

The 7th Special Operations Squadron was activated 40 years ago on 1 July 1964 as the 7th Air Commando Squadron (7 ACS/USAFE) at Sembach Air Base, Germany. The original cadre came from Hurlburt Field, Florida, in March 1964, as Detachment 4, 1st Air Commando Wing. The new squadron was equipped with 4 C-123s, 6 C-47s and 2 U-10 aircraft, and had 265 personnel authorized. In February 1967, the 7 ACS was designated as the unit to receive the new C-130E(I) Combat Arrow aircraft. In May 1967, command of the squadron was transferred from USAFE to 17th Air Force.

Major changes in the squadron began in the summer of 1968 when MC-130 aircraft replaced C-123s, U-10s, and part of the C-47 force. Also in 1968, the squadron moved to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and USAFE Special Order G-62, dated 2 July 1968, renamed the 7 ACS as the 7th Special Operations Squadron (7 SOS), which was also effective on 15 July. During the period from 5 to 18 July, the four C-47s, the remaining C-123s and the two U-10s were returned to CONUS. September 1968 marked the beginning of a long and successful FLINTLOCK exercise series. Joint/Combined Exercise FLINTLOCK I was conducted in the fall of 1968 and consisted of four sub-exercises located in Germany, Greece, Spain, and Denmark.

On 3 April 1969, the squadron experienced the loss of one of its two C-47 aircraft and its crew. Major Paul C. Jones was the instructor pilot, Captain Randolph S Crammer was the co-pilot and Staff Sergeant Donald J. Bissell was the flight engineer. The aircraft was on an instrument training flight and had departed Sembach for Ramstein when the accident occurred. The vertical stabilizer on the C-47 had collapsed, thus putting the aircraft into a condition from which the crew could not recover.

From 28 August until the end of November 1970, a 13-man 7 SOS crew, commanded by Major Irl L. Franklin, participated in the preparation and execution of the Son Tay Rescue Raid, which was an attempt to liberate POWs held in North Vietnam. Flying Combat Talon 64-0523 (assigned to the 15 SOS at Nha Trang AB, Vietnam), the 7 SOS crew lead a dissimilar formation of H-53s and an H-3 deep into North Vietnam. Although no prisoners were found at Son Tay, the Combat Talon portion of the operation went off without a hitch. All aircraft and crews returned safely to Thailand after the mission.

The spring of 1971 brought about yet another change with the additional assignment of UH-1N helicopters. In September 1972, while deployed for FLINTLOCK V, the squadron was notified by USAFE that it would leave Ramstein the following March and move to Rhein-Main AB near the city of Frankfurt, Germany. Movement Order Number 23, dated 5 December 1972, directed that the 7 SOS move to Rhein-Main and be in place there NLT 15 March 1973. At Rhein-Main, the squadron came under the 322nd Tactical Airlift Wing (USAFE). From 12 to 13 March, the squadron moved its equipment and personnel, and by 15 March, it was operationally ready at its new location. The 7 SOS closed out a significant part of its history with the move to Rhein-Main. Both the C-47 and UH-1N flights remained at Ramstein as a squadron detachment.

By the summer of 1973, however, only the four Combat Talons (64-0523, 64-0551, 64-0555 and 64-0566) stationed at Rhein-Main remained in Europe. All other SOF assets had been either decommissioned or returned to the US. In 1977, the 7575th Operations Group was formed at Rhein-Main, realigning the 7 SOS under its control, until March 1983, when the 7 SOS transferred from USAFE to Military Airlift Command. Under this new alignment all special operations forces came into a chain of command from squadron through the 2nd Air Division to 23d Air Force.

When the 2nd Air Division was deactivated, the 39th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing at Eglin AFB, Florida picked up the 7 SOS for training and logistics support. Operational control of the squadron resided with the Commander, Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) at Patch Barracks, Stuggart-Vaihingen, Germany.

On 22 May 1990, the Air Force Special Operations Command was established as a major command with its headquarters at Hurlburt Field, Florida, replacing 23d Air Force in the unit's chain of command. On 15 January 1991, the unit deployed in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM to Incirlik AB, Turkey. Flying operations were conducted until the end of the war. The redeployment to Rhein-Main was conducted in early March 1991. Before the squadron could reestablish routine training operations, they were deployed again to Turkey. Within 24 hours of the President's order, they performed the first operational PROVIDE COMFORT airdrop over Northern Iraq.

In August of 1991, a 7th crew deployed to Kadena AB, Okinawa, Japan to augment the 1 SOS after their abrupt move from Clark AB, Republic of the Philippines. This augmentation was continuously supported by the 7 SOS until April 1992, when they deployed in support of the State Department ordered evacuation of American citizens in Sierra Leone. Operation SILVER ANVIL brought home more than 400 people.

During the third quarter of 1991, the squadron was notified that it would move from Rhein-Main to RAF Alconbury, UK during FY92. Concurrent with the move, the squadron would convert from the MC-130E Combat Talon I to the MC-130H Combat Talon II. For the first time since its activation in the mid 1960s, the squadron would be located outside Germany. Beginning on 5 November 1992, elements of the 7 SOS began the move from Rhein-Main to RAF Alconbury.

The date marked the official move of the squadron, but remaining Combat Talon I crews and maintenance personnel continued to operate out of Germany. Detachment 7, 39 SOW was established at Rhein-Main, effective 5 November, to provide oversight for the CT I element. As the new Combat Talon IIs arrived in Europe, they were delivered to RAF Alconbury. At years end, the 7 SOS was operational with the Combat Talon II, and the older Combat Talon Is were transferred back to the US. Formal raising of the flag at Alconbury took place on 5 November 1992.

Ironically, four months later, in February 1993, the entire squadron deployed back to Rhein-Main AB, Germany in support of Operation PROVIDE PROMISE. While there, members of the unit conceived and tested a unique delivery technique for the free-fall airdrop of individual Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) over Bosnia-Herzegovina. Using leaflet drop rigging procedures, the Tri-wall Aerial Distribution System (TRIADS) was a way to safely deliver food to drop zones close to cities, which avoided fights at distribution centers and kept the besieged refugees from being lured into Serbian fields of fire. This quality idea went from the drawing board to full utilization in less than thirty days. It is still being used and is saving lives.

In October 1993, 7 SOS aircraft and personnel completed an historic mission to the former Soviet Central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, transiting Russia and Georgia. This trip represented the first significant contact between US military forces and military representatives from these newly independent states, and gave the squadron a new appreciation for the region.

In December 1993, the squadron performed another first, a humanitarian relief mission to Rovno, Ukraine. This mission provided needed supplies to people of this area. December 1993 also found the 7 SOS back in business at Kenitra Air Base, in Morocco. Through aggressive Office of Defense coordination at the US Embassy in Rabat, the cooperation of Royal Moroccan Air Force officials at the Air Staff and Kenitra Air Base, and the persistence of 7 SOS planners, we were once again flying Combat Talons through the Atlas Mountains.

The same energetic quest for lucrative training locations resulted in a return to Greece and night low-level routes in Spain. In May 1994, two 7 SOS loadmasters ventured to Tunisia, to familiarize Tunisian loadmasters with procedures for air dropping the Combat Rubber Raiding Craft (CRRC). The result was enhanced Tunisian capabilities and improved cooperation with the 1st and 3d Special Forces Group. The squadron's stay at RAF Alconbury was a short one. On 12 January 1995, the squadron moved to RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom where the 352nd Special Operations Group consolidated all of its assigned forces.

Now that the Squadron finally felt settled, it was time to fully utilize the combat power of the highly capable MC-130H Combat Talon II.

As always historically the case in Africa, US embassies are constantly on the alert for hotbeds of severe unrest. Because of the close proximity of the squadron to Africa, the 7 SOS is always prepared to answer the call to directly support US assets throughout the continent. In June 1997, when the US embassy was about to be overrun in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, the squadron launched one Talon II to infiltrate a European Survey and Assessment Team and to evacuate embassy personnel from the war ravaged country. Despite heavy gunfire at the airport, the mighty Talon II evacuated 30 Americans, and 26 nationals from 11 eleven different countries. This over 13-hour mission earned the crew the 1997 Mackay Trophy. Only 15-months later, the US Embassy was threatened in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The 7 SOS was tasked with the infiltration of a European Survey and Assessment Team

(ESAT). After a 16.3 hour mission laden with treacherous flying conditions and operating on only 3-engines, the mission was marked with total success earning the crew the Tunner Award for 1998.

The holiday season ended abruptly on January 3rd, 1999. Three aircraft were launched after only 2 hours from notification to pick up US national assets at a forward staging base and infiltrate the assets to another location. As is always the case, the crews from the mighty 7th overcame weather at minimums and successfully infiltrated their precious cargo on-time, on-target. This began a 5-month constant 24-hour alert posture with a 2-hour notification to launch. Over those five months, the unit was called upon 13 times to execute high-level missions. All 13 missions were executed perfectly.

In March of 1999, Operation ALLIED FORCE began in response to Serbia's invasion of Kosovo. The squadron was called upon by the Joint Psychological Operations Task Force to facilitate the largest PSYOPs leaflet campaign since WWII. This event marked the first time Talon IIs were utilized in a major theater conflict. This campaign would be like no other, requiring the Talons to fly at 30,000 feet, unpressurized, and dangerously close to enemy surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft artillery. For 79 straight days, the members of the 7 SOS maintained 24-hour operations planning, executing, and recovering missions into the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. When the last box of leaflets had been kicked out on June 8th, over 101.7 million leaflets had been delivered to 81 targets over 52 combat missions encompassing 440 flight hours.

"We will not waver, we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail". These words spoken by President George W. Bush are the credence the men and women followed after the tragic events of 11 September 2001. At the very hour terrorists struck America, the SOG, along with classified units, were engaged in the largest JCS-directed SOF exercise in EUCOM. Immediate force reconstitution was the "order"...for the beginning of a new war with no boundaries was unfolding. The 7th rapidly established the redeployment air-bridge: 6 intense days, some in excess of 20 hours, airlifting 307 troops and 136+ tons in 41 sorties and 114 flight hours. Preparation for the "War on Terror" had begun. On September 24th, the 7th placed crews in alert and energized a "hasty" planning cell for what would become America's first-strike on terror. A mere 20 hours later, the execute order served the opening blows of the War on Terror as the 7th inserted elite SOF elements to a classified location in the EUCOM AO. These forces conducted a night commando raid on suspected al-Qaeda terrorist cells, netted four arrests and thwarted plans for future attacks against US embassies abroad. This operation was conducted silently, under cover of darkness and without fanfare marking the US's first strike on terror. However, this was only the beginning for a unit prepared to follow through for the defense of the nation.

Called to duty by EUCOM on 11 October 2001 the unit immediately began preparations for a long deployment... and for war. On 20 October, the 7th launched four aircraft and 65 personnel bound for their forward staging base with a mission into the unknown. Within 3 days of arrival, the 7th began vital combat resupply missions to fielded ODAs and Afghan Alliance fighters...through treacherous terrain and Taliban AAA/SAM threats, to become the most heavily tasked AFSOC unit in the opening stages of OEF. So significant and challenging was the first low-level re-supply mission into Afghanistan that it won the 2001 Lt Gen Tunner Award.

After the dust settled, the numbers speak for themselves. Combat mission totals for the 73 days in 2001 are staggering: 1,711 combat hours, 240 mission critical in-flight refuelings with an average crew day in excess of 17-hours; airdropped over 1.75 million pounds of critical war materiel during 127 CDS drops to 54 different drop zones located in every geographical quadrant of Afghanistan--all before Christmas. End state impact was obvious: keyed the rapid fall of Taliban centers of gravity in the key northern cities of Mazar-e-Sharif, Konduz, Herat, and Kabul; southern key cities of Kandahar and Jalalabad; and cave-sweeping operations in the Tora-Bora region. The squadron's aggressive ops-tempo was aided through assimilation of two additional aircraft from the 16 SOW and two additional crews (15 SOS/550 SOS), allowing mission surges on consecutive nights. The 7th's contribution directly provided lethal supplies key to "breaking the Taliban's back" and accelerating a quick and successful ground campaign.

In September 2002, three Talons from the 7 SOS deployed to the Ivory Coast to evacuate American and third-country nationals (TCNs) from an advancing rebel force ripping apart this West African nation. The rebels had begun battling government troops, and in the process had killed over 270 people in 2 days, creating a rapidly deteriorating situation and an atmosphere of total chaos. The 7 SOS responded within 6 hours of initial notification,

flew for 26 hours and established a forward base at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast. From there, they immediately began conducting the evacuation of 476 American and TCNs.

The 7 SOS rapidly deployed the entire squadron to Romania in February 2003, and immediately prepared for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM combat operations. On 22 March 2003, 7 SOS initiated a bold plan to infiltrate 300 special forces soldiers into Iraq staging from an undisclosed Middle-East location. This mission, named "Ugly Baby" for its difficulty and danger, became, according to the USCENTCOM historian, one of the top two or three most important missions in the war. Each crew flying at altitudes as low as 100 feet, experienced intense AAA along their routes of flight, from some 35 previously unknown locations. Four of the six formation aircraft were struck by ground fire. For their efforts during the historic "Ugly Baby" mission, the crew of Harley 37 won the PK Carlton Award for Valor, cited for their role in safely landing a battle-damaged MC-130H loaded with special forces members during the insertion mission on 22 March 2003. The plane took 19 hits from anti-aircraft artillery fire, ranging from 7.62 mm to 57 mm, with one shell shattering the pilot's windscreen and others striking the main wing spar. During that one crucial night, these 7 SOS warriors demonstrated exceptional airmanship, courage and heroism successfully completing their missions, earning 29 Distinguished Flying Crosses and 18 Air Medals. In one night, the entire dynamic of northern Iraq had changed, allowing nightly infiltration missions of Special Forces troops from their forward operating base in Romania. All told, 7 SOS crews flew 242 sorties and 924 combat hours, delivering 2,371 combat troops, 2.1 million pounds of war materials, and 350K of fuel executing its OIF mission. In 2004 and 2005, 7 SOS once again deployed crews to support OIF and OEF missions.

The 7 SOS continues to maintain its traditional ties with the United Kingdom, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Germany, Spain, Italy and France, with new training relationships forming in Albania and Romania. From Central Asia to South Africa and all of Europe, the squadron's mission is ever expanding and it is ready, willing and able to perform wherever tasked--anywhere, anytime. Since its inception, the squadron has been unique in that it is the only USAF unit in Europe dedicated to special operations. Now, combined with the other squadrons of the 352 SOG, the 7 SOS regularly trains with US Army Special Forces, US Navy SEAL units, and military personnel from many European and African nations.

In typical fashion, the 7 SOS has been very busy and gone through significant transitions over the past few years. 2014 was a banner year for the 7 SOS as the unit participated in Operation Morning Glory won Squadron of the Year honors, the Outstanding Unit Award, and multiple other individual awards. 2014 also marked the official transition from MC-130H to CV-22B.

In Aug 2013, the unit took delivery of the first of 10 CV-22B aircraft. The arrival of this first aircraft marked the capstone event of literally years of hard work and preparation for the return of vertical lift capability to the EUCOM AOR. The unit once again was a dual MDS squadron with 4 MC-130H Talon IIs and 4 CV-22 Ospreys. In March 2014 two Talon II aircraft and crews were called to participate in Operation Morning Glory with Unit 2. This POTUS directed mission was a ship takedown in the Mediterranean Sea. Talon IIs had the opportunity to utilize their unique ability to infil Navy Seals and their MCADS via airdrop.

In October 2014 the 7 SOS deployed 2 Combat Talon IIs (with 3 crews) and 2 CV-22 crews to Djibouti Africa for a 3 month deployment. While deployed these crews operated in Africa and supported CENTCOM taskings and Task Force missions. During this deployment, 7 SOS crews participated in multiple POTUS directed missions, and successfully rescued 2 hostages being held in Yemen.

Upon return from this deployment in December 2014, the Talon II Crews began preparations to fly the last two Talon IIs back to CONUS. The last Talon II departed RAF Mildenhall in early February 2015. The day was a typical overcast and rainy British day, a fitting end to the proud history of the Combat Talon II and its service at RAF Mildenhall. That same month, we took delivery of 3 more CV-22s bringing the unit up to 7 aircraft on the ramp.

Before, during, and after the transition, 7 SOS crews have continued to display excellence and professionalism. Our operations tempo has increased as we work to establish training areas, relationships with EUCOM teams and NATO partners, TTPs, maintain an alert posture, support SOCEUR and SOCAFRICA taskings, and augment the

CENTCOM deployment rotation. While there have been many changes over the past 2 years, the professionalism and mission focus of the unit has remained.

The 7 SOS is a numerically small but important part of the US military presence in Europe. Its unconventional warfare capability has reaped the squadron nine AF Outstanding Unit Awards, the 1997 MacKay Trophy for the most meritorious USAF flight of the year, the 1998 and 2001 William Tunner Award for the most outstanding airlift mission, and selection as AFSOC's Special Operations Squadron of the Year for 1998.

The 7 SOS is a proud unit steeped in the traditions of special operations. The squadron is filled with quiet professionals who make it the European Command's elite combat airlift force, employing special operations forces throughout Europe, Africa and Central Asia. Innovative, Precise, Dependable, and Self-Reliant--The Mighty SEVENTH Air Commando's!