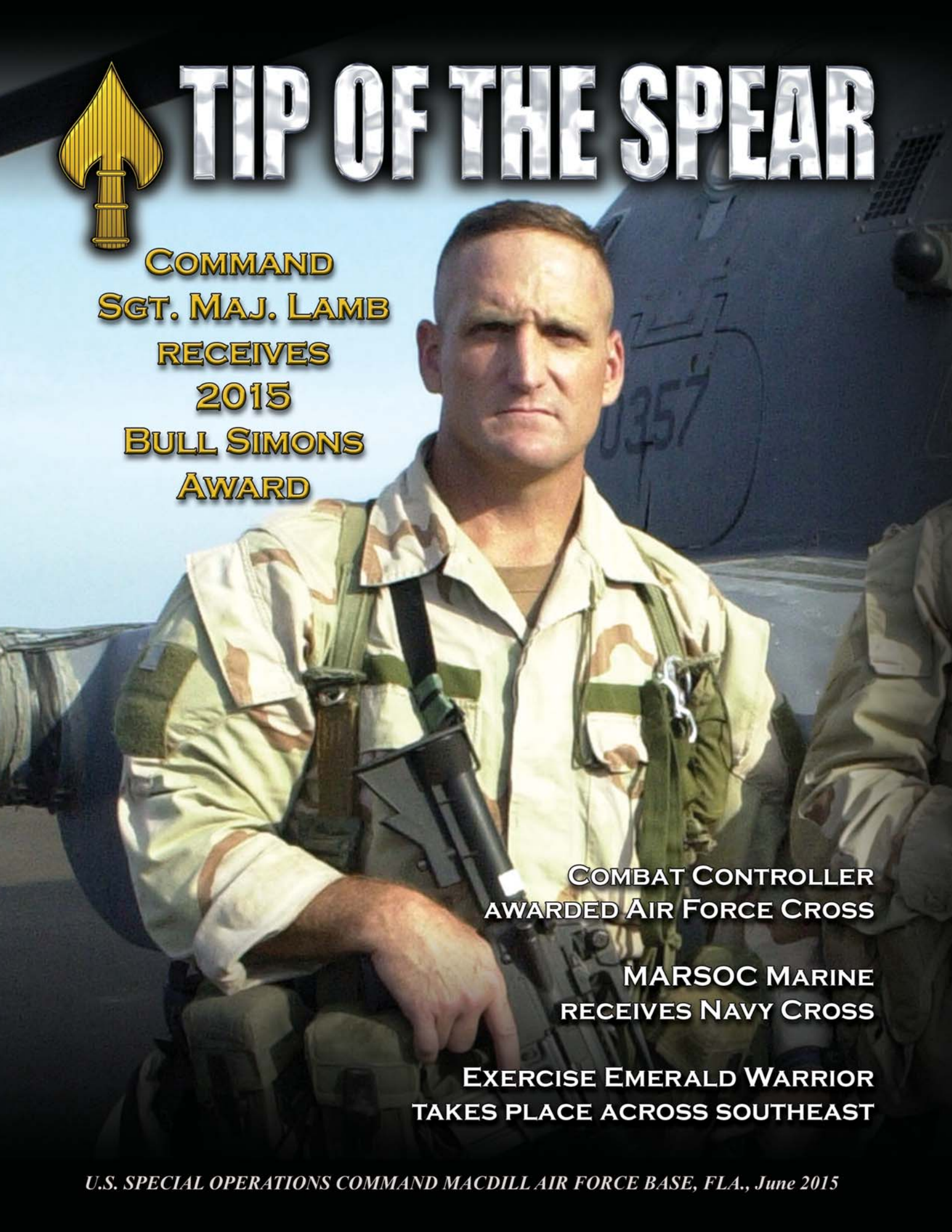
TIP OF THE SPEAR



Command Sgt. Maj. Lamb receives 2015 Bull Simons Award

Combat Controller awarded Air Force Cross

MARSOC Marine receives Navy Cross

Exercise Emerald Warrior takes place across southeast

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

U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Lamb is the 2015 USSOCOM Bull Simons award recipient. The Bull Simons Award is named in of honor Army Col. Arthur D. "Bull" Simons and is given for lifetime achievements in Special Operations.

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A Chilean special forces soldier fires a U.S. machine gun April 22, at a firing range in Camp Shelby, Miss., as part of a Special Operations Command South bilateral training exchange between U.S. and Chile Special Operations Forces. The exchange, carried out by Army National Guard units and Special Operations Detachment South, strengthens ties between the nations' forces. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Osvaldo Equite.

US, Chile Special Operations Forces complete training at Camp Shelby

Story and photos by Army Staff Sgt. Osvaldo Equite
SOCSOUTH Public Affairs

More than 100 Special Operations Forces members from Chile and the U.S. concluded a 17-day bilateral training exchange at the Joint Forces Training Center at Camp Shelby, Miss.

Chilean SOF, Army National Guard Special Forces soldiers and Force Recon Marines, participated in the exchange April 15 – May 1. The event, organized by Special Operations Command South, facilitated the development of tactical and operational interoperability between the forces to respond to regional crises.

SOF members shared common tactics, techniques and procedures, or TTPs, completing training in pistol, rifle and sniper marksmanship, water survival, combatives, close quarter combat, urban operations, tactical field medical care and helocast and fast rope operations.

"I was extremely impressed with the

professionalism and the warrior mindset the Chileans demonstrated," said a U.S. Special Forces captain, who for security reasons spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"In many ways, they are very similar to us," said the captain, an Operational Detachment-Alpha team leader who worked daily with his Chilean counterpart. "We plan the same way and they even conduct operations the same way too."

On many occasions, Chilean and American operatives were fully integrated into stacks, training side-by-side at Camp Shelby's Combined Arms Collective Training Facility, a 35-building urban terrain complex.

Aside from sharing many similarities, U.S. and Chilean Marines proved that both SOF counterparts learned from each other after observing how each of the teams maneuvered and operated throughout the exchange.

"When fast roping, they use a different lockout technique than us," said a U.S. Marine Corps team leader. After seeing the Chileans use this technique, the U.S. Marine team will further evaluate the newly learned technique and possibly adopt it into their standard TTPs.

We had a very good experience working with our U.S. counterparts. While working together, we realized that a lot of our problems are also their problems ... I hope to stay friends with those I met here for a long time.

— Chilean SOF soldier

The training exchange, carried out by the guard and Special Operations Detachment South members, gave the participants an opportunity to build strong and enduring partnerships.

"We had a very good experience working with our U.S. counterparts," said a Chilean SOF soldier. "While working together, we realized that a lot of our problems are also their problems," he explained, referring to the mutual cooperation the countries share in the region. "I hope to stay friends with those I met here for a long time."

To finalize the training exchange, SOF members from both countries participated in a joint airborne operation. Participants then traded airborne wings as a sign of camaraderie and accomplishment.

(Top) U.S. and Chilean Marines carry a log as part of a physical training event April 22, at Camp Shelby, Miss., during a month long bilateral training exchange between the two partner nations.

(Left) Chilean and U.S. Marines practice firing drills April 23, at a firing range at Camp Shelby, Miss., during a bilateral training exchange organized by Special Operations Command South. Chile and U.S. Marines exchanged techniques, tactics and procedures to foster operational interoperability between partner nations to respond to regional crises.

Eager Lion 2015

A Success All Around

Eager Lion 2015 is a multinational exercise held in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan during the months of April and May. More than two dozen countries participated in the combined exercise designed to test the interoperability between militaries - both conventional and unconventional forces. Courtesy photo.

Story on next page

By Gunnery Sgt. Reina Barnett
USSOCOM Public Affairs

Eager Lion 2015 officially comes to a close, May 19, after more than two weeks of training in the region.

Now in its fifth year, the multinational exercise included U.S. and Jordanian military forces and more than two dozen partner nations. The exercise is designed to increase interoperability and facilitate responses to conventional and unconventional threats.

Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Abernethy, Special Operations Central Command senior enlisted adviser, witnessed several training events at the King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center in Amman, and noticed the synergistic effect between the countries involved in the training scenarios.

"When you can get all these type A elements … all of these elite counter-terrorism elements all in one place, and they all have their different ideas of how they're going to actually execute a mission and then get in one spot and have them work together, compromise, and negotiate to accomplish the mission, that truly is the essence of what Eager Lion is all about," said Abernethy.

The tactical execution of the missions which also served to showcase the men's interoperability was quite impressive, Abernethy added.

Command Sgt. Maj. Patrick McCauley from U.S. Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, echoed his counterpart's sentiments.

"The fact that you could take that many assault forces together with the language barriers, and with the coordination that is required to pull that off, and to do so as smoothly as they did, impressed us both," McCauley said.

One prime example was Poland's elite counter-terrorism unit, otherwise known as GROM, in the lead as the ground force planner for the non-combatant evacuation and embassy reinforcement scenarios that took place at KASOTC.

Both sergeants major agreed the missions were extremely well planned out and bringing all the entities together, the end result was very well executed.

Training together as a coalition not only increased efficiency, it allowed members to share tactics, techniques, and procedures they may not have had in common.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician 1st Class Brie Coger, helps United Arab Emirati military personnel detonate C4 training explosives at Camp Titin near Aqaba, Jordan, during exercise Eager Lion 2015. Eager Lion is a recurring multinational exercise designed to strengthen military-to-military relationships, increase interoperability between partner nations, and enhance regional security and stability. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Arthurgwain L. Marquez.

Lt. Col. Patrick Vermer, a commanding officer in the Belgian army, said the most valuable part of the exercise was to train and execute missions with partner nations.

"To execute our TTPs in a unique operational context from CJTF [combined joint task force] down to tactical units, in a physically and culturally demanding environment, within a multinational context with elite troops was a great opportunity," he said.

Vermer said the training in Amman was something his troops simply could not get in Belgium and proved invaluable.

"In three weeks' time here, we've collected an outstanding and incomparable experience; more than in one full year of training back home. For our planners at the staff level and for our teams in the field, they had the opportunity to interact and coordinate with all their stakeholders," Vermer said.

The future of military operations, McCauley stated, relies on coalition teamwork.

"That's what ultimate success is going to look like," he said. "It can't be the United States trying to solve problems; it's got to be a coalition of governments that together, are holistically looking at the problems that are out there and looking for solutions."

Eager Lion 2015 definitely tested the interoperability of the nations and their forces and proved that training together and building partnerships pays dividends when conducting operations together.

Lt Col. Mohammed Al-Atiyat, a fighter controller with the Royal Jordanian Air Force, said everyone working together to achieve the same goal was inspiring.

"What I noticed was how armies from different countries get along together to achieve the same goal and try to understand each other to do their task," Al-Atiyat said.

"Everyone worked together – the army, ground forces, air force, and navy – the whole government worked toward the same goal; it was more efficient than working alone."

Regardless of the nation, the theme that resonated over and over was the same.

"At the end of the day, we see borders between countries, but the enemy doesn't see those borders; so any time we can work together as a team, we're going to be much more effective," said Abernethy.

"The U.S. is not going to win alone; we have to win this fight through our partners. They have to be the ones in the lead across this region if we ever want to be able to effectively counter the violent extremist ideology we have going on right now," Abernethy continued.

"This is an event where we can bring all of our partners together, build relationships, learn from each other, and go back to our respective countries and use those techniques we've learned."

Some of those techniques were on display through the many training scenarios in various parts of the country. Partners participated in direct action drills, NEO exercises, a visit, board, search and seizure exercise, as well as smaller scenarios such as personnel recovery, combat search and rescue, live-fire exercises, and close-quarter battles.

Lead operations officer for Eager Lion 2015, U.S. Army Maj. Joseph Vigueras, said the exercise's success was due to the input and assistance of coalition partners in the planning process.

"Everyone who had some part in the planning and execution of the exercise were valuable assets," Vigueras said.

"The exercise was designed to test our joint-interoperability and we succeeded."

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Christopher Burns, assistant commanding general for U.S. Special Operations Command Central, said Eager Lion helped coalition partners better understand how to deploy their forces forward.

"With regard to real-world events -- especially Daesh, the exercise allowed our coalition SOF partners to build confidence and also allowed us to all share ideas from a SOF perspective," Burns said.

Future wars, Al-Atiyat said, will not be between two countries, it will be a coalition effort.

"We want peace with all our neighbors around us, but sometimes peace needs force, especially when other nations don't take it [peace] seriously," Al-Atiyat continued.

"It's exciting to see the training take place and tying and weaving it all together," Burns said.

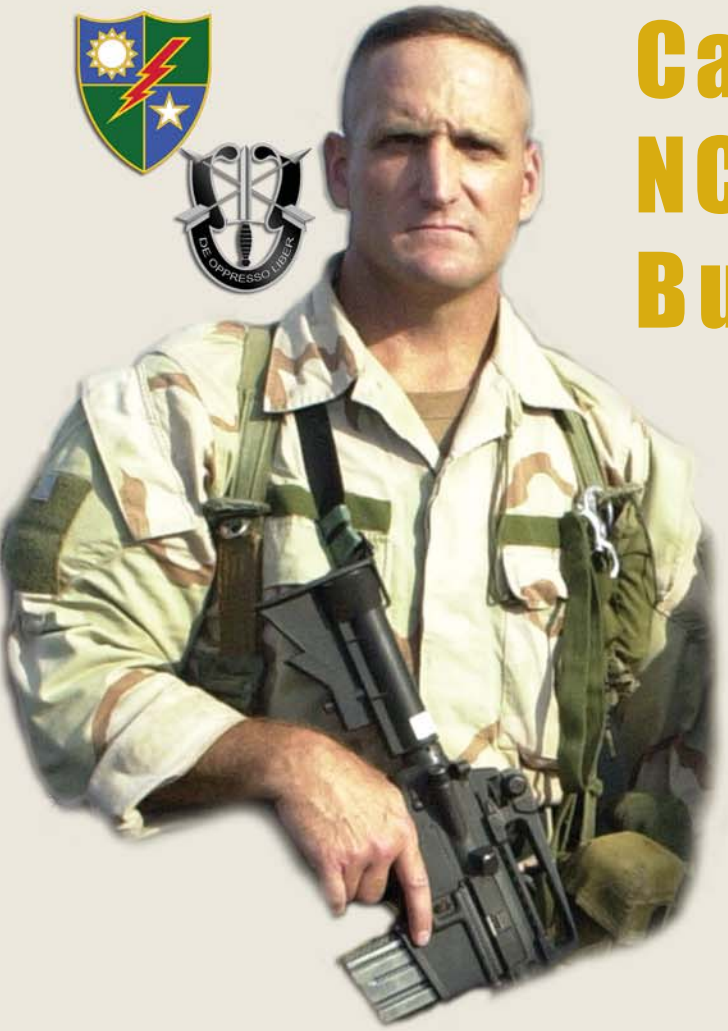
"This exercise proves for Jordanians in particular, that their focus and resolve to work on their security, to reflect and begin to implement training is a serious commitment."

Through the myriad training scenarios Eager Lion provided, Burns said the participants learned exactly what was needed in the region by executing complex planning scenarios and collaborating together – realizing in the process that no nation alone can win this fight.

"The ability for Jordan to bring all these partners together is a testament to Jordanians that despite everything that's going on, their partners find value in joint training exercises like Eager Lion," said Burns.

Participants in this year's exercise were: Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Egypt, France, Iraq, Italy, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, as well as NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps.

U.S. Navy divers enter the water in the Gulf of Aqaba, Jordan, during a SCUBA dive as part of Eager Lion 2015. Courtesy photo.



Career SOF senior NCO receives 2015 Bull Simons Award

By Mike Bottoms
USSOCOM Public Affairs

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Richard "Rick" Lamb is described by a colleague as "an NCO who looks like Sergeant 'Rock,' and he's got a personality that's a mile wide and at least a quarter-mile deep, and he's just as fun as fun could be." These are qualities that get you noticed, but it was Lamb's leadership ability, professionalism and competence in Special Operations that earned him the 2015 Bull Simons Award.

The Bull Simons Award is a lifetime Special Operations Forces achievement award and USSOCOM's highest honor. It was first awarded in 1990 and has since become an annual tradition. The award recognizes recipients who embody the true spirit, values, and skills of a Special Operations warrior. Col. Arthur "Bull" Simons, whom the award is named after, was the epitome of these attributes.

Lamb's career spans more than three decades and multiple operations, from Eagle Claw to Iraqi Freedom, and he comes from a family steeped in military tradition.

The men in Lamb's family have fought in conflicts since the Crimean War in the 1850s, the Civil War, World War I and II, Korea and Vietnam. Rick Lamb continued the family tradition by serving in nearly every major SOF-related combat operation until his military retirement in 2003 following his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"As a young kid, every male in my family that I loved and respected either wore herringbone twill or a police uniform, just about every male in my family starting with long lost relatives who fought in the Charge of the Light Brigade, my great-great grandfather who fought in the Civil War, my grandfather who was in the American Expeditionary Force (during World War I), and his three sons who fought in World War II, Korea and Vietnam," Lamb said. "Our family military heritage spanned quite a bit of military action, so we were a military family. There was no doubt what I was going to be."

Lamb initially joined the Army National Guard because his father and uncle were still serving.

"It just seemed like the right thing to do and in fact, my first platoon sergeant was my uncle," said Lamb. "He sat me down and said, 'Son you are good at this so

Command Sgt. Maj. Lamb's father, (bottom right) Staff Sgt. Richard C. Lamb, in the 1950s. Lamb's family has had men in the military going back to the 1850s. Courtesy photo.

you should consider doing this full time,' and so I went ahead and went from the National Guard to active duty and signed up under the Airborne Ranger enlistment option. I reported to 1st Ranger Battalion. My first company commander was then, Captain Grange."

Capt. David Grange would become Maj. Gen. Grange and commanded Lamb's company during Operation Eagle Claw.

Operation Eagle Claw, April 1980

On Nov. 4, 1979, Iranian militant students stormed the American Embassy in Tehran, Iran, and captured more than 60 American hostages. Operation Eagle Claw was developed to rescue the hostages, and Cpl. Lamb took part in that mission.

Pvt. Richard Lamb

"I met Rick Lamb in 1978. Tough guy, the best in the battalion. He was the epitome of a team leader," Grange said.

Lamb's company "Hard Rock Charlie" had the airfield seizure mission inside Iran.

"We were the extraction location for the raid ... the hostage rescue raid in Tehran," said Grange. "Lamb was an integral part in the security of that airfield and extraction of both hostages and counter-terrorism forces out of the AO (area of operation)."

"We were up to that point, pretty much Rogers' Rangers. We'd spend Monday through Friday out in the swamps of Fort Stewart. We were good at small unit tactics, raids, recon, and ambushes," said Lamb. "But he (Grange) brought us into the dayroom one day and said, 'Alright Rangers, I want to know who the best snipers are; I need to know who the best machine gunners are; I need to know who owns four-wheel drive vehicles, as a private vehicle, and drives them off road.' He needed to know who has a motorcycle license, who owns dirt bikes and drives those off road; he needed to know who grew up on farms and who were capable of keeping things running with bubble gum and baling wire, and who was comfortable around machines."

According to Lamb, Grange identified those unorthodox skill sets and used them to task organize his Rangers for the evolving tactics they would encounter during the Iranian raid.

"That was the first time I had seen that degree of flexible, unconventional thinking, and I liked it," Lamb said. "Being part of Eagle Claw, because that was my first assignment as a young Ranger, I think I was all of a corporal, so to us it was exciting. I mean the train up to it was intense, it was the best I've ever seen. I say that because of the time we spent flying in aircraft, working with mock targets, and executing airfield seizures. We had a scale terrain model that rivaled the 'Barbara' terrain model for the Son Tay raid. We probably took down every air field west of the Mississippi training for that mission; we were breaking new ground."

Unfortunately, the rescue mission was aborted, with tragedy following the forces' evacuation. According to witnesses, a helicopter lifted off, kicked up a blinding dust cloud, and then banked toward a C-130 aircraft. Its rotor blades sliced through the main stabilizer of the plane. The chopper rolled over the top of the aircraft, gushing fuel and fire as it tumbled. The resulting explosion killed eight American servicemen and seriously injured several others.

"We were on our final rehearsal getting ready to board the planes, when they shut the planes down and said there had been issues on the desert strip. So they basically told us to sterilize the area; we didn't want anybody to know we were there, and then we pulled out." said Lamb. "It was gut-wrenching. I don't know how many months we had prepared for that and everybody was on the razor's edge. So, it was pretty depressing. But the tactics we developed, the lessons we learned, and the relationships we established during that mission survive to this day. Eagle Claw set a solid foundation for integrating vehicles, aircraft, C2, and SOF Service Components, and propelled us into this modern era of Special Operations."

The Soviet Defector Incident, November 1984

Then Staff Sgt. Richard Lamb is kneeling and firing at North Korean soldiers during the Soviet Defector Incident on Nov. 23, 1984. Courtesy photo.

Lamb was later stationed at the Joint Security Area on Camp Kitty Hawk as it was known at the time in Pan Mun Jom, on the border between North and South Korea. His company commander was Army Capt. Bert Mizusawa, now a major general.

"I was put in charge of a combat unit with a very unique mission, and I quickly learned whoever came to that unit because we had a high turnover given it was a hardship tour on the DMZ and, because we were face-to-

face with the North Koreans, we had to work with a no-flaw mentality," Mizusawa said. "What we call the Soviet Defector Incident occurred on Nov. 23, 1984, and Vasily Matuzok apparently was planning the defection for a few years, and he was part of a tour group that day."

Matuzok asked one of the North Korean border guards to take his picture. While the guard was taking his picture, he bolted across, ran through the U.S and South Korean guards and shouted he was defecting. To Matuzok's surprise and everyone else's, the North Korean guard ran after him.

"The North Korean kid is in big trouble because he has lost his charge, so he pulls his pistol and runs after him," said Lamb. "Our guys shoot him in the street because now you have a North Korean soldier with a pistol drawn chasing a defector. After that, all hell breaks loose."

Soon, a battle ensued and approximately 30 North Korean soldiers entered through the Sunken Garden firing their weapons.

"I told the quick reaction force to load trucks, which was our signal to get on board to start moving," Mizusawa said.

"Everybody is looking at me because I'm the dude with the Ranger tab, and they asked me, 'What do we do?'" Lamb said. "Reporting from our checkpoints let us know that there was a large group of KPA [Korean People's Army] pinned down in the Sunken Garden. This changed the mission from secure the defector to secure the southern half of the Truce Village."

"Lamb had us dismount, formed us on line, and then we crested the hill and you could hear the bullets passing by," said Pfc. Mark DeVille. "Of course at that time I didn't know they were bullets, all I knew was the leaves were moving, the trees were losing bark and I was hearing that little sonic pop."

The firefight would last approximately 40 minutes. Five North Koreans were wounded and three killed, including the infamous captain the U.S. Army believes plotted the axe murders of two U.S. officers in 1976 during a tree-trimming operation at the DMZ. In addition, Cpl. Jang Myung-ki, a South Korean augmentee to the U.S. Army, was killed, and Pfc. Michael Burgoyne was wounded.

Matuzok would survive the firefight because of the actions of Lamb's platoon and later move to the United States.

"When Lamb and his squad crashed into the North Korean flank and then moved around them, that bought Matuzok a few seconds so we had a chance to get him out of there," said Mizusawa. "You always want to have the proper mix of competence and professionalism and he (Lamb) led the charge. He inspired the Soldiers to follow him into what can only be described as the most dangerous life and death situation and for all the right reasons, his aggressive maneuvering helped prevent the North Koreans, who initially had more people than we did, from continuing to pursue the defector."

Lamb would be awarded the Silver Star for his actions in the DMZ that day.

A North Korean soldier drags his wounded comrade to safety after the Soviet Defector Incident Nov. 23, 1984. Courtesy photo.

Operation Just Cause, December 1989

Between Dec. 20, 1989, and Jan. 31, 1990, the United States invaded Panama to oust the country's dictator General Manuel Noriega. Lamb was deeply involved in the invasion.

"On the night of D-Day of Just Cause, Lamb led a four-man assault team fast roping on top of a multi-story building that was eighteen to twenty stories," said retired Col. David McCracken who was a major at the time and Lamb's commander.

"We had just come back from knocking out a TV station, basically just knocking down the lines of communication and one of the guys turns on a little transistor radio and he's flipping through the channels and he hears Noriega giving a speech," Lamb said. "Someone asked for the radio station call numbers and we found a Panamanian phone book and looked up the address. We realized that the radio station was right down the street so the SOC [Special Operations Command - South] cranked helicopters and we flew over the building, identified it, and fast roped onto the roof."

The team thought Noriega might be giving a live speech at the radio station and were intent on capturing him.

"Rick was one of the lead team leaders off the helicopters and took the fast ropes that had fallen down onto the roof and did a field expedient mechanism to take the fast rope and tie it off and then further fast rope down onto the balcony of a restaurant there at the top of the building because otherwise we really weren't sure how we were going to get into the building," McCracken said.

"It was like a nineteen-story building I think, and we

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Lamb (front row, second from left) in Panama in the late 1980s. Lamb was instrumental in developing and coordinating the tactics for what would become known as "Ma Bell" operations during Operation Just Cause, capturing 188 Panamanian Defense Force personnel which led to the surrender of an entire military zone.

lowered ourselves down to the eighteenth floor onto a balcony and then we were able to breach the glass sliding doors on the balcony and get into the office complex and then run back upstairs and let the boys in. I think we went down, I can't remember the floor the radio station was on, but it was a tape (not Noriega) and we were successful in knocking the radio station out."

As SOF missions began to expand outside the major cities, Lamb was instrumental in developing and coordinating the tactics for what would become known as "Ma Bell" capitulation operations. Working with Rangers from the 75th Ranger Regiment, Lamb designed, rehearsed and implemented the first major surrender operation outside Panama City, capturing 188 Panamanian Defense Force personnel which led to the surrender of an entire military zone. This template was subsequently used throughout the remainder of Operation Just Cause with great success and would later earn Lamb a Bronze Star.

Task Force Ranger, Mogadishu, Somalia October 1993

The Battle of Mogadishu was part of Operation Gothic Serpent and was fought Oct. 3 and 4, 1993, in Somalia. The battle put U.S. and international forces against Somali militiamen loyal to Mohamed Farrah Aideed.

"There were eight different warring factions in Mogadishu at the time and we went there as part of the United Nations mission, but we weren't there to provide security. Our mission was man-hunting. We were going after Mohamad Farrah Aideed and all of his lieutenants," said 1st Lieutenant Tom DiTomasso, a Task Force Ranger platoon leader.

On Oct. 3, 1993, a mission to capture Aideed was generated, but the mission erupted into a furious battle with two Black Hawk helicopters crashing into the streets of Mogadishu. Task Force Ranger would rush to one of the Black Hawk crash sites.

"Three October was a Sunday, which was traditionally a down day for the task force," said Maj.

Rangers are engaged in a firefight, Oct. 3, 1993. Courtesy photo.

Gen. Austin "Scottie" Miller, then a captain and assault force commander. "The idea was a quick in, secure the target, then quick out."

"We launched on the mission at 1533 in the afternoon. Within minutes of the air assault raid on the building, the two lieutenants we were going after were captured," DiTomasso said. "As we were getting ready to leave, the first Black Hawk was shot down. There was a large crowd to our north and there was a lot of shooting going on outside of the building. All of the Ranger positions were under direct small-arms fire, hand grenades were being thrown over the walls ... everything was very, very close proximity as far as the fighting goes. Several of us raced the crowd to get to the crash site first and we were able to successfully defend the crash site throughout the afternoon and into the entire evening."

"The convoy going back, as we listened to the debriefs afterward, was in a terrible firefight, convoys were riddled with RPGs and automatic weapons fire, they were losing individuals, KIAs, individuals wounded in action, and they were fighting their way back trying to get back to the airfield," Miller said.

"Once the birds went down, we immediately scrambled a convoy, we tried to link up with 10th Mountain, they were coming from the north of the city and we were coming from the south, and each element got repulsed and had to turn around and go back," Lamb said.

The convoys made it back to the safety of the home base, but they wouldn't be there long.

"So, I don't know if I could even paint the picture for you, but imagine five-ton trucks and Humvees coming out of the city, the sun is getting ready to go down, but they have been ambushed the entire way back from the objective area and back ... they have prisoners that are wounded, they have American Soldiers that are wounded and killed," DiTomasso said. "The call then goes out by the commander to every able bodied Ranger that is at the airfield to include the headquarters, the administrative guys, and the clerks, 'Everybody grab a rifle, we're going to wash out the trucks and you're going back in the city to try and reinforce the objective.'"

"This is the beauty of having someone like Rick Lamb in your formation, a senior non-commissioned officer, well experienced, been around a bit and not a stranger to firefights, and able to bring a steady, calming leadership to a very chaotic situation, dealing with young Soldiers who have not seen this type of fighting previously," Miller said. "Seeing their friends wounded or killed, and we're asking them to get back into the vehicles that didn't protect them the first time, and we need you to move to effect a rescue operation. It's tremendous leadership; having someone like Rick Lamb out there was exactly what you needed at the time."

"You look into the eyes of the kids that just came back. You're inside the perimeter, you're safe, then you could see the blood drain out of their faces, they knew they had to go back out, but it goes back to that Ranger creed. You look at them and say, 'you guys knew this was going to be tough when we signed up,' you motivate them a little bit and you go out," Lamb said.

Lt. Gen. Michael Ferriter, then a major in 3rd Ranger Battalion, described Lamb's actions that day.

"The first Humvee was an up-gunned Humvee with a machine gun and they would go through the intersection and they would shoot the corners of the intersection and all the Somalis would duck down, and the second Humvee would come through and shoot and the Somalis would again get down, then Lamb's Humvee would come through and all the Somalis would jump up and shoot and Lamb said, 'It's crazy, what am I doing in the third Humvee?'" said Ferriter.

"There was an RPG flash off to the right side. You could hear the guys in the back yelling RPG and everything slowed to where you could almost follow it with your eyes. It hit in the alleyway to my left," Lamb said. "I can remember my head going back and watching a spurt of blood hit the running lights on the dashboard and I remember swearing under my breath and saying, 'damn it, I just got killed,' and everything went to a white pristine point of light, everything got quiet. I was almost feeling pretty good; you're wet, you're sweaty, it's noisy, it's stinky, and everything was feeling 'nirvana-ish,' (sic) then I remember focusing on that white spot of light then thinking about my kid, what about my wife? Then the guys in the back hit me in the back of my head and yelled, 'don't stop here, don't stop here!'"

Then Sgt. 1st Class Richard Lamb recovering from surgery in 1993 due to injuries he received in Somalia. Courtesy photo.

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Lamb receives the 2015 USSOCOM Bull Simons award from Army Gen. Joseph L. Votel, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, May 20, in Tampa, Fla. The Bull Simons Award is named in honor Army Col. Arthur D. "Bull" Simons and is given for lifetime achievements in Special Operations. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Angelita Lawrence.

A piece of shrapnel had lodged in Lamb's head causing him to be shipped back to the United States for treatment.

"When he got to the hospital they took a frontal X-ray and there was a thin, gray line where that dot had been. They took a side view and it was like a razor blade, a triangular razor blade had gone straight into his head and right between his lobes in his brain," Ferriter said. "The doctor told him, 'I am good enough to get that out, but I wouldn't have been good enough to put that in.'"

Lamb would receive the Joint Service Commendation Medal with Valor for his actions and the Purple Heart for his injuries.

Conclusion

Lamb continued to serve on active duty for 10 more years before retiring in 2003. He also participated in missions in Haiti, Bosnia, Djibouti, and, finally, in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"Each successive assignment in SOF seemed to build on the last," Lamb said. "I remember during the rehearsals for the invasion of Haiti, I looked at the assembled Task Force and thought about how far we had come as a force. On the Tarmac was a razor sharp, truly Joint Force that could seize and hold just about any spot on the planet for as long as we cared to keep it. It was awesome to be a part of that maturation process."

Looking back on his service in Special Operations Lamb reflected, "From the moment I joined SOF, I found myself surrounded by legendary men! They were Rangers and Recon men, men from the OSS, CIDG, and SOG. Men who jumped into Normandy, led bayonet charges in Korea, and kept small camps in El Salvador from being overrun. I met men of myth and character – men with unparalleled work ethic – men of improvisation. Men they write stories about and make into movies. Men that motivated me, trained me, showed patience, chewed my ass, saved me, protected me, led me, followed me, demanded a high standard, challenged me, and above all focused me. The fact that some of it rubbed off is more a testament to them than to me. I consider myself truly blessed to say I walked among them."

Today, Lamb continues to serve as a Department of Defense civilian at U.S. Special Operations Command in the J3-International directorate, where he was instrumental in designing a state-of-the-art collaborative work space that exists nowhere else in the United States government and integrates international Special Operations officers from more than 15 partner nations into USSOCOM.

Lamb has been praised by very senior officers in the Army and the Department of Defense, but perhaps his highest compliment came from Mark DeVille, who, as a 19-year-old private, served in Lamb's squad during the Soviet Defector Incident in Korea in 1984.

"What I saw him do during that firefight, and how he influenced me to stand by him and do the same thing, expose ourselves as we did, you tell me how good a leader he was. I followed him," DeVille said.

Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, vice chief of staff, United States Army, presents Staff Sgt. Travis Dunn, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, with the Bronze Star with Valor and a Purple Heart during the Battalion Award Ceremony on Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Ga., April 29. Photo by Pfc. Eric W. Overfelt.

1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment honors its heroes

By Tracy Bailey
75th Ranger Regiment Public Affairs

Two Rangers assigned to 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment were awarded the nation's third highest honor for their heroic actions at a battalion awards ceremony, April 29, at Hunter Army Airfield, Ga.

Staff Sgt. James Jones, a Ranger Squad Leader and Sgt. Derek Anderson, a Ranger Team Leader, both with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, were awarded the Silver Star Medal for their actions during an assault against an armed enemy in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, Dec. 2, 2014.

"Today we celebrate [the Warrior Ethos], along with the values of courage and valor," said Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, vice chief of staff of the United States Army. "The example this unit sets, and the expertise the Ranger Regiment builds and carries to the rest of the force, is a large part of what makes us the greatest fighting force in the world."

Jones and Anderson maneuvered on multiple enemy fighting positions during a sustained six-hour direct fire engagement resulting in the elimination of more than 25 enemy combatants according to the official citation. Both Rangers, without regard for their own personal safety placed themselves in direct fire and imminent danger to move a wounded Ranger to safety. They undoubtedly saved the lives of numerous Rangers and directly contributed to the success of the joint task force.

"Anybody in this battalion or in this regiment would do the exact same thing. I just happened to be the one standing there. We all work hard, train hard … we all do the same thing," said Anderson. "We just do the job for the guys to our left and right. I don't think anyone here really wants to be put in the spotlight."

In addition, two Rangers received Bronze Star Medals with valor, two Rangers received the Joint Service Commendation Medal with valor, and one Ranger received the Purple Heart Medal.

First Battalion received the Meritorious Unit Citation

Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, vice chief of staff of the United States Army, presents the Silver Star to Staff Sgt. James B. Jones for his heroic actions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom at Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Ga., April 29. Photo by Pfc. Eric W. Overfelt.

and Bravo Company received the Valorous Unit Award for actions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, May 15 - Aug. 28, 2011.

"During summer 2011, the International Security Assistance Force surge in Afghanistan was at its peak, and we were in the process of eradicating the Taliban from historic strongholds," Allyn said. "The warriors of 1st Ranger Battalion delivered a decisive role. You fought in places that will forever resound in Ranger lore. Names like Khost, Paktika and Nangarhar, will hold a hallowed place in the hearts and souls of all veterans of the Afghanistan campaign."

Allyn went on to praise the actions of 1st Battalion.

"Nowhere is the discipline, endurance, expertise, and confidence more apparent than in the 1st Ranger Battalion, and it's reflected in the eyes of every Ranger in this formation," Allyn said. "Knowing that you serve with our nation's best gives you the courage to always do your duty … and triumph over fear. And that courage was on full display during the summer of 2011."

First Battalion supported the surge into Afghanistan while conducting continuous combat operations, including time sensitive raids and deliberate movement to contact operations while in enemy held terrain out of reach by other friendly forces.

Bravo Company also received the Valorous Unit Award for their extraordinary heroism, combat achievement, and unwavering fidelity while executing numerous and diverse missions.

These awards did not come without a price.

Staff Sgt. Jeremy Katzenberger was killed June 14, 2011, and Sgt. Alessandro Plutino was killed Aug. 8, 2011 in Paktika province, Afghanistan.

"… We honor the sacrifice of all who have served before them, especially those who have made the ultimate sacrifice … and laid down their lives in defense of the values we unwavering pursue, and the freedom our service guarantees."

Charlie Company received the Valorous Unit Award for extraordinary heroism, combat achievement and conspicuous gallantry while executing combat operations in support of a named operation November 2010. The Rangers conducted a deliberate movement to contact in enemy held terrain. The collective acts of heroism demonstrated by these Rangers contributed significantly to the success of the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

In the wake of the attacks on Sept. 11, President George W. Bush said, "We will not waver; we will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail."

Allyn referring to this quote when ending the ceremony..

"This is an inspiring quote ... but the American resolve President George W. Bush referred to is not new, and it would have been equally powerful had he simply recited: 'Readily will I display the intestinal fortitude required to fight on to the Ranger objective and complete the mission though I be the lone survivor.' Your actions make me prouder than ever to be a Ranger and a veteran of this historic outfit. God Bless you, our great supporting Ranger families, and all of our heroes serving near and far ... Rangers Lead the Way!"

Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, vice chief of staff of the United States Army, presents the nation's third highest award, the Silver Star, to Sgt. Derek J. Anderson for his heroic actions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom at Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Ga., April 29. Photo by Pfc. Eric W. Overfelt.

Plumlee earns Silver Star

By Sgt. Michael Sword
1st Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Sgt. 1st Class Earl D. Plumlee, assigned to 1st Special Forces Group (A), is presented the Silver Star Medal for his actions in Afghanistan at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. on May 1. Photo by Spc. Codie Mendenhall.

The explosion they heard Aug. 28, 2013, was a nearly-2000-pound vehicle-borne IED that shook Forward Operating Base Ghazni in Afghanistan, and as the smoke cleared, insurgents dressed in Afghan National Army uniforms could be seen entering the newly-created hole in the perimeter of the base.

By that time, several Green Berets from 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) were already on their way, discovering several well-armed insurgents had already made their way into the base and were beginning to open fire.

Driving in a truck to the scene, they came face-to-face with one of the insurgents as he reloaded his AK-47 rifle.

One operator remembers making eye contact with one of the attackers just before he started firing bullets into the truck. At that moment, Sgt. 1st Class Earl Plumlee leapt from the truck and began firing his pistol at the enemy.

Another insurgent began firing on Plumlee from nearby. He fired a single round in the attacker's chest, resulting in a large explosion.

"That's when I became aware that there were suicide vests on the fighters," he said.

The fight instantly became more deadly as the Green Berets were taking more and more small-arms fire while worrying about the possibility of a suicide vest going off near them.

The group of operators continued to engage the insurgents, making their way through bullets flying and vests exploding, when an insurgent began to attack them from the rear.

After engaging the enemy, Plumlee saw a downed U.S. Soldier next to the enemy, ran to him, pulled him to safety and began first-aid procedures, applying multiple tourniquets. He then directed a civilian and a U.S. Soldier to load the wounded Soldier on a vehicle and evacuate him to the Forward Surgical Team unit on base.

Plumlee then took charge of three coalition Soldiers and conducted a methodical search of the surrounding areas to ensure no additional insurgents remained.

"The strongest emotion I had from that day was the last time we were pushing down and had really gotten organized we were moving as a really aggressive, synced-up stack, moving right into the chaos," Plumlee said. "It was probably the proudest moment of my career, just to be with those guys, at that time, on that day, was just awesome."

Nearly two years later, Plumlee was awarded the Silver Star Medal by Maj. Gen. Kenneth Dahl, I Corps Deputy commanding general, for his actions that day during a ceremony at the 1st SFG (A) Memorial Wall, May 1.

The actions that day resulted in more than 55 awards, including Plumlee's Silver Star. More important, were the hundreds of lives saved by 1st SFG (A) Green Berets

"It's no exaggeration when I say they saved FOB Ghazni," said Maj. K, a Special Forces Soldier that was there that day. "If they would have arrived 10 seconds later than they did, the insurgents would have been in the more densely populated part of FOB Ghazni."

"They, on their own accord, moved to the sound of the guns, they moved to the breach point and they destroyed the enemy," he added.

"I realize that I am representing a number of general officers throughout the military who would prefer to be officiating this ceremony if they could be here," said Dahl.

"It was Sgt. Plumlee that was there at that time and place, and it was he who had the opportunity to demonstrate uncommon gallantry, and it is he we are recognizing today with a well-deserved silver star," Dahl continued.

Brig. Gen. Erik Peterson, the commanding general of the United States Army Special Operations Aviation Command, awards the Soldier's Medal to Staff Sgt. Jeremy Samuels, a medic with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, (Airborne) May 20.

Night Stalker awarded Soldier's Medal

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Gaelen Lowers
160th SOAR (A) Public Affairs

It was midday Aug. 2, 2014. Staff Sgt. Jeremy Samuels, a medic and then student attending the Combat Skills Training Course assessing to become a part of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, was driving down the road near Fort Campbell, Kentucky, when he witnessed a horrific accident between three vehicles.

Without hesitation, Samuels parked his vehicle and sprinted toward one of the vehicles, ignoring the 2-foot-high flames projecting from the engine compartment.

Samuels attempted to open the door of the burning vehicle, but because of the extensive damage, the door wouldn't budge. As the flames grew higher and started spreading across the rest of the vehicle, Samuels used a closed pocketknife to strike the window until it shattered and removed the female passenger from the flame-engulfed vehicle.

Samuels used his advanced medical training to assess the passengers from each of the three vehicles and applied first-aid treatment to those who needed it; ignoring wounds he sustained while extracting the first passenger.

For his heroism and disregard for his own safety, Samuels was rightfully awarded the Soldier's Medal, the nation's highest non-combat related heroism award, May 20, at the 160th SOAR (A)'s compound.

Brig. Gen. Erik Peterson, the commanding general of the United States Army Special Operations Aviation Command presented the award.

"I am proud and humbled to present this award to Staff Sgt. Samuels," said Peterson. He went on to say that Samuel's actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service, and reflect great credit upon himself, the 160th SOAR (A) and the United States Army.

A U.S. Army Cultural Support Team member from Special Operations Task Force - East, shakes the hand of a young Afghan, while on a presence patrol. Photo by Spc. Patricia Caputo.

Special ops cultural support team women serve with distinction

By Terri Moon Cronk
Defense Media Activity

Three women, who served overseas on cultural support teams in battle alongside U.S. special operators, shared their experiences during a panel discussion at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 27.

The trio - an Air Force officer, an Army non-commissioned officer, and a former Army NCO - participated in a daylong review of the roles of women in combat, following the 2013 repeal of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, which had excluded women from serving in combat since 1994.

Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, author of the recently released book titled "Ashley's War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Operations Battlefield," was the panel's moderator.

The cultural support team, or CST, pilot program was underway when Army 1st Lt. Ashley White-Stumpf was killed by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan's Kandahar province during an Oct. 22, 2011 night raid while her unit was embedded with the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment.

"These women were bonded and had a sisterhood like none other," Tzemach Lemmon said. The story of cultural support teams, she said, is "one of purpose; a heroes' story we haven't heard as a country … and about people, who wanted to do something with a real-value mission as the women who served alongside the best of best."

Women Warriors

Servicewomen, who have served on cultural support

teams, have been hailed as warriors by senior military leadership, said Tzemach Lemmon, adding that through her book research, she learned doing a job in combat comes down to who best can fill those mission requirements.

"So many leaders would say, 'I know what the regulations are, but this is a war we're fighting. We have to be innovative and use the best people,'" she said.

Women came into the program after special operations officials discussed its legality with military lawyers, Tzemach Lemmon learned. "They said, 'Yes, you can attach [women] to special operations units. It's perfectly legal,'" she said.

Those Who Served Gained

Army Sgt. 1st Class Meghan Malloy, Air Force Capt. Annie Yu Kleiman and Army Sgt. Janiece Marquez served with White. All attended the cultural support team school on Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to learn about medical civic action programs, searches and seizures, humanitarian assistance and civil-military operations, basic human behavior, tribalism, Islamic and Afghan cultures, and the role of women in Afghanistan.

Malloy was an Army medic with three deployments when she learned of the CST program and felt driven to become a part of it. "I jumped on it and would do it again in a heartbeat," she said.

Kleiman's husband flew reconnaissance aircraft providing over watch for the teams, who encouraged her to apply to the CST school. She did not believe women in battle existed, she said.

"I had this weird cognitive dissonance going on," said Kleiman, who recalled thinking, "I'm not going to be in combat. The objective is going to be secured before they bring us in."

During training, the women thought they would walk with the platoon leader and be separate from the assault element, Kleiman said.

"We all bought into the combat exclusion thing and thought we wouldn't be in combat," she said. Now, Kleiman recalls bullets zipping past her from distances of 50 to 100 feet.

A Role with a Purpose

With the support of a superior, Marquez said, she fought her way up the chain of command to gain acceptance into the program.

"I finally had a purpose," she said of her new role on the cultural support team. "It wasn't just being in the military and following everyone else. I was able to be a pioneer in a program that hadn't started yet … a brand-new concept of putting women on these teams and being able to fight on the front lines. It was exciting."

The women rehearsed with the special operations forces, Marquez said. "And there were times when I was the gunner. [That's what] I did the entire last three months of my deployment."

Malloy and her female cultural support team partner worked hard at performing better.

"We'd wonder, 'What can we do for this team?'" she said. "How can we gather intel? How can we gain a bond with the women and children so they're willing to give us this info that would potentially help out the team?"

Malloy said that kind of thinking has helped in her career because she looks at issues from a leadership perspective.

Confidence in Performance

Serving on the cultural support team has provided "through the roof" confidence to Marquez, she said.

"A lot more doors are open that wouldn't be if I didn't have the combat experience," said Marquez, who is now working in South America.

Marquez said senior leaders put their confidence in her because she was willing to put herself up front to fight and learn.

"Foreign military commanders invite me into their offices and talk about how to fix their programs because of what I've done," Marquez said. "Had I not been a CST [member] and fought on the front lines, I wouldn't have the clout that I do."

Women in the cultural support team program learn things that are completely new to them, Marquez said.

"And you go out there and put your best foot forward," she said.

A team leader for a U.S. Special Operations Cultural Support Team, hands out utensils during a women's shura held in the village of Oshay, Afghanistan. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Kaily Brown.

NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

A Scan Eagle unmanned aerial vehicle takes flight during a training exercise, May 12, at Camp Roberts, Calif. Scan Eagles provide surveillance assistance to Naval Special Warfare personnel operating in a variety of environments around the world. Photo by Seaman Richard A. Miller.

A New Approach; NSW Opens Unmanned Aircraft System School

By Seaman Richard Miller
NSW Public Affairs

Late in the morning, the sun beats down on a small group of structures in the middle of a field in Camp Roberts, Calif. More than a dozen men gather around a tent at the back end of the site as Senior Chief Aviation Structural Mechanic Travis Bramwell speaks to them. As he speaks, a man kneels beside him and refuels a Scan Eagle unmanned aerial system.

Bramwell has worked with, and trained others on Scan Eagle for many years, but the group surrounding him now is different. They are the very first class to attend the Naval Special Warfare Advanced Training Command's new Scan Eagle training school.

"This is the first stepping stone in the development of our UAS operators," said Lt. Cmdr. Stephanie Muskovac, the Special Reconnaissance Team Two UAS troop commander.

Scan Eagle unmanned aerial systems are piloted remotely and can be used in a variety of different settings.

"Scan Eagle is a runway-independent aircraft," said Chief Operations Specialist Richard Baker, a student in the course. "It has a myriad of capabilities we can bring to the fight."

The craft's versatility makes it a valuable asset to operators down range.

"This technology is an organic platform, so when we're with the operator they don't have to request support from anywhere else," said Baker. "We're right there with them and we're on top of it."

The brand new course, which consists of classroom instruction in a new schoolhouse at Silver Strand Training Complex in Imperial Beach, Calif. and hands-on training at Camp Roberts, marks the first time Naval Special Warfare has instructed its own UAS course from start to finish.

"This schoolhouse has been in development for as long as I've been in NSW," said Bramwell. "It's been around seven years."

Before shifting to the schoolhouse, students who received Scan Eagle training traveled to Oregon to learn from civilian instructors. The new course provides an opportunity for students to receive training tailored to their own mission.

"We're going to have a better product here and a lot more structure," said Bramwell. "There's a level of attention and specialization we can provide here the school previously lacked."

The new approach to Scan Eagle training is a condensed and accelerated version of the training students had received in Oregon.

"It's intense, it's fast, and the learning curve is quick, but the instructors and the group of guys we have are awesome, so we all learn together," said Baker. "We all succeed as a team."

The specialized training aims to give students a leg up and make them more prepared to operate Scan Eagle systems in any environment for any mission they may be assigned to.

"I want to have a better-qualified UAS operator coming right out the door," said Bramwell.

After years of planning, the opening of the schoolhouse has immediately had an impact on the community.

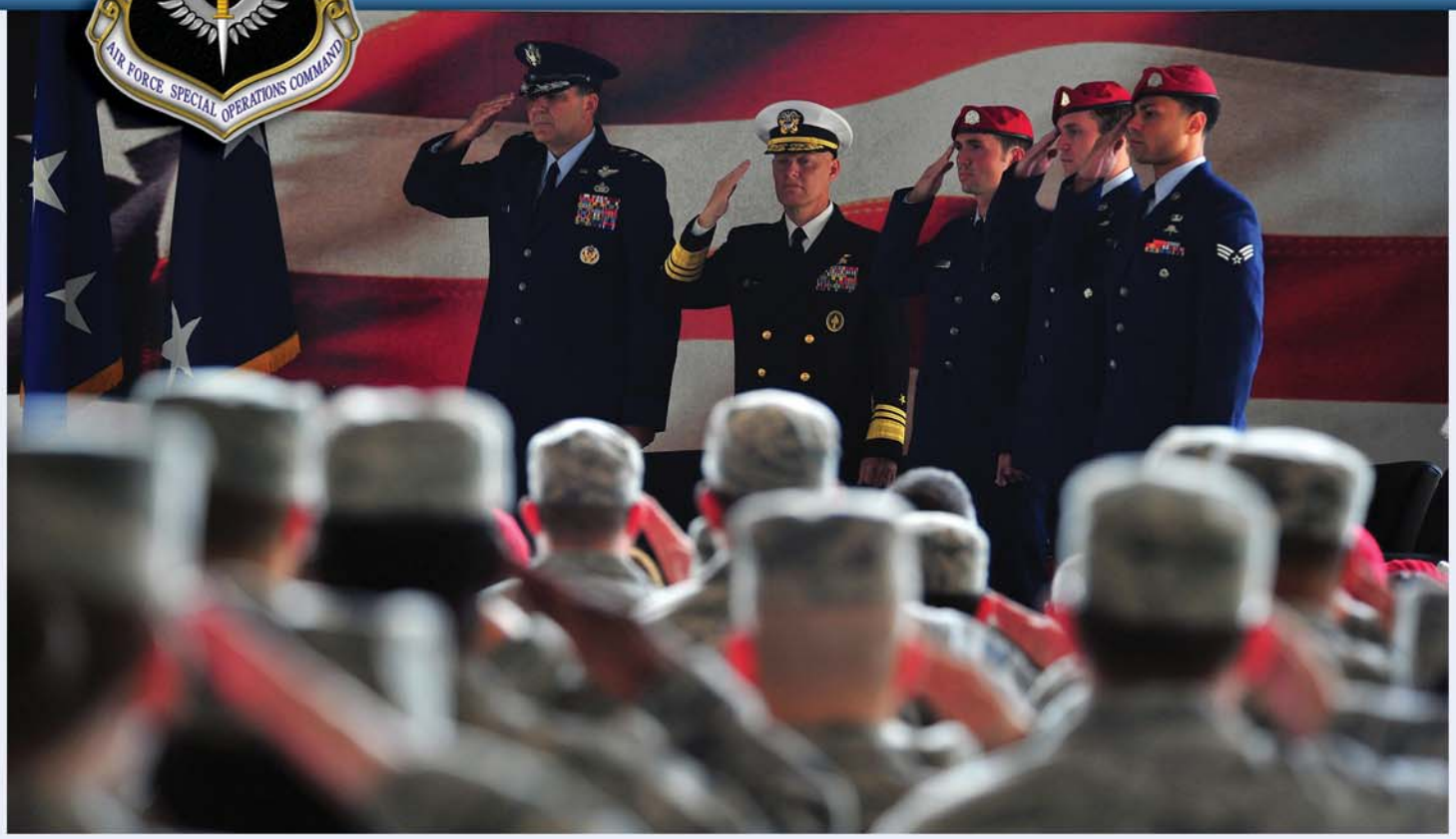
"It's pretty amazing how far this program has come in a short period of time," said Muskovac. "It's a true testament to the spec-war mentality. They saw a need and they found a solution."

While still brand new, the Scan Eagle program is already expanding.

"You start with one good idea, and now we're building an enterprise around it," said Muskovac. "We're becoming more professional with having our own instructors and establishing our own safety guidelines and tactical principles."

Muskovac, Bramwell and Baker all predict the course will keep its momentum and continue to improve and evolve as time goes on.

"This program is still growing," said Baker. "I see it getting larger, I see it getting more attention and being a valuable asset to the community."



U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Bradley A. Heithold, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, and U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Sean A. Pybus, deputy commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, stand beside three U.S. Air Force Special Tactics combat controllers, who received the Air Force Cross and two Silver Stars. They are credited with saving the lives of more than 80 U.S. Army Special Forces and Afghan Commando teammates.

48-hour Afghanistan battle results in Air Force Cross, Silver Star medals

Story and photos by Airman First Class Ryan Conroy
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs

Three Special Tactics combat controllers were awarded the Air Force Cross and two Silver Star medals at Pope Army Airfield, N.C., May 6, for extraordinary heroism and gallantry in the face of danger while on a deployment to Afghanistan in September 2014.

The combat controllers, all from the 21st Special Tactics Squadron, were recognized for their superior integration of air and ground power against armed enemies of the United States.

Lt. Gen. Bradley A. Heithold, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, presented Senior Airman Dustin T. Temple the seventh Air Force Cross since 9/11.

He also presented Tech. Sgt. Matthew J. Greiner and Senior Airman Goodie J. Goodman the Silver Star medal -- the 31st and 32nd Silver Star medals for the Special Tactics community since 9/11.

"You are the guardians who run toward the sound of the guns and not away from them," said Heithold. "Your bravery, your intensity and your pure guts ... you epitomize what being an Air Commando is all about.

"Not everyone deserves to be called a hero ... you do," said Heithold.

This is only the second battle in U.S. Air Force history resulting in an Air Force Cross and multiple Silver Star medals in the last fifteen years.

The three Special Tactics combat controllers were embedded with a U.S. Special Forces team in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, when their team infiltrated a well-known enemy staging point by helicopter, Sept. 27, 2014.

Their mission was to disrupt insurgent operations, including drug and weapons caches, and enemy command and control. Their unit came under heavy machine-gunfire, rocket-propelled grenades, and small-arms fire from approximately 100 insurgents who would not back down.

The combat controllers acted on instinct and training and immediately assessed the situation before jumping to action.

"It was unlike anything I could have ever imagined … unlike anything you can prepare yourself for," said Temple. "It all came back to training for me at that point. I remember thinking back to those days in training that were really tough, and now I realize they were preparing me for something like this."

A teammate, U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Weathers, was gravely wounded by a sniper, and Temple put himself in the direct line of fire to drag his wounded teammate from a rooftop. At this same time, Goodman was under a barrage of machine-gun fire, with bullets narrowly missing his head by inches, according to the award citation. Still, Goodman secured his rooftop position in order to repel the insurgent force with close air support and his personal weapon.

With friendly forces taking fire from within 200 meters, Greiner and Goodman began coordinating multiple close air support strikes from AH-64 Apache attack helicopters on the closest threats while simultaneously coordinating danger-close mortar fire on enemy forces 300 meters away.

With a medical evacuation helicopter inbound, Temple once again risked his own life, carrying his wounded teammate across 100 meters of open terrain to a landing zone.

As overwhelming and accurate enemy machine-gun fire suppressed Temple and his team, he remained on the open landing zone providing cover fire while his teammates pulled back.

After he returned to the compound, enemy fighters surged within 40 meters after intercepted communications stated, "Take the Americans alive." Temple immediately directed danger-close F-16 Fighting Falcon strafing runs to repel the assault.

As the supplies dwindled during the 48-hour firefight, Temple braved open terrain several times to retrieve critical ammunition from a resupply helicopter. At the same time, Greiner coordinated precision airstrikes to cover Temple and the other Special Forces team members.

"These Airmen are much of the reason I am standing here today," said U.S. Army Capt. Evan Lacenski, Special Forces team leader for the combat controllers while deployed. "They were faced with one of the most significant battles of Operation Enduring Freedom, in my opinion, and they acted professionally, valorously, flawlessly and executed the mission. I couldn't ask for a better group of Airmen."

The men are credited with saving the lives of 21 U.S. Special Operations forces and approximately 60 Afghan commandos.

"These Special Tactics Airmen turned the tide of the battle with heroism and extraordinary competence. I'm privileged to be on this stage with them this morning," said U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Sean A. Pybus, deputy commander of U.S. Special Operations Command. "These are the best of us."

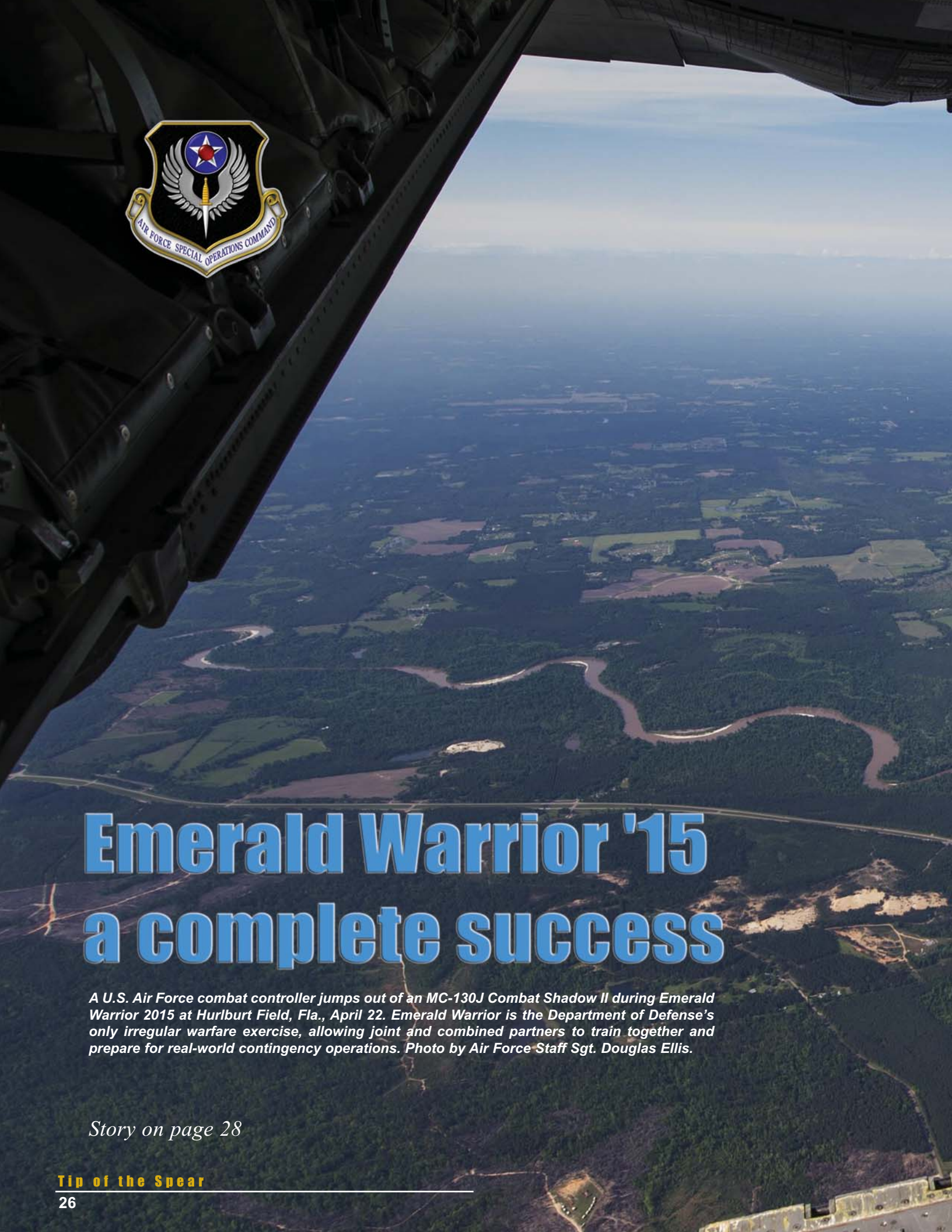
The event drew more than 450 attendees, including the Airmen's family, friends and colleagues. Pybus and Heithold both took time to thank the families for their support.

"I want to thank their families for allowing them to serve at AFSOC, and supporting their service ... You have our gratitude and our enduring thanks," said Pybus.

The Special Tactics Airmen's integration of airpower during the battle tallied a total of 80 airstrikes, eliminating a confirmed 38 insurgents, destroying 28 vehicles, 17 buildings and 32 enemy fighting positions.

"Every combat controller I know has the ability and training to do what it takes," said Temple. "I know that any of those guys would have my back in a situation like this. That's just the level of expertise and competence in our community."

U.S. Army Capt. Evan Lacenski, Special Forces team leader for the three combat controllers, laughs with Senior Airman Goodie Goodman, Special Tactics combat controller and Silver Star recipient. Lacenski credits the combat controllers' control of close air support with saving lives of their joint teammates in a 48-hour battle in September 2014.



Emerald Warrior '15 a complete success

A U.S. Air Force combat controller jumps out of an MC-130J Combat Shadow II during Emerald Warrior 2015 at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 22. Emerald Warrior is the Department of Defense's only irregular warfare exercise, allowing joint and combined partners to train together and prepare for real-world contingency operations. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Douglas Ellis.

Story on page 28

By Erica Vega
AFSOC Public Affairs

More than 2,100 members participated in Emerald Warrior, an annual Air Force Special Operations Command two-week joint service, interagency and partner nation exercise that concluded here May 1.

"Emerald Warrior 2015 was a complete success," said Col. Brenda Cartier, Emerald Warrior 2015 exercise director. "It has gone spectacularly. I am very proud of the team and of the folks that have participated."

The exercise provides realistic and relevant pre-deployment training encompassing multiple joint operating areas. The exercise prepares special operations forces, conventional force enablers, partner nations and interagency elements to integrate with and execute full spectrum special operations.

"It is very important for us to operate with other nations to see how they conduct their training, tactics and procedures," said Flt. Lt. Mark Dilley, British Royal Air Force. "It is essential to expose our air crews to large scale multi-national operations and to other disciplines they might not normally see."

Cartier echoed the importance of training in the joint, combined environment.

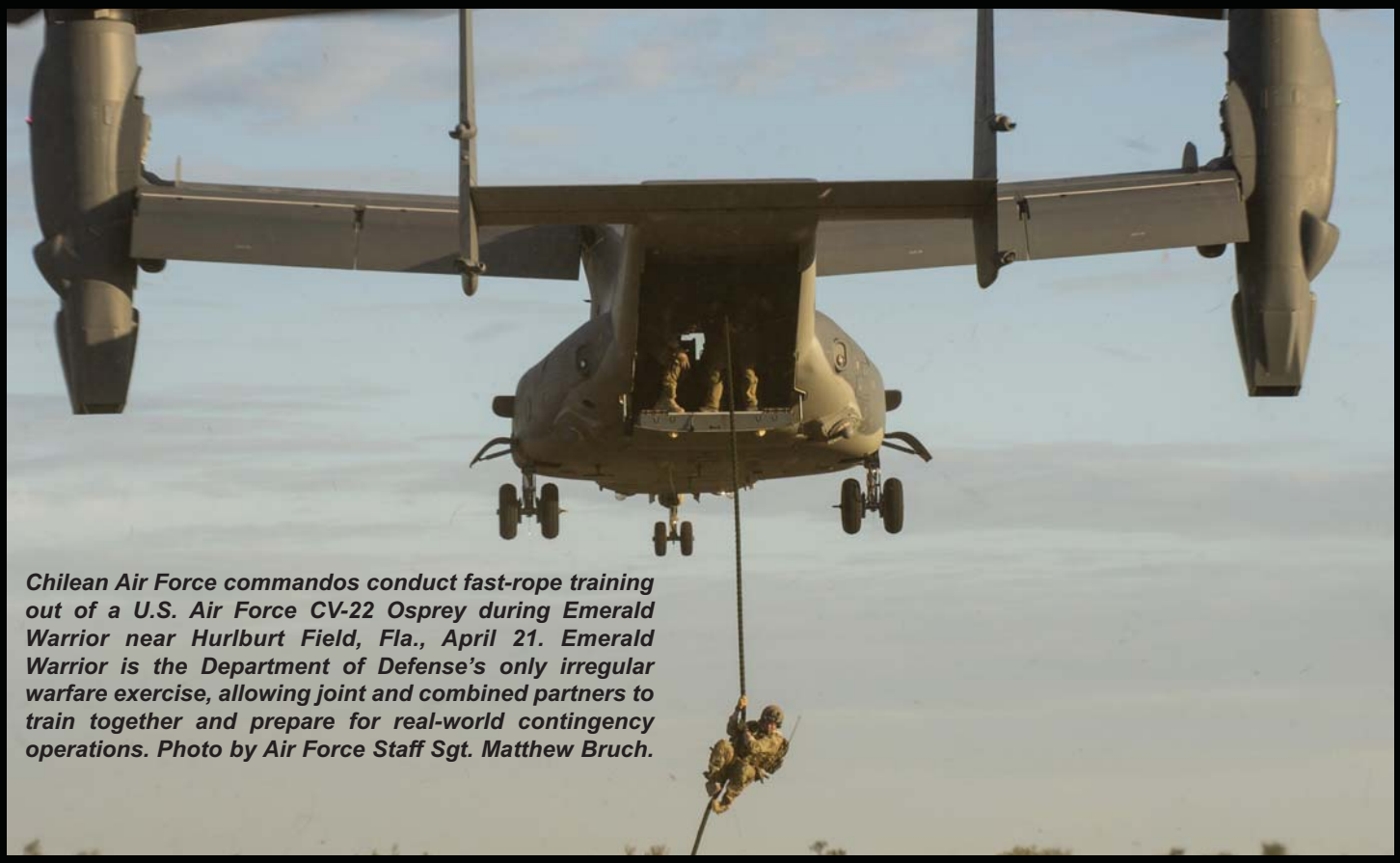
"Coalitions are key to successful operations, together we become a better more integrated force," she said.

This year's iteration of Emerald Warrior had more complex training scenarios that used more advanced tactics, techniques and procedures. It is the Defense Department's only irregular warfare exercise, using both live and virtual training.

"The three elements that we're accredited to train in are Close Air Support, Tactical Mobility and Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance," said Cartier. "Emerald Warrior is one of the few exercises of this magnitude where you really get to do these partial and full mission profiles in a night-time scenario. The missions that we've conducted during the past two weeks are as complex, and sometimes more complex, than the mission that created (U.S. Special Operations Command)," said Cartier.

The exercise took place in multiple training areas at Hurlburt Field, Eglin Air Force Base and Apalachicola in Florida; Camp Shelby and Stennis Space Center in Mississippi; Pelham Range in Alabama; and Cannon AFB in New Mexico.

"We want to thank our local community and all of the civilian agencies that supported us throughout this exercise," said Cartier.



Chilean Air Force commandos conduct fast-rope training out of a U.S. Air Force CV-22 Osprey during Emerald Warrior near Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 21. Emerald Warrior is the Department of Defense's only irregular warfare exercise, allowing joint and combined partners to train together and prepare for real-world contingency operations. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Bruch.

A training rocket launches to engage incoming aircraft during Emerald Warrior 2015, at Elizabeth Drop Zone, Fla., April 22. The 1st Special Operations Support Squadron directs operations of nine unique flights with more than 400 personnel in the most diverse operations support squadron in the Air Force. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. DeAndre Curtiss.

(Top left) An Air Force Special Operations Forces medical element team member, 1st Special Operations Support Squadron, and a U.S. Army Special Operations Resuscitation Team member, 528th Sustainment Brigade, examine a patient at Crestview Airfield, Fla., April 23. Photo by Senior Airman Cory D. Payne.

(Left) A member of the Chilean navy jumps from a CH-47 Chinook as part of Emerald Warrior at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 21. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Kenneth W. Norman.

(Above) A combat controller, 21st Special Tactics Squadron, observes an AC-130 Gunship conduct a live-fire mission during Emerald Warrior at Camp Shelby, Miss., April 22. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder.

Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, presents Gunnery Sgt. Brian C. Jacklin with the Navy Cross Medal, the second highest award for valor, at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., April 9. Jacklin received the award in recognition of his actions during a two-day firefight with the Taliban in Helmand province, Afghanistan, which started June 14, 2012.

Navy Cross, Bronze Stars with Valor awarded to MARSOC Marines

Story and photo by Lance Cpl. Steven Fox
MARSOC Public Affairs

On the morning of June 14, 2012, in the extremely kinetic Upper Gereshk Valley of Helmand Province, Afghanistan, a firefight erupted between a Marine Special Operations Team and the enemy. The MSOT, with 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, had been conducting village stability operations in the area when the enemy opened fire, severely wounding the team leader and another teammate.

The battle raged on for two days before American forces could completely quiet the contested area of enemy gunfire. Throughout the 48-hour engagement, Marines with the team displayed countless acts of valor. Six of those Marines were recognized for their individual actions that day during a ceremony on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., April 9.

Two additional team members involved in the firefight, Petty Officer 1st Class Jordan Walker and Sgt. Ryan K. Pass, were unable to attend the ceremony, but are scheduled to be awarded later this year. Pass will be awarded the Bronze Star Medal with valor distinguishing device, and Walker will be awarded the Silver Star Medal.

Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, presented the Navy Cross Medal to Gunnery Sgt. Brian C. Jacklin, and the Bronze Star Medal with valor distinguishing devices to Staff Sgt. Christopher W. Buckminster, Sgt. William P. Hall, Sgt. David E. Harris, Staff Sgt. Hafeez B. Hussein, and Gunnery Sgt. William C. Simpson.

"What we're really picking up on today is the gallantry and valor of these six Marines in combat operations in Afghanistan," said Osterman. "I think it's only appropriate to do all these awards together because it was all for the same action. It was all for the same teamwork. That cohesion, that competence, that bravery and professionalism really epitomized what that team concept is all about."

Each individual played an integral role in not only eliminating the enemy threat, but also in administering life-saving medical care to the casualties or helping evacuate them from the kill zone under heavy enemy fire.

Immediately following the initial volleys of enemy gunfire that wounded the two Marines positioned on the exposed rooftop, Jacklin orchestrated a counterattack and casualty evacuation.

As Buckminster repeatedly exposed himself to the onslaught of enemy fire to verify enemy targets and mark their positions, Jacklin radioed a neighboring supporting unit to coordinate direct, indirect and aviation weapons fires and prepared to lead his team across a field to secure a landing zone for medical evacuation.

"When surrounded on all sides by seven to eight times our numbers, we faced what seemed the inevitability of death as we attempted the day-time (casualty evacuation) of our grievously wounded," Jacklin said during the ceremony.

Recounting the firefight, Jacklin said he asked his teammates, "Does anybody have a problem with risking it to take these guys out of here? Because if we don't, they are going to die here."

His team's resounding response was, "I'm in. Let's do it," Jacklin said.

Pass was the first Marine to reach the casualties, and as Jacklin established communication, Pass scaled a ladder to the rooftop. He provided the Marines with initial casualty care and, with enemy fire encircling his position, began engaging the enemy with M249 Squad Automatic Weapon fire while moving the casualties closer to the ladder.

Buckminster, Hussein and Simpson had made it through the gunfire-saturated open field in time to lower Marines from the roof. They continued to treat the casualties' wounds until Walker arrived to more thoroughly tend to the Marines' injuries.

Walker, the team's special amphibious reconnaissance corpsman, quickly stabilized the wounded, mending their most serious injuries to ensure the Marines would survive transportation to a hospital.

Meanwhile, combatants closed within 100 meters of the Marines' position. Harris developed and employed a plan for effective air support to destroy enemy targets and clear out the landing zone he had identified for the evacuation site.

Buckminster, Hussein and Pass, led by Simpson, carried the casualties through an open field and relentless enemy fire to the landing zone for evacuation. Upon arriving at the landing zone void of cover and concealment, Walker acted as a human shield, positioning himself between the casualties and the incoming enemy fire, as to personally absorb any accurate fire.

As the helicopters approached to extract the wounded Marines, Hall, who had coordinated an Afghan Local Police element to repel enemy advancement, had repositioned the police around the landing zone to establish an outer security perimeter. Directing the Afghans, Hall diminished the enemy assault, allowing the evacuating aviation assets to land.

The firefight continued into the night, and when a larger special operations unit arrived to relieve the MSOT, both Jacklin and Harris volunteered to stay and assist.

Harris continued to identify and destroy targets as they appeared, as well as coordinate casualty evacuations.

As for Jacklin's continued participation, his Navy Cross award citation reads: "throughout a raging battle all the next day, he provided vital intelligence, tactical assistance, and deadly accurate personal fires. Throughout 48 hours, he inspired all around him as he led a vicious fight to defeat a determined enemy force."

Jacklin praised the men who stood in recognition with him and their extraordinary manner of conduct on that day in the valley, explaining it is the proudest moment of his military career to have witnessed their battlefield performances.

"Not a man before you here today skipped a beat in their commitment to seeing their injured brothers home," Jacklin said at the ceremony. "All or nothing. Death or glory. These men before you charged out into the heaviest barrage of fire I've seen in over 10 years of heavy combat to get the job done."

Participants of the MARSOC Mud, Sweat and Tears Run make their way through one of the larger mud-filled trenches featured in the mud run course on Stone Bay, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., April 25.

Running with Mud, Sweat and Tears

Story and photos by Marine Corps Cpl. Steven Fox
MARSOC Public Affairs

Service members, along with their families and local community members gathered on Stone Bay, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune – home to U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command (MARSOC) – for the unit's annual Mud, Sweat and Tears Run, April 25.

The MARSOC-sponsored Marine Corps Community Services event challenged runners with a 10K movement through obstacle-rich terrain comprised of swamps, creeks, fallen trees and plenty of mud – chest-high pits filled with it and steep slopes soaked in it.

The run attracted roughly 1,700 people, military and civilian – young and old, and MARSOC capitalized on the opportunity to strengthen bonds with the local military and civilian community. Many of the course obstacles, by purpose of design, required a collaborative effort, allowing Marines and Sailors with the unit to foster relationships with visiting parties.

Among the participants was the MARSOC commander, Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, and MARSOC sergeant major, Sgt. Maj. John W. Scott.

"This event ties MARSOC directly in with our local community," said Osterman. "We are pleased to host this event, as it also provides the local community an opportunity to rub elbows with our Marines and Sailors, while building awareness for MARSOC and who we are and what we do as the Marine Corps' component of U.S. Special Operations Command."

Before the mud run's commencement, MARSOC recruiters held the MARSOC Strength Challenge, in which active-duty military members competed in a battery of different challenges featuring pull-ups, kettle-bell carries, a sled push and sled pull.

"A lot of time, thought and effort went into developing the strength challenge to make sure it's molded around the basic physical attributes you need as a MARSOC operator," said one of the MARSOC recruiters. "This also allows us to see who the performers are, because the people who come out for the MARSOC Strength Challenge generally aren't your half-steppers, or your 80-percent guys; we're looking for the 100-percent guys."

Any parties interested in joining MARSOC, or simply curious about the command, were able to stop by the recruiting tents to get their questions answered by tending critical skills operators.

The challenges wrapped up in the early afternoon, but many of the participants stuck around to cap the day's festivities off at the MARSOC-sponsored cookout to eat, drink, and socialize before the awards ceremony.

Osterman and Scott presented various awards, ranging from 1st, 2nd and 3rd place medals, to plaques, checks and ornamental wooden paddles, to all victorious event participants.

The Lady Raiders, a team consisting of four MARSOC Marines and one civilian, placed first among females in MARSOC's race.

"We really enjoy the aspect of competition, but it's more about the teamwork and camaraderie for us," said Lady Raider team member, Capt. Christie Everett. "Some of us got individual awards, too, but it was more important to us that we performed well as a team than performing well individually."

Also during the event, the MARSOC Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, Cathy Johnson, set up a booth in recognition of April being Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Johnson and several volunteers offered information about sexual assault prevention to all participants.

Participants of the MARSOC Mud, Sweat and Tears Run wade through a trench, April 25, at Stone Bay, on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Dave Roever, Founder and President of Operation Reconnect, shares a personal story of his own to the five wounded Afghan soldiers during a week-long rehabilitation retreat at Eagle Summit Ranch in Junction, Texas, April 2. Roever is setting the foundation for these wounded Afghan soldiers to develop and create their own Wounded Warrior Program in Afghanistan.

Healing Afghanistan: A Soldier's Story

Story and Photos by Tech Sgt. Angelita Lawrence
USSOCOM Public Affairs

More than 10,000 miles away from home, four Afghan National Army wounded soldiers sit with their sergeant major and some American men and women in the heart land of America for a weeklong seminar, March 31- April 3, 2015, to learn skills that will better enable them to take care of their Afghan brothers wounded in combat.

A few hours northeast of San Antonio lies 'Eagle's Summit Ranch,' a 250-acre property owned by the Roever Foundation, a nonprofit organization focused on supporting the U.S. military, providing assistance to wounded warriors, hosting educational workshops, and providing public speaking opportunities for veterans.

This week, Dave Roever, President and Founder of Operation Warrior RECONnect, along with his staff, provide techniques to help build self-esteem among the warriors through mentoring, team-building, and therapeutic activities. The special operations commandos also receive educational opportunities and tools for overcoming and coping with new physical and mental injuries.

Unlike the U.S., Afghanistan does not have benevolent care centers for their veterans. When injured in combat, Afghan soldiers receive a one-time pension, are forced to retire, and often left to fend for themselves. The goal of Afghan National Army Command Sgt. Maj. Faiz Mohammad Wafa, the top enlisted leader of Afghanistan's National Army Special Operations Command, is to change that.

Afghan National Army Sgt. Safi Mirwais wipes his eyes while listening to a wounded Afghan soldiers' story April 3, during a weeklong seminar at the Eagle Summit Ranch in Junction, Texas. The weeklong seminar was designed to learn skills that will better enable Afghan soldiers to take care of their Afghan brothers wounded in combat.

Wafa is determined to start an organization similar to U.S. Special Operations Command's Care Coalition, where wounded soldiers and their families receive the support they need from their nation, their community, their service, and their family and friends. Wafa and his four commandos, with the help of the Roever Foundation, will form the groundwork of a new wounded warrior program in Afghanistan.

Wafa said having a program to support the country's wounded warriors is critical to the ANA's continued success.

"Without the wounded warrior program, we can't train more heroes," he said. "Our army is volunteers; if they don't see support, they would leave."

Roever, a Vietnam wounded warrior himself, knows the challenges these men face all too well, and said despite language barriers and some cultural differences, there are many similarities between the commandos and U.S. Soldiers.

"I look at them as bonafide heroes who have gone way above and beyond," said Roever, who is more than willing to help turn Wafa's dream into a reality.

One of the first lessons at the ranch is teaching and encouraging the commandos to share their stories with others.

Roever said being able to talk about their injuries is part of the healing process for these men.

"They are the faces of Afghanistan's wounded warriors," he said.

Afghan National Army SGT Safi Mirwais knew from a young age he wanted to help his country by fighting for Afghanistan's freedom from the Taliban. That desire led him to join ANASOC. Now, years later, Mirwais sits with his brothers and new American friends and shares his story for the first time.

"When I took a step I didn't know there was something there, it seemed like a bomb went off and a small ditch was formed," said Mirwais. "I was screaming for help and an American Soldier jumped on me, held me and carried me to the helicopter," he continued.

Three months into his assignment with the special operations kandak in Kandahar, Mirwais stepped on an improvised explosive device while clearing buildings on a joint U.S.-Afghan patrol. As a result, he lost his right leg below the knee.

"I am a patriot. I don't care that I lost my leg or if I lose my other leg; my job is to fight for Afghanistan's freedom," he professed.

After his experience at the ranch, Mirwais said he no longer feels alone and no longer feels like his life is ruined.

Afghan National Army Sgt. Safi Mirwais skeet shoots sitting down April 1, during a weeklong seminar at the Eagle Summit Ranch in Junction, Texas. The weeklong seminar was designed to learn skills that will better enable Afghan soldiers to take care of their Afghan brothers wounded in combat.

The U.S. Special Operations Command's 2015 Commando Hall of Honor inductees or their representatives stand with Army Gen. Joseph L. Votel, (far right) commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, and USSOCOM Command Sgt. Maj. William Thetford, (far left) after being inducted into USSOCOM's Hall of Honor, April 6, at the headquarters, MacDill Air Force Base Fla. The command and special operations community gathered to honor nine individuals whose service spanned 70 years from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom. Photo by Mike Bottoms.

USSOCOM recognizes newest Commando Hall of Honor inductees

By USSOCOM Public Affairs

The U.S. Special Operations Command inducted nine former special operators into the USSOCOM Commando Hall of Honor located at the USSOCOM headquarters here, April 6, 2015.

More than 120 people attended the ceremony to honor the inductees and watched as each of the former special operators or their surviving family member received a medal presented by Army Gen. Joseph L. Votel, USSOCOM commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. William F. Thetford, USSOCOM Command Senior Enlisted Adviser.

"These men embody the skills, value, spirit and courage of the special operations warrior," said Votel. "Today is about honoring these men and their sacrifice to the nation they love, to honor their sacrifice, and to honor their families who stood by their side."

Maj. Gen. James L. Hobson, Jr., distinguished himself during a lifetime of service to the United States and Special Operations Forces. Hobson's contributions to Special Operations aviation, Air Commandos and their unique brand of airpower, are inscribed throughout the history of Air Force Special Operations. His career in Special Operations culminated his selection and final assignment as Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

1st Lt. Jack L. Knight distinguished himself "above and beyond the call of duty" on Feb. 2, 1945 near Loi-Knag, Burma. Knight led a troop attack against entrenched Japanese positions dominating the hills overlooking the Burma Road. Single-handedly attacking key dug-in enemy positions, disregard for his own life, and concern for the safety of his men, earned him the Medal of Honor posthumously. Knight was the only Soldier serving in an Army Special Operations unit to receive the Medal of Honor during World War II.

Col. James H. Kyle distinguished himself during a lifetime of service to the United States and Air Force Special Operations Command in a myriad of worldwide. Kyle's dedication and herculean efforts supporting Special Operations Forces encompass more than 30 years of training, educating, and leading an elite group of commandos from training exercises to combat operations. His leadership was pivotal in the United States' response to the hijacking of the United States merchant ship SS Mayaquez, continuing with planning Operations Eagle Claw, and commanding the Air Force element of Desert One.

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard C. Lamb was the first noncommissioned officer selected to "cross-walk" between the Special Forces and the Ranger Infantry, setting the leadership standard for a generation of Special Operators. Wounded in combat and twice decorated for valor and gallantry in action, his contributions to the Nation are unparalleled. In Korea, he received the Silver Star and Combat Infantryman's Badge for leading a quick reaction force into the Demilitarized Zone to expel a North Korean incursion. In Panama, he led a Ranger Rifle Company as a noncommissioned officer - a feat not accomplished since the Vietnam era - on an operation that captured 188 hostile prisoners, led to the surrender of an entire military zone, and earned him a Bronze Star. In Somalia, he was part of the brutal 12-hour street fight that became known as the Battle of Mogadishu, suffering life-threatening wounds and earning a Purple Heart and a Joint Service Commendation Medal with Valor for his part in rescuing portions of Task Force Ranger.

Lt. Col. Terrence L. Moore distinguished himself in service to his country, the Marine Corps, and his fellow Special Operations Warriors across three decades of service. As a young enlisted Reconnaissance Marine, he participated in innumerable reconnaissance patrols and direct-action raids against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Forces from 1961-1963. Drawing upon a vast reservoir of professional military knowledge honed in extensive combat, then, Gunnery Sgt. Moore developed a comprehensive training program for Reconnaissance Marine candidates, while simultaneously leading a Special Operations team for the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion in the Republic of Vietnam in 1970. Due to his outstanding combat leadership during this tour, Gunnery Sgt. Moore was commissioned a second lieutenant on the field of battle.

Col. John W. Ripley served in a variety of Infantry positions, both afloat and ashore, and attended the U.S. Army's Airborne School. He commanded with distinction a Rifle Company in combat, with his unit earning the moniker ''Ripley's Raiders.'' He left his first Vietnam tour with a Silver Star, Bronze Star with V device, and Purple Heart. Returning to Vietnam in 1972, Ripley demonstrated exceptional bravery when he emplaced and wired explosives to destroy the strategic bridge of Dong Ha to halt a large NVA armored penetration of South Vietnam troops. Several times, with heavy loads of explosives and detonation cord hanging from his body, he hand-walked under the bridge by clinging to its I-beams, dangling some thirty feet above water as the enemy constantly fired upon him. Awarded the Navy Cross for his actions, Ripley's successful destruction of the Dong Ha Bridge delayed the downfall of South Vietnam for three years.

Col. Phillip R. Stewart distinguished himself during a 42-year career as both a commissioned Intelligence Officer and as a dedicated Special Operations Forces civil servant, culminating as Assistant Director for Intelligence, Naval Special Warfare Development Group. During multiple tours of duty attached, and in command of, sensitive national mission forces, Stewart influenced, planned, and executed multiple, successful intelligence operations against some of the Nation's most dangerous threats in dynamic operating environments. Stewart's commitment to the development of personnel and organizations, as well as new intelligence tactics, techniques, and procedures, had a direct and measurable impact on the agility, flexibility and lethality of Special Operations Forces on the battlefield over a decade of sustained combat.

Col. Lynn B. Stull distinguished himself through a lifetime of service to the United States and Special Operations Forces in a myriad of assignments, culminating as the Defense Threat Reduction Agency Liaison Officer to Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., from June 1968 to February 2014. Stull's dedication and support to the Special Operations community spans more than 40 years, from advising foreign forces in combat operations to serving as a Foreign Area Officer and Defense Attaché, through his tenure as a defense contractor and liaison officer. His personal efforts, drive, and determination forged long-standing Special Operations Forces and Countering Weapons of Mass of Destruction community relationships, which today continue to support the Special Operations Forces community with technical expertise and specialized training programs.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Paul A. Ziesman distinguished himself during a lifetime of service to the United States and Special Operations Forces culminating as a Department of Defense civilian serving as the Deputy Director Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence systems, Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, N.C. He was a pioneer in developing special mission unit communications operations and capabilities. Zeisman modified and developed innovative communications capabilities for combat operations, operations other than war, and classified assignments around the world including the first secure manpack satellite radio and what is now called Blue Force Tracking.

SOCNORTH hosts multi-national North American symposium

Story and photo by F.B. Zimmerman
JSOU University

More than 120 people from three countries recently gathered at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colo., to discuss how their countries can work together to address an issue each country deals with – transnational organized crime.

The two-day "SOF Role in Combating Transnational Organized Crime" symposium was held April 8-9 and hosted by Special Operations Command North and facilitated by Joint Special Operations University and Canadian Special Operations Forces Command. This is the fifth symposium JSOU and CANSOFCOM collaborated on, but the first with representatives from Mexico in attendance – from the National Defense Secretariat (SEDENA), the Navy Secretariat (SEMAR) and the Federal Police.

Rear Adm. Kerry Metz, commander of SOCNORTH, opened the symposium and remarked on how the countries need to work with one another, especially in training, so the trust is there when it's needed.

"Hopefully over the next two days what we will come up with is, 'is there or isn't there' [a SOF role in combating transnational organized crime], and then we'll get into the debate of what we can do versus what we should do," Metz said. "Collectively as North Americans, we see a shared security bubble … a threat to one is a threat to all. It's important to understand that it's a shared problem that's going to need a shared solution."

Over those two days, three "keynote addresses" were given: "Threats and Challenges," by Mark Hanna, the deputy National Intelligence Officer for Transnational Threats/Narcotics; "SOF and the New Borderless World," by Brig. Gen. Mike Rouleau, CANSOFCOM commander; and "Fighting the Transnational Organized Crime Threat as a North American Coalition," by Konrad Trautman, National Intelligence University and Defense Intelligence University Chair to U.S. Special Operations Command. There were also four panel discussions held—Transnational Organized Crime in Regional Contexts: What is Being Done and by Whom; What is the Transnational Organized Crime Gap and How Can SOF Fill It; Borders and Security: Balancing Security and Interdependence; and Foreign Fighters: Who's Problem is it Anyway? Each panel had a moderator and up to four individuals from the various countries with experience and knowledge on the topics being discussed.

More than 120 people from Canada, Mexico and United States attended the SOF Role in Combating Transnational Organized Crime symposium April 8-9 in Colorado Springs, Co.

"Events like this are important … because it's another opportunity to share, to collaborate, to contribute," Rouleau said. It's not just around the issues, it goes to the relationships – there are a lot of people I know here I'm strengthening my relationship with, but there are other people I've never met before who I think just expand our network."

Though this was the first year the Mexican delegation took part in the symposium, Col. Francisco Javier Martinez Pereyda, representing SEDENA, said Mexico has been benefiting from support from allies.

"In terms of building capability, to keep going forward, building relationships between the three countries, it's good because the development of the special forces in Mexico has been doing well because of all the support we have been receiving," Pereyda said.

While Rouleau felt the most important thing to take away from the symposium was building trust and cooperation in combating transnational organized crime, there was also another valuable take-away.

"The second thing I want to get out of [the symposium] is further informing how we can continue doing this sort of thing – this is an annual symposium – and how we can do it even better the next time around so we're always building on that success," Rouleau said.

Air Force Staff Sgt.
Jordan A. Lewis
20th Special Operations Squadron

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

An MC-130J Commando II aircraft from the 9th Special Operations Squadron taxis for departure from Red Horse landing zone in support of Emerald Warrior April 29, at Melrose Air Force Range N.M. Emerald Warrior is the Department of Defense's only irregular warfare exercise, allowing joint and combined partners to train together and prepare for real world contingency operations. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Plew.