

4400th COMBAT CREW TRAINING GROUP

LINEAGE

4400th Combat Crew Training Group

4400th Tactical Bombardment Group

4400th Combat Crew Training Group

STATIONS

Langley AFB, VA, 12 Mar 1951-19 Jul 1954

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The transition proved a happy one. Because the 84th Squadron remained preoccupied by atomic training, the bulk of training and flying activities reverted to the 85th Squadron, whose personnel were already B-45 proficient. By the end of June 1951, all of the B-26s had been replaced by jets. The Tornados now trickling into Langley had previously been cocooned while awaiting delivery, and they arrived in unserviceable shape. "The reason for their poor condition was evidently caused by an extended period of storage at the contractors from the date of manufacture in 1947 until actual delivery late in 1951," the historian wrote. Try as they might, the 47th Bomb Wing never

got a break. Still, the 85th Squadron flight crews continued training with their Tornados while personnel from the 115th Squadron arrived at Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, to attend the B-45 Mobile Training Unit. Meanwhile, newly arrived aircraft lacked visual bombing equipment and were wholly dependent upon the APQ-24 radar for aiming purposes. When these units functioned poorly at high altitude, technicians determined that they required pressurization for the system modulator kits, parts for which had been ordered from the manufacturer back in May 1950. The requisite equipment fortunately materialized nearly a year later, the sets were modified accordingly, and bombing scores improved commensurately. Taxiing problems also arose after the jets began finding themselves competing for takeoff time with B-26s of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Group, which was also at Langley. It was essential that the jet bombers launch quickly to conserve fuel, so a system of staggered takeoff and landing times was adopted for both units. Sufficient Tornados were also on hand to allow three aircraft for a flyover of Clarksburg, West Virginia, during Armed Forces Day, May 20, 1951. Three additional B-45s were likewise dispatched to Shaw AFB, South Carolina, to participate in firepower demonstrations held at Fort Bragg.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued a call to train airborne warfare specialists in response to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's declaration directing the spread of communism throughout the Third World. This project, code-named Jungle Jim, began the revival of the air commando legacy here at Hurlburt Field. The Tactical Air Command activated the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) on April 14, 1961. Less than a year later it expanded to become the 4400th Combat Crew Training Group (CCTG), which provided the Air Force with a counterinsurgency and military assistance capability. As its responsibilities and size grew, the group assumed the air commando name and became the 1st Air Commando Wing (ACW) on June 1, 1963.

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The first Jungle Jim operation, codenamed SANDY BEACH ONE, involved training Mali paratroopers to operate from C-47 aircraft. The operation was a resounding success.

In November of 1961, 4400th CCTS deployed a detachment to Bien Hoa, Republic of Vietnam, on Operation FARMGATE. Air Force special operations forces flew the first US combat missions in Vietnam. The Bien Hoa operation was soon to consume nearly all of USAF's commitment to supporting counterinsurgency operations.

USAF special operations continued to expand along with the growing commitment to Southeast Asia. The 4400th CCTS grew into the 4400th Combat Crew Training Group (CCTG) in March of 1962, with a total strength of 1,800 personnel. On 27 April 1962, the Group was incorporated into the USAF Special Air Warfare Center (USAF SAWC). The mission of SAWC was To Provide command and staff supervision over assigned units engaged in training aircrews and maintenance

personnel in operations and employment of aircraft for fulfilling the Air Force mission in counterinsurgency situations and the development, in coordination with other services, of the doctrine, tactics, procedures, and equipment employed by air forces in counterinsurgency operations.

To augment already assigned aircraft, additional assets were added to SAWC throughout the mid 1960s, including A-1, O-1, O-2, A-37, C-46, C-119, C-123, and later C-130 aircraft, along with numerous types of helicopters. 12 The SAWC, commanded by a general officer, reported directly to Headquarters, Tactical Air Command, at Langley AFB, Virginia, an arrangement which bypassed 9th Air Force as an intermediate headquarters." By early 1964, SAWC had grown from a small unit with limited resources to almost 3,000 personnel spread throughout the world, several hundred aircraft, and priority funding for its projects."

The 4400th CCTG was responsible for training crews in all aspects of unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency air operations. The CCTG provided training in low-level parachute resupply, close air support, use of flares for night operations, assault takeoffs and landings, psychological operations with leaflets and loudspeakers, and other counterinsurgency techniques. In addition to flying skills, air commandos were also given area orientation and basic language training for the area in which they were to be deployed. They learned a 600-800 word French or Spanish vocabulary before being certified for OCONUS deployment.

The rapid growth of SAWC can be attributed to Kennedy's call for an unconventional warfare capability. Men and equipment were thrown together quickly, and there was no time to develop doctrine and long range strategies from which Air Force counterinsurgency forces could develop plans for optimum employment. Much of the organization, equipment, planning, doctrine, and concept of operations were ad hoc affairs. By 1966, SOF assets had increased to 5,000 personnel and 550 aircraft in 19 squadrons. Air commandos were deployed worldwide to such countries as Mali, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Iran, Thailand and the Congo Republic. This tremendous operational commitment eliminated the ability to develop long range plans and unconventional warfare strategy.

Entering the counterinsurgency arena without either adequate vision or doctrine had driven the SAWC to employ primarily conventional tactics rather than develop those necessary to fight small wars. As did the air commandos of World War II, the people assigned the task came through by organizing and fielding a credible SOF capability."

SOF forces enjoyed many successes. In 1964, air commandos from Hurlburt Field deployed to Laos and Thailand on Operation WATERPUMP. From a rice warehouse in Vientiane, Laos, a few airmen kept Laotian and Thai T-28s in operation and provided a link between US embassy personnel and Seventh Air Force. Training pilots of the almost defunct Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF) and the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF), air commandos were directly responsible for support of the Royal Lao Army (RLA). A combined RLAF/RTAF/RLA operation successfully blunted a major Pathet Lao offensive. The follow-up operation, known as Operation TRIANGLE, was extremely successful. This was a classic operation whereby USAF knowledge and expertise were taught to a friendly air force without exposing a single American to combat. 19 The RLAF was able to build to a 3,000 strike sortie per month capability over the next several years. Similar

successes in Central and South America were enjoyed in civic action and mobile training team deployments during the mid 1960s.

On 8 July 1968, SAWC was redesignated USAF Special Operations Force (USAFSOF) and became the equivalent of a numbered air force. Units under SAWC were redesignated as special operations wings and squadrons, eliminating all reference to air commandos. The Vietnam War was at its peak and consumed virtually all of USAFSOF's attention. From this time forward, the requirement to provide mobile training teams to unified commands outside the Southeast Asia Theater was totally ignored.

Evolution of Hurlburt Field Air Commando/Special Operations Organization 1961–1979
Date Event
April 1961 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) activated at Hurlburt Field, Florida
March 1962 4400th Combat Crew Training Group (CCTG) activated at Hurlburt Field (as supervisory headquarters for 4400th CCTS)
April 1962 Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC) activated at Eglin, Florida; concurrent activities: Activation of 1st Air Commando Group (ACG) and 4400th CCTS redesignated 4410th Air Commando Squadron (ACS)
July 1963 1st ACG redesignated 1st Air Commando Wing (ACW)
January 1966 1st ACW transferred to England AFB, Louisiana; Hurlburt Field contingent designated Detachment 2, 1st ACW
July 1968 SAWC redesignated USAF Special Operations Force (USAFSOF); all subordinate Air Commando units redesignated Special Operations wings/squadrons
July 1969 1st SOW returned to Hurlburt; England AFB contingent designated 4410th Special Operations Training Group (SOTG)
July 1973 4410th SOTG deactivated; assets moved to Hurlburt Field
July 1974 USAFSOF deactivated; function and staff moved to Hurlburt Field; redesignated 834th Tactical Composite Wing (TCW); redesignated 1st SOW
July 1975 July 1979 1st SOW falls below Headquarters USAF budget cutoff for active units;

Eglin AF Auxiliary Field #9 (Hurlburt Field), FL, 20 Mar 1962-27 Apr 1962

Early in 1950 with the international tension mounting and the war clouds on the not too distant horizon, the 122nd Bombardment Squadron, Louisiana Air National Guard was activated. It was assigned to the 4400th Combat Crew Training Group, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia and given the mission of training B-26 combat crews. The 4400th, of which the 122nd was an integral part, trained a record number of crews. These crews flew combat duty in Korea and the training they received with the 122nd equipped them to compile a combat record unparalleled in the history of light bombardment. With the Korean conflict nearing an end the National Guard personnel were released to return to civilian life and were replaced with the Korean combat seasoned veterans. The

unit was redesignated as the 424th Bombardment Squadron Light assigned to the 4400th Tactical Bombardment Group (Training). The 424th was now assigned the dual mission of being combat capable and continuing the training of B-26 combat crews.

Early in 1954, the Combat Crew Training drew to an end and on July 18th the unit was redesignated the 499th Bomb Squadron. With this redesignation came the transition from conventional aircraft to the new jet B-57.

This unit from activation has never suffered a casualty and this most enviable record possibly could be accredited to the fact that the average pilot time is over 3000 hours and out of experience grow the wise. With the new B-57 in operation and the personnel checking out an increase in the tempo of activities can be felt. The combat seasoned personnel accept the transition with enthusiasm and the level eyes of their experience guide them. They are proud to be the "bat out of hell" squadron and will carry its insignia wherever ordered and pile additional laurels on top of the already long list accredited to the famed 499th.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources