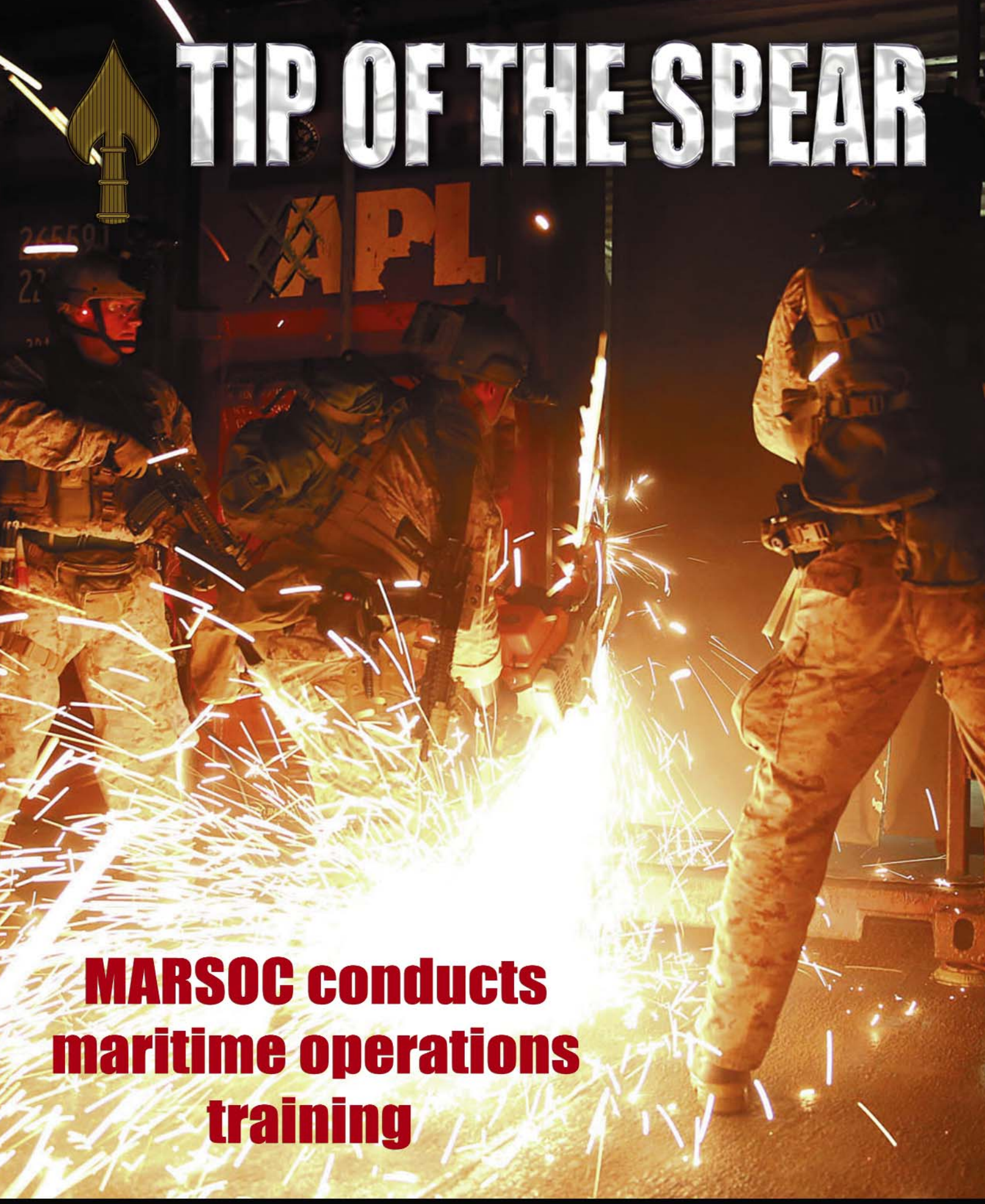
TIP OF THE SPEAR



MARSOC conducts maritime operations training

U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., August 2013

U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

MARSOC conducts maritime operations training ... 30

Tip of the Spear

Thomas Jefferson Award Winner

Adm. William H. McRaven
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(Cover) Members of 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion practice breaching on board a ship at night. Photo by Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Robert M. Storm.

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SOCSOUTH teams support fishermen program, MEDCAP in Dominican Republic

Dominican navy personnel paint newly registered fishing boats orange in order for them to be more detectable at sea for search, rescue and interdiction purposes during a boat registration and MEDCAP in Cabo Rojo, Dominican Republic, June 7. During the event, fishermen were able to register their boats and receive medical services for themselves and their families at no cost.

Story and photos by Capt. Daisy C. Bueno
SOCSOUTH Public Affairs

Pristine blue waters, sandy beaches and palm trees were the backdrop for a Dominican-led two-day civil-military operation event in the province of Pedernales, Dominican Republic, June 6-7. These events kicked off a campaign called Costas Seguras (Safe Coasts) in Isla

Beata and Cabo Rojo, which included a Medical Civic Action Program and boat registration for local fishermen and their families. Dominican officials have acknowledged these areas to be susceptible to drug trafficking organizations, which make the fisherman vulnerable to illicit activities.

Members of the Civil Affairs Team, 478th Civil Affairs Battalion, and Military Information Support Team, 1st Military Information Support Operations Battalion, who were in support of Special Operations Command South, assisted the Dominican Republic navy in the planning and concept development process and were present and participated in an advise and assist role during the two-day event which provided much needed medical and social services to the fishermen and their families.

As the Special Operations component for U.S. Southern Command, SOCSOUTH, based in Homestead, Fla., is responsible for all special operations in the Caribbean, Central and South America. Through the command's Theater Security Cooperation Program, Special Operations Soldiers work closely with their partner nation counterparts in order for them to better protect their borders and increase their capacity to conduct civic action programs such as the MEDCAPs.

The first day of events took place on Isla Beata, a tiny island off the southwest coast of the Dominican Republic, where a small community of fishermen often work weeks at a time, but have homes and families on the mainland. The Dominican navy, which has a small base there, became aware of the fishermen concerns, ranging from health to environmental issues, thus leading the navy to want to form a mutually beneficial relationship with them.

"We want the fishermen to know that they are important and that they will get assistance from us," said Dominican Navy Cmdr. Feliciano Perez Carvajal, Director of Plans and Operations. "We want them to know that they can rely on the navy and we want them to have confidence in us."

"The ultimate goal is for the fishermen to see the Dominican navy as their ally and for them to feel comfortable reporting suspicious activities to navy personnel," said Army Capt. Greg Metellus, team leader, 478th Civil Affairs Battalion. "The Navy can't be everywhere all the time, and they are eager to collaborate with the fishermen who know the area. These fishermen play a key role by providing the navy with feedback on what they see in the surrounding waters when they are out fishing."

The second day, another boat registration and MEDCAP were held in the city of Cabo Rojo, Pedernales Province, on the southwestern coast of the Dominican Republic. At both locations, MEDCAPs were conducted by the Dominican navy and non-governmental organizations. Classes in the form of discussion groups and services available to the fishermen and their families included medical consultations, dental hygiene, pharmaceuticals and maritime security/safety.

In addition, those who attended were able to register their boats at no cost and had their boats painted orange to make them easier to spot if in distress. The paint serves a secondary function of signifying that they are registered.

At the end of each day of events, the fishermen received their certificates of registration along with a first aid kit for their boats. All in attendance were given a bag of non-perishable food supplies as well.

"This was a good idea," said Bienvenido Urbaez, the mayor of "La Cueva de Cabo Rojo" and a fisherman of 44 years. "We need to be represented, and this project helps the community."

In total, 233 residents attended and 88 boats were registered. The Dominican navy will continue to check on the fishermen on Isla Beata and Cabo Rojo to ensure they have the registration and safety kits on their boats. The Dominican navy also plans on conducting more boat registrations in the future in order to help more fishermen and to maintain a strong bond between the community and the Dominican navy.

A fisherman receives his boat registration, first aid kit and non-perishable food items at the conclusion of a Dominican-led MEDCAP in Cabo Rojo, Dominican Republic June 7. This civil military operation was organized and conducted by the Dominican navy with assistance by non-governmental organizations and U.S. Civil Affairs and Military Information Teams in support of SOCSOUTH.

SOCSOUTH, U.S. Embassy help provide free, much-needed medical care in Paraguay

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

Life in the small farming district of Yasy Cany in the Canindeyú Department is tough, and it shows on the faces of its 30,000 residents.

Located in the vast internal countryside located 160 miles outside of the capital of Asuncion, the town lacks many basic services and its infrastructure needs to be revamped.

Driving into town is quite a sight as poverty is truly visible. With small shops on one side of the road and a few rundown houses, shacks and restaurants on the other side, the livestock running the grounds along the road tend to be the most interesting part of the drive.

Unemployment is high and most families live on a monthly wage of $100 a month in order to feed a family of six and in some cases up to 10 people in one household.

To put it into perspective, many Americans can typically spend that amount if not more at their neighborhood restaurant or bar on any given night. It's safe to say life is not easy here and everyday is a struggle.

A Paraguayan military dental hygienist examines the teeth of a local man during a two-day Paraguayan-led Medical Civic Action Program June 1 in Yasy Cany, located in the Canindeyú Department of Paraguay. Several hygienists and dentists helped thousands of residents by examining patients for oral diseases such as gingivitis, performed teeth cleanings and provided other preventive dental care.

Its towns like these where members of the Paraguayan military and its civil affairs elements thrive and love to work in. This is their purpose and it has been since it was established eight years ago.

After several months of planning and with support from the Office of Defense Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Paraguay and Special Operations Command South Civil Affairs, based in Homestead, Fla., a two-day Medical Civic Action Program, commonly referred to as a MEDCAP, was held June 1-2 in the area's largest school.

More than 3,000 residents received social and medical services to include pediatrics, gynecology general medicine, optometry, ophthalmology, dentistry, immunizations, identification registration and family planning. In addition, laboratory and pharmacy services were also provided.

Paraguayan officials also felt the Canindeyú Department, located in the northeast part of Paraguay and bordering Brazil, was an important area to provide these services due to the poverty level in the region and in the wake of the massacres in nearby Marina Cue following a land dispute between land squatters and police leaving 17 dead, 11 peasants and 6 police officers, and 80 wounded in June 2012. The event shook the confidence and trust among many of the residents toward the nation's security forces, a misperception they want to change.

"We plan and execute these missions because we understand the needs of the people in places like this and these services are important to their livelihood," said Paraguayan Col. Leonardo Ibarrola, the operations officer for Paraguay's civil affairs team. "This is a very poor area, and we understand our role as part of the

government is to make sure our presence is felt and help those in the country who don't have much and need our assistance."

In order to provide these essential services to residents living in the country's rural districts, the Paraguayan military works closely with a number of different government agencies such as the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Justice and various other agencies and civic groups to provide the support and personnel for such a complex operation and truly reflects Paraguayan's "whole-of-government" approach.

Despite a rainy, cool weekend in the area, word of the event spread quickly throughout town. Some residents walked three to four miles to arrive at the school and others packed themselves in pick-up trucks.

The Paraguayan military also provided transportation to the MEDCAP as it used its fleet of five-ton trucks to run a shuttle service in order to reach citizens living in the rural areas with no or limited road access to ensure as many people as possible could receive these services.

Sitting outside one of several classrooms, which were used as makeshift clinics during the two-day event, 74-year-old resident Anadeto Furrez, a father of eight children, patiently waited for his prescription for free medicine. Anadeto, who also suffers from cataracts, a clouding of the lens of the eye that impairs vision, was also given a new pair of glasses to help him improve his sight.

"This day is a miracle and a blessing," said the grandfather of 35 grandchildren. "These are services we truly need, and I am very grateful to our military and the support from the U.S. We hope things start to get better and more jobs come to our town. This is a start!"

Along with support for the MEDCAP, the U.S. Embassy in Paraguay donated $15,000 worth of medicine and medical equipment to the town's public clinic as well as an assortment of school supplies such as backpacks, coloring pencils, and dry-erase boards, among other items for two local schools.

The donation was a symbolic gesture by U.S. officials in Paraguay for continued cooperation between the allies for the people of Paraguay.

"The United States is committed to assisting Paraguay and help improve the quality of life for all Paraguayans and build a lasting friendship based of mutual respect and cooperation between our great nations," said Marine Col. Michael D. Flynn, the Senior Defense Official and Defense Attaché for the U.S. Embassy in Paraguay, during a small ceremony celebrating the event and donation.

Since 2008, the Paraguayan civil affairs section, which also teams up with the country's national police during the planning and execution for these events, have averaged four MEDCAPs a year in ungoverned and under-resourced areas across the country. This event marked the 22nd time this type of operation was accomplished.

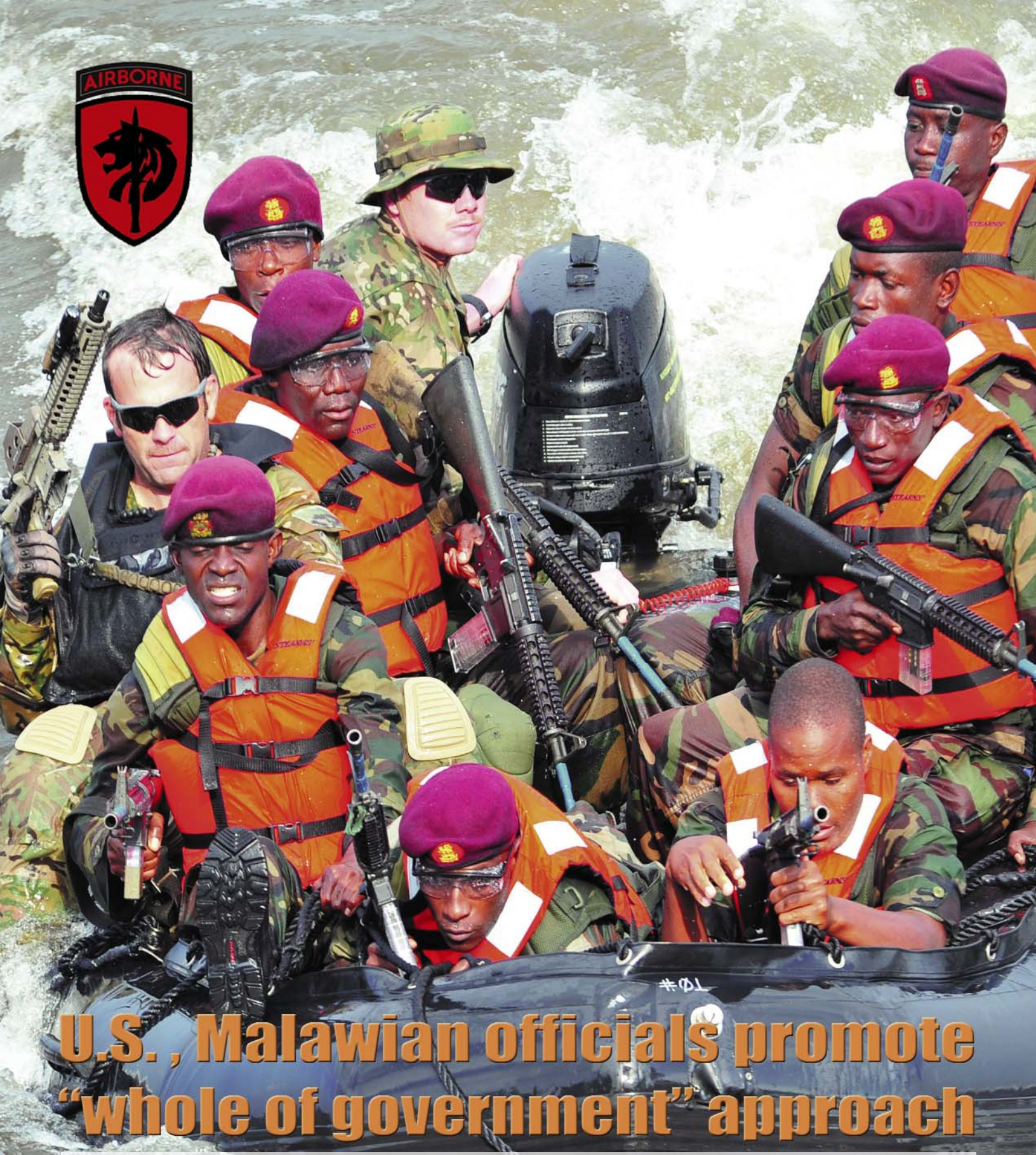
"These guys [Paraguayan civil affairs] are truly professional and have a passion for what they do," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Hansel Delgadillo, who is the lead civil affairs planner for SOCSOUTH in support of the ODC in country.

Delgadillo has been working with his counterparts for the better part of three years and has seen the Paraguayan Civil Affairs unit develop each year.

"From planning to coordination and execution, they are really in control of each event they conduct, and the leadership demands nothing but the best to ensure every citizen is treated and cared for," he said.

Paraguayan civil affairs planners, with support from SOCSOUTH, are already coordinating the concept of operations for another MEDCAP this September in another rural community.

Residents of Yasy Cany packed themselves in pick-up trucks in order to receive free medical and social services during a two-day Paraguayan-led Medical Civic Action Program June 1 in the Canindeyú Department of Paraguay. More than 3,000 residents received services to include pediatrics, gynecology, general medicine, optometry, ophthalmology, dentistry, immunizations, identification registration and family planning. In addition, laboratory and pharmacy services were also provided.



U.S., Malawian officials promote "whole of government" approach

U.S. Special Operations Forces, along with Malawian Defense Force (MDF) paratroopers, perform a beach landing during rehearsals for an assault upon a compound during a simulated crisis at the Fish Eagle Inn, in Salima, Malawi, May 6. The main exercise was preceded by pre-exercise training between U.S. SOF and MDF, which included skills such as marksmanship, small unit tactics, close quarters battle, combat medicine, and mission planning. Photo by Air Force Master Sgt. Larry W. Carpenter Jr.

By SOCAFRICA Public Affairs

Approximately 1,000 participants took part in a three-week long capacity building event to empower partner nation governments to improve their capability to deal with crises that could arise, from violent extremist threats to major natural disasters.

Exercise Epic Gaurdian took place in April and May 2013 across three countries—Djibouti, Malawi and Seychelles.

A watermark of the exercise was that it represented the first time the Malawian government employed a Crisis Inter-Agency Task Force in the planning process for a major crisis.

"The CIATF is an interagency task force used to take the national command authorities directives and requirements and give them to tactical level forces, units and agencies," said Lt. Col. Herb Skinner, Joint Expeditionary Control Group-Forward. "The CIATF is an operational level organization, and they resource the tactical level units and synchronize efforts within the government."

This is what is commonly referred to as the "whole-of-government" approach to finding solutions to seemingly extraordinarily complex problems.

Skinner also said that the 'whole-of-government' approach to solving crises means using all departments, ministries and agencies of government to solve problems together; with each performing its function and synchronizing efforts to minimize wasted effort.

Multiple Malawian government agencies were involved throughout the exercise, to include their Ministry of Defense, Paratroop Battalion, National Intelligence Bureau, Ministry of Interior and Public Safety, Malawi police services and airport security service, working side by side with their military counterparts.

"It gives me great pleasure to … mark the successful conclusion of Epic Guardian 2013, a joint training exercise promoting a 'whole-of-government' approach to good governance, security, and crisis response," said Nicole Thompson, U.S. State Department Public Affairs Officer. "I would like to extend a special word of gratitude to the Government of Malawi for hosting this joint exercise and to General Henry Odillo, Commanding General of the Malawi Defense Force, for hosting our U.S. Military and civilian personnel. The gracious hospitality and professionalism of all members of the Malawian government ensured a successful exercise."

The Epic Guardian exercise was engineered to work with the Malawian Defense Force—as well as other Malawian Government agencies—to help them establish an efficient way to operate a CIATF, providing them with a greater capacity to coordinate local and regional responses to a broad range of security and humanitarian crises.

Though Epic Guardian is not the first example of military cooperation between Malawi and the United Sates, Thompson did elaborate on the scope and significance of the event.

"[Epic Guardian 2013] is the largest and most complex exercise that we have ever undertaken. Years of planning, coordination and cooperation between the Malawian and U.S. governments were required to carry out an endeavor of this scale," said Thompson. "Now, at its conclusion, I can say without equivocation that the friendship between the United States and Malawi is stronger, our government civilian and military forces more capable, and our ability to respond to crises and protect our citizens is more integrated than ever before."

Prior to Epic Guardian, there was no framework within the Malawian government to synchronize and integrate civil and military assets for a coordinated response; which is why developing a Malawi internal crisis response structure was a priority for the exercise, which included CIATF and a MDF/MOI Counter Terror Task Force.

Brig. Gen. Peter Andrew Namathanga, commanding officer of the Malawi Defence Force Air Wing, explained why the CIATF is necessary.

"If something happens to the country, it is not only the military that is going to be responsible to respond to that. The crisis that have come before, they do not always deal with the military," said General Namathanga. "Today when you talk about national security, it is a broad subject, you are talking about basically human security, and human security covers so many areas. Disasters can come that result from rains and floods and the like; this is not necessarily a military operation. There will be different agencies that would lead the response, and we are saying the 'whole-of-government approach' embraces all different departments."

The main exercise was preceded by pre-exercise training between U.S. Special Operations Forces and Malawi Defense Forces, which included skills such as marksmanship, small unit tactics, close quarters battle, combat medicine, and mission planning; essential skills during the various missions throughout the exercise.

"Let me commend the government of the United States of America, for their invaluable contributions that led to the success of this training exercise, it is indeed through such joint training exercises that we can make the world a safer place to be," said Namathanga. "There were challenges and a lot of lessons were learned as different agencies merged their various skills to resolve the crisis at hand."

Senior-level officers from various partner nations, to include Nigeria, take part in a capabilities demonstration on an 11-meter long Naval Special Warfare Rigid-Hulled Inflatable Boat while attending a 2012 Strategic Level Small Craft Combating Terrorism Course at the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School. Photo by Darian Wilson.

NAVSCIATTS provides expertise as Nigerians launch tactical riverine operations course

By Darian Wilson
NAVSCIATTS Public Affairs

A program to assist African security force partners to develop security capacity has culminated in the delivery of patrol craft and the establishment of on-going training efforts designed to improve Nigerian coastal and riverine security.

The program includes a training partnership between Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School and the Nigerian Joint Maritime Security Training Center. It is specifically designed to address recent trends in which, for the first time, incidents of piracy in western Africa have overtaken incidents in eastern Africa, as recently reported by the International Maritime Bureau.

JMSTC initially opened in 2010 as a capacity-building initiative with help from the government of the United Kingdom as Nigeria's first fully-dedicated maritime security and littoral and riverine operations training center.

NAVSCIATTS' role as the only Department of Navy Security Cooperation enabling schoolhouse operating under the U.S. Special Operations Command led to numerous exchanges between the two organizations, according to Cmdr. John Cowan, NAVSCIATTS commanding officer, all of which were intended to support the upcoming launch and success of JMSTC's first Tactical Riverine Operations Course in Lagos, Nigeria, from July 13 to Sept. 6, 2013.

"From the beginning, JMSTC coordinated through Security Force Assistance channels to send key leaders to NAVSCIATTS' in-resident and instructor development training," said Cowan. "They also requested support from NAVSCIATTS Mobile Training Teams, who deployed to Nigeria to teach best practices and provide their staff on-the-job training."

As a result, NAVSCIATTS personnel have conducted three MTT events to include Patrol Craft Officer Riverine and Outboard Motor Maintenance training in 2011, Instructor Development and OBM training in 2012, and Patrol Craft Hull Maintenance and OBM instruction in 2013. A pre-deployment site survey team deployed to Nigeria in 2010 to meet with JMSTC leadership to better understand the personnel, equipment and training requirements of the center.

In addition, Nigerian partners have filled nearly 30 in-resident training slots at NAVSCIATTS since 2010, according to Cowan, to include training in riverine and coastal operations, hull maintenance, outboard motor maintenance, instructor development, tactical communications, and strategic-level small craft to combat terrorism.

The training partnership also supports U.S. Africa Command's guiding principles, which state in part that AFRICOM activities, plans, and operations are centered on the fact that a safe, secure, and stable Africa is in U.S. national interest. Over the long run, it will be Africans who will best be able to address African security challenges; and, that AFRICOM most effectively advances U.S. security interests through focused security engagement with our African partners.

"TROC was tailored after the training that many of our personnel have already received during the NAVSCIATTS Patrol Craft Officer - Riverine course," said Lt. Jibril Umar Abdullahi, a JMSTC instructor and graduate of the NAVSCIATTS Strategic Level Small Craft Combating Terrorism Course in July 2012. "This new course and training would not have been possible without the support and training we have all received from NAVSCIATTS."

At least four of the TROC instructors were trained at NAVSCIATTS, according to Abdullahi, and the center will also benefit from the training that the maintenance officer received at NAVSCIATTS.

"He has been relentless in transferring all the skills he learned to the technicians under him in an effort to achieve planned maintenance of equipment goals at the center," said Abdullahi.

Nigerian Defense Headquarters planned the new course as part of an on-going initiative to develop JMSTC into a regional "Training Center of Excellence" for the entire western African sub-region. Such efforts reinforce the intent of NAVSCIATTS' leadership and staff, who consider building such centers under the "train-the-trainer" model as a core component of their mission.

A student performs hull maintenance during a Mobile Training Team event sponsored by Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School at the Nigerian Joint Maritime Security Training Center in Lagos, Nigeria. U.S. Navy photo.

"We were very honored when asked to work with JMSTC as their personnel are primarily provided by the Nigerian Navy Special Boat Service, a group that is well-known for high levels of professionalism, tactical skill, and maturity as well as their use of restraint in complex situations," said Cowan. "As our daily focus here is on building relationships, professional leadership development, operational level engagement, maintenance, strategic level instruction and human rights development; this seemed like a great opportunity to work together.

"The fact that JMSTC recently took delivery of six 25-foot patrol boats facilitated by the U.S. Embassy through the Foreign Military Sales program, shows that the system is working and that we are all committed to a long-standing relationship with Nigeria and its quest to collaborate in securing the region's maritime domain."

FIT TO FIGHT

Marine Corps Maj. Andy Christian has spent years in some of the world's deadliest combat zones. Now, he's fighting a different kind of battle as he swims, cycles and runs to raise money to help injured service members

Story and photos by Petty Officer 3rd Class Paul Coover NSW Public Affairs

Marine Corps Maj. Andrew Christian's desk sits in a small room in a cubicle-filled office on the second floor of a climate-controlled building that overlooks the Pacific. From his seat behind his computer, he can neither hear the waves nor smell the ocean breeze. What he can hear is the clicking of keyboards and the hum of air conditioners. What he can smell is recycled air.

His is the only Marine uniform in a mass of Navy camouflage, and his title - liaison officer - hints at a job requiring a more complicated level of diplomacy, coordination and logistics than any 20-year-old joining the Marine Corps in 1989 could have imagined.

"No one joins the military to work at a staff position," he says.

From here, it is hard to see how Christian could be physically fit at all, let alone an endurance athlete whose career has seen him complete 13 half-Ironman triathlons, six full Ironmans and personally raise more than $250,000 for wounded American service members in the process.

But he has not always held a job in a quiet little office.

He acknowledges, of course, that his current job is an important one, even if it is removed from the military action around the world. He is stationed in Coronado to learn how Naval Special Warfare functions, and to use that knowledge to help align the efforts of the relatively young Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, which stood up in 2006, with Naval Special Warfare. Such coordination could allow for greater interoperability between forces. The phrase sounds like military jargon until one realizes that the ability of Marines and Navy SEALs to work together in places like Afghanistan – and increasingly in conflict zones nearer the world's coastlines, where the Navy is familiar but MARSOC is less so – can be the difference between saving human lives and losing them.

So Christian comes into the office a little before 7:30 a.m. every morning. He sits behind his computer, he checks his email, drinks his coffee, and he begins his work day.

As he sits in that second story room, listening to keyboard strokes and breathing the recycled air, he tries to explain his unlikely story. He begins with a story about war.

In 2006, then-Capt. Andrew Christian was deployed to Iraq and tasked with advising Iraqi forces near Baghdad. A seasoned warfighter serving his 10th deployment, he was 37 years old, going on 17 years in the Corps, the first eight of which were spent as an enlisted rifleman – a genuine leader of Marines. On Feb. 20, he drove down an asphalt road as part of a three-vehicle convoy. It was a road he had traveled many times before.

Lives changed for all of the Marines in the convoy moving down the road that day. They changed because of the difference between a low-level improvised explosive device and one made with advanced technology and special consideration given to the capabilities of American military vehicles.

Explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) are the IED's more professional, more sinister cousin, designed to maim and kill not by the random spray of shrapnel, as with the more rudimentary devices, but with calculated aim. When detonated, EFPs discharge a metal plate that turns into a spinning projectile, accurate at short distances, able to penetrate the armor of vehicles designed to withstand anti-tank mines.

The first thing Christian remembers is the sound of the explosion.

The Marines believe their enemy had a spotter that day – a lookout who signaled another insurgent at the moment the EFP had the potential to inflict the most harm to the American convoy. After the detonation, the spinning disk began its violent path toward the vehicles. It missed Christian, but took the hand of one Marine and the leg of another. It injured an Iraqi interpreter who was riding along. And it took the life of Staff Sgt. Jay Collado.

In the immediate aftermath, the Marines engaged their attackers, who fled the vicinity. Then began scenes of rescue and recovery. They are scenes that need not be relived.

What matters is that three people were saved and one was not.

What matters is that Collado had been about a month away from returning home to his family.

How could any good come from that level of evil?

From his office with a view, Christian recounts the events of that day in Iraq in even, measured tones. He uses precise language befitting a military officer. To someone not familiar with the Marine Corps, he would sound emotionless.

Here is how emotionless he is:

In the aftermath of the explosion, and after the Marines secured the area, they removed an American flag from the Humvee in which Collado was riding. Only four months later, Christian would run with that flag from start to finish of the San Diego Rock 'N' Roll marathon. He did so not only to honor Collado but also to raise money in hopes that someday Collado's 6-year-old daughter, Kaiya, might be able to afford college tuition.

After the run, Christian decided one event wasn't enough. So he petitioned several endurance companies for sponsorship, and Specialized Bicycles came through; they put photos of Christian on water bottles so cycling stores could give them out as a marketing tool to help raise money for wounded Marines.

Marine Corps Maj. Andy Christian, right, gets a hand up one of the most difficult climbs in San Diego from his riding partner, an active-duty Navy SEAL.

A few of those bottles made it to a cycling store in Arizona, where a man named John Greenway caught sight of them. A lifelong civilian, Greenway had just attended his nephew's graduation from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego and, struck by the image of young men and women sacrificing for others, resolved to do more to support them.

"I'd taken the military for granted my whole life," he says. Not anymore. He got Christian's email address and sent him a message. Christian was back in Iraq, serving another deployment, but got the note.

When Christian read Greenway's ideas about a new event intended to support injured troops, he immediately agreed to get on board, and thus began the Ride for Semper Fi. Christian returned home from Iraq and was able to ride in the inaugural event. The event is now called the Ride 430, for the distance cyclists travel between the Tuscon area and San Diego, all in support of the service members. It has raised over a million dollars in its first five years, and is still growing.

Andrew Christian grew up in Wisconsin, where he dabbled in sports and considered a career in law enforcement. He married his high school sweetheart, Sarah. In 1989, two years out of high school and working for the police department, he tagged along with a buddy who was interested in joining the Marines. His buddy opted out. Christian opted in.

So began a career that has spanned the world, from California to North Carolina, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Liberia. He has been a Marine for more than 23 years. He was recently informed he will be promoted to lieutenant colonel, and has no plans to retire.

It wasn't until the explosion in Iraq that Christian began competing competitively in endurance events.

"I got a late start," he says with typical understatement.

Most of the cyclists and triathletes with whom he competes began their careers in their teens, if not sooner. Christian's began with his marathon at 37, but has since included events all over the country. In almost all of them, he has competed on behalf of others.

Greenway, like most who know Christian, speaks of the Marine almost in awe. He talks about getting emails from Christian from combat zones, when Christian could have been resting and was instead using down time to help even more service members and families who have been affected by war. He talks about how as soon as Christian returns from those wars -- time others use for themselves -- he gets right back on the bike, or into the pool.

"If he's not deployed," Greenway says, "he's raising money for his brothers."

It would be understandable, then, if Sarah Christian harbored some resentment about her husband's chosen career and subsequent commitment to his fellow Marines and Sailors. She does not.

She, too, has gotten emails during combat missions. She has had to consider what it means for her husband to work in Special Operations, where he is often in as dangerous a situation as any American fighter.

"You do think about it," she says, "and you count your blessings."

Like her husband, she speaks directly about patriotism and duty.

"Someone has to go do what has to be done," she says.

On a foggy weekend morning in north San Diego, Christian is preparing for yet another bike ride.

He stretches his black MARSOC Foundation jersey over his shorts, carefully lays out a towel on which to change shoes, hops on his bike for a quick spin to test his gearing. He does all of this automatically, carrying on a side conversation as he works.

The man who sits next to Christian at work -- an active-duty SEAL officer who is also riding -- calls Christian "a stereotypical Marine."

"He's methodical, regimented, disciplined," the SEAL says. That's on display today.

The race will cover a little more than 100 miles, and hundreds of cyclists in colorful jerseys mill about the starting line, where the two Special Operations officers chat casually, anonymously. The enormity of the physical feat doesn't seem to bother them.

"I think it's at the core of who we are," the SEAL said earlier in the week.

As the race begins, riders roll from the start in a high school parking lot and into the streets that will take them on a massive loop through some of the most remote stretches of the county. The fog remains thick as the tightly-packed group navigates the early, flat stretches of the course. The real racing will take place on the mountains to follow, and on one mountain in particular -- its slopes are said to nearly mirror those of Alpe D'Huez, one of the most notoriously difficult climbs in the Tour de France.

There is advantage to be gained from tucking into the group in the early going, to slipping into a daze and allowing minutes, and miles, to slide by. Most riders operate this way. Nothing is gained from riding out front and pulling others down the road as the pack travels together.

Nothing, perhaps, except pride.

The group of lead riders is dense enough that even support vehicles cannot make a clean pass in the early stages of the race. Only when the road begins to roll -- only when lesser riders begin to struggle under the weight of premature ambition -- does the pack thin.

Seven years ago, a calculated killing produced an unimaginable tragedy. Could any good come from that evil?

The loss of life, of course, will never be recovered, but the blast also produced an athlete whose pedal strokes mean more to his fellow Marines than even he might know.

They certainly matter to Kaiya Collado, who will be able to afford college tuition as soon as she's old enough to go.

As the support cars make their way to the front of the race, the road begins to climb. The riders are again clearly visible as they ascend out of the ceiling of a cloud and into a sun that's brilliant and blinding. Maj. Andy Christian is at the front, leading those who prefer to follow.

Many days, Christian is the first person in the gym.

United States Army Special Operations Command Commanding General, Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, presents the Soldier's Medal to the family of Sgt. Maj. William L. Lubbers during an award ceremony on July 15. Lubbers was posthumously awarded the Soldier's Medal for his courageous actions on Nov. 15, 2012, when tragedy struck during a parade in Midland, Texas.

Hero receives Soldier's Medal

Story and photo by Sgt. Daniel A. Carter
USASOC Public Affairs

Because of his heroic actions on the fateful day of Nov. 15, 2012, Sgt. Maj. William L. Lubbers was posthumously awarded the Soldier's Medal, July 15, 2013.

Lubbers was aboard a float during a Show of Support parade in Midland, Texas when it was struck by a train moving at more than 60 miles per hour. The parade took place 4 days after Veterans Day in order to show support for veterans injured while in combat operations.

Lubbers had reacted as fast as he could, instantly pulling Soldiers and their wives off of the float in order to move them out of harm's way. With only 15 seconds of warning, Lubbers showed remarkable bravery, courage, and selfless action when he jumped from his seat on the float and began to physically move people to get them to the ground. Lubbers stayed aboard the float, with no regard for his own personal safety, in order to save as many people as he could before being struck by the train, killing Lubbers and three other veterans.

United States Army Special Operations Command Commanding General, Charles T. Cleveland, attended the ceremony as the guest speaker.

"Sgt. Maj. Lubbers was a hero in every sense of the word," Cleveland said, "He is greatly missed and will always be part of the USASOC family."

After the orders were published, Cleveland presented the Soldier's Medal to Lubbers' wife, Tiffanie, and children Zachary and Sydnie.

The award ceremony in dedication of Sgt. Maj. Lubbers was attended by the Lubbers' family and friends, civilians and Soldiers.

ARSOF 2022 campaign of learning: Firebird demonstration

By Maj. Emily Potter
USASOAC Public Affairs

During the scenario demonstration of the Firebird Optionally Piloted Aircraft, Sgt. Alexis Parache, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), operates the sensors while Staff Sgt. Lorezno Wright, 224 Military Intelligence Battalion, operates the signal intelligence. Photo courtesy of USASOAC.

Soldiers and leaders alike were able to partner with industry to build and test concepts that define how Army Special Operations Forces will fight in the future with a demonstration of the Firebird Optionally Piloted Aircraft, associated intelligence collection sensors and command and control systems.

Soldiers spent the week practicing with and getting hands-on time with the equipment, culminating in a key leader demonstration.

The learning event was part of the U.S. Special Operations Aviation Command's efforts to improve Army Unmanned Aircraft Systems to meet joint expeditionary tactics, techniques, procedures, forward-based networking and sensor requirements.

Mr. Eric Rosario, USASOAC UAS logistics, explained this as a way to "keep the Army in front of all the new technology, and determine if this is a capability we could use somewhere."

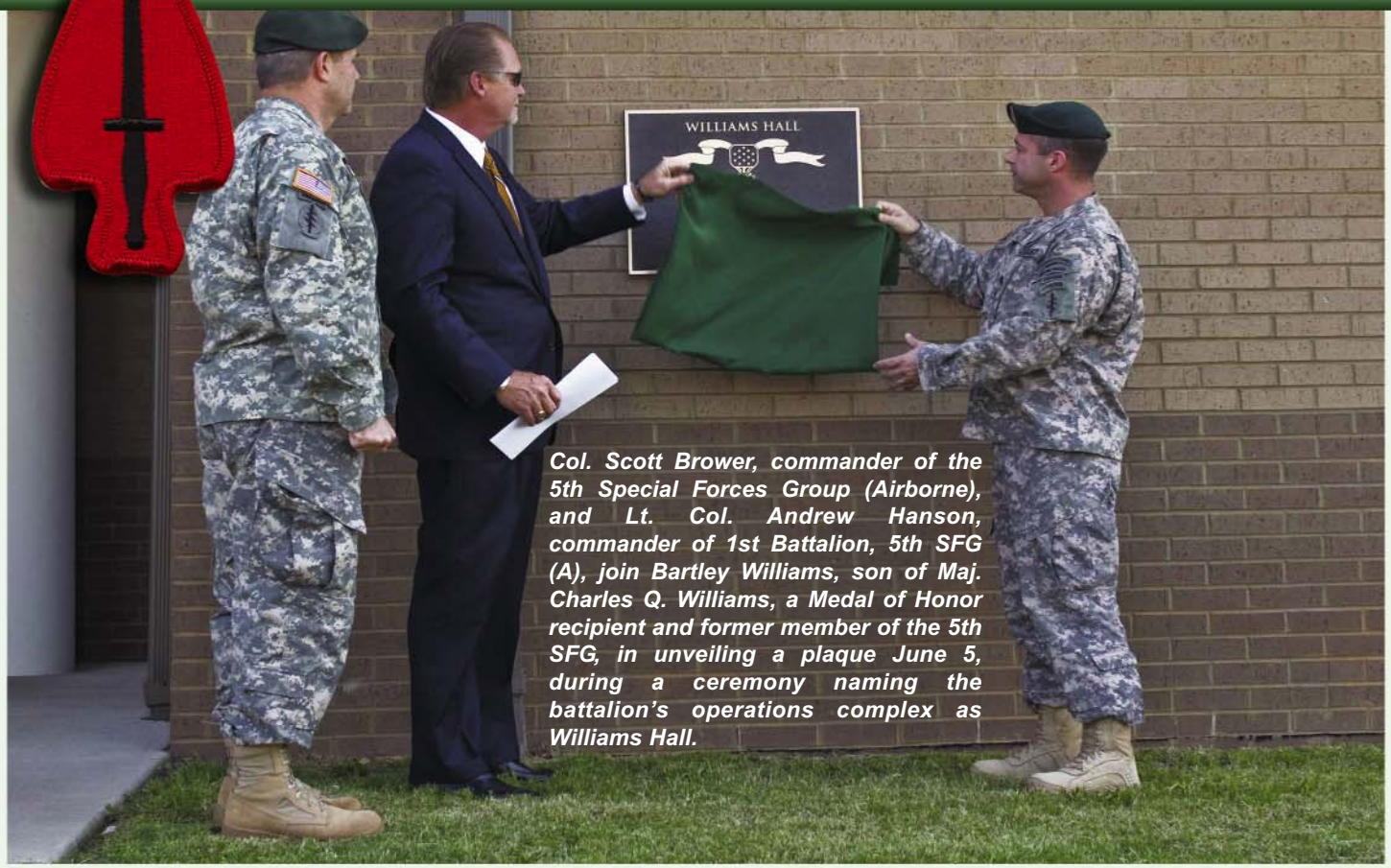
As the aviation staff proponent of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, USASOAC hosted the demonstration "as an opportunity to see the emerging technology and the future possibilities for UAS," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Cory Anderson, who created and ran the operational scenarios that demonstrated the capabilities of the airframe and allowed Soldiers to get behind the controls.

Anderson, along with Staff Sgt. Brian Edinger, created the scenarios "based off similar situations to what we see in theater in the current environment." Other Soldiers acted as opposition forces on the battlefield, operated the payloads and performed maintenance.

"This was absolutely great for the 15Ws (operators) and 15Es (mechanics) who got to operate the sensors and actually turn wrenches to change out the payloads on the airframe," said Anderson. "They were able to see a different side, not just Army technology."

The Soldiers found the systems easy to learn. Pfc. Andrew May, who has been a UAS operator at 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) for six months and worked with the portable ground control station, joked "if a Private can do it, anyone can do it. It's that simple."

Pfc. Joseph Patton, 30th Brigade North Carolina National Guard, attended the demonstration to "gauge how much more capable this UAS is compared to what we're using. Training as a UAS operator is very technical - you get used to that aircraft. To see another UAS operating takes you out of that comfort zone, and makes you look at future capabilities and the expansion of our field."



Col. Scott Brower, commander of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and Lt. Col. Andrew Hanson, commander of 1st Battalion, 5th SFG (A), join Bartley Williams, son of Maj. Charles Q. Williams, a Medal of Honor recipient and former member of the 5th SFG, in unveiling a plaque June 5, during a ceremony naming the battalion's operations complex as Williams Hall.

SF Ops complex named Williams Hall

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Barbara Ospina
5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Public Affairs

The Medal of Honor is our Nation's highest military honor awarded for valor. It is for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, and is awarded by the president of the United States on behalf of Congress.

Soldiers, families and friends from 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), also known as The Legion, gathered together June 5, at the battalion's operations complex to reflect on the true bravery and selfless actions of a fellow Special Forces Soldier and name the complex in honor of Medal of Honor recipient Maj. Charles Q. Williams.

Williams was awarded the Medal of Honor for his acts of valor while defending a Special Forces Camp in Dong Xoai, Republic of Vietnam, in June 1965.

Williams was a Special Forces lieutenant when his acts of gallantry merited the Medal of Honor. He defended a base camp against a violent attack from a hostile enemy that lasted for 14 hours. He was wounded four times during the attack and did not falter as he continued to lead the defense until all personnel were evacuated.

"Although I did not personally know Maj. Charles Williams, I feel like I know of him," commented Lt. Col. Andrew Hanson, commander of 1st Bn., 5th SFG (A). "I see a piece of him in every Special Forces Soldier that walks these halls."

Even though it has been roughly 40 years since the conflict in Vietnam, there is a common bond of duty between the generations of Special Forces Soldiers past, present and future.

Williams' son Bartley attended the ceremony on behalf of his father. He spoke on the kind of man he knew him to be and he spoke on what the dedication would mean to his father. He was certain that if his father was alive to attend the ceremony he would be more than grateful for such an honor.

A bronze plaque hangs at the entrance of the newly dedicated Williams Hall reminding Soldiers of the true embodiment of a Special Forces Soldier and why they fight.

Canine complex honors fallen Soldier

Story and photo by Sgt. Daniel A. Carter
USASOC Public Affairs

Family, friends and former team members gathered on June 13, to dedicate the new Special Forces Multi Purpose Canine Complex in honor of a 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) Soldier, Sgt. Aaron J. Blasjo.

"This Green Beret, who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to his Nation, did so while performing his duties as a military dog handler," said Col. Heinz P. Dinter, 3rd SFG (A) deputy commander.

Blasjo was killed in action on May 29, 2011, after the vehicle that he was traveling in, on a mounted patrol, struck an improvised explosive device in the Wardak province, Afghanistan.

Dinter explained that for the Soldiers who have deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, military working dog teams are vital to the success of the mission. Not only do they help achieve the mission goals, but in the process have saved countless lives, both military and civilian.

"Aaron loved being a military dog handler," said Master Sgt. David West, a former team member of Blasjo's.

"He was a great Soldier, a great Special Forces Soldier. He wanted to do and try everything," said West. "He came to Special Forces, and right away he took to doing everything that was necessary, always trying to go above and beyond. He was trying to be the best that he could in his military occupational specialty. He then moved on to become a dog handler, in order to increase the safety of the guys down range."

"So it's a privilege for us, as members of the 3rd SFG, to be here today and to pay tribute to Sgt. Blasjo," Dinter said, "Especially those of us who directly benefited from Sgt. Blasjo's courageous service and commitment on the battlefield."

Following his speech, Dinter and Crystal Blasjo, Sgt. Blasjo's wife, officially unveiled the memorial plaque that will be placed on the front of the complex.

At the bottom of the plaque the words read: Sgt. Blasjo and SFMPC, Special Forces multi-purpose canine, "Hunter" saved countless lives."

Mrs. Blasjo described Hunter, a Belgian Malinois, and the relationship that the two had.

"Hunter was like Aaron: he was cocky, he was arrogant, and he didn't like to listen, which was how Aaron was," she recalled while laughing, "But I think that is what made Aaron such a great Soldier, he was very stern. [Hunter] knew when it was time to do his job and he knew when it was time to play. Hunter was an amazing dog."

Crystal Blasjo, Sgt. Aaron J. Blasjo's wife, and Col. Heinz P. Dinter, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) deputy commander, officially unveil the memorial plaque that will be placed on the new 3rd SFG Special Forces Multi-Purpose Canine Complex. The complex was named in honor and memory of Blasjo, who was killed in action on May 29, 2011.

Although Blasjo deployed shortly after his son Talon was born, Mrs. Blasjo says that he knows about his dad; he can tell you who he is and tell you that he lives in the sky now. In memory of his dad, Talon carries around a stuffed animal named Hunter.

"He carries a lot of his dad's personality and passion for things," Mrs. Blasjo explained while holding onto her son's stuffed animal, "He makes you smile at the most opportune times when you just want to burst into tears. He will bring a smile to your face, just like Aaron would do with all of his friends, family, and Soldiers. He would always make you smile, no matter what."

Many people throughout the Special Forces community, especially 3rd Special Forces Group, knew Blasjo and held him in high regard as a Soldier and as a leader.

"This dedication and the memorial plaque unveiled here today, will serve as an inspiration to those who follow him; it will serve as a constant reminder to us all that we should live up to his high standard of commitment, and that our continuing service must be worthy of his sacrifice," Dinter said.

Admiral William H. McRaven looks on as Rear Adm. Brian L. Losey salutes Rear Adm. Sean A. Pybus during the Naval Special Warfare change of command ceremony June 21 at Naval Base Coronado, Calif. Losey relieved Pybus as commander, Naval Special Warfare Command. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Megan Anuci.

Naval Special Wafare Command welcomes new commander

By Petty Officer 3rd Class Paul Coover
NSW Public Affairs

Rear Adm. Brian L. Losey relieved Rear Adm. Sean A. Pybus as commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, during a change of command ceremony at Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, Calif., June 21.

Adm. William H. McRaven, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, was the guest speaker for the ceremony. In his remarks, McRaven praised Pybus' leadership within Naval Special Warfare.

"In the midst of all the challenging times, Sean's SEALs, combatant-craft crewmen and NSW Sailors have contributed to the fight in Afghanistan, East Africa, Yemen, North Africa, the Philippines and countless other hot spots around the world," McRaven said. "We have earned a reputation that is unparalleled, primarily because Sean has led the effort to ensure we send the best selected, the best trained, the best equipped and the best supported Naval Special Warfare warriors ever."

Pybus will leave Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command to command NATO's Special Operations headquarters in Brussels. He will be promoted to vice admiral in his new assignment. Pybus, a career SEAL

officer, has previously served at Joint Special Operations Command and U.S. Special Operations Command, among other assignments.

"All good things must end," Pybus said at the ceremony, "and there are new beginnings today."

Pybus' time at CNSWC was marked by an emphasis on a return to the community's maritime roots and a focus on caring for the NSW force and its families.

McRaven said he was impressed by Pybus' efforts to take care of those under his command.

"His personal efforts regarding the Preservation of the Force and Families and the success that accompanied the hard work made NSW the model program for the Navy and for U.S. Special Operations Command," McRaven said.

Pybus was relieved by Losey, another career SEAL officer.

Losey most recently served as commander, Special Operations Command Africa. A 1983 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, Losey also served as commander, Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, and as a director on the National Security Council in the Executive Office of the President.

Losey said he was honored to take command from Pybus.

"The place produces warriors that are intensely focused and committed," Losey said at the ceremony.

"The complex and dynamic security situations that are evolving around the world today will continue to call on the full extent of our commitment, our creativity and our adaptability," Losey said. "We will build on the course that Admiral Pybus has set for this community."

NSW is comprised of approximately 8,900 personnel, including more than 2,400 active-duty SEALs, 700 Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen (SWCC), 700 reserve personnel, 4,100 support personnel and more than 1, 100 civilians.

CNSWC in San Diego leads the Navy's Special Operations Force and the maritime component of USSOCOM, headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Fla.

NSW groups command, train, equip and deploy components of NSW squadrons to meet the exercise, contingency and wartime requirements of the regional combatant commanders, theater special operations commands and numbered fleets located around the world.

The Naval Special Warfare commander's flag is raised during the command's change of command ceremony June 21 at Naval Base Coronado, Calif. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Megan Anuci.

One team, one fight

The Navy SEAL and SWCC Scout Team redirect their efforts to find candidates able to form strong bonds in multiple cultural settings

By Petty Officer 3rd Class Geneva Brier
NSW Public Affairs

Bodies covered in sand, sweat dripping from young men's faces, and clothes soaked from murky water. Thirty-seven young men bellowing out orders over each other as they quickly try to form a height line before their allotted time runs out.

The young men are football players from Hoover High School, a local high school in City Heights well known for its diverse student body. The school is visiting Naval Special Warfare Command for the fourth time in hopes of experiencing what it would be like to go through Navy SEAL training.

The young men stand nervously waiting for a Navy SEAL to nod his acceptance of their effort or hold the megaphone to his mouth to order a secondary command. He walks slowly down the line looking the players up and down, his goal to give them a brief glimpse into SEAL training and offer them the tools if they do in fact choose to volunteer for Special Operations.

For U.S. Navy SEALs, a strong bond and partnership with trusted allies in any given region could greatly improve combat effectiveness. Recruiting candidates like the students at Hoover could help that effort - a SEAL who has significant cultural knowledge and language skills is irreplaceable when forming relationships with allies.

Naval Special Warfare is diverse as a force as a whole, but is much less when it comes to its operators. Over the past several years, missions have had a greater demand on operators in a variety of regions as opposed to a focus on a single war zone, making the need for diversity among SEAL teams a priority.

"The strongest bonds are developed when you have someone from that specific culture who is in our organization," said Capt. Duncan Smith, director of Navy SEAL & SWCC Scout Team. "Having members within our ranks who know certain cultures around the world and who are quick to develop bonds multiplies our combat effectiveness."

The Naval Special Warfare Center Recruiting Directorate, also known as the Navy SEAL & SWCC Scout Team, was developed in 2005 to bring awareness about the teams to potential SEAL candidates and to fill Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL classes to capacity, which had previously never been done. Since 2007, every class has been filled, and about 70 percent of graduates have previously obtained a college degree, which raised the standards for entry into the training.

With the increase in the number of college graduates

applying to become operators atop the already vast amount of applicants interested in becoming SEALs, NSW has shifted its recruiting focus. The Scout team's main objective now is not only finding qualified applicants but also attracting diverse individuals capable of becoming operators.

In December 2011, Rear Adm. Sean A. Pybus, who was then commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, moved forward with a proposal by RD to broaden the definition of diversity as it relates to recruiting. In the past, scouting efforts were primarily focused on finding African-American officers. Currently, due to Pybus' actions, efforts have broadened so that scouts now seek enlisted and officer candidates across a variety of ethnicities to include Asians, Hispanics and African-Americans, among others.

"Rear Adm. Pybus has repeatedly and steadfastly articulated their commitment to developing diversity among this elite group," writes Captain Cynthia I. Macri, M.D, Special Assistant for Diversity to the Chief of Naval Operations. "Their interest is operational: SEALs succeed because of their ability to blend into the host country. You can't do this if you don't look like, act like, and sound like a native."

Although an obvious lack in diversity is present throughout the SEAL teams, it is difficult to obtain an accurate record of ethnicity due to the fact that phases throughout the process of becoming a SEAL record ethnicity and race differently. Numbers regarding diversity are also recorded differently depending on where in the country information is recorded. Another hurdle in the system is that all members have the option to decline providing their race or ethnicity, changing results significantly and making recruiting more challenging.

"Diversity is as much art as it is science," said Smith. "Some statistics are purely self reported, others are reported by the recruiter. And ethnic categories do not always accurately capture who is coming into the force."

Having knowledge of the inaccuracy of statistics makes the RD effort more challenging and makes their presence and involvement within diverse communities an important factor while scouting.

"We focused a heavy effort over the last 18 months within outreach activities, including the release of 'Act of Valor'," said Smith. "'Act of Valor' was done with a purpose; there is a reason why three of the eight Navy SEALS in the film are diverse."

In addition to the production of "Act of Valor," a large recruiting effort is focused on outreach programs with the Boy Scouts of America, Hispanic Games, National Football League, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, NFL combines and SEAL Fitness Challenges that are held at diverse high school and college campuses.

"We send a few SEALs to each event of various pay grades and who are able to bring their background into the conversation to create a mutual understanding," said Smith.

The Navy SEAL & SWCC Scout Team focuses on parts of the country that have the most diverse populations and it has blended that knowledge where it hosts outreach programs.

"They are looking for truly culturally fluent people," writes Macree. "They have supported many outreach and recruiting initiatives to develop a cadre of eligible and qualified individuals. They know that this will not happen with a speech, a visit, or a tour - no matter how inspirational."

Much of the Scout Teams' efforts focus on hosting diverse local high schools, like Hoover, to compete in a Navy SEAL Challenge. The challenges include jogging in formation, log physical training, forming height lines and other samples of types of training they would experience throughout BUD/S.

"We really didn't know anything about Special Forces before coming here but after we left last time a lot of the guys were talking about trying to join," said Donnie Martin, a junior at Hoover High School.

Another significant recruiting campaign is the contract with the NFL Scouting Combine which began in 2012. At these events Scout Teams have the opportunity to meet with the players after their try-out individually and talk about Naval Special Warfare.

"The vast majority of candidates from the NFL combine are diverse," said Smith. "We present the notion that if they are driven to pursue the excellence they have already achieved on the field, they have obviously demonstrated the mental toughness, ability to operate as a member of a team, physical grit and determination necessary for NSW. We then invite them to bring that sense of drive and sense of mission to the military as a member is NSW, specifically SEALs and SWCC."

Scout teams also have programs set up with Boy Scouts of America and the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program, which have both been proven successful.

Because of RD efforts, NSW has seen a rise in diversity within the force. According to statistics from fiscal year 2012, there has been approximately a four percent rise among NSW force as a whole since 2009. More significantly, in the past two years there has been approximately an 18 percent increase in NSW operators with Hispanic backgrounds.

"When you look at who is in the cockpit or who is pressing the launch button in a submarine it doesn't matter what your ethnicity is," said Smith. "However, as a Naval Special Warfare Operator your cultural understanding, your language skills and your ethnicity can be a tremendous advantage on the battlefield, and that makes our recruiting search very genuine and worthwhile."

Refueling over Greenland

A CV-22B Osprey receives fuel June 21 off the coast of Greenland by a 7th Special Operations Squadron MC-130H Combat Talon II. The aircraft landed in Iceland during its journey to RAF Mildenhall, England, to allow for crew rest and refueling. The CV-22 is assigned to the 7th SOS and is the first of 10 slated to arrive as part of the 352nd Special Operations Group expansion, which will last through the end of 2014. Photo by Senior Airman Laura Yahemiak.

RESCUE

Lt. Gen. Eric E. Fiel, Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command, stands with Tech. Sgt. Ismael Villegas, 24th Special Operations Wing combat control recruit liaison, and Staff Sgt. Dale Young, 342nd Training Squadron combat control instructor, after awarding the pair Silver Stars July 22. Villegas and Young were awarded Silver Stars for their actions against enemy forces in Afghanistan. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Vernon Young Jr.

Two Special Operations Airmen earn Silver Stars for actions in Afghanistan

By Mike Joseph
Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Public Affairs

Two Air Force Special Operations Command combat controllers stationed in San Antonio were each presented a Silver Star for gallantry in combat during a ceremony at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland July 22.

The two combat controllers, Tech. Sgt. Ismael Villegas and Staff Sgt. Dale Young, were decorated by Lt. Gen. Eric E. Fiel, the commander of the Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

The Silver Star is the third highest award exclusively for combat valor.

"Gentlemen, your bravery and tenacity epitomize what being a warrior is all about," Fiel said during the ceremony. "Your brave actions under hostile fire at great risk to your lives not only decimated the enemy, but also saved lives of your teammates. Your unwavering gallantry and devotion to duty are an example for all of us to follow."

It was the second Silver Star awarded to Villegas, who is currently the only active-duty two-time recipient in the Air Force. Villegas is assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field and presently works as a recruiting liaison for the 369th Air Force Recruiting Group at Lackland.

Young is assigned to the 342nd Training Squadron at Lackland as an instructor in the entry level course for all special operators.

Both recipients expressed how humbled and honored they were by the award.

"I was surprised," Young said. "It was submitted as a Bronze Star with Valor and after statements from some of my team members, different boards recommended an upgrade to Silver Star. It's an honor."

Villegas, a 16-year veteran with eight deployments, used "surreal and shock" to describe his reaction.

"The first one (in 2011) you don't even expect -- that in itself is a shock," he said. "To receive two -- that's even more incredible. For me to be awarded a second one is even more of a shock."

Both men received their awards for gallantry in action during separate military operations near Helmand province, Afghanistan.

Villegas' citation states he risked his life from Feb. 6-24, 2011, during nonstop enemy engagements. In an 18-day mission riddled with trench warfare battles, Villegas controlled 40 aircraft that delivered more than 32,500 pounds of precision ordnance. The air strikes resulted in 21 enemies confirmed killed in action and destroyed eight fighting positions and two communication repeaters.

During the mission, Villegas gathered intelligence from fortified insurgent positions at great risk. He also protected, covered, then pulled to safety a teammate hit by shrapnel.

Col. Marc Stratton, the commandant of the Inter-American Air Forces Academy at Lackland, was one of Villegas' first commanders when both served in the 21st Special Tactics Squadron, Pope Air Force Base, N.C., in 2002. Stratton is a special tactics officer who has spent 25 years in the career field.

He recalled that Villegas, then a senior airman, impressed his teammates in the field when directly engaged with the enemy on numerous missions during his first deployment to Afghanistan.

"Little did any of us know, at the time, that we would be here many years later at an event recognizing his courage under fire, not merely for one isolated incident, but for consecutive exceptional selfless actions during successive engagements over time," Stratton said.

"In short, this oak leaf cluster carries a great deal of significance," he said. "The award of a second Silver Star is very rare for good reason."

Young compared the award upgrade to "the kind of stuff you see in movies and TV."

"You never really see yourself in that position," he said. "The training we get is so good, so precise and key in building our skills.

"This is a tribute to my supervisors, the first controllers I met and the ones who taught me everything I know," Young said.

From May 19-23, 2009, near Helmand province, Young's citation states he served as the primary combat control joint terminal attack controller assigned to an Army Special Forces team. Young's element was under continuous enemy fire for 94 hours.

Young controlled up to 11 coalition aircraft and ensured safe and effective fires on enemy positions despite small-arms and rocket fire within 10 meters of his position. The mission also destroyed more than $1 billion in black tar opium.

During his remarks, the AFSOC commander cited the humility and training of Special Operations Airmen.

"Special Operations is a community of quiet professionals," Fiel said. "If you ask these men or anyone who wears our berets their thoughts about decorations, I think they would all say, 'I was just doing what I was trained to do.'

"The citations detail your amazing acts of heroism and bravery," he said. "Your stories are truly inspiring."

"Your brave actions under hostile fire at great risk to your lives not only decimated the enemy, but also saved lives of your teammates. Your unwavering gallantry and devotion to duty are an example for all of us to follow."

— Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, AFSOC commander

Son Tay Raid aircraft displayed at Cannon Air Force Base

By Senior Airman Jette Carr
27th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs

Spectators gather near the Combat Talon I, Cherry One, during a ceremony officially welcoming the retired aircraft to its new home by the front gate of Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., June 28. The Talon flew point in the largest covert operation of the Vietnam War, the Son Tay Raid, to rescue Prisoners of War. Photo by Senior Airman Jette Carr.

The 27th Special Operations Wing held a ceremony to celebrate the official new home of Combat Talon I, Cherry One, near the front entrance of Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., June 28, 2013.

If the retired aircraft could speak, it would undoubtedly have many hair-raising and death-defying exploits to share. Perhaps, though, the most intimidating story it could tell is that of the Son Tay Raid, the moment this particular Talon cemented its mark in time during a Prisoner of War rescue mission in the Vietnam War.

The notorious MC-130E was given a voice during the Cannon ceremony by way of several original crew members who flew the craft during the famous raid. Together, the veterans reminisced, chiming in with details and reminding each other of the moment they leapt into the history books.

Retired Lt. Col. Irl "Leon" Franklin, the Talon's pilot, recalled the day he was recruited to play a part in the Son Tay Raid.

"We got word from Headquarters [U.S. Air Force] to provide a crew for an unknown, classified mission," said Franklin. "They expressed my name specifically, and that of another fellow, a navigator, by the name of Tom Stiles. The rest of the crew was to be chosen from the 7th Special Operations Squadron."

It was a joint-service operation of the utmost secrecy -- formulated like a puzzle. Only those with a need-to-know were told how the pieces fit together, leaving most participants in the dark. Each group, from the flight crews to the Army Special Operators, practiced specific combat maneuvers, all the while speculating what their mission would be.

According to the National Museum of the United States Air Force, an assortment of aircraft trained for the operation, including six helicopters, five small attack planes and two large support aircraft. All unknowingly prepared for a raid on a POW camp in North Vietnam, where intelligence analysts believed 55 prisoners were being held.

Eventually, the mission was briefed to all and they flew what was to become the largest covert operation of the Vietnam War on the night of Nov. 20, 1970.

Flying point under the call sign Cherry One was the faithful Talon 0523, prepared to lead a team of helicopters in close formation. However, as it would happen, all was not smooth sailing for the military bird as the mission started off with what the craft's copilot, retired Maj. William Guenon, called a "Murphy" moment.

"In any good, secret and dangerous mission deep behind enemy lines, there's usually a few surprise 'Murphy' moments to be dealt with along the way, and this will always be the case no matter how much development and training is done," Guenon said. "Our mission was no exception. After having flown Cherry One for more than four months with

absolutely no serious issues, on the night of the raid, her number three engine would not start. We lost 21 minutes before we finally, using the double-starter-button-trick, got number three to start."

Once airborne, the crew modified their route to make up for lost time and caught up to the already in-flight formation. Upon reaching their destination, the Talon crew began to drop flares on the sleeping prison camp below, lighting up the area for other aircraft that destroyed Son Tay's defenses and landed inside the fortifications to begin the raid.

Cherry One then flew up the road away from camp and dropped fire crackers to simulate a ground fire-fight in an effort to deter North Vietnamese reinforcements. Finally, Cherry One was to drop a couple napalm bombs, which would burn bright and serve as a reference point for five A-1E Skyraiders and Cherry Two, another Combat Talon I. The first bomb went out on point, but it was the second that gave the crew of aircraft 0523 a bit of a problem.

"Our bird, Cherry One, aka 64-0523, is a larger than life C-130E(I) - one of the first, and has been operating in the shadows around the many hot spots of the world, she's always brought her aircrews safely home."

— Retired Maj. William Guenon

"Another anxious moment that will always remain with the crew of Cherry One was when our second napalm bomb was armed, got hung up during airdrop and would not leave the aircraft," said Guenon. "You can believe we all had our individual visions of what nasty things could happen, and you can be sure none of these thoughts were very pretty. That derelict napalm was finally jettisoned by using negative G's and an old-fashion, and properly timed, heave-ho by our highly motivated ramp crew."

Though they were prepared for nearly every kind of hiccup in the mission, there was one moment that no one saw coming. During the raid a message came over the radio that simply stated, "No packages."

"When they said negative packages, I never knew what that meant," said Tom Eckhart, head navigator on Cherry One. "I said, 'What's that'; and they said, 'No prisoners.' That was quite a letdown because that was our purpose, but later on I found out it was worthwhile because I got to speak with several people who were prisoners in Vietnam and each one told me that I saved their lives. That made it all worthwhile."

"They were told over and over again, 'Nobody will come and get you; they don't care about you; they have forgotten about you, and you're here forever'," said Eckhart. "After the Son Tay Raid, they [the POWs] found out that we did come for them."

Because of the raid on Son Tay, North Vietnam gathered all POWs together in one location, fearful of a repeat attack. It gave men who had been in isolation for many years the ability to communicate with one another - they were no longer alone.

In Secret and Dangerous, a book by Guenon containing a first-hand account of the rescue operation, was a letter from a Vietnam POW, retired Brig. Gen. Jon Reynolds, who expressed the importance of the Son Tay Raid.

"While the rescue was not to be, the success of the mission and its importance for American prisoners in North Vietnam should never be understated," said Reynolds. "Its impact on us was positive and immediate...morale soared. The Vietnamese were visibly shaken. Even though not a man was rescued, the raid was still the best thing that ever happened to us."

After the mission was completed, the crew parted ways with their Talon, though they found they had become quite attached. At their craft's retirement, the Vietnam veterans were glad to see Cherry One, not in the bone-yard or buried in a museum, but prominently displayed at a Special Operations base.

"Our bird, Cherry One, aka 64-0523, is a larger than life C-130E(I) - one of the first, and has been operating in the shadows around the many hot spots of the world, she's always brought her aircrews safely home," said Guenon. "When not stemming the tide of communism, she, in the dark of night, quietly pursued those fanatics who still wanted to harm the U.S. Indeed, for a large-sized aircraft, this is certainly no small feat."

"By displaying a proven Special Operations legend at the Cannon Air Force Base front gate, aircrews can see and realize the true spirit and proud tradition of the Son Tay Raid from so long ago," Guenon continued. "Hopefully her example will influence others to succeed in spite of great odds."

Members of 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion practice boarding and searching ships. Marines train for Visit, Board, Search and Seizure at the highest level. This type of interdiction involves a non-compliant ship, underway, and opposed. Photo by Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Robert M. Storm .

MARSOC conducts maritime operations training

Maritime operations training

Story and photos by
Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Robert Storm
MARSOC Public Affairs

Members of 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion fast rope onto a ship during a Visit, Board, Search and Seizure exercise.

Marines with the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command recently conducted a maritime interdiction exercise and Visit, Board, Search and Seizure training off the shore of Coronado, Calif. from May 20th to the 24th.

"We can use this skill set all over the world. It'll help us build our capability for future maritime operations and build our ability to work with other SOF (Special Operations Force) groups," said a 1st MSOB master sergeant.

VBSS is the term used by the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command and other agencies for maritime interdiction, designed to capture enemy vessels. It is also used to combat terrorism, piracy and smuggling, and to conduct customs, safety and other inspections. VBSS teams provide crises response and anti-terrorism capabilities by boarding suspicious ships that may be trafficking drugs or harboring terrorists.

There are different levels of training, Level I focuses on ships that comply with the instructions of the inspection team. Level II, which addresses the tactics used to board vessels that are non-compliant. Level II ships also have a freeboard (the distance between the waterline and the main deck of the ship) that is low. Level III and IV which involve non-compliant vessels that have a high freeboard, or that are actively opposing the boarding, are handled by Special Operations Forces.

"It is very important for 1st MSOB to get back to our maritime roots as we begin our regionalization in the Pacific. We have lost a lot of experience in these skill sets over the past six years due to our large (footprint) in Afghanistan, but we are quickly reestablishing our foundational skill sets in maritime operations which will enable our force to meet the needs of the combatant and Special Operations commanders. Maritime Interception Operations is going to be one of core tasks and conducting realistic and difficult training is the only way we will become proficient in the complex skill set," said a 1st MSOB officer.

During the evolution, the training involved tactical movement and shooting, defensive tactics, rappelling, searching, and other team coordinated exercises. MARSOC operators also trained to fast rope aboard vessels from helicopters as well as insert from a Rigid-Hulled Inflatable Boat. The exercise peaked with day and night runs. One of the main focuses of the training is how to safely board and search cargo vessels with proper climbing and rappelling techniques.

"We train to the highest level," said the 1st MSOB master sergeant. "That means we can take down a non-compliant, opposed ship, underway at night with either helicopter insertion or with RHIBs."

Formal VBSS training was created following the Gulf War in 1990 as a way to standardize and continue the Maritime Interception Operations as a result of United Nations resolutions. Conducting interaction patrols and using VBSS to search vessels, conduct inspections and disrupt drug and arms trafficking are elements of maritime operations and allow commercial shipping to occur safely in a region.

"MARSOC teams are adaptable, scalable forces that thrive in harsh and confusing environments. We develop our personnel so they have the experience to meet future needs as we regionally align MARSOC," said the 1st MSOB officer. "Our training allows us to provide SOF support to maritime and amphibious operations."

Members of 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion practice boarding and takedown of a ship at night. The operators have to attach a grappling ladder to the superstructure to board vessels with high entry points.

The double edged sword – An empowered NCO corps

By Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Faris
Senior Enlisted Advisor,
U.S. Special Operations Command

As we move toward the end of combat operations in Afghanistan it is fitting to examine the effects of nearly 12 years of combat on our noncommissioned officer corps. I submit that the greatest single effect is that at no time in our military's history has the NCO Corps ever been more empowered.

The wars in Iraq, and Afghanistan were and are counter insurgency fights. COIN is characterized by decentralized command and control and small unit tactics. For these two reasons, NCOs were given more responsibility and authority. You only have to watch the documentary "Restrepo" to see this empowerment in action. The reasons for NCO empowerment become even more obvious when you add the complexity of joint and coalition forces.

If we reflect on the successes of the last decade on the battlefield it is due in large part to our NCOs. They have been magnificent at executing commander's guidance and intent in a complex operational environment. Deployment after deployment our NCOs have led troops in offensive action, stability operations, facilitation of governance, security force assistance, civil-military operations and a myriad of other missions. They have been truly remarkable at integrating joint-force and inter-agency capabilities.

U.S. Special Operations Command's Senior Enlisted Advisor, Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Faris speaks to Soldiers assigned to 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), May 2013, at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. Courtesy photo.

How do we as a joint force preserve this goodness as we transition out of combat in a time of fiscal uncertainty and force reductions? An empowered NCO Corps is essential to achieving the Chairman of the

Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Force 2020 and Mission Command principles. In order to preserve our empowerment we – the NCOs – must understand and more importantly, appreciate where it comes from.

Leaders at the organizational level, both commissioned and noncommissioned officers, must educate subordinates that NCO empowerment is a delegation of command authority. It is not an inherent right gained by mission or responsibility. This simple fact has been lost in the noise of repetitive deployments where NCO roles and responsibilities have become standardized through TTPs and SOPs. I feel that this has created a strong sense of entitlement by our NCOs – a sense that can foment a negative outcome of arrogance, hubris and perhaps officer and NCO friction.

Without an appreciation and understanding of where this empowerment comes from, we – the NCOs – are in jeopardy of being disempowered. Under U.S. Code Title 10, officers are legally responsible and accountable for the personnel, missions and resources they are assigned. They are ultimately accountable for their service members' conduct. If we violate that trust, why shouldn't it be rescinded?

Should we be empowered if we allow a lack of adherence to the core principles and values of our Profession of Arms that leads to either specific or general misconduct? We will only ensure a perpetuation of this new dynamic through the exercise of trusted conduct in adherence to command authority and responsibility. To put it in perhaps simpler terms, I often hear from NCOs who state, "my officer does not empower me," as though it is the result of bad leadership on the officer's part. My response to them is "look yourself in the mirror and ask what you have done to earn or deserve it."

While the tenet that trust is earned and not given may be an old adage, I fear it has been relegated to being simply trite and that the expectation on behalf of NCOs is the opposite. In the CJCS Mission Command paper, the chairman clearly states that trust is a key attribute. "Mission command for Joint Force 2020 requires trust at every echelon of the force. Building trust with subordinates and partners may be the most important action a commander will perform. Given our projected need for superior speed in competitive cycles of decision-making, it is clear that in Joint Force 2020, operations will move at the speed of trust."

Maintaining the current officer/ NCO relationship is critical as we integrate a new generation that has not experienced combat operations. Without an understanding of delegation of command authority on behalf of the officer and the responsibility of delegated authority by the NCOs we could, and likely will, see this trend reverse.

I often hear from NCOs who state, "my officer does not empower me," as though it is the result of bad leadership on the officer's part. My response to them is this, "look yourself in the mirror and ask what you have done to earn or deserve it."

— Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Faris

As we look across our military today we can see the beginnings of the erosion of our empowerment. Whether we look at sexual harassment and assault, suicides, alcohol and substance abuse or other discipline issues it all boils down to leadership. I submit that the greatest failure of leadership is at the NCO level and that begs us to examine why. I believe it is because of the negative edge of the sword – the hubris that comes with believing our empowerment is a right. From that belief stems a disdain for our leaders as we move to correct these problems. A final extension of this disdain is turning a blind eye to many of the behaviors that lead to bad conduct and creating an environment that does not prevent, but instead fosters, misconduct and indiscipline.

This forces commanders to be more draconian in their approaches and disenfranchises NCOs. The potential for draconian measures do not simply exist within the Department of Defense. Congress may very well enact legislation regarding sexual harassment and assault investigations and prosecution that will deny commanders of their current authority. The role we NCOs have in helping to preserve these authorities is self evident.

The sword is double edged. One side of the blade is critical to Joint Force 2020 and Mission Command. That edge has been forged in blood and necessity of 12 years of war. The other edge exists only to dull the first.

JSOU expands global SOF network via senior enlisted academy

By Anna-Marie Wyant
Joint Special Operations University

At the U.S. Special Operations Command, the commander has outlined four lines of operation for the command and Special Operations Forces: win the current fight; expand the global SOF network; preserve the force and families; and responsive resourcing. At the Joint Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Academy, the second line of operation is well underway.

JSOFSEA, the Joint Special Operations University's professional military education for senior noncommissioned officers, graduated Class 11 in June. While E-8 and E-9 NCOs from the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps made up the bulk of the class, one non-U.S. special operator was present to represent his military and learn the ins and outs of U.S. Special Operations.

In an effort to expand the global SOF network, JSOFSEA began opening the class up to international military students during Class 10. Their first international student was an NCO from the Netherlands army. This time, the student was from a partner nation on the other side of the world—New Zealand. Warrant Officer Wiremu M., a New Zealand special forces soldier, was the first from his country to attend and graduate from JSOFSEA, a six-month distance learning, two-month in-residence course at JSOU.

"It's an amazing program," Wiremu said of JSOFSEA. "Instead of just teaching us things we don't know, the course draws from the experiences we've had. It's more focused on being a relevant NCO."

Wiremu, who had previously served with U.S. SOF in Afghanistan, said JSOFSEA has given him a better understanding of why U.S. forces do what they do, how they operate, and how he can better communicate with his American counterparts. In addition, upon spending two months interacting face-to-face with U.S. military students, Wiremu said the course was a great networking opportunity for not only himself and his classmates individually, but for New Zealand and U.S. SOF overall.

"A global SOF network is so important today," Wiremu said. "I feel like I'm bringing home a network, or connecting a network that is being built. Without these networks, SOF couldn't effectively function."

Sgt. Maj. Paul Casey, lead instructor for Wiremu's class, said having international students attend JSOFSEA is mutually beneficial to U.S. and other nations' SOF.

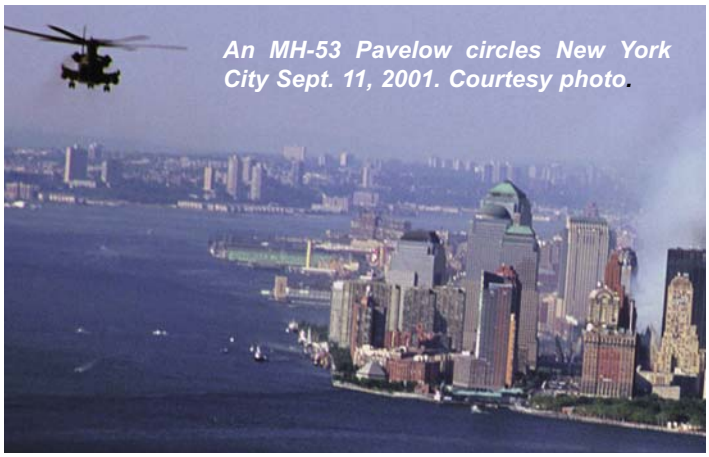
"It's good to have international students because that's who we work with down range," Casey said. "Many of our students may have worked with our coalition partners before, but probably not on a daily basis like this."

Casey also said Wiremu, who made the Commandant's List - top 20 percent in the graduating class - brought a unique perspective that the U.S. students might otherwise not have heard or considered.

"(Wiremu) brought an outside perspective, so the class had more than solely a U.S.-centric perspective," Casey said. "Understanding is key to building relationships."

JSOFSEA is continually working to expand the global SOF network one student at a time. Every relationship built is a step toward strengthening that network.

Warrant Officer Wiremu M. from the New Zealand Special Forces was the second international military student to attend the Joint Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Academy and the first from New Zealand.



An MH-53 Pavelow circles New York City Sept. 11, 2001. Courtesy photo.

At the threshold of the long war

Christian E. Fearer
USSOCOM History & Research Office

08:46:40, Sept. 11, 2001. The nearly perfect, cloudless Tuesday morning in Lower Manhattan was shattered by a violent explosion high in the North Tower of the World Trade Center as American Airlines Flight 11, with its engines wailing under full throttle as it flew fast over the city, struck the building. By nightfall, three additional hijacked planes had crashed, both the North and South Towers had collapsed into piles of rubble, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., was smoldering, and responders sifted through the fields and woods outside Somerset, Pennsylvania, looking for victims' remains. In all, nearly 3,000 people were dead, and the world had changed. Twelve years removed from that fateful day, it is worth considering USSOCOM as a headquarters and its forces on the threshold of 9/11 and the plans for Special Operations Forces in the first decade of the new century.

At the start of the new century and millennium, USSOCOM was postured to support the national military strategy by working to "shape the international environment and respond to crises while preparing now for an uncertain future." Al Qaeda attacks in Africa in the late 1990s and on the USS Cole in Yemen in October 2000 raised concerns of international terrorism; however, USSOCOM's highest operational priority as articulated in the command's 2000 posture statement was counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

While the public's awareness of SOF involvement throughout the world has increased over the last decade, USSOCOM had been regularly engaged with international partners well before 9/11; arguably, such consistent and persistent engagement made possible many of the SOF successes in the next decade. During fiscal year 1999, for example, SOF units deployed to 152 different countries and territories, placing nearly 5,000 operators in approximately 60 countries any given week. And, like today, the overwhelming majority of those missions were training exercises, building trust and partner capacity.

The new century and the accompanying, evolving international environment gave cause for concern. It became apparent that some scholars' and analysts' predictions of unprecedented global advancement and economic growth in the post-Cold War era were overoptimistic. Unpredictable and sweeping economic, demographic, political, and technological changes shaping geopolitics were occurring at different paces and levels throughout the world, resulting in significant differences in the relative dispersion of power, both economically and politically. The underdeveloped and undergoverned spaces specifically caused increasing concern.

Given the geopolitical realities and threats, SOF predicted that it would perform three important roles in support of the National Security Strategy. First, there were surgical strikes and recovery missions, dubbed "special missions" in the command's 2000 Posture Statement. Maintaining the ability to perform such missions was SOF's highest priority. Secondly, SOF anticipated an increased role in performing special reconnaissance in support of decisionmakers' strategic and operational requirements. Lastly and like today, USSOCOM and SOF were prepared to perform missions at the intersection of political and military operations, such as foreign internal defense, psychological operations, civil affairs, and humanitarian assistance.

While performing operations at the nexus of political and military operations were often dependent on a commitment to partners, SOF were not anticipating more than a decade of prolonged engagement in multiple, simultaneous conflicts in varying theaters. September 11 and America's response to the threat posed by the lethal concoction of fundamentalism and terrorism changed that. Building on the groundwork laid in the previous decades and by constant global involvement, SOF adapted itself to the demands of the post-9/11 era and its role in the prosecution of the Long War.

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

Marines with U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, freefall during a High Altitude Low Opening training exercise over an airfield in North Carolina, July 8. Photo by Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Steven Fox.