



Hurlburt AFA Chapter 398



AFSOC Special Edition

June 2015

AFA Mission

To promote a dominant USAF and a strong national defense, and to honor Airmen and our Air Force Heritage.

To accomplish this we:

Educate the public on the critical need for unmatched aerospace power and a technically superior workforce to ensure U.S. national security. Advocate for aerospace power and STEM education, and support the total Air Force family and promote aerospace education.

Chapter Officers

President – Jim Connors
Vice President - Fred Gross
Secretary – Susan Ault-Davis
Treasurer – Danny Webb

AFA Chapter 398
P.O. Box 9814
Hurlburt Field, FL 32544-9814
www.Hurlburt.AFAFlorida.org

Air Force Special Operations Command 25th Anniversary Issue

This month Chapter 398 is pleased to present a special edition newsletter highlighting the 25th Anniversary of the Air Force Special Operations Command and the contributions and sacrifices the members of AFSOC and its units have made in service to our nation. A very special thanks to the AFSOC/ Public Affairs office for providing a history of AFSOC.

Following Operation EAGLE CLAW in 1980, the Iranian hostage rescue attempt better known as Desert One because of the name of the location where the accident occurred, the Holloway Commission convened to investigate what went wrong. The commission produced two major recommendations: First, the Department of Defense should establish a counterterrorism task force with a permanently assigned staff and forces; and second, the Joint Chiefs of Staff should consider formation of a special operations panel. However, in the years immediately following these recommendations the military and its predominantly conventional force continued to drag its feet and only provided a window dressing to the problem. For example, in 1983 the Air Force transferred special operations from Tactical Air Command to Military Airlift Command and activated 23rd Air Force at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. Despite this move 23rd AF was not solely dedicated to special operations, but also responsible for other missions as well. Frustrated the Services were not taking their unconventional capabilities seriously, Congress took matters into their own hands and pursued legislation that went much further than just a task force or advisory panel. In 1986, Senators William Cohen of Maine and Sam Nunn of Georgia, followed by Congressman Dan Daniel of Florida, introduced bills that directed the formation of a Unified Command responsible for special operations and created the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict.



Birth of Air Force Special Operations Command

On 22 May 1990, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Larry D. Welch redesignated 23rd AF as Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). The new major command consisted of three wings--the 1st, 39th and 353rd Special Operations Wings—as well as the 1720th Special Tactics Group, the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School, and the Special Missions Operational Test and Evaluation Center. Air Reserve components included the 919th Special Operations Group of the Air Force Reserves at Duke Field, Fl, and the 193rd Special Operations Group of the Air National Guard at Harrisburg International Airport, Pa.

In 1987, the military activated the Unified Command as United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) at MacDill Air Force Base, Fl. Shortly after the activation, the Army and Navy established service components as major command equivalents and activated Army Special Operations Command (ARSOC) and Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM). Although the Air Force relocated 23rd AF to Hurlburt Field, Fla., it did not create a separate major command for its special operations forces. In a conciliatory move two years later in 1989, the Air Force eventually divested 23rd AF of its non-special operations units. However, later that year the issue quickly became contentious between Gen James J. Lindsay, the commander of USSOCOM since its inception, and the new commander of Military Airlift Command, Gen Hansford T. Johnson. The issue was amplified when General Johnson directed 23rd AF take its proportional share of the manpower reductions that was occurring Air Force-wide as a result of the end of the Cold War—even as General Lindsay was in the midst of building the command. In early 1990, he took his argument to the Air Force chief of staff. Within a month, General Welch had agreed to redesignate 23rd AF a major command.



Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM

From early August 1990 to the end of February 1991, AFSOC participated in Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, the protection of Saudi Arabia and liberation of Kuwait.

Active duty, AFRES, and ANG components deployed to King Fahd International Airport, Saudi Arabia and Batman, Turkey.

The 1st SOW with its AC-130s, HC-130s, MC-130s, MH-53s and MH-60s; the 193rd SOG with its EC-130s; and the 919th SOG with its AC-130s, and 71st SOS's HH-3s, all deployed to Saudi Arabia.

The 39th SOW deployed to Turkey with its HC-130s, MC-130s, and MH-53s. Special Tactics personnel operated throughout the theater on multiple combat control and combat rescue missions. Special operations forces performed direct action missions, combat search and rescue, infiltration, exfiltration, air base ground defense, air interdiction, special reconnaissance, close air support, psychological operations, and helicopter air refuelings. Pave Low crews led the helicopter assault on radars to blind Iraq at the onset of hostilities, and they also accomplished the deepest rescue for which they received the Mackay Trophy, a prestigious award presented by the National Aeronautic Association for the most meritorious flight of the year.

Combat Talons dropped the largest conventional bombs of the war and, along with Combat Shadows, dropped the most psychological warfare leaflets. The AC-130 gunships provided valuable fire support and armed reconnaissance, but they also suffered the single greatest combat loss of coalition air forces with the shoot down of an AC-130H from Hurlburt Field, call sign Spirit 03. All 14 crewmembers aboard were lost. Overall, AFSOC flew 5,000 sorties and 10,000 hours in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM—but it did not end there.



Following the Gulf War, AFSOC continued to stand alert for personnel recovery and various other missions in support of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in Turkey and Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in Saudi Arabia. In 1994, a pair of U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters were shot down in a tragic friendly-fire incident during Operation PROVIDE COMFORT III in Iraq. AFSOC units played significant roles in the search, support, and recovery operations.

AFSOC Reorganizes

AFSOC identified lessons learned from the Gulf War and began a series of organizational moves, most planned for, but one not planned was the relocation of the 353rd SOW from Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines, to Kadena Air Base, Japan in June 1991 after the volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo. Dubbed Operation FIERY VIGIL, personnel evacuated the Philippines while the unit was supported by temporary duty personnel under Operation SCIMATAR SWEEP for more than a year. In January 1992, the 39th SOW relocated from Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, to RAF Alconbury, United Kingdom. Later that year the 39th SOW inactivated and its personnel and equipment were reconstituted as the 352nd SOW. In December 1992, AFSOC redesignated both overseas wings as groups. More reorganization occurred on Hurlburt Field to include the 1720th STG redesignated as the 720th STG in March 1992; the transfer of ownership of Hurlburt Field from Air Mobility Command in October 1992; followed by the merger of the 834th Air Base Wing into the 1st SOW which assumed host unit responsibilities. A year later the 1st SOW inactivated and the 16th SOW activated. Meanwhile, in April 1994 the Special Missions Operational Test and Evaluation Center was redesignated the 18th Flight Test Squadron.

AFSOC Upgrades

In addition to a series of organizational changes, it quickly became apparent the wear and tear on the new command's aging aircraft during Operation URGENT FURY in Grenada, Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, and Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had taken its toll and would need to upgrade its weapon systems. In December 1990, the AC-130U flew for the first time. AFSOC received its first AC-130U in July 1994. Meanwhile the first MC-130H Combat Talon II arrived at Hurlburt Field, Fla., in 1991, became initial operation capable in 1993 and fully operation capable in 2000. Finally, in May 2002, the Air Force completed its conversion of 25 MH-53J Pave Low III helicopters to MH-53M Pave Low IV's. Basically the aircraft were modified with the interactive defensive avionics system and multi-mission advanced tactical terminal.

Somalia

Intervening in AFSOC's preparation for Operation DESERT STORM was Operation EASTERN EXIT on 3 January 1991, with the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Somalia. One AC-130H Spectre gunship departed the following

day from King Fahd International Airport, Saudi Arabia, and performed close air support over the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, the capital. The gunship returned two days later.

Two years later in December 1992, AFSOC Special Tactics and intelligence personnel again found itself in Somalia under Operation RESTORE HOPE, followed by the return of the gunships in the spring of 1993 under Operation CONTINUE HOPE. By the fall of that year the mission continued under OPERATION CONTINUE HOPE II where from 3-4 October 1993 AFSOC was part of a combat search and rescue effort to get two UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter crews out after they were shot down by Somalian clan militia. TSgt Timothy A. Wilkinson supported Task Force Ranger during the longest sustained firefight by U.S. forces since the Vietnam War. For his heroic actions in Mogadishu, Sergeant Wilkinson earned the Air Force Cross. In March 1994, an AC-130H gunship crew, call sign Jockey 14, paid the ultimate price for freedom when they experienced an in-flight explosion, forcing the crew to ditch off the coast of Kenya while supporting Operation CONTINUE HOPE II in Somalia; Eight crewmembers were killed, while six survived. A year later in 1995, AFSOC again returned to Somalia in support of Operation UNITED SHIELD.



Haiti

In the fall of 1994, AFSOC units spearheaded Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY by playing an essential role in establishing security and assuring de facto public administration in rural areas of Haiti. AFSOC units led the formation of fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft to complete the operation. Air Force special operations helicopters flew from Navy aircraft carriers during the massive deployment.

Most AFSOC aircraft operated out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and included the largest gathering of MH-53 Pave Lows to participate in one action. The operation was the last real-world deployment for the AC-130As of the 919th Special Operations Wing prior to their retirement. Also during Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, radio messages were broadcast by the 193rd Special Operations Group's Commando Solo EC-130 aircraft. To help ensure that the radio messages would get to the target audience, 10,000 radios were air dropped into Haiti, substantially increasing the listening audience.



Messages from President Aristide were broadcast daily on three FM radio channels along with discussions by a panel of Haitian political experts. The purpose of these broadcasts were to educate the Haitian people on the basic theories and concepts of democracy and what benefits they could expect to see with the restoration of a democracy in Haiti. To further attract a listening audience and to reinforce the credibility of the information, the radio broadcasts also included current news stories, commentaries by popular local figures and selected popular Haitian music.

The Balkans

From July 1992 through June 1996 AFSOC units participated in Operation PROVIDE PROMISE, the U.S. portion of the United Nations humanitarian relief effort in Bosnia. Overall, more than 4,000 U.S. airland sorties delivered more than 60,000 tons to Sarajevo, many by AFSOC units. Over 2,000 U.S. sorties airdropped nearly 30,000 container delivery system bundles and more than 1,000 tri-wall aerial delivery system bundles

between February 1993 and August 1994, again many by AFSOC units. From April 1993 through December 1995, AFSOC units participated in Operation DENY FLIGHT, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enforcement of a no-fly zone over Bosnia. Over 40,000 U.S. sorties were flown, many of which were conducted by AFSOC units. From August through September 1995 AFSOC supported Operation DELIBERATE FORCE in the Balkans, NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serbs. Overall, Coalition Air Forces flew more than 3,500 combat sorties, some of which were flown by AFSOC units. The attacks on more than 300 individual targets, and 50 targeted complexes quickly led to the Dayton Peace Accords. Pave Low helicopter crewmen received combat wounds while flying as part of a force trying to rescue two French aviators who had been shot down near Sarajevo during Operation DELIBERATE FORCE. The efforts of the Pave Low flight crew during this attempted rescue resulted in their receiving the 1995 Air Force Cheney Award. From December 1995 through December 1996, AFSOC supported Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe peace implementation force mission in Bosnia. Overall more than 50,000 coalition sorties were flown, again many by AFSOC units. In 1996, AFSOC aircraft and personnel were the first on the scene when the CT-43 aircraft carrying U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown crashed near Dubrovnik, Croatia, killing everyone on board. AFSOC launched two MH-53Js and one MC-130P as part of the search and rescue effort. The efforts of these crewmembers, during this highly visible event, resulted in them being awarded the Air Force Cheney Award for 1996. In September 1997, three EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft from the 193rd SOW deployed in support of Operation JOINT GUARD. The stabilization force commander requested the deployment of the AFSOC-gained aircraft to Brindisi, Italy, to serve as a NATO resource to counter Serb radio and television broadcasts misrepresenting the Dayton Peace Accords. Throughout 1998 AFSOC maintained a constant combat search and rescue alert posture as part of Operation JOINT GUARD, with aircraft and personnel rotating from the 16th SOW and 352nd SOG to San Vito, Italy, on a routine basis. The role increased significantly in March 1999 during the crisis in Kosovo and Operation ALLIED FORCE. During the NATO air campaign to remove Serbian forces from Kosovo, special operators conducted two successful combat search and rescue operations to rescue downed American pilots (one F-117, one F-16) in the area of conflict. In addition, Operation ALLIED FORCE witnessed the employment of the EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft from the 193rd SOW to counter Serb radio and television broadcasts, while the MC-130H conducted extensive leaflet drops over Serbia, and the AC-130U provided armed reconnaissance. All told, AFSOC's special operators and aircraft played a significant role in bringing the conflict in Kosovo to an end.

Liberia

The crews involved in the 1996 Secretary Brown rescue quickly moved to Operation ASSURED RESPONSE, a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) of nearly 2,500 people from Monrovia, Liberia. Operating in a hostile environment, AFSOC conducted dozens of evacuation flights. They used MH-53Js and overhead fire support from AC-130Hs, vectoring aircraft through small arms and rocket fire. The efforts earned the crews the Tunner Award for outstanding airlift crew of the year.

Congo

Operation GUARDIAN RETRIEVAL was conducted in response to the unstable situation in the Democratic People's Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) from 17 March - 5 June 1997. Following factional fighting in Rwanda and the successful gains by Tutsi rebels, many Hutus fled in mass into Eastern Zaire. This large exodus resulted in massive refugee camps in Eastern Zaire creating regions of instability and increased tensions. Many non-government organizations (NGO) and private volunteer organizations (PVO) were working in these camps to ease the suffering of the refugees. Continued fighting between the various factions led to looting and pilfering of many villages in eastern Zaire endangering US citizens. During Operation GUARDIAN RETRIEVAL, noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO) were conducted to support the Department of State (DoS) in

evacuating noncombatants and nonessential military personnel. An MC-130H from the 352nd SOG delivered an American military assessment team and evacuated 30 Americans, 26 foreign nationals, and a dog held by an adolescent boy. The 21-hour flight by the crew included three in-flight refuelings and earned them the Mackay Trophy.

Foreign Internal Defense

In April 1994, the 6th Special Operations Squadron (6 SOS) returned to Hurlburt Field to perform the foreign internal defense mission. By 2000, the squadron had received qualification training on several dissimilar aircraft to include a Russian made MI-17 helicopter, AN-26 and AN-32 aircraft, while also seeing its core mission area, FID, expanded. FID is the participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization, to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their security. The focus of



US efforts is to support the host nation's internal defense and development which can be described as the full range of measures taken by a nation to promote its growth and protect itself from the security threats. The squadron's mission assessed, trained, advised and assisted foreign aviation forces in airpower employment, sustainment and force integration. Simply put, the 6th SOS supported the national security policy helping foreign friends and allies to defend their own countries and to function as viable coalition partners. The Republic of the Philippines has been one of the 6th SOS' frequent customers. AFSOC transferred several UH-1H helicopters to the Philippine Air Force, who could fly them, but not tactically. Over several years and numerous trips, the crews from the 6th SOS trained the Filipino crews starting with visual flight rules, then on to night-vision tactical insertion and extraction for combat operations and casualty evacuations.

Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM

On 11 September 2001, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., pushed the nation's special operations forces to the forefront on the global war against terrorism. Thirty-one days later, AFSOC forces deployed to southwest Asia for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to confront and remove the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, along with the Taliban-supported al Qaida terrorist organization headed by Osama Bin Laden who was responsible for the attacks. AFSOC airpower delivered Special Tactics forces to the battle ground and they in turn focused U.S. airpower to dispatch the Taliban and al Qaida from Afghanistan.



In addition to its support in Afghanistan, AFSOC personnel also deployed in support of OEF to the Philippines and Horn of Africa to aid those region's efforts against terrorism. From 1-17 March 2002, AFSOC participated in Operation ANACONDA, the first large-offensive of OEF, in the mountainous

TSgt Bart Decker, AFSOC combat controller, and the Northern Alliance, engage Taliban and al Qaida forces in Afghanistan.

Shahi Khot region in eastern Afghanistan.

Over 2,000 Coalition and 1,000 Special Operations Forces inlited at altitudes of 12,000 feet and at temperatures of 15 degrees Fahrenheit. Al Qaida fired on U.S. forces when disembarking from helicopters. A combat controller, TSgt John Chapman and pararescueman, SrA Jason Cunningham were killed-in-action — both posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross. In addition to Afghanistan, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM involved a global effort against terrorism to include the Horn of Africa, as well as the Republic of the Philippines. In January 2002, members of AFSOC headed by Brig Gen Donald C. Wurster, commander of Special Operations Command Pacific, deployed as Joint Task Force 510 to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM – Philippines (OEF-P). AFSOC members joined their counterparts from the Southern Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), commanded by Lt Gen Roy Cimatu. Air Force special operations forces advised and assisted the AFP to help combat terrorism in the country. Much of the operation took place on the island of Basilan in the southern region of the Philippines. Basilan was a stronghold of the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf. The group had terrorized the citizens of this beautiful island and wreaked havoc with its economy. By the end of the operation, the two forces had built 81 kilometers of road, improved an airfield and port facility, and dug fresh water wells. In February 2003, AFSOC and Philippine forces again conducted combined operations against the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in the Southern Philippines in the Sulu Archipelago. A month later, in March 2003, AFSOC participated in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM with deployed forces in support of Joint Special Operations Task Force-North at Bashur Airfield in northern Iraq. The combat phase of the operation quickly removed Saddam Hussein from power and liberated the Iraqi people from his ruthless Baathist regime. The Command's personnel and aircraft teamed with SOF and conventional forces to quickly bring down Saddam Hussein's government by 1 May 2003. So successful was SOF in OEF and OIF, that in 2004 President George W. Bush expanded United States Special Operations Command's responsibilities under the Unified Command Plan, "as the lead combatant commander for planning, synchronizing, and as directed, executing global operations against terrorist networks." Not only did the president and Congress make lasting impressions, so did the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Greatly influenced by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld shifted emphasis away from conventional conflict, involving nation-states, to wars requiring special operations capabilities in combating terrorists, insurgents, and guerillas. This deep imprint on special operations was a legacy evident in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, which called for a 15 percent increase in SOF and clearly placed special operations as the now "dominant form of warfare."



In April 2006, AFSOC consolidated the rotating personnel in support of OEF and OIF. As a result, an average of 115 people rotated in and out of Hurlburt Field each month—the monthly "rotator" had begun. Overall in support of Operations ENDURING and IRAQI FREEDOM from 11 September 2001 through 29 Dec 2014, the command conducted an estimated 173,000 flying hours and 150,000 combat sorties in support of 21,000 named operations. During those operations against terrorism, AFSOC moved more than 300,000 passengers, nearly 20,000,000 pounds of cargo and 20,000 vehicles. Those efforts directly contributed to over 20,000 detainees captured, 17,000 enemy killed-in-action, and nearly 5,000 communication devices retrieved. On 17 February 2010, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that as of 1 September, the name "Operation IRAQI FREEDOM" would be replaced by "Operation NEW DAWN." The last U.S. combat troops withdrew from Iraq on 18 December 2011.

Rescue

In October 2003, while supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the globe, AFSOC welcomed the movement of the USAF's continental U.S.-based rescue forces from Air Combat Command (ACC). With this move AFSOC inherited the 347th Rescue Wing and 563rd Rescue Group, while also gaining oversight responsibilities for the 920th Rescue Wing (AFRC), 106th Rescue Wing (ANG), and the 129th Rescue Wing (ANG). However, in February 2006, Gen T. Michael Moseley, Air Force Chief of Staff, moved rescue back to ACC based on his experiences as the joint forces air component commander in Central Air Forces.

Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)

Tracking down elusive enemies was harder than finding a needle in a haystack. In fact, it was like trying to find needles amongst other needles. But in October 2005, AFSOC began the MQ-1 Predator unmanned aircraft mission with the activation of the 3rd Special Operations Squadron, followed by the AFSOC Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination or PED mission in March 2006, which was absorbed with the reactivation of the 11th Intelligence Squadron in August 2006 which became an unblinking eye for special operations forces. In May 2007, the command's ISR mission grew exponentially with the 3rd SOS patch swap and the growth of the 11th IS. With the help of the Predator, the squadron followed an enemy's patterns of life and found and fixed on them as special operators rode in on the back of AFSOC aircraft and finished them off. The ISR mission is sure to continue to grow with the arrival of the MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aircraft in July 2009.

Arrival of the CV-22

In November 2006, AFSOC welcomed its first aircraft specifically built for Air Force Special Operations Forces—the CV-22 Osprey. After only two years of testing and training, AFSOC conducted the first operational deployment of four CV-22s in October and November 2008 in Mali. Ironically, the first ever operation of Air Force Special Operations Forces in October 1961, code named Sandy Beach One, involved training Malian paratroopers. The 2008 deployment was the first transatlantic movement of the CV-22, the first CV-22 deployment east of the prime meridian, first CV-22 deployment to Africa, longest CV-22 flight on record at 8.7 hours and 5,230 miles, and the first flight with strategic air refueling supporting tilt-rotor air refueling as KC-135s refueled MC-130s and the MC-130s refueled the CV-22s. A year later in 2009, AFSOC again broke all records with the CV-22s in support of OIF and OEF.



The CV-22 Osprey makes its final descent in November 2006 as the tilt-rotor aircraft arrives at Hurlburt Field, Florida for the first time.

Cannon Air Force Base

Originally established in 1942 as Army Air Base, Clovis, Cannon AFB was named in honor of Gen John K. Cannon—former commander of Tactical Air Command (TAC). On 13 May 2005, the base was placed on the

Department of Defense Base Realignment and Closure list for closure. Political pressure was applied by then Senator Pete Dominici and Gov Bill Richardson and the BRAC commission recommended Cannon be placed in an enclave status until 31 Dec 2009—finding a new mission for the installation became a top priority for the Air Force.

On 1 October 2007, AFSOC assumed host responsibilities of Cannon Air Force Base, NM. The transfer became effective with the activation of the 27th Special Operations Wing and the arrival of the 73rd SOS and the MC-130W. Soon other aircraft and units arrived to include the PC-12 in January 2008 and the 318th SOS in May 2008, the 3rd Special Operations Squadron and its Predator aircraft in October 2008, the 16th SOS and its aircraft in June 2009, the 551st SOS and its training mission in July 2009, and the 33rd SOS and its MQ-9 Reaper aircraft also in July 2009. In 2011, AFSOC surpassed the original number of personnel assigned and increased to 5,100—by the end of 2011, the 27th SOW took possession of more than half of AFSOC's manned aircraft and all of its 50 unmanned platforms. Further expansion of the base took place on 18 January 2012 when the USAF accepted an 11,000 acre land gift, valued at \$3.2 million, from the state of New Mexico to extend the area of Melrose Air Force Range.

Retirement of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopter

In September 2008, AFSOC retired the venerable Sikorsky MH-53M Pave Low IV helicopter after four decades of dependable service. Despite its outstanding flight safety record and unparalleled capabilities, the cost of maintaining and flying the aging fleet exceeded the potential benefits of keeping it in flight. On the night and early morning hours of 27 and 28 September 2008, AFSOC's remaining six MH-53s flew their final combat mission. The successful SOF logistical resupply and passenger movement took the Pave Lows on a final run through central and southern Iraq.

AFSOC's MC-130 Transformation

In early 2011, in preparation for transition to a new airframe, the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC) began its first MC-130J flight training program with the class practicing air drops, aerial refueling, and formation of the 193rd SOW EC-130J Commando Solo at Harrisburg International Airport. Two months later, the first AFSOC MC-130J, nicknamed Combat Shadow II, rolled out of the Lockheed Martin facility in Marietta, Ga. Six months after its initial roll-out, on 29 September, the first MC-130J arrived at Cannon AFB, and the command's MC-130J's name changed to Commando II was approved in March 2012.

The Air Force decommissioned its MC-130E Combat Talon I aircraft during an official ceremony at Duke Field, Fla., 25 April 2013, marking a significant step in AFSOC's continuing transition to a new Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AvFID) mission. The MC-130E entered operational service in 1966 and primarily provided infiltration, exfiltration, as well as resupply of special operations forces and equipment in hostile or denied territory. It featured terrain-following and terrain-avoidance radars and an extensive electronic warfare suite, which helped aircrews detect and protect the aircraft from both radar and infrared-guided threats in hostile environments. Extensively used during operations in Southwest Asia, including Afghanistan and Iraq, the Talon I was replaced by the MC-130J Commando II.

AFSOC began modifying the Commando II with the goal of creating a "best of both worlds" aircraft. The end result became a hybrid model with the flying proficiencies of the MC-130J and the combat capabilities of an AC-130 gunship. By the close of 2013, AFSOC took delivery of 32 MC-130Js.

24 SOW Activation

The 24th Special Operations Wing (24 SOW) activated on 12 June 2012, at Hurlburt Field, Fla. The 24 SOW became AFSOC's third operational wing. It recruits, trains, develops and deploys Special Tactics operators to enable global access, precision strike and personnel recovery missions across the globe.

623 AOC Redesignated AFSOAWC

On 11 February 2013, the 623rd Air Operations Center (623 AOC) was redesignated Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center (AFSOAWC). The AFSOAWC mission solidified the AFSOC commander's guidance to consolidate forces responsible for SOF-specific doctrine, tactics, education, training, Irregular Warfare operations, operational test/evaluation and analysis for AFSOC.

After two and a half decades, AFSOC continues to employ a full range of special operations air power capabilities. However, if the command is to sustain operational readiness and remain relevant in the future it will need to modernize its force.

In order to accomplish that, AFSOC's number one priority is to recapitalize its aging fleet. Currently, after major redesignations and reorganizations, AFSOC's primary subordinate units include the 1st SOW, 24th SOW and AFSOAWC at Hurlburt Field; the 27th SOW at Cannon AFB; the 352nd SOW at RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom; and the 353rd SOG at Kadena Air Base, Japan.

