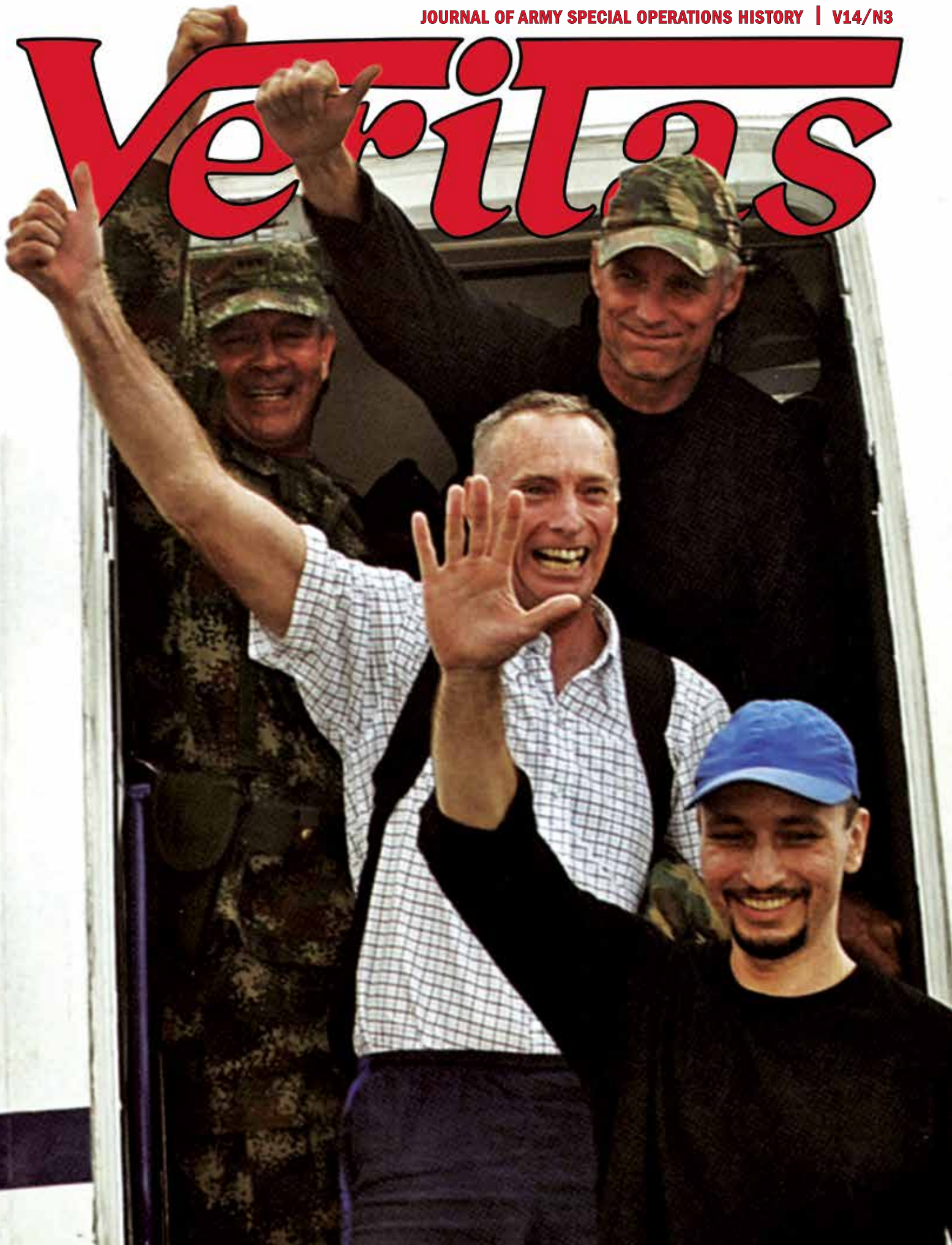


Veritas



The current 'spectrum' issue of *Veritas* will be the last in this format. Change is intrinsic to adopting a multimedia approach to presenting ARSOF history. Making Army SOF history more actionable, accessible, and appealing to multiple generations in our military has already broadened the span of audience. Embracing 21st century communications technology has enabled us to better share ARSOF history with the greater Army, other military services, joint commands, and the U.S. Government.

Please bear with us during this 'high adventure' transition. Rest assured, the quality and integrity of our historical products as you have come to know them, will not suffer. *Veritas* will be more diversified with shorter articles, abstract prefaces, key point 'takeaways,' and endnotes at the end like most books. And, *Veritas* will historically support command priorities.

By the time you read this, our website on the official USASOC portal will have been providing electronic access to the ARSOF Medal of Honor and Memorial books and over a hundred articles from earlier issues. That virtual *Veritas* library will be indexed and grow weekly. Since we have been publishing this journal since 2003, that section will grow immensely. This shift to multi-media history presentation is a major 'sea change' for the historians and our desktop publications folks alike. Nearly two decades into the 21st century, it was time.

This issue is heavy on Colombia. A year plus of operational analyses covering Operation WILLING SPIRIT and the daring Colombian Army (COLAR) rescue of three American and twelve Colombian hostages from the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) terrorist group yielded some outstanding combined operations history with our strongest Latin American ally. Organizational professionalism at several levels was demonstrated. One of the most daring 'sting' operations (JAQUE) in history 'topped the ladder' in deception warfare. ARSOF Sustainment in South Sudan, Aviation in Brazil, and a Colombian PSYOP article round out the issue. That condensed article with its abstract and critical points at the end, is a peek at some of the format changes in future issues.

Lastly, the history behind our six ARSOF branch 'calling cards' to assist recruiting has a 'tear off' back page since we all can recruit. I am confident that you will like the new format for the print *Veritas*; sixteen years of strong support is testament. Our shift to multimedia is already paying dividends... CHB

USASOC HISTORY OFFICE

Command Historian & Editor

Charles H. Briscoe, PhD
910-432-3732 / charles.briscoe@socom.mil

Deputy Command Historian & Associate Editor

Michael E. Krivdo, PhD
910-908-0939 / michael.krivdo@socom.mil

Associate Editors

Troy J. Sacquety, PhD
910-432-9324 / troy.sacquety@socom.mil

Jared M. Tracy, PhD
910-396-5906 / jared.tracy@socom.mil

Joshua D. Esposito, PhD
910-432-5349 / joshua.esposito@socom.mil

Robert D. Seals
910-432-9780 / robert.seals@socom.mil

Christopher E. Howard
910-908-2816 / christopher.e.howard@socom.mil

Design

Daniel W. Telles
Art Director / daniel.telles@socom.mil

Laura S. Goddard
Designer / laura.goddard.ctr@socom.mil

Mariano Santillan
Web Designer/Illustrator / mariano.santillan.ctr@socom.mil

Veritas: *Veritas* is published by the United States Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina (ISSN 1553-9830). The contents are not necessarily the official views of, nor endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, USSOCOM, or USASOC. The contents are compiled, edited, and prepared by the USASOC History Office. All photos not credited are courtesy of the USASOC History Office.

Copyright: Material in *Veritas* may be reprinted, except where copyrighted, provided credit is given to *Veritas* and the creators.

Copies: Copies of previous *Veritas* issues are no longer available. A limited number of the current issue is maintained at the USASOC History Office.

Permission to Reprint: Reprinting well-received *Veritas* articles in a modified version and/or without the documentation (endnotes) degrades serious historical scholarship. If this professional courtesy cannot be accorded, requests will be denied. Permission to use photographs from private collections was granted only to the USASOC History Office. These photos, like the illustrative sketches, customized maps, and schematics used in *Veritas* articles are NOT available for public use.

Questions: Address questions and comments to **USASOC, ATTN: AOHS Veritas, E-2929 Desert Storm Drive, Fort Bragg, NC 28310**, or e-mail one of our editors.

Firewalls and Spam Filters: DoD network firewalls routinely place unrecognized addresses into 'Junk Mail' and emails with Non-DoD encryption and/or attachments may be blocked. If you send an email and do not receive a response, it is likely that the network firewalls or spam filters are working. If this is the case, please assume that we did not get your message and call.

Subscriptions: Those wishing to subscribe to *Veritas*, should write to **USASOC, ATTN: AOHS Veritas (Mr. Seals), E-2929 Desert Storm Drive, Fort Bragg, NC 28310**, or e-mail Mr. Seals at **robert.seals@socom.mil**. Please include affiliation to Army Special Operations or list any applicable military service. This helps us build a support network for future *Veritas* articles.



44

CONTENTS

Azimuth

By Charles H. Briscoe

- 1 **Operation WILLING SPIRIT (OWS)**
Setting Conditions for *Operación JAQUE*
By Charles H. Briscoe
- 10 **The Ultimate Deception:
*Operación JAQUE***
By Charles H. Briscoe and Daniel J. Kulich
- 25 **“Who’s in charge down here?”**
By Charles H. Briscoe
- 32 **Joint SOF Integration—SDO, Bogotá**
By Charles H. Briscoe

37 Total Immersion

Language, Culture, and the Colombian Military
By Jared M. Tracy & Charles H. Briscoe

44 A Different SORT of Mission

Special Operations Resuscitation Teams in
Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS
By Christopher E. Howard

57 Night Stalker Ingenuity

Taking the ‘Bad Guy’ off the Battlefield
without Black Helicopters
By Joshua D. Esposito

69 What is a Ranger or ARSOF Aviator? What is a Special Forces, PSYOP, Civil Affairs, or ARSOF Support soldier?

By the USASOC Historians

FRONT COVER

The Commander of the Columbian Army, GEN Mario Montoya Uribe (top-left), celebrates the success of rescuing Keith D. Stansell (top-right), Thomas R. Howes (middle), and Marc D. Gonsalves (bottom) from the *FARC* on 2 July 2008.

ABOVE

Members of a Special Operations Resuscitation Team (SORT) practice with a jungle penetrator in an open area.

Operation

WILLING SPIRIT

Setting Conditions for
Operación JAQUE



by Charles H. Briscoe

The strong American military relationship with Colombia dates to the Korean War. This partnership is a model of U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) long-term engagement. Since the 1980s, the United States has provided significant support to Colombia and other South American countries to attack cocaine production at its source. *Plan Colombia* (1999), presented in English to the U.S. Congress by President Andrés Pastrana Arango, was designed to contain the drug problem in that country. Unfortunately, his demilitarized *FARC-landia* plan backfired. In the wake of 9/11, a charismatic Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez convinced the American legislators that *Plan Colombia* could also restore legitimacy to insurgent-controlled areas in his country, particularly *FARC-landia*.¹

U.S. funding was increased, and training support was extended beyond the National Police to the new Colombian Army (COLAR) Counter-Drug battalions. The mobility afforded by organic helicopter fleets was key to better successes in the mountainous country—twin-engine UH-1N *Hueys* and UH-60L *Black Hawks* were provided as security assistance.² America's Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) proved a boon to her allies.³

U.S. National Security Presidential Directive 18 (NSPD-18) labeled the *FARC* (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), and *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) as terrorist organizations in 2002. This enabled the U.S. military to increase intelligence sharing and support Colombian counter-terrorist (CT) operations.⁴ However, the counter-drug mission would continue to dominate the American effort in Colombia. The State Department (DOS) contracted DynCorp for aerial spraying and coca eradication while the Department of Defense (DoD) contracted SOUTHCOM Reconnaissance Systems (SRS), a subsidiary of Northrop Grumman, to conduct aerial surveillance of coca-producing regions.⁵

While the *FARC* had been taking hostages for decades (more than 500 military, police, and local government officials) for ransom and political negotiations, it was



Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010) meets U.S. President George W. Bush.

not until they seized three American SRS contractors (Marc D. Gonsalves, Keith D. Stansell, and Thomas R. Howes) that Washington had to deal with the problem. Their SRS single-engine Cessna 208B *Caravan* developed engine problems and crash-landed near the *Cordillera Oriental* mountain range, south of Bogotá on 13 February 2003. The *FARC* executed the injured pilot, retired CW5 Thomas J. Janis, a Vietnam veteran helicopter pilot, and the COLAR observer, Sergeant (SGT) Luis Alcides Cruz, before the terrorist group disappeared into the heavy jungle with their three U.S. hostages.⁶

U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) training the COLAR and National Police monitored the aircraft distress radio traffic. They were working 30 minutes *Black Hawk* helicopter flight time from the crash site, but were not allowed to join the Colombian aerial response. U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) rules of engagement (ROE) did not permit American SOF to accompany host nation (HN) forces into *FARC*-dominated territory.⁷

Why not? Latin America had not been designated as a U.S. theater of combat operations. Since SF could not engage in direct combat, there was no U.S. military (USMIL) personnel recovery (PR) plan, nor a quick reaction force (QRF). Since *FARC* strength in the crash site

L to R |

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia flag (*FARC*);

Ejército de Liberación Nacional (*ELN*);

Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (*AUC*).



Previous page |

Members of the *Compañía Jungla Antinarcóticos*, counter-narcotics police from Colombia, were trained by the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne).



L to R | U.S. hostages held by FARC: Thomas R. Howes, Marc D. Gonsalves, and Keith D. Stansell.

A 'Rewards for Justice' poster solicited information on the three U.S. hostages in Colombia.

Sus familias y amigos los buscan

Dé información que permita rescatar a estas personas... Ellos dependen de usted para ser libres.

¿Sabe dónde están?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estatura: 1.93 m • Ojos: azul grisoso • Piel: blanca • Contextura gruesa <p>Keith D Stansell</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estatura: 1.82 m • Ojos: azules • Piel: blanca • Contextura gruesa <p>Thomas R. Howes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estatura: 1.77 m • Ojos: cafe • Piel: trigueña • Contextura media <p>Marc D. Gonsalves</p>

• Llame Gratis al: **01 8000 919 621**

LINEA 146
SEGURA
Gratis desde cualquier lugar
línea y costo adicional

• En Bogotá: **2 19 0777**

• E-mail: fuentes@dipol.gov.co

Comuníquese o informe a la autoridad más cercana
Total seguridad para usted y su familia



U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Anne W. Patterson.



Army BG Remo Butler, Commander, Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH).

area was unknown, the American ambassador, Anne W. Patterson, and the Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH) commander, Brigadier General (BG) Remo Butler, recently relocated to Puerto Rico from Panama, were reluctant to request authority to commit U.S. forces in Colombia. To further complicate matters, the U.S. policy on hostages did not specify that American citizen (AMCIT) contractors were considered U.S. Government (USG) personnel nor contain anything about assisting in their recovery.⁸ With no additional information the fate of hostages was unknown. 'Proof of life' would not come for several months.⁹

Meanwhile, the SRS contract flight team continued to search for their lost members between drug surveillance missions. They flew the remaining Cessna *Caravan* until 25 March 2003, when it clipped a tree and crashed in a ravine. The two pilots, James Oliver and Thomas Schmidt, and the sensor technician, Ralph Ponticelli, were killed. That ended the SRS effort.¹⁰

Washington officials used NSPD-12 to prevent family members from contacting the FARC. The official U.S. policy was not to negotiate with terrorists.¹¹ Ironically, the official status and rights of USG contractors and USG responsibilities for them had never been delineated despite a proliferation of contractors on 'battlefields' dating to the First Gulf War (Operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM) in 1990-1991.¹²

The plight of three Americans held captive in the jungles of Colombia became obscured by the start of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) in 2003, while Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) continued in Afghanistan and the Philippines (OEF-P).¹³ In addition, the SOUTHCOM headquarters in Miami was heavily engaged with stability operations in Haiti, and the SOCSOUTH headquarters was departing Puerto Rico for Homestead Air Reserve Base in Florida. Officially, SOCSOUTH could only saturate FARC-controlled areas with 'Rewards for Justice' leaflets seeking information on the status of the three Americans. The Department of Justice and the U.S.

ambassador approved the messaging on these leaflets. 'Proof-of-life' was finally received in July 2003. Colombian journalist Jorgé Enrique Botero videotaped his interviews with the captured Americans and former Senator Ingrid Betancourt Pulecio and her campaign manager/vice presidential running mate, Clara Leticia Rojas González. The latter two had been seized on 23 February 2002 while campaigning for the presidency in the Switzerland-sized demilitarized zone of Colombia called *FARC-landia*.¹⁴

Ironically, two months before Botero was given access to the VIP hostages a U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) CT-trained Colombian SOF (COLSOF) element attempted a daylight direct action rescue assault in the jungle. It failed miserably. Upon hearing the UH-60 *Black Hawk* helicopters hovering as the COLSOF assaulters 'fast roped' to the ground, the *FARC* commander ordered his hostages shot. Nine were killed and three wounded (one fatally). Amazingly, one survived unscathed. Remember, *FARC* units had to guard, feed, and constantly move 500 plus hostages in the jungle-clad mountains. President Álvaro Uribe Vélez took full responsibility for the debacle in a nationally televised address.¹⁵ Afterwards, the possibility that a senior Colombian leader would authorize a direct action hostage rescue in the jungle became very remote. The fact that the Colombian military (COLMIL) leadership had categorized direct action rescue as nonviable in 2002 was either unknown, or it was lost on SOCSOUTH.¹⁶

Subsequent electronic warfare (EW)/signal intelligence (SIGINT) radio intercepts revealed that *FARC* leaders had increased security measures and directed hostage executions when rescue was imminent. For example, an accidental encounter between two different *FARC* elements in the dense jungle led to a firefight and hostages were executed.¹⁷ After the 2002 hostage rescue fiasco, COLSOF redirected their direct action against *narco-trafficante* and terrorist leaders (high value targets [HVT]) to disrupt organizational command and control.

Despite a dearth of actionable intelligence on the whereabouts of the American hostages from 2003-2005, COLSOF did well against HVTs. This effort supported

the suggestion of BG Charles T. Cleveland, subsequent SOCSOUTH commander, who recommended that the *FARC* leadership be inundated with 'dead or alive' rewards and specific targeting. He wanted to keep them 'off balance' and feed their paranoia about security.¹⁸ COLMIL opened communications with the *FARC* hostage holding groups with their radio program that weekly broadcast family messages (*'El Voz de Secuestrados'* [Voice for the Abducted]). Allowing the captives to listen was a morale booster. *FARC* commanders adjusted their routines to accommodate broadcasts.¹⁹ After a thorough assessment of the American hostage recovery situation to date, the newly-appointed ambassador, William B. Wood, cabled the White House in November 2004 to request it be given a higher priority.

Army General (GEN) Bantz J. Craddock, the SOUTHCOM commander, shared the ambassador's request with the Secretary of Defense and directed his staff to draft an execution order (EXORD) for Operation WILLING SPIRIT (OWS). 'Leaning forward,' DoD authorized SOUTHCOM to participate in combined (non-combat) sensitive site exploitation (SSE) operations (crime scene forensics) on HVT camps recently targeted by COLSOF. Approval for USSOF to accompany COLSOF reconnaissance teams into *FARC*-controlled regions was withheld. It was May 2005 when the Joint Chiefs of



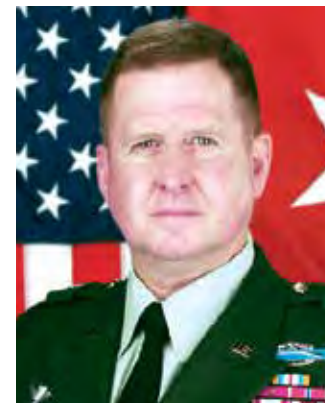
Cessna 208B *Caravan* flown by SOUTHCOM Reconnaissance Systems (SRS), a subsidiary of Northrop Grumman.

L to R |

U.S. Ambassador
William B. Wood.

Army General (GEN)
Bantz J. Craddock, U.S.
Southern Command.

BG Charles T. Cleveland,
SOCSOUTH Commander.





Before & after Colombian Police Subintendente Jhon F. Pinchao was released.

Colombian Anti-Narcotics Police *Junglas* recovered Pinchao.

Staff (JCS) approved the OWS EXORD. It had guidance, authorities, and granted access to national defense and intelligence resources to expedite locating and rescuing the American hostages. New ROE also allowed more direct support to the COLMIL.²⁰

However, the expanded ROE did not apply to USSOF already committed to counter drug training and military assistance. Despite the OWS EXORD, operations in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility (AOR) remained an economy of force effort. However, when the ARSOF BG Charles T. Cleveland took command of SOCSOUTH in June 2005, he announced that his top priority was the recovery of the American hostages in Colombia.²¹

As Executive Agent for OWS, BG Cleveland adroitly leveraged the authorities in the OWS EXORD, NSPD-18, and Section 1208 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to build greater COLSOF capacity and improve capabilities. Capitalizing on the successes of combined SSE missions, he requested that GEN Craddock authorize the 'imbedding' of USSOF personnel with COLSOF reconnaissance teams working in FARC areas. Capitalizing on his personal and professional relationship with Colonel (COL) Simeon G. Trombitas, Military Group (MILGP), Colombia commander, and the MILGP commander's access to Ambassador Wood, BG Cleveland requested and was allowed to put a small SOC-Forward (SOC-FWD) element in Bogotá to 'operationalize' the OWS EXORD.²²

In the meantime, the SOCSOUTH staff at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida, prepared a regional 'playbook' for the high priority countries of Latin America. The Colombia section was the most developed. It had hostage recovery contingencies and assorted task force packages. Among them was a unilateral U.S. direct action rescue option with COLMIL support. SOCSOUTH took this option seriously. It was first rehearsed in Florida before being exercised with COLAR elements at the John C. Stennis Space Center in Mississippi.²³

COLMIL capabilities and COLSOF capacity had improved significantly with General Cleveland's command emphasis, combined partnering initiatives, information sharing, and the SOC-FWD presence. In June 2006, COLAR SIGINT intercepted a message that the FARC VIP hostage group with Ingrid Betancourt and the Americans had been given permission to relocate to Yari province. Combined reconnaissance (recce) teams were launched. These teams were to 'find and fix' that FARC element location and positively identify the hostages. Despite a lot of COLSOF/SOCSOUTH efforts, the COLAR-dominated *Operación CENTURIÓN* accomplished little more than demonstrating a compatibility for combined operations under OWS.²⁴

Sophisticated aerial search platforms were thwarted by the dense, triple canopy jungle-covered mountains of Colombia, especially at night.²⁵ COLAR human intelligence (HUMINT) was still minimal because

relations with the National Police remained fractured by a competition for resources.²⁶ The *FARC* element with the VIP hostages was not located, but they were always at the top of essential elements of information (EEI) assigned to the recce teams.²⁷

A significant breakthrough came a year later when Colombian police *subintendente* Jhon F. Pinchao escaped after nine years in captivity. He was recovered by National Police Counter-Narcotics jungle commandos (*Junglas*) in May 2007. Several post-rescue debriefings provided vital information on current *FARC* hostage security procedures, physical condition and health of the hostages, and a general location of his 'prison' camp. Pinchao had been held captive with Ingrid Betancourt and the three Americans. A combined inter-agency SSE mission to that camp site yielded evidence to corroborate his story.²⁸

Most importantly, the COLMIL and National Police discovered that the leader charged with the VIP hostages was *Cabecilla* (*Sub-Comandante*) Gerardo Aguilar Ramírez (alias 'César'), a subordinate of Victor Julio Suárez Rojas (aliases Jorge Briceño Suárez and 'Mono Jojoy'), the *FARC* Eastern Bloc commander. The VIP hostages were not controlled by the Southern Bloc commander as originally thought. This gave more focus to SIGINT radio monitoring. *FARC* defectors and former hostages were the sources of HUMINT. The very detailed SSE results caused BG Cleveland to press harder to get USSOF embedded with COLSOF recce elements.

Then, in November 2007, the *FARC* released a second proof-of-life video of the three Americans. At the end of December, the COLAR military intelligence (MI), finished tabulating *FARC* radio communication tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) after years of SIGINT monitoring. The combination of these activities from mid-May to December 2007 inspired the COLMIL to plan another hostage search operation.²⁹

Operación ELIPSE evolved into a combined Colombian/U.S. operation a week after the COLMIL deployed conventional forces (4 February 2008) to block the *FARC* hostage unit movement to the far west. Nine combined SOF recce teams emplaced ground sensors along a known *FARC* resupply route before starting their searches. Phase One of *Operación ELIPSE* was to 'fix' their location. Phase Two called for the insertion of COLSOF/USSOF elements to surround the *FARC*. Then, once the cordon was established, the area would be blanketed with psychological operations (PSYOP) leaflets announcing that the COLMIL wanted to negotiate the release of the hostages (Phase 3). A direct action rescue might be considered, but only if there was minimal risk to the hostages. Yet, that remote possibility prompted BG Cleveland to begin pre-positioning a SOCSOUTH task force in Colombia.³⁰

As U.S. elements arrived in Tolemaida, more combined COLSOF/USSOF recce teams were pushed into field cordon positions. The American task force consisted of

a command and control element, two ground forces, and special operations (spec ops) fixed and rotary wing aircraft. They quickly filled the base to capacity, exceeding the COLMIL population. A huge tent city sprang up overnight to accommodate the growth. Unique American spec ops helicopters, making daylight team insertions and heat injury extractions, alerted the *FARC* hostage element. Even the American hostages recognized these uniquely-equipped helicopters.³¹

Still, on 16 February 2008, a COLSOF recce team reported 'eyes on' three white men speaking English, addressing one another by name as they bathed in the Yapuri River. They were guarded by some twenty *FARC*. For the next four days (17-20 February 2008) the COLSOF recce team continued to report hostage sightings. BG Cleveland wanted 'U.S. eyes on' the hostages and pushed to infiltrate more combined blocking teams. Then, on 20 February, the sightings abruptly ended. The combined conclusion was that the *FARC* group, after being resupplied, slipped away in the night, presumably to the north. Several efforts to helicopter cordon forces ('leap frogging') further north into new blocking positions proved fruitless. The *FARC* had escaped the porous jungle cordon.³²

On 28 February and 1 March the COLMIL helicoptered more forces into the Dos Rios area. They encountered a small point team from the *FARC* hostage group. Two guerrillas were killed.³³ While the COLMIL continued searching the area, BG Cleveland began to redeploy his task force back to the States on 9 March. Five days later the headquarters departed.³⁴

Despite the exodus of the SOCSOUTH Task Force, the COLMIL persisted. *Operación ELIPSE* continued until mid-July 2008. The Special Forces company (20th SFG [Army National Guard (ANG)]) with its complement of Civil Affairs (CA), PSYOP and Naval Special Warfare (NSW) elements provided 'embeds' for the COLSOF recce missions and supported COLMIL and National Police training requirements.³⁵ The SOCSOUTH-arranged national



Cabecilla (*Sub-Comandante*) Gerardo Aguilar Ramírez ('César') was in charge of the VIP hostages.



Victor Julio Suárez Rojas (Jorge Briceño Suárez, 'Mono Jojoy') was the *FARC* Eastern Bloc commander.



Luís Edgar David Silva, alias *Raúl Reyes*, the *FARC* Southern Bloc commander, was killed along the Ecuador border by COLSOF.



Jose Juvenal Velandia, alias *Iván Ríos* aka *Manuel Jesús Muñoz*, the *FARC* Central Bloc commander, was killed by his security chief for reward money.



Pedro Antonio Marín Marín, alias *Manuel Marulanda Vélez* aka *Tirofijo* (Sure Shot), the founder and supreme leader of the *FARC*, was reported as dead on 26 March 2008.



Marín Marín's second-in-command for twenty years, León Sáenz Vargas, alias *Alfonso Cano*, took command of the *FARC*.

Serendipitous Blessings

As the combined aspect of *Operación ELIPSE* wound down in March 2008, the *FARC* lost three of its seven top leaders, causing major upheaval. First, Luís Edgar David Silva, alias *Raúl Reyes*, one of the seven-member *FARC* Secretariat General and the Southern Bloc advisor, was killed along the Ecuador border by a COLSOF direct action team. Second, Jose Juvenal Velandia, alias *Iván Ríos* aka *Manuel Jesús Muñoz*, who had just taken command of the Central Bloc, was killed by Pablo Montoya, his security chief, for the 'dead or alive' reward. Third, the *FARC* reported the death of its founder and Supreme Leader, Pedro Antonio Marín Marín, alias *Manuel Marulanda Vélez* aka *Tirofijo* (Sure Shot). On 26 March 2008 Guillermo León Sáenz Vargas, alias *Alfonso Cano*, an intellectual on the Secretariat General, who had been second-in-command to Marín Marín for twenty years, assumed the senior leadership. The COLAR SIGINT ploy was to convince César, the *FARC* 1st Front commander, to bring the VIP hostages to *Alfonso Cano* for a propaganda video.³⁷

intelligence assets remained dedicated to support OWS requirements assessed by the SOC-FWD.

The recent deaths of key *FARC* leaders (see sidebar) raised the optimism of the COLMIL generals. The PSYOP campaign against *FARC* leadership, rewards for information program, and integration and amnesty for any surrendering *FARC* soldiers, was producing results. Venezuelan President Hugo R. Chávez's two *FARC* 'humanitarian missions' in January and February 2008 effected the release of more hostages. Among them was Ingrid Betancourt's vice presidential candidate, Clara L. Rojas González. Her malnourished, sickly son Emmanuel, had been left at the San José del Guaviare hospital in June 2005 by the *FARC*. Though the Venezuelan Chávez had overstepped Colombian sovereignty with the 'humanitarian missions,' they triggered some 'out of the box' thinking by junior officers and sergeants in the COLAR EW/SIGINT units.³⁶

Unbeknownst to the Americans—SOUTHCOM, SOCSOUTH, SOC-FWD, the 20th SFG company and its attachments, the Military Group, Colombia, and the U.S. Embassy—and the majority of the COLMIL, a small cell

personally selected by the Commanding General of the COLAR, General Mario Montoya Uribe, was putting together a highly compartmented 'grand deception stratagem.' It consisted of several smaller deceptions within a much larger one that was perpetrated by unwitting COLSOF, embedded and supporting USSOF, and virtually the entire COLMIL. While that 'grand deception' was underway, a hostage 'sting' operation recovered fifteen VIP hostages without a shot being fired and no one injured.³⁸

After the successful 'sting' was executed by COLAR deep cover military intelligence operatives on 2 July 2008, its codename was released. *Operación JAQUE* was a unilateral COLMIL rescue of the *FARC* VIP hostages: former senator Ingrid Betancourt and fourteen others including the three American contractors. It was accomplished with 97 percent done by the COLMIL and 3 percent by unwitting USSOF rece imbeds, PSYOP assets, and intelligence platform support.³⁹ *Operación JAQUE* nullified the reason for OWS. The following article, "The Ultimate Deception: *Operación JAQUE*," explains that mission. ♣

SUMMARY

- ◆ The OWS EXORD provided expanded authorities needed to improve COLMIL capabilities and capacity to locate and recover the Americans hostages held by the *FARC*.
- ◆ BG Charles Cleveland, the SOCSOUTH commander, made finding and rescuing the hostages his top priority; he operationalized OWS by establishing a SOC-Forward in Bogotá.
- ◆ SOCSOUTH adroitly used the OWS EXORD, NSPD-18, and Section 1208, National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to get dedicated national intelligence assets and forces.
- ◆ Providing counterterrorist (CT) training to COLSOF enabled COLMIL to take direct action against *FARC* leaders.
- ◆ The PSYOP campaign created dissent in the *FARC* ranks and encouraged defections.

CHARLES H. BRISCOE, PhD

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations in Latin America, the Congo, and the Lodge Act.

Endnotes

1 Retired COL Kevin M. Higgins, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 October 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, hereafter cited by name and date. In late 1998, President Andrés Pastrano Arango had allowed the formation of *FARC-landia*, a Switzerland-sized demilitarized zone in the heart of Colombia. It was part of his peace overtures to the *FARC*. Off limits to the Colombian police and military, it became a sanctuary for narco-trafficking, kidnapping and extortion. Arms and drug trafficking yielded hundreds of millions of dollars to expand their army and provide the most modern, lethal weaponry. June Thomas, "Guerrillas in the Midst," 14 January 2002 at <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2002/01/colombian-rebels-prepare-to-leave-farclandia> accessed 10/24/2018.

2 Higgins interview, 17 October 2018.

3 Robert D. Ramsey III, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque: The Colombian Security Force Experience, 1998-2008*, Occasional Paper 34 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2009), 55-58; Gregory Wilson, "A Modern Day Trojan Horse—Operation *JAQUE* and the Use of Stratagem in a Hostage Rescue Operation," in Hy Rothstein and Barton Whaley (eds.), *The Art and Science of Military Deception* (Boston, MA: Artech House, 2013), 385-386.

4 U.S. Government, National Security Policy Directive 18 (NSPD-18), 11 October 2002, 2.

5 Charles H. Briscoe, Barrett F. Lowe, Daniel J. Kulich, and Theodore Mataxis II, White Paper: "ARSOF and Operation WILLING SPIRIT, 2003-2008: Operational Analysis," U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), May 2018), 4, hereafter cited as White Paper.

6 Marc D. Gonsalves, Keith D. Stansell, and Thomas R. Howes with Gary Brozek, *Out of Captivity: Surviving 1,967 Days in the Colombian Jungle* (NY: Harper Collins, 2009), xv-xxii; T. Christian Miller, "American Killed in Colombia Is Buried," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 February 2003 at <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/feb/26/world/fg-colombia26> accessed 6/29/2018.

7 White Paper, 5.

8 White Paper, 5.

9 White Paper, 5.

- 10 James McQuaid, "Flying Blind," New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 10 November 2003 at https://www.nola.com/military/index.ssf/2003/11/flying_blind.html accessed 10/3/2018; Mark Bowden, "Flight Risk," *The Atlantic* (July/August 2009) at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/07/flight-risk/307492> accessed 10/3/2018.
- 11 Victoria Bruce and Karin Hayes with Jorgé Enrique Botero, *Hostage Nation: Colombia's Guerrilla Army and the Failed War on Drugs* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 113; Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, had designated the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia as well as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) 8 October 1997 and the Executive Order 13224 signed by President George W. Bush after 9/11 (23 September 2001) made the Abu Sayyaf Group subject to terrorist funding constraints. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, at <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> accessed 08/22/2018; "Executive Order 13224," at <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/122570.htm> accessed 08/23/2018.
- 12 White Paper, 14-15.
- 13 Briscoe, "Rescuing the Burnhams: The Unspoken SOCPAC Mission," 48.). OEF-P was originally based on the recovery of three American Citizens (AMCITs) held by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines. Ironically, after the ASG kidnapped 20 tourists and hotel employees [3 AMCITs] on 27 May 2001 from the Dos Palms Resort, offshore of Palawan Island, the Philippines, one AMCIT, Peruvian-born Guillermo Sobero from California, was beheaded a few days later. The ASG wanted \$2 million dollars for Gracia and Martin Burnham, New Tribes Missionaries. Their 'proof-of-life' video was released in February 2002 and \$300,000 in private donations was raised...which disappeared after being given to an ASG 'contact.' Only Gracia survived the Philippine Army Light Reaction Battalion assault on their ASG camp on 7 June 2002. Her husband and a Filipino nurse were killed in the firefight. Briscoe, "Rescuing the Burnhams: The Unspoken SOCPAC Mission," *Special Warfare*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (September 2004), 50; "U.S. Hostage Dead in the Philippines," *ABC News* at <https://abcnews.go.com/international/story?id=79955&page=1> accessed 8/23/2018.
- 14 Bruce and Hayes with Botero, *Hostage Nation*, 145-154.
- 15 Ramsey, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque*, 55-58.
- 16 Retired Colombian Army General Mario Montoya Uribe, interview by Briscoe and Kulich, 14 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 17 Retired Colombian Army COL Navas*, interviews by Briscoe and Kulich, 13 September 2017 and 15 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 18 COL Gregory Wilson, SOCSOUTH-Forward Commander, Bogotá, Colombia, "Statement to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) on Operation WILLING SPIRIT and JAQUE in Colombia," 17 July 2008, *Report of the Activities of the Committee on Armed Services for the One Hundred Tenth Congress, January 3, 2009* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009), 63, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited Wilson, HASC Statement.
- 19 Gonsalves, et al., *Out of Captivity*, 248-249; Bruce, Hayes, and Botero, *Hostage Nation*, 174-176.
- 20 Wilson, HASC Statement.
- 21 White Paper, 6.
- 22 White Paper, 7.
- 23 Wilson, HASC Statement.
- 24 Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- 25 White Paper, 7.
- 26 Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- 27 Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- 28 White Paper, 7.
- 29 White Paper, 7.
- 30 White Paper, 7.
- 31 Gonsalves, et al., *Out of Captivity*, 390-393.
- 32 Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- 33 Gonsalves, et al., *Out of Captivity*, 390-393.
- 34 Wilson, HASC Statement; Wilson, "A Modern Day Trojan Horse—Operation JAQUE and the Use of Stratagem in a Hostage Rescue Operation," in Rothstein and Whaley, *The Art and Science of Military Deception*, 387-389; LTC Timothy Carns, Deputy Commander, SOC-FWD-Colombia, interview by Lowe, 7 September 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Juan Carlos Torres, *Operación JAQUE: La Verdadera Historia* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2008), 48.
- 35 LTC Eric Kreitz, interview by Briscoe, Lowe, Kulich, and Mataxis, 2 August 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Ft Bragg, NC; LTC Brandon A. Garcia, interviews by Briscoe, Lowe, Kulich, and Mataxis, 20-21 September 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Ft Bragg, NC.
- 36 White Paper, 7.
- 37 White Paper, 4.
- 38 Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- 39 Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.



Operación
JAUQUE The Ultimate Deception

by Charles H. Briscoe and Daniel J. Kulich

Note | Pseudonyms used in the Colombian government-sanctioned official history by Juan Carlos Torres, *Operación JAQUE: La Verdadera Historia* (Bogotá, CO: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2008) will be duplicated while true names in that account will remain.

JAQUE (meaning ‘check’ as applied in the game of chess) was a highly compartmented, unilateral Colombian military (COLMIL) deception operation that successfully recovered fifteen VIP hostages from *Las Fuerzas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) on 2 July 2008 without a shot fired or anyone injured. The Colombian Army (COLAR) intelligence-orchestrated ‘sting’ was made possible by a highly effective ‘grand deception’ operation. ‘Unwitting’ Colombian and American special operations forces (COLSOF/ USSOF) were operationally deployed to conduct combined reconnaissance, sensitive site exploitation, and psychological operations (PSYOP) in a ‘restricted’ region. They diverted FARC attention from the area arranged for the ‘sting.’¹

This “deception within the ‘grand deception’” operation succeeded because all aspects of *Operación JAQUE* were exclusively controlled and personally directed by General (GEN) Mario Montoya Uribe, the COLAR Commander.² This was not atypical behavior. Colombian generals like to direct operations from the forward command posts of subordinates.³

GEN Montoya was counting on the professionalism of the COLAR generals. He wanted them to unknowingly (‘unwittingly’) establish conditions to make the hostage recovery possible. Their unwavering loyalty would make his ‘grand deception’ credible to FARC leadership. These ‘unsung heroes’ continued *Operación ELIPSE* after U.S. Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH) had taken its task force home. However, *ELIPSE* would be confined to a specific ‘restricted’ area. This enabled COLAR signal intelligence (SIGINT)/electronic warfare (EW) units to convince the two FARC commanders to move their VIP hostages some 20-25 miles to the southeast where they would be helicoptered to meet the new FARC leader, Guillermo León Sáenz Vargas, alias *Alfonso Cano*, to participate in a major propaganda video.⁴



Flag of the FARC (*Las Fuerzas Revolucionarias de Colombia*).

This article, based extensively on COLAR participant interviews, will demonstrate that *Operación JAQUE* was a unilateral COLMIL operation, separate from the Joint Chiefs of Staff-authorization to U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to conduct combined operations with Colombia [Operation WILLING SPIRIT (OWS)]. The deception within the ‘grand deception’—*JAQUE*—was 97 percent COLMIL; 3 percent U.S. technical ‘platform’ intelligence. Embedded ‘unwitting’ USSOF with ‘unwitting’ COLSOF reconnaissance, sensitive site exploitation and PSYOP teams who were to search for the FARC VIP hostage holders in the ‘restricted’ area, was part of GEN Montoya’s ‘grand deception.’ *JAQUE* was not part of OWS; its success nullified the reason for OWS.⁵ The three Americans, Ingrid Betancourt Pulecio, and eleven other Colombians were recovered by the Colombian military. “Remember, we knew that Ingrid Betancourt and the Americans would be the last hostages released by the FARC. The French president had failed to negotiate her release earlier. They were too valuable as peace negotiation pawns,” said GEN Montoya.⁶ Now, from whence did this unorthodox, nontraditional deception operation originate, and why did this concept get ‘traction’ with senior COLAR intelligence officers and GEN Montoya?

The stroke of genius did not originate in the upper echelons of the COLAR, but came from below—the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) of an Army EW/SIGINT company—in early December 2007. The commander listened intently to a very bright young crypto analyst sergeant. “We have the capacity to dupe the FARC into collecting the VIP hostages to attend an international propaganda video with their new commander, *Alfonso*



GEN Mario Montoya Uribe, Commander of the Colombian Army (COLAR), 2006-2008, was the ‘Grandmaster’ behind *Operación JAQUE*.



SOCSOUTH SSI and SOCSOUTH Crest with logo “Guardianes del Sur.”



Yapuri River where the three Americans were spotted bathing during *Operación ELIPSE*.

Cano. The Venezuelans convinced them to release some hostages for humanitarian reasons earlier. Instead of just reacting to *FARC*-directed hostage moves, let's take control of their communications and order them to relocate them where they could be rescued. You know that the only consistently reliable intelligence on the *FARC* is coming from us."⁷

The COLAR crypto analysts had successfully penetrated *FARC* communications several months earlier and were systematically breaking their codes. Constant monitoring yielded tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). The *FARC* changed codes for communications security, but the crypto analysts 'cracked' them in days. The SIGINT company commander formed a working group of his most experienced NCOs, which he chaired. Their work was very 'close hold.' They 'war gamed' methods for testing their theory and determined innocuous messages, if answered, would lend 'proof' to the viability of the concept.⁸

Four events reinforced their confidence. During *Operación AURORA* (2005-2006), the *FARC* 33rd Front commander had been convinced to entrust his codes to a confidant (a COLAR Human Intelligence [HUMINT] deep cover operative) long enough to be photocopied. This SIGINT 'coup' confirmed that the *FARC* could be deceived.⁹ In April 2007, National Police officer Jhon F. Pinchao had escaped from a *FARC* prison camp on the Apaporis River. He reported that Ingrid Betancourt, the three Americans, and other VIP hostages were controlled by the *FARC* 1st Front, Eastern Bloc, led by Gerardo Aguilar Ramírez aka *César*.¹⁰

A combined inter-agency sensitive site exploitation team went to the vacated site, conducted forensics to confirm that the VIP hostages had been there, and corroborated the information provided by Pinchao. Previous supposition that the 63rd Front (Amazonas) had the VIP hostages was spurious.¹¹ The COLAR SIGINT working group refocused



Proof-of-Life photos of the SOUTHCOM Reconnaissance Systems (SRS) contractors taken by Colombian journalist Jorgé Enrique Botero in July 2003: (left to right) Keith D. Stansell; Marc D. Gonsalves; and Thomas R. Howes.



Senator Ingrid Betancourt Pulecio, a presidential candidate, was taken hostage while campaigning in *FARC-landia* on 23 February 2002.



Colombian National Police *Subintendente* Jhon F. Pinchao. On the right is Pinchao after 9 years of *FARC* captivity.

Key Figures as the 'Decepción' Played Out

Command Personnel



Álvaro Uribe Vélez, President of Colombia.



Colombian Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón.



GEN Freddy Padilla de León, Commander, Colombian Armed Forces (2006-2008).



GEN Mario Montoya Uribe, Commander of the Colombian Army (COLAR), 2006-2008, was the 'Grandmaster' behind Operación JAQUE.



BG Ricardo Díaz Torres, Colombian Army (COLAR) G-2.



BG Charles T. Cleveland, Special Operations Command, South (SOC SOUTH) Commander.

FARC Personnel



León Sáenz Vargas, alias Alfonso Cano was named as Commander of the FARC on 26 March 2008.

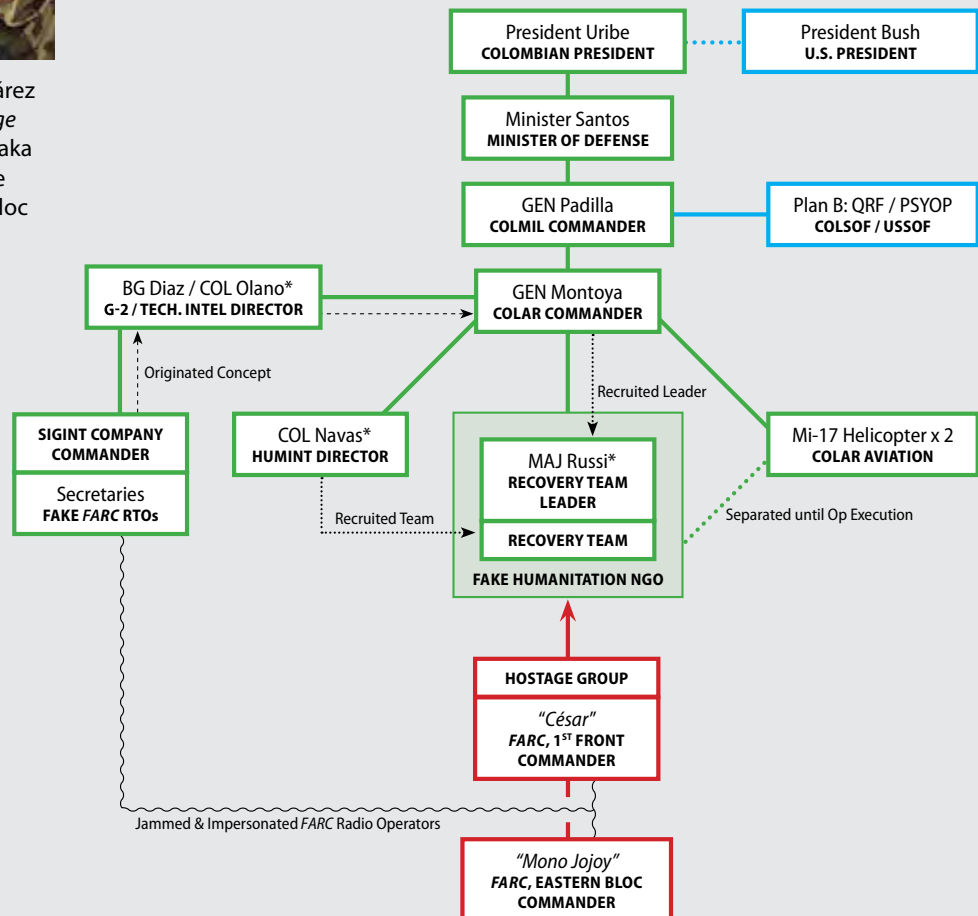


Victor Julio Suárez Rojas, alias Jorge Briceño Suárez aka Mono Jojoy, the FARC Eastern Bloc commander.



Gerardo Aguilar Ramírez aka César, FARC 1st Front commander, controlled the VIP hostages.

Interaction/Communication Lines in Operación JAQUE





Route of the RESCUE

Map depicting the route of the rescue Mi-17. At Tolemaida the rescue team boarded the Mi-17 for the flight to Puerto Rico airfield. When the order to execute was received, the Mi-17 flew to Tomachipan to recover the hostages. The dotted line denotes the areas where the deception plan was executed. Area 1 was the long-range diversion; area 2 was the close-in deception.

on the FARC 1st Front and the Eastern Bloc directed by Victor Julio Suárez Rojas, alias *Jorge Briceño Suárez*, aka *Mono Jojoy*.¹² Then, a second American proof-of-life video, released in November 2007, was followed by a COLAR SIGINT-intercept of a message from *César* (1st FARC Front) to *Mono Jojoy* (Eastern Bloc commander) asking to move the VIP hostages north into the Yari region. This caused GEN Freddy Padilla de León, Commander of the Armed Forces, to alert COLSOF to infiltrate reconnaissance (rece) teams along the Apaporis River and Dos Ríos confluence. This triggered *Operación ELIPSE* in mid-January 2008. Tasked to support that operation, the SIGINT company commander set aside their initiative.¹³

ELIPSE evolved into a combined Colombian/U.S. operation a week after the COLMIL launched a conventional operation (4 February 2008) about fifty miles

west to discourage the FARC with the VIP hostages from moving in that direction. Nine combined rece teams employed ground sensors and were either observing or blocking access to Yari in the north. As more elements were inserted to form a cordon around the suspected FARC VIP hostage-holding group, Brigadier General (BG) Charles T. Cleveland, Special Operations Command South commander, the executive agent for OWS, was authorized to pre-position an American *in extremis* direct action rescue force at Tolemaida. Within days the U.S. military 'footprint' at that Colombian base was larger than that of the COLMIL. The American special operations task force quickly filled Tolemaida to capacity. Daylight USSOF helicopter flights further 'spooked' the FARC hostage element after they found some of the ground sensors.¹⁴

Then, on 16 February 2008, a COLSOF rece team reported that they had 'eyes on' three white men speaking English and addressing one another by name as they bathed in the river. They were guarded by about twenty FARC. For the next four days (17-20 February) the COLSOF rece team reported hostage sightings. BG Cleveland, anxious to get American 'eyes on' the hostages, pushed to infiltrate more combined cordon teams. However, with no sightings on 21 and 22 February, the combined SOF leaders concluded that the FARC had escaped north in the darkness. Several attempts to 'leap frog' combined cordon elements piecemeal into northern blocking positions proved fruitless. The Americans were discouraged.

On 28 February and 1 March the COLMIL helicoptered additional units into the Dos Ríos area. A small point team from the FARC hostage group was encountered.



Aerial photograph of the rehearsal site for *Operación JAQUE*.

Two guerrillas were killed, but contact was lost.¹⁵ While the COLMIL continued the search, the SOCSOUTH Task Force started sending elements back to the States on 9 March. The headquarters followed five days later.¹⁶

Relieved of his mission to support *ELIPSE* in late March 2008, the COLAR SIGINT company commander increased the monitoring of communications between *Mono Jojoy* and *César* and reconvened the working group. By June, they were ready to test their concept with a benign encrypted message to *César*: “How is the cargo?” *Mono Jojoy’s* female radio operator (RTO) had already been jammed. They anticipated a delay in getting a reply because the *FARC* alternated transmissions between mornings and afternoons and jungle weather was always a problem. To their pleasant surprise *César’s* RTO answered, “Fine,” without question.¹⁷

The SIGINT company commander and his senior crypto analyst sergeant took their concept and results to Major (MAJ) Davila*, the director of COLAR SIGINT analysts. Skeptical about their ‘crazy idea’ he wanted more proof. Two days later they brought back the replies to two more queries answered by *César*. MAJ

Davila* acquiesced but money and personnel priorities had to be approved by his superior, the Technical Intelligence director, COL Olano*, and the COLAR G-2, BG Ricardo Díaz Torres.¹⁸ The SIGINT working group needed radios identical to those used by the *FARC*. Official cover ‘backstopping’ their mission had to be arranged to conduct these clandestine activities. Compartmentation with a strict ‘need to know’ was critical for operational security (OPSEC). And, a secure, remote field (jungle) radio base station had to be established to cement the ruse.¹⁹

The COLAR G-2 and COL Olano* knew full well that the only consistently reliable intelligence on the *FARC* was being produced by SIGINT. But, these consummate intelligence officers had strong HUMINT backgrounds. Nontraditional recommendations from deep cover operatives in the field were common. ‘Field soldiers’ operated daily based on ‘ground truth.’ This unorthodox concept from the ranks was amazingly logical and feasible if covered properly. It offered possibilities unattainable by conventional methods. The two experienced intelligence officers felt that GEN

The two oldest Soviet Mi-17 *Hip* helicopters were repainted in international search and rescue colors: white & red.



Clara Rojas & Emmanuel.

Clara Leticia Rojas González, the vice presidential candidate, was taken hostage with Senator Ingrid Betancourt Pulecio while campaigning in *FARC-landia* on 23 February 2002. Suffering from *Stockholm Syndrome*, Clara Rojas became pregnant by a *FARC* guerrilla and gave birth to a son (Emmanuel) in captivity. The *FARC* gave a malnourished, sickly Emmanuel with a broken arm to a peasant family who took him to the San Jose del Guaviare hospital. Emmanuel was in a foster home in Bogotá when located by his grandmother. Emmanuel was reunited with his mother, Clara Rojas, after Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arranged her release from the *FARC* as a humanitarian gesture on 10 January 2008.³⁴ The Venezuelan humanitarian missions in January and February 2008, effected with Mi-17 helicopters and doctors and nurses wearing International Red Cross vests and documented by *Telesur* television journalists and cameramen, served as image models for the *JAUQUE* subterfuge.³⁵



Clara Rojas and Emmanuel reunited.



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arranged the humanitarian release of Clara Rojas from the *FARC* on 10 January 2008.

Montoya should be briefed immediately. The concept had real promise.²⁰

Frustrated and confused by the U.S. withdrawal from *ELIPSE*, and discouraged by their inability to capture the *FARC* VIP hostage holders employing conventional tactics in the dense jungle terrain, GEN Montoya and other COLMIL senior leaders were ready to listen to viable options, even if they were unorthodox. BG Díaz Torres and COL Olano* were aware that GEN Montoya was a very audacious commander who willingly took risks to achieve victory. In that regard he was somewhat Machiavellian—the ends justified the means. A successful deception operation had to be credible at multiple levels and the overall ‘grand stratagem’ had to be tightly compartmented.²¹

The simplicity and sheer audacity of the concept appealed to GEN Montoya. He quickly grasped that a “deception within a ‘grand deception’” provided the best chance for success. And, as the COLAR commander he controlled the resources, had the power to ‘lock everything down,’ and the authority to ‘make it happen.’



The Colombian Army signal intelligence (SIGINT) was in a remote countryside location.

BG Díaz and COL Olano* were sworn to secrecy before the trio assessed those known for 'leaking' sensitive information. As 'grand master' of the deception stratagem he alone would control all compartments and BG Díaz would manage the compartmentation and 'need to know' in the G-2 by name.²²

They would use intelligence 'discretionary' funds and clandestinely cover the purchase and rationale for acquiring commercial radios, renting civilian vehicles, temporary use of land (clandestine radio base station), appropriate civilian clothes, explaining relaxed grooming for the field SIGINT and recovery teams, and theatrical and special equipment training. Everything had to be plausible to minimize attention within the COLMIL. COL Olano* would provide SIGINT reports verbally in person to COLSOF generals to emphasize their significance. There would be no electronic or paper trails. Together Díaz and Olano* would update GEN Montoya in person weekly. COL Navas*, the director of HUMINT, would be detailed to Montoya for the duration of the operation. The specificity of his directives were not taken as affronts by these senior intelligence professionals. That was natural for clandestine and covert operations. GEN Montoya was closing the doors to his 'grand deception' compartment.²³

The 'grand deception' had to be operationally credible in order to convince and sustain continued scrutiny by the FARC. This meant 'manipulating' SIGINT intelligence to keep the 'unwitting' combined COLSOF/ USSOF reconnaissance teams diligently searching. PSYOP leaflets and radio broadcasts encouraging FARC defections and promising amnesty saturated the new search area to add further credence. That effort would be sustained by 'unwitting' combined teams of psywarriors. Unquestioning loyalty from subordinates and non-interference by seniors were key to creating credible operational conditions to make the critical, smaller deceptions within possible. BG Díaz and COL Olano* directed and carefully cross checked the 'adjusted' intelligence to support the 'grand deception' orchestrated by GEN Montoya.²⁴

The COLAR commander kept his own counsel. Personal paranoia is an essential trait to protect compartmented operations. Orders and reports, false and true, were given verbally to commanders, face-to-face. Only the 'grand master' (Montoya) of the stratagem retained simple hand-written notes and pledges of secrecy. COL Olano*, the director of Technical Intelligence, did not know the details of how the SIGINT company commander would perform his role. That was a separate compartment and he did not have a 'need to know.'²⁵

COL Navas*, the G-2 HUMINT director, was responsible for recruiting, organizing, and training an all-volunteer recovery team, with one exception. GEN Montoya identified someone as the best candidate for the

team leader. This deep cover operative had set conditions for and then instigated a vicious firefight between FARC and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)* elements in a city whose control was contested. Throughout the night the operative moved back and forth escalating the violence. By morning the two forces were combat ineffective. They were easily subdued by Montoya's men and the COLAR restored law and order to the beleaguered city. That deep cover operative was MAJ José Luís Russi Caballero (hereafter MAJ Russi*), of Italian descent, who had spent considerable time in Europe.²⁶

The recovery/rescue was a very high risk mission. Experienced deep cover intelligence operatives, confident and comfortable with 'singleton high wire' missions, would constitute the core of the team. Every member had to be able to comfortably 'live' a deep cover persona that was well 'backstopped' to pull off a deception ruse under a 'false flag.' GEN Montoya had the final approval on the recovery team members recruited by COL Navas.*²⁷

The COLAR commander would personally coordinate air assets [the two oldest of five Soviet Mi-17 helicopters (30 passengers)] recently purchased by President Álvaro Uribe Vélez for air search and rescue. He would be the interface with GEN Padilla, the Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, and President Uribe. All were kept informed in general terms to allow each to distance himself in the event of failure. GEN Montoya personally shouldered that responsibility and adroitly shifted from tactical to operational and strategic levels to ensure that proper perspectives were maintained.²⁸ Since the tactical elements of *Operación JAQUE* (the SIGINT and hostage recovery teams) determined operational and strategic dynamics, the two lines of effort moved concurrently.

Back down at the level where the deception concept originated, the SIGINT company commander and his NCO working group prepared the messages to be interjected into the radio communications lines of the FARC leaders, *Mono Jojoy* and *César*. They searched within their organization for women whose voices best matched the two FARC female RTOs. None of the military crypto analysts or radio operators had voices that fit, but two civilian secretaries did. Meanwhile, a remote field radio site location had been located an hour and a half away from Bogotá by car and foot. The environment had all the insect and animal sounds common to the two FARC jungle radio stations that the COLAR SIGINT teams had been monitoring daily for than six months. The site would be kept primitive. Plastic sheeting commonly found in FARC camps would keep the rain off the radio equipment, sleeping areas, and the RTOs imitating 'Andrea' (*Mono Jojoy*) and 'India' (*César*) as well as their crypto analyst security team.²⁹

While the SIGINT NCOs learned the intricacies of the commercial radios used by the FARC, other sergeants from the working group prepared a ten-day practical



The Venezuelan Mi-17s used in their hostage exchanges had International Red Cross markings.

training course for the secretaries. Since the substitute RTOs would be queried by the *FARC* for authenticity, the three other SIGINT company commanders and their senior NCOs were given 'limited read-ons' by COL Olano.* They would help to provide answers to *FARC* questions within 24 hours. Their only respite would be bad weather delaying radio contacts. The essential elements of life—fires for cooking, water for drinking, personal sanitation, clothes washing, food preparation, rest, and constant guard duty consumed much of the guerrillas' day. Great distances and the mountainous terrain isolated *FARC* leaders in the jungle. Gerardo Aguilar Ramírez ('César') and Victor Julio Suárez Rojas (*Jorgé Briceño Suárez, 'Mono Jojoy'*), Eastern Bloc commander, had not met in over three years.³⁰ Natural suspicion kept them alert and alive. By mid-April 2008, the two field SIGINT teams were operational and closely monitored. Their company commander daily took encrypted situation reports (SITREPs) to COL Olano.*³¹ GEN Montoya got weekly updates from BG Díaz and his Technical Intelligence director.³² Meanwhile, COL Navas* was fully engaged.

The G-2 HUMINT director was recruiting a hostage recovery team while arranging plausible, well 'backstopped' explanations for the temporary reassignments of some fifteen personnel from all over the COLAR. Candidates were identified to fit roles associated with a civilian humanitarian mission much like those on the two earlier Venezuelan operations. COL Navas* was quite familiar with Montoya's candidate. MAJ Russi* had

several successful deep cover assignments 'under his belt.' He was an intelligent, energetic, charismatic natural leader with good common sense. He volunteered without hesitation.³³ Since an integral part of funding humanitarian missions comes from media coverage, sympathetic liberal photo journalists and a viable television camera crew had to be portrayed.

MAJ Davila,* the SIGINT crypto analysis director, was technically inclined and quite knowledgeable about video production. He convinced COL Navas* that he could best perform this role by gaining some weight. A *Telesur* television cameraman would distract/relax/divert the attention of *FARC* security and provide some comfort to the hostages as another 'proof of life' opportunity. He would 'glue himself' to MAJ Russi,* the ground force commander.³⁶

The composition of the team would be similar to that of the Venezuelans. Medical personnel had to be courageous *bona fide* practitioners. Multi-nationals would provide an international face to the humanitarian mission—a Colombian officer of Lebanese descent who spoke Arabic and another raised in Australia who spoke good English were recruited. The two would feign ignorance of Spanish. Anyone capable of dual roles was especially helpful. A 'vetted,' trusted sixteen-year *FARC* veteran and an intelligence operative very familiar with the Eastern Bloc would perform as representatives of *Alfonso Cano*. The knowledge, experience, and familiarity of the *FARC* veteran might be sufficient to alert the team of imminent danger.³⁷ And, there had

to be several men capable of subduing accompanying FARC personnel without using weapons. The FARC guerrillas were jungle-hardened and physically tough after a lifetime of surviving in the field.³⁸

Once assembled in their 'safe house,' the team was sworn to secrecy and each signed a non-disclosure statement. Anyone who changed his/her mind about participating in the mission could do so without prejudice, but they would be isolated until the completion of the operation. Thoroughly 'backstopped' individual covers had to be committed to memory, rehearsed, and 'lived' through several peer evaluations. Once comfortable that everyone could live his/her cover, COL Navas* hired a professional actor to critique demeanor, confidence, and poise to eliminate military posture, mannerisms or speech styles. Basic acting lessons and suggested techniques enhanced performances and individual confidence. Then, everyone had to 'perform' in front of a 'murder board'—GEN Montoya, BG Díaz, and COLs Olano* and Navas.* GEN Montoya felt that the cast had too many young people and changed out some people.³⁹ After the mission, several rescue team members admitted that the 'murder board' was tougher than 'pleasing' any of the FARC and hostages 'on the ground.' Every aspect of one's persona—individual mannerisms, body language, stance, clothing and apparel was minutely scrutinized to identify potential flaws in their character 'role playing.'⁴⁰

In the meantime a cover headquarters for the fictitious non-governmental humanitarian organization (NGO) had been set up in a commercial office building by BG Díaz. "An Italian named Ruse was its director. He had a dozen secretaries answering twice as many telephones while recording all conversations. They were 'backstopping' the NGO and the covers assigned to each of the recovery team members. Military intelligence personnel satisfied

"They were '**back stopping**' the NGO and the **covers assigned** to each of the recovery team members."

— General Mario Montoya Uribe,
the COLAR Commander

queries from family members. A fictitious website with email and telephone linkage was monitored daily. Recorded data was sent to COLAR military intelligence personnel for personnel identification and surveillance. Radio and television advertised the humanitarian NGO program. President Uribe endorsed their work in a public broadcast to add legitimacy," said GEN Montoya.⁴¹

Helicopter transport for the 'humanitarian' mission was coordinated by GEN Montoya. The two oldest of the five Colombian Air Force (COLAF) Soviet Mi-17s had been flown to Medellin to be painted white to perform as national air rescue aircraft. To further 'backstop' the new mission the COLAF was programmed to demonstrate their capability in the national air festival in July 2008. Two Mi-17 aircrews had been personally selected and trained specifically for that program.⁴² While this aspect of the mission was being orchestrated by GEN Montoya, the SIGINT radio team dealt with several FARC challenges.

As expected, the SIGINT 'intervention' RTOs got challenged by *Mono Jojoy* and his RTO, Andrea, after jamming sessions caused temporary shutdowns. Weather interruptions and lackadaisical FARC RTO answering patterns provided sufficient time for the other SIGINT monitoring teams to query FARC 'counterparts' and obtain correct answers. With comfort levels restored and suspicions assuaged, the two field SIGINT teams began 'coaxing' César to assemble and move the VIP hostages northward into the region where Venezuela effected their humanitarian efforts earlier in the year. The SIGINT NCOs calculated that the FARC would be comfortable in that remote region. Technical intelligence still continued to be the only viable intelligence source on the FARC.⁴³

By late June, with preparations 95+ percent ready, GEN Montoya, became concerned that 'unwitting' COLSOF/USSOF elements might inadvertently engage a FARC element that strayed into their 'restricted' zone. The COLAR commander wanted nothing to cause César to delay/halt his SIGINT-directed movement. He recommended that Defense Minister Santos tell Ambassador William R. Brownfield and COL Gregory Wilson, the SOCSOUTH-Forward commander, about the impending unilateral Colombian humanitarian hostage recovery operation. Minister Santos did so in his home on Thursday night, 26 June 2008.⁴⁴ No date was provided.⁴⁵

Considerable 'stewing' by staffers in Bogotá, Washington, Miami, and Homestead, Florida, resulted afterwards but produced nothing concrete. President Uribe called President George W. Bush on Saturday, 29 June. The American president said that he did not want a firefight, before asking President Uribe what he needed. The Colombian president requested that the U.S. technical intelligence platforms continue to be available. President Bush agreed and that ended the U.S. 'stewing.'⁴⁶

By then, the JAQUE recovery team had been isolated in an aircraft hangar at Tolemaida with a 'stand by to execute' order. The two Mi-17 aircraft and aircrews had

“We’re here! Let’s do it! Tell the pilots to land. It’s ‘Game’ time!”

— MAJ Jose Luís Russi*



Aerial view of *Operación JAQUE* with *FARC* guerrillas approaching the helo.

been ordered home from Medellín. The aircrews joined the recovery team in isolation, but physically located apart. As GEN Montoya had directed, the Air Force commander ‘grounded’ all aircraft on Tolémaida. He ‘locked down’ his command, restricting all airmen to the base. Rather than risk both Mi-17s by having them airborne during the top secret mission, one helicopter would stand by, engines running, at the San José del Guaviare airport. Heavy rain blanketed the area on Monday, 1 July, the second half of the Saint Peter and Paul national holiday. D-Day was slipped 24 hours.⁴⁷

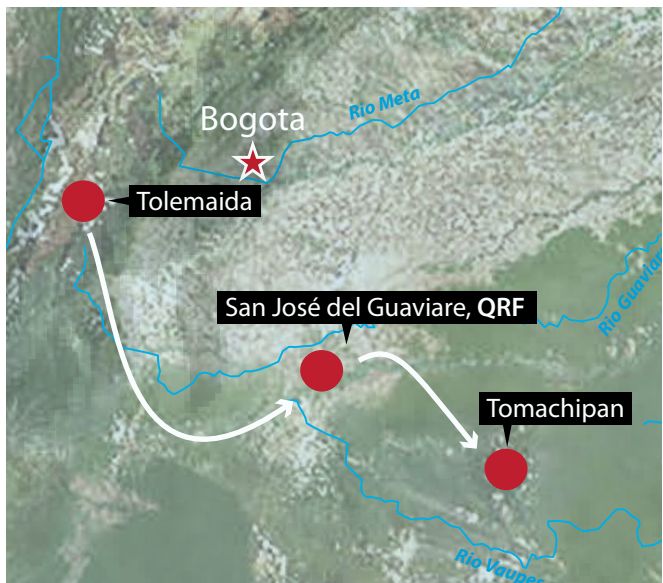
The COLAR field SIGINT teams had earlier messaged four conditions key to receiving the humanitarian helicopter that would carry *César* and the VIP hostages to meet *Alfonso Cano*, the new *FARC* commander: 1. a radio frequency to contact the *FARC* on the ground;

2. that a bonfire mark the landing zone to determine wind direction; 3. that the hostages would wear white t-shirts; 4. that no rifles or hand guns be brought aboard the humanitarian helicopter. The stipulations were consistent with those requested during the Venezuelan humanitarian missions. Majors Russi* and Davila* were aware of these conditions.⁴⁸

The lack of communication from *César* concerning the conditions delayed the mission more than the weather on Monday, 2 July 2008. It was after 2 P.M. when the SIGINT company commander heard from *César’s* RTO, India, that he would receive the humanitarian helicopter. The Mi-17 with the rescue team aboard lifted off. GEN Montoya and COL Navas* were already airborne in a UH-60 *Black Hawk* monitoring the operational code words tied to a common pre-flight checklist.⁴⁹

As the single white Mi-17 helicopter approached the area south of Tumuchapan, Majors Russi* and Davila* were standing behind the pilots looking out of the cockpit windows. They saw a large group of armed people, presumably *FARC* guerrillas, assembled on the opposite side of the river four hundred meters from the best landing area. They had no communications with the *FARC* below. No hostages wearing white T-shirts could be seen. And, there was no bonfire to provide wind direction for the pilots. The decision to land or abort the mission rested fully on MAJ Russi*, the ground force commander/humanitarian mission leader. He said to MAJ Davila* who was wearing a throat microphone, “We’re here! Let’s do it! Tell the pilots to land. It’s ‘game’ time!”⁵⁰

As soon as the Mi-17 ramp was lowered MAJ Russi* surged off the helicopter with MAJ Davila*, his *Telesur* television cameraman, in tow. The pilots had been instructed to maintain the necessary RPMs to effect a quick takeoff if ordered by MAJ Davila*. All he had to tell the pilots was, “I lost my wallet,” and they would lift off.⁵¹



Route of the Rescue.



GEN Montoya waves from the COLAF *Fokker 28* as the three Americans, (top to bottom) Keith D. Stansell, Thomas R. Howes, and Marc D. Gonsalves, deplane at Tolemaida.



The USAF MC-130 carrying the combined PSYOP team and negotiation leaflets for Plan B was diverted to Tolemaida to carry the Americans to Bogotá.

MAJ Russi* moved to the nearest *FARC* guerrilla surrounding the helicopter in a cordon. He identified himself as the leader of the humanitarian mission and demanded that he be taken to *César* and meet the hostages. The other team members (some wearing Che Guevara t-shirts) followed Russi's* lead and began conversing with the common *FARC* guerrillas, treating them like celebrities. The friendliness, verbal flattery and kindness shown by the 'humanitarian missionaries' bewildered the *FARC* 'privates.'⁵²

While his team engaged the *FARC* soldiers with pleasantries and inquired about medical issues, MAJ Russi* and the 'TV cameraman' strode off to find *César* and the hostages. The initial estimate of ten minutes on the ground was rapidly evaporating. As the two humanitarians neared some crude thatched roof huts, Russi* recognized *César*, the *FARC* 1st Front leader

"Montoya! Montoya! Montoya!"

— *The recovery team*

watching them from a doorway. Russi* 'bee-lined' towards him loudly announcing himself as the mission leader, Jorgé, who had radioed him. Russi* turned on the charm, effusively connecting *César* with Julius Caesar, the great Roman leader and presenting a book on Caesar as a gift. He reminded him that time was wasting—the helicopter was burning up precious fuel that was needed to get them to their meeting with *Alfonso Cano*, the new senior *FARC* commander.⁵³

The TV cameraman busily filmed the 'momentous occasion' with a continuous verbal spiel. *César*, who was obviously impressed by the helicopter and *Telesur* television coverage, and taken aback by the notoriety, finally ordered that the hostages be herded towards the aircraft. As they passed by the *Telesur* cameraman, each hostage hesitated to provide full names as they had done before for 'proof-of-life' videos.⁵⁴ They refused any proffered medical help, loudly challenging their 'humanitarian benefactors' as imposters, balked at being 'flex-tied' for the helicopter ride, and objected to being shoved by the '*FARC* impersonators' aboard.⁵⁵

"I was mouthing off to a guy wearing a Che Guevara t-shirt, being obnoxious, and trying to delay the helicopter loading when he ('Australian') got 'up in my face' and muttered through gritted teeth, 'Shut up, Stansell! Do as we say. We're here to rescue you.' I immediately closed my mouth and encouraged everyone to cooperate," said the American hostage, Keith Stansell.⁵⁶

Getting the group aboard the helicopter while simultaneously distancing *César* from his bodyguard required considerable finesse. The *FARC* 1st Front leader refused to surrender his shoulder-holstered handgun. The recovery team had an accurate count for the inner security cordon (34) but had not convinced *César's* bodyguard, Gafas, the last to board, to leave his sidearm. As the Mi-17 began lifting off, MAJ Russi* pushed a few cases of non-alcoholic beer and boxes of candy off the ramp to the bewildered *FARC* guerrillas who witnessed the charade. When the pilots announced the checklist code word for 'Success' some twenty-three minutes after landing, GEN Montoya breathed a sigh of relief.⁵⁷

During takeoff, team members by *César* noticed his distress and signs of air sickness. A doctor was available to assist but the *FARC* chief still had a weapon. Then, before he knew what was happening, the bleary-eyed *César* was thrown to the aircraft floor and subdued by several of the team. His bodyguard in the rear suffered the same fate. The two were disarmed, stripped to their underwear, and 'flex-tied' with nylon restraints.⁵⁸

These actions confused and frightened the bound hostages. As their bonds were cut free, the former hostages were quietly told that the Colombian Army had just freed them. Then, the recovery team began to chant, "Uribe! Uribe! Uribe!" followed quickly by "Montoya! Montoya! Montoya!" That got the former captives on their feet, tears of joy running down cheeks. They got so excited that they began jumping up and down until the Mi-17 pilot, fighting to control a 'roller coasting' helicopter, ordered everyone into their seats to avoid a crash. Thirty minutes after takeoff, the Mi-17 landed at San José del Guaviare airport where fifteen former captives and their rescuers were welcomed heartily by GEN Montoya. The deception had worked perfectly. Twelve Colombian and three American VIP hostages were rescued without a shot being fired and no one was injured.⁵⁹



Plan B called for negotiation leaflets to be spread over the area in the event the rescue failed.

The COLAR rescue team and aircrews were awarded Colombia's highest military decoration, the *Orden de Boyaca Gran Cruz*.



General Montoya escorted the fifteen hostages and MAJ Russi* to a COLAF *Fokker F-28* jet transport for the flight to Tolemaida. Awaiting their arrival at that airbase was GEN Padilla and Minister Santos, Ambassador Brownfield, the Deputy SOUTHCOM commander, and a mixed group of COLSOF and USSOF who had been standing by as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) if the rescue failed. In the hubbub of the media affair MAJ Russi* slipped away to rejoin his team whose Mi-17 had discreetly landed on the far side of the airfield.⁶⁰ But, what if the rescue had not succeeded?

The COLAR Plan B was typecasted from *Operación ELIPSE*. A COLSOF/USSOF QRF was standing by, aboard UH-60 *Black Hawk* helicopters, rotor blades spinning, at Tolemaida. A U.S. Air Force MC-130E *Combat Talon* transport containing Colombian and American PSYOP teams had been circling twenty miles from the rescue site. If that failed, the MC-130E would fly over the site dropping leaflets that called for a negotiated release of the hostages. Then, COLAR-inserted elements were to form a cordon around the *FARC*. Once that cordon force was in place, the QRF would accompany a team of negotiators to effect release of the hostages. Establishing a cordon in the jungle during *Operación ELIPSE* had proved time-consuming and fruitless. The preponderance of COLSOF with imbedded USSOF was 'unwittingly' supporting the *JAQUE* deception by

While the hostages' release was celebrated by the media on one side of Tolemaida, the *JAQUE* rescue team slipped away.



conducting *FARC* search missions more than twenty miles to the northeast. Plan B was not really viable.⁶¹ “If the Mi-17 did manage to escape, the *FARC* would have had another nine unarmed hostages,” stated MAJ Russi.* “That was reality and we knew that when we landed to meet *César’s* group.”⁶²

The ability of the COLMIL to unilaterally compartment, plan, and execute a complex deception ‘sting’ operation as an integral part of a greater combined deception operation was most remarkable. *Operación JAQUE* speed-lifted the COLMIL into the ranks of the top three Latin American militaries and into the upper tier internationally. Unique to the *JAQUE* deception operation was the absence of casualties—friend or enemy. That factor alone separates and raises this 21st century success above the modern 20th century Entebbe and Princess Gate raids, the Trojan horse employed during the Greek Wars,



The citizens of Bogotá filled the city’s streets on 3 July 2008 to celebrate the *JAQUE* rescue and to condemn the *FARC*.

and heavenly intervention that gave the Israelites entry into Jericho in ancient times. The brazenness and audacity were similar, but not the lack of casualties. *JAQUE* was the perfect military ‘sting’ deception operation.

Unfortunately, GEN Montoya had become so focused on achieving success that he gave little thought to operational failure, and none to post-operation information and media operations. There was no follow-on plan regardless of the outcome. The top four leaders of Colombia, GEN Montoya, General Padilla, Defense Minister Santos, and President Uribe became totally engulfed in the political, military, and social glory immediately accompanying the success.

The ‘grand strategist’ did not reunite the ‘unwitting’ COLMIL generals acknowledging their utmost loyalty which had made the deception possible. By conducting intense hostage search operations before and during the ‘sting,’ they made the ‘grand deception’ credible and created the conditions that had made *JAQUE* possible. They were the ‘unsung heroes’ who went unacknowledged. While it truly was a major COLMIL success, that was lost in the senior officer rancor afterwards. There would be no recovery from this serious cultural slight inflicted on the COLAR generals. Public euphoria masked some of the resentment, but COLAR Intelligence was distrusted for several years afterwards. That is the negative epilogue.

Still, *Operación JAQUE* should be remembered as an unqualified tactical, operational, and strategic success against the *FARC* at a very critical time. ‘Witting’ and ‘unwitting’ soldiers at the tactical level performed their missions superbly and a national success was achieved. And, *Operación JAQUE* will go down in world history as the ultimate military ‘sting’ deception operation and the COLMIL’s most successful mission to date.⁶³ †



CHARLES H. BRISCOE, PhD

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations in Latin America, the Congo, and the Lodge Act.

DANIEL J. KULICH | Operational Analyst

Daniel J. Kulich is a retired Army Special Forces Officer with extensive experience in Latin America. A graduate of West Point, he also earned an MS in Government/Political Science from Campbell University. As a member of the USASOC History Office Sensitive Activities Historical Collections (SAHC) team, he did in depth research and writing on U.S. Operation WILLING SPIRIT (OWS), 2003-2008, and Colombia Operación JAQUE, 2008.

Endnotes

- Retired Colombian Army General Mario Montoya Uribe, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe and Mr. Daniel J. Kulich, 14 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Charles H. Briscoe, Barrett F. Lowe, Daniel J. Kulich, and Theodore Mataxis II, draft "ARSOFF and Operation WILLING SPIRIT, 2003-2008: Operational Analysis" White Paper, U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), May 2018), 4, hereafter cited as Briscoe, et al., "White Paper"; Juan Carlos Torres, *Operación JAQUE: La Verdadera Historia* (Bogotá, CO: Editorial Planeta, 2008), 100.
- Montoya, interview, 14 June 2018.
- Colombian MAJ Jose Luis Russi Caballero*, interviews by Briscoe and Kulich, 7 September 2017 and 12 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- Torres, *Operación JAQUE* 141-143; MAJ Russi,* interviews 7 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Colombian SIGINT Company Commander, interviews by Briscoe and Kulich, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as COLAR SIGINT Company Commander and date.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018.
- Colombian MAJ Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; "César y 'Gafas' traicionaron su compromiso revolucionario: FARC" at <https://www.semana.com/on-line/articulo/...gafas...farc/93844-3> accessed 6/30/2018.
- Jhon F. Pinchao, *Mi Fuga Hacia la Libertad* (Bogota, CO: Editorial Planeta, 2008), 114, 137; Marc D. Gonsalves, Keith D. Stansell, and Thomas R. Howes with Gary Brozek, *Out of Captivity: Surviving 1,967 Days in the Colombian Jungle* (NY: Harper Collins, 2009), 321-344.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018.
- Gonsalves, et al., *Out of Captivity*, 216-218, 390-393.
- Gonsalves, et al., *Out of Captivity*, 390-393.
- COL Gregory Wilson, SOCSOUTH-Forward Commander, Bogota, Colombia, "Statement to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) on Operation WILLING SPIRIT and JAQUE in Colombia," 17 July 2008, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter referred to as Wilson, HASC Statement; *Report of the Activities of the Committee on Armed Services for the One Hundred Tenth Congress*, January 3, 2009 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009), 63; Wilson, "A Modern Day Trojan Horse—Operation JAQUE and the Use of Stratagem in a Hostage Rescue Operation," in Hy S. Rothstein and Barton S. Whaley (eds.), *The Art and Science of Military Deception* (Boston, MA: Artech House, 2013), 387-389; LTC Timothy Carns, Deputy Commander, SOCFWD-Colombia, interview by Barrett F. Lowe, 7 September 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Torres, *Operación JAQUE*, 48.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Colombian COL Navas*, interviews by Briscoe and Kulich, 13 September 2017 and 14 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2018; Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 14 June 2018.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Operación JAQUE* video, *National Geographic*, 2009.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 15 June 2018.
- Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 14 June 2018; MAJ Russi* interviews by Briscoe and Kulich, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- "Jail for Colombian Peasant Who Raised Hostage's Son," *BBC News*, 25 April 2013 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-22290999> accessed 10/26/2018.
- Montoya interview, 15 June 2018; Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 15 June 2018.
- Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018.
- Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 15 June 2018; Torres, *Operación JAQUE*, 161-164; MAJ Daniel Pace, "Operation JAQUE: A Capacity-Building Success Story," unpublished manuscript.
- Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 15 June 2018; Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Montoya interview, 15 June 2018.
- Operación JAQUE* video, *National Geographic*, 2009.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 15 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 15 June 2018; Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 14 June 2018.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018.
- Wilson, HASC Statement; Wilson, "A Modern Day Trojan Horse—Operation JAQUE and the Use of Stratagem in a Hostage Rescue Operation," 387; Carns interview, 7 September 2017.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2008.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2008.
- Montoya interview, 14 June 2008; Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 14 June 2018.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018; Montoya interview, 14 June 2008; Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 14 June 2018; Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; Torres, *Operación JAQUE*, 215; *Operación JAQUE* video, *National Geographic*, 2009.
- COLAR SIGINT Company Commander interviews, 13 September 2017 and 16 June 2018; Montoya interview, 14 June 2008; Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 14 June 2018; Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; Torres, *Operación JAQUE*, 215.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; *Operación JAQUE* video, *National Geographic*, 2009.
- Operación JAQUE* video, *National Geographic*, 2009.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018; *Operación JAQUE* video, *National Geographic*, 2009.
- Pace, "Operation JAQUE"; Gonsalves, et al., *Out of Captivity*, 418-422.
- Keith D. Stansell, conversation with Briscoe, 5 July 2018, Tampa, Florida.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018; Davila* interviews, 8 September 2017 and 12 June 2018.
- Montoya interview, 15 June 2018.
- Navas* interviews, 13 September 2017 and 15 June 2018; Montoya interview, 14 June 2018.
- Russi* interviews, 7 September 2017 and 13 June 2018.
- Operación JAQUE* video, *National Geographic*, 2009.



“Who’s in charge down here?”

by Charles H. Briscoe

“Speak with one voice and become fully integrated with the embassy departments and supporting agencies as well as the Colombian military at all levels—tactical to operational to strategic.”



Bogotá MILGP Coin

U.S. Army soldiers, accustomed to a clear military chain of command, want to know who their boss is when away from home station. “Who’s in charge?” is often the first question asked by Army special operations forces (ARSOF) team leaders on temporary duty (TDY) in a foreign country. Five years ago the answer was often nebulous because the Department of Defense (DoD) had not addressed that issue in American embassies.

U.S. ambassadors traditionally selected their principal military advisor according to the most amiable personality—the Defense Attaché (DATT) or the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) or Military Group (MILGP) commander. Only a general officer-led MAAG escaped this problem. It was especially problematic during El Salvador’s thirteen year war.¹

This finally changed in 2013. DoD specified that a clear military chain of command would be established in U.S. embassies abroad. DoD Directive Number 5205.75 (4 December 2013) was designed to eliminate the “dueling of colonels” between DATT and the U.S. MAAG and U.S. MILGP commanders vying to be the ambassador’s principal military advisor.²

To accentuate Senior Defense Official (SDO)/DATT special status, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) officially appoints the SDO with formal letters of introduction to the U.S. ambassador and the host country minister of defense. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) provides an appointment letter to his host nation counterpart.³ U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), which has the oldest and best organized military assistance program in the world, promulgated this change in Latin America. The SDO/DATT is rated by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) deputy and senior rated by the Deputy Commander, SOUTHCOM.⁴

While this article is centered on Colombia, our strongest regional ally, SOUTHCOM is the leading advocate of

clear military chains of command among the geographic combatant commands (GCC). Likewise, Latin America has six of the twenty-four U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Special Operations Liaison Officers (SOLO) assigned to its countries.⁵ There are over 150 officers and sergeants in the Military Personnel Exchange Program (MPEP) assigned to foreign military commands and schools worldwide. The SDO/DATT keeps track of these great American military contacts in country. So, who ‘jump started’ this concept for Latin America?

In the summer of 2014, Admiral John J. Audubon tasked Field Artillery Colonel (COL) Robert A. Wagner, West Point ‘90, to establish the SDO/DATT concept in El Salvador. It was his success there that led to a 2016 reassignment to Colombia, our strongest partner nation (PN) in the hemisphere.⁶ That country’s government was heavily engaged in peace negotiations with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)* and *Ejército de Liberación (ELN)* after decades of insurgent warfare. It was critical that the DoD personnel in Bogotá “speak with one voice and become fully integrated with



COL Robert A. Wagner, SDO Colombia, and the U.S. Southern Command Seal.



the embassy departments and supporting agencies as well as the Colombian military at all levels—tactical to operational to strategic.”⁷ COL Wagner scrambled to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of a nation with sixty years of ARSOF persistent presence, further ingrained with a Special Operations Command, South-Forward (SOC-FWD) command and control presence since Operation WILLING SPIRIT (OWS) in 2003.

The establishment of a SOC-FWD ‘operationalized’ the execution orders (EXORDs) from the JCS and SOUHCM for OWS. It expanded the persistent ARSOF presence into a U.S. SOF presence. OWS elevated the recovery of three American contractors held by the FARC to a national priority.⁸ Still, the SOC-FWD element was originally intended to be temporary.

The interjection of a regional SOF headquarters with its brigadier general (BG) into the “dueling match” between MILGP and DATT colonels was unprecedented in the region. Latin America’s State Department (DOS) ambassadors prided themselves on controlling the U.S. military presence in ‘their’ countries. BG Charles T. Cleveland, SOCSOUTH commander, capitalized on a close personal and professional relationship with COL Simeon T. Trombitas, the MILGP Colombia commander, to garner support from U.S. Ambassador William B. Wood. It was fortuitous that the U.S. hostage situation had become very emotional in the States.⁹

As an operational commander with an EXORD, BG Cleveland could request national military assets (intelligence gathering platforms and forces) to support the Colombian military (COLMIL) efforts to locate the hostages and effect their recovery. He assured Ambassador Wood that his senior official could work in harmony with the MILGP, DATT, and COLMIL during OWS.¹⁰ The combined effort from mid-2005 through March 2008 was a distinct OWS success.



Brigadier General (BG) Charles T. Cleveland, Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH) commander and the SOCSOUTH shoulder sleeve insignia (SSI).

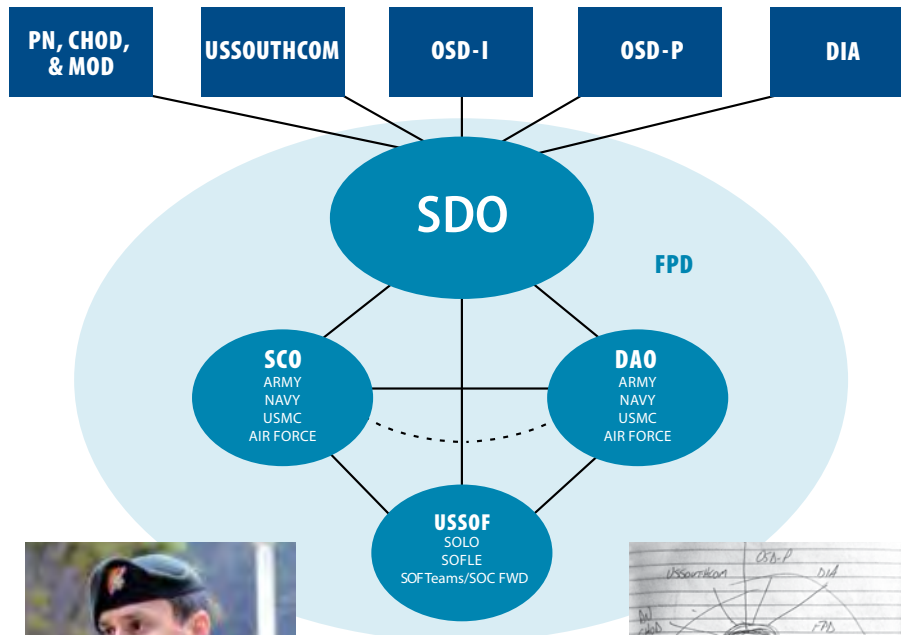


Brigadier General (BG) William Armando Mejia, El Salvador Army Chief of Staff greets Field Artillery Colonel (COL) Robert A. Wagner, U.S. Senior Defense Official.

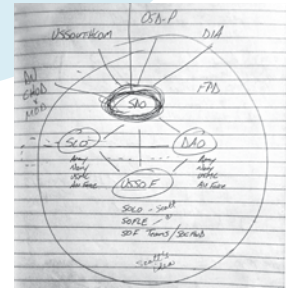


LTC Morley's schematic depiction of the interconnectivity of military relationships in the embassy with USSOUTHCOM and SOCSOUTH

- PN** Partner Nation
- CHOD** Chief of Defense
- MOD** Minister of Defense
- USSOUTHCOM**
United States Southern Command
- OSD - I** Office of the Secretary of Defense - Intelligence
- OSD - P** Office of the Secretary of Defense - Policy
- DIA** Defense Intelligence Agency
- SDO** Senior Defense Official
- FPD** Force Protection Detachment
- SCO** Security Coordination Office
- DAO** Defense Attaché Office
- USSOF** U.S. Special Operations Forces
 - SOLO** Special Operations Liaison Officer
 - SOFLE** Special Operations Forces Liaison Element
 - SOC FWD** Special Operations Command Forward



LTC Kenneth S. 'Scott' Morley, SOLO Colombia, 2016-2018. Morley's original sketch.



It was the unilateral Colombian Army (COLAR) *Operación JAQUE* that successfully recovered the FARC VIP hostages—three American contractors, Senator Ingrid Betancourt Pulecio, and eleven other Colombians—on 2 July 2008. *JAQUE* effectively nullified the rationale for OWS. The Special Forces (SF) Operational Detachment Bravo (ODB) that performed counter-narcotics missions had been kept separate from SOC-FWD during OWS. It became SOC-FWD-Andean Ridge (AR) in 2014.¹¹ This command and control change was factored by COL Wagner when he came to Colombia in July 2016.

The SOC-FWD-AR was a SOCSOUTH initiative as were the SOC-FWDs for Central America (CENTAM) and the Caribbean (CARIB). Interestingly, SOCSOUTH kept operational control (OPCON) of U.S. Navy SEALs advising and assisting in theater as well as the U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) in the Southern Cone (SC) countries of South America until 2017. These three SOC-FWDs had OPCON of ARSOF, Air Force (AFSOF), and Marine (MARSOC) mobile training teams (MTT) and Deployments for Training (DFTs).¹² However, embassy coordination was a different matter.

In those countries having a SOLO (a USSOCOM asset serving the regional SOC) permanently assigned, or a

Special Operations Forces Liaison Element (SOFLE) on TDY, SOC-FWDs coordinated through them. The SDO (COL Wagner) had tactical control (TACON) for Force Protection (FORCPRO). It was his security officer who briefed all assigned and TDY military, not the embassy Regional Security Officer (RSO). This took the State Department out of the U.S. military authority chain.¹³

SDO/DATT nominees are recommended by two Under Secretaries of Defense—Policy and Intelligence. As the senior military representative of the SOUTHCOM commander and the ambassador, COL Wagner had the authority to 'deport' Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, and Marines from Colombia for unbecoming conduct or misconduct on duty and off.¹⁴ His 'action arm' was the SOLO, but could have been a SOCSOUTH Liaison Officer (SOFLO).¹⁵

The SOLO in Colombia was SF Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Kenneth S. 'Scott' Morley, who accompanied COL Wagner from El Salvador (2014-2016). While labeled the "single-in-country point of contact (POC) for all U.S. SOF activity in a partner nation," the SOLO has no specific authority over SOC-FWD and deployed forces in country except by rank, experience, and relationships. However, he is the continuity for TDY military coming into and

leaving country. LTC Morley explained: “The SOLO has a bevy of senior officers trying to ‘boss/command’ him and he has to ‘move very delicately.’¹⁶

LTC Morley’s schematic showed how the SDO/DATT reorganization worked in Colombia. Having experienced the postwar political upheaval in El Salvador (insurgents losing the war and winning the peace), COL Wagner and LTC Morley knew that the COLMIL would face challenging times during the transition period. “I realized that the DoD team had to speak with one voice in the embassy. There had to be a shared vision in which parochialism had no part. We had to be creative with resources—time, money, and people. Instead of relying on the force of personalities to prevail in this fluid environment we had to pull together to leverage access, gain placement, and capitalize on opportunities,” said COL Wagner. “I measure the achievement of success by three indicators: networking in the embassy; productivity; and evidence of teamwork.”¹⁷

“We had to be creative with resources—time, money, and people. We had to pull together to leverage access, gain placement, and capitalize on opportunities.”

— COL Robert A. Wagner, SDO

Getting beyond the ‘herding cats’ stage meant agreement on internal reorganization, the delineation of key tasks, and lines of effort (LOE). This required more than concurrence by the assigned colonels. Distinct missions, funding streams, and information sharing systems had to be preserved and conflicts of interest avoided without adverse impacts on DAO (Defense Attaché Officer) or SCO (Security Cooperation Officer) missions. Regular review and concurrence from Washington and Miami were critical. Thus, COL Wagner solicited comments on his “Marching Orders” in both locations.¹⁸

“I realized that the DoD team had to speak with one voice in the embassy . . . a shared vision in which parochialism had no part.”

— COL Robert A. Wagner, SDO

“Colombia remains our strongest partner in the hemisphere. Strategic and operational environments are changing as evidenced by fluctuating political systems, budgets, and a variety of persistent criminal threats. All DoD tools available have to be efficiently leveraged and synchronized with the government of Colombia (GOC) and interagency partners—the State Department (DOS), its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—to support multiple LOEs and operational directives from USSOUTHCOM,” stressed Wagner.¹⁹ There could be no wasted effort.

Communications within the SDO were flattened to improve information flow; weekly meetings were consolidated and reduced. COL Wagner did daily ‘drive bys’ with the colonels to maintain the ‘pulse.’ This ‘effects driven’ structure was a ‘bare bones’ Joint Staff (J2, J3, and J5) and a Ministry of Defense Advisor (MODA). To avoid delays, weekly Significant Activities

“I measure the achievement of success by three indicators: networking in the embassy; productivity; and evidence of teamwork.”

— COL Robert A. Wagner, SDO

U.S. Government Agencies *Synchronized* with the Government of Colombia



DoD
Department of Defense



DOS
U.S. Department of State



INL
DOS Bureau of
International Narcotics and Law
Enforcement Affairs



DHS
U.S. Department of
Homeland Security



DEA
U.S. Justice Department Drug
Enforcement Administration



FBI
Federal Bureau of Investigation



USAID
U.S. Agency for International
Development

(SIGACTS) reports to SOUTHCOM were approved by the ‘most available’ colonel. Mutual trust, confidence, and agreement on ‘standing talking points’ were critical to keeping harmony and ensuring access,” related COL Wagner. “I also had a few ‘bonus’ players.”²⁰

ARSOF permanent party and TDY personnel constituted the ‘bonus’ player pool. The SOLO, while regionally detailed to SOCSOUTH, was a constant. MPEP officers (two ARSOF) worked in the COLMIL joint special operations headquarters [*Comando Conjunto de Operaciones Especiales (CCOES)*] and the Air Assault School at Tolemaida. These two-year MPEP positions belong to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS) at Fort Bragg, NC. Having developed a very solid professional relationship with COL Wagner in El Salvador, LTC Morley was his ‘designated hitter’ and ‘trouble shooter’ with the SOC-FWD. This arrangement

worked smoothly because LTC Morley traveled to SOCSOUTH monthly for direct coordination.²¹

Based on the liaison workload in Colombia, the Deputy J-3, SOCSOUTH, convinced SOUTHCOM that a Army National Guard SOFLO was needed in Colombia. A second officer gave SOCSOUTH a 24/7 presence in Bogotá. The outstanding performance of the native Spanish-speaking infantry SOFLO merited re-validation of the requirement.²² With the SOC-FWD, a SOLO, a SOFLO, and two SF MPEP officers in-country, the Army SOF leaders advising and assisting in Colombia have good support in the embassy.²³ And, the Latin American countries have a goodly number of U.S. military exchange officers and sergeants.

SOUTHCOM has five Army SF SOLOs in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, El Salvador, and Panama. U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) has two Army SF SOLOs

covering Mexico and Canada.²⁴ Two of the three Army MPEP officer positions in Colombia are filled as is one Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO). A fifth Army MPEP aviation officer is pending. Brazil has three MPEP officers and an NCO. Two of four officer billets in Chile are filled. Mexico has one officer MPEP.²⁵

In summary, there is one Army colonel in charge as the SDO/DATT in Colombia. In addition, numerous permanent party Army SOF personnel are assigned and/or attached to the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá. Coordination can be easily effected by TDY SF, Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and Civil Affairs (CA) team leaders. Now responsible for the SC countries of South America, the SOC-FWD-AR covering the Southern Cone (SOC-FWD-SCAR) is connected with the SOC-FWD at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida (SOC-FWD-CARIB) and SOC-FWD-CENTAM at Joint Task Force (JTF) Bravo in Honduras. The SDO/DATT organizational 'lash-up' in Bogotá, Colombia with its clean 'chain of command' is the SOUTHCOM regional model. Incidentally, one of the two MPEP officers is now the SOLO in Colombia, to provide good continuity. ▲

CHARLES H. BRISCOE, PhD

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations in Latin America, the Congo, and the Lodge Act.

Endnotes

- 1 Retired COL John D. Waghelstein, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 June 2007, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Ft Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 2 COL Robert A. Wagner, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 2 November 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Department of Defense Directive Number 5205.75, "SUBJECT: DoD Operations at U.S. Embassies," dated 4 December 2013, hereafter cited as DoDD No. 5205.75.

- 3 Defense Institute of Security Management, *The Management of Security Cooperation*, 4-14; COL Paul J. Schmitt, "Special Operations Liaison Officers: (SOLO) or Team Effort?" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategy Research Project, 2013), 4.
- 4 Schmitt, "Special Operations Liaison Officers: (SOLO) or Team Effort?" 5.
- 5 USSOCOM International Engagement Program Brief, 2 March 2018, copy USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 Wagner interview, 2 November 2017; DoDD No. 5205.75.
- 7 Wagner interview, 2 November 2017.
- 8 Retired MG Simeon T. Trombitas, interview by Briscoe, 10 November 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 9 Retired MG Trombitas and BG Hector E. Pagan, interview by Briscoe, 11 October 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 10 Trombitas and Pagan interview, 11 October 2017. **When U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) issued the Execution Order (EXORD) for Operation WILLING SPIRIT (OWS), the Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH) forward command and control element was focused on working with the Colombian military (COLMIL) to rescue the three American hostages. The OWS mission was classified and treated as sensitive, 'need-to-know.' The Operations Center (OPCEN) of the Special Forces (SF) company and its attached Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and Civil Affairs (CA) team leadership worked in tents inside the embassy compound, but outside the embassy building. They were supporting MILGP Colombia requirements.**
- 11 Michel Martin and John Otis, "Hostages Rescued in Colombia After Long Captivity" at <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92180214>, accessed 3/26/2018.
- 12 LTC Kenneth S. 'Scott' Morley, interview by Briscoe and Daniel J. Kulich, 27 October 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 13 Morley interview, 27 October 2017.
- 14 SOCSOUTH Message, SUBJECT: SOCSOUTH C-2 GUIDANCE dated 12 September 2014.
- 15 Morley interview, 27 October 2017; U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Memorandum, "SUBJECT: Codifying Relationships for Special Operations Liaison Officers dated 3 May 2013.
- 16 Morley interview, 27 October 2017; U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Memorandum, "SUBJECT: Codifying Relationships for Special Operations Liaison Officers," dated 3 May 2013; Schmitt, "Special Operations Liaison Officers: (SOLO) or Team Effort?" 11.
- 17 Wagner interview, 2 November 2017.
- 18 DoDD No. 5205.75, para 3.g.; Wagner interview, 2 November 2017.
- 19 Department of Defense. Office of the Senior Defense Coordinator, Colombia. "Team DoD – Colombia Marching Orders, November 2016 – April 2017 (as of 1 November 2016)," USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 Wagner interview, 2 November 2017.
- 21 Morley interviews, 27 October and 8 November 2017.
- 22 Retired LTC Patrick J. Lenaghan, Deputy J-3, SOCSOUTH, interview by Briscoe, 2 March 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Morley interview, 8 November 2017.
- 23 Morley interview, 27 October 2017.
- 24 USSOCOM J3 International Fact Sheet: "Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO)," dated 24 April 2018.
- 25 U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) "MPEP Roster," dated 28 February 2018.



Joint

SOF

Integration

SDO, Bogotá

by Charles H. Briscoe

U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) normally deploy Operational Detachment Bravo (ODB) headquarters to provide leadership and staffing for joint security assistance (SA) missions overseas. This article explains how the Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH) Forward (SOC-FWD) element in Colombia was 'nested' with the Senior Defense Officer (SDO) to reinforce the "one Department of Defense (DoD) voice" in the Bogotá Embassy.¹ Overlook the 'title changing' that has accompanied the theater special operations command (TSOC) practice of 'pushing' forward command and control (C2) elements into advanced regional locations.

It focuses on the ODB reorganization into a 'mini' Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) in the spring of 2018 as mentioned in the preceding article, "Who's in charge down here?" The SA and counter narcotics (CN) training missions in Colombia have rotated between the 7th SF Group (SFG) and the Florida Army National Guard (ANG) 20th SFG for many years. This presentation will reveal how the mission command architecture was innovatively optimized for effectiveness, efficiency, and interoperability while making interdependence a key operating principle.²

As part of their pre-deployment site survey (PDSS), the A Company commander, 1st Battalion, 20th SFG, Major (MAJ) Ned T. Yardley*, an older direct commission ANG officer, met with the SOCSOUTH commander, Rear Admiral (RDML) Collin P. Green, at Homestead Air Force Reserve Base, Florida. Two things came out of their discussions: the authority of the SOC-FWD had been expanded to cover the Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) as well as those of the Andean Ridge (Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia); and the rear admiral wanted the Navy Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) officer to serve as the deputy. "Since the SOC-FWD in Colombia was his premier element, RDML Green felt that a SEAL serving as the

Rear Admiral Collin P. Green, Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH) Commander. Below is the SOCSOUTH SSI.



deputy would be a joint SOF professional development opportunity and support better integration," said MAJ Yardley*. "After all, SF officers have to be flexible. It gave me something to think about on my flight to Bogotá."³

In Colombia, the 20th SFG major was met at the airport by the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO), SF Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Kenneth S. 'Scott' Morley, who provided a situation report (SITREP), orientation, and schedule of events. MAJ Jonathan W. Mendez*, B Company commander, 3rd Battalion, 7th SFG, current SOC-FWD commander, briefed him on current missions in the Southern Cone-Andean Ridge (SCAR) countries before the Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) leadership explained their Colombian Military (COLMIL) engagements. "This was done in the cramped, narrow linear office space within the embassy, euphemistically called the 'bowling alley.' The 'tribal' separations were readily apparent," commented MAJ Yardley*. "I soon learned that this was not lost on the Senior Defense Official (SDO)."⁴

Field Artillery (FA) Colonel (COL) Robert A. Wagner, West Point '90, established the SDO/Defense Attaché concept for U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) in El Salvador, before his reassignment to Colombia in 2016 to do the same.⁵ His SOLO in San Salvador, now LTC Scott Morley, chose to accompany him.⁶ The two worked together to unify the DoD position in the embassy, in a country whose wartime government had ended the



20th Special Forces Group
Flash with DUI



7th Special Forces Group
Flash with DUI

thirteen year guerrilla war with *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)* in 1992, only to lose political power in 2009. The two U.S. Army officers came to Colombia in the midst of peace negotiations between the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)* and *Ejército de Liberación (ELN)* insurgencies which they had been fighting for more than sixty years. It was vitally important that the DoD personnel in Bogotá “speak with one voice and become fully integrated with the embassy departments and supporting agencies, as well as the COLMIL at all levels—tactical to operational to strategic,” stated COL Wagner.⁷

“I got my ‘marching orders’ from COL Wagner. I was to build synergy, integrate with the Country Team and its interagency partners, and flatten communications in the SOC-FWD. How COL Wagner was reorganizing, and why, were spelled out in his *Department of Defense (Team DoD–Colombia) Marching Orders*, the *Team DoD Integration Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)*, a very specific individual *Task Orders* for all assigned, and definitions of problems or threats,” said MAJ Yardley*. “I was to come back ready to fully integrate the SOC-FWD with the SDO. The *Task Orders* left no doubt on interface. There would be no ‘tribalism’ in the SOC-FWD. Functional staff ‘holes’ in logistics and personnel plus additional radios to cover the ‘out stations,’ would have to be filled by Group [20th SFG],” explained MAJ Yardley*.⁸ With very specific ‘marching orders’ for Colombia, he could focus on cultural immersion in a jungle environment during pre-mission training (PMT).

Thirty days at Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico, was PMT ‘on the cheap.’ Air National Guard flights to and from San Juan, a transient barracks, and locally supplemented MREs (meals-ready-to eat) were sufficient. A day visit to *El Junque* rain forest had to suffice for a jungle orientation. Having worked overseas on JSOTF staffs in Afghanistan and Iraq, the SF Guardsmen used those experiences to adapt those capabilities and practices for the Colombia mission. The thirty days in Puerto Rico was sufficient to restore some thinking in Spanish to improve individual confidence in language skills.⁹

The relief-in-place (RIP) between the 7th SFG and the 20th SFG companies in Colombia was somewhat different. The National Guard SF personnel with equipment flew into Tolemaida on U.S. Air Force ‘rotator’ C-130 *Hercules* transport aircraft over several days. Radios from 7th SFG remained at the outstations until the 20th SFG communications package arrived. Half of the Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs) in A Company were commanded by warrant officers. “Recruiting and retaining commissioned Guard officers in SF is difficult,” said Yardley*.¹⁰

While the SOC-FWD commander had a wealth of interagency talent in his SF unit, the paucity of commissioned officers prompted him to assess the CA and PSYOP leadership to fill key staff. Compiling the unique

team in the ‘mini’ JSOTF arrangement would ensure unity of effort and prevent tribalism. MAJ Yardley* drew on his experience as an executive management ‘head hunter’ in Dallas and Memphis.¹¹ The SF commander knew that the position requiring the most military experience was the operations officer and the CA leader had the most.

The five CA teams in Colombia were led by a former Combat Cameraman with service in the Balkans and with the 3rd and 20th SFGs. Commissioned into the Infantry after Officer Candidate School in 2005, MAJ David J. Masterson* had been an airborne rifle platoon leader (C Company, 2nd Battalion, 325th Infantry Regiment) in Iraq with the 82nd Airborne Division. Since volunteering for CA in 2007, Masterson* had been a CA Team Leader in Peru, the Executive Officer for the Caribbean AOB (Distributed Command and Control [DC2]), and had served in the 81st CA Battalion, which supported the Conventional Army. In June 2017, MAJ Masterson* took command of C Company, 98th CA Battalion. He had first worked with 20th SFG in 2000 as a Combat Cameraman.¹²

“MAJ Yardley* told me he wasn’t looking for a ‘good idea fairy’—nothing creative or magical. Focusing ‘inside the box,’ I was to figure out how to do things better, more efficiently, and make the best use of our functional capabilities. Doctrinally, while the SOC-FWD was not a JSOTF, we would operate like one. And, nobody turns down a good operations job,” commented MAJ Masterson*. “Yardley* was very astute. My assistant would be the PSYOP Team Leader.”¹³



West Point Football player, Field Artillery COL Robert A. Wagner, used his El Salvador SDO/DATT experience to best ‘shape’ that concept in Colombia. The U.S. Military Academy football team is called the Black Knights.



Captain (CPT) Charles D. Parson*, B Company, 1st PSYOP Battalion (POB), a 2010 graduate of Vanderbilt University's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, had gone to Air Assault and Airborne Schools as a scholarship cadet. As a Second Lieutenant (2LT) Parson* had been a 155mm towed gun battery platoon leader, a fire direction officer (FDO), and an Assistant S-3 in the 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division before assignment to 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry as a Fire Support Officer (FSO). His father had been the FSO for the 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry in Vietnam. Six months of temporary duty (TDY) at Joint Task Force (JTF) Bravo in Honduras (coordinating command, control, and logistics for Medical Capability [MEDCAP] events) convinced then First Lieutenant (1LT) Parson* to volunteer for PSYOP in 2015.¹⁴

"MAJ Yardley* wanted fusion across the board. I had been in S-3 operations in the U.S. and Honduras, so it was a natural fit. The PSYOP team had very experienced, Spanish speaking NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers) with multiple Latin American tours. My question was: 'Why had we not done this before in Colombia?' I ended up writing the weekly SOC-FWD Situation Report (SITREP) going to SOCSOUTH. It was reviewed by MAJ Masterson* before being approved by MAJ Yardley*. By May 2018, it was being read closely by RDML Green at Homestead. He was pleased with the joint unity of effort, ease of understanding, and messaged us to that effect in Bogotá. That's when we knew that we were doing what he and COL Wagner had wanted in the embassy—a seamless DoD team," reflected CPT Parson*. "That wasn't

true in the outstations. The PSYOP Support Element (PSE) North got it best. Peru got close by the time we rotated, but the others could not/would not 'break the tribal rice bowls.'"¹⁵ MAJ Yardley* also wanted intelligence-operations staff fusion ('ying & yang') to better integrate with interagency representatives on the country team.¹⁶

The best qualified candidate for SOC-FWD S-2 happened to be a warrant officer field artillery targeting technician [Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) 131A] assigned to the 98th CAB. The Colombian-born Spanish speaker, Chief Warrant Officer Three (CW3) Hector Asunción*, a graduate of the Colombian Army (COLAR) Sergeants School, had been deployed to Colombia to assist MAJ Masterson*. As the S-2, CW3 Asunción* quickly adjusted his targeting skills to address the human terrain audience, 'refugees' from Venezuela transiting Colombia bound for the United States via Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico.¹⁷ Mixed into this 'river of humanity' were 'floaters'--nefarious individuals (drug 'mules' [carriers], smugglers, human traffickers, and possible terrorists) who merited questioning by Colombian authorities.¹⁸

Having an SF intelligence sergeant (MOS 18F) as his senior Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO), CW3 Asunción* was supported in multi-purposing CA and PSYOP detachments afield. They could capitalize on audience assessment and leadership identification skills. 'Observations and findings' from field sites near transit routes were shared with interagency representatives at weekly meetings. These efforts promoted a more viable "Rewards for Justice" program.¹⁹

U.S. Embassy in Bogotá



So, what are the **'TAKEAWAYS'** from this mission?

- » Reorganizing the Special Forces ODB into a mini-JSOTF is good practice and facilitates 'Joint-ness' and a one ARSOF team mentality.
- » ARSOF officers are resilient, innovative problem solvers who thrive on challenges.
- » Attachments can 'shore up' personnel shortages and fill critical staff posts if the SF commander knows what they 'bring to the table'; think ARSOF team, capitalize on talent, and consolidate 'tribal' reports into one.
- » Supporting means truly integrated/'nested' with the supported office, unit, command.
- » 'One face' professionalism betters the Force, the Army, and the Joint Commands.

Mexican-born Sergeant First Class (SFC) Alejandro Fuentes*, the PSYOP detachment senior NCO was a former Marine with three tours in Afghanistan. He had provided PSYOP support to Marine Special Operations Forces, foreign internal defense in Herat, and print development and products to twenty-nine teams across that country. SFC Fuentes* quickly realized that paying rewards for information on abandoned jungle drug processing sites, a long standing practice, was a waste of time and money. After querying Colombian police units and U.S. interagency elements, he suggested major changes. A better return on investment would be paying for information about threats to Americans, Colombian authorities, and non-government organizations (NGOs), locations of *FARC* and *ELN* weapons caches, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in areas suitable for helicopter landings. The change addressed counter terrorism (CT) and CN. The accumulation of weapon serial numbers facilitated source tracking which all law enforcement elements appreciated.²⁰ SOC-FWD successes were noticed.

Weekly SITREPs quickly revealed that the SOC-FWD was fully 'nested' with the SDO in Bogotá. RDML Green expressed his satisfaction with "one DoD team voice" and praised the clarity of descriptive reports that facilitated understanding on what was being accomplished by the joint service team. The junior SEAL officer performing as the Deputy, SOC-FWD, was having his joint experience broadened by serving in an efficient and effective mini-JSOTF environment. The SOF elements were happy with how they were being portrayed in the collective report that was getting serious attention at Homestead Air Reserve Base in Florida.²¹ The SOC-FWD performance under MAJ Yardley's* leadership and tutelage represented true professionalism from the entire SOF team. 📌

CHARLES H. BRISCOE, PhD

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations in Latin America, the Congo, and the Lodge Act.

Endnotes

- 1 COL Robert A. Wagner, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 2 November 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 2 *The U.S. Army Strategy*, October 2018; Army G-3/5/7, *Force Structure Path to Army 2028*, November 2018.
- 3 MAJ Ned T. Yardley*, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe and Daniel J. Kulich, 1 August 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 4 Yardley* interview, 1 August 2018.
- 5 Wagner interview, 2 November 2017; Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) Number 5205.75, "SUBJECT: DoD Operations at U.S. Embassies," dated 4 December 2013, hereafter cited as DoDD No. 5205.75.
- 6 LTC Kenneth S. 'Scott' Morley, interview by Briscoe and Kulich, 27 October 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Memorandum, SUBJECT: Codifying Relationships for Special Operations Liaison Officers dated 3 May 2013; COL Paul J. Schmitt, "Special Operations Liaison Officers: (SOLO) or Team Effort?" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategy Research Project, March 2013), 11.
- 7 Wagner interview, 2 November 2017.
- 8 Yardley* interview, 1 August 2018.
- 9 Yardley* interview, 1 August 2018.
- 10 Yardley* interview, 1 August 2018.
- 11 Yardley* interview, 1 August 2018.
- 12 MAJ David J. Masterson* interview by Briscoe and Kulich, 12 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 13 Masterson* interview, 12 June 2018.
- 14 CPT Charles D. Parson*, interviews by Briscoe and Kulich, 16 August and 19 September 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 15 Parson* interviews, 16 August and 19 September 2018.
- 16 Yardley* interview, 15 November 2018.
- 17 Masterson* interview, 15 November 2018.
- 18 Parson* interview, 19 September 2018.
- 19 SFC Alex Fuentes*, B Company, 1st POB, interview by Briscoe, 12 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Parson* interview, 16 August and 19 September 2018; Masterson* interview, 12 June 2018.
- 20 Fuentes* interview 12 June 2018.
- 21 Retired LTC Daniel J. Kulich, USASOC Sensitive Activities Historical Collection (SAHC), interview by Briscoe, 16 May 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Yardley* interview, 1 August and 15 November 2018.

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 active ARSOF personnel in photos are blocked out when not covered with dark visors or sunglasses, except when the photos were publicly released by a service or DoD. Source references (end notes) utilize the assigned pseudonym.



TOTAL IMMERSION

Language, Culture, and the Colombian Military

by Jared M. Tracy and Charles H. Briscoe

Extract — Total cultural immersion must be anticipated if U.S. soldiers are to fully benefit from a foreign military course, as evidenced by two U.S. Army Psychological Operations (PSYOP) soldiers attending a recent Colombian PSYOP course. Total immersion has three inextricable links: language nuances (country and region); national culture; and military culture. Pre-Mission Training (PMT) must address these aspects to capitalize on the advantages of placement. PMT-focused, operationally experienced PSYOP veterans ought to attend partner nation courses. Or, send an experienced PSYOP/Civil Affairs (CA)/Information Operations (IO) officer/sergeant to advise and assist as an exchange professional.

Two 1st Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Battalion (POB), 8th PSYOP Group (POG) soldiers, an officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO), graduated from the eleven-week Colombian Army (COLAR) 'Military Sensitization Missions' [*Misiones de Sensibilización Militar (MISEM)*] course on 3 July 2018.¹ Captain (CPT) James P. Bronson* and Sergeant (SGT) Ross J. Roberson*, having recently completed the PSYOP Officer and NCO Courses at Fort Bragg, NC, were diverted from the Military Information Support Team (MIST) with the Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH) Forward (SOC-FWD) Andean Ridge (AR) in Bogotá, Colombia. They were enrolled as students to evaluate and assess COLAR alignment with current U.S. PSYOP doctrine.² To do this they had to fully understand the missions and activities of *Acción Integral y Desarrollo* [Integral Action & Development (AID)]. The COLAR combined PSYOP, Civil Affairs (CA), and Public Affairs Office (PAO) functions to improve relations between the government and citizens during the national transition to peace after almost sixty years of insurgent war.³

The experiences of the two American soldiers selected to attend this basic AID course will reveal the criticality of pre-mission training (PMT) before starting a foreign course. Total immersion entailed quickly learning Colombian Spanish language nuances, adjusting to its national culture, flexibility with COLAR training idiosyncrasies and living in their military school environment. Though good Spanish speakers according to U.S. military standards, each spoke versions unique to their learning locale and native country of the instructor. The challenges associated with understanding Colombian idiomatic phrases and meanings of words were compounded by the COLAR technical military vocabulary.⁴

They had to develop that understanding quickly to avoid offending instructors and fellow students, or embarrassing themselves. SGT Roberson* grew up in Arizona with Mexican Spanish, and learned Chilean Spanish as a Mormon missionary.⁵ CPT Bronson's* four years of high school Spanish in Colorado were improved by Spanish taken in the PSYOP Officer Course. PMT for Roberson* focused on his initial MIST assignment to Peru and the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining



SGT Ross J. Roberson* and CPT James P. Bronson*, B Company, 1st POB, 8th POG, attended the COLAR PSYOP Course from April to July 2018.



Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral (ESMAI) coin with PSYOP emblem on reverse, presented to CPT James P. Bronson*

Path) insurgency in that country. Bronson* received no PMT, having just graduated from the PSYOP Officer Course. Total immersion was “on-the-job training (OJT) with a fire hose,” commented CPT Bronson*, a U.S. Air Force Academy graduate who learned Mandarin Chinese as a cadet.⁶ Their assignments in Colombia were changed to accommodate a ‘spur-of-the-moment’ AID class invitation, a significant, short notice honor. However, short notice compromised administrative coordination by the MIST which, in turn, led to a rough few weeks at the beginning.⁷ For the two U.S. military students, the pressure of the total immersion “fire hose’



A statue on the COLAR School of International Missions and Integral Action (*Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral [ESMAI]*) campus, where CPT Bronson* and SGT Roberson* attended the PSYOP Course. The symbol on top bears close resemblance to the U.S. Army PSYOP Branch Insignia (above right).

increased significantly with having to learn military terminology while adapting to daily life in a COLAR school environment.⁸

Their first course formation was enlightening. CPT Bronson* was in the officer class and Roberson* was in the second of two NCO classes. The curriculum for officers and NCOs was the same, which helped the co-billeted Americans, but there were no course books. At the first 0630 hours inspection, tactical officers cited the two of them for not having the 'required' *antigoles* (penalty) package and not wearing black socks. Both men were quite bewildered until an *antigoles* packet was produced by a COLAR student and explained. It was a plastic bag that contained a comb, toothbrush, nail clippers, small notebook, pen, and pencil. Black socks were COLAR regulation wear.⁹ There were more 'surprises' to come.

Students await the Friday dress uniform inspection outside of the *ESMAI*.



Each day something physical was inspected—ranging from finger nails, haircuts, and toe nails and foot condition to uniform fit, trouser lengths, and headgear cleanliness. Regularly baffled by the morning inspection ‘craziness,’ the Americans did not understand the purpose or rationale for what was being inspected.¹⁰ They later learned that the inspections reinforced what COLAR officers and NCOs were expected to do as leaders and professionals in a conscript military. They were responsible for taking care of the conscript soldier in an Army that was in a constant state of reconstitution, every six months during peace, and annually in wartime.¹¹

Eighty-five percent of the COLAR were conscripts from the lower class; rural peasants (*campesinos*) and people from the city tenements (*barrios*). The only volunteers were officers, draft-eligible citizens who paid to attend the Colombian Military (COLMIL) Sergeant School, and those draftees who chose to remain as professional soldiers (*profesionales*) following their mandatory service.¹² The ‘fire hose’ of total immersion was mitigated after two weeks when a COLAR ‘sponsor’ was assigned to assist them with language and cultural differences. Because the PSYOP MIST was fully engaged at the embassy, it

was another several weeks before *per diem* costs—meals, Colombian cell phone, COLAR identification cards, and travel—were arranged. MIST liaison visits had to be done after classes because, following the morning inspection, the three groups (about 80 personnel) were marched directly to class which started at 0700 hours... without breakfast.¹³

Meals and physical training (PT) brought more surprises. Most of the lunch hour was spent standing in line at the school cafeteria for a tortilla smeared with refried beans. Supper was usually purchased ‘out of pocket’ at the local Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)—equivalent outside the *cuartel* (military base). During the first week, CPT Bronson* and SGT Roberson* went hungry all day until peanut butter and crackers became the breakfast and lunch staple. After the initial PT test, that element got little emphasis despite being scheduled three times a week in the afternoons. So much for getting rid of total immersion stress with regular exercise. As they adjusted to the school environment and their understanding improved, the two Americans realized that PSYOP constituted less than fifty percent of this initial course.¹⁴

Blending their Civil-Military Relations course with PSYOP and public affairs to create *AID* was deliberate.¹⁵ Why did the COLAR get assigned this vital national postwar mission? The institution most trusted and respected by *Colombianos* is the COLAR, not the Catholic Church, nor the elected national government. Considered the most objective and reliable, official COLAR histories are ‘materials of choice’ in grammar and high schools (*colegios*) and universities.¹⁶ Unaware of how big an impact the COLAR had on Colombian culture, and its postwar mission of improving relations between the public and national government, CPT Bronson* and SGT Roberson* could not appreciate the purpose behind morning inspection rituals and the heavy non-PSYOP periods of instruction.¹⁷



The Colombian flag, National Anthem, and emblem are prominently displayed as a conspicuous reminder of COLAR national focus.



Community engagement was a critical aspect of the PSYOP Course, as the COLAR ‘bridged the gap’ between the Colombian government and the people.



CPT Bronson* makes a presentation in a typical classroom environment at the PSYOP Course.



MISEM students participate in the culminating exercise, the *jornada*, at a local *barrio*.

Responsibility and image were vital elements of professionalism. Their importance was ingrained in all schools' curricula. Daily inspections, creed recitations, demonstrated knowledge of national government and military organization, and the singing of the national anthem before classes were integral to building the COLAR image.¹⁸ "It may not seem significant, but when the Colombian public sees that all soldiers know the words of the national anthem and are proud to sing it in public, that garners respect and sends a message," said a Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO) escorting a general and three field grade officers to MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida, for an international

professional development presentation. "You saw that all four were proudly singing their national anthem at the closing ceremony."¹⁹ School attendance provides another opportunity to remind and reinforce what is expected of COLAR officers and NCOs. Even demeaning tasks serve to refocus 'temporary' students.²⁰

"Though *el aseo* (the equivalent of police call and grounds maintenance) was a regular pain for everyone, sergeant and officer students worked together. We quickly found that 'litter bugs' were not common in the COLAR—much different from Fort Bragg," said SGT Roberson*. "Attending classes and studying without a book was a challenge for us. A female government civilian was writing

Acción Integral doctrine while we attended class, and we were called in to provide comments and suggestions.”²¹

Despite the lack of *AID* manuals, COLAR instructors liked to use technology. “They posted notices, class changes, and assignments via cell phone applications (apps). Our class leader sent cell phone pictures to the cadre to show that we were working during ‘aseo’ time. Since this method was expensive with our U.S. cell phones, the MIST provided us a Colombian phone to reduce the personal financial burden,” commented SGT Roberson*. “The lack of a textbook forced us to share class notes since we were getting sixty-five percent of what was presented in class.”²² As the COLAR students began to plan the culminating field exercise, their *jornada* in a Bogotá *barrio*, the two American PSYOP soldiers realized that the headquarters approval of the physical site started the reverse planning.

“Instead of the *jornada* being designed to influence audience behavior afterwards and analytics used to measure success, students planned a *barrio* entertainment event,” commented CPT Bronson*. “While the COLAR students knew their audience, the reason for PSYOP and CA activities was lost. There was nothing lasting behind the *jornada*, and the project misled the *AID* soldier aspirants, creating misunderstanding for the officers. Our PSYOP doctrine focuses on external audiences, but our tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) can apply to an internal audience,” if those authorities existed.²³ Regardless, all student groups had to perform their *jornadas*.

“What it devolved into was ‘party planning,’” added SGT Roberson*. “In my NCO group *jornada*, I performed as one of the clowns who entertained the kids with simple tricks. I put on grease paint, a wig, and rented costume. Colored pencils, school tablets, and coloring books with *AID* logos were passed out along with candy. The parents,



COL César Alberto Karán Benítez, ESMAI Commandant, discussed doctrinal revisions with CPT Bronson*, then attending the *MISEM*.

primarily mothers and grandmothers because the men were working, enjoyed seeing the children laughing and happy. How ‘happy’ we made those *barrio* kids during party hour was how success was measured. Lasting or long term effects were ‘not in the books.’”²⁴

Though the absence of post-*jornada* evaluation was politely explained to COLAR students and instructors by the two Americans, it did not resonate until discussed with the school commandant, Colonel (COL) César Alberto Karán Benítez, and his *AID* doctrine writer. “We had a very good exchange,” explained CPT Bronson*. As graduates of the first COLAR course that was developed ‘live,’ the Americans admitted that it was a tough learning experience, but worth the effort.²⁵ COL Karán commented: “We did things that we thought were fine, but when we saw how [the U.S.] did them, we realized we could improve the process significantly. The same happened to them.”²⁶ In reality, total immersion proved tougher than it sounded. While CPT Bronson* and SGT Roberson* ‘survived’ Colombia and COLAR total immersion, and graduated from the course, it could have been more fulfilling for both parties.

The following ‘takeaways’ came from the soldiers’ attendance at the *MISEM*:

[TAKEAWAYS]

- » U.S. PSYOP and CA are limited to external use; COLAR *AID* is internal-oriented.²⁷
- » Field experienced, bilingual U.S. PSYOP veterans ‘officially licensed by COLAR’ as course evaluators/students can help instructors prepare ‘task, condition, standard’ lessons as well as develop course curricula specifically for Colombia.²⁸
- » Total cultural immersion is very intense; PMT and coordination of administrative details will reduce personal stress on students in foreign training courses.²⁹

POST SCRIPT

U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) endorsed the recommendation by CPT Bronson* and SGT Roberson* to create an Information Operations (IO) exchange officer position for Colombia. ▲

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.

CHARLES H. BRISCOE, PhD

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations in Latin America, the Congo, and the Lodge Act.

Endnotes

- 1 B Company, 1st Psychological Operations Battalion (POB), 8th Psychological Operations Group (POG), After Action Report (undated): 1B10, ESMAl, Bogotá, Colombia, 13 April – 3 July 2018, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as B/1/8 POG AAR; Myriam Ortega, “U.S. Service Members Train in Colombia,” *Dialogo: Digital Military Magazine* (10 August 2018), <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/us-service-members-train-colombia>.
- 2 CPT James P. Bronson*, interview by Charles H. Briscoe, 31 October 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; CPT Charles D. Parson*, SFC Alex Fuentes*, and SGT Ross J. Roberson*, interview by Briscoe, 16 August 2018, hereafter cited by name and date; CPT Charles D. Parson*, interview by Briscoe, 19 September 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 3 CPT Chance D. Panter and SFC Alejandro Fuenteszamorá, “ESMAI: The Future of Colombia’s PSYOP,” *Special Warfare* 31/3 (July-September 2018): 80.
- 4 Parson* interview, 19 September 2018.
- 5 Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 6 Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 7 SFC Alex Fuentes*, interview by Briscoe, 2 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 8 Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 9 B/1/8 POG AAR; Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 10 B/1/8 POG AAR; Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 11 LTC Kenneth S. Morley, interview by Briscoe, 8 November 2017, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 12 Morley interview, 8 November 2017; Fuentes* interview, 12 June 2018.
- 13 B/1/8 POG AAR; Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 14 B/1/8 POG AAR; Bronson*, 31 October 2018; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson*, 16 August 2018.
- 15 Panter and Fuenteszamorá, “ESMAI: The Future of Colombia’s PSYOP,” 80.
- 16 CPT Serge W. Monteggo*, interview by Briscoe, 6 July 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 17 B/1/8 POG AAR; Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 18 B/1/8 POG AAR; Fuentes* interview, 12 June 2018.
- 19 Monteggo* interview, 6 July 2018.
- 20 Fuentes* interview, 12 June 2018.
- 21 B/1/8 POG AAR; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 22 B/1/8 POG AAR; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 23 B/1/8 POG AAR; Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018.
- 24 Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 25 B/1/8 POG AAR; Bronson* interview, 31 October 2018.
- 26 Ortega, “U.S. Service Members Train in Colombia.” *COL César Alberto Karán Benítez is the Commandant of the School of International Missions and Integral Action [Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral (ESMAI)]*.
- 27 B/1/8 POG AAR; Parson*, Fuentes*, and Roberson* interview, 16 August 2018.
- 28 B/1/8 POG AAR; Fuentes* interview, 12 June 2018.
- 29 B/1/8 POG AAR; Parson* interview, 19 September 2018.

Graduates received a certificate like this one presented to CPT James P. Bronson*.



**Special Operations
Resuscitation
Teams in Operation
OBSERVANT COMPASS**

A DIFFERENT **SORT** OF MISSION

by Christopher E. Howard



SORT personnel conduct jungle extraction training with Green Berets from the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

Word came into the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) at Forward Operating Site (FOS) Nzara, Republic of South Sudan, that a combined patrol of U.S. Army Special Forces and Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) soldiers had been attacked by elements of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The complex ambush was initiated by an improvised explosive device, followed by withering small arms fire. Numerous U.S. and UPDF soldiers had been wounded, some of them critically, and were in need of immediate medical attention. This was exactly the type of 'mass casualty' (MASCAL) event that the 528th Sustainment Brigade's Special Operations Resuscitation Teams (SORTs) were especially trained and equipped to handle. The five-man medical team sprang into action.

One of the SORT's three Special Operations Combat Medics (SOCMs) accompanied the casualties during evacuation. The SORT's Flight Surgeon, its remaining two SOCMs, and its Medical Laboratory Specialist awaited the casualties at the dirt airstrip that lay just southeast of the town of Nzara. The casualties arrived by Toyota pickup truck in waves of three, until the total number had reached nine. It had all the makings of a very bad day for both U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) and their Ugandan partners.

The UPDF medics unloaded the casualties and triaged them into four categories: expectant, immediate, delayed, or minimal, in descending order of severity.¹ Fortunately, in this situation, none of the casualties fit the "expectant" category, which meant that all nine casualties could be saved, with the proper medical care. Three of the casualties were assessed as "immediate"; the remaining were either delayed or minimal. The triage was efficient and by-the-book, and yet something was different: the SORT was not helping the UPDF triage the casualties. It was observing and evaluating.

Upon closer examination, the casualties that the UPDF medics were sorting and treating were not victims of an LRA ambush, after all. The SORT was not treating the wounds because it had 'inflicted' them, through the expert use of moulage.² The mass casualty event was simulated. It was the culminating exercise for UPDF medical personnel, who had trained with the SORT every Saturday for nearly three months. During the exercise, the SORT personnel were 'observer-controllers.' When it was all over, the SORT team leader, Army Captain (CPT) Lucas T. Haynes,* was pleased with the outcome. The UPDF medical personnel had performed well.³

Such training was typical of the SORT contribution to Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS (OOC), the U.S.

Counter-LRA mission in central Africa, from January 2012 through December 2016. Having proved themselves during MASCAL situations in Afghanistan from 2008 through 2011, OBSERVANT COMPASS presented the SORT with a different mission. Focusing on a 'typical' SORT deployment, from May through November 2013, this article explains how they contributed to OOC. With few U.S. casualties to treat or evacuate (its primary



1 Special Operations Combat Medic (SOCM), SSG Peter R. Vaughn* (RIGHT), observes Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) medics during a 'mass casualty' (MASCAL) exercise with the Special Operations Resuscitation Team (SORT) in October 2013. The event was the culminating exercise of three months of medical training.

2 UPDF medics triage 'casualties' outside their field hospital near Nzara, South Sudan. During triage, casualties are sorted into four categories: immediate, delayed, minimal, and expectant.

ROLES OF MEDICAL CARE

(Joint Publication 4-02: *Joint Health Services*)



Role 1: First Responder Care

Provides medical treatment, initial trauma care, and forward resuscitation, not including surgical care. Also known as unit-level medical care.

Role 2: Forward Resuscitative Care

Provides medical treatment, advanced trauma management, emergency surgery, and resuscitative care.

Role 3: Theater Hospitalization

Provides emergency and specialty surgery, intensive care, medical specialty care, and extended holding capacity and capability augmented by robust ancillary support.

Role 4: Definitive Care

Provides the full range of preventive, acute, restorative, curative, rehabilitative, and convalescent care found in United States base hospitals and robust overseas facilities.



LTC Lorykay W. Wheeler envisioned the SORT:

“Operating in an austere environment like Afghanistan, where the coverage was difficult to provide due to the **great distances and lack of Role 2 facilities.**”

mission), the SORT embraced its secondary mission of advising and assisting partner nation (PN) medical personnel. In doing so, the SORT built rapport with the partner force and local civilians, provided access for other ARSOF elements in the area of operational responsibility (AOR), increased partner force medical capabilities, and prevented unnecessary ‘out of theater’ medical evacuations. All the while, the SORT presence reassured the small contingent of ARSOF working in the heart of Africa.

In order to understand why the SORT was in Africa, an explanation of the SORT concept, mission, composition, and operational history will be provided. The SORT concept emerged following the July 2003 U.S. Special Operations Command Medical Lessons Learned Conference. “Special Operations Forces (SOF) medical leaders and medical operators identified the need for expeditionary, short-term, SOF-specific Role 2 medical support for initial entry operations into immature theaters or remote locations of mature theaters” (see sidebar “Roles of Medical Care”).⁴ Within the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), it was Army Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Lorykay W. Wheeler, the Special Operations Support Command Surgeon from 2004 to 2008, who was the driving force behind the SORT concept.⁵ She envisioned the SORT “operating in an austere environment like Afghanistan, where the coverage was difficult to provide due to the great distances and lack of Role 2 facilities.”⁶ Since its inception, the SORT mission has been “to provide expeditionary, limited, short term resuscitative treatment, and patient hold to enable the rapid integration of forward surgical assets ISO ARSOF operations.”⁷

By 2011, there were three SORTs assigned to the Special Operations Medical Detachment (SOMEDD), Special Troops Battalion, 528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne). These teams were designated as SORT-A, SORT-B, and SORT-C. Each SORT had a Flight Surgeon (Military Occupational Specialty



528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne) Distinctive Unit Insignia. Beside it is the Special Operations Medical Detachment (SOMEDD), Special Troops Battalion, 528th Sustainment Brigade, which created a unique unit emblem by combining medical and special operations symbols.

Special Operations Resuscitation Team



- 1 x **Critical Care Nurse** (MOS 66S, Team Leader)
- 1 x **Flight Surgeon** (MOS 61N) *or* **Emergency Medicine Physician** (MOS 62A)
- 3 x **Special Operations Combat Medic** (MOS 68WW1, Senior SOCM = Team Sergeant)¹
- 1 x **Medical Laboratory Specialist** (MOS 68K)
- 1 x **Radiology Specialist** (MOS 68P)
- 1 x **Patient Administration Specialist** (MOS 68G)

Due to a force cap, the SORT was limited to five personnel for the duration of the Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS mission. They compensated with rigorous cross-training during pre-mission training.²

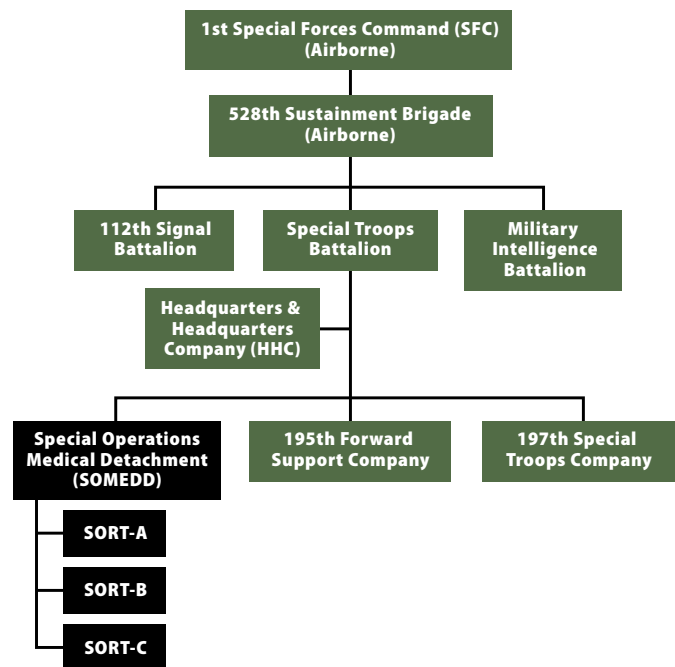
[MOS] 61N) or Emergency Medicine Physician (MOS 62A), a Critical Care Nurse (MOS 66S), three SOCMs (MOS 68W), a Medical Laboratory Specialist (MOS 68K), a Radiology Specialist (MOS 68P), and a Patient Administration Specialist (MOS 68G).⁸ The Critical Care Nurse typically was the team leader, and the senior SOCM was the team sergeant.⁹

The SORT's first operational mission was in Afghanistan in 2008, in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). The mission was trauma-heavy, with combat wounds to U.S. and partner nation personnel being the most common. During that first SORT deployment, the team resuscitated over eighty trauma patients and performed over thirty evacuation missions.¹⁰ In doing so, they validated the SORT concept. Rotating every six months, SORT teams supported OEF until late-2011.¹¹

As the SORT mission in Afghanistan drew to a close, the 528th Sustainment Brigade and Special Troops Battalion leadership began searching for another operational mission.¹² At that time, the Special Operations Command, Africa (SOCAFRICA, or 'SOCAF') was planning an operation against Joseph Kony and his LRA; a problem of which few Americans were aware.

Joseph Kony formed the LRA in 1988 to seize control of Uganda and rule according to his interpretation of the Ten Commandments. The LRA quickly gained a reputation for brutality and child abduction for soldiers and 'brides.'¹³ Fighting between the LRA and Ugandan

SORT Task Organization



military started in 1988 and continued intermittently for twenty years.¹⁴

The crisis in central Africa gradually attracted world attention. In 2005, the International Criminal Court issued warrants for the arrest of Kony and two of his subordinates based on war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁵ Fact-finding and lobbying prompted the U.S. Congress to pass Public Law 111-172, "Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009."¹⁶ President Barack H. Obama reinforced this effort with a:

"Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army":

1. **Protect civilians**
2. **Kill/capture Joseph Kony and senior LRA commanders**
3. **Promote defection, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of remaining LRA fighters**
4. **Increase humanitarian access and provide continued relief to affected areas¹⁷**

Despite the actions of President Obama and Congress, few Americans knew of Joseph R. Kony, the LRA, or its practices until the non-governmental organization (NGO) Invisible Children video *Kony 2012* went 'viral' in the spring of 2012. By the time the video appeared, Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS was underway. A small contingent of U.S. military was in central Africa, as part of the AFRICOM Counter-LRA Control Element (ACCE). Based out of Entebbe, Uganda, the ACCE was to "advise and assist Uganda and advise the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan in their efforts to remove Joseph Kony and other senior LRA leaders from the battlefield."¹⁸

The decision to place a SORT among the one hundred U.S. 'boots-on-the-ground' conducting the OOC mission grew out of a medical risk assessment. During the initial OOC planning, the SOCAF Surgeon, Army LTC Melissa L. Givens, performed this. Based on the huge AOR, the lack of U.S. military medical evacuation assets and Western-standard medical facilities in theater, and the high risk of infectious disease, she warned the SOCAF Commander, RDML Brian L. Losey, that the medical risk was "immense."¹⁹

Evacuation of casualties was an obvious problem. In emergency medicine, the term 'golden hour' implies getting a trauma patient to a fully-equipped surgical facility within sixty minutes of injury.²⁰ This was impossible given the OOC mission and the vast distances

between medical treatment facilities (MTF) in central and east Africa. The OOC AOR encompassed parts of four countries: Uganda, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. The last of these, by itself, was nearly the size of Texas. From Nzara, at the northeastern corner of the AOR, the closest U.S. MTF was at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, a four hour (977 nautical mile [NM]) flight by fixed-wing aircraft. The closest Western-standard medical care was in Nairobi, Kenya, a two and a half hour (625 NM) fixed-wing flight from Nzara.

While it was impossible to 'shrink' the AOR, it was possible to use a Role 2 medical capability, such as a SORT, to bridge the gap between the point of injury and definitive care facility. Doing this would improve the likelihood of success with a life-threatening injury or illness. Locating the Role 2 capability in Nzara, South Sudan placed it inside the 'golden hour' for the main ARSOF outstations. Additionally, the Nzara airstrip could handle C-130s at night.

In addition to the vast size of the proposed AOR, LTC Givens was acutely aware of the risk of infectious disease, which she assessed to be greater than the trauma risk.²¹ Combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan prompted medical planners to make trauma the primary concern of all military medical units. Dr. Givens understood that "all is not trauma."²² This assessment determined her proposed solution.

Viewing the OOC problem set "through an ER [emergency room] lens," LTC Givens felt that an 'ER' physician would be better than a surgeon; they were better equipped to deal with the full range of medical issues that U.S. personnel in central Africa were likely to encounter.²³ Knowing that a SORT included an ER physician, she considered it to be a good fit for the OOC mission. Dr. Givens' professional opinion was that a SORT would "put the medical risk at a tolerable level," allowing the mission to move forward.²⁴ Due to the congressionally-approved force cap, the SORT would be limited to five instead of its full complement of eight personnel.

In September 2011, SOCAF directed 10th Special Forces Group (SFG), which had been identified for the OOC mission, to request a SORT.²⁵ They did so and the request was approved. The ACCE 'Commander's Intent' was for the SORT "to provide Role 2 medical support for U.S. forces in the OOC AOR; including routine sick-call, resuscitation, patient hold, CASEVAC [casualty evacuation], and en route critical care," and to "advise and assist partner nation forces on all aspects of medical care, as needed."²⁶

SORT-A was initially identified for the first OOC deployment, in January 2012. However, an individual accident before departure prompted a switch to SORT-B.²⁷ With a compressed timeline, the pre-mission training (PMT) was limited to 'in house' medical refresher



Map of central Africa, depicting location of SORT in Nzara, 'golden hour coverage,' casualty evacuation routes, and location of rotary-wing (OBO) and fixed-wing (ENTEBBE) CASEVAC aircraft.

training, a tactical driving course, weapons qualification, and a validation exercise.²⁸

The team's Flight Surgeon, CPT Lucas T. Haynes*, recalled a sleepless night before deploying to Africa. Having just completed his residency at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, it dawned on him that he would be the only U.S. military physician in a theater that spanned four countries.²⁹ The thought, he said, "scared the crap out of me."³⁰ Doubt persisted as the SORT-B arrived in Nzara: "I'm landing on an airstrip in the middle of the night with no camp; I have no medical facility whatsoever."³¹

Much of SORT-B's 15 January through 8 July 2012 deployment was spent getting to Nzara; helping the Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) construct the camp and improve the airstrip; setting up their medical tent; and establishing relationships with the partner military force and local medical providers. The next two teams to deploy, SORT-C (July 2012 through December 2012) and SORT-A (December 2012 through May 2013), improved the foundation established by SORT-B during the first six months of 2012.

In the early phase of OOC, patrols were infrequent and U.S. casualties were rare. The SORT worked at finding ways to keep busy. Most often, this entailed making rounds at nearby medical facilities and training UPDF medical personnel. This actually built rapport with the

partner force and the locals, which supported the overall mission. It was not what a SORT was designed to do, but they did it quite well.³²

After ten months at Fort Bragg, SORT-B was ready to make a second trip to Africa in May 2013, this time having a full PMT cycle.³³ Based on their initial experiences, the team had swapped out its Critical Care Nurse (CCN) for an additional SOCM. Without a CCN, CPT Haynes* became team leader.³⁴ Three of the five team members had done the first OOC rotation in 2012 (Haynes*, Staff Sergeant (SSG) Kevin L. Stevens*, Medical Laboratory Specialist, and Sergeant (SGT) Zane P. Anderson*, SOCM). The two newcomers, SSG Peter R. Vaughn* and SSG Jason D. Coverdale*, were both SOCMs. CPT Haynes* stated that his second descent into Nzara was not quite as terrifying because he knew what to expect.³⁵

Unlike that first deployment a year and a half earlier, the SORT 'hit the ground running' in 2013. Facilities were available and relationships were well-established, with the 10th SFG and partner forces (UPDF and Sudan People's Liberation Army [SPLA]). The SORT was again co-located in Nzara with a 10th SFG ODA in a small compound of 'Alaska tents' on the west side of the Nzara airstrip.³⁶ The large UPDF compound was across the airstrip. Nzara was northwest of the U.S. compound.



1

Additional ODAs from 10th SFG were located to the west (in Obo, CAR) and south of Nzara (in Dungu, DRC). The contract CASEVAC, a Bell 412 helicopter, was based in Obo, closer to the main area of counter-LRA operations in CAR. Obo was an hour by helicopter from Nzara. The ACCE headquarters and the Joint Special Operations Aviation Detachment (JSOAV) were based in Entebbe, Uganda, with the fixed-wing CASEVAC, a single-engine PC-12 airplane capable of transporting two litter cases.

After SORT-B completed its relief-in-place (RIP)/transfer of authority (TOA) with SORT-A, it went to work, seeing patients at the SORT facility in the U.S. compound, the UPDF field hospital, and the Nzara County Hospital. Between those three, the SORT seldom lacked medical work. The primary SORT medical facility, an Alaska tent, was at FOS Nzara, alongside their living quarters. The medical tent had two trauma beds, shelving for supplies, additional litter stands, laboratory and X-ray equipment, a sink, refrigerator, and small waiting area.³⁷ The SORT



2

1 The SORT had two 'Alaska tents' on FOS Nzara. One served as their living quarters (LEFT) and the other as their medical facility (RIGHT).

2 Inside the SORT medical tent, SSG Vaughn*, SORT team sergeant, built two trauma beds and shelving.

3 Aerial view of Forward Operating Site (FOS) Nzara, home to the SORT for the duration of Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS (OOC), from January 2012 to December 2016. One 10th Special Forces Group Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) was co-located with SORT-B during its 2013 rotation.

3





1



2

1 CPT Lucas T. Haynes* inspects the injured toe of a 10th SFG soldier at the SORT medical tent on FOS Nzara. The Special Forces soldier had cut his foot with a chainsaw while helping the Sudan People's Liberation Army clear brush for their encampment.

2 'All sown up': the injured toe, ten days later. Thanks to the SORT, the injured Green Beret did not have to be evacuated out of theater and was able to return to his team.

facility was intended primarily for U.S. personnel, but it also saw referrals from the UPDF hospital, mostly for X-Rays. The SORT had the only X-Ray in South Sudan's Western Equatoria State.³⁸ CPT Haynes* estimated that the SORT saw one or two U.S. personnel weekly and handled one severe case a month.³⁹

One severe case was on a Special Forces Engineer Sergeant (18C) who gashed his foot with a chainsaw helping the SPLA clear brush for their encampment. Thanks to the SORT, the wound was treated on-site, precluding evacuation. He returned to his ODA with a couple of months of light duty. The SORT also treated multiple malaria cases, which recovered in theater.⁴⁰ LTC Givens, SOCAF Surgeon, relied on the SORT to provide her with 'ground truth' on U.S. patients and respected their evacuation decisions.⁴¹

Among the 'outsiders' serviced at the SORT facility were LRA prisoners, defectors, and liberated captives.



3



4

3 CPT Haynes* examines Caesar Acellam, a senior officer in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) who was captured in May 2012.

4 SGT Zane P. Anderson*, one of the team's SOCMs, examines an African woman at the SORT facility on FOS Nzara. The woman had previously been held captive by the LRA. In the background, SSG Vaughn* examines a boy who had also been rescued from the LRA.

Medical examinations were offered as an incentive to surrender or defect.⁴² While CPT Haynes* had examined Caesar Acellam, a captured senior LRA officer during his first rotation, SORT-B did not examine any defectors during its rotation. Multiple liberated LRA captives, including a young boy and an expecting mother were examined and treated.⁴³

The lack of combat casualties caused the SORT to embrace its secondary, 'advise and assist' mission. This equated to doing rounds at the field hospital in the UPDF compound, which ran along the eastern side of the Nzara airstrip. It served UPDF and SPLA soldiers, contractors, and local civilians. There was a surgical facility and laboratory, but no imaging capability. The medical providers at the hospital were not technically doctors by Western standards, but simply better-trained medics.⁴⁴ The SORT presence and willingness to help in the UPDF hospital built rapport and trust with the partner force.



1



2



3

1 SSG Jason D. Coverdale* escorts the litter bearing a UPDF soldier whose hands were injured when a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) accidentally discharged. The wounded soldier was taken to the UPDF field hospital near the Nzara airstrip.

2 CPT Haynes* (LEFT) and SSG Coverdale* (CENTER) examine the severely injured right hand of a UDPF soldier. Sam, a Ugandan medical provider (RIGHT), stands by, ready to assist.

3 SSG Anthony J. Watson*, an 18D (LEFT), and CPT Haynes* (RIGHT) examine the leg of a local man who accidentally shot himself with a shotgun. The homemade shotgun shells were filled with a combination of irregular lead pellets and salt granules.

The medical visits provided, in CPT Haynes’* estimation, “our ‘in’ with the UPDF initially..but also for the ODA. They [the ODA] encouraged us [the SORT] to make those connections for them.”⁴⁵

The SORT’s assistance to the UPDF was not limited to consultations. As a good partner, they took the lead role in handling the most severe UPDF trauma cases, to provide the best outcome. One of the more dramatic cases during the 2013 deployment came after a UPDF soldier was severely injured when a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) he was carrying accidentally discharged on patrol outside Obo. The 18D (Special Forces Medic) on the scene bandaged the soldier’s hands, started an intravenous saline solution (IV), and provided pain relief with a fentanyl ‘lollipop.’ He accompanied the casualty on the CASEVAC helicopter to Nzara.

"I was actually out for a run when we first got the call," said CPT Haynes*. "Somebody came and got me and told me that there was a casualty. We ran to the TOC [tactical operations center] to get the ETA [estimated time of arrival], grabbed our gear, and then went out to the airstrip to receive the casualty."⁴⁶ SORT and UPDF medics litter carried the injured soldier to the UPDF hospital, where CPT Haynes* administered local anesthesia and examined the soldier.

"It was a pretty gnarly injury. He had lost part of his little finger and next two fingers on his left hand were 'degloved' [missing all the tissue, down to the bone]. He had some burns over his other fingers and a large laceration across the palm." Assisted by SSG Jason D. Coverdale* and a Ugandan provider named Sam, "We did a washout and cleaned it all up. I debrided some of the loose, nonviable tissue, got him some antibiotics, sutured the large laceration across his hand and dressed it. I knew he'd need to see an orthopedic surgeon."⁴⁷ The injured UPDF soldier was ultimately flown to Entebbe for follow-on treatment.

In addition to its regular visits to the UPDF field hospital, the SORT also worked at the Nzara County Hospital (aka: the "Sister's Hospital"), in nearby town Nzara. The hospital was primarily a tuberculosis, leprosy, and HIV referral center, operated by Roman Catholic nuns and funded by donors. It had an extensive pharmacy, but no imaging or surgical capability. Like the UPDF hospital, most 'providers' were not true physicians.⁴⁸ The SORT was provided a room to serve as a makeshift surgical/trauma ward. Trauma became its primary function.

On its very first visit to the hospital, the SORT was asked to examine a local girl, possibly ten years old, who had been severely burned from her belly button down to knees by boiling water. Without proper medical care, infected burns could be life threatening. Recognizing the seriousness, CPT Haynes* provided pain relief, cleaned her burned areas, and changed the dressings. SORT personnel continued to care for her until she was released two months later.⁴⁹

Later in their second deployment, the SORT treated a local man in his early twenties who had accidentally shot himself with a shotgun. The homemade shotgun shells contained irregular lead pellets and salt granules. The blast went through his hand into his thigh and peppered his abdomen and groin. CPT Haynes* treated wounds and, once it was possible, performed a skin graft on the man's hand. The SORT cared for him for over a month. Haynes* noted that, despite the successful outcome, the young African hated coming for treatment, because of the pain.⁵⁰ At the Nzara County Hospital, the SORT dealt with a South Sudanese soldier who had been stabbed in the chest, a local man whose wife had hacked his leg with a machete, several car accidents, and more gunshot wounds. Dislocations from falling off the back of Mopeds were common.⁵¹



1 SSG Watson* (LEFT) assists CPT Haynes* (RIGHT) as he tends to a young boy with a dislocated elbow. "Reduction" is the medical term for correcting a dislocation.



2 SGT Anderson* (RIGHT) instructs SPLA medics on first aid. The SPLA had no organic medical capability when the SORT first arrived in Nzara, so they started with the basics.

The SORT's 'advise and assist' mission included training partner force medical personnel. The UPDF rotated soldiers through Nzara every three months, which was just long enough to train their medics.⁵² The SORT provided classes to the UPDF medics every Saturday morning: Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC), taking and recording vital signs, traumatic brain injury symptoms, opening airways, improvised litters, and use of defibrillators. All UPDF medical training culminated in a MASCAL exercise, like that described at the beginning of this article.⁵³

While the UPDF was the main beneficiary of SORT medical training in 2012 and 2013, the other partner force located in Nzara, the SPLA, was not neglected. In 2013, the SORT began training SPLA Commandos, starting with basic first aid (pressure dressings, slings, and carries) and progressing to TCCC, which emphasized combat medical care 'under fire.'⁵⁴ The SORT training focus shifted to the SPLA medics when their Commandos assumed greater responsibility for the counter-LRA



1 SSG Coverdale* (RIGHT) teaches obstetrics to local nursing students in Nzara. The SORT gave seminars to local medical providers every Saturday afternoon.

2 Jungle training with the ODA: the SORT learned to use jungle penetrators and practiced vertically hoisting casualties with a Bell 412 helicopter. CPT Haynes* and SGT Anderson* were the SORT's subject-matter experts on hoisting.

3 SSG Coverdale* on a presence patrol with a combined ODA/partner force element. Such patrols were more common during SORT-B's second rotation than they were during the first.

patrols.⁵⁵ In late 2014, the SORT implemented a six-month medical training program for the SPLA, based on the U.S. Army's Combat Medic (68W) training manual.⁵⁶ By its end, CPT Craig T. Burns*, the current SORT physician, said that SPLA medical personnel were quite willing to handle routine medical cases and were more inclined to consult with UPDF medical personnel.⁵⁷ This showed that the SORT training in Nzara over three years was having a positive impact.

As part of their community outreach, the SORT conducted weekly seminars for local medical providers on Saturday afternoons.⁵⁸ Many of them were learning to become midwives, as reflected in the program of instruction: obstetrics, cardiopulmonary, genital-urinary, and pharmacology. Attendance was spotty – as few as three to a “packed house” of more than twenty.⁵⁹

Still, the SORT improved its tactical and technical proficiency. Jungle training with the ODAs included instruction in vertical casualty extraction with jungle





SORT-B in Africa (from LEFT to RIGHT): SSG Kevin L. Stevens*, CPT Lucas T. Haynes*, SSG Peter P. Vaughn*, and SSG Jason D. Coverdale.* Not pictured: SGT Zane P. Anderson*.

penetrators.⁶⁰ The SORT took advantage of ODA weapons training in Nzara. By 2013, the SORT SOCMs were accompanying combined ODA/partner force presence patrols.

SORT-B returned to Fort Bragg, NC, in early November 2013, after their RIP/TOA with SORT-C. The team saw 298 patients at its Nzara facility during its six-month deployment in support of OOC without that “critical American patient.”⁶¹ No U.S. personnel were critically wounded during the entire OOC mission, which ended in early 2017, when the LRA was removed from the battlefield. Nevertheless, the SORT contributed to mission success.

The SORT treatments precluded overseas evacuation of numerous U.S. patients, saving considerable money and reducing mission impact.⁶² Their medical outreach to the partner force and to the local medical providers garnered good will and gained access and placement for other ARSOF personnel.⁶³ And, its presence provided comfort to the U.S. personnel conducting the OOC mission and reassured those responsible for sending them into this austere and forbidding environment.⁶⁴

SORT-B made two more rotations to Africa in support of OOC, but the 2013 deployment was CPT Haynes* last as a SORT physician. Reflecting on his assignment to the SORT, Major (MAJ) Haynes* considered it “the best experience of my life.”⁶⁵ Recalling his initial anxiety before his first deployment, he said, “I don’t get nervous anymore.”⁶⁶

POSTSCRIPT

CPT Lucas Haynes* was replaced by SORT-B physician CPT Craig T. Burns*. After his rotation in early 2015, CPT Burns* became the 3rd Battalion, 7th SFG Surgeon. He led the medical planning effort for Special Operations Joint Task Force – Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (SOJTF-OIR), tasked with supporting international efforts to destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁶⁷ Not

coincidentally, the SOJTF-OIR medical package included a SORT. After five years in central Africa on the OOC medical mission, the SORT returned to its basis – advanced trauma care. It was going back to war. 📌

CHRISTOPHER E. HOWARD

Christopher E. Howard served four years in the U.S. Army before earning an MA in History from Appalachian State University. He worked as a Psychological Operations training specialist at USAJFKSWCS before joining the USASOC History Office in June 2018. His research is focused on the history of ARSOF sustainment and support.

Endnotes

- 1 Per Army Field Manual 4-02: “Triage is the medical sorting of patients. The categories are: MINIMAL (OR AMBULATORY)— those who require limited treatment and can be returned to duty; IMMEDIATE—patients requiring immediate care to save life or limb; DELAYED—patients who, after emergency treatment, incur little additional risk by delay or further treatment; and EXPECTANT—patients so critically injured that only complicated and prolonged treatment will improve life expectancy” (Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual 4-02: *Army Health System*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 2013), Glossary 6).
- 2 “Moulage is the art of depicting lifelike injuries.” See: Bobbie Merica, “How Moulage Brings Realism to Training,” *EMS World*, 25 January 2013, <https://www.emsworld.com/article/10858762/how-moulage-brings-realism-training>, accessed November 8, 2018.
- 3 Lucas T. Haynes*, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 2 November 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Haynes* interview, date.
- 4 Jamie C. Riesberg, “The Special Operations Resuscitation Team: Robust Role II Medical Support for Today’s SOF Environment,” *Journal of Special Operations Medicine* 9:1 (Winter 09): 27, <https://www.jsomonline.org/Publications/2009127Riesberg.pdf>, accessed 20 November 2018, hereafter “SORT.”
- 5 Stephen R. Cain, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 17 August 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 Lorykay W. Wheeler in Kenneth Finlayson, “SORT(ing) Out the Casualties: The Special Operations Resuscitation Team in Afghanistan,” *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, 5:1 (2009): 49; the Special Operations Support Command (SOSCOM) was deactivated in 2005 and replaced by the 528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne).
- 7 “528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne) Command Brief,” 8 April 2011, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter 528th SB Command Brief.
- 8 SOCMs are highly-trained combat medics who have successfully completed the Special Operations Combat Medic Course at the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare and School, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 528th SB Command Brief.
- 10 Riesberg, 29, “SORT.”
- 11 Jacob G. Brown*, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 28 September 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Brown interview. For more information on the SORTs role in OEF, see Kenneth Finlayson, “SORT(ing) Out the Casualties: The Special Operations Resuscitation Team in Afghanistan,” *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, 5:1 (2009): 47-57.
- 12 Brown interview.
- 13 Paul D. Ronan, Power Point Presentation, “U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations: Challenges and Opportunities,” no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter “U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations.”
- 14 “U.S. Deployment in Counter-LRA Operations.”
- 15 The White House, “Fact Sheet: Mitigating and Eliminating the Threat to Civilians Posed by the Lord’s Resistance Army,” 23 April 2012.
- 16 Public Law 111-172, “Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009,” <https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ172/PLAW-111publ172.pdf>, accessed 15 November 2018.
- 17 The White House, “Letter from the President on the Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord’s Resistance Army,” 24 November 2010.
- 18 SOCAFRICA, “MOD 001 to CDRSOCAFRICA OPERATION OBSERVANT COMPASS OPORD,” 27 January 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 19 Melissa L. Givens, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 31 October 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Givens interview.
- 20 Charlie Eisele, “The Golden Hour,” *Journal of Emergency Medical Services*, 31 August 2008, <https://www.jems.com/articles/2008/08/golden-hour.html>, accessed 13 November 2018. The author of the article uses the term “definitive care” to refer to a trauma treatment (i.e. surgical) facility.
- 21 Givens interview.
- 22 Givens interview.

- 23 Givens interview.
- 24 Givens interview.
- 25 Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, AOB 0330 to ACCE Transition / RIP-TOA, September 21, 2011, Slide 66.
- 26 "SORT-B After-Action Review: Operation OBSERVANT COMPASS, 12 May – 3 November 2013," hereafter SORT-B AAR.
- 27 Lucas T. Haynes*, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 12 October 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Haynes* interview, date.
- 28 Haynes* interview, 12 October 2018.
- 29 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 30 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 31 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 32 Haynes* interview, 12 October 2018.
- 33 Pre-mission training had improved considerably from the first OOC rotation to the fourth. For their first rotation, most of the medical training was done 'in-house.' For its second rotation, SORT-B's PMT included the Tropical Medicine Course, Live Tissue Training (LTT) for all members of the team, including 'ancillary' personnel (laboratory specialist, radiology specialist, and patient administration specialist), SERE-C, Joint Enroute Care Course, Flight Paramedic training, and a Validation Exercise (Haynes* interview, 12 October 2018).
- 34 Other OOC rotations used different configurations of personnel, but all included at least one physician (Flight Surgeon or Emergency Medicine Physician) and two SOCMs.
- 35 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 36 'Alaska tent' is another way of referring to the Alaska Small Shelter System, produced by Alaska Structures and widely used by the U.S. Army. Designed to meet the specifications of the U.S. Special Operations Joint Base Program, these tents are sometimes referred to as "Bare Base Housing Systems."
- 37 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 38 SORT-B AAR.
- 39 Haynes* interview, 12 October 2018.
- 40 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 41 Givens interview.
- 42 SORT-B AAR.
- 43 Email from Lucas Haynes* to Christopher E. Howard, "SUBJECT: Follow Up," 3 November 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 44 SORT-B AAR.
- 45 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 46 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 47 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 48 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 49 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 50 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 51 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 52 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 53 Haynes* interviews, 12 October 2018 and 2 November 2018.
- 54 Haynes* interview, 12 October 2018.
- 55 Craig T. Burns*, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 31 October 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Burns interview.
- 56 Burns* interview.
- 57 Burns* interview.
- 58 SORT-B AAR.
- 59 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018. **CPT Haynes* noted that the seminars increased access to the local community and to influential senior clergy, in particular, who hosted the medical training at their facility in Nzara.**
- 60 Haynes* interview, 12 October 2018.
- 61 Givens interview.
- 62 Givens interview.
- 63 Givens interview; Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 64 Givens interview.
- 65 Haynes* interview, 12 October 2018.
- 66 Haynes* interview, 2 November 2018.
- 67 Burns* interview.

Special Operations Resuscitation Team Sidebar Endnotes

- 1 Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) "W1" awarded upon graduation from the Special Operations Combat Medic Course at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.
- 2 Lucas T. Haynes*, interview with Christopher E. Howard, 12 October 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

Roles of Medical Care Sidebar Endnote

Joint Publication 4.02: *Joint Health Services* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2017), GL-13. It can be found on the internet at the Joint Doctrine Library, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp4_02ch1.pdf?ver=2018-10-10-113551-603, accessed 01 November 2018. See also: Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual 4-02: *Army Health System*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 2013), 1-8 to 1-10.

SORT medic observing UPDF medics.



Night Stalker *Ingenuity*



Taking the ~~'Bad Guy'~~ off the Battlefield
without Black Helicopters

Joshua D. Esposito

Chief Warrant Officer Two (CW2) Phillip W. Fox* left the hangar after an early-morning discussion with officers of the *Coordenadoria de Recursos Especiais* (CORE), a special tactics unit belonging to the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police, and pilots of the *Serviço Aeropolicial* (SAER), the CORE air wing. The day before, Fox* and a small aviation foreign internal defense (AvFID) team from 3rd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) (Airborne) (3/160th) had completed a week-long subject matter expert exchange (SMEE) with the Brazilian CORE and SAER. He had been asked to clarify some points on Sunday morning. Across the flight line, the Night Stalker saw police armed with M4 carbines boarding SAER Airbus AS-350(B3) *Écureuils*, and UH-1 *Huey II*'s, before launching in late-morning. Several hours later, they returned with a large quantity of illegal drugs, and several major traffickers in handcuffs.¹ Success could be attributed to solid tactics, techniques, procedures, and planning, emphasized during the SMEE. The 3/160th AvFID team had built partner capacity and helped the Brazilians hone their skills. This was a tactical victory in the fight to improve national security for both Brazil and the United States.²

The SOAR flies, maintains, and tests rotary-wing and unmanned aircraft to provide long range assault and fire support to special operations forces at night and in adverse conditions. At its core, the SOAR exists, according to now-CW3 Fox*, "to take the 'bad guy' off the battlefield."³ One way to reduce threats while advancing national strategic objectives is to train and cultivate relationships with the security agencies of partner nations.⁴ Doing so improves their capabilities and increases interoperability between ground and air units, military and otherwise.⁵ This article explains how a small, dedicated group of individuals in 3/160th created a formal AvFID program from the bottom-up between 2012 and 2016, at the same time that U.S. national strategy increasingly emphasized building partner capacity.⁶ It further argues that the program achieved tactical through strategic-level success in Brazil.

From 1994 to October 2012, the U.S. Air Force's 6th Special Operations Squadron (6th SOS) was tasked by the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to provide rotary-wing training to partner nations.⁷ In the Western Hemisphere, however, elements of the SOAR were forward deployed with U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) in Panama (see sidebar).

The 617th Special Operations Aviation Detachment (617th SOAD), later D Company, SOAR (A), regularly participated in *ad hoc* engagements with regional aviation units, usually while supporting training conducted by 7th Special Forces Group (7th SFG).⁸ However, the relocation of D Company from Panama to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, in 1999, and then to Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, GA, in 2003, increased the cost of conducting training in Central and South America, and the Caribbean.⁹ In the early-2000s, the demand for rotary-wing support in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, Africa, and Colombia exceeded the Army's ability to provide such support.¹⁰ As a result of that high demand, particularly in the Middle East, SOAR engagement with partner aviation units declined, especially in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility (AOR).¹¹

Between 2006 and 2016, several factors intensified the demand for 3/160th AvFID efforts in the USSOUTHCOM AOR. First, national strategy increasingly called for training partner aviation forces to combat terrorism and contribute to global stability. Doing so would reduce the demand on overstretched U.S. soldiers and materiel, and provide a cost-effective special operations forces (SOF) aviation capability where an overt U.S. presence was politically untenable.¹² The emphasis on working with partner nations was reflected in geographic combatant command (GCC) and theater special operations command (TSOC) planning, resulting in greater demand for 3/160th assets.

Second, as part of the Department of Defense's (DoD) long-term plan to transfer rotary-wing responsibility to the Army, the Air Force drew-down its helicopter



The U.S. Air Force 6th Special Operations Squadron (6th SOS) was responsible for aviation foreign internal defense (AvFID) training before USSOCOM transferred responsibility to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command in 2012. Because of the 3/160 relationship with USSOUTHCOM, the SOAR conducted 'side FID,' or 'pick-up FID' in the 1990s, and was regularly tasked to support FID in the late-2000s.

Previous page | Brazilian special operations units conduct Fast Rope Insertion/Extraction System (FRIES) training during an exchange with the 3/160th AvFID team in preparation for the 2016 Summer Olympics.

3rd Battalion, 160th SOAR

Unique Relationship with U.S. Southern Command

In October 1986, the 129th Special Operations Aviation Company (SOAC) was activated at Hunter Army Airfield (AAF), GA.¹ It provided one *Black Hawk* platoon (provisionally activated as the 617th Special Operations Aviation Detachment [SOAD]) to support U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). In October 1987, the 617th SOAD was formally activated at Howard Air Force Base, Panama. It relied on the 160th Special Operations Aviation Group for administration, logistics, and standardization support.²

In January 1988, the 129th SOAC was inactivated, with personnel and equipment transferring to the newly constituted and activated A Company, 3rd Battalion, 160th Aviation (3/160th).³ The 617th SOAD remained in Panama, as 3/160th reorganized the following year as a battalion under the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). In June 1995, the 617th SOAD was inactivated, and replaced with a separate D Company under the 160th SOAR Headquarters.

On December 31, 1999, the Panama Canal Treaty officially abolished the Panama Canal Zone, giving operations of the interoceanic waterway to the government of Panama.⁴ As a result, headquarters, USSOUTHCOM, relocated to Miami, FL, and elements of the command moved to various areas. D Company was relocated to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, in 1999.⁵ D Company transferred again, joining the rest of 3/160 at Hunter AAF, when Roosevelt Roads closed in August 2003. Even after the relocation, however, the *Black Hawk* platoon remained under the operational control (OPCON) of USSOUTHCOM.⁶



The pocket patch worn by members of the 617th Special Operations Aviation Detachment.

capability in the early-2000s.¹³ As a result, demand for Army rotary-wing AvFID increased, and in 2012 USSOCOM transferred responsibility for training partner nations from the 6th SOS to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC).¹⁴ The newly established U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command (USASOAC) stood up a cell to support USSOCOM and TSOC AvFID requirements, especially in the U.S. European Command, U.S. Africa Command, and U.S. Central Command AORs.¹⁵ However, the SOAR's Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) was structured for warfighting, not FID, limiting their ability to train partner forces.¹⁶ Since elements of 3/160th remained under the operational control (OPCON) of USSOUTHCOM, the battalion would assist with conducting AvFID in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁷

Third, the five-year effort to rescue three American contractors held hostage by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)* in Colombia convinced some participants that improving partner nation interoperability was critical. The Colombian Army's successful rescue of the hostages demonstrated the potential for achieving operational success 'without black helicopters.' This conclusion led to increased demand for joint combined exchange training (JCET) in the region.¹⁸ While the demand for support increased, 3/160th AvFID was still conducted *ad hoc* in the late-2000s.

According to then-Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Kirk E. Keepers, 3/160th commander from 2009–2011, increased demand on the battalion required "maximizing capacity" by ensuring training events supported the TSOC and helped Night Stalkers obtain qualifications.¹⁹ In addition, the cooperative relationship between 3/160th and 4th Battalion, 160th SOAR (A) (4/160th) created scheduling flexibility, as 4/160th occasionally 'covered' rotations to the Middle East. Third battalion 'paid-back' those rotations, Keepers noted, and it was "guys sacrificing dwell time" that allowed 3/160th to support its USSOUTHCOM theater requirement and the national mission.²⁰

In 2009, Keepers made CW5 William D. 'Dean' Vanderberry a part-time 3/160th liaison (LNO) to Special Operations Command-South (SOCSOUTH).²¹ Vanderberry, a Flight Lead and son of an Air Force Senior Master Sergeant, served in the position until 2012.²² He was chosen for the position because of his experience in the AOR, having served in D Company in the 1990s, and his ability to balance the role with his responsibilities as a subject matter expert in other areas.²³

As the SOCSOUTH LNO, Vanderberry occasionally led AvFID-type missions, similar to those the unit had conducted since the late-1980s. Vanderberry's goal was to develop a program that worked with partner nation units to identify the type of training they wanted, assess their skill level, and determine how to help them achieve their objectives with a self-sustaining program. The keys to engagement, Vanderberry concluded, were

finding individuals within 3/160th whose personalities were conducive to building relationships and developing trust, to set the basis for long-term engagement based on feedback from the partner nation. Relationships, consistency, and tailored training—humans not hardware—were the core of the program. Maintaining consistent contact with specific units, however, was challenging, since priority countries occasionally changed at the GCC level.²⁴

Nearing retirement, in 2012, Vanderberry asked to work with then-CW4 Robert X. Villarreal, a Fully Mission Qualified pilot who Vanderberry hoped would assume the role of SOCSOUTH LNO and further develop an AvFID program after his departure. In addition to his Spanish fluency, Villarreal was a prior-enlisted Ranger, which gave him the rare ability to provide the first-hand perspective of both a ground soldier and a pilot. Vanderberry and Villarreal then developed a schedule of standardized classes to teach partner nations.²⁵ They worked with the 160th Training Development and Support Cell (TDSC), and the Regimental S-2, for disclosure authorization of selected training material. Soon after, the two began implementing the program, taking available personnel within the battalion on site surveys and training trips in the USSOUTHCOM AOR, identifying challenges along the way. In particular, DoD instructions and unfavorable risk assessments kept them from riding on partner nation aircraft, at times complicating efforts to establish trust with counterparts.²⁶

The Army's commitment to rotary-wing AvFID expanded over the next two years, as 3/160th responded to increased demand from USSOUTHCOM. In 2013, Lieutenant General (LTG) Charles T. Cleveland, Commanding General, USASOC, introduced ARSOF 2022, which reflected national guidance in emphasizing the need for building capacity in partner forces.²⁷ In August of that year, 3/160th began working with the Brazilian *Coordenação de Aviação Operacional* (CAOP) during a SMEE.²⁸ The engagement enhanced 3/160th's AvFID capability, and established a foundation for future cooperation in Brazil.

In July 2014, two events furthered the evolution of 3/160th's AvFID efforts. First, then-Major (MAJ) Matthew L. Parker, a 160th alum, was assigned to the TSOC and became the Air Operations Officer for SOCSOUTH.²⁹ With MAJ Parker as a conduit to SOCSOUTH, 3/160th was able to effectively engage the U.S. interagency, embassy teams, and partner nations. They were also better able to discern the operational objectives of the TSOC and GCC, and to articulate the aviation-specific aspects of FID to SOCSOUTH. Specifically, SOCSOUTH agreed to recognize four AvFID priority countries, alleviating the challenge of shifting efforts and inconsistent engagement. Thus, the battalion's AvFID program was enhanced, and its integration into theater planning was improved.³⁰

Second, then-LTC Ronald C. Black, 3/160th commander from 2013–2015, decided to formalize AvFID to support consistent tasking from SOCSOUTH. LTC Black tasked Villarreal and then-CW2 Fox*, a native of Pendleton, SC, with developing a dedicated AvFID program. In addition to being a Fully Mission Qualified pilot and company safety officer, Fox* was conversant in Spanish, and

Brazilian Units

Responsibility for counter-terrorist and other domestic special missions in Brazil is shared between Special Operations units in state-level Military Police Departments and state-level Civil Police Departments. The Brazilian Federal Police (DPF) are the nation's lead counterterrorism agency, though the Brazilian Armed Forces are permitted to intervene to maintain law and order in defense of the nation or to guarantee the constitution.¹

Between 2013 and 2016, the 3/160 AvFID team worked with the units listed below:

CAOP



Coordenação de Aviação Operacional – rotary-wing unit of the federal police; Counter Illegal Trafficking, Counter Terror, Counter Organized Crime, support to other Federal Police Units.

CAVEX



Comando de Aviação do Exército– Army Special Operations Aviation Unit.

CORE



Coordenadoria de Recursos Especiais– Police Tactical Unit of the Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro state.

COT



Comando de Operações Táticas– Counter-terrorism unit of the Federal Police

SAER



Serviço Aeropolicial–Special Tactics aviation Unit in the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police.

quickly learned Portuguese.³¹ LTC Black noted that, since 3/160th did not have MTOE positions for FID, he decided to stand-up an internal cell to create the program. The cell aligned its travel with quarterly trips to the AOR to reduce the effects of the additional workload. The cell developed the AvFID model, and drove the process, while LTC Black ensured policies, procedures, and regulations were aligned.³² LTC Black emphasized that “Dean Vanderberry, Bobby Villarreal, and Phil Fox* are the real superstars. I just supported because they were crushing it.”³³

Then, in August 2014, Villarreal and Fox* routed their initial plan to LTC Black. They proposed using small teams of 3/160th advisors to fulfill four primary FID roles: assessment, training, advising, and assisting partner nations. Villarreal and Fox* proposed a five-

“Develop and sustain their ability to utilize aviation assets and support their defense.”

— MAJ Matthew L. Parker,
Air Operations Officer for SOCSOUTH

phased approach to AvFID. After appraising the partner’s baseline capabilities in phase one, basic SOF mission planning would be conducted in phase two. Phase three would entail advanced SOF mission planning, progressing into advanced aircraft tactics, techniques, and procedures in phase four. Phase five would involve a full mission profile (FMP) exercise, and continuity training in an advise and assist role for 3/160th.³⁴ Crucially, the program was grounded on mission planning and classroom training, not training in 160th aircraft. Throughout the next year, Villarreal and Fox* honed their plan, working on a formal 3/160th AvFID guide as national strategy continued to prioritize partnering as a means of protecting U.S. interests.³⁵

In January 2015, a SOCSOUTH Mission Guidance Letter to 3/160th directed the unit to “build enduring relationships and be the military partner of choice for partner nation near-peer conventional aviation and aviation special operations forces.” SOCSOUTH emphasized that those “relationships are foundational to [the] success of our long-term strategy.” Partnering included FID to “develop unit skills and capabilities of selected partner nation SOF.”³⁶ According to Parker, AvFID would help partner nations “develop and sustain their ability to utilize aviation assets and support their defense.” Moreover, AvFID would contribute to developing “interoperable aviation forces to support U.S. forces requiring mobility” in contingency operations.³⁷ The ability to communicate in host nation language, the memorandum noted, was important, a point that the 3/160th AvFID cell consistently emphasized.³⁸

The same month, a six-man 3/160th team traveled to Brazil to conduct an AvFID Phase 1 assessment, and to prepare the CAOP for follow-on engagements. Villarreal led a five-man Pre-Deployment Site Survey (PDSS), while Fox* participated in a SMEE.³⁹ The team met with representatives from the CAOP to invite the unit to participate in an upcoming JCET, and discuss what training they would like to conduct during the event. The CAOP “went all-in” in deciding to work with 3/160th, according to Fox*. The visit laid the groundwork for what the AvFID cell expected to be the “proof of concept” for their program over the coming months.⁴⁰

During the PDSS, the team met with the U.S. Military Group (MILGRP), Army and Air Force Section Chiefs, and the Defense Attaché Office (DAO), as well as Brazilian Air Force and civilian aviation authorities. Those interactions allowed the team to obtain clearance for flight operations with U.S. military aircraft in Brazilian airspace. Finally, meeting with leaders in the Brazilian aviation units helped the AvFID team develop a training plan for the JCET and SMEE later in the year.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the classroom conversation during the January SMEE focused on establishing a maintenance and operations baseline. The discussion assessed Brazil’s aviation readiness, and contributed to the development of basic mission planning formats and products. The conversation overviewed tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for different environments, maintenance programing, and enhanced mission planning. Perhaps most significantly, it allowed the 3/160th AvFID team to establish relations with the Brazilian law enforcement SOF community. The variety of assessments gave the AvFID team an understanding of Brazil’s aviation readiness.⁴² The assessment also resulted in an acknowledgment that the CAOP was ‘Phase 1 complete,’ setting the stage for more advanced training during JCET 452 later in the year.⁴³

Throughout the spring of 2015, Fox*, Villarreal, and MAJ Christopher T. Wickam*, then the battalion operations

officer, revised and completed a 3/160th AvFID guide. The nearly-200 page document standardized AvFID efforts in the battalion. It carefully outlined “lessons learned, best practices, and checklists” to “aid in the conceptualization, planning, execution, and recovery of units” working with partners in Central and South America.⁴⁴ Building on years of groundwork, Villarreal and Fox* finished formalizing the program as LTC Black had directed.

The AvFID team’s work paid off when the Secretary of Defense approved JCET 452 to Brazil as part of the 2015 Global Force Management Allocation Plan. Per that plan, 3/160th trained with forty personnel from the Brazilian *Diretoria Executiva, Policia Federal*, and nine individuals from the Brazilian Special Operations Command. The JCET took place from 20 June to 31 July in Brasilia, the nation’s capital, and Goiania, where the Army’s Special Operations Brigade (*Brigada de Operações Especiais*) is headquartered.⁴⁵ The aviation portion took place from 16 to 31 July, and was the first implementation of the AvFID cell’s ‘five-phase process.’⁴⁶ Training focused on a variety of joint mission-essential task list items, including operations planning, rotary-wing integration, helicopter infiltration and exfiltration techniques, and joint terminal attack control.⁴⁷

During the exercise, nine pilots and thirty enlisted members of 3/160th, and six airmen from the U.S. Air Force 720th Special Tactics Group, conducted training using two MH-60M *Black Hawks* brought into the country on a C-17 *Globemaster III*. The training was extensive, and included strategic air operations, day and night air-land operations, day and night fast rope insertion

and extraction system operations (FRIES), USSOCOM currency training in support of aircrews and the ground force, urban and multimode radar currencies, and time sensitive target and deliberate mission planning and execution. It culminated with an FMP scenario in Brasilia.⁴⁸ During the FMP scenario, Fox* notes, “CAOP helicopters performed sniper over-watch and casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) operations between assault force lifts of 160th MH-60Ms. CAOP crews were included in the 160th planning cell, and helped the 160th with operations in the airspace. Our mutually supporting efforts provided continuous coverage to the ground force. It was truly combined, with U.S. and Brazilian aircraft affecting the same targets.”⁴⁹

The JCET helped the AvFID team identify lessons used to refine their program. In particular, they noted that conducting a SMEE simultaneous to a ground force JCET led to competition for assets between the Brazilian units. Moving forward, they decided to conduct the aviation SMEE “before the JCET to expose the aviation assets to the concepts they would see in the following days.”⁵⁰

JCET 452 was the ‘proof of concept’ for the AvFID teaching model that 3/160th had been developing since 2012. The 3/160th-7th SFG event facilitated cooperation between the CAOP and the *Comando de Operações Táticas* (COT), the counterterrorism unit of the federal police, integrating Brazilian air and ground forces in a counterterrorism exercise. The success of the ‘teach-demonstrate-evaluate plan,’ according to Fox*, “had nothing to do with black helicopters.” Its effectiveness lent credence to the cell’s plan for ‘no-aircraft’ training the following spring, an important methodological

Two 3rd Battalion, 160th SOAR Black Hawks insert 7th Special Forces Group and Brazilian COT via FRIES during JCET 452 in Brasilia, in July 2015.

3/160th AvFID Logo

USAF 720th STG Crest





A CAOP AS-355 *Écureuil 2* lifts off after leaving sniper overwatch to perform a casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) during the JCET 452 full mission profile scenario.

advancement for the unit, as well as an efficient one that considerably reduced the cost of conducting FID.⁵¹

In addition to the direct benefits to the 160th, JCET 452 demonstrated the CAOP's capabilities, and gave the 160th credibility as a partner for the Brazilian unit. The CAOP's interest in further engagement, and their proven ability, convinced the AvFID cell to make the CAOP the center of follow-on training in early-2016. According to Fox*, the AvFID cell wanted to "demonstrate [our] ability to go down there and prepare a partner nation force to execute missions with American special operations forces against a target that we deem appropriate."⁵² Following JCET 452, U.S.-Brazilian cooperation primarily focused on preparing for the 2016 Olympic Games scheduled for the following summer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.⁵³

Finally, JCET 452 laid the groundwork for a significant strategic success for the AvFID team. After the training, members of the 160th attended a barbeque at the invitation of their Brazilian counterparts. During the social, Fox* was introduced to Marcelo Guerrante, State Aviation Coordinator at the Brazilian civil aviation agency. During the conversation, Fox* was asked to attend the International Public Aviation Conference in Rio de Janeiro, scheduled for November. During the conference, the Brazilians would be considering revisions to *Regulamento Brasileiro Da Aviação Civil-90* (RBAC-90). Guerrante described the law as "an innovative regulation to outline requirements for public safety and civil defense [aviation] operations."⁵⁴ Recognizing the value of participating in the discussions, 3/160th added the event as a SMEE.⁵⁵

In late-September, CW5 Villarreal accepted a position as the Senior Fully Mission Qualified Pilot and

Maintenance Test Pilot, in D Company, 3/160th.⁵⁶ He was awarded a Legion of Merit for his work as part of the AvFID cell upon retirement, in 2018.⁵⁷ Villarreal was replaced by CW5 Shawn B. Cutler*, an FMQ pilot with considerable experience in the USSOUTHCOM AOR, including support to FID in the 1990s. The change in LNOs and battalion commanders portended a shift in priorities. New leadership advocated engagement with Brazil in support of Olympics security, while scaling-back the AvFID program to shift limited resources to other mission sets.⁵⁸

In October 2015, CW5 Cutler* traveled to Brazil for a PDSS to maintain engagement with the Brazilians, and in November a 3/160th team returned to Brazil for a SMEE in conjunction with the aviation conference. Throughout the conference, newly-promoted CW3 Fox* talked with Brazilian law enforcement aviation professionals about special operations aviation. He discussed his experiences, best practices, and fundamentals of tactical flight and asset deployment, dispelling rumors and misunderstandings about nighttime operations.⁵⁹ While CW5 Cutler* was re-tasked elsewhere on a high-priority mission, Fox* spent five hours talking with the *Agência Nacional de Aviação Civil* (ANAC) director, the director of the American Law Enforcement Aviation Association, and a small group of key Brazilian officials.⁶⁰ By the end of the conference, an updated RBAC-90 had been drafted. It addressed a number of issues, including night vision goggle (NVG) operations, standard operating procedures, and low altitude flights.⁶¹ Thus, a major obstacle was overcome, improving Brazilian units' ability to "more effectively conduct advanced special

operations while increasing the safety of civilians.⁶² A few days after the SMEE ended, 3/160th was tasked with supporting additional training in March 2016.

In early 2016, 3/160th began planning for the coming engagements with their Brazilian counterparts. In January, a SOCSOUTH memo validated the air worthiness of Brazilian aircraft, specifically, those of the CAOP.⁶³ Two days later, CW5 Cutler* submitted a Traditional Commander's Activities (TCA) request to USSOUTHCOM to train with the Brazilian *Comando de Aviação do Exército* (CAVEX), the Brazilian Army's special operations aviation unit which had been tasked with supporting Brazilian SOF for the Olympics.⁶⁴ The first week of February, CW3 Fox* again traveled to Brazil for a PDSS, reinforcing the cell's emphasis on persistent engagement and developing relationships with partners.⁶⁵

"As the LNOs prepared to reach program actualization," Fox* explained, "international and intradepartmental politics, and changing CENTCOM combat demands 'threw a major curveball' at the battalion. It was the perfect storm of complications at the most inopportune time. The most confounding problem was that the CAOP was forced to withdraw from the exercise just three weeks from mission execution. The small size of the no-aircraft model," however, "allowed us to flex to a new partner force."⁶⁶ As a result, the Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO) and the Brazilians identified other special operations units for the event. Ultimately, 3/160th supported the *Serviço Aeropolicial* (SAER), a special tactics aviation unit in the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police.⁶⁷ Members of the Brazilian Navy, state special operations police, and observer units were part of the training.⁶⁸ The AvFID team's persistent engagement and relationship building with the wider Brazilian special operations community were crucial to quickly overcoming the unexpected change.

The ensuing training was, according to Fox*, the objective toward which the AvFID team had been striving for four years: "a no-aircraft" training event. All training was in the classroom, or using Brazilian aircraft.⁶⁹ From 6–29 March, a five-man team from 3/160th traveled to Rio de Janeiro for a SMEE and follow-on training with the CORE and SAER. The events would help develop direct-action air assault capabilities, interoperability between Brazilian and U.S. SOF, and facilitate collaboration during major events. A key to the plan was adapting the training to the Brazilians' requests, including for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support to the ground force, reducing acoustic signature, and techniques for conducting time sensitive targeting.⁷⁰ Training emphasized integration of aviation mission planners into ground mission planning to apply key concepts and test capabilities. Units conducted an operational preparation of the environment (OPE) to prepare for the upcoming Olympics.⁷¹ During the

FMP, the SAER provided ISR, sniper over-watch, and CASEVAC support for U.S. and Brazilian SOF at the 2016 Olympic venues. The FMP, Fox* noted, "was critical to establishing trust in the ground forces and showcasing their aviation capabilities."⁷²

The March training event led to tactical improvements for the partner force, while contributing to 2016 Olympics preparation for both the U.S. and Brazil. The exercise refined the use of partner nation LNOs in U.S. and Brazilian ground force operations. Specifically, the SAER pilot bridged the gap between the LNO and joint terminal attack controller (JTAC). As a state police officer, the pilot imbedded with the U.S. and Brazilian SOF ground force during execution. The exercise refined the Brazilians' aircraft planning and integration into the ground force scheme of maneuver. This was demonstrated as they controlled the ISR aircraft's sensors while simultaneously relaying the ground force commander's requests for aircraft support. The exercise also provided the 3/160th an in-depth understanding of the real-world threat picture in Rio de Janeiro via sharing of intelligence and ISR footage. Finally, the event led to the completion of an operational appraisal checklist for the SAER, laying the groundwork for future cooperation with U.S. forces.⁷³

On the Saturday after the SMEE, CW3 Fox* received a phone call from a Brazilian counterpart, asking him to stop by the SAER operations center early the following morning. When he arrived, several members of the SAER were already there. They discussed mission planning, and asked for clarification on a class Fox* gave "on acoustic masking, sound wave propagation, masking the aircraft from fire, and landing zone selection" five



The *Serviço Aeropolicial* (SAER) and *Coordenadoria de Recursos Especiais* (CORE) captured a large quantity of cocaine, weapons, and contraband in March 2016, in part by implementing lessons discussed during a SMEE with 3/160th personnel the previous week.

days earlier.⁷⁴ After the session, the unsuspecting Fox* walked out of the hangar, pleased with the outcome of the training, and the development of 3/160th's AvFID program over the course of four years.

As he left the hangar, Fox* saw CORE officers boarding SAER aircraft, preparing to launch. Within hours, the SAER helicopters returned, having assisted their ground force (the CORE) in a major drug interdiction, in part by applying lessons learned in the just-completed training.⁷⁵ That operation, Fox* noted, "demonstrated that a 3/160th SMEE was immediately successful in covering an information gap, connecting a few dots, and enabling a partner unit to achieve a major tactical success less than 48 hours after training ended." The key, Fox* observed, "was not black helicopters."⁷⁶

As the Olympics neared, CW5 Cutler* staffed the funding requests and built a team for one last engagement, near Taubate, Brazil.⁷⁷ From 9 to 13 May, Cutler's* five-man team exchanged ideas, experiences, and lessons learned with the CAVEX, which had recently been tasked as the primary rapid response unit for the Olympics.⁷⁸ The CAVEX, Cutler* noted, was "a highly capable, near-peer unit."⁷⁹ Their aircraft were well-maintained, and crews were well-trained, including in NVG operations.⁸⁰

Then-CW3 Timothy S. Crockett* similarly noted that the exchange "was very much a 'give-and-take,' with classes taught alternately by the Brazilians and Americans." Classes covered a range of topics, including lessons learned, techniques, and mission planning.⁸¹

Sergeant First Class (SFC) Charles C. MacRaven*, who worked with the Brazilians on several occasions, noted that personal relationships were fundamental to mission success. MacRaven* observed "a lot of commonalities in the personalities of Brazilian counterparts." There was constant engagement, and the team ate all of its meals with the Brazilians. "Lunches kept getting larger as more individuals from class showed up," MacRaven* explained, and "bonds were formed" as conversations drifted between work and personal topics. The engagement, he concluded, was highly successful, though he hoped in the future to include partner nation crew members in the discussion.⁸²

The CAVEX's competence, and the relationships established over three years, precluded a need for additional training. The ensuing dialogue considered many of the skills and objectives 3/160th and Brazilian partner units had been cooperating on for the previous year. They discussed direct-action air assault, U.S.-Brazilian interoperability, and integration of Brazilian Army aviation into a potential joint, combined task force.⁸³ Once again, the objective was met without using 3/160th aircraft. CAVEX pilots and maintenance personnel were supported in Maintenance Test Pilot Operations, Jungle Operations, Urban Operations, Flight in Degraded Weather Conditions, and Battlespace De-confliction, culminating in Aviation Enablement of Time Sensitive Target TTPs.⁸⁴ Thus, Brazilian special operations units reached a new level of proficiency on the eve of the 2016 Olympics, an event that drew 500,000 U.S. spectators.⁸⁵



Official logo of the 2016 Olympics held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Weapons captured from a separate raid conducted by the CORE are sobering examples of how heavily-armed the criminal networks are.

CONCLUSION:

The 3/160th AvFID cell's ambitious efforts over several years resulted in a formal AvFID capability in the battalion, and nested well during the development of the Special Operations Aviation Advisory Directorate (SOAAD).⁸⁶ In implementing the program, 3/160th achieved tactical through strategic successes in Brazil in the year prior to the Olympics. Tactically, direct application of trained skills led to a major drug interdiction. Operationally, persistent engagement led to improvements in partner nation capabilities, and established familiarity that made interoperability possible, had a crisis struck at the Olympics. The U.S. Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, for example, noted a dramatic improvement in Brazil's "interagency and international cooperation on counterterrorism issues in 2016."⁸⁷ Strategically, RBAC-90 passed a public hearing, and is in the final phase of deliberation by the Board of Directors of ANAC.⁸⁸ It improved the legal framework within which near-peer partner forces can operate, enhancing their ability to provide internal security, and to work with U.S. SOF.

3/160th's success came despite limited resources, and was the result of several key factors. As CW5 Vanderberry recognized early on, personal relationships were the foundation of the AvFID program, allowing for persistent engagement and creating opportunities to overcome unexpected complications. Working with the Brazilians to identify what they wanted to train, and developing a program that addressed both U.S. and partner nation needs established trust with the partner nation.

Ultimately, the 3/160th AvFID cell created a program that demonstrated how a small number of individuals could significantly enhance a partner nation's ability to conduct special operations. This directly supports national strategy that continues to emphasize the importance of partnering to improve U.S. security. The 2018 National Defense Strategy emphasizes that "partnerships are crucial to [U.S.] strategy." It calls for countering subversion "by, with, and through" partners, "pool[ing] resources and shar[ing] responsibility for common defense," and "deepen[ing] interoperability" to "achieve military objectives."⁸⁹ Similarly, USSOUTHCOM's 2018 Posture Statement emphasized the need to "build a regional security network of principled, inclusive partnerships" to counter threats to the United States before they reach the homeland.⁹⁰ The successful cooperation between 3/160th and Brazilian units and agencies in enhancing that nation's special operations aviation capabilities validates the AvFID cell's program, and supports national strategy in the USSOUTHCOM AOR. 📌

JOSHUA D. ESPOSITO, PhD

Joshua D. Esposito served four years in the U.S. Navy before earning an MA and PhD in Diplomatic History from West Virginia University. He was a historian at U.S. Southern Command for two years prior to joining the USASOC History Office in July 2017. His current research is focused on Special Operations Aviation.

Endnotes

- 1 CW3 Phillip W. Fox*, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 6 March 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date. Email from CW3 Phillip W. Fox* to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 28 November 2018, hereafter cited by name and date. Fox* was promoted to CW3 on 1 November 2015.
- 2 "Defending the southern approaches to the U.S." has long been a cornerstone of U.S. Southern Command's (USSOUTHCOM) strategic purpose. The current Theater Campaign plan emphasizes "promoting regional security by degrading transregional and transnational threat networks (T3Ns)," such as those that traffic illegal drugs through Brazil. See, for example, United States Southern Command, Theater Campaign Plan, 2017–2027, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 CW3 Phillip W. Fox*, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 4 April 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 4 CW4 Trent M. Johnson, "Army Special Operations Aviation: Rebalancing the Portfolio with Aviation Foreign Internal Defense," (National Defense University, 2016), makes a similar argument, that tactical victories resulting from improved aviation capacity led to operational successes and advanced U.S. strategic goals.
- 5 Joint Publication 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense, 17 August 2018, <http://www.jcs.mil/Doctrine/Joint-Doctrine-Pubs/3-0-Operations-Series/>, accessed 26 November 2018; Joint Publication 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense, 12 July 2010, Homeland Security Digital Library, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=706800>, accessed 26 November 2018. Broadly, foreign internal defense (FID) aims to enhance partners' ability to counter violence and internal instability with limited U.S. support.
- 6 Building partner capacity is most effectively understood as the achievement of U.S. national security through the provision of training and equipment to improve partner nations' ability to execute specific tasks, and self-sustain their capabilities. See: Joint Publication 3-20, Security Cooperation, 23 May 2017, I-2, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Directorship of Building Partnership Capacity, <http://www.dsca.mil/about-us/programs-pgm>, accessed 28 November 2018.
- 7 The 6th SOS traces its lineage to the 6th Fighter Squadron (Commando) during World War II, and was activated at several times, in different forms, to train U.S. and foreign forces in the ensuing decades. In 1986, the Goldwater-Nichols Act identified FID as a primary special operations activity. As a result, the Air Force Special Operations Command, with the support of USSOCOM, established a dedicated AvFID organization. A successful "proof of concept" deployment to Ecuador in 1992 led to the establishment of Detachment 7, Special Operations Combat Operations Staff, in July 1993. That unit was renamed 6th Special Operations Flight in April 1994, and updated to squadron status that October. See: 6th Special Operations Squadron, Fact Sheet, <https://www.afsoc.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/877958/6th-special-operations-squadron>, accessed 26 November 2018; Department of the Air Force, Special Order GS-33, 25 September 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 CW5 Shawn B. Cutler*, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 3 April 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) (Ret.) Daniel J. Boonie, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 31 August 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; CW5 (Ret.) William D. Vanderberry, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 8 July 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; CW5 (Ret.) Todd C. Thelin, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 26 June 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. The 617th SOAD was formed out of the remaining Special Forces flight detachments that came together in the late-1980s as the Army's special operations aviation elements gradually coalesced under a single command, reconstituting as the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment in June 1990. Vanderberry referred to these exchanges as "side-FID," while former C Company Commander, LTC (R) Daniel E. Boonie called the engagements "pick-up FID."
- 9 Cutler*, 3 April 2018.
- 10 Statement of Garry Reid, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Combating Terrorism, U.S. Department of Defense, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 111th Congress, 2nd Session, 27 April 2010 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010), hereafter HASC No. 111-161.
- 11 Colonel Vincent M. Reap, Director, Maritime and Rotary-wing Assessment, U.S. Special Operations Command, HASC No. 111-161; Cutler*, 3 April 2018; LTC (Ret.) Kirk E. Keepers interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 7 December 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 12 Statement of Garry Reid, HASC No. 111-161, 27 April 2010; The White House, National Security Strategy, May 2010, Homeland Security Digital Library, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=24251>, accessed 26 November 2018; The White House, Defense Strategic Guidance, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, January 2012); ATP 3-5.02,

- Foreign Internal Defense, August 2015, https://armypubs.army.mil/ProductMaps/PubForm/Details.aspx?PUB_ID=105480, accessed 26 November 2018. The U.S. military has trained foreign forces since the nineteenth century. FID became part of national strategy when President John F. Kennedy approved National Security Action Memorandum 182 on August 24, 1962. See: National Security Action Memorandum No. 182, 24 August, 1962, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/ZwPjq2qEu02NamllyftoA.aspx>, accessed 5 September 2018. FID was first included in Army doctrine in 1976. See: ATP 3-5.02, Foreign Internal Defense, August 2015, https://armypubs.army.mil/ProductMaps/PubForm/Details.aspx?PUB_ID=105480, accessed 26 November 2018. FID was increasingly stressed in early-1990s National Security Strategies that sought to balance an expected post-Cold War military drawdown with the decision to use the U.S. military to preserve order across the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The emphasis on such efforts increased along with demands on the armed forces after the terror attacks on 11 September 2001, at the same time the Department of Defense shifted to a capabilities-based model for strategic planning. National Strategic documents from the 1990s are available through the Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense website, under the historical resources tab. See: <https://history.defense.gov/>, accessed 29 October 2018.
- 13 Darrell D. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride: A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2012), 631–638.
 - 14 Memorandum for Distribution, "SOCOM Resource Decision 2012-001 (Aviation Foreign Internal Defense Tiger Team Results), 8 December 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Department of the Air Force, Special Order GS-33, 25 September 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 15 Email from Patrick O'Hara, U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command Deputy Chief of Staff to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 7 December 2018, hereafter cited by name and date. USASOAC was provisionally activated in 2011, and officially stood up on 1 October 2012.
 - 16 LTC (Ret.) Kirk E. Keepers noted that the 160th first received five MTOE positions for AvFID in 2004. See: Keepers, 7 December 2018.
 - 17 LTC Matthew L. Parker, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 15 November 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; O'Hara, 7 December 2018. Parker was promoted to LTC in January 2018.
 - 18 CW5 (Ret.) Robert X. Villarreal, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 5 March 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Keepers, 7 December 2018. Villarreal was promoted to CW5 on 1 January 2016. He retired in April 2018.
 - 19 Keepers, 7 December 2018; LTC Kirk E. Keepers, "Battalion Commander Inbrief," undated, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 20 Keepers, 7 December 2018.
 - 21 Keepers, 7 December 2018.
 - 22 Vanderberry, 8 July 2018; Email from William D. Vanderberry to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 27 November 2018.
 - 23 Vanderberry, 8 July 2018; Keepers, 7 December 2018.
 - 24 Vanderberry, 8 July 2018.
 - 25 Vanderberry, 8 July 2018; Email from William D. Vanderberry to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 26 November 2018, hereafter cited by name and date; Villarreal, 5 March 2018.
 - 26 Vanderberry, 8 July 2018; Vanderberry, 26 November 2018.
 - 27 U.S. Army Special Operations Command, ARSOF 2022, Office of Strategic Communication, United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 28 Memorandum for Commander, Special Operations Command South (SOC SOUTH), Homestead Air Reserve Base, FL, "Brazil Rotary-Wing Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE), 5 AUG-9AUG, 2013, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 29 Email from LTC Matthew L. Parker to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 29 November 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 30 Email from LTC Matthew L. Parker to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 16 November 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Parker, 15 November 2018.
 - 31 While much of Latin America and the Caribbean speaks Spanish, Brazil, which includes one-third of the region's population, is a Portuguese-speaking country.
 - 32 COL Ronald C. Black, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 5 November 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date; Parker, 15 November 2018. LTC Black was promoted to COL on 1 July 2016.
 - 33 LTC Ronald C. Black to Eugene G. Piasecki, 11 April, 2016, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 34 CW2 Phillip W. Fox* and CW4 Robert X. Villarreal, Memorandum thru Operations Officer to Commander, 3/160th SOAR (A), "3/160th SOAR (A) Foreign Internal Defense (Aviation) (AVFID) Mission in FY16 and Beyond, 7 August 2014, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; USSOUTHCOM Historical Slide CH1 PowerPoint, 4 June 2015, Copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Full mission profile implies an exercise will encompass the "entire scope of a mission, including planning, rehearsals, infiltration, actions on the objective, and exfiltration." See: Dr. Jared M. Tracy, "Defense Diplomacy: Exercise VAJRA PRAHAR 2011," *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, 14:2 (2018), 13.
 - 35 The National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy published in 2015 reinforced the strategic emphasis on advancing U.S. interests through partnerships. See: The White House, "National Security Strategy" (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, February 2015); Joint Chiefs of Staff, "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America" (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2015). See also: Johnson, "Army Special Operations Aviation."
 - 36 SOCSOUTH Mission Guidance Letter, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter SOCSOUTH Mission Guidance Letter.
 - 37 Parker, 15 November 2018.
 - 38 SOCSOUTH Mission Guidance Letter. LTC Keepers emphasized the same point in an oral history interview with the author, noting that he thought it crucial to align language billets with the company expected to conduct AvFID.
 - 39 Villarreal, 5 March 2018; Fox*, 4 April 2018; 452WHF Pre-PDSS Discussion, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC Brazil Assessment & SMEE CONOP, 5 Jan 2015; JCET 452 WHF Brasilia Brazil PDSS INBRIEF, 8 Jan 2015, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 40 Email from CW3 Phillip W. Fox* to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 10 September 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 41 Fox*, 4 April 2018.
 - 42 452WHF Pre-PDSS Discussion; Brazil Assessment & SMEE CONOP, 5 Jan 2015. For information about the *Comando de Operações Especiais*, see the unit's official webpage: <http://www.copesp.eb.mil.br/index.php/institucional-2>, accessed 22 October 2018.
 - 43 CW3 Phillip W. Fox*, Olympics 2016: PN Aviation Employment Considerations, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter, Fox*, "Olympics 2016."
 - 44 CW4 Robert X. Villarreal and CW2 Phillip W. Fox*, "3/160th SOAR (A) Irregular Warfare Aviation Foreign Internal Defense Guide," 9 April 2015, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 45 Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict) Action Memo, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; FY 2006-2016 3-160 Support, Engagement History 2007-today, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; *The Brigada de Operações Especiais is one of the units that comprise the Brazilian Strategic Rapid Reaction Force. See: Alvaro de Souza Pinheiro, Knowing Your Partner: The Evolution of Brazilian Special Operations Forces (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2012), 24, 53.*
 - 46 Villarreal, 5 March 2018.
 - 47 Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict) Action Memo, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; FY 2006-2016 3-160 Support, Engagement History 2007-today, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 48 AAR, FY 2006-2016 3-160 Support, Engagement History 2007-today, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 49 Fox*, 28 November 2018; CW3 Phillip W. Fox* interview with Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 29 November 2018.
 - 50 AAR, FY 2006-2016 3-160 Support, Engagement History 2007-today, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Fox*, 28 November 2018.
 - 51 Fox*, 7 March 2018.
 - 52 Fox*, 7 March 2018.
 - 53 Fox*, 7 March 2018.
 - 54 Marcelo Guerrante to CW3 Phillip W. Fox*, "ANAC AAR," copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter, Guerrante to Fox*, "ANAC AAR."
 - 55 SOUTHCOM Traditional Commander Activity [Request], 25 August 2015, copy in USASOC History Office, Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter, SOUTHCOM TCA Request; Fox*, 7 March 2018; Fox*, 28 November 2018.
 - 56 Chief Warrant Officer 5 Robert X. Villarreal, Final Bio, copy in USASOC History Office, Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 57 Email from Robert X. Villarreal to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 29 November 2018. Villarreal's award referred to the program as "Building Partner Capacity," or "BPAC." While the concept remained the same, the AvFID program was reclassified as BPAC for funding purposes.
 - 58 Cutler*, 3 April 2018.
 - 59 SOUTHCOM TCA Request; Fox*, 7 March 2018.
 - 60 Fox*, 7 March 2018; Cutler*, 3 April 2018.
 - 61 Guerrante to Fox*, "ANAC AAR."
 - 62 Fox*, 28 November 2018.
 - 63 [Harper Memo, ANNEX M-3-160 PN Air Recommendation Memo (Signed), Olympics Binder], copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
 - 64 SOUTHCOM Traditional Commander Activity, 13 January 2016, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Email from CW5 Shawn B. Cutler to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 6 December 2018.
 - 65 Fox*, 7 March 2018.
 - 66 The quote is from an Email from CW3 Phillip W. Fox* to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 28 November 2018. CW5 Cutler* also noted the challenges of intradepartmental politics in Brazil in an oral history interview with the author. See: Cutler*, 3 April 2018.
 - 67 Fox*, 7 March 2018.
 - 68 Fox*, 28 November 2018.
 - 69 Fox*, "Olympics 2016."
 - 70 Fox*, 7 March 2018; Fox*, "Olympics 2016."
 - 71 Fox*, "Olympics 2016."
 - 72 Fox*, 28 November 2018.

- 73 Fox*, "Olympics 2016."
- 74 Fox*, 28 November 2018.
- 75 Fox*, 28 November 2018.
- 76 Fox*, 7 March 2018.
- 77 Cutler*, 3 April 2018; [CAVEX SMEE CONOP v7; overall], copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; [BR-19 CAVEX SMEE, 1605 BRA Army Avn Cmd SMEE], copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Email from CW5 Shawn B. Cutler to Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 6 December 2018.
- 78 Cutler*, 3 April 2018; Sergeant First Class (SFC) Charles C. MacRaven* interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 8 March 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 79 Cutler*, 3 April 2018. SFC
- 80 CAVEX SMEE AAR (Draft), copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 81 CW3 Timothy S. Crockett* interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 8 March 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date. **Crockett was promoted to CW4 on 1 June 2018.**
- 82 MacRaven*, 8 March 2018.
- 83 2016 May 9-13: BPAC SMEE in Taubate, Brazil w/ CAVEX (Comando de Aviação do Exército) [FY 2006-2016 3-160 Support, Engagement History 2007-today], copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; [BR-19 CAVEX SMEE, 1605 BRA Army Avn Cmd SMEE] copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Cutler*, 3 April 2018.
- 84 CAVEX SMEE AAR (Draft), copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 85 Cutler*, 3 April 2018.
- 86 O'Hara, 7 December 2018. **In 2016, CW3 Fox* was asked to escort the SOAAD to Tunisia as the BPAC AOR expanded. Fox* notes that "it was an exchange of ideas and techniques as we prepared for operations there."** Fox*, 28 November 2018.
- 87 **While it does not detail specific efforts, the evaluation of Brazil's overall counterterrorism capabilities is drawn from the following report: Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, Country Reports on Terrorism, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272234.htm#Brazil>, accessed 16 October 2018.**
- 88 Guerrante to Fox*, "ANAC AAR."
- 89 United States Department of Defense, Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge, 2018.
- 90 Posture Statement of Admiral Kurt W. Tidd, Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 115th Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, 15 February 2018.

3rd Battalion, 160th SOAR's Unique Relationship with U.S. Southern Command Endnotes

- 1 Department of the Army, Permanent Order 67-13, 129th Aviation Company, Unit Activation, 21 April 1986.
- 2 U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office, "160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment: Historical Handbook," USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC, 2017.
- 3 Department of the Army, General Order No. 3, Organizational Actions of Units to Form the 160th Aviation Regiment Under the U.S. Army Regimental System (USARS), 16 January 1988.
- 4 Department of State, Office of the Historian, "Milestones, 1977-1980: The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties," <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/panama-canal>, accessed 3 December 2018.
- 5 U.S. Southern Command, Command History, 1997-2000, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) (Ret.) Daniel J. Boonie, interview by Dr. Joshua D. Esposito, 31 August 2018, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

Brazilian Units Endnotes

- 1 Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, Country Reports on Terrorism, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272234.htm#Brazil>, accessed 16 October 2018; Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Title V, Chapter 2, Article 142, <http://web.mit.edu/12.000/www/m2006/teams/willr3/const.htm>, accessed 23 October 2018. For greater detail, see: Alvaro de Souza Pinheiro, *Knowing Your Partner: The Evolution of Brazilian Special Operations Forces* (MacDill Air Force Base: Joint Special Operations University Press, FL, 2012) 21-23, 85.



What is a **Ranger** or **ARSOF Aviator**? What is a **Special Forces, PSYOP, Civil Affairs,** or **ARSOF Support** soldier?



by the USASOC Historians

How does an ARSOF soldier concisely explain his/her capabilities to another soldier or, harder still, to a potential recruit in 'non-militareeze,' without acronyms and 'buzz' terminology, in fewer than 50 words, within 8 seconds, to meet the average attention span of the Generation Y and Z? What defines him/her as an ARSOF soldier specialist? What are the 'bare minimums' that this ARSOF soldier 'will bring to the table'? Are those 'minimums' different for officers, warrant officers, sergeants, and enlisted soldiers? This is a difficult challenge for serving ARSOF soldiers, as it was for our veterans.

When President John F. Kennedy promoted Army Special Forces as America's counter-insurgency specialists, and distinguished them as elite with the Green Beret on 12 October 1961, the Special Warfare Center (SWC) had not codified basic credentials of an SF soldier. Neither had its predecessor, the Psychological Warfare (Psywar) Center, done this for Psywar soldiers. The SF were to organize, train, and advise indigenous guerrilla infantry units, but what specific level of infantry ('shoot, move, and communicate') expertise was required? Was it different for officers than non-commissioned officers (NCOs)?

The 1959 "Code of the Special Forces Operator" was a pledge to abide by the Code of Conduct, and an understanding that he was volunteering to be deployed behind enemy lines to organize, train, and exploit guerrilla forces, and realized the hazards involved. He would not tarnish the honor of his team, service, or country. The SF Operator pledged to keep himself mentally and physically fit at all times. He understood that language and specialist training was required, and that he would "undergo more intense and more rugged training than is required of the average soldier of the United States Army."¹ The SF Operator further pledged "to remain in Special Forces for a minimum of six years."² And, he acknowledged that a "failure to achieve satisfactory



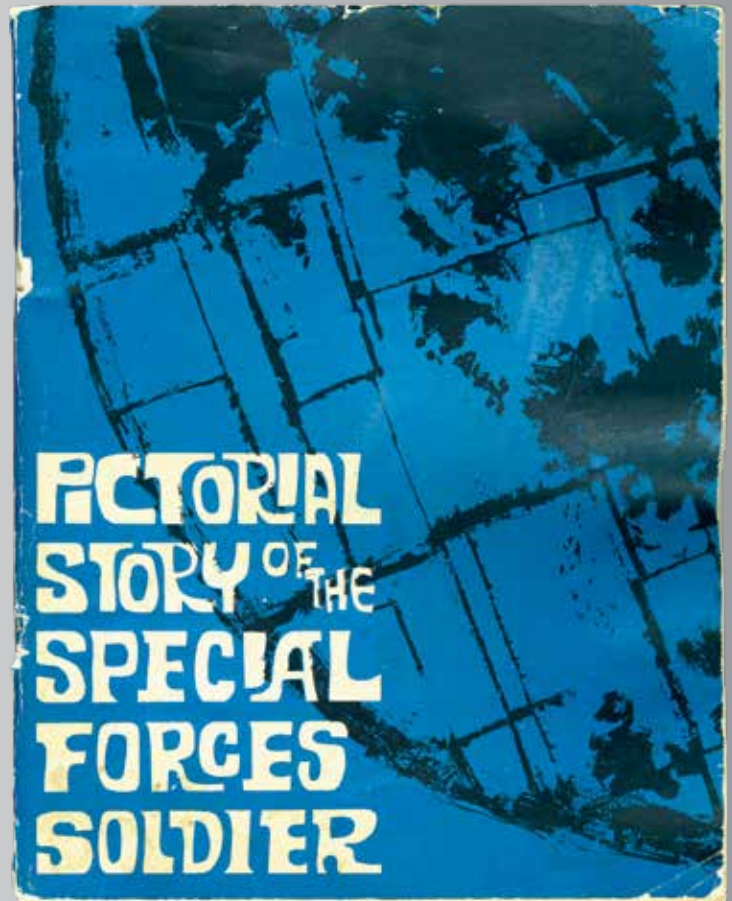
COLs Charles H. Karlstad (U.S. Army Psychological Warfare Center & School Commandant) and Aaron Bank (Center Executive Officer) with LTCs Lester L. Holmes (6th RB&L Group commander) and John O. Weaver (Psywar Division Chief of the Psychological Warfare School) pose by the Headquarters sign on Smoke Bomb Hill, Fort Bragg, NC.

progress in training, demonstration of poor judgment, immaturity or misconduct of such a nature as to bring discredit on [himself] or Special Forces, [would] be proper cause for immediate reassignment and a permanent bar from future duty with Special Forces."³ Specific standards were not addressed.

Two books, a *Pictorial Story of the Special Forces Soldier* and a *Pictorial Story of the Psychological Warfare Soldier*, were illustrated and printed by the 3rd Psywar Detachment, 1st Psywar Battalion (Broadcasting & Leaflet) in 1962. In 'glittering generalities' akin to 'Mom and apple pie' verbiage, a variety of SF and Psywar 'special' skills, operational environments, and unique specialties and techniques were cited for both.

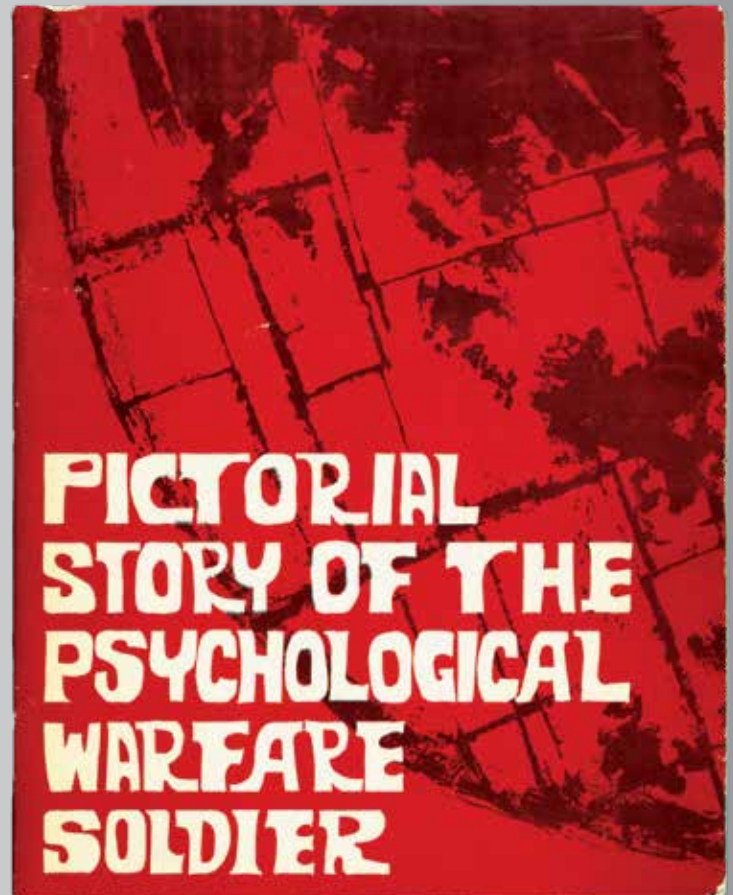
A Special Forces soldier is:

“The ambassador of American ideals, technical know-how, initiative and compassion, wearing his green beret, has in the past, and will ever be, ready to aid any of the nations of the world to maintain their own identification and dignity as members of the free world community. This is the Special Forces Soldier.”⁴



Somewhat better, the Psywar soldier is:

“an imaginative and enterprising specialist capable of persuading his audience through word and picture to develop an attitude that will assist the Army’s combat forces to accomplish their mission. He has the infantryman’s ability of protecting himself and his equipment against enemy attack while still performing his vital function of production and dissemination of propaganda and information, convincing our enemies of the ultimate victory of freedom and individual dignity. This is the United States Army’s Psychological Warrior.”⁵



Fifty-six years later, that dilemma still existed. It had been further compounded because ARSOF had a third functional branch, Civil Affairs. And, it encompassed the Rangers, Special Operations Aviation, and Special Operations Sustainment.

Our Volunteer Army (VOLAR), and in turn, the six Army SOF functional specialties, face serious recruiting challenges. The ARSOF ‘calling cards’ were an attempt to ‘codify’ what the Army can expect from our soldiers. They identify basic capabilities—the essence of particular ARSOF specialist soldiers. These fill a void, and a ‘basic issue’ will be distributed to the CSCs and CSUs as a ‘75 percent solution kick start.’ Please reflect on each card’s descriptors and remember the Generation Y and Z audience. Tweak the verbiage, but avoid using

contemporary ‘militarese buzz words/terms.’ The descriptors were designed to last more than a few years. ‘Electrons’ for each are available. POC: USASOC History Office: Daniel Telles, 910-432-9625 or daniel.telles@socom.mil. ⬆

Endnotes

- 1 Charles H. Briscoe, “The Special Forces Operator,” *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History*, 14:2 (2018), 63.
- 2 Briscoe, “The Special Forces Operator,” 63.
- 3 Briscoe, “The Special Forces Operator,” 63.
- 4 U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, *Pictorial Story of the Special Forces* (Fort Bragg, NC: 3rd Psywar Detachment, 1st Psywar Battalion [Broadcast & Leaflet], 1962), iii.
- 5 U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, *Pictorial Story of the Psychological Warfare Soldier* (Fort Bragg, NC: 3rd Psywar Detachment, 1st Psywar Battalion [Broadcast & Leaflet], 1962), iii.



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIERS

Tactical Infantry master trainers who shoot, move, and communicate better than the indigenous forces they organize, advise, and accompany into combat

Proficient in infantry squad and platoon tactics

Can independently function in austere environment

Skilled with foreign combat equipment

Flexible and comfortable in uncertain situations

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com



U.S. ARMY RANGER SOLDIERS

Army's best light infantryman—goes faster & further; shoots better; and fights harder

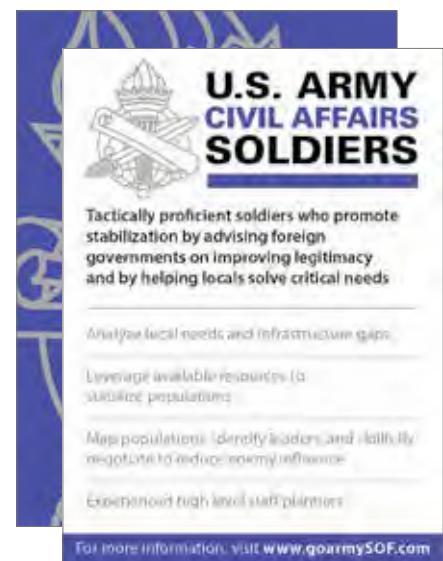
Takes charge & leads—physically & mentally tough, disciplined, yet adaptable

Owens the night's edge for combat now

Excels at long-range reconnaissance and raids

Masters of urban fighting trademarked by violence of action

For more information, visit www.SOC.mil



U.S. ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS SOLDIERS

Tactically proficient soldiers who promote stabilization by advising foreign governments on improving legitimacy and by helping locals solve critical needs

Analyze local needs and infrastructure gaps

Leverage available resources to stabilize populations

Map populations, identify leaders, and skillfully negotiate to reduce enemy influence

Exceeds most high level staff planners

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS AVIATION SOLDIERS

Fly, maintain, and test aircraft, providing long range lift and fire support to ground forces in the most challenging conditions

Technical experts and exceptional navigators, combat proficient in all environments

Only Army aviators who operate at sea

Plan and conduct precise deep penetration and direct air insertions at night

Innovate and develop unique equipment, tactics, and doctrine, and train foreign forces

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com



U.S. ARMY PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS SOLDIERS

Masters of influence supporting military and interagency with culturally appropriate media to weaken enemy capacity, enhance partner capabilities, and win local support

Advise U.S. government policy through information and influence programs

Shape target audience behavior via tailored messages

Weaken enemy morale and encourage surrender, defection, or desertion

Enhance partner nation legitimacy and ability to influence

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT SOLDIERS

Provide special operations forces with tailored logistics, signal, medical and intelligence services

Deliver creative solutions to complex communications problems

Provide logistical support to special operations soldiers in all environments

Form a life-saving link between the field and surgical facilities

Enable special operations forces to perform their missions

For more information, visit www.SOC.mil

The front of each ARSOF function ‘calling card’ has either the branch insignia (SF, PSYOP, and CA) or its distinguished unit insignia (DUI) with lineage colors or shoulder sleeve insignia (SSI). The descriptors on the back side are universal standards for that specialty.



U.S. ARMY RANGER SOLDIERS

Army's best light infantryman—goes faster & further; shoots better; and fights harder

Takes charge & leads—physically & mentally tough; disciplined, yet adaptable

'Owns the night'; ready for combat now

Excels at long-range reconnaissance and raids

Master of urban fighting trademarked by violence of action

For more information, visit www.SOC.mil



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT SOLDIERS

Provide special operations forces with tailored logistics, signal, medical and intelligence services

Deliver creative solutions to complex communications problems

Provide logistical support to special operations soldiers in all environments

Form a life-saving link between the field and surgical facilities

Enable special operations forces to perform their missions

For more information, visit www.SOC.mil



U.S. ARMY PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS SOLDIERS

Masters of influence supporting military and interagency with culturally appropriate media to weaken enemy capacity, enhance partner capabilities, and win local support

Advance U.S. government policy through information and influence programs

Shape target audience behavior via tailored messages

Weaken enemy morale and encourage surrender, defection, or desertion

Enhance partner nation legitimacy and ability to influence

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com



U.S. ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS SOLDIERS

Tactically proficient soldiers who promote stabilization by advising foreign governments on improving legitimacy and by helping locals solve critical needs

Analyze local needs and infrastructure gaps

Leverage available resources to stabilize populations

Map populations, identify leaders, and skillfully negotiate to reduce enemy influence

Experienced high level staff planners

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS AVIATION SOLDIERS

Fly, maintain, and test aircraft, providing long range lift and fire support to ground forces in the most challenging conditions

Technical experts and exceptional navigators, combat proficient in all environments

Only Army aviators who operate at sea

Plan and conduct precise deep penetration and direct action missions at night

Innovate and develop unique equipment, tactics, and doctrine, and train foreign forces

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIERS

Tactical infantry master trainers who shoot, move, and communicate better than the indigenous forces they organize, advise, and accompany into combat

Proficient in infantry squad and platoon tactics

Can independently function in an austere environment

Skilled with foreign combat equipment

Flexible and comfortable in uncertain situations

For more information, visit www.goarmySOF.com

ARSOF Calling Cards

✂ Cut-out along dotted line

These 'calling cards' provide fidelity on the attributes of Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) soldiers by their respective branch or functional area. They provide concise, jargon-free descriptors of ARSOF career fields to soldiers and prospective recruits. In addition, they are intended to help soldiers, veterans, and families talk with individuals interested in a career in Army special operations. Most include the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion website address for further information. An initial shipment of cards has been hand delivered to ARSOF commands and units. For replacement cards, contact Mr. Bob Seals, 910-432-9780, robert.seals@socom.mil.



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