

# ANASOC Commandos and Special Mission Wing: Working On Their Night Moves



By Maj William Atkins

ON THE EVENING of 23 October 2013, cadre from the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC) School of Excellence (SOE) conducted a joint training event with two Mi-17s from the Special Mission Wing (SMW). This event marked the first time that the SOE Commandos had conducted nighttime infiltration and exfiltration training in conjunction with the SMW.

Air assault is a core mission of ANASOC, but Commandos cannot complete nighttime helicopter assault operations without close coordination and integration with the SMW. A self-sustained helicopter assault force is vital to the success and future sustainability of ANASOC, and increasing the coordination between ANASOC and the SMW has been a priority for the Commando Special Operations Advisory Group (CDO SOAG).

Since a joint training event of this type had never been performed, CDO SOAG advisors spent several weeks validating current Air Mission Request (AMR) processes and, at times, cultivating new links in an attempt to generate this training.

Because it was a night mission, the request for air support was intended specifically for the SMW, as the regular Afghan Air Force has no night flying capability. Nonetheless, the air support request had to be routed through the standard air support pipeline before making its way over to the SMW.

A mission of this caliber, being planned and executed for the first time, might take months to orchestrate. However, under the tutelage of the CDO SOAG, the entire process took just nine work days to accomplish (due, in part, to the religious holiday Eid al-Fitr falling in the middle of the planning, from 14-19 October).

Planning for these types of missions usually stalls due to confusion over Special Operations Kandak (SOK) AMR routing. To alleviate this, CDO SOAG advisors orchestrated the first Key Leader Engagement (KLE) between ANASOC G3-Air (Colonel Sadiq) and the Air Command and Control Center (ACCC) Director (Brigadier General Babah Jee). During this meeting, Col Sadiq and BG Babah Jee clarified the required processes and aligned the SOKs

with regional AMR requests, resulting in a best practice. Although they are generally considered national assets due to their low density and high demand, SOKs can now significantly shorten the approval process for air support by following the regional AMR flow. This process dictates that local units (including SOKs and the SOE) send air requests to the local ANA Corps and associated AAF Wings in an attempt to gain access to air support at the lowest possible level. If air support is unavailable, the request can then be routed through the more complex (and slower) national AMR process.

Furthermore, this mission provided the added benefit of substantiating the capabilities of a new addition to the ACCC, the Special Mission Wing Liaison (SMW LNO). The SMW LNO is the primary link between the control center of the AAF and SOF air assets (the SMW). Utilizing this process allowed the ACCC to remain informed of the overall air picture, even though they were unable to task the

Continued on page 11



SMW directly. The importance of the SMW LNO as a link between the AAF and SMW cannot be stressed enough.

Since additional relationships were needed in order to complete the 9-day planning process, CDO SOAG arranged a KLE between the SMW and the ANASOC G3-Air—the first KLE between these two groups. During this meeting, the SMW Commander (Colonel Ramin) explained the capabilities, limitations, and future structure of the SMW to Colonel Sediq (ANASOC G3-Air), and the two parties confirmed their respective roles and responsibilities in a new partnership fostering greater combat effectiveness and integration. The SMW and SOE commanders also conducted initial planning for the upcoming joint training event, and discussed future ANASOC Commando/SMW relationship. As a result of this meeting, both parties agreed to create a monthly training plan, with joint training events to occur every 1-2 weeks. Additionally, the SOE proposed changes to their own training syllabus for Commando Candidates, adding courses on SMW capabilities and limitations, helicopter landing zone (HLZ) considerations and markings, and infiltration/exfiltration (infil/exfil) operations. Colonels Jabar and Ramin also agreed to a weekly or bi-weekly planning and coordination meeting, further increasing the integration of the two units. Although Col Sediq

was especially thankful for CDO SOAG support in setting up the initial encounter, the meeting was entirely Afghan-led, with minimal input from Coalition mentors. On the morning of the training event, representatives from the SMW, SOE, and ANASOC G3-Air (with mentorship from CDO SOAG, 438 AEW, CAAT, and CJSOTF-A J3 personnel) conducted another joint meeting to confirm the evening's operation and to further solidify the roles and responsibilities in the new relationship. Additionally, Colonels Sediq and Ramin exchanged contact information for the first time in order to continue the relationship without SOAG support. Direct coordination between the SOE and SMW will be a telling sign of future sustainability for both organizations.

The training event that was developed ensures that the Commando cadre, who instruct incoming Commando candidates at the SOE, refresh their operational skills that may have atrophied during their time at the schoolhouse. As a result of countless hours of preparation and planning, two SMW Mi-17s arrived at the designated HLZ, where the pilots and crew chiefs conducted static instruction on Mi-17 capabilities, limitations, and infil/exfil procedures to a class of thirty Commandos. Utilizing night vision goggles, the Commandos practiced on- and off-load procedures, perimeter establishment, and conducted several

infil/exfil flights to solidify the training.

These types of joint training events help to facilitate a partnership and habitual relationship between ANASOC and SMW, increasing their functional capabilities within the Combined Arms Integration pillar of Functionally Based Security Force Assistance operations. Routinely conducting joint training will increase combat effectiveness and interoperability for both ANASOC and SMW. The groundwork laid by this operation will be codified in the new Air C2 Doctrine currently under revision, which will serve as a “roadmap” for future SOE and SOK operations with the SMW. This codified roadmap will ensure that as Coalition mentors consolidate at the higher echelons in preparation for the RESOLUTE SUPPORT Mission, that tactical-level special operations units retain proven guidance for orchestrating similar missions in the future. Additionally, the relationships forged between the SOE, SMW, and ANASOC G3-Air allow for interagency collaboration of future training events and operations, creating a sustainable Commando force capable of successfully executing the challenging mission of nighttime helicopter assault.