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**AIR FORCE COMPONENT OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FORCES OF THE US ARMED FORCES
AND ITS COOPERATION WITH
THE ARMY SPECIAL FORCES (1950S – 2001)**

The adoption of the Law of Ukraine No.4795, dated 7 July 2016, by Verkhovna Rada (VR) “On amendments to some laws of Ukraine concerning Special Operations Forces of the Ukrainian Armed Forces” and development of Special Operations Forces as a separate component of the Ukrainian Armed Forces actualized research objectives and the creative use of instructive experience of the leading countries of the world in creating “elite troops”¹.

Combining forces and special units of different profiles into united SOF (Special Operations Forces – separate component of the state military power) has become one of the main trends of military construction. The undisputed leader in this respect is the United States of America. SOF, in the form in which they were created in the USA, is a unique phenomenon of military organization. The USA became the first country which since the late 1980s turned the military forces and other special structures into a *separate component of the Armed Forces*. A specific role of Special Operations Forces is confirmed in conceptual military and political documents of the USA of the highest level and is defined as permanent means for defending the geopolitical and military interests of this superpower.

In particular, the creation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in April 1987, was a conceptual innovation in modern military construction and turned different special forces (Special Operations Forces (SOF) with their own command) into a separate component of the armed forces of this superpower, very important geostrategic lever to ensure military and political “global presence” of the USA in the world².

Since May 1990 Air Force Special Operations Command of the USA (AFSOC) has gained the status of a constituent of the SOCOM. AFSOC consists of special units of the Regular Air Force, National Guard and Reserve. AFSOC performs such basic functional tasks as aerial reconnaissance in the interests of special operations; transportation of the army special units by air and their logistic provision; aviation support of SOF operating in

¹ Про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо Сил спеціальних операцій Збройних Сил України [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1437-19>.

² Богдан Б. Силы специальных операций Сухопутных войск США / Е. Богдан // Зарубежное военное обозрение. – 1999. – № 10. – С. 14–21.

the area of special operations; search and rescue operations; support in conducting psychological operations from the air; training foreign specialists for working in special aviation³.

A special role of aviation in the strategy and tactics of warfare in the US Army is of great military significance in the development and use of air component. In fact, a close cooperation of the Air Force and the Army and thus, air component and army units of SOF, strengthened during key US military campaigns, in which Vietnamese war played a turning point. In particular, in the US military campaigns in Iraq (in 1991, since 2003), in Afghanistan (since 2001) systematic cooperation of air and army components became a success⁴.

After World War II there was a reorganization and increase in number of American reconnaissance and sabotage formations. During the Korean War in 1950-1953 in the USA there was created the Army unit 8086 which took on full preparation and planning of “guerrilla operations” and carrying out reconnaissance and sabotage tasks behind enemy lines. US military advisers trained South Korean guerrillas for special operations behind front line. Advance team of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) – Joint Commission of advisers in Korea – carried out “support” for special naval, air and ground operations. The operations included the withdrawal of agents to North Korean back areas and their evacuation, carrying out sabotage tasks, as well as search and rescue of pilots from downed aircraft⁵.

Taking into account the experience of the Korean War the US military command reached the conclusion to form units that would well know methods of warfare behind front lines. In 1952 in the structure of the Department of Defense (DOD USA) there was established an Office for special methods of warfare which began to form special operation units for conducting combat operations in the rear of the USSR and its allies, as well as in other theaters of military operations⁶.

Since then there began a serious reformation of Special Operation Forces of the USA. First of all, at the end of 1950s and in the first half of 1960s there were issued conceptual ideas about their functional purposes and place in the total military and political strategy of the USA. According to the opinions of the government of that time, reconnaissance and sabotage formations had to, if necessary, penetrate deep into the territory of the socialist countries for large-scale sabotage actions in wartime, to conduct “anticommunist operations” and to fight against rebel forces of national liberation movements of peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In the US Armed Forces on the base of the experience of World War II and postwar local wars there developed a number of relevant regulatory (constitutional) documents,

³ Слюсаренко А. В. Розвиток форм і способів збройної боротьби у війнах у зоні Перської затоки у 90-х роках ХХ ст. – початку ХХІ ст.: дис. ... кандидата іст. наук: 20.02.22 / А. В. Слюсаренко. – Київ: НАОУ, 2005. – 240 с.

⁴ Сергеев С. Силы специальных операций США в боевых действиях в зоне Персидского залива / С. Сергеев // Зарубежное военное обозрение. – 1991. – № 10. – С. 16–18; Владимиров В. Силы специальных операций США в ходе контртеррористической операции “Несгибаемая свобода” в Афганистане С / В. Владимиров, И. Попов // Зарубежное военное обозрение. – 2003 – № 2. – С. 19–26.

⁵ Война в Корее 1950–1953. – Санкт-Петербург: Полигон, 2003. – 923 с.

⁶ Історія воєнного мистецтва: підруч. / І. І. Фурман, М. І. Рибак, С. В. Сидоров та ін. – 2-ге вид., випр. та доп. – Київ: НУОУ, 2012. – С. 126–128.

including Field Service Manual “Combat operations of special forces” (1965) and Instructions “Operations against irregular forces” (1965). These documents emphasized that reconnaissance and sabotage operations were the main missions of Special Forces, with sabotage and reconnaissance formations belonging to operational and strategic intelligence used in the interests of higher military political leadership of the armed forces in a particular theater of combat operations⁷.

The implementation of such functions required massive air support. The Vietnamese War of 1964–1975 gave a powerful stimulus to the development and use of various combat elements of SOF. Analysis of the experience of the use of Special Forces in Vietnam led American experts to the conclusion about practicability of their use in other limited wars in order to conduct sabotage, reconnaissance, to find out guerillas of Vietkong and target attitude for air strikes, to evaluate the effectiveness of recent strikes etc.

To ensure air support and cooperation of army special units with aviation, appropriate organizational and staff changes were made. So, headquarters army aviation section, helicopter platoons of army aviation and parachute property, were implemented in the special operations groups (1484 men as defined in staff) that were subordinated to Air Force Special Forces Center, Command and Control of Special Forces. In operative service of the group there were 4 light reconnaissance helicopters “Kayova”, two light aircraft, 2000 parachutes. In addition, SOF troops could use mini-helicopters, inflatable and film light aircraft, gyroplanes and gliders. Special operations groups supported by aviation were able to carry out operational and tactical tasks behind enemy lines at the depth of 350–3000 km.

Simultaneously, the formation of special units of other arms of the US Army took place. In 1961 *aviation sabotage forces AF* were created with three sabotage air wings consisting of 13 combat sabotage squadrons, two separate sabotage squadrons, one troop carrier sabotage aviation group, three squadrons for training crews of sabotage aircraft (a total of 552 aircraft). Air National Guard of the US organized 4 separate sabotage aviation groups (56 aircraft), and opened a center of special air operations to coordinate the work of aviation units at the US airbase in Anglin (Florida).

At the end of 1980 SOF became a separate structural component of the US Armed Forces, and air component of elite troops was represented by special units of the US Air Force and by air component of SOF US Army – 160th regiment of special army aviation “Night Hunters” (Task Force 160) located in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and Puerto-Rico (motto – “Death is waiting in the dark”). Using the most advanced equipment the regiment was able to carry out different missions: delivery and evacuation of special army units from the areas of conducting special operations; support of special operations from air; destruction or disabling objects on the enemy territory; conducting electronic warfare; conducting psychological operations.

The regiment includes three battalions of army aviation; total number of personnel was 828 people.

The 1st battalion is located at the military airbase Sebr, Fort Campbell (Kentucky). In operative service of the battalion there are light combat helicopters AH-6, versions G and J, and also AH-6, versions G, K and L.

⁷ Нейландс Р. В зоне боевых действий. История войск специального назначения с 1945 года / Р. Нейландс. – Москва: ФАИР-ПРЕСС, 2005. – 378 с.

The 2nd battalion is located at the same place. In operative service the battalion has helicopters MH-47E, developed by “Boeing” company on the base of model CH-47D.

The 3^d battalion is located at the military airbase Gunter, state Georgia. The battalion is equipped with helicopters MH-60L, MH-47E, AH-6 and MH-6.

In the regiment there are 40 versatile helicopters (MH-60), 17 transport amphibious helicopters (MH-47E) and 37 light combat helicopters (AH-6, MH-6). In operative service there are also light helicopters MD-530, equipped with antitank guided missile “Toy”. There is a version of combat helicopter AH-6H, equipped with “Stinger” missiles. Helicopters of 160th regiment are equipped with modern electronic equipment for navigation and communication, and for electronic warfare. Combat training of the regiment is mainly conducted at night.

Of the known operations with the participation of “Night Hunters” it is worth mentioning their involvement in failed hostage rescue mission in Iran in 1980. Further on helicopters of the regiment took part in the invasion of Grenada (1983) and in a number of CIA secret operations in different regions of the world (only in 1983 17 pilots were killed).

As for US Air Force Special Operations Command, its foundation was made up of the following parts⁸:

720th Special Task Force (Special Tactics Group), based in Hurlburt Field, state Florida, is assigned to control air traffic in the areas of special operations or warfare, reconnaissance of assault units landing, close air support of assault and transport aviation, organization of field medical aid. It is composed of coordinators of special operations and para-rescue jumpers that operate in cooperation with special tactical groups;

16th special operations wing;

352nd special operations group, based in Great Britain, is assigned to conduct special operations in Western Europe;

353rd special operations group, based in Japan, provide operations in the Pacific region.

18th flight test squadron is a school of special operations of the US Air Force. It is located in Florida and it trains specialists in the appropriate field from the representatives of all arms that are subordinated to the Department of Defense, and also for governmental agencies of the USA and friendly countries;

193rd special operations wing belongs to the Air National Guard of the USA;

919th special operations wing is the US Air Force Reserve and is based in Florida. It consists of 5th and 711th special operations squadrons.

SOF of the US Air Force are armed with aircraft and helicopters of American production with special navigation equipment that can provide use of air assets in any weather conditions to perform relevant tasks by SOF units of the Army and Navy in different regions of the world. In particular, transport aircraft MC130E, Combat Talon I, MC-130H Combat Talon II for SOF are developed by American Lockheed Company and are the upgraded version of the aircraft C-130 “Hercules” with improved navigation electronic equipment that can provide high accuracy of the aircraft flight to the given area even at night, when flying at low altitudes under adverse weather conditions.

⁸ *Крюков М. П.* Особливості застосування військово-повітряних сил у повітряних операціях локальних війн кінця ХХ століття / М. П. Крюков, О. О. Смірнов // Труды академії. – Київ: НАОУ, 2002. – Вип. 36. – С. 81–85.

They are able to carry up to 52 people with equipment and cargo to the deep rear of the enemy, able to conduct bomb strikes (load can be up to 6.8 tons). Their tactical and technical properties allow conducting search, rescue and information and psychological operations at the distance of up to 4500 km.

Special operations aircraft AC-130 that provide fire support during anti-guerilla and anti-terrorist operations were created on the base of military transport aircraft C-130. The US military called them “gunship”, that is “artillery ship” or “gunboat” (the name of all special operations aircraft of this type in the US Air Force). AC-130H is designed for close aerial fire support of troops, patrolling, fire attacks on previously identified objects or while patrolling, defense support of home bases and important objects. Equipment of AC-130H consists of two 20-mm aerial guns M61A1 Volcano, 40-mm guns L60 Bofors, 105-mm gun M102 Howitzer.

At the end of 1980s the USA developed a special plane EC-130E for conducting psychological war on the base of the plane C-130. In the mid-1990s EC-130E was repeatedly upgraded, modern version “Commando Solo II” has a set of equipment for broadcasting in a wide range of frequencies and broadcasting TV programs in a global WWCTV color format. Six transmitters operating in the range of 450kHz to 350 MHz, emit signals via 9 transmitting antennas installed throughout the aircraft⁹.

Typically, “Commando Solo” came to the zone of impending conflict before the start of combat phase. This permitted to determine operating frequencies of military communication lines and television and radio stations of the enemy of peacetime. After studying local problems the total strategy of psychological operations was formed, and specific programs were prepared in ground studios which were aimed at certain social groups.

EC-130E can be used as an aircraft of electronic surveillance and electronic warfare in order to violate communication systems, enemy TV and radio broadcasting, and also for purely civilian purposes – providing local broadcasting in case of natural disasters and catastrophes, giving instructions to local population, recommendations for evacuation, temporary replacement of regional mass media or spectrum broadening of their broadcasting.

Multipurpose military transport aircraft CV-22 Osprey has three main options: paratroop transport MV-22 for Marine Corps, search and rescue aircraft HV-22 for US Navy and CH-22 for SOF US Air Force. Air Force also have several versions of helicopters adapted for special operations: multipurpose helicopter MH-53J Pave Low III, designed to carry SOF personnel and cargo deep behind enemy lines, and evacuate the wounded; MH-60G Pave Hawk – a multipurpose helicopter for reconnaissance and rescue operations of SOF soldiers; multipurpose helicopter MH-47E Chinook for army aviation special forces. Multipurpose helicopters A-6 and MH-6 are developed especially for SOF aviation units (fire support to rangers, transportation of soldiers etc.).

The first large-scale test of the cooperation of air and SOF army components of the USA in difficult combat conditions was the participation of different SOF elements in the military campaign against Iraq in 1991¹⁰.

⁹ Кобко В. А. Підготовка спеціальних операцій у збройних конфліктах другої половини ХХ ст.: дис. ... кандидата іст. наук: 20.02.22 / А. В. Кобко. – Київ, 2004. – 209 с.

¹⁰ Крюков М.П. Особливості застосування військово-повітряних сил... – Вип. 36. – С. 81–85.

It was crucial for the development of strategies and tactics of their use, because they were put into effect not only together with other arms, but also as a separate element in accordance with the strategic plan of the Multinational Forces Command (MNF)¹¹.

To coordinate SOF operations in the Persian Gulf at the headquarters of MNF Commander General Schwarzkopf, there was established a separate special operations headquarters (of joint central command) headed by Brigadier General Johnson, which included 160th regiment of SOF Army aviation. Specially equipped helicopters MH53J “Pave Low”, MH60G “Pave Hawk” and AH/MH-6, and also aircraft MC-130 and gliders of special group, were previously penetrated deep into enemy territory (units that were searching launching mobile installations of operational-tactical missiles “Scud” submerged to a depth of 250 km). A few weeks before the first aerial phase of the operation forward groups of SOF units were penetrated behind enemy lines to the territory of Iraq and Kuwait to install operating bases and receive main forces, collect information about groupings of Iraqi troops, check the data of aerial and space reconnaissance, and also prepare conditions for training special operations. As a result, in the Iraqi desert two operational bases were equipped, where a significant amount of weapons, equipment, fighting vehicles was concentrated. This allowed carrying out all tasks¹².

Since the beginning of the air operation phase SOF units began to direct MNS aviation to the strategic objects of Iraq using radio beacons, laser “illumination” of the targets (during the air campaign over 830 sorties of the SOF USA were carried out with penetrating and support of special groups). Helicopters of the SOF US Air Force destroyed the most important Iraqi radar stations creating 10-kilometer corridor for the passage of the advance group of bombers. At the same time, other SOF units installed radio beacons along the northern border of Saudi Arabia to provide navigational assistance to combat aircraft that were bombing Iraq. A part of SOF was involved in search and rescue operations and evacuation of crews of downed aircraft (MNF created a strong aviation group for this purpose – 2-3 aircraft of radar reconnaissance, up to 3 attack squadrons A-10 and up to 40 helicopters)¹³.

During the use of SOF in the operation “Enduring Freedom” (2001) and subsequent actions of the USA in Afghanistan, units of 16th and 193rd aviation wings of SOF Command and support units distinguished themselves in action. The aircraft carrier “Kitty Hawk” of the US Navy was used as operational base of SOF till December 2001, up to 20 aircraft (AC-130H/U, EC-1 30E, MC-130E/H/P), up to 20 helicopters (MH-60K, MH-47D and MH-53J) were at the disposal of special operations units¹⁴. After creation of

¹¹ *Ткаченко В. И.* Тактика ведения боевых действий сил специальных операций армий иностранных государств, их вооружение, оснащение и боевая техника: уч. пособие / В. И. Ткаченко, И. А. Калинин. – Киев: Академия СБ Украины, 1996. – 112 с.

¹² *Сергеев С.* Силы специальных операций США в боевых действиях в зоне Персидского залива / С. Сергеев // Зарубежное военное обозрение. – 1991. – № 10. – С. 16–18.

¹³ *Ротарь К. М.* Досвід застосування повітряно-десантних військ багатонаціональних сил в ході війни в зоні Перської затоки / К. М. Ротарь // Труды академії. – Київ: НАОУ, 2002. – Вип. 36. – С. 53–58.

¹⁴ *Плахов В. В.* Воєнне мистецтво контртерористичної операції “Непохитна свобода” / В. В. Плахов // Труды Академії. – 2002. – № 36. – С. 26–32.

the main operational SOF bases near Afghan cities of Kandahar and Bagram, airmobile groups of quick response started to operate; they were composed of soldiers of the Army and Marines supported by aircraft-“battery” on the base of C-130 “Hercules” and attack aircraft F-18 of Marine aviation. Two aircraft ACC-130E “Commando Solo” arrived at the airbase of Khanabad (Uzbekistan) from 193rd special operations aviation wing of the US National Guard that was involved in information and psychological operations¹⁵.

Thus, the historical development of the air component of the US SOF was going on in two main areas: implementation of special operations aviation, which was directly subordinated to the Command of the SOF Army contingent and closely interacted with it; creation of special operations component as part of the Air Force for solving different tasks, mainly of strategic character, accompanied by the development of certain versions of aviation equipment. Special aviation units had to carry out a wide range of tasks: reconnaissance and target designation for air-assault strikes; landing operations and support of SOF units and other troops; fire support of friendly troops; radio electronic suppression of enemy; search and rescue operations; participation in information and psychological operations etc¹⁶.

Historical experience of rational organizational development of aviation special units is instructive, and for SOF of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, in our opinion, the greatest interest is in the integration of aviation units in the Army component of SOF. Calls attention the fact how serial versions of military aviation equipment were adjusted to the needs of SOF, and also development of specialized versions for the needs of “war without front lines”.

Note that the lack of modern profile logistics of SOF in the Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2014 was openly recognized by the competent military experts. Irreplaceable losses of 11 aircraft and 8 helicopters in combat operations of low intensity in the East of the country for a few months of 2014 showed unreadiness of the army of that time for proper air support of special and combined operations even under the conditions of limited anti-aircraft attacks of regular enemy forces. The year of 2017 is only declared “Year of the Air Force” while the Russian Army had to get 600 new aircraft and 1000 helicopters including models for special operations before 2020¹⁷.

Improvement of aviation component of SOF operation and its close cooperation with special army units are very important in connection with the general tendency of increasing importance of “depth” special units which are used for reconnaissance and sabotage operations far behind enemy lines in any theater of combat operations. It is important to gain such skills by elite forces not only in the USA, where high altitude parachute jumps are practiced at the bases of Fort Bragg and Fort Daven with further planning of guided parachute in the rear of the enemy (Military Free-Fall and methods НАТО – High Altitude High Opening). In particular, in Poland the number of units for deep reconnaissance and

¹⁵ *Владимиров В.* Силы специальных операций США... – С. 19–26.

¹⁶ *Стрижевський В. В.* Розвиток Сил спеціальних операцій Сухопутних військ США / В. В. Стрижевський // Труды Академії. – 2002. – № 41. – С. 28–35.

¹⁷ *Биструхін Г. С.* До проблеми формування Сил спеціальних операцій в Україні / Г. С. Биструхін // 3 нагоди 15-річчя створення Служби безпеки України: матеріали науково-практичної конференції (Київ, 16 березня 2007 р.). – Київ, 2017. – С. 142–146.

sabotage before 2012 had to increase from 5 to 9 battalions (3500 bayonets), for operations behind enemy lines as deep as 300-500 km they could involve from 36 to 72 reconnaissance and sabotage groups. The number of special units in Romania increased to 1500 soldiers. Turkey, except 4 “commando” teams, created a special unit IAC (Interstate Aviation Committee) on the model of the US “Delta Force”¹⁸. By the mid-2017 the Russian airborne troops and SOF RF will increase in number and get over 1200 skillful paratroopers who will take appropriate training in the 309th training center MD RF in Riazan (using parachute system “Arbalest” and oxygen equipment they can land from the height of 4-8 km and covertly go to a set place behind enemy lines at the distance of 20 km)¹⁹.

The latest tendencies of the world military construction and challenges to the national security of Ukraine encourage to thoughtful study of the experience of integration of army and aviation components of SOF, taking into consideration the reformation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and economic capabilities of the country, show vital importance of preservation and development of design and engineering potential of the country.

Андрій Слюсаренко. Військово-повітряний компонент Сил спеціальних операцій збройних сил США та його взаємодія із сухопутними військами і спецпідрозділами (1950–2001)

В умовах агресії Російської Федерації в Україні основним чинником гарантування незалежності та збереження територіальної цілісності нашої держави стає розбудова Збройних Сил України. У цьому контексті важливого значення набуває вивчення історії функціонування та досвід використання різних військових підрозділів, зокрема Сил спеціальних операцій західними державами. У статті розкрито історію становлення та сучасні організація, функції й спрямованість повітряного компоненту ССО США, особливості його взаємодії із сухопутними військами та суходільним компонентом ССО в ході локальних війн та збройних конфліктів кінця XX – початку XXI ст.

Ключові слова: Сили спеціальних операцій, США, сухопутні війська, збройні конфлікти.

Andrii Sliusarenko. Air force component of special operations Forces of the US armed forces and its cooperation with the army special forces (1950s – 2001)

The article reveals the history of formation and modern organization, functions and direction of the air component of the US SOF, the features of its interaction with the army forces and the land-based component of the SOF during local wars and armed conflicts in the late XX – early XXI centuries.

Key words: special operations forces, USA, armed forces, armed conflicts.

¹⁸ Веденеев Д. Теневая сила “новой Османской империи”: специальные службы Турецкой Республики / Д. Веденеев // Камуфляж. – 2012. – № 6. – С. 28–31.

¹⁹ Иванников И. Польські спеціальні служби / І. Іванников // Волонтер. – 2012. – № 6. – С. 52–58.