

Veritas



This special issue of *Veritas* is devoted to the evolution, history, and activities of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). The central focus is Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-Afghanistan (OEF-A) through its five campaign phases and the activation of CJSOTF-A (15 March 2002) through deactivation on 31 October 2014. Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL (OFS) succeeded OEF on 1 January 2015. Significant events, personalities, and the Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) roles in reconstituting the National Army (ANA) with SOF and National Police (ANP) in Afghanistan are highlighted in a 'Timeline.' A commemorative poster will be sent to all battalion and above headquarters for display purposes.

While the ARSOF 'footprint' has been reduced, the functional 'players' remain engaged in foreign internal defense (FID) in the unconventional war (UW) that continues in Afghanistan. The Night Stalkers of the 160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment (SOAR) support Special Forces (SF) advising Afghan counter-terrorist elements (KKA), Commandos, and SF units, the 75th Ranger Regiment, and other service and allied SOF elements. The drawdown emphasized the criticality of rotary wing assets—infiltration and exfiltration of helicopter assault elements, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), close air support (CAS), and resupply—to success in a UW campaign. Psychological Operations (PSYOP) teams reinforced their 'value added' role during Village Stability Operations (VSO) which provided stability and lent legitimacy to the central government of Afghanistan. PSYOP tactical radio support created 'The Voice of Gizab' and female Cultural Support Teams (CSTs) proved to be strong 'enablers' to VSO success during UW Phases IV and V of OEF.

We appreciate the continued support of our research for *Veritas* and other publications. A Civil Affairs History Handbook, like the PSYOP one already available, will be distributed in the fall. Thanks. CHB

Cover: Soldiers from ODA 7224 and Afghan Local Police (ALP) conduct a dismounted patrol in Daykundi Province, Afghanistan, in October 2009. These patrols were frequently undertaken to establish presence, build trust and rapport with the people and the ALP, and to gather 'atmospherics' on what was happening in the area.

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CONTENTS

IFC Azimuth

By Charles H. Briscoe

1 CJSOTF-A (Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan)

A Short History 2002-2014

By Michael E. Krivdo

29 There's No Place Like Home

Creating a CJSOTF-A Headquarters in Afghanistan

By Michael E. Krivdo

38 The U.S. Army Cultural Support Team Program

Historical Timeline

By Jared M. Tracy

51 Operation ZUMMARI 241

Braving Fire Ambushes in Afghanistan

By Charles H. Briscoe

64 NiLi Experiment

ODA 7224, Village Stability Operations

By Michael E. Krivdo

85 The Voice of Gizab

Tactical Radio Support to Village Stability Operations

By Jared M. Tracy

95 Medal of Honor

United States Army Special Operations Recipients

By Michael E. Krivdo

CJSOTF-A



Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan
A Short History | 2002-2014

by Michael E. Krivdo



Southeastern Afghanistan, 2003

Weather-wise, 25 August 2003 began as it had in the past few weeks. As the sun cleared the mountains temperatures were in the 90s and would peak above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The air was heavy with fine dust that clung to everything as vehicle-mounted soldiers of Operational Detachment - Alpha (ODA) 2056 (20th Special Forces Group [SFG]) scanned the area with binoculars. They were responding to the night ambush of an Afghanistan Militia Force (AMF) near the village of Day Chopan in southeast Afghanistan. The AMF had captured a 'live' enemy radio and the intense 'chatter' indicated the presence of a large enemy force in the hills north of Day Chopan. ODA 2056, mounted in two Land Rovers, a Toyota HiLux pickup truck, and an unarmored high mobility multi-wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) (military utility vehicle known as a 'Humvee'), was accompanied by two vehicles of AMF soldiers.¹

At 0630 hours outside the small settlement of Da'udza'i, ODA 2056 received small arms fire from some hills two hundred meters on their flank. The SF team took immediate action and assaulted the attackers, who pulled back. Surprisingly, the Americans were re-engaged by

even greater numbers. The Taliban were determined to keep friendly forces out of the area. While engaging the enemy, the team leader radioed details of the contact to higher headquarters. Recalcitrant enemy intentions raised suspicions at the CJSOTF-A. When the Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) requested close air support (CAS), the Joint Operations Center (JOC) directed two U.S. Marine Corps AV-8B 'Harrier II' attack aircraft to support the ODA. They also forwarded the ODA 2056 contact report to Task Force (TF) 180, the headquarters for all American forces in Afghanistan, to add to their targeting cycle. The 'Harriers' made multiple bombing runs, temporarily reducing the enemy's volume of effective fire.²

At the end of the day when ODA 2056 reported 14 enemy dead and many more wounded, the Taliban were stubbornly maintaining contact by replacing their losses. The CJSOTF-A had been getting more contact reports from other units operating in the Day Chopan District. These reports indicated the presence of a very large enemy stronghold. As the traffic volume grew at JTF 180, conventional U.S. Army forces made plans to exploit the SF findings. Special reconnaissance (SR) ODAs 'fixed' a substantial enemy force, prompting JTF 180 to plan, coordinate, and execute a major coalition offensive action that was labeled Operation MOUNTAIN VIPER.³

For the next two weeks SOF elements from CJSOTF-A provided the 'eyes' that pinpointed the Taliban forces and kept them 'fixed' with CAS to enable conventional ground force attacks against the stronghold in Day Chopan. MOUNTAIN VIPER became one of the most successful operations of 2003 in Afghanistan. SOF elements and coalition forces teamed up to inflict heavy casualties on the Taliban, denying them a base of operations in Zabul Province.⁴ Iraq reduced U.S. military interest thereafter.



Map of the Day Chopan valley in northwest Zabul Province, showing the high relief. ODA 2056 conducted a mounted reconnaissance from Day Chopan to Da'udza'i on 25 August 2003, an action that led to Operation MOUNTAIN VIPER.

IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of 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.

“On my orders the United States military has begun strikes against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan”

**George W. Bush,
President of the
United States,
7 October 2001⁵**



This article covers the creation of the CJSOTF-A in early 2002, general operations for 13 years, and its deactivation in 2014. Organized by Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) phases, the key operational events which caused the CJSOTF-A to assume new missions are highlighted and placed in context with operational and strategic decisions redirecting efforts. While how the command and control functioned in CJSOTF-A is central, what happened at levels above and below makes the rationale for role and mission changes more understandable.



OEF (Afghanistan) Phase I (Liberation):

11 September 2001 - 30 November 2001

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush directed military action against the perpetrators.⁶ Having determined that Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda (AQ) terrorist network were responsible and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan were providing them with support and safe haven, the National Command Authority made plans to defeat AQ and topple the Taliban in Afghanistan. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) had a key role in those plans. The Special Operations Command of U.S. Central Command (SOCCENT) formulated and

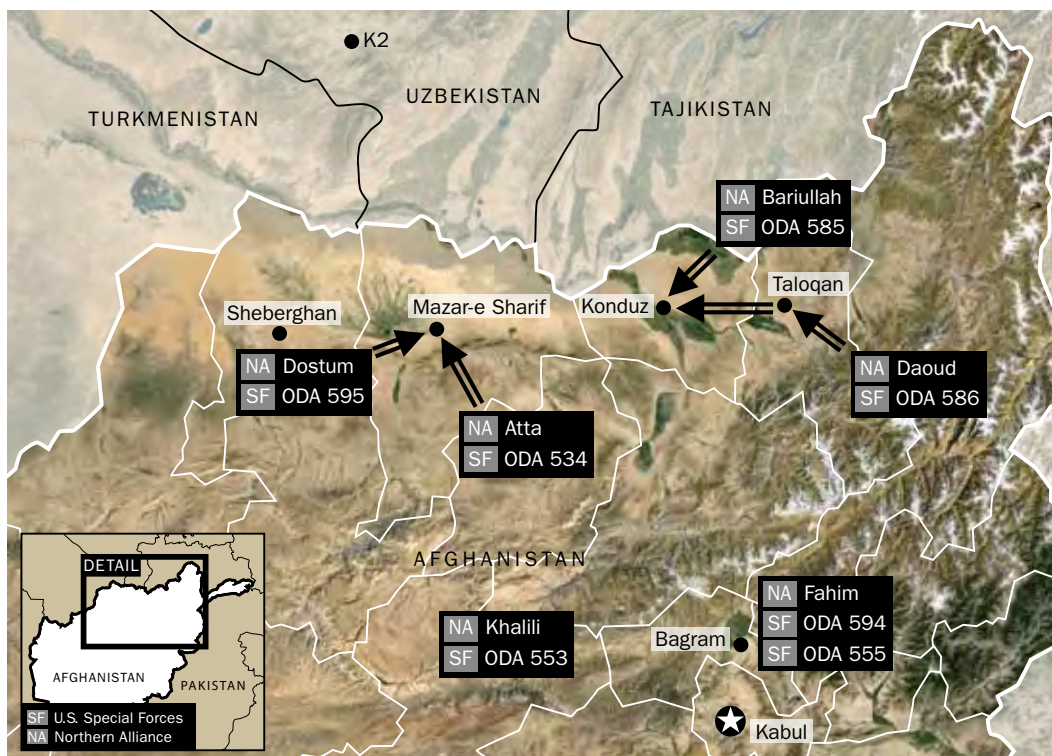
conducted an unconventional warfare (UW) campaign to advise and assist Afghan elements willing to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁷

The SOF UW campaign had two major components, each designed to fit the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. In northern Afghanistan, where indigenous forces (like the Northern Alliance [NA]) had long been fighting the Taliban, SOCCENT initially created JSOTF-North with an Air Force Special Operations unit tasked with Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) operations. Air Force Colonel (COL) Frank J. Kisner, Commander, 16th Operations Group, Hurlburt Field, FL, got to Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Airbase in Uzbekistan on 5 October 2001 just as the advance echelon (ADVON) from 5th SFG arrived. The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) air campaign was scheduled to begin 7 October.⁸ And, it did with air and missile attacks throughout Afghanistan.⁹

However, the intent of the National Command Authority (NCA) had been to put ‘boots on the ground’ in Afghanistan. U.S. Army SOF would spearhead that effort.¹⁰ As SF ODAs were infiltrating into Afghanistan to advise and assist the anti-Taliban groups, Army Rangers made parachute assaults to seize key Taliban leaders. Based on wartime alignment with CENTCOM, the 5th SFG, Fort Campbell, KY, would provide the Special Forces. COL John F. Mulholland Jr. would assume command of JSOTF-North when his SF teams began entering Afghanistan (10 October 2001). Understanding the sensitivity of that relationship, COL Kisner blended the two staffs into one seamless



Aerial view of Karshi Khanabad (K2) Airbase, Uzbekistan, early 2002.



Map showing initial SF ODAs operating with Northern Alliance (NA) forces in Northern Afghanistan, October 2001.

organization while suborning himself to Mulholland as Deputy Commander, JSOTF-North.¹¹

As the situation changed, SOCCENT divided Afghanistan roughly in half; JSOTF-N would conduct Unconventional Warfare (UW) in the northern half. Its mission was to kill or capture AQ leaders and to seize control from the Taliban. They would do this by training, equipping, and advising the Afghan forces willing to fight the Taliban. A major SF task was to control and direct U.S. and allied airpower to support the attacks on Taliban positions. ODAs, augmented by U.S. Air Force Combat Control Teams (CCT) and tactical air control parties (TACP), finalized preparations in isolation. In the darkness of 19-20 October 2001, the first two ODAs were flown into northern Afghanistan. MH-47E 'Chinook' helicopters from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR)

overcame challenges of inclement weather, high mountains, and low visibility to deliver the teams to their specified landing zones. More ODAs were inserted in the next few days, each establishing contact with anti-Taliban leadership throughout the north. Together with coalition air support, they pushed the Taliban from power, forcing withdrawals into the mountainous border regions.¹² On 22 October, General (GEN) Tommy R. Franks, CENTCOM Commander, approved the redesignation of JSOTF-North to Task Force (TF) DAGGER.¹³

Southern Afghanistan had different problems. Populated predominantly with Taliban-supporting Pashtun tribes, the south had few indigenous forces to advise and assist. Thus, the CJSOTF-South, formed on 17 October 2001, focused on Direct Action (DA) and SR missions rather than UW. U.S. Navy Captain Robert S. Harward, the Naval Special



COL John F. Mulholland Jr. (L), Commander, JSOTF-North/Task Force DAGGER, providing GEN Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a brief at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Airbase in Uzbekistan.



For its actions, the personnel of CJSOTF-S/TF K-BAR were awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Presidential Unit Citation.



Personnel assigned to JSOTF-North/TF DAGGER were awarded the Joint Meritorious Unit Award (above left) as well as the Army Presidential Unit Citation (above right) for actions in Afghanistan from 6 October 2001-28 February 2002 (DAGO 9; 18 November 2005, DAGO 32; 29 December 2009).

Warfare Group One (NSWG-1) commander, renamed his headquarters TF K-BAR.¹⁴ CJSOTF-S/TF K-BAR controlled other Naval Special Warfare units (SEALs), a battalion of Army Special Forces, Air Force SOF assets, U.S. Marines, and Coalition SOF from seven nations. The two Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable) (MEU [SOC]) had organic aviation, fire support, and combat service support elements. By late October TF K-BAR had dislodged enemy fighters from the Kandahar area and was liberating the adjacent provinces to free the southern and eastern regions from Taliban control. By taking the fight to the leaders, they rapidly reduced the ability of the Taliban and AQ to dominate the populace.¹⁵



OEF (A) Phase II (Consolidation I):

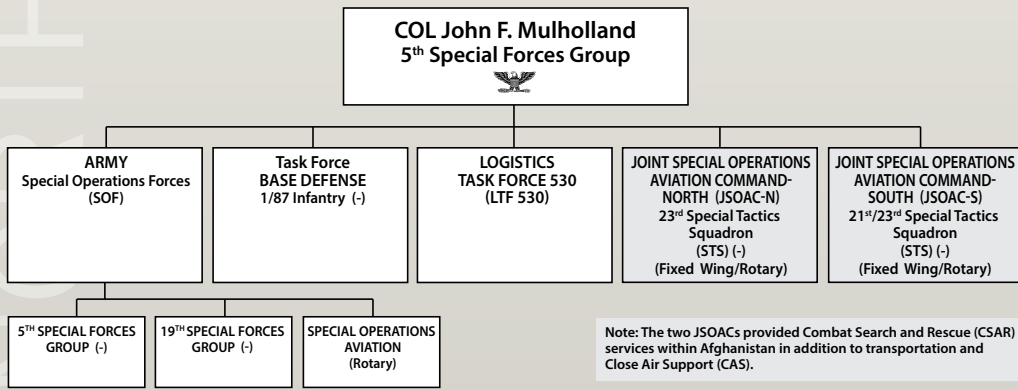
1 December 2001 - 30 September 2006

By December 2001, the collective efforts of JSOTF-North and CJSOTF-South had forced the Taliban from power and most of Afghanistan was controlled by allied indigenous forces. SOF had been the supported force for the capture of Kabul on 13 November and Kandahar on 7 December. That status was reversed to supporting when conventional forces in Afghanistan assumed the long-term missions of stabilization and elimination of the bypassed strongholds of Taliban and AQ.¹⁶

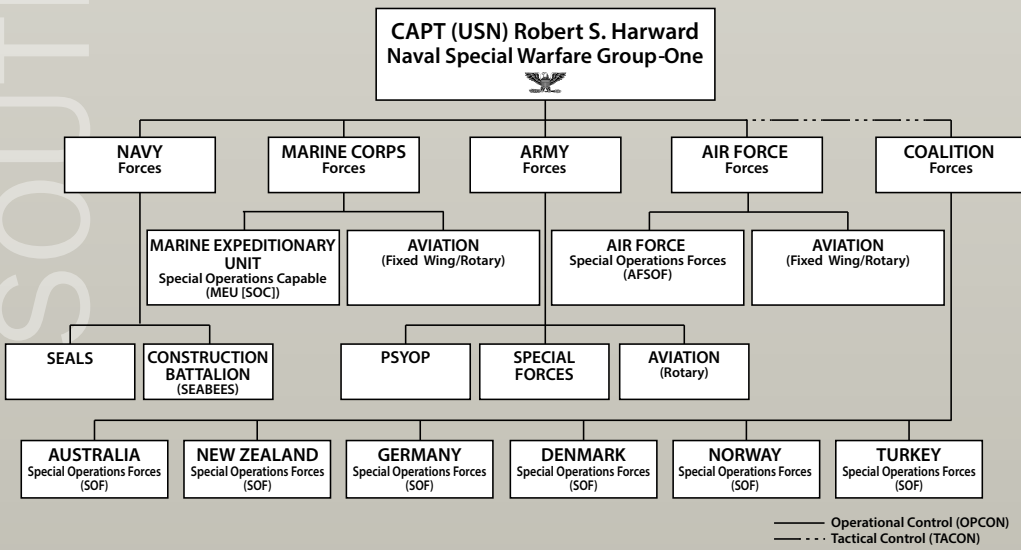
As storm clouds continued to grow over Iraq, SOCCENT closed out CJSOTF-North (TF DAGGER) on 15 March 2002 and expanded the CJSOTF-South (TF K-BAR) mission to encompass all Afghanistan. The new CJSOTF-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) consolidated the staffs and transferred all SOF elements under one command responsible for conducting UW missions country-wide.¹⁷ With the 5th SFG rotating back to the States for new contingencies, COL Mark V. Phelan, 3rd SFG, assumed command of CJSOTF-A at Bagram Airbase on 30 March. Commensurately, SOCCENT authorized CJSOTF-A additional staffing and granted expanded authorities--operational control (OPCON) of all joint SOF and tactical control (TACON) of assigned coalition SOF elements.¹⁸

During the transition period, CJSOTF-A inherited a commitment to Operation ANACONDA, the largest military operation in the war to date. Several SF ODAs and Navy SEAL platoons had been sent to perform strategic reconnaissance and to 'fix' the reported AQ and Taliban forces concentrating in the steep mountainous caverns in the Shahi-Kot region of eastern Afghanistan. Other SOF units had been brought in to block and contain the enemy forces with anti-Taliban forces (ATF) as they were located.¹⁹ The ATF had been promised considerable air support. To exploit SOF successes, infantry battalions from the U.S. 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne Divisions were helicoptered into assault positions while the SOF and ATF blocked the exits from the Shahi-Kot valley. Instead of breaking contact and escaping into Pakistan, the Taliban and AQ forces fought from strong defenses under well-directed protective fire of mortars and artillery. Consequently, U.S. conventional forces, decisively engaged, relied heavily on airpower. The stalemated fighting lasted until 8 March 2002 when CENTCOM proclaimed ANACONDA a success. U.S. casualties were light: eight killed in action (KIA) and

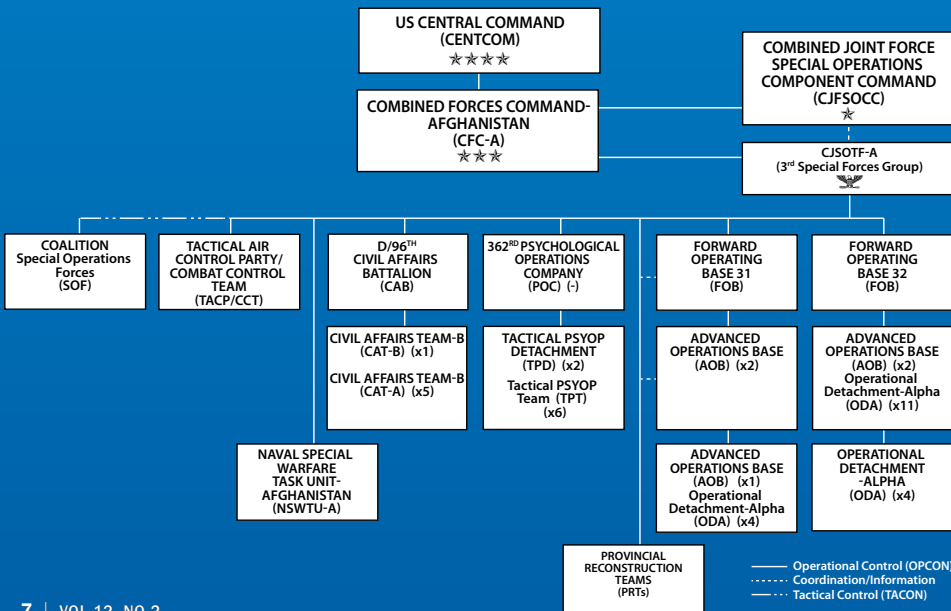
Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSOTF-N)/Task Force DAGGER



Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-South (CJSOTF-S)/Task Force K-BAR



Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A)



TWO BECOME
ONE

TF DAGGER & TF K-BAR,
Before and After

Initially, USCENTCOM divided responsibility for Afghanistan between two separate and distinct SOF structures: JSOTF-North/TF DAGGER and CJSOTF-South/TF K-BAR. On 15 March 2002 SOCCENT combined the SOF assets of both organizations into a new CJSOTF-Afghanistan structure, initially formed around CJSOTF-S. On 30 March 2002, COL Mark V. Phelan (3rd SFG commander) assumed command of CJSOTF-A at Bagram Airbase. The 3rd SFG played a major role in CJSOTF-A for the next twelve years, until it was officially deactivated on 31 October 2014.

Map showing SF ODAs operating with anti-Taliban Militia (ATM) forces in Southern Afghanistan, October - December 2001.



The old Russian control tower as it appeared when the first U.S. forces arrived at Bagram Airbase in late 2001. The tower, a familiar landmark to deployed service members and civilians who worked there, was built on Bagram Airbase in 1976 during the Soviet Union's period of economic collaboration with Afghanistan.



46 wounded. The Taliban and AQ casualty figures, difficult to confirm, were much higher.²⁰ Official estimates said “Up to several hundred enemy fighters were killed. The rest fled the Shahi-Kot Valley, leaving it in the control of U.S. and allied forces.”²¹ Impact on the new CJSOTF-A headquarters was minimal because much of the coordination to support the SOF in the fight had already been arranged before ANACONDA. Still ‘lightly-manned,’ the CJSOTF-A had its hands full with communications and sustainment requirements.

The second task involved constructing a secure base in-country. The old Soviet airbase outside of Bagram was much closer to the fight than K2 Airbase in Uzbekistan. Bagram was quickly assessed as being safe enough to house its JSOTF headquarters and personnel without excessive risk. On 30 November 2001, GEN Franks decided that Bagram

Airbase would be the Forward Operating Base (FOB) for all combat and humanitarian operations in Afghanistan. It posed its own challenges. Just fifty-five kilometers north of Kabul, the Taliban and Northern Alliance had fought over Bagram for more than a decade. As one would expect of a constant battleground, the infrastructure was in shambles and few amenities remained. Nonetheless, American and coalition units began offloading tons of supplies and materials. An operational command and control facility was key to transferring control from K2 to Bagram. The top engineer priority was to rehabilitate the runway for cargo jet aircraft operations. Facilities were a close second. The CJSOTF-A headquarters staff competed with advance parties of the several units assigned to establish ‘homes’ on Bagram Airbase (see article on Camp Abel).²²

“When we were here before, we began the process of building the ANA. Coming back this time, three brigades had been completed and it allowed us to start maneuvering and utilizing the ANA battalions on the battlefield. And that has had a dramatic positive impact.”

**COL Joseph D. Celeski,
two-time Commander of
CJSOTF-A, 2003³⁰**



COL Joseph D. 'Joe' Celeski, CJSOTF-A and 3rd SFG commander, in Afghanistan. COL Celeski served twice as the commander of CJSOTF-A in its formative days, adding a degree of stability and cohesion to that organization during a particularly difficult period of its history.

A third challenge for the combined/joint headquarters staff was to effect a change of command less than two months after formation and in the midst of combat operations. When COL Phelan assumed command of CJSOTF-A on 30 March 2002, he was already slated for reassignment after two years of command. COL Joseph D. 'Joe' Celeski, his successor, arrived in Bagram in mid-May and became familiar with the situation. On 28 May, COL Celeski took command of the 3rd SFG and CJSOTF-A during a simple ceremony outside the motor pool. A combat veteran of DESERT STORM with considerable experience in Somalia, COL Celeski focused on his immediate critical key tasks.²³ Combat operations continued as planned, but the expansion of GWOT to include Iraq had distinct impacts.

With the eviction of the Taliban from power and all major cities and towns now under coalition control, America's attention shifted to future combat in Iraq. The Afghanistan war slipped into shadow because Iraq's large conventional military forces mandated a major strategic shift to accommodate that fight--manpower, funding, and support priorities were significantly reduced. GEN Tommy L. Franks shifted responsibility for all combat operations in Afghanistan to a corps-level Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)-180 headquarters formed on 1 June 2002 using the XVIII Airborne Corps staff.²⁴ The CJSOTF-A became a supporting command under the Tactical Control (TACON) of Lieutenant General (LTG) Dan K. McNeill and CJTF-180. This arrangement was in effect until December 2005. The

SOF elements of CJTF-180 produced a prodigious amount of intelligence in support of conventional force operations.²⁵ As that relationship matured during the formation of an Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) in June 2002, SOF assumed a larger Foreign Internal Defense (FID) role.

In addition to finding (Special Reconnaissance), fixing, and engaging the enemy, SOF was advising and assisting the Afghan militias in combat operations against the Taliban and al Qaeda. But, more significantly, the CJSOTF-A was tasked to train a new Afghan National Army (ANA). This would be done at a new training camp near Kabul (Kabul Military Training Center). Defense Secretary Rumsfeld authorized another SF battalion for that mission, raising the SF battalions to three. CJSOTF-A began supervising the formation, training, and equipping of new ANA units.²⁷

The 1st Battalion, 3rd SFG created a specially-tailored Program of Instruction (POI) approved by the CJSOTF-A headquarters. SF instructors were to produce a fully-equipped, trained to standard, Afghan National Army (ANA) battalion every ten weeks. During recruit training, the SF cadre also selected natural Afghan leaders to serve as instructors in successive classes. This was done purposefully to commit the Afghan military to train-to-standard. These progressive transfers of responsibility went smoothly. At the first ANA battalion graduation ceremony, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Kevin M. McDonnell (1/3 SFG battalion commander and ANA Training Program Manager [PM]) said, "We're here to help the Afghans ensure

“I would get reports from my subordinate headquarters, which was CJTF-180, then CJTF-76, and they got reports from CJSOTF [Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force], and they got reports from all their various component piece parts out there.”

**LTG David W. Barno,
Commander, Combined
Forces Command -
Afghanistan,
2003-2005²⁶**

that the people that attacked us . . . do not come back and terrorize the civilians of Afghanistan.”²⁸ After watching the first three battalions in action, COL ‘Joe’ Celeski, CJSOTF-A commander, said that their combat proficiency made them valuable assets. It “allowed us to start maneuvering and utilizing ANA units on the battlefield. And that has had a dramatic positive impact” in the Afghan conflict.²⁹

Until October 2003, CJSOTF-A had three SF battalions in-country; one in the north operating from K2, a second in Kandahar to cover the large swath of border region in the south and east; and a third dedicated to training the Afghan National Army (ANA) in Kabul. Coalition SOF elements (see sidebar) and a Navy SEAL platoon rotated the SR and DA missions throughout Afghanistan. In later years the SEAL platoons grew to SEAL team-size (roughly SF battalion equivalent) and U.S. Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) battalions and companies were added to rotations. The SEAL Team and Marine Special Operations Battalions (MSOBs) also replaced SF battalion Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) for a number of cycles. Initially, the assigned Civil Affairs (CA) battalion

and tactical Psychological Operations (PSYOP) company ‘pushed’ detachments to CJSOTF-A subordinate SOTFs, Advanced Operating Bases (AOBs), and individual ODAs when needed. In succeeding rotations, the CA commitment to CJSOTF-A shrank to company size because of Iraq.³¹

The early SF rotations in Afghanistan were predominantly borne by the 3rd and 7th SFG headquarters, augmented by individuals and elements from other active component SF Groups and the two Army National Guard (ANG) SF Groups (19th and 20th SFGs). The 20th SFG also covered the CJSOTF-A command element commitment for one six-month period. Eventually, every active SF battalion and most ANG SF battalions served at least one deployment with many returning several times. The 3rd and 7th SFG staffs habitually rotated as the nucleus of the CJSOTF-A headquarters. Force planners at USSOCOM and USASOC soon developed a long-term rotation plan centered on 3rd SFG as the executive agent for CJSOTF-A with 7th SFG providing some relief from that commitment. Tour lengths became standardized to better manage troop rotations. USSOCOM coordinated the assignment of other service SOF components into the

Trainees from the 1st Battalion, Afghanistan National Army (ANA), graduate at the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC) in Kabul, Afghanistan. *DoD Photo.*



COALITION SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, several nations contributed Special Operations Forces (SOF) to fight alongside U.S. SOF in Afghanistan. The first seven nations to contribute such forces were Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, and Turkey. Most were national Counter Terrorism (CT) forces that specialized in Direct Action (DA) missions. Because of that, the coalition SOF were initially assigned to Task Force K-BAR (CJSOTF-South), and transferred in May 2002 when CJSOTF-A was formed.¹

Serving in elements that ranged from teams to companies, these were extremely capable in their own right. Elements often performed Special Reconnaissance (SR) or DA missions, or served as ready reaction forces for emergency backup. The various contingents rotated in and out of theater according to agreements and commitments made by their national government. The coalition SOF units filled important gaps in the CJSOTF-A structure and reinforced the international commitment for combat action in Afghanistan.²

The Original Coalition SOF Forces Assigned to CJSOTF-A

There are a number of terms that describe relationships between U.S. Forces and military units from other nations. To help clarify those relationships, we have provided definitions for some of the more commonly used terms. These definitions are found in Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.

Alliance

The relationship that results from a formal agreement between two or more nations for broad, long-term objectives that further the common interests of the members. See also coalition; multinational.

Coalition

An arrangement between two or more nations for common action. See also alliance; multinational.

Combined

A term identifying two or more forces or agencies of two or more allies operating together.

Multinational

Between two or more forces or agencies of two or more nations or coalition partners. See also alliance; coalition.

NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (Can be a sub-set of coalition, allied, or multinational forces)



The Afghanistan war is “by design and necessity, an economy-of-force operation. There is no getting around that. Our main focus, militarily, in the region and in the world right now is rightly and firmly in Iraq.”³⁴

**Admiral Michael G. Mullen,
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff**

deployment plan. The pattern of replacing elements after six-month intervals became the *modus operandi* which allowed the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC) and USSOCOM to draw from a larger population base.³²

By late 2003, Afghanistan had clearly become an economy of force effort. The primary focus of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) was Iraq. Troop levels in 2007 reinforced that status; 166,000 troops in Iraq versus 25,000 in Afghanistan, almost seven times larger. Conventional and SOF manning in Afghanistan dropped to minimal levels by mid-2003.³³ A shift in SOF operational focus caused other changes in CJSOTF-A missions.

The ANA training mission disappeared in mid-2003 for American SOF when the CJTF-180 commander, LTG Lloyd J. Austin, transferred that responsibility to 10th Mountain Division.³⁵ This would be done by a newly-formed TF PHOENIX (June 2003). That prompted a mission analysis by CJSOTF-A resulting in SOF forces continuing to train Afghan militia and targeting key AQ and Taliban leaders for capture or elimination. SF teams were reduced.³⁶ And, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) assumed responsibility for northern Afghanistan, the CJSOTF-A repositioned its SOF teams to cover the Pakistan border. Hence, by September 2003, there were only two SF battalions (minus) at Bagram and Kandahar. These two American SF FOBs, augmented by Naval Special Warfare elements and coalition SOF, focused on DA and SR missions.³⁷

A rise in politically motivated violence and criminal activities led to more conventional forces being committed to Afghanistan to stabilize the situation. In April 2004, the newly-organized Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) led by Major General (MG) David W. Barno, divided the area of operations (AO) into Regional Command (RC) South and RC East for Operation TICONDEROGA. CJSOTF-A was to concentrate forces on the Pakistan border while conventional forces conducted stability and support operations (SASO) in the interior. Civil Affairs (CA) teams were allocated to help non-SOF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) country-wide.³⁸

Spreading its reduced assets to cover more than 750 miles of rugged mountains that dominated the Pakistan-Afghanistan

border presented major challenges: First, there were insufficient Afghan forces partnered with SOF to properly do the border security mission; Second, by concentrating SOF along the border, its presence was removed from large portions of the interior and their well-cultivated sources of intelligence on enemy activities and movement went untended; Third, SOF support in Iraq had reduced sustainment in Afghanistan to a trickle. Twenty-five SF ODAs distantly arrayed along the long border region were extremely difficult for CJSOTF-A to resupply, let alone interdict Taliban and AQ fighters and supplies coming into Afghanistan nightly through remote mountain passes and trails.³⁹ Nonetheless, some progress was made.

In December 2004, just before Afghan national elections, a few CJSOTF-A elements were partnered with ANA *kandaks* (battalions) to bolster their fighting spirit in combat. This proved beneficial to both in April 2005 when a *kandak* in RC South successfully attacked a long-established AQ sanctuary (Operation NAM DONG).⁴¹ The ANA accomplishments got the attention of American and Afghan military leaders. The significant part played by SF led to major changes in the CJSOTF-A mission set.



SF soldiers from SOTF-South and ANA soldiers prepare at Kandahar in 2009 for a combined night combat mission.

“Special Operations Forces had killed or captured hundreds of terrorists and insurgents using precisely targeted offensive operations.”

**GEN Bryan D. ‘Doug’ Brown,
Commander, USSOCOM, 2005 ⁴⁰**

COMMANDERS AND SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISORS

CJSOTF-A

COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE-AFGHANISTAN

UNIT	DATES	COMMANDER	SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR
NSWG-1	03/14/02 - 03/30/02	CAPT (USN) Robert S. Harward	BMCM (SEAL) Ronald D. Cooper
3 rd SFG	03/30/02 - 05/28/02	COL Mark V. Phelan	CSM Christopher W. Abel
3 rd SFG	05/28/02 - 09/18/02	COL Joseph D. Celeski	CSM Francis McFadden
20 th SFG	09/18/02 - 03/29/03	COL James G. Champion	CSM Albert Allen
3 rd SFG	03/29/03 - 09/21/03	COL Joseph D. Celeski	CSM Francis McFadden
3 rd SFG	09/21/03 - 07/01/04	COL Walter M. Herd	CSM Thomas A. Reesman / CSM George A. Bequer
3 rd SFG	07/01/04 - 12/01/04	COL Patrick M. Higgins	CSM Francis McFadden
7 th SFG	12/01/04 - 07/01/05	COL Jeffrey D. Waddell	CSM Keith W. Kocher
3 rd SFG	07/01/05 - 02/01/06	COL Patrick M. Higgins	CSM Francis McFadden / CSM David J. LaFountain
7 th SFG	02/01/06 - 09/01/06	COL Edward M. Reeder Jr.	CSM Christopher R. Zets
3 rd SFG	09/01/06 - 04/01/07	COL Christopher K. Haas	CSM David J. LaFountain
7 th SFG	04/01/07 - 11/01/07	COL Edward M. Reeder Jr.	CSM Christopher R. Zets
3 rd SFG	11/01/07 - 05/29/08	COL Christopher K. Haas	CSM Terry L. Peters
7 th SFG	05/29/08 - 01/29/09	COL Sean P. Mulholland	CSM George A. Bequer
3 rd SFG	01/29/09 - 07/29/09	COL Gus Benton II	CSM Jeffrey W. Wright
7 th SFG	07/29/09 - 01/30/10	COL James E. Kraft	CSM George A. Bequer
3 rd SFG	01/30/10 - 04/01/10	COL Gus Benton II	CSM Jeffrey W. Wright
3 rd SFG	04/01/10 - 05/16/11	COL Donald C. Bolduc	CSM Jeffrey W. Wright / CSM Richard P. Meffert
3 rd SFG	05/16/11 - 04/02/12	COL Mark C. Schwartz	CSM Richard P. Meffert
7 th SFG	04/02/12 - 03/30/13	COL Antonio M. Fletcher	CSM Brian D. Edwards
3 rd SFG	03/30/13 - 11/30/13	COL Patrick B. Roberson	CSM Brian C. Rarey
7 th SFG	11/30/13 - 07/31/14	COL Christopher N. Riga	CSM Amil Alvarez
3 rd SFG	07/31/14 - 10/31/14	COL Robert L. Wilson	CSM Brian C. Rarey

CJSOTF-A TIMELINE

2001

11 September

Terrorists attack targets in the United States. **Phase I of Afghanistan Campaign (Liberation of Afghanistan) begins.**

14 September

President Bush authorizes call-up of 35,000 Reserves. Congress passes Joint Resolution 23, "Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists."

20 September

ARSOF elements deployed to U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). Initially organized into task forces assigned to the Special Operations Command, Central Command (SOCCENT). **SOCCENT activates the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) in Qatar.**

15 October

Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSOTF-N) formed from 5th SFG (A), 160th SOAR; USAF 16th SOW; COL John F. Mulholland Jr. commanding. On 23 October JSOTF-N is also designated as Task Force DAGGER, and tasked to conduct Unconventional Warfare (UW) operations in Northern Afghanistan.

17 October

CFSOCC-A activates Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-South (CJSOTF-S) from Task Force K-BAR, a unit formed from Naval Special Warfare Group One (NSWG-1) (commanded by Navy Captain Robert S. Harward); ARSOF; and Coalition SOF. CJSOTF-S will deploy to Kandahar in November 2001 to conduct combat operations in that region and along the border with Pakistan.

19 October

Special Forces (SF) Operational Detachment - Alpha (ODA) 555 and ODA 595 infiltrate into Northern Afghanistan and establish contact with Northern Alliance forces. SOF assists indigenous forces in fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda.

14 November

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378 invites member nations to provide peacekeeping troops and assist in governing Afghanistan.

30 November

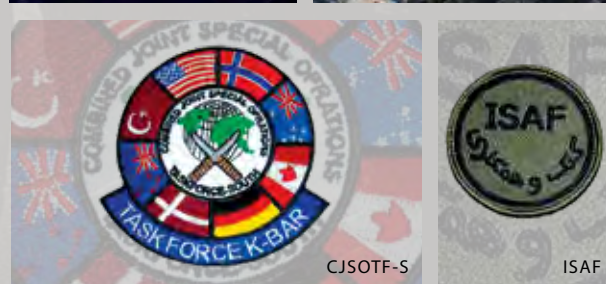
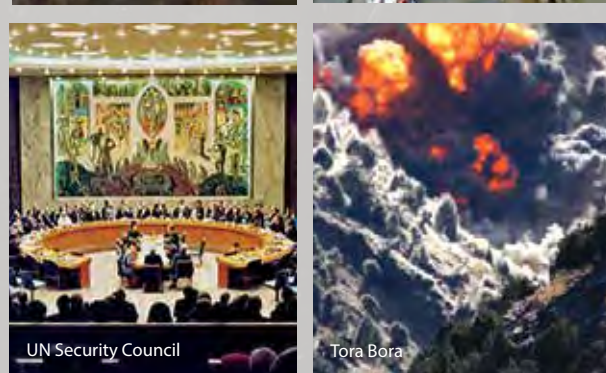
Conflict in Afghanistan shifts from SOF-led effort to conventional fight. **Phase II of Afghanistan Campaign and Phase I of Consolidation begin.**

6 December

The Battle for Tora Bora begins in the White Mountains of Eastern Afghanistan. The attempt to kill or capture Osama bin Laden, leader of al Qaeda, ends on 17 December with Coalition Forces in control of the area. The al Qaeda leader escaped.

20 December

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 authorizes the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the Afghan Interim Authority maintain security in Kabul and surrounding areas. ISAF later expands to cover all of Afghanistan.



2002

January

USSOCOM tasks 3rd SFG (A) to provide troops and focus on the Afghanistan region.

2 March

Operation ANACONDA, to destroy remaining Taliban fighters in the Shahi-Kot Valley in Paktia Province, commences. It ends on 18 March after inflicting heavy casualties on the Taliban.

15 March

Afghanistan SOF reorganization occurs. **CJSOTF-A** formed from CJSOTF-S (TF K-BAR) and JSOTF-N (TF DAGGER). CJSOTF-A is given Operational Control (OPCON) of all Joint SOF and Tactical Control (TACON) of Coalition SOF in Afghanistan. **CFSOCC-A inactivated.**

30 March

3rd SFG (A) commander COL Mark V. Phelan assumes command of CJSOTF-A at Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan.

28 May

COL Joseph D. Celeski takes command of 3rd SFG (A) and CJSOTF-A. This begins a rotational pattern in transferring CJSOTF-A responsibilities.

13 June

Loya Jirga appoints Hamid Karzai as Interim President.

18 September

20th SFG (A) assumes CJSOTF-A mission for six months.

2003

20 March

U.S. begins the invasion of Iraq. Operation Iraqi Freedom becomes the main effort in the Global War on Terror; units in Afghanistan must compete for resources, support, and funding.

4 June

Task Force PHOENIX activated, assumes former CJSOTF-A mission as primary trainer of the Afghan National Army.

11 August

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumes responsibility for ISAF in and around Kabul.

7 November

CJSOTF-A supports the 10th Mountain Division in Operation MOUNTAIN RESOLVE. For about a month, CJSOTF-A elements serve as the 'anvil' in a conventional force-led 'hammer and anvil' operation.

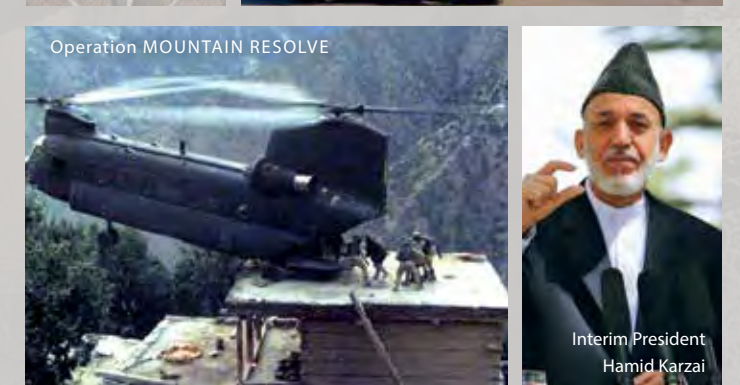
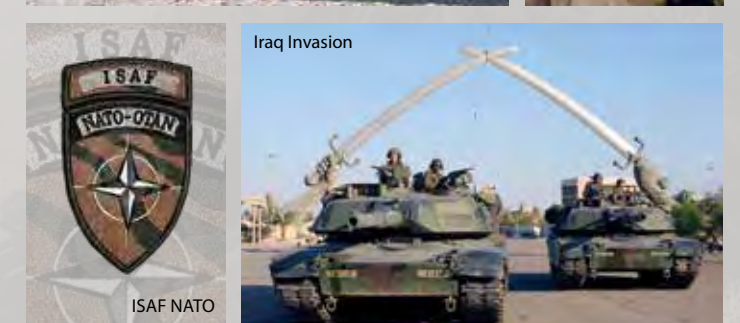
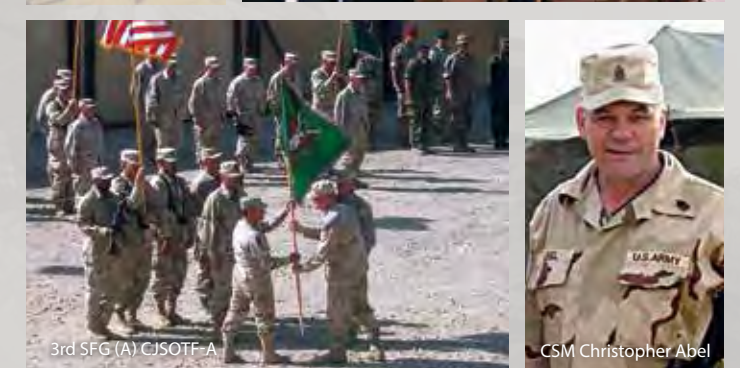
14 December

Constitutional Loya Jirga begins Afghanistan self-rule.

2004

9 October

Afghanistan holds first democratic elections. Hamid Karzai becomes first democratically elected President of Afghanistan.



2006

30 September

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)/ISAF assumes responsibility for security over all of Afghanistan. **Phase III of Afghanistan Campaign and Phase II of Consolidation begin.**

2007

10 January

U.S. announces plans for a troop surge in Iraq.

24 July

First ANA Commando *Kandak* graduates at Camp Morehead.

2008

17 November

Signing of U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) sets the date for all U.S. Forces to be out of Iraq: 31 December 2011.

2009

31 January

CFSOCC-A re-established in Afghanistan under the command of BG Edward M. Reeder Jr. Coalition Force numbers increased in Afghanistan as troop numbers in Iraq decreased. The increase in ISAF headquarters levels result in a flag rank command to conduct SOF planning and coordination. CJSOTF-A is OPCON to CFSOCC-A.

15 June

GEN Stanley A. McChrystal assumes command of ISAF. Develops and implements a strategy for population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN).

July

CFSOCC-A and CJSOTF-A establish the first Community Defense Initiative (CDI) site at Nili village, Daykundi Province (SF ODA 7224). CDI later becomes Local Defense Initiative (LDI), and by 2010 is commonly called *Village Stability Operations (VSO)*.

21 August

USSOCOM assigns 3rd Special Forces Group primary responsibility for Afghanistan region. It formalized SF assignment of regions in the Middle East. The directive also stabilized tour lengths. 7th Group to assist in that responsibility.

30 November

President Barack Obama authorizes an increase of 30,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan, raising the total to 100,000.

Phase IV of Afghanistan Campaign (Consolidation III) begins 1 December 2009.

2010

1 April

A realignment is made where CFSOCC-A becomes OPCON to ISAF. CJSOTF-A is still commanded by CFSOCC-A, but its subordinate SOTFs are placed in direct support of the conventional force Regional Commands (RCs). CJSOTF-A continues to conduct Village Stability Operations (VSO) and FID as primary missions.

13 May

First ANA Special Forces Qualification Course graduates at Camp Morehead.

4 July

GEN David H. Petraeus assumes command of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan.



UNITED NATIONS



ANA Commando SSI



GEN Stanley A. McChrystal



SOFA Signed



VSO Site, Nili, ODA 7224



MG Edward M. Reeder Jr.



GEN David H. Petraeus



3rd SFG



ANA SF SSI



ANA Commando Graduate

20 November

NATO nations agree to the Lisbon Summit to transfer security responsibilities to Afghanistan and withdraw NATO combat forces by the end of 2014.

2011

2 May

Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR, the mission to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, is successful. Bin Laden killed in raid on his house in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

22 June

President Barack Obama announces plans for a drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and a plan to transfer all security responsibilities to Afghanistan forces by the end of 2014.

30 June

Phase V of Afghanistan Campaign (Transition I) begins 1 July 2011.

18 December

Last U.S. forces depart Iraq. Attention and priorities shift back to Afghanistan.

2012

1 July

CFSOCC-A transitions to NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A)/Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan (SOJTF-A), a two-star headquarters (MG Raymond A. 'Tony' Thomas III) with command authority over all Allied SOF in Afghanistan.

2013

18 June

Afghanistan National Army (ANA) assumes responsibility from NATO forces for all military and security operations.

2014

29 September

New Afghanistan government: Dr. Ashraf Ghani elected as Afghanistan President; Dr. Abdullah Abdullah becomes Chief Executive Officer.

30 September

New Afghanistan government signs Bilateral Security Agreement and SOFA.

31 October

CJSOTF-A deactivated at Camp Vance, Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan.

1 November

Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (SOTF-A) assumes command of all U.S. SOF assigned to advise-assist missions in the country. It remains OPCON to SOJTF-A.

31 December

United States ends all direct combat operations in Afghanistan.

Phase V of Afghanistan Campaign (and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM) ends.

2015

1 January

Transition II (and Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL) begins.



Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR



US Drawdown in Afghanistan



SOJTF-A/
NSOCC-A SSI



ANA



Dr. Ashraf Ghani



Camp Vance



Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL

COMMANDERS AND SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISORS

CFSOCC-A

COMBINED FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMPONENT COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN

DATES

01/31/09-03/10/10
03/10/10 - 07/01/11
07/01/11 - 07/01/12

COMMANDER

BG Edward M. Reeder Jr.
BG Austin S. Miller
BG Christopher K. Haas

SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR

CSM Kurt D. Lugo
CSM Ledford 'JR' Stigall
CSM David R. Gibbs/CSM Jeffery D. Stigall

NSOCC-A / SOJTF-A

NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMPONENT COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN/
SPECIAL OPERATIONS JOINT TASK FORCE-AFGHANISTAN

DATES

07/01/12 - 06/13
06/13 - 07/01/14
07/01/14 - 06/01/15
06/01/15 - Present

COMMANDER

MG Raymond A. 'Tony' Thomas
MG Austin S. Miller
MG Edward M. Reeder Jr.
MG Sean P. Swindell

SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR

CSM Jeffrey W. Wright
CSM Ledford 'JR' Stigall
CSM Channing C. Bell
CSM James D. Napolett

(L to R) Army COL Donald C. Bolduc, CJSOTF-A Commander and CJSOTF-A Army CSM Jeffrey W. Wright, unveil a commemorative wooden plaque for placement in the CJSOTF-A Hall of Heroes. The men and women of the unit hosted a Memorial Day 'Honor and Remembrance' Ceremony at Camp Vance, Bagram Airbase, 31 May 2010.



“...when several of the [enemy] leaders tried to return to the villages after Operation NAM DONG, they were run out of town by the people they had suppressed for years.”⁴²

Soldiers from the 3rd Company, 6th Afghan Commando *Kandak* conduct a room clearing exercise in the 'tire house' at Camp Morehead, Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2011. The training is supervised by SF soldiers assigned to CJSOTF-A. DoD photo.



Throughout Phase II of OEF-A (May 2002 – September 2006), CJSOTF-A forces focused on DA and SR to provide intelligence to support a conventional force offense. But their efforts were clearly minor compared to the major initiatives going on in Iraq. By mid-2006, coalition partners were voicing concerns that the security situation in Afghanistan was getting worse. With Iraq as the top American priority, political and military leaders faced a dilemma—how to improve conditions in Afghanistan sufficiently to allow a reduction of military forces. The conundrum prompted SOCCENT to come up with resourceful solutions for the next phase of the long campaign. These initiatives modified SOF missions in Afghanistan.



OEF (A) Phase III (Consolidation II):

1 October 2006 - 30 November 2009

In the winter of 2006, Brigadier General (BG) Francis H. 'Frank' Kearney, the SOCCENT commander, directed COL Edward M. Reeder Jr., the 7th SFG/CJSOTF-A commander, to investigate the possibility of creating Special Forces-type units within the ANA. After a thorough analysis COL Reeder concluded that the Afghan military “did not have the core capability to develop, task-organize, equip, train and sustain” SF units. However, Reeder felt that light-infantry commando forces like the U.S. Army Rangers could be organized and trained.⁴³ The commando battalions could spearhead ANA offensive operations. BG Kearney approved a 'pilot' program to prove the concept.

Based on his assessment, COL Reeder set out to “build a well-organized, well-trained, and well-led infantry fighting force.”⁴⁴ One hundred ANA soldiers were selected and sent to Jordan to be trained in small unit leadership skills by 5th SFG soldiers. When they returned home the graduates became the instructors for a new Commando Training Course set up at the Camp Morehead near Kabul. The ANA instructors, working closely with COL Reeder's SF advisor teams, then selected, organized and trained volunteers from the 201st Corps to become the first ANA Commando *Kandak* (battalion). Over three months the SF teams provided the trainees with combat marksmanship, small-unit tactics, reconnaissance skills, and land navigation. Organized as squads and platoons for collective training, the future commandos practiced small raids and direct action missions.⁴⁵

The 1st Commando *Kandak* graduated on 24 July 2007. Its 'baptism of fire' operation came in September in Nangarhar Province near the Pakistan border. They captured a high value target (HVT), the Taliban bomb-maker Haji Shir Khan, 80 kilograms (176.5 pounds) of opium, and uncovered two large weapon caches. This success established the reputation of the Commandos and demonstrated their 'value added' to the ANA. Subsequent Commando *kandaks* increased their *elan*. Today, nine Commando *kandaks* are stationed throughout Afghanistan to 'spearhead' ANA combat operations. CJSOTF-A teams provided a true 'force multiplier' to the Afghan military and became partnered with the Commandos.⁴⁶

2007 was also the year that the CJSOTF-A started using the proper doctrinal term Special Operations Task Forces (SOTF) to denote its subordinate battalion-size headquarters



Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, left foreground, receives a tour of the Camp Morehead Afghan Commando Training Camp by Afghan National Army (ANA) LTC M. Farid Ahmadi in Kabul, Afghanistan, June 4, 2007. DoD photo



ANA Commando SSI

The “nine Commando kandaks. . . remain the most effective fighting force in the Afghan Army.”

| BG Edward M. Reeder Jr.⁴⁷

elements. SOTF replaced the previously used Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), a term that conventional forces adopted for specific locations and bases. SF battalion-sized SOTFs were more than support organizations; they directed and supported subordinate special operations elements in the field (AOBs and ODAs), making SOTF the proper term. In time, the SOTFs became aligned with the conventional Regional Commands (RCs) that controlled sections of Afghanistan.⁴⁸

U.S. Army SOF brigadier generals were integrated into the special operations command structure in 2009 as the situation stabilized in Iraq. After six years of benign neglect, the Taliban and AQ had come out of hiding to pose a major threat to American, coalition, and ANA forces. With the creation of the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command - Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) on 31 January 2009, an Army SOF general officer became part of ISAF planning and insulated CJSOTF-A from the ‘staff overmatch’ caused by the number of senior commands that had sprung up in Afghanistan as the war progressed.

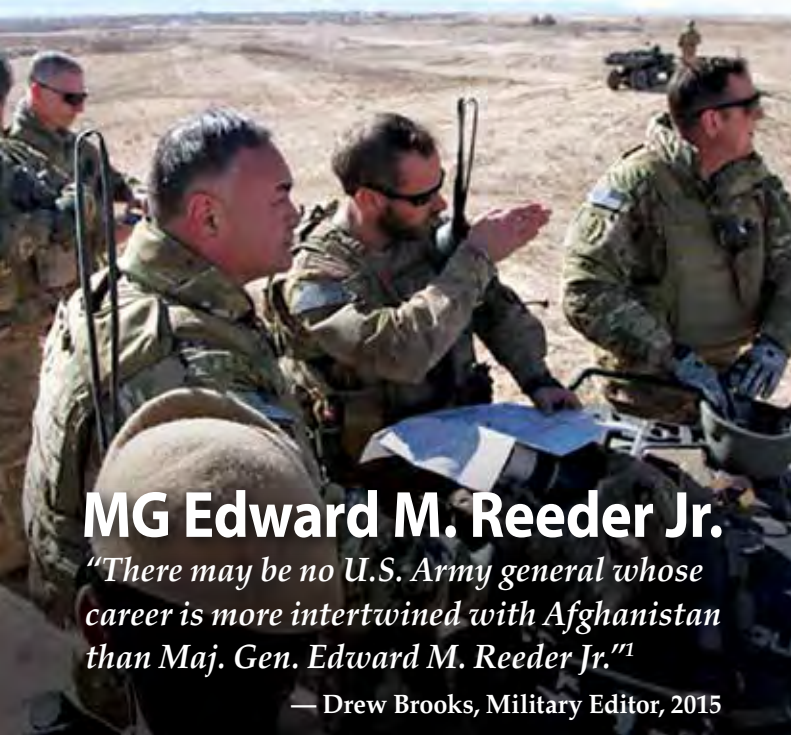
Assigning BG Edward M. Reeder Jr. to command CFSOCC-A put an experienced ‘Afghan hand’ in charge of all UW. Reeder, an El Salvador and JUST CAUSE (Panama) SF veteran, had commanded 2/3 SFG in Kandahar (2002-2003) and had been the CJSOTF-A commander at Bagram twice while 7th SFG commander (2005-2007).⁴⁹ His experience with Afghans and their problems paid dividends. With CJSOTF-A operationally controlled by CFSOCC-A, BG Reeder sought ways to improve local security by “applying unconventional warfare (UW) principles to the fight against Anti-Afghan Forces.” Knowing that Special Forces in Vietnam had relied heavily on Civilian Irregular Defense



Soldiers from ODA 7224 conduct Village Stability Operations (VSO) in Nili, Daykundi Province, 2009.

Group (CIDG) forces to protect rural villages and hamlets, BG Reeder challenged his staff to develop a similar program to be implemented at province level.⁵⁰

Shortly after assuming his post as ISAF commander (15 June 2009), GEN Stanley A. McChrystal introduced his vision of a new population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy for Afghanistan.⁵¹ BG Reeder’s UW-centric concept embedded SF ODAs at the village level to increase security, provide stability, and lend legitimacy to the central government of Afghanistan. These soon became referred to as Village Stability Operations (VSO). The first VSO site



MG Edward M. Reeder Jr.

“There may be no U.S. Army general whose career is more intertwined with Afghanistan than Maj. Gen. Edward M. Reeder Jr.”¹

— Drew Brooks, Military Editor, 2015

BG Edward M. Reeder Jr., commander of the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC), visits with special operations forces in Kandahar, 6 January 2012. During the trip, he received updates on the progress being made in village stability operations. MG Reeder had a wealth of experience with SOF in Afghanistan. *DoD photo*

Career Assignments

1982	Commissioned as an Infantry Officer	
1986	Attended Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC)	
1988	Advisor, El Salvador	
1989	Commander, ODA 786, Operation JUST CAUSE, Panama	
2001-2003	Commander, 2 nd Battalion, 3 rd SFG	
2002	Commander, SOTF 32, OEF-A	
2003	Commander, SOTF 32, OEF-A	
2005-2007	Commander, 7 th SFG	
2006	Commander, CJSOTF-A, OEF-A	
2007	Commander, CJSOTF-A, OEF-A	
2009-2010	Commander, CFSOCC-A, OEF-A	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command - Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) SSI
2010-2012	Commanding General, U.S. Army Special Forces Command	
2012-2013	Commanding General, USAJFKSWCS	
2013-2014	Commanding General, SOJTF-B	
2014-2015	Commanding General, SOJTF-A/NSOCC-A, OEF-A	

- Denotes combat assignments

established in the village of Nili in Daykundi Province in July 2009 would become the model (see article on VSO – “The Nili Experiment”).⁵²

As more military leaders began treating the mission in Afghanistan as counterinsurgency, BG Reeder directed CJSOTF-A to expand VSO to more locations. Continued success firmly established the program as the way for the future in Afghanistan. By the end of 2009, almost all SF ODAs had moved into VSO sites across the country. CFSOCC-A began soliciting more SOF to cover requests from more VSO coverage. COL Donald C. Bolduc, the CJSOTF-A commander at the time, considered VSO expansion in late 2009 to be “the strategic shaping phase” of the overall ISAF COIN campaign plan.⁵³

On 21 August 2009, USSOCOM emphasized personnel stability and continuity of leadership as critical to the COIN-based strategy for Afghanistan. The 3rd SFG, designated as the ‘framework group’ for forming CJSOTF-A, would provide about 40 percent of the headquarters personnel; the remainder would be sourced from “across the joint special operations community.” CJSOTF-A staff tours were extended from seven months to a year, and SF battalion deployments went from seven months to nine months. These initiatives were designed to increase organizational stability, provide more predictability to plan individual and collective training, lengthen time at home between rotations, and build area familiarity and cultural knowledge in Afghanistan.⁵⁴



OEF (A) Phase IV (Consolidation III):

1 December 2009 - 30 June 2011

The next eighteen months were marked by large-scale expansion of VSO country-wide. Success in the field overcame initial reluctance from Afghan officials. It proved to be the most viable stability program introduced by the American military. On 14 July 2010, Afghan President Hamid Karzai spoke in behalf of the “village stability initiative,” stating that the program meshed with the coalition’s overall counterinsurgency strategy. Karzai’s endorsement of VSO led to the creation of Afghan Local Police (ALP) units to improve security from the bottom up. ALP units were formed and trained in the villages. Local volunteers were key. This capability was expanded upwards first into the districts and then the provinces.⁵⁵ President Karzai’s decree reinforced GEN McChrystal’s COIN vision with SOF spearheading the ISAF effort.

CFSOCC-A became the executive agent for VSO in Afghanistan. As “a bottom-up COIN initiative ... to promote local governance and development,” it involved “establishing ...Village Stability Platforms (VSPs)” around embedded ODA-sized units in key villages countrywide. Enablers (Civil Affairs, PSYOP, medical, and logistics support personnel and dog handlers) were attached to

“If you’ve seen one VSO site...you’ve seen one VSO site.”

Often-repeated statement by VSO veterans emphasizing the vast differences between sites.⁵⁷



A Special Operations Task Force-East (SOTF-E) Cultural Support Team (CST) member conducts a women’s *shura* for Konduz province. The CST members are providing health awareness, education, and a sewing project, 5 April 2011. DoD Photo



Afghan Local Police (ALP) fill sand bags during the construction of a traffic checkpoint in Jegdalay district, Kabul Province, Afghanistan, 5 March 2014. ALP assisted by U.S. Special Forces soldiers assigned to CJSOTF-A. The checkpoint disrupted insurgent freedom of movement. DoD Photo



A U.S. Special Forces soldier analyzes targets with ANA soldiers during training in Staging Area Tinsley in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan, 9 May 2011. Soldiers from CJSOTF-A train Afghan national security forces on soldiering skills and security measures to protect the local populace. DoD Photo

ODAs committed to VSO as needed. Conventional infantry squads ‘beefed up’ security in the more remote sites. VSO teams, living in the small towns and villages, worked closely with local leaders to improve health, education, and economic conditions. The Afghan central government was legitimized by supporting community projects. In 2011, select female soldiers, trained as Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), were attached to some ODAs to work with the females and children. SOF conducting VSO also recruited local volunteers for training as ALP. Once formed the SF soldiers advised and assisted in the performance of guard duty and accompanied local security patrols.⁵⁶

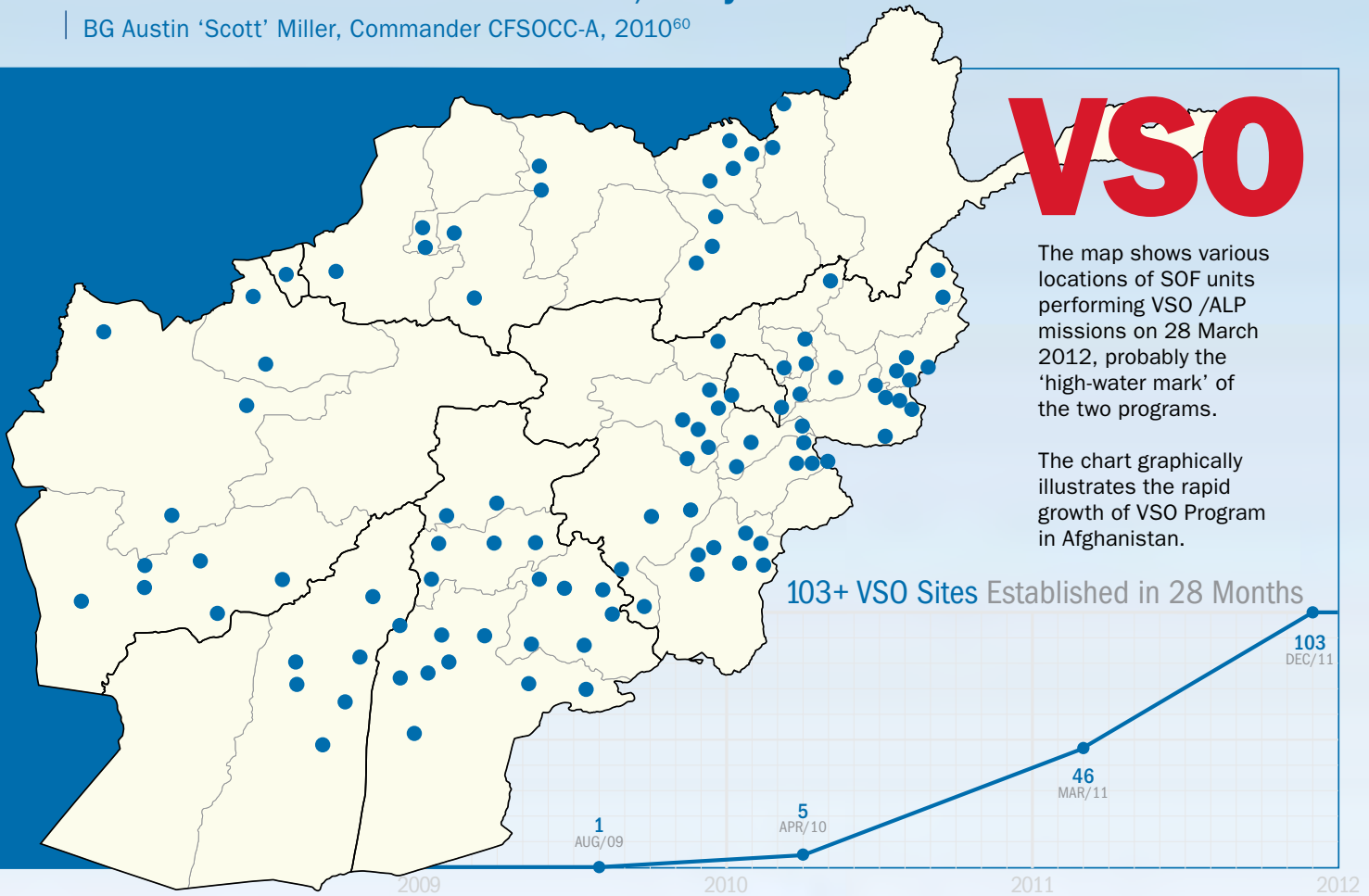
CFSOCC-A made VSO and its ancillary ALP requirement the primary focus of CJSOTF-A. While training, equipping, and advising ALP was more Foreign Internal Defense

(FID), it was an integral part of the VSO mission. The two complemented each other. The ‘bottom-up’ execution worked well with the ‘top-down’ planning and management to support the ISAF COIN strategy. CJSOTF-A Operational Order (OPORD) MUSTAQUILANA (‘Afghans standing up for themselves’) provided the guidance necessary to duplicate the successes achieved by ODA 7224 and earlier UW experiences.⁵⁸

Expanding VSO to ‘blanket’ Afghanistan required a significant increase in SOF personnel and ‘enablers.’ All services ‘surged’ SOF assets into the country to accommodate the demand. VSO grew from one ‘pilot’ site in July 2009 to five by April 2010. Forty-six sites existed by March 2011. By the end of the year there were 103 VSO or ALP training sites spread throughout Afghanistan. By then, the CJSOTF-A had grown from 2,900 to more than 6,000 personnel.⁵⁹

“You can execute VSO without ALP, but you can’t execute ALP without VSO.”

| BG Austin ‘Scott’ Miller, Commander CFSOCC-A, 2010⁶⁰



Special Forces Weapons Sergeants from ODA 7224 conduct weapons training with Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police (ALP) on a range near Nili, Daykundi Province, 2009.



In addition to performing VSO and training ALP in 2010, CJSOTF-A relooked another capability that was first raised back in 2006—creation of ANA Special Forces. In 2006, COL Reeder felt that the condition of the ANA would not support that capability at that time. As the CFSOCC-A commander in 2010, BG Reeder reevaluated his earlier assessment and concluded that the ANA had now reached the level of maturity where it could raise and sustain a SF component. He envisioned ANA SF units specifically trained to operate within their own complex multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment. Trained professionals could “leverage the local ethnicity and tribal affiliations” to their advantage in combat operations.⁶² After getting his concept approved by the ISAF commander and Afghan Minister of Defense, BG Reeder directed the CJSOTF-A to create ANA Special Forces.⁶³

By the end of February 2010, the SOTFs were recruiting and screening volunteers from existing Commando *Kandaks* to attend the first ANA SF Qualification Course (SFQC). Medical screening was followed by physical fitness tests and mental aptitude evaluations at the two SOTF bases. The potential candidates did pushups, situps, and pullups before a two kilometer run. Then, they were given literacy and math tests. After the results were analyzed, packets of

those qualified were sent to the CJSOTF-A to select the best-qualified twenty-five soldiers to attend the first ANA SFQC, scheduled to begin in March 2010 at Camp Morehead.⁶⁴

As SF personnel screened candidates at the SOTFs, the CJSOTF-A staff prepared a program of instruction (POI) for ANA SFQC. While loosely based on the SFQC conducted by the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS) at Fort Bragg, NC, it was uniquely tailored for Afghanistan and conducted over a ten-week period. FID and COIN were reduced to internal Afghanistan defense and counterinsurgency tasks. During weapons training students mastered only Soviet weapons common in the region. Instead of foreign language and culture training, the program stressed improving literacy. Basic knowledge of the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan was included. ANA SF ODAs, while mirroring U.S. specialties, consisted of fifteen personnel. The other three men were an intelligence sergeant; an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) sergeant; and a religious officer. The first ANA SF class graduated at Camp Morehead on 13 May 2010.⁶⁵

To further enhance ANA SOF capabilities during VSO, CJSOTF-A implemented the Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) Planners course, the first of which began on 19 September 2010. AIDO training



The first class of ANA SF graduated at Camp Morehead, Kabul, on 13 May 2010.



ANA Commando SSI

“These [ANA SF] teams provide immediate rapport with the local populace and at times have ties with the locals. The ANA SF teams take the lead in the villages, and they add legitimacy to the mission.”

| BG Edward M. Reeder Jr.



Some Afghan National Army Commando and Special Forces personnel were trained in Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) by U.S. PYSOP soldiers at Camp Morehead, Afghanistan.



ANA soldiers from the 8th Commando *Kandak* conduct deliberate clearing operations, 2011. U.S. SF soldiers accompanied the Commandos, providing advice and support.

involved U.S. PSYOP personnel instructing Afghan Commandos on Military Information Support Operations (MISO) (formerly PSYOP) principles. The AIDO course was essentially a translated, modified version of the U.S. Psychological Operations Qualification Course (POQC). While AIDO's primary Military Occupational Specialties remained combat arms, they also functioned as the MISO Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) within their units, with the end-goal of 'improved public perception of Commandos, ANA, ANP, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) as a whole.' By early 2011, 250 Commandos were already AIDO-qualified.⁶⁶

After graduation, ANA SF ODAs were sent to select VSO sites to join the Commando *Kandaks*, countering insurgency in Afghanistan. The CJSOTF-A provided the "tactical framework for supporting CFSOCC-A operational priorities" to conduct the ISAF campaign. Authorities were broadened to allow VSO sites to "move at the speed of the populace and the insurgent," said COL Bolduc. Tactical commands (SOTFs and below) had to be agile and flexible to accommodate rapid situational changes encountered daily at the lowest levels.⁶⁷ From 2010 until 2012, VSO and ALP training grew hand-in-hand with the ANA SF ODAs as they often jointly occupied areas. In these cases coalition SOF leaders could mentor ANA COIN partners during hundreds of combat operations to dramatically increase the experience base of Afghan SOF.⁶⁸



OEF (A) Phase V (Transition I):

1 July 2011 – 31 December 2014

This phase of the war was seriously affected by major GWOT strategy shifts. On 2 May 2011, U.S. forces killed AQ leader Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.⁶⁹ This caused President Barack Obama to announce that all U.S. forces would be out of Iraq by 31 December 2011.⁷⁰ Plans to transfer some of those assets to Afghanistan were forestalled when Congressional pressure for an 'exit strategy' prompted President Obama to announce his plans on 22 June 2011. He stated that by 31 December 2014 the Afghan government would assume responsibility for its security.⁷¹ With the end dates firmly set, coalition forces accelerated efforts to prepare Afghan forces to assume responsibilities.

The SOF commands had to adjust quickly. On 1 July 2012 the CFSOCC-A morphed into a two-star Special Operations Joint Task Force – Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) and the NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) under ISAF. MG Raymond A. 'Tony' Thomas III, a former CFSOCC-A commander and more recently the deputy commander of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at Fort Bragg, NC, became its first commander. The larger SOJTF headquarters

“Our contribution to the strategy revolves around U.S. SOF living among the people in rural villages . . . , building relationships and assisting the local populace to stand up against insurgents.”

**COL Donald C. Bolduc,
Commander CJSOTF-A, 2011⁶¹**

commanded all U.S. SOF and tactically controlled NATO and Afghan SOF forces. “Our mission set spans the entire spectrum of special operations” stated MG Thomas. “13,000 special operators and support people from 25 partner nations (perform missions) ranging from direct action to capacity-building.”⁷² Reducing SOF headquarters minimized redundancy, concentrated power in high level decisions, and integrated all special operations capabilities. And, it downsized the American presence in Afghanistan.⁷³

SOJTF-A strategy anticipated a drawdown of coalition SOF and a calculated transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghans in 2014. VSO would enter a Transition Phase. Afghan officials at district and province levels and local and national police and ANA forces would assume primary responsibility for the country’s security. Coalition SOF would transition to secondary roles as advisors. How the roles would be shifted was the major challenge and central focus of MG Austin S. ‘Scott’ Miller when he assumed command of the SOJTF-A in June 2013. MG

Miller, like MG Thomas before him, brought considerable Afghanistan experience to the position.⁷⁴

As COL Patrick B. Roberson (3rd SFG commander at the time) viewed it, the central question was “How do you put the Afghans in the lead?” With an “outsider’s eye for detail” Roberson analyzed the challenge leveraging his three years of Iraq experience. He visited COL Antonio M. Fletcher, the 7th SFG commander in charge of the CJSOTF-A at that time, and discussed the question while becoming familiar with the different nuances of SOF operations in Afghanistan.⁷⁵ Roberson would soon have to answer that question.

The soon-to-be CJSOTF-A commander focused on two lines of effort: first, build the capacity of the Commando *Kandaks* and Afghan SF to assume missions being done by coalition SOF; second, raise VSO and ALP initiatives to the next level. His SOF had to relinquish dominant roles with the local Afghan leaders and become mentors who focused ‘up’ on district and provincial officials.⁷⁶ The efforts had



COL Patrick B. Roberson, commander of 3rd Special Forces Group and CJSOTF-A, addresses U.S. service members assigned to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan on Nov. 28, 2013, at Bagram Airbase, Parwan Province, Afghanistan. *DoD photo*



Afghan National Army (ANA) LTC Saifullah Najribi (center), 4th Special Operations Kandak commander, talks to Afghan and U.S. Special Operations soldiers through an interpreter (right), during a transfer of authority (TOA) ceremony at the Village Stability Operations (VSO) site at Parmakan, Shindand District, Herat Province, 26 September 2013. *DoD photo*



NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A SSI



“Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.”

COL. Thomas Edward Lawrence,
‘Lawrence of Arabia’⁷⁹

An American Special Forces captain observes how his Afghan trainees do on their own as they meet villagers near Taliban territory in Parwan Province, 2014.
Photo: Diego Ibarra Sanchez for The New York Times



“If you want to put Afghans in the lead, you’re going to have to accept the fact that they are, in some ways, going to be less capable.”

**COL Patrick B. Roberson,
3rd SFG/CJSOTF-A Commander, commenting
on ‘expectation management.’⁸⁴**

the same goal – to ‘cut the Afghan reliance on coalition capabilities cord’ while instilling confidence in their ability to protect and govern themselves.⁷⁷

COL Roberson and other SOF leaders knew that the hardest part would be curbing the American tendency to lead. “I always thought that if you are going to put partner forces in the lead, you’ve got to have ‘forcing functions’ or compliance mechanisms to get guys to do what you want done.”⁷⁸ Measures had to be put in place to reduce the SF urge to get out in front and convince them to move aside and let the Afghans take charge.

To change SF behavior, Roberson ‘capped’ the number of Americans accompanying the Afghan SOF and local police on field operations. “When you place that force ratio out there [10 Afghans per American], it definitely makes our guys put Afghans out front, keeps them away from the leading edge, and forces them into a command and control role. If American SOF outnumber Afghans [in an assault], they are much more predisposed to take charge and take buildings by themselves.” What was needed at that phase in the war was to get the Afghans to lead by example, not vice versa. SF, as advisors, had to be

content to hold back and mentor the Afghan SOF leaders. “You’re not accompanying them to teach troop leading procedures, but to encourage them to take charge and do it on their own.”⁸⁰

Along the second line of effort (VSO and ALP programs), CJSOTF-A began turning over select VSO sites to partner forces and other sites were eliminated. ALP training with only Afghan instructors was consolidated at provincial training centers. ODAs originally responsible for VSO sites maintained contact with district leaders and conducted ‘tactical overwatch’ presence patrols as reassurance during the transitions.⁸¹ Basically, a mounted ODA would irregularly circulate through old VSO areas. As time passed and Afghan confidence and experience grew, the number of ODAs in-country could be reduced as SF ‘stepped back’ and put mentoring/advising in the forefront.⁸²

By late 2013, the environment and U.S. role had changed dramatically in Afghanistan. “I had 72 SOF teams when I went to Afghanistan [in March 2013]. I had 45 in October,” COL Roberson recalled. He had succeeded in changing the American SOF mindset and enabled the Afghan SOF to lead their country’s fight.⁸³



The last CJSOTF-A command group commemorates the unit deactivation on 31 October 2014 with a photo in front of the CJSOTF-A Memorial Wall, Camp Vance, Bagram Airbase. From left to right are: CW5 Edward K. Hall, COL Robert L. Wilson, and CSM Brian C. Rarey.

Subsequent CJSOTF-A commanders followed suit while the conventional force ‘footprint’ shrank. As Operation ENDURING FREEDOM came to a close in late 2014, the CJSOTF-A had transitioned to advising and assisting. The commensurate reduction of coalition forces had forced CJSOTF-A to operate from a handful of strongpoints. The impact of medevac, fire support, and sustainment limited SOF operating ranges. Commanders assessed calculated risks carefully. SOF elements were positioned where they could optimally influence ANA SOF.



OEF (A) Ends, Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL

Begins (Transition II): 1 January 2015 - Present

By Presidential decree, OEF ended on 31 December 2014 and was replaced by Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL (OFS), which continues today.⁸⁵ The NATO mission, labeled Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT, is to “train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.”⁸⁶ American SOF remains key to fulfilling the NATO mission in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The proud legacy of CJSOTF-A continues forward with the Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (SOTF-A), albeit on a much smaller scale.⁸⁷

At the deactivation of the CJSOTF-A on 31 October 2014, the 3rd Battalion, 3rd SFG commander, LTC Michael P. Sullivan, became the first commander of SOTF-A, the smaller, SF battalion-sized organization that commanded the remaining UW-focused U.S. SOF in Afghanistan. His headquarters and subordinate elements were to train, advise, and assist the newly-created ANA Special Operations Command (ANASOC) and select Afghan National Police (ANP) units.⁸⁸ LTC Sullivan had ‘shadowed’ his 3rd SFG commander (and final CJSOTF-A commander), COL Robert L. Wilson, and forged a good relationship with BG Mark C. Schwartz (a previous CJSOTF-A commander and the Deputy Commanding General, SOJTF-A, to MG Edward M. Reeder Jr). Together authorities were allocated, redistributed, and adjusted. LTC Sullivan viewed his task to “work the SOTF-A out of job.”⁸⁹ The new ‘way ahead’ for Afghanistan was clear.

EPILOGUE

What are the ‘takeaways’ and legacy of CJSOTF-A? First, the organization validated joint doctrine that a Special Forces Group had the capacity to act as a CJSOTF in wartime. It did this for an extended period of time in combat – more than twelve years. While initially two SOF task forces were used (TF DAGGER and K-BAR) to prosecute the CENTCOM war in Afghanistan, SOCCENT and its elements were the ‘supported’ command. When American conventional forces grew to dominate the battlefield, CENTCOM changed SOF to a ‘supporting’ role. Consolidating all coalition SOF under one command, the CJSOTF-A, proved to be a logical progression. Its flexibility to accommodate mission changes was proven over time.

Second, SFGs had commanders and functioning staffs to facilitate accommodating additional missions and SOF elements. And USSOCOM could capitalize on Army's command selection process instead of having to convene boards for CJSOTF leaders. It could also provide personnel augmentees from the other services as well as the Reserves and National Guard. SFG commanders dual-hatted as

Major 'Lessons Learned' from Operational Analysis of CJSOTF-A performance

- ❑ Validates the doctrinal model for command and control of Joint SOF
- ❑ Highlights the inherent strengths of building a 'framework' around an SF Group
- ❑ Advantages of utilizing existing command selection processes
- ❑ Maximizes on 'reachback' capability to fill gaps and preserve force
- ❑ Demonstrates the versatility and flexibility of the CJSOTF-A in extended combat environments
- ❑ Successfully got Afghan SOF to assume responsibility as the primary engagement force

CJSOTF-A commanders could 'tap' their rear echelons and access higher Army SOF commands in CONUS to get assistance. These capacities were skillfully 'tapped' throughout the life of CJSOTF-A.

Lastly, VSO supported by ALP were a major success story in Afghanistan. The CJSOTF-A demonstrated its nimbleness when ISAF expanded the program country-wide. VSO paved the way towards making Afghan officials responsible for the security, economic recovery, and future of their country. Coalition SOF commanders had to restrain the inherently American cultural tendency to take charge and enforced advise and assist roles. They did, and Afghan

SOF leaders 'stepped up' to fill the void. Today, Afghan SOF elements lead the fight against insurgents. That is the ultimate measure of SOF success in Afghanistan.

The twenty-three commanders of CJSOTF-A (five of whom served twice) and their staff contributed in turn to the progressive achievements of SOF in Afghanistan. The combined joint special operations command was a central player in the fight for Afghanistan for twelve critical years. CJSOTF-A played a key role in every major development in that war. Everyone that served in CJSOTF-A throughout its long history should be justifiably proud of their contributions and sacrifices. 📌

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Endnotes

- 1 Gentext Message, CDR3DSFGA FWD to COMCJTF-180 and COMJFSOCC EF, 242100ZAUG03, "CJSOTF-AFG SITREP 24 AUG 03," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, 5-6; Gentext Message, CDR3DSFGA FWD to COMCJTF-180 and COMJFSOCC EF, 242100ZAUG03, "COMCJTF180 SITREP 24 AUG 03," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, 1-2. ODA 2056 is in the 20th Special Forces Group (SFG) (Airborne), a National Guard unit headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama. Day Chopan village has also been spelled as Deh Chopan, Daichopan, and several other variations. Located in Southeastern Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan, the surrounding mountains have long provided a safe haven for Taliban fighters, and before that for the Afghans who fought against soldiers from the Soviet Union. The unarmored or lightly armored High-Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), or 'Humvee' was the standard military tactical utility vehicle at the time.
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- 4 COL Celeski interview, 13 March 2015; Noor Khan, "U.S., Afghan Forces Kill at Least 14 Guerrillas," *Stars and Stripes*, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 26 August 2003, 7; Sayed Salahuddin, "Aircraft Bomb Big Taliban Force," *Ariana*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 25 August 2003; Noor Khan, "At Least 14 Die in Afghan Bombing," *Associated Press*, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 26 August 2003; "U.S. General: Taliban Streaming from Pakistan to Afghanistan," *USA Today*, Gardez, Afghanistan, 8 September 2003; n.a., "Up to 100 Afghan Militants Killed in Operation 'Mountain Viper,'" *Voice of America*, 29 October 2009. Although enemy casualty figures were hard to ascertain, reports from all sources indicate a large number of Taliban or ACM fighters were killed during Operation MOUNTAIN VIPER. The official U.S. Army history of the action noted that "the Taliban stood and fought for the first time since March 2002," and that "U.S. forces routed the enemy, killing one hundred forty to two hundred insurgents." Center of Military History, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, March 2002-April 2005. The United States Army in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2011), quote from 43. U.S. losses were limited to one ARSOF soldier killed (Sergeant First Class Mitchell A. Lane, assigned to 2nd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group [Airborne]). SFC Lane died of injuries sustained during a night fast rope accident while inserting for a combat assault. From USASOC History Office, *The Last Full Measure of Devotion: ARSOF Fallen from the War on Terrorism, 2001-2014* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2015), 27.
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- 6 107th Congress, Senate Joint Resolution 23, "Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists," 14 September 2001, Enacted 18 September 2001.
- 7 Charles H. Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Reprinted [2003]; Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 41-42; RADM Bert Calland, Commander, Special Operations Command, U.S. Central Command, interview by Kalev I. Sepp, 3 May 2002, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 COL John F. Mulholland Jr., interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe and MAJ Tom Searle, 12 July 2002, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Gentext Message, USCINCCENT to multiple addressees, "Subj: USCINCCENT Operation ENDURING FREEDOM Karshi-Khanabad Mod," 010901Z Oct 01, copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL; Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice*, 68. COL Kisner's mission was to conduct Combat Search and Rescue operations throughout Afghanistan when the American forces began their attack on the Taliban.
- 9 According to Gentext Message, JSOTF Khanabad UZ to COMSOPCENT, "SITREP02/ENDURING FREEDOM/07OCT01," 080700Z Oct 01, copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, on 7 October 2001, USCINCCENT commenced engaging hostile targets within Afghanistan.
- 10 Joseph J. Collins, "Initial Planning and Execution in Afghanistan and Iraq," in Richard D. Hooker Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, Eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, September 2015), 23-24.
- 11 Mulholland interview, 12 July 2002; Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice*, 52-54, 57-58, 74-75;

- 12 Mulholland interview, 12 July 2002; Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice*, 52-54, 72-80, 96-99. JSOTF-North, led by COL John Mulholland (also Commander, 5th SFG [A]), controlled Joint SOF forces operating in the northern portion of Afghanistan from the time of first infiltrations on 19 October 2001, until the creation of the CJSOTF-A organization on 15 March 2002. On that date CJSOTF-A gained operational control (OPCON) of all U.S. SOF elements operating within Afghanistan (except JSOC) and Tactical Control (TACON) of all coalition SOF assets.
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- 14 USCENCOM FRAGO 020, 17 Oct 2001.
- 15 Dwight Jon Zimmerman, "Task Force K-Bar – Special Operations Forces and Operation Enduring Freedom," *Defense Media Network*, 19 September 2011, on Internet at: <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/operation-enduring-freedom-the-first-49-days-6/>, accessed on 19 February 2015. CJSOTF-South, also known as TF K-BAR, had been formed around Naval Special Warfare Group-One (NSWG-1) (Commanded by Navy Captain Robert Harward). On 7 December 2004, President George W. Bush presented the unit with a Presidential Unit Citation.
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- 18 "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 80; Briefing slides, USCENCOM Joint Operations Center (JOC), "JOC Floor Update," 30 March 2002, copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL. According to GENTEXT Message, 3RDSFGAFWD to COMJFSOCC and COMJTF Afghanistan, "SITREP/CJSOTF-A/30301530ZMAR02," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, "CJSOTF-Afghanistan assumed C2 of all SOF in Afghanistan at 301300ZMAR02."
- 19 Richard W. Stewart, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, October 2001-March 2002 (The United States Army in Afghanistan)* (Washington, DC: GPO, Center of Military History, 2004), 32.
- 20 "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 73-74.
- 21 Richard Krugler, *Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Adaptation in Battle* (Case Studies in Defense Transformation Number 5) (Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2007), on Internet at: http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA463075%25262location%3DU2%2526doc%3DGetTRDoc.pdf&ei=mNojVbTCH8iQsAWKwILQDg&usq=AFOjCNEiP_WXQNVY7_qVAO_-mUqvxvhuSQ&bv=m-bv.89947451.d.eXY, accessed on 1 April 2015, quote from 1.
- 22 Message USCINCENT 302200Z Nov 2001, "FRAG 02-020, Establishment RT Bagram (U)," copy at "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 36; SGM (Ret.) Richard C. Kimmich, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 4 August 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 23 COL Celeski interview, 13 March 2015; COL Joseph D. Celeski, interview by MAJ Jeff Davis, 11 September 2003, Bagram, Afghanistan, original at SOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL; Email correspondence, COL (Ret.) Joseph D. Celeski to Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 13 April 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Document "Change of Command," 28 May 2002, CJSOTF-A, Bagram, Afghanistan, USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL.
- 24 "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 129; Center of Military History, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, March 2002-April 2005, The United States Army in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2011), 13.
- 25 Christopher N. Koontz, General Editor, *Enduring Voices: Oral Histories of the U.S. Army Experience in Afghanistan, 2003-2005* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2008), 13; Commander, Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 180, CJTF-180 Operations Order (OPORD) 02-01 [CJTF Assumption of Authority for Operations in Combined Joint Operations Area (CJOA) Afghanistan], 23 May 2002, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, *passim*; Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), "CJSOTF-A Campaign Plan Jun-Oct [20]03," 11 June 2003, Headquarters, CJSOTF-Afghanistan, Camp Vance, Bagram, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, 9. LTG Dan K. McNeill also concurrently commanded the XVIII Airborne Corps. For a good description of the issues raised by subordinating the CJSOTF to the lead conventional force, see MAJ Grant M. Martin, "Special Operations and Conventional Forces: How to Improve Unity of Effort Using Afghanistan as a Case Study," School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2009, 19-22.
- 26 Koontz, Ed., *Enduring Voices*, 57.
- 27 SFC Kathleen T. Rhem, "American Soldiers Training Afghan National Army," *American Forces Press Service*, Washington, DC, 21 May 2002, on Internet at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=44032>, accessed on 2 April 2015.
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- 29 COL Celeski interview, 11 September 2003.
- 30 COL Celeski interview, 11 September 2003. COL Celeski commanded the CJSOTF-A for two separate rotations (May-September 2002, and March-September 2003).
- 31 CJSOTF-A Campaign Plan Jun-Oct 03, ANNEX A (Task Organization), ANNEX C (Operations), Headquarters, CJSOTF-Afghanistan, Camp Vance, Bagram, 111000Z June 2003, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. The size and composition of the CJSOTF organization changed constantly throughout its existence. Each rotation was different in some way to previous ones, although there were a few features that were fairly predictable. The same applied to the coalition SOF elements that also changed from time to time.
- 32 Findings from the analysis of the historical patterns from CJSOTF-A command assignments, unit deployments and mission taskings.
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THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Creating a **CJSOTF-A** Headquarters in Afghanistan

by Michael E. Krivdo



SGM Richard C. Kimmich (L) and CSM Christopher W. Abel (R) at the access gate of Camp Abel, home of the CJSOTF-A Headquarters, early 2002.

When formed on 1 March 2002, the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) faced several simultaneous challenges. The first was to provide command and control over units spread across Afghanistan and support them in the field. The second was to create a base to house the headquarters and its personnel. Its third challenge was to manage the incoming flow of food, water, ammunition, and supplies needed to sustain CJSOTF and all of its elements. The CJSOTF-A headquarters staff had to accomplish all of these tasks at a former Soviet Union airbase about twenty-five miles northeast of the Afghanistan capital of Kabul, while engaging the Taliban and al Qaeda throughout the rugged country.¹

In 2002, Bagram Airbase was still a hostile and austere environment with no modern features. Just months prior

the base had been fiercely fought over by Taliban and Northern Alliance forces. A Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) from 5th Special Forces Group under Task Force DAGGER operated out of Bagram as early as 21 October 2001, controlling close air support (CAS) missions for friendly indigenous forces still fighting entrenched Taliban dug into the plains around the airbase. When American combat support forces moved in soon after, there were only rudimentary defensive works, sporadic power, no potable water, and no sewage treatment. Landmines, 'booby traps,' and other unexploded ordnance from decades of conflict littered the area. The few buildings still standing, neglected for years, were damaged from the fighting. It took a concerted effort by the allied forces to make it habitable; more than

200 Soviet-era bombs and landmines were detected and safely destroyed in December 2001 alone.² That was the situation faced by the 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG)/CJSOTF-A staff in mid-March 2002.

While the new CJSOTF-A commander, Colonel (COL) Mark V. Phelan, and his staff focused on fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda terrorists, his Command Sergeant Major (CSM), Christopher W. Abel, concentrated on making the base habitable and functional. A long-time Special Forces non-commissioned officer with a wealth of deployments 'under his belt,' CSM Abel knew what needed to be done. The Group Support Company personnel staked out their claim near the runway and surrounded it with concertina wire. From this humble beginning they fashioned 'Camp Abel.' Procuring the services of the only functional bulldozer in Afghanistan, berms were formed, roads cut, and areas for tents were levelled. Allied Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technicians 'cleared' the area of mines and explosives before construction could begin. 3rd SFG Engineers replaced generators with electrical lines that enabled the Group Signalers to install radios, telephones, and computers. CJSOTF enlisted personnel erected tents, poured concrete slabs, and built makeshift plywood facilities. One of the top priorities involved setting up the large 'Circus Tent' to house the Joint Operations Center (JOC). In addition, CSM Abel designated areas for a motor pool, supply center, dining facility, billeting area, and an aid station. In short order, the CJSOTF HQ had "a better setup than even the 10th Mountain [Division]," Abel said.³

Because of the still present threat of enemy ground attack or indirect fire, the command placed special emphasis on force protection measures to counter those actions. In addition to laying protective wire and constructing fighting positions, plans and procedures were formulated for base defense. Although soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division (MD) assumed overall responsibility for protecting the Bagram area, the CJSOTF-A headquarters organized its own local security force from available support personnel and it operated around the clock. The security force guarded

access points to the camp and escorted civilian laborers who had been cleared by the 10th Mountain Division to work on Bagram during daylight hours. In addition to household functions like filling water containers, emptying trash, and pumping waste, contract labor supervised by soldiers filled collapsible wire and heavy-duty fabric HESCO containers with sand and gravel and sited them to provide cover from direct fire weapons. Engineers excavated bunkers at key positions to give personnel shelter from indirect fire. Emergency procedures were published, rehearsed, and refined throughout.⁴

On 28 May 2002, COL Joseph D. 'Joe' Celeski assumed command of 3rd SFG and the CJSOTF-A in a simple ceremony held in the main street of the new camp. Attention then turned back to fighting the war and sustaining units in the field. In the months that followed, soldiers labored steadily to improve the camp facilities to meet the challenges as the war while still performing their normal daily duties. Each rotation worked hard to leave the camp in better condition than they had received it. In 2004, the CJSOTF headquarters moved to a new site on Bagram Airbase, but the old camp continued to serve special operations elements until the CJSOTF was deactivated on 31 October 2014.⁵ †

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Michael Krivdo earned his PhD in Military and Diplomatic History from Texas A&M University. He is a former Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance Officer with varied special operations research interests.

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*IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of 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.



Map of Afghanistan showing the location of Bagram Airbase.

CSM ABEL

Christopher W.



CSM Christopher W. Abel, Senior Enlisted Advisor for CJSOTF-A, March-May 2002.

Christopher W. Abel joined the U.S. Army in 1973 and attended Basic Training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Trained as a Field Radio Operator at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, he served in the XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; in the 2nd Infantry Division in the Republic of Korea; and in the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

In 1978, then-Sergeant Abel was selected for 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta (1st SFOD-D)¹. He also completed the Special Forces Qualification Course as a Weapons Sergeant and in 1985 joined the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) (Airborne) in Bad Tolz, Germany. He served first as a Senior Weapons Sergeant for a Military Freefall Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) and later as the Team Sergeant for a Combat Diving ODA. When he departed 10th SFG in 1990, he was assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School and served as the Sergeant Major for the Special Forces Underwater Operations School in Key West, Florida. Following that assignment, he became the A Company Sergeant Major (SGM) for 1st Battalion, 10th SFG in Stuttgart, Germany.

In 1998, SGM Abel joined 3rd SFG, Fort Bragg, as the SGM for Company A, 2nd Battalion. When selected for Command Sergeant Major (CSM), he became CSM for 2nd Battalion before advancing to the position of 3rd SFG CSM in 1999. Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, elements of the 3rd SFG were attached to Task Force DAGGER for the invasion of Afghanistan. In early 2002 the 3rd SFG assumed the primary mission of supporting the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), and CSM Abel became the Senior Enlisted Advisor. He retired on 1 July 2003 after more than thirty years of service.

Endnotes

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View of 'Camp Abel' looking out over billeting and working area tents, May 2002. ----->



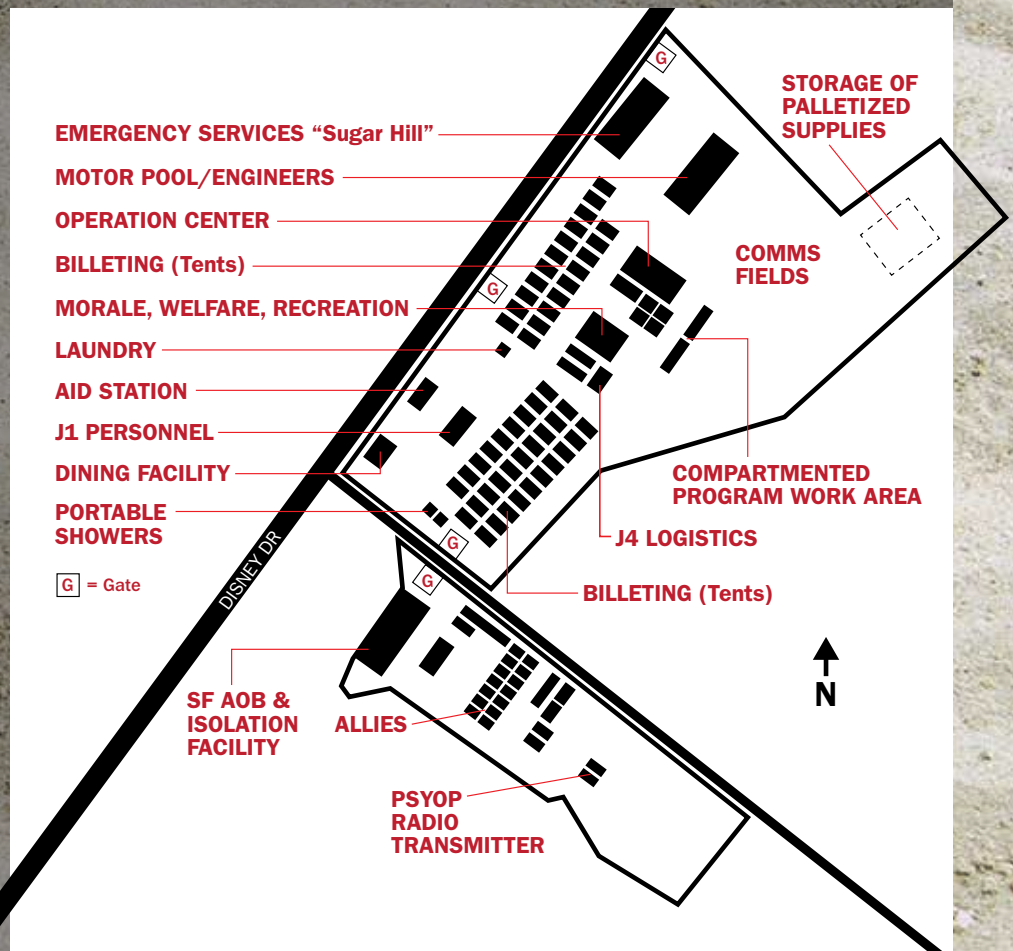
View of temporary guard towers constructed atop a HESCO wall. HESCOs filled with dirt and gravel were used for perimeter and interior walls. They were replaced in later years by concrete T-walls (large concrete forms in the shape of inverted 'T's). The advantages of HESCOs are that they can be easily sited and filled, and provide excellent protection from direct-fire weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).



Photo showing a portion of the HESCO perimeter wall around the CJSOTF Headquarters in April 2002. Note the addition of lighting for night operations. Surveillance cameras were installed to allow guards to remotely view sectors without exposing themselves to direct fire weapons.



An expedient 'step-up' fighting position prepared behind a HESCO exterior wall in the CJSOTF camp at Bagram Airbase. The pallets allowed soldiers to engage enemy outside the perimeter wall behind sandbag protection. Several of these augmentation fighting positions were sited inside the camp area to cover critical parts of the perimeter.





Exterior of the CJSOTF-A aid station set up and manned by personnel of the Medical Platoon, Group Support Company, 3rd Special Forces Group, April 2002.

Construction of the large utility tent housing the Joint Operations Center (JOC) and other office spaces.



Interior of the CJSOTF-A aid station, organized to receive casualties in the event of an attack. The most severe casualties would be transported to the Emergency Medical Station (EMS) or evacuated to the nearest hospital as appropriate.

Tents erected alongside the JOC housed staff sections of the CJSOTF-A headquarters.





View facing the billeting area of the camp, April 2002.



Location of the 3rd Special Forces Group Signal Detachment (SIGDET) on the CJSOTF-A compound, Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan, May 2002.



The Motor Pool constructed by the Maintenance Platoon, 3rd SFG Group Support Company, May 2002.



Area occupied by an Operational Detachment – 'B' (ODB) of the 20th Special Forces Group, April 2002. They 're-purposed' a dilapidated Soviet-era building.



The Soviet Union constructed a control tower at Bagram Airbase in 1976 and used it until 1989 when they abandoned the area. When coalition forces seized the base from the Taliban in October 2001, a Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) used the tower as an observation post to call in close air support (CAS) to assist the friendly indigenous forces defeat Taliban troops entrenched in the surrounding plains. U.S. Air Force Air Traffic Controllers put the tower back into service.



Soviet/Russian legacy building initially housed the CJSOTF kitchen and functioned as the cook's quarters. Messing initially took place to the left of the building, where tentage served as the CJSOTF-A Dining Facility on Camp Abel. Later, a more modern building was constructed.



Two types of underground bunkers provided soldiers with protection from indirect fire. These were located near sleeping areas and work stations for use during rocket or mortar attacks. The troops regularly rehearsed emergency actions.



Expedient bunker to provide protection from indirect fire attacks. Over time, these were replaced with above-ground concrete and sandbag bunkers. In those early days the troops experienced random direct fire attacks which were gradually replaced with sporadic monthly indirect rocket or mortar attacks.



Tent that housed the CJSOTF-A Base Defense Operations Center (BDOC).



The BDOC coordinated and directed the defense of the camp with all elements occupying Bagram Airbase.



Change of command/transfer of authority (TOA) between the outgoing CJSOTF-A/3rd SFG commander, COL Mark V. Phelan, and the incoming commander, COL Joseph D. Celeski, at 'Camp Abel,' Bagram, on 28 May 2002. COL Celeski (L) receives the 3rd SFG (A) flag from MG Geoffrey C. Lambert, commander of the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC).

The U.S. Army
**Cultural Support
Team Program**



Historical Timeline



by Jared M. Tracy

“The Cultural Support Program provides capability to ... Special Operations Forces by assessing, selecting and training select [female] volunteers to engage the female population in a secured objective area when such contact may be deemed culturally inappropriate if performed by a male service member.”¹

*-USAJFKSWCS,
“Concept Plan for the Cultural Support Program,” 2011*

The CSTs Were:

- Combat Support enablers to Direct Action (DA) missions and Village Stability Operations (VSO).
- Specially assessed, selected, and trained for the mission.

The CSTs Were Not:

- Direct Action female assaulters.
- The main effort at VSO locations.
- The point element during combat and non-combat operations.²

.....2009.....

● August 2009 |

Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) briefs International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) about increasing U.S. female service member support to Special Operations Forces (SOF).³

.....2010.....

● 10 March 2010 |

ISAF directs U.S. Forces, Afghanistan (USFOR-A) to develop a Cultural Support Team (CST) concept.⁴

● 25 May 2010 |

U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) issues Tasking Order specifying five key CST tasks:

- 1 Directly interacting with Afghan women and children;
- 2 Providing medical care for Afghan women and children;
- 3 Searching and questioning Afghan women and children;
- 4 Supporting information operations (IO) messaging to the female population and “minimiz[ing] civilian interference with military operations”; and
- 5 Advising Special Operations Task Force commanders and small unit leaders on female aspects of Civil-Military Operations (CMO).

U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) directed to train Army CSTs.⁵

USSOCOM Rationale for the Term ‘Cultural Support Team’

Cultural: CSTs would respect Afghan culture by only using females to engage Afghan women and children. In addition, CSTs would receive training on Afghan history and culture.

Support: CSTs would support SOF units and missions as ‘attached’ rather than ‘assigned’ soldiers.

Teams: CSTs were to operate as two- or three-person teams.⁶

● 10 July 2010 |

USCENTCOM drafts Request for Forces (RFF) for 64 females for CST missions in Afghanistan and Iraq (mission reduced to only Afghanistan before the first CST training class).⁷

● 26 July-25 August 2010 |

The USASOC proponent for CST training, the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS), conducts three In-Progress Reviews (IPRs) to prepare for training. CST Program of Instruction (POI) is completed in September. Tentative start date for the first CST Assessment and Selection (A&S) is 1 November 2010, to be followed by the 6-week CST Training Course (CSTC), finishing around 15 December 2010.⁸

IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of 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.

● **8 September 2010** |

USCENTCOM RFF 855 MOD 4 requests 20 females to support SOF.⁹

● **1 October 2010** |

The 95th CA Brigade begins internal training program for CST applicants to help prepare them for A&S.¹⁰

● **1 November 2010** |

The CST pilot program launched as 57 CST-1 candidates from USASOC and III Corps (Fort Hood, TX) units begin A&S at Camp Mackall, NC. 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (SWTG) has primary responsibility for all CST training, the active duty, reserve, or National Guard status of applicants notwithstanding.¹¹

● **8 November 2010** |

36 CST-1 selectees begin the first CSTC.¹²

● **10 November 2010** |

USCENTCOM RFF 1210 requests 8 CSTs (24 personnel) to support SOF.¹³

● **10 December 2010** |

31 soldiers of CST-1 graduate from the first CSTC.¹⁴

“I want to remind you all of what a key part of history you are . . . Your addition to this command is a significant milestone and the whole world is watching [to see] how women integrate into Special Operations.”¹⁵

-Brigadier General (BG) Christopher K. Haas, Commander, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A)



Unofficial CST insignia design for CSTs assigned to Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A)

Designated CST-1 through CST-7, all seven groups of CSTs went through an A&S and the CSTC before Pre-Mission Training (PMT) and deployment. Operational requirements determined how many females per iteration would support the DA and VSO missions. Women were board-selected for one of the two missions prior to CTSC graduation.

This early USASOC CST recruiting poster announced Female Engagement Teams (FETs), a term previously used by the Marine Corps and other Army units for their programs. USSOCOM and USASOC selected the term CSTs to distinguish their SOF-support program from FETs.



A CST-1 member searches and questions Afghan families during a night operation, August 2011.



During their A&S, candidates for CST-2 road march for an unknown distance.

“You [must be] prepared to fight and defend yourselves first. You have to be able to kill the guy that is a threat to you or a threat to your partners or brothers on the battlefield.”¹⁷

*- Brigadier General (BG)
Christopher K. Haas*

.....2011.....

● **January 2011 |**

After Pre-Mission Training (PMT) with SOF units, 28 personnel of CST-1 deploy to Afghanistan (11 support DA mission; 17 support VSO mission).¹⁶

● **1 March 2011 |**

Department of the Army approves Personnel Development Skill Identifier (PDSI) D5K (Cultural Support Team).¹⁹

● **17 March 2011 |**

A&S begins at Camp Mackall for Reserve Component and National Guard candidates of CST-2. 34 soldiers are soon selected. ²⁰ (Due to USASOC’s inability to meet demand for CSTs from its own units, applications were invited from across the total Army for CST-2.)

● **29 April 2011 |**

USAJFKSWCS assigned responsibility for the entire U.S. Army CST program.²¹

● **5 May 2011 |**

A&S held at Camp Mackall for Active Component candidates of CST-2. Selection ends on 13 May.²²

● **6 June 2011 |**

Assessed and selected CST-2 soldiers begin the CSTC.²³

● **19 July 2011 |**

56 soldiers of CST-2 graduate from the CSTC. A&S for CST-3 is scheduled for 12-16 September.²⁴

Village Stability Operations (VSO) Cultural Support Team (CST) Task Organization Afghanistan, July 2011



OPCON - Operational Control
SFODA - Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha

“The CST was taking part in a major clearing operation with us. Around mid-afternoon, a four to-five man insurgent element engaged us with small arms fire and [rocket-propelled grenades] . . . The CST acted very professionally. We were able to set up a support by fire and sent a maneuver element to destroy the enemy.”¹⁸

-Special Forces Soldier



“We’re not Special Forces, we’re not trained to be Special Forces. We’re trained in this particular area to help gather the information and enable their mission.”²⁶

-CST-2 member in support of Special Forces

A CST-1 soldier hands out cooking supplies during a women's shura in the village of Oshay, Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, 4 May 2011.

“[CSTs are] going to see wounded children from Taliban attacks, sick women, women abused by their men. They’re going to see a lot of stuff that they’ve probably never seen before.”²⁷

-Special Forces Soldier

“We were out there every night [with] 50 pounds of gear on [our] back, up and down Afghan mountains [at] very high elevation. That’s where the physical fitness really came into play. If you slowed down your platoon, if you couldn’t keep up or if you fell out on infil or movement to target, you were a liability.”

-CST-2 member supporting 75th Ranger Regiment

● **27 July 2011 |**

USAJFKSWCS finalizes the Cultural Support Concept Plan to help transition the program “from only meeting RFF immediate needs to a capacity embedded [in Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF)].”²⁵

● **August 2011 |**

After PMT, 54 personnel from CST-2 deploy to Afghanistan (19 support DA mission; 35 support VSO mission).

● **August-September 2011 |**

CST-1 soldiers re-deploy from Afghanistan.²⁸

● **22 October 2011 |**

CST-2 First Lieutenant (1LT) Ashley I. White, Medical Service Corps, 230th Brigade Support Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, North Carolina Army National Guard, is killed in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, while supporting 2/75th Ranger Regiment. She is the first CST killed in action.²⁹



1LT Ashley I. White, CST-2

● **31 October 2011 |**

Assessed and selected CST-3 soldiers begin the CSTC.³¹

● **16 December 2011 |**

46 soldiers of CST-3 graduate from the CSTC.³²



CST-3 members demonstrate how to brush teeth during a basic hygiene class with children from a village in Shah Wali Kot District, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, on 29 July 2012.



A CST-3 member meets Afghan youth while supporting a Provincial Reconstruction Team mission in Dehwaniwar Village, Afghanistan, 23 May 2012.

“The addition of Cultural Support Teams . . . enabl[es] dialogue and routine interaction with . . . Afghan females normally isolated from exposure to male SOF personnel.”³⁰

-ADM William H. McRaven,
Commander, USSOCOM

2012

- **February 2012 |**

After PMT, 44 personnel from CST-3 deploy to Afghanistan (17 support DA mission; 27 support VSO mission).³³

- **March 2012 |**

CST-2 soldiers re-deploy from Afghanistan.

- **25 July 2012 |**

Assessed and selected CST-4 candidates begin the CTSC.³⁵

- **12 September 2012 |**

30 soldiers of CST-4 graduate from the CTSC.³⁶

- **15 October 2012 |**

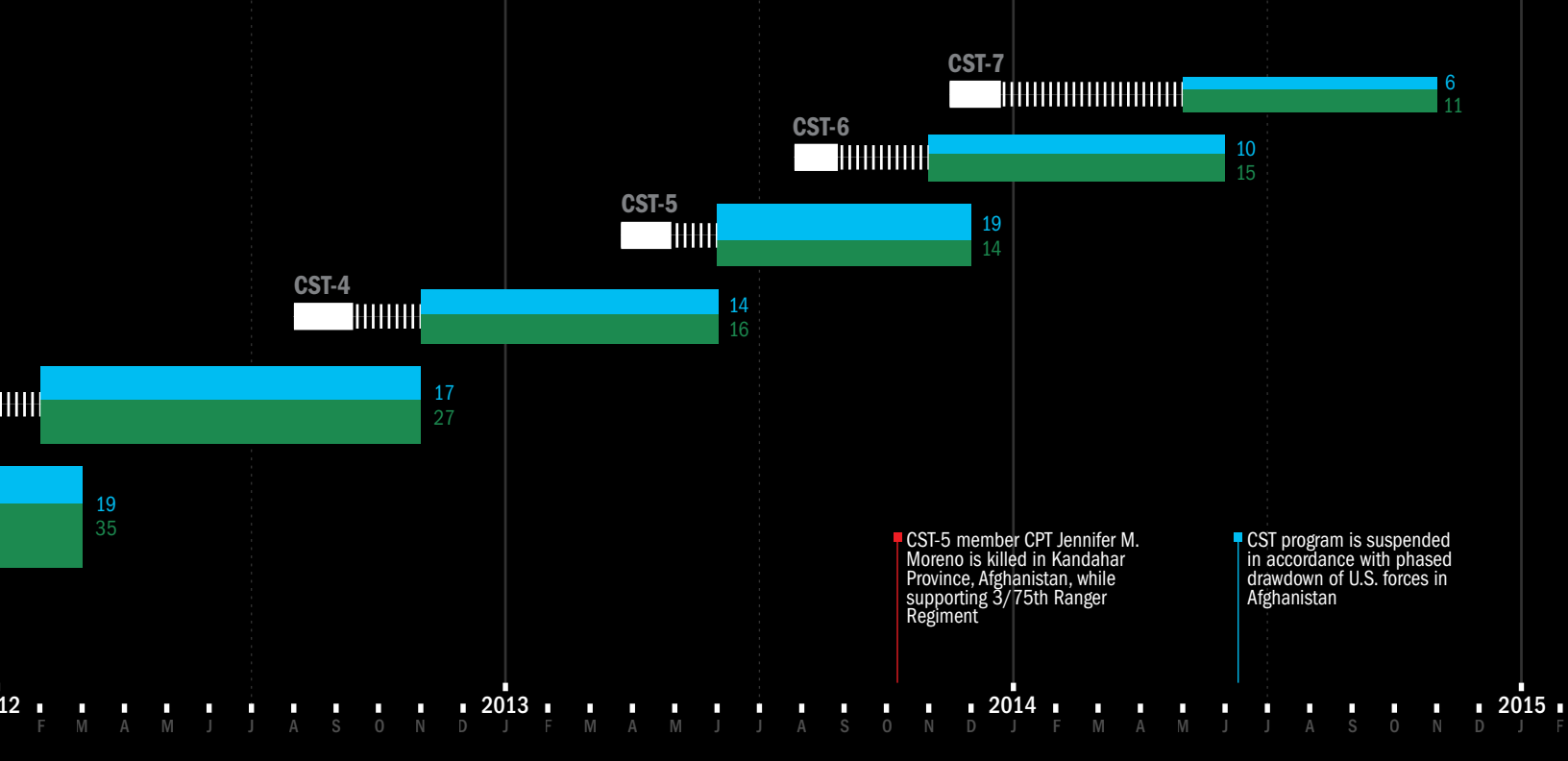
3rd Battalion, 1st SWTG schedules CSTC dates for CST-5 and CST-6 as 13 March-26 April 2013 and 17 July-29 August 2013, respectively.³⁷

- **November 2012 |**

After PMT, 30 personnel from CST-4 deploy to Afghanistan (14 support DA mission; 16 support VSO mission).³⁸
CST-3 soldiers re-deploy from Afghanistan.³⁹



A CST-3 member supporting VSO for Special Operations Task Force-South (SOTF-S) talks with Afghan children in Khakrez District, Kandahar Province, on 5 June 2012.



● **June 2013 |**

After PMT, 33 personnel from CST-5 deploy to Afghanistan (19 support DA mission; 14 support VSO mission).⁴² CST-4 soldiers re-deploy from Afghanistan.

● **22 July 2013 |**

Assessed and selected CST-6 candidates begin the CSTC.⁴⁴

● **23 August 2013 |**

25 soldiers of CST-6 graduate the CSTC.⁴⁵

● **6 October 2013 |**

CST-5 member CPT Jennifer M. Moreno, Army Nurse Corps, Madigan Army Medical Center, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, is killed in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, while supporting 3/75th Ranger Regiment. She is the second CST killed in action. She was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star for valor.⁴⁶



CPT Jennifer M. Moreno, CST-5

● **November-December* 2013 |**

After PMT, 25 personnel from CST-6 deploy to Afghanistan (10 support DA mission; 15 support VSO mission). CST-5 soldiers re-deploy from Afghanistan.

● **12 November 2013 |**

Assessed and selected CST-7 candidates begin the CSTC.⁴⁷

● **19 December 2013 |**

22 members of CST-7 graduate the CTSC.⁴⁸

“[W]e were able to do a lot of good because there were many times that the women on target presented a threat to the men. Women are just as capable of hiding an AK-47 or [suicide vest] under their [clothes] as a man is.”⁴³

-CST-2 member supporting 75th Ranger Regiment



Members of the 4th Special Operations *Kandak* (SOK), Afghan National Army, and CST-6 distribute supplies to support a local school in Shindand District, Herat Province, Afghanistan, 28 December 2013.



CST-7 members meet with an official in the Afghan Department of Women's Affairs in Balkh Province, Afghanistan, summer 2014.

● **May 2014 |**

After PMT, 17 personnel from CST-7 deploy to Afghanistan (6 support DA mission; 11 support VSO mission).⁴⁹

● **June 2014 |**

CST-6 soldiers re-deploy from Afghanistan.

● **9 June 2014 |**

Due to the phased drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, the winding-down of VSO, and the shift away from unilateral U.S. military operations, USASOC suspends the CST program.⁵⁰

● **October-November 2014 |**

CST-7 soldiers re-deploy from Afghanistan.

Conclusion

1. The USASOC CST program was created as a *temporary*, mission-driven enabler program directed at engaging Afghan women and children. It was not intended as a model for women in combat.
2. USAJFKSWCS created a viable CST training program ‘out of hide’ to meet overseas mission requirements while sustaining existing training. A&S and the CSTC were critical to selecting and training the best candidates to serve on CSTs. However, the quick out-processing of CST females after re-deployment did not include a formal After Action Review or debriefing. This delayed course improvements.
3. From PMT to deployment, CSTs had to continually ‘sell’ their capabilities to their supported SOF units because they were frequently attached to new teams unfamiliar with the program.
4. CSTs provided valuable support to the DA and VSO missions in Afghanistan. They demonstrated ‘value-added’ by building rapport with the Afghan women and children; gathering useful information about high value targets and weapons caches; and promoting Afghan government legitimacy to the population.
5. CST was an *ad hoc* concept, temporarily fielded with volunteers from the Total Army. Therefore, continuous, centralized administrative support for and accountability of CST soldiers from training through post-deployment was poor. If implemented again, a CST Program Manager or staff directorate should have authority to manage all CST personnel at the component level, regardless of their status—training or deployed.
6. The concept of Cultural Support Teams as SOF enablers remains viable, provided that a mission requirement exists. ⬆

“We could find the terrorists [that the Rangers] were going after much quicker, and we were much more accurate usually because the women and children knew what was going on in the community . . . I think [the Rangers’] mindset shifted very quickly to us being an asset and not a liability.”

-CST-2 member supporting
75th Ranger Regiment

JARED M. TRACY, PhD

Jared M. Tracy served six years in the U.S. Army, and became a historian at USASOC in December 2010. He earned an MA in History from Virginia Commonwealth University and a PhD in History from Kansas State University. His research is focused on the history of U.S. Army psychological operations.

Endnotes

- 1 USAJFKSWCS, "Concept Plan for the Cultural Support Program: An Enduring Army Special Operations Capability," 27 July 2010, 10, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter "CST Concept Plan."
- 2 USAJFKSWCS, "Cultural Support Briefing," 4 October 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 3 CFSOCC-A, "CFSOCC-A CST Brief," 11-15 July 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter CFSOCC-A CST Brief.
- 4 USASOC G-3, "Female Manned Cultural Support Teams," 27 August 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "Female Manned CSTs."
- 5 Excerpt of text in USAJFKSWCS, "Cultural Support Team Command Update," 26 August 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; see also CFSOCC-A CST Brief.
- 6 Explanation provided by former USSOCOM Commander ADM Eric T. Olson at a Senate Panel on the Emerging Role of Women in Combat, 28 April 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaSBRJyq5IM> (accessed 31 July 2015), hereafter Senate Panel on Women in Combat.
- 7 "Female Manned CSTs." This number was based on input from Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A), the 75th Ranger Regiment, and the Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command-Iraq (JFSOCC-I).
- 8 USAJFKSWCS, "Cultural Support Teams, IPR #1," 26 July 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; USAJFKSWCS, "Cultural Support Teams, IPR #2," 20 August 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; USAJFKSWCS, "Cultural Support Team Training Course IPR," 25 August 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files. The CST program was refined during these IPRs, which explained that each CST would have 3 members ranked E-4 to 0-4 and would support Special Forces Operational Detachments-Alpha or U.S. Army Ranger units; that the 1st Special Warfare Training Group (SWTG) and various USAJFKSWCS directorates would oversee CST training; that the CST program would be open to all females across the Army; that the 3-5 day A&S would be followed by the 21 day CSTC, consisting of Orientation (3 days), General Culture (10 days), Afghan Culture (5 days), Engaging (2 days), and a Situational Training Exercise (1 day); that CST selectees will have also satisfied requirements of Civil Affairs (CA) A&S; and that U.S. Army Special Forces Command and 75th Ranger Regiment will directly assist CSTs with Pre-Mission Training (PMT).
- 9 "CST Concept Plan," 10.
- 10 "CST Concept Plan," 10.
- 11 USAJFKSWCS, "TDD [Training and Doctrine Division] SITREP, 1-5 November 2010," 5 November 2010, 2, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; USAJFKSWCS, Information Paper, "SUBJECT: Cultural Support Team Assessment and Selection Pilot Course (CSTAS) 01-11," 9 November 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter CST Pilot Info Paper.
- 12 CST Pilot Info Paper.
- 13 95th Civil Affairs Brigade S-3, "95th CA BDE (A), S3/Training Meeting," 12 October 2010, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 14 Commander, 3rd Battalion, 1st SWTG, CST-1 Graduation Invitation, no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 15 *Cultural Support Teams: Training for a Critical Role in Village Stability Operations*, CFSOCC-A, digital video, 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 16 Deployment dates drawn from Enlisted Record Briefs from CST-1 personnel. See also USAJFKSWCS, "USAJFKSWCS – Cultural Support Team In-Brief," 7 May 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "CST In-Brief."
- 17 *Cultural Support Teams: Training for a Critical Role in Village Stability Operations*.
- 18 Quotation from SGT Warren Wright, 19th Public Affairs Detachment, "Two Members of Cultural Support Team Receive Combat Action Badges," 13 September 2011, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/76916/two-members-cultural-support...> (accessed 30 July 2015).
- 19 HQDA, "ALARACT 080/2011, SUBJECT: ESTABLISHMENT OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT SKILL IDENTIFIER (PDSI) CODE D5K (CULTURAL SUPPORT TEAM)," 2 March 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 20 USASOC, "Cultural Support Team (CST) Program Reassignment to SWCS," 5 April 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "Reassignment to SWCS."
- 21 "Reassignment to SWCS."
- 22 "Reassignment to SWCS."
- 23 TDD, "SITREP, 31 May-3 June 2011," 3 June 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 24 Directorate of Special Operations Proponency (DSOP), "DSOP SITREP, 25-31 July 2011," 31 July 2011, 3, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; "CST In-Brief."
- 25 "CST Concept Plan," 10.
- 26 *Cultural Support Teams: Training for a Critical Role in Village Stability Operations*.
- 27 *Cultural Support Teams: Training for a Critical Role in Village Stability Operations*.
- 28 Re-deployment dates drawn from Enlisted Record Briefs from CST-1 personnel.
- 29 USASOC History Office, *The Last Full Measure of Devotion: ARSOF Fallen from the War on Terrorism, 2001-2014* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 2015), 170.
- 30 Senate Panel on Women in Combat, 28 April 2015.
- 31 USAJFKSWCS, "SWC Off-site (14 March 2012): CST Training," 14 March 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "SWC Off-site."
- 32 "SWC Off-site."
- 33 "CST In-Brief."
- 34 Posture Statement of ADM William H. McRaven, Commander, USSOCOM, Before the 112th Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, 6 March 2012.
- 35 "SWC Off-site"; 1st SWTG, USAJFKSWCS, Memorandum, "SUBJECT: 1st SWTG(A) Weekly SITREP 25 – 31 July 12," 1 August 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "1st SWTG(A) Weekly SITREP 25 – 31 July 12."
- 36 "SWC Off-site"; "1st SWTG(A) Weekly SITREP 25 – 31 July 12"; 3rd SFG, "Cultural Support Team #4 IPR," 24 September 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; C Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd SFG, "Cultural Support Team Training Brief," no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; 3rd Battalion, 1st SWTG, "Historical Summary-Fiscal Year 2012," no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.



Flanked by her interpreter (right), a CST-7 soldier (left) hands out sweets to Afghan children in 2014. She was one of the last CST females to re-deploy in late 2014.

- 37 "CST In-Brief."
- 38 3rd SFG, "CST #3 R3 IPR," 29 November 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files; "CST In-Brief."
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- 40 D Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st SWTG, "D/3/1 SWTG (A) TRAINING SCHEDULE, CULTURAL SUPPORT TEAM," 4 March 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "D/3/1 SWTG (A) TRAINING SCHEDULE," 4 March 2013.
- 41 "D/3/1 SWTG (A) TRAINING SCHEDULE," 4 March 2013; 1st SWTG, Memorandum, "SUBJECT: 1st SWTG(A) Weekly SITREP 25 April - 01 May 2013," 2 May 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 42 "CST In-Brief."
- 43 Quotation from Terri Moon Cronk, "Cultural Support Team Women Serve with Distinction," 30 April 2015, http://www.army.mil/article/147493/cultural_support_team_serve... (accessed 30 July 2015).
- 44 D Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st SWTG, "D/3/1 SWTG (A) TRAINING SCHEDULE, CULTURAL SUPPORT TEAM 03-13," 13 May 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "D/3/1 SWTG (A) TRAINING SCHEDULE," 13 May 2013.
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- 46 USASOC History Office, *The Last Full Measure of Devotion*, 188; Award of Bronze Star with "V" Device to Captain Jennifer M. Moreno, 16 October 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- * Dates are approximate.
- 47 D Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st SWTG, "D/3/1 SWTG (A) TRAINING SCHEDULE, CULTURAL SUPPORT TEAM 01-14," 2 December 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter "D/3/1 SWTG (A) TRAINING SCHEDULE," 2 December 2013.
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- 50 USASOC, "SUBJECT: USASOC CULTURAL SUPPORT TEAM (CST) PROGRAM SUSPENDED," 9 June 2014, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files.



OPERATION **ZUMMARI 241**

Braving Fire Ambushes in Afghanistan

by Charles H. Briscoe

In the high mountainous terrain of Afghanistan favored by insurgent Taliban and al Qaeda fighters, the ‘assault’ helicopter of choice for Army Special Operations Forces (SOF) is the MH-47G *Chinook*. This advanced heavy lift twin-engine workhorse ‘earned its bones’ as a medium ‘lifter’ more than fifty years ago in Vietnam. Upgraded with larger fuel tanks, advanced navigation radar, sophisticated avionics, and proven weaponry, this *Greyhound* bus-sized ‘assault’ helicopter ‘dominates the night skies.’ Capable of aerial refueling to extend its operating range and armed with lethal 7.62 mm mini guns and machine guns, the MH-47G is a formidable ‘war wagon’ on the Southwest Asia battleground, especially when protected by a team of heavily armed MH-60L *Black Hawk* Defensive Armed Penetrators (DAPs). This current operations article substantiates the capabilities and strengths of that advanced heavy lift helicopter in combat, and like the DAP, is piloted and crewed by highly skilled ‘Night Stalkers’ of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR).

This article covering a very short notice air exfiltration of an Afghan *KKA* (counter-terrorist) element and several Commando units in contact illustrates how highly qualified and experienced 160th SOAR aircrews support Army and allied SOF under the worst of combat conditions. Knowing what is required to become a Flight Lead pilot and FMQ (Fully Mission Qualified) pilot and aircrew member and their roles in planning, rehearsing, and executing all aspects of unconventional warfare (UW) missions are critical. Remembering that the primary purpose of the DAP is to protect assault helicopters carrying ground attack forces **to and from** the objective keeps SOF aviation missions in proper perspective. Army SOF Flight Lead pilots, responsible for all planning, must factor the entire mission profile and prepare contingencies. Hence, their view of ground tactical operations covers the full spectrum—into and off the ground force objective(s) and all aspects before, during, and after.

Operation ZAMMARI 241 on 2-3 March 2015 was a US-supported Afghan partner mission to find and to rescue thirty Hazara hostages. The kidnapped were being held captive in two Taliban-sympathetic mountain villages, Shigan and Akhtar, about 40 miles northwest of Kandahar. Both agricultural villages were in the Khak-e-Afghan District of Zabul Province. American Special Forces (SF) Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) 7311 and two other 7th SF Group ODAs were advising and assisting the *KKA* (counter-terrorist) force and two Commando elements (about 240 Afghans) in the search and clearing of the two rural villages where the captives were harbored.²

“This hostage rescue mission was supposed to be a turning point for the Afghan SOF (ANASOF)—Afghans fighting to save Afghans,” related Specialist (SPC) Sean D.T. Williams,* a MH-47G *Chinook* crew chief and M-240 machine gunner, A Company, 4th Battalion.³ The abductors were to be captured or killed. The Afghan SOF forces, carried by 160th *Chinooks* to helicopter landing zones (HLZs) east of the Arghandab River, became decisively engaged on 2 March shortly after moving off the landing zones. Other ANA infantry battalions and their U.S. advisors were flown into HLZs west of the river on 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) CH-47D *Chinooks*. These aircraft were protected by AH-64 *Apache* attack helicopters. The conventional ANA force was the blocking force.⁴ Planners had designated the river as the ‘line of death’ to prevent fratricide between the two helicopter elements.⁵

Afghan SOF elements bore the brunt of the fight. Shortly after the *Chinooks* of the 160th SOAR lifted clear of the HLZs, the enemy surprised the assaulters with a massive volume of fire. The ANA SOF quickly discovered that a dug-in enemy was fighting from well-placed defensive positions linked by trenches. Interlocking machine gun fire across their front thwarted attacks. The enemy was there to fight and did not intend to back off. They were armed with light and heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades



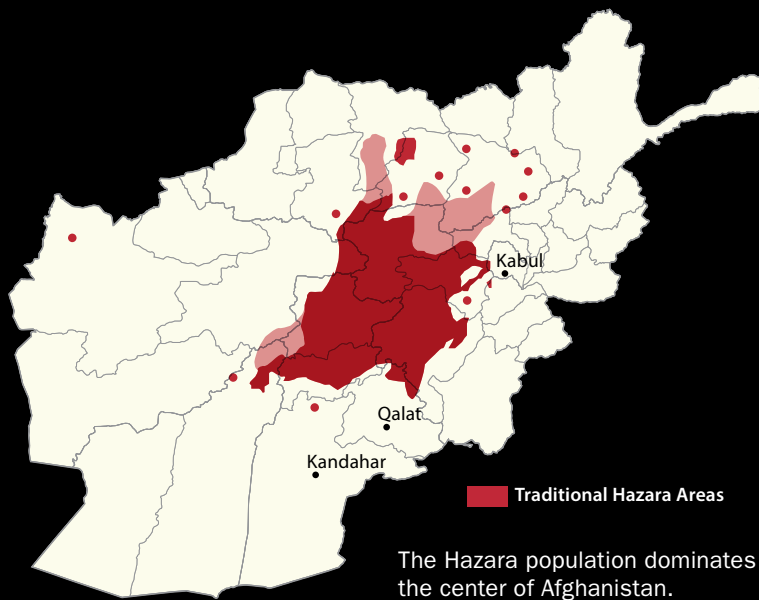
- 1 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) distinctive unit insignia (DUI).
- 2 160th SOAR personnel wear the U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command (USASOAC) shoulder sleeve insignia (SSI).
- 3 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) DUI.
- 4 Personnel of the 82nd CAB wear the SSI of the 82nd Airborne Division.

IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of 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.



1 An Hazara town street. **2** Two local girls enjoying the Arzu Studio Hope Garden where women sell their rugs and receive literacy classes. **3** A Mullah speaks at a gathering of Hazaras on the final day of Ramadan.

The Hazaras



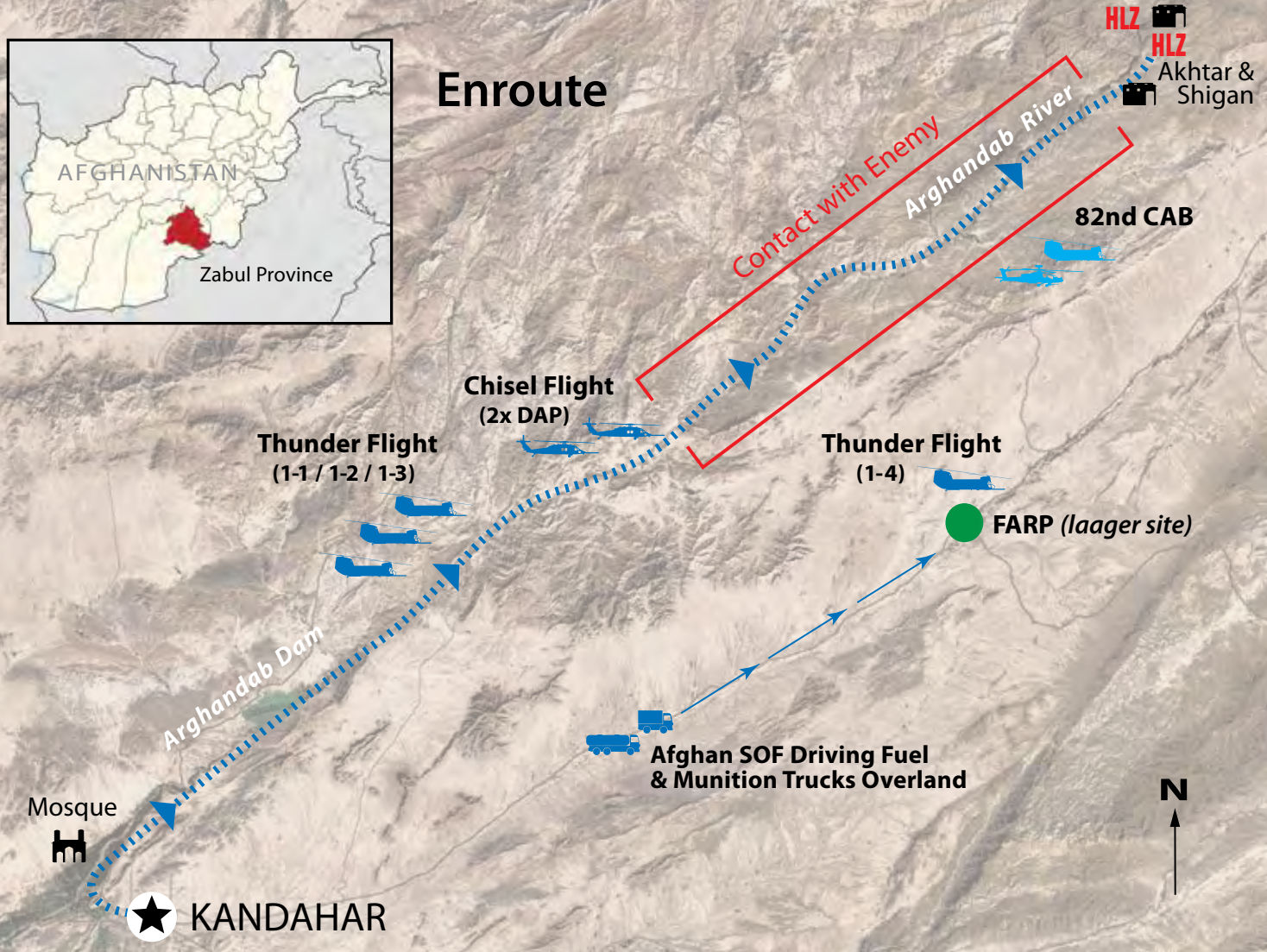
The Persian Dari-speaking Hazaras, numbering almost 3 million, constitute the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and consider themselves indigenous. The Hazara are Imami, the Shi'a Muslim majority labeled the 'Twelvers' because they believe in twelve *imams* (divinely appointed, sinless, infallible leader successors of Muhammed). They speak Hazarangī, a Dari dialect, one of the country's two primary languages. The Ismail Shi'a who believe in seven *imams* are referred to as 'Sevensers.' The Zaydi Shi'a who believe in five are called 'Fivers.' In the post-Soviet socialist era, the Hazaras were persecuted and massacred by Sunni Muslim Pashtu Taliban. When the Taliban dynamited the two colossal Buddhas carved into the cliffs (507 and 554 AD) overlooking Bamian, the Hazara heartland, in March 2001, international outrage was vociferous. After the overthrow of the Taliban government in early 2002, the Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara leaders, who had supported American and coalition forces, united to support President Hamid Karzai.¹

1 Walled pathways surround the cultivated fields that were overlooked by huge Buddhas for 1700 years. **2 a-b** Two of these ancient Buddhas overlooked Bamian until March 2001 when Mullah Mohammed Omar ordered their destruction. The Taliban used dynamite to destroy the two Buddhas above the city. Bottom center left (2a) is the taller Buddha in 1963, bottom center right (2b) shows the Buddha after destruction in 2001. **3** Rogue Taliban kidnappers prowl the Hazara villages with impunity.





Enroute



HLZ East & West Helicopter Landing Zones (HLZ) ● Forward Arming/Refueling Point (FARP)

(RPGs) and had plenty of ammunition. “We knew that our ground force was heavily engaged outside the villages before we cleared the river valley. The radio traffic was heavy,” said CPT David P. Paulson,* the Air Mission Commander (AMC) from 2nd Battalion. “It would be a long night for them.”⁶ Daylight on 3 March ushered in more surprises.⁷

ODA 7311-directed air strikes had disrupted enemy attacks during the night, but highly accurate 82 mm mortar fire, directed by enemy forward observers (FOs) on the canyon heights, commenced at first light. This limited ANA SOF fire and maneuver attempts to break through the enemy’s defenses. Since the rescue had been anticipated to be a short duration direct action (DA) mission, Afghan SOF soldiers carried more ammunition than food and water—a *Power Bar* and a canteen of water per *KKA* man did not

support a prolonged fight. ‘Traveling light,’ most Afghans ‘froze’ that night and they fought hungry and thirsty in the next day’s heat.

Though stalemated at dawn, the enemy force suffered heavy casualties from AC-130 gunships and attack aircraft that systematically rubbed the two villages during the night. While the rescue had been thwarted, the combined forces commander wanted to keep the ANA forces ‘in the fight’ to build morale. With just a few minor wounds after ‘slugging it out’ with a well-trained, determined enemy, confidence grew as the day progressed. Word that ANA troops were ‘holding their own’ against heavily-armed foreign fighters spread quickly through the armed forces. Withdrawal could be concealed by darkness. But, Mother Nature changed that decision.⁸

The forecast of rapidly deteriorating weather by nightfall in the surrounding mountains posed a serious threat to the planned helicopter extractions of the ANA elements. Withdrawal would have to be done in daylight negating the Night Stalkers' strengths in darkness. Worse, the helicopter ingress routes to accommodate the change were reduced by cloud-covered ridges and occluded mountain passes caused by the approaching storm. One channelized corridor remained. It was up the cultivated, narrow (3/4 mile at its mouth) Arghandab River valley which was flanked by steep cliffs—forty miles north of Qalat, the *laager* site adjacent to an ANA base.⁹

Like all river valleys in the arid mountains of Afghanistan, the one containing Shigan and Akhtar was heavily populated with agrarian enclaves. Both villages were composed of clusters of low buildings surrounded by walls. The compound walls corralled livestock at night. Blooming cherry trees that bordered well-cultivated farm plots irrigated by the Arghandab River created a false idyllic setting. The heavily-leafed, pretty flowering trees provided cover for enemy fighters and sympathizers inclined to shoot at low-flying helicopters.

Having scheduled an aerial refuel with AC-130J *Hercules* tankers following the night insertion, the 160th SOAR *Chinooks* (THUNDER Flight) and the two DAPs (CHISEL Flight) were ready for subsequent missions when they landed at the night *laager* site which would be a forward arming and refuel point (FARP) for the 82nd CAB aircraft.¹⁰ To extract the Commando forces from their blocking position on the east side of the Arghandab River, the AH-64 *Apache* attack helicopters and CH-47D *Chinooks* had to be refueled. To improve operations security (OPSEC) Afghan SOF soldiers were driving civilian fuel and munition trucks overland to the *laager* site. Night navigation proved difficult and delayed the convoy's arrival until after daybreak.

After several hours 'standing by' at the *laager* site to cover any emergency missions, the Night Stalkers returned to Kandahar at 0800 hours, 3 March. The FARP convoy had not arrived when they left. "Post-mission aircraft and weapons maintenance and rearming always preceded crew rest.

"The wild card was extracting both Afghan elements if the 82nd aircraft could not be refueled before we launched."

— CPT David P. Paulson*

That's 160th SOP [standing operating procedures]," explained SPC Peter M. Thomas,* crew chief on the left side mini-gun. "The second half of my tour I flew with Mr. Dockery [CW4 Hubert C. 'Cal' Dockery] and Mr. Shelton [CW3 Anthony J. 'Tony' Shelton*]; I knew what they expected."¹¹

Readiness for combat enabled 160th flight teams to quickly respond to engaged ground forces. Daylight extraction of the ANA Commando elements and their American SF advisory teams was feasible, but more dangerous, and required a 'Surge Operations' mode for planning and preparations. "The wild card was extracting both Afghan elements if the 82nd aircraft could not be refueled before we launched. Since the FARP was not established at the *laager* site when we left, we had to plan for 'worst case,'" said CPT Paulson*. "The enemy was not backing off in the Arghandab Valley."¹²

Despite repetitive air strikes well-protected enemy mortars continued to bracket the ANA SOF. The KKA and Commandos hunkered down against the banks of irrigation canals lining the fields around the villages. Since the enemy had been effectively employing its mortars since daybreak to 'pin down' the Afghan SOF, Soviet-made 12.7 mm crew-served DShK heavy machine guns, protected by Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) teams, could serve as antiaircraft artillery (AAA) against helicopters. This was not good news for THUNDER Flight. Radars guiding missile systems could be jammed and the missiles distracted by flares. But line-of-sight shoulder-aimed RPGs and mobile DShKs posed a serious threat. Evasive helicopter maneuvers were the primary defense against them. The AAA threat was one of many contingencies for which the Flight Lead, CW4 'Cal' Dockery, and the AMC, CPT Paulson,* had to plan and coordinate support.¹³

The 'left seat' Flight Lead, CW4 'Cal' Dockery, his 'right seater' FMQ pilot, CW3 'Tony' Shelton,* and the AMC, CPT Paulson,* alerted the THUNDER and CHISEL (DAP) Flight pilots and aircrews. Instead of having several days to plan as they had for their night insertion, the three had only hours to plan and coordinate contingencies with supporting units and commands. Shelton* did flight route planning and rehearsals, Dockery did the

"Post-mission aircraft and weapons maintenance and rearming always preceded crew rest. That's 160th SOP [standing operating procedures],"

— SPC Peter M. Thomas*

160th SOAR Pilot & Aircrew Standards & Qualifications Progression

QUALIFICATION

PROGRESSION REQUIREMENTS

Pilot in Command	PC	2 to 3 months (faster for Flight Warrant than Commissioned Officers).
Basic Mission Qualified	BMQ	6 to 9 months to fulfill all requirements before evaluated and certified by a Fully Mission Qualified (FMQ) Instructor Pilot (IP).
Air Mission Commander	AMC	BMQ and 12 to 24 months to fulfill requirements before evaluated and certified by Company (Co) or Battalion (Bn) Standards Officer and Flight Co Commander (Cdr) or Bn Cdr.
Fully Mission Qualified	FMQ	BMQ and 18 to 24 months before FMQ Consideration Board and 1 to 2 months to fulfill requirements before FMQ evaluation & certification by Flight Co Standards Officer & Flight Co Cdr.
Flight Lead Qualified	FLQ	FMQ and 3 to 5 years before FLQ Consideration Board & 9 to 12 months to fulfill requirements & successfully pass FL Evaluation by Regimental Standards Officer during Bn STX (Standards Training Exercise) before certification by the Regimental Commander (RCO).

**Ground assault force leaders should be aware that 160th Flight Leads bring 6 to 7 years' experience 'supporting SOF customers' to the table; FMQs have 3 to 4 years; AMCs have at least a year (FLQ warrant officer pilots often serve as AMCs); and BMQs have almost a year as Night Stalkers. Prior Army aviation experience is relative. Specific training requirements/ events and standards have also been established for the SOAR enlisted aircrew (160th crew chiefs spend 4 to 5 years getting qualified as Flight Engineers) as well as the staff, maintenance, and support personnel.

160th Assessment and Selection (**'Green Platoon'**) training constitutes a **'rite of passage'** and is the **'common denominator'** among Night Stalkers.¹⁴

sequencing and contingency planning, and Paulson* shared the coordination and briefings with Dockery.¹⁵

Contingency plans addressed communications, protective air cap (Coalition Air Force fighters overhead), fire support coordination (Coalition Air Force close air support [CAS] and Army attack helicopters), anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) communications jamming during ingress, holding, and egress along pre-planned routes, selecting alternate landing zones and 'catch up' loiter positions, combat search and

rescue (CSAR), casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), downed aircraft situation and subsequent 'bump' plans for ground forces and aircrews, and refueling—aerial and ground.¹⁶

Aloft CPT Paulson,* the AMC, responded to operational guidance and alerts from higher headquarters, reported 'hitting' critical execution checkpoints, and provided situation reports (SITREPs) to the Air Force-led Joint Special Operations Aviation Command (JSOAC) of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A).

Paulson* was assigned to Army Special Operations Aviation (ARSOA) branch of the JSOAC. As AMC he signed the post-mission after action report (AAR).¹⁷

With their compressed schedule, rehearsals were minimal to afford 3-4 hours of crew rest. Extension of the aircrew day had to be approved by the CJSOTF commander.¹⁸ Details for every contingency had to be nailed down. There were no 'roadside rest areas' in the sky to resolve in-flight problems and prepare for the 'worst case' scenarios. The Flight Lead had to get this done before aircraft lift-off. "There was no turning around. We put them in and we WILL get them out," remarked CW4 Dockery.¹⁹ The aircrews stayed abreast of the ground situation.

The MH-47G aircrews had heard reports that resupply and medical evacuation attempts had failed earlier in the day. "We knew that we'd be going. The only question was 'When?' So, we loaded extra water and MREs [meals, ready to eat] aboard for the ground force. They went in very 'light'

at the FARP. They could extract the Commandos from their blocking positions on the east side of the river valley."²² Complications often wait to step forward.

With enemy mortar fire bracketing the primary (largest) landing zone the American SF advisors wanted all aircraft to use the smaller HLZs closest to their positions. The approaching storms threatened to turn the ground stalemate to the enemy's favor. Extraction had to be done as quickly as possible to avoid losing the momentous gains from the ANA action. The three MH-47Gs would not be 'over grossed' weight-wise by the Afghan SOF and their American advisors, but CW4 Dockery, the Flight Lead, would decide aircraft landing sequence.²³

The CHISEL Flight DAPs were already enroute when the THUNDER Flight lifted off into deceptively clear and sunny blue skies. Seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit seemed hot after several weeks of cold at Bagram. Postcard picture conditions at Kandahar caused Sergeant (SGT) Neal K.

"We knew that we'd be going. The only question was 'When?' So, we loaded extra water and MREs [meals, ready to eat] aboard for the ground force. They went in very 'light' the night before. What we did not do was reload our guns with 'day' ammo. Tracers would have been nice."

— SPC Peter M. Thomas*

the night before. What we did not do was reload our guns with 'day' ammo. Tracers would have been nice," reflected Specialist Thomas* in hindsight.²⁰

"This was my first daylight 'exfil,'" said SGT Nathan L. Branch,* crew chief and right ramp M-240 gunner on THUNDER One-One. "While resting in the shade at Kandahar, I saw a rainbow directly overhead and took that as an omen for a good day. I came to the 160th in 2012, straight from AIT [Advanced Individual Training] at Fort Eustis, VA. I am a Night Stalker 'baby.' After less than a year in Maintenance [D Company], I was given a flight crew interview and I've been enjoying it ever since."²¹ Branch's* omen for a 'good day' changed meaning as the day stretched into darkness.

Flight Lead contingency plans anticipate 'Murphy's Law,' so CW4 Dockery had the fourth MH-47G divert to the *laager* site to 'stand by' for CASEVAC or CSAR missions. Three aircraft had inserted the ANA SOF the night before after an engine warning light had flared on one *Chinook* during pre-launch 'run-ups.' That proved to a very wise move," said CPT Paulson,* the AMC. "The 82nd CAB *Apache* and *Chinook* crews were standing ready. Their aircraft had been refueled

Konrad,* the Chalk One flight engineer, to think that this "might be a 'milk run' for the lead MH-47G. The first *Chinook* usually caught the enemy by surprise and often slipped by relatively unscathed. Trailing aircraft were easier targets for alert enemy gunners. At least that's how it worked at night," related Konrad.*²⁴ However, using one narrow ingress corridor in daylight and making sequential landings into smaller HLZs made that possibility unlikely. Still, one could hope for the best.

After flying over the mosque at the entrance to the river valley the three MH-47Gs, in a loose staggered trail formation, dropped down 'on the deck' (15-25 feet above the trees). "Based on the thirty to forty people milling around outside the mosque entrance there was little doubt that someone sent a warning," said the AMC, CPT Paulson.*²⁵ "This was reinforced by radio intercepts. They had 'eyes on us,' describing our aircraft, and direction of flight. We were told what weapons they were manning to engage us," said CW4 Dockery.²⁶ The DAPs had pushed straight to the HLZ to clear it for the approaching *Chinooks*. Engaging the heavily armed MH-60Ls apparently was not worth the



- 1 The Soviet-made 14.5 mm DShK heavy machine gun can be tripod-mounted for easier transport or gun carriage mounted for as anti-aircraft artillery (AAA).
- 2 The Soviet-made 7.62 mm Deglyanyov RPD 3 light machine gun had a large drum magazine.
- 3 The Soviet-made 7.62 mm Kalashnikov RPK light machine gun accommodates clip magazines and drum magazines.
- 4 The Soviet-made, shoulder-mounted RPG can fire 40 to 105 mm rocket-propelled anti-tank grenades.

risk. The MH-47G pilots started ‘bank rocking & rolling’ their big aircraft back and forth down the narrowing valley in elongated ‘S’ patterns.²⁷

CW4 ‘Cal’ Dockery, THUNDER Flight Lead, had programmed AAA communications jamming to begin twenty minutes from the target HLZ. ‘Murphy’ was alive; repeated calls got it turned on 8 minutes ‘out,’” said the Flight Lead.²⁸ Cherry trees in full bloom were swayed by the turbulent airstreams. The *Chinooks’* rotor wash blew flower petals like snowflakes down on the villagers. While rural Afghan men traditionally carry weapons, those below were not treated as threats by the MH-47G mini-gunners and rear M-240 machine gunners unless their gun barrels pointed skyward.²⁹

THUNDER Flight had established radio contact with the Afghan SOF as they entered the valley. The largely illiterate population appeared transfixed by the big, thundering aircraft racing overhead. “We (gunners) were on high alert, tracking ‘potential shooters,’” said SGT Konrad,* the Chalk One flight engineer on right mini-gun. “People were all over the place, but most were curious bystanders, watching ‘the show.’ I spotted a motorcycle with two men that headed north at high speed, but that was not enough to engage. Then, about six minutes ‘out’ from the HLZ, ‘Wham!’ we took what felt like a sledge hammer blow to our belly.”³⁰ In response CW3 Shelton,* the FMQ pilot on the controls, pushed the throttle to max speed.³¹

“A DShK [pronounced ‘Dish ka’] round slammed into the aircraft. The impact noise and subsequent structural vibration as it punched into the fuselage frame caused the ‘back enders’ on One-One (flight engineer and three crew chiefs) to quickly scan 360 degrees around them to see if something had come loose and crashed onto the rear deck—like a poorly lashed tool box. “The noise was really loud, considering that we were all helmeted! All four of us reported no obvious damage to Mr. Dockery,” said SGT Konrad.*³² “The guys in the back have better situational awareness—inside and outside. The elevated cockpit area is a small part of the aircraft. Our view is basically forward, 10 to 2 o’clock, with occasional 9 o’clock and 3 o’clock views during banks and turns,” related CPT Paulson,* the AMC.³³ “During later damage checks at the *laager* site, we discovered a large caliber bullet hole near the No. 1 Fuel Jettison Access panel,” said SGT Konrad.*³⁴ That hit was simply the beginning for THUNDER One-One.

“Seconds later we started getting peppered by small arms and 7.62 mm Kalashnikov RPK and Deglyanyov RPD light machinegun fire. The hits resonated like the sporadic pinging of light hail pellets before the onslaught of heavy marble-sized ice that drums down heavily in severe thunder storms. The seriousness hit hard when the pinging noises (ricocheting small arm bullets) changed first to sputtering, and then to loud rattling ‘Wop! Wop!’ like the noise heard in the first fifteen seconds when the popcorn starts exploding,” remembered SGT Konrad.* “By then I was so busy engaging targets and passing them to my (right side) M-240 gunner, SPC Williams,* it became

background noise."³⁵ "I saw dust from the mini gun bullets rise up alongside a guy with a Kalashnikov AK assault rifle. Then, I engaged a white-dressed RPG gunner and his assistant who was firing his AK at us from three o'clock. They were no more than fifty feet away," related Williams.* "I knew that an RPG had just been fired when I saw the fireworks 'sparkler' ignite. It was like a 'handful of glitter' thrown into the air. The sparkling came from the rocket propelling the grenade. This is very obvious at night. Insufficient time for the warhead to arm is all that you can hope for," said SPC Williams,* the right M-240 machine gunner.³⁶ "'Chief' Shelton* was 'jitter bugging' (violent evasive flight maneuvers) the 'bird' towards the HLZ at more than 120 knots by then," said SGT Konrad.*³⁷

"Though we were taking the brunt of the fire ambush, all three MH-47Gs of THUNDER Flight were receiving effective ground fire," said CW4 Dockery, the Flight Lead tracking reports from the *Chinooks* and DAPs. "It began with small arms ground fire--7.62 and 5.45 mm Soviet-made AK-47 and AK-74 assault rifles, and escalated as some RPK and RPD light machine guns joined in as RPGs were launched from both sides of the valley. Dust puffs against the cliff walls marked the explosions of RPGs that missed. I believe most shooters were just 'spraying' small arms and light machine gun fire at our belly as we 'rocketed by' overhead."³⁸

"In the rear we felt reverberations through our feet when armor piercing DShK rounds penetrated and rattled off the stringers. But, unless a round hit close to my gun position I only heard dull 'Thunks!' My flight helmet 'cut' most of the noise," said SGT Konrad.* "But, I could see their tracers really well. We were 'invading' a valley where nobody liked us."³⁹ "We had stirred up a hornet's nest," recalled CPT Paulson,* the AMC sitting in the aisle jump seat just behind the pilots. "If the people on the ground weren't shooting at us, they were running to hide in their houses. When the foreign fighters and their 'friends' started shooting it became pure mayhem on the ground."⁴⁰ The THUNDER One-One pilots, AMC, and aircrew focused on spotting obstacles and engaging threats 'passed' over the intercom while staying 'in tune' with the high speed evasive maneuvering.

CW3 Shelton,* 'flying one with the airplane,' registered an enemy fighter in his peripheral vision firing a DShK 14.5 mm heavy machine gun. "He was sitting astride his gun mount blasting away from a cliff side perch. I yelled into the intercom, 'Left gun, left gun, left gun,'" to alert the left side mini gunner, SPC Peter M. Thomas,* and his rear M-240 gunner, SGT Nathan L. Branch,* as I banked hard left," said Shelton.*⁴¹

"When I saw the gun carriage-mounted DShK crammed onto that cliff shelf, I wondered to myself as I began firing at him, 'How in the world had they gotten it up there?' He was positioned between a couple of trees for cover. We were flying so fast that I only got off a short burst," said SPC Thomas.*⁴² CW4 Dockery in the left seat, said, "I saw gunpowder smoke 'rings' puff out of that barrel every time he fired. 'Andy'* rocked the 'bird' over almost forty degrees to assist the gunners."⁴³

"We got both guns on him before breaking clear," said SGT Branch,* "but we were flying so fast and using 'night ammunition' (no tracers) it was impossible to tell if we were hitting."⁴⁴ "Our warnings alerted Chalks Two and Three to avoid the DShK," said Dockery, the Flight Lead. "We shortly had a DShK round hit up front."⁴⁵

"I thought that we had broken clear until 'Andy' started turning and slowing down to prepare for landing. Then, a loud 'Thunk!' shook the floor under my feet so hard that I instinctively 'knee jerked' them straight up, off the pedals. I banged them against the multi-functional dashboard (MFD equates to an instrument panel). Whether it was that 'old' guy who got us or another DShK gunner was hard to tell. I smelled something burning and instinctively looked down for smoke. The smell was intensifying," said the Flight Lead. "As I was frantically feeling under my butt for blood and looking down around my feet to locate any smoke, that burning smell suddenly dissipated."⁴⁶ "Specialist Thomas* and I glanced towards the cockpit. Seeing no billowing smoke, we went back to firing," said SGT Konrad.* "We were close to the HLZ. It was time to give obstacle warnings and look for enemy threats around the landing zone."⁴⁷

"I saw gunpowder smoke 'rings' puff out of that barrel every time he fired. 'Andy' rocked the 'bird' over almost forty degrees to assist the gunners."*

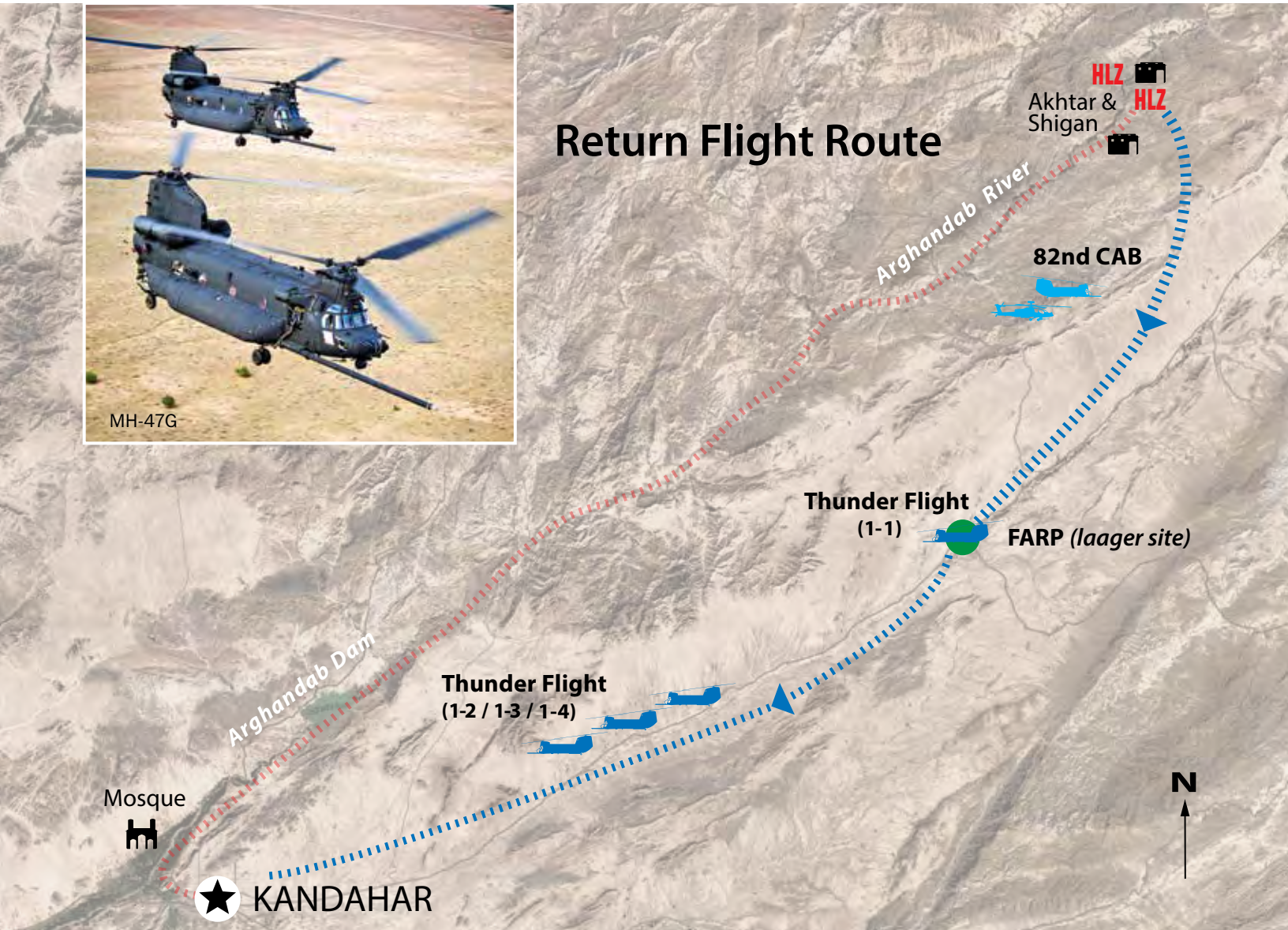
— CW4 Hubert C. 'Cal' Dockery

CW4 Hubert C. 'Cal' Dockery had done hairy work before the Army. He paid his tuition at Utah State University with money earned summers fighting forest fires as a Logan Hotshot. In July 2013, nineteen Granite Mountain Hotshots died in an out-of-control wildfire near Prescott, AZ, that burned more than 200 buildings and 8,000 acres.





Return Flight Route



HLZ East & West Helicopter Landing Zones (HLZ)

● Forward Arming/Refueling Point (FARP)

“When we took that hard hit to the cockpit, I spotted a small plateau straight ahead, just beyond the HLZ, but near the ground force, where I could control crash if necessary,” related CW3 Shelton.^{*48} “That round into cockpit area got my attention, but having spotted the ground force, I knew that they could protect us if we crashed,” stated Specialist Thomas,* left mini-gunner.^{*49} “Just seconds after getting the ‘HLZ clear’ from the ‘back ends,’ I banked hard left, ‘button-holing’ 270 degrees with a pedal turn, started reducing power, then flared to ‘hop’ a ditch, and ‘planted four gear’ smack on the HLZ. The crew chiefs dropped the ramp and they jumped out to secure our flanks. SGT Konrad,* the flight engineer, climbed down and made a cursory ‘360’ [degrees] damage check,” said CW3 Shelton.* “In those few moments waiting for the Commandos to load

the cockpit became eerily quiet except for the blaring radios. To me it was like holding your breath in a ‘dead’ zone. I knew Chalks Two and Three were positioning themselves to land as soon as I lifted off. The DAPs were engaging enemy running towards the fight from the northeast.”^{*50}

“Then, we were loaded. As I cautiously began lifting the aircraft, the controls felt a little sluggish. I pivoted the ‘bird’ around and aimed the nose towards a hole in the clouds that were blanketing the valley,” said CW3 Shelton.^{*51} “After we cleared the trees, I heard pops of small arms fire. But not for long, because we were pushing hard for the safety of higher altitude,” said SPC Thomas.* “My view became limited as we shadowed the valley cliff wall on the way out.”^{*52} “Once out of DShK range I reduced our climb to ‘slow and steady’ to minimize strain on the airframe,” said CW3 Shelton.^{*53}

“Looking back down the valley on the way out, it reminded me a little of the Grand Canyon,” remarked SGT Konrad,* the flight engineer and right mini gunner.⁵⁴

THUNDER One-Two and One-Three, using the terrain for cover as they made low angle approaches, flew into the ‘shooting gallery’ fast, one right behind the other. After his ‘shoot up’ CW4 Dockery wanted to minimize exposure. He told both *Chinooks* to land together on the two smallest HLZs.⁵⁵ It was a tight fit for both. Just as CW3 Shelton* had to do, CW4 Randall W. Lawton,* piloting One-Three, ‘skipped’ over a drainage ditch to land. The second MH-47G (One-Two), flown by CW4 John D. MacIntosh,* had MAJ David M. Caldwell,* the 1st Battalion Flight Surgeon, and two flight medics aboard. They took a wounded Commando and an injured, heavily-tattooed Chechen female detainee on board and began treating them. The Chechen ‘Angel of Death’ (ANA SOF nickname for her) was alleged to have been buying children and women for the international sex market. One-Two lifted out and got away clean.⁵⁶ It was different for One-Three.

CW4 Lawton,* flying THUNDER One-Three, was using max torque to lift straight up when he spotted two power lines at tree top level close to his forward rotor tips. To compensate for the low rotor (downward bend) situation at high torque, Lawton* eased the power and made quick flight control adjustments to remain steady. Having recovered his aircraft, Lawton* began a slow turn to lift out. Just when he thought he was clear of the tight HLZ, his aft landing gear snagged the power lines and ripped them away. One-Three began its ascent dragging sixty feet of wire. With their ‘monkey straps’ snap-linked into the aircraft floor, the ramp crew chiefs cleared the wire as the aircraft gained altitude.⁵⁷ It was a ‘Katie, bar the door!’ situation as One-Three accelerated to get beyond DShK range.

As the last *Chinook* (THUNDER One-Three) lifted clear, the DAPs swept the HLZs for heavy machineguns before racing to catch the egressing MH-47Gs. CHISEL Flight protected the three *Chinooks* into the *laager* site. CW3 Shelton* made a precautionary landing to thoroughly check the aircraft. By then it was dark.⁵⁸

As soon as the ground force was offloaded from THUNDER One-One and moving to board THUNDER One-Four, the flight engineer and three crew chiefs did Battle Damage Assessments (BDA) inside and out with flashlights.⁵⁹ The ANA SOF boarded the ‘stand by’ MH-47G (One-Four) to return to Kandahar. After ‘passing’ the BDA report to the CJSOAC with their satellite communications (SATCOM) radio, THUNDER One-One was deemed non-mission capable and was grounded. A Damage Assessment Recovery Team (DART) was assembled for dispatch to the *laager* site. The THUNDER One-One crew secured the MH-47G and sat down to wait in the darkness. They would be ‘backhauled’ to Kandahar aboard the two MH-60L *Black Hawks* carrying the DART and their equipment.⁶⁰

“The next thing we knew THUNDER One-One was alone at the *laager* site. There were a couple of Air Force Pararescue Jumpers (PJs) left behind so that One-Four could carry our

ANA SOF. The *laager* site was ‘sketchy.’ Supposedly ANA were manning the perimeter. Fortunately, we were still pretty ‘amped up’ and stayed awake just talking about the mission,” recalled SPC Thomas.*⁶¹ “I was a qualification [a FARP refueling] short of being FMQ when we arrived in February,” said SPC Williams.* “All of us ‘back enders’ were Night Stalkers ‘Babies.’”⁶² “And, my first ride in a *Black Hawk* was going to be back to Kandahar. That was sweet,” commented SPC Thomas.*⁶³

THUNDER Flight battle damage was significant. During the ten minutes of heavy ground fire, THUNDER One-One had suffered nine large caliber and multiple small arms penetrations in various places. The rotor blades had several bullet holes and numerous edge chips. Daylight revealed innumerable RPG creases and dents and a rash of small arms pepper marks. The most serious damage was caused by the DShK round that penetrated the cockpit belly area (beneath CW4 Dockery’s feet). It slashed through, but did not sever, the two tubes shielding the push-pull control rods. THUNDER One-Three had two armor piercing bullet penetrations and minor wire damage to its rear landing gear. On the positive side of the ledger none of the aircrews had wounded or injured. The two CHISEL Flight DAPs, Nine-One and Nine-Two, tallied five enemy KIA, one WIA, and two unconfirmed KIA.⁶⁴

*“Looking back down the valley
on the way out, it reminded me
a little of the Grand Canyon.”*

— SGT Neal K. Konrad*

“In retrospect, that was the hairiest mission I have ever experienced in the 160th, or the Army for that matter. But, the seamless melding of pilots, aircrews, and maintainers from the different Night Stalker battalions made success without casualties possible. I’m proud to be a member of this winning combination,” stated CPT David Paulson,* the ‘jump seat’ AMC for Operation ZAMMARI 241.⁶⁵ The pre-mission rainbow spotted by SGT Nathan Branch,* left ramp M-240 gunner and crew chief, had truly been a good omen.⁶⁶ “It turned out to be a very exciting day,” said SPC Peter Thomas,* the left mini-gunner and crew chief.⁶⁷

Despite the ANA SOF rescue operation growing from a 30-man ground force to 400+ ANA and advisors in less than 24 hours, the night infiltrations on 2 March 2015 went smoothly. The ANA SOF assault to rescue the 30 Hazara hostages was a couple of days late. During the building clearings sufficient evidence was found to reveal that

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— CPT David Paulson*



MH-60L *Black Hawk* Defensive Armed Penetrator (DAP).

the hostages had been moved to another location well before the KKA assault. The well-trained and equipped enemy force was not budging from their strong defensive positions. They were ready to fight. CAS through the night enabled the ANA SOF to retain a ‘beach head,’ but well-directed enemy mortar fire commencing at daybreak stalemated the fight. When an approaching major storm threatened to prevent the helicopter withdrawals of the ANA and turn their limited success into major defeat, the 160th SOAR airmen lived up to their motto, “Night Stalkers Don’t Quit (NSDQ)!”

Hammered hard by a fusillade of fire from multiple ground to air ambushes--small arms to heavy machine guns and RPGs-- for more than ten minutes, THUNDER Flight, protected by the DAPs of CHISEL Flight ‘rescued’ the beleaguered ANA SOF troops enabling them to fight again proudly for their country. The six 160th helicopters sustained no irreparable damage. Night Stalker pilots and aircrews from three different battalions planned, coordinated, flew, and fought seamlessly. This is the true measure of a well-

trained ARSOF element. ZAMMARI 241 pointed to a need for more aerial gunnery at higher speeds (90-120 knots) when aircraft are maneuvering to evade enemy fire. The failure to rearm with daytime ammunition can be attributed to fatigue; a simple add-on to the checklists that keep all Night Stalkers ‘at the top of their game, all the time’ will suffice. The confidence of ANASOF was buoyed by American resources—helicopters and CAS—and this action reinforced foreign internal defense (FID) as the primary SF mission in this unconventional warfare (UW) environment. †

CHARLES H. BRISCOE, PhD

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Endnotes

- 1 Phil Zabriskie, “The Outsiders,” *National Geographic* (February 2008): 114-135.
- 2 CW4 Hubert C. Dockery and SSG Neal K. Konrad,* interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 4 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter interview cited by name and date.
- 3 SPC Sean D.T. Williams,* interview by Briscoe, 8 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter interview cited by name and date.
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- 10 Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
- 11 SPC Peter M. Thomas,* interview by Briscoe, 8 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter interview cited by name and date.
- 12 Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
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- 15 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015; Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
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- 21 SGT Nathan L. Branch,* interview by Briscoe, 8 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter interview cited by name and date.
- 22 Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
- 23 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
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- 28 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015; Thomas* interview 8 December 2015.
- 29 Williams* interview, 8 December 2015; Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 30 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015; Branch* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 31 Shelton* interview, 3 December 2015.
- 32 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015; Branch* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 33 Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
- 34 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 35 Branch* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 36 Williams* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 37 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 38 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 39 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 40 Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
- 41 Shelton* interview, 3 December 2015.
- 42 Thomas* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 43 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 44 Branch* interview, 8 December 2015; Thomas* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 45 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015; Branch* interview, 8 December 2015.
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- 47 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 48 Shelton* interview, 3 December 2015.
- 49 Thomas* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 50 Shelton* interview, 3 December 2015; Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
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- 52 Thomas* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 53 Shelton* interview, 3 December 2015.
- 54 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 55 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 56 DA Form 2823. Sworn Statement. CW4 Randall W. Lawton,* dated 5 November 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as DA Form 2823 – Lawton*.
- 57 DA Form 2823—Lawton*.
- 58 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 59 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 60 Dockery and Konrad* interview, 4 December 2015.
- 61 Thomas* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 62 Williams* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 63 Thomas* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 64 AAR Operation ZUMMARI 241 dated 4 March 2015; **During the 300 hour phase maintenance done on THUNDER One-One in December 2015, a tenth large caliber penetration was discovered.** Dockery email to Briscoe, 29 July 2016.
- 65 Paulson* interview, 17 June 2016.
- 66 Branch* interview, 8 December 2015.
- 67 Thomas* interview, 8 December 2015.

The four ‘backenders’ on THUNDER One-One were all Night Stalker ‘Babies.’



NOVA EXPERIMENT



ODA 7224
Village Stability Operations

by Michael E. Krivdo

Village Stability Operations (VSO)

In Afghanistan, the original concept was known as the Community Defense Initiative (CDI). CDI was also later referred to as the Local Defense Initiative (LDI), but by the time the concept matured was called Village Stability Operations (VSO). Therefore, for the sake of clarity VSO is used throughout this article.

When he first saw the child in the long line of patients, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Dan A. Marvin* (pseudonym), junior Special Forces (SF) Medical Sergeant, knew that this was the most serious case he would see today and that the boy might not survive. Malik, about two years old, had fallen off the roof of his house a few days earlier and his condition had gradually declined. Now he was listless and unresponsive, with a massive bulge protruding from his skull. SFC Marvin* diagnosed hematoma and brain trauma. He “didn’t appear to see anything, he wouldn’t track with his eyes, couldn’t get much of a response from his pupils” said Marvin*.¹ The child had paralysis on the left side of his body, a symptom that was consistent with the damage to the right side of the skull. Malik’s desperate father, hearing that Americans were providing medical treatment in Nili village, carried his lethargic child about 50 kilometers hoping they could help. As the soldiers of Operational Detachment - Alpha (ODA) 7224 realized the seriousness of Malik’s injuries, they moved into action to save his life.²

SFC Marvin* and the senior SF Medical Sergeant, SFC Josiah Monza*, stabilized the child, cleaned his injuries, and made him comfortable. Other team members explored options to evacuate Malik for major trauma surgery. Without surgery the boy would die. The Afghans had no hospital with the capability to perform delicate surgery outside Kabul, and the closest military facility with the means to treat Malik’s injuries was in Kandahar, 400 kilometers to the south. And neither the district nor province officials had the means to medically evacuate (MEDEVAC) a patient that distance. Coalition forces were initially reluctant to evacuate an Afghan not injured in combat. When SFC Marvin* notified the ODA Team Leader, Captain (CPT) Mike L. Bourne* Jr., of the situation, Malik’s care became a priority. Their actions (or inaction) were being judged by the people of the region. Since the ODA was to forge good relationships with the villagers, Malik’s critical condition was an ideal platform.³

Working through the higher headquarters, the senior Weapons Sergeant, SFC Brad D. Rendition*, a qualified Joint Tactical Aircraft Controller (JTAC), arranged for a passing helicopter to fly Malik and his father to Kandahar. On arrival, Malik was rushed to a U.S. military surgical unit where a neurosurgeon operated to relieve the pressure on his brain and repair the damage. The operation took place just in time; the swelling subsided and he became more alert and aware of his surroundings. Within days the paralysis began to dissipate, and feeling and mobility returned to his left side.

Malik’s case attracted the attention of Cable News Network (CNN) commentator and neurosurgeon Dr. Sanjay Gupta, who had been reporting on the war and visiting medical facilities. Dr. Gupta saw the child, heard the story, and publicized Malik’s splendid recovery. He also accompanied the boy and his father back to Nili. International television covered the event, highlighting the life-saving efforts of the SF ODA. The boy’s father, Khodadad, was ecstatic: “God answered our prayers, God sent someone to save my son.” The act of kindness bolstered trust and earned the esteem of the local villagers. These Special Forces soldiers could be counted on in time of need.⁴

This article examines Army SOF’s first deliberate experiment with Village Stability Operations (VSO) in Afghanistan, an event that marked a dramatic change in the SOF role. It explains how the concept came about, its goals, and what SOF planners were hoping to achieve. In particular, it focuses on ODA 7224’s actions in that situation and how their experiences shaped the future expansion of the program. How ODA 7224 prepared and adapted were key. The SF soldiers thrived on the challenges of the new mission. Despite limited information about their area they soon became experts on the region. They anticipated requirements, understanding the need for integrating Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations into their efforts. The ODA exercised good initiative and anticipated needs for assistance. They also provided detailed feedback on progress to their higher command staff, thereby sharing ‘lessons learned’ so others could benefit. The success achieved by ODA 7224 caused a rapid growth of SF teams doing VSO missions throughout Afghanistan. ODA 7224 set the standards for individuals and teams. Here’s what they did to shape and influence village stability operations as it happened.

Four Phases of VSO⁶

- 1 - **Shape:** address local concerns and improve security.
- 2 - **Hold:** enhance security within the area.
- 3 - **Build:** relationships with better local coordination.
- 4 - **Transition:** leave effective local government in charge.

*** Similar to the Strategic Hamlet Strategy in Vietnam*

IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of 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.



(Left) Malik, a two-year old Afghan child who suffered a severe head injury from a fall, received life-saving care from American Special Forces medics (Right) Special Forces Medical Sergeant SFC Dan L. Marvin* removes staples from Malik during the child's recovery after emergency brain surgery. (AP Photo)

In 2009, General Stanley A. McChrystal (Commander, International Security Assistance Force [ISAF]) shifted to a Counter-Insurgency (COIN)-based strategy in Afghanistan. The two Special Operations Forces (SOF) command elements, the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command - Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) and the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), were responsible for developing and implementing enhanced security at the village level in order to bolster the legitimacy of the Afghan government among its citizenry. The Special Operations mission became VSO. Influenced by early Special Forces Unconventional Warfare (UW) efforts in Vietnam (such as the raising and training of Civilian Irregular Defense Group [CIDG] units and implementing the Strategic Hamlet Program), Special Forces ODAs lived within select villages. There, they helped residents establish 'white space,' or a 'security bubble' around their community. It was a 'bottom-up' approach beginning at the local level. Once accomplished, the VSO villages would be linked with other secure areas and connected to higher (district, province, or national) levels of governance to form larger, more stable regions.⁵ Security could be improved in increments, region by region throughout the country.

As explained by a later commander of CJSOTF-A, Colonel (COL) Donald C. Bolduc, the VSO concept envisioned SF ODAs "building relationships and assisting the populace to stand up against insurgents."⁷ Regular, determined engagement of village leaders would enable the ODA to improve security. The local *shura* would discuss or 'sell' suggestions to improve economic stability. Concurrently, SOF leaders would coordinate with ISAF and various non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) like Oxfam or other groups such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for village projects. Resources had to come from regional and national leaders. In turn, the ODA would form and train an Afghan Local Police (ALP) element to perform local guard services and conduct patrols. This armed, organized presence was meant to deter insurgent activity.

In April 2009, Brigadier General (BG) Edward M. Reeder Jr. (Commander, CFSOCC-A and former commander of 7th SFG and CJSOTF-A) and COL James E. Kraft Jr. (Commander, 7th SFG and future commander of CJSOTF-A)



MG Edward M. Reeder Jr., a former commander of 7th SFG, was twice commander of CJSOTF-Afghanistan and later commander of CFSOCC-A and SOJTF-A.



MG James E. Kraft, former commander of 7th SFG and CJSOTF-Afghanistan.

selected Special Forces ODA 7224 to lead the village stability operation effort. Chosen for their leadership, maturity, proficiency, long-term personnel stability, and UW experience, the SF team focused on the new mission. In the absence of detailed mission briefings, the ODA worked to understand the village stability mission and to gather intel on their newly formed province, Daykundi. Before 2004 it was part of Oruzgan Province north of Kandahar (see map). To SFC Brad J. Rendition*, the team's senior Weapons Sergeant, the VSO mission "sounded like a hybrid of COIN, FID, and UW; it would be based ultimately on whatever . . . conditions we encountered." Depending on the situation, "we would flex to COIN, UW, FID, or whatever met the mission, intent, and end state" to succeed.⁸

The ODA got the VSO mission just prior to deploying to Afghanistan. "We originally were training to go to Fire Base Tycz and essentially search for and destroy the enemy. We didn't focus on much else" during pre-mission training, explained Team Leader CPT Mike L. Bourne* Jr. The team had already completed all preparations for their 'kill or capture' direct action (DA) mission. Instead, Bourne* continued, "I was called off of block leave prior to

deployment" and given a new mission – village stability operations. CPT Bourne* called in his Team Sergeant, Master Sergeant (MSG) Thomas E. 'Tom' Douglas, and the two collected all available information to support new planning. As MSG Douglas put it, "This was a whole new concept for us."¹⁰ The two began analyzing available data to determine the political, economic, religious, and historical dynamics in Daykundi Province. "Together we conducted the military decision making process (MDMP) . . . cranked out the plan and briefed the guys," recalled CPT Bourne*.¹¹ They also briefed the commander of 2nd Battalion, 7th SFG, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) James Miller, on their concept despite not knowing their precise location for VSO. That said, the clock was counting down on their time to deploy. MSG Tom Douglas summarized the situation best when he said "a lot of planning remained to be made in-country."¹²

The ODA deployed as scheduled in early June 2009, spending "a full month at Kandahar to plan, prep, and get people on board" for their new mission, stated SFC Rendition*.¹³ By the time they arrived, the specific site for the VSO experiment had been confirmed by BG Reeder.¹⁴ The team would infiltrate and set up operations in the village of Nili, the

"We are enthusiastic about this initiative and believe that it will go a long way to increasing security and enabling villagers to defend themselves."⁹

— Then-COL James E. Kraft,
Commander 7th SFG/CJSOTF-A, 2009





Members of ODA 7224, the U.S. State Department, and officers of the 82nd Airborne Division meet with the Governor of Daykundi Province, Sultan Ali Uruzgani, at his residence.

district and provincial capital of Daykundi, located about 400 kilometers north of Kandahar. The province was populated mostly by Hazara, a pro-Western tribal group considered to be 'neutral' in the fight against the Taliban and anti-coalition militia ('warlords'). "Teams had driven through there in 2002, 2003, but had never left a sustained presence," SFC Rendition* explained. The province was new; before 2003 it had been a part of the Pashtun-dominated Oruzgan Province. The ethnic minority Hazaras had long been discriminated against by the Pashtun majority; freeing the Hazara districts from direct Oruzgan/Pashtun provincial control helped rebalance that situation. The political leadership of the province was progressive by Afghan standards, and Nili boasted the first female mayor in the country. For their part, local Hazara leaders supported efforts to increase village and district security. They had long requested assistance from the Afghan central government in Kabul to help reduce Taliban influence in Daykundi. The central government had promised the Provincial Governor and Chief of Police that coalition forces were coming. American leadership believed that introducing Special Forces to bolster security in the district would fulfill that pledge from the national government.¹⁵

During mission planning in Kandahar the team determined that attachments were needed. Having two soldiers qualified as Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTACs), airmen with those skills were not included. He did request an additional Weapons Sergeant to help share the security duties with the two ODA weapons sergeants, and that request was approved. CPT Bourne* also determined in his mission analysis that Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological

Operations (PSYOP) personnel would be beneficial, so he requested them as well. The CJSOTF-A commander initially provided three persons: CA Major (MAJ) Jon D. Borman, CA SFC Mack Reyes-Solis*, and PSYOP SSG Prasert 'Pot' Pradtana*. SFC Reyes-Solis* and SSG Pradtana* joined the ODA at Kandahar and helped the team plan for its mission. MAJ Borman joined the team after infiltration, and in September a second PSYOP soldier, Specialist Four (SP4) Rick Hartung*, arrived to assist SSG Pradtana*.¹⁶

Because the team would be operating in isolated rural areas with no electricity or running water, the detachment got to hire a local generator mechanic/small engine repairman to keep lights, electricity, and water pumps working. In addition, the CJSOTF provided three contract civilian interpreters to communicate with the locals in their own languages and dialects. This mix of SF, SOF support, and contract enablers eventually became the basic model for successive VSOs.¹⁷

GEN Stanley A. McChrystal's Four Criteria for Prioritizing VSO Locations

- "established in communities with a grass roots history of resisting the Taliban"
- "located in strategically significant" areas for ISAF and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA)
- "areas important to insurgent operations"
- "capable of sustaining a SOF presence"

Endnote

Quotes from Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 3.

With its organization fixed, ODA 7224 completed mission planning and coordinated for their night infiltration into Nili. Lacking good road connections, the team opted to take two Toyota HiLux pickup trucks modified to mount weapons. These could be transported internally via heavy lift helicopters. Two four-wheeled all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) were added as well. In the interim a pre-deployment site survey (PDSS) visited Nili to confirm information, select a camp location, and meet with local leaders.¹⁸

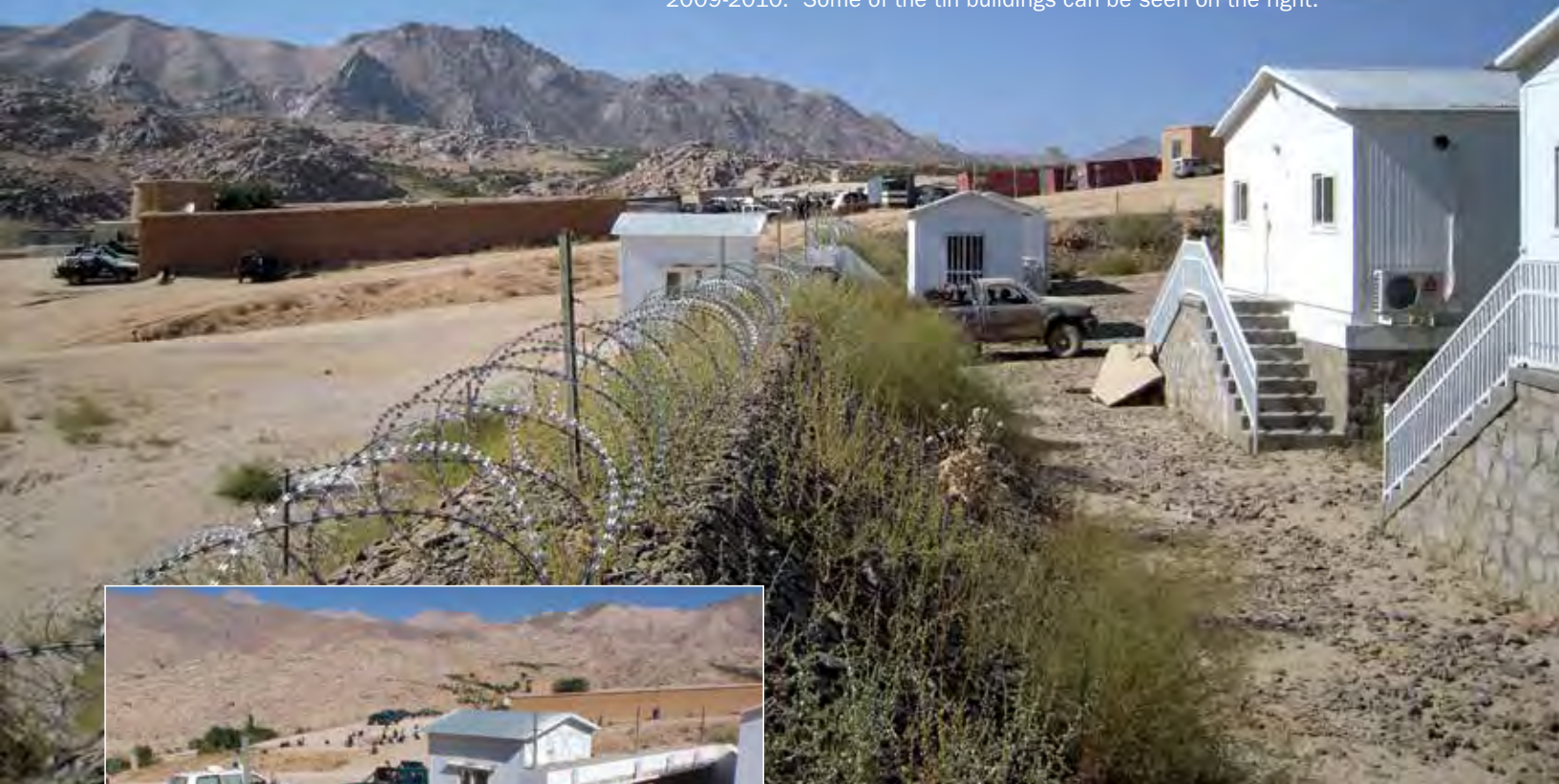


At night in late July 2009, three CH-47 'Chinook' heavy lift helicopters delivered ODA 7224. They landed next to a United Nations (UN) World Health Organization (WHO) compound near a small Afghan National Police (ANP) contingent. Carrying five days' worth of equipment and supplies, the vehicle-mounted team quickly occupied a nearby 70 by 70 meter site confirmed earlier. The team's new home had been constructed in 2007 by USAID to house a promised Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) that had instead been diverted to another province. "It was almost like *Field of Dreams*," SFC Rendition* joked, "If you build it, they will come . . . but two years later." The compound had its own well, was surrounded by small earthen and rock berms that added some degree of protection, and contained eight tin/metal buildings/sheds (see sketch). The site was located across the rocky 'street' from the provincial police headquarters and near one of the town's two rudimentary hospitals. The village mayor had kept the compound buildings in good condition, guarding against 'homesteaders' in the hope that a friendly military force would come. By daybreak the team had settled into their new home and were busy making improvements.¹⁹

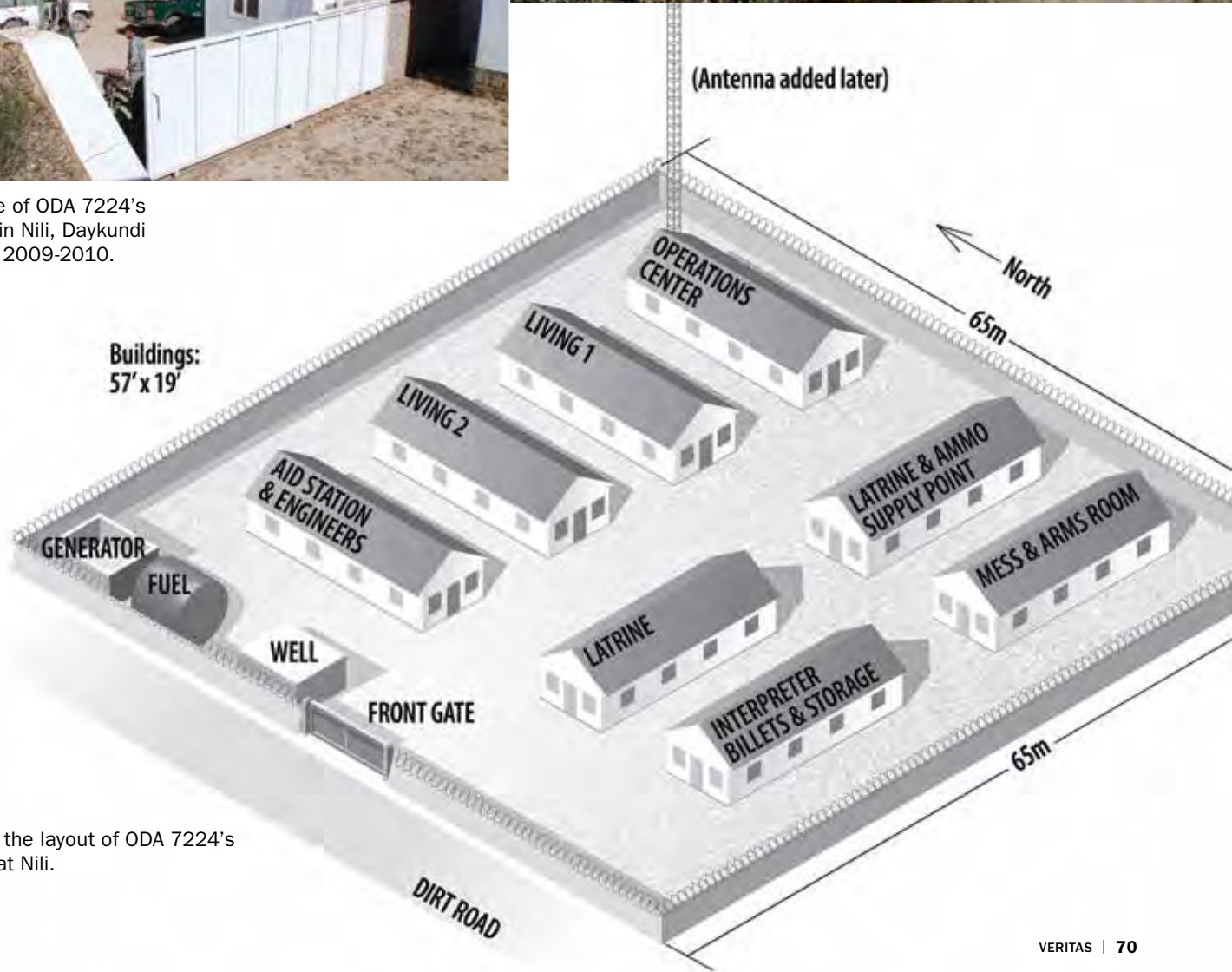
ODA 7224 loaded vehicles, supplies, and equipment onto CH-47 Chinook helicopters for the VSO mission.



View of the front gate area of ODA 7224's VSO site in Nili, Daykundi Province, 2009-2010. Some of the tin buildings can be seen on the right.



Front gate of ODA 7224's VSO site in Nili, Daykundi Province, 2009-2010.



Sketch of the layout of ODA 7224's VSO site at Nili.

The SF ODA leaders had a key decision to make. Still uncertain as to threat, CPT Bourne* improved camp defenses. However, a camp too fortified might hinder interaction with the villagers critical to the VSO mission. The SF team emplaced some wire and obstacles that provided the right degree of security without completely insulating themselves from the villagers. After submitting their defensive plan, CJSOTF-A approved it and funded the desired improvements.²⁰ As Team Sergeant MSG Douglas described it, “We were trying to protect ourselves, but not overdoing it.”²¹ “Our security also depended on people talking with us and giving us information,” CW2 ‘Chaka’ Santos* confirmed.²² MAJ Jon Borman best described it: “The locals were our early warning device.”²³ If conditions worsened, more security measures could be taken quickly.

In keeping with the goal of the first phase of VSO—to shape (the environment) to obtain local consent for the SF element – ODA 7224 became thoroughly familiar with the province. “We’d pick a village in the outlying districts, and we’d go out and visit it,” MSG Douglas related, “and we’d get to know the local elders.” Typically the ODA would leave some soldiers back at camp to continue work while the remainder went on long-range vehicular patrols. “Those first couple of months we did a lot of driving,” Douglas said, to conduct “a lot of engagements and meetings.” They usually brought Afghan National Police with them on the trips to serve as guides, to help with introductions, and to

push them into stretching authority outside the districts.²⁴ The ODA members quickly learned the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the region, and got to know who the real local leaders were.

When not patrolling outlying districts the team met with the provincial leaders and the ANP in Nili. Three days a week detachment specialists trained the police to increase their proficiency. Team members rotated giving classes on weapons training, patrolling, small unit tactics, Human Rights instruction, communications, law enforcement procedures, and first aid. As MSG Douglas explained: “It was a constant ... either driving to meetings, or training . . . We certainly stayed busy and kept them engaged to everyone’s benefit.”²⁵

The ODA Civil Affairs personnel also worked hard. MAJ Jon D. Borman, the CA element leader, brought a wealth of experience and maturity to the job. A former enlisted Infantryman who was an Infantry Officer for nine years before transitioning to CA, Borman had deployed a number of times and served several months as the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) Chief before joining the VSO experiment. MAJ Borman had plenty of connections in CA circles to help the ODA. As he described it, “One of the biggest things about Civil Affairs is establishing and building relationships and networks and knowing ‘who is who’ in the neighborhood.” Those skills fit right in with the VSO mission. “I had a direct line to the CMOC in Bagram,” Borman stated, “which helped get projects approved.”²⁶

ODA 7224 regularly patrolled Daykundi Province in their vehicles.





ODA 7224 SF Weapons Sergeants conduct ANP marksmanship training on a flat range outside Nili, Afghanistan, October 2009. Flat space for ranges was difficult to find in the mountainous area. "Everything was on a slope," SFC Brad Rendition* noted. "If it was flat, it had buildings, people, or animals on it," added MSG Tom Douglas.



Ceremony marking the commencement of repairs on the mosque in Nili, Afghanistan, on 2 October 2009. ODA 7224 and the CA element leader (MAJ Jon Borman) made arrangements to expand the mosque and make repairs to better accommodate the people of the town. In the center (with microphone), Mullah Faazili addresses the villagers. To his left (in business suit) is the Deputy Governor of Daykundi Province, LTC M. Amar Gharji. To Gharji's left is CPT Mike L. Bourne* Jr., Team Leader of ODA 7224. Note that the sign refers to the ODA as a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), since the concept of ODAs performing VSO was unknown at that time.

"The very first project we did was in Nili, the provincial capital," MAJ Borman recalled. CPT Bourne* "and I met with the Imam (Islamic worship leader of a mosque) and talked to him" about his needs. Essentially, Borman continued, "the mosque in downtown Nili wasn't big enough. The townspeople had to pray in shifts." CPT Bourne* "wanted to do a project to expand and fix up the mosque. I helped get the project funded and completed," Borman said. The building was expanded, rest rooms added so that they could wash before praying, and repairs made. According to the CA major, "That project paid huge dividends" on several levels. First, "the Imam was extremely pleased; he said great things about the Americans and what we

would be doing." Second, "The mosque was a very visible thing, being in the center of it; everyone saw it." Third, "It didn't just affect Nili. Word spread about the project throughout the province." Lastly, "It was tangible and real. It was something they could see with their own eyes, and experience."²⁷ With CA assistance, the ODA knocked their first ball 'out of the park.'

Other projects were completed that further cemented the good relations between the ODA and the people of Daykundi. These included several school expansions or renovations. School projects especially resonated with the Hazara. "As an ethnic minority...they put a high value on education," MAJ Borman explained. "That was one way



1

Operation **BEANIE BABY**

As SFC Brad D. Rendition*, senior Weapons Sergeant for ODA 7224, eloquently put it: “Hearts and minds don’t make easy targets.”¹ The Special Forces non-commissioned officers of ODA 7224 also came up with their own creative ways to gain the trust of the people of Daykundi. The junior SF medic, SFC Dan A. Marvin*, believed that “the best and fastest way to get the parents and adults to trust us, was to win the trust of the kids.” A common ‘trick of the trade’ was to give out soccer balls to children when visiting villages, but Dan Marvin* could go beyond that. The Catholic Diocese in his home town of Green Bay, Wisconsin, wanted to help an Afghan province and picked Daykundi.²

The response was greater than the ODA ever expected. In November, the detachment received more than 80 boxes filled with over “1000 pounds of stuffed animals, toys, and kid’s blankets.” The Diocese had collected up the materials from all over Green Bay. In addition, an anonymous donor provided \$2,000.00 to ship the items to the ODA in Daykundi.³

The soldiers of 7224 now had plenty of ‘ammunition’ to give to the kids of the province. However, to get even more impact from the gifts, the soldiers arranged for the Afghan National Police (ANP), who generally accompanied them on patrol, to actually hand out the items to the crowds of kids and parents that gathered. Doing so put ‘an Afghan face’ on the distribution by making it appear the gifts came from the ANP or a concerned Afghan government.⁴

Other benefits came with that approach. First, it helped the ANP establish themselves as a benefactor in the eyes of the villagers rather than someone to be feared. Second, it provided the people with the opportunity to see the Americans in a non-combat setting. And with the ANP and Americans working side-by-side, it reinforced the ‘trust-factor’ where both were concerned. Third, as SFC Marvin* noted, “With the kids happy and cheering, more adults were happy to meet with us.”⁵ And as can be seen in the photos, adults often snuck into the beanie baby handout line as well.



2



3



4

*“Hearts
and
minds
don’t
make
easy
targets.”*

— SFC Brad D. Rendition*

1 Over 1,000 lbs. of stuffed animals, toys and kid’s blankets were donated by the Green Bay Catholic Diocese.

2 Americans, pulling security, and ANP worked side by side reinforcing the ‘trust-factor’ with the community.

3 In the remote villages, crowds of kids and parents gathered to receive the ‘goodies’ from the Afghan National Police.

4 ANP handed out toys to the children during village engagements. This helped the people see the ANP as a force to be trusted, and not one to be feared.



MAJ Jon Borman, CA Officer (right) discusses a school extension project with school officials in Nili, Afghanistan, December, 2009.



MAJ Jon Borman (forefront) and CPT Mike Bourne* (left rear of Borman) discuss a project to construct a school building to replace the temporary tent school in the background. September 2009, Nili, Afghanistan. Note the steep slope gradient present throughout Daykundi that complicated all construction efforts.

they had of dealing with discrimination. As we went out and talked with leaders, [education and schooling] were common points brought up.” Essentially, “they had enough teachers . . . they just didn’t have the physical schools. Some of the schools were under a tree or in a tent. Some were in a mosque.” As Borman described it, “some families had to send kids to schools in shifts, either in the morning or afternoon” because of shortages of space. Providing or improving schools was key to connecting with the communities. “We started eight or ten different projects with schools . . . in different districts and locations.”²⁸

Other humanitarian aid projects further cemented their relationships. The SF Detachment JTACs arranged for blind drops of humanitarian aid to more remote locations. MAJ Borman also “empowered the local leaders as much as we could” by delivering boxes of humanitarian aid donations to the leaders who then “put packages together with food, blankets, clothing” for needy families. “I could also get the funding for little projects through quickly,” such as one

that provided firewood to heat the Women’s Prison. Unlike western prisons, the children of imprisoned women were also incarcerated with their mothers, making it a humanitarian issue forgotten by many people. Several medical/dental civic action projects (MEDCAP/DENTCAPs) were also held throughout the district to treat patients who otherwise might have gone without proper care. In addition to the SF medics assisting the local hospitals/clinics with their daily ‘sick calls,’ sometimes medical personnel were brought in from outside units to provide specialized care and treatment.²⁹

The PSYOP element was similarly engaged. SSG Prasert ‘Pot’ Pradtana*, the PSYOP element leader, joined ODA 7224 at Camp Brown, Kandahar, ready to work. On checking in with the Team Leader, CPT Bourne*, he declared: “I come with print and audio capability, and ‘Radio in a Box’ [RIAB], and I’m outgoing and enthusiastic. I’m here to help you persuade, change, and influence the locals, whether they are Hazara or Pashtun.” CPT Bourne* put ‘Pot’ to work and provided him with guidance.³⁰



ODA 7224 SF medic SFC Dan A. Marvin* checking the vitals of a local Hazara woman. A contract interpreter is at her left, providing language assistance.



ODA 7224 SF medic SFC Dan A. Marvin* (background, with flashlight) assisting a 20th SFG Dentist (right side) while the Surgeon from 2nd Battalion, 7th SFG observes.



Members of ODA 7224 and PSYOP SSG Pradtana* examine the radio antenna set up in the camp to extend the range of the detachment's Tactical Radio Station (TRS). The blur in the picture is falling snow.

On arriving at Nili, 'Pot' set up his Tactical Radio Station (TRS) and collected material for broadcasts. SSG Pradtana* accompanied the ODA during their many engagements throughout the province. "MSG Douglas was all about getting out there, extending the 'white space,'" he related. Before each trip 'Pot' would "match up the pre-approved PSYOP objectives with those of CPT Bourne*." For example, one objective was to "Increase the legitimacy of GIRoA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], ... and so I used the local personalities to disseminate information." Essentially he enabled the local leaders to "put out public information coupled with subtle lines of persuasion." SSG Pradtana* would get Afghan leaders like the Chief of Police to record messages that informed villagers "what to report, who to report it to, how to report," transforming the people into the eyes and ears of the ANP. When 'Pot' returned to the camp, he included those recordings in the radio station's programming, thereby helping the local officials broadcast targeted messages that reinforced their legitimacy to a larger, dispersed audience and enlisted them in the fight for law and order, sort of a 'Neighborhood Watch.'³¹

To extend the range of his FM radio amid the mountainous terrain in the province, SSG Pradtana* erected about 100 feet of antenna sections he had discovered earlier in a scrap pile at Camp Brown. He took the initiative to clean the sections, paint them, and even packed the lot for delivery to Nili on one of the scheduled resupply runs. Once installed, the extra height of the antenna extended the range of his set and allowed him to reach more people. SSG Pradtana* also tied the radio programming in with a feedback mechanism; a set of 'suggestion boxes' that he made out of wood and placed at key locations in the province. For force protection purposes, and to further put an Afghan face on that initiative, he arranged for the ANP to periodically check the boxes, translate any messages found, and relay the content to the SF Detachment. The boxes proved to be a good means of gaining feedback on the station's content, and the occasional source of information on Taliban movements, activity, and placement of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).³²

SSG Pradtana* also provided a wide variety of other products to "persuade, change, and influence." "I wanted a balance where we could manage the [TRS] 24/7, but still

EXPLOSIVE AWARENESS

TPT 1C12B
PSA
19 OCT 09

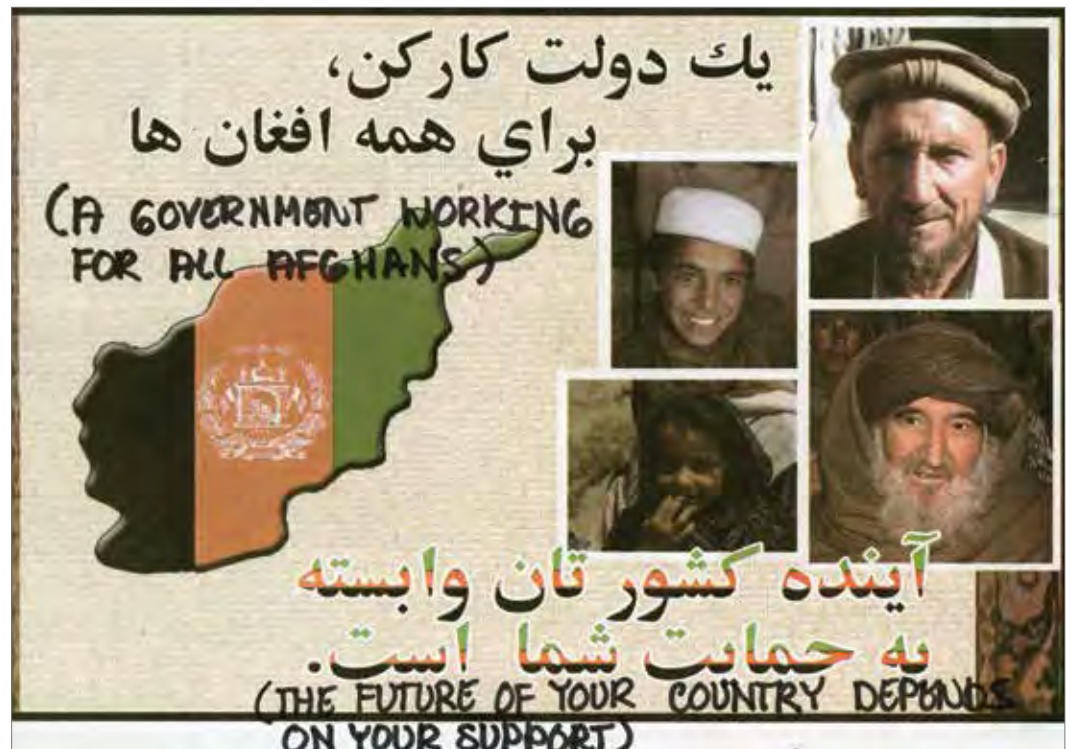
A Public Service Announcement (PSA) warning villagers of the dangers of grenades and explosives. The radio broadcast also provides information on how to report the discovery of any explosive materials, again making the ANP the 'entry point.'

"A couple days ago a kid from Kesaw village in the Keyti district, found a hand grenade on a mountain behind his village. He was playing with a hand grenade thinking it was a toy; the hand grenade exploded and destroyed his hand. The kid was lucky the hand grenade did not kill him.

Explosives are dangerous and can kill anyone around it. If you see any explosives, including land mines, hand grenades, mortar rounds, artillery rounds, or bombs; do not touch the explosive, make note of the location, and contact the ANP immediately. Teach your children not to play with explosives; their lives are at risk if they play with explosives.

Again if you see any explosives, do not touch it, take note of the location, and contact ANP immediately. This is for your safety and the safety of your family."

An informational leaflet produced by SSG Pradtana*, the Tactical Psychological Operations Team leader (TPT 1C12) for ODA 7224. These and similar products were distributed during the many engagements and events the team conducted throughout the province. This graphic depicts a master copy that has an English translation of the content.



conduct combat patrols" and provide other services. In addition to "pulling guard, filling sandbags, etc.," the PSYOP element created and distributed various pamphlets, handouts, leaflets, that educated and informed the populace while reinforcing the legitimacy of the government, police, and leaders. 'Pot' also informed his Afghan listeners on public health issues, IED avoidance, ANA recruiting, and humanitarian assistance. SSG Pradtana* noted that "we could have focused on things like women's equality, since we had a woman mayor, or on education, or the ANP or ALP. We could have focused

on so many areas, and I think we delicately touched on so many of them."³³

The SF Medical Sergeants (SFC Marvin* and SFC Monza*), supplemented by SOTF/CJSOTF doctors, conducted MEDCAPs and DENTCAPs that augmented the efforts of the local clinic and regional hospital in treating the people of the community. Those events were widely attended since the province's organic medical capabilities were rudimentary. During these events, the team's Operations and Intelligence Sergeant (18F) (SFC Jorge Cortez*) and other SF soldiers canvassed the people to gain their ideas on how to improve

living conditions and security in the region. In the process, the ODA members got to know the area's demographics, key personalities, and issues well. When not needed for force protection, the three SF Weapons Sergeants (SFC Rendition*, SSG Jameson H. Govoni, and SFC John Hertz*) trained the provincial and district Afghan National Police (ANP) to increase their capabilities and weapons proficiency. Meanwhile the SF Engineers constructed facilities, ranges, checkpoints, and billeting spaces, as well as continually improving the VSO site.³⁴

The team faced several logistical challenges in resupplying their camp. Because of the remoteness of its location and the

rugged topography of the area, resupply and provisioning was problematic. Ground transport was considered too dangerous. The combination of rough terrain, lack of serviceable roads, and infinite number of prospective ambush sites along the route made convoys dangerously impracticable. The team brought only five days of food, water, ammunition, and supplies with them when they arrived. Everything thereafter had to be air delivered by helicopter or parachute.³⁵ A better solution was needed.

The closest utility helicopters to supply the detachment were located at Tarin Kowt, about 100 kilometers distant. And considering the higher altitudes and rugged terrain,



Special Forces Weapons Sergeants and other members of ODA 7224 conduct weapons training for provincial and district Afghan National Police (ANP) near the village of Nili, Day Kundi Province, Afghanistan, 2009.

Personnel from ODA 7224 have a 'working lunch' in Nili, 12 August 2009. On the left (with traditional head wear) is Karim Khalili, Vice President of Afghanistan. Seated to Mr. Khalili's left is CPT Mike Bourne*, Team Leader of ODA 7224.





Soldiers from ODA 7224 conduct parachute resupply. Because of the remote mountainous terrain in Daykundi Province, the ODA depended mainly on airdrops for food, water, ammunition, parts, and supplies.

helicopters could carry few supplies and were operating at the limits of their range without refueling. In order to ‘stretch the legs’ of the helos and bring more supplies per flight a local refueling capability was needed. The funding for that effort was not granted until December, but eventually local workers under the supervision of the ODA created an HLZ capable of ‘spotting’ four CH-47s. Essentially, the workers had to flatten the top of a small hill and grade the site by hand. The laborers also built up earthen berms to hold fuel bladders to refuel helicopters. But when finished, the project significantly improved living conditions and morale in the detachment; the ability to supply by helo freed them from their steady diet of Meals, Ready to Eat (MREs) and increased the frequency of mail deliveries.³⁶ CJSOTF learned and included plans to either ensure future VSOs had some HLZ capability, or

to provide sufficient parachute riggers and equipment to drop supplies.

As part of the VSO concept, each ODA would create a small Afghan Local Police (ALP) element formed out of local volunteers who would help improve the security in the village. ODA 7224 was specifically tasked to “create such a fighting force ...and to make it legitimate” in the minds of the locals.³⁷ Fortunately, the team’s prior experiences in Afghanistan reaped great dividends. In October, after first disseminating flyers advertising the ALP idea and its intended role, a “Hazara elder, who was part of a strike force in 2002, showed up at the camp gate.” The ODA Assistant Team Leader, Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CW2) Juan A. ‘Chaka’ Santos*, was called out to meet with him. “As soon as they opened that gate, it was like a reunion ... I brought him in and we talked about past operations.” “It was like a gold

mine,” ‘Chaka’ recalled. Niazi, the elder, turned out to be a local official and he said he had “about twenty or twenty-five villagers” interested in joining. Many had worked with American forces during the first year of the war. Fortuitously, CW2 Santos* had some digital photos from his earlier operations in that same area. “I’m a big believer in identity and identity operations,” ‘Chaka’ explained. He found pictures of some of the same prospects working with coalition forces in 2002, thereby substantiating their claims. Another prospect showed up for an interview with a dog-eared folder containing training certificates issued by coalition SOF units that showed he had indeed fought against the Taliban earlier. Although their claims were also checked by CJSOTF personnel and Afghan officials, the photos and documents helped establish their identities, motivation, and past associations.³⁸ Altogether, ODA 7224 compiled a list of about twenty candidates that made it to the next stage -- screening.

Armed with the roster of volunteers, the detachment began processing them individually to see who would ‘make the cut’ to be trained as ALP. The SF Medical Sergeants screened the candidates for diseases or infirmities that would keep them from performing security duties. Basic physical fitness tests were administered to determine those in good physical shape. Other ODA members performed biometric screening and background checks to ensure the individuals were who they claimed to be and were trustworthy. Soon, the twenty prospects were ‘whittled down’ to about eleven who advanced to the next phase — training.³⁹

SFC Rendition*, the senior SF Weapons Sergeant, taught the recruits basic weapons training and combat marksmanship skills with their personal AK-47 rifles. He and the other SF Weapons Sergeants took them to a nearby detachment range and evaluated their live fire techniques. The SF Medics gave classes on basic lifesaving and combat

casualty care. Other members of the ODA provided the group with rudimentary training in small unit tactics and other field skills. Under the tutelage of ODA 7224, the first class of ALP reached the point where it could handle some basic defensive tasks, such as manning a checkpoint, but the team did not have enough time to get them to the level where they could conduct independent offensive operations. That task would fall on their replacement ODA. After the training was completed, the team conducted a public ‘graduation ceremony’ and issued certificates of completion to the new ALP members.⁴⁰ The act bolstered the morale of the new ALP and legitimized their status in the minds of the villagers.

By the end of 2009, ODA 7224 was firmly embedded in the fabric of the villages and districts through much of the



A graduate from the first class of Afghan Local Police (ALP) shakes the hands of ODA 7224 members who trained him. He is holding his graduation certificate.

SF Weapons Sergeant provides instruction to ANP on pistol marksmanship.





ODA 7224 conducting combined vehicle patrol with several members of the provincial ANP.

province. The team members were especially trusted by the residents of Nili, and in turn helped the villagers improve their own living conditions and safety. Reports of encounters with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), although never a lot, dropped to almost none, providing further metrics on the improving conditions. Surveys indicated that the citizens felt safe to walk the streets in seven of the nine districts in the province, another measure of success. The safer conditions promoted trade with neighboring districts that substantially increased the economic well-being of the area.⁴¹ Furthermore, the people felt comfortable dealing with members of the team in a wide variety of circumstances and provided a wealth of information.

The ODA's success was easy to measure. Professional relationships had matured to the point where the Provincial Governor and district leaders hosted a Christmas dinner for the team, and even participated in a gift exchange. Toward the end of their tour, CPT Bourne* reported that "the populace worked with the detachment to expel enemy forces," and that "the province shifted from a non-permissive to semi-permissive environment."⁴²

Several metrics provided evidence to that fact. Reports of probable threats dropped almost to zero within the province. The ODA was able to travel throughout most of its region in non-armored vehicles, remain lightly armed, and conduct meaningful engagements with locals at will. Working with local leaders they made improvements in eight schools, several mosques, and delivered humanitarian supplies to areas previously untouched by government influence. By the time ODA 7224 conducted its relief in place, it "was essentially able to exert control over a province comprising over 18,000 square kilometers."

Furthermore, the improved security environment in five of the province's seven districts prompted a surge in the economic well-being of the region, thereby improving the standard of living for all the residents. Trucks and trade could move freely in most of the province, unhindered by banditry or Taliban interference. All of these achievements were accomplished with only eighteen U.S. soldiers, 100 ANP, about 20 ALP, and some scattered elements of the Afghan National Army.⁴³

As expected, CFSOCC and CJSOTF planners learned a lot from ODA 7224's VSO experience in Daykundi that shaped the conduct of similar efforts throughout Afghanistan. The team's detailed reports and daily communication passed on hard lessons learned and allowed future VSO elements to benefit from their experiences and observations. ODA 7224 Team Leader CPT Bourne* conducted outbriefs with BG Reeder, COL Kraft and COL Gus Benton II (commanders of CJSOTF-A), and several other military leaders. Perhaps most importantly, during a visit of Afghan Vice President Karim Khalili, CPT Bourne* showed him what they were accomplishing in the province. Khalili was so impressed that he convinced the American Ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl W. Eikenberry (a former Lieutenant General in the U.S. Army), and Afghan President Hamid Karzai to endorse the VSO program. Khalili's enthusiastic support ensured adoption of a VSO strategy in Afghanistan.⁴⁴

The ODA's efforts imparted other useful information for future VSO practitioners. Perhaps the most important lesson learned was that team members supporting VSO missions must conduct a thorough study of the prospective site's demographics, political makeup, ethnic background

and local history to adequately meet the challenges they would face after infiltration. Although the conditions an ODA faced in one area were not automatically applicable to another ODA in a different area, success required a solid understanding of the many factors affecting each village/district in the region. In summary, VSO planners were repeatedly cautioned there was “no cookie-cutter solution” to conducting VSO.⁴⁵

Despite that, ODA 7224’s experiences proved valuable in planning other VSO missions. The problems they encountered served as a model for what other ODAs could expect when tasked to conduct VSO. In particular, the higher headquarters learned a lot through their efforts to support the ODA in the field. For example, CJSOTF operations personnel were keenly interested in the physical security arrangements that ODA 7224 made to their site to make it safer and more habitable. Also, CJSOTF-A contracting and comptroller personnel learned early the difficulties and complexities of establishing the funding authorities that would enable the ODA to pay for all of the things it required to perform its mission in a timely and efficient fashion. CJSOTF-A logisticians and support personnel had to work through a myriad of problems to sustain 7224’s effort. Operations personnel needed to expand their systems to deal with a greater number of sites scattered further out in areas that had little or no coalition military support. Working through these situations and issues helped the CJSOTF staff to better understand the challenges of supporting VSO in isolated rural areas. It prompted changes in procedures to allow CJSOTF to more efficiently establish and maintain future VSO sites.

Other units and staff sections also benefitted from the VSO experiment. The practicality and utility of embedding CA and PSYOP personnel in ODAs became the model for later VSO missions. Similarly, medical planners within the CJSOTF were tested to their limits in ensuring adequate medical evacuation coverage was made and intermediate facilities identified so that the soldiers could be treated in the event of emergencies. Legal personnel were challenged by having to answer complex questions involving military support for civilians, creation of authorities for operations, and providing expert legal opinions on questions involving multiple parties, nationalities, and situations.⁴⁶ The many ‘lessons learned’ from ODA 7224 and other pioneers of VSO were later incorporated into Operation Order MUSAQUILANA, the CJSOTF-A Operations Plan (OPLAN) for conducting VSO in Afghanistan.⁴⁷ For all these reasons and more, the Nili experiment proved valuable in validating the VSO concept and paving the way for scores of similar sites throughout Afghanistan.

Looking back, several factors contributed to the success of the experiment. First, ODA 7224 took the time to examine past historical examples of VSO-like efforts by Special Forces. By better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of past programs like the Vietnam-era CIDG, the ODA members could learn from past experiences and avoid making similar mistakes.⁴⁸



Members of ODA 7224 celebrate Christmas dinner and a gift exchange with district and provincial governor staff in the ODA camp dining facility, 25 December 2009.

Results of the ‘Nili Experiment’

- 1 Validated the VSO concept
- 2 Improved the security of Nili and surrounding districts
- 3 Established the practicality of combining CA and PSYOP elements with SF ODA
- 4 Established good rapport between the coalition and Hazara people
- 5 Improved people’s view on GIROA legitimacy
- 6 Highly visible success with tangible public results
- 7 Provided a wealth of information on how to establish and support VSO in the field
- 8 Established a baseline of information on establishing the Afghan Local Police
- 9 The experiences of ODA 7224 helped shape the VSO program

Factors Contributing to ODA 7224 Success

- 1 Critical Examination of Historical Precedents
- 2 Fully Understood Historical, Cultural, Economic, Ethnic, Religious Background of People
- 3 Mature, Experienced, Stable Team
- 4 Honest Self-Assessment and Ability to Communicate with Higher Commands

“Commander and VSO team driven innovations have been critical to VSO/ALP’s success.” ⁴⁹ — Dan Madden, RAND Corporation, 2011

Second, the team went to great lengths to fully understand the cultural, religious, economic, and historical dynamics of the region’s people. This informed their detailed mission analysis and plan of action. Third, the level of maturity and experience that the team brought to the VSO mission gave them the flexibility, interpersonal skills, and diplomatic expertise to deal effectively with the villagers of the region. The SF, CA, and PSYOP soldiers were able to make adjustments to their approaches to improve rapport with the people, gauge their needs, and help them develop solutions to their problems.

Finally, the soldiers of ODA 7224 and their teammates possessed the ability to critically examine their own actions. They provided an honest assessment of performance that helped inform others seeking to duplicate their success. Furthermore, by providing a combination of clear communication with higher levels of command and honest feedback, the ODA showed what would be needed to effectively expand and support the VSO program for CFSOCC and CJSOTF leaders and planners. ▲

Members of ODA 7224 provided Afghan National Police (ANP) with a shipment of soccer balls in the national colors to distribute to village children in September 2009. The team excelled at ‘putting an Afghan face’ on the distribution of morale-boosting and humanitarian items to the people of the province. These efforts reinforced that the government cared for their welfare.



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Michael Krivdo earned his PhD in Military and Diplomatic History from Texas A&M University. He is a former Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance Officer with varied special operations research interests.

Endnotes

- 1 Sergeant First Class (SFC) Brad D. Rendition* and SFC Dan L. Marvin*, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 7 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, quote from SFC Marvin*.
- 2 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015; Kevin Maurer, "Fracture Healed by US Forces, Afghan Boy Goes Home," *Associated Press*, 19 September 2009, Daykundi Province, Afghanistan.
- 3 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015; Major Mike L. Bourne* Jr., interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 7 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 *Cable News Network* (CNN), "House Call with Dr. Sanjay Gupta," Aired 12 September 2009, 7:30 ET, CNN.Com - Transcripts, on Internet at: <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/090912/hcsg.01.html>, accessed on 12 January 2016; Maurer, "Fracture Healed by US Forces, Afghan Boy Goes Home," quote from text.
- 5 Dan Madden, "The Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency: A History of Village Stability Operations & the Afghan Local Police," Rand Corporation, CFSOCC-A Commander's Initiative Group, 30 April 2011, 2-3; Donald C. Bolduc, "Forecasting the Future of Afghanistan," *Special Warfare* 24, Issue 4 (Oct-Dec 2011), 24-25. For more information on Special Forces Unconventional Warfare in Vietnam, see Eugene G. Piasecki, "Civilian Irregular Defense Group: The First Years, 1961-1967," *Veritas* 5:4, 1-10. In Afghanistan, the original concept was known as the Community Defense Initiative (CDI). CDI was also referred to as the Local Defense Initiative (LDI), but by the time it matured was widely expressed in the term Village Stability Operations (VSO).
- 6 Condensed from: Robert Hulslander and Jake Spivey, "Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police," *Prism* Vol. 3, Number 3, National Defense University, 130-35.
- 7 Bolduc, "Forecasting the Future of Afghanistan," 25.
- 8 Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 3; Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, October 2011, on Internet at: http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230_1231Report.pdf, accessed on 22 October 2015, 67; SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015, quotes from interview; Mark L. Brown Jr., "Village Stability Operations: An Historical Perspective from Vietnam to Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal* 28 March 2013, available on Internet at: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/printpdf/13939>, 1-5; Chief Warrant Two (CW2) Juan A. Santos*, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 22 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. ODA 7224 had a wealth of experience and maturity in its ranks, making it well-suited for the task of being the first to implement the concept of VSO in the field. The detachment commander, Captain (CPT) Mike L. Bourne* Jr., was formerly an enlisted SF soldier with several combat deployments before gaining his commission. The Team Sergeant, MSG Thomas E. 'Tom' Douglas, had been in the ODA for several years. The Detachment Technician (assistant team leader), CW2 Juan A. Santos* had deployed previously to that same region and even knew some of the local individuals they would deal with on a daily basis. Similarly, each of the other team members had two to three combat deployments 'under their belt,' as well as several training missions into Central and South America. They would draw heavily from all those experiences during their VSO trial.
- 9 Kevin Maurer, "U.S. Forces Move into Central Afghan City," *Associated Press*, Nili, Afghanistan, 26 September 2009, on Internet at: <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2009/sep/26/afghan-special-forces-neighbors-092609/>, accessed on 28 March 2016, quote from text.
- 10 MSG (Ret.) Thomas E. Douglas, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 22 March 2016, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 Correspondence from MAJ Mike L. Bourne* Jr., to Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 18 March 2016, quotes from text.
- 12 MSG (Ret.) Douglas interview, 22 March 2016.
- 13 Quote from SFC Rendition* from SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015.
- 14 Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 3.
- 15 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015, quote by SFC Rendition*; CW3 Santos* interview, 22 December 2015. For more information on Azra Jafari, Nili's female mayor, see: Golnar Motevalli, "Afghanistan's First Female Mayor Proves Critics Wrong," *The Guardian* (UK), Kabul, Afghanistan, 24 February, 2013, on Internet at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/24/afghanistan-first-female-mayor>, accessed on 28 March 2016.
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- 17 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015.
- 18 Douglas interview, 22 March 2016, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, North Carolina; SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015; Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 3.
- 19 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015, quote from interview; CW3 Santos*, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 22 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; MSG (Ret.) Thomas E. Douglas, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 22 March 2016, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015; CW3 Santos* interview, 22 December 2015; MSG (Ret.) Douglas interview, 22 March 2016.
- 21 MSG (Ret.) Douglas interview, 22 March 2016.
- 22 CW3 Santos* interview, 22 December 2015.
- 23 MAJ (Ret.) Borman interview, 22 March 2016.
- 24 MSG (Ret.) Douglas interview, 22 March 2016, quotes from interview.
- 25 MSG (Ret.) Douglas interview, 22 March 2016.
- 26 MAJ (Ret.) Borman interview, 22 March 2016.
- 27 MAJ (Ret.) Borman interview, 22 March 2016.
- 28 MAJ (Ret.) Borman interview, 22 March 2016.
- 29 MAJ (Ret.) Borman interview, 22 March 2016.
- 30 SFC Prasad Pradtana*, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 23 March 2016, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 31 SFC Pradtana* interview, 23 March 2016. For more details on the Tactical Radio Set (TRS), see the article on that subject in this issue.
- 32 SFC Pradtana* interview, 23 March 2016, quotes from text.
- 33 SFC Pradtana* interview, 23 March 2016.
- 34 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015; CW3 Santos* interview, 22 December 2015; Maurer, "Special Forces Become Part of Village Life.
- 35 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015.
- 36 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015.
- 37 Quote from SFC Rendition* from SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015.
- 38 CW3 Santos* interview, 22 December 2015, quotes from interview.
- 39 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015; CW3 Santos* interview, 22 December 2015.
- 40 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015.
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- 43 Brown Jr., "Village Stability Operations," 6, quote from text; Bolduc, "Forecasting the Future of Afghanistan," 26.
- 44 MAJ Bourne* interview, 7 December 2015; Email correspondence, MAJ Mike L. Bourne* Jr. to Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 18 March 2016; Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 3-4.
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- 46 Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 3; DoD, *Report on Progress, October 2011*, 67; SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015; Brown Jr., "Village Stability Operations," *passim*.
- 47 CJSOTF-A, "OPLAN MUSTAQUILANA," copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, *passim*; Bolduc, "Forecasting the Future of Afghanistan," 26.
- 48 Brown Jr., "Village Stability Operations," 1-3.
- 49 Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 5.

"Operation Beanie Baby" Endnotes

- 1 Sergeant First Class (SFC) Brad D. Rendition* and SFC Dan A. Marvin*, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 7 December 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, quote from SFC Rendition*.
- 2 SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015, quote from SFC Marvin*.
- 3 Briefing, "ODA 7224: Lessons Learned from Daykundi," 1 August 2010, ODA 7224, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 SFCs Relation and Martens interview, 7 December 2015.
- 5 Briefing, "ODA 7224: Lessons Learned from Daykundi," text; SFCs Rendition* and Marvin* interview, 7 December 2015, quote from SFC Marvin*.



**THE
VOICE
OF**

Gizab

**TACTICAL RADIO SUPPORT TO
VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS**

After assuming command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in June 2009, General (GEN) Stanley A. McChrystal initiated a 'population-centric' counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Afghanistan. U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) labeled their COIN approach 'Village Stability Operations' (VSO). In VSO, SOF worked with Afghans to build Afghan Local Police (ALP), oust the Taliban, and develop rural areas. SOF also helped bolster district, provincial, and national governments. Security, development, and governance were the watchwords of VSO. The Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) was the VSO proponent in-country, and its assets included a Tactical Military Information Support Operations (MISO) Company. Psychological Operations (PSYOP) soldiers from the Tactical MISO Company directly supported the regional Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs), Special Forces Operational Detachments - Alpha (ODAs), and other SOF units located at Village Stability Platforms (VSPs) across Afghanistan. As will be demonstrated, Tactical Radio Stations (TRSs) served as a key medium for PSYOP soldiers in VSO.¹

This brief article is an overview of tactical MISO in VSO. First, it outlines the structure and chain of command of tactical MISO elements under the CJSOTF-A. Second, it explains how the CJSOTF-A expected MISO to support VSO. Third, it describes the general makeup of Tactical Radio Stations and how they were



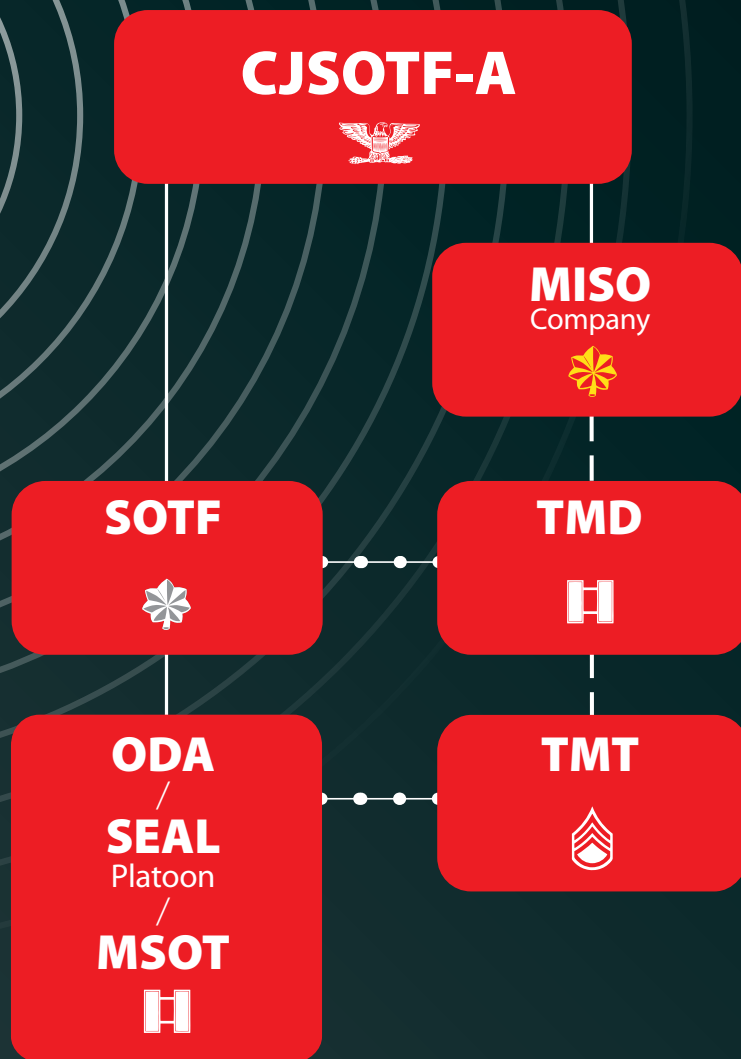
General Stanley A. McChrystal, ISAF commander.

IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of 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.



Outside of the 'Voice of Gizab' station are DJ Nawid Ahmed (center left), District Chief of Police Agha Lalai (center), and DJ Dawood Shah (center right), owner and announcers, in late 2011.

Tactical MISO Organization in Afghanistan



CJSOTF-A = Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan

MISO = Military Information Support Operations

SOTF = Special Operations Task Force

TMD = Tactical MISO Detachment

ODA = Operational Detachment-Alpha

MSOT = Marine Special Operations Team

TMT = Tactical MISO Team

ADCON (Administrative Control) - - - - -

TACON (Tactical Control) ●-●-●-●-●-●-●-●

employed for VSO. Centered on the 'Radio in a Box' (RIAB), including a 300 watt FM transmitter sold by Ramsey Electronics, the roughly 35 SOF-established TRSs were built by active duty PSYOP personnel but operated by local Afghans. Finally, this article highlights the 'Voice of Gizab,' a TRS in Oruzgan Province constructed by 9th PSYOP Battalion (POB) soldiers in 2010. On 4 September 2011, 'Voice of Gizab' became the first TRS formally transferred to Afghan control.² The first topic addressed here is the structure and chain of command of MISO forces under the CJSOTF-A.

During the VSO phase in Afghanistan (2009-2014), the alignment of MISO forces under the CJSOTF-A adhered closely to doctrine, namely Army Field Manual 3-53: *Military Information Support Operations*.³ In addition to a full-time MISO Planner on staff (in the J39), the CJSOTF-A had a Tactical MISO Company, a rotating assignment filled by C, E, and later A, Companies, 9th POB (SOF's global tactical PSYOP support element). Located at Camp Montrond, Bagram Airbase, were the Tactical MISO Company headquarters, staff, and Product Development Detachment (PDD). The PDD consisted of the Plans and Programs Team, the Target Audience Analysis Team, and the Product Development Team.

Attached to each regional battalion-level SOTF was one of the company's Tactical MISO Detachments (TMD). Each TMD had a captain as Officer-in-Charge (OIC) and a sergeant first class or staff sergeant as Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge (NCOIC). Finally, each TMD had multiple Tactical MISO Teams (TMTs) directly supporting ODAs or other SOF teams at VSPs. Each TMT typically had a staff sergeant or sergeant as Team Leader and a sergeant or specialist as Assistant Team Leader.⁴ Having described MISO structure and command relationships, it is necessary to explain how the CJSOTF-A expected MISO to support VSO and the role that Tactical Radio Stations played in that mission.

In April 2011, the CJSOTF-A published "Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police: Bottom-up

TRS Equipment Included:

1. Radio in a Box (RIAB)

- FM Stereo Transmitter
- Media Inputs (USB, MP3, CDs, SD cards)
- Digital AM/FM Tuner
- Microphone/Source Mixer
- Power Input

2. Omnidirectional antenna with cable (sold with the RIAB)

3. Microphone (sold with the RIAB)

4. Antenna mast

5. Generator for power

6. Laptop computer with programming software

7. Additional Audio/Visual Cables

Radio-In-A-Box (RIAB)



Furman Classic Series Power Conditioner (15 Amp)

ROLLS RM67 Microphone/Source Mixer

ROLLS RS80 Digital AM/FM Tuners

Galaxy Audio Rack Mount USB/MP3/CD/SD Players

MIZAR FM Stereo Transmitter

RIAB weight (incl. antenna): approx. 250 lbs.
RIAB dimensions: approx. 22" (h) x 28" (w)

Counterinsurgency," a reference for planning, executing, supporting, and assessing VSO. It explained how SF ODAs, Marine Special Operations Teams, and Navy SEALs, as well as their SOF 'enablers' (including Civil Affairs, Cultural Support, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams), fit into VSO. The CJSOTF-A directed PSYOP soldiers to deliver truthful messages through various media and face-to-face interactions to persuade Afghan tribal, religious, and local political leaders to support VSO and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). These leaders would in turn influence their own constituencies to support VSO and GIROA.⁵

Tactical Radio Stations would prove to be a highly effective medium to achieve VSO objectives. Often the only station in remote areas, TRSs were "the primary means of communication" to reach the Afghan population. The CJSOTF-A elaborated: "The reach of the radio broadcasts is an important part of expanding security, development, and governance into key rural areas of Afghanistan."⁶ TRSs used vetted Afghan operators/announcers and broadcasted news, music, religious teachings, educational information, and messages from district and provincial officials.

The core of the TRS was the 'Radio in a Box' (RIAB), an 'off-the-shelf' broadcasting solution purchased from the New York-based Ramsey Electronics. According to Ramsey, "The standard RIAB is a stand-alone broadcast station for local origination, that includes various program source modules . . . including CD, CD-R, MP3, Cassette, and Digital Media players pre-wired into multichannel professional audio mixers for simple operator or 'DJ' operation. Two standard microphones for local production are also included and integrated into the mixer. The standard RIAB includes an easy to setup omnidirectional antenna and 100 feet of low loss antenna feed line, preassembled and ready to connect. The normal RIAB can be set up and on-the-air in less than 30 minutes."⁷



Some TRSs were operated by Afghan National Army Commando or Special Forces personnel trained in Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) by U.S. PSYOP soldiers at Camp Morehead, Afghanistan.

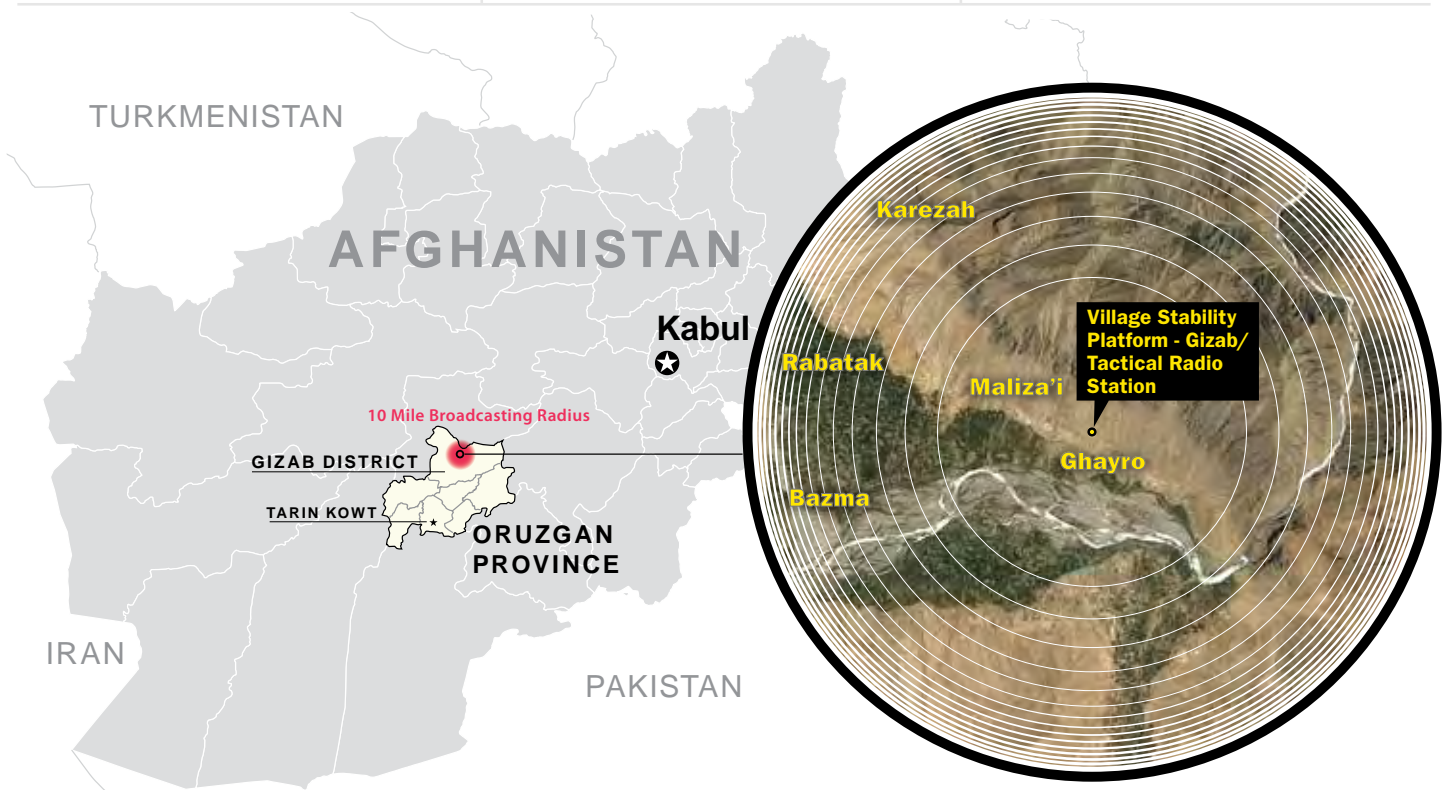
Based on ‘lessons learned’ while supporting SOTF-South in Kandahar Province in 2011, TMD 9C30 established *modus operandi* for constructing and operating TRSs. First, a TRS required other equipment besides the RIAB: a generator for power, an antenna mast and extended cable (if necessary), audio-video cables, and a laptop computer with programming software (typically Apple, Inc. MacBooks loaded with Radiologic DJ or Zarasoft software). Second, the TRS needed to be in a climate-controlled, dust-free room with enough space for equipment to be situated off the floor and for the disc jockey (DJ) and other personnel to work. The building housing the TRS should account for proximity to the antenna mast, accessibility, and security.⁸

TMD 9C30 believed that the most important aspect of TRS operations was that the stations must not appear as being overtly American controlled. “No MISO messages should be played until the TMT is sure that the local population is satisfied with the current programming. This will

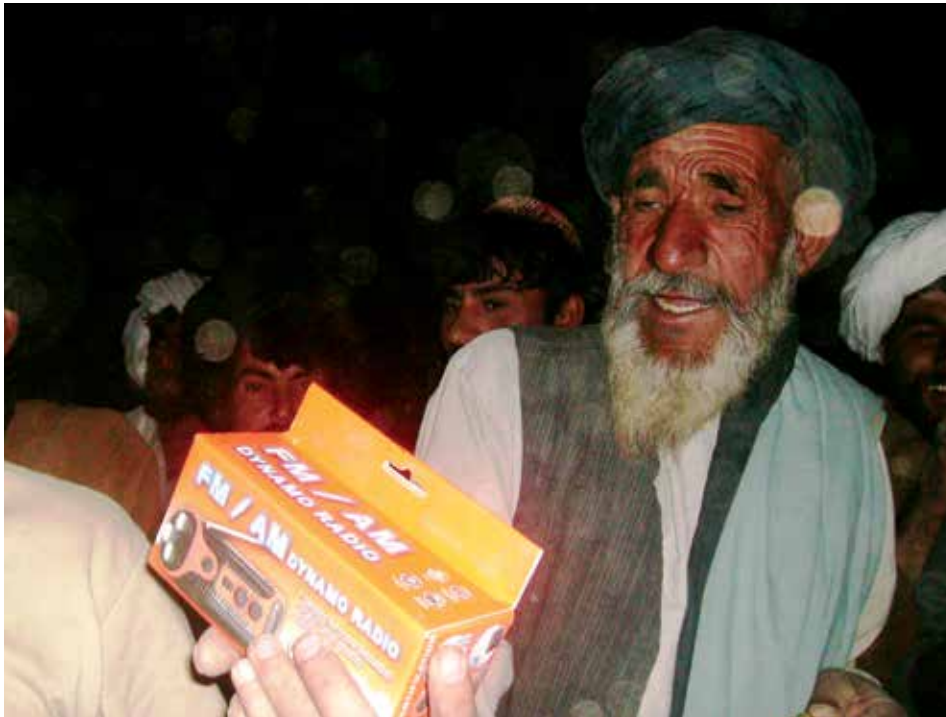
[We achieved] “the ‘Afghan face’ for which we always strive . . . since it is a local person putting messages out instead of US military personnel.”⁷ — TMD 9C30 personnel

ensure that the TRS earns a positive reputation and the people do not think of it as an ‘American owned’ radio station.” Getting ‘buy-in’ and participation from local tribal and religious leaders and district and provincial officials (such as governors and chiefs of police) was paramount. Doing this achieved “the ‘Afghan face’ for which we always strive . . . since it is a local person putting messages out instead of US military personnel.”⁹

The final objective of this article is to highlight the ‘Voice of Gizab’ in Oruzgan Province, a station that typified TRS support to VSO. Working with a 7th Special Forces Group ODA in SOTF-South, PSYOP soldiers from C Company, 9th POB, established that TRS during their July 2010-January 2011 deployment. Their replacements from E Company, 9th POB continued and fine-tuned the ‘Voice of Gizab’ during their January-July 2011 rotation. Deployed from July 2011 to January 2012, Sergeants (SGTs) Patrick M. Smith and John W. Scotland* of TMT 9C62 (C Company, 9th POB) were the last ‘owners’ of that station until it was turned over to the Gizab District Chief of Police in September 2011.¹⁰ What follows is a brief description of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ provided by C Company, 9th POB personnel who handled its transition to Afghan control.



While ‘Voice of Gizab’ programming could be heard by some listeners as far as 10 miles away (the approximate broadcasting radius of the TRS antennas), distance and terrain greatly impacted reception. The above map shows the location of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ TRS, and depicts signal degradation the further one gets from the station.



TMT 9C62 leader, SGT Patrick M. Smith, distributes hand-cranked AM/FM Dynamo Radio receivers to local Afghans.

*“We were given *carte blanche* to put whatever we wanted on our radio station.”— SGT Patrick M. Smith*



Leaflets complemented TRS broadcasts in promoting the VSO themes of security, development, and governance. The leaflet held by the girl on the left reads, “A Government Working for All Afghans. The Future of the Country Depends on Your Support.”

Commanded by MAJ Mark P. Cocherell*, C Company served as the CJSOTF-A Tactical MISO Company from July 2011 to January 2012. With 118 soldiers, it was “the largest deployment of a Tactical MISO Company ever deployed in support of a CJSOTF.”¹¹ Among its soldiers was Wilmington, Delaware, native SGT Patrick M. Smith, a former Light-Wheel Vehicle Mechanic on his third Afghanistan deployment. As the Team Leader of TMT 9C62 under TMD 9C60 (SOTF-Southeast), Smith’s mission was to provide MISO support to ODA 1333b at VSP-Gizab in Oruzgan Province.¹² (Led by SF Warrant Officer 2 [WO2] Donald M. Pearson*, ODA 1333b was a ‘split-team’ ODA from C Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st SFG.) With no experience in radio operations, Smith and his Assistant Team Leader, John W. Scotland*, ‘fell in’ on the ‘Voice of Gizab’ early in the deployment.¹³

The ‘Voice of Gizab’ TRS was situated at VSP-Gizab and configured to broadcast in a roughly 10-mile radius around the site. SOF personnel at that site had earlier ‘seeded’ the area by distributing hand-cranked AM/FM Dynamo Radio receivers to local Afghans. The TRS already had solid programming and seasoned DJs by the time TMT 9C62 arrived. Smith described how TMTs found the ‘voices’ for their TRSs. “TMT leaders had the authority to hire DJs. We’d pay them with our own discretionary funds once a month.” Hiring DJs to operate the ‘Voice of Gizab’ had been no exception. PSYOP soldiers had previously built close ties with the Gizab District Chief of Police, Agha Lalai, and had hired his son, Dawood Shah, as DJ/radio operator. With family ties to the well-respected Lalai, a decent education, a radio-friendly voice, and the ability to quickly grasp English, Shah was the perfect fit for the station. In addition, Shah’s cousin, Nawid Ahmed, was hired as assistant radio operator.¹⁴

‘Voice of Gizab’ programming generally resembled that of TRSs elsewhere, while also accounting for

local preferences. “We were given *carte blanche* to put whatever we wanted on our radio station; we just had to let the TMD know at the SOTF so they could answer the question if asked.” ‘Voice of Gizab’ featured traditional and popular music, world news, agricultural and health programs, comedy shows, and stories for kids. The TRS also hosted a Radio Literacy Program (RLP) to help local children learn to read and write in Pashtun.¹⁵ Shah and Ahmed received listener feedback during face-to-face discussions with the local population. Listening to handheld receivers while out on patrol allowed U.S. SOF personnel a degree of quality control.

To support their primary duty of manning the ‘Voice of Gizab’ (FM 103.5), Shah and Ahmed began serving as “investigative journalists” starting in August 2011. This allowed them to gather information about current events while ‘taking the pulse’ of people in the listening area. “We interview people about events that occur like when the ALP successfully repels insurgent activities, or development occurring in the area,” said Shah. “The best part of my job is keeping people informed about what is going on in Gizab. I feel like the radio station helps unify people in this area.” One resident expressed appreciation for the TRS. “The radio station makes us feel like we have a voice, like government officials can hear our opinions.”¹⁶

Another highlight of the TRS was the ‘suggestion box.’ According to Smith, “We set up that box in the middle of the village so that locals could make musical requests or provide general comments about the radio station.” The box also allowed for informants to anonymously provide tips about Taliban members and activities. “One time, our translator told us that a local shopkeeper had placed a shopping list in the suggestion box. Apparently, the Taliban had come in and hadn’t paid him for the stuff that they took, including some 20 coats,



SGT Patrick M. Smith (right) and interpreter Wali John record a news message about recent ALP successes in the region to be broadcasted on the TRS.

“We interview people about events...like when ALP successfully repels insurgent activities.”— Dawood Shah



Face-to-face interaction proved critical for PSYOP personnel supporting VSO. Here, SGT Smith bonds with two Afghan children while assessing what they have learned through the Radio Literacy Program (RLP).

10 pairs of shoes, food, supplies, and other items. That tip gave us the size of that particular Taliban cell. Overall, the suggestion box was really effective.”¹⁷

The goal of VSO was to improve local security, development, and governance to the point that VSPs could be shut down and Afghans could assume full control over their own affairs. Once a location was deemed a success, U.S. and coalition units there would ‘roll back’ to the CJSOTF-A at

Bagram or move to another site. The ‘retrograde’ of American PSYOP personnel from forward VSPs presented an interesting dilemma for TRSs. Should TRSs be destroyed in place? Should they be packed up and shipped to another location? SGT Smith explained how this predicament played out in Gizab.

“SOTF-Southeast had decided that Gizab had been a successful VSO mission.” Smith became a vocal advocate of transferring it to Afghan custody. “We can’t just shut the station down, the people love it,” he reiterated to CPT Dominik V. Garizone*, TMD 9C60 OIC, and SFC Mitchell ‘Bryce’ Hurlbert*, the detachment NCOIC. He recommended that Chief Lalai, Gizab District Chief of Police, take ownership of the station (provided he was willing to do so). Operation of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ would not be an issue since Dawood Shah and Nawid Ahmed “already knew how to run everything, including the generators and the MacBook.”¹⁸

While TMT 9C62 received assurance of Chief Lalai’s willingness to assume ownership, TMD 9C60 worked to get approval for the transfer. Due to the inter-governmental nature of the transaction, the U.S. State Department Embassy in Kabul had to concur. In addition, because the turnover would involve the removal of items from the detachment property book, it required a legal review by the CJSOTF-A. Within weeks, the State Department had approved the transfer while the CJSOTF-A staff completed all legal reviews. On 4 September 2011, personnel from ODA 1333 and TMT 9C62 held a low-key ceremony to transfer the ‘Voice of Gizab’ to Afghan ownership.¹⁹ As an added bonus for the new ownership, “We also bought them two generators off the economy to help them sustain longer TRS operations,” recalled CPT Garizone*.²⁰ The turnover of ‘Voice of Gizab’ set in motion a cascade of others as additional VSPs closed and coalition forces retrograded. With the security burden falling increasingly on Afghans, locally owned and

“The best part of my job is keeping people informed about what is going on in Gizab. I feel like the radio station helps unify people in this area.”— *Dawood Shah*



SOF personnel at VSP-Gizab built close ties with District Chief of Police Agha Lalai. TMT 9C62 leader SGT Patrick M. Smith (left) helped facilitate the transfer of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ to Chief Lalai (right) in late 2011.



‘Voice of Gizab’ DJ Dawood Shah (left) doubled as an ‘investigative journalist,’ interviewing local Afghans about recent events, as seen here.

operated TRSs proved invaluable to 'bridging the gap' between GIRoA and the local populace.

Tactical Radio Stations were highly valuable assets in MISO support to VSO. As TMD 9C10 explained in its 2011 post-deployment after action review, a TRS "can be as important as the Afghan Local Police [in] linking the populace to their govern[ment]."²¹ The 'Voice of Gizab' showcased how well-suited TRSs were to SOF's 'population-centric' approach of VSO. First, TRSs allowed U.S. personnel to deliver truthful, pro-ISAF, pro-GIRoA, and anti-insurgent messaging through vetted local Afghan operators/announcers and daily programming. Second, it gave local populations entertainment and information, as well as a sense of involvement in regional and national affairs. Finally, transitioning TRSs from coalition to Afghan control gave district and provincial leaders a direct role and stake in the security, development, and governance of their localities and the nation writ large.



Gizab District Chief of Police Agha Lalia signs the paperwork granting him ownership of the 'Voice of Gizab' on 4 September 2011 as Special Forces Warrant Officer 2 (WO2) Donald M. Pearson* of a 'split team' from ODA 1333 (foreground) and assistant radio operator Nawid Ahmed (background) observe.



Gizab District Chief of Police Afgha Lalai and WO2 Donald M. Pearson* of ODA 1333 make the transfer of the 'Voice of Gizab' to Afghan ownership official against the backdrop of the Afghanistan flag, held by Nawid Ahmed (left) and Dawood Shah (right).

Afterword

Tactical Radio Stations have been used in combat zones outside of Afghanistan. In early 2016, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) invited U.S. Army PSYOP personnel to train the Senior Officer of its Information Department and five other MoD officers on 'Radio in a Box' (RIAB) operations. In response, on 22-26 February 2016, four soldiers from A Company, 3rd POB deployed as a Broadcast Training Team (BTT) to Kyiv, Ukraine. The goal of the BTT was to enable the MoD to better counter Russian-Separatist propaganda. The BTT improved the MoD officers' understanding of basic broadcasting principles; RIAB set-up, maintenance, and trouble-shooting; the use of audio software; script-writing; 'on-air' best practices; and interviewing techniques. The BTT thus equipped the officers with the 'know-how' to establish TRSs in Eastern Ukraine and teach others on its use. TRSs continue to be employed by U.S. allies to further their own national and military objectives. 📌

JARED M. TRACY, PhD

Jared M. Tracy served six years in the U.S. Army, and became a historian at USASOC in December 2010. He earned an MA in History from Virginia Commonwealth University and a PhD in History from Kansas State University. His research is focused on the history of U.S. Army psychological operations.

Endnotes

- 1 In this article, the term 'PSYOP' is used to describe SOF soldiers holding that Military Occupational Specialty, as well as for official designations of units (e.g., 9th Psychological Operations Battalion). The term 'MISO' is used to describe the *function* of what PSYOP soldiers and units do, as well as for deployed elements serving under the CJSOTF-A (e.g., Tactical MISO Company, Tactical MISO Detachment, and Tactical MISO Team).
- 2 USASOC, "Annual Command History, Calendar Year 2011," USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; SPC Ashley L. Bowman, "Coalition Forces in Gizab Turn Over Control of Radio Station to District Chief of Police," 4 September 2011, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/76562/coalition-officials-gizab-turn-over-control-radio-station-district-chief-police#VriiP3Yo7y8>, accessed 15 January 2016.
- 3 Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual 3-53: *Military Information Support Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2012), 4-5; Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual 3-53: *Military Information Support Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2013), 4-5.
- 4 9th Military Information Support Battalion, "CAPABILITIES BRIEF," no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. *Doctrinally, a Tactical MISO Team should have three personnel (a Team Leader, an Assistant Team Leader, and a PSYOP Specialist), but the limited number of personnel forced units to conduct 'split-team' operations.*
- 5 CJSOTF-A, "Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police: Bottom-up Counterinsurgency," 1 April 2011, 1-2, 62-63, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 CJSOTF-A, "VSO and ALP: Bottom-up COIN," 62.
- 7 Ramsey Electronics, "User Guide: RIAB FM STEREO TRANSLATOR PXB30008D98S, 300 Watt, 8RU, 110-120VAC/60Hz," April 2011, 3, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 TMD 9C30, "Employment of the [RIAB] to Support Tactical [MISO]," December 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 TMD 9C30, "Employment of the [RIAB]."
- 10 USASOC, "Annual Command History, Calendar Year 2011," USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 C Company, 9th POB, "SUBJECT: Charlie Company, 9th MISB (A) After Action Review," 12 March 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 *Also supporting the split-team from ODA 1333 at VSP-Gizab were Civil Affairs Team 114; one Cultural Support Team soldier; a two-man District Augmentation Team; and a small security team of local Hazaran tribe members.*
- 13 SGT Patrick M. Smith, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 4 December 2014, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. *Later in the deployment, Smith transferred to Tagaw, Shahidi Hassas District, Oruzgan Province, to support ODA 1335.*
- 14 Smith interview, 4 December 2014; SPC Ashley L. Bowman, "Gizab Now Has a Voice through Afghan Radio Station," 17 August 2011, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/75717/gizab-now-has-voice-through-afghan-radio-station#VriiYHYo7y8>, accessed 15 January 2016.
- 15 Smith interview, 4 December 2014.
- 16 Bowman, "Gizab Now Has a Voice through Afghan Radio Station," 17 August 2011; RC-South/CJSOTF-A, "Gizab Now Has a Voice through Afghan Radio Station," 26 August 2011, <http://www.rs.nato.int/article/news/gizab-now-has-a-voice-through-afghan-radio-station.html>, accessed 3 February 2011.
- 17 Smith interview, 4 December 2014.
- 18 Smith interview, 4 December 2014.
- 19 Bowman, "Coalition Forces in Gizab Turn Over Control of Radio Station to District Chief of Police," 4 September 2011; RC-South/CJSOTF-A, "Coalition Forces in Gizab Turn Over Control of Radio Station to District Chief of Police," 6 September 2011, <http://www.rs.nato.int/article/news/coalition-officials-in-gizab-turn-over-control-of-radio-station-to-district-chief-of-police.html>, accessed 3 February 2011.
- 20 CPT Dominik V. Garizone*, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 9 February 2016, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 21 TMD 9C10, "Tactical Military Information Support Operations in support of CJSOTF-A's Village Stability Operations," no date (ca. January 2011), copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



9th Psychological Operations Battalion DUI



Afghan National Army Commando Patch with Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) and Special Forces Tabs



Medal of Honor

United States Army Special Operations Recipients

Although selected individuals throughout Army history have executed special missions or tasks, it was not until World War II that the first units to be deliberately organized, formed, and trained for special operations appeared. Modern Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) trace their official lineage to such World War II units as the First Special Service Force, the 475th Infantry Regiment, and the original Ranger Battalions. Additional ARSOF legacy units can also be found in elements of the Philippine Guerrillas, Alamo Scouts, Merrill's Marauders, and the MARS Task Force. ARSOF personnel also served in joint special operations units like the original Amphibious Scouts and Raiders and select elements of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

To date, twenty-eight ARSOF Soldiers have earned our nation's highest award for valor. Each will be included in an upcoming memorial book chronologically in the order of the combat action for which the award was earned. One action occurred during World War II, twenty-three in Vietnam, two during Operation GOTHIC SERPENT in Somalia, and two during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan. Of these twenty-eight total ARSOF Medal of Honor awards, fifteen were presented posthumously to surviving family members.

— *Sine Pari*

Rank/Name	Unit/Conflict	Date of Action	Date Awarded
• 1LT Jack L. Knight	MARS TF/World War II	2 Feb 1945	25 Jun 1945
CPT Roger H.C. Donlon	7th SFG/Vietnam	6 Jul 1964	5 Dec 1964
CPT Charles Q. Williams	5th SFG/Vietnam	9 Jun 1965	9 Jun 1966
SFC Bennie D. Adkins	5th SFG/Vietnam	9-12 Mar 1966	15 Sep 2014
• 1LT George K. Sisler	5th SFG/Vietnam	7 Feb 1967	6 Jul 1968
SSG Drew D. Dix	5th SFG/Vietnam	21 Mar 1967	16 Jan 1969
• MSG Charles E. Hosking Jr.	5th SFG/Vietnam	21 Mar 1967	23 May 1969
• SFC Eugene Ashley Jr.	5th SFG/Vietnam	7 Feb 1968	18 Nov 1969
• SGT Gordon D. Yntema	5th SFG/Vietnam	18 Jan 1968	2 Dec 1969
SFC Fred W. Zabitosky	5th SFG/Vietnam	19 Feb 1968	7 Mar 1969
MSG Roy P. Benavidez	5th SFG/Vietnam	2 May 1968	24 Feb 1981
• SP5 John J. Kedenburg	5th SFG/Vietnam	13 Jun 1968	7 Apr 1969
• SSG Laszlo Rabel	LRP (RGR)/Vietnam*	13 Nov 1968	7 Apr 1970
• SP4 Robert D. Law	75th IN (RGR)/Vietnam**	22 Feb 1969	6 Aug 1970
• SFC William M. Bryant	5th SFG/Vietnam	24 Mar 1969	16 Feb 1971
SFC Jose Rodela	5th SFG/Vietnam	1 Sep 1969	18 Mar 2014
SSG Melvin Morris	5th SFG/Vietnam	17 Sep 1969	18 Mar 2014
• SSG Robert J. Pruden	75th IN (RGR)/Vietnam***	29 Nov 1969	22 Apr 1971
SSG Franklin D. Miller	5th SFG/Vietnam	5 Jan 1970	15 Jun 1971
• SGT Brian L. Buker	5th SFG/Vietnam	5 Apr 1970	16 Dec 1971
SGT Gary B. Beikirch	5th SFG/Vietnam	1 Apr 1970	15 Oct 1973
1LT Robert L. Howard	5th SFG/Vietnam	30 Dec 1970	2 Mar 1971
SSG Jon R. Cavaiani	TAG/Vietnam****	4 Jun 1971	12 Dec 1974
• 1LT Loren D. Hagen	TAG/Vietnam****	7 Aug 1971	6 Sep 1974
• MSG Gary I. Gordon	TF Ranger/Somalia	3 Oct 1993	6 Sep 1994
• SFC Randall D. Shughart	TF Ranger/Somalia	3 Oct 1993	6 Sep 1994
• SSG Robert J. Miller	3rd SFG/OEF-Afghanistan	25 Jan 2008	6 Oct 2010
SFC Leroy A. Petry	2/75th RR/OEF-Afghanistan	26 Mar 2008	12 Jul 2011

* 173rd Airborne Brigade (LRRP) (P) which became N Company (RGR), 75th Infantry (A).

** I Company (RGR), 75th Infantry (A), 1st Infantry Division.

*** G Company (RGR), 75th Infantry (A), Americal Division.

**** Training Advisory Group, U.S. Army Vietnam (USARV).

• Denotes Posthumous Award





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Fort Bragg, NC 28310

Future Veritas...

The next issue of Veritas will be a special edition that commemorates the 35th anniversary of the creation of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). All elements of the Regiment will be covered individually and in a similar manner. Brief articles will describe their respective histories and highlight their participation in 2-3 significant events or operations. Because of the sheer number of possibilities, the units themselves selected and provided the article topics that best demonstrated their unique capabilities.

This issue will also feature a timeline that will become the basis for the U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command (USASOAC) history handbook that will be created during the next calendar year. That handbook will serve as a source of basic information regarding the history, traditions, and heraldry of the Regiment. It will be used to inculcate the spirit of the 160th SOAR (A) in the Night Stalkers of the future. "Night Stalkers Don't Quit!"



Addenda

The last Veritas article, "Commando & Ranger Training, Part II: Preparing America's Soldiers for War: The Second U.S. Army Ranger School & Division Programs" should have addressed that in the post-Vietnam era, the 101st Airborne Division Recondo program was revived as the 101st Airborne and Fort Campbell Recondo program before it was inculcated into the 101st Air Assault School. The 82nd Airborne Division Raider program was resurrected as the 82nd Airborne Recondo School. After the last 82nd Recondo class graduation in 1977, XVIII Airborne Corps (ABC) integrated Recondo training into a month-long Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) focused on preparing corporals (CPL) and specialists (SPC) to be non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Their pocket patch with the XVIII ABC shoulder sleeve insignia (SSI) was awarded to PLDC graduates until it became the Army's Warrior Leader Course (WLC). The latest evolution, the Basic Leaders Course (BLC) is the cornerstone of NCO development today.

