

# AIR|OBSERVER

the journal of the 137th special operations wing

# YEAR

TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-THREE

# IN REVIEW





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Members of the 205th Engineering Installation Squadron and 137th Special Operations Communications Squadron partnered to conduct annual training at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, Aug. 8, 2023. The instructors certified 15 members in tower climbing, rappelling and rescue operations, ensuring they are able to conduct operations safely as they deploy around the world. The squadrons have supported operations in U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Southern Command.

Photograph: Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire



The 137th Special Operations Communications Flight was redesignated as a squadron on May 7, 2023, during a ceremony held at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City. The squadron supports a vital capability for 1,200 members of the 137th Special Operations Wing, ensuring members are connected securely and able to maintain operations that prepare them to conduct missions around the world. Cyber attacks both at home and abroad pose a threat to national security and further developing 137th SOCS multi-capable Airmen will allow the squadron to securely build, operate and maintain digital and critical infrastructures while protecting and defending data against adversaries.

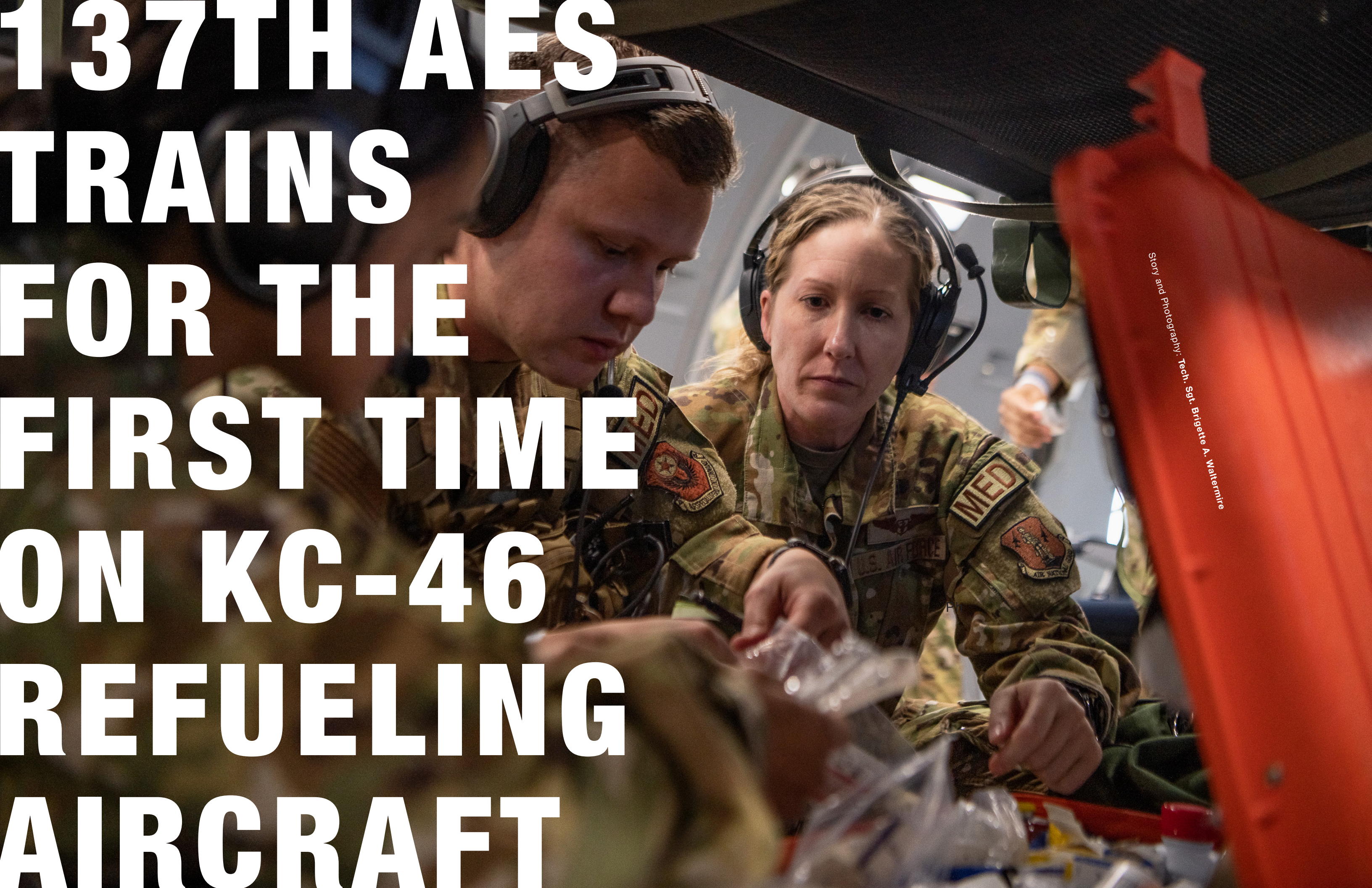
Photograph: Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa (above) and Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire (below)





# 137TH AES TRAINS FOR THE FIRST TIME ON KC-46 REFUELING AIRCRAFT

Story and Photography: Tech. Sgt. Brigitte A. Wallermitte







Photograph: Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa

Members of the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron and 156th AES completed initial certifications for operations on the KC-46A Pegasus Sept. 15-17, 2023, at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City.

A total of 25 Airmen participated in 35 aircraft and survival scenarios and 20 different medical scenarios, but also provided consistent care to simulated patients during three flyovers conducted by the 22d Air Refueling Wing aircraft. This made the scenarios more realistic as aircraft conducting real-world operations are not always able to maintain flight at a constant altitude.

“Considering our potential future fight, it is critical for our aeromedical evacuation crewmembers to be as aircraft versatile as possible,” said Lt. Col. Christopher Lane, 137th AES commander. “The KC-46 will be critical to meeting Air Mobility Command’s vision for peer-to-peer conflict. Having our crews trained on this airframe makes us ready, trained and available to meet U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and other combatant commander needs.”

The AES Airmen must understand systems for each aircraft they fly on to include aircraft configuration, emergency and egress procedures, electrical components, communication functions, and oxygen systems, as well as the different capabilities on board to respond to patient emergencies during flight.

Members of the 137th AES are certified on the KC-135 Stratotanker, the H and J models of the C-130 Hercules, C-17 Globemaster III, and the C-21 in addition to the KC-46A. Lane noted that in many ways the KC-46A seemed to have been designed with aeromedical evacuation in mind, making it easier for crews to focus on patient care needs.

“Air Mobility Command is preparing for the next fight and Aeromedical Evacuation will be critical to ensuring mission success – familiarizing the Mobility Air Forces with our operations is important across the total force,” he said. “This mission was a great example of MAF total force integration with active-duty members from McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, flying the KC-46 aircraft and including three AE crew members of our ANG sister unit from Charlotte, North Carolina, in our initial certification training.”

Over 400 individual training items were accomplished by the AES Airmen in addition to the successful proof of concept for launching local KC-46A training missions from the Will Rogers Air National Guard Base flightline.

“We are charged to be experts in the aviation medicine environment,” Lane said. “With no aircraft assigned to the wing that we operate under, our aircrew training non-commissioned officer in charge communicates our needs to ANG, Air Force Reserve and active-duty units around the country to set up flights for training. It becomes an immediate win-win for both of us to train together toward a more cohesive wartime response.”

Gen. Mike Minihan, AMC commander, underscored the importance of air mobility’s readiness, integration and agility in projecting and sustaining the U.S. military.

“We must maintain custody of our readiness and get better every day,” said Minihan during an AMC rehearsal of concept meeting held in April 2023. “Aggressively seek situational awareness, aggressively seek integration and aggressively seek mission.” **AO**



Photograph: Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa



# 137 SOWANG AIRMEN PREMIER AT TRADEWINDS 2023



Story and Photography: Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire





Nine Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing participated in TRADEWINDS 23 Exercise, a multi-domain U.S. Southern Command exercise, for the first time July 15-27, 2023, in Guyana.

Oklahoma National Guard participants included eight tactical air control party specialists and a survival, evasion, resistance and escape instructor who were conducting training and operations at more than five different locations during the exercise.

TRADEWINDS is a U.S. Southern Command-sponsored exercise designed to strengthen partnerships and interoperability, promote human rights, as well as increase all participants' training capacity and capability to mitigate, plan for and respond to crises and security threats.

“The participation of more than 1,500 service members this year exemplifies the shared commitment to one another as we strengthen our partnerships and remain united to share responsibilities as defenders of our common values,” said U.S. Army South Commanding General, Maj. Gen. William Thigpen. “TW23 is key to leveraging the capabilities of like-minded countries to reach common goals and strengthen regional stability.”

In total, nearly two-thirds of the U.S. service members participating were made up of Guard and Reserve troops.

The Oklahoma Air National Guard attendees were based at a headquarters location in Georgetown, the Guyana Defence Force Jungle Amphibious Training School, Camp Seweyo and Camp Stephenson but also operated out of Air Base London and a shore base facility. In total, they worked alongside military partners from 18 nations.

The TACPs helped ensure the success of significant events throughout the exercise, to include establishing communications for and participating in a joint and multinational wing exchange for over 90 jumpers from six nations; a helicopter medical evacuation; an anti-piracy training exercise; certification of 100 multinational troops in fast rope insertion and extraction system operations from a tower and helicopter; and three full mission profiles supporting the U.S. Army and five nations.

“We worked closely with our multinational and joint partners on tactics, techniques and procedures, and we were actually living with the GDF so we got to know more about their culture that way,” said Master Sgt. Fred Moreton, a tactical air control party specialist who was based at Camp Seweyo.

The Airmen assisted in training for four countries and the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. They taught courses in tactical combat casualty care, conducted joint calls for fire, established the first published helicopter landing zone at the camp, as well as trained forces in small unit and close

quarters battle tactics. They also established beyond-line-of-sight radio communications with Camp Stephenson and Georgetown for the first time for U.S. forces in over two years.

“The U.S. Southern Command deputy commander for mobilization and reserve affairs, Maj. Gen. Javier Reina, was on the call from Camp Stephenson, and I think we made an impression since he asked for information to document it in an official report,” said said 1st Lt. Christopher Vaughan, security cooperation operations officer with the 137th SOW who was at Camp Stephenson.

In addition to establishing radio communications with Camp Seweyo and Georgetown, the four Airmen stationed at Camp Stephenson executed three full mission profiles that included five nations and also conducted fast rope operations, tactical combat casualty care courses, radio PRC-152 training and arms qualifications.

“It was momentous for us not only because of the accomplishment of making comms, but doing it on the high frequency medium,” said Maj. Jeffrey Hansen, director of operations for the 137th Combat Training Flight. “That has become more uncommon due to the proliferation of satellite communications.”

Hansen worked with the Caribbean Task Force in Georgetown throughout the exercise. He partnered with Canadian Armed Forces members to instruct Guyana Defence Force officers in the operational planning process as well as help run Caribbean Task Force tabletop exercises.

“Working with our NATO allies from Canada to teach the OPP model was a great opportunity to introduce air ground integration concepts to the training,” Hansen said. “We were able to apply those concepts to the types of missions and responses the nations around the Caribbean community might encounter.”

The U.S. has been a committed partner with robust engagement in the region. The exercise helped improve interoperability with participating nations, to include 60 multinational students attending JATS. Students from Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Canada, France, Grenada, Guyana, Mexico, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, and the U.S. all worked through courses learning jungle survival skills.

“This exercise has created opportunities for our Airmen to build skills and forge partnerships in an austere environment in multiple ways,” said Hansen. “As we continue to pivot toward agile combat employment, being able to practice applying those multi-capable skills in training will help them be better at it in real-world scenarios.”

The Tradewinds exercise has been held annually since 1984, only missing one year in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the goals of enhancing the collective ability of participating nations’ defense forces to counter regional threats and conduct humanitarian aid/disaster relief operations while developing strong relationships and reinforcing human rights awareness. [AO](#)







# 146 ASOS SUPPORTS AIR DEFENDER, CONDUCTS OPERATIONS WITH NATO ALLIES

Story and Photography: Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire





and provided information on an unexpected but imminent threat to the ground force. This allowed the German air force to test how a ground assisted air interdiction mission could potentially flow into a CAS mission.”

Participation in this exercise continues a legacy of partnership with NATO allies and partner nations for the 146th ASOS. They historically have conducted JTAC training and integration missions due to the multiple air players that are members of NATO, supporting training in Estonia, Germany, Poland and Oman, and will soon include Guyana.

“In this exercise we are providing another capability to the CFACC that they previously did not have in any other conflict,” said Hebb. “We can provide a tactical problem set to the enemy.”

This specific exercise demonstrates TACPs perform a role beyond expertise in close air support missions and is a U.S. Air Force specialty that is inherently joint. For CAS, TACPs advise commanders on how to integrate U.S. airpower, assist in the planning and execution of those mission sets, and exercise procedural control of aircraft as needed.

“The most important thing here is we are demonstrating we are much more than CAS experts,” said Senior Master Sgt. Nicholas Altgilbers, senior enlisted leader for the 146th ASOS. “We provide a much more valuable tool to the CFACC, and that is the ability to extend the command and the control network by being sustainable, low visibility and multi-capable.” **AO**

**M**embers of the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron supported Exercise Air Defender 2023, providing joint all-domain command and control to the combined force air component commander June 12-23, 2023, throughout the U.S. European Command area of responsibility.

This was the first time that tactical air control party specialists conducted mission-specific tasks designed to solve CFACC strategic-level operational challenges. The 146th ASOS participated in this initiative with eight tactical air control party specialists and two special warfare mission support personnel.

“We saw there was no other representation or opportunity for other missions sets from our state to be in the exercise, so it was important to us to showcase Oklahoma Airmen and be part of the largest reinforcement air exercise since the foundation of the German Armed Forces,” said Master Sgt. Paul Hebb, operations superintendent for the 146th ASOS.

Air Defender is a German Armed Forces led effort that is the largest mobility of NATO forces since the Berlin Airlift, with 10,000 participants and 250 aircraft from 25 nations. Planning began five years ago for the exercise, which is being held in four countries.

The Air National Guard TACPs exercised a new mission set and integrated sensing and effect teams in the early phases of large-scale combat operations.

“For our unit, this is the first time we’ve gone out to test this

concept on a large scale,” said Staff Sgt. Brock Williams, a 146th Air Support Operations Squadron tactical air control party specialist with the sensing and effect team. “It will directly relate to our career field and our job specifically to prove that we can conduct reconnaissance on strategic level targets to move the phases of the war forward.”

The 146th ASOS was the only unit representing the Oklahoma Air National Guard in the exercise, operating from two different locations in Germany and one in Poland. The SET provides the air component commander with intelligence preparation of the battlefield, which identifies critical gaps in the command’s knowledge of the battlefield environment or threat situation.

“It’s been a good lesson in conducting that mission set in a foreign environment for us,” Williams continued. “We are in a country where we’re not familiar with the local customs, dress and appearance, or even the language. This was a lesson in what it might be like to conduct operations in a location where we are truly out of place.”

The 146th ASOS also provided close air support during a German-led air interdiction mission with German Tornado combat aircraft, demonstrating that an operation with multinational partners can morph into a CAS mission on dynamic targets.

“We are able to make critical contributions to our multinational allies at a moment’s notice to defend shared values,” said Hebb. “We were able to mobilize with 24 hours’ notice





# AFSOC CONDUCTS LIVE-FIRE EXERCISE WITH RAPID DRAGON

Story and Photography: Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire





Two Air Force Special Operations Command wings partnered in a total force initiative to conduct the first live-fire demonstration of Rapid Dragon, a long-range palletized munitions system, in the U.S. European Command theater over Andøya Space Defense Range, Norway, Nov. 9, 2022.

During U.S. Special Operations Command Europe exercise ATREUS 22-4, two MC-130J Commando II aircraft assigned to the 352d Special Operations Wing flew the Rapid Dragon package to a Royal Norwegian Air Force training range and deployed it over the Atlantic Ocean. An MC-12W assigned to the 137th SOW, Oklahoma Air National Guard, used its manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to collect and disseminate information about the release.

This is the first time Rapid Dragon has been employed using cargo aircraft in the U.S. European Command theater, and precision munitions capabilities for medium-sized or larger cargo aircraft allows U.S. and NATO forces a flexible rapid response option.

“It’s really easily exportable to our partners and allies around the globe that may want to increase the utility of their air force,” said Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, AFSOC commander, during a recent Air and Space Force Association event. “When you look at partner capability, we have a lot of partners around the globe that don’t have heavy bomber-type platforms that would be traditional carriers of those types of munitions, but they’ve got plenty of C-130s proliferated around the world.”

More than 40 countries operate C-130 Hercules aircraft, but AFSOC has been the only U.S. Air Force combatant command to demonstrate this system.

“An MC-130J is the perfect aircraft for this capability because we can land and operate from a 3,000-foot highways and austere landing zones whereas a bomber cannot,” said Lt. Col. Valerie Knight, 352d SOW mission commander. “Additionally a crew qualified to execute heavy equipment airdrop could employ this operationally. After the successful execution of this airdrop, we have now proven we can employ the same weapons system — creating a dilemma for our adversaries. As the only U.S. Air Force Special Operations Wing in Europe, this capability provides our allies, partners and the joint force an additional response option, strengthening our deterrence capabilities in USEUCOM.”

Developing relationships between allies and partners extended to the total force with the inclusion of an Oklahoma Air National Guard MC-12W aircraft. Two Air Force pilots and a combat systems officer were part of the MC-12W aircrew to conduct the mission, with support from aircrew flight equipment and special operations communications Airmen.

“The 137th SOW actively seeks out exercises where we can demonstrate our unique capabilities and create relationships with our partners — not just within AFSOC and the total force, but across a multi-national coalition,” said Maj. Murray Ludwig, a 137th SOW combat systems officer. “Thanks to the

assistance of our Norwegian allies, our integration into this exercise has been seamless. We were able to demonstrate that our wing can provide top-tier ISR support and a wide array of sustainment capabilities for our joint partners.”

Members of the 137th Mission Sustainment Team also participated, conducting pre-deployment site surveys and airfield assessments. While it is not the first time the team has worked with coalition forces, it is the first time the MST has conducted their mission in a setting realistic to the austere environments they will operate in as they support global SOF operations.

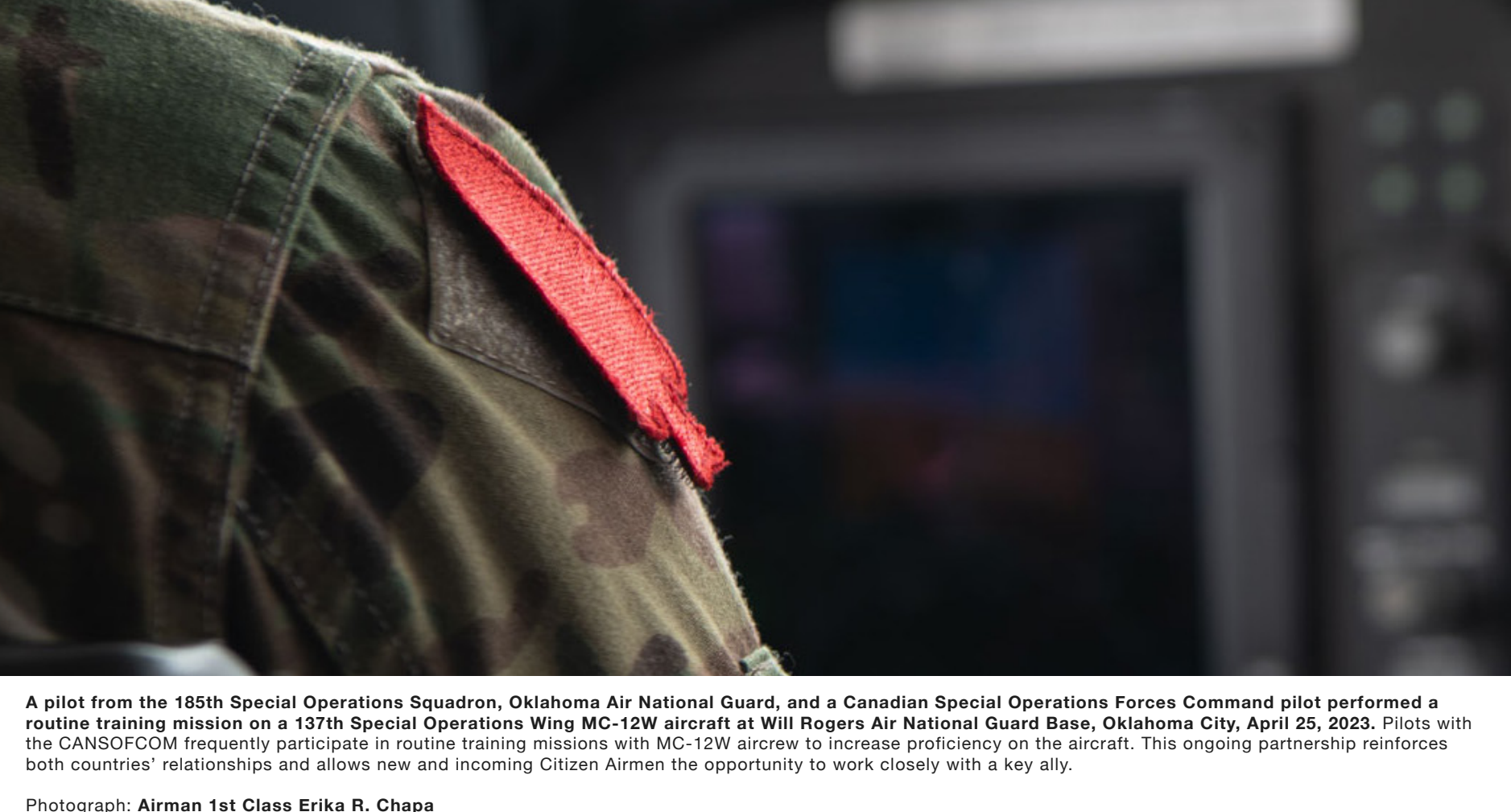
“The multi-capable Airman concept allows us to become completely self-sufficient anywhere in the world,” Ludwig said. “The training our operations Airmen and Mission Sustainment Team are receiving here will be critically important to their future war-fighting potential.”

As AFSOC postures its forces for the future fight, developing unconventional, innovative capabilities to protect against near-peer adversaries is critical.

“This rapid roll on, roll off capability extends America’s ability to project firepower across the globe,” said Knight. “It doesn’t require any aircraft modifications, making it incredibly easy to employ any place, any time.” **AO**

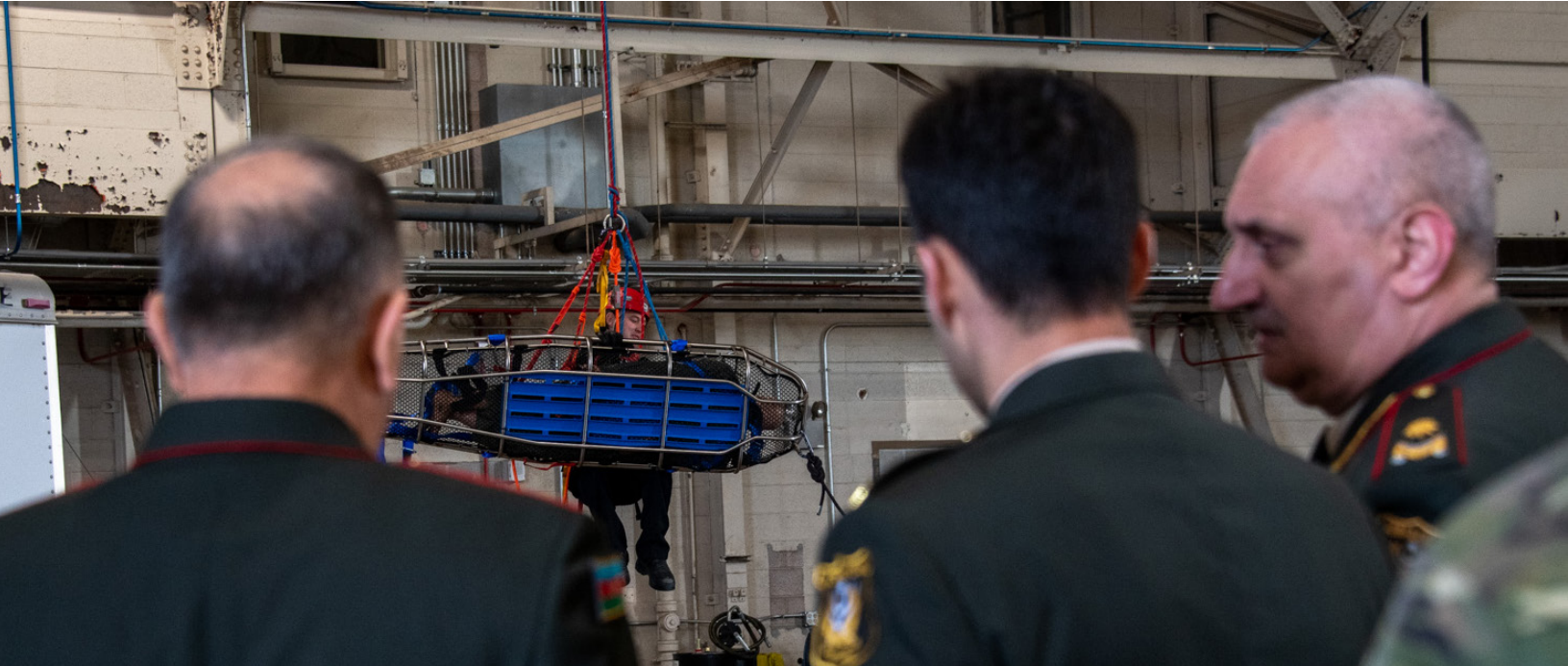






**A pilot from the 185th Special Operations Squadron, Oklahoma Air National Guard, and a Canadian Special Operations Forces Command pilot performed a routine training mission on a 137th Special Operations Wing MC-12W aircraft at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, April 25, 2023. Pilots with the CANSOFCOM frequently participate in routine training missions with MC-12W aircrew to increase proficiency on the aircraft. This ongoing partnership reinforces both countries’ relationships and allows new and incoming Citizen Airmen the opportunity to work closely with a key ally.**

Photograph: **Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa**



**The 137th Special Operations Wing hosted a State Partnership Program visit Dec. 1, 2022, in Oklahoma City for members from the Azerbaijan Army and Embassy of Azerbaijan, Washington, D.C., to introduce them to the many capabilities of the 137th SOW as a global force provider. This tour was part of a three-day visit with the Oklahoma National Guard in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the partnership between Oklahoma and Azerbaijan. This was the fifth time the 137th SOW participated in SPP visits in calendar year 2022, helping to improve both militaries and relationships through cooperative training and knowledge exchanges.**

Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**





# 137TH SOTG VALIDATED FOR JOINT WARFIGHTING FUNCTIONS

Story and Photography: **Tech. Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire**

The 137th Special Operations Wing certified its Special Operations Task Group during a training exercise held Dec. 1-9, 2022 at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City.

The exercise tested the operational and tactical integration between air and ground forces. A total of 11 members with the 137th SOW SOTG completed desired learning objectives and also validated their developed tactics, techniques and procedures.

“The SOTG is a deployed group-level command,” Maj. Jean Fuselier, commander for the 137th SOW SOTG. “We are the first Air National Guard SOTG within AFSOC, so working with other wings to learn and understand their capabilities is critical to our readiness to execute command and control in a new era of mission command.”

The focus of the SOTG is to integrate multi-domain special operations forces air power into the joint operational environment. The SOTG commands special operations task units, or SOTUs, which are uniquely tailored to the missions of their assigned areas of responsibility.

Participants in the exercise included the 137th SOW, 919th SOW and 75th Ranger Regiment. The SOTG was based in various locations in Oklahoma, while the SOTU operated out of Georgia to realistically mimic the environment in which the SOTG will execute seven Joint Warfighting Functions: intelligence, movement and maneuver, fires, information, protection, sustainment, and command and control.

“We faced challenges performing command and control while dislocated from our SOTUS during the exercise,” said Fuselier. “This trial run was crucial to learn what we may have to deal with while at Theater Special Operations Command on a deployment. You don’t know what you don’t know until you get out there and do it.”

Designing forces deliberately for unique missions will help with readiness under the force generation cycle — a four-phase training model — to strategically compete with and deter adversaries.

“To deliver the Air Force Special Operations Command we need in today’s increasingly complex and uncertain environments, we must decentralize and empower Special Operations Task Units (SOTU) and Special Operations Task Groups (SOTG) with mission command,” said then-AFSOC commander Lt. Gen. James Slife during a Mission Command Summit in November. **AO**



# 137TH SOW HOSTS ANG COMMAND CHIEF

Story: **Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa**

U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Maurice L. Williams visited the 137th Special Operations Wing at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, Feb. 5, 2023.

Williams holds the highest level of enlisted leadership for the ANG and has been traveling to wings to ensure changes to the strategic outlook of the guard are being communicated to the lowest level. This marked his 60th base visit.

After meeting with Col. Christopher D. Gries, 137th SOW commander, and other command team members, Williams emphasized the necessity of building culture to improve retention.

“I think it is great that the commander has a priority of culture and connection. We’ve got to be connected,” Williams expressed.

Williams called on Airmen to both find a mentor and actively mentor others.

“How are you being the best version of you to give back to someone else?” Williams asked during an enlisted town hall. “We all have to do this thing together.”

Furthermore, Williams stressed taking initiative to understand the country’s adversaries as outlined in the 2022 National Defense Strategy and how they seek to disseminate misinformation.

“If you don’t understand the adversary in a competition, how can you think in a way to have purpose and understand ‘the why’ in the things that we do?” Williams questioned.

In addition to Williams' visit, U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Aaron Dent, command first sergeant of the ANG, visited the 137th SOW First Sergeant Council to discuss how they fit into the development of the current and future leaders of the ANG.

The two chiefs aim for Airmen to use knowledge from the visit to become stronger leaders and further the capabilities of the ANG.

“This is one of the best parts of this job, to get out, see Airmen and talk to Airmen,” Williams said. “But also to tell you what we’re doing at the national level that affects you, so you understand ‘the why’ behind it.” **AO**



Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire**





The 137th Special Operations Wing conducted a major accident response exercise at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, Feb. 8, 2023. In the aftermath of a simulated tornado, 137th SOW emergency responders and first responders from Oklahoma City Fire Department and Oklahoma Emergency Medical Services Authority immediately began response and recovery operations on simulated patients. Multi-agency exercises like this are essential to preparing for real-life emergencies that may occur on base.

Photographs: **Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa (above)** and **Tech. Sgt. Brigetta A. Waltermire (below)**



Family, friends and fellow service members joined the fourth 137th commander Maj. Gen. Stanley Newman at his resting place Aug. 16, 2023, in Oklahoma City to celebrate what would have been his 100th birthday. Two F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 138th Fighter Wing conducted a flyover, and visitors followed the Jewish custom to leave a visitation stone as an act of remembrance. Newman flew 57 combat missions with the 9th Air Force in Europe during World War II and was credited with shooting down the last German plane of the war. He went on to serve in Korea and Vietnam where he flew several more missions. From 1973 to 1978, he served as the 137th Tactical Airlift Wing commander through its transition to the 137th Airlift Wing. He was promoted to Major General in 1979 and retired in July of 1983 after 41 years of service to his country. Newman will continue to stand as a pillar of patriotism and service within our community, and the time he dedicated to the Wing throughout his life will not be forgotten.

Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigetta A. Waltermire**





# OKLAHOMA GUARDSMEN TAKE FIRST PLACE AT CYBER SHIELD

Story: **Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa**

Oklahoma National Guard members, including three 137th Special Operations Communications Squadron Airmen, participated in a two-week cyber defense exercise June 2-16, 2023, alongside approximately 800 military and civilian cyber professionals at the Professional Education Center in Little Rock, Arkansas.

For the second year in a row, the joint OKNG team showcased the “Oklahoma Standard” by winning first place in the exercise, outperforming teams from more than 20 states and territories, in addition to five National Guard state partnership program groups.

Cyber Shield 2023 focused on industrial control and protection, including a virtual capture the flag competition to test each team's ability to capture key information regarding enemy activity on a network.

“It goes without saying the cyber domain is a dynamic, fast-paced, and ever-changing environment and requires highly-trained and prepared Airmen,” said Maj. Tyler Davis, commander of the 137th SOCS. “Cyberspace dominance is paramount to effectively projecting global air and space power, and the Airmen of the 137th Special Operations Communications Squadron are at the leading edge.”

As cyber warfare continues to evolve, the Department of Defense focuses on continuing to develop, train and exercise cyber forces within areas of computer network internal defense measures and cyber incident responses.

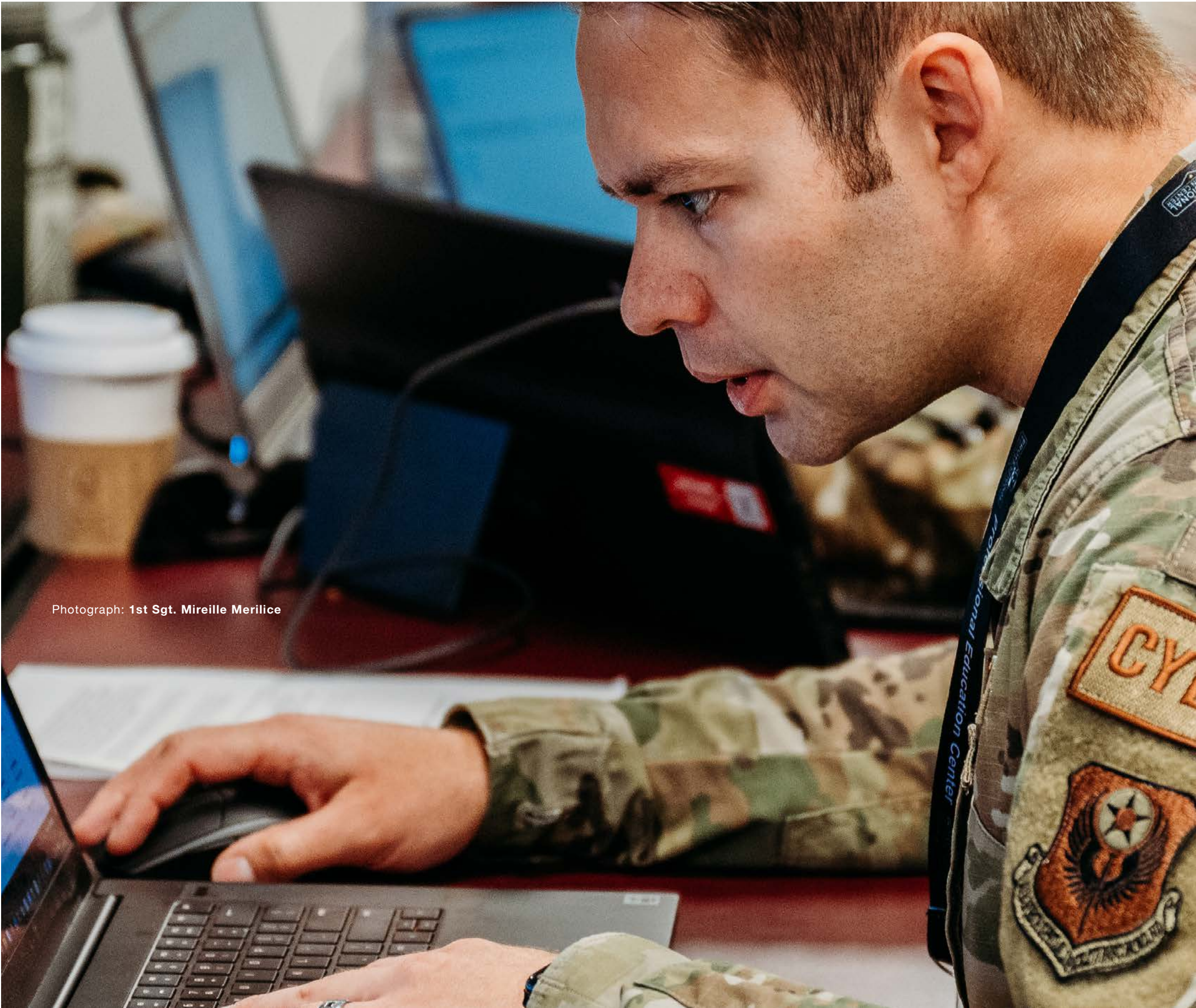
“Cyber is an entire different domain of warfare,” said 2nd Lt. Chad Chudoba, officer in charge for the 137th SOCS mission defense team. “We’re essentially coming on to the battlefield and assessing the terrain to conduct reconnaissance, determine where the enemy is and clear them out of that terrain. And then, once we take that terrain, we do what we can to build up our defenses and hold that terrain from the enemy.”

Cyber Shield is the largest DoD unclassified cyber defense exercise and provides cyber challenges to participants through hands-on exercises and collaborative workshops. Furthermore, participants had the opportunity to obtain additional cyber-related certificates through volunteer courses.

“This exercise not only improved the training, skills and knowledge of the Airmen who were able to physically attend Cyber Shield 2023, but it also allows them to bring this information back to the unit and provide critical training and information to all our other 137th Special Operations Cyber professionals once back in garrison,” Davis added.

Among the attendees, cyber professionals from Oklahoma’s State Partnership Program country Azerbaijan developed and strengthened their skills. This was the first time Azerbaijan participated in Cyber Shield.

“Since Cyber Shield is the largest unclassified exercise of its kind within the DoD with over 800 total participants, it allowed a few of our Airmen to participate and have the opportunity to improve their skills and collaborate with other governmental agencies, other Guard units and with our partner nations,” said Davis. **A0**



Photograph: **1st Sgt. Mireille Merilice**





**Hadly McIntyre became the newest honorary member of the 185th Special Operations Squadron at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, June 29, 2023.** Hadly received a full mission brief and conducted an MC-12W taxi mission as a copilot, and his dad marshaled the aircraft out during a visit to the base. The 137th SOW was honored to share the wing's mission and learn about Hadly's love of aviation and his pursuit of becoming a pilot despite his very difficult battle with cancer.

Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**



**Over the summer, 137th Special Operations Wing kids embarked on a four-day STEM adventure called STARBASE.** The U.S. Department of Defense youth program uses hands-on experimental activities to challenge and improve young students' science, technology, engineering and math skills through experiments ranging from robotics to aerodynamics and beyond. This year, STARBASE and its members found their new home at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base.

Photograph: **Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa**







# OKLAHOMA GUARDSMEN ASSIST OKLAHOMA BUREAU OF NARCOTICS WITH COUNTER DRUG OPERATIONS

Story and Photograph: **Spc. Haden S. Tolbert**

Members of the Oklahoma National Guard supported the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs during a state-wide operation to curb the supply of illegally grown marijuana, Sept. 27-Oct. 7, 2022.

More than 30 Airmen and Soldiers volunteered for the joint Oklahoma Air and Army National Guard state active duty mission to collect, transport and prepare more than 75,000 plants seized in the ONB-lead operation for destruction.

Col. Shane Riley, the director of military support for the Oklahoma National Guard, said the Oklahoma National Guard has the unique capability to support state agencies along with the people of Oklahoma whenever called upon, whether it be in support of law enforcement or response to natural disasters.

“We are not law enforcement,” said Riley. “We still act as National Guardsmen and we let the law enforcement do their job. What the Guard specifically brings to a mission set like this is the capability that we have to provide a large number of Soldiers to get work done quickly.”

With the support of the Oklahoma National Guard, OBN removed and disposed of more than \$9.7 million in street value of marijuana over the course of ten days and potentially helped the OBN further their operation and investigations.

Command Sgt. Maj. Brent Pearce, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the state active duty mission, said the work and effort put in by guardsmen that volunteered was recognized by the state agencies and the civilians as they put in hours of work. Clarifying that once the illegal area is secured by law enforcement and the legal process is completed on the agency's side, the Oklahoma National Guard's role is to help facilitate the cleanup of the sites by removing marijuana and contraband.

OBN Director Donnie Anderson says he is particularly grateful to the Oklahoma National Guard which provided personnel and heavy equipment to assist with the eradication and disposal of plants during these operations.

“The Oklahoma National Guard's hard work and support was crucial to the success of our operation over the previous weeks,” said Anderson “Their assistance enabled OBN to continue investigations that will have a positive impact on Oklahomans.”

Oklahoma Guardsmen utilized skid-steers and other heavy machinery from both the Air and Army Guard, normally used for route clearing and construction by the National Guard units, to load the marijuana into trucks that were used to transport the plants to the disposal site.

“What this shows is the versatility of the Oklahoma Army National Guard and the Air Guard and their ability to work together,” said Pearce, the command sergeant major for 700th Brigade Support Battalion. “I think it's about building those relationships.”

Riley said, “The National Guard understands that the Soldiers have a lot of competing priorities and Airmen have a lot of competing priorities in their life between their civilian job, participation in the National Guard and their personal responsibility at home and when the state calls. We've never had any hesitancy on the part of the citizen soldiers in Oklahoma to answer that call.” **AO**





The 137th Special Operations Wing recruiting team opened a new location in Norman, Oklahoma, on Aug. 22, 2023. The official grand opening at the Armed Forces Career Center included Norman Mayor Larry Heikkila, 137th SOW commander Col. Jason Davis and many members of the Wing and Oklahoma recruiting teams. By positioning recruiters in local communities with broad student bases and aviation programs, the Oklahoma Air National Guard will be able to better help future Citizen Airmen learn how they can serve their community, state and nation.

Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire**



High school students, community partners and honorary commanders from around the state traveled to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma, for a 137th Special Operations Wing fly-in event on May 4, 2023. Units from across base demonstrated the importance of their roles to the 137th SOW overall mission through hands-on display stations. Airmen with the 137th SOW regularly engage with the community to build a stronger understanding of the impact the wing has locally and around the world.

Photograph: **Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa and Tech. Sgt. Brigitte A. Waltermire**





# START! 137TH SOW AIRMEN ESCAPE TO ZOO AFTER DARK

Story and Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**

Airmen, families and friends encountered lions, tigers and bears during the 137th Special Operations Wing “Zoo After Dark” event held Sept. 8, 2023, at the Oklahoma City Zoo.

Around 1,300 people went where the wild things are during the Airman and Family Readiness Office event, made possible using Preservation of the Force and Family funding.

"Most of our (POTFF) events are held at the unit or squadron level, and sometimes at a group level, with 100 to 200 people," said Jim Beatty, Air Force Special Operations Command community support program manager. "What is unique about this event is the size, with much of the success because of (the AFRC program manager) Tracy Poindexter and how she has advertised it, worked with the community for partnerships and made so many resources available."

The mission of the POTFF is to optimize and sustain Special Operations Forces mission readiness, longevity, and performance through integrated and holistic human performance programs designed to strengthen the force and family. The 137th Airman and Family Readiness program applied for the funds in 2021 and held the first “Zoo After Dark” event in August last year.

“We have asked our Airmen how we can do better at helping build connections with their workplaces and families, and this is one of the ways we are trying to apply that feedback,” said Col. Shelby Dreyer, 137th SOW deputy commander. “Having this event off of base allows our Airmen to spend time with their families away from their workspaces and puts the emphasis on experiencing that time together.”

Have you ever seen an elephant fly? Sadly the Asian elephants at the zoo did not have ears as big as Dumbo, but the evening was filled with activities, including an elephant demonstration, a dance performance celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month and a scavenger hunt that took participants to resource vendors and animal exhibits.

"This event gives us the opportunity to show our families the resources the Airman and Family Readiness office has to help them, but it also allows family and friends to be brought



closer into our Guard family,” said Dreyer. “It also allows us to bring our Airmen into the community for an event that appeals to any age and family structure without the burden of cost being on them or the unit.”

One of the five POTFF domains includes family cohesion as a component. Special operations can include frequent separations that involve sensitive, high-risk and secretive missions, which places a unique hardship on the families of operators. Creating opportunities to forge stronger bonds while home is the main focus of the funding.

“The POTFF program across the board is a readiness program, but it’s also a resiliency program, and we use those funds to help Airmen do their part for the mission in the most impactful way while also connecting them to better understand the importance of the roles everyone plays,” said Beaty. “We truly believe that by optimizing an individual’s performance, they will put that back into their work which will help with mission success.”

Beatty also noted that the timing of the event was very unique compared to active-duty events because it was held over a training weekend. Guardsmen meet one weekend each month to maintain their readiness and training, so timing the event to coincide with the training weekend meant members could also bring their families.

"Most Guard families are not co-located geographically with the base, so if they are coming to the event from three hours away, they are able to network with someone who might be able to help them connect them to the unit as well," said Beaty.

While the event is a chance to connect with family in the local community, one thing is certain: taking time for families to have Hakuna Matata ain't no passin' craze for the wing. **AO**



Photograph: **Airman 1st Class Erika R. Chapa**

Photograph: Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire





**Col. Shelby Dreyer, deputy commander of the 137th Special Operations Wing, threw the first pitch at an Oklahoma City Dodgers veteran's appreciation game Sept. 13, 2023, in Oklahoma City.** She shared the moment with total force partners from across Oklahoma, two of her sons, as well as veterans of all ages attending the game. Citizen Airmen of the 137th SOW are unmatched professionals thanks to experience gained from their dual civilian/military identity and their service to both a state and federal mission.

Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**



**Airmen with the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, families, friends and community members ran, walked and rucked for 24 hours in support of living and fallen tactical air control party Airmen May 5, 2023, at Scissortail Park in Oklahoma City.** The TACP challenge coin was carried for the entire period and the run ended with pushups to remember the fallen. The squadron competed against other ASOS teams to complete as many miles as possible in the 24 hour period, finishing with a total of 550 miles.

Photograph: **Tech. Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**







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