

## CHAPTER 1

### THE 1950s – A LONG, HARD GESTATION

#### 1950 – The Korean War

In Korea, operational security limited the use of Pathfinders in the three main airdrops of the war. During the same period, turf battles raged in Washington as Army and Air Force leaders tried to sort out the Pathfinder mission. The Army wanted to retain its Pathfinder teams (and control USAF aircraft), while Air Force leaders wanted to dump the requirement, contending there were three major disadvantages to Pathfinder operations:

- Insufficient element of surprise,
- poor use of NAVAIDs, and, not the least,
- being forced to rely on Army Pathfinders.

During the transition period, the Air Staff conceded that air traffic control (ATC) was an Air Force-unique mission. The Department of Defense (DOD) agreed and soon decided to combine the Pathfinder mission with that of the WWII glider-borne Combat Control Teams and assign it to the US Air Force. The Air Force reluctantly accepted the task and immediately ignored it.

- During the same period, the Army, made no bones about its willingness to continue fulfilling the Pathfinder role. The Army has never deactivated its Pathfinder units although their primary mission has evolved to emphasize helicopter operations.

**July 28, 1952 – Pathfinder Activities at Fort Bragg** – The following letter, copied from the US Army archives at Fort Bragg, provides insight into the Army and Air Force activities in mid-1952.

#### **JOINT AIRBORNE TROOP BOARD**

**Fort Bragg, N. C.**

**28 July 1952**

**JAbnTB-E 322**

**MEMORANDUM FOR : Directorate**

**Joint Air Transportation Board**

**Fort Bragg, North Carolina**

**SUBJECT: Accomplishment of the Pathfinder Mission.**

1. **The responsibility for the accomplishment of the pathfinder mission is set forth in the following documents published jointly by Tactical Air Command and Office, Chief of Army Field Forces: "Joint Training Directive for Air-Ground Operations", 1 September 1950; and "Standard Operating Procedures for Troop Carrier/Airborne Operations", 16 February 1951. These**

directives specifically charge the Air Force with the responsibility for establishing and operating ground-to-air communications and navigational aids on the drop zone or forward airfield to aid incoming troop carrier serials in making accurate delivery of troops, supplies and equipment. It appears that no positive action has been taken to create within the structure of the Air Force an organization to perform this mission

2. In view of the fact that the Air Force has not provided the pathfinder teams called for in the Joint Training Directive for Air Ground Operations, the Airborne units have retained organic pathfinder teams in order to assure accurate delivery. However, the operational capability of these pathfinder teams has rapidly decreased. This has been caused by two major factors: First, the development of equipment, tactics and techniques for pathfinders; and Second, the definite lack of coordination exists between the Army and Air Force due primarily to lack of joint training and the reluctance of air crews to depend upon navigational aids established by ground forces.
3. The great concern expressed by airborne commanders over this lack of Pathfinders has increased to the point where it is felt that the entire airborne potential is in jeopardy. This was evident during a conference held on 15 July 1952 by this Board, at which time the major airborne commanders posed the following questions.
  - a. What Action is being taken by the Air Force to establish a pathfinder unit to execute the pathfinder mission?
  - b. When is it anticipated that action to establish a pathfinder unit within the air Force will be initiated and by what date would such a unit be capable of satisfactorily performing these duties?
4. This Board is aware of the effort being made by the Air Force to select suitable equipment to perform this function but feels that the emphasis is being placed on long range plans involving only equipment while neglecting the immediate present day needs. To date only the proven method of accomplishing this mission has been through the use of personnel parachuted into the airhead. Therefore, it is deemed essential that the Air force accept this method until such time as more satisfactory methods or systems have been developed.
5. In February 1951, this Board, operating at the time as the Army Airborne Center, prepared a plan of action for implementing the transfer of this mission. A copy of this plan is attached as Enclosure 1. It is the opinion of this Board that the plan is sound and furnished a workable solution. To implement this action, it is considered appropriate that a provisional pathfinder unit be established by the Air Force and that all Army pathfinder personnel be attached to this unit without delay.
6. It is requested that this Board be furnished with the answers to the questions set forth in Paragraph 3 above and the opinion of your Board on the plan described in Paragraph 5.
7. To further expedite the transfer of the pathfinder mission to the Air Force, it is recommended that a conference be conducted under the auspices of the Joint Air Transportation Board to include representation from the Air and Army General Staffs, as well as the Tactical Air Command and Office, Chief of Army Field Forces Agencies who would be involved in this problem. It is believed that such a conference would resolve the complete problem to include target dates.

W. N. GILLMORE /s/

W. N. GILLMORE /t/

Major General, U S Army

Directorate

## **1952 – Air Force Indecision**

In those early days, the Air Force gave little more than lip service to their newly acquired mission set. Their long-range plan was to do away with Pathfinders altogether. Senior Air Force leadership believed that electronic navigational aids (NAVAIDs) would ultimately replace the need to field Pathfinder units. The situation came to a head in mid-1952 and something had to be done quickly or the Air Force would lose the mandate to field Pathfinder teams. And worse, if the Army were given the green light to take on the mission, their pathfinders would be controlling Air Force aircraft. The Tactical Air Command (TAC) ordered Eighteenth Air Force to take the necessary steps to fix the problem. In the following letter to Tactical Air Command, requests permission to assume responsibility for activation of the USAF Pathfinder teams.

**HEADQUARTERS  
EIGHTEENTH AIR FORCE  
Donaldson Air Force Base  
Greenville, South Carolina**

**26 August 1952**

**HDC/D 322**

**SUBJECT: Accomplishment of The Pathfinder Mission**

**TO: Commanding General  
Tactical Air Commanders  
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia**

- 1. It was agreed at the “Pathfinder Conference” held at this headquarters on 22 May 1952 that:**
  - a. Between now and 1 January 1953 Eighteenth Air Force will under take a program for testing and evaluation all possible methods of eliminating the need for parachuting troops into a drop zone in advance of the main assault echelon.**
  - b. Between now and 1 January 1953 our present methods will be employed in operations utilizing Army troops as Pathfinder parachute troops. On 1 January, if ascertained as an absolute necessity that parachute troops are required, the Air Force will assume this responsibility.**
  - c. The aim of the development and testing will be to achieve, at the earliest possible date, the navigation to a drop zone by the lead serial without the aid of an advance element. Emphasis will be placed on the training of lead crews to accomplish this objective.**
- 2. this conference was attended by representatives from your headquarters.**
- 3. Navigational equipment, with the accuracy and dependability necessary to justify the elimination of Pathfinder teams, is not presently available. This headquarters has no reason to believe that this equipment will be available by 1 January 1953.**
- 4. In view of the above, it is recommended that:**
  - a. This headquarters assumes its responsibility for Pathfinder teams, as prescribed in the Tactical Air Command, Office, Chief of Army Field Forces Standing Operating Procedures for Troop Carrier Airborne Operations, at the earliest practical date.**
  - b. This headquarters be given a quota of ten (10) spaces for the next class at the Army Jump School and a quota of two (?) Spaces per class thereafter**

**5. This action is predicated upon:**

- **a. The belief that the Air Force should assume its responsibility for Pathfinder teams at the earliest practicable date.**
  - **b. The concern expressed by the Army because of our reluctance to assume our responsibility in this area (Ref. enclosed Memorandum to Director Joint Air Transportation Board).**
- 6. This headquarters will continue to present testing program in this area with the view of eventually eliminating the need for this information.**

**FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:**

**HARRY W CRAIG /s/  
Colonel, USAF  
AIR ADJUTANT GENERAL**

**1 Incl:**

**JATB Memo, dtd 28**

**Jul 52, subj as above**

**October 14, 1952 – Air Force takes First Positive Step**

On 14 October 1952, the first ten USAF Pathfinders attended jump school. Anticipating an influx of fully trained Army Pathfinders, Eighteenth Air Force activated the Pathfinder Squadron, Provisional, on 15 January 1953 at Donaldson Air Force Base, South Carolina. The initial plan was to fill the unit with sister-service transfers primarily from the Army. From Army ranks, they hoped to form six Pathfinder teams, but were lucky to get enough men to field one team.

On the 27 March 1953, the Pathfinder Squadron, Provisional, was deactivated and the jumpers were assigned to 1st Aerial Port Squadron (APS) and officially designated a Combat Control Team - or CCT. Army leadership continued to be very critical of the Air Force for usurping what they saw as an Army mission. And, the Air Force was vulnerable to criticism, as it seemed unwilling to fully assume its responsibility. They focused instead on developing supersonic fighters, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), and long-range bombers.

**1953 – The Army vs. the Air Force**

A Waterloo of sorts - for the Army Pathfinder's versus Air Force CCTs - occurred in August 1953. The 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) at Dobbins Air Force Base, Georgia refused to comply with directives that incorporated CCTs into their joint tactical missions. Although, Special Forces (SF) had no objection to controllers working drop zones and participating in practice jumps, they did not want them integrating into their missions. As a result, Tactical Air Command (TAC) suspended all US Army support airlift missions on 11 August 1953, until the Army and Special Forces reversed their decision. The unfortunate incident did have a positive result in that it served to reinvigorate the Air Force commitment to Combat Control Teams.

**1953 - Early Growing Pains**

There were other problems for the hastily organized CCTs. Parachutes were in short supply and the few radios the teams had were not adequate for the job. Poor morale was also a problem. Combat controllers were not authorized to wear an identifying badge or the Army's parachutist badge. This fact, coupled with the uncertainty of promotion in a new undefined career field, contributed to recruiting and morale problems.

Furthermore, the aerial port squadrons did not have a pool of trained personnel to draw recruits from or qualified trainers in the event that a recruit was found. This was not a very promising start for the orphan career field.

## **The Air Force Pathfinder Problem**

*The following is an excerpt from the official history of Headquarters 18th Air Force. It discusses Combat Control activities during the period 1 July to 31 - December 1953. The original document was classified **SECRET**, but was already downgraded when received by the author. Since this CCT history is taken from within the 18<sup>th</sup> AIR FORCE HISTORICAL DOCUMENT, notations begin at 46 and end at 78. Notes are found in the Bibliography.*

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**1 July – 31 December 1953 – Headquarters, 18<sup>th</sup> Air Force, Donaldson AFB, South Carolina** - The Pathfinder problem has been ongoing and continuing in nature. It was recognized by the Air Force (early in the postwar period) that measures developed during World War II could only be termed "a means to an immediate end" as they possessed too many inherent disadvantages—an insufficient element of surprise, the dropping of teams in the lead serial which often aborted identification of the Drop Zone, and, from the Air Force's viewpoint, the undesirability of the utilization of army personnel.

Notwithstanding these objections, the Air Force failed to give little more than lip service to its contentions that pathfinder responsibilities should be inherently its function. With the advent of a separate troop carrier force, the pathfinder area of responsibility gained import. Both the Army and the Air Force realized that pathfinder techniques were integral to troop carrier operations and that the doctrines developed by the XVIII Airborne Corps and Eighteenth Air Force would play an important part in both peace and war concepts of vertical envelopment. However, the Air Force was considerably remiss in its aggressiveness and continued to buffet the pathfinder problem around throughout 1952.

The Army, on the other hand, was positive in its attitude and made no bones about its willingness to continue fulfilling pathfinder requirements. Rather it made strong emphasis of the fact that the Air Force would be usurping army responsibility if it tried to make an inroad in pathfinder procedures.

In early 1952, the Air Force realized that it would have to take a definite stand on the pathfinder problem as the numerous joint missions, maneuvers, and demonstrations to which the Eighteenth Air Force was committed served notice that a vacillating attitude could not longer be tolerated. In February 1952, TAC took an initial step when it directed this headquarters to designate a minimum of four lead crews in each troop carrier group to specialize in pathfinder training. This was movement toward making pathfinder teams organic to the wings.

Prior to receipt of TAC's directive, the 62d Troop Carrier Wing (Heavy) had submitted a proposal to the Eighteenth Air Force that was opposed to the formers supposition. The 62d believed that the pathfinder element was of such value that it should be a separate unit under command rather than a function organic to individual wings.<sup>46</sup> The 62d's study was based, on the logic that pathfinder teams in a separate unit could concentrate on electronics, standardize techniques, and, of great import, become more proficient by participating in more numerous missions than could be realized if organic to a single wing.

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Conversely, TAC's decision for not desiring to establish a subordinate unit was the fact that the training lead crews would ultimately result in a saving of manpower and equipment. The Eighteenth threw its support to the 62d as it was believed that the lead crew system would not satisfy troop carrier requirements because of the inability of existing electronics equipment to assist the lead formation in locating the Drop Zone. Furthermore, a second factor detrimental to the lead crew system is that saturation of the Drop Zone with personnel and equipment hampers initial activities of the lead crew pathfinder team in becoming operational.

As a consequence, Eighteenth Air Force reiterated its stand that the lead crew system should be abandoned in favor of separate pathfinder aircraft and teams until such time as electronic and similar navigational equipment are developed. This theme was further developed at a conference on 21 May 1952 at Headquarters Eighteenth Air Force when representatives of this and higher headquarters recommended that (1) Army Field Force Pathfinder Teams be utilized until 1 January 1953, since the Air Force had no personnel trained in this function, and (2) that research be continued for electronic devices capable of guiding aircraft to the Drop Zone without the aid of pathfinder teams.

This search for electronic devices received impetus throughout the remainder of 1952 through the medium of Exercise TEST DROP and allied studies by both the Air Proving Ground Command and Wright Air Development Command. These studies proved one definite fact, existing navigational equipment had marked potentialities but none possessed all the capabilities required to eliminate the need for pathfinder personnel. Accordingly, the Air Force had to prepare to accept its pathfinder responsibilities on 1 January 1953, three years after the Air Force Joint TAC-OCAAF directive had made the Air Force responsible for establishing and maintaining ground-to-air communications and navigational aids to the Drop Zone.

It is believed that a more positive approach to the problem had been held in abeyance by an innate belief that the development of electronic navigational aids would preclude a requirement for personnel drops in advance of the main assault echelon. However, time proved this to be "wishful thinking"; and, the Airborne Troop Board at Fort Bragg alleged that the Air Force was "failing to carry the ball" in pathfinder development. It was the consensus of the airborne that its potential was being placed in jeopardy by the Air Force, since the latter had not provided pathfinder teams in accord with the dictates of the 1 September 1950, Joint TAC-OCAIR FORCEF Memorandum.<sup>47</sup>

To offset this deterrent, the airborne had retained its organic pathfinder teams as an interim measure. The practicability of this action could not be questioned by the Air Force as it had no pathfinder elements and army parachute troops were required for implementation of Exercise TEST DROP.

Consequently, both TAC and Eighteenth Air Force accepted the army's proposal to provide assistance, pending the training of Air Force pathfinder agencies to a state of readiness where they could accept full responsibility for this function. In consonance with this proposal, the Eighteenth Air Force, late in August 1952, requested that TAC take necessary action to obtain quotas for Air Force personnel at the Army Jump School. An immediate allocation of ten was approved by the army for the 14 October 1952 class, with an additional quota of two per week authorized for the period 21 October 1952 - 27 January 1953.

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**Activation of the Pathfinder Squadron (Provisional)** - In anticipation of an influx of trained pathfinder personnel, the Eighteenth Air Force activated a Pathfinder Squadron (Provisional) on 15 January 1953, as a medium for implementing Air Force responsibilities in pathfinder activities. <sup>48</sup>

**15 January 1953 – Donaldson AFB, SC**



*Pictured here are members of the first Air Force Pathfinder Team - the name was changed in March 1953 to Combat Control Team. The photo was taken on the day the team was officially formed. Shown (L to R) are TSgt Alicide S. "Bull" Benini – first NCOIC, A1C Ray Litz, SSgt Robert Combs, A2C Joe Hunnicut, A2C Frank Barrett, Major General Robert W. Douglass, Jr., - 18th Air Force Commander, A3C Lonnie Walker, Captain Richard Baker, - 18th Air Force Pathfinder Project Manager, A3C Mavon Jernigan, A2C Dennis Mazakowski and A1C James McElvian.  
(Air Force Photo)*

It was anticipated that this organization, attached to Headquarters Squadron Section, Eighteenth Air Force for administrative and logistical support would be the forerunner of a Table of Organization (T/O) unit as the Eighteenth Air Force had forwarded a proposed pathfinder squadron table of organization to higher headquarters late in December 1952. <sup>49</sup> Premised on this expectancy, action was initiated in January to procure army personnel to man the new unit. <sup>50</sup> Included in those requirements was a request for one officer and 13 enlisted men from the airborne pathfinder detachments to man the squadron.

Headquarters. Air Force did not concur in the proposed utilization of SCARWAF \* personnel on the premise that Air Force personnel could be selected and trained from available manpower sources. Neither was favorable consideration given to this headquarters' recommended pathfinder squadron table of organization (T/O), as this was to be the only unit of its type in the Air Force and they did not consider a T/O appropriate. As an alternate solution, this headquarters recommended that TO 1-1967 be utilized as manning authority for pathfinder elements, and that the composition of this document includes authority for six pathfinder teams. <sup>51</sup> A conference at Headquarters US Air Force in early March 1953 concluded that this was a feasible solution to the problem and T.O. 1-1967, as finalized by the conferees, contained an authorization to for these teams in Part II A. <sup>52</sup>

The receipt of this information necessitated discontinuance of the Pathfinder Squadron, Provisional, and effective 27 March 1953, action was accomplished to make this a reality. <sup>53</sup> However, the inception of combat control teams (formerly pathfinder teams) has left much to be desired, but not because of their organizational status as elements of 1<sup>st</sup> Aerial Port Squadron. The problem stems from the air force's relative

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inability to assume full responsibility for this function. The army has continued to be very critical of this inadequacy and, as a result, the air force has left itself vulnerable to loss of this function. Especially is this true in view of army conviction that this function is its (army's) inborn responsibility. <sup>54</sup>

The 1st and 2d Aerial Port Operations Squadrons (APOS) were also reorganization during the interim with strengths of 13 officers and 267 airmen, and seven officers and 209 airmen, respectively. <sup>55</sup> In anticipation of these reorganization procedures, this headquarters had requested, in April, that all aerial port operations squadrons be redesignated aerial transport squadrons. It was opined that the new designation would be more indicative of Air Force responsibilities, as aerial ports, which are established by theater commanders, may be operated by any service the latter designates. <sup>56</sup>

Although Part II A of the aerial port operations squadron's T/O accommodates the requirements for combat control teams (thereby eliminating separate squadron overhead), the road of Air Force acceptance for pathfinder responsibilities remains "bumpy." Material-wise, the teams have never received any T-7 or T-10 parachutes. (These are presently being procured from army units on a loan basis.)

The personnel problems of Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) are not indicative of duty performed, nor do they identify personnel with this particular field of endeavor. Contrary to their army predecessors, Air Force combat control personnel are not authorized an identifying badge. There should be, it appears, a provision whereby these airmen can attain senior and master parachutist badges. This is an acute morale problem and, combined with the fact that there is no progression in grade possible, has considerably hindered the APOS (Aerial Port Operations Squadron) in enticing personnel into these teams. Of considerable consequence is the fact that there is no source of trained personnel; all are trained by the aerial port operations squadron. Since the latter also had no trained personnel found on which to draw, the problem has been considerably magnified. The problems of the CCT's and the APO's have not been sufficiently resolved. Air Force Letter 55-6 still leaves some areas questionable as no firm policies of operations have been devised. Until these elements are removed from their "step-child" status, they will continue to be harassed by units of the army.

### **Relationship with Army Field Force Units**

As denoted in the foregoing discussions on the Aeromedical Group and the Aerial Port Operations Squadrons (APOS), there remain many areas of disagreement between the two services. It is self-evident that troop carrier – airborne operations are, and will continue to be, of major import in the operational scheme. A workable solution to these problems is a must, but the end must not be attained at the expense of prostituting the Air Force position. The aircraft commander must be familiar with troop carrier's position in joint operations, and must assert himself when his army counterpart questions these precepts.

Experience has shown that the Air Force was placed in a compromising position by a "weak-spine" officer who concurred with army opinion on the point in question. This deterrent, as noted in a previous history of this command, has been alleviated by indoctrination of crews. \*

That this practice has proven timely is supported by evidence. Early in the period, a question of whether to violate higher headquarters directives was confronted by the 464th Troop Carrier Wing at Lawson Air Force Base, Ft. Benning, Georgia. This problem stemmed from an aversion on the part of the 10th Special Forces Group, Airborne, at Dobbins Air Force Base, Georgia to conform to directives which stipulated that combat

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control teams would be utilized on joint tactical missions. The group had no objection to the employment of Air Force combat controllers in setting up the drop zones for routine training jumps, but did not concur that they should be employed for tactical jumps. <sup>57</sup>

In view of the fact that the problem was definitely a question of policy, the 464th, rather than acquiesce to army demands, queried this headquarters on the avenue of approach to take. Neither TAC nor this headquarters would permit deviation from established procedure and, on 11 August, the 464th was advised that the command supported its contention that no airlift of troops would be approved until the Service Forces withdrew their objection. <sup>58</sup>

July witnessed several unusual requests from army units supported by the Eighteenth Air Force, requests which, if approved, would have given the stamp of approval to questioning Air Force capabilities. During the early summer months, the 82d Airborne Division had experienced a superfluity of casualties during training jumps. This was, of course, a morale factor, of importance and the army, in its desire to alleviate the situation, urged that a wind dummy be dropped from the aircraft (on morning missions) as a means of instilling confidence in the airborne troopers. This proposal met with mixed reactions, but probation was given for approximately 60 days. The command remained adamant to additional overtures that this practice became a part of the SOP.

Of even greater import was XVIII Airborne Corps desire to place an airborne man in the cockpit of each aircraft to record airspeeds over the drop zone and while dropping troops. <sup>59</sup> This action was identical to questioning the integrity of the pilot and could not be subscribed to by this headquarters. It appears that the army is bent on injecting its character into areas that are specifically Air Force. In still another instance, the 82d Airborne Division directed that a company grade Air Force officer give the demonstration commentary, when Tactical Air Command had proscribed that the briefing would be given by a field grade officer. <sup>60</sup> Singly, these incidents are of little consequence, but when studied as a whole they spell out a concerted attempt by the army to usurp certain Air Force responsibilities.

Although the eighteenth is interested in preserving Air Force integrity, it recognizes the concern expressed by the array for the safety of its personnel and, through mutual understanding and agreement, is interested in lowering accidents and/or fatalities to paratroopers. Consequently, this headquarters was amenable to a July proposal of the 82d Airborne Division to jump in ten-man sticks with a jumpmaster tapping each man. This action necessitated each troop carrier aircraft making two passes but the expenditure of aircraft time was of little consequence if troop casualties could be lowered. As stated above, troop carrier was not amenable to the proposal that an airborne man ride in each aircraft to note airspeed over the drop zone. However, this information, in addition to altitude, free air temperature statistics was made available to the army and allowed the airborne corps safety board to study jump activities. <sup>61</sup> It is emphasized that this was an interim measure for the August jump period and was not practiced throughout the six-month interval.

Paradrop inaccuracies continued rife throughout the period of this history. Especially was this true during August and September when several incidents occurred which focused attention on the trend of undue mishaps. The August incident, involving troop carrier aircraft of the 64th Troop Carrier Wing, has allegedly resulted in the dropping of 120 paratroopers in the trees outside of the drop zone. The first report proved

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erroneous as a check with the air liaison officer disclosed that a total of 14 had landed in the trees with no personnel injuries. Air Force interest was couched in hearsay that the army was taking pictures of the parachutes in the trees to point up the episode.<sup>62</sup> Headquarters concern proved groundless, however, as ground force reaction was not as unfavorable as had been asserted.

The September blunder was of considerable significance as a complete complement of airborne personnel (118 paratroopers) landed in the trees during a night drop. On the wind dummy pass, one dummy had landed 50 yards from the trees, the other in the trees. The combat controllers notified the aircraft commander that the drift was 500 yards at 3 o'clock, but the lead commander misinterpreted this to read 500 yards at 10 o'clock.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the three aircraft, correcting further right on second pass, dropped all troops in the trees.

As one can readily deduce, such miscalculations place the Air Force in an unfavorable light. Therefore, it was timely that the Eighteenth should initiate a series of actions designed to prevent further occurrences of inattention to detail. Two avenues of action were taken. The first was to direct that the air liaison officer at XVIII Airborne Corps set up a system of pilot-jumpmaster briefings for all incoming crews.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, a conference was held at this headquarters on 12-13 October 1953 to discuss problems relating to troop carrier – airborne operations. Attended by representatives of all wings and combat control teams, the agenda included drop zone safety control and the CARP \* system. The latter was given additional cognizance at a conference on 3 November, when Headquarters Eighteenth Air Force afforded additional indoctrination on the air dropping of troops by means of this system.\*

### **Troop Carrier-Airborne SOP**

The difficulties outlined above emphasized that troop Carrier units were proficient in varying degrees, and that a need existed for changes in troop carrier-airborne operational procedures if these mission inadequacies were to be eliminated. As early in the period as July, Colonel Edson, G-3 XVIII Airborne Corps had expressed concern that troop carrier units were at variance not only in their in-flight procedures but their ground briefing as well. The Colonel exemplified this by stating that “one unit will brief that in the event of an emergency, the aircraft commander will ring the emergency bell three short rings, at which time the jumpmaster will order the troops to stand up, hook up, and then sit down.”<sup>65</sup> Some units had issued instructions that intermittent ringing of the emergency bell did not necessitate standing up, hooking up and then sitting down; merely that troopers should remain seated with fastened safety belts until the emergency bell was turned on continuously to indicate abandoning of the aircraft. The TAC-OCAAF SOP of 1951 outlined the first of the two procedures mentioned, but it was felt by the Eighteenth Air Force that this could be changed if the airborne desired.

A second divergence involved the opening of aircraft doors. Several units flew with the doors open in flight, while others opened them four minutes prior to aircraft arrival over the air release point. The airborne asserted that this was an insufficient interval to position and push their bundles out at the terminus – air release point.

Colonel Edson's concern regarding these inconsistencies was appreciated by this command, and appropriate action was taken to allay airborne apprehensiveness when, on 15 September, a directive was issued to all wings which outlined changes in the TAC-OCAAF SOC SOP for Troop Carrier-Airborne Operations.<sup>66</sup>

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"Of particular Import was command approbation that (for airdrop operations) aircraft doors will be opened a minimum of 20 minutes prior to drop time in all instances where flight time permits."

Experience has dictated continuing needs for changes in the TAC-OCAAF SOP for Troop Carrier-Airborne Operations. This has been due, in particular, to the advent of the C-124 with its tremendous capabilities. It had been proven conclusively during Exercise TEST DROP that this aircraft was adaptable to personnel as well as equipment drops. However, the 62d Troop Carrier Wing believed the employment of this aircraft, because of its marked payload of humanity, was somewhat at variance with that of other troop carrier aircraft, particularly in the area of formation flying. As a consequence, this troop carrier wing, on 6 October 1953 forwarded its recommends for changes to the existing SOP.<sup>67</sup> This headquarters realized that an element of disparity existed between utilization of heavy and medium aircraft but did not believe it of sufficient import to amend an SOP to pinpoint those differences. Rather, it was felt that any manual could reflect these changes by means of notations in lieu of a separate annex.

Acting on this premise, the 62d proposals, and those of the other wings were retained at Eighteenth Air Force Headquarters and studied within the Directorate of Operations and Training. The results of these studies, discussed with wing representatives at several conferences late in the period, were to the effect that this headquarters would prepare a unilateral troop carrier SOP (in the form of a manual) for distribution prior to the spring maneuvers of 1954.<sup>68</sup> Through this medium, the lack of uniformity and obsolescence in operational procedures, so prevalent within the existing TAC-OCAAF SOP would be replaced by standardization. \*

### **Factors Behind the Proposed Manual**

As has been mentioned previously, inconsistencies on the part of troop carrier units personnel had occasionally placed this headquarters in a compromising position. Wing commanders were notified of these indiscretions and action leading up to the proposed manual were implemented by diverse means.

A message to all commanders on 24 July directed their attention to Air Force doctrines, policies, and their responsibilities in joint airborne operations.<sup>69</sup> On several missions, commanders had not utilized the CARP and had allowed the army to assume responsibilities assigned the Air Force by joint agreement. As a consequence, the wings were directed to screen, select, and indoctrinate those officers well qualified in all phases of airborne operations for potential mission commanders. From this pool of personnel, one pilot served as OIC of wing elements on all joint airborne training and/or operations missions to which his unit was committed.

Additionally, each wing was required to establish lead crews - three per squadron for heavy tactical groups, and four per squadron for medium tactical groups. This procedure combined with the establishment of a briefing team (as directed by this headquarters) was another step toward adequate indoctrination of troop carrier echelons.<sup>70</sup> Concurrently with this action, wings were directed to place a field grade officer on the drop zone during personnel drops.<sup>71</sup> This, however, did not prove feasible as it extended wing capabilities when several DZ's were required for a mission. As an alleviatory measure, units were instructed that a fully qualified troop carrier pilot would suffice.

These were but several of the measures taken to combat the situation, wing commanders were also directed

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to publish SOP's for slow down of aircraft into the drop zone. <sup>72</sup> Although this assured a semblance of standardization in individual wing formations it was discernible that there would be as many different SOP's as there were wings. This fact further emphasized the need for a manual that would set forth uniform procedures for all tactical groups. The combat controller came in for further consideration during this study of conflicting directives. To protect the combat control teams, this headquarters prohibited their employment in other than prepared drop zones, unless concurrence was given by Eighteenth Air Force. Furthermore, wing commanders having operational control for a specific mission were directed to assure that medical and voice communication facilities were present in the drop zone prior to dropping of personnel. <sup>73</sup>

This question of dropping personnel has been a continuing one. Injuries to paratrooper personnel had been instrumental in the army's opining that drop speeds were too high. Air Force countered with the allegation that lowering of the drop speed would create a stability hazard, a situation more dangerous to personnel safety than a high Indicated Air Speed (IAS) at the moment of drop. Therefore, the Eighteenth, on 16 December, directed that the IAS for drops of personnel and equipment from C-119 and C-124 aircraft would be 130 knots. A single exception permitted the commander of the 464th Troop Carrier Wing to lower the speed to 115 knots for novice drops at Fort Benning. This policy was short lived as Tactical Air Command, two days later, outlined that the IAS for both aircraft would be 130 knots when troops were using the T-10 parachute, but would be reduced to 115 knots when T-7 parachutes were employed. <sup>74</sup>

The critical aspect of drop speed in the operation of heavy troop carrier aircraft had been noted by the 62d Troop Carrier Wing in a July mission. As a result of this experience, the wing requested that AFM 60-1 be amended to add: "Characteristic of C-124 is that once airspeed is reduced, an abnormal power setting is required to gain the airspeed lost." This was critical on final approach and the 62d desired to maintain speed on the final leg approach between 130 knots and 120 per cent of stalling speed. <sup>75</sup> Approbation was given this proposal pending revision of the Air Force manual (AFM).

### **Parachutes for Combat Control Teams**

Procurement of T-10 parachutes for Combat Control Team personnel was a problem throughout this period of history. Late in July, this headquarters had set forth its requirements for T-10's but had met with opposition at Headquarters Air Material Command. Again in September the necessity for these chutes was re-emphasized, as their inherent advantages would permit a 130 IAS drop speed. These advantages included: (1) improved formation flying during parachute drops; (2) improved pilot control of individual aircraft; (3) increased aircraft stability during drops; (4) decrease in hazards during engine failures at low airspeeds when dropping; and (5) exploitation of the potential employment of the C-124 aircraft for troop dropping operations.

This final advantage was of primary import as utilization of the C-124 for personnel drops remained in the embryo stage notwithstanding Exercise TEST DROP. Faced with this realization, the command reached a decision to utilize C-124s during December training missions at both Fort Bragg and Campbell Air Force Base, as a means to familiarize both pilots and personnel of the aerial port squadron in drop procedures. <sup>76</sup> Subsequent application of this policy proved the logic sound for, on 15 December, successful mass drops of 11th Airborne Division personnel were made at Fort Campbell. <sup>77</sup> This mass exiting bore out conclusions reached by the 504th Airborne Infantry early in November. In its after action report, the 504th had concluded that (1) C-124's were excellent aircraft for exiting of large numbers of parachutists (2) C-124s plus T-10 parachutes helped maintain unit integrity and (3) V's in trail were the best formation for these drops. <sup>78</sup> It is believed that this success will contribute toward future employment of the C-124 in paratroop missions, and open the door for its utilization in TACAIR 54-7, the joint spring maneuver of 1954.

**SECRET**

*Editor's Summary – I find it odd that there is no record of USAF discussions concerning the World War II Combat Control Teams and their contributions to the Great War. Apparently the lessons learned by the US Army Air Force, were lessons forgotten by the newly establish US Air Force when it assigned the Pathfinder team moniker on 15 January 1953. But then again someone in the new USAF remembered; but who, who can we credit with assigning the Combat Control Team name in 1953?*

### **CAREER FIELDS – Pre-1956**

1953 - 464th Troop Carrier Wing - Lawson Air Force Base, Georgia -- In the very early days, Combat Control Team members were either Radio Operators Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) B292xx or Radio Maintainers AFSC B304xx. The B-prefix indicating parachute status was in later years changed to a P-prefix.

According to long-time Combat Controller Vernon Morgan - in April 1954 - he and two others were selected as radio operators and assigned to the 464th Troop Carrier Wing, 3rd Aerial Port Squadron, Lawson Air Force Base, Fort Benning, GA. At that time the Wing was flying the C-119 Flying Boxcar. Later that year, the Wing, Squadron and Team moved to Pope Air Force Base, NC. In 1955, the first true assault landing aircraft - the C-123 Provider - was introduced into the Air Force's airlift fleet.

At the same time, the Air Staff decided that ATC certification was necessary for those radio operators who would be controlling traffic at assault landing zones. According to Morgan, it was around that time - in early-1956 - that the Civil Air Administration (CAA) sent a team of instructors to Pope to qualify the team's Radio Operators to control air traffic. After a three-day course of instruction and qualification test, the CAA issued ATC certificates to the newly christened Combat Control (ATC) operators. Within months, Air Force trained Air Traffic Controllers were being assigned to the Combat Control Teams. Morgan recalls, some of those early CCT Radio Operators that finished jump school together; they were: Richard Callahan, Herbert (Mo) Lattimore, Encarnation (Mike) Ramos, Merrill Bupp, Larry Gist, Reuben Ramos, Martin Ragland and Vernon Morgan.

### **CAREER FIELDS – Post 1956**

1956 - 3rd Aerial Port Squadron - Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina – In 1956, the technical nature of Combat Control changed and then required they have either an air traffic control (AFSC B272xx) or radio maintenance (AFSC B304xx) skills. Soon, the Air Force actively solicited recruits from the two career fields.

At that time, air traffic control school or radio maintenance schools, and jump school were the only formal schools required to become a Combat Controller. The other specialized skills came through either on the job (OJT) or in-house training classes. Controllers were eventually given permission to blouse their trousers, wear paratrooper boots and a navy blue baseball cap. To stand out just a little more they pinned jump wings to their caps.

*Speaking of jump wings! Did you know the Air Force once had its own version?*

## **AIR FORCE PARACHUTE BADGES** by Donald R. Strobaugh, Colonel, USAF (CCT) Retired

**1955 – The Pentagon, Washington, DC** - By 1955, Air Force parachutists wore Army parachutist wings and consisted primarily of Combat Control Teams (Air Force took over and enlarged the Army Pathfinder mission in 1953), a small group of test parachutists assigned to El Centro NAS, California and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, and a small number of jumpers assigned to Air Intelligence. The Air Force decided that it was time to adopt distinctive Air Force parachutist wings, and they sent a letter to all Air Force parachutist organizations asking for design proposals. Upon comparing notes later, all 3 of our Combat Control units sent in variations of the standard Air Force aviation wings with a parachute in the center and in 3 classes, Basic, Senior and Master. One of the test parachutists at El Centro was a CWO Larry Lambert who had made the United States first test ejection seat jump from a jet in 1946 and with 600+ jumps was considered to be the most qualified jumper in the Air Force. He and an officer in the Pentagon designed the Jewish Chaplain/Dental Technician-style parachutist badge that was adopted by the Air Force in 1956. The first Air Force Master Parachutist badge pinned on CWO Lambert by the Secretary of the Air Force at a ceremony in the Pentagon. The first badges manufactured in 1956 (let's call them Type I) were thick, slightly convex, marked STERLING and with 9 suspension lines under the canopy.



*Shown here are the three USAF Parachute Badges. At lower right is the basic parachutist badge; at center is the senior parachutist badge - with star; and at top left is the master parachutist badge - with star and scroll. (Gene Adcock Collection)*

The supply of these badges was used up by 1957 and the follow-on badges (Type II) were manufactured in a thinner, flat design, without STERLING and with only 7 suspension lines under the canopy. These badges were not worn in cloth, except for the Combat Control Team assigned to Japan in 1956 who had them manufactured locally and wore them on the fatigue uniform until approximately 1958 when they were directed to wear the standard Army-style white on green cloth parachutist badges that the rest of the Air Force jumpers were wearing. These Air Force parachutist badges were also proposed in bullion for Mess Dress uniform and a few were made by aggressive manufacturers looking to make a buck, but they were never adopted or worn officially. The standard full size silver bullion on black Army parachutist dress badge was sometimes worn on Air Force Mess Dress Uniform. In 1963, after seven years of gripes, complaints and design proposals for aviation-style parachutist wings, the Air Force moved in its wise and mysterious way and discontinued distinctive Air Force parachutist badges completely. They reverted back to the standard Army parachutist metal badges for the dress uniform and white on blue fabric badges for wear on the Air Force fatigue uniform.

**TWENTY-TWO COMBAT CONTROLLERS RECEIVE JUMP WINGS** - Copied from a well-worn article clipped from the Donaldson AFB News Paper

**August 1955 – Donaldson Air Force Base, South Carolina** — The C-119 Flying Boxcar drones on toward the drop zone. Inside its cargo space, 13 airmen from Donaldson Air Force Base, SC sit waiting for the first order. Ten minutes to DZ they begin to gather equipment and help each other tighten chute straps. Then, four minutes to drop zone the pilot signals the jumpmaster, a first lieutenant, who makes a final check on his

men. He shouts commands:

“Get Ready”! The men sit rigidly in their seats and stamp their feet to let him know they understand.



*In this 1954 photograph, twenty-two combat controllers of the 1st Aerial Port Squadron received their jump wings upon completing a course at the Fort Benning, GA. Presenting the wings is Captain Adam Heller, Assistant Combat Control Operations Officer. Editors Note: In 1954, there was no combat control school and no blue beret. The headgear worn by these combat controllers is the Ridgeway cap, a left over from the Korean War. (Air Force Photo)*

“Stand UP – Hook Up,” They hook static lines to an overhead cable that will open their chutes automatically when they step out of the plane.

“Check Your Equipment.” Carefully, they check each other.

“Sound Off for Equipment Check,” Each man hits the back of the man in front of him.

“Stand in the Door.” The first men in the two lines start moving. The jumpmaster heads one of the lines. Behind him are two radio mechanics, nine radio operators and another communications specialist – a top non-com who is assistant jumpmaster and will jump last.

The green light flashes; lines of men move forward to the door and into space. Less than 1,500 feet below lay their objective, a strip of land suitable for a forward air base. These men are the forerunners of the regular paratroopers, and will decide whether more men will follow, or the operation in this sector will be abandoned and set up somewhere else.

In January 1953, the Air Force took over the Army pathfinder mission, and recent stateside maneuvers gave the Air Force and Army the latest use for paratroopers – the advanced airhead operation. An all-out nuclear war will probably be decided within a few days, some military experts say. But these same experts will tell

you that such a war might never come, and instead, an enemy may attempt to grab territory in limited-scale or brush-fire wars such as the Korean police action. This situation would call for new tactics – and that’s where the advance airhead operation comes in. Instead of establishing a beachhead and fighting inland, large masses of airborne infantry would be dropped into enemy territory to secure land for an airfield. The airhead becomes a hopping off point for another such operation farther behind enemy lines.

Success of this new tactic depends on the Air Force and its combat control teams who will enter the drop zone before the regular paratroopers. It’s their job to relay accurate information to the operation commander who in turn makes the final decision. Combat Control teams are a part of US Air Force’s rapidly expanding Tactical Air Command. The job was given to the Air Force, since the men deal directly with the aircraft commanders in a tactical situation and have to be acquainted with Air Force techniques and situations.



*<<< In this March 1957 photograph, 1st Aerial Port Squadron, Combat Controllers at Donaldson AFB, South Carolina practice first aid. A3C Jack McConnell is the “patient”, kneeling is A3C Johnny Johnson. Standing is Bob Booth; kneeling in back is A1C Lew Martinez and sitting in back is A3C John Turner.*

*(Bob Booth Collection)*

Sixty seconds after leaving the aircraft, the first member of the Donaldson team hits the ground. After collapsing his chute, he stands by to help other members of the team who might be in difficulty. Then the team gathers equipment dropped with them and starts operations. One of the mechanics sets up the radio and checks it out. He finds a tube broken and replaces it from the reserve supply and he’s in business. Other men set up anemometers to check the ground wind. If it’s over 15 knots per hour – no jump by the paratroopers, and the control team will have to get out of there and make it’s way back to friendly territory the best way it can. Speed is essential. Just 30 minutes away are other C-119s heading for this area loaded with paratroopers. By the time they arrive all data must be gathered and relayed to the operation commander who will decide whether to make to jump or not. The team lays luminous strips of cloth at the beginning of the drop zone and gets ready to set off colored smoke to mark the area. Every tree, rock and bush is carefully watched for snipers. Because of the small size of the control team, a few well-placed shots could wipe them out and abort the operation.

The 30 minutes are almost up. The wind is light enough so that paratroopers should make the jump without injury. The radio operator contacts headquarters; relays the information, and word comes through. The operation will go. After the final trooper is on the ground, the last planes in the formation come over and drop equipment – light bulldozers to clear a landing strip, food for the men, and heavier weapons to repulse

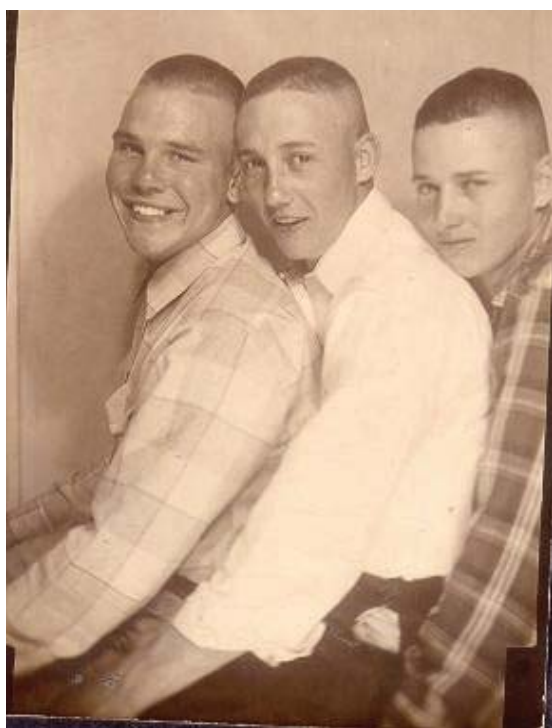


counter-attacks. While combat engineers build the runway, paratroopers guard the area. As soon as assault aircraft can be landed on the strip, paratroopers, backed by the new troops, fan out to expand the original drop zone and cut railroads and highways. On the return trip, the same aircraft carry casualties to the rear.

The control teams acts as air traffic controllers, until tower men can be brought in. To an outside observer, parachuting would seem to be the most important part of the control team operation. But as one jumper put it, "Jumping is just a fast form of transportation for us. As far as we're concerned it a sport."

At present, TAC has only ten of an authorized 12 combat control teams. One reason for being two teams is to volunteer, and there's no set procedure for doing that. Team members and danger have become fast friends and for that reason membership on a team is kept on a voluntary basis. Combat casualty rates for controllers may run 50 percent. Why so high? Many times a team drops on the operation area to find that it is impossible to use, either because of high winds, changed enemy position, or the fact that building an airstrip on the selected site would take too long. Controllers are then on their own to get back safely. Using every escape and evasion tactic in the book with a few inventions of-their-own, they fight, crawl, and walk back to friendly lines.

The ten control teams - now in service - are located at Pope Air Force, NC, Sewart Air Force, TN, Donaldson Air Force Base, SC and Europe. And, like the team at Donaldson, they are part of Aerial Port Squadrons, which also handle air transportation for troop carrier wings. Most men in the 1st Aerial Port Squadron at Donaldson brought to their units a background in radio communications acquired in Air Training Command Schools at Keesler Air Force Base, MS, and Scott Air Force Base, IL. But they are in continuous training for their exacting assignments. They spend many hours increasing proficiency in the operation of radio and radar equipment. They also learn about weather, and of course, they practice jumping.



### ***Donaldson AFB Combat Controllers***

*<<< Pictured here during a break in jump training at Ft. Benning is (L to R) Bob Booth, Lew Brabham and unidentified friend. Both Booth and Brabham would be career Combat Controllers. In later years, Booth was commissioned and became the Commandant of the Combat Control School. Brabham would be credited as the last American military man to escape Vietnam - during the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. (Bob Booth collection)*

After volunteering for duty with a team and being accepted, prospective controllers go to the Army parachutist school at Ft. Benning, GA, for four to six weeks. If they are NONCOMs, they might take a longer jumpmaster's course. One of the most distinctive things about the teams is their uniform. Their two-piece green fatigues and paratrooper boots are topped off with

an Air Force blue Ridgway cap. Wings are pinned on the cap, and they usually have a flashy squadron insignia on their jacket. They are proud of their units and jobs. "After all, it's a mighty interesting job," one of them said. "And you get into combat first." These men are taking part and living a whole new concept of combined air-ground warfare. The days of beachheads may be over, to be replaced by airhead operations. In a future war the success of every airborne attack will depend on the Air Force combat control team.

## **FIRST REAL WORLD MISSION**

**July 1958 - Weisbaden Air Force Base, Germany** – In July 1958, the first real-world CCT mission came in July 1958 when members of the 5th Aerial Port Combat Control Team deployed to Lebanon. The purpose of the operation was to bolster the pro-Western government of President Chamoun against internal opposition and threats from Syria and the United Arab Republic. The Weisbaden team provided air traffic control (ATC) services at the Beirut International Airport in support of airlift operations, preventing open warfare.

In the first nine days of the operation the CCT supported the delivery of more than 3,000 personnel and 2,500 tons of equipment that were delivered by 242 air land missions. By October that same year, tensions had eased and civil war had been forestalled.