

AIR|OBSERVER

the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

AIR SUPPORT | JTACs | NATO PARTNERSHIPS | TACTICAL SYSTEMS OPERATORS



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[Relinquished command Dec. 1, 2018]

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH:
WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE,
OKLAHOMA CITY
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This cover represents how the passengers who travel through Will Rogers World Airport see the 137th Special Operations Wing in Oklahoma City. What those passengers don't see, is how the manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance mission partnerered with the Wing's Battlefield Airmen, intelligence squadrons, and school houses are shaping the modern day battle space downrange.

Cover Photograph:
SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

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WING COMMANDER

COL. DEVIN R. WOODEN

[Relinquished command Dec. 1, 2018]

Interview: STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS
Photography: STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD

"EVERYONE CAN FEEL A BELONGING TO THE MISSION. SO TO TAKE OUR CLOSE AIR SUPPORT, MANNED ISR, AGILE COMBAT SUPPORT, CYBERSPACE, ENGINEERING AND INSTALLATION, LOGISTICS SUPPORT, MEDICAL, AND AEROMEDICAL EVACUATION ... THAT TAKES EVERY AIRMAN TO MAKE THE INDIVIDUAL MISSIONS AND THE COLLECTIVE MISSION SUCCESSFUL. BRINGING ALL OF THAT HERE, AND INSTILLING THAT MINDSET, HAS REALLY INVOLVED EVERYBODY IN BEING A PART OF AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND (AFSOC) AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND (SOCOM)."

WHAT IS A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

I think a center of excellence, in its most simple form, is an area of high achievement in a particular discipline. More specifically, as I see it here at Will Rogers, it's an area where we have logically linked mission sets, all in one place, that create a lot of synergy. As we work together to enter a continual process improvement within those individual disciplines, share that information across those logically linked lines and learn from one another, we continue to improve what we do here at the 137th.

There are a few things that play into that: geography (vv, location), vision and people. It's how all of this comes together. We're obviously very fortunate, geographically, to be placed here in the center of the state, with a lot of ranges, and different capabilities here that make this possible. With the vision of several – AFSOC Headquarters, the National Guard Bureau, our Oklahoma National Guard, and then the Wing itself – brings in those logically linked units that create that synergy here, so we can share from one another and do the things that we're able to do.

We have the ability to link all that training together, to learn from one another in each other's mission set, and to share that information across those logically linked lines. In doing so, we not only learn our own mission set, but how we fit into the greater mission set.

HOW DOES THAT UNDERSTANDING HELP US WITH MISSIONS DOWNRANGE?

It affects deployments greatly. One, is it allows us to train in a controlled environment, the way that we would present our forces when we deploy. We have the ability to have our manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) mission work with battlefield Airmen and our Special Operations Forces (SOF) on the ground, to interact with the intelligence fusion cell both in the air and on the ground as part of our crew on every mission. Then, the ability to bring in other SOF partners who want to take advantage of what we have here, builds relationships. So, it's about relationships. Whether it's other people within Special Operations Command (SOCOM) that come to work with us, or any other mission partners, they get to know us. They get to know our call sign, they get to train with us, and then when we deploy downrange, there's that familiarity based on those relationships which creates a huge force multiplier while deployed. We benefit directly from that, as well as the partners that come and train with us.

HOW DOES THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IMPACT OUR AIRMEN?

The first thing that comes to mind as I think about how it benefits our Airmen is, as we've gone through this transition of becoming Air Commandos, I think it has tied the Wing together. Everyone has a sense of the mission in a way that perhaps before we didn't necessarily have. Everyone can feel a belonging to the mission. So to take our close air support, manned ISR, agile combat support, cyberspace, engineering and installation, logistics support, medical, and aeromedical evacuation ... that takes every airman to make the individual missions and the collective mission successful. Bringing all of that here and instilling that mindset has really involved everybody in being a part of Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and SOCOM.

If we want to be the sharpest spear that we can, we can have the sharpest point, but if the shaft is broken, rusted, or not fully put together, then it's not a very effective implement.

HOW DO WE AS A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE CONTRIBUTE TO THE TOTAL FORCE?

Directly. We have the 137th Combat Training Flight, and then our active duty tenant, the 306th IS, that are direct gateways into the Air Force. With the Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course (JTACQC), we're taking brand new three-level tactical air control party Airmen and turning them into five-level JTACs. The 306th Intelligence Squadron then brings in the total force partners – active duty, reserve, and guard. After they've gone through basic training and their initial intelligence school, they need basic air crew fundamentals and their initial and mission qualification training to be an effective tactical system operator here. Everybody flows through Will Rogers. That's a benefit not only for us, but for [AFSOC], to see how we operate and do those things.

Also, with the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, the 185th Special Operations Squadron and the 137th Special Operations Support Squadron, we have hosted a number of our mission partners from other components here for sharpening training prior to deployment – to work with manned ISR and to build their tactics, techniques and procedures. We've received feedback from the special tactics squadrons, other ASOSs and other SOF partners, that the training that they've received here was directly beneficial to their deployment, and was so effective and that they'll come back.

Part of geography that makes that happen is with the effective



ranges we have around here. Down in Fort Sill at Falcon Range we have arid desert mountainous type of terrain, which are like some of the areas in which we operate. The Jungle Warfare Center for SOCOM happens to be over in Fort Smith, Arkansas at Razorback Range, so that's a different, applicable urban and rural environment in which we can operate. Then around Salina, Kansas, Smoky Hill is a High Plains open area for doing combat operations. You can fly to the West Coast, you can fly to the East Coast, you can fly to the South, but if you come here, within a 30-minute flight or a two or three-hour drive, we have just about every environment that you can imagine, right here, to conduct valuable training.

WHAT SUCCESSES HAVE GOTTEN THE WING TO THIS POINT?

Some of the things that are easier to speak to would be the character traits that lead to those successes. The first one is attitude. Attitude can overcome just about any challenge. I hear it all the time, every time someone visits us or we send somebody out TDY, of the attitude of our Airmen and how contagious that is. Attitude has played a huge role in our success. The other thing would be we've got quite a few Airmen and leaders here in our senior enlisted corps who are quite visionary, and they see the benefit of change. They see the benefit of doing something different, or tackling a new problem or new challenge. Being visionary is continual process improvement. It's not being stagnant. We've got to continue to evolve, and that goes back to the center of excellence.

The center of excellence has to be forward thinking. It has to be looking at the newest, best way to get at the problem or the issue, but at the same time, can't be so visionary it's not relevant to the problems of today. I think our Airmen have a nice

balance of that. The other thing that I think has been a huge part of our success is our culture. We have a culture of safety, we have a culture of compliance, and we certainly have a family atmosphere, which has helped facilitate all those things. Our successes talk to our attitude, our culture, and our people. All of those folks at one time or another, throughout this transition process, have been tested under fire.

HOW DO YOU FEEL LOOKING BACK AT THE WING AND MISSION WHEN YOU BEGAN YOUR MILITARY CAREER HERE COMPARED TO TODAY?

Since 1986, we've gone from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve where we have people now who have served over 20 years, retired, and have never known peace. They've always had some conflict, someplace to go, some mission to do. I stress that the operational reserve force is what we are now, with the emphasis on operational. We're in a world, in a service, where just about every Airman is their own deployable position. We are deploying individual Airmen 365 days, 24-7. We have people deployed from this base constantly. That's a big difference.

I still think that one thing that hasn't changed is we are still a huge value for America, in that everything we do generates readiness. We don't have a lot of overhead. We provide a quality force sooner, that's cost-effective, and in fact, if there was a way to ship us overseas, overnight, with free shipping, we would be just like Amazon. We would be the perfect force. That part, it hasn't changed at all. **AO**

PREPARING FOR DOWNRANGE

HOW A PATCHWORK OF HIGHLY-TRAINED BATTLEFIELD AIRMEN
AT THE 137TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING ADD TO THE
WORLDWIDE FIGHT

Story: STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS

Fifteen friendly assets overhead. Twenty-six friendlies and 30 enemies on the ground. Seven units total. Two weeks of operations.

Six months to plan it all.

The results: one exercise named Gunslinger-17 and hundreds of fully-trained, experience-sharpened lethal special operations and conventional assets ready to deploy for, and in support of, U.S. and NATO allies.

“We’re in the business of customer service,” said Tech. Sgt. J.T. Simmons, 137th Air Support Element (137th ASE) noncommissioned officer in charge. “So people come to us when they need training. We (the 137th ASE) have a plethora of backgrounds so that if somebody needs something specifically, we can give it to them.”

The 137th ASE, part of the 137th Special Operations Support Squadron out of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, is no stranger to the long hours and exhaustive training regimen behind each U.S. and NATO service member.

As Battlefield Airmen from assorted backgrounds, the 15 consistent members of the element act as instructors, evaluators, specialists, coordinators and even players in highly-detailed joint and combined operations in order to shape and prepare the modern-day warfighter. So far, they have regularly trained and continue to train multi-tier special operations forces assets, which help comprise the elite of each military branch, including the Navy SEALs, U.S. Army Special Forces, U.S. Air Force Special Tactics and more.

Oftentimes, these multifaceted training operations require hours of research and coordination in the form of phone calls, relationship building, intelligence gathering and plain ole’ foot pounding.

“I mean just the man-hours total to prep for Gunslinger, you’re looking at – with all the people and everybody involved and everything it took to make that happen successfully – I would venture to say it’s several thousand hours dedicated to training in just one year,” Simmons estimated.

The element must plan everything, from the larger details like syncing the schedules of up to seven flying units, to the slightly

Photograph: STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD

A U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook ascends after offloading 24th Special Operations Wing (24th SOW) Special Tactics Airmen during Gunslinger-17, at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Nov. 7, 2017. The 24th SOW traveled from Hurlburt Field, Florida, to participate in the full mission profile culmination training orchestrated by the 137th Air Support Element, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City. The exercise incorporated the F-16 Fighting Falcon, AH-64 Apache, UH-60 Blackhawk, CH-47 Chinook, HH-60 Pavehawk and MC-12W into realistic military scenarios, Nov. 5 -17, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Tyler K. Woodward)



Special Tactics Airmen from the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, Kentucky Air National Guard, maneuver through multiple training scenarios at Falcon Bombing Range, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, March 22, 2017. The 137th Air Support Element from the 137th Special Operations Wing, Oklahoma City, coordinated a joint training event with the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, Kentucky Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 301st Fighter Wing and T-38 Talons from the 88th Fighter Training Squadron, Sheppard Air Force Base, March 20-23, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)

tedious like lodging for every participant, and even the minute like the color of a shirt on a simulated enemy.

Luckily for the unit, the expertise of each 137th ASE member, along with the hundreds of service members from across the nation who they bring to augment, plays a huge role and saves countless hours in the planning and execution of each event.

“We can train in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; close air support; fires ... things like that,” said Simmons. “We have people who can provide breach trainings, who were snipers and combat controllers, who have nonstandard training in blending in with populations, training in medical, driving, and advanced shooting ... they can train with us on things that they would otherwise have to pay to go to a formal school for, all because we have a plethora of backgrounds.”

The element specializes in full mission profile training, or operations that cover every aspect of a scenario – from receiving the mission to returning home after it’s completed. Downrange, this translates to realistic preparation for both the operations and conditions in which operators will find themselves.

“Overall, the biggest plus to working at ASE prior to deployment was being pushed to learn supporting asset's capabilities, employment methods, weaponeering, and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) for a more realistic training environment,” said Master Sgt. Kevin Gregory, 238th Air Support Operations Squadron (238th ASOS), Meridian, Mississippi Air National Guard. “This improved knowledge allowed us to be more adept at employing the myriad of assets available in theater and actually knowing how to use the provided capabilities. The daily training missions were beneficial to honing skills that were already present and becoming smoother and more proficient at controlling congested airspace.”

Tech. Sgt. Dustin Steinhilpert, who was also assigned to the 238th ASOS and worked within the 137th ASE with Gregory for six to eight months prior to the two deploying, said the experience “completely changed” his thought process by forcing the participants to handle several tasks and assets simultaneously.

“Being a joint terminal attack controller who is supporting the ASE is an extremely unique position,” Steinhilpert said. “It creates a skillset of in-depth, complex problem solving.”

For ASE, overwhelming the event players with resources and capabilities is all a part of the strategy.

“You want training to be as realistic as you're gonna see it downrange,” Simmons explained. “Because when you go downrange and people start shooting at you, you will absolutely go back to the lowest level of training you have; you will not perform at your highest level of training. So if you don't have a good foundation and you don't have a strong grasp on that foundation, then when s**t hits the fan, everybody's going to go scatterbrained.”

Since its conception in 2015, the 137th ASE has served thousands of customers, which include 20 or so tier one assets, 200 - 300 tier two assets, and hundreds more in the conventional warfare community. The element creates scenarios and training for anywhere from a single asset to hundreds at a time.

“So, we originally created ASE to help formally establish the flying training unit after the 137th Special Operations Wing (137th SOW) converted to part of the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC),” said Maj. Steven Blaylock, 137th Air Support Element officer in charge. “They've been here since the beginning.”

Though still acting as the main interface for the 137th SOW’s MC-12W manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) mission, the 137th ASE no longer just caters to the AFSOC community.

“Because having the MC-12s available to us and all the close air support that is readily available, we can give everyone training that they're not able to get anywhere else,” added Simmons. “You know, with the infrastructure and the networking and all the training areas that are close – having the MC-12s based out of here, with all the capabilities that they bring to the table – we're able to give them training that prepares them for what they're gonna see downrange, more realistically than they can get in most places in the country outside of a major exercise. It's a function that frankly didn't exist before we created it.”

Because of their wide influence, the 137th ASE has the ability to both train with and utilize the same units’ expertise for different scenarios. This includes units and assets from the same base – the ISR platform of the MC-12W aircraft and its aircrews, and fellow JTACs from the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron and 137th Combat Training Flight – but also units from around the nation.

The 138th Fighter Wing (138th FW) located in Tulsa, Oklahoma less than 150 miles away from Will Rogers, is one of numerous units that provide frequent support for operations and take advantage of the training of their own assets at the same time.

“It's sort of a ‘I’ll scratch your back, you’ll scratch mine’ kind of thing,” said Maj. Rob Vaccariello, 125th Fighter Squadron Weapons Officer from the 138th FW. “We always make the maximum effort to be able to support that. It's not always about just the fighter jets, nor is it always about just the ISR platforms. There's really three equal parties of this triad, and what we try to do to the best of our ability, is to set it up so that we're all getting the same amount of training at the same time.”

Vaccariello added that his squadron also benefits from the deeply held connections of ASE, from those with the U.S. Army air and fires assets to the rarely-trained-with special operations forces.

“The ASE has some of the most experienced and embedded individuals in that community that I've ever seen,” Vaccariello said.

For such a compact unit, the 137th ASE has used their collective expertise, access, capabilities and connections to create a lasting effect on not only their own wing, but also the special operations and conventional forces of the nation.

“For us, our impact is that we're able to give operators training that they're not going to get otherwise,” finished Simmons. “They’re going to have to find out while they're deployed about these assets and these capabilities – things that we can teach them here; you don’t want to learn all of that deployed. By us being who we are, we’re able to help them be better before they go – not while they’re there.” **AO**

FALCON RANGE

LOCATED 94 MILES SOUTHWEST OF WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, OKLAHOMA CITY, FALCON RANGE SITS ON 15 THOUSAND ACRES THAT INCLUDE THE GREAT PLAINS AND THE WICHITA MOUNTAINS, HOME OF OKLAHOMA'S HIGHEST PEAK. FALCON RANGE PROVIDES THE CHALLENGES OF AN ARID SUBTROPICAL CLIMATE WITH FREQUENT WEATHER CHANGES AND TERRAIN SIMILAR TO THE AUSTERE LOCATIONS IN WHICH SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES CURRENTLY DEPLOY AROUND THE GLOBE.

COMBAT TRAINING

CAPT. JEFF K. HANSEN

Director of Operations, 137th CTF

Interview: STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS
Photography: STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD

"WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE EXCELLENT TRAINING HERE BECAUSE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AND ASSETS THAT ARE AT WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE IN OKLAHOMA CITY. WE HAVE THE OBLIGATION TO HOLD THAT TO NOT ONLY OUR STUDENTS, BUT ALSO OURSELVES AS INSTRUCTORS, TO A HIGHER STANDARD IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE THAT WE'RE PROVIDING OUR CUSTOMERS WITH THE BEST POSSIBLE PRODUCT."

WHAT IS JTACQC, AND WHAT IS ITS MISSION?

JTACQC stands for the Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course. What it does is it provides a Department of Defense certification for the students that come through here to go forth and, in a deployed environment while conducting close air support, grant weapons release clearance to an aircraft on behalf of a supported ground commander. As guard tactical air control party members supporting the Army National Guard, they will also support conventional units. So as joint terminal attack controllers (JTAC) graduate to go support those units, they will be in a position to go downrange with their supported joint partners and conduct close air support in support of the Army.

GENERALLY, WHAT KIND OF THINGS DO STUDENTS LEARN, AND WHAT DOES IT PREPARE THEM FOR?

The JTACQC curriculum is very wide and very, very broad in its scope. The key focus is the actual safe execution of close air support, but in its name of a "joint terminal attack controller" that also requires them to have a knowledge of sister service fire support systems. They'll learn about Army artillery, Army mortars, Naval gunfire, and the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets that are provided through the Department of Defense. They will learn the breadth of joint fire support and how to bring that to bear and support ground forces.

As far as the situations that these JTACs might find themselves in, it could be anywhere from going downrange in a combat environment, conducting close air support, conducting intelligence-gathering operations in support of a maneuver operation, and then goes all the way to domestic operations supporting some sort of civil authority agency. For example, the Texas Air National Guard Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) from Houston that went forth during Hurricane Harvey and used their expertise to integrate aircraft into search and recovery efforts.

WHAT AREAS ON BASE DOES JTACQC AFFECT, AND WHO DOES IT SERVE?

An example of who we serve right here on base is the 146th ASOS. They are one of our customers. We train their tactical air control party Airmen (TACPs) to become JTACs and they're

one of 14 in the Guard that we support. However, in a total force initiative, half of our class is active-duty TACPs as well.

Now, as far as who we affect here on base, we kind of affect everybody in terms of trying to integrate with Will Rogers' mission. We have the MC-12W schoolhouse, so we have opportunities to conduct introductory close air support training right here on base. You have people that are new to the type of mission that the MC-12 conducts, and so we're available to provide that schoolhouse and offer alternative training opportunities just to enhance their experiences. So, while we have our primary mission of conducting courses, not only for JTACQC, we also have our initial combat skills training (ICST) course for the guard TACP community. However, we will assist with the training of not only other entities here on Will Rogers, but also extend out to our joint partners at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, with the artillery schoolhouse to enhance their training.

WHY IS WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE AN IDEAL LOCATION FOR THE COURSE?

Will Rogers is probably the best location this course could be in for the Air National Guard. Not only is it geographically centered right here in the middle of the United States, but we have immediate access to Falcon Range in Fort Sill right down the road. We also have access to Razorback Range in Arkansas. I can't think of many other places in the country where we have immediate access to two close air support ranges, let alone one of them being the home of the field artillery, which as JTACs is necessary for us to become proficient. We're able to offer opportunities to our students that some JTACs don't get in their entire careers. Then, you tack on the mission of Will Rogers with the MC-12 schoolhouse and the MC-12 mission here ... again, these are training opportunities for these students to get exposure to assets that can really magnify their presence and their capability on the battlefield. Without coming here and seeing it and learning of those capabilities, it's almost like they're being handcuffed, because they're not getting a total glimpse of all the tools that they have in their tool box. So, I think the nonconventional mission of Will Rogers is something that truly is a game changer for JTACs on the ground to work with a platform like the MC-12. As far as tying in with the 146th ASOS' mission, it's very simple. They create TACPs. We turn them into JTACs and send them back to their unit.



HOW DOES IT SUPPORT OR TIE INTO THE MISSIONS OF THE 146TH AIR SUPPORT OPERATIONS SQUADRON, THE 137TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING, AND YOUR MAJOR COMMANDS?

As far as the Wing's mission, ideally what we would like to become is a supporting training asset that would not only enhance the MC-12s' training, but allow the MC-12 to enhance our training and create that symbiotic relationship. Tying it in with Fort Sill down the road, you have not only joint surface fires in close air support training, but you're also tying in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. You've got this joint effects capability for training that you don't see in training here in the States. I think it's a one-of-a-kind training opportunity that ties those three assets together.

When it comes to the Air National Guard, we are bringing the entire Air National Guard's TACP community to Will Rogers. You're potentially bringing all the best candidates right here to your house to expose them to the opportunities here at Will Rogers, which is exactly what happened to me. I was lucky enough to have a friend of mine who was stationed here at the 146th ASOS, and I came out to visit him. I was exposed to the 137th Combat Training Flight (CTF), and I immediately applied when I found out there was a job opening here. You're pooling the nation's guard TACP community to come here for training, and you can then show them the opportunities here that you can't find anywhere else in the country.

I think for the long-term goals of this wing, it's very important for the Guard Bureau. We're directly supporting them. As far as Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) with the evolving mission of the MC-12, whatever that may be, you're

going to have this mutually supporting relationship between ground party and aircrew that can provide a total perspective to not just AFSOC, but also to any combatant commander. You're looking at assets that you really can't put a price tag on and there are just never enough of.

HOW DOES JTACQC TIE INTO THIS WHOLE IDEA OF THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE?

As far as tying this course to the center of excellence, it's a training course and we have to uphold that standard. As we create the next generation of JTACs to go forth and support conventional and potentially special operations forces, we're going to be the standard that they operate off of in their careers. We have the opportunity to provide excellent training here because of the opportunities and assets that are at Will Rogers. We have the obligation to hold not only our students, but also ourselves as instructors, to a higher standard in order to make sure that we're providing our customers with the best possible product. A few of our students are just a couple of months out of technical school, so we have a large gap to fill between their technical school and being a certified JTAC. Excellence is paramount in our everyday activities. **A0**

HIGH STAKES FOR THE BATTLE SPACE

HOW THE 137TH COMBAT TRAINING FLIGHT TRAINS BATTLEFIELD AIRMEN TO CONTROL THE BATTLE SPACE IN JUST FIVE WEEKS DURING THE JOINT TERMINAL ATTACK CONTROLLER QUALIFICATION COURSE

Story: STAFF SGT. BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE
Photography: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

Helicopters are flying overhead. Occasionally, there is an incoming swooping scream of a fighter. One voice reports a line of tanks incoming from the north – another demands a “sitrep.” Suddenly, an aircraft is signing off. Someone else reports ground troops are on the move. An airman takes all of this information in over a pair of headphones, holed up in one spot and trying to track these movements. It’s also the middle of the night. Night vision goggles (NVGs) are the only thing keeping that lone joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) from sitting in complete darkness with no way to map the battlefield.

“We’re taking fire!”

The JTAC must prioritize. Ground troops need an exit route and the pilots need to know where the enemy is. It’s dark, and everyone is on night vision. What are the steps?

The 137th Combat Training Flight (CTF) has added to the operational capabilities and renown of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City since it began in 2016. The 137th CTF has run a total of 32 students through the school since then. It offers initial qualification training for JTACs, who control the ground and air space on a battlefield to coordinate air and ground attacks targeted at the enemy.

“Your whole career relies on this school,” said Master Sgt. Benjamin Lake, 146th Air Support Operations Squadron JTAC, who is also an instructor for the course with the 137th CTF.

Tactical Air Control Party Airmen (TACPs) must pass the JTACQC within 18 months of their school dates, or they cannot remain in the career field. The stakes are high, with good reason. Through these JTACs, who are on the ground coordinating air strikes, the Air Force helps joint forces on the

ground be more effective and protected.

“There’s so many more moving pieces, and it’s so much more dynamic,” said Senior Airman Brandon Cooke, who was in the Army before joining the 14th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) as a TACP airman. “As a JTAC, you’re such a pivotal player on the battlefield, and I think that’s highly critical to future operations.”

COURSE OVERVIEW:

The course used to be four weeks long, but has been increased to five. This class, 19A, was the first class under this new schedule.

The depth of the education they receive is unique to the 137th CTF.

“We get more one-on-one time with smaller class sizes,” said Capt. Lawrence Wilson, 14th ASOS Air Liaison Officer (ALO) out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina. “You can ask more in-depth questions and there’s a chance to expand on topics.”

The max class size with the amount of instructors who are certified in the course is four. For the other training courses, a class size of 24 is normal.

“I was looking around the first day of class and thought, ‘Oh man, there are so many people that are gonna get in trouble, they’re so late,’” said Senior Airman Alec Eller, 284th ASOS TACP out of Salina, Kansas.

The squadron has a certain number of instructors, so class sizes must remain smaller, but this allows the students to come together more easily as a unit.



Students in the Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) Qualification Course (Class 19A) gain visual confirmation of their assigned aircraft to assess the fighter's attack geometry at Falcon Range, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Nov. 11, 2018. A Type One control is used when the JTAC requires control of individual attacks and the situation requires them to visually acquire the attacking aircraft and visually acquire the target for each attack.



Students in the Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course (Class 19A) work together to do a radio check before their aircraft signs on at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Oct. 17, 2018. Tactical Air Control Party Airmen are experts with portable radios and radio language skills.



Students in the Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) Qualification Course (Class 19A) use visual observations and map reading to build an initial 9-line as part of familiarization training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Oct. 17, 2018. The most simple form of battle tracking that JTAC's use is the mental and graphic picture built and maintained by using maps, observations, and battle updates from higher headquarters.



Senior Airman Alec Eller, a Tactical Air Control Party airman from the 284th Air Support Operations Squadron, McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, trains on the Air National Guard advanced joint terminal attack controller training system (AAJTS) during the Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, Oct. 24, 2018. The AAJTS system can simulate almost any environment, aircraft and weapons system including the A-10 Thunderbolt II, the F-16 Fighting Falcon, F-15E Strike Eagle, F/A-18 Hornet, AC-130U Gunship, MQ-9 Reaper, AH-1 Cobra and AH-64 Apache.



Students in the Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course observe the Marine Artillery Detachment, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, train on post with a M777A2 lightweight towed howitzer, Oct. 17, 2018. Students are exposed to a variety of Army and Marine artillery throughout the course that may be available to them on the battlefield.



Capt. Jeff Hansen, 137th Combat Training Flight director of operations, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, points out a targeted area to Senior Airman Alec Eller, a Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course student from the 284th Air Support Operations Squadron, McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, as they go over a battle damage assessment to see if the previous attack was effective at Falcon Range, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Nov. 4, 2018. Following an attack, JTACs expeditiously obtain and report battle damage to determine if objectives have been met or whether an immediate reattack is necessary.

PHASE ONE: ACADEMIC PHASE

“We are basically giving them a firehose and telling them to drink,” said Tech. Sgt. Fred Moreton, Air National Guard chief JTAC Qualification Course instructor.

They’re drinking from a hose spouting acronyms, procedures and hypothetical scenarios – pressurized by expectations – with two tests (one each week) temporarily damming the barrage. These tests are the Phase One building blocks on which their careers rest.

Ten days of PowerPoint presentations outline in words what the JTACs are supposed to do in less than an hour.

As a break in the monotony, the class also had the unique opportunity to go to Fort Sill near Lawton, Oklahoma, to be briefed by Army and Marine components.

“Ironically, we’re going to Fort Sill next week, and that’s where I heard about the transition program initially,” said Wilson. He transferred from the Army into the TACP officer program to become an air liaison officer (ALO).

Ties with the Army can help when the JTACs are learning how to speak the lingo and translate it to another branch, but the Army and Marines only gave the TACPs a small taste of what they do and who is responsible for what on the battlefield.

“We have to know the information before we implement it,” said Eller. “The reality is, it’s going to be a lot more work than I anticipated.”

Learning by doing is not a possibility for these TACPs until they pass the first phase. They must learn every aspect of the battlefield and how to operate within that setting on paper first. However, with nearly 3,000 slides in less than two weeks, information builds up.

“I got here and I was expecting the academics to be the easy part and the operating to be the hard part,” said Cooke. “This is like the hardest standardized test ever taken.”

PHASE TWO: SIM PHASE

The battle space between the air and ground must be a finely-tuned, seamless group dance all called by one person. The responsibility that comes with this position saves U.S. and friendly force’s lives. And that is why they run JTACQC Airmen through a simulator for practice.

“The stress level is a little higher because you’re two weeks from going home as close to a JTAC as you can be,” said Senior Airman Dalton White, TACP Airman from the 169th ASOS, Peoria, Illinois. “I grew up accepting challenges – wanting a challenge to just defeat me or bring me down. It was definitely a challenge to get where I am now.”

The Air National Guard advanced joint terminal attack controller training system (AAJTS) can easily create a challenging virtual battlefield for these JTACs. It spans a 270-degree field of view and uses visual projections and surround sound. It also allows interaction between participants and the simulation by utilizing field equipment, which means JTACs can use their NVGs while in a simulated night battle.

The classwork plays into every single part of the simulation, and instructors expect brevity in every communication. The JTACs are there to fight an enemy, and they hold lives in their hands as they operate.

“Words mean things – especially when you’re talking about

human life,” said Lake.

Basically, this is the instructors telling students that, as JTACs, they are ultimately responsible. Lives are on the line, and there are serious consequences for what might be initially minor mistakes. But the intimidation factor is not all the instructors are there for: They offer advice to the TACPs to help them develop best practices to convert to instinct later on. This time in the simulator is crucial for setting them up for success in Phase Three.

“Way more exciting than academics, but the tradeoff is a lot more stress,” said Eller. He joked, “I never cried so much in one day.”

PHASE THREE: FIELD TRAINING EXERCISE

The voices coming through the headphones in the sim phase become the voices of actual pilots during the field training exercise. The pilots are there from the first week of simulations through Phase Three.

“We can provide them with a higher level of understanding than other pilots who show up for their last week of training and are more unknown,” said Lt. Col. Gerremy Goldsberry, 457th Fighter Squadron (457th FS) F-16 Fighting Falcon Forward Air Control - Airborne, in Fort Worth, Texas.

The 457th FS partners their close air support F-16 pilots specifically with the 137th CTF to accomplish JTACQC training. These pilots are the in-the-air version of a JTAC. They come to the third, fourth and fifth week to help on the simulators and during the live fly. Other JTACQC courses have JTAC instructors who are able to man the simulator controls but can lack the expertise of actual pilots.

“It makes the scenario more realistic with pilots versus JTACs running controls, and offers a different perspective,” said Goldsberry.

So what happens when the pilots leave the simulator?

Falcon Range is in Lawton, Oklahoma. Expanses of grassland and stubby prairie trees give way to craggy hills. All of that uninterrupted landscape is a perfect quilt to stitch together a battlescape.

We have a LTL of 270 with a laser safety fan of 260 to 310 or 280 to 230 – ground base lase.

This line of acronyms, nouns and numbers means something to these JTACs now, so it is time they step up. The students are given desired learning objectives, what they are expected to learn during five scenarios over five days on the range, so they are prepared for what a real battlefield in the real world can look like.

“Each step of this course is adding a new stressor to it,” said Moreton. “The final step is Falcon Range with an aircraft that has limited fuel and cannot be reset.”

GRADUATION:

The class fought to graduate and developed into a focused team with tight camaraderie over the five weeks of intense training. This was the first class at the 137th that every student graduated.

“You guys worked together as a team and made it through,” said Moreton. **A0**

SMOKY HILL

LOCATED IN NORTH-CENTRAL KANSAS, 260 MILES NORTH OF WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, OKLAHOMA CITY, SMOKY HILL WEAPONS RANGE IS THE LARGEST AND BUSIEST AIR NATIONAL GUARD BOMBING RANGE IN THE NATION. IT IS AN ELECTRONIC WARFARE RANGE THAT ENCOMPASSES 51 SQUARE MILES AND HAS MORE THAN 100 TACTICAL TARGETS. SMOKY HILL HAS TWO DISTINCT CLIMATES, AND THE COMPLEX PROVIDES APPROXIMATELY 36 THOUSAND ACRES FOR COMBINED ARMS TRAINING, ALLOWING JOINT SERVICES TO TRAIN IN A REALISTIC ENVIRONMENT.

AIR SUPPORT OPERATIONS

MASTER SGT. LARRY L. MANSELL
Operations Superintendent, 146th ASOS

Interview: STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS
Photography: STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD

"INTEROPERABILITY WITH OUR NATO COUNTERPARTS IS THE KEY FOR EFFECTIVENESS. BEING ABLE TO SHIFT FROM MORE TERRITORIAL DEFENSE TO A MULTINATIONAL EXPEDITIONARY MISSION WOULD BE LIMITED WITHOUT THESE INTERACTIONS. TECHNOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES, MISSION COMMANDS, CONTROL ISSUES AND RESOURCE GAPS ARE ALL THE ISSUES WE CAN BE RID OF BY CONTINUING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ESTONIA. WITH A COMBINED TRAINING PLAN, WE CAN AID IN PROVIDING MORE COMBAT MISSION READY ENABLERS TO THE ENTIRE ESTONIAN DEFENSE FORCE."

AS A JOINT TERMINAL ATTACK CONTROLLER (JTAC), WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY MISSION AND WHY IS YOUR ROLE SO IMPORTANT DOWNRANGE?

Our mission is threefold, and it can be defined by three words: advise, assist and control. What the JTAC can bring to the fight with the "advise" piece is educating Army maneuver commanders how the Air Force can integrate into their ground scanning maneuver and how we can help shape the battlefield. Whether it's offensively or defensively, I'm in their planning process. When we do that, we can "assist" the ground team and the ground maneuver commander with building that plan and integrating our assets into it. Then we can "control" those assets when they come on station during the mission.

WHAT DOES THE 146TH AIR SUPPORT OPERATIONS SQUADRON WORKING WITH THE ESTONIAN JTACs LOOK LIKE?

We help them interpret doctrine from our Joint Publication 3-09.3, which is the Close Air Support joint publication. We help them interpret that doctrine and pick out the doctrine versus the tactics, techniques and procedures that are a little bit different. We actually helped them build their own equivalent of an Air Force Instruction (AFI), which lays out their training plan.

When they came down here last December, we sat down and had them go through our operations training manager section, our JTAC Program manager section and our standard program manager section. We showed them our step-by-step process of how to build a TACP, which is a tactical air control party specialist, how to build a JTAC, how to instruct them in learning and how to evaluate that instruction. We did that from square one, and they took all those products back, utilized those products for their staff assistant's visit and passed.

WHY IS THE CERTIFICATION OF THEIR PROGRAM IMPORTANT?

They are a signatory, and what that means is now they can be internationally recognized as an accredited JTAC program. It's a year to go through the accreditation process, which is laid out by JCAS (Joint Close Air Support). They sent out a checklist of everything they had to do. We went over there a year ago, and we sat through a staff assistant visit with JCAS.

I sat through their mock accreditation, saw what they were achieving and learned what they needed to improve on, and we gave them a one-year road map to get there. They passed the actual accreditation three weeks ago. So now they are an internationally recognized and accredited JTAC program, which means I can give them instructions and evaluations. They can come here and control the aircraft on our ranges a lot easier than those who aren't accredited and without people questioning their training capabilities.

WHAT SPECIFIC EXPERIENCE(S) AND RESOURCES THAT WE HAVE HERE AS A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE CONTRIBUTE TO THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN OUR NATO ALLIES?

What comes to mind, first and foremost, would be our abilities to teach their instructors to evaluate their JTACs, to provide that feedback immediately and to provide our JTAC training simulator, which is unique to the Air National Guard. It's accredited for our currencies here. Now that they're accredited, their same currencies can all be met inside of that simulator, too. So that's the first thing that we can offer as the 146th ASOS. The next thing that will be available in the near future will be the ability for their JTACs, or their guys that want to be JTACs, to go to the Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course by the 137th Combat Training Flight (137th CTF).

These guys will be able to come here, go through the JTAC Qualification Course, and come out the other side as a qualified JTAC. That's going to be big for them. They were traveling to other countries like Britain and Poland for the majority of their training, but they want to come here. They feel that we are the subject matter experts in close air support.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT, HOW DOES THE PARTNERSHIP BENEFIT OR ADD TO OUR WING?

I think one of the biggest ways that the partnership can affect the 137th SOW is that it's been seen all the way up to Special Operations Command. They've had visibility on the 146th ASOS going to the Baltic states, which are in a very pivotal place for any potential event in the region. I think it's a very strategic relationship that we can have with them (the Estonians), which can be built upon by potentially moving into their special operations forces and establishing further partnerships.



HOW DO OTHER PARTS OF THE WING BENEFIT FROM THE INTERACTION WITH THE ESTONIANS, IF THEY DO AT ALL?

I believe the 146th ASOS' initial interaction with the Estonians has set the path for the 137th CTF to be able to gain that capability to bring in NATO JTACs and instruct them here at the JTAC Qualification Course. It will be a stepping stone to keep their mission growing and will gain ground in teaching and instructing more JTACs down the road. The 146th has found an active state partner with Estonia and their JTAC program. They're eager and hungry to learn.

Also, interoperability with our NATO counterparts is the key for effectiveness. Being able to shift from more territorial defense to a multinational expeditionary mission would be limited without these interactions. Technological differences, mission commands, control issues and resource gaps are all the issues we can be rid of by continuing our relationship with Estonia. With a combined training plan, we can aid in providing more combat mission ready enablers to the entire Estonian defense force.

WHAT HAVE THE ESTONIANS TAUGHT YOU IN THE PROCESS, AND HOW DOES THAT BENEFIT THE 137TH AND ITS CUSTOMERS?

We've learned quite a bit of field skills from them, because most of their guys are former Army from their scouts battalion. They are tactical-minded and disciplined in their teaching process. They adhere to timeliness and checklists very well. If it's on the checklist, they do it. So we've learned a lot in field craft skills and how they communicate with aircraft.

One of the biggest things we've learned in listening to them talking on the radio is their language differences. They are very clear and concise on the radio, because they don't know extra words in each others' languages.

So, they're right to the point, like every JTAC should be. We communicate and sometimes trip over our own words or don't know what to say, while they have to be very deliberate. Some of the controls we have recorded of them have been great examples to show our guys. We'll ask, "Do you see how he said everything he wanted to say in three words?" They were very clear and concise, and that's one of the biggest things that I think we've learned from them. When I'm on the mic talking to aircraft, I will drastically reduce the time it takes to get bombs on target for the ground commander. **AO**

MISSION FOCUSED READY

146TH AIR SUPPORT OPERATIONS SQUADRON AND ESTONIAN
JTACs STRENGTHEN PARTNER-NATION CAPABILITIES AND
BUILD ON NATO BROTHERHOOD

Story and Photography: STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD

Maps and handwritten notes littered a workbench in a large classroom. Master Sgt. Ben Lake, the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron standards and evaluations program manager, stood on one side of the table debriefing an Estonian joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) who listened on the other side.

After a complex scenario in the Air National Guard Advanced Joint Terminal Attack Control Training Simulator (AAJTS), the two were running through the mission and discussing what they could have done better.

“So, JTAC to JTAC,” Lake said to the 2nd Lt. Estonian JTAC. “These are the things you need to work on.”

The 2nd Lt. grabbed his pen and prepared to jot down the suggestions.

“You have to get better at receiving, processing, prioritizing and disseminating this information,” Lake said with a straight face that quickly broke to a grin. “But in your defense, I know we threw a lot at you today.”

The 146th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) hosted three Estonian JTACs for two weeks of personalized training at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base (WRANGB) in Oklahoma City, Dec. 1-16, 2018.

This marks the second consecutive year the Estonian tactical air control party (TACP) program has worked



alongside the 146th ASOS in Oklahoma. However, this year the Estonians stood a little taller and with a slightly different purpose.

MANY, MANY SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

In December of 2017, the Estonians visited WRANGB to meet with 146th ASOS program managers, instructors and evaluators to gain the practical knowledge of both establishing and running an internationally accredited JTAC program.

Master Sgt. Larry Mansell, the 146th ASOS operations superintendent, was one of the individuals assisting the Estonians during their first visit to the U.S. He gathered the list of requirements for the partner nation JTAC unit to be accredited by NATO.

According to this list, the Estonians needed access to an accredited JTAC schoolhouse, an approved official request from a Joint Fire Support Executive Steering Committee, a regulation manual that outlined responsibilities for certification (similar to Air Force Instructions) and to become a Joint Close Air Support Memorandum of Agreement Signatory – among other things.

After a year of planning and preparing, the Estonians received their first-ever JTAC accreditation. With this, they are now able to operate with Coalition partners as recognized JTACs; it was a grueling year for the Estonians.

“We weren’t sure we’d be able to acquire accreditation this year,” said the Estonian 1st Lt., a TACP specialist. “But, after 12 months of hard work and many, many sleepless nights, we finally made it.”

The Estonians arrived in Oklahoma City this year with a shift in focus from preparing for signatory status to preparing for a more active role in NATO operations.

RUGGED, STEADFAST, PASSIONATE

The future of the Estonian TACP program is bright and steady. Partnering with the 146th ASOS has enabled both units to learn and grow from each other in ways that neither of them expected.

“They have knowledge in areas that we don’t,” Lake said. “So, as I am teaching them, I’m also learning from them. They specialize in the tactics of foreign entities around their country, so we learn a ton from them about those things.”

The Estonian TACP specialists also know how to speak concisely when controlling aircraft. Since English is not their primary language, they have excelled in communicating as briefly as possible, said Mansell. This ultimately reduces the time it takes to carryout the ground commander’s intent.

In fact, Mansell has played voice recordings of the Estonian controls for the 146th ASOS personnel as an example of brief and precise radio communication.

The Estonians are also rugged, steadfast and passionate about their craft. The way they conduct themselves has turned heads from day one. Mansell said their presence brings a spark to the unit when they train together; and when they show up, they want to be the best.

“Honestly, to see the passion they have about their program is refreshing,” Mansell said. “Their willingness to improve constantly has been what’s made it all worthwhile.”

Combining great effort and great opportunity, this new relationship has been mutually beneficial for the individuals involved from both countries.

A CENTER FOR EXPERIENCE AND EXCELLENCE

The 146th ASOS has provided in-depth training opportunities to the Estonians because of experienced personnel, training infrastructure and geographic location.

Between live-air missions at nearby ranges and the AAJTS simulated missions at WRANGB, the Estonians have access to a wide range of opportunities to increase their overall mission readiness.

“We get to experience many things that you don’t always get in Estonia or other NATO countries,” the Estonian JTAC 1st Lt. said. “There are some really important things we get to experience here, which will help us be prepared when it comes to the big fight. Coming to the U.S. is eye-opening.”

The Estonian program manager spoke with Lake about the training requirements for their JTACs prior to their arrival. They were hoping to gain knowledge on how to better operate as instructors and evaluators within their own program.

Utilizing many readily available resources, Lake personally built a custom two-week plan based on the needs of the Estonian JTACs.

“I get gratification knowing that I’m helping not only our NATO allies, but also my fellow JTACs — my friends,” Lake said. “I know that when I run into them downrange that they’re going to know their stuff because they were trained the right way.”

MORE THAN WHAT’S ASKED

This relationship between countries doesn’t appear to be slowing. Now that the Estonian JTAC program has the proper qualifications, it is easier to conduct training missions with U.S. and other NATO allies.

Lt. Col. Matthew Emerson, the 146th ASOS director of operations, projected a long-term relationship with the Estonian TACP program in which training could reoccur annually or semi-annually.

In the near future, there may be integrated training opportunities between the Estonians and the manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities of the MC-12W – just another example of the 137th’s growing operational relevance.

“This is important because we’re building partner nation capability in the Baltic region,” Emerson said. “And this gives our guys additional training opportunities to go work with partner JTACs across NATO.”

The success of the Estonian and 146th relationship was spurred by individuals doing more than what was asked of them – by finding solutions instead of excuses and being in the right place at the right time.

“It’s been very rewarding going from a conversation in 2015, to now, in 2018, having three Estonians here in America experiencing Oklahoma and our culture here at WRANGB,” Mansell said. “Being a part of this has absolutely been a fulfilling moment in my career.” **AO**



Master Sgt. Ben Lake, the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron standards and evaluations program manager, shares advice with an Estonian joint terminal attack controller, after a simulated mission in the Air National Guard Advanced Joint Terminal Attack Control Training Simulator (AAJTS) at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, Dec. 12, 2018. During their two week training, the Estonians split the time between controlling live-air at a nearby range and working simulated scenarios in the AAJTS.



An Estonian tactical air control party specialist, completes a daytime close air support mission in the Air National Guard Advanced Joint Terminal Attack Control Training Simulator (AAJTS) at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, Dec. 13, 2018. The Estonian’s trained heavily on working with joint fire observers in the simulator, a type of training they don’t regularly receive in their country.

RAZORBACK RANGE

LOCATED 219 MILES EAST OF WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE IN OKLAHOMA CITY AND JUST SOUTH OF THE ARKANSAS RIVER, RAZORBACK RANGE PROVIDES 60 TARGETS ON MORE THAN 1,000 ACRES FOR CLOSE AIR SUPPORT (CAS) AND LIVE-FIRE CONTROLS. THE MILD WINTERS AND HOT, HUMID SUMMERS ALONG WITH 65 THOUSAND ADDITIONAL ACRES OF TRAINING SPACE, MAKE THE RANGE IDEAL FOR SPECIAL WARFARE AIRMEN TO TRAIN ON CAS SCENARIOS AND GROUND MANEUVERS LIKE BREACH-AND-CLEAR EXERCISES, LAND NAVIGATION AND FIREARMS TRAINING.

Photography: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX



THE 9-LINE

HOW THE CLOSE AIR SUPPORT 9-LINE IS USED TO RELAY CRITICAL INFORMATION TO AIRBORNE FIREPOWER IN SUPPORT OF GROUND COMMANDERS AND PROTECTING TACTICAL GROUND FORCES IN DEPLOYED ENVIRONMENTS

Story and Photography: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

In the blistering summer sun of the Middle East, the freezing winter storms of the northern Baltics or training in the Great Plains of America, joint terminal attack control (JTAC) qualified tactical air control party (TACP) Airmen search for ideal, covert locations to gain a panoramic overview of their assigned battle space. From their perch, the JTACs can direct the action of combat aircraft operating in close air support (CAS) and other tactical offensive operations, calling in airstrikes, gun runs and shows-of-force to support and protect American and allied forces serving overseas.

This close air support is a critical and dynamic weapon for a ground commander's ability to complete their mission, protect lives, reduce damage and control infrastructure. Providing this support, a JTAC must understand the mission, the commander's intent and be able to speak across different services, both within the U.S. Department of Defense and NATO allies. The JTAC does this all while observing forces moving on the ground and managing the stack – a diverse collection of air assets that can include helicopters, fighters, bombers, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft like the MC-12W.

Close air support, determined by situation rather than distance, provides ground commanders with flexible and timely aerial support.

To utilize CAS, TACP Airmen and JTACs use the CAS 9-line – a standardized briefing for fixed wing (FW) and rotary wing (RW) aircraft used to pass information supporting the ground commander's intent between a controller on the ground and an aircraft flying above.

A traditional CAS 9-line includes:

LINE 1 — Initial Point (IP) or Battle Position (BP). The IP is the starting point for the run-in to the target. For RW aircraft, the BP is where attacks on the target are commenced.

LINE 2 — Heading and Offset. The heading is given in degrees magnetic from the IP to the target or from the center of the BP to the target. The offset is the side

of the IP-to-target line on which aircrews can maneuver for the attack.

LINE 3 — Distance. The distance is given from the IP/BP to the target.

LINE 4 — Target Elevation. The target elevation is given in feet mean sea level (MSL) unless otherwise specified.

LINE 5 — Target Description. The target description should be specific enough for the aircrew to recognize the target.

LINE 6 — Target Location. The JTAC provides the target location.

LINE 7 — Mark Type/Terminal Guidance. The type of mark the JTAC will use (for example, smoke, laser, or infrared). If using a laser, the JTAC will also pass the call sign of the platform/individual that will provide terminal guidance for the weapon and laser code.

LINE 8 — Friendlies. Cardinal/sub-cardinal heading from the target (N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, or NW) and distance of closest friendlies from the target in meters (e.g., "South 300").

LINE 9 — Egress. These are the instructions the aircrews use to exit the target area.

Remarks/Restrictions. Supplies additional information important to the conduct of the attack.

Building a 9-line requires intimate knowledge of each aircraft in the stack, including speed and altitude limitations, munition specifications, and even fuel levels. Through experience and committed mostly to memory, these details, along with battle space information and locations, are compiled by JTACs in mere minutes, which can be the difference in taking or saving lives.

Although the JTAC is the eyes on the ground and builds and transmits the 9-line, the mission commander is the ultimate authority when calling in strikes or providing much-needed ISR.

The mobility and speed of aircraft provide the JTAC and commanders with a means to strike the enemy swiftly and unexpectedly or help ground forces move safely across hostile areas.

This means that using CAS, safely and lethally facilitated by the CAS 9-line, commanders can fully utilize their JTAC as a critical strategic force enabler in today's evolving, complex and dangerous threat environments. **A0**

INTELLIGENCE

CHIEF MASTER SGT. BRIAN A. BRINDLE

Chief Enlisted Manager, 189th IS

Interview: STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS
Photography: STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD

"I'VE BEEN TELLING THE AIRMEN IN THE 189TH, 'YOU'RE PART OF THE INITIAL CADRE OF NOT ONLY THE 189TH BUT ALSO THIS WHOLE INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE AND RECONNAISSANCE (ISR) CENTER OF EXCELLENCE.' AND REALLY THAT APPLIES TO EVERY MEMBER OF WILL ROGERS. WE'RE IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR OF SOMETHING NEW, AND IT'S REALLY NOT BEING DONE ANYWHERE ELSE."

YOU ARE A TACTICAL SYSTEMS OPERATOR, CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TSO, AND HOW THEY TIE INTO THE MISSION OF THE 189TH INTELLIGENCE SQUADRON?

Well, a tactical systems operator (TSO) is basically a de facto shred out of the 1A8X2 Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), which is the airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) operator, and we perform cryptologic intelligence as an enlisted aviator aboard Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) aircraft. Our aircraft, the MC-12W, is a light ISR aircraft, as opposed to the heavy ISR aircraft that might be in Air Combat Command. We use a sophisticated suite of equipment aboard the aircraft, and we process ISR information and communicate it to the rest of the crew, the ground force commander and the rest of the intelligence community. The sole mission of the 189th is to employ that capability in support of global special operations and provide a central airborne intelligence to the decision makers and action takers on the ground so they can achieve their mission objectives.

CAN YOU GIVE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE AIRBORNE CRYPTOLOGIC CERTIFICATION TRAINING AND HOW IT FITS INTO BEING A CERTIFIED TSO?

The nature of the TSO job dictates a very strictly regulated and challenging pipeline, which includes ACCT, or Airborne Cryptologic Certification Training. It's the fifth of at least seven formal training courses for TSOs, and it's about six weeks long. It's all ground based with academic and practical phases, and prepares TSOs for the flight phase within mission qualification training, which is the next step in the pipeline. That's when they start their actual flying career. The certification they earn in ACCT is universally recognized throughout the ISR community, and that enables the TSOs to operate the equipment aboard any ISR aircraft.

HOW DOES BOTH THE CONTENT AND LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL BENEFIT 189TH AIRMEN?

Having it here at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base is a huge benefit for our Airmen. The school is run by our active duty partner, the 306th Intelligence Squadron. They used to be based at Beale Air Force Base in California, so that's six weeks of paid travel that's been eliminated. That's huge for our guys, because prior to ACCT, the TSO students were at Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas for the ISR fundamentals and apprentice course, which is almost three months long, and then also water and combat survival or SERE training, up at Fairchild in Washington, which is almost a month long. It's good for them to be able to complete most of the follow-on training here at home, especially the most challenging part of it. ACCT is pretty challenging. But with the 306th here and the stand-up of the full schoolhouse, it's not just our Guardsmen that are attending but also reserve and active duty TSO students. They've incorporated it into the total force pipeline. So it's getting pretty busy here. And, active duty students that have come through here love it. We've gotten great feedback on what it's like to be on a small, friendly and family-oriented base like Will Rogers.

WHY IS THAT IMPORTANT FOR THEM?

Mission qualification training or MQT is here also for the 189th. Our students have the home field advantage. The classes are small, and the students are the center focus, which is the standard for most aircrew training programs throughout the Air Force. For TSOs, who have to be the sole subject matter experts within their crew, the small, close-knit team of students and instructors help them learn to function as a crew to get that expertise so they can fly 'find, fix and finish' missions. Another advantage of training at home station is the close integration with our flying squadron, the 185th Special Operations Squadron, who provide the pilots and the combat systems officers. Without them, we can't get off the ground, but without us, they can't complete their mission. We have a pretty strong relationship between the



two units and develop a really good sense of teamwork. TSO students learn this early on in their training so that by the time they qualify, the front-end crew knows that they have a TSO who can then help enable that mission success.

HOW DOES THE SCHOOL IMPACT THE WING'S MISSION AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE HERE?

The Wing's mission statement says that we're a force provider, and what better way to provide that force than to train those who deliver it. So as the center of excellence here at Will Rogers evolves, it's also evolving for our TSO mission partners, the 361st ISR Group based out of Hurlburt Field in Florida. They've been supporting us from the beginning with the stand-up of the 189th, and we continue to enjoy a strong partnership with them. The integration between the 137th SOW and the 361st ISR Group allows students to be able to complete ACCT and then MQT with an efficient and effective approach that hasn't been possible before in the TSO enterprise. That's going to benefit not only all the TSOs but also our front end crews and all of the units within the Wing, because they're going to have the opportunity to participate in innovating and collaborating with our active duty partners to build this center of excellence concept. The best part: it's all up to us on how we do that because it doesn't exist anywhere else. I've been telling the Airmen in the 189th, "You're part of the initial cadre of not only the 189th, but also this whole ISR center of excellence." And really that applies to every member of Will Rogers. We're in on the ground floor of something new, and it's really not being done anywhere else. There's not anybody else to copy from. We get to build to suit, as they say, and I think that's pretty cool.

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

It's been a huge privilege really working with the team that we have in the 189th. Many retrained from other positions within the 137th as part of the Wing's conversion, and to see it go from conception to real-world operations in such a short period of time has been the highlight of my career so far. Now our ranks include many first-term Airmen, and it's a pretty bold move for somebody to raise their hand and say, "Yeah, I'm going to go do this thing that you say is extremely challenging and you can't tell me much about due to the nature of the job." They're beginning their Guard careers with us and the aptitude and attitude that they've shown so far has been stellar – just truly amazing. I think it really speaks to the character and intelligence of young people these days, and it's something that we're really proud to be a part of. **AO**

Clandestine operations have been used by the United States to make and break nations since the dawn of the nation itself. The intelligence and computing technology produced in England by the Allied Powers, which included the U.S., during World War II shortened the war by two to four years and helped ensure its positive outcome, according to the official historian of British intelligence in 1993.

Make and break.

Though the technology has progressed significantly – from the heat-activated ink of the Revolutionary War, to the first programmable electric computer of World War II, to airborne intelligence platforms over battle spaces today – the mission hasn't changed.

"I believe in what we do," said Staff Sgt. Samuel Carothers, a tactical systems operator instructor with the 189th Intelligence Squadron, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base (WRANGB) in Oklahoma City. "We have a direct impact on the battlefield, not only to bring U.S. service members home safe, but also have an impact on the enemies of our nation."

As a tactical systems operator, or TSO, Carothers and those like him are trained to operate complex intelligence systems – which include sensors, receivers, recorders and geolocation equipment – to gather actionable information that they then provide to air, ground and maritime forces for real-time decision making. They must also be prepared to solve any in-air emergencies while identifying targets and being knowledgeable of U.S. and allied operations, such as: interception, interdiction, close air support, combat search and rescue, combat air patrol, reconnaissance, offensive or defensive counter air, suppression of enemy air defenses, and special operations forces.

In order to act as the 'eye in the sky' over a wide range of battle spaces and balance the airborne component with the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance mission, these Airmen must undergo extensive preparation and qualification training, including: a formal school on how to be a part of an aircrew, a technical school, survival schools, initial qualification training and finally mission qualification training.

Fortunately for 189th TSOs, the last two courses are co-located at their base at WRANGB.

"It helps network with people that you're going to be working with," said

Airman 1st Class Christian Angier, 189th Intelligence Squadron TSO who is currently in mission qualification training (MQT). "You know, being in class with people that you're going to be working with, being taught by people you're going to be working with, it helps a lot."

Before entering MQT, which is typically held at each airman's gaining squadron, all U.S. Air Force TSO students – active duty, guard and reserve – must pass their initial qualification training, or for TSOs, airborne cryptologic certification training (ACCT), an Air Combat Command course that is universally held by the 306th Intelligence Squadron (306th IS) at WRANGB.

"It comprises what we would normally refer to as initial qualification training, which is just one part of every aviator's career field," said Dean Howell, 306th IS director of operations. "We also feature three additional courses and are adding others as the forces demand them. That's why we're here and what we're all about – making sure that Airmen are qualified to go forward in a real mission."

ACCT begins with a mix of theoretical work in a classroom and applied scenarios on a tactical systems emulator (TSE), which uses monitors to mimic the systems used in the aircraft, and ends after five or six weeks in a culmination event similar to a check ride.

"In ACCT, we're teaching them the equipment and technologies," explained Howell. "There are enough tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) thrown in there to make it all make sense, but they may not be the exact TTPs that they're going to use when they go forward to wherever it is they are going to go. The location, mission and aircraft may change, but the basic technology won't."

Currently, the 306th puts about 60 students through ACCT each year – about 40 of those are active duty Airmen, six are Reservists and the remaining are Air National Guardsmen. Class sizes stay small and range from three to six students, which is limited by the nature of the two emulators used in the course.

"Three students is ideal," said Howell. "There are traditionally three student training positions on the TSE and a fourth position, which is the facilitator. They sort of sit back and run the scenario."

The facilitator and instructors are hands-on throughout the entire scenario, participating in pre and post mission briefs and role playing the parts

of pilot or ground forces. Each scenario has a desired conclusion and objective, but the techniques each student uses to arrive at the conclusion is their own.

"It's still very intensive training using the emulators," said Howell. "It's basically one-on-one with student to instructor while running the scenario; but, this way, it's in a controlled environment."

The scenarios prepare students to move on to mission qualification training and then, ultimately, to their careers as TSOs.

"It benefited me well, in a sense that the material in ACCT was directly transferable to the operational side," said Angier. "I mean, that's what ACCT is for – to give you that skill initially, and then MQT is to take that and transfer it to the aircraft."

As a both a qualified TSO and a civilian instructor certified to teach ACCT and MQT, Carothers has the opportunity to watch the TSO career field develop with each new airman.

"I get to raise the next generation of TSOs and help shape and mold them," Carothers explained. "I get to see them initially when they come into training, and later as they progress through their careers. It makes it more personal for me when I teach, because I know that I'm going to have to work with these people in the future. It just drives the point home that we need to be imparting the best education and tools that we have so that they can not only succeed in MQT, but give them the foundation to do well the rest of their careers."

Carothers is an example of the total force effort that goes into all intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance career fields, but especially the ACCT course at Will Rogers.

He began his Air Force career as an active duty Urdu linguist in 2011, working mostly behind the scenes in secured offices. In 2014, he was expeditiously trained for airborne intelligence operations and detailed for a 2015 deployment as a TSO. After returning, Carothers went back to being a linguist and then chose to join the Air National Guard, where he officially cross-trained into the TSO career field. The following year in 2017, he deployed again, this time not in a temporary position, but as a permanent part of the U.S. Air Force's TSO program.

Though it was his second deployment, it was also the 137th Special Operations Wing's first mass deployment since

converting to a wing under the Air Force Special Operations Command. As part of that conversion, it was necessary for the wing to establish new intelligence units, one of which was the 189th IS. Carothers was a part of that original 189th cadre and watched the unit develop into the fully operational squadron it is today.

"Standing up the 189th was hard work," Carothers said. "Everyone worked their ass off to get to that first deployment – to get those people initially qualified. Whether you hadn't been to school yet or you were the first person to fully qualify, you had two jobs: make sure you were bettering yourself as a TSO and make sure we had the manning to do our mission."

This year, Carothers taught his first Airmen in both ACCT and MQT. His passion for deployments and the direct impact TSOs have downrange motivates him to drive the future of the 189th IS and the TSO career field through his students and their successes.

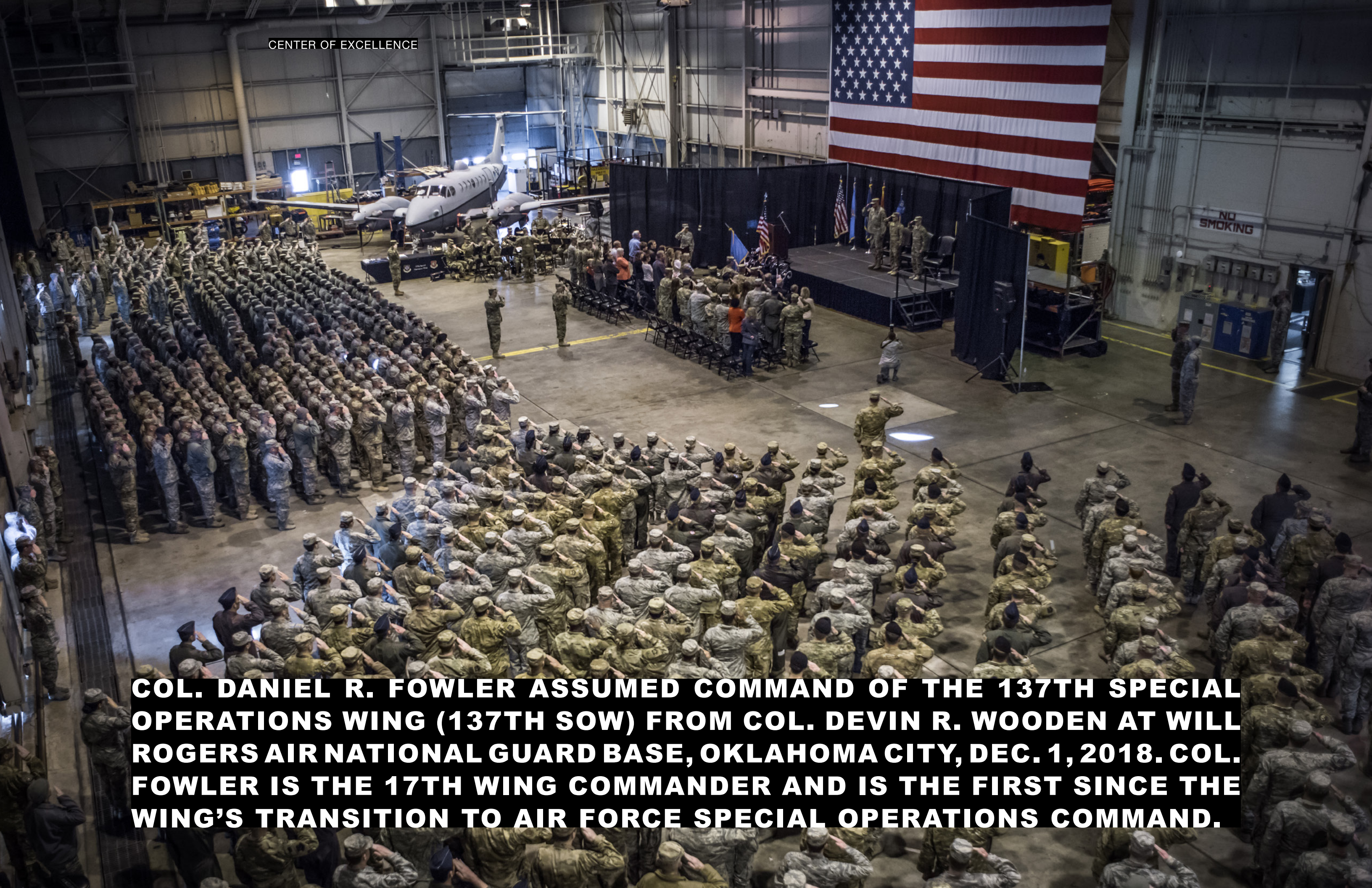
"I'm very proud of the 189th and how far we've come in such a short period of time – from the ground up," Carothers said. "We've sent people in support of the Special Operations Command all over the world in just a couple short years, and it's good to hear that the Airmen downrange are doing well and having a real impact on the battlefield and the lives there. Hearing their accomplishments and seeing them get to grow, and their results ... this school house got them there." **AO**



Story: STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS

Photography: Staff Sgt. Tyler K. Woodward

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



COL. DANIEL R. FOWLER ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE 137TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING (137TH SOW) FROM COL. DEVIN R. WOODEN AT WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, OKLAHOMA CITY, DEC. 1, 2018. COL. FOWLER IS THE 17TH WING COMMANDER AND IS THE FIRST SINCE THE WING'S TRANSITION TO AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND.

WING COMMANDER

COL. DANIEL R. FOWLER

[Assumed command Dec. 1, 2018]

Photography: STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD

[EXCERPT FROM 137TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY REMARKS, DEC. 1, 2018]

"I believe that there is a vast opportunity in front of us, which is very unique to the 137th Special Operations Wing. We have the opportunity to be leaders in a changing global environment. At the 137th, we work with Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), Air Mobility Command (AMC) and Air Combat Command (ACC) — and we are going to maximize on those associations to execute global special operations today and into the future.

Col. Wooden's leadership brought the Wing through tough times, overcoming staunch challenges, and you (the Wing) ended up on top. The 137th is well-poised for the future. It's going to be a future that's built on transition, priorities and, specifically, this Wing's culture. The 137th's effort to convert to the MC-12W was magnificent. But as always, in service to our state and nation, there's more work to do.

We are going to evolve into a high-intensity operational reserve unit.

Inherent in the MC-12 mission is our repeated annual involuntary mobilization that will continue on 12-month cycles.

This embodies the operational reserve construct.

It combines assured access with our active duty counterparts while guaranteeing long range predictability for the unit. This maximizes our combat deployability while preserving the Citizen Airmen lifestyle and the Air Commando ethos. AFSOC expects us to be ready, relevant and resilient. We already are.

The operational reserve construct can balance the challenges of full-time citizenry and full-time military service while providing us with the tools for assured access and guaranteed reliability. With the predictability of the operational reserve construct, we can determine the time and pace of our deployments to better support our downrange combatant commanders and maximize the impact of our Citizen Airmen. We will have reversed the traditional strategic reserve construct.

With the predictability of the operational reserve construct, we already have AMC aeromedical evacuation Airmen volunteering to go to AFSOC's Emerald Warrior exercises, we have ACC security forces requesting to become Deployed Aircraft Ground Response Element (DAGRE) teams so that they can deploy with fellow AFSOC defenders, and we currently have deployed AFSOC Air Commandos picking up additional overseas exercises and providing much-needed manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance downrange.

Thank you Maj. Gen. Micheal Thompson for the opportunity, thank you Col. Wooden for setting us up for success and, most importantly, thank you 137th Special Operations Wing Airmen, YOU are why I'm excited to be here."





AIR|OBSERVER

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