

# SQUADRON OFFICER SCHOOL



## **LINEAGE**

Established and activated as Squadron Officer School, 1 Nov 1954  
Redesignated as Headquarters, Squadron Officer School, 1 Aug 1986

## **STATIONS**

Maxwell AFB, AL, 1 Nov 1954

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Air Command and Staff College, 1 Nov 1954  
Air University, 1 Jul 1959  
Squadron Officer College, 8 Feb 2000

## **COMMANDERS**

Col Edward R. Ellis, 1997

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

None

### **Campaign Streamers**

None

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

None

## **Decorations**

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jan 1969-31 Dec 1970

1 Jan 1973-31 Dec 1974

1 May 1980-30 Apr 1982

1 Jan 1983-31 Dec 1984

Air Force Organizational Excellence Awards

1 Jan 1985-31 May 1986

1 Jul 1993-30 Jun 1995  
1 Jul 1997-30 Jun 1998  
1 Jul 1998-7 Feb 2000  
8 Feb 2000-30 Jun 2001  
1 Jul 2002-30 Jun 2003  
1 Jul 2003-30 Jun 2004  
1 Jul 2005-30 Jun 2006  
1 Jul 2006-30 Jun 2007  
1 Jul 2007-30 Jun 2008

## **EMBLEM**

Approved, 15 Oct 1998

## **EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE**

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

AS THE large clock on the wall marked the precise hour of 4:30 a.m., an Air Force commander spoke to his officers, assembled in the small room.

"Gentlemen, the missions you are flying today and for the next few days might well be the beginning of the end of action in this theater."

He paused, paced up and down the room, chose his words carefully.

"As you know, intensive counter-air operations against the enemy have reduced opposition in the air to practically nothing. Our Air Force interdiction program has shown a high degree of success; the lack of supplies and reinforcements has limited the enemy armies to only defensive holding actions. The theater commander has determined that now is the time to start our big push north, to throw the invaders out of Korea."

He turned to a map and pointed to a red line running across Korea.

"The plan of attack is for the First Army to launch an attack toward the town of Inje." He drew a blue line from the right side of the battle line up to a small circle which marked the town of Inje, near the eastern coast.

"The Second Allied Army will launch an attack up the Pukhan river and form a junction with the First Army in Inje." Again he drew a blue line, this time from the left side of the battle line to Inje. The blue and red lines then formed a circle.

"If this operation is successful, we stand to trap about 110,000 Red troops in this area. This might well end major resistance in this theater. The primary job of the 177th Fighter-Bomber

Wing is to support the Second Allied Army in this operation. However, if enemy air opposition increases, we may have to revert back to counter-air operations, for we must maintain air superiority. I cannot overemphasize the importance of the missions assigned this wing. It is imperative that you make good to the second all times over target and you must put your firepower on the target."

He then enumerated targets, and the forces involved in their destruction. The intelligence officer presented the target details, enemy capability, and evasion and escape procedures. The operations officer listed times, take-off procedures, navigational plan, bombing, strafing and rocketry information, and the plan of attack on each target. The weather officer gave weather information en route to, and at the target. The chaplain concluded the briefing with a short prayer. It was 5:00 a.m.

No scramble followed the briefing, as you might expect. No jet fighters screamed into the air. Not one aircraft actually left the ground, because the briefing did not take place in Korea, but at the Air Command and Staff College's Squadron Officer School at Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, Ala.

The mission briefing was part of the Tactical Air Operation problem, one of the final school exercises. The 177th Fighter-Bomber Wing is a mythical wing which the students had activated, trained, moved overseas, and were now committing to combat operations. The students — captains and lieutenants acting as a wing staff — had to plan and conduct the missions under realistic combat conditions.

There were mistakes, and errors in judgment—which under actual combat might prove disastrous. However, as Col. Russell V. Ritchey, Assistant Commandant of the Air Command and Staff College, and former Director of the Squadron Officer School, points out, "Here is the place to make mistakes, when they don't count. If we can point out these mistakes and correct them, we can avoid those errors when the chips are down."

Combat operations, however, are but one small part of the SOS curriculum. World affairs, writing, speaking, reading, techniques of command and staff work, leadership and management, activation, training, movement and combat employment are integrated into the fourteen-week course.

With outbreak of the Korean war in 1950, the Air Force once again began to expand. Thousands of Reservists were recalled to active duty and scattered throughout the Air Force, many into squadron command and staff responsibility.

The influx of men increased an already serious problem—the lack of fundamental, professional training and education among the veterans of World War II. During World War II these officers had been trained for highly specialized duty, served only in that duty and were released. They had learned little of the broad principles of organization, management, leadership, and employment, and had been

taught few of the principles and techniques of command and staff duty. In addition, the Air Force had changed greatly. New aircraft, new weapons, new organization, different administrative procedures confronted the recalled Reservist. To develop these young officers into future leaders, the Air Force had to give them a well-rounded system of professional education.

So the Air Tactical School was de-activated and the Squadron Officer Course (now the Squadron Officer School) at Maxwell took its place. The course was completely redesigned to provide the first step in the Air University program of professional education for both Regulars and Reserves.

The curriculum of the Squadron Officer School concerns itself primarily with present principles rather than facts, for principles tend to remain unchanged. All officers must be able to think clearly and logically, to solve problems, and to arrive at sound workable decisions and recommendations. And an officer must be able to communicate his decisions clearly and concisely, orally or in writing, to those who must carry them out.

These elements are summed up in the theme of the Squadron Officer School: Think—Communicate—Cooperate.

At SOS factual information is presented, not as an end in itself, but as a tool to enable the student officer to improve his ability to think, communicate, and cooperate. Facts and principles are not data to be memorized and then quickly forgotten. The students get plenty of opportunity to apply them in as realistic situations as can be devised in an academic situation. Not only do they use what they learn during the course in solving these problems, but they must use the cumulative knowledge gained through previous training and experience.

Finally, the curriculum treats each subject as a part of an interrelated whole—the complex organism of the Air Force. One of the guiding principles of the course is that knowledge without application is of little value.

Lectures are presented to the entire student body, usually about 750, in the morning periods. Lecturers are carefully selected by the Air Command and Staff College, not only for their specialized knowledge, but also for their ability to convey ideas to others.

In the afternoons, the student body is broken down into small groups, usually twelve to thirteen students in each. One faculty member, called a section leader, is assigned to each of the sections. The section is the heart of the course.

The task of the section leader, usually a major or a captain, is not an easy one. He lives with his students, conducts group discussions, supervises and criticizes student-led problems, evaluates student writing and speaking. He must be able to evaluate each student in all situations—some of which entail considerable stress—and then counsel him about his strengths and weaknesses.

The organization of the student body into sections affords an ideal unit for many extra-curricular activities at SOS. Each section forms a team in the compulsory athletic program; it forms an aircrew for the evasion and escape problem; it becomes a task group for solving outdoor

problems at Project X. The section also forms a unit to build high morale and esprit de corps—the will to win.

As Lt. Col. J. R. Anderson, USMC, stated "The point is that to build mo-rale and prestige we need more leadership, tradition, pageantry, ceremony, and in plain language, color. These things give a sense of pride, a connection with the past, and a will to make the organization better in the future."

Such things are being accomplished at SOS. The athletic program, mentioned earlier, serves to weld the unit together and exploits the innate desire for competition. Each section has a pennant bearing the section number and the course emblem. The pennants are carried and displayed at all athletic events and social functions. Each group, which is composed of nine or ten sections, also has its flag.

Section parties and formal group "dining ins," patterned after the tra-ditional British dining in, are held pe-riodically during the course. Themes, slogans, and mottoes are used to advantage—"Think or Die," "Every Man a Tiger," "Think-Communicate-Cooperate," and even "Stay Loose."

A section that possesses high morale

A group who successfully escaped from a prison camp hides from a guard.

usually does extremely well in the academic phases of the course. However, tradition, prestige, and morale are not fostered solely for their value to the course. The students are shown how these things can be developed in their units in the field to help them accomplish their missions better.

Another aspect, closely akin to unit morale, is leadership. Class 54-B saw the birth of the Leadership Development Area. As the name implies, it is a separate area, removed from the regular SOS academic area, where each section spends two to three weeks of the fourteen-week course. Here the students run the show. They are responsible for their own organization, discipline, mess, adminis-tration—always under the critical eye of the section leader.

The Leadership Development Area follows a plan used throughout the SOS—to get multiple outcomes from all activities. Here, the students learn the fundamentals of Air Base Defense planning and at the same time are placed in leadership situations.

The stress on the students in this problem is quite great. They must guard against infiltrators and the prob-lem is climaxed with a concentrated attempt by other troops to penetrate the defensive positions and destroy vital elements of the base.

Another form of leadership training and practical training in problem solving is known as "Project X." X is a series of twelve physical tasks, each simulating a combat problem calling for

quick group solution and action. For example, a section gets fifteen minutes to move a fifty-five-gallon

drum of gasoline across a heavily mined field and over a four-foot barrier, using only two sections of steel pipe, a plank or two, and a piece of manila rope. Stepping on any part of the simulated mine field or dropping any part of the equipment will theoretically blow the section sky high. Though no leader is appointed, one individual usually emerges to direct the activities. Originated by the Germans and used by the British in World War II for training commandos and testing potential officer material, SOS's Project X is an excellent training laboratory.

Following Project X is "Tiger Trek," an all-night field exercise built around evasion and escape. Again, this is problem solving under stress. After a day in the classroom, sections are taken to a prison camp surrounded by a wire fence and "Red" guards. The students are required to escape from the prison compound and make their way back to the base through "enemy territory" heavily patrolled by "Red" sentries, guards, and motor patrols.

If captured, an officer is interrogated by a specially trained team from the Air Defense Command. Sometimes he is grilled for as many as four hours — questioned — exercised — questioned—taken out and made to run until his legs will barely hold his weight —questioned some more—"Where is the first check point?", "Who helped you escape?", "What were you doing down by the lake?", "Where were you going?"

Some break under this rigid test and confess but most don't. Most students who have been through it feel that every officer should be afforded the experience. Although the interrogations are primarily to give the student a knowledge and experience of some of the methods used and afford the defense team practice, they may eventually help solve the intrinsic problem of behavior after capture.

The problems of educating and training Air Force officers for wars of the future are many and varied. The plans for the Squadron Officer School of tomorrow are, and will remain, flexible to include new areas of instruction, new devices for training, and new changing programs.

Bold planning exists. How much of such a program can be translated into actuality will depend on time and future budgets and cannot as yet be fully answered. But one fact remains— the value of SOS training to support an aggressive, combat-oriented Air Force has already been proved. In the future as today an Air Force officer must think or die

### ***SQUADRON OFFICER SCHOOL***

***(Affiliated with the Spaatz Center)***

***SOS is a 5-week leadership program and is the second tier of PME for officers. For nearly 60 years, SOS has educated CGOs, teaching them to think analytically and creatively, to build and***

***lead small teams, and to improve their leadership abilities. The mission of SOS is to "Educate,***

*motivate, and mentor Captains as current and future Air Force Leaders.” The curriculum relies*

*heavily on a hands-on, applied teaching model for learning and focuses on the tactical level leadership competencies as articulated in Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1 and the Air Force Institutional Competency List.*

*\_ SOS offers seven classes per year in order to meet the Air Force throughput of approximately 80 percent attendance opportunity for line Captains*

*\_ SOS graduated 2,958 students in FY09, including 64 DoD civilians and 73 international officers. SOS planned throughput for FY10 is 2,976 students. .*

*SOS also provides a distance-learning (DL) course for eligible DoD officers and civilians. The SOS distance-learning course is particularly important for Air Force Reserve and Air National*

*Guard personnel as the vast majority are unable to attend SOS in-residence.*

*\_ In 2009, fielded SOS DL Course 20 that leverages the web-based Blackboard learning management system to deliver updated content and scenario-based assessments. There are over 4,000 enrolled.*

*\_ SOS has about 8,000 enrolled in the previous version (called Course 28).*

*Source of Data: SOC/CCE*

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Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 25 Sep 2012

Updated:

Sources