

# The SOD-JF in Iraq:

## A “Total Force” Success Story

### The Trials and Triumphs of the Maryland Army National Guard’s Special Operations Detachment–Joint Forces in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: 2002–2003



By Alan D. Meyer

**ON** Tuesday, 15 October 2002, James Croall, general manager for a regional truck tire sales and service company and a Special Forces colonel in the Army National Guard, was balancing the demands of a civilian job with the task of preparing for his unit activation ceremony. In the year since its inception in the fall of 2001, the Special Operations Detachment–Joint Forces (SOD-JF) had grown from just two members into a functioning organization based in Baltimore, Maryland. In less than a year, Colonel Croall and Sergeant Major Arnold “J.R.” Macmillan\* had managed to fill twenty of the unit’s thirty authorized positions, many with experienced officers and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) with Special Forces and Military Intelligence backgrounds. More recruiting, staff training, and a major joint exercise were on the calendar for 2003. At the moment, however, Croall and his staff were focused on the upcoming ceremony.<sup>1</sup>

SOD-JF flash.



wartime histories of these two units are inseparable. The small National Guard detachment was integrated almost from the start as 5th SFG commander Colonel John Mulholland assembled the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–West (CJSOTF-W) headquarters around his own staff beginning in late 2002. SOD-JF members participated in prewar planning, the overseas deployment of the Special Forces Group, and the CJSOTF-W rapid buildup into

a huge multinational task force in the months shortly before the war. During the invasion, SOD-JF members helped to direct and support combat operations on two separate fronts focused on three-quarters of Iraq.

By the time President George W. Bush declared an end to major combat operations on 1 May 2003, the SOD-JF was already involved in transforming CJSOTF-W into CJSOTF-AP (Arabian Peninsula), moving the task force headquarters from its remote desert base to Baghdad, and taking responsibility for all Coalition special operations forces (SOF) in Iraq. Over the coming months, SOD-JF members served as primary staff directors or headed key staff elements in CJSOTF-AP that were directing and supporting SOF security and stability operations throughout Iraq.<sup>4</sup> Their efforts and contributions did not go unnoticed: awards included ten Combat Infantryman Badges, five Bronze Star Medals, and sixteen Joint Service Commendation Medals. When the SOD-JF prepared to leave Baghdad at the end of its tour, Colonel Hector Pagan, who had assumed command of both 5th SFG and CJSOTF-AP from Colonel Mulholland in June 2003, offered the highest praise possible: “I can’t tell who’s National Guard, who’s a Reservist, and who’s a full-time 5th Grouper. I just know who I go to when I want to get something done. And you’re it.”<sup>5</sup>

Everything was going as planned . . . until Colonel Croall’s phone rang. It was Major Brett Savage\*, the unit’s executive officer. Savage had just left a meeting at the National Guard Bureau (NGB) headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. His message was simple but urgent: “We need to meet.” As Croall later recalled: “I met Brett Savage at a McDonalds on his way home from NGB, and he gave me the word.”<sup>2</sup> The U.S. military was ramping up for a potential invasion of Iraq if diplomatic talks with Saddam Hussein proved fruitless. As part of these preparations, four of the six newly-created National Guard SODs, including the SOD-JF, were to mobilize as soon as possible. Thus, in little more than a year, and far sooner than anticipated, the SOD-JF had evolved from a mere concept into a unit mobilized for the Global War on Terrorism, with its citizen-soldiers first learning about the call-up before they had officially unfurled their guidon.<sup>3</sup>

Because the SOD-JF spent its entire twelve-month mobilization attached to the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG), in many ways the Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

Viewed in retrospect, the SOD-JF experience in Iraq epitomized the “Total Force” concept: the smooth integration of active and reserve units (U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard) and personnel into a single joint

\*Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.

task force to conduct sustained combat operations.<sup>6</sup> Success hinged on augmentees arriving at the right place and time with the military skills needed to get the job done, and this was indeed a part of the SOD-JF story. But a closer look at the unit's contributions revealed that much of its success also depended on the civilian backgrounds and skills that SOD-JF brought to the fight—and on the CJSOTF commander's willingness to make the best use of these citizen-soldiers even when this required thinking outside the box. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief history of this small National Guard unit's employment during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, with an emphasis on how a unique blend of military and civilian expertise contributed significantly to the successes of CJSOTF-W and CJSOTF-AP.

Getting off on the right foot did not guarantee success, but it certainly helped to set the stage. For the SOD-JF, this meant mobilizing quickly enough to meet the needs of the 5th SFG, its gaining wartime unit. As described earlier, the SOD-JF received its first notice of an impending call-up on 15 October 2002. Formal notification came via Department of the Army Mobilization Order 228-03, dated 8 November 2002, which ordered the unit to active duty twelve days later on 20 November.<sup>7</sup> Because Department of Defense policy calls for thirty days formal notice prior to an involuntary mobilization, SOD-JF members were asked to voluntarily sign a "thirty-day waiver" in

order to meet this greatly compressed timeline. Only one declined, foreshadowing the high level of dedication that most unit members would exhibit throughout the coming year. That individual left the SOD-JF for a position elsewhere, to avoid the deployment. Thus, nineteen of the original twenty unit members would serve with the 5th SFG in Iraq.

The same Department of the Army order called for the SOD-JF to report to the Fort Campbell, Kentucky Mobilization Center by 25 November, just days before Thanksgiving. However, when Colonel Croall learned that this facility would be closed for the extended holiday weekend, he negotiated a new departure date so that his troops could spend Thanksgiving at home with their families instead of sitting idle in Kentucky. On the morning of Sunday, 1 December 2002, SOD-JF members assembled again at the 5th Regiment Armory in downtown Baltimore, loaded their gear, kissed loved ones goodbye, and boarded a chartered bus for Fort Campbell. Major Alex Martin\*, a unit operations officer, had gone ahead the week before to serve as a one-man advance party. When the bus rolled up to a back gate at Fort Campbell late that Sunday night, Martin was waiting to sign the soldiers in and lead them to their barracks. By the end of the week, the SOD-JF had cleared the Mobilization Station and were in-processing with the 5th SFG. They were just in time for "Internal Look 02" (IL02), the U.S.

## The Story Behind the SODs

THE Special Operations Detachment concept addressed two longstanding shortfalls within the Special Forces community. First, in states with Army National Guard Special Forces units, most senior personnel eventually had to move into non-SF jobs due to the scarcity of upper-level jobs. While these NCOs and officers were often a boon to the conventional units they joined, this career progression meant that countless years of accumulated expertise were lost to the special operations community. Second, the increased operational tempo associated with post-Cold War era peacekeeping and contingency operations caused problems. Active duty SF Groups and regional Theater Special Operations Commands were frequently tapped to provide senior personnel "out of hide" in order to run a Joint Special Operations Task Force headquarters in conflict regions like Bosnia, leaving only a skeleton staff back home to take care of ongoing missions and future planning.<sup>1</sup>

Starting in the early 1990s, leaders and

senior staff at the National Guard Bureau and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) started exploring ways to address both issues. One proposal involved creating, within the National Guard force structure, small detachments made up of senior SF operations and intelligence personnel that mirrored the basic command and staff structure of a JSOTF headquarters. This approach would keep senior National Guard SF personnel together instead of scattering and squandering their expertise as had happened in the past. It would also provide trained and experienced staff for a JSOTF during times of war, relieving pressure on the active force.<sup>2</sup>

James Croall, then an SF lieutenant colonel serving as the Maryland Army National Guard Troop Command S-3 (a non-SF staff position), recalled: "It took probably five or six years of studies and assessment before USSOCOM . . . finally took the initiative to see if they could form these units." He recalled that Colonel Jim Smith, a former Maryland

Army National Guard officer who was by this time working at the NGB, shepherded the idea from concept to reality, a process that included convincing the Adjutant Generals of several states to accept responsibility for these new units. Ironically, one concern was that the new SODs—designed in part to make better use of senior 18-series personnel who had "outgrown" the limited positions available in SF companies, battalions, and groups—would themselves strip MOS-qualified personnel from the National Guard's 19th and 20th SFGs. Eventually Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Mississippi, West Virginia, and Washington agreed to host the first six SODs.<sup>3</sup>

1 USSOCOM *History, 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (MacDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM History and Research Office, 2002), 17; "SOCOM SOD Information Brief to CJSOTF-AP & SOD-J," PowerPoint briefing, 19 August 2003, slide 17, CD, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Colonel James E. Croall, interview by Major Alan D. Meyer, 10 April 2005, Baltimore, MD, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

2 Croall interview.

3 Croall interview.



*The 5th Regiment Armory in downtown Baltimore, Maryland, is the home station for the SOD-JF.*

Central Command prewar command and control exercise that started on 7 December 2002. This was important. By participating in IL02, the SOD-JF was on the ground floor when Colonel Mulholland and the 5th Group were assembling the CJSOTF-W staff using augmentees from every U.S. service and two Coalition partner nations.

Simply chronologically listing these dates fails to convey the effort it took for the SOD-JF to arrive “just-in-time.” Wartime mobilization places huge demands on citizen-soldiers. Not only must the soldiers prepare themselves and their unit for deployment, but they must also arrange to leave their civilian careers and prepare their family members—many of whom have no prior experience “navigating” the military system as “dependents”—for an extended absence. This was true for members of the SOD-JF. Major Martin, the advanced liaison (ADVON) to the 5th SFG, was notified of the call-up by cell phone on 19 October while driving home from his honeymoon. He turned to his bride of one week and said: “I guess the honeymoon’s over.” As he drove toward home near Washington, DC, she pulled a pen from the glove compartment to start a “to do” list on the back of an old envelope. Item number one, he recalls, was to get her enrolled as a military dependent through the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. Item number two was equally pragmatic: “update will.”<sup>8</sup>

While everyone faced challenges on the home front, it is difficult to top those of Major Calvin Striker\* or the husband-and-wife team of Majors Brett Savage and Gwen Cook\*. When Striker, the unit J-3 and a strategic marketing expert at a Fortune 500 company, told his employer that he was being mobilized, his boss told him to finish all projects—originally due in February 2003—before leaving for war. As he worked relentlessly to meet this new deadline, Striker also purchased a house in his wife’s hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, and moved his household there from Erie, Pennsylvania . . . all in less than a month. Meanwhile, Savage and Cook—the unit’s executive officer and J-4 (logistics), respectively—were likewise busy. Savage had just become the Director of

Public Health Preparedness for the State of Pennsylvania. Both he and Cook, a registered nurse, had to arrange leaves-of-absence from work as they cleared out of their house and placed their worldly goods in storage. For the next year, the Army became, quite literally, their home.<sup>9</sup>

Even as they put their personal affairs in order, SOD-JF members also began working to ready the unit for deployment. The J-3 rescheduled several months’ worth of weekend drills so soldiers could complete last-minute training and administrative affairs in late October and early November.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the shorter than usual timeline, the SOD-JF faced pre-mobilization tasks that a more mature reserve unit would have already completed. For example, the initial soldier readiness exercise—to update training records and personnel files, receive immunizations, and undergo medical screening—had been scheduled for 2003. These tasks had to be crammed into the few weeks between activation and the mobilization date. Likewise, the SOD-JF was not scheduled to receive individual or unit equipment until mid-2003. Suddenly the J-4 had to come up with weapons, helmets, rucksacks, web gear, sleeping bags, and protective masks for an extended deployment into a potential combat zone, all in very short order.<sup>11</sup>

With his staff firmly focused on near-term issues, Colonel Croall looked ahead to the long-term mission. Within two weeks of receiving the alert from Major Savage, Croall was at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to meet with the 5th SFG commander and staff. He arrived with a list of questions from every SOD-JF staff section. Major Marc DeAngelo\*, the J-6 (communications), who not only knew the SOD-JF’s strengths and weaknesses, but also knew his way around Fort Campbell, accompanied him. As an active duty Signal officer, DeAngelo had served with distinction during Operation DESERT STORM commanding the 5th SFG’s Headquarters and Headquarters Company. When Croall and DeAngelo walked into their first meeting, 5th SFG commander Colonel John Mulholland surprised members of his senior staff by greeting DeAngelo like a long-lost friend: “Marc, how the hell are you?”<sup>12</sup>

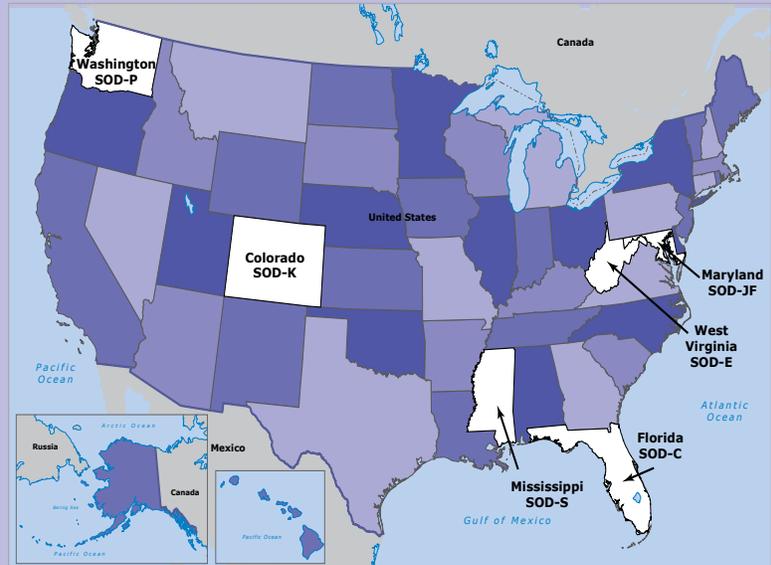
While this personal connection probably helped first impressions, Croall and DeAngelo accomplished a lot in two days. Colonel Mulholland and his staff explained what they knew of the coming operation. In return, Croall and DeAngelo provided an honest assessment of the unit readiness. Together, they filled openings in the Joint Manning Document (JMD) that expanded the 5th SFG headquarters to a CJSOTF. This commander-to-commander approach matched individual talent and expertise to JMD positions far better than the usual method of blindly filling slots based on rank and MOS/branch. Croall also made it a point to relieve any apprehensions Mulholland may have felt by having another O-6 (colonel) assigned to his command. Ultimately, they decided that Croall could best serve as the CJSOTF-W liaison officer to Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) in Kuwait, the headquarters responsible for all Coalition land forces during the invasion. Finally, Croall

# Mission, Organization, and Affiliation

IN 2001, USSOCOM designated a total of six National Guard Special Operations Detachments, each aligned with an existing Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC). While every SOD has the same basic mission and organization, each one trains with a specific TSOC during peacetime and can expect to be the first SOD mobilized in response to conflict within its specific region. Unit names reflect this war-trace affiliation: SOD-S is aligned with SOCSOUTH (Special Operations Command–U.S. Southern Command), SOD-E with SOCEUR (European Command), SOD-C with SOCCENT (Central Command), SOD-P with SOCPAC (Pacific Command), and SOD-K with SOCKOR (U.S. Forces Korea). Only SOD-JF, aligned with SOCFJCOM (U.S. Joint Forces Command), has a functional instead of geographic alignment.<sup>1</sup>

Each SOD is authorized thirty personnel and roughly mirrors the basic organization of a Joint Special Operations Task Force headquarters (see Organization Chart). Including the commander and sergeant major plus a twelve-man Operations section (J-3), there are fourteen slots for Special Forces officers and NCOs. The Intelligence section (J-2) has six positions, while the Personnel (J-1), Logistics (J-4), and Communications (J-6) sections each have three positions. One legal NCO brings the total to thirty. Eventually, these may become joint units with the proposed addition of fifteen Air National Guard personnel to each SOD.<sup>2</sup>

intelligence, and support staff officers and NCOs to augment a theater-level JSOTF or TSOC. In theory, a SOD could also provide the core command and staff structure



Home states of the original six National Guard SODs.

around which a full JSOTF is formed. At the state level, each SOD stands ready to provide command and control expertise to support state or federal government response to a local, regional, or federal emergency.<sup>3</sup>

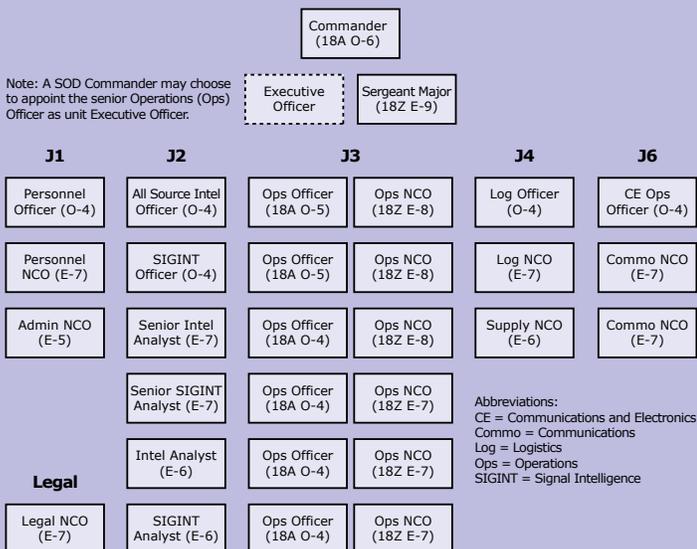
Although the SODs are USSOCOM assets, they have close ties to USASOC. Nearly half of the authorized positions are senior 18-series MOS/career branch NCOs and officers, all of whom must have trained and served earlier in their careers in active or reserve Special Forces units. Furthermore, many members of the intelligence, communications, logistics, and personnel sections also have ARSOF experience. Finally, USASOC soldiers may well find themselves working directly alongside members of a SOD in a combat zone. For example, two of the four SODs mobilized in late 2002, SOD-JF and SOD-E, were attached directly to the 5th and 10th Special Forces Groups, respectively, helping these units to form the headquarters of two Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.<sup>4</sup>

1 Colonel James E. Croall, interview by Major Alan D. Meyer, 10 April 2005, Baltimore, MD, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

2 "SOCOM SOD Information Brief to CJSOTF-AP & SOD-J," PowerPoint briefing, 19 August 2003, slides 4–5, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

3 "SOCOM SOD Information Brief," slide 3.

4 "SOCOM SOD Information Brief," slides 7–8.



Basic organization chart for a Special Operations Detachment.

Because the SODs are National Guard assets, they have both federal and state missions. The SOD federal wartime mission is to provide fully-trained operations,

and Mulholland discussed when and how the SOD-JF would join with the 5th SFG, before Internal Look 02 kicked off on 7 December 2002.<sup>13</sup>

SOD-JF members have few fond memories of their month spent at Fort Campbell. While participating in Internal Look 02 and the pre-combat planning that followed helped them integrate into CJSOTF-W, there was still a sense that things were in limbo. Everyone worked long hours, but then the 5th SFG was able to go home at night while the SOD-JF returned to its dreary rooms in a dilapidated three-story cinderblock barracks. These quarters, which post engineers had condemned as “unfit for habitation,” were several miles from the temporary CJSOTF-W headquarters set up in the 5th SFG Isolation Facility. The only mess hall open to the SOD-JF was in another distant location. Since the SOD-JF had been specifically instructed not to bring privately owned vehicles to Fort Campbell, this meant that just getting around was a problem. Juggling two rental vans among nineteen individuals with widely conflicting work schedules proved the first real test of tempers. Cold, gray, wet weather during the weeks leading up to Christmas combined with continued uncertainty regarding the mission—and where the SOD-JF might end up if there was no invasion of Iraq—put a damper on pre-holiday cheer. When the first floor bathroom at the barracks backed up, flooding the entryway with a lake of raw sewage, SOD-JF members started joking: “it just doesn’t get any better than this.”<sup>14</sup>

But then Colonel Mulholland declared a short break for the holidays with the understanding all might have to return on a moment’s notice. Colonel Croall authorized the SOD-JF to go home for Christmas. At a party in downtown Clarkesville, Tennessee, Majors Cook and Savage gave an early Christmas gift to everyone, a striking black ceramic coffee mug with the 5th SFG logo embossed in gold. There was more than a little symbolism in this—the SOD-JF’s destiny was tied to the 5th SFG.

After Christmas, events unfolded quickly. Several

SOD-JF members were called back on New Year’s Day to deploy to the Middle East with the advance party. Their job was to set up a forward base in a remote desert location near the Iraqi border. Back at Fort Campbell, the 5th SFG finished packing its gear for overseas shipment while more augmentees arrived. After much wrangling over which military agency would pay (NGB, Fort Campbell Garrison, or 5th SFG), the SOD-JF relocated from the dilapidated barracks into an off-post hotel. The detachment would not enjoy these new quarters for long. Major Alex Martin and Sergeant First Class Jamie Mayberry\* left to join Special Operations Command, U.S. Central Command (SOCCENT) in Tampa, Florida. Within a week, they were in Qatar serving as CJSOTF-West liaison officers to Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC), SOCCENT’s forward-deployed headquarters. Meanwhile, Colonel Croall flew to Kuwait to begin his duties as liaison officer to the CFLCC. By mid-January, all members of the SOD-JF had deployed to the Middle East to join the 5th SFG and prepare for combat. Most would not be home again until October 2003, a year after their unit activation ceremony.<sup>15</sup>

To appreciate the extent of SOD-JF’s role in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, one must remember that OIF differed significantly from its predecessor in Afghanistan, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Begun some eighteen months earlier, 5th SFG teams worked closely with the Afghan irregulars of the Northern Alliance to overthrow the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Although the operation required significant support in the form of air strikes and aerial re-supply, conventional ground forces were noticeably absent from the battlefield until early 2002, after most of the country was secured.<sup>16</sup>

The war in Iraq, on the other hand, entailed a full-scale ground, air, and sea invasion against a massive conventional force. Shortly before the invasion on 20 March 2003, 5th SFG teams and Coalition special operations forces infiltrated Iraq’s western desert. Their mission was to work with the Coalition air power to prevent Iraq from launching theater ballistic missiles (TBM) toward Israel as had happened during Operation DESERT STORM. In

*With it spread out on the barracks floor, Major Calvin Striker organizes some of the combat equipment issued at Fort Campbell on 14 December 2002.*

*SOD-JF members pose for a group photo in the snow outside the 5th SFG headquarters at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, December 2002. The anti-aircraft gun in the foreground was captured by the 5th SFG during Operation DESERT STORM.*



southern Iraq, 5th SFG teams were also inserted ahead of conventional Army and Marine forces. These teams secured key sites and conducted strategic reconnaissance in support of the main land attack. They also pinpointed specific hostile targets as U.S. and British tanks and infantry assaulted enemy strongholds. Both of these missions—conducting the counter-TBM fight in the west and supporting the conventional invasion in the south—required considerable planning and constant coordination at every level to prevent fratricide and to maximize chances for success.

From the time the SOD-JF was attached to the 5th SFG in early December 2002, its members were incorporated into key staff roles in CJSOTF-W. They worked in the Joint Operations Center (JOC), Future Plans (J-35) shop, and filled leadership and analyst positions in the Intelligence (J-2) section. SOD-JF members also worked in Personnel (J-1), Logistics (J-4), and Communications (J-6). Three served in positions unrelated to their MOS: one as the information management officer and the others with the Base Camp Engineering section. SOD-JF members also served as liaison officers to two separate higher headquarters. After the invasion ended and CJSOTF-W evolved into CJSOTF-AP in May 2003, many 5th SFG staff members redeployed home. The CJSOTF commander filled his vacancies with augmentees who had proven themselves during the first phase of the war.

As a result, by the summer of 2003, many SOD-JF members were primary staff officers and NCOs supervising and supporting all special operations in Iraq. Major Striker (J-35), Major DeAngelo (J-6), Major Jason Miller\* (J-1), and Major Marvin Blocker\* (Joint Fires Element) became section directors. In the JOC, Major Savage became the JOC chief and Sergeant Major Macmillan, the senior NCO. From there Savage tracked all convoys and operations that left the base camp, including the weekly re-supply missions to downtown Baghdad led by his wife, Major Cook, the chief procurement officer (J-4).

When both CFLCC and CFSOCC re-deployed stateside after 1 May 2002, Colonel Croall and Major Martin were the CJSOTF-AP commander's choice to liaison with Combined Joint Task Force Seven (CJTF-7). Meanwhile, SOD-JF NCOs continued to serve as key players, including: Master Sergeant Carl Dirk\*, ground operations officer in the JOC; Master Sergeants John Brown\* and Roger Cantrell\*, senior members of the Base Engineering Team; and Sergeants First Class Ben Murray\* and Jeffrey Stone\*, along with Staff Sergeant Jack Langley\*, who all worked on important projects within the J-2.<sup>17</sup>

For the SOD-JF, Hemingway's adage "You make your own luck. . ." applied not only to going to war, but also to coming home. As the unit's twelve-month mobilization neared completion, Colonel Croall began to receive conflicting messages from stateside headquarters (National Guard Bureau and USASOC) that said, in essence: first, SOD-JF mobilization orders would not be extended (this was before the Department of Defense changed its policy and began to extend reservists beyond the one-year



*Members of SOD-JF helped build the CJSOTF-W headquarters from scratch prior to the invasion of Iraq. Shown here is the construction of the shell that became the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF).*

call-up); second, the unit could not return home until replaced; and third, no replacement unit had been identified, much less notified.<sup>18</sup> Croall saw a potential "Catch-22" situation unfolding: if no one took action, his unit would eventually find itself still living and working in a combat zone when its mobilization orders expired and the Army dropped its personnel from active duty. Colonel Croall and 5th SFG Commander Colonel Pagan stubbornly pushed the issue through each echelon of higher command until, in an eleventh-hour decision, U.S. Special Operations Command notified the Colorado National Guard's SOD-K (Special Operations Detachment-Korea) that it would replace the SOD-JF.<sup>19</sup>

Major Martin drew the "lucky straw" to brief SOD-K members, to help them mobilize, and then to accompany the detachment to Iraq to make certain, as Colonel Pagan put it jokingly, "that nobody got lost along the way in Germany during Oktoberfest." Martin was up to the task. He knew the operational overview in Iraq as a liaison officer to CJTF-7. He also knew his way around Fort Carson, Colorado. This was not only the Mobilization Station

*Outgoing commander Colonel John F. Mulholland Jr., Major General Geoffrey C. Lambert, and incoming commander Colonel Hector E. Pagan salute the colors during the change-of-command ceremony in Baghdad. Pagan assumed command of both 5th SFG and CJSOTF-AP on 24 June 2003.*



## Where Are They Now?

**T**WO new members joined the SOD-JF in theater. Subtracting the one original member who did not deploy, this means that a total of twenty-one served in Iraq. Within two years of returning home, only nine of these twenty-one were still with the unit. The SOD-JF quickly rebounded—by the end of 2005, twenty-six of the unit's thirty slots were filled, five more than its wartime peak—but this high turnover meant that considerable hard-earned institutional knowledge was gone.<sup>1</sup> What happened? By design, every SOD is staffed mainly with senior personnel. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that three chose to retire soon after returning from Iraq. Two took full-time jobs in the military which required them to leave the SOD-JF. Three more moved to other units within the National Guard or Army Reserve citing civilian or military career progression as reasons (for instance, one moved halfway across the U.S. to take a new civilian job, which made drilling in Maryland impractical; another could not be promoted without leaving the SOD-JF). Four other SOD-JF members left the military.

Equally dramatic, at least nine of these twenty-one returning veterans experienced a significant change in civilian career within this same two-year period. Though most of these were either a promotion or a new and sometimes dramatically different career opportunity, this still showed that mobilization for war could have far-reaching effects in the lives of citizen-soldiers. As a small, rank-heavy special operations unit, the SOD-JF can hardly be cited as representative of the Total Force. But just as its contributions and accomplishments during the war were crucial to mission success, the high turnover rate in both military and civilian jobs afterward reinforced the realization that sending citizen-soldiers to war may have long-term, unintended consequences for the Total Force.<sup>2</sup>

1 Alan D. Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War: Special Operations Detachment-Joint Forces, Maryland Army National Guard, in Operation Iraqi Freedom: 2002–2003," unpublished manuscript, 2004, 71–77, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

2 For example, the unit's after action report briefing, while overwhelmingly positive regarding the overall SOD-JF experience during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, warned that repeated deployments could affect readiness: "SOD-JF soldiers have concerns of possible remobilization in 1–2 yrs; This will have negative impact on retention and recruiting." "SOD-JF MDARNG Operation IRAQI FREEDOM After Action Review," slide 15, PowerPoint briefing, 20 February 2004, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

for SOD-K, but also home to the 10th SFG, which was slated to replace the 5th SFG in Iraq later that fall. Colonel Michael Repass, 10th SFG's commander, had generously offered his unit's resources to smooth the way for the SOD-K, and Martin, a former 10th Grouper, knew Repass because they had served together in Bosnia.<sup>20</sup>

Except for the thump of mortar rounds falling on Baghdad International Airport as the SOD-K replacements arrived, the battle handover was remarkably uneventful. By 5 October 2003, the SOD-JF, along with some 5th SFG members, were homeward bound on a C-5A Galaxy. After arriving at Fort Campbell in the early morning, the SOD-JF headed to the mess hall to enjoy their first genuine American breakfast in almost a year. But, it was too early to relax, because the unit's mobilization orders had not been extended. The detachment had to finish demobilizing before terminal leave started in late October. Thus, the war for SOD-JF ended just as it had begun, in a rush.<sup>21</sup>

This small and highly specialized unit of experienced officers and senior NCOs does not represent a typical reserve forces unit, nor should its experience with the 5th SFG in Iraq be held up as the norm. But in a broader sense, its mobilization and subsequent contributions to CJSOTF-W and CJSOTF-AP highlight the central role that augmentees, and in particular citizen-soldiers of the National Guard and Reserves, have and continue to play in the ongoing Global War on Terrorism. While the SOD-JF deployment to Iraq truly represented "A 'Total Force' Success Story," there was another side. The unit's high post-deployment turnover in personnel hints that employing augmentees in this manner, while useful in the short term, has long-term consequences to the Total Force. ♣

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## Endnotes

1 Colonel James E. Croall, interview by Major Alan D. Meyer, 10 April 2005, Baltimore, MD, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Major Calvin Striker\*, "T-SOCD Training Calendar for TY 2003," undated draft memo, circa late-2001/early-2002, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Major Calvin Striker\*, "Monthly Training Breakout," spreadsheet, circa 2002, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

2 Croall interview.

3 Croall interview. Although the activation ceremony did not take place until 20 October 2002, technically the SOD-JF was activated on 1 October 2002, fifteen days before Major Savage\* received the verbal warning order that the unit would be mobilized.

4 "Special Operations Detachment-Joint Forces (SOD-JF) Operation IRAQI FREEDOM After Action Review, 20 November 2002–19 November 2003," memo, 28 October 2002, 1–3, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

- 5 Alan D. Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War: Special Operations Detachment-Joint Forces, Maryland Army National Guard, in Operation Iraqi Freedom: 2002-2003," unpublished manuscript, 2004, 15, 69, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 For a description of the history and possible future of the Total Force concept in the U.S. military, see Brian D. Jones, "The Abrams Doctrine: Total Force Foundation or Enduring Fallacy?" (Carlisle Barracks, PA, Army War College: February 2004) [available online at: <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA423689>].
- 7 "DA MOB Order 228-03," 8 November 2002, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 15.
- 9 Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 15.
- 10 Major Calvin Striker\*, "Special Monthly Training Schedule for 26 October 2002—Change 1," circa late October 2002, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Major Calvin Striker\*, "Special Monthly Training Schedule for 23–24 NOVEMBER 2002," circa early November 2002, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. These indicated that the SOD-JF went above and beyond the minimum train-up and preparation for mobilization, for instance, on 23–24 November unit members completed two days of training on C2PC, the computer software they would soon be using for real-time battle-tracking as members of the CJSOTF-W staff.
- 11 Croall interview; "SOD-JF After Action Review," 4–5; "SOD-JF MDARNG Operation IRAQI FREEDOM After Action Review," PowerPoint briefing, 20 February 2004, slide 7, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Major Gwen Cook\*, "OCIE List," message to SOD-JF members, 23 October 2002, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Captain Alex Martin\*, "Memorandum for Record, SUBJECT: Status of OCIE Issue for CPT Alex Martin," memo, 25 October 2002, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 21.
- 13 Croall interview; SOD-JF J-3, "Topics for Discussion (draft), 5th SFG visit 28–29 Oct 02," informal memo to Colonel Croall, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 14 Major Calvin Striker\*, telephonic interview by Major Alan D. Meyer, 4 March 2006, notes, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 17.
- 15 Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 19.
- 16 See Charles H. Briscoe et al, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003),.
- 17 For a general overview of unit member contributions, see: "SOD-JF SOD Conference Presentation," PowerPoint briefing, 19 August 2003, slide 11, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; "SOD-JF After Action Review," PowerPoint briefing, slides 9–11; Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 25–55. Considerable details regarding SOD-JF contributions to CJSOTF-W and CJSOTF-AP are found in the end-of-tour awards for unit members submitted through the 5th Special Forces Group chain-of-command. See the following "Narrative" sections of recommendations for awards (listed alphabetically, note that award recommended did not always correspond to award received): Major David Adair\* (Joint Service Achievement Medal for 15 June 2003 to 1 October 2003); Major Marvin Blocker\* (Joint Service Commendation Medal for 23 January 2003 to 17 May 2003); Sergeant First Class Randall Bravehart\* (Bronze Star Medal for 16 July 2003 to 1 October 2003); Master Sergeant Roger Cantrell\* (Joint Service Commendation Medal for 5 January 2003 to 12 August 2003); Staff Sergeant Jack Langley\* (Joint Service Achievement Medal for 16 May 2003 to 1 October 2003); Sergeant Major Arnold Macmillan\* (Bronze Star Medal for 2 July 2003 to 1 October 2003); Major Jason Miller\* (Bronze Star Medal for 16 July 2003 to 1 October 2003); Sergeant First Class Ben Murray\* (Joint Service Achievement Medal for 1 June 2003 to 1 October 2003); Sergeant First Class Jeffrey Stone\* (Joint Service Achievement Medal for 1 June 2003 to 1 October 2003); Major Calvin Striker\* (Bronze Star Medal for 5 January 2003 to 17 May 2003); Major Calvin Striker\* (Joint Service Commendation Medal for 15 July 2003 to 1 October 2003). Copies of these awards documents are in the USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 18 Croall interview. Eventually the Department of Defense decided to keep mobilized troops on active duty beyond the initial twelve-month call-up, extending tours so that individuals spent a full year with "boots on the ground" in Iraq. However, because the SOD-JF had mobilized earlier than the vast majority of U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard forces involved in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, this decision was still months in the future when the end date for the unit's twelve-month orders approached.
- 19 Croall interview.
- 20 Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 67.
- 21 Meyer, "The SOD-JF at War," 67; "SOD-JF After Action Review," memo, 6–7.

## Establishing a Tradition

IN addition to recruiting personnel, finding office space, and organizing training, SOD-JF commander Colonel James Croall and Sergeant Major J.R. McCulloch took on the task of establishing the new unit's symbols and traditions. Following strict guidelines from the U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry, they designed a guidon (unit flag) and a coin for SOD-JF members to carry in the long-standing tradition of special operations units. The coin, which actually represents the collective input of several SOD-JF members, managed to capture—simply and elegantly—the unit's lineage and war trace affiliation. On one side, a Revolutionary War era "Minute Man"—the traditional symbol of the Army National Guard—stands beside a Special Forces crest against a field of SF green. "Maryland Army National Guard" is emblazoned across the top, while a serial number stamped on the bottom indicates when the holder joined the unit (as the first member of the SOD-JF, Colonel Croall holds coin #001; Sergeant Major McCulloch received #002). The reverse is adorned with a full-color image of the SOCJFCOM unit crest, and "Special Operations Detachment Joint Forces" is inscribed around the perimeter. Colonel Croall ordered one hundred serial-numbered coins in time for the unit's activation ceremony in October 2002. The coins were distributed to the unit's original pre-mobilization members and most of the remainder were handed out to friends of the SOD-JF during the unit's year-long mobilization. Recipients included Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum, head of the NGB, who came up through the ranks in the Maryland Guard SF community; Colonels John Mulholland and Hector Pagan, 5th SFG's two commanders during the time the SOD-JF was attached; and select service members (and even a few civilians) who served honorably with or went above and beyond in their efforts to support the unit.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Colonel James E. Croall, interview by Major Alan D. Meyer, 10 April 2005, Baltimore, MD, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

*SOD-JF guidon and coin at the time the unit was activated in October 2002.*

