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Teammates—This month the LeMay Center's Doctrine Paragon highlights Operation ANACONDA for the C2 of counterland operations and airspace control in the Shahikot Valley of Afghanistan during 2002.

Control is the antidote to chaos. Prior to March 2002, the airspace in Afghanistan was nothing short of chaotic. There was limited C2 of air operations and coordination between the air and land components. Specifically, there was no air support operations center (ASOC). The ASOC is a key element of the Theater Air Control System (TACS), performing key roles in controlling airspace over land forces and integrating air-ground operations. The lack of an ASOC in Afghanistan directly contributed to the chaos of Operation ANACONDA.

Operation ANACONDA marked a shift from SOF-centric operations to conventional land force operations in Afghanistan. On March 2, 2002, elements of the US Army's XVIII Airborne Corps, US special operations forces, and partner forces initiated Operation ANACONDA to destroy Taliban and al-Qaeda forces sheltering in the Shahikot Valley southeast of Gardez, Afghanistan. Army and SOF forces assessed the operation to be "low threat" and requested the air component only provide air interdiction (AI) strikes along with two 2-ship close air support (CAS) orbits prior to the start of the operation. Unfortunately, planners underestimated the numbers, strength, and resolve of the enemy forces. During the first hour, US forces inserted into the valley's eastern mountain passes immediately took heavy fire and had no effective response capability. After losing rotary wing support to battle damage, US and partner forces found themselves pinned down.

By March 3rd, the CFACC directed air component planners to revamp the ATO and surge fighters and bombers to support the isolated troops. However, without an ASOC, air assets struggled to effectively integrate into the fight due to airspace deconfliction challenges and



limited battlefield info. Though E-3C AWACS airmen provided positive and procedural deconfliction to aircraft supporting the operation, they were not trained to manage 37 enlisted terminal attack controllers' (ETACs) CAS requests on the ground. Another C2 aircraft, the E-8 JSTARS, was brought into the fight augmented with SOF personnel and F-16 pilots



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to assist with airspace deconfliction and coordination with ground forces to prioritize CAS missions. Real-time target updates and aircraft deconfliction over the target area were often accomplished by Forward Air Control-Airborne (FAC(A)) and Tactical Air Coordinator-Airborne (TAC(A)) aircraft. Although their efforts were unplanned, this team of airborne C2 nodes took control of the airspace, determined the land force's fires priorities, and enabled CAS while preventing fratricide.

Why it matters today: Understanding Air Force and Army integration to provide C2 and airspace control over land forces is critical to plan, coordinate, and successfully execute counterland missions. The Air Force provides the Army the capability to integrate airspace and air-to-ground fires with Army fires and maneuver through the ASOC. Operation ANACONDA illustrates why the air and land components must plan together for the effective integration of air operations in support of land force objectives. Future conflicts may change the way the Army and the Air Force provide C2 of airspace over the battlefield, but understanding the command relationships and the capabilities each component contributes to the joint fight is the first step to successful integration of the air and land domains.

For more info on counterland operations and airspace control, see [AFDP 3-03, Counterland Operations](#), and [AFDP 3-52, Airspace Control](#). To hear the story of Operation ANACONDA directly from the pilots who flew in it, check out the latest episode of [The Air Force Doctrine Podcast: Lessons Learned in Doctrine – Ep 10 – LEDx Doctrine: Operation ANACONDA on Tap](#) on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon Music, or at www.doctrine.af.mil.

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