

# ALMOST A FOOTNOTE

The Special Operations  
Support Battalion,  
1986–1989

by Christopher E. Howard



**Abstract:** In June 1986, the U.S. Army activated a Special Operations Support Battalion (SOSB) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to address shortfalls in Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) combat service support (CSS). This unique unit spent its first three years finding ways to demonstrate its value, while refining its mission to better support ARSOF. Short of war, however, it could only do so much to prove its worth. In May 1989, the Army ordered that the SOSB be inactivated, effective September 1990.

Upon graduating Airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia, in June 1986, Private (PVT) Stephen R. Anderson received orders to the 13th Special Forces (SF) Battalion (Special Operations) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. To his surprise, none of his Airborne school cadre had ever heard of it, and for good reason: there was no such unit.<sup>1</sup> To the extent there ever was a 13th SF Battalion, it existed from 17 December 1985, when U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) issued its activation orders, to 16 May 1986, when FORSCOM amended those orders, renaming it the 13th Support Battalion, Special Operations.<sup>2</sup> That unit was activated at Fort Bragg earlier in the month, just two weeks before PVT Anderson got his orders. Undeterred, he proceeded to Fort Bragg, where he joined a brand new, one-of-a-kind unit: the Army's first and only Special Operations Support Battalion (SOSB).

The activation of the 13th SOSB on 2 June 1986 marked the culmination of nearly two years of continuous effort by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Louis G. Mason, an SF-qualified Logistics Officer. His first experience with ARSOF logistics came in 1967 when, as a second lieutenant (2LT), he reported to the 5th SF Group (SFG) in the Republic of Vietnam. By the time of his August 1984 assignment as the G-4, 1st Special Operations Command (1st SOCOM), Mason had more ARSOF experience to draw from, including two tours at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Center for Military Assistance.<sup>3</sup>

From his vantage point as the G-4, Mason quickly assessed a dismal logistics situation in 1st SOCOM, and proposed a SOSB as a viable solution.<sup>4</sup> He spent the next twenty-one months selling the SOSB concept and laying the foundation for the new unit. Upon activation, he assumed command of the 13th SOSB, leading it until 20 June 1988. Within a year of his departure,



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



**Top:** 1st SOCOM Shoulder Sleeve Insignia (SSI). **Left:** MG Leroy N. Suddath, Jr. (right) hands LTC Louis G. Mason (left) the 13th Support Battalion colors at the battalion activation ceremony, 2 June 1986.

FORSCOM ordered the inactivation of the battalion Mason had labored so arduously to create, and then guided through its infancy. For a moment, it seemed that the SOSB would become little more than a footnote in ARSOF history, spanning three brief years.

This article tells the story of those years. It summarizes the SOSB's origins (1984-85), before focusing on the period from its June 1986 activation to its May 1989 inactivation orders. During this span, the battalion doubled in size, fielded new equipment, integrated with supported 1st SOCOM units, and changed names. SOSB organization, equipment, and mission are described, from the battalion level down to the detachment. The article also briefly explains how the SOSB supported 1st SOCOM units in various readiness exercises, and during one contingency operation. It concludes in May 1989, when the countdown started towards a 15 September 1990 inactivation. At the time, the SOSB was actively preparing for combat in Panama. On this note, the article provides a prequel to "Proving the Concept: the 528th Support Battalion in Panama."

Veritas Article: "Proving the Concept: The 528th Support Battalion in Panama"



## Background

In the aftermath of the failed hostage rescue mission in Iran (Operation EAGLE CLAW) in April 1980, the Army committed to modernizing its special operations forces. 1st SOCOM was one outcome of this effort.<sup>5</sup> Provisionally established on 1 October 1982, and formally activated a year later, it functioned as the higher headquarters for Army SF, Ranger, Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and Civil Affairs (CA) units.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1983, with 1st SOCOM still in provisional status, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) completed a Special Operations Forces Mission Area Analysis, identifying ARSOF CSS shortfalls.<sup>7</sup> To address these deficiencies, the Army proposed an "austere" Special Operations Support Element (SOSE), capable of providing support to SOF units for short, low visibility operations, in two theaters simultaneously.<sup>8</sup> The Army Program Objective Memorandum (POM) allocated funding for SOSE manning, anticipating a Fiscal Year (FY) 1986 activation.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, 1st SOCOM had immediate readiness issues that needed to be addressed. Prior to LTC Mason's arrival as G-4, materiel readiness rates among the command's units were almost universally substandard, with 32 of 36 reporting units being rated C-4: incapable of performing their wartime mission.<sup>10</sup> At the time, ARSOF relied on in-theater logistical support when deployed, and installation maintenance facilities



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

As a newly commissioned Logistics Officer, Second Lieutenant (2LT) Mason (shown as 1LT in photo) was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) in the Republic of Vietnam. It was his first of many ARSOF assignments.

ARSOF Icons: COL  
Louis G. Mason Bio



when in garrison.<sup>11</sup> The SFGs had more organic CSS capability than their Ranger, PSYOP, and CA counterparts, but they still relied on external sources to meet their direct and general support requirements.<sup>12</sup> As the readiness ratings suggest, the results were often disappointing.

In August 1984, the Commanding General (CG), 1st SOCOM, Brigadier General (BG) Joseph C. Lutz, gave Mason two tasks: first, "clean up the logistics mess" in 1st SOCOM, and second, review the existing SOSE proposal.<sup>13</sup> Completing the first task required much more time and effort than the second. Mason concluded, in short order, that the proposed SOSE would be insufficient because it lacked a direct support capability. "Furthermore," he says, "the concept for the SOSE was to provide support to the headquarters, 1st SOCOM when deploying as a SOF task force [but] 1st SOCOM did not have a tactical mission for the headquarters."<sup>14</sup> What made sense to Mason, in lieu of a SOSE, was a multi-functional CSS battalion capable of providing direct support to ARSOF, and sustaining SOF-unique equipment: a SOSB.<sup>15</sup>

Later that month, BG Lutz passed command of 1st SOCOM to Major General (MG) Leroy N. Suddath, Jr. Soon after, MG Suddath called an offsite meeting at Pope Air Force Base (AFB) to discuss issues facing the command. There, LTC Mason made his initial pitch for a SOSB, adding that he would like to command the unit, once activated.<sup>16</sup> MG Suddath concurred.<sup>17</sup>

Mason had little difficulty getting 1st SOCOM support for the SOSB, given that the logistics problems facing the command were in plain view. Selling the battalion to the Army, on the other hand, required what Mason describes as "constant door-to-door salesmanship," due to competing priorities for resources, and a generally poor understanding of SOF support requirements.<sup>18</sup> Between August 1984 and July 1985, Mason briefed and worked with a vast array of people and organizations, including Headquarters, Department of the Army



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

**“Having senior enlisted operators on-hand to discuss sustainment shortfalls was a huge success.”** — LTC Louis G. Mason

MG Eugene L. Stillions, Jr. (L), Commandant of U.S. Army Quartermaster School, was an early supporter of the SOSB. He is pictured here with LTC Mason (R), at the 13th Support Battalion activation ceremony on 2 June 1986.

(HQDA) Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCSOPS) and Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics (DCSLOG), FORSCOM, Army Materiel Command (AMC), and Army Troop Support Command (TROSCOM).<sup>19</sup> Throughout the process, Mason received critical support from 1st SOCOM leadership.<sup>20</sup>

In early spring 1985, Mason and MG Kenneth E. Lewi (Commander, TROSCOM) organized a SOF equipment fair at Fort Bragg, showcasing SOF-peculiar items that conventional Army maintenance and supply systems were ill-equipped to support. By doing so, they hoped to underscore the need for a SOSB.<sup>21</sup> At the exposition, 1st SOCOM soldiers displayed and discussed the pros and cons of their equipment with general officers from AMC, HQDA DCSLOG, and the Combined Arms

Support Command (CASCOM).<sup>22</sup> Mason was thrilled by the result: “the ability of [Big Army] CSS leaders to speak directly to SOF warfighters was eye-opening. Having senior enlisted operators on-hand to discuss sustainment shortfalls was a huge success.”<sup>23</sup>

Soon thereafter, in April 1985, the Army approved the SOSB Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E). It authorized 12 officers, 5 warrant officers, and 146 enlisted soldiers, for a total strength of 163 personnel.<sup>24</sup> According to the TO&E, the SOSB mission was to “provide dedicated administrative and logistical support to the Headquarters, [U.S.] Army Special Operations Command, and, when directed, to provide support to other Army Special Operations Forces.”<sup>25</sup> With the TO&E complete, the Army approved the SOSB in July,

1st SOCOM staff photo from 1985. MG Suddath is in the front row, 4th from right. LTC Louis G. Mason is in the 3rd row, 2nd from right.



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

and an activation order for the tentative 13th Special Forces Battalion followed on 17 December 1985. The target activation date was 2 June 1986.<sup>26</sup>

In the interim, LTC Mason assembled a small team in the G-4, 1st SOCOM, initially consisting of a captain (CPT) and a staff sergeant (SSG), to plan the SOSB stand-up.<sup>27</sup> In March 1986, officers and enlisted personnel, mostly young and untested, started arriving at Fort Bragg, with orders to the 13th SF Battalion. By the time of its activation, the battalion was at 50 percent of its authorized strength.

### Activation

The 13th SOSB unfurled its colors on 2 June 1986, at a ceremony officiated by MG Suddath, and attended by General (GEN) Richard H. Thompson (AMC), MG Eugene L. Stillions (Commandant, Army Quartermaster School), and various senior logisticians from Fort Bragg.<sup>28</sup> “The young soldiers of the SOSB did well with the formation,” Mason recalls, “and MG Suddath emphasized the need for the unit and its potential for success.” “Then it was off to work,” says Mason, “with a blank sheet of paper.”<sup>29</sup>

The SOSB was building from the ground up, but Mason’s sheet of paper was not entirely blank. There was one number on it that he wanted very much to erase: 13. He did not like that the unit designation had been randomly chosen, and saw value in the SOSB inheriting the lineage of a combat-decorated CSS unit.<sup>30</sup> The 528th Quartermaster Battalion (QMB) fit the bill, having made two amphibious assaults during World War II (Sicily and Southern France), and later earning multiple campaign streamers in Vietnam (1969 to 1971). As a bonus,

## 1st SOCOM (Oct 1986)



13th Support Battalion troops, led by LTC Mason, salute the colors during their 2 June 1986 activation ceremony at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In the first rank are (left to right): CPT Brenda J. Matthews (HHC Commander), 1LT Sterling Harlston (Supply Detachment Commander), 1LT Robert T. Davis (Maintenance Detachment Commander), and 2LT George E. Pack (Transportation Detachment Commander).

(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



528th DUI and Flash



the WWII 528th QMB had served alongside the First Special Service Force, from which all SF units derive their lineage.<sup>31</sup> Supported by 1st SOCOM leadership, Mason and his staff began working on the name change in January 1986, five months prior to activation, but it did not become official until 16 May 1987.<sup>32</sup>

Another number proved even more difficult to change: 163. This was the number of TO&E-authorized personnel slots for the SOSB, dating back to the earlier SOSE concept, with its mission of supporting two deployed ARSOF headquarters.<sup>33</sup> The SOSB quickly outgrew that mission, in an effort to stay relevant and meet supported unit requirements, but the TO&E did not change accordingly.<sup>34</sup> Mason knew his unit was undermanned, and was betting on personnel growth, over time, to increase its capacity.<sup>35</sup>

### Battalion Organization and Missions

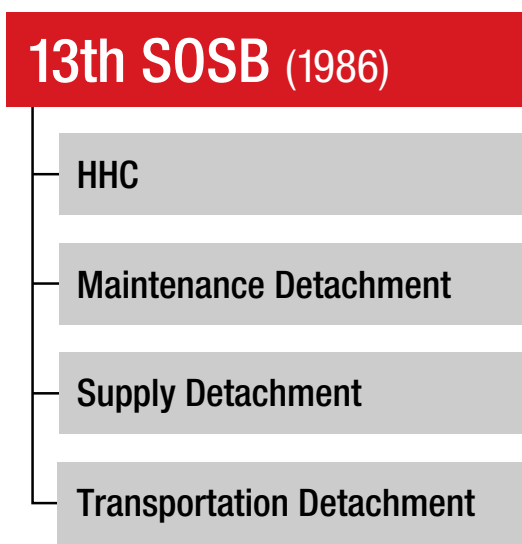
Activated at half-strength, the battalion's eighty soldiers were organized into a Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) and three functionally aligned detachments: Supply (Detachment A),

Maintenance (Detachment B), and Transportation (Detachment C). These elements were scattered across Fort Bragg, occupying whatever space could be found. Prior to activation, LTC Thomas W. Glazener, 1st SOCOM engineer, located available barracks, a motor pool, and office spaces. Once activated, LTC Mason planted his battalion colors outside of his temporary headquarters, in a rundown World War II-era building in the main post area of Fort Bragg, near the old Womack Army Medical Center (currently the Soldier Support Center).<sup>36</sup>

The battalion headquarters and staff included LTC Mason, Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Kenneth R. Lewis, Major (MAJ) Joseph Spafford (Executive Officer), and MAJ John J. 'Jay' Erb (Battalion S-3). Mason described his CSM as a "personnel type," who assisted in the screening new noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and enlisted personnel, prior to entry into the unit.<sup>37</sup> MAJ Spafford, previously the Chief of Supply, 1st SOCOM, and MAJ Erb, formerly the S-4, 4th PSYOP Group (POG), were both, in Mason's estimation, "energetic and competent, requiring little guidance to organize and get the wheels turning."<sup>38</sup> They leveraged relationships within the ARSOF community, which helped the SOSB gain buy-in from the supported units.<sup>39</sup>

CPT Brenda J. Matthews commanded the HHC, initially consisting of two officers, one warrant officer, and twenty-four enlisted personnel. The company was organized into the following sections: HQ, administrative, medical, food service, and materiel management.<sup>40</sup> The medical section was to act as a battalion aid station capable of providing triage, stabilization,

The activation program for the 13th Support Battalion was printed by the 8th Psychological Operations Battalion.



# Headquarters Company

Company HQ

Administrative Section

Food Service Section

Medical Section

Materiel Management Section

basic emergency medical care, and basic sick call. It staffed Troop Medical Clinic (TMC) 13, located in the Smoke Bomb Hill area of Fort Bragg, freeing SF medics of that responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

The food service section was capable of feeding 400 to 600 personnel, and providing Class I distribution for a variety of rations. It had four refrigeration vans, four mobile field kitchen trailers, eight water trailers, and two five-ton tractors. The supply support activity processed requisitions, and monitored receipt of Classes II, IV, and VII, for deployed ARSOF elements.<sup>42</sup>

Early on, HHC took center stage, due to MG Suddath assigning the 1st SOCOM Dining Facility (DFAC) to the SOSB, and attaching most 1st SOCOM cooks on Fort Bragg to HHC.<sup>43</sup> These moves effectively doubled the size of the battalion, and provided the SOSB with a chance to impress their CG, who took great interest in the DFAC and frequently dined there with his soldiers and commanders.<sup>44</sup> In this high-visibility mission, the SOSB did not disappoint. MAJ Erb (Battalion S-3) remembers that the DFAC was a “big deal,” helping the battalion build a reputation within 1st SOCOM while the functional detachments were still getting their feet under them.<sup>45</sup> Under HHC leadership, the 1st SOCOM DFAC won the Phillip A. Connelly Award for Fort Bragg from 1987 to 1989, presented for food service excellence by culinary specialists.<sup>46</sup>

The Supply [Alpha] Detachment, led by First Lieutenant (1LT) Sterling Harlston, had twenty-two assigned personnel, organized into a detachment HQ, petroleum products section, ammunition support section, and supply section.<sup>47</sup> It implemented the first



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

**Top:** The 13th Support Battalion sign pictured here hung outside of the first battalion headquarters, near the former Womack Army Hospital location. **Bottom:** Battalion Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Kenneth R. Lewis, and HHC First Sergeant (1SG) Bruce Pittman, during a field exercise.

automated logistics capability in 1st SOCOM, the Direct Support Unit Standard Supply System (DS4).<sup>48</sup> It was also ahead of conventional Army logistics with its multi-class warehouse for storing authorized stockage list (ASL) items (Classes II, IV, VII, and IX). This facility provided a repository for SOF-peculiar equipment on Fort Bragg.<sup>49</sup>

The petroleum products section (or “POL” section, for petroleum, oils, and lubricants) had four sets of Forward Area Refueling Equipment (FARE), each with a 1,500-gallon capacity, and two Fuel System Supply Points (FSSP), capable of storing 60,000 gallons apiece.<sup>50</sup> It trained alongside the 160th Special Operations Aviation Group (SOAG) to perfect high-risk Forward

Arming and Refueling Point (FARP) operations, using either the FARE or FSSP.<sup>51</sup> The 160th had developed an air-droppable refueling and rearming package known as ‘Big Willie,’ built around the lighter FARE system.<sup>52</sup> Accompanied by a security element of Rangers, the SOSB fuelers rehearsed pushing the palletized Big Willie from C-130 Hercules and C-141 Starlifter cargo aircraft, following it to the ground, and then establishing a FARP.<sup>53</sup> They also practiced hot refueling (engines-running), at night, essential to supporting the Night Stalkers of the 160th.<sup>54</sup>

1LT Robert T. ‘Tim’ Davis, one of the first officers to receive orders to the SOSB, led the Maintenance [Bravo] Detachment.<sup>55</sup> An Ordnance Officer, he commanded fourteen mechanics, organized into a detachment HQ, maintenance management section, and a maintenance section.<sup>56</sup> Their mission was to provide direct support (DS) maintenance for tactical wheeled vehicles, engineer equipment, and small arms, and to provide inspection, repair/evacuation, and limited recovery.<sup>57</sup> To do this, they were allocated two contact trucks, two mechanical shop sets, two small arms sets, four five-ton cargo trucks, and two five-ton wreckers.<sup>58</sup> At their first location, the detachment HQ operated out of the back of a field ambulance, before graduating to a general purpose (GP) medium tent.<sup>59</sup> After a few months, it found a much more suitable home, behind the XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters, in a facility vacated by the 503rd Maintenance Company.<sup>60</sup>

## Supply Detachment

Detachment HQ

Petroleum Products Section

Ammunition Support Section

Supply Section

Assisting Davis was the Battalion Maintenance Warrant, Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CW3) James M. ‘Jim’ Zeitler. Tall, imposing, and blunt, CW3 Zeitler (‘Chief Z’) played a critical role in the early success of the detachment.<sup>61</sup> While the detachment slowly built a customer base within 1st SOCOM, Zeitler found projects to keep his mechanics busy, including overhauling a second-hand five-ton wrecker. He also cross-trained the power generation and wheeled vehicle mechanics on both organizational and DS maintenance, requiring that they always have the correct technical manual (TM) nearby, opened to the right page.<sup>62</sup> The detachment also stored, maintained, and repaired the specially modified jeeps and motorcycles used by the Rangers when training at Fort Bragg and nearby Camp Mackall.<sup>63</sup>

Demand for the SOSB increased shortly after activation, when 1st SOCOM activated the 112th Signal Battalion on 17 September 1986. Lacking a maintenance capability, the 112th turned to the SOSB with a unique problem. The standard M-1028 Commercial Utility Cargo Vehicle (CUCV) was not capable of transporting the 112th’s heavier communications equipment, but the larger two-and-a-half and five-ton trucks capable of doing so were too large to roll-on/roll-off a standard C-141 cargo aircraft.<sup>64</sup> Together, the 112th and SOSB Maintenance Detachment decided to convert the CUCV to a dual rear axle configuration that could accommodate the extra weight, while retaining the desired roll-on/roll-off capability. SOSB mechanics then collaborated with Tobyhanna Military Depot, in Coolbaugh Township, Pennsylvania, to fabricate the prototype. Completed in September 1988, it was fielded by the 112th the following summer.<sup>65</sup>

Over time, 1st SOCOM units on Fort Bragg began turning to the SOSB for their DS maintenance needs, starting with the 4th POG and 96th CA Battalion,

## Military Classes of Supply

**Class I:** Subsistence

**Class II:** Clothing, Individual Equipment, Tools, Administrative Supplies

**Class III:** Petroleum, Oils, and Lubricants

**Class IV:** Construction Materials

**Class V:** Ammunition

**Class VI:** Personal Demand Items

**Class VII:** Major End Items: Vehicles, Weapons, Electronics

**Class VIII:** Medical Materials

**Class IX:** Repair Parts

**Class X:** Material for Non-military Programs

\* Source: Defense Acquisition University



MG Suddath placed the 13th Support Battalion in charge of the 1st SOCOM Dining Facility, and attached most 1st SOCOM cooks on Fort Bragg (less 5th SFG) to HHC, 13th Support Battalion.

(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



In 1987, the 13th Support Battalion displayed its equipment for BG Wayne A. Downing (DCG, 1st SOCOM). Here, Forward Area Refueling Equipment (FARE) can be seen in the foreground, in front of an ambulance (left), medical tent (center), and mobile field kitchen (right).

(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



which lacked organic CSS.<sup>66</sup> As a result, materiel readiness improved across the command. Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CW2) Michael Tannenbaum, a Maintenance Warrant with the 6th PSYOP Battalion, 4th POG, relied on the Maintenance Detachment to repair and modify, when necessary, PSYOP-unique equipment such as loudspeaker systems and printing presses. “The 528th took care of us,” he remembers.<sup>67</sup>

LTC Mason notes that his Maintenance Detachment, under the leadership of 1LT Davis and CW3 Zeitler, “did miracles with limited resources,” adding that “Davis [was] a regular problem-solver at the 1<sup>st</sup> SOCOM Chief of Staff’s ‘Maintenance Shootouts.’”<sup>68</sup> Those meetings were held regularly to track the progress of maintenance requests for all 1st SOCOM units.<sup>69</sup> For his part, Davis credits Mason for having the vision for the battalion, Chief Zeitler for having the maintenance expertise,

## Maintenance Detachment

Detachment HQ

Maintenance Management Section

Maintenance Section



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

A few months after activation, the Maintenance Detachment, 13th Support Battalion, moved to the facility pictured here, which had recently been vacated by the 503rd Maintenance Company.



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

An M923 5-ton cargo truck undergoes routine maintenance inside the Maintenance Detachment shop, located near the XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters.



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

The Maintenance Detachment maintained and stored ten heavily modified jeeps for the Rangers to draw when training at Fort Bragg.



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

An unidentified Maintenance Detachment soldier works on a hand-me-down M816 wrecker. CW3 James M. 'Jim' Zeitler used the second-hand wrecker as a training tool for his young mechanics.

# “[My Maintenance Detachment] did miracles with limited resources.”

— LTC Louis G. Mason

and young, highly motivated enlisted soldiers like Specialists (SPC) Nathan W. Creamer, Paul Driscoll, and G. Marshall Rancourt, for getting the job done.<sup>70</sup>

2LT George E. Pack’s Transportation [Charlie] Detachment started out with sixteen personnel, organized into a detachment HQ, a transportation movement control section, and a light truck section.<sup>71</sup> Tall and lean, Pack describes himself as being “gung-ho” at the time, and considers himself fortunate to have served in such a unique unit, so early in his career.<sup>72</sup> His non-commissioned officer-in-charge (NCOIC), Sergeant First Class (SFC) Bobby Fortuna, was described by one of his soldiers as “crusty, short, and stocky,” and “the kind of guy you’d follow into hell.”<sup>73</sup> 2LT Pack and SFC Fortuna were opposites, in many ways, but they complemented one another, and kept their young soldiers mission-focused.

The detachment’s movement control mission was to provide two movement control teams for processing transportation of personnel and supplies into and within theater, and to plan for, receive, transship, or deploy personnel and equipment via organic and external air/ground assets.<sup>74</sup> For a time, Sergeant (SGT) Ronald Jackson was the only Air Movement NCO (88N), but an exceptionally competent one, who also served as the de facto Detachment Operations NCO.<sup>75</sup>

The transportation mission was to move 280 personnel or 70 tons of cargo (or a combination) in one lift; to move four Air Force pallets on a flatbed trailer; and to move specialized equipment via low bed trailer.<sup>76</sup> To perform this mission, the detachment had twenty (20) five-ton cargo trucks, two (2) forty-foot flatbed trailers,

two (2) twenty-five-ton low bed trailers, and two (2) five-ton tractors, nearly all of which were brand new.<sup>77</sup> The detachment parked this sizable fleet of trucks in a motor pool near the battalion headquarters. The trucks did not stay parked for long.

The Transportation Detachment was gainfully employed, owing to the 75th Ranger Regiment’s lack of organic transportation assets. Pack noted that “transportation folks have to prove their worth to the combat arms guys, [but] once you do, life is good.”<sup>78</sup> The key to doing so, for Pack, was getting the right equipment at the right place, and at the right time, but also providing



(Image Credit: Robert T. Davis)

**Top:** To make its AN/TSC-93A satellite terminal more deployable, the 112th Signal Battalion turned to the 528th SOSB. Partnering with Tobyhanna Army Depot and General Motors, the 528th’s Maintenance Detachment modified a standard M-1028 Commercial Utility Cargo Vehicle (CUCV) by adding a dual-wheel rear axle. SOSB mechanics SPC Paul Driscoll (left) and SPC G. Marshall Rancourt (right) are seen here with the completed prototype in September 1988. **Bottom:** SPC Rancourt (left), SPC Driscoll (center), and LTC David L. Shaw (right), 528th SOSB Commander, pose in front of the completed dual-wheeled M-1028 prototype in September 1988. The civilians pictured are General Motors technicians and engineers, who helped with the project.



(Image Credit: Robert T. Davis)



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

1



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

2



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

3



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

4

**1:** In the foreground is a second-hand M816 wrecker belonging to the Maintenance Detachment. A new-issue M923 5-ton cargo truck can be seen in the background. **2:** Led by 1LT Davis (left) and CW3 Zeitler (right), the Maintenance Detachment, 13th Support Battalion, wasted no time addressing the equipment readiness issues in 1st SOCOM. **3:** Twenty M923 5-ton cargo trucks, like the one seen here, were the workhorses for the Transportation Detachment. **4:** BG Wayne A. Downing (left), Deputy Commanding General, 1st SOCOM, discusses the SOSB's transportation mission with SPC Marcus L. Luckey (center) and 1LT Pack (right). **5:** SPC Nathan W. Creamer (left) and PFC Scott J. Meyer (center) inspect one of the Transportation Detachment's two M931 5-ton tractors, with 25-ton low bed trailer. 1LT Robert T. Davis (right) supervises.



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)

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the customer with “squared-away soldiers, who made the right impression.”<sup>79</sup>

Young truck drivers (MOS 64C, later 88M) like Privates Scott J. Meyer and Jeffrey A. Hutsell jumped into exercises with the supported Ranger and SF units, remained with them throughout, and then drove them out of the field in their staged five-ton trucks.<sup>80</sup> This frequent, close contact with elite SOF operators helped keep morale high. The detachment was able to stay on the move, and that helped keep his soldiers out of trouble, and focused on the task at hand. Meyer remembers the Rangers treating him as one of their own. That meant a lot to him and the others. Looking back thirty years later, he deemed “Charlie Company” [Detachment C], 528th SOSB, “the best truck driving job in the Army.”<sup>81</sup>

### Training and Exercise Support

LTC Mason and his officers believed that rigorous, realistic training was required to prepare the SOSB to support some of the U.S. military’s most elite units. Soon after activation, they established an ARSOF-focused, ten-item mission essential task list (METL) for the battalion. This served as a foundation from which each detachment formulated its own METL, each with ten key training items.<sup>82</sup> They used the METL during MG Suddath’s regular training reviews as a framework for discussing training and readiness, down to the detachment level.<sup>83</sup>

Frequent, realistic airborne operations were also necessary to support ARSOF. Mason recounts one battalion-sized, nighttime, combat equipment airborne operation at Sicily Drop Zone (Fort Bragg). According to Mason, “After the jump, once all soldiers were accounted for, and no injuries reported, the XO stated that there were no trucks to take the troops back to post. I informed the XO to tell the commanders and first sergeants that we were marching back to the battalion headquarters with a couple medics and an ambulance in the rear.”<sup>84</sup> Mason declared it “a great experience, with some groans and a few laughs...a surprise planned and executed.”<sup>85</sup> Enlisted soldiers asked about it years later remembered it less enthusiastically.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to detachment, company, and battalion-level training, the SOSB quickly integrated into ARSOF and Joint SOF exercises, which provided it with an excellent opportunity to demonstrate its capabilities. In August 1986, a mere two months after activating,

## Transportation Detachment

Detachment HQ

Movement Control Section

Transportation (Light Truck) Section

(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



**Top:** Preparation for the Combat Water Swim Test (CWST) included instruction in water survival techniques. **Bottom:** SOSB soldiers conduct training wearing their Mission-Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear, circa 1987.



**Left:** A SOSB soldier prepares to execute a parachute landing fall during a combat equipment airborne operation on Fort Bragg, NC. **Right:** While supporting Operation EARNEST WILL, CPT Mark A. Olinger, 528th SOSB, accompanied 160th Special Operations Aviation Group air crews on resupply missions to U.S. Navy frigates throughout the Arabian Gulf, and to the mobile sea barge *Hercules*, pictured here.

the SOSB supported 1st SOCOM with food, medical, and transportation during a three-day command post exercise (CPX) at Camp Mackall, North Carolina.<sup>87</sup> Two months later, in its first field exercise, the SOSB provided transportation, maintenance, POL, rations, and medical support to Joint SOF units at Sabre Hall and Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia.<sup>88</sup>

To support larger readiness exercises, the SOSB most often relied on a deployable, task-organized, company-sized unit of action known as a company team.<sup>89</sup> Prior to an exercise, the SOSB commander tailored the company team to execute supply, maintenance, transportation, food service, and medical support, based on mission requirements.<sup>90</sup> CPT Mark A. Olinger, who commanded HHC, 528th SOSB from 1988 to 1990, considered the company team one of the most versatile ARSOF CSS assets.<sup>91</sup>

In Spring 1987, the SOSB began supporting FLINTLOCK. This annual U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) joint-combined exercise allowed U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) SOF to train in unconventional warfare, strategic reconnaissance, and direct action missions, while exercising their ability to infiltrate into European countries under denied conditions.<sup>92</sup> The 10th SFG (-) and supporting units deployed to the U.K., where they established a Special Forces Operating Base (SFOB), to which the SOSB provided supply, maintenance, transportation, and food service support.<sup>93</sup>

Then, from 22 October to 22 November 1987, the SOSB participated in CASINO GAMBIT 1-88 at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. Following a snowy airborne assault, the unit supported 10th SFG, Ranger, and 160th SOAG elements in a variety of cold weather scenarios.<sup>94</sup> The exercise was under the command of the COL Joseph S. Stringham, Deputy Commanding General (DCG), 1st SOCOM.<sup>95</sup>

The following spring, the SOSB supported CASINO GAMBIT 2-88 at Hurlbert Field, Florida. This real-world planning and rehearsal exercise, also commanded by COL Stringham, prepared Joint and Army SOF (including 7<sup>th</sup> SFG) for a potential U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) deployment.<sup>96</sup> Around this time, MAJ Joseph R. Lalla, Chief of Plans, G-4, 1st SOCOM, seized the opportunity to write the 528th SOSB into the contingency plan for Panama, code-named ELABORATE MAZE.<sup>97</sup>

Additionally, Joint SOF exercises were conducted quarterly at either Fort Bragg, North Carolina, or Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to fulfill training requirements and conduct mission rehearsals. According to CPT Olinger, these exercises “involved a rotation of company teams organized to provide supply, maintenance, transportation, food service, local procurement, contracting, and provide the Class IV material for the fabrication of training facilities and targets.”<sup>98</sup> Olinger assessed the well-funded quarterly joint exercise program to have provided the best training available for the SOSB,

with the drawback of “concentrating [SOSB] efforts and resources on only a few select units.”<sup>99</sup>

Overseas deployments were scarce during this period, with one exception. For the first time since the Vietnam War, 528th soldiers directly supported combat operations, deploying a small contingent to Bahrain as part of Operations EARNEST WILL and PRIME CHANCE.<sup>100</sup> Lasting from August 1987 to September 1989, these operations intended to protect U.S.-flagged and neutral oil tankers and merchant ships transiting the Persian Gulf from Iranian attack.<sup>101</sup> Operating from the U.S. Navy’s Administrative Support Unit, Bahrain, the SOSB facilitated the movement of SOF-specific munitions to the 160th SOAG, and provided supply, transportation, and administrative support to both Army and Joint SOF units.<sup>102</sup>

### Changing of the Guard

On 20 June 1988, LTC Mason passed command of the 528th SOSB to fellow Vietnam veteran LTC David L. Shaw. Under Mason’s leadership, the SOSB had gone from crawl, to walk, to what Mason described as a “trot.”<sup>103</sup> On Shaw’s watch, it was poised to run, due to its assigned role in ELABORATE MAZE. In the meantime, it supported FLINTLOCK ‘89 and JAGUAR BITE

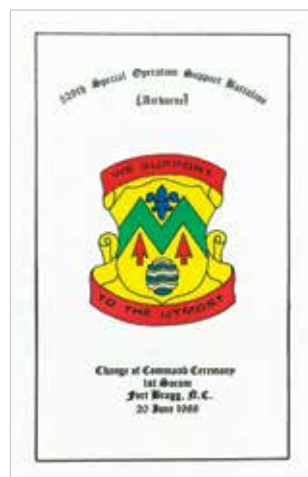
‘89, and participated in two 1st SOCOM capabilities exercises (CAPEX).<sup>104</sup>

For these particular CAPEXs, MG James A. Guest, who had succeeded MG Suddath as CG, 1st SOCOM, the previous summer, had the units involved form an Army Special Operations Task Force (ARSOTF).<sup>105</sup> This was task-organized around the 5th SFG, with one company each from the 75th Ranger Regiment, 4th POG, 96th CA Battalion, 112th Signal Battalion, and 528th SOSB. The 160th SOAG provided the required aircraft. Such exercises demonstrated the advanced skills and diverse capabilities of ARSOF units, and allowed civilian attendees to interact with the American soldier, of which 1st SOCOM had some of the finest.<sup>106</sup>

Then, on 11 May 1989, two orders were issued that affected the future of the 528th SOSB. The first was the execution order (EXORD) for Operation NIMROD DANCER, a build-up of U.S. forces in Panama in response to General Manuel Noriega’s nullification of the Panamanian presidential elections. A contingent of 528th soldiers departed for Panama the following day, led by MAJ Joe Lalla (Battalion XO) and 1LT Tim Davis. Once there, they refined plans and rehearsed their assigned refueling mission, in support of ELABORATE MAZE, anticipating that war might be imminent.



**Left:** Incoming 528th SOSB Commander, LTC David L. Shaw (left), takes the battalion colors from MG Suddath (center) at a 20 June 1988 change-of-command ceremony on Fort Bragg. **Right:** The program from LTC Mason’s change-of-command with LTC Shaw is a testament to Mason’s impact on the battalion. He was involved in the design of the DUI and the selection of the unit motto, and was the driving force behind the renumbering of the battalion, from 13th to 528th Support Battalion.



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



MG Suddath, seen here at the 13th Support Battalion activation ceremony, commanded 1st SOCOM from August 1984 to June 1988.

Elsewhere that day, FORSCOM ordered the inactivation of the 528th SOSB.

The reason 528th SOSB was marked for inactivation was, and remains, somewhat of a mystery to its former leaders.<sup>107</sup> An August 1987 briefing entitled “Army SOF Command and Control” called for disestablishing the SOSB, and using its 163 billets to help standup Theater Army Special Operations Commands (TASOCs), Enhanced SF Brigades, or a combination thereof.<sup>108</sup> MAJ Lalla, who had spent close to four years on the 1st SOCOM staff prior to becoming the 528th’s XO, viewed the decision as part of a larger fight over bodies, noting “everyone wants support without losing combat troops.”<sup>109</sup>

Regardless of why, when MG Suddath departed 1st SOCOM in June 1988, SOSB leaders had reason to feel like they had lost their greatest advocate. Suddath had supported the SOSB from Day One, when LTC Mason first proposed it at the August 1984 1st SOCOM off-site at Pope AFB. By contrast, MG Guest considered it too small to support 1st SOCOM’s four SFGs, while also fulfilling its requirement to support Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).<sup>110</sup> Guest recalls that, prior to his arrival, 1st SOCOM was “engulfed with support for JSOC,” at the expense of the SFGs.<sup>111</sup> “The result,” he says, “was a nightmare for the [SF] groups,” which had to provide support personnel to JSOC, when the SOSB could not.<sup>112</sup> By the time FORSCOM issued the 11 May 1989 inactivation order, 1st SOCOM was already actively planning for the disestablishment of the 528th SOSB.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the battalion’s future, LTC Shaw insisted that it maintain a business-as-usual posture.<sup>114</sup> It prepared for and rehearsed its assigned ELABORATE MAZE mission; continued to support EARNEST WILL; and participated in readiness exercises, including a pop-up opportunity to train with the 11th SFG (U.S. Army Reserve). Through it all, the officers and soldiers of the 528th SOSB maintained their mission-focus and professionalism.<sup>115</sup>

## Conclusion

Tim Davis, one of the SOSB’s initial detachment commanders, who later served as its S-3, remembers that the battalion “spent its first three years justifying its existence, and staving off inactivation.”<sup>116</sup> Despite raising materiel readiness rates across 1st SOCOM, integrating into Army and Joint exercises, and supporting EARNEST WILL, the battalion’s prospects for survival looked dim in mid-1989. If not for the grave miscalculations of Manuel Noriega, in Panama, and Saddam Hussein, in Kuwait, the 528th SOSB would likely have gone away, having been denied the chance to prove its value to ARSOF in combat. Fortunately, its superb performance during Operations JUST CAUSE and PROMOTE LIBERTY (Panama), and Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait), ensured its continued existence for another fifteen years. One of those stories is told elsewhere (JUST CAUSE); the other remains to be told. Neither story would exist, however, without the vision and tenacity of COL (Ret.) Louis G. Mason, and the small cadre of officers and soldiers who



helped him bring the SOSB concept to fruition, and see it through its formative years.

Those who served in the SOSB during this brief period recall it fondly. Enlisted men such as Stephen Anderson, Scott Meyer, and Jeff Hutsell, all assigned to the SOSB as privates, straight out of Airborne school, consider themselves fortunate to have landed in such a unique unit.<sup>117</sup> Looking back, Meyer believes that his SOSB experience prepared him for life. “Working with those who were a cut above,” he says, “created in me a lifelong desire to be excellent.”<sup>118</sup> Officers like Tim Davis, George Pack, Jay Erb, Jim Zeitler, Joe Lalla, and Mark Olinger view their time in the SOSB as a career highlight. Davis recalls, “we thought we were special.”<sup>119</sup> Erb echoes that sentiment, describing the men and women of the SOSB as “special loggies.”<sup>120</sup> As for Lou Mason, he still treasures the memories, the friendships, and the photo album presented to him, at his change of command in June 1988. 🇺🇸

**Acknowledgements:** The author would like to thank all of the 528th Support Battalion veterans who made this article possible: COL (Ret.) Louis G. Mason, COL (Ret.) Mark A. Olinger, COL (Ret.) John J. Erb, LTC (Ret.) Robert T. Davis, LTC (Ret.) George E. Pack, MAJ (Ret.) Joseph R. Lalla, CW4 (Ret.) James M. Zeitler, Stephen R. Anderson, Scott J. Meyer, Jeffrey A. Hutsell, and Paul Driscoll.

## Takeaways:

- 1** From 1986 to 1989, the SOSB supported Army and Joint SOF in garrison, during a variety of ARSOF and Joint exercises, and in one overseas contingency operation.
- 2** The SOSB mission evolved during this period in order to better meet ARSOF CSS needs.
- 3** It raised material readiness rates across 1st SOCOM by providing timely direct support maintenance
- 4** The size of SOSB limited its ability to support all 1st SOCOM units equally, while also supporting Joint SOF, leading some ARSOF leaders to look for other CSS solutions.
- 5** Competing concepts for ARSOF CSS nearly ended the SOSB experiment, before it had a chance to prove its value during combat operations in Panama and the Middle East.

528th Support Battalion soldiers form up for an awards ceremony outside their headquarters at the Old Stockade facility, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, circa 1989.

(Image Credit: Robert T. Davis)



## Endnotes

- 1 Stephen R. Anderson, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 14 January 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Anderson interview, date; Department of the Army, Headquarters, United States Army Infantry Center, "Orders 168-195," 17 June 1986, copy at USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Department of the Army, U.S. Army Forces Command, "Permanent Orders 196-15," 17 December 1985, copy at USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Permanent Orders 196-15; Department of the Army, U.S. Army Forces Command, "Permanent Orders 80-18," 13 May 1986, copy at USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Redesignated as U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center (1 April 1983), and later redesignated as U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (15 May 1986).
- 4 COL (Ret.) Louis G. Mason, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe and MAJ James W. Bogart, 23 February 2006, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Mason interview, date.
- 5 1st SOCOM was an Army unit provisionally established in 1982, and activated in 1983. It should not be confused with the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), a joint command established in 1987.
- 6 1st SOCOM gained the 160<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Aviation Group (SOAG) in January 1985.
- 7 Army Special Operations Forces Combat Service Support Review, 17 December 1990, copy at USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC; Cheryl Morai-Young, ed., *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1983* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 36-37, <https://history.army.mil/books/DAHSUM/1983/ch03.htm>. "The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) tasked TRADOC, in 1982, to conduct a SOF Mission Area Analysis (SOFMAA) to identify deficiencies of SOF and recommend solutions for these areas. TRADOC completed the SOFMAA in June 1983."
- 8 Morai-Young, ed., *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1984* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1995), 14, <https://history.army.mil/books/DAHSUM/1984/ch02.htm>, hereafter DAHSUM FY84, page number.
- 9 Mason interview, 23 February 2006; DAHSUM FY84, 14.
- 10 Louis G. Mason, email to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "Mason's Notes on 528th," date.
- 11 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020. "Up to the birth of the 528<sup>th</sup> [SOSB], SOF was reliant upon conventional forces or installation civilian organizations to provide logistical support above the organizational level. A couple of the SFGs even created support battalions 'out-of-hide' but did not have the skills, funding, or resources to provide direct support for combat operations."
- 12 MG (Ret.) James A. Guest, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 4 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Guest interview, date. As Commander, 5th SFG, Guest had consolidated his battalion-level support companies into one group-level support battalion.
- 13 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020.
- 14 Mason interview, 23 February 2006.
- 15 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020.
- 16 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020; Mason interview, 23 February 2006.
- 17 Mason interview, 23 February 2006.
- 18 Mason interview, 23 February 2006; "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020. Mason cites the following challenges in selling the SOSB concept to the Army: 1) competition for personnel slots and equipment, with the emphasis at the time being on light divisions; 2) lack of [Army] understanding of SOF missions; 3) SOF command and control conflicts at the strategic and operational levels across the Service and Unified Combatant Commands.
- 19 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020. "The challenge," he recalls, "was to campaign the concept across relevant stakeholders, both SOF and conventional communities, from the tactical to the strategic level."
- 20 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020. "I had total cooperation from MG Suddath (CG), COL Paul Fisher (Deputy Commander), COL Sidney Shachnow (Chief of Staff), COL Don Soland (G3) and COL Ken Rice (G1). There was never an instance where travel or operating outside the 1st SOCOM chain of command was denied in the pursuit of the SOSB."
- 21 "Mason Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020. Prior to this, GEN Richard H. Thompson (Commander, AMC) had assigned MG Lewi to be the logistic "SOF godfather" to fix the equipment-on-hand readiness of SOCOM and to assemble TOE equipment to field the SOSB.
- 22 "Mason Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020. This equipment included including commercial individual items being purchased by soldiers, weapons, communications equipment, spare parts, parachutes, scuba gear, and boats.
- 23 "Mason Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020.
- 24 Headquarters, Department of the Army, "Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) 31705L000: Special Operations Support Battalion (Airborne)," 1 April 1985, Center for Military History, Fort McNair, Washington, DC, hereafter SOSB TO&E, date.
- 25 SOSB TO&E, 1 April 1985.
- 26 Permanent Orders 196-15.
- 27 Mason interview, 23 February 2006; "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020.
- 28 Louis G. Mason, email to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: 528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Mason, "528th Write-Up," date.
- 29 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 30 Mason interview, 23 February 2006.
- 31 Mason interview, 23 February 2006. For more information on the renaming, see: Robert W. Jones, Jr., "A Legacy of Support: The 528th Sustainment Brigade," *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History* 5:3 (2009), 24, [https://www.arsof-history.org/articles/v5n3\\_528th\\_sustain\\_brigade\\_page\\_1.html](https://www.arsof-history.org/articles/v5n3_528th_sustain_brigade_page_1.html). The First Special Service Force (FSSF) Service Battalion from WWII provided a fitting historical parallel to the SOSB. In 1990, MG James A. Guest, CG, 1st SOCOM, requested that the Center of Military History (CMH) grant the Service Battalion a separate lineage, which the 528th SOSB could inherit. CMH denied the request, reasoning that the Service Battalion was organic to the FSSF.
- 32 Message from Commander (CDR), 1st SOCOM, to CDRFORSCOM, "SUBJECT: Permanent Orders 196-15," 7 February 1986, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC. 1st SOCOM reached this decision at a 30 January 1986 In-Progress Review (IPR), convened and chaired by the Chief of Staff (COL Sidney Shachnow), citing the need for the SOSB to "draw its lineage and heritage from a unit with combat records and campaign streamers." In his message to FORSCOM, MG Suddath requested that the activation order for 13th Support Battalion be rescinded, so that it could be renamed 528th Support Battalion. This request had an unintended consequence that caused it to be set aside until after activation. See: Message from CDRTROSCOM, to CDRFORSCOM, "SUBJECT: Activation of the 13th Support Battalion (Special Operations)," 5 February 1986, copy at USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC. TROSCOM objected to the proposed name change so soon before the planned activation of the unit: "As a result of the above action [the renaming request], all requisitioning by TROSCOM for Class VII and Class XI PLL items (scheduled to begin 31 JAN 86) for the total package fielding of this unit has been halted [emphasis in original]. The waterfall effect will now take place causing all the equipment fielding milestones to slip further."
- 33 SOSB TO&E, 1 April 1985; Richard W. Stewart, Stanley L. Sandler, and Joseph R. Fischer, *Command History of the United States Army Special Operations Command: 1987-1992 Standing Up the MACOM* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC Directorate of History and Museums), 154.
- 34 MAJ (Ret.) Joseph R. Lalla, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 24 May 2019, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Lalla interview, date; MAJ (Ret.) Joseph R. Lalla, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 30 June 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Lalla interview, date. Lalla notes that, due to an Army waiver, the SOSB was equipped at a level that exceeded its manning, resulting in "a lot of equipment, but not many people."
- 35 Mason interview, 23 February 2006.
- 36 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020; Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020. Within a year, the battalion relocated to the "Old Stockade" facility on Butner Road, Fort Bragg, where it remained for several years.

- 37 Mason interview, 23 February 2006.
- 38 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 39 Mason interview, 23 February 2006; COL (Ret.) John J. Erb, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 20 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Erb interview, date.
- 40 "13th Support Battalion (Special Operations) (Airborne)," undated, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter 13th SOSB presentation. The authenticity of this document was confirmed by COL (Ret.) Mason. Handwritten information on the presentation indicates that it dates to around the time of activation (June 1986). The personnel strength provided for HHC and the three detachments is as of activation, when the battalion was at half-strength. Within a year, those numbers had doubled.
- 41 Mark A. Olinger, email to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: Re: SOSB article," 17 August 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Olinger email, date. "We also had a [Class] VIII mission, providing both [medical] equipment and supplies to 7th SFG and the 4th POG, [and] providing drop zone medical coverage for non-SF 1st SOCOM units."
- 42 13th SOSB presentation.
- 43 "Mason's Notes on 528th," 27 April 2020; Olinger email, 17 August 2020. Estimates of how many cooks were attached to HHC vary from 80 to 100. This number did not include 5th SFG cooks, who ran a separate DFAC known as the "Desert Inn."
- 44 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020. Olinger email, 17 August 2020. All interviewed agreed that this was a high priority for MG Suddath. Prior to taking command of HHC, CPT Mark A. Olinger and outgoing HHC Commander, CPT Woody Roberson, had an office call with MG Suddath on the importance of the DFAC mission.
- 45 Erb interview, 20 May 2020.
- 46 Olinger email, 17 August 2020; U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, Joint Culinary Center of Excellence, "Philip A. Connelly Program," [https://quartermaster.army.mil/jccoe/Special\\_Programs\\_Directorate/Philip\\_A\\_Connelly/P\\_A\\_Connelly\\_main.html](https://quartermaster.army.mil/jccoe/Special_Programs_Directorate/Philip_A_Connelly/P_A_Connelly_main.html), accessed 20 August 2020. "The Phillip A. Connelly Program is the personification of food service excellence executed by culinary specialists resulting in the presentation of extremely gratifying dining experiences across all Army food service platforms in garrison and field environments."
- 47 13th SOSB presentation. The ammunition support section was equipped with two 10,000-pound capacity forklifts and four 5-ton trucks. The supply section had two 6,000-pound forklifts and miscellaneous warehouse equipment.
- 48 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 49 LTC (Ret.) Robert T. Davis, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 27 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Davis interview, date.
- 50 13th SOSB Presentation; SOSB TO&E, 1 April 1985. The FARE stored fuel in 500-gallon blivets [collapsible drums], whereas the heavier FSSP used 10,000 bags that required engineer support to emplace.
- 51 LTC (Ret.) Robert T. Davis, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 4 June 2019, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Davis interview, date. FARRPs were also known as "Forward Area Rearming and Refueling Points" (FARRP).
- 52 Robert T. Davis, email to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: Re: SOSB Photo IDs," 24 August 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC. "Big Willie was a creation of the 160<sup>th</sup>... [to be] a total FARRP package on a single platform that could be set up and in operation very quickly. It was a single 32-foot, type-5 platform with 6x 500-gallon fuel blivets, 250 gallon-per-minute GPM pumps, hoses, folding-fin aerial rockets (FFAR) and 7.62mm minigun ammunition. [Dropping] it required 5x G-11 parachutes. We trained with a Ranger Platoon for security, and they also secured the chutes while we set up the FARRP for operation. Once all chutes were accounted for, we would be open for business and bring in the helos." Davis adds, "The 160<sup>th</sup> was always involved to ensure we were meeting their standards."
- 53 Davis interview, 4 June 2019.
- 54 Davis interview, 4 June 2019.
- 55 LTC (Ret.) Robert T. Davis, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 29 May 2019, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Davis interview, date. In addition to LTC Mason, two junior officers were already there when he arrived in March 1986, but were assigned to the G-4, 1st SOCOM.
- 56 13th SOSB presentation; Davis interview 27 May 2020.
- 57 13th SOSB Presentation.
- 58 James M. Zeitler email to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: RE: Contact Teams/Trucks," 9 September 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC. "Standard Army contact trucks were equipped with a generator, air compressor, electric arc welder, oxy/acetylene set, and a least a master mechanics toolbox," says CW4 (Ret.) Zeitler. The 528th SOSB was not issued such trucks during the timeframe covered (1986-1989) in this article. In lieu thereof, according to Zeitler, "we [the 528th] outfitted CUCV cargo trucks with tools, parts, a generator (usually a 1.5KW), a small air compressor, and POL packaged products to support missions as they came up."
- 59 Davis interview, 27 May 2020.
- 60 CW4 (Ret.) James M. Zeitler, interview with Dr. Charles H. Briscoe and Christopher E. Howard, 23 June 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Zeitler interview, date; Davis interview, 27 May 2020.
- 61 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020; Davis interview, 27 May 2020.
- 62 Zeitler interview, 23 June 2020.
- 63 Zeitler interview, 23 June 2020. The Maintenance Detachment also maintained a backup 'float' of these vehicles, to replace those destroyed or severely damaged.
- 64 CW4 (Ret.) James M. Zeitler, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 19 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Zeitler interview, date.
- 65 Lalla interview, 24 May 2019; Olinger email, 17 August 2020. The 112th Signal Battalion debuted the modified CUCV platform during the annual U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) FLINTLOCK exercise in 1989. The work-around remained in service until new communications vans were introduced the following decade.
- 66 Zeitler interview, 19 May 2020. Zeitler notes that 5th and 7th SFG were "slower to come around."
- 67 CW4 (Ret.) Michael Tannenbaum, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 22 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 68 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 69 Davis interview, 27 May 2020.
- 70 Davis interview, 27 May 2020. SPC Creamer later became a Warrant Officer, retiring as a CW5.
- 71 13th SOSB presentation.
- 72 LTC (Ret.) George E. Pack, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 18 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Pack interview, date.
- 73 Scott J. Meyer, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 17 January 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Meyer interview, date.
- 74 Pack interview, 18 May 2020.
- 75 Pack interview, 18 May 2020.
- 76 13th SOSB presentation.
- 77 13th SOSB presentation; Pack interview, 18 May 2020.
- 78 Pack interview, 18 May 2020.
- 79 Pack interview, 18 May 2020.
- 80 Meyer interview, 17 January 2020.
- 81 Meyer interview, 17 January 2020. Meyer refers to the Transportation Detachment as "Charlie Company."
- 82 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 83 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 84 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 85 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 86 Scott J. Meyer, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 13 July 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Meyer interview, date.

- 87 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 88 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 89 Mark A. Olinger, "Information Paper: 528th Support Battalion 1988 – 1990," 21 May 2020, copy at USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Olinger Information Paper, date. Olinger notes that the term company team is more commonly used and understood than was forward area support team (FAST), the term in use at the time. He adds, "the FAST concept and term fell into disuse after Operation DESERT STORM."
- 90 Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020. "[A] company team was typically task-organized with supply and truck platoons, food service, medical, maintenance, and movement control teams, based upon the mission."
- 91 Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020.
- 92 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020; Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020. FLINTLOCK was a Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)-directed exercise.
- 93 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020; Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020. One 10th SFG battalion was already forward-stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany).
- 94 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 95 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 96 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020.
- 97 Lalla interview 24 May 2019. Lalla assigned the 528th a refueling mission in support of the 160th SOAG.
- 98 Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020. By the time Olinger took command of HHC, 528th SOSB in mid-1988, it was thoroughly integrated into Army and Joint SOF exercises. "We exercised all the time," he recalls, noting, "these exercises presented challenges for the entire battalion and provided true tests of overall combat readiness."
- 99 Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020. Rangers and 160th SOAG were the main beneficiaries, which did not go unnoticed by some SFG leaders.
- 100 COL (Ret.) Mark A. Olinger, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 13 May 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 101 *United States Special Operations Command History, 20th Anniversary*, (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Headquarters, U.S. Special Operations Command History and Research Office, 1987), 29; Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020: "The code names were used interchangeably. The command history uses EARNEST WILL with July 1987 through September 1989 as the operations dates."
- 102 Lalla interview, 24 May 2019; Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020. CPT Olinger was the last soldier from the battalion to participate in this operation. Between July and September 1989, he flew resupply missions with 160th SOAG air crews throughout the Arabian Gulf. When the 160th transferred its mission to TF 118 (later re-designated 4th Squadron, 17th Cavalry), the 528th passed its support mission to 1st Corps Support Command.
- 103 Mason, "528th Write-Up," 12 May 2020; Erb interview, 20 May 2020.
- 104 Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020. Joint Exercise JAGUAR BITE '89 was a JCS-directed, joint Army-Air Force exercise conducted by USSOCOM. Olinger led the task-organized company team on a two-day, 650-mile road march to Fort Campbell, Kentucky to provide supply, maintenance, transportation, medical and food service support [road march here refers to a mounted movement]. Battalion CSM Otis W. Norfleet volunteered to lead one of the march elements. The SOSB conducted the return road march in two elements back to Fort Bragg, the latter in near white-out conditions. Olinger notes that such lengthy road marches helped prepare the unit for Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM (1990-91).
- 105 Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020.
- 106 Olinger Information Paper, 21 May 2020.
- 107 Lalla interview, 30 June 2020; Olinger interview, 13 May 2020. The enlisted soldiers interviewed for this article were unaware of the inactivation order, at least until after it was rescinded, but others clearly had been. Olinger notes that, while there was no major "jumping of ship," some enlisted soldiers did ask for transfers out of the unit.
- 108 "Army SOF Command and Control," August 1987, USSOCOM History Office, MacDill AFB, FL; "Talking Paper on SF Brigade," 27 April 1988, USSOCOM History Office, MacDill AFB, FL. These discussions dated back to at least mid-1987, but intensified the following year. The "Enhanced SF Brigade" concept called for each of the four SFGs to add 112 personnel to man a forward-deployed SF Brigade (Forward) for each theater. Under the plan, existing SF support companies would grow by 36 personnel per SFG (144, in all). The 528th SOSB, with its 163 positions, provided a convenient bill-payer for this initiative. The competing Theater Army Special Operations Command (TASOC) proposal called for 100-personnel planning cells for each theater. The TASOC proposal won out, and five Theater Special Operations Support Commands (TASOSCs) were activated in 1989-90. With one exception, the TASOSCs were never adequately manned or resourced, and were eventually inactivated in 1995.
- 109 Lalla interview, 24 May 2019. Lalla recalled that some SFGs had complained to MG Guest, CG, 1st SOCOM, that the 528th was "too hard to use," and preferred to have CSS assets under their command, at the group-level.
- 110 Guest interview, 4 May 2020. MG (Ret.) Guest traces the origins of the SOSB to the Army's JSOC-support mission.
- 111 Guest interview, 4 May 2020.
- 112 Guest interview, 4 May 2020; Louis G. Mason, email to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: Re: Introductions," 15 April 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC. Mason contends that MG Guest saw the SOSB inactivation as a way to gain additional SF billets. MG Guest but did not recall where the inactivation decision originated, but he was an advocate of the Enhanced SF Brigade concept.
- 113 Memorandum from COL Mercer M. Dorsey, Jr., for 1st SOCOM staff, "SUBJECT: 528th Support Bn Deactivation," 21 April 1989, copy at USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC. This memorandum from the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCSOPS), 1st SOCOM, solicits staff input to a Letter of Instruction (LOI) for the inactivation of the 528th SOSB, with a suspense of 26 May 1989. That LOI has not been located, but other archival documents indicate that the DCSOPS was still receiving input as late as 3 August 1989. The inactivation is formally suspended in March 1990, at the direction of the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army.
- 114 COL (Ret.) Mark A. Olinger, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 14 August 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Olinger interview, date.
- 115 Olinger interview, 14 August 2020.
- 116 Davis interview, 27 May 2020.
- 117 Jeffrey A. Hutsell, email to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: Re: SOSB Project," 10 August 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC; Meyer interview, 13 July 2020; Anderson interview, 14 January 2020; Olinger email, 17 August 2020. Olinger: "Former Sergeants Anderson, Hutsell, and Creamer, along with Specialist Meyer, were junior leaders we came to depend on when executing missions"
- 118 Meyer interview, 13 July 2020.
- 119 Davis interview, 27 May 2020.
- 120 Erb interview, 20 May 2020.