

A photograph of several soldiers in camouflage uniforms and helmets operating in a dense, green jungle. One soldier in the center is pointing towards the right, while others are positioned around him, some appearing to be working with equipment on the ground. The background is filled with tall, thin trees and thick foliage.

JOURNAL OF U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS HISTORY

VERITAS

Volume 17 / Number 1

From A Great Height

Helicopter Recovery at Takur Ghar

A Team Approach

PSYOP and LRA Defection in 2012

Soldier, Physician, Astronaut

ARSOF COL Andrew J. Morgan



Azimuth

of the USASOC History Office

Volume 17, Number 1

Judging from the amount of favorable correspondence received since the publication of the last *Veritas*, the new format and its tie-ins with the ARSOF History website are a big hit with you, the readers. That's a good thing. The website analytics also continue to soar, revealing that more people find and access the site every month, and spend quality 'linger time' perusing the contents. It remains a highly visited site in the command. Within the office we are justifiably proud of these accomplishments and our work creating and disseminating definitive ARSOF history. We continue to value your thoughts on the format and content.

This 'spectrum' issue of *Veritas* opens with an article on the creation of a means to formally recognize the efforts of Special Forces personnel who successfully complete the arduous requirements of the Combat Diver program of instruction. Despite being qualified divers, graduates were not eligible to wear a distinguishing device for their skill until 1972. Even then, the generic, all-service SCUBA qualification badge was not an accurate representation of the high level of skills required of a combat diver. That problem was resolved in 2004, when a new badge representative of a combat diver was created and authorized.

Two articles focus on the development of dedicated support and sustainment capabilities for Army Special

Operations. The first article traces the evolution of today's ARSOF Support units from their roots in WWII through the current period. The second article describes the origins of the 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, and recounts its early efforts to support SOE, from 1986 to 1989. Both are valuable additions to the history of ARSOF Support, now captured in the 528th Sustainment Brigade History Handbook.

In addition, a different take on the Battle of Takur Ghar is explored with an examination of the recovery effort afterwards. Following the battle, aircrew and pilots developed a plan of action to recover one of the downed helicopters so that it could eventually be placed back in service.

Also, the issue contains two articles on the successful application of PSYOP principles to increase international pressure on rogue African warlord Joseph Kony. In 2012, a small team of PSYOP professionals stepped into the picture and helped to weaken a source of Kony's strength by actively encouraging defections of members of his Lord's Resistance Army. Starting with small gains whose effects were magnified by judicious use of social media coverage by NGOs, PSYOP assisted in the steady marginalization of Kony's influence and power.

- Mike Krivdo

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Collective Research Efforts

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) played a significant role in the U.S.-led response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Less than a year old at the time, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) deployed Special Forces, Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs, Special Operations Aviation, Rangers, and ARSOF Support soldiers to the region in the ensuing months. Coalition missions were, first, to defend Saudi Arabia from Iraqi attack (Operation DESERT SHIELD); second, to expel Saddam Hussein's occupying forces from Kuwait (Operation DESERT STORM); and finally, to protect and assist Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq after the war (Operation PROVIDE COMFORT).

Now, thirty years later, the USASOC History Office is researching all facets of ARSOF during and after the Persian Gulf War, and is interested in any documents, photographs, or other materials that readers are willing to share. Further, the Branch/Unit Historians would like speak with Gulf War veterans to capture their stories. If you served in Operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM or PROVIDE COMFORT, and are willing to share your materials and/or experiences, please email the USASOC History Office at arsof_history@socom.mil, or contact one of our Historians directly.

In addition to this strategic collection effort, the USASOC Branch/Unit Historians are always researching topics specifically related to their fields. Their collections priorities are posted on the Branch pages on the ARSOF History Website (<https://arsof-history.org/>). We invite ARSOF soldiers and veterans to check those pages frequently to see how you can assist these ongoing historical research and writing projects. Thank you for your support.

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Collection Activities

Historical Record Collection Process

The USASOC History Office collects and preserves documents, photos, and other historical records pertaining to Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF). The following guidance explains how to donate or transfer historic materials to this office.

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Coordination: Contact the History Office via e-mail (arsof_history@socom.mil) to coordinate delivery and receipt of historical assets. A brief description of the types, condition, and quantity of materials is appreciated.

Mailing Address:

Commander, USASOC
ATTN: AOHS (*Veritas*)
E-2929 Desert Storm Drive
Fort Bragg, NC 28310-9110

Pickup Assistance: In exceptional cases, History Office personnel can assist with on-site collection of materials.

Please send all questions to:
arsof_history@socom.mil.

Check out the ARSOF History website:
<https://arsof-history.org>



Publication Information

Veritas: Published by the USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, North Carolina (ISSN 1553-9830). The contents are not necessarily the official views of, nor endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, USSOCOM, or USASOC. They are compiled, edited, and prepared by the History Office.

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Cover: Special Operations Resuscitation Team (SORT) personnel from the 528th Sustainment Brigade conduct jungle extraction training with 10th Special Forces Group soldiers near Nzara, South Sudan, in 2013. They are part of the small ARSOF contingent in Central Africa supporting Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, the multinational mission to defeat Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army.

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Recognizing “Combat Divers”

A History of Army Special Operations Diver Badges

by Robert D. Seals

Abstract: Prior to 1969, no Army Scuba Diver Badge existed. That year, the Scuba Badge was authorized, but not for wear by Special Forces (SF) “combat divers” until 1972. Full recognition for the unique training and skills of SF divers came in 2004 when the Special Operations Diver and Diving Supervisor Badges were approved.

In 2004, the current silver Special Operations Diver Badge was approved for graduates of the Special Forces (SF) Underwater Operations (UWO) course. It includes a mask and mouthpiece, typical of a closed-circuit rebreather system; daggers honoring the legacy of Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Maritime Unit swimmers; and sharks representing stealth, speed, and power.¹ This badge was a long time coming. When SF began underwater operations in the 1950s, no scuba qualification badge existed. Starting in the early 1970s, SF shared a generic Scuba Badge with U.S. Army Engineer and U.S. Navy scuba divers. Finally, SF received the Army Special Operations-unique badge mentioned above.² This brief photo essay explains how this esteemed award came into being.

Through World War I, the only Army qualification badges were for marksmanship, gunnery, and aviation.³ During World War II, this had expanded to nine Army-authorized “ground badges,” including the Expert and Combat Infantryman Badges, and four Engineer underwater “hard hat” badges (with dive courses at Fort Screven, Tybee Island, Georgia, and later Camp Gordon



The current Special Operations Diver badge. Adopted in 2004, it includes a mask and mouthpiece typical of a closed circuit rebreather system, daggers representing OSS Maritime Unit swimmers, and sharks representing stealth, speed, and power.



The Second-Class Diver badge was one of four approved for Army Engineer “hard hat” divers in 1944.



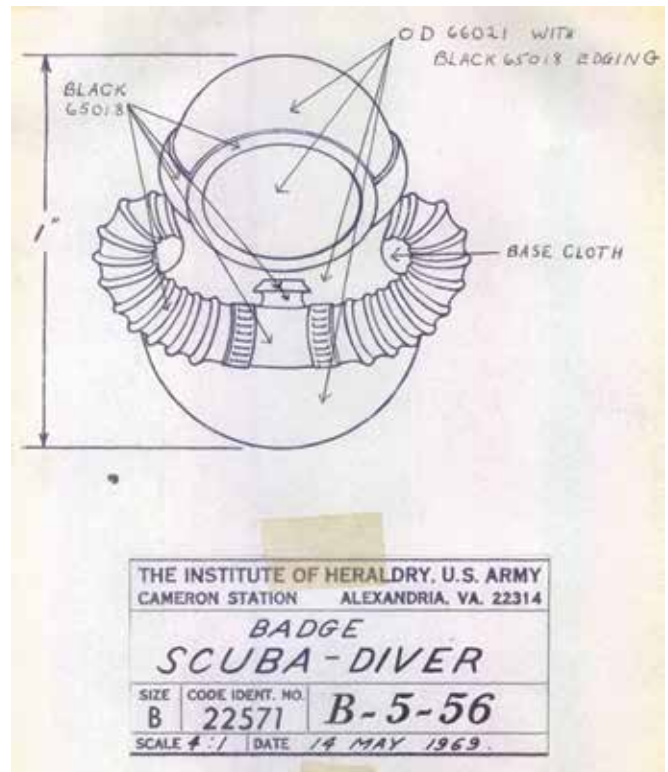
(Image credit: Colonel Charles H. Fry)

77th SF Group Scuba demonstration team, Fort Bragg, NC, 1956. ARSOF icon and scuba pioneer then-Sergeant First Class Charles H. Fry is on the far right.

Johnston, Florida).⁴ There were no badges for experimental special operations diving (e.g., the OSS use of an early closed-circuit underwater rebreathing system), which had shown potential. Postwar advances in scuba opened the door for both civilian recreational diving and increased combat application.

Following the establishment of SF in 1952 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, scuba was one of many specialized skills eventually added to the SF portfolio. With no dive school of their own, Army SF soldiers formed clubs, attended the U.S. Navy Underwater Swimmers course, or created their own *ad-hoc* training programs. By 1963, SF formalized an underwater operations requirement to support “clandestine infiltration and attack of targets” during the conduct of Unconventional Warfare.⁵ Accordingly, in 1965, the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center consolidated existing ‘in-house’ SF dive training as the SF UWO course at Key West, Florida.⁶

By the late 1960s, the Army’s appreciation of scuba had increased. A 1968 revision to Army Marine Diver Regulation identified scuba as a subset of Engineer diving.⁷ Scuba was not considered “a separate, distinct rating,” but rather the first step to earning the “hard hat” Second-Class Diver rating and badge. On 1 May 1969, the Army authorized wear of a new Scuba Badge, but there was a catch. SF UWO graduates were omitted from the regulation, and were not eligible to wear the Scuba Badge.⁸



The approved badge, Institute of Heraldry drawing, was oxidized silver, “1 inch high consisting of a scuba diver’s hood with face mask, mouth piece and breathing tube,” symbolic of the distinctive equipment required by scuba divers.

SF divers were in an awkward situation of earning an award that they could not wear. For example, SF Staff Sergeant Ernest A. Jensen recalls his graduating class being given the Scuba Badge, but being told “not to wear

it during an official formation.”⁹ The Army corrected this in late 1972, when it authorized SF divers to wear the Scuba Badge.¹⁰ To complicate matters, the following year, the U.S. Navy approved wear of the Army Scuba Badge for graduates of its own dive programs. For over thirty years, SF graduates of the UWO course wore the same badge as U.S. Army Engineer and U.S. Navy scuba divers who had been trained elsewhere.¹¹

In 2004, at the request of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, the Army approved new Special Operations Diver and Diving Supervisor Badges. These badges, awarded to graduates of the SF UWO Combat Dive Qualification and Combat Dive Supervisors Courses, hearkened back to the legacy of World War II OSS Maritime Unit swimmers, and emphasized the tactical nature of “combat diving.”¹² The symbolic divide between the SF UWO courses and Engineer/U.S. Navy dive courses was complete.¹³

Awarded over the decades, these various qualification badges recognized noteworthy accomplishments by Army “combat divers.” Retired SF Colonel Robert W. Marrs, who commanded a 7th SF Group combat diver detachment, reflected, “To this day, the Scuba course was the most physically demanding school in the U.S. Army that I attended.”¹⁴ The first Scuba Badge in 1969, followed by the Army Special Operations-unique dive badge in 2004, testify to that fact. 🇺🇸

(Image credit: LTC Larry A. Greene)



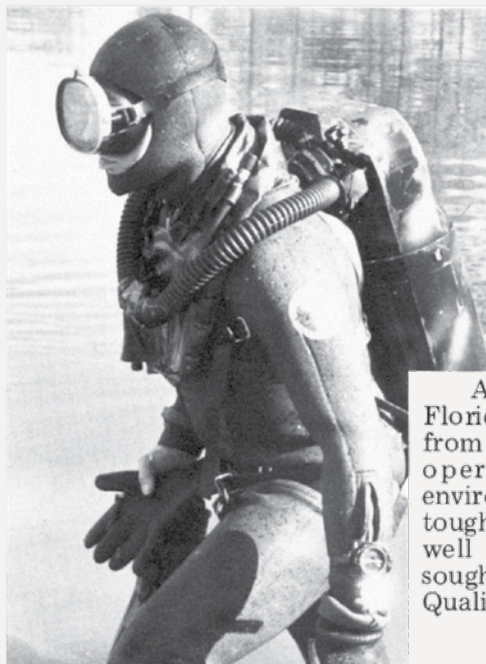
LTC (ret.) Larry A. Greene was the Dive Committee Executive Officer in 1971-72. He is wearing a closed-circuit system by the SF Underwater Operations sign, Naval Air Station Key West, Florida.

In 1972, the Scuba Badge (inset) was awarded to SF divers, and was featured in a 7th SFG recruiting pamphlet.

AND THERE'S MORE TOO!



Scuba Badge



LIKE SCUBA!

A five week course at Key West, Florida, teaches selected personnel from our detachments how to operate in an underwater environment. It's some of the toughest training anywhere, but well worth it. Graduates wear the sought after silver SCUBA Diver's Qualification Badge.

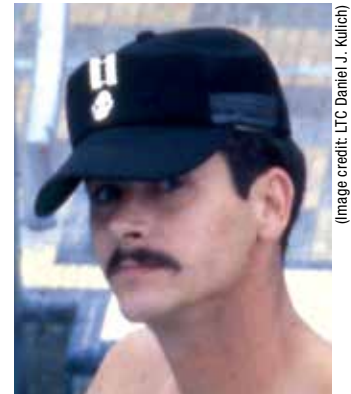
Takeaways:

- 1 In World War II, the Army authorized nine “ground” qualification badges, including four for “hard hat” Engineer divers.
- 2 Prior to 1969, no Army Scuba Badge existed; even then, SF divers were not eligible to wear it until 1972.
- 3 A modified badge for Army Special Operations combat divers was approved in 2004.

Endnotes

- 1 Email from Keith A. Garrison, The Institute of Heraldry (TIOH), to Robert D. Seals, “SUBJECT: RE: US Army Scuba Badge c. 1969,” 2 November 2018, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; LTC (ret.) Emil L. Posey, interview with Robert D. Seals, 26 August 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Posey interview. LTC Posey was the Dive Committee OIC from 1971 to 1972, and stated that the only weapon used in training during that period was a “K-bar knife,” illustrative of a technical emphasis. TIOH describes the “Special Operations Diver Badge” in the following way: “The diver is wearing a low volume mask, typical of combat diving operations and mouthpiece with inhalation/exhalation hose of a stealth rebreather. The daggers recall the heritage of the OSS operational swimmers of World War II. The shark represents stealth, speed, power and efficiency in dispatching its prey. The star and laurel wreath represent the Special Operations Diving Supervisor Badge qualification level.”
- 2 HQDA, Army Regulation (AR) 611-75: *Selection, Qualifications, Rating and Disrating of Army Divers* (Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 1982), 1-1, 2-14. This regulation made the distinction between “hard hat” and “combat divers.” The term “combat diver” was defined as divers “mainly in SF units,” with a “horizontal combat diving mission.”
- 3 William K. Emerson, *Marksmanship in the U.S. Army; A History of Medals, Shooting Programs, and Training* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 18-21, and *Encyclopedia of United States Army Insignia and Uniforms* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 356. The initial issue U.S. Army marksmanship badge was a ‘button’ worn on the collar in 1881. After the Civil War, the emphasis on marksmanship was part of a trend towards greater professionalism. Brigadier General Edward O.C. Ord, commander of the Departments of California, Texas, and the Platte, believed in the carrot and stick method, announcing the “best and worst shooting” in monthly circulars to his command.
- 4 HQDA, AR 600-70: *Personnel, Ground Badges* (Washington, DC, War Department, 6 August 1946), 1; Forrest C. Pogue, *Organizer of Victory, 1943-1945* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 80-88. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall remained concerned about “the importance of little things to morale,” and advocated awards and badges. In 1946, the nine authorized ground badges were the Expert / Combat Infantryman, Medical, Parachutist, Glider, Master Diver, First-class Diver, Salvage Diver, and Second-class Diver badges. Only one badge could be worn, except for soldiers with the Parachutist or Glider badges.
- 5 Memorandum, Headquarters, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, “SUBJECT: Service Test of SCUBA Diving Equipment,” 15 May 1963, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC. This underwater operational requirement included both open and closed systems to support six tactical missions.
- 6 Kenneth Finlayson, “Key West: Home of ARSOF Underwater Operations,” *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2007): 3-6. SF conducted scuba courses at Fort Bragg, NC, until relocation to Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, to consolidate and standardize underwater training. Units overseas frequently ran their own courses to save travel funds.
- 7 HQDA, Army Regulation 611-75: *Personnel Selection and Classification, Selection, Qualifications, Rating and Disrating of Marine Divers* (Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 1968), 1-7. Military Occupational Skills (MOS
- 8 Commanding Officer, TIOH, Memorandum, “SUBJECT: Request for Scuba Diver Badge,” 13 March 1969, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Memorandum, “SUBJECT: Request for Scuba Diver Badge,” 1 May 1969, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC. The Institute of Heraldry developed five designs, some possessing dolphins and a trident, with the simplest design, “D,” selected by the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel.
- 9 Email from Master Sergeant (MSG) (ret.) Robert B. Johansen and Sergeant Major (ret.) Ernest A. Jensen to Robert D. Seals, “SUBJECT: Dive Badge Information Received,” 18 August 2018, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Posey interview. Resourceful MSG Harold Jacobson requested that his 1st SF Group Dive Detachment be awarded an additional MOS of 00B, Diver. Jacobson then submitted a request for the Scuba Badge which was approved by U.S. Army Base Command, Okinawa, on 25 September 1972. LTC (ret.) Emil L. Posey confirms that graduates were only given a certificate during his tenure at Key West.
- 10 HQDA, DA Message 131507ZDec72, “SUBJECT: Award of Scuba Diver Qualification Badge,” 13 December 1972, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Posey interview. LTC Posey attended the scuba course late in 1970, and two months later in 1971 became the OIC. The committee then consisted of one officer and twelve NCOs, who taught a six-week course six times a year.
- 11 HQDA, AR 672-5-1: *Military Awards* (Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 3 June 1974), 5-7; HQDA, AR 611-75: *Selection, Qualifications, Rating and Disrating of Army Divers* (Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 1982), 1-1, 2-14.
- 12 HQDA, Letter, “SUBJECT: Change to the Army Scuba Diver Badge,” October 2004, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; email from Keith A. Garrison, Institute of Heraldry, to Robert D. Seals, “SUBJECT: US Army SCUBA Badge c. 1969,” 2 November 2018, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC. As before, changes to the Army Scuba Badge were approved before a design was selected in November 2004. The new badges were manufactured and began to be worn later in 2005.
- 13 Memorandum, Headquarters, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, “SUBJECT: Request Reconsideration for Special Operations Diver Badge,” 3 August 2004, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Both services, Army and Navy, wore the same Scuba Badge since 1973. This led to confusion since the Army course was a tactical 5-week course, in contrast to the Navy technical 2-week course. Army graduates of the Navy course continued to wear the older badge after the change in 2004.
- 14 COL (ret.) Robert W. Marrs, interview with Robert D. Seals, 25 August 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; LTC (ret.) Daniel J. Kulich, interview with Robert D. Seals, 17 August 2020, USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC. In 1982, Marrs earned his Scuba Badge as a 5th SF Group Communications Staff Sergeant. In Panama, LTC (ret.) Kulich commanded a 3-7th SFG ODA from 1980 to 1983, and conducted basic and advanced scuba courses for U.S. and Panamanian forces at Fort Gulick. To illustrate the difficulty of dive training, in one U.S.-only course, twenty students began with only seven graduating.

By 1980, the Scuba badge was worn by instructors during courses. CPT Daniel J. Kulich and ODA-15 ran courses for U.S. and Panamanian forces at Fort Gulick while assigned to 3-7th SFG in Panama.



(Image credit: LTC Daniel J. Kulich)



ARSOF SUPPORT HISTORY

A Brief Overview

by Christopher E. Howard

Abstract: *The history of Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) Support begins in World War II, when the forerunners of today's support units were first activated. Like most ARSOF units, these support units were inactivated after WWII, but their lineage and wartime honors live on today in the 528th Sustainment Brigade, 112th Signal Battalion, and 389th Military Intelligence Battalion. This brief historical narrative explains their evolution.*

In July 1942, the First Special Service Force (FSSF), an American-Canadian commando unit in the lineage of Army Special Forces (SF), was activated at Fort William Henry Harrison, Montana. It was made up of three combat regiments, and a separate service battalion, with Headquarters, Maintenance, and Service companies. After leading the recapture of the Aleutian Islands, the FSSF moved to Italy, where it fought grueling mountain battles with the Germans in late 1943 and early 1944, held the defensive line at Anzio, and was

among the first Allied units to occupy Rome on 4 June 1944. The Force spearheaded the amphibious assault on the southern coast of France (Operation DRAGOON) in August 1944, and fought its way inland before being disbanded on 5 December 1944.

Elsewhere in the summer of 1942, at Camp Savage, Minnesota, Japanese-American soldiers entered the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) as linguists. One MIS unit, the 389th Translator Team, was activated in February 1945, and fought alongside the Army's 96th Infantry Division on Leyte, Philippines, and Okinawa, earning a Presidential Unit Citation. The 389th Military Intelligence Battalion carries on that lineage today.

In December 1942, the 528th Quartermaster Service Battalion was activated at Camp McCain, Mississippi. It first saw action in Sicily in July 1943, as part of Lieutenant General George S. Patton's U.S. Seventh Army. Subsequent operations in Italy, France, and Germany earned the 528th Quartermaster Battalion (QMB) six campaign streamers. It was also awarded two bronze arrowheads for amphibious assault landings



The FSSF Service Battalion maintained the M-29 Weasel, a tracked cargo vehicle designed specifically for the Force (pictured here near the Rapido River in Italy, 23 January 1944).

on Sicily and Southern France. Since 2008, the 528th Sustainment Brigade has perpetuated the lineage of the 528th QMB.

On 14 July 1944, Headquarters, Seventh Army, at Lido de Roma, Italy, activated the 512th Airborne Signal Company, consisting of a wire section, radio section, message center, and Signal Office section. In August 1944, the 512th provided communications to the 1st Airborne Task Force during Operation DRAGOON. It was later merged into the 112th Airborne Army Signal Battalion, which activated on 10 February 1945 and parachuted into Germany with the First Allied Airborne Army in Operation VARSITY on 24 March 1945. The 112th Signal Battalion inherited the lineage of these two early airborne signal units.

By the end of World War II, the lineage predecessors of the 528th Sustainment Brigade, and its component battalions (112th Signal and 389th Military Intelligence), had all been activated and seen combat. These units were inactivated following World War II, and none were reactivated for service in the Korean War. The 389th Military Intelligence Detachment was activated in 1962, and attached to the 11th Special Forces Group (SFG) the following year. In 1969, the 528th QMB was reactivated for duty in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), where it supported conventional forces in the I Corps Tactical Zone/Military Region One until 1971. Logistical support for SF in Vietnam was provided by the Counterinsurgency Support Office, located in Okinawa, and by the 5th SFG Logistics Support Center, in Nha Trang, RVN.

During the 1980s, ARSOF experienced significant growth and modernization following the failed mission to rescue U.S. hostages in Iran in April 1980 (Operation EAGLE CLAW). The Army provisionally established the 1st Special Operations Command (1st SOCOM), under U.S. Army Forces Command, in 1982 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as the headquarters for SF, Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Civil Affairs (CA), and Ranger units. A 1983 Army study validated the need for dedicated ARSOF support units, after which 1st SOCOM staff officers began planning for the establishment and activation of a Special Operations Support Battalion (SOSB) and Special Operations Communications Battalion (SOCB). Their efforts came to fruition in 1986, with the activation of 1st SOCOM's first dedicated support units.

The 13th Support Battalion was activated on 2 June 1986, at Fort Bragg, to provide dedicated administrative, logistical, and maintenance support to 1st SOCOM, and, when directed, to other ARSOF. A year later, on 16 May 1987, the 13th was reflagged by the U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry as the 528th Support Battalion, but often referred to as the 528th SOSB.



Top: Unidentified WWII Signalmen bury spiral-4 cable near the Rhine River. **Bottom:** 528th QMB personnel in RVN used 6,000-pound rough terrain forklifts to load, offload, and move ammunition and heavy ordnance.

Authorized 12 officers, 5 warrant officers, and 146 enlisted soldiers, it was organized into a headquarters company, and supply, maintenance, and transportation detachments. In 1988, the 528th adopted the motto: "We Support to the Utmost."

On 17 September 1986, the 112th Signal Battalion was activated at Fort Bragg, with an authorized strength of 16 officers and 229 enlisted soldiers. Its mission was to provide tactical command and control communications to deployed Army and Joint SOF. The battalion focused its efforts toward Special Operations Command, South (SOC SOUTH) and Special Operations Command, Europe (SOCEUR), which belonged to the two Army-supported combatant commands (U.S. Southern Command and U.S. European Command). 112th soldiers quickly identified themselves as "Shadow

Associated Insignia



The distinctive arrowhead design of the First Special Service Force Shoulder Sleeve Insignia (SSI) is perpetuated by the USASOC SSI, worn by 528th Support Battalion and 112th Signal Battalion soldiers from 1992 to 2009.



96th Infantry Division SSI



U.S. Seventh Army SSI



1st Allied Airborne Army SSI



Special Forces SSI



528th Support Battalion Distinctive Unit Insignia (DUI)



112th Signal Battalion DUI



389th Military Intelligence Battalion DUI



Special Operations Support Command DUI



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



(Image Credit: James S. Kestner)

Top: LTC Louis G. Mason heads the 13th Support Battalion formation at its 2 July 1986 activation ceremony. **Bottom:** LTC Steven R. Sawdey (left), 112th Signal Battalion Commander, CPT Eric G. David (center), and CPT James S. Kester (right), pictured here at a June 1990 change-of-command ceremony, all deployed to Panama during Operation JUST CAUSE.

Warriors,” derived from the unit motto *Penetra Le Tenebre* – Penetrate the Shadows.

Initially, both the 528th SOSB and 112th Signal Battalion reported directly to 1st SOCOM, but they were later administratively aligned under the Commander, 4th PSYOP Group. This makeshift arrangement, known as the ARSOF Support Command, was in effect in May 1989, when the U.S. Army Forces Command published an inactivation order for the 528th SOSB, effective 15 September 1990. With the situation in Panama deteriorating in mid-1989, the 528th simultaneously prepared for war and inactivation.

The 528th SOSB and 112th Signal Battalion first entered combat in December 1989, supporting

Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama. Then, in late August 1990, both battalions deployed lead elements to Saudi Arabia as part of Operation DESERT SHIELD, remaining there through the end of Operation DESERT STORM in 1991. Spared from inactivation by its superb performance in Panama and the Persian Gulf, the 528th SOSB expanded from fewer than 200 to approximately 400 personnel over the next few years. Additionally, Theater Army Special Operations Support Commands (TASOSCs) were established in 1989-90 at each

geographic combatant command (GCC) to coordinate logistical support to deployed SOF elements.

In 1995, the Special Operations Support Command (SOSCOM) was activated to provide a brigade-level command structure for ARSOF Support units. That same year, signal detachments (SIGDETs) from the 112th Signal Battalion were permanently assigned to each of the five Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs). Special Operations Theater Support Elements (SOTSEs) from SOSCOM replaced the TASOSCs,

(Image Credit: Stephen R. Anderson)



CH-47 helicopters delivered potable water, purified by 528th SOSB soldiers, to ARSOF outstations in Saudi Arabia using sling-loaded 500-gallon blivets.



A 112th Signal Battalion detachment in Afghanistan, circa 2002.



528th SOSB soldiers with TF Viking are pictured here refueling a CH-47 helicopter of the 101st Airborne Division.

performing the same coordination mission with a fraction of the personnel. In 2008, these were renamed ARSOF Liaison Elements (ALEs).

SOSCOM units were among the first deployed following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. They accompanied Task Force DAGGER (5th SFG) to Karshi-Kanabad (K2) Air Base, Uzbekistan, using it as an intermediate staging base for operations in Afghanistan in

the early stages of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). When the focus shifted to Iraq in early 2003, the 528th SOSB and 112th Signal Battalion were again called on to support SF-led task forces in northern and western Iraq. Meanwhile, SOSCOM Headquarters was operationalized during the early days of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), providing command and control for a Logistics Task Force supporting SOF in western Iraq. It was during this initial phase of the Global War on Terrorism that SOSCOM adopted the nickname “Sentinels,” to reflect its constant state of readiness.

In 2005, USASOC started implementing the ARSOF Logistics Transformation Plan, which shifted support personnel and resources from SOSCOM to the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC). Accordingly, both SOSCOM and the 528th SOSB were inactivated by year’s end. In their place, a provisional Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) and a Special Troops Battalion (STB) were established. Some 528th SOSB personnel positions were redistributed to help stand up group SF support battalions (GSBs), formally activated in 2009 to provide SFGs with sustainment, signal, and military intelligence capabilities.

In December 2008, the 528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne) was activated, inheriting the 528th SOSB number and lineage. It provided the higher headquarters for the 112th Signal Battalion, six ALEs, and an STB consisting of the 195th Forward



Left: LTG John F. Mulholland, CG, USASOC, affixes campaign streamers to the 528th Sustainment Brigade colors at its July 2009 activation ceremony. **Bottom:** SORT personnel conduct vertical hoist training with 10th SFG, near Nzara, South Sudan.



(Image Credit: Louis K. Haase)

Support Company (Nebraska Army National Guard), the 197th Special Troops Company (Texas Army National Guard), and a Special Operations Medical Detachment (SOMEDD), with two eight-man Special Operations Resuscitation Teams (SORTs). In April 2008, the first SORT deployed to Afghanistan (OEF) as a proof-of-concept; its success helped the 528th justify a third SORT. From 2012 through 2016, SORTs operated in South Sudan, as part of Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, the successful ARSOF-led mission to remove Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army from the battlefield.

Since activating, the 528th Sustainment Brigade had reported directly to Headquarters, USASOC. This changed in July 2014, when USASOC provisionally established the 1st Special Forces Command (1st SFC) as a deployable ARSOF headquarters, replacing USASFC. In 2016, the Commanding General, 1st SFC, directed 528th soldiers to don the SF Shoulder Sleeve Insignia (SSI). This was the same SSI their predecessors in the 528th SOSB and 112th Signal Battalion had worn twenty-five years earlier, while supporting the 5th SFG-led Army Special Operations Task Force during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM.

In 2015, USASOC approved the establishment of a provisional Military Intelligence Battalion, under the 528th Sustainment Brigade. It was formally activated in July 2019 as the 389th Military Intelligence Battalion, with an authorized strength of 5 officers, 5 warrant officers, and 86 enlisted personnel, organized into two companies, and a headquarters detachment. It provides command and control for intelligence operations in support of the 1st SFC, its subordinate SF, CA, and PSYOP units, and mission partners. The battalion can also deploy as part of a Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF).

In recent years, the 528th Sustainment Brigade, 112th Signal Battalion, 389th Military Intelligence Battalion, and STB have supported the counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) mission, known as Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, as well as Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL in Afghanistan. They stand ready to support 1st SFC and its subordinate units "to the utmost," wherever and whenever the need arises.



In August 2018, LTC Richard A. Malaga (left) passed command of the 1st SFC MI Battalion (Prov.) to LTC Sapriya Childs (center).

The recently released 528th Sustainment Brigade History Handbook provides ARSOF Support soldiers with a pocket-sized reference that includes a brief historical overview, timeline of key events, unit lineages and honors, insignia, and organizational structures. While focusing primarily on the 528th and its subordinate units, the handbook also honors the service of all ARSOF Support soldiers, past and present. 🔥

Additional information on ARSOF Support can be found online at: https://www.arsof-history.org/branch_support.html.





From a
GREAT HEIGHT
Helicopter Recovery at Takur Ghar

by Troy J. Sacquety

Abstract: *The 4-5 March 2002 Battle of Takur Ghar in Afghanistan resulted in two downed MH-47E Chinook helicopters. Only one, tail number 476, was salvageable. However, it was in an extremely remote and contested area, factors that complicated a recovery. With considerable planning and the use of a contracted airframe, aviation maintenance soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment recovered the helicopter, allowing it to return to service.*

Within weeks of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) began conducting combat operations in Afghanistan against the terrorist group al-Qaeda and forces of the Taliban government which harbored them. Dubbed Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) on 7 October 2001, the U.S. assisted anti-Taliban Afghan fighters, securing much of the countryside, and liberating the capital city of Kabul in November. By late-December, a coalition of anti-Taliban Afghan groups and western allies had installed Hamid Karzai as head of a transitional government.¹

While Coalition and anti-Taliban Afghan forces made rapid gains in seizing Afghan territory, they were unsuccessful in destroying al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Most importantly, a sizeable enemy force escaped during the Battle of Tora Bora, 6-17 December, assuring ongoing military action. Among the first soldiers engaged, the MH-47E Chinook pilots and crews of 2nd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (2/160th) remained heavily involved in combat operations in early 2002. One of the pivotal moments of the 2/160th's early involvement in OEF came on 4 March 2002, during Operation ANACONDA.

Centered on the Shahi-Kot Valley and Arma mountains, in Afghanistan's Paktia Province, ANACONDA was designed to drive al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters against blocking positions held by regiments from the 101st Airborne and 10th Mountain Divisions. Combined – Joint Task Force Mountain expected just a few hundred insurgents, and reasoned that they would not put up much of a fight. This assumption was wrong.² Nowhere was this more apparent than on the mountaintop of Takur Ghar. Situated at 10,500 feet above sea level, Takur Ghar provided an excellent vantage point to observe movement in the valley below, and U.S. forces aimed to seize the height. Unfortunately for the MH-47E pilots, crews, and accompanying ground

forces, enemy forces had already occupied and fortified the peak.

The first to discover the entrenched enemy were those in an MH-47E with tail number 476. As the pilot tried to offload its troops onto Takur Ghar in the pre-dawn hours on 4 March, insurgents brought 476 under intense fire. Suffering several crippling rocket-propelled grenade strikes and automatic weapons fire, the Chinook jerked upward, causing U.S. Navy SEAL, Petty Officer First Class (PO1) Neil C. Roberts, to fall approximately five to ten feet into the snow on the ridge. Although the pilot tried to return to extract PO1 Roberts, the helicopter was critically damaged. With great skill, the pilot managed to set the crippled helicopter down about six kilometers away at a location nearly 2,000 feet below the summit.³ The crew and passengers were picked up by another helicopter. Meanwhile, in an effort to recover or rescue PO1 Roberts, whose status was unknown, two additional MH-47Es separately inserted SOF teams. Both helicopters came under fire, and the insurgents disabled one (tail number 475), leading to a lengthy battle on top of Takur Ghar. After the battle, the ARSOF command element, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), had to decide if, and then how, to salvage the two downed aircraft.⁴

The recovery of 475 was the most problematic due to its location and the extent of damage suffered. In addition to being shot down, it had been subject to intense gunfire throughout the firefight on Takur Ghar. A U.S. Air Force plane solved the problem when it inadvertently bombed and completely destroyed the helicopter. "There wasn't anything to recover," recalled then-Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Kevin W. Magnum, 1/160th commander, and the senior 160th SOAR officer in Afghanistan.⁵ That left 476 as the sole salvageable MH-47E.

Estimating the cost of salvage and repair of 476 to be less than the expense of procuring a new MH-47E, CJSOTF-A gave the go-ahead for the 160th to recover the airframe. Maintenance Test Pilot Chief Warrant

NOTE: IAW USSOCOM Sanitation Protocol for Historical Articles on Recent Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publically 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 photos are publically released by a service or DoD. Source references (end notes) utilize the assigned pseudonym.

Gardez

5

TAKUR GHAR AMBUSH



2 4

Takur Ghar

1 3

Little Whale

Shahikot Valley
The Whale

The Ambush

1 On 4 March 2002, MH-47E tail number 476 comes under fire and P01 Neil C. Roberts falls out. The pilot attempts to rescue him, but the aircraft is too heavily damaged to return.

2 476 crash lands below the summit and is abandoned.

3 MH-47E tail number 475 attempts to

land troops to rescue P01 Roberts and is shot down on the summit, leading to an intense firefight. Seven Special Operations personnel are killed and several others wounded. This helicopter is later destroyed.

Aircraft Recovery

4 A team from 2/160 recovers 476 on 8 April 2002 with the aid of a Russian-built Mi-26.

5 Mi-26 conducts refueling at Gardez.

6 Mi-26 conducts second refueling at Kabul.

7 Mi-26 delivers 476 to the airfield at Bagram. The MH-47E Chinook is then transported to Fort Campbell, Kentucky for repair.

Officer 4 (CW4) Peter A. Milch* recalled that “LTC Mangum asked me what could I do. I replied, I need to see it.”⁶ An assessment team, made up of CW4 Milch*, Maintenance Technician CW3 Thomas M. Katz*, and Technical Inspector Staff Sergeant (SSG) Samuel J. Stills*, was ready two weeks after the crash. Bringing tools and lengths of hose in case they had to drain the fuel tanks, the team flew from Bagram Air Base to a forward operating base (FOB) that housed a Navy SEAL platoon. Early the next morning, a few SEALs, the 160th assessment team, and Afghan Northern Alliance soldiers boarded Toyota Hilux pickup trucks for the three-and-one-half hour drive through “scary, bad guy land,” to the crash site.⁷

While on the drive, the 160th team learned that the only observation 476 had been under was an occasional drone flyby and one visit by a SEAL team. Because of the lack of constant control, the SEALs had planted desired items like “food, water, and warm jackets” aboard.⁸ Missing items would have been a clear indication that someone had visited the crash. When the group arrived at the site, covered by sniper overwatch,

a Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) expert checked for booby traps, and to see if the planted items had remained in place. Having determined the site was safe, the EOD tech gave the ‘green light’ to evaluate the aircraft.⁹

SSG Stills* recalled that the helicopter was sitting “on a [steep] angle, and we had to watch our step” because slippery hydraulic fluid coated the floor.¹⁰ The three 160th soldiers inspected the aircraft for half-an-hour to determine if it could be made operational with minimal repairs. They found that an RPG impact had destroyed some avionics, sent shrapnel into the rotor blades and electrical system, and caused a fire. CW4 Milch* called it “a complete [and] total electrical nightmare.”¹¹ In addition, a single bullet had severed an oil line and completely drained the fluid from the rear rotor transmission. The assessment team could not determine if the MH-47E had operated without oil. The situation was potentially fatal if the helicopter tried to fly and the transmission “locked up” in flight, explained Katz.*¹² CW4 Milch* assessed, “There was so much damage we were surprised the aircraft continued flying” during the



Top: The rear of 476. The glove tied to the ramp was placed there by the SEAL team as a marker to help determine if the helicopter had been tampered with. If the glove was removed, it was a sure sign that someone else had been there.



Center: The initial view of 476 as seen by the assessment team. At first glance, the helicopter does not appear to have sustained much damage.



Bottom: The other side of 476 displayed much more of the damage that crippled the helicopter. Notice the impact damage to the front, below the window just to the rear of the cockpit.

battle.¹³ SSG Stills* summarized the team's conclusion: "there was no way to fly it out."¹⁴

Because the helicopter needed to be lifted out, the team emptied the fuel tanks to reduce the weight, and for safety. Emptying the fuel tanks would remove the hazard of having a flammable combustible on the craft and prevent shifting weight that a liquid would cause when the helicopter was lifted. The assessment team hooked up the drain hoses, placed the open ends downhill, and opened the emergency fuel dump tubes. Draining the tanks ahead of the actual recovery also allowed time for fuel vapors to dissipate. The group then returned to the FOB. On the way back, the convoy came under fire as it neared a village, but did not engage.

Once back at Bagram, the recovery team searched for a helicopter with enough lift capability to sling load the crashed MH-47E from its nearly 9,000-foot elevation. Their efforts met with frustration. The first choice was a U.S. Marine Corps CH-53E Sea Stallion heavy-lift helicopter, but its pilots did not think they could lift the Chinook from that altitude. At that height, the ability of a helicopter to produce lift is greatly reduced because of lower air density.

Next, 2/160 tried to get a CH-47D, which had more powerful engines than the MH-47E, from the 101st Airborne Division. Its pilot, a former Night Stalker, thought they might be able to lift 476 if the recovery team could lighten the airframe to under 18,000 pounds.¹⁵ After hard calculation, the 160th personnel determined they could get the MH-47E below that weight by strip-

ping off the rotor blades, engines, avionics, most interior components, electronics, fuel probe, and external fuel tanks. In the end, the 101st decided that even if all those items were removed, the risk was too high.¹⁶

Finally, Captain Elias Goosecheap* from Company A, 2/160th suggested contracting a corporate-owned Russian-made and crewed Mi-26. He had seen the

extremely large heavy-lift helicopter operating just a few weeks prior. It took about two and a half weeks to obtain the necessary permissions and award a contract for the helicopter company to perform the job. Once the Mi-26 arrived at Bagram on 7 April, soldiers from Company D, 2/160th planned with the Russian crew how to recover 476.

Communication proved challenging. Thankfully, one of the 160th soldiers was a Russian linguist.

“There was so much damage we were surprised the aircraft continued flying.”

— CW4 Peter A. Milch*

Tail number 476 set down several kilometers from Takur Ghar. It suffered considerable damage and was no longer in a flyable condition, but it was recoverable.



Through him, the Mi-26 crew learned what they had been contracted to lift. Although reluctant, the crew agreed to lift the broken Chinook if the recovery team could get it down to 20,000 pounds. The 160th team decided to remove both engines, the rotor blades, fuel probe, gun mounts, avionics, and other specialized electronics, to get 476 to the target weight. The Russian crew also lightened their own aircraft to provide more lift capacity. The plan was to go in that night (7 April), prepare the aircraft for sling load, and lift it out at dawn the next day.

At 2000 hours, four MH-47Es took off for the 45-minute flight to the downed helicopter. The Mi-26 remained on the ground until the recovery was far enough along that it could proceed for a pick up. Three of the MH-47Es carried U.S. Army Rangers for force protection, while the fourth carried the nine-man recovery team and their equipment. Additionally, several 101st Airborne Division AH-64 Apaches, an F-18 Hornet jet fighter, and an unmanned aerial vehicle orbited overhead while another four A-10s were on strip alert. Katz* said that it was “really comforting knowing [the aircraft were] watching over us.”¹⁷

At the site, the three MH-47Es inserted the Rangers. After declaring the area safe, they signaled the recovery team to land. Although surveillance had monitored 476 to detect tampering, a Navy EOD specialist again checked out the wreckage. He determined that the aircraft had not been tampered with, and signaled the recovery team into action. Although they had been briefed, most of the recovery team had not yet seen 476 for themselves. Sergeant (SGT) Michael P. Bonham* recalled that the helicopter was perched “on the side of a mountain [and looked like it] could have rolled off in a moment.”¹⁸

Still, the 160th soldiers swarmed over the aircraft, each wearing night vision goggles (NVGs) while working to complete their individual task. However, Katz* recalled that the recovery team found the NVGs too restrictive, so they “went with the alternative plan of using blue chem sticks.”¹⁹ In quick order, the crew removed anything they could, including the “probe, FLIR [Forward Looking Infrared] turret, MMR [Multi-Mission Radar] components and pod, all cockpit instrumentation and radio control heads, [and] every avionics black box and component,” according to the After Action Report.²⁰

Concurrently, two soldiers worked on removing the engines, while overcoming a brief challenge brought on by the physiological challenges of operating at a high altitude. Like all members of the recovery team, SGT Bonham*, one of the mechanics, had received medication to prevent altitude sickness, but he began to vomit and suffer from a severe headache during the engine removal. He was aided by a 160th medic, who provided additional medication that quickly enabled him to return to work. SGT Bonham* recalled that a few minutes after taking a pill, he was “good to go.”²¹ Even though none of the other team members got sick, the altitude took a toll, sapping everyone’s energy, and slowing down the engine removal.

Complications arose, as well, when the crew’s plan to use the base of the rotor blades as a lift point to hoist the engines from their mounts failed. When they tried to execute the plan, the blades bent under the weight, and team members had to physically lift the engines from the mounts, then lower them to the ground without damage. The extra effort put them far behind schedule. As the sun broke over the mountains at 0100 hours, they were still removing the second engine.

The Russian-made Mi-26, one of the largest helicopters in the world, is capable of providing extreme heavy lift. It was a logical choice for recovering 476.





Top: A close up view of the damage to the front of 476. The RPG had exploded on the outside of the helicopter, and started a fire that affected the electrical system. The areas where the paint has been chipped are shrapnel impact points.



Center: 476 landed at an angle. When combined with slippery hydraulic fluid that covered the floor, it made work difficult for the recovery crew.

Bottom: The front view of 476. This photo further illustrates the angle at which the damaged helicopter had landed.



The team next turned their attention to cutting the rotor blades from underneath with a rescue saw. This worked well until the blades were nearly cut through. When only a few strands of material remained, the blades bent to the ground. The angle made completing the cut difficult, so the recovery team twisted the blades back and forth to break them free. The technique was less than ideal, and one blade struck the airframe, putting a gash in the exterior. Once the last rear blade was cut at 0220 hours, the team radioed for the Mi-26 to proceed. With two 160th soldiers on board, it flew to the crash site.

While the Mi-26 was en route, two members of the recovery team at 476 worked on removing the front rotor blades. A falling blade again struck the airframe, this time damaging the high frequency antenna. The

other team members staged the removed components in a central location for quick loading when the Chinooks returned to extract the team and force protection detail.²²

The engines proved to be the most difficult items to relocate to a central collection point. The mechanics hoped to lift the engine into the back of the single John Deere Gator all-terrain utility vehicle that the recovery team had brought with them. However, fatigue having set in, no matter how hard they tried, the soldiers could not wrestle the engine into the back of the Gator. Their ingenious solution to the problem was to park the Gator downhill, use the severed rotors as ramps, and roll the engine into the back. Once accomplished, the team realized that it could not get the first engine out of the back



Left: The recovery crew at work cutting the rear rotor blades. Cutting them proved problematic and time-consuming when the blades bent down, forcing the crew to work them back and forth to help break them away.

Bottom: Physically lifting the engines proved to be too much for the exhausted recovery crew, who had been working at high altitude for hours. They ingeniously used the Gator and the cut rotor blades to roll an engine into the back of the vehicle. Unfortunately, once on the Gator, they did not have the strength to lift it out, meaning that only one engine was recovered.





The Mi-26 as it prepared to sling load 476. Notice CW4 Milch* and CW3 Katz* on the rear, both of whom were lifted into the air and had to jump off the rising airframe.



The Mi-26 lifts 476 from its crash site. Once it left, the maintenance crew followed in another Chinook.

of the Gator to load the second. As they pondered how to recover the second engine, the Mi-26 arrived.

CW4 Milch* and CW3 Katz* climbed on 476 to hook up the slings from the hovering Mi-26. Katz* remembered that the rotor wash was “like a hurricane.”²³ The Mi-26 effortlessly lifted the Chinook, so much that the two found themselves quickly ascending, forcing them to jump about eight feet down to the ground. The Mi-26 easily handled the load and made it the approximately fifteen miles to Gardez for a refueling from 101st Airborne Division CH-47Ds. The Mi-26 set 476 down, detached the straps, and then landed alongside the 101st Chinook.

Meanwhile, back at the crash site, the recovery team struggled with the second engine. The group received word that unidentified vehicles were headed their way. The MH-47E pilots made the decision to immediately extract the recovery team and the Rangers. Thus, the only ‘casualty’ of the recovery operation, other than altitude sickness, was one engine left behind.

The MH-47Es transporting the recovery team and the security force flew to Gardez to assist the Mi-26 crew with refueling and re-hooking 476 to the lift helicopter. After hooking 476 up, the recovery crew piled

back into their Chinook to follow the Mi-26 to Kabul International Airport.²⁴ At Kabul, the Mi-26 crew again set down 476, refueled, and conducted an inspection of their helicopter. Finally, the recovery team again helped sling load 476 and followed the Mi-26 to its final destination, at Bagram.²⁵

For CW4 Milch*, having 476 back on the tarmac was a sobering moment. “Just about everybody in the 160th [who was there] came out to look at it. It was extremely surprising that they could fly it away,” from Takur Ghar. CW4 Milch* later recovered some of the many spent enemy rounds from 476 and presented them to the crew who had flown it in combat. Then, the wreck was prepped for shipping back to the U.S. for a complete overhaul.²⁶

Having recovered the aircraft, the 160th rebuilt 476, and continued to fly it in combat. In addition to saving an airframe, the recovery had a more significant impact. It led to standardized procedures and training in Downed Aircraft Recovery Team (DART) operations within the 160th, and the development of DART packages of standard recovery equipment.²⁷ After the recovery, CW4 Milch* traveled to the Boeing plant that manufactures Chinooks. He gave a presentation to a



The recovery team posed for a quick photo after the successful recovery. It was the first combat-loss recovery of a Chinook since the Vietnam War.

full auditorium describing the strength of the airframe and the importance of the April mission. In addition to saving the airframe, and developing DART packages, the 160th used the recovery mission as a training case study. The recovery of 476 forced 2/160th to become “proactive instead of reactive” in regards to helicopter recovery, and incorporate it into their training. This is an ethos that has since spread to the other battalions.²⁸

The recovery, and lessons learned, also led to the development of new equipment, such as the spider-crane, a helicopter-deployable mobile hoist. This equipment would eliminate the problems experienced at Takur Ghar in recovering the engines. Instead of relying on human muscle power, which was greatly affected by environmental conditions in this case, a crane is not affected by weather conditions or altitude. Overall, in conducting the first combat-loss Chinook recovery since Vietnam, the recovery team demonstrated that they had the skills and ingenuity to conduct a difficult salvage mission in an austere and contentious environment. In so doing, they helped to keep a valuable SOF-specific helicopter in the fleet and influenced training the force in the event of a future downed helicopter scenario.²⁹ 🇺🇸

Takeaways:

- 1 The 2/160th soldiers used ingenuity and contracted assets to recover an aircraft downed in mountainous, hostile territory.
- 2 The recovery kept a valuable, SOF-specific airframe in the fleet during the early days of GWOT.
- 3 The 160th applied lessons from the recovery to refining its downed aircraft recovery capability, improving unit training, and developing new recovery equipment.

Endnotes

- 1 France, the UK, Germany, Canada, Turkey, Norway, Australia, and New Zealand provided forces. For more on early operations, see Charles H. Briscoe and others, eds., *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (United States Army Special Operations History Office, 2016).
- 2 For more on Operation ANACONDA, see *Weapon of Choice*, 275-335.
- 3 D/2/160, "Aircraft 476 Recovery Overview," [2003?], copy in USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "Aircraft 476 Recovery Overview."
- 4 For more on CJSOTF-A, see Dr. Michael Krivdo, "CJSOTF-A: A Short History, 2002-2014," in *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2016), on internet at https://arsof-history.org/articles/v12n2_cjsotf_page_1.html.
- 5 LTG Kevin W. Mangum, interview by Dr. Michael Krivdo, 18 February 2016, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC; LTG Kevin W. Mangum email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, "SUBJECT: Takur Ghar," 23 April 2016, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 CW5 Peter A. Milch*, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 28 January 2016, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Milch interview.
- 7 Milch interview.
- 8 Milch interview.
- 9 Milch interview.
- 10 Samuel J. Stills*, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 26 January 2016, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Stills interview.
- 11 Milch interview.
- 12 Thomas M. Katz*, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 8 April 2016, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Katz interview.
- 13 Milch interview.
- 14 Stills interview.
- 15 Katz interview.
- 16 "Aircraft 476 Recovery Overview."
- 17 Katz interview.
- 18 MSG Michael P. Bonham*, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 25 January 2016, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Bonham interview.
- 19 Katz interview.
- 20 "Aircraft 476 Recovery Overview." Other items removed included the oxygen systems, aircraft survivability equipment, fast rope insertion extraction system, and radio antennas.
- 21 Bonham interview.
- 22 "Aircraft 476 Recovery Overview."
- 23 Katz interview.
- 24 On arrival at Gardez, the 160th soldiers noticed that the Mi-26 refueling operation had attracted the attention of about seventy-five locals. Despite verbal warnings to back away, the crowd only dispersed when pelted by sand and rocks flung by rotor blade turbulence when the Mi-26 lifted off.
- 25 "Aircraft 476 Recovery Overview."
- 26 Milch interview.
- 27 Bonham interview. See term DART in "Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," amended 15 February 2013, appendix A, p. 39, on internet at https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/misc/doctrine/CDG/cdg_resources/manuals/jps/jp1_02.pdf.
- 28 Terry Mason* interview by Dr. Troy Sacquety, 22 October 2020, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 29 Milch interview.

The Chinook is set down at Gardez to allow the Mi-26 to refuel. Locals came to investigate and refused to leave until the propeller wash pelted them with flying debris.



Preface

A Team Approach: **PSYOP** & LRA Defection in 2012

by Jared M. Tracy

Ugandan choir students rehearse at the St. Theresa Secondary School in Lira, Uganda, 23 February 2009. The school's previous location in the nearby village of Alanyi had been attacked by the LRA in late 2002, resulting in the killing, abduction, and displacement of many innocent civilians.

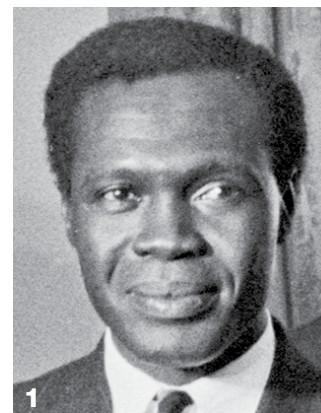
Abstract: Shaped by the horrors of the 1980s Ugandan Bush War, young Joseph Kony declared himself a prophet and deliverer of the Acholi people. Instead, his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) brutalized tens of thousands of African civilians. Heightened sensitivities to LRA atrocities led the U.S. to deploy Special Forces advisors in 2011. However, marksmanship and small unit training alone would not be enough to defeat Kony; more creative solutions were needed.

In Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) partnered with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN peacekeepers, and African military forces to end the violent threat of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in central Africa. Key to mission success were U.S. Army psychological operations (PSYOP) efforts encouraging LRA members to defect. This campaign helped reduce the LRA from several hundred fighters when the operation started in October 2011, to less than one hundred when U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) ended it in April 2017. An operational success, OBSERVANT COMPASS showcased the unique capabilities of the PSYOP Regiment.

This preface explains the emergence of Kony and the LRA, providing historical context for the next article about the PSYOP role in OBSERVANT COMPASS. The roots of the LRA problem dated to post-colonial Uganda, following that nation's independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. The new nation's first head-of-state, Milton Obote, served as Prime Minister and President until 1971. He was overthrown by Ugandan Army General Idi Amin, which led to years of despotic rule, economic ruin, and human rights abuses.¹

Idi Amin's rule came at great cost to Uganda. During the 1970s, the self-proclaimed President for Life grew increasingly repressive against minorities and political opponents. Relations with the West soured as Amin warmed up to countries like the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Libya. As the Ugandan economy crumbled, he became expansionist, claiming parts of Kenya and invading Tanzania. In response, Tanzania, bolstered

Joseph Kony, an ethnic Acholi, founded the LRA in 1987 and controlled it through fear and superstition.



1: Ugandan President Milton Obote on 22 October 1962 at the White House, shortly after his nation's independence.

2: Ugandan dictator Idi Amin.

3: Ugandan President Tito Okello.

4: Three years after his rebels defeated the military regime and he ascended to power, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni arrives at Andrews Air Force Base, MD, on 29 January 1989, to visit with U.S. President George H.W. Bush.



Top: Lucy Lamara is typical of LRA victims. In 2003, an LRA soldier shot her through the mouth, causing her to lose an eye. Her wounds still cause bleeding and headaches.

Right: This leaflet advertising the U.S. State Department War Crimes Rewards Program highlights the three LRA leaders indicted by the International Criminal Court in 2005: Joseph Kony, Okot Odhiambo, and Dominic Ongwen.

MBANO

Gouvernement ya Etats-Unis d'Amérique ezali ekopesa mbongo epai ya bato oyo bakoya na information ekosalisa bato kokanga bato oyo :

Joseph Kony, Okut Odhiambo, mpe Dominique Ongwen. Mbongo oyo ekoki kopesama ekoki kozala ata \$5.000.000 (USD). Mbongo wana ekoki kokomisa libota lya yo libota lya mosolo mingi mpo na libela.

Babali oyo bazali babomi (criminels) mpe bakonzi ya ba LRA. Boloko international oyo babengi (Cour Pénale Internationale) ezali koluka bango mpo na mabe oyo ya koboma bato na ndenge ya mabe tango ya bitumba. Soki ozali na information na esika oyo bato oyo bazali, benga numéro oyo, to yebisa moto moko ya gouvernement ya Etats-Unis.

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KONY



ODHIAMBO



ONGWEN



by the anti-Amin Ugandan National Liberation Front (UNLF)/Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA), invaded Uganda in 1979, forcing Amin to flee the country. After elections, Milton Obote returned as President, with the UNLA as the military arm of the government.²

Obote could not establish stability. He was deposed again in 1985 by another general, Tito Okello, but not before a bloody insurgency began against the UNLA. From 1981 to 1986, the Ugandan Bush War raged between the northern-based, Acholi-dominated government, and the southern-based, non-Acholi National Resistance Army (NRA), led by Yoweri Museveni.³ The death toll reached hundreds of thousands. Once the NRA defeated the UNLA, Museveni became President on 29 January 1986. Acholi-led rebel groups, namely the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), opposed the NRA, but were defeated.⁴ From these conflicts emerged a 25-year-old Acholi named Joseph Kony.

Kony's past gave no hint of the monster he later became. Born in 1961 to Christian parents, Kony had a modest upbringing in the northern village of Odek. He abandoned school in the late 1970s to become a healer. After the Ugandan Bush War, Kony mourned the defeat of the HSM, led by his relative Alice Lakwena. Kony declared himself a prophet to the former rebels, and a deliverer of the Acholi people. In 1987, he formed the

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from the remnants of the HSM, to force a return to Uganda's previous political structure, incorporating mysticism and Acholi nationalism into his message. Claiming access to spirits, Kony inspired his followers to view him as a messiah, while others feared his supposed power to curse them. The LRA leader used his occult influence to consolidate power and exact extreme violence on Ugandans.⁵

As one congressional research study argues, the LRA did "not have a clear . . . agenda, and its operations appear[ed] to be motivated by little more than the infliction of violence and the protection of senior leaders."⁶ Kony ordered the LRA to attack and destroy villages, and torture, mutilate, and execute civilians. They abducted children to serve as porters, soldiers, and 'bush-wives'.⁷ One NGO, The Enough Project, estimated LRA abductions at nearly 70,000 people (30,000 children) over thirty years.⁸ Among those brutalized were the Acholi, whom Kony distrusted since Museveni started recruiting them into the military after assuming power.⁹ In the 1990s, the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) began attacking the LRA. This set a pattern of direct military engagement, followed by LRA soldiers scattering and causing violence elsewhere.¹⁰

While the LRA was widely dismissed as a 'Ugandan problem', bordering nations were taking notice, and



(Image credit: MONUSCO)

began guarding against it, among other regional threats. For example, in 1999, the UN Security Council created the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) in response to the seemingly unrelated Second Congo War.¹¹ This UN peacekeeping force, later re-designated MONUSCO, was headquartered in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While the LRA was not MONUSCO's first priority, peacekeepers located in the eastern part of that country formed a bulwark against the LRA in hopes of keeping them from coming in from Uganda.¹²

Continued LRA atrocities led the Ugandan government in 2005 to press the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, to issue arrest warrants for Kony, Major General Okot Odhiambo, and Brigadier General Dominic Ongwen, for crimes against humanity. This raised the stakes for their capture, but failed to yield quick results.¹³ A glimmer of hope arose in 2006 when the UPDF pushed the LRA out of Uganda, and ceasefire talks began in Juba, the future capital of South Sudan. However, these negotiations foundered after two years. The LRA dispersed into Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central African Republic, and resumed atrocities.¹⁴ With the LRA operating in four states and a roughly 164,000 square-mile area (about the size of California), it had become a regional problem.¹⁵

Heightened global awareness of the LRA led to U.S. involvement. In 2008, the State and Treasury Departments designated Kony a terrorist, and the U.S. began logistical support to UPDF-led counter-LRA operations, called LIGHTNING THUNDER.¹⁶ Meanwhile, U.S.-based NGOs lobbied to raise policy-makers'

interest in the LRA. Chief among these was Invisible Children, founded in 2004 "to end Africa's longest running conflict led by Joseph Kony and [the LRA]."¹⁷ Their activism soon paid off.

In 2009, the U.S. Congress passed the "Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act," with 201 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives, and 64 in the Senate.¹⁸ President Barack H. Obama, who viewed Uganda as a key partner against terrorism in the region, signed it into law on 24 May 2010 (Public Law 111-172).¹⁹ The act committed to "increased, comprehensive U.S. efforts to help mitigate and eliminate the threat posed by the LRA to civilians and regional stability."²⁰ Its chief aim was "an end to the brutality and destruction that have been a hallmark of the LRA across several countries for two decades."²¹ While the act did not directly authorize military action, it had another outcome.

Six months after signing the law, Obama presented his follow-on "**Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army**" to the U.S. Congress.²² This "Strategy" consisted of four pillars:

1. Protect civilians
2. Remove Joseph Kony and senior LRA commanders from the battlefield
3. Promote defection, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of LRA fighters
4. Support and provide humanitarian assistance to affected areas

Though the "Strategy" did not authorize military action either, it provided the core objectives for future operations.

Obama took one final step before deploying soldiers to aid the fight against Kony. In August 2011, he declared atrocity prevention a "core national security interest and . . . moral responsibility" of the U.S.²⁴ Naturally, this applied to the LRA. Between general anti-Kony

After intense activism and lobbying, NGO representatives were invited to witness President Obama signing the "LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009" in the Oval Office, 24 May 2010.



(Image credit: NARA)



- 1:** RADM Brian L. Losey (left), Commander, Combined-Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, greets Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, in Djibouti, on 24 February 2011, shortly before assuming command of SOCAFRICA.
- 2:** SOCAFRICA Shoulder Sleeve Insignia.
- 3:** COL Russell A. Crane, 19th SFG, commanded the ACCE in Entebbe, Uganda, and SOCCE-HOA at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.
- 4:** GEN Carter F. Ham commanded USAFRICOM from 2011 to 2013, during the opening of Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS.

sentiment, Public Law 111-172, the November 2010 “Strategy,” and the formal declaration against atrocities, Obama had ample justification for direct U.S. military involvement. On 14 October 2011, the President informed U.S. Congress that he authorized deployment of the first combat-equipped U.S. soldiers to central Africa, with additional soldiers slated to arrive the following month. Obama set the force cap at 100, since their role was advisory only.²⁵

Named OBSERVANT COMPASS, the mission’s broad objectives were the same as the November 2010 “Strategy.” The lead headquarters was the USAFRICOM Counter-LRA Control Element (ACCE [pronounced āce]), in Entebbe, Uganda. Colonel (COL) Russell A. Crane, 19th Special Forces Group (SFG), commanded both the ACCE and Special Operations Command and Control Element — Horn of Africa (SOCCE-HOA), at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.²⁶ The ACCE reported to Special Operations Command, Africa (SOCAFRICA),

in Stuttgart, Germany, commanded by Rear Admiral (RADM) Brian L. Losey, a U.S. Navy SEAL.²⁷ As explained in the next article, Losey soon applied a ‘whole of SOCAF’ approach against Kony.

Nesting the counter-LRA mission within broader theater priorities was USAFRICOM, also located in Stuttgart.²⁸ The Commander, USAFRICOM, U.S. Army General (GEN) Carter F. Ham, argued that OBSERVANT COMPASS was “best done through support, advising, and assistance, rather than U.S. military personnel in the lead . . . conducting the operations to try to find Kony and capture him. We are an enabling force to facilitate and advance the capabilities of the African forces.”²⁹ Importantly, on 7 December 2011, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, clarified that “this is not an open-ended commitment; we will regularly review and assess whether the advisory effect is sufficiently enhancing our objectives to justify continued deployment.”³⁰

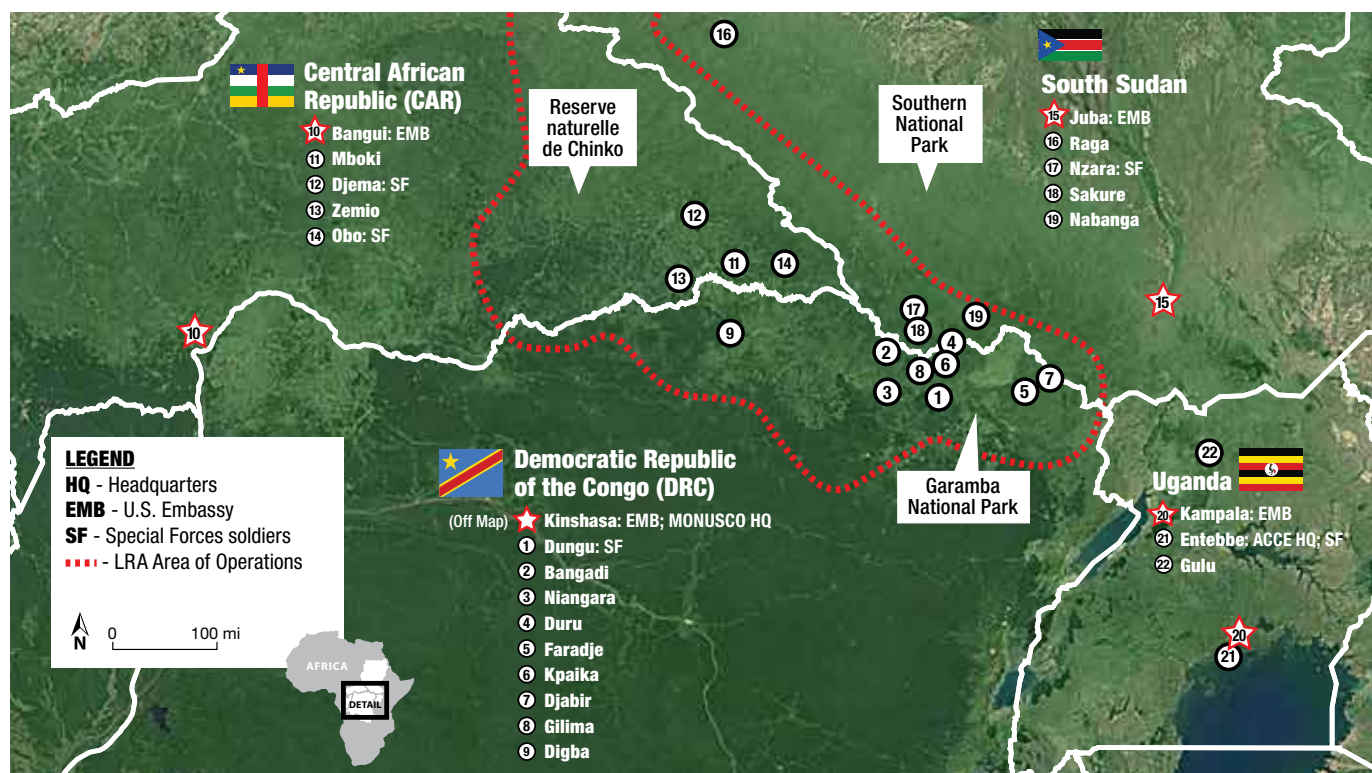
*“... this is **not an open-ended commitment**; we will regularly review and assess whether the advisory effect is sufficiently enhancing our objectives to justify continued deployment.”*

– Johnnie Carson, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

The ACCE initially treated OBSERVANT COMPASS as a typical Foreign Internal Defense (FID) mission. U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) soldiers, initially from 10th and 19th SFGs, were to train the UPDF in Entebbe, Uganda; the Central African Armed Forces in Djema and Obo, Central African Republic; MONUSCO and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Nzara, South Sudan.³¹ SF soldiers could not conduct combat operations against the LRA, and weapons were only

authorized for self-defense.³² In addition to the size and complexity of the forested operational area, a key challenge was training the same African and UN forces that had thus far been unable to defeat the LRA.³³

OSBERVANT COMPASS required a creative approach beyond SF providing marksmanship and small unit tactics training to partner forces, MONUSCO, and the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF).³⁴ Interagency cooperation within the LRA-affected countries was essential.³⁵ On an official level, the ACCE dealt with the U.S. Agency for International Development



Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS Area of Operations



A U.S. Army SF soldier instructs Ugandan and Central African Republic soldiers assigned to the AU-RTF in 2012.



Jason Lewis-Berry (right), State Department counter-LRA advisor, tests radio reception with a local near Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Lewis-Berry helped connect U.S. military personnel with NGOs.

(Image credit: Nathan J. Todd)

Counter-LRA Organizations

United States

- U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM)
- Special Operations Command, Africa (SOCAFRICA)
- AFRICOM Counter-LRA Control Element (ACCE)
- U.S. State Department/U.S. Embassies
- U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

African

- African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF)
- Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF)
- Central African Armed Forces (FACA)
- Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)
- Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)

United Nations

- UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC)
- UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

- Invisible Children
- The Resolve Crisis LRA Initiative
- The Enough Project
- The Voice Project

*This list represents the 'key players' through early 2012, but is not exhaustive.



(Image credit: USAID)

Started by Invisible Children and bolstered by USAID, the Early Warning Network connected LRA-affected communities with one another, and enabled them to report violent or criminal activity to security forces.

(USAID), the U.S. Embassies, and the State Department Field Representative, Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, Jason Lewis-Berry.³⁶ As the bureau's stabilization advisor specializing in the LRA, Lewis-Berry also connected the ACCE with various NGOs in the region, including The Voice Project and Invisible Children.

NGOs had demonstrated that there was more to the fight against Kony than 'kinetic' operations. In 2010, Invisible Children launched its Early Warning Network (EWN) of "high-frequency (HF), two-way, long-range radios."³⁷ The EWN allowed African communities to report violent activity to one another, to humanitarian organizations, and to security forces, improving those units' response times to LRA attacks. The following year, Invisible Children partnered with the Washington, DC-based Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative to create the LRA Crisis Tracker, a "publicly accessible mapping tool that display[ed] up-to-date armed group activity data in an interactive format."³⁸ This site displayed individual LRA attacks, and collated data to show violent trends.

These two examples demonstrated the unique contributions being made by NGOs against Kony and the LRA.

Together, NGOs, the ACCE, other U.S. agencies, MONUSCO, African military forces, and the AU-RTF, became critical strands in a larger counter-LRA 'web'. According to one State Department counter-LRA specialist, this collaborative approach "built unique partnerships among civil society leaders, communities, NGOs, and UN missions." He added that "most LRA members did not choose to be in the LRA, and remain[ed] with them only because they fear[ed] retribution by Kony." Finally, he argued that encouraging defections would weaken the LRA, and increase fighters' chances of getting home safely.³⁹ From this statement, U.S. Army Psychological Operations clearly had a role to play in OBSERVANT COMPASS.

Having provided the historical context behind Kony, the LRA, and Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, the story now turns to early PSYOP efforts. The following article describes how SOCAFRICA arranged the deployment

of the two-man MISO Support Element – Uganda (MSE-UG) to central Africa in January 2012. It then details how MSE-UG partnered with many organizations countering Kony, and went on the offensive by chipping away at LRA membership through defections. 🗺️

Takeaways:

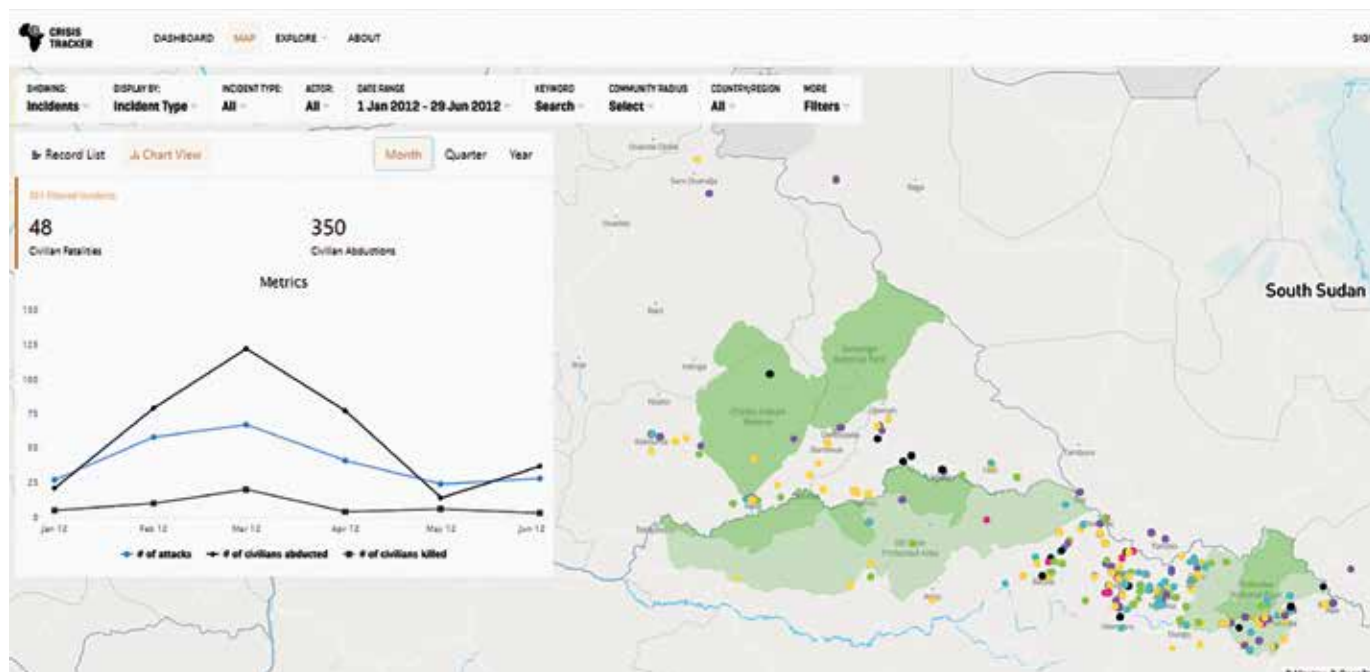
- 1** After the bloody Ugandan Bush War, Joseph Kony founded the LRA and used it to inflict extreme violence on innocent Ugandans
- 2** The LRA became a regional threat by spreading violence into countries neighboring Uganda, increasing outside involvement
- 3** ‘Kinetic’ military operations had proven unable to defeat Kony; NGOs demonstrated that creative solutions were needed to weaken the LRA

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. State Department, “U.S. Relations with Uganda,” 26 October 2018, accessed online at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-uganda/>, hereafter “U.S. Relations with Uganda”; British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), “Uganda Profile – Timeline,” 10 May 2018, accessed online at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14112446>, hereafter “Uganda Profile – Timeline.”
- 2 “U.S. Relations with Uganda”; “Uganda Profile – Timeline.”
- 3 “U.S. Relations with Uganda”; “Uganda Profile – Timeline.” See also, MAJ Jonathan R. Easter, “Bending the Spear: The Campaign Against the Lord’s

Resistance Army” (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), 3. According to Easter, the Acholi are “part of the larger ethno linguistic group called the Luo (or Lwo) which has affiliates scattered from the current borders of South Sudan, to Kenya, through Uganda, south to Tanzania.” The Luo and Acholi are distinct linguistically from the Bantu languages in southern Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic.

- 4 Easter, “Bending the Spear,” 3-19. See also, Michael M. Phillips, “Pizzas, Loudspeakers and Moms: The U.S. Military’s Unorthodox Mission Against Joseph Kony,” *Wall Street Journal*, accessed online at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pizzas-loudspeakers-and-moms-inside-the-u-s-militarys-most-unorthodox-mission-1489158880>, hereafter “Pizzas, Loudspeakers and Moms”; Paul D. Ronan, Power Point Presentation, “U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations: Challenges and Opportunities,” no date, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter “U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations.”
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- 6 Congressional Research Service, “The Lord’s Resistance Army: The U.S. Response,” 28 September 2015, 6, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter “The U.S. Response” (2015).
- 7 “Pizzas, Loudspeakers and Moms”; “The U.S. Response” (2015), 1.
- 8 The Enough Project, “Lord’s Resistance Army,” no date, accessed online at <https://enoughproject.org/conflicts/lra>.
- 9 “The U.S. Response” (2015), 6.
- 10 “U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations.” For more on Ugandan counter-LRA measures, to include offensive military operations, amnesty and reintegration programs, and direct negotiations, see Easter, “Bending the Spear,” 21-31.



Available on www.crisistracker.org, the interactive LRA Crisis Tracker allows users to view LRA activity over time using selected parameters. This screenshot shows all LRA incidents from January through June 2012.

- 11 United Nations, "MONUC: United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," no date, accessed online at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/monuc/>. MONUC stood for *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo*.
- 12 SEAL Team 8, "Africa Introduction Briefs: Regional Counter-LRA Partners," no date, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "Africa Introduction Briefs"; United Nations Peacekeeping, "MONUSCO Fact Sheet," no date, accessed online at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/monusco>. MONUSCO stood for *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo*. MONUC became MONUSCO on 1 July 2010. With around 18,500 military, police, civilian, and volunteer personnel as of March 2020 (having decreased over time), the top 10 countries in MONUSCO have been India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, South Africa, Indonesia, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Nepal, and Malawi.
- 13 The White House, "Fact Sheet: Mitigating and Eliminating the Threat to Civilians Posed by the Lord's Resistance Army," 23 April 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "Fact Sheet: Mitigating and Eliminating," 23 April 2012; "The U.S. Response" (2015), 7.
- 14 "U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations"; Easter, "Bending the Spear," 33-51; "The U.S. Response" (2015), 5, 7.
- 15 Easter, "Bending the Spear," 3.
- 16 "Fact Sheet: Mitigating and Eliminating," 23 April 2012; "U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations"; U.S. Department of State, "Individuals and Entities Designated by the State Department Under E.O. 13224," no date, accessed online at <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/143210.htm>; Congressional Research Service, "The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. Response," 11 April 2012, 1, accessed online at <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a584570.pdf>, hereafter "The U.S. Response" (2012); "The U.S. Response" (2015), 9, 11-12. *Between 2009 and 2012, the State Department allocated \$56 million in support for forces conducting counter-LRA operations, namely the UPDF. Support took the form of "contract airlift, fuel, and trucks, as well as the transfer of equipment such as satellite phones, night vision goggles, signaling devices, hydration packs, and compact pickup trucks," as well as HF radios, cell phone towers, and radio network infrastructure. Additionally, between 2010 and 2014, U.S. humanitarian support totaled nearly \$90 million.*
- 17 Invisible Children, "Our Story," no date, accessed online at <https://invisiblechildren.com/our-story/>.
- 18 "The U.S. Response" (2015), 1.
- 19 "The U.S. Response" (2012), in Summary; "The U.S. Response" (2015), 13-16, 18. *Congress passed several key pieces of legislation after the 2009 act, which expanded funding and authorities to the Executive Branch for counter-LRA operations.*
- 20 The White House, "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the Lord's Resistance Army," 14 October 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "Letter from the President," 14 October 2010.
- 21 "Fact Sheet: Mitigating and Eliminating," 23 April 2012.
- 22 "The U.S. Response" (2015), 1-2.
- 23 The White House, "Letter from the President on the Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army," 24 November 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; "The U.S. Response" (2015), 8.
- 24 The White House, "Fact Sheet: A Comprehensive Strategy and New Tools to Prevent and Respond to Atrocities," 23 April 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC. *For more on the anti-atrocity strategy, see The White House, "Fact Sheet: The Obama Administration's Comprehensive Efforts to Prevent Mass Atrocities Over the Past Year," 1 May 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "Fact Sheet: Comprehensive Efforts to Prevent Mass Atrocities," 1 May 2013.*
- 25 Jake Tapper and Luis Martinez, "Obama Sends 100 US Troops to Uganda to Help Combat Lord's Resistance Army," 14 October 2011, accessed online at <https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/10/obama-sends-100-us-troops-to-uganda-to-combat-lords-resistance-army/>; The White House, "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the Lord's Resistance Army," 14 October 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 26 West Virginia National Guard, "Brigadier General Russell Crane," no date, online at <https://www.wv.ng.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Bio-Article-View/Article/1541379/brigadier-general-russell-crane/>. SOCE-HOA was a subordinate command of Combined-Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTJF-HOA), which had the following mission: "in partnership with our joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners, conducts theater security cooperation activities and enables regional actors to neutralize violent extremist organizations . . . On order, CJTF-HOA will execute crisis response within East Africa to protect and defend U.S. military, diplomatic and civilian personnel, facilities, and interests." Its area of responsibility included Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda, though its interests lay beyond that in the central African region.
- 27 RIST-HOA to 7th POB, "SUBJECT: RIST-HOA PMT DAILY SITREP: 312200MAR13(Z) to 012200APR13(Z)," 1 April 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC. *The SOCAFRICA mission was as follows: "Leads, plans, coordinates, and as directed executes the full spectrum of special operations in [USAFRICOM's] AOR as part of an integrated theater strategy to combat terrorism and advance [USAFRICOM's] strategic objectives."*
- 28 RMT-UG, "RMT-UG Mission Concept Brief," 4 April 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "RMT-UG Mission Concept Brief," 4 April 2013. *The USAFRICOM mission was as follows: "protects and defends the national security interests of the United States by strengthening the defense capabilities of African states and regional organizations and, when directed, conducts military operations, in order to defeat transnational threats and to provide a security environment conducive to good governance and development."*
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- 30 Quotation in "The U.S. Response" (2015), 10.
- 31 SOCAFRICA, "MOD 001 TO CDRSOCAFRICA OPERATION OBSERVANT COMPASS OPORD," 27 January 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 32 The White House, "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the War Powers Resolution," 15 December 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Files, Fort Bragg, NC; "The U.S. Response" (2015), 10.
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- 34 LRA Crisis Tracker, "Surge in AU RTF Counter-LRA Operations," accessed online at <https://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/q3-2013/au-rtf-counter-lra-operations/>. Created in 2012, the AU-RTF was authorized 5,000 soldiers from Uganda, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Central African Republic, and its mission was to protect civilians and capture LRA leaders.
- 35 SOCAFRICA Briefing, June 2014.
- 36 SOCAFRICA Briefing, June 2014; U.S. Department of State, "Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations," no date, accessed online at <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-civilian-security-democracy-and-human-rights/bureau-of-conflict-and-stabilization-operations/>. *A subordinate bureau under the State Department, the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations mission "is to anticipate, prevent, and respond to conflict that undermines U.S. national interests. The bureau implements this mission in two complementary ways: through data-driven analysis and forward deploying stabilization advisors to conflict zones. The objective is to inform U.S. strategy, policy, and programs on conflict prevention and stabilization." Lewis-Berry was the stabilization advisor for the LRA.*
- 37 Invisible Children, "Early Warning Radio Network," no date, accessed online at <https://invisiblechildren.com/program/early-warning-network/>. *By early 2018, the EWN had expanded to 74 HF radios and 30 satellite phones supporting around 80 communities and 300,000 people.*
- 38 Invisible Children, "LRA Crisis Tracker," no date, accessed online at <https://invisiblechildren.com/program/lra-crisis-tracker>. *By early 2018, the Crisis Tracker had logged over 3,000 LRA incidents.*
- 39 SOCAFRICA Briefing, June 2014. *The State Department official quoted here was Jon Gandomi, Jason Lewis-Berry's successor as of June 2012.*



Aerial leaflet drop during Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS.

A Team Approach

PSYOP and LRA Defection in 2012

by Jared M. Tracy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



(Image credit: LTC Joseph A. Dewey)

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

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

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

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



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

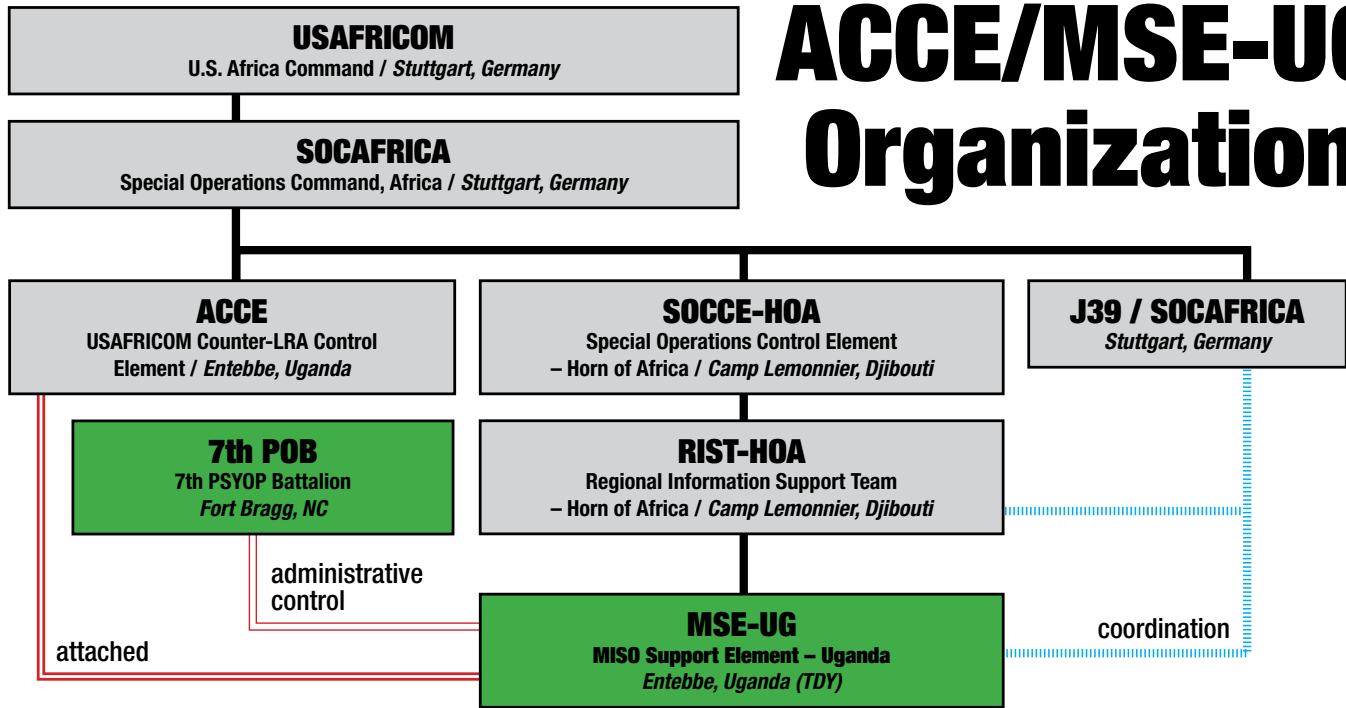


7th POB Distinctive Unit Insignia

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

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

ACCE/MSE-UG Organization



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

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

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

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

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

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



Image credit: MSE-UG



Image credit: MSE-UG

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

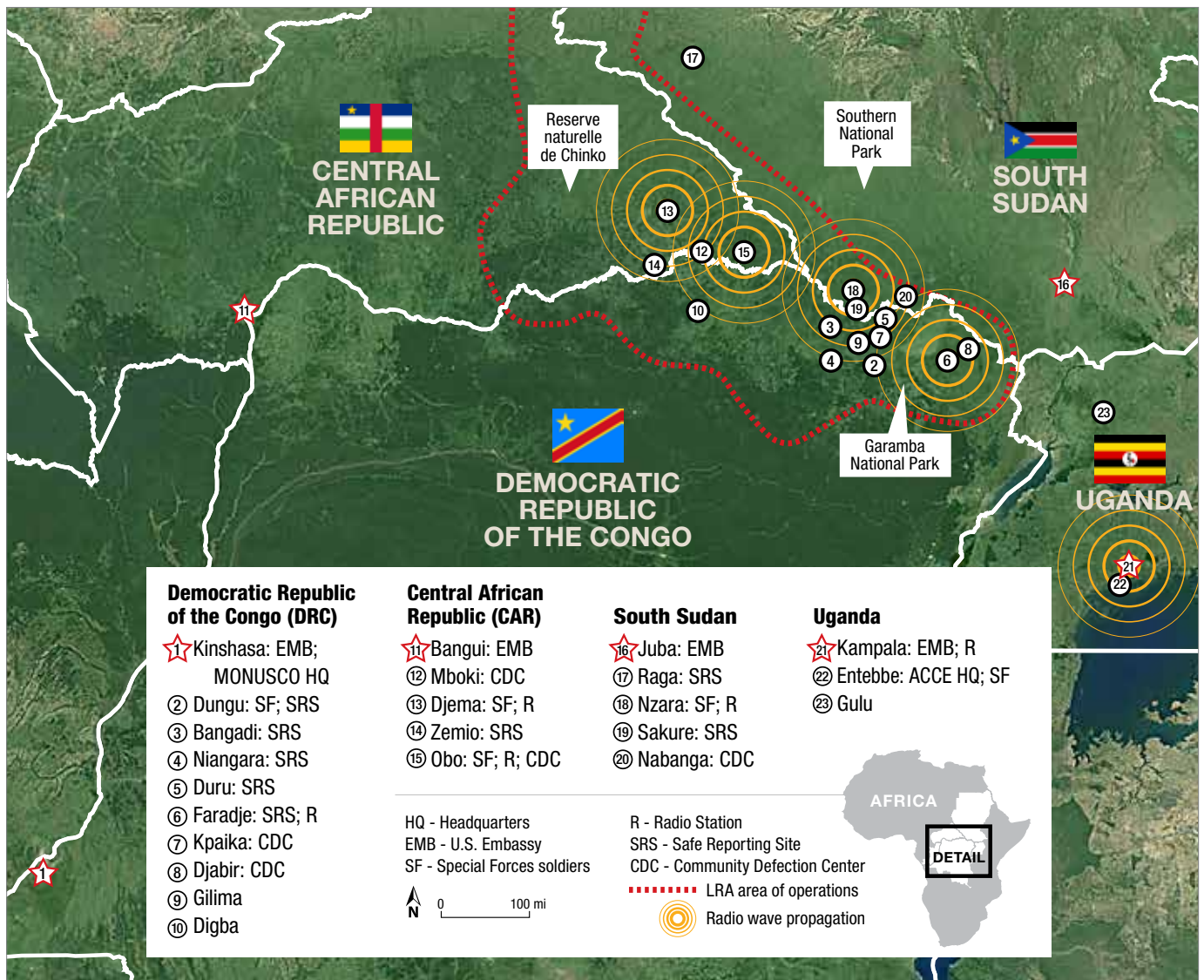
Upon arrival at Camp Lemonnier, they were met by RIST-HOA members, and provided billeting. The next day, they flew to Entebbe, Uganda, where the ACCE was expecting them. “They had workstations set up for us,” Vance recalled, “which is always a good sign.”¹⁴ In Uganda, Vance and Todd briefly met with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

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

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

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

OBSERVANT COMPASS Area of Operations



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



(Image credit: MSE-UG)

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

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

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

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

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

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



(Image credit: MSE-UG)



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

(Image credit: MSE-UG)



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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Kony 2012 screenshot on YouTube.





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Postscript

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

(Image credit: MSE-UG)



(Image credit: MSE-UG)



(Image credit: MSE-UG)



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

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

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

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

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



5

WABWA BITTO IYEM ATALA PIYU PE DOKWEMPE AABE WA NI NIWUPU PACE NA NIWE KI JYO NA DAWU GI
 BUNWA ABUNWA NA ZAMBWA ANWESA NA LINDU NA YA NIWABWA YE JIYUWI JIYUWI YE ZAMBWA NA ZAMBWA YE

LAWOT NIWU ACHELLAM OZANAN UGAYI I ZAMB
 NIWU UPOTI BI JOLI NIWABA NA NIWUPU
 BUNWA JIYUWI KI CUPACA MA NIWE
 ACHELLAM ABUNWASHI NA DA UPOTI YELD AZALI
 NA JIYUWI NA YE BUNWA

YEC DUG KARATAC MAN: WEX IMHI
 BOTI LUKUN GANO NA NIWABO
 MAN: I GANU GANO ME I KARIBO
 MAN BI BI JOLI KA GI TERI BOTI
 UPOTI I KARIBO NA COE KWEDDI,
 KI KONU KI BI MINI CAM, PE , RVE
 KI JEMU MA PLE TIC PE KWU NI
 GANO MA SI TYE I TARIKH
 SAKURE, ABOKI KI MUNY UPOTI
 WENGU BI IYI ATERA ME JOLI WEX
 I SPWIS DANE LARONDO AYELA
 UN MA NIWABAC NA BUNWA NIWU
 PEKE, PE I BUN KI SWARDI

KENDU NA NIWUKI TO NA SAKURE,
 NIWE TERISA NA NIWUKA, YE
 OLINDI OBAMA, NA NIWUKA NA
 NIWEMWA YU EPAYI NA DA UPOTI
 NIWU YE BASALISA YO.

COE: COE, LAWOT NIWU MA NIWU NIWUBO KWEDDI I LUM KUNU NA NIWINE
 BUNWA BUNWAKIYERD OBNYO I NIWUKI CI KI JOLE, MAREB ADADA
 BUNWA BUNWAKIYERD ABUNWA NIWUKI YU NA NIWUKI NIWE AZALI NIWABWA



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

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

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

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

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

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

Takeaways:

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

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank LTC Joseph A. Dewey, MAJ Jonathan Easter, MSG (ret.) Nathan J. Todd, Adam R. Vance, and the soldiers, NCOs, and officers of 7th POB, for their support to this article.

Endnotes

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

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

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

99,506,000 views.

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

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



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.¹ 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.² 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.³

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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸ The Army Program Objective Memorandum (POM) allocated funding for SOSE manning, anticipating a Fiscal Year (FY) 1986 activation.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ MG Suddath concurred.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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).¹⁹ Throughout the process, Mason received critical support from 1st SOCOM leadership.²⁰

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.²¹ 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).²² 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.”²³

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.²⁴ 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.”²⁵ 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 1986.²⁶

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ “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.”²⁹

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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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 1987.³²

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.³³ 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.³⁴ Mason knew his unit was undermanned, and was betting on personnel growth, over time, to increase its capacity.³⁵

Battalion Organization and Missions

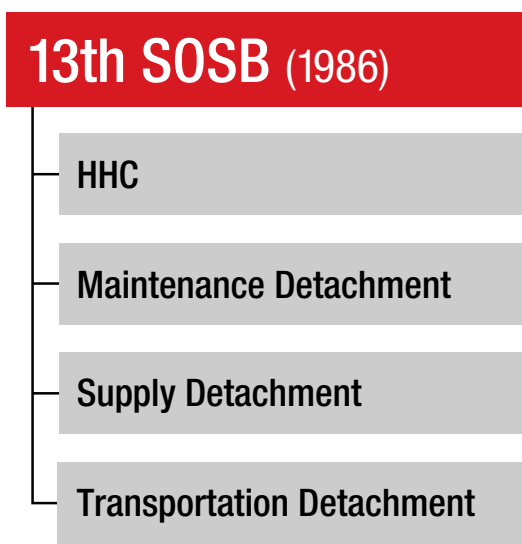
Activated at half-strength, the battalion's eighty soldiers were organized into a Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) and three functionally aligned detachments: Supply (Detachment A),

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).³⁶

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.³⁷ 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."³⁸ They leveraged relationships within the ARSOF community, which helped the SOSB gain buy-in from the supported units.³⁹

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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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.⁴²

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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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).⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ The 160th had developed an air-droppable refueling and rearming package known as ‘Big Willie,’ built around the lighter FARE system.⁵² 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.⁵³ They also practiced hot refueling (engines-running), at night, essential to supporting the Night Stalkers of the 160th.⁵⁴

1LT Robert T. ‘Tim’ Davis, one of the first officers to receive orders to the SOSB, led the Maintenance [Bravo] Detachment.⁵⁵ An Ordnance Officer, he commanded fourteen mechanics, organized into a detachment HQ, maintenance management section, and a maintenance section.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

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 1st SOCOM Chief of Staff’s ‘Maintenance Shootouts.’”⁶⁸ Those meetings were held regularly to track the progress of maintenance requests for all 1st SOCOM units.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

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.⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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.”⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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.”⁷⁸ 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)

5

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

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.⁸⁰ 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.”⁸¹

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.⁸² They used the METL during MG Suddath’s regular training reviews as a framework for discussing training and readiness, down to the detachment level.⁸³

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.”⁸⁴ Mason declared it “a great experience, with some groans and a few laughs...a surprise planned and executed.”⁸⁵ Enlisted soldiers asked about it years later remembered it less enthusiastically.⁸⁶

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,

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.

Transportation Detachment

Detachment HQ

Movement Control Section

Transportation (Light Truck) Section

(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)



(Image Credit: Louis G. Mason)





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.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸

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.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹

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.⁹² 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.⁹³

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.⁹⁴ The exercise was under the command of the COL Joseph S. Stringham, Deputy Commanding General (DCG), 1st SOCOM.⁹⁵

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 7th SFG) for a potential U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) deployment.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷

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.”⁹⁸ 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.”⁹⁹

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.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰²

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.”¹⁰³ 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

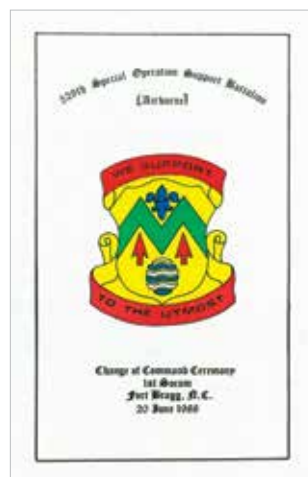
‘89, and participated in two 1st SOCOM capabilities exercises (CAPEX).¹⁰⁴

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).¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸ 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.”¹⁰⁹

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).¹¹⁰ Guest recalls that, prior to his arrival, 1st SOCOM was “engulfed with support for JSOC,” at the expense of the SFGs.¹¹¹ “The result,” he says, “was a nightmare for the [SF] groups,” which had to provide support personnel to JSOC, when the SOSB could not.¹¹² By the time FORSCOM issued the 11 May 1989 inactivation order, 1st SOCOM was already actively planning for the disestablishment of the 528th SOSB.¹¹³

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the battalion’s future, LTC Shaw insisted that it maintain a business-as-usual posture.¹¹⁴ 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.¹¹⁵

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.”¹¹⁶ 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.¹¹⁷ 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.”¹¹⁸ 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.”¹¹⁹ Erb echoes that sentiment, describing the men and women of the SOSB as “special loggies.”¹²⁰ 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 160th 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 528th [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. 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, 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 160th... [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 160th 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 artic. 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.

ARSOF-History.org Microsites

The USASOC History Office routinely updates the Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) History website. This includes new thematic microsites that consolidate, provide context for, and add content related to specific units, conflicts, or topics of interest to the command. Among new microsites released since the last *Veritas* issue are Headquarters, USASOC Memorialization and Displays; the digital ARSOF Timeline; and ARSOF in the Korean War. Summaries of these are provided in the following pages.

By USASOC Historians

Headquarters, USASOC: Honoring ARSOF History, Legacy, and Sacrifice

Formally activated on 1 December 1989, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) carries on the legacy that began in World War I with Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs, and in World War II with Rangers, the First Special Service Force, and other legacy ARSOF units. At the USASOC headquarters building, named for Army Special Warfare pioneer Major General Robert A. McClure, the command proudly honors ARSOF history, legacy, and the service and sacrifice of its fallen warriors. This microsite allows visitors to see the many ways in which USASOC commemorates its past, and pays tribute to its soldiers.



Visit: https://arsof-history.org/hq_plaza/index.html

USASOC INTERACTIVE MEMORIAL DISPLAY

In May 2017, the Interactive Memorial Display opened inside the lobby of the USASOC headquarters building. This 41-foot-high, 12-foot-wide, multi-screen memorial exhibit honors the sacrifice of ARSOF's fallen warriors since 11 September 2001. Complementing the USASOC Memorial Wall and the Eagle and Stars display, this monumental Interactive Memorial Display provides photos and brief biographies of each fallen warrior. The individuals honored in the display exactly match the names in the post-9/11 portions of the USASOC Memorial Wall. However, unlike traditional static memorials, visitors can search this exhibit database by name, date, operation, location, or unit. As of Memorial Day 2019, there are 366 ARSOF warriors featured in the display. These individuals represent all branches, units, and Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) in USASOC, showcasing the versatility, bravery, and sacrifice of ARSOF soldiers.

For our online memorial, visit [ARSOF Fallen](#)

Examples of the display's search functionality

HEADQUARTERS, USASOC

Honoring ARSOF History, Legacy, and Sacrifice

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) was officially activated on 1 December 1989. However, its roots in Special Operations Forces (SOF) extend back to World War I with the biological operations (PSYOP) unit and Airborne Cavalry, and to World War II with Special Forces (SF), Rangers, and ARSOF support.

It was during the Second World War that each unit's unique role in the First Special Service Force, the Ranger Battalion, Medical Detachment, MASH Detachment, and the Office of Strategic Services, were established and committed to destroy Axis forces. Over time, ARSOF soldiers have conducted operations across the globe, exhibiting a tradition of service excellence, and a dedication to the nation.

The first performance contract to have no other contractor is USASOC was the First Lodge of Officers (FLO) and the USASOC Memorial Wall. On April 11, 2017, the USASOC Memorial Wall was dedicated, marking the 28th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The USASOC Memorial Wall is a tribute to the fallen warriors of ARSOF, and a symbol of the command's commitment to honoring their sacrifice.

USASOC MEMORIAL WALL

The USASOC Memorial Wall is a tribute to the fallen warriors of ARSOF, and a symbol of the command's commitment to honoring their sacrifice. The wall is a tribute to the fallen warriors of ARSOF, and a symbol of the command's commitment to honoring their sacrifice.

- This wall honors the memory of the fallen warriors of ARSOF, and a symbol of the command's commitment to honoring their sacrifice.
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ARSOF Timeline

Modern ARSOF traces its legacy to World War I with the American Expeditionary Forces' Propaganda and Civil Affairs efforts. After degrading in the interwar years, specialized capabilities were re-invigorated during World War II. Since the 1952 creation of the Psywar Center, ARSOF has grown and adapted to meet evolving national security threats. This microsite provides historical context, significant events, and changes in ARSOF over the last century. Color-coded timeline entries correspond to individual ARSOF branches. Site visitors can isolate events by branch, or view them within the greater ARSOF context; navigate to specific conflicts; and display or hide broader historical information. Finally, select entries are linked to other History Office products to allow visitors to learn more. Visit: https://arsof-history.org/arsof_timeline/index.html



1943

- 1 JAN 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.
- 1 FEB 1943** Philippine Guerrilla Movement (PGM) Activated. It is the first special operations unit in the Philippines.
- 1 MAR 1943** Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories Established in Italy. It was the first major U.S. Military Government action in WWII.
- 1 APR 1943** 2nd Ranger Battalion Activated at Camp Forrest, TN.
- 1 MAY 1943** Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories Established in Italy. It was the first major U.S. Military Government action in WWII.
- 1 JUN 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.
- 1 JUL 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.
- 1 AUG 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.
- 1 SEP 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.
- 1 OCT 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.
- 1 NOV 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.
- 1 DEC 1943** 1st Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated. It is the first special operations unit.

WWII 7 DEC 1941 – 28 AUG 1945

Philippine Guerrillas in Mindanao. Navy LCDR Charles 'Chick' Parsons landed by submarine to meet COL Wendell W. Fertig, leader of the largest guerilla unit. Parsons arranged for continued communications and logistical support to Fertig's command.

1 APR 1943 2nd Ranger Battalion Activated at Camp Forrest, TN.

1 MAY 1943 Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories Established in Italy. It was the first major U.S. Military Government action in WWII.

4 MAY 1943 First Special Operations Group (SOG) Activated.

Post-9/11 Ops 11 SEP 2001 – Ongoing

MAR 2014 Special Operations Aviation Training Battalion (SOATB) Began Unmanned Aircraft System Crew Training.

24 JUL 2014 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) (P) Established. Replacing the U.S. Army Special Forces Command, 1st Special Forces Command was the higher headquarters for Special Forces, Psychological Operations, and Civil Affairs units, and the 528th Sustainment Brigade, under the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, to enable deployment of Special Warfare packages to Theater Special Operations Commands and joint force commanders

SOLDIER PHYSICIAN ASTRONAUT

Army Special Operations Trained Astronaut Colonel Andrew J. Morgan

By Michael E. Krivdo

On the afternoon of 20 July 2019, a ball of fire erupted from the base of the 150 foot Russian FG rocket launching from the historic Site 1 launch pad in Baikonur, Kazakhstan. Two hours later, the Soyuz transport spacecraft with its three crewmen arrived at its destination, the International Space Station (ISS), orbiting 254 miles above the earth. Three astronauts, Russian Cosmonaut Colonel (COL) Aleksandr A. Skvortsov, Italian COL Luca Parmitano, and U.S. Army COL Andrew R. Morgan, commenced their individual missions aboard the ISS.¹

This article introduces the training that COL Morgan gained after his selection for the astronaut program, correlating it against his previous SOF training. His experience clearly illustrates that NASA and the Army both value tough, realistic training and that his time in special operations prepared him well for the challenges of space. It also leads into a new microsite on the ARSOF History.org website that provides greater detail on aspects of COL Morgan's space mission and his advocating of the versatility of SOF-trained soldiers. The accompanying URL link and QR code will take an internet-capable reader to that new microsite.³

Stepping across the threshold from the Soyuz to the ISS, COL Morgan began the first of the 272 days he would spend in orbit. His extended mission was full of milestones. He holds the record for the fourth longest space mission of an American Astronaut since the program began, and his seven extra-vehicular spacewalks give him a total time of 45 minutes, 48 seconds outside a spacecraft, placing him at number 18 among the many world astronauts in that event. And he was very active in promoting the practicality of ARSOF training as a solid preparation for a career in space.⁴

As one might expect, it takes several years of intense training to qualify as an astronaut. Being selected

for such a program is a highly competitive process, and many rely on the sum total of their training and education to prepare them for the challenges of that assignment. COL Morgan was no different, and explained that his Army special operations background provided him with some valuable tools to meet those challenges head on and excel. "Astronaut training, the process of being selected and then going through



(image credit: NASA)

Launch of the Soyuz MS-13 Spacecraft carrying Astronauts Morgan, Skvortsov, and Parmintano from Baikonur, Kazakhstan, 20 July 2019. Scan the QR code to listen to an interview with COL Morgan about his experiences as an astronaut.



The eight-member 2013 class of NASA astronauts (Group 21) take a break from training to pose for their group portrait at NASA's Johnson Space Center. Pictured from the left (front row) are Anne C. McClain, Tyler N. 'Nick' Hague and Nicole A. Mann. Pictured from the left (back row) are Jessica U. Meir, Josh A. Cassada, Victor J. Glover, Andrew R. 'Drew' Morgan and Christina M. Hammock.

the initial qualification is all challenging stuff and it uses all aspects of our experiences [up] to that point in our career," he said. "The initial training that we go through, we get a lot of technical training in the systems of the ISS. We learn to become aircrew in T38 supersonic jets. We learn about robotics, we learn about space walking, which is very physically demanding. And then we learn the Russian language to a certain proficiency level. So, it uses a very broad knowledge base that we've developed over the course of our careers," he explained.⁵


While "most people don't have backgrounds in every single one of those things, when I think back about my experiences in special operations and the Army, it's [the] operational experiences; being around and working under the most austere working conditions" that helped prepare him for the pace of instruction. "Working under immense pressure, in tough realistic exercises," Morgan said, helped prepare him. Other similarities abound between astronaut training and special operations. For example, "the fact that we're doing something very highly technical, but also have to learn a foreign language," he explained, is one similarity that many SOF soldiers can relate to. "We also have to perform tasks in and around aircraft; those are all aspects of operations that Army Special Operations Forces (ARSO) soldiers experience," factors that make them well suited for functioning in a high pressure training environment. "Those are all things that I drew upon as an astronaut candidate going through the difficult training to become initially qualified." "There

"I'd always say to my crewmates, **'Rangers rehearse; that's what we're going to do.** We're going to go over this until there's nothing left to the imagination.' And then we went out, and we were successful."

—COL Andrew Morgan⁷

was nothing that I encountered in astronaut training that was more challenging than the experiences I had in the Army," he concluded.⁶

"So even though I had never been to space [before his launch]," he continued, "it felt like I had, because the training is so good. This is another touch point between the way Astronauts [...] and the way that the Army and SOF soldiers train: Tough and realistic training leads to successful missions. This was just another example of that in my career," Morgan confirmed.⁸

For more information on the specifics of COL Morgan's space mission, see the linked material on the USASOC History Office website through the QR code. 

Acknowledgements: The author is grateful to COL Morgan for granting time for an excellent interview that covers the issues of training for space, functioning on board the ISS, and daily routines in space.

Endnotes

- 1 Website, "Soyuz MS-13 Mission," Russianspaceweb.com, no date, on internet at: <http://www.russianspaceweb.com/soyuz-ms-13.html>; Mark Garcia, "Three Expedition 60 Crew Members Heading to Station on Apollo 50th," NASA.Gov, 20 July 2019, on internet at: <https://blogs.nasa.gov/spacestation/2019/07/20/three-expedition-60-crew-members-heading-to-station-on-apollo-50th/>.
- 2 Morgan Interview. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), "Astronaut Biography: Andrew R. Morgan," April 2020, on internet at: <https://www.nasa.gov/astrospace/biographies/andrew-r-morgan/biography/>.
- 3 Morgan Interview; **The new microsite can be accessed by navigating to:** https://www.arsof-history.org/arsof_in_space/index.html.
- 4 Morgan Interview; Mark Garcia, "Touchdown! Expedition 62 Returns to Earth, Completes Station Mission," 17 April 2020, on Internet at: <https://blogs.nasa.gov/spacestation/2020/04/17/touchdown-expedition-62-returns-to-earth-completes-station-mission/>; Wikipedia, "List of Cumulative Spacewalk Records," no date, on internet at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cumulative_spacewalk_records.
- 5 Morgan Interview.
- 6 Morgan Interview.
- 7 Morgan Interview; "Astronaut Biography: Andrew R. Morgan."
- 8 Morgan Interview.

ARSOF Icon:

SGM ERNEST K. TABATA (1930–2015)

Special Forces | WHITE STAR | Vietnam | SF Engineer Instructor

Sergeant Major (SGM) Ernest K. Tabata was born on Oahu, Hawaii, in 1930, as the son of Japanese immigrants. He began his military career at age 15 in the Hawaiian Territorial Guard. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1949, and served with the 1st Cavalry Division during the Korean War, afterwards with the 11th and 82nd Airborne Divisions.

In 1961, he began his Special Forces (SF) career with 7th SF Group (SFG), and served extensively throughout Asia. He deployed to Laos with WHITE STAR, with three tours of duty in Vietnam, including Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), and four years in the Republic of China on Taiwan. Tabata had tours of duty with the 1st, 5th, 7th and 10th SFGs, and retired from active duty as a SGM in 1981, after thirty-one years of service. He later became the first civilian instructor on parachute status at the SF Engineer Sergeants Course, and was an SF engineer and demolitions instructor for twenty-nine years.

He was named the 2004 U.S. Special Operations Command Bull Simons Award recipient, and a Distinguished Member of the SF Regiment. Passing away in 2015, he was honored by having the SF Engineer Training Facility named for him in 2018. SGM Ernest K. Tabata's legacy lives today in the SF Engineer Sergeant Course, and in the high standards and excellence that he demanded of himself and his soldiers.



For more information and video interviews with SGM Tabata, please visit:
<https://arsof-history.org/icons/tabata.html>



Commander, USASOC
ATTN: AOHS (Veritas)
E-2929 Desert Storm Drive
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