



**22nd Annual SO/LIC
Symposium and Exhibition**
Wednesday, 9 February 2011
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**As Prepared
for Delivery
~25 min.
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Introduction

Thank you for that kind introduction. And, thank you to the National Defense Industrial Association for inviting me to this wonderful event. It is always an honor and a pleasure to spend time with long-time friends: the quiet professionals of special operations.

Last December, Secretary Donley and I were honored to join retired Brigadier General John Alison for his 98th birthday celebration. General Alison led the 1st Air Commando Force, famous for its infiltration of the Chindits into Burma during the Second World War, using, among other platforms, gliders, one of which he piloted. In celebrating General Alison's remarkable contributions to our Nation, it was especially meaningful to recognize his foundational impact on special operations. General Alison's story has become the first volume of SOF aviation history, and he set the bar very high for those who attempted to follow.

He also proffered, in his own way and time, several observations that became known as the "SOF truths"—positing, among other things, that humans are more important than hardware, that the quality of these humans is more important than quantity, and that we must respond to emergencies with the forces on hand, since competent SOF cannot be created overnight. The SOF truths encapsulate the wisdom that military professionals across the Joint force would do well to consider when deciding how best to prepare for tomorrow's challenges.

This wisdom remains as relevant as it was in General Alison's era—especially today, in a global strategic environment that's marked by escalating complexity and uncertainty, and with a defense budget that's challenged by worrisome national debt. Considering, in this light, the history of special operations forces over the last three decades, I appreciate how well the SOF truths have guided those in our profession, vectoring their collective efforts to bestow upon us today the most capable, most prepared special operators that our Joint force has ever seen, and with tangible prospects for even greater capabilities to come.



Institutional Reforms in the Aftermath of Operation EAGLE CLAW

Of course, when we say that humans are more important than hardware, we mean that in general, warriors who are better trained and confident in their abilities can prevail over adversaries who are less motivated and less inclined to think, plan, and act independently. Still, we certainly do not mean to dismiss the significance of good hardware in sufficient quantities for the mission.

Consider the state of the Air Force Special Operations Force that I—along with several of you—joined in the early 1980s, as a captain. In that era, AFSOF had only 33 Vietnam-era aircraft in the inventory, including AC-130s, MC-130s, and MH-53s. Our manning levels experienced a similar lull in this era, with just over 3,100 active duty and civilian Airmen on board. Many of us came into special ops despite our bosses' recommendations, for at that time, SOF was simply considered a questionable career move, with no clear path for routine employment or individual advancement. This clearly was not a reflection of sound application of the SOF truths; rather, it was the situation that crystallized in the aftermath of Operation EAGLE CLAW.

Fortunately for special operators, the Air Force, and the Nation, a determined group of dedicated public servants was actively working to address these problems. Thanks to the careful work of the Holloway Commission—and, I might add, to the leadership of Senators Barry Goldwater, Sam Nunn, and then-future Secretary of Defense William Cohen—the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 put special operations forces across the Department of Defense on a path toward improving virtually every weakness in our processes to plan, program, train, and develop special operations forces. Goldwater-Nichols established U.S. Special Operations Command, as well as the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict.

These important institutional changes empowered the special operations community to articulate the requirements for remediating its capabilities, which enabled its determined rise to today's enviable position as the world's most talented and deadly special operations force, bar none. By 1990, the number of AFSOF aircraft had more than tripled, and the number of Airmen grew by over 2,000,



thanks to the focused efforts of the first SOCOM Commander, General Jim Lindsay, as well as the visionary leadership of Major General Tom Eggers, who served as the first commander of Air Force Special Operations Command.

Sufficient quantities and quality of equipment also enabled SOF policymakers and trainers to focus their attention on refining the proficiencies of SOF personnel, which led to improvements across the broader Air Force as well. For instance, in the 1980s, C-130 assault landings and low-level operations using night-vision goggles, required specially-qualified SOF aircrews who, as a matter of routine, would duct-tape “chem-sticks” to their instrument panels, and tape over warning lights to allow safe operations on NVGs.

Today, however, well beyond AFSOC, nearly every airframe in the inventory is configured—and most crews are qualified—for NVG operations. These onetime special or atypical qualifications have been adopted as part of the standard flight training curriculum, thereby advancing the capabilities of our entire aircraft fleet—fixed- and rotary-wing.

The “Golden Age” of SOF

By 1996, Air Force SOF had more than tripled in personnel from that low point in the mid-1980s, and our fleet of aircraft had quadrupled. We had gone from clock-to-map-to-ground navigation, to moving-map with GPS-based precision, navigation, and timing. And, we had progressed from “chutes and ladders”—from aircraft stacked in the sky, often narrowly focused on airfield seizures, and with barely an afterthought to major combat operations—toward a thoroughly-integrated element of major combat operations.

At my promotion to brigadier general in that era, I spoke with great pride about my special operations brethren—particularly, the Airmen of the 16th Special Operations Wing, which I then commanded—crediting them for their operational achievements, which had everything to do with the honor that I received that day. Considering how far we had come since I had first joined this band of brothers, I declared my belief that we had entered a “golden age of special operations.” The relevance of SOF was by then quite clear throughout the Department of Defense, across American public perception, and in the eyes of our international partners.



Throughout the 1990s, mission sets from peacekeeping and noncombatant evacuations operations, to counterterrorism and integrated major combat operations, all benefitted immensely from the progressively better organized, trained, and equipped special operations team. And, with a renewed focus on the SOF truths, this team grew into a force that was very well prepared to respond powerfully to the attacks on September 11, 2001. Significantly, after 9/11, the SOF team was also able to launch itself on a trajectory of further development that, I believe, ensured the extension of the Golden Age of SOF through to the present, and well into the future.

While the relevance and importance of a strong special operations force were well-understood by 9/11, the nature of the conflicts that ensued in Afghanistan and Iraq nonetheless became a real inflection point for special operations, including AFSOC. In response, one of the most important developments in AFSOC in the last decade was to bolster the Joint Special Operations Task Force's ability to satisfy its burgeoning need for timely and accurate intelligence in order to pursue an elusive and embedded adversary. We stood up new squadrons, equipped with the latest remotely-piloted ISR technology to gain understanding of the enemy, and to find, fix, and finish targets when necessary. Two operations squadrons and two intelligence squadrons have been created to develop "pattern of life" intelligence on targets of interest, and turn this information into action. We use this intelligence for many purposes, including for information operations efforts, which, in particular, require contextually-rich descriptions of the environment and circumstances. SOF often make invaluable contributions to coalescing the cognitive dimension of the information environment—that which describes psychological, cultural, behavioral, and other human attributes that influence adversary decision-making.

Developing this glimpse into an adversary's decision-making process is time- and effort-intensive, with processes that are tremendously complex, in an environment that is extremely dynamic. But, these efforts are very worthwhile, and we must undertake this hard work, because this sort of intelligence is vital—from planning operational campaigns and missions, to any information operations efforts. It is often SOF, through their blending into hostile environments and their proximity



to the adversary, that are often the primary source, as well as a consumer, of information on language, education, history, religion, and other cultural, societal, and attitudinal nuances that compose the cognitive dimension of the information environment.

Similarly, by taking command of the 17th Air Support Operations Squadron and their Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, and by growing the special tactics force in the post-9/11 period, AFSOC has bolstered significantly the critical interface between SOF ground forces and the decisive effects airpower can provide. This special tactics force is emblematic of today's Golden Age of SOF. Back in the 1980s, in the era of John Carney, combat control was a group of less than 100 tough and committed ground radio guys whom we sent to air traffic control school, then taught to jump from a C-130 and control a landing zone from a jeep.

That pioneering group of Airmen has evolved into a culturally-attuned, elite force of lethal warriors—steeped in special tactics, and fortified with an ability to concentrate firepower on the ground, and airpower effects whenever and wherever needed. Special tactics is over 800 strong today, and one of AFSOC's top priorities is to develop an additional 600 battlefield airmen to form a second Special Tactics Group—an effort strongly guided and properly constrained by the SOF truths.

And, yet, our history has taught us to balance our investments on both humans and hardware. In Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere, the need to augment tactical battlefield mobility arose early. The operational focus on remote areas where traditional SOF airframes were either unable to reach, or not of sufficient numbers, prompted AFSOC to build a fleet of light and medium aircraft, such as the U-28 and M-28 Skytruck non-standard aviation assets. This special operations mobility build-up, along with the addition of ISR platforms, resulted in a nearly 75% increase in the special operations aviation inventory in the last decade alone.

Homage to the Giants of SOF

Ladies and gentlemen, over the last three decades, the SOF story has been one of selfless dedication and collective efforts—not only on the battlefield, but also in the countless days and nights spent building and preparing the SOF team. We owe



a debt of gratitude to SOF operators, like retired Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Wayne G. Norrad, whose unquestionable courage, innovation, and professionalism are consistently recorded as beyond compare the world over. After beginning his distinguished career as a combat controller, and culminating it as the senior enlisted advisor to the Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, Chief Norrad amassed many lifetime achievements that make him a most worthy recipient of the DeProspero Award.

We also owe it to the leaders whose vision shaped the transformation of special operations—leaders such as General Pete Schoomaker, whom NDIA rightly honored last night with the 2010 Rylander Award. Nearly 31 years ago, Pete was a plankholder in the attempt to rescue American hostages that ended in disaster at DESERT ONE. Throughout his career, Pete effected incredible change in the SOF community and the U.S. Army, and I know that he leveraged the lessons he learned that night at every opportunity, enabling the growth in scope and scale of the SOF community that I have discussed today.

Subsequent USSOCOM commanders such as General Holland have run with the baton that Pete handed them. When challenged by the early days of the Global War on Terrorism, General Holland advanced SOF to the very forefront of our Nation's security, and the security of our friends around the world. Later, General Doug Brown—the first member of the Army's Aviation branch to attain the rank of four-star general—rose to Secretary Rumsfeld's challenge to take the lead in planning and leading future U.S. counter-terror operations, rather than supporting others, as USSOCOM had in large measure in the past.

Our current USSOCOM commander, Admiral Eric Olson—the highest-ranking “bull frog” ever—has drawn great inspiration from the SOF truth that most SOF missions will require non-SOF assistance. In today's operations, we have come full circle, with conventional capabilities that are called-upon regularly as *supporting* forces, to enable SOCOM to accomplish its missions as a *supported* force. This is now par for the course in Afghanistan and Iraq, and U.S. Air Force assets will always be there when SOCOM requires them. Likewise, Admiral Olson has been a



real driving force in growing an even more potent Air Force special operations force, focusing, for instance, on C-130 recapitalization.

The net result of the efforts of these SOF giants—and too many others to recount here—is that our Nation has in its service today the world’s most competent, most capable special operations force.

Conclusion

Three decades ago, I would have never imagined that a SOF pilot could be nominated to serve as the Air Force Chief of Staff. Now that it has come to pass, I believe that it suggests not that I am in any sense special, but that there is institutional acknowledgment of the critical missions that SOF performs—for our Air Force, our military, and our Nation. I am grateful for the tremendous service of legendary SOF operators and leaders, many of whom are here today. I salute the strength of your commitment, courage, persistence, and intellect, which so effectively transformed special operations in the space of my career. Today’s SOF operators stand on your shoulders—as do I—and you can rest assured that each day, they amply repay the debt that they owe you, by carrying on the family business, and by renewing and extending the Golden Age of SOF.

Thank you very much. I will gladly accept your questions.