



# “YOU HAVE ARRIVED”

## 1st Special Operations Command & the Birth of Modern ARSOF

by Christopher E. Howard

On 7 August 1984, Major General (MG) Joseph C. Lutz stood beside his wife Joyce in the shadow of the Special Forces Soldier statue, known to many as “Bronze Bruce,” and fought back tears while the 24th Infantry Division band played “Auld Lang Syne.”<sup>1</sup> Fifteen minutes earlier, Lutz had passed the colors of the U.S. Army 1st Special Operations Command (1st SOCOM), which he had commanded since its founding two years earlier, to MG Leroy N. Suddath, Jr.

Opposite the incoming and outgoing commanders stood a formation representing the Army Special Forces (SF), Rangers, Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and Civil Affairs (CA) units that came under the command of 1st SOCOM upon

its provisional establishment on October 1, 1982, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (known as Fort Liberty since 2023). Prior to that, no single command and control headquarters existed for all Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) units. Since then, the Army has not lacked one, with the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) filling that role since December 1989.

### “A Rocky Road”

General (GEN) Robert W. Sennewald presided over the change of command ceremony, as the commander of 1st SOCOM’s higher headquarters, the U.S. Army Forces Command. In his remarks, he noted the rocky road that 1st SOCOM had travelled to get to where it was in August 1984.<sup>2</sup> Without elaborating on the specific obstacles overcome by 1st SOCOM, Sennewald’s comments likely resonated with the Vietnam-era ARSOF leaders in attendance, including Lutz. After great sacrifice and exceptional valor in Vietnam, many ARSOF units endured

force reductions and resourcing shortages in the aftermath of that war. By the late 1970s, ARSOF was reeling from years of neglect.

From his position as the Commander, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Center for Military Assistance, MG Lutz had played a significant role in revitalizing ARSOF, and Army Special Forces, in particular. Under his leadership, the Center produced an Army-directed Special Operations Forces Mission Area

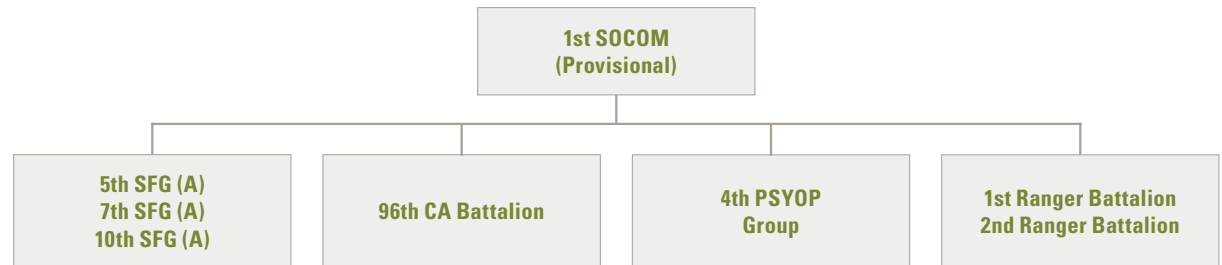


MG Joseph C. Lutz, the outgoing 1st SOCOM Commander, stands by his wife Joyce during his 7 August 1984 change of command with MG Leroy N. Suddath Jr., at Fort Bragg, NC.

Analysis that prescribed some of the most impactful changes to ARSOF in the 1980s, including the establishment of 1st SOCOM.<sup>3</sup> GEN Sennewald testified to Lutz's impact, saying, "Our national leadership made a commitment to develop your capabilities, and General Lutz has been instrumental in bringing this commitment to reality."<sup>4</sup>

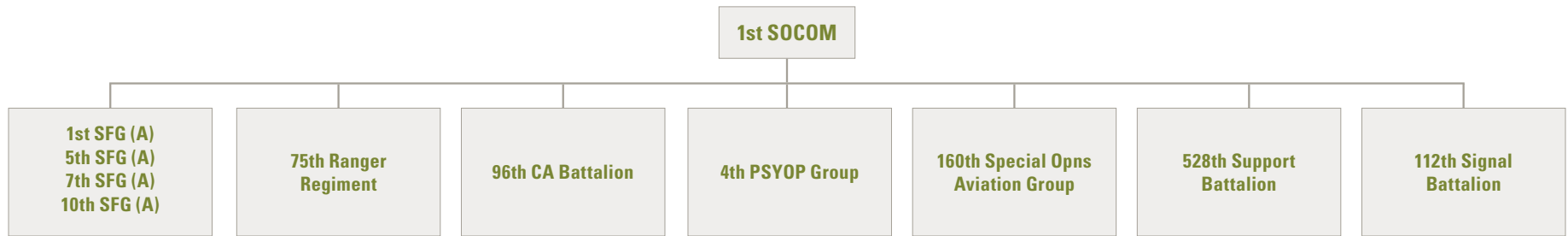
With a mission to prepare, provide, and sustain active-duty Army SF, PSYOP, CA, and Ranger units, 1st SOCOM was the first headquarters to exercise both administrative and operational control of the full spectrum of ARSOF. On Lutz's watch, the command had fought a brief war on the Caribbean Island of Grenada (Operation URGENT FURY) and deployed mobile training teams to sixty-five countries, including such hotspots as El Salvador, Honduras, and Lebanon.

### 1st SOCOM / October 1982



A wide array of 1st SOCOM units participated in Operation URGENT FURY, the October 1983 invasion of Grenada, including the U.S. Army Rangers pictured here.

## 1st SOCOM / 1987



GEN Robert W. Sennewald (front row, third from left), Commander, U.S. Army Forces Command, visited 1st SOCOM again in 1986. To his left is MG Leroy N. Suddath, Jr., 1st SOCOM Commander. To Suddath's left is his Deputy Commanding General, BG Wayne A. Downing, who later commanded USASOC and, after that, USSOCOM.

Under the leadership of Lutz and his successor, MG Suddath, 1st SOCOM continued to revitalize and expand ARSOF, reversing some of the post-Vietnam cuts and adding new capabilities. In 1984 alone, the command oversaw the reactivation of 1st Special Forces Group (SFG) and the addition of a Ranger Regimental headquarters and the 3rd Ranger Battalion. Early the following year, the Army transferred Task Force-160, a dedicated ARSOF Aviation unit, from the 101st Airborne Division to 1st SOCOM. This unit was reorganized into the 160th Special Operations Aviation Group (SOAG) in October 1986. 1st SOCOM also added two dedicated ARSOF Support units that year.<sup>5</sup>

By 1987, when 1st SOCOM became the Army component of the newly established U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), its major subordinate units were the 75th Ranger Regiment; the 1st, 5th, 7th, and 10th Special Forces Groups; the 4th PSYOP Group; the 96th CA Battalion; the 528th Support Battalion; the 112th Signal Battalion; and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Group.

### Toward a MACOM

In 1988, Suddath passed command to MG James A. Guest, an SF veteran of the Vietnam War who had previously commanded the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School



GEN James J. Lindsay, Commander, USSOCOM (left), and GEN Carl E. Vuono, Chief of Staff of the Army (right), congratulate Gary E. Luck (center) on his promotion to LTG during a 1 December 1989 ceremony at Fort Bragg, NC. LTG Luck's new command, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, was formally activated during the same ceremony.



1st SOCOM Distinctive Unit Insignia

and 5th SFG. Under Guest's leadership, 1st SOCOM successfully advocated for the establishment of a Major Command (MACOM) for ARSOF. On 1 December 1989, the Army activated USASOC, under the command of Lieutenant General (LTG) Gary E. Luck, as the Army's sixteenth MACOM.<sup>6</sup>

Concurrently, 1st SOCOM became a major subordinate command of USASOC, responsible for all active-duty ARSOF, alongside the short-lived U.S. Army Reserve Special Operations Command, which commanded all U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) and Army National Guard (ARNG) SOF units. MG Guest continued serving as 1st SOCOM commander through this transition period, during which the command rapidly deployed large contingents in support of Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama and Operation DESERT SHIELD in Saudi Arabia.

On 27 November 1990, 1st SOCOM was redesignated as the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC) and assigned the mission of equipping, training, and validating all Army Special Forces, including two ARNG and two USAR SF Groups. This arrangement persisted until 2014, when USASFC merged with active-duty PSYOP, CA, and ARSOF Support units to form the 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne), a division-level ARSOF headquarters under USASOC that commands and controls five active-duty and two ARNG SF groups, two PSYOP groups, a CA brigade, and a Sustainment brigade.

It is difficult to see how organizations such as USASOC and 1st Special Forces Command would exist, had it not been for visionary leaders like Joseph Lutz, Leroy Suddath, and James Guest. These three were the only commanders of 1st SOCOM, the first modern ARSOF headquarters.

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### **“You have arrived”**

Despite the long and sometimes rocky road back from the post-Vietnam doldrums, GEN Sennewald saw only positives in August 1984. “Today,” he said, “I am firmly convinced that road is part of history. If the words ‘you have arrived’ have meaning to anyone, they should have special meaning to the soldiers of 1st SOCOM.”<sup>7</sup>

In the intervening four decades, ARSOF has continued to prove its value to the nation in myriad ways and innumerable places, in conflicts big and small, always striving to live up to the motto first adopted by 1st SOCOM in 1982: *Sine Pari*, meaning “Without Equal.” In his parting comments in 1984, MG Lutz expressed a sentiment shared by ARSOF leaders ever since when he said, “I want to thank GEN Sennewald and our Army for allowing me the privilege to command the greatest soldiers in the world.”<sup>8</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Then-MG H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr, commanded the 24th Infantry Division at the time. Schwarzkopf was MG Leroy N. Suddath's roommate at the United States Military Academy.
- 2 "1st Special Operations Command Change of Command Ceremony," 7 August 1984, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Liberty, NC, hereafter, 1st SOCOM Change of Command, date.
- 3 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>.
- 4 1st SOCOM Change of Command, 7 August 1984.
- 5 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, 1996), 15-16.
- 6 Headquarters, Department of the Army General Order 8, 20 June 1990, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Liberty, NC; USASOC Activation Ceremony, Fort Bragg, NC, 1 December 1989, copy of video in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Liberty, NC. **The complete video from the USASOC Activation Ceremony is available at <https://arsof-history.org/collections.html>. In his remarks, LTG Luck credited MG Guest for having the "drive and enthusiasm" to overcome the formidable obstacles to USASOC's creation.**
- 7 1st SOCOM Change of Command, 7 August 1984.
- 8 1st SOCOM Change of Command, 7 August 1984.



MG Leroy N. Suddath, Jr. (center) and COL John N. Dailey (right) are pictured here at the October 1986 activation ceremony for the 160th Special Operations Aviation Group at the Fort Campbell, KY.