TIP OF THE SPEAR

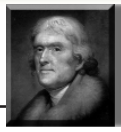
Ranger receives Medal of Honor

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

U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Petry receives Medal of Honor 18

Tip of the Spear



Thomas Jefferson Award Winner

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(Cover) President Barack Obama awards the Medal of Honor to Sgt. 1st Class Leroy A. Petry at the White House in Washington, D.C., July 12. Photo by Army Spc. David M. Sharp.

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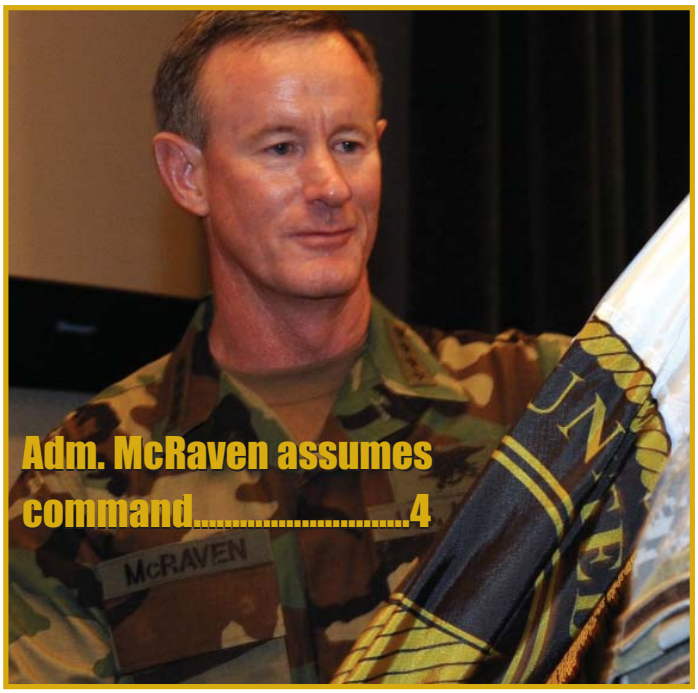

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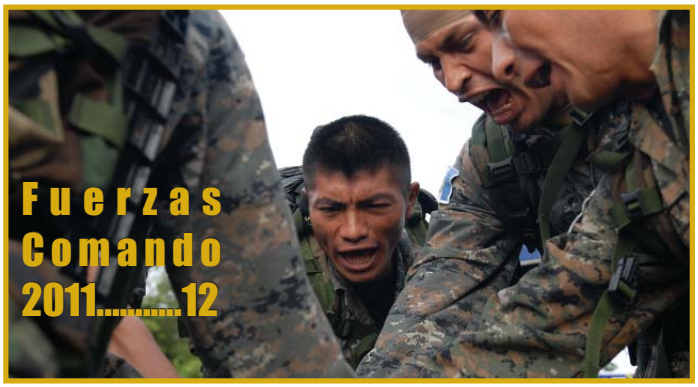

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Adm. William H. McRaven gives remarks during the U.S. Special Operations Command change of command ceremony held at the Davis Conference Center, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Aug. 8. McRaven assumed command from Adm. Eric T. Olson and is the ninth commander of USSOCOM. Photo by Mike Bottoms.

USSOCOM welcomes new commander

By Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly
USSOCOM Public Affairs

Adm. William H. McRaven assumed command of U.S. Special Operations Command from Adm. Eric T. Olson during a change of command ceremony Aug 8. at the Davis Conference Center, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta presided over the ceremony, praising Olson for the work he and the command have accomplished.

"Eric is beloved by those under his command," said Panetta. "As he says, humans are more important than hardware, and quality is more important than quantity. And that's exactly where his focus has been here at SOCOM – finding, caring for and keeping the highest quality people.

"As a result of his hard work, we now have the best-trained, the best-equipped and the most experienced Special Operations Force in the history of the United States."

Panetta also acknowledged Olson's operational contributions, highlighting his efforts during the 1993 Black

Hawk down battle in Mogadishu.

"It was then-Commander Olson who led a ground convoy to rescue his comrades fighting for their lives against hundreds of enemy fighters who had them surrounded.

"That mission showed Eric's extraordinary courage, his warrior spirit, his inspired leadership and the overwhelming care and concern he has for his comrades-in-arms. All traits that he has demonstrated again and again throughout his storied career."

During the ceremony, a moment of silence was observed to honor the U.S. servicemembers and Afghan National Army commandos killed during recent events in Afghanistan.

"We will honor the fallen by showing the world our unyielding determination to press ahead, to move forward with the hard work that must be done to protect our country," said Panetta.

McRaven becomes the ninth commander of USSOCOM and responsible for all Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps Special Operations Forces. USSOCOM is the Department of Defense's lead command for planning and synchronizing the global war against violent extremist organizations.

"I can't think of anyone better suited to help succeed Admiral Olson in this tough job and manage the continued growth of SOCOM than another Navy SEAL, Admiral Bill McRaven," Panetta said.

"He is one of the military's outstanding strategic thinkers and leaders, who has always kept faith with those serving downrange."

McRaven thanked Secretary Panetta and reminded everyone of the importance of USSOCOM's mission.

"The world today is as unpredictable as ever," said McRaven. "And as such, the American people will expect us to be prepared for every contingency, to answer every call to arms, to venture where other forces cannot, and to win every fight no matter how tough or how long.

"They will expect it because we are the nation's Special Operations Force, and Mr. Secretary, we will not let them down," McRaven concluded.

McRaven most recently served as the commander of the Joint Special Operations Command headquartered at Fort Bragg, N.C.

He has also commanded at every level within the Special Operations community, including assignments as the commander of Special Operations Command Europe, director of the NATO Special Operations Forces Coordination Centre, deputy commanding general for Operations at JSOC, commodore of Naval Special Warfare

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Adm. William H. McRaven applaud Adm. Eric T. Olson during the U.S. Special Operations Command change of command ceremony held at the Davis Conference Center, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Aug. 8. McRaven assumed command and became the ninth commander of USSOCOM. Photo by Mike Bottoms.

Group 1, commander of Seal Team 3, Task Group Commander in the Central Command area of responsibility, Task Unit Commander during Desert Storm and Desert Shield, squadron commander at Naval Special Warfare Development Group, and SEAL platoon commander at Underwater Demolition Team 21/SEAL Team 4.

His professional education includes assignment to the Naval Postgraduate School, where he helped establish and was the first graduate from the Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict curriculum.

Olson, the first Navy SEAL to be promoted to three- and later four-star rank, will retire in August after 38 years of service to the nation.

"My most powerful memories will be of the individual people who selflessly serve or served," Olson said. "I've had the opportunity to meet them at their headquarters, training areas and forward bases, hospitals and recovery centers.

"Their motivation is strong, their skills are incredible, their bravery in the face of the enemy is unflinching, their spirit is unwavering and their families are impressive almost beyond belief… I admire each of you for all you have done and continue to do.

"To serve as commander has been the highest of honors," Olson said. "This is a force of which America can and should be intensely proud. And it is a force that America surely needs."

SOCOM changes of command

Naval Special Warfare Command

Adm. Eric T. Olson, (center) USSOCOM commander, watches as Rear Adm. Edward G. Winters (left) and Rear Adm. Sean A. Pybus (right) salute at the Naval Special Warfare Command change of command ceremony held at Coronado, Calif., June 30. Pybus relieved Winters as commander of Naval Special Warfare Command. Photo by Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique M. Lasco.

Air Force Special Operations Command

Air Force Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel (right), accepts command of Air Force Special Operations Command from Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz, Hurlburt Field, Fla., June 24. Fiel was the vice commander, Headquarters U.S. Special Operations Command, Washington, D.C., before taking command of AFSOC. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Julianne M. Showalter.

Special Operations Command - Central

Marine Gen. James Mattis, (center) U.S. Central Command commander, presides over the Special Operations Command - Central change of command ceremony where Army Maj. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland (left) relinquished command to Army Brig. Gen. Ken Tovo (right) at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., July 29. Courtesy photo.

Special Operations Command - Pacific

Navy Adm. Robert F. Willard, U.S. Pacific Command commander, (center) presides over the Special Operations Command - Pacific change of command ceremony where Navy Rear Adm. Sean A. Pybus (left) is relieved by Air Force Maj. Gen. Norman J. Brozenick Jr. (right), Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, June 9. Photo by Marine Sgt. Peter J. Thibodeau.

Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan

(Left to right) Army Brig. Gen. Scott Miller, Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, International Security Assistance Force former commander, and Army Brig. Gen. Christopher Haas, incoming CFSOCC-A commander, render honors during the CFSOCC-A change of command ceremony July 1 in Kabul, Afghanistan. Courtesy photo.

Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines

Army Col. Fran Beaudette, Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines incoming commander, speaks during a change of command ceremony at Zamboanga, Philippines. Beaudette assumed command June 24. Photo by Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Cassandra Thompson.

7th Special Forces Group (A)

Army Col. Antonio Fletcher took command of 7th SFG (A) in a ceremony at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., July 8. Army Brig. Gen. Edward Reeder Jr., (left) Army Special Forces Command (Airborne) commander, passes Fletcher the command flag. Courtesy photo.

75th Ranger Regiment

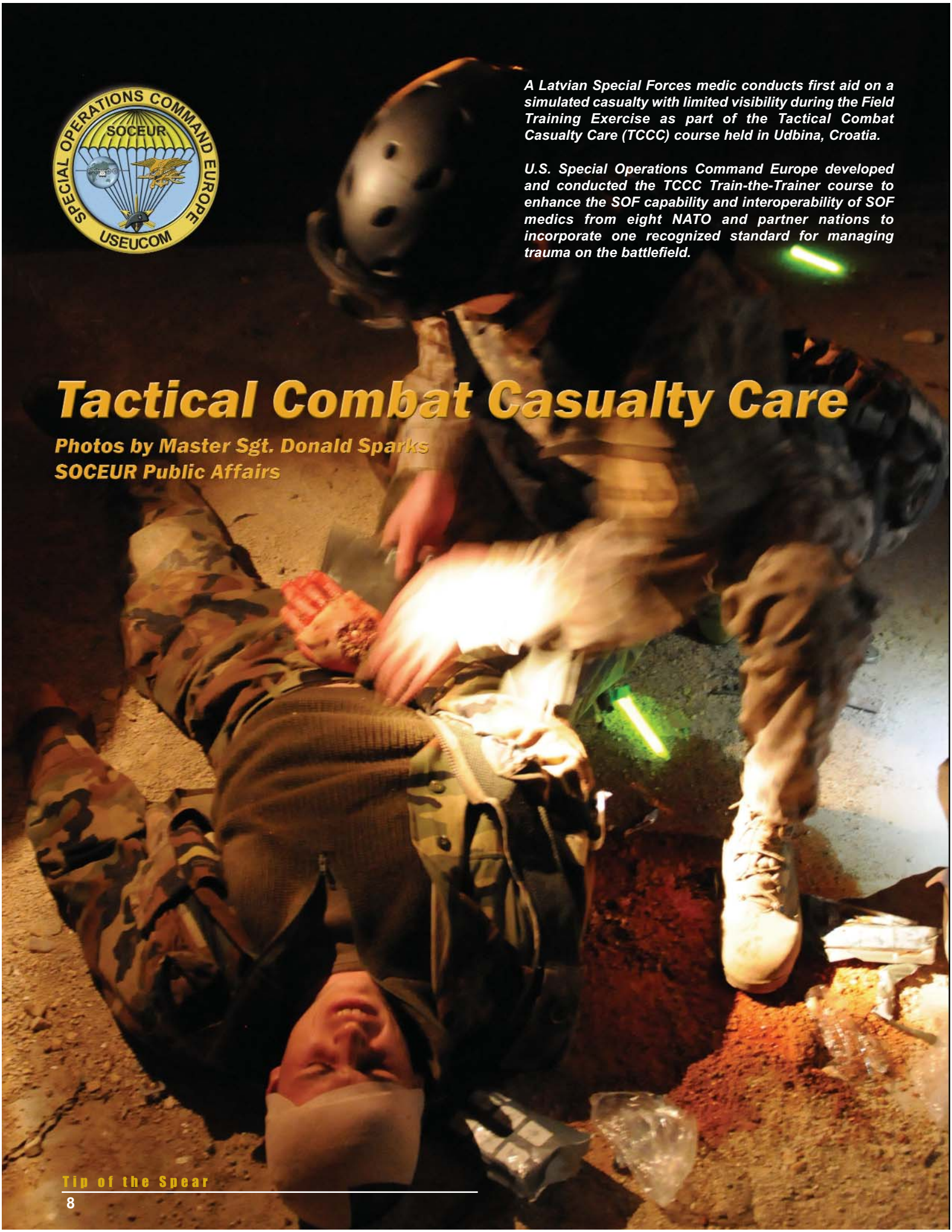
Army Col. Mark W. Odom (left) accepts command of the 75th Ranger Regiment from Army Lt. Gen. John Mulholland, USASOC commander, at Soldiers Field, National Infantry Museum, Fort Benning, Ga., July 28. Photo by Tracy Bailey.

1st Special Operations Wing

Air Force Col. James Slife (right) accepts command of the 1st Special Operations Wing from Air Force Special Operations Command commander Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, Hurlburt Field, Fla., June 29. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Stephanie Jacobs.

27th Special Operations Wing

Air Force Col. Albert Elton II, (right) accepts command of the 27th Special Operations Wing from Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, AFSOC commander, at the change of command ceremony at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., July 8. Photo by Air Force Airman Ericka Engblom.



A Latvian Special Forces medic conducts first aid on a simulated casualty with limited visibility during the Field Training Exercise as part of the Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) course held in Udbina, Croatia.

U.S. Special Operations Command Europe developed and conducted the TCCC Train-the-Trainer course to enhance the SOF capability and interoperability of SOF medics from eight NATO and partner nations to incorporate one recognized standard for managing trauma on the battlefield.

Tactical Combat Casualty Care

Photos by Master Sgt. Donald Sparks
SOCEUR Public Affairs

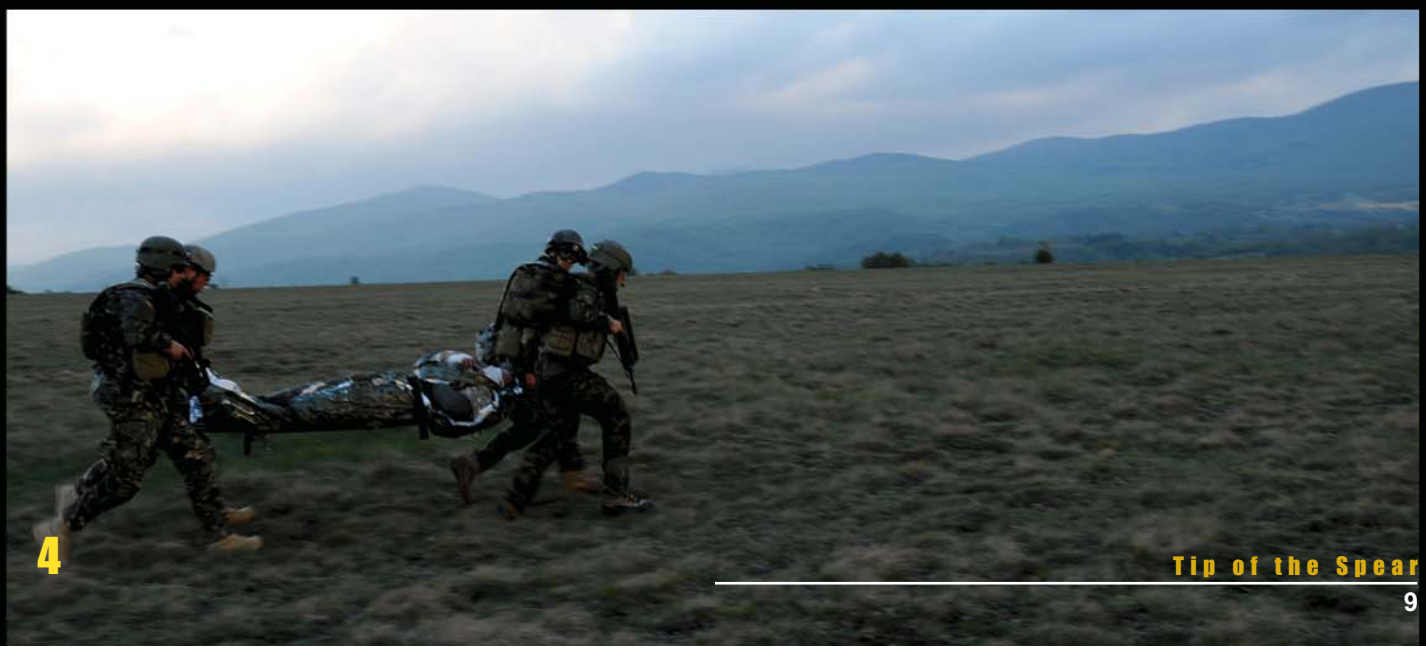
1) A Romanian, left, and Lithuanian Special Forces Medic, right, debates over the best method to evacuate simulated casualties to safety during the Field Training Exercise as part of the Tactical Combat Casualty Care course held in Udbina, Croatia.

2) Croatian SOF medics evacuate a simulated casualty to safety as a Hungarian Special Forces medic evaluates their performance.

3) A Croatian Special Forces Medic provides hand and arm signals to land a Mi-17 aircraft to pick up simulated casualties during a field training exercise as part of the Tactical Combat Casualty Care.

4) A team of multinational Special Operations Forces medics from Hungary, Croatia and Ukraine hurries across an open field to take a simulated casualty to an awaiting aircraft.

5) A team of multinational Special Operations Forces medics from Hungary, Croatia and Ukraine evacuates a simulated casualty to a Croatian Mi-17.



Valor within our ranks

Task Force 10 Operators garner numerous awards

Story and photo by Army Master Sgt. Donald Sparks
SOCEUR Public Affairs

Special Operations Forces personnel from the 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 321st Special Tactics Squadron, and Special Operations Command Europe gathered at Patch Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany, to pay homage to and witness the presentation of two Silver Star Medals, 11 Bronze Stars with Valor, and one Army Commendation Medal with Valor during a ceremony June 13.

Master Sgt. William "Joe" Dickinson and Staff Sgt. Adam Dorner, both of 1/10 SFG (A), were formally presented their Silver Star Award by Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command.

Olson particularly praised the families of the SOF community for their role in supporting their operators.

"This has to be a family affair," Olson said. "The Soldiers and Airmen are not who they are without the family support behind them, so it's great for them to be here. I recognize that every time we ask something of the servicemember we are asking just as much of the unit infrastructure – the families. It is their sacrifices that make these missions possible and I thank you all."

As part of the ceremony a personal video from ISAF Commander Gen. David Petraeus was presented to the audience highlighting not only the courage of the Soldiers and Airmen, but also recognizing the success of Task Force 10's continuous rotation of Special Operations Forces to support the ISAF mission.

In praising the men for their valorous actions on the battlefield, Maj. Gen. Michael Repass, SOCEUR commander, said, "They are men who are humble in their daily life yet extraordinary in every aspect of combat. These are men of deeds and not words. As a result you would otherwise not know anything about them and what they did in combat, what they accomplished when it was their time to act under extreme circumstances."

Dickinson – Right Place, Right Time

Dickinson, an operations sergeant to U.S. Special Operations Task Unit-0112, Special Operations Task Force -10, distinguished himself by exceptional heroism while engaged in direct combat against invading insurgent forces at Bagram Airfield on May 19, 2010.

Realizing the base was under attack, Dickinson and his five-man team gathered their weapons and body armor and maneuvered toward an inner perimeter wall 120 meters away while exposed to enemy RPG and tracer fire.

"We gathered our weapons and equipment, it took us a little while to get there," Dickinson said. "The AH-64s were on site pretty fast and there was some dangerous close 30 millimeter fire going on. I knocked a few of them (Taliban) down."

Reaching the inner perimeter, Dickinson and the team engaged and killed three insurgents who had breached the outer perimeter wall. He then led two other team members to the outer perimeter wall, evading grenades being thrown by enemy forces on the other side.

Countering with their own grenades, Dickinson and his team secured their position and observed that the three insurgents from their first engagement were dressed in the U.S. Army Combat Uniform and equipped with suicide vests, hand grenades, RPGs, and AK-47 assault rifles.

"Once we got a handle on the situation and saw that they were in ACUs, I knew that was going to be a problem – a really bad problem, as they were not quickly identifiable to friendly forces on Bagram," Dickinson said. "So I made the decision to go outside the outer wall because the guard towers didn't cover all the dead space."

Coordinating with the Bagram Air Field guard towers, the team decided to clear the dead space on the other side of the outer perimeter. Though exposed to enemy observation, Dickinson led four other team members over the wall. Four additional deceased insurgents were identified immediately on the other side. Another, still living, tried to arm his suicide vest and was quickly neutralized by Dickinson and members of the element.

The team was then informed that 20 insurgents were reportedly massing 800 meters southwest of their position. Realizing the imminent threat, the SOTU-0112 Team

Leader organized a voluntary patrol of five SOTU-0112 Soldiers, two Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Soldiers, and six TF Morgan Soldiers.

Dickinson fearlessly took point in the front, skirting the BAF perimeter to close with and engage the assaulting enemy. Approximately one kilometer into the patrol, the number eight man stepped on an anti-personnel mine and was severely injured. Without hesitation, Dickinson ran 20 meters from the front of the patrol to give first aid and saved the life of the TF Morgan Soldier.

After helping to extract the Soldier over the wall, he then grabbed a mine detector from an engineer on the perimeter, scaled the wall a final time, and cleared a path for the four patrol members still in harm's way.

Dorner – Dangerous Sprinter

Dorner, a weapons sergeant for SOTU-0116, SOTF-10, distinguished himself by valorous actions against the enemy while deployed to Logar Province, Afghanistan. On Aug. 17, 2010, SOTU-0116 was enabling 20 Afghan Nation Security Forces members to perform route reconnaissance along Route New York.

While moving south to north, the unit discovered a pressure-plate Improvised Explosive Device ahead of the convoy. While clearing the IED, the patrol found itself in a complex ambush, engaged by 10-12 insurgents occupying two fighting positions 300 meters to the east. The enemy opened fire with 82mm mortars, RPGs, PKM light machine guns and AK-47 assault rifles against the team.

"Me and two other teammates were on a flanking element pulling outside security when my gun went down," said Dorner, who was out in the open during the attack when his weapon malfunctioned.

Dorner realized the SOTU's 60mm mortar was essential to continue the fight and repel the enemy, so with disregard for his own life, he ran over 150 meters south through flat, open terrain paralleling enemy fighting positions to reach the SOTU's RG-33 vehicle and mortar system.

Despite the RPG rounds detonating within 30 meters of his location, Dorner emplaced the mortar tube and delivered 10 accurate, high-explosive rounds on the insurgent positions. As a direct result, the SOTU-0116 leadership was able to reorganize and direct maneuver elements into position and request emergency Close Air Support.

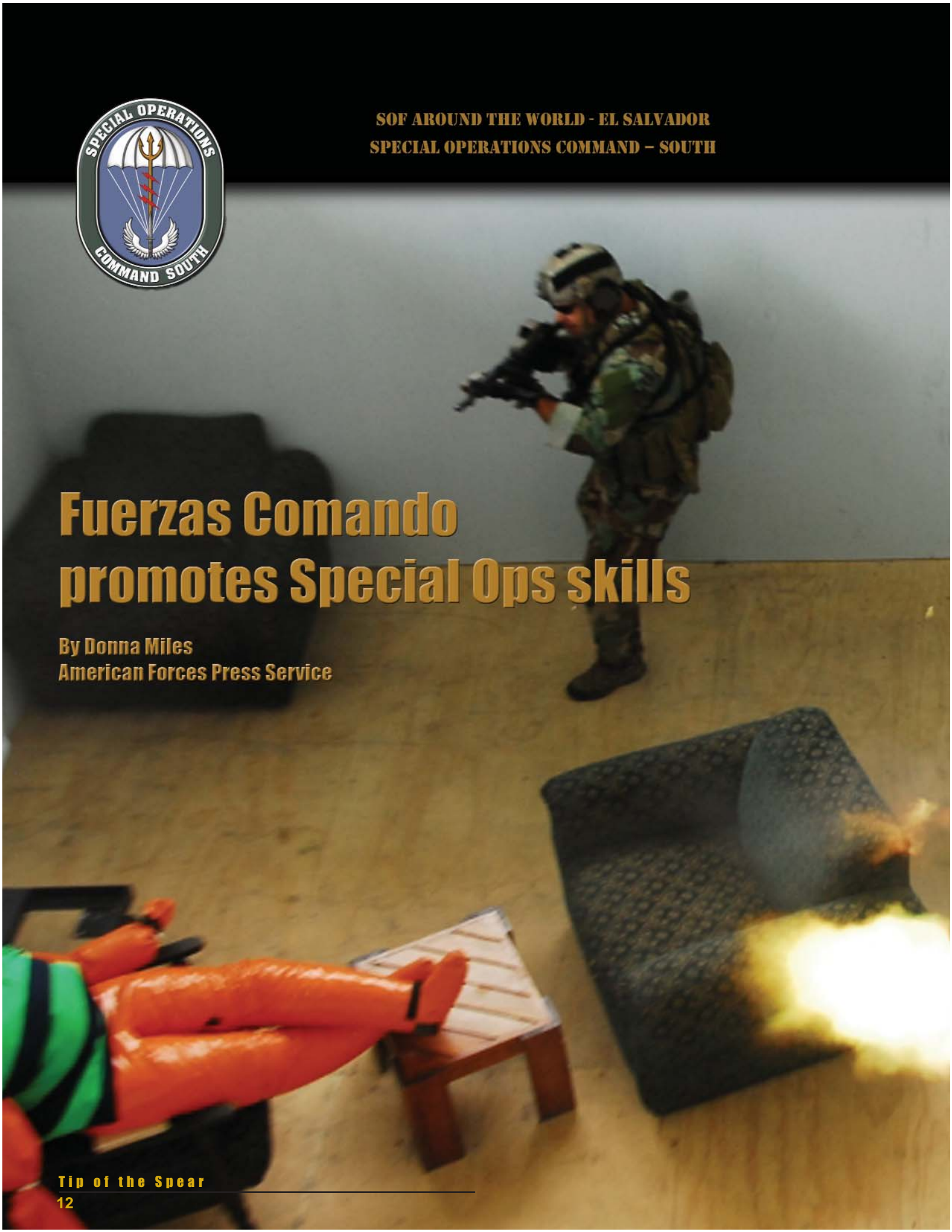
Informed that the AH-64 Air Weapons Team overhead was unable to effectively target the enemy positions, the team assessed the only way to eliminate the insurgents was by direct assault. Dorner hastily prepared and led a maneuver element consisting of seven ANSF and three SOTU-0116 members to engage and assault the enemy forces.

"We just started assaulting through the objective," said Dorner who fearlessly took point for his element and led a bold assault across 300 meters of open terrain. "The enemy actually reinitiated two or three times with machine gun fire. But once we started taking the fight to them they began to quit. We won the day that day."

Other valor award recipients were:

Army Capt. Craig Bighouse, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Murray, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Sgt. 1st Class McKenna Miller, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Sgt. 1st Class Rod Reschel, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Staff Sgt. Sabriel Ashley, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Staff Sgt. Robert "Al"Murray, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Staff Sgt. Patrick Roberts, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Staff Sgt. Richard Telck, Bronze Star w/Valor
Air Force Staff Sgt. David Ibsen, Bronze Star w/Valor
Air Force Staff Sgt. Theodore Hofknecht, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Pfc. William Langley, Bronze Star w/Valor
Army Staff Sgt. Ricky Streeter, Army Commendation Medal w/Valor

Servicemembers assigned to 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and 321st Special Tactics Squadron stand alongside family members and friends at the conclusion of a valor ceremony held June 13 at Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. The event recognized 14 valor award recipients for their courage and gallantry while assigned to Special Operations Task Force 10 in Afghanistan.



Fuerzas Comando promotes Special Ops skills

By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

United States Special Operations Soldiers perform a demonstration of an "Integrated Assault" for the Fuerzas Comando competition June 20. Fuerzas Comando, established in 2004, is a U.S. Southern Command-sponsored Special Operations skills competition and senior leader seminar conducted annually in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Photo by Army Spc. Bethany L. Little.

The Dominican Special Operations Sniper Team prepares for the Stalk event of Fuerzas Comando 2011, June 16, at Shangallo Range, outside San Salvador. Fuerzas Comando, established in 2004, is a U.S. Southern Command-sponsored special forces skills competition. Photo by Army Spc. Casey Collier.

Elite commandos from 19 countries participated in Fuerzas Comando 2011, a demanding counterterrorism and special operations skills competition sponsored by U.S. Southern Command to promote military-to-military relationships, increased interoperability and improved regional security.

The competitors, from throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean, are taking part in the eighth annual competition that kicked off June 15 and continues through June 23 in Ilopango, El Salvador, said Air Force Maj. Brett Phillips, the lead Fuerzas Comando planner for U.S. Special Operations Command South.

The El Salvadoran military hosted this year's exercise, with participants from Bahamas, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and the United States.

The competition consists of sniper, assault, physical fitness, strength and endurance events that challenge commandos psychologically as well as physically, Phillips said.

Among this year's events was a timed 18.8-kilometer forced march, with six-man teams from each country carrying 30-pound rucksacks and rifles, and a series of sniper competitions that include target acquisition, range estimation and night shooting events.

While special operators tested out their tactical skills, a concurrent senior-leader seminar provided a strategic-level focus to security challenges and possible solutions. Twenty-four nations sent a senior special operations officer, typically the brigade-level commander of the country's commando team, and a ministerial-level policymaker associated with the country's counterterrorism policies,

procedures and strategies, to participate in the two-day distinguished visitor program, Phillips said.

"That's when they talk about the regional counterterrorism projects and programs that are in place, they talk about trans-national threats, they talk about illicit trafficking and how to combat that," he said. "That is where you are addressing those strategic-level thought processes and objectives."

Phillips called this two-part approach key to fostering relationships throughout the ranks that pay off in closer regional cooperation, enhanced mutual trust and increased military interoperability as it advances the counter-terrorism training and readiness of participating special operations forces.

"It's the strategic level, with the commanders and strategic thinkers from that country, all the way down to the tactical level, where the teams that go and break down the doors and go save people, or, depending upon their requirement, they eliminate a threat," he said.

There's another dimension to Fuerzas Comando as well. As commandos compete and their leaders convene, staff members from each participating country operated as a combined staff, providing administrative, logistical, medical, communications and other support.

This, Phillips explained, gives the staffs experience they would need to work together during a real-world contingency.

While Fuerzas Comando has sparked some healthy competition among participants, "the camaraderie and the fraternity between these teams from all these different countries has been just exceptional," he said.

When the commandos weren't competing, they shared their operational experiences and ideas with other teams and compared different tactics, techniques and procedures. This promotes cooperation and learning, along with a better understanding of how different countries' militaries operate, Phillips said.

It also lays a foundation for relationships, he said, that could have a big payoff in the future as commandos advance to increasingly responsible positions within their respective militaries.

"Now, if there is a conflict," he added, "it is a lot more likely that the conflict will be resolved between two chiefs of staff who know each other, who have had a relationship on a personal side as well as professional, and they can resolve their problems in a more practical manner than resorting to armed conflict."

Phillips said he's seen past competitors who'd risen through the ranks return to Fuerzas Comando as senior military commanders or government officials to participate in the strategic-level distinguished visitor forum.

"That's our dream that we are seeing realized," Phillips said. "These younger team leads from years ago are now growing in rank and position and soon will be able to pick up the phone and talk to Juan or Jose or Jorge or whoever they competed against 10, 15 years ago as a team member," and bring the benefit of shared operational expertise to strategic-level conversations.

Phillips said he's also encouraged by the growth of the Fuerzas Comando, which began in 2004 with 13 countries.

"It just grows and gets better every year," he said.

U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Thomas L. Brown II, commander of Special Operations Command South, thanked participants during the opening ceremonies at El Salvador's Special Counterterrorism Command special operations center for the dedication they have brought to the competition and to regional security.

"You represent the world's finest warriors, sacrificing daily to defend and protect the freedom and security of the citizens of the Western Hemisphere," the admiral told the participants.

A Panamanian special operations member fires his rifle during the Pistol and Rifle Qualification event June 16, at the Centro Especial Anti-Terrorista compound, El Salvador. Photo by Army Sgt. Luke Rollins.

Fuerzas Comando 2011 imagery

1) Col. Jesus Daniel Serrano Cea of the El Salvadoran Army salutes the colors during the opening ceremony of Fuerzas Comando 2011 June 15 at the Comando Especial Anti-Terrorista compound, Ilopango, El Salvador. Photo by Army Sgt. Luke Rollins.

2) A Guatemalan competitor does push ups trying to help his team win the first event, the physical fitness test, in this year's Fuerzas Comando competition held at Ilopango, El Salvador. Photo by Army Sgt. Monique Tindal.

3) The Chilean special operations team brings its raft ashore June 20 at the aquatic event of Fuerzas Comando 2011 at Costa del Sol, El Salvador. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Shapiro.

Fuerzas Comando 2011 imagery

4) A member of the assault team from Trinidad and Tobago drags a weighted dummy during the "Stress Event" of the Fuerzas Comando, Shingallo Range, El Salvador, June 19. Photo by Army Sgt. Casey A. Collier.

5) The spotter from the two-man sniper team assists the sniper during the shooting from unknown distances event at Fuerzas Comando 2011 June 19, Ilopango, El Salvador. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Nicole L Howell.

6) Special Operations Sniper Teams begin the Stalk event of Fuerzas Comando 2011, June 16, Shangallo Range, El Salvador. Photo by Army Sgt. Casey A. Collier.

7) Chilean Special Operations team completes the 16.8 kilometers-long "Forced March" event during the Fuerzas Comando 2011 competition June 18. Photo by Army Sgt. Monique Tindal.

Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry
Medal of Honor

Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. 1st Class Leroy A. Petry receives a standing ovation from President Barack Obama and guests in the East Room of the White House, July 12. Photo by J.D. Leipold.

Ranger Petry awarded Medal of Honor

By Megan Neunan
Army News Service

Sgt. 1st Class Leroy A. Petry received the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama during a historic ceremony in the East Room of the White House July 12.

Petry is only the second active-duty servicemember since Vietnam to live to accept the nation's highest military honor. The first Soldier, Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta, was seated in the audience that included Vice President Joe Biden, Army senior leaders, several rows of decorated Army Rangers, and more than 100 of Petry's family and

friends, including his wife, mother, father, grandparents, brothers and four children.

"This could not be happening to a nicer guy or a more inspiring family," the president said. "Leroy, the Medal of Honor reflects the deepest gratitude of our entire nation."

Obama took the audience back to May 26, 2008, to Paktya, Afghanistan. It was the day Petry's act of conspicuous gallantry saved the lives of Sgt. Daniel Higgins and Pfc. Lucas Robinson.

The president explained how Petry and members of his Co. D, 2nd Bn., 75th Ranger Regiment, took on a rare daylight raid on an insurgent compound to pursue a top al-Qaida commander sequestered inside, and how the mission left Petry and two of his comrades within feet of a live enemy grenade.

Petry was already shot through both legs, but with no regard for his life, still took action to save comrades Higgins and Robinson from certain death.

"Every human impulse would tell someone to turn away. Every Soldier is trained to seek cover. That's what Sergeant Leroy Petry could have done. Instead, this wounded Ranger, this 28-year-old man who had his whole life ahead of him, this husband and father of four did something extraordinary -- he lunged forward toward the live grenade. He picked it up. He cocked his arm to throw it back. What compels such courage that leads a person to risk everything so that others might live?"

— President Barack H. Obama

"Every human impulse would tell someone to turn away. Every Soldier is trained to seek cover. That's what Sergeant Leroy Petry could have done," Obama said. "Instead, this wounded Ranger, this 28-year-old man who had his whole life ahead of him, this husband and father of four did something extraordinary -- he lunged forward toward the live grenade. He picked it up. He cocked his arm to throw it back. What compels such courage that leads a person to risk everything so that others might live?"

Petry shook hands with the president today using a robotic hand, which replaced the one he lost when the grenade detonated as Petry released it.

The day of the incident, even the loss of his hand failed to fluster him, though. Obama marveled that the war hero applied a tourniquet himself and then radioed for help.

"The service of Leroy Petry speaks to the very essence of America -- that spirit that says, no matter how hard the journey, no matter how steep the climb, we don't quit," Obama said.

Petry's calm handling of a highly dangerous mission allowed other Rangers to kill enemy fighters. Spc. Christopher Gathercole gave his life in the battle. Gathercole's brother, sister and grandmother stood as the audience gave them a thunderous round of applause in his honor.

Obama shared that in an earlier meeting in the Oval Office, Petry displayed a plaque he has mounted on his mechanical hand that bears the names of Gathercole and other Soldiers the regiment has lost.

Higgins and Robinson were able to celebrate with Petry at the White House.

"This is the stuff of which heroes are made," Obama said. "This is the strength, the devotion that makes our troops the pride of every American. And this is the reason that -- like a Soldier named Leroy Petry -- America doesn't simply endure, we emerge from our trials stronger, more confident, with our eyes fixed on the future."

Petry continues his work to help wounded warriors. After re-enlisting, he even returned to Afghanistan for an eighth combat tour last year.

"Today we honor a singular act of gallantry," Obama said in closing, "yet as we near the 10th anniversary of the attacks that thrust our nation into war, this is also an occasion to pay tribute to a Soldier and a generation that has borne the burden of our security during a hard decade of sacrifice."

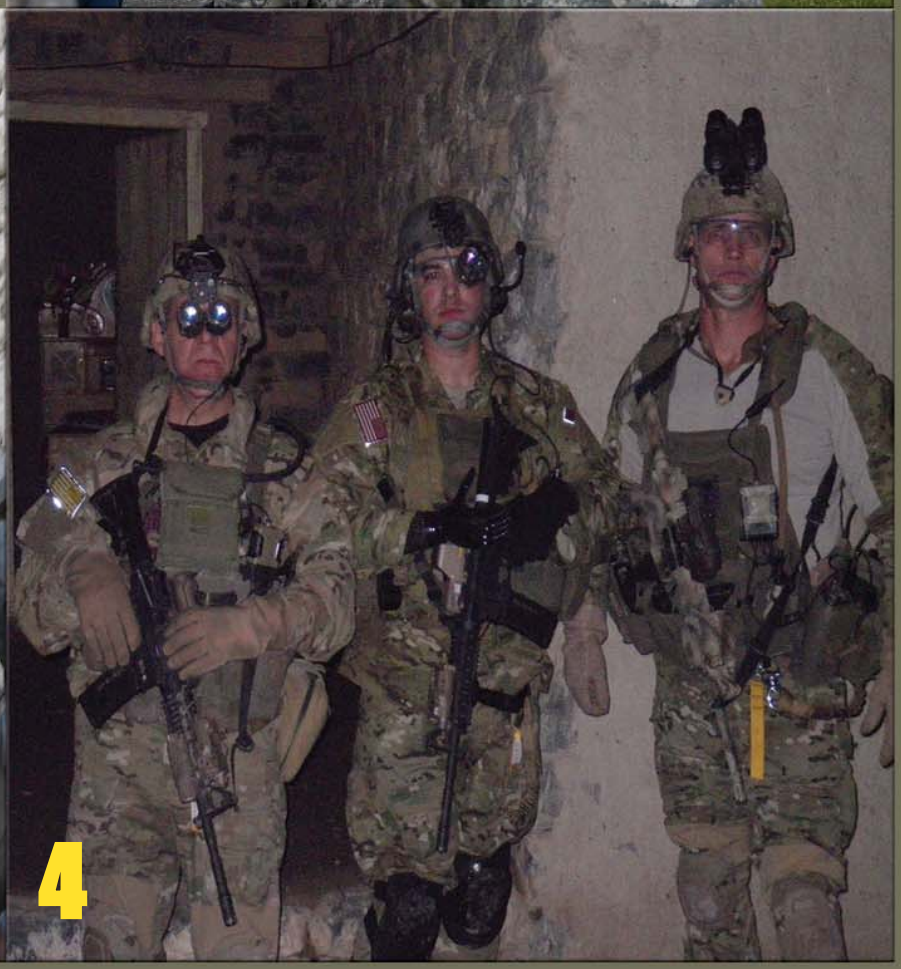
Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry
Medal of Honor

1) Sgt. 1st Class Leroy A. Petry stands in front of the 2nd Ranger Battalion memorial at Fort Lewis, Wash. Courtesy photo.

2) Then Staff Sgt. Petry re-enlists for indefinite status at Fort Lewis, Wash., in May of 2010. Courtesy photo.

3) Then Staff Sgt. Leroy Petry on a mission in Afghanistan. Courtesy photo.

4) Sgt. 1st Class Leroy Petry stands between two teammates on an objective in Afghanistan. Courtesy photo.



Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry Hall of Heroes Induction

Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. 1st Class Leroy A. Petry looks at the Hall of Heroes plaque now bearing his name after it is unveiled during a ceremony at the Pentagon, July 13. Photo by Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jacob N. Bailey.

Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry
Medal of Honor
Official Citation

The President of the United States of America,
authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863,
has awarded in the name of Congress the Medal of Honor to

Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry
United States Army

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty:

Staff Sergeant Leroy A. Petry distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with an armed enemy in the vicinity of Paktya Province, Afghanistan, on May 26, 2008. As a Weapons Squad Leader with D Company, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Staff Sergeant Petry moved to clear the courtyard of a house that potentially contained high-value combatants. While crossing the courtyard, Staff Sergeant Petry and another Ranger were engaged and wounded by automatic weapons fire from enemy fighters. Still under enemy fire, and wounded in both legs, Staff Sergeant Petry led the other Ranger to cover. He then reported the situation and engaged the enemy with a hand grenade, providing suppression as another Ranger moved to his position. The enemy quickly responded by maneuvering closer and throwing grenades. The first grenade explosion knocked his two fellow Rangers to the ground and wounded both with shrapnel. A second grenade then landed only a few feet away from them. Instantly realizing the danger, Staff Sergeant Petry, unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his safety, deliberately and selflessly moved forward, picked up the grenade, and in an effort to clear the immediate threat, threw the grenade away from his fellow Rangers. As he was releasing the grenade it detonated, amputating his right hand at the wrist and further injuring him with multiple shrapnel wounds. Although picking up and throwing the live grenade grievously wounded Staff Sergeant Petry, his gallant act undeniably saved his fellow Rangers from being severely wounded or killed. Despite the severity of his wounds, Staff Sergeant Petry continued to maintain the presence of mind to place a tourniquet on his right wrist before communicating the situation by radio in order to coordinate support for himself and his fellow wounded Rangers. Staff Sergeant Petry's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service, and reflect great credit upon himself, 75th Ranger Regiment, and the United States Army.

New CC: AFSOC packs a punch

By Rachel Arroyo
AFSOC Public Affairs

There is nothing Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel enjoys more than to deploy as part of a joint team.

So to be back among the Airmen who do it the most as commander of Air Force Special Operations Command is both humbling and exciting, he said.

"I cannot imagine any other command in the Air Force that is more forward postured and forward deployed than AFSOC," Fiel said.

If given the opportunity to sit down with each Air Commando, the first words out of his mouth would be "thank you." Thank you for having the courage and ingenuity to get the job done and for sacrificing time with family in order to do it.

"I'd thank each individual, but more importantly, I'd thank their families as well," he said.

Fiel, who took command of AFSOC in June, has come full circle. His first assignment out of navigator and electronic warfare officer training brought him to Hurlburt Field, Fla. where he was an MC-130E Combat Talon electronic warfare officer, instructor and executive officer assigned to the 8th Special Operations Squadron.

Approximately 13 years of his 30-year career have been spent at Hurlburt Field and have included assignments as chief of the electronic combat division at the 23rd Air Force, director of operations at the 18th Flight Test Squadron and commander of the 4th Special Operations Squadron.

After being promoted to brigadier general, Fiel returned to Hurlburt Field in 2005 to direct all AFSOC operations. His most recent assignment was as vice commander, Headquarters U.S. Special Operations Command, Washington D.C.

Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel

Eleven years spent in joint and combat assignments have reinforced the impact Special Operations Forces have working as a team in theater.

"We usually provide one hell of a punch to any combatant commander," Fiel said. "There's not much a SOF team can't solve."

The combatant commanders' focus is directed toward the operational capabilities of the joint team, the general said, emphasizing AFSOC cannot complete the mission without its Army, Navy and Marine Corps counterparts.

"Everyone has their service affiliation and their patch, but when you're forward deployed, patches come off," Fiel said. "Everyone wears the same flight suits and uniform, so it is truly a SOF team. The Army Special Forces guy cannot do his job without us. Neither can the SEAL. They've got to have mobility, they've got to have fire support, they've got to have intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, or they're walking."

"Everyone has their service affiliation and their patch, but when you're forward deployed, patches come off. Everyone wears the same flight suits and uniform, so it is truly a SOF team. The Army Special Forces guy cannot do his job without us. Neither can the SEAL. They've got to have mobility, they've got to have fire support, they've got to have intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, or they're walking."

— Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel

This impact has Fiel confident AFSOC will hold up well in the face of impending Department of Defense budget cuts. For an organization that is allocated approximately one percent of the Air Force budget,

AFSOC is a bargain.

"We are a relatively cheap organization with high payoff, so I think we'll do okay," he said. "But I think we need to focus on quality, not quantity, because the bigger you get, the harder it is to maintain that quality edge."

Over the course of the next 60 days, Fiel will be conducting a "Health of the Force" assessment that will focus on combat readiness, force structure and infrastructure.

It will culminate in the October release of fiscal year 2012 "AFSOC Commander's Guidance."

Fiel will brief the state of the command to both the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the commander of USSOCOM following the close of the assessment.

While the budget is of concern, it is not what keeps Fiel awake at night.

"The thing that bothers me the most is waiting for the phone call - that we lost another Airman - and you know it's going to happen because we've been doing this for ten years," the general said. "I think to myself, have we done everything we possibly can to keep our Airmen forward deployed in a safe manner?"

The SOF truth "humans are more important than hardware" resonates with Fiel. His first piece of advice to Airmen centers on family.

"Make sure that you take care of your family because the higher rates of deployments put a lot of pressures on the family unit," he said.

Problems at home can often yield problems at work, making it difficult for Airmen to perform on the job. While it can be a challenge to balance the two, the New York native said, Airmen should do their best to take care of not only their families, but their teammates' families.

Fiel credits his own wife and son for support that enables him to serve.

"I love deploying. I absolutely do. But my wife and son have paid the price," Fiel said. "They've allowed me to go do what I absolutely love doing, and that's why I joined."

Their commitment to the mission, in addition to the commitment of the Air Commando, distinguishes AFSOC.

"We work at it," Fiel said. "We're not perfect. There's always room for improvement, but at the end of the day, it's the family that makes SOF special."

Air Guard member named one of AF's top 12

Air Force Staff Sgt. John Norris, a tactical air control party specialist with the Pennsylvania Air National Guard's 193rd Special Operations Wing, works alongside soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division during his deployment to the Kunar province, Afghanistan, in late 2010. Air Force officials announced July 14, that Norris was selected as one of the 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year. Courtesy photo.

A Navy SEAL platoon performs a land warfare demonstration from a SH-60 Sea Hawk helicopter during a capabilities demonstration at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Va., July 16. The Naval Special Warfare Community displayed its capabilities as part of the 42nd UDT/SEAL East Coast Reunion celebrations. Photo by Senior Chief Petty Officer Robert Fluegel.

SEALs gather to celebrate, remember their past

By Petty Officer 3rd Class James Ginther
NSWG 2 Public Affairs

The Naval Special Warfare community held its 42nd annual East Coast Underwater Demolition Team (UDT)/SEAL reunion July 16-18 on board Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Va.

The event reunites active and retired Navy SEALs for a weekend focused on NSW history, heritage and family support.

"It's the one time of the year that active and retired members of the [NSW] community can get together and swap stories and just hang out," said Chuck Williams, UDT/SEAL Association president and event coordinator. "It's a huge boost of camaraderie."

The annual reunion started in 1969 and has expanded into a weekend of events, contests and SEAL capabilities exercises.

This year's reunion began with a reception commemorating the 50th anniversary of SEAL Team 2. The weekend included a golf tournament and skeet shoot competition, followed by a tennis tournament. Competitive sports are a mainstay at the reunions, because they reinforce the mentality of working together towards a common goal.

"It's a fraternal order," said Williams. "These guys consider themselves brothers no matter the age gap."

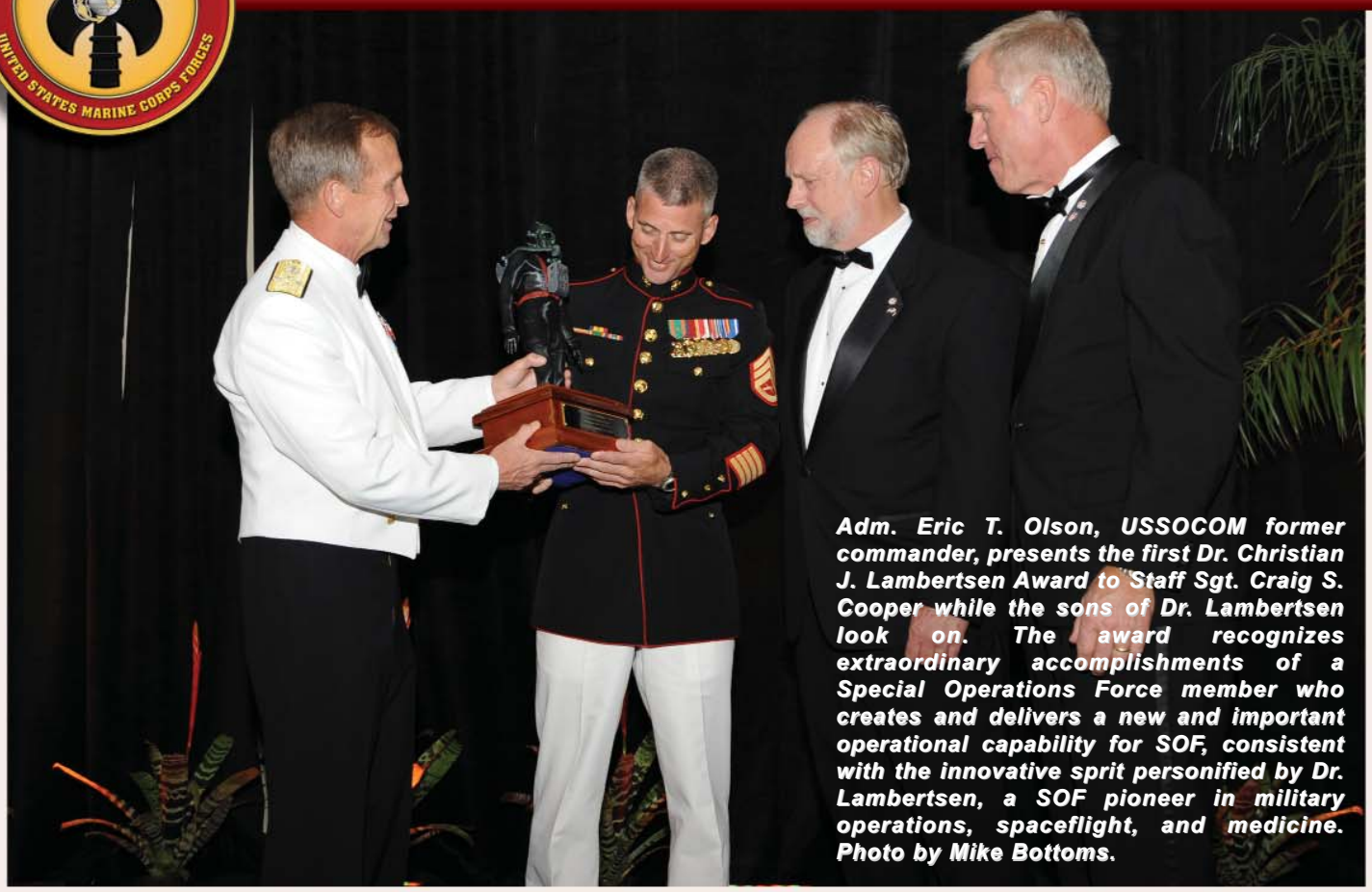
The crowning event of the weekend was the capabilities demonstration, which showcased UDT/SEAL tactics and equipment, while providing a brief history of their origins.

Six thousand active duty and retired SEALs, along with their friends and families, and event volunteers, gathered at "E" beach where the Navy's parachute team, the Leap Frogs, kicked things off by landing with a wreath and an American flag as the national anthem was sung.

"The volunteer effort is outstanding," said Williams. "We had upwards of 50 people who came to us and wanted to be a part of the event."

The weekend celebration ended with several events including a beach bash, which featured a live band, and a picnic on Sunday.

The U.S. Navy Demonstration parachute team, the Leap Frogs, perform a down-plane maneuver during a capabilities demonstration at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Va., July 16. The Naval Special Warfare Community displayed its capabilities as part of the 42nd UDT/SEAL East Coast Reunion celebrations. Photo by Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Robert Fluegel.



Adm. Eric T. Olson, USSOCOM former commander, presents the first Dr. Christian J. Lambertsen Award to Staff Sgt. Craig S. Cooper while the sons of Dr. Lambertsen look on. The award recognizes extraordinary accomplishments of a Special Operations Force member who creates and delivers a new and important operational capability for SOF, consistent with the innovative sprit personified by Dr. Lambertsen, a SOF pioneer in military operations, spaceflight, and medicine. Photo by Mike Bottoms.

First Lambertsen Award for operational innovation awarded to MARSOC Non-Commissioned Officer

By Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly
USSOCOM Public Affairs

The first Dr. Christian J. Lambertsen Award for Operational Innovation was recently awarded to Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Craig S. Cooper during a ceremony at the 2011 Special Operations Forces and Industrial Conference formal dinner.

The award recognizes extraordinary accomplishment of a Special Operations Force member who creates and delivers a new and important operational capability for SOF, consistent with the innovative sprit personified by Dr. Lambertsen, a SOF pioneer in military operations, spaceflight, and medicine.

Currently serving as the Motor Transport Chief with 2nd Marine Special Operations Battalion at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Cooper is the first person to be recognized with the honor.

Deployed to Afghanistan during the summer of 2010, he recognized a critical need on the RG 31 and RG 33 armored personnel carriers.

"The vehicles came with an individual tool that only opens the doors on those vehicles," Cooper said. "It was

large and held in by a pin on the side of the vehicle. It weighed three or four pounds… too big to carry on your gear."

Cooper explained that if your vehicle was disabled with an IED or rollover and that specific variant tool was unusable, you couldn't get the locks open.

"We went down to the machine shop that SOCOM had, explained the idea and they put it together for us. The result was a multipurpose egress tool that we could carry on our gear and it actually opened up all the blast locks on all the different variants of vehicles," Cooper said.

A couple of months later, that initiative proved to be critical when returning from a forward operating base in Afghanistan. "We were coming back from setting up a village stability platform, and it had been raining a few days," Cooper explained.

"We crossed the bridge and one of the guys in front of me went to the left a little bit and the road gave way, when we started to pull the truck out, the road completely gave way and he just rolled over on the driver side and went in the water in about 5 or 6 feet of water."

"We climbed up on the truck and the tool that was on the vehicle was underwater so we couldn't get to it and we didn't have another variant of that vehicle so we climbed up there and one of my guys said he couldn't get it open so I told him to use the tool that he had on his vest. So he pulled that tool out and stuck it in the slot and opened the blast locks and we were able to get all four of them out."

Although his team only had moments to react, Cooper said panic never set in.

"I had no time to think, it was just quick reaction: just get them out, get the truck out of the water and get down the road. Everyone came out uninjured, except one troop with a scratch on his forehead."

Cooper credited the homegrown SOF multipurpose tool for ease of egress.

"We would have had a hard time getting them out of there without it. Granted, they would have eventually been able to open the lock from the inside because they weren't hurt, but had they been hurt, we wouldn't have been able to get them out so quickly. We probably had them out of the vehicle in less than two minutes."

It took an hour to get the vehicle completely out of the water. By the time they recovered it, water had completely filled the cab, he said.

When Cooper returned to base that night, he briefed his executive officer on what had happened. He was notified about the Lambertsen award shortly after.

"It caught me off guard; I wasn't expecting anything like that. We knew we needed it, we just hoped we never had to use it," Cooper said.

"The award was humbling, as the first person to receive it I hope there are more to be given out," Cooper said. "It just proves that there is a lot of ingenuity in the services. People that are coming up with ideas are being recognized when they should be. It helps folks know they are doing the right thing."

William Shepherd, SOCOM Science and Technology advisor, agreed.

"As the first SOF award of its kind, this honors Dr. Lambertsen by recognizing individuals in the force who innovate," Shepherd said. "Cooper certainly distinguished himself in a number of aspects. Not only did he bring this capability to being, but was also able to use it in a significant and meaningful way. We hope this award stimulates the other Staff Sergeant Coopers who are out there. Innovation is a part of the SOF ethos."

Shepherd said that Adm. Eric T. Olson championed the idea of moving capabilities closer to the warfighter.

"The Rapid Exploitation of Innovative Technology for SOF initiative is something relatively new to the command," said Shepherd. "We began the experiment in 2009, establishing mobile shops, engineers and technologists literally on the battlefield. We knew that if we could get the right resources and talent in places that need it, good things are going to happen."

In this case, good things were delivered in the form of lives saved through the innovation of one Marine Corps staff noncommissioned officer. Like his award's namesake, Cooper said improving systems and resources comes naturally to him.

"My dad did stuff like this, invented things when he was young," Cooper said. "I guess it's in my nature to do the same. I have a habit of looking at something and seeing things I'd do differently with it, it usually works out a lot better."

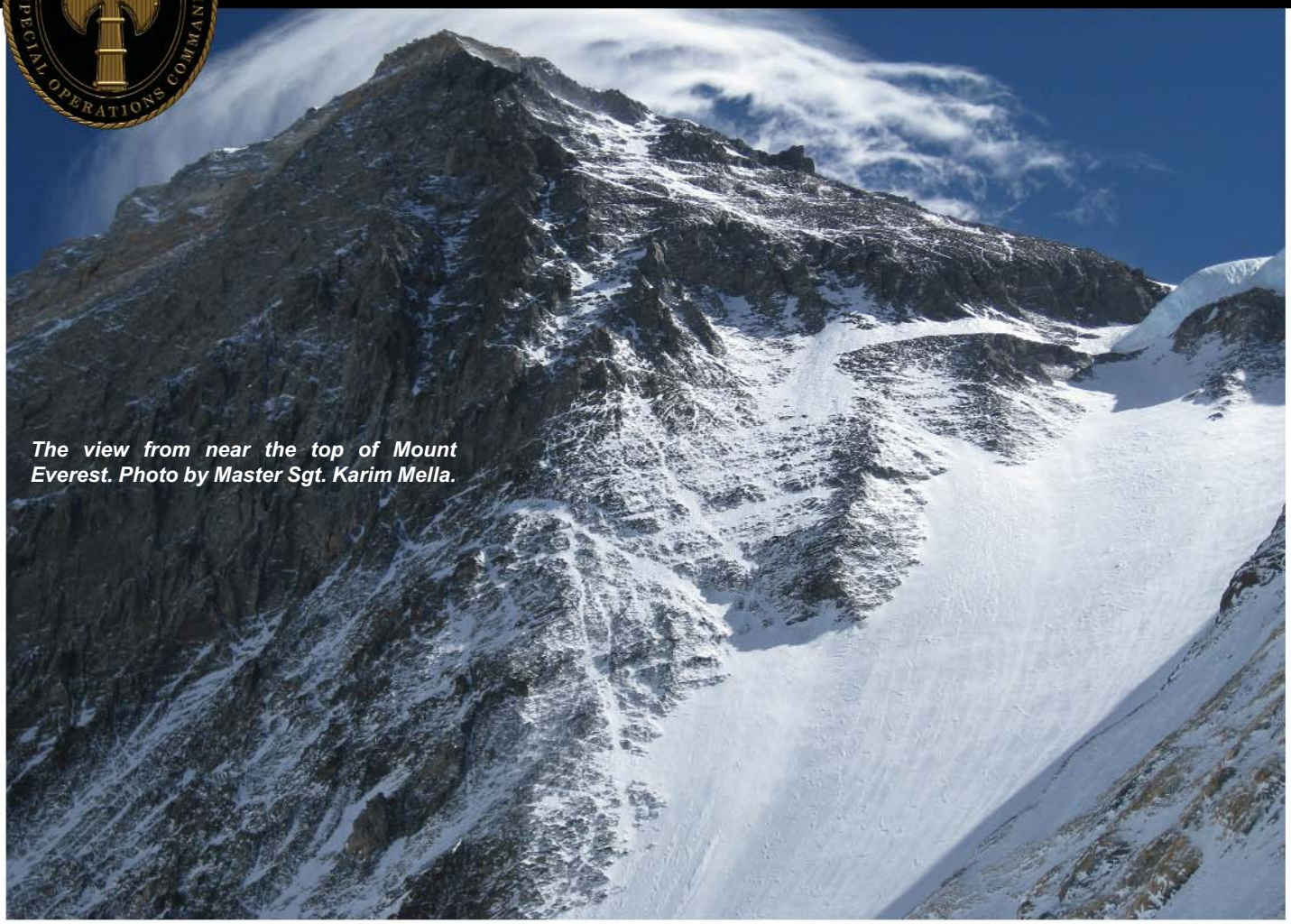
Cooper and Shepherd both encouraged all SOF servicemembers to do the same.

"Anytime you come up with an idea that works or saves a life, or betters something around you, continue to push that and don't give it up," Cooper said. "Just because one thing doesn't work doesn't mean that you're not going to come up with something later down the road that will work. Never give up on that."

Green Beret summits Mount Everest

By Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly
USSOCOM Public Affairs

Master Sgt. Karim Mella (right) displays the American flag loaned to him from the Post 911 Foundation atop of Mount Everest May 21. Mella is the first Dominican to climb Mount Everest. Courtesy photo.



The view from near the top of Mount Everest. Photo by Master Sgt. Karim Mella.

At age 13, when most young boys are chasing soccer balls, baseballs and footballs, Karim Mella began chasing a dream.

"I decided to go to Everest in 1982…a long time ago. I said 'I'm going to climb that mountain.'"

Nearly 30 years later, Mella fulfilled that ambition, reaching the top of the famed peak May 21.

The Dominican Republic native and U.S. Army Master Sgt. with Special Operations Command began climbing mountains in 1987.

"My first high mountain was Pico Bolivar in Venezuela, I was 19-years-old," he said. "I did that during my summer vacation in my sophomore year of the naval academy. After that I fell in love with mountaineering. Before that I was just doing a lot of trekking through the mountains in the Dominican Republic."

After graduating from high school, he attended the Dominican Republic naval academy, spending two years as an ensign before immigrating to the United States, where he joined the U.S. Army.

"When I came to the United States, I started doing rock climbing, eventually going back to mountaineering. I started doing high mountains like Aconcagua, Huascaran, McKinley, Kilimanjaro, Kenya and Mount Denali in Alaska," he said.

His motivation to mountain climb, Mella explained, is a combination of many things.

"One is to be out there in nature, another is you go there because of your efforts," Mella said. "It's not like you can take a car and drive there; you have to fight and work to get to the top. And the view is just amazing; it basically shows you how small you are in the big scheme of things. Some people think they can take over the world in a day but we're so insignificant - the mountain shows you that."

Although he had successfully ascended high mountains before, scaling Everest presented some unique training challenges.

"I compete in Iron Mans and triathlons, training for those prepared me for the mountain," he said. "Swim, run and bike with just a few changes here and there, but for Everest I also had to do stairs."

When referring to "stairs", Mella does not mean the Stairmaster machine at the local YMCA.

"I received permission to train in the 43-story Bank of America building in downtown Tampa. I would climb it three or four times depending on how fast I would do that day. That was a part of my weekly training for Everest," he said.

Training solo, Mella maintained the routine for six months.

Throughout the rigorous training, Mella remained injury-free, allowing him to set off for the two-month expedition March 27, joining a team of 26 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mella met with two other Dominican climbers and they formed Team Excelsior, the first Dominican expedition to the top of the world. At their arrival in Nepal, Excelsior joined International Mountain Guides for the expedition.

The team had to trek for two weeks before reaching base camp. In the approach, Sgt. Mella experienced a cold and stomach flu that lasted five days. The second time, his illness put him out for six days. Recovery at that altitude is very slow, he said.

"It's something you can't do anything about, but I never let that get to my head," Mella said. "I just concentrated on doing everything I had to do to recover: getting medicine, resting, getting fluids, that was my main job."

Throughout the journey, the original team had divided into several groups. When a member of the group falls ill, the team progresses on. Mella had to catch up after he recovered.

"In the end, I was only one day behind my original group. My climbing partner was with me and the two of us made up the third group. When the group in front of us went to summit, there was a big storm and some of them had to be rescued. One suffered frostbite. They had a really bad time on the mountain."

Once he reached the summit, Mella said the climb, the suffering, the hard work, the two months away from home and all the cold was worth it.

"The feeling I got when I got to the summit, I could tell you but it really wouldn't describe it," he said. "It's a surreal experience, seeing the curvature of the earth and where you're standing, that's priceless."

In addition to his gear and supplies, Mella carried something else with him along the journey to the top of the world.

"The American flag that I took was a loan from the Post 911 Foundation," Mella said. "It will be returning to New York for the 10-year memorial at Ground Zero."

The Post 911 Foundation is led by veteran first responders, military veterans, and local community organizers to provide direct support to those serving the nation in battle and emergency response services.

According to the foundation, the "Follow the Flag" campaign strives to inspire those in need through the symbolism of the American flag. To demonstrate there is no place on earth too remote or too challenging for military and first responders, the flag flown over Ground Zero the morning after September 11 was with Mella when he ascended the peak.

Although the original team was made up of 26 people, only 19 made it to the summit. One member died and the rest abandoned the expedition.

When a fatality occurs, Mella said maintaining focus is critical.

"As a climber you have to shield yourself from events like that, you cannot carry that tragedy with you on the mountain, because you can end up like that," he said. "If your mind is not with you in the mountain, it's very dangerous. When that happens you feel really sorry and bad, in some ways it's like combat: you need to put it aside and continue the mission, in an expedition it's no different."

"When you are up there and see all the mountains and ridges around, you really look inside and say 'I'm nothing, I'm not even a mark.' That really makes you think about what you are experiencing and what you are looking at and seeing."

While Sir Edmund Hillary may have been the first to ascend the mountain in 1953, Mella became the first Dominican to successfully reach the top of the peak. The feat garnered him many accolades when he arrived home. Only one other member of Team Excelsior successfully made the ascent.

"After our return from Everest, we met the President of the Dominican Republic during a small ceremony at the National Palace," he said. "I also received a plaque from the Dominican Navy's Chief of staff and my Dominican Republic Naval Academy class. It was a huge honor."

Humbled and invigorated by the experience, Mella said his next journey will take him to the world's second-tallest peak.

International perspectives converge to promote global security

Story and photos By Staff Sgt. Ryan O'Hare
USSOCOM Strategic Communications

United States Special Operations Command hosted Sovereign Challenge VII, June 6-9, in the heart of the nations' largest Arab-American community, Dearborn, Mich.

Sovereign Challenge is a USSOCOM Strategic Communications-sponsored international engagement program focused on defending the sovereignty of nations and how extremism threatens that independence. This conference, titled "Minorities and Ethnic Groups: Separation, Assimilation and Radicalization," highlighted the possibility of extremism potentially arising out of ethnic and minority groups within a nation.

Stan Schrager, Sovereign Challenge Coordinator, says the conference provides a venue for representatives from participating nations to foster relationships and share national policies, positions, and ideas related to sovereignty, security and associated threats. Participant feedback helps the conference progress. This year's event included more than 80 government and civilian attachés from 55 countries, as well as influential

Imam Sayid Hassan Al-Qazwini, Islamic Center of America scholar and religious leader, educates Sovereign Challenge VII guests about America's largest Arab-American community, Dearborn, Mich. Sovereign Challenge is a United States Special Operations Command-sponsored international engagement program, focusing on defending the sovereignty of nations. This conference, titled "Minorities and Ethnic Groups: Separation, Assimilation and Radicalization," highlighted the possibility of extremism potentially arising out of ethnic and minority groups within a nation.

community, political and religious leaders.

According to Brig. Gen. Peter Resch, Austrian Defense Attaché, the interaction among participants and the lessons learned from each Sovereign Challenge event can be applied globally. The evolution of the conference has been valuable.

"I would describe Sovereign Challenge as a platform for exchange of views," said Resch. "What is real interesting to me is the changing of Sovereign Challenge over the years. In the beginning it was a military platform, the participants were soldiers and we always wanted to integrate more and more law enforcement and political attachés. When I look now to this conference, it's what we wanted, and this is great."

Sovereign Challenge VII guests address issues concerning their countries during a discussion group. Panels and discussion groups accompany daily conference presentations, allowing more in-depth communication among international participants. This year's event, located in Dearborn Mich., included more than 80 government and civilian attachés from 55 countries.

The cultural diversity of Sovereign Challenge VII attendees creates an opportunity for a variety of perspectives to be presented. Throughout the four-day conference, 26 guest speakers and subject matter experts from diverse backgrounds discussed the conference topics and how they affect their country.

"I would say that nearly all nations deal with this issue – in some it is more significant than others –but in today's world, the movement of ethnic and national groups and minorities, which is common, clearly alters the character of a nation," said Schrager. "These groups may remain separate though they may reside in our nations, they may assimilate, or they may become radicalized – we call it 'homegrown terrorism'."

The conference's location complemented its theme. Of approximately 100,000 people residing in Dearborn, nearly 45,000 are Arab-Americans. The city's diverse heritage is traced back to the early 20th century, when Lebanese immigrants came in large numbers seeking employment in the local automotive industry. Since that time, immigrants from Iraq, Yemen and other Middle-Eastern countries have also immigrated, creating a melting pot of Arab-American culture.

Attendees visited the Arab-American National Museum, the first museum in the world devoted to Arab-American history and culture. Robert Stockton, professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan, Dearborn campus, spoke with the conference guests regarding Arab integration into Dearborn and the effects of 9/11 on the community.

Although the Arab-American community in Dearborn grieved along with the rest of the nation, they were instantly viewed as a threat.

"I wish I could take you back to September 12th," said Stockton."I can't tell you the level of shock. It was chilling. We didn't know what was happening next."

In addition to the AANM, Dearborn is home to the Islamic Center of America, the largest Muslim mosque in North America. These notable facilities, supported by the cities unique ethnic identity, are a paradigm of Arab integration into America's heartland.

The documentary film, "Fordson the Movie: Faith, Fasting, and Football" features another Dearborn landmark, Fordson High School. The film looks at the school's football players and how a student body comprised of 95 percent Arab-Americans impacts the team, especially after 9/11. Conference attendees watched a private screening of the film.

"I think it's an interesting lesson," said Schrager. "It's about more than American football, obviously. It's a parable, a metaphor. I think it fits in very well with the theme of this conference about minorities and ethnic

groups and their valued place in American society."

The following day commenced with a panel discussion titled the "Dearborn Experience." Its focus brought community leaders, including the mayor, chief of police and local imam, together to educate attendees on issues affecting Dearborn.

"Muslims live in the Unites States in peace. And especially in this beautiful city, the city of Dearborn," said Imam Sayid Hassan Al-Qazwini, the religious leader at the Islamic Center of America. "They are as normal as any other American individual or citizen. They love America. And they eat like Americans. They dream like Americans. They laugh like Americans."

As part of the afternoon agenda, the conference focus shifted from local demographics to international terrorism concerns. Peter Bergen, CNN national security analyst and author, presented his global view on violent extremism, particularly the future of Al-Qaida in the Middle East after the death of Osama bin Laden.

"Al Qaida and its allies have been losing the war of ideas in the Muslim world for a long time," said Bergen. "The death of bin Laden and the Arab Spring have accelerated this process."

Panels and discussion groups accompanied the conference presentations, allowing more in-depth communication among participants.

"These discussion groups are intentionally structured to have a mix of countries talking about these topics together," said Schrager. "It's a way to continue the main conference topics in a more intimate, informal environment. The ongoing dialogue via these conferences, seminars and other appropriate forums enhances security within the global environment."

Before a private tour of the Henry Ford Museum, Adm. Eric T. Olson, USSOCOM Commander, spoke with the audience and expressed his gratitude for their interest and participation in Sovereign Challenge VII.

"We do intend that Sovereign Challenge is a forum for discovery, for casual conversations, for building relationships, for learning from one another," said Olson. "I believe it's a very important topic to address, at this particular conference, at this particular time. We're dealing with issues that strike at the soul of who people are and what they stand for. I would say that it is not always about what people think; it is often about what people believe that is the subject of this conference. I thank you for being here. I thank you for being active participants."

The following day commenced with a presentation titled "Homegrown Terrorism: Prevent, Pursue, and Engage." It focused on ethnic and minority groups increasing within global capitals and suburbs. According to Dr. Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi, a religion, conflict and social cohesion lecturer and consultant from Sri Lanka, many homegrown terrorists are second or third generation citizens searching for a new identity. These individuals are often mentored from terrorist groups overseas with a religiously motivated agenda.

According to Hettiarachchi, these ideals must be countered early in order to prevent future attacks. Communities must study, analyze, monitor, pursue and engage these individuals. Community engagement prevents radicalization in a practical way. It encourages people to fall back on community to counter terrorism, because violent behavior proves unproductive. It helps individuals understand and respect people's values, cultural norms, social etiquette and behaviors.

"We cannot fear, it will defeat us. Victory is no entitlement, but an obligation to our future."

Dr. Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi

"We cannot fear, it will defeat us," said Hettiarachchi. "Victory is no entitlement, but an obligation to our future."

With terrorists using the Internet as an open forum to spread their violent propaganda worldwide, law enforcement agencies are playing a larger role in efforts to counter terrorism.

International Law Enforcement attachés provided insight into issues they face. In addition to various community engagements, a European Union program called "Check the Web" finds, translates and assesses various documents posted on extremist websites. Check the Web is used as an information portal for nations to analyze information from more than 400 web sites worldwide. It includes statements, videos and audio files from multiple terrorist networks. Used to combat

(Left) George Selim, Department of Homeland Security guest speaker, speaks with Stan Schrager, Sovereign Challenge VII coordinator, regarding America's largest Arab-American community. The conference, located in Dearborn, Mich., provides a venue for representatives from participating nations to foster relationships and share national policies, positions and ideas.The cultural diversity of this year's event, including more than 80 government and civilian attachés from 55 countries, creates an opportunity for a variety of perspectives to be presented.

terrorist propaganda, it is increasingly recognized within the EU Member State Counter Terrorism community as a point of reference for documenting extremist web sites and material. Once credible information's discovered, it's shared with international agencies to counter the terrorist threat.

The conference agenda featured other topics including U.S. border security and programs designed to de-radicalize extremists before, or even after, they have committed a terrorist act.

The final day of Sovereign Challenge VII continued the issue of countering violent extremism. The first panel discussion titled "Use of Sports to Reduce Radicalization of Youth," encouraged bringing adolescents together through team sports to promote positive values and life skills. These values, such as leadership, cooperation and conflict resolution, enhance relationships within a diverse community. Over time, coaches and staff become positive role models to the players. Various countries worldwide have implemented sports programs, reducing stress and tension among youth and providing constructive alternatives to gang activity and violence.

Concluding the conference presentations, a representative from the Department of Homeland Security discussed the importance of protecting Americans and their values, regardless of ethnic background. Additionally, he spoke about community involvement and public engagement programs fostering domestic and international benefit.

"One of the specialties of Sovereign Challenge is the global approach," said Resch. "It's easy in a region to find agreements to common problems because we have a similar approach to the problem. If you discuss the same problem with someone from Indonesia, you discover a different dimension of the same problem. This is something we very often forget."

For more information on the Sovereign Challenge program visit www.sovereignchallenge.org.

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Editor's note: Honored are Special Operations Forces and conventional forces supporting SOF missions who lost their lives since June's Tip of the Spear.

Then Staff Sgt. Leroy A. Petry (2nd row, 3rd from left) stands with 2nd Ranger Battalion during the 2008 deployment to Afghanistan. Petry received the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House July 12. Petry distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with an armed enemy in the vicinity of Paktya Province, Afghanistan, on May 26, 2008.