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F-22s at War

**Flying Wing Bombers
The BRAC Debate
KC-46 Enlisted Team**



in the debate is the number of omitted facts and issues, presumably cherry-picked to support USAF's early retirement case. These include three key additional missions performed by the A-10 community that are either unknown to most within the debate or intentionally omitted to strengthen the erroneous single-mission argument:

(1) Forward air control (Airborne) (FAC[A]).

(2) Combat search and rescue/personnel recovery rescue mission commander (RMC, or Sandy One).

(3) Special operations forces support.

(4) Multimission versus single-mission capability: As shown above, the A-10 conducts three additional missions above and beyond CAS, belying the oft-seen argument that the platform and community are only "single mission." Detractors will argue that the above missions are all simply a subset of CAS. While certainly not true in the case of CSAR/PR, a rarely seen counter needs to be: How can and will USAF justify having communities dedicated to each of its classic functions—air superiority, strategic attack, and interdiction—and three of its more recently constituted ones—airlift, ISR, and CSAR/PR—and not have a community dedicated to provide CAS to the US Army, a specific function tasked to the service by the 1948 Key West Agreement?

The F-35 was slated to take over all A-10 missions and many of the F-16's and F-15E's missions, as well, in a graceful phasing out of the older platforms over time while the F-35 community stood up. What needs to be addressed by USAF, DOD, and Congress in this debate before the FY 16 Presidential Budget and spending bills are the real problems:

- What is the best way to provide CAS to the US Army?

- Does the joint community need USAF to conduct FAC(A)?

- Does the joint PR and USAF CSAR require a trained, qualified RMC?

- Does SOF need dedicated, integrated fighter air support?

- If USAF maintains the CAS mission for the US Army (and presumably the other missions above), how does the service institutionalize the CAS attack mission excellence developed and maintained by the A-10 community since the 1970s?

The youngest Hog airframe is over 30 years old, making it one of the oldest fighter fleets in USAF. A service life extension and the A-10C upgrade have added life to the platform, but even USAF's most liberal projections in the

past slated its retirement for 2028-30. The A-10 retirement debate needs to be less about retirement of an aging airframe and more about when and how that retirement is conducted in a way that preserves the attack mission excellence.

Lt. Col. Robert M. Chavez Jr.,
USAF (Ret.)
Las Vegas

For the USAF Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James to reinvent close air support and declare other "platforms" suitable for CAS, they are forgetting the ultimate benefactor and *raison de guerre* that we fly is the US Army soldier, the boots on the ground.

Yes, General Welsh has taken some heat over the controversy that has arisen concerning scrapping the A-10 and reassigning the CAS mission to "other platforms" as the bean counters and politicians like to characterize the discussion. I guess that's why he has four stars on his shoulders.

"It's not all about the A-10." Our obligation is in supporting the young Army troopers on the ground—referred to as troops-in-contact or TICs. My college roommate Maj. Pete Larkin, flying an AC-47 in Vietnam, explained it to me: "TICs are Army troops engaged in a firefight with NVA or Viet Cong. When confronted with a larger communist force, they usually call us for help. Then we kill the attacking enemy troops with our three Gatling guns."

Look at the typical munitions mentioned in the subject article that can be fired from the example fast jets "platforms" and drones when performing CAS: GBU-12 Paveway II, AGM-65 Maverick missile, and the AGM-114 Hellfire missile. These examples are all expensive, heavy, guided weapons.

Either way, the enemy will probably confront our troopers in small squads or platoon sized groups. Traveling in stolen vehicles, probably Toyota pickups "Desert Rat style" with mounted guns, seem very popular, as well as stolen Bradley Fighting Vehicles—and a tank or two. Another popular enemy tactic is to stage an ambush using mortars from dug-in positions. Are we going to send an F-16 after a mortar team or a Toyota pickup truck?

SECAF James, and Air Force Deputy Undersecretary Heidi H. Grant recently assured us other aircraft can pick up the CAS role: F-16s, F-15s B-1s, B-2s, and B-52s; and we will have a stronger Air Force even though we downsize, cut pilot flying time, and send masses of operating personnel home in cruel RIFs.

No ma'am, we are playing Russian roulette with our national defense and the lives of countless ground personnel—boots on the ground, remember? I would venture that if we asked ISIS if we should keep the A-10, they would vote to scrap it.

My first squadron commander—fresh out of UPT—had a sign on his desk that read, "The mission of the US Air Force is to fly and fight, and don't you ever forget it!"

Michael W. Rea
Savannah, Ga.

No Pressure

I must disagree with the statement at the bottom of p. 64 that the C-124 Globemaster II was derived from a Douglas commercial design [*The Hearings That Revolutionized Airlift*, November 2014].

The C-124 was derived from the C-74, which built on the Douglas DC-4 in terms of aerodynamics and airframe structure, but was designed specifically as a military transport. Since the C-74 was never intended to be an airliner, it was not pressurized.

Paul Talbott
Fayetteville, Ga.

Exhaustingly Loud

Thanks for a most interesting piece on Eisenhower's B-25 [*December 2014*, p. 70]. I flew in the Marine Corps bomber version, the PBJ-1, as an aircrewman in the Southwest Pacific in 1944 and 1945. Postwar, with a USAF commission courtesy AFROTC, the TB-25J was my advanced pilot training airplane. The B-25 was well-described in the article, except for one "feature": It was *loud*. Note the individual exhaust stacks ringing the cowling, giving each cylinder its own blast port. And I do mean blast. On p. 74, note in the picture that there are no exhaust ports on 34030's cowling, the exhaust having been converted to a more modern—and quieter (relatively speaking)—collector ring system. I have never seen a preserved and operating Mitchell that has not been converted to collector rings. If there is one, clue me in, and I'll get my ear defenders and observe.

Col. Robert J. Powers,
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Shreveport, La.

Anti-aircraft Flak

I'd like to respond to retired Colonel Coffman's comments on General Hostage, the A-10, and the "bigger picture" [*Letters*, December, p. 8]. I don't know when Colonel Coffman left the Air Force, but I'm a retired fighter pilot who trained almost exclusively against the Soviet-era threat, retiring in 1997.

I returned to Active Duty from 2009 to 2013. I can assure Colonel Coffman that, without going into specifics, the integrated air defenses possessed by many of today's military forces, including Syria, far (yes, far) exceed the threat we faced during the Cold War. The A-10 was designed to kill Soviet tanks pouring through the Fulda Gap. Today it remains an unequaled low-threat CAS aircraft. But there is no serious consideration among those with knowledge of the current environment, of being able to employ the A-10 against any enemy with modern air defense capabilities.

Incidentally, Capt. Mike Hostage was a student of mine in the F-16 in the '80s. I remember him being a receptive student, a gifted pilot, and a thoroughly likeable guy.

Lt. Col. Dale Hanner,
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Loveland, Colo.

More of the Same

Rebecca Grant's fine article (Fighting Through, December 2014, p. 40) brought back a flood of fond memories from my tour at Kunsan Air Base in South Korea.

In 1997-98, Korea was about as close as you could get to all-out war, and we regularly exercised to fine-tune our warfighter skills. As the senior airfield ops officer, I was assigned to an

exercise position as night shift mission coordinator in the "Wolf Pit," located in the bowels of the wing's operations center. From that not-so-lofty position I couldn't actually see but could monitor flying ops and other operations on the airfield.

Kunsan's airfield was somewhat operationally constrained by its one, and rather narrow, runway and accompanying limited ramp space—good enough to support fighters but challenging for big cargo aircraft. With that in mind we'd scratch our heads when we'd review war plans that identified numerous cargo aircraft projected to transit through that would make up the air bridge to support our war efforts.

Every exercise would come with those exhilarating moments when the incoming missile light would come on. We'd all scramble to top off our MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) gear by donning gas mask, hood, and gloves. We'd then hunker down in place to await the outcome.

Invariably the simulated missiles would hit on and/or around the airfield and cause considerable havoc. With the all clear we'd quickly dispatch fully MOPPED personnel out to assess the damage. A runway sweep would be conducted to identify any damage, and the various sensors on the airfield would be checked for chemical-biological presence.

These sweeps brought their own threat. One dark night we got a reality check when a fully MOPPED troop in a pickup truck was reported driving helter-skelter down the runway headed to check an onfield sensor. This would not necessarily be a problem except for the four-ship of Vipers that was taxiing into position for immediate takeoff at end of the runway. Expect to deal with communications breakdowns in war.

There were always runway cratering scenarios to cope with during exercises. The real showstopper was not necessarily missile impacts but what was notionally contained in their warheads. We not so affectionately called it being "spodged" when our contaminant sensors detected positive results—a potential showstopper.

For practical purposes, that would bring our exercise to a screeching halt. In a weeklong exercise you can't wait out long-term chemical/biological impacts. In a real-world scenario, I suspect that any continued ops would be a real challenge for the short or long term.

As I read Grant's article I couldn't help wondering what all has really changed since my Kunsan experience. I hate to cast a cloud over "fighting while degraded," but I sense: not much.

Col. Bill Malec,
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O'Fallon, Ill.



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