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AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS TRAINING CENTER: DOES 3-LEVEL MAINTENANCE TRAINING BELONG?

BY

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CERTIFICATE

I have read and understand the Academic Integrity Section of the Student Guide. I certify that I have not used another student's research work and that the creative process of researching, organizing, and writing this research paper represents only my own work. I have accomplished the research paper in accordance with the most current instructions.

//SIGNED//

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Biography

Colonel Robert "Mig" Miglionico is a career aircraft maintenance officer, currently a student of the Air War College at Maxwell AFB, AL. He began his career in 1989 as an aircraft maintenance officer at Keesler AFB, MS. He then moved to Hurlburt Field, Florida where he was assigned to Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command, Logistics Directorate. From there, he moved to Kadena AB, JA and served as the Maintenance Supervisor for the 353d Maintenance Squadron. Upon completion, he was reassigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina working as Director of Logistics for a special operations unit. Colonel Miglionico was then selected to attend Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB. Upon graduation, he returned to Hurlburt Field and took command of the 16th Equipment Maintenance Squadron. After command, he moved back to the Air Force Special Operations Command Headquarters and served on the A4 staff. Next, he was assigned back to Kadena AB and served as commander of the 353d Maintenance Squadron. Upon completion of that tour, he moved to Little Rock AFB, AR and served as the 463d Airlift Group Deputy Commander for Maintenance. He followed that assignment with a tour at Kirtland AFB, NM, serving as the deputy commander of the 58th Maintenance Group. Finally, prior to attending Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, he was assigned to the A4 staff at Air Mobility Command Headquarters, Scott AFB, IL. His operational experience includes service in Operations DESERT STORM and ENDURING FREEDOM (Afghanistan and Philippines), and as the Joint Special Operations Air Component J4 during Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and UNIFIED ASSISTANCE (Tsunami Relief).

Chapter 1

Introduction

Should the Air Force Special Operations Command incorporate 3-level aircraft maintenance on-the-job training as part of the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC)? The current method of providing the OJT for 3-levels using 'out of hide' resources is adequate at best and needs improvement. If resourced properly with ample equipment and manpower, without degrading the existing aircraft maintenance organizations' productivity, then AFSOTC is a viable for ensuring 3-level on the job training. The fiscally constrained world makes proper resourcing a challenge and it makes sense to consider options that include a Total Force Initiative that takes advantage of the Air Force Reserve Center resources, both equipment and expertise. In order to create and sustain an efficient, successful maintenance training environment and continue high levels of support for the long war, it is imperative to look 'outside of the box' for a solution.

Air Force Instruction requires MAJCOMs to ensure on-the-job training for 3-level aircraft maintainers upon arrival to their units from technical school.[1] However, the Air Force Instructions do not mandate how the training must be accomplished. MAJCOM's differ in their approaches to the training, some (like Air Mobility Command) have a relatively formal process for ensuring the training gets accomplished. Regardless of the method each MAJCOM employs to ensure proper OJT for their 3-levels, one common theme exists throughout the Air Force: maintenance organizations are suffering from low maintenance manning and experience and operations/deployment tempos are high. These factors result in maintenance organizations

[1] Air Force Instruction 36-2232, *Maintenance Training*, 22 February 2006. 41.

having difficulty in providing consistent, timely training while still trying to accomplish safe sortie generation both at home station and deployed. AFSOC is not immune to the difficulties seen throughout the Air Force with regards to training 3-levels. In addition, AFI36-2232 states that the chapter on maintenance qualification training does not apply to AFSOC[2] and therefore, the command has the opportunity to determine the right process for their maintainers. The difficulties seen with high operations tempo and low maintenance manning and experience highlight the need for AFSOC to find a more efficient/effective process to ensuring proper training. The newly established AFSOTC may be able to provide some much needed assistance to the AFSOC maintenance world.

[2] Air Force Instruction 36-2232, *Maintenance Training*, 22 February 2006. 41.

Chapter 2

Current Maintenance Training Process

Air Force Maintenance Training

The United States Air Force provides aircraft maintenance training to its new aircraft maintenance career field accessions. These new maintainers earn their initial 3-level qualification at the Air Education and Training Command formal training schools. Their training is general and not aircraft specific. It is incumbent upon the gaining organization to provide 'on-the-job' training for the new 3-level apprentice maintainers to prepare them for hands-on tasks on their specific aircraft type. The on-the-job training is two-fold: first, the 3-levels are provided training that gives them the very basics necessary to be minimally productive in their particular maintenance discipline; second, they are provided on-the-job training intended to upgrade them from a 3-level apprentice maintainer to a 5-level, journeyman status. This paper will focus on the first part, on-the-job training that elevates the 3-level apprentice from just being a 'tech school graduate' to an apprentice maintainer that can perform some basic tasks. This training will be referred to in the remainder of this paper as 3-level 'top-off training'.

Why is top-off training important? New Airmen at technical school are provided general training. It is normal for a basic trainee to progress through basic military training, then graduate from technical school, and arrive at a base having never seen the type of aircraft he or she is assigned to work on. The basic technical school can only provide generic training, thus it is important to provide weapon system specific familiarization once the Airmen arrives reports to his or her first base. Once the Airman arrives, he or she will be put in a training status and will

be in an upgrade program designed to take them from an apprentice 3-level to a qualified 5-level journeyman. The standard timeline for upgrading from 3- to 5-level is about 12 months but can vary greatly depending on circumstances and the individual maintainer. This top-off training is not designed to get the Airman to the upgraded skill level, it is simply to provide them familiarization and training to render the Airman somewhat productive during the upgrade process. The Airman will still require supervision throughout the day, however with proper top-off training the potential for the Airman to be part of a mishap is reduced, and the Airman may be able to assist in some tasks. This training can enhance the organization's productivity as the new 3-levels become capable on tasks such as aircraft towing, aerospace ground equipment operation, aircraft and equipment refuel/defuel, aircraft marshalling, etc. Any productivity from a 3-level adds to the productivity of the organization, so it is clear that each MAJCOM benefits from having a solid top-off training program and Air Mobility Command has a superb program, though it also has challenges.

AMC Maintenance Training

Air Mobility Command established the AMC Maintenance Qualification Training Program (MQTP) and the Level I training is its mechanism to ensure 3-levels are provided adequate, useful top-off training. AMC supplemented the AFI36-2232 training guidance and spelled out the formal requirements for entry level Airmen in flightline maintenance career fields. The AMC supplement indicates which maintainers are required to be enrolled in the MQPT program, the minimum maintenance tasks that they are required to be trained on, and the process for the enrollee to progress through the program. This level of detail ensures that the 3-levels are trained to a minimum standard level on tasks that the field deems are necessary for

productivity in the maintenance organizations. The program is sound, but implementation has its challenges.

In an ideal world, there would be enough qualified 5- and 7-level maintainers to ensure safe reliable maintenance actions are performed and enough consistently available to provide training to the new 3-levels. The reality of the world today is that there are not enough experienced maintainers to accomplish the requirement. This shortage exists for many reasons, but two significant reasons in particular. First, due to a standard maintenance manning level of 85% the maintenance organizations are generally starting out behind the power curve. After several recent Presidential Budget Directives, maintenance manpower authorizations have been reduced to what many professional maintainers consider 'bare minimums'. Recent efforts to buy back maintenance authorizations are only slightly helpful, as most authorizations are being provided to new missions, not to fix shortages at existing units. Additionally, the increase in active-associate units (active duty Airmen assigned/aligned with Reserve of Guard units—with ARC being the lead) has led to an increase in active duty authorizations. Even though there are more authorizations now, it takes several years to grown qualified maintainers to fill the authorizations, thus the pool of maintainers that exist now at active duty units will be decreased for the next few years to fill positions at active-associate units.

The aircraft experience level of maintainers provides the second reason for the shortage of qualified 5- and 7-level maintainers to train new 3-levels. The AF/A4 reduced the number of 'shred-outs' attached to Air Force Specialty Codes. For example, the letter code that designated a maintainer as an "F-15" crew chief was removed, and now that maintainer is coded as a more generic "CAF" (fighter) crew chief. This means the CAF crew chief can be assigned to units with F-15s, F-16s, A-10s, etc. The end result is that a unit can (and does) end up with

maintainers that are technically qualified as 5- or 7-level mechanics, yet they may have little to no experience on the particular type of aircraft flown by their unit. This shred-out removal affected AFSCs throughout maintenance, both from the fighter/bomber world, and the mobility world. The significance of this "generalization of the experience base" with respect to the 3-level training is that now the pool of experienced 5- and 7-level maintainers qualified to provide hands on OJT to 3-level maintainers is reduced.

AMC developed a program called "Focused Training' to combat the shortage of trainers. In this program, they canvass that MAJCOM for volunteers to go TDY to units that have large training backlogs. The intent is for the 'volunteers' to work on the flightline to free up the home unit maintainers so they can train their 3-levels. This program has met with some success, but the pool of available volunteers is low and the program is only a stop-gap to keep them afloat.

AMC's initiatives to ensure proper top-off training for their 3-levels are formal, adequate, but not easily sustained. Manpower constraints, number of maintainers, and qualification levels impact their ability to train their 3-levels. The issues that affect AMC's maintenance training are also present in AFSOC.

AFSOC Maintenance Training

AFSOC maintenance organizations, like those from other MAJCOMs, need quality top-off training for their new 3-level maintainers. AFSOC maintenance is affected by manpower shortages and experience gaps similar to other commands. Additionally, AFSOC and the other MAJCOMS may face a slight reduction in manning percentages with the onset of the new missions (Global Strike Command, Active-Associate units). As the worldwide manning averages decrease due to the new missions, the AFSOC manning averages will decrease

accordingly. This will occur despite the fact that AFSOC maintenance manpower requirements will remain high as the ops tempo at home and abroad remain high due to the long war. AFSOC maintenance recognizes the situation they find themselves in and has initiated an effort to ensure their training program is able to meet the challenge.

The 1st Special Operations Maintenance Group at Hurlburt Fld, FL assigned one of its squadrons (1SOAMXS) the task of developing a tailored training program. The test program is focused on getting new 3-levels top-off training and upgrade training simultaneously. The program formalized the process so that the 1SOMXG, like AMC will have a standardized approach to providing OJT to its new maintainers. There were no additional resources provided to the 1SOAMXS for this test, so the internal training is still taken out of hide.[3] It still remains to be seen if the value of taking qualified maintainers off the line to focus on training only will have a negative effect on the unit's maintenance productivity. The test is still ongoing, so the cost-benefit ratio has not been determined; however, initial response from the unit commander is positive.

Will the 1SOAMXS be able to crack the nut on maintenance training and be able to develop an effective training program from within its own resources? If so, their success should be replicated throughout the 1SOMXG and 27SOMXG. Can potential 1SOAMXS successes also work in the non-standard maintenance organizations in the overseas special operations groups? If so, then there is reason to be excited and to implement rapidly. If the 1 SOAMXS cannot develop an effective training program using internal resources, then an alternative solution must be found; possibly under the AFSOTC.

[3] Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command, "*MC-130H Maintenance and Munitions Manpower Statement*", (Hurlburt Fld, FL: HQ AFSOC/A1M, February 2008). 17-19.

Chapter 3

Air Force Special Operations Training Center

Current AFSOTC Mission

On 1 October 2008, Air Force Special Operations Command established the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC) at Hurlburt Field, Florida.[4] The AFSOTC Commander reports directly to the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command and the Center is one of AFSOC's six primary subordinate units.[5] The AFSOTC mission is to:

> Develop a focused recruiting, selection, assessment, and training and retention program to ensure adequate numbers of personnel specialty and equipment. Missions include: planning, support, and command and control of tasked assts executing overt or clandestine special operations to disrupt, defeat, or destroy designated targets. AFSOC will establish an AF Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC) to focus training and separate operations.[6]

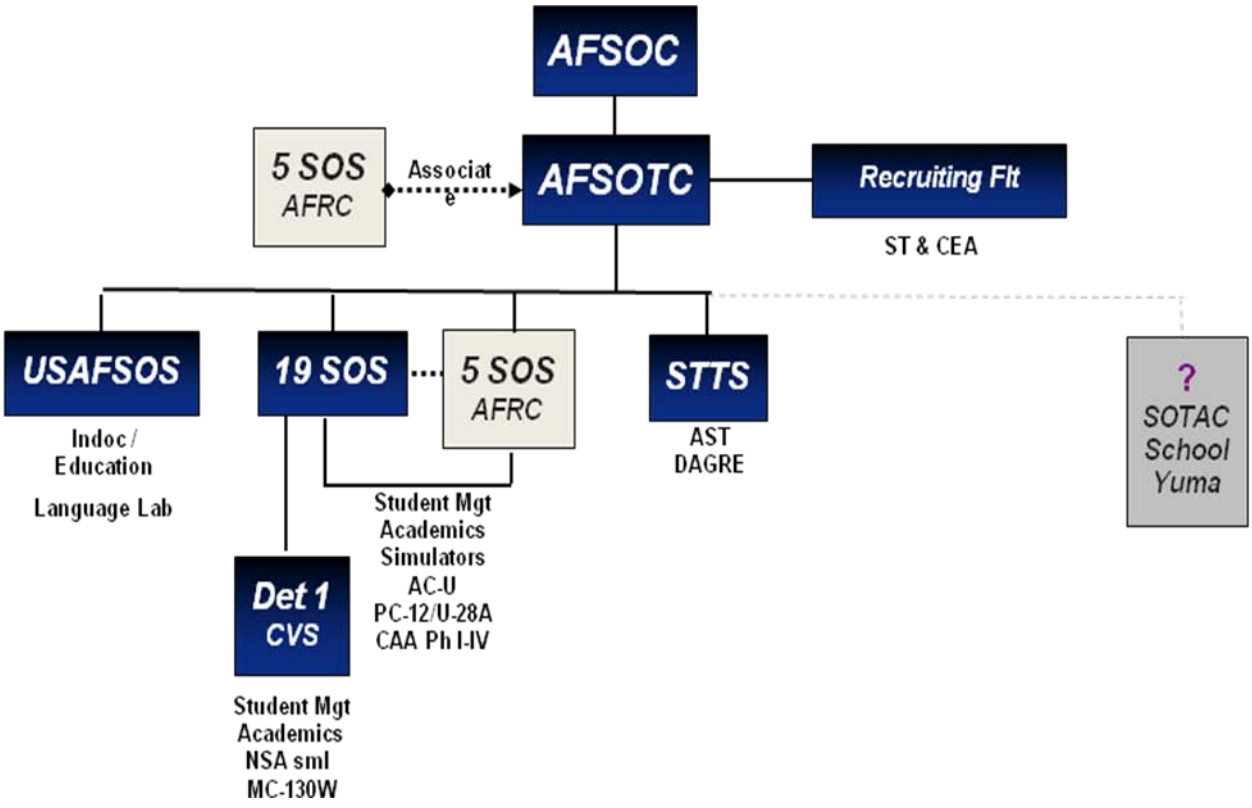
The last sentence from the USSOCOM Mission Guidance Letter above is the heart of what AFSOTC is all about. The first commander of AFSOTC, Col Paul Harmon, further refined his role as the single commander responsible for carrying out the guidance in the USSOCOM mission guidance letter; with his specific intent to "consolidate initial qualification training—war fighters fight; trainers train".[7] This commander's intent clearly defines the direction that the AFSOTC was headed. Their reason for being was to allow the warfighters to focus on their combat mission, without the burden of having to provide initial training to their personnel. The

[4] Air Force Portal, "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (https://www.my.af.mil/gcss-af/USAF/ep/globalTab.do?channelPageId=s6925EC1331650FB5E044080020E329A9)
[5] Air Force Portal, "Air Force Special Operations Command" (https://www.my.af.mil/gcss-af/USAF/ep/index.do?command=subOrg&channelPageId=s6925EC13560B0FB5E044080020E329A9)
[6] Headquarters United States Special Operations Command, *2007 Mission Guidance Letter* (Tampa, FL: HQ USSOCOM, 2007), unclassified extract.
[7] Colonel Paul Harmon, "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (powerpoint briefing AFSOTC Master Plan, Headquarters AFSOTC, 7 May 08). Slide 3.

AFSOTC mission was to take initial training out of the operational units' hands and to provide them trained Air Commandos ready to contribute to the mission once they arrive to their respective units.

The AFSOTC mission is to provide mission qualification training for AC-130H/U, MC-130W, U-28, Combat Aviation Advisors, Nonstandard Aviation, Special Tactics, Deployed Aircraft Ground Element, and ISR exploitation mission areas.[8] The AFSOTC organizational structure (shown below) is designed to provide training for the Airmen involved in the aforementioned mission areas. [9] It is important to note that the Air Force Reserve Center has a unit (5th Special Operations Squadron) associated with the AFSOTC. This Total Force relationship is a force-multiplier, providing a cross-utilization of manpower, expertise, and experience between the active duty and reserve forces.

[8] AFSOC Programming Plan 08-03, "Establish the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC)", 15 Aug 08. 6.
[9] Colonel Paul Harmon, "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (powerpoint briefing AFSOTC Master Plan, Headquarters AFSOTC, 7 May 08). Slide 5.



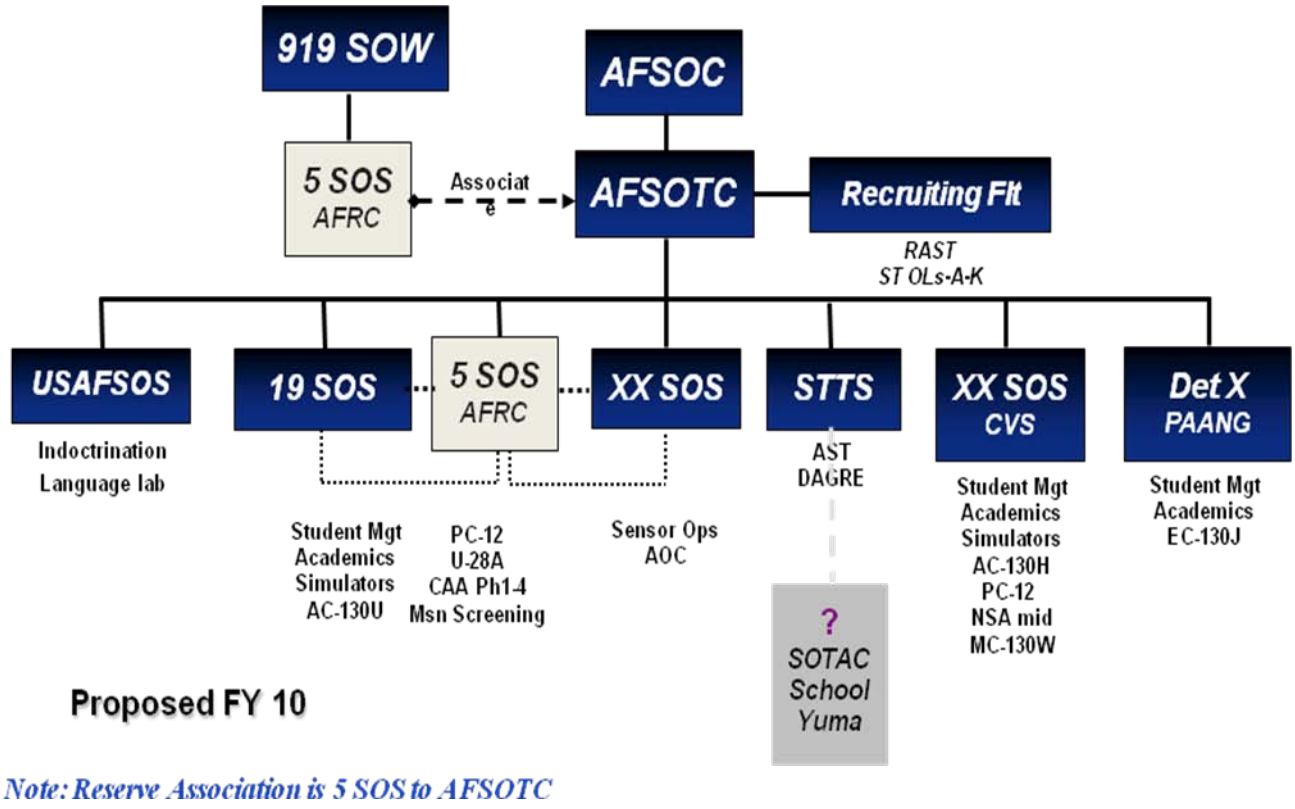
This organizational structure is the second iteration as the AFSOTC is going through its planned growth.[10]

Future AFSOTC Mission

The AFSOTC organization structure is projected to change again FY2010 as it expands its role in aviator training (AC-130, EC-130J, PC-12, U-28, etc.) and Sensor operator training.[11] The new organizational structure below highlights these changes and shows the 5 SOS chain of

[10] Colonel Paul Harmon, "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (powerpoint briefing AFSOTC Master Plan, Headquarters AFSOTC, 7 May 08). Slide 5.
[11] Ibid., 5-27.

command going directly to the 919th Special Operations Wing (AFRC) at Duke Field, FL and the association to the AFSOTC commander.[12]



Note: Reserve Association is 5 SOS to AFSOTC

The AFSOTC mission continues to grow, but the resources it utilizes are not additive to AFSOC. As per COMUSSOCOM, the AFSOTC must be 'resource neutral'.[13] To be resource neutral, AFSOC had to move resources within the command to build up the AFSOTC. For instance, in order to establish manpower billets in AFSOTC for Combat Aviation Advisor training, the 6th Special Operations Squadron was required to give up twelve active duty billets to

[12] Colonel Paul Harmon, "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (powerpoint briefing AFSOTC Master Plan, Headquarters AFSOTC, 7 May 08). Slide 27.
[13] Colonel Mark B. Alsid, commander, Air Force Special Operations Training Center, interview by author, 30 Nov 09.

the AFSOTC.[14] This process was repeated throughout several AFSOC units so that the AFSOTC standup could remain resource neutral.

Understandably, warfighting units are uneasy about giving up billets, regardless of the projected benefits. The 319th Special Operations Squadron was initially apprehensive about giving up some of its authorizations to the AFSOTC, but in the end the unit recognized the benefit as they gained better trained aircrews without impact to operations.[15]

Neither the AFSOTC mission as described in the P-Plan, or the AFSOTC organizational diagram, as resourced, account for inclusion of special operations aircraft maintenance training to aligned under the AFSOTC umbrella.[16] The aforementioned documents can be interpreted as only being applicable to operations training. However, the door for expansion of the AFSOTC scope has been opened with the comments made by the AFSOC Vice Commander during the 2009 AFSOTC Change of Command ceremony, "Your mission is to recruit, assess, select, indoctrinate, train and then educate Air Commandos, other special operations forces and SOF enablers…"[17] The AFSOC/CV statement provides a vision that AFSOTC can have a role in training support personnel and one could interpret the comments as guidance to AFSOTC to determine how they can best train 'the SOF enablers'.

[14] Colonel Paul Harmon, "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (powerpoint briefing AFSOTC Master Plan, Headquarters AFSOTC, 7 May 08). Slide 15.
[15] Colonel Mark B. Alsid, commander, Air Force Special Operations Training Center, interview by author, 30 Nov 09.
[16] Major General Kurt Cichowski, "Air Force Print News Today" (speech, AFSOTC Change of Command, Hurlburt Fld, FL, 18 Aug 09).
[17] Ibid.

Chapter 4

3-Level Maintenance Training in AFSOTC

The special operations maintainers are clearly 'SOF enablers' and it can therefore be argued that inclusion of initial maintenance training under AFSOTC falls within the bounds of the AFSOTC responsibility. If the boundaries of AFSOTC are such that maintenance can be included, then the question remains, should it be included? If the answer is yes, then a sight picture on how to establish maintenance training in AFSOTC must be developed. The picture should include the scope of training to be provided; allocation of resources; and the desired organizational structure to include lines of authority.

Should 3-Level Maintenance Be Included in AFSOTC?

The short answer is 'it depends'. Any change to the current process to train 3-level maintainers in AFSOC should result in better trained 3-levels, and safe, effective, and efficient aircraft maintenance productivity at homestation and at deployed sights around the globe. If a plan can be developed to include 3-level top-off training in AFSOTC and the aforementioned results attained, then the answer is a resounding 'YES'. If any plan to include 3-level top-off training in AFSOTC results in a less effective training program, or in a degradation in maintenance productivity, then the change should not be made. Due to the high deployment rate low maintenance manning authorizations and subsequent low fill rate, and experience gaps induced by the removal of AFSC shred-outs and projected new Air Force mission fills, it is imperative that any change to the training process does not include reducing the experienced manpower assigned to the AFSOC maintenance units. This will be difficult to accomplish with

AFSOTC remaining resource neutral, thus it may be necessary for AFSOC to identify manning offsets from non-maintenance organizations within the command. Assuming this can be done, the next step is to determine the scope and scale of training.

Scope and Scale of Training

The training process needs to be determined with two aspects in mind: scope and scale. First the scope of the training needs to be determined; specifically, which tasks the 3-levels should master in top-off training. Once the scope is determined, the next step is to determine the scale of the effort, which special operations maintainers to include in the 3-level top-off training. The target 3-level maintainers could range from those locally assigned (Hurlburt Field and Eglin AFB), to those assigned stateside (includes Cannon AFB), or to AFSOC maintainers worldwide (includes Mildenhall and Kadena). The scale of training will be important in determining how to resource the AFSOTC.

AMC's Level I MQTP training model provides a sound, proven plan for scoping the tasks for 3-level top-off training. The tasks listed in Air Mobility Command supplement to AFI36-2232 include a multitude of tasks that once mastered, would enable a 3-level to be productive in a maintenance organization. The tasks are more specific than what the 3-level would have accomplished at basic technical training, yet specific enough to give them proper familiarity with the equipment they will be working on in their units. [18]

- Technical Order Familiarization
- Flightline safety/precaution/security
- Introduction to aircraft/airframe familiarization/egress
- Inspect/operate portable external electrical power unit
- Inspect/use ground maintenance stands
- Dropped Object Prevention Program (DOPP)

[18] Air Force Instruction 36-2232 AMC Supplement, *Maintenance Training*, 10 March 2008. 56-57

- Defensive Systems familiarization (on applicable aircraft)
- Statically ground aircraft, if applicable
- Apply/disconnect external electrical power unit
- Perform wing/tail walker duties
- Perform jacking team member duties
- Perform refuel/defuel team member duties
- Open and close engine cowling
- Remove/install aircraft maintenance access panels
- Use aircraft interphone system
- Perform aircraft marshaling procedures
- Team communications

The AMC task listing above, with the exception of the Dropped Object Prevention Program (AFSOC does not use this program) should be included in the scope of tasks assigned to the AFSOTC. The timeline for the 3-levels to master these tasks, assuming they are in a focused, controlled training environment is approximately sixty days. This timeline is not problematic if the units are resourced correctly, and if the trainees are from the local area. For expansion of training to those outside the local area, there are more issues to consider.

If the scale of the student pool extends beyond the local area, issues such as TDY funding, billeting, time away from homestation, etc. become factors to consider before including them in the scope of 3-level maintenance top-off training in AFSOTC. Additionally, the number of 3-levels special operations maintainers in the local area, CONUS, and OCONUS will need to be evaluated to determine reasonable/doable class throughput.

If 3-level top-off training is moved to AFSOTC, the scale should be deliberately metered, similar to the way the aviation training scale is projected in the AFSOTC.[19] Though metered, a clear goal of having a standardized training program for the command under AFSOTC is desired. Including all AFSOC 3-levels in the AFSOTC training center will prove beneficial in several

[19] Colonel Paul Harmon, "Air Force Special Operations Training Center" (powerpoint briefing AFSOTC Master Plan, Headquarters AFSOTC, 7 May 08). Slides 4-29.

ways. First, an all-inclusive approach ensures a standardized training syllabus from which the instructors can train from. Next, a single training center will ensure standard level of quality and experience of trainers. Finally, an all inclusive program under the AFSOTC will provide a single commander that can champion the training effort, using economies of scales. The following phased approach to get to include all special operations 3-level maintainers is recommended:

PHASE	3-LEV TRAINEE POOL	TRAINING TASKS
Phase I	Local (Hurlburt Fld, Eglin AFB)	All AMC tasks (except DOPP)
Phase II	CONUS (Hurlburt Fld, Eglin AFB, Cannon AFB)	All AMC tasks (except DOPP)
Phase III	ALL (Hurlburt Fld, Eglin AFB, Cannon AFB, RAF Mildenhall, Kadena AB	All AMC tasks (except DOPP)

Allocation of Resources

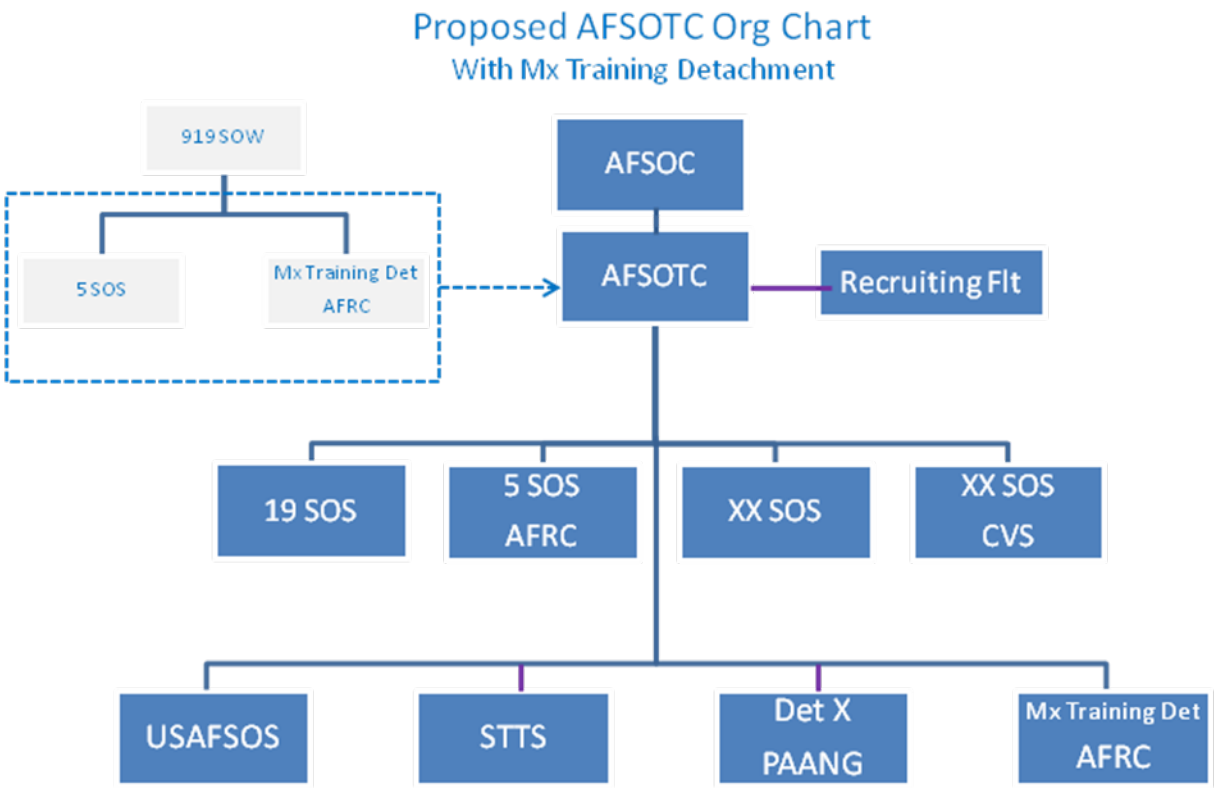
Determining how to resource 3-level top-off training in an organization that has no resident maintenance capability requires either a lot of funds or a lot of ingenuity; both would be helpful. Since the AFSOTC is directed to be resource neutral, an out of the box approach to resourcing must be taken. Resources would have to include personnel, equipment, and training devices. Of note, AFSOC recently purchased nine maintenance training devices and associated equipment for the Cannon AFB Field Training Detachment at a cost of $19.9M.[20] The cost of maintenance training devices could jeopardize the resource neutral requirement. There are two key points to remember when determining how to resource the AFSOTC to enable the center to take on 3-level maintenance top-off training. First, the effort should result in better trained 3-levels, and second, there must be no degradation in homestation or deployed maintenance

[20]MSgt Maurice Plummer, chief, Detachment 17, 317 TRS, Cannon AFB, NM. To the author: E-Mail, 2 December 2009.

productivity; ideally, productivity at homestation and deployed locations would increase. Can this be done in a resource neutral environment?

This can be done, but would require a cooperative Total Force Initiative. By using the resources (both maintenance expertise and equipment) resident in the 919th Maintenance Group (AFRC) at Duke Field, FL in concert with the 1SOMXG and AFSOTC, a workable solution is possible. With the retirement of the 919 SOW's MC-130E fleet, it makes sense to capitalize on the special operations maintenance expertise that will be left behind.

In order for the AFSOTC to provide maintenance training, it will need qualified maintainers to serve as training instructors and it will need equipment and training devices to train the 3-levels. The MC-130E maintainers in the 919MXG are qualified to train 3-levels on the majority of the tasks outlined in the recommended maintenance task listing. Some minor familiarization training will be required to qualify the instructors on the weapons system variations in AFSOC. Under this concept, the 919 MXG would take lead the AFSOTC 3-level maintenance top-off training at Duke Field. The following organizational structure for AFSOTC is recommended:



The cost of new training devices and equipment is not likely supportable, and is not necessary to train the 3-levels on the recommended tasks. Retaining one or more of the MC-130Es as ground trainers after their retirement would meet the majority of the aircraft training device needs while significantly reducing the costs associated with acquiring new devices. Additionally, reserving some of the Aerospace Ground Equipment owned by the 919MXG would provide a trainer for the majority of the ground equipment tasks. The shortfall with regards to aircraft trainers is the lack of specific aircraft types at Duke Field (MC-130H, CV-22, AC-130H/U, MC-130P). The tasks that require hands-on training on specific aircraft are minimal and can be accomplished by scheduling aircraft for that purpose at Hurlburt or Eglin.

In addition to capitalizing on the 919MXG expertise for 3-level training, there is an opportunity to enhance the maintenance training and productivity of the AFSOC units as well.

In conjunction with the MC-130E retirement and stand up of the AFSOTC 3-level maintenance training, it would be useful to embed 919MXG maintainers in AFSOC maintenance units at Hurlburt and Eglin. Their expertise will be of value in training beyond the 3-level stage and will benefit the day to day productivity in the operational maintenance organizations. This association would be a win for the nation as the special operations maintenance expertise from the reserve forces would be utilized where needed.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

AFSOC should incorporate 3-level aircraft maintenance top-off training into the AFSOTC if and only if two important results can be achieved. First, the 3-level training provided by AFSOTC should be better than the current training received. Second, there can be no degradation in maintenance production at homestation or at deployed locations as a result of the transfer of training responsibility. It is possible for AFSOTC to assume 3-level aircraft maintenance top-off training for the entire command, and efforts to develop a detailed roadmap should be accomplished.

Top-off training is important to the maintenance community throughout the Air Force. It is the process that can render new 3-level maintainers productive in their organizations without having to wait for them to complete 5-level upgrade training. Current Air Force instruction requires each MAJCOM to provide hands on maintenance qualification training to new 3-levels but does not provide specific, detailed guidance. Air Mobility Command has formalized their program and developed a solid list of specific OJT tasks for 3-level maintainers to accomplish. The special operations maintenance group at Hurlburt Field is testing a formal 3-level training program that may be exportable throughout the MAJCOM if the benefits are deemed greater than the costs. Of note, aircraft maintenance organizations are not provided manpower to accomplish top-off training; the resources come ‘out of hide’. The high ops tempo, low manning, and diminished experience levels in the aircraft maintenance communities present challenges in balancing quality training for 3-levels and sustaining safe, successful aircraft generation.

Moving responsibility for 3-level training to AFSOTC can help the maintenance community focus on maintenance productivity. The AFSOTC exists to 'let trainers train, and to let warfighters fight'. However, as a resource neutral organization, AFSOTC does not have excess resources to tackle new responsibilities. With out of the box initiatives, AFSOTC can tackle the task of leading the charge for 3-level maintenance top-off training.

Embracing a Total Force Initiative with the 919th Maintenance Group can result in resource sharing necessary to move the maintenance training to AFSOTC. The MC-130E aircraft flown by the 919th Special Operations Wing are scheduled for retirement, creating an opportunity to take advantage of potential excess special operations maintenance expertise and aircraft. A cooperative arrangement should be secured with an AFRC to create maintenance detachment at Duke Field, FL associated with AFSOTC. This training detachment would utilize 919MXG maintenance experts to provide 3-level top-off training for all special operations maintainers. Use of retired MC-130Es as ground trainers and Aerospace Ground Equipment owned by the 919MXG would enable hands on training to accomplish the majority of the training tasks. In addition, the cooperative agreement should include embedding maintenance experts from the 919MXG in the special operations maintenance organizations at Hurlburt Fld, and Eglin AFB to enhance training and day to day operations in the active duty maintenance organizations.

There is truly a need to improve maintenance 3-level top-off training. AFSOC has a golden opportunity to utilize the newly established Air Force Special Operations Training Center to take on this responsibility. If properly done, AFSOC can benefit from moving training to the AFSOTC. However, if proper resourcing cannot be secured, then the training should not be moved to the AFSOTC.

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