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# AFSOC ADOPTING A GLOBEMASTER VIEW

by

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**Abstract**

At present, AFSOC lacks a heavy airlift capability to support special operations warriors. The author seeks to determine the most effective means to expeditiously transport special operations troops and equipment by examining the current process, interviewing several key AMC and AFSOC individuals, and developing long held beliefs. The current arrangement relies on support by Air Mobility Command to supply aircraft and aircrews to USSOCOM units for direct support. This approach is flawed in two fashions. First, these AMC aircrews are restricted by conventional AMC regulations and command and control procedures. This creates a lack of experience and knowledge base within special operations units and AMC for effective decision making and control. Secondly, AFSOC should maintain complete control of all special operations airlift for greater mission focus amongst the aircrew and better decision making at leadership levels. Ultimately, while moving AMC's special operations support mission to AFSOC would provide greater special operations support, the convenience of the status quo makes such a move prohibitive.

## Chapter 1

### Scenario #1

### July 2010, South Africa

Tensions are high at Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) Headquarters. The compound, located on Fort Bragg, NC, is buzzing with commotion as intelligence has determined that a nuclear device has been smuggled into Johannesburg, South Africa prior to the World Cup. United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is charged with finding and defusing the loose WMD, but the equipment needed for the mission is outsized and sitting over 7,000 miles away on America soil. Air Force Special Operations Command-assigned C-130 aircraft are incapable of airlifting the needed massive classified nuclear detector to the country due to size limitations, so USSOCOM seeks airlift assistance from the military's logistics provider, United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM). According to intelligence, the radiological detector is needed in place within 24 hours to prevent the attack. Due to the sensitivity of the equipment, USSOCOM does not disclose what the equipment is or the requisite urgency to USTRANSCOM. TRANSCOM's automated priority system fails to account for the equipment's importance, and relegates it to a delivery in 96 hours due to mobility's high operations tempo. The necessary equipment and supporting personnel arrive too late to intervene, and the terrorists secure another victory for their cause.

### Scenario #2

### Charleston AFB, SC

### August, 2010

Terrorists have seized a cruise ship transiting the Mediterranean Sea and are threatening to kill all western passengers. A C-17 Special Operations Low Level (SOLL) II crew is

awakened by the ringing of pagers at 0213 in their alert dorm. By 0218, the crew has assembled and is hurriedly gathering information about their mission. Performing an alert start of the aircraft, the massive C-17 is taxiing out for takeoff by 0229, and departs on a predetermined route by 0233 to pick up US special operators and equipment. The aircraft arrives at the planned location, efficiently onloads the operators and equipment, and quickly departs. Once airborne, the crew communicates with home-station planners and command and control to plan an insertion of the special operators at the scene. Eight hours later, the aircraft is nearing French airspace, and the aircrew is alerted to a malfunction of their navigation equipment. Due to exhaustive training and "homegrown" procedures, the crew overcomes the degraded condition and continues the mission. The crew contacts their Standardization and Evaluation (Stan/Eval) representative for waiver approval to operate and conduct airdrops under such equipment-degraded conditions. The Charleston Stan/Eval representative informs the "on call" Air Mobility Command (AMC) C-17 Stan/Eval officer, explains the malfunction, and requests a waiver to normal AMC procedures to continue the airdrop. The AMC on-call representative has no SOLL II training, and is unfamiliar with operations under such conditions. His prior experiences, and the governing regulations, dictate the malfunction as a mission-limiting critical failure to the aircraft component. Due to the lack of familiarity, the representative recommends a denial of the waiver request to the TACC/CC. Also lacking a SOLL II background, the Tanker Airlift Control Center (TACC) commander denies the waiver to continue the mission in a degraded condition, and the crew diverts to Ramstein AB for landing. The required transload of personnel and equipment cost four valuable hours, when minutes equate to life or death. AMC and TACC's hesitancy for risk, and ignorance of SOLL II procedures, has cost 54 American lives aboard the ship.

## Reality

Both scenarios are fictitious, however both are capable of occurring in the current arrangement that exists between AMC and the C-17 Special Operations community.

The first scenario depicts the lack of organic heavy airlift within USSOCOM and its air component, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), to accomplish these missions. The example indicates the problems which may occur with miscommunication and a lack of understanding under the current arrangement for heavy special operations airlift.

The second scenario exposes shortfalls in the present command and control structure for heavy lift special operations personnel. It details the existing disconnect between C-17 SOLL II operations and the conventional-minded bureaucracy of AMC and TACC.

## Problem

Currently, AFSOC utilizes several C-130 variants as the primary lift capacity for special operations troops and cargo. These aircraft execute AFSOC's mission of being "America's specialized airpower…a step ahead in a changing world, delivering Special Operations power anytime, anywhere."[1] While the C-130 platform is a reliable and proven asset within AFSOC, it is hampered by age and airframe restrictions. AFSOC utilizes the MC-130H Combat Talon II to "provide infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply of special operations forces and equipment in hostile or denied territory."[2] These aircrew execute their demanding mission by utilizing "terrain following and terrain avoidance radars capable of operations as low as 250 feet in adverse weather conditions."[3] This unique mission is executed by well trained aircrew, solely trained for this mission. The MC-130H has a top speed of 300 mph, can carry 52 paratroopers, and has a range of 2,700 NM without air refueling, but can be unlimited with air refueling.[4] The maximum takeoff weight of a Talon II is 155,000 pounds.[5] The Talon II is a solid special operations

platform, but special operators are cautioned that "the Combat Talon is not a rapid response force" and that "missions deep into heavily defended enemy territory require extensive preflight planning."[6] The Talon II aircraft are primarily intratheater aircraft, and lack capability to insert special operations forces from outside the theater in a timely manner. If AFSOC seeks to be proactive in countering worldwide threats to the United States, it unfortunately is limiting itself to an airframe of degraded or limited performance. AFSOC needs a different type of airlift platform to support the warfighter.

The current arrangement does not allow special operations the ability to meet certain specific objectives, clashing directly with Air Force doctrine. United States Air Force Doctrine for Air Mobility Operations, AFDD 2-6, states "airlift used in a special operations role provides commanders the capability to achieve specific objectives that may not be attainable through more conventional airlift practices."[7] Presently, Air Force airlift of special operations is sourced through two MAJCOMs, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) and Air Mobility Command (AMC). While much of the special operations airlift capacity can be found within AFSOC, there exists no heavy lift capacity with dedicated OPCON to the command. This airlift resides within Air Mobility Command's C-17 SOLL II aircraft stationed at Charleston AFB, South Carolina. Currently, these aircraft and aircrew support USSOCOM forces in a relatively loose, ad hoc relationship, allowing some flexibility but creating great obstacles to effective execution and management of a critical mission. The OPCON of these forces rest in AMC, with AFSOC (and USSOCOM) possessing no control of the heavy lift, direct delivery capacity which the C-17 offers.

While primarily designed as a conventional airlift and airdrop platform, some C-17s are also being employed in a special operations capacity. SOLL II qualified aircrews augment

AFSOC assets to execute covert/clandestine missions of special operations forces. These AMC-dedicated aircraft and selectively-manned C-17 aircrews routinely train and operate with AFSOC and special operations units. SOLL II's combat role is to "conduct clandestine formation or single-ship intrusion of hostile territory to provide highly reliable, self-contained, precision airdrop/airland of personnel and equipment."[8] SOLL II C-17s use additional equipment on such missions allowing the Ground Forces Commander (GFC) and Airborne Mission Commander (AMC) greater communications capacity and battlespace intelligence. While these C-17s are not presently equipped with the MC-130's terrain following or avoidance radar capability, they execute many of the same missions. In preparation, SOLL II aircrews continually train, honing tactics and procedures to execute the special operations support mission. One principle of SOLL II is the constant Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)-directed alert to deploy and support special operations forces with world-wide capability at a moment's notice. The alert ready aircrew train for and adopt a "no fail mission" mentality when supporting special operations, and their performance reflects such.

Unfortunately, the current arrangement between USSOCOM and AMC with regard to the C-17 SOLL II mission has two primary problems. The first, and most dangerous, is that there exists a potential for a failure to support the user during mission execution and training. The second, more insipid shortfall, is the mismanagement of aircrews during the course of a career, limiting their ability as mission ready crewmembers. The result is a lacking experience level of personnel, creating a critical gap in the current structure of AMC support for special operations. Additionally, as C-17 aircrews mature into AMC leaders, if they are not exposed to the C-17 SOLL II, they will likely have a lack of understanding of the constraints, capabilities, and

challenges of the mission. These future leaders could have a deficit of understanding with regards to special operations airlift support.

Another complicating factor is that during mission execution, a SOLL II aircrew has a dual chain of command, running between JSOC and AMC. AMC and JSOC have arranged the command and control in a classified manner, but there is a lack of clarity regarding who makes the decisions. According to the current deputy director of SOLL II at Charleston, "right now we have our 'daddy' [JSOC] up north, AMC/A3DJ as our voice at AMC, [TACC] XOOS as our execution advocate, [AMC] A3V as our policy maker, AMC and TACC with their hands in our business all the time, and we wonder why nothing ever gets done or people don't use us."[9] Clearly, the dual chain of command is a source of frustration, confusion, and delay in crucial decisions. Additionally, command directives can become distorted, creating confusion to the aircrew and operator, with a greater chance of problems. The current command and control arrangement of C-17 SOLL II and the special operations mission is critically flawed.

Special operations forces cannot be guaranteed support of SOLL II because the aircraft and aircrews remain under the OPCON of the TACC. This Air Operations Center (AOC) for worldwide airlift and air refueling operations provides support using quantitative formulas and criteria, determining the priority of airlift allocation. While striving to be efficient in operations, this bureaucracy could inhibit and limit the effectiveness of counterterrorism and direct action support missions. The 437 OG Director of Special Capabilities states that the in SOLL II at Charleston "we struggle to generate five jets for MLATS [exercises with special operations] due to real world TWCF/OEF/OIF taskings," which come from TACC.[10] TACC's determination of which airlift requests receive support is confusing at best to aircrew and supporting commanders, but is the only system available to administer such a complex problem.

USAF doctrine in AFDD 2-6 clearly shows the pitfalls of such a system with regards to special operations. The doctrine states that "SOF units usually request support through the joint force special operations component commander (JFSOCC) and the special operations liaison element (SOLE) in the AOC. When SOF units require intratheater airlift in excess of available assets, or their airlift requirements exceed the capacity of assets in the theater, the JFSOCC or the SOLE in the AOC will coordinate appropriate support."[11] No guarantee exists that special operations forces will receive the required support. This is not efficient or effective usage of the AOC or SOF personnel or aircraft. This arrangement does not support America's premier warfighters with a constant, reliable method to get them and their equipment to the fight. The concentration of special operations heavy lift capability only within AMC and TACC also creates operational level complications.

Currently, these C-17 aircraft are controlled by AMC very tightly and Special Operations personnel have limited access to both static and flying training times. The frustration of lack of discretion for joint special operations training is felt at both the aircrew and operator level. The results are a lack of familiarity with the crews and aircraft due to limited training opportunities. One special operator remarks that "if you wanted to do something outside of the already scheduled bi-monthly training window…it was close to impossible to get a C-17."[12] In the opinion of the current 437th Deputy Director, the bureaucracy is so entrenched that "the Spec Ops community doesn't even ask to use us because it is a pain…to go through AMC."[13] The current arrangement breeds frustration and lack of understanding about the restrictions on Air Force crews amongst users. Generally, these highly specialized warriors have a much more restrictive training schedule and regimen than the aircrew supporting them. Such restrictions as

Crew Duty Day (CDD) limitations and aircrew rest considerations should be balanced against limited availability of users to train, by leaders with awareness of the user limitations.

While no glaring predicaments have emerged with the performance of the C-17 SOLL II aircrews in conducting their mission, the success is primarily due to herculean efforts by aircrew, leadership, and support personnel. The C-17 SOLL II aircrew are managed and governed under the same regulations (AFI 11-2C-17, Volume 3) as all other C-17 aircrew.[14] These AMC-owned Air Force Instructions (AFIs) were created for operations of conventional forces, not for executing a no-fail mission. Using conventional regulations in execution of a clandestine mission could limit the aircrew and force critical decisions upon a mission or aircraft commander. One example of the underlying problems with the arrangement is the method of waiver protocol. Waivers constitute a higher headquarters approval to disregard a rule. If a C-17 SOLL II aircrew needs a waiver for CDD to execute a mission (while in execution), they are required to get approval from the "MAJCOM/A3/DO with mission execution authority for active duty, AFRC, or ANG units flying MAJCOM-directed missions."[15] The waiver request would flow from the aircrew, through 618th TACC, through AMC Standardization and Evaluation pilots and leadership, then to the AMC/A3. With the exception of the aircrew requesting the waiver, none of these steps would necessarily have SOLL II experience or detailed knowledge of the mission.[16] The insanity is palpable; particularly since there is no requirement for a SOLL II qualified pilot to recommend a course of action to the commander charged with granting/denying the waiver.

As detailed earlier, one of the most vexing problems for a SOLL II crewmember is to determine who is in charge during the course of a mission. Many of the details of this arrangement are classified, however what it comes down to is a "just make it work" mentality.

The aircraft commander reports to the mission commander, and they liaison with JSOC, TACC, and AMC to ensure air refueling, flight clearance, and enroute support of the mission. If any problems arise, as already alluded to, the waiver protocol is even more nebulous, with non-special operations qualified personnel making uninformed and potentially ill-advised decisions. While one of AMC and TACC's greatest capabilities is the command and control structure, it clearly can inhibit the conduct of a SOLL II mission.

There is a lack of focus and continuity within the C-17 SOLL II community on careers and training. The investment in training of an individual to become a mission qualified special operations pilot is enormous, yet AMC receives very little actual return on that training. To create a C-17 "leftseater" (SOLL II aircraft commander) takes approximately five years of grooming, training, and experience. Under the current arrangement, these aircrews are selected for airdrop training, then again selected to participate in the SOLL II program. A SOLL II "rightseater" (the first position assigned) is generally an aircraft commander, having completed copilot airdrop, which would generally be around the 1.5-2 year point for new pilots.[17] After another one to two years of seasoning and training, the individual upgrades to "jumpseat" (navigator-like position). This position is generally occupied by a C-17 instructor pilot and a graduate of aircraft commander airdrop course, taking 3.5 years to reach that milestone.[18] Lastly, after approximately another year of seasoning, experience, and additional training, the pilot upgrades to the "leftseat" position. Once fully qualified, these "leftseaters" not only execute the special operations mission at a tactical level, but they also form the instructor and examiner corps of the entire SOLL II force.

Additionally, at present, C-17 SOLL II crewmembers deploy with their associated squadron every 16 months. Enabling upgrades in a reduced timeline and the necessary retraining

after four months of AOR time results in a decreased combat ability for C-17 SOLL II. The product of this deployment cycle is a weaker cadre of leftseaters, because they do not get enough training time at previous crew positions.[19] The current AMC deployment cycle is inefficient with respect to the 437th OGS (SOLL II) because it uses highly qualified SOLL II members to fly primarily airland conventional missions. The result is that upon returning to Charleston at the conclusion of the deployment, many SOLL II currency events must be accomplished in order to sit the alert and be current for a SOLL II mission. This retraining takes an additional 2 weeks to accomplish.[20] All of this is in addition to the constant upgrade requirements, limiting overall training for the unit as a whole.

The sum of this time, training, and monetary investment to produce a qualified SOLL II aircraft commander is often wasted. Once fully leftseat-qualified, these highly trained SOLL II pilots historically remain on station for only a year to year and a half, and then are reassigned to the needs of the USAF. In general, when an initial tour in SOLL II is complete, most aircrew does not return to the SOLL II program in any capacity, and the training investment and experience is lost. While there is little investment return directly to Air Mobility Command, the experienced gained within the mission is important. Many of these will go on to other positions in Air Mobility Command as staff personnel, Directors of Operations, and Commanders. To date, only four previous C-17 "leftseaters" have returned to SOLL II out of the 102 qualified.[21] This is a pittance on the extensive investment that AMC has made. AMC may be tempted not to surrender its most highly trained, experienced, and qualified C-17 personnel to another MAJCOM.

Not only are SOLL II aircrew in an imperfect situation, but the airframes and maintenance support are in a similarly flawed arrangement under AMC. Currently, C-17 SOLL

II aircraft must be modified for their mission with "Roll-on, Roll-off" equipment, and maintenance must return the aircraft to the basic configuration after completion of the mission. The AMC/A4 "has a vision of a homogeneous C-17 fleet and doesn't want 'special' C-17s here and there."[22] The result is that SOLL II at Charleston cannot "permanently mod[ify] the jets with anything that would benefit us" according to the 437th OGS Deputy Director.[23] Maintenance personnel are thus tasked with an increased workload in modifying/demodifying the aircraft with suboptimal, temporary equipment for the mission. Equipment which is permanent on the aircraft would be of higher quality, exhibit better performance, and be less likely to break due to constant adjustments. Such an arrangement creates additional workload and logistical restrictions on the aircraft.

The current arrangement for SOLL II dictates that AMC and TRANSCOM control the aircraft and aircrews. However, if SOLL II were controlled by AFSOC, multiple operational and training difficulties would be eliminated, resulting in better support of USSOCOM in executing America's counter-terrorism fight. The special operations airlift mission currently executed by AMC, C-17 SOLL II, should be transferred to AFSOC to enable smoother execution. AFSOC clearly needs the mission sets possessed by the C-17, but there is a resistance to fully integrate the C-17 into the MAJCOM. AFSOC should aggressively seek ownership and full OPCON of the C-17 SOLL mission and heavy lift capabilities to best support the special operations warfighter.

## The Solution

The Air Force can fix these problems. It can elect to make a decision which enhances special operations forces support and ensures C-17 SOLL II aircrew experience is not wasted. Moving the C-17 SOLL II mission to AFSOC will allow a guarantee of user support with heavy lift assets by highly experienced C-17 SOLL II aircrews. With SOLL II resident in AFSOC, aircrew careers can be fostered, and synergies gained, by utilizing the gathered experience of previous SOLL II personnel. The payoff will be in allowing AFSOC to harness a corps of experienced C-17 special operators.

Supplying these aircraft to AFSOC will have to come from somewhere. When C-17 SOLL II was established at Charleston AFB, it was during a period of limited inventory of C-17s and AMC lift capacity. Since then, the C-17 fleet has dramatically grown and is at full operational capacity within the USAF. In presenting an overview of his command to ACSC AY10 students, then AMC Commander, General Lichte, indicated that he was unsure of where he would put ten more C-17 aircraft, or how they would be utilized.[24] Air Force Secretary Michael Donley added in February 2010 that "we have more strategic airlift tails than we need."[25] These "unneeded" ten C-17 aircraft present an excellent opportunity for AFSOC to adopt C-17s and the SOLL II mission. For relevant examples, AFSOC can study how other MAJCOMs, such as PACAF, AFMC, AFRC, AETC, and the NGB, incorporated the C-17 into their operations, and maintained a relationship with the lead MAJCOM of AMC.[26] These sister MAJCOMs can provide a lessons learned approach to integration of a new airframe, personnel, and asset to AFSOC. The creation of a MOA mirroring that of PACAF with AMC would solve many problems with regard to the relationship of the two MAJCOMs.[27] This arrangement will ensure optimum use of both aircrew and aircraft in the MAJCOMs.

The C-17 can provide AFSOC with expanded utility and capabilities to enable the MAJCOM to fully support the special operations force. AFDD 2-6 boasts that "direct delivery is normally an intertheater flight that bypasses en route stops by airlifting personnel and materiel from the aerial port of embarkation (APOE) directly to forward operating bases (FOBs) within a theater."[28] The C-17 airframe is a heavy lift strategic aircraft capable of global direct delivery, which also possesses many tactical airlift efficacies. C-17s are capable of 450 knots (.76 Mach), has global range with air refueling, and can carry 102 paratroopers or 170,900 pounds of cargo.[29] Note that the maximum cargo weight of the C-17A is greater than the maximum gross weight of a MC-130H aircraft. Equally impressive, this aircraft can operate from "small, austere airfields" and "takeoff and land on runways as short as 3,500 feet."[30] Throughout many trials, the C-17 has proven itself as a steadfast airlifter. Originally developed with a sizeable price tag (approximately $300 million each), it was doubted that C-17s would be used in a hostile, tactical environment. However, events since have repeatedly proven the C-17 as a staunch asset in such spartan locations. Most recently during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the C-17 has proven itself as a workhorse in providing key logistical support directly to the warfighter.

With AFSOC ownership of C-17s, the MAJCOM would now be able to truly follow the AFDD 2-7 Special Operations doctrine. According to this document, "the AFSOF mobility mission area includes the rapid global airlift of personnel and equipment through hostile airspace to conduct operations and to enable air mobility across the spectrum of conflict."[31] AFSOC would possess an organic heavy lift component to move forces and equipment globally in hours, not days. This heavy airlift force within AFSOC would allow for greater cooperation, training, and compatibility across all aircrews and special operations users. Presently tied to the use of multiple airframes and coordination tolerances, special operations missions are restricted by the

least capable aircraft in the operation. Some additional classified restrictions in executing SOF missions due to mixed-airframes would also be alleviated if the mission was solely executed by C-17s. With these barriers removed, mission capabilities would expand with an AFSOC-integrated C-17 force executing independent of other airframes.

Should AFSOC adopt C-17s into the fleet, an important determination would be the control of the SOLL II mission. With ownership (OPCON, TACON, and ADCON) of SOLL II, AFSOC could dictate training time, waiver process, and what units are supported without the "middle man" of TRANSCOM and AMC. The repetitive training by unchanging aircrews would breed greater connection and familiarity between the special operations troops and the aircrew that fly them. Relationship building between units and capabilities can only enhance mission performance in demanding environments, such as covert/clandestine operations. While there is currently some limited interaction, a closer relationship between the customer and aircrew would eliminate many cultural barriers that currently exist between special operations troops and heavy lift airland and airdrop aircrews. Another byproduct of the new arrangement would be additional secrecy and operations security, with fewer outside agencies being affected or involved.

If these aircraft and aircrews were to be AFSOC assets, they would be restricted solely by HQAF and AFSOC-generated AFIs. AFSOC would change the crew duty day and other waiver protocols to flow to an AFSOC Director of Operations (A3), not an AMC or TACC general who may not fully comprehend the mission or requirements. Additionally, because AFSOC's sole focus is support of the special operations warfighter, they possess a more liberal, mission focused approach than AMC. The perception is that AFSOC aircrews have much more "leeway in how to make it happen" and greater discretion with regard to regulations than AMC

aircrews.[32] Such discretion would free C-17 SOLL II leaders and aircrews from the current decentralized command arrangement, and create an informed, unified command within the special operations airlift community.

Another effect of incorporating the SOLL II mission into AFSOC is the impact upon on the MC-130 world. AFSOC SOLL II C-17s would assume many of the traditional MC-130 roles, and the Talon aircraft would be freed for employment in more specialized SOF missions. These include limited air resupply missions of an ODA team in a Troops in Contact (TIC) situation, helicopter air refueling, or IADS counter tactics missions.[33] The smaller C-130 airframe is better suited for these limited situations than the massive C-17. This shift of aircraft would essentially expand the MC-130's training and capabilities in these missions, and become a greater asset to special operations.

Many operational level details must be resolved prior to AFSOC conducting the C-17 SOLL II mission. The first major detail would be to decide who would pay for the transition of operations. The aircraft assigned to AFSOC would come from existing C-17s based at Charleston AFB and currently slated to support the SOLL II mission. These aircraft are some of the newest in the fleet, and possess communication, navigation, and equipment upgrades to the aircraft. This transfer of aircraft would be arranged through HQ USAF to mediate any differences between MAJCOMs. In exchange for these aircraft, other AMC C-17 bases would receive the 10 newest conventional C-17 aircraft from the Boeing factory. In contrast, the newly-assigned AFSOC C-17s would have to be modified with Terrain Following Radar, RWR, and additional communications equipment to support the missions previously designated for the MC-130. These permanent aircraft modifications would require additional training time for the C-17 SOLL II aircrews for familiarity and expertise with the equipment. AFSOC would also

agree to maintenance support by AMC, using a MOA between USSOCOM and TRANSCOM, which would mirror PACOM and TRANSCOM's arrangement.[34]

Ideally, the aircraft and aircrews of AFSOC C-17 SOLL II would be located close to the users and primary training partners. Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina, is the ideal location to situate the aircraft and mission, lying adjacent to Fort Bragg. Fort Bragg is home to JSOC and a large contingent of special operations personnel. This location would allow a quicker response time to the user, more familiarity between aircrews and the users, and the opportunity for increased joint training time. Additionally, the Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base currently possess airlift assets and considerable training airspace that could be used. Multiple drop zones and semi-prepared airfields are in close proximity for ideal training. Additionally, Charleston C-17's primary training location, North Auxiliary Airfield in North, South Carolina, is within 30 minutes flying time, and provides an ideal location for off-station training. However, locating the C-17 AFSOC unit at Pope AFB possesses some difficulties. The first, and most important, is a lack of current infrastructure to support the basing of C-17s at Pope. Creating the infrastructure necessary to support the C-17 SOLL II mission would require additional hangars, parking aprons, fuel pits, and maintenance facilities for the aircraft alone. The aircrew would require simulators, alert dormitories, a SCIF, and a squadron building to operate from. Without monetary restrictions, Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base provides the best location for C-17 SOLL operations.

Adding fiscal considerations to the location decision, Charleston AFB, SC may be a better home base for AFSOC-assigned C-17 SOLL II. Charleston AFB is already home to AMC's SOLL II contingent with aircrews, alert dorms, maintenance facilities, and simulators. An AFSOC C-17 SOLL II contingent as a tenant unit on an AMC base would require some

coordination between the MAJCOMs and base personnel, but these details can be worked out. While not collocated with the primary users of the SOLL aircraft, Charleston is merely a half-hour flight away from JSOC HQ and Fort Bragg, adding less than an hour to crew duty day limitations for any mission. Further positive synergies can be realized from the ensuing crosstalk between aircrews of two different MAJCOMs. This would allow enhanced mission focus and greater use of shared experience in both. With basing arrangement determined, the next issue is the organization and training of aircrews.

With a dedicated fleet of aircraft and aircrews, AFSOC would be able to enhance SOLL II with more stringent training. A more robust selection criteria and internal training would emerge to continually sharpen the required skill sets. These AFSOC aircrews would be shielded from the hectic, erratic scheduling and mission management of TACC. Instead, the selectively-manned AFSOC C-17 unit would be allowed to hone their skills in training strictly for execution of the SOLL II mission. When not training or being utilized by AFSOC, these aircraft and aircrews could augment AMC missions just as PACOM C-17s do.[35] These few conventional airlift missions would allow increased worldwide experience and additional training for junior crewmembers. However, these missions would be a tertiary responsibility, with the primary focus of SOLL II to be training and execution of the special operation mission.

As detailed, less than 4% of previous SOLL II "leftseaters" have returned in any capacity to AMC C-17 SOLL II, and they only return in a leadership position. These returning individuals have limited opportunities to fly the SOLL II mission and influence aircrew training.[36] If C-17 SOLL II were absorbed through AFSOC, there would be a greater return and flow of personnel back to the special operations unit. AFSOC (through AFPC) would be able to select previous aircraft commanders to return to fly after career broadening assignment or

developmental education. Currently, the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) codes AFSOC assigned pilots with an 11S code, allowing careers to be directed by the special operations functional.[37] Adding this code to C-17 SOLL II aircrews would allow for a greater career control of these highly trained individuals, and allow for a smoother career progression within AFSOC. The result would be a return of highly qualified experience back to the SOLL II unit. Ultimately, a reduction in training and upgrade requirements would occur, lessening the time to generate aircrews.

Another benefit of AFPC coding of SOLL II aircrew would allow for seasoning and a mix of varied combat and training experiences within the crewforce. Lessons learned from previous operations would be emphasized, rather than how they are presently discarded and underutilized. This more pronounced mixture of personnel within SOLL II would also foster improved relationships between users and aircrew. With AFSOC adding the SOLL II mission, the only method to maintain consistency and capability would be to fully absorb and incorporate the current AMC SOLL II aircrews into the new MAJCOM. These crews should be given a choice whether or not they want to remain in AMC or move with the SOLL II mission to AFSOC. A two year implementation/transition period would allow those that did not want their careers managed by another MAJCOM to get out of the program. A separate facet of organizing AFSOC's newest mission would be incorporating personnel for present AFSOC airframes (MC-130, MC-12, etc.) into the C-17 SOLL II mission. AFSOC would need to start sending aircrews to C-17 initial training and blend into the C-17 SOLL II world. This melding of experience and training could only aid the conduct of a mission, and support of special operations.

Being a new "stepchild" to AFSOC, particularly one that is geographically separated from the command structure, could be a detriment to career progression of SOLL II pilots. They

would own a non-traditional AFSOC career path, and tensions may develop within the new MAJCOM. Upon AFSOC's full ownership of C-17 SOLL II, it is important that the careers and upgrades of those C-17 aircrews are managed in a positive manner. AFSOC will need an O-6 level officer to represent the newly adopted mission and aircrews to ensure that their careers are shepherded. This leader would be in a position to advocate for promotion, staff opportunities, and developmental education opportunities. Eventually, SOLL II will become mainstream within AFSOC, and advocated for at the highest levels based on performance. It would be imperative that this new mission is assimilated into AFSOC, and not left as a compartmentalized subarea of AFSOC.

If AFSOC were to add C-17s and the SOLL II mission to their fleet, training of aircrews would also be emphasized as well. A greater emphasis would be on relevant currency events, rather than AMC-based standard training events. The focus would be on training events that are applicable to the SOLL II mission. No longer would crews be forced to keep currency on mainstream AMC events, such as day low levels, day assault landing, and traditional formation training events, but could focus on relevant training events.[38] AFSOC ownership would also reduce breaks in training caused by underutilizing deployments. Rather, AFSOC SOLL II crews could augment the current AEF deployment cycles for real world and real time utilization. Two crews and one aircraft could forward deploy to augment AMC deployments and as a resource for "on-call" missions. These highly trained crews would be used as rapid reaction airlift and airdrop for clandestine mission sets supporting JSOC. The forward deployed SOLL II crew would also conduct any training opportunity that exists for interface with the users and support their needs, reducing retraining for currency upon return to homestation.

For AFSOC to completely administer the SOLL II mission, AFSOC C-17s would require some equipment augmentation. The current temporary navigation and communications equipment which is added for the SOLL II mission would become a permanent fixture aboard AFSOC C-17s. These permanent modifications to AFSOC C-17s would also reduce the repetitive maintenance workload of installing and uninstalling the equipment aboard the aircraft. Modifications to the aircraft would be approved by AFSOC test and evaluation channels, and not by the homogenous fleet-fixed AMC.[39] The modifications would allow greater discretion and input from the special operations community than what currently occurs with AMC C-17s. The result would be a less stringent, more responsive approval process for new equipment. This would allow direct special operations support with the newest, most advanced technology while enroute to their mission location. Ultimately, the result would be a greater warfighting capability for the United States military.

The needed medications to AFSOC C-17s would consist of some capabilities resident in the current MC-130 fleet. The addition of the Combat Talon's Terrain Following/Terrain Avoidance Radar (TF/TA), Precision Ground Mapping (PGM) Radar, Electronic Countermeasures (ECM), and Infrared Countermeasures (IRCM) would prove invaluable to SOLL II C-17s.[40] Amongst these, the addition of the TF/TA Radar would be the most significant modification, allowing the C-17 to fully execute the demanding special operations mission.[41] These modifications would permit C-17 SOLL aircrews to operate with an all-weather capability in a higher threat area than at present time. Aircrew would train exclusively on this equipment, and not fly other C-17s outside of AFSOC. The training, and modifications, would make the C-17 a truly effective special operations platform. Lastly, the costs of aircraft modifications and

associated aircrew and maintenance training required to support this equipment would be sizeable, and should be addressed.

Initially, there would be a far greater "startup" costs to arranging these aircraft and mission to AFSOC. This action would generate a significant increase in Operations and Maintenance (O&M) costs for AFSOC to absorb. Predictably, AFSOC would be reluctant to accept these additional costs. HQ USAF would need to reallocate funds within the budgeting process, moving capital from AMC to AFSOC. As mentioned, some of these costs would be minimized by stationing the AFSOC C-17s at Charleston AFB. In addition to the shared use of "backshop" maintenance personnel, logistical personnel and equipment, and base operations support would be shared. Historically, this has been done at PACAF and USAFE locations where the AFSOC unit is a tenant of the hosting MAJCOM. The host unit, AMC, would provide the personnel for these tasks, however repair and replacement costs would be charged to the aircraft owning MAJCOM.[42] This last large hurdle of maintaining the aircraft and funding operations should pave the way for AFSOC to incorporate C-17s and SOLL II into their MAJCOM.

## Why It Won't Happen

Unfortunately, without an acknowledgement that a problem exists, there is a natural reluctance to work on a solution. According to Mr. Ralph Van Wagner, a retired USAF Colonel and current analyst for AMC special operations, there has never been a shortfall by AMC in direct support of special operations lift by the SOLL unit at Charleston.[43] This is undoubtedly due to the massive individual efforts to overcome a corrupted system. Mr. Van Wagner proposes that "in execution, AMC realizes that they will have to break glass when necessary to meet SOLL II requirements. AMC's crisis response procedures acknowledge the importance of the

mission and the JCS priority assures support."[44] This is the equivalent of a "handshake agreement" between AMC and JSOC for special operations airlift support of missions. Since history has thus far proven AMC good to its promise, and there has never been a glaring lack of support, no widespread call to change or adjust anything concerning the special operations mission has arisen.

There are additional reasons why the SOLL II mission will not leave AMC. AMC does not want to lose the prestige of conducting such an important mission. IT is a "feather in the cap" of AMC and Charleston AFB leaders to administer such a high visibility mission. SOLL II provides AMC leadership with a vivid example of how they are directly supporting the National Command Authority's (NCA) anti-terrorism campaign. Additionally, there is no reason for AFSOC to desire an additional airframe and its associated personnel. A former AFSOC staff officer and veteran of SOLL II, Lt. Col. (retired) Marion Gravely, questions "why would AFSOC want the headache of another airframe?"[45] His point is that AFSOC already receives the benefits of the C-17 without having the responsibility for their personnel or the associated operations and maintenance costs. The result is a lack of a push or pull at the General officer level from either MAJCOM, and may translate simply to "if it ain't broke, don't fix it".

The current status quo with C-17 SOLL II in AMC does provide some advantages that would be absent if a change were to happen to AFSOC. Airlift is a vital military requirement, and no organizations are better suited to allocate airlift assets than AMC and TACC. While it is far from perfect, these organizations provide unmatched global support of airlift missions. TACC is considered a huge asset by senior leadership with its ability for command and control, scheduling diplomatic clearance support, logistical support, and flight planning.[46] Additionally, having the SOLL II mission internal to AMC allows the clandestine mission to "hide in plain

sight" by using standard AMC aircraft. A Charleston C-17 on the ramp in a foreign country raises minimal suspicion, whereas an AFSOC aircraft may be conspicuous.[47] Lastly, if AFSOC were to adopt C-17s and the SOLL II mission, it would be tempting for the MAJCOM to use the aircraft as a general strategic lift capability for all of AFSOC. This would amount to AFSOC C-17s essentially "trash hauling" for missions which TACC relegates as too low a priority to support. If this were to occur, AFSOC C-17s would only be minimally used for their designed special operations mission.[48] Another consideration is the careers of the aircrews which execute SOLL II.

The current arrangement for SOLL II is a positive to the manning and experience resident in AMC. Many current AMC leaders at all levels (AMC staff, squadron commanders, directors of operation) have been members of SOLL II at one point in their career. SOLL II exposure and training opportunities provided these individuals with experience broadening, and joint force interaction, while remaining within AMC. The result has been that these individuals have formed a core group of evaluators and instructors with extensive experience. This group has become the backbone of Charleston and AMC C-17 training, guaranteeing their experiences are passed down to future aircrews. This resource is well known amongst commanders, and they would protest the idea of relinquishing their training core to another MAJCOM.

## Conclusion

Tweaks and changes can be made internally to AMC to ensure more adequate support of the special operations mission. The first is a requirement for a current and qualified SOLL II evaluator pilot position in AMC/A3V (AMC Standardization and Evaluation). This pilot would be a direct interface between the SOLL unit at Charleston and the AMC and TACC commanders at Scott AFB, IL. Additionally, this SOLL representative will be an advocate on the AMC staff

for budgeting, training, and aircraft modifications. This representative could coordinate modifications of existing AFIs to provide better support to the SOLL II and special operations community. Presently, this is a huge void within the AMC.

Next, there should be an emphasis on returning prior SOLL qualified personnel to those roles, adding experience and shortening the learning curve necessary to create a fully qualified SOLL crewmember. AFPC should modify the personnel system to include a code for prior qualification of Special Operations C-17 force. If requested by the individuals, and needed by the unit, these personnel can then return to Charleston as a SOLL crewmember. This would ensure greater continuity and consistency within the Special Operations division, along with reduced upgrade time, to create a fully qualified aircrew. Lastly, AMC/A4 should allow permanent modification of dedicated SOLL II aircraft to enhance mission capabilities and effectiveness for special operators. These provisional tweaks to the current system can bring AMC and TACC closer to full, direct support of special operators.

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