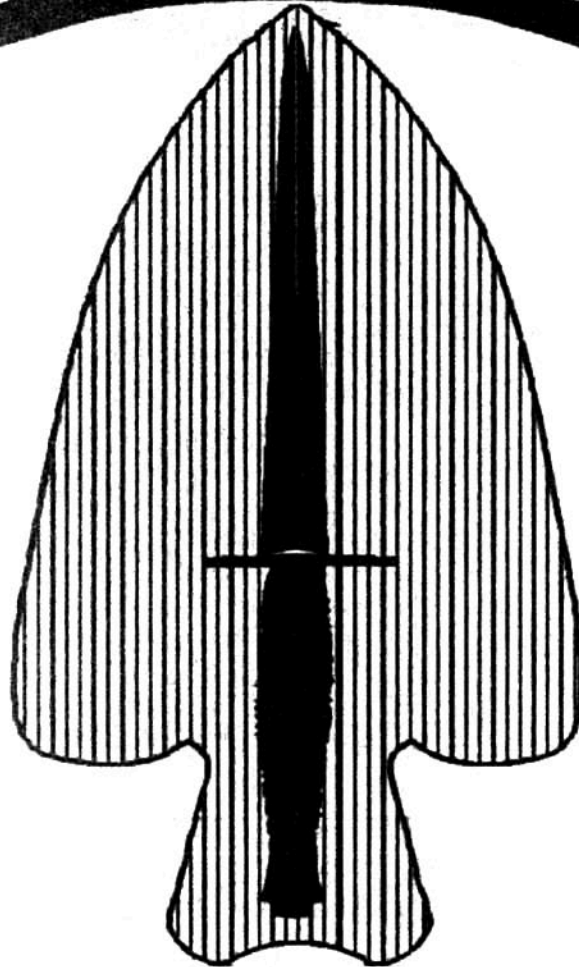


**STANDING UP THE MACOM:
THE U. S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
1987-92**

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of Kuwait early in August 1990 set the command in the middle of the largest and fastest deployment of U. S. forces since Vietnam: DESERT SHIELD. The development of staff procedures, section SOPs, optimum organizations and all of the other major actions necessary to ensure the smooth running of a new organization had to be undertaken in haste under the pressure of imminent conflict. That conflict became real in January 1991 with the commencement of Operation DESERT STORM. The command deployed over 7,000 Army SOF soldiers to serve in the Persian Gulf and more into Turkey to serve in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in support of the Kurdish refugees.

JUST CAUSE and PROMOTE LIBERTY: The events in Panama of December 1989 are well known. The increasing level of violence sponsored by dictator Manuel Noriega finally led to a U. S. armed response on 20 December. The roles played by U. S. Army Special Operations Forces included direct action (seizure and disabling of radio and TV stations, protection of forces at Torrijos Airport by seizing the Pacora River Bridge), psychological operations (loudspeaker teams accompanying assault and follow-on elements) and Civil Affairs (refugee control, rebuilding police forces, etc.). As a MACOM, especially as a new MACOM, there was little direct involvement by USASOC in the events of JUST CAUSE. After all, a MACOM is a major headquarters element with the missions of long-term budgeting, sustainment, combat developments and training for the entire Army Special Operations Forces community. It does not and will never have a deployable combat role. Nevertheless, USASOC's and that of its Major Subordinate Commands involvement in JUST CAUSE was critical.

The invasion of Panama was essentially a short operation. Although JUST CAUSE lasted from 20 December 1989 to 12 January 1990, most of the combat operations were concluded by D + 5, Christmas Day. USASOC barely had time to establish its Crisis Response Cell (CRC) and set up an Emergency Operations Center. USASOC's long-term mission--sustainment of a force and planning for additional forces and equipment--was never fully tested. Yet, a critical element of the establishment of USASOC in December 1989 was the simultaneous formation of a single Reserve Component command (USARSOC) for all RC Special Operations Forces. This element received its first major test in JUST CAUSE as well.

Almost immediately after USASOC received word of JUST CAUSE, it notified USARSOC.⁶² USARSOC quickly established its cell in the USASOC Emergency Operations Center. It were given the

⁶²USASOC passed the word to USARSOC at approximately 1000 hrs on 20 Dec and by 1030 hours, 21 Dec USARSOC established their Emergency Operations Center. HQ, USARSOC "Smart-Book", "Operati6n Just Cause/Promote Liberty (20 Dec 89 - 30 Apr 90), Daily Staff Journal, 21 Dec-22 Dec 89.

mission by the USASOC Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Colonel David McKnight, to "identify, select, validate, process and deploy individual USAR SOF personnel to support the Civil Affairs contingency operation in Panama."⁶³ Because some 96 percent of all of the Army's civil affairs assets are in the Army Reserve, USARSOC and its major subordinate Civil Affairs Commands would be key players in ensuring the long term success of the US operation in Panama.

USARSOC, in regular coordination with USASOC, began preparing lists of reservists with specific civil affairs skills who would be needed in Panama. The USSOUTHCOM war plans provided general guidance on CA requirements while CA and PSYOPS personnel in Panama developed the lists of specific needs. A Civil Military Operations Task Force (CMOTF) was organized, volunteers were located and mobilized and personnel were dispatched to Panama by 25 December. In later phases, CA functional/technical teams were organized from reserve volunteers and dispatched along with specific individuals who sustained the CA effort. Twenty-five volunteers formed the CMOTF and one hundred and eleven CA specialists were dispatched over the next few months to fill out the functional/technical teams. As **BLIND LOGIC** transitioned to **PROMOTE LIBERTY** (the-long term nation rebuilding operation), the CMOTF was disbanded while individuals continued to be dispatched to help reestablish the Police Force, work with displaced persons and assist in rebuilding the government. While the rest of the Army was able to withdraw almost all of its additional personnel sent to Panama for the invasion, Civil Affairs personnel directed by USARSOC continued to be identified, notified and dispatched to "seal the victory." These Special Operations volunteers were being sent even as events in the Middle East began to spell out a new mission for USASOC and USARSOC.

DESERT SHIELD.

Within less than a year of its activation as a MACOM, USASOC in August of 1990 found itself in the middle of its second major military operation. This time, unlike JUST CAUSE, the operation was going to be of long duration. As such, USASOC established a Crisis Response Cell (CRC) and all of its major subordinate commands established Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) to process the information flowing from South West Asia and the requests for personnel, equipment and guidance. As a sustaining headquarters, USASOC entered into the entire range of requirements coming from DESERT SHIELD. The CRC at USASOC reported both to USSOCOM and to DA and worked with other MACOMS

⁶³USARSOC Operations Order 1-89, 211600R December 1989, Fort Bragg, NC. The Civil Affairs portion of JUST CAUSE, entitled BLIND LOGIC, was the basis for USARSOC planning.

training in reconnaissance and night operations while assisting in counternarcotics border control operations.

REACTIVATION OF THE 3RD SF GROUP.

In addition to organizing major command and major subordinate command headquarters, USASOC was able to assist 1st SOCOM (later USASFC) in reactivating another Special Forces Group (Airborne). The 3rd SF Group Headquarters was activated on 29 June 1990 and placed under 1st SOCOM on 1 July 1990. The 3rd Group's 1st battalion was immediately activated from personnel and equipment from the Fort Bragg based former 3rd Battalion, 5th SFG(A) and plans were made to activate the 2nd battalion at the end of FY 91 and the third battalion by the end of FY 92. However, the pressing need to support DESERT SHIELD and still maintain their growing mission load prompted USASOC to begin preparing for the activation of both battalions before the end of FY 91. Crossleveling of equipment and some personnel from other SF Groups was required in order to accomplish this ambitious goal. On 16 October 1991, the 2nd battalion of the 3rd SFG(A) was re-activated, followed by the 3rd battalion on 16 October 1992. For the first time since 1969, the complete 3rd SFG(A) was on the active Army rolls and Special Forces returned to a strength of five active duty groups and four reserve component groups.

HURRICANE HUGO (Virgin Islands Humanitarian Assistance)

In the wake of the devastation of the Virgin Islands by Hurricane Hugo in September, 1989, the National Command Authority directed elements of XVIII ABN Corps (Combined Joint Task Force 140) to restore order on the islands. On 21 September 1989, 1st Special Operations Command (1st SOCOM), provided four Psychological Operations teams (18 personnel) to support the Corps. The teams from 4th PSYOP Group provided public information support, loudspeaker and radio message support to the effort to restore order. The teams stayed for more than three weeks and were an invaluable aide to the Airborne forces in restoring public order.

JUST CAUSE: Panama

Special Forces conducted a number of missions as part of Operation JUST CAUSE, December 1989. The details of many of those missions remain classified. However, three missions may provide a sample of the wide range of jobs that Special Operations Forces can do.

a. Cerro Azul TV Tower: As part of the operation to replace dictator Manuel Noriega with a democratically-elected government, one Special Forces team conducted a mission to prevent Noriega from rallying his scattered armed forces. The

mission was assigned by U. S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). On 20 December, an 18-man Special Forces team from 3rd battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (A) was landed near the Cerro Azul television relay station above Panama City. They were accompanied by two TV technicians from the 1109th Signal Battalion. The team was carried to the site by Special Operations aviation helicopters from the 617th Special Operations Aviation Detachment (SOAD). The team members fast-roped to the ground, captured the station and removed several critical parts from the station which prevented its operation. After the combat actions were completed in Panama City, the team returned to the station, secured it again, and replaced the critical parts so that US PSYOP forces could begin PSYOP broadcasts. The team departed the station on 26 December.

b. **Pacora River Bridge:** A critical element of the USSOUTHCOM plan to secure the Torrijos/Tocumen international airport was for a Special Forces team from 3rd battalion 7th Special Forces Group (A) to prevent reinforcements from the nearby Fort Cimarron from crossing the Pacora River Bridge towards the airport. A 24 man team landed on the western side of the river just at H-Hour on 20 December for Operation JUST CAUSE. They were taken to the LZ by Special Operations and conventional unit helicopters from the 617th SOAD (2 helicopters) and 228th (one helicopter) Aviation Battalions. As the flight of three helicopters flew near the bridge, team members noted vehicles below them. After exiting the helicopters at the landing zone, the team members moved closer to the bridge. One team member stepped into the middle of the road near the bridge and fired his shoulder-fired light anti-tank weapon into the column of vehicles. The convoy was halted. Meanwhile, the team leader contacted a nearby AC-130 (an Air Force Special Operations attack plane) and vectored it onto the convoy. The mini-gun fire from the AC-130 destroyed several vehicles and forced the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) soldiers to flee the area. Only a few firefights were needed to convince the remainder to surrender or retreat. The minimal use of force was enough to accomplish the mission.⁶⁶

c. **TORRIJOS/TOCUMEN and RIO HATO:** On 20 December, three battalions of the 75th Ranger Regiment (A) dropped onto critical targets in Panama to lead the way for the XVIII Abn Corps. The mission was assigned by US SOUTHCOM. First Battalion dropped into the darkness at the Torrijos/Tocumen Airfield and quickly seized the civilian and military portions of the airport. Despite a tense standoff with Panamanian Defense Force soldiers in the main terminal--the PDF members had taken civilian

⁶⁶The After Action Report (AAR) from the 7th SFG(A) suggests, based on the EPW debrief, that this was only the rear detachment. The main body had already crossed the bridge.

hostages--the Rangers neutralized the threat with a combination of diplomacy and direct action. At RIO HATO, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions dropped into withering anti-aircraft fire from an alerted PDF mechanized unit that was stationed there. Despite the fire, the Rangers seized the critical base and airstrip and put the PDF out of action in under 2 hours.

PROVIDE COMFORT:

After the completion of Operation DESERT STORM, United States Special Forces, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations soldiers from the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 353rd Civil Affairs Command and 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, and the 4th Psychological Operations Group were deployed to Turkey and Northern Iraq on 7 April 1991 for Operation PROVIDE COMFORT. Other units included the 7th Special Operations Support Command, the 112th Special Operations Signal Battalion and the 431st and 432nd Civil Affairs Companies. Their mission was assigned by U. S. European Command (USEUCOM). These units were to prevent the death by starvation and exposure of more than 450,000 Iraqi Kurds who had risen in rebellion against the regime of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. More than 1700 Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel were instrumental in establishing refugee camps, rudimentary sanitary and hospital facilities and distributing food. Operating out of remote and primitive facilities, US Special Operations personnel worked with the local leadership to establish a sense of rapport and trust, which was so critical when dealing with a people as suspicious as the Kurds. The SOF teams prevented mass starvation and death, especially among the thousands of infants. After the situation stabilized, the teams of SOF personnel established waystations with food, medical care and sanitary facilities along the route back into Iraq. The refugees were persuaded to return home along safe routes mapped out by Special Forces teams. PSYOP leaflets with the routes printed on them and warnings about where minefields were located were distributed to the Kurds. The Kurds safely returned to their precarious existence in Northern Iraq. By June 1991, the assigned mission was accomplished and U. S. Army SOF personnel returned to their home stations.

SEA ANGEL:

In May 1991, U.S. Special Forces and Civil Affairs soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) and 351st Civil Affairs Command, respectively, joined U. S. Marine Corps personnel in Bangladesh to assist in humanitarian relief operations. A major cyclone hit the low-lying country on 29 and 30 April killing as many as 100,000 people and stranding millions of others on mud-covered, disease ridden islands in the Ganges and Brahmaputra river deltas. Working through U. S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), SOF personnel joined Task Force PRODUCTIVE EFFORT in Bangladesh on 12 May. SOF personnel conducted