TIP OF THE SPEAR

USSOCOM competes in the 2015 Warrior Games

U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLA., August 2015

U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Tip of the Spear

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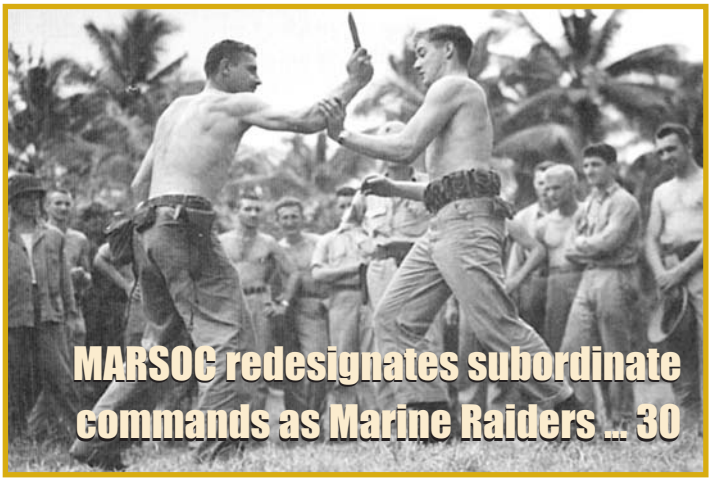
(Cover) Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Kapacziewski (left) and Petty Officer Steven Toboz Jr. compete in the 100-meter sprint at Butler Stadium at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., June 23. Kapacziewski won the gold medal in the event. Photo by Lance Cpl. Terry W. Miller Jr.

Highlights



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Paratroopers from Canadian Special Operations Regiment and 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne) jump from the ramp of a U.S. Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft, supported by crewmembers from 317th Airlift Group, Dyess Air Force Base, into Marshall Field Drop Zone, Fort Harrison near Helena, Mont., June 13. The partnership airborne operation included more than 70 jumpers, commemorating the 72nd anniversary of the 1st Special Service Force, or "Devil's Brigade." Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Ashley Baum.

SOCNORTH commemorates Devil's Brigade with a bi-national jump

By Navy Lt. Joseph Nawrocki
SOCNORTH Public Affairs

On June 12 in a field near Helena, Montana, a special operations team consisting of Canadian and U.S. operators conducted a combined airborne jump from a U.S. Air Force C-130 to commemorate the history of the "Devil's Brigade," an elite bi-national special operations team formed during World War II.

The First Special Service Force was activated on July 9, 1942, at Fort William Henry Harrison in Helena, Montana. The site was chosen as the primary training location due to its flat terrain for airborne training and its close proximity to mountains for ski and winter training.

The FSSF was a small, elite military force capable of fighting behind enemy lines in winter conditions. The commando unit's objective was to land by sea or air into Nazi occupied Romania or the Italian Alps on sabotage missions against hydroelectric plants and oil fields to disrupt the German atomic weapon research program.

Although in operation for only a few years, the

Devil's Brigade saw 251 days of combat, suffered 2,314 deaths, captured 27,000 prisoners and earned five U.S. campaign stars and eight Canadian battle honors. The unit fought throughout the Aleutian Islands, Italy and southern France before being disbanded in December 1944.

The recent commemorative jump was extraordinary because it was the first time in 73 years that operators from U.S. Special Operations Command North and Canadian Special Operations Force Command, donned the FSSF patch and conducted a combined airborne operation into the same drop zone used for training in 1942.

"First there's the history component and not forgetting where we came from," said a member of Canada's Special Operations Force. "But more importantly, the reality is that we do the same job and we often end up in the same places overseas so this gives us a chance to see the little differences, establish some comaraderie amongst the people we work with, plus make the contacts. In case we need something we can call you guys up to lend a hand."

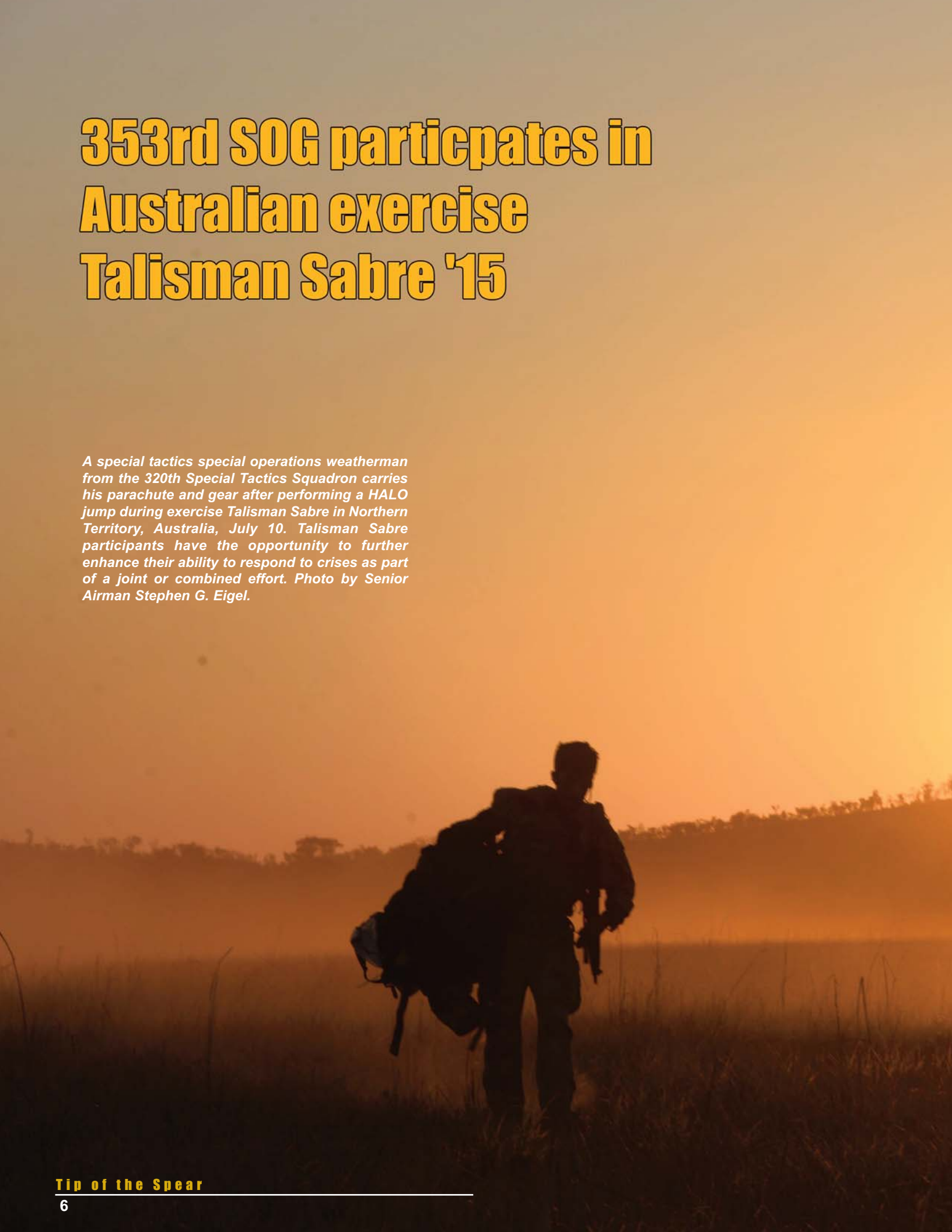
SOCNORTH also found working with partner nations' SOF elements to be significantly rewarding.

"Too many units don't use their resources to work with other countries where as we have a very powerful country to our north that we could become buddies with essentially," said a US SOF operator. "In all my deployments we've always worked with people from other countries."

The remembrance ceremony served as a reminder of the sacrifice these brave men made of the FSSF and how they paved the way for many of the joint special operations teams currently in service today.

(Left) A member from 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne) lands on Marshall Field Drop Zone, Fort Harrison, Mont., June 14. (Above) Paratroopers walk off the Marshall Field Drop Zone, June 13. (Below) A Canadian Special Operations Regiment Soldier pins the Canadian Parachutist Badge on Army Capt. Benjamin Carrick, after completing a U.S.-Canadian partnership jump, June 14. Photos by Army Staff Sgt. Ashley Baum.

353rd SOG particpates in Australian exercise Talisman Sabre '15



A special tactics special operations weatherman from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron carries his parachute and gear after performing a HALO jump during exercise Talisman Sabre in Northern Territory, Australia, July 10. Talisman Sabre participants have the opportunity to further enhance their ability to respond to crises as part of a joint or combined effort. Photo by Senior Airman Stephen G. Eigel.

Story continues on next page

A U.S. Air Force combat controller from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron calls in an Australian Army S-70A Black Hawk during exercise Talisman Sabre in the Northern Territory of Australia, June 29. Talisman Sabre, jointly sponsored by the U.S. Pacific Command and Australian Defence Force Headquarters, Joint Operations Command, incorporates U.S. and other forces with Royal Australian Air Forces, and government agencies from each country.

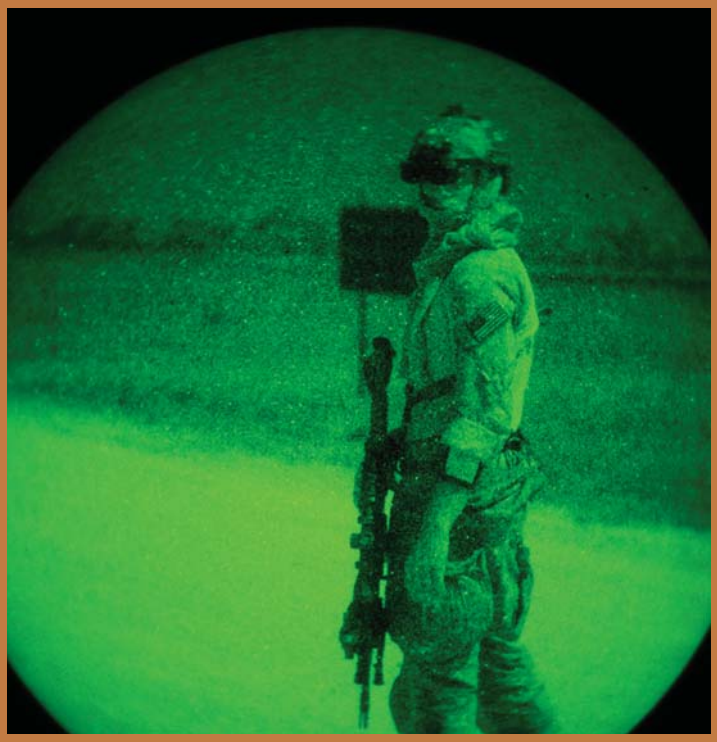
Story and photos by Senior Airman Stephen Eigel
18th Wing Public Affairs

More than 33,000 U.S. and Australian personnel participated in the biennial military training exercise Talisman Sabre 2015 in Australia, July 4-19.

The 353rd Special Operations Group along with several other U.S. and Australian military units began the Talisman Sabre exercise in the Northern Territory of Australia.

Talisman Sabre, jointly sponsored by the U.S. Pacific Command and Australian Defence Force Headquarters Joint Operations Command, incorporated U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force and the Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army, and Royal Australian Air Force, as well as other government agencies from each country.

Talisman Sabre is a realistic and challenging exercise bringing service members closer and improving both nations' ability to work bilaterally, and preparing them to be poised to provide security regionally and globally. This exercise is a major undertaking and illustrates the closeness of the Australian and U.S. alliance and the strength of military-to-military relationships.



A U.S. Air Force Special Tactics combat controller from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron prepares to call in an Australian Army S-70A Black Hawk to extract personnel during exercise Talisman Sabre in the Northern Territory of Australia, June 30.

(Top) U.S. Air Force Maj. Mathew Nevius, 1st Special Operations Squadron pilot, performs low-level maneuvers in an MC-130H Combat Talon II during exercise Talisman Sabre in Northern Territory, Australia, July 2. (Left) A special tactics combat controller from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron speeds off to help static line parachute jumpers after their landing during exercise Talisman Sabre in Northern Territory, Australia, July 8. (Above) A special tactics combat controller and special tactics officer from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron get ready for a personnel recovery mission after performing a high-altitude low-opening jump during exercise Talisman Sabre in Northern Territory, Australia, July 10.

A special tactics operator from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron jumps out of an MC-130H Combat Talon II to assess damage on Wake Island, July 20. Members from the 353rd Special Operations Group worked with the 36th Contingency Response Group from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, to open Wake Island air field after Typhoon Halola passed through the island a week earlier. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Kristine Dreyer.

353rd Special Operations Group helps reopen Wake Island airfield

By Tech. Sgt. Kristine Dreyer
353rd Special Operations Group Public Affairs

Members from the 353rd Special Operations Group deployed to Andersen Air Base, Guam, July 18, to support the 36th Contingency Response Group with the opening of Wake Island airfield after a typhoon hit the island.

Prior to Typhoon Halola's arrival, more than 125 Department of Defense members were evacuated July 15, leaving the island vacant. After the typhoon moved past the island, a special tactics team from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron was tasked to conduct the initial assessment of the runway.

"The 353rd SOG responded quickly and efficiently to support the 36th CRG," said Lt. Col. John Trube, 353rd SOG deputy commander and mission commander. "This operation not only demonstrated the SOG's ability to quickly deploy anywhere, anytime in the Pacific, but it also showed seamless interoperability between the 36th

CRG and the 353rd SOG that led to mission success."

Staged out of Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, an MC-130H Combat Talon II from the 1st Special Operations Squadron provided airlift for a special tactics jump clearing team and combat search and rescue team to infilitrate Wake Island. After conducting military freefall operations onto an unmarked drop zone, the operators were able to clear the runway, assess the airfield environment and receive the first aircraft within 20 minutes. This allowed for the arrival of a C-17 Globemaster III from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, carrying a team from the 36th CRG and Wake Island Airfield staff to join the mission.

"The sheer size of the Pacific can turn an ordinary mission into a real challenge," said Lt. Col. Edmund Loughran, 320th STS commander. "Special tactics operators and MC-130 aircrew provide rapid responses to difficult problems which makes it safer for the next guy to get the job done. I am very proud of what the team was able to accomplish on Wake Island."

Once access to the island was gained, the crisis response Airmen from Andersen worked with local residents to further assess the area for damage and re-establish the airfield, so normal operations could resume as quickly as possible.

"It was critical that we open the airfield and get Wake Island back online quickly," said Col. Lee Anderson, 36th CRG commander. "The team from 353rd SOG showed up with skilled operators ready to execute. It's always a pleasure to work with the 'Quiet Professionals.'"

Wake Island airfield, located in the Pacific Ocean between Japan and Hawaii, is ran by the U.S. Air Force and managed by the PACAF Regional Support Center at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. In addition to being a strategic location in the Pacific, Wake Island serves as a divert airfield for overseas flights.

(Left) Aircrew from the 1st Special Operations Squadron and special tactics operators from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron, conduct mission planning for the opening of Wake Island while enroute to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, July 18. Photo By Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Sharp. (Above) A combat controller from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron clears the first C-17 Globemaster III from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, to land on Wake Island, July 20, after it was hit by a typhoon. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Kristine Dreyer. (Below) A special tactics team from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron unloads equipment from an MC-130H Combat Talon II on Wake Island, July 20. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Kristine Dreyer.

Uruguayan competitors race toward a spring July 19, during a water event in this year's Fuerzas Comando competition held in Poptun, Guatemala. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Osvaldo Equite.

Fuerzas Comando '15 strengthens military partnerships, interoperability

Team Colombia wins third title in row; United States second; El Salvador third

Story by Pfc. Christine Lorenz
SOCSOUTH Public Affairs

The Guatemalan Army Band could be heard playing patriotic music under the warmth of Central America's sun as Fuerzas Comando 2015, a nine-day test of endurance, strength and mental fortitude, came to an end, July 23, among the rolling hills of northern Guatemala.

The special operations competition concluded with the Colombian team hoisting the trophy for the third time in a row. Colombia, which has won the competition seven times since it began in 2004, is not the only country leaving with more than what they arrived with. The U.S. team, which takes home second place overall, demonstrated their strength in the sniper and assault team events, finishing fifth and second, respectively. El Salvador, on the strength of its performance in the sniper team events, earned third place overall.

Sponsored by U.S. Southern Command, the competition brought together special operations teams from across the Western Hemisphere to compete. Nineteen countries competed in 17 events to determine the best special operations team from countries within the USSOUTHCOM area of operations.

"Fuerzas Comando promotes regional security and cooperation, improving our capabilities, increasing interoperability, and sharing ideas on facing common threats between participating countries," said U.S. Army Col. John Wilt, commander of Special

Operations Detachment-South.

Other awards presented included: Jamaica winning the assault team category, Honduras taking the sniper team title, and Guatemala victorious in the combined team/physical fitness category.

Though the competition provided every competitor involved the opportunity to learn from one another by sharing strategies and tactics, some learned completely new techniques and weapons systems.

"The competition is good for the whole continent," said Gordon Surpris, a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team leader from Haiti and a participant in this year's competition. "(During the competition) the countries' representatives get to know each other, bringing (all of the) Americas together."

(Top Left) U.S. Special Forces soldiers move through an obstacle course, July 19, while participating in the Fuerzas Comando international special operations competition in Poptun, Guatemala. The competition improves the collective ability of participating nations to confront common threats by encouraging training and relationships between special operations forces. Photo by Pfc. Christine Lorenz. (Bottom Left) Haitian competitors navigate an obstacle July 19, during Fuerzas Comando 15. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Chad Menegay. (Top Right) A Surinamese competitor participates in the water event July 20, in Poptun, Guatemala. Photo by Pfc. Christine Lorenz. (Right) Guatemalan special operations soldiers rescue a simulated casualty July 21, during a live-fire shoot house event as part of Fuerzas Comando. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Michael Carden.

USASOC welcomes Tovo as new commanding general

By USASOC Public Affairs

Soldiers from the United States Army Special Operations Command said farewell to Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland and welcomed Lt. Gen. Kenneth E. Tovo during a change of command ceremony at Fort Bragg, North Carolina July 1.

Cleveland relinquished command of USASOC to Tovo after nearly three years as the commanding general.

Gen. Joseph L. Votel, commanding general, U.S. Special Operations Command, officiated the ceremony and passed the unit colors from Cleveland to Tovo, representing the transfer of authority. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, U.S. Army Chief of Staff was a distinguished guest in attendance.

While speaking to the audience, Votel also spoke words of praise of Cleveland's success.

"[Cleveland] subsequently refocused Army Special Operations with ARSOF 2022, laying out the principles, the intellectual underpinnings and resource strategy to enable Army SOF to thrive in an environment characterized by complexity, uncertainty and a form of hybrid warfare we have not previously experienced," said Votel. "Though met at first with some resistance, [Cleveland] stayed the course, educating others on its purpose and importance until it was understood by the Army, USSOCOM, our GCCs [Geographic Combatant Commanders], and our oversight committees; his persistence and vision made unconventional warfare a part of our national security lexicon."

Cleveland has had numerous accomplishments while in charge of USASOC. One of his most notable is ARSOF 2022 -- the blueprint for ARSOF's success in future operations.

"Nearly three years ago, USASOC embarked on the journey to fundamentally change the way our nation viewed its Special Operations Forces. At the time, our redirect was divisive, our processes were unbalanced and our standing in the Army, though high, was fragile and uneven, built on personalities and shared respect born of combat, but quickly receding as the press war subsided," said Cleveland, addressing Odierno and reflecting on his assumed responsibilities. "Your challenge to me, Sir, was to make sure that we don't let that pass."

"I couldn't be prouder of what this magnificent team of professionals, and our friends throughout the Army, have accomplished in this short period. In our blueprint for change, ARSOF 2022 and part two, we outlined our planned to pay a hefty sequestration bill -- one that ultimately led to the unpopular loss of 20-25 percent our or Special Forces and Ranger warfighting capacity, said Cleveland. "In the end, we redesigned ourselves to be better at our respective Special Warfare and Surgical Strike missions, to begin learning how the two should work in concert with one another as well was with our Conventional Force."

Lt. Gen. Kenneth Tovo, incoming USASOC commanding general accepts the command flag from Gen. Joseph Votel, USSOCOM commander, July 1. USASOC courtesy photo.

As the longest serving "Green Beret" on active duty, Cleveland, who will be retiring later this year, also took time to thank everyone who made an impact on him during his illustrious 37 year career.

Following Cleveland, Tovo said he was honored and humbled for the opportunity to become the twelfth commanding general in USASOC's storied history and assured Odierno and Votel, that he will do everything he can to meet expectations for the USASOC Soldiers, the U.S. Army and, most importantly, for the Nation as the senior leader of USASOC.

"In my mind USASOC must do four things well: we must sustain today's fight; we must sustain today's force; we must prepare for the future; and, most importantly, we must honor, preserve and build upon the tremendous legacy of our predecessors," Tovo said.

Army Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland (left), former commanding general, USASOC, presents Chief Warrant Officer 5 Heriberto Serrano Jr. with the Command Chief Warrant Officer Charge of Orders, June 18. Serrano became USASOC's first command chief warrant officer. Photo by Spc. David M. Shefchuk.

USASOC inducts its first ever command chief warrant officer

By Sgt. 1st Class Thaddius S. Dawkins II
USASOC Public Affairs

The United States Army Special Operations Command inducted its first command chief warrant officer, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Heriberto Serrano Jr., during a ceremony June 18, inside the Heritage Auditorium at the command headquarters, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

"Everything has a time and a place," said former Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, commanding general, USASOC. "I don't necessarily think this is overdue; it's the right thing to do now. In the business of talent management and the business of bringing together, our warrant officer capability now marries up nicely with what we've done with the rest of the changes in the command."

Prior to being named the command's first CCWO, Serrano served in a dual-hatted role as the Chief Warrant Officer of the Special Forces Branch and Command Chief Warrant Officer for the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.

"It feels a little surreal to be up here to tell you the truth," Serrano said. "I'm a little humbled by looking at all your faces and I'm extremely taken aback by all the things the warrant officers have done in this organization to get to where we are at today. I didn't get here by myself. I got here because of all the warrant officers, past and present, and all the hard work they're doing. That's why this position was created."

The presence of warrant officers within USASOC ensures not only the technical and tactical competence expected of the cohort, but also a continuity of expertise managing warfighting systems and equipment that is unique to the Department of Defense.

Serrano, who has 32 years of service, was chosen after a stringent selection process based on his significant Army special operations experience, professional military education, leadership capabilities and other highly desirable traits. He was selected from a pool of 12 other highly qualified candidates from across the Army Special Operations Forces enterprise.

For his newly-inherited role, Serrano will serve as the senior warrant officer advisor for USASOC in all aspects of Army special operations. Additionally, he will be the principal advisor to the commander, his staff, and subordinate warrant officer leaders regarding the unique recruiting, accession, training, retention, professional development and personnel management of all warrant officers assigned to USASOC.

Serrano will also be responsible for coordination with higher headquarters and external organizations to synchronize and enhance the management of warrant officers within the U.S. Army and appropriate branches, ensuring maximum support to the warfighting commands.

"I'm not up here to be a 180 Alpha," he said. "I'm up here to be the command chief warrant officer for all of you. The bottom line is, you get up in the morning to go to work for your commanders and your organization. I get up in the morning to work for you. That's the privilege that I have. With that, my vision is pretty clear for my position - support the warfighter so he can protect our nation, without fear, without fail and without equal. Sine Pari."

Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), conduct surf passage operations at Sunset Beach in Warrenton, Ore., June 15. The 10th SFG(A) soldiers are conducting dive requalifications in the Pacific Northwest to familiarize themselves with the cold waters found in much of their area of operations. Photo by Army Sgt. Timothy Clegg.

10th Group ODA trains maritime operations in the Pacific Northwest

By Army Capt. Anthony Kivlehan and Sgt. Timothy Clegg
10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

This summer, many maritime detachments will conduct training in the warm waters off Florida. One Special Forces ODA found a less familiar option. In June, a detachment from 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) traveled to Washington and Oregon to train on those states' cold shores.

With a focus on the European area of responsibility, the detachment selected a location that would prepare them for future deployments in harsh maritime conditions.

"The Northwest offers swift currents, cold water, and dynamic tides that mimic some maritime regions of Europe," said the detachment's assistant commander.

The Pacific Northwest provided numerous opportunities for the detachment to highlight Army Special Operations Forces 2022 principles including optimizing resourcing and commodity areas and optimizing special operations forces/conventional force/joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational interdependence.

The detachment used existing training areas and support facilities regularly used by 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). Soldiers from 1st Group supported the exercise and provided wash facilities, boat trailers, compressed air, and the expert knowledge about diving in the Puget Sound.

"We always like to support other Special Forces units. The Puget Sound is a great place to train," said the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the 1st Group Maritime Operations Detachment.

Training in Oregon provided the opportunity to enhance joint interdependence by training with Air Force, Army Reserve, and Coast Guard assets. The 15th Air Wing from Hawaii provided a C-17 to conduct deliberate water-airborne operations off the coast of Oregon. Camp Rilea, an Army Reserve training location in Warrenton, Oregon, provided a staging location for the training. In Astoria, Coast Guard ships were used to simulate mother-ship operations.

Lt. Ryan James, the commanding officer of the United States Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast remarked, "We seek to work with other Department of Defense units to create an environment of cooperation and to share resources."

This maritime training was unique because it used joint assets to enhance Special Warfare training at the base of the Columbia River and the Oregon Coast. The Special Warfare scenario was based on operating at the seam of a semi-permissive and non-permissive environment. Waterways act as natural physical and political borders and are often less patrolled and observed. The ability to operate in maritime borders was exactly what the detachment needed to focus on.

"Utilizing maritime and inland waterways is one of the best ways to conduct a clandestine infiltration," explained the detachment's operations sergeant. "Waterways are often less patrolled and offer battlefield seams that can be exploited by special operations forces."

An underwater operations team uses various skills to infiltrate an operations area, while a detachment may use over-the-horizon boat movement, surface swimming, or closed-circuit diving to clandestinely infiltrate an area.

"The Northwest offers the terrain and support to execute all of our maritime capabilities in conjunction with a special warfare scenario," explained the detachment commander. "We're enhancing infiltration techniques that make sense to our area of responsibility."

The ODA is part of a much larger effort to provide the United States Army Special Operations Command and Special Operations Command Europe, ready and relevant special warfare capabilities with a maritime focus.

"We're working on the ability to insert into the big blue ocean, infiltrate by riverine movement, and link-up with coastal forces using covert methods," said the assistant detachment commander.

Infiltrating by waterborne methods is not so farfetched. Airports, seaports, bridges and border crossing areas are some of the most heavily secured areas in any crisis country. Using these maritime methods allows special operators to maneuver in low-visibility or clandestine methods to avoid detection.

Like other SOF units, 10th Group continues to work to increase Special Warfare prowess by enhancing the ability to conduct their primary mission: Unconventional Warfare. Combined with a dive requalification, this training opportunity enabled one ODA to further that aim.

Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), follow a zodiac into the water out of a MH-47 Chinook in Solo Point, Wash., June 10. Photo by Army Sgt. Timothy Clegg.

Origin of the First Special Boat Team, PT Squadron 2(2)

By Ret. Master Chief Petty Officer (SWCC)
James D. Gray
Combatant Craft Crewman Association Historian

Most people within the NSW community trace the heritage of the special boat teams back to the Patrol Torpedo boats of World War II, and they would be correct. The PT squadrons did insert and extract agents as a secondary mission. However, for one small three-boat element, it was a primary mission.

At the outset of WWII, this task was one of the missions of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services. By 1943, the OSS still had no organic means to deliver agents from the sea in the European Theater, but British Motor Gun Boat Squadron 15 had been almost routinely running agents to and from the occupied continent since 1940. British Special Operations Executive grudgingly took the fledgling OSS under its wing and explained the nature of the tasking. Ultimately, the OSS needed boats. An urgent request was made to the U.S. Navy for a PT boat squadron to fulfill the mission. The Navy responded to the request by making three boats available, from its training command in Melville, Rhode Island.

In March 1944, PT boats 71, 72, and 199 were placed in commission as the re-designated PT Boat Squadron 2(2) the 2nd iteration of PT Boat Squadron 2. The old PT Squadron 2 had been decommissioned after the Solomon Islands Campaign. While the PT boats themselves had seen many hours as training boats, the selected OSS boat squadron personnel had an active and decorated history. The commanding officer of this three-boat unit was Lt. Cmdr. John D. Bulkeley, best known for taking Gen. Douglas McArthur off the Philippines and being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his combat-delaying actions in the Philippines in 1941. The boat crews were comprised of battle-tested veterans who had rotated home from the Pacific. All were volunteers.

By late April 1944, Squadron 2(2) reached its base in England. Dartmouth was a secluded port on the English Channel used by British Combined Operations. The 78-foot Higgins PT boats had been modified for their "special duties." The torpedo tubes were removed, and with the weight gone, three powerful 1,200 hp Packard engines were installed. This gave the boats a speed of 45 knots and a range of 400 miles. They were also fitted with special navigation and fathometer equipment, and the communications suites were upgraded (yet most operations were done under radio silence due to the high use of RDF by the Germans). Armament for the boats were a 37mm automatic cannon, twin 50cal. machine guns (port and starboard), and a 20mm cannon amidships with a 40mm cannon on the stern. Two Mk6 depth charges and an Mk3 smoke generator rounded out its offensive and defensive capabilities. To finalize the modifications, a British Camper-Nicholson dory was added to the boats. The dory

Lt. Cmdr. John D. Bulkeley, commanding officer of OSS PT Squadron 2(2). Photograph dated Sept. 4, 1942. Courtesy of the National Archives.

had padded sides, muffled oarlocks and four cupped oars, making insertion and extraction as quiet as possible. The boats were now ready, and the crews were instructed by the British on every tactical aspect of the mission, from mission planning to insertion and extraction of agents.

On May 19, 1944, PT 71 got the squadron's first mission. Furious mission planning and coordination with the OSS and the BCO had to be accomplished; boat preparations and last minute details had to be resolved. The mission: the delivery of an agent working for the SOE. The agent showed up on the pier dressed as a French peasant and accompanied by a British naval officer who would act as liaison between the boat crew and agent. After dusk, the PT quietly slipped out of Dartmouth and transited to the area of operations. Later in the evening, the blacked out PT idled into the insertion point off the coast of Normandy. The correct light signals were exchanged with the French Resistance forces ashore. The assigned crewmen and agent silently lowered the dory into the sea and rowed ashore. After a brief challenge and correct reply, the agent was with the resistance forces and the resistance forces also passed some "mail" in a canvas sack to be taken back. The mail was intelligence gathered, including notes recording obstacles the Germans had planted along the shoreline. Extraction was accomplished by dory to PT. While extracting, they experienced an engine casualty and made the necessary repairs before completing a high speed transit home. At Dartmouth, PT 71 received a hero's welcome from the rest of the squadron. The first mission was a success and set the pace for future operations.

Lt. Cmdr. Bulkeley on another mission went ashore to gather sand off Utah Beach, much like the well known NSW Operator Phil Bucklew who recovered sand on Omaha Beach. This sand would determine if tanks and other vehicles would bog down attempting to cross the beach on D-Day. The most spectacular "projected" missions by the OSS to Squadron 2 was for a long-range transit, evading the German blockade in the North Sea to Denmark to deliver arms and supplies to the Danish Resistance Movement. Because of it being such a long transit; there would be no return trip. With luck, the boat crew would be interned in Sweden for the remainder of the war. Nevertheless, there was no difficulty assembling a crew of volunteers. PT 72 was chosen for the mission and fitted with extra fuel tanks and loaded with its cargo. On its final check run, she had a serious engine casualty and before repairs could be made, the OSS canceled the mission. From May to October 1944, Squadron 2 engaged in 20 missions for the OSS, landing agents and supplies on the German held coastline. All missions were successful considering the threat from E-boats, mines, shore gun-batteries, radar and RDF sites, sentries, and guard dogs. Their success is truly the mark of their professionalism.

In its short existence, squadron members would be awarded 11 Bronze Star Medals and three Navy Commendation Medals. The OSS would also use boat units in the Mediterranean and Pacific Theater of Operations during WWII. And, Special Boat Team 12's building would be named for John D. Bulkeley.

PT-199 at sea. Note: Torpedo tubes removed and painted in British Camoflage called Mountbatten Pink. Photo Courtesy of Ret. Master Chief Petty Officer (SWCC) James Gray.

Healing through excelling

Story and photos by Petty Officer 1st Class Tony DeFilippo
Naval Special Warfare Group TWO

For most kids, their bike is their most prized possession. It's your first taste of individual freedom. Flying around the neighborhood, over curbs, through backyards, sun on your back and wind in your face, your bike took you anywhere you wanted to go. You didn't need mom and dad's permission. Your big brother didn't have to give you a ride. You were in control.

Most adults trade in their bikes for cars, but at age 47, Lt. Cmdr. Jaime Sigala, the weapons officer at Naval Special Warfare Logistics Support Unit 2 in Virginia Beach, Virginia, has rediscovered the liberating power of two wheels.

On Dec. 13, 2013, Sigala fell and suffered a compound fracture of his lower left leg. The injury became infected, and after months of trips to the hospital and multiple surgeries, his doctor gave him news which would change his life. His leg needed to be amputated.

"My whole world came tumbling down," he said. "How do I go from a broken leg to you have to cut my leg off? How did this happen?"

Even today, there's still a look of disbelief in his eyes as he recalls it, but Sigala did have a choice. The doctor told him if he underwent years of more surgeries, they could save the limb, but it would never regain proper mobility. If they amputated, however, he could get a prosthetic and be walking in a matter of months. Chomping at the bit to get back to work, Sigala chose the amputation.

The very next day, he was in the operating room and they removed his left leg below the knee. He remembers waking up in the middle of the night and feeling the most intense itch on his ankle he'd ever felt. He reached down and there was nothing there. Sigala says this was when it really started to sink in. For a while he dealt with depression and self doubt. Even now, more than a year later, he still gets choked up talking about it. He says it was a shot to his self-worth. He felt like a cripple, like a piece of him had been taken away in more than just a physical sense.

Lt. Cmdr. Jaime Sigala, weapons officer from Naval Special Warfare Logistic Support Unit TWO, prepares for a practice run of the course he'll be racing the following day for the 2015 Warrior Games men's upright cycling event at Marine Base Quantico, Va., June 20. The Warrior Games is an annual Department of Defense event designed to introduce wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans to Paralympic sport competition and encourage them to remain physically active.

One of his biggest concerns was how the injury would jeopardize his naval career. His chain of command, however, reassured him they had his back and would do everything they could to help him get better.

"That was a blessing," he said. "I can't say how much relief I had after that. It made the process easier knowing that LOGSU-2 and Naval Special Warfare Group TWO were behind me, and I'm going to be able

to get through this."

The command told him to focus on getting himself right, and Sigala says he couldn't be more grateful to his co-workers for the support. They all chipped in and made sure everything was taken care of at work so he could focus on his physical therapy.

"I grew up in the Navy," he said. "I've met so many great people. I've been a part of so many things in the world, and I didn't want to leave like that. I wanted to get better, stand up and finish my career on my terms."

Working with the physical therapist at LOGSU-2, Sigala began making big strides in his recovery. Before long, he was up walking; shortly thereafter, he discovered a nonprofit called "Ride 2 Recovery." They help injured service members and veterans by providing them with bicycles and training them. He met with them in September, got a bike, and in October was in his home state, California, for a six-day challenge ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

A lot of people told him he wasn't ready for something like that, but one of the ride's organizers, Mike Day, stuck up for Sigala, and said, "No, Jaime's coming." Sigala says that gave him a goal, and it gave him hope because someone believed in him.

"Being able to do something physically, when you don't have a leg, it's proof to myself that, 'Hey, I can do this,'" Sigala said.

He completed the ride and then decided to try out for the Warrior Games selection camp. The Warrior Games is an annual event sponsored by the Department of Defense where injured, ill and wounded service members and veterans compete in Paralympic sporting events. Sigala qualified for the men's upright bike race and the shooting competition for Team U.S. Special Operations Command, and on June 21, 2015, at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, he got his chance to compete.

The race kicked off at 10 a.m., and after the first lap, Sigala was in the lead. On the second lap, though, a piece broke off of his bike. Despite continuing problems with his bike, Sigala finished the 30-kilometer race in 56 minutes and 46 seconds.

Following the race, Sigala was extremely frustrated and disappointed by the equipment malfunction because he felt he had a strong chance of medaling. Still, he was able to keep everything in perspective.

"I feel accomplished," he said. "I look back a year ago and I couldn't even walk; now here I am, I just finished a race. I did it on my own, and I'm pretty proud of that."

It's been a long road for Sigala, but he says he is grateful for his teammates and the support they've given him for the past year.

Lt. Cmdr. Jaime Sigala, weapons officer from Naval Special Warfare Logistics Support Unit 2, has water poured on him by a volunteer during the men's upright bike event at the 2015 DoD Warrior Games at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., June 21.

Lt. Col. Allison Black, commander of the 319th Special Operations Squadron, became the first woman in her special ops navigator field. Now younger generations of airmen can take the same path while embarking on their own journey in the Air Force. Photo by Master Sgt. Jeffrey Allen.

The Path

How one female special ops navigator cleared the path dozens now fly

By Tech. Sgt. David Salanitri
Airman Magazine

Under the cover of night, then-1st Lt. Allison Black left her tent in Uzbekistan to walk to a preflight brief. Hours later, she'd be making history.

On this November night in 2001, the United States was hoping to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks two months earlier in New York City, Pennsylvania, and at the Pentagon.

Flying over the skies of Afghanistan, Black, who is now a lieutenant colonel and the commander of the 319th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida, was the navigator on the AC-130H Spectre. As the navigator, she was charged with several duties, one of which was to be the single voice communicating from the aircraft to troops on the ground.

As the gunship fired everything it had upon the Taliban, expending 400 40mm rounds and 100 105mm rounds, the Northern Alliance leader, Gen. Abdurrashid Dostum (often referred in the media and around camp fires as "Dostum the Taliban killer") heard Black's voice communicating to the joint terminal attack controller on the ground to better understand where rounds need to be fired.

"He heard my voice and asked the special ops guys 'Is that a woman?' and they said 'Yeah, it is,'" Black recalled. "He couldn't believe it. So he's laughing and says, 'America is so determined, they've brought their women to kill Taliban.' He calls the guys we're shooting and says 'You guys need to surrender now. American women are killing you … you need to surrender now.'"

The morning after that first mission, those remaining Taliban members surrendered.

"My first combat mission began the collapse of Taliban in the north," said Black, who became the first female to be awarded the Air Force Combat Action Medal.

This operation would have looked different in 1992.

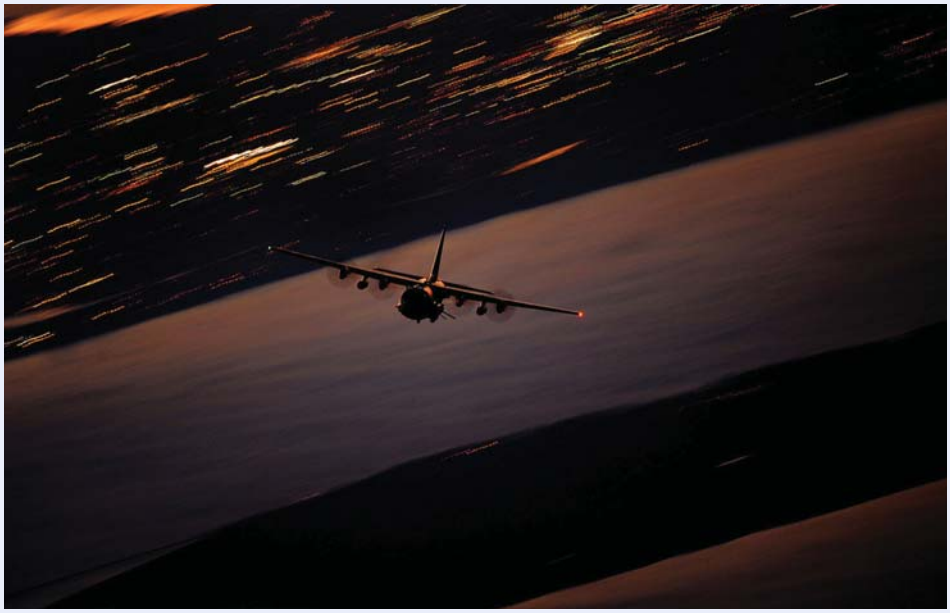
CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

When Black joined the Air Force in 1992, females weren't allowed to fly combat missions. That didn't change until 1993, as the Air Force opened all but less than 1 percent of career fields to women, with the remainder scheduled to open up by early 2016.

At just over 5 feet tall, the Long Island, New York, native seeks and embraces challenges and doesn't play for second place — a mindset that led her to the Air Force.

"The Air Force seemed to be the hardest service to get into. That got my attention," Black said. Arriving at basic military training as an enlisted Airman, she was guaranteed a job in the medical career field. But her plans changed when a survival, evasion, resistance and escape specialist briefed Black's flight on his career field and challenged the group of trainees to join SERE.

"I didn't know how to chop down a tree, didn't know how to kill a rabbit, didn't know how to set a snare, but I was willing," Black said. "It sounded challenging."



AC-130U Gunship. Photo by Master Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock.

After more than four years as a SERE instructor, including time as an arctic survival instructor, Black wanted another challenge.

Upon finishing her degree, Black earned a commission as a second lieutenant and headed off to become a navigator — a career field available on several airframes, including bombers and fighters.

There was just one airframe Black wanted: the gunship — specifically, the AC-130H gunship — so she could be on the main flight deck with the pilot, right in the thick of things.

But becoming an Airman, a SERE specialist, an officer and a navigator wasn't enough — she wanted to join the elite Air Force Special Operations Command.

"It was exciting. It's special operations command. You're in a small force, asked to do tough missions — missions that operate in the gray," Black said.

Black didn't realize it at the time, but when she arrived at the 16th Special Operations Squadron, then stationed at Hurlburt Field, she became the first female navigator in that unit and on the AC-130H.

"The thought of being the first was the furthest thing on my mind," she said. "At that time, I was so focused on being really good at my job and not letting any naysayers get in my way."

Not only was the milestone the furthest thing from her mind, but it was also something she didn't want to be on anyone else's mind either.

"I wasn't trying to change anyone's opinion on whether I should or shouldn't be in a job," Black said. "I wanted to be an asset. I wanted to be sought after. I wanted to be really good at what I did. I didn't want to come in second; I wanted to be first."

Each person defines success differently.

I wasn't trying to change anyone's opinion on whether I should or shouldn't be in a job. I wanted to be an asset. I wanted to be sought after. I wanted to be really good at what I did. I didn't want to come in second; I wanted to be first.

— Lt. Col. Allison Black

Black doesn't define success by the medals on her chest or the oak sleeves on her shoulders.

"By not trying to make a statement, I think I found success. I didn't have an agenda. I didn't join the Air Force, I didn't join SERE, and I didn't join AFSOC to prove that women can do a job," Black said. "I joined all those things because of the challenge and the career field and the sexy mission. And I just happen to be a woman doing it. And, fortunately, because of my successes, it brought more visibility to 'Hey, it doesn't matter if it's a guy or a girl.'"

PAYING IT FORWARD

"It wasn't until years later … when I'd have young female or male Airmen tell me that my story was inspiring, that hearing what I was able to do in AFSOC gave them the confidence to raise their hands and go forward. It was humbling," Black said.

Black remembers vividly a point in her career where it was clear she needed to pay it forward.

After a speech to members from base, a female senior airman approached her and referenced the part of the presentation when Black said it has been possible to mother children while also being an Airman. The senior airman was about to get out of the Air Force because she didn't have anyone telling her the same thing.

"She's a senior master sergeant now, and we still keep in contact," Black said.

Seeing these tangible results from telling her story, Black began to reach out even more.

"It's second and third order effect that just at the virtue of me doing my job, it highlighted that women can succeed. It highlighted the opportunity for women: 'Hey you're going to be accepted. They're going to respect what you bring to the fight,'" Black said.

When she arrived at AFSOC, she didn't have a cadre of female navigators to offer her mentorship. What she did have were those she refers to as her everything: her husband, Ryan, who was also a SERE instructor, and a supply of male mentors who were all willing to help a teammate grow, regardless of which bathroom stall they use.

"All of the gentlemen I've worked for have equipped me with the skills to be a good leader. They gave me that opportunity to shine and to step up," she said. "You're judged on game day. You can practice every day of the week, but it's what you do on Sunday that counts. And I don't believe in 'Everyone gets a trophy."

A NEW GENERATION

When Black joined the Air Force in 1992, her options looked a lot different than they do for female Airmen today. However, because of her success and the success of many others like her, there are more options in the Air Force for females than in any other service.

This success gave people like 1st Lt. Margaret Courtney many options and paths to walk — or even fly.

Just over two years ago, Courtney had the world on a string, with options in droves. The Baylor University graduate, who majored in neuroscience, managed to pass the Law School Admission Test while working at a mental health institution helping to rehabilitate individuals with drug dependencies. Her potential career paths were in no way limited.

But she wanted more. She wanted a bigger challenge even than graduating with a neuroscience degree and going to law school.

After talking to recruiters from three different branches of the military, and after pinging several friends and family members, Courtney noticed a trend.

"It's funny — everyone who wasn't in the Air Force recommended the Air Force," Courtney said.

1st Lt. Margaret Courtney graduated Baylor University with a degree in neuroscience and later passed the Law School Admission Test, but chose to join the Air Force and become an AC-130 Gunship navigator. Photo by Master Sgt. Jeffrey Allen.

After commissioning as an officer and going through training to become a navigator, Courtney faced a decision — what airframe did she want to work on for the remainder of her Air Force career?

"I remember going through (navigator) training, and there are several airframes that require (combat systems officers). You're going through those aircraft and imagining your life three to 10 years down the road," Courtney said. "How different would my life look if I joined this community or that community?"

The number of opportunities the Air Force has given Courtney caught her off guard.

"It's not too bad to be in your young 20's and have basically limitless possibilities laid out in front of you. I'm like 'Goodness gracious, let me look into it all,'" Courtney said. "I feel like I'm hitting this whole job and career at the sweet spot. I've had plenty of people ahead of me pave the way."

Knowing what's ahead for Courtney, Black is excited, and almost proud of the options female Airmen now have.

"It's exciting — hearing about Lieutenant Courtney," Black said. "I can't help but to reflect on when I was a lieutenant and how excited I was to come

to the mission, then, after 9/11, to go and fight. I'm excited for her, because I know she's going to find the reward."

Black doesn't just see the past and the present, but the future keeps her motivation high, knowing the possibilities now out there for females in the Air Force.

"The success is that we don't hear about it because they're blended in," said Black of current female aircrew members. "They're just people doing great things – male and female. That's success."

When Black arrived at Hurlburt in 2000, she was wide-eyed and ready to take on the world. She saw a fork in the road and committed to a direction, not knowing the path. Now that she's traveled that path, she feels she has a responsibility to people like Courtney and other female Airmen.

"She doesn't know what she doesn't know," said Black of Courtney, who's even more wide-eyed than the prior-enlisted Black was at this stage in her AFSOC career. "That's where people like me come in. Lt. Col. Megan Ripple is the director of (operations) at the 4th Special Operations Squadron. We arrived here at Hurlburt together. We are taking the initiative to reach out to these women to prepare them for deployment, to teach them all the things we didn't know."

Considering Courtney's only job up until this point has been to learn and receive training, she's growing more and more excited to fly this new path.

"I'm still trying to figure out how everything works," said Courtney, who was recently assigned to the 4th SOS. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I can't wait to actually partake in it, and do what I've been training for. They want you to learn, they want you to train; they want to set you up for success. No one really cares where you've come from, what your rank is. They care about how much work you put into your job every day. If you're competent and put forth the work, you get rewarded."

Though there are some years between Black and Courtney, they noted a common mentality present when they joined the AFSOC community.

"I haven't noticed if anyone cares about me being a girl or not," Courtney said. "They care about how good you are at what you do, and if you care or not, and if you take pride in your work."

Letting your work speak for itself is a welcome reality for Courtney.

"It's definitely a relief that you're judged based on the quality of your work, and nothing else," Courtney said, pointing out that the impact of the mission is way too important to care about the irrelevant. "AFSOC is pretty open about it. The game we play is life or death."

AC-130U Gunship. Photo by Senior Airman Julianne Showalter.

1st AC-130J Ghostrider gunship arrives at Hurlburt Field

By Staff Sgt. Marleah Robertson
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs

An AC-130J Ghostrider gunship landed at Hurlburt Field, Florida, July 29, making it the first in Air Force Special Operations Command's programmed fleet of 37.

After completing the initial developmental test and evaluation by the 413th Flight Test Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, the aircraft will be flown by the 1st Special Operations Group Detachment 2 and maintained by the 1st Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron during its initial operational tests and evaluations at Hurlburt.

"Putting it through these tests will allow us to wring out the AC-130J in a simulated combat environment, instead of the more rigid flight profiles in formal developmental testing," said Lt. Col. Brett DeAngelis, 1st SOG Det 2 commander. "Now that we know the equipment works when we turn it on, it's our task to determine the best way to employ our newest asset."

For most, this new gunship is the future.

"The AC-130J brings new technology to the table for AFSOC with more efficient engines, improved fuel efficiency and the ability to fly higher, further and quieter," said Master Sgt. Michael Ezell, 1st SOAMXS production superintendent. "Additionally, the modified

Air Force Special Operations Command's first AC-130J Ghostrider taxis under a water arch at Hurlburt Field, Fla., July 29. The AC-130J recently completed its initial developmental test and evaluation at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., and will begin operational tests and evaluation later this year. Photo by Airman Kai White.

Master Sgt. James Knight (right) 18th Flight Test Squadron aerial gunner, instructs Staff Sgt. Rob Turner (left) 1st Special Operations Group Detachment 2 aerial gunner, on new changes regarding pre-flight inspections in an AC-130J Ghostrider on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., July 29. The aircrews of the 1st SOG Det. 2 were hand-selected from the AC-130 community for their operational expertise and will begin initial operational testing and evaluation of the AC-130J later this year. Photo by Senior Airman Christopher Callaway.

weapons system it possesses is a precision-strike package that was collected from the older models, such as the laser-guided bombs and AGM-176 Griffin bombs, and combined to give us all the capabilities of the AC-130W Stinger II and AC-130U Spooky all in one package."

The gunship is a modified MC-130J Commando II, containing advanced features that enables it to provide ground forces with an expeditionary, direct-fire platform that is persistent, suited for urban operations and capable of delivering precision munitions against ground targets.

"This is an exciting transition as we move the AC-130J from the test community to the operational community," DeAngelis said. "While we still have initial operational testing in front of us to accomplish, it will now be done by aircrews selected for their combat expertise, instead of their testing background."

A cadre of 60 aircrew and maintainers were selected by Air Force Personnel Center to stand up the program, and there will be an additional 30 contractors to help work on the new gunship.

"We will be training on the airplane, getting all the qualifications and hands-on experience we need to be able to perform operational testing in order to give an exact picture of how this plane will operate in a real-world environment," said Ezell. "Our focus right now is to learn how to maintain the aircraft, and the operators will learn how to fly it and get ready for IOT&E, which should start later this year."

The Airmen hand-selected to work on the new gunship encompass a solid background and level of expertise on C-130Js. The maintenance team cadre came from Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas, Dyess AFB, Texas, Kirtland AFB, New Mexico, Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, and Cannon AFB, New Mexico.

"As more AC-130Js are produced and delivered, the older models will slowly be retired," said DeAngelis. "Until then, we'll hold on to them while the AC-130J completes operational tests and the fleet becomes abundant in numbers."

Operational testing is expected to be complete next spring 2016.

"Det 2's mission is simple; 'Get it right,'" said DeAngelis. "And we have the right group of people to do just that."

Master Sgt. James Knight (left) 18th Flight Test Squadron aerial gunner, performs a pre-flight inspection with Staff Sgt. Rob Turner (right) 1st Special Operations Group Detachment 2 aerial gunner, at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., July 29. Photo by Senior Airman Christopher Callaway.

Staff Sgt. Travis Jordan, 320th Special Tactics Squadron combat controller, performs a high-altitude low-opening jump recently in Texas. He is one of the 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2015. Courtesy photo.

Combat Controller named Air Force Outstanding Airman of the Year

By Staff Sgt. Melanie Holochwost
AFSOC Public Affairs

A Japan-based combat controller is one of the 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2015, Air Force officials recently announced.

Staff Sgt. Travis Jordan, 320th Special Tactics Squadron combat controller, is the latest Air Commando selected for this honor.

"Travis exemplifies the Air Force core values and the SOF ethos both with his actions on the battlefield and in his personal life," said Col. William Freeman, 353rd Special Operations Group commander. "He is truly an outstanding Airman, and I couldn't be prouder for him and his family on being formally recognized."

While serving with an Army Special Forces team in Afghanistan, Jordan controlled more than 200 aircraft on 19 combat missions. One of those missions was so dramatic that it could be the climactic scene out of an award-winning war film.

One day in December 2014, Jordan said his team approached a small village. Their objective was to speak with the village elders.

Suddenly, they were ambushed.

"We came under heavy and effective fire from multiple directions, and one of our medics suffered a gunshot wound to his arm," Jordan said.

I didn't immediately realize I was shot. I knew I couldn't stop… the rounds were still impacting inches from us.

— Staff Sgt. Travis Jordan

Jordan and another special operator worked together to lay down suppressive fire and move their injured teammate to safety. But, Jordan took a bullet to his foot in the process.

"I didn't immediately realize I was shot," he said. "I knew I couldn't stop … the rounds were still impacting inches from us."

The enemy snipers continued to engage the team while Jordan applied a tourniquet to his lower leg.

"I knew my other teammates had worse injuries and I didn't have time to waste on mine," he said. "I got on my radio and coordinated air-to-ground engagements so we could locate, target and destroy the enemy."

Jordan said his gunshot wound was a distraction, but he remained calm and focused on directing airstrikes and a medical evacuation, which eliminated two Taliban commanders and saved four lives.

He received the Purple Heart and a Bronze Star with Valor.

Although these actions may seem extreme, the courage and professionalism Jordan displayed never surprised his team, said Capt. Dan Breiding, 320th STS silver team leader.

"Jordan can always be counted on to get the mission done," Breiding said. "He is resolute in being the best at every task he performs. He constantly makes everyone around him better."

Jordan also excelled outside the battlefield at Kadena Air Base, Japan.

At Airman Leadership School, Jordan won the John L. Levitow award, which is presented to the student who demonstrates the most outstanding leadership and scholastic qualities.

Jordan also participated in joint exercises and joint combine exchange trainings in four countries across the Pacific. During this time, he participated and conducted training with key special operations partners, which enhanced interoperability among U.S. Allies.

Jordan said he is truly honored to be recognized as one of the Air Force's 12 Outstanding Airmen.

"We have so many Airmen doing amazing things for our country every day," he said. "This award attests to the remarkable special operators we have in our Air Force, and I have no doubt that any one of my teammates could be receiving this very same award."

Staff Sgt. Travis Jordan, 320th Special Tactics Squadron combat controller, relays friendly positions to aircraft during a mission in Afghanistan, Dec. 19, 2014. Courtesy photo.

Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, takes his position during the MARSOC re-designation ceremony at Stone Bay, on Camp Lejeune, N.C., June 19. The ceremony was held to officially adopt the name Marine Raider, carrying on the heritage and legacy passed along by the Raiders of World War II. During the ceremony, the units' colors were cased and their new colors were unveiled. Photo by Marine Corps Sgt. Donovan Lee.

MARSOC re-designates subordinate commands as Marine Raiders

By Marine Corps Sgt. Donovan Lee
MARSOC Public Affairs

"United States Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command is proud and honored to adopt the name Marine Raider, carrying on the rich heritage and legacy passed along to us by the Raiders of World War II," said Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, commander, MARSOC.

MARSOC officially re-designated its subordinate commands as Marine Raiders during a ceremony at Stone Bay, on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, June 19. The re-designations make official the use of the Marine Raider moniker for all of MARSOC.

The ceremony was especially monumental for original Raiders seeking to keep their heritage alive. Three Raiders and family members of other Raiders who are deceased were in attendance, representing all

original Marine Raiders and the U.S. Marine Raider Association, a non-profit organization supporting scholarships in the Solomon Islands, the Marine Raider Museum located at Raider Hall on Marine Corps Base Quantico, Speaker Forums and Memorial Visitations.

"This is a proud moment for me and my fellow Raiders who can't be here today," said Charles H. Meacham, an original Marine Raider who served as a machine gunner with the Raiders during World War II. "We are grateful to know that our legacy will not be forgotten, and is being carried on by the extraordinary Marines of MARSOC."

The Marine Raiders were formed in 1942 as the war in the Far East was reaching a difficult phase and senior leadership sought to replicate the special operations missions conducted by the British Commandos and other Special Forces units within the Pacific theater.

MARSOC and the Marine Raiders share the common experiences as a specialized unit, formed during a time of conflict, and uniquely manned, trained and equipped to conduct special operations.

Marine Raiders have long highlighted their wish for their legacy to be carried on by another Marine Corps unit. They requested MARSOC to be the unit, and Gen. James F. Amos, former Commandant of the Marine Corps, concurred.

Amos made official the title in a proclamation released Aug. 6, 2014, which called for "the official continuation of our Corps' special operations heritage from the Raiders of World War II to our modern day Marines."

While assigned to MARSOC, all personnel are authorized to call themselves a Marine Raider, to include all support personal, civilian employees as well as the command's critical skills operators and special operations officers.

A CSO with MARSOC, describing his feelings about carrying the title of Marine Raider, made reference to the CSO creed, which includes the phrase: "My title is Marine, but it is my choice and my choice alone to be a Special Operations Marine. I will never forget the tremendous sacrifice and reputation of those who came before me."

"It's extremely important to carry on the legacy of the original Raiders and all other reconnaissance and special operations Marines before us," said the CSO. "It's up to us to keep the honor of 'Always Faithful, Always Forward, Spiritus Invictus (unconquerable spirit), and now, Marine Raider."

MARSOC unit emblems will continue to use the existing blue Raider shield with Southern Cross, but will not use the Raider skull. The Raider patch itself will not be an authorized unit emblem to wear in uniform or kit, but may be used in a personal capacity, out of uniform as a symbol of unit pride and Marine Corps heritage.

Marine Raiders training during World War II. Courtesy photo from U.S. Marine Corps.

The U.S. Special Operations Command team march to their seats at the 2015 Department of Defense Warrior Games opening ceremony at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Va., June 19. The Warrior Games, founded in 2010, is a paralympic-style competition that features eight adaptive sports for wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans from the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy/Coast Guard, Air Force, Special Operations Command, and the British Armed Forces. This year marked the first time DoD took responsibility for operational planning and coordination of the event, in which approximately 250 athletes competed. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg.

Team SOCOM joins 2015 Warrior Games hosted by Marine Corps

By Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly
USSOCOM Public Affairs

The joint U.S. Special Operations Command Warrior Games team joined more than 250 fellow wounded, ill and injured warriors to kick off the 2015 Warrior Games, June 19.

Hosted by the U.S. Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia, the inaugural Department of Defense Warrior Games highlight the finest athletes from all U.S. military branches, including members of the British Armed Forces.

The athletes were welcomed to Quantico by Maj. Gen. Juan G. Ayala, the base commander and commander of the Warrior Games Task Force. Ayala said that it was a privilege for the U.S. Marine Corps to be the first to host the games and emphasized that the focus of the next 10 days were the athletes and their families.

Team SOCOM is comprised of 38 Special Operations Forces athletes from across the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps and is led by Team Captain, U.S. Army Ranger, Master Sgt. Joseph Kapacziewski, of Bristol, Connecticut.

After a below-the-knee leg amputation following a combat injury, Kapacziewski re-qualified as a U.S. Army Ranger, regained a squad leader position, and was promoted to a platoon sergeant position. Kapacziewski was the first U.S. Army Ranger to return to combat with a

prosthetic, deploying to Afghanistan as a combat leader six times.

"These games are a testament of strength and personal courage," said Kapacziewski.

"Team SOCOM prides itself on camaraderie and puts an emphasis on the bonds created through our training and competition. This event is a symbol to all wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans that individuals can recover from serious injury or illness and lead fulfilling, productive and inspiring lives."

Throughout the competition, athletes will compete in eight adaptive sports including archery, cycling, track and field, shooting, sitting volleyball, swimming, track, and wheelchair basketball. Athletes from each team will also be invited to participate in a wheelchair rugby exhibition on the final day of the games. Awards and closing ceremonies were held June 28.

The Military Adaptive Sports Program is one of the ways the USSOCOM Care Coalition supports SOF warriors and their families through the process of restoring their life purpose and regaining normalcy and balance after a life-altering injury.

(Top) Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Kapacziewski leads and and wins the gold medal in the 100-meter sprint at Butler Stadium at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., June 23. Photo by Lance Cpl. Terry W. Miller Jr. (Top right) Army Capt. Sean Walsh swims the 50-meter freestyle category at Freedom Aquatic and Fitness Center in Manassas, Va., June 27. He earned a silver medal in the event. Photo by E.J. Hersom. (Above) Army Staff Sgt. Victor Sassoon competes in the archery competition. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg. (Right) Army Lt. Col. Robin Pickel particpates in the cycling competition. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg.

Family, Care Coalition key to success for SOCOM athletes

Story and photo by Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly
USSOCOM Public Affairs

As athletes push their physical limits and reach new heights during the 2015 DoD Warrior Games competitions in Quantico, Virginia, their family members cheer and count these victories as their own and rightly so. If it wasn't for their support as care givers, advocates and cheerleaders, these feats would have been nearly impossible.

The parents, spouses, siblings and even children accompanying the members of the U.S. Special Operations Command team share a common experience - they have rallied around a loved one to prevail over great adversity.

It's an experience Christina Kilmartin, wife of retired U.S. Army Maj. Robert Kilmartin, can relate to.

While her husband diligently prepared for his field events in the distance, she recounted her experience after her husband, a civil affairs team leader, sustained injuries related to improvised explosive device blasts while deployed to Afghanistan.

"I knew things wouldn't be the same after he returned, but when he came home, you could tell something was different. The blasts affected him in different ways," she said.

Embracing her husband's challenges as her own, Christina did not hesitate to forego her professional and academic pursuits to take on the role of caregiver.

"The hardest part about becoming a caregiver for me was thinking about the life we had before and what we'd planned. It's very different than what it is today. He was planning on staying beyond 20 years; I was pursuing my master's degree. It's just a different life," she said.

Reflecting on the early days of his recovery, she offered some lessons learned in becoming a caregiver and advocate.

"In the beginning, I wish I would have known that it was absolutely necessary to rock the boat, and truly be my husband's advocate. That meant seeing different doctors, having hard conversations, saying, 'Let's look at the pros and cons here together.'"

Those conversations also included which therapies to pursue. Among those options, the Care Coalition Military Adaptive Sports Program offered post-rehabilitation support. The program assists athletes in developing and achieving immediate and long-term health goals in support of their total recovery care plan.

"Out of all the different therapies that are out there, the adaptive sports program was by far the most beneficial," she said. "A lot of special operators are athletes; they are highly-competitive and active. Losing that makes you question your value, what you're worth."

It is important for family members, for service members, to realize that they don't have to go at it alone. The sooner they contact the Care Coalition, the faster they will get connected with a network of support.

— U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Kelly Ammerman

Additionally, MASP affords wounded warriors adaptive sports equipment, professional level coaching, sport specific training, and the ability to attend various camps and competitions.

"For Robert, it started out with golf. Something he had never tried before, but took to it immediately. It gave him purpose, something positive to focus on. It also brought him alongside other veterans, and he realized he wasn't alone. For someone in that situation, it's not just a golf game."

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Kelly Ammerman, with the USSOCOM Care Coalition, agreed.

"It is important for family members, for service members, to realize that they don't have to go at it alone. The sooner they contact the Care Coalition, the faster they will get connected with a network of support," said Ammerman. "Events like these are important for active

duty service members, but especially important for our veterans, who once they leave the service, often return to communities that don't quite understand them.

"To be able to recommune with their brothers and sisters in the Special Ops community is significant. I have seen it change lives."

Ammerman also underscored the broader benefits to the extended wounded warrior community.

"While it's great to see everyone get together and the camaraderie that's built among all the services and SOCOM teams, the positive impact can also be seen among the family members and caregivers," he said.

"Injuries of this magnitude don't just the change the lives of service members, it can change the entire family dynamic. Caregivers have their own host of challenges that they have to deal with. The sense of community and camaraderie is as important to them as it is for the military member they are taking care of," he added.

Recognizing the key role families play in the recovery service members, benevolent organizations like the Fisher House have developed family support programs that address their needs. Most of the family members attending the Warrior Games were sponsored by the Fisher House.

Often people want to offer support, but don't know what to do. Christina offered some simple advice.

"Something as simple as 'I'm here for you,''I'm praying for you' or 'I know this is hard for you and I appreciate everything you do' ... just showing kindness and genuine care. It's not pity, it's encouragement, and it means so much. It's a small thing to ask for men and women who have served and suffered for our country and their families."

Christina Kilmartin stands behind her husband, retired Maj. Robert Kilmartin, as he waits to compete in the field events as part of the U.S. Special Operations Command team participating in the 2015 DOD Warrior Games. More than 270 wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans from the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy/Coast Guard, Air Force, Special Operations Command, and the British Armed Forces are competing this year.

Three things you probably got wrong about the SOCOM Care Coalition

Myth 1 : Care Coalition is a benevolent organization

The Care Coalition is the USSOCOM organization charged with care of wounded, ill and injured service members. It is recognized by Congress as one of the DOD warrior care programs.

Myth 2 : You need to go to the Care Coalition when you are getting ready for discharge

The Care Coalition is different from the services' wounded warrior programs because its primary goal is reintegration of SOF members back into their unit. The Care Coalition will assist members to access the best care possible for their specific situation seeking to retain the service member's knowledge and skill set in the SOF enterprise if possible, and to help them navigate a path in transition if they cannot.

Myth 3 : Care Coalition services are only for combat wounded service members

The Care Coalition provides support to wounded, ill and injured SOF. Whether the condition is a result of a training injury, off-duty accident or chronic illness, the Care Coalition offers advocacy and support across four lines of operation: Recovery, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Transition.

Sgt. 1st Class Yancy Taylor competes in the shot put during the Warrior Games at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, June 23. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg.

A profile in courage: Sgt. 1st Class Yancy Taylor soldiers on

By TSgt. Heather Kelly
USSOCOM Public Affairs

The road to the Warrior Games is a challenging one. For prospective competitors, training often requires a commitment of several hours a day for months, sometimes years, in advance.

While physical training is only one of the hurdles athletes face in preparing for the event, mental discipline is often the toughest to master. It's a considerable task for any athlete, and even more so for a wounded warrior.

It's something U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Yancy Taylor knows all too well.

After sustaining a gunshot wound in the left shoulder while deployed, Taylor spent nearly a year in recovery and rehabilitation before he was released back to his unit to continue therapy.

That's when some of the real challenges began, he said.

"The hardest part of recovery was the mental aspect, going from being very active -- running three to six miles a day, to sitting on a couch not doing a whole lot, and being told that I can't do a whole lot," Taylor said. "It was really mentally and emotionally draining, and it took me to a lot of dark places."

I had physical therapy every day, and that just became routine. But the hours and hours of sitting in my room by myself with nothing to do really took a toll on me."

The Special Forces medical sergeant and father of five soon recognized that something would have to change if he wanted to persevere.

"It pretty much came down to focusing on what I can do, as opposed to focusing on what I used to do," said Taylor.

That subtle shift in focus began to make all the difference according to Taylor. He began taking steps toward regaining his active lifestyle while recovering at Brooks Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas.

"The therapists there would help you adapt and find ways to get back out there and be active again," Taylor said.

"For me, I was a big skier and rock climber, so one of the events I did was Challenge Aspen. They had professionals with us at all times to teach us how to re-ski and use my body without poles. It was beyond therapeutic," said Taylor.

Re-energized by the experience, Taylor became interested in competing in the Warrior Games this year. He will compete in wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, shot put, discus, pistol shooting and swimming.

It's awesome to have my family here. My children realize that I might not be as physically able as I once was, but I am not broke. I am still me, and I am still active and can still push on.

— Sgt. 1st Class Yancy Taylor

"The Games have been really good and it's great to be around other veterans," Taylor said.

"We may not share the same disabilities; we each have our own struggles but we bounce ideas off of each other on ways to cope … and its fun just to get out to be competitive again."

Cheering him on at every turn is Taylor's family, a small army in their own right, seated just off to the side of every event.

"It's awesome to have my family here. My children realize that I might not be as physically able as I once was, but I am not broke. I am still me, and I am still active and can still push on," said Taylor. "They see that even though bad things happen, there's still another day and you can still be the best you can be, even though you might not be as good as you were yesterday."

The sentiment was echoed by Taylor's sister.

"Having family and friends around as much as you can plays a huge part in recovery; it addresses the mental as well as physical piece. I have three kids, and for them to see Uncle Yancy injured and never giving up is a point of pride for all of us," said Lenore Fastnachk. "He's such a go-getter, nothing knocks him down; he just gets back up and accepts the next challenge. I'm most proud of him for that. He's just like, 'Bring it on, what's next?' Nothing holds him back."

Tech. Sgt.
Marty Bettelyoun
720th Operations Support Squadron

Sgt. 1st Class
James M. Ginas III
Special Operations Command - Europe

Petty Officer 1st Class (SEAL)
Seth C. Lewis
Naval Special Warfare Command

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Army 1st Sgt.
Peter A. McKenna Jr.
7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Tech. Sgt.
Timothy A. Officer, Jr.
720th Operations Support Squadron

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

Army Master Sgt.
Pablo A. Ruiz III
3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne)

A CV-22B Osprey assigned to the 7th Special Operations Squadron performs an aerial display of its capabilities during the Royal International Air Tattoo at Royal Air Force Fairford, England, July 19. The U.S. participation in RIAT highlighted the strength of America's commitment to the security of NATO and its allies. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chrissy Best.