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Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) Shortage Standards, Training Opportunities and Ongoing Initiatives

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Background: Lately there has been considerable attention being focused on the importance of Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) qualified personnel. In a memorandum from GEN David Petraeus, USCENTCOM Commander, to the Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff, he highlighted the criticality of providing more JTACs for operations in the USCENTCOM AOR. JTACs provide the expertise to direct accurate Close Air Support (CAS) to successfully engage enemy targets, while reducing collateral damage and civilian casualties. The dispersed nature of U.S and Coalition forces on the counter-insurgency battlefield calls for more JTACs to be emplaced with these units. The shortage of qualified JTACs can be attributed to factors such as lack of suitable training ranges, limited aircraft availability, high operational tempo, and a limited number of qualified instructors (JTAC-I) and examiners (JTAC-E). It is important for SOF units and personnel to understand Terminal Attack Control (TAC) operations and the training required to increase and/or maintain JTAC qualified personnel. In order to do so, familiarity with the following publication is essential:



[USSOCOM Manual 350-5, Joint Terminal Attack Controller \(JTAC\) Training, 5 September 2008.](#)
This manual establishes the minimum standards for training, qualifying, evaluating, and certifying USSOCOM personnel to control CAS missions as a JTAC. It is essentially the SOF JTAC "bible."

Definitions: The process to establish minimum standards for training, qualifying, evaluating, and certifying USSOCOM personnel to control close air support missions as a JTAC can be somewhat confusing for those not intimately involved in the field. To better understand these processes, the following definitions should be understood:

- JTAC. A Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) is a qualified (certified) Service member who from a forward position directs the action of combat aircraft engaged in close air support and other offensive air operations. A current and qualified joint terminal attack controller will be recognized across the Department of Defense as capable and authorized to perform terminal attack control.
- JTAC-I. A Joint Terminal Attack Controller Instructor (JTAC-I) is a highly qualified JTAC who provides the requisite instruction and guidance for certification to JTAC trainees. This individual must be at least an E-5, have at least 2 years continuous JTAC experience as a qualified JTAC, must be appointed in writing by the unit commander, and must pass a recurring 18-month evaluation using the criteria outlined in Table 5-1 of USSOCOM Manual 350-5.
- JTAC-E. A Joint terminal Attack Controller Examiner (JTAC-E) is a highly qualified JTAC who provides the requisite evaluations of JTACs required for initial certification and the recurring evaluations JTACs undergo to maintain qualification. This individual must have at least 1 year continuous JTAC experience, must be a qualified JTAC and JTAC-I, must be on a letter from the unit commander, and must pass an initial evaluation using criteria outlined in Table 5-1 of USSOCOM Manual 350-5.
- Terminal Attack Control. A control consists of at least one aircraft (fixed/rotary wing) attacking a surface target. The control begins with a CAS brief, also known as the "9-line briefing," from a JTAC and ends with either an actual/simulated weapons release or abort on a final attack run. No more than two controls can be counted per CAS briefing per target.
- Type 1 Terminal Attack Control. JTACs use a Type 1 control when the risk assessment requires them to visually acquire the attacking aircraft and target under attack.

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- Type 2 Terminal Attack Control. A Type 2 control is used when the JTAC desires control of individual attacks but assesses that either visual acquisition of the attacking aircraft or target at weapons release is not possible, or when attacking aircraft are not in a position to acquire the target prior to weapons release.
- Type 3 Terminal Attack Control. A Type 3 control is used when the JTAC requires the ability to provide clearance for multiple attacks within a single engagement subject to specific attack restrictions, and any or all of the following conditions exist: 1. JTAC is unable to visually acquire the attacking aircraft at weapons release. 2. JTAC is unable to visually acquire the target. 3. The attacking aircraft is unable to acquire the mark/target prior to weapons release.
- Proponent. The proponent for USSOCOM Manual 350-5 is the USSOCOM J33-G (Ground Branch).
- Lead Agent. The lead agent for USSOCOM Manual 350-5 is the AFSOC Air Integration Branch (AFSOC/A3OG).
- Executive Agent. Commander, AFSOC is the USSOCOM Executive Agent and JTAC Program Manager for all Terminal Control Operations involving Special Operations personnel.

JTAC Accredited Courses: A JTAC is specially trained, qualified and authorized to provide terminal control of CAS aircraft conducting operations in support of ground forces. Standardized training for JTACs is essential to providing effective air control and deconfliction of all CAS missions. The complexity of coordinating CAS with ground fire support and maneuver units requires a detailed understanding of combat aviation capabilities and other fire support means. USSOCOM only recognizes the following accredited JTAC qualification courses:

1. Expeditionary Warfare Training Group (EWTG) Atlantic/Pacific (LANT/PAC) Tactical Air Control Party Course.
2. Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center (NSAWC) Joint Terminal Attack Controller Course.
3. Special Operations Terminal Attack Controller Course (SOTACC).
4. U.S. Air Force Joint Air Ground Operations Group (JAGOG) Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course.*
5. U.S. Air Force Europe Joint Fires Center of Excellence (JFCOE) Joint Terminal Attack Controller Qualification Course.*
6. Also includes the multinational JTAC courses Australian Defense Force (ADF) Forward Air Controller Developmental Unit (FACDU), Canadian Armed Forces Forward Air Controller Course, Norwegian AGOS, and UK Joint Forward Air Control Training and Standards Unit.

*Note: Graduates of JFCOE and JAGOG are not fully qualified JTACs until they complete their respective Component phased programs at their home units.

Maintaining Currency: Once an individual graduates as a JTAC from one of the previously mentioned schools, he has to maintain currency and accomplish all recurring evaluation requirements to retain authority to execute terminal attack operations. Of note, AC-130 aircraft do NOT count as fixed wing controls. MQ-1 and MQ-9 UAVs may be counted for currency (maximum of 2 controls), but will not replace any of the required fixed wing controls. USSOCOM Manual 350-5, page 10 outlines the JTAC currency requirements:

1. All 12 annual currency CAS controls require the use of a 9-Line.
2. A qualified JTAC must conduct (6) Type 1 or Type 2 controls within a 6-month period. Type 3 controls can be used for proficiency, but do not count toward this requirement.
3. A minimum of 3 of 6 controls must be fixed-wing.
4. A minimum of 1 control every 6 months must expend live or inert ordnance.
5. One control every 6 months must be a night control.
6. Recurring evaluation requirements must occur prior to the end of the 17th month after the previous evaluation.



7. If a JTAC does not accomplish 6 controls in a 6-month period, he is considered non-qualified.

JTACs who do not satisfy the above requirements are considered non-qualified until re-qualified in accordance with paragraph 3-14 of USSOCOM Manual 350-5. NOTE: Of the 6 required controls per 6 month period, 75% must be fighter-designated aircraft. The other 25% may be bomber aircraft, forward firing helicopters, or armed UAVs.

JTAC Training Venues: The lack of aircraft and training venues seem to be major factors in the shortage of qualified and current JTACs. In addition to unit-level training events, the following venues provide the opportunity for JTACs to execute the necessary terminal attack controls to maintain currency. While most of these training opportunities exist as part of a scheduled event, others are solely JTAC focused. Points of contact follow each training venue/event should units desire to gather information concerning possible participation in these events.

- **Air Wing Fallon (AWF).** The Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center (NSAWC) located in Fallon, NV trains each carrier air wing on the latest TTPs related to airborne command and control, offensive counterair (OCA), air interdiction, suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD), electronic warfare (EW), close air support (CAS) and combat search and rescue (CSAR). Mr. Al Glover, SOCOM J7/9, albert.glover.ctr@socom.mil.
- **Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course (WTI).** WTI, located in Yuma, AZ, hones participants knowledge about weapons and their delivery, platform tactics and integration among Marine aviation and other Marine, joint and foreign aviation platforms and command and control systems. Mr. Tony Styer, SOCOM J7/9, anthony.styer.ctr@socom.mil.
- **Red Flag– Alaska (RF-A).** RF-A is planned and executed by the 353rd Combat Training Squadron (CTS), located at Eielson AFB and Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. RF-A is Pacific Air Forces (PACAF's) premier joint and coalition air combat employment exercise. Mr. Al Glover, SOCOM J7/9, albert.glover.ctr@socom.mil.
- **Red Flag– Nellis (RF-N).** RF-N is a tactical level exercise located at Nellis AFB, NV, which provides aviators combat sorties in a realistic training environment. Mr. Al Glover, SOCOM J7/9, albert.glover.ctr@socom.mil.
- **Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFFEX).** JTFFEX is a scenario-driven live exercise designed primarily to train the Strike Group Commander and Staff, and assigned ships conducting expeditionary and other naval missions in a Joint/Coalition environment. Mr. Don Gresham, SOCOM J7/9, donald.gresham.ctr@jffcom.mil.
- **Emerald Warrior (EW).** EW provides a dedicated venue (Hurlburt Field, FL and off-sites) where AFSOC aircraft can focus on interoperability tasks with other SOF assets (ground and air) and conventional Air Force assets in a tactical and operational level training event. Mr. Jeff Mason, SOCOM J7/9, jeffrey.mason.ctr@socom.mil.
- **Angel Thunder (AT).** HQ ACC's premier CSAR training event. The largest personnel recovery (PR) exercise in the world with joint, coalition, and interagency participation at distributed locations in Arizona and New Mexico. JCAS opportunities exist throughout the exercise. Mr. John Jewell, SOCOM J7/9, john.jewell.ctr@socom.mil.
- **Enhanced Mojave Viper (EMV).** Unit and individual training to prepare USMC, joint, and Allied Forces to conduct relevant live-fire combined arms training, urban operations, and Joint/Coalition level integration training that promotes operational forces readiness. Mr. Doug Craddock, SOCOM J7/9, douglas.craddock@soc.mil.
- **HAVE ACE Program.** HAVE ACE East (Hurlburt Field, FL) and West (Cannon AFB, NM) coordinate with SOF units to conduct realistic tactical level full-mission profile training, with an emphasis on Joint Close Air Support. HA East CW3 Gary Ostrander, ostrandg@hurlburt.af.mil; HA West CW4 Todd Sowerby, todd.sowerby@cannon.af.mil.
- **Atlantic Strike.** Atlantic Strike is a semi-annual training event, located at the Avon Park Air Ground Training Complex, FL. The event prepares joint air and ground forces for maximum battlefield effectiveness through realistic urban close air support and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance training. MAJ Brendan Powell, JFCOM JFIIT / J32 / Atlantic Strike Exercise Director, brendan.powell@eglin.af.mil.

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- **JTAC Continuation Program.** The JFCOM JTAC/JFO Continuation Training Program was implemented in FY09 to enhance the warfighting capabilities of forces flowing into the USCENTCOM AOR. The program is designed for JTAC/JFO continuation training, not initial training, and pays for any combination of travel, per diem, billeting, and rental vehicles. Funds may be requested for any JCAS training event. For more information contact Mr. Celio Castiblanco, JFCOM J7, celio.castiblanco.ctr@jfc.com.



" JTACs are critical enablers for safe, effective employment of CAS. Our experience continues to demonstrate that JTACs are essential to reducing collateral damage and civilian casualties in the successful engagements of targets."

**GEN David H. Petraeus
USCENTCOM Commander**

Ongoing Initiatives: Since JTAC production is being outpaced by mission requirements, increasing the JTAC presence on the battlefield requires additional manning, funding, and increased access to JTAC assets. Accordingly, AFSOC has undertaken the following initiatives to meet the high demand for this critical skill set.

1. JTAC Training Initiatives:

- Hired 16 contractors to be placed at Special Tactics (ST) units to conduct in-unit JTAC training. ST JTACs will be available for deployment after training handover to contractors.
- Established 720th Operations Support Squadron (OSS)/OL-B at Nellis AFB, NV to improve JTAC training at USAF Weapons School (USAFWS); 250+ JTACs trained per year.
- Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC) assumed management of the Special Operations Terminal Attack Controller Course (SOTACC) in July 2009 with full control in 2010. Added 3 classes (academics only) in FY10 which will increase the number of students per year from 96 to 144.
- Funded JTAC simulator (Indirect Fire-Forward Air Control Trainer) upgrades to maximize JTAC training sorties.

2. JTAC Manpower Initiatives:

- Converted 6 existing 17th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) billets to TACP.
- Converted 30 unfilled billets from HQs AFSOC to TACP billets at no cost.
- Special Tactics recruiting: 12 positions approved for USAF recruiting groups. Utilizing experienced but non-deployable personnel to improve recruiting and pipeline success.
- Air Education and Training Command (AETC) approved Tier 1 initiatives which included improved facilities, increased focus on recruiting and selection, and improved instructor cadre.

Minimizing collateral damage is at the forefront of all military leaders' priorities in Afghanistan and Iraq. Those leaders depend on the teamwork between pilots and JTACs to ensure innocent civilians and their property aren't put at unnecessary risk. As one JTAC stated, "we exist to inflict maximum damage on the enemy while reducing collateral damage to civilian personnel and structures, and more importantly to bring the good guys home alive."



This newsletter is produced by the USSOCOM J7/9 Integration and Interoperability Branch. For additional I&I-related information or comments, please contact the following individuals at:

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