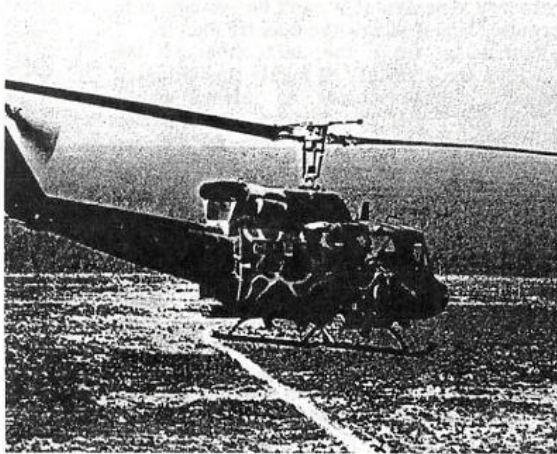


The 1st Special Operations Wing is ready....

"Any Time, Any Place"



by Major James M. Lee
Supervising Editor

The roar of the powerful 3,000 horsepower piston engine was deafening as the camouflaged A-1E streaked over the highway and pulled up sharply into a left closed pattern. In its wake, a flight of two OV-10s whined overhead, heading out to practice with rockets and machine guns. Viet Nam? No! It was Hurlburt Field, Florida, May 1970, and I had just arrived there to become a forward air controller (better known as FAC) in the O-2A "Skymaster." Now, 13 years later, I once again arrived at Hurlburt, this time as a member of a MAC Safety staff assistance team. The A-1Es and their powerful roar were long gone, as were the OV-10s and O-2s, but the spirit and excitement of my first visit were still there, as powerful and overwhelming as they had been 13 years earlier.

History

Spirit and pride—those two words sum up the history of what is now known as the 1st Special Operation Wing, or 1 SOW. They also describe its present and its future as a part of MAC.

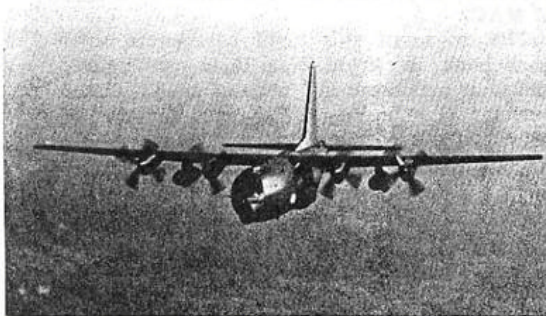
The origin of this highly decorated wing goes back to World War II to Hailakandi, India. It was there in March of 1944 that the 1st Air Commando Group was created to provide fighter cover, air strikes and airlift for Wingate's Raiders operating behind enemy lines in Burma. But following the war, the group was transferred back to the United States and disbanded in October 1948.

The Air Commandos and the concept of special operations lay dormant until 1961 when President John F. Kennedy called on the military to train its forces to fight guerilla warfare; especially against communist-inspired wars of national liberation.

The Air Force responded by activating the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Hurlburt Field in April 1961. Less than a year later, the organization was upgraded to a group, and in 1963 was redesignated the 1st Air Commando Wing. In 1968 it became the 1st Special Operations Wing, part of the Air Force Special Operations Force. Following consolidation, it was renamed the 834th Tactical Composite Wing in July 1974, but reassumed its historic name as the 1st Special Operations Wing in July 1975.

It was during the Viet Nam conflict that Air Force special operations forces were at their largest, encompassing 31 squadrons and more than 10,000 personnel and 550 aircraft. At the peak of the war, Hurlburt teemed with activity as countless crewmembers received special operations training and headed to Southeast Asia to fight the war. Their legacy lives on in the 3,500 men and women who now make up the 1 SOW.

The Skyraiders and Broncos that once filled the flight line at Hurlburt have now been replaced by newer, more sophisticated aircraft such as the AC-130H "Spectre" gunship, the MC-130E "Combat Talon," the HH-53H "Pave Low," and the venerable UH-1N "Huey." It's these aircraft and the people who fly, support and maintain them that carry on the proud tradition of the first "Air Commandos."



A 1 SOW MC-130E "Combat Talon" over Florida.

AC-130 "Spectre"

The AC-130H brings to MAC a true "offensive" weapons system. Equipped with side firing weapons including twin 20mm Vulcan cannons, a 40mm Bofors cannon and the lethal Army 105mm howitzer, this highly modified C-130 is well equipped for its wartime roles of armed reconnaissance, interdiction and close air support. But all this weaponry is useless if it can't be brought onto targets. This is where the Spectre excels.

Protruding from the left side of the AC-130s are a variety of highly sophisticated sensors. These include an infrared sensor system and low-light television. Information from these systems is fed into an onboard computer that combines it with aircraft performance data such as airspeed, altitude, bank angle and distance from the target. The gun alignment and firing computations are then automatically figured by the computer which aims the guns when firing begins. According to experienced AC-130 crewmembers, after four or five rounds are fired from the 105mm howitzer, the computer is able to calculate the winds between the aircraft and the target and over 90 percent the succeeding rounds will be direct hits on the target. It was just such accuracy that earned the Spectre its reputation as a devastating truck killer during the latter part of the Southeast Asia conflict.



The power of an automatic weapon is demonstrated to students of the Dynamics of International Terrorism Course taught at Hurlburt.

The gunships are also equipped with a 2-kilowatt searchlight for illuminating target areas. Because of this capability, they've been used extensively for night search and rescue operations. In fact, an AC-130 was instrumental in the night rescue of survivors of a commercial aircraft that crashed in the Everglades near Miami in 1973. It orbited the area and illuminated the crash site, directing rescuers to individual survivors in the scattered wreckage.

The AC-130H is flown by the 16th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Hurlburt, the only active duty squadron in the Air Force to operate the Spectre gunships. The slightly different AC-130A model gunships are flown by Air Force reservists from the 919th Special Operations Group, located at Duke Field, north of Hurlburt on the Eglin AFB reservation.

MC-130 "Combat Talon"

The MC-130E Combat Talon "Blackbird" has also received extensive modifications and performs a variety of unconventional warfare support missions. One of the most interesting modifications is the addition of the Fulton recovery system. Designed as a means to rescue downed crewmembers, the system has been in development since 1963 and is operational on the Blackbirds. The aircraft have been outfitted with a yoke on the nose which resembles the feelers of a large beetle. The yoke is normally folded back against the fuselage and is extended hydraulically into the recovery position. In addition, there is a special hydraulic winch used to reel the rescued individual on board the aircraft.

In actual operation, the person on the ground is airdropped a special kit containing a harness suit, a lift line, a balloon and two containers of helium. The individual opens the kit, dons the suit, ensures the lift line is attached to both the suit and the balloon, then inflates the balloon with the helium and lets it fly. The pilot of the MC-130 then maneuvers the aircraft to intercept the lift line with the yoke, flying at an altitude of 400 feet and a maximum airspeed of 150 knots. Once the line is intercepted, it is attached to the aircraft by a special lock. The individual is then pulled smoothly into the air and winched on board the Blackbird. In the event the aircraft fails to intercept



AN HH-53H "Pave Low" hovers prior to departure.

the lift line, there are two fending wires running from the nose of the aircraft to each wingtip which fend off or cut the lift line. If the line is cut, the individual on the ground is dropped another kit and the process is repeated.

The Combat Talon aircraft are also designed and equipped for all-weather, low altitude penetrations of hostile airspace. Fitted with advanced terrain following and ground mapping radars, an infrared system, and both Doppler and inertial navigation systems, the aircraft is capable of making extremely accurate high speed, low altitude airdrops to small drop zones, day or night. Special communication and electronic warfare equipment aids the Blackbird in this role. As with the AC-130H, the MC-130E is air refuelable. The Combat Talon is flown by the 8 SOS at Hurlburt, the 1 SOS at Clark AB, Republic of the Philippines, and the 7 SOS at Rhein-Main AB, Germany.

Helicopters

Rotary-wing aircraft also play a vital role in the 1 SOW mission. The 20 SOS, known as the "Green Hornets," flies both the HH-53H "Pave Low" and UH-1N "Twin Huey" helicopters, and is the only special operation helicopter squadron in the active duty Air Force.

HH-53 "Pave Low"

Assigned to the 1 SOW in 1980, the HH-53H was acquired to provide airlift capability for special operations missions. The Pave Lows are equipped with retractable air refueling probes, an external hoist, two

jettisonable auxiliary fuel tanks and armor. They can be armed with up to three 7.62mm miniguns or three .50 caliber machine guns to provide suppressive fire.

These specially equipped helicopters have both night and adverse weather capability, provided by terrain following, terrain avoidance, and ground mapping radars, a forward looking infrared system, Doppler and inertial navigation systems. The Pave Low helicopters have the missions of low-level penetration for infiltration and exfiltration, aerial gunnery and reinforcement and resupply of unconventional warfare forces worldwide.

UH-1N "Twin Huey"

The 20 SOS uses its Twin Hueys to provide gunship coverage, infiltration and exfiltration of reconnaissance and combat control personnel, and medical evacuation of casualties. To accomplish these diversified missions the twin turbine helicopters can be outfitted with searchlights, personnel rescue hoists, machine or gatling guns, rocket pods and loudspeakers. The Twin Hueys are also flown by Detachment 1, 2d Air Division, at Howard AB, Panama.

USAF Special Operations School

Another major organization at Hurlburt is the USAF Special Operations School, now a part of the 2d Air Division. Originally established as the Special Air Warfare Indoctrination Course, it was conducted in conjunction with the USAF Air Ground Operations School (another Hurlburt-based Air Force school) and Air University, and was primarily an orientation course on Southeast Asia. Since its beginning in 1964, the school has grown steadily and now has the Air Force-wide responsibility for conducting academic training related to special air operations. A listing of its courses demonstrates its wide range of instruction.

—The Foreign Internal Defense Course was originally called the Air Force Counterinsurgency Course and provides a basic orientation on the problems of insurgencies, their causes and methods to defeat them.

—The Psychological Operations Course provides selected U.S. and NATO officers, senior NCOs and civilians with a basic understanding of the principles and techniques of psychological operations.

—The Unconventional Warfare Course is designed to instruct selected DOD personnel in the concepts of unconventional warfare, including terminology, organization, capabilities and applications.

—The Dynamics of International Terrorism Course provides students with an awareness of the terrorist threat overseas. Areas addressed include: the psychology of a terrorist, terrorist tactics and technology and transnational and regional terrorist groups. A major goal of the course is to provide instruction in the principles of personal security in overseas areas.

—The Cross Cultural Communications Course aids DOD people who train, negotiate or contract with foreign nationals in this country. It seeks to improve students' communicative skills and sensitizes them to different cultural values, behavior, assumptions and perceptions.

—The Crisis Response Management Workshop provides senior military personnel the principles for identifying, planning and managing the temporary application of limited force during an international crisis.

—The Middle East Technical Assistance Field Team (TAFT) Orientation Course teaches newly-assigned field team members about their roles and mission. Also discussed are living and working conditions, history, economics, religion and cultural aspects of the area.

Combat Control Team

The Special Operations Combat Control Team (SOCCT) is yet another organization with a proud heritage. Known as the "Pathfinders" during World War II, the CCT has done everything from establishing drop zones and guiding aircraft to targets in remote areas, to helping reestablish communications during disasters. Team members are trained in parachute jumping, air traffic control, radio maintenance, scuba diving, forward air control operations and much more.

Future

The men and women of the 1 SOW are the product of a rich and highly decorated history and are looking forward to an equally prestigious future under MAC. Their motto explains their mission and their motivation—"Any Time, Any Place." From TMF, welcome to MAC.