



# AIR | OBSERVER

the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing

# AIRMEN DEPLOY

WILL ROGERS AIR COMMANDOS HEAD TO SOUTHWEST ASIA

## GLOBAL REACH

OKLAHOMA GUARDSMEN HEAD TO THE BALTIC REGION TO SUPPORT NATO ALLIES

## GLOBAL POWER

WILL ROGERS AIRMEN PARTICIPATE IN JOINT REPUBLIC OF KOREA U.S. EXERCISE

# AIR OBSERVER

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## ON THE COVER

This photograph pays tribute to the estimated 140 Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing who voluntarily deployed to multiple undisclosed locations across Southwest Asia. Will Rogers Airmen are known for answering their nation's call and showing their deployed partners how 137 SOW Air Commandos lead, fight and win.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Senior Airman Tyler K. Woodward

POST-PRODUCTION: Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux



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# JULY 2016 - DECEMBER 2016

Volume 2 Number 2



Airmen at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, train in preparation for Tactical Air Control Party Specialist school to become TACPs in the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, Nov. 2, 2016. One member of the group searches for their next location, while the other members hold 45-pound plates above their heads. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Caroline Essex)

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## WING COMMANDER COL. DEVIN R. WOODEN

**A**irman readiness, the proficiency to perform our full spectrum of unique capabilities, is and continues to be the priority of your leadership. Our challenge is to conduct and sustain effective air power and agile combat support to any point on the globe by providing critical support to civil authorities during domestic operations, and fighting and winning our nation's wars against those who wish to do us harm. Our success relies on skilled Air Guardsmen responding to contingencies and conducting operations with reliable equipment, proven tactics and techniques, and in minimal time.

Our Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Robbie Asher, routinely points out that our readiness is directly tied to our relevancy, and he is not alone in recognizing the symbiotic relationship between the two.

"This agile force has established itself as a proven choice to provide air, space, and cyber power to combatant commanders in any Area of Responsibility, the first choice for homeland operations, and the enduring choice for building and maintaining long-term partnerships."- Air National Guard Strategic Master Plan

"Ensure READINESS to execute global special operations today, transform our force and fleet to maintain RELEVANCE tomorrow, and invest in the RESILIENCY of our force, family and relationships."- Air Force Special Operations Command priorities 2016

"Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur."- number four of the Five SOF Truths

"Leadership, Investment, Fitness, Readiness, Teamwork"- the Five Pillars of Will Rogers ANGB Airmen

Readiness is paramount to being the first choice for homeland operations, executing global special operations and being able to conduct operations at a time and place not of our choosing, and is at the core of being a Will Rogers Air Guardsman.

This past year has found Oklahoma guardsmen participating in exercises such as our Operational Readiness Exercise in August 2016 and fine tuning our deployment process working group. We've had Airmen exercising in Korea, Estonia, and Poland, training with our joint partners. We have trained with our special operations counterparts in exercises in Florida, Oregon, Wisconsin, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, and Texas. More importantly, we have Airmen deployed to Southwest Asia who are ensuring our nation's security.

Squadron commanders and senior noncommissioned officers directly affect the readiness of their units by the priority levied upon training core-skills, exercising realistic scenarios, establishing a mobility mindset and ensuring proficiency in wartime skills. Commanders are dedicated to the efforts of our Airmen who continually strive to achieve readiness. Moreover, this wing is dedicated to the families who share their loved one, give their time and sacrifice those precious memories while their loved one is deployed.

We have just enjoyed two of the most cherished family holidays. My wife (Kelly) and I are keeping you and your deployed loved ones in our prayers. I pray for a safe and expedient return and thank you for your sacrifice and contribution to the readiness that keeps us safe.

## STATE COMMAND CHIEF CHIEF MASTER SGT. RONALD D. TEAGUE

**F**rom the onset of Operation Desert Shield in August 1990 to today, the 137th Special Operations Wing has been in a constant state of readiness for over 26 years. The men and women of the 137th have steadily deployed throughout the Middle East and to Germany in support of operations like Operation Provide Promise. As a wing, the operations tempo you have been asked to maintain during this time, which included three different mission sets, speaks volumes to your constant pursuit of readiness.

I believe today's world is a much more unpredictable and dangerous place. It is constantly changing on a daily basis. I don't see our operations tempo decreasing anytime soon with the rise of the Islamic State (ISIL) and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. They have the ability to move and recruit around the world, as well as China and Russia flexing their muscle in the South China Sea and Europe. For these reasons, readiness in the Air National Guard has never been more important than it is today.

As your command chief master sergeant, I urge you, the men and women of the Oklahoma Air National Guard, to continue to maintain your physical, spiritual, mission and family readiness so that we are ready to respond immediately and collectively. Whether accomplishing job specific training, professional development, fitness assessments, or visiting the chaplain or director of psychological health for guidance and advice, we must not become complacent in our efforts.

Just as importantly, our families need our attention. They are the ones that press forward when we deploy and it is vitally important that we meet their needs and expectations. Communicating with our spouses, children, and extended family members during the pre-deployment process can reduce their anxieties and prepare them for what lies ahead.

After the call is not the time to start preparations ... BE READY!



**INTO THE SUNSET** | Tech. Sgt. Caroline E. Essex

Hands wave out of bus windows as family and friends say goodbye to their loved ones who are on their way to a waiting aircraft, Oct. 19, 2016, at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City. This was a part of the deployment of an estimated 140 137th Special Operation Wing Airmen to Southwest Asia in support of Operations Enduring Freedom's Sentinel and Inherent Resolve.





## CHAPLAIN 1ST LT. KENNETH R. TEEL

**I**t was June 1996, I was an airman first class, and I had only been a member of the 3rd Combat Communications Group for eight months. My phone rang, and the voice of my noncommissioned officer in charge was on the phone informing me to grab my A bags for a full recall. I would soon learn that 19 Airmen had been killed by a terrorist attack at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. Our unit was being called to respond by establishing a new Air Operations Center for the theater while providing C4 communications as part of Operation Southern Watch.

Once I arrived at my squadron, I was informed that we would be deploying in 48 hours and was told to call my family and inform them.

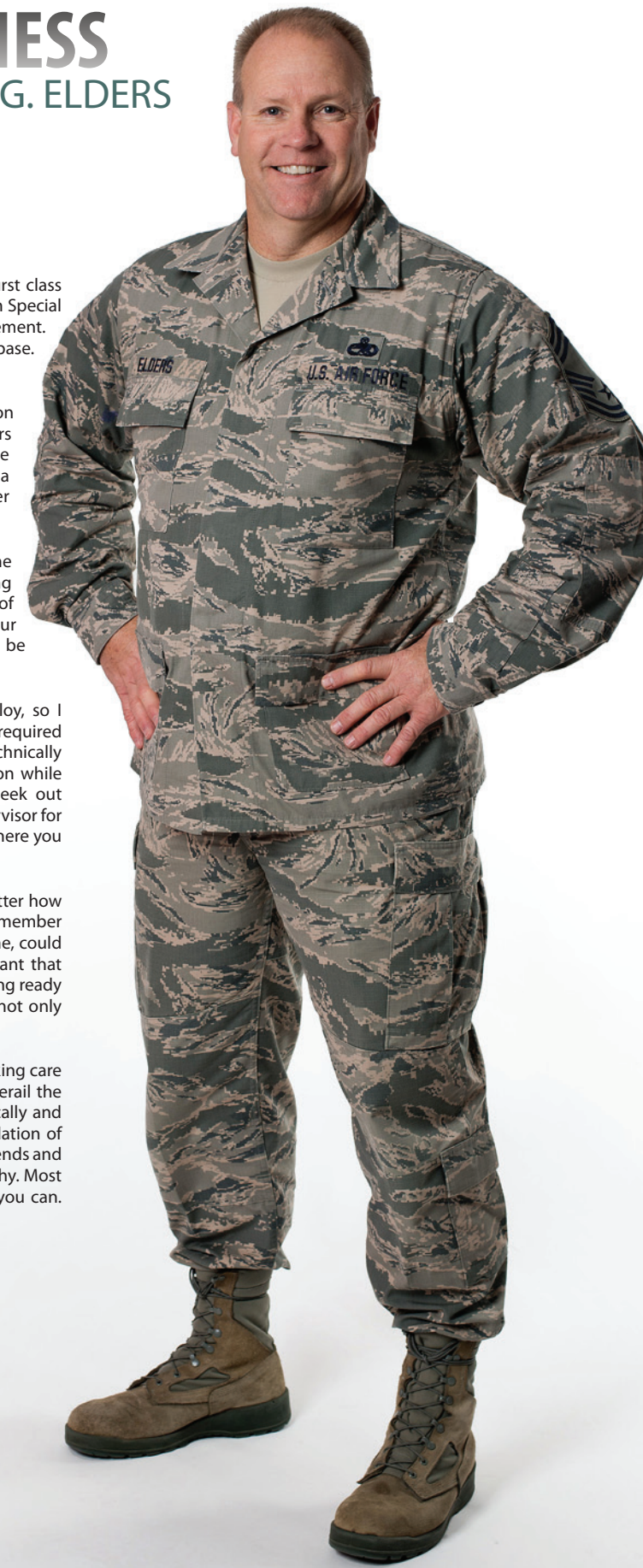
I was trained to setup and operate the necessary communications equipment to support the mission and had completed combat readiness school. My personal readiness folder was up to date and all the items on the mobility checklist were packed into my A bags. I was ready and I was salty! I relished the opportunity to perform the real world mission that I had trained for and the esprit de corps of the unit was higher than ever.

We arrived in theater and subsequently ran 35,000 feet of communications lines. I was part of the night-shift crew who ran the cable and configured circuits. It was some of the hardest work I had ever experienced.

Though physically ready for my mission, an often overlooked part of readiness is knowing where to turn when the mission and life get tough. I was finishing up my 38th consecutive 12-hour night shift and watching an Arabian sunrise on the roof top of a villa; I was exhausted, thousands of miles away from my family and very discouraged. As the sun rose, I felt my faith stir, reminding me that God was with me. In that moment I turned to Him.

When life's circumstances overwhelm you, don't avoid talking to God, be ready to turn to Him and be encouraged. Be spiritually ready!

## LOGISTICS READINESS CHIEF MASTER SGT. JEFFREY G. ELDERS



**R**eadiness is everyone's responsibility – from an airman first class to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. It is part of the 137th Special Operations Wing's Five Pillars and the Wing's vision statement. It's even posted on the main gate as you exit the base. However, it should also be part of your personal core values.

As the 137th Special Operation Logistics Readiness Squadron superintendent, readiness is all encompassing. Over my 30 years in the military, I've heard many tell me they were ready. Yet come to find out when they showed up to work or were leaving for a deployment, they found unfinished business. You must empower yourself to be ready!

I have found good communication skills to be one of the biggest assets in readiness. It is a two-way street, so be willing to give and receive information from up and down your chain of command. Let your command work with you and for you. All of your fellow Airmen want you to be successful in your endeavors, so be willing to take that step in personal and professional readiness.

You also never know when your time will come to deploy, so I encouraged you to be fully trained to accomplish all of your required tasks. Being ready means taking the initiative to ensure you are technically prepared to execute any task necessary to complete the mission while deployed. I've learned you must be proactive each drill to seek out different opportunities to practice your craft. Even ask your supervisor for opportunities to spend your summer training at another base where you can learn different skills.

Each of us has a responsibility within the Wing, and no matter how big or small the task, it is critical for our Wing's overall success. Remember there is power in numbers. I've often asked myself, "If I were gone, could someone else pick up where I left off?" That's why it is important that everyone is ready. There is nothing more frustrating than not being ready to serve or do your part. So fix it. Being ready means you can not only identify a problem, but also be a part of its solution.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, readiness means taking care of personal matters. A disorganized health and home life can derail the brightest careers. It is every Airman's responsibility to be physically and medically ready to deploy. That means building a strong foundation of support while home station through relationships with family, friends and community. It means working all year round to stay fit and healthy. Most importantly, it means making family time a priority whenever you can. Because I know that if my family isn't ready, I'm not ready either.

My takeaway: stay ready, in all aspects, at all times!



**THE STRIKER** | Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux

The lights and sounds from the 137th Fire Department's newest fire truck scream across the Will Rogers Air National Guard Base flight line in Oklahoma City, Nov. 3, 2015. The Oshkosh Striker aircraft rescue and firefighting vehicle features an ultra high pressure firefighting system with a pump that delivers 300 GPM of foam at 1,250 PSI through a front bumper turret. It also releases smaller water droplets at a much higher pressure than conventional firefighting systems.



## MEDICAL MAJ. TANYA M. KECK-SMITH

Over the past year, the deployment tempo has increased considerably, and medical readiness has become vital. As a physician assistant in the 137th Special Operations Medical Group, that same medical readiness is my daily focus.

To determine who is and who is not medically qualified for deployment, we perform a risk assessment. We consider a member's medical issues, medications, need for follow-up or further treatment in their future Area of Responsibility, and the potential impact of the deployment on their family. If the member's health could deteriorate or mission safety could be compromised, we won't clear a member to deploy without one or more waivers.

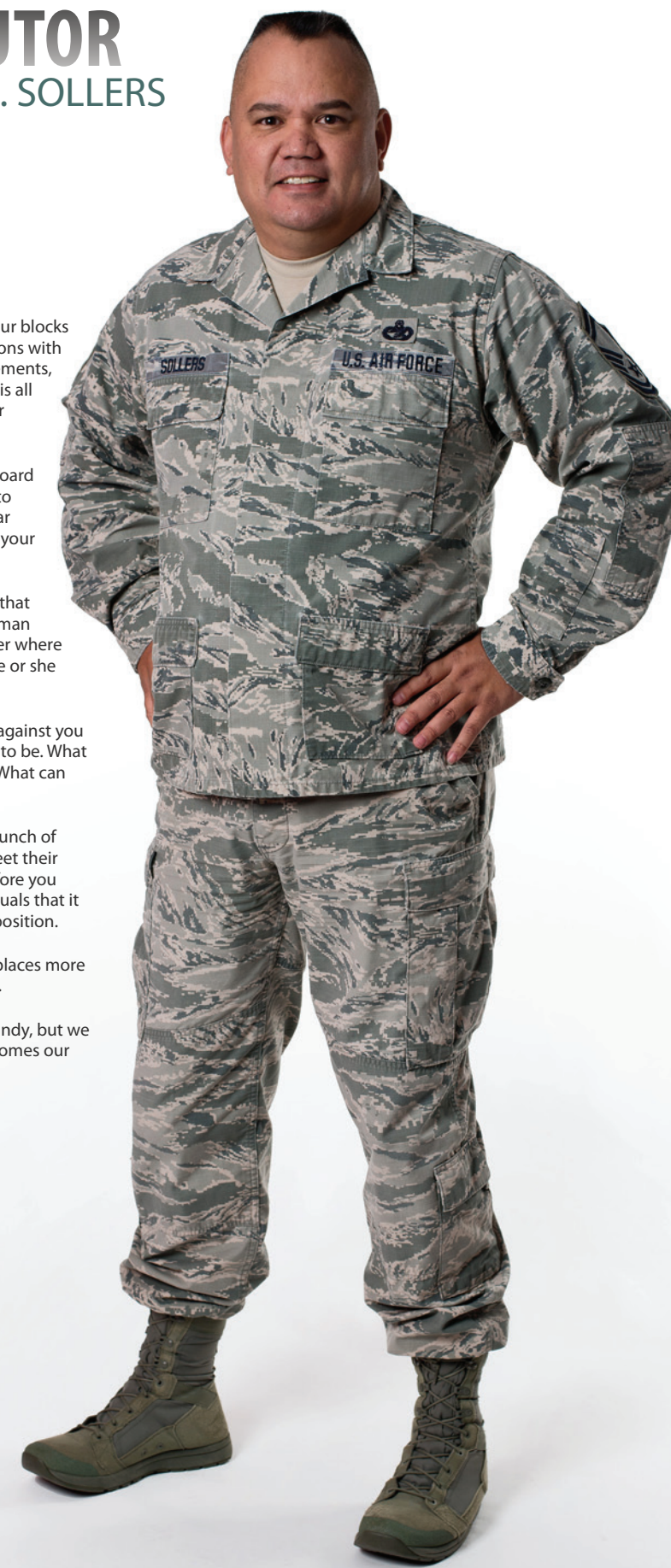
That process sometimes seems like a moving target. Our guidance changes two or three times a year, and we depend on everyone disclosing an accurate medical history on their annual WebHA. If we don't have a full picture of a member's health status, we may unknowingly make a decision to deploy and risk personal and mission safety. Therefore, we can't make decisions lightly.

A notable example of this process occurred early in my career. I was tasked to clear a master sergeant in his mid-30s for deployment. He showed up in his fitness gear and appeared short of breath. He explained he was cooling down from his fitness test three hours earlier, and his only known medical problem was high blood pressure. I reviewed his medical record and realized his level of triglycerides was nearly 2,000. Triglycerides are a bad type of cholesterol. To give perspective, normal levels are less than 150, and I had never seen a number above 900! Instead of clearing the master sergeant to deploy, I sent him to the Emergency Department. I was notified a short time later that he was suffering a heart attack and had been admitted. He did recover fully, was granted a medical waiver, and gratefully finished a 20-year career.

Imagine if that member had deployed. Not only would the limited resources in the AOR impact his recovery, but the mission would have suffered as his position would have remained vacant until someone else arrived.

Medical readiness is often an underestimated but vitally important part of the overall warfighting mission. We, at the 137 SOMDG, strive to provide great service to the members of the 137 SOW while protecting your health and the safety of the mission.

## GUEST CONTRIBUTOR SENIOR MASTER SGT. REX L. SOLLERS



I personally think about readiness in two ways.

The first answers the question: "Do you have all of your blocks checked off?" This is where you get the reporting instructions with certain training requirements. You complete those requirements, fill in the dates and sign off. This particular piece of readiness is all fine and well. It gets you to your new Area of Responsibility or temporary duty location, and it gets you working.

The second and, perhaps, biggest question across the board to ask ourselves is, "Are you prepared?" This answer delves into the conversation of knowing the details of your own particular role in every situation. What is your Unit Task Code? What are your responsibilities within that UTC?

In my job as a logistics planner, I know a lot of the UTCs that we have. In my shop, I have a superintendent role and a two-man package that my other two Airmen fill. Each Airman, no matter where he or she is, is responsible in knowing the roles of the UTCs he or she could be postured against.

For Airmen, you can look at the UTCs that are postured against you and create a plan to climb the ranks. Look at where you want to be. What training do you need? What outside schooling can you find? What can set you apart?

As a senior noncommissioned officer, I'd rather have a bunch of overqualified Airmen than Airmen who are still training to meet their current positions. Be prepared to take the next step, even before you have to take it. We should have so many overqualified individuals that it is hard for senior leadership to choose just one for that next position.

Being prepared keeps operations moving forward and places more than capable Airmen in positions that are vital to the mission.

In the end, completing those checklists is all fine and dandy, but we need to do a better job of preparing ourselves for whatever comes our way, whenever it happens.

It all starts with knowing our roles.



**UP IN SMOKE** | Senior Airman Tyler K. Woodward

Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron engage a target through green smoke during an urban terrain scenario at Camp Gruber Training Center near Braggs, Okla., Aug. 3, 2016. Approximately 40 members of the 137 SOSFS completed annual training from July 29 to Aug. 5, 2016. Airmen participated in extensive training exercises including close combat, weapons, military operations on urban terrain and navigation.



READY

RELEVANT

RESILIENT

# OKLAHOMA GUARDSMEN GO GLOBAL

introduction SENIOR AIRMAN KASEY M. PHIPPS

From the light-dappled woods on the edge of the Baltic countryside to the screaming neon of Korea's inner cities, Air Commandos are there. They are deployed in all corners of the globe, training and preparing to act in any situation, at any time.

Deployed to strategically positioned locations near and in hot spots of unrest, they are being put to the test and pushed to their limits. Time and time again, they prove their unique capabilities and ongoing resiliency.

Among these Airmen are the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guardsmen working in their own capacity. In these same places, their presence attests to their maintenance of the "Always ready, always there" Guard mission — whether protecting their country in the homeland and protecting freedom abroad. Alongside U.S. active duty, guard and reserve military personnel from all branches, Oklahoma Guardsmen work with their foreign military and NATO ally counterparts in areas worldwide to put Oklahoma on the map and in the fight.

Even before gaining the special operations title, Airmen from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City remained

globally relevant with their involvement in contingency operations throughout the world.

Spread within the Baltic region in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, WRANGB personnel were among the more than 30,000 NATO troops along the Russian border in the spring and summer months of May and June.

Walking in the hurried and humid streets of the Republic of Korea, more WRANGB Airmen operated at several bases on the Korean peninsula during the world's largest exercise of its kind.

Even now, more than 140 Airmen are deployed or are scheduled to deploy to nine different locations in Southwest Asia in support of ongoing operations as part of the Wing's largest deployment since 2003.

Whether participating in their local community, training at home or patrolling the skies in foreign regions, 137th Air Commandos are there, ready and more relevant than ever. **AO**



Capt. Jared Ackerman, 146th Air Support Operations Squadron air liaison officer, simulates A-10 close air support while being observed by Lithuanian Air Support Operations Officer, Capt. Andrius Bivainis, as part of Exercise Sabre Strike 16 near Vilnius, Lithuania, June 15, 2016. Sabre Strike is a long-standing U.S. Army Europe led cooperative training exercise held in multiple locations across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, May 28 to June 21, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Micah Campbell)



BOTTOM LEFT: Members of the Polish Army collaborate with Soldiers from the 45th Field Artillery Brigade, headquartered in Mustang, Oklahoma, in the tactical operations center during Exercise Anakonda 16 at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, June 12, 2016. Anakonda 16 is a Polish-led, multinational exercise that took place throughout Poland, June 7-17, 2016, and tested the ability, readiness and interoperability of Polish Armed Forces with allies and partners, while conducting a joint defensive operation on a large scale. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Micah D. Campbell)

BOTTOM RIGHT: Senior Airman Derek Rowland (left) and Staff Sgt. Mark Eidschun (right), both crew chiefs for the 138th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, perform routine maintenance on an F-16 Fighting Falcon from the 138th Fighter Wing, Tulsa, Okla., during Exercise Anakonda 16, June 10, 2016, Lask Air Base, Poland. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)

*“In our current construct with the threats in Eastern Europe, our NATO allies are going to rely heavily on JTACs and U.S. air power to project force.”*

## EXERCISE SABER STRIKE

story 1ST LT. MICAH D. CAMPBELL

### *“Hog one-one, cleared hot.”*

Within seconds, the distinct silhouette of an A-10 Warthog appeared over the tree line. “BRRRRRRRT,” echoed the report from the 30 millimeter cannon. Downrange, dirt flew, sparks erupted and a target vehicle was shredded in an instant.

For members of the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, who were deployed to Tallinn, Estonia for Exercise Sabre Strike 2016, this moment marked the culmination of several years’ worth of relationship building and intense training.

“The Estonian Joint Tactical Air Control training program is led by 146 ASOS Airmen and falls under a state partnership program assigned to the Maryland National Guard,” explained Master Sgt. Larry Mansell, 146 ASOS chief JTAC. “We operate under an agreement formed between the Maryland and Oklahoma Adjutant Generals, which allowed us to play a vital role in Exercise Sabre Strike and operate throughout the region.”

Saber Strike is a long-standing U.S. Army Europe-led cooperative training exercise designed to improve joint interoperability through a range of missions that prepare the 13 participating nations to support multinational contingency operations. The exercise served as an effective proving ground for units to validate their ability to assemble rapid-reaction forces and deploy them on short notice where needed.

One of the participant nations included Lithuania, which was also supported by 146 ASOS Airmen. 146th tactical air controllers working with their Lithuanian counterparts sought to maximize their training time, despite a myriad of challenges. When weather prevented ASOS airman from controlling aircraft, they made the most of their partnership by simulating A-10 close

air support for Lithuanian soldiers aspiring to gain Joint Tactical Air Control qualification.

“We are able to help by providing JTAC instructor and evaluator feedback,” said Mansell. “For us, it’s beneficial for our young instructors to be able to develop their skills by teaching foreign soldiers with very basic JTAC knowledge.”

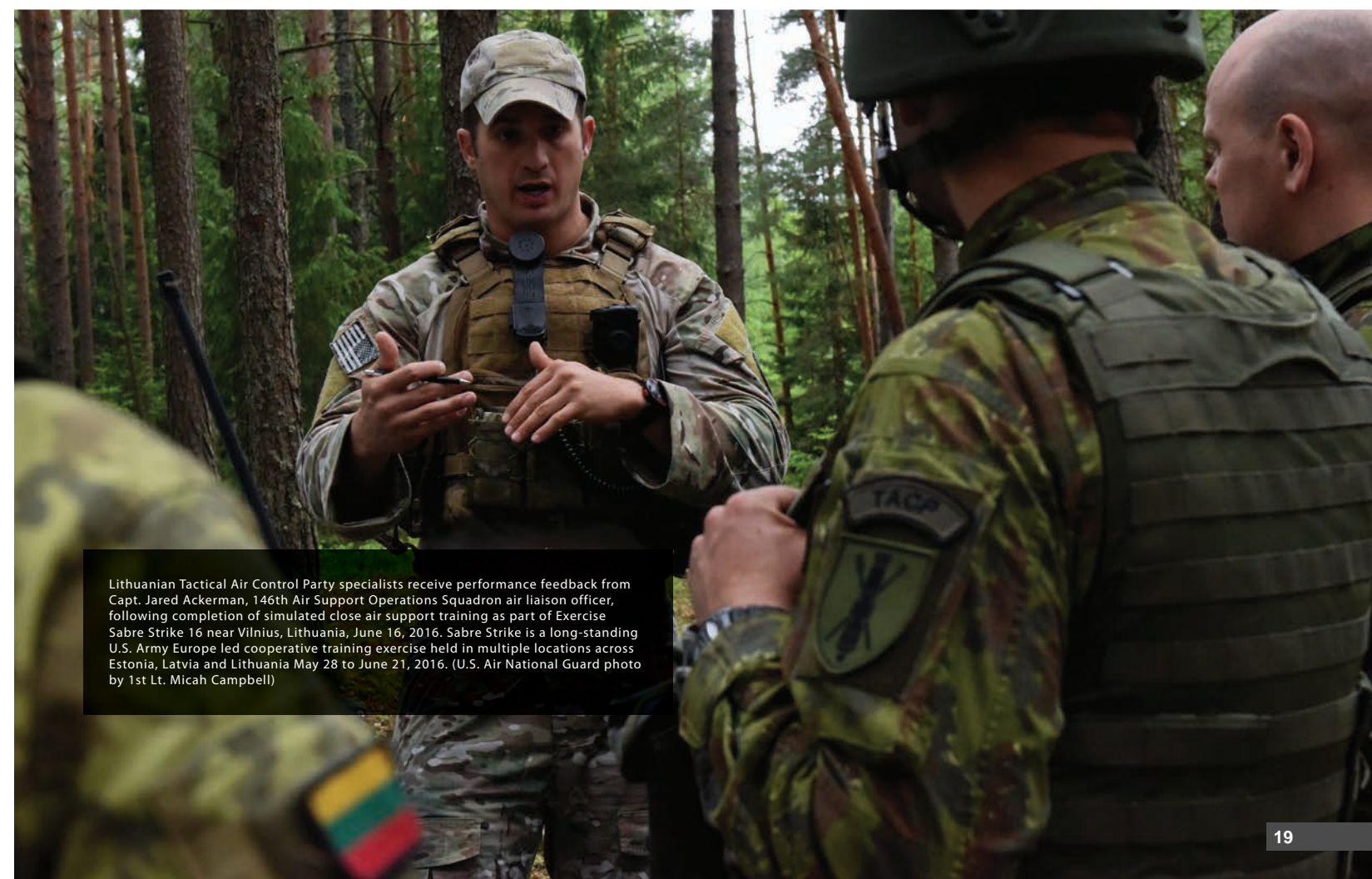
Operating from Lask Air Base, Poland, Airmen from the 138th Fighter Wing, Tulsa Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma, contributed to Sabre Strike by joining active duty personnel from the 31st Fighter Wing, Aviano Air Base, Italy, to maintain and operate F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft. This included bombing runs on the ranges in Estonia and Lithuania where 146th JTACs worked jointly to train and control range operations.

“With close air support, it’s always a joint endeavor,” said Mansell. “We faced challenges, but we had the commonality of being JTACs. We all knew the 9-lines; we all knew the cadence of what needed to be done, so we all had common ground.”

The focus on getting the job done ultimately resulted in a successful Sabre Strike exercise and an increased combat capability, which, according to Lt. Col. Christopher Gries, 146 ASOS commander, is vitally important.

“In our current construct with the threats in Eastern Europe, our NATO allies are going to rely heavily on JTACs and U.S. air power to project force,” said Gries. “We need to operate with the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians flawlessly to ensure force protection for all of our troops and our allies, which increases our combat capability throughout all of Eastern Europe. I’m confident that Oklahoma Air National Guardsmen did just that through their contributions to Sabre Strike 16.” **AO**

Tactical Control Air Party specialists from the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron analyze visibility while controlling A-10 Thunderbolts from the 127th Wing as part of Exercise Sabre Strike 16 near Tallinn, Estonia, June 20, 2016. Sabre Strike is a long-standing U.S. Army Europe led cooperative training exercise held in multiple locations across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, May 28 to June 21, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)



Lithuanian Tactical Air Control Party specialists receive performance feedback from Capt. Jared Ackerman, 146th Air Support Operations Squadron air liaison officer, following completion of simulated close air support training as part of Exercise Sabre Strike 16 near Vilnius, Lithuania, June 16, 2016. Sabre Strike is a long-standing U.S. Army Europe led cooperative training exercise held in multiple locations across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania May 28 to June 21, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Micah Campbell)

*“You get to do this live. You get to experience that stress level and do your job — what you signed up to do — all in a training environment.”*

## EXERCISE ANAKONDA

story 1ST LT. MICAH D. CAMPBELL

Stepping out of the tent onto the damp, sandy soil, the smell of gunpowder, hum of generators, and sight of heavy military vehicles moving in coordinated waves immediately announces the stark reality; you're not in Oklahoma anymore.

For members of the 45th Field Artillery Brigade from Mustang, Oklahoma, the unfamiliar terrain and unique smells, sounds, and sights of Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, became home during Exercise Anakonda 16.

The exercise is one of U.S. Army Europe's premier multinational training events, as well as a Polish national exercise aimed at training Polish forces for operations in a multinational environment. Anakonda 16 involved more than 31,000 participants from 24 nations, and supported assurance and deterrence measures by demonstrating allied defense capabilities to deploy, mass, and sustain combat power. Controlling that combat power is something that the 45th FAB is highly skilled at.

“We were brought in specifically to perform as the force fires headquarters at the Joint Task Force level as part of Anakonda 16,” said Col. Greg Lankford, commander of the 45 FAB. “The 4th Infantry Division Artillery is the fires control for the Command Post Exercise portion of Anakonda, but they didn't feel they could do that and perform artillery fires control simultaneously, so we got the call.”

Though understated, the “call” was significant for many reasons.

“Not only are we coordinating surface-to-surface fire, we are also coordinating air-to-ground fire and performing air defense and airspace management across a multinational, multiservice, multi-echelon environment

for all fires support systems here in Poland,” said Maj. Jack Vaughn, operations officer for the 45 FAB.

As part of the air-to-ground control component for the 45 FAB, F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 138th Fighter Wing, Tulsa Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma, were utilized to deliver munitions on targets at the Drawsko Pomorskie range. Though only a part of the overall battle plan, the opportunity to have Oklahoma assets working together half way around the world was rewarding.

“It's very rare for us to pull all of these components together,” said Lankford. “We've never really worked with multinational elements directly in the field, especially directing live fire exercises. It's also very rare that we directly interface with the Air Force and have the ability to integrate air defense artillery radar in our operations. All of these are unique opportunities.”

Vaughn echoed Lankford's assessment and added, “It's a high stress environment but it's not wartime; it's still peacetime. You get to do this live. You get to experience that stress level and do your job — what you signed up to do — all in a training environment.” AO

### RELATED VIDEO



The U.S. Army's 155mm Paladin howitzers from Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery Regiment, conduct a fires mission during Exercise Anakonda 16 at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, June 13, 2016. The 45th Field Artillery Brigade, headquartered in Mustang, Oklahoma, controlled fire operations as part of Anakonda 16, a Polish-led, multinational exercise that took place throughout Poland, June 7-17, 2016, and tested the ability, readiness and interoperability of Polish Armed Forces with allies and partners, while conducting a joint defensive operation on a large scale. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Micah D. Campbell)



Members of the Polish Army collaborate with Soldiers from the 45th Field Artillery Brigade, headquartered in Mustang, Oklahoma, in the tactical operations center during Exercise Anakonda 16 at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, June 12, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Micah D. Campbell)

**FOREST DAWN** | Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux

Tactical Air Control Party specialist Tech. Sgt. Justin Davis from the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, debriefs Lithuanian TACP's following simulated close air support training during Exercise Sabre Strike 16 near Vilnius, Lithuania, June 16, 2016. Sabre Strike is a long-standing U.S. Army Europe led cooperative training exercise held in multiple locations across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that contributed to the overall interoperability between partner nations, May 28 to June 21, 2016.





A wall of monitors lights the faces of U.S. military and Department of Defense personnel, United Nations Command representatives, and military members from the Republic of Korea in the operations room of the Korean Air and Space Operations Center at Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, Aug. 22, 2016.

*“We want our simulations to be so effective that the warfighter fights the war, not the simulation.”*

## EXERCISE ULCHI FREEDOM GUARDIAN

*story* SENIOR AIRMAN KASEY M. PHIPPS  
*photographs* SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

Scents from the scattered food vendors fight for dominance over the cobbled sidewalks as pedestrians, bicycles and mopeds weave around each other to create a rhythm of polite chaos, periodically interrupted by a frustrated cab horn. Widely unknown to the people swept up in the motions of the city, an exercise – the largest of its kind in the world – was taking place in the virtual spaces around them.

Ulchi Freedom Guardian 16, an annual joint, combined and simulation-supported command and control exercise, took place electronically across six installations on the Korean Peninsula and select military and government installations in the U.S.

The Aug. 22 - Sept. 4, 2016, exercise brought 2,500 U.S. military and Department of Defense personnel to the peninsula to test decision-makers at the general officer level and strengthen the U.S. and Republic of Korea alliance. The United Nations Command sent representatives from nine of its States as well as neutral observers to join the already on-peninsula Republic of Korea personnel in creating the largest, most robust multinational exercise of its kind.

Though the exercise was focused at the general officer level, 25,000 Airmen, Marines, Soldiers and Sailors of all ranks supported every aspect of the mainly Pacific Air Forces training event. Among those in attendance were Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City.

“Having the opportunity to work with other units is always beneficial to your future and growth as an Airman,” said Capt. Jennifer Gomes, 137 SOW sexual assault response coordinator who acted as a public affairs officer during the exercise. “With exercises like this, you have the opportunity to step out of the norm and learn from experts in their fields. This exercise just happened to be thousands of miles from home and gave us a great experience of working with our foreign military counterparts like the ROK Air Force.”

Whether working within a three-story, monitor-lined command center, gathering data in a vaulted intel room, answering phones in the small, well-lit offices of headquarters buildings or bouncing down the road behind the steering wheel of a bus, WRANGB Airmen represented the Wing through a multitude of roles, including: exercise planners and evaluators, translators, public affairs, intelligence, and services and logistics personnel.

“The PACAF exercise was beneficial to us because it allowed us to not only meet other units and make great contacts, but it also allowed other units to see the 137 SOW and see a lot of the members fill various positions across numerous locations,” said Master Sgt. Ryan Andresen, 137 SOW security forces squadron noncommissioned officer in charge of operations.

In contrast to the neon-lit and Lego-like businesses stacked on top of one another in Seoul, South Korea, Rush Park, or “Tent City” (as the temporary lodgings for the exercise augmentees came to be called) was marked by sage



Senior Airman Shenandoah Delrio-Rodriguez, 137th Special Operations Force Support Squadron, records and fulfills service requests for augmentees, Sept. 1, 2016, at Rush Park, Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea.



A marker board sign greets Ulchi Freedom Guardian augmentees as they enter the Morale, Welfare and Recreation area within a hardened shelter at Rush Park, or "Tent City," at Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, Sept. 2, 2016.

and sand tents pumped with roaring AC units and lighted outside by lines of amber lights.

The first wave of 137th Will Rogers Airmen arrived from the 137th Logistics Readiness and Force Support Squadrons almost 20 days before the exercise began, helping to setup the air conditioned tents and other arrangements for the approximately 600 joint military personnel who were slated to stay there.

During the exercise, the services and logistics Airmen kept and managed Tent City by providing snacks, entertainment, comfort, sleeping arrangements and transportation to the tent-dwelling service members.

Three 137 LRS Airmen organized and provided bus routes for the car-less augmentees to ensure they had access to the Base Exchange and dining facilities at all hours.

"I and two other Airmen rotated shifts on the bus route as well as moved equipment like tents, cots, and supplies," said Staff Sgt. William Drake, vehicle operations noncommissioned officer in charge during the night shift. "We also transported individuals who had to go to locations that weren't accessible by the buses. Overall, we supported the more than 600 joint military members who were working 24-hour operations."

Back in the exercise's "White Cell," or scripting cell, Airmen were responsible for injecting the exercise's scenarios and maintaining their realistic nature.

The scenarios, which are based on real-world contingency plans, are designed around the learning objectives of both the general officers and the personnel on the operations floor.

Airmen in the White Cell script each scenario from injection to resolution in order to test as many sections and units as possible, while monitoring the progress of each scenario and making adjustments based on how the participants respond.

"We want our simulations to be so effective that the warfighter fights the war, not the simulation," said retired U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Lovelace, Korea Air Simulations Center simulation manager. "We want them to forget that it's a simulation altogether."

Andresen worked in the White Cell as one of the scripters. There, he witnessed how each role on a base can be affected with a single event.

"It was a very eye opening experience, because traditionally we, especially as security forces, are always worried about the Air Base Ground Defense aspect and protection of Air Force resources," said Andresen. "To create more challenging or more complex exercise inputs while working in the White Cell forced us to understand other Air Force Specialty Codes (positions) and all the things they have to accomplish on their end to get all of their boxes checked to ensure they meet the training requirement."

On the receiving end of the scenarios, Gomes participated in operations where she saw how different career fields, nations and ranks work together to accomplish a single goal and create an impact.

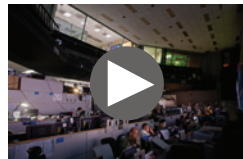
"This exercise gave me the chance to learn more about working with larger areas of responsibility, and as a PAO, what we say and when it is relayed forward has a huge impact," said Gomes. "We were responsible for letting thousands of people know what was going on."

From the captains sitting at tables with generals to the Airmen driving bus routes, UFG's Tent City and operations rooms would have been noticeably empty without the presence of 137th Airmen. In fact, several 137th participating Airmen received awards and accolades for their efforts in UFG.

"This exercise shows these Airmen that not only are their tasks vitally important, but they are connected to the decisions made at the highest level," said Air Force Maj. Gen. Walter Sams, deputy commander Air Force Forces. "I am enormously proud of all military members on this peninsula."

Though the sights and sounds of the Republic of Korea are far behind them, WRANGB Airmen can be assured that their efforts, along with those of the other participants, helped to strengthen the U.S. and ROK alliance and ensure the safety of the country's 51 million citizens. **AO**

**RELATED VIDEO**



A banner welcomes Ulchi Freedom Guardian participants to the bustling streets and colorful storefronts of the outdoor shopping mall just outside the main gate of Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, Aug. 22, 2016.



1st Lt. William Jennings, 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, serves as the night shift air liaison officer attached to the 607th Air Support Operations Group of the 8th Army Air Liaison Element, Aug. 28, 2016, at the Combined Operations Intelligence Center, U.S. Army Garrison Yongsan, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

**THE BIRD'S NEST** | Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux

A MC-12W shelters from the rain outside among some of the equipment and systems that keep it ready to fly in a moment's notice, Nov. 7, 2016, at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City. The 137 SOW is the sole U.S. Air Force unit operating the MC-12, which is maintained through a contract with L3 Communications.



“Every member needs to be ready in all aspects – professionally, personally and in family life”

## DEPLOYMENT SOUTHWEST ASIA

story SENIOR AIRMAN BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE AND SENIOR AIRMAN KASEY M. PHIPPS

As the Airmen of the 137th Special Operations Wing are settling into their new mission under the Air Force Special Operations Command, America's international conflicts and global responsibilities continue – as does our Wing's mission to deploy in support of our nation overseas.

For some, this is their first time in a deployed role, and for the Wing, it's the first under its new AFSOC moniker.

“I'm excited to go,” said Tech. Sgt. Cassandra Essary, 137th Security Forces noncommissioned officer in charge of combat arms. “This will be my first time to deploy as combat arms instead of in the traditional security forces role. So I'm really excited.”

The last base-wide wing deployment was in 2003 when the 137th was still a C-130 Hercules airlift wing. Now, in support of Operations Enduring Freedom's Sentinel and Inherent Resolve, nearly 140 WRANGB Airmen have deployed or are deploying to nine different locations in Southwest Asia, where our forces will be working across 20 countries with multiple airframes and multiple missions amongst various branches of the U.S. military and international military forces.

Operation Freedom's Sentinel is the U.S. military mission following the official end of Operation Enduring Freedom and combat operations in Afghanistan that adds to the continued security of the region.

Operation Inherent Resolve is the U.S. military operation for the military intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), including both the campaign in Iraq and the campaign in Syria.

“I know I'm a part of a team out here,” said Senior Airman Tyler Woodward, a 137 SOW Public Affairs specialist who is currently deployed. “All across the Area of Responsibility, we are directly involved in the dismantling of radical extremism through Operation Inherent Resolve. So, being given the opportunity to wear my uniform and contribute to the mission in a deployed environment has been the greatest honor of my short Air Force career.”

The deployment is part of the 137 SOW's standard Air Expeditionary Force rotation, which, starting with this one, puts the Air National Guard wings into four-year Reserve Component Periods, or deployment rotations that deploy each wing every four years.

The process began nearly one year ago when the Wing received a list of roles that needed to be filled by various unit personnel. Since that tasking, extensive and comprehensive preparation has occurred in all deploying areas on base.

“We have to make sure everyone meets military, medical and flight requirements, for those who need it,” said Senior Airman Aaron Rickey, unit deployment manager for the 137th Aeromedical Squadron. “Deployers have to complete all of their usual trainings, plus the training in their reporting instructions. Some of the units have different needs, and some deployed locations even have multiple reporting instructions ... It gets complicated.”

While the UDMs are responsible for ensuring their members have met all of their military training requirements for their deployed locations, like schools, weapons qualifications, medical appointments and relevant classes, there are



Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing listen to a pre-deployment briefing, Oct. 2, 2016, in Mayberry Hall at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Brigette Waltermire)



Airmen complete several training courses prior to deployment, including this Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense Awareness course, in which Airmen donned their chemical protective gear, July 19, 2016, at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Brigette Waltermire)





Air Force Master Sgt. Michael Rigsby, 137th Special Operations Civil Engineering Squadron, spends time with his daughter prior to deploying from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, October 19, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Caroline Essex)



Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, wait for their baggage to be inspected and loaded prior to deploying in Support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel, October 19, 2016. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Caroline Essex)

other offices on base that focus on the requirements of their families.

"We make sure the families have access to all of the resources they'll need, we check up on them regularly during the deployment, and we provide opportunities for them to be with other families in similar situations so that they don't feel so alone," said Tracy Poindexter, 137 SOW Airman and Family Readiness program manager. "They're going to know that we're here for them – deployed or not. We're going to get them through the deployment, and we're going to make sure they get through it well."

Yellow Ribbon events are just one of the ways that Family Readiness prepares both the Airman and his or her family ahead of time. Each event is a series of briefings on family readiness during a deployment, covering issues like family finances, childcare, communication strategies, life coaching, and other important topics that are important to families at home and on station while the service member is deployed.

"They have it so well managed, it's pretty easy for us," said Airman 1st Class Kaleb Peckham, 137th Special Operations Civil Engineering water and fuel systems maintainer. "We just show up, and they have everything set. There was a lot of good information for my family, and it helped us know what to expect."

Family Readiness largely prepares the Airmen and their families prior to takeoff, while unit first sergeants maintain that continuity during the deployment. The 137 SOW first sergeant, Senior Master Sgt. Serge Factuar, is also deployed this rotation, which offers deployed Airmen a friendly face and advice while they away from their normal support systems.

"Every member needs to be ready in all aspects – professionally, personally and in family life," Factuar said. "Be prepared and always communicate."

Even though Airmen are officially gained by their deployed command while overseas, they are never out of the minds of the command here at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, said Col. Rick Mutchler, 137th Special Operations Mission Support Group commander.

"The 137th Airmen took great care in ensuring all deploying airmen were prepared for a successful deployment, proving that the entire team is ready, relevant and resilient in meeting the needs of both the Air Force and their fellow Airmen," said Mutchler. "We are confident that the outstanding Airmen we sent will not only have a positive impact on the AOR, but will leave a legacy for those that follow to emulate. We look forward to their safe return so that we may reunite them with their families, units and communities." **AO**

*"The 137th Airmen took great care in ensuring all deploying Airmen were prepared for a successful deployment, proving that the entire team is ready, relevant and resilient in meeting the needs of both the Air Force and their fellow Airmen"*



photograph TECH. SGT. CAROLINE E. ESSEX



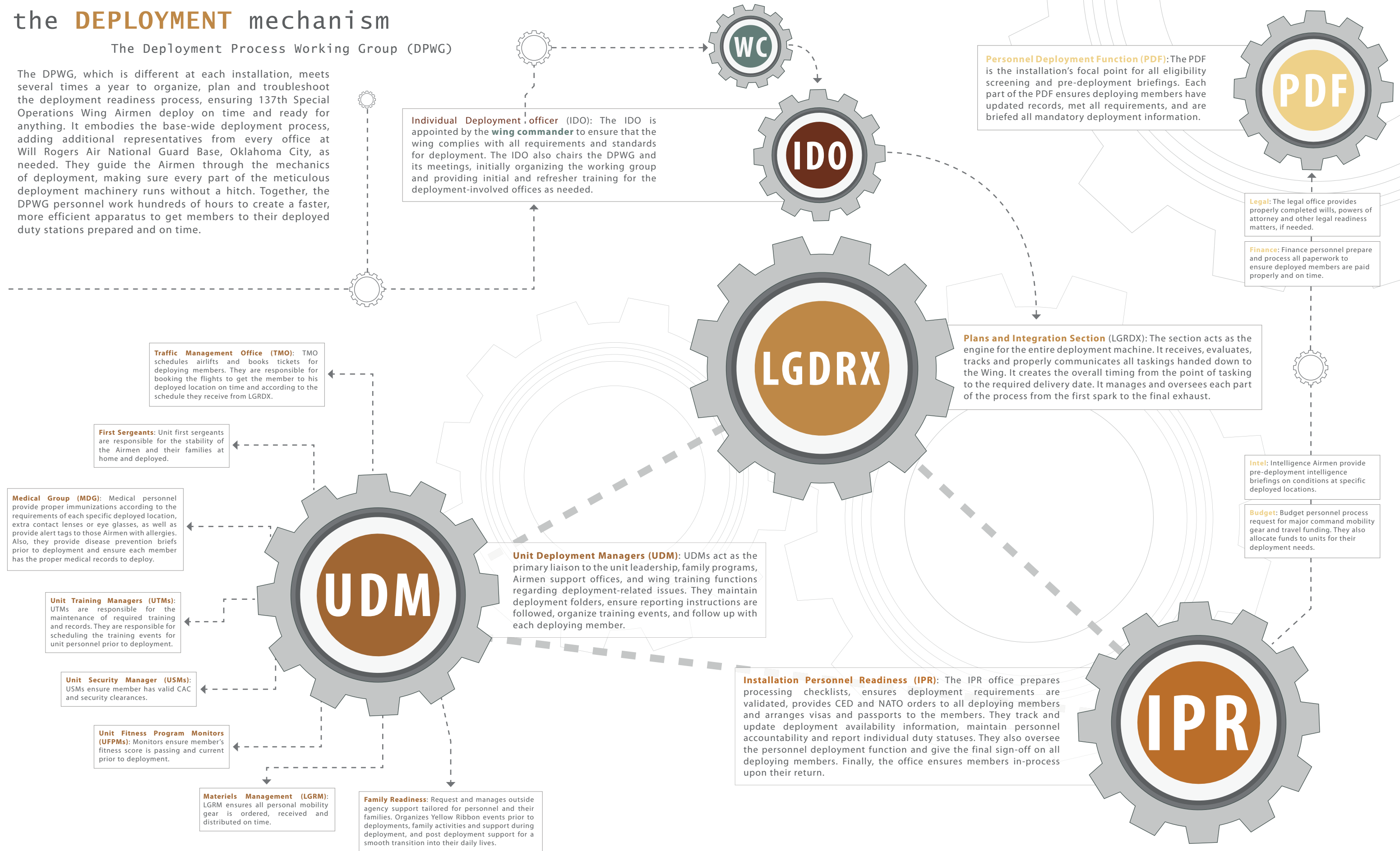
**DELTA DAWN** | Senior Airman Tyler K. Woodward

Senior Airman Eliezer Najera, 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron, stands guard on a flight line at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia, Nov. 17, 2016. The 137 SOW guardsmen directly contribute to Operation Inherent Resolve by protecting various Coalition airframes. The operation has been the most precise air campaign in the history of warfare – 99% of all munitions have been precision guided.

# the DEPLOYMENT mechanism

## The Deployment Process Working Group (DPWG)

The DPWG, which is different at each installation, meets several times a year to organize, plan and troubleshoot the deployment readiness process, ensuring 137th Special Operations Wing Airmen deploy on time and ready for anything. It embodies the base-wide deployment process, adding additional representatives from every office at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, as needed. They guide the Airmen through the mechanics of deployment, making sure every part of the meticulous deployment machinery runs without a hitch. Together, the DPWG personnel work hundreds of hours to create a faster, more efficient apparatus to get members to their deployed duty stations prepared and on time.

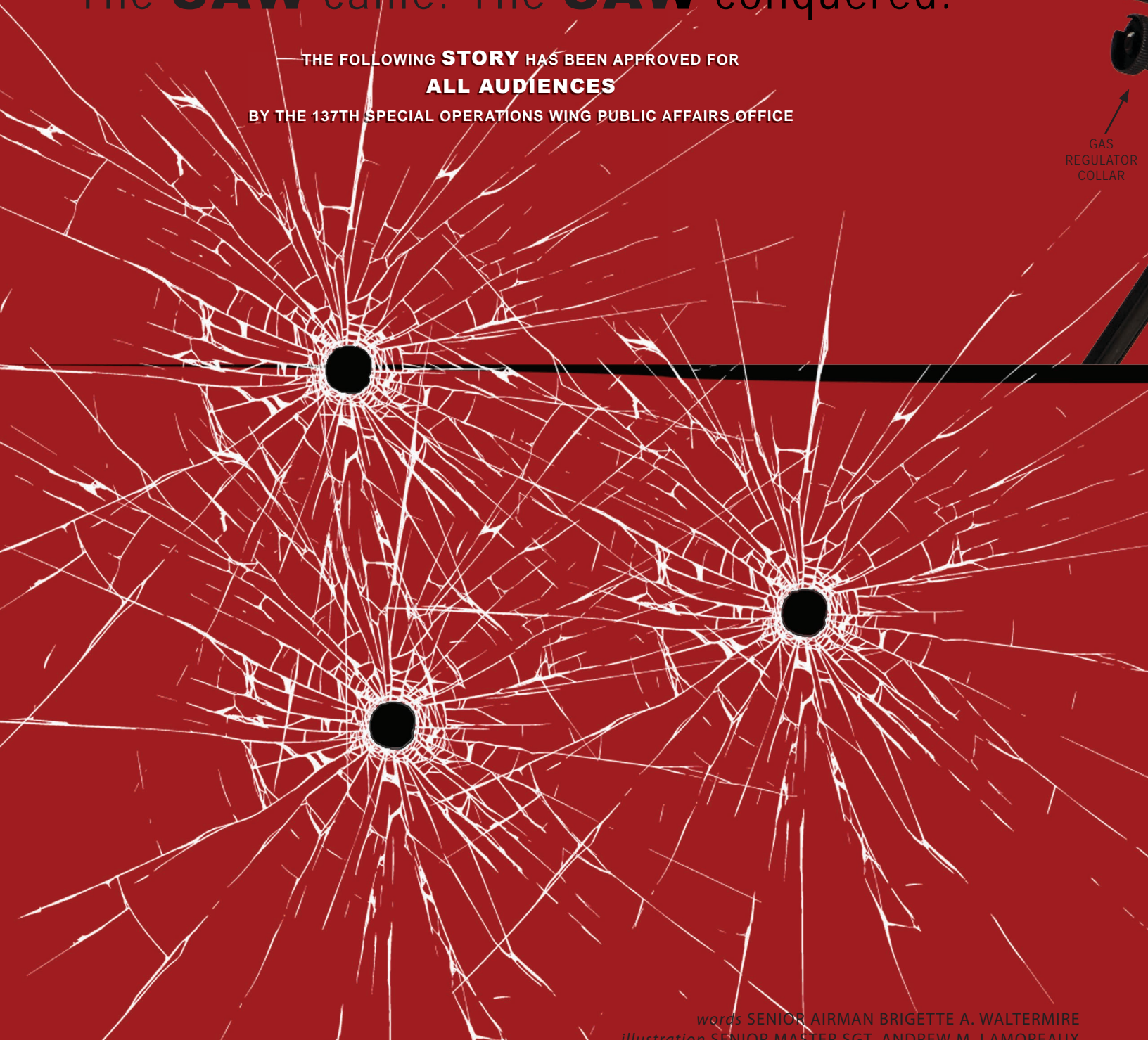


# M249

# THE .SAW.

The **SAW** came. The **SAW** conquered.

THE FOLLOWING **STORY** HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR  
**ALL AUDIENCES**  
BY THE 137TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



**S**taring down the barrel at the target downrange, the sudden, pounding burst of machine gun fire breaks the still morning air.

### Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop!

The target drops to the ground, surrounded by the smoky haze of dirt where bullets hit the turf. Smiling, the gunner moves to the next silhouette in the lane, adjusting for the added 100 meters. **Pop, pop, pop!** ... Just like in the fire swamp, you know what's coming next.

This is not the first machine gun fire the range has seen, but for Will Rogers Airmen, this "say hello to my lil' friend" moment is integral to their training capability.

The M249 SAW light machine gun: an asset vital to the success of the Air Force security forces in combat. Its rate of fire compared to other weapons (like the M4) means that it will cover a larger area with suppression fire that would make Bruce Willis reexamine his cinematic weapons choices.

"Three guys with M4s aren't close to the superiority of the M249," said Staff Sgt. Lucas Wagner, 137th Security Forces Flight Chief.

Although it has bipod arms attached for the barrel rest, its lighter design (compared to the M240) means it can potentially be

carried like a regular assault rifle. Therefore, it is the only machine gun used when our forces clear buildings.

"[The SAW] really helps if you're in a combat situation," said Wagner.

AFSOC wings are in the business of delivering violence for their customers, and the SAW will deliver faster than it takes to mentally say, "Die, [sic] Mr. Falcon, die!" (which, according to Combat Arms Training and Maintenance instructors, is the optimal amount of time to hold down the trigger). While the SAW can use a typical assault rifle 30-round magazine, the standard rate of fire would go through those rounds too fast for a magazine to be useful ... no action-movie-unrealistic-infinite-load-of-ammo here. Instead, an "assault pack" is used for uninterrupted firing. It looks like a film reel canister, but instead of holding frames of black and white classics, it carries a payload of 200 glowing brass rounds.

At 100 meters, it's easy to see the human silhouette target through the double-circle sight, but it looks more like a miniature mummy at 500 meters. As the 137 SFS members hone their skills at zeroing in on the targets, the firing range shows the results of our Airmen's capabilities and the advantages of this weapon – for combat or the zombie apocalypse.

"Having that light machine gun there – that's where the advantage comes from, the rate of fire and suppression," said Wagner.

Although the M249 is a big weapon that makes big noise, the recoil is almost negligible. Any slow-motion sequence would show the constant jolts are very light, thanks to the gas-pressured firing.

The biggest concern is how hot the barrel gets. Simply opening the bolt to load new ammo means it's necessary to have skin protection from the hot oil that spews from the ammunition feeder. Called a "cook off," this Hell's Kitchen hazard is more explosive than Gordon Ramsay encountering a too-spicy curry. It occurs when the black powder in a bullet is ignited while the round is chambered. The operators change out the barrels (wearing thick gloves) after every 200 rounds fired to try and augment this potential issue.

This weapon is vital for our forces to succeed in their AFSOC prerogatives. The M249 SAW is a great asset for strategic offensive and defensive security use, according to Wagner. Deployment for security forces usually does not entail driving Miss Daisy around base. Rather, they will be the Airmen outside the wire, jolting around in Humvees as they deploy to unprotected locations that might necessitate the protection the M249 can offer. **AO**

words SENIOR AIRMAN BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE  
illustration SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

HONORING OUR AIRMEN AND FAMILIES



**AIR | OBSERVER**  
the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing

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