CHAPTER 5

THE 1990s – A VERY BUSY FORCE

The last decade of the twentieth century was extremely turbulent for Combat Control. Combat Control forces were split among seven different commands and they were deploying to hot spots almost continuously. Another demobilization, another draw down, constant deployments, training problems, and internal turmoil once again threatened the long-term survival of the career field.

1990 - CCT OVERVIEW - The decade of the 1990s would see combat controllers in every theater performing a wide variety of missions.

CENTRAL COMMAND - Controllers were deployed to Southwest Asia almost continuously supporting combat search and rescue (CSAR), weapons inspections, and relief efforts. A laundry list of CCT operations include:

- Provide Comfort,
- Southern Watch,
- Northern Watch,
- Desert Strike
- Desert Thunder,
- Desert Fox;
- United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspections; and
- in April 1996, they supported the evacuation of Monrovia, Liberia.

EUROPEAN COMMAND - Combat Controllers deployed in support of relief efforts to included Provide Promise, Provide Hope and others.

- In 1992, the Central Balkans - beginning with the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia - was an operational mission calling for CCT support. Controllers were called upon for air traffic control, worked airdrops of relief supplies, and provided long-range communications support.
- As hostilities continued to flare, CSAR and fire support were added to the list of their duties. CCT was attached to various allied forces as their primary fire support officers. They were attached to peace keepers from Russia, the Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Egypt, Malaysia, Pakistan, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. This created a lot of tension with conventional American forces. Non-rated personnel controlling air strikes was, and has always been, considered sacrilegious, especially to the United States Marine Corps (USMC).
- Traditional USAF leadership was not excited by the concept and created regulatory obstacles. Careful planning and meticulous documentation answered every nuisance. Young combat controllers were able to provide concise professional briefings on doctrine, tactics, and procedures on the spot. When challenged with bureaucratic problems, controllers presented well-documented training records and "just happened to have" current copies of the governing regulations.

SOUTHERN COMMAND - In September 1994, combat controllers deployed to Haiti in support of Operation Uphold Democracy. Combat Controllers worked over 200 air assault missions in less than 2 days.

The combat controllers continuously rotated into theater providing services to drug enforcement efforts, humanitarian efforts, and joint/combined exchange training.

PACIFIC COMMAND - Operation Sea Angel, a humanitarian effort in Bangladesh, was one of the last deployments of the team stationed at Clark AB in the Republic of the Philippines. In June 1992, Mount Pinatubo erupted, destroying the base. Combat controllers responded by providing ATC, security, and other special missions, helping to evacuate over 18,000 Americans. Ash clouds combined with a typhoon multiplied the challenges of airfield control. Later, the team was reconstituted and permanently assigned to Kadena AB, Okinawa.

OTHER OPERATIONS - Combat controllers provided services during several civilian disasters including Hurricane Andrew in Fall of 1992. In addition, the testing and development of new and emerging technologies continued to occupy combat controllers. The entire spectrum of mission equipment from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and the C-17; to radios and the MMLS, the CCTs have tested, refined, and many times developed tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) that facilitated employment.

THE AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

May 1990 - Hurlburt Field, Florida - Air Force Special Operations Command, was established in May 1990, with headquarters at Hurlburt Field, Fla. AFSOC is a major command and the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command, a unified command located at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

Mission

AFSOC is America's specialized air power. It provides Air Force special operations forces for worldwide deployment and assignment to regional unified commands. AFSOC's core tasks have been grouped into four mission areas: forward presence and engagement, information operations precision employment and strike, and special operations forces mobility.

AFSOC is responsible to USSOCOM for the readiness of Air Force special operations forces (SOF) for worldwide deployment. The command's SOF are composed of highly trained, rapidly deployable airmen who are equipped with highly specialized aircraft. These forces provide global ability to conduct special operations missions ranging from precision application of firepower, to infiltration, exfiltration, resupply and refueling of SOF operational elements. AFSOC's unique capabilities include airborne radio and television broadcast for psychological operations, as well as combat aviation advisors to provide other governments military expertise for their internal development. The command's special tactics squadrons combine combat control, combat weather and pararescuemen to ensure air power is integrated and operable with special operations and conventional forces.

The command is responsible for inland search and rescue in the 48 contiguous states. Combat Search and Rescue units also provide worldwide peacetime and CSAR operations in support of humanitarian and U.S. national security interest. Personnel and Resources AFSOC has approximately 19,000 active-duty, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian personnel. The command's five active-duty and five Reserve component flying units are composed of more than 160 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, including the AC-130H/U, C-130, EC-130, HC-130, MC-130E/H, MC-130P, HH-60 and MH-53.

Organization

The command's forces are organized under two active-duty wings, two Reserve wings and three National

Guard wings, two overseas groups and several direct report units. The command operates two major active-duty bases.

Wings

The 16th Special Operations Wing, also at Hurlburt Field, is the Air Force's only active-duty Special Operations Wing. The 16th SOW is primarily responsible to U.S. Central, Joint Forces, and Southern commands, but also provides augmentation forces to AFSOC groups forward deployed in Europe and the Pacific. The 347th Rescue Wing at Moody Air Force Base, Ga., is the command's largest active-duty Combat Search and Rescue unit. It provides combat-ready forces in support of CSAR operational missions.

Groups

The 352nd Special Operations Group (including a 720th STG Combat Control Team), at Royal Air Force Mildenhall, England, is the Air Force component for Special Operations Command Europe. The 353rd Special Operations Group, at Kadena Air Base, Japan (including a 720th STG Combat Control Team) , is the Air Force component for Special Operations Command Pacific.

The 563rd Rescue Group, at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., is a subordinate unit to the 347th Rescue Wing at Moody. The group oversees other CSAR units at Nellis AFB, Nev. The 720th Special Tactics Group at Hurlburt Field has combat controllers, combat weathermen and pararescuemen.

Subordinate Units

The Air Force Rescue Coordination Center at Langley Air Force Base, Va., is the executive agent for inland U.S. search and rescue, and is responsible for coordinating on-land federal search and rescue activities in the 48 contiguous United States. The U.S. Air Force Special Operations School at Hurlburt Field provides special operations-related education to Department of Defense personnel, government agencies and allied nations.

The 18th Flight Test Squadron, also at Hurlburt Field, conducts operational and maintenance suitability tests and evaluations for equipment, concepts, tactics and procedures for employment of special operations forces.

Gained Air Reserve Components

- 919th Special Operations Wing at Duke Field, Fla., is the command's only Special Operations Reserve Wing. It provides MC-130E and MC-130P aircraft that support helicopter refueling requirements to USSOCOM
- 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick AFB, Fla., assists in space shuttle launches at Cape Canaveral and performs civilian humanitarian rescues in addition to its combat search and rescue duties.
- Gained Air National Guard Units 106th Rescue Wing at Gabreski Field, N.Y., is the only Air Force combat search and rescue unit in the northeastern United States. It performs civilian humanitarian rescues in addition to its combat search and rescue duties.
- 129th Rescue Wing located at Moffett Field, Calif., performs civilian humanitarian rescues in addition to its combat search and rescue duties.
- 193rd Special Operations Wing at Harrisburg International Airport, Pa., provides the only airborne psychological operations platform in the Department of Defense with the EC-130 Commando Solo.
- 123rd Special Tactics Squadron at Standiford Field, Ky., provides combat controllers and pararescuemen for worldwide operational needs

- 209th Civil Engineer Squadron located at Gulfport, Miss., is AFSOC's only Guard civil engineer squadron supporting the command's transportable collective protection system mission.
- 280th Combat Communications Squadron at Dothan, Ala., is AFSOC's only Guard communications squadron.
- 107th Weather Flight at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Mich.;
- 146th Weather Flight at Pittsburgh; and the 181st Weather Flight at Dallas, are the command's three National Guard combat weather units.

DESERT SHIELD / DESERT STORM by Charles P. Tappero, Colonel, USAF (CCT) Retired

August 1990 - Ft. Bragg, North Carolina - In the summer of 1990, less than a year after the invasion of Panama, the United States again found itself on the brink of war. In August 1990, controllers deployed to Saudi Arabia as part of a massive buildup of coalition forces in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Conventional CCT Operations in Desert Shield / Desert Storm

Controllers surveyed more than 200 potential drop and landing sites and worked several key airfields. At Rafa Air Base, the teams worked over 1,650 C-130 sorties in just 10 days in marginal weather conditions.

Combat controllers were assigned to scores of US Army, USMC and allied maneuver elements. They were there as airlift command and control links and to control drop and landing when needed to support mission requirements. The CCTs became key to coalition operations because of their skills and technological edge. Each three-man team was equipped with a Global Positioning System (GPS) as standard equipment. The US Army and Marine Corps units were not so equipped. Consequently, the navigational abilities of the controllers became indispensable to the units to which they were attached.

In some instances, a team of controllers was placed at the point divisional scout elements. The CCT's high-mobility, multi-purpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) led the scout element to predetermined coordinates where they would wait for another scout vehicle to race back to the main body. Once the main body arrived at the point, the scout element, led by the CCT, carefully proceeded to the next way point. This went on throughout the first nights of the ground war all around Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait.

The CCTs led Marine and Army divisions through and around unexploded ordnance and minefields. The CCT/scout relationship was invaluable to the drive to liberate Kuwait. Not enough can be said about the confidence and leadership abilities of these young CCT NCOs who led entire US divisions across the desert. The maneuver element leaders were:

- 82nd Airborne Division - SSgt Vernon Simmons.
- 101st Air Mobile Division - SSgt Joe O'Keefe.
- 1st Armored Division - SSgt Todd Swenson.
- 3rd Armored Division - Sgt Jess Horstman.
- 1st Infantry Division - Sgt Terry Ness.
- 24th Infantry Division - TSgt Sean McPartland.
- 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force - SSgt Pat Moulton.
- XVIIIth Airborne Corps Engineer Battalion - SSgt Rick Bush.

A common trait shared by controllers was to help were they could and get the job done. They filled in wherever they where the could. When not in the tower, they worked with the armory, fuels, aerial port, and even base security. Security forces augmentation was not a big issue in the Persian Gulf combat zone. However, when the 1722nd CCS CCT - who did not immediately deploy - were called upon to work the main gate at McChord AFB, Washington - they were less than enthusiastic. Not only was the decision to augment the local security forces demeaning, but it also "rubbed salt in the wounds" of the ones who volunteered but were not chosen to go off to war.

Special Operations CCT Operations

Special tactics combat controllers participated in combat search and rescue (CSAR), fire support, DZ/LZ surveys and ATC missions. As an example, the new, but incomplete King Fahd International Airport was surveyed and operations commenced less than 24 hours after the survey was approved on 16 August 1990. The surveying controllers put in charge and became responsible for total airfield management at King Fahd. They were instrumental in coordinating the installation of runway lights; and upgrading the tower with electricity, drinking water, and air conditioning. All this was done while the air traffic count ballooned to a staggering 30,000 takeoffs and landings in just 4 weeks. By the time the airfield was transferred back to civil control, the traffic count had reached 3,000 takeoffs and landings a day.

When the invasion started, Special Tactics (ST) combat controllers continued to operate landing zones at the forward operating locations as well as emergency airfields for battle-damaged or minimum-fuel aircraft returning from combat missions in Iraq.

Radar Beacon Navigational Aids

One unique assignment was the beacon-update mission. ST combat controllers deployed surreptitiously along the northern Saudi border and placed radar beacons at GPS surveyed locations, inside Saudi Arabia. This gave coalition aircraft a means to accurately update their internal navigation system (INS); facilitating

Deep Penetration

Another mission that showcased CCTs' abilities took place on 22 January 1991. As part of a special operations force coalition, an STS controller infiltrated to within 15 kilometers of Baghdad on a classified mission. The controller's knowledge of fire support provided the team with the confidence to infiltrate deep into Iraq. The team's mission was to cut and disrupt the Iraqi command and control capabilities. They were able to cut numerous communication lines and get back out completely undetected.

Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR)

Staging out of Operating Location (OL) Batman, Turkey, combat controllers, PJs, and Army Special Forces provided vital CSAR coverage for the entire northern region of Iraq. Captain Terry Maki and SSgt Geoff Hitchcock were awarded Air Medals for their part in the rescue of a downed pilot deep in Iraq.

Common Ground

During the liberation of Kuwait City, conventional CCTs linked up with ST controllers at the international airport and provided ATC services for the next 36 hours. Smoke from the oil fires and unexploded ordnance added to the complexity of the mission. Here was one team, comprised of Combat Controllers from different units, working together for mission success.

Lessons Learned

Lessons were learned from Desert Shield, Desert Storm and the Liberation of Kuwait City. For example:

- A lack of adequate IFR (instrument flight rule) navigation aids and support capabilities hampered operations and led directly to the development of the mobile microwave landing system (MMLS), which is now standard combat control equipment.
- Training standards and equipment procurement, though not perfect, were on the right track and improving. Today's Combat Control Teams are some of the best equipped forces in the US Military establishment.
- The line between special operations CCTs and the conventional forces was drawn, not by controllers but by the command structure.

Traditional missions such as ATC, LZ/DZ surveys, and fire support were still at the core of CCT, while combat search and rescue (CSAR) and other special support missions loomed large on the horizon. Action was taken to train and equip the teams to support these newly assigned mission sets.

MAC COMBAT CONTROL OPERATIONS IN DESERT SHIELD/STORM by Charles P. Tappero, Colonel, USAF (CCT) Retired

1992 - Ft. Bragg, North Carolina – The following after-action report was submitted by LtCol Tappero in January 1992. It is followed by the citation accompanying the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor, for CCTs actions during DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM.

AFTER-ACTION REPORT

FROM: Commander, 1616th Combat Control Squadron Provisional (1616 CCSP)

SUBJECT: Combat Control Team Operations, Operation DESERT SHIELD / DESERT STORM.

TO: Commander, 1725th Combat Control Group (1725 CCG)

1. This after action will present an overview of MAC Combat Control Team (CCT) operations during Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM, Aug 90 – May 91.

2. The 1721st Combat Control Squadron (1721 CCS), Pope AFB NC initially deployed a CCT package to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia (SA) with the 82d Airborne Division (82 ABD), Ft. Bragg NC. This original package of 18 personnel was augmented by additional elements of the 1721 CCS and the 1722 CCS McChord AFB WA over the next four months. The final UTC of combat controllers arrived in Saudi Arabia in early Jan 91. By this time, the theater assigned personnel numbered 85 and was organized into the 1616 CCSP at Riyadh SA with Detachment 1 at Dhahran SA and Detachment 2 at King Fahad SA. A 9-man maintenance cell was established at Dhahran to repair and control all equipment for the squadron.

3. The Command Section of the 1616 CCSP was collocated with the 1610th Airlift Division Provisional (1610 ALDP) at Riyadh and received tasking directly from the theater Commander of Airlift Forces

(COMALF), Brig Gen Tenoso.

4. Initial tasking during Operation DESERT SHIELD were to survey drop and landing zones in Saudi Arabia for the establishment of Medical Support Teams (MASTs) throughout the northern tier. These assault strips were slated to act as transfer points for casualties being evacuated by helicopters to C-130 medevac aircraft. Combat Control Teams also surveyed and operated numerous DZ and LZ locations for aircrew training scenarios. Over 200 locations were surveyed resulting in approximately 60 usable DZs and LZs. Weekly combat exercises at night LZs coupled with a night training bundle drop were conducted in the Nov 90 through early Jan 91 time frame in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

5. In Dec 90, CCT was tasked to survey potential airfields along the Iraqi border that could sustain a massive troop movement. These airfields were to become the jumping off points for the ground war. Combat Control Team worked both ends of the forward deployment of troops from the XVII Airborne Corps, the 82d Airborne Division, the 101st Airmobile Division (101 AMD) and elements of the 24th Mechanized Infantry. The prime airfield for forward deployment of the US flanking force was Rafa SA. CCT surveyed and operated this airfield for the initial 10 days of the deployment working over 1,650 sorties on a 24-hour a day schedule. The original flow as fraged for one aircraft every 10 minutes; however, weather problems drastically slowed this ambitious flow and on occasion halted the flow altogether. This illustrated a define need for our CCTs to be equipped with a C-130 portable radar capability. The US Army aviation elements have a radar capability; however, it required 13 C-130 sorties and over land hauling of equipment that was 1950s technology. Once operational at Rafa, over 72 hours after all assets arrived, this radar was down approximately 50% of the time. Additionally, the Army includes no night lighting in their package.

5. Once Army and Marine ground forces were in-place, the battle field was designated into thirds with two Army corps; the XVIII Airborne Corps, the VII Corps, and the equivalent of a Marine Corps (two Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEF)), each assigned a corridor. Prior to the commencement of the air war, I assigned a 3-man CCT element with vehicle to each forward Army and Marine division in all three corps areas. Each CCT maneuver element was equipped to operate day/night DZs and a 5,000 foot day/night runway for approximately 72 hours, requiring only food, fuel, and ammunition replenishment from the Army. These elements were tasked through the Airlift Control Center at the 1610 ALDP and attached to the MAC Tactical Liaison Officer (TALO) assigned to each division. This lash up worked well as I was the theater manager for all the TALOs in country and the commander of CCT forces. I also attached a 3-man CCT element to an Army engineer battalion charged with rapid runway repair to support the flanking forces. This element with the French 6th Armor Division. The division which had CCT attached were: 1 MEF, 2 MEF, 82 ABD, 101 AMD, 24 ID (M), 1 AD, 3 AD, 1 ID (M), and the XVII Corps Engineer Battalion.

7. Our CCT elements were used differently by each division. Some were attached to the G-4 Logistics and others to the G-3 Operations. I believe we functioned well in both arenas and the Army/Marine division being supported was best equipped to determine where our expertise could best serve them. One of our elements attached to the Marines was with a forward scout platoon because of CCT'

expertise with the Global Positioning System (GPS) and was used to help lead the 2 MEF into Kuwait City.

8. These forward CCT elements became the main MAC Command and Control link with the forward Army/Marine units providing real time weather assessments and battlefield intelligence. They were looked to by the Army/Marines to find and operate areas to be used for landing zones and drop zones to resupply the ground force while on the move through Iraq and Kuwait.

9. In addition to the elements attached to the Army and Marines, we had designated LZ teams to operate two Navy/Marine airfields (Khanjar LZ and Ras Mishab Airfield), a Army logistics base, (Log Base Charlie) and a full 18-man unit to operate Kuwait City International Airport.

9. Once the ground war commenced our CCT elements, were part of the seizure package as As Salmon, Iraq, where one element found the flight papers and ID card of a British pilot who was a POW. CCT elements assisted in the disposal of unexploded ordnance as various airfields came into allied control. From As Salmon teams moved east to Tallil and Jalibah in Iraq where they cleared these airfields, worked air traffic, then coordinated with Air Force Red Horse units to destroy the airfields as allied forces converged on Kuwait.

11. While moving through Iraq CCT worked five resupply airdrop missions, medevac casualty emergencies, a highway landing strip in Northern Kuwait, captured 40 POWs, controlled three close air support strikes and conducted surveys of over 100 potential drop and landing zones.

11. As the Marines converged on Kuwait City, our CCT elements proceeded to the International Airport and assumed air traffic control. The first sorties in plussed up the first six personnel to 20 controllers and the airport was opened for traffic after extensive removal of unexploded ordnance and coordination with Army and Marine helicopter traffic.

13. The ground war moved through Iraq and Kuwait so fast that many airfields that were planned to be used were quickly passed by.

13. Listed are the major airfields and assault strips that CCT controlled during Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM:

- Rafa, SA - 1,656 fixed wing sorties (includes French/British), 400 helicopter sorties.
- Abquaiq LZ, SA - 860 fixed wing/200 helicopter sorties.

- Khanjar LZ, SA - 1,490 fixed wing sorties
- Ras Mishab Airfield, SA - 1,680 fixed wing sorties
- Kuwait Highway Landing Strip - 40 fixed wing sorties
- Kuwait City International Airport - 2,120 fixed wing (all allied forces), 600 helicopter sorties
- Scores of dirt strips in SA were operated for short periods of time.

15. Your two-squadron commanders LtCol Jim Oeser, 1721st CCS and LtCol Steve Scott, 1722 CCS did a superb job of training their troops. The men from both CONUS squadrons were well prepared and equipped to perform their wartime mission. The exception would be the lack of an IFR radar capability to provide our aircrew assistance in the weather and in the case of Kuwait City, smoke.

16. Our training in air traffic control weather, demolitions, small arms, and field tactics were all used extensively. The GPS was used constantly both in navigation and surveys, as documented in the study sent you at the conclusion of the war.

17. Initial problems with mobility, the UTCs and equipment were addressed and quickly resolved by your staff. Of particular note was the work done by Captain Steve McLeary on the UTCs and the MAC mission support designation and MSgt Glen Palmer for his outstanding work in solving out lithium battery shortfall. TSgt John Jones enhanced our mission capability significantly with his hard work on the remote control runway lights.

18. Also worthy of recognition was the outstanding work of Maj Ron Watkins and Chief Rudy Elizondo for their job of organizing the troops. Capt Ray Heath and Chief Elizondo did tremendous work at Kuwait City International Airport as did Maj Willet: 2 MEF – SSgt Molten; 82 ABN – SSgt Simmons: 101 AMD – SSgt O'Keefe; 24 ID – TSgt McPartland; 1 AD – SSgt Swensen; 3 AD – SSgt Horsman; 1 ID Engineer Battalion – SSgt Bush -- were all superb.

18. It was an honor to serve.

CHARLES P. TAPPERO, LtCol, USAF, Commander, 1616 CCSP

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE AIR FORCE OUTSTANDING UNIT AWARD (WITH VALOR)
TO THE
1616th COMBAT CONTROL SQUADRON PROVISIONAL
(From Charles Tappero collection)

The 1616th Combat Control Squadron Provisional, of the 1610th Airlift Division Provisional, Central Command, Riyadh Air Base, Saudi Arabia, distinguished itself by exceptionally meritorious service from 9 August 1990 to 31 March 1991 in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. During

this period, the 1616th Combat Control Squadron Provisional, spearheaded the combat offensive of eleven United States Army, Marine and French divisions encompassing three C0orps. They provided vital air traffic control, intelligence gathering, a command and control link, close air support, explosive ordnance disposal and weather observations at forward area assault landing and drop zones while attached to combat forces during the ground offensive into Iraq and Kuwait. The professionalism, knowledge, and technical skills of the 1616th Combat Control Squadron Provisional personnel contributed directly to the fulfillment of national objectives. The distinctive accomplishments of the members of the 1616th Combat Control Squadron Provisional while engaged in direct action against a force hostile to the United States, reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.

720th SPECIAL TACTICS GROUP – Finally, a world-wide Combat Control consolidation

March 31, 1992- Hurlburt Field, Florida - On March 31, 1992 the 720th Special Tactics Group was activated. The 720 STG is an integral part of the Air Force Special Operations Command and is home-based at Hurlburt Field, Fla. The group is comprised of more than 800 Special Operations Combat Control, Pararescue, Combat Weather and support personnel.

The 720th STG organizes, trains and equips Special Tactics forces worldwide to provide airmanship expertise and establish and control the air-to-ground interface in an objective area.

It also provides long-range operational and logistics planning, and deploys command and control elements during special tactics force employment or deployment. Lastly, it functions as the command's proponent for military parachuting, diving and other special tactics-related matters.

Squadrons within the 720th STG are composed of Air Force Combat Controllers, Pararescuemen and Combat Weathermen. Combat Controllers and Pararescuemen are specifically organized, trained and equipped to control aviation assets and provide search and rescue, trauma care and evacuation staging of the wounded. Combat Weathermen support the Army Special Forces Groups, the 75th Ranger Regiment, and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment by generating accurate, mission tailored forecasts for ingress, employment, and egress of air, land and sea forces, and conduct special weather reconnaissance.

Units

The group has five units in the continental United States:- 21st and 24th Special Tactics Squadrons, Pope Air Force Base, N.C.- 22nd Special Tactics Squadron, McChord Air Force Base, Wash.- 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla.- 10th Combat Weather Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla. The 10th CWS has five subordinate active duty detachments, and three Air National Guard combat weather flights.

The 720th STG is also the functional manager for AFSOC's two overseas Special Tactics squadrons: the 320th under command of the 353rd Special Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan, and the 321st under the command of the 352nd Special Operations Group at RAF Mildenhall, England.

The 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, an Air National Guard unit based at Standiford Field, Ky., augments the 720th STG in supporting national security objectives, humanitarian efforts and training.

Lineage

Established as 1720th Special Tactics Group, and activated, on 1 Oct 1987. Redesignated 720th Special Tactics Group on 31 Mar 1992.

Emblem Significance

Blue and yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The swords symbolize the elite forces merged to form the Group. They are crossed above the globe, in a protective gesture signifying strength and unity. The globe stands for the worldwide mission of the Group. The division of the globe stands for day and night readiness. The three stars and the three parts of the shield reflect the insertion methods of the forces---land, sea and air.

HUMANITARIAN MISSION ? ?

THE SOMALIA OPERATION

August 1992 - Mogadishu Airport, Somalia - Operations in Somalia began as a humanitarian airlift to relieve the starvation caused by years of civil war. Combat controllers operated landing zones throughout the country beginning in August 1992.

Early on, the commander of deployed forces could see the handwriting was on the wall:

"The strong get the food and the weak become reliant on the strong."

Armed factions stole food and crushed the weak and the operation dragged on for months. Things in Somalia deteriorated into open warfare, particularly in the capital city of Mogadishu, and the United States felt the key to speedy resolution was the capture of Mohammed Farah Aideed, one of the more hostile faction leaders. The operation changed to an armed relief mission later that year.

Special Tactics Team Concept Validated - A mission on 3 October 1993 would validate the special tactics concept in a most unpleasant manner. Reports indicated that Aideed and his lieutenants were meeting at the Olympic Hotel in downtown Mogadishu. Teams airlifted by helicopter from their forward operating base at Mogadishu Airport. Blocking elements were fast-roped into strategic intersections; as the main assault force moved into the area. Once in place, they rounded up combatants and suspects transporting them to a holding area in the rear. SSgt John McGarry and Sgt Pat Rogers were both assigned to blocking elements, and SSgt Jeff Bray accompanied the assault force.

As the blocking force fast-roped into place and set up they could see the incoming fire was growing more intense. Immediately, they called for the close air support by attack helicopters. SSgt Bray's calls for fire quickly suppressed slowed incoming fire. At first, the mission seemed to be going well and they expected to be in and out quickly. However, as the assaulters were regrouping and preparing to move out, SSgt Bray received a disturbing call from the command and control helicopter, orbiting above. "Super 61 is down; move immediately to the crash site."

The Somalis had downed an orbiting Blackhawk helicopter with an RPG; a shoulder-fired rocket-propelled grenade. The crash site was only 300 yards northeast of his team; unfortunately, those 300 yards were through a honeycomb of buildings, streets, and alleys. Each corner, window, and doorway was a potential hiding spot for a sniper or, worse, a Somali with an RPG. SSgt Bray's team quickly but cautiously made their way to the downed chopper. The assaulters split into two elements and leapfrogged down the street. As one group bounded forward, the other provided covering fire. The closer the rescuers got to the downed helicopter, the more intense the gunfire became.

As they approached the crash site, Bray's team could see Somali gunmen racing to the downed helicopter on parallel roads and alleys. The Somalis were thirsty for American blood. Other friendly elements were in the area in blocking positions. However, they had their hands full fending off other gunmen attracted to the crash site. Consequently, they were not able to lend Bray's team any assistance.

SSgt Bray's element began to take serious casualties and needed to get out of the street and into some type of cover. After repeated attempts, SSgt Bray was able to break open the doors to a small courtyard. He and his team members cleared the yard and the adjacent home, detained the residents, and set up a casualty collection point. This position also became the control point from which SSgt Bray would direct helicopter gun-ships attacks. Gun ships were overhead, but needed direction to attack the bad guys and prevent friendly casualties. For the next 15 hours, SSgt Bray directed helicopter gun ships onto targets as close as 10 meters from his position. Expended 7.62 mm shell casings often rained down onto his team's position as the helicopters maneuvered overhead.

There were other combat controllers in the area that did not have contact with the gun ships. They relayed critical information to SSgt Bray, who then supported them as he directed the strikes. Several times through the course of the night, he exposed himself to hostile fire in order to accurately call in the helicopter fire missions. For his actions, SSgt Bray was awarded the Silver Star, the first awarded to a combat controller since the war in Southeast Asia.

While the battle raged around the Olympic Hotel, other task force members worked frantically to find a route to the downed aircraft and their trapped comrades. Seven controllers were part of the effort.

MSgt Jack McMullen's convoy was caught in an ambush before they could ever get to the Olympic Hotel area. The Somalis ambushed the lead vehicle by firing an RPG. MSgt McMullen was in the second vehicle, turned perpendicular to the road, and set up a hasty blocking position for the rest of the convoy. The four following vehicles turned around and quickly departed the area. In fact, they left so quickly that they left MSgt McMullen behind. For awhile, McMullen and his team were on their own, escaping and evading throughout the city as they tried to find their way back to the airport. After returning to the task force compound, MSgt McMullen volunteered to reenter the area with another convoy. This time he made the trip with a Malaysian tank. The second rescue attempt proved more successful. It diverted the Somalis' attention enough to bring some relief to the trapped task force members.

As dawn broke across the city, the Somali gunmen began to filter away. The beleaguered controllers and their teammates regrouped, counted heads and loaded on vehicles for the ride back to the airport. The all-night battle was some of the most viscous fighting since Vietnam. The task force lost 18 men and sustained 84 injuries. General Aideed's forces suffered incredible losses. Some estimates put the KIAs and wounded as high as several thousand.

- All the controllers involved in the operation performed bravely. Some were recognized with Bronze Stars, including MSgt McMullen (with Combat V), MSgt Bob Rankin, SSgt Ray Benjamin, and SSgt Dan Schilling.
- In keeping with Combat Control tradition, MSgt Rankin was the last military member off the streets of Mogadishu.

Post Script

There is a sad ending to this story. Two days later, the Somalis were lucky and dropped a mortar round right

into the entrance of the task force's compound. A death and several more injuries were added to the already bloody list of casualties. Additionally, following the battle, the Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, resigned in disgrace. He had earlier refused to grant the task force commander's request for M-113 armored personnel carriers (APC).

Lessons Learned

Today, the Introduction of the Special Tactics checklist contains pearls of wisdom gleaned from Somalia operation. They are there as reminders and keys to future success.

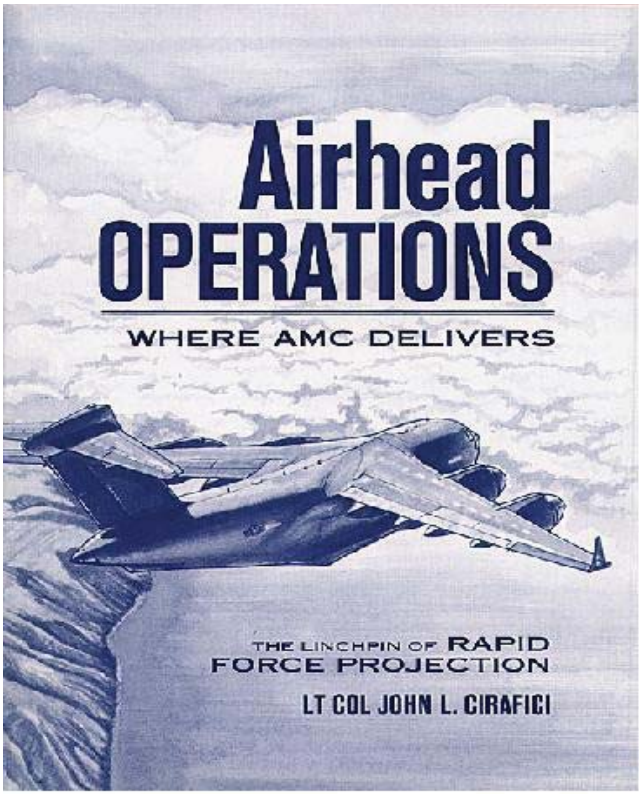
In addition, Special Tactics recognized the need for a more effective system for extracting personnel from downed aircraft. The rapid extraction deployment system (REDS) kit is now standard issue and the search and rescue (SAR) Security Team reflects the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) learned from the Somali operation.

Day and night urban close air support (CAS) tactics were reevaluated and modified to assure compatibility with current tactics.

The most significant outcome was the shift in attitude among sister-service commanders. Special Tactics proved to be essential to the joint team effort and no one could deny it. However, the general public remains pretty much unaware of CCT and it's contributions to the defense of the nation. This was reflected in the movie Blackhawk Down.

AIRHEAD OPERATIONS -- WHERE AMC DELIVERS: THE LINCHPIN OF RAPID FORCE PROJECTION by Colonel John L. Cirafici, formerly A1C, CCT, Dyess AFB, Texas & Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam

March 1995 – The Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama -- This award winning book by Colonel John L. Cirafici, he reviews airhead activity in contingencies during World War II and in operations Urgent Fury, Just Cause, Desert Shield/Storm and Restore Hope. He examines the newly activated Air Mobility Command (AMC) structure within the theater and discusses the Somali civil war to illustrate how airhead's air mobility forces fit into the overall scheme of force deployment, reassembly, employment, and sustainment. Colonel Cirafici identifies some problems and needed improvements and recommends that AMC look beyond past successes and provide greater effort toward training and exercises to promote jointness at all operational levels.



Airhead Operations by John L. Cirafici >>>
1995, 109 pages - ISBN: 1-58566-057-4 - $6.50
Air University Press
Catalog Number and free download link: Order No. B-60

EDITOR'S NOTE

John Cirafici began his Air Force career as an enlisted combat controller at the 10th Aerial Port Squadron, Dyess AFB, Texas in the mid-1960s; later serving at Khe Sanh, South Vietnam. Read his entire biography at the Air University website. Among other things in his book, you will find copies of AIRFIELD SURVEYS signed by combat controllers who were serving in Somalia and other combat operations during the period

'CHUTE FOR THE STARS from Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs

Special Tactics teams drop in to assist recruiting.

July 22, 1996 - Hurlburt Field, Florida – The AFSOC STARS were born on July 22, 1996. They were formed as a recruiting tool to aid US Air Force recruiting service in the drawing young men into the Air Force. The following story ***'Chute for the STARS'*** written several years after their activation by the AFSOC Public Affairs Office.

Staff Sgt. Tim Donovan stays prepared to deploy with little notice. Trained to slip silently behind enemy lines, the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla., pararescueman has been quietly doing his job for 16 years with little fanfare.

That is until now. These days, Donovan often wows crowds of 100,000 people and millions of television viewers as part of Air Force Special Operations Command's Parachute Demonstration Team.

*<<< "Flying" red. white and blue "squares" the STARS parachutes proudly display the phrase **Aim High – Air Force**. (Courtesy Photograph)*

Called **Special Tactics and Rescue Specialists**, or **STARS**, the team is comprised of combat controllers and pararescuemen (known as CCTs and PJs) who help recruiters attract potential enlistees, especially those interested in special tactics jobs.

"We talk to people about the Air Force as a whole, such as quality of life and skills training. But because CCT and PJ career fields face critical manning shortages, we obviously encourage them to try these demanding jobs, if they qualify," said Wayne Norrad, STARS coordinator, and a retired CCT chief master sergeant.

<<< Washington State ---- Florida Keys >>>

The STARS have performed around the country. From Washington state to the Florida Keys – and hundreds of locations in between - they are enthusiastically welcomed by throngs of spectators. (Courtesy Photographs)

Norrad, who once served as AFSOC senior enlisted advisor, said STARS evolved from McChord AFB, Wash., CCTs "jumping here and there" to support a nearby recruiter. At one event the chief attended in 1996, people mistook the BDU-clad airmen for Army paratroopers. Afterwards, CCTs coaxed him into starting a team clearly stamped as Air Force, one that could perform and support recruiters nationwide.

Working with Headquarters Recruiting Service, Norrad suggested the concept to AFSOC leadership, and on July 22, 1996, STARS was born. Just two months later, as part of POW/MIA Recognition Day, one jump team landed in the National Football League Carolina Panthers' stadium, while another team landed on the 50-yard line of a nationally televised NFL game at Foxboro, Mass.

"We were pushed to the very end waiting for parachutes to be manufactured with the 'Aim High' Air Force logo and with last-minute training and coordination, but we made it," Norrad said.

Unlike the Air Force Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds, STARS isn't Department of Defense sanctioned. In other words, they have other full-time jobs. The 30 jumpers belong to operational squadrons at Pope AFB, N.C., McChord AFB and Hurlburt Field, and could be parachuting at a New York air show on Sunday and deploying to real-world contingencies in Southwest Asia or some other hot spot on Monday.

"Whenever we perform, I always stress that we are combat-ready, that we could be sent into hostile fire the next day – that catches everyone's attention," said Norrad, who earned three Bronze Star Medals in combat and also came up with the rescue scene for producer Wolfgang Petersen's blockbuster movie "Air Force One" starring Harrison Ford, before retiring in 1997 with 30 years' service.

Because of the high operations tempo for AFSOC special tactics members, CCTs and PJs from other major commands, the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command were asked to try out for STARS this year. "We really needed their help," Norrad said. "Without them we wouldn't be able to muster a full team for more than half of our shows."

To become a STARS member, airmen must have at least 200 free-fall jumps. And for some special events, such as dropping into a stadium, they must be "pro-rated" by the U.S. Parachute Association, which requires 500 jumps and being able to land standing up in a 10-meter circle, 10 times in a row. Slip on your ninth try and you start again.

And they must be proficient with show parachutes much smaller than military ones. With demonstration canopies, jumpers go faster and maneuver quicker as they race toward the ground.

"It can be a little hairy sometimes," Donovan admitted. "Especially when the winds swirl."

Since 1996, STARS teams, typically four parachutists, a ground controller and a narrator, have jumped two or three times monthly at packed air shows, open houses, car races or ballgames, essentially all on off-duty time.

"We know recruiters have a tough challenge finding potential candidates who can qualify for the CCT or PJ career fields," Norrad said.

"Plus, we have an awareness problem. Most people know of the Army Rangers and Special Forces, Navy SEALS or Force Recon Marines, but few are aware that the Air Force has ground combat forces."

But they also do it for the excitement, according to Donovan, who served in Desert Storm, Provide Comfort, Provide Promise and Urgent Fury.

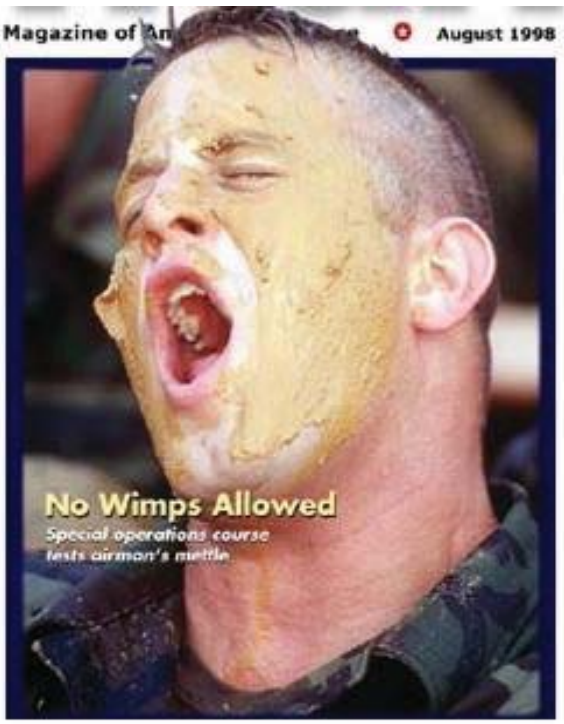
"There are special moments," he said, "like when we mingle with Medal of Honor recipients."

Plus, Donovan said, laughing, "We're guests people don't mind having drop in for a while."

NO WIMPS ALLOWED Story and photos by Master Sgt. Val Gempis

Special operations course tests airmen's mettle.

1998 - Pope AFB, North Carolina -- His hands and feet shackled by rope, Senior Airman Todd Popovich, stood by the edge of the pool. His body hurt so much it finally went numb. "I must be crazy," he muttered as he readied to jump into 12 feet of water. At that moment, he would have given a week's pay to obtain the secret to Houdini's underwater straight jacket escape act.



He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and disappeared into the pool.

Popovich recently took part in one of the most physically demanding courses in the military – a 10-week Pararescue and Combat Control Indoctrination course at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. The task described above, called drown-proofing, is designed to increase confidence in water and teach students to react calmly and rationally in high-stress situations.

"This training questions your confidence every time you wake up in the morning," Popovich said. "It's not if I can do it, but do I want to. It's a gut check."

The course recruits, screens and trains pararescue and combat control candidates for Air Force Special Operations units. Pararescuemen are search and rescue specialists with emergency medical capabilities. Their mission is to recover combat aircrew in austere environments. Combat controllers are trained to provide air traffic control support. They deploy to forward locations and establish assault zones.

When he was a security policeman, Popovich idolized pararescuemen. "I needed a challenge," he said.

He got it.

Popovich's class started with 76 students. Only 11 survived the grueling schedule.

Before completing the course, trainees must meet final requirements, which include a 6-mile run in 42.3 minutes, a 4,000-meter swim with fins in 80 minutes, and 75 push-ups, 80 sit-ups, 13 pull-ups, 14 chin-ups and 85 flutter kicks in two minutes each. And all of that has to be done in one day.

But the most challenging part of the course is "Motivation Week," a three-day test of physical will. Popovich had nightmares about Motivation Week. In the middle of one night he saw an instructor standing by his bed. He thought it was a

dream. It wasn't. Next thing he remembered was crawling through ditches.

"It seems like I was running forever," he said.

Motivation Week cuts the class size quicker than a weed eater slices dandelions. "I cried like a baby afterwards," Popovich admitted.

"This course is designed to prove that trainees can break from their comfort zone and push themselves to the limit," said Master Sgt. Rod Alne, flight supervisor. Alne, a pararescueman for the past 20 years, has been to countless operations, including Just Cause in Panama and Desert Storm during the Persian Gulf war.

"I remember doing back-to-back missions in Panama," Alne said. "Carrying an 80-pound ruck sack, I was fast roping from a helicopter from one building to another during recovery missions. We'd been up for 48 hours. I was mentally and physically drained. During that time, I experienced every emotion one could have. One minute I was excited, next nervous, then sometimes fear would set in. This training [at Lackland] prepares you for that."

After 10 weeks and an estimated 25,000 sit-ups, 15,000 flutter kicks, 75 miles of swimming and 200 miles of running, indoctrination is over. Those who make it move through the pipeline to Key West, Fla., for scuba training.

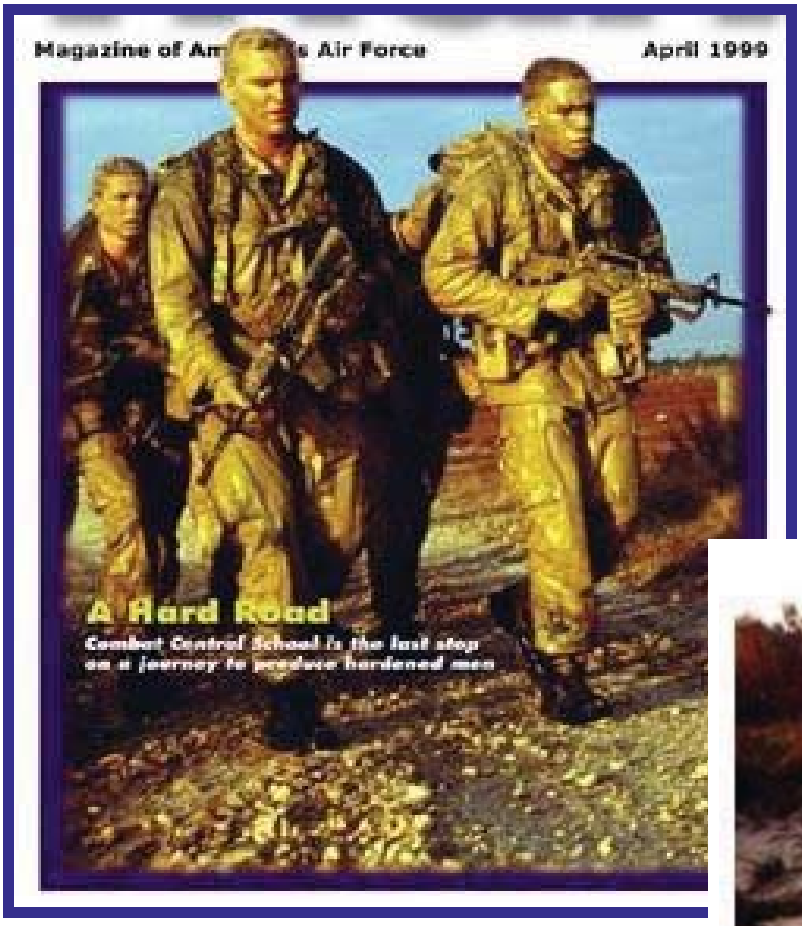
Only 55 more weeks before graduation!

For some of the toughest troops in the Air Force, the Combat Control School at Pope AFB is at the end of…

...A HARD ROAD by Tech. Sgt. George Hayward photos by Staff Sgt. Angela Stafford

1999 - Pope AFB, North Carolina -- In the early chill of a North Carolina morning, hardened warriors file down the stone path to a black marble headstone. They touch it reverently, one by one, sometimes pausing as lips form voiceless words. It's a silent ritual, watched solemnly each day by a dozen others. Those watchers are not worthy to tread the path, but the sweat and mud dripping from them represent their dreams of doing so.

Carrying the names of 40 men, the headstone sits in front of the Combat Control School at Pope Air Force Base. The men who touch the stone are instructors, among the best in their tiny career field. Those who watch them are trainees, struggling to survive the final few weeks of some of the hardest training they'll ever endure.



The names on the stone are those of men who did survive, only to die in the line of duty in one of the most demanding and dangerous duties the Air Force offers.

Combat controllers are the Air Force's version of Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and the Marines' Force Reconnaissance — a small but elite special operations force whose mission puts them in a hostile environment where lives depend on their training and each other.

"Our basic job is combat airfield operations," said Senior Master Sgt. Jack McMullen, commandant of the Combat Control School. "We establish landing zones and drop zones to bring in airborne and airland forces.

But McMullen's understated explanation does not convey the rigors or perils that are their daily bread. The combat controllers' motto is "First There." Like Navy SEALs, they arrive with stealth, via sea, air or land. Their destination is usually a hostile, and often enemy-held, area. They infiltrate an airfield or drop zone, clear it of the enemy and obstacles, and provide air traffic control for the arrival of a larger invading force.

"We'll jump in ahead of time, and we have 30 minutes from the time we exit the aircraft to putting the first airplane on the ground," McMullen explained.

Newcomers to the career field endure more than a year of training in combat tactics and survival, scuba and parachute, demolitions and air traffic control. McMullen's schoolhouse is the last stop in that nationwide training tour ("No Wimps Allowed" in Airman's August 1998 issue describes the first stop). There, already hardened trainees are made even harder. Start of a hard day

That hardening starts every day in the predawn darkness. It's still hours before the quiet rite at the headstone, and the trainees — less than a dozen — stand at attention in a square bed of gravel. They are waiting. On silent cue, they break into an a acappella version of the Air Force song. The instructors are arriving. The day's training begins.

The instructors, who nearly outnumber the trainees, put them through an hour of relentless exercise. Though the temperature hovers in the mid-30s, the trainees are soon soaked in sweat. The instructors snake among them, raining a constant barrage of explosive verbal artillery. The instructors also participate in the exercises. They drop for push-ups, getting face to face with a trainee, driving a trainee to push harder.

Later that day, when their hours of training are over, the trainees will return to that gravel bed, called "The Pit." They'll manicure it with the care due a royal flower garden. Like the path leading to the headstone, they're taught to treat it with reverence.

"The students have to weed it and rake it every day. They're not even allowed to spit in it," said instructor Staff Sgt. Scott Nowlin. "The Pit is their sacred ground."

The instructors are hard on the students, to say the least. The language, challenges, stresses and punishments are not for the faint of heart. There is no candy-coating on anything the instructors dish out. But for good reason. In a career field of less than 400 people, the training they give today could save their own lives tomorrow.

"This is a three-year tour for me," said Staff Sgt. Dean Unger, a combat control instructor. "When I'm done here, I'm going to be working with those guys. I have to make them the best product I can."

Only the strong survive

The road that ends at Pope is long, and the attrition rate in the combat control training pipeline is incredible. "We'll get 100 of them in for initial indoctrination training [at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas] and 80 of them will drop out," McMullen said. "More will wash out in scuba school or airborne school. They just can't handle the physical and mental demands of the job. Of those that stay, only half will become combat controllers; the others become para-rescuemen."

That means less than 50 students a year make it to McMullen's class. But once at Pope, the attrition rate is less than 6 percent.

"The chaff has already been separated from the wheat by the time we get them," McMullen said. "And when they fall out here, it's usually because of injuries, so they're recycled, not retrained."

Most of the trainees are young airmen in their early 20s. But the career field also draws a few officers, who stand side-by-side with the airmen and endure the same hardships.

Capt. Tom Stephens was a civil engineer before he volunteered to be a combat controller. After 14 months of training, and just weeks before he graduated from the Pope school, he hustled down a dirt airstrip, his rank — and his face — invisible under layers of mud. He stopped every 500 feet to pound wooden stakes into hard soil, while instructors harangued him for being too slow. Following their morning exercise hell, Stephens and his airmen classmates had hiked about 12 miles in full battle gear to prepare the Fort Bragg airstrip for incoming C-130s full of Army soldiers. But even as he pounded stakes, he said he felt great.

"At times, it's pretty grueling. But it's real rewarding," he panted. "It's a lot better than sitting behind a desk."

Hard thinkers

Stephens' attitude defines what combat controllers are about. The students accept the stresses and instructors' invectives with vigor.

"You get to the point where it doesn't faze you," said one of Stephens' classmates, Airman 1st Class Tobin Berry. "You get desensitized after a year and a half."

Desensitized, but not senseless. The combat control school is not designed to build fearless automatons, but tough troopers who can stay calm and think under the most hostile conditions.

"We want thinking men because it's 90 percent mental," Staff Sgt. Jeff Nagel, a combat control instructor and former Marine who served with their elite Force Recon unit. "We do a lot of physical things, but if a guy can hack it mentally, if he can say, 'I can overcome this,' he's going to make it through. This is a thinking man's job."

To ensure trainees exercise their minds as well as their bodies, instructors grade them on point systems. Every trainee enters the 13-week Pope course with 100 points. He loses points for breaking rules like spitting in The Pit to leaving a weapon beyond arm's reach in the field.

"If they get down to 70 points, they're strongly considered for recycling or even elimination from the program," said instructor Staff Sgt. Paul Durst.

<<< Fallen Combat Controller monument at the Combat Control School
(CCS collection)

Nagel said the combat-oriented treatment and high standards are necessary because to let them falter now could mean a lapse in thinking or discipline later.

"A lot of people — especially Air Force — don't understand why it appears we're so harsh in training these guys. We have to be," Nagel explained. "You can't baby these guys. In this job, if you stay around long enough, you're going to be under hostile fire. If you babied them, the chances of them surviving a bad situation aren't good. If you train warriors, you're going to get warriors."

McMullen, Nagel's boss, is such a warrior. His graying hair and creased features reflect 22 years of service in nearly every operation involving the U.S. military. He's earned Bronze Stars for valor in both Grenada and Somalia, and suffered the distinction of a Purple Heart in Mogadishu. His experiences are evidence of why combat controllers train so hard. His training helped keep his name off that marble headstone, but it's the Grenadas and Somalias that combat controllers train for.

"It was no different from training — except the live ammunition," McMullen said of Mogadishu. "The hard part was seeing buddies, guys you had known 10 or 15 years, get shot." He pauses for a moment and his features soften. "And die."

Back on the hard path

After a seven-mile March over hills, across streams and even low-crawling through a storm culvert, the trainees stagger back to the school. It's still early morning, and a full day of classes and hardening await. They assemble outside the path to the headstone. Before the instructors file past for their personal communions with the marble, they lead the trainees in a silent set of push-ups.

"We tell them if they only do 10 push-ups right each day, to make sure it's those 10," Durst said.

"It's for all the combat controllers who have made the ultimate sacrifice," said trainee Airman 1st Class Mark Kling.

When they're finished, the students watch the instructors walk the path and touch the names on the stone.

"This is the most important part of the day," Stephens said. "We all want to join the team."

It's a hard road. But they want to walk that path.

NEW SECAF VISITS POPE, TAKES A FALL by Captain Susan Idziak, 43rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

August 20, 1999 - Pope AFB, North Carolina – The Secretary of the Air Force fell today. Freefalling from 8,000 feet falls under the caption "other duties as required," on Whit Peters' job description.

The new Air Force secretary completed that duty here August 20 during one of his first official trips since being confirmed August 3.

The day started at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., when an MC-130 Talon flew out of Pope Air Force Base, N.C., to take Peters to the Luzon Drop Zone on Fort Bragg, N.C., where he made an 8,000-foot tandem freefall jump with Tech. Sgt. Gregg Pittman of the 24th Special Tactics Squadron.

"It was great," Peters said once safely on the ground. "But now my numbers of landings and takeoffs don't match anymore!"

The secretary spent the rest of the day with combat controllers and pararescuemen of the 21st and 24th STS and students of the Combat Control School.

"I came here to spend time with the special operators," Peters said. "I really wanted to see what the combat controllers and pararescuers do -- and hear their concerns firsthand."

One of their major concerns is high operations tempo, he said. The small Air Force specialty is one of the most tasked and demanding, and is currently only 70 percent to 80 percent manned.

The secretary's day included a Special Tactics and Rescue parachute demonstration jump at Pope Park and a press conference with media about his visit to Pope.

When asked by Air Force Television News reporter Staff Sgt. Dean Padgett if his tandem jump was "a result of a mid-life crisis," Peters, 53, replied jokingly, "The job of being secretary of the Air Force is my mid-life crisis. But I have lots of family support."

About his jump he added, "It was fascinating. I think I'd like to do it again. But I'm first going to reread the insurance papers."

While at Pope, the secretary officiated a ceremony dedicating one of the base's newly renovated dorms to be shared by combat controllers and 23rd Fighter Group enlisted members. The dorm is named Scholl Manor in honor of Tech. Sgt. Mark Scholl, who, while assigned to the 24th STS at Pope as a combat controller, gave his life in service to his country during a United States Special Operations Command training exercise in 1992. Scholl was 33 years old when he died.

"In his short life Sergeant Scholl epitomized the standard of service before self and consistently placed the welfare of his fellow man before himself," said Peters at the ceremony. "The debt of gratitude we owe for his sacrifice is immense, and today we have an opportunity to immortalize his contribution with the dedication of this important building."

UAV DEMO BRINGS STRANGE SHAPE OVER EGLIN by Capt. Craig Heighton, 53rd Wing Public Affairs

1999 - Eglin AFB, Florida - To the casual observer, watching the unmanned aerial vehicle in the sky may remind him of a flying peanut, but the UAV is actually a practical aircraft designed to save lives and get "one up" on the enemy.

"Using Bombardier Aerospace's CL-327 Guardian UAV, special ops forces are able to receive real-time video to see what is ahead of them," said Major Stephen Bishop, program manager for the small-scale contingency demonstration. "With that information, they can either send in close air support to take out the obstacle or deviate around the opposing forces."

The UAV Battlelab, in conjunction with Air Force Special Operations Command's 18th Flight Test Squadron, conducted a week long test recently of a Guardian that was fitted with off-the-shelf electronic equipment. The battle lab then applied the system to support forces engaged in a simulated small-scale contingency operation.

Providing a direct video picture to Air Force combat forces -- while on the move -- had not been demonstrated before.

"In our demonstration, we simultaneously fed video directly from the UAV to airborne and ground units, in

real time, to allow them to react to threats," said Bishop. "Up until now, this concept could be accomplished only with the aid of big, bulky equipment and satellites."

With this demonstration complete, real-world uses such as safely evacuating threatened embassy personnel or escorting civilians in hostile territories during humanitarian missions may be only years away.

In the scenario, teams from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla., were evacuating non-combatant civilians in a heavily wooded, hostile territory. Hovering approximately 500 feet overhead, the UAV was their eye in the sky, giving them a real-time look at what lay ahead of them as they worked their way down an old dirt road.

"We did have (opposition forces) up ahead at a blocking position," said Tech. Sgt. Bart Decker, a combat controller with the 23rd STS, as he sat in his HUMVEE and saw the live feed from the Guardian on his laptop computer. "We detected it, and instead of putting the team in harm's way, we turned in time to try a different route and got out of the hostile situation."

If there was no other way around that situation, Decker said he had another option.

"We could call in airborne strike support to take out the enemy," said Decker. "They would be able to see what I'm seeing here in the tactical vehicle."

The demonstration was a success, proving a concept that started out as just a mere "what-if" question two years ago.

From here, the battle lab presents its findings to the Air Force Requirements Oversight Committee, which will decide if this concept holds enough merit and utility to divert existing funds to eventually field the concept.