

# Air Force provides Army look from above

By **CHUCK CANNON**

Public Affairs and Communication

FORT POLK, La. — One of the benefits of a rotation to the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk is that Soldiers are afforded the opportunity to train against a world-class opposing force at a location with which they aren't familiar.

Another plus is the chance to work alongside other military units, including those from sister services.

During the 101st Airborne Division's recent rotation to JRTC, Soldiers from the Army's 7th Special Forces Group and the Air Force's 548th Combat Training Squadron, 57th Operations Group out of Fort Polk, joined forces to battle the JRTC "Geronimos."

While most JRTC and Fort Polk personnel might be familiar with Army Special Forces, the 548th CTS — assigned to the Air Force 34th Special Operations Squadron — is most likely a new unit, especially since this rotation was its first trip to JRTC and Fort Polk.

A four-man crew, assigned to a U-28A Draco fixed-wing aircraft, provided an "eye-in-the-sky" for 7th SF Group Soldiers, which then passed on the information to 101st Abn Div commanders for use in force-on-force operations against JRTC OPFOR.

The crew consisted of U.S. Air Force Capt. Peter Coote, pilot; U.S. Air Force Capt. Marc Kwietniak, co-pilot; U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Chris Hanna, combat systems officer; and U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Devin Martin, tactical systems operator.

"Historically the U-28 has been in the counter-insurgency fight working with special operations forces," Coote said. "Now we're moving to the near-peer fight and this is a chance for us to interact with large conventional-force Army units that we don't typically work with down range. This is our first exposure as a crew to working with big Army."

Coote said participating in the JRTC rotation is beneficial to everyone involved.

"This is the first time we worked with conventional Army forces on the ground that might not be familiar with the U-28 capabilities and our general mission set," he said.

U.S. Air Force Capt. James Bradin, a U-28A instructor pilot who accompanied the crew to JRTC and served as mission commander for the exercise, said the U-28A provides the ISR (Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance) arm for the SOT-D (Special Operations Training Detachment) 7th Group out of Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

"The SOT-D is working with the 101st Airborne Division," he said. "Everything we are flying in support of this exercise, we're reporting to the special operations entity that is here, and that's being filtered down to the 101st."

*USAF U-28A crew, from left, Senior Airman Devin Martin, 1st Lt. Chris Hanna, Capt. Marc Kwietniak and Capt. Peter Coote, stand in front of their aircraft on Polk Army Airfield at the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk Sept. 25. The crew was supporting JRTC Rotation 21-10.*



*U.S. Air Force Capt. Marc Kwietniak, 548th CTS, checks a sensor on his U-28A aircraft prior to a mission at the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk Sept. 25.*



Kwietniak said the crew is basically a tactical ISR platform.

"We have two sensors that provide full motion video to ground teams," he said. "We support guys on the ground without the delay that a Reaper, MQ-9 or drone would have."

From his combat systems officer seat, Hanna said his team also has an important communications mission.

"We also have a pretty solid communications suite in terms of radios, which is pretty good for us because sometimes guys on the ground have trouble relaying information through other aircraft," he said. "Often, we'll be the central hub to push out all of that information either via radios or some of the data links we carry."

Martin said he relishes his position in the rear of the aircraft.

"We in the back provide real-time intelli-

gence for troops on the ground using classified techniques and equipment," he said. "That about sums up my job."

The U-28A and its crew's deployment to JRTC and Fort Polk in support of the 101st Airborne Division's rotation was also part of the Air Force's GREEN FLAG-East, an Air Force exercise that runs parallel to JRTC.

Coote said most Soldiers are unaware what the U-28A and its crew can bring to the fight.

"Once they learn, they understand we are a valuable asset," he said. "I see us doing more of these large-scale exercises in our future."

In fact, Bradin said that is the plan.

"This is the first time we've applied the U-28 in this type of exercise and it's being used as a test platform to see just how it can be utilized in future near-peer conflicts as more people learn about our capabilities," he said. "It's mutually beneficial for all concerned."

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