COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES / CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE

PCEMI 35 / JCSP 35

EXERCISE NEW HORIZON

CANSOFCOM: *A Special Force Command Without a Specialized Fixed-Wing Capability*

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24 April 2009

ABSTRACT

Due to the high operational demands on our legacy fleet of CC-130 Hercules transport aircrafts, the Canadian Special Operation Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) has gradually lost its specialized fixed-wing capability needed to support its global mandate. Allied doctrine and the review of historical examples revealed the essential nature and importance of specialized fixed-wing support (SPECOPS). This review has confirmed that the Canadian Forces has a serious doctrinal shortfall in defining specialized fixed-wing support. Until recently, the fixed-wing air mobility force was able to provide limited specialized fixed-wing support by virtue of its high readiness crew force called Advance Tactical Air Transport (ATAT). However, the toll exerted on the older fleet of CC-130 forced the air mobility leadership to cancel the only means of specialized fixed-wing support available to CANSOFCOM. Recent announcement at the departmental level offer great promises in the re-generation of the capability; the new procurement of the C-130J and the relocation of CANSOFCOM main base of operation in Trenton, will offer unique opportunity in re-activating some level of interest at the operator level. However, there is still a SPECOPS capability gap for years to come.

When the hour of crisis comes, 40 selected men can shake the world.

Yasotay 1220 AD

INTRODUCTION

The attacks of 11 September 2001 were tragic events that shattered the invulnerability of Western society and put at the forefront the transnational threat of radical Islamism. The ensuing campaign waged against Al Qaeda and the Taliban resulted in the biggest Canadian military deployment of troops since the Korean War. Leading the pack, Canadian Special Forces units were quickly deployed to join the fight against global terrorism.

The Canadian Forces (CF) return to a classical role of warfare after a generation of peace support operations has led to an influx of new defence spending that significantly addressed decades of neglect. For instance, the procurement of seventeen C-130J Hercules, scheduled to enter service in 2010, will significantly increase the tactical airlift capability of the CF by replacing its aging fleet of CC-130 Hercules. Furthermore, it will address critical operational shortcomings in the global deployability of high readiness units - namely units that belong to the Canadian Special Operation Forces Command (CANSOFCOM). However, a serious capability gap exists until this new platform is fully integrated in the CF arsenal. The high level of aircrew readiness, training and expertise required to provide specialized fixed-wing airlift to CANSOFCOM no longer exists. In short, CANSOFCOM is a Special Forces Command without a specialized fixed-wing capability.

The intent of this paper is to demonstrate that due to the current high operational tempo using our current fleet of CC-130, CANSOFCOM has gradually lost its specialized fixed-wing airlift capability needed to support its global mandate. Moreover, it will show that even though the new C-130 J will enter the CF inventory starting in the spring of 2010, a specialized airlift capability role suitable to globally support CANSOFCOM is not to be contemplated for years to come.

To begin, this paper will first identify key terms related to fixed-wing specialized support, will compare allied Air Force doctrine, and finally confirm with historical examples that fixed-wing specialization is an essential capability needed to support Special Forces. Second, the paper will describe the factors that contributed to the CF erosion of specialized airlift capability in the last decade. Finally, it will look at existing unique opportunities that might reverse the decline of this essential role and potentially re-instate specialized fixed-wing capability as part of the air mobility inventory.

SPECIALISED FIXED-WING AIRLIFT ENVIRONMENT

Specialized fixed-wing airlift key terminology

Airlift support to Special Operations is probably the most misunderstood concept in the CF joint environment and this lack of understanding is not limited to fixed-wing air mobility neophyte. Before proceeding with this paper, key terms related to specialized fixed-wing air mobility and its CANSOFCOM support application must be defined and understood. They consist of *Special Operations (SO), Special Forces (SF)* flights, *Special Operation Support (SPECOPS),* and *Threat Level.* It will also cover terms that

are specific to CF air mobility operations such as *Basic Tactical Airlift Transport (BTAT)* and *Advance Tactical Airlift Transport (ATAT).*

Special Operations (SO) "are highly specialized and focused operation, executed at the tactical level but designed to achieve wider operational and strategic effects".[1] CANSOFCOM special operation mission tasks include Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations, Maritime Counter-Terrorism (MCT) operations, High-Value Tasks (HVT) that includes Special Reconnaissance (SR) and Direct Action (DA).[2] By their nature, SO are often conducted at great distance from operational bases and usually require special means of insertion, support and extraction to penetrate hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas.[3]

Special Force (SF) flight is a specialized fixed-wing assets flight, usually consisting of specially equipped C-130s operated by dedicated crews that are directly assigned and tasked to support Special Forces.[4] As a minimum, its integrated equipment list generally consists of a Defensive Electronic Warfare Systems Self-Protection Suites (DEWS SPS), a level of ballistic protection (armor plating) to protect the crew and vital

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[1] Australian Defence Force, *Operation Series: Special Operations.* Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 1997, 1-1.

[2] Department of National Defence. *Canadian Special Operation Forces Command: An Overview.* Ottawa: ADM (PA), 2008, 9.

[3] Australian Defence Force, *Operation Series…*, 1-5.

[4] LCol M. Cournoyer, *Time for the Creation of a Canadian Special Operation CC-130 Flight.* Toronto: Canadian Forces College Command and Staff Course, New Horizon Paper, 2002, 12/19.

aircraft parts.[5] Finally, the specialized airlifter is equipped with low light visibility devices such as Night Vision Goggles or NVGs.[6]

For example, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) has the mandate to provide specialist air transport support to its Special Operation (SO) Command. "RAAF C-130 aircrafts are earmarked at specified notice to move in support of SO. The crews are specially selected and trained in the techniques of very low level flying, particularly at night to enhance their ability to penetrate hostile air space."[7] This operational structure does not exist in the CF but is extensively applied in the United States Air Force (USAF) and Royal Air Force (RAF). A SF flight will have crews and airplanes on a stand-by posture 24/7 to provide support to Special Forces.[8]

Special Operation Support (SPECOPS) is defined as the "deployment, support and withdrawal of Special forces whose mission is covert or highly specialized. This may include inserting troops into enemy-occupied territory without detection to conduct…clandestine operations deep inside the enemy territory."[9] To ensure secrecy, these missions are usually conducted at night using night vision equipment by specially

[5] 1 Canadian Air Division. Standard Manoeuvre Manual Vol. 1: Tactical Air Transport Procedures. CFACM 60-2601, Winnipeg, 1999. Chap 1, section 7, para 5 pg 1-7-3.

[6] Author's note - Canadian CC-130 crews are not trained or equipped with NVGs therefore they can only operate in overt lighting conditions i.e. daylight.

[7] Australian Defence Force, *Operation Series…*, 5-3.

[8] Author's note - Former CO of LXX RAF Squadron Commanding Officer (DS Staff) has confirmed that the RAF SF flight has the following stand-by posture: Total of 14 crews, 1 crew at 3 hrs Notice To Move (NTM), 2 crews at 12 hrs NTM and 2 crews at 48 hrs NTM.

[9] Royal Australian Air Force, *Fundamentals of Australian Aerospace Power*. Fairbarn: National Library of Australia, 2002.Aussie air doctrine, 188.

trained aircrew. Furthermore, the aircraft used in SPECOPS are usually modified and have specialized equipment.[10]

Threat level is the level of risks present in the environment in which crew and airplane have to operate to execute the mission in support of the user, in this particular case CANSOFCOM. In the Canadian construct, there are two levels of threat that CC-130 crews are trained to operate within; Threat System Category 1 (TSC 1 or BTAT) is a low threat environment where no radar based air defence or fighter threats exists (such as in Afghanistan), and Threat System Category 2 (TSC 2 or ATAT) where a radar based air defence or fighter threat exists (Iran for example).[11]

Basic Tactical Airlift Transport (BTAT)[12] is the first level of combat readiness used in the CF Air Mobility. Crews trained at that level can conduct all types of air delivery method including equipment, personnel airdrop in a TSC 1 environment. Crews currently operating in Afghanistan are trained to that level.

Advance Tactical Airlift Transport (ATAT) [13] is the highest level of readiness used in CF air mobility. Crews trained at that level can conduct all types of air delivery methods including equipment and personnel airdrop (BTAT) plus they can operate in a TSC 2 environment. ATAT crews are more experienced and are usually selected for covert missions in support of CANSOFCOM.[14] Only a small portion of the crew force is

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[10] Royal Australian Air Force, *Fundamentals of Australian Aerospace Power…*, 189.

[11] 1 Canadian Air Division, *Standard Manoeuvre* … Chap 1, section 1, para 21 p. 1-1-6.

[12] *Ibid*., pg 1-1-4 to 1-1-5.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] The author operated as ATAT crew from 2001 until 2007 and participated in covert missions in support of CANSOFCOM.

trained to ATAT level. Although limited in SPECOPS capability compared to other allied nations, ATAT is the only core element among CF high readiness air mobility crews that is able to provide credible specialized fixed-wing support to CANSOFCOM. Now that all essential elements related to the field of specialized airlift operations have been identified, an examination of allies' air force doctrine is required.

Special Force and Air Mobility Doctrine

The USAF and its formidable global force projection ability and unmatched range of operational capability has been and continues to be the leader of the aerospace doctrinal domain. As a matter of fact, USAF doctrine is the keystone of all allies air doctrine including the RAF and the RAAF; CF air doctrine is no exception.[15]

As defined by the USAF air mobility doctrine, airlift has four primary missions. They consist of operational support airlift, combat employment and sustainment, aero-medical evacuation and finally, *Special Operations Support* [my emphasis].[16] The USAF confirms the essential nature of this highly specialized support by clearly identifying specific air assets, dedicated training, crew force structure and employment. It also recognizes the force multiplier effect that this component of air mobility can bring to the

[15] Author has confirmed with a senior staff officer currently employed at the Canadian Forces Air Warfare Center (CFAWC) that British (RAF) and Australian (RAAF) air doctrine are 70 to 80% similar to the USAF. CFAWC is currently awaiting final guidance from the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) for a rewrite of Canadian Air Doctrine. CFAWC senior staff officer estimates that once finalized, CF air doctrine will be 60 to 70% similar to the USAF.

[16] United States. United States Air Force, AFDD 2-6, *Air Mobility*. Washington, D.C.: USAF Chief Of Staff, 01 March 2006, 29.

Joint Force by enabling the commander "to achieve specific objectives that may not be attainable through the more conventional airlift practice."[17]

The RAF and RAAF air doctrine reflects the same level of commitment to *Special Operations Support* or SPECOPS. Under the airlift umbrella, the RAAF doctrine clearly articulates the need for SPECOPS by defining its role as the means of "deployment, support and withdrawal of Special Forces whose mission is covert and highly specialized."[18] Both Commonwealth nations have clearly identified the essential nature of this force enhancement capability. Moreover, they have also recognized that by its complex nature, special airlift in support of Special Operations cannot be conducted in an improvised or case-by-case basis. This is why both Air Forces have integral specialized airlift units and have dedicated assets to the task.[19]

In contrast, the CF has no such SPECOPS capability definition within its air mobility inventory. Although *Special Missions* are mentioned in its Air Mobility Operation Tactical Doctrine and is described as "clandestine operations such as the insertion or recovery of Special Forces personnel"[20], there is no dedicated or organic air mobility SF flight in the CF.[21] Furthermore, there is no CF doctrinal documentation that identifies the need for an air mobility SF flights to effectively support CANSOFCOM.

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[17] United States. United States Air Force, AFDD 2-6, *Air Mobility…*, 35.

[18] Royal Australian Air Force, *Fundamentals of Australian Aerospace Power…*, 188.

[19] LCol M. Cournoyer, *Time for the Creation* …, 2002.

[20] Canada, Department of National Defence. B-GA-450-000/FT-000 *Air Mobility Operations.* Winnipeg: 1 Canadian Air Division, 2008 (DRAFT), 19.

[21] LCol M. Cournoyer, *Time for the Creation* …, 2002.

Although SPECOPS and SF flight are omitted in Canadian aerospace doctrine, CF air mobility by virtue of its highly experienced and trained ATAT crew force has, until recently, been able to support CANSOFCOM in most of its operations.[22]

History is rife with great examples that confirms the essential nature of air mobility SPECOPS, especially in the contemporary context of the fight against terrorism. The following examples provide concrete evidence of this fact.

Air mobility SPECOPS historical significance

In July 1976, an Air France Airbus containing 254 passengers of which 106 were Israeli nationals was hijacked by four Palestinian terrorists and diverted to Entebbe, Uganda. Within hours, Israeli Defence Force (IDF) Special Forces started planning the rescue. One of the key elements of the rescue plan was the employment of Israeli Air Force (IAF) C-130s. Although the IAF only had one squadron of C-130s that was not organized along the line of a SF flight, the high level of readiness of the IAF crews were at par with air mobility SPECOPS units used in the USAF, RAF and RAAF.

After rehearsing only for 5 days, four IAF C-130s were able to covertly deploy a rescue force and free all hostages. The IAF C-130s achieved the following objectives:

1) Transported 190 Israelis commandos, four Armored Personnel Carriers (APC), two Land Rovers, one Jeep and one limousine to Entebbe and back;[23]

[22] Author has confirmed with a JTF2 operator and senior staff officer that the range of capability that our current fleet of CC-130 can offer to CANSOFCOM is limited. The nature of these limitations is classified.

[23] William H. McRaven *SPEC OPS, Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice.* Novato: Presidio Press, 1995, 339.

2) Covertly flew overweighed C-130s for 7.5 hours at altitude at times not exceeding 50 feet to avoid detection over 2200 miles of challenging terrain that included mountains;[24]
3) Landed undetected at Entebbe airport;
4) Evacuated all hostage within 50 minutes of the first landing; and
5) Evacuated the remainder of the rescue team within 90 minutes of the first landing.

In terms of fixed-wing SPECOPS, the Entebbe raid is a great example of the global reach provided by a small and well-trained core of air mobility crews. More importantly, it brings at the forefront the synergy achieved when Special Forces and air mobility assets are combined at the tactical level in achieving strategic objectives. However, the achievement of the Entebbe raid would not be repeated for years to come, even when the most powerful airforce in the world tried to emulate the IDF's successes.

In contemporary military Special Operation literature, the rescue attempt by the US military to free the American hostages in Teheran in April 1980 has been described as a resounding failure. After the smoke cleared, eight American crewmembers had lost their lives, the Iranian desert was littered with the wrecks of one MC-130 Combat Talon[25] and six CH-53 Sea Stallion.[26] Furthermore, the hostages remained in captivity for another 9 months.[27]

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[24] Author's note - C-130 is limited to 175,000 lbs maximum take-off weight. IAF C-130s took-off at 180,000 lbs.

[25] Version of C-130E Hercules modified for USAF Special Operations such as covert infiltration and exfiltration at very low altitude at night, using special avionics for terrain masking, navigation and airdrops, under code name Combat Talon. From *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1980-81,* Huddersfield: Netherwood Dalton & Co. Ltd, 1980, pg 375.

However, closer examination of *Operation Eagle Claw* confirmed that the air mobility SPECOPS aspect of the mission worked flawlessly. All eight MC-130 Combat Talon used on the operation met all their mission objectives:

1) They flew a team of over 130 personnel consisting of Delta Force and Army Rangers over hostile territory without being detected;
2) All MC-130s landed safely at the austere landing zone (Desert One) under blacked-out conditions without incident;
3) The MC-130s remained on the ground for a period of five hours; and
4) They brought the rescue team members back at their staging base in Oman.

The key lesson learned from *Operation Eagle Claw* was that air mobility SPECOPS involving specialized airframes and highly trained aircrew is a force enabler and a critical capability needed for Special Operations missions. In contrast, ad-hoc matching of SPECOPS capabilities as seen in the employment of the poorly trained and equipped CH-53 helicopters in *Operation Eagle Claw* can and will more than likely result in catastrophic failure and ultimately in loss of lives. [28] Colonel Charlie Beckwick, the commander of the failed American rescue attempt summarized the operation by stating that "[in] Iran we had an ad hoc affair. We went out, found out… people and equipment,

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[26] Improved version of CH-53A for US Marine Corps that can be used for troop carrying (55)or as airborne minesweepers. From *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1976-77,* Huddersfield: Netherwood Dalton & Co. Ltd, 1976, 387.

[27] Richard N. Andersen *et al, Special Forces and Missions.* Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1991, pg 125-163.

[28] In effect, of all 8 helicopters that left for the staging base in the Iranian desert only six made it thru with one that broke down upon landing at Desert One, prompting the cancellation of the rescue mission that needed at least six helicopters to evacuate the hostages from Teheran. Tragically one of the helicopters hit a MC-130 while maneuvering on the ground, killing 8 crewmembers. From Richard N. Andersen *et al, Special Forces and Missions.* Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1991, pg 125-163.

brought them together occasionally, and then asked them to perform a highly complex mission. The parts all performed, but they didn't necessarily perform as a team."[29]

These two examples validate the essential nature of fixed-wing SPECOPS; its ability to rapidly conduct clandestine operations deep inside enemy territory. Moreover, these operations confirm the need for high readiness and specialized air mobility forces to support Special Force operators. Finally, it demonstrates two different approaches to air mobility SPECOPS. The American model used a highly specialized, dedicated and independent Special Flight (SF) structure. In contrast, the Israeli Air Force by implementing high standards of specialized training and readiness throughout its single C-130 squadron performed flawlessly and was able to effectively support the raid on Entebbe. Of note, the level of readiness and competence demonstrated by the Israeli Air Force is comparable to the CF ATAT force. Sadly, the high demand on our airlift capability in Afghanistan, has forced the air mobility leadership to reduce and then disband our ATAT crew force. The following section will describe some of the major causes that led to this drastic decision.

THE DECLINE

Since late 2001, the CC-130 fleet was, and continues to be, heavily involved in the support of our Canadian contingent in Afghanistan. To meet the demand of traditional airlift necessary to move our troops in and out of the current theatre of operation, Canada's Hercules fleet saw a drastic increase in its operational tempo - a tempo that was never contemplated for an older fleet that needed increasing maintenance to remain operational. Consequently, airplanes that could have flown for another decade

[29] Richard N. Andersen *et al, Special Forces and Mission…*, 160.

were forced into early retirement. It also meant that there was less airframes available to conduct domestic force generation.

The level of proficiency required to maintain the high level of readiness needed to support CANSOFCOM combined with the reduction of airframes available to conduct ATAT training had become operationally unachievable. The erosion of air mobility SPECOPS was therefore caused by a combination of factors that can be grouped in the following categories; *The Fleet*, *Current Operations* and finally *Crew Readiness.*

The Fleet

The CF association with the CC-130 Hercules began in the 1960s. Of the currently used airframes, 24 "E-model" Hercules were purchase between 1964 and 1968 (five of these have been lost in crashes). Between 1975 and 1996, a total of 16 "H-model" Hercules representing a number of different models including five air-to-air refuellers that were purchased in 1991. Of these, three airplanes have been lost in accidents. [30]

Nowadays, there are only 27 airframes left that are still flying operationally; five airplanes have been recently retired because it was no longer cost effective to maintain these airplanes on strength. It is estimated that up to four more CC-130s will be retired in the next two to three years, a 30 percent reduction of the CC-130 fleet.[31]

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[30] Department of National Defence. *CC130 Hercules Statement of Operating Intent (SOI).* Ottawa: NDHQ/DGAEPM, 8 April 2008, pg v.

[31] Author's note - As 8 Wing Deputy Operation Officer (D/A3) from 2007 to 2008, the author had to supervise the utilization of each airframe to ensure that all possible flying hours were used before airplane retirement.

Last but not least, structural monitoring of the aging CC-130 fleet has revealed that the load factor exerted on the wings of our Hercules flying in Afghanistan is eight times higher than normal conditions expected in a routine domestic flight. Simply put, each hour of flying done in Afghanistan equate to eight hour of flying in Canada; a rate of utilization never contemplated when the fleet was initially purchased in the 70s and 90s.[32]

Current Operations

Our current fleet of CC-130 is a multirole force. Understandingly, the requirement to maintain at all time a force of three CC-130s in South West Asia has forced the 1 Canadian Air Division to prioritize limited assets that are also needed on the domestic front. "Aircraft that are currently available must be kept in a central pool to ensure that the highest-priority airlift requirements of the CF are addressed in a form of ongoing 'triage' process."[33]

At 8 Wing Trenton for example, CC-130s are used for search and rescue (SAR), force generation (training) and finally strategic airlift. Of all these roles, SAR has the highest priority for airframes allocation. Therefore, if the airplane assigned to hold SAR stand-by posture becomes unserviceable, missions will be cancelled and airframes re-allocated to fulfill CANADACOM's primary tasking of ensuring full 24/7 SAR coverage in its area of responsibility. If there is no spare aircraft available, at least one maybe two

[32] Author's note - As D/A3, Author had to supervise monthly the rate of utilization of all CC-130s assigned to 8 Wing Trenton. This initiative was conducted in cooperation with the CC-130 maintenance organization.

[33] Bernard Brister, *Canadian Special Operations Mobility – Getting the right tools.* Canadian Military Journal Vol 9, No2 (Winter 2009): 53.

missions scheduled on that day will be cancelled. Usually training missions are the first to be re-scheduled or cancelled. Daily cancellations have a serious effect on the readiness level of the crews, more importantly, on their currency levels. As early as 2002, the air mobility leadership recognized that the fleet situation could not "support [the] current force structure and readiness level."[34] "Over the last decades…the competing uses of our CC130s for strategic airlift have greatly reduced our abilities to train for [SPECOPS]".[35]

Crew Readiness

Following SAR, BTAT force generation missions have the second highest tasking priority since they are directly linked to the support of the operation in Afghanistan. To ensure that crews deploying are at the highest level of BTAT readiness, the Wing will focus its effort and energy in ensuring that all training events needed are conducted in a timely fashion using the limited fleet resources available. The lower level of readiness needed for BTAT currency compared to ATAT, make it somewhat easier to achieve. However, BTAT crews that are scheduled to deploy have, at times, been sent to the theater with waivers to address their shortcoming in their operational readiness. Simply put, the numbers of serviceable CC-130s left at home does not even meet the demand to keep our BTAT crews readiness at the level needed to deploy in a combat zone.

ATAT training missions have the lowest priority in the tasking matrix. To make matters worse, the level of crew training required to maintain ATAT level of readiness

[34] 1 Canadian Air Division. *Minutes of the Air Mobility Advisory Group Meeting* 25 Nov-28 Nov 2002 (1180-1 A3 Tpt) Dated 13 January 2003. para 19b.

[35] LCol M. Cournoyer, *Time for the Creation* …, pg 2/19.

has put more strains on the limited resources available. The BTAT level of force generation can be conducted locally at 8 Wing and at a moment notice. In contrast, ATAT proficiency requirement dictates that once every 18 months all ATAT crews must attend one of two major level exercises, called Red Flag or its Canadian equivalent, Maple Flag.[36] Attending these exercises means that twice a year, usually in the spring and late summer, the Wing has to deploy two airplanes per exercise with at least two to three crews for a period of two weeks. In the end, with a fleet that has multiple duties, "there [is] little room for the specialized training, capability, and allocation of these assets to the high demand and high readiness world of special operations."[37]

Last but not least, the rare and unlikeliness of fixed-wing SPECOPS requests from CANSOFCOM made the ATAT level of readiness a 'nice to have' instead of a 'must have' capability.[38] To make matters worse, "fixed-wing airlift support for special operations has always been an uncertain proposition, and it has carried with it a significant price tag in terms of operational penalty …in other parts of the CF."[39] Therefore, it is easy to see that in a time of scarce resource, ATAT specialization, the only relevant level of air mobility SPECOPS available to support CANSOFCOM, was

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[36] Red Flag is a realistic combat training exercise involving the air forces of the United States and its allies. The exercise is conducted on the 15,000 square miles Nevada test and Training Range, north of Las Vegas. Red Flag is one of a series of advanced training programs administered by the USAF Warfare Center. From *Nellis Air Force Base News* <http://www.nellis.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123136194> Internet; accessed 25 March 2009.

[37] Bernard Brister, *"Canadian Special Operations Mobility…*, 52.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*, 53.

perceived as a luxury that the air mobility community could no longer afford to maintain in its inventory, hence its cancellation in 2007.[40]

THE FUTURE

It has been established that air mobility capability to support CANSOFCOM in its unique role and mandate has been severely degraded and no longer meet the level of readiness of the past decade. However, recent announcements from the Department of National Defence provide an unforeseen opportunity that may have an impact to bridge the fixed-wing SPECOPS capability gap. The first one is the announcement in the procurement of the new C-130J and the second is the relocation of CANSOFCOM main base of operation to CFB Trenton, 'the home of air mobility'.

The C-130J

The procurement of the world's most advanced tactical airlifter, will certainly address critical operational shortcomings experienced by our aging fleet of CC-130s. In a drastic departure from the past employment of air mobility assets, the newly purchased C-130Js will be exclusively employed as tactical airlift. Simply put, the new airframe will only be utilized for tactical airlift force generation and employment instead of being used for SAR, air-to-air refueling, and strategic airlift.

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[40] Author note – E-mail correspondence between 1 Cdn Air Div A3 Transport System and 1 Cdn Air Div Transport Readiness and SAR Evaluation Team (TRSET) SE-5 has confirmed that the AMAG BN initiating the cancellation of ATAT was generated by 8 Wing Comd and was endorsed by 1 Cdn Air Div Comd . "[ATAT] capability is no longer supportable due to [airframe] constraints...Red Flag (Jan 08) will be the last FG exercise for this capability".

More promising is the fact that the C-130J airlift capability project has clearly defined the intended roles for the new platform. Although capable of providing fixed-wing SPECOPS support, there is no plan at this time to consider a SPECOPS role for CC-130J in the near future.[41] However, the Statement of Operating Intent (SOI) confirms that the CC-130J implied task will be to "enhance JTF2 response and increase airlift support for… operation and training." [42]

The SOI also describes at great length specific roles and potentially defines SPECOPS tasks for the C-130J; it mentions landing in austere high threat environments, conducting high level parachute drops or guided parachutes, and finally employing low detection tactics and equipment to support SO.[43] Therefore, the current air mobility leadership although unable to commit to a SPECOPS role for the C-130J, has identified the great potential for future implementation of this capability. Ironically, it only confirms that there is still a fixed-wing SPECOPS capability gap for years to come.

CANSOFCOM Relocation

CANSOFCOM main base relocation to 8 Wing Trenton will have a synergistic effect in the re-generation of an embryonic SPECOPS capability. The co-location of the SO force at 'the home of air mobility' will generate great interest and great opportunity in the integration of fixed-wing air mobility assets in the operational capability of CANSOFCOM units. For the first time in its history, SO units will be, within hours not

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[41] Department of National Defence. *CC130 Hercules Statement of Operating Intent (SOI).* Ottawa: NDHQ/DGAEPM, 8 April 2008, 8.

[42] *Ibid*., 5.

[43] *Ibid*., 9.

days, given full access to the great diversity of air mobility airframes that are integral to the Wing and key to SO units' strategic rapid response. Moreover, the higher serviceability rate expected of the new C-130J combined with its mandated force generation activities, will offer SO units great opportunity for specialized fixed-wing training integration. In the end, closer cooperation between SO users and C-130J operators will undoubtedly lead to initiatives that will see a 'grass root' regeneration of an embryonic fixed-wing SPECOPS capability.

However promising this might be, it is doubtful that new fleet of C-130J will be able to sustain such commitment. The number of C-130Js purchased is not enough to warrant the creation of a separate flight of Hercules (SF) to be solely used in a SPECOPS role. The reality of our vast domestic theatre of operation combined with our overseas commitment, will make theses assets a scarce commodity; "the allocation system [will] make best use of [the] resource in order to address the highest priority interests and objectives."[44] Even if the scope of utilization of the new fleet compared to the legacy fleet will be more catered to the need of CANSOFCOM, there will still be more support requests than assets available.

In a final effort to bridge the fixed-wing SPECOPS capability gap, CANSOFCOM has to improve its airlift expertise. Due to its historical association with the CH-146 Griffon helicopter, CANSOFCOM's only airforce staff experience reside in a core of dedicated and highly experienced helicopter pilots. Although able to broadly understand basic concepts of fixed-wing airlift concepts, these capable officers do not possess the skills required to master the intricacy of fixed-wing SPECOPS. One potential solution to address this shortcoming is to create fixed-wing airlift mobility positions as

[44] Bernard Brister, *Canadian Special Operations Mobility…*, 53.

part of the J3 and J5 staff at CANSOFCOM HQ. Another way to address this knowledge gap would be the creation of Liaison Officer (LO) that would be selected from current units that will fly the C-130J.

Although fixed-wing SPECOPS is a proven capability that is fully integrated in our allies' Special Forces construct, it is doubtful that the CF air mobility leadership will pro-actively re-initiate this now defunct capability. The burden to re-generate a fixed-wing SPECOPS capability solely rest on the shoulders of CANSOFCOM staff and operators. After all is said and done, there will likely be a SPECOPS air mobility gap for many years to come.

CONCLUSION

The intent of this paper was to demonstrate that due to the high operational demands that have been placed on our legacy fleet of CC-130 Hercules, CANSOFCOM has gradually lost its fixed-wing SPECOPS capability needed to support its global mandate. It also revealed that although the new CC-130 J will be delivered to the CF starting in the spring of next year, there is no current plan to regenerate fixed-wing SPECOPS capability for years to come, making CANSOFCOM a Special Forces Command without a specialized fixed-wing capability.

Closer examination of allied doctrine and the review of historical examples that fully support the integration of the concept of air mobility SPECOPS, established the essential nature and importance of fixed-wing SPECOPS. It has also confirmed that the CF has a serious doctrinal deficiency in defining its fixed-wing SPECOPS capability. Throughout the last decade, the fixed-wing air mobility force was able to marginally

provide some fixed-wing SPECOPS capability by virtue of its high readiness ATAT crew force. However, the toll exerted on the older CC-130 fleet, combined with the operational tempo of the Afghanistan campaign, and finally the scarcity of training opportunity on the domestic front, forced the air mobility leadership to cancel the only means of fixed-wing SPECOPS available to CANSOFCOM.

Although left without a specialized fixed-wing SPECOPS role, the Department's recent announcements offer great promises in the re-generation of the capability. The new procurement of the C-130J, the newest and most advance tactical airlifter in the world, will provide CANSOFCOM greater accessibility and more importantly, more training opportunity to integrate tactical airlift assets and Special Forces units. Last but not least, the relocation of CANSOFCOM units to Trenton, will offer unique opportunity in re-activating some level of fixed-wing SPECOPS interest at the operator level.

In the end, Canada has been at war against a very potent and capable adversary that has been acting freely on the international scene. We must therefore accept the fact that one day Canada might be challenged by an international crisis of the same magnitude that faced Israel in 1976. Even though the CF has in its arsenal a highly effective counter-terrorism unit that can effectively achieve the same level of operational success, the CF has no means to covertly deploy our SO units in a hostile environment.

In matters of SPECOPS, we should remember the hard earned lesson of Operation Eagle Claw in regards to the ad-hoc utilization of nonspecific air assets and crews. SPECOPS is a not a capability that can be generated or improvised at the last minute when needed. The disastrous results of using generic helicopters and crews for SPECOPS in the Iranian desert certainly confirmed that fact. Sadly, it seems to be the

favored approach of the CF in the matter of fixed-wing SPECOPS. Let us hope it is never put to the test – innocent Canadian lives might be at stake.

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