Welcome to
HURLBURT FIELD
Florida & the Fort Walton Beach Area
the HISTORY of Hurlburt Field and the Air Commandos

HURLBURT FIELD, home of the Air Force Special Operations Command and the 16th Special Operations Wing, has a long and distinctive history. Hurlburt Field was named for 1st Lt. Donald W. Hurlburt, a World War II pilot, who perished in an aircraft accident on the Eglin military reservation in 1943. Originally designated as Auxiliary Field No. 9, Hurlburt Field became one of the first pilot and gunnery training fields built on the Eglin Air Force Base complex in the 1940s.
In Burma, during 1943, American C-47s and British Dakotas formed an unbroken aerial lifeline to British General Orde Wingate's Raiders. Aircrews dropped provisions such as food, ammunition, clothing, and medical supplies. These drops were done by parachute from 200 feet during the day and 400 feet during the night.

General Wingate's 1943 campaign prompted further efforts of the same unconventional nature. The U.S. Army Air Force formed the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air) to spearhead Wingate's operations. This group's inventory reflected as odd an assortment of hardware as could be imagined. It boasted C-47 transports, P-51 fighters, B-25 Mitchell bombers, UC-64 utility aircraft, L-1 and L-5 observation aircraft, and a glider force consisting of CG-4As and TG-5s. The group also utilized the YR-4 helicopter and conducted the first ever combat helicopter rescue. During the mission, dubbed Operation Thursday, the 5318th successfully airlifted ground troops and equipment into a jungle clearing nicknamed Broadway.

The 1st Air Commando Group, created March 29, 1944, in India, won historical fame by providing fighter cover, air strikes, and airlift for "Wingate's Raiders," who operated 200 miles behind enemy lines in Burma.

In 1955, the 17th Light Bombardment Wing arrived at Hurlburt Field from Miho, Japan, to conduct routine training. After a three-year stay, the 4751st Missile Wing of the Air Defense Command replaced it to test surface-to-air missiles launched from facilities on neighboring Santa Rosa Island.

With the phase-out of the Bomarc missile in 1961, the call to train airborne special warfare specialists revived the legacy of the air commandos. On April 14, 1961, the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron activated. Less than a year later the squadron expanded and became the 4400th Combat Crew Training Group to provide the Air Force with a counterinsurgency military assistance capability. As its responsibilities continued to grow, the group became the 1st Air Commando Wing on June 1, 1963.

The Kennedy Administration's policy of "flexible response" revived interest in special operations. As the Vietnam War expanded in scope and intensity, the Air Force increased its counterinsurgency capability. The Air Force dedicated most special operations resources to the war in Southeast Asia.

Propeller aircraft such as the T-28s, B-26s, C-47s and A-1s appeared strangely out of place in the jet-age Air Force during this time, but the commandos contended, "Our planes may be obsolete and unsophisticated, but they can do our kind of job." Whether the job entailed a C-47 dropping flares to illuminate the target area or a B-26 making repeated strafing, rocket, and bombing passes, the job got done.

The 1st ACW met the expanded requirements of air operations in Vietnam. The air commando units conducted psychological operations as well as unconventional warfare and advisory activities. The AC-130 performed the interdiction mission in an outstanding manner and proved to be the most effective truck killer of the war.

The Air Force redesignated the 1st ACW as the 1st Special Operations Wing on July 8, 1968. Missions of the Air Force Special Operations Force and the 1st SOW consolidated on July 1, 1974, and the Air Force redesignated the 1st SOW as the 834th Tactical Composite Wing, reporting directly to the commander of Tactical Air Command. Only one year later, July 1, 1975, the wing again became the 1st SOW.

After Vietnam, the wing participated in Operation Rice Bowl, the 1980 attempt to rescue American embassy
personnel held hostage in Iran. On March 1, 1983, the 1st SOW became a unit under the reactivated 2nd Air Division.

The 1st SOW participated in Operation Urgent Fury in October 1983. The wing’s AC-130H Spectre Gunships and MC-130E Combat Talons spearheaded the assault on the island of Grenada. The Spectres provided close-air support to ground units, while the MC-130s supported the infiltration of U.S. Army Rangers and combat control teams. The objective consisted of rescuing American medical students and other Americans on the island. The success of the mission threw the 1st SOW into the limelight and drew national attention for months.

The 2nd Air Division inactivated February 1, 1987, and the headquarters for 23rd Air Force moved to Hurlburt Field from Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, on August 1, 1987. In August 1989, four MH-60 helicopters and two HC-130 tankers conducted search operations for Texas Congressman Mickey Leland’s party, which disappeared while on a survey of relief activities in Ethiopia. Rescuers quickly located the crash site, however there were no survivors. The 1st SOW mobilized for Operation Just Cause in December 1989 and deployed aircraft and aircrews from all five flying squadrons plus maintenance and support personnel to Panama. The 1723rd Special Tactics Squadron also participated. The objectives of the operation included protecting the lives of Americans and American interests under the Canal Treaty, establishing law and order, restoring democracy,
and bringing Panama's dictator, General Manuel Noriega, to justice. The successful mission resulted in the arrest and extradition of Noriega to the U.S. on drug charges and the surrender of Panama's Defense Forces.

President George H. W. Bush ordered the execution of Operation Desert Storm in mid-January 1991 to expel Iraq from Kuwait. Hurlburt Field airmen played a significant role in Desert Storm. The MC-130E Combat Talons dropped leaflets on Iraqi forces and dropped 15,000-pound BLU-82 bombs in combat.

The 20th Special Operations Squadron’s MH-53 PAVE LOWs teamed with Army Apache helicopters and knocked out Iraqi early warning sites, which opened a hole in the Iraqi air defense system on the first night of the air war. The PAVE LOWs then served primarily in a combat search-and- rescue role and rescued a downed Navy flier January 21, 1991.

The AC-130H Spectre Gunships flew armed reconnaissance and destroyed targets identified during the Operation Desert Shield buildup. The MH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters performed combat search and rescue and inserted Special Forces behind enemy lines. Also, HC-130 Combat Shadow tankers flew deep into Iraq to refuel 1st SOW helicopters in a threat environment. By March 13, 1991, wing aircraft had flown more than 10,000 hours on more than 5,000 sorties.

During Operation Desert Storm, the 1st SOW lost one AC-130H and its crew of 14 while supporting Marine ground forces during the battle for the town of Al-Khafji, Saudi Arabia. This incident would be the Air Force’s largest single loss suffered by any unit during the operation.

Following the overwhelming victory, the 9th and 20th Special Operations Squadrons remained in the desert area to meet new taskings for two years.


On October 1, 1993, the Air Force redesignated the 1st SOW as the 16th Special Operations Wing as part of the Air Force-wide wing redesignation program implemented by the Air Force Chief of Staff. Its mission – to provide a rapid reaction force for global special operations and to train aircrews to instruct and assist allied forces in all phases of special air operations – has not changed.

In recent years, the wing has been involved in operations in Haiti, the Balkans, Somalia, Liberia, Korea and Southwest Asia. Currently, the 16 SOW aircrews, aircraft, maintenance and support personnel are supporting the nation’s global war on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq. Hurlburt Field is proud of its history and it stands ready to perform its unique mission “Any Time, Any Place.”

In the near future, the CV-22 will be added to the 16th Special Operations Wing inventory, fulfilling a longstanding requirement to accomplish the long-range infiltration/exfiltration mission within a single period of darkness. As the air component of U.S. Special Operations Command, Air Force Special Operations Command provides the rapid global response of America’s Special Operations Forces and the CV-22 is essential for AFSOC to continue to prove this critical capability. The increasing employment of SOF around the world into remote areas without access to developed runways and established operating bases means the CV-22 is key to providing rapid, flexible access to these areas for SOF.
Established at Hurlburt Field, Fla., AFSOC is a major command and the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command, a unified command located at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

In October 2003, AFSOC also gained the continental United States-based Air Force Combat Search and Rescue units.

AFSOC is America’s specialized air power. It provides Air Force special operations forces for worldwide deployment and assignment to regional unified commands. AFSOC special operations forces’ core tasks are grouped into seven mission areas: shaping the battlefield, information operations, precision engagement, SOF mobility, agile combat support, aerospace interface, and personnel recovery and rescue operations.

The command’s special operations forces are comprised of highly trained, rapidly deployable Airmen who are equipped with highly specialized aircraft. AFSOC is responsible to USSOCOM for the readiness of its Air Force SOF for worldwide deployment. These forces provide global ability to conduct special operations missions ranging from precision application of firepower, to infiltration, exfiltration, resupply and refueling of SOF operational elements.

AFSOC’s unique capabilities include airborne radio and television broadcasts for psychological operations, as well as combat aviation advisors to provide other governments military expertise for their internal development. The command’s special tactics squadrons combine combat control, combat weather and pararescuemen to ensure air power is integrated and operable with special operations and conventional forces.

Additionally, the command’s CSAR units provide worldwide peacetime and Combat Search and Rescue operations in support of humanitarian and U.S. national security interests. CSAR units are responsible for inland search and rescue in the 48 contiguous states. AFSOC has about 19,000 active-duty, Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard and civilian personnel. The command’s five active-duty and five Reserve component flying units are composed of more than 160 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, including the AC-130H/U, C-130, EC-130, HC-130, MC-130E/H, MC-130P, and HH-60 and MH-53 helicopters.

Forces are organized under two active-duty wings, two Reserve wings and three National Guard wings, two overseas groups and several direct reporting units. The command operates two major active-duty bases.

720TH SPECIAL TACTICS GROUP

The 720th Special Tactics Group is home-based at Hurlburt Field, Fla. The group is comprised of more than 800 special operations combat control, pararescue, combat weather and support personnel.

The group organizes, trains and equips special tactics forces worldwide to provide airmanship expertise and establish and control the air-to-ground interface in an objective area.

It also provides long-range operational and logistics planning, and deploys command and control elements during special tactics force employment or deployment. Lastly, it functions as the command’s proponent for military parachuting, diving and other special tactics related matters.
**18TH FLIGHT TEST SQUADRON**

The 18th Flight Test Squadron provides leadership, direction and guidance for executing test and evaluation for Air Force Special Operations Command headquarters. Additionally, the squadron is the focal point for tactics development. It evaluates new and modified weapon systems to increase overall combat effectiveness, and it oversees all test activities including AFSOC’s participation in joint test and evaluation. The squadron ensures that AFSOC headquarters acquisition programs meet warfighters’ needs by planning and managing major command testing and evaluation resources. The squadron is comprised of five flights: fixed-wing, rotary wing, operations analysis, combat applications and mission support.

**U. S. AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS SCHOOL**

The U.S. Air Force Special Operations School is a primary support unit of Air Force Special Operations Command and the resident college of the Joint Special Operations University.

Activated in April 1967 as the U.S. Air Force Special Air Warfare School under the Special Air Warfare Center, the school was redesignated USAFSOS in July 1968. Courses have grown and expanded continuously to meet the educational needs of the emerging special operations warriors as they respond to complex world situations.

USAFSOS provides education as opposed to functional training conducted by other agencies. USSOCOM training component schools are the U.S. Navy Special Operations Command’s Special Warfare Center and U.S. Army Special Operations Command’s John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.

Currently, courses are focused in one of four areas: asymmetric warfare education, regional and cultural awareness, special operations forces professional development, and joint operations.
Mission

The PAVE LOW’s mission is low-level, long-range, undetected penetration into denied areas, day or night, in adverse weather, for infiltration, exfiltration and resupply of special operations forces.

Features

The MH-53J PAVE LOW III heavy-lift helicopter is the largest, most powerful and technologically advanced helicopter in the Air Force inventory. The terrain-following and terrain-avoidance radar, forward-looking infrared sensor, inertial navigation system with global positioning system, along with a projected map display enable the crew to follow terrain contours and avoid obstacles, making low-level penetration possible.

The MH-53M PAVE LOW IV is a J-model that has been modified with the Interactive Defensive Avionics System/Multi-Mission Advanced Tactical Terminal or IDAS/MATT. The system enhances present defensive capabilities of the PAVE LOW. It provides instant access to the total battlefield situation, through near real-time Electronic Order of Battle updates. It also provides a new level of detection avoidance with near real-time threat broadcasts over-the-horizon, so crews can avoid and defeat threats, and replan en route if needed.

Under the PAVE LOW III program, the Air Force modified nine MH-53Hs and 32 HH-53s for night and adverse weather operations. Modifications included forward-looking infrared, inertial global positioning system, Doppler navigation systems, terrain-following and terrain-avoidance radar, an on-board computer, and integrated avionics to enable precise navigation to and from target areas. The Air Force designated these modified versions as MH-53Js.
19th Special Operations Squadron

The mission of the 19th Special Operations Squadron is to ensure AFSOC forces are trained and relevant in support of the warfighting commanders around the world. The squadron is the center of training excellence for AFSOC aircrews in mission qualification on the AC-130H, AC-130U and MC-130E aircraft. State-of-the-art flight simulators are integral in training for initial students and qualified crews. In addition, the squadron is one of the first Department of Defense flight simulator facilities to be High Level Architecture-certified, allowing its flight simulators to communicate in real-time virtual simulation with other facilities around the country. The squadron is also a testbed for developing the operational construction of Distributed Mission Training in a Joint Synthetic Battlespace, a capability that will train Air Expeditionary Forces through the use of distributed mission rehearsal. The 19th SOS trains approximately 200 combat ready graduates annually and is committed to training special operations forces joint warfighters to fight and win.

20th Special Operations Squadron

The 20th Special Operations Squadron, known as the “Green Hornets,” is the largest of four special operations helicopter squadrons in the active duty Air Force. The squadron flies the MH-53J/M PAVE LOW III/IV helicopter. The squadron’s primary mission is to conduct day or night low-level penetration into hostile or denied territory to accomplish clandestine insertion/extraction and resupply of special operations forces. These operations include tactical low-level navigation, night vision goggle operations, ground extraction techniques and over-water operations. The unique capabilities of the MH-53J/M allows the 20th SOS to operate from unprepared landing zones in any terrain and otherwise inaccessible areas. To accomplish its mission, the PAVE LOW employs many advanced technologies, including a Forward Looking Infrared camera, Terrain Following/Terrain Avoidance radar, Enhanced Navigation System and an Automatic Hover Coupler system. The MH-53M is equipped with the Interactive Defensive Avionics System/Multi-Mission Advanced Tactical Terminal, which provides aircrews with a new level of readiness and capability. A color, multifunctional digital map gives the aircrew a clearer picture of the battlefield. Crews have access to near real-time events including the aircrew’s flight route, man-made hazards and potential enemy threats, which are transmitted to the aircraft via satellite.
16th Component Maintenance Squadron

The 16th Component Maintenance Squadron is responsible for organizational and all intermediate level maintenance on AC-130 gunships, MC-130H Combat Talon IIs, MC-130P Combat Shadows and MH-53J/M PAVE LOW III/IV helicopters assigned to the 16th Special Operations Wing. Technical support is provided on communication/navigation, guidance and control, sensor, electronic warfare, pneumdraulics, electrics and fuel systems, engines and propellers. The squadron’s unique repair capabilities run the gamut from vacuum tube, solid state and infrared components, to laser and fiber optic technology. In addition to maintenance for the wing’s operational and transient aircraft, the squadron performs test and development work for ongoing acquisitions in support of Air Force Special Operations Command, U.S. Special Operations Command and Department of Defense.

16th Equipment Maintenance Squadron

The 16th Equipment Maintenance Squadron is dedicated to providing the 16th Special Operations Wing with the best quality in maintenance, ensuring the wing can accomplish its mission “Any Time, Any Place.” Comprised of five flights, more than 550 people provide essential maintenance with a broad range of capabilities. The Maintenance Flight provides heavy and light maintenance for C-130 platforms assigned to Hurlburt Field and Eglin Air Force Base. The C-130 Isochronal Dock performs major and minor isochronal inspections and special inspections. Aero Repair and Dash 21 Element is responsible for heavy maintenance of flight control, landing gear, doors, and all associated equipment. This element is also charged with providing crash recovery response.

The Fabrication Flight accomplishes extensive metal, fiberglass, and fabric repair; their primary mission is inspection and repair. The Nondestructive Inspection Element detects flaws on and in aircraft components using state of the art equipment. The Structures Element prevents aircraft part failures by combating effects of environmental exposure and metal fatigue while utilizing advanced equipment to repair and manufacture parts. The Metals Technology Element also uses advanced equipment and techniques to reverse engineer and manufacture parts. The Survival Element maintains aircraft flotation devices and repacks personnel parachutes.

The Munitions Flight provides storage, assembly, delivery, inspection and control of conventional munitions. Maintaining and inspecting the weapons of AC-130H/U gunships and MH-53M helicopters is the responsibility of the Weapons Flight. Weapons Flight Airmen are able to repair, functional check and configure the many different weapons unique to AFSC aircraft.

Aerospace Ground Equipment Flight repairs, services, inspects and delivers more than 640 pieces of powered and non-powered flightline support equipment. The flight is comprised of three Combat AGE Teams, Operation Support and Production Support sections.

Finally, overseeing day-to-day functions, Maintenance Supervision provides clear lines of communication between each flight. The “War Room”/Mobility section mobilizes personnel and more equipment than any other squadron in the 16th SOW. A staff of production supervisors ensures the 16th EMS works effectively with the numerous supported squadrons in the Wing.

16th Helicopter Maintenance Squadron

The 16th Helicopter Generation Squadron’s mission is to perform all on-equipment maintenance in support of worldwide special operations missions in response to national command authority tasking for the MH-53J/M PAVE LOW III/IV aircraft supporting the 20th Special Operations Squadron. The maintenance performed includes routine flight-line tasks, aircraft servicing and inspections, to include phase inspections, troubleshooting, repair, modifications, and launch and recovery for all assigned aircraft. The 16th HMXS is the largest helicopter maintenance organization in the Air Force with the largest number of any single mission design series aircraft in the Air Force Special Operations Command.

16th Maintenance Squadron

The 16th Maintenance Squadron is located at Eglin Air Force Base and provides on-equipment and back shop support for the MC-130P Combat Shadow. The squadron is a blend of 151 active members, 18 civilian contractors and is partnered with the 719th Maintenance Squadron as its associate unit that includes activated reservists and full-time air reserve technicians. The mission of the 16th MXS is to serve and defend the nation through teamwork. That teamwork is demonstrated every day through its associate maintenance structure and superior support for 9th Special Operations and 5th Special Operations Squadrons flying missions.