

International Airmen & Guardians Newsletter

Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs

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Photo courtesy of UK Ministry of Defence

Operation POLARBEAR: Making a Difference in Sudan

By: MPEP Maj Alexander Plumb

My crew was alerted to the news of the initial spin-up to rescue British diplomats from Sudan in April 2023. This highly dangerous AFRICOM mission set was not in my approved deployed mission location, but we immediately considered exfiltration ideas, generated draft CONOPs for each option, and remained ready to launch.

After the initial spin-up slowed, we shifted toward operation POLARBEAR. We in-filled Royal Marines and personnel into Wadi Seidna airfield, north of Khartoum, to secure it and commence the sustained evacuation mission. The Officer Commanding of 40 Commandos (OC 40), the commander on the ground, expressed thanks that I, a US exchange personnel, would fly his men in for the Sudan rescue effort. The final seven miles of the approach into Wadi followed the Nile River, which was lined with urban areas on both banks of the river. We assessed this approach could be dangerous if the fighting progressed north, so we modified our final approach to minimize the time our aircraft was exposed over the river. The first landing, taxi, and offload proved uneventful.

While the Royal Marines on the airfield were dealing with various humanitarian situations, we were monitoring the open-source news and attending intel assessments of the growing threat picture as a result of the fight heading northwards. During one mission, my crew witnessed a Turkish C-130 being shot up on final approach to the southern runway. On the next mission, we saw significant surface-to-air and surface-to-surface fires beginning 250 miles out from the airfield that persisted until we landed. I have around 800 combat hours in C-130s and have seen quite a bit of small-arms fire in the past, but this sight genuinely alarmed me. The large caliber rounds were reaching altitudes only a few thousand feet below my ingress altitude, which meant they could reach my aircraft much sooner than the AAA I have experienced previously. As a result, we modified our ingress tactics to minimize our expose to the AAA, but we would still be within reach of it on our final approach into Wadi. We all knew the risks and the priority of the mission, and continued the mission because civilians needed to get out of that airfield and country. Our approach tactic worked well—nobody witnessed any AAA being directed toward our aircraft. When we departed the airfield an hour later, we avoided known AAA areas and noticed all fighting in the area had stopped. Shortly afterward, the warring parties in Sudan agreed to another fragile cease fire.

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Message from IAPA Division Chief, Col Carey “Drew” Johnson

I am excited for the opportunity to support the International Airmen and Guardians community in my new role as SAF/IAPA Division Chief and FAO Career Field Manager. I have been fortunate to have such an eclectic career across many fields, and I wanted to share with you a little about myself.

I am a political-military affairs specialist (PAS) and SAF/IA alum. I started in SAF/IA as the Chief of MPEP Operations followed by a deployment to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. In addition to running the military air operations for the UN, I had regular engagements with the U.S. Embassy in Mali and several country team members. Upon redeployment, I was “asked” to be the new SAF/IAP executive officer where I picked up some understanding of the policy and strategy side of security cooperation. Rounding out my international experience, I was assigned to the NATO Joint Force Command Brunssum in the Netherlands working in the operations and intelligence directorate. Outside the international arena, I flew multiple aircraft to include helicopters, remotely piloted aircraft, and fixed-wing aircraft in the Air



Force Special Operations Command. One of the best things I learned during my diverse career is that you never know when the Air Force will move you to your next assignment, so make the most of the time you have by getting started now.

The IAPA Division has seen tremendous change over the last couple years. FAO is now a core career field, MPEP has grown to over 700 personnel and includes 51 partner nations, and security cooperation training is being revamped to enhance the capabilities of the combatant commands. There are no shortages of opportunities to succeed. I am especially vested in the deliberate development of our International Airmen and Guardians and the strategic investments we make with our resources. We are at the dawn of a new era and all of us can determine the new baseline for International Airmen and Guardians to ensure readiness today and relevance tomorrow. I look forward to working with each and every one of you as we develop the international professionals we need.

FY23 Important Dates:

6 July: Americas AFELM Change of Command, JB Andrews, MD

8-10 Aug: USAF FAO Orientation Course, JB Andrews, MD

15-17 Aug: MPEP Europe/Middle East/Africa Forum, Frankfurt, Germany

Mid-Aug: CY23 Intermediate and Senior Developmental Education (IDE/SDE)
Designation Board Results

Late Summer: FAO Command Candidate List Results

19-21 Sept: MPEP Americas Forum, JB Andrews, MD

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FAO Spring '23 DT Recap

The Development Team (DT) met at Randolph Air Force Base in mid-March to tackle some of the issues facing the 16F/16Z career field. Along with several GS-15 and above SAF/IA experts, the DT included O-6s serving as Senior Regional FAOs/mentors who reviewed, assessed, and discussed the records of 191 applicants for traditional development and direct crossflow. Based on USAF crossflow limits for 2023, the DT could only select 22 officers for the FAO career field.

The DT selected 13 officers from a competitive group of 52 for Overseas Intermediate Developmental Education (O-IDE). Additionally, the DT selected the most qualified officers for six Overseas Senior Developmental Education (O-SDE) seats from a superb group of 37 eligible FAOs.

The DT also provided formal career vectors for 48 FAOs and nominated 15 FAOs from among 42 eligible for Command Candidacy. This command list was published in late April to help fill seven projected command FAO positions coming open next summer, but commanders from other career fields can also hire from this list.

SAF/IAPA held a post-DT webinar and career field update on 10 May. If you were not able to make it or have difficulty accessing the recording, please reach out to our org box (SAF.IAPA.IAS.Program.Workflow@us.af.mil).

Congratulations to our newest FAO selectees and command candidates!

Operation POLARBEAR (contd. from page 1)

Over the next few days, the RAF mobility detachment worked around the clock with RAF A-400-Ms and C-130-Js making about six runs per day in and out of Wadi, forming an effective “air bridge” across Egypt and Sudan. Meanwhile, the C-17 provided strategic lifts to and from Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti and RAF Brize Norton in the UK. A robust infrastructure of airlift aircraft and crews were now forward deployed to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. This couldn't have happened without the professionalism of leadership at RAF Brize Norton, including U.S. Marine exchange personnel, Major Nathan Fluker, who was vital to the safe and rapid C-130J forward deployment. The RAF mobility aircraft worked seamlessly to bring civilians safely out of Sudan and into Cyprus.



Photo courtesy of UK Ministry of Defence

On the last POLARBEAR mission, my crew landed the final C-130 2-ship into Wadi. We were behind another RAF C-130 and unloaded the last of the Marines and their kit. It was surreal closing such an important operation and an honor to serve alongside another highly respected 47 Squadron pilot. On the way home, the OC 40 and JFHQ Commander were incredibly thankful for our efforts; I was filled with a tremendous sense of pride. I will never forget what it was like to see a warzone on the horizon and to have that real talk with the crew that we were going to continue and get the mission done. As the last RAF exchange C-130 pilot from US Special Operations Command, I will be forever grateful I was given the opportunity to close down the legacy in this way. It was an end worthy of this historic exchange.

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LEAP Scholars Represent 73% of 2023 FAO Selects

By: Mikala McCurry, AFCLC Outreach Team

Of the 22 selectees, 16 are LEAP Scholars, a 73% selection rate from LEAP. In 2022, 72% of the officers selected for the FAO career field were also members of LEAP. The LEAP Scholars selected as FAOs span 15 Air Force strategic languages and represent years of cost-effective investment through periodic eMentor online synchronous language courses and Language Intensive Training Events. Please join the Air Force Culture and Language Center in congratulating our LEAP Scholars who were selected to serve as FAOs!

The 8th Annual Air University Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Symposium
A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENT

Theme: Integrated by Design
Deadline: 30 June 2023
Submit proposals at airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC

Integrated by Design
AFCLC

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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A FREE APP DEVELOPED BY THE AIR FORCE'S GLOBAL CLASSROOM

Over 70 Field Guides accessible for countries around the globe

Certified courses and professional videos to develop cross-cultural awareness



As featured in
The Wall Street Journal



How do you say
“diplomacy” in your
target language?

French:
diplomatie

Spanish:
diplomacia

Chinese:
外交 (wàijiāo)

Arabic:
دبلوماسية (diblumasia)

Trivia (answers on back page):

Q1: Which is the only nation that has been able to completely disarm its entire nuclear weapons stockpile?

- A. South Africa B. Russia
C. United States D. North Korea

Q2: What was the name of the first atomic bomb to be dropped in conflict?

- A. Fat Man B. Enola Gay
C. Little Boy D. Bockscar

Q3: How many countries currently have nuclear weapons?

- A. 3 B. 9
C. 27 D. 81

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Meet Your EUCOM Senior Regional FAO (SRF): Col Christina “Cruella” Vile

By: Liam Arne, SAF/IAPA



The International Airmen & Guardians Newsletter will be featuring a SRF from each AOR. Look out for a new profile in every upcoming edition!

Col Christina “Cruella” Vile never expected to join the Air Force. She was pursuing a masters degree in special education when her college roommate’s mother connected her to a summer job at Langley Air Force Base for ACC Public Affairs. At the end of the summer, two O-6s in the office sat her down and asked her to consider joining the Air Force, but she was not interested. However, Cruella returned to the position the following summer and ended up joining the ROTC detachment at the University of Virginia. 23 years later, here she is!

Cruella’s first assignment was at NATO’s Airborne Warning & Control System (AWACS) in Germany where she was able to put her college German classes to use. She returned to AWACS for future assignments as the Director of Operations and the Squadron Commander. With several assignments under her belt in Europe, Cruella completed secondary

development education in Belgium just as the FAO career field transitioned into a core AFSC. Upon graduation, she crossflowed into the FAO community as an O-6 in EUCOM to utilize her newfound French language skills.

Cruella’s transition to a core EUCOM FAO would not be uneventful. More than a year into the unprovoked Russian attack on Ukraine, Vile remarked, “It’s an incredibly exciting, rewarding, and exhausting time to be a FAO.” Cruella is glad to see some changes happening in the career field, such as the development of O-6 USAF FAOs like herself in regional divisions. Noting the breadth of knowledge needed to address the existential crisis facing Ukraine, NATO, and the entirety of Europe, she applauds the increasing breadth amongst all our sister Services to manage complex security cooperation and security assistance programs.

Cruella is grateful to serve as the EUCOM SRF for the opportunity to mentor the next generation of FAOs. Vile stated, “I fundamentally believe that [being an SRF] is my primary job for the Air Force- I take that responsibility with the gravity it deserves. I wish I could do it more!” Cruella recently facilitated a forum for EUCOM FAOs to share feedback and gain insight, the first event of its kind in years. She emphasized that her role as an SRF means it is equally important to provide guidance to other FAOs as it is to share their input, for the benefit of the USAF FAO program or the needs of EUCOM. Her biggest advice for FAOs is to “be the expert at your job providing reliable, unemotionally-presented information” while remaining globally-minded to anticipate the needs facing your AOR and the National Defense Strategy long-term. Vile continued, “As FAOs, we need to be the strategist, operationalist, and tactician all at once on a sliding scale, depending on the subject and the moment.”

Cruella encourages all EUCOM FAOs to reach out to her by email (Christine.Vile@us.af.mil), phone, or messaging apps like WhatsApp or Signal- if she doesn’t respond at first, she asks that you please follow up again so that she does not miss your message. What does she wish EUCOM FAOs knew about her? “I can always be bribed with chocolate and coffee.” Vile also noted, “And I really don’t find my callsign offensive- it works with my last name, and it helps I have a dalmatian too!”

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Congratulations to our 2023 FAO Cohort!

Maj Smith, Daniel S.	11X	Maj Mata, Jennifer	14N	Capt Winslow, Briana	18S
Capt Hamaker, Daniel	11X	Maj Padoemthonaweekij, Jessica	14N	Capt Obolonskiy, Roman	21A
Maj Peterson, Benjamin M.	12R	Capt Cunningham, Sage	14N	Capt Wisner, Sarah	21R
Maj Lashomb, Jonathan	12S	Capt Do, Derrick	14N	Capt Upreti, Saroj	31P
Maj Villegas-Gonzalez, Enrique	13M	Capt Prillwitz, Ronald	14N	Capt Joseph, Marvis	32E
Capt Martinez, Kyle	13N	Capt Pietri Collado, Walliot	18R	Lt Col Verbik, Terra	38F
Capt Wright, Jamari	14F	Capt Levingston, Gregory	18S	Maj Sparks, Hanna	38F
Maj Ku, Joshua	14N				

Congratulations to our FAO O-5 Selects!

Ahn, Andrew	Frolova, Natalia	Martinez, Michael	Rodriguez, Emilio
Batson, Sean	Gentile, Erin	Mayor, Michael	Romero, Nicholas
Beltran, Rafael	Gorski, Timothy	McCullough, Kyle	Schrader, John
Benoy, Cody	Harton, Gergely	Meredith, Wesley	Schulze, Joshua
Beville, Patrick	Holbrook, Samuel	Moore, Semira	Shreve, Carlton
Borders, Andrew	Hughes, Anthony	Morgan, Clark	Silva Garza, Angelica
Charbonneau, Nicholas	Hunter, Annaleis	Morris, Michael	Snyder, Alan
Cipolla, Andrew	Jorgensen, Nathan	Myl, Jason	Sturm, Douglas
Cocomazzi, John	Kim, Chehun	Olivine, Maxim	Thorley, Mark
Coffman, Benjamin	Labit, Stephen	Petri, Lauren	Velati, Nicolas
Cubillos Fonseca, Angelica	Langley, John	Rayl, Nicholas	Wang, Steven
Darconte, Christopher	Lupo, Stephen	Robillard, Nicole.	Wong, Jonathan
Esposito, Daniel	Macdonald, Christina	Rodgers, Jonathan	Young, Oyunchimeg

Congratulations to our MPEP Promotees!

Lt Col(s) Cangelosi, Kristen	Maj(s) Mason, Dylan	Maj(s) Robertson, Ian	(M)Sgt Larry, Derek
Maj(s) Ao, James	Maj(s) McElwrath, Craig	Maj(s) Ward, Matthew	(M)Sgt Manning, Joshua
Maj(s) Bible, Krista	Maj(s) Owens, Gavin	(S)MSgt McClung, Jamie	(M)Sgt Patton, Anthony
Maj(s) Fisher, Nathan	Maj(s) Palmer, Howard	(M)Sgt Fagan, Ashley	
Maj(s) Green, Leslie	Maj(s) Pike, Jacqueline	(M)Sgt Kirby, Daniella	