

*Brothers in Berets: The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics, 1953–2003* by Forrest L. Marion. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2018.

Forrest Marion has produced a very useful picture of the development of Air Force Special Tactics, especially from the invasion of Panama through 2003. His book is entitled *Brothers in Berets: The Evolution of Air Force Special Tactics, 1953–2003*. The narrative is organized chronologically, beginning with the American airborne operations in the Mediterranean in 1943 and concluding in May of 2003. The first chapter, coauthored with Jeff Sahaida, deals with the beginnings of the combat control concept with the Airborne Pathfinders in operations in the Mediterranean, Operation Overlord, and Operation Market Garden. The rest of the chapter deals with Army–Air Force efforts to come to mutually acceptable concepts of drop zone control and defense, creation of the Air Force combat control (CC) concept; the creation and training of combat control teams (CCT); and biographical sketches of CC pioneers.

The next three chapters deal with the development of CC in the decade before deep involvement of US forces in Southeast Asia (SEA), CC in SEA to 1975 (with biographies), and developments in CC in the post–SEA development of US counterterrorism forces to 1981. The next chapters deal with Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada and the beginnings of Air Force Special Tactics (AFST), Operation Just Cause in Panama, the evolution of AFST and deployments to Southwest Asia (including Operation Eagle Claw); and AFST in Somalia. Chapter nine deals with AFST in the period 1993–99, including Operation Deliberate Force, and chapter 10 focuses on the period 1999–2003. The last chapter is an epilogue, extending to 2007.

Dr. Marion is the oral historian at the Air Force’s archive, the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) at Maxwell Air Force Base, AL. His work is based largely on AFHRA’s holdings that include an extensive oral history collection. He has also relied on the archival holdings of the Air Force Special Operations Command history office and those of the United States Special Operations Command—both of which include oral histories. He has also used official Army sources. His choices of secondary sources are for the very large part exemplary, including oral and memoir materials. The choices of source materials make *Brothers in Berets* very special and an important part of the history of US Special Operations history.

The very bright parts of chapter four include the fact that it adds to the record of the story of Eagle Claw–Desert One and most especially to the story of Air Force–Marine Corps interoperations. The chapter provides an insightful depiction of career–field developments as well. Chapter five describes career–field progression issues for “snake eaters.” Chapter six is where Dr. Marion’s narrative takes off and adds to the record. Chapter seven begins to describe the new ST mission: “airfield seizure and counterterrorist operations.” He discusses career progression and jointness, explains the merger of pararescue with CC, and documents the drawdown of combat rescue. Other issues dealt with include Operation Desert Storm, jointness, combat search and rescue, the Scud hunt, and Operation Provide Comfort. The very best is chapter 8, which deals with Somalia. Dr. Marion includes a shrewd introduction that explains the history of and contradictory nature of Somali–Sufi anti-imperialism. The rest of the narrative is one of the best descriptions of Special Operations, particularly in Mogadishu, which includes participants’ firsthand narratives. The other things that stand out in the narrative are the explanations of the creation, development, and training of Air Force Special Operators. This material provides insight into how the Air Force produced the remarkable Airmen with the high degrees of competence and trustworthiness required in special operations with their Army, Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard counterparts.

There are complaints, however. Chapter one is particularly faulty. The experiences in Husky, Overlord, and Market-Garden nearly brought the whole idea of airborne operations to an end. Airborne was saved by its successes in the China–Burma–India (CBI) and Southwest Pacific theaters. The 187th and 303rd Airborne Infantry Regiments are notable in this regard—active in the Southwest Pacific in World War II and Korea. The Pathfinder concept was not explained. Path-

finder was a “precision” bombing technology developed by the British and adopted by the Army Air Forces. It centered on navigation. Pathfinder navigators and bombardiers would “find and mark” targets. Later developments included radio beacons and then radar. In the troop carrier context, pathfinders were airborne soldiers who were to “find and mark” drop zones (DZ) with lights or radio beacons and set up the primary defense of the DZ. The connection to later CCs is clear, but not in this work—CC function and mission should have been established here. Also, there is a dearth of discussion of contemporary (to World War II) airborne doctrine. What were the control systems for German *Fallschirmjäger* drop zones, how about British Commonwealth airborne divisions and their Special Air Service, or the incipient Soviet or Japanese airborne forces?

Chapter two is notable in a similar regard for omitting the failure of CC in the loss of five and injury of 137 paratroopers and near loss of the 101st Airborne Division’s commanding general, William Westmoreland, to high winds on the ground (this writer was present, but not for long). This event is what led to the combat weather (CW) specialties. Another omission is the developments in US Navy–Marine Corps tactical air control squadrons that had progressed from World War II. A lack of attention to the development of forward air control (FAC) in CBI in World War II weakens chapter three.

Chapter four is also notable for a lack of depth in the discussion of Army–Air Force friction with the development of Army Special Forces, Rangers, and especially Delta Force. It could have been noted that with the end of the conflict in SEA, the interservice rivalry in the US military was at its peak. Because of the interdependence between the Army and the Air Force, the conflict between them over command and control (C2) was especially piquant. The Air Force insisted on absolute C2 over anything to do with air, and the Army mistrusted because of experience. There was a missed opportunity in chapter four. The establishment of trust and common experience between Air Force CCTs and Army Rangers coincided with the AirLand Battle concept. The 1981 publication of the Army FM100-5 put the Soviets on notice that the Army and the Air Force would confront them with an integrated AirLand Battle at the Fulda Gap. Chapter five deals with the period 1981–87, including Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, the emergence of US Special Operations Command, USAF ST, and the incorporation of PJs into CCTs.

Chapter six is the beginning of Dr. Marion’s real story; he deals with Operation Just Cause in Panama 1989–90. Chapter seven covers the period 1986–92, including the end of the Cold War. The narrative begins to take off, discussing “airfield seizures and counterterrorist operations,” career progression, and jointness. Marion explains the merger of PJs with CC and the drawdown of combat rescue. CC, ST, and PJ missions become established. The discussions of Desert Storm, jointness, CSAR, and Scud hunts are based largely on interview material. The Provide Comfort material is illuminating. Chapter eight, ST in Somalia, 1993, is quite good, again for the interview material that Dr. Marion provides but also for a very useful summary of Somali history. The chapter concludes with more about the fusion of PJs with CCTs.

Chapter nine covers 1993–99. The story of AFSOC consolidation is here. Elevation of PJ skills and their importance and relative equivalence to Army SF 18-deltas. There are problems here—the extended discussion of SEA pararescue seems to be out of place, and that of CW should have begun in chapter four and carried through the narrative. Flashbacks would be useful if the narrative were better ordered and thematic. Descriptions of the Vega-31 and Hammer-34 rescues are included.

Chapter 10 deals with the personnel pipeline, especially Advanced Skills Training and the Combat Rescue Officer specialty training. This chapter also discusses unmanned aerial vehicles, the debacle of 9/11, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and in the Philippines, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The last chapter includes a brief description of the exploits of the “in lieu of” combat Airmen embedded within Army battalions defending supply convoys throughout Iraq—think “gun trucks” and improvised explosive devices—and Air Force Security Forces. A

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large part of the chapter is devoted to the preparation of Air Force Battlefield Airmen (BA) for the “long war.” The chapter ends with a testament to the valor of individual BA.

Appendices are included to document specific events in Air Force Special Tactics history and to chronologize significant events. The bibliography is particularly useful, but particular attention should be paid to Dr. Marion’s citations. This is an ambitious work that probably should have covered several volumes.

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