TIP OF THE SPEAR

353rd SOG Airmen open strategic runways for relief operations in Japan

- SOF conduct exercises Emerald Warrior, Foal Eagle, Fused Response
- Two USASOC Soldiers, three NSW Sailors receive the Silver Star
- Eight Night Stalkers receive the Distinguished Flying Cross

U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., April 2011

SOG Airmen open strategic runway following Japan's devastating earthquake.....8

Tip of the Spear

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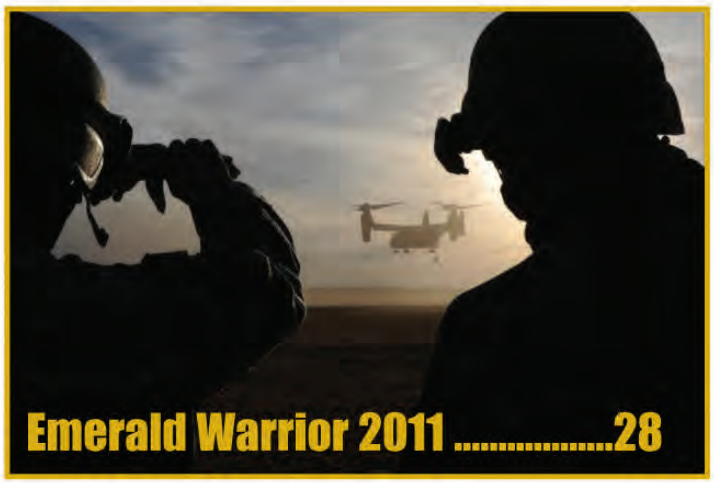
(Cover) Tech. Sgt. Ray Decker, 320th Special Tactics Squadron, prepares his rucksack prior to boarding an MC-130P Combat Shadow, Yokota Air Base, Japan, March 16. Members of the 320th STS, stationed out of Kadena Air Base, Japan, deployed to Sendai Airport to help clear the runway and make it ready for fixed-wing aircraft traffic. Photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse. (Above) Airmen from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron assess debris on the runway at Sendai Airport, Japan, March 16. Photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse.

Highlights



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Sgt. 1st Class Chad E. Lawson shakes the hand of Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander, International Security Assistance Force and commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, after receiving the Silver Star during a ceremony Feb. 14, at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. Lawson, a communications sergeant, Operational Detachment - Alpha 3116, 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C., deployed as a member of Special Operations Task Force – South and was awarded the medal for his valorous acts performed Aug. 4, 2010, during combat operations in Kandahar.

Special Forces Soldier awarded Silver Star for valor in Kandahar

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy D. Crisp
Special Operations Task Force ¬ South

A member of 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C., was awarded the nation's third highest medal for valor by Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander, International Security Assistance Force and commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, during a ceremony at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, Feb. 14.

Sgt. 1st Class Chad E. Lawson, a communications

sergeant with Operational Detachment – Alpha 3116 and deployed as part of Special Operations Task Force – South, was awarded the Silver Star for his heroics during combat operations Aug. 4, 2010, in southern Afghanistan.

"What you did, frankly, was extraordinarily heroic," Petraeus said before pinning the medal on Lawson's chest. "Your team sergeant was down, others were down, and your instincts were to go and run through 500 meters of heavy machine-gun fire to the scene and rescue downed comrades."

On that day, he and members of his team were caught in an ambush with approximately 45 insurgents attacking his unit. Lawson ran through a hail of enemy fire in order to rescue his downed team sergeant and organize forces for a medical evacuation.

"During his sprint, Sergeant Lawson was barely missed by [rocket-propelled grenade] and [heavy machine-gun] fire, with rounds chipping off the walls and ground all around him," the narrative accompanying his award reads.

Lawson, a native of Cincinnati, called in a medical evacuation, and, "while still receiving heavy, direct and accurate deadly fire, for a second time he exposed himself" when he grabbed a fellow team member as well as Afghan Commandos on the mission, and led them in defense of a landing zone for the MEDEVAC helicopter.

"It is really extraordinary to read in black and white what you did, and then to think about what that represented on that particular day, one in which you put it all on the line for your fellow members of the brotherhood of the close fight, and again, did something truly heroic."

— Gen. David H. Petraeus

Like his actions on that day, Lawson said his medal presentation was about his team.

"The nice thing about military honors is that rarely, if ever, is it solely your award," Lawson said after receiving the Silver Star from Petraeus. "So I refuse to accept it on behalf of myself, but more for my team. Nothing anyone did out there was by themselves, on any operation, in particular that one. So for me to be recognized, by myself, is an honor for our team, our battalion and our group."

Petraeus said Lawson exemplified what he called the "new greatest generation."

"You did instinctively the right thing, which is the heroic thing," Petraeus told Lawson. "It is really extraordinary to read in black and white what you did, and then to think about what that represented on that particular day, one in which you put it all on the line for your fellow members of the brotherhood of the close fight, and again, did something truly heroic."

Excerpt of the medal citation:

...With total disregard for his safety, Sergeant Lawson fearlessly exposed himself to rocket propelled grenades and heavy machine-gun fire to evacuate a seriously injured teammate. Remaining calm under fire, his decisions allowed his team to defeat the insurgents and ensured the safe evacuation of his teammate. His actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military heroism ...

Desert deployment offers sand Sailors opportunity to earn EXW

By Staff Sgt. John Etheridge
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs

Cmdr. Michael McAbee, deputy commander of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula, awards the Enlisted Expeditionary Warfare Qualification pin to Senior Chief Petty Officer Wade Corporan during a pinning ceremony Jan. 9. The EXW was established by the Department of the Navy in 2006 to recognize Sailors assigned to Navy special warfare and expeditionary combat commands and demonstrate a high proficiency in skills associated with coastal and inland warfare. Courtesy photo.

The middle of the Iraqi desert may not seem like a normal location for a Navy deployment, but for enlisted personnel assigned to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Arabian Peninsula, at Camp Syverson, Iraq, the desert deployment offers a rare opportunity for these "Sand Sailors" to earn the Enlisted Expeditionary Warfare Qualification.

The Enlisted Expeditionary Warfare Qualification, or EXW, was established by the Department of the Navy in 2006 to recognize Sailors assigned to Navy special warfare and expeditionary combat commands who demonstrate a high proficiency in skills associated with coastal and inland warfare.

"It's a really good perk to be able to earn the EXW here," said Petty Officer 1st Class Damas Wilson, a gunner's mate and EXW recipient assigned to CJSOTF-AP. "Earning the EXW is a big deal because it is a new pin that has only been out a couple of years. It shows that that you are a warfare specialist on the expeditionary side of the Navy."

Sailors starting the EXW program at CJSOTF-AP begin by completing the Personal Qualification Standard, or PQS. The PQS is a book containing all the skills and information necessary to earn the EXW. Topics in the PQS cover a wide range of expeditionary field and administration skills, many of which are non-traditional skills for the Navy including land navigation, survival, convoy operations, weapons fundamentals, and camp security.

A few previous EXW awardees currently volunteer their time to serve as program managers and set up informal study groups and formal classes to prepare sailors prior to administrating the written exam.

"We have formal classes three times per week taught by personnel that are EXW qualified and are specialists in the section that they are teaching," said Petty Officer 1st Class Alicia Bruggeman, a cryptologic technician at

CJSOTF-AP and EXW program coordinator there. Bruggeman said due to the vast amount of subject areas, it takes the average person a couple months of classes until they are ready to take the written exam.

"When the exam is passed, the Sailor moves on to the 'murder board,' which can last three to six hours," Wilson said. "During the murder board, they are tested on all the skills in the PQS book, including land navigation and escape and evasion."

The murder board consists of EXW qualified petty officers who use the board to properly assess the Sailor's skill level, and to determine which expeditionary skill areas the Sailor needs additional training in before advancing to the final board.

"If you know the majority of the material in the murder board, we'll go over areas that you need to work on and then we will recommend you to go to the final board," Bruggeman said.

The last step of the EXW program is the final board, which usually consists of three senior enlisted EXW qualified personnel. It is a final questioning phase to ensure the EXW candidate is proficient in naval expeditionary skills. Upon passing this board, the Sailor is officially awarded the EXW.

"It takes the average person approximately two to three months to earn the qualification," Wilson said. "Here at CJSOTF-AP we have about three to five Sailors per month earning the award."

Chief Petty Officer Paula Ludwick, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula Combat Camera Chief, awards the Enlisted Expeditionary Warfare Qualification pin to Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Ball during a ceremony Jan. 9. Courtesy photo.

"Putting in the extra time earning the EXW is worth it," Bruggeman said. "It gives you something to do in your off-duty hours that helps pass the time while on deployment, and it is also beneficial to your career."

The EXW qualification (referred to as Enlisted Expeditionary Warfare Specialist) is a warfare qualification awarded to enlisted United States Navy personnel, and select United States Coast Guard personnel temporarily assigned to the U.S. Navy. To qualify, the Sailor must satisfactorily complete the required qualification course and pass a qualification board hearing, and be assigned to Navy special warfare and expeditionary combat commands and demonstrate a high proficiency in skills associated with coastal and inland warfare.

SOG Airmen open strategic runways for relief operations in Japan

By Tech. Sgt. Aaron Cram
353rd Special Operations Group

A combat controller with the 320th Special Tactics Squadron marshals an MC-130H Combat Talon II after a successful landing at Sendai Airport March 16. Photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse.

Airmen from the 353rd Special Operations Group have assisted Japanese officials in opening two key runways to support relief operations in northern Japan March 16.

Facilities and airfields at Matsushima Air Base and Sendai Airport were damaged by the 8.9 magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami that rocked northeastern Japan March 11.

Airmen from the group departed Yokota Air Base, Japan, in the early morning March 16 on a 17th Special Operations Squadron MC-130P Combat Shadow to survey and reopen the airfields. Approximately 40 minutes later, the highly-trained aircrew was able to land the special operations aircraft at Matsushima Air Base even though the air traffic control was not up and running. Immediately after landing, Airmen offloaded equipment and vehicles to reestablish Matsushima Air Base and Sendai Airport as fully functional runways.

Within an hour of landing at the air base, a group of specially trained combat controllers from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron were in the air control tower ready to provide air traffic control support for the airfield. Combat controllers are trained Special Operations Forces and certified air traffic controllers who can establish airfields, while simultaneously conducting air traffic control, command and control and humanitarian assistance in austere locations.

At the same time, another team of combat controllers and Japan Self Defense Force personnel drove to Sendai Airport, approximately 25 miles from the air base, to conduct surveys and set up their air traffic control equipment. Sendai was heavily damaged by the tsunami and littered with debris. Maj. John Traxler, 320th STS commander, said the extensive damage made it extremely difficult to operate from this airport.

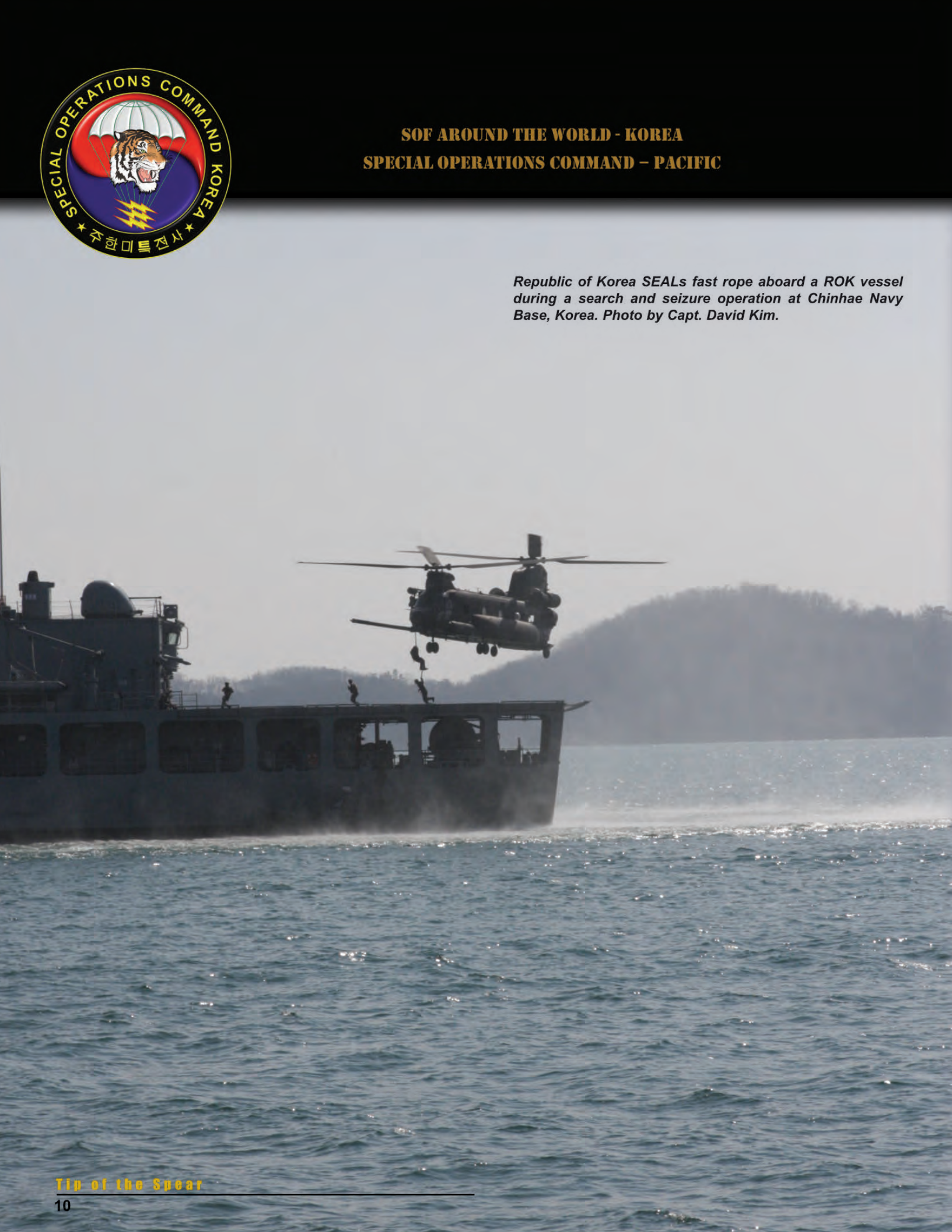
"The surveys we conducted from the air a few days ago didn't give us the complete picture of how bad this airport was hit," Traxler said. "We knew there was a substantial amount of debris scattered over the airfield, but when you see it at ground level you fully understand the destruction caused here. I've worked out of several austere and damaged airfields, but this is the most devastated place I've seen."

Staff Sgt. Chris Allen, 320th Special Tactics Squadron special operations weather team, checks the windspeed and temperature at Sendai Airport, Japan, March 16. Photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse.

Within hours of arriving at the airport, the combat controllers had completed their surveys, marked the useable portion of the runway, set up their equipment and provided air traffic control support to clear their first aircraft to land -- an MC-130H assigned to the 1st Special Operations Squadron, which carried equipment necessary to establish aerial port operations and much-needed relief supplies for the surrounding areas.

The first aircraft to land at Sendai Airport also carried Col. Robert Toth, 353rd SOG commander. The colonel noted the condition of the area, as well as the hard work still being put in by the combat controllers and JSDF personnel.

"Despite the total devastation, the resiliency and strength of the Japanese people was clearly evident," Toth said. "They have been working around the clock since the tsunami to remove debris. Because of their hard work, we were able to land here today, open the airfield, and provide assistance."



SOF AROUND THE WORLD - KOREA
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – PACIFIC

Republic of Korea SEALs fast rope aboard a ROK vessel during a search and seizure operation at Chinhae Navy Base, Korea. Photo by Capt. David Kim.

US, Korean SEALs, 160th SOAR (A) join forces during Foal Eagle 2011

By Maj. Marc Deshaies
Special Operations Commad - Korea

SEALs from both the Republic of Korea Naval Special Warfare Brigade and U.S. Naval Special Warfare recently conducted combined training here as part of exercise Foal Eagle 2011 at Chinhae Navy Base, Korea. The focus of training was to enhance interoperability between the SEAL elements and to enhance the alliance's maritime Special Operations capabilities.

SEALs conducted clandestine missions infiltrating objective areas by fixed and rotary wing aircraft, Navy surface ships, combatant craft, submarines, and ground mobility vehicles. Also participating in the training were MH-47 helicopters from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne).

The 160th SOAR employs a unique combination of sophisticated and highly modified aircraft which provide all Special Operations Forces precision rotary wing infiltration/exfiltration capabilities in adverse weather and all terrain environments. During the exercise the MH-47 helicopters supported day and night combined U.S. and ROK SEAL fast rope insertions for the conduct of visit, board, search, and seizure events, known as VBSS, in Chinhae Harbor. The target ship was provided by the ROK Navy. U.S. and ROK SEALs conducted maritime insertion VBSS events as well. In addition to the VBSS training, SEAL elements also conducted live fire shoot house training, mission planning process exchanges, as well as focused medical training.

Overall, the training opportunity provided by Foal Eagle to the U.S. and ROK SEALs as well as the 160th SOAR (A) was used to great advantage by all participants. It reinforced the preparedness of Special Operations Forces in defense of the Republic of Korea, its citizens and the alliance.

Republic of Korea SEALs conduct a top-down exercise in search and seizure operations aboard a ROK vessel at Chinhae Navy Base, Korea. Photo by Sgt. Aaron Rognstad.

Exercise Fused Response 2011

A U.S. Army Special Forces Soldier (left) assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) watches as his Dominican counterparts assigned with the Ministerio de Estado de las Fuerzas Armadas, known as MIFA, prepare to enter a building during a joint assault and close quarters battle training event March 10 near Santo Domingo in support of Exercise Fused Response. The weeklong exercise, which took place from March 7-11, is designed to increase the capacity to combat terrorism and illicit trafficking in the Caribbean and Latin American region.

Story and Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Alex Licea
SOCSOUTH Public Affairs Office

It was all about teamwork and communication during this year's Fused Response exercise, a Special Operations Forces military exercise March 7-11 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

The purpose of Fused Response, which involved approximately 250 Special Operations personnel from U.S. and Dominican forces, was to allow both nations to train on skills, such as personnel planning, reconnaissance, joint integration, as well as improving the interoperability and increasing the military capacity, to confront common threats, such as illicit traffic, organized crime, and terrorism.

In order to support the exercise, Special Operations Command South personnel provided key logistic, operational, medical and staff support.

Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jason Stahl, the lead planner for Fused Response, said the focus of the exercise is to ensure both nations' military forces are comfortable and confident working with each other as they face common threats.

"The focus of the exercise is how to deal with threats

such as drug trafficking," Stahl said. "This exercise helps build rapport between the two nations as we work together and establish new relationships. By cross-training, they are learning from each other and, at the same time, building friendships that last a lifetime."

From staff planning, tactical operations, and logistics movements, the weeklong exercise challenged personnel from both militaries to perform at a high level in a short amount of time.

"This exercise is an extremely rapid process and truly takes a combined effort to make everything work," Stahl said.

At the tactical level, U.S. and Dominican SOF units conducted room-clearing procedures, close-quarters battle training, and personnel recovery operations. The battle staff also received some key training as both the U.S. and Dominican military leaders learned how to work together as part of a joint task force.

Dominican commandos assigned to the Ministerio de Estado de las Fuerzas Armadas jump out of a helicopter during an air assault and close quarter battle training event in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Daniel Flaherty, the senior enlisted advisor for the SOCSOUTH training and exercise section, said exercise Fused Response allows both nations to see which skill sets are strong and which ones need improvement.

"The whole thing about the exercise evaluation process is that you get another set of eyes watching you from planning to execution," he said. "You get all the great training tools you need because it identifies all the areas that you need to train in."

Flaherty also said training events like this are vital to enable both partners to build upon their existing relationships and be prepared to work together in the event of a real-life international crisis.

"We know who we are going to be working with, so if a real-world situation were to evolve, we are not starting from scratch. You have a rolodex of people to contact, and you know what to expect from the partner nation," he said.

This exercise is just another step in the growing partnership between these two countries. The U.S. – Dominican partnership worked well during relief operations following Haiti's devastating earthquake last year; the Dominican Republic facilitated additional access for the U.S. military to deliver humanitarian supplies to earthquake victims on short notice.

From the Dominican Republic's role in assisting Haiti relief efforts, to hosting Fuerzas Comando 2010, a major Special Operations skills competition with 23 participating countries, the Dominican Republic is viewed as a valued security partner in the region.

Dominican Maj. Ambrocio Castillo-Volquez, the commander of the Ministerio de Estado de las Fuerzas Armadas, known as the MIFA, confirmed he and his commandos have been working with the American military for the past three years, and the training has helped them improve as a military organization.

"Our unit is more professionally developed, and there has been improvement in areas such as planning. The entire operational climate has improved," Castillio-Volquez said. "Our interoperability with our soldiers and the American Soldiers is excellent, and we are like brothers."

In addition to Fused Response, an Operational Detachment-Alpha team assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group has been training with members of the MIFA for the past couple of months.

The officer-in-charge of the ODA stated that the Dominican soldiers are capable of defeating any threat.

"They are well-trained and are consistently improving," he said. "The goal is for them to develop their own training programs."

CA Soldier receives Silver Star for Afghanistan actions

By USASOC Public Affairs

On the morning of Jan. 29, 2010, Sgt. 1st Class Steve Kimsey would be using his 10 years of Army training and experience in less than two seconds.

His actions in those few seconds would later earn him the Silver Star medal, which was presented to him at a ceremony during the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade's annual Civil Affairs Week at Pinehurst, N.C., March 17.

Kimsey and his Civil Affairs team had arrived days earlier to Camp Nunez, several miles west of Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. They were in the process of planning an upcoming medical outreach mission with their U.S. and Afghan partnered elements when they all heard AK-47 rounds fired.

Kimsey recalled sitting on a box and talking with other Soldiers in the operations center at a Special Forces camp, when he heard a single burst of an AK-47 go off around 5 p.m.

"The first shots, we thought were an accidental discharge," Kimsey recalled. "Our partnered forces team leader and chief ran for the door."

"The team leader and chief were going out of the door as the interpreter was coming in. The team leader turned to try to get back in, get out of the way. That's when I heard the second set of rounds being fired," he said.

"I didn't initially see the team leader or chief go down, because of the way the walls were partitioned in the operations center. I knew rounds were coming our way and then saw an Afghani enter the operations center with an AK-47."

As the shooter entered the building with his weapons raised, Kimsey drew his pistol and began to fire while closing the distance. The shooter went down. After determining that the threat was neutralized, Kimsey secured the room and called for medics to treat the wounded.

"It happened very quickly, from the first burst to the second burst, to the time he came in…probably 10 to 15 seconds," Kimsey said. "Muscle memory, training and experience definitely played its part."

The soon-to-be dismissed interpreter had killed two U.S. Soldiers, Captain David Thompson and Specialist Mark Decoteau, and seriously wounded another, before being killed by Kimsey.

Kimsey said, "No one expected the shooting. It was very unexpected and unfortunate. Captain David Thompson and Specialist Mark Decoteau were among the best Soldiers I had ever worked with."

After the shooting, Kimsey helped with coordinating the triage of the wounded, directing the medical evacuation, and help locate and search all of the Afghani base employees.

To ensure the incident was not more than an act of a single individual, the rest of the interpreters were kept in the camp's small TV lounge for several days, while their rooms were searched and the incident was being investigated.

Kimsey made sure the interpreters were treated fairly, bringing them some mattresses, blankets, food, and water.

In presenting Kimsey with the Silver Star medal, Maj. Gen. Kurt Fuller , U.S. Army Special Operations Command deputy commanding general, noted, "He [Kimsey] knew that he was the only thing standing between his teammates and either death or serious injury. This is the kind of thing that makes all of us proud and wants to recommit ourselves both to each other as Soldiers and to the mission at hand. He did exactly the right thing and the only thing that could have been done, to prevent further disaster. He changed the outcome by his personal heroism."

At the time of the incident, Kimsey was a team sergeant with Company A, 91st Civil Affairs Brigade during its deployment to Afghanistan from January through August 2010. He is currently assigned to the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg as an instructor for Civil Affairs students.

Sgt. 1st Class Steve Kimsey (left) returns from a mission in Wardak province, Afghanistan, with a civil affairs teammate. Courtesy photo.

Brave mission earns eight Night Stalkers the DFC

Photo and story Spc. Ashley M. Outler
28th Public Affairs Detachment

"I flew super fast, I flew low, and I flew hard, like I stole it," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Todd Peterson, Chinook helicopter pilot, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), about the night that his crew and two others flew a dangerous but crucial mission that risked their lives for the safety of other forces and earned them the Distinguished Flying Cross for their heroism and valor.

Eight Soldiers of the 160th SOAR who braved the mission were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross during a ceremony at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., April 11.

On that September night in Afghanistan, 2009, unexpected orders came down for a mission in which success depended on the expertise of highly skilled MH-47 Chinook helicopter crews, Navy Vice Adm. William H. McRaven, commander Joint Special Operations Command recounted during his remarks at the ceremony.

> *"I think that the Distinguished Flying Cross is the purest recognition of heroism in the service. It was clear to me that every Night Stalker who volunteered for this mission and fought in the crucible of that night warranted either a DFC or the Air Medal of Valor."*
>
> *— Vice Adm. William H. McRaven*

Without much intelligence on the target or knowledge of the degree of the enemy threat, the three helicopter crews of 160th SOAR quickly developed a plan and took flight. To their surprise, they came under intensive enemy fire approximately five miles from the objective.

"I was thinking, 'wow that's a lot of RPG's [rocket propelled grenade].' I thought this is the craziest thing I've ever been on," said Peterson. "The sheer volume of fire that we took that night from the enemy, how prepared they were for us to come in there was surprising."

That night McRaven followed the fight intently over the radio, and could recall more than 50 RPGs being fired at the team, forcing the crews to stray from the original plan and rapidly adapt to the increasingly hostile situation.

"The helos had to land right next to the objective. It was the only chance for success, the only chance for survival. In what was unquestionably heroic flying but more importantly incredibly skillful flying, all three crews set their helos down in a composed landing zone," McRaven said.

The crews landed only meters from their target, completed the objective and prepared for the intense flight back all the while remaining continuously engaged with the enemy.

"Our ability to get into such a heavily defended area and get out successfully surprised the heck out of me. It was pretty amazing overall," Peterson remarked.

Once they were out of harm's way, the crews began to relax, but the comfort was short-lived as they received a call for support from the ground forces.

"Once we got that call to come back we were like, 'Wow we have to go do this again,' but we had to go get them; we put them in and we weren't going to leave anybody behind. So we just bumped fists and headed back out there. There was no question in my mind that we weren't coming out of it, but because of our gunners we are all here and we were successful," he added.

Now, two years after the event, McRaven sees it

Navy Vice Adm. William H. McRaven, center left, commander of the Joint Special Operations Command, pins the Distinguished Flying Cross on Sgt. Jeremy Gribbles, center right, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) who was among eight Night Stalkers of 160th SOAR (A) to receive the award during a ceremony at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., April 11. The Soldiers received the award for exceptional heroism and valor during a dangerous mission in Afghanistan in 2009, that required the MH-47 Chinook helicopter crews to put their lives in danger for the safety of other forces.

only fitting to recognize every member of the three crews. The Distinguished Flying Cross recognizes servicemembers whose exceptional acts of heroism, valor and achievement while engaged in aerial flight are above and beyond the call of duty and set them apart from others in like situations.

"I think that the Distinguished Flying Cross is the purest recognition of heroism in the service. It was clear to me that every Night Stalker who volunteered for this mission and fought in the crucible of that night warranted either a DFC or the Air Medal of Valor," said McRaven. "On that night there was no doubt that uncommon valor was a common virtue of these men."

Awardees were:

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Bernard Litaker Jr.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Maciek Mankowski

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Todd Peterson

Staff Sgt. Benjamin Tate

Staff Sgt. Stanley Yeadon

Sgt. Jason Brown

Sgt. Jeremy Gribble

Spc. Matthew Jones

Special Forces Soldier earns Soldier's Medal

Story and photo by Jeff Melvin
USASOC Public Affairs

Like many Special Forces Soldiers, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Clayton shuns the limelight, preferring to toil relentlessly at his job and pursue excellence, not recognition; he tries to live the SOF motto "The Quiet Professional," and stay under the radar. Occasionally, however, Clayton somehow finds himself in the limelight.

During the course of a 12-year career that has already seen him earn three Bronze Star Medals, three Army Commendation Medals as well as an ARCOM with Valor, Clayton has once again found himself directly in the limelight as he received our nation's highest decoration for heroism in a non-combat related action, the Soldier's Medal, presented Feb. 2 at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Clayton, the J-6 noncommissioned officer in charge for Joint Task Force Sword at Fort Bragg, was recognized for his efforts to recover the bodies of four Haitian schoolchildren trapped in the rubble of a school that collapsed during a landslide in Cap Haitien, Haiti, Feb. 15, 2010. At the time of the incident, Clayton was deployed with JTF SWORD in support of Special Operations Command-South in Operation Unified Response.

Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, pinned the medal on the Clayton's chest during a visit to Fort Bragg. The Fort Bragg-based JTF Sword is the USSOCOM commander's deployable command and control element. On hand to witness the ceremony were Clayton's wife and parents, Lt. Gen. John F. Mulholland Jr., commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, as well as other JTF SWORD members who watched from Stuttgart, Germany, via secure video teleconference.

An excerpt from Clayton's Soldier's Medal citation reads: "… Throughout the four-hour operation, conducted in high heat and cramped conditions inside the school, all the while dirt and rocks continued to fall from the hillside, with complete disregard for his own personal safety, SFC Clayton placed himself in the hazard zone and rotated with other U.S. military personnel to dig out the children who had been buried in the mud and rocks of the landslide. SFC Clayton remained at work digging for the children even after a second landslide occurred, which buried one of the children, and caused many of the local firemen to refuse to continue to work due to the continued danger of another landslide…"

Recounting the circumstances that led to his award, Clayton said he was at the airfield monitoring customs processing of humanitarian aid shipments when a call came in about the landslide, so he went without hesitation to investigate.

Haitian fire department responders, local civilians, a few U.S. Marines and a few civil affairs Soldiers from the Special Operations Task Force were already on scene when he arrived. The group was so excited when the first child was extracted that most followed the rescue workers to the treatment area where they took the child, leaving Clayton and a Marine to continue the rescue efforts on their own.

He started removing debris; trying to dig out another child, all the while trying to avoid debris in response to warnings shouted out by bystanders in Creole, a language he barely understood. Clayton had the child nearly uncovered except for the child's feet.

"I thought I saw him breathing, so I stepped up the pace," he said. "After I got him out, I realized he was dead. I was devastated."

That effort alone had taken nearly one and a half hours; Clayton was exhausted, so he went outside and helped with crowd control and security.

The sight of the dead child hit close to home, Clayton said, because he is a father of four children.

The veteran of multiple combat deployments, gunfights, and buddies lost, said, "none of that holds a candle to the loss of innocent children."

Devastated, but not deterred, the rescuers continued to dig.

"We wanted to get the children out alive," he said. "Everyone held out hope."

He cited the example of some 9/11 survivors who were uncovered several days later.

His subsequent recognition is bittersweet. Cognizant of the magnitude of the award and grateful that his superiors thought highly enough of him to seek recognition, he is still not quite sure what to make of the award.

"If the children were alive and well, I'd be dancing on the table," he said.

There is no such ambivalence about the award from his wife, Megan, and his parents, Rick and Linda Spargur of Brandywine, Md.

Megan said she did not grow up in a military environment, so she did not initially grasp the magnitude of the Soldier's Medal. Nevertheless, she said she was very proud and grateful for the acclaim her husband is receiving.

"We find reasons to be proud of ourselves in our family and personal lives, but it's awesome to receive a tangible acknowledgement of his actions," she said.

Clayton's parents were equally proud.

"We're very proud of him. In fact, we would have been surprised if he didn't get something like this eventually," said Rick Spargur. "He's a topnotch guy. He's always thinking of others before himself."

Linda Spagur choked back tears as she said how her father, retired Air Force Lt. Col. Bryson, was a role model for Clayton, and although he could not be there that day, he was very proud of his grandson.

Despite receiving the prestigious medal, Clayton is still a "Quiet Professional" and tries to stay out of the limelight.

"I just want to reflect in a positive light for the Special Forces Regiment," he said.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Clayton stands with Adm. Eric T. Olson after Olson presented Clayton with the Soldier's Medal, the highest medal a Soldier can earn for a non-combat related action.

USASOC receives final MH-47G SLEP aircraft

By Jeffrey Zak and Staff Sgt. Anna-Marie Wyant

Leaders and employees from the H-47 Program gathered for a ceremony at Boeing's helicopter facility in Ridley Township, Pa., Feb. 10 to commemorate the delivery of the final MH-47G Chinook to U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

Representatives from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), Fort Campbell, Ky.; Technology Applications Program Office, Fort Eustis, Va; and U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., also attended the ceremony to recognize the completion of the MH-47G Service Life Extension Program. The decade-long endeavor produced 62 Special Operations Chinooks for U.S. Special Operations Forces warriors.

"We are all very proud to support aircrews of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment with the final upgrade of this MH-47G aircraft," Leanne Caret, vice president, H-47 Programs, said at the ceremony. "We know this fleet of mission-ready aircraft will serve our troops with unmatched capability well into the future."

"The work you do here is where it all begins," said Col. John W. Thompson, commander, 160th SOAR (A), addressing employees at the facility. "We deploy this aircraft around the world on vital missions, and you are a part of that. Thank you for the work you do every day."

The MH-47G Chinook is a twin engine, tandem-rotor, heavy assault helicopter specially modified for Special Operations missions. The aircraft has a secure, integrated communication system with both line-of-site and over the horizon capabilities. It has a precision integrated navigation system, defensive armament systems, radar and infrared detection and defensive systems, and is equipped with an aerial refueling probe. It also incorporates a Common Aviation Architecture System cockpit, vibration reduction, enhanced air transportability kits, a forward looking infrared, Multi-Mode Radar and other upgrades.

"This is truly a great accomplishment that will benefit USSOCOM for years to come," said Donald Reedy, system acquisition manager for the MH-47G at SOCOM. He said the 160th SOAR(A), also known as the 'Night Stalkers,' will be able to use the MH-47G helicopter to conduct overt and clandestine infiltrations, exfiltrations, air assault, resupply and sling load operations over a wide range of environmental conditions.

"The aircraft can perform a variety of other missions including shipboard operations, urban, overwater, mass casualty, and combat search and rescue operations in support of the combatant commander," he added.

Under the modernization program that began in 2004, the fleet of MH-47D and E model Chinooks were modified to include additional capabilities specifically for the 160th SOAR (A).

"This program illustrates the outstanding team work between numerous government agencies and industry to deliver the most highly capable and most highly integrated heavy assault helicopter in the world," Reedy said.

In February 2007, the first MH-47G was flown into combat. This month marks fours straight years in combat for the MH-47G aircraft with thousands of combat hours flown, usually at night, in all weather conditions, and in the face of enemy fire, helping the 160th SOAR (A) live up to their motto, "Night Stalkers Don't Quit."

Col. John W. Thompson, commander, 160th SOAR (A), thanks employees at the Boeing facility in Ridley Township, Pa., for all their hard work on the MH-47G Service Life Extension Program. Courtesy photo.

New Blackhawk delivered to 160th

By Sgt. 1st Class Jason Cauley
160th SOAR (A) Public Affairs

The first shipment of the newest line of special operations helicopters were recently delivered to the Night Stalkers.

Two of the long-awaited MH-60M Blackhawks were delivered from the Special Operations Forces Supply Activity facility in Richmond, Ky., to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) at Fort Campbell, Ky., Feb. 1.

"This aircraft is a real game changer," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Tracy Stapleton, a Night Stalker and experimental test pilot for the new helicopter. "This is good for everybody. It will provide an immense tactical advantage to the aviators and crews as well as the ground forces we support."

The new Blackhawk brings plenty to the table in the form of state-of-the-art day and night optics systems, enhanced integrated weapons systems, multi-mode radar with all-weather capability and new high-performance engines. The larger, stronger engines coupled with improved rotor blades allow the new aircraft to operate at higher altitudes while maintaining substantial payloads. These capabilities enable the helicopter to literally soar to new heights. Regiment developmental test pilots from the Regiment's Systems Integration and Maintenance Office who aided in its development are excited about the opportunity to employ the new and improved capabilities.

"From what I've seen and experienced during the testing of this aircraft, it will be a great combat multiplier for the unit," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Tom Thompson. "This aircraft will take us to the enemy no matter where he is hiding."

Thompson and Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael Hangge were the Night Stalker pilots who delivered the new Blackhawks to the regiment. After a few photos next to the aircraft they helped produce, both men were quick to acknowledge the many individuals and countless hours of effort involved in the process of making the 160th's modified MH-60M a reality.

"This all began back in 2005 when it was just a vision of those whose shoes I now fill," said Thompson. "Since then, it has been the efforts of hundreds of engineers (mechanical, electrical, software and aerospace), corporations, contractors, other governmental agencies, and military personnel to make it all come to fruition. Many a great people have sacrificed precious nights and weekends of their own time to make this happen."

Hangge echoed Thompson's comments saying, "I have flown this aircraft nearly from coast-to-coast and have had the distinct pleasure of working with the one of the most professional, dedicated, and self-sacrificing teams ever melded together. There is no way to acknowledge everybody who has had an impact upon this program. There are literally hundreds of men and women, both in and out of uniform, who have dedicated large portions of their lives to the continuing development of the MH-60M."

The new Special Operations MH-60M Blackhawk brings many impressive capabilities including state-of-the-art day and night optics systems, enhanced integrated weapons systems, multi-mode radar with all-weather capability and new high-performance engines. Photo courtesy of 160th SOAR (A).

Asked how it felt to be selected as the pilots who got to deliver the new Blackhawks to the unit, both men responded with the same word: "Humbling."

"After all the efforts of others, to be one of the first Night Stalkers to deliver this aircraft to the unit, I am greatly humbled and thankful for this opportunity," said Thompson.

Hangge was also quick to point out that this first delivery "was just one milestone on a long road to the combat deployment of the 'Mighty Mike' and the sweat that this team has given will continue to pour well into the future. Even as these aircraft were delivered, there are aviators, engineers, mechanics, and many others working diligently towards the ultimate goal of qualifying the aircraft for full operational employment. To be given the opportunity to test and evaluate this amazing aircraft while working beside such consummate professionals has been one of the finest aviation experiences of my career."

The new Blackhawks are scheduled to be phased into use throughout the next four to five years, ultimately replacing the 160th SOAR's existing fleets of MH-60K and MH-60L models.

SF Soldiers visit NYC to commemorate 9/11 response

By Spec. Kerry Otjen
5th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Within hours of the attack on the World Trade Center, Soldiers of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) began preparing for a rapid deployment.

Regionally focused on the Middle East and Central Asia, and specially trained to operate in small groups under isolated and austere conditions, 5th SFG Soldiers knew they would be the first called upon to respond to the terrorist threat in Afghanistan.

While their fellow citizens were still in shock after seeing the Twin Towers destroyed, Green Berets here found themselves packing their gear and loading aircraft. One of the first Soldiers deployed was Master Sgt. Chris Spence, a Special Forces communications sergeant.

"We were the ones who went forward to represent the survivors and first responders of the attacks on 9/11," said Spence, now a master sergeant assigned to the Group headquarters.

After operations began in Afghanistan to topple the Taliban, the City of New York gave the 5th SFG commander, then-Col. John F. Mulholland Jr., pieces from the World Trade Center. Mulholland, now a lieutenant general and commander of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, gave those pieces to Special Forces Operational Detachments to bury in different locations all over Afghanistan.

"Placing the pieces of the World Trade Center around Afghanistan was a reminder to why we were there, and also, it served a purpose to heal the country's loss for so many people," Spence said. "So, we brought a little bit of America with us and left it there."

Nearly a decade later, while some teams from 5th SFG (A) are still deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries in the region, a small contingent from Fort Campbell traveled to New York City in January to commemorate their continued dedication to the mission and recognize the efforts of the Port Authority. Green Berets presented a map depicting the nine locations in Afghanistan where pieces of the World Trade Center are buried.

"Burying pieces of the towers was our commitment to the nation and a way of representing to our country that we had taken the fight back to the enemy overseas," said Col. Scott Brower, 5th SFG deputy commander.

Port Authority employees expressed their gratitude and support of Soldiers.

"I think the benefit here for us is the ability to recognize the fact as we cross the 10th anniversary, that our military is still out there fighting the fight that was started on September 11, 2001," said Lt. John Ryan, day commander of the Port Authority Police Rescue Recovery Team.

"We were all very much affected by, and a part of, what happened that day and haven't had the opportunity to react with representatives from different branches of the military," Ryan said. "It is especially moving and it puts into perspective the amount of time and sacrifice that our military has done in responding to the attack on September 11."

Employees of the Port Authority helped construct the World Trade Center, and many worked in the Twin Towers. The Port Authority lost 60 people in the attacks.

"I was home on that day because my daughter had a 102 degree fever, or else I would just be arriving to the building or even on an elevator bank at the time the planes hit." said Theresa Mulligan, business manager for the Port Authority Office of Administration. "I had friends that were arriving at that time of the day for work. I was really fortunate not to be there that day, but watching on the television to see my towers hit and crashing down was devastating."

"Knowing that the Special Forces are over there for us here has grown a strong bond and unity," Mulligan said. "Mentally, I think burying pieces of the World Trade Center in Afghanistan was very good for us."

The 5th SFG (A) teams that were in Afghanistan in

2001 and early 2002 and given pieces of the World Trade Center were told that once their mission was completed, they were to bury their piece of the World Trade Center. The teams conducted small ceremonies, providing full military honors by digging a six foot grave, folding a flag, then placing it in the grave. They also carefully recorded the exact locations using GPS coordinates.

"Being involved was such a huge honor for the team members selected," said Spence. It provided a feeling of being connected to what had happened on 9/11, Spence said of burying the pieces.

The commemoration ceremony was a solemn occasion that became an emotional event for the 5th SFG (A) Soldiers in attendance. Some had tears in their eyes and were grateful to know that the military and their fellow Americans remain connected by their support for each other and their commitment to honor the events of 9/11, Spence said.

Spence said attending the recent event in New York City brings a certain kind of closure for him as a Soldier who plans to retire this summer. Members of his company traveled to NYC in May 2001 to represent Special Forces and the U.S. Army during the Ellis Island Medal Of Honor ceremony.

"We were standing on Ellis Island looking at the World Trade Center towers – a few months later they fell," Spence said. "[Returning to New York] felt like full closure for me; it was a humbling experience."

Soldiers of 5th SFG (A) also presented plaques to representatives from the New York City Fire Department and the Police Department.

Many of the Port Authority employees in attendance did not even know that 5th Group buried pieces of the World Trade Center in Afghanistan.

"Once it was explained at the ceremony, you could really see a lot of 'Wow' on their faces," Spence said. "It was a great honor to be involved in that."

A photo taken in May 2001 shows members of a 5th Special Forces Group company standing on Ellis Island with the World Trade Center towers in the background. Master Sgt. Chris Spence is standing 2nd from the right in the front row. The current 5th SFG Commander, Col. Mark Mitchell (then a major and company commander) is standing far left in the front row. Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Chris Spence.

Old tactics, new tech

Story and photos by Sgt. David William McLean
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Eyes are fixed in the near horizon, scanning and searching for strange activities or patterns in the scattered underbrush of the pine forest. Spotting scopes spin from one direction to another looking for a reflection from a barrel or an ill-advised movement of one of the students of the Special Forces Sniper Course at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, N.C., Feb. 4.

Sgt. 1st Class Gabriel Kessay, the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the stalking exercise, calls out on a radio, "Freeze," as he guides a fellow instructor to the location of the silent pursuer.

Today, this student has been caught; but the only thing he loses is some of his free time on Saturday for additional practice. If this had been the real thing, he could have lost his life.

The Army's most advanced snipers perfect their abilities and refine their skills in the classrooms and ranges of the Special Forces Sniper Course. For eight weeks, students learn technical equipment use, fieldcraft, tactics and methods in order to become a sensor able to detect, verify and shoot. The instructors teach techniques used by the earliest marksmen, coupled with the newest technology to make the silent-but-deadly force more accurate, agile and effective on the battlefield.

"One of the oldest tactics of the sniper is stalking a target," Kessay said.

Ghillie suits, infused with vegetation found in the sniper's immediate area, help to break up the silhouette as he creeps forward to observe and potentially eliminate a target.

Kessay said he has seen a general decline in Soldiers' fieldcraft skills due to the high tempo of operations overseas in desert terrain, but the skill set is of critical importance to a sniper.

Staff Sgt. Jakob Anderson, a student of the Special Forces Sniper Course at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, enters shot data into a ballistics PDA during a long range target session at Fort Bragg, N.C., Jan 27. The PDA is part of new technology used in the course to increase accuracy and speed for the long distance shooters.

"[Fieldcraft] is just as important as shooting, because if I can't find and fix the enemy, I don't get to take that shot," Kessay said. "The stalk is a good way of teaching them to find those target indicators or locate the observation position. They also use those target indicators in a reverse effect to hide themselves or to better blend."

Students practice the stalk both in wooded and urban environments to cover a broad range of conditions they may encounter in the field. The rules move them closer to a target than they would normally be, but success at this range makes them perfect their craft.

Not only does the training offer opportunities for the snipers to hone their skills, but equipment upgrades give today's snipers a distinct advantage over snipers of the past.

Upgrades to the sniper's kit in the past few years have enhanced their weapons, ammunition and communication. To perfect their marksmanship, the sniper has a new tool in his bag besides the old log book: a personal data assistant with an advanced ballistics software program.

"It has all the gun data, atmospherics, temperature, barometric pressure, humidity and the target information," said Master Sgt. Kevin P. Owens, a senior instructor for SFSC. "From that, it gives them a shooting solution, and they dial it into the gun and shoot. It is really accurate."

"We're dialed in at 1,000 meters hitting a 4-inch clay pigeon," said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Bode, a student at the SFSC. "You can't do that without a whole lot of data collection on the old system. I can do in a split second what we used to have to collect data for years on a gun before we had that information. It really makes things a lot faster."

While the speed of the new system helps to make corrections quickly, there is still information the sniper has to apply to the shooting formula before sending the round on target.

"The only thing the PDA does not do is account for wind," Owens said. "The students do a wind formula in their head watching the grass or other factors in the scope. It is all very skillful, but reading the wind is the hardest part. If you do anything wrong, you are going to miss."

Accurately putting rounds on the target with the first shot is the priority of a sniper, said Bode, and the skills he is learning with and without the technology will make him more effective downrange.

"Once we get the fundamentals of marksmanship down, they are teaching us wind culls, how to read the mirage and how to know which direction and velocity the wind is coming in," Bode said. "This is all to see how it is going to play on the bullet. There is little on the battlefield more demoralizing than an effective sniper in an effective position."

Mixing the tried and true techniques of snipers past with the newest technology in communications, weapon systems, ammunition and data analysis, makes today's Special Forces sniper a revolutionary weapon in U.S. military operations. The training, skill and determination of the Soldiers who pass through the SFSC make the newest crop of snipers a lethal combination of new and old school anywhere in the world.

A student of the Special Forces Sniper Course at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School moves quietly while avoiding detection during a stalking exercise at Fort Bragg, N.C., Jan. 27. The students of the 8 week course practice techniques of marksmanship, fieldcraft, and communication to become elite Special Forces snipers.

Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Ray Mabus, delivers remarks to Sailors assigned to Naval Special Warfare Group 1, Feb. 11, at Coronado, Calif. Mabus also awarded three Silver Stars and three Bronze Star medals to members of the unit for outstanding valor and bravery during combat operations. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher Morton.

SECNAV visits Naval Special Warfare Command, presents awards for valor

By Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique Lasco
NSWC Public Affairs

The secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, visited Naval Special Warfare Command, Coronado, Calif., Feb. 11, for the first time since taking office in June 2009.

During his visit to NSW headquarters, Mabus presented three Silver Stars, the nation's third highest military award, to recognize the actions of Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Jared Tuxill, Chief Petty Officer Gerardo Sosa and Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Joseph Molina, while they were deployed to Afghanistan in direct support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Three bronze stars, each with a combat distinguishing device, were also awarded to Molina, Lt. Cmdr. John Green and Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Thomas Shea for their actions while deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

"The awards that I presented today recognize uncommon heroism and uncommon valor," Mabus

said. "It shows the skill level, the dedication and the patriotism, and its one of the best things I get to do — to recognize the people for what they do for us."

While the awardees were acknowledged for their courageousness and nerve in combat, they were both humbled and honored to receive their awards directly from the SECNAV.

"It's an honor to have the secretary of the Navy award me the Silver Star," said Sosa. "I'm sure he has a lot on his plate; for him to make the time to be here today means a lot. It's a reflection of all the hard work everybody in our community has accomplished."

Mabus also took time to observe the training of Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL candidates, toured the medical and rehabilitation facilities, and spoke to BUD/S Class 287.

"You have an interesting seven weeks coming up, and your country needs you to finish that seven weeks," Mabus said. "You are the most in demand specialty that we have got. I want to wish you good luck, but finish what you started. I want to see you in the fleet."

The SECNAV continued his tour by visiting Naval Special Warfare Group 1, and the Mission Support Center. The afternoon's banner event was at an all-hands call where Mabus addressed NSW Sailors and their families about their contributions to the ongoing war.

"Most Americans know about some of the kinetic activity that you do, but most don't realize is the scope of training that you get, how many different missions you guys can perform," Mabus said. "They also don't realize what your operation tempo is. They don't realize how many times you deploy and how many times that you come home, that you don't get to spend the whole time with your families. To spend as much time as you do away from your family, from the people that you love, thank you for your sacrifice. It cannot be easy, but it is incredibly valuable to this country."

"You get such a feeling of what it takes to wear the trident. You get to see what it takes to become a Special Warfare Operator and just how well trained they are and how they never lose that."

— The secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus

After the visit, Mabus remarked on how informative and great it was for him to visit with the community.

"You get such a feeling of what it takes to wear the trident," said Mabus. "You get to see what it takes to become a Special Warfare Operator and just how well trained they are and how they never lose that."

Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Ray Mabus, congratulates Chief Petty Officer Gerardo Sosa after presenting him with the Silver Star medal at Naval Special Warfare Group 1, Feb. 11, at Coronado, Calif. Sosa was awarded the medal for clearing 200 yards of a suspected mine field by hand during combat operations in Afghanistan while deployed with SEAL Team 7. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Chris Morton.

Emerald Warrior 2011: Joint training for joint operations

By Capt. Kristen D. Duncan
AFSOC Public Affairs

U.S. Soldiers assigned to Alpha Company, 4th Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) exit via rope from a CV-22 Osprey during Emerald Warrior 2011 March 1, at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. Emerald Warrior is an annual two-week joint/combined tactical exercise sponsored by U.S. Special Operations Command to provide realistic training opportunities to conventional and Special Operations Forces. Photo by Tech. Sgt. DeNoris Mickle.

A Soldier assigned to the 4th Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) fast ropes out of a helicopter during Emerald Warrior 2011 in Tallahassee, Fla., March 2. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Bradley C. Church.

A joint service and interagency exercise using both live and virtual forces concluded at Hurlburt Field, Fla., March 11.

The Emerald Warrior exercise concentrates on integrated tactics and multi-service command and control, as well as leverages lessons from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom to provide trained and ready forces to combatant commanders.

"Emerald Warrior provides the only joint readiness exercise designed by [Special Operations Forces] -- both air and ground participants -- with unique integration and interoperability requirements not available in conventional exercises alone," said Brig. Gen. Michael Kingsley, 23rd Air Force commander. "This is the only exercise where readiness training is determined from the ground up by the warfighter."

According to the Air Force Special Operations Command Directorate of Air, Space and Information Operations, Emerald Warriors trains 1,200 to 1,400 Special Operators and conventional forces annually, and it is the only accredited irregular warfare exercise. The training provides certification for forward deployers and meets tactical and operational joint mission essential tasks and high-priority Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff training requirements.

Components of U.S. Special Operations Command are involved, as well as conventional, interagency and non-governmental agencies. In addition to providing tactical airlift, fires support and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance assets, more than 900 servicemembers support this exercise on the ground and in command and control elements.

"Exercises of this degree cannot execute without Joint Staff, U.S. Special Operations Command, U.S. Air Force and Joint National Training Capability funding, support and exercise-training enablers," Kingsley said. "Our warriors deserve nothing but the best replication of realistic combat environments."

Emerald Warrior is the ideal venue for integrated joint fires support, using live and virtual forces for the Defense Department's next generation of training.

"The incorporation of tactical simulators in a 'live virtual constructive distributed environment' that can augment traditional training has proven to be of great cost savings to our warfighters while providing the same effective training," Kingsley said. "In the SOF community, we have very perishable core skill sets that we must train...but equally important is how we integrate as a [Special Operations] force into the conventional, coalition and interagency forces and the joint environments of modern warfare. We fight jointly so we must train jointly."

He said one of the primary benefits is collectively using different terminology, cultures and systems in training, to be better equipped on the battlefield.

Emerald Warrior spans across 1.5 million acres of air and ground space, covering multiple ranges and training areas.

Soldiers from 10th Special Forces Group fast rope out of a helicopter during Emerald Warrior 2011 in Tallahassee, Fla., March 2. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Bradley C. Church.

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Dave Holcombe, an MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft loadmaster assigned to the 9th Special Operations Squadron, waits to open the ramp doors for combat weatherman jumpers assigned to the 10th Combat Weather Squadron in the skies over Florida March 2, in support of Emerald Warrior 2011. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Manuel J. Martinez.

U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Randy Theisen, center, a combat control student, watches as Airmen check his parachute while being transported aboard an MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft for an airfield seizure mission March 2, over Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., in support of Emerald Warrior 2011. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Manuel J. Martinez.

The MC-130J, Air Force Special Operations Command's newest aircraft, sits on the tarmac after its unveiling at Lockheed Martin in Marietta, Ga., March 29. The MC-130J is the newest aircraft in AFSOC's inventory. Photo by Master Sgt. Scott MacKay.

MC-130J rollout accelerates AFSOC fleet recapitalization

By Rachel Arroyo
AFSOC Public Affairs

Air Force Special Operations Command officials welcomed the latest variant of the MC-130 at a rollout ceremony held at Lockheed Martin's Marietta, Ga., factory recently.

The rollout accelerates AFSOC commander Lt. Gen. Donald C. Wurster's priority to recapitalize the fleet by acquiring MC-130J Combat Shadow IIs to replace aircraft that have been flying combat missions for up to 45 years.

Lockheed Martin officials exhibited the MC-130J for members of AFSOC, U.S. Special Operations Command, the Air Force, Congress and the community.

The streamlined turboprop tanker is designed to fly low-level, clandestine aerial refueling missions as well as infiltration, exfiltration and resupply missions.

The Combat Shadow II has the capability to complete these missions faster and more efficiently than

its MC-130 Combat Talon and MC-130P Combat Shadow counterparts, said Wurster, who was the keynote speaker at the event.

"The MC-130J is better in all respects," he said. "It's faster, it's more powerful, it's more efficient, it flies higher and farther, and it is easier to maintain."

Capt. Joey Sullivan, a member of the initial MC-130J training cadre and an MC-130P pilot, touched on the enhanced capabilities of the aircraft for the crowd by comparing the MC-130P and the MC-130J in a fictional mission scenario.

In the same resupply scenario, the Combat Shadow II completes its mission on less fuel since the rate of consumption on a J-model is 18 percent less than that of an MC-130P.

Takeoff and cruise power exceed that of the MC-130P by 25 and 20 percent, respectively.

Range is also increased by 40 percent, he said.

Enhanced efficiency is not limited to fuel consumption, carrying capacity and avionics, Sullivan said. The MC-130J is minimally manned by a five-member crew as opposed to the standard eight-member MC-130P crew, requiring increased coordination among members.

A cockpit view of the MC-130J displays the state-of-the-art technology utilized by Air Force Special Operations Command's newest aircraft. The aircraft was unveiled at Lockheed Martin in Marietta, Ga., March 29. Photo by Master Sgt. Scott MacKay.

"The MC-130J is powerful and capable," he said. "While it requires fewer crewmembers, it demands more from each (crewmember) to utilize all the capabilities and situational awareness that this aircraft provides."

Traditionally modified from baseline C-130 Hercules E and H models, the MC-130J represents the first C-130 specifically built for Special Operations, making it lighter and more efficient, Wurster said. It was not modified after the fact to accommodate Special Operations missions.

"From this frame, we will build all the new variants of Hercules in the future AFSOC fleet," Wurster said. "We will leverage 50 years of design and operational lessons to field the special operations airlift, refueling, penetration and strike force of the future."

In addition to the MC-130J tanker, AFSOC officials will be acquiring AC-130Js as the streamlined version of the gunship.

"If we use our heads, that airplane will be remarkably similar to this machine with the addition of a proven weapons package," Wurster said.

The first of the MC-130Js are slated to be delivered to their home bases during fall of this year.

Wurster credited Air Force and SOCOM staffs, government partners and industry teammates for years of hard work dedicated to making the acquisition possible.

"All of you have had a hand in bringing this program to the finish line and should be proud of the service you are providing to our great nation," he said. "Our current crewmembers, as well as the next generation, will benefit from the intellectual, technical and financial investment we have made in this new fleet."

Though Sullivan lauded the modern avionics and capabilities of the Combat Shadow II, he said crewmembers will be the ones who will make it great.

"The MC-130J can carry the Shadow's legacy and it can do it with fewer crewmembers, but it is going to take true Special Operations Forces spirit and tenacity to carry this aircraft to its true potential."

MARSOC marks 5th birthday

By Cpl. Thomas W. Provost
MARSOC Public Affairs

U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command celebrated its fifth birthday, Feb. 24, with a ceremony and presentation of annual awards at the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion headquarters building March 2.

A simultaneous ceremony was held at Camp Lejeune which was linked via video teleconference to the West Coast event.

The awards presented included the MARSOC Commander's Award of Excellence, Special Operations Forces Support Marine of the Year, MARSOC Instructor of the Year, SOF Operator of the Year, MARSOC Marine of the Year, MARSOC Sailor of the Year, and MARSOC Civilian of the Year.

MARSOC has come a long way in just a few short years. Former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, directed the formation of MARSOC in October of 2005 and the command was born Feb. 24, 2006.

"Although we are relatively young, we bring 235 years of ethos that has thrived in chaos and friction and is comfortable in the uncertainty of combat," said Maj. Gen. Paul E. Lefebvre, MARSOC commander, during a speech at the ceremony.

Even though MARSOC is still a new command within the U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Special Operations Command, Special Operations is not a new concept with Marines.

"The Marines of MARSOC continue to build upon the war fighting excellence established by the Marine Raiders of 1941," said Capt. Waiann W. Mai, the ceremony's narrator.

The Raider units were a highly trained and lightly armed force whose mission had three categories: make amphibious landings ahead of larger landings on beaches thought to be inaccessible, surprise raids requiring swiftness and conduct operations behind enemy lines utilizing guerrilla tactics.

"Edson's Raiders of the 1st Marine Raider Battalion and Carlson's Raiders of the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion are said to be the first U.S. Special Operations Forces to form and see combat in World War II," said Mai.

As advances in aviation brought about the more common use of helicopters, the Commandant of the Marine Corps approved the activation of Marine Test Unit 1 in 1954.

"This unit developed and performed innovative clandestine insertion methods before the Navy SEALs and the Army's Green Berets (U.S. Army Special Forces)," said Mai.

Maj. Gen. Paul E. Lefebvre

These methods were then practiced and developed further in between conflicts with Test Unit 1 until Marine force reconnaissance units were created after combining Test Unit 1 and the Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion to create the first force reconnaissance companies.

"Force reconnaissance companies deployed to Vietnam in 1965 and operated independently behind enemy lines, conducting deep reconnaissance and direct action using heliborne and waterborne insertions and extractions," said Mai.

"An agreement between the Marine Corps and U.S. Special Operations Command lead to the activation of Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment 1 on June 19, 2003," said Mai. "As the Global War on Terrorism drew more and more heavily on Special Operations units it was decided to formally incorporate a Marine Special Operations force element into SOCOM to ensure success in the long war ahead."

MARSOC has come a long way in just five years but will continue to grow in the future and uphold Marine Corps traditions which is described in the motto, "Marines are who we are, Special Operations are what we do."

Lefebvre stated that MARSOC's successes are due to the accomplishments of its Marines, Sailors, civilians and most importantly their families.

"Our goal will never be to merely participate, it will be to lead the effort. We will never be happy with the status quo, we are fixers and innovators and we must keep pressure on the system," said Lefebvre.

New 3d MSOB's CO sees challenges

By Lance Cpl. Kyle McNally
MARSOC Public Affairs

In February 2006, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command was born as the Corps' contribution to U.S. Special Operations. Marines thrive in irregular warfare, and as such, the Corps has provided SOCOM with critical thinkers who can operate in ambiguous and often austere environments. But like the operations in which they are currently engaged, MARSOC's warriors live in a world of constant evolution – on the battlefield, and at home.

As the new commanding officer of the 3d Marine Special Operations Battalion, Lt. Col. Darren Duke is already adapting to the unique task of leading a command that still faces much growth.

"Third MSOB is the youngest of the three battalions," said Duke, who took command Nov. 17. "That means there's still a lot of work to do."

MARSOC is tasked by SOCOM to provide units specially trained in the following Special Operations capabilities: counterinsurgency, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, information operations, security force assistance, special reconnaissance and direct action missions.

Since 3d MSOB's activation in May 2009, it has dealt largely with foreign internal defense missions - mostly in Africa and the Western Pacific - that assist other governments in protecting their countries from insurgency and terrorism. Although it has deployed Marine Special Operations Teams to Afghanistan, 3d MSOB itself has not yet been the base battalion of a Special Operations Task Force deployment to the country.

But now 3d MSOB is gearing for war, said Duke.

"We're developing our capabilities into full spectrum special operations capabilities, and are preparing to provide our forces to other SOCOM commands for Operation Enduring Freedom."

That doesn't come easily in a command that is constantly evolving, he said.

"It's like painting an airplane while you're flying it," said Duke, a Camden, Ark., native and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. "We're trying to deploy a force as we're trying to build it. It's difficult, but Marines always accomplish the mission."

Duke plans to accomplish his mission with the three pillars of his command philosophy – discipline, agility and service. "As Marines, we possess all of those traits," Duke said. "We set aside our own goals in the desire to see someone or something else move forward – that's what discipline and service are all about. And agility means we can do it all."

In the two months since he's taken command, Duke has already begun his renovations. "We've scoped the command to find our current level of capabilities. What we're doing now is laying the foundation – finding the challenges and overcoming them. I have a great team of Marines and Sailors who are getting the job done."

One of Duke's most important goals is standardizing training for his MSOTs. "We have to recognize that each of these teams has its own unique requirements. One team has to speak Spanish, one team has to speak Arabic; one team is going to the desert, another to the jungle. But we still need to find efficiencies in training," he said.

A Marine from 3d Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, performs a fast rope insertion from a UH-1 Huey helicopter as part of a maritime mobility exercise at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Nov. 18, 2010. The maritime mobility exercise was used by the 3d MSOB commander to assess his battalion and quickly communicate his expectations of the command. Photo by Sgt. Edmund Hatch.

SOF focus on 'unlit spaces'

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

A photograph of the Earth illustrates the shift in Special Operations Forces' missions over the last decade from the lit to the unlit spaces, Navy. Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, said Feb. 8, at the National Defense Industrial Association's 22nd Annual Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict Symposium. NASA photo.

A NASA composite image of the Earth at night, seen from space, offers an illuminating reference point for the shift in Special Operations Forces' missions since 2001, according to the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command.

Before Sept. 11, 2001, the military considered the places where the lights are to be the most strategically important on the globe, Navy Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, said.

Olson discussed the strategic importance of the globe's unlit areas during Feb. 8 remarks at the National Defense Industrial Association's 22nd Annual Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict Symposium.

"I've come to think of this as ... representative of how the world has changed," Olson said, indicating the photograph.

The swath of light stretching in a narrow band across the Northern Hemisphere represents industrialized nations with "developed societies... things and money," Olson said. During most of the 20th century, he added, the U.S. military focused on that area.

"But the world changed over the last decade," he said, explaining that SOCOM now considers 51 countries to be of high-priority interest in the global campaign against the extremist threat.

For the most part, "there's not a great deal of overlap" between those countries' locations and where the lights are, Olson said.

"Our strategic focus has shifted largely to the south... certainly within the special operations community, as we deal with the emerging threats from the places where the lights aren't," he said.

Olson said the unlit places generally have ungoverned or under-governed spaces, more porous borders and less-secure airports than in more developed areas.

"They have the opportunity for training, for movement, for smuggling –- for activities to occur that ultimately may threaten us," he said. "They are also places where the population may be riper for recruitment into behavior that is sort of challenging to the more legitimate form of government."

Places where Special Operations Forces are deployed show "a pretty high degree of overlap" with the unlit places in the photograph, Olson said.

"We are in these places at the request of the host government and in accordance with the strategy [of] the geographic combatant commander," he said. "These are countries where building partner capacity, assisting our partners in helping themselves, is becoming more and more important to us."

Olson described the two primary "flavors" of Special Operations activities: strike capability -- which he called the "man-hunting, thing-hunting, direct-action piece" -- and the indirect approach, which includes engagement, training, advising, mentoring, equipping and "sticking with" foreign forces.

It's the second approach, Olson said, that ultimately leads to decisive effects on the battlefield, but the direct action buys time for engagement, and both are necessary for success in operations such as those in Afghanistan.

Many of the nations where Special Operations Forces

primarily operate today, the SOCOM commander said, don't historically have a strong military-to-military relationship with the United States "either because of politics, or economies, or both."

The absence of a historical military relationship poses a number of challenges to effective military partnerships with those countries, the admiral said.

"We don't know them, and they don't know us," Olson said. "We generally don't speak their languages, we don't understand their histories, we don't know their families, we don't know how work is done, we don't know how money is made, we don't know all the nuances, we don't know the effects, truly, of climate, of terrain, of religion, of culture, in these regions. And it takes time to get there from here."

Special Operations Forces see an ever-increasing need to work effectively in locations where they haven't operated before in the numbers or with the purpose they have now, he said.

When he was first asked how the Special Operations community has changed since 2001, Olson said, his answer referenced the classic military construct of "shoot, move, communicate."

"Our ability to shoot hasn't changed all that much," he said, noting that weapons and tactics have improved, but that forces find, approach and address targets in much the same way as they did before 9/11.

But SOCOM's ability to move, particularly over ground, is significantly better, Olson said.

"Before [2001], of our five active-duty Special Forces groups, only one ... had a motor pool of any significance. Now we are fully equipped, across our force, with a variety of vehicles," he said.

But the "sea-change movement" within the Special Operations community and the real change over the last decade, Olson said, has been in the third area.

"By 'communicate,' I mean 'network,'" he said. "We have placed networks on the battlefield with truly powerful effect."

Olson said networks offer instant communication, the ability to change targets while en route to a target, the ability to sort out friendly and enemy forces at the target with biometric feedback quickly, and the ability to transmit imagery and classified message traffic wherever a team-sized element may be.

"Wherever there is a vehicle or a handful of people, we have that kind of connectivity now," he said. "And then all of the talent that is required to ... grow up in that networked community."

But shooting, moving and communicating isn't all there is to it, Olson pointed out. The goal, he said, is understanding.

"If you can shoot, you can move and you can network the battlefield, how do you then know that what you're doing is right?" he asked.

It takes a deep understanding of a place to accurately predict the effects of Special Operations actions, Olson said. His approach to fostering this understanding, he added, is what he calls "Project Lawrence," inspired by Thomas Edward Lawrence, a British army officer better known as "Lawrence of Arabia," who served as a liaison officer to Arab forces during their revolt against Ottoman rule in 1916 to 1918 during World War I.

SOCOM needs "Lawrences" of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mali, Indonesia and other places, Olson said.

"Absolutely, enormously essential and valuable when you can find these kinds of people, because they are the key to understanding the place," he said. "Much better if we can recruit them from that place and make them part of us than ... train us to be part of them, but we've taken a balanced approach to that, and frankly, we have more of us."

SOCOM is intensifying the training and preparation of its people to work in the places they're sent, Olson said, with a particular focus on high language capability.

"You don't get the sense of a place if you can't look at it through the lens of that language and communicate with those people," he said. Over the past year, SOCOM has created cultural support teams made up of women that are deployed with tactical elements in all sorts of situations and remote environments, Olson said.

The teams are trained in many advanced skills, but their primary value is that they give those tactical elements access to "the 50 percent of the population ... that we simply couldn't reach before," the admiral said.

That access has greatly increased his forces' understanding of their operating environments, Olson said, noting his ideal approach to operations is "understand, communicate, move and shoot."

"If you don't understand, your communications will be wrong; if your communications are wrong your movement will be wrong; and if your movement is wrong you're not shooting at the right things," he said.

JSOU completes move to MacDill

By Tech. Sgt. Larry W. Carpenter Jr.
USSOCOM Public Affairs

The Joint Special Operations University made its move to Tampa official during a ribbon cutting ceremony April 4. The ceremony marks the conclusion of its relocation from Hurlburt Field, Fla. with the stand up of its main campus at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

"The growing recognition that education was a fundamental piece of our capability, led to us outgrowing the facility at Hurlburt Field, and that we would be better served by a closer association with the command itself down here at MacDill," Dr. Brian Maher, JSOU president, said.

Attending the ceremony was Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, as well as former JSOU presidents, senior mentors and Caesar Civatella from the World War II-era Office of Strategic Services.

"I'm very pleased to note this milestone, this momentous day in the life of the Joint Special Operations University, certainly an important day for the United States Special Operations Command," said Olson. "The formal establishment of the Joint Special Operations University here at MacDill Air Force Base, marks the culmination of the vision, the decisions and the actions of many leaders over many years."

The admiral went on to emphasize the importance of education, quoting former USSOCOM commander Gen. Pete Schoomaker who said, "You train for certainty; you educate for uncertainty." It's for this reason alone, he said, that JSOU's role in preparing our future leaders is more critical than ever.

During his speech, Maher gave credit to members of the JSOU family who made the transition from Hurlburt Field to Tampa.

"A special appreciation to the faculty and staff members who moved with us," said Maher. "It was really flattering to know so many were committed to the education process that they really changed their lives when we pulled it up and moved down here to Tampa."

Early last year JSOU achieved a major milestone, led by JSOU's dean of academics Dr. Joe Kilgore, when it became a nationally accredited institution with all curriculum and programs reviewed by the accrediting council of continuing education and training.

(From left to right) Dr. Brian Maher, Joint Special Operations University president, USSOCOM Command Sgt. Major Thomas Smith and Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of USSOCOM, cut the ribbon with a Ka-bar knife officially marking the transition of JSOU's move to MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. The Ka-bar was given to Olson during his BUD/S training and he donated it to the university. Photo by Mike Bottoms.

"And this is why JSOU's role is more important than it has ever been and will continue to grow in importance as we go into the future," said Olson. "It is JSOU's mandate to develop Special Operations Forces leaders who can think outside the boundaries of convention and constraints and appreciate that the employment of joint Special Operations Forces is more art than science."

"Looking to the future, the next several years will be a defining period for JSOU and will determine our impact on Special Ops education well into the future; our major objective is to set the way in SOF education for the next 10 years," Maher said.

"As we move through today's chaotic warfare environment and toward future conflicts, we will need to think our way out as much as fight our way out," said Olson. "SOF leaders must continue to develop and maintain the intellectual capital to counter the nation's complex threats across the globe."

Olson ended the event by cutting a ceremonial ribbon with a special knife, the Ka-bar knife he received during his Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training. Olson then presented the knife to the university as a keepsake.

Army Sgt. 1st Class
Dae Han Park
1st Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Editor's note: Honored are Special Operations Forces who have lost their lives since February's Tip of the Spear.

Pararescuemen from 103rd Rescue Squadron, 106th Rescue Wing, New York Air National Guard, and West Coast-based Navy SEALs leap from the ramp of an Air Force C-17 transport aircraft during free-fall parachute training over Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Jan. 21. Photo by Lance Cpl. Reece E. Lodder.