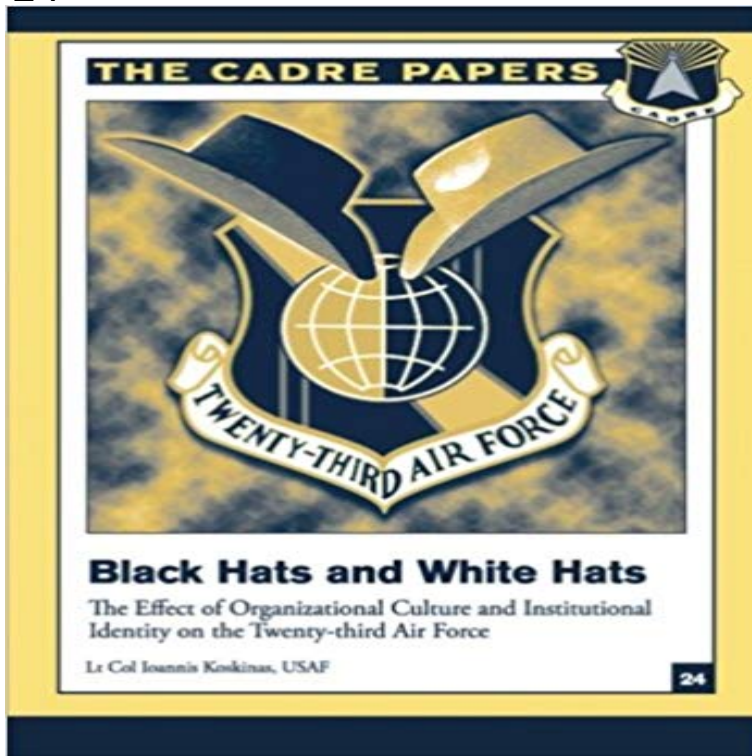


Black Hats and White Hats: The Effect of Organizational Culture and Institutional Identity on the Twenty-Third Air Force: CADRE Paper No. 24



In a move to consolidate its Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) and the Air Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS), the United States Air Force (USAF) and the Military Airlift Command (MAC) activated the Twenty-third Air Force on March 1, 1983. When interviewed, the former ARRS commander and new Twenty-third Air Force commander, Maj Gen William J. Mall, offered a reason behind the creation of the new numbered air force: We created [the] Twenty-Third AF [Air Force] primarily to enhance the special operations (SOF) mission. The move capitalized on the synergism that exists between SOF and the combat rescue forces because their mission, training and equipment [are] very similar. It makes sense to manage the training, tactics, maintenance, and supply from one headquarters. By equipping and training our forces under a common, event centered standard, we provide the military with the capability to move our forces from one mission area to another to best accomplish both tasks. This actually gives us more assets and greater flexibility if a contingency arises. Although this merger lasted only until 1989, the Twenty third Air Force experience provides sufficient data for a thorough analysis of the internal effect of organizational culture and institutional agendas. This study seeks the answer to the following question: how did organizational culture affect the institutional growth of the Twenty-third Air Force? To answer the question, this study explores the impact of organizational culture on the evolution of the ARRS and AFSOF up to 1989. By exposing the reader to the effects of institutional agendas on the organizational growth of the Twenty-third Air Force, this research paper looks for hints into the future by studying the past. The significance of this research effort becomes evident considering the October 1, 2003 merger of Combat Search and

Rescue (CSAR) and AFSOF under the auspices of the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). The AFSOC commander, Lt Gen Paul V. Hester, in a message welcoming CSAR to AFSOC, offered the following explanation for the merger: The history of teamwork [between AFSOF and CSAR professionals] is one of the powerful reasons behind the realignment. Our forces use similar weapon systems, training and operating concepts to conduct personnel recovery missions ... Our objective is to improve the mission, training, equipment and career opportunities for the entire AF CSAR community. Ultimately our goal is to enhance AF CSAR capabilities. By analyzing the Twenty third Air Force experience, this paper seeks to provide a preview of how organizational culture may affect AFSOCs current endeavors to strengthen CSAR capabilities. Much of the evidence presented in this paper is derived from interviews and personal correspondence with some of the leaders who shaped the Twenty-third Air Force. Additionally, it draws on documents preserved at the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) that were declassified specifically for this project. The research also utilizes previous School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS) thesis and other professional military education research projects. In presenting the evidence, the paper intends to structure the argument in a way that documents an important segment of the CSAR and AFSOF histories, codifies their institutional identities, and considers the influence of their cultural biases on the Twenty-third Air Force.

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