



Clay Christian

USAF TACP 1981-2003



Clay Christian Living Legacies Book



Foreword

This book was created on behalf of the Tactical Air Control Party Foundation to preserve the career stories of TACP legends and to thank them for their lasting contributions to the TACP community, the United States Air Force, and our grateful nation. Thank you to Clay Christian for participating in this Living Legacies project. This effort greatly helps in preserving and memorializing TACP, Air Force, and American military history.

My hope is that this book is a lasting family heirloom. Two hard copies were made, one for Clay, and one for the TACP Foundation. It will also be preserved digitally. If there are ever any questions about this book, feel free to reach out to the TACP Foundation.

- Nathan Bachand, TACP Foundation Historian



Clay Christian Interview with Nathan Bachand

Sunday, November 9th, 2025

Nathan Bachand

Alright, so we'll go ahead and start with a little bit about where you're from, where you grew up, how you ended up joining the Air Force, how you heard about TACP, how you became a TACP.

Clay Christian

Sure. So I grew up in southeastern Arizona, in and around Tucson, Arizona, for the most part, although I did live in some of the suburb areas north of Tucson, and then down in Douglas, with my dad, which is on the extreme southeastern corner of Arizona on the Mexican border. My parents were divorced by the time I went into the service, but when I entered the service, I was in Tucson, Arizona, living with my mom at the time. I actually started getting interested in going into the service when I was 15 or 16 years old. I didn't have any desire to go to college. I was looking at different things to do. So we're talking 1979, 1980, early 1980. So I was 16 at that particular time. And I started looking at different services, but hadn't really decided on any specific branch or MOS, military occupational specialty, whether Marine Corps, Army, or rating if it was Navy, or of course, Air Force Specialty Code, if it's the Air Force.

Clay Christian

Until I happened to go to an air show at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson. So this was in spring of 1980 with a friend and we're there at the air show. And, of course, they have all the static displays and stuff. And there's these guys in camouflage uniforms carrying weapons, which at the time, I didn't know what they were, but it was a little GAU-5, CAR-15, 5.56 ARs. And they had these Jeeps, they had these camouflage nets set up along with everything else. And they're wearing black berets. Now at this time, the black berets were approved. But that was well before we had the crest and the flash. So they were wearing, at the time, the Tactical Air Command crest, because that was part of the wing, the headquarters for the 602nd Tactical Air Control Wing which was headquartered at Davis-Monthan at the time.

So I went up to the guys and I started asking (I can't remember the guy's name, I would never remember it anyway) about what the career field was. I'm scribbling notes down and

they say 275XO. ROMAD, Radio Operator, Maintainer and Driver. So I asked a little bit about it, and they gave me a little bit of details. And they explained how they work with the Army or stationed mainly on Army installations. And that just piqued my interest. This was a time where there's no internet or anything else, so you can't easily go research or anything like that. So there really wasn't information other than that. So I had seen this, this guy, with these vehicles, wearing these uniforms with a black beret out there on display and I said I'm gonna go talk to my recruiter about that. So I went to the Air Force recruiter that I'd been dealing with and asked him, hey, do know anything about this? He didn't know anything about the 275XO career field, so he started looking it up, even though he had never heard of it before, and he started looking through the book describing Air Force career fields.

Clay Christian

He read it to me as far as what the job description and stuff was. And he said, I don't know anything about it. I said, that's what I want to do. So at the time, I'm still 16 years old. Alright, so I had to wait. So this would have been spring of 1980 by the time I had talked to recruiters, just before I finished my junior year in high school. I didn't turn 17 until 18 May of 1980. So I had to wait until after I turned 17. And my mom had to sign for me to be able to enlist in the Air Force under the Delayed Entry Program. So I did that in June of 1980. And I was still in high school. But I had enough credits where I was going to graduate a semester early. So I basically did 10 months of delayed entry to start basic training in April of 1981. So I finished high school, then I had a couple of months off to wait after I finished high school in January, so I took time off just relaxing before I went to basic training.

Got into basic training and there were people, of course, the TIs, the training instructors basically asking people what were you going to be doing in the Air Force. When I told them what I was doing, they didn't really have any idea what it was either. This is long before the career field developed a selection process. This was back when it was open general, as far as the career field. There were no course assessment selections, there was nothing like that then. It wasn't voluntary for the most part unless you, like me, found out about it and basically enlisted that way. Most of the people who were coming in were basically just hijacked out of basic training. One of the guys that I was in basic training with ended up going to tech school with me and actually went to my first duty station at Fort Lewis with me as well. And he was one of those guys, open general, that just said, hey, I'm going in and take a chance, and that's what they ended up becoming.

So, I finished up basic training in, I will say late May of 1981, and of course I get my orders and it basically says, your tech school is at Auxiliary Field Nine... alright... Eglin Air Force Base... alright. So back then, even though it had a name as Hurlburt Field, it was known as an Auxiliary Field Nine for Eglin Air Force Base, because there are so many auxiliary fields dating back to the Second World War and so forth. So I fly in (laughs), I arrive at the end of the day, actually at the time it was at VPS at Valparaiso Fort Walton Beach, and I get picked up by two crusty old guys, a Master Sergeant and a Staff Sergeant. I actually remember the

Master Sergeant, a guy named Humphries. He wasn't an instructor, he worked at AGOS, the Air Ground Operations School, right. And I'm a slick sleeve, I don't know anything, and end up going down there and they take me in and basically drop me off at the schoolhouse barracks, which has since been destroyed.

Clay Christian

It's been taken down, demolished for many, many years, but it was straight across the street from where the main gym is at Hurlburt Field now, and the main running track. But I get there at the point where I have to wait to start my class, right, so I get there, this is end of May, the first class I can get into is starting in July. So, basically, I'm on weeds and seeds, just mowing lawns and picking up trash and casual duty and stuff like that. I did go home on leave back to Arizona for a little bit while I was there, but I didn't actually start my class until July of 1981, and the class was Eagle III. So this would have been the seventh class, because they started by order of... I think it was Eagle, Hawk, then Falcon, if I remember correctly.

So mine was the seventh class to start there at Hurlburt Field, of course prior to that, everything was at Keesler Air Force Base when the career field had been created before they moved over to Hurlburt, so a lot of those instructors that were there at Hurlburt when I went through had been at Keesler, and of course, they moved over to Hurlburt. I want to say my class size was about maybe 15, maybe a little bit more than that, not much more than that, I don't think. And we didn't lose anybody in my class, everybody did graduate. At the time, the course was 15 weeks long, and it was six or seven blocks, I can't remember. Actually, years ago, not too long ago, but probably about six, seven years ago, I actually threw away, my original notes I had and everything else from tech school. I had everything, all the blocks and everything else was in there and then it's just one of those things that I just said, I don't really want this stuff anymore.

Nathan Bachand

A couple questions for you. So one, were all of your instructors at the schoolhouse, were they all previous 304x4s that were forced into 275?

Clay Christian

Absolutely. Yes, they were. All of them were former 304s, with the exception of a couple. And I'll explain this. So in context here, and it's probably been talked about in the past multiple times. So, we're talking 1981, the career field as a whole was very low manned, alright? As far as the total number of people that were actually manning the authorized slots was nowhere near what it was supposed to be. So the instructor cadre at the time for a

couple of classes prior to mine, we're talking, maybe like Eagle one, Eagle two, those type of classes that had gone through there, they actually Shanghai'd at least three students that graduated, alright and made them instructors. One of them is a guy by the name of Dan Guillaume. So he actually is retired. I've run into him a while back, I think he's out in New Mexico somewhere in Albuquerque or something last time I talked to him or something like that. But if you're able to talk to him as far as early stuff about instructors, he'll tell you these guys were A1Cs that were instructors at the schoolhouse. But other than that, yes, everybody had been a prior 304, and as far as I know, there wasn't any other AFSCs that had crossed over anything like that.

Nathan Bachand

And did it feel like it was still a work in progress, like they were still figuring out how to run the schoolhouse, or did it feel like a curriculum that was pretty set?

Clay Christian

They had a curriculum that was pretty set, at least in my perspective, as far as the block construction, the equipment, everything else that was there. But it was just a matter of the career field was just so new that it was still going to be growing, we didn't even know it was going to be evolving, as far as being young kids coming through and stuff like that. But we did have a lot of esprit de corps. So, even back then, it was basically gung-ho all the way. Weak fall by the wayside. All stuff that was going on back then, we're talking 1981. So, all the heritage and stuff dates back, that far, at least from my personal experience, as far as going through tech school. So that stuff was already there. And basically, had already morphed, or solidified, I guess they should say. But as far as curriculum wise, it was set. Now, of course, it changed over years. I'll talk about it later when I'm talking about going back as an instructor myself. But yeah, it was pretty good.

Nathan Bachand

And did you understand that as a young Airman that hey this is a pretty new career field? Did you understand how it came to be and why it existed?

Clay Christian

Yeah, so prior to getting there? No. Now maybe the individual I talked to at the air show in Tucson that basically got me into the career field, he may have mentioned some stuff about it, but I can't remember. It was only when you get to the schoolhouse they started talking

about how the career field had basically changed from being radio maintainers to basically ROMADs, Radio Operators Maintainers and Drivers, and that was the emphasis on it. So of course, at that time we had no ETACs, Enlisted Terminal Attack Controllers, or JTACs, Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, but it was talked about. In our last block of instruction I remember was a block where we did CAS (Close Air Support) mission planning and we did go out to the range on Eglin and we at that time, we're talking 1981, actually got a chance to talk to F4s under the supervision of a rated officer that was actually at the tower that we were dealing with.

Nathan Bachand

And that was during the schoolhouse? Wow!

Clay Christian

That was not something that was necessarily solidified within the schedules. It was just like one of those ad hoc things. It was like, I think, hey, we got this ability, this freed up asset that's out here. We're going to take you up the range, get you a chance because you did this CAS mission planning stuff, now we're going to actually do it and show you some stuff.

Nathan Bachand

That must have been pretty awesome as a young airman.

Clay Christian

Yeah it was, the first time trying to talk to an airplane, it was fun and interesting at the same time, but also things morphed over the decades of course. Back then, everything was basically high threat tactics. So aircraft were coming in either off the left or right hand offset 45 degrees off the target and you know that during the nine line brief. And when they did the pop-up, you knew to look left or right 45 degrees and that's where you're looking for the aircraft to do the pop. And when they pop-up there, you can see them. If you've been out to Hurlburt or out at Eglin Range with the pine trees and stuff, that's how low those fighters would get. You get enough time to know that the aircraft is coming in and then it's in a pop-up and then you see it and you've got just a few seconds to try to get the nose on the target area. So yeah, it was interesting.

But yeah, that was my experience as far as tech school. I graduated the first week of November. I was an honor grad, so I was one of the top ones in class to finish up the school. At the time you didn't get any preference on your first assignment, it was arbitrary.

Basically the needs of the Air Force came first. I was hoping for something West Coast. Of course, West Coast at that time, the Air Force, 1981, the West Coast presence was a lot larger than today. So on the West Coast, you had basically 7th Infantry Division at Fort Ord in California and I ended up getting 9th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington. There were some guys in my class who did have an opportunity to volunteer for jump school.

We had two of our guys that actually did volunteer and go to jump school. One ended up went up to the 82nd at Bragg, Dan Hanneken. And then John Thorpe was another buddy of mine. He ended up coming out to the Rangers after he finished up. But at the time of course, there was no survival school or anything like that as far as going through. So, everything was in house as far as training for that. So basically, I get my orders and with a report date of no later than I think, end of December or middle of December of 1981. I go back out to Arizona to take leave en route. And then I had my first car, which was a 1964 VW Bug. And I drove that from Tucson, Arizona, all the way up the West Coast, all the way to Fort Lewis, Washington outside Tacoma. I got there about middle of December, maybe a little bit earlier. It was definitely before Christmas. And that was a culture shock as far as environment. Not the unit, okay? Just the location, all right? So if you've been up to Fort Lewis, if you like rain, that's great.

Nathan Bachand

A little different than Arizona.

Clay Christian

Yes, especially when you get there in December, all right, it's dark as shit because the sun is going down early. During summertime the sun's up til like 10 o'clock at night. But during the wintertime, it gets dark early, it's dreary, it's rainy. I overcame that because I'm a big outdoors guy. So I was hiking and backpacking the Olympics and skiing in the Cascade's. I got my scuba certification while I was there. So I did a lot of outdoor stuff.

But going back to the unit, so the unit that I was assigned to was Detachment 6, 602nd Tactical Air Control Wing. So I mentioned the 602nd TAIRCW is at Davis Monthan. So that's our headquarters. Then you had the detachments. So these different divisions were detachments. So Det 6 basically supported the 9th Infantry Division. And our compound was right next to Gray Army Airfield. It was an old Army fire station that we basically converted over to office space. And then we had some trailers that we had out there for offices. And of course, we have a whole bunch of overhead shelters where we have our vehicles. So when we were trained in tech school, of course we were trained in driving the M151 jeeps, okay, and the radio pallets, which either was a Mark 107 or Mark 108 (MRC: Mobile Radio Communications) radio pallet, just a little variation difference as far as the

setup configuration on the radios. All the radio pallets we had at Fort Lewis were Mark 107s.

So I get there. And I'm basically staying in billeting and my supervisor at the time is Ben Johnson, who was a Senior Airman as my supervisor. It was pretty new to him as well as far as having somebody to have to supervise. He gets me set up and stuff like that. So my first impressions of being in a unit as a first unit were really good, right, because they took care of me. They met me there, got set up, got my gear. I was actually initially assigned to First Brigade, Second Battalion 39th Mechanized Infantry Regiment. So it was a mech unit. So mix of infantry and M-113 APC, Armored Personnel Carriers. So I spent some time doing exercises and stuff with this unit. And I mentioned that basically, that our career field was very low manned. It actually was that way for the most part of my first 10 years. It was always chronic critical, as far as the manpower, but to give you an idea how bad the manning was, at least in our detachment. So like my first major exercise that I went with out with this battalion was out at Yakima Firing Center on the eastern side of Washington State.

Clay Christian

So think High Plains Desert, right. And normally, you would think you would have a couple of ROMADS, and you would have at least one officer because at the time you're supposed to have an officer and a lot of times they were supposed to be BALOs. Basically, Battalion Air Liaison Officers coming out of TAC (Tactical Air Command) attached to a Tactical Air Support Squadron, but a lot of times they didn't come and play. So we never really got to see any of that augmentation as far as the officers. So our brigade had one Captain that was for the entire brigade, a Captain.

So for the battalions? Guess how many Air Force people were there in a battalion? *Yeah, me as an E3.* Okay, so I don't know squat, alright? So I'm trying to do my best. The Army was great. I never had any issues with the deal as far as the Commanders or Sergeant Majors or anybody had we dealt with as far as fire supporters or anything like that. They understood the issues and stuff like that. So they were supportive of it. So we just did the best we could. Prior to going out on this exercise, of course, I had to get basically rated as far as getting my CMR rating, mission readiness rating. So that was basically a lot of stuff as far as land navigation, radio communications, all the different things you're supposed to be able to do out of tech school. They're basically signing you off these things. And then, for the next year plus, I was also in five level upgrade training, CDCs, career development, that sort of thing. So at the same time I was doing this I was supporting Army exercises as well.

Nathan Bachand

So you are alone as an A1C advising a battalion commander?

Clay Christian

Yes. There wasn't a whole lot of advising going on. As an A1C, I've been in the service literally, when I went to this exercise, was literally like a week after my one year anniversary of being in the service. I had just pinned on E3. So, yeah, I didn't know squat. But you go with what you can and try and support them the best you can as far as putting in requests for air, stuff like that that's going on.

Nathan Bachand

So I have a question about the structure at the time. You said there was only one officer per brigade, assuming that was a captain. Usually, who was that guy? Was he a fighter pilot that was on a two-year assignment? And I'm assuming the same could be said for the squadron commander and the DO (Director of Operations).

Clay Christian

Yeah, alright. So our detachment, basically, we did have a Corps. I Corps was there, the Army still had I Corps. So we not only had a Division, we also had a Corps headquarters there. So actually, our detachment was commanded by an O-6. So it was a detachment, but still our ranking guy was an O-6. Everybody else, as far as Division, the ALOs, were Lieutenant Colonels and Majors, as far as DO's and things like that. All those the Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, and even that O-6, we're talking about were Vietnam era fighter pilots. There was one backseater, WSO guy. I don't know if you guys ever heard of him, Buddy Knox, Colonel Buddy Knox. He did ALO tours at Lewis, than I was with him at JSOC, when I was there. He was also the deputy commander for the 617th ASOG (Air Support Operations Group) in Germany, when I was in Italy. And I think he went on someplace else afterwards from there. So he did several tours, but that's the only WSO, weapons systems officer, that we had, that I remember. Everybody else were all fighter pilots, everyone.

Nathan Bachand

And did you ever have like a Bronco guy or anyone who had done the airborne FAC mission?

Clay Christian

In that instance, we never had any. They were all either F-111, F-4, maybe old Thud pilots, things like that. What they were doing, like I mentioned, was doing a two or, maybe a three year tour, which they did so that they could get their next fighter, because if they volunteered as an ALO that put them up higher as far as the ranking to switch airframes and go to an F-16 or an F-15C. Those were the two main aircraft they were thinking about that they were flying in the early 80s as far as going into, or an A-10. So that's what they were doing. They're coming in and doing their due diligence. Some of them are great guys for the most part, but then they were gone and they were going to another airframe.

Nathan Bachand

Right. Did that feel awkward? Or were you too young to realize? That's a weird leadership position for the ROMADs.

Clay Christian

It was, but coming in, that's like, okay, this is the way it is. All right. So I don't know any better. That's the way it is. And that's the way it's going to be, as far as we're in there. So the continuity was basically going to be all your NCOs that are carrying on stuff from within a brigade, battalion, or within the entire unit itself, that were carrying on any continuity in the career field. And we had some great senior NCOs. Our Chief was a guy named Gene Kemper, Chief Kemper. He had been in the Navy as a Submariner. Then he got in the Air Force as a radio maintainer, as a 304. And then basically was one of those guys that got caught up and went over and became a 275. But all the senior NCOs again, even the brigade NCOIC, they were all 304s.

Nathan Bachand

And was your relationship with the Army pretty tight? With your battalion? Did they know you? Were you with them often?

Clay Christian

So not that particular battalion. Not as much as what happened later. So I ended up at the unit in December of 1981. I did a few exercises in 1982 to include going down to Panama to jungle warfare school with the battalion that I was basically aligned with in late 1982 and

ended up meeting up with a bunch of guys that were at another Air Force base that were ROMADs over there as well. But once I got back, a thing happened and it had to be probably late 1982 or right at the beginning in 1983.

Tactical Air Command, the forerunner of ACC (Air Combat Command), basically put out a message about the low manpower. The airborne contingent was even shorter as far as the number of bodies that were able to fill the 82nd, Rangers, or any other units that were out there that were actually filling airborne billets. So they put a message out asking for volunteers to go to jump school at Fort Benning. So I raised my hand because I wanted to go to jump school. So I ended up going to Benning jump school in April of 1983. So I've been at the unit for less than a year and a half at that point. But I got picked up for airborne by basically volunteering. They said, yeah, that's right, you're good to go. And then I finish up jump school, come back and I get assigned to the 2nd Ranger Battalion to work with and support them.

Nathan Bachand

Did you expect that or were you were you interested in that?

Clay Christian

I kind of did because at that time that detachment not only supported 9th Infantry Division and I Corps, but also 2nd Battalion Rangers, all right, so all that entire detachment was there to support those different units.

I'll talk about that in a second. So, I knew if I go to jump school and come back, yeah, I'm gonna be supporting the Rangers. Now, I wasn't the primary okay because we had some of the guys who were already primaries at the time. Jackie Wallace was one of the primaries, John Naeole, and Jeff Staha who got out of our career field as enlisted, went officer, then became a STO (Special Tactics Officer), then he retired as an O-6 six or seven years ago. So those were all the primary ones that were there and then later on Keith Ingram and of course the buddy of mine went who through school with me was John Thorpe. He was there too. So myself and then later on, Randy Long. I'll mention him a few other times because we were stationed together several times, we also ended up working with the Rangers, but that was short-lived for the both of us.

We were doing this for a year off and on as far as supporting stuff, but what happened in the interim, our Corps ALO, and in conjunction with the Division ALO, were talking with the 9th Infantry Division leadership about what was at the time called a high-technology testbed. So the Division tested a lot of new weapons, technology, equipment, vehicles, and stuff like that. Well, they decided that they were going to reestablish a LRS Company, a long-range reconnaissance company. So, it was a Company of airborne scouts. So that goes back to

patrols in Vietnam. And they needed the Air Force to be able to support this LRS Company, but nobody was qualified at that point. A couple of us were jump qualified, so that made us the most ready.

Clay Christian

So we basically went through this scout indoctrination program. It was only a three week program with this Company when they stood up. So we were there from the ground when they set it up and we went through the program, then we started doing exercises with them. So we were embedded, and the patrols were five man patrols so I was one of the five that was on a five-man LRS patrol for the exercises. So we do things like Yakima. We jump in, and in the summertime, so it's hot as hell, it's high desert, you're not getting resupply probably for about a week so most of the ruck weight is water weight that you're carrying.

We did another one in Gowen Field, Idaho, which is outside of Mountain Home in the winter, in January. If you ever been up there in the snow near the Snake River, it's cold and miserable shit. They dropped us off. We were supposed to jump in, but the weather was so bad that we couldn't make the jump so they had to truck us in and they dropped us off. The movement was basically planned for over 10 days, over 120 Klicks, in the winter with one resupply. You're basically traveling at night and doing a hide site during the daytime. But we're providing communications. You had asked earlier about what comm stuff we were using. So, for UHF it was a PRC-66 for our basic single radio that we used as far as portables because at this time, anything portable means not vehicles. Then of course the PRC-104 is for HF and PRC-77 is FM.

So because the 9th Infantry Division was doing high technology test-bed, they were doing a lot of tests with a lot of equipment as well, as far as long-range long-haul HF communications. So we weren't using 104s, we were using the Army's equipment, but we were trained on it. We were also using one-time DIANA burn pads to do all the coding and stuff. We weren't using crypto equipment so it was basically one-time pads and encoding everything and sending it before destroying the pad as it's flash paper so it just burns up. But that's when I was doing a lot of the exercises and getting more involved with the Army counterparts on a consistent basis, working with them, and got really close.

Nathan Bachand

And so, it's interesting because guys, based on where they were, had such a different experience. And it sounds like in your first few years of being a TACP, or being a ROMAD, you are getting after it. You are doing difficult things pretty frequently. Was that training pretty much generated in-house? I don't imagine the Air Force had much of a say on what training you were doing.

Clay Christian

It was more self-motivation on the individual, at least speaking for myself. I took every opportunity I could to find things where I could go train. One of the first things I did as far as going up there was go up to the 9th Infantry Division's winter training camp and summer training camp up in the Cascade Mountains. So they had a winter course and a summer course. So winter taught you skiing. I never knew how to ski. So of course, if you ever ski on military skis, if you can ski on those, you can ski on anything. So downhill and cross country, also survival type stuff as far as up there. I did the summer course with them. I actually was selected to go to the instructor course, so I became a mountaineering instructor while I was there.

Of course, I went to jump school while I was there. I went to jungle warfare school down in Panama while I was there. So I got my jungle expert badge while I was there for that. So any opportunity I could find, I would volunteer or went out and get it to include competitions. I was in the first TACP, I call it TACP, the first ROMAD competition, if you want to call it that, or 275 competition, in 1983, right after Grenada had occurred. So four of us were on that team. Myself, John Naeole, John Thorpe and Randy Long, right? So we were the four man team out of Lewis that did that.

Nathan Bachand

What did you call that competition?

Clay Christian

It was 275, it was 275XO competition. I don't know if I still have the t-shirt because I saved some of that stuff. I have to pull it out. It was, I want to say, the Worldwide 275XO competition. Whether it said ROMADS on it or not, I can't remember on the t-shirt. Yeah, so I'd have to pull out some of the stuff I had as far as the damn trophies since I had them boxed up. I did another competition, which was the 602nd Wing one in December 1983. We actually did the Worldwide first and then I ended up going out to Tucson, did that one, and won first place there. We won, I think third place on the nav team at the first Worldwide comp. I won second place in the comp on the obstacle course. I'm pretty sure there was a couple of different awards we ended up getting out there. So yeah, that was self-motivation. It wasn't that way necessarily for every person, nor the unit necessary pushing the training for everybody.

Nathan Bachand

And so you had mentioned Grenada. So Grenada happened, there were some enlisted guys like Robert Scott who had controlled in combat at Grenada. Was that at the forefront of the young enlisted guys' mind at the time? Was there an interest in becoming very proficient at controlling, or was it even in the mindset of most young guys to start controlling close air support without the supervision of an ALO?

Clay Christian

Again, it was individual dependent. Myself, just because I've wanted to do that stuff, I looked for opportunities to be able to do it. So, I mentioned that we had a good cadre of ALOs that basically encouraged us to say, hey I'll be there, not only for over the shoulder controlling, but to allow us to be able to get on the mic and actually control. So, I got a good opportunity to control quite a bit when I was doing this stuff. Grenada wise, even before that, yes, we were trained and able to do stuff, basically under the supervision of an ALO that was there. Even the ALOs said hey, we may not always be there. So, they would train us so that we would be able to handle it.

Nathan Bachand

Essentially, it sounds like it was on the mind, but it wasn't necessarily like hey, this is what we do, this is what we're training to.

Clay Christian

Correct, not at that time, that wasn't our primary skill set, per se. It was still radio support, more than anything else. Although we were trained to do it in the eventuality, because we knew that, hey, when it came to the Soviet Union if the balloon went up, we would have to be out there, and we're going to be in that chair to actually have to take care of that stuff. So yeah.

Nathan Bachand

How often were you actually able to train with some fixed wing?

Clay Christian

Oh, yeah. Yeah I did. I controlled A-10s, F-4s. So don't want to get too far down in the weeds and stuff. One ALO, the brigade ALO, he had said, Hey, Clay, we've got this trip, supporting this battalion, one of our 9th ID battalions that's going down to Pendleton, Camp Pendleton, the Marine Corps base. And there's gonna be some air. Can you go down and control it? I'm going, Ah, okay. And at this time, I'm still an A1C. I might have been a Senior Airman. I actually don't think I was a Senior Airman. I still think I was an A1C at that time. And I said, okay, I'll go down.

And so I flew down with a PRC 66 radio. And was going to be controlling some Marine A-4s. And it was going to be hot, on a live range. So live drops. And, I've done A-10s, a couple of aircraft and stuff like that. We would do stuff with F-111s out of Mountain Home, at Yakima firing range. They come and drop Mark 82s. So I've done live stuff before. But I didn't know... I was not smart enough to know things like, Hey, when you go into a new place, you're supposed to go to range control and get signed off on all the range procedures, and make sure that you're good to go for that particular range before you actually go out there and do stuff. No, I went right out there. I got my ass chewed by the Marine Corps about that. As far as that, I didn't know better.

Clay Christian

Yeah, so it was a learning process. But yes, I did. I did get quite a bit of chances to do some controls out there. So one of the things I wanted would have been pursuing a lot of professional development. And so I started getting interested in thinking about going to become an instructor. I was getting closer at that point of being able to basically sew on E4. And they're accepting E4s at the schoolhouse. In fact, when I had gone and participated in the first worldwide competition, I talked to a couple of instructors. So this would have been October 83. And they said, yeah, put your paperwork in. It was basically a volunteer package you put in to Tactical Air Command headquarters, and then they would make the decision.

So I went and put it in, got my supervisors letters of recommendations, photo, and all my EPRs. Back then they were the Airman Performance Reports. And, lo and behold, I got selected to go ahead and become an instructor. So this would have been... I put in the package in early 84 and got basically picked up with an assignment to report there in October of 1984. So I did just less than three years at Lewis before punching out and go on to Hurlburt and becoming a tech school instructor. And I spent about 4 years down there. I was not in, at the time, ATC Air Training Command, which became Air Education Training Command later on.

So there were two different pools of instructors. You had Air Training Command, and you had Tactical Air Command, or now ACC, Air Combat Command instructors, because the TAC guys were assigned and worked for AGOS, Air Ground Operations School, think basically the Joint Firepower Control Course, but they were up at the schoolhouse. So we had a

combination of Air Training Command and TAC instructors that worked at the schoolhouse under supervisors that were ATC. All right, they may have been TAC as well, but there was a pool of both that were working at the schoolhouse, so it wasn't just one.

Nathan Bachand

Which of them owned the schoolhouse?

Clay Christian

Schoolhouse was owned by ATC, so it was detachment 1, 3400 Technical Training Group out of Keesler. So it was still owned by the Schoolhouse, but we were on loan. So I was on jump status, because none of the instructors that were with ATC were on jump status. The only jump billets were down at AGOS at the Air Ground Operations School and not all of them, of course. So luckily, when I got there I got to fill one. My assignment back then was P275 before J's ever came out or anything like that. So I was in a jump billet from when I started jump school in 1983 and was on jump status 20 years, continuous, until 2003. I never had a lapse from the time I went to Benning until I retired. So I lucked out as far as being on jump status the entire time. At least in those days.

So I went to Keesler to attend the instructor course that they had. Took some more opportunities, went to several more courses while I was there, as far as both instructor ones, because I got my master instructor rating. Also completed a couple of Community College of the Air Force degrees, went to water survival, land survival school, anything and everything I could pick up along the way I'd actually do. And I was teaching as the primary instructor for block two, which was the survival and E&E (Escape & Evasion) block that we used to do. Because at that time we still weren't going to survival school, Air Force survival school. I also taught the GRC-206 course, as far as for the pallet training, when we finally went from the jeeps to the Humvees and put the GRC-206 pallet in.

Nathan Bachand

So was the GRC-206 the default comm pallet for the Humvees?

Clay Christian

I think that was a transition when we from went from the M-151, okay, the MRCs, then we had the slick 151s that didn't have a pallet so we'd just drive around. But then we also had the CUCVs, which was a Chevy blazer, but it didn't have a pallet. It might have had a PRC-77 or something like that with the amplifier but that'd be about the extent of the radio you'd

have in there. And then of course we got the Hummer family and went to the GRC-206 radio pallet.

Nathan Bachand

The GRC-206 had a long life span. The last GRC-206 system I ever saw was in 2018.

Clay Christian

I think the first course would have been probably about 86-ish is when we started teaching the course. So it was, yeah, at the time, state of the art for what we were going with.

Nathan Bachand

So you were able to still just keep getting after it while you're at the schoolhouse. Did you have any idea that that would lead you to a very unique opportunity after that?

Clay Christian

No, I just did it because that's what I wanted to do. And when I was at Lewis, I wasn't sure whether I was going to get out after one enlistment, but when I got picked up for instructor, I said, I'm going to go ahead and extend. I didn't re-enlist at that time. I went and extended until I got down to Hurlburt and when I got down there and liked it enough and said, okay, I'm going to go ahead and re-enlist, which was my first re-enlistment bonus. I only got two. So not like what the guys were getting, up to at least three or four years ago or right now, as far as re-enlistment bonuses. Yeah, so I was just doing stuff and I liked it enough that I wanted to keep going and pursuing opportunities, which basically led to Joint Communications Unit at JSOC.

Nathan Bachand

How did that come about? Because it seems like that's pretty early in the career field to get an opportunity to go to JSOC.

Clay Christian

Yeah. So this will have been 1988. All right. This would have been in the summer of 88, probably May-ish, maybe June at the latest. Might even have been a little bit earlier than that. I had never heard of JSOC, never heard of Joint Communications Unit, which is within the compound at JSOC. So what happened was Chip Burgess, who was an instructor at the schoolhouse with me, somehow, I don't remember exactly how he got the info, but he somehow got into the recruitment program, and we both got recruited.

So the JCU commander came down from Bragg to do an in-person interview and PT test. So at the time, when we're talking about this, the first TACP that was going to be there, at JCU, was Dan Guillaume, who I'd already mentioned earlier. He'd been an instructor right out of the schoolhouse, before he went to an actual unit. He ended up going, after the schoolhouse, up to Bragg, and then got picked up to go to JCU. So he's the first one. All right, there were a couple other people, Doug Tillman, Ron Plunkett, Randy Long, Johnny Kleber, but I was number three. What happened was, when that commander came down, he was looking for additional bodies. What they'd done, is that JCU, if I remember correctly, basically had a bunch of Combat Control AFSCs on their manpower document.

They had a Combat Control chief there that wanted to basically get rid of that and change it over to our career field, because they wanted to get the Combat Controllers out of JCU. Right. So that they can go do other stuff. So they were looking for additional bodies. So it just happened to be that I know my name got mentioned. May have been mentioned by Doug Tillman when he was down at Howard AFB in Panama at the time. He may have mentioned a couple of names. My name, as well as a couple of the other guys, Chip, Johnny Kleber, Randy Long. And, at the time we were all instructors together at the schoolhouse. And so the JCU Commander came down and he interviewed Chip. And then he asked if I was interested because he heard my name, and I said yes. And basically I said, you need me to do a PT test? He says no, you're good. Because I was one of the instructors that did PT all the time with the students.

But I did the interview and of course it's all contingent on your security clearance and paperwork and stuff like that. But JCU has a lot of power, okay, as far as when you talk about assignments. So this would have been like I said, maybe June. Then I'm up in Pathfinder School at Benning in July. Me and Randy Long, we got slots because Dan Hanneken is up there with the Rangers.

So he's got his friends with the guys at the Pathfinder branch and they get him slots to Pathfinder School. While I'm there, I get notified, you got an assignment and you're leaving in September. Okay... So I've got about eight weeks after I get back from Pathfinder School to basically figure it out. I was single, so it didn't make any difference. Now I pack my bags and basically head up to Bragg.

That was the beginning of a totally different view on the world. Let's just put it that way. So at the time, JSOC in general, like for the compound... I can't really get into all details and ops,

stuff like that. Because even though a lot of things are decades old, there are still things up there. I signed shit that can't get released until it's 99 years old. But, it was relaxed grooming standards, civilian clothes. There were times yes, we did wear uniform stuff, but a lot of times it's regular clothes.

The second time I went back there, it was different. They didn't do that anymore. It wasn't the same. But the opportunity was there to do things. Not only schools. I did go to freefall and freefall JM (Jump Master) while I was there, and some other stuff. But just the constant on the road... God, all the time. Which is fine when you're being single, but I did get married while I was there. But by then I was getting close to where I was getting ready to leave the unit anyway. I was initially renting out an apartment, but I was gone all the time.

One op I can tell you about, JSOC was involved with Operation Just Cause in Panama. So I was down there in Panama, I didn't jump in, but we had a couple of guys that did. But there was a lot of other opportunities and stuff, and also the first time, as far as dealing with SATCOM. So prior to that, everything's line of sight - HF, UHF, VHF. We did do line of sight at JCU, but it was all mainly SATCOM. So we were doing a lot of stuff with, in my opinion, at that time, with state-of-the-art comms there. We were special operations communicators to support the command and associated units with the comm support.

Nathan Bachand

So did you essentially function as a de facto S6 for JSOC?

Clay Christian

So everything they had there was Js. Okay, so they are joint, right? So, the J6 was actually in the headquarters building. So at the time, there's no windows, they're all big two story concrete buildings with a basement in each one. So the JSOC headquarters, that's where your directors, J1, J2, J3, J4, J5, J6, so on, so forth, where they are. Okay, so we worked with them as far as supporting them with their requirements, but we were our own unit. They were directly supporting the command with all the stuff, right?

So we interacted with the J6 all the time. But the J6 had their own staff. JCU had its own Commander, Sergeant Major, because it was an Army command, but we have all four services working there, as far as doing communications for them. So, for us, most of the communicators, at that time from the Air Force standpoint, it was combat comm and then 275 as far as doing stuff. For Marines, they were comm guys that were coming out of force recon. Out of the Navy, it was ETs, electronics technicians, as far as the ratings and stuff like that. And then the Army, you have guys that were coming out of the Rangers, out of the Regiment, or basically Special Forces 18-Echoes. It's totally different these days.

So that was what it was like a lot at that time, it was a lot more tactical than it is technical these days. Now there's a lot of cyber and things that are going on with that. Then it was very, very tactical. So they were looking for guys as far as from a tech piece standpoint to be able to bring that tactical expertise that also knew communications.

Nathan Bachand

What was your day-to-day like there? When you weren't traveling.

Clay Christian

All right, so I was on what we call a field operations detachment. So we had three FODs, FOD A, B, and C – Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. So I was on FOD A. At the time when I went through, there was no formal training. Now there is a Special Operations Radio Operators Course, SOROC. They train people on all the communications gear and everything else. At the time, it was basically on the job training as far as learning all the equipment.

So when I first got there, that was my main thing was to learn all the equipment and procedures. Then after that is basically exercises, training, and deployments, because we were on what was called a JORTS (Joint Operational Readiness Training and Support) cycle. So, every couple of months we would rotate from training, to mission, to support. So whichever cycle you were on, you had something to do. If you're in training, that was basically the time period of when you could go to schools, or you can take leave, or as far as you want to go on a long leave, that's the only time you can do it. And there were certain circumstances when you end up supporting a mission out of cycle, because if they need additional people you go on mission, you're on call period. So, there's always training and stuff going on daily.

Nathan Bachand

I'm assuming when you're on call that there was no leaving the local area or going out on the weekend.

Clay Christian

I can't get into details about the timeline, but extremely short. Let's just put it that way.

Nathan Bachand

I'm looking at your notes here. So were you there during Desert Storm?

Clay Christian

So I mentioned I was involved in Panama. I did not deploy for Desert Storm, because, remember I mentioned about whether you're on mission, support, or training. So we needed to bring in a bunch of augmentees to be able to support us to backfill for stuff because we not only had to support what was going on down range for Desert Storm, but we also had to support ongoing mission requirements that might pop up. So I was in the one buckets that was basically staying at home to support those other potential mission requirements that will pop up. So I didn't end up going down Desert Storm on that particular instance.

And I was also getting close to leaving. I got married and had a baby on the way. I got married in August 1990 and literally a week before I got married is when Iraq invaded Kuwait. And then by the time the US invaded, I was overseas doing stuff for a couple of months as far as on another deployment, but it was totally separate from Iraq and then came back. By that summer, I basically got my next assignment, which was gonna be to Vicenza Italy. So at that particular time, it was, okay, hands off and I'm basically getting ready to head out of here.

Nathan Bachand

I bet your wife was pretty happy with that.

Clay Christian

Well, it's because she didn't know any better, right? So she was not a local gal. She was actually from New Jersey. So I met her through friends. I know guys from different places and stuff. So you probably know or heard of John McKay.

Nathan Bachand

That name comes up a lot.

Clay Christian 58:27

Yeah, JMac and I were good buddies. So I've known JMac for a long time, but he was down at Hunter, at 1st Batt at the time when I was at JSOC. So I would go down there periodically because I wasn't married yet. And he, JMac, is a very interesting individual and has had a very picturesque life and so on. So he owned a bar on River Street, okay? The Rangers, the 1st Batt guys, that was the main place they went too. Called Corky's. So if you've ever been to Savannah, every year they have a huge St. Patty's Day party down there. They turn the River Green and they have all these parades, along with everything else.

So he said, yeah, come out and help me because I'm going to open up another spot. I'll rent it in another location right next to my place so I can serve beer out of it. So I went down there and I was down there for several days. That's where I met my future wife. She was down there because her sister was also married to a TACP that was one of my students that had gone through the schoolhouse. So it's like, six degrees of separation doesn't come close to what you get when you're talking about the career field, as far as people go.

Clay Christian

Anyway, she didn't know what would be better as far as assignments or deployments or what would be worse. She just knew that I was gone a lot. So I ended up getting the assignment and moving over to Vicenza in March of 1992. I was there for four years. I volunteered to do an extended/long tour, and that's how I got picked up as it put me higher relatively on the voluntary listing and I could stay on jump status.

So we get there in March and I was the NCOIC. So that was the first time I was actually supervising. At that point, I had never supervised anybody, and I was a Tech Sergeant now. Yeah. All right. So I made Staff Sergeant while I was an instructor at the schoolhouse, and made Tech Sergeant while I was at JCU. I did make Master while I was at Vicenza, but I got there as the NCOIC as an E6. So it's the first time I'm supervising anybody, but it was a very small detachment.

So, we supported the third battalion (3rd/325) airborne infantry regiment ABCT. So it's an Airborne Battalion Combat Team. At the time the largest battalion in the US Army. What I mean by that is it's an airborne battalion, that had, a headquarters company, and three rifle companies. It also has a combat engineering company. It had a heavy weapons platoon and it had its own battery of 105s because they were part of the allied airborne rapid reaction force for Europe. So to throw a couple of name drops, the commander that was there when I got first there was Lieutenant Colonel Abizade. He ended up becoming the four star CENTCOM commander. When I left, it was Lieutenant Colonel Scaparotti who became the four star EUCOM commander.

So it was a plumb assignment. The next one closest to it, as far as battalion, would be with a Ranger battalion. It was the best assignment hands down I ever had. And it was absolutely

fantastic. It was a small unit at the time when I got there, we had two officer billets and three enlisted, that's it. Five bodies. All right. So when I got there, we had one officer and he's getting ready to leave. He left like within three weeks when I got there. So it was me, Don Becken, and Al Harris, three of us as far as working there.

Clay Christian

By the time I left, I want to say we were up to 11 because they increased our manning to the same manpower billets as what a Ranger battalion would have, so we'd have individuals at each company, as well as plussed up in some other areas. So we actually pretty much doubled in size by the time I left four years later.

I was on the Southern European Task Force (SETAF) parachute demonstration team. So, I got excited because I was free fall qualified. So they have a parachute demonstration team that basically is manned by the battalion guys. So I got in there and I was jumping my butt off while I was there while still doing static-line stuff, but mainly doing skydiving stuff for change of commands, and traveling to a lot of places in Italy for air shows and stuff like that.

But operationally wise, we did a lot of work and we lived and breathed inside the Army battalion headquarters. That was the closest I've ever worked with an Army unit was right with that battalion as far as how our daily interaction with those individuals.

Nathan Bachand

That's unique, and I imagine that you developed a great relationship with them, too.

Clay Christian

Yeah, absolutely, of course. You're always going to make friends with the Command Sergeant Major and the Ops Master Sergeant. But yeah, we had a really great relationship. We did. Italy doesn't have live fire ranges for us to be able to do CAS stuff, nor do they have live fire ranges for the Army to be able to shoot stuff. We would have to go up to Grafenwöhr twice a year to get our controls, as well as just for firing small arms stuff.

And then at other locations we could do a lot of dry stuff. And I'll explain that in a second. But anything live, we'd have to do it there at Grafenwöhr. I mentioned the allied airborne rapid reaction force. So we did stuff with the German paratroopers and British paratroopers. We went to an exercise in Turkey and we did one or two that I remember up to England. So there were at least one or two exercises every year we were doing in Europe with other countries and training with their airborne units.

But it would have been 93 when the former Yugoslavia broke apart. And Bosnia Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Croatia, were all killing each other with the civil war. And that's when they started Operation Deny Flight, right? So that's where you had United Nations Protection Forces for your Forward Air Controllers (UNPROFACs). Dutch, Spanish, British, French, Canadians, and there's a bunch of other ones that were basically there as the UNPROFACs. No US, okay, there was no US FACs in there, right? Deny Flight primary purpose was to basically not allow other former Yugoslavia countries to fly their fighters. But Deny Flight was also there to be able to do close air support in the case the UN forces needed CAS.

Well, unfortunately, UNPROFACs couldn't do their own training, even dry CAS in theater, right? So what they had to do is they had to drive over to Italy for training, okay, and it's not that far of drive. You think it'd be oh my god, that's a long ways drive. It's not, it's only a few hours to get from around the corner of the Adriatic to get down to where we're at in the upper peninsula there in Italy. And they were coming to Aviano and we go out to this place called Maniago Range twice a week for two years, where we trained the UNPROFACs in dry CAS ops.

And of course, it was all dry, right? I get my lives and stuff up in Graf but we're doing all dry stuff in Italy. Yeah, Dutch F-16s, Spanish F-18s, Marine Corps F-18s, A-10s, F-16s, German Alpha Jets, Tornados, and whatever British version, they pronounce it differently.

Clay Christian

And there's probably another three or four different fighters, we were controlling anything and everything that was flying over and doing Deny Flight. They weren't the only ones who were basically doing stuff there as well. I got a chance to actually get on the ABCCC, the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center, an EC-130. It was at Aviano. So a lot of the US aircraft were all on Aviano. The Maniago Range is less than an hour to drive to Aviano because that's where we go and meet the FACs and they follow us up to the range and we do the dry CAS out there. It's an Italian range where it's at. So again, we could do the dry CAS, but we couldn't do anything live. But the ABCCC was at Aviano as well. So at the time, I don't know if you know we had 275s, TACPs flying as air crew members from the back end of the ABCCCs.

Nathan Bachand

I didn't know that.

Clay Christian

Yes, absolutely. So one of the guys that was there was a Master Sergeant Jake Jacoby. There was another guy, and he's a buddy of mine that I was stationed with out of Lewis, Marty Palaniuk. There were several of them that were stationed out of Tucson that were on as air crew. So they were doing the radio comms for airborne Air Support Operations Center (ASOC) stuff. They were doing that until the ABCCC went away. Or at least maybe not quite that long, but in the 90s, definitely. So I actually got a chance to fly over in Bosnia before Captain Scott O'Grady got shot down.

We wanted to do fam flights in the ABCCC to be able to see what it's like on the radios and everything else for supporting UNPROFACs. So I flew one mission on the ABCCC out of Aviano over into theater. But that was the only time I flew with them doing that stuff. And again, that was when they were flying ops feet dry until Scott O'Grady got shot down with his F16 and then they couldn't go over land and had stay over the Adriatic from that point on.

Nathan Bachand

So, now you're in Italy and you've been in for about 10 years now. I'm assuming all the former 304s are out by now. Can you talk a little bit about how the career changed over your first 10 years?

Clay Christian

So yeah, 304s, there were still a number of them, but they were now getting to the point where they're the E8, E9s. Okay, so some of the CEMs and the functional managers and staff were now the ones that are 304s and they're still in the service. They were there. The biggest change, of course, was going from being basically a TACP that was non-qual to a guy that's actually ETAC. That was the biggest change.

So when I got to JCU at JSOC, of course, I didn't control at all the entire time I was there, right? I was just doing special ops-comms stuff. So when I got the assignment to Italy, I went and got my ETAC qualification before I got to Italy, because I knew it'd be hard to do it after I got to Italy. So luckily the 14th ASOS was right there out the back gate of JSOC. I could walk down there and go to the guys who were supporting the 82nd, and I was able to get with them to take my written test and everything else to start my ETAC qual.

And then I went out to Fort Smith, Arkansas, where at that time that was where JRTC (Joint Readiness Training Center) was doing rotations at Fort Chaffee. So I went out there and got my live controls and got a checkride so that I could get signed off. So that was my first time in 1991 and the first time when I was actually signed off. So that's 10 years from the time I

came into service to now that I'm actually signed off and legal and everything else and doing controls on my own.

And of course, when I get to Italy, I'm controlling gobs of stuff all over the place. Not to mention, we're the first ones doing night CAS as far as doing stuff out of Graf or some contingency op stuff that we're thinking about doing with the A-10s out on the range up there doing night vision CAS controls. And then I was on the A-10 multi-command manual rewrite at Nellis AFB. I spent two weeks out there as one of the European representatives who went out there and did that too. So it was a huge difference as far as just level of expertise, as far as things that you were allowed to do and be basically done. The world opened up as far as the career field. It started to broaden a lot more as far things you could do in the early 90s.

Clay Christian

So, after the four years in Italy, so this would have been late 95, Bosnia-Herzegovina finally starts to wrap up. They signed the peace accords, and our Battalion actually did go over into Tuzla airfield to secure it as part of Operation Joint Endeavor, but because this was like December or January, and I already had orders to leave to go to Yuma Army Proving Ground to become a free fall instructor. Basically, I stayed back because we had to have a rear detachment to take care of families and stuff like that.

So, John McKay, that's where he and I were assigned together. He went forward to Tuzla as the Master Sergeant. I was a Master Sergeant as well, but he was going to be taking over as the NCOIC anyway. That would have been the only deployment while I was there that the unit actually went on, but I wasn't involved actually outside of the Operation Deny Flight stuff that was going on.

So, I left Italy in March of 96, and I get to Yuma in April of 96. Now this is the one assignment that I did not work for, as far as either asking for it or trying to get it. They moved the free fall school from Bragg to Yuma in 95, and Doug Tillman didn't want it. He was the NCOIC for the Air Force element, and he didn't want to leave Bragg. So, I got snagged up because I was the only E-7, that was HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) Jump Master qualified, that was coming back from overseas, because there really weren't that many TACP guys at the time who had those type of qualifications.

So, I get to Yuma in April of 96, and I have to wait to start the advanced course. It's was a 10-week course, which was a prerequisite to become an instructor. I already had free fall Jump Master qualification that was also a prerequisite. 10 weeks? That's a long course. And later on they ended up going 8 weeks, I don't know what it is now, but yeah, 2 and a half months, jumping every single day. Alright, so I had to wait until July, and there were only like 8 of us that were in the class, and it's not only guys that are going to become instructors then it was also guys that were SF (Special Forces) guys that might potentially come back, or they were going to do it as unit level on the teams as far as internal trainers. But yeah, it's a

consolidated course, so it's Navy Seals, Rangers, SF, Force Recon, and at the time we had Combat Control, Pararescue, TACP, and SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape). So, we had all four of those Air Force career fields at the time.

Clay Christian

It changed a few years later, just because of how recruiting was for instructors was like. But it was a good assignment, I enjoyed it for three years, but it was also one of the most difficult things, because I was on the drop zone when Brian Daly went in. I was going through the advanced course on the South End of Phillips DZ. And I'm a superintendent for all the Air Force instructors, I should say, because we were an operating location for the 342nd training squadron out of Lackland AFB, Texas.

So we had just actually just finished a jump and were packing parachutes before getting on the van, and going back and to get on another lift. And we hear over the radio from the DZSO (Drop Zone Safety Officer), cease all operations, and we're going, what's going on? Something is wrong here. And we soon find out that somebody is missing. They're trying to find somebody, they don't know where he's at, and they were trying to get accountability of everybody, students and instructors.

So, I had to ask as it'd been a while by this point. I said, I need know, is this an Air Force individual? Because they weren't wanting to release things over radio. So, they said yes, all right. So, I said, all right get me on a vehicle and take me up here to the north side of the drop zone where the DZSO is handling everything so I can talk to him. I get there and that's when I find out that they found Brian's body out on the south side of the DZ where I had been at, but a little bit further out into the desert. That was a rough few days of dealing with the stuff that was going on with the fatality and stuff. And of course, his family who came out to Yuma, and then his funeral that we went up to Wisconsin to attend.

So yeah, other than that it was a good assignment, because it was a very close knit family of guys, regardless of what services guys came from, as far as working with individual cadre out there. So I end up working both the basic course and the jump master branch as an instructor, as well as being the superintendent for the Air Force personnel there. I did that until April of 99.

What happened is I found myself another job going back to JCU. So at the time I was of course at the 342nd that was AETC, so it was Air Education Training Command as far as position. The one way I could get out of it was to find somebody to take my place. So there's a TACP guy named Mike Bratcher at JCU. And I'm still an E-7, he's an E-7. And basically, I had gone back to JCU about 6 months before I got the assignment. And I went up, I talked to them, I still knew guys who were there, because they stay there for a long time. I said, any chance I can come back? I've been gone seven years. They said, yeah, we'd love to have you come back.

Clay Christian

So basically, we just did a swap. So he took my position and I took his. Again, JCU, they can work magic with Air Force Personnel Center. And they can just make a phone call and make it happen. So literally, it's a done deal. And I left there in April 99, and went back to JCU, and I became the chief of training and evaluation. So basically, what that means is I wasn't on a team anymore. I was up in a headquarters shop, basically running all the scheduling for all the training to include jumps, as well as working emergency deployment readiness exercises, as far as planning them, going out and doing site surveys for them, set them up and everything else.

I was also still going out to Yuma as a freefall instructor, because I could be a guest instructor and host one of my guys. It was all about the numbers out there. The numbers of students you can bring, based upon what service, was determined by how many instructors you had qualified which in turn would determine the number of students you could bring in there, even though the max is 50 anyway. I was able to host a couple of my guys as far as to come out there, but I just had to go out there as an instructor, not necessarily for them, but just supporting the schoolhouse. So I did that as well.

And then I was doing some other stuff. I started my grad program, my first grad program, I actually have two. I mentioned I had the history degree, but I had one in organizational development as well. So I did that first one while I was there. And I made Senior, and I would probably have gotten it at least a year earlier, but I mentioned that we changed our AFSCs at the freefall school. We went from a number of TACP and SERE instructors to basically one Combat Controller, one PJ, and then we converted the other AFSCs to J8B. So the 8B's are your technical instructors at Lackland, as well as J8B's which are your airborne instructors at the Air Force Academy because of the skydiving there.

So that allowed us to open up approval for more instructors so we can hire more of the SERE instructors in there. So we weren't limited to that. So by then there was only like three of us that were TACPs there. Mike Bender (BamBam) was there while I was there. And Carl Servania. And then Paul Ford was there before I left. So there were four of us. There was four TACPs at Yuma when I left there for JCU. So I'm at JCU from April of 99 until September 4, 2001. So what happened was, I made Senior, and they didn't have any billets at JCU for a Senior Master Sergeant. Alright, so I knew that the writing was on the wall that I'm gonna have to find something or I'm gonna get an assignment that's gonna be to my liking.

Clay Christian

So do you know Ray Vivian? So Ray was a Senior as well. And he was at Fort Hood. His wife's Korean. So he's done a couple of tours in Korea. So I was number one non-vol for Korea cause I never did a short tour. All right. I did a long tour, but I never did a short tour

and I didn't want to do a short tour in Korea, right? So, I call up Ray. I said, Hey, man, the assignment list is going to be coming out, are you volunteering? He says, yeah, I'm volunteering to go back to Korea. I said, thank you. All right. I'm going to make a trip out your way and I'm going to bring a case of beer. What do you drink? I purposely made a recruiting trip to Fort Hood from JCU to go out there to the 712th ASOC, and at the same time, brought Ray his case of beer to pay him for taking that assignment so that I wouldn't have to take Korea.

But while I was out there on that recruiting trip, I wanted to go and do a courtesy call or courtesy visit to the CEM (Chief Enlisted Manager), who was, Chief Master Sergeant Roy Johnson at the 3rd ASOG, Fort Hood. So, I go into his office, and he looks up and he says, we were just talking about you and I said, who's we? He says, well, the career field manager who's up at the Air Staff, Chief Burrow Steve Burrow, and the ACC FAM (Functional Area Manager). And what they were trying to figure out was the 18th ASOG had at that particular time, so we're talking spring, like April of 2001, the CEM at the time there was not a TACP. It was Chief Rick Ames, who was an aircraft maintainer. And they were in the process of getting ready to basically change out Group commanders in the summertime.

And Rick Ames, basically dropped his papers, he's going to retire. So they didn't have any E-8s. Okay. You had one at the 14th. I think, it was Marty Klukas because Marty would have been at the 24 Special Tactics Squadron at the fires desk when I was at JCU the second time, but then he went down to the 14th ASOS (Air Support Operations Squadron) as the, superintendent. But they weren't going to move him right to the Group. So I was only E-8 that's on that base, as far as Pope slash Bragg, that's available and jump qualified. So they said, hey, we're looking at you, would you be interested? I said, yeah, I'd love to go back. Cause I'm thinking about retiring, but I'd love to be able to go back to the career field one more time before I sunset out. And so he said, well, we don't have any problem with it. As long as JCU is okay with it, but you also have to talk to the incoming commander. So the incoming commander is LA (Colonel Michael Longoria). Right. So I don't know if you know the background behind how he became the 18th ASOG Commander.

Nathan Bachand

I don't.

Clay Christian

Okay, so he was initially supposed to go to the 1st ASOG to become the commander there. The guy, the 06, that was going to the 18th was not jump qualified. And he says, I'm not going to jump school. And they said, well, you can't become the 18th ASOG commander because that's 18th Airborne Corps and you have to be jump qualified. So what they did is they flip flopped. So LA became the 18th ASOG commander and the other guy that was going

to the 18th became the 1st ASOG commander. So it's just that right time, right place, right guy came in.

So in June, he does the change of command. So I go and do a sit down face to face with him and I explain to him, I'd love to come back, but I'm going to tell you and I'll be up front with you. I'm probably going to do like 18 months, maybe two years at the most, and I'm going to retire. But I'd like to come back. He says, yeah, no problem. And JCU didn't have any problem because they didn't have any Senior billets. So I would have had to leave anyway. So again, JCU works magic, and basically I get the assignment and the report date is the first week of September. I roll there on the 4th of September, 2001. Seven days later, 9/11 occurs. From that point on, it was a ride.

Nathan Bachand

When did LA get there?

Clay Christian

He'd already been there since June of 2001 when he did his change command. So he'd already been there, what, four months-ish by the time I came in there. So he's been the commander for about four months. Alright, so we're thinking, okay, it's just regular 18th ASOG ops, until 9-11.

Nathan Bachand

The 20th ASOS had just had some pretty fresh command changes, right?

Clay Christian

Yeah, "Shack" Bochain was the one that took over the 20th, he was the commander for there, and then there was the guy.

Nathan Bachand

And then Donnelly, Donnelly had just taken over for Steve Call.

Clay Christian

He was a major at the 20th. He was not a commander. He was just one of the ALOs at the 20th. I knew Pete Donnelly from a deployment. So what happens is 9/11 occurs and within a couple of weeks the 22nd ASOF guys, Tim Stamey and Steve Tomat, a couple other guys, they're already looking at working with their teams. As far as hey these teams are going to be going into theater, then where are we supposed to be at and there's also stuff going on with the Rangers.

Well, LA is very proactive, okay. He is a go-getter, to say the least, as far as knowing what needs to be done. He said I don't care how we're going to do it, but we're going to go do it, all right. So he knew what needed to be done. It's just that the things you can do or not do are very hard legally, all right. So he knew that we needed to be able to have certain forces in theater, okay, to be able to support them. But we can't do it ourselves from stateside. You have to basically have a RFF request for forces from the theater, okay, that is requesting the support. They normally will not do a request by name or by unit. They'll do it by the functionality, the requirement that you're looking for to be able to meet the requirement. How you word it will lead it towards where you get the support. It's like filling out a 1972 request for CAS.

So we knew we had a few units that were going to be working support, but he knew that there was other things that needed to be done, as well as there's all the stuff with the 10th Mountain Division and everything else that's just part of it. But we're thinking more along the lines of how do we get some of these people into theater, all right. So a couple things are going on. By this point in time this will be my fourth assignment with Randy Long, because Randy Long was on the group staff as well, and he was an E-7. So I was the E-8, and ops superintendent, and at that time Chief Ames withdrew his retirement paperwork so he wasn't going to retire but he's in and out so I was also acting as the CEM in his stead for certain instances.

Randy and I, we had the SOF stink from JSOC, but we were 18th ASOG staff and we had TS-SCI (Top Secret-Sensitive Compartmented Information) clearances. LA was an ex-STO officer, a Special Tactics Officer. Basically, he knew who we needed to deploy. He said you need to go to SOCCENT, so I'm sending you to SOCCENT at MacDill Air Force Base to get embedded with the planners so that we can be able to try and work out how we can be able to get bodies and get the right people to the right place. So on 12 October, I'm not sure about all my TDY dates because back then there was no DTS (Defense Travel System) it was all hard copy travel vouchers. However, I've got a log that has all my TDYs, exact dates, what it was, where it was by locations, and everything else so I actually know the information.

Clay Christian

I went there on the 12th of October, so this is four weeks after 9/11, and this is before the first ODA (Operational Detachment Alpha) goes into Afghanistan. So Task Force Dagger is at

Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in Uzbekistan, but they haven't deployed into Afghanistan yet so these teams are basically in the isolation facilities. So we get down there and lo and behold again it's that six degrees of separation. The Command Sergeant Major for SOCCENT happened to be the former JSOC J3 Sergeant Major so I knew it was going to be alright otherwise if I had just walked in the door they would have probably said, who the hell are you and why are you here?

So I basically explained what's going on with the Sergeant Major. He said okay, yeah, we'll get you set up and everything else. So again, it's one of those things where it worked out how we were going to get in there. Randy did stay there for about five, maybe six days because it ended up being like a one-person job that needed to be there. But I was there for two weeks, up to the point of when the first teams went in, but got embedded so that we could talk to K2, to the staff there. And at that time as the first teams are going in, they saw the need for CAS and planners. They said we don't know how to do this stuff, even at K2, how we can do this? What do we need to do?

So I told them to put in a RFF, I wrote it out for them and told them this is the requirement that you need to write as an RFF, word for word. I didn't put the 20th ASOS or anything else as far as by name or anything else, but I worded it so that it directed the support requirement towards the 18th ASOG. And then we could actually source it. So that's how it came to be as far as from sourcing things for how the first ones got in there. "Shack" Bochain and Pete Donnelly, to be able to get those guys over there was basically because we got embedded in SOCCENT so we could do an RFF. So we get the guys over there to do that. At that time I said, okay, I'm done. I've done my thing. I need to go back because you've got other stuff that's going on.

Nathan Bachand

And by the time that Shack and Donnelly go over there, was 10th Mountain already at K2?

Clay Christian 01:31:52

Yes, 10th Mountain was already there. Remember, this is all about that debate of Major General Hagenbach not taking his ALO with him and his TACP. Again, there were a lot of arguments both ways to either side, but to fix it, we were able to do that. We had to get embedded to have somebody there. In this case, it wasn't with 10th Mountain. It was the actual SOF guys. And then we were having a very contentious relationship to say the least with the FAM at ACC, the TACP FAM Chief.

So they didn't like us, and they didn't like LA, okay? So we had to try to work ways around them to be able to get the stuff in there. So when we did the RFF, and RFF goes to Joint Staff, Joint Staff says, okay, this has got to go to which command, in this case Air Force and Air

Combat Command. Air Combat Command looks at it. It's got to go to the TACP FAM. TACP FAM goes, *shit!* I got to send us the 18th ASOG. So we were talking and letting them know, hey, this is going to be coming. We're not going to hide it from you, but this is going to be coming. So they get the RFF and that's how we were able to get those forces in.

At the same time, so this is now late October. LA also knows that we need to have basically an ASOC capability, a full-up ASOC capability, all right? As well as how we're going to be able to get forces to deal with other stuff. So 3rd Army as far as the command, just like 9th Air Force at the time, was a three star command. So you have an Army three-star that's at Camp Doha, Kuwait. So that's where CFLCC (Combined Force Land Component Command) headquarters was. There was no Air Force liaison or anything like that functionality there. L.A. sent one of our ALOs from the group staff down to, I think it's Fort Gordon. It's in Atlanta, where that Fort was at, where 3rd Army was at. Got embedded with that staff and got them to talk to their staff deployed at CFLCC to put an RFF for 18th ASOG, okay, because 3rd Army basically owns 18th Airborne Corps to say, I need an ALO to be over here at CFLCC headquarters with a small staff. So that's how LA was able to get himself and a small staff, myself included later on, to go into CFLCC headquarters.

And once we got embedded in there, we were able then to start daily ops. I got there late December, the day after Christmas, until right before Operation Anaconda. Basically, I was the FAM, I was the TACP FAM within that theater now. So now I can make requirements directly to other commands. I don't have to go to ACC, all right? I can talk to air staff, I can do anything I want, because I'm the FAM now within the theater. So I can make requirements based upon what we say we need. So that's how he was able to get his foot in the door, okay, and then go over there and get in on the plans with the CFLCC headquarters. And it's also the first time this type of liaison is seen in joint doctrine, it's now known as a JACCE, the Joint Air Component Coordination Element.

Clay Christian

So the JACCE never existed prior to that. So once we got over there, because of what we did over there, that became basically a normal thing, and it got written as doctrine to where it's normalized now, to have that at a CFLCC headquarters, or even at a CFMCC, at a maritime component headquarters. We were needed by the Air Force. In other words, the JFACC (Joint Force Air Component Commander), the Air Force Three Star in the theater, says, I want to have my liaison at this land component, or maybe maritime component headquarters, to deal with operations that are going on.

Nathan Bachand

So you and LA were fighting a political battle to get guys there.

Clay Christian

Yes, there was a lot of political shit going on, a lot of stuff going on with that, a lot.

Nathan Bachand

How hands-on and how in tune were you with what exactly was going on with the ODAs, as they were getting ready and planning Anaconda.

Clay Christian

So for me, we're at the Group staff and were hands off. So yeah, the 22nd ASOF and then of course, the 17th, which is now a STS, but at the time it was an ASOS for the Rangers, they were independent, they did their own planning stuff. If they had to give us a heads up on something that was important, they would, but other than that, we were hands off. We never dealt with them, never got involved with them. It was only with the conventional side, because once we got embedded in the CFLCC, that's when we were able to get the ASOC, okay, the 682nd to come over along with the 19th ASOS guys for Fort Campbell, the 101st guys to come over, because they went to a different location in Kandahar in preparation for Anaconda.

Those people we ran daily. The one instance that I did deal directly with on the SOF side was at PSAB, Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, where the CAOC was at (Combined Air Operations Center) before it moved to AL Udeid a couple of years later. So the SOLE was there, the Special Operations Liaison Element. So we had bodies there that we would rotate out. And we had one guy that had been there for a while, and finally we're going hey, he needs to go, he's been there for several months, let's rotate him out. So we're saying, okay, who can we get for a replacement, and by this time I'm there at CFLCC. So I know who it is we can get. Again, it's about who you know. So I called up and talked to Marty Klukas, who's a Senior in Germany and Mark Lutz, who was a Master Sergeant, who had been on our group staff, who is now in Germany, also on the group staff with Marty, because they both were ex-SOF guys, both with TS-SCI clearances.

I said, hey, I'm looking at you guys, are you interested? They said absolutely. Okay, let me deal with it. So I call up Dave "Skinny" Devine. Now a retired Chief, but was than a Senior Master Sergeant, who was the FAM at USAFE. And because I was the theater FAM can do that and call him directly, and of course I call the Air Staff and talk to Chief Burrow because they want to give him a heads up on what's going on. And basically said we're going to do a by name request for them and rotate them in. So that is one instance where we did do a by name request, because those were guys with a certain capability that is very limited as far

as when you're talking about security clearance and background to be able to get in. But yeah, other than that, it was more functionality than anything else.

Nathan Bachand

Yeah, so anything notable at Anaconda or post Anaconda.

Clay Christian

There's a lot of stuff. It should be an entire other interview. Some of the things to include with that was the SOF train up. And then I get into the stuff about pre-Iraqi Freedom as far as what was going on with plans for that operation. Because I was doing trips down to SOCCENT again as an ops planner because after what had been going on in Afghanistan they wanted every ODA to have a JTAC whether it's a Combat Controller or whether it was TACP. Alright, so we'll support. At the planning conference, we're sitting together, us and the Special Tactics guys. We're going, we don't have enough JTACs to be able to fully support the requirement with the expertise we're trying to get. So we had to come up with two different train-ups to do this SOF indoctrination spin-up training just to get bodies on a roster. I actually still have that roster somewhere, I have to look through my emails. I think I still have it. It had those names of people that went through training so we could put them on ODAs later on.

Nathan Bachand

Yeah, it's interesting from some of the guys that I've heard, the differences between Afghanistan and then going into Iraqi Freedom. Rock Davis and Achey are two of the guys that come to mind that were on the ground for both of those and just the stark difference in the planning and how prepared they were to go into Iraq and the way that we were able to fight that war. It seemed like it's a rare thing in American military history where we immediately learned a lesson and then applied those lessons learned going into the next one.

Clay Christian

Absolutely. we learned a lot from mistakes and said, we don't want to do this again. We've got to get the right equipment. It's gonna be the right personnel. We've got to get the right people at the right time. We have to do good planning. I have it in my TDY log, but I went to SOCCENT probably at least four more times as a planner. I went out to Fort Hood at least twice because we had the 712th and also the 682nd ASOCs that were gonna be involved with

operations on the conventional and the SOF side. I was involved more on the SOF side on the planning stuff. This also included support from the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. I went up there for a talk with the TACP FAM at the time. I can't remember what the dang guy's name was, but he was the functional that was at the National Guard Bureau.

So there was all sorts of planning activity, and it was constant. The entire staff at 18th ASOG was constantly doing stuff. What ended up happening was in 2002 stop-loss came off. Because after 9/11, everybody was stop-lossed. Yeah, so my plans to retire basically went out the window until stop-loss ended, and at that time my two daughters were in third grade and fifth grade. I had been in almost 22 years, and I'm thinking, if I stay in I'm gonna probably make Chief and at the time there's only seven Chief billets in the entire career field. Okay, and I did not have any interest in going to any place except the 18th ASOG, and I knew that I was gonna get someplace else because the Air Staff FAM is going to say, no, I'm taking you and putting you some place you don't want to be.

Another Senior and I, he'd been the superintendent for the 682nd, Vince Fox, who passed away several years ago from cancer. We were both Seniors and he put his retirement papers in too because I dropped mine in 2002. But we said well, we're gonna test. I'm gonna go ahead and test for Chief. I'm gonna go and just mark everything down just so we can get the eligible numbers up so we can get other guys promoted. So that's the cycle that Marty Klukas got picked up for Chief. The thing is, Marty and I both had the same board score. Luckily, I just went down the score sheet and just marked anything I could on the test because I didn't want to be that guy that makes it and then go I'm not gonna take the promotion and just screw somebody out. So at that point I said, okay, I made my decision. And I went ahead and dropped my retirement papers, and I was lucky.

Speaking about Anaconda, we were doing a lot of briefings to a lot of different people. This is like a half year after Anaconda occurred. So this would have been about October 2002, and we had a one briefing we've been giving to a lot of different commands and units. A guy called up that I knew, Kyle Hurst. A Retired TACP who was working down here at Hurlburt Field at the training squadron that basically teaches the Air Operations Center formal training. So he had said, hey can you give me that briefing because we're interested in being able to present it? I said sure and he asked what my plans were. I said, I dropped my retirement papers. He asked me what are you gonna do? I said, I don't know... I don't have any opportunities. I'm putting out resumes, but nothing's coming up right now. He asked me to send him my resume.

I get a phone call like two days later from one of the subcontractors who asked me if I wanted a job. I said, well yeah, but I can't start until my terminal leave begins in February. He said don't worry, we'll hold the job for you. So I had a job lined up three or more months before I started my terminal leave. So I started terminal in February and didn't retire until 30 April 2003 after 22 years and 14 days. I ended up working at Hurlburt until just before the end of this May 2025 when I retired. I initially did six years as a contractor with AOC formal training unit Teaching systems and processes.

And then I was tired of the contractor thing because you never know if the contract is going to end, or if it's going to get re-bid, and then you never know if you are going to be hired back on. A GS civilian position came open, which was a pay cut, to go to the Special Tactics Training Squadron to be an instructor there at the STTS with the 24th SOW. So I put in for it and again, no clue who you might know. So Lunk was the Chief at the TACP schoolhouse at the time. And he was out running PT and the STTS commander was out running and he ran into him. He says, hey, you know this guy Clay Christian, I got this resume and Lunk said, Yeah, I know him.

I knew Lunk when he was a Tech Sergeant and with the Rangers. So yeah, I got picked up and became a ST instructor for a couple years. I was back to where I was free fall jumping and jumpmaster as a civilian. But I was pushing 50 years old and working gunship training until one o'clock in the morning or all night doing jumps or water ops. It hurt my back and but I just couldn't do it anymore. Another GS civilian position came up where I was able to go from GS-11 to a GS-12 when the 505th Training Squadron converted from contractor over to GS civilians where I formerly worked at the AOCFTU. So I went back there in 2012. So basically from that point till I retired just this past May (2025) is where I worked as a GS, about 15 years as a GS in total, and then wrapped it up.

Nathan Bachand

Yeah, so you said you started terminal in February of 2003. Did you have any fear of missing out on Iraq?

Clay Christian

Not at all, it just happened that as soon as they kicked off in March, which was basically when stuff started off because I didn't officially retire until 30 April. So when they kick off operations in March of 2003, basically the Air Force put another stop loss unless you were already on terminal.

Nathan Bachand

Ah, okay, so that worked out really well.

Clay Christian

I didn't get called back, but if I was, I knew I was gonna be at least in the initial phase and because I've been an ops planner for SOCCENT they were gonna put me at the SOC Forward

headquarters. So that's where I would have been at so I would have been way out away from everything anyway.

Nathan Bachand

Gotcha. Well, I think that's a good place to wrap up the main body of the interview. I do have just a couple of random questions, just for my own knowledge. Who owned the 22nd ASOF and what are your thoughts on that? I understand those guys weren't supposed to go deploy with their ODAs. That wasn't the purpose of it, but it seemed like it worked out pretty well, according to some of those guys that I've talked to, like John Knipe.

Clay Christian

So the 22nd ASOF belonged to the 18th ASOG. So they were basically a flight under the group. Their initial mission, if you talk to the guys, (because I was never a member of the 22nd ASOF), but if you talk to guys, which you probably have, their mission statement was supposed to be CAS training. But they did a lot more than that for years, and guys were going out with the ODAs and doing a lot of other stuff. And when it came time to support ODAs, they are going, we want these guys.

Nathan Bachand

Do you know why it went away?

Clay Christian

It was still there when I retired, so I don't know the exact date of when it went away, but I'm trying to remember why.

Nathan Bachand

I could see ACC just having a problem with it because they were doing something they weren't supposed to.

Clay Christian

I can't remember if there was some reasons of why they were doing it, and it had maybe something to do with maybe the JTAC program, or because SF ODA s didn't have a formal JTAC program yet.

Nathan Bachand

Was it still ETAC up until 2004?

Clay Christian

JTAC didn't really come about until right in between the Afghanistan/Iraqi Freedom operations as far as when you're thinking a joint qualification and all that. They'd been working on it, but everything hadn't been formalized just yet. It might have been close to it, but it was new. So the Army didn't necessarily have their own program. Then they started doing SOTAC programs as far as qualifications, and so there's a lot more JTACs out there to include all the Combat Controllers. Now Combat Controllers pulled away from it as far as keeping and maintaining that qualification so much, so I think that may have had something to do, but don't hold me to it.

Nathan Bachand

Another random question, do you know when the switch from 275 to 1C4 was?

Clay Christian

Yeah, it happened when I was in Italy, I know that. So I got there in 92 and left in 96. I want to say right about the middle, I'd have to pull up my old EPRs. I don't have them, they're boxed up someplace. It would have had to have happened somewhere around 94, 95-ish. The Air Force in general changed the structure and re-numbering. So it wasn't just our career field, it was Air Force-wide. They did that as far as I'm aware.

Nathan Bachand

Another question along those lines so when I joined in the mid 2010s the term ROMAD is still there, but they had just stopped allowing ROMAD deployments. I always thought it would be really cool to go get a ROMAD deployment before you become a JTAC and follow that traditional path. By the time I showed up to the 19th ASOS, they had said ROMAD

deployments aren't a thing anymore but still as we went through our CMR training we were still calling ourselves ROMADs before we became a JTAC. When did the identity in the career switch from hey, I'm a ROMAD to hey, I'm a TACP?

Clay Christian

Again, I would start thinking more along the early nineties is what I'm thinking. Timeline wise, I'm thinking basically Desert Storm operations, that's what I'm thinking. Because we had a lot of guys that were controlling, right? That were basically on their own and awarded a lot of honors in that operation as well. So that's kinda where that identity started. We always said TACP and we weren't doing it as a term of the team. It was as an individual, but we still somewhat identified as ROMADs, but TACP really came to the forefront during like 1990, 1991 time frame.

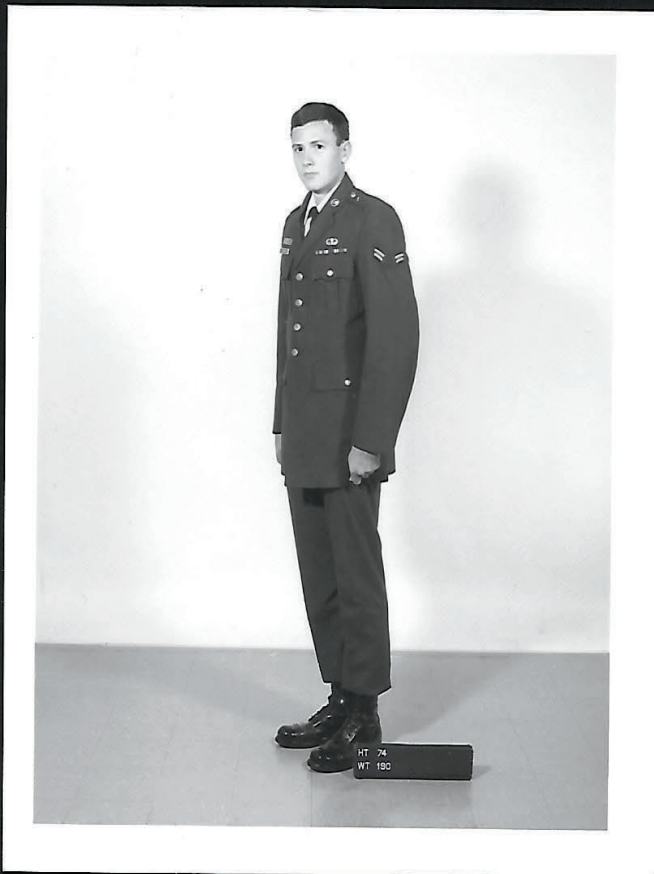
Nathan Bachand

Well, that was the last question I had. Do you want to sneak anything else in before I cut the recording?

Clay Christian

No, I hope I haven't rambled on too much for you. Thank you.

















RANGER

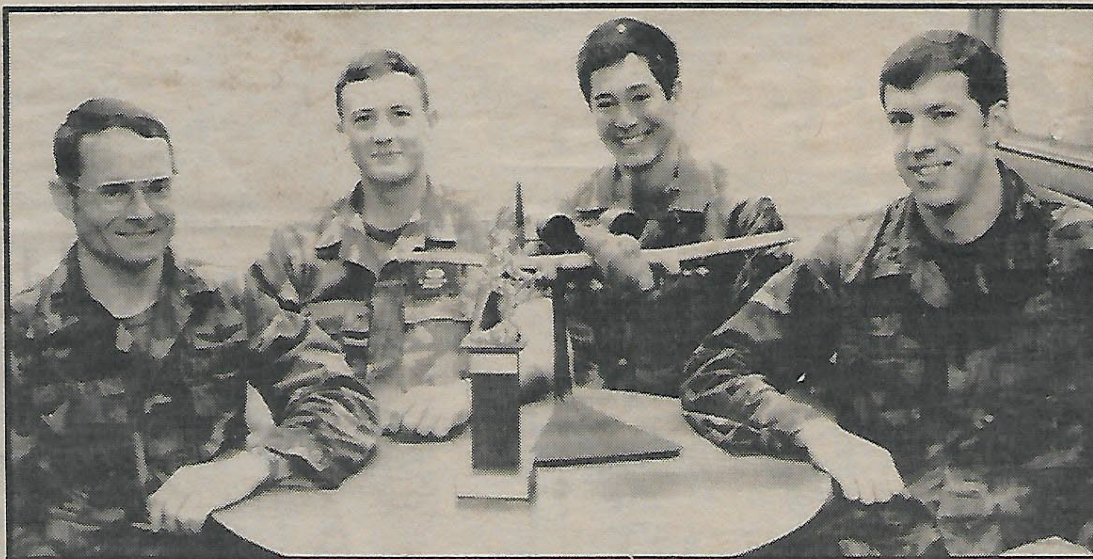
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Air Force members representing Fort Lewis and Det. 6 in the Blue Thunder competition were, from left, Capt. Rick Welch, Airman 1st

Class Clay Christian, SSgt. Jay Wright and Capt. Bob Berg.

9th's Air Force support team booms in 1st in 'Blue Thunder'

Story and photo by DAVE SCHAD

An Air Force Close Air Support team representing the 9th Inf Div captured first place in December's Blue Thunder '83, a first of a kind Air Force competition.

Blue Thunder, held at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., brought together eight, two-man teams from the 602nd Tactical Air Control Wing. The wing has eight detachments assigned to six Army combat arms units throughout the western United States.

The 9th Division's representatives were Airman 1st Class Clay Christian and Capt. Rick Welch. Taking a third place in the competition was the I Corps' team of SSgt. Jay Wright and Capt. Bob Berg.

These detachments provide Army units with air liaison support and assistance down to battalion level. The detachments generally operate in two-man teams consisting of an enlisted tactical air command and control specialist and an air liaison officer, most of whom are fighter pilots. Fort Lewis's Det. 6 is

authorized over 90 members, 51 vehicles and associated communications equipment.

During Blue Thunder, the teams were tested on marksmanship, driving/land navigation, air strike control, a written general knowledge test and a five mile run. The most heavily graded of these was the air strike control portion. It was worth 300 points and involved two A-10 fighters. Welch and Christian finished first in that part of the competition as well as the five mile run.

Christian was one of only two airmen first class involved in the competition but he says that he wasn't concerned at all. "I was pretty confident. I felt like I could compete with anybody there," the airborne qualified E-3 said. "Davis-Monthan is close to my hometown so I really wanted to go. It was a little extra motivator for me."

The winners were honored at an awards banquet where they received a revolving trophy that will be taken back to next year's competition.

AIR FORCE TIMES OCT 1985

Fairchild Team Wins at 'Leapfest'

FAIRCHILD AFB, Wash. — The 3636th Combat Crew Training Wing (AF Survival School) and an attached squadron took top honors in team and individual static line competition in the Leapfest '85 military parachute meet at Fort Bragg, N.C. The event is sponsored by the Army's Green Beret Parachute Club. A total of 55 teams from all services competed.

First place in the team static line contest went to the 3636th CCTW team of TSgt David B. Robinson, SSgt Noe G. Cortez, and SrA James E. Goulette and Michael A. Wayt, with TSgt George E. Riley as alternate. A team from the 3613th Combat Crew Training Squadron from Homestead AFB, Fla., headed by TSgt Robert Milks of the 3613th CCTS won the individual static line title, edging Cortez by a second.

21st TASS Wins Own Parachute Meet

SHAW AFB, S.C. — The host 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron took first place in the recent "Jumpfest" parachute competition.

Seventy-five of the 120 parachutists in Tactical Air Command participated in the fourth annual meet, said Col Richard G. Rhyme, commander of the 507th Tactical Air Control Wing.

The event was scored by timing the four jumpers on each team from the time they touched ground to the time they touched the target, a 10-inch disc, then totaling the times for a team score. The 21st TASS won the contest with the lowest team time, 149.56 seconds. Team members were Capt. Daniel D. Hancock, SSgt Gary Broussard, Sgt Michael L. Berman and A1C James J. Demeo.

In second place was a team from the USAF Air Ground Operations School at Hurlburt Field, Fla., with 161.07 seconds. Members were SSgt Lawrence Burgess and Douglas F. Fillman and Sgts Clay Christian and Randal S. Long.

The lowest individual time was recorded by Christian of Hurlburt Field, with 11.08 seconds.









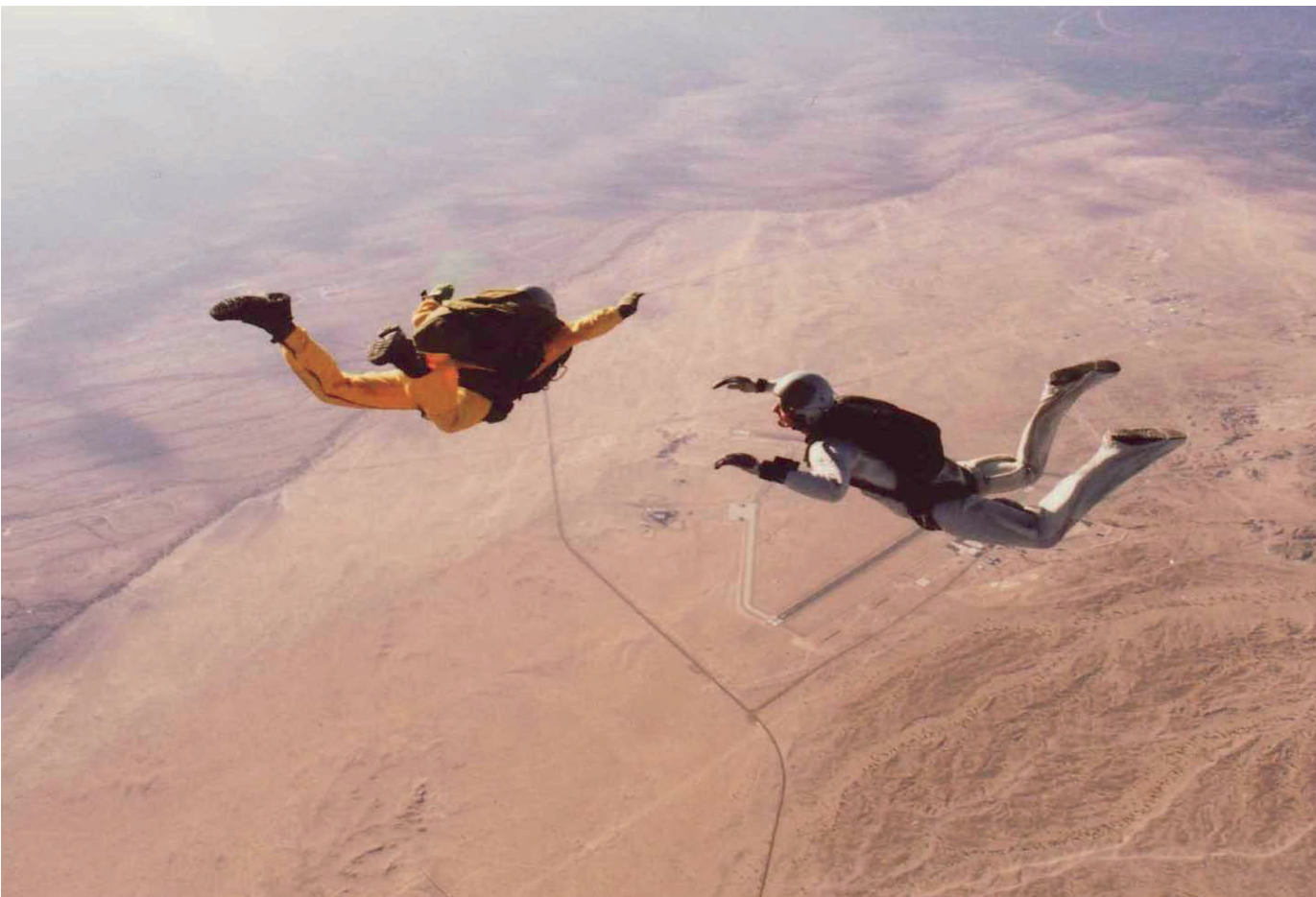
























Brake's uniform has two US Army unit patches. A patch worn on the left sleeve indicates he is the 10th Mountain Division, which he was serving with at the time. When a patch is worn on the right sleeve, it indicates what service with a unit (in this case, the 10th Mountain Division) he was serving with. Kinney wore this baseball cap while in Iraq. The TACP/SOF on the front of the patch is for Tactical Air Control Party/Special Forces.

Brake deployed to Kuwait in 2001 and had both this challenge coin and US flag flown in USAF aircraft during Operation Southern Watch. He later carried them in his rucksack on all his missions in Iraq. SSGT Rich Brake, JTAC, who served three tours in Iraq, wore this keffiyeh (also called a shemagh) during his service with the US Army 10th Special Forces Group (Albome) in Iraq in 2004-2005. Keffiyehs are commonly worn in the Middle East to provide protection against the sun and blowing sand, and to identify one's social position and group. SMSgt Clay Christian, a highly-experienced JTAC, wore this flight suit during Operation Enduring Freedom deployments and planning Operation Iraqi Freedom while assigned to the 18th Air Special Operations Group. Earlier in his career, he also participated in Operation Just Cause in Panama and in Operation Deny Flight in the Balkans. The badges on his nametag represent (clockwise): jumpmaster military freetail (HALO) parachute badge, master parashooter, and the pathfinder badge.

The shirt and pants Colon-Lopez was wearing in the photo to the right are on display here. The New York City Fire Department patch was sent to him by FDNY firefighters, and he wore it on several missions. Sot Max Purrs, a JTAC, went into Afghanistan shortly after 9/11. While there, he wore this Afghan hat and "I Love New York" pin.



The SMSgt Clay Christian wore this baseball cap and keffiyeh during his deployment to Afghanistan. The patch on the front of the flight suit is the emblem of the PJ/Combat Team, which is the nickname for the PJ/Combat Team. The patch on the back of the flight suit is the emblem of the PJ/Combat Team, which is the nickname for the PJ/Combat Team.



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE AIR FORCE ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL
HAS BEEN AWARDED TO

STAFF SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN

FOR

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
1 JUNE 1987 TO 30 OCTOBER 1987

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Staff Sergeant Christian's exceptional motivation and organizational abilities insured the smooth operation and flawless coordination that marked the Fifth Annual Worldwide 275X0 Competition as the best yet. This event which hosted Tactical Air Command and Control Specialists from every using command has now become a catalyst for improved training throughout the career field. Sergeant Christian's outstanding efforts resulted in dramatic and rewarding improvements which have set the standards for future competitions. Through his diligence and managerial excellence, Sergeant Christian has brought credit to Detachment 1, 3400 Technical Training Group, Air Training Command, himself and the United States Air Force.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND THIS 1st DAY OF FEBRUARY 19 88


Commander
USAF Tactical Air Warfare Center



AF 2274, FEB 83
PREVIOUS EDITION WILL BE USED



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

THE AIR FORCE COMMENDATION MEDAL

HAS BEEN AWARDED TO

STAFF SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE
28 SEPTEMBER 1984 - 26 AUGUST 1988

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND

THIS 1st DAY OF SEPTEMBER 1988


Commander
USAF Tactical Air Warfare Center

AF FORM 2224, APR 85



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE AIR FORCE COMMENDATION MEDAL
TO
CLAY CHRISTIAN

Staff Sergeant Clay Christian distinguished himself by meritorious service as Instructor Tactical Air Command and Control Specialist Course, Detachment 1, 3400 Technical Training Group, Hurlburt Field, Florida from 28 September 1984, to 26 August 1988. During this period, the outstanding professional skill, leadership, and ceaseless efforts of Sergeant Christian resulted in major contributions to the effectiveness and success of the unit's training mission. Sergeant Christian's innovative manner of instruction, persistence in developing and improving the plan of instruction and meaningful contributions in all areas of instructional development have contributed greatly to the unit's mission. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Christian reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.





THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
HAS AWARDED

THE JOINT SERVICE ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL

TO

STAFF SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE
FOR THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 31ST DAY OF MAY 19 89

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
COMMAND OR OFFICE



GARY E. LUCK, MG, USA, COMMANDING
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE



Citation

TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE

Joint Service Achievement Medal

TO

CLAY CHRISTIAN

Staff Sergeant Clay Christian, United States Air Force, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious achievement from 10 February to 17 February 1989 while assigned as a Radio Operator to the Joint Communications Unit during exercise "ELATED ISSUE". During this period, he was responsible for operations of secure controller cell communications. He consistently displayed exceptional competence, sound judgement, and professional knowledge in the execution of his duties. His dedication to the mission was demonstrated by the flawless communications he provided while under deficient site conditions. His professionalism and versatility were directly related to the success of the Joint Communications Unit's support mission. Sergeant Christian's exemplary performance, dedication to the mission, and extremely high standards reflected great credit upon himself, the United States Air Force, and the Department of Defense.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
HAS AWARDED

THE JOINT SERVICE ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL (FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

TO

STAFF SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE
FOR THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 28TH DAY OF MARCH 19 87



Wayne A. Downing
WAYNE A. DOWNING, MG, USA, COMMANDING
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
COMMAND OR OFFICE



Citation

TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE

Joint Service Achievement Medal

TO

CLAY CHRISTIAN

Staff Sergeant Clay Christian, United States Air Force, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious achievement from 20 November 1989 to 10 December 1989 while serving as Communications Team Leader of the Department of Defense element of an interagency crisis response team, Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Working around the clock in austere environments, he anticipated unplanned requirements and developed innovative solutions to overcome complex operational challenges. Sergeant Christian's performance reflected great credit upon himself, the United States Air Force, and the Department of Defense.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
HAS AUTHORIZED THE AWARD OF THE

DEFENSE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

TO

TECHNICAL SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

FOR

EXCEPTIONAL MERITORIOUS SERVICE
FOR THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES
FROM 30 AUGUST 1988 TO 10 MARCH 1992

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND THIS 19TH DAY OF FEBRUARY 1992

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
COMMAND OR OFFICE



William F. Garrison
WILLIAM F. GARRISON, MG, USA, COMMANDING
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY AWARD OF THE
DEFENSE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

TO

CLAY CHRISTIAN

Technical Sergeant Clay Christian, United States Air Force, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service while serving as a Special Operations Tactical Control Party Noncommissioned Officer, Joint Communications Unit, Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina from 30 August 1988 to 10 March 1992. Sergeant Christian deployed on 11 classified Joint Staff directed exercises and contingency operations. He consistently provided flawless command and control communications, greatly contributing to the success of these intricate and challenging missions. His outstanding communications expertise and thorough professionalism enhanced the success of four command capabilities exercises. Sergeant Christian's performance was underscored by pride, self-improvement, boundless initiative, and total mission accomplishment. Sergeant Christian's distinctive accomplishments reflect great credit upon himself, the United States Air Force, and the Department of Defense.





DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

THE AIR FORCE ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL
(FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

HAS BEEN AWARDED TO

TECHNICAL SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN

FOR

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
12 JULY 1993 TO 25 JULY 1993

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Technical Sergeant Clay Christian distinguished himself by outstanding achievement as an Airborne Enlisted Terminal Attack Controller Noncommissioned Officer in Charge while assigned to Operating Location Kilo, 4th Air Support Operations Group, Caserma Ederle Army Installation, Italy. Sergeant Christian was instrumental in the coordination and execution of Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force Exercise CRATER which provided essential Close Air Support training to the United Nations Protection Forces Forward Air Controllers in support of Operation DENY FLIGHT. He established the communications plan for the exercise and acted as the communications liaison between the participating units. He also maintained command and control radio nets, resulting in continuous communications for all units involved.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND THIS 10TH DAY OF MARCH 1994

STEPHEN O. HAMMOND, Colonel, USAF
Commander, 4 ASOG



AF 2274, FEB 83
PREVIOUS EDITION WILL BE USED



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HAS AWARDED

THE ARMY ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL

TO
TECHNICAL SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN
3D BATTALION, 325TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

FOR MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT DURING JRTC ROTATION 94-3. HIS DEVOTION TO DUTY, TECHNICAL, AND TACTICAL COMPETENCE WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN THE SUCCESS OF THE ROTATION. HIS ACTIONS BRING CREDIT UPON HIM, THE AIRBORNE BATTALION COMBAT TEAM, THE 17th AIR FORCE, AND THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE.

18 JANUARY 1994 TO 29 JANUARY 1994

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS THIRTY DAY OF NOVEMBER 19 94

PERMANENT ORDER 29-002 30 NOV 94
HQ, 3-325TH INF (ABCT)
VICENZA, ITALY



Curtis M. Scaparrotti
SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
CURTIS M. SCAPARROTTI
LTC, IN
COMMANDING



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
HAS AWARDED

THE JOINT SERVICE ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL

(SECOND OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

TO

MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE
FOR THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 25th DAY OF AUGUST 19 95

JOINT TASK FORCE
PROVIDE PROMISE AND DENY FLIGHT
COMMAND OR OFFICE



Hal M. Hornburg
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
HAL M. HORNBURG
Major General, USAF
Director, Combined Air Operations Center

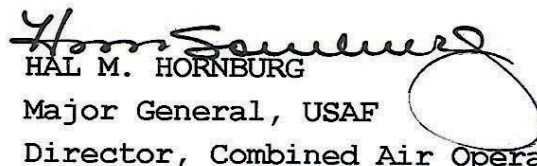


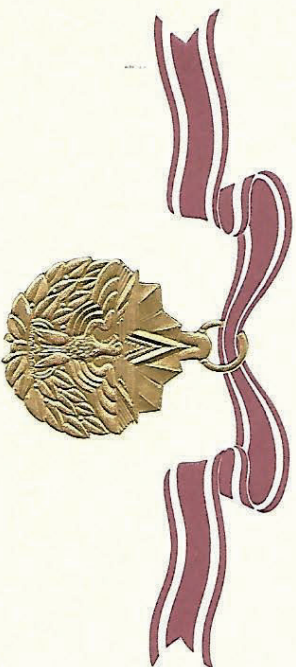
HEADQUARTERS
JOINT TASK FORCE PROVIDE PROMISE
APO AE 09784



CITATION
TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE JOINT SERVICE ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL
(SECOND OAK LEAF CLUSTER)
TO
MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Master Sergeant Clay Christian, United States Air Force, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service as the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, United Nations Protection Forces, Forward Air Controller Refresher Training Program, Combined Air Operations Center, Operation Deny Flight and Joint Forces Air Component Command, Operation Provide Promise from 1 October 1994 to 31 December 1994. During this period, the performance of Sergeant Christian in a key support role contributed substantially to the detailed planning and execution of operational and humanitarian missions in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. As the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, United Nations Protection Forces, Forward Air Controller Refresher Training Program, his demonstrated outstanding leadership, managerial skills, and high standards of performance were instrumental in Operations Deny Flight and Provide Promise exceeding all operational goals and commitments, including the humanitarian delivery of food and medical supplies to refugees in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Christian reflect credit upon himself, the United States Air Force, and the Department of Defense.


HAL M. HORNBURG
Major General, USAF
Director, Combined Air Operations Center



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 16 JANUARY 1969
HAS AWARDED

THE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

TO

MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN

FOR

OUTSTANDING SERVICE
23 MARCH 1992 TO 8 MARCH 1996

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND
THIS 8TH DAY OF MARCH 19 96

William E. Johns
WILLIAM E. JOHNS, Colonel, USAF
Commander, 617th Air Support Operations Group



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

TO
CLAY CHRISTIAN

Master Sergeant Clay Christian distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Detachment 1, 617th Air Support Operations Group, Caserma Ederle, Vicenza, Italy, from 23 March 1992 to 8 March 1996. During this period, Sergeant Christian provided exceptional close air support liaison advice and assistance to the 3/325 Airborne Infantry Battalion, the Southern European Task Force Infantry Brigade, and the Allied Command Europe Rapid Mobile Force during 15 deployments to Germany, Turkey, England, and numerous locations within Italy. He used outstanding managerial and leadership skills to develop an effective standardization-evaluation program while guiding his detachment through a restructure. Sergeant Christian planned and implemented the first-ever integration of Italian Air Force fighters in support of United States Army mass tactical airborne operations. As a recognized theater expert on AC-130 gunship tactics, he trained Air Force forward air controllers and Army forward observers on planning and integrating of fires during contingency training exercises, leading to successful validation of training and procedures for United States forces deploying in support of Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Christian reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.





THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 16 JANUARY 1969
HAS AWARDED

THE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

(FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

TO

MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN

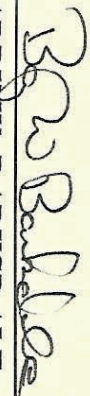
FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE

22 APRIL 1996 TO 1 APRIL 1999

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND

THIS 17th DAY OF March 1999


BARRY W. BARKSDALE
Brigadier General, USAF
Commander



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF

THE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL
(FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

TO

CLAY CHRISTIAN

Master Sergeant Clay Christian distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as Superintendent, Air Force Element, Military Free-Fall School, 342d Training Squadron, Operating Location Delta, 37th Training Wing, Yuma Army Proving Ground, Arizona, from 22 April 1996 to 1 April 1999. During this period, Sergeant Christian provided exceptional Air Force liaison assistance to Bravo Company, 2d Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group, and the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center in conducting military free-fall training for special operations personnel, ensuring a seamless interservice working environment. His outstanding leadership skills led to a strategic planning process that converted and restructured 64 percent of instructor positions resulting in a 100 percent sustained unit manning rate, and were key factors in the unit receiving an "Excellent" rating on its first-ever Quality Air Force Assessment and a 95 percent graduation rate for Air Force students. Sergeant Christian provided the catalyst in implementing a host support agreement with Luke Air Force Base and the first comprehensive revision of a memorandum of understanding between Air Force and Army chains of command. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Christian reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.





DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HAS AWARDED

THE ARMY ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL

TO
MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN
COMPANY B, 2D BATTALION, 1st SPECIAL WARFARE TRAINING GROUP (AIRBORNE)

FOR meritorious achievement while serving as the Master of Ceremonies for the dedication of the Daly Special Operations Airborne Terminal at Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona. Master Sergeant Christian's professionalism and dedication to duty reflect great credit upon himself, 2d Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne), and the United States Air Force.

FROM: 27 March 1999 to 27 March 1999

PO 19-2, 19 January 2000

HQS, USAJFKSWCS
Fort Bragg, NC



Kenneth R. Bowra
Major General, USA
Commanding



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
HAS AUTHORIZED THE AWARD OF THE

DEFENSE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL (FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER) TO

SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

FOR

EXCEPTIONALLY MERITORIOUS SERVICE

FOR THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES

FROM 12 APRIL 1999 TO 29 AUGUST 2001

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND THIS

17TH

DAY OF

JULY, 2001

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

COMMAND OR OFFICE



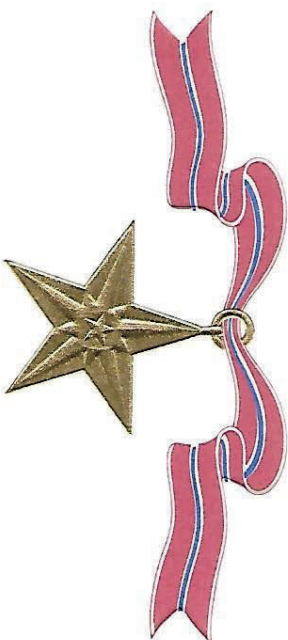
DELL L. DAILEY, MG, USA, COMMANDING

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

**CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE
DEFENSE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL
TO
CLAY CHRISTIAN**

Senior Master Sergeant Clay Christian, United States Air Force, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service while assigned as NCOIC, Selection and Training, Joint Communications Unit (JCU), Fort Bragg, North Carolina, from 12 April 1999 to 29 August 2001. During this time, Sergeant Christian projected training, forecasted resources, and planned ten worldwide unit level EDREs. Leading the exercise control group, Sergeant Christian ensured the timely integration of other government agencies (OGA) and fixed-wing assets in addition to transporting the forces, lodging personnel, and overseeing the evaluation process. His sense of leadership led to maintaining over 125 individual training records while scheduling over 200 courses, including all ATTRS schools and technical specific training for personnel assigned to JCU and JSOC. Sergeant Christian's expertise, guidance, and supervision ensured the success of his section by scheduling more than 100 contract, SAAM, and JAAT aircraft without once missing a deadline. His section flawlessly managed all unit air operations, executing 30 airborne operations with no incidents. Sergeant Christian's performance has been exceptional and is in keeping with JCU's reputation as "DOD's FINEST COMMUNICATORS". Through his distinctive accomplishments, Senior Master Sergeant Christian reflected great credit upon himself, the United States Air Force, and the Department of Defense.





THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, AUGUST 24, 1962
HAS AWARDED

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN

FOR

MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
29 DECEMBER 2001 TO 26 FEBRUARY 2002

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND

15 November 2002

Hal M. Hornburg

HAL M. HORNBURG
General, USAF
Commander

AF FORM 2236, 20000101 Air Combat Command



THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

CLAY CHRISTIAN

Senior Master Sergeant Clay Christian distinguished himself by meritorious achievement as Central Command's Theater Tactical Air Control Party Functional Manager and Fire Support Operations Planner to the Combined Forces Land Component/Air Combat Center while engaged in ground combat operations against an enemy of the United States at Camp Doha, Kuwait, from 29 December 2001 to 26 February 2002. During this period, Sergeant Christian supervised the combat employment of over 135-special operations and conventional Tactical Air Control Party and Combat Weather Team members. He independently made crucial prioritization decisions dealing with the development, positioning and utilization of critically needed Air Force ground combat forces and their equipment while his unique leadership and technical skills had a direct impact on the expeditious and successful air to ground campaign during the crucial first phases of ground combat during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in the Afghanistan area of operations. Sergeant Christian was responsible for coordinating Tactical Air Control Party and Combat Weather Team personnel assets in accordance with the Combined Forces Air Component Commander, Combined Forces Land Component Commander and Joint Special Operations Task Force Commander's intent. He provided the vital link synchronizing the Combined Forces Land Component Command and Air Combat Center staff, Special Operations Liaison Element staff, Joint Special Operations Task Force Fire Support Cell and the teams engaged in ground combat. Sergeant Christian tracked, coordinated and de-conflicted all personnel moves by developing and implementing an effective tracking system reducing confusion and maximizing the accuracy of the deployed personnel. The exemplary leadership, personal endeavor, and dedication to duty displayed by Sergeant Christian in this responsible position reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.





THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 16 JANUARY 1969 HAS
AWARDED

THE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

(SECOND OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

TO

SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT CLAY CHRISTIAN

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE

1 SEPTEMBER 2001 TO 31 JANUARY 2003

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Senior Master Sergeant Clay Christian distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as Chief Enlisted Manager, 18th Air Support Operations Group, Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina. During this period, Sergeant Christian demonstrated superior leadership and outstanding management concepts in the accomplishment of peacetime and wartime tasks. He meticulously coordinated with members of Air Staff and three major commands to develop and implement an Air Force-wide special operations forces training course. This action provided airmen at the tip of the spear the ability to employ the most accurate and lethal close air support against Taliban and Al Qaeda forces during all operations. Additionally, Sergeant Christian led the largest and most diverse Air Support Operations Group to the highest level of readiness throughout the most turbulent time in its history. He constructed and standardized tactical air control party and combat weather team equipment requirements for combat operations, providing force protection and critical combat equipment to previously unfilled requirements. His support was key to the preservation of combat assets. As primary planner to Special Operations Command Central, Sergeant Christian's exhaustive efforts have facilitated the success of ground combat operations for current and future combat operations. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Christian culminate a distinguished career in the service of his country and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND
25 March 2003

LARRY L. TWITCHELL
Major General, USAF
Commander, Ninth Air Force (P)



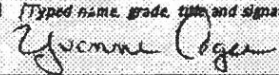
AF FORM 2228, AUG 98

CAUTION: NOT TO BE USED FOR
IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT RECORD.
SAFEGUARD IT.

ANY ALTERATIONS IN SHADED AREAS
RENDER FORM VOID

CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE OR DISCHARGE FROM ACTIVE DUTY

1. NAME (Last, First, Middle) CHRISTIAN CLAY		2. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH AIR FORCE - REG AF		3. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER [REDACTED]		
4a. GRADE, RATE OR RANK SMSGT	b. PAY GRADE E8	5. DATE OF BIRTH (YYYYMMDD) 19630518	6. RESERVE OBLIGATION TERMINATION DATE (YYYYMMDD) N/A			
7a. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE DUTY PHOENIX, AZ		b. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY (City and state, or complete address if known) TUCSON, AZ				
8a. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND 0018 AIR SUPT OPNS GP (ACC)		b. STATION WHERE SEPARATED POPE AFB NC				
9. COMMAND TO WHICH TRANSFERRED NOT APPLICABLE			10. SGLI COVERAGE ☐ NONE AMOUNT: \$250,000			
11. PRIMARY SPECIALTY (List number, title and years and months in specialty. List additional specialty numbers and titles involving periods of one or more years.) J1C471- Tactical Air Command and Control, 14 years and 11 months. J8B000- Military Training Instructor, 03 years. T1C451- Technical Training Instructor, Tactical Air Command and Control, 04 years.		12. RECORD OF SERVICE		YEAR(s)	MONTH(s)	DAY(s)
		a. DATE ENTERED AD THIS PERIOD		1981	Apr	16
		b. SEPARATION DATE THIS PERIOD		2003	Apr	30
		c. NET ACTIVE SERVICE THIS PERIOD		22	00	15
		d. TOTAL PRIOR ACTIVE SERVICE		00	00	00
		e. TOTAL PRIOR INACTIVE SERVICE		00	10	06
		f. FOREIGN SERVICE		04	03	15
		g. SEA SERVICE		00	00	00
h. EFFECTIVE DATE OF PAY GRADE		2000	Sep	01		
13. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED (All periods of service) AF Commendation Medal, AF Achievement Medal with 1 oak leaf cluster, Joint Service Achievement Medal with 2 oak leaf clusters, Meritorious SEE REMARKS		14. MILITARY EDUCATION (Course title, number of weeks, and month and year completed) Basic Military Training, 6 weeks, May 1981; Winter Operations Course, 5 days, Mar 1982; Advanced Operations Course, 5 days, SEE CONT SHEET				
15a. MEMBER CONTRIBUTED TO POST-VIETNAM ERA VETERANS' EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ☐ YES ☒ NO		b. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE OR EQUIVALENT ☒ YES ☐ NO				
16. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID 3.5	17. MEMBER WAS PROVIDED COMPLETE DENTAL EXAMINATION AND ALL APPROPRIATE DENTAL SERVICES AND TREATMENT WITHIN 90 DAYS PRIOR TO SEPARATION		YES ☐ NO ☒			
18. REMARKS ITEM 13: Service Medal with 1 oak leaf cluster, Army Achievement Medal with 1 oak leaf cluster, Defense Meritorious Service Medal with 1 oak leaf cluster, Bronze Star Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, NCO Professional Military Education Ribbon with 2 oak leaf clusters, Combat Readiness Medal with 3 oak leaf clusters, Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon with 1 oak leaf cluster, National Defense Service Medal with 1 oak leaf cluster, AF Overseas Long Tour Ribbon, Armed Forces Service Medal, AF Training Ribbon, AF Longevity Service Award with 4 oak leaf clusters, NATO Medal, Joint Meritorious SEE CONT SHEET The information contained herein is subject to computer matching within the Department of Defense or with any other affected Federal or non-Federal agency for verification purposes and to determine eligibility for, and or continued compliance with, the requirements of a Federal benefit program.						
19a. MAILING ADDRESS AFTER SEPARATION (Include Zip Code) 6500 JACOBS CREEK CIRCLE FAYETTEVILLE, NC 28306		b. NEAREST RELATIVE (Name and address - include Zip Code) RENEE CHRISTIAN 6500 JACOBS CREEK CIRCLE FAYETTEVILLE, NC 28306				
20. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 6 BE SENT TO <u>NC</u> DIRECTOR OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ☒ YES ☐ NO						
21. SIGNATURE OF MEMBER BEING SEPARATED MEMBER UNAVAILABLE TO SIGN		22. OFFICIAL AUTHORIZED TO SIGN (Typed name, grade, title and signature) YVONNE AGEE, 1LT, USAF OIC, Relocations & Employment 				

SPECIAL ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (For use by authorized agencies only)		
23. TYPE OF SEPARATION RETIREMENT		24. CHARACTER OF SERVICE (Include upgrades) HONORABLE
25. SEPARATION AUTHORITY AFI 36-3203	26. SEPARATION CODE RBD	27. REENTRY CODE 2V
28. NARRATIVE REASON FOR SEPARATION SUFFICIENT SERVICE FOR RETIREMENT		
29. DATES OF TIME LOST DURING THIS PERIOD (YYYYMMDD) NONE		30. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 4 (Initials)

DD Form 214-AUTOMATED, FEB 2000

PREVIOUS EDITION IS OBSOLETE.

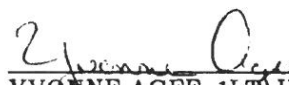
MEMBER-4

1. NAME (LAST, FIRST, MI) 2. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH 3. SOCIAL SECURITY
CHRISTIAN CLAY AIR FORCE -- REG AF

4a. GRADE, RATE, OR RANK 4b. PAY GRADE 4c. DATE OF SEPARATION
SMSGT E8 2003 Apr 30

ITEM 13: Unit Award with 2 oak leaf clusters, AF Outstanding Unit Award w/Valor with 3 oak leaf clusters, AF Good Conduct Medal with 6 oak leaf clusters. ITEM 14: Jul 1983; Jungle Warfare Training Course, 3 weeks, Sep 1982; Airborne Course, 3 weeks, Apr 1983; Communication NCO Course, 1 day, Apr 1983; Static Line Jumpmaster Course, 3 weeks, May 1984; Land Survival Course, 5 days, Sep 1985; USAF Air Ground Operations School Firepower Control Course, 3 weeks, Apr 1986; Pathfinder Course, 3 weeks, Jun 1988; Canadian Parachutist Badge Course, 5 days, Aug 1990; Responsible Officers Course/Force Protection II, 5 days, May 1999; SNCO Academy, 6 weeks, Apr 1998; NCO Academy, 6 weeks, Aug 1991; MC-5 Static Line Ram Air Parachute System instructor Certification Course, 12 days, Sep 1996; Advanced Military Free Fall Parachutist Course, 71 days, Sep 1996; USAFE Air Ground Operations School, 5 days, Jul 1992; BSR Antiterrorist Driving and Surveillance Detection Course, 3 days, Jun 1991; Special Forces Military Freefall Jumpmaster Course, 23 days, Apr 1991; Individual Terrorism Awareness Course, 5 days, Jun 1990; Military Free Fall Parachutist Course, 37 days, Aug 1989; Combat Survival Training Course, 17 days, Mar 1988; Basic Counseling Course, 32 hrs, Feb 1988; Water Survival Training Course, 3 days, Jan 1988; Test and Measurement Course, 40 hrs, Jan 1987; Special Operations School- Counterinsurgency Course, 5 days, Aug 1986; NCO Leadership School, 6 weeks, Jun 1986; Instructional Systems Development Course, 40 hrs, May 1986; AN/GRC- 206 Communications System Course, 80 hrs, Nov 1985; USAF Special Operations School- Dynamics of International Terrorism Course, 5 days, Aug 1985; Technical SEE CONT SHEET

MEMBER UNAVAILABLE TO SIGN
CHRISTIAN CLAY


YVONNE AGEE, 1LT, USAF
OIC, Relocations & Employment

DQS: 2003 APR 30

1. NAME: Christian, Clay
2. Department, Component, and Branch: 18 ASOG (ACC), USAF
3. Social Security Number: XXXXXXXXXX
4. Pay Grade: E-8

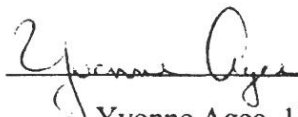
ITEMS CONTINUED:

ITEM 14: Training Instructor Course, 216 hrs, Nov 1984; Scout Indoctrination Program, 19 days, Sep 1983; USAF NCO Orientation Course, 22 hrs, Oct 1982; Tactical Air Command and Control Specialist Course, 560 hrs, Nov 1981. Member has completed first full term of service. Subject to Recall to Active Duty by the Secretary of the Air Force.

-----NOTHING FOLLOWS-----

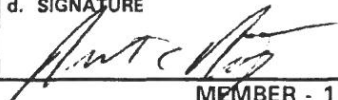
MEMBER UNAVAILABLE TO SIGN

Christian Clay


Yvonne Agee, 1LT, USAF
OIC, Relocations & Employment

CAUTION: NOT TO BE USED FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES

ANY ALTERATIONS IN SHADED AREAS RENDER FORM VOID

CORRECTION TO DD FORM 214, CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE OR DISCHARGE FROM ACTIVE DUTY				
1. NAME (Last, First, Middle) CHRISTIAN CLAY		2. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH AIR FORCE - REG AF		3. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (Also, Service Number if applicable)
4. MAILING ADDRESS (Include ZIP Code) 6500 JACOBS CREEK CIRCLE FAYETTEVILLE, NC 28306				
5. ORIGINAL DD FORM 214 IS CORRECTED AS INDICATED BELOW:				
ITEM NO.	CORRECTED TO READ			
13 *****	SEPARATION DATE ON DD FORM 214 BEING CORRECTED: 2003 Apr 30 Add: Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Services Medal, Air Force Expeditionary Service Ribbon with Gold Border *****LAST ENTRY*****			
6. DATE (YYYYMMDD) 2006-03-22 NARA		7. OFFICIAL AUTHORIZED TO SIGN		
a. TYPED NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) ROOTZ, ROBERT C.		b. GRADE GS-12	c. TITLE Manager Core Three, NPRC	d. SIGNATURE 

DD FORM 215, FEB 2000

PREVIOUS EDITION IS OBSOLETE.

MEMBER - 1

