



Aerial leaflet drop during Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS.

A Team Approach

PSYOP and LRA Defection in 2012

by Jared M. Tracy

Abstract: *Sectarian and ethnic conflict, genocide, and slavery long plagued central Africa. Military actions by African armed forces had weakened but not defeated one regional threat, Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). When the multi-national counter-LRA effort demanded creative solutions, Psychological Operations soldiers stepped in to help solve the problem.*

In fall 2011, Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Major (MAJ) Joseph A. Dewey reported to Kelley Barracks, in Stuttgart, Germany, as the PSYOP Planner in the J39 (Information Operations), Special Operations Command, Africa (SOCAFRICA). There, Dewey learned that U.S. President Barack H. Obama recently authorized the deployment of 100 combat-equipped soldiers to central Africa to support ongoing counter-Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) efforts.¹ Named Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, the mission involved 10th and 19th Special Forces Group (SFG) soldiers training counterparts from Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan, and other multi-national forces. As the preface to this article explained, those partners sought to remove the brutal LRA from the battlefield.

Led by the mystic Acholi nationalist Joseph Kony, the LRA had perpetrated atrocities against civilians across central Africa since 1987. The President's authorization finally committed the U.S. to aiding its allies against that threat. Even though encouraging LRA soldiers to defect was a core military objective, in practice the U.S. emphasized foreign internal defense (FID), an SF specialty, with no PSYOP personnel included at first. Thanks to a few enterprising PSYOP soldiers, that soon changed in a way that impacted the trajectory and outcome of OBSERVANT COMPASS. This article describes the deployment activities and accomplishments of the first PSYOP team in Uganda, from January to July 2012. The story begins in the J39, SOCAFRICA, with its newly arrived PSYOP Planner, MAJ Dewey.

Commissioned in 1996, the former Transportation and Chemical Officer had Bosnia and Kosovo deployments before switching to PSYOP in 2004. Deploying to Iraq as a detachment commander (Company C, 9th PSYOP Battalion [POB]), Dewey was then assigned to 6th POB. After leading Military Information Support Team (MIST) – Ethiopia, he became a Plans Officer on the 4th PSYOP Group staff. This led to a nine-month deployment supporting the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan. After

serving as 5th POB Executive Officer, which included a tour with the Joint Information Support Task Force (Special Operations) (JISTF [SO]) in Qatar, he joined the J39, SOCAFRICA. From his new position in Germany, Dewey would play a key role in getting a PSYOP team into central Africa.²

OBSERVANT COMPASS rules of engagement dictated that U.S. soldiers could not directly attack the LRA. That restriction shaped the initial approach of the U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) Counter-LRA Control Element (ACCE [pronounced āce]), the lead headquarters for the operation. Located in Entebbe, Uganda, the ACCE treated OBSERVANT COMPASS as a typical FID mission. However, the SOCAFRICA Commander, U.S. Navy SEAL Rear Admiral (RADM) Brian L. Losey, realized that 'kinetic' military operations had not yet defeated the LRA. Political interest in the crisis led Losey to adopt a "whole of SOCAFRICA" approach involving more than FID. He directed MAJ Dewey to "get after this problem."³

Despite his extensive experience, the PSYOP Planner saw this as a unique mission. He and Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Greg Mogavero, the new Information



Left: Joseph Kony, an ethnic Acholi, founded the LRA in 1987 and ruled it through fear and superstition. **Right:** U.S. Navy RADM Brian L. Losey addresses the audience after relinquishing command of Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa on 19 May 2011. Losey then assumed command of SOCAFRICA.

NOTE: IAW USSOCOM sanitization protocol for historical articles on recent operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk (*). The eyes of active ARSOF personnel in photos are blocked out when not covered with dark visors or sunglasses, except when the photos were publicly released by a service or DoD. Source references (end notes) utilize the assigned pseudonym.



(Image credit: LTC Joseph A. Dewey)

MSG Geoff Ball, Jr.* (left) and LTC Joseph A. Dewey (right) from the J39, SOCAFRICA, while on TDY at the ACCE in January 2012.

Operations (IO) Officer, discussed how to use Military Information Support Operations (MISO) against Kony.⁴ Lacking specific guidance or MISO authorities, they had a blank slate. Dewey spoke with 19th SFG leaders at the ACCE, and planned temporary duty (TDY) visits there. The first TDY was a one-week trip in January 2012, involving Dewey and his Non-Commissioned Officer-in-Charge (NCOIC), Master Sergeant (MSG) Geoff Ball, Jr.* Though confirming the ACCE’s FID-heavy approach, they also discovered that it was “receptive” to MISO.⁵

Given the OBSERVANT COMPASS objective of promoting LRA defections, PSYOP had an opportunity. However, the ‘maxed-out’ 100-person force cap required a workaround. MAJ Dewey contacted LTC Lee H. Evans, commander of the new, USAFRICOM-aligned 7th POB, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.⁶ They planned to deploy two PSYOP soldiers to Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, for assignment with the Regional Information Support Team (RIST), Special Operations Command and Control Element-Horn of Africa (SOCCE-HOA). The team would then go TDY to the ACCE, but could return to Djibouti quickly, if necessary.⁷ The mission would fall on two unsuspecting members from Company A, 7th POB: Captain (CPT) Adam R. Vance and Staff Sergeant (SSG) Nathan J. ‘Jed’ Todd.⁸

SSG Todd had reported to his Company A detachment in mid-2011, after studying Arabic at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) at Monterey, California.⁹ Todd had enlisted in 1994, studied Russian at DLI, served in Military Intelligence (MI), and deployed to Bosnia with the 302nd MI Battalion from Germany. He left active duty in 1999, but later joined the 345th PSYOP Company, U.S. Army Reserve, in Lewisville, Texas. The PSYOP



Prior Infantry and SF-qualified Officer LTC Lee H. Evans helped activate, and then commanded, the USAFRICOM-oriented 7th POB.

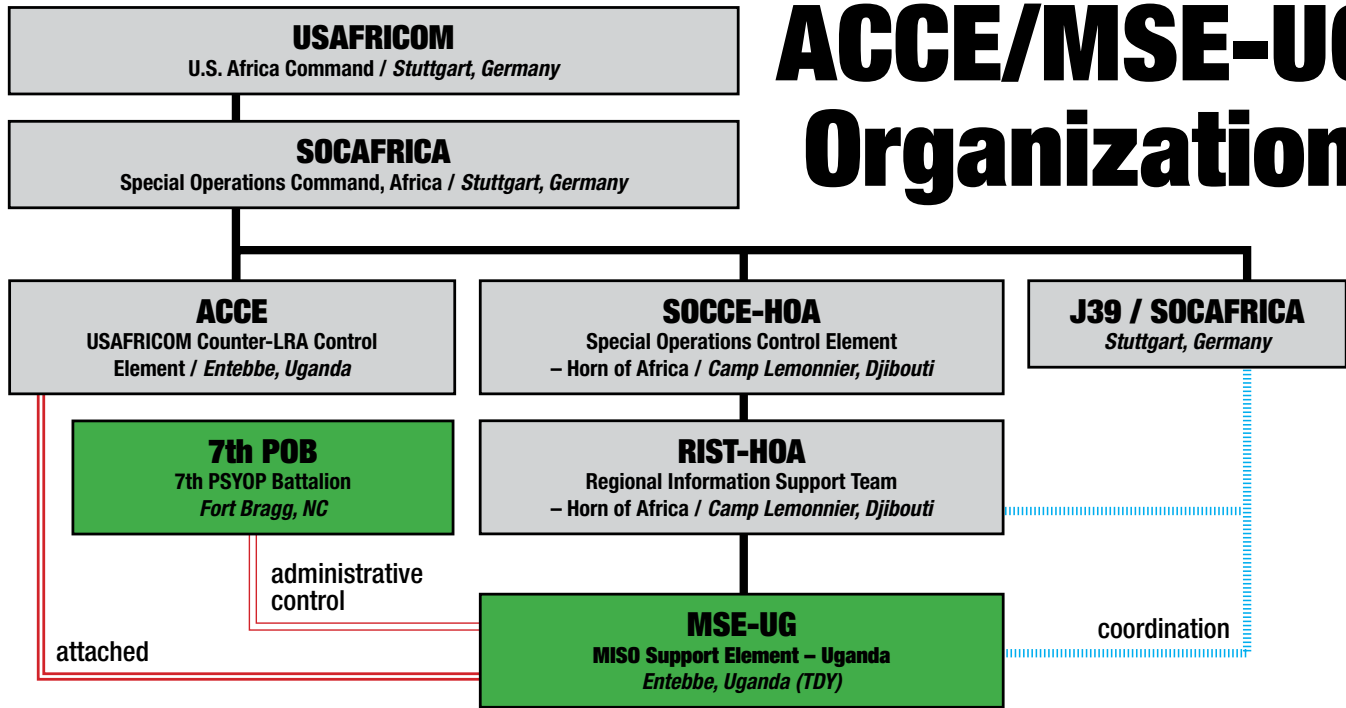


7th POB Distinctive Unit Insignia

Specialist deployed to Afghanistan (2002) and Iraq (2004), before returning to active duty in 2006. Assigned to 9th POB, he supported 20th SFG during a second Iraq tour (2006-2007). As a 6th POB soldier, he deployed with MIST-Mali, partnering with the U.S. Embassy in Bamako on counter-terrorist messaging. With tactical and regional experience under his belt, SSG Todd joined 7th POB as a motivated, seasoned PSYOP NCO.¹⁰

Led by CPT Matthew J. Shirley, this detachment was tasked to analyze the South Sudan region. Todd clearly recalled that “the LRA kept coming up” during ‘duty day’ research on the area and potential target audiences. Meanwhile, a surprise opportunity arose from the enrollment of a fellow soldier at Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC). One evening, FTCC hosted a presentation by Invisible Children, a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 2004 to raise

ACCE/MSE-UG Organization



awareness about Kony, and to assist Africans in LRA-affected countries. SSG Todd accepted his teammate’s invitation to attend. Impressed by Invisible Children’s efforts, he subsequently contacted the NGO, beginning a relationship that later paid operational dividends.¹¹

In December 2011, CPT Shirley handed command of the detachment over to CPT Adam R. Vance. The 2006 U.S. Military Academy graduate had recently completed an 11-month tactical deployment with Company E, 9th POB, in support of Special Operations Task Force – South, in Afghanistan. Vance was impressed by Todd’s knowledge of the LRA, and his rapport with Invisible Children. The captain had heard rumors that a PSYOP team might deploy to central Africa, but was skeptical when he took leave for Christmas break. Unbeknownst

to him, SOCAFRICA and 7th POB had been working hard to get a team into Uganda.¹²

After the New Year, LTC Evans informed CPT Vance and SSG Todd that they were deploying in mid-January. To Vance, this “seemed completely unrealistic, but it turned out to be true!” Vance and Todd got orders in-hand, and scrambled to get ready (Todd’s tenacity in researching the region and the LRA reduced some of the stress of the short-notice deployment). “We hit a snag with getting our Uganda visas approved, so Jed and I drove a day to the Ugandan Embassy in Washington, D.C. We had just express-mailed our passports the day before, so we hand-picked them up, got them stamped, and drove back,” said Vance. After getting ready in record-time, the two left on 20 January 2012, wearing

Left: SSG Nathan J. Todd, MSE-UG NCOIC, built relationships with NGOs and prepared his PSYOP team for deployment to OOC.

Right: Former Signal Officer CPT Adam R. Vance reported to Company A, 7th POB, in December 2011, and became the first MSE-UG OIC.



Image credit: MSE-UG



Image credit: MSE-UG

civilian clothes, and carrying two uniforms and extra civilian clothing in personal bags.¹³

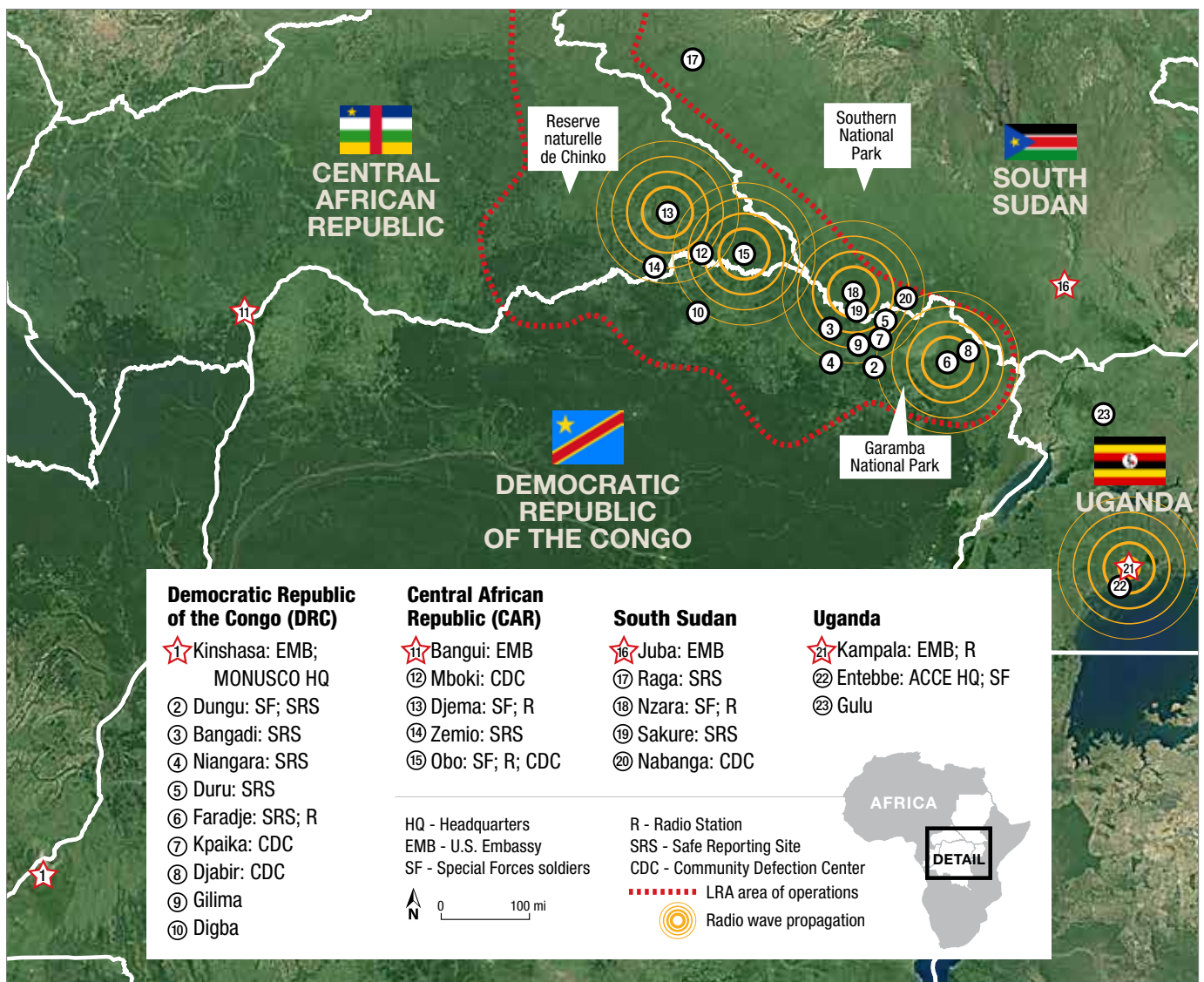
Upon arrival at Camp Lemonnier, they were met by RIST-HOA members, and provided billeting. The next day, they flew to Entebbe, Uganda, where the ACCE was expecting them. “They had workstations set up for us,” Vance recalled, “which is always a good sign.”¹⁴ In Uganda, Vance and Todd briefly met with two NCOs from the J39, SOCAFRICA, who were finishing another TDY to gather information for the broader MISO program.¹⁵ Soon, they were on their own.

As MISO Support Element – Uganda (MSE-UG), Vance and Todd quickly reached two conclusions.¹⁶ First, the 100-soldier limit seemed low given the size and complexity of the operational area (multiple ethnicities speaking dozens of languages in an area the size of California).¹⁷ Obviously, the two could not do anything about the force cap, meaning that effects must be achieved in other ways.

Second, Vance and Todd noted that U.S. military expertise on central Africa and the LRA was lacking. However, NGOs fluent in local languages and customs were already on the ground, helping civilian communities throughout the region. MSE-UG decided early on that it would make sense to work directly with them, particularly Invisible Children. The only condition was that they had to keep the U.S. State Department’s in-theater counter-LRA representative, Jason Lewis-Berry, informed.¹⁸

On paper, the MSE-UG mission was simple: influence fighters to leave the LRA. “For every member of the LRA removed from the operational area,” MAJ Dewey said, “we . . . achieved a portion of the desired effect.”¹⁹ Once LRA soldiers defected, they would need to report to designated Safe Reporting Sites (SRSs), managed by local security forces or by the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Defectors could also report

OBSERVANT COMPASS Area of Operations



On 17 February 2012, CPT Vance (seated, left) and SSG Todd (standing, left) met in Obo with two Central African Republic military commanders (second and third from left), Jason Lewis-Berry (standing, right), the local ODA commander (seated, second from right), and international war crimes prosecutor Matthew Brubaker (seated, right).



(Image credit: MSE-UG)

to civilian-run Community Defection Centers (CDCs).²⁰ U.S. Navy SEAL Captain (CAPT) Kenneth Wright, ACCE commander, granted MSE-UG latitude in developing its approach to this problem.

With enthusiastic U.S. Embassy support, the ACCE sent Vance and Todd to Djema and Obo, Central African Republic; Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Nzara, South Sudan, in order “to get a solid plan together.”²¹ At those locations, MSE-UG planned to meet with SF teams, local religious and political figures, NGO representatives, and civilian-run radio stations. The two were comfortable working with SF due to their previous combat tours. In addition, Todd had inter-agency experience from his earlier MIST-Mali deployment. Together, they knew how to coordinate cross-organizational efforts at the ground-level.

In February, during their site surveys, MSE-UG realized that FM radio was key to reaching the LRA and nearby communities. MONUSCO and host nations, with NGO support, were running local radio stations. However, coverage was spotty, and Acholi-language broadcasts were rare (Azande-language programs were more prevalent). MSE-UG had current FM radio coverage mapped to suggest expansions. They found that Radio Zereda in Obo needed better equipment and must relocate to higher elevation for better range. Further, Djema was a good candidate for an FM transmitter for several reasons: nearby LRA activity; the presence of an SF Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) from Company A,

4-10th SFG, for security; and no other stations nearby.²² Djema became a priority.

A change in MSE-UG NCOICs did not halt ongoing site surveys, plans, and improvements. SSG Todd, who had gotten MSE-UG on a good footing for deployment and had made critical inroads with groups on the ground, departed on 30 March so that he could return for a full tour in July. His replacement, SGT Pete H. Blackman*, kept radio expansion efforts going. By mid-April, with U.S. Embassy approval in-hand, MSE-UG finished coordinating with USAFRICOM and SOCAFRICA for shipping two tactical FM transmitters. They arrived on 3 May; three days later, the U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group trained SGT Blackman* on their use and repair.²³ One FM transmitter was then transferred to Djema, where Blackman* trained locals for the remainder of May.

The Djema station provided local leaders, the SF ODA, and African military forces the ability to broadcast popular music, public safety notices, and counter-LRA messaging, to listeners within a 30-kilometer radius. In addition, as CPT Vance noted, MSE-UG sat with defectors to document their stories and gratitude for being free of the LRA.²⁴ Recordings were then edited on a Panasonic Toughbook CF-31 laptop by MSE-UG, in partnership with the NGO The Voice Project. Djema broadcasters voluntarily played sixteen recorded “come home” messages from LRA defectors, which complemented printed products.²⁵



(Image credit: MSE-UG)



Left: SGT Pete H. Blackman* replaced SSG Jed Todd as MSE-UG NCOIC halfway through the first rotation. **Right:** MSE-UG trained locals on operating FM radio stations, with 'come home' messages pre-loaded onto laptops.

(Image credit: MSE-UG)



Matthew Brubaker (third from left), the local ODA commander (second from right), and CPT Vance (right) inspect Radio Zereda in Obo to see how they can help with improvements.



A view of the radio station and antenna in Djema months after installation.

1: This simple leaflet reads, “Have you seen Kony?” It says that “Any information is useful,” and invites readers to contact the African Union – Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) via text message.

2: One of Kony’s many wives, Guinikpara Germaine, was abducted by the LRA in 2008.

3: An LRA escapee, Germaine reads a leaflet similar to the one that inspired her to flee.

4: As seen in this summer 2012 leaflet drop, leaflets were frequently color-coded (red in this case) as a way of tracking where defectors obtained them, and how far they traveled to escape.



As MSE-UG expanded radio coverage, it also assisted Invisible Children with defection leaflets.²⁶ First, MSE-UG, ‘armed’ with information from site visits, planned leaflets directly with the NGO.²⁷ Next, Invisible Children printed, packaged, and delivered the leaflets to the ACCE with their own vehicles.²⁸ Finally, Vance and Todd arranged the dissemination of these products (usually by contracted air) based on target audience location.

One leaflet campaign featured one of Kony’s former wives, Guinikpara Germaine (abducted in 2008), who claimed that seeing another former wife on a leaflet inspired her to flee as well. On 17 February 2012, 20,000 of these leaflets were dropped around Gilima, Democratic Republic of the Congo. A month later, 30,000 leaflets fell on Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, on 23 March, 50,000 were dropped around Djema and Obo, and 20,000 around Duru, Democratic Republic of the Congo.²⁹ Aerial leaflet drops like these remained commonplace during OBSERVANT COMPASS.

Leaflets were also distributed face-to-face by SF teams, NGOs, MONUSCO, partner nation forces, and community leaders. In one case, MSE-UG delivered dozens of boxes of leaflets in the back of a Toyota Hilux pickup truck to the SF team in Dungu to hand out. Vance recalled that the load “was so heavy that the front wheels came off the ground. I don’t know how we steered!”³⁰ These missions demonstrated how NGOs, MSE-UG, and other agencies cooperated to encourage defections from the LRA.

These efforts were working, and the LRA was shrinking one soldier (or a handful) at a time. Still, in the West, OBSERVANT COMPASS was overshadowed such events as the drawdown in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)



efforts against Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. That changed on 5 March 2012, when Invisible Children released its 30-minute film, *Kony 2012*, on YouTube. It was produced on the following premise: “Can an online video make an obscure war criminal famous? And if he is famous, will the world work together to stop him?”³¹ Directed by Invisible Children co-founder Jason Russell, *Kony 2012* exposed LRA crimes and atrocities, especially child abduction and slavery. It also urged viewers worldwide to publicize Kony in their own communities.

Reactions to *Kony 2012* exceeded expectations. According to SSG Todd, “We knew in advance that Invisible Children was making a movie, [the Embassy] knew about it, and the ACCE knew about it. But no one thought it would be a big deal.”³² To their surprise, it exploded on social media, gaining millions of views. According to Invisible Children, *Kony 2012* was “the fastest growing viral video of all time and resulted in unprecedented international action to end Africa’s longest running conflict.”³³ Virtually overnight, Kony and the LRA became front-page news. *Kony 2012* offered an interesting dynamic: a short film released on YouTube generated instant global visibility of, and interest in, a low-key, U.S.-supported mission.

As a result of *Kony 2012*, Congressional visits to Uganda increased. Further, on 23 April 2012, at the

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, Obama said, “part of our regional strategy [is] to end the scourge [of] the LRA and help realize a future where no African child is stolen from their family, no girl is raped, and no boy is turned into a child soldier.” The U.S. was stepping up “efforts to facilitate defections and support their reintegration, in parallel with increased military pressure, [to] help reduce the LRA’s capacity.”³⁴ Continued political support of the mission seemed assured.

Additionally, Colonel (COL) Kurt S. Crytzer, who became ACCE commander in June, saw enormous potential in the PSYOP-supported defection campaign against the LRA. The former 2-19th SFG and Joint Special Operations Task Force – Trans-Sahara commander “really got relationships going with NGOs, [and] transformed the mission from training folks in tactics to developing partnerships with the community.”³⁵ With great political support, strong command backing, and enduring partnerships, PSYOP soldiers went on to play a critical role throughout OBSERVANT COMPASS.

In mid-2012, the first MSE-UG rotation was nearing the end of its tour. Replacing CPT Vance and SGT Blackman* in July were Sergeant First Class (SFC) Nathan J. Todd and SGT Trevor B. Rangel*. Before completing the turnover, on 6 July, Vance, Blackman*, Todd, and Rangel* cooperated on an aerial leaflet drop mission. Invisible Children had delivered eight cardboard boxes,

“... the fastest growing viral video of all time... resulted in unprecedented international action to end Africa’s longest running conflict.”



Kony 2012 screenshot on YouTube.





Left: After the release of *Kony 2012*, President Obama reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to help eliminate the LRA at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. **Right:** Becoming ACCE commander in June 2012, COL Kurt S. Crytzer emphasized the importance of MISO in LRA defections.

each filled with 2,500 defection leaflets, to the airfield. The PSYOP soldiers then loaded them into the contracted Cessna 208 *Caravan*, operated by Air Serv.

Due to weight limits, only Vance and Blackman* boarded the plane. While in flight, they dropped 20,000 leaflets over suspected LRA locations around the Chinko Natural Reserve in eastern Central African Republic. Some leaflets showed defectors who later joined the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF). Others showed former LRA Major General (MG) Caesar Achellam, who was reunited with his family.³⁶ A milestone in the counter-LRA fight, the UPDF had captured Achellam, an LRA member since the late-1980s, on 12 May 2012, near the Central African Republic-Democratic Republic of the Congo border. From then on, Achellam cooperated with the U.S. and its partners by encouraging other LRA soldiers to defect.³⁷

By the end of the first MSE-UG deployment in July 2012, twenty-five out of perhaps 500 LRA members had defected.³⁸ Among them was Michael Oryem, who was abducted by the LRA at around eight years old in 1995, rose to battalion commander, and defected on 22 June 2012.³⁹ Subsequent PSYOP teams highlighted the defection of higher-ranking LRA members like Oryem to encourage highly indoctrinated, lower-ranking soldiers to defect, through products demonstrating that their former leaders and comrades were safe and happy.

U.S.-supported defection efforts seemed to be paying off, despite several obstacles. First, defecting was inherently difficult due to tight small-unit cohesion within

the LRA, and Kony's strong psychological hold over his forces (rooted in superstition). Second, the region's size and topography made it difficult to pinpoint where LRA units were located, and for LRA fighters themselves to leave. A third obstacle was limited literacy and technology use within the LRA, forcing PSYOP to rely expressly on leaflets and radio broadcasts. These factors affected, but did not derail, the counter-LRA defection campaign, which was showing results.

LRA defections alone were not the only credit to PSYOP in early OBSERVANT COMPASS. In a short period of time, a few highly motivated and experienced soldiers had established a team presence on the ground; made the right interagency connections; plugged-in with and expanded existing NGO efforts; and got the MISO effort up and running. The second MSE-UG rotation, and every subsequent team, built on the strong foundation laid by PSYOP soldiers in SOCAFRICA and MSE-UG in 2011-2012.⁴⁰

Postscript

There were eleven PSYOP rotations to central Africa between the start of Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS in October 2011 and its successful conclusion on 21 April 2017. Each one supported the ACCE, which became Special Operations Command Forward – Central Africa (SOCFWD-CA) in 2013. These rotations bore similarities to the first one discussed in this article, but there were also differences. For example, starting with the third rotation in May 2013, the PSYOP team consisted of at least three or four personnel per deployment (as opposed to two). Also, the team designation

(Image credit: MSE-UG)



(Image credit: MSE-UG)



(Image credit: MSE-UG)



1: From left to right, SFC Nathan J. Todd, SGT Pete H. Blackman*, and SGT Trevor B. Rangel* (with CPT Adam R. Vance in the aircraft), just before the 6 July 2012 leaflet drop, during the 'overlap' between the first two MSE-UG rotations.

2: SGT Blackman* (left) and an Invisible Children representative transfer boxes of leaflets from a van to a Cessna 208 on 6 July 2012.

3: SGT Blackman* drops leaflets highlighting LRA defectors and the recently captured MG Caesar Achellam over Central African Republic.

4: MG Caesar Achellam (in red beret) as a senior LRA commander.

5: This leaflet highlights Caesar Achellam, shown free of the LRA and happy with his family.



5

WABWA DITTO TFWA ATALA PIWA PE DOKWEMPE AABE WA WU NUBEDU PACE NA ABBE KI JOTO NA DABE KI
 BUNWA ABUNWA NA DABWA ABUNWA NA LONDO NA YA WABABA TI APWOTI ABUNWA TI DABWA NA DABWA TI

LAWOT WU ACHELLAM DABAN UGATI I DABE
 MUKU UPOTI BI JOLI WABWA NA I DABWA
 BUNWA ABUNWA KI DABWA MA MUKU
 ACHELLAM ABUNWA NA DA UPOTI VELD ADALI
 NA JUTWA NA YA DABWA

YEC DDO KARATAC MAN WEX IMHI
 BOT LUKIN GANO NA HAREDO
 MAN I GAN GANO ME I KARIDO
 MAN BI BI JOLI KA SI TARI
 UPOTI I KARIDO NA COE KWEDDI
 KI KONU KI BI MINI CAM, PE , RVE
 KI JENU MA PLE TIC PE KWID BI
 GANO MA SI TYE I TARIH
 SAKURE, ABUKI KI MUKU UPOTI
 WENG BI TYE ATERA ME JOLI WEX
 I SPWIS DANE LARONDO AYELA
 UN MA WABAC NA DITIME HEM
 PEKE, PE I RED KI SWODI

KENDI NA MUKU TO NA DABWA,
 MPE TERISA SA IMBUKA TE
 OLINGI OBAMA SA HFDIKA NA
 KIMEMA YU EPAYI NA DA UPOTI
 MPO TE BASALISA YO.

COE COE LAWOT WU MA WUM NUBEDU KWEDDI I LUM KUNJA NA NYINBE
 BENNIS BOKKONYWEDU ODONYO I MUKU CI KI JOLE MAREB ADADA
 BENNIS BOKKONYWEDU ABUNWA MUKU UPOTI NA MUKU MPE ADALI MALAME



1: A 7th POB soldier conducts a low-altitude aerial loudspeaker mission during Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, a common practice after 2013. **2:** U.S. soldiers prepare to release a leaflet-laden box over a suspected LRA location. **3:** Former LRA soldiers who defected and joined the UPDF were frequently highlighted on leaflets.

changed over time. Starting off as the MSE-UG in 2012, it became Regional MISO Team – Uganda (RMT-UG) by 2014, and finally, Regional MISO Detachment – Uganda (RMD-UG) by 2015.

Interagency cooperation continued, but on 17 July 2013, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the “USAFRICOM Counter-LRA MISO Program.” This led to unilateral PSYOP messaging and improved MISO tactics. For example, by 2013, low-altitude aerial loudspeaker (ALS) missions via contracted Bell UH-1 *Iroquois* (‘Huey’) helicopters, which caused LRA soldiers to scatter and defect, had become standard practice.⁴¹

In addition, by 2015, products began targeting specific LRA soldiers. These included pre-recorded loudspeaker messages featuring their own family members. Customized products remained a mainstay of MISO during OBSERVANT COMPASS.

Although Kony remained at-large, the PSYOP-supported defection campaign had diminished the LRA down to less than 100 fighters by early 2017. Defectors and escapees included LTC Opio Sam on 25 June 2014; Brigadier General Dominic Ongwen in late 2014; seven members of Kony’s inner circle (known as the Kony 7) in June 2015; COL Okot George Odek, one of Kony’s

bodyguards, on 6 February 2016; and LRA Chief of Communications, Michael Omona, in January 2017.⁴² On 29 March 2017, General Thomas D. Waldhauser (U.S. Marine Corps), Commander, USAFRICOM, declared that African forces could handle what remained of the LRA, and shut the mission down the next month.⁴³ OBSERVANT COMPASS offered a model of how to apply creative, ‘non-kinetic’ solutions to complex military situations. 🇺🇸

Takeaways:

- 1 OBSERVANT COMPASS was an ‘economy of force’, requiring cooperation between multiple U.S. agencies, UN and partner forces, and NGOs
- 2 Two 7th POB soldiers filled a critical gap, applying expertise and creativity ‘on the ground’ to bolster the multi-organizational LRA defection program
- 3 The release and viral explosion of *Kony 2012* on YouTube in March 2012 led to global visibility of U.S.-supported counter-LRA efforts in central Africa

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Endnotes

- 1 LTC Joseph A. Dewey, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 7 April 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Dewey interview with date; The White House, “Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the Lord’s Resistance Army,” 14 October 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Dewey interview, 7 April 2020.
- 3 Dewey interview, 7 April 2020.
- 4 On 3 December 2010, the Secretary of Defense replaced the term PSYOP with the term MISO to describe that *function*. The Joint Staff defined MISO as “planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.” IO was defined as the “integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.” IO encompassed or worked alongside other information/influence functions (including MISO) to disrupt enemy decision-making and operations, and advance U.S. interests. Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-13: *Information Operations*, 27 November 2012 (updated 20 November 2014), GL-3, II-6, II-9-II-10, accessed online at https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_13.pdf.
- 5 Dewey interview, 7 April 2020.
- 6 7th POB was technically a provisional battalion when Todd arrived. Briefly designated the 51st POB upon reconstitution in December 2009, the re-flagged 7th POB was formally activated on 16 October 2011 (just after Obama announced the beginning of OBSERVANT COMPASS).
- 7 Dewey interview, 7 April 2020. Usually at the Special Operations Command — Forward (SOCFWD) level, a RIST is more of a mission than it is a unit. Typically, a RIST serves as a control element for MISTs and MSEs in the operational area, and as a conduit between them and the Theater Special Operations Command, and the U.S.-based force provider. In addition, the RIST advises MISTs on matters like funding, administrative issues, and measures of effectiveness. Though assigned to RIST-HOA, MSE-UG had little direct interaction with it.
- 8 Email from Jonathan Easter to Jared M. Tracy, “SUBJECT: Re: Thanks,” 20 December 2017, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Easter email with date.
- 9 Each detachment typically consisted of an OIC (CPT), NCOIC (MSG or SFC), and two teams with three junior NCOs (SSGs and SGTs).
- 10 MSG Nathan J. Todd, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 22 December 2017, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Todd interview with date.
- 11 Todd interview, 22 December 2017.
- 12 CPT Adam R. Vance, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 6 April 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Vance interview with date.
- 13 Vance interview, 6 April 2020. They also brought an individual loudspeaker, but that was not used. Excepting SF personnel at the outposts, all U.S. military personnel, including the ACCE leadership and staff, wore civilian clothes as their daily ‘uniform’.
- 14 Vance interview, 6 April 2020. Though sharing the same commander early on, the ACCE and SOCCE-HOA were two different commands under SOCAFRICA, each with its own organizational structure, mission, authorities, and operational area. While SOCCE-HOA *could* support the ACCE, as a general rule, they were kept separate. The fact that Vance and Todd were technically assigned to RIST-HOA but worked for the ACCE made them an exception.
- 15 Todd interview, 22 December 2017.
- 16 The team was originally called the Strategic Effects Cell due to perceived State Department concerns about the term MISO. However, U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Officer Daniel Travis permitted it to be called a MISO Support Element (MSE). For consistency, only MSE-UG is used here. MSE-UG was a modern version of the earlier PSYOP Support Element (PSE), defined in the Joint Publication 3-53 (2003) as “a tailored element that can provide limited [PSYOP] support. [PSEs] do not contain organic command and control capability; therefore, command relationships must be clearly defined. The size, composition, and capability of the [PSE] are determined by the requirements of the supported commander. A [PSE] is not designed to provide full-spectrum [PSYOP] capability; reach-back is critical for its mission success.”
- 17 MAJ Jonathan R. Easter, “Bending the Spear: The Campaign Against the Lord’s Resistance Army” (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), 3.
- 18 Todd interview, 22 December 2017.
- 19 SOCAFRICA, “Special Operations Command Forward – Central Africa MISO Support Element Operational Overview to Counter – Lords Resistance Army Operations,” June 2014, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter SOCAFRICA Briefing, June 2014.
- 20 SRSs and CDCs were preferred as a means of avoiding reprisals if defectors arrived at other communities or locations. As of June 2014, there were eight SRSs at the following locations: Raga and Sakure (near Nzara), South Sudan; Zemio, Central African Republic; and Bangadi, Niangara, Duru, Dungu, and Faradje, Democratic Republic of the Congo. There were five CDCs at the following locations: Nabanga, South Sudan; Obo and Mboki, Central African Republic; and Kpaika and Djabir, Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to SRSs and CDCs, there were a number of ‘sensitized’ communities that were not officially in the defection network, but were considered ‘safe zones’ for LRA defectors.
- 21 Vance interview, 6 April 2020.
- 22 Company A, 7th POB, Storyboard, “OOC, FM Radio,” 30 May 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter 7th POB Storyboard, 30 May 2012; SOCAFRICA Briefing, June 2014. There were more FM radio stations than those discussed here, some of them poorly utilized or in disrepair. By 2014, SOCFWD-CA had established two stations in Central African Republic (Djema and Sam Ouandjah), and repaired/enhanced two others (Obo and Mboki). Meanwhile, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO was operating two stations aided by

The Voice Project, Radio Okapi in Dungu and Radio Rhino in Faradje. See Easter, "Bending the Spear," 50.

- 23 7th POB Storyboard, 30 May 2012; Vance interview, 6 April 2020; AWG, "Mission," no date, accessed online at <https://www.awg.army.mil/About-Us/Mission-Core-Functions-Priorities/>. The AWG mission was to provide "global operational advisory support to U.S. Army forces to rapidly transfer current threat-based observations and solutions to tactical and operational commanders."
- 24 Vance interview, 6 April 2020.
- 25 7th POB Storyboard, 30 May 2012; Voice Project, "Our Work," no date, accessed online at <http://voiceproject.org/our-work/>. An NGO established in 2009 in response to the LRA, The Voice Project used music and other forms of creative expression to cause social change.
- 26 There was a brief 'pause' by the Embassy on MSE-UG cooperation with NGOs in early March. This took the form of the Embassy telling the ACCE to, in turn, direct MSE-UG to cancel a planned meeting with Invisible Children, and to not make others. When *Kony 2012* posted, MSE-UG was allowed to attend the meeting. Email from Nathan J. Todd to Jared M. Tracy, "SUBJECT: Re: Follow-Up," 1 April 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 27 Leaflets featured large images with few words, to account for varying literacy rates in the operational area (ranging from around 30 percent in South Sudan, to around 80 percent in Uganda). Literacy rates also greatly varied based on sex and age, with males through their mid-20s typically being the most literate. For summaries of education and literacy in LRA-affected countries, see, for example, "Literacy Rate by Country 2020," no date, accessed online at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/literacy-rate-by-country/>, and United Nations International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014, "Democratic Republic of the Congo," no date, accessed online at https://unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/FINAL_Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo.pdf.
- 28 Later, printing support was also provided by the JISTF (SO) in Qatar, an example of effective cross-Geographic Combatant Command coordination. JISTF (SO) also introduced a practical improvement to the leaflets by printing them on weatherproof material to avoid having them get soggy or disintegrate in central African woodland areas. Dewey interview, 7 April 2020.
- 29 Company A, 7th POB, Storyboard, "OOC Defection Leaflets," 25 March 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Vance interview, 6 April 2020. During the deployment, MSE-UG introduced a color-coding strategy, in which leaflets with assigned colors were dropped in specifically designated areas. When someone defected from the LRA with a leaflet in-hand, they compared their location with where the leaflet had been dropped to help determine defection trends.
- 30 Vance interview, 6 April 2020.
- 31 Invisible Children, "Kony 2012," no date, accessed online at <https://invisiblechildren.com/kony-2012/>, hereafter "Kony 2012."
- 32 Todd interview, 22 December 2017.
- 33 "Kony 2012"; SOCAFRICA briefing, June 2014. As of 16 June 2014, just over two years after release, *Kony 2012* had

99,506,000 views.

- 34 The White House, "Fact Sheet: Mitigating and Eliminating the Threat to Civilians Posed by the Lord's Resistance Army," 23 April 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 35 Email from Nathan J. Todd to Jared M. Tracy, "SUBJECT: Re: Follow-Up," 1 April 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 36 ACCE MSE, Storyboard, "6 July 2012 Airdrop," 6 July 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 37 Email from Adam R. Vance to Jared M. Tracy, "SUBJECT: Re: Thanks," 9 April 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 38 SOCAFRICA Briefing, June 2014.
- 39 Team Nzara, ACCE MSE, Storyboard, "10 August 2012 Airdrop," 10 August 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Tom Maliti, "Witness Says Ongwen Regularly Talked with Civilians while Commanding an LRA Battalion," *International Justice Monitor*, accessed online at <https://www.ijmonitor.org/2019/06/witness-says-ongwen-regularly-talked-with-civilians-while-commanding-an-lra-battalion/>.
- 40 Easter email, 20 December 2017. For a broad discussion of the background and PSYOP role in OBSERVANT COMPASS, see MAJ Jonathan R. Easter, "A Mission of Attrition: The 7th Psychological Operations Battalion's PSYOP Campaign against the Lord's Resistance Army," *Special Warfare* Vol. 32, No. 1 (January-March 2019): 32-38.
- 41 This tactic was inspired by the 15 September 2012 defection of LRA Corporal Jon Olonya, who broke loose from his unit after an ALS mission, and was safely delivered to the UPDF by civilians. ACCE MSE, Storyboard, "Airborne Speaker Implementation, 17 September 2012," 17 September 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 42 The Voice Project, "Senior LRA Commander Lt. Col. Opio Sam Has Surrendered in the Central African Republic," 25 June 2014, accessed online at http://voiceproject.org/post_news/breaking-news-senior-lra-commander-lt-col-opio-sam-surrendered-central-african-republic/; Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, "First Ugandan suspect, LRA Commander Dominic Ongwen, appears before the ICC," 26 January 2015, accessed online at <http://www.iccwomen.org/documents/Dominic-Ongwen-First-Appearance-26-January-2015.pdf>; Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan, "Lord's Resistance Army Update," 5 October 2015, accessed online at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures/south-sudan/lra.html>; Drew Brooks, "At AUSA, USASOC Offers Big Impact at Little Cost," 11 October 2017, accessed online at <http://www.fayobserver.com/news/20171011/at-ausa-usasoc-offers-big-impact-at-little-cost>.
- 43 USAFRICOM, PAO Press Release, "SUBJECT: U.S. Forces Transition Counter-LRA Mission to Broader Security and Stability Activities," 29 March 2017, accessed online at <http://www.africom.mil/media-room/pressrelease/28776>.

This leaflet shows how former LRA members supported U.S. and partner agencies' efforts to influence other LRA soldiers to defect.

