



TIP OF THE SPEAR

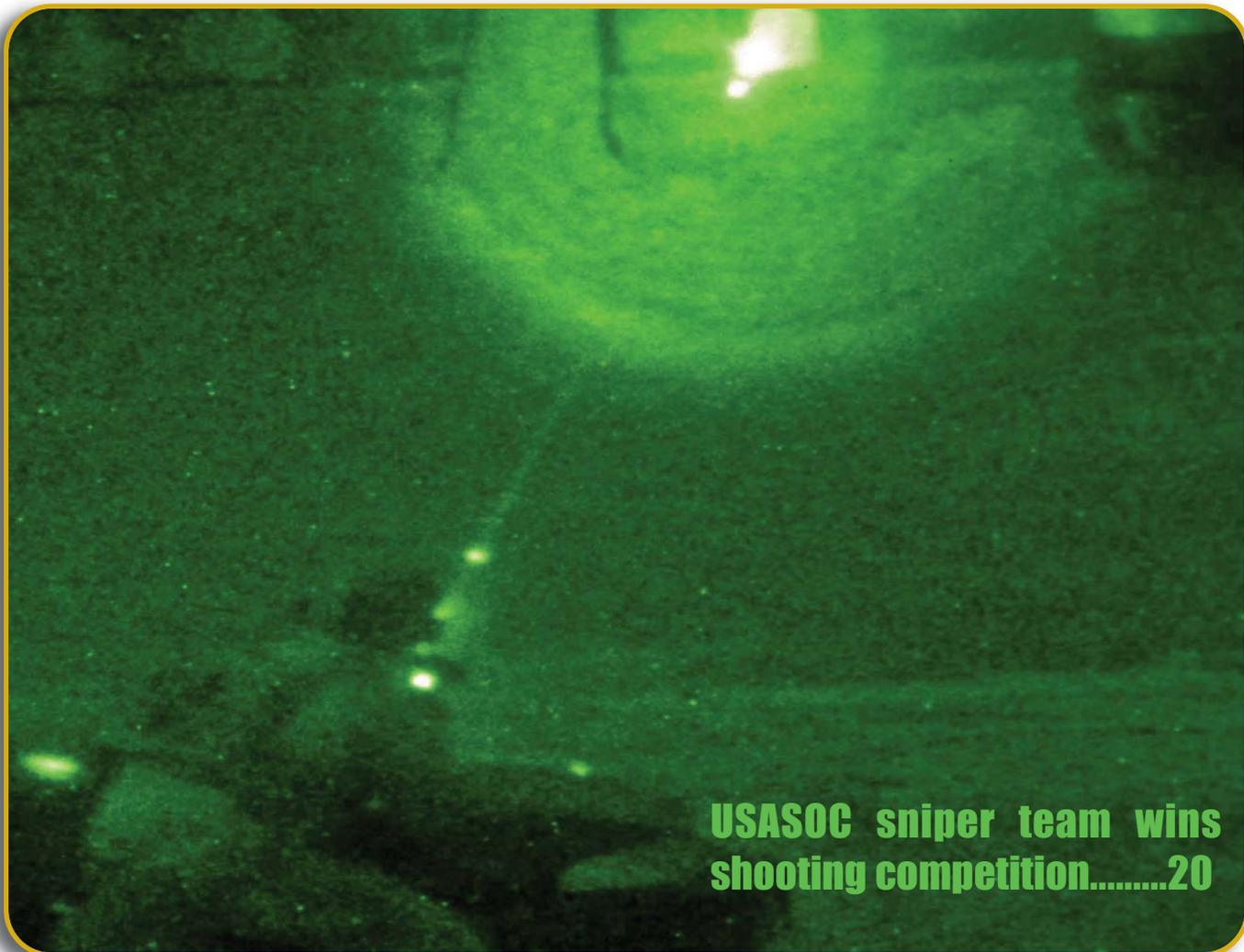


USASOC hosts 2010 top sniper competition

- ♣ SOF helps Central America combat illicit trafficking
- ♣ Medal of Honor recipient's headstone unveiled
- ♣ Standing on top of the bottom of the world



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



USASOC sniper team wins shooting competition.....20

Tip of the Spear



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Best magazine format in DoD 2007 and 2008

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(Cover) A Special Forces sniper runs through a high stress event during the 2010 USASOC Sniper Competition at Fort Bragg, N.C. (Above) A Special Forces sniper engages a target during the night stress event at the 2010 USASOC Sniper Competition at Fort Bragg, N.C. Photos by Staff Sgt. Thaddius S. Dawkins II.

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USSOCOM Commander's guidance for 2011

Background

Since the attacks of 9/11, Special Operations Forces (SOF) have proven their ability to rapidly and reliably respond to the operational needs of the theater commanders. Over the past nine years, we have doubled SOCOM's manpower, tripled our total budget, and quadrupled the number of deployed SOF personnel. We remain most heavily committed by far to Central Command's Area of Responsibility.

During 2010, we saw significant changes in the employment of Special Operations Forces. The operators assigned to both National Mission Forces and Theater Mission Forces, to a degree greater than ever before, performed the missions for which they were selected, trained and equipped. SOF leaders were more engaged in the development and implementation of theater and national strategy, and SOF operations were planned and conducted under more direct SOF leadership-- with impressive results. As a result, SOF are in greater operational demand in both battlefield environments and engagement missions around the globe. And as operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan continue to evolve, SOF will remain the force of first choice for many non-traditional and remote area missions. This increasing demand will require us to be more discerning and clever in our application of Special Operations Forces.

The growing need for our specialized capabilities, especially for our unique ability to address new and ambiguous challenges, will continue to grow. At the same time, we will be under increasing fiscal pressure to gain additional efficiencies in budget and manpower.

Purpose

This guidance reaffirms my three priorities for all Special Operations Forces - mission, people, and equipment - and identifies focus areas for 2011. It applies to all personnel assigned to USSOCOM and is intended to guide all decisions and actions throughout the year.

USSOCOM will separately provide refined guidance on specific goals, objectives and performance measures.

Focus for 2011

In priority order, USSOCOM and SOF will:

Further increase our "Tooth-to-Tail" ratio

SOF's access to future operational environments "ahead of the sound of the guns" will depend on small footprints and low profiles. We will vigorously pursue concepts and technologies that energize a "think ahead, push forward" approach to supporting deployed forces. USSOCOM's Global Mission Support Center (GMSC) will continue as a priority effort to help downsize our forward footprint.

In the theaters of open armed conflict, SOF's presence has grown over the past decade and our need for Combat Support (CS) and Combat Service Support (CSS) has also increased. Yet we cannot (and should not) try to grow our internal "enablers" at the same rate we grow our operational elements. In 2011, we will work more closely with the Joint Staff and the Services to augment SOF with the CS and CSS they provide. We will create and sustain an appropriate "demand signal" for these capabilities that are essential to SOF's success.

SOCOM HQs will begin to submit Requests For Forces (RFFs, but more accurately "requests for Service-provided capabilities") to the Joint Staff for deploying Special Operations Joint Task Forces to ensure the total force is assembled with enough lead time to assemble and train together as a complete task force prior to deployment. We will explore with the Services the concept of designating specific General Purpose Force (GPF) units for habitual training with, and support of, SOF as "on-call" forces. The integration of the Special Operations Force Generation (SOFORGEN) cycle and the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle in 2010



Adm. Eric T. Olson

is a positive step. We will seek similar arrangements with the other Services in 2011.

Improve and institutionalize the “presentation” of SOF to Geographic Combatant Commander (GCCs)

We must refine how we package, project and sustain SOF to support the GCCs’ operational requirements. As a key element of this effort, we will further develop, validate and resource the concept of a fully capable and scalable Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF) as the principal SOF war fighting structure, and institutionalize the SOJTF in both SOF and Joint Doctrine. The SOJTF will be an expeditionary force package wrapped around the basic structure of a Special Forces Group, Naval Special Warfare Group, Task Force (TF) SWORD or TF 487 (and in future years, a Marine Special Operations Regiment). It will integrate, in every way feasible, National Mission Forces and Theater Mission Forces and will be a scalable and flexible command, led by officers of O6 to O9 rank.

Enable USSOCOM to be more agile

One of SOF’s traits is the ability to quickly adjust to changing environments and situations. This agility is a strength that must be preserved and enhanced. In 2011 we will pursue all options to streamline organizations, systems and processes with the goal of eliminating redundancies, reducing bureaucratic hindrances, accelerating procedures and gaining flexibility. All leaders must strive to incentivize innovative thinking through unit and command recognition.

To sharpen our thinking, USSOCOM will lead a structured evaluation of the Office of Strategic Services to better understand the authorities, policies and practices that contributed to that organization’s effectiveness in World War II. We will extract applicable lessons and vigorously pursue changes to policies and authorities that will strengthen SOCOM’s ability to rapidly adapt to changing environments.

Stress the importance of Operational Context

In an ever more complex world, SOF’s ability to understand the environments to which we deploy, in order to accurately predict the nuanced impact of our actions, will continue to define our force. Our deeper knowledge of micro-regional geography, history, languages, religions, cultures and traditions will continue to distinguish SOF from General Purpose Forces. In 2011, we will expand our base of global expertise and will pursue every reasonable opportunity to strengthen

our overseas presence, develop meaningful personal relationships with key foreign military leaders, and steep selected members of SOF in environments of current and future importance. The establishment of the NATO SOF Headquarters provides a quality opportunity to strengthen existing SOF relationships, and build new ones. We will support and bolster NATO SOF HQs efforts as they develop doctrine and enhance interoperability for our NATO SOF partners.

Specifically, we will continue to support the MAVNI and provisional MOS 18L programs, increase the number of career SOF individuals in advanced language training, and expand the number of foreign education and immersion opportunities. To enhance current battlefield effectiveness, we will strive for repetitive deployments by individuals and small teams to the same locations. More broadly, we will participate in academic symposia and seminars, and place SOF members in key positions in US Missions, and foreign military units and headquarters. Careful planning and coordination within the Department of Defense, and with other US agencies and foreign governments, is essential. Additionally we will pursue career incentives that place value on regional and micro-regional expertise and determine a process that allows us to track and assign Foreign Area Officers with prior SOF experience back into SOF units.

Encourage the unconventional and resourceful spirit that exemplifies SOF

SOF’s success does not depend on employing overwhelming force or holding key terrain. SOF’s operational focus is the “human” terrain. The qualities of cleverness, tenacity, speed, precision, discipline and focus enable our force to achieve amazing effects in relatively small numbers. We must recognize that our strength is in our methods and not in our mass. We must aggressively cultivate a SOF culture that values and rewards independent thought, open-minded approaches, experimentation, accessibility, and unfiltered communications up, down and across our force. In 2011, we must reduce our predisposition to default to habits, traditions and precedents as starting points for our decisions and actions.

Adjust to the new fiscal environment

Our Nation is entering into a more fiscally constrained environment-- USSOCOM is not exempt. Admiral Mullen recently stated “the single biggest threat to national security is the national debt.” Secretary Gates



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - HEADQUARTERS

has directed cost consideration in all we do, and a “culture of savings” to ensure that we optimize the resources entrusted to us. USSOCOM will aggressively participate in these savings and efficiency initiatives. We proactively gained many efficiencies in 2010. In 2011, we will further test our ability to adapt from an ever increasing resource environment to one that remains relatively flat. We must be innovative in how we address these challenges; requests for additional resources must not be our first response. Improvised solutions, hallmarks of SOF, must guide our decision-making as we navigate this new environment.

Improve global synchronization

USSOCOM is responsible for synchronizing DOD planning for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). We will continue to utilize the global synchronization process to prioritize the GCC’s GWOT planning efforts, as well as the worldwide requirements for SOF. We will use the global synchronization process to prioritize SOF requirements against the CONPLAN 7500 lines of operations to ensure the best utilization of SOF against terrorist threats. We will strive to be ahead of the sound of the guns, and will continue to respond with speed and precision to achieve strategic effect and defend the Nation’s interests in an environment characterized by irregular warfare.

Implement the SOF Information Environment

In 2011, we will begin transition to a single cyber environment across the global SOF community. The SOF Information Environment (SIE) will be the USSOCOM cyber weapon system and will provide the common operational environment for command, control, combat support, combat service support, intelligence and business functions. The SIE will provide an enterprise-wide Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, while consolidated Distributed Data Centers (DDCs) will serve as the repositories of all SOF data. National Mission Forces and Theater Forces will integrate their networks with appropriate controls.

Enhance the internal jointness of SOF

Operational jointness is about interoperability based on knowledge of others’ capabilities and methods. Although SOF’s discrete tactical elements may not all require joint manning, nearly every SOF operation involves contributions from two or more SOF Service

Components. Exposing our people early in their career to joint SOF tactics, equipment, planning, and staff procedures is important, and should be reinforced and repeated frequently. In 2011, we will increase our attendance in basic and advanced training conducted by other-Service SOF, and we will further exchange officers and NCOs across SOF as instructors and staff members. We will strive for increased familiarity and improved interoperability within our SOF Service Components.

The Joint Special Operations University will conduct an analysis of all courses and programs with the goal of better preparing SOF for joint operations. The new Joint Special Operations Senior Enlisted Academy is a strong example of how our joint effectiveness can be increased.

Improve the career management of SOF leaders

The professional development of our people is essential to the long term relevance of SOF. In 2011, we will implement enhanced internal mentorship programs and hold senior leaders accountable for ensuring that training, education and job assignments are optimized for both the joint force, and the individual SOF officer and enlisted leader. Importantly, we will actively pursue assignments that both broaden expertise and provide increased exposure to non-SOF military and civilian leaders.

Address the effects of pressure on the force

Nine years of high-risk combat and other sensitive and demanding operations have created intense pressure on our people and their families. The “new normal” is forward deployed, and this high OPTEMPO is manifesting itself in a wide variety of subtle and not-so-subtle behaviors. In 2011, we will renew our efforts to be predictive, to anticipate support requirements and provide assistance before the pressure manifests itself, while striving to provide increased balance for our people and their families. We will use a combination of SOF and Service-provided programs to analyze, prevent and respond to physical and psychological trauma. Specifically, we will refine the USSOCOM-led study of the impact of repetitive combat deployments and we will continue to strongly support the SOF Care Coalition.

Redesign the Geographic Commanders’ In-extremis Forces (CIFs)

Our investment in CIFs is significant, but they have never been used for their original purpose. It is time to redesign the CIFs with the goal of providing a

reliably and rapidly available force that can be used to meet priority needs. In 2011, we will allocate a company-size special operations force, augmented with appropriate enablers, to each OCONUS GCC. We will work with the Joint Staff and OSD to arrive at an appropriate command relationship that provides each GCC full time authority over his SOF force.

Revise Military Information Support Operations (MISO)

In 2010, PSYOP was re-designated as MISO; there was no change to the mission or operational focus of the force.

Over most of the past decade, the fierce pace of information operations prevented us from properly preparing the MISO force for long term employment. In 2011, we will continue to implement this new organizational structure by realigning the Joint Military Information Support Command and consolidating resources under the 4th MISO Group.

Within the MISO force, we will focus our intellectual capital on crafting, not transmitting, the message in order to influence our adversaries' thoughts, perceptions and actions. We will also reemphasize the role of MISO experts as operational advisors and planners who carefully consider the potential psychological impact of proposed military operations.

Enhance acquisition agility

Effective, robust, and capable equipment is essential to SOF's success at the force, unit and individual levels. In 2011, we will continue our progress toward more rapid acquisition of SOF-peculiar and SOF-modified equipment, at lower costs, while increasing our investment in SOF-peculiar research and development. We will continue the semi-annual USSOCOM-DoD Acquisition summits initiated in 2010, and we will aggressively pursue new material developments and acquisitions utilizing the proven Joint Acquisition Task Force approach.

As with SOF operators, it is essential that we properly train, educate and validate our contracting and acquisition personnel, while expanding our use of the unique authorities and processes of SOF procurement.

Produce and issue SOF Doctrine

Development of doctrine for special operations is a legislated responsibility of USSOCOM. Throughout our history, however, we have merely contributed to or

coordinated on the SOF doctrine published by the Joint Staff and the Services. In 2011, we will invigorate our doctrine-writing efforts with the goal of issuing or co-signing all military doctrine that guides SOF organizations and activities. This must be done in close coordination with the Services and with the understanding that operational commanders retain the authority to deviate from published SOF doctrine.

Increase diverse populations within our ranks

Diversity is a SOF operational necessity. In both our current and projected operating environments, we anticipate persistent engagement among populations with widely varied societal values. In the future, we will continue to train, work and fight in more international environments with allied partners. It is to SOF's strong advantage to be able to assess situations from multiple points of view and perspectives. USSOF require highly qualified, intellectually dissimilar members with a broad range of backgrounds and skills. In 2011, we will increase our recruitment of those who will bring ethnic, business, academic, technical and experiential diversity to our force. Further, we will increase the operational employment of females within current law and policy.

Conclusion

Our Special Operations Force's accomplishments in the past year have given all of us cause for deep pride. In the current operating environments, SOF have demonstrated ingenuity, perseverance, spirit and skill to accomplish their missions. SOF have emerged from the shadows and become a key element of every Geographic Combatant Commanders' regional strategy. This is all attributable to the SOF operators who are incredibly mission-focused, tenacious and courageous.

In 2011 we will continue progress on today's battlefields, expand our impact "ahead of the sound of guns," and prepare the force for success in ever more complex and ambiguous strategic and operational environments. We will pursue the highest quality people, conduct ourselves with integrity and humility, and hold to high professional and personal standards.

We are about excellence--in our people, equipment, preparation and mission execution. Together, we will continue to develop and provide SOF's exceptional capabilities to meet today's threats and tomorrow's challenges. Thank you for your unwavering commitment.

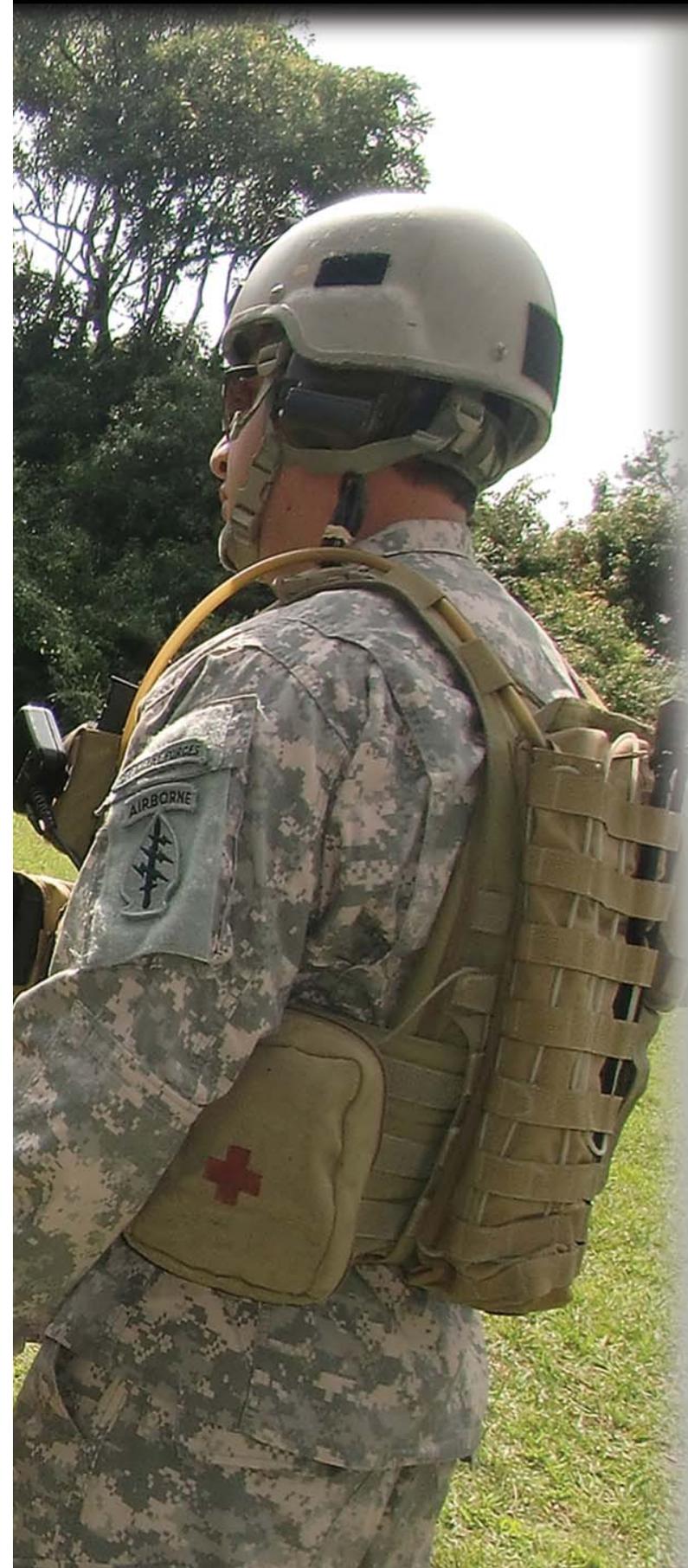


SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - SOUTH



Special Operations Forces help Central American nations combat illicit trafficking

By Staff Sgt. Joshua Johnson
7th SFG (A) Public Affairs



As one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere with a landscape offering seclusion to illicit traffickers, Honduras has a considerable amount of criminal activity across its borders en route from South America to the U.S.

Countries throughout Central America deal with the common threat of illicit trafficking and are taking efforts to resolve the problem.

The Honduran military understands the difficulties facing their nation as they train with a U.S Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha, a group of the Army's most elite warriors, near a military base in the coastal town of Trujillo, Honduras.

For members of the ODA, a team composed of Soldiers assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), assisting and advising their Honduran partners assigned to the nation's Special Forces battalion is important in order to build their military capacity against illicit activities. The battalion's mission is to help the Honduran government handle the nation's illicit trafficking concerns.

The Fort Bragg, N.C.-based Soldiers are assisting the Hondurans establish their own Special Forces school and ODAs. This school will help turn Honduran Commandos, which is their version of U.S. Army Rangers, into Honduran Green Berets as they transition from a conventional infantry battalion to a special forces battalion.

"One of the most important things about interdicting illicit activities is reaction time," said a weapons sergeant assigned to the ODA. "Before they got here, we were under the impression that the officers took care of everything. However, with our course, we try to teach them very similarly to the way U.S. forces do it."

The U.S. Green Berets are taking the Honduran Commandos through a six-week course where they train them in jobs typically found in Special Forces ODAs. To achieve this, the U.S. trainers are splitting up the Honduran soldiers into teams consisting of officers, intelligence sergeants, operations sergeants, and other specialized jobs, such as weapons, engineering and medical personnel.

A 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) member observes a group of Guatemalan Special Operations soldiers conduct marksmanship drills during a training exercise in Poptun, Guatemala. The training is key in helping the Guatemalan forces increase their capacity to combat illicit trafficking in the region. Photo by SOCSOUTH Public Affairs.



SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – SOUTH

During each specific course, an ODA team member instructs a group of six Honduran soldiers on a number of military skills particular to each job required on a SOF team. The goal of the U.S. Green Berets is to have at least three operational ODAs ready by the completion of the six-week training.

Although still in training, the Honduran soldiers are already being called into action, as they often respond to narcotics traffickers.

“This area is one of the hottest areas in the country,” said the commander of the Honduran Special Forces battalion. “We have a lot of problems with illicit organizations trying to destabilize the government.”

Training and building the Honduran Special Forces Battalion and helping it establish a formal special forces school is an example of how Special Operations Command South assists partner nations in Central America combat illicit trafficking.

As the subordinate component for U.S. Special Operations under U.S. Southern Command, SOCSOUTH, based at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla., works in an



A Navy Special Warfare Combatant-Craft crewman explains how to construct a planned intended movement, or PIM, chart to members of the Fuerza Especial Naval, the Guatemalan Naval Special Forces, on Base Naval Del Pacifico in San Jose, Guatemala. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jacob L. Dillon.

area that includes 31 nations, 25 languages and 10 major religions among its 404 million people. The area includes nations from the Caribbean, Central and South America.

While supporting SOUTHCOM’s theater security cooperation activities, SOCSOUTH enables partner nations to better protect their borders by increasing their capacity to confront regional threats.

“Helping our partners in Central America build their capacity to confront illicit trafficking is key to addressing the security concerns of the region,” said the SOF commander on the ground.

With nations such as Honduras, Guatemala and Belize centrally located between North and South America, illicit traffickers are

employing these places as transit points. Whether traveling in vehicles, boats or by aircraft, these areas are being used to transport everything, including drugs, weapons, people and money to the U.S.

Throughout Central America, Special Operations Forces are working with partner nation defense forces in building ground and maritime capabilities to combat these illicit traffickers.

“We work at the request of the partner nation’s government. They request our help to develop a capability in order to secure their country and its internal defense,” said the SOF commander. “When building an interdiction capability in a country, I go into it looking at two things: who are the key players and what do they need to be even more successful.”

“While working with a partner nation, we are not trying to build up their whole military; we are just training with a specific unit,” he added.

These training exercises have been effective and in recent months, several U.S-trained units have successfully intercepted illicit traffickers.

The Belize Special Assignment Group, usually the first responding unit when it comes to combating illicit activities, recently intercepted more than 2,000 kilos of cocaine and arrested a number of alleged corrupt police officers. The cocaine is said to be worth more than \$40 million.

Units like the BSAG have been training with U.S.

“Helping our partners in Central America build their capacity to confront illicit trafficking is key to addressing the security concerns of the region.”

— SOF commander on the ground

Special Forces during the past several months, and success stories like this one demonstrate the effectiveness of this partnership.

Similar drug busts have also recently occurred in Guatemala. A team of U.S. Navy SEALs and Navy Special Warfare Combatant-Craft crewmen have been working with the Guatemalan Fuerzas Especiales Navales, Guatemala's naval special forces, in building their maritime capabilities.

"[Guatemala Forces] have interdicted \$84 million worth of drugs in the last couple of months," said the SOF commander. "They captured a submarine carrying 4,000 kilos [of drugs] and destroyed it before it ever made it to the United States. They have gone and interdicted a narco-boat as far as 100 miles out into the open ocean, which is almost impossible. That is really an admirable feat."

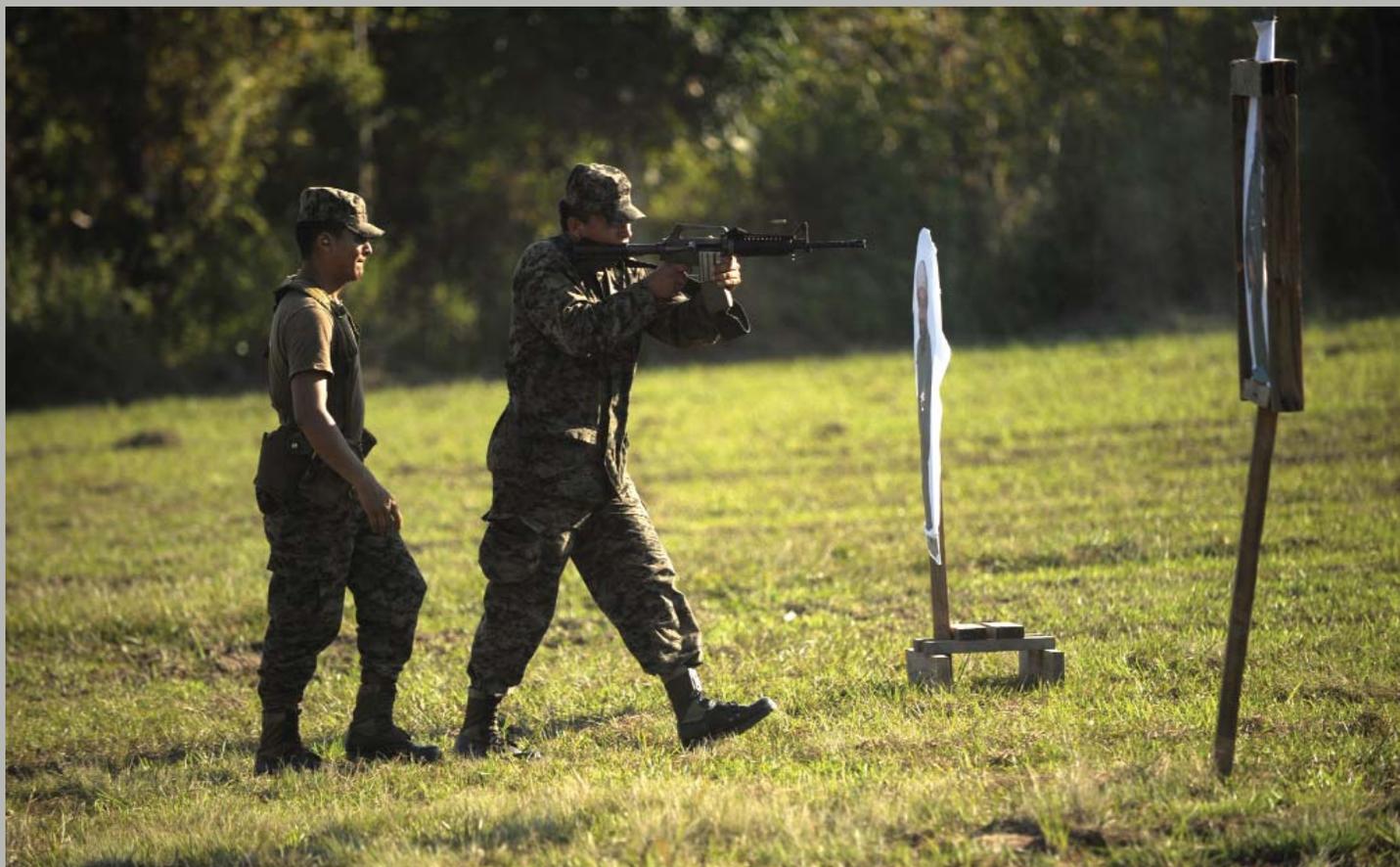
These are just a few examples of successes happening

throughout Central America, said the SOF commander. But training these units to combat illicit activity with their own internal resources is not the end state when it comes to working with partner nation forces.

"[U.S. Forces] are part of a whole-of-government approach that includes various U.S. agencies working together to enhance our partners ability to fight off internal and regional threats," the SOF commander said.

The SOF commander said helping partner nations take care of these problems on their own by using their own resources to stop illicit traffickers in their tracks before they ever reach the U.S., is important to both regional and U.S. national security.

"Ultimately, the goal is for the entire region to work together to deter illicit trafficking, which will keep the region and the U.S safe," he said.



Honduran Commandos engage multiple targets at a training site near Trujillo, Honduras. The Honduran Special Forces Battalion is working with a team of U.S. Green Berets assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne). The U.S. Soldiers are assisting the Honduran unit as it transitions from an infantry battalion to a Special Forces battalion. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Joshua Johnson.



Female Treatment Team provides health education in Khakrez

By CJSOTF-A Public Affairs

Afghan women completed their first series of a three-part block of instruction at the District Health Clinic in Khakrez district, Kandahar province with a test Jan. 3.

Air Force Capt. Jennifer Buckingham, physician's assistant and instructor, her assistant, Air Force Senior Airman Stephane Tripp, medical technician, and a coalition forces female interpreter make up a Female Treatment Team which, in support of Afghanistan's

Ministry of Public Health, works to educate females on health care in a Kandahar village.

The team, one of the first in the country, is working with Afghanistan's government through the MoPH to create a sustainable infrastructure for women to provide healthcare for other women in the district.

The team works out of a room in the health clinic, which is run by a male Afghan doctor who works for the MoPH.

Directly adjacent to the clinic is the unfinished foundation of a new women's health clinic.

"This will be the check-in area," said Buckingham, who wore a traditional afghan gown and head covering, gesturing to an area with a low counter. "And down this hall, these could be used as birthing or exam rooms."

The building's foundation is about twice the size of the existing clinic next door, made sturdily out of bricks.

"Our primary goal with use of the Female Treatment Team is to build Afghan health capacity at the village level to improve long-term women's health care," said Maj. (Dr.) Gary Means, surgeon, Special Operations Task Force-South. "The primary mechanism for this is education. The Female Treatment Team is performing direct health education for women and promoting, supporting the [Afghan government's] Ministry of Public

Health Community Health Worker curriculum. When they leave this district, they will leave behind women with health education."

Currently, Buckingham's team is training two separate classes of CHWs, conducting health care education classes three times a week. This is a conservative district, and the women have obtained permission from their husbands to attend the training. They must leave their household work until later in the day when they return.

Most bring their children with them to class.

"I've never felt more passionate about a job before in my life," Buckingham said. She said she hopes another team will replace her team here when her deployment is over, or an Afghan woman can take charge of women's health care and education. Her top priority, she

said, is to get an Afghan mid-wife in the area.

Finding candidates to be educated as Community Health Workers can be challenging.

Most of the area's populace is illiterate, and almost all women have several children and have to run a household. They also need permission from their husbands.

Each female adult patient seen in the clinic is asked if she would like to participate in medical education classes offered each day after the clinic closes. Course offerings for midwife programs are also offered by the Female Treatment Team.

"When I came to Afghanistan, I had no idea I'd be working out here in a village training Afghan women in healthcare," Buckingham said. "It's been an incredible experience."

She tells the story of being called upon to deliver a baby the first week the team arrived in the village. The district governor, who was very supportive of their presence, introduced Buckingham and her team to people

"When I came to Afghanistan, I had no idea I'd be working out here in a village training Afghan women in healthcare It's been an incredible experience."

— Capt. Jennifer Buckingham

in neighboring villages.

“Villagers came to the camp gate one night asking for ‘Doctor Jen’ to deliver the baby,” Buckingham said. “I’d only delivered a baby in training in a modern hospital, surrounded by many professional staff members telling me what to do. Here, I didn’t have an interpreter, and I only had some basic medical supplies and instruments in a very rustic setting with little light and my medical technician.”

“I asked for a head lamp, got set-up and with the help of Tripp and the mother, they birthed a healthy baby,” Buckingham said.

Two babies have been successfully delivered in this same clinic by Buckingham and the team.

One of every ten women die in childbirth, which most commonly takes place in the home, far from a medical facility if one exists in the area. Reducing these statistics

is the goal of the Ministry of Public Health, while the Coalition FTT aim to assist with this mission through education and training.

“One of the most rewarding experiences for me was the day I began teaching, and seven women showed up to attend the instruction,” Buckingham said. “I had been so nervous that no one would show up. When they walked through the door that day, I was so relieved and happy.”

Since then, each day at the clinic brings something new. Her Afghan students have now taken on training the newer classes of women, which Buckingham said she finds immensely rewarding.

“This is how it is supposed to work,” Buckingham said, “Afghan women training one another and passing on their knowledge.”

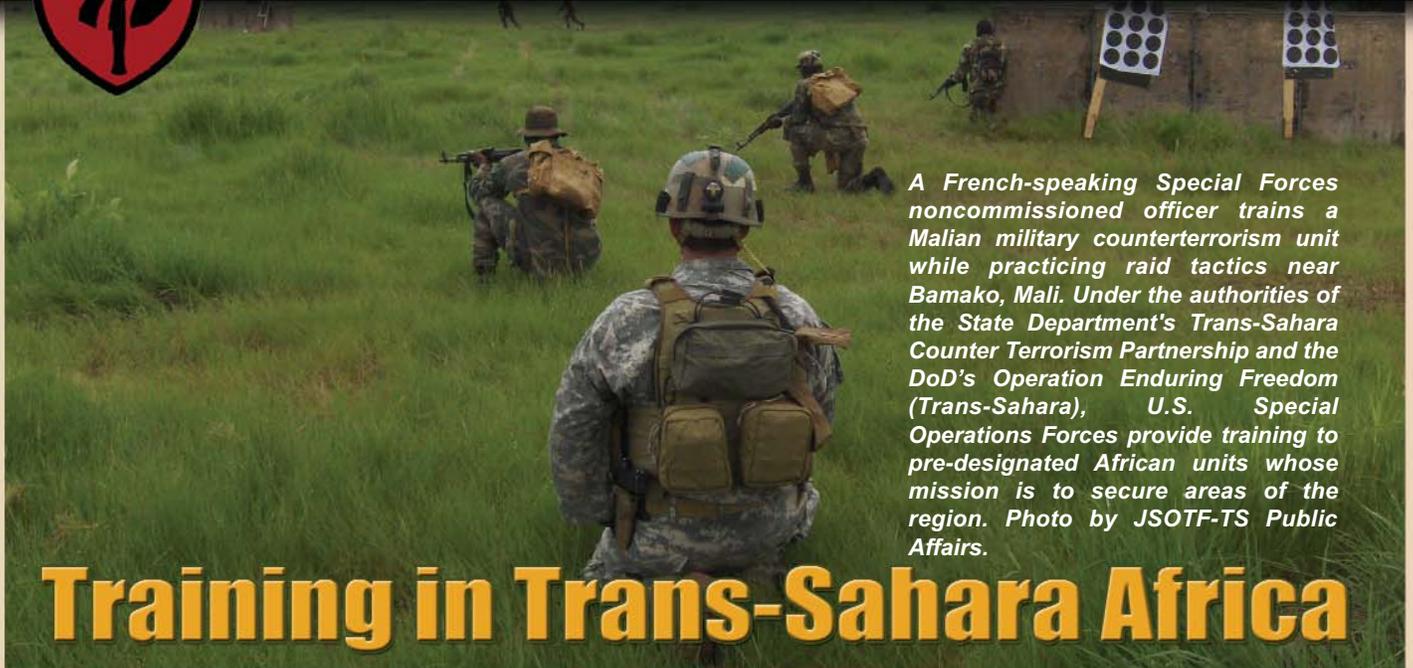
Editor’s note: See related story about the development of female Cultural Support Teams on page 23.



Air Force Capt. Jennifer Buckingham, physician’s assistant and instructor, and her assistant, Air Force Senior Airman Stephane Tripp, medical technician, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, treat an Afghan woman in Khakrez district, Kandahar province. Buckingham is part of a Female Treatment Team who, in support of the Ministry of Public Health, is working to educate females on health care in a Kandahar village. Photo 1st Lt. Julianne Barcia.



SOF AROUND THE WORLD - MALI SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA



A French-speaking Special Forces noncommissioned officer trains a Malian military counterterrorism unit while practicing raid tactics near Bamako, Mali. Under the authorities of the State Department's Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership and the DoD's Operation Enduring Freedom (Trans-Sahara), U.S. Special Operations Forces provide training to pre-designated African units whose mission is to secure areas of the region. Photo by JSOTF-TS Public Affairs.

Training in Trans-Sahara Africa

*By Max R. Blumenfeld
JSOTF-TS Public Affairs*

The Malian patrol finally reached its destination, a small village north of Gao, Mali, following a long drive through the northern territories of vast desert in this Trans-Saharan nation nearly twice the size of Texas.

The platoon leader had been with this specially trained counter-terrorism unit, the Echelon Tactique Interarmé, for some time and knew his men as well as the area.

“Establish defensive positions,” he radioed in Bambara, the predominant African language in the region, signaling the patrol to establish a perimeter while he waited for the Americans following the patrol to arrive and accompany him into the village.

“Les vehicules ont bien fait (The vehicles did well),” one of the American officers, a 91st Civil Affairs Battalion captain commented in French to the Malian leader as the other American officer, the Special Operations Forces Liaison Element, from the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), looked on.

The Malian smiled and nodded. He was grateful for the all-terrain pickup trucks, which had been provided by the U.S. Government the previous year to his unit to replace old vehicles which would have never been able to make this journey.

Together, the platoon leader and the four Americans greeted the village leader, an elderly Toureg who welcomed

these familiar faces. This was not their first time at the village, and the elderly man looked forward to what they might be able to do for his deprived village.

Later that evening, the SOFLE sent his situational report to the Theater Special Operations Command's task force and provided information regarding the vulnerable community, as well as recommendations for another medical civic action program, to be conducted near the village.

This mission is an example of just one of many similar targeted missions the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Trans Sahara, or JSOTF-TS, accomplishes every year in Africa. Initiated in late 2006 by a handful of Special Operations officers, the JSOTF-TS was created as a unique organization capable of orchestrating counter-terrorism objectives under the auspices of the U.S. State Department initiated and led Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership, or TSCTP, with its integrated three-dimensional strategy of diplomacy, development and defense.

“The overarching role of the JSOTF-TS is to orchestrate all Department of Defense efforts and activities toward accomplishing the TSCTP objectives, which included increasing bilateral and regional capacity in the region to defeat terrorist and extremist organizations,” said Army Lt. Col. Chris Call, former JSOTF-TS Operations Officer during its inception and earlier development.

Col. Call explained the unit's initial focus was on four nations which had requested this assistance from the State

Dept., but soon the TSCTP and the Department of Defense's Operation Enduring Freedom (Trans-Sahara) program, would encompass 10 northern and western African countries to form a Joint Operations Area slightly larger than the Continental United States.

JSOTF-TS was transferred to the newly-formed U.S. Africa Command in October 2008, and then it was subsequently named a subordinate unit of Special Operations Command Africa in May 2009. Throughout this transition, the relatively small staff of about 40 uniformed personnel and civilians continued planning, coordinating and executing the full-spectrum of OEF-TS programs in the Trans-Saharan region.

This included managing more than 30 U.S. SOF-conducted military training engagements annually designed to enhance the counter-terrorism skills of pre-designated units and nearly 30 medical and approximately 15 veterinary civic action programs synchronized by its Civil Military Support Element in conjunction with local and national health authorities and non-governmental organizations.

The JSOTF-TS was also planning, managing and disbursing organizational equipment and vehicles to equip indigenous units in their security functions and developing as well as overseeing the JSOTF-TS created Trans-Sahara Security Symposium, an African taught week-long academic civil-military cooperation national and regional-focused forum targeted for African military and civilian representatives.

Additionally, JSOTF-TS also assumed the monumental task of planning, coordinating and executing the multi-national SOF exercise Flintlock, which evolved as AFRICOM's premier SOF exercise on the continent.

"Flintlock is the culmination of all military training engagements conducted at the tactical level with our host nation partners, where we bring them together at the regional level under a multi-national operational headquarters," said Army Lt. Col. John Williamson, exercise planner for two Flintlock exercises.

"The Flintlock exercise series was greatly enhanced with the establishment of a Multi-National Coordination Center, or MCC. The Flintlock MCC has advanced our efforts towards a regional approach to counter-terrorism in terms of operational level coordination and communication to support tactical operations in countries such as Mali,

Mauritania, Senegal and Chad," Williamson said.

"Additionally, the increased participation of our European SOF partners such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain in tactical training and MCC activities underscores the importance of our desire for an international approach toward trans-border terrorist threats," he added.

The methodology of effort exerted by JSOTF-TS over the years, maintaining consultation and coordination lines with servicing U.S. Embassies and other existing civilian and military capabilities and actors in the area of responsibility, has made tangible progress.

Units in Mali and Chad, previously trained and advised by U.S. SOF teams in critical counterterrorism battle skills, now incorporate key leader engagements in consonance with civil military operations to secure vulnerable borders and vast under-governed spaces, and address the underlying conditions that provide terrorists and extremists with recruits, sanctuary and resources.

"The JSOTF-TS has consistently maintained a holistic and persistent approach toward capacity development in the region," said Army Col. Nestor A. Sadler, current JSOTF-TS commander. "Our 'by, with and through' focus on security assistance reflects itself not only in the continued development of African special operations units and their ability to better secure the vast regions, both nationally and with their neighbors, but also in their awareness and approach toward a common enemy.

"Tactical and operational progress for some of these countries, which are some of the poorest in the world, demands patience and the very best of our SOF attributes. The JSOTF-TS has established and continues to further reflect that relevancy across the board and all the time," Sadler said.

On the horizon is Flintlock 11 when African, North American and European SOF units and staffs will have another opportunity to enhance their capabilities to share information and further develop capacities in a multi-national environment, the cornerstone to regional security and stability.

"In our CT objectives, we have come to the point where African nations have become partners," Sadler said. "Flintlock 11 will be African planned, coordinated and executed, and we welcome the opportunity to work with our African partners in our shared desire for peace, stability and security in the Trans-Saharan region."



SOA AROUND THE WORLD - GERMANY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – EUROPE

SOCEUR marks 56 years of service

By Maj. Jim Gregory
SOCEUR Public Affairs Office

Even with multiple operations occurring around the world, whether within combat zones or international partner training situations, the service members of the U.S. Special Operations Command Europe found time to pause momentarily Jan. 19 to celebrate their history. The command headquarters held a small observance in the Patch Chapel on the eve of its anniversary to celebrate 56 years of existence.

Maj. Gen. Michael Repass, SOCEUR commander, praised the men and women of the command for their extraordinary efforts in support of the Special Operations personnel deployed globally, reminding them that they are living and creating SOCEUR history every day.

“Your personal history and that of SOCEUR are running concurrently,” Repass said. “Twenty years from now, you will look back and remember where you were, and know that you have been part of something special that is now part of history.”

SOCEUR’s story began when U.S. European Command’s commander-in-chief established Support Operations Command Europe in Paris Jan. 22, 1955 to provide peacetime planning and operational control of Special Operations Forces conducting unconventional warfare in the European Command area of responsibility. Later that year, European Command re-designated the command as Support Operations Task Force Europe. In 1967, based on France’s withdrawal from NATO, SOTFE relocated from Paris to Panzer Kaserne, Germany, to better facilitate interaction with European Command. One year later, the SOTFE relocated five miles down the road to its current location on Patch Barracks. On May 30, 1986, the Joint Chiefs of Staff confirmed it as a subordinate unified command of EUCOM, and the commander assumed his current dual-hatted role as both SOCEUR commander and EUCOM Special Operations director.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the



Maj. Gen. Michael Repass and Sgt. Maj. Gregg Hayes cut into the SOCEUR Establishment Day cake with a V-42 Stiletto, first used by the First Special Service Force. Photo by Richard Herman.

disestablishment of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, the command shifted its focus from Soviet containment to hot spots around Europe, Africa and the Middle East. SOCEUR and its components have since planned and executed special operations during operations Desert Storm, Provide Comfort and Provide Comfort II. In addition, the command has executed many operations not as publicly well known, such as Silver Anvil in Sierra Leone and Atlas Response in Mozambique. It has conducted non-combatant evacuation operations in locations such as Lebanon, Sierra Leone, Chad and Liberia as well. In the Balkans, SOCEUR forces participated in multiple operations including Joint Endeavor, Joint Guard and Allied Force. Currently, SOCEUR forces contribute to Operation New Dawn, Operation Enduring Freedom and multiple ISAF SOF Task Forces in Afghanistan.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Repass took part in a cake-cutting with the senior officer and noncommissioned officer from each of the four services that comprise the headquarters staff. Each used cutting implements that best commemorated the spirit of the service they represent. Repass and Sgt. Maj. Gregg Hayes cut with the First Special Service Force’s V-42 Stiletto to commemorate all special operations forefathers, and Col. Buck Dellinger, the SOCEUR J-5, used a Norwegian Commando knife to represent close ties with international partners. In addition, service leaders used an Army Military Assistance Command Vietnam/Studies and Observations Group, or MACV/SOG, Combat knife, Naval Cutlass, Marine Mamaluke Sword and a sharpened Air Force aircraft turbo prop to represent the four services.

As he concluded his remarks, to reinforce his assertion that the men and women of SOCEUR continue to build upon its collective history, Repass reminded everyone of their own significance within the command.

“You are taking part in history,” he said, “and are directly involved in something special.”

1/10 SFG (A) Soldiers honored for valor

*By Maj. Jim Gregory
SOCEUR Public Affairs Office*

Four members of the 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), received awards during a ceremony at the Panzer Community Club, Stuttgart, Germany, Jan. 19, for their valorous actions during their last deployment to Afghanistan in support of International Security Assistance Forces Special Operations Forces and Task Force -10.

“We have the opportunity to recognize some of the valor and sacrifices these men have rendered in defense of their nation, and as members of the Special Forces Regiment,” said Maj. Gen. Michael S. Repass, commander, Special Operations Command Europe. “All the better that their families, friends, team mates and associates are present to hear what they’ve done, since they most likely have never said much about it themselves.”

During the ceremony, one Bronze Star Medal for valor, two Army Commendation Medals for valor and one Purple Heart were awarded. Although all valor medals were presented for separate actions, the Special Forces Soldiers to whom they were awarded came from the same detachment.

In an interview, Staff Sgt. Robert Murray, who received the Army Commendation Medal for valor, humbly said the awards were a tribute to the team and its solid leadership.

“I did what anyone would do in that situation,” he said. “I was just at the front when the shooting started.”

But as the narrator read Murray’s citation, it became clear that he was responsible for much more; he successfully lead a combined Afghan and Romanian contingent to a blocking position that eliminated enemy forces attempting to flank his team members during the battle, thus saving many lives.

For the Bronze Star for valor recipient, Master Sgt. Joe Dickinson, the detachment’s senior NCO and operations sergeant, the ceremony offered an opportunity for his “all-star” team to be recognized.

“Though the awards are given to individuals, we view the recognition as larger than ourselves,” he said. “These are about the success of the team successfully accomplishing a difficult mission in one of the most

volatile areas of Afghanistan. They represent team cohesiveness and what can be achieved when everything clicks.”

Dickinson, who will receive a Silver Star during a ceremony scheduled later in the year for a separate action, was credited in his citation with directly exposing himself to enemy fire on multiple occasions as he led his international force on an attack against insurgents in the Kapisa province. At one point during the battle, Dickinson, surrounded by enemy forces, organized a patrol and successfully led his element to safety in coordination with other friendly supporting forces.

During the closing remarks, Repass gave credit to the men honored during the ceremony as he quoted General George Patton.

“Brave, but undisciplined men have no chance against the discipline and valor of other men,” he said. “These men we recognize today no longer wonder how they will perform in the face of the enemy. You can now leave that pondering for the new and untested. You have answered the eternal Soldier’s question.”

Currently, members of 1st Battalion, 10th SFG (A) are deployed to Afghanistan in support of ISAF SOF and TF-10.



Maj. Gen. Michael Repass pins the Bronze Star Medal for valor on the chest of Master Sgt. Joe Dickinson during a valor ceremony Jan. 19 at the Panzer Community Center. Photo by Angeline Hoffmann.



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

USASOC awards Medics of the Year at SOF Medic Conference

*Story and photos by Senior Airman Anna-Marie Wyant
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

Two U.S. Army Special Operations Command medics were recognized as the top Soldiers in their career fields at the Army Special Operations Forces Medic Conference, Dec. 12, and the Special Operations Medical Association conference, Dec. 14, at the Marriot Waterside Hotel, Tampa, Fla.

Sgt. 1st Class James C. Birchfield from the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) was officially named the Special Forces Medical Sergeant of the Year during a ceremony at the close of the ARSOF Medic Conference. Sgt. Jonathan Peney from the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment was selected as the Special Operations Combat Medic of the Year. Peney was killed in action June 1 while deployed to Iraq. His wife Kristin and mother Sue accepted the award on his behalf at the SOMA conference mess night.

Birchfield, whose wife and daughter were present for his award presentation, was nominated for the award because of his outstanding service while deployed to Iraq, said Maj. David Bowling, 5th SFG (A) company commander. Bowling said Birchfield, an experienced medic, was personally responsible for training other medical personnel on his deployment. He said by sharing medical knowledge with others, Birchfield successfully trained several Soldiers who went on to save lives.

Col. Peter Benson, USASOC command surgeon, presented the award to Birchfield and said he knew the award would be received with humility, maybe even too much.

"Our medics are universally humble to a fault," Benson said.

Upon receiving his award, Birchfield certainly proved Benson's assessment of USASOC medics.

"It's an honor to represent my unit," said Birchfield, "but far more medics in special ops deserve [the award] more than me. I just did my job every day."



Sue Peney thanks the crowd at the Special Operations Medical Association conference mess night Dec. 14, for remembering her son, Sgt. Jonathan Peney, who was killed in Afghanistan June 1. Sgt. Peney was named the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Combat Medic of the Year and was awarded posthumously at the end of mess night.



Col. Peter Benson, USASOC command surgeon, pins a Meritorious Service Medal on Sgt. 1st Class James Birchfield at the close of the Army Special Operations Forces Medical Conference Dec. 12 in Tampa, Fla. Birchfield was named the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Medical Sergeant of the Year for outstanding service while deployed to Iraq.

Bowling disagreed with Birchfield.

“His supervised treatment saved lives both directly and indirectly,” Bowling said. “He won’t say that he did anything special, but he really did.”

Peney’s performance was equally impressive. He graduated from Ranger school just nine days before deploying to Afghanistan, and although he was not tasked to go, he voluntarily deployed with his unit, showing his loyalty to his team and country.

Capt. Andrew Fisher, a physician assistant who deployed with Peney, described Peney as a great medic and Soldier who constantly did his best and continued to improve.

“He was always a step above,” Fisher said. “He was always trying to do more.”

Fisher said Peney showed true bravery in his last mission. While their unit was in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, they were ambushed, and a team member was shot. Fisher said Peney was the first to rush through enemy fire in an attempt to save the Ranger’s life. While administering aid to the wounded Ranger, Peney was also shot. Fisher, who initially attended to Peney’s wound, nominated Peney for the award due to his selfless

heroism on this occasion and many others. He said he is glad Peney was named Special Operations Combat Medic of the Year, a title he truly deserves.

“It’s a great feeling knowing [USASOC] is able to

recognize him, knowing what he did for his unit and his fellow Soldiers,” Fisher said. “It’s nice that all the medics from his company were present [for the award ceremony].”

Selecting these awardees was no easy process, said Master Sgt. Rick Hines, U.S. Army Special Forces Command (Airborne), who was a member of the board that reviewed the award nominations and selected the winners.

“It was very competitive, but we ended up with a clear consensus,” Hines said. “[Birchfield and Peney] definitely stood out as going above and beyond.”

Hines said the awards are important because they highlight the outstanding actions of dedicated individuals who raise the bar for other Soldiers.

“The award recognizes our medics for doing extraordinary things,” he said. “It holds up an example for all of us; this is what we should strive for in our field.”

“He was always a step above He was always trying to do more.”

— Capt. Andrew Fisher describing Sgt. Jonathan Peney

AIRBORNE

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



USASOC team wins annual sniper competition

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Thaddius Dawkins
49th Public Affairs Detachment

As the sunshine glimmered off the frozen ground at the training grounds at Fort Bragg, N.C., Dec. 6, most Soldiers gathered for their unit's regular physical training. At the Miller Training Complex, however, sniper teams from all over the United States were preparing to compete in a grueling five-day competition in hopes of being named the 2010 U.S. Army Special Operations Command top sniper team.

"The competition is in its second year," said Master Sgt. Kevin Owens, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Special Forces Sniper Course.

Owens said his goal while organizing this year's competition was to get snipers from all over the U.S. That goal came to light after 19 different sniper teams made reservations for this year. The teams included members from the Army and Marines, as well as the Special Weapons and Tactics, the Department of Energy and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives from Raleigh, N.C. and Pasadena, Calif.

The competition ran smoothly throughout the five days without any hang-ups, Owens said, but he said planning a seemingly flawless sniper competition has its challenges.

"There are several big challenges when organizing an event like this," Owens said. "You have to make sure all of your briefings are perfect without any gray areas in there for competitors to exploit."

Prior to the competition, another organizational challenge was ensuring all of the events were well-planned and thought out.

"Vetting the competition is definitely the biggest challenge," he said. "We had to make sure and shoot the events over and over again."

"You have to rehearse every event multiple times, so we got snipers from the 82nd Airborne Division down here to test it out," Owens explained. "We had them run through every event a couple times to make sure the events were solid."

Owens said the instructors shot as well, helping gauge the length of time each event would take. He said the most difficult of all the challenges was ensuring the competition was the exact same for every competitor.

"If you have a moving target in one portion of the event, it has to be the exact same mover every single time," he said. "On top of that, you have to make sure you have redundant systems in case that mover breaks down and you need a backup."



Two Special Forces snipers carry a casualty during a day stress event at the 2010 USASOC Sniper Competition at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Moreover, the stress events consisted of a night and day event that utilized everything a sniper would possibly have to do while on a combat mission.

"The night and day stress events were extremely important to us as snipers," said Staff Sgt. Derek Balboa, an instructor at the U.S. Army Sniper School. "They were very close to what we are going to see on a combat mission."

While Owens had challenges organizing the competition, competitors had an equally challenging time competing in it.

"Leading into the competition, I knew this course would be challenging," said Sgt. 1st Class Charles Zalewski, a member of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) sniper team. "All the events in the competition encompassed multiple challenging tasks that we have to be expected to do as snipers."

Owens said the course was meant to be extremely challenging so all of the snipers could learn from it, and the competitors did.

"To me, the best thing about this competition is it shows the weak points in your training," Zalewski said. "It identifies what you need to train on to better the force."

On the final day, everyone gathered at the Holiday Inn Bordeaux in Fayetteville, N.C. for the official announcement of the first place winners – a sniper team from USASOC headquarters.



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Family, friends witness headstone unveiling for Medal of Honor recipient

Story and photos by USASOC Public Affairs

Approximately 200 people gathered Jan. 24 at the grave of Army Staff Sgt. Robert J. Miller at the All Faiths Memorial Cemetery in Casselberry, Fla., to witness the unveiling of his Medal of Honor marker in a ceremony hosted by U.S. Army Special Operations Command and the Miller family.

Attendees consisted of members from U.S. Special Operations Command, local and regional government officials including Florida Gov. Rick Scott, junior ROTC cadets, family, friends and military veterans. Lt. Gen. John F. Mulholland Jr., commander, USASOC, and Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander, USSOCOM, spoke at the event.

“Robby was tough, skilled, smart and proven in many battles,” Olson said. “He knew what he was doing and why it mattered. Those who spent time with him understood that they were in the presence of a gifted and giving man to whom they could trust their very lives.”

In 2003, Miller enlisted in the Army as an 18 X-ray, Special Forces candidate. He graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course Sept. 26, 2004, and was assigned to Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne).

Miller was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor Oct. 6, 2010, for heroism and valor in combat while serving in Afghanistan Jan. 25, 2008. The event marked the three year anniversary of his death.

“We thank all those present today, his family and friends, and especially his teammates and the Special Forces command; he was so proud to be in your ranks,” said Maureen Miller, Sergeant Miller’s mother. “This marker that we place on his tomb today is another reminder of our son’s heroism, but it is also a testament of solidarity with other parents who have dealt with loss. It is an honor to share this moment with all of you who knew and loved Rob so dearly.”

Miller was recognized for his valorous actions in the Gowardesh Valley, Afghanistan, while serving as Special Forces weapons sergeant for his team. When his patrol came

under attack from insurgents, he deliberately moved forward, exposing his position repeatedly, drawing fire from more than 100 enemy fighters, and ultimately saving the lives of his fellow Green Berets and 15 local Afghanistan National Army soldiers.

Members of Sergeant Miller’s former Operational Detachment-Alpha 3312 also attended the ceremony to pay their respects to the family and remember their fallen brother who risked his life for them.

“It’s men like Robby who make the U.S. military special,” said Maj. Robert Cusick, former team leader for ODA 3312. “I’m able to talk to you guys because of Robby Miller. That’s what makes this country so great, are men like Robby who are willing to die for their friends.”

Miller was the seventh service member and first Special Forces Soldier to receive the Medal of Honor during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.



Lt. Gen. John F. Mulholland, Jr., commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command (Airborne), assists Maureen and Philip Miller with the unveiling of a special Medal of Honor headstone at the tomb of their son, Staff Sgt. Robert Miller. Sergeant Miller was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor Oct. 6 for heroism and valor in combat while serving in Afghanistan three years ago.

The right women for the right job:

Cultural Support Team training teaches female Soldiers to support Special Operations missions

By USASOC Public Affairs

“This is a landmark moment,” said Lt. Gen. John F. Mulholland Jr., commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, during the first Cultural Support Team Training Course graduation ceremony Dec. 10 in the John F. Kennedy Auditorium, Fort Bragg, N.C.

The CST training course educates female officers, warrant officers and enlisted Soldiers in the basic capabilities required to access and interact with female and adolescent populations in foreign areas. These teams will accompany Special Operations teams and units, including those which are all-male, and communicate and interact with individuals who may not be able to do so with male Soldiers for cultural reasons, such as female and adolescent civilians.

Special Operations Soldiers, both male and female, are taught to respect foreign populations’ cultures and beliefs; cultural support teams provide another mechanism with which Civil Affairs, Special Forces and Military Information Support Operations units may interact appropriately and respectfully with these populations.

This training focuses on the Soldiers’ individual mental and emotional endurance, as well as civil information management, teamwork and use of interpreters. Students are also educated on specific regions and cultures where they may operate.

“This is a significant step that is long overdue,” Mulholland said. While ad-hoc groups similar to CSTs have been formed in the past for particular situations, this course has set a new standard of excellence that will be examined and copied over and over, he said.

“It is my hope that CSTs become an enduring competency within the U.S. Army Special Operations Command,” Mulholland said.

The process of becoming an enduring competency starts at the Special Warfare Center and School, which

has been defining, designing and conducting the training. Members of CSTs will accompany Army Special Operations units on missions and operate alongside them. Their training prepares them to personally interview and communicate with females and adolescents in culturally sensitive ways.

“The course offers the skills necessary to better understand ourselves and others to maintain control in high-stress situations,” said Sgt. Anitra D. Carpenter-Rivas, a graduate of the CST training.

“Women have been performing this job in the field because it is necessary to the mission,” said Master Sgt. Lita J. Fraley, another CST training graduate. The CST course gives female Soldiers the training they need to bring new capabilities to Special Operations teams.

Fraley understands that vital role of female contact, having been deployed in Iraq as an NCO in a civil affairs unit.

“Women have a larger understanding of the needs in their community. When the Army wants to understand the needs of an area, these women [in the communities] become a great source of information,” Fraley said.

Soldiers on CSTs will be able to interview females in foreign areas where it would be culturally inappropriate for them to interact directly with male Soldiers. With CSTs, special-operations teams gain an improved method of communicating with foreign communities while respecting their culture.

“If you can’t learn to understand how and why people behave, those people become a road block rather than an asset,” said Brenda Herrick, a CST course developer at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. “The CST course is designed to teach cultural awareness and critical-thinking capabilities to gain females’ perspectives in these communities.”

For more information on the CST program call 910-396-0545 (DSN 236)/910-432-6283 (DSN 239) or email cst@soc.mil.

“It is my hope that CSTs become an enduring competency within the U.S. Army Special Operations Command,”

*— Lt. Gen. John F. Mulholland
USASOC commander*

AIRBORNE

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Gold Star mother offers inspiration, hope

*By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service*

Just seven months after her 23-year-old son was killed in a helicopter crash in Iraq, and with three months left before her husband returns from his deployment to Afghanistan, Sheila Patton isn't facing the holidays feeling sorry for herself.

Instead, she has found a calling: helping to bring inspiration and hope to families of fallen Soldiers at this post that's suffered a heavy toll in combat losses since the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

Patton, the wife of Army Command Sgt. Major Gregory Patton, command sergeant major for the 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Fort Campbell, Ky., said she feels the pain of her son's death as if it had happened yesterday.

Army Staff Sgt. James R. "Jimmy" Patton, died April 18 during a combat mission in Tikrit, Iraq. The 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment soldier, based at Fort Benning, Ga., was serving his seventh overseas deployment since 9/11 that had included two previous tours to Iraq and four deployments to Afghanistan.

His mother learned of his death when a casualty assistance officer drove up to her in-laws' home in Indiana while she was visiting to celebrate her father's birthday.

Patton had every reason to feel alone at the time. Her children were at home near Fort Campbell and her daughter-in-law was with family in her native Ecuador,



Sheila Patton, here with her son, Army Staff Sgt. James R. "Jimmy" Patton, who was killed April 18, in a helicopter crash in Iraq, said she has come to peace with his loss as she reaches out to comfort other Gold Star families. Courtesy photo.

still unaware of Jimmy's death. Her husband, who deployed to Afghanistan just two months earlier, had flown to Iraq to accompany his son's body to Dover Air Force Base, Del.

Yet from the moment the notification officials

delivered the heart-wrenching news, Patton said, she felt embraced by the Fort Campbell community. It continued as the family made plans to lay Jimmy to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, and after the senior Patton left just a week after the funeral to rejoin his fellow “Rakkasan Battalion” soldiers in Afghanistan’s Khost province.

“The support I have been given through the Fort Campbell community has been absolutely amazing,” she said. “They have been phenomenal in rallying to support my family. It’s been an absolutely heart-warming experience.”

Patton said she cries for her son every day and still feels the devastation of his loss. But she has also developed a sense of peace about his death that’s helped her cope and begin healing.

“I am a proud momma of a soldier who died fighting for his country and doing what he loved doing,” she said. “If he had to die before us that is the only way we could ever have accepted his death: to smile and be proud and honored that God thought enough of my son to make him a hero.”

Patton said she comforts herself “knowing God took my son for a bigger mission, because his mission on Earth was complete.”

Meanwhile, Patton has found a new mission as well: reaching out to other families struggling with their own losses as senior advisor to Fort Campbell’s Survivor Outreach Services program. The program is part of the Army’s effort to help and stay connected with families of the fallen.

As a Gold Star Mother and wife of a Soldier serving in harm’s way, Patton recognizes she is in a unique position to comfort families of the fallen.

“I have been where they are, and I can share what they are feeling because I am going through what they are going through, almost simultaneously,” she said.

Patton shared her story as keynote speaker at a recent



“I am a proud momma of a soldier who died fighting for his country and doing what he loved doing ... If he had to die before us that is the only way we could ever have accepted his death: to smile and be proud and honored that God thought enough of my son to make him a hero.”

— *Sheila Patton*

candlelight vigil honoring Fort Campbell’s fallen. As the crowd began to disperse, one mother who was having a particularly difficult time dealing with her own son’s combat death approached Patton.

“You have given me hope,” she told Patton. “I just want you to know that.”

Patton said she is not quite sure where she gets the strength to carry out what she has come to see as a personal calling.

“I guess God and Jimmy have given me the strength to do this,” she said. “Jimmy has a bigger mission in heaven, and I think this is my mission on Earth, to be able to share his story and offer hope to other families.

“If I can give one person hope that they can look at the loss of their soldier in a different light,” she added, “then that is one person I have helped.”

Editor’s note: American Gold Star Mothers is an organization of mothers who have lost a son or daughter during military service.



Sheila Patton shares the story of her family’s loss of their son, Army Staff Sgt. James R. “Jimmy” Patton, during a candlelight vigil at Fort Campbell, Ky. Patton died April 18, in a helicopter crash in Iraq. Photo by Dana Chango.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND



Navy SEALs visit New York for the 2011 Hispanic Games

An East coast based SEAL answers questions from athletes at the 17th Annual Hispanic games who are interested in the Naval Special Warfare community. The SEAL and SWCC scout team attended the track and field event held at the Armory indoor track and field complex in New York City to educate the athletes about opportunities available to them in the NSW community.

*Story and photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Joshua Rodriguez,
Naval Special Warfare Group 2 Public Affairs*

The Naval Special Warfare East Coast SEAL and Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewman scout team attended the 17th annual Hispanic Games, Jan 7-10, at the armory indoor track and field stadium in the Bronx Borough of New York City.

More than 8,000 athletes attended the meet from high schools throughout the state of New York. The SEAL and SWCC scout team worked with members of the Navy JROTC and mentored and encouraged athletes throughout the event.

“It was larger than I anticipated and also allowed us to answer questions these kids have about our community and the Navy as a whole,” said Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Eddie Lugo.

Lugo said many youth have interest in Navy special programs such as SEALs and SWCCs, but rarely have the opportunity to talk to someone who actually works in Naval Special Warfare or someone that understands what it takes to get started in the special warfare community.

“Looking back at how I came into the NSW community, it was just by chance where somebody gave me a book about Navy SEALs, then I became interested in becoming a SEAL

operator. An event like this gives me the opportunity to come back to my hometown and expose these young men to the SEAL community,” Lugo said.

Lugo and other SEALs used a pull up challenge to mentor athletes and test their physical abilities. Lugo said SEAL challenge events are a great venue for interacting with youth and emphasizing the importance of fitness and conditioning.

“It is really useful to be in your best physical shape as a SEAL. Events like these allow us to interact with people who could be the next generation of special warfare operators,” Lugo said.

Athletes were also treated to a static display by SEAL and SWCC personnel, where they demonstrated equipment special operators use in the field. Items on display included parachutes, diving equipment, body armor and more.

“The sheer number of kids participating in this event is what made this weekend successful; we were able to give them a small peek behind the curtain and expose a diverse group of young men to the SEAL and SWCC communities,” said Senior Chief Petty Officer Gio Giovanetty, a Navy special programs coordinator. “Now there is an effort being made to introduce diverse communities to opportunities in Naval Special Warfare. I think this is good for the Navy and good for young Americans of all backgrounds as well.”

The 700-Mile journey – Retired WWII SEALs set record with swimming

*Story and photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Joshua Rodriguez
Naval Special Warfare Group 2 Public Affairs*

Imagine swimming one mile a week for the past 15 years with your best swim buddy. That is what Louis A. Cruz, 87, and Fredrick G. Robbins, 84, did Dec. 8 when they completed their 700th mile in the Naval Special Warfare Combat Swimmer Trainer at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Va.

Cruz and Robbins met in the early 90s and began to work out together at Rockwell Gym on JEB. They started out working out at the gym three times a week and eventually also added a weekly one-mile swim. They started their 700-mile quest in 1995.

Cruz joined the Navy in 1942 and served during World War II through the Vietnam War. He retired in 1973 as a Chief Boatswain's Mate. Robbins also joined the Navy in 1942 and was on a minesweeper in the Mediterranean during World War II. He became a Navy SEAL in 1950 after training with Underwater Demolition Class 5 and was stationed at JEB for most of his 20-year career.

Cruz and Robbins both said serving in the Navy gave them the motivation and self-dedication needed to complete their swimming milestone.

"Once I started I didn't want to stop," Robbins said.

Both men said the secret to their success is eating healthy foods and avoiding tobacco and alcohol products. "We motivate each other; we stay side by side and I never leave my swim buddy," Cruz said.

The Navy veterans have been swimming 100-miles every two years for the last 15 years and said they have no plans to quitting now.

The next task for Cruz and Robbins is to swim to 800-miles in their quest for the 1000-miles mark. "If we both get too 800-miles it will be an amazing feeling," said Cruz

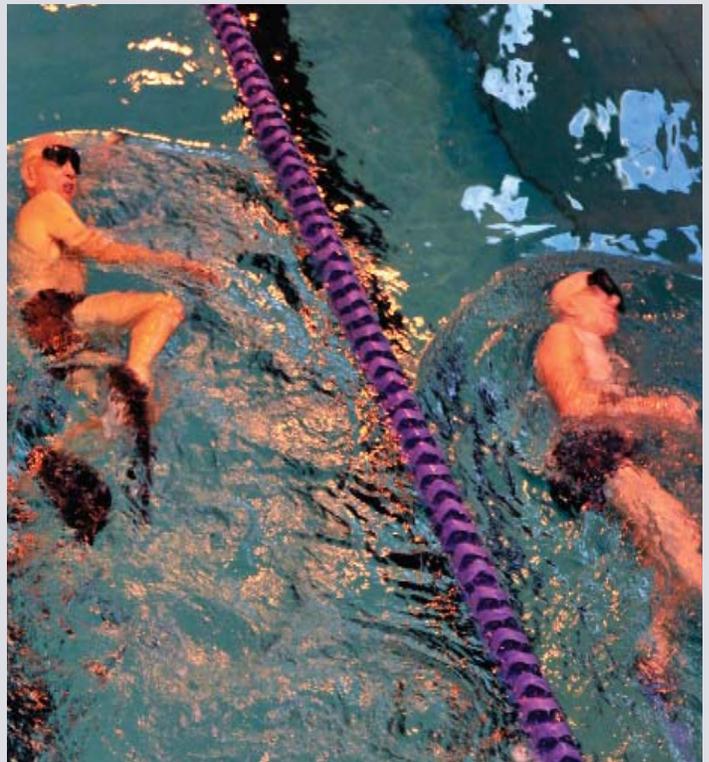
By the time they reach 1000-miles, Cruz will be 95 and Robbins will be 92 and both men said they are positive they will reach their next milestone.

"These guys are the greatest generation," said retired Master Chief (SEAL) Mark E. Courier, head of the Naval

Special Warfare East Coast Scout Team. "They lead by their commitment, drive, discipline, and motivation. They set a great example."

"The next generation is inspired by these two role models," said Capt. Tim Szymanski, commander, Naval Special Warfare Group TWO. "I would send these two guys back to Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training tomorrow, because they have the drive and motivation to make it through."

Both Cruz and Robbins said they swim for their health and because it enriches their lives, but most off all, they are doing this for the friendship. They said they have become more than just friends over their journey; they have become brothers who are proud of their Naval service and proud of the life they have led.



Louis A. Cruz, 87, and Frederick G. Robbins, 84, swim the final mile of the 700-mile journey at the combat swimmers pool, Dec. 8, Norfolk, Va. They started their 700-mile quest in 1995. The Seal/SWCC and scout team hosted a celebration in honor of their 700-mile journey.



Standing atop the bottom of the earth



The U.S. Air Force Seven Summits team reached Mount Vinson's 16,077-foot summit Dec. 9. The team has conquered five of the seven continents' highest peaks. Courtesy photo.

Commentary by Capt. Robert Marshall 8th Special Operations Squadron

Driving my ice axe into the lip of snow separating our team from the summit of Antarctica's highest peak, I trusted its tenuous hold and took the last step up. The views during the entire trip were amazing, but nothing quite tops the view, or the feeling, that greets you on the summit.

It is hard to imagine that just four days earlier, our tents were battered and broken by 30 to 40 mph winds in a spell of bad weather that lasted four days. But with a little tenacity and patience, our goal of flying the Air Force flag from atop Antarctica was realized.

Five years ago, our group of Air Force members started a historic undertaking: to be the first team of American military members to climb the famed '7 Summits', which is made up of the highest point on each continent. At the time, no military group had ever

attempted it. We dreamed of seeing the Air Force flag proudly flying from the top of each continent, and eventually, on top of the world.

The successful expedition to reach Antarctica's summit was the fifth peak tackled in the challenge, leaving just a small mountain in Australia and then the world's tallest peak, Mount Everest, remaining.

Stepping off the Russian IL-76 transport that had just delivered us to a remote runway of blue ice was like stepping onto the surface of a different planet. There were no plants, animals, insects or smells -- just the sound of bitter wind blowing off the glaciated peaks surrounding us.

Shortly after arriving in Antarctica, our team loaded hundreds of pounds of food, fuel and equipment onto a small turboprop that flew us to a huge glacier flowing off the side of our goal: Mount Vinson.

Standing at 16,077 feet, Mount Vinson is a rugged and beautiful combination of ancient ice, snow pack thousands of feet deep and crumbling rock.

As the small plane turned on its skis and departed, the truly remote nature of our location sunk in. Without that one plane, there was little way we were leaving this mountain range. It put a smile on the face of the team members, as it was just us and Mount Vinson. Our task was free from distractions. We had been meticulously planning this climb for weeks, and it was time to execute.

Being in Antarctica, we planned for extreme conditions. Our primary risk came from the possibility of cold injuries: frostbite and hypothermia. After reviewing cold injury prevention and treatment with Hurlburt Field medical personnel, and in conjunction with our winter mountaineering equipment, we were prepared to deal with ambient temperatures of 40 below zero.

Luckily the coldest temperature we encountered was 15 below zero, during our summit day. While we always protected against the cold, the team also had to take significant steps to avoid severe sunburn due to the 24-hour sunshine and reflective snowcap.

With base camp built at 7,500 feet on the beautiful Branscomb Glacier, we began several long days during which we carried equipment and supplies to camps higher up the mountain. Traveling to higher altitudes and then returning lower to sleep helps the body acclimatize.

Each day averaged 12 hours of hauling backpacks and sleds, digging tent platforms and cutting snow blocks for protective walls. Travel required crossing deep crevasses and climbing steep faces of snow and ice, so we remained roped to each other at all times outside camp.

Four days later, we had established ourselves at the 10,000-foot camp and stashed supplies at the 12,500-foot camp. We were ready to move everything to the high camp when a storm system moved over the entire mountain range. For the next six days, high winds, cold temperatures and low visibility forced us to hunker down at 10,000 feet. Out of reach of our supplies at 12,500 feet, we watched as food and fuel began to run low.

But, in line with the training and risk management taught to all Air Force Special Operations Command members, we stayed put, not willing to foolishly risk our welfare to push up and further into the storm. Slowly, the clouds broke and the winds abated, leaving us just enough time to push higher toward the summit before running out of supplies and catching our scheduled flight.

Attempting a mountain summit is much like long distance swimming: you must ensure you have enough energy to not only reach the top, but enough to turn around and make it back.

Carrying enough water, keeping it from freezing and consuming thousands of calories from the right foods is as important as staying warm during a high-altitude summit attempt. Luckily for us, the weather and snow conditions



The U.S. Air Force Seven Summits team makes its way up to Mount Vinson's 16,077-foot summit. The team arrived at Antarctica's highest peak Dec. 9. Courtesy photo.

were perfect. Taking a more challenging route than normal, the team reached a ridge just 1,000 feet below the summit that offered breathtaking views of the Antarctic landscape.

An hour later, we climbed over the steep lip atop the summit, proudly swapping high-fives and soaking in the accomplishment of reaching the top.

In line with a long-standing tradition started during my early years of climbing at the Air Force Academy, we did pushups on the summit. The idea is to give a military twist as well as show the mountain didn't take all our strength.

Additionally, the pushups have become a great way to raise money for military-oriented charities, with donations made for each pushup accomplished. Since 2005, team members have raised approximately \$60,000 for charities.

After proudly flying the American and Air Force flags, we quickly packed up and began the descent.

Poor weather was rolling in at base camp, threatening the ability for our small plane to land. What took us four days of active climbing to ascend only took 12 hours to descend; that's how motivated we were to catch a flight and begin our trip back home. The plane landed through thickening clouds and fog, getting us off the glacier just as the weather socked in.

Three days of poor weather later, we loaded back onto the Russian cargo plane and flew the four hours back to the tip of South America. Our physical training, mental preparation and extensive equipment paid off: no one on the team got frostbite or seriously injured and the U.S. Air Force became the first military team to reach the summit of Antarctica.

Funny enough, it felt much like "another day at work" in the unpredictable and exciting life known to members of AFSOC.

For more information about the U.S. Air Force Seven Summits Challenge, visit www.usaf7summits.com.



PJ traces his father's footsteps to RAF's No. 1 Squadron

*Story and photos by Senior Airman David Dobrydney
48 Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

Five-year-old Louis Distelzweig was looking forward to his father coming home from work -- maybe playing on the swing set in the yard -- when he heard something, something wrong.

“My sisters and I were upstairs, and I heard my mom crying,” said the now-grown master sergeant. “I came down and asked her why. Of course, at that age, I didn't really understand. It didn't really hit me that we were never going to see him again until his funeral.”

The funeral would be for Sergeant Distelzweig's father, Capt. Louis V. Distelzweig Jr. A decorated F-100 Super Sabre pilot, Captain Distelzweig was stationed at Royal Air Force Wittering, England, as part of an exchange program with the Royal Air Force. The assignment to No. 1 Squadron flying Harrier jets was a welcome change after two back-to-back tours in Vietnam.

In 1970, shortly after a takeoff, Captain Distelzweig's plane experienced a mechanical failure. He attempted to eject, but in doing so the plane inverted and crashed. Captain Distelzweig died on impact.

In the years following his father's death, Sergeant Distelzweig followed in his father's footsteps and chose the military as a career. Rather than becoming a fighter pilot, however, his interest was in special operations. After speaking to Army, Navy and Marine Corps recruiters, his Air Force recruiter put him in contact with a pararescue instructor.

“The following day I signed on the

dotted line. My class started with 27 guys and three of us graduated,” Sergeant Distelzweig said.

Today, he is the 48th Operations Group chief of pararescue standards and evaluations.

Sergeant Distelzweig's wife, Eve, said she considers it no accident that her husband went into the pararescue field.

“It's not a coincidence he dedicated his life to saving others,” she said.

When he found out he would return to the United Kingdom after more than 35 years, Sergeant Distelzweig



Master Sgt. Louis Distelzweig and his wife, Eve, pose with a picture of Sergeant Distelzweig's father, Capt. Louis Distelzweig Jr., in front of a Royal Air Force Harrier jet Jan. 11, at Royal Air Force Cottesmore, England. Captain Distelzweig was a decorated pilot who perished in an aircraft accident in 1970 while serving as an exchange pilot with the Royal Air Force.

knew what he wanted to do.

“I was going to go (to No. 1 Squadron) or at least make contact with them to check out my dad’s old squadron and have them show me the Harriers,” he said.

When he first arrived to his new assignment, however, Sergeant Distelzweig immediately found himself preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. Soon after his return, he found out No. 1 Squadron would be shut down as part of U.K. defense restructuring.

“It pushed me to act on this right away,” he said.

While No. 1 Squadron was based at RAF Wittering in Captain Distelzweig’s time, today they are based at nearby RAF Cottesmore. When Sergeant Distelzweig arrived for his visit Jan. 11, Capt. Andrew Tenenbaum, an American exchange pilot like Captain Distelzweig, gave Sergeant Distelzweig and his wife a tour of the Harrier jets.

“It’s something we’ve been doing for 30-plus years that builds up good ties between the two nations,” said Tenenbaum of the exchange program, noting Captain Distelzweig would have been one of the program’s first participants.

For the first time, Sergeant Distelzweig was able to climb in the cockpit of the plane his father flew.

“I saw them as a kid, but at that time you’re more into playing,” he said. “All planes are pretty much the same to a 5 year old.”

Following the tour of the hangar, an even bigger surprise awaited Sergeant Distelzweig. No. 1 Squadron had existed in one form or another since the turn of the last century, and in that time it amassed a copious amount of records and memorabilia.

“People can come back and read the diaries and find out what happened to their loved ones,” said Royal Air Force Pilot Officer Cameron Macleod, who also accompanied the Distelzweigs during their visit. Several Britons have come to No. 1 Squadron to view the records, Pilot Officer Macleod said, but Sergeant Distelzweig was one of the few Americans to visit.

In an album documenting the early 1970s, among yellowed news clippings and sketches were several pictures of Captain Distelzweig including one of him and his wife at an official dinner.

“There were photos of him that even I don’t have,” Sergeant Distelzweig said. Since the album was too large



Master Sgt. Louis Distelsweig looks at a picture of his father, Capt. Louis Distelsweig Jr., in an album at No. 1 Squadron Jan. 11, at Royal Air Force Cottesmore, England. Sergeant Distelsweig visited RAF Cottesmore to view the Harrier aircraft his father flew in the 1970 as an exchange pilot. Sergeant Distelsweig is a pararescueman with the 56th Rescue Squadron at RAF Lakenheath.

and fragile to photocopy, Mrs. Distelzweig snapped photos of several of the pages.

“My mother will be real appreciative of that,” Sergeant Distelzweig said.

Even more intriguing was a declassified flight log, recording every activity the squadron undertook, including Captain Distelzweig’s accident. Sergeant Distelzweig read the account of the accident out loud as Tenenbaum explained some of the technical details of why the accident was fatal.

“What they told my mother and what actually happened were probably two different things,” Sergeant Distelzweig said. “It would have been done for the benefit of the family.”

Sergeant Distelzweig came to No. 1 Squadron to take a personal tour of a Harrier unit and maybe find a bit of closure for his father’s death. He said seeing long-lost photos of him and reading the hitherto unknown account of his final flight gave more closure than he could have hoped to find when he first contacted the squadron.

“It was way more than I expected, especially this,” he said, pointing to the log book.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Lt. Gen. Donald Wurster, commander, Air Force Special Operations Command, left, acknowledges the applause from the audience during the AFSOC Order of the Sword ceremony at the Emerald Coast Conference Center in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., Nov. 19. His wife Ronda, center left, retired Chief Master Sgt. James Binnicker, the ninth chief master sergeant of the Air Force, center right, and Chief Master Sgt. William Turner, 27th Special Operations Wing command chief, right, watched Wurster become the seventh recipient of AFSOC's Order of the Sword, the highest honor an individual can receive from the enlisted force. Photo by Senior Airman Sheila deVera.

AFSOC commander inducted into The Order of the Sword

*By Airman 1st Class Joe W. McFadden
AFSOC Public Affairs*

More than 700 Airmen from Air Force Special Operations Command paid tribute to Lt. Gen. Donald Wurster, AFSOC commander, by inducting him into The Order of the Sword during a ceremony at the Emerald Coast Conference Center in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., Nov. 19.

Wurster became the seventh recipient of AFSOC's Order of the Sword, the highest honor an individual can receive from the enlisted force. He first became aware of his nomination Aug. 31 when more than 200 Air Commandos notified him of their decision.

"There's no greater honor that can be afforded to a commander than to hold the trust, respect and affection of those they lead," Wurster said. "You truly humble me with this honor, and I am most grateful. My family and I thank you for this incredible, overwhelming and awesome honor."

Airmen donned full service or mess dress uniforms and cheered for Wurster and his wife Ronda as they arrived at the conference center. As the Wursters entered the main ballroom, the hall reverberated from the bagpipes playing, thunderous applause and the crowd banging 105mm and 40mm shells together to celebrate a general they hailed as "an Airman among Airmen."

Chief Master Sgt. Michael Gilbert, AFSOC command chief, served as the ceremony's command chief. He was flanked by Chief Master Sgt. Dexter Mitchell, 1st Special Operations Wing command chief, and Chief Master Sgt. William Turner, 27th Special Operations Wing command chief, both representing the enlisted personnel from Hurlburt Field, Fla., and Cannon Air Force Base, N.M.

After calling the room to order, Gilbert shared his perspective of working with Wurster on behalf of all special operations Airmen.

“As AFSOC command chief, I enjoy a front row seat from which to view the performance of our commander during what has arguably been the most demanding era in AFSOC's history,” Gilbert said. “We are more heavily tasked than ever before, but we're also bigger and better largely due to General Wurster's efforts.”

Gilbert listed many of Wurster's contributions to the quality of life for his Airmen while leading them through missions in Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries around the world. He also acknowledged the command's success to the general's leadership style and example.

“When there's success, and there's a lot of success in this command, he's thankful for such great Airmen to serve with and gives them all the credit,” Gilbert said. “When there's failure, he immediately assumes everyone gave their best and it must have been a failure on his part that allowed something wrong to happen. This is a rare leadership quality. It's a style that instructors work hard to teach, because in those rare cases when it's perfected, it's so powerful. For General Wurster, it's the way he looks at the world, the way he looks at his AFSOC team and simply the way that he serves.”

With the ornate, ceremonial sword placed below the speaker's podium, Wurster took to the stage. His remarks highlighted the contributions of the special tactics, operations, maintenance, mission support, medical and AFSOC Airmen whom he has commanded since November 2007.

“Tonight is not about me, but a celebration of the

terrific enlisted force in the United States Air Force,” he said. “We say that AFSOC is a step ahead in a changing world and that agility is led by our enlisted force. What's occurring in AFSOC in this generation is unlike anything in the entire history of the command, and you all are a part of it. We truly are a step ahead, and these

“You are well trained, highly disciplined and incredibly competent. You are lethal, but compassionate and willing to bear the burdens that accompany this life of selfless service and sacrifice for the sake of the security of our nation.”

— Lt. Gen. Donald Wurster

changes are essential to our national security in the coming years. I'm truly proud of each one of you, because it's you who are doing this.”

Wurster closed by thanking the more than 16,000 Airmen for their selfless service in “the most relevant, respected and capable command in the

United States Air Force.”

“One percent of the people in this country serve to defend our nation, and you're that one percent,” he said. “You are well trained, highly disciplined and incredibly competent. You are lethal, but compassionate and willing to bear the burdens that accompany this life of selfless service and sacrifice for the sake of the security of our nation.”

Once the ceremony was complete, Wurster took the time to give a coin to every Airman in attendance.

Airman Basic Sarah Maria Schaum, 1st Special Operations Security Forces Squadron entry controller, is one of only 32 Airmen Basic at Hurlburt Field. Despite being at Hurlburt Field for just three weeks, she represented her rank as part of the sword cordon in the ceremony. She said she left the event with a better appreciation of Air Force traditions and for being in AFSOC.

“He was so thankful to the enlisted personnel,” Schaum said. “I've been in the military for less than a year, and I've already witnessed something that's only happened six times before. I'm really glad to have been a part of this.”

According to Air Force Instruction 36-2824, “The Order of the Sword was established by the Air Force to recognize and honor military senior officers, colonels and above, and civilian equivalents, for conspicuous and significant contributions to the welfare and prestige of the Air Force enlisted force, mission effectiveness as well as the overall military establishment.”



MARSOC critical skills operator training

A Marine with Individual Training Course, Marine Special Operations School, Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, patrols through a forest during a fire and maneuver exercise Sept. 24 at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The exercise was the culminating event of a weapons and tactics package. Photo by Lance Cpl. Thomas W. Provost.



Marines with Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command conduct a static-line parachute jump at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Dec. 15. MARSOC Marines who are basic parachutists and beyond must complete annual jump requirements in order to maintain their jump status and proficiency. Photos by Lance Cpl. Kyle McNally.



Marines with 3rd Marine Special Operations Battalion, Marine Special Operations Regiment, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, blast an opening through a mock wall during explosive breaching refresher training at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Nov. 3. Photo by Lance Cpl. Thomas W. Provost.



(Left and above) Marines with 3d Marine Special Operations Battalion, Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command breach a room as part of a Close Quarters Battle training package Jan. 25, at Camp Lejeune, N.C. Photos by Lance Cpl. Kyle McNally.



A Marine with Individual Training Course, Marine Special Operations School, Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, patrols through a forest in a weapons and tactics exercise Sept. 24, at Camp Lejeune, N.C. Photo by Lance Cpl. Thomas W. Provost.



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - HEADQUARTERS



USSOCOM plank holder soars into retirement

Albert E. Vernon III parachutes into his own retirement ceremony at the Special Operations Memorial, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Jan. 7. Vernon, a retired Army colonel and former Green Beret, was a member of the Para-Commandos, SOCOM's demonstration jump team, for nearly 15 years.

*Story and photos by Senior Airman Anna-Marie Wyant
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's Albert E. Vernon III making an unforgettable entrance into his retirement ceremony at the Special Operations Memorial, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Jan. 7.

Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, and Sgt. Maj. Thomas H. Smith, USSOCOM command sergeant major, accompanied Vernon on his memorable final jump. Preceded by the Para-Commandos, SOCOM's demonstration parachute team, Vernon gracefully floated from the sky donning a patriotic red, white and blue parachute. After landing right on target and receiving a round of applause, Vernon swiftly changed from a jumpsuit to a suit and tie for his retirement—his second retirement at the command.

"I'm not sure whether SOCOM has had another ceremony like this one, but it was, in my view, a great way for the official party to arrive," Olson said at the ceremony.

End of an Era

Vernon, a retired Army colonel and former Green Beret, served as the director of SOCOM's Command Operations Review Board—responsible for providing independent oversight of SOCOM's sensitive programs and activities—since 1996. He is known as a "plank holder" since he had been at the command since July 1987, just months after it officially stood up. Vernon held key positions within the command and helped shape it into what it has become, Olson said.

"Many of you may not be aware that were it not for Al Vernon's efforts some twenty-three years ago... I might not be in a position to participate in today's event," he said, referring to the Navy's initial resistance to having its special operators fall under SOCOM. He said Vernon's carefully crafted argument convinced the secretary of defense to direct all Naval Special Warfare units be officially assigned to SOCOM.

Olson thanked Vernon for his service and sage advice over the years. He called his second—and presumably final—retirement the "end of an era" in

SOCOM's history.

"So ask anyone who has worked for, with or around Al Vernon, and they're unanimous in their admiration," Olson said. "He's a true gentleman; he's a mentor; he's a gracious and humble professional of the highest integrity, and Al, we are all better people for having served with you."

A Brief History

Vernon said his interest in the military came at a young age. Since high school, he knew he wanted to be a Soldier. In college, he further refined that idea and decided he wanted to be an infantry officer in the Army. Shortly after commissioning in the Army in 1965, he said he became interested in joining Special Forces.

"It just seemed to be the cutting edge," said Vernon of Special Forces.

During the Vietnam War, Vernon served in multiple Airborne Infantry, Mechanized Infantry, Ranger and Special Forces assignments. After nearly seven years serving in infantry, Vernon decided to attend law school. Following many assignments as a judge advocate, Vernon attended the U.S. Army War College, where he met Gen. Wayne A. Downing, a prominent figure in Special Operations, at a luncheon.

"It was the only [luncheon] I attended, and I sat right next to him," Vernon said of his encounter with Downing at the Army War College.

The encounter left an impression on Downing, who recommended Vernon as the staff judge advocate for Gen. James J. Lindsay, the first commander of SOCOM. Vernon said he was involved in a lot of things not typically reserved for staff judge advocates; since the command was so new, he was handling a broad range of issues. He was directly involved in helping further define the roles and authorities of SOCOM and its commanders. He said he had to fight the good fight, which was not always easy, but was always worth it.

"If something makes sense, and you're determined to do it, you can get it done," he said.

Less than six months after retiring from the Army at SOCOM, Vernon returned as a civilian to serve as the deputy director of the CORB in 1993. At this time, the Para-Commandos were a new addition to SOCOM, with spots on the team open to military members and government civilians. Vernon said he became interested in joining the team.

"I thought, 'Why not?' I really wanted to give it a



Adm. Eric T. Olson, USSOCOM commander, congratulates Albert E. Vernon III at Vernon's retirement Jan. 7. Vernon, who had worked at the command since shortly after its doors opened in 1987, retired militarily from SOCOM in 1992 and returned as a civilian employee with the Command Operations Review Board less than six months later.

try, so I did," he said. "I stayed on the team for almost fifteen years... It's a hoot!"

Vernon said he had a fantastic time in all his roles within the command.

"As a staff judge advocate, the things you could see that needed to be done, I actually had the chance to do," he said. "It was very rewarding. In the CORB, the work has been important. We've had slow but steady progress."

But most of all, Vernon said he will miss the people he has had the privilege of working with over the years and is proud to have served with heroes of all ranks. He also voiced his gratitude for the consistently good leadership he worked under for more than two decades.

"We have been blessed in SOCOM with our leadership," he said. "We've had truly outstanding people in the command group, not only in intellect, but also in character. It's been a pleasure to work with those people."



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - HEADQUARTERS

SOCOM runners win 191-mile inaugural Ragnar Relay Florida Keys

*Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. Larry Carpenter Jr.
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

Eighteen members from U.S. Special Operations Command participated in the inaugural Ragnar Relay Florida Keys endurance race Jan. 7-8.

The Ragnar Florida Keys relay race is a 191-mile course that took racers from Crandon Park in Miami, Fla., located on the barrier island of Key Biscayne, all the way to the famous Duval Street in Key West, Fla.

The command was represented by two teams: a 12-man regular relay, SOCOM 12, and a six-man “ultra” relay team, SOCOM 6, who ran around the clock for more

than 24 hours honoring fallen Special Operations warriors and their families. In support of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, the team raised nearly \$4,300 for college scholarships and providing family support to members of the Special Operations Forces community affected by combat and training casualties.

“Knowing that we were racing for our wounded warrior family made the race even more rewarding,” said Col. Frank Donovan, USSOCOM J-35 chief, operational planning division. “Pushing hard to maintain pace and do your part for the team takes on more meaning when you are representing SOF wounded warriors that have done so much for the SOF community.”



(From left to right) Cmdr. Todd Gagnon, Lt. Cmdr. Brian O’Lavin, Col. Lex Brown, Maj. Rob Bailey, Australian Lt. Col. Stuart Davies and Col. Frank Donovan, who make up the SOCOM6 team, stand at the finish line inaugural Ragnar Relay, Jan. 8, in Key West, Fla. SOCOM6 from U.S. Special Operations Command took first place in the ultra division with a time of 24:03:58. In this 191-mile race from Miami to Key West, Fla., participants run a relay race for more than 24 hours straight. Their efforts raised \$4,279 for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation.

More than 300 teams with a total of approximately 3,400 runners competed in the race, which led runners through trails and paved roads. Sections of the race stretched through the Everglades, where runners were warned that alligators are regularly spotted.

SOCOM 12 also faced challenges. The night before the race, their lead-off runner, Mr. Haggas, broke his ankle and could not compete. In true SOF warrior fashion, the team decided to run with eleven members. Lt. Col. Hazel and Capt. Nolan volunteered to cover the extra 21 miles to allow the team to continue to compete. Not wanting to be left behind, Mr. Haggas in a temporary cast, and only hours from his injury, quickly became team trainer, navigator, and loudest cheerleader on the trek to Key West.

“To have athletes with the endurance to cover those extra miles on the fly with no drop in performance is testament their personal fitness and commitment to the cause,” said Lt. Col. Tom Hancock, SOCOM 12 member.

The team finished third in their division with an overall time of 28:58:50.

Going into the race, Donovan said he was confident SOCOM6 would be successful. The team set a goal not only to win their division, but also to finish the race in less than 24 hours.

“I knew we had the right type of endurance athletes to be a competitive team,” Donovan said. “I think we are always looking for ways to challenge ourselves, and Ragnar Florida Keys provided that physical and mental challenge over a great race course.”

This event provided SOCOM members from multiple services, as well as a runner from a coalition partner, the opportunity to get to know one another on a different level, rather than just passersby in the hallways of the headquarters buildings.

“Traveling and racing together was a great experience,” Donovan said. “The camaraderie is instantaneous and lasting when you are surrounded by great athletes with great attitudes. You learn much about each other as the team covers the miles day and night for over twenty four hours.”

Normally, the race teams would consist of 12 runners who split the overall distance into 36 separate legs with each runner completing three throughout the race. SOCOM6, the ultra team, in comparison was composed of only six athletes who ran two consecutive legs at a



Lt. Cmdr. Brian Olavin (SEAL), U.S. Special Operations Command's J8 executive officer, runs his leg of the Inaugural Ragnar Florida Keys Relay race Jan. 8.

time, with distances ranging from 5.9 miles to 19.9 miles.

“To maintain a seven-minute, thirty-second per mile pace for one hundred ninety-one miles was physically demanding for the team,” Donovan said. “However, all the team members had competed in endurance events in the past and knew how to recover after an assigned leg and prepare for the next.”

“I think having military teams participate adds a sense of pride amongst all the runners,” said Carrie Meng, Florida Race Director, Ragnar events.

Battling injuries sustained during the race, SOCOM6 members missed their goal of finishing the race in less than 24 hours; their time was 24:03:58, which was enough for them to win first place in the ultra division by two and half hours, finishing in sixth place overall.

“Congratulations! Running the race as an ultra team is quite an accomplishment in itself, let alone placing first,” Meng said. “Thank you for coming out. Have fun, relax and see you next year.”

SOCOM6 members were Col. Frank Donovan, Col. Lex Brown, Cmdr. Todd Gagnon, Lt. Col. (AUS) Stuart Davies, Maj. Rob Bailey and Lt. Cmdr. Brian O’Lavin.

The members of SOCOM12 were Donovan Haggas, Col. Christopher Leyda, Col. Stephen Goto, Lt. Col. Thomas Hancock, Lt. Col. Cynthia Hazel, Lt. Col. James Higgins, Maj. Matthew Razvillas, Maj. Billy Moore, Maj. Eric Young, Capt. Trevor Nolan, Master Sgt. Brian Burns and William Lengner.



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - HEADQUARTERS

SOCKOR'S mission critical presence in Republic of Korea

*By Maj. Julie Shively
USSOCOM History Office*

With today's continuing deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, an assignment to Special Operations Command Korea transfers a person back in time from current hot spots to a Cold War relic, even though the Korean Peninsula is a region in which hostilities could resume with little or no warning. SOCKOR's mission of "maintaining the Armistice while preparing to fight tonight" is interpreted by some Special Operators as a downshift in action and responsibilities. Serving in the Republic of Korea may not appear as exciting as other locations; training and exercising with the ROK forces to show unity of effort to North Korea is less glamorous than bringing peace to a country. However, the importance of SOCKOR in peninsular conflict prevention and contribution of unique capabilities toward South Korea's defense cannot be understated. Recent events in Korea demonstrate that SOCKOR's mission remains both vital and relevant to maintaining the armistice agreement established in 1953.

North Korea's periodic muscle flexing toward the ROK since 1953 created the need to coordinate the actions of Combined Forces Command and the ROK's Special Warfare Command during armistice, leading to SOCKOR's establishment in 1988 as the only country-specific Special Operations Command. SOC-K, SOCKOR's original moniker, was initially buried in U.S. Forces Korea CJ-3, with its commander dual-hatted as deputy commander, CJ-3 Special Operations Division. In 1995, however, after much staff work, SOCKOR was converted into a separate component command. The incoming commander, Col. Glenn Harned, focused on establishing SOCKOR's legitimacy as a functional component command that would more effectively contribute SOF capabilities to the combined command. A small staff element, Special Operations Division-Korea remained within CJ-3 temporarily.

"To establish the legitimacy of SOCKOR, I viewed many otherwise routine actions from the perspective of how they would contribute to building SOCKOR," Harned said.

One of these routine actions resulted from the

Kangnung nK submarine infiltration Sept. 18, 1996.

SOCKOR hastily responded to the incident, leaving incoming intelligence analyst Staff Sgt. Curry Wright to report for duty to a deserted SOD-K. The following day, SOCKOR sent Wright to Special Forces Detachment-Korea, a Special Forces unit that trains ROK SF brigades by embedding within their units, exchanging tactics, techniques and procedures and developing greater interoperability to enhance effectiveness. From there, Wright could relay intelligence from the unit as they conducted combat patrols.

Harned recalled, "SWC asked to borrow the U.S. night vision goggles. I agreed on the condition that SFD-K could deploy as observers with their brigades. SOCKOR provided a valuable stream of information to the USFK and SWC senior leadership."

Later SOCKOR Commander Col. Robert Leicht (1997-1999) referred to this incident as "a turning point in USFK's perception of what USSF could do for them in country."

As North Korea continued naval infiltration between 1996 and 1998, a SOD-K SEAL, Lt. Frederick Vincenzo, studied the accompanying intelligence and discovered that infiltrations occurred during certain moon and tide combinations. This realization led SOD-K to assist the ROK military in predicting and detecting nK naval infiltration, including the sinking of a semi-submersible in December 1998. When the ROK raised the nK semi-submersible three months later, SOCKOR sent Vincenzo and Wright to inspect the craft, where they recovered items with intelligence value.

"Our guys were most proficient, and we made the point to the CINC that if this is an able special warfare craft, then put Naval Special Warfare guys on it to tell you what its capabilities are," Leicht said.

After nearly 23 years of the command's existence, SOCKOR personnel continue to demonstrate the importance of remaining vigilant and focused as Korean tensions continue to be a major source of international friction and concern. While the political rhetoric rages regarding North Korea's recent actions, SOCKOR carries on with its seemingly mundane, but critical, behind-the-scenes mission of maintaining the Armistice while ensuring they and their ROK counterparts remain poised to respond to any contingency.



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James T. Jones IV
U.S. Special Operations Command*



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Anthony Venetz, Jr.
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Editor's note: Honored are Special Operations Forces who have lost their lives since December's Tip of the Spear.

GILBERT ALAREZ (B) RALPH L. THOMPSON (B) WESLEY B. MULLINS (B) ALAN C. BAY (B) 2074
IMCO PVT USA B30175 IMCO CTR USA B10170 IMCO PVT USA B09927 IMCO 1 PT USA B100
VANCE B.S. WILLIAM C. HAYES ROBERT A. BRANNAN KENNETH W. CAMPBELL
800175 IMCO SFC USA B10412 IMCO SSC USA B41118 IMCO 1SG USA B100

A Chinook helicopter is shown in flight, viewed from a low angle. The helicopter is dark green and has two large rotors. It is flying over a desert landscape with rocky hills and sparse vegetation. The sky is clear and blue.

160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)

A 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) crew conducts environmental training in their MH-47G Chinook helicopter. The MH-47G is highly modified for transporting Special Operations Forces into a variety of locations. Courtesy photo by the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne).