was the only serious player in the national counterterrorism mission. From 1977 Carney worked with the 1st and 2nd Ranger battalions and Col Charlie Beckwith's Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta (Delta Force) in a number of counterterrorist training and emergency deployment readiness exercises. Carney's location at Pope AFB facilitated his unit's work with the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at neighboring Fort Bragg. JSOC, established in October 1980, sought to increase joint capabilities in the special operations force (SOF) arena, including rectifying some of the problems witnessed at Desert One.¹

In 1981 Carney's Detachment 1, Military Airlift Command Operations Staff (Det 1, MACOS), was authorized 16 combat controllers—including two officers—plus five support personnel, for a total of 21 positions. Det 1's senior enlisted member, CMSgt Nicholas S. "Nick" Kiraly, aggressively worked the personnel system to obtain highly-qualified combat controllers for the unit. In the fall of 1981, Wayne Norrad and Doug Phillips were the last of the original Det 1, MACOS combat controllers to join the unit. Shortly thereafter, the detachment organized into two CCTs: "Blue" and "Silver" teams. MSgt Mike Lampe led Blue team, which included tech sergeants Rick Caffee, Rex Evitts, Dick West, and Jerry Bennett and staff sergeants Doug Brown and Raymond Heath. Norrad led Silver team, which included tech sergeants Dave Lilloco and Johnny Pantages; staff sergeants Chuck Freeman and Fran Oster; and Sgt Doug Phillips. Both teams were loaded with high performers and several future leaders, particularly Lampe who rose to become the command chief for US Special Operations Command

(USSOCOM) and Norrad who served as senior enlisted advisor to the commander, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC).²

Carney chose Craig F. Brotchie, a talented young captain with only a year's experience in combat control, as his first officer selection in the detachment. Brotchie grew up in San Bernardino, California, and attended Southern Utah State College on a football scholarship. He was 6'2" and 215 pounds when he arrived at Pope in early 1981, losing 30 pounds from his weight as an offensive center to meet the Air Force's weight limit for Reserve Officer Training Corps summer field training. Carney and Brotchie, the detachment's only two officers until Jeffrey Buckmelter arrived in mid-1982, became close professionally and personally, a process no doubt enhanced by their mutual love of football. Both Brotchie and Buckmelter followed in Carney's footsteps: Brotchie commanded the 720th Special Tactics Group (STG) from 1995 to 1997; Buckmelter from 1999 to 2001.³

For most of the first two years after Carney's team moved to Pope (winter 1980–81), the detachment concentrated on airfield seizure procedures, working with the Army special operators with whom they were collocated. Additionally, the men performed daily physical training (PT), wore their hair long if they wanted to, carried weapons of choice, and generally did not bother with Air Force regulations. However, Det 1's freedom was more than a personal benefit to the men; it carried operational advantages. Combat controllers tested innovative ideas, high-altitude parachuting, and airfield seizure techniques without being overly constrained by "bureaucratic red tape." One team member described having "the latitude . . . [and] imagination to try different things," while still keeping safety in mind.⁴

By 1983, the core of Carney's detachment had worked together for nearly two years. Most of the men wanted to stay there, and many did remain for significantly longer than the Air Force's standard tour. For example, three future chiefs, Lampe, Timothy C. "Tim" Brown, and James A. "Jim" Lyons, each remained in the unit for a decade: Lampe from 1981 to 1991, Brown from 1983 to 1994, and Lyons from 1986 to 1996. Although officers' career paths were quite different, the third officer to join Det 1, Buckmelter, served six years there (1982–88). By late 1983 Carney's men were ready for their first real test.⁵

Grenada

In October 1983 the United States intervened militarily on the small eastern Caribbean island of Grenada to remove a Marxist government threatening the security of the region. It was the largest American military operation since withdrawing from Southeast Asia a decade earlier. It was also a very uneven affair; in football terms it was something akin to a National Football League team competing against a small “scrub” team, with a tally of 7–3. One author described it as “a communist nutmeg . . . smashed by an enormous American sledgehammer.”⁶ Although a “win” for the United States, it was an ugly win, with many problems surrounding the employment of SOFs. Carney, disappointed and frustrated with his combat controllers being denied the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities, wrote to the JSOC commander after the operation. He told Maj Gen Richard A. “Dick” Scholtes, US Army, that the command “needs to get back to blocking and tackling . . . if you’re a ‘tackle,’ you do ‘tackle’ things, if you’re a ‘center,’ you do ‘center’ things, if you’re a ‘quarterback,’ you do ‘quarterback.’” Carney had seen enough of the “jack-of-all-trades and masters of none” mentality within JSOC.⁷

Carney’s observation represented one of several steps toward bringing pararescuemen (PJ) into his combat controller detachment, by then known as Detachment 4, Numbered Air Force Combat Operations Staff (Det 4, NAFCOS). With the March 1983 activation of the Military Airlift Command’s (MAC) Twenty-Third Air Force as the numbered air force for all Air Force SOF, the designation of the “cool” sounding “Det 1, MACOS” was changed to “Det 4, NAFCOS.” Despite the new designation, which many combat controllers hated, the 1983–84 period witnessed the de facto birth of the first Air Force “special tactics” unit. The unit resulted from the initiative of Carney and several other key leaders in MAC/Twenty-Third Air Force.⁸

A small island dependent mainly upon tourism, the former British colony of Grenada gained independence in 1974. Five years later in a nearly bloodless coup, a Marxist movement known as the New Jewel Movement came to power under the leadership of Maurice Bishop. Over the next several years, officials in Washington observed with increasing anxiety as Grenada allied itself with Cuba and the Soviet Union.

In early 1983 Washington noted construction of an international airport with a 9,000-foot runway at the island’s southwestern tip, Point Salines. Grenadian officials explained that the long runway was

necessary for handling large commercial aircraft expected to boost tourism. However, Reagan administration officials took a dimmer view—the hotels needed to support a larger tourist trade were conspicuously absent. Moreover, Cuba was providing much of the funding, materials, and workers. The US chargé d'affaires in Barbados expressed the feelings of many: “It isn’t the airport per se that bothers us. Lots of islands around here have airports of comparable size,” he said. “It is that the airport in Grenada was primarily financed and built by the Cubans, who tend not to do these things out of a sense of Christian charity.”⁹

Once the runway was completed it could support Soviet military aircraft, enabling MiG-23s from Cuba and Grenada to enjoy “overlapping ranges covering the entire Caribbean.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Grenada was situated 1,000 miles east of Cuba. A Grenadian base offered a clear strategic advantage for any deployments of Cuban forces to and from Africa, such as during the fighting in Angola. Pres. Ronald W. Reagan referred to Grenada as “a Soviet–Cuban colony being readied as a major military bastion to . . . undermine democracy.”¹¹

In mid-October 1983 the island’s Marxists—increasingly displeased with Bishop, who was not leftist enough for some—arrested the country’s prime minister. Bishop was murdered on 19 October leaving a junta, the Revolutionary Military Council, in power. Although endangerment from the junta’s arbitrary actions was real, the US citizens on the island may have been no more endangered than the 100,000 Grenadians. But the junta’s announcement of a curfew on the evening of the 19th gave the Reagan administration the feel of a developing hostage crisis. Indeed, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger viewed it in terms of “another Tehran.”¹² Later, he wrote, “Once the announcement of the twenty-four-hour curfew, with its open license to kill, was made by the most fanatical and irresponsible of the leftist elements in Grenada, who had already murdered Bishop and his colleagues, we naturally had to think about how we could either extricate the Americans there or prevent their being seized as hostages in a reprise of the Iranian seizure . . . in 1979.”¹³

As Weinberger indicated, the administration’s primary objective was to rescue the American citizens on Grenada, most of whom were students attending the St. George’s University School of Medicine. The memory of the Iranian hostage crisis and the possibility of one in Grenada haunted Reagan administration officials. It could hardly have been otherwise, as Reagan’s team came to Washington in part as

a result of his predecessor's failure to resolve the Iranian crisis. British author Mark Adkin, a staff officer with the Barbados Defence Force during the operation, explained the administration's decision:

The decision to intervene in Grenada was made on the basis of seizing a fleeting strategic-political advantage, which had the added merit that inevitable military success would raise U.S. flagging morale. It was justified by a possible potential danger to U.S. citizens on the island and an urgent plea for help by [Organization of Eastern Caribbean] states, together with Barbados and Jamaica. That the governor-general had requested invasion was, in all probability, a fabrication to strengthen the shaky legality of the operation.

It was a bold decision, fraught with risks. It succeeded. Because of its success, the president is entitled to the credit and the enduring gratitude of Grenadians and other Caribbean communities who were saved from a grim future.¹⁴

While an in-depth discussion of the poorly coordinated planning (including numerous changes) and the uneven execution of Urgent Fury will not be attempted here, a brief sketch places the role of SOF combat controllers in its proper context.¹⁵ Prior to Bishop's murder, the Reagan administration directed the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Gen John W. Vessey, Jr., US Army, to begin planning for a noncombatant evacuation of US citizens from Grenada. Bishop's execution pushed President Reagan to order plans to be drawn up for possible hostilities on the island—a task that fell to US Atlantic Command (LantCom). On 20 October Secretary of State George Shultz and Chairman Vessey warned the Special Situation Group (SSG), chaired by Vice President George H. W. Bush, that the military junta in Grenada might oppose an evacuation of US citizens. The unknown intentions of the several hundred Cuban construction workers on Grenada, which some US analysts believed to be military members in disguise, complicated the situation. Such uncertainties highlighted the woeful US human intelligence assets on the small island that had been the focus of US concern for four years. Two analysts put it bluntly, stating, "military intelligence with respect to Grenada was deficient."¹⁶

The SSG approved Vessey's recommendation for an expanded mission, including neutralizing the Grenadian forces and, if necessary, the Cubans. Vessey envisioned an assault in which either Rangers or Marines in conjunction with airborne forces, in the words of historian Ronald Cole, conducted "multiple simultaneous rescue and combat operations."¹⁷ President Reagan approved the chairman's recommendation to employ the Rangers and the Marines in the US

ground force after US intelligence agencies reported that Grenadian troops and the Cubans were indeed organizing to fight. Shortly thereafter, LantCom commander Adm Wesley L. McDonald designated a tactical boundary across Grenada. The Marines took responsibility for the north, while the Rangers took the south, which included the critical Point Salines runway. Late in the afternoon of 22 October, the JCS issued the execute order for *Urgent Fury* to “conduct military operations to protect and evacuate US and designated foreign nationals from Grenada, neutralize Grenadian forces, stabilize the internal situation, and maintain the peace.”¹⁸

LantCom, headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia, was a Navy command with only limited representation from the other services. LantCom’s staff lacked adequate representation of ground, air, and special operations components and had not planned a major joint operation since World War II. In the context of John Carney’s combat controllers, LantCom’s unfamiliarity with special operations proved to be the most significant deficiency, but the most damaging aspect pertained to H-hour—the hour on which a combat operation is to be initiated—on 25 October. Although originally planned for 0200, various circumstances—including inadequate intelligence—led Admiral McDonald to push H-hour to 0500.¹⁹ The inevitable result was that the multiple SOF missions scheduled just prior to or after H-hour were executed mostly in daylight. In today’s operational environment, a daylight mission is almost unthinkable, but even in the early 1980s special operators generally conducted missions under cover of darkness. In daylight, the typically lightly armed SOF forces were far more vulnerable to an adversary’s conventional forces. Unfortunately, the leadership at LantCom appeared unaware of such considerations. “The conventional planners seemed to have no inkling what this would mean for those [SOF] who needed darkness on D day to carry out their missions,” Adkin wrote.²⁰

Although overall casualties in the brief operation were light by historical standards (19 US fatalities, about 120 wounded), the US military sustained several losses that resulted from “friendly fire” or accidents.²¹ In one tragic incident on the evening of 23 October, four US Navy SEALs perished in a night water jump at the start of a planned surveillance and reconnaissance mission.²²

Grenada is an oval-shaped island, roughly 20 miles in length along a northeast–southwest axis and about 12 miles wide. Most of it consists of jungle-covered mountains, with a coastal plain wider in the

south. Available intelligence for planning Urgent Fury was sadly lacking, including a much-publicized dearth of basic maps of the island, despite the fact Grenada had been a political concern to US officials since 1979. Recent photographs of the island, if any existed, were unavailable to military planners. Thus, the actual conditions of the runway at Point Salines airfield were unknown. Planners advocated deploying a combined SEAL/CCT to survey the airfield and emplace radio navigation beacons prior to the assault. Remarks after the operation confirmed the wisdom of the attempted reconnaissance. “It was not a good runway. The runway wasn’t finished and didn’t have lighting or off-ramps. The surface was still being prepared and it didn’t have the traditional markings for safety,” Lt Col Allen A. Pichon, a C-141 pilot and 53rd Military Airlift Squadron commander, recalled.²³ Brig Gen Robert B. Patterson, the commander of airlift forces for Urgent Fury—who landed at Salines several hours after the assault began—described the airfield:

You have to realize that this was a classic construction site. No one had ever landed an airplane on it prior to our assault. Like any other construction site, it had debris including bricks, barricades and many barrels. The Cubans had moved more than 100 fifty gallon drums, barbed wire and pieces of large construction equipment. The Rangers somehow moved all of this off. They initially got enough moved to land the C-130s in order to begin the airflow.²⁴

Patterson, a no-nonsense Southern gentleman, whose father earned two Silver Stars in World War I, understood the combat control business extremely well. In addition to having worked with combat controllers in tactical airlift assignments, in his Air War College research paper he recommended reorganizing CCTs to improve career progression for the few officers in the career field. At Point Salines, he witnessed their work firsthand, and approved of what he saw. Moreover, Patterson possessed more than the expected professional concern for the progress of the mission at the forward airfield. His son, Robert “Buzz” Patterson, piloted a C-141 filled with paratroopers to Grenada on the morning of the assault. While on the ground at Grenada, the general took the opportunity to check out one of several warehouses filled with ammunition. A grisly, old sergeant in the 82nd Airborne approached and asked Patterson if he had a son in the Air Force, to which the general responded affirmatively. “He flew us down here today,” responded the sergeant. Years later, General Patterson laughingly recalled the incident: “Not many people in the back end of a C-141 know who’s up front, but I thought that was pretty interesting.”²⁵

Maj Gen Duane H. Cassidy commanded the Twenty-First Air Force at the time of the Grenada operation. Later, retired General Cassidy recalled an anecdote involving the construction equipment at Salines. While at Pope AFB prior to the operation's start, Cassidy learned that Soviet vehicles might be on the runway. He mentioned the Soviet vehicles while mingling with the troops on Pope's "Green Ramp" and asked, "Can you get them off of there?" One soldier responded immediately, "Hey, General, I'm from New York. I can jump anything!" Cassidy recounted that the troops "hot-wired a few of them and then pushed the rest . . . off with the ones they hot-wired, and we were in there in no time!"²⁶

However, prior to commencing the operation the leadership hungered for "ground truth" concerning the runway's condition. Accordingly, LantCom assigned General Scholtes's Task Force (TF) 123—Army Rangers, Delta, Navy SEALs, and an Air Force CCT—a reconnaissance mission at the Salines airfield. After darkness set in on 23 October, Colonel Carney was to lead four combat controllers to assess the site prior to the Rangers' planned assault early on D-day, the 25th. In addition to securing the airfield to allow for "air-landing" of follow-on forces, the Rangers planned to rescue the several hundred medical students believed to be residing nearby.²⁷

Prior to Urgent Fury, the only known location of US students was the "True Blue" campus, situated about a mile from the eastern end of the Point Salines runway. Actually, less than one-third of the students lived there, a potentially disastrous intelligence failure. The task force had no knowledge of the whereabouts of most of the 600 students. Only after the operation was underway did task force members learn of a second campus and then a third area where more than 400 students resided (some 200 at each). The safety of US citizens was the Reagan administration's primary objective, but if any Grenadians had intended to harm Americans or take hostages, they could easily have done so even after the start of operations. As was typical of various official (unclassified) reports after Grenada, planning and operational failures were largely dismissed or ignored. The LantCom report on Urgent Fury, signed by Admiral McDonald, stated, "Available basic intelligence was generally adequate for overall planning purposes. Estimates of Grenadian personnel and equipment strengths were sufficiently accurate, and estimated number of Cuban personnel was within an acceptable range of uncertainty."²⁸ Mark Adkin, referring to

that part of the report, viewed the statement as “a polite way of saying nobody had the faintest idea.”²⁹



Figure 5.1. CCT in Grenada. *Left to right:* Leslie “Rex” Evitts, Jeffrey Buckmelter, John Carney, Michael Lampe, and Robert Griffin.

The plan called for Carney’s men to be transported to a nearby destroyer, the USS *Clifton Sprague*, which was to carry them to a pre-determined area in the waters off the coast of Grenada. Meanwhile, two MC-130E Combat Talon aircraft were to fly a SEAL contingent of 12 (possibly 16) men expected to parachute into the water and board two Boston Whaler boats (dropped with the SEALs). After boarding the boats, the SEALs were to transport Carney’s men near Point Salines. There, after conducting reconnaissance and emplacing the radio beacons for the initial assault aircraft, the combat controllers were to take cover between the runway and the shoreline just to the south, remaining undetected until the start of the assault early on the 25th. Unfortunately, the SEAL/CCT team never made it to Salines.³⁰

Accounts of what actually transpired vary, and SEAL Team Six’s documentation has never been released. But, clearly, planning errors and marginal weather conditions complicated the mission. One error was a failure to take into account the seasonal time change that turned the clock back by one hour on 23 October. Instead of the intended daylight jump, the jump took place in the dark, on a moonless night. The commander of SEAL Team Six wrote,

Urgent Fury had been planned on “local” time. Eastern Daylight Time was the same as Atlantic Standard Time, which applies in Grenada. That is, it was the

same, until 0200 of the day we launched the reconnaissance team: the Atlantic time zone didn't observe daylight saving time. When we "fell back," they stayed the same. Instead of an easy daylight drop, my men had to do a more complicated night drop. I didn't know it at the time, but SEAL Team Six had never done a night boat drop—or any night water parachuting, for that matter.³¹

In the best description of the failed SEAL mission, Orr Kelly, long-time Washington news correspondent and author, wrote that the wind was at least 20 knots, "creating moderate waves, with many whitecaps and some spray." A training jump was not permitted under such conditions, an indicator of the likelihood of serious difficulties in an operational setting.³²

Kelly gave two possibilities for what happened when the SEALs hit the water. Perhaps the SEALs' 100- to 400-pounds of weapons, ammunition, and gear weighed them down to the point their life jackets could not keep them afloat or bring them back to the surface quickly enough after they hit the water. As a result, they were pulled under and drowned. Or, they may have been unable to extricate themselves from the parachute shroud lines after hitting the water, with the same deadly outcome. Possibly both explanations are correct, as four individuals were lost, perhaps independently of one another. Whatever the reason, the four never surfaced that night. The Boston Whaler was also lost.³³

While no combat controllers were lost that night or in the operation overall, the loss of the four SEALs was keenly felt by their Air Force brothers. Some CCTs, including Wayne Norrad, had jumped a number of times in training with at least three of the four SEALs who perished.³⁴

Meanwhile, two of the four combat controllers climbed into the *Sprague's* safety boat to await the parachuting SEALs.³⁵ The Air Force men were Carney, tech sergeants Jerry Jones and Johnny Pantages, and Desert One veteran Dick West. Following the disastrous jump, the surviving jumpers and combat controllers searched unsuccessfully for the four missing SEALs. Using the lone Boston Whaler recovered after the drop, an undetermined number of SEALs—at least eight (possibly as many as 12)—headed toward Grenada with Carney's men. The *Sprague* continued its search in vain. Carney recalled the boat was about 30 miles from Grenada when an unidentified vessel arrived in the area "panning with its searchlight." Several accounts stated that the SEALs cut the boat's motor to avoid detection and were unable to restart it, apparently due to a flooded engine. With dawn approaching, the team aborted the night's mission and drifted

back out to sea, where the *Sprague* picked them up. They hoped to try again the next night.³⁶

General Scholtes, the special ops task force commander, still wanted a CCT-conducted reconnaissance at Salines in addition to the emplacement of radio navigation beacons for the assault transports. He requested a 24-hour delay to H-hour, but the Department of State feared the fragile coalition of Caribbean states might not hold that long. Scholtes settled initially for a two-hour delay, which later was pushed back another hour. The revised H-hour was set for 0500 on 25 October, just before dawn. 'Owning the night' was standard practice for US special operations, but in Grenada the initial SOF missions lacked the protective cover of darkness. Special operators were dangerously exposed and almost certainly sustained unnecessary casualties as a result. The initial assault at Point Salines, where most of the fighting took place, did not begin until 0534, by which time the advantage of darkness had passed.³⁷

On the evening of 24 October, the SEALs again tried to insert Carney's men onto Grenada's shores. This time, a single Boston Whaler was dropped near the *Sprague*, about 15 miles from Point Salines. Unlike the previous night, the SEALs waited with the combat controllers on the destroyer's deck. At about 2200, Carney's men and half of the SEALs launched in a second whaler—the surviving whaler from the previous night's tragedy—towing an inflatable Zodiac boat. The remainder of the team boarded the freshly-dropped whaler, and all three small boats headed toward Point Salines. Carney recalled,

The weather was bad, the sea was rough, and problems with motors on our Whaler required the SEAL team leader to ask the *Sprague* for a close tow to within four miles of the island. We made it to within about a mile of the beach running at high speed when a Grenadian patrol boat approached again. When its searchlight panned in our direction, our coxswains cut the boats' powerful engines. As a result of the sudden stop and heavy seas, the wakes behind the boats came over the transoms, flooding the Whalers and our radios and equipment and shutting down their motors. At this point, we had the Zodiac and two inert Boston Whalers. We transferred to the Zodiac. We spent hours working on the motors, drying the spark plugs, and attempting to get back under way. We drifted seaward about four miles from Point Salines. Daylight was about to break.³⁸

At that point, any possibility of completing the reconnaissance mission evaporated when Carney realized the satellite communications link had been lost. Even if they made it to the airfield, the team had no means to communicate its findings to JSOC. The team floundered

in the water until near dawn before being recovered by the USS *Caron*, a signals intelligence ship. In a disturbing case of post-Grenada distortion and blame shifting, the SEAL Team Six commander, Robert A. Gormly, wrote that it was “the Air Force lieutenant colonel” who decided that the Boston Whaler “was in no condition to proceed.” The SEAL team leader “felt they could continue but the lieutenant colonel was adamant. They finally returned to the destroyer.”³⁹ Years later, retired Colonel Carney recalled the incident with frustration. The SEALs’ “job was to get me in there, and they didn’t get me in there. . . . I’m in the Air Force, and I’m going to tell a boat of SEALs we’re *not going?*”⁴⁰ Carney’s point was well taken, especially since Gormly commented elsewhere: “In our business, experience, not rank, has privilege.” The decision never belonged to Carney.⁴¹

The “recon” mission’s failure at Salines did not stop the invasion. Operation Urgent Fury commenced as dawn broke over the eastern Caribbean on 25 October. Jeff Buckmelter, one of Carney’s two other officers in Det 4, was one of the first CCT members slated to jump. Almost 32 years old, Buckmelter served two tours as an enlisted combat controller before completing his undergraduate degree at Rutgers University. He returned to the CCT career field and joined Carney in 1982 following his commissioning in 1980. Highly respected among his peers, Buckmelter later rose to full colonel and commanded the 720th STG. More than a few colleagues felt that if the special tactics career field had matured several years earlier, Buckmelter was general officer material.⁴²

On 25 October 1983 CCTs Buckmelter, Doug Brown, Rex Evitts, and Doug Phillips flew on the lead C-130 carrying the airfield seizure package to Grenada. As with so many aspects of the operation, unexpected problems arose. En route to the target, Buckmelter’s aircraft lost its inertial navigation and infrared systems, which, coupled with unforecasted rain showers and low ceilings, led the aircraft commander to pass the formation’s lead to another Hercules. By the time the aircraft were reshuffled, the C-130 carrying the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) led the assault. On that aircraft were combat controller Bob Kelly, who supported the TOC, and Lt Col Wes Taylor, the Rangers’ 1st Battalion commanding officer. Taylor directed his men to jump from an altitude of only 500 feet after learning that the Grenadians expected the assault. Not long after the operation, Brig Gen Patterson surmised that Taylor had made his decision not so much “in light of AAA [antiaircraft artillery] so much as exposure to small

arms ground fire as they were coming down.”⁴³ That was perfectly logical, but regardless of Taylor’s rationale, his decision—admittedly risky—most likely saved a number of lives. First, positioned as they were on the hills, the Grenadian AAA batteries could not achieve a low enough trajectory to effectively fire at the incoming US aircraft; second, the low altitude limited the dispersal of the paratroopers, some of whom might have landed in the water if dropped from a higher altitude. In any case, the Americans’ reception was far different from the “pina coladas” at least one senior MAC officer had briefed them to expect.⁴⁴ Other officials had stated the Cubans were unlikely “to interfere militarily.”⁴⁵

Such predictions may have lulled at least one combat controller into a false sense of security, at least momentarily. Upon landing at Point Salines, Phillips complained to his companions, “I keep seeming to get these bees by me.” The ever alert Buckmelter replied quickly: “Little Fella,” using his friend’s nickname, “Those are bullets coming by you.”⁴⁶

Buckmelter’s airplane had ended up far back in the formation, but his team still jumped into Point Salines and got into the action, only considerably later than planned. Col Bruce Fister, a future AFSOC commander, was aboard the airborne command post with General Scholtes, coordinating the aircraft inbound to Grenada. Years later, General Fister recalled that when the lead C-130 aborted, things became “terribly hectic” for him. It took him two weeks to review the tapes to discover what had happened and what he said over the radios to deconflict the air traffic and reorder the transports. Whatever his exact words were, Hurlburt Field’s 2nd Air Division commander, Col Hugh Cox, lauded Fister for his decisive handling of the potentially catastrophic situation. Years later, the retired general mused, “That was an answer to prayer; that wasn’t me talking, that was the Lord, I think.”⁴⁷

With the last-minute change, Mike Lampe’s team became the first CCT on the ground at Salines. Originally scheduled to go into Pearls airfield in northeast Grenada, when the responsibility for Pearls transferred to the Marines, Lampe’s team—Rick Caffee, Rob Griffin, and John Scanlon—received a new mission. Lampe vividly recalled that his combat jump from 500 feet landed him and several Rangers in a mudflat or swampy area near the airfield. Thankful for the soft landing, Lampe emerged from the mud looking like “the Swamp Monster” and carrying an inoperable, mud-slimed sidearm. One Ranger landed face-down in the mud, and Lampe pulled the grateful trooper out of the muck, perhaps even saving him from drowning.

For the remainder of that day and into the next, Lampe's CCT established control of the airfield. As Lampe had witnessed a decade earlier in Southeast Asia, one C-130 after another landed under fire, slowed almost to a stop on the runway before dropping the ramp, and then pushed the throttles forward causing its load to slide out the rear of the aircraft. A moment later, the Hercules rolled to take off. At some point late that night, Lampe's men "pretty much crashed along the side of the runway" for a few hours' sleep.⁴⁸



Figure 5.2. Grenada CCT. *Back row, left to right:* Gregg Capps, Rick Caffee, Ray Heath, John Scanlon, Tony Snodgrass, Mike Lampe, Jerry Jones, Bob Kelly, Johnny Pantages, Bob Reyes. *Front row, left to right:* Dick West, Jack McMullen, Doug Phillips, John McReynolds. (Photo courtesy of Mike "Sgt Mac" McReynolds.)

The CCT was situated inside the Rangers' perimeter around the Point Salines airfield, and except for sporadic, random small-arms fire, they were relatively secure. Near the end of his time controlling the airflow at Salines, Lampe refused permission for an unusual request: a bulldozer drop. The aircrew was not pleased with the decision, but Lampe knew there was no real need for the bulldozer and did not want to risk damaging or obstructing the runway in the event of a problem with the drop.⁴⁹

By midday on 26 October (D plus one), the CCT relief element of Capt Ronald L. "Ron" Watkins arrived on Grenada. Shortly thereafter,

Lampe and Watkins began the handoff between their respective CCTs at the Salines airfield. Watkins's 317th Tactical Airlift Wing CCT deployed from Pope AFB to Barbados, then to Grenada. "Our deployment was very confused and . . . we got very disorganized alert notices and messages" about what the team was to do, Watkins recalled. "It finally was released to us that we were going to control an airport. Initially, it was a drop zone, then it was a landing zone, and [then] it was, okay, you are going to control this airport," the retired colonel continued. "We were given the wrong times to be ready, the wrong aircraft to show up and load on. In fact, I had to jump the fence. I remember banging on the door of the control tower . . . to be let in, so I can call the aircraft back so we won't get left behind." In short, "It was not a pretty deployment."⁵⁰

Problems at the airfield itself were not surprising. In the handoff briefing, Det 4's CCT informed Watkins of the SOF missions then in progress. What proved more challenging was gaining control of the airfield itself, which took about 18 hours, he recalled. "Our real issue . . . was that the Army and the Navy and Marine Corps were all attempting to use the airfield as well [as the Air Force], and no one had deconflicted the control. . . . Everybody had their own plan. . . . [and] was trying to execute it on the same piece of real estate," Watkins said. General Patterson observed that each service, quite erroneously, believed itself to be the primary user of the field and in charge.⁵¹

The commander of airlift forces had landed at Salines in a C-130 shortly before noon on D-day. "I had a great deal of concern for the potential for disaster on that runway at Pt. Salines. We just had a hell of a time getting that under control," he recalled. He noted that within three hours the first C-141 landed on the runway, despite the presence of debris. Although he did not allow any C-141s to land the first night due to the debris and lack of lighting, he approved landings for 26–27 October. "The combat controllers, with their . . . (beanbag) lights, did a great job," Patterson said.⁵² The general may not have been aware that Watkins's CCT "had never even talked with a gunship prior to going to Grenada," indicative of the wide gap in training that existed in that era between the conventional combat controllers and those in JSOC.⁵³

Retired Colonel Watkins recalled several difficult and dangerous issues during his time at Salines. An artillery battery set up on one side of the airfield and commenced firing without any warning to aircraft in the vicinity. "We had seen them setting up," Watkins remembered, "but

we didn't believe that they were going to fire, they were *firing across the runway*." For Ron Watkins, a well-built, quiet-spoken, and affable CCT officer, getting the Army to stop firing over the runway required the most "confrontational, physical event" he ever experienced with "friendlies;" he came close to striking a superior officer. Years later, responding to a query about the frequency of near misses at the airfield, Watkins said they had occurred "all the time. I had helicopter conflicts, [and our] folks were on all-terrain vehicles constantly chasing down helicopters for disregarding control instructions . . . there [were] quite a number of conflicts."⁵⁴

Chief Nick Kiraly of Det 4 and two other combat controllers—one of whom was Desert One veteran Rex Wollmann—supported the Army's Delta Force. He recalled that Grenada was one mission many of his teammates did not expect. He had planned to retire in December and start a civilian security job in Savannah. But when the operation developed, the chief deployed one last time. He supported the Delta missions at several installations around the capital city of St. George's, including air strikes against Forts Rupert and Frederick situated a few miles north of Point Salines. The use of different maps by the ground elements and the pilots greatly complicated the coordination of the strikes—just one of myriad examples of the lack of jointness during Urgent Fury.⁵⁵ Fort Rupert served as the Grenadians' army headquarters; Fort Frederick was a command post.

Kiraly remembered accompanying Delta and keeping a close watch across the bay on Grenada's west coast, "talking to [AC-130] gunships, putting gunships in support of Delta," and seeing other "fast movers" who came south because of a lack of activity over the northern part of the island. He contacted them on guard frequency (UHF 243.0, VHF 121.5) and directed them against targets around St. George's. Despite the fact that "they didn't have our frequencies, [and] we didn't have their frequencies"—in addition to the different maps—the combat controllers and pilots somehow managed to work together. "It was not the picture perfect assault that was shown in the media," Kiraly said. Wollmann, from Hurlburt's 1st Special Operations Wing, recalled witnessing the crash of a US helicopter hit by ground fire. The aircraft plummeted roughly 200 feet into the water offshore. There was no chance the pilot survived.⁵⁶

Beginning on 26 October, Lampe began to redeploy individual members of his team to reconstitute JSOC's CCT in case a tasking for another mission emerged. By 27 October, the handoff to Watkins's

team was complete. By the 28th, Lampe's men were back home in the United States.⁵⁷

As the operation progressed, Watkins's conventional combat controllers transitioned from the ground next to the Salines airfield and moved to the control tower. Eventually, they managed to get all local aircraft talking on the same frequencies. However, for the first two or three days Watkins's men found out "how long you can go without sleep because there was no opportunity for it."⁵⁸ In any case, living in a ditch next to the runway and sleeping "in parachutes left by Army [R]angers," as recorded in one command history, was not particularly conducive to sleep. His CCT remained on Grenada for more than a week before redeploying in early November.⁵⁹

Despite a difficult beginning to the Grenada operation, by 28 October the remaining medical students had been located and airlifted to the United States. Combat operations were all but over, and only an occasional sniper interrupted mop-up work and the search for several key leaders of the revolutionary junta. In one of the last Urgent Fury combat control missions, on 31 October a four-man CCT flew to Pearls Airport. As the main combat force was withdrawing from Pearls, General Patterson requested a CCT to provide continued air traffic control. The team occupied the tower and quickly took control of the airfield, operating it for the C-130s until 1 November when it was relieved by Airmen who deployed from the continental US. On 2 November combat operations officially ended in Grenada.⁶⁰

Historian Ron Cole summarized the Grenada operation and its effects:

Despite faults in execution, Operation Urgent Fury accomplished all of its objectives. The eight thousand soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines rescued nearly 600 Americans and 120 foreigners, restored popular government to Grenada, and eliminated the potential strategic threat to US lines of communication in the area. Urgent Fury cost US forces 19 killed and 116 wounded; Cuban forces lost 25 killed, 59 wounded and 638 captured. Grenadian forces suffered 45 killed and 358 wounded; at least 24 Grenadian civilians were killed. Urgent Fury reinforced awareness of weaknesses in the joint system and helped prod Congress to undertake the fundamental reforms embodied in the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986.⁶¹

Despite its problems, Urgent Fury gave the United States a morale-boosting military success. But for MAC/Twenty-Third Air Force's combat controllers, Grenada meant more than the first large-scale opportunity to perform in combat since the withdrawal from Southeast Asia. Retired chief Kiraly, one of Carney's original combat controllers in

the detachment, felt that Urgent Fury “validated” the CCTs in a combat situation in which they “overcame a lot of obstacles to make it happen. . . . Our guys did their job and did well. . . . [Grenada] was our ‘coming out party,’ I guess.”⁶² Of great importance to the future of the combat control and pararescue career fields, Urgent Fury proved to be the catalyst for what became known as Air Force Special Tactics. In Grenada’s aftermath, Carney, drawing on his football background, wrote to General Scholtes that the command needed to “get back to blocking and tackling.” Moreover, Carney had observed within some SOF elements an attitude he viewed as counterproductive to jointness and interoperability.⁶³

Similarly, Tim Brown, who deployed to Grenada with Det 4, remembered that one of the operation’s shortfalls was in tactical medical care. “We had a lot of guys that had battlefield trauma care capability, but going through the course and maintaining those skills are two different things. Their job [was] to secure radios, not medical packs,” Brown, a retired Air Force chief master sergeant, recalled. “If somebody got hurt, they knew how to use the medical pack, but it was not their job. We figured that there is only so much that one man could do well, so we brought in folks that could do those things well all the time.”⁶⁴

Birth of Special Tactics

The Air Force’s specialists in handling battlefield trauma were its PJs. That specialty was in addition to their traditional role of rescuing downed aircrew members, often behind enemy lines. John Carney felt that if PJs had been available in the Grenada operation several wounded SOF members either would have survived or received treatment more quickly. In some cases, CCT personnel performed battlefield casualty care when Special Forces medics were unavailable. As Chief Brown said, though they did their best to care for their wounded comrades-in-arms, combat controllers had other primary duties.⁶⁵

Between 1985 and 1987, several visionary leaders at Headquarters MAC brought the pararescue and combat control communities together to form Air Force Special Tactics. Gen Duane Cassidy, who commanded MAC from September 1985 until his retirement four years later, was perhaps this community’s single most influential leader throughout the decade. Twenty years later, many combat controllers,

beginning with John Carney, credited General Cassidy with having shepherded their career field with great care. Cassidy brought Carney to headquarters at Scott AFB, Illinois, and later put him in charge of a combined combat control and pararescue directorate to see “what kind of synergies [they] could develop,” including in the SOF tactics arena. The paramount development took place in October 1987 with the activation of the 1720th STG (later 720 STG) at Hurlburt Field. The creation of the special tactics group represented the first big step in the institutionalization of special tactics within the Air Force.⁶⁶

In addition to his moral and organizational support, in 1984–85 while serving as the deputy chief of staff for manpower and personnel (DP), Cassidy pushed for special duty assignment pay (SDAP) for enlisted combat controllers. Lt Col Charles P. Tappero, who succeeded Carney in 1984 as the commander of Det 4, NAFCOS, submitted an SDAP package for his unit. Michael A. “Mike” Longoria, an up-and-coming staff officer at the Twenty-Third Air Force, reworked the package with assistance from Wayne Norrad so that it applied to *all* Air Force CCTs. Cassidy encouraged this expansion. After Longoria nursed the package through Twenty-Third Air Force, Carney walked it through the Pentagon’s maze to General Cassidy’s final approval—one of the last documents he signed as the DP of the Air Force. Longoria, later a brigadier general and only the second CCT officer to attain that rank, recalled that SDAP “was just for our great enlisted force. That wasn’t for officers.”⁶⁷ In 1985 General Cassidy, after adding a fourth star and accepting command of the MAC, stated that “payment of SDAP to the combat controllers will be a step in the right direction towards retention of these valuable individuals and hopefully will compensate them to some degree for their demanding duties.”⁶⁸ The Air Staff authorized the special pay effective 1 January 1986.⁶⁹

Even with special pays (there were several), the CCT career field remained undermanned. On occasion a commander had the opportunity to help his unit’s manning and a former member at the same time. Combat controller William A. “Andy” Baillie had been injured in a training jump during Combat Control School but managed to serve for most of the 1980s in CCTs, first at Charleston and later at Pope. In 1986, discouraged by recurring knee troubles, he decided not to reenlist and instead tried his hand as a civilian air traffic controller. When the plan fell through, his squadron commander, Lt Col John E. Buck, was more than happy to bring Andy back into the

1721st squadron on the 89th day of a 90-day window of eligibility. It was good for him and good for the Air Force, Buck recalled.⁷⁰

Bob Patterson, Cassidy's close colleague and personal friend, also served in an air rescue squadron early in his career and was like-minded on bringing PJs and CCTs together. From March 1982 through July 1984, Patterson served as vice-commander at Twenty-First Air Force, first under Maj Gen Thomas Sadler, then under Cassidy, succeeding the latter as the commander. In 1985, the same month that Cassidy took the reins at MAC, Major General Patterson took command of MAC's Twenty-Third Air Force. Carney's assignment as director of Combat Control and Pararescue Operations at Headquarters MAC became the stepping stone to the October 1987 activation of the 1720th, the first and only special tactics group in the Air Force. Appropriately, and in circumstances almost unheard of, its first commander was the formerly-twice-passed-over-for-promotion, but in 1987 an early promotee, Col John Carney.⁷¹

Other factors informed the decision to align CCTs and PJs institutionally rather than only at JSOC's combat control pararescue unit. First, PJ authorizations were linked to the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service's (ARRS) airframes, mainly H-3 Jolly Green Giant and H-1 Huey helicopters. PJ authorizations decreased at the rate of two per airframe with the drawing down of the rescue service, a trend strongly influenced by the shift toward rotary-wing special operations following Desert One in 1980. In the mid-to-late 1980s Generals Cassidy and Patterson viewed special tactics as a means to protect nearly 90 pararescue authorizations potentially at risk due to projected air rescue aircraft reductions. On the positive side, the MAC and Twenty-Third leaders also expected the move to build synergies with combat control.⁷²

Second, the airlift command was concerned for the supervision of the PJ career field particularly after a peacetime mission led to the death of a new pararescueman. On 11 April 1983 two PJ staff sergeants—Jeffrey Y. Jones and Steven Rodman—assigned to the rescue wing at McClellan AFB, California, parachuted into heavy seas about 800 miles northeast of Hawaii to rescue two downed fliers. Both pilots ejected from one TA-4J Skyhawk after it developed a serious in-flight malfunction. A Rescue HC-130 monitoring the Skyhawk flight dropped MA-1 survival kits to the downed aviators, then deployed Jones and Rodman. While Rodman and the two pilots were rescued, Jones disappeared sometime after his chute opened and was never

seen again. After 10 days of fruitless searching, the effort was called off. Carney recalled that “when they did the accident report, it wasn’t very good,” suggesting unnamed supervisory issues.⁷³ In October 1983 Operation Urgent Fury highlighted the need for the medical capability PJs offered to Air Force special operations elements. Carney recalled that in discussions with the Twenty-Third Air Force Commander, Maj Gen William J. Mall, Jr., Sergeant Jones’s loss served as a “catalyst” to get PJs into the Twenty-Third’s CCT detachment at Pope.⁷⁴

In addition to SOF battlefield trauma requirements, PJ authorizations, and supervisory concerns, General Cassidy’s experience facilitated the merger of PJs and combat controllers. Early in his career Cassidy learned to value PJ capabilities. “I had my first brush with PJs in 1955 in the 49th Air Rescue Squadron. [That’s] when I found out that . . . if you are going to go somewhere and things are tough, you better have one of these guys with you because it is going to make life a lot easier for you,” he recalled. In the early-to-mid 1980s, Cassidy’s rise through the general officer ranks allowed him to observe “the CCT people who had been pulled aside and given very special capabilities, and they were . . . John Carney’s team.” Cassidy referred to his tour between 1981 and 1983 as assistant director of operations at Headquarters MAC:

All this kind of came together and I came to believe more and more that we had to establish our credibility in combat arms with the people we were going to be working with and supporting [mainly Army SOF, Delta]. If we didn’t, we would lose control of some of our airplanes and that would be detrimental to the safety of our overall mission. . . . The only way we could do that was [with] combat controllers who were able to gain the respect and confidence of the ground troops we were supporting. That is really what John Carney was able to do and what he did superbly.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the pararescue career field struggled in the post-Vietnam era. During that conflict the exploits of highly-decorated PJs who rescued downed Airmen behind enemy lines became legendary, marked by names like Wayne Fisk, Duane Hackney, Bill Pitsenbarger, and Joel Talley. However, by the 1980s, Cassidy felt that PJs “were not getting the same attention” as Carney’s combat controllers.⁷⁶ Patterson added that “nobody had taken care of the PJs since Vietnam,” a situation that contributed to a drift “into a peacetime mind-set.”⁷⁷ Additionally, the PJs lacked the newer equipment that JSOC’s combat controllers enjoyed as part of the national joint counterterrorism entity. “So it became clearer and clearer that we were going to have to

put these two [different] colored berets together sometime,” Cassidy said.⁷⁸ He continued,

I was worried about it, frankly, because I did not want to do anything that would lose the luster of the PJ. . . . At the same time . . . the attrition rate from the training is so high, it just became a matter of “we just don’t have enough people to man two of these” [PJ and CCT specialties]. We are going to have to put them together and figure out a way to use them correctly at the right time. That is what brought the first special tactics group together. It was not anybody having a great penchant to make it happen, and it wasn’t because some general had a vision that this should be done, [and] it wasn’t because somebody was mad at either group. It was because both of these groups became so well qualified at doing things that would always be needed when in a fight and they just naturally came together.⁷⁹

Regardless of how naturally the two groups seemed suited for each another, key personnel and organizational decisions still required input from general-officer leadership—namely, Cassidy and Patterson.

In January 1984, not long after Grenada, the first PJs reported to “The Hill” at Pope AFB. John Pighini and Emilio Jaso became the first PJs ever to join an all-CCT detachment. Pighini, a Southeast Asia combat veteran who served at Scott AFB as the PJ medical branch chief for the air rescue service, had retired from the Air Force in December 1983.⁸⁰ General Mall offered to bring him back onto active duty to start up the PJ augmentation at Carney’s detachment, a possibility Carney and Pighini discussed. The PJ found the secretive nature of the job attractive: he was told nothing except that he was allowed to wear civilian clothes and did not have to cut his hair. Convinced, Pighini returned to active duty and quickly reported to Pope AFB, North Carolina.⁸¹

Retired combat controller and friend Wayne Norrad recalled that although Pighini’s expertise clearly lay in the medical area, he worked hard to get into top physical condition, especially for such demanding events as night equipment jumps. Pighini later confessed to having spent many nights soaking in a hot tub after a grueling workout. Carney obtained Mall’s approval for Pighini to bring one other PJ to Pope with him. He chose Emilio Jaso, a young NCO in the air rescue squadron at Eglin AFB, Florida. Jaso was extremely capable, loyal, and willing to let the boss know when something was not right. Jaso was already in shape physically but “he wanted to be a shooter.” “We had to calm Emilio down,” Norrad remembered. “Don’t go telling the Delta Force that you want to go kick doors down with them and shoot people, because then they’re not going to want to take us . . . it [would

look] like you're trying to take their job. *You're the medical guy,*" he wisely counseled the young PJ.⁸²



Figure 5.3. CCT at Sigonella, Sicily, the morning after the Egypt Airlines aircraft (background) carrying the *Achille Lauro* hijacker was forced to land. Left to right: Bob Martens, Rick Caffee, Mike Lampe, and Tony Snodgrass.

The response to a training accident in February 1985 highlighted the need for medical expertise. On a night airfield seizure exercise with Rangers on the western Pacific island of Tinian, combat controller and Desert One veteran Mike Lampe fell out of an H-60 Black Hawk helicopter and nearly lost his left arm. Lampe's aircraft took on more soldiers than originally planned because another scheduled helicopter was unavailable. The aircraft was to execute a hover taxi along the runway at Tinian, clearing for obstacles prior to a C-130 landing on the blacked-out runway. As the helicopter approached the runway and soldiers maneuvered to don their rucksacks in the overcrowded cabin, Lampe either fell or was inadvertently pushed out at 20 to 30 feet above ground. "Mike had reached out with his left arm to cushion his fall, and his arm penetrated the coral like a pickax, his forearm embedded almost up to his elbow," Carney wrote.⁸³ Fortunately, medical

personnel were ready to assist. After a Ranger medic pulled Lampe's arm out of the taxiway—it was horribly bent—Pighini administered a double dose of morphine before they walked Lampe down the runway and lifted him into the medical evacuation helicopter. Lampe sustained a shattered wrist and forearm. After waiting seven hours for initial treatment at the small naval hospital on Guam, Lampe was evacuated to the main US Army hospital in Oahu, Hawaii.⁸⁴

Carney and Lampe related how Lampe's teammates later rescued him from the hospital to get him to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for proper treatment. Lampe was next door to a patient named "Lumpken," and the nurse assigned to them tried to administer Lumpken's medicine to Lampe. Desperate to get back to Womack Army Hospital at Fort Bragg, Lampe called his commander, Colonel Tappero, who promised to airlift him home on the next Pope aircraft transiting Hawaii. "It was one of our best snatches ever," Carney wrote.⁸⁵

Detachment 4 remained shorthanded in special operators, so in June and October, while recovering from his frightful injury, Lampe deployed on the counterterrorist operations associated with the TWA Flight 847 and *Achille Lauro* hijackings, respectively. On both operations he worked in the planning cell and supervised airfield operations. Normal Air Force unit procedures did not allow such participation due to medical clearance requirements, but Det 4 remained largely autonomous at the time, an operational advantage. Lampe, fully recovered, returned to unrestricted duty in December 1985.⁸⁶

Within a year of Pighini and Jaso's arrival, three other PJs joined the detachment: Scott Gearen, Al Mora, and Larry Hiyakumoto—all of whom made it through the first combined PJ–CCT assessment selection course conducted in fall 1984. The first six months of Pighini's tour had been largely consumed with defining PJ roles and missions in the detachment and in obtaining personnel authorizations for up to six more pararescuemen. By the summer, development of the selection course began. Course developers, especially Lampe, Pighini, and Brown, borrowed certain elements from the British Special Air Service's and Delta Force's selection courses. Conducted mainly in the rugged mountains near Dahlonega, Georgia, the course began with a basic PT test. Academic and practical testing followed, including common tasks (e.g., weapons assembly, rappelling) and those tasks specific to the individual's specialty (PJ or CCT). For example, a PJ might be given 15 minutes to solve a medical problem or a combat controller given the same amount of time to assemble and check a

radio. Candidates performed individual land navigation problems combined with psychological testing. Pighini recalled that “mind games” were an integral part of the assessment. For example, candidates did not know when the last checkpoint had been reached or the day’s final task accomplished. One candidate self-eliminated when he could not be certain that he was done for the day. He had finished for the day, but the uncertainty was too much for him and he quit. The ordeal included both two-man and team problems where a PJ or CCT candidate took the lead depending on the required task.⁸⁷

In addition to testing candidates’ technical skills, they also learned to appreciate their counterpart’s capabilities, building rapport between the two communities. The final part of the five-to-seven day course repeated some basic skills accomplished on the first day, but by that time the men were sore, hungry, and sleep deprived. As soon as the course ended, each candidate met a commander’s board, was taken immediately to the Atlanta airport, and flown home. He was notified later regarding his selection.⁸⁸

Scott Gearen was one of three PJs to join Det 4 in early 1985. Two years later he nearly lost his life. On 4 February 1987 the 31-year-old PJ from Tampa, Florida, performed a day, freefall jump from a CH-46 helicopter. His fellow jumpers consisted of members of his own detachment as well as US Navy SEALs. Stepping out of the helicopter from 13,000 feet above the Virginia countryside, Gearen descended normally and opened his parachute at the briefed altitude of 3,500 feet. All went well until a freefalling fellow jumper suddenly collided with Gearen. The impact knocked Gearen unconscious and collapsed “five of the chute’s seven air-filled nylon cells.”⁸⁹ Falling to earth for the remaining 3,000 feet, miraculously Gearen survived the impact with the (wet) ground at approximately 100 miles per hour. Ironically, the day before his accident Gearen had instructed SEAL members on how to do a cricothyroidotomy—the same lifesaving procedure the emergency room staff performed as soon as he arrived at Portsmouth Naval Hospital.⁹⁰ A February 1995 feature in *Airman* described his major injuries:

an open skull fracture, crushed nose, cheekbones and eye sockets, and multiple fractures of the jaw. X-rays of his head looked like an exploded view of the human skull. All the bones were there. They just weren’t connected. His face bruised and swollen to twice its normal size, fluids inside his skull stretched the skin so tightly over his eyes it looked transparent, like a blue balloon ready to pop.⁹¹

After enduring a number of surgeries and battling recurring, life-threatening scar tissue in his throat, Gearen returned to full duty three years later. In addition to merciful providence, his experience testified to three things: a professional medical system that allowed him access to specialists, including a preeminent surgeon, Dr. William W. Montgomery of Boston, Massachusetts, who resolved the throat-scarring issue with his own invented procedure; the PJ's dedication and commitment to his profession, refusing to give up his dream of returning to full duty; and the long-term care and encouragement of a spouse and family who refused to give up on him. In 1991 Gearen participated in combat rescue sorties during Operation Desert Storm. He went on to serve in key PJ duty positions until retiring from active duty in 2002.⁹²

In spring 1985, pararescueman Rodney D. "Rod" Alne joined the detachment. A dedicated wrestler at Iowa's Northwood-Kensett High School, Alne appreciated the value of that sport's mental toughness during the infamous PJ indoctrination course at Lackland AFB, Texas. "I was 5'6" and probably 135 or maybe 140, so I was the littlest guy," he recalled. "But the water is an equalizer, and it doesn't matter if you are 220 pounds or you are 145 pounds; you get in the water and it is all equal and now it is 'all upstairs.'" ⁹³ As flight superintendent at Lackland's indoctrination course later in his career, Alne decided that wrestling provided an especially good preparation in terms of the mental toughness required in the demanding courses that PJ and CCT candidates experienced:

I did a lot of track, wrestling, and football, but I think that wrestling was a huge impact. It helped me out a lot especially going through the "indoc" course. . . . When I worked at the indoc course, we used to take interviews and find out [the candidates'] sports activities, and a lot of the guys that were successful [were so because of] conditioning and the mental toughness. . . . [in wrestling] you not only have to be in good shape but also [to practice] cutting weight and that type of dedication. . . . It was pretty much the wrestlers that had the highest [rate of] success and it was because of their background.⁹⁴

When Alne arrived at Pope, the detachment had roughly 18–20 combat controllers but only a half dozen PJs. Not surprisingly, bringing the two small, tightly-knit, and "Type-A" personality career fields together created some cultural issues. A number of individuals from both career fields referred to the relationship as challenging—seeking to put it diplomatically—while a few were unwilling to discuss it. Alne

focused on the differing perspectives of *supported* versus *supporting* roles. “I think the biggest cultural issue was as a PJ, you were pretty much the ‘top dog,’” the retired chief said. In a traditional combat rescue mission, especially in Southeast Asia, “everything was there to support us, so we can go in” to pick up a downed Airman. Alne said that the typical PJ’s attitude was that the helicopter’s job was “to get us into the spot,” so we could “get to that person” who needed rescue.⁹⁵

On the other hand, the combat controller filled a supporting role, providing communications, navigational aids, and air traffic control assistance for C-130 aircraft conducting drops and landings at remote drop zones (DZ) or landing zones (LZ). The prevailing attitude toward combat controllers for much of the 1980s was simply that “you guys are just a bunch of ‘support toads’ that support the airplanes,” Col Craig Brotchie, a highly respected CCT officer, said.⁹⁶ Other career combat controllers, including Colonel Watkins, recalled that MAC basically viewed the CCTs “as training aids” for the aircrews.⁹⁷ Chief Brown added that the command used CCTs to “showcase” its aircraft by having them jump from the aircraft at night, landing unexpectedly in front of a crowd.⁹⁸ Still others, including Chief Jim Lyons, felt that in those years the Air Force considered CCTs—including those in JSOC—“glorified air traffic controllers,” and they did not like that.⁹⁹ Brotchie, handpicked by Carney to become his deputy at Pope, added that the Air Force viewed CCT as part of the support mechanism for its aircraft and really did not understand that JSOC’s CCT detachment was fully integrated into the national counterterrorism ground force. As Brotchie expressed, “We are not about supporting airplanes, we are about *supporting the ground forces* and proving the effectiveness of the airplanes.”¹⁰⁰

“The Air Force brushed us off as insignificant. They knew that both of the communities [CCT, PJ] were necessary, but they also knew that both . . . were small,” retired chief Tim Brown observed. “We . . . did not have the political clout like the SEAL teams in the Navy or Special Forces in the Army. We were just a speck of an organization.”¹⁰¹ By joining the mostly-CCT detachment, Alne experienced the loss of the top dog aura, which produced a personal crisis of sorts. He acknowledged that was “the hardest thing for me to deal with when I first got there.” He was not alone.¹⁰²

PJs not only lost their top dog image but also found themselves in a supporting role vis-à-vis their CCT comrades. Some combat controllers thought that PJs were their personal medical support package,

which, in a sense, they were. However, the PJs provided assistance on the battlefield not only to CCT but to other SOF and non-SOF personnel as well. Additionally, the PJs maintained their personnel recovery mission. Some PJs thought that the big Air Force did not appreciate their capabilities. “They just saw someone that could give you an IV [intravenous feeding] and treat a gunshot wound . . . they didn’t see all of the other things that we could bring to the table,” Alne stated.¹⁰³

Chief Alne added insightful remarks about how the nature of the CCT business gave combat controllers a closer relationship with the Army than that of pararescue. The Army and CCTs worked well together because “on the controller side it is very ‘cut-and-dry’ . . . these airplanes are coming in every 30 seconds or whatever, and they have got them stacked up.” In situations like that, a checklist was necessary to preclude mishap and tragedy. A number of controllers agreed that “the Army is run very much the same way. It is very, very structured.”¹⁰⁴ With PJs and Navy SEALs, however, the nature of their work was more free-flowing. For example, a PJ faced with a seriously wounded teammate did whatever he had to do to save the man’s life. It might not be a by-the-book situation in which a checklist was useful. A SEAL’s work was arguably similar. Alne noted that on every mission he participated in with the SEALs, “it was never what we briefed or . . . what we rehearsed.” New, creative solutions were often required. In a nutshell, that was the basis for Alne’s view that the combat control business naturally aligned more closely with the Army than did pararescue, and that “the PJs and the SEALs mesh more.”¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, a natural point of friction stemmed from the fact that a number of combat controllers had sought to become PJs. Some PJ candidates who did not make it through the excruciating indoctrination course went into combat control. But there were no PJs who sought at first to become combat controllers. However, the current state of the two career fields was more significant than what had transpired during earlier training. Carney commented about the state of the CCT community beginning in the 1970s and summarizing the next decade:

I need to get this point across . . . the fact of the matter is, combat control was dying. It was going nowhere; they were not training; they had no budget; they had no leadership; they were basically . . . working drop zones. Very, very little [air traffic control] going on at all. . . . On the other hand, you look back at the PJs after Vietnam, their mission was “depleted,” is the best I could say, and they are sitting there, I mean they’ve got a pretty “fat” job—I mean they “PT-ed”

[physical training] and they rode on helicopters as gunners. And that's basically what they did; so the combat controllers always felt like they were out there working their ass off on these drop zones and whatnot and now all of a sudden they're rising out of the ashes and they're starting to get recognized in these exercises, and they're doing their job. . . . And . . . they're getting equipment . . . getting organizations [combat control squadrons] and now all of a sudden we're taking PJs on. Well, there was, I wouldn't say bad blood, but there was always that "one-upmanship" between a combat controller and a PJ. Who could run faster, who could jump farther, swim faster . . . all that kind of stuff.¹⁰⁶

At first many senior NCOs, including Chief Lampe, and some officers did not see a need to bring PJs into the combat control business, Carney acknowledged. Many combat controllers asked why they needed PJs. Carney, the first 1720 STG commander, responded to that challenge in 1987. "Look, we're all wearing the blue uniform. It all says 'US Air Force' on your pocket, and we're going to put this group together and we're going to learn how to work together and how to accomplish our missions . . . in the special operations business," he said to his men.¹⁰⁷

A "you weren't one of us" attitude was prevalent in the SOF community. In such a demanding operational environment, where personal trust in one's teammates was absolutely necessary for mission success, that attitude could hardly be faulted, but it posed challenges. Combat controllers and PJs, beginning with those at JSOC's detachment, had to overcome that hurdle. Perhaps not surprisingly, Colonel Carney related that once the "old guard" retired, the CCT and PJ relationships improved and many close friendships developed. Certainly, the combined PJ-CCT assessment selection course that began in late 1984 was a valuable tool in overcoming professional rivalries and building rapport and trust. But it was only the new members in both specialties that underwent that bonding experience. "It was not a smooth transition, but I didn't expect it to be a smooth transition," Carney said.¹⁰⁸

Some 20 years after the turbulence of the late 1980s, a number of PJs credited Carney with helping preserve the pararescue career field. Rightly so, for without his efforts—alongside those of Cassidy and Patterson—the PJ career field expected, as of 1985, to lose nearly 90 of 451 authorizations as the Air Force continued drawing down the number of its air rescue helicopters. One year later, the Twenty-Third Air Force historian stated the command's 346 pararescue billets "faced possible diminishment to 210 spaces by FY 1990" due to aircraft reductions. The decision by MAC and Twenty-Third Air Force

leaders to consolidate CCT and PJ specialties began in early 1986. By January 1987, formal consolidation under MAC's directorate of combat control and pararescue was complete, but the informal work of merging the two cultures and of building rapport, friendships, and trust had just begun.¹⁰⁹

Organizational Changes Affected Special Tactics

At the same time PJs joined their CCT brethren, major organizational changes improved the business of Air Force combat control. In January 1984 MAC's boss, Gen Thomas M. Ryan Jr., requested a thorough review of CCT training, standardization, organization, and control. A task group led by Brig Gen Jack W. Sheppard, the MAC chief of staff, began work with the following definition of the combat control mission: "To rapidly establish assault zones [including DZ/LZs] and to control expeditionary airfields, as the primary source of tactical air traffic control in austere and nonpermissive environments. The mission includes conducting reconnaissance of potential assault zone sites, initial placement of en route and terminal [navigational aids], providing command and control communications, and removal of obstacles and unexploded ordnance with demolitions."¹¹⁰

Sheppard's group briefed General Ryan on its findings two months later. To no one's surprise, the group reported "serious deficiencies" in training, organization, and standardization, resulting in "a severe degradation of combat control readiness."¹¹¹ The amount of realistic combat training was inadequate, mainly due to the CCT support required for aircrew training and exercises the study group deemed "minimally productive" for combat controllers. The group found that organization of CCTs as "staff functions in MAC wings" was useful for supporting aircrew training, but it failed to contribute to CCT mission readiness. Significantly, Sheppard concluded that "the combat control organization was a line combat organization and that it should have an established command line."¹¹²

As those in the business knew from personal experience, the command needed combat control squadrons for better functional control and to provide normal career progression opportunities for CCT officers. Prior to 1984 the lack of squadrons for lieutenant colonels to command meant that CCT officers had, as Ron Watkins stated, "a life expectancy up to O-4 [major] and if you had any aspirations beyond

O-4, then you really needed to be thinking about another line of work. . . . It was just a generally accepted concept,” with which Mike Longoria agreed.¹¹³

Each of MAC’s 14 CCTs had its own standardization and evaluation criteria without any centralized management—a condition that continued for another decade. This lack of management inhibited supplementing teams with personnel from other CCTs and slowed the process of bringing new arrivals “up to speed” operationally. Sheppard recommended the activation of combat control squadrons as the best solution for meeting peacetime and wartime missions. Additionally, he argued that CCT taskings should be handled by the numbered air forces to allow for more “efficient use of this high value[,] limited resource.” The task group also called for a “quality training program” for combat control and further study of manpower and equipment shortages.¹¹⁴

General Ryan agreed with Sheppard and wasted no time in responding. Less than four months later, on 1 July 1984, MAC consolidated its CCTs and activated the first-ever squadrons in that Air Force specialty: one in each numbered air force—the 1721st, 1722nd, and 1723rd combat control squadrons, stationed at Pope AFB, North Carolina; McChord AFB, Washington; and Hurlburt Field, Florida, respectively. Although a few personnel in the 1721st and 1722nd squadrons augmented Det 4, NAFCOS, it was primarily the 1723rd squadron—also known by its pre-squadron designation, the Special Operations CCT (SOCCT)—that augmented Det 4 in certain counterterrorist training and exercises. There were two main reasons for that. First, the 1723rd resided in the Twenty-Third Air Force, SOF’s numbered air force, which included air rescue. Second, the Air Force’s highest-ranking and most-respected combat control officer, Lt Col John Carney, became the first commander of the 1723rd squadron. Although Det 4, NAFCOS, was the premier SOF entity in the nascent Air Force special tactics arena, and remained so, it continued as a *detachment* until May 1987 when the 1724th Combat Control Squadron (later, 1724th Special Tactics Squadron) was activated at Pope. Although the Air Force combat control community claimed three squadrons as of mid-1984, three years passed before those combat controllers and PJs that comprised part of the national counterterrorist force attained the coveted and long-overdue squadron status.¹¹⁵

In the mid-1980s, Jim Lyons was a first-assignment combat controller assigned to Hurlburt’s SOCCT. Growing up in Indianapolis, he

talked to an Air Force recruiter when a lengthy period of harsh winter weather put a stop to his outdoor construction work. Enlisting in 1978, Lyons entered combat control in 1982 and soon looked for opportunities to augment Det 4. “The big thing down there [Hurlburt] was to be the cream of the crop and to get the blessing from the chief . . . so you could go augment,” he recalled. “Back then the . . . Det 4 guys were all in civilian clothes and all had long hair and you wanted to be there. Those were the cool guys. . . . you knew all of these guys that were just stellar.”¹¹⁶

When augmenting the high-speed JSOC outfit, “I was just glad to have my one job . . . [as] a bike chaser. . . . The bike chaser [was] the guy who would put the lights out and . . . clear all of the taxiways and he was the one running around,” Lyons said.¹¹⁷ Normally, 16 Rangers and four combat controllers jumped together from the first airplane over the DZ. “The first going out the door would be a combat controller and a Ranger and you would have a double bike bundle. It was one of the bigger bikes. . . . around 350 [cubic inch] size. . . . That would go out, [then another] combat controller and a Ranger would go out and they would chase the bike bundle. And that is what we would use for mobility on the airfield,” Lyons explained.¹¹⁸ If all went according to plan, two combat controllers and two Rangers each had a bike, but if one or more bikes were lost or inoperative, the combat controllers had priority. While the CCTs worked the air traffic control, the Rangers established blocking positions around the airfield.¹¹⁹

Being stationed at Hurlburt was the best of both worlds for Lyons and other SOCCT members. They could periodically augment the premier Pope detachment, yet still enjoy the Florida beaches. “Who wants to leave Hurlburt Field? Spring break is enough to keep any young man there,” Chief Lyons expressed.¹²⁰ That point suggested a source of long-running, low-level friction between the Pope/Bragg and Hurlburt CCT communities. Known for years as “Fayette-Nam” and “No Hope Pope,” the Fayetteville area could not compete with Hurlburt’s Fort Walton Beach in the eyes of the mostly young, single combat controllers. Many Det 4 members viewed themselves as more dedicated to the mission than the Hurlburt guys who enjoyed the good life: beautiful beaches and, lacking thousands of soldiers in the immediate vicinity, far less competition for prospective girlfriends or wives.¹²¹

But often it was as much a matter of timing as dedication, as seen in Lyons’s own career. Despite Hurlburt’s distinct advantages, in late 1985 Lyons volunteered for Det 4, survived the assessment selection course, and served at Pope for the next 10 years, earning a combat

jump star in the 1989 Panama operation. In 1996 he was named the Air Force Combat Control NCO of the Year. Promoted to chief master sergeant in 2004, Lyons finished his active duty career as the chief enlisted manager of the 21st Special Tactics Squadron—once again, at Pope AFB.¹²²

Establishing US Special Operations Command and Special Tactics

While Grenada's aftermath continued to influence the evolution of Air Force special tactics, larger issues were brewing in Washington. In the post-Southeast Asia years of the late 1970s, US special operations had suffered considerably from budget cuts, lack of interest, and a persistent reputation as “snake-eaters” and “cowboys.” One author referred to “a near-eradication” of US special operations capabilities in the 1970s.¹²³ The failure to rescue the hostages in Iran in 1980 highlighted the problems affecting joint and special operations and placed those concerns on the radar screens of the Pentagon and Congress.

A few key individuals—led by House Armed Services Committee member and Readiness Subcommittee Chairman Wilbur C. “Dan” Daniel and a staffer, Ted Lunger, as well as Noel Koch, Lynn Rylander, and Col George McGovern—took the initiative in SOF reform. Author Susan Marquis wrote that Koch, Rylander, and McGovern “conducted guerrilla operations throughout the Defense Department bureaucracy and on Capitol Hill” in support of the reform.¹²⁴ Koch was astute enough to realize that the Pentagon, despite a few marginal improvements, was simply unwilling to support meaningful SOF reform; he needed to go to Capitol Hill, where he began emphasizing the role of SOF in counterterrorism and low-intensity conflict.

The Grenada experience only reemphasized and increased Koch's and others' concerns. Undoubtedly, Carney's frustrations with the error-ridden operation were tempered with the fact that Urgent Fury, as he wrote, “proved a defining moment for special operations, for it led directly to the creation, by congressional mandate three years later, of the U.S. Special Operations Command, when special operations finally came into its own.”¹²⁵

The year 1986 witnessed the genesis of genuine SOF reform. In May, Senators William Cohen and Sam Nunn and Representative Daniel introduced SOF reform bills in their respective legislative

bodies. The Senate bill called for a joint military organization for special operations forces and the establishment of a Pentagon office to ensure the proper funding and policy attention for low-intensity conflict and special operations.¹²⁶

Dan Daniel's initiative went further, proposing a national special operations agency led by a civilian, thus bypassing the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and reporting directly to the secretary of defense. Daniel wanted to keep the JCS and the services out of the SOF budget process, which in the past had provided an opportunity for mischief regarding congressionally intended SOF purchases. During the hearings on the bills, the testimony of General Scholtes was, according to Marquis, "crucial in the battle for SOF reform."¹²⁷ The former JSOC commander detailed the misuse of SOF assets in Grenada as well as the "intelligence failures, poor command, control, and communications, and equipment failures during Urgent Fury." Following his formal testimony, he met privately with a small group of senators to discuss the SOF-related problems seen in Grenada.¹²⁸

Both houses passed the SOF measures, and the final version included the framework for USSOCOM: a unified combatant command headed by a four-star general for SOF and the so-called "SOF checkbook," a new Major Force Program 11 specifically to protect SOF funding. The final bill was attached to the 1987 Defense Authorization Act, amending the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. In October 1986 Pres. Ronald Reagan signed the watershed legislation into law.¹²⁹

In January 1987 the JCS recommended to the secretary of defense that the US Readiness Command be disestablished, thereby providing billets and facilities for the congressionally-mandated USSOCOM. On 13 April 1987 President Reagan approved the new command, and it activated three days later. Army general James J. Lindsay, the previous commander of US Readiness Command, took the reins as the first commander of USSOCOM. A decade earlier, when Delta was looking for a suitable facility at Ft. Bragg, then-Brigadier General Lindsay solved Charlie Beckwith's problems by relocating a handful of military prisoners to the downtown Fayetteville jail and turning the Fort Bragg "Stockade" over to Beckwith, leading the latter to consider Lindsay's chances of promotion slim due to his uncommon efficiency. Now Beckwith ate his words.¹³⁰

On 1 October 1987 the Headquarters, 1720th Special Tactics Group was activated at Hurlburt Field, Florida. Concurrently, the

1723rd Combat Control Squadron at Hurlburt and the redesignated 1724th Special Tactics Squadron at Pope were assigned to the group. It had been a long, hard road for SOF combat control. In 1984 CCTs attained their first squadrons. The same year, a nascent special tactics entity began unofficially with the introduction of PJs into Detachment 4, NAFCOS. Finally, the dreams of John Carney and many other combat controllers were a reality. Two units of the US Air Force, one group and one squadron, now officially bore the designation of “Special Tactics.” And, with perfect appropriateness, the first commander of the only special tactics group in the Air Force was Colonel Carney. His chief enlisted manager, CMSgt Wayne Norrad, was one of Carney’s first team leaders from the early days of Det 1, MACOS.¹³¹

Notes

1. The European and Pacific MC-130 units were the 7th Special Operations Squadron and 1st Special Operations Squadron, respectively. After 1975 special operations CCT activities in Southeast Asia ceased.

2. John T. Carney Jr., and Benjamin F. Schemmer, *No Room For Error: The Covert Operations of America’s Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 103, 302–3; CMSgt Nicholas S. Kiraly, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 19 September 2006; CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 14 November 2006; CMSgt Michael I. Lampe, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 5 June 2007; Col Craig F. Brotchie, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 21 July 2007; and Norrad, briefing, copy in AFHRA files. Two of the five support positions at Det 1, MACOS, remained unfilled for several months: see Norrad to the author, e-mail, subject: “RE: trip report/book update,” 13 December 2010.

3. Brotchie, interview; Brotchie to the author, e-mail, subject: “Re: Col Brotchie’s position in football,” 5 October 2010; Col Jeffrey Buckmelter, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 14 December 2007; and Buckmelter, official biography.

4. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 103; Brotchie, interview; Lampe, interview; and CMSgt Timothy C. Brown, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 11 November 2006, including quote.

5. Lampe, interview; Brown, interview; CMSgt James A. Lyons, interview with the author, 9 March 2007; Buckmelter, interview; and Lampe, Brown, Lyons, Buckmelter, official biographies.

6. Mark Adkin, *Urgent Fury: The Battle for Grenada* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), xv. In the late 1700s, nutmeg was introduced to the island and flourished there: see Courtney Glass, “The Setting,” in *American Intervention in Grenada: The Implications of Operation “Urgent Fury”* edited by Peter M. Dunn and Bruce W. Watson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 2.

7. Col John T. Carney Jr., USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 November 2006. An overly favorable treatment of the US performance in Grenada was in Caspar

W. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace, Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), chapter 4.

8. Carney, interview; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 171, 302–03.

9. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 5–7, 12, 110–11, including quotes; Frank Uhlig Jr., “Amphibious Aspects of the Grenada Episode,” chapter 8 in Dunn and Watson, *American Intervention in Grenada*, 90; and Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 92.

10. Report, US Department of State and US Department of Defense, subject: Grenada, A Preliminary Report, 16 December 1983, SD 1-1 in MAC History Office, subject: “Urgent Fury: The United States Air Force and the Grenada Operation,” January 1988, vol. 2.

11. Chronology, US Information Agency, subject: Grenada: October 25 to November 2, 1983, n.d., SD 1-2 in MAC History Office, subject: “Urgent Fury,” vol. 2, including quote (Reagan quoted by US Information Agency); Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 111; Uhlig, “Amphibious Aspects of the Grenada Episode,” in Dunn and Watson, *American Intervention in Grenada*, 90; and Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 92.

12. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 93; Glass, “The Setting,” in Dunn and Watson, eds., *American Intervention in Grenada*, 9–10; Dorothea Cypher, “Urgent Fury: The U.S. Army in Grenada,” chapter 9 in Dunn and Watson, eds., *American Intervention in Grenada*, 100; and Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, 106–07.

13. Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace*, 106–07.

14. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 107-9, 115, including quote; and Message, 152100Z Nov 83, MAC Public Affairs to AIG 7212 Public Affairs, subject: MAC News Service Release, SD 3-4 in MAC History Office, “Urgent Fury,” vol. 3.

15. Adkin’s *Urgent Fury* is the best work on the Grenada operation that deals with politics, society, and the economy in addition to the military activities. A lengthy and excellent US Army history is Edgar F. Raines Jr., *The Rucksack War: U.S. Army Operational Logistics in Grenada, 1983* (Washington: Center of Military History, 2010). A shorter, useful overview of the operation is Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury, The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Grenada, 12 October–2 November 1983* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 1997). Two useful personal accounts I have found are Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, and Michael J. Couvillon, *Grenada Grinder: The Complete Story Of AC-130H Spectre Gunships In Operation Urgent Fury* (Marietta, GA: Deeds Publishing, 2011).

16. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 117; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 93–94; Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 1–2; Gerald Hopple and Cynthia Gilley, “Policy Without Intelligence,” chapter 6 in Dunn and Watson, eds., *American Intervention in Grenada*, 62, including quote.

17. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 2–4.

18. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 126.

19. *Ibid.*, 126, 170; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 94; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 120, 159.

20. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 170, including quote; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 159, 161. The best example of the increased potential for SOF casualties stemming from the loss of darkness was seen in the SEALs’ mission to rescue the island’s governor-general: see Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 4, 43–44; and Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 99–100.

21. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 105. Nine of the 19 US fatalities were SOF members. Sources varied on the number of wounded. Adkin and Marquis listed 152 wounded Americans: Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 309; and Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 105. Adkin's total was based on the number of Purple Hearts awarded, which exceeded an early official number of wounded or injured (115). Cole tallied 116 US wounded: Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 61. Carney and Schemmer listed 123 wounded: Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 109.

22. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 167–69; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 96–97; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 122–23, 130–31, 156.

23. Message, 152100Z Nov 83, MAC Public Affairs to AIG 7212 Public Affairs, subject: MAC News Service Release, SD 3-4 in MAC History Office, "Urgent Fury," vol. 3, including quote; Dunn and Watson, *American Intervention in Grenada*, 90; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 116–19, 129.

24. Brig Gen Robert B. Patterson, 21AF/CV, interview with E. D. Canivan, 21AF/HO, 29 December 1983, SD 4-1, in MAC History Office, "Urgent Fury," vol. 3, 7.

25. Maj Gen Robert B. Patterson, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 18 September 2006. "Buzz" Patterson has authored several insightful books on current issues in American politics.

26. Gen Duane H. Cassidy, USAF, retired, interview by the author, 20 May 2005.

27. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 136; Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 24, 30, 34; and Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 95-96.

28. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 130, 336–37; and Commander, US LantCom, Muir S. Fairchild Research Information Center call no. M-U 40390-17, report, subject: Operation Urgent Fury Report, section VII-1, October 25–November 2, 1983, Norfolk, VA, 6 February 1984, including quote. One hundred thirty-eight students were rescued from the True Blue campus on 25 October. The second location where medical students resided was the Grand Anse campus located 2.5-kilometers northwest of Point Salines on the island's west coast; 224 students were rescued there on 26 October. The third area was the Lance aux Epines peninsula near the town of St. George's, where 202 students were evacuated on 28 October. A number of students on the peninsula resided in homes or apartments. The official number of medical students carried to safety by US forces was 564: Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 4, 42, 46, 48, 56. Sources varied on the number of medical students. Secretary Weinberger referred to some 800 medical students, but perhaps not all of those enrolled were resident on the island by the time of the operation: see Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 107.

29. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 337.

30. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 136–37, 144, 167–68; Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 34–5; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 122–23, 126–27, 130–31; Robert A. Gormly, *Combat Swimmer: Memoirs of a Navy SEAL* (New York: Dutton, 1998), 165, 181–87; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 96; and Kelly, *Brave Men*, 209–10. I have been unable to determine the actual location of the ill-fated jump from unclassified sources. Adkin's excellent book stated the jump took place "30 kilometers [18 miles] off the southwest tip of Grenada." Kelly wrote the men were to "parachute into the sea off the south coast of the island." Gormly, the SEAL Team Six commander, wrote the drop was planned for "about forty miles northeast of Grenada." Carney and Schemmer, borrowing from Gormly, stated the distance was "forty miles at sea." Verification of this aspect of the mission must await the declassification of primary documents,

especially those of SEAL Team Six, or interviews with SEAL participants in the operation. Note that Adkin, Kelly, and Marquis all mistakenly stated the combat controllers were to jump with the SEALs. Although jump-qualified, the combat controllers did not plan to jump, nor did they, but rather were transported to the SEAL drop area via the destroyer USS *Clifton Sprague*, as Carney and Schemmer noted. On the question of how many SEALs jumped on the mission, Adkin, Kelly, and Marquis indicated a total of 12 (including the four who were lost), while Carney and Schemmer mentioned 16. I think it likely that Carney and Schemmer borrowed the number “sixteen” from the other authors without being aware that they had mistakenly included the four combat controllers among the jumpers. In other words, because Adkin, Kelly, and Marquis were unaware that the controllers did *not* jump, they indicated 16 jumpers (the total number in the SEAL/CCT force), which number Carney and Schemmer appeared to have borrowed. Twelve SEALs appeared to be the most likely number that jumped that night. Adding the four combat controllers gave a total of 16 men who planned to take the whalers to Point Salines that night. Cole, however, indicated only eight SEALs as participants (one four-man team per MC-130E, including the team that was lost).

31. Gormly, *Combat Swimmer*, 185, including quote; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 130–31. The SEAL commander acknowledged that he was unaware that his SEALs had never jumped into the water at night, which raised additional questions.

32. Kelly, *Brave Men*, 210.

33. *Ibid.*, 210–11; Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 168–69; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 131; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 96–97; and Gormly, *Combat Swimmer*, 183–87. Gormly’s account—unlike those of Kelly, Adkin, and Marquis—failed to mention the SEALs’ overloaded condition.

34. Norrad, interview.

35. I have been unable to determine whether the *Sprague*’s safety boat was, in fact, a Boston Whaler. As of April 2017, the Naval History and Heritage Command confirmed the ship’s log books remained closed.

36. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 126–27, 130–32, including quote; Col John T. Carney Jr., USAF, retired, phone conversation with the author, 2 September 2008; Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 168–69; Kelly, *Brave Men*, 210–11; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 96–97; and Gormly, *Combat Swimmer*, 186–87. Another confusing point concerned the number of small boats in the vicinity that night. Available sources indicated there were three: the two Boston Whalers dropped by the MC-130Es, plus the USS *Sprague*’s own safety boat (possibly a whaler). Adkin mentioned a total of three boats but mistakenly indicated the two whalers were deployed by the *Sprague*. Orr repeated the error of the boats being deployed by the destroyer. Marquis noted the two whalers were airdropped and acknowledged the presence of a third boat deployed by the *Sprague*. Carney and Schemmer mentioned the two airdropped whalers and indicated the *Sprague*’s safety boat was also a whaler (I have not been able to verify this through the Naval Historical Center). In any case, there were three boats in the water in the vicinity of the *Sprague* that night.

37. Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 169–70, 194–96, 208; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 97; and Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 41. Cole stated the assault at Salines began at 0536, whereas Adkin stated that Lt Col Wes Taylor (1/75 Rangers) was the first to jump at 0534 (see page 208).

38. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 137, including quote; Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 170; Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 97; and Carney, phone conversation, 2 September 2008. Adkin mistakenly wrote that on the second night the SEALs again parachuted into the water near the destroyer.
39. Gormly, *Combat Swimmer*, 165, 187, including quotes; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 137.
40. Carney, interview [emphasis added].
41. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 137; and Gormly, *Combat Swimmer*, 165, 187, including quote.
42. Brotchie, interview; Buckmelter, interview; Buckmelter, biography; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 124–26, 143–44; and Maj Steven L. McLeary, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, “RE: question for Col Carney for Air Force history program book on Special Tactics,” 4 April 2017. In 2005 Robert H. Holmes, Buckmelter’s successor in command at the 720 Special Tactics Group, became the first CCT officer to be promoted to brigadier general.
43. Patterson, interview with Canivan, 6.
44. Buckmelter, interview, including quote.
45. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 118–19, 142–45, including quote; Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 194; and Dunn and Watson, *American Intervention in Grenada*, 99, 102.
46. Buckmelter, interview.
47. Lt Gen Bruce L. Fister, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 26 November 2007, including quotes; Buckmelter, interview; Couvillon, *Grenada Grinder*, 92–93; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 143–44. From 2000 to 2010, Fister served as the Officers’ Christian Fellowship executive director; Fister, phone conversation with the author, 17 August 2010.
48. Lampe, interview, including quotes; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 126, 144–45.
49. Lampe, interview.
50. Col Ronald L. Watkins, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 14 January 2008.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.; and Patterson, interview with Canivan, 7, including quotes.
53. Brig Gen Michael A. Longoria, USAF, interview with the author, with Col Ronald L. Watkins, USAF, 18 July 2007.
54. Watkins, interview, including quotes [emphasis added]; and Carney, interview.
55. Kiraly, interview; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 149–50.
56. Kiraly, interview, including quotes; CMSgt Rex V. Wollmann, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 24 May 2007; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 126, 149–50; and Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 44. Cole noted the loss of two Marine Corps Sea Cobra helicopters on 25 October, one of which was witnessed by Wollmann.
57. Lampe, interview; and Watkins, interview.
58. Watkins, interview.
59. History, 21 AF, Jan 1982–Dec 1984, vol. 1, 182.
60. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 56; and MAC History Office, “Urgent Fury,” vol. 1, 128–30.
61. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, 6.
62. Kiraly, interview.

63. Carney, interview. At Det 4, NAFCOS, combat controllers were expected to be both high-altitude, low-opening (HALO) parachute and SCUBA qualified. Wayne Norrad relayed an anecdote that illustrated Chief Kiraly's example to his men: "Chief Kiraly was HALO qualified but not SCUBA. So he got a class slot to attend the Special Forces (SF) Underwater Dive Course (SCUBA School) at Key West, Florida. He was not able to complete one of the mandatory events. From what I remember hearing, he literally drowned and was pulled out of the pool and resuscitated. He was told he could not continue in the course, but could return at a later date if he volunteered to do so. He returned to Pope AFB a bit dejected, but still determined to make it through the course." Later, Kiraly met with his top NCOs in the unit and told them he was returning to the SCUBA course. If he should not graduate, he said, he would request a transfer to another unit. That time, he made it through the course. "That's the type of example Chief Kiraly set. Do it or move on to another job," Norrad said: Norrad, e-mail, 13 December 2010.

64. Brown, interview, including quotes; and Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, 190; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 168, 170. Adkin noted that on 25 October there were unacceptable delays of several hours in the evacuation of some casualties.

65. Carney, interview; Norrad, interview; and Brown, interview.

66. Carney, interview, including quote (paraphrasing Cassidy); Cassidy, official biography; and Norrad to the author, e-mail, subject: "RE: Norrad Check In," 10 April 2017. For a time the abbreviation "STGP" was used for special tactics group.

67. Longoria, interview (with Watkins), including quote; and History, 23 AF and Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS), AFHRA call no K316.01, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 10, in SD III-67, news release (Unclassified), MAC Public Affairs, subject: Air Force Approves Special Duty Pay for Combat Controllers, 27 September 1985. Longoria was promoted to brigadier general in July 2006.

68. History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 10, in SD III-67, Air Force Approves Special Duty Pay for Combat Controllers, 27 September 1985. Cassidy took command of MAC on 20 September 1985, one week prior to the announcement of SDAP: see History, MAC, AFHRA call no. K300.01, Jan–Dec 1985, vol. 1, 477; and Norrad, discussion with the author, 9 December 2010.

69. History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 10, in SD III-67, Air Force Approves Special Duty Pay for Combat Controllers, 27 September 1985.

70. MSgt William A. Baillie, USAF, retired, discussion with the author, 23 March 2007; and Col John E. Buck, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 22 March 2007. 71. Patterson, interview; Patterson, official biography; History, 21AF, call no. K303.01, Jan 1982–Dec 1984, vol. 1, Appendix 2, subject: Roster of Key Personnel, 275; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 112–13, 181–83, 191. An official biography of Carney was contained in History, 1720 STGP, AFHRA call no. K-GP-CMDO-1720-HI, Jan 1990–Dec 1991, vol. 2, SD 1-25. Although Carney moved to HQ MAC in April 1985—five months prior to General Cassidy's taking command of MAC—Cassidy influenced his assignment. It was some months before Carney was named as director of combat control and pararescue operations, certainly with Cassidy's approval.

72. Carney, interview; Cassidy, interview; and Patterson, interview.

73. Carney, interview, including quote; and History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan–Dec 1983, vol. 1, 42; History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 10, in SD III-38,

MAC News Service (Unclassified), MAC Public Affairs, subject: Rescue sergeant earns Cheney Award,” 7 September 1984, 3-5. The award was posthumous.

74. Carney, interview.
75. Cassidy, interview, including quotes; and Cassidy, biography.
76. Cassidy, interview.
77. Patterson, interview.
78. Cassidy, interview.
79. Ibid.
80. The full designation was the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS).
81. SMSgt John L. Pighini, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 25 July 2008; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 170.
82. Norrad, interview, including quotes (emphasis in original); Pighini, interview; and MSgt Emilio Jaso, USAF, retired, phone conversation with the author, 11 September 2008.
83. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 168, including quote; Lampe, interview; and Lampe to the author, e-mail, subject: “RE: SOF Battlefield Airmen interview,” 30 September 2008.
84. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 170; and Lampe, interview.
85. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 170.
86. Ibid., 170-79; Lampe, interview; and Lampe, e-mail, 30 September 2008.
87. Pighini, interview, including quote; and Lampe, interview.
88. Ibid.
89. Vickie M. Graham, “Surviving the Fall,” *Airman*, Feb 1995, 3-5, including quote; and Gearen to the author, e-mail, subject: “Re: Scott G’s accident,” 25 September 2008.
90. Graham, “Surviving the Fall,” 4-5; Gearen, e-mail, 25 September 2008; and Pighini to the author, e-mails, subject: “Re: Scott G’s accident,” 24-25 September 2008.
91. Graham, “Surviving the Fall,” 5.
92. Pighini, interview; and Graham, “Surviving the Fall,” 5-7.
93. CMSgt Rodney D. Alne, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 22 April 2008.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Brotchie, interview.
97. Longoria, interview (with Watkins).
98. Brown, interview.
99. Lyons, interview.
100. Brotchie, interview.
101. Brown, interview.
102. Alne, interview.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Carney, interview.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.
109. History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984-Dec 1985, vol. 1, 68; History, 23 AF, AFHRA call no K316.01, Jan 1986-Dec 1987, vol. 1, 20-22, including quote; and

MSgt Ray A. Cooper, USAF, retired, telephone conversation with the author, 16 September 2008.

110. History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 1, 5–6.

111. *Ibid.*, 6.

112. History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 8, SD I–12, VIII–127.

113. Longoria, interview (with Watkins).

114. History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 1, 6, including quotes; History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 8, SD I–12.

115. History, 23 AF and ARRS, Jan 1984–Dec 1985, vol. 1, 6, CD-35. Concurrently with the 1723rd squadron's activation in 1984, HQ MAC activated two subordinate detachments: Det 1 at Rhein Main AB, Germany, and Det 2 at Clark AB, Philippines. The 1721st and 1722nd squadrons remained in the conventional arena.

116. Lyons, interview.

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

122. *Ibid.*; and Lyons, biography.

123. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 35, including quote; Jerry L. Thigpen, *The Praetorian Starship: The Untold Story of the Combat Talon* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, Dec 2001), 184.

124. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 80–86.

125. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 108–12; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 109, including quote. For an excellent, detailed account of the struggle for SOF reform in the 1980s: see chapters 4–8 of Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*.

126. *United States Special Operations Command History: Special Operations Forces, Global Scouts* (MacDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM History and Research Office, 1998), 3–5.

127. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 105, including quote; Kelly, *Brave Men*, 213; and *Global Scouts*, 3–5.

128. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 105, including quote; and Kelly, *Brave Men*, 213.

129. *Global Scouts*, 5. The bill's final version included an assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict (LIC) and a coordinating board for LIC within the National Security Council.

130. *Ibid.*, 6; and Beckwith and Knox, *Delta Force*, 115.

131. Prior to 1 October 1987, the 1724th Special Tactics Squadron was designated the 1724th Combat Control Squadron.

Chapter 6

First Fight

Special Tactics in Panama, 1989

Background and the Run-up to Operation Just Cause

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States had joined the major European nations as a colonial power—the result of the Spanish–American War in 1898. New economic opportunities coupled with the navy-mindedness of Alfred Thayer Mahan’s disciples ensured overseas possessions such as the Philippines and Puerto Rico intensified Washington’s interest in a transisthmian canal in Panama. Two decades earlier the French attempted to construct a canal across the isthmus but eventually were turned back by the jungle, tropical disease, and inadequate funding. Between 1899 and 1903, Panamanian nationalists unsuccessfully sought independence from Colombia. In November 1903 American intervention resulted in Panama’s independence from its Latin American neighbor, Colombia, but it was hardly independent from US interests.¹

The United States and Panama signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty in 1903, granting the United States the right to build its canal. It also gave the United States control of a 10-mile-wide swath of land along the canal’s 50-mile length. The Panama Canal opened in 1914, representing “an engineering marvel even by today’s standards.” In the decades that followed, US interventionism, limited Panamanian sovereignty, and US discrimination toward the local population marked the relationship between the United States and Panama.²

For the most part, tensions between the two countries remained manageable, but in 1964 riots over the flying of the Panamanian flag at an American high school in the Canal Zone resulted in two dozen deaths, including three US Soldiers. In 1977–78 the United States agreed to treaty revisions that called for the canal’s control to be

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turned over to Panama at the end of 1999. In 1981 the country's popular, nationalistic leader, Omar Torrijos, died in a plane crash. In his place, Manuel Noriega, a National Guard intelligence chief with ties to the United States, emerged as the new military dictator in Panama.³

In 1985 the murder of one of Noriega's political opponents proved to be a turning point in US–Panamanian relations. In the wake of the killing, anti-Noriega political activity began in Panama, and US political sentiment turned against Noriega. Two years later, negative publicity regarding Noriega's nefarious activities sparked rioting in the capital of Panama City. Shortly thereafter, the US Senate passed a resolution calling for the Panamanian leader's resignation.⁴

In February 1988 two US federal grand juries indicted Noriega on charges of drug trafficking, and the United States initiated economic sanctions designed to force him from power. A month later, a coup against Noriega failed. Meanwhile, his Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) stepped up arbitrary harassment and assaults against US military members and their dependents.⁵ Following the May 1989 presidential election in Panama—in which Noriega's handpicked candidate lost in a landslide—Noriega invalidated the election and encouraged the PDF's brutality against anti-Noriega protestors, including the winning candidate. In response to the gross display of fraud and violence, as well as another incident in which a US sailor was beaten and robbed, Pres. George H. W. Bush ordered an additional 1,900 military personnel to Panama as a means to increase security at US installations.⁶

This show-of-force measure by the Bush administration, named Operation Nimrod Dancer, was intended to bolster security for US personnel and facilities in Panama. Over the next several months, numerous units deployed to Panama for training and exercises in accordance with existing agreements between the United States and Panama. By December 1989 most of the forces that participated in Operation Just Cause actually had entered Panama under the auspices of Nimrod Dancer. Many personnel knew the travel routes, objectives, and PDF forces they opposed during the operation. The United States also deployed—either under Nimrod Dancer or surreptitiously—a number of the aircraft that conducted operations during Just Cause. Those included AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, MH-6/AH-6 Little Bird light helicopter gunships, MH-53J Pave Low and MH-60 Pave Hawk special operations helicopters, and AC-130 Spectre gunships.⁷

The leadership of US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) changed hands at the end of September, when US Army general Maxwell Thurman took the helm. Only days later, another attempted coup against Noriega failed within hours. The Bush administration had hoped that economic sanctions or a successful coup would end Noriega's criminal regime, but both options fizzled. A military operation seemed the only recourse. Planners counted on Noriega to commit another provocative act that threatened the lives of US citizens or the security of the canal.⁸

Noriega dutifully complied. On 15 December "Maximum Leader" Noriega declared that "a state of war" existed between Panama and the United States. The following evening PDF guards stopped four US military officers at a roadblock in Panama City. When the driver elected to run the blockade for fear of being assaulted, the guards fired on the vehicle, killing a US Marine Corps lieutenant. General Thurman received word of the incident while on leave in Virginia. After meeting with chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Gen Colin L. Powell, US Army, Thurman returned immediately to Panama.⁹

President Bush met with his national security team the afternoon of 17 December. Army historian Lawrence Yates wrote that the president asked "several hard and detailed questions" and that his approval "was not a foregone conclusion."¹⁰ The deciding factor may have been that the discipline and control of the PDF seemed to be disintegrating, thereby threatening the lives of Americans in the country. "This guy [Noriega] is not going to lay off. It will only get worse," the president said. He turned to General Powell and stated, "Okay, let's go. We're going to go."¹¹ President Bush ordered the execution of a military operation in Panama "to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal treaty."¹² Later, he added one more directive—Manuel Noriega's apprehension and extradition to the United States to face federal drug trafficking charges. The overall operation was called Just Cause.¹³

US military planners had prepared for such an operation since late 1987. Until December 1989 the military phase of the planning bore the designation, "Blue Spoon." Washington originally called for a gradual buildup of forces in the Canal Zone, coupled with economic and diplomatic pressure, encouraging the Panamanians to rid themselves of Noriega. In September–October 1989, however, Blue Spoon's operational planning transitioned from US Army South, USSOUTHCOM's

Army component, to the XVIII Airborne Corps. The lead assault element shifted from the 7th Infantry Division (Light) to the 82nd Airborne Division. A growing number of Americans might have welcomed the changes had they known of them, including Rep. Robert Dornan (R-CA). Earlier in the year, Dornan voiced his frustration over several incidents of harassment and the assault of a US military member. “The next time an American is beaten we should hit them with a ton of bricks. And sometimes a ton of bricks is spelled: 82d Airborne,” he said.¹⁴

The concept plan for Panama was that any military incursion must be swift enough to prevent insurgents from dispersing into the jungles to organize a meaningful opposition—hence, the 82nd’s lead role. At the same time, planners boosted the role of special operations forces (SOF). Since 1980 the United States had devoted considerable resources to SOF, culminating in the establishment of US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in 1987 that included its own line of funding. The SOF assets for Panama included Air Force special tactics teams of combat controllers (CCT) and pararescuemen (PJ). While the CCTs belonged to the 1724th Special Tactics Squadron (STS) or 1723rd Combat Control Squadron (CCS), the special tactics PJs belonged to the 1724th STS or 1730th Pararescue Squadron (PRS). All three squadrons reported to the two-year-old 1720th Special Tactics Group (STG) into which the CCTs and PJs had merged in the aftermath of the 1983 Grenada operation.¹⁵

Finally, after repeated provocations on the part of Noriega and his thugs, President Bush decided on the military option. Sometime between 17 and 19 December, he and his closest advisors changed the name of the operation from Blue Spoon to Just Cause, which suggested something of the operation’s essence. But perhaps just as important, in years to come its participants were far more likely to recall with pride their role in an operation named “Just Cause” rather than its nondescript, if not juvenile-sounding, antecedent.¹⁶

Military planners devised Joint Task Force South (JTF South) to be conducted under the auspices of General Thurman’s USSOUTHCOM. Thurman selected the XVIII Airborne Corps commander, Lt Gen Carl Stiner, to command the JTF. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd battalions of the 75th Ranger Regiment and the 82nd Airborne Division comprised the core of Stiner’s ground forces. Under JTF South, initial phase operations belonged to six maneuver task forces (TF), one of which was TF Red.¹⁷ The three Ranger battalions comprised the bulk

of Red's initial forces. Their mission was to fly from US bases and jump into the Torrijos-Tocumen and Rio Hato airfields, which took place on the opening night.¹⁸

Torrijos-Tocumen was an international civilian airport and a military airfield, located just east of Panama City. The PDF's 1st Infantry Company was based there. Rio Hato was a strictly military airfield situated about 50 miles west of the city, home to the PDF's 6th and 7th rifle companies. At Torrijos-Tocumen, the 1st Ranger Battalion and one company of 3rd Rangers were to jump into the airfield at H-hour, set for 0100 local, 20 December. At Rio Hato, the remainder of 3rd Ranger Battalion and the 2nd Rangers expected to "hit the silk" at 0104 hours. About 55 minutes after H-hour, "Task Force Pacific" consisting mainly of 82nd Airborne troopers plus heavy equipment, including Sheridan light tanks, were to parachute into Torrijos-Tocumen. Because the Panamanians could not challenge US control of the air, except for a limited ground-based anti-aircraft capability, planners assigned slow-moving US Army helicopters and USAF AC-130 gunships with the primary ground attack role from the air.¹⁹

The US plan called for 27 key targets to be struck or secured on the opening night, about half of them simultaneously and the rest within hours. An interesting aspect of the Panama operation was that whereas the objectives of US-based units were located thousands of miles from their home station, some targets of Panama-based US units were situated only a few hundred yards from the units' home turf. Noriega became the top priority for TF Black, added by the president to the operation's original list of four objectives. The "one criteria for success in the Panama mission" was getting Noriega, said Maj Craig Brotchie, the 1724 STS commander.²⁰ Expecting special operators to "bag" him on the first night, planners anticipated the PDF's acceptance of the *fait accompli* and a quick surrender. But as the operation unfolded, Noriega remained at large for several days, troubling US officials.²¹

Arguably, the second-most critical objective for TF Black was the rescue of a US citizen. Kurt Muse was imprisoned for running an anti-Noriega radio station. Muse's daring rescue from Panama City's "Model Jail" by Delta operators constituted the first successful hostage rescue in the 10 years since the validation of the Army's counter-terrorist/hostage-rescue force.²²

Operations at Torrijos-Tocumen Airfield

On the opening night of Just Cause, the marking of the Torrijos-Tocumen Airport by special tactics members to ensure the air assault's success in the event of bad weather constituted a little known but significant action. In an interview, Brotchie recalled that his opinion on the eve of the operation was that one of the few ways "this thing can fail early is not [to] have the [Torrijos-] Tocumen Airport."²³ But what if fog or low clouds, common in Panama, made it impossible for the lead transport aircraft to identify the drop zone (DZ)? Brotchie's combat controllers devised a plan for placing an electronic marker at the DZ prior to the arrival of the first aircraft carrying the Rangers. Their plan called for two MH-6s to airlift relatively large all-weather navigational beacons to be placed at the DZ 15 minutes prior to H-hour. Meeting resistance at lower command levels, Brotchie took his idea to the Joint Special Operations Command commander, Maj Gen Wayne A. Downing, who authorized a rehearsal on the night prior to the start of the operation. Thus, Downing continued his excellent relationship with CCT that had begun a decade earlier with Brotchie's mentor, John Carney.²⁴

Based on the rehearsal, Brotchie received approval for the DZ markers to be emplaced the next night by MH-6s flying out of Howard AFB, Panama—situated several miles southwest of Panama City and the most important US air base in Latin America. At H-hour minus 12 minutes, a four-man team led by TSgt Robert Kinder and including SSgt Bradley Baxter, TSgt Robert Martens, and a PJ, SSgt Ishmael Antonio, placed two TPN-27 zone markers at the approach end of the intended runway. The Ranger-laden C-141 Starlifter crews entered the markers' exact locations into their computers. They could have relied on the "eleventh-hour" backup measure had the weather been marginal. About the time that Delta operators rescued Muse, just one block away special operations AC-130 gunships opened fire on the Comandancia, the PDF's headquarters building.²⁵

On 19 December, as deploying troops gathered at several stateside installations, severe weather conditions threatened to delay the operation. Ground fog and heavy Christmas-shopping traffic slowed the 7,000-strong 7th Infantry Division's travel from Fort Ord, California, to its primary departure airfield at Travis AFB, California. Even more serious, a sudden drop in temperature turned rain into a dangerous ice storm at Fort Bragg and Pope AFB, North Carolina. Of

20 C-141s that flew into Pope, half of them experienced a takeoff delay of three hours due to the ice. Pope's deicing equipment handled no more than six aircraft at a time. The Rangers and 82nd Airborne paratroopers loaded their aircraft on schedule but then, wet and cold, had to sit until the deicing process was completed.²⁶

As part of TF Red, a small number of Air Force CCTs and PJs joined those shivering on the Pope flight line. John Koren, a CCT veteran of Desert One and a captain in 1989, served as liaison officer between the 1st Rangers and the two dozen special tactics members he commanded. On the night of 19–20 December, Koren's team jumped into Torrijos-Tocumen with the Rangers and controlled the airfield for the follow-on forces that arrived an hour later. But a few days prior he had a challenge "to get out of 'Dodge,'" when he and the rest of the team watched their scheduled C-130 depart Pope AFB without them—and inexplicably empty! Koren and the team had to "drive' to the war."²⁷ Colonel Carney wrote, "They unrigged their gear from its palletized airdrop configuration, loaded it back aboard a five-ton truck, drove four or five hours down Interstate 95 to Savannah through one of the Southeast's worst ice storms in years, unloaded their equipment, re-rigged it for a parachute assault, and flew . . . to Panama."²⁸

Koren's special tactics team—14 CCTs and nine PJs—was dispersed among the first three or four C-141s. Upon finally arriving over Panama, they jumped into the Torrijos-Tocumen airfield from 500 feet. The Rangers—with whom Koren's team jumped—secured the airfield within about 45 minutes. Shortly thereafter, the special tactics team controlled the C-141s that dropped the 82nd Airborne troopers. Despite the drop being made "right on the zone," Carney wrote that a number of Army "vehicles, howitzers, and ammunition pallets landed in deep mud well to the east of the runway" but still on the combat spread drop zone. Some were irrecoverable.²⁹

In the years since, debate has persisted over whether the 82nd needed to jump in or whether airdropping was the better option. Koren did not argue with the Army's decision to jump, but he disagreed with the decision to drop the troopers from a combat spread formation rather than in trail. There was only sporadic enemy ground fire by that time, so a trail formation that ensured greater accuracy on the DZ made sense tactically despite lengthening the time required for the jump. A combat spread formation, on the other hand, allowed the paratroopers to jump together, but it also ensured their dispersion on the ground. Not only did some debate the decision to drop the 82nd, the deicing delay at Pope

AFB contributed to the paratroopers' aircraft arriving at Torrijos-Tocumen in several cells of between two and about 16 C-141s, spread over a period of more than three hours that morning.³⁰



Figure 6.1. CCT/PJ members who made the combat jump into Torrijos-Tocumen International Airport. Left to right (kneeling): Capt John Koren, TSgt Ray Cooper, TSgt Lucky Cook, SSgt Fred Wulff, TSgt Duane Stanton, MSgt Scott Fales, and SSgt Steve Borbee. Left to right (standing): SSgt Stan Braxton, *TSgt Jim Lyons, SSgt Steve Cast, SSgt Joel Getzug, TSgt Harvey Perriott, *MSgt Tim Brown, SSgt Dave Holcomb, SSgt Dan Rivera, SSgt Chuck Hibbard, and *TSgt Rick Caffee. Missing from photo are SrA Paul Lawrenz, MSgt Ed Lundberg, TSgt Dave Pickering, SSgt Adam Pope, TSgt John Scanlon, and TSgt Ron Taylor. (* denotes second combat jump for three members who previously jumped into Grenada). Det. 6 members were Cooper, Fales, Lawrenz, Pickering, Pope, and Stanton.

The choice of formation was not the only cause for concern when it came to the 82nd Airborne's jump into Panama, however. Years later, one combat controller who jumped into Torrijos-Tocumen that night, a retired chief master sergeant, recalled other issues, including communication problems, paratroopers jumping without authorization—including cases when the aircraft's red "no jump" light was clearly illuminated—and lack of fire discipline once on the ground that could have resulted in fratricide incidents.³¹

MSgt Timothy "Tim" Brown coordinated with Koren and served as the special tactics team leader on the "Torrijos" side of Torrijos-

Tocumen. A Michigan native who worked in a central market in Detroit after high school, Brown entered the Air Force in 1977 and initially served as an air traffic controller. He retrained into combat control in 1979. In 1983 he was assigned to the Pope CCT unit later designated the 1724th STS. At the time of Just Cause, Brown led Silver Team. He described the preparations for Panama and the initial phase of the operation:

We had been rotating into and out of Panama for a year. Some of us had been in Panama over the years numerous times working surveys and with [Special Operations Command]. So . . . we knew the target very well. The special ops folks were all dropped where we were supposed to be. When we got to Torrijos-Tocumen, we established internal communications immediately. We . . . [set] up the runway and our equipment, navigational aids, and lights. We . . . helped the reconnaissance element set up that [had come] in on Little Birds.³²

Brown recalled that once on the ground at Torrijos-Tocumen, SSgt Danny Rivera, a Spanish-speaking combat controller, made his way to the control tower and began controlling the airfield. Suddenly, the pilot of a commercial airliner, obviously unaware of the magnitude of what was unfolding around him, started taxiing prior to takeoff. Rivera told him to stop and return to the parking ramp where there were people to offload his airplane. “Our guys are creative and adapt to the situation,” stated the retired chief, noting that the last thing anyone expected was to have an airliner attempt to take off in the middle of an air assault.³³

Scott C. “Scotty” Fales, a 1724th PJ who sat next to Brown on the lead aircraft at Torrijos, remembered that “when the 82nd came in, it rained equipment.” Retired Sergeant Fales continued, “It was equipment that came off the bodies of soldiers because they did not secure their stuff. . . . It rained hand grenades. . . . There were grenades all over the runway.”³⁴ The most dangerous piece of errant equipment was most likely a base plate to an army mortar that thudded to the ground not far from where Brown and Fales stood. There was humor amid the chaos. Fales recounted an incident in which some Rangers, who had located a pararescue “recovery all-terrain vehicle” (RATV), drove around looking for their gun jeep. Meanwhile, some 1724th squadron PJs were riding around in a gun jeep searching for their RATV. He likened it to a “Chinese fire drill.” Presumably, they swapped vehicles at some point in the melee.³⁵

Although Fales was a PJ, he held a dual role—as did many special operators. Initially upon landing at Torrijos-Tocumen, he emplaced a

strobe and a radar transponder on the airfield before reverting to his primary job of providing medical assistance for battlefield trauma casualties. In addition to providing immediate aid, PJs controlled the helicopter landing zone at the joint casualty collection point (JCCP) using night vision goggles, infrared chemical lights, and communications with the tower. Fales personally treated several chemical burn casualties and at least one Soldier wounded by enemy fire, but the heat and humidity were responsible for most casualties he treated on the operation's first day. The morning sun on 20 December was bright, the air humid, and temperatures pushed 90 degrees. "Everyone was just passing out right and left from heat exhaustion. We had them stacked up . . . and [fellow PJ] Ray Cooper and I were just giving 'IVs' like they were going out of style," Fales recalled.³⁶ Another PJ, TSgt Duane Stanton, noted in an after action report that he treated up to 10 "heat exhaustion patients," some of whom required an IV. A separate report mentioned between 6 and 10 "serious heat injury victims."³⁷

Tim Brown and the rest of Silver Team—CCTs and PJs—remained at Torrijos-Tocumen for about three days, handling the "string of airplanes" that arrived there. On 22 December they relocated to Howard AFB after being relieved by follow-on CCTs. Until redeploying around 6 January 1990, Silver Team conducted a number of "small missions," including counterdrug work, rescue missions, and securing another airfield for the US Army's use. Another 1724th STS combat controller and future chief, TSgt James "Jim" Lyons, participated in several missions in the mountainous northwestern part of the country, looking for possible insurgents and arms caches. He also encouraged locals to turn in their weapons for cash, a program employed again several years later in Haiti.³⁸

Operations at Rio Hato Airfield

For Air Force special tactics personnel, one of the biggest challenges was the simultaneous takedown by airborne forces, with CCT/PJ augmentation, of both the Torrijos-Tocumen Airport and the Rio Hato military base airfield. The location of one of Noriega's several residences in the vicinity of Rio Hato heightened that airfield's importance. Panama's weak military could not stop the US incursion, but a worst-case scenario was the prospect of Noriega escaping from Panama—perhaps flying from Rio Hato's airfield—to inspire a Panamanian insurgency

from abroad. At Rio Hato, special tactics personnel assisted in clearing the airfield of obstacles, lit the field “for follow-on airland sorties,” and provided air traffic control, satellite communications, and medical support.³⁹

The Rangers’ 2nd battalion and most of the 3rd received the assignment to “take down” Rio Hato. Minutes after 0100 on 20 December, nearly 1,000 Rangers parachuted to the objective. They were opposed by the PDF’s 6th and 7th rifle companies with an estimated strength of 500. CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, the combat control advisor to the 3rd battalion’s commanding officer, worked out of the primary tactical operations center (TOC). Norrad flew on the second aircraft into Rio Hato—chalk two, left door, 29th in the stick, as he recorded later in his mission report. He described the hours at Fort Benning, Georgia, on a rainy and cold 19 December leading up to the flight to Panama:

We made our initial manifest call at noon, the final manifest was 1315 [hours], parachute issue 1330. Colonel [William E.] Kernan . . . the regimental commander, delivered some inspiring words out on the flight line, and he and the chaplain led us in prayer. . . . We began rigging at 1415, had our jumpmaster inspection, and waited for movement to the aircraft.⁴⁰

Given the expected heat and humidity in Panama, a number of the men dressed lightly, not wanting “to put ‘long-johns’ on.” But, it was cold and miserable out on the flight line in Georgia. Prudently, someone decided to issue the paratroopers the old, green Army blankets affectionately known as “horse blankets,” which they wrapped around themselves while waiting for three hours to board the aircraft. Despite the blankets, “We were kind of chilled out there,” Norrad recalled.⁴¹ A fellow combat controller, SSgt Chet Ebeling, added that he started to “get real cold until they brought us blankets to keep warm and some hot coffee and cocoa to drink.”⁴²

Finally, at 1802, 15 C-130s departed Fort Benning’s Lawson Army Airfield for the seven-hour flight to Panama. The pilots, trained in special operations low level standards, flew what one veteran expressed as a “miserable low level,” mostly over water.⁴³ With a parachute on, and more than 60 men rigged for combat, Norrad remembered the flight as uncomfortable. The inexperienced or unread may perceive the combat mission as a thing of glory. But the reality was far different, even in support of a noble cause. Both Norrad and Maj Michael Longoria, USAF, later a brigadier general, recalled that one of the most unpleasant aspects of the flight to Panama concerned—however mundanely—their bladders. Norrad recollected with chagrin,

“The idea of hydrating yourself was a good idea, but it was difficult to relieve yourself in the aircraft. . . . Sixty-three people trying to hydrate and then urinate was pretty tough. . . . About three hours out, they actually passed around a five-gallon plastic container to urinate in. . . . There’s got to be a better fix to this problem.”⁴⁴



Figure 6.2. CCT/PJ members who made the combat jump into Rio Hato. Left to right: TSgt Gary Lantrip, Sgt Jim Holloman, SSgt Gordy Tully, **TSgt Jerry Thomas, CMSgt Wayne Norrad, Maj Mike Longoria, Capt “Jeff” Schuldheiss, *CMSgt Mike Lampe, SSgt Chet Ebeling, TSgt “Carl” Casey, **SSgt Rex Frericks, and MSgt Bernie Oder. Missing from the photo are **SSgt Tim Ryan and SSgt John Thompson. (* denotes making their second combat jump; ** denotes PJs).

Norrad offered no further details on that experience, but in 2007 General Longoria did so. “Packed in like sardines, and it was miserable. . . . and it’s hotter than Hades in the back” of the airplane. The CCT brigadier general remembered that several hours into the flight the Ranger next to him “up-chucked,” producing a smell that “just doesn’t go away.” Longoria continued, “I remember this big jerry can coming by and the guy drops it and it hits one of our Ranger buddies and now it spills, and I kind of halfway . . . up-chuck and I’ve got to [urinate] and there is nothing I want to do more than jump out of that airplane. I didn’t care [about the dangers]. . . . It’s a motivating thing just to [want to] get out of that airplane!”⁴⁵

At least one combat controller, Chet Ebeling, enjoyed a somewhat more comfortable flight. As the designated “bike chaser” on the first plane into Rio Hato, Ebeling was the first CCT man to exit the aircraft and so sat in the rear of the plane, where he had room to lie down and rest.⁴⁶

As Longoria’s hot, filth-ridden aircraft neared the Panamanian coast about 30 minutes from the drop, Norrad reflected:

From a personal standpoint, my biggest fear was getting shot down in the aircraft with absolutely no control over the situation. And I was trying to think, was I better off in aircraft #2? Or would the first couple of aircraft get shot down, and everybody else would abort? The other thing I was thinking was, “What the hell is a 42-year-old chief master sergeant, who could have been retired, doing on this mission anyway?” Or that I could have been in the joint special operations operating center instead of being on the jump plane. And I was really pondering in my mind, was this going to be a total success or would we take a lot of casualties needlessly and listen to all the critics the next few years.⁴⁷

His thoughts turned to the “young troops” and their mission, and the chief thought about how few had ever seen combat. Granted, several senior combat controllers like Mike Lampe, MSgt Bernie Oder, and TSgt John “Carl” Casey were combat veterans. Lampe and Casey served in Southeast Asia, as had Norrad, while Oder participated in Grenada. But for the rest, “this was their first taste of combat.”⁴⁸ One of those as yet untested in combat, Ebeling, recalled the final minutes before the jump:

The aircrew opened the door at three minutes out; all I could see was water. I had the job of getting the bike bundle in the door so that I could push it out and follow it on the green light. The aircrew called 1 minute warning; I could see the beach, some houses along the beach, and fishing boats out in the water. Just as I positioned the bike bundle in the door the aircrew passed back [the 10-second] warning. The green light came on, I pushed the bundle out the door and followed it out. We were only at 500 feet when we jumped.⁴⁹

At the one-minute warning, Norrad transmitted over the intrateam radio: “Okay guys, this is what you’ve been training for, Be Safe, Good Luck and Do Your Job, I’ll see you all on the ground.”⁵⁰ Close to 15 special tactics men jumped with the Rangers on the Rio Hato airfield seizure, about three of whom were PJs. One of the PJs was assigned to the 1730th PRS, the other two to the 1724th STS. Of the combat controllers, Lampe was from the 1724th STS, but the remainder belonged to the 1723rd CCS.⁵¹

Just seconds after H-hour at 0100 (local) and four minutes before the first C-130 began disgorging its paratroopers, unknown to Norrad, two Air Force F-117 Stealth fighter-bombers each dropped a single 2,000-pound bomb in the general vicinity of the PDF barracks. But the bombs were intended to “stun defenders” rather than to kill them. Some argued later that the F-117’s deliberate misses—the target coordinates were for an “open field”—merely served to alert the PDF to the impending attack.⁵² A valid question was whether or not the opportunity to employ the Air Force’s most advanced stealth technology aircraft was too great to pass up regardless of its operational necessity?

Reminding one of nineteenth-century strategist Carl von Clausewitz’s “friction” in war, Norrad recalled being briefed just prior to the mission that the F-117s were to be used, then receiving word in-flight that they were not to be employed. “We didn’t have any clue that the F-117s were being used,” he said.⁵³

At 0104 the Rangers hit the silk, the Hercules crews delivering them, as was true also at Torrijos, “at the right time and place.” The Rangers were well supported from the air. Beginning at 0045 (local) and for the next several hours, at various times two or more AC-130 Spectre gunships and AH-64 Apaches, plus two Little Bird helicopters, struck PDF targets in support of the Rangers at Rio Hato. The PDF, comprised mainly of two companies of soldiers, had at least two ZPU-4 anti-aircraft guns and V300 armored personnel carriers in the vicinity that might have posed a significant threat to the US forces. Indeed, the first US combat casualty at Rio Hato was a Ranger who was struck by ground fire as his transport approached the drop zone. One historian concluded of the fight at Rio Hato, “This close-in fire suppression may have been much more valuable than has been widely recognized.”⁵⁴

Well before H-hour, Major Longoria and others wanted to get out of their airplane. Get out they did, but while the “stick” of jumpers shuffled to the door, at least one trooper fell inside the cabin. Weighted down with equipment, he couldn’t get himself up even with assistance. Chief Norrad climbed around the Soldier to make the jump himself. Late in exiting the aircraft into the darkness from an altitude no higher than 500 feet, Norrad struggled with one of the two equipment quick-releases until he hit the ground “pretty hard.” “I wasn’t even prepared to do a parachute landing fall,” he confessed, “because I was still looking to pull that strap” to release his nearly 100 pounds of equipment prior to impact.⁵⁵

Once on the ground, Norrad “chambered a round,” got out of his parachute, and moved out. With the delay exiting the aircraft, he was several hundred yards away from the intended location. Norrad linked up with a group of Rangers and encountered Major Longoria, but the men somehow became separated into several smaller groups. “Movement was slow due to some small arms fire and [an] occasional mortar round,” Norrad noted.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Longoria was making his way through the brush when a young Panamanian boy “popped out” of nowhere. Years later the incident was still vivid to him. “I was locked and loaded, and I was going through the bushes to get to the [primary] TOC. This kid pops out and I don’t know it’s a kid at that time. . . . I almost shot him. I was prepared to shoot him,” General Longoria recalled. Looking back on the incident, he expressed his great relief. “Because if I had shot an innocent kid, unarmed. . . .”⁵⁷ His restraint was an excellent example of what a US Army historian meant when he wrote that US forces in Panama demonstrated a combination of “both violent engagement and sensitive restraint.”⁵⁸

The young Panamanian was not the only beneficiary of US troops’ restraint. A veteran of Desert One in 1980 and the Grenada operation three years later, combat controller Mike Lampe worked as the 1724 STS liaison with the 3rd Battalion, 75th Rangers. Rather than follow the normal procedure of augmenting the 1724th with combat controllers from Hurlburt Field’s 1723rd STS, Lampe’s squadron commander, Major Brotchie, delegated the Rio Hato special tactics mission to the 1723rd. Since Brotchie maintained overall responsibility for the CCT mission in Panama, he assigned Lampe to the Rio Hato operation “to ensure our linkage in command and control.” Furthermore, because the 1723rd lacked pararescuemen at the time, Brotchie assigned three of his squadron’s PJs—Rex Freriks, Robert H. (last initial only), and Tim Ryan—to accompany Lampe at Rio Hato. The PJs provided a JCCP in the immediate vicinity of the DZ—a deficiency identified in Grenada in 1983. Ryan broke his ankle on the jump, the only USAF casualty of the operation. Undeterred by the pain, he performed his mission for several hours and was the last of the initial assaulters evacuated from the DZ.⁵⁹

Lampe also served as assistant jumpmaster on his aircraft. Manifested on a C-130 at the end of the formation, Lampe was one of the last to jump at Rio Hato. By the time his aircraft approached the DZ, the PDF had plotted the transport formation and adjusted its fire. The

chief recalled his aircraft took numerous small arms hits as it arrived over the zone. When the rounds struck the Hercules, they sounded like “a rock in a tin can,” he remembered.⁶⁰ After landing safely on the ground—earning his second combat jump star—Lampe checked in on the CCT intrateam radio, fired a few rounds downrange, and made his way to the alternate TOC, his rendezvous point. The protective flap of his Gentex helmet covered his ears and limited his ability to hear ambient sounds. It nearly cost him. Suddenly his “sixth sense” told him something was not right. Lampe took off the helmet just in time to hear a Ranger giving him a final “challenge-and-reply” before engaging him as a “hostile.” Lampe quickly responded with the correct reply and was allowed to continue. Unknowingly, he had stumbled upon the TOC’s outer perimeter, manned by vigilant 3rd battalion Rangers. The training and restraint of US forces paid off once again.⁶¹

As the Rangers secured the airfield, one of the AC-130’s repositioned to fly a wider orbit in case of approaching threats. Shortly thereafter, the Spectre gunship destroyed a truck carrying PDF soldiers toward the fight and another ZPU-4 the Panamanians had moved into firing position near their barracks. Although intermittent firing in the area continued for another day, the gunship’s display of firepower “marked the end of organized resistance at Rio Hato.”⁶² The casualties at Rio Hato included four US Soldiers and 34 Panamanians killed.⁶³

Pararescue Activities

Casualties might have been higher without the presence of a small number of PJs, including SSgt Frank Medeiros. Assigned to the 1730th PRS, Medeiros arrived on the first aircraft to airland at Rio Hato less than two hours after the Rangers jumped in. Within minutes of his arrival, Medeiros’ teammates informed him of two injured Soldiers on the northeast side of the runway. He located a Ranger with a compound tibia–fibula fracture and another with a fractured femur, who had lost a significant amount of blood. Medeiros treated the second Ranger, the more serious of the two, and requested air transport. Next, he was directed to “the runway north of the highway,” where he and another paramedic “on a big motorbike” discovered five civilians with multiple bullet wounds. He called for transport and helped load the wounded onto the plane as quickly as possible. An urgent call to help a sucking chest wound victim came

next. After hydrating the patient and assisting a doctor with a chest tube procedure while under fire, Medeiros and three other PJs moved again to assist four seriously injured Rangers. Once again they came under enemy fire, which killed one Ranger. “Medeiros began marshaling helicopters into a landing site near the . . . JCCP, and his team loaded two litter patients and two ambulatory ones on an MH-60 while other critical casualties were put into a waiting C-130 and quickly flown out of Rio Hato,” Colonel Carney wrote.⁶⁴

Exhausted, the PJs hydrated themselves with an intravenous saline solution for some quick energy. An hour later, the four used a motorcycle and a RATV to reach another sucking chest wound victim.⁶⁵ The on-scene physician recommended against moving the Soldier, so Medeiros called for an MH-53 helicopter to land on a small parade ground near the Ranger command post. As the helicopter neared the ground on final approach, its more than 100-miles-per-hour rotor wash ripped shingles from the building’s roof, and the pilot aborted the approach. The PJs loaded the Ranger on their RATV and drove him and several other casualties to the JCCP where they were flown out. Carney summarized the work of Medeiros and his PJ team in the operation’s opening hours on 20 December 1989: “Medeiros had personally treated twelve badly wounded U.S. soldiers and eight civilians, put three killed civilians into body bags, helped marshal aircraft on Rio Hato airfield and clear it of planes, trucks, parachutes, and stray or discarded equipment and ammunition that would have made the airstrip inoperable.”⁶⁶

The RATV represented a significant and creative improvement over the handling of battlefield trauma in previous conflicts. Much of the credit for its development belonged to a physician and Air Force reservist, Dr. Craig D. Silverton. The son of an anesthesiologist, Silverton loved sports and was intrigued by the Air Force. He finished medical school in 1978 and considered how to combine a medical practice with his military interests. He discovered the Air Force’s pararescue field, but there was one problem: that specialty was enlisted only. With the support of the 403rd Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan, Silverton joined the wing as the “pararescue medical officer,” filling a reserve billet the commander created especially for him. In 1980 he entered the pararescue training pipeline, the first officer to do so.⁶⁷

As a reserve colonel in 2008, Silverton recalled the difficulties both for the PJ instructors and himself many years earlier. He mentioned

that the questions, “Can we wash [him] out?” and “What do we do if Captain Silverton doesn’t cut it?” were problems. The normal wash-out rate was 90 percent. One instructor, about 6-foot 5-inches, 240 pounds, and solid muscle, liked to hold students’ heads under the water in the pool during the “buddy-breathing” portion of snorkel training. “Everybody feared having Sergeant [G] in the water with them,” Silverton recalled, “because he was so big and he would hold you down until you were sure you were going to die.” Silverton felt certain he “held me down longer than anybody else just to see if I was going to give in.”⁶⁸

There were amusing incidents, too. As the only officer in the course, he laughingly remembered that on one occasion, a fellow PJ candidate loaned him his fatigue shirt so he could enter the mess hall as an “enlisted” member and eat with his teammates. He was “busted” for impersonating an enlisted man. On other occasions, “We would be down at Fort Benning, and people would come up and salute me—and then tell me to drop and do push-ups. It was a lot of fun.”⁶⁹

While assigned to the 403rd about three years later, Silverton got a phone call from SMSgt John L. Pighini. At the end of 1983 Pighini retired as the senior PJ in the Twenty-Third Air Force (Military Airlift Command [MAC]) Surgeon General’s office. Shortly thereafter, Colonel Carney talked Pighini into returning to active duty to join Detachment 4, Numbered Air Force Combat Operations Staff, at Pope AFB. (In 1987 the unit was redesignated the 1724th STS.) Ironically, before 1980 Pighini opposed the idea of Silverton, an officer, attending the pararescue course, but by the mid-1980s he was Silverton’s biggest supporter and wanted him to join the detachment to help improve PJ medical qualifications. After about the third tantalizing phone call from Pighini alluding to covert operations in exotic places, Silverton wanted to find out for himself what all the excitement was about. In 1987 he reported to Pope AFB and the 1724th squadron.⁷⁰

Silverton filled two roles: first, he was assigned to the 1724th as the sole PJ officer among the 10 or so pararescuemen; and, second, he worked as an orthopedic surgeon at Fort Bragg’s Womack Army Hospital. The dual role provided Silverton a synergistic opportunity that he put to good use:

When I went to Womack, I said this is going to be a good opportunity to train our people. We are right here on base, and we are at a hospital and they [PJs] can learn intubation; they can work in the emergency room; they can come to the operating room with me. . . . We would put fractures back together; we

were driving pins in; they were putting plates on; they were in the operating room intubating patients; they were stopping bleeding. It was an incredible experience for them for training. They had never seen anybody bleeding.⁷¹

Although some PJs loved the hands-on training, other unit members had reservations. At one point the 1724th commander, Lt Col John E. Buck, came to his PJ-doctor and said, “Silverton, you are turning our PJs into ‘brain surgeons.’ What are you doing here?”⁷² Silverton recognized that, in the special mission unit community of the late 1980s, each service needed to have an area of expertise if it expected to be tapped for national-level operational missions. Silverton wanted to keep the 1724th’s PJs “at least on par” with the well-trained Army Special Forces’s medics, known as “18 Deltas.” “I wanted to make sure the PJs had capabilities that were similar to what the Army [had], so we would not get pushed off every mission,” Colonel Silverton recalled. If he could manage that, the PJs’ qualifications as high-altitude, low-opening (HALO) jumpers—generally, 18 Deltas were either HALO or SCUBA qualified, but not both—it might give them an edge over their Army counterparts on certain missions.⁷³

Another initiative evolved into the RATV. Unit PJs had looked for a vehicle to move stretcher casualties off the airfield and to a casualty collection area. The PJs experimented with motorcycles and with three- and four-wheeled vehicles, but none proved satisfactory. Silverton and several other PJs, including Brian Williams, decided to build their own vehicle, which turned out to be a version of the M151, better known as the US Army jeep. The RATV featured litter extensions and onboard oxygen—both major improvements in handling battlefield casualties.⁷⁴

In early December 1989, on the last rehearsal in Florida before the Panama operation, Silverton broke his ankle on the low-altitude jump—and apparently attained the dubious distinction of being the first casualty evacuated on the recovery vehicle he helped develop. Several other casualties resulted from the jump and at least one jeep that overturned. Although he chafed at missing the deployment to Panama because of his injury, Silverton’s efforts with the 1724th’s pararescuemen paid huge dividends. Years later, Colonel “Doc” Silverton summarized his years as a PJ: “Of everything I’ve done [since] medical school and college, being in pararescue was clearly the best part of my life.”⁷⁵

In its first operational test, the RATV proved its worth in three areas: delivering PJs to casualty collection points, providing continuous

medical communications, and transporting casualties to the JCCP. In the 20 years after Panama, the RATV, or a related vehicle, became a standard feature in US contingency operations.⁷⁶

Follow-on Activities and Conclusion

By daylight on 20 December, the Rangers at Rio Hato repositioned the primary and alternate TOCs—the former to several buildings situated a short distance from the runway. For the next two days Major Longoria and special tactics members remained at Rio Hato, mainly providing communications for the Rangers. Special tactics personnel conducted various missions, especially hunting for Noriega, who had eluded the first night's dragnet. Noriega remained at large until 24 December, when he sought refuge at the papal nunciature in Panama City. On 3 January 1990, he surrendered to US forces and was extradited to Homestead AFB, Florida, to face federal charges. Meanwhile, all 27 initial targets in Panama were secured sometime after midnight on the night of 20–21 December, approximately 24 hours into the operation.⁷⁷

By 23 December special tactics personnel relocated to Howard AFB to link up with a locally based detachment of the 1721st CCS. Chief Norrad had coordinated with Howard's CCT members to secure cots, towels, and other necessities for the incoming personnel. The relative luxury of air conditioning and a "little TV lounge" felt pretty good, he recalled.⁷⁸ Although organized resistance all but ceased on the 20th, two dramatic attacks occurred on 23 December. In the first, at 1130 (local) Noriega loyalists attacked a Panamanian police facility near the USSOUTHCOM headquarters at Quarry Heights, wounding several in the ensuing 10-minute battle. In the second engagement, late in the afternoon, 30 armed men carrying a white flag approached the paratroopers guarding Madden Dam. When the Soldiers "left their defensive positions" to retrieve their weapons, the Panamanians "attacked them with small arms and grenades." The paratroopers killed five of the Panamanians but suffered 10 wounded in what amounted to the last major engagement of Operation Just Cause.⁷⁹

Most of the special tactics men remained in Panama over Christmas. Chief Norrad and several others determined to make the best of it. After collecting money from the troops, he made his way to the

commissary and bought a 24-pound turkey, ham, potatoes, and all the fixings. SSgt Robert H. (last initial only) knew how to cook. Under his direction, Norrad and Sgt James Holloman helped prepare the Christmas dinner. Both combat controllers and pararescuemen enjoyed the meal in the relative plush surroundings of one of Howard's recently vacated base houses. Moreover, Norrad felt that the great meal brought an unplanned benefit—the bonding of combat controllers and pararescuemen. “The CCT/PJ bond was now in place. War and Christmas together!”⁸⁰

The day after Christmas, Norrad and a number of other passengers returned stateside on a MAC C-141. Arriving at Pope AFB, the 1723rd members transferred to a waiting C-130 that flew them to Hurlburt, where the Twenty-Third Air Force commander, Maj Gen Thomas E. Eggers, welcomed them home. After a brief discussion on the flight line, the group departed. Later, Norrad closed out his mission report with, “went home to sleep for a while. MISSION COMPLETE.”⁸¹

An Air Force historian, the late Eduard Mark, summarized the Panama operation:

On the whole, the U.S. Air Force and the other armed services carried out their responsibilities during Operation JUST CAUSE efficiently and according to plan. It detracts nothing from the accomplishment to observe that conditions . . . were uniquely favorable—American forces were present in the country to be occupied, and . . . there was little about Panama that the United States did not know. Rarely indeed can an invasion be practiced on the very ground where it is to be executed. The local population generally favored the intervention, and the Panamanian armed forces had little stomach for hard fighting in Noriega's dubious cause. The PDF was in any case a small and largely unprofessional force.⁸²

In contrast to their adversaries, the small community of 1720th STG members—combat controllers and PJs—demonstrated superb professionalism in their first fight since the two career fields joined together. The synergy that generals Duane Cassidy and Bob Patterson and Col John Carney envisioned in bringing together the CCT and PJ specialties bore impressive results. Shortly after midnight on 19–20 December, Panama became the objective of the largest nighttime airborne operation in 40 years. Of some 3,700 US troops that jumped onto their objectives that night, at least 40 were combat controllers or PJs assigned to units belonging to the 1720th.⁸³

One of the longest-serving combat controllers, John Koren, reflected on Operation Just Cause: “I thought Panama was a culmination of a

very successful evolution in the organization at every level.” He remembered the days of limited CCT support when combat controllers “packed their own parachutes, typed their own stuff . . . all of that.”⁸⁴

Summarizing the role of the 1720th in Panama, Carney stated: “During Operation Just Cause, special tactics personnel were attached and employed with all maneuvering task forces. Their responsibilities ranged from beacon insertions to participating in parachute assaults where they provided air traffic control, established command-and-control communications, assisted gunship operations, directed marshalling, and FARP [forward air refueling point] operations. In addition, pararescue personnel established forward casualty collection points while providing emergency medical treatment on the airfields.”⁸⁵

Carney, the first-ever qualified combat controller to be promoted to full colonel, viewed Panama as “the high-water mark” for special tactics in the 1980s. It had been a long road, with significant improvements achieved during the decade—and particularly in the six years since Grenada. But more tests lay just ahead for Air Force special tactics.⁸⁶

Notes

1. Lawrence A. Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management, June 1987–December 1989* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2008), 3; Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988–January 1990* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 1995), 5; Bruce W. Watson and Peter G. Tsouras, eds., *Operation Just Cause: The U.S. Intervention in Panama* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 3–5, 17–18.

2. Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama*, 3, including quote; Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 5.

3. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 6–8, 10–11, 20–22, 24.

4. *Ibid.*, 25; and R. Cody Phillips, *Operation Just Cause: The Incursion into Panama* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, n.d.), 5.

5. Sources varied between “Panama” or “Panamanian” Defense Forces (PDF). Noriega reorganized and redesignated the National Guard as the PDF to help ensure his personal control.

6. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 12–13, 25, 51; and Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 5, 8.

7. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 8–9; and John T. Carney Jr. and Benjamin F. Schemmer, *No Room for Error: The Covert Operations of America’s Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 211–12.

8. Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 14–16; and Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 9.

9. Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 27, including quotes; and Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 9.

10. Yates, *U.S. Military Intervention in Panama*, 276.
11. Ibid.
12. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 9.
13. Ibid., 9, 18 and Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama*, 276. By 1988–89, Washington sought to rid Panama of Noriega because of the embarrassment his presence created for the counterdrug efforts of the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.
14. Yates, *U.S. Military Intervention in Panama*, 146, including quote; and Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 10–11.
15. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 10–11; and Forrest L. Marion, “First Fight: The U.S. Air Force’s Special Tactics Group in Panama, December 1989,” *Air Power History* 59, no. 4 (Winter 2012), 31, 36. The 1723rd CCS lacked PJs at that time. Although the majority of PJs in the USAF served in non-SOF (for example, “Air Rescue”) units, only SOF—or special tactics—assigned PJs deployed for the Panama incursion, per MSgt Ray Cooper, USAF, retired, to the author, e-mail, 2 October 2009.
16. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 18.
17. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 18–19; and Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 71–74. Ground troops for the initial phase of operations were divided into six maneuver task forces (TF): Black, Red, Bayonet, Semper Fi, Pacific, and Atlantic. TF Pacific was to jump into Torrijos-Tocumen about one hour after H-hour. TF Red’s Rangers should have secured the airport by then: see Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 71–74.
18. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 72; and Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 19.
19. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 16, 20–22, 32; Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 70; Steele, “*Operation Just Cause*,” 37–41; and Marion, “First Fight,” 31. On 19 December, General Stiner moved up H-hour by 15 minutes, making it 12:45 a.m. on 20 December: Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 20.
20. Col Craig F. Brotchie, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21 Jul 2007, including quote; Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 83; and Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 18–19. On 21 December 1989, General Thurman stated the capture of Noriega was “his second highest priority after the neutralization of the PDF.” See Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 54.
21. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 23, 41–42.
22. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 84; Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 24; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 213–14. Muse told his story in Kurt Muse and John Gilstrap, *Six Minutes to Freedom* (New York: Citadel Press, 2006). For more on Delta’s early history, see chapter 4 of the present work.
23. Brotchie, interview.
24. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 204–05; and Brotchie, interview.
25. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 205–206, 214; Brotchie, interview; and CMSgt James A. Lyons, USAF, interview with the author, 9 March 2007.
26. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 16–17; Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 91; Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 33; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 209; and CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 6 February 2007.

27. Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 5 October 2006, including quote 1; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 205, including quote 2.

28. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 205, including quote; and Koren, interview.

29. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 206–207, including quotes (quote 1 was a Military Airlift Command spokesman quoted by Carney); and Koren, interview.

30. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 91; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 206–207; Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 22; and Koren, interview. Note that because of the (icing) weather delay of some C-141s, the last paratroops at Torrijos-Tocumen took place just prior to dawn at about 5:15 a.m. local, per Steele, “*Operation Just Cause*,” 40.

31. CMSgt Timothy C. Brown, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 11 November 2006.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. MSgt Scott C. Fales, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 July 2007. Fales was the only PJ on his aircraft. About seven PJs jumped into Torrijos-Tocumen from other aircraft.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.; and History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 18 December 1989–16 January 1990, 73–74, 85, including quotes.

38. Brown, interview, including quotes; and Lyons, interview.

39. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 25, including quote; Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 20, 32; and Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 76–79.

40. Norrad, interview, including quote; History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 26; Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 32; Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause* 90; and Brig Gen Michael A. Longoria, USAF, interview with the author, 18 July 2007. Watson and Tsouras (pg 76) reported a total of 1,700 Rangers dropped at both Torrijos-Tocumen and Rio Hato at H-hour. Of that number, 700 jumped at Torrijos-Tocumen; about 1,000 at Rio Hato. One hour later, some 2,000—mostly 82nd Airborne troopers—dropped at Torrijos-Tocumen.

41. Norrad, interview.

42. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 93.

43. Longoria, interview, including quote; and Mark, *Just Cause*, 43.

44. Norrad, interview, including quote; Longoria, interview; and History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 26.

45. Longoria, interview.

46. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 93.

47. Norrad, interview.

48. Ibid.

49. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 93–94.

50. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 27.

51. Norrad, interview.

52. Robert F. Dorr and Fred L. Borch, “Airmen Helped Drive Out Noriega in Panama Invasion,” *Air Force Times*, 11 Aug 2008, 45, including quotes; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 215–16; and Cole, *Operation Just Cause*, 31.

53. Norrad, interview, including quote; and Dorr and Borch, “Airmen Helped Drive Out Noriega.”

54. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 89–90, 119–20; Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 32; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 212. Carney and Schemmer state there were seven AC-130 gunships in Panama.

55. Norrad, interview.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Longoria, interview.

58. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 27, 49, including quote; and Longoria, interview. Watson and Tsouras cited another excellent example of restraint on the part of US forces at Rio Hato, when Rangers burst into a PDF barracks room occupied by 180 unarmed PDF trainees and no one fired: see Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 90.

59. Brotchie, interview, including quote; CMSgt Michael I. Lampe, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 16 September 2009; Mark, *Just Cause*, 66; and History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 112.

60. Lampe, interview.

61. Lampe, interview; and Norrad, interview. In addition to Lampe, three other 24th STS personnel earned their second combat jump stars that night: MSgt Tim Brown, SMSgt Rick Caffee, and MSgt John Scanlon. See Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 208.

62. Mark, *Just Cause*, 53.

63. *Ibid.*, 54. It remained unclear whether two of the four American deaths were the result of “friendly fire.” General Longoria referred to a “blue-on-blue” incident involving an AH/OH-6 Little Bird, but whether that incident may have accounted for the above-mentioned casualties was uncertain. Longoria, interview.

64. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 217–18, including quotes; and History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 103–105.

65. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 218; and History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 106.

66. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 218–19, including quote; and History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 107.

67. Col Craig D. Silverton, MD, USAFR, interview with the author, 1 May 2008, including quote; and Walter Rath, “Physician Undergoes Training” *Lackland Talespinner*, 19 December 1980, 22.

68. Silverton, interview.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*; SMSgt John L. Pighini, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 25 July 2008; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 171, 183.

71. Silverton, interview. By 1990 Silverton estimated the unit had roughly 20 PJs.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. Ibid., including quote.; and MSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 6 March 2007.
76. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 105–106; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 218–19; and Marion, “First Fight,” 35.
77. Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 35, 41–42; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 222; Mark, *Just Cause*, 66–67; and Longoria, interview.
78. Norrad, interview, including quote; and History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 29.
79. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 93; and Phillips, *Operation Just Cause*, 40, including quotes.
80. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 30, including quote; and Norrad, interview.
81. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 30–31, including quote; and Norrad, interview.
82. Eduard Mark, *Just Cause: The United States Air Force in Panama* (Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1993), 69.
83. Watson and Tsouras, *Operation Just Cause*, 76; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 208; and Marion, “First Fight,” 36.
84. Koren, interview.
85. History, 1720 Special Tactics Group, 4.
86. Col John T. Carney, Jr., USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 November 2006.

Chapter 7

Special Tactics Evolves and Deploys to Southwest Asia, 1986–1992

Changes in Special Tactics

The brief Grenada operation of October 1983 showed significant deficiencies existed in the US military's ability to conduct joint operations. In the aftermath, Military Airlift Command (MAC) and Twenty-Third Air Force leaders recognized the need for battlefield trauma treatment as part of airfield seizure packages. In early 1984 the first pararescuemen (PJ) arrived at Col John Carney's Detachment 4, Numbered Air Force Combat Operations Staff (NAFCOS).¹ By the fall of 1984, the establishment of a screening-and-selection process for bringing additional PJs into the Pope AFB, North Carolina, detachment laid the groundwork for what soon became Air Force Special Tactics (ST).² In October 1987 the personnel from Carney's former detachment comprised the 1724th Special Tactics Squadron (STS), the first ST squadron in the US Air Force. Concurrently, MAC activated the 1720th Special Tactics Group (STG), commanded by Colonel Carney.³

A single, close-knit team—originally just 16 operators and several support personnel—made up the detachment in the early years. From the outset, Carney emphasized the highest degree of physical training (PT) as the first requirement of all his operators. A recruiting letter from around 1990 reinforced that view: "It is vital to the applicant that he physically prepare himself for this course (running, calisthenics, weight training and swimming)."⁴ The progression tables for combat control team (CCT)/PJ physical training indicated the seriousness of the recruiting letter's admonition (table 7.1).

Exceptionally rigorous PT remained the foundational building block for all ST units. Since September 2001 the necessity for physically capable operators has been proven again and again from the mountains of Afghanistan to the jungles of the southern Philippines to the deserts of Iraq.⁵ Physical training and the small number of support personnel in the early years characterized the unit. Although improved, it was still common for CCT/PJ operators to handle some of their own support functions—packing parachutes, maintaining

life support gear and weapons, or typing and filing paperwork—well into the 1980s. “If you got some guy into your outfit that had been a clerk before . . . whether he liked it or not, he was going to be the admin guy,” retired chief master sergeant Richard “Rick” Crutchfield recalled.⁶ As late as 1989, Carney reported that some ST teams under the 1720th group maintained their own vehicles (including motorcycles) and Zodiac boats, rigged equipment for paradrops, and packed their own parachutes.⁷

Table 7.1. CCT/PJ Physical Training Requirements, Indoctrination Course, ca. 1990

Running:	
Miles	6
Intervals ¼-mile (1:25 per lap)	14 (1-minute rest between laps)
Calisthenics:	
Exercise	Repetitions
Brown Bags/Cherry Pickers/Deep Knee Bends/Donkey Calf Raisers	15 each
Flying Crosses	10
Flutter Kicks (2 sets), Hello Darlings	100 each
Sit Ups	80
Isometrics Sit Ups	(10 repetitions)
Up	45
Down	10
8-Count Bodybuilders	28
Chinese Push Ups (2 sets)	35
American Push Ups (2 sets)	90
Chin Ups	19
Pull Ups	16
Weight Training:	
Complete Circuits	5 (30 seconds between stations)
Pool Training:	
Distance Swim with Fins	4,000 meters (80 laps)
Bobbing with Weight Belt/Tanks	2 minutes
Knot Tying	3 knots
Crossovers with Weight Belt/Tanks	8 repetitions (15 second rest)

Reprinted from Col John T. Carney Jr., personal papers, copy in AFHRA files.

A former first sergeant described the transition. From 1986 to 1989 Samuel C. Shearin served at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He returned in 1992 as a member of the 24th STS and later advanced to first sergeant. From his seven-year tour in the “24” he recalled the squadron had its own financial and research-and-development (R&D) personnel, two training monitors, a photographer, and separate parachute and life support shops. A four-man supply shop ensured the operators received the latest and best equipment available from the military and civilian sectors.⁸

By the early 1990s each of the two operational teams in the 24th typically consisted of 10–15 combat controllers and four to eight PJs (about 36 to 40 total operators). Senior men on the teams were a captain and a senior noncommissioned officer (NCO), usually an E-7 or E-8. Technical sergeants and staff sergeants normally made up the rest of the team. “Staff sergeant was ‘low man’ on the totem pole,” Shearin recalled. In other words, Silver and Blue, the operational teams, had a great deal of experience.⁹

Even during peacetime, team members spent more time deployed than at home. The high number of temporary duty days per year, easily 200, meant that those remaining at home station did their best to support the spouses of those deployed. “I kept in very close contact with their families,” Shearin noted.¹⁰ In the years before cell phones were commonplace, he often patched phone calls from deployed squadron members through to their loved ones at home. One of the 24th squadron’s chief master sergeants referred to Shearin as “one of the best first sergeants I have met in the Air Force. . . . Sam did . . . first sergeant duty, but he [also] did protocol, family support coordinator, [took] charge of morale funds, as well as the traditional first sergeant” role.¹¹ He also “broke the code” on getting the 24th into base quarterly award competitions. Soon, on a regular basis, the squadron was walking away with two or three awards out of the six categories. The squadron appreciated Shearin’s efforts. He was twice named the First Sergeant of the Year for the 720th STG.¹²

Family issues seemed to come around in cycles. “Everybody would get married at once. All of a sudden everybody would have a baby. . . . Then, the next thing you know, a lot of people would be getting a divorce. And then they would start the cycle up again,” Shearin said.¹³ One of the longest-serving members of the unit, CMSgt Timothy C. “Tim” Brown, added his thoughts on the high divorce rate within the squadron. “I still say to the young guys in the orientation course that you can

stay married your whole career, or you can go through as many wives and girlfriends as you choose,” he said. “It depends on how strong you want to work on the relationship.” He acknowledged that he and his wife Nancy “had weaknesses, too” in their relationship, but “instead of taking the easy way out . . . we stayed together and worked it out.”¹⁴

Until around 1990 the 1724th enjoyed an unusual degree of liberty such as hair length, civilian clothes, PT, and personal weapons. Former member John A. Koren recalled the unit “broke a lot of [Air Force] rules” in its first few years. Often, its freewheeling nature—cloaked in a secretive mission—contributed to problems with Pope AFB offices and personnel, who either did not understand what the unit was about or envied its favored status. But the 1724th’s liberty enabled it to experiment with innovative tactics, techniques, and procedures.¹⁵ Brown, a unit member from 1983 to 1994, described the latitude that facilitated the unit’s excellence:

We made our mistakes. We fell on our faces, picked ourselves up, and pressed on. That was the beauty of the organization. . . . That allowed us to come up with some of the great tactics and techniques even used today. They gave us the latitude . . . to try different things, and as long as you kept [in mind] safety, mission success, and stayed within the parameters, you were given a lot of room to operate. It was really exciting for us. We did things that other units did not even think about doing. That is how we became so good at our techniques.¹⁶

Unfortunately, such high-risk training could not be expected to be accident free. One grievous loss took place in 1986. TSgt Jerome E. “Jerry” Bennett, a combat controller assigned to Det 4, NAF COS, died in a high-altitude, high-opening jump. On 27 October 1986 the well-liked teammate and former boxer for the Air Force—he won the Amateur Athletic Union’s 165-pound class in 1977—became the detachment’s first fatality in its short history during a training jump when his main canopy malfunctioned and he had difficulty cutting it away. When he got it “chopped away,” his reserve deployed normally at approximately 900 feet. He was unable to release his stirring lines on the MT-1S reserve and was probably still trying to unstow them upon impact. He landed in rough terrain on the downward side of a hill under a “partially deflated parachute canopy,” and died shortly after impact.¹⁷

The Combat Control School continues to remember Bennett through its Jerome E. Bennett Award, presented to the student who best exemplifies the attributes of Sergeant Bennett, “namely, that of being a team player, continually putting others ahead of himself;

keeping the team together, and striving for mission success.”¹⁸ Prior to graduation, the students in each class select a classmate most deserving of the award. Former CCT mate and Desert One veteran Manuel L. “Bud” Gonzalez remembered Jerry this way: “Good guy, quiet guy, hardworking, steady as a rock. . . . You ask him to do something and it was done, period, end of statement. . . . It just got done, and he was pretty much cheerful about doing it.”¹⁹

Although the six-year period between Grenada and Panama appeared to be one of relative inactivity for Air Force Special Operations Forces (SOF), the reality was quite different. In *No Room for Error*, John Carney listed at least eight contingencies for which his former squadron deployed between 1984 and 1986. Only a few missions could be mentioned—the hijackings of TWA Flight 847, the *Achille Lauro*, and Pan Am Flight 83. Retired CMSgt Tim Brown noted laconically that the squadron was “chasing terrorists long before it was popular. . . . People say we did not do anything between Grenada and Panama. . . . That is very much a false impression.”²⁰

Not only did the Air Force’s prime counterterrorist unit (elevated to squadron status in 1987) remain busy operationally, it also continued to grow. By the beginning of the 1990s the 1724th—the only special mission unit and the largest unit in the STG—had six officers and 79 enlisted personnel authorized, but assigned strength figures were unavailable. In 1981 there were 16 operators in Det 1, MAC operations staff (MACOS). Unit veterans recalled that near mid-decade there were roughly 50 members, including a handful of PJs. In 1991 the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) history included assigned strength figures for the first time. The 1724th’s roster topped the century mark with 110 of 132 military spaces filled. John Koren recalled that the squadron included around 20 PJs at that time.²¹ In February 1992 the squadron had 148 authorizations on its books—131 military and 17 civilian positions—but only 112 military positions and one civilian position were filled. By the end of 1992 authorizations rose significantly, to 190 billets—173 military (125 assigned) and 17 civilian (eight assigned). The trend in the 24th sharply contrasted with the Air Force at large, which steepened its ongoing drawdown in the early 1990s following the breakup of the Soviet Union. The 24th STS continued to increase.²²

New squadron leadership around 1990 contributed to a changing climate in the 1724th. Craig F. Brotchie, although selected early for promotion, held the rank of major when he took command of the

1724th STS just prior to the Panama operation. Indicative of the unit's relaxed approach to Air Force standards in those days, Brotchie recalled the "uniform" the men typically wore:

I always thought it was funny because if you were down at the bar at Bennigan's in Fayetteville, [North Carolina,] you could always pick out the JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command] guys. . . . They all looked the same. They all had jeans on; they all had either moccasins or deck shoes or tennis shoes . . . and a golf shirt and a beeper hanging off their belt. Nobody had beepers in those days—only JSOC people. So, it was pretty funny. It was a uniform by a different name that you weren't hiding from anybody.²³

Shearin recalled that squadron personnel were issued the same wristwatches and sunglasses and other manifestations of the unofficial uniform to which Brotchie referred.²⁴

At the squadron level, one longtime combat control officer credited Brotchie and his senior enlisted, CMSgt Michael I. "Mike" Lampe, with taking the 1724th "to a higher level" in terms of its maturation as an Air Force unit. They also "marketed the unit well" within the SOF community, Koren added.²⁵ In a similar vein, one of the many chiefs in the community credited Brotchie with leading the unit through the critical transition from MAC to US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) ownership, in a sense. The chief felt that the preceding unit commanders—John T. Carney, Jr. (1981–84), Charles P. "Charlie" Tappero (1984–86), and John E. Buck (1986–89)—did well in spite of the challenges of dealing with a command (MAC) whose mission focus remained airlift, not airfield seizures and counterterrorist operations.²⁶

Buck, an affable and impressive 6'3" former football player, viewed getting the squadron into the program objective memorandum (POM) process as one of the major accomplishments during his tenure, for which he credited operations officer John Koren. The POM became the source for validating the squadron's requirement to increase in size—doubling its authorized personnel.²⁷

But Brotchie "closed the [major command] gap and it has been getting better ever since. He was the transition guy," Chief Tim Brown said. Several years earlier MAC's senior leadership—particularly two commanders, Gen Thomas M. Ryan, Jr. and Gen Duane H. Cassidy—initiated two basic and far-reaching developments. First, in 1984 General Ryan's initiative led to the first-ever combat control squadrons, which, at a single stroke, provided a legitimate career path for combat control officers to advance beyond the rank of major—hitherto impossible. Second, between 1985 and 1987 General Cassidy approved

the joining together of PJs and combat controllers in one combat control squadron, the 1724th—Brotchie's unit by late 1989—a critical step toward the institutionalization of ST in the US Air Force. Maj Gen Robert B. Patterson, the Twenty-Third Air Force commander, fully supported the MAC commander's initiative. Later, PJs joined another squadron, the 1723rd, but the numbers remained small.²⁸

In 1981 Craig Brotchie, a protégé of Carney, was the only other officer in Det 1, MACOS. He recalled that in those early days, "We had no money, so we built everything." Five years after leaving the unit, he returned to command it. By then the much larger unit, designated the 1724th STS, was housed in a secure, permanent structure on the boundary between Fort Bragg and Pope AFB with a gate that opened onto each facility.²⁹

Between 1986 and 1992 at least three ST officers achieved significant *firsts* in the new Air Force SOF community's march toward maturity. First, John Carney became the first combat control officer to achieve the rank of full colonel and became the first commander of the 1720th STG, arguably the most important development for CCT and ST up to that time. Also in 1987 Craig Brotchie became the first Air Force combat controller to graduate from the US Army's intermediate-level professional military school for officers, the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Another future colonel, Jeffrey Buckmelter, who began his career in the early 1970s as an enlisted combat controller and returned as an officer a decade later, became the first CCT officer assigned to the US Special Operations Command headquarters at MacDill AFB, Florida, in 1988. Pinning on the rank of major three years earlier than his contemporaries—unheard of at the time—Buckmelter managed several highly sensitive programs for the command and supported the operations in Panama (1989) and Iraq (1991).

In 1992 Brotchie added another first when he was chosen to attend the Army War College at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. "Coming out of Carlisle nobody had a plan for what they were going to do with a war college graduate combat controller. . . . Nobody had ever gone to War College before in combat control," retired Colonel Brotchie recalled years later. The three—Carney, Brotchie, and Buckmelter—earned the respect of many in Special Tactics. Had the ST community matured earlier than it did, almost certainly one of the three was expected to have become its first general officer. That long-anticipated

honor did not occur until 2005, when Brig Gen Robert H. Holmes pinned on a star.³⁰

Some of the challenges in merging the pararescue and the combat control career fields have been mentioned. Especially in the early period, combat controllers perceived some PJs to be fearful of losing their distinctive identity, which was well established in the combat rescues of Southeast Asia. At the same time, combat controllers soon recognized that “when you get hurt or busted up, the best thing you can have is a pararescueman next to you, because they’ll take care of you,” John Koren expressed. But, initially, many PJs followed CCT leadership with reluctance.

Although ST successes in the last 20 years may tempt one to minimize the concerns of an earlier era, there was some basis in fact for such anxiety. For example, although the elite Pope AFB detachment included a small number of PJs from 1984, it was October 1987 before the designation 1724th STS became effective. By 1987 there were perhaps 8–10 PJs in the unit, but from May to October of 1987 the unit’s official designation was the 1724th Combat Control Squadron (CCS). Thus, in terms of the unit’s official identity as a combat control squadron, the pararescuemen were not included. At Hurlburt Field, Florida, though, the story was better. No PJs were assigned to the locally based squadron under the 1720th group until late 1989 or early 1990. The unit was known as the 1723rd CCS until April 1990, when the designation was changed to 1723rd STS, thereby embracing its few PJs shortly after their arrival. Colonel Carney candidly summarized the process of bringing PJs into combat control units: “I didn’t expect it to be a smooth transition.”³¹

However, the loss of pararescue authorizations in conjunction with the Air Force’s helicopter drawdown—part of a broader trend that began after Desert One—was more critical than unit designations. Beginning in May–June 1980 with the Air Staff’s transfer of the first Pave Low-modified H–53s from MAC/Rescue to Tactical Air Command (TAC), the Air Force focused increasingly on SOF at the expense of its air rescue assets. In the late 1980s the Twenty-Third Air Force historian noted that PJ authorizations were “tied to [the] numbers of aircraft assigned to various rescue detachments and squadrons.”³² As the Air Force inactivated one rescue unit after another and retired its aircraft, manpower officials projected the number of PJ billets to decrease from 346 in fiscal year (FY) 1986 to a mere 210 by FY 1990. A Headquarters MAC plan in 1987 bluntly stated, “Since pararescuemen

authorizations are currently tied to pure rescue aircraft, the pararescue force will be decimated because of the switch to multimission aircraft.”³³

As early as 1986, MAC and Twenty-Third Air Force leaders sought to bring the combat control and pararescue communities closer together in organizational terms. MAC’s Directorate of Combat Control Operations (office symbol DOY), headed by Colonel Carney, revised the concept of operations for pararescue. In May 1986 he issued a memorandum to all air rescue units outlining “a new relationship” between the CCT and PJ communities. General Cassidy, MAC commander, authorized Carney’s office to begin exercising functional management responsibility for pararescue, and PJs started to join the DOY staff. With visionary insight, the command looked ahead not only to a new concept of operations that altered pararescue’s “mission emphasis to ground operations vice aircrew involvement” but that also might lead to “establishment of a pararescue officer corps, and development of new pararescue units.” Carney’s envisioned PJ officer corps came to fruition fourteen years later when the Air Force established the combat rescue officer (CRO) specialty in 2000.³⁴

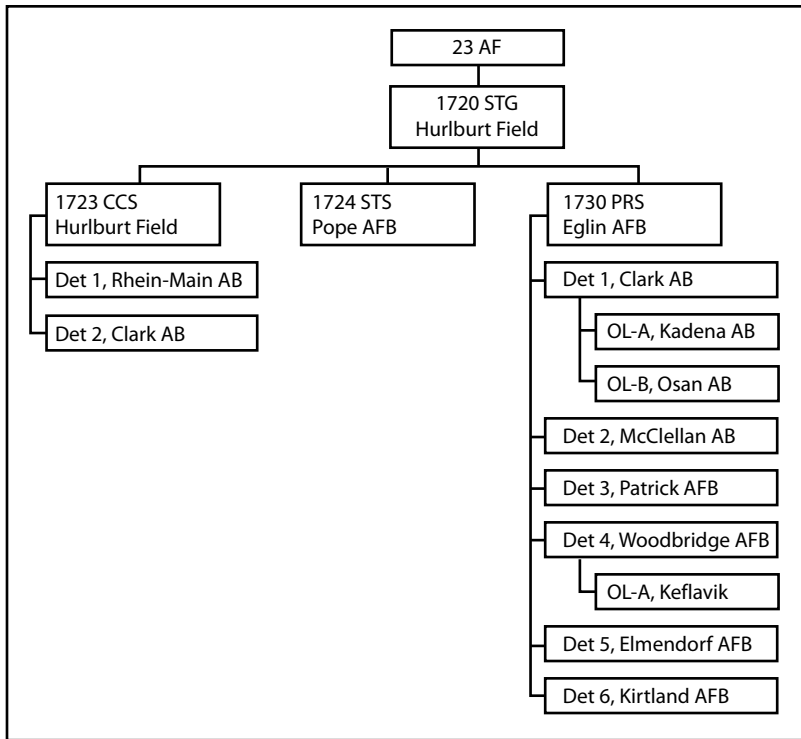
In early 1987 all CCT and PJ personnel in Headquarters MAC were consolidated under DOY, renamed the Directorate of Combat Control and Pararescue. The command wanted to preserve the steadily dwindling number of PJ authorizations. As a young officer, General Cassidy served in an air rescue squadron that gave him first-hand experience of what PJs could do. Valuing their unique expertise, Cassidy directed his staff, in a meeting on 16 March 1987, “to ‘find’ spaces for the PJs.” One month later, the MAC deputy chief of staff for plans published a programming plan for the reorganization of pararescue. The plan described the revised concept of employment for PJs:

Commanders employ pararescue forces to provide surface search and an on-scene authentication, medical treatment, survival/evasion assistance, aircraft reception, and a recovery capability. Pararescuemen are able to employ day or night, on land or water, and in worldwide geographic areas. They operate in friendly, hostile, denied, or sensitive areas as deployable crewmembers on recovery aircraft, as surface teams that operate in extended roles, or as elements assigned or attached to other surface teams needing combat medical and [search and rescue] expertise.³⁵

Over the next several months in negotiations that some said produced “more heat than light,” the framework emerged for ST.³⁶ Organizational actions followed. On 1 May 1987 John Carney’s former detachment at Pope was inactivated and its personnel and equipment

organized at the same location as the 1724th CCS. In August 1987 the 1730th Pararescue Squadron (PRS) was organized at Eglin AFB, Florida, and five subordinate PJ detachments were organized at other locations. Finally, on 1 October the 1720th STG was activated at Hurlburt Field. Concurrently, the 1724th CCS was redesignated the 1724th STS. In addition, Hurlburt's 1723rd CCS and the new 1730th PRS were assigned to the 1720th STG (see table 7.2).³⁷

Table 7.2. Organization of 1720th Special Tactics Group, 31 December 1987



Reprinted from History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 1, 23.

Less than two years later, another round of organizational upheavals occurred, stemming from the divestiture of air rescue from the Twenty-Third Air Force. During 1987 and 1988, Gen Larry D. Welch, the Air Force chief of staff (CSAF), chaired several discussions concerning air rescue at conferences with his fellow four-star generals. The Pacific Air

Forces commander at the time, Gen Merrill A. McPeak, wanted to revive the air rescue capability in his theater. That made perfect sense for a commander in a vast theater of operations, mostly covered by water, whose assets included hundreds of single-engine fighters for which an engine malfunction could mean a life-threatening situation requiring air rescue. By the end of 1988, suggested organizational changes were under way, but the Air Staff left the details to MAC's General Cassidy. In January 1989 Cassidy's newly-formed Rescue Working Group envisioned a redesignated Air Rescue Service (ARS). At another Corona commander's conference the next month, generals Welch, Cassidy, McPeak, and the TAC commander, Gen Robert D. Russ, agreed "to a separate ARS under MAC." The generals expected the change to provide the Air Force with a revitalized air rescue capability, while enabling MAC's Twenty-Third Air Force to focus on its primary mission of special operations. Hitherto, the Twenty-Third carried responsibilities for several missions in addition to special operations—especially combat rescue and weather reconnaissance.³⁸

Numerous organizational changes followed the agreement—many affecting ST. One after another, unit authorizations and personnel were divided between conventional and special operations entities. The only PJ unit—the 1730th PRS—was reassigned, without personnel or equipment, from the 1720th STG to the ARS. While 179 PJ billets were assigned to ARS, 88 pararescue spaces remained with the 1720th group. Up to that point, only one unit, the 1724th STS, had merged PJs with combat controllers. Carney, the 1720th commander, requested Headquarters MAC's approval of a plan to increase the number of PJs in the 1724th from 15 to 31, integrate 16 PJs into the 1723rd CCS, and add nine PJs into each of its two overseas detachments—Detachment 1 at Rhein-Main AB, Germany; and Detachment 2 at Clark AB, Philippines. Those billets in two squadrons and two detachments accounted for 65 of the pararescue authorizations.³⁹

The decision to establish a separate ARS necessitated major organizational changes in early 1990. On 1 February, MAC realigned pararescue between ARS under Major Force Program (MFP) 4 and Twenty-Third Air Force under MFP 11. Conventional (traditional air rescue) PJs remained under ARS while SOF pararescuemen fell under the Twenty-Third. MFP 11 was known informally as the SOF checkbook because the activation of USSOCOM enabled it to be funded like a separate military service. At the end of March, MAC followed suit with its combat controllers, realigning conventional

CCTs under the Twenty-First and Twenty-Second air forces and SOF combat controllers under the Twenty-Third. In the final outcome, Twenty-Third Air Force was authorized 125 combat controllers and 88 PJs for a total of 213 special operators—including 17 to the 1720 STG headquarters, 73 to the 1723 CCS/STS, and 119 to the 1724 STS.⁴⁰ Also, the conventional mission of the 1723rd squadron's two overseas detachments was eliminated; henceforth, Dets 1 and 2 conducted only special operations.⁴¹

Capt Manuel L. “Bud” Gonzalez, a Desert One veteran, arrived in Germany in early 1990 as the new commander of Detachment 1, 1723 CCS. He was just in time to deal with the turmoil of the split in the detachment's personnel and equipment and a geographically-separated PJ element. In a 2007 interview, retired Major Gonzalez recalled how the decision to separate the conventional air rescue mission from special operations was carried out in the field. “We actually split the unit—the combat control team that was there—we split it pretty much down the middle,” he said. Half remained in Det 1 for the special ops role in Europe; the other half went conventional. “We were actually flipping coins to see who was going to get some of this stuff [such as radios]. And then when you got what you got, you didn't always get the best stuff,” Gonzalez continued. “I didn't want to leave [the conventional] unit completely non-mission capable and make myself ‘fat’ at their expense. So, we tried to do everything right down the line.”⁴²

Gonzalez's combat control detachment also picked up around 12 to 15 PJs from the air rescue unit at Royal Air Force (RAF) Woodbridge, England, which also divided as a result of the separation of conventional and SOF assets. One pararescueman, Rodney D. “Rod” Alne, recalled that whereas the PJs shared the medical equipment, “Our PJ team was split in half. Half were special ops, and the other half were ARS—and I was on the special ops side.” He continued, “We were geographically separated, and [Captain] Gonzalez was our commander. So, within the PJ team, we had two different commanders and two different squadrons . . . which was kind of confusing.”⁴³

Many combat control officers admitted that they had only limited familiarity with PJ medical requirements and issues. As longtime AF-SOC historian Herb Mason wrote, combat controllers and PJs “were indistinguishable until they revealed the contents of their 100-pound ruck sacks.”⁴⁴ But Gonzalez had attended the PJ medical school at Sheppard AFB, Texas, which gave him “insight into the medical end

of it.”⁴⁵ He commended MSgt Dave Root of the Woodbridge PJs as “the right man at the right time” to watch over the organizational transition of the geographically-separated PJs. As part of the redesignation of the 1723rd squadron to ST, the operating location (OL) at Woodbridge was renamed OL-A, Det 1, 1723rd STS, on 1 April 1990. Gonzalez noted his end-of-tour plaque from Det 1 identified him as the Combat Control detachment commander of shortest tenure. He had just a month in command before assuming the ST designation.⁴⁶

Another combat control officer, Maj Steven L. McLeary, retired, who completed Combat Control School with John Carney in 1975 and later worked with him at the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, offered his perspective on the restructuring in the overseas detachments. “They took the teams and they split [them] up, and now we had in the same building . . . this team was conventional and this team [was] special operations,” he said. “It was a food fight for equipment and missions and people and who was going where and who was doing what. It was so bad in Germany that they drew lines down the building; it was awful.”⁴⁷

Additional organizational actions affected pararescue in 1990. Effective 1 February, Detachment 6, 1730th PRS, was inactivated at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico, and its personnel reassigned to the 1550th Technical Training Squadron—part of the rescue schoolhouse. Colonel Carney took advantage of the detachment’s closure to activate a new ST detachment at Kirtland. “Colonel Carney did not want to lose the opportunity to grab these sixteen . . . ST trained guys who had been supporting all of these special ops exercises. He put three combat control positions at that unit to keep it open. . . . He just did it,” Scott C. “Scotty” Fales, a retired master sergeant and decorated PJ from Panama and Somalia, remembered.⁴⁸

As a result of Carney’s timely decision, on 1 March a new detachment, Det 4, 1723th CCS, was activated at Kirtland. Detachment personnel considered themselves part of the 1723rd STS, even though the redesignation of the squadron and its subordinate elements did not become effective until April. Carney had preserved a valuable, highly trained asset for the Air Force rather than allowing 16 pararescuemen to be “relegated,” as Fales expressed, to serving as gunners and scanners on training aircraft at Kirtland. The decorated PJ used the term *relegated* with care; simply put, the original plan was arguably a misuse of Det 6’s highly trained PJs.⁴⁹

Detachment 2 of the 1730th PRS was also inactivated on 1 February at Eglin AFB, Florida, and its PJs assigned to Det 3, 1723rd CCS, which was activated the same day. By March 1990, there were no less than four ST detachments under the 1723rd squadron: Bud Gonzalez's Det 1 at Rhein-Main (plus OL-A, Det 1, at Woodbridge); Det 2 at Clark; Det 3 at Eglin; and Carney's quickly-formed Det 4 at Kirtland. The official designation of ST caught up with the CCT/PJ mergers a month later.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, OL-A, Det 1, 1723rd CCS, was activated at RAF Woodbridge on 1 February 1990, with its approximately 12 PJs transferring from the air rescue unit also based at Woodbridge. Two years later, OL-A relocated from Woodbridge to RAF Alconbury, England. On 22 May 1990, at the direction of the secretary of the Air Force, Headquarters Twenty-Third Air Force was redesignated the Headquarters AFSOC, completing the transition of the Twenty-Third to an entity that focused strictly on special operations.⁵¹

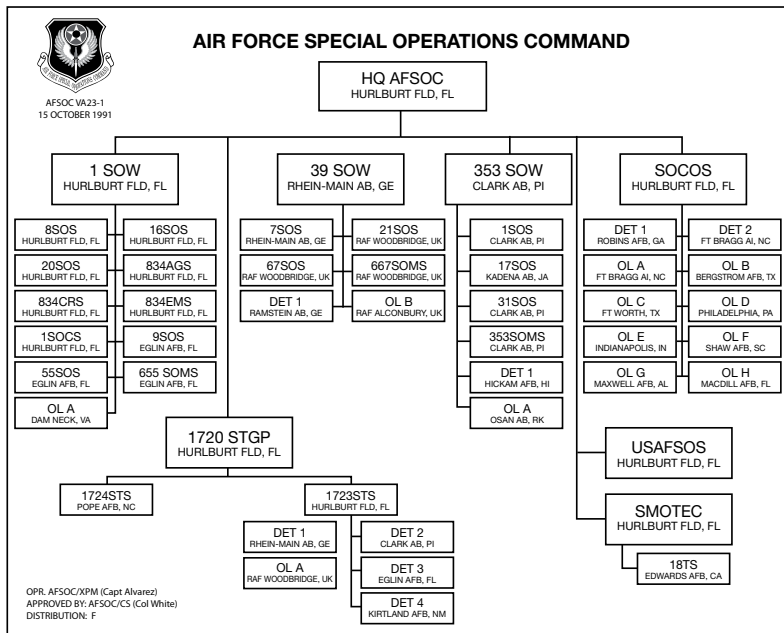
The redesignation of Twenty-Third Air Force to AFSOC offered a brief respite to the disconcerting pace of organizational actions affecting ST. The selection of Maj Gen Thomas E. Eggers, the Twenty-Third Air Force commander, as the first commander of AFSOC provided a measure of stability. General Welch, the CSAF, officiated in the change-of-command ceremony and accepted the Twenty-Third's flag from Eggers—and then handed the AFSOC flag to him. As the retired General Eggers put it lightly, “I actually changed command with myself.”⁵²

Early 1992 brought additional changes. Effective 1 January 1992, Det 3, 1723rd STS, inactivated at Eglin AFB, following 23 months of service. Concurrently, Det 4, 1723rd STS, inactivated and its personnel and equipment transferred to Det 1, 1720th STG, which was activated at Kirtland AFB on the same day. At the end of January, OL-A, Det 1, 1723rd STS, which consisted of approximately 20 PJs, relocated on short notice from RAF Woodbridge to RAF Alconbury where its assets soon fell under the 321st STS.⁵³

Originally, four-digit units were intended to meet the short-term needs of USAF major commands (MAJCOM). Unlike traditional three-digit units authorized and controlled by Headquarters USAF, MAJCOMs authorized and controlled the four-digit units, providing greater flexibility to meet mission requirements. However, with the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, General McPeak, the CSAF, streamlined the Air Force and ended the use of MAJCOM-controlled

units. His decision resulted in redesignations throughout the USAF: the 1720th STG was redesignated the 720th STG, and the 1723rd and 1724th squadrons were redesignated the 23rd STS and 24th STS, respectively. The AFSOC historian noted that, in 1991 and 1992, “The number of organizational actions had reached such record proportions that even HQ USAF had a hard time keeping up with them.”⁵⁴ Also, on 30 April 1992 the newly-activated Pacific and European theater ST units—the 320th STS at Kadena AB, Okinawa, and the 321st STS at RAF Alconbury—were reassigned to the 720th STG. At that point, the 720th STG boasted four squadrons for the first time in its short history—the 23rd STS at Hurlburt, 24th STS at Pope, 320th STS at Kadena, and 321st STS at Alconbury.⁵⁵

Table 7.3. Organization of 1720th Special Tactics Group, 15 October 1991



Reprinted from History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 2, SD I-12.

Col Robert W. “Bob” Neumann kept watch over what could have been termed an identity crisis for the ST community. In May 1991 Neumann, a former C-130 pilot, succeeded Colonel Carney as the 1720th STG commander when Carney retired shortly after the end of

Operation Desert Storm. Col Marc F. Stratton, the commander of the 720th in 2007, commented on Neumann's tenure. Recalling his own perspective as a younger officer, Stratton credited Colonel Neumann—in addition to using his “connections to the aircrew world” to the 720th's advantage—with “saving the group and keeping our structure” during the McPeak era.⁵⁶ The CSAF sought a “one wing, one base, one boss” concept that simply did not fit ST. Some, including General McPeak, questioned whether the 720th should retain its status as a group.⁵⁷ Colonel Neumann “held his ground” and worked very hard at keeping the group—and with it, ST—intact, Stratton said. He strongly felt that his predecessor's role ought not to be forgotten. “We would not be here in this building right now”—referring to the group's headquarters facility at Hurlburt Field—without Bob Neumann's strenuous efforts, Stratton said.⁵⁸

In an informal sense, the birth of ST took place in 1984 with the addition of PJs to the later-designated 24th STS. Between 1987 and 1989, however, ST's genesis became official with the activation of the first ST units. When air rescue separated from special operations in 1989 and 1990, including the redesignation of Twenty-Third Air Force as AFSOC, pararescuemen and combat controllers once again saw their career fields divided. It was a trying time for many operators caught between the conventional combat rescue and SOF communities. “The teams floundered about between 1990 and 1996 because the Air Force had reorganized so many times and combat control units had changed flags so often they simply quit putting up new unit crests,” Carney wrote. In 1996 combat controllers and SOF pararescuemen finally merged under the AFSOC umbrella.⁵⁹

Special Tactics in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm

From 1980 to 1988, an expensive and prolonged war between Iraq and its neighbor to the east, Iran, established Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein as an unpredictable dictator in the region. The devastating eight-year conflict also left Saddam with a relatively large army and air force and an \$84 billion war debt. Such factors encouraged him to look to the oilfields of the tiny kingdom of Kuwait. In July 1990 the Iraqi leader began saber rattling, threatening the governments of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates and accusing them of

exceeding the production quotas of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. Iraqi military units, specifically two armored divisions, massed along the border with Kuwait. Intelligence officials of the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) Headquarters in Tampa, Florida, predicted an impending Iraqi attack by 31 July. Two days later, Saddam invaded his smaller neighbor, Kuwait. Within three days Iraqi forces controlled the entire country and appeared poised to continue the attack against Saddam's larger southern neighbor, Saudi Arabia.⁶⁰

On 4 August, following a meeting of his top advisors, including USCENTCOM commander Gen H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Pres. George H. W. Bush committed the United States to defend Saudi Arabia, assuming the Saudis requested US forces to help defend their country. Two days later, in a meeting with General Schwarzkopf in Jeddah on the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd made the anticipated request. But quite unexpectedly, he did so at that very moment, and by his own mouth, rather than responding through subordinates after the meeting. The gears of a massive US deployment that continued for more than five months, known as Operation Desert Shield, began to turn.

On 9 August Saddam closed the borders of Iraq and Kuwait, "trapping more than thirteen thousand westerners and other foreigners and changing the entire nature of the crisis," General Schwarzkopf wrote. Although hostilities could still be avoided, Saddam's taking of US hostages "could be cause for war."⁶¹ On about 9 August, Headquarters AFSOC directed the 1720th STG to deploy an eight-man pararescue team and five combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) mission planners to develop a concept of operations in the event of US participation in hostilities in the Persian Gulf region. It was the first of many taskings for the group in the months ahead.⁶²

Around the same time, at least four combat controllers—Capt Tony Tino, CMSgt Wayne Norrad, SMSgt Robert Boyle, and MSgt James "JD" Burch—deployed to Saudi Arabia as part of an AFSOC survey team to plan the movement of forces in terms of air traffic control (ATC) and airfield requirements. Ending up at King Fahd Airport, where "the last slab of concrete" had been poured and which had not yet officially opened, the men did a quick assessment and decided the field was suitable. Captain Tino became King Fahd Airport's first airfield manager. The 1720th STG historian noted that Tino's controllers "developed the initial runway approach routes, traffic

patterns, and parking plans,” and, with borrowed radios, directed the first fixed-wing aircraft to land at King Fahd International. The controllers also helped coordinate the installation of runway lighting, electricity in the control tower, potable water, and air conditioning.⁶³

Norrad returned stateside after about a month, but the other combat controllers remained to handle the ATC duties at what became an extremely busy airfield during the buildup of forces in Saudi Arabia. In the first four weeks of Desert Shield, ST controllers handled around 30,000 takeoffs and landings at the airport. By the time they handed over control of the field, the number of takeoffs and landings increased to 3,000 a day. Conditions were challenging, to say the least. Prior to getting the air conditioning installed, temperatures in the tower reached 130 degrees. Robert Boyle recalled that even at night it was so bad “that you couldn’t write on paper when you were taking down information because the sweat would just soak everything.”⁶⁴

King Khalid Military City was northwest of King Fahd International. At the live-fire training ranges near King Khalid, the Saudis certified certain ST combat controllers—and no other US personnel—as range control tower authorities. As a result, US and coalition ground attack aircraft made good use of the training opportunities there.⁶⁵

John “Jeff” Schuldheiss, a former PJ turned combat control officer, assumed the task of the Air Forces Central Command fuels officer. Air Force ST personnel deployed to three expeditionary airfields—Al Jouf, Arar, and King Khalid Military City—to coordinate setting up forward arming and refueling points. Captain Schuldheiss oversaw the establishment or, in some cases, the upgrade of the munitions and fuel storage areas, including obtaining fuel bladders and pumps in the proper quantity and size for the types of aircraft expected to operate from each airfield. ST members quickly gained credibility with their Saudi hosts and received permission to direct all air traffic from the previously unmanned control towers. They also conducted approximately 85 assault-zone surveys, mainly for C-130 use throughout the border region between Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

After five months of building up US and coalition forces in the desert, on 15 January 1991 a United Nations (UN) deadline for the withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait quietly passed. Saddam promised that if war came, US troops would “swim in their own blood.”⁶⁶ The ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait was about to begin.⁶⁷

US and coalition planners had devised an air campaign plan to reduce Iraqi military capabilities prior to the start of ground action.

Plans for the first night called for Army AH-64A Apache helicopters, led by Air Force MH-53J Pave Low helicopters, to punch a small hole in Iraq's air defense network on the Saudi border; the strike aircraft expected to use the gap to approach their targets. The Apaches were to destroy key air defense radars on Baghdad's western border, followed by F-15 Eagle tactical fighters to neutralize the nearest air defense command post, effectively blinding the enemy. Planners anticipated the combined action to "spring the gate into Iraq by opening a corridor for hundreds more airplanes headed toward targets throughout Iraq," General Schwarzkopf said.⁶⁸

The Apaches possessed the needed firepower, and the Pave Lows provided the required all-weather navigational systems. To ensure that two critical and geographically separate Iraqi radars near the border were neutralized, USCENTCOM's AFSOC component, Air Force Special Operations Command Central (AFSOCCENT), planned for two Pave Lows to lead four Apaches each to their respective targets. "Our job was to get the shooters to the target on time. And the Apache's job was to kill the enemy," Pave Low squadron commander Col Richard L. Comer stated.⁶⁹ ST combat controllers launched and recovered the rotary-wing force while Special Tactics PJs manned the Pave Lows as machine gunners, combat trauma experts, and/or rescuers.⁷⁰

On the opening night of hostilities, 16–17 January, these helicopter formations crossed the border at no higher than 50 feet above the desert floor and "zigzagged around [B]edouin camps to avoid being heard, ducked into wadis (desert gulches) to fly under the radar coverage, and weaved through a maze of Iraqi observation posts," the AFSOC historian wrote.⁷¹ At 22 minutes prior to H-hour, 0300 local on 17 January 1991, the two helicopter formations did their jobs perfectly, as the Apaches simultaneously destroyed the two radars with Hellfire missiles. As Col George A. Gray, the AFSOCCENT commander, promised General Schwarzkopf, the mission was 100 percent successful. At 0300, the air campaign began as attack aircraft including F-111F Aardvark tactical attack aircraft, F-15Es, and Tornado GR1 multirole combat aircraft took advantage of the radar gap along the Saudi–Iraqi border. By that time, 1720th STG personnel who flew into the area on Army SOF MH-47 Chinook helicopters had marked the breach in Iraq's radar coverage by emplacing beacons or reflectors on the ground, helping to guide US and coalition aircraft through the gap.⁷²

Friendly aircraft losses on the first night were stunningly low. Planners anticipated losing dozens of aircraft, but only one US fighter, an F/A-18 Hornet, was downed. Lt Cmdr Michael Speicher, US Navy, was shot down; his status remained in doubt for over a decade. One AFSOCENT helicopter, an MH-47, sustained landing gear damage after taking evasive action to avoid an Iraqi SA-7 Grail surface-to-air missile (SAM). The Army special operations helicopter pilot flew to the airfield at Rafha, Saudi Arabia, where 1723rd STS combat controllers laid out mattresses on which the pilot landed the helicopter without incident. Throughout the air campaign, ST combat controllers directed thousands of US and coalition sorties and handled aircraft refueling at Al Jouf, Arar, and Rafha airfields in northern Saudi Arabia.⁷³

The classic PJ role, made famous by daring exploits in Southeast Asia, was that of a helicopter-borne rescuer descending into the jungle to recover a downed Airman at the risk of his own life. To a limited degree, the war in Iraq afforded ST PJs the opportunity to renew their traditional role as they participated in a small number of CSAR sorties launched during the campaign. According to the CSAR plan, Batman AB, near Diyarbakur in southern Turkey, and Arar airfield, in northern Saudi Arabia, constituted two of the main locations for rescue forces.⁷⁴

In December 1990 Lt Col Craig Brotchie, the 1724th STS commander, identified Arar as a likely airfield for SOF aircraft supporting the Scud hunt. The Scud, a virtually unguided tactical ballistic missile, carried only a light payload and lacked any real military value. But it could carry chemical warheads and was feared as a terror weapon much like the German V-weapons of World War II. Brotchie linked up with Maj Michael A. Longoria of the 1723rd STS who, as operations officer, led his squadron's activities in the desert. The two men surveyed about five airfields in two days. "When we drove into an airfield there was somebody there to meet us, and [soon] we were sitting down and having tea with whoever ran the airfield," retired Colonel Brotchie recalled.⁷⁵ "Every one of these airfields was owned by Saudi Air," which ran a few commercial flights daily into each field.⁷⁶ Brotchie and Longoria obtained data on runways, ramp space, and logistics support, and their trip facilitated the negotiations that led the Saudis to grant permission for US forces to use Arar.⁷⁷

When hostilities began, the remote airfield near the Iraqi border served as a forward operating location for aircraft supporting the Scud hunt as well as for CSAR aircraft. Paul "Vinnie" Venturella, a young combat controller and future chief master sergeant, worked in

Arar's control tower. He recalled that in one attention-grabbing incident, a Navy aircraft dropped a missile that homed in on the airfield's tactical aid to navigation.⁷⁸

While aircraft at Arar responded to Airmen downed in the southern part of the country, Batman's assets handled missions in northern Iraq. Michael J. "Mike" Ramos, a combat controller from the 1723rd's detachment at Rhein-Main AB, Germany, who deployed to Batman, recalled that a CSAR element typically consisted of two CCTs and two PJs. The rescue helicopter crew included the CSAR element's two PJs, who were prepared to leave the aircraft to search for and retrieve a survivor on the ground or in the water. At Batman, combat controllers from Rhein-Main and PJs from RAF Woodbridge served together in the CSAR role, mostly sitting alert.⁷⁹

In *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, retired colonel Darrel D. Whitcomb noted that CSAR in that conflict was "a mixed bag." There were a host of reasons, of which at least four deserve mention here. First, most of Iraq's terrain was unsuited for rescue—flat, barren, and with ground so hard that downed Airmen could hardly dig a small trench for cover, which facilitated the Iraqis' ready capture of 24 of the 39 downed personnel that landed alive. Second, Iraq's air defense system was "extensive and lethal." In some cases it made little sense to send a rescue aircraft into the shoot-down area for fear of producing more personnel in need of rescue. Third, the ARS was in the midst of an aircraft transition and—no fault of its own—was unprepared for the war. However, special operations helicopters took up the mission and performed it with the same élan that Air Rescue crews had shown in prior conflicts. Fourth, few (only 43) US and coalition aircraft were downed; so thankfully, there were limited opportunities for rescue.⁸⁰ In *Every Man a Tiger*, Tom Clancy and Gen Chuck Horner wrote matter-of-factly, "Seven combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) missions were launched, resulting in three saves. . . . [It was] not an inspiring record."⁸¹

As noted, hostilities began in the early morning hours of 17 January as US and coalition aircraft began a massive air campaign against targets throughout Iraq. From the beginning, US and coalition aircraft losses were even less than normal peacetime operations. Still, there were scattered rescue opportunities. Following two unsuccessful rescue attempts of downed pilots on 19 and 20 January, AFSOCCENT accomplished its first successful CSAR on the war's fifth day.

Early on 21 January 1991, the US Navy F-14 Tomcat crew of Lieutenants Devon Jones and Larry Slade conducted its first combat sortie escorting an EA-6B Prowler electronic warfare aircraft supporting a strike package west of Baghdad. While the F-14, call sign “Slate 46,” held at the orbit point, an Iraqi SA-2 high-altitude air defense system fired a missile. Despite the crew’s evasive action, the missile exploded just aft of the Tomcat’s tail. The aircraft became uncontrollable; wisely, Jones and Slade ejected. The rescue coordination cell received word that two good parachutes had been seen, and an Air Force A-10 Warthog pilot reported he had radio contact with at least one survivor.⁸² Slade was captured in the barren desert terrain, where—as Darrel Whitcomb paraphrased several survivors from the air campaign—“there was just nowhere to hide.”⁸³ Jones managed to find a ravine offering cover and evaded the Iraqis. When word of the downed aircraft reached AFSOCCENT, officials passed the mission to the command center at Arar, located a few miles from the Iraqi border. As became clear over the next few hours, two important pieces of information were erroneous—only one aircraft was downed—not two—and the initial map coordinates for Slate 46 were well off the mark.⁸⁴



Figure 7.1. Downed Navy F-14 pilot Lt Devon Jones, running toward the MH-53, with PJ Sgt Ben Pennington, ready to assist him on board

At 0805 local, Capt Tom Trask's MH-53J, call sign "Moccasin 05," departed Arar in dense fog. His crew included two PJs: Sgt Thomas Bedard, a Special Tactics PJ from Kirtland AFB, and an Air Rescue Service pararescueman, Sgt Ben Pennington. One of the PJs' roles—indeed, their most important duty—was to recover the survivor and secure him safely inside the rescue helicopter. The fog lifted within 30 minutes, and by that time the aircraft was in Iraqi airspace. As Trask flew deeper into Iraq in broad daylight, his crew received radio warnings and electronic indications that Iraqi SAMs were going active and that enemy MiG fighters and helicopters were in the vicinity. Most likely the MiGs were looking for the MH-53, expecting an easy kill, while the enemy helicopters searched for the F-14's pilot. Reaching the area northwest of Baghdad that was erroneously reported as the survivor's location, Trask's crew searched in vain for at least 20 minutes before returning to Arar for fuel.⁸⁵

While at Arar, Trask monitored his radios and learned that Slate 46A (Jones) had been sighted on the ground. Instead of going into crew rest, Trask requested and received permission to launch a second try. He took off northbound, this time with another MH-53, "Moccasin 04," on his wing. Two A-10s, led by Capt Paul J. Johnson, had contact with Jones. When Johnson reported the A-10 Sandy flight low on fuel and in need of finding a tanker, Trask requested the survivor's location to press ahead, if necessary, on his own. However, the nearest tanker flew well inside Iraqi airspace for the refueling, enabling Johnson's flight to return to working the CSAR.

As Moccasin 05 headed further into Iraq, Trask learned that Jones was much farther north than expected. To reach him, the rescue helicopter had to cross a dangerous four-lane highway carrying military traffic. Flying extremely low, Moccasin 05 crossed uneventfully and approached the area where Jones was hunkered down. After refueling, the A-10s returned and flew the standard rescue escort "daisy-chain pattern" around the helicopter. When Jones spotted the helicopter, he began giving vectors to guide Trask. But a pair of Iraqi trucks headed directly toward the survivor, and Trask's copilot called to the A-10s to "smoke the trucks!" One truck was hit; the other prudently turned the other way. Whitcomb's rescue narrative continued:

Trask continued inbound. About 500 meters out, he saw Jones stand up. Trask went into a landing flare and set the helicopter down between Jones and the truck, calling to his crew on the intercom that the survivor was at "one o'clock to the airplane and fifty feet." Then he cleared the two PJs to leave the aircraft

and get Jones. They were back on board in about 30 seconds. When the PJs reported that they were secure, Trask lifted off and headed south. The A-10s again fell into a daisy-chain above the helicopter for protection.⁸⁶

In a scene reminiscent of hundreds of rescues from Korea to Southeast Asia and beyond, the two PJs—Bedard and Pennington—exited the helicopter and performed the pilot pickup. Sergeant Bedard provided covering fire while his partner assisted Jones to the waiting helicopter. The crew flew to the airfield at Al Jouf, Saudi Arabia, completing more than six hours of flight time over enemy territory, returning the uninjured and grateful pilot to friendly control. For this daring rescue northwest of Baghdad, the crew received the MacKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year by an Air Force member or organization.⁸⁷

The following night MSgt Steve Jones, an ST combat controller attached to a British special unit, participated in a clandestine mission deep into Iraq. Infiltrating within 30 kilometers (18 miles) of Baghdad, the team failed to locate its primary objective, a fiber-optic cable used for Scud missile command and control. Instead, the team located and blew up conventional communications cables that connected Baghdad with outlying areas. Jones provided the communications and close air support expertise for the British-led team of special operators. After 90 minutes on the ground, a helicopter withdrew the team. Apparently, the British liked what they saw in Sergeant Jones. They requested and received ST augmentation for four additional missions. However, all four missions were cancelled due to the rapid conclusion of the ground campaign. In another mission, four ST men joined the Brits in the re-taking of the British embassy in Kuwait City. The Americans fast roped from a helicopter onto the 15-story building and controlled the communications and the air support for the British commander.⁸⁸

Steve Jones's infiltration mission was not the only classified work performed by ST members. In the early morning hours of 18 January, Saddam Hussein began firing short-ranged but deadly Scud ballistic missiles (throughout the conflict, roughly one-half were launched against Israel)—7 of them on the 18th, 8 on each of the 20th and 21st, and 10 on 25 January—in an attempt to draw Israel into the conflict. Saddam's best hope for victory appeared to be to entice Israel into joining the war against Iraq and splitting the coalition, as no Arab nation could politically afford to remain in a coalition with Israel. To keep Israel out of the war, Washington promised to commit JSOC teams to stop the Scud launches and devote considerable aerial assets

to neutralizing the terror threat. Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney and Gen Colin L. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, designated the anti-Scud mission as the top priority for US special operations forces in the Iraq–Kuwait theater. The theater commander, General Schwarzkopf, appeared wary of allowing JSOC too great a role in the conflict. Special operators were pleased that he was powerless to prevent the top-priority Scud mission in which their personnel played a key role. General McPeak later termed the effort “the great Scud chase.”⁸⁹

The 1720th STG commander, Colonel Carney, wrote that JSOC developed a “two-pronged strategy” to stop the Scuds. First, helicopters inserted small patrols deep inside Iraq to locate and destroy the Scuds. Second, modified MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the Army’s 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment conducted search-and-destroy missions. JSOC expected the aircraft—heavily armed with .50-caliber machine guns, a 7.62-caliber minigun, 2.75-inch rockets, and Hellfire missiles—to destroy any Scuds they discovered.⁹⁰

Combat controller Brian M. Shreve, a participant in the Scud-hunting patrols in February 1991, recalled that on one occasion his team had to be airlifted, or exfiltrated, briefly from Iraq. Within two days after being inserted, an Iraqi civilian driving a water truck spotted the US patrol while they reconnoitered an observation post. The driver sped off after the troops refrained from shooting the individual, in order not to draw even more attention to themselves. Shreve remembered he and his teammates “collapsed the hide sight and drove several hours to a new hide sight to get away” from where his team was identified.⁹¹

After settling down at their new hide site, the SOF team encountered an enemy element consisting of “seven or eight Iraqi APCs [armored personnel carriers],” and as Shreve recalled, “We started a firefight with them.” The approximately 20 US troops faced three times the number of Iraqi soldiers. Western Iraq had not been bombed much and the soldiers, armed with rocket-propelled grenades, were “pretty motivated,” Shreve said. The firefight lasted almost an hour while Shreve contacted a flight of Air Force F-15 Eagles. One Army senior NCO, seriously wounded, was exposed in open terrain. Recovering the wounded man became the team’s sole objective. One Soldier ran across the open area, hoisted the sergeant major onto his back, and carried him safely to one of the vehicles. The rescuer earned the Silver Star. The F-15s arrived on-station as the daring rescue took place.

Shreve called in the F-15 strike as three Air Force special ops MH-53s landed nearby and loaded the SOF team aboard. The helicopters airlifted the team, including the wounded, to the airfield at Arar.⁹²

A day later, SOF aviation assets reinserted the team into northwestern Iraq, where it continued its mission until the cease-fire on 28 February. Shreve, who earned a Bronze Star with Valor, noted that SSgt Bruce Barry and TSgt Mark Scholl, working with their respective special mission unit teams, “called in air strikes” against Scuds (or at least what appeared to be Scuds).⁹³

Since 1991 there has been discussion on just how many Iraqi Scuds and Scud launchers were destroyed, if any, by US and coalition aircraft or by the Army’s special mission unit teams. There may have been cases in which SOF teams neutralized what they believed to be Scuds or launchers that were actually decoys. Certainly, the aerial Scud-hunters destroyed Iraqi decoys on occasion. The *Gulf War Air Power Survey* reported that there were 88 Iraqi Scud launches during the conflict, and the terror weapon “posed one of the most serious challenges for the Desert Storm air campaign.” Poor weather “aggravated” the Scud threat, the survey noted, making identification difficult for US space assets and hampering the aerial hunt by US and coalition strike aircraft. Additionally, the intelligence community’s prewar estimate of Scud launchers was low, although it was raised just prior to the start of hostilities. “The [mobile] launchers proved particularly difficult to detect and were never fully suppressed. . . . It is also difficult to determine the precise impact of the Scud-hunting campaign on Scud launches,” the survey’s authors concluded.⁹⁴

One caveat was that the above statement seemed to refer strictly to aerial Scud-hunting—not that done by JSOC ground teams. In any case, the Iraqis managed to launch three or more Scuds on each of several days late in the conflict: 21, 23, 24, and 25 February. The ground-based Scud hunt ended on a positive note, however, when SOF teams located approximately 29 mobile Scud launchers in southwestern Iraq on 26 February, just 48 hours before the start of the cease-fire. “Had US special operations teams not found the 29 Scuds poised against Israel, the next-to-last day of the war might have been the beginning of a far bigger one,” distinguished military historian Benjamin F. Schemmer remarked.⁹⁵

The six-week air campaign took such a heavy toll on Iraq’s military that when Washington authorized the ground phase on 24 February, it quickly cleared Kuwait of all Iraqi forces. With the help of what

General Schwarzkopf called “the largest helicopter assault in history,” conducted by Maj Gen J. H. Binford Peay’s 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Division, the allies pushed far into Iraq. In his autobiography, Schwarzkopf described the opening of the ground campaign:

In cold rain and darkness and under the covering fire of 155-mm howitzers, the first Marines crossed into Kuwait—M-60 tanks and Cobra helicopters in the lead, followed by thousands of troops in armored personnel carriers and humvees. The troops wore clumsy charcoal-lined suits to protect them from chemical weapons, and carried gas masks on their belts. By the time President Bush went on TV at six A.M. Saudi time to declare “the liberation of Kuwait has now entered a final phase,” the Marines had already penetrated the first line of border defenses.⁹⁶

An ST team accompanied the First Division Marines. Capt Terry “Eugene” Willett’s team of combat controllers, MSgts Steve Jones and Larry “Gus” Rhinehart, and PJ TSgt Duane Stanton trudged alongside the Marines. For three days they crossed numerous man-made and natural barriers, minefields, and unexploded ordnance situated between the Iraq–Kuwait border and the airport. The Marines secured Kuwait City’s airfield while Willett’s team cleared a portion of one runway needed to land an eight-ship Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) helicopter assault force that arrived on the 27th.⁹⁷

On 27 February, Willett’s four men and eight ST personnel accompanied the SOCCENT force to the international airport to prepare for the arrival of fixed-wing aircraft in conjunction with the agreed-upon cease-fire. The ST team cleared the 10,000-foot runway 33L (left) with its taxiway and nearby ramp area. Personnel removed debris, including abandoned cars, cement barriers, and unexploded ordnance. A shortage of explosive ordnance disposal personnel meant that ST members assisted with the dangerous job of clearing the unexploded bombs. In addition, ST personnel participated in the airfield’s perimeter defense and helped operate the satellite communications network.

On the 28th, ST combat controllers, including Chief Norrad, handled all the ATC at the airport until relieved by MAC controllers. Before hostilities began in January, a number of combat controllers redeployed to the United States when it appeared they were not needed. Norrad returned to help fill the gap, deploying for the second time to the theater. He and Jones controlled the first fixed-wing airplanes to land at Kuwait City International since the Iraqi invasion. The retreating Iraqis had set fire to Kuwait’s oilfields, and Norrad recalled

shutting down the airfield for a time because the smoke from the burning oilfields reduced visibility “almost like it was night.”⁹⁸

In another case, a three-man PJ team—consisting of TSgt Ryan J. Beckmann, Sgt Bob Vaughan, and Sgt Steve West—accompanied the US Army’s 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) as it advanced along the coast to Kuwait City. The PJs augmented the battalion aid station and worked as frontline trauma experts, treating seven patients during the brief ground action.⁹⁹

On 31 January, in the largest allied aerial loss of the conflict, Iraqi ground fire shot down a special operations AC-130H, call sign “Spirit 03,” as it supported US Marines near the border town of Khafji, Saudi Arabia. All 14 personnel on board died when the aircraft crashed into the water just off the coast of Kuwait. One of the crewmembers, Capt Art Galvan, was a former combat controller. Following the cease-fire, a nine-man ST dive team led by MSgt Michael J. Sandler conducted a search-and-recovery mission. The team flew from King Fahd International Airport to a beach landing near the crash site, dispatched inflatable boats, and recovered most of the remains before a severe storm forced a halt to the operation.¹⁰⁰

Unlike the operations in Grenada and Panama, ST personnel did not have the opportunity for a dramatic combat jump as part of an airfield seizure in Iraq. Nevertheless, far more ST members served in Southwest Asia than in the prior conflicts—more than 160, roughly half of the 1720th STG—and they performed a wide variety of roles. The 1720th group historian wrote that beginning in August 1990 combat controllers “spearheaded the efforts to establish” King Fahd International Airport in Saudi Arabia as a major US installation for what was called the aluminum bridge airlift, carrying critically needed personnel, supplies, and equipment into the theater. They established and provided air traffic control of three expeditionary airfields—Al Jouf, Arar, and Rafha. ST teams conducted assault-zone surveys, participated in infiltration missions, and planned and executed CSAR sorties. The teams provided combat trauma assistance, emplaced navigational aids, and controlled close air support sorties. In strategic terms, their most critical role was participating in the hunt for mobile Scuds deep inside of Iraq. At a congressional breakfast honoring Desert Storm personnel after the conflict, Secretary of Defense Cheney said to at least one ST man, “Oh, you’re from the Scud busters. You kept Israel out of the war.”¹⁰¹ For most US and coalition forces, the cease-fire meant their

work was done and it was time to go home. This was not necessarily the case for ST personnel, however.

Special Tactics in Operation Provide Comfort

The Kurds, a traditionally nomadic ethnic group straddling the northern Iraqi border with Turkey and Iran, comprised about 20 percent of Iraq's 17 million inhabitants. Nationalistic in outlook, for years they suffered as an oppressed minority—particularly at the hands of Saddam Hussein, who gassed thousands to death in the late 1980s. During Operation Desert Storm, American radio broadcasts encouraged them to rise up against the “dictator” Saddam. Following the cessation of hostilities, in March 1991 the Kurds rebelled against the Iraqi government, attacking disorganized Iraqi units and taking over several towns in northeastern Iraq—their historic homeland. When Saddam's forces responded brutally, including the use of napalm and chemical weapons, virtually the entire Iraqi Kurdish population fled north toward Turkey and Iran. Though unwilling to actively support the rebellion with firepower, the Bush administration sent fighter-bombers against the Iraqi units pursuing the Kurds and managed to establish a buffer zone in northern Iraq. However, approximately 1.5 million refugees had fled without food, water, medicines, or adequate shelter. Turkey already possessed a Kurdish population within its own borders and for years had opposed Kurdish nationalism. Not surprisingly, the Turkish government refused the Iraqi refugees entry into their country. Trapped in harsh, 6,000-foot mountainous terrain near the border, with subfreezing temperatures by night and lacking basic necessities, by the beginning of April 1991 hundreds of Kurds died daily.

On 5 April a UN resolution asked member states to assist the Kurds. The next day, the Pentagon formed Joint Task Force (JTF) Provide Comfort and began deploying to Incirlik AB, Turkey, to help stop the dying and alleviate the suffering in northern Iraq. On 16 April President Bush expanded Provide Comfort to include multinational forces intended to establish temporary refugee camps in northern Iraq. One of two subordinate JTFs, JTF Alpha, was established at Silopi, in southeastern Turkey—some 18 miles from the Iraqi border. The 10th SFG, commanded by US Army Brig Gen Richard W. Potter, formed the core of this force.¹⁰²

Airdrops of emergency supplies and water began immediately along the mountainous Iraq–Turkey border—the first mission flown by an MC-130 from the 39th Special Operations Wing. Although many of the men had just returned home from Desert Storm, ST teams from units belonging to the 1720th STG assisted. The ST personnel deployed to three of the largest camps located in Turkey near the border—Isikveren, Cukurca, and Yekmal. Pararescueman TSgt Rod Alne arrived at Isikveren from OL-A, Det 1, 1723rd STS. He had been back at RAF Woodbridge for no more than two weeks before redeploying with a team including US Army Special Forces (SF) Soldiers, and Air Force ST men. Alne was one of about eight PJs at Isikveren led by a senior pararescueman, MSgt Emilio Jaso, formerly of the special mission unit at Pope. Alne described the distressing, gut-wrenching scene in his early days at the Isikveren camp, less than one mile from the Iraqi border:

We were the first ones in, we came in on the helicopters and landed and were patrolling, and there was death everywhere. There were dead kids and people and dogs. . . . There was trash and feces, it was . . . [at least 80,000] people in this really, really small place. The first couple of nights we camped right there, and all you heard was screaming and crying—and it was bad. It was real bad. So, our job was to improve their living conditions.¹⁰³

Within a few days, humanitarian groups including the Turkish Red Crescent Society, CARE, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), and the Red Cross joined hands with the combined JTF. Clean drinking water and food was the first priority. Many Kurds had died from cholera, and almost all were in a weakened condition. Several aid stations set up throughout the camp were open for business 16–18 hours a day, Alne said.¹⁰⁴

The US forces deployed with minimal medical supplies and didn't have enough to really help the Kurds until constructing a helicopter landing zone (HLZ). The HLZ enabled the delivery of pallets of food, water, medicine, blankets, cots, and 10-man tents. In a grim irony considering Saddam's recent attacks against them, some Kurds received chemical warfare suits, which officials deemed prudent because the charcoal linings provided considerable warmth. The troops searched out Kurdish tribal leaders and obtained their help in setting up a distribution system. At times the men had to push people away and shoot in the air to keep from being crushed by the refugees. On occasion refugees threw stones at them. US personnel found themselves in the middle of tense situations involving Turkish troops with

M-60 machine guns and armed Kurdish fighters. “As time went on, it got better,” Alne noted. “We got triple concertina wire, and we wired everything off, and we got security around everything.”¹⁰⁵

Later, the US personnel relocated to another part of Isikveren and trucked the food supplies and water into the refugee area. Alne felt good about the final outcome. “It took us a month, but it was amazing how well we set it up and got it running,” he said.¹⁰⁶

Retired Chief Alne reflected on the experience in 2008: “Everybody was celebrating Desert Storm, saying we won the war. But you don’t see the aftermath of war. . . . That is one of the things I learned from that [experience]. . . . I have a lot of respect for the Doctors without Borders and those types of people that go into those situations. . . . That is tough.”¹⁰⁷ The respect was mutual, although initially some Médecins Sans Frontières members held a low regard for military medical personnel. That low regard changed after witnessing the work of US Army SF medics and Air Force ST pararescuemen in the field. In *No Room for Error*, John Carney added, “Operation Provide Comfort made us feel good about our work, but also saddened us by its failure to bring closure.”¹⁰⁸

Other PJs at Isikveren included Sergeant Troy (first name only), Sgt Michael J. Ziegler, and A1C Brian D. Hicks. After the initial chaotic pace stabilized somewhat, Hicks spent nine days at the camp administering measles vaccinations to Kurdish children, distributing food and water, escorting food as it moved between camps, guarding equipment, and pulling border guard duty with an Army SF team. The Turks and Kurds had long-standing ethnic tensions that sometimes manifested themselves in disturbing ways. Hicks—who later served as a CRO—and others trying to help the needy were forced to watch Turkish soldiers stealing relief supplies intended for Kurdish refugees, “then selling them to the Kurds,” as the *Air Force Times* noted.¹⁰⁹

Three combat controllers accompanied the Isikveren PJs. Led by SSgt Stacey Poland, the CCT members from Det 1, 1723rd STS, at Rhein-Main AB, surveyed HLZs and fixed-wing drop zones (DZ), established a satellite communications link with the combined task force headquarters, and transmitted vital information to incoming aircrews. The initial sorties into the camp were particularly hazardous because some Kurds, desperate for help, tried to “storm the helicopter,” wrote the 1720th group historian.¹¹⁰ Poland and his teammates, including Sgt Timothy “Tim” Thompson, controlled the crowds and provided for safe helicopter operations at the camp. The

Isikveren CCT controlled some 1,500 helicopter sorties that delivered more than 3,500 tons of food and medical supplies.¹¹¹

At another camp, Cukurca, combat controller Mike Ramos deployed for the Kurdish relief effort just after returning home from the war. Ramos was among the last to redeploy from Iraq and so had been at home in Germany for only a week when notified of the humanitarian crisis. In 1989 Ramos, a future chief master sergeant, began his tour at Rhein-Main AB in Det 1, 1723rd CCS, and later moved to the newly-formed Det 2, 1721st CCS, when the SOF-conventional split occurred. On 19 April 1991 Sergeant Ramos was the lone combat controller (and Air Force member) attached to Maj Carl W. Riester's SF company as he moved his headquarters and six Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) teams ("A-teams") from Incirlik to Diyarbakir on a C-130 in preparation for movement to Cukurca. The next day, some 60 SF Soldiers plus Ramos flew by helicopter into a mountainous area and landed near the Turkey-Iraq border, where they transitioned to ground vehicles for the remainder of the trip. The ride in a truck to the remote, mountain refugee camp at Cukurca was a hair-raising experience. "We were on these 'Indiana Jones' roads where you are looking down the side"—and over a cliff in many cases, Ramos said. He felt a bit "like the 'Beverly Hillbillies' all packed up," with his truck overloaded with food, water, and gear.¹¹²

After arriving safely at the camp, in the midst of "really, really harsh terrain," Ramos found that many of the more than 100,000 refugees had walked to safety with only the clothes on their backs. Fifty or more died daily, many of cholera, resulting from lack of clean water. "It was a classic SF mission. The engineers got to do their thing, the doc's got to do their thing," he said.¹¹³ Engineers, doctors, medics, and others engaged in their respective specialties to save lives, hoping also to win "hearts and minds." In one incident, an NCO SF medic performed a risky "jugular cut down" on a tiny, two-month-old, dehydrated baby that a civilian physician deemed too small and weak to survive the procedure. The baby survived, and an MH-53 helicopter evacuated him to Incirlik AB, Turkey, where he recovered. For Ramos and others, "It was a good mission because you were saving people, and it was [a] tough mission because of the kids." It was also an intriguing cultural environment in terms of both refugees and relief workers: "You could meet homeless, illiterate people all the way to people with doctorates from Harvard that speak Japanese."¹¹⁴

The mission was not limited to the SF or medical role. Provide Comfort represented a classic mission for ST combat controllers in terms of handling air traffic control and surveying DZs for the airdrop of supplies. The need for CCT expertise was obvious. Prior to the arrival of the ST controllers, some Kurds, unfamiliar with the nature of airdrops, were injured or killed by pallets of food and water dropped by US and coalition aircraft that lacked either ATC assistance or proper clearance on the DZs. Mike Ramos described the CCT role at Cukurca:

For a drop zone mission it was great because I got to mark multiple drop zones and I felt my camp was “dialed in” really good. I had published coordinates [that we] sent back to Silopi [Turkey, marking areas that were] mined . . . [to indicate] “drop in these areas and don’t drop in these areas.” I set an IP [initial point] for a river intersection with something I found on a geographic map [to indicate] “enter the valley at this point, that way I will know where you are coming from.” . . . So I got to . . . run my air traffic [control] piece.¹¹⁵

Combat controller SSgt Lloyd “Wayne” Clayborn joined Ramos. Having three or four HLZs on which to bring in supplies and a mountaintop perch with a commanding view of the area gave Ramos and Clayborn an advantage. Often, personnel at nearby HLZs called the inbound, supply-laden aircraft—C-130s or helicopters—on the radio and directed them not to drop (or helicopters, not to land) because their only drop or landing zone was occupied. But Cukurca had multiple sites. Ramos recalled contacting inbound aircraft: “I would call them back and say . . . ‘I have plenty of space at my camp.’” His counterparts at the other camps’ HLZs complained, “Dude, quit snaking our airplanes.” Ramos replied, “Hey, they are going back to Incirlik with loads, and I can use them, dude!”¹¹⁶

Typically, Ramos and Clayborn controlled about 40 sorties a day, accounting for some 200 tons of supplies, and involving up to 10 different types of aircraft. In addition, the standard CCT system for tallying loads facilitated the preparation of accurate situation reports. “We had a real good running tally on what we were contributing to the people there,” Ramos remarked on the reports that included tons of food, water, and cooking oil delivered to the needy Kurds.¹¹⁷ One US Army study pointed out that the rugged terrain and wind patterns in the area were such that helicopter drops “proved far more effective” than airdrops. “The helicopters,” which included various types of US Air Force, Marine Corps, Army, and German and British rotary-winged aircraft, “could land at a precise location, bringing in supplies

without damage or creating a hazard for those on the ground,” Army historian Gordon W. Rudd wrote.¹¹⁸

Toward the end of Ramos’s deployment, he met two ST comrades whom he jokingly referred to as “the Moss brothers.” Ramos had not met combat controller Steve Moss or pararescueman Dave Moss, so when the two of them met him at the camp and introduced themselves, Ramos suspected a practical joke. Actually, the two Mosses were unrelated, but initially Ramos wondered. Another PJ, MSgt Patrick Sinon, arrived with the Mosses. During a period of two-and-half weeks in May 1991, Steve Moss controlled nearly 400 helicopter sorties, most of them operating to and from the forward base at Silopi, Turkey. Many of the sorties sent troops and supplies to the border camp or evacuated the sick and injured. PJ Dave Moss, attached to the same Special Forces ODA as Ramos, quickly became adept at performing sutures on the Kurdish refugees.¹¹⁹

In hindsight, Ramos reflected philosophically on the unnecessary and backbreaking work he performed upon his arrival at Cukurca. Leaving the trucks and trekking up a mountain to the area where his ODA intended to establish its base camp, Ramos carried a “man-killer” rucksack in excess of 100 pounds. His load included at least four radios, batteries, a week’s worth of meals-ready-to-eat, and water. Ramos unpacked some of his gear and made several trips throughout the night to get everything to the top. Preparing, finally, to pitch his tent as the first rays of daylight appeared, he noticed “a big circle of rocks . . . about a three hundred meter radius, and it’s an ‘H.’” It was a HLZ where an H-60 Black Hawk could have landed—saving him several trips up the mountain! Nevertheless, at least by 2007 when he was interviewed, Chief Ramos considered the humanitarian relief operation in 1991 absolutely the most rewarding mission of his career, despite its initially unwelcome nature—coming immediately after Desert Storm. Altogether, 37 ST members participated in the Kurdish relief effort between April and July 1991, including at least 18 combat controllers and 12 PJs.¹²⁰

Although institutionalized between 1987 and 1990 by the activation of the first ST units, numerous organizational changes made for a very difficult yet successful period for the ST community. A retired colonel, John Buck, pointed out the bottom-line achievement during the period. “John Carney took us from the ‘band of gypsies’ to an organized, structured . . . career field,” he said. However, the downside was that units changed commands and were divided into conventional

and special operations entities—in some cases more smoothly than in others. In addition to the operation in Panama, ST personnel fought in Iraq and then transitioned immediately to a humanitarian role vis-à-vis the Kurds along the Iraq–Turkey border. In Desert Storm, ST personnel participated in the national strategic mission of hunting the Iraqi Scud missiles that threatened to bring Israel into the conflict. Combat controllers and PJs also performed their traditional functions in ATC and airfield operations and as rescuers of downed US and coalition service members and battlefield trauma medical specialists. In Provide Comfort on behalf of the Kurds, combat controllers and PJs established DZs; directed the aerial delivery and distribution of life-saving supplies of food, water, shelters, and medicines; and treated the sick and injured. Some participants described it as a classic hearts-and-minds operation.¹²¹

The Kurdish relief effort was only one of many, as the United States entered an era of seemingly endless humanitarian and peace-oriented operations as part of the post–Cold War’s new world disorder. Sometimes the lines between peace and war were very fuzzy, as the ST experience in Somalia soon bore out.

Notes

1. Col John T. Carney, Jr., USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 November 2006. Many former members referred to “Det 1, MACOS” well after the time period to which that designation applied. By the time of Grenada, the unit’s designation was Det 4, NAFCOS. In 1987 the unit underwent two more redesignations, first to 1724th CCS, then to 1724th STS. John T. Carney Jr. and Benjamin F. Schemmer, *No Room for Error: The Covert Operations of America’s Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 171, 302–03.

2. The 1724th STS facility was situated along the boundary between Fort Bragg and Pope AFB, North Carolina. The message address was Bragg, but the mailing address was Pope. A gate provided access to each installation. Thus the squadron may rightly be referred to in connection with either Bragg or Pope. Special Order GA-009, HQ AFSOC, 18 March 1992.

3. Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) Lineage and Honors files. The 1730th PRS also was activated in October 1987.

4. TSgt Joseph A. Kahovec, USAF, to recruiters, letter, subject: “Dear Recruiter,” ca. 1990–91, including quote, copy provided by Col John T. Carney Jr., USAF, retired, in AFHRA files, Maxwell AFB, AL.

5. Carney, interview; author’s personal observations while serving as Joint Task Force-510 historian, southern Philippines, 2002; and discussions at AFSOC command history office, 2006–2007.

6. CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 9 February 2007.

7. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 192.

8. MSgt Samuel C. Shearin, retired, interview with the author, 8 September 2006. In 1992 the 1720th STS was redesignated the 720th STS; AFHRA Lineage and Honors files. Some of these support functions may not have come to full fruition until the mid- to late 1990s.

9. MSgt Scott C. Fales, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 July 2007; and Shearin, interview, including quote. Unit strength figures for the 1724th STS were not included in the AFSOC history until October 1991.

10. Shearin, interview.

11. CMSgt Timothy C. Brown, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 11 November 2006.

12. Shearin, interview, including quote; Brown, interview; Shearin retirement flyer, 1 July 1999, copy in AFHRA files.

13. Shearin, interview.

14. Brown, interview.

15. Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 5 October 2006.

16. Brown, interview.

17. "CCA News-Brief," December 1986, including quote 1, copy in AFHRA files; and CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: "Jerry Bennett Remembrance," 27 October 2009, including quote 2.

18. Norrad, e-mail to the author, subject: "RE: Trophy Honoring Jerry Bennett," 27 October 2009.

19. Ibid.; and Maj Manuel L. "Bud" Gonzalez, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 February 2007, including quote.

20. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, chapter 11; and Brown, interview, including quote.

21. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 456, 464, [note that all AFSOC histories cited herein are under AFHRA call no. K317.01]; and Koren, interview. In 1991, 17 civilians were authorized, but the number assigned was unavailable.

22. History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, 269, 276; Koren, interview; Brown, interview; and Shearin, interview. Total USAF manpower end-strengths had been in decline since 1986.

23. Col Craig F. Brotchie USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21 July 2007.

24. Memo, author to self, following discussion with MSgt Shearin, 17 April 2017, copy in AFHRA files.

25. Koren, interview.

26. Brown, interview.

27. Col John E. Buck, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 22 March 2007; Koren, interview; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 168.

28. Brown, interview, including quote; Koren, interview. For more on Ryan, Cassidy, and Patterson, see chapter 5 of this work.

29. Brotchie, interview, including quote; and Shearin, e-mail to the author, subject: "RE: Pope or Ft Bragg," 27 October 2009. Brotchie commanded the 1724th STS from October 1989 to June 1992; unofficial bio, Col Brotchie, copy in AFHRA files.

30. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 191–92; Brotchie, interview, including quote; Col Jeffrey Buckmelter, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 14 December 2007; and Maj Steven L. McLeary, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, “RE: question for Col Carney (for Air Force history program book on Special Tactics),” 4 April 2017. Brig Gen Holmes’s official bio is at USAF Biographies, <http://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/104892/brigadier-general-rob-ert-h-holmes/>.

31. Koren, interview, including quote 1; AFHRA Lineage and Honors files; Carney, interview, including quote 2; History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January–December 1989, vol. 1, 19, [note that all Twenty-Third histories cited are under AFHRA call no. K316.01].

32. History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 1, 20, including quote; and History, Military Airlift Command, January–December 1990, vol. 1, 6, call no. K300.01.

33. *Ibid.*; and History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 6, SD I-39, 1, including quote. In 1985 the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service had 18 rescue units. In early 1989, only four units were expected to remain operational by 1990, see History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January–December 1989, vol. 1, 5.

34. History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 1, 21; and History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 6, SD I-35, including quotes.

35. History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 1, 21, including quote 1; and History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 6, SD I-39, A-1, including quote 2.

36. History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January 1986–December 1987, vol. 1, 21–22.

37. *Ibid.*, 22.

38. History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January–December 1989, vol. 1, 1–5.

39. *Ibid.*, 7, 18–19; and History, Twenty-Third Air Force, January–December 1989, vol. 7, SD I-85; and History, Military Airlift Command, January–December 1990, vol. 1, 10.

40. History, Military Airlift Command, January–December 1990, vol. 1, 13; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 15–16. In early 1990, Colonel Carney managed to gain 16 more PJ spaces to support space shuttle duties.

41. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 15–16.

42. Gonzalez, interview.

43. *Ibid.*; CMSgt Rodney D. Alne, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 22 April 2008, including quotes; and Alne, telephone conversation with the author, 10 November 2009.

44. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 14.

45. Gonzalez, interview.

46. Gonzalez, interview, including quote; and Alne, interview. Carney mentioned sending some combat controllers through PJ medical training at Sheppard AFB, Texas, see Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 196.

47. Maj Steven L. McLeary, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 December 2007, including quotes.

48. Fales, interview, including quote; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, xxiii–xxiv. The order inactivating Det 6, 1730th PRS, was not

issued until 22 February 1990. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 3, SD I-76, SD I-78.

49. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, xxiv, 23; and Fales, interview, including quote.

50. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 3, SD I-77, SD I-78, SD I-83.

51. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, xxiv, xxvii, 434; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, xvii, 19.

52. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 56–58; and Maj Gen Thomas E. Eggers, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 30 July 2007, including quote.

53. History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, xvii, 19; History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 4, SD I-96, SD I-97.

54. Mr. Paul B. Witt, AFSOC/HO, e-mail, to Mr. Mark P. Stanley, AFHRA/FS, subject: “4 digit [units],” 6 November 2009; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, xix, 10, 19, including quote. For a time the abbreviation “STGP” was used for “Special Tactics Group.” For the sake of simplicity, I elected to use the later abbreviation, “STG.”

55. History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, 190–91.

56. Col Marc F. Stratton, USAF, interview with the author, 6 June 2007, including quotes; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, xxxvi. A biographical summary of Colonel Carney was in “‘Coach’ John Carney Retires, Headed for Chef’s School,” *Armed Forces Journal International*, July 1991, 40.

57. Stratton, interview, including quote; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, 15.

58. Stratton, interview, 6 June 2007.

59. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 199.

60. H. Norman Schwarzkopf and Peter Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero: The Autobiography of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf* (New York and Toronto: Linda Grey Bantam Books, 1992), 291–97; and Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, vol. 2, part 1 (Washington, DC: DOD, 1993), 11.

61. Schwarzkopf and Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*, 299–314.

62. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 30–31, AFHRA call no. K-GP-CMDO-1720-HI; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 269, 271.

63. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 259–61, 274–75, including quote 1; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 32, including quote 2; CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 6 February 2007; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 227.

64. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 275, including quote; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 34; and Norrad, interview.

65. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 34–35; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 317.

66. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 35–36; History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 317, 319; and George J. Church, “Saddam’s Options,” *Time*, 21 January 1991, 29, including quote.

67. Schwarzkopf and Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*, 407–09.

68. *Ibid.*, 414, including quote; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 36; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 365.

69. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 366, including quote (Comer quoted by AFSOC historian); and Whitcomb, Darrel D. *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2006), 92.

70. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 34.

71. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 368–69.

72. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 256, 367–71; Tom Clancy with General Chuck Horner (Ret.), *Every Man a Tiger* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1999), 336–37; Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 95; and History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 37.

73. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 370–71; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 36–37; and Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 97–99.

74. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 380; Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 62–63, 102–103, 245; and Clancy with Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, 391–93. The AFSOC historian counted eight CSARs attempted by AFSOCENT.

75. Brotchie, interview, including quote; and Longoria, interview.

76. Brotchie, interview.

77. Ibid.; Longoria, interview; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 231.

78. CMSgt Paul Venturella, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 8 March 2007.

79. CMSgt Michael J. Ramos, USAF, interview with the author, 5 June 2007.

80. Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, xvi–xviii, 245–47, and 271–72, including quotes. Forty-eight other airmen died prior to or upon landing.

81. Clancy with Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, 391. Nineteen of the downed Airmen became prisoners of war. Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, xvi, 252–53.

82. History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 371–72, 375–76; and Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 142–43. For General Horner's recollection of this rescue, see Clancy with Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, 394–97.

83. Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 246, (survivors paraphrased by Whitcomb).

84. Ibid., 143–46; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 376–77.

85. Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 144–46; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 37; History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 376–77; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 227 (according to official documents, the correct spelling is “Bedard”).

86. Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 147–51.

87. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 37; History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 378; and “ASC Award Winners Mackay Trophy,” Aeronautical Systems Center website, 11 June 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100612180241/www.ascho.wpafb.af.mil/birthplace/AWARD3.HTM>.

88. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 37–39; History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 390–91; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 228–29. While the 1720th history stated Jones's mission took place on 22 January, Carney's book said 25 January. I elected to follow the 1720th document.

89. Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, vol. 5, part 1 (Washington, DC: DOD, 1993), 562, 565; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 229–31; and Ben-

jamin F. Schemmer, “Special Ops Teams Found 29 Scuds Ready to Barrage Israel 24 Hours Before Cease-Fire,” *Armed Forces Journal International*, Jul 1991, 36, including quote (McPeak quoted by Schemmer). General Horner expressed his complaints with SOF Scud-hunting procedures in Clancy with Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, 384. Schemmer’s article stated that of 86 Scuds fired by the Iraqis during the conflict, 40 were against Israel; of the total, 42 were intercepted by Patriot missiles.

90. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 231.

91. SMSgt Brian M. Shreve, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 7 March 2007.

92. Shreve, interview, 7 March 2007.

93. *Ibid.*, including quote; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 233.

In October 1992, Scholl perished in a helicopter mishap in the western United States; see Norrad to the author, e-mail, subject: “RE: Dave Schnoor – approval?,” 19 September 2012.

94. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, vol. 5, part 1, 562.

95. *Ibid.*, 565; and Schemmer, “Special Ops Teams Found 29 Scuds,” 36, including quote. On the eve of hostilities, the estimate of Scud launchers had climbed to “thirty-some,” which was reasonably close to the mark; see Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, vol. 2, part 2, 345.

96. Schwarzkopf and Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*, 310, 348, 451–52.

97. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 39–40; History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 391; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 235.

98. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 40–41; History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 394; Charles H. Cureton, *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990–1991, With the 1st Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps), 83, 91, 96, 103; and Norrad, interview, including quote.

99. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 41–42; and History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 391.

100. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 43; History, AFSOC, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 385–86; and Norrad, telephone discussion with the author, subject: confirmation of Michael J. Sandler’s role in Spirit-03 recovery, 1 May 2017.

101. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 43–44, including quote 1; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 226–27, 233; and Schemmer, “Special Ops Teams Found 29 Scuds,” 36, including quote 2 (Cheney quoted by Schemmer).

102. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 49–50; John Pike, “Operation Provide Comfort,” *GlobalSecurity* (website), accessed 1 May 2017, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/provide_comfort.htm, including quote; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 236–38; and William Matthews, “U.S. Forces Try to Comfort Kurdish Refugees in Iraq,” *Air Force Times*, 6 May 1991, 23.

103. Alne, interview, including quote; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 51–53; and Douglas J. Gillert, “Journey to Isikveren,” *Airman* 35 (July 1991), 2–9; Gordon W. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention, Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, 1991* (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Army, 2004), 66–68, 74. Rudd estimated there were 80,000–100,000 refugees at Isikveren. He may have counted the three combat controllers among the PJs that

deployed to Isikveren. Rudd reported desperate conditions at Cukurca similar to those Alne reported at Isikveren.

104. Alne, interview; and Gillert, "Journey to Isikveren," 6.

105. Alne, interview, including quotes; Sean C. Kelly, "3rd AF steps up support for Kurdish refugees," *Air Force Times*, 6 May 1991, 22; and Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 70.

106. Alne, interview.

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 243, including quote; and Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 71.

109. Capt Brian D. Hicks, USAF, e-mails to the author, subject: "RE: Isikveren, Turkey – PROVIDE COMFORT," 20 and 23 November 2009; Jim Wolffe, "Turkish soldiers accused of abuse," *Air Force Times*, 20 May 1991, 6, including quote; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 241; and Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 74, 101–02.

110. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 52, including quote; Gillert, "Journey to Isikveren," 3, 5; and Alne, interview.

111. History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 52.

112. Ramos, interview, including quotes; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 54; and Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 74–77.

113. Ramos, interview.

114. *Ibid.*

115. *Ibid.*, including quotes; and Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 76.

116. Ramos, interview.

117. *Ibid.*, including quote; History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 54; and Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 65–66.

118. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 65.

119. Ramos, interview, including quote; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 238–39.

120. Ramos, interview, including quotes; and History, 1720th STG, January 1990–December 1991, vol. 1, 51.

121. Buck, interview.

Chapter 8

The Battle of Mogadishu

Special Tactics in Somalia, 1993

Somalia, a largely semiarid country of plains, plateaus, and highlands located on the East African coast at the Horn of Africa, possesses the longest coastline of any state on the continent. Somalia's position across the sea from the Arabian Peninsula facilitated its early embrace of Islam, largely through commerce. One scholar described "the rise and decline of Muslim emporia along the coast" as an integral part of Somalia's history until the late nineteenth century. At the coastal city of Mogadishu, merchants traded with foreigners in the Mediterranean–Red Sea and Arabian Peninsula regions and as far away as India and China. When the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama's ships passed by the city in the 1490s, he noted its large size and its many fine buildings, palaces, and mosques.¹

In the late nineteenth century the major European powers colonized most of Africa, but Somalia maintained an autonomous status as the Dervish State until 1920. In that year British airpower contributed to the defeat of the Dervishes and established a British protectorate in northern Somalia. The Italians took control militarily of southern Somalia and occupied the area until early in World War II when a British military administration assumed power. During the late 1940s and 1950s Somali nationalism expressed itself mainly through an organization known as the Somali Youth League. At the same time, the British and Italians increased educational and vocational opportunities for Somalis, trained indigenous civil officers, and prepared for Somali independence. In 1960 the northern and southern regions joined together as the independent Somali Democratic Republic.²

In 1969 Gen Mohammed Siad Barre assassinated and replaced the country's president. Barre, who instigated a disastrous war in 1977 with neighboring Ethiopia, ruled Somalia as an increasingly repressive military dictator until his government's collapse in the face of clan-based

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civil warfare at the end of 1990. In response to widespread riots against his regime, Barre fled the country with his closest supporters in January 1991. Governmental functions ceased, and the local economy was thrown into chaos. Mogadishu reverted from a once-modest city to a repressive Third World capital, lacking electricity and suffering from food and fuel shortages, rampant inflation, and the breakdown of law and order. Food was traditionally a source of power in Somalia, and competing clans fought over the control of food supplies and storehouses. A drought exacerbated the suffering. Private relief organizations could not prevent the theft of food by armed militias and the use of food as a political weapon. In 1990–91 an estimated 300,000 Somalis died from famine. Richard W. Stewart, a US Army historian and veteran of Somalia, commented, “The most visible elements of the suffering—pictures of starving, fly-covered children—appeared nightly on American television screens. Fresh from its triumph in Operation DESERT STORM, the administration of President George H. W. Bush felt it could not ignore the situation, despite the obvious risks of intervening in a country still at war with itself.”³

In April 1992 the United Nations (UN) authorized relief operations in Somalia and established the United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM). A small number of UN peacekeepers deployed and tried to oversee the distribution of food to those in dire need. The peacekeepers experienced some success in the cities, but the Somali clans’ armed groups and/or UN-hired indigenous security guards diverted or stole food from the starving in many smaller towns and rural areas. In response to the worsening situation, in August 1992 the United States began airlifting food supplies from neighboring Kenya to remote airstrips in Somalia to avoid supply bottlenecks in Mogadishu’s port as well as clan militias and unscrupulous food convoy guards. Operation Provide Relief sought to use US logistical capabilities to help the situation without placing US troops on the ground. Problems with food distribution continued, however, with lawless gangs stealing and hoarding supplies and allowing thousands who failed to support them or pay protection money to starve. Soldiers from the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) (SFG-A), from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, accompanied many of the relief flights and began gathering intelligence on the areas they observed.⁴

In December 1992 the United States (not the UN) began Operation Restore Hope under the direction of a US Marine Corps-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF). The I Marine Expeditionary Force,

based at Camp Pendleton, California, formed the core of UNITAF's headquarters, which included the other services. Lt Gen Robert B. Johnston, USMC, commanded the UNITAF, which also included sister-service, allied military, and interagency civilian membership. The Army's 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, from Fort Drum, New York, comprised the primary ground component. Altogether, 23 countries contributed a total of 38,000 soldiers for the humanitarian operation. Representatives from 49 relief agencies joined in the effort to feed the needy Somalis. The president appointed former ambassador Robert B. Oakley as special envoy to Somalia, and he and General Johnston established a close working relationship.⁵

On 9 December US Marine and Navy elements moved into Mogadishu. The Marines' initial contingent arrived by helicopter at the airport, while the Navy SEALs (sea-air-land) swam ashore. Within an hour of their arrival, conventional Air Force combat controllers began providing air traffic control and ground services at Mogadishu's all-but-abandoned airport. Although greeted unexpectedly by "the blazing lights of forewarned media crews," the SEALs and Marines faced no resistance.⁶

The UNITAF's mission was strictly to facilitate the delivery of food, not to disarm the traditionally heavily-armed Somali factions. Leading Somali warlords decided to cooperate with the UNITAF in establishing a relatively safe and secure environment that facilitated relief efforts. The warlords included Gen Mohammed Farrah Aidid, a major figure in the former Barre regime. By February 1993 local Somalis moved most of their heavy weapons out of Mogadishu or into cantonment areas.⁷

Perhaps influenced by the presence of massive US firepower and the leadership of Ambassador Oakley, Aidid and rival warlord Ali Mahdi Mohamed accepted a sort of cease-fire. With a tentative agreement in place by the end of 1992, US special operations and allied elements began moving into the countryside to facilitate food deliveries as well as to garner intelligence on potentially hostile clan militias.⁸

The southern region of Somalia was the most affected by drought and famine. Divided into nine "humanitarian relief sectors," the Marines moved into two sectors (one was Mogadishu), while Army elements worked, often with allied soldiers, in four others. From February to May 1993 the mission proceeded without any major incidents and succeeded in halting mass starvation in the country. There were other encouraging signs. Local markets returned to life, increasingly

Somalis felt safe enough to travel, and initial efforts at restoring the Somali national police appeared favorable.⁹

In May the four-month-old Clinton administration terminated Restore Hope and turned the Somalia mission over to the UN. Shortly thereafter, however, the situation deteriorated. In late March the UN passed a resolution authorizing military forces to conduct peace enforcement or peacemaking in Somalia (under Chapter VII of its charter) rather than peacekeeping (under Chapter VI)—an important distinction. With the end of the US initiative, the UN transitioned its Somalia operations (known as UNOSOM II) into Operation Continue Hope. On 4 May Turkish Lt Gen Çevik Bir assumed command of UNOSOM II, with Maj Gen Thomas M. Montgomery, US Army, as his deputy. The United States supported UNOSOM II with some 2,600 logistics personnel, 1,100 members of a quick reaction force (QRF), and a small special operations element. ADM Jonathan Howe, US Navy, retired, became the new US envoy to Somalia.¹⁰

On 5 June, in one of several coordinated attacks against UN/US forces in Mogadishu, Aidid's militia ambushed and attacked Pakistani soldiers assigned to UNOSOM II, killing 24 and wounding 44. The next day the UN Security Council adopted a more aggressive posture toward the Somali warlord, calling for additional troops and equipment from member nations. The US Central Command (USCENTCOM) commander, Gen Joseph P. Hoar, USMC, requested and obtained a deployment of four AC-130 gunships. That month the gunships destroyed several of Aidid's weapons storage facilities and vehicle compounds and neutralized *Radio Mogadishu*, dubbed *Radio Aidid* for its propagandist broadcasts. By the time the AC-130s redeployed on 14 July, the gunships had flown 32 sorties including interdiction, reconnaissance, and psychological operations—the latter including leaflet drops.¹¹

On 17 June Admiral Howe inadvertently provided “folk hero” status to Aidid, declaring him an outlaw and naming him responsible for the recent attacks. Howe sought Aidid's capture and pursued an arrest warrant. That same day, armed Somalis killed five Moroccan soldiers and wounded 39 conducting a “search-and-arrest mission.”¹²

The violence continued. On 2 July three Italian troops were killed and 21 wounded in an ambush in Mogadishu. Ten days later, the US QRF attacked an Aidid compound using helicopter gunships. After the raid, hostile Somalis killed four Western journalists covering the

operation. What began as a peacekeeping mission had evolved into peace *enforcement*, impossible to distinguish from war.¹³

The UN/US focus shifted to Aidid, the leader of the largest of Somalia's major clans. Since the June attacks, Aidid appeared to be the "center of gravity" of the Somali groups opposing the strictly humanitarian effort. A US aviation task force comprised of various helicopters, snipers, and a scout platoon began conducting continuous surveillance of Aidid. One task force element aimed at Aidid was designated "Team Snatch." But the elusive warlord lowered his profile and was rarely seen. On 8 August his forces used a roadside bomb to kill four US military policemen in Mogadishu. Two weeks later, US Secretary of Defense Les Aspin directed a joint special operations task force (JSOTF) to deploy to Somalia.¹⁴

Task Force Ranger (TF Ranger) was composed of US Army Rangers from the 3rd Battalion (75th Ranger Regiment), 10th Mountain Division, a battalion from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), and special mission unit personnel from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. A handful of pararescuemen (PJ) and combat controllers from the 24th Special Tactics Squadron (STS) made up the USAF element. Maj Gen William F. Garrison, US Army, commanded TF Ranger. The Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) commanding general served two tours in Southeast Asia, had commanded Delta Force, and was, according to several Air Force special operators, the finest general officer for whom they ever worked.¹⁵

The majority of TF Ranger arrived in Mogadishu by 28 August with its mission to capture Aidid and his key subordinates. That same day, 24th STS combat controller Dan Schilling participated in TF Ranger's first patrol in Mogadishu. He noticed the awful, almost indescribable smell of the city "which contained within it a palpable desperation. You could feel it on your hands and face," he wrote later.¹⁶ Within days, following one poorly-coordinated operation in which an unlisted UN compound was hit and some workers temporarily detained, General Garrison began coordinating TF Ranger's activities with General Montgomery at UNOSOM II, despite not being under UNOSOM's command-and-control structure.¹⁷

Garrison's task force conducted five other missions between August and the end of September; all succeeded tactically. Even so, the command-and-control arrangement was so deficient in one combat search and rescue (CSAR) training exercise in Mogadishu, that during the postmission debriefing, 24th STS PJ Scott C. "Scotty" Fales

used “butcher paper” to outline the problems and how to fix them. The enemy enjoyed an excellent view, looking downward onto the Mogadishu airfield complex. Because the movement of aircraft and personnel could not be hidden, Garrison directed his crews to launch up to 10 sorties a day to condition the Somalis to frequent flights. The Somalis had no way of knowing when an operational mission launched. Moreover, to keep the enemy off balance, Garrison ordered his men, accustomed to fighting only at night, to perform some raids by day, employing both helicopters and ground vehicles.¹⁸

The typical operation involved a special mission unit deploying by helicopter onto (or near) a target building in the city, while other helicopters dropped Rangers to establish blocking forces, in some cases “kind of like in a square.”¹⁹ The special mission unit handled everything *inside* the square, while the Rangers blocked anyone from entering from the outside. A Ranger QRF awaited at the airfield in case their comrades required additional support. On 21 September TF Ranger captured one of Aidid’s closest advisors in a raid near Digfer Hospital, but, for the first time, the US forces encountered massed rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire from the Somalis.²⁰

The UNOSOM II forces in the city also began to encounter greater threats. On 8 September Somali militia attacked US and Pakistani soldiers clearing roadblocks. The well-armed Somalis employed small arms, 106 mm recoilless rifles, and RPGs. They were suppressed only by extensive allied fire from ground and air assets. Later that day, Somali militia, joined by a mob of perhaps 1,000 civilians, attacked the same allied element. In the next two weeks, two other roadblock-clearing teams were attacked. In one of the incidents, a Pakistani armored personnel carrier (APC) was lost; among the nine casualties, two soldiers died. On 25 September a US Army H-60 Black Hawk helicopter was shot down by an RPG, killing three Soldiers. A week later the same basic scenario occurred again. On that occasion, the attack became part of the longest sustained firefight involving US forces since Southeast Asia.²¹

The roughly 440-member task force included 12 members of the 24th STS: the commander, Lt Col James Oeser; three PJs—Scotty Fales, Rusty Tanner, and Timothy A. “Tim” Wilkinson; and eight combat controllers—Ray Benjamin, Jeff Bray, John McGarry, Jack McMullen, Bob Rankin, Pat Rogers, Dan Schilling, and Dave Schnoor. Schnoor participated in the first three raids in Mogadishu just after TF Ranger’s deployment. He was redeployed, however, when his infant

son died of medical complications. Another combat controller, Jeff Bray, only 26, filled Schnoor's position.²²



Figure 8.1. Jeff Bray in the field. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Bray.)

Bray became the highest-decorated combat controller in the battle of Mogadishu, earning the Silver Star. One PJ, Scotty Fales, 35, also earned the Silver Star, the third-highest award for valor in combat. Tim Wilkinson, Fales's partner in Somalia, earned the Air Force Cross, the second-highest award for valor in combat.²³

On 3 October 1993 Fales, the PJ team leader, and Wilkinson were the primary PJs supporting TF Ranger. Rusty Tanner, a third 24th STS PJ, was the senior enlisted man among the deployed squadron members. He filled the role of "our little detachment first sergeant," as Wilkinson described, and expected to work the casualty collection point for any wounded personnel. But the level of concern was not unusually high; the Somalis, nicknamed "Sammies" or "Skinnies" by the Americans, "rarely hit anything." The missions had been "a piece of cake," with three of the six conducted in daylight, all "without a hitch."²⁴



Figure 8.2. Scott Fales in Mogadishu, 1993. (Photo courtesy of Scott Fales.)



Figure 8.3. MSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson. (Photo courtesy of Wayne Norrad.)

Fales was among those who wanted to “mix it up with the bad guys.” On the morning of 3 October he went for a “ruck hump around the airfield”—a self-imposed march of sorts, with a rucksack—for some physical training, unaware that he and his teammates were about to do just what he wanted.²⁵ Around midday, his teammates received an alert for a possible mission involving a Humvee that struck a land mine in downtown Mogadishu. However, another unit responded and the mission was scrubbed. Disappointed, Fales, Wilkinson, Bray, and other task force members expected another long, boring afternoon. However, at 1350 local, General Garrison received intelligence on the location of two of Aidid’s lieutenants on the wanted list. He approved a “snatch-and-grab” mission for midafternoon. The target location, a compound in the so-called “Black Sea” district of downtown Mogadishu, was the center of Aidid’s power base.²⁶ *Black Hawk Down* author Mark Bowden wrote that a mission there represented “a thumb in the warlord’s eye.” Bowden captured the mind-set that was played out in the streets of Mogadishu:

War was ugly . . . but it was still the way things got done on most of the planet. Civilized states had nonviolent ways of resolving disputes, but that depended on the willingness of everyone involved to *back down*. Here in the raw Third World, people hadn’t learned to back down, at least not until after a lot of blood flowed. Victory was for those willing to fight and die.²⁷

At 1532 local, a helicopter-borne team of US Army special mission unit members accompanied by Rangers, SEALs, and 24th STS personnel departed the airport. Three minutes later, the team swooped into the area of Hawlwadig Road and fast-roped to the ground. Jeff Bray was the lone combat controller, and the only Air Force member, with the main assault force. Fellow combat controller John McGarry accompanied the Rangers’ blocking force. Ray Benjamin flew on the command-and-control helicopter in a kind of communications-liaison role. Dan Schilling served as the combat controller for the exfiltration convoy that departed from the airfield at 1535 local. The convoy consisted of six or seven “Kevlar [armored] Humvees,” two unarmored Humvees, and three flatbed five-ton trucks. The plan called for the blocking force to secure the perimeter around the compound where Aidid’s men stayed, while the assault team entered the structure, located, identified, and secured the warlord’s lieutenants. After the takedown, the plan called for all US personnel and the Somalis to be transported back to the airport in the convoy’s vehicles. Schilling recalled that very

shortly after the blocking and assault force's liftoff, the exfiltration convoy departed for its destination next to the seven-story Olympic Hotel on Hawlwadig Road.²⁸ Only minutes later, however, TF Ranger began taking fire from the Somalis. The fire was heavier than on previous missions and quickly grew worse. Most likely, Jeff Bray was not the only assaulter somewhat surprised to be shot at, initially wondering, "Have they lost their minds?"²⁹ Even prior to arriving at the target building, the exfiltration convoy experienced heavy fire, too. While parked outside the target building, an RPG disabled one of the five-ton flatbed trucks.³⁰

Inside the compound, the assault team discovered and captured not two, but 24, Somalis—stunning, handcuffing, and blindfolding them in preparation for transport. The mission still appeared manageable 30 minutes after the start of the operation, despite several casualties and the disabled truck. One Ranger had fallen out of his helicopter and was badly injured. He and several other casualties were slated for evacuation to the airport by three of the convoy's Humvees.³¹

Assault team members were busy loading the Somalis into the remaining convoy vehicles when an RPG slammed into one of the H-60s, call sign "Super 61." The helicopter crashed three blocks to the east of the target building, killing both pilots. However, the operators and crew chiefs in the cabin survived the impact. Bowden described the helicopter coming "to rest in a narrow alley on its side against a stone wall in a cloud of dust."³² Ray Benjamin called Bray from the command-and-control helicopter and directed him to move to the crash site. In the confusion that followed, Bray and the assault team maintained adequate communications with only one of the four groups of Rangers in the blocking positions, McGarry's group. The UHF radio frequency used may have contributed to the confusion. The frequency was 242.6, only 400 megahertz from the international emergency frequency of 243.0. In any case, the static was terrible.³³

Soon, Bray's and McGarry's teams joined together and moved toward Super 61's location while under fire. They intended to assist the CSAR team secure the site and rescue or recover their downed teammates. Many of the men, including Bray, soon regretted they had brought less than half the normal number of 30-round clips for their weapons.³⁴ The Rangers and assaulters sustained more casualties during the movement to Super 61. Meanwhile, the convoy was instructed to move to "61's" site. Lacking clear directions—the location was several

blocks north and east—the convoy had great difficulty doing so in the developing urban chaos.³⁵

Combat controller Dan Schilling rose to the occasion. The ground reaction force lacked a PJ, so Schilling served as both the ground-air communicator for the ground force as well as its unofficial medic. As casualties mounted from Somali small arms fire, Schilling treated a number of wounded, including his ground force commander and several other Rangers. More significant, however, he took the initiative to keep the convoy moving toward Super 61's site when his commander appeared temporarily dazed and unable to respond. Making matters worse, the second Black Hawk, "Super 64," was shot down less than a mile to the south of Super 61's location.³⁶

Finally, frustrated by the inability to obtain clear instructions on which direction to move and with communications breaking down, Schilling switched to a different frequency to talk with the helicopters. "This is Uniform six four Charlie on helo common. I'm in the lead Humvee in the convoy, and I need vectors to the crash site. Request assistance," he transmitted. One of the helicopters sent vectors, but Schilling realized too late that the instructions were taking the convoy to the *second* crash site, not the first. It was just one of several hard lessons that day, as he had not specified *which crash site* in his request.³⁷

Schilling, now temporarily leading the convoy, recovered quickly and redirected the convoy to Super 61's site. However, with the combination of mounting casualties from intense Somali fire, winding streets and narrow alleys, and damage to the convoy's vehicles, they never made it. Soon, the ground force commander reassumed control of the convoy and decided to head for the airfield. Schilling's Humvee brought up the rear of the convoy which, carrying most of the dead and wounded, limped back to the airfield by about 1810.³⁸

Meanwhile, aboard the CSAR Black Hawk, "Super 68," PJs Scotty Fales and Tim Wilkinson and combat controller Pat Rogers were part of the rescue team tightly packed in the helicopter's cabin. At 1620 local, Fales witnessed the crash of Super 61. "I saw it hit in a big huge plume of dust, and it hit the ground and came up. I knew right away . . . that we were going to get committed," he said.³⁹

He was right. Mike Durant, the pilot of Super 64 (the second H-60 downed by the Somalis 20 minutes after the first loss), wrote, "In those few seconds, everything changed. The radios, which up till now had hissed the occasional code word or updates, went crazy. Sure, we'd all prepared for the possibility of a bird going down, but the timing and

location were about as bad as they could be.” Dan Jollata, the pilot of Super 68, came on the radio and announced, “Hey, they are calling us in, and it’s going to be a fast rope, fellas. Does everybody have their fast rope gloves on . . . [is everyone] buckled and ready to go?”⁴⁰

The one-minute call came, then about 15 seconds later came the call for ropes. Fales noted that the helicopter came into a hover over the middle of the street and short of the wrecked Super 61, preventing him from seeing it. The Rangers began their fast-rope exit from the Black Hawk’s left and right sides. Then “Tim chucked out the . . . big CSAR bags and then . . . Tim and I hit the ropes, and down we went,” he recounted. While the PJs were still on the ropes, perhaps 40 feet above ground, their helicopter took an RPG hit. Seeing the aircraft’s parts flying, Fales “darn near let go of the rope because I wanted to get from underneath” the helicopter in case it came down.⁴¹ Bowden described the moments that followed:

[The pilot, Dan] Jollata could hear his rotor blades whistling. Shrapnel from the blast had peppered them with holes. The aircraft slobbered from side to side. . . . Instinct and training both dictated that he move out, fast, but Jollata eased the Black Hawk back down to a hover for the remaining seconds Wilkinson and Fales needed to finish sliding down the ropes.⁴²

With superb airmanship, Jollata managed to nurse Super 68 to a safe landing near the airport.⁴³

Once on the ground, the men were in a “brown-out” from the helicopter’s rotor wash. “You could hardly see your hands in front of your face,” said Fales. When Super 68 pulled power and staggered back to the airfield, the dust began to clear. The helicopter had been aligned with the road, facing north, for the team’s fast-rope insertion. By the time Fales and several other men entered a courtyard on the left side of the street and exchanged some gunfire, the brownout dissipated.⁴⁴

Other CSAR team members were on the right side of the street. Both groups began working their way north, looking for the wreckage of Super 61. They spotted the helicopter, and Fales thought, “It looked like a giant boulder,” all balled up. Fales’s group alerted their teammates on the intrateam radios, entered the alley, and started setting up a security perimeter around what remained of the aircraft. They were the first Americans on the scene. A dazed survivor tried unsuccessfully to pull one of the pilots out of the cockpit. Unfortunately, the pilot, Cliff Wolcott, had expired. Fales moved to the front of the helicopter to see if anyone was there and was struck by a bullet

in the back of his left leg. Immediately, he “rolled back behind a pile of rocks and tried to shield” himself. Seconds later, Wilkinson and his group came into view. For most of the next 14 hours, he and Fales remained within earshot and eyesight of one another as they did their best to care for wounded comrades while fighting for their lives.⁴⁵

Fales’s wound was “an all-muscle hit” for which he “did just a quick bandage job pushing some ‘meat’ back in, and I got up by myself.” He and a special forces (SF) medic set up the “choke point” at the tail end of the helicopter. “At that point it was a shoot out . . . it was getting the guys out of the wreck and finding the guys that [they thought] were missing,” he said.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Wilkinson and an Army medic went inside the wreckage and pulled out the crew chief from the cabin. Before extracting him from his pinned position, Wilkinson called to him. Seeing his little finger move, the PJ “knew he was still alive.” The rescuers got the crew chief out but took shrapnel hits—Wilkinson in the face and lower arm, the Army medic in the hand. Discovering that no one was missing, they “hunkered down” to assess the situation.⁴⁷

There were two parts to the operation taking place simultaneously in the vicinity of Super 61; each had its own intrateam radio net. The outer perimeter (security) element managed the fight with the Somalis, “a nose-to-nose kind of a gun battle,” Fales said. The CSAR element handled the inner perimeter, including getting everyone out of the wreckage and treating the casualties. Fales worked both radio nets. The PJ noted that the tactical doctrine for such a situation was to seize a nearby building to provide some cover, a place to shelter casualties, and a command post, but the 10-foot high stone walls surrounding the alley made that option less practicable. Although they could have moved back out into the street, which was actually just a wide dirt path, “We had bad guys all around us, so moving out into the street was just not an option at that time. The best thing for us to do was defend the crash [site] right where we were,” Fales said. The PJs grabbed Kevlar pads from inside the cabin and set them up to provide some cover.⁴⁸

While treating casualties by the tail of the aircraft, Fales heard a call for a medic from across the street in the courtyard where Bray’s group was situated. Wounded and in no condition to respond himself, he glanced at his fellow PJ and said, “They need a medic, Wilky.” An article in *Airman* magazine described what happened:

Wilkinson grabbed his medical ruck sack, waited for the Rangers to lay down cover fire, then dashed up the narrow alley. A hail of bullets, shrapnel and RPGs greeted Wilkinson as he raced some 45 meters across the open intersection. 'I felt like I was moving in slow motion,' he said. . . . 'These boots weigh a thousand pounds' [he thought]. Safely across the deadly intersection, Wilkinson caught his breath, then assisted in dragging the wounded off Freedom Road. Inside the 'safe' confines of the casualty collection point, Wilkinson assessed the medical situation. Four wounded, one critical.⁴⁹

Realizing he needed additional medical gear, he called to Fales on his intrateam radio and confirmed the supplies were available. Running back across the street, Wilkinson collected the gear and then returned, crossing the opening for a third time. An Army Ranger, Capt A. Scott Miller, wrote, "These trips across the open street were at the peak of the battle when enemy fire was . . . most intense. . . . [Wilkinson's] repeated acts of heroism saved the lives of at least four soldiers." In his self-deprecating way, Wilkinson joked that probably the reason he wasn't hit was that the Somalis "led" him too much, being deceived by his exaggerated arm-swing and not realizing *just how slow* a runner he was!⁵⁰

Bray recalled how difficult it was to remain in position near one of the badly wounded that Wilkinson was treating: "I remember looking down one time, and [Wilkinson or a medic] cut the guy's pants off and there was blood everywhere. It was of a deathly, stinking smell, and I will never forget that," he said. "That was pretty devastating, and it was then that I realized . . . this is really bad and we might not live. . . . I had to look away because I was almost going into shock looking at the blood . . . it was terrible."⁵¹

Surprisingly, there was some humor in the midst of a grave situation. At one point, Fales and Wilkinson were sitting behind the tail rotor section of the crashed H-60 while bullets repeatedly struck the tail section. "It sounds like a hammer hitting a big piece of metal . . . bink, bink, bink. . . . I am looking at these holes opening up in this aluminum and Tim looks at me and [recalling Steve Martin in the movie, *The Jerk*] goes, 'It's the cans, man, it's the cans. Get away from the cans!'" Fales said. Although many behaviors depicted in war films are not much like the real thing, the humor of "the cans" found its way into the battle of Mogadishu thanks to Tim Wilkinson.⁵² Another time, as in countless war movies, Wilkinson yelled at Fales, "Cover me!" Fales responded by looking around at his disbelieving comrades who realized the ridiculousness of the request. Fales, armed

with an M9 pistol and an M4 rifle, recollected that they were in the midst of the Mogadishu war zone. “We just said, ‘Yeah, okay, go ahead, we got you [covered] (laughter)!” Reflecting on those incidents, Wilkinson remarked on the practice of gallows humor: “It’s funny what comes to your mind at times. . . . I guess people really do talk like that in critical situations, who would have thought?”⁵³

Although the Somalis enjoyed the advantages of numbers, familiarity with the urban terrain, and a sort of moral strength from believing—erroneously from the American perspective—that they were defending their homes against foreign invaders, for the most part their fire was poorly executed. Fales observed one of the dynamics in the fight was that “the Somalis at that point are nose-to-nose with probably the most trained, fire-disciplined, accurate-[shooting] group of American fighters that you could ever go up against. So, if a bad guy stuck his head up, he would generally get it blown off.” So, the Somalis mostly remained hidden, spraying their fire inaccurately. In some cases, though, Somalis found good sniping positions, especially on the roofs of buildings.⁵⁴

To a degree, the urban melee in Mogadishu was reminiscent of Arnhem, Holland, in September 1944. A passage in Cornelius Ryan’s classic work, *A Bridge Too Far*, described the combat as Allied forces fought the Germans for control of the city and its strategic bridge: “This strange, deadly battle now devastating the outskirts of the city barely two miles from the Arnhem bridge seemed to have no plan or strategy. Like all street fighting, it had become one massive, fierce, man-to-man encounter in a checkerboard of streets.”⁵⁵ Although the Americans’ adversary in Mogadishu was far from a professional force and the scale of the fighting was miniscule in comparison, nonetheless, the urban battle in 1993 was perhaps the closest parallel to Arnhem that US forces had experienced since World War II.

In one of several strange occurrences in the midst of heavily-armed men trying to kill one another in street-to-street fighting, a miserable little donkey dragging a wooden cart came down the street. “There is nothing on the cart and everybody was like ‘cease-fire,’ don’t kill the donkey, ‘cease fire,’ and the donkey just kept right on going,” Fales recounted. It was an amusing incident in an otherwise grim situation. An hour or so later the donkey came back the other way: “It was the same donkey with nothing on the cart.” Fales made it clear that if the donkey had been hauling weapons or ammunition, “We would have [had] to take care of the donkey.” But it was completely

unoffending. So, the poor creature's presence produced a few tranquil moments as both sides ceased firing and allowed the unsuspecting animal to pass by the wreckage and chaos unharmed.⁵⁶

The fighting continued uninterrupted until dark. A portion of a mud-and-stone wall that offered an opening into a building came down when Super 61 crashed. Several Rangers were wounded trying to get through the hole and into the building for cover during daylight hours. However, once it was dark the CSAR team moved into the building. Fales sensed they were in one of the city's middle-class neighborhoods, definitely a better area than the "tin-shanty hovels" of the Black Sea district. One of the rooms in the building had a "regular bed." By that time, Fales's injured leg had gone from hurting badly to numbness, and he was beginning to anticipate an amputation if he survived the ongoing ordeal. Thankfully, the bullet had hit only muscle, not bone. His teammates wanted him to lie down on a stretcher and rest, but Fales refused. "Oh, no, if I am going to lose this leg tomorrow, I am running on that baby all night tonight!" he said.⁵⁷

Fales and a Ranger considered their options once inside the building. The particular room they were in was small, and they had the casualties, including several dead, with them. Ultimately, the team wanted to find another access point to the street. The Ranger carried a demolition load of "C4." He arranged the C4 on one of the walls and pulled the igniter, blowing away what Fales called "a beautiful [arch] doorway." Unfortunately, it ran out into another courtyard that offered no better access than what they already had. His partner tried another wall and blew a second hole. This time, the opening led into another house that opened to the street. Relocating into that house, the Americans encountered a frightened Somali family whom they flex cuffed and put in a corner. Fales recalled it was perhaps 2100 or 2200 by then. He remembered that things settled down for about an hour, as, apparently, the Somalis could not locate the Americans.⁵⁸

The team had radio contact with the US/UN-manned relief convoy that was forming. The convoy, which included combat controller Dan Schilling, encountered several delays and did not depart the new port facility just east of the airport until after 2300.⁵⁹ The convoy's arrival came not a moment too soon. For a time, the Somalis fired RPGs into the building, at least one of which started a small fire. Wilkinson likened the sound of RPGs impacting nearby to "a chest freezer door closing, only 30 times louder."⁶⁰ The firing eventually quieted down, no doubt due in part to a complete lack of night vision devices on the

Somali side. Most of the US personnel did not have anything better. None had expected the mission to continue after dark; so, most task force members left their personal night vision goggles (NVG) behind. However, the helicopters generally carried NVGs, and Fales recalled that operators retrieved them from Super 61 and distributed them to the Rangers on the outer security perimeter. “Always take your goggles, always,” Fales emphasized in his after action report. Additionally, combat controller Jeff Bray noted that by the time darkness set in they were “in bad shape”—out of water and low on ammunition.⁶¹

The downturn in the fighting allowed Fales and several others to turn their attention to the wounded. But, at one point, the Somalis managed to emplace a 12.7-mm machine gun across the street and began shooting into the room where some of the Americans were sheltered. Fales recalled that the strobe effect produced by the tracers was somewhat comic: “Every time a tracer would come through you would catch somebody in motion,” perhaps diving or hitting the floor.⁶²

Bray called in a danger close AH-6 Little Bird gunship strike that took out the machine gun. “That missile hit 10 yards from us,” Fales said.⁶³ During at least one danger close strike, Bray was close enough that spent shell casings from the helicopter gunship rained down on him, burning the back of his neck. Fales commented on the “phenomenal job” done by Bray and fellow combat controller Pat Rogers. CW2 Paul White, US Army, agreed with Fales’s assessment: “I will always remember the calm demeanor and professionalism [Bray] showed over the radio even as I heard bullets hitting very near his position each time he keyed his radio microphone,” he said.⁶⁴

There was at least one moment when Bray needed some reassurance. Because Wilkinson established the triage site in Bray’s area, the two saw a lot of each other that night. “It was always good to see Tim’s face because we could always make each other laugh a little bit,” Bray recalled. But as Bray prepared for one (of at least two) danger close air strikes, Wilkinson came over, sensing that his friend needed a lift, and patted him on the back and offered a word of encouragement. “Then he went back in and started treating people,” Bray remembered. Soon, the sounds of helicopter minigun rounds hitting their targets told Bray what he needed to know. He immediately contacted the gunships and called, “Cleared hot for rockets.” The helicopters’ rockets nearly took down an entire wall on their next pass.⁶⁵

Bray was the only Air Force member among the main assault force. Without his combat controller’s expertise, the task force members

caught in the Black Sea almost certainly would have suffered greater casualties at the hands of the Somalis. In fact, the Americans might not have made it out alive. Later, he alluded to the relationship between the 24th STS's combat controllers and the special mission unit they often supported. "As a combat controller . . . they have you there for a reason, and that is for calling for fire, land airplanes, set up airfields, beacons, or whatever. . . . It is a very 'big boy' world and a very stressful world," he said.⁶⁶ Using the call sign, "Kilo 64 Charlie," Bray remained in contact with helicopter gunships throughout the night, coordinating their strikes against targets, in some cases only yards away from the friendly forces. After attempting to follow the established formal procedures for calling in strikes, Bray finally decided to improvise. "That stuff wasn't working, and so finally I said, 'Hey, listen, let's just talk like I am talking to you on the telephone. You tell me what you need to know, and that is what I am going to tell you.' . . . This formal stuff . . . just wasn't working with the distance and direction," he said. Formal or informal, the bottom line on Bray's work that night was what one Air Force writer described as talking "steel onto the targets."⁶⁷

Bray experienced added stress when, after talking with one helicopter flight for an hour to get them oriented to the exact locations of the US personnel and the Somalis, the aircraft was forced to depart for fuel. Thankfully, the next flight was monitoring the conversation and was quickly briefed on the urban battlefield below. It also helped that another helicopter conducted an airdrop at Bray's location, delivering two kit bags full of ammunition, NVGs, and medical gear. Bray now had the NVGs that allowed him to see what the gunships he was talking to were seeing. Flying "right off the deck" to ensure an accurate delivery, the helicopter was badly damaged by Somali ground fire and barely made it to an emergency landing site.⁶⁸

A huge challenge was how to talk the helicopters, mainly AH-6 Little Bird gunships, onto the targets while minimizing the risk of a "blue-on-blue"—that is, fratricide—incident. Bray devised a system that was simple, creative, and effective. He had drawn a simple dirt map on the ground to keep track of the four groups of Soldiers in his vicinity. No one had moved. After dark, the idea came to him of placing infrared (IR) strobe lights—most of the operators carried them on their helmets or persons—on the rooftop where each group was located: one strobe with group 1, two strobes with group 2, and so on. It took over an hour for Bray to collect the needed strobes, deliver them to each of the four groups, and ensure they were properly placed

on the rooftops where the helicopter pilots could see them. Then turning on the IR laser beam sighted to his weapon, he pointed it straight up into the air and asked one of the helicopter crews if it was visible. It was. Better yet, it stood out clearly when viewed from the air. Bray could now point his weapon's laser at a target and call for fire being assured that the gunships could see exactly where the four groups of Americans were positioned, thus avoiding a blue-on-blue.⁶⁹

As Bray later described, two Little Birds out of eight total gunships were on scene at a time. One conducted a run-in while the other provided the "overhead watch," then the two swapped roles. At the same time, two other AH-6s refueled, two rearmed, and two were en route to the battle area. Bray estimated that the helicopter gunships expended close to 70 rockets, and tens of thousands of minigun rounds, just in his immediate vicinity. "Everybody that had an individual job to do, stood up and did as good as it could have ever been done, including those helicopter pilots," he said.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, shortly before midnight, a multinational relief convoy, stretching for over a mile, set out from the new port facility at the east end of the airfield. Led by four Pakistani tanks and including 28 Malaysian APCs, US Humvees, and perhaps other vehicles, the 10th Mountain Division's Soldiers mainly manned the convoy. Helicopters provided security overhead. In the darkness and confusion, two Malaysian APCs took a wrong turn and were ambushed. Its soldiers took cover in a nearby building for several hours before being rescued. Finally, after a series of "fits and starts," at 0155 local, part of the convoy reached the northernmost crash site, Super 61.⁷¹

The convoy remained together until reaching a road intersection situated between the two crash sites. There, some of the APCs turned north to the first crash site, while others headed south to the second crash site. Combat controller Dan Schilling remained with a third convoy element that secured the intersection. To the Rangers and assault team members at the northern site who survived the hours of darkness on their own, the sight of the vehicles was "an awesome relief, to look up and see your guys coming to get you," Bray recalled.⁷² However, while still under sporadic fire, the force remained in place for more than three hours, as the Rangers, true to their creed, labored to extract the body of pilot Cliff Wolcott. Unfortunately, they lacked the equipment to cut through the Black Hawk's fuselage, making the task even more grisly and difficult. Following extraction of Wolcott's remains and the setting of destructive charges on the aircraft wreckage,

the northern crash site convoy element—their wounded riding in APCs—departed to link up with the rest of the convoy at the intersection a short distance away.⁷³

When the now-rejoined convoy, including the survivors of the task force's original vehicles, began to move, Schilling's vehicle was last in line. Bob Rankin, a fellow combat controller and a member of the relief convoy, found himself looking for a ride. Schilling pulled him up onto the rear of his vehicle, where Rankin was “wedged face-down among all the guys in the back and he couldn't see anything.” He rode in that uncomfortable position all the way to the “so-called Pakistani [soccer] stadium” in the northeast part of the city, where the convoy arrived at 0630 local.⁷⁴

Although the stadium was in the opposite direction from the airport, it provided a closer area of relative security where casualties could be treated. The location was also suitable for helicopter evacuation. The decision to direct the convoy to the stadium seemed tactically shrewd, as undoubtedly some of the Somalis still interested in fighting expected the convoy to return along the same route—back to the airfield. While most personnel rode to the stadium in the APCs, about 15, including Bray, walked out. Continuing to control air strikes conducted by several Army helicopters, Bray walked and at times ran backwards behind the last vehicle while directing the Little Birds. The gunships flew directly overhead at low altitude, covering the movement to the soccer stadium, which was perhaps six blocks away. Shortly after 0800 local, task force helicopters began transporting the survivors from the stadium to the airport. Later that day, Bray and the pilots he controlled during the battle met in person in an emotional gathering.⁷⁵

Fales's group remained in place until the arrival of the relief convoy. As daylight appeared on 4 October, Fales witnessed a fresh lieutenant apparently unaware of the dangers of the neighborhood. The veteran PJ, who repositioned himself by the base of a nearby tree, recalled seeing a lieutenant with his chin strap unbuckled “strolling around” the street. Warning him that this was “Indian country” and to get down, Fales laughingly recalled that after a few rounds of errant AK-47 fire the lieutenant hit the deck and “conducted himself better after that!”⁷⁶ As casualties were loaded into the APCs, Fales boarded one on his own strength. But with the effects of adrenaline finally wearing off, he gave in to shock, fatigue, and dehydration. Teammates administered IVs and morphine prior to evacuating him to a hospital.⁷⁷

On 3 and 4 October Somali fighters killed 18 US troops and wounded, depending on the source, between 79 and 84. Allied losses included two Malaysian soldiers killed and seven wounded and two Pakistanis wounded. Estimates of Somali casualties ranged between 500 and up to three times that number. The days following the battle were a mix of pain and relief. On 6 October a Somali-fired mortar struck the hangar area at the airport, killing one and wounding 12, including SFC Matthew Rierson, US Army, who had displayed impressive leadership with the relief convoy two days earlier. Dan Schilling wrote that Rierson's death "really affected me. That's not to diminish the memory of the other fine soldiers we lost during the battle. . . . But Matt's the only person I've ever watched die, so close I could touch his face. And he was trying so hard to stay."⁷⁸

On 14 October, 11 days after the battle, warlord Aidid released Mike Durant, the 160th SOAR pilot who survived the crash of Super 64. Despite his grievous injuries, in time he recuperated and returned to flying helicopters. One week later, TF Ranger redeployed stateside, and the Clinton administration decided to withdraw from Somalia. Although the impact was impossible to quantify, the US public's revulsion at seeing a dead US Soldier dragged through the streets of Mogadishu contributed to the decision in Washington. Undoubtedly, many special operators shared the feelings of a 22-year-old Ranger: "We knew that we had been sent to do a job and that the job was dangerous. Granted, we had taken some casualties, but we were all ready to put our lives on the line again . . . until we'd completed the mission," he wrote. "We had a job to do, but we were pulled out."⁷⁹

Meanwhile, the administration took heavy criticism for Secretary of Defense Les Aspin's decision in late September to deny USCENTCOM's request for M-1 Abrams tanks and M-2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles (IFV). Congressional testimony by General Hoar and General Montgomery made it clear that the requested tanks and IFVs could have resulted in fewer casualties in Mogadishu. Lacking the US vehicles, the relief convoys relied on Pakistani M-48 tanks and Malaysian M-113 APCs. Most likely based on the generals' testimony, in mid-December President Clinton announced Secretary Aspin's impending resignation from the Pentagon. In February 1994, an *Air Force Times* editorial expressed the desire to withdraw from Somalia. Fred Reed wrote, "The original mission has been accomplished in Somalia. Starvation has ceased. But now what?"⁸⁰ By the end of March 1994, most US troops had departed Somalia, although several hundred

Marines remained offshore in case an evacuation of US citizens should be required. By early March 1995 all remaining UN/US personnel had left the country, which reverted to warlordism and chaos.⁸¹

As noted in various accounts, the Mogadishu battle included numerous acts of heroism. Two SF Soldiers—Gary Gordon and Randall Shughart—who defended the wounded Mike Durant at the site of his crashed helicopter at the cost of their own lives, earned the Medal of Honor (posthumous). However, the small contingent from the 24th STS also garnered high recognition. TSgt Tim Wilkinson earned the Air Force Cross, the nation's second-highest medal for valor. Perhaps just as important for Wilkinson, this was the same medal that his role model for entering pararescue, Duane Hackney, had earned in Southeast Asia. "Everybody was doing heroic things. Nobody quit. Nobody whined. Nobody shirked their duty," he recalled.⁸²

Wilky's team leader, MSgt Scotty Fales, and combat controller SSgt Jeff Bray earned Silver Stars for gallantry. For Bray, if not for all the 24th STS members, the recognition also meant that his family learned that he was not just "a regular guy in the Air Force" who came home on vacation with his hair "a little longer than it should be." Three other combat controllers, MSgt Jack McMullen, Sgt Pat Rogers, and SSgt Dan Schilling, received the Bronze Star with Valor.⁸³



Figure 8.4. Jeff Bray in Air Force blues. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Bray.)

After the so-called 'ugly win' a decade earlier in Grenada, John Carney garnered the support of the Military Airlift Command and Twenty-Third Air Force's leadership to bring together PJ and combat control team (CCT) specialties with the expectation of achieving synergies on

the battlefield. In short, Mogadishu vindicated that vision to a degree even greater than in Panama in 1989 or Iraq in 1991. In 1995 a *Joint Forces Quarterly* article analyzing recent doctrinal issues pointed out that “Somalia reveals that many institutional mistakes are corrected (when the chips really *are* down) only through extraordinary efforts by junior officers, NCOs, and most of all by individual soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen” (emphasis in original).⁸⁴ The performance of Special Tactics Airmen in the battle of Mogadishu had been extraordinary, indeed. Retired Colonel Carney added his thoughts on the October 1993 battle. “That action captured the vision that Major General Bill Mall and I had formed for merging combat control and pararescuemen and that Major General Bob Patterson had later championed as commander of 23rd Air Force,” he asserted. In the US military’s longest continuous firefight since Southeast Asia two decades earlier, both the concept of Special Tactics, and its men, had been tested and proven under excruciating stresses.⁸⁵

Notes

1. I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (1965, repr., Oxford, UK: James Currey Ltd., 2002), 18.

2. *Ibid.*, chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

3. Richard W. Stewart, *The United States Army in Somalia, 1992–1994* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2002), 5–6.

4. *Ibid.*, 6–9; and Frederick H. Fleitz, Jr., *Peacekeeping Fiascoes of the 1990s: Causes, Solutions, and U.S. Interests* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 130–31. This initial effort became known as UNOSOM I to distinguish it from its successor, UNOSOM II.

5. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 9–10; and Fleitz, *Peacekeeping Fiascoes*, 131. Aware that the contingency would be left for his successor to wrap-up, Pres. George H. W. Bush sought and obtained the support of president-elect William J. Clinton prior to the start of Operation Restore Hope.

6. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 9–10.

7. *Ibid.*; and Timothy P. Barela, “Home is Where the Havoc Is,” *Airman*, March 1993, 6–8.

8. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 9–11.

9. *Ibid.*, 10–13.

10. *Ibid.*, 14–16.

11. *Ibid.*, 16; Walter S. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia, August 1992–March 1994* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 2005), 41–43; and Fleitz, *Peacekeeping Fiascoes*, 131–33. The two US government studies by Stewart and Poole listed the number of Pakistani soldiers killed in the ambush as 24, while Fleitz listed 25. Regarding the four AC-130 gunships supporting UN–US operations in Somalia, official documentation indicated the aircraft flew from either Djibouti or Mogadishu at various

times. Apparently, between 14 July and early October 1993, however, there were no gunships in the area for supporting the operations in Mogadishu (at least one request in September was turned down by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin). Following the Mogadishu battle on 3–4 October, a total of four gunships deployed within days.

12. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 16; Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 43–45, including quotes; and Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down, A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999), 94.

13. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 16; and Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 44.

14. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 44, 48, including quote 1; and Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 16–17, including quote 2.

15. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 17–18; Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 48; and Matt Eversmann and Dan Schilling, eds, *The Battle of Mogadishu: Firsthand Accounts from the Men of Task Force Ranger* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 165, including quote.

16. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 18; and Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 161, including quote.

17. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 18. Garrison's JSOTF reported directly to Gen Joseph P. Hoar, USMC, at USCENTCOM rather than to UNOSOM II.

18. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 18–19; MSgt Scott C. Fales, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 July 2007, including quote; and Forrest L. Marion, “‘Heroic Things’: Air Force Special Tactics Personnel at Mogadishu, October 3–4, 1993,” *Air Power History* 60, no. 3 (Fall 2013), 35.

19. Jeffrey W. Bray (former SSgt, USAF, separated), interview with the author, 12 July 2007.

20. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 18; Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 56; and Bray, interview.

21. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 19.

22. John T. Carney, Jr. and Benjamin F. Schemmer, *No Room for Error: The Covert Operations of America's Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 248–49, 259; and CMSgt Wayne Norrad, USAF, retired, to the author, e-mail, subject: “RE: Lt Col James Oeser, Mogadishu–1993,” 1 October 2015. Different sources listed the number of TF Ranger's personnel between 440 and 450. Bowden stated 450 men were in the task force: Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 96. Approximately 200 members participated in the action on 3–4 October 1993. Although a total of 12 24th STS personnel served in Mogadishu in September 1993, when Dave Schnoor returned home for a family emergency, it left 11 squadron members deployed.

23. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 259; and MSgt Scott C. Fales, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 July 2007.

24. MSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 6 March 2007, including quote 1; and Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 21, 38, including quotes 2–4.

25. Marion, “‘Heroic Things,’” 35–36, including quote 1; and Fales, interview, including quote 2.

26. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 249, including quotes; Philip F. Rhodes, “No Time For Fear,” *Airman*, May 1994, p 24; and Memo, “After Action Report for TASK FORCE RANGER Operations in Support of UNOSOM II; 22 August–25

October 1993 (U),” 5 January 1994 (copy at AFHRA). The time of 1350 local was contained in the above memo. On 3 October 1993 the CSAR package was cut from between 15 and 17 Rangers to about 12. PJs were cut from three to two, plus one combat controller. Fales, interview.

27. Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 21, 33.

28. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 19; Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 56; Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 171, 173, including quote; Fales, interview; and Bray, interview. Maj Gen William F. Garrison, US Army, retired, TF Ranger’s commanding general, indicated that to the best of his recollection all the helicopters—including the CSAR helicopter, Super-68—launched at the same time. Garrison, telephone conversation with the author, 19 October 2010. Garrison’s recollection was supported by Sgt John Belman, a Ranger who served as part of the CSAR team. “We knew CSAR would be going up in the air along with the other Black Hawks and Little Birds, all in squadron formation,” he wrote. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 108. Note that the AFSOC history listed an incorrect time for the start of the mission, stating that Bray began the mission (with the assaulters) at approximately 1500 local. The actual time was 1532 local. However, the AFSOC history was much closer when it stated that Wilkinson (and Super-68’s team, including Fales) responded to the first downed Black Hawk (Super-61) at 1620 hours. Actual time was most likely 1628 to 1630 local—the crash of Super-61 occurred at 1620. The times of 1532, 1535, and 1620 local were contained in excerpted material from Memo, “After Action Report for TASK FORCE RANGER.”

29. Bray, interview.

30. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 175.

31. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 19; Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 56; Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 99; and Michael J. Durant with Steven Hartov, *In the Company of Heroes* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2003), 18–19.

32. Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 83, including quote; and Durant, *In the Company of Heroes*, 19.

33. Bray, interview.

34. Ibid. Bray normally carried 8–10 clips, but on October 3 he carried only about four. An after-action item emphasized the lesson: never go “light” on ammunition, a maxim that combat controller Dan Schilling also emphasized. See also, Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 181, 194.

35. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 183; Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 21; and Bray, interview.

36. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 171, 179, 182–83.

37. Ibid., 185–86, including quote; and Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 123–24.

38. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 186–92; Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 21; and Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 124–25.

39. Fales, interview. My evidence indicated the CSAR helicopter, Super-68, launched at the same time as the assault- and blocking-force helicopters; Garrison, telephone conversation, 19 Oct 2010; and Sgt. John Belman’s comments in Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 108.

40. Durant, *In the Company of Heroes*, 19–20, including quote 1; and Fales, interview, including quote 2. Durant survived his aircraft’s shoot down and was held captive by the Somalis until released on 14 October.

41. Fales, interview.
42. Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 139.
43. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 136; and Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 139. In “No Time for Fear,” Rhodes indicated Fales’s watch read 1539 hours at the one-minute call prior to his fast roping to the ground. Based on other primary sources, however, this time appeared erroneous. The time of 1620 local for Super-61’s shoot down was contained in excerpted material from Memo, “After Action Report for TASK FORCE RANGER Operations in Support of UNOSOM II, 22 August – 25 October 1993,” 5 Jan 94” (copy at AFHRA). According to Wilkinson’s account, the insertion of the CSAR team took place some 8–10 minutes after Super-61’s shoot down, arguing for insertion between 1628 and 1630 local. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 133–35.
44. Fales, interview.
45. Ibid. In “No Time for Fear,” Rhodes stated that Fales egressed the helicopter on the right side and Wilkinson on the left. In his interview with me, however, Fales stated the opposite; he egressed on the left, Wilkinson on the right. Wilkinson agreed with that statement. See also Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 136. That fact helped explain the above narrative regarding Fales’s actions and position in the street.
46. Fales, interview.
47. Rhodes, “No Time for Fear,” 28, including quote 1 (Wilkinson quoted by Rhodes); and Fales, interview, including quote 2.
48. Fales, interview, including quotes; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 252; and History, AFSOC, 127.
49. Rhodes, “No Time for Fear,” 29.
50. Ibid.
51. Bray, interview.
52. Fales, interview, including quotes; and Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 144.
53. Fales, interview, including quotes 1–2; and Wilkinson, interview, including quote 3.
54. Fales, interview.
55. Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 342.
56. Fales, interview. Mark Bowden and Dan Schilling also mentioned a donkey in the midst of the battle that remained unhurt. Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 105; and Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 174, 180.
57. Fales, interview. Fales’s numbness, he learned later, was probably due to a major nerve in his leg that had been cut. His leg was saved.
58. Ibid.
59. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 195–96; and Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 57.
60. Rhodes, “No Time for Fear,” 29, including quote (Wilkinson quoted by Rhodes); and Fales, interview.
61. Fales, interview, including quote 1; and Bray, interview, including quote 2.
62. Fales, interview.

63. Ibid. *Danger close* was a specific term used by CCTs that alerted one's own forces to the heightened threat of supporting fire intentionally directed within a few yards of friendly forces.

64. Ibid., including quote 1; Rhodes, "No Time for Fear," 30; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 255, including quote 2 (White quoted by Carney).

65. Bray, interview.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid., including quotes 1–3; and Rhodes, "No Time for Fear," 29, including quote 4.

68. Bray, interview.

69. Ibid., including quote; Rhodes, "No Time for Fear," 30; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 255; and History, AFSOC, 125. This history referred to "an ingenious perimeter marking system" but did not provide details.

70. Bray, interview, including quote; and Rhodes, "No Time for Fear," 30.

71. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 22–23, including quote; and Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 57. Sources varied on the relief convoy's arrival time at the first (northern) crash site (Super-61, pilot Cliff Wolcott). Both Stewart and the official after-action report stated the convoy (northern element) arrived at 0155 local (that element then spent several hours attempting to extract the pilot's body). The relief convoy (southern element) that proceeded to the second crash site, Mike Durant's Super-64, secured the site at 0227 local, according to the after-action report. I have elected to follow the official after-action report; Memo, "After Action Report for TASK FORCE RANGER." Bowden stated the convoy consisted of "almost a hundred vehicles and was nearly two miles long." Given the number of vehicles and their length, and the spacing between vehicles to provide mutual support, this was almost certainly an overstatement. For example, generously assuming a convoy of 90 vehicles and allowing an average length of 20 feet per vehicle and a spacing of 60 feet between vehicles, the total length of the convoy calculates to 7,140 feet, or approximately 1.4 miles. Of course, if the number of vehicles was less than 90 or the spacing less than 60 feet, the total length could have been considerably less than 1.4 miles. Note that Stewart listed the convoy as "sixty-plus" vehicles; Poole listed a "seventy-vehicle column."

72. Bray, interview, including quote; and Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 197.

73. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 23; Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 197; and Bray, interview.

74. Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 199, including quote 1; Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 23, including quote 2; and Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 258. The time of 0630 local was contained in excerpted material from Memo, "After Action Report for TASK FORCE RANGER."

75. Bray, interview; Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 198–200; and Memo, "After Action Report for TASK FORCE RANGER."

76. Fales, interview.

77. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 258; and History, AFSOC, 127.

78. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 23; Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 57; Rhodes, "No Time for Fear," 25; and Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 202–4, including quote.

79. Durant, *In the Company of Heroes*, 349, 357; Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 24; Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 58; and Eversmann and Schilling, *Battle of Mogadishu*, 55, 205 (Sgt Raleigh Cash quoted in chapter he authored).

80. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 58; and Fred Reed, “No Reason to Be in Somalia,” *Air Force Times*, 7 February 1994, 55, including quote.

81. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 59, 62, 65–67; and Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 25.

82. Stewart, *United States Army in Somalia*, 21; Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 247, 259; and Andrew Compart, “Everyone ‘was doing heroic things,’” *Air Force Times*, 14 February 1994, 4, including quote.

83. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 259; Compart, “‘heroic things’”; and Bray, interview, including quotes.

84. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*, 249; and C. Kenneth Allard, “Lessons Unlearned: Somalia and Joint Doctrine,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Autumn 1995), 109, including quote.

85. Carney and Schemmer, *No Room for Error*.

Chapter 9

Special Tactics, 1993–1999

At Home and in the Balkans

At Home

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a flurry of organizational activity within the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) as well as in special tactics (ST)—in fact, too much so for the morale of some in the community. Even so, the Combat Control Association's (CCA) newsletter showed the combat controllers kept a sense of humor. In 1992 the CCA addressed the latest organizational changes about to take place at Scott AFB, Illinois: "The TACC [Tanker Airlift Control Center] CCT [combat control team] Ops (office symbol to follow) will be a component of a centralized tasking and execution agency for the command. Now, we are not going to tell you who is where only because that would infer order and logic (maybe next newsletter)."¹ The recent activation of overseas units (320nd and 321st Special Tactics Squadrons [STS]), initially assigned to the respective theater command (respectively, Pacific Air Forces [PACAF] and US Air Forces in Europe [USAFE]) rather than to AFSOC, exacerbated the multicommand nature of the CCT regulation known as 3-3. The CCA opined with tongue-in-cheek, "Now it can be an AF-SOC-AMC-ACC-USAFE-PACAF [Air Force Special Operations Command-Air Mobility Command-Air Combat Command-US Air Forces in Europe-Pacific Air Forces] Regulation 3-3. The crowning blow is to figure out how to blouse our boots with the new USAF airline uniform, but that shouldn't be a problem since we remember two combat controllers who insisted on blousing their mess dress pants."² Ironically, the two new overseas units were transferred to AFSOC only one month after their activation—and then eight months later moved back to the theater commands.

By 1993 the hectic pace began to slow. Within two years the consolidation of the combat control career field appeared on the horizon. The years 1995 and 1996 witnessed the two major organizational developments of

the decade for ST: the bringing together of all operational CCT personnel under AFSOC's banner; and—although requiring several years to mature—the activation of the Air Force's first special operations weather squadron, the 10th Combat Weather Squadron (CWS).³

The consolidation of all operational Air Force combat controllers under AFSOC was the single most important organizational change affecting ST in the 1990s. For years, the relatively small number of Air Force combat controllers served in no less than six different commands—each with its own training requirements, equipment, procedures, and ultimately, capabilities. The system was confusing and inefficient and created difficulties in sending a single combat controller from one command to another whether for a short-term augmentation or a new assignment. Nonstandard equipment, training, tactics, and security clearance issues associated with special operations forces (SOF) made conventional augmentation of special operations highly problematic. As a result, AFSOC-assigned combat controllers had significantly higher temporary duty rates than their conventional counterparts. In fiscal year (FY) 1994 SOF members averaged 183 days away from home station—fully half of the year. That contrasted with the conventional forces' average of 106 days. AFSOC argued that the “long-term result is a loss of combat readiness of the force through lack of necessary economies of scale to support realistic unit training, inequitable tasking of resources and loss of standardization of training and equipment.”⁴

Despite a seemingly strong case for consolidation, support for any change had to come from the Air Force's top-tier leadership because the CCT specialty resided in several different commands. A former 720th Special Tactics Group (STG) commander, Col Craig F. Brotchie credited the Air Force chief of staff (CSAF), Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, with providing the vision and leadership necessary for the move. Brotchie, who led the group from 1995 to 1997, emphasized that his predecessor, Col Robert W. “Bob” Neumann, worked very hard “to set the stage” for the realignment, which successive AFSOC commanders, major generals Bruce Fister and James Hobson, also supported.⁵

When Brotchie took over the 720th, he moved Maj Steven L. “Steve” McLeary from the plans and programs shop to be his air operations integration chief. The job description was simple, as McLeary recalled: “Make the consolidation happen and write the . . . plan.” McLeary did. He prepared the plans and briefings required to move the realignment concept forward and was soon “flipping the slides” as

his group commander briefed General Hobson.⁶ At the CSAF's invitation shortly thereafter, Colonel Brotchie briefed the proposal to the Air Force's four-star generals at a major conference (known as Corona). General Fogleman decided to give the CCT consolidation a try despite an unenthusiastic response from his peers. Some of the generals probably shared the same reservations as their subordinate (conventional) wing commanders, who, according to Major McLeary, were mainly concerned with aircrew unilateral training.⁷

McLeary was only one of many to emphasize the inadequacy of the traditional practice of devoting only two weeks annually to "dedicated training" for combat-related training requirements. For the remainder of the year, the combat control units supported exercises and aircrew unilateral training. Simply put, most wing commanders "did not want to lose 'their' combat controllers," McLeary recalled.⁸

Prior to the move, roughly 40 percent of combat controllers already served in AFSOC. The realignment anticipated bringing 23 officers, 304 enlisted, and one civilian into AFSOC from the other five commands. Upon completion of the moves, AFSOC expected its ST manpower authorizations to be 65 officer, 745 enlisted, and 23 civilian positions (833 total).⁹

Given the importance of the consolidation to AFSOC's future capabilities, a lengthy excerpt from the command's 1995 history is fitting:

To consolidate current CCT forces [except AETC instructors] under AFSOC, the [Organizational Change Request] proposed to activate the 22 STS at McChord AFB, Washington, and the 21 STS at Pope AFB, North Carolina. These STS will be aligned under the 720 STG. Interim operating locations (OL) will be activated for one year at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas, Ramstein AB, Germany, Scott AFB, Illinois (remaining an OL indefinitely), and Langley AFB, Virginia. The OL at Little Rock . . . will be aligned under the 22 STS and will support the Joint Readiness Training Center . . . and the Combat Air Delivery School. . . . The OL at Ramstein will be aligned under the 321 STS at RAF Mildenhall [England] and will support United States Air [Forces] Europe . . . during the transitional phase of the consolidation. The OL at Scott AFB will be aligned under the 720 STG and will provide liaison to the Air Mobility Command (AMC) staff and to the AMC Tanker Airlift Control Center . . . until the CCT command and control . . . cell is transferred to the 720 STG. The OL at Langley AFB will be aligned under the 720 STG and will provide liaison to the Air Combat Command . . . staff until the transition is complete. An OL at [Stuttgart], Germany, Special Operations Command Europe . . . has been also added out of the 352d Special Operations Group.¹⁰

Overall, AFSOC gained two new ST squadrons and four OLs to help respond to worldwide combat control taskings. In November

1996 AFSOC gained the 123rd Combat Control Flight, Kentucky Air National Guard, which later was redesignated the 123rd Special Tactics Flight.¹¹

AFSOC emphasized that consolidation “will enhance combat control support to all mission areas by significantly improving the combat readiness of the entire force through joint interoperability.” The new organization facilitated a “focus on doctrine, tasking, training and requirements while decreasing overall manpower required at management levels. . . . The consolidation allows combat control forces to regain lost standardization of training, equipment and organization.” Under the consolidation the majority manned operational positions instead of maintaining CCT staff personnel in six different commands.¹²

Col Kenneth F. Rodriguez, a former 720th STG commander, affirmed the significance of the consolidation in 2008: “That was a fundamentally earth-shaking thing for special tactics, not just combat control, but special tactics. It is the reason that we have been so successful. There are a lot of other reasons . . . [including] a lot of hard work by the guys, but if there is any one thing that I can point to . . . [it’s] that.”¹³

Those Air Force major commands that still required CCT assistance but no longer had their own teams lacked the assurance of continued support. Indeed, former combat control squadrons (CCS) underwent redesignation as “special tactics” units. The uncertainty represented the foremost concern of the “big Air Force” with the realignment. AFSOC, well aware of this issue, made it clear that following the consolidation CCT forces “will support all airlift and air customers as tasked” and the “conventional air wings that currently command CCT units will receive the present level of support for their aircrew unilateral training.”¹⁴

To help provide as smooth a transition as possible, AFSOC assigned combat control officers to the other major commands’ staffs. Lt Col Robert H. Holmes, who commanded the 62nd CCS at McChord and then served as the first 22nd STS commander when the new unit activated at the same base, recalled the challenge of reassuring the 62nd Operations Group of his continuing support. “I told them that I was part of their team and that they would never fail for lack of support from the special tactics squadron,” he said.¹⁵ Along with supporting McChord’s airlift mission, Holmes’s priority for his 22nd squadron was getting them out of “some old condemned buildings” into a better facility, which turned out to be a hangar that his men transformed nicely to meet their needs.¹⁶

There were several noteworthy trends in the 1990s in the numbers of ST units and their size. First and foremost, the number of operational squadrons increased from two to seven (table 9.1). In 1991 only two squadrons, the 1723rd and 1724th, fell under the Air Force's lone ST group, the 1720th (redesignated the 720th in 1992). But by 1996 there were five more units: the 320th, 321st, 21st, and 22nd ST squadrons and the 10th CWS. In 1992 the 320th and 321st ST squadrons joined the group. In January 1993 the operational control of the two overseas squadrons was transferred to the Pacific and European theater commands under the 353rd and 352nd special operations groups, respectively, but the squadrons remained under the functional management of the 720th STG. In 1996, as part of the worldwide consolidation of combat control under AFSOC, CCT units at Pope and McChord, designated the 21st and 22nd STS respectively, were activated and assigned to the 720th.¹⁷

The ST units increased in size as well. From 1991 to 1999, the two oldest units, the 23rd and 24th STS, grew from 110 to 166 military personnel and from 78 to 113, respectively. The overseas units, the 320nd and 321st STS, increased to 63 and 72 members, respectively, by the close of the decade. The Pope and McChord units, 21st and 22nd STS, activated in 1996; each topped 110 personnel within three years. The 10th CWS—also activated in 1996—maintained the bulk of its roughly 60 to 70 members in the five detachments stationed on certain Army posts, with just a handful of squadron leadership and administrative personnel at Hurlburt Field, Florida. Overall, the eight-year period (1991–99) witnessed a more than threefold increase in terms of ST enlisted personnel (from 177 to 595) and a nearly fivefold increase in the elite community's tiny officer corps (from 11 to 52). The majority of the increase came from existing CCT units that were brought under AFSOC rather than by increased authorizations.¹⁸

While CCT units consolidated and ST units increased in number and size, the pararescueman (PJ) specialty also underwent a transition. As more PJs entered AFSOC, their medical ratings became increasingly important. In the late 1980s an orthopedic surgeon and fully-qualified PJ in the Air Force Reserve, Craig D. “Doc” Silverton, thought that the PJs at the 1724th STS should attain medical credentials recognized outside the Department of Defense. He was also concerned that unless Air Force PJs were certified above the emergency medical technician (EMT)–basic level, they might be overlooked for certain SOF missions in favor of the Army Special Forces's (SF) medics

known as 18-Deltas. At the time, the SF medics undertook a higher standard certification as EMT–paramedics. Silverton worked out an arrangement where the unit’s PJs spent time at the Fort Bragg hospital’s emergency room to gain experience and credentialing. Silverton’s successor, Robert “Doc” Kadlec, began a “ride-along program” for the PJs with city ambulance crews.¹⁹

Table 9.1. Number of assigned/functionally managed enlisted (“enl”) officer (“off”) personnel, by squadron, 720th STG, 1991–1999

Unit	Oct 91	Jul 92	Jan 93	Jan 94	Mar 95	Jun 96	Jul 97	Jun 98	Jun 99
	enl/off	enl/off	enl/off	enl/off	enl/off	enl/off	enl/off	enl/off	enl/off
21STS	—	—	—	—	—	02/00	98/08	100/06	99/12
22STS	—	—	—	—	—	62/01	100/07	106/10	106/11
23STS	74/04	84/05	76/05	83/05	78/05	99/06	120/08	120/09	105/08
24STS	103/07	107/07	118/07	128/08	130/08	128/09	135/10	134/10	155/11
320STS	—	04/00	25/01+	51/03	48/03	51/05	60/04	60/04	59/04
321STS	—	22/00	52/04+	48/04	53/04	53/05	64/05	65/06	67/05
10CWS#	—	—	—	—	—	01/01*	02/01	04/01	04/01
Totals	177/11	217/12	271/17	310/20	309/20	396/27	579/43	589/46	595/52

Reprinted from Histories, AFSOC, 1991–1999.

reflects HQ staff only; the majority of unit personnel (66 enlisted and nine officers) were assigned to detachments.

+ In January 1993 the 320th STS and 321th STS were reassigned to their respective theater commands, but they remained under functional management of the 720th STG.

* As of 31 December 1996.

MSgt Timothy A. “Wilky” Wilkinson recalled that the 1724th’s physician initiated the practice of PJs going to Baltimore, Maryland, to ride the city’s ambulances in order to gain “street medicine” experience.²⁰ “The Saturday night knife and gun club [was] alive and well, unfortunately,” Wilky said, providing PJs the opportunity to treat “a lot of gunshot wounds, a lot of those basic combat-type wounds” not often experienced by military medical practitioners at that time.²¹

Beginning in 1993 the New Orleans ride-along program built upon the earlier initiatives at the 1724 STS. That year, the 720th group and the New Orleans Health Department–Emergency Medical Service signed a memorandum of understanding where ST personnel accompanied the city’s ambulance crews on two-week rotations. The PJs

gained valuable hands-on experience in treating gunshot and other wounds and traumatic injuries and also fulfilled National Registry Emergency Medical Technician (NREMT) requirements for recertification. Riding with the city's emergency vehicles, the PJs were authorized to provide medical care according to the level of their certification.²²

Of the three levels of EMT in the pararescue field—basic, intermediate, and paramedic—the 720th STG expected its PJs to maintain the highest rating. By 1995 the pararescue “pipeline” began training all PJ candidates to the paramedic level, but some older PJs required upgrade training to achieve the new standard. To facilitate the upgrade of operational PJs, the 720th obtained approval from the Military Training Network to host advanced cardiac life support courses locally.²³

Meanwhile, in 1995 the director of the New Orleans Emergency Medical Service program lauded the PJs of the 23rd STS “for their second-to-none trauma medical skills and overwhelming enthusiasm in support of hundreds of real world medical emergencies in some of the most dangerous parts of the city.”²⁴ The director credited the PJs with more than a dozen individual life-saving incidents that year.²⁵

The question of standardized PJ certification across the Air Force gained considerable attention. In May 1994 a working group met at Headquarters US Special Operations Command attended by representatives from Air Education and Training Command (AETC), AFSOC, ACC, and the 720th STG. All commands except for ACC agreed that EMT–Paramedic (EMT–P) should be the minimum standard for PJs. ACC “held reservations about the cost and time for sustainment training at the EMT–P level, especially with the National Registry recertification requirements.”²⁶ Added to those concerns was the fact that for some time ACC had employed PJs mainly as helicopter gunners and scanners and, therefore, perceived a lesser requirement than the other commands for maintaining pararescue medical standards. “In those days I don’t think that the [Air Rescue Service was] using Pararescue to their fullest capacity. . . . We were really put into a box and could only operate in this [limited] area,” recalled CMSgt Rodney D. “Rod” Alne, whose career included various rescue and SOF assignments. “There was so much more we could do. It was really frustrating.”²⁷

As the ST community matured, a number of senior PJs—several with exceptional service—transferred to AFSOC. Two highly-decorated PJs from Southeast Asia were CMSgts Joseph S. “Stu” Stanaland and Joel E. Talley. Stanaland enlisted in 1966 and served three tours in Southeast Asia. In his first tour in 1967–68, he flew combat rescue missions on

HH-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopters with the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) at Da Nang AB, South Vietnam.²⁸

Following a schoolhouse tour, Stanaland returned to Southeast Asia in 1970–71 as a PJ flight examiner with the 40th ARRS at Udorn AB, Thailand. During that tour, while on an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant combat mission flown by a future general officer, Philip S. Prince, Stanaland went down on the helicopter's hoist to recover the body of an F-4 Phantom II fighter-bomber's weapon systems officer (the backseater), whom the enemy apparently shot and killed when no initial rescue attempts were made. For the daring rescue-turned-recovery mission inside North Vietnam, Stanaland earned his first Silver Star.²⁹

Stanaland's third tour was at Nakhon Phanom AB, Thailand, from 1974 to 1975. In the month after South Vietnam and Cambodia fell, Stanaland participated in the SS *Mayaguez* rescue in May 1975, earning his second Silver Star. The two-time Silver Star recipient remained in Rescue for another 15 years. After 24 years in Air Rescue, newly-promoted Chief Stanaland crossed over into AFSOC in 1990, becoming the 1720th STG's first pararescue functional manager and later the chief enlisted manager. The chief described his thoughts at the decision to leave Rescue so late in his career: "AFSOC was playing the only game in town. They had all the money, they had all the toys, they had all the 'invites to the ballpark.'" Stanaland led the group's enlisted force until 1996, retiring with nearly 30 years' service.³⁰

Joel Talley arrived for his first operational assignment near the end of Stanaland's tour at Da Nang in 1968. Like Stanaland and many other first-term PJs in the 37th ARRS, Talley reported to Vietnam at the age of 20, viewing himself as bulletproof and ready for any mission. Exactly one month after reporting to the unit and completing all local checkout requirements, on his first operational mission Talley rescued a downed F-105 "Thud" pilot, Lt Col Jack Modica. The lieutenant colonel was leading a flight of four Thuds on an interdiction mission north of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) when he was forced to eject after his aircraft was hit. He was knocked unconscious during the ejection and awoke on the ground. He transmitted to his wingman that he could not move due to his injuries (he had a separated pelvis). The pilot, unable to help himself, was in mountainous, jungle terrain in enemy territory. It was the schoolhouse, "canned scenario for a pararescue-man," Talley remembered.³¹

Two HH-3s stood ground alert each day at Da Nang for potential combat rescues—normally, one became the primary pickup aircraft

(“low-bird”) on a given mission, and the other, the backup (“high-bird”). Two other HH-3s forward-deployed to Quang Tri Combat Base, South Vietnam, about an hour away and close to the DMZ, replicating Da Nang’s alert posture. On days scheduled for air strikes against North Vietnam, two additional Jolly Greens from Da Nang flew airborne alert at an orbit point just off the coast and south of the DMZ, making a total of six helicopters on rescue alert. Talley’s helicopter crew, led by a US Coast Guard exchange pilot—Lt Lance A. Eagan—was scheduled for low-bird alert at Quang Tri on 2 July 1968.³²

Two attempted rescues on the afternoon of 1 July had failed. Talley described that the enemy had “a well-established SAR [search-and-rescue] trap” in which they remained hidden, waiting until the helicopter entered a hover in the survivor’s vicinity before opening up with small arms fire. Unknown to Eagan’s crew at the time, two Jolly Greens had received considerable battle damage in rescue attempts that afternoon and were forced to return to base. Eagan’s crew learned they were scheduled to attempt the rescue at first light the next day. The lieutenant briefed his crew that he planned to fly a “low-and-slow” pass over the survivor’s area, “trolling for ground fire,” Talley explained. If they received none, they would return for a second pass while calling for the survivor to “pop his smoke” so they could spot him and over-fly his position. The crew intended to drop the hoist “right down on his lap” so he could strap himself in and be pulled up—without putting a PJ on the ground. That was the plan.³³

On the morning of 2 July, Eagan’s crew departed on the mission but received word of its cancellation en route. Disappointed, they landed at Quang Tri and pulled ground alert in accordance with normal procedures. About midday, while crewmembers rested, they received word that the mission was back on. Because of the threat, their mission was to be “the last attempt going in” to try and rescue Modica. Eagan flew the first low-and-slow and did not receive ground fire. On the second pass, the mission changed as it became clear that no survivor could be spotted from the air due to the double- and triple-canopied jungle. Eagan requested his PJ to descend on the penetrator and search for Modica. Talley volunteered and was lowered on the hoist. Eagan held his hover, anxiously counting the minutes as Talley searched along the semi-darkened jungle floor for Modica.³⁴

About 20 minutes later Talley found the injured Thud pilot. Talley recalled the survivor’s gear “was laid neatly alongside of him . . . a picture-perfect school setup,” just as he remembered from training.

Talley vectored the helicopter closer to his position and then used a fireman's carry to get Modica to a clearing some 50 yards away. Eagan pulled into a hover over the new spot. Talley strapped the survivor in, then himself, and called on his radio, "We're on and secure, take us up!" At about that time, the helicopter took a round through the windshield—the start of enemy forces opening up with ground fire.³⁵

Eagan held his hover long enough to get Talley and Modica far enough off the ground that he could start moving forward, gaining air-speed and altitude to egress the area without losing the men clinging to the hoist. Talley—who credited Eagan with saving his life—estimated the helicopter was at an altitude of 3,000 feet before he and Modica were finally pulled inside the cabin.

After checking on the pilot's injuries, the crew decided to deliver him to an Army mobile army surgical hospital unit before returning to Quang Tri. Not realizing the extent of damage to their aircraft, the crew began refueling at the forward base, then noticed fuel pouring out of the helicopter's main fuel tank as quickly as it was pumped. They were done for the day. Joel E. Talley earned the Air Force Cross, the service's second highest combat medal, for Colonel Modica's rescue mission. Years later, the Talley and Modica families became close friends, both of them residing not far from Eglin AFB, Florida. Lt Col Jack Modica died on 4 July 2011.³⁶

Following his Vietnam tour, Talley remained in Air Rescue for nearly 20 years, including overseas assignments in Portugal, Thailand, and Japan, and stateside duty in Florida, Michigan, and Illinois. Talley also grew to understand the SOF community, especially in assignments at headquarters Twenty-Third Air Force and Military Airlift Command, both at Scott AFB, in the 1980s.

In 1992 Chief Talley entered AFSOC, becoming the 39th Special Operations Wing (SOW) senior enlisted advisor (SEA) at RAF Alconbury, United Kingdom. He continued as the SEA when the group was redesignated the 352nd Special Operations Group (SOG). From 1995 until his retirement two years later, the chief served as superintendent of the professional development branch at Hurlburt's Air Force Special Operations School, a prestigious and fitting capstone assignment to an illustrious 30-year career.³⁷

10th Combat Weather Squadron

In addition to the changes affecting the combat control and para-rescue forces, special operations weather team (SOWT) personnel officially joined the command with the activation of the 10th CWS. On 1 April 1996 the 10th CWS activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, but underwent a station change to Hurlburt Field only four months later. The five small Air Force elements that provided weather support to US Army Special Operations Command in the continental United States were also activated in April as detachments at their respective posts (table 9.2). Prior to activation, the weathermen had reported to the local Air Force air support operations squadron or group.³⁸

Table 9.2. 10th CWS detachments/personnel, 31 December 1996

Unit	Station	Personnel assigned (enl/off)
Det 1, 10 CWS	Ft. Lewis, WA	06/01
Det 2, 10 CWS	Ft. Campbell, KY	15/01
Det 3, 10 CWS	Ft. Carson, CO	09/01
Det 4, 10 CWS	Ft. Benning, GA	03/01
Det 5, 10 CWS	Ft. Bragg, NC	14/02
Totals		47/06

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Prior to the 10th squadron's activation, a SOWT had only to complete basic airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia. One officer, a former enlisted SOWT who returned to the career field, recalled the pre-1996 term for the specialty. Capt Robert D. "Don" Garrett, who enlisted in 1988 and was commissioned 12 years later, knew the career field as "paraweather" prior to the mid-1990s. One point of confusion was that ACC-assigned conventional weather teams also used the name paraweather. And on the berets of both ACC and AFSOC weather personnel, the crest had "Special Operations Weather Team" on it—despite the fact that ACC's teams were not part of the special operations weather community and were obviously not under AFSOC.³⁹

Obtaining slots for training sometimes required creativity. When Garrett arrived at Fort Benning, a year or more prior to the activation of 10th CWS, he was unable to secure an airborne school slot until he

gave a six-pack of beer to a sergeant in the school. A couple of years later it was time for Pathfinder school—which “cost me a Leatherman and a small rucksack” for a slot, Garrett added, smiling.⁴⁰

From 1995 to 1998 1st Lt Joseph T. Benson worked at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where his detachment (det) supported the Army’s 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) and 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). Prior to the 10th’s activation, the detachment reported to the Air Force’s 19th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS). Following activation of Detachment 2, 10th CWS, the relationship with 5th SFG and 160th SOAR continued unchanged. The SOWTs greeted the activations with excitement, in part because they expected to see an improvement in training opportunities—hitherto mostly informal, under Army management, rather than formal, institutionalized, and funded by unit programming. But training opportunities did not materialize overnight.⁴¹

It took Benson six months to secure a training slot for basic airborne school, while his det remained under 19th ASOS. Following the 10th CWS’s activation in April 1996, it was another two years before he attended basic survival training at Fairchild AFB, Washington. Moreover, Benson recalled that most of the training he and fellow SOWT members obtained at Fort Campbell was on an ad hoc basis. He developed the habit of simply picking up the phone and calling the local Army SOF units, asking what upcoming training opportunities the SOWTs could participate in. Often, if four or five guys were available, an Operational Detachment–Alpha (ODA) member came over to the detachment and taught land navigation or “small unit tactics and shooting and moving [and] communication skills,” Benson noted. Despite the “disjointed” nature of the training, Benson felt it improved the SOWTs’ skills.⁴² By the late 1990s, basic airborne and survival school slots still were not routine for SOWTs and were hard to come by. The training issues for SOWTs continued into the new millennium.⁴³

One factor that affected the SOWT detachments was that two of them supported more than a single Army SOF unit. Detachment 2 at Fort Campbell supported both the 5th SFG and 160th SOAR, while Fort Bragg’s Detachment 5 supported two special forces groups, the 3rd and 7th. “Det 2 at Campbell is a particularly difficult nut [to crack] because you’ve got the 160th and 5th group there . . . [with] very different missions [aviation, ground], very different requirements on the guys,” former 10th CWS commander, Lt Col Robert L.

“Bob” Russell, Jr., observed.⁴⁴ Because of the dual-unit commitment, detachments 2 and 5 were twice as large as any of the other three. By 1998 the Campbell and Bragg dets each boasted 20 personnel, compared with 10, nine, and five at the Fort Carson, Colorado; Fort Lewis, Washington; and Fort Benning, Georgia, detachments, respectively. Meanwhile, the squadron headquarters element at Hurlburt remained small, with only five personnel.⁴⁵

Despite the training challenges, by the end of the decade SOWTs claimed a new mission: environmental reconnaissance (ER). Joint Pub 3–05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, defined ER succinctly as “operations conducted to collect and report **critical** hydrographic, geological, and meteorological **information**” (emphasis in original).⁴⁶ In addition to the traditional role of obtaining and reporting atmospheric data, ER could properly include diverse environments such as brown-water littorals, or snow pack and avalanche conditions in the mountains. In a 2008 interview, Lt Col Stephen A. Rose, the 10th CWS commander, related a classified example of ER in the mountains of Afghanistan that contributed to tactical successes. Although Rose’s example occurred after 2001, perhaps such possibilities were in view by the late 1990s when at least one SOWT was assigned to the 24th STS. However, the other stateside ST units did not have SOWTs assigned.⁴⁷

An example of the use of weather personnel during World War II in a “special operations” role suggested more contemporary possibilities. In a gripping first-person account, Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agent turned public servant Franklin Lindsay outlined the OSS’s work with Yugoslav partisans who operated against the Germans in their homeland. One passage described the intelligence value of behind-the-lines weather observers:

Since all German weather observations were radioed in code to their weather central, there was no way that these much more numerous observations could be used by the Allied meteorologists unless the German code could be broken. As it was known that each German airfield was equipped to make weather observations and radioed reports every four hours, a second and potentially even more important purpose of OSS weather observers was to get as close to German airfields as possible and make their observations at the same time. By comparing the radio intercepts of coded German reports with the observations of our own weather observers it should be possible to break the German weather code. This would make it possible to read all of the German weather reports from occupied Europe as soon as they were sent, a feat I later heard was ultimately accomplished.⁴⁸

Classified operations aside, having the 10th CWS under AFSOC's 720th STG represented a huge stride forward for the SOWT community. It was inspiring to reflect that the squadron's immediate lineal predecessor, the 10th Weather Squadron, had been commanded in 1974–75 by the legendary Keith Grimes (after 1975, the unit remained inactive until 1996). Not all was rosy nostalgia, however. As a long-time SOWT officer, Bob Russell, who commanded the 10th CWS from 2001 to 2003, expressed, “the grey beret wearers are probably the least understood of the [ST] community.”⁴⁹

Within the Air Force, the grey beret wearers were confusing to a degree because all weather personnel who completed basic airborne training—whether assigned to AFSOC or a conventional unit—were authorized to wear the beret. Thus, by simply seeing a grey beret, one did not necessarily identify the command to which the wearer belonged. Russell viewed the SOWT community's tradition of support for the Army, especially during World War II, as “one of our deepest roots” and one of the reasons for not being well understood by the Air Force.⁵⁰



Figure 9.1. Air Force STARS team freefall in line with Mt. Rainier in the background. *Left to right:* Ty Clark, “Mitch” Braddock, Ron Thompson, and jumpmaster Stacy Poland.

Special Tactics and Rescue Specialists

Regardless of which career field was in view, ST recruiting remained a challenge for years, in part because most of the young men physically qualified and inclined to volunteer for an ST-type job automatically considered the Army or Marine Corps first. In 1996 CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, the command's CCT/PJ recruiting liaison, attended a public

event with McChord AFB combat controllers who conducted a demonstration jump. The jumpers included CMSgt James D. “Jim” Charvat and TSgt Stacey A. Poland. Following their jump—using parachutes with nondescript, grey canopies—Norrad joined the men at an information booth, where it quickly became apparent that most people assumed the jumpers to be US Army—not Air Force—personnel. Norrad approached his group commander, Col Craig Brotchie, and requested permission to ask the Air Force Recruiting Service for Air Force-specific parachute canopies for an Air Force demonstration team. Brotchie agreed.

The chief traveled to Randolph AFB, Texas, and met with the vice commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service and his director of advertising, Tim Talbert, who also liked the idea—though he could not fund it. However, Talbert recommended that Norrad approach the Air Force’s 50th Anniversary Committee, which was preparing for various celebratory events in 1997. The chief envisioned the possibility of obtaining red, white, and blue parachute canopies, marked with the Air Force “Aim High” recruiting slogan. A demonstration team with such a clear Air Force identification might serve as a valuable addition to some of the anniversary events as well as an excellent recruiting tool for ST.⁵¹

Following an initial, favorable contact with the committee, Norrad followed up by obtaining an official request from the AFSOC commander, General Hobson, who sought the help of the Air Force assistant vice chief of staff, Lt Gen Lloyd W. Newton. Not only did Newton approve the proposal, he wanted the teams ready to jump into National Football League (NFL) stadiums on 22 September 1996 in conjunction with the annual prisoner of war—missing in action (POW—MIA) recognition day. That was barely 60 days away. Norrad quickly identified skydivers currently in ST/CCT and readily available, and set up a training plan at Pope AFB. Meanwhile, airlift and permit requests and orders for logos and multicolored parachute canopies went out.⁵²

By late September, the AFSOC Parachute Demonstration Team was ready. Three ST squadrons—the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd—contributed approximately 16 qualified jumpers. As scheduled, on 22 September combat controllers jumped into two NFL stadiums. Norrad joined 22nd STS combat controllers Jim Charvat, Stacey Poland, and David J. “Dave” Thomas, who jumped into the New England Patriots game in Foxboro, Massachusetts, at halftime with the American, POW, US Air Force, and the home team flags. Another CCT team of three—

Dave Schnoor, J. D. Steagald, and Michael R. “Mike” West—from Pope AFB’s 21st STS jumped into the Carolina Panthers stadium in Charlotte, North Carolina, as part of pregame activities. Years later, Norrad acknowledged, “I was not really a big skydiver . . . so little did I know [that] going into a stadium is probably the toughest jump you can make, and that’s how we started our parachute team. We didn’t start out with airfields for an air show, we were going into a couple of NFL stadiums. But we didn’t get hurt, everybody landed on the field, [and the] crowd was happy.”⁵³ The home crowds were even happier as the Panthers went on to a 23–7 “drubbing” of the San Francisco 49ers and the Patriots beat the Jacksonville Jaguars on a field goal in overtime.⁵⁴



Figure 9.2. Chris Larkin lands in the Citrus Bowl game with the US flag

As Chief Norrad prepared to retire at the end of 1996, SMSgt Robert “Bob” Holler assumed the duties of managing the demonstration team. However, the time required for one military member to manage the team became so great that Brotchie decided to contract the job, keeping his active duty members focused on military duties. Norrad was selected for the contract position and managed the team and narrated the shows during the team’s active periods over the next six years. But as an Air Force retiree, he no longer jumped.⁵⁵

Although initially all the jumpers were combat controllers, PJs soon joined the team. The team’s name, the “STARS”—for “Special

Tactics and Rescue Specialists”—was inclusive of the PJs. Although budget cuts in FY 1999 forced the STARS into inactive status for a time, by 2000 the team again received funding from other operations and maintenance monies and was very busy. That year the STARS performed in 28 events, including air shows, professional football and baseball games, and auto races. All team members were qualified free-fall parachutists and military jumpmasters with no less than 200 jumps. Although the team was associated with AFSOC, the jumpers actually hailed from several other commands as well, including AETC, ACC, Air Force Reserve Command, and the Air National Guard.⁵⁶

In the aftermath of 11 September 2001, operational requirements overtook the STARS's ongoing funding uncertainty. ST members were needed for deployments, so the 720th STG commander, Col Craig D. Rith, “decided to stand-down” the program, hoping to reactivate the team when the operations tempo lessened. It was not to be. On 22 September 2002, at the Dover Speedway in Dover, Delaware, the team performed its final jump—exactly six years from its opening event in 1996. Over its six-year existence, STARS jumpers performed in 144 events.⁵⁷

In the Balkans

In May 1993 *U.S. News & World Report* informed readers of the “ancient animosities between Catholic and Orthodox, Christian and Muslim, Habsburg and Ottoman” that threatened to draw the United States and NATO into military action in the Balkans. For generations Serbian nationalism comprised a principal ingredient in the political ebb and flow of the region. As part of the settlement at the end of World War I, the victors established the “first Yugoslavia.” Serbia—the most populous state and a participant on the winning side—naturally considered itself the senior member of the “Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.” Over the next three decades, Serbian and Croatian mistrust, conflict, and killing preserved and exacerbated historic antipathies. However, following World War II a wartime partisan leader—Josip Broz Tito, soon known to the world as Marshal Tito—emerged as the ruler of the “second Yugoslavia.” For more than three decades, until his death in 1980, Tito's strong rule as an independent (from Moscow) communist dictator in Yugoslavia kept the lid on the region's centuries-old enmities.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, Tito died without leaving political institutions or other organizations capable of carrying on without him. By the end of the 1980s, the breakup of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, in conjunction with an economic crisis at home, inflamed nationalistic, ethnic, and religious hatred. The rise to power of “neocommunist” Slobodan Milošević in Belgrade, an ethnic Serb ambitious for a Greater Serbia, provoked a new, messy civil war.⁵⁹

By the spring of 1992 Bosnian Serbs, encouraged by Milošević, campaigned to drive out the Muslims from Serbia’s neighboring state of Bosnia. Soon, the world heard and read reports of the chilling term “ethnic cleansing.” Croatian Serbs joined in, possessed with their own aspirations for carving out a portion of Croatia to add to the aspiring Greater Serbia. By the spring of 1993 Serbs occupied about a third of Croatia, a situation that periodically caused fighting between the two main players in the region. Indeed, there were fears of a general war between Serbia and Croatia. The Serbs also controlled at least two-thirds of Bosnia. The West, divided but nominally led by the new, untried US president, William J. Clinton, sought a response but viewed each option as a bad choice.⁶⁰

Operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia

As early as July 1992 the United Kingdom-based 352nd SOG deployed a number of personnel to support Operation Provide Promise, a humanitarian relief effort in Bosnia. In May 1993 President Clinton considered air strikes to stop the killing in Bosnia, but torn by competing views on the least disagreeable course to adopt, his administration took no action. However, two months later, US Secretary of Defense Les Aspin approved the deployment of 40 aircraft, which joined other NATO forces in the region to enforce a no-fly zone known as Operation Deny Flight. By the fall, several incidents in which surface-to-air missiles targeted US aircraft heightened the concerns for a military confrontation.⁶¹

With the commitment of American aircraft and crews to a potentially hostile situation, units under AFSOC and the European Command deployed combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) helicopter crews and special tactics teams (STT). The 321st STS, based at RAF Mildenhall, deployed STTs of two PJs and one combat controller. However, the 321st required augmentation due to a shortage of PJs. While

awaiting help, the 321st STS “cancelled all of the formal schools providing critical core skills” in order to maintain combat ready status. Moreover, AFSOC cancelled the upcoming selection course for the 720th STG’s premier unit, the 24th STS.

The pararescue shortage took a toll on the men and their families. “After Desert Storm [1991], it was just a constant rotation into Turkey or going down into Bosnia. So no one was ever home,” Rod Alne, who served in the 321st in 1993, recalled. “You would go to Turkey for a month or so and then . . . go home for a couple of weeks and then . . . to Bosnia or down to San Vito [Air Station, Italy] and sit alert. . . . It was a tough time.”⁶²

ST personnel also deployed to Bosnia as members of forward-deployed Special Operations Command and Control Elements to support non-NATO ground forces serving in the country. In that capacity, ST men provided communications, including emergency “show-of-force” close air support sorties (mainly during patrols and convoys), and technical services to the peacekeepers from nearly a dozen non-NATO countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Egypt, and Malaysia.⁶³

In addition to CSAR, command-and-control, and humanitarian commitments in Italy, Bosnia, and Turkey, respectively, the relocation of the 321st STS from RAF Alconbury to RAF Mildenhall stressed unit personnel. From 1994 to 1996 Maj John A. Koren commanded the 321st. An enlisted combat controller for the first decade of his career, in 1980, Koren participated at Desert One with John Carney. In 1989, as an officer, he led a team and jumped into Torrijos-Tocumen, Panama. Koren arrived in England in the midst of the move and found his squadron to be “one of the last to physically go to Mildenhall. So, I lived on the Mildenhall side and drove an hour to get to the Alconbury side,” he said. “I got to a squadron that was in a little bit of disarray because of the move; there were some morale problems. We got through that with some great NCOs . . . [and] got a pretty good facility at the old [airport] hangar at Mildenhall that we converted.” Koren was not the only 321st leader to feel that “it was too fast of a two-year timeframe” because of the multitude of unit obligations.⁶⁴

During Koren’s tenure, the unit was also tasked to survey the airport at Dubrovnik, Croatia, situated in high and difficult terrain next to the Adriatic coast. The 321st members accomplished their work not long before tragedy struck nearby. In the late afternoon of 3 April 1996 an Air Force T-43 aircraft carrying US Secretary of Commerce Ronald H. “Ron” Brown and 34 others on a trade mission to Croatia

crashed while inbound to Dubrovnik. Within 30 minutes, a quick reaction force consisting of three 352nd SOG aircraft launched—two MH-53J Pave Low III and one MC-130P Combat Shadow (tanker) aircraft. Each helicopter carried an STS. Aboard “Facet-23” were PJs Eric A. Beane and Robert F. “Rob” Ridout, and CCT William C. “Calvin” Markham; “Facet-24” carried PJs Scott Duffman and Brandon Plaster, and CCT, Gary Salway.

The weather was bad in the area, which was along a coastal mountain ridge some 2,300 feet high, about two miles from the airfield. Poor initial reporting on the aircraft’s location delayed the discovery of the crash site for several hours. When a local ground party reached the site at about 2230 local, the Croatians discovered just one survivor, a seriously injured Air Force flight attendant.⁶⁵ Doubtful that she could survive the trek back down the mountain, the ground party requested a NATO helicopter evacuation. Within minutes Facet-23 took off from Dubrovnik airport, but with the top third of the mountain obscured by clouds, the crew could not reach the crash site. The aircraft commander described the harrowing flying conditions as “raining cats and dogs with lightning all over the place.”⁶⁶ On two occasions Facet-23 nearly hit a telephone stanchion that suddenly appeared out of the blackness and fog. Finally, the crew located a small clearing suitable for the three ST members to fast-rope to the ground. The aircraft commander, Capt Steve Kelly of the 21st Special Operations Squadron, later described the mission as “the hardest flying I’ve ever done in my life . . . we all knew that there was one lady up there that we wanted to help.” Only later did Facet-23 learn that the mishap aircraft carried Secretary Brown.⁶⁷

The ST personnel coordinated with Croatian police units and assisted in the identification and recovery of the bodies. The mission formally ended on 7 April with the recovery of all 35 bodies from the wreckage and most of the aircraft debris. General Fogleman, CSAF, accepted responsibility for the Air Force; the service had failed to accomplish its mission to transport Secretary Brown and his entourage safely to Dubrovnik.⁶⁸

The heavy CSAR commitment for the 321st STS continued until 1999. One younger PJ who pulled his share of alert at San Vito in the latter part of the decade—crossing over from Rescue into AFSOC and later rising to chief master sergeant—was Craig A. Sammons. In 1996 then-Staff Sergeant Sammons had served in pararescue for 10 years. More than half of that time was spent at Patrick AFB, Florida,

where Sammons earned most of his 13 career “saves.”⁶⁹ In his most memorable rescue at Patrick, in July 1987 he and his teammate, Sgt Greg Hehir, picked up a shrimp boat’s crewman who nearly perished some 22-miles off the coast of Cocoa Beach.

Sharks infested the area’s waters, and before Sammons jumped from the helicopter he noticed a good-sized hammerhead shark within 50 yards of the survivor. Just that morning, Sammons had read in his Bible, “Be strong and courageous! . . . for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Years later, he observed that at that time in his life he was reading a lot, and the Bible was “becoming part of who I was. . . . That very verse was preparing me for what was about to come,” he said. “It made a difference in my life.”

Sammons and Hehir made a difference in the life of Willie Charpentier, the *Leslie Rae*’s first mate. In the modern-day mutiny-at-sea, two hired hands had conspired to take over the vessel. One man attacked the skipper with a ball-peen hammer, smashing his skull. Charpentier managed to jump into the shark-infested water when the second mutineer attacked him with a pry bar. The men threw the captain’s body overboard, later concocting a story that the *Leslie Rae*’s two experienced seamen had fallen overboard. Early the next morning, having been alerted to a vessel in distress, the crew of a CH-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopter from Patrick AFB spotted someone in the water. As the pilot performed a low-and-slow maneuver several feet above the surface, the PJs jumped in, quickly secured the survivor in a Stokes litter, and, assisting the flight engineer, helped to get him aboard the rescue helicopter. Bloodied from the pry bar attack, and having periodically fought off sharks during his 12 hours in the water, Charpentier could not have lasted much longer. Sammons and Hehir saved his life.⁷⁰

Sammons left Patrick and went on to assignments in Iceland—in 1993 he was credited with the Jolly Green Rescue of the Year for the rescue of a Spanish sailor in the North Sea—and New Mexico, before moving to AFSOC’s 321st STS in 1996. The squadron was organized into three teams with two elements under each team. Sammons served as an element leader in charge of six PJs, and he encouraged the combat controllers to join his PJs for training.⁷¹

Of the roughly 70 321st squadron personnel at RAF Mildenhall, the unit filled approximately a dozen of the 15 authorized PJ billets. The PJs spent much of their time standing CSAR alert for US/NATO air operations in support of Bosnia and, later, Kosovo. Sammons

recalled spending about half of his tour at San Vito on alert. Capt Bradley P. “Brad” Thompson, his squadron director of operations from 1997 to 1999, commented that at any given time about 35 percent of unit personnel were deployed to, or supported, Bosnia.⁷²

Thompson entered combat control relatively late and was on the fast track to command. His two years in the 321st STS were among his busiest ever because of the heavy CSAR mission for Bosnia. James A. “Jim” Lyons, a senior enlisted combat controller who arrived in 1998 added that, in his view, the teams lacked structure and answered to more than one boss; a nearly “dysfunctional” situation, he recalled.⁷³ A future chief master sergeant, Jim Lyons joined other key squadron players in formalizing the teams’ structures, long-term training plans, and budgeting requirements. The 321st enjoyed an excellent relationship with its in-theater parent unit, the 352nd SOG. “We were one team. They didn’t go anywhere without us,” Thompson said.⁷⁴

Sammons observed another advantage of serving in AFSOC. By the late 1990s one of the “huge benefits” in AFSOC was the difference in support personnel. In Rescue, “we had to support ourselves,” including taking care of the PJs’ SCUBA lockers and managing their medical inventory. Although it was a long, slow struggle for combat control and ST units to obtain the necessary support personnel that enabled operators to focus on training rather than on administrative or support tasks, by the late 1990s, it became a reality in the 321st STS.⁷⁵

Operations in Serbia and Kosovo, 1999

The Serbians had long-considered Kosovo as part of their nation. According to Serb history, in 1389, at the Battle of Kosovo Polje, Serbia saved Europe from the Ottomans by “sacrificing itself to halt the Turks in Kosovo.”⁷⁶ Serbia gained independence in 1878, which rekindled its desire for control of Kosovo. A US Air Force study noted that to Serbian nationalists, “Kosovo was an intrinsic part of Serbia.”⁷⁷ Under Tito’s rule following World War II, Kosovo enjoyed a degree of autonomy while under Serbia’s control. But in the post-Tito 1980s, Serbian leaders viewed ethnic Albanians in Kosovo—comprising 90 percent of the population—as a threat to their aspirations for control of the province. Slobodan Milošević, playing upon Serbian nationalism and fears, rose to the presidency in Serbia in part because of his promises of retaining control of “ancestral” Kosovo. In 1989 Milošević

withdrew Kosovar autonomy and permitted the removal of Kosovar Albanians from government jobs, including the police. By 1991–92, as the former Yugoslavia disintegrated, Kosovar Albanians formed a shadow government. Still, the province remained relatively peaceful.⁷⁸

In spring 1998, however, Kosovo began to unravel. In March Yugoslavian—essentially Serbian—security forces initiated attacks against insurgents of the independence-minded Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The violence increased, including the forced evacuation of Kosovar villages and the murders of ethnic Albanians. Nevertheless, by summer the KLA controlled about a third of Kosovo. Serbia responded with a major offensive. Meanwhile, fearful of what appeared to be the start of another round of ethnic cleansing—as occurred in Bosnia several years earlier—NATO defense ministers considered military options against Serbia. In mid-October 1998 the NATO council authorized air strikes against Serbia, which persuaded Milošević to comply with a UN-directed cease-fire and to withdraw Serbian forces from Kosovo.⁷⁹

Although Milošević did, in fact, withdraw a sizeable number of his security forces from Kosovo, the cease-fire was short-lived due to violations on both sides. By early 1999 Serbian forces returned to Kosovo. Reports of human rights abuses against ethnic Albanians increased, including evidence of a massacre of Kosovar civilians at Račak, Kosovo. Meanwhile, thousands of Kosovar refugees, driven from their homes and villages in what appeared to be a systematic campaign by the Serbians, began crossing the borders into neighboring Albania and Macedonia. In February and March 1999 last-ditch diplomatic efforts at Rambouillet and Paris failed to secure a return to the October 1998 agreement or an end to Serbian operations in Kosovo. On 20 March, Serbian forces renewed an offensive against the KLA and continued ridding Kosovo of ethnic Albanians. Three days later, Dr. Javier Solana, the NATO Secretary General, directed the start of air operations against Serbia. The NATO operational name was Allied Force; the US component was called Noble Anvil.⁸⁰

Air operations planners calculated on a very short campaign. US/NATO leaders anticipated that only two or three nights of limited air strikes should be required to convince Milošević to change his rogue-like behavior. As the campaign began, the forces of US Army general Wesley K. Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, had only 51 fixed targets approved. Perhaps ironically, at the very point in the conflict that NATO expected Milošević to fold, Serbia came within

the proverbial hair's breadth of an unprecedented propaganda victory—the downing of an American stealth aircraft and the capture of its pilot.⁸¹

The downing of the Air Force F-117 Nighthawk attack aircraft, call sign “Vega-31,” was not the first Serbian success against US/NATO aircraft in the Balkans during the decade. On 16 April 1994 a British Sea Harrier aircraft was downed by an SA-7 missile near Gorazde, Bosnia. A year later, on 2 June 1995, a Serbian SA-6 brought down an Air Force F-16 pilot, Capt Scott O’Grady, over western Bosnia. Both the British and American pilots were rescued. On 30 August 1995, near the town of Pale, Bosnian Serbs employed a surface-to-air missile to down a French Mirage 2000K, call sign “Ebro-33.” US aircraft flew 92 dedicated sorties in support of Ebro-33 until officials confirmed that the Serbs had captured the two-man crew. The crew’s release later served as a stepping stone toward the Dayton Peace Accords in November 1995.⁸²

From its base at Brindisi, Italy—near the port from which Roman legionnaires embarked in an earlier age—the Joint Special Operations Task Force Two (JSOTF2) maintained CSAR alert forces in support of US/NATO air operations in the former Yugoslavia. That was in spite of increased stability in Bosnia following the Dayton agreement, which allowed for a reduced AFSOC presence during 1996—from 14 aircraft to six for a time. Nevertheless, AFSOC assets at the base included MC-130P Combat Shadow tankers, MH-53J Pave Low helicopters, and AC-130H gunships as well as ST combat controllers and pararescuemen. In March 1999, just days before the commencement of Allied Force, AFSOC deployed four MH-60G Pave Hawks and five MH-53M Pave Low helicopters to Brindisi for possible CSAR operations. The deployment increased the total number of task force MH-53s to nine (four J-models, five M-models).⁸³

ST forces were strengthened as well. Under the leadership of Maj Terry “Eugene” Willett and his successor, Maj William “Bill” Sherman, the 321st STS “spun-up” no less than three times in anticipation of contingency operations in response to Serbian actions in Kosovo. However, the third time in March 1999 was the real deal. Capt Bradley Thompson recalled that he was initially tasked with forming three CSAR teams, totaling about 10 personnel. By the time the air campaign against Serbia began, he was the mission commander for some 70 personnel, including operators who deployed to the JSOTF2 from ST and Air Rescue units at Hurlburt Field and Patrick AFB, Florida; Portland International Airport, Oregon; and Moody AFB, Georgia. It

was one of the largest concentrations of deployed ST operators—even though some were under Rescue—in one location prior to 11 September 2001. The 321st STS commander, Major Sherman, commanded the JSOTF2's Special Tactics forces.⁸⁴

On the fourth night of the air campaign, 27–28 March, the JSOTF2 CSAR package Alpha (CSAR A) departed from its alert location for Tuzla AB, Bosnia, 20 minutes after the air-strike window opened. The CSAR A package consisted of three SOF helicopters: an MH-53M, MH-53J, and MH-60G. Immediately after arriving, two of CSAR A's helicopters heard a Mayday call from an aircraft in distress, indicating the possibility of a survivor in need of rescue. All three aircraft commanders began preflight mission planning. Vega-31 had gone down northwest of Belgrade, hit by a Serbian surface-to-air missile.⁸⁵

An hour later, the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) authorized CSAR A to launch. The JSOTF2 directed an MC-130P tanker to provide air refueling for the helicopters. Forty minutes later, the three helicopters departed with instructions to rendezvous with an A-10 Warthog attack aircraft over southeastern Croatia near the Serbian border. Arriving at the transition point, CSAR A began a holding pattern while awaiting the A-10 on-scene commander (OSC). To conserve fuel and allow the ST combat controllers to contact the CAOC via satellite communications, CSAR A landed its helicopters. The MH-53M pilot, Capt James L. "Jim" Cardoso, decided to launch again after overhearing Vega-31's survivor talking with the A-10 OSC. Soon, the CSAR package formed up in the air, ready for the anticipated rescue attempt.⁸⁶

Based on the reported survivor's coordinates, Cardoso's rescue package expected a two-hour window before requiring air refueling. But his team realized they had received faulty information on Vega's location. The change in the pilot's location gave CSAR A only a 30-minute window. That was insufficient. The pilot coordinated a rendezvous with the tanker for gas, then proceeded to a different transition point over northeastern Bosnia near the borders with Croatia and Serbia. There, the rescue package held for a long time—two hours—while waiting for the OSC to prepare the survivor and the CSAR support package for the pickup. Unknown to the helicopter crews, the situation was pretty dicey for Vega-31. Local Serbian forces searched intently for Vega, who, at one point, drew his survival knife when a dog, not more than 20 yards from his position in an irrigation ditch, appeared to have picked up his scent. Thankfully, the dog was upwind and the pilot remained

undetected. The poor weather hindered the rescue attempt because the OSC could not assess the enemy forces in Vega's vicinity. During the run-in for the pickup, mission commander Lt Col Stephan J. Laushine estimated the conditions as a 500-foot ceiling, no more than one mile of visibility, with intermittent rain showers.⁸⁷



Figure 9.3. Vega-31 rescue, MH-53M ST members and aircrew, March 1999. Photo courtesy of Jim Cardoso.

Finally, the rescue package received approval to cross into Serbian airspace while the OSC reauthenticated the survivor. A report that the survivor might have been captured concerned the A-10 pilot. Reassured that Vega was still evading the enemy, the OSC issued the execute order for the rescue. At that point, Cardoso's package was approximately 23 miles away. Descending to 50 feet above the terrain, the CSAR three-ship proceeded toward the survivor. Several times, Cardoso increased his altitude to 100 feet to avoid obstacles and populated areas. Airpower historian Darrel Whitcomb related how at one point, TSgt Ed Hux, Cardoso's flight engineer, "spotted an uncharted power line in the haze, just ahead and level with the helicopters. He quickly shouted, 'Wires! Climb! Climb!'" After that scare, all three helicopters remained slightly higher in altitude.⁸⁸

Approaching Vega's location, the helicopters encountered Serbian spotlights looking for them, but there was no ground fire. About

three miles from Vega, the CSAR team spotted three Serbian trucks evenly spaced on a road as enemy troops searched for the F-117 pilot. Two miles from Vega's location, the rescuers contacted the survivor but could not see him. Cardoso's team told him to fire his overt flare and Vega did so. Lt Col Dale P. Zelko, the downed pilot, wrote that "it probably lit up half of Serbia," but more importantly, the helicopters immediately spotted the flare a half mile to the east. Capt Chad P. Franks, the Pave Hawk aircraft commander, turned toward Vega and headed inbound. The two Pave Lows also turned to overfly Vega, then turned to the west to hold. Franks flew the approach to the ground, settling down as close to Vega as was relatively safe—the survivor was just outside the path of the rotor blades. The ST personnel—PJs Eric Giacchino (team lead, 304th Rescue Squadron, augmenting the 321st STS) and John M. Jordan, and combat controller Donald "D. J." Cantwell—quickly exited. The PJ team lead grabbed the pilot and assisted Vega aboard with the announcement, "Your PJs are here to take you home!" Forty-five seconds after landing, Franks' aircraft was airborne.⁸⁹

The MH-60G and the MH-53s rejoined and flew a different route leaving Serbia than on the ingress. As they approached the border with Bosnia, they observed Serbian antiaircraft fire in the vicinity of their previous flight path. The Serbians were unable to see the aircraft and appeared to be firing volleys hoping that the helicopters were flying the same route as before. Cardoso's team landed safely at Tuzla, completing the grueling 6.5 hour mission. Colonel Zelko, who sustained lacerations to his hand as well as a bad contusion to his right leg and some other bruising, underwent a physical examination before being flown to Aviano AB, Italy. Both Cardoso and Franks earned Silver Stars for the rescue mission; other crew members received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC).⁹⁰

Despite the initial expectations of a short, limited air campaign, the operation increased in intensity, continuing until early June when Milošević, faced with a crumbling economy and dwindling popular support, agreed to withdraw from Kosovo. The Serbian leader remained obstinate until perhaps beginning to fear that a NATO ground option into Kosovo—which President Clinton, unwisely, had dismissed at the outset—might be under consideration. The prolonged air campaign provided a second opportunity for the combat rescue of a downed Airman inside Serbia. By that time, the CSAR crews spent several days at a time forward deployed to Tuzla AB instead of sending

crews from Brindisi on a daily basis, a practice that taxed people and machines more than necessary.⁹¹

Table 9.3. Special Tactics Personnel, “Vega-31” F-117 Rescue, 27–28 March 1999

<i>MH-53M (Chalk Lead)</i>	<i>MH-53J (Chalk 2)</i>	<i>MH-60G (Chalk 3)</i>
Anthony Negron (PJ)	Nathan Cox (PJ)	Eric Giacchino (PJ)
Lance Supernaw (PJ)	Ronald Ellis (PJ)	John Jordan (PJ)
Robb Patterson (CCT)	Christian Begnal (CCT)	Donald Cantwell (CCT)

Adapted from CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: ST personnel on Vega-31 rescue, March 1999,” 31 August 2010; and Lt Col Dale P. Zelko, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: “the goods – RE: names of PJs/CCTs on the MH-53s,” 29 September 2010.



Figure 9.4. Nine ST members, Hammer-34 rescue, May 1999. Photo courtesy of Jeremy Hardy.

On 2 May, Serbian ground fire downed an Air Force F-16CG, call sign “Hammer-34,” near the border with Bosnia–Herzegovina. The CSAR A force of three helicopters—two Pave Lows and a Pave Hawk—launched from Tuzla AB as soon as the downed pilot was located and authenticated and a threat assessment accomplished.

Hammer's shoot down occurred four hours later into the night than Vega's, which gave the CSAR force less time to work. A daylight rescue in many parts of Serbia was too risky to undertake. Unlike the first mission, in this case the rescue force came under surface-to-air missile fire as it crossed the Serbian border. Each helicopter crew managed to evade no less than three missiles while inbound to the objective area. Also unlike the Vega mission, on 2 May the night was beautiful, clear, with no clouds and a full moon. This increased the threat because the Serbs fully expected a rescue attempt, and they enjoyed better visibility of the CSAR force.⁹²

The helicopters encountered large caliber anti-aircraft artillery but evaded it by jinking and terrain masking maneuvers. Despite hearing radio traffic suggesting that CSAR A hold and await close air support escort, mission commander Colonel Laushine, aboard the MH-53M piloted by Capt Kent A. Landreth, pushed forward to the objective area in order to take advantage of the precious hours of darkness. Once in the area, the rescue helicopters linked up with the A-10 and a flight mate of the downed flier, another F-16CG who assumed the OSC role. Using the call sign "Hammer-33" (rather than the traditional "Sandy"), the downed pilot's flight mate assisted by vectoring CSAR A to the survivor's position. Two miles from his location, Capt William F. Denehan, Jr., the MH-60G pilot, came under ground fire. The flight engineer, SSgt Richard D. Kelley, returned fire using the helicopter's minigun. Immediately, the rescuers contacted the downed pilot and directed him to turn on his flashing beacon. Making one pass over the survivor, the Pave Hawk and MH-53M failed to obtain a visual on him. However, Denehan spotted the downed Airman and started inbound to make the pickup. He landed his Pave Hawk in a field near the survivor. The ST team of PJs Jeremy Hardy (team lead) and Ronald Ellis and combat controller Andrew Kubik jumped out to secure the pilot, inadvertently knocking out a case of bottled water in the process.⁹³

Serbian soldiers nearby also spotted Hammer-34 and were closing in, the command historian later wrote. Herb Mason related that when the pilot "bolted from the nearby tree line," Hardy, armed with an M-4 rifle, quickly authenticated him one last time. Using the case of bottled water as a convenient step, the ST team loaded Hammer-34 aboard the aircraft "and quickly piled on top of him to protect him from any incoming ground fire." Twenty seconds after landing, with the ST men and their pilot aboard, Denehan took off to the sound of gunfire.⁹⁴

Denehan's Pave Hawk and Landreth's MH-53M quickly rejoined the second Pave Low holding a mile away and began their egress. Changing their outbound route, CSAR A encountered minimal ground fire but required a jinking maneuver near the border to avoid an enemy position. The rescue team landed safely at Tuzla, with early twilight already beginning to appear. As in the rescue of Vega-31, the pickup helicopter pilot (Denehan) and the MH-53M pilot (Landreth) each earned the Silver Star; their crews received DFC's. Mission commander Steve Laushine compared the two rescues and noted that overall the second CSAR "went a lot smoother than the first," despite poor radio discipline. It was ironic that the Vega and Hammer pickup helicopters belonged to the 55th Special Operations Squadron, which was slated for inactivation later in the year. This deployment was their swan song.⁹⁵

For rescuer and rescuee, there was at least one personal remembrance of the dramatic event in later years, as both men went on to greater responsibilities. In 2010 PJ Jeremy Hardy was promoted to chief master sergeant. The presiding official for the ceremony was Maj Gen David L. Goldfein, Hammer-34, Hardy's rescued pilot. Six years later, General Goldfein became the Air Force chief of staff.⁹⁶

Table 9.4. Special Tactics Personnel, "Hammer-34" F-16 Rescue, 2-3 May 1999

MH-53M (Chalk Lead)	MH-53J (Chalk 2)	MH-60G (Chalk 3)
Robert W. Bean (PJ)	Darryl Cherry (PJ)	Ronald Ellis (PJ)
Isaiah Staley (PJ)	Juan Ridout (PJ)	Jeremy Hardy (PJ)
Ryan Stanhope (CCT)	Christian Begnal (CCT)	Andrew Kubik (CCT)

Adapted from SMSgt Jeremy S. Hardy, e-mail to the author, subject: "RE: ST personnel on Vega-31 rescue, March 1999 [content included data on Hammer-34 rescue]," 3 September 2010.

Six weeks after the rescue of Hammer-34, the air campaign ended. Serbian ruler Milošević returned to the negotiating table and agreed to pull his forces out of war-ravaged Kosovo. To many Airmen, the two successful combat rescues of Vega-31 and Hammer-34 were "among the most significant tactical successes of the air war over Serbia."⁹⁷ Arguably, it was only the success of both rescues—particularly the first—that precluded their strategic significance from being more readily appreciated. Put another way, had an Air Force F-117 pilot been captured and shown to the world, the situation might well have

been far more than a tactical issue for the United States and its allies; it could easily have escalated to a strategic and political crisis of the highest order.

Notes

1. *Combat Control Association News*, April 1992, 5, including quote, copy in AFHRA files; and official lineage and honors files, AFHRA.

2. *Ibid.*, including quote. The sixth command with combat controllers, AETC, was not included in the 3-3 regulation.

3. For several years after 1996, almost all 10th CWS personnel were assigned to the five detachments collocated with Army SOF, Airborne, and Ranger units.

4. History, AFSOC, January–December 1994, vol. 1, 250, AFHRA call no. K317.01; History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 1, 16, 249–50; History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 4, SD I–21, subject: “Organizational Change Request, Combat Control Forces,” including quote (from unnumbered pg 2), AFHRA call no. K317.01; and Steven Watkins, “525 Combat Controllers now Work for One Command,” *Air Force Times*, 4 December 1995, 4. Note that all AFSOC histories cited herein are under call number K317.01.

5. Col Craig F. Brotchie, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21 July 2007.

6. *Ibid.*; Maj Steven L. McLeary, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 December 2007, including quotes; and Col Kenneth F. Rodriguez, interview with Capt Nicole Dubnicay, USAFR, 4 March 2008.

7. Brotchie, interview; and McLeary, interview.

8. McLeary, interview.

9. History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 1, 16–18, 250–53, 256; History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 4, SD I-21; and Watkins, “525 Combat Controllers,” 4. In 1995, aside from AFSOC the other commands with assigned combat controllers were ACC (128 positions), AETC (11), AMC (130), USAFE (21), and PACAF (33). The organizational change request included in the 1995 AFSOC history used slightly different numbers for the realignment: “64 CCT officers, 472 enlisted CCT, 105 pararescuemen, 4 support officers, 22 civilians, and 170 enlisted support personnel for a total of 837.” Note that the 472 enlisted CCTs, 105 PJs, and 170 enlisted support personnel totaled 747 enlisted members.

10. History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 1, 251, 253. The following combat control squadrons (CCS) were inactivated as part of the realignment: 23rd CCS at Pope AFB, North Carolina; 314th CCS at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas; 62nd CCS at McChord AFB, Washington; and 437th CCS at Charleston AFB, South Carolina.

11. *Ibid.*, 253; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1996, vol. 1, 178. There was no change to the 720th STG exercising functional management over the 320th and 321st STS.

12. History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 4, SD I-21.

13. Rodriguez, interview.

14. History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 4, SD I-21.

15. Brig Gen Robert H. Holmes, interview with the author, 8 November 2006.

16. *Ibid.*

17. History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, 190–91; History, AFSOC, January–December 1996, vol. 1, 16, 129–31; and official lineage and honors files, AFHRA.

18. History, AFSOC, January–December 1992, vol. 1, 269, 274, 276, 278; History, AFSOC, January–December 1993, vol. 1, 266–67, 269, 271, 273, 275; History, AFSOC, January–December 1994, vol. 1, 322–23, 324–29; History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 1, 325–26, 327–28, 330, 332–33; History, AFSOC, January–December 1997, vol. 1, 277, 279–80, 282–83, 285–86, 288–89, 291–92; History, AFSOC, January–December 1998, vol. 1, 248–51; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1999, vol. 1, 233–44. Table 9.1 figures did not include support personnel.

19. Col (Dr.) Craig D. Silverton, interview with the author, 1 May 2008; MSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 6 March 2007, including quote; and CMSgt Rodney D. Alne, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 22 April 2008.

20. Wilkinson, interview.

21. Ibid.

22. History, AFSOC, January–December 1993, vol. 1, 180; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1994, vol. 1, 263.

23. History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 1, 265, 267.

24. 720 STG, “1995 Base/Community Relations,” 23rd Special Tactics Squadron/CCA, copy in AFHRA files.

25. Ibid.

26. History, AFSOC, January–December 1994, vol. 1, 264.

27. Ibid., 240, 242; and Alne, interview, including quotes.

28. CMSgt Joseph S. Stanaland, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 5 November 2007; and Stanaland, unofficial biography provided to the author, October 2007, copy in AFHRA files.

29. Ibid.

30. Stanaland, interview, including quote; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1994, vol. 1, 241. For more details on the *Mayaguez* mission, see chap. 3 of this work and the excellent first-person account by John F. Guilmartin, Jr., *A Very Short War: The Mayaguez and the Battle of Koh Tang* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995).

31. CMSgt Joel E. Talley, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 5 November 2007, including quote; and Talley, unofficial biography provided to the author, n.d., copy in AFHRA files.

32. Ibid.; and History, 3 ARRGp, July 1968–June 1969, 22–23, 45, AFHRA call no. K318.222-3.

33. Talley, interview.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.; History, 3 ARRGp, July 1968–June 1969, 348; and Talley, e-mail to the author, subject: “Re: CSAR 2011,” 7 July 2011.

37. Talley, interview; and Talley, biography. In 1982 the author, a rescue helicopter copilot, served with Talley in the 33rd ARRS.

38. History, AFSOC, January–December 1996, vol. 1, 16, 129; and official lineage and honors files, AFHRA. Note that I have elected to use the term “SOWT” exclusively

in this section for the purpose of clarity. As pointed out by Lt Col Robert L. Russell, former 10th CWS commander, terms other than “SOWT” tended to confuse. For example, a term such as “SOF weathermen” could be applied to conventional weathermen who acted in support of SOF aviation. Furthermore, conventional weather personnel that completed basic airborne training were authorized to wear the grey beret, which was common to AFSOC-assigned SOWT and USAF conventional “combat weather” personnel. With such opportunity for confusion between the two specialties—which also shared the same Air Force specialty code—I elected to use “SOWT” strictly in this section at the risk of its overuse.

39. Capt Robert D. Garrett, USAF, interview with the author, 2 November 2007, including quote; and Garrett, official USAF biography, copy in AFHRA files.

40. Ibid.

41. Maj Joseph T. Benson, USAF, interview with the author, 9 February 2007.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.; Garrett, interview; Lt Col Stephen A. Rose, USAF, interview with Capt Nicole Dubnicay, USAFR, 5 March, 2008; and Lt Col Robert L. Russell Jr., USAF, interview with the author, 8 February, 2007.

44. Russell, interview.

45. Ibid.; Benson, interview; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1998, vol. 1, 248.

46. Joint Pub 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, 17 April 1998, II-5; and Benson, interview.

47. Rose, interview; Benson, interview; and Russell, interview. In 2008 Rod Alne recalled that shortly after the year 2000 there were three SOWT members assigned to the 24th STS: Alne, interview. In 2007, Colonel Russell mentioned riverine operations as a new arena for SOWTs under the ER mission.

48. Franklin Lindsay, *Beacons in the Night: With the OSS and Tito's Partisans in Wartime Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 34, including quote; and John F. Fuller, *Thor's Legions: Weather Support to the U.S. Air Force and Army, 1937–1987* (Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1990), 65, 211.

49. Russell, interview, including quote; Fuller, *Thor's Legions*, 330–37; and AFHRA lineage and honors files.

50. Russell, interview. During the Southeast Asia conflict, the majority of Air Force weather support for the Army was conventional in nature. See chap. 3, this work, for SOF weather support.

51. History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chap. 2, 40–41, including quote, AFHRA call no. K-GP-720-HI; and CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 6 February 2007.

52. Ibid.

53. History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chap. 2, 42; Norrad, interview, including quote; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1996, vol. 1, 143.

54. Michael Silver, “Real Deal,” *Sports Illustrated* 85, 30 September 1996, 43, including quote.

55. Norrad, interview.

56. History, AFSOC, January–December 1999, vol. 1, 16; History, AFSOC, January–December 2000, vol. 1, 100–1; and History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chap. 2, 43.

57. History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chap. 2, 44, including quote; and Norrad, interview.

58. David Lawday, “Doomed by an Ancient Disease,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 17 May 1993, 34–35.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Stephen Budiansky, “No Good Choices,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 10 May 1993, 50–52; Budiansky, “Bosnia: Too Little, Too Late?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 17 May 1993, 23–30, including quote; and Budiansky and Robin Knight, “When Hope Runs Out,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 24 May 1993, 36–38.

61. History, AFSOC, January–December 1993, vol. 1, 105–6. Operation Deny Flight replaced Provide Promise. Later, ST forces deployed to Italy and the Balkans under Operation Joint Guard.

62. *Ibid.*, 110–11, including quote 1; and Alne, interview, including quotes 2–3.

63. History, AFSOC, January–December 1996, vol. 1, 138–39.

64. Maj John A. Koren, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 5 October 2006.

65. *Ibid.*; History, AFSOC, January–December 1996, vol. 1, 95–97, 137–38; History, 16 SOW, January–December 1996, vol. 6, SD II-176, 4, AFHRA call no. K-WG-16-HI; J. Michael Murphy, Jr., and William H. Northacker, *Response to Disaster: SOCEUR and the CT-43A Recovery Operation, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 3–6 April 1996* (MacDill AFB, FL: US Special Operations Command History and Research Office, April 1998), 1–9; Ann Blackman, et al, “The Joyful Power Broker,” *Time*, 15 April 1996, 68–70; Darrel D. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride, A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2008), 402–04; CMSgt William C. “Calvin” Markham, USAF, e-mail to the author, subject: “Re: Secretary Brown’s recovery mission, April 1996,” 30 August 2010; and Peggy Ream, AFHRA, unpublished manuscript, ca. 2008, “Search and Rescue for IFO 21,” copy in AFHRA files. Note that Chief Markham, the CCT on Facet-23 alongside two PJs, stated “Rob Ridout was the PJ” (there was another CCT with a similar name, Juan Ridout). I am indebted to Ms. Ream for sharing her research on this topic. The T-43 was the military version of the Boeing 737; of the 35 who perished, all but two were Americans; seven were crew members.

66. Ream, “Search and Rescue for IFO 21,” 3–6, including quote; and Murphy and Northacker, *Response to Disaster*, 9–11.

67. Ream, “Search and Rescue for IFO 21,” 7, including quote; and Murphy and Northacker, *Response to Disaster*, 10–11.

68. Murphy and Northacker, *Response to Disaster*, 30–35; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1996, vol. 1, 97–98.

69. SMSgt (later, CMSgt) Craig A. Sammons, official USAF biography, copy in AFHRA files. Normally, a *save* was designated in those cases in which an individual was reasonably expected to lose life, limb, or eyesight without rescue.

70. SMSgt Craig A. Sammons, interview with the author, 7 June 2007, including quotes 2–3; Sandra Mathers, “Bail Denied for Suspects in Mutiny on Shrimp Boat,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 7 August 1987; and “Mutiny on the Leslie Rae,” *Sun Times*, 1 May 1988, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1988-05-01/features/8801270350_1_first-mate-willie-charpentier-leslie-rae; and Joshua 1:9 (quote 1).

71. Sammons, interview; and Sammons, biography.

72. Sammons, interview; Lt Col Bradley P. Thompson, USAF, interview with the author, 18 December 2006; CMSgt James A. Lyons, interview with the author, 9 March 2007; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1998, vol. 1, 248–51.

73. Thompson, interview; and Lyons, interview, including quote.

74. Lyons, interview; and Thompson, interview, including quote. Thompson later commanded the 720th STG.

75. Sammons, interview, including quotes. Support personnel manned the 24th STS earlier than at the other ST units.

76. *The One Year Report of the Air War over Serbia: Aerospace Power in Operation Allied Force, Volume 1* (Washington DC: Headquarters USAF, October 2000), 5.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid., 6–7. Legally, Kosovo was under Serbian sovereignty, a fact that may lead to questions beyond the scope of this study.

79. Ibid., 7–8.

80. Ibid., 9–11, 45; and Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 445–46.

81. Ibid., 32; and Darrel D. Whitcomb and Forrest L. Marion, “Team Sport, Combat Search and Rescue over Serbia, 1999,” *Air Power History* 61, no. 3 (Fall 2014), 32–34.

82. Brian Cathcart, “Harrier Pilot Safe,” *Independent* (UK), 16 April 1994, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/harrier-pilot-safe-1370719.html>; Roger Thurow, “Among Serbs, Facts Clash With Fancy In Attack on Gorazde,” *Wall Street Journal*, 18 April 1994, 1; Ross W. Simpson, “The Rescue of ‘BASHER 52,’” *Leatherneck Magazine*, September 1995, <https://www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck/rescue-basher-52>; Darrel D. Whitcomb, “Searching for Ebro–33,” *Air Power History* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2002), 34–39; and History, AFSOC, January–December 1995, vol. 1, 150–51.

83. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 446–47; History, AFSOC, January–December 1998, vol. 1, 92–93; History, AFSOC, January–December 1999, vol. 1, 86–88; Lt Col Stephan J. Laushine, USAF, interview with the author, 10 September 2001; and Maj Gen Clay T. McCutchan, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: San Vito / Brindisi,” 31 August 2010. The MH-53M was an MH-53J modified with the Interactive Defensive Avionics System/Multi-Mission Advanced Tactical Terminal (IDAS/MATT). John Pike, “MH-53M Pave Low IV,” *GlobalSecurity*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/mh-53m.htm>.

84. Thompson, interview.

85. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 448; and *One Year Report*, 48.

86. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 449–50; and Richard J. Newman, “Silver Stars,” *Air Force Magazine* 83 (June 2000), 82–83.

87. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 450; Laushine, interview; Newman, “Silver Stars,” 83; and Whitcomb and Marion, “Team Sport,” 33.

88. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 450–51, 453, including quote; Laushine, interview; and Newman, “Silver Stars,” 83.

89. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 451; Newman, “Silver Stars,” 83; Gene Rosel, e-mail to A-1 Spad Association, and others, subject: “Great read of F-117 Rescue in Serbia” [transcript of interview with Lt Col Zelko, no date], 21 August 2006 (copy from Mr Herbert A. Mason, AFSOC/HO, to the author), 22 August 2006, including quotes; Norrad, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: ST personnel on Vega-31 rescue, March

1999,” 31 August 2010; and Lt Col Dale P Zelko, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: “the goods – RE: names of PJs/CCTs on the MH-53s,” 29 September 2010.

90. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 451–52; Newman, “Silver Stars,” 82–83; Whitcomb and Marion, “Team Sport,” 34; and Zelko, e-mail.

91. Steven Erlanger, “NATO Was Closer to Ground War in Kosovo than Is Widely Realized,” *New York Times*, 7 November 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/11/07/world/nato-was-closer-to-ground-war-in-kosovo-than-is-widely-realized.html>; *One Year Report*, 71–72; and Laushine, interview.

92. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 455–56; *One Year Report*, 48; and Laushine, interview.

93. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 456–57; Laushine, interview; Newman, “Silver Stars,” 82; SMSgt Jeremy S. Hardy, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: ST personnel on Vega-31 rescue, March 1999 [content included data on Hammer-34 rescue],” 3 September 2010; and Whitcomb and Marion, “Team Sport,” 36.

94. Whitcomb and Marion, “Team Sport,” 36, including quotes; and Newman, “Silver Stars,” 82.

95. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 457–58; Laushine, interview, including quote; and Newman, “Silver Stars,” 82.

96. Norrad, e-mail to the author, subject: “Re: Chief Hardy – contact,” 16 May 2017; and Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 457, 460.

97. *One Year Report*, 48, including quote.

Chapter 10

Beginning the Long War

Special Tactics at Home and Abroad, 1999–May 2003

At Home

Since the early 1990s, 1720th Special Tactics Group (STG) leaders recognized a “need for a common [Special Tactics] ST-specific school for combat controllers.”¹ By the close of the decade, ST leaders raised an additional concern: the attrition rates for combat control students in their initial training. For example, in fiscal year 1998 the combat controller (CCT) attrition rate was 85 percent, and the pararescue-man (PJ) rate was 78 percent. In 1999 the CCT pipeline graduated a mere seven combat controllers, which equated to a 92 percent attrition rate. Manpower experts spoke ominously of a “death spiral” in the CCT career field.² The first general officer to rise from the combat control community, Brig Gen Robert H. “Bob” Holmes, recalled the situation from 1999 to 2001 when, as a colonel, he served as Col Jeffrey Buckmelter’s deputy at the 720th STG:

Jeff and I talked, and we knew we had to do something to try to “kill the vampire.” All of the combat controllers were in AFSOC [Air Force Special Operations Command], so we had . . . absolute control of . . . the combat control AFSC [Air Force Specialty Code], although our training pipeline was shared with pararescue. Air Education and Training Command had already told us that combat control was in a “death spiral” if we did not fix our pipeline. So, we discussed it, and with the advocacy of [AFSOC commander, Lt. Gen. Maxwell Bailey] . . . I can still remember him saying . . . “I want you guys to figure this out, and I want a bold stroke, and I will be your advocate.” So we basically broke the combat control pipeline, because it had grown into 18–22 months of what I call a “vampire.” The attrition rate was sometimes in the 90s, and I felt like we were not . . . screening and training people, we were just breaking people who were not genetically blessed.³

In 2006 General Holmes discussed the CCT indoctrination course, which was combined with the pararescue counterpart course held at Lackland AFB, Texas. Holmes recalled they had some students “that would get hurt and stay there for months.”⁴ So, in taking the AFSOC commander’s bold stroke, Buckmelter and Holmes planned to split

the combat control pipeline into a two-part program. The new objective became “a very respectable 3-level” (apprentice), achieved in 33 weeks beginning at Lackland AFB and followed by air traffic control school at Keesler AFB, Mississippi; airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia; survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) training at Fairchild AFB, Washington; and finally the combat control school at Pope AFB, North Carolina. All of that training prepared personnel for a new year-long training function at Hurlburt Field, Florida, known as Advanced Skills Training (AST). AST was designed to increase the combat controller’s skills to the craftsman (or 5-level) stage before he reported to his operational unit.⁵

Another advantage was that the time required to achieve the intermediate rating was no longer than the 18- to 22-month vampire Holmes had lamented. Some in the community felt that the standard had changed since transitioning to AST. Holmes, who succeeded Buckmelter as 720th STG commander in July 2001, asserted otherwise, stating that the leadership found “a different way to achieve the standard. In a crawl, walk, run manner, in a train-for-success manner; so that we didn’t just ‘break’ people and leave them in the pool or along the side of the road. If you had ‘screened’ and had the heart, then we were committed to training you.”⁶ As the group’s historian noted, in its evolution AST “drifted from its original goal of providing common training to ST operators [all specialties] to being a craftsman level awarding course [only] for combat controllers.” Still, some of the original training concept survived in that PJs attended AST for the course’s final phase.⁷

General Holmes and Colonel Buckmelter emphasized that the standard was never lowered nor the training made easier. Rather, the message to the students was, as Holmes said, “We will train you. It will be tough.”⁸ Buckmelter added that AST’s intent was to “take a young kid, and we’re going to bring him up to the same standard, but we’re going to take a little bit longer, instead of 12 weeks.”⁹ We “put the tougher standards at a point in the pipeline where . . . the individual [was] ready for it,” Holmes commented.¹⁰ Perhaps ironically, Holmes felt that in one way the new system was “harder than it was before,” because it placed even more responsibility on the trainee.¹¹ Holmes promoted the “Train for Success” mind-set among the AST cadre that echoed throughout the Air Education and Training Command and the Air Force. That philosophy stated that the instructor was committed to a student’s success, wanting him to succeed but

unwilling to change the standard. A deeply rooted attitude on the part of instructors that “I will help you succeed . . . I will train you,” meant that in most cases the student had to be the one to quit. “We wanted [a combat controller] to succeed in the training. So what you do is . . . train smart and ultimately build a stronger combat controller,” Holmes said.¹²

A key to training smarter was shifting some of the tougher standards to the first phase of AST training, at which time most students were ready for them. The first AST class, dubbed AST-01, graduated on 16 April 2002. There can be little doubt of the success of the training if the proof of concept has been taken from operational experience. In some cases, Holmes noted, new CCTs graduated from AST and went straight to war. A dramatic example of the AST-to-war transition occurred when AST-05’s class of nine CCTs graduated on 28 February 2003. Within 17 days, seven of them were deployed to Southwest Asia in time for the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom.¹³

The new AST graduates demonstrated skill and valor in combat. SrA Joseph Hepler summarized his experience by saying that although AST overwhelmed him at times, the training prepared him for operations in Iraq. Hepler, promoted to staff sergeant, earned a Bronze Star with Valor in December 2007 while attached to an Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) in Afghanistan. He controlled close air support (CAS) strikes against Taliban forces in support of a helicopter-borne assault landing of some 600 US/coalition Soldiers on the objective. In defending a checkpoint, he warned and then, in self-defense, killed an insurgent who threatened friendly forces.¹⁴

Funding for the school, regardless of the AST graduates’ work in Iraq and Afghanistan, remained a concern—partly because it was inseparable from the 720th’s reorganization plans. By 2003 the AST entity had not been officially established as a unit. Rather, it was considered a *flight* under the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron (STS) and had only a small operating budget. Instructors, mentors, support personnel, and personal equipment for each student were all “taken out of hide” from the parent squadron. “The unexpected deployment of members of AST Class 05 required they be fully equipped for desert warfare before they transferred to their operational squadrons. Consequently, the money for this came from the Flight’s small operating budget,” the 720th historian noted.¹⁵ “Unfortunately, as a non-warfighting entity, AST did not qualify for reimbursement of those funds once the Air Force and [Special Operations Command] repaid their units

for money spent upfront on the War on Terror, further depleting their already underfunded operating budget.”¹⁶

Additionally, the school required more instructors and mentors as the numbers of AST students increased. As had been the case since its opening in April 2001, the use of support, contractor, and Air Force Reserve personnel—traditional unit and individual mobilization augmentee (IMA) reservists—helped keep the school operating. However, the group historian wrote, the other “side of the coin” was that the 23rd STS “had one less operational team than it appeared on paper because the ‘bodies’ that would fill that team were instructing at AST.”¹⁷ Finally, in 2008 the school officially was designated a separate squadron, the “Special Tactics Training Squadron.”¹⁸

The first of the two group commanders with oversight of the CCT pipeline transformation was a highly-respected combat controller who began his career as an enlisted man. In 1971, the spring semester at Rutgers University—where Buckmelter was in his second year—ended abruptly in the midst of the antiwar protests on college campuses nationwide. Soon after, disheartened with college life and with a low draft number, Buckmelter enlisted in the Air Force. While undergoing training as a ground radio repairman, he learned of combat control and volunteered. In the end-of-course critique at the combat control school, Jeff Buckmelter had only a few gripes, particularly that students were required to paint vehicles—perhaps an early example of his concern for training smartly. One combat controller who earned the Silver Star, remembered him as a “strong father figure.”¹⁹ When asked about his most rewarding Air Force assignment, Buckmelter responded that as much as he loved commanding the 23rd and 24th ST squadrons, his most satisfying tour was commanding the 720th STG because he “actually got to see the changes [to the CCT pipeline] and see how it affected career fields . . . right up until 2007.”²⁰

While much of the ST emphasis on the home front between 1999 and 2003 rightly focused on AST’s evolution at Hurlburt, the entire PJ career field—roughly two-thirds of which was assigned to Air Combat Command (ACC) units—also experienced significant change. Many perceived that the PJ career field, enlisted-only for more than 50 years, suffered from a lack of advocacy at the higher ranks when it came to planning, budget battles, and the allocation of resources.²¹

In 2000, in response to interest from Secretary of the Air Force (SecAF) F. Whitten Peters, the Air Force announced the creation of the combat rescue officer (CRO) specialty. Secretary Peters viewed

the new specialty as a major step in resolving the problem of “the appropriate advocacy in leadership levels” for the pararescue field.²² CRO training lasted 53 weeks and included airborne and SCUBA schools as well as search-and-rescue techniques. Rather than the traditional PJ role of insertion behind enemy lines to make aircrew pickups, CROs usually remained at the air operations center to coordinate the mission and “optimize [the] combat recovery.” The CRO specialty designation, which shared the 13DX career field with combat control officers, became “special tactics officers” (STO). The officer career field was designated “Rescue and Control.”²³

Two of the first three CROs possessed an ST background. Vincent “Vinny” Savino, a combat control officer, served as director of operations for the 24th STS when several senior PJs he had worked with earlier in his career called him. He accepted the offer to undergo CRO training and went on to command the 38th Rescue Squadron at Moody AFB, Georgia, the first CRO-led squadron. His operations director was Maj Paul T. “Terry” Johnson, who also came from the ST community and was among the first three CROs. Promoted to lieutenant colonel in 2004, Johnson succeeded Savino at the 38th’s helm. Joseph G. Higgins, another early CRO, became the Air Staff’s CRO functional manager for the Air National Guard (ANG) in 2002. In a 2008 interview, Colonel Higgins noted that CRO-trainees underwent basically a traditional PJ course of instruction minus some of the medical training. Some of the early CROs were PJs who took an active-duty commission and proceeded to CRO training.²⁴

Stephen F. Colletti, a nine-year pararescueman, did that very thing. He was selected by the first CRO board in 2001. Following his commissioning later that year, then-Lieutenant Colletti was assigned to the USAF Weapons School at Nellis AFB, Nevada, and coauthored the Air Force’s tactics, techniques, and procedures manual for Guardian Angel/Special Tactics forces. During Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Colletti served as the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) representative within the Joint Search and Rescue Center for the reintegration of prisoners of war and was the subject matter expert for PJ employment issues.²⁵

Another pararescueman who followed a nontraditional career path was Frank A. Rodriguez, an enlisted PJ who left active service to complete his undergraduate degree. However, one day before his planned reentry into active duty in 2000, Rodriguez fell from his roof and was badly injured. He worked to restore his health and strength

until he was not only capable of being commissioned but also passing the STO selection course. Perhaps because the CRO career field was not yet established, Rodriguez trained and became qualified in combat control as a STO and earned recognition in several combat deployments after September 2001.²⁶

The third initial CRO was Lt Col Tom “T. C.” Phillips, a former PJ and later a rescue helicopter pilot. Even before qualifying as a CRO, he became the first CRO career field functional manager at the Pentagon. From personal experience, he knew that the PJ career field survived on an inherently unreliable system of end-of-year funding for equipment, repairs, and training. Colonel Phillips perceived that by bringing the three small career fields of PJ, CRO, and SERE into a single, officially designated “weapon system,” a reliable institutional funding and standardized equipping should result. He worked the package proposal through his chain of command and briefed the chief of staff of the Air Force (CSAF), Gen John P. Jumper, and one of his Air Staff leaders, Maj Gen Richard A. Mentemeyer in May 2003.²⁷

In May–June 2003, General Jumper approved the proposed PJ/CRO/SERE community—later called Guardian Angel—as an official USAF weapon system, and he asked why other small specialties that operated outside the wire—CCT, STO, tactical air control party (TACP), special operations weather teams (SOWT)/combat weather—had not been included in the concept. Phillips did not tell the chief that those career fields had turned down the offer, although they had. Jumper charged General Mentemeyer with standing up a team to pursue the new weapon system initiative, with the additional career fields under consideration. Thus, the “Ground Warrior IPT [Improvement Process Team]” was formed.²⁸ Later, Jumper and his boss, Secretary of the Air Force James G. Roche, decided that a more Air Force-sounding name was needed. By October 2003, a USAF steering committee began to address the “Battlefield Airmen” concept. By 2004 the Air Force leadership had settled on and began to publicize the new concept of Battlefield Airmen.²⁹

The initial three career fields—PJ, CRO, SERE—dealt with the rescue or recovery of personnel from “outside the wire” (i.e., from non-secure or hostile environments), so the term Guardian Angel may have seemed most appropriate. Colonel Higgins and Maj Scott Shepard, the AFSOC CRO functional manager, were directly involved in coming up with the name, probably sometime in 2003.³⁰

In October 2003, in response to a directive from General Jumper, all rescue-designated units in the continental United States were realigned from ACC and placed under AFSOC. The requirements for deploying PJs for conventional, as opposed to SOF, missions caused some frustration. Maj Michael E. Martin, STO, related that the authorization to deploy PJs on conventional missions required the approval of Joint Forces Command and ACC. Despite the realignment, combat search and rescue (CSAR) units were still to be organized, trained, and equipped as Air Force Rescue or combat air forces assets funded under Major Force Program (MFP) 4 instead of Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) MFP 11. Jumper's directive specified that Rescue assets, including PJs, were not USSOCOM assets and required the approvals.³¹

From 2000 to 2002 Marc F. Stratton, a combat control officer and future 720th STG commander, served as assistant division chief of the Air Staff's special operations division. He served as the combat control career field manager and the program element monitor for the funding sources. Colonel Stratton noted that the interest in standing up the CRO career field captured part of the Air Staff's attention during his tour. In his first year at the Pentagon, just prior to 9/11, he experienced a good deal of frustration. "I could not get anybody in the E-ring of the Pentagon to spell 'Special Tactics,'" he recalled.³² "We [ST] were falling out of favor, and there [were] a lot of other things going on . . . some of it had to do with the growth of the . . . Rescue squadrons and the CRO [specialty] was standing up. . . . It kind of took away some of the focus from those other ground guys."³³ Stratton felt that AST, which was "working out of trailers" and was not fully funded, operated "on scraps." Nevertheless, he viewed the new CRO specialty as a positive move for the combat search and rescue mission.³⁴

Of course, 9/11 changed the Pentagon's ho-hum attitude toward Special Tactics, whose operators soon became, as Stratton said, "the darlings of the Air Force."³⁵ On the morning of 11 September, Stratton was on the opposite side of the Pentagon from where the fuel-laden airliner struck, but his brother, a US Navy commander, was close to the site. They had just spoken on the phone, comparing thoughts about the attack at the Twin Towers, when the Pentagon was hit. In the confusion, following what was described as a dull rumble, someone reported that the Pentagon had been hit by a truck bomb. On his way out of the building, Stratton offered to help but was told to go home. He complied—his apartment was only a mile away—but

he planned to return for night duty with the crisis action team. Once he exited the building, he observed a chaotic scene, with nearly 23,000 employees leaving in every direction. Mass transit ceased, traffic was gridlocked, and frantic callers overwhelmed most communication channels. His brother remained at the scene for several hours “pulling people out and trying to assist.”³⁶ Colonel Stratton remembered the day as “a gorgeous September day” with “deep, dark blue sky,” except for the billowing black smoke spewing from the Pentagon’s ruptured west side.³⁷

As the 720th STG entered the new millennium, it boasted five active-duty squadrons under its purview: the 21st STS at Pope AFB; the 22nd STS at McChord AFB, Washington; the 23rd STS at Hurlburt; the 24th STS at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and the 10th Combat Weather Squadron (CWS) at Hurlburt. Additionally, the 123rd STS of the Kentucky ANG, based at Louisville’s Standiford Field, was aligned with the 720th. The 720th called on the 123rd’s members for augmentation when short of manpower to fill its deployment commitments. The group also provided functional management of two overseas squadrons: the 320th STS at Kadena Air Base (AB), Okinawa, Japan, and the 321st STS at Royal Air Force (Base) Mildenhall, United Kingdom. While the US Pacific Command (USPACOM) exercised operational control (OPCON) over the 320th, the US European Command maintained OPCON over the 321st STS.³⁸

The 10th CWS, the group’s newest squadron, experienced certain trials similar to its combat control brethren in earlier decades. In the late 1970s a number of US Army leaders, including Wayne Downing—eventually, USSOCOM’s four-star boss—viewed CCT as performing basically an administrative function. Two decades later, the Army perceived SOWTs in a similar light. The Army had ceased using tactical weathermen after the Southeast Asia conflict, thereby promoting its view of such personnel as staff weather officers (SWO). Lt Col Stephen A. Rose, 10th CWS commander, recalled his time as a young, motivated airborne-qualified SWO working for the US Army’s Seventh Infantry Division. “We were really nothing more than an airborne SWO. . . . I just had a set of Airborne wings,” he lamented. One of the battles the SOWTs fought for years was with the Army’s mind-set—“Why do we need to bring a SWO if we have the internet? I can look it up at CNN.com,” Rose said. Furthermore, its designation of Combat Weather rather than Special Operations Weather or Special Tactics could not help but muddy the waters for many outside the command. Since ACC

already owned certain tactical or *combat* weathermen, the designation *Combat Weather Squadron* under AFSOC failed to distinguish between the two commands and their respective missions.³⁹

In 2007 Lt Col Robert L. “Bob” Russell, a previous squadron commander, explained that the lack of a separate AFSC for SOWTs was the basic problem. He noted that without a separate AFSC to distinguish between conventional weather (in some cases, combat weather) and SOWTs, the latter had to be managed “as a population subset” within a single weather career field.⁴⁰ The lack of a distinctive AFSC also hindered SOWT members from securing specialized, tactical school slots. It took several more years to establish a pipeline for the grey beret wearers to institutionalize the production of combat ready SOWTs. The group/SOWT’s leadership envisioned the weather candidates joining combat control students at Lackland AFB and continuing through the pipeline together. The SOWTs earned their 3-level (apprentice) upon completion of the Combat Control School at Pope. The new apprentices then should report to Hurlburt and undergo AST to obtain the craftsman (5-level) training. Colonel Russell hoped that such a program might prevent future deployments of “guys who weren’t trained to go do what they were going to do. . . . But because they were qualified in weather tasks and they were Airborne qualified, off they went!”⁴¹

The lack of a distinctive AFSC and the related training problems constituted an identity crisis of sorts and probably contributed to other issues as well. When interviewed, a few ST members reluctantly acknowledged that their SOWT brothers had a legitimate SOF mission. That may have been the case among those combat controllers who viewed themselves as capable of doing almost everything expected of 10th CWS weathermen despite a lack of training in the critical job of weather forecasting. Colonel Buckmelter agreed, acknowledging that “there was a lot of animosity, especially with the combat controllers, because they all thought they were weather observers,” if not forecasters. One decorated CCT was not alone in expressing, “I had a Kestrel 4000 [weather meter] in my pocket and that suited me just fine.”⁴²

The use of the term “weather ninjas” within the AFSOC community caused another challenge for SOWTs. Though the term could be used jokingly, it also suggested a mind-set disdainful of the need for SOWTs to obtain specialized, tactical training. “Why are we trying to train and create a weather ninja?” Colonel Rose said. “We’re not doing all this to be a ninja, we’re getting this training so that when we

step ‘outside the wire’ with an [Army Special Forces] Operational Detachment Alpha on a combat reconnaissance patrol,” the SOWT will not be a liability for the rest of the team.⁴³ “When the chips are down,” Rose continued, and someone is needed to take over at a machine gun or provide first aid to a casualty, “you can’t pull out [your] ‘Air Force card’ and say, ‘Sorry, I don’t do that.’”⁴⁴ Rose emphasized that his goal was not to make his SOWTs into Rangers or Special Forces (SF). “That’s not our mission set . . . but we have to train them to a level where they can incorporate and be part of the team, because . . . when we go out there it’s all about being part of the team,” he said.⁴⁵

Given the cultural climate at the start of the decade, 10th CWS leaders recognized the need to improve training for their SOWTs. Since the mid-1990s the weathermen had been organized in five detachments collocated with Army Ranger, Airborne, or SOF units at Fort Lewis, Washington, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Fort Carson, Colorado, Fort Benning, and Fort Bragg. During 2001 then-Maj Bob Russell and SMSgt Bruce Perkins oversaw the development of a course to improve SOF weathermen’s tactical skills. In the summer of 2001 at Fort Campbell, the weather squadron’s Detachment 2 initiated weapons and small team tactics training for SOWTs to bridge the gap between the basic airborne and survival courses and the realities of an unconventional tactical environment. The next class, designated Initial Skills Training, took place at Detachment 5’s location, Fort Bragg, in the spring of 2002.⁴⁶

Course feedback indicated the need for more time devoted to field, and less to classroom, training. Two highly-experienced, enlisted SOF weathermen, TSgt Ronald Bouchard and MSgt John Farris, revised a more field-oriented course for the next year’s class. Farris, adept at talking himself onto various operational teams over the years, was the “ultimate B Team member,” willing to go anywhere and do anything, whether the job was related to weather support or not.⁴⁷ His only request was, “Give me one jump!”⁴⁸

While AFSOC’s weathermen worked to improve both their skills and credibility, combat controllers entered a new technological arena. Military use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) was on the rise, and the ST community took the initiative to determine whether small UAVs could serve its purposes. In 1998 Anthony “Tony” Tino and MSgt Tim Wilkinson of the 720th plans and programs shop began looking into a rotary-winged craft dubbed the CL-327 Guardian. The Guardian had to be capable of transmitting surveillance data via direct

video to the CCT flying the UAV from the ground and to an AC-130 gunship operating no more than 20 miles away. By the year 2000 the 720th STG began a one-year test program to develop a concept of operations for a Special Tactics UAV.⁴⁹

In January 2002 TSgt Christopher “Chris” Crutchfield, the son of retired CMSgt Richard “Rick” Crutchfield, arrived at Hurlburt to manage the UAV acquisitions. A veteran of the 1989 Panama operation, several years later the younger Crutchfield became the first Air Force member to fly a small (later termed “mini-”) UAV and was a natural choice for the UAV acquisitions job. Soon, Crutchfield had obtained a number of drones and tested ST and AFSOC drone requirements in what the command called “battlelab” experiments. By mid-2001 he sought funding from AFSOC and USSOCOM for an advanced ST drone. In the wake of the 11 September attacks, he finally secured funding for a single mini-UAV—an AeroVironment FQM-151A Pointer—to be used for training. He designed a training course for ST operators, and, by late 2002, the ST community proudly owned a dozen Pointer UAVs, which were distributed among the 720th’s operational squadrons. Although funding remained uncertain, the 720th STG achieved an innovative and potentially significant step forward in terms of battlefield surveillance capabilities by harnessing a rapidly evolving technology.⁵⁰

Like his fellow CCT Marc Stratton, on the morning of 11 September 2001 combat control officer James G. Cusic worked in the Pentagon when American Airlines Flight 77 struck the building. When his work section evacuated, he headed straight to the crash site. He found a mass casualty scene similar to what he had experienced in both training and real-world scenarios during his 20 years in the Air Force, first as a pararescueman and then as a combat controller. Of 65 people treated in the makeshift triage center in the Pentagon’s north parking lot, Cusic saved three lives. He assisted two others until they were evacuated to a hospital. Later, he led a team of volunteers back into the building to look for survivors. Unable to spend much time in the building because of the intense heat and smoke, his team found no survivors. “Natural instincts took over, and I just started to treat people. You train to do this your whole life, and I got the chance,” Major Cusic, who maintained his emergency medical technician qualifications, recalled.⁵¹ As the United States prepared to respond to the attacks, other combat controllers as well as ST pararescuemen

and special operations weathermen soon had the chance to perform their wartime jobs as well.

Abroad

Operation Enduring Freedom–Afghanistan

In the weeks immediately following the deadly attacks on American soil, the United States prepared to strike the Taliban-controlled country of Afghanistan. Although the Taliban controlled some 90 percent of the countryside, there were still pockets in the far north where anti-Taliban partisans resisted. The main anti-Taliban group had been led by Ahmed Shah Massoud, the Lion of Panjshir, until his assassination by al-Qaeda on 9 September 2001. Led by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's vision of combining air strikes with a small footprint on the ground consisting of special operators capable of working with anti-Taliban indigenous forces, the 720th group's ST men expected to play a major role. General Jumper, whose first day on the job as CSAF was 11 September, compared Afghanistan with the 1999 Kosovo conflict. General Jumper stated that if SOF forces proved valuable in Kosovo, it was "absolutely imperative . . . that you start with people on the ground" in Afghanistan. For the Air Force, that meant Special Tactics.⁵²

Within hours of the 11 September attacks, then-Col Bob Holmes, the 720th STG commander, began preparing to deploy the group's headquarters and squadrons to the theater of operations. Holmes declared his intent: "We're going to take this group flag and . . . plant it" in the middle of the combat theater. "This group headquarters is going to war with its squadrons," he said.⁵³ By November, he established his headquarters at Masirah, Oman, with elements of four deployed squadrons. Holmes also served as deputy commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force–South (K–Bar); in December he moved the 720th STG headquarters to Kandahar, Afghanistan. Supporting the Combined Task Force 58's deployment into Objective Rhino in southern Afghanistan, Special Tactics Officer Michael J. "Mike" Flatten ensured the runway "was lit within minutes for follow-on waves of KC-130's" bringing US Marines into the forward operating location in the desert, and he supported the task force's subsequent move to Kandahar.⁵⁴

On the night of 7–8 October, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) began. During its initial stages, the Air Force Operations Group began fully staffed 24-hour coverage. Because the initial Air Force participation was so heavily SOF-oriented, the special operations desk manned by Colonel Stratton and his office mates became a hub of activity. The hours were crazy. At one point, Stratton went three days straight “on caffeine and snack food” because it seemed everyone in the Pentagon suddenly wanted to know about ST—who they were and what they could do. Stratton often used his connections to acquire on-the-spot combat information, providing the background for the daily briefings to the leadership.⁵⁵

During the critical first three weeks of OEF, “‘antique’ B-52s and B-1s based in Diego Garcia” conducted 10–20 percent of all strike sorties, but they accounted for 65–76 percent of all weapons or tonnage dropped against Taliban targets. In the operation’s first year, although US Navy carrier-based aircraft conducted 75 percent of all strike sorties flown, the relatively small number of USAF heavy bomber sorties accounted for more than 70 percent of the tonnage dropped on targets in Afghanistan. Leading strategist Anthony Cordesman observed that only 10 B-52s delivered the majority of ordnance during the war’s first year. Some of the B-52 strikes were controlled by ST combat controllers like Calvin Markham.⁵⁶

By 15 October, William C. “Calvin” Markham arrived at Karshi-Khanabad (K-2) airfield, Uzbekistan. The husky six-foot-one ST member from Waukesha, Wisconsin, augmented an Army SF team, ODA 555, which had the primary task of identifying ground targets in support of operations against the Taliban regime. Markham was welcomed with open arms when 555’s team sergeant recognized his “swim buddy” from a SOF SCUBA course, thereby establishing the credibility and rapport so critical to joint special operations.⁵⁷

On the night of 19–20 October two Army SOF MH-47E helicopters from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment inserted ODA 555 into a site in Afghanistan’s Panjshir Valley, north of Bagram AB, some 30 miles north of Kabul. Meanwhile, another SF team, ODA 595, was inserted into an area south of Mazar-i-Sharif, in north-central Afghanistan. Detachments 555 and 595 thus became the first two SF teams to operate inside Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.⁵⁸ Markham described how the team’s specific mission determined which member was the lead:

You have a 12-man team and each person . . . brings a “piece of the pie.” . . . If this [had] been a sniper mission, the sniper on the team would have [been] the key guy. If this [had] been an engineering project for blowing up a bridge, the engineer would have had it. If this [had] been something medical . . . the medic on the team would have had it. But this particular mission was close air support, so that was my piece of the pie.⁵⁹

In other words, because of the particular nature of ODA 555’s assignment, Markham, its lone Air Force augmentee, was unquestionably the team’s “key guy.” Markham recalled that during his brief stay in Uzbekistan, some wanted to make the US troops “look like locals” in the Central Asian area of operations:

So they went out and bought these Uzbek civilian clothes, but . . . it is basically like that Saturday Night Live skit with Dan Aykroyd and Steve Martin, and that is how the Uzbeks dress. It was kind of like disco and *Dance Fever*. They had these tight polyester pants with bellbottoms and these big furry jackets. I just thought to myself, “This is not the way to go.” I went . . . and pulled out my rough civvies. I had Columbia pants, my Rockley hiking boots, my REI cold weather gear with the fleece and the wind-stopper jacket over it. Everybody said, “Oh you are going to stand out, and you are going to look like an American.” As soon as we got into the Panjshir Valley [Afghanistan], the first guy that walks up to us . . . [says] “Would any of you guys like some sausage?” So right away we knew that we were in friendly territory. . . . [He] had on some Rockley hiking boots and Columbia pants or North Face pants . . . an REI button shirt and fleece, and a ball cap, and it had the “Fire Department of New York” on it!⁶⁰

“From the night they infiltrated, Team 555 members began working with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and with Northern Alliance commanders to select targets for airstrikes,” a *Washington Post* article noted. The ODA’s first priority was to destroy the Taliban’s forces near Bagram airfield, where, for three years, the Taliban and Northern Alliance had faced one another from their respective entrenchments.⁶¹ Soon after arriving in Afghanistan, Markham found himself in Bagram’s control tower looking out incredulously at Taliban forces spread out just east of the runway as he prepared to call in air strikes against them. “As a certified air traffic controller,” he quipped, “there is no better place to be than in the tower.” The Alliance forces held the tower and the west side of the airfield. “It was just surreal and the most untactical place to be, and it went against all of my training and my learning. But it just ended up being where we could affect the most damage to the enemy because we had the biggest field of view from there,” he said. On that day at Bagram, Markham controlled some six flights of F/A-18 Hornets, with two to

four aircraft per flight. All carried laser-guided bombs (LGB). He estimated the Taliban's losses at 500, probably more Taliban than the Northern Alliance had killed in years. "We completely annihilated that whole front line that they had just east of the airfield," he added.⁶²

After clearing the Taliban forces, Markham's team cleared the 30-mile stretch between the airfield and the capital, Kabul, to the south. Markham had at his disposal a variety of Navy and Air Force aircraft, mainly F-18s, but also F-14 and F-15 fighters, B-52 and B-1 bombers, and AC-130 gunships. To best ensure that all the targets could be struck, 555 split into two sections and positioned themselves at observation posts situated less than two miles apart. From their vantage points using high-powered binoculars, they could see "small columns of men walking ridge lines, cooking fires burning near trench lines, artillery and mortar pieces and tanks glistening in the afternoon sun. . . . Sometimes they saw black-shrouded figures, which they took to be al Qaeda members."⁶³

Whenever Markham identified a potential target, he contacted the combined air operations center near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The request was then vetted to ensure civilians or certain prohibited sites remained undamaged. The *Washington Post* writer, alluding to Markham, credited a combat controller from the 720th STG with teaching the ODA "how to call in close air support using binoculars, a laser target designator, Global Positioning System devices and other equipment."⁶⁴

In the SF tradition, the team lived and closely worked with the indigenous forces, building relationships and trust. Markham recalled many days when his hosts shared the traditional Afghan meal of goat and rice, a fare of which he eventually grew tired.⁶⁵

By the first week in November, the numbers of US/coalition aircraft available for CAS were on the rise. But some US Army elements were disinterested in Air Force combat controllers directing their air support. Markham recalled one incident in which a battalion commander was told by his soldiers, "We don't need a combat controller, we can do this job ourselves." Although in one sense the assertion was true, it was a wasteful approach. Markham commented,

They were wasting aircraft. When an aircraft . . . got frustrated . . . they knew right away, hey, come on down to Bagram. I was open seven days a week and twenty-four hours a day, and I will get rid of your bombs for you. . . . Our call sign was Tiger-Zero-Zero-One, and they were Tiger-Zero-Zero-Two. . . . [CAS aircraft] would come down and [say], "What is the deal with Tiger-Zero-Zero-Two?" "Well," I said, "they should have a combat controller with them."⁶⁶

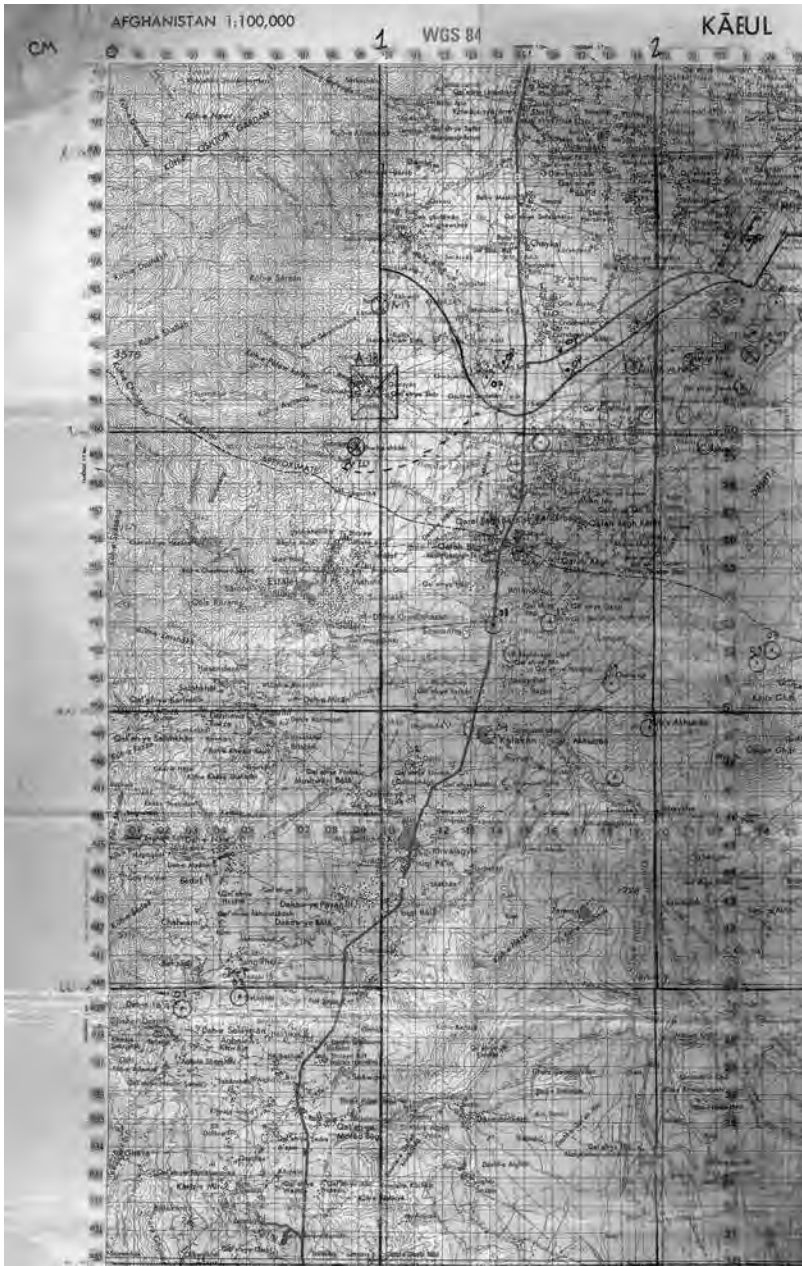


Figure 10.1. Map of Bagram, 2001. (Map courtesy of Calvin Markham.)

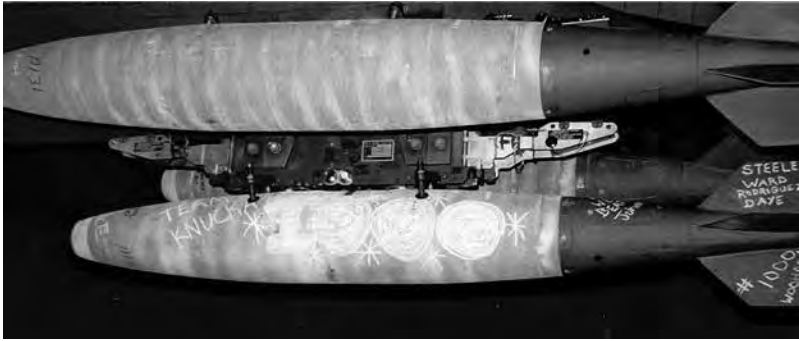


Figure 10.2. The 1000th Mk-82 bomb loaded by Scotty Briscoe’s unit since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom. Briscoe’s aircraft, “Rocky-61,” dropped its entire bomb load in support of US/Northern Alliance forces (including CCT Calvin Markham) on 12 November 2001 near Bagram Airfield. (Photo courtesy of Lt Col Richard “Scotty” Briscoe.)

By the second week of November, the Northern Alliance planned an offensive near Bagram. The Taliban, meanwhile, sought to counter the move. Initially, Markham anticipated a significant amount of dedicated air support. Just prior to the offensive, however, he was chagrined to learn that his air support was to be minimal. Markham likened it to showing up “to a gunfight with a knife.” On the morning of 12 November 2001, Northern Alliance forces lined up on the north side of the main east–west road at Bagram. The better-armed Taliban forces, several thousand strong, were situated on the south side of the 12-foot-wide dirt road. The Taliban began firing anti-aircraft guns, artillery, mortars, tanks, and small arms, producing significant casualties among the Northern Alliance. It was clear the Taliban were preparing to overrun their adversaries. At one point, one of the Northern Alliance generals jumped on top of Markham to protect him from the Taliban fire. When the surprised combat controller asked what was going on, the general said that if he were killed, another could take his place but if Markham was killed, the airplanes “would not come.” That simple, sobering analysis was quite correct. At that particular moment, Tiger 01, whom the Northern Alliance called the “minister of air,” needed emergency CAS. A lone B-52H bomber, call sign “Rocky 61,” contacted Tiger 01 and offered its assistance.⁶⁷

The B-52 had flown north from its base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, loaded with unguided 500-pound Mark-82 bombs—often

called “dumb” bombs—rather than the standard mix of Mark-82s and guided Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) or guided bomb units (GBU)-31s. The standard load was 27 Mark-82s, consisting of three racks of nine loaded internally; and 12 JDAMs attached to pylons, six under each wing. For unknown reasons the B-52 responding to the call carried no JDAMs. Rather, its bomb load was 45 Mark-82s, including nine under each wing (and 27 internal). The radar navigator, Richard “Scotty” Briscoe, recalled the urgency in Tiger 01’s voice and the seriousness of his request—in addition to being able to hear gunfire in the background.⁶⁸

After Tiger 01 determined the B-52’s bomb load, one of the first things he said was, “I need a two-thousand-meter string of bombs.”⁶⁹ Briscoe thought to himself, “Wow, that is over 6,000 feet. . . . What has this guy gotten himself into?”⁷⁰ Markham wanted the string on a two-two-zero-degree course just to the east of the main dirt road running from Bagram to the southwest. Markham had expected JDAMs and was sorely disappointed when told that the bomber was carrying only dumb bombs, especially given his team’s desperate straits. With no alternative, Markham asked for a string of all 45 of the 500-pounders along the Taliban’s front line. The bomber crew realized the desperate situation as well. “We knew whoever we were talking to on the ground was in pretty bad shape,” Briscoe said, “otherwise they wouldn’t be calling for unguided bombs from 40,000 feet only about 500 yards from their [own] position!”⁷¹

Even more disconcerting to Markham, the B-52 crew had to make adjustments for the strong winds. From Markham’s perspective, on top of a building that might be struck by a Taliban mortar at any moment, it appeared the bomber was well to the north of where it needed to be. In 2008 Briscoe described the challenges of dropping unguided bombs, especially from high altitudes:

Everything was focused on maintaining the proper ground speed and the proper heading, because if your ground speed gets off and if you don’t have the proper throttle setting then your spacing [between each bomb in the string] changes. . . . So we spent a lot of attention [on] our headwind/tailwind component to make sure ground speed was good. The other thing was zeroing in our heading. When you drop unguided weapons, the only thing that you can control is the release point, and that has to be as accurate as possible. Once you release the weapons, it is pure physics and wind.⁷²

To assist his crew with an easily identifiable initial point (IP), Briscoe chose Bagram airfield, some 15 miles northeast of Tiger 01's position and clearly visible from the air for the bomb run.⁷³

Tiger 01 was in a "danger close" situation, meaning that his own position was in danger of being struck if the bombs were even slightly off the target. His team expected the Taliban's assault at any moment and, thus, was anxious for the drop. Briscoe completed his calculations and checked them with the other navigator. The 45 bombs were set to fall in a string, 120 feet apart along the Taliban's front line. The aircraft commander (AC), banking over Bagram airfield, started the run-in on the requested two-two-zero-degree course. Briscoe contacted Tiger 01 and told him they were inbound from the IP. Briscoe recalled that several minutes later, he completed the checklist for the drop and everything looked good. At about 20 seconds prior to the drop, he heard, "Rocky 61, Tiger 01, have you guys dropped yet?"⁷⁴ The AC responded, "No, Tiger 01, we are about fifteen seconds out, why, what's wrong?"⁷⁵ At precisely 15 seconds the huge bomb bay doors opened automatically. Briscoe recalled those moments:

Here we are and the bomb bay doors are already open, and we are 15 seconds to release . . . and Tiger 01 comes back on the radio and says, "Well, I'm just not used to seeing you over my shoulder like that." I was still confident that we had everything set and ready to go. . . . So at eight seconds to release the aircraft commander called, "Withhold," which is our code word to stop the bomb run. I hit a couple of switches, and we stopped the bomb run with about six seconds to go.⁷⁶

The huge bomber immediately started "a big, right hand turn" back toward Bagram. Though frustrated, Briscoe knew his AC had made the proper call.⁷⁷ The AC reported to Tiger 01 that "we are off dry," meaning they had not released any weapons. Markham relayed his concern that it looked as though the bomber was flying over his position. Briscoe communicated to his AC the reason for the bomber's position, who then reassured Markham that Rocky 61 had to drop from seven miles back to ensure the bombs actually overflew his position prior to hitting the ground. Tiger 01 came back, "Roger that, cleared hot."⁷⁸ Six minutes later, Rocky 61 was again on its run-in. Briscoe made sure that the pilot did not cut the turn too short to allow enough time to complete the checklist and "zero out" the heading from the IP inbound. This time the bomber gave a 60-second-out call, and Markham repeated, "You are cleared hot."⁷⁹ Calvin Markham recalled the several minutes that followed:

I gave him “cleared-hot,” and it took [one minute] from the time he dropped them to when they hit. I said, “Hey, just give me a 10-second countdown because that way . . . we can at least say, ‘Hey, it was great knowing you’ or whatever.” He gave us that 10-second countdown and I rolled over on my back and I did not see anything. . . . Then it was a five-second countdown, and just then I see these objects . . . falling out of the sky. . . . I turned my head and laid it on the side of the roof, and right exactly where we told them to put them, [the bombs] hit. . . . Then this devastating explosion started going off. . . . It was like the A-bomb just went off. . . . We all stand up . . . and the dust settles and there is not one gunshot going on at all. Then all of a sudden . . . the Northern Alliance, all of the guys that were hiding behind these buildings . . . started cheering. . . . Then they started rushing, and just thousands of Northern Alliance guys started moving across this road.⁸⁰

Briscoe, who of course could not see what was actually transpiring on the ground, recalled that it was exactly 55 seconds from bomb release to impact—after which the B-52 crew did not hear from Markham for at least 30 seconds—a tense wait.⁸¹

Only minutes after Briscoe’s B-52 dropped its bombs and prepared to depart the area, Markham suddenly came on the radio: “Rocky 61, great hits, great hits, absolutely great hits!” Briscoe concluded that “whatever we had done, it solved their problem, and he was quite a bit happier about it.” In fact, Markham’s SF team members were so appreciative that when they recovered two US flags from the US embassy in Kabul, abandoned since 1989, they gave one to Markham.⁸²

In fact, the air strike ended the Taliban’s actions at Bagram. “All enemy action ceased,” stated Briscoe’s air medal citation. The battle damage assessments from Tiger 01 credited Briscoe’s B-52, Rocky 61, with some 1,200–1,500 of the enemy killed by air strikes. From shortly after the bombs hit until the next day, 13 November, Northern Alliance forces drove their jam-packed trucks literally “from the trench lines at Bagram” into the capital of Kabul. The Taliban had fled the city. *The New York Times* reported that “the Taliban left Kabul as they arrived five years ago, fading away in ghostly fashion at the dead of night, in their pickup trucks, with all the weapons they could carry.”⁸³ It was barely three weeks from the start of ground operations in OEF. An Army SOF publication later summarized that on the ground, the unconventional warfare campaign in Afghanistan was directed by a very small number of specialists—about 130 special forces, civil affairs, and psychological operations Soldiers “and a handful of Air Force special tactics [combat] controllers.”⁸⁴

Calvin Markham's 12 November mission was only one of a number of outstanding feats performed by combat controllers between late 2001 and early 2003. TSgt James Hotaling, a reservist and combat controller, was working as a Washington State trooper on 9/11. The next day, he volunteered for active duty; several days later, he had orders and prepared to deploy to Afghanistan. By November, Hotaling, the only Air Force IMA in the combat control career field, was traversing high mountainous terrain in search of Taliban hideouts while carrying a ruck weighing nearly 140 pounds.⁸⁵

In March 2002 Hotaling participated in Operation Anaconda, controlling aircraft using a grease pencil and surprisingly accurate old Soviet maps. Hotaling's team expected to be in the field for no more than five days but instead remained for two weeks. Food supplies ran low, including water, and the team had to use flavored drink mix for "snow cones for supper."⁸⁶ Another CCT, SSgt Joseph "Matt" Lienhard, recalled the mixed blessing of having a horse to share his burden. "My first horseback riding experience came three days after I got into Afghanistan. From then on, I rode every day until we arrived in Mazar-e Sharif," he recalled. "I figured if anything was going to happen to me in Afghanistan it was going to be a horseback riding accident. Almost everyone was thrown from their horse at one time or another."⁸⁷ Commenting with insight generally seen in more experienced operators, 26-year-old Lienhard continued, "They can give us all the high-speed gear they want and the best training in the world, but the key to success is the quality of the person in the field."⁸⁸

Combat controllers were not the only ST personnel that served in Afghanistan. In December 2001 several SOWT members deployed to Karshi-Khanabad (K-2) Airfield, Uzbekistan, a former Soviet air base. Among them was TSgt Steven D. "Steve" Adams, who supported the special operations aviation elements operating from the field. In 2007 Adams recalled that a few former Soviet air force weather personnel ran the weather station while he was there. He developed friendly relationships with the Uzbeks despite the language barrier and was assisted at times by an interpreter.⁸⁹

One of several challenges in forecasting weather conditions for flights operating over Afghanistan concerned the nearly complete lack of weather data in that country. The Taliban considered weather forecasting akin to sorcery and were alleged to have killed Afghan weathermen for simply doing their jobs. A SOWT officer, Joseph T. Benson—later, the 10th CWS commander—noted that in 2001 the

airport at Kabul possessed the only weather station in the country. Apparently the Taliban turned “a blind eye” to Kabul’s weather shop, perhaps because of the importance of the drug trade to their economy, which depended to no small degree on air transport.⁹⁰

Within several weeks, Adams had moved farther downrange into Afghanistan, where he and a handful of SOWTs used sensors to provide weather data in remote areas. Their sensors—ceilometers manufactured by the American communications company ORBCOMM—measured winds, temperature, dew point, pressure, and—with the help of a small infrared beam—visibility. A solar panel, or a short-lived battery if a panel was not an option, powered the sensors. However, SOWTs often experienced a time lag of several hours between the sensor’s data transmittal to a satellite and the data’s transfer to the Air Force Weather Agency at Offutt AFB, Nebraska, from where weather personnel worldwide could pull the data from a secure database.⁹¹

Although SOF helicopters dropped a number of sensors undetected (or so they thought) in remote areas that were unlikely to be compromised, many sensors disappeared within a short time. Local inhabitants may have found them and carried them off. Adams and other SOWTs sought a better system to deal with the high loss rate of sensors. In the western Afghan city of Herat, Adams convinced the local authorities under warlord Ismail Khan that it was in his best interest to ensure that weather sensors were left undisturbed. Otherwise, Adams said, United Nations (UN) flights that brought humanitarian goods to the region would be hindered. This was similar to the solution developed by special operations meteorologist Keith Grimes in Southeast Asia more than 30 years earlier.⁹²

Indigenous personnel were to leave the sensors undisturbed, except for occasionally cleaning the solar panels. As a backup in case the sensor malfunctioned or was stolen, Adams gave the warlord a Kestrel 4000, a handheld radio that captured basic weather data. Over the next several years, SOWTs transitioned to a compact and higher-quality iridium-based system marked by a more robust satellite constellation than that of the ORBCOMM sensors.⁹³

At about the time Adams dealt with the warlord in Herat, another SOWT arrived in southern Afghanistan. In January 2002 MSgt James A. Morello, who served as the SOWT for 3rd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), arrived at Kandahar Airport. He found the region’s weather conditions challenging, particularly the sand and dust. “The sand and dirt was like talcum powder in the

summertime,” he recalled.⁹⁴ The conditions at Kandahar, including its location, topography to the west, and meteorological and wind patterns, were such that “you could have visibilities that were fine, and then within 15–20 minutes you could go to nothing,” he observed.⁹⁵ Morello recalled instances of sand or dust storms, and zero visibility, with the sky looking like nighttime because it was so thick with dust and sand.⁹⁶

After Herat and a few days of (relative) rest and relaxation in Uzbekistan, Adams redeployed to the eastern section of Gardez, Afghanistan, around 20 February 2002. At the same time, SOWT Jason C. Beyer deployed to the vicinity of Khowst near the amorphous, lawless border of Pakistan’s federally administered tribal areas. The two SOWTs were attached to US Army SOF elements and provided observations and forecasting for air operations intended to eliminate remaining enemy forces from the Shahi Kot Valley in southeastern Afghanistan, a traditional stronghold for Afghan guerrillas. At the time, it was thought that Osama bin Laden might be hiding in the vicinity.⁹⁷

From 2–16 March Operation Anaconda became OEF’s first “prolonged ground battle in difficult terrain.” An undetermined number of several hundred enemy combatants were holed up in the cave-ridden 10- to 11-thousand-foot mountains overlooking the valley.⁹⁸ From their strong defensive positions, the enemy rained down mortars and small arms fire on the roughly 1,500-man US/coalition force as it entered the valley below. For days, friendly CAS aircraft poured ordnance into a small “postage-stamp size battle area,” one Air Force report stated.⁹⁹ The most significant action from the ST perspective took place on 4 March on a nearby ridgeline known as Takur Gar.

There, seven US special operators died during a helicopter insertion and its follow-on operations. Early on the 4th, during a nighttime insertion of a US Navy sea, air, and land (SEAL) team by an MH-47E—call sign “Razor 3”—the helicopter was hit by machine gun and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire just prior to the landing. The pilots struggled to abort the landing while maintaining control of the aircraft and looked through their night vision goggles for a nearby emergency landing site. As the Chinook transitioned from the aborted landing, SEAL team member Neil Roberts fell from the aircraft. The pilots flew the severely damaged helicopter to a level area about four miles away, where they managed a forced landing. Once on the ground—in an area of uncertain security—TSgt John Chapman, the lone combat controller on the aircraft, contacted an AC-130

and requested CAS coverage. He also “directed the gunship to begin the search for the missing team member,” Chapman’s posthumous citation stated. The enemy had captured Roberts; at some point, they executed him.¹⁰⁰

Within an hour of Razor 3’s forced landing another MH-47 picked up Chapman and the SEAL team. After dropping off Razor 3’s pilots at a nearby staging area, the second MH-47 returned to the ridge where Roberts had been captured. The aircraft landed without incident, and the SEALs and Chapman disembarked. Automatic weapons fire opened up from three directions as the helicopter lifted off. Chapman and one SEAL advanced on an enemy position and “killed two of the al Qaeda fighters in the process. When he reached the enemy position, Chapman turned his fire on a second enemy machine gun nest which was raking the SEAL team and exchanged fire with the al Qaeda fighters at close range,” reported *Air Force Magazine*. Chapman’s aggressive action enabled the SEAL team leader to break contact with the enemy and withdraw down the mountainside with his two wounded teammates.¹⁰¹

At about the time Chapman assaulted the machine gun positions, a third MH-47 arrived on the ridge with a rapid-reaction rescue force of nine US Army Rangers and three Air Force members—two PJs (Jason Cunningham and Keary Miller) and a combat controller (Gabriel Brown). RPG and small arms fire hit the rescue helicopter, and it crashed, killing four and wounding others. The sun had risen, and for the rest of the day the US forces—SEALs, Rangers, and Air Force members Cunningham, Miller, and Brown—fought from difficult ground, while CAS aircraft strafed and bombed enemy positions only a few hundred feet away. Brown directed CAS aircraft from behind a rock that provided only minimal cover from enemy fire. When the situation became dire, Brown directed air strikes against an enemy bunker, as his citation stated, “within 75 meters of his own position”—and to good effect. For his valor under fire, Brown earned the Silver Star. He later was commissioned and served as a STO. Sadly, in addition to Neil Roberts, six other Americans died at Takur Gar. Later, the troops renamed the battle area “Roberts’ Ridge” in honor of PO1 Neil C. Roberts.¹⁰²

Among those warriors who perished at Roberts’ Ridge were combat controller John A. Chapman and PJ Jason D. Cunningham. Chapman had been hit by enemy fire during or shortly after the SEALs’ withdrawal down the ridgeline. At the end of the 15-hour battle, the US forces found Chapman “where he had succumbed to numerous

wounds.”¹⁰³ The SEAL team leader credited Chapman with enabling his men to break contact with the enemy, thereby saving their lives. John Chapman was the first combat controller to die in Operation Enduring Freedom–Afghanistan.

Cunningham, one of the two PJs aboard the third helicopter, augmented the Rangers’ quick reaction force (QRF) into the hot landing zone (LZ). Initially, despite the fact that the helicopter represented a huge target, Cunningham remained inside the burning fuselage to treat the injured Rangers. Later, he moved the wounded outside to a casualty collection point that appeared somewhat more secure. While moving repeatedly under fire to care for the injured, Cunningham sustained mortal wounds but continued to direct their movement and care as long as possible. His award citation stated that “his distinct efforts led to the successful delivery of ten gravely wounded Americans to life-saving medical treatment.”¹⁰⁴ In ceremonies attended by the Air Force’s senior leadership, Chapman and Cunningham were awarded (posthumously) the Air Force Cross. Only the Medal of Honor carries greater weight.¹⁰⁵

Cunningham’s PJ team leader, a 24th STS member, earned the nation’s third-highest award for valor. When the third Chinook was downed by enemy fire, Miller, Cunningham, and an Army medic treated the wounded while the rest of the able-bodied team moved toward an enemy bunker. As the day wore on, the Rangers ran low on ammunition. At one point, Miller and an aircrew member took bullets and grenades from the dead and wounded and rushed them across an open area to the Rangers. CAS strikes by US/coalition aircraft kept the enemy at bay, but the LZ was too hot for an evacuation. The helicopter crews could only fly into the LZ to pull out the dead, wounded, and survivors after darkness had set in, thus ending the all-day engagement. For his actions, ST pararescueman Keary J. Miller—like his combat controller teammate Gabe Brown—was awarded the Silver Star. In 2017, Miller’s medal was upgraded to the Air Force Cross.¹⁰⁶

In early 2003 combat controller Douglas A. Thiel was attached to an Army SF team tasked to eliminate enemy fighters in an unidentified valley in Afghanistan. By day, the team conducted quick hits on nearby villages and suspected enemy houses. In a daily logbook, Thiel’s comments highlighted some of the emotions shared by team members as well as how quickly a much-needed “down day” could turn into another mission:

0300 [hours] dudes are making a lot of noise and wake me up. Team Sgt advises we will have day to reconstitute and get some rest. . . . [Col C, who arrived last night] advised we would not move south to [location omitted], as it's too dangerous.¹⁰⁷

We had the momentum and enthusiasm but this decision to slow or stop has brought the motivation down. I still have hope.¹⁰⁸

. . . Performed maintenance on GMV [ground motor vehicle] . . . Needed rest day. 1500 [3pm] [while] I was organizing my gear on the GMV the rest of the team comes out, in hurry, and starts loading out. I'm informed we are going out to a [OP, observation post] for the night. . . . Throw my gear into Hummer and away we go. 1530 arrive [OP] southeast . . . and set up for the night.¹⁰⁹

Later during the same mission, Thiel shifted gears to a humanitarian role, a traditional component of the hearts-and-minds campaigns long-conducted by unconventional warriors. Thiel wrote in his entry for 19 February 2003:

0350 roll out of bed and get ready for "grip and grin" operations in the village. [Later] have [chai, Afghan tea] and socialize with the ranking officials.

0800 during the visit to the bazaar we find two boys that are injured and need medical assistance. We load them into our vehicles and take them. . . . The [physician's assistant] examines the two boys and determines they need to be hospitalized or they will not make it. The MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] is alerted in Kandahar and we prepare the boys for helo transport. I coordinate with the TACP [tactical air control party] dude who is requesting the MED [medical] bird and advise him to expedite due to WX [weather] moving in.

1050 I work 1xAH-64 [Apache attack helicopter] and 1xUH-60 [Black Hawk utility helicopter]. The boys are secured and the helos depart for Kandahar. WX moves in and we get situated and take a break.¹¹⁰

ST Awardees

Classification issues prevented many ST missions from inclusion in this work. However, those missions mentioned in this chapter, down-graded or originally unclassified, are a sampling. Award selections at least hinted at the work of ST members. For example, of the 12 Air Force members selected as Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2002, two were ST members: MSgt Bruce Dixon (24th STS) and SSgt Alan Yoshida (23rd STS). In 2003 another combat controller, SSgt Jason Blodzinski of the 23rd squadron followed suit. That same year, the German air force awarded the Ehrenmedaille of the Bundeswehr to TSgt Brad Reilly, combat controller, and SrA Eric Giacchino, pararescuer, both of the 21st STS, for their services while attached to coalition forces in Afghanistan.

Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines

For generations, most of the nation's Muslims resided in the Sulu Archipelago in the southern Philippines. The Muslims in the archipelago, the poorest province in the Philippines, felt either oppressed or neglected by the Roman Catholic-dominated government. Many Muslims there did not consider themselves Filipinos and instead favored independence from Manila. Since the 1970s a Muslim independence movement in the south produced several splinter groups—one of which was the violent Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), a US Department of State-designated terrorist organization.¹¹¹

Concurrent with the ASG's founding in the early 1990s, the loss of major US military bases in the Philippines initiated a decade of slight military-to-military contact between the United States and its long-standing treaty ally. Multiple insurgencies in the Philippines had been active for years, but the 11 September 2001 attacks and the start of combat operations in Afghanistan heightened US interest in supporting its Southeast Asian allies in the fight against al-Qaeda and its regional affiliates. Prior to 9/11 USPACOM and its subordinate, Special Operations Command–Pacific (SOCPAC), began following ASG activities. The Islamist group had earlier financial ties to al-Qaeda, although more recent connections were murky. For instance, a brother-in-law of bin Laden led the Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiyah, an insurgent group with links to the ASG.¹¹²

By 2001 about 300 ASG fighters, mainly on Basilan Island, comprised the group's operational core. Additionally, the ASG enjoyed varying degrees of support from others throughout the archipelago. The island, roughly the size of Oahu (Hawaii), consisted of jungles, mountainous terrain, unsafe water, and an almost nonexistent road network. One military engineer described the terrain as nearly straight up and down in many places and without any infrastructure to assist travelers.¹¹³

The ASG's signature activity was kidnapping for ransom and occasionally conducting bombings and beheadings. Many Basilenos feared the ASG so much that they refused to risk traveling to take their goods to market. Some abandoned their homes and closed their schools, and the economy nearly shut down.¹¹⁴ The ASG kidnapped three US citizens in May 2001, which heightened the US government's interest in the insurgency. Martin and Gracia Burnham—a missionary couple celebrating their anniversary—and a third vacationer were

taken from a resort on Palawan Island. Shortly before the kidnappings, USPACOM approved a training program led by Okinawa-based US Army SF teams on the northern Philippine island of Luzon. The SF teams' objective was to train a counterterrorist unit of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Just days after completing its training in July 2001, the elite AFP unit known as the Light Reaction Company (LRC) deployed from Luzon to Basilan Island, where the three vacationers had been taken.¹¹⁵ SF leaders viewed the LRC as the best combat soldiers in the AFP, and extremely capable. But, despite the unit's skills and the killing of a number of ASG cadres in operations on Basilan between July and September 2001, the Burnhams remained captives.¹¹⁶

After 9/11 SOCPAC developed an operational plan that became the basis for Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines (OEF–P). After Afghanistan, the southern Philippines became the second front in the fight against al-Qaeda and its affiliates. At the same time, the United States hoped to do what it could on behalf of the Burnhams, mainly by assisting the LRC and other AFP units improve their counterterrorist capabilities. Due to Philippine political sensitivities regarding US intentions concerning permanent military basing in the islands, the United States agreed to officially terminate the operation within six months.¹¹⁷

Joint Task Force–510 (JTF–510) constituted the USPACOM commander's permanent crisis response force. When activated, the JTF fell under command of the SOCPAC commander, Brig Gen Donald C. Wurster, USAF.¹¹⁸ In January 2002 Secretary Rumsfeld ordered the execution of Phase I, OEF–P, which called for about 160 SF advisors to deploy to Basilan supported by the JTF headquarters from Zamboanga City, Mindanao. Most of the SF Soldiers comprised ODA teams, each one matched to a particular AFP battalion. Each ODA's role was to assess, advise, and train its AFP counterpart. The US goal in the Philippines was to make the southern islands a terribly inhospitable place for terrorists, a senior US officer said.¹¹⁹

Having Soldiers deployed to a combat zone to train an ally's forces was an unusual situation and one that required airpower and other support. General Wurster felt that having US forces on Basilan necessitated a helicopter MEDEVAC and a QRF capability on the ASG-controlled island, in addition to C-130 aerial tanker/transport aircraft and a forward-based surgical team. The C-130s, specifically MC-130P Combat Shadows, were responsible for air refueling the

JTF's helicopters and serving a MEDEVAC role. The additional JTF air assets included US Army MH-47E Chinook helicopters for inserting SF teams into Basilan and handling short-haul airlift requirements between that island and Zamboanga City. In case of an incident on Basilan, helicopter crews expected to airlift the QRF from JTF headquarters. Several intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft, mainly US Navy P-3s, kept an eye on the ASG. Beginning in mid-February, the JTF focused on inserting the initial teams into Basilan.¹²⁰

Tragically, on the night of 21–22 February, after the insertion of the last ODAs on Basilan, one of two MH-47s “flying in tandem” crashed into the water south of Negros Island, Philippines. Within minutes, two PJs from the second helicopter jumped into the pitch-black water in an attempt to save any survivors, but all 10 personnel aboard the mishap aircraft perished. The dead included two ST men, MSgt William L. McDaniel II and SSgt Juan M. Ridout, both of the Okinawa-based 320th STS. An Ohio native and Air Force veteran of 18 years, McDaniel served as the pararescue flight superintendent for the squadron. Ridout, originally from Texas, participated in the successful combat rescue of the F-16 pilot (Hammer-34) downed over Kosovo in May 1999 during Operation Allied Force. The two, although serving in a less publicized operational theater than their brethren in Afghanistan, became the first ST members to die in post-9/11 contingency operations.¹²¹

Despite the loss, the work of US special operators in the southern Philippines during 2002 produced favorable results. First, the capabilities of the Philippine armed forces, particularly the LRC, was increased; second, infrastructure improvements such as water wells and road work—although constructed with embedded US forces' requirements in view—improved the quality of life and economic opportunities for many Basilenos; and, third, the ASG appeared to lose much of its support, including a number of its fighters, and for the most part went into hiding for an extended period.¹²²

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Although the First Gulf War in 1991, known as Operation Desert Storm, was widely viewed as a victory for airpower, it left Saddam Hussein firmly in control of the Iraqi government. Throughout the 1990s, Saddam remained a thorn in the side of Washington, the West,

and the UN—particularly regarding the possibility of his developing or acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Although UN inspection teams located and destroyed some WMDs after the ceasefire in 1991, subsequent intelligence estimates indicated that Iraq maintained several dozen surface-to-surface ballistic missiles capable of carrying chemical or biological agents.¹²³

For the remainder of the decade, and into the next, a low-level conflict became the new standard in Southwest Asia. In 1991 the United States and its allies established a no-fly zone intended to protect the Kurdish minority in northern Iraq. A year later, they established a no-fly zone to protect Iraq's Shiite minority in the south. Historically, both groups suffered persecution and attacks under Hussein's regime. In 1996 (Operation Desert Strike) and 1998 (Operation Desert Fox) the United States and its allies conducted retaliatory strikes against Iraq. In the latter case, Saddam ejected the UN Security Council arms inspectors from his country, precipitating the retaliation.¹²⁴

After the 11 September al-Qaeda attacks, concerns of Iraqi intentions increased. Some intelligence reports supported the view that Saddam was close to acquiring WMDs. Many believed the Iraqi dictator had no hesitation in placing such weapons into the hands of al-Qaeda to use against the United States and Israel. That Saddam remained adamantly opposed to UN arms inspections compounded those fears. By late 2002 Washington and its allies prepared to remove Hussein from power if he refused to leave the country on his own initiative. Finally, Pres. George W. Bush issued an ultimatum for Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq or face an attack by US/coalition forces; Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced on the night of 19–20 March 2003. Unlike the 1991 operation, the start of US/coalition air strikes in 2003 did not precede the ground attack. Of five fronts planned for the attack on Iraq, SOF played a leading role in three of them and participated in the other two. The two fronts where Air Force ST played the largest role were in the north, where SOF participated with Kurdish forces, and in the west, where teams infiltrated the desert and secured what USCENTCOM commander Gen Tommy Franks, US Army, called the "SCUD baskets."¹²⁵

One mission in Iraq's western desert secured an airfield (or landing zone) from which SOF fixed-wing MC-130 Combat Talons could operate in "deep infiltration" activities. An Army Operational Detachment-Bravo (ODB 570) was assigned the task. SF ODA 574, augmented by

four Air Force combat controllers from the 23rd STS, was under its operational control.¹²⁶

The US Army Special Operations Command historian noted the experience level of the combat control team. “Three members of the team were veterans of Afghanistan with first-hand experience operating desert landing strips. The savvy controllers cautioned that simple dirt landing strips tend to become badly rutted after only a few landings, and the mission profile for this operation called for multiple aircraft and multiple sorties.”¹²⁷

The CCT, after careful analysis, identified a hard surface airfield at Wadi al Khirr in southwestern Iraq as a potentially suitable site for the Combat Talons. The team surmised that the main runway or a parallel taxiway might provide a suitable landing strip. The nearest known enemy forces were Iraqi border posts located nine miles away.¹²⁸

Although originally planned for execution two nights prior to President Bush’s deadline on 19 March, a shortage of air assets caused the Wadi al Khirr mission to be delayed until the night of 19–20 March. Air Force MH-53J Pave Low helicopters flew the Green Berets and combat controllers through “a somewhat crowded night sky” to the airfield’s vicinity. The helicopters landed about 10 miles from Wadi al Khirr and dropped off the team members who transferred to several tactical vehicles for the approach to the airfield. Once the CCT made their way to the airfield, they conducted a quick survey. Most of the runway was intact, although previous bomb hits nearby had left “huge slabs of concrete and massive amounts of dirt” on its surface, rendering it unusable. The combat controllers decided that even though they had to clear the parallel taxiway of debris, it was much less work to prepare than the main runway and was well-suited for MC-130 operations. The combat controllers reported their findings, and the rest of the SF security team, aboard the orbiting MH-53s, was dropped off near the high ground surrounding Wadi al Khirr. From there they could defend the men who were already beginning to clear the landing strip, should the enemy discover them.¹²⁹

Although the team planned to remain under cover during daylight hours, the massive task of the debris removal had to be completed—a prerequisite to safely landing fixed-wing aircraft. The CCT decided to risk working in the daylight, experiencing one close call on the afternoon of 22 March when two civilian vehicles, most likely water trucks driven by Bedouin shepherds, drove by. By late afternoon, the CCT began providing aircrews with Wadi al Khirr’s landing strip layout, the

weather conditions, and “digital imagery via e-mail.” After dark, the controllers placed “infrared strobe lights [as runway lights] visible only to incoming pilots.” One primary controller handled air traffic control duties while two others guided the aircraft after landing, directing them to the taxiway’s turnoff point and then to the parking area.¹³⁰

The first aircraft landed at 2210 local, 22 March, followed by another two minutes later. Within 15 minutes, both aircraft were offloaded and ready for takeoff. Their arrival and departure blew much of the remaining debris off the landing strip, making the landings easier for follow-on aircraft. Two more flights of two aircraft each arrived at 20-minute intervals, bringing in an ODA for another nearby mission, an intelligence team, and a CBS television crew. At 0100, 23 March, six MC-130 aircraft landed in flights of two, the first flight delivering a fresh ODA to relieve ODA 574 of the airfield security mission, the next two bringing in more SOF teams. Once its relief was in place, ODA 574 transferred responsibility to ODA 572 and departed, bound for Kuwait, on the last two of the six Combat Talons. The Army Special Operations Command historian summed up the operation at Wadi al Khirr as “an unqualified success and a testament to the planning and operational expertise of special operators from both the Army Special Forces and the Air Force. It was a bold move to establish a clandestine airfield deep in enemy controlled territory.”¹³¹ Major Boyd Sinclair of ODB 570 expressed, “I wouldn’t call it Desert One [referring to the desert landing strip established in Iran during Operation Eagle Claw in 1980], but it got five teams on the ground ahead of the conventional force and put eyes on the target.”¹³²

Lesley R. Rouell, a task force weather forecaster, was among those ST members that participated in OIF prior to the official termination of major combat on 1 May 2003. In March, Rouell joined a Ranger–82nd Airborne force tasked with a mission in southern Iraq near the Haditha Dam. His element escorted and provided security for the Army’s High Mobility Rocket System and intelligence for the Rangers’ Tactical Operations Center. On the opening night of hostilities, the Ranger–Airborne force crossed from Saudi Arabia into Iraq. Rouell, the ranking man in his Humvee, commanded the vehicle and was responsible for the two Ranger gunners, a communications specialist, and a driver. “I had the responsibility of a Ranger NCO. That was my vehicle. . . . if anything happened, it was my fault,” he said.¹³³ The mission lasted more than a week, during which time Rouell reported on the high winds and sandstorms on 25–26 March that hindered operations for

three days. Because of the extreme weather conditions “at night you never would take your hand off your vehicle. You stayed inside it,” he commented. To leave one’s vehicle and remove one’s hand from it risked not finding it again.¹³⁴

Rouell worked in the south, but another SOWT played a pivotal role in northern Iraq. Several days prior to a jump mission planned for 26 March, SSgt Tom Dishion deployed to Bashur Airfield, Iraq, with the United Kingdom-based 321st STS personnel as part of an ST team. The combined/Joint Special Operations Task Force–North planned to drop nearly 1,000 Rangers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade (–) onto the airfield at Bashur.¹³⁵ A 20-man element from the US European Command’s 86th Contingency Response Group, an Air Force unit tasked with opening the airfield, accompanied the Rangers. The Iraqi northern front was small compared with the southern front but was intended to complicate Hussein’s defensive plans by giving him another force to contend with—especially in an area inhabited by independence-minded Kurds.¹³⁶

Dishion began taking weather observations upon arrival. As the mission approached, he reported hourly using an iridium phone, and the data was uploaded instantly into a secure database. But about 24 hours prior to the mission the weather began to deteriorate. At that point the weather at Bashur still met the minimum requirements for the Air Force’s C-17 crews, who needed a 2,500-foot ceiling and four miles of visibility for the night jump.¹³⁷

In 2007 Maj Joe Benson, who four years earlier served as the lead special operations meteorological and oceanographic officer at USCENTCOM, recalled that on the morning of the jump, still some 12 hours away, the weather began dipping below minimums. In addition, the winds, a critical factor for a jump mission, began to pick up. Rain and then snow followed.¹³⁸

Despite the conditions, Benson’s forecasters predicted a narrow window in which weather conditions should improve enough to accomplish the jump. However, when the 15 C-17s departed from Aviano AB, Italy, four hours prior to the drop at 2000 local, Bashur’s weather remained below minimums. “The weather was bad when we took off, and the weather was bad two hours out,” Col Robert R. Alardice, C-17 mission commander, recalled.¹³⁹ At one point Dishion reported the ceiling at no higher than 1,000 feet and visibility about one-half mile. At about an hour prior to the scheduled drop, Brig Gen Gary Harrell, commander of Special Operations Command Central,

queried Benson on whether the mission was going to go or if he thought the C-17s might have to return without dropping. Benson asked for a little more time for Dishion to continue reporting from the drop zone. “The weather changed about thirty to forty minutes prior to the C-17s’ arrival. . . . Tom [Dishion], by being on the ground, could detect pressures rising and . . . [the] visibility . . . starting to come up. . . . By the time they got there the ceiling had come up [to 2,500 feet] . . . and the winds had dropped down to three or four knots. They were able to get the jump off,” Benson recalled.¹⁴⁰ Nearly 1,000 paratroopers to his north now complicated Hussein’s defense. Having a SOWT on the ground at the drop zone communicating in real-time with command-and-control elements proved advantageous for task force decision makers.¹⁴¹

The airfield at Irbil, Iraq, lay about an hour’s drive southwest of Bashur. CMSgt Paul “Vinnie” Venturella of the 321st STS deployed there in April 2003 and worked with his squadron commander managing a number of combat controllers then augmenting SF ODAs in northern Iraq. Chief Venturella recalled that Maj Eric D. Ray had personnel from four ST units under his command at Irbil.¹⁴² Ray “had 16 combat controllers killing bad guys from the air and doing CSAR,” Venturella remembered with relish.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, as US and coalition forces prepared to enter Baghdad on 8 April, ST pararescueman Joshua A. Swartz accompanied a SOF advance reconnaissance vehicle element. The team was situated about 125 miles north of Baghdad near the city of Bayji, one of Hussein’s strongholds. Swartz and several others were wounded when his element came under attack. An official Air Force report stated that the PJ pulled a wounded Ranger from a burning vehicle and rendered medical assistance without regard for his own safety. He also provided information that facilitated the rescue of an eight-man team that became separated from the main special operations force. For his actions, Sergeant Swartz was recognized as the Air Force recipient of the Noncommissioned Officers Association’s Vanguard Award.¹⁴⁴

Shortly after US/coalition forces captured Baghdad in early April, a career combat control officer, Col Ronald L. Watkins, deployed with part of the 447th Air Expeditionary Group—which he commanded—to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). His group took a small, austere civilian airfield not far from the Iraqi border and turned it into a special operations deployment base. In a herculean effort over the course of about nine days, conventional Air Force Rapid Engineer

Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers (RED HORSE) and other combat support teams readied the airfield for a joint special operations task force that expected to operate in western Iraq. With the occupation of Baghdad that month, BIAP became “the strategic mobility hub for the theater,” Watkins recalled, hence his move to that location. He described the challenges as “repairing battle damage on the operating surfaces and trying to bring in and establish an operating hub . . . for the Air Force, nongovernmental organizations, as well as the Army.”¹⁴⁵

As the senior officer at the new field, sadly, it was not long before he designated it in honor of a 24th STS combat controller. A young, dedicated CCT, SSgt Scott D. Sather died on 8 April 2003 during a classified mission in Iraq, the first Air Force enlisted member to die in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Watkins named the field Camp Sather. It seemed fitting for Ron Watkins’s unit to reside there. Scott Sather had twice served in the same unit with Watkins, the second time when the colonel commanded the 24th STS.¹⁴⁶

Thus, Air Force ST members—weathermen, pararescuemen, and combat controllers—participated with distinction in the opening weeks of OIF. Years of combat operations followed, and the end is not in sight. Most of their accounts, and many names, must await declassification before they can be released. The few vignettes in this chapter are only a snapshot of the work of the Air Force’s Special Tactics Airmen. Their service—and in some cases their loss—at the “tip of the spear” goes on daily, largely unrecognized.

Table 10.1. Air Force combat controller (1962–67) and Special Tactics (2002–15) fatalities in contingency operations

Name	Date of Loss	Unit Assigned	Country
TSgt Richard L. Foxx	killed in action (KIA), 15 October 1962	Det 2A, 1 ACG	South Vietnam
A1C Andre R. Guillet	missing in action (MIA), 18 May 1966	1 ACW	Laos
MSgt Charles A. Paradise	KIA, 4 September 1967	8 APS	South Vietnam
A1C Gerard L.J. Gauthier	KIA, 4 September 1967	8 APS	South Vietnam

Table 10.1 (continued)

Name	Date of Loss	Unit Assigned	Country
A1C William E. Jerkins	KIA, 4 September 1967	8 APS	South Vietnam
TSgt Frederick L. Thrower	KIA, 4 September 1967	8 APS	South Vietnam
SMSgt Paul L. Foster	MIA/KIA, 29 December 1967	1 ACW	Laos
MSgt William L. McDaniel II	KIA, 22 February 2002	320 STS	Philippines
SSgt Juan M. Ridout	KIA, 22 February 2002	320 STS	Philippines
TSgt John A. Chapman	KIA, 4 March 2002	24 STS	Afghanistan
SSgt Scott D. Sather	KIA, 8 April 2003	24 STS	Iraq
Capt Derek M. Argel	KIA, 30 May 2005	23 STS	Iraq
Capt Jeremy J. Fresques	KIA, 30 May 2005	23 STS	Iraq
SSgt Casey J. Crate	KIA, 30 May 2005	23 STS	Iraq
SrA Adam P. Servais	KIA, 19 August 2006	23 STS	Afghanistan
TSgt Scott E. Duffman	KIA, 18 February 2007	24 STS	Afghanistan
TSgt William H. Jefferson, Jr.	KIA, 22 March 2008	21 STS	Afghanistan
SSgt Timothy P. Davis	KIA, 20 February 2009	23 STS	Afghanistan
SrA Daniel R. Sanchez	KIA, 16 September 2010	23 STS	Afghanistan
SrA Mark A. Forester	KIA, 29 September 2010	21 STS	Afghanistan
TSgt John W. Brown	KIA, 6 August 2011	24 STS	Afghanistan
SSgt Andrew W. Harvell	KIA, 6 August 2011	24 STS	Afghanistan
TSgt Daniel L. Zerbe	KIA, 6 August 2011	24 STS	Afghanistan
SSgt Forrest B. Sibley	KIA, 15 August 2015	21 STS	Afghanistan
Capt Matthew D. Roland	KIA, 26 August 2015	23 STS	Afghanistan

Adapted from AFSOC/HO and 720th STG/HO files, Hurlburt Field, Florida; Combat Control Association records, courtesy of CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired; and CMSgt Wayne G. Norrad, USAF, retired, e-mails to the author, various dates. Note that since 2002 only those individuals assigned (not attached to or who augmented) to ST units and killed in contingency operations were included. I am unaware of any ST assigned members from 1987 through 2001 that perished in contingency operations—Panama (1989), Iraq (1991), Somalia (1993), Serbia (1999), and Afghanistan (October 2001–February 2002).

Special Operations Warrior Foundation “Whomper Stomper” Fundraiser

Calvin Markham had long been aware of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation (SOWF). The foundation's antecedent began after eight special operators died at Desert One in 1980. Col John Carney led the foundation from 1998 until retiring at the end of 2013. As of this writing the SOWF has funded the college tuition for more than 160 college graduates. Markham acknowledged that he had not been involved in the foundation, but after the loss of John Chapman and Jason Cunningham in March 2002, he began to appreciate SOWF's importance to the ST community. He decided to support the foundation's work of providing for the college education of the children of ST warriors killed in the line of duty. With the help of his sisters Sharon and Teri and his brother-in-law Bob, Markham started an annual golf outing as a fundraiser that has caught on and grown into a major local event. The golf outing is called the “Whomper Stomper Open” in honor of his childhood nickname. Fuzzy's Bar and Grill in Waukesha, Wisconsin, holds a Friday night fish fry fundraiser where Markham tends bar and shares a few war stories. A Reserve Officer Training Corps color guard from the University of Wisconsin–Madison opens the outing on Saturday and the Green Bay Packers annually send a signed football to be raffled. The event at the Olde Highlander Golf Club has grown each year and as of 2010 has raised over \$40,000 for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. In 2007 Scotty Briscoe, whose B-52 air strike saved ODA 555 in 2001, began attending the local event. One Olde Highlander employee familiar with the Stomper noted there are a lot of laughs each year mixed with a few tears as fallen comrades and their families are remembered. At the sixth annual SOWF dinner, Markham was recognized as the volunteer of the year.

Source: Briscoe, interview; Markham, interview; Olde Highlander Golf Club, Oconomowoc, WI, telephone conversation with the author, 6 July 2010; Sharon Bremser (Markham's sister), telephone conversation with the author, 8 July 2010; and Briscoe, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: SOF Battlefield Airmen book [this was the original title for the manuscript],” 5 October 2011. Although informally considered a part of the ST community when he perished in Operation Anaconda, pararescueman Jason D. Cunningham was not assigned to an ST unit, but rather to the 38th Rescue Squadron: Sean D. Naylor, “Honor the Fallen, Air Force Senior Airman Jason D. Cunningham,” *Military Times*, n.d., <http://thefallen.militarytimes.com/air-force-senior-airman-jason-d-cunningham/262885>.

TSgt Lesley R. Rouell

Lesley Rouell, reared in the small town of Pryor in northeastern Oklahoma, grew up with a fascination for the thunderstorms and tornadoes native to the region. In his junior year of high school, he talked with an Air Force recruiter who promised him the weather career field. “Being from Oklahoma, I loved the thunderstorms, and I was good at natural sciences. So I went straight into weather,” Rouell recalled. Between 1991 and 2002 he served in several weather assignments, including a tour at Fort Bragg, where he supported the 82nd Airborne Division as a weather forecaster. In late 2001 Rouell and SOWT member Pradipan Boonyobhas deployed to Afghanistan. Most special operations weathermen were employed individually with the US Army’s Airborne or Ranger units they supported, but in this case the SOWT actually consisted of two weathermen. A memorable aspect of their time in Afghanistan was the three-day snowfall they experienced in the mountains; in many areas, the snow was waist-high. “We actually had to take over a farmer’s barn to survive in. . . . That is how much it had snowed,” he said. After returning stateside, in July 2002 Rouell reported to Fort Benning, Georgia, where he joined Detachment 4, 10th CWS, which provided weather support to the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment.

Source: TSgt Leslie R. Rouell, USAF, interview with the author, 23 May 2007; and Rouell, official biography.

Notes

1. History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chapter 2, 1–2, including quote, AFHRA call no. K-GP-720-HI. Note that in 1992 the 1720th STG was redesignated 720th STG. Although in various periods official documents used either “STGP” or “STG” for “special tactics group,” I have elected to use “STG” throughout this manuscript.

2. Brig Gen Robert H. Holmes, USAF, interview with the author, 8 November 2006, including “death spiral” quote (quoted by Holmes); Col Jeffrey Buckmelter, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 14 December 2007, including “death spiral” quote (both Holmes and Buckmelter referred to a “death spiral” in the career field); Capt Tom Montgomery, “Fallen Airmen Memorialized Forever,” *AFSOC News*, 31 May 2007, <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/163340/fallen-airmen-memorialized-forever/>; and History, AFSOC, January–December 2000, vol. 1, 98–99, AFHRA call no. K317.01. The AFSOC article also referred to a “death spiral” in the CCT and PJ pipeline training prior to establishment of the Advanced Skills Training (AST) program. Note also that low recruitment of CCT candidates was a major issue in fiscal year 1999. The Air Force’s CCT recruitment goal was 366, but

only 42 candidates were secured (11 percent). The numbers for PJs were somewhat better but still low: History, AFSOC, January–December 2000, vol. 1, 99. *Note that all AFSOC histories cited herein are under AFHRA call no. K317.01.*

3. Holmes, interview, including quote; Holmes, official biography; and History, AFSOC, January–December 2001, vol. 1, 197. Lt Gen Maxwell Bailey approved the AST initiative in January 2001, during Buckmelter’s command of 720th STG.

4. Holmes, interview.

5. *Ibid.*, including quote; and Buckmelter, interview.

6. Holmes, interview.

7. History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chapter 2, 7–8. AST included HALO, pre-SCUBA, and SCUBA training.

8. Holmes, interview.

9. Buckmelter, interview.

10. Holmes, interview.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*; History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chapter 2, 8; and History, 720 STG, AFHRA call no. K-GP-720-HI, January–December 2003, 14–16.

14. History, 720 STG, January–December 2003, 17; and Bronze Star with Valor citation for SSgt Joseph J. Hepler, USAF, copy in AFHRA files.

15. History, 720 STG, January–December 2003, 5, 17–18.

16. *Ibid.*, 17.

17. History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chapter 2, 9, including quote; and History, 720 STG, January–December 2003, 19.

18. Mr Timothy M. Brown, AFSOC/HO, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: Special Tactics Training Squadron – 2008,” 18 May 2017.

19. Buckmelter, interview; Buckmelter, biography; A1C Jeff Buckmelter, memorandum, subject: “Critique Questionnaire,” in historical files, Combat Control School, Pope AFB, NC, n.d.; and MSgt William C. Markham, USAF, interview with the author, 16 July 2007, including quote. The author is indebted to Mr. Ron Brown of the Combat Control School for his gracious assistance in this project, including granting access to the school’s historical files.

20. Buckmelter, interview.

21. The lone exception was Dr. Craig D. “Doc” Silverton, an Air Force Reserve officer who completed all PJ requirements prior to serving a tour in the 24th STS in the 1980s (see chapter 5, this work).

22. Jennifer Palmer, “Cool Career, Combat-Rescue Career Field on the Way for Officers,” *Air Force Times*, 23 October 2000, 12–13. Initially, the new specialty was known as “Personnel Recovery Officer.” In 2000 the name was changed to “Combat Rescue Officer.”

23. *Ibid.*, including quotes (quote 1 of Lt Col Ken Rodriguez, quoted by Palmer); and History, AFSOC, January–December 2000, vol. 1, 51–52. I am indebted to CMSgt Paul D. Miller, USAF, retired, of the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency for a bullet background paper on the evolution of the CRO specialty: Miller, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: T. C. Phillips,” 3 August 2010.

24. Palmer, “Cool Career,” 13; Darrel D. Whitcomb, Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, oral debrief with Lt Col Vinny Savino, USAF, 7 October 2003, copy of transcript

in AFHRA files; Col Joseph G. Higgins, USAF, interview with the author, 9 January 2008; and Higgins, e-mail to the author, subject: "RE: Guardian Angel doc's," 4 August 2010. It was 2008 before the first "actual CRO course" was held: CMSgt Ryan J. Beckmann, USAF, retired, of the Department of Homeland Security, e-mail to the author, subject: "Guardian Angel background," 5 August 2010. I am indebted to retired Colonel Whitcomb for sharing his sources and materials as we have worked on somewhat parallel projects.

25. Capt Stephen F. Colletti, USAF, interview with the author, 24 July 2007; and Colletti, official biography.

26. Capt Frank A. Rodriguez, USAF, interview with the author, 7 December 2006; and Rodriguez, unofficial biography.

27. Lt Col Tom "T.C." Phillips, USAF, retired, e-mail to the author, subject: "RE: Guardian Angel doc's," 4 August 2010; Higgins, e-mail, 4 August 2010, including quote; and Higgins, interview. General Mentemeyer served in Headquarters USAF, Air and Space Operations.

28. Gen John P. Jumper, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21 July 2008; Higgins, e-mail, 4 August 2010, including quote; Higgins, interview; Phillips, e-mail, 4 August 2010; Beckmann, e-mail, 5 August 2010; and Message, [USAF] CC to Various Offices (CC, CV, CVA, XOO etc), subject: "Corrected Copy: Activation of Combat Rescue Officer (CRO) Career Field (13DXA), Based on Corona Fall Decision CF00D-12," 4 June 2003. This message stated, "The Air Force will establish CRO/PJ/SERE as a weapons system."

29. Message, [Pentagon] Mailroom to AFXOOS, subject: "Creation of Battlefield Airmen Working Group and Battlefield Airmen Steering Committee," 8 October 2003, including quote; James G. Roche, secretary of the Air Force, *The Secretary's Vector*, 1 March 2004; and Beckmann, e-mail, 5 August 2010. It was 2005 when USAF issued a Battlefield Airmen directive: Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 10-35, *Battlefield Airmen*, 4 February 2005.

30. Higgins, e-mail, 4 August 2010, including quote (quoted by Higgins); and author's personal observation while assigned to 33rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, 1982-84. Although the SERE specialty was included in the Guardian Angel weapon system, and its personnel trained those who might find themselves outside the wire (i.e., in an operational rather than a training setting), SERE was excluded from the "Battlefield Airmen" family because its personnel served in a training function and were not expected to perform their jobs outside the wire: Higgins, e-mail, 4 August 2010.

31. Adam J. Hebert, "CSAR, Under New Management," *Air Force Magazine*, August 2003, 84-86; Maj Michael E. Martin, USAF, interview with the author, 23 April 2007; Higgins, interview; and Darrel D. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride, A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2008), 581-82. Between 2003 and 2006 those CSAR units assigned to USAFE or PACAF remained in those commands. In October 2006 Rescue returned to ACC. An additional PJ-related change took place between 2002 and 2004 when the Air Force shifted PJ slots from the Pope and McChord units (21st and 22nd STS) to the 23rd STS at Hurlburt. From then on, all ST-assigned PJs were assigned to either the 23rd or 24th STS.

32. Col Marc F. Stratton, USAF, interview with the author, 6 June 2007. Stratton took command of 720th STG in August 2006: Stratton, official biography.
33. Stratton, interview.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. History, AFSOC, January–December 2000, vol. 1, 15–16; 123rd STS lineage and honors file, copy in AFHRA files; and David P. Anderson, telephone conversation with the author, 17 June 2010. Note that the 123rd was elevated from a “flight” to squadron status on 1 October 2000.
39. Gen Wayne A. Downing, US Army, retired, interview with the author, 19 March 2007; and Lt Col Stephen A. Rose, USAF, interview with Capt Nicole Dubnicay, USAFR, 5 March 2008, including quotes.
40. Lt Col Robert L. Russell Jr., USAF, interview with the author, 8 February 2007. Russell commanded the 10th CWS from 2001 to 2003.
41. Ibid. The SOWT and CCT students used the same facilities at Pope AFB.
42. Buckmelter, interview, including quote 1; and Markham, interview, including quote 2.
43. Rose, interview.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Russell, interview; and History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chapter 2, 10–11.
47. Russell, interview; History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chapter 2, 11–12; and MSgt John D. Farris, USAF, interview with the author, 16 January 2008, including quote.
48. Farris, interview.
49. History, 720 STG, January–December 2002, chapter 2, 20–21. The Guardian was manufactured by Bombardier to meet a U.S. Navy requirement. Note the 720 STG history misidentified the UAV as the CL-337 Bombardier.
50. Ibid., chapter 2, 21–23. The designation “Pointer” originated from the requirement that the UAV’s nose be pointed directly at the target for the nose-mounted camera to provide data to the operator. A mini-UAV, the Pointer’s data included a length of six feet, wingspan of nine feet, weight under 10 pounds, speed 43 knots, ceiling just below 1,000 feet, and mission radius of 2.7 nautical miles: Andreas Parsch, “AeroVironment FQM-151 *Pointer*,” *Directory of U.S. Military Rockets and Missiles* (website), 26 January 2006, <http://www.designation-systems.net/dusrm/m-151.html>.
51. Tim Dougherty, “There to Save,” *Airman*, Sep 2002, 34–37.
52. Rebecca Grant, *The First 600 Days of Combat* (Washington, DC: IRIS Press, 2004), 49, including quote (Jumper quoted by Grant); Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 95–96; and Forrest L. Marion, “The Destruction and Rebuilding of the Afghan Air Force, 1989–2009,” *Air Power History* 57 (Sum 2010), 27. Massoud was known as the “Lion of Panjshir” for his fierce and successful resistance against the Soviets in the Panjshir Valley during the 1980s: Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret*

History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

53. Holmes, interview.

54. Ibid.; Combined Task Force 58 (CTF-58), “Narrative Summary of Operations in Afghanistan: 27 October 2001 to 26 February 2002” (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University History Department, n.d.), 30–31, including quote; and Col Michael J. Flatten, USAF, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: Mike Flatten, Nov. 2001,” 19 May 2017, copy in AFHRA files.

55. Stratton, interview.

56. Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Ongoing Lessons of Afghanistan: Warfighting, Intelligence, Force Transformation, and Nation Building* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS] Press, 6 May 2004), 18, 26–28. The Cordesman study did not have access to coalition strike sortie data, which appeared not to be included in the data it reported. The above study stated 65 percent of all *weapons* dropped in the first three weeks was by B-52 and B-1 bombers. In another study by Cordesman, he stated “more than 76 percent of the *tonnage*” [emphasis added] dropped in the first three weeks was by bombers: Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2003), 301.

57. Markham, interview.

58. Ibid. ODA 595 did not have a combat controller with the team. Apparently, ODA 555 was short by one member (or Markham replaced one SF Soldier); the normal authorized strength of an ODA was 12, but Markham referred to a total of 12 men on 555’s team including himself (rather than 13 total).

59. Ibid., including quote; Caspar W. Weinberger and Wynton C. Hall, *Home of the Brave: Honoring the Unsung Heroes in the War on Terror* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2006), 67–76; and Dana Priest, “In War, Mud Huts and Hard Calls,” *Washington Post*, 20 February 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/02/20/in-war-mud-huts-and-hard-calls/e9128400-e375-4848-9ba5-9cc109ebf9a9/?utm_term=.b1274b3cf1e2.

60. Markham, interview.

61. Priest, “In War, Mud Huts and Hard Calls,” including quote; and Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *Weapon of Choice*, 96.

62. Markham, interview, including quotes; and Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *Weapon of Choice*, 96.

63. Markham, interview; and Priest, “In War, Mud Huts and Hard Calls,” including quote.

64. Markham, interview; and Priest, “In War, Mud Huts and Hard Calls,” including quote.

65. Markham, interview.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid. For clarification, note that in the interview Markham referred to 14 November as the date. In fact, it was 12 November.

68. Lt Col Richard S. Briscoe, USAF, interview with the author, 24 April 2008; Markham, interview; and Briscoe, discussion with the author, 24 April 2008. Briscoe recalled his aircraft was at Flight Level 390, or 39,000 feet above sea level. Cordesman stated that during the first year of combat operations in Afghanistan, the majority of bombs delivered by B-52s were unguided: Cordesman, *Ongoing Lessons of Afghanistan*, 28.

69. Briscoe, interview.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid., including quote; and Markham, interview.
72. Markham, interview; and Briscoe, interview, including quote.
73. Briscoe, interview.
74. Ibid.; and Markham, interview, including quotes. In their interviews, both Briscoe and Markham discussed the “danger close” aspect of the mission. Briscoe did not recall Tiger-01 stating “danger close,” but regardless, the situation was grave enough for the term to apply.
75. Briscoe, interview.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Markham, interview, including quote; and Forrest L. Marion, “‘Ten Seconds to Impact’: The B-52 Air Strike at Bagram, November 12, 2001,” *Air Power History* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 12.
81. Marion, “‘Ten Seconds to Impact,’ 12–13.
82. Briscoe, interview.
83. Briscoe, Air Medal citation, 3 May 2004, including quote 1, copy in AFHRA files; Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *Weapon of Choice*, 103, including quote 2; John F. Burns, “A Nation Challenged: The Retreat; The Taliban Fade Away, But Remain a Threat,” *New York Times*, 14 November 2001, including quote 3, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/14/world/a-nation-challenged-the-retreat-the-taliban-fade-away-but-remain-a-threat.html>; and William Branigin, “Alliance Asserts Control Over Kabul,” *Washington Post*, 14 November 2001, 1.
84. Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *Weapon of Choice*, 102. Afghanistan’s second-largest city, Mazar-i-Sharif (in the north), fell to the Northern Alliance on 10 November, and Jalalabad (east of Kabul) on the 14th; Briscoe, Kiper, Schroder, and Sepp, *Weapon of Choice*, 102–03.
85. Clay T. McCutchan, Donald N. Cullen, and Forrest L. Marion, “Answering the Call: Contributions of the Air Force Individual Mobilization Augmentee to the Global War on Terrorism, 11 September 2001 through 11 September 2003” (Air War College manuscript [draft], 2005), 6; and John E. Lasky, “Business as Usual,” *Airman*, 46 (Sept 2002), 44, 48.
86. Lasky, “Business as Usual,” 44, 48.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., 46.
89. Steven D. Adams, USAF, interview with the author, 8 June 2007.
90. Ibid., including quote; and Maj Joseph T. Benson, USAF, interview with the author, 9 February 2007. One of several works highlighting the importance of the drug trade to the Taliban economy was Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), chapter 9.
91. Adams, interview; and Benson, interview.

92. Adams, interview; Benson, interview; and John F. Fuller, *Thor's Legions. Weather Support to the U.S. Air Force and Army, 1937-1987* (Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1990), 322-23; and chapter 3, this work.

93. Adams, interview.

94. MSgt James A. Morello, USAF, interview with the author, 16 January 2008.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Adams, interview; and Benson, interview.

98. HQ USAF/XOL, "Operation ANACONDA, An Air Power Perspective" (Washington, DC, 7 February 2005), 3. Enemy estimates varied widely in the high mountainous area, but there may have been 1,000 fighters in the vicinity. There were upwards of 40 caves in the area.

99. Ibid. US/coalition officials acknowledged the difficulty of determining the number of enemy combatants, but by 13 March they estimated the enemy fighters at "fewer than 1,000": Linda D. Kozaryn, "Operation Anaconda Is 'Winding Down,'" *American Forces Press Service*, 13 March 2002, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=1050.

100. HQ USAF/XOL, "Operation ANACONDA," 8; James Kitfield, "To the Top of Takur Gar," *Air Force Magazine* 94, no. 7 (July 2011): 1-2, <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2011/July%202011/0711TakurGar.aspx>; and John A. Chapman, Air Force Cross citation, including quote, <http://www.ccsfhf.org/portfolio-view/tsgt-john-chapman/>.

101. Kitfield, "To the Top of Takur Gar," 4, including quote; and Capt Gabriel P. Brown, USAF, e-mail to the author, subject: "Roberts Ridge section RE: SOF BA complete," 12 October 2012, copy in AFHRA files. CCT Gabriel Brown wrote that the infiltration helicopter that returned to the original site searching for Neil Roberts "went unscathed and was able to drop off the [SEAL] team with Chapman."

102. Kitfield, "To the Top," 4-5 of 9; and Gabriel P. Brown, Silver Star citation, including quote, <http://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient.php?recipientid=3687>; and Brown, e-mail, 12 October 2012.

103. Kitfield, "To the Top," 5, including quote; and Chapman, Air Force Cross citation.

104. Kitfield, "To the Top," 5; and Jason Dean Cunningham, Air Force Cross citation, including quote, http://www.homeofheroes.com/valor/08_WOT/afc_cunningham.html.

105. Terry Walker, "Hero Awarded Air Force Cross" (377th Air Base Wing Public Affairs press release, Kirtland AFB, NM, 16 September 2002), http://www.euro-pean-security.com/n_index.php?id=3763; Jason A. Neal, 43rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs, "Pope Combat Controller Awarded Air Force Cross," 13 January 2003, <http://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/140133/pope-combat-controller-awarded-air-force-cross/>; and Brown, e-mail to the author, subject: "RE: rewrite of Anaconda," 23 January 2013, copy in AFHRA files. Two weeks prior to Cunningham's loss, two PJs died in the Philippines, representing the first PJ losses in OEF. See section on OEF-Philippines, this chapter.

106. Bruce Rolfsen, "Guardman Earns Silver Star for Actions at Roberts Ridge," *Air Force Times*, 3 November 2003, 10; and Keary J. Miller, Silver Star citation, <https://www.pararescue.com/awards/keary-j-miller-silver-star>. Retired CMSgt Wayne Norrad stated that at the time of Anaconda, Keary Miller was assigned to the 24th STS (later, he was assigned to 123 STS): Norrad, e-mail to the author, subject: "Re: Keary

Miller,” 24 May 2017. In 2017, Miller’s Silver Star was upgraded to the Air Force Cross: Oriana Pawlyk, “Meet the Airmen Who Will Get Upgraded Valor Medals,” *Military.com*, 24 January 2017, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/01/24/meet-airmen-upgraded-valor-medals.html>.

107. History, 720 STG, January–December 2003, SD 3029, excerpt of Thiel AAR entry for 13 January 2003.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid., excerpt of Thiel AAR entry for 19 February 2003.

111. Maj Gen Donald C. Wurster, USAF, lecture to Air War College, subj: “OEF-PHILIPPINES,” 28 April 2006; and Forrest L. Marion, “Opening the Second Front: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES, January–August 2002” (unpublished manuscript prepared for US Special Operations Command, 2003). From February to August 2002, the author served as JTF-510 historian covering OEF–P.

112. Wurster, “OEF-PHILIPPINES”; Marion, “Opening the Second Front”; and Charles H. Briscoe, and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad: Army Special Operations Forces in Iraq* (Ft. Bragg, NC: USASOC History Office, n.d.), 26.

113. Wurster, “OEF-PHILIPPINES”; and Marion, “Opening the Second Front.”

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid. Later developments disclosed that the ASG beheaded the third American hostage.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.; and Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 26. In June 2002, Mrs. Burnham was rescued, but her husband died in the rescue attempt: Bradley Graham, “Hostage Dies, Wife is Freed in Rescue,” *Washington Post*, 8 June 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/06/08/hostage-dies-wife-is-freed-in-rescue/c2223794-ec11-4fde-9c51-933a3c52ba7c/?utm_term=.72cef29844a7.

118. Wurster, “OEF-PHILIPPINES”; and Marion, “Opening the Second Front.” Lieutenant General Wurster commanded AFSOC from November 2007 through July 2011: USAF biography of Lt Gen Donald C. Wurster, <http://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/105090/lieutenant-general-donald-c-wurster/>.

119. Wurster, “OEF-PHILIPPINES”; and Marion, “Opening the Second Front.”

120. Ibid.

121. Carlos Bongioanni, “Kadena Gives Final Salute to Fallen Airmen,” *Stars and Stripes*, 1 March 2002, 2, including quote; and Joseph Giordono, “After Crash, Pair Attempted Rescue,” *Stars and Stripes*, 6 March 2002, 5. Biographical data provided to the author by 720th STG historian, Wade Scrogam, August 2006.

122. Wurster, “OEF-PHILIPPINES”; and Marion, “Opening the Second Front.”

123. Daniel L. Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, *Confronting Iraq: US Policy and the Use of Force since the Gulf War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000), 39–43, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR1146.pdf; and Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 7.

124. Byman and Waxman, *Confronting Iraq*, 43–52, 58–64, 68–71; and Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 15. In Operation

Desert Strike in 1996, the United States launched cruise missiles against Iraqi targets in response to Hussein's attacks on the Kurds.

125. Cordesman, *Iraq War*, 1, 60, 61; and Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 25–26, including quote. Essentially a terror weapon similar to the Germans' V-2 in World War II, "Scud" was the NATO designation for a Soviet-manufactured tactical ballistic missile that Hussein modified for carrying chemical or biological agents.

126. Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 134–35.

127. *Ibid.*, 135.

128. *Ibid.*

129. *Ibid.*, 135–40.

130. *Ibid.*, 140–41.

131. *Ibid.*, 141–42.

132. *Ibid.*, 142.

133. TSgt Leslie R. Rouell, USAF, interview with the author, 23 May 2007, including quote; and Capt Robert D. Garrett, interview with the author, 2 November 2007. At that time, Garrett commanded Det 4, 10th CWS, Rouell's unit.

134. Rouell, interview, including quote; Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 189; and Cordesman, *Iraq War*, 76–80.

135. "Brigade (-)" indicated less than the full brigade.

136. Benson, interview; and History (Contingency), MSgt Randy Bergeron, USAF, memorandum, subject: "Northern Express: Deployment of the 86th Contingency Response Group to Iraq," chapter 1, screens 5–8, AFHRA call no. K-GP-CR-86-SU-RE.

137. Benson, interview.

138. *Ibid.*

139. Benson, interview; and History (Contingency), Bergeron, "Northern Express," chapter 2, screens 1–4, including quote (Allardice quoted by Bergeron). "Northern Express" stated the date of the airdrop as 27 March; Bergeron, "Northern Express," chapter 2, screen 3. Some sources indicated 26 March for the airdrop. Certainly, it was either 26 or 27 March.

140. Benson, interview, including quote; and Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 78, 190. The drop was conducted in a "secure environment," as friendly forces (including 3,000 Kurd fighters known as *Peshmerga*) controlled the airfield. In fact, the jump was a complete surprise to the Army's SF personnel who were already at Bashur. "We kind of saw something because the moon was finally starting to show. We started seeing little things dropping. It was the 173rd [Airborne Brigade (-)] jumping in," one fuel handler specialist at the airfield that night recalled: Briscoe and Special Operations CMD History Office, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 199.

141. Benson, interview; and History (Contingency), Bergeron, "Northern Express," chapter 2, screen 14.

142. CMSgt Paul "Vinnie" Venturella, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 8 March 2007.

143. *Ibid.* Venturella added that each combat controller augmented a different ODA.

144. Bruce Rolfsen, "Paramedic Lauded for Saving Ranger's life," *Air Force Times*, 24 May 2004, 31.

145. Col Ronal L. Watkins, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 14 January 2008, including quotes; and Watkins, official biography.

146. Watkins, interview; Watkins, biography; Watkins, e-mail to the author, subject: "RE: your Battlefield Airmen interview in 2008," 17 May 2017; and Mike Joseph, "Base Unveils Memorial for Fallen Combat Controller: Sather Memorial Finds New Home at JBSA-Lackland," *AETC News*, 27 January 2012, <http://www.aetc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/261526/base-unveils-memorial-for-fallen-combat-controller-sather-memorial-finds-new-ho/>. Camp Sather was redesignated Sather Air Base. For Watkins's role in Operation Urgent Fury, see chapter 5, this work.

Chapter 11

Epilogue, 2003–2007

This work focused on those Battlefield Airmen (BA)—combat controllers/special tactics officer (STO), pararescuemen/combat rescue officer (CRO), and special operations weathermen (officer, enlisted)—assigned to the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) whose core competencies required them to perform duties primarily on the ground, often outside the wire, and under austere conditions. Prior to the activation of the Twenty-Third Air Force in 1983, the lines were somewhat blurry in terms of which Airmen to include. I attempted to concentrate on those whose jobs probably would have fallen under the “special operations” umbrella. Although the contemporary special operations community accounted for about half of the specialties formally encompassed by BA (the Air Combat Command [ACC] accounted for the remainder), since 2003 the operational requirements in Iraq contributed to the evolution of another category of Airmen now included, albeit informally, as Battlefield Airmen.¹

Late in 2003, in the midst of a growing insurgency in Iraq coupled with insufficient US Army manpower deployed in the theater, the Joint Staff directed the Air Force to deploy three teams of Airmen for six months as combat convoy operators. Approximately 300 Airmen trained stateside with the Army and then underwent live fire training in Kuwait before reporting to Iraq. Because the Airmen were essentially being outsourced to another service to perform missions they were not prepared for, the Pentagon labeled the plan the “In Lieu Of” (ILO) program. The Airmen were embedded as detachments within Army battalions whose mission was to convoy supplies to US bases throughout Iraq.²

The ILO program initially showed mixed results. In response to certain discrepancies, the Air Force developed its own specialized training known as the Basic Combat Convoy Course to provide vehicle operations training to Airmen (as well as some sister service personnel). The ILO program soon expanded to include other Air Force combat support personnel, such as detainee interrogators and guards, camp defense forces, personnel countering improvised explosive devices, civil engineers, and others. In early 2006, more than 3,800 Airmen filled Army billets in US Central Command. By mid-2007 the

number of Airmen serving ILO deployments had increased to 5,000—mostly in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Later that year, of some 25,000 Airmen deployed to the US Central Command theater, nearly 6,300—fully one-quarter—performed ILO duties. Security forces, the largest career field in the Air Force, had been especially hard pressed with a high deployment rate from the program's beginning.³

Later, Air Force leaders including Gen T. Michael Moseley, chief of staff of the Air Force (CSAF) from 2005 to 2008, acknowledged that the Army's and Marine Corps's needs for ILO Airmen were likely to continue for a time. But Moseley also stated that “as we get closer to 316,000”—the service's projected end strength—“the capacity of the Air Force to offer up this kind of help will diminish down to about zero.”⁴

Several years earlier, Moseley's predecessor, Gen John P. Jumper, and Dr. James G. Roche, the secretary of the Air Force (SecAF), had implemented a new concept—Battlefield Airmen. As the former CSAF recalled in 2008, the term originated when the two men discussed how to deal with the set of problems related to the transition to an expeditionary Air Force, a process begun under Gen Michael E. Ryan, Jumper's predecessor. They were concerned with issues such as “[airfield] security, with toughening the corps, with getting the right kind of recruits into the special ops business, with . . . how there are levels of ‘battlefield airmen’ and how we would get this going, starting with Basic [Military] Training (BMT).” Roche and Jumper viewed the BA concept as comprising three levels following initial expeditionary training during BMT at Lackland AFB, Texas. With that in mind, the Air Force leadership sought to lengthen BMT to devote additional time to training in an expeditionary setting.⁵

At the time, 2003–2004, Brig Gen-select Robert H. Holmes commanded the 37th Training Wing at Lackland and began implementing the principles of expeditionary combat and the warrior ethos for the changes at BMT. Jumper recalled that following basic training, the progression of battlefield Airmen included the first level consisting of “RED HORSE combat engineers, security forces, EOD [explosive ordnance disposal] forces, and civil engineers” whose jobs were on or near the flight line. Those were the Airmen expected to be able to defend the flight line, if necessary. The second tier of BA consisted of personnel, primarily security forces, operating outside the airfield's perimeter. They had to be prepared to defend the approach and departure corridors to the airfield. Special operations personnel with

ground jobs made up the third level—combat control, pararescue, and special operations weather teams (SOWT). General Jumper explained that the key issues were how to build these BA levels, and, “How do we change the Air Force to reflect our expeditionary Air Force culture?” General Holmes transferred to Headquarters Air Force as the director of security forces and force protection and was instrumental in increasing staff awareness for the expeditionary Airman and BA concepts, initiatives, and service cultural changes.⁶

As BA got underway, in March 2004 the SecAF issued a brief memo that inadvertently may have muddied the waters regarding the identities of the new group of Airmen. In his *Secretary’s Vector*, Roche addressed the need to “Increase our Focus on Special Operations.” In addition to referring to “Special Operations” in both the first and last sentences of the paragraph, he stated that “we intend to bring together our Battlefield Airmen—combat controllers, pararescuemen, combat weather, TACPs [tactical air control personnel/party], and others—under a common training and organizational structure to strengthen the combat power they bring to the fight.”⁷ Either the SecAF had unwittingly included TACPs—whose jobs were very similar to combat control—under the umbrella of special operations, or he decided to include a conventional specialty in a paragraph clearly identified with special operations. In either case, some people wondered whether Battlefield Airmen pertained strictly to special operations/AFSOC ground specialties or questioned which Air Force specialties were part of the new BA community, including whether TACPs were to be assigned to AFSOC or not.⁸

One year later Secretary Roche spelled out exactly which specialties the Air Force officially considered its Battlefield Airmen. In February 2005 he issued a brief Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD). The directive acknowledged that certain surface combatant capabilities are “an Airman’s responsibility and require unique surface operations that are integral to the application of air and space power.” The Air Force recognized the need to meet that responsibility by organizing, training, and equipping “a force of Battlefield Airmen (BA) capable of delivering distinctive expertise in a ground combat environment with unequalled accuracy, responsiveness, flexibility and persistence.” Further, the directive stated that BA “directly assist, control, enable, and/or execute operational air and space power functions . . . in the forward battlespace independent of an established airbase or its perimeter defenses,” emphasizing that BA were “removed from traditional

airbase support.” They could be employed “alone or as part of an AF, joint, interagency or coalition force . . . and may operate under the most austere conditions for extended periods.”⁹

The new policy directive identified nine Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) encompassed under BA. Two codes distinguished between those officers and enlisted men trained in combat control—STO and combat control Airman (CCT). Similarly, two others—CRO and pararescue airman (PJ)—differentiated between pararescue-trained officers and enlisted. Another pair of AFSCs delineated between officers and airmen as part of special operations weather teams: SOWT officer (15WX) and SOWT airman (1W0X1). A fourth area was battlefield weather, which used the identical coding of SOWT personnel but was intended for ACC-assigned battlefield weather officers (15WX) and battlefield weather airmen (1W0X1). The ninth specialty code specified an enlisted-only field, TACP. Both the battlefield weather (officer/enlisted) and TACP (enlisted) belonged strictly to ACC and, therefore, did not fall under the present study’s purview.¹⁰

Four of the remaining six specialty codes—STO/CCT and SOWT (officer/enlisted)—were unique to AFSOC. The remaining two, CRO/PJ, were common to ACC and AFSOC. By design, in part to maintain a manageable scope to the project, the present work included only AFSOC-assigned specialties: STO/CCT, SOWT, and those CRO/PJ members that were assigned to AFSOC rather than ACC.¹¹

Roche’s directive specified 13 capabilities required of Battlefield Airmen. Combat controllers’ (STO/CCT) responsibilities were extensive, including airfield surveys and assessments, command-and-control battle management, air traffic control and assault zone marking, and terminal attack control. Although several other capabilities overlapped two or more specialties, those requirements exclusive to pararescue and SOWT were fewer in number. The primary skill sets of PJs and CROs were personnel recovery, defined as “Combat Search and Rescue and Isolated Personnel Repatriation,” and field trauma care. Weather operations was SOWT’s “bread-and-butter” mission area.¹²

With the addition of ILOs and other specialties under the Battlefield Airmen moniker, special operations weather team, combat control, and pararescue personnel continued to perform operationally in an outstanding manner and garnered numerous awards for valor. In early November 2003 special operations weather team member Pradipan Boonyobhas—nicknamed Boony—air assaulted into eastern Afghanistan in support of US Army Ranger operations in the Kunar

Valley. After completing an 18-hour armed convoy, he climbed 3,000 feet to a Ranger sniper team observation post (OP) situated at an elevation of 10,700 feet above sea level. During the next three weeks, Boony transmitted more than 250 weather observations from his OP, 22 of which diverted special operations helicopters that otherwise could have encountered hazardous weather conditions in his area. He “provided the sole satellite communication link between his team and the battlefield commander” during the exfiltration of friendly forces on 27 November.¹³ During the ensuing engagement, the team came under rocket propelled grenade and small arms fire. “Get me a distance and approximate elevation on that enemy mortar team,” yelled someone on the mortar team. Quickly pointing his laser range finder—ordinarily used to determine visibility and cloud heights—downrange, Boony obtained the distance and elevation and reported it to the mortar team via his AN/PRC-117F radio.¹⁴ “The Ranger mortar team element . . . dropped mortars on these individuals. That was significant for a weather guy using his weather equipment to assist in taking out some bad guys,” Capt Robert D. Garrett, 10th Combat Weather Squadron (CWS), recalled. For his work throughout the deployment, Boony earned the Bronze Star.¹⁵

On 11 April 2005 TSgt Bradley T. Reilly responded as part of a quick reaction force (QRF) in direct support of an Afghan army general who had come under enemy fire while traveling in the vicinity of the Khowst-Gardez Pass in eastern Afghanistan. Reilly, the lone combat controller attached to Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha 163, deployed on one of two UH-60 helicopters assigned to the mission. As the helicopters approached the ambush area, the special forces team pursued the enemy. Two A-10s and two AH-64s provided combat air support (CAS) for Reilly’s team. Upon landing, Reilly’s element immediately came under machine gun fire. Launching an uphill assault, the QRF overran the enemy machine gun position but came under fire from three directions. Observing that most of the enemy fire originated from below a narrow “finger” of a slope, Reilly and one other member assaulted down the finger along with friendly local militiamen. The enemy’s fire intensified and the militia withdrew, leaving Reilly and his comrade exposed. Both were injured, Reilly from an AK-47 round in the foot. Despite his injury, he continued returning fire and controlling the CAS aircraft. He rendered medical assistance to his comrade during lulls in the fighting. Some

80 minutes later, both men were medically evacuated. For his actions, Reilly earned the Silver Star and Purple Heart.¹⁶

On 28 January 2007 combat controller David J. Orvosh was deployed to a firebase outside of Najaf, Iraq. While preparing to return to Baghdad, his team received an urgent request to assist some “Iraqi scouts” engaged in a firefight just to the north. For the next five hours, Staff Sergeant Orvosh and another CCT, TSgt Bryan Patton, shared the duty of controlling the CAS aircraft, clearing them for gun and bomb runs against enemy targets. At about noon, his team replenished their ammunition, water, and batteries and then returned to the firefight, where their next task was securing an AH-64 helicopter downed by enemy fire. The initial report gave an incorrect location for the downed Apache, so Orvosh’s teammates “ended up following the gunfire” to find it, often engaging enemy fighters at close range. Six months after the battle, Orvosh described the experience: “We were engaging guys . . . for the entire two kilometers. . . . They were so close that [our] guys couldn’t shoot with the .50-cal. . . . They had to pull out their 9-mm. or sidearm or rifle and had to engage guys moving.” The entire mission lasted some 14 hours, ending at about 2100.¹⁷

In a fourth illustrative incident, in October 2007 PJ Davide Keaton demonstrated extraordinary compassion on the battlefield. While on a routine mission with an elite team of special operators, he came under enemy fire. Seeing a young Afghan boy who had been hit, Keaton moved 150 meters to the boy’s location. “When I came up to the first little boy, my heart stopped for a second. He had a serious gunshot wound [to the pelvis] and had to be taken care of right away,” he recalled. Keaton shielded the boy with his own body while tending to him, then moved him 30 meters away to a sheltered area. After stabilizing the boy, Keaton found an eight-year-old boy and an 11-year-old girl who had been hit. Sergeant Keaton stabilized the two, then again exposed himself to gunfire to assist two seriously wounded Afghan women. All five victims were evacuated to Kandahar where they underwent emergency surgery. All survived. The enemy had used them as human shields in their attack. For his actions, Keaton earned the Air Force Sergeants Association Pitsenbarger Award.¹⁸

But with success came sorrow as well. On 30 May 2005 the Special Tactics (ST) community suffered its greatest loss in a single incident when three operators died in the crash of an Iraqi Air Force Comp Air SL7 aircraft. Two pilots, one American and one Iraqi, also perished in the crash. The three members of the 23rd Special Tactics

Squadron (STS)—Capt Derek Argel, Capt Jeremy Fresques, and SSgt Casey Crate—were aboard the Iraqi aircraft as it flew 80 miles northeast of Baghdad near the Iranian border. There was no indication of hostile fire in the Memorial Day mishap.¹⁹ Shortly after being notified of her only son’s tragic loss, Casey’s mother, Linda Crate, spoke bravely: “What an appropriate day. . . . If it happens, what a great tribute.”²⁰

Two years later—two days after Memorial Day in 2007—ST operators fast roped into Hurlburt Field, Florida, to hoist an American flag at the new, state-of-the-art training facility named in honor of the fallen ST men. Col Marc Stratton dedicated the new \$8 million, 50,000-square-foot facility—formally designated the Crate Advanced Skills Training Center in honor of Casey Crate. The center’s auditorium was dedicated to Jeremy Fresques and the aquatics facility to Derek Argel. Derek’s mother, Debra Argel-Bastian, took an impromptu dive into the pool to honor her son. In addition, the street adjacent to the new facility was named for another combat controller, SrA Adam Servais, who died in an engagement with enemy fighters in southern Afghanistan on 19 August 2006. His mother, Sue Servais, acknowledged that it meant “a lot to us that the street is forever named after Adam.”²¹ Former Air Force Secretary James Roche was the keynote speaker at the dedication. “The Advanced Skills Training Center is an investment this country has made and I have no qualm in pointing out it is an investment in democracy, because the first of those who wish to harm us will feel the brunt of those who are trained here,” he stated.²²

Although the extent to which Roche’s words have been borne out since 2007 will await the work of other historians, if the “past is prologue,” there is little doubt those words will be proven again and again for years to come. One ST commander put it simply: “Ultimately it is the guy with heart that is successful in this job.”²³ If there is a single enduring lesson in the history of the US Air Force’s Special Tactics community to date, perhaps it is simply this: the presence of a very small number of superbly trained, skilled, and exceptionally dedicated SOF Battlefield Airmen—often two or three, but sometimes only one—may make a critical difference on the battlefield . . . and it often has.

Notes

1. For example, during Southeast Asia the term “Air Commandos” described those men who in later years would be considered “special operators.”

2. David W. Marttala, *The “In Lieu of” Myth: Airmen in Joint Ground Operations*, Walker Paper 13 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, January 2009), 5–7.

3. *Ibid.*, 5–9, 17–18; Julie C. Boit, “*Blue in Lieu of Green*: Is Air Force Filling Army Positions a Worthwhile Endeavor or a Slippery Slope?” (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 13 February 2006), 4–6; and Rod Hafemeister, “More Airmen Filling Those Boots on the Ground,” *Air Force Times*, 14 February 2005, 32–33.

4. Otto Kreisher, “Ground Force Taskings Go On,” *Air Force Magazine*, March 2008, accessed 3 May 2017, <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2008/March%202008/0308ilo.aspx>. In mid-2007 the ILO program was formally renamed the Joint Sourcing program.

5. Gen John P. Jumper, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21 July 2008. Gen T. Michael Moseley, General Jumper’s successor, oversaw the lengthening of BMT to 8.5 weeks in late 2008; see *A Brief History of US Air Force Basic Military Training* (Lackland AFB, TX, n.d.), 9, accessed 3 May 2017, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/5719315/abrief-history-of-us-air-force-basic-usafmtiaorg>. As late as October 2005, BMT remained at 6 weeks; see Bruce Rolfsen, “Air Force May Extend Basic, Adds Rifle Training,” *Air Force Times*, 7 November 2005, 12.

6. Jumper, interview, including quotes; and Brig Gen Robert H. Holmes, USAF, retired, draft manuscript review note, 8 August 2011. There was some shifting of specialties (and/or overlap) between the first and second levels of BA. For example, an *Air Force Times* article listed EOD technicians, security forces, Air Force Office of Special Investigations agents, and convoy teams in the second level, whereas General Jumper included EOD forces in the first level. Bruce Rolfsen, “Taking Its Best Shot,” *Air Force Times*, 7 November 2005, 10, 12. In January 2008 the 93rd Air Ground Operations Wing was activated at Moody AFB, Georgia, to focus on expeditionary training for TACP, combat weather, and security forces personnel. Rolfsen, “Air-Ground Operations Wing to Stand Up at Moody,” *Air Force Times*, 24 December 2007, 13.

7. James G. Roche, secretary of the Air Force, *The Secretary’s Vector*, 1 March 2004.

8. *Ibid.* In fact, at the time, all TACPs were assigned to ACC, none to AFSOC, which clearly identified them as conventional rather than special operations assets. At the Air Force Association Symposium on 14 February 2004, Roche identified “combat controllers, pararescuemen, combat weather, special tactics, and tactical air controllers” as “Battlefield Airmen.” In that instance, however, he appeared not to identify any of them with “special operations.” An additional (minor) source of confusion was the use of the term “combat weather” rather than “special operations weather team (SOWT)” to designate AFSOC-assigned weather personnel that performed their jobs in hostile or uncertain environments. While *combat weather* could encompass certain weather personnel assigned to ACC, SOWT was the correct term for AFSOC’s BA weathermen. Every SOWT I have met preferred the terms SOWT or *special ops weatherman* to *combat weather* or *battlefield weather* personnel; a former 10th CWS commander preferred SOWT or *special operations weather team*. To a man, the SOWT community viewed the terms *combat weather* or *battlefield weather* as referring to ACC-assigned conventional weather assets, despite the (confusing) fact that AFSOC’s one and only SOWT unit was designated the 10th Combat Weather Squadron. Considerable confusion might be relieved if the 10th was redesignated as a ST or special operations weather squadron.

9. Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 10-35, *Battlefield Airmen*, 4 February 2005, 1, accessed 2 May 2017, <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil>.
10. Ibid. On 1 October 2008, the TACP unit at Fort Benning, Georgia, the 17th Air Support Operations Squadron, was reassigned from ACC to AFSOC. Other TACP units, however, remained under ACC for a time.
11. AFPD 10-35, *Battlefield Airmen*, 1, 3.
12. Ibid., 2.
13. “Citation to Accompany the Award of the Bronze Star Medal to Pradipan Boonyobhas,” 17 April 2006, copy at AFHRA.
14. SSgt Pradipan Boonyobhas, USAF, e-mail to the author, subject: “RE: ST Briefing,” 5 February 2010.
15. Capt Robert D. Garrett, USAF, interview with the author, 2 November 2007.
16. History, 720 Special Tactics Group, 2004–2006, SD 5003, Reilly, Silver Star Citation; and Bruce Rolfsen, “I Didn’t Stop Shooting,” *Air Force Times*, 15 May 2006, 8, including quote.
17. Erik Holmes and Gina Cavallaro, “800 Insurgents, Airmen Play Pivotal Role in Victory at Najaf,” *Air Force Times*, 3 December 2007, 14–16, 18, including quote 1; and SSgt David J. Orvosh, 21st STS, USAF, interview with the author, 12 July 2007, including quotes 2–3.
18. History, 720 Special Tactics Group, 2007, 43–44; Capt Amy Cooper, AFSOC/PA, “AFSOC Pararescueman Receives 2008 Pitsenbarger Award,” AFSOC Public Affairs, 23 June 2008, accessed 3 May 2017, <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/163226/afsoc-pararescueman-receives-2008-pitsenbarger-award/>. Note the unusual spelling of “Davide” is correct. The Pitsenbarger Award recognizes an enlisted Airman who has performed a heroic act resulting in saving a life or preventing serious injury to another person.
19. For a full account of the incident, see George W. Cully, *Adapt or Fail: The USAF’s Role in Reconstructing the Iraqi Air Force, 2004–2007* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2017), 41–47, accessed 3 May 2017, <http://aupress.maxwell.af.mil/bookinfo.asp?bid=613>.
20. Alex Fryer, “Iraq Crash Kills Casey Crate,” *Seattle Times*, 2 June 2005, accessed 3 May 2017, <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/iraq-crash-kills-casey-crate/>.
21. Capt Tom Montgomery, AFSOC/PA, “Fallen Airmen Memorialized Forever,” *Commando*, 31 May 2007, accessed 3 May 2017, <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/163340/fallen-airmen-memorialized-forever/>.
22. Ibid.
23. Col Marc F. Stratton, USAF, 720th Special Tactics Group commander, interview with the author, 6 June 2007.

Appendix A

Combat Control's Father-Son Combinations

The uniqueness of the combat control career field has contributed to making CCT a family tradition for some. So far, there have been four father-son combinations in the specialty. All four fathers—James D. “Jim” Charvat, Richard W. “Rick” Crutchfield, James A. “Jim” Howell, and Cesar A. “Tony” Urenda—entered CCT in the 1950s or 1960s; three served in Southeast Asia. Their combat controller sons—Michael D. “Mike” Charvat, Christopher C. “Chris” Crutchfield, William B. “Billy” Howell, and Lance A. Urenda—served in CCT from about 1980 to the period of 1995–2005. One, Mike Charvat, remains on active duty as of this writing.

Jim and Mike Charvat. Jim served 30 years on active duty, from 1967 to 1997, including two tours in Alaska, one in Germany, and the last eight years at McChord AFB, Washington, as the squadron's chief enlisted manager. His son, Mike, entered the Air Force in the mid-1990s and remains on active duty as of this writing. Mike has earned multiple Bronze Stars during combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. A highlight for the Charvats took place in 1997 when the new combat controller, Mike, jumped into McChord AFB carrying his father's retirement orders as part of Chief Charvat's retirement ceremony.

Rick and Chris Crutchfield. Rick served 29 years on active duty, including the last half of his career as a chief master sergeant. As a chief, he taught, supervised, and mentored more young combat controllers than anyone else in the career field up to his retirement in 1990. His son, Chris, enlisted in 1986 and served his entire 20-year career in CCT. In 1989 he participated in Operation Just Cause as part of the Howard AFB, Panama, CCT. At Headquarters AFSOC, Chris played an instrumental role in the command's acquisition and employment of small unmanned aerial vehicles (see chapter 10).

Jim and Billy Howell. Jim Howell enlisted in the Army in 1946 and later entered the Air Force via the Air Force Reserve. He served until 1978, retiring as a chief master sergeant. His career has been termed “legendary” by many and included early high-altitude, low-opening (HALO) parachute jumps and record-setting (or -sharing) high altitude jumps, in addition to Southeast Asia duty (see chapters 1–3). As a young boy, Billy was influenced by watching his dad jump

at El Centro, California. Billy enlisted in 1972 and served in CCT for many years. Rising to senior master sergeant, he retired as commandant of the Combat Control School in the early 1990s.

Tony and Lance Urenda. In 1970 Tony earned the Silver Star at a remote landing zone in northern Cambodia. He served several more tours as a combat controller before transitioning into the first sergeant career field, retiring as the first-assigned first sergeant, 1723rd Combat Control Squadron. His son Lance enlisted in 1986 and served 20 years on active duty, including participating in Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom. Upon reaching the “pinnacle” assignment of combat control, the 24th STS, he remained there from 1998 until retiring in 2006. Tony’s first cousin, Kenneth “Kenny” Urenda, also served four years in combat control in the 1970s.¹

JOINT AIRBORNE TROOP BOARD
Fort Bragg, N. C.

JAbnTB-E 322

28 July 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director
Joint Air Transportation Board
Fort Bragg, North Carolina

SUBJECT: Accomplishment of the Pathfinder Mission

1. The responsibility for the accomplishment of the pathfinder mission is set forth in the following documents published jointly by Tactical Air Command and Office, Chief of Army Field Forces: "Joint Training Directive for Air-Ground Operations", 1 September 1950; and "Standing Operating Procedures for Troop Carrier/Airborne Operations", 16 February 1951. These directives specifically charge the Air Force with the responsibility for establishing and operating ground-to-air communications and navigational aids on the drop zone or forward airfield to aid incoming troop carrier serials in making accurate delivery of troops, supplies and equipment. It appears that no positive action has been taken to create within the structure of the Air Force an organization to perform this mission.

2. In view of the fact that the Air Force has not provided the pathfinder teams called for in the Joint Training Directive for Air Ground Operations, the Airborne units have retained organic pathfinder teams in order to assure accurate delivery. However, the operational capability of these pathfinder teams has rapidly decreased. This has been caused by two major factors: First, the development of equipment, tactics and techniques for pathfinders have not kept pace with progress being made in other fields; and Second, a definite lack of coordination exists between the Army and Air Force due primarily to lack of joint training and the reluctance of air crews to depend upon navigational aids established by ground forces.

3. The great concern expressed by airborne commanders over this lack of Pathfinders has increased to the point where it is felt that the entire airborne potential is in jeopardy. This was evident during a conference held on 15 July 1952 by this Board, at which time the major airborne commanders posed the following questions for which this Board has no definitive answers.

- a. What action is being taken by the Air Force to establish a pathfinder unit to execute the pathfinder mission?
- b. When is it anticipated that action to establish a pathfinder unit within the Air Force will be initiated and by what date should such a unit be capable of satisfactorily performing these duties.

JAbnTB-E 322

SUBJECT: Accomplishment of the Pathfinder Mission

4. This Board is aware of the effort being made by the Air Force to select suitable equipment to perform this function but feels that the emphasis is being placed on long range plans involving only equipment while neglecting the immediate present day needs. To date the only proven method of accomplishing this mission has been through the use of personnel parachuted into the airhead. Therefore, it is deemed essential that the Air Force accept this method until such time as more satisfactory methods or systems have been developed.

5. In February 1951 this Board, operating at the time as the Army Airborne Center, prepared a plan of action for implementing the transfer of this mission. A copy of this plan is attached as Inclosure 1. It is the opinion of this Board that the plan is sound and furnishes a workable solution. To implement this action, it is considered appropriate that a provisional pathfinder unit be established by the Air Force and that all Army pathfinder personnel be attached to this unit without delay.

6. It is requested that this Board be furnished with the answers to the questions set forth in Paragraph 3a and 3b above and the opinion of your Board on the plan described in Paragraph 5.

7. To further expedite the transfer of the pathfinder mission to the Air Force, it is recommended that a conference be conducted under the auspices of the Joint Air Transportation Board to include representation from the Air and Army General Staffs, as well as the Tactical Air Command and Office, Chief of Army Field Forces Agencies who would be involved in this problem. It is believed that such a conference would resolve the complete problem to include target data.

W. N. GILLMORE /s/

W. N. GILLMORE /t/
Major General, U S Army
Director

Figure A.1. CCT 50th Anniversary Reunion (2003). Two of the early legendary combat controllers together, Chiefs Jim Howell and Alcide "Bull" Benini. (Photo courtesy of Mike "Sgt Mac" McReynolds.)

Note

1. Information taken from CMSgt Richard W. Crutchfield, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 9 February 2007; Crutchfield, unofficial biography, copy in AFHRA files; CMSgt James A. Howell, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 21-22 May 2007; SMSgt William B. Howell, USAF, retired, interview with the author, 13 December 2007; Crutchfield and Norrad, various e-mails and conversations with the author; and Cesar A. Urenda, Silver Star citation, copy in AFHRA files.

Appendix B

Accomplishment of the Pathfinder Mission Memo (Joint Airborne Troop Board)

EIGHTEENTH AIR FORCE
Donaldson Air Force Base
Greenville, South Carolina

HDC/D 322

26 August 1952

SUBJECT: Accomplishment of The Pathfinder Mission

TO: Commanding General
Tactical Air Command
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia

1. It was agreed at the "Pathfinder Conference" held at this headquarters on 22 May 1952 that:

a. Between now and 1 January 1953 Eighteenth Air Force will undertake a program for testing and evaluating all possible methods of eliminating the need for parachuting troops into a drop zone in advance of the main assault echelon.

b. Between now and 1 January 1953 our present methods will be employed in operations utilizing Army troops as Pathfinder parachute troops. On 1 January, if ascertained as an absolute necessity that parachute troops are required, the Air Force will assume this responsibility.

c. The aim of the development and testing will be to achieve, at the earliest possible date, the navigation to a drop zone by the lead serial without the aid of an advance element. Emphasis will be placed on the training of lead crews to accomplish this objective.

2. This conference was attended by representatives from your headquarters.

3. Navigational equipment, with the accuracy and dependability necessary to justify the elimination of Pathfinder teams, is not presently available. This headquarters has no reason to believe that this equipment will be available by 1 January 1953.

4. In view of the above, it is recommended that:

a. This headquarters assumes its responsibility for Pathfinder teams, as prescribed in the Tactical Air Command, Office,

18AF HDC/D 322

SUBJECT: Accomplishment of The Pathfinder Mission

Chief of Army Field Forces Standing Operating Procedures for Troop Carrier Airborne Operations, at the earliest practicable date.

b. This headquarters be given a quota of ten (10) spaces for the next class at the Army Jump School and a quota of two (2) spaces per class thereafter.

5. This action is predicated upon:

a. The belief that the Air Force should assume its responsibility for Pathfinder teams at the earliest practicable date.

b. The concern expressed by the Army because of our reluctance to assume our responsibility in this area (Ref. inclosed Memorandum to Director Joint Air Transportation Board).

6. This headquarters will continue the present testing program in this area with the view of eventually eliminating the need for this information.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:

1 Incl:
JATB Memo, dtd 28
Jul 52, subj as above

HARRY W CRAIG
Colonel, USAF
AIRADJUTANT GENERAL

Appendix C

Accomplishment of the Pathfinder Mission Memo (Eighteenth Air Force)



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS MILITARY AIRLIFT COMMAND
SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE ILLINOIS 62220-9001

19 MAY 1986

REPLY TO
ATTN OF

DOY

VI-368

SUBJECT

Combat Control and Pararescue Inter-relationships

TO See Distribution

1. As you may have heard through informal channels, a new relationship is developing between MAC Combat Control and Pararescue forces. It is a pleasure to announce that there will be closer associations between these two MAC career fields as this affiliation develops and grows.
2. This office now has functional management responsibility for the pararescue community per CINCMAC directive. SMSgt Pete Harding is a welcome addition to my staff and is the MAC POC for pararescue matters. We anticipate adding four or five more pararescue positions to the DOY staff over the next 6-10 months. As this occurs, the directorate will be split into two divisions--one for pararescue and one for combat control.
3. The 23 AF is currently developing a concept of operations for pararescue that returns mission emphasis to ground operations vice aircrew involvement. This could ultimately result in a career field reorganization, establishment of a pararescue officer corps, and development of new pararescue units. These units would then be supported by this directorate through 23 AF. In addition, the new combat control OL planned for Lackland AFB combat control candidate indoctrination may be collocated with the already established pararescue indoctrination OL. The economies of scale are obvious.
4. As an example of our intent to capitalize in areas of similar skill, there will be four pararescue personnel participating in the VOLANT RODEO 86 opening ceremony demonstration jump. Although the missions of combat control and pararescue do differ, because of certain similarities there is significant opportunity to improve training, management, supply and logistics, administration, etc. I will need everyone's wholehearted support of this concept. Your help will be needed to realize the benefits we see in this growing partnership.

John T. Carney, Jr.
JOHN T. CARNEY, JR., Col, USAF
Director, Combat Control Operations
DCS/Operations

1 Atch
Distribution

MAC--THE BACKBONE OF DETERRENCE

Appendix D

Combat Control and Pararescue Interrelationships



About the Special Operations Warrior Foundation (SOWF)

Established in 1980, the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, a top-rated 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization, provides support and assistance to the families of fallen and wounded Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps special operations personnel.

The SOWF offers three primary programs: (1) College educations to the surviving children of fallen special operations personnel; (2) Educational and family counseling to ensure the success of special operations families; and (3) Immediate financial assistance to the families of severely wounded special operations personnel.

The SOWF provides full college educations to the surviving children of fallen special operators. Funding is provided for tuition, books, fees, room and board, computer and printer.

The foundation has nearly 900 children of fallen warriors in its program, with 144 students currently attending colleges and universities across the country. In 2010, the foundation provided \$4.8 million in scholarship grants, counseling and support, financial aid, and secured funds for future obligations incurred during 2010.

The SOWF also provides immediate financial assistance to severely wounded special operations personnel so their loved ones can be bedside during their recovery. The SOWF provides a \$2,000 stipend to assist with unexpected expenses such as travel and miscellaneous expenses during the hospitalization and recovery. To date, the SOWF has provided \$1.2 million to the families of wounded special operations forces.

The outstanding service and efficiency of the Warrior Foundation resulted in being recognized as a "Four Star Charity" by Charity Navigator, an independent charity evaluation group and as one of the "Best of America" charities by Independent Charities of America.

The SOWF does not receive any funding from the federal or state government. As a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization, the SOWF is run on financial gifts from the general public. If you would like to show your support to the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, visit their website at <http://www.specialops.org>.

Special Operations Forces Casualties (since 1980): 807

Casualties since 9/11: 475

Number of surviving children (since 1980): 911

Number of children added since 9/11: 518

Number of SOWF college graduates: 191

Number of SOWF students in colleges & universities: 144

Number of Wounded SOF Warriors assisted: 652

Appendix E

Significant Events Chronology

20 Jul 1951	In response to wartime requirements in Korea, an Air Cargo Resupply Squadron (Provisional), was organized at Donaldson AFB, SC.
21 Nov 1951	A new squadron formed from the above provisional unit was redesignated the Aerial Port Operations Squadron (Provisional).
11 Jan 1952	1st Aerial Port Operations Squadron was activated at Donaldson AFB, SC., to support airdrop requirements by USAF aircraft.
February 1952	Tactical Air Command (TAC) directed Eighteenth Air Force to designate lead crews in each troop carrier group to specialize in Pathfinder duties; step toward establishing combat control teams (CCT) (Pathfinder) as organic to the wings.
1 Jan 1953	The Pathfinder mission transferred from US Army to Air Force.
1 Jul 1955	Aerial Port Squadron table of organization authorized specific number of CCTs per squadron, thereby establishing a requirement to procure Airmen and officers to serve as combat controllers.
Jul-Dec 1956	TAC was authorized 11 CCTs of 14 men each.
August 1962	The first known Air Commando CCTs deployed to Southeast Asia for combat operations.
March 1964	Operation Water Pump personnel, including CCTs, deployed from 1st Air Commando Wing to Southeast Asia; Water Pump was among longest-running US military operations in the Southeast Asia conflict.
May 1966	Several Air Commando CCTs began serving as airborne forward air controllers known as "Butterflies."
Jan-Feb 1973	The United States ceased offensive operations first in Vietnam, then in Laos. The communists, however, continued offensive operations.
12 Apr 1975	A four-man CCT participated in the evacuation of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
29 Apr 1975	A four-man CCT participated in evacuation of Saigon, Republic of Vietnam.

15 May 1975	US forces conducted an operation on Koh Tang Island off the coast of Cambodia intended to rescue the crew of SS <i>Mayaguez</i> .
4 Jul 1976	The Israeli Defense Force conducted an operation at Entebbe, Uganda, and rescued hostages held by Palestinian terrorists.
Dec 76 or May 77	A classified meeting held at Scott AFB, IL, led to the start of special CCT development as part of US national counterterrorism capability; CCT to be led by John T. Carney Jr.
15 Sep 1977	Col Keith Grimes, a key leader supporting Carney's "Brand-X" CCT, perished in an EC-135 crash in New Mexico.
17 Oct 1977	West German commandos (GSG 9) rescued hostages at Mogadishu, Somalia, further demonstrating the need for US national counterterrorism capabilities.
Late 1978	John Carney's Brand-X was authorized six full-time, permanent combat controllers who reported to Charleston AFB, SC.
4 Nov 1979	Iranian radicals captured the US embassy in Teheran, taking more than 50 Americans hostage.
24-25 Apr 1980	Operation Eagle Claw at "Desert One," Iran, failed to rescue the American hostages.
15 Jan 1981	Det 1, MACOS, was activated at Pope AFB, NC, under the leadership of John Carney.
1 Mar 1983	Headquarters, Twenty-Third Air Force, was activated at Scott AFB, IL, to become the "home" for USAF special operations.
25 Oct 1983	Operation Urgent Fury began, toppled the Marxist government in Grenada.
1 Jul 1984	First three USAF combat control squadrons (CCS) were activated: 1721 CCS, 1722 CCS, and 1723 CCS; 1723rd represented the first squadron-level CCT entity engaged in special operations.
16 April 1987	The US Special Operations Command was activated at MacDill AFB, FL.
1 May 1987	The 1724 CCS was activated at Pope AFB, NC, assigned to Twenty-Third Air Force.

1 Oct 1987	<p>Headquarters, 1720th Special Tactics Group (STG), was activated at Hurlburt Field, FL; official birth of USAF "Special Tactics."</p> <p>The 1723 CCS was reassigned to 1720 STG.</p> <p>The 1724 CCS was redesignated 1724th Special Tactics Squadron, reassigned to 1720 STG.</p> <p>The 1730th Pararescue Squadron, activated two months earlier, was assigned to 1720 STG. The assignment lasted two years.</p>
20 Dec 1989	Operation Just Cause began, toppled Manuel Noriega's government in Panama.
1 Feb 1990	<p>A total of 88 pararescue authorizations were moved to special operations units.</p> <p>Military Airlift Command divided its combat control units between conventional airlift (1721 CCS, 1722 CCS) and special operations (1723 CCS, 1724 STS).</p>
1 Apr 1990	The 1723 CCS was redesignated 1723 STS.
22 May 1990	Twenty-Third Air Force was redesignated Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC).
2 Aug 1990	Iraqi forces attacked Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia.
16-17 Jan 1991	Operation Desert Storm began, resulted in ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait.
6 Apr 1991	Operation Provide Comfort began in support of Iraqi Kurds.
31 May 1991	Col John Carney, first commander of 1720 STG, relinquished command and retired from active duty.
31 Mar 1992	<p>Headquarters, 1720 STG, was redesignated HQ, 720 STG.</p> <p>The 1723 STS was redesignated 23 STS.</p> <p>The 1724 STS was redesignated 24 STS.</p> <p>The 320 STS was activated at Kadena AB, Okinawa, Japan, assigned to 353 Special Operations Wing (SOW).</p> <p>The 321 STS was activated at RAF Alconbury, United Kingdom, assigned to 39 SOW.</p>
30 Apr 1992	<p>The 320 STS was reassigned to 720 STG.</p> <p>The 321 STS was reassigned to 720 STG.</p>
2 July 1992	The 352nd Special Operations Group (SOG) began supporting Operation Provide Promise, the first of several humanitarian/peace operations in the Balkans.
1 Jan 1993	<p>The 320 STS was reassigned to 353 SOG.</p> <p>The 321 STS was reassigned to 352 SOG.</p>

3-4 Oct 1993	In the Battle of Mogadishu, Somalia, Special Tactics members earned numerous awards for valor.
1 Apr 1996	The 10th Combat Weather Squadron was activated, assigned to 720 STG.
3 Apr 1996	A USAF T-43 aircraft carrying Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown crashed near Dubrovnik, Croatia, killing all aboard; Special Tactics members assisted in the recovery.
1 May 1996	The 21 STS was activated at Pope AFB, NC, assigned to 720 STG. In earlier years, some controllers in predecessor unit supported SOF activities on an ad hoc basis. The 22 STS was activated at McChord AFB, WA, assigned to 720 STG. In earlier years, some controllers in predecessor unit supported SOF activities on an ad hoc basis.
7 Nov 1996	The 123 Combat Control Flight (later, 123 Special Tactics Flight; 123 Special Tactics Squadron) was reassigned from Air Combat Command to AFSOC.
24-25 Mar 1999	Operation Allied Force began, resulted in Serbian withdrawal from Kosovo. Special Tactics teams participated in two high-visibility combat rescues of downed pilots (Vega-31, Hammer-34).
11 Oct 2000	USAF announced the creation of the Combat Rescue Officer career field.
11 Sep 2001	Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners, attacked targets in New York City and Washington, DC.
7-8 Oct 2001	Operation Enduring Freedom–Afghanistan began.
November 2001	US/Afghan Northern Alliance forces toppled Taliban government in Kabul, coalition soon controlled virtually all urban areas.
Jan-Jul 2002	The United States conducted Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines in support of Armed Forces of the Philippines as they battled insurgents in southern Philippines.
2-16 Mar 2002	Major ground battle at “Roberts’ Ridge” in eastern Afghanistan.
16 Apr 2002	The first Advanced Skills Training class graduated at Hurlburt Field, FL.
19 Mar 2003	Operation Iraqi Freedom began, toppled Saddam Hussein’s government in Iraq.
1 May 2003	Pres. George W. Bush declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq.

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This work explores the evolution and contributions of the Battlefield Airmen assigned to Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) special tactics units over 50 years. "Their story deserves telling within the US Air Force and to the general public," notes Gen John Jumper, USAF, retired. Battlefield Airmen core competencies include performing duties primarily on the ground, often "outside the wire," and under austere conditions—all skills needed for carrying the fight to the enemy on the ground. The AFSOC special tactics community is a small brotherhood of highly trained and equally dedicated warriors consisting of special tactics officers and combat controllers, combat rescue officers and pararescuemen, and officer and enlisted special operations weathermen. They have proven themselves as force multipliers time and time again throughout their history in places like Somalia, Serbia, and the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq.



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