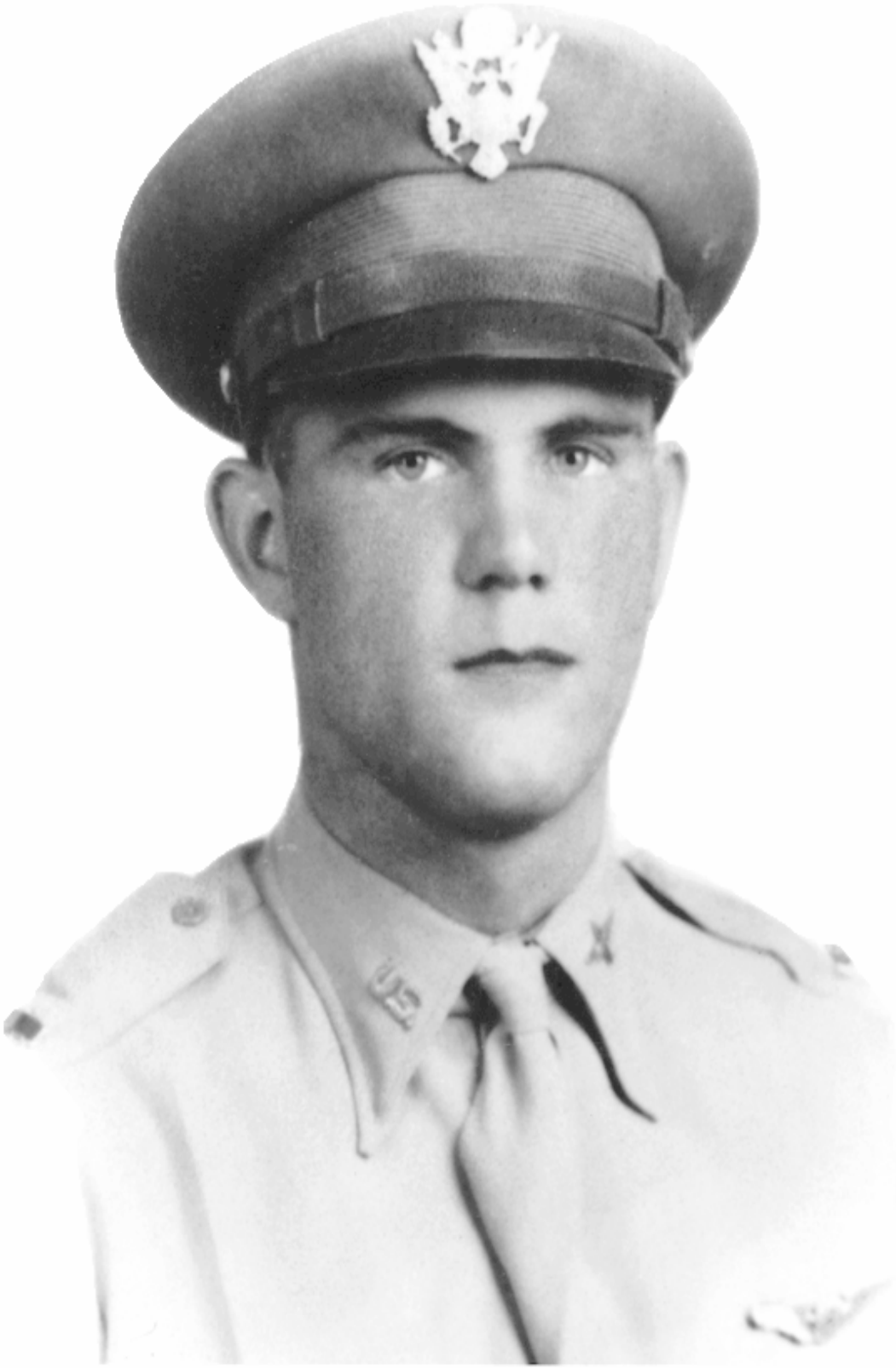
1st Special Operations Wing
Hurlburt Field, Florida

Commando Heritage

TABLE OF CONTENTS

First Lieutenant Donald Hurlburt Biography 4
Hurlburt Field.....4
16th Pursuit Group.....5
Birth of the Air Commandos 5
Operation THURSDAY 8
Accomplishments 10
Hurlburt Field and the Air Commandos 11
Vietnam.....14
Post-Vietnam Involvement 17
Iran Hostage Rescue Attempt.....17
Creation of 23rd Air Force 19
Operation BAT 19
Operation URGENT FURY 19
Operation JUST CAUSE.....20
Operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM 21
Post-Desert Storm 22
Operation DESERT CALM 22
Operation PROVIDE COMFORT 22
Operations
PROVIDE PROMISE / DENY FLIGHT /
DECISIVE ENDEAVOR.....23
Operation CONTINUE HOPE 24
Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY 24
Operation NOBLE ANVIL 24
Operations ENDURING FREEDOM / IRAQI FREEDOM.....25
In Memoriam 26
Lineage.....27
Growth 27
Conclusion 29
Commanders 30
Honors.....32



First Lieutenant Donald Hurlburt

Donald Wilson Hurlburt, born in Watts Flats, NY on June 16, 1919, enlisted in the U.S. Army in August 1941. Upon completing basic training, and his subsequent promotion to Private First Class, he attended Preflight Training School at Maxwell Field, Alabama. In June 1942, after completing Advanced Flying School at Moody Field, Georgia, he received his commission and assignment as a pilot with the 358th Bomb Group at Alamogordo Army Air Base, New Mexico.

In October 1942, he departed for the European theater of operations. There he served with the 258th Bomb Squadron, 303rd Bomb Group and received his promotion to First Lieutenant one month before his return to the United States.

His next assignments included Headquarters, 1st Air Force, Mitchel Field, New York, and then the 1st Proving Ground Electronics Unit at Eglin Field, Florida.

First Lieutenant Donald W. Hurlburt died October 1, 1943, of injuries sustained when the aircraft he piloted crashed on takeoff during a local mission at the Eglin Field Military Reservation.

For his actions overseas and his military service, Lieutenant Hurlburt received the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters. He also received the World War II Victory Medal, the American Defense Service Medal, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one Bronze Star for participation in Air Offensive Europe Campaign, and the Aviation Badge "Pilot."

HURLBURT FIELD

Home of the Air Commandos since 1961, Hurlburt Field today accommodates the 1st Special Operations Wing (1 SOW), Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), an Air Force major command, and a number of associate units. Officially designated Eglin Auxiliary Field No. 9, it served as one of the small training fields built on the sprawling Eglin Air Force Range in the 1940s. General Grandison Gardiner, Eglin commander, named it for First Lieutenant Donald Wilson Hurlburt who perished in an aircraft crash at the main base in 1943. The Eglin Military Reservation, to include the surrounding auxiliary fields, played key roles in the training of special operations rescue forces for operations such as the 1970 Son Tay Raid in Vietnam. When the Air Force redesignated the 1 SOW as the 16 SOW on October 1, 1993, it retained the heritage and honors of the 1 SOW, its predecessor designations, and the 16th Pursuit and Fighter groups. On November 16, 2006, the Air Force redesignated the 16th Special Operations Wing back to the 1st Special Operations Wing. Despite the redesignation, the 1 SOW retained all the honors garnered by the 16 SOW from October 1993 through November 2006.

BIRTH OF THE AIR COMMANDOS

General Henry H. (Hap) Arnold coined the term "Air Commando" in early 1944. This term referred to a group of Air Corps personnel established in India to support British long-range penetration forces in Burma. Its lineage began with the highly secret Project 9, the organizing and recruiting stages in the United States. Project 9 became the 5318th Provisional Group (Air) in India, which airlifted British General Orde Wingate's Special Forces into Burma during Operation THURSDAY in March 1944. Before the end of the month, it had changed, in name only, to the 1st Air Commando Group (1 ACG). The men of this all-volunteer unit established the high standards of innovation, ingenuity, courage, and resourcefulness to which air commandos have looked ever since.

General Arnold selected Lieutenant Colonels Philip G. Cochran and John R. Alison to develop this radically new concept and unique application of airpower. Could airpower infiltrate, supply, maintain, and exfiltrate a sizeable ground force in the jungles deep behind enemy lines? Their unorthodox tactics proved highly successful, and laid the foundation and provided the justification for special operations refinements beginning in 1961.

Lt Col Philip Cochran

Lt Col John Alison

Colonels Cochran and Alison discuss an upcoming mission with Lt Col Arvid Olson, 1 ACG operations officer. Because of the relatively small size of the pre-World War II Air Corps, Colonels Cochran and Alison were able to choose individuals whom they knew to fill key spots on their force. Note the five diagonal stripes painted on the P-51 "Mustang" in the background. All of the 1 ACG aircraft had these distinctive markings representing the original five sections: fighters, light aircraft, transport, gliders, and bombers.

The air commando force consisted of C-47 and UC-64 transports, P-51 fighters, L-1 and L-5 utility aircraft, CG-4A and TG-5 gliders, B-25 bombers, and six YR-4 helicopters (two were destroyed enroute). One of these new helicopters executed a combat rescue and received credit for the first combat use of a helicopter. The high priority given Project 9 allowed them to obtain four helicopters for combat evaluation. From a weak but successful beginning, the helicopter evolved into the proven weapons system of Vietnam.

The variety of aircraft in this small command, the 5318th and then the 1 ACG, set precedence at the time. (It took the Air Force until the 1990s to begin officially organizing composite wings consisting of more than one type of aircraft to meet the anticipated challenges of a changing world.) However, the air commandos in Burma, the air commandos of the 1 SOW in the 1960s, and the Air Force special operations forces up through the present day, have operated a composite force and operated it very effectively.

Colonels Alison and Cochran confer with British General Orde Wingate in India before Operation THURSDAY. Wingate's concept of long-range penetration (LRP) proved to be successful when coupled with the capabilities of the 1 ACG. The ability to rapidly insert supplies, equipment, and fresh troops, as well as evacuate wounded was a major factor in the success of the Burma operations.

OPERATION THURSDAY

Operation THURSDAY began on March 5, 1944, when the first C-47 launched from India towing two overloaded gliders filled with Wingate's troops, equipment, and supplies. A total of 26 transports towing gliders comprised the first wave. The gliders, carrying from 1,000 to 2,000 pounds of excess weight, strained the C-47 tow planes and ropes causing significant problems. With eight of the first wave of C-47s each losing a glider, Colonel Cochran decided to limit one glider to each remaining transport. This decision allowed the air commandos to successfully deliver Wingate's initial and succeeding forces to the jungle clearings over 200 miles behind Japanese lines in Burma.

Glider operations proved critical to the 1 ACG in the Burma campaign. Once released from the C-47 tow aircraft, they silently soared into a landing zone with critical cargo like troops and jeeps.

During the first day troops improved the airstrip, designated "Broadway," so transport, glider, and liaison aircraft could land safely. The aircraft brought supplies, equipment and reinforcements, and evacuated the injured. A second strip, opened by glider assault, relieved congestion at Broadway. Airlift inserted almost 10,000 men, well over 1,000 mules, and approximately 250 tons of supplies. Casualties from the high-risk, untested concept, including missing, totaled less than 150, and for the first time in military history aircraft evacuated all killed, wounded, and sick from behind enemy lines.

The air commandos also protected the British ground forces by harassing the Japanese. This harassment, conducted by P-51s and B-25s equipped with a 75mm cannon in the nose and 12 .50 caliber machineguns, included bombing bridges, strafing and bombing parked aircraft, air-to-air combat, and destroying the communications, transportation, and military infrastructure.

In a unique technique, P-51 pilots cut Japanese telephone lines by attaching a weighted cable to the aircraft. This cable hung down like a pendulum and cut the lines as the aircraft flew over. In another, not-recommended instance, the pilot flew through the wires and broke them with his aircraft.

Although Cochran and Alison's men were air commandos from the beginning, the 1 ACG was officially constituted on March 25 and activated on March 29, 1944. The 1 ACG continued to support British forces in Burma through April in an impressive manner. On April 4, P-51s armed with rockets attacked a concentration of Japanese aircraft at a northern Burma base. Caught by surprise, P-51s destroyed 26 Japanese aircraft along with two probables and eight damaged in this seven-minute attack; whereas a single P-51 took only a bullet in the wing.

Three Nepalese Gurkhas prepare to board an air commando C-47 bound for Burma. The question mark on the tails of the C-47s came from all the questions air commandos got about the unusual equipment attached to them for snatching gliders.

On April 21, four P-51s used 1,000-pound bombs in a dive-bombing tactic to destroy a major bridge that survived numerous attacks by other bomber forces. In late April, when a light plane carrying three wounded soldiers conducted an emergency landing on a road behind enemy lines, an air commando helicopter responded to recover them. Due to engine overheating and the limited payload capacity of the R-4B, it required four hazardous trips and two days to complete this mission. As mentioned earlier, this became the first, but not the last, combat rescue by helicopter.

OPERATION THURSDAY
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Air commando gliders continued to play an important role in supporting British forces with supplies and equipment for building additional airstrips in Japanese-held Burma. Although glider losses had been high in the initial stages of Operation THURSDAY with landings in rough and unimproved clearings, casualties had been surprisingly light.

Without gliders the invasion could not have succeeded. In contrast, the C-47s had a remarkable accident-free record. They flew almost 95% of their missions at night on instruments over hazardous terrain, utilizing short, rough landing strips deep behind enemy lines. Yet these pilots sustained no casualties and lost only one C-47 (it struck a water buffalo during a night landing).

The UC-64 light transports conducted 510 missions, flew 1,366 combat hours, and moved 510,780 pounds of cargo – impressive statistics made more impressive considering the small number of aircraft available.

Most of the 40 L-1 and L-5 liaison force losses in March and April occurred on landings and take-offs from the primitive strips, but none from enemy action. Light plane activities, perhaps the most impressive, logged an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 sorties with over 2,000 casualties evacuated from behind enemy lines, including non-battle casualties such as malaria, fatigue, and general sickness. This capability contributed significantly to morale since no longer did the sick and wounded have to be left behind. Operation THURSDAY's success resulted in the Distinguished Unit Citation for the 1 ACG.

The air commandos of World War II pushed American airpower into a new dimension, and established a number of firsts in our military history, including:

- first air unit designed to support a ground unit
- first composite air unit
- first aerial invasion into enemy territory
- first nighttime heavy glider assault landing
- first gliders airlift of large animals
- first major employment of light aircraft in combat
- first military unit to employ helicopters in combat
- first helicopter combat rescue

The 1st Air Commando Group inactivated after World War II, on November 3, 1945, and the Air Force disestablished it on October 8, 1948.

HURLBURT FIELD AND THE AIR COMMANDOS

After falling into disuse and disrepair following World War II, the Air Force reactivated Hurlburt Field in 1955 to receive the 17th Light Bombardment Wing which had moved from Japan. They trained at Hurlburt for three years before being succeeded by the 4751st Missile Wing of the Air Defense Command. The 4751 MW tested surface-to-air missiles launched from Okaloosa Island between Santa Rosa Sound and the Gulf of Mexico.

Emblem and Motto of the 1st Air Commando Group, 1962

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued a call to train airborne warfare specialists in response to Soviet Premier Nikita Kruschev's declaration directing the spread of communism throughout the Third World. This project, code-named Jungle Jim, began the revival of the air commando legacy here at Hurlburt Field. The Tactical Air Command activated the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) on April 14, 1961. Less than a year later it expanded to become the 4400th Combat Crew Training Group (CCTG), which provided the Air Force with a counterinsurgency and military assistance capability. As its responsibilities and size grew, the group assumed the air commando name and became the 1st Air Commando Wing (ACW) on June 1, 1963.

Worldwide deployment quickly became a way of life for the air commandos at Hurlburt Field. Only four months after activation, the first deployment occurred. Detachment #1, code-named Sandy Beach 1, deployed to Mali, West Africa, in August 1961 to train paratroopers. Before Detachment #1 returned home, Detachment #2, code-named Farmgate, departed Hurlburt in early November for South Vietnam to perform a six-month assignment, later extended. They trained South Vietnamese Air Force personnel and flew some of the earliest US combat missions of the war. The Farmgate contingent represented a significant portion of the 4400 CCTS' authorized manning of 124 officers and 228 enlisted. This initiated the high operations tempo and hazardous duty, which came to be hallmarks of air commando activity.

An A1E Skyraider," painted in "Farmgate" scheme, drops bombs on a target in Southeast Asia. Air Commandos flew some of the earliest U.S. combat missions in Vietnam.

Detachment #3 personnel and aircraft, also known as Bold Venture, deployed to Panama to initiate air commando involvement in Latin America. This country became a major area of interest to which mobile training and civic action teams deployed regularly. Panama benefited from the development of airfields, schools, water and sanitation projects, and medical care in the interior. Other countries in which air commandos operated in 1962 included Venezuela, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Greece, Crete, Iran, Turkey, and Germany. Countries seemed to be added every year until 1995, when their number exceeded 65.

Attorney General Robert Kennedy greets members of Detachment 3, 1 ACG, Panama Canal Zone

VIETNAM

As the Vietnam War expanded in scope and intensity, the Air Force increased its counterinsurgency capability and dedicated most of its special operations resources to the war in Southeast Asia. Propeller aircraft such as the T-28, B-26, C-47, and A-1 appeared strangely out of place in a jet-age air force.

However, as one air commando commented, "Our planes may be obsolete and unsophisticated, but they can do our kind of job." That might be a C-47 dropping flares to illuminate the target; a B-26 making repeated strafing, rocket, and bombing passes; or a forward air controller (FAC) identifying a target for strike aircraft. Whatever it might be, the air commandos finished the jobs and met the expanded requirements and tasks of air operations in Vietnam. Air commando units performed psychological operations, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, forward air control, close-air support, and interdiction.

The gunship became the most important special operations development to evolve from the Vietnam War – the AC-47, the AC-119, and at its best, the AC-130. The AC-130 performed its interdiction and close-air support missions in an outstanding manner and proved to be the most effective "truck killer" in the war.

This radical concept, calling for a transport aircraft with side firing guns, met considerable initial opposition within the Air Force. However, after equipping and testing a C-47 in Vietnam, the results proved convincing.

Although vulnerable to enemy ground fire, the gunship had the advantage of being able to keep a target under constant fire by executing its signature orbit overhead. In the face of heavier ground fire, the Air Force responded by improving avionics and increasing gunship firepower to permit it to operate at higher and safer altitudes.

Gunship development progressed from the AC-47 through the AC-119G/K models, to the AC-130A during the Vietnam era. The AC-130H, and the newest gunship, the AC-130U, continued this legacy by providing greater capabilities and larger, more accurate weapons.

The initial armament of 7.62mm miniguns on the AC-47, while devastating to enemy ground troops, could not compare with the power of the 25mm, 40mm, and 105mm weapons of the AC-130U. Due to continuing technology improvements, day and night precision strikes came to be a gunship hallmark.

Members of the 1 ACG and a South Vietnamese observer discuss a training mission. Notice the B-26 in the background. Air Force special operators utilized a broad range of aircraft in Southeast Asia, many unwanted "cast-offs" from other U.S. military departments.

Side mounted 7.62mm mini-guns protrude from the door and windows of an AC-47 on the flight line at Nha Trang, AB, South Vietnam in 1967.

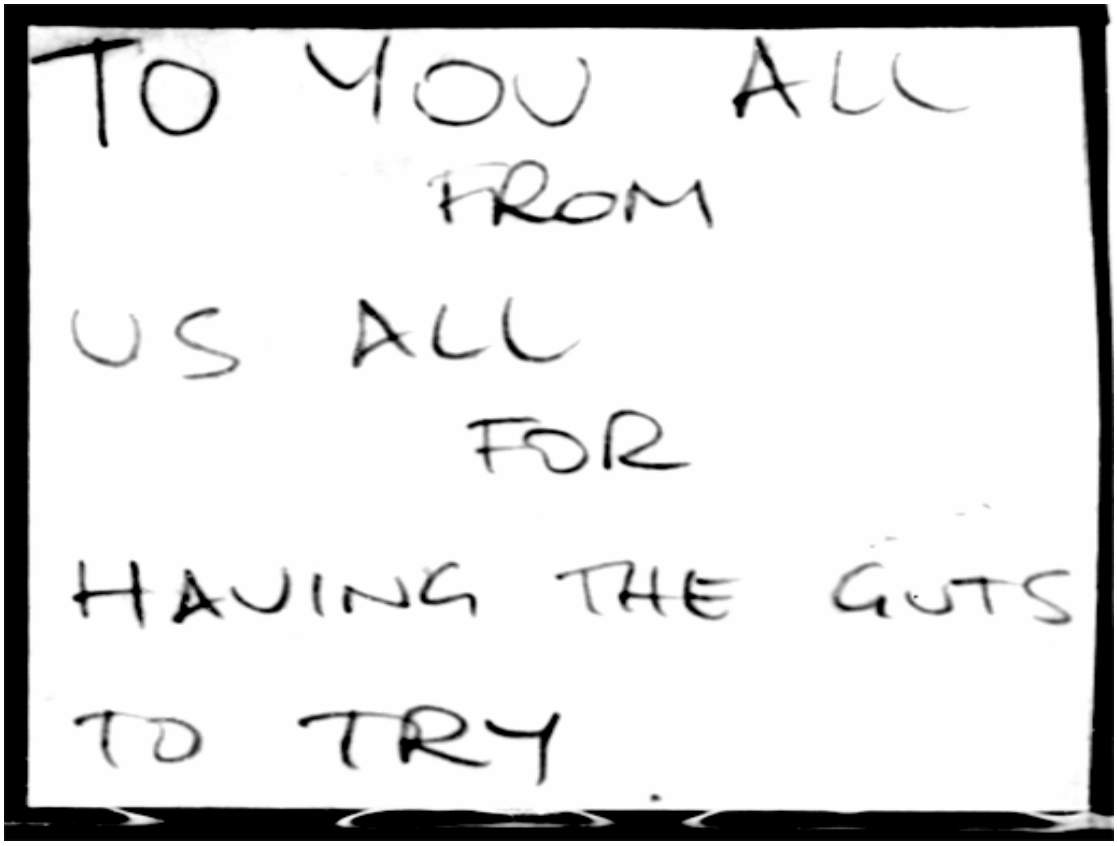
The wing concentrated almost exclusively on training aircrews enroute to Vietnam and increased its size significantly. By October 1965 Hurlburt had 165 aircraft of 10 different types assigned.

Due to the number of aircraft and the training requirements, the Air Force split operations into two wings – one at Hurlburt Field and one at England AFB, Louisiana. Headquarters, 1 ACW transferred to England and the 4410th Combat Crew Training Wing took charge at Hurlburt on January 15, 1966. Split operations continued until July 15, 1969, when 1 ACW headquarters transferred back to Hurlburt Field. During that time, the Air Force redesignated the 1 ACW as the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) effective July 8, 1968. Except for one year from July 1974 to July 1975, when it became the 834th Tactical Composite Wing, the wing remained the 1 SOW until October 1, 1993 when it then became the 16 SOW.

POST-VIETNAM INVOLVEMENT

In 1979, Iranian "students" overran the American Embassy in Teheran and took Americans hostage. When all diplomatic efforts proved unsuccessful, US special operations forces attempted a daring rescue, Operation EAGLE CLAW, in April 1980 with the 1 SOW playing a key role. Before the rescue could be attempted, however, weather and mechanical problems caused the mission to abort.

As the rescue forces began evacuating the area, a US Marine Corps CH-53 helicopter crashed into one of the EC-130s resulting in the death of the eight crewmembers with five assigned to the 8 SOS at Hurlburt Field. While this effort did not free any hostages, it demonstrated to the world the highest commitment to those in need and the willingness of the air commandos to risk and sacrifice their lives if necessary.



Foreign nationals, who operated at the airport from which forces launched their rescue attempt, inscribed this note on the box top of three cases of beer they sent to the returning forces.

The Hurlburt Field stained glass memorial tower is the centerpiece of the base chapel. Dedicated on April 25, 1980, it honored those who died in Iran, and commemorated all Air Commandos who lost their lives while assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing. Inside, on brass plates, are names of wing special operators who perished serving their country.

ARTIST'S CONCEPT

In the left hand corner, perched atop the 1st Special Operations Wing insignia sits the American bald eagle. In its beak it holds a fragment of yellow ribbon, which depicts the nation waiting. Curving outward from this area is a rainbow of color within which can be seen eight translucent diamonds, indicating the course of eight men's lives. The rainbow ends in an eight-pointed abstract starburst symbolizing the uniting of the eight lives in death. Man's love of God and his fellow man are shown in the spreading curvature of colors radiating outward from the starburst.

Design Artist: Jack Larusso, Ft Walton Beach
Stained Glass Artisans: Jerry & Dorothy Milton, Ft Walton Beach

Creation of 23rd Air Force

The Air Force consolidated combat rescue and special operations forces and assigned them to the Military Airlift Command (MAC) under a new Numbered Air Force, Twenty-third Air Force (23 AF), on March 1, 1983. The 1 SOW no longer belonged to Tactical Air Command (TAC) as it had been since 1961. The wing reported through the reactivated Second Air Division (2 AD) at Hurlburt Field and 23 AF at Scott AFB, Illinois.

This arrangement lasted almost four years until the 2 AD inactivated on February 1, 1987. Later in the year on August 1, HQ 23 AF moved to Hurlburt Field. The Air Force redesignated 23 AF, one of three Numbered Air Forces in MAC, to Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) on May 22, 1990 and concurrently established AFSOC as a major air command of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).

Operation BAT

On May 1, 1983, 20th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) aircrews received an important role in the Vice President's South Florida Drug Task Force. The 20 SOS helped curb the flow of illegal drugs into the United States through the Bahamas in Operation BAT by transporting Bahamian authorities and American drug enforcement agents to sites of drug action.

In almost 2½ years, the squadron flew over 1,100 sorties which supported the capture or destruction of over $1.5 billion in drugs, vessels, aircraft, equipment, and weapons. During the operation, one 20 SOS UH-1N helicopter crashed at sea resulting in the death of three squadron members.

Operation URGENT FURY

In late October 1983, the wing provided three AC-130H Spectre gunships and five MC-130E Combat Talons to support Operation URGENT FURY on the island of Grenada off the coast of Venezuela. The US government considered Americans, primarily medical students studying in Grenada, in imminent danger from anti-American elements. The United States organized a joint task force of Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine elements to affect their rescue with the 1 SOW aircraft leading the air assault. Without AC-130Hs to suppress ground fire, the MC-130Es could not have successfully dropped the Army paratroopers.

Wing personnel earned, among other awards, the Mackay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year, and the William H. Tunner Award as MAC's outstanding aircrew of 1983.

All wing participants contributed significantly to the 1 SOW earning the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (AFOUA) with Combat "V" for valor for the period of May 1982 through April 1984. Although the US knew the presence of Cuban military existed, their number exceeded expectations. The Combat Talons initially air-dropped and then air-landed the Army and later dropped leaflets to encourage the Cubans to surrender.

Operation JUST CAUSE

Six years later, in December 1989, relations between the US and the Panamanian government deteriorated to the point that the National Assembly of Panama, under General Manuel Noriega, declared war on the US. Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) personnel harassed Americans and even killed without provocation.

An American court had previously indicted General Noriega on drug charges, but he resided in Panama, thus not under American jurisdiction. These events caused President George Bush to order the execution of Operation JUST CAUSE on December 20, 1989.

Operation JUST CAUSE objectives included capturing General Noriega, delivering him to the United States to face drug charges, protecting American personnel and United States interests under the Panama Canal Treaty, and restoring democracy to the Panamanian citizens which had been suppressed by General Noriega.

All five 1 SOW flying squadrons, the 8th, 9th, 16th, 20th, and 55th Special Operations Squadrons, plus maintenance and other support personnel saw action in JUST CAUSE. With precise timing, despite very bad weather enroute, the Talons and gunships flew directly to their targets in Panama.

This extremely complex joint force operation started in the early morning hours when 16 SOS "Spectre" gunships opened fire on General Noriega's military headquarters. Following the headquarters attack US forces coordinated attacks on other key military targets in Panama.

An MC-130H, the type of aircraft flown by the 15 SOS

The massive air and ground assault in JUST CAUSE effectively defeated General Noriega and his PDF on the first day, leaving scattered and uncoordinated resistance. Despite accomplishing all operational objectives, Noriega remained at large until January 3, 1990.

In one of the highlights of JUST CAUSE, an 8 SOS aircrew flew Noriega from Howard AFB, Panama, to Florida, and then onto prison to await trial. The 1 SOW flew over 500 sorties and over 1,300 hours on schedule with no aircraft losses and no ground or air aborts while deployed to Panama.

The 1 SOW distinguished itself during JUST CAUSE. The Tunner Award, the Jabara Award, and the Mackay Trophy went to wing individuals. One squadron earned the Air Force Maintenance Effectiveness Award, and the wing received the Air Force Daedalian Maintenance Award for displaying the highest degree of maintenance professionalism. These honors climaxed wing efforts that resulted in an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for the period May 1988 through April 1990.

The 1 SOW personnel returned from Panama early in 1990 after missing Christmas and New Year's Day with their families. Less than six months later Iraq invaded Kuwait dashing hopes of 1 SOW personnel in spending their next Christmas season at home.

Operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM

Quickly, President Bush ordered ground, sea, and air forces to Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf as part of a multinational operation named DESERT SHIELD. Even with over 500,000 troops, this massive and technologically superior force failed to convince Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait and end his aggression.

In mid-January 1991, when all prospects for a peaceful solution had evaporated, President Bush ordered the execution of Operation DESERT STORM to expel Iraq from Kuwait. Hurlburt Field personnel played a significant role in DESERT STORM as part of Task Force Normandy.

Task Force Normandy consisted of MH-53 Pave Lows navigating a route for Army Apache helicopter gunships, which knocked out Iraqi early warning sites. This attack opened a hole in the air defense system to start the air war.

After Task Force Normandy, the Pave Lows served primarily in a combat search and rescue (CSAR) role and rescued a Navy flyer, Lieutenant Devon Jones, on January 21, 1991, resulting in the first successful combat recovery since Vietnam.

The MC-130E Combat Talon crews dropped psychological operations leaflets on Iraqi forces and employed a total of 11 15,000-pound, BLU-82 bombs in combat.

The AC-130H Spectre gunships flew armed reconnaissance, destroyed targets identified by intelligence, and provided close-air support of ground troops when requested.

The MH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters inserted Special Forces behind enemy lines and performed CSAR. Also, HC-130 Combat Shadow tankers flew deep into Iraq to refuel wing helicopters in a high threat environment.

By March 13, 1991, 1 SOW aircraft flew over 10,000 hours on more than 5,000 sorties. The loss of "Spirit-03," an AC-130H, and its crew of 14, resulted in the largest single loss suffered by any Air Force unit in Operation DESERT STORM. The gunship, supporting US Marines in a battle for the town of Khafji, remained in the area too long, and the morning light afforded the enemy the opportunity to shoot it down. Heroism often has an extremely high price. In this case, the aircrew of "Spirit-03" certainly recognized the potential cost to them and benefit to the Marines and accepted the risk.

MC-130 tankers from the 9 SOS fly over Saudi Arabia during Operation DESERT STORM

POST DESERT STORM

Operation DESERT CALM

The end of DESERT STORM did not end the 1 SOW's involvement in that part of the world. While other units deployed home, the 9th and 20th Special Operations Squadrons remained in Saudi Arabia in the event Operation DESERT CALM needed CSAR for aircraft operating in Saudi Arabia and Southern Iraq. Also, with Iraqi forces no longer occupying Kuwait, Saddam Hussein could once again turn his attention on the Kurdish population of northern Iraq.

Operation PROVIDE COMFORT

Saddam Hussein had ruthlessly quashed a Kurdish rebellion in the late 1980's. New fears of further Iraqi reprisals forced the Kurds to flee into southern Turkey. Operation PROVIDE COMFORT began humanitarian airlift of basic necessities to the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, and the United Nations (UN) established a no-fly zone over the Kurd's homeland. The 9 and 55 SOS provided CSAR capability for forces flying relief supplies into this rugged area and patrolling the no-fly zone.

An AC-130H gunship flown by the 16 SOS

Since 1991, the 8th, 9th, 15th, 20th, and 55th Special Operations Squadrons participated in PROVIDE COMFORT II, PROVIDE COMFORT III, and NORTHERN WATCH. In 1997, the 8 SOS provided CSAR capability to Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in Saudi Arabia.

Operations

PROVIDE PROMISE / DENY FLIGHT / DECISIVE ENDEAVOR

Events in the former country of Yugoslavia also involved 1 SOW personnel. The 20 SOS supported Operation PROVIDE PROMISE by delivering relief supplies to people in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the same area, 16 SOS gunships provided close-air support to UN ground forces in Operations DENY FLIGHT and DECISIVE ENDEAVOR.

The 16 SOS aircrews participated in the searches for American pilot Scott O'Grady and the rescue attempts of the French "EBRO-33" aircrew in Bosnia. Crews from the 20 SOS also participated in the rescue attempt of "EBRO-33," and the crash of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown's plane. The 4 SOS and 8 SOS also participated in Balkan operations until the 1 SOW units departed the region in 2000.

Operation CONTINUE HOPE

Operation CONTINUE HOPE in Somalia involved the UN in another humanitarian and peacekeeping mission. The wing supported this operation by deploying gunships from the 16 SOS. As called upon, the gunships attacked targets and patrolled the area.

In mid-March 1994, as American involvement decreased, one of the gunships crashed while on a routine patrol in support of Operation CONTINUE HOPE. Six of the crew of 14 survived, but this incident became the second time in a little over three years that the wing lost a gunship and crew. Also during that time, an MH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter crashed on a training mission. These three losses cost 25 skilled airmen their lives, and once again highlighted the high-risk nature of special operations.

Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY

In 1994 the Caribbean became a potential hot spot in world affairs. The return to power of the ousted Haiti president received UN and American support in Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY. To preclude resistance and possible bloodshed, an overwhelming force assembled which included the 1 SOW. However, this time the matter resolved peacefully.

Operation NOBLE ANVIL

In March 1999 the wing supported Operation NOBLE ANVIL, the air portion of Operation ALLIED FORCE in the Kosovo region. The 20 and 55 SOS played vital roles in the CSAR of downed F-117 and F-16 pilots. Within hours of being shot down CSAR crews returned the pilots to friendly forces with no losses to rescue personnel. General Wesley Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, commented, “CSAR is more precious than stealth.”

Overall, wing aircraft flew hundreds of sorties without losing a single aircraft to enemy fire. In addition to the CSAR operations, AC-130Us from the 4 SOS flew interdiction missions destroying Serbian border posts.

Operations ENDURING FREEDOM / IRAQI FREEDOM

As the new millennium began, the 1 SOW continued its high operations tempo. After the coordinated terrorist attacks in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, the 1 SOW continued to lead the nation's global war on terrorism. Aircraft, aircrews, maintenance, and support personnel have deployed in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM and performed their duties in the most austere conditions.

A 20 SOS Pave Low assists in recovery efforts at the Pentagon after the September 11, 2001 terrorists attacks.

By the end of 2006, the 1 SOW had flown more than 26,000 combat missions accumulating more than 80,000 flying hours in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM.

IN MEMORIAM

During the Vietnam era, the air commandos at Hurlburt Field renamed base streets to honor those killed in the line of duty. November 21, 1964 marked the first ceremony honoring 22 air commandos killed in Southeast Asia. On October 24, 1980, Hurlburt Field memorialized the five wing personnel killed in Iran during the hostage rescue attempt; on 28 May 1984 the three crewmembers killed during Operation BAT received honors; and the crew of Spirit 03 had Hurlburt streets named after them on January 31, 1992. Also, the wing named Hume Drive in memory of Colonel Harlan B. Hume, the 1 SOW Vice Commander who died in an EC-135 crash in New Mexico while participating in a joint training exercise.

The Airman Leadership School (ALS) renamed the ALS Auditorium after Airman 1st Class John Vincent, a victim of a lightning strike on the Hurlburt Field flightline in 1996. Also, the 20 SOS named their Operations Building in memory of Chief Master Sergeant John D. Selfridge, a 20 SOS member who died while on active duty in 1993.

Additionally, several memorial plaques are on display in the Hurlburt Field Memorial Air Park and "Walk of Fame." These honor aircrews and individuals who died in service to their country, as well as Air Force Medal of Honor recipients.

LINEAGE

Activated as the 16th Pursuit Group on December 1, 1932, in the Panama Canal Zone. Redesignated the 16th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) in 1939 and the 16th Fighter Group in 1942. Disbanded on November 1, 1943. Re-established and consolidated with the 1st Special Operations Wing on October 1, 1993, as the 16th Special Operations Wing.

Established as 1st Air Commando Group on August 9, 1944, and replaced the 1st Air Commando Group (a miscellaneous unit) which was constituted on March 25, 1944, and activated March 29, 1944. It was consolidated on August 9, 1944, with the headquarters unit of the new establishment; inactivated on November 3, 1945; disestablished on October 8, 1948; and re-established on April 18, 1962. It was activated and organized again on April 27, 1962; redesignated 1st Air Commando Wing on June 1, 1963; 1st Special Operations Wing on July 8, 1968; 834th Tactical Composite Wing on July 1, 1974; 1st Special Operations Wing on July 1, 1975.

To comply with then Air Force Chief of Staff General Merrill McPeak's directive that no active duty units would have the same designation, the Air Force decided to redesignate the 1 SOW rather than the 1st Fighter Wing located at Langley AFB, VA, because the latter possessed a higher heritage score. On October 1, 1993, the Air Force officially redesignated the 1 SOW as the 16th Special Operations Wing.

In 2006, the Air Force announced the stand-up of a second active duty Air Force Special Operations Wing at Cannon AFB, NM. Because of the proud and rich heritage of special operations and Hurlburt Field, Air Force leadership decided that it would return the Hurlburt based wing back to its original 1 SOW designation and activate a new 16 SOW at Cannon AFB. On November 16, 2006, the Air Force redesignated the 16 SOW back to the 1 SOW. The 1 SOW retained all the honors the 16 SOW garnered in its 13 year existence.

GROWTH

After each of this nation's conflicts, the military cut special operations forces dramatically. In the case of the Vietnam War, the Air Force Special Operations forces shrank from 6,000 people, 550 aircraft, and 19 squadrons at its peak, to one wing with three squadrons by 1979.

In the build-up years following the failed hostage rescue in Iran, additional squadrons activated. In 1989, the wing stood-up the 9 SOS and 55 SOS. The 15 SOS, added in 1992, along with Talon II aircraft, and the 6 SOS, with its foreign internal defense mission, further expanded the 1 SOW capabilities in 1994. Additional gunship capability in a new weapon system drove the creation of another squadron, the 4 SOS, in 1995. In 1996 the 19 SOS activated and provided centralized instruction and aircrew training for the wing. In 1999 the Air Force inactivated the 55 SOS. By the year 2000, the 6 SOS received qualification training on several dissimilar aircraft to include the Russian made Mi-17 helicopter, and the AN-26 and AN-32 aircraft, while also seeing its core mission area expanded.

In October 2005, the Air Force activated the 3 SOS and the 319 SOS. The 3 SOS, located at Creech AFB, NV, operates the MQ-1 Predator unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), a medium-altitude, long-endurance, remotely piloted aircraft. The 319 SOS flies the U-28A, a modified version of the Pilatus PC-12, and has a mission of providing intra-theater support for Special Operations Forces.

In August 2006, the Air Force activated the 73 SOS which flies the MC-130W. The unit utilizes the MC-130W Combat Spear to conduct infiltration, exfiltration, and re-supply of US and allied special operations forces in direct support of unified and theater special operations commands. The MC-130W is also capable of refueling special

operations rotary wing assets, forward arming and refueling, ordnance delivery, psychological operations support through airdrops, and to some extent, command and control functions.

Also in August 2006, the 8 SOS ceased operating the MC-130E Combat Talon and prepared for AFSOC's newest platform, the CV-22 Osprey. On November 16, 2006, the 8 SOS welcomed its 22nd type of aircraft by accepting the ceremonial key for the unit's first CV-22.

The CV-22's mission includes infiltration, exfiltration, resupply missions, and rapid mobility while leaving a small footprint. The aircraft's speed allows it to reach destinations worldwide much quicker than a helicopter. When in airplane mode, the aircraft is 75 percent quieter than other fixed-wing aircraft, which is beneficial when heading into unknown territories. It has the capacity to fly long ranges before refueling, and it can reach speeds of more than 275 mph.

The concept for the CV-22 evolved from the Operation EAGLE CLAW disaster in 1980. The need for an aircraft to cover long distances quickly with few refuelings, have the ability to convert to helicopter mode and remain as quiet as possible was in need then, as it is now.

The AFSOC aircraft of the future.
The 8th Special Operations Squadron transitioned from the MC-130E Combat Talon to the Bell OV-22 Osprey in November 2006.

CONCLUSION

The 1 SOW, like its predecessors the 1 ACW, and 1 ACG, fills needs not met by the rest of the Air Force, by providing a rapid reaction force for global special operations tasks. More and more, the wing also responds to calls for conventional support. Its impressive list of capabilities includes close air support, airlift, airdrop, interdiction, infiltration, exfiltration, supply and resupply, psychological operations, search and rescue, combat search and rescue, navigational path-finding, and varied and secure communications for Army, Navy, Marine, and other Air Force customers.

The wing prefers to operate in the dark rather than in the light due to slow airspeeds and limited maneuverability. The 1 SOW continues to build on its proud heritage as a unique, composite wing with a distinctive history. It stands ready to perform all assigned tasks "Any Time, Any Place."

COMMANDERS

16th Pursuit Group

Maj Robert L. Walsh.....2 Sep 33
Lt Col Willis H. Hale.....Sep 38
Maj Arthur L. Bump .....ca. 1939
Capt Robert J. Browne.....24 Feb 41
Lt Col Otto P. Weyland .....20 May 41
Maj John A. H. Miller.....1 Mar 42
Lt Col Philip B. Klein.....10 Apr 42
Lt Col Hiette S. Williams, Jr.....Sep 42
Maj James K. Johnson .....ca. 1943
Maj Edwin Bishop, Jr. .....25 Sep 43

1st Air Commando Group

Col Philip G. Cochran.....29 Mar 44
Col Clinton B. Gaty .....20 May 44
Col Robert W. Hall .....7 Apr 45

1st Air Commando Wing

Lt Col Miles M. Doyle.....27 Apr 62
Col Chester A. Jack.....29 Apr 62
Col Gerald F. Dix.....19 Mar 63
Col Harry C. Aderholt.....28 Mar 64
Col Gordon F. Bradburn .....10 Jul 64
Col Hugh G. Fly.....1 Dec 65
Col Alpheus W. Blizzard, Jr. .....3 Apr 67
Col Albert S. Pouloit.....9 Sep 67

1st Special Operations Wing

Col Leonard Volet.....14 Feb 69
Col Robert W. Gates.....15 Jul 69
Col Michael C. Horgan.....31 Oct 70
Col James H. Montrose.....1 Apr 73
Brig Gen William H. Holton.....11 Jan 74
Col Edward Levell, Jr. .....1 Jul 76
Col Richard H. Dunwoody .....29 Jul 77
Col T. W. A. Stuart.....13 Sep 80
Col Hugh L. Cox III.....26 Jul 82
Col Hugh L. Hunter .....1 Mar 83
Col Leonard A. Butler.....12 Jul 85
Col Hanson L. Scott.....13 Jul 86
Col Dale E. Stovall .....13 Jul 87
Col George A. Gray III.....21 Jun 89
Col Charles R. Holland.....20 Jun 91
Brig Gen Maxwell C. Bailey .....7 Jun 93

16th Special Operations Wing

Brig Gen Norton A. Schwartz.....2 Jun 95
Col Richard L. Comer.....16 May 97
Col Donald C. Wurster .....12 Jun 98
Col David J. Scott .....29 Jul 99
Col Lyle M. Koenig Jr .....29 Jun 01
Col Frank J. Kisner .....28 Jun 02
Col Otis G. Mannon.....24 Oct 03
Col Norman J. Brozenick Jr.....7 Jul 05

1st Special Operations Wing

Col Norman J. Brozenick Jr.....16 Nov 06
Col Marshall B. Webb .....3 Jul 07

HONORS

Service Streamer

World War II

American Theater

Campaign Streamers

World War II

India – Burma
Central Burma

Southwest Asia

Defense of Saudi Arabia, 1990-1991
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait, 1991
Southwest Asia Cease Fire, 1991

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Grenada, 1983
Panama, 1989-1990

Joint Meritorious Unit Award

JUST CAUSE
DESERT STORM

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation

Burma & India, 25 Mar – 20 May 44

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award With Valor Device

1 May 82 – 30 Apr 84
1 Jun 97 – 31 May 99
1 Jul 03 – 30 Jun 05
1 Jul 05 – 30 Jun 07

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

Jul 63 – Jun 65
1 Jul 69 – 15 Apr 71
1 Jan 76 – 31 Mar 77
15 Jul 79 – 15 May 80
16 May 80 – 30 Apr 82
1 May 85 – 30 Apr 87
1 May 88 – 30 Apr 90
16 Apr 92 – 15 Apr 94
1 Jun 95 - 31 May 97
1 Jul 99 – 30 Jun 01
1 Jul 01 – 30 Jun 03

Authored by Mr Jeffrey Michalke
Approved for publication by
1st Special Operations Wing, Office of History