

238th AIR SUPPORT OPERATIONS SQUADRON



MISSION

The mission of the 238th Air Support Operations Squadron is to provide liaison and expertise to Army combat units on aerospace force applications. The units mission focuses on close air support, interdiction, and force enhancing missions, including surveillance and reconnaissance, airlift, electronic warfare, and special operations.

LINEAGE

238th Airways and Communications Service Flight activated, 1 Nov 1953

238th Mobile Communications Flight

Redesignated 238th Combat Communications Squadron

Redesignated 238th Combat Information Systems Squadron, 1 Jul 1985

Redesignated 238th Combat Communications Squadron

Redesignated 238th Air Support Operations Squadron

STATIONS

Key Field, Meridian, MS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Maj Ralph C. Brashier, Jr. #1970

Maj Richard L. Tolbert, #1981

1Lt John P. Stephens

LTC Norman W. Miller, #2004

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



238th Combat Communications Squadron emblem: On a disc Blue divided by a vertical Green band fimbriated Yellow bearing a Yellow Minuteman figure detailed Blue between two stars above and three stars below; a Silver Gray antenna in sinister emitting a Yellow lightning flash overall to top and to dexter a Silver Gray mobile control tower emitting a Yellow lightning flash, overall to top, all within a narrow Yellow border. Attached above the disc, a Green scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border. Attached below the disc, a Green scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "FIRST ON – LAST OFF" in Yellow letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue represents the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The Minuteman signifies that the unit is a National Guard element. The unit's communications mission is indicated by the antenna and the mobile tower. The stars represent the five squadrons of the Combat Communications Group.

238th Air Support Operations Squadron emblem: On a disc pierced per pale, Azure a flight symbol ascending palewise Or; Gules a Minuteman figure Argent garnished Sable; Vert a saber bendwise in saltire with a musket surmounted by an arrow palewise armed to chief of the second; all within a diminished bordure of the like. Attached above the disc, a Green scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "238TH ASOS" in Yellow letters. Attached below the disc, a Green scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed with "FIRST ON

- LAST OFF" in Yellow letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The Minuteman signifies the National Guard unit. The aircraft shows support provided through air support units. The combined arms represent a combination of Army ground units and Air Force operations.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

On November 1, 1953 the 238th Airways and Communications Service Flight was activated, and commanded by 1Lt John P. Stephens. Although the 238th was assigned to the 231st AACSS Squadron in Washington B.C., they became a tenant unit of the 186th and were located in buildings 108 and 109 on A Street, Meridian, MS. The mission of the 238th was to "provide a mobile capability of the installation, operation, and maintenance of airways communications facilities, to include control of air movement of aircraft on and around an airport, transmission and receipt of weather data, and operation and maintenance of radio navigational aid facilities."

When envisioning images of military special operations, one typically goes down a list to include Navy Seals, Army Rangers and Marine Raiders. Unbeknownst to many, Tactical Air Control Parties (TACPs) are one entity of the Air Force's special operations force. TACPs have the enormous responsibility of calling in air strikes. Air strikes, also known as close air support (CAS), are paramount on the battlefield in taking out the bad guys and saving innocent lives. A TACP has the ability to facilitate both. TACPs imbed with the Army on the frontline, and provide CAS ensuring that the right target is hit at just the right time.

To train and practice their craft, TACPs from the 238th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) assigned to the 186th Air Refueling Wing, Key Field Air National Guard Base in Meridian, Mississippi, participated in Southern Strike 17 at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center from Oct. 24 to Nov. 4. Every U.S. military branch convened for the large-scale conventional and special operations exercise hosted by the Mississippi National Guard, which allowed participants to build partnerships and maintain combat readiness for future missions.

A symbiotic relationship exists between the Air Force's TACPs and other ground forces. In combat, TACPs are assigned to Army units. They plan, request and direct CAS with Air Force air power against enemy targets that potentially could be near friendly forces. A TACP is generally a two-airman team, working in an Army ground unit and directing close air support firepower toward enemy targets on the ground.

"We are liaisons to the Army - that's who we support," Tech. Sgt. James Buckley, 238th ASOS TACP/JTAC, said. "We go out and imbed with Army teams using a two man JTAC team, and we control the air strikes for them." JTAC or Joint Terminal Attack Control is an additional certification that a TACP can attain. JTAC certification gives a TACP the authority to tell the aircraft to release its ordinance. The Army's ground forces commander is the approving authority for the targeting process. "It's a checks and balance system, so we can't strike targets that aren't valid, and the ground commander can't tell us to strike something that's not valid,"

Buckley said. "In the end, the ground forces commander on the Army side owns any ordinance that comes off an aircraft."

Meeting the physical and academic requirements is no easy feat which is why this career field needs recruits who are mentally and physically strong and can make it through the TACP pipeline. "You may fast-rope once just to live on the ground for 30 days," Staff Sgt. Sean King, 238th ASOS TACP/JTAC, said. "The cool stuff is over, and now you're living like the Army, eating with the Army, sleeping less like the Army, marching like them. You have to take it serious."

"I think that someone who wants to do this job needs to do their homework," Buckley said. "You have to really have it in your heart that your mission is to ultimately advise the Army, and drop ordinances to save lives on the battlefield. If you don't have the mission in your heart, you're not going to make it through." To become a TACP, you have to attend basic training, go through the TACP pipeline or schoolhouse at Lackland Air Force Base which is four months of job skills training. From there you go to Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) school where you learn to survive in case you become isolated. After that, you return back to your unit and are mentored by a JTAC.

"You really are going to be challenged at the school house," Buckley said. "They're going to weed out the weak. Our motto is 'The strong shall stand; the weak will fall by the wayside.' The 238th linked up with the Army's 3rd Special Forces Group during the exercise at Camp Shelby. "What we're doing with them is a multi-echelon exercise where they are training us on their tactics and procedures so that we can integrate better when we do go out with a special operations forces team or another scout team," Buckley said. "We'll know what they're baseline procedures are so we can integrate seamlessly with them. Common character traits indicative of a TACP are self-confidence, determination and self-reliance. "A no-quit attitude is a must," King said.

"You have to be really self-reliant, because you're going to be out there on your own," Buckley said. "We have guys that are Senior Airmen that are JTACs who are talking to full-bird colonels and advising them how to use close-air support. So if you're not self-reliant and you don't have the confidence in yourself, it could be the difference between the ground commander listening to you, and taking your advice, and potentially saving lives on the battlefield - or blowing you off, and you're just there monitoring a radio. There's a lot of responsibility because you control multi-million dollar aircraft, dropping 100 thousand dollar bombs. There are lives on the battle field. There are civilians on the battlefield. So, those are the considerations you have to take in." Being in the 238th ASOS is likening to family for the TACPs "It's the brotherhood," Buckley said. "Honestly, I love these guys. I was prior Army, and I felt that brotherhood there. But this is like a whole new level. They're like family to me. We train close together, and we rely on each other. "It's just great comradery with everybody," King said. "Plus, the job brings in a whole bunch of fun."

Being a TACP at the 238th ASOS is just as rewarding as it is exciting. At Southern Strike 17, the 238th trained with the 3rd Special Forces Group from North Carolina, Naval Special Warfare Team, the 122nd ASOS from Louisiana, the 165th ASOS from Georgia, and the 11th ASOS out of Texas.

Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.