INTRODUCTION

THE 1940s - CCT HERITAGE

World War II spawned both conventional and special operations roots of Combat Control Teams. Conventional roots sprouted in the European theater of operations (ETO) while the teams' special operations heritage can be traced to the Pacific theater of operations (PTO).

THE EUROPEAN THEATER - CONVENTIONAL OPERATIONS

1941 - The Germans at Crete

German paratroopers surprised the Allies by successfully supporting the sea-borne invasion of Norway and Denmark in 1940. However, they shocked the world with their first stunning victory over the British on Crete in 1941. The operation employed classic door kicking techniques in the seizure of airports and port facilities. In the Crete invasion, lightly armed German airborne troops overwhelmed a well equipped and highly trained British force five times its size. While this battle heralded the potential value of the use of airborne forces to the Allies, it proved catastrophic for Germany; nearly half of the German paratroopers were casualties. As a consequence, Hitler never used them in an airborne capacity for the rest of the war.

1943 - The Allied Invasion of Sicily

The Allies first major airborne assault took place on the night of 9–10 July 1943 when elements of the 82nd Airborne Division and the British 1st Airborne Division jumped into battle near the city of Gela on the island of Sicily. Code named Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily was counted as a major campaign of WWII. It involved both amphibious and airborne assaults. In the airborne operation, more than 200 C-47s were launched. Of those, a tenth were mistakenly shot downed by U.S. Navy gunners before crossing the coastline.

For those who made it, poor visual references and 35 mph winds wrecked havoc with two battalions. They landed 30 miles off the drop zone, and a third landed 55 miles away. In all, the entire airborne invasion force missed the objective area by a wide margin. Despite this lackluster beginning, American and British paratroopers were able to regroup and slow a German counterattack, giving sea-borne forces time to gain a foothold at the beach landing.

1943 – Gavin's Decree

Major General James M. "Jumpin' Jim" Gavin was the Deputy Commander of the 82nd Airborne Division. Because of the aerial delivery problems at Sicily, he decreed that future paratroop operations must incorporate a method for assuring the safe delivery of more paratroopers in the target area. With his decree, General Gavin planted the first seed for Combat Control Teams.

The Army Pathfinder team (the forerunner of the first USAAF and later, USAF Combat Control Teams) was created in response to Gavin's decree. Pathfinder Teams were formed as a small group of specially trained airborne troops. Their mission was to jump in advance of the main force. Upon arrival at the objective, they would set up visual navigation aids and other markers that would guide the following airborne armada to the designated objective.

Despite the limited capability of early Pathfinder equipment, their skills and crude navigation aids made for a good combination. In operations where Pathfinders were used, airborne infantry operations were far more successful; where they weren't used, operations suffered. For example, during the Normandy invasion, Pathfinders jumped in 30 minutes prior to the main force and over 13,000 highly motivated paratroopers were able to quickly assemble and effectively engage the Germans.

1944 - At the Bulge

The Allied operation at the French village of Bastogne in the final days of December 1944, ***". . . will live on in the minds of USAAF troop carrier personnel as one of the most critical, albeit one of the most tragic, of the war."*** By December 22, 1944, elements of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division had dug themselves into fields and forests near Bastogne but found themselves surrounded by advancing German soldiers. Believing they held the advantage, German officers, under a white flag, entered the 101st camp demanding surrender. Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe issued a one-word, morale-boosting response: ***"Nuts!"***

Without troop carrier resupply-ammunition in particular-the Battle of the Bulge would undoubtedly have turned out much differently, and McAuliffe may not have been as confident as he appeared. When the first airborne resupply missions arrived, each U.S. artillery position was down to about 10 rounds. McAuliffe later admitted, ***"Had it not been for air resupply, the situation would have become worse than desperate; it would have been untenable."***

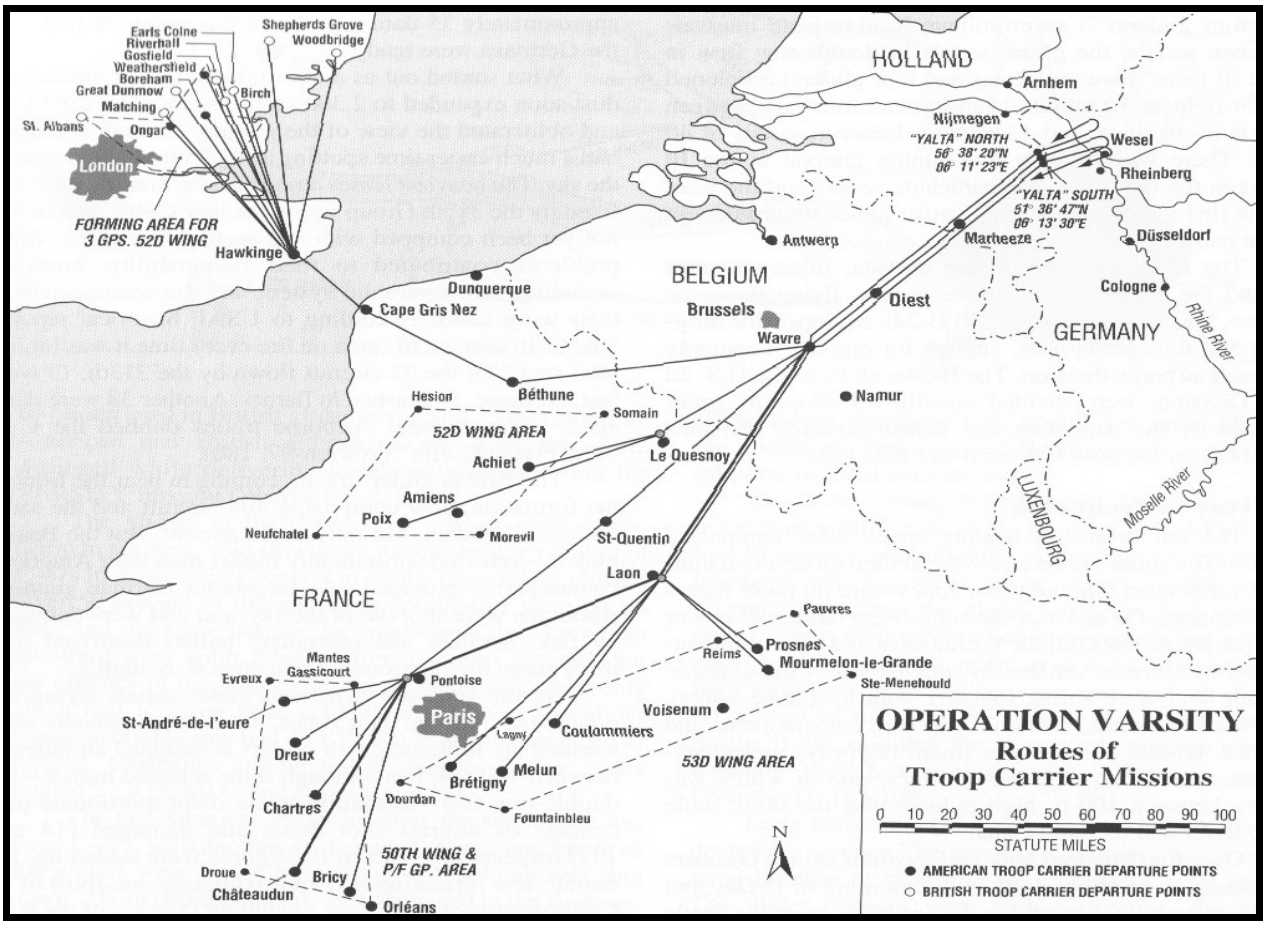
The U.S. lost 26 percent of the troops in a 50-ship glider tow to Bastogne on December 27, 1944, the highest proportion for any troop carrier mission of the war. To help iron out future communication and coordination problems, the USAAF trained Combat Control Teams to mark drop and landing zones ahead of oncoming troop carrier "serials" and have Pathfinder equipment and trained personnel in place on the ground when the troop carrier forces arrived. They operated on special VHF radio frequencies to assure discrete ground-to-air communications. In addition, inter-ship communications were established between troop carrier forces and protecting fighters over the target areas.

Later, the largest one-day airborne assault in history took place on March 24, 1945, when troop carrier aircraft and gliders carried British and American divisions to assist the Allied crossing of the Rhine River near Wesel, Germany. (Air Force Times, February 1999)

1945 – Operation Varsity

Near the end of 1944, the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) developed glider-borne teams known as Combat Control Teams (CCT). Unlike the Army Pathfinders, the new Combat Control Teams were outfitted with visual markers, ground-to-air and point-to-point radios and electronic navigational aids (NAVAIDS) - such as the Eureka radar homing beacon. Additionally, the newly commissioned teams were charged with the responsibility of airhead air traffic control (AATC). AATC required the CCT to provide both terminal guidance (into the assault zone) and air traffic control of aircraft transiting the airhead. In later years, AATC added the responsibility for coordinating the

high-altitude firing of allied artillery batteries and issuing intelligence advisories about enemy gun positions in the airhead. However, the first real test of the new Combat Control Teams would come in March 1945, during Operation Varsity.



The Operation Varsity map traces the routes of troop carrier aircraft from their origin to the point where they crossed the Rhine River into the objective area at Wesel.

By the end of 1944, many of the problems noted during the invasion of Sicily had been fixed. Most C-47s were now fitted with self-sealing fuel tanks. Most of the CG-4A Waco gliders were now equipped with parachute arresters and reinforced noses. Glider pilots had gotten additional training with a requirement for at least five landing per month and additional infantry training. And finally, nine Combat Control Teams had been organized and trained to provide much-needed communications links with ground troops and re-supply aircraft. The addition of Combat Control Teams was seen as a long overdue action that had the potential for saving lives among troop carrier crews, while aiding ground forces with aerial re-supply and medical evacuation. In January 1945, allied forces were already preparing for an operation that would spearhead the invasion of Germany.

By March 1st, 1945, the allies began to line up at the west bank of the Rhine River, along a 450-mile front stretching from Holland to Switzerland. Three hundred and sixty miles to the east, the Soviet army was less than fifty miles from Berlin. In order to quickly secure a foothold on the east bank of the Rhine, plans for an airborne assault - dubbed Operation Varsity - were initiated.

For Operation Varsity, two CCTs were assigned to each of the Airborne Divisions; including the 13th, 17th, 82nd,

101st, and one team was held in reserve. In all, a total of nine CCTs were formed and provisioned for the operation. For Varsity, a Waco glider pilot and four enlisted technicians were molded into Combat Control Teams. Each glider-borne team was launched with a jeep and trailer filled with ground-to-air, point-to-point radios; a radar homing beacon and visual markers. Upon arrival at an objective area, they setup visual markers and transmitted terminal guidance information to oncoming troop carrier aircraft. In addition, the teams transmitted weather information and AATC instructions to aircraft approaching the area of operation (AOR).

March 22, 1945 - THE RED WACO by 1LT Norman Wilmeth, USAAF CCT, World War II

Operation Varsity heralded the introduction of the first Air Force air traffic control team into combat. They were more than Pathfinders, they were the first team of communications experts who could verbally paint a picture of the conditions at a target assault zone and effectively control activities in an airhead.

On March 22, 1945, while loading our CG-4A Waco glider for Operation Varsity, our CCT severely damaged it, putting it out of commission. On checking the availability of a replacement, we found there was none. I scrounged around and finally found a recovered Normandy glider that had just been rebuilt, but not yet painted. The newly replaced canvas skin was still covered with red primer. It was not yet on line, but was available, so we took it.

"*I didn't want to miss this mission or abandon my role as commander of the CCT, so I asked maintenance to release the rebuilt glider to us; they did! After it was towed to the marshaling area, we loaded it very carefully. My copilot for the Varsity Mission was Flight Officer Leon V. Rounds, and our crew chief, TSgt Neal L. Long. The second glider – the one carrying the trailer and radios – was flown by 2LT William D. Fasking and Flight Officer Lawrence E. Moyer."*

D-Day, March 24, 1945 – I was in the first wave of Operation Varsity, crossing the Rhine, to a landing near the town of Wesel. Accompanying us was a second glider filled with the rest of the Combat Control Team. We were infiltrated into Germany - crossing the Rhine - by glider. We were delivered several hours before the main force of 18th Airborne Corps troops.

"*We stayed until we were relieved, and before long we became Airfield Control Teams (ACTs), working the forward fields during the heavy re-supply period following the crossing of the Rhine."*

Following the successful conclusion of the initial assault, our CCT moved along with the infantry to forward airfields, where we supported aerial re-supply operations and provided assault airfield air traffic control.

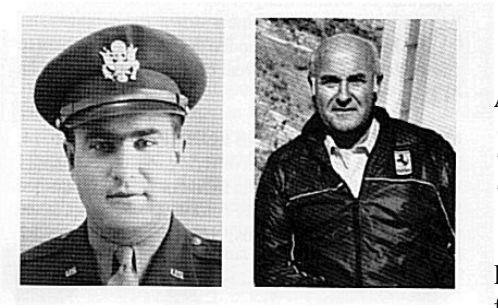
"The Combat Control Teams – after undergoing some operational streamlining – would find their most effective and extensive application in the later stages of the war as Airfield Control Teams (ACT). The ACTs coordinated the use of the crowded skies and airfields in Germany that were taken over by IX Troop Carrier Command for re-supplying the rapidly-advancing allied armored columns."

Colonel Charles H. Young, from his book "Into the Valley"
The Untold Story of USAAF Troop Carrier in WWII

1945 - ONE COMBAT CONTROLLER'S PATH TO OPERATION VARSITY by Milton Linn, 1LT, USAAF CCT, World War II

In 1938, I enlisted in the New York National Guard and was assigned to the 244th Coast Artillery. The 244th was later federalized and based at Camp Pendleton, Virginia.

When World War II was declared, my unit was sent to Ketchikan, Alaska. It was there that I volunteered for the Army's new Glider Program. I was accepted and soon sent back stateside for flight training. I took my primary flight training at Plainview, TX: and basic flight training at Ft. Sumner, NM. I graduated as Flight Officer from Victorville Air Force Station, California.



<<< Milton Linn during WWII and in the early 2000s.

After graduation, I was assigned to the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron (TCS), part of 314th Troop Carrier Group (TCG). While with the 50th TCS, I was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant. I deployed with the 50th TCS to North Africa on the USS West Point.

Dubbed the Red Devils, the 50th TCS would soon undergo a baptism-by-fire as they charged their C-47 Skytrains into combat in May 1943. Launching aircraft from Field J, in Tunisia, they airdropped a battalion of 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers during the invasion of Sicily.

While in Africa I was transferred to the 44th TCS, of the 316th TCG at Cottesmore, England. Later, I was assigned to RAF School at Watchfield England where I became a control officer in command of one of nine newly formed Combat Control Teams.

During the war, I participated in the following missions with the 316th and other groups on detached service: Normandy, Southern France and Holland. I was the control officer on an advanced pathfinder combat control team for the crossing of the Rhine River at Wesel, Germany. Pathfinders consisted of elite troops, who set up radar beacons for landing airborne troops behind enemy lines. Around that time I was promoted to 1st lieutenant.

When World War II ended, I returned to my beloved country, the United States.

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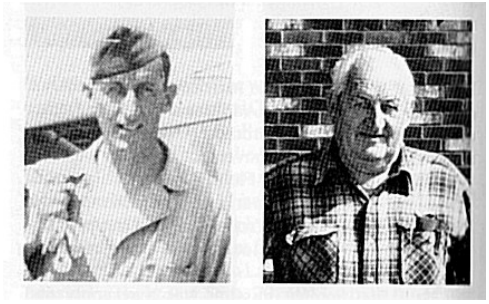
Publisher of WWII Glider Pilots, ISBN 0938021958

1945 – A WORLD WAR II COMBAT CONTROLLER'S EXPERIENCE by John Naughtin, WWII CCT

John Naughtin was born in Spalding, Nebraska on April 28, 1915. I moved to Idaho in 1937; married a native Idahoan Josephine Randleman in 1939.



In 1942 I was living and working a grocery business in the town of Werner, Idaho; I was married and 26 years old. We had a nervous draft board that had their eyes on three of us that were about the same status. Being drafted wasn't our great desire – so when the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) Program became available, we took advantage of it.

<<< John Naughtin during WWII and in later years.

The program was being conducted at what is now Boise State College. With an already established airstrip and facilities for ground school classes already in place we were fortunate to qualify for the program. Don Schutt and I completed the program and in September 1942 were sent to Roswell, New Mexico. There we were assigned different flight training schools. He was sent to the West Coast for dead stick and the other necessary training for the basic CG-4A glider program. I was sent to Big Spring, Texas for my dead stick training and then to Ft. Sumner, News Mexico for my sailplane part of the program, graduating there in the spring of 1943.

I was then shipped to Wichita Falls, Texas for assignment to the CG-4A program. There, the higher ups decided to abandon the glider training program. Being staff sergeants, we weren't too popular around there. They gave me two choices between (1) officers candidate or (2) radio schools. In May of 1943, I was assigned to Radio School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

In December 1943, after having completed radio school, the glider program wanted me back. I was soon sent to Louisville, Kentucky and immediately started back in the glider program - more dead stick and finally the big one. From there we were sent to Lubbock, Texas in 1944 for more training. Graduated from there in the mid-summer. Next we were sent to Maxton, North Carolina for advanced combat training. From there the whole class was sent to Camp Kilman, where we were told to prepare for a trip by boat. The Isle de France was our assignment. In September 1944, we were sent to the European Theater of Operations (ETO) in time for Holland Encounter. The boat trip lasted four days, landing in Halifax, England. From there - in a round about way - we finally reached Granthorn, England - our final destination.

I was assigned to the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron, 314th Troop Carrier Group. After a couple of months waiting around for something to happen, three of us from our squadron were called before the Commanding Officer who was rather reluctant to turn us loose. However, we had been ordered to report to Winsan Ascot, not knowing why. Well it was a Radio School renewal. This was the beginning of the Combat Control Team.

My three-man combat control team had a jeep trailer with both sending and receiving radio equipment. We trained in all means and methods of survival training - as an independent group. About this time the First Allied Airborne Army was putting together all airborne units under one command. General Gavin was brought back to Rheims, France to be in command. From Winsan Ascot, England we were flown to Rheims to get our assignment. Our group was sent to an airstrip outside of Munich, bright near the front lines. We had to clear an airstrip so the C-47s could land. Our job was to assist the evacuation of prisoners-of-war, in camps in the area. The prisoners were of many different countries. We had to sort and get them on the right plane for their home areas.

From there we were sent to Halle. Two weeks there and then we came back to our own units. Mine was the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron of the 314th Troop Carrier Group. Things didn't last, we had to move to Wesel to prepare for the Rhine Crossing. We were right in front of the 3rd British Army and a Scottish Brigade on D-Day. From there, we had orders to Marseille, France, continuing to the South Pacific; just in time V-J Day.

Soon, I received my orders back to the States. I returned to the states in the victory ship SS Laconia sailing to Boston. After a long, tiring train trip I arrived in Utah on May 6th. Military career finished!

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THE PACIFIC THEATER – SPECIAL OPERATIONS

THE USAAF WAR AGAINST JAPAN

1943 - China, Burma, India – U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) General Henry H. (Hap) Arnold created a unique organization to support operations against the Japanese in Burma. Major General Orde C. Wingate, a British commander, was conducting guerrilla warfare with great results but with high causalities. To support Wingate's behind-the-lines operations, Arnold wanted to develop a method of re-supply and reinforcement, a unique aviation force adapted to the unique mission. Rugged terrain and long distances further complicated the undertaking. General Arnold envisioned an Air Commando Force; a special group that could transport large numbers of troops deep into enemy territory and wholly supply them by air.

Colonel Philip G. Cochran, a veteran fighter pilot from the North Africa campaign, was chosen as the reluctant commander of the new aerial force, designated the 1st Air Commando Group. Cochran said he wanted to go where there was some fighting. General Arnold told Cochran he would get all the combat he wanted and outlined the mission. Arnold left Cochran with the freedom to execute the unique mission, saying to hell with the paperwork, go out and fight.

With tremendous autonomy, Colonel Cochran and his Air Commando staff carefully selected the aircraft, equipment and personnel, matching them to unique mission requirements. Transport, light liaison aircraft and gliders were selected to support the logistics chain, while fighters and medium bombers provided necessary fire support. With the selection process completed, an exhaustive training and rehearsal program began. The training Cochran selected was designed to hone the unit to meet Wingate's mission requirements, but Cochran's methods were unconventional and confounded outsiders. Cochran once said, *"Visitors to our installations were confounded by the lack of rank, officers and men sweated shoulder to shoulder."* At first Allied troops were not sure the Air Commandos could do what they promised.

AIR COMMANDO! A HERITAGE WRAPPED IN SECRECY by Captain Timothy Bailey

1943 - China, Burma, India (CBI) Theater of Operations - When General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold created an elite war- fighting unit during World War II, and called them ***Air Commandos,*** he had no idea an Air Force tradition was being set in motion. A tradition few blue suiters know about today.

The setting was Japanese-occupied Burma, 1943. Geography made a "textbook" frontal assault on the Japanese impossible, and dictated the British take an unorthodox approach to the fight. Their answer was a commando unit that would use unconventional "hit and run" tactics to confuse the enemy, and destroy their lines of communication and resupply.

The concept depended heavily on air support, and with most of their resources committed to Europe, the British looked to America for assistance. Arnold met with British Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the supreme allied commander for the theater, to discuss the air support plan. To honor Mountbatten's earlier leadership of British commandos, Arnold coined the phrase ***Air Commandos*** as a name for the unique unit created to fill the requirement.

The 1st Air Commando Group (part of the 10th Air Force) was a self-contained composite force of fighters, cargo planes, light aircraft, helicopters and support people. The 1st ACG, which adopted the motto ***Anytime, Anywhere***, successfully attacked the enemy from the air, resupplied British commandos on the ground, and airlifted injured out of the battle area, eventually driving the Japanese out of Burma.

1944 - Operation Thursday - The fighter-bombers began preparing the battlefield in February 1944; at the same time they were updating intelligence on possible landing sites. On 5 March 1944 the airlift portion of Operation Thursday began in earnest. At the same time, pathfinder aircraft scouted the target area, looking for sites that could be marked as landing zones for follow-on forces.

Soon after airborne operation began, Pathfinders, using long-haul communications reported that initial resistance was

light and aerial-delivery reinforcements were recalled. Rapid runway construction allowed follow-on forces a much safer landing area.

Over the course of the three months the Air Commandos delivered more than 9,000 troops, 1,300 pack animals and 245 tons of supplies. They had delivered the fight to the enemy. During the operation, Pathfinders coordinated air strikes using their ground-to-air radios; landed aircraft to evacuate the wounded, and were instrumental in the aerial re-supply of the infantry. Air Commando tactics, techniques and procedures were honed to a fine edge in 1944.

When the Burma Road was reopened in January 1945, the Air Commandos were deactivated. The men and equipment were absorbed into conventional units in preparation for the planned invasion of the Japanese mainland. The first use of atomic weapons overshadowed many of the Air Commandos accomplishments. Almost everything the Air Commandos did was an important first:

- First air unit designed to support a ground unit
- First composite air unit
- First air unit employed with total autonomy
- First invasion into enemy territory solely by air
- First nighttime heavy glider assault landing
- First night combat glider recovery
- First glider airlift of large animals
- First major employment of light airplanes in combat
- First air unit to employ helicopters
- First firing of rockets from aircraft in combat.

The legacy of those early Air Commandos, those heroes providing specialized air power ***Anytime, Anywhere*** can be seen in today's U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) units.

WHAT DOES ANY OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH THE 21st CENTURY AIR FORCE?

September 18, 1947 – Washington, DC - As World War II ground to a close, the Armed Forces demobilized and reorganized. The United States Air Force was created when the National Security Act became law on 18 September 1947. On that day, Senator Stuart Symington became Secretary of the Air Force, and on September 26, General Carl A. Spaatz became the USAF's first Chief of Staff. Major reorganization issues, the Berlin Airlift and the Cold War soon became the USAF's highest priorities. As a result, USAF pathfinder and most tactical airlift issues took a back seat to the immediate challenges in Germany and the building of a long-range, strategic air force to fight the Cold War and Communism.

Reluctantly, the USAF modified their position when they established the first Combat Control Team in 1953. Then in April 1961 a unit was created at Hurlburt Field, Florida, by then-Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis E. LeMay to train Air Force members to fight unconventional, "non-textbook" air warfare. This was in response to Soviet-supported insurgencies springing up in Third World countries. Borrowing the namesake from its Army Air Force forefathers, the unit trained Air Commandos and had a two-fold purpose: counterinsurgency training and combat operations. It was the first unit of its kind in the new U.S. Air Force.

<<< Heinie Aderholt - WWII (left) and Vietnam (right)

"The Air Commando concept was to have a self sufficient, self-contained force that could deploy anywhere in the world and conduct operations," said retired Brigadier General Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt, a commander of Air Commandos in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. As Aderholt answered

questions about the Air Commandos, during an ***Airman*** magazine interview, it became clear why he's known by many as the "father" of Air Force special operations. From air dropping agents deep in North Korea during the Korean War, to commanding clandestine flights into Tibet during the anti-communist guerrilla uprising, to helping plan the Bay of Pigs invasion, Aderholt has had unique experiences qualifying him to talk about operations that were often carried out in secret.

Air Commandos like Aderholt operated in wars at locations worldwide, but it was in the Vietnam War that commandos made some of their greatest contributions. Initially deployed to Bien Hoa Air Base in 1961 as part of Operation Farm Gate, Air Commandos flew combat missions with South Vietnamese pilots, training them to conduct counterinsurgency warfare from the sky in the AT-28. As a result, Air Commandos flew some of the first combat missions in the conflict.

Operations required specialized equipment, Aderholt explained. Propeller-driven aircraft, like the AT-28, and others like the A-1 Skyraider, were better for the job than fast-moving jets. "In a jet, you burn fuel at an incredible rate, and you go too fast to maintain sight of a target. In these aircraft, pilots could remain over a target for longer periods, and maintain visual contact," Aderholt said.

In response to requests for support in countering North Vietnam's intrusion into Laos with the Ho Chi Minh trail, Air Commandos trained Laotian and Thai pilots to interdict the supply line in Operation Water Pump.

Counterinsurgency operations expanded to include combat operations directly supporting U.S. ground forces, more of which were being committed to the war. The need for close air support increased as the Vietcong, the South Vietnamese communist sympathizers conducting insurgency in South Vietnam, attacked and often overran friendly encampments. The "gunship" was born out of this requirement, and Air Commandos were the ones to turn its heavy firepower on the enemy.

The AC-47, a modified C-47 firing three multi-barrel mini-guns out side windows, was the first gunship. The AC-119 and later AC-130 brought technological advances and increased effectiveness to the gunship idea, including night-vision equipment and heavier armament, some of which are still used today.

"The gunship was an amazing airplane, not a single friendly fortress was ever given up to the enemy when a gunship was overhead," Aderholt said. "I think we should have gotten them sooner and made more of them. It would have changed the outcome of the war in my opinion."

A wide variety of other aircraft were used for operations, from light airplanes to helicopters. The A-26, a twin-propeller light bomber-type aircraft, similar to ones used in World War II, was tested on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in 1966. Air Force records show it was extremely effective in the interdiction mission.

While "truck kill" statistics generated by Air Force leadership showed Air Commandos were more effective than conventional forces at interdicting the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Aderholt said he met more than his share of resistance from all-jet force advocates while trying to get the resources required to fight.

Aderholt remembers a humorous wager with a wing commander that proved his confidence in special operations. Convinced the Air Commandos could not interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail as effectively as conventional jet forces, the commander accepted Aderholt's bet: the winner would be the person whose unit destroyed more trucks on the trail that night. While he can't remember the exact statistics, Aderholt chuckles as he recalls how the margin he won by spoke for itself.

One of the most notable missions the Air Commandos participated in was the Son Tay prisoner of war camp raid of 1970. Army and Air Force special operators conducted the nearly flawless operation to free POWs from the camp. Although the North Vietnamese had moved all the prisoners, the operation was a watermark for the potential of special operations.

Jerry Rhein, an A-1 pilot during the raid, said the whole operation was shrouded in secrecy. He reported to Southeast Asia for the mission without knowing why until shortly beforehand. "We took off in radio silence the night of the operation," said Rhein. "The wing commander was up in the tower and was told that A-1s would take off at a certain time, and to ignore them."

It is important to note Air Commando contributions were not limited just to air operations. In fact it would take volumes to account for every story of heroism. "You name it, we had 'em: pilots, combat controllers, medics, combat weather teams, forward air controllers, everything we needed to be a self-sustaining force," said Aderholt.

This self-sustaining nature of the Air Commando force put every member through training above and beyond that of the average blue suiter, and every commando "pulled more than his own weight," according to Aderholt.

Aircraft mechanics would load bombs and work in the orderly room if need be. Medics, who were not officially qualified as surgeons, often acted as such when necessity dictated it. "Every one of my commandos was trained to use the radio; every single one of them could call in an air strike if it was required," said Aderholt.

Carlos Christian served with the 1st Air Commando Group in Burma during World War II, and as an Air Commando squadron First Sergeant during Vietnam. "I had a dozen jobs I could do, and there was no saying that you couldn't do a certain thing. That's how we got the job done - you just did it," he said.

Combat Control Teams were jump-qualified communications experts who went behind enemy lines to set up landing zones, drop zones or call in air strikes from hidden ground positions by radio. *"The art of being a combat controller is being able to communicate with your fellow countryman, and ours were the best in the world,"* Aderholt said. So good in fact, that they operated for a time, contrary to Air Force policy, as Airborne Forward Air Controllers, according to Aderholt. In summary, Aderholt said:

"For a while no one knew who was controlling the strikes that were going on in Laos, but the job got done, and it was done well." He said, there was never a "bad bullet or a bad air strike" while combat controllers served as FACs. "The esprit-de-corps and teamwork among these people was tremendous."

"*There wasn't any talk of AFSCs - if there were airplanes to be moved, medics and maintainers moved them together,"* he said. *"It was always a tight team. They believed they could do just about anything, and when you believe like that, you often can,"* Aderholt said.

From the beginning to the end of the Vietnam War, Air Commandos showed a diversity of capabilities and missions that could never be documented on just a few pages. Close air support, interdiction, civic affairs, psychological operations, medical, and defoliant operations were but a few. At the peak of their strength during Vietnam, the Air Commandos never accounted for more than 5 percent of the total Air Force effort. Yet five of the 12 Medals of Honor awarded to Air Force people during the war went to Air Commando/Special Operations people.

In July 1968 the Special Air Warfare Center at Hurlburt Field was redesignated the USAF Special Operations Force. Subordinate units were redesignated special operations wings and squadrons, and all reference to "Air Commandos" was officially dropped.

Aderholt, who was the last general officer to leave Southeast Asia, remains a strong advocate for special operations.

"Special operations seems to be one of those areas that nobody wants to talk about, until it's really needed, that is - then it gets called on big time. "Look at special operations today, for example; these people are gone TDY a majority of the time. There is obviously a need."

After several realignments and combat operations since that time, Air Force Special Operations Command was created in 1990. These modern day Air Commandos carry on the World War II legacy as they refine the training and equipment required to conduct unconventional warfare. A prime example is the AC-130U with a pressurized cabin, and improved sensors and armament.

So far, the modern commandos haven't airlifted any mules or horses as the old outfit did in China, but they have still had a wide variety. For example, in Vietnam their cargo has included live chickens -- there's no refrigeration in the jungles -- rice, rubber soled canvas shoes, propaganda leaflets, ammunition, and of course, troops. Sometimes their high-value cargo has been a tape recorder with a loudspeaker system slung under the fuselage. They delivered

messages of freedom, hope and security. In the 21st Century, the 193rd Special Operations Wing EC-130 Commando Solo aircraft are used to conduct psychological operations (PSYOP) and civil affairs broadcast missions in the standard AM, FM, TV and military communications bands.

In 2008, Lt. Gen. Michael W. Wooley, Commander of the Air Force Special Operations Command noted that AFSOC troops increasingly are soaring into uncharted territory. Modern-day Air Commandos are adapting to the emerging difficulties of fighting counterinsurgency wars in the U.S. global war on terrorism.

"Our force is maturing to the point where we can be assigned a geographic area and be held responsible for that piece of ground," Wooley said in an interview.

From the determination in his voice, it is absolutely clear that his 21st Century Air Commandos are more prepared than ever to take the fight to the enemy - ***Anytime, Anyplace.***

THE 1940s – CCT SUMMARY

WHY ARE THEY CALLED COMBAT CONTROL TEAMS? Its not certain, but based on my research of WWII, the U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) and Allied Army Airborne Forces (AAAF) commands and; their experiences, decisions and actions preceding Operation Varsity, it appears that the name – Combat Control Team (CCT) – was somehow derived from the oft-used Army designations – Brigade Combat Team or BCT and Regimental Combat Team (RCT).

BCTs were – and are still[1] – the common designation for the U.S. Army's primary independent-fighting unit. Thus, it is thought that the U.S. Army Air Force Combat Control Teams were so designated because they became the primary communications link between the Army BCTs and USAAF troop carriers. CCTs were introduced into an objective area with the primary mission of providing airhead-air traffic control and terminal guidance to the troop carrier aircraft.

However, unlike the early U.S. Army Pathfinders of WWII, the new USAAF CCTs were outfitted with ground-to-air and point-to-point communications equipment. In addition, electronic navigational aids (NAVAIDS) -- such as the Eureka beacon -- were used by the CCT. The newly commissioned CCTs were charged with the responsibility of airhead air traffic control (AATC). AATC required the CCT provide both terminal guidance at an assault zone and air traffic control of aircraft transiting the airhead.

- **Army Pathfinders** - In the earlier WWII airborne operations, Pathfinder Teams were provisioned with only visual markers for drop zones and landing zones. They may have had some limited radio equipment, but there was no standard electronic ground-to-air communications gear. One minor exception was the sporadic use of a Eureka beacon, a navigational aid for radar homing.
- **Varsity Transition** - For Operation Varsity, the USAAF decided to dramatically improve upon previous airborne delivery deficiencies -- such as those encountered at Normandy and Sicily. The Command commissioned a dozen teams to support the delivery of the Army's Brigade Combat Teams -- thus the name Combat Control Teams.

- **Army Air Force CCT** - For Operation Varsity, Combat Control Teams (CCT) were provisioned with ground-to-air, point-to-point radios and radar homing beacons. They transmitted terminal guidance, communicating final approach information to drop zones and landing zones. In addition, the teams transmitted weather information and airhead air traffic control instructions to aircraft approaching the area of operational responsibility (AOR). This was the first appearance in combat of a military air traffic control team - a team of communications experts who could verbally paint a picture of the conditions at their target assault zone.

Note 1: *A prime example is the 173rd Airborne Brigade [Separate] - an independent BCT that was very effectively employed in both Vietnam and Iraq. In 2008, Army divisions consist of four brigades, each an independent fighting BCT.*