



The background of the page is a photograph showing a pair of HH-60 Pave Hawks in flight. The aircraft are seen from a low angle, with their wings and rotors visible against a clear blue sky. Below the aircraft, a vast, mountainous landscape stretches across the horizon, with rolling hills and valleys under a bright sky. The overall scene conveys a sense of aerial search and rescue training.

# Albuquerque's Elite Trainers

**Airmen of the 58th Special Operations Wing train  
aircrews for a wide range of specialized missions.**

Photography by Jim Haseltine

*A pair of HH-60 Pave Hawks fly a search and rescue training mission over  
New Mexico.*

**F**rom personnel recovery to the covert insertion of special operators and even VIP transportation, the airmen at the 58th Special Operations Wing, Kirtland AFB, N.M., train airmen in a wide range of missions on multiple aircraft types. The 58th is the schoolhouse for crews of the HH-60, HC-130, MC-130, and Air Force Special Operations Command's CV-22, the tilt-rotor aircraft that replaced the MH-53 Pave Low. **1** A CV-22 Osprey makes a low-speed pass over a landing zone. **2** An MC-130J from Kirtland's 415th Special Operations Squadron maneuvers over mountains in New Mexico. The unit received its first Commando II in October 2011.



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**3** Capt. Jesse Vig, a combat systems officer with the 415th SOS, scans the screens at his station aboard an HC-130J, a dedicated personnel recovery platform. **4** TSgt. Richard Harrington surveys the landing zone during a SAR training mission, as the No. 2 Pave Hawk orbits above.



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**1** A UH-1N Iroquois, more popularly known as a “Huey,” flies past some rocky bluffs. Kirtland’s 512th Rescue Squadron trains both Huey and Pave Hawk crews. **2** Lt. Col. Tim Arnold enters data into the navigation system on a CV-22 during a training mission. **3** The nose of an MC-130P Combat Shadow reveals the old radome mounts for a Fulton Recovery System. The balloon and tether ap-

paratus recovered downed airmen by reeling them up to the aircraft. USAF discontinued using the system in the 1990s. **4** An HH-60 from the 512th RQS performs a low-level mission over central New Mexico. Flights commonly take place at several ranges around Kirtland, including the Melrose Range, adjacent to Cannon AFB, N.M. **5** Air Combat Command also uses an extended-range variant of the

C-130 Hercules, the HC-130P/N, to refuel rescue helicopters and assist with combat SAR missions.

**11** A Pave Hawk from the 512th RQS takes on fuel from a Combat King II. SSgt. James Johnson, at right, communicates using light signals to control the process. **12** A CV-22 sits low at a landing zone in central New Mexico during training. **13** Maj. Kevin Brewer flies up into formation with a new MC-130J Commando II during training. **14** A close-up of the MC-130J and its MTS-A gimbal—the Multispectral Targeting System. MQ-1 Predators also employ this real-time imagery sensor. **15** An airman (under the wing) from the 58th Maintenance Group reviews reports for the Commando II on a laptop prior to a night training flight. **16** An HH-60 prepares to take on fuel from an MC-130J during helicopter aerial refueling training.



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*11* A UH-1N passes dormant volcanic formations southwest of Albuquerque, N.M. *12* The MC-130J is the newest aircraft in the 58th SOW's portfolio and is flown by the wing's newest squadron, the 415th. *13* A CV-22 in helicopter mode approaches a landing zone. *14* A two-

ship of UH-1N helicopters exits the "Jaws of Death"—the nickname for the deep canyon behind them—during low-level training. *15* A Commando II passes over central New Mexico. The J model offers more power, greater range, and shorter takeoff distance.

*111 Lt. Col. Nicola Gismondi, commander of the 415th SOS, flies an HC-130J in formation with the MC-130J to his left. The “glass cockpit” and head-up display are clearly visible—key improvements for the J model. 121 A CV-22 Osprey from the 71st SOS takes off in a cloud of snow to continue its training mission. The 71st was activated in 2005 at Kirtland to serve as the Osprey training squadron. 131 An older MC-130H Combat Talon II (left) of the 550th SOS waits for its next mission, on the ramp next to a new HC-130J of the 415th SOS. 141 A Huey of the 512th RQS flies low through a rocky pass.*





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*11* An airman on the wing of an MC-130P (left aircraft) performs a preflight inspection before a night sortie. *12* A 512th RQS Pave Hawk comes in for a landing. *13* Arnold (left) and Lt. Col. Steven Breeze, the 71st SOS commander, refuel their Osprey from an MC-130P. Note the glass-cockpit displays of the CV-22. *14* The MC-130J maneuvers as the sun starts to set. AFSOC plans to acquire 37 MC-130J aircraft to replace all other MC variants. The 58th SOW conducts many night flights, since most special ops missions using Combat Shadows and Commando IIs take place in clandestine, low-visibility conditions. ■