

Victoria Ex Umbra

Activating 4th Battalion,
1st Special Forces Group (Airborne)

by Jared M. Tracy



IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current 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.*

“Steve, I challenge you to lead this battalion to excellence.”

— COL Brian R. Vines

Coin of LTC Steven A. Warman, first commander of 4-1st SFG.

This was Colonel (COL) Brian R. Vines’ charge to Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Steven A. Warman at the 26 August 2011 ceremony activating 4th Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (SFG), at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington. Vines, Deputy Commanding Officer, 1st SFG, reminded Warman, 4th Battalion commander, “You and your battalion will never have this opportunity again to make an initial and enduring impact . . . The history of 4th Battalion starts today.”¹

This article recounts the background of the activation of 4th Battalion, 1st SFG. High operational tempo (OPTEMPO) after the 9/11 terrorist attacks led the Department of Defense (DoD) to expand Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) formations. The goal was to reduce strains on ARSOF soldiers and families while continuing operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. For each active duty SFG, this meant a fourth battalion to deploy companies (Operational Detachments – Bravo [ODBs]) and teams (Operational Detachments – Alpha [ODAs]) to conduct Unconventional Warfare (UW), Foreign Internal Defense (FID), and other SF mission sets. On activation, 4th Battalion, 1st SFG would support its higher headquarters’ mission: “[conduct] Special Operations throughout the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) Area of Responsibility and other theaters as directed, in order to support USPACOM objectives and U.S. national interests.”² This article explains the impetus for activating operational fourth battalions in each active duty SFG, with particular focus on 1st SFG.

By 2005, continual deployments to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in Afghanistan and the Philippines (OEF-P), Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) in Iraq, and other locations had severely strained the U.S. Army. For example, from September 2005 to December 2008, the Army averaged 128,000 personnel deployed to OEF and OIF-A, a large portion of total Army strength. (Active Army end-strength grew from 487,000 in 2002 to 557,000 by December 2008.)³ A small but vital population within the Army, ARSOF personnel were especially taxed by the high OPTEMPO of a multi-front war.

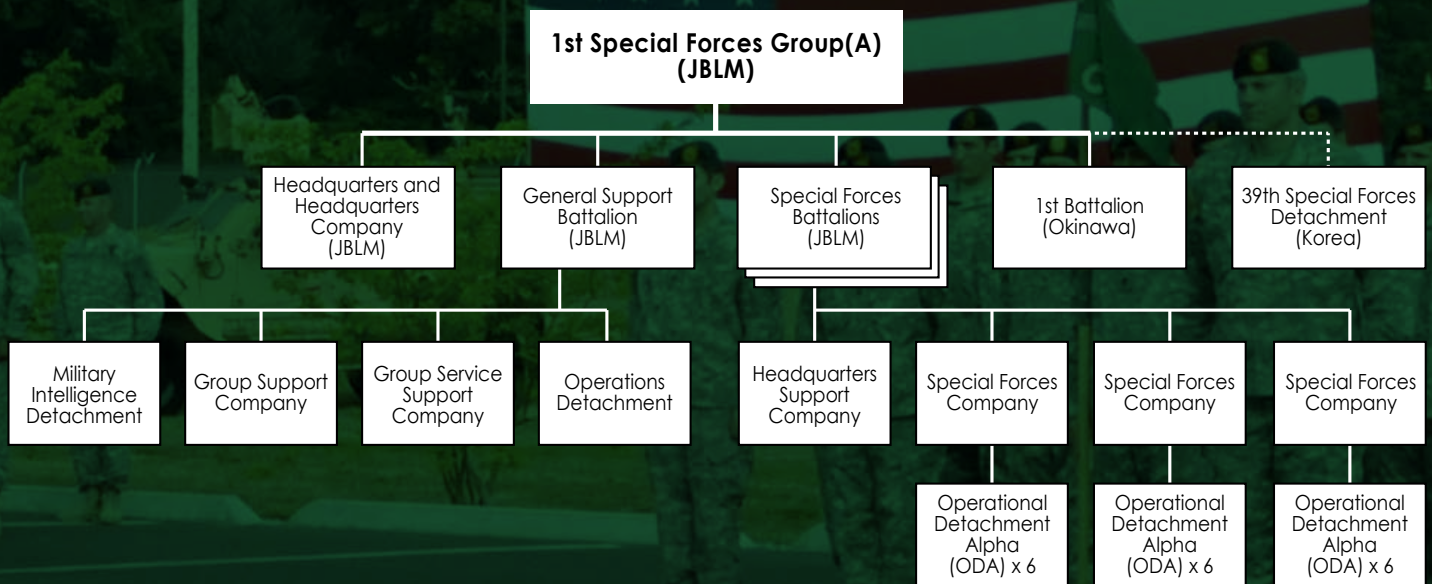
To meet these global demands, the DoD looked to expand ARSOF structure, particularly Special Forces. A 2005 DoD Program Decision Memorandum (PDM) advocated growing each SFG by one battalion. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) echoed the need for additional SF battalions in order to “strengthen forces to defeat terrorist networks.”⁴ As COL Vines explained later, “The establishment of fourth battalion[s] is intended to allow SFGs more flexibility in executing their missions. Additionally, it provides relief to our soldiers who have been continuously deployed since 2001 in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).”⁵ On 21 May 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates described the planned activation of fourth battalions in each active duty SFG as proof that SOF “will continue to be front and center” in the GWOT.⁶

With the fourth battalion plan formally approved, the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, created the 4th Battalion Coordination Cell under its G-8 (Force Modernization). That cell provided “the planning, synchronization, and coordination within [USASFC] to effectively implement the QDR and PDM directives.” It “serve[d] as the Office of Primary Responsibility for the establishment of five

Formerly the Director of Central Intelligence and President of Texas A&M University, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates (December 2006 to July 2011) approved the expansion of active duty Special Forces Groups from three to four battalions.



1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) Organization, 2011



Fourth battalion activations were scheduled as follows:

2008: 4-5th SFG ■ 2009: 4-3rd SFG ■ 2010: 4-10th SFG ■ 2011: 4-1st SFG ■ 2012: 4-7th SFG ²⁷



Deputy Commanding Officer, 1st SFG, COL Brian R. Vines, addressed the formation and attendees at the 4-1st SFG activation ceremony, 26 August 2011.

additional [SF] Battalions on time and combat ready.”⁷ A new fourth battalion would be activated annually until all active duty SFGs had one. On 8 August 2008, 4th Battalion, 5th SFG, the first new SF battalion in sixteen years, activated at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.⁸ This was followed in 2009 by 4-3rd SFG, and in 2010 by 4-10th SFG. COL Vines later stated that the lessons learned from the activation of those fourth battalions had given 4-1st SFG a head start “in developing its manning, equipping, facilities infrastructure, and training.”⁹

Between late-2009 and August 2011, an activation element within 1st SFG laid the groundwork for the new 4th Battalion. On 17 August 2011, nine members of the still-forming provisional battalion and six members of USASFC met to discuss the new unit’s status. First, the battalion’s organizational structure was in place: a Headquarters Support Company, a functional staff (S-1 [personnel], S-2 [intelligence], S-3 [operations], S-4 [supply and logistics], and S-6 [information]), and three operational companies, each with six ODAs.¹⁰

Second, the S-1, Captain (CPT) Emily L. Millet*, listed the battalion at 72 percent strength with 314 personnel, and was optimistic about meeting the next milestone of 349 personnel by November. (At full strength, the battalion would have 432 military personnel and 6 civilians.)¹¹ Third, the S-3, Major Yung M. Choe*, remarked that the battalion

was reaching its validation and certification benchmarks thanks to ongoing training.¹² Fourth, the battalion had 79 percent of its allotted equipment. Finally, the meeting closed after discussing equipment procurement, budgetary matters, and the upcoming activation ceremony.¹³ LTC Warman later praised the work of the “plank holders in the activation element” during the battalion’s formative stage.¹⁴

On 26 August 2011, 4-1st SFG officially activated at JBLM.¹⁵ “It is a distinct pleasure for me to serve as reviewing officer for today’s ceremony to activate our 4th Special Forces Battalion,” said COL Vines, in the absence of the 1st SFG commander, COL Francis M. Beaudette, who was in the Republic of the Philippines as the ‘dual-hatted’ commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P). In his remarks, Vines explained that “an experienced and dynamic command team has been selected to complete the activation of the battalion, and see it through its full operational capability on the 16th of August 2012.”¹⁶

Commanding 4-1st SFG was LTC Steven A. Warman, a 1992 Norwich University graduate and former Field Artillery Officer who later became an SF Officer and deployed multiple times to OEF and OIF.¹⁷ According to Vines, LTC Warman “was highly recommended, respected, and talented Special Forces leader [who] has proved himself an outstanding combat leader and a knowledgeable Special Forces operator.”¹⁸ Warman’s Senior Enlisted Advisor was Command Sergeant Major (CSM) George L. Hines*, a 1983 Army enlistee who later became SF qualified and held

leadership positions from the team level up. His deployments included two to OIF and one to OEF-P.¹⁹ COL Vines remarked that Hines* had “excelled as a Special Forces operator and is highly respected within our community . . . The battalion will quickly benefit from his leadership, and his mentoring and developing of the battalion’s NCOs.”²⁰

LTC Warman had the last words at 4-1st SFG’s activation ceremony: “While this ceremony marks the completion of the stand-up of this battalion, it is only the beginning of its legacy. The reputation of this battalion will be a reflection of the soldiers that stand before you. Your deeds will shape our unit’s history . . . I challenge us to ensure that the bedrock that we build over the next months will stand forever. We have some work ahead as we accept the mission [to] train, man, and equip eighteen [ODAs] to place on the field of battle . . . From all accounts, as I look at the men in front of me and the work that you have already accomplished, we are up to the challenge.”²¹

POSTSCRIPT

4th Battalion, 1st SFG was very active during its provisional stage and in the first year after formal activation, thus validating the need for a fourth battalion. In 2011, Company A, 4-1st SFG hosted Indian Army Special Forces soldiers for a Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) exercise at JBLM called VAJRA PRAHAR 2011 (see full article in this issue of *Veritas*). In addition, an ODA from Company A conducted FID training with the Japan Ground Self Defense Forces, Special Operations Group (JGSDF SOG) as

CSM George L. Hines* receives the battalion guidon from LTC Steven A. Warman at the 4-1st SFG activation ceremony, to symbolize the role of the Senior Enlisted Advisor as the ‘keeper of the colors’.



part of exercise SILENT EAGLE. Meanwhile, ODAs from Company B, 4-1st SFG joined 2nd Battalion soldiers in a JCET with Philippine National Police (PNP) to improve counter-narcoterrorism (CNT) capabilities.²²

4-1st SFG OPTEMPO picked up in 2012. Two ODAs from Company A deployed to OEF-Afghanistan, with assignment to Special Operations Task Force – Southeast (SOTF-SE), Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), to conduct Village Stability Operations (VSO) and FID. Alongside U.S. Marine Corps personnel, Company A, 4-1st SFG soldiers deployed to the Philippines for a JCET with the Philippine Marine Corps 62nd Force Recon Company and Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT), to improve host nation capabilities. Other teams deployed to the Philippines to train with such agencies as the 12th Scout Ranger Commandos and the PNP. Also in 2012, Company A personnel conducted FID training with the Singhanath Commando Battalion and Mahabir Ranger Battalion from Nepal, the Taiwanese Army Aviation SF Command (AASFC), and the Malaysian Commandos, as well as CNT training with the Royal Thai Police from Thailand.

Company B personnel deployed to the Philippines for counter-terrorism training with Philippine Security Forces (PSF), and later as assigned members of JSOTF-P. Company C soldiers trained with the PNP in the Philippines; the Anti-Terrorism Platoon, 1st Para Commando Battalion, from Nepal; and the Maldivian National Defense Force. Along with the 4-1st SFG headquarters and teams from 19th SFG, Company C deployed to Thailand for COBRA GOLD 2012, training on UW and FID with the Royal Thai SF.²³ The following year, 4-1st SFG elements deployed again to Afghanistan and the Philippines. LTC Owen G. Ray, Warman's successor as 4-1st SFG commander as of 8 August 2013, stated succinctly: "ODA work is our business, our priority of effort."²⁴ Simultaneously, the battalion looked for ways to improve its ability to conduct UW across all seven phases (Preparation, Initial Contact, Infiltration, Organization, Buildup, Employment, and Transition).²⁵ From Thailand, to Afghanistan, to the Philippines, to the Maldives, 4th Battalion has proved critical to the 1st SFG mission of conducting Special Operations "throughout the [USPACOM] Area of Responsibility and other theaters . . . in order to support USPACOM objectives and U.S. national interests."²⁶ ▲

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Endnotes

- 1 4th Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Activation Ceremony, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, 26 August 2011 hereafter Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 2 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) Mission Statement, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter 1st SFG Mission Statement. In 2018, USPACOM was re-designated as U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).
- 3 Timothy M. Bonds, Dave Baiocchi, and Laurie L. McDonald, *Army Deployments to OIF and OEF* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), iii, x-xii, 12, 14, 22, 35.
- 4 United States Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review Report," 6 February 2006, 5, <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf> (accessed 11 December 2012). The QDR also proposed a 15 percent manpower growth across all SOF.
- 5 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 6 Remarks by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates at the Special Operations Forces International Conference in Tampa, FL, 21 May 2008, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1245> (accessed 3 January 2014).
- 7 USASFC, "4th Battalion Activation Smart Book, 24 September 2007-24 September 2010," no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 4-5th SFG, "Calendar Year 2008 Annual Historical Review," 2008, 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 10 4-1st SFG, Activation Ceremony Program, 26 August 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Activation Ceremony Program, 26 August 2011.
- 11 Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), News Release No. 987-09, "Army Announces Force Structure Actions at Fort Lewis, Washington," 17 December 2009, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=13198> (accessed 11 December 2012).
- 12 USASFC and 4-1st SFG, "Monthly VTC Brief," 17 August 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; HQ, USASFC, "SUBJECT: Minutes from 4-1st Special Forces Battalion Activation In Process Review, 17 August 2011," 23 August 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter IPR Minutes, 23 August 2011. These two documents contain a minor discrepancy in the total number of military personnel. The VTC briefing listed 311 personnel assigned, while the minutes listed 314 personnel assigned. However, both figures round out to 72 percent given the authorization for 432 total personnel.
- 13 IPR Minutes, 23 August 2011.
- 14 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 15 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011; HQ, USASOC, "Permanent Order 322-2," 18 November 2009.
- 16 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 17 Activation Ceremony Program, 26 August 2011; LTC Steven A. Warman, 4-1st SFG, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 25 August 2011, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 18 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 19 Activation Ceremony Program, 26 August 2011; CSM George L. Hines, 4-1st SFG, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 25 August 2011, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 21 Activation Ceremony, 26 August 2011.
- 22 USASOC, "Classified Annex—U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) Annual Command History (ACH), Calendar Year 2011," 254-256, 260, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 23 USASOC, "Classified Annex—U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) Annual Command History (ACH), Calendar Year 2012," 226-228, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 24 LTC Owen G. Ray, 4-1st SFG, interview with Michael E. Krivdo, 11 December 2013, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 25 USASOC, "Unconventional Warfare Pocket Guide," April 2016, http://www.soc.mil/ARIS/Unconventional%20Warfare%20Pocket%20Guide%20v1%2000_Final%206%20April%202016.pdf (accessed 6 June 2018), 1, 11-16.
- 26 1st SFG Mission Statement.
- 27 HQ, USASOC, "Permanent Order 193-7: Unit Activation, 4th Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group," 12 July 2006; HQ, USASOC, "Permanent Order 267-1: Unit Activation, 4th Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group," 24 September 2007; HQ, USASOC, "Permanent Order 210-1: Unit Activation, 4th Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group," 28 July 2008; HQ, USASOC, "Permanent Order 322-2: Unit Activation, 4th Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group," 18 November 2009; HQ, USASOC, "Permanent Order 161-2: Unit Activation, 4th Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group," 10 June 2011, copy of each in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.