



# TIP OF THE SPEAR



**SGT. 1ST CLASS MELVIN MORRIS**



**5TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP**

**VIETNAM VETERANS**

**RECEIVE MEDALS OF HONOR**



**MASTER SGT. JOSE RODELA**



# U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



**Vietnam era Soldiers receive Medal of Honor ... 12**

## Tip of the Spear



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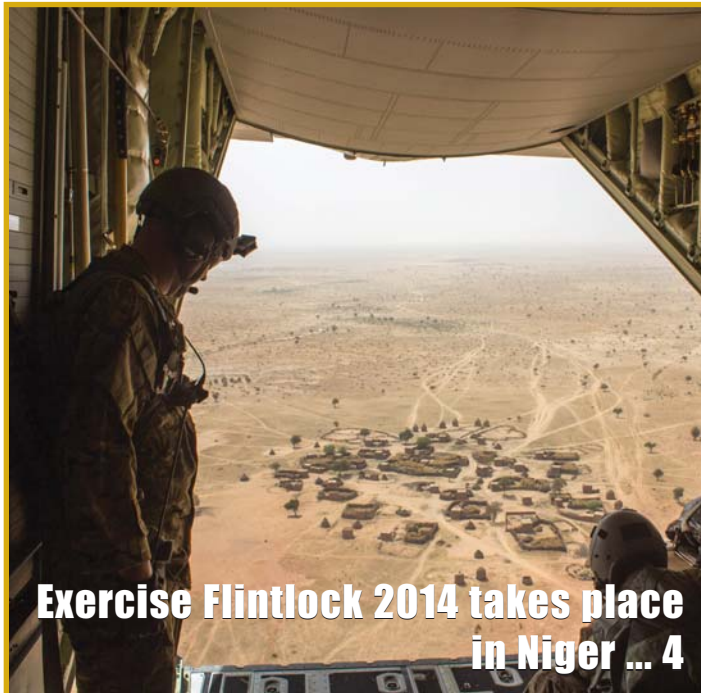
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*(Cover) Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris and Master Sgt. Jose Rodela, both Special Forces Soldiers, had their Distinguished Service Cross medals for combat actions in Vietnam upgraded to Medals of Honor. Photo illustration by Mike Bottoms.*

# Highlights



**Exercise Flintlock 2014 takes place in Niger ... 4**



**Ridge Runner training program in W. Va. ... 18**



**SOF Wounded Warriors train for Warrior Games ... 30**

## Departments

### SOF Around the World

*Exercise Flintlock 2014 takes place in Niger ... 4*

*Overwater training in Honduras ... 8*

*Belize hosts exercise Fused Response ... 10*

### Special Feature

*Vietnam era Soldiers receive Medal of Honor ... 12*

### U.S. Army Special Operations Command

*Two Nightstalker CW5s retire together ... 16*

*Ridge Runner training program in W. Va. ... 18*

*Father, son serve together in the Nightstalkers ... 22*

### Naval Special Warfare Command

*NAVSCIATTS supports Uruguayan navy in Haiti ... 24*

### Air Force Special Operations Command

*Cannon AFB honors Ratchet 33 ... 26*

*1st SOS pays tribute to Stray 59 ... 27*

*Special Tactics Airmen honored in valor ceremony ... 28*

### Headquarters

*SOF Wounded Warriors train at MacDill AFB ... 30*

*TALOS: Working outside the box ... 34*

*USSOCOM jumpers train with an MV-22 ... 36*

*Ted Lunger and the creation of USSOCOM ... 38*

*Editors note: There were no Special Operations Forces killed in action since February's issue*



# **Niger leads a multi-national training exercise in the Sahel region of Africa**





***Soldiers from the Niger Army practice patrolling during Flintlock 2014 in Diffa, Niger. Flintlock is a multi-national exercise with participants from Burkina Faso, Canada, Chad, France, Germany, Italy, Mauritania, the Netherlands, Norway, Nigeria, Senegal, United Kingdom, United States and Niger, focusing on building partner capacity to help strengthen stability across Africa. Photo by Scott Nielsen.***

*Story continues on next page*



**Mauritian soldiers take part in a casualty evacuation training exercise in Gofat, Niger, Feb. 27. The Mauritian armed forces are being trained by partner nations during Exercise Flintlock 2014. Photo by Spc. Timothy Clegg.**

***By SOCAFRICA Public Affairs***

Flintlock 2014, the annual African-led military exercise for interoperability in security, counterterrorism and humanitarian aid, officially kicked off Feb. 19 with an opening ceremony celebrating the spirit of regional security cooperation in Niamey, Niger.

The exercise - which include Burkina Faso, Canada, Chad, France, Mauritania, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Senegal, U.K., the U.S. and the host nation of Niger - focuses on building partner capability to strengthen stability across the Sahel region of Africa. Flintlock exercises have been conducted across north and western Africa since 2005.

For three weeks, more than a 1,000 different troops practiced military drills such as airdrops of personnel or equipment, conducted weapons ranges, rehearsed small unit tactics and delivered aid to remote areas with limited medical care.

While not focused on any particular operation or security situation, Flintlock 2014 focused on the development of the mutual security capacity while strengthening bonds among exercise participants,

according to officials.

“Your presence reflects your interests in our regional partnerships,” said Nigerien Col. Mahamane Laminou, the Flintlock country coordinator. “By sharing their experiences, expertise, and camaraderie, we share our interests in promoting stability in the region.”

Some of the major tactical components of Flintlock 2014 included small-unit combined counterterrorism training, along with humanitarian relief operations providing basic medical, dental, and veterinary access for select communities in Niger.

The host nation led the development of the exercise’s training objectives to help build interoperability among participating nations. Interoperability augments the security and is necessary for growth and stability in the region. Special Operations Command Africa Commanding General Brig. Gen. James Linder joined African nation partners for opening ceremony activities.

During the ceremony, the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Trans Sahel commander Col. Kenneth Sipperly, said, “Although Flintlock is considered an exercise, it is really an extension of ongoing training, engagement, and operations that help prepare our close

Africa partners in the fight against extremism and the enemies that threaten peace, stability and regional security.

“Working together to guard against the effects of extremism will be realized by the future generations of all

our countries.”

The Nigerien chief of staff agreed, adding that, “This exercise is occurring at a time when our nations are faced with multiple obstacles within our region which requires strong resolve to confront extremism.”



*A Combat Controller Team from the 720th Special Tactics Group, Hurlburt Field, Fla., exits a C-130 H3 during a high altitude, high opening jump over northeastern Niger, Feb. 28, during Joint Exercise Flintlock. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Eugene Crist.*



*Sgt. 1st Class Norma Estrella, Company B, 91st Civil Affairs Battalion, coordinates a medical civilian action plan in Gofat, Niger, Feb. 27. Photo by Spc. Timothy Clegg.*



*Members from the Nigerien Special Forces learn techniques for target marking during Flintlock 2014 in Diffa, Niger. Photo by Scott Nielsen.*



# Joint Task Force-Bravo conducts overwater training in Honduras

*Story and photo by Air Force Capt. Zachary Anderson  
Joint Task Force-Bravo*

Members of Joint Task Force-Bravo and 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) conducted helocast, caving ladder and overwater hoist training at Lake Yojoa, Honduras, Feb. 26.

The training was conducted in order to allow military members to maintain proficiency in a variety of skill sets, as well as to prepare for future operations and exercises throughout Central America.

The training provided valuable experience for Task Force members from a variety of career fields. For the pilots of Joint Task Force-Bravo's 1-228th Aviation Regiment, the overwater operations provided a unique challenge and an opportunity to hone their aviation aptitude.

“This training is vital to maintain our operational flexibility to support Joint Task Force-Bravo and U.S. Southern Command’s mission in the Central America area of responsibility,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. E.J. Irvin, 1-228th commander. “We support Special Operations Forces, as well as other countries’ defense forces which may require this capability. I need our pilots and crewmembers to be proficient in this skill set to mitigate risk.”

Irvin said the helocast training, during which the helicopter pilot holds an altitude of 10 feet at 10 knots of forward airspeed above the water while service members jump from the helicopter into the water, requires a special skill set that not everyone has.

“It is a unique challenge for pilots to get used to being that low over the water and being that slow,” said Irvin.





***A member of Joint Task Force-Bravo jumps from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during helocast training at Lake Yojoa, Honduras, Feb. 25. Several members of the Task Force spent the day training on helocasting, caving ladder, and overwater hoist operations.***

The three training events each required a different set of skills and presented different challenges to the participating service members.

The caving ladder, an extraction method, required service members to climb out of the water using a ladder lowered from a helicopter. The hoist training required flight medics to be lowered into the water from the helicopter on a cable to “rescue” Task Force members from the water.

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Benjamin Bashinski said the training was one of the best experiences of his Army career to date.

“As a communications officer, I don’t typically get a lot of adrenaline-inducing experiences,” said Bashinski. “But for this exercise, I got to spend two days working with Special Forces members, culminating with jumping from a moving helicopter into a lake. It definitely

opened my eyes to some of the incredible experiences that are part of being in the military, even if at the end of the day it’s still considered ‘training.’”

According to U.S. Army 1st Lt. Joshua McFarland, participating in the training provided not only an opportunity to hone new skills, but also a chance to build his own water confidence and observe the proficiency of his fellow Task Force members.

“We have a lot of aviation assets, and a lot of what we do brings us near the water,” said McFarland. “I feel comfortable knowing that if for some unfortunate reason I end up stranded in the water, two things will happen. First, I will be able to survive, and second, the 1-228th pilots and their crews will be able to safely recover me.”

In all, more than 30 members of Joint Task Force-Bravo participated in what was deemed a highly successful training exercise.



# Exercise Fused Response promotes U.S.-Belize Special Ops Capabilities, Partnership



*An MH-60 Black hawk helicopter from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) provides suppressive fire while providing transportation to members assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) during a training event as part of Exercise Fused Response 2014 outside of Belize City, Belize. Photo by Petty Officer First Class Elisandro T. Diaz.*

**By: Capt. Daisy C. Bueno**  
**Special Operations Command South Public Affairs**

A bilateral military exercise featuring elite members from both the U.S. and Belizean Special Operations Forces was held in Belize in an effort to reinforce strong bonds between the two nations in response to common threats in the Western Hemisphere.

The exercise named “Fused Response,” allows both nations the opportunity to train in a combined environment focusing on communications, staff planning, reconnaissance and other military skills. The exercise also enhances interoperability and expands military capacity, in order to confront common threats, such as illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime.

The intent of Fused Response, a U.S. Southern Command-sponsored exercise, was to build on the solid professional relationship between the two nations by improving military skills and practices to better respond to various security challenges.

This exercise, the largest of its kind in the region for Special Operations Command South, also allows senior leaders to evaluate their response to a serious threat across the region while working closely with partner nation counterparts.

“We have an excellent relationship and have been training with the Belize Security Forces for many years, but this is the rare opportunity to work with them on an exercise with this type of focus and scale,” said Air Force Lt. Col. Heber “Bull” Toro, Special Operations Command South lead exercise planner. “This exercise increases our ability to work with each other and strengthens the mutual respect our militaries have for each other.”

Exercise Fused Response kicked off March 5 and continued through March 14, bringing together about 500 U.S. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and members of the Belizean military.

“Training in other countries with their militaries and Special Operations Forces is such a gratifying experience,” said a 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) team sergeant. “My guys and I learn something new every day from our Belizean brothers. You can’t get this type of practice unless you train together and that’s exactly what we did and are better for it.”

The exercise is part of U.S. Southern Command’s ongoing effort to build and sustain enduring partnerships in the region. These engagements, some bilateral and some multilateral, include personnel exchanges, exercises and senior-level forums that address broad, strategic issues.

“This has been such a great experience to work with our U.S. military counterparts and their knowledge helps use become better so we can protect our nation and our people,” said a member assigned to the Belize Special Assignment Group (BSAG). “They teach us and we teach them. It’s a perfect exchange of ideas and methods.”

During Fused Response, the Belizean Joint Operation Center (JOC) located at Price Barracks, was used for the first time in an exercise of this caliber and was the result of several years of collaboration between the Belizean Defence Force, U.S. Southern Command, and the Governments of the U.S., Belize, and Canada.

Participants were able to exercise the operational command and control of the JOC by using it as a command center to monitor the daily events of the exercise, conduct briefs and communicate with outlying elements.

But, the importance of Fused Response is most visible with the forged friendships between the two nations that continue long after the exercise concludes.

“Exercises like this build rapport and bonds between U.S. forces and Belize,” said Toro. “We are grateful for the Belize military, their friendship, and we look forward to working with our partners again in the future.”



**7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Soldiers conduct a room-clearing exercise as part of Fused Response 2014 in Belize City, Belize. The U.S. Southern Command-sponsored exercise is executed by Special Operations Command South. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Roman Madrid**

## Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris



President Barack Obama awards the Medal of Honor to retired Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris during a ceremony at the White House March 18, in Washington, D.C. Morris earned the Medal of Honor for his valorous actions during combat operations against an armed enemy in the vicinity of Chi Lang, Republic of Vietnam, Sept. 17, 1969. Photo by EJ Hersom.

# After more than four decades, Vietnam War hero receives Medal of Honor

### *Army News Service*

Sept. 17, 1969, was a “terrible day, a hard day,” said a Vietnam War veteran who received the Medal of Honor at the White House, March 18, for his actions on that day more than four decades ago.

“I was in a few battles,” retired Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris said. “But nothing compares to that. Nothing.”

More than four decades later, he received a surprise

call that brought him the news of the nation’s highest military honor for valor for his extraordinary actions and bravery that day.

### **The Day**

The mission began early in the morning, Morris said. He was with Detachment A-403, Company D, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

On a strike force on a mission north and east of Chi Lang, on the central coast of Vietnam, Morris and his team were tracking the enemy and found a well-guarded

supply point.

“After we got to the rice cache, that’s when the ambush occurred,” he said.

Bullets whizzed by. Morris and his team used machine guns and grenades. Enemy fire wounded some of the men. Things happened so fast, he said, yet time seemed to stand still.

“It was chaos during that time,” Morris said.

Morris credited his actions that day to adrenaline, years of specialized training, and upholding the values he had sworn to defend.

He and his team “laid down a barrage” of machine-gun fire, and he lobbed hand grenades, Morris said.

“Everywhere I could put a grenade, I put a grenade.”

“[There was] automatic weapons fire. I can’t remember too many human voices,” Morris said. “I remember looking at my watch once and the next time I looked at it, it was in the evening. This started in the morning.”

Morris navigated himself and two Vietnamese men through enemy fire to recover the body of his fallen team sergeant, Master Sgt. Ronald Hagen. “He was a good man, a friendly man. He was fair with me,” Morris said. “I miss him.”

Despite shots being fired from seemingly everywhere, Morris paused to pray over the body.

“I didn’t worry about the shooting,” he said.

“Somehow it seemed it just stopped for a second.”

Then, he said, the fire intensified. And that is when the two men with him got wounded.

“I had to get them out, then I had to come back again and again,” said Morris, who returned with other men to recover Hagen’s body.

While transporting the body, a map containing special operating instructions fell out of Hagen’s pocket, he said. Morris put himself back into the line of enemy fire to retrieve the sensitive document.

“It wasn’t a pleasant day, I can’t recall seeing anything,” Morris said. “I just went into combat mode. I was operating on adrenaline and instinct, training, everything kicked in at the right time.”

“I was untouched until that last trip,” Morris said.

“When I went back, that’s when they shot me, I was shot once and had to defend myself and got behind a tree. They were trying to shoot the tree, so I got wounded again. I got wounded three times during that period.”

“I had to fight my way out,” he continued. “I got out. My training was kicking in and I was recalling everything I had to do. Believe in your training. That’s all I got to say. I was trained well.”

Alone, with enemy fire coming from all directions,

he knew he had to make his way to safety.

“I don’t know how many magazines I used, how long I fought, until I finally decided I had to get out some kind of way, because I was by myself,” he said.

Air support dropped explosives, “but that didn’t do any good,” as the fighting raged.

“I was able to take out one position, to allow me a chance to get out. I remember on my way out, I was taking fire everywhere. Everywhere,” Morris said.

He made it out. Finally away from the danger, he was reunited with his unit. He had been shot in the chest, arm and through the finger. A helicopter evacuated him to a field hospital.

“I didn’t feel any pain until after I was in the hospital and I realized what happened and I started to come around,” he said. “Then the shock hit me about what had happened. That’s when it really tears you up.”

Morris was taken to a hospital in Saigon, then on to Japan, and finally to Fort Bragg, N.C.

He was hospitalized for about three months total.

Mary, his wife, said she ran as fast as she could to greet him when he arrived back in the United States.

“When I saw him, wow, it was a blessing,” she said.

“I was home,” he said.

### **Army Service**

With 23 years of distinguished service in the United States Army, the military life agreed with Morris and his family, providing them security and a safe, familiar community.

As a paratrooper and jumpmaster, Morris remembered fondly his time in the skies, “I was as high as I could go, and that was great, to hang out of the door of that aircraft.”

Morris left the Army for three years, but his devotion to duty and commitment to the nation were too strong and beckoned him back into the uniform.

“Call of duty, I just couldn’t get away from it. Military was in my blood and I wanted to go back,” Morris said. “I was 36 years old and started over as an E-4, which didn’t bother me. I’m Army. That’s it. I wanted to finish my career.”

In addition to the two tours in Vietnam, his Army assignments also took him to Panama, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Fort Bragg, and his last posting, Fort Hood, Texas. He retired in May 1985.



## Master Sgt. Jose Rodela



President Barack Obama awards the Medal of Honor to retired Master Sgt. Jose Rodela during a ceremony at the White House March 18, in Washington, D.C. Rodela earned the Medal of Honor for his valorous actions during combat operations against an armed enemy in Phuoc Long Province, Republic of Vietnam on Sept. 1, 1969. Photo by EJ Hersom.

# Vietnam era 5th SFG (A) Master Sgt. Jose Rodela receives Medal of Honor

### *Army News Service*

President Barack Obama presented retired Army Master Sgt. Jose Rodela the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for military valor, during a March 18 ceremony at the White House.

Rodela distinguished himself during combat in Phuoc Long Province, South Vietnam, Sept. 1, 1969, while serving as the company commander of a mobile strike force with 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

Rodela's entire company was made up of Cambodian soldiers whom, he said, he helped recruit from Cambodia.

"Every three months we'd go to Cambodia, load up the volunteers in C-130s, and take them to war," he said, during an interview in December 2013. He added that he trained them how to fire the M-16 rifle and other combat skills prior to action.

For some missions, Rodela said he helped recruit Vietnamese fighters, but never mixed them with Cambodians in the same unit because they "didn't like

each other.”

Rodela said he spoke some Vietnamese and Cambodian, but had a Cambodian interpreter. During their free time, he'd help the interpreter improve his English.

He credits his extensive Green Beret training with not only learning the art of war, but also advanced first aid, which he said became especially useful for treating the wounded and injured in his company, which was without a medic and far from garrison.

### **Extraordinary Heroism**

On that fateful day in September, his company was in search of the enemy, he said during an interview Sept. 30. “We looked for them, found them and killed them,” he said. “That’s what we were there to do.”

Unfortunately for him and his men, the North Vietnamese Army troops they were up against outnumbered and outgunned them, he said. “They were well prepared, just like we were.”

As soon as they engaged, they came under an intense barrage of mortar, rocket and machine-gun fire, according to the Medal of Honor citation, which continues:

“Rodela disregarded the withering enemy fire, immediately began to move from man to man in his company, physically pushing them into defensive positions to form a half moon perimeter.

“His clear thinking and quick action prevented much heavier casualties in his company and relieved the pressure of the remainder of the battalion, providing time to organize a defensive perimeter.”

The citation describes the ensuing battle in which 33 in his company were wounded and 11 killed. A supporting document to the citation notes that the battle continued for 18 hours.

Later in the battle, according to the citation, “Rodela suddenly jumped up. He was the only member of his company who was moving and he began to run from one position to the next, checking for casualties and moving survivors into different positions in an attempt to form a stable defense line.

“Throughout the battle, in spite of his wounds, Rodela repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire to attend to the fallen and eliminate an enemy rocket position.”

Looking back on that day, Rodela said matter-of-factly, “we trained for this and I would have done it again.”

Prior to the day he was medically evacuated, Rodela said he and his company would be on continuous, extended missions where they would often make enemy contact, based mostly on intelligence from locals. He said he did these types of missions for a total of 20 months.

They supplemented their rations, which were airdropped from C-130 cargo planes, by foraging for vegetation and animals. The men in his unit knew what

was edible and what was not, and Rodela himself had survival training and skills, learned during his Green Beret training.

During a recruiting mission into Cambodia, Rodela said he came across a 12-year-old Cambodian orphan who wanted to join his unit. With no one to care for him in his village, the unit took him in.

Rodela said he was making plans to adopt the boy and bring him to the U.S. Unfortunately, the boy stepped on a mine during a night mission and was killed. Rodela was injured on his right side during the explosion, but later returned to duty.

That incident was the hardest he faced during his service in Vietnam and he said that he cried a lot whenever he thought about it. “I already considered him my son.”

### **Aftermath**

After recovering from his wounds, Rodela said he continued to serve in the Army “doing similar things we did in Vietnam,” only now training and leading militaries in Central and South America.

Rodela said his perfect Spanish came in handy, in addition to his extensive combat experience and training skills.

In December 1975, Rodela retired after serving in the Army 20 years. He prefers not to discuss what he did after retirement and was hesitant to even discuss his service in Vietnam. He said he was surprised to learn that he'd receive the Medal of Honor, and added that the greatest honor he ever had was serving with his men.

Rodela now lives in San Antonio, Texas, in the state he's always called home. He had enlisted right out of high school in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1955, “because my friends did.” He also later joined the Green Berets because his buddies did.

Rodela said he's never gone back to Vietnam or Cambodia to visit, but has been in contact with some of the Special Forces Soldiers he served with who live in the San Antonio area. He said “it would be interesting” to meet some of the Cambodians and Vietnamese he served with someday.

A lot of his wartime experiences he describes as “painful memories” and are because “I lost a lot of people.” He hasn't even told his two sons and daughter about what he'd experienced.

Some painful memories still haunt him, however, “because you have the mission of giving them orders and they don't come back.”

“I feel better keeping to myself,” he added.





# 160th SOAR CW5s retire after combined 70 years of service

*By Staff Sgt. Thaddius S. Dawkins II  
USASOAC Public Affairs*

As the A Company, 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment hangar began to fill with people Friday, it was clear this wasn't just another retirement ceremony.

This ceremony had an even greater significance than most others. After all, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Karl H. Maier and Chief Warrant Officer 5 George "Billy" Cook had more than 70-years of combined Army Service — with more than 50 of those years spent as Night Stalkers.

"We planned on 250 people, but we ran out of programs, seating and food," said 1st Sgt. Devon M. Weber, A Co., 1st Bn., 160th SOAR. "Honestly, we lost count at 350 people. It was a sight to see guys piled around the ceremony sitting in aircraft and maintenance stands, just to get a glimpse of the two legends."

The day prior to the ceremony, flight-leads from A Co. took the opportunity to talk about Maier and Cook. The men, in true honor of the "Quiet Professional" motto, asked to speak under the condition of anonymity.

According to those men, both Maier and Cook are the reason A Co. is what it is today.

"When Karl first arrived at the unit, there was still a stigma with being the new guy," one flight lead said. "No one would really appreciate you or listen to anything you said until you proved yourself. Karl learned early on that wasn't the way to treat people. He helped Alpha Company change for the better and everyone was treated with respect. He quickly learned treating them poorly didn't produce performers, it just made people unhappy with life and not wanting to be here."



**Chief Warrant Officer 5 George "Billy" Cook and Chief Warrant Officer 5 Karl H. Maier stand with Col. John R. Evans Jr., 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment during a retirement ceremony Friday at Fort Campbell, Ky. Cook and Maier retired following a combined 70-years of service, with more than 50 years spent as Night Stalkers. Photo by Staff Sgt. Thaddius S. Dawkins II.**

"Like Karl, Billy agreed in the mentality of not calling people out in front of others and treating people poorly," another flight lead added. "He has never once called anyone out in public. Believe me, I've had my fair share of talks from him, but it was always him and I alone. He never did it to anyone in public."

Up until their retirement ceremony Friday, Maier was the longest-tenured Night Stalker in the 160th SOAR (A). He had been in the unit since 1986, with a majority of his time serving in the same company. Cook wasn't too far behind, having served 24 years in the legendary unit.

"Pretty much everything you've read in any book



about the 160th, Karl was a part of,” said one of the flight-leads who first met Maier 20 years ago. “In 23 years of aviation service, I have not met anyone with more professional military aviation knowledge than Karl Maier.

“Karl and Billy have always been that mark on the wall that I have tried to achieve at the professional level,” he added.

Both men, described as absolute professionals by the men they had worked with for so long, were two polar opposites when it came to personality. Maier is reserved and quiet, while Cook is as outgoing as they come.

The flight-leads elaborated on Maier’s personality, describing him as the most humble man they had ever met.

“During Gothic Serpent, Karl was awarded the Silver Star for his role in the mission,” one flight lead said.

“The only thing he cared about was, ‘Well if I’m getting this, what are the rest of my guys receiving?’ He was always thinking about others. Even during our mission briefs, with every decision made, his first thought was how will this affect the guys on my crew?”

“I often talk about Karl, describing him as the hero who landed the Little Bird in the streets of Mogadishu to save the Ranger unit – the ultimate expression of courage in my book,” said Maj. Gen. (P) Kevin W. Mangum, former 160th SOAR commander and now as the Aviation Branch Commander. “And as the consummate and quiet professional, Karl successfully resisted telling his story to anybody who would ask, for over 20 years.

“For those reasons, I chose Karl to be the first regiment command chief warrant officer,” he added. “I’m proud to say that based off of Karl’s example, our combat aviation brigades will see the position of command chief warrant officer added into their organizational structure starting next year.”

“Karl has been a strong personal role model and good friend for more than 20 years,” said CW5 Bob D. Witzler, the U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command’s command chief warrant officer. “He has always been a consistent example for warrant officers to emulate and we will miss him in our formation. His accomplishments in Army Special Operations Aviation are legendary, and I consider myself lucky to have served with him and to have had the opportunity to follow his example, albeit unsuccessfully.”

Mangum further elaborated on the type of leader Maier has been throughout his illustrious career.

“In the Army, we define leadership as the process of influencing people by providing purpose, motivation and direction to accomplish the mission and improve the organization,” Mangum said. “Karl Maier is just that each and every day in a humble and multifaceted way since his arrival here, nearly 27-years-ago. I cannot think of any Night Stalker who has served continuously for 27 years.”

The flight leads also lent insight into Cook’s personality and what he meant to the Night Stalkers.

“He can do a handshake with a guy he’s never met before, talk to him for 30 seconds and he’s already befriended the guy for life” one of them said. “He’s very witty and has a personality that everyone likes. He’s like your best friend as soon as he meets you. Everyone throughout the community knows Billy for that reason.”

Col. John R. Evans Jr., commander of the 160th SOAR (A), added to the thought that Cook is well known throughout the Special Operations community.

“The United States Special Operations Command consists of over 65,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines,” he said. “Despite the sheer magnitude of this multifaceted and complex organization, regardless of where you’re operating, if you say the word, ‘Billy,’ everyone knows who you’re talking about.”

“That’s just the type of guy he is,” one flight lead said. “His outgoing personality has made him the face of the Regiment. Billy Cook is friends with everyone.”

Along with his personality, Evans said it is Cook’s commitment to the job that made him the well-respected aviator that he has become.

“In a tightknit community where uncommon valor is a common virtue and reputation is quickly known, you would be hard-pressed to find any operator who garners as much universal recognition as Billy Cook,” he said.

During his speech to the large audience attending the ceremony, Mangum said it was a “sad, but very sweet and happy day.” Something the flight-leads and platoon sergeant echoed the day prior.

“We always say that no one is so important that if you left today someone isn’t going to be able to backfill you,” one said in closing. “But Karl and Billy don’t fall into that. Trying to replace them is going to be impossible. Guys will continue to progress professionally and do all those things. We will all take a little bit from those guys to try to make ourselves better, but collectively to try to capture everything that they knew, a single person won’t be able to do that for either one of those guys.”

**AIRBORNE**

**U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**



*Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and a West Virginia Army National Guard soldier acting as a guerilla warfighter assault an enemy mortar position during a training exercise on March 12, near Kingwood, W.Va. Soldiers from 10th SFG (A) were in the state to participate in the West Virginia National Guard's new Ridge Runner training program, which offers dynamic opportunities for Special Operations Forces to train on all aspects of unconventional warfare. Photo by Sgt. Sara Yoke.*

# Ridge Runner training program offers meaningful, challenging training opportunities for SOF

*By Army Sgt. Sara Yoke  
West Virginia National Guard Public Affairs*

The global security posture remains dynamic and unpredictable. Accordingly, Special Operations Forces must maintain the highest levels of readiness to support the Geographic Combatant Commander and the West Virginia National Guard's Ridge Runner Irregular

Warfare Training Activity assists in that by providing realistic and challenging scenarios simulating today's operational landscape.

Recently, a company from 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), traveled from Fort Carson, Colo., to Camp Dawson, W.Va., to utilize the Ridge Runner program to prepare for employment within the European theater of operations.

“This training enhanced our company’s preparation for forthcoming operations in the EUCOM area of responsibility, as well as increased our tactical and technical proficiency in our core mission set – unconventional warfare,” said Maj. Michael Lueckeman, the company’s commander.

SOF operations have transitioned from a kinetic nature to a more mutually supporting role with emphasis on the human dimension. The methodology for conducting Special Operations is also under continuous refinement.

The Ridge Runner program is a cost-effective way for SOF to be able to train on varying aspects of irregular warfare in scenarios that are realistic and tailored to the participating unit’s upcoming mission. The 3-10 SFG(A) staff and Ridge Runner personnel worked together to leverage existing West Virginia resources to add both realism and depth to a specific, requirements-driven scenario.

“This exercise let us work on skills we haven’t used for a while. We brushed the dust off and got back to the basics and remembered why they are so important,” said Capt. Travis Allard, a Special Forces detachment commander.

For this exercise, one of the training goals was to increase the team’s understanding of the seven phases of unconventional warfare - preparation, initial contact, infiltration, organization, build up, employment and transition. These set the framework for how the scenario unfolded during the two-week training.

“Participating in Exercise Ridge Runner increased our ability to deploy our force, prepare personnel for deployment, provide intelligence and communications support, conduct mission planning, and establish and operate an advance operation base – these are all tasks we will conduct in upcoming deployments,” said Lueckeman.

For the infil phase, the Special Forces teams moved to the guerilla force bases using different methods, including a water infiltration route. As they entered the icy waters in canoes and began to navigate, a local swift water rescue team was onsite to ensure safety while also acting as trusted local guides within the scenario.

“Ridge Runner has dynamic infiltration lanes,”



*During a Ridge Runner Irregular Warfare training scenario near Kingwood, W.Va., a U.S. Army Soldier with 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) trains members of a guerilla force, comprised of role players who are members of the West Virginia Army National Guard. Ridge Runner is the WVNG’s Irregular Warfare training program. Photo by Pfc. Gabriel Segura.*

Lueckeman said. “Ridge Runner allowed us to infiltrate by land, by air, and through waterborne operations. That combined with the excellent facilities at Camp Dawson, the support of the surrounding communities, and the flexibility of the Ridge Runner staff made Ridge Runner the most appealing and beneficial option for our training event.”

Ridge Runner has land use agreements to over 500,000 acres of public and private property. Any WVNG facility can potentially be leveraged to support a Ridge Runner sponsored training event, so specific training locations offer varying degrees of flexibility plus will often decrease the per diem costs associated with off-site training for the exercise participants. For this exercise, the training occurred on and around Camp Dawson, located near Kingwood, W.Va.

The local community actively supported the training in several ways. Beyond the land use access, many community leaders participated as role players in key leader engagements. By having real community leaders participate, the ODA members gained additional experience by having a community leader convey notional problems (scenario) with the institutional knowledge of that office to encourage the ODA to think

*Story continues on next page*

**Tip of the Spear**

**AIRBORNE**

## U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



beyond its task and purpose of the mission. Helping community leaders with solving local problems leads to rapport building and ultimately accomplishing their mission. This added depth and variety.

Ridge Runner facilitates organic resources in the WVNG or from the community and using the unit's mission essential task list as a base plate, combines the two to make a realistic scenario," said Command Sgt. Maj. Tom Edmonds, program manager for Ridge Runner.

WVNG Soldiers participated as role players in the exercise, acting as the indigenous force that Special Forces Soldiers had to train to become the resistance force. WVNG servicemembers were able to bring their civilian job skill sets to the exercise, reinforcing the scenario as more convincing and providing additional depth to their character development.

"It adds realism in an environment where a Special Forces team would be in a country training civilians to become a paramilitary force," said Edmonds.

"We had real world rapport with our guerilla fighters," Allard said about his team's interaction with the WVNG role players. "The interaction between the two elements was great. In a Unconventional Warfare setting, people have skills and connections they could bring to build the resistance capabilities. By working with them, we got them to go outside the box, be resourceful and see if it worked."

The training exercise was beneficial for all elements. While the Special Forces company increased its skill sets at the individual, detachment, and company levels, the WVNG participants also had the opportunity to gain valuable training they might not otherwise receive, such as small unit tactics, survival, planning and conducting raids and ambushes, and close-quarters combat training.

"When it's servicemembers training servicemembers, it is beneficial, and it's what makes Ridge Runner unique. Many other programs use contractors," said Maj. Erik Sarson, Ridge Runner's officer in charge.

Beyond the guerilla warfighters, the exercise was also supported by multiple WVNG elements – fixed wing and rotary aircraft, military police, engineers,

*Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) assault an enemy mortar position during a training exercise on March 12, near Kingwood, W.Va. Photo by Army Sgt. Sara Yoke.*

transportation and medical. In total, more than 70 WVNG service members either participated or supported the exercise.

Ridge Runner staff also coordinated with local agencies such as the Preston County Sheriff's Office and the W.Va. State Police. During one scenario, state police officers set up a simulated criminal checkpoint. The narcotics canine was utilized, giving the dog and its handler the chance to train. Detention cells were made available, and the Soldiers were separated and interviewed. Other emergency services such as the local fire department and ambulatory services supported the training.

What is unique to West Virginia is the closely stitched relationship between the military and the residents of the state. The WVNG's positive response to frequent natural disasters in the state such as flooding, snow storms and the recent water crisis, residents are accustomed to seeing Guardsmen in their neighborhoods helping. For Ridge Runner, that means having a community that is enthusiastic and supportive of training, Edmonds said.

"A needed resource is always just a phone call away," Sarson said.

Ridge Runner's staff members pride themselves on working with visiting units to facilitate their training objectives into the most realistic environment possible. Most, if not all of the training, will occur in or around local communities.

"Where other training programs are very structured, Ridge Runner is more like a lab. We offer a flexible environment where a unit can come in and try something creative," Sarson said, referring to a unit's approach on how to train for a difficult mission.

"One thing that makes training for unconventional warfare like this difficult is that so many elements have to come together. It is usually very challenging, but the Ridge Runner flexibility and the competency of the WVNG allowed this to come together in about four months. Our doctrinal knowledge has been significantly enhanced because of this training," Lueckeman said. "We have developed a terrific relationship with the WVNG that we hope to be enduring in nature."



*U.S. Army Soldiers with 10th Special Forces Group and West Virginia National Guard conduct unconventional warfare training in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia March 08. Photo by Pfc. Gabriel Segura.*

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**U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**



*Staff Sgt. Joseph Simms and Pvt. Charlie Shaw, father and son, share a hug following the Combat Skills Enlisted Green Platoon graduation ceremony, Feb. 18, 2014 at Fort Campbell, Ky. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Rick Branch.*

## **Soldier father, son serve together in the Night Stalkers**

*By Army Staff Sgt. Rick Branch  
160th SOAR (A) Public Affairs*

When Staff Sgt. Joseph Simms donned his maroon beret after completing Enlisted Green Platoon-Combat Skills, he never expected a few years later to see another member of his family experience it. His son Pvt. Charlie Shaw changed that when he graduated from Enlisted Green Platoon, Feb. 18, at Cole Parks Commons, Fort Campbell, Ky.

“I never expected back then that a few years later I’d watch one of my kids graduate through Green Platoon,” beamed Simms. “Charles has always liked the Army and been exposed to the regiment from a few visits here and

there ... he really liked what he saw.”

Simms, 42, from Sylvester, Ga., is one of a growing number of Soldiers witnessing family members follow in their footsteps by becoming second generation Night Stalkers. Often the younger family member joins many years after the senior member has left the organization, but on rare occasions, they serve together.

“It’s great, a real treat to have him working here in the unit with me,” Simms said. “We’ve talked about him coming here a lot after I knew it was really going to happen. I let him know right off the bat that he’s his own guy and I wanted to make sure he’s given that opportunity to represent himself on his own accord.”

Shaw, 19, from Clarksville, Tenn., said he was

**Tip of the Spear**

slowly getting exposed to life in the 160th SOAR (A) through occasional visits, books, movies, and discussions with his dad. Those moments helped influence his decision to don the maroon beret as a Night Stalker.

“I’ve always wanted to join since I was real young,” he said. “As I got older, I started leaning toward that goal with a higher sense of honor and pride.”

Those aspirations helped push Shaw to pursue a career in Special Operations aviation. Once his mind was set to join the aviation field, he attempted to keep his desire to join the 160th SOAR (A), a secret from his Night Stalker father.

“I told him I was thinking about joining the 101st CAB (Combat Aviation Brigade), but I was really going to try out for the 160th SOAR (A),” Shaw said. “I met the SOAR recruiter after I completed basic training and was in advanced individual training ... then found myself here for Green Platoon.”

Once he arrived to Green Platoon, Shaw was exposed to the rigorous training aspiring Soldiers looking to join the regiment must experience. From water survival to escape and evade training, the second generation Night Stalker had to do it all in his journey to be a Night Stalker.

“I knew all my skills were going to be put to the test,” Shaw said. “I quickly learned that you have to push your body to its limits and surpass it to join this unit.”

Despite having a Soldier father, Shaw was never given any insider information as his father wanted the experience to be original and not ruined in any way.

“I didn’t want to take away from the experience of what it’s like to go through Green Platoon,” Simms said. “I did tell him to keep his stuff together and be ready at a moment’s notice. I also had the opportunity to watch him go through Black Day.”

Simms explained that Black Day is a grueling day-long experience during Enlisted Green Platoon where Soldiers have each of their physical and mental skills put to the test.

“I know it’s a day all Night Stalkers remember and will never forget,” he said. “I can say that he may have received a ‘little’ extra attention, but I knew he was up to the task ... I was proud to see him gut it out.”

Although Shaw is called a second generation Night Stalker, in reality he’s a third generation Soldier. Simms’ father served in the U.S. Army in the 1960s.

“It’s quite an honor to have a child try to follow in your footsteps,” Simms said. “It’s not easy to let your

child join; however, it’s very rewarding to watch them succeed and become independent young adults and successful Soldiers.”

Not many are privileged to serve with their kids. Not many have the opportunity to take a lunch break and work out with their kids. Simms, proud of his son, has a few things he’s looking most forward to experiencing with Shaw.

“The other day he asked me how to shape his beret, knowing I had to do the same for mine a few years back,” he said. “It’s really all those small things that I’ll enjoy the most. Getting to show and teach Shaw how to do those little details, which are important to establishing good Army habits throughout a Soldier’s career.”

When asked together what it’s like to serve in the regiment, both agree that it’s a blessing and creates that special bond shared only among family members to strive to do better and push each other, all while living the Night Stalker motto of never quitting when things get tough.



*Pvt. Charlie Shaw stands at attention for the crowd following his first donning of the maroon beret during the Enlisted Green Platoon - Combat Skills graduation ceremony, Feb. 18, at Fort Campbell, Ky. Shaw, a second generation Night Stalker, attended Green Platoon as part of the assessment process aspiring Soldiers must endure before joining the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). 160th SOAR (A) courtesy photo.*



## NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

# NAVSCIATTS supports Uruguayan navy efforts in Haiti

*Story and photo by Darian Wilson  
NAVSCIATTS Public Affairs*

It has been said that no operation extends with any certainty beyond the first encounter and nowhere is this more true than with military-to-military training partnerships.

Despite highly-detailed planning, there are times when training requirements change, deployment schedules shift, and the needs and goals of countries evolve.

Simply put, when two or more countries join to train together, flexibility is a requirement.

That certainly proved to be the case for two personnel from the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) who were recently assigned to work with 10 members of the Uruguayan navy in Jacmel, Haiti, as part of a Mobile Training Team (MTT) designed to improve Uruguayan small craft maritime capabilities.

Uruguay, in turn, has been providing assistance and building partnership capability to the Haitian Coast Guard as part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in that country since 2004.

The NAVSCIATTS MTT was the culmination of a multi-agency Security Cooperation and Security Assistance partnership put together by Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA), Program Executive Office Ships (PEO Ships/PMS325), U.S. embassies in Haiti and Uruguay, Naval Education and Training Security Assistance Field Activity (NETSAFA) and Naval Special Warfare under a Global Peace Operations Initiative, according Myung C. Park, project manager, PEO Ships/PMS325.

The intent of the equipment and training purchase, in which outboard engines and a package of spare parts,



***Petty Officer 1st Class Cesar Villamar, NAVSCIATTS instructor, provides outboard motor maintenance training to members of the Uruguayan navy during a recent Mobile Training Team event. Courtesy photo.***

diagnostic tools and training for the Uruguayan military were procured under the United Nations Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH), was to reactivate four of eight patrol boat engines currently stationed by Uruguay in Haiti and to promote equipment sustainability and increase Uruguayan capabilities in engine maintenance.

“When we first hit the ground for the Pre-Deployment Site Survey (PDSS), our initial plan was that we were going to be helping Uruguayan personnel install several new engines and showing them how to conduct maintenance so that they could keep all their small craft up and running,” said Chief Petty Officer Alejandro Rodriguez, an instructor for the NAVSCIATTS Outboard Motor Maintenance and Overhaul Course. “Instead, when we got there, we found that all the engines had already been installed by our Uruguayan partners and that, based on their initiative, we would be



able to do even more to maximize our time in country.”

Three old, damaged engines rusting away on the ground behind the maintenance building provided just the opportunity that the NAVSCIATTS staff was looking for, according to Rodriguez, as they were able to not only provide required preventative maintenance training for all the new engines as initially planned, but were also able to scavenge parts from the three old engines and rebuild them into a single new working engine.

The Uruguayans were also able to diagnose and fix three of the older engines that had already been replaced with the assistance of the NAVSCIATTS instructors.

“One of the great advantages of working with NAVSCIATTS is that we do a PDSS before every MTT to make sure we know exactly what we need to make the most of our time, effort and investment,” said Rodriguez. “In this case, that means we were able to teach them how to maintain all their new engines and equipment as initially planned, and also help them repair four additional engines that otherwise may have been thrown away. Having four additional working engines offers a huge boost to their capabilities and also helps save a lot more money down the line.”

Cutting costs and getting more for less is another result of this first direct partnership between NAVSCIATTS and PEO Ships/PMS325 as military-to-military training provided by NAVSCIATTS is not subject to many of the additional costs attached to other Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs, according to Park. This results in every dollar allocated to training being spent on the actual training for the FMS customer.

“The only costs to conduct the PDSS and the MTT were for the trainers to travel to and from Haiti, in-country transportation, and food and lodging costs,” said Park.

Such savings are substantial and are another reason why, after researching the request and the capabilities and offerings of NAVSCIATTS, PEO Ships/PMS325 determined that it was a great opportunity to work directly with NAVSCIATTS on this project to provide military training to the Uruguayan navy, Park said.

“NAVSCIATTS brings to the table both flexibility and an ability to provide military-to-military operational and life cycle maintenance training in addition to the vendor procured and provided familiarization training, he said. This is in line with the ‘total-package approach’ in meeting the needs of the customer that PEO

Ships/PMS325 and NAVSEA strive to provide to Security Assistance programs. Given the capabilities of NAVSCIATTS and the unique opportunity for military-to-military type training, PMS325F is looking at future opportunities to bring NAVSCIATTS into the training mix.”

When asked what they would have changed about the training, or what could have been done better, several personnel from the Uruguayan maritime unit replied with similar answers.

“I wish we had been able to conduct this maintenance training two years ago,” said Lt. Cmdr. Guillermo Delgado, URUMAR G3 Staff, Uruguay Maritime Unit in Haiti. “Maintenance is the key to operations. Engines do not last forever. If we had been able to get together and do some of this training earlier we would have been in a much better position to accomplish our mission and realize our other long-term goals and objectives.”

NAVSCIATTS leadership also offered up some ideas on how to improve the overall procurement and training process from their perspective.

“It’s always very useful to be able to conduct a PDSS before any MTT,” said Cmdr. John Cowan, NAVSCIATTS commanding officer. “In this and most other cases, however, we would also like to be able to send some of the Foreign Security Force students to the U.S. for maintenance and instructor development training before both the PDSS and MTT.

“Doing so will ensure that our partner nations will always get the most from the equipment and training that they purchase as they will be more prepared when the first equipment arrives. We can then follow up the U.S.-based training with an MTT like this one.”

The ability to better plan ahead, cooperate and share information between countries will continue to play an increasingly important role in security cooperation matters around the world, according to Maj. Eldridge R. Singleton, U.S. Army Operations Officer, Security Cooperation Office, U.S. Embassy, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

“NAVSCIATTS is here to help the Uruguayans, who are here to help the Haitians,” said Singleton. “It’s great in that it shows both a willingness among countries to share and help each other and also puts a focus on the importance of various maintenance and training programs. Alone we may not have the capabilities to do what we have to do, but together we can get it done.”



## AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



U.S. Air Force Air Commandos from Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., walk during a six-mile memorial ruck march, Feb. 18, at Cannon's Unity Park. The march was conducted in honor of Capt. Ryan Hall, Capt. Nicholas Whitlock, 1st Lt. Justin Wilkens and Senior Airman Julian Scholten, the aircrew members who lost their lives when "Ratchet 33," a U-28A, crashed in Djibouti, Africa, Feb. 18, 2012.

# Cannon AFB honors Ratchet 33

By Senior Airmen Whitney Amstutz  
27th Special Operations Public Affairs

Members of the 27th Special Operations Wing completed a ruck march and flag-folding ceremony, Feb. 18 at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., to commemorate the anniversary of "Ratchet 33," a U-28A that crashed in Djibouti, Africa Feb. 18, 2012.

A thorough investigation concluded that the aircrew, based out of the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Fla., fell victim to spatial disorientation and was unable to identify Ratchet 33's position in the air. The aircrew was comprised of Capt. Ryan Hall, Capt. Nicholas Whitlock, 1st Lt. Justin Wilkens and Senior Airman Julian Scholten.

"The purpose of the ceremony was to honor those lost on Ratchet 33, which went down in the Horn of Africa on this day two years ago," said Capt. Nathanael Smith, 318th Special Operations Squadron executive officer. "Also, we wanted to make sure the families of the men we lost know that we haven't forgotten the sacrifice they made."

Assigned to the 34th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, the crew departed the Ambouli International Airport to accomplish a combat

mission in support of a Combined Joint Task Force. Having accomplished their objective, Ratchet 33 and its crew reentered Djiboutian airspace uneventfully and requested entry into the pattern at AIA. Due to other traffic, the crew's request was denied and Ratchet 33 was redirected to the southwest for descent.

Despite seemingly coherent communication between the aircrew and Air Traffic Control at AIA, something went awry aboard Ratchet 33; just five nautical miles shy of their destination, the aircraft crashed, killing all four service members instantly. The loss echoed throughout the AFSOC community.

"As a member of AFSOC, the significance is to remember the legacy of the men who have gone before us," Smith said. "It also becomes a reminder that the business of protecting this country is inherently dangerous."

Their backs weighted with ruck sacks, dozens of Airmen completed the six-mile trek to pay homage to their fallen brothers in arms.

"We had a great turnout and incredible support from various units around Cannon which helped the memorial to be a great success," Smith said. "It just shows that in AFSOC we are a big family, and when we lose one of our own it affects the whole community."

# 1st SOS pays tribute to Stray 59

*Story and photo by Tech. Sgt. Kristine Dreyer  
353rd Special Operations Group Public Affairs*

A 1st Special Operations Squadron crew conducted its annual wreath drop Feb. 26 off the coast of the Philippines to pay tribute to the crew of Stray 59.

Stray 59 was the call sign of an MC-130E from the 1st SOS that crashed Feb. 26, 1981, during an exercise, killing eight of the nine crew members and 15 special operators that were passengers. The memorial flight has been flown by the 1st SOS every year since the crash.

“It’s an honor to pay tribute to our fallen Stray Goose comrades and remember their sacrifice,” said Lt. Col. Mike Jackson, 1st SOS commander and aircraft commander for the memorial flight. “By nature in our SOF community, events like this truly resonate. We don’t forget, and we view our heritage as a real resource even as we continually look ahead to improve how we execute our ops. It was a gorgeous day in the Philippines and over the memorial DZ. The mission was flown to Talon II and 1st SOS standards. We’re proud to keep this tradition going.”

In February 1981, crews from the 1st SOS were responsible for the airlift during Special Warfare Exercise ‘81, an annual joint exercise in the Philippines hosted by the U.S. Navy Seals. The squadron established a base of operations at Naval Air Station Cubi Point, Philippines, and crews flew day and night missions involving low-level, psychological operations, and infiltration and exfiltration of forces.

Maj. James M. Kirk commanded STRAY 59 and a crew from the 1st SOS that was responsible for a total of 12 missions during the 16-day exercise. STRAY 59 was scheduled to be his crew’s final mission during the Specwarex ‘81.

The morning of Feb. 26, 1981, the crew’s takeoff time for the mission was slipped from 1:05 a.m. to 4:30 a.m. due to an extended crew day on their mission a day before. STRAY 59, executed a non-tactical departure from Cubi Point at 4:28 a.m. and executed a tactical landing back at Cubi Point at 5:06 a.m. to quickly load 15 personnel participating in the exercise. STRAY 59 executed a tactical departure two minutes later. The crew made their operational normal call six minutes into their low-level flight with a ground radio station. The second,



*From left, Staff Sgt. Michael Wilson and Staff Sgt. Anthony Bliss, both loadmasters from the 1st Special Operations Squadron, prepare to drop the wreath from an MC-130H Combat Talon II off the coast of the Philippines Feb. 26, in memory of those who died in the crash of Stray 59. The flight honors those who were lost 33 years ago when a 1st SOS MC-130E, call sign STRAY 59, crashed during an exercise killing eight crew members and 15 passengers.*

and last, transmission from STRAY 59 was received at 5:21 a.m.; there had been no indication from the crew to indicate a problem with their aircraft.

Minutes later, a local fisherman watched the aircraft impact the water and explode. Eight crewmembers and 15 special operators were killed instantly. One crew member from the 1st SOS, the electronic warfare officer, was thrown from the wreckage and rescued by a local fisherman.

The investigation conducted on STRAY 59 could not pinpoint the exact cause of the accident. The lack of physical evidence following the crash hindered the investigation. Minutes after impacting the ocean the wreckage sank to a depth of 240 feet.

The 1st SOS members lost during the STRAY 59 crash on Feb. 26, 1981 were Maj. James Kirk, aircraft commander, Capt. Norman Martel, pilot, Capt. Thomas Patterson, navigator, Capt. Gregory Peppers, navigator, Tech. Sgt. Stephen Blyler, radio operator, Tech. Sgt. Barry Chumbley, loadmaster, Tech. Sgt. Gary Logan, loadmaster, and Staff Sgt. John Felton, flight engineer.



*Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, Air Force Special Operations Command commander, speaks to the families of medal recipients in a ceremony at the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla. March 14. Fiel thanked the families for the support they have given to members during their many deployments. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria Sneed.*

# Special Tactics Airmen earn Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Action Medal

*By 1st Lt. Jerred Moon  
24th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

Four Special Tactics Airmen from Air Force Special Operations Command were recognized with medals for actions downrange in a ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Fla., March 14.

Tech Sgt. Michael Blout, a combat controller, earned

the Silver Star Medal; Staff Sgt. Stephan Merlics, a tactical air control party member, earned the Bronze Star with Valor; Airman 1st Class Philip Armstrong, a Special Tactics pararescueman, received the Purple Heart Medal and Senior Airman Nathan Wright, a combat controller, earned the Combat Action Medal. All four Airmen are assigned to the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field.

“In AFSOC we are all about deploying,” said AFSOC Commander Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel. “Every day we train to fight and these guys are responsible to protect our families; our sons and daughters. It’s amazing.”

Blout was presented the Silver Star, the nation’s third highest combat military decoration, for gallantry in action against an enemy of the U.S. in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, October 2012.

When he received radio traffic indicating an Army Special Forces teammate required immediate medical attention after sustaining wounds from an enemy ambush, Blout sprinted one mile toward the sound of enemy fire to assist his comrade.

While exchanging direct fire with the enemy, he orchestrated close air support to keep the enemy at bay and coordinated for the arrival of medical evacuation aircraft.

Blout then placed himself between the landing zone and the enemy and urged his teammates forward, screening the landing and enabling the evacuation of friendly forces.

Merlics received the Bronze Star with Valor, the nation’s fourth highest combat military decoration, for heroism in action against an enemy of the U.S. in Afghanistan, from September 2012 to March 2013.

He conducted 48 combat missions with partnered Afghan forces and controlled 263 attack, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft.

His bravery was displayed during a reconnaissance patrol when his team came under direct fire from fortified enemy positions. Disregarding the danger he left cover in order to positively identify enemy positions.

As Merlics was shot at he returned fire on the enemy while simultaneously coordinating medical evacuation assets and directing air strikes onto enemy positions.

Armstrong was presented the Purple Heart, the nation’s oldest military authorization, for wounds received in action, May 2013.

Wright was also presented the Air Force Combat Action Medal for active participation in combat, having been under direct and hostile fire or physically engaging hostile forces with direct lethal fire.

“This is a great opportunity for us to recognize our Special Tactics Airmen and their courageous actions downrange,” said 24th Special Operations Vice Wing Commander Col. Eric Ray. “It is also great to see the family and friends who provide unwavering support for our warriors. It’s these spouses, fathers, mothers, sons,



***Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, Air Force Special Operations Command commander, pins a Silver Star medal on the lapel of Tech. Sgt. Michael Blout at the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla., March 14. Blout distinguished himself by using his own body as a shield for a wounded team member as he called in air support on a deployment in Afghanistan. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria Sneed.***

and daughters and other family members whose continued sacrifices are seldom seen and never recognized, but are critical to our success on the battlefield.”

With six Air Force Crosses, 30 Silver Stars and hundreds of Bronze Stars, the 24th Special Operations Wing is the most decorated Air Force unit since the end of the Vietnam War.



***Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel pins a Bronze Star on Staff Sgt. Stephen Merlics at the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla., March 14. Merlics distinguished himself by coordinating medical evacuation while taking enemy fire on a mission while deployed in Afghanistan. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria Sneed.***

# SOF Wounded Warriors Train at MacDill

*Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence  
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

*U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Christopher Tyndall, combat controller, practice tosses the discus during the Special Operations Command Warrior Games try-outs at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., March 5. The Warrior Games try-outs are to help athletes prepare for each Warrior Games sporting event and build camaraderie amongst all participants.*



The U.S. Special Operations Command's Care Coalition hosted 54 wounded, ill, and injured Special Operations Forces service members on MacDill AFB through the Wounded Warrior Athletic Reconditioning Program (WWARP) for a USSOCOM All-Sports Training Camp March 3 - 7.

The weeklong event consisted of six different sports – shooting, archery, track and field, volleyball, swimming, and cycling, and Warrior Games trials with coaches on hand to provide instruction. The wounded warriors also had the opportunity to challenge USSOCOM's command staff, led by the SOCOM Commander Admiral William H. McRaven, and the University of South Florida varsity women's volleyball team to a few exhibition matches of seated volleyball.

"The purpose of this event is to introduce our wounded, injured, and ill SOF service members to new sports, activities, and equipment that are specially adapted to accommodate their injuries and limitations," said Army Major Tony Gonzalez, USSOCOM adaptive sports program manager.

The WWARP's mission is to assist in both the physical and mental recovery processes and works to improve the overall health and welfare of wounded, ill, or injured Special Operations Forces, through exposure to adaptive team sports and recreation. WWARP supports both active duty and retired members of the Special Operations community.

"Our program affords them the opportunities to get back into their sport(s) of choice and receive world-class training from some of the best coaches in the world," Gonzalez said. "The program seeks to help its athletes adapt and adjust to their injuries and do so in a peer-based environment."

There are some athletes that have been a part of events like this for several years, such as Marine Corps Staff Sgt. John Stances.

"I have been part of the Warrior Games for three years and it's great," said Stances. "The camaraderie is awesome, I love it."

Then there are the athletes just getting into these events for the very first time, and Army Master Sgt. David

Arabinko is a perfect example of this type of athlete.

Arabinko retired after 27 years of service after sustaining his worst injury in 2003 when he was shot through the head with a 7.62mm bullet. This is Arabinko's first year at the Warrior Games and he said he was looking forward to the bike riding and shooting events.

"I came here because I haven't done anything for three years and I want to learn to work out and get back into shape and try to lose some weight, it's like going to basic training and working out for the first time," said Arabinko. "There are some people here that are in really good shape but most of these guys are wheelchair confined or missing limbs, but they are teaching camaraderie, sportsmanship and how to be part of the team."

There are many benefits for the athletes that participate in this event but the hard work doesn't come without some repercussions.

"I have been perpetually sore since I have been here," said Arabinko.

Athletes on hand represented every service, component and Theater Special Operations Command within USSOCOM, and Gonzalez stated they continue to reach out to get more athletes all the time.

One of the other purposes of the WWARP is to introduce new athletes to adaptive sports and to provide returning athletes intermediate-to-advanced training. Ideally, many of the athletes will return home and continue their participation in their own communities.

"Our goal is to not only support our current participants, but to also reach those wounded, injured, or ill service members that erroneously believe that their athletic days are behind them. Our current athletes are proof that anything is possible if you refuse to let your limitations hold you back," said Gonzalez. "Prior to their injuries, our participants were some of the best athletes that the military had to offer."

The athletes that excel in training and express a desire to do so may be selected to the team that will represent USSOCOM at the 2014 Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Sept. 22 - Oct. 4, Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez said that they plan on having the final team decided no later than June.

*Photo essay continues on next page*



*U.S. Special Operations Command held try outs March 3 - 7 to prepare athletes for the upcoming Wounded Warrior Games. The games are a sporting competition hosted by the U.S. Olympic Committee for wounded members of the Armed Forces.*



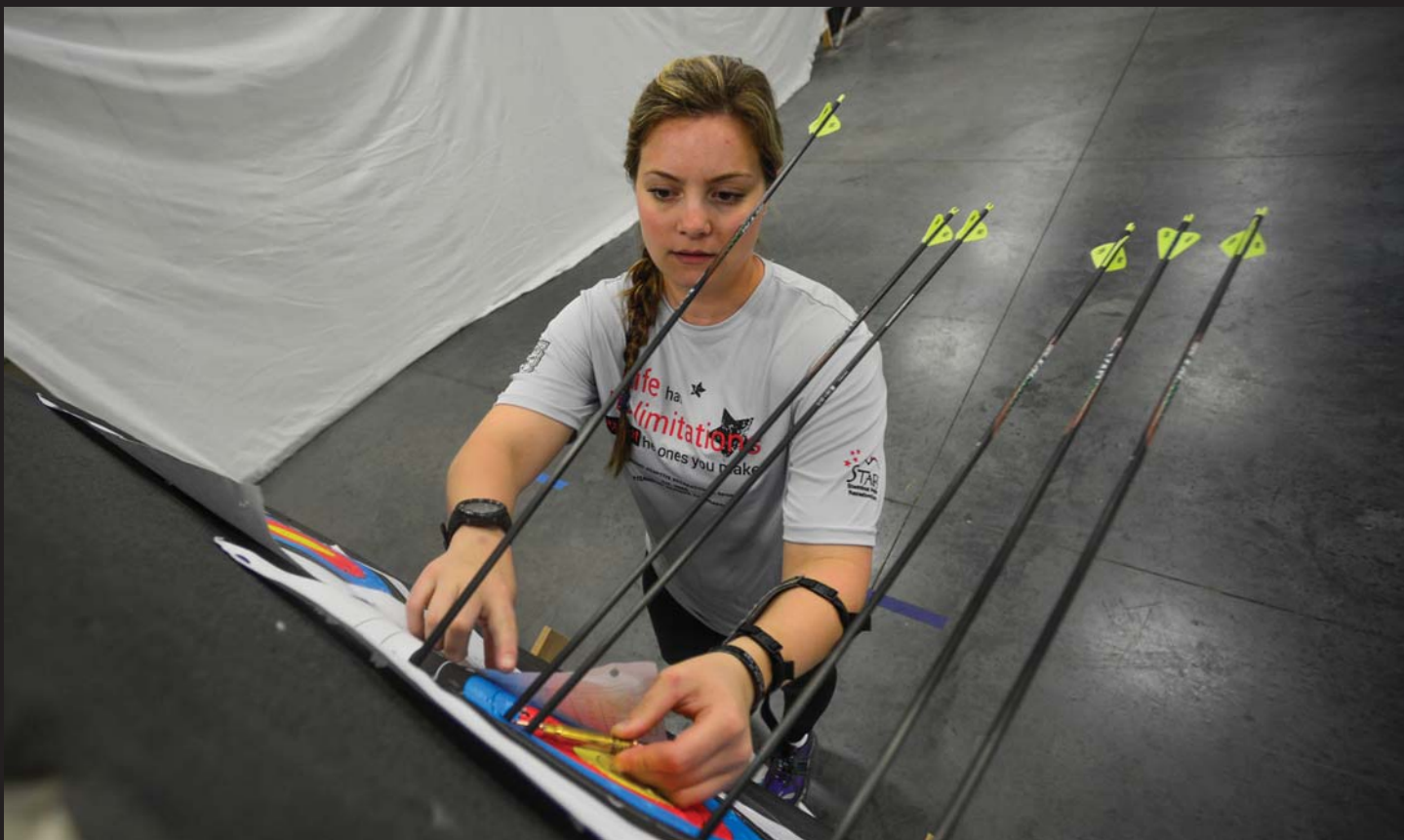
*(Top left) U.S. Army Staff Sgt. (ret) Charles Taylor works out on the ladder machine at MacDill AFB, Fla., March 6.*

*(Bottom left) U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class (ret.) Sualauvi Tuimalealiifamo, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), conditions his body for the recumbent bike March 6. This is Tuimalealiifamo's first year participating in the U.S. Special Operations Command Wounded Warrior Games try outs since his spinal cord injury in July 2007.*

*(Above) U.S. Army Sgt. Roosevelt J. Anderson, attached to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) at Ft. Campbell, Ky., plays golf during the Warrior Games try outs at MacDill AFB, Fla., March 5th.*







**U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Erin McLoughlin, 4th Special Operations Squadron loadmaster, tallies up her score during archery practice at U.S. Special Operations Command warrior games try-outs at MacDill AFB, Fla., March 6.**



**(Above) U.S. Special Operations Command wounded warriors, practice rifle shooting during the wounded warrior try-outs at MacDill AFB, Fla., March 6.**



**(Top right) U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) wounded warriors, warm-up before the exhibition game of seated volleyball with Adm. William McRaven, USSOCOM commander, and his staff at MacDill AFB, Fla., March 4.**



**(Bottom right) U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) wounded warriors, practice archery, during the wounded warrior games try outs at MacDill AFB, Fla., March 6.**

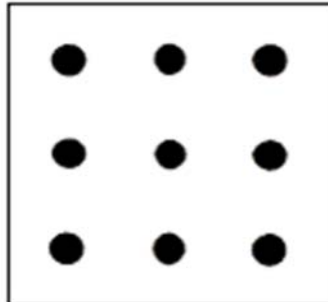


## TALOS: Working outside the box

*By Navy Lt. Stephen Eggan and Chelsea Hamashin  
SORDAC JATF-TALOS*

We often fail to solve challenges because we impose imaginary boundaries, restrictions and constraints on how to achieve the solution.

Take for example the pictured classic brain teaser. The challenge is to draw four or fewer straight lines that go through all nine dots without lifting the pencil.



It seems impossible, but the key is to think outside the box. It is common to approach the problem with the assumption we must draw all the lines within the box. However, the challenge did not include that limitation. Once freed from the restrictions of the imaginary boundaries, the solution is more easily seen. The challenge can be solved with four, three or even one line.

The take-away from this puzzle is it is important to look beyond the existing definition of a problem to solve it and question whether boundaries are real or perceived. Pushing boundaries and causing small changes may create exponential impacts.

The USSOCOM Joint Acquisitions Task Force team tasked to build the Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit, or TALOS, is taking this outside-the-box approach to answer the challenge, which was put forth by USSOCOM's commander, Adm. William McRaven.

McRaven announced TALOS on May 15, 2013, at the annual Special Operations Forces Industry Conference (SOFIC). His vision is to drastically improve the ground operator's survivability in direct action activities that present the greatest personal risk. "With all the advance in modern technology, I know we can do better" to protect our SOF Operators, said McRaven at the 25th Annual AO/LIC Symposium & Exhibition.

The vision of TALOS is to "develop a peerless war-fighting system with superior protection, enhanced human performance, surgical lethality and heightened situational awareness by August 2018," said Michael Fieldson, a USSOCOM program manager. To develop that end-state

product, the JATF-TALOS team conducts extensive market research and has built broad networks with subject matter experts to identify and integrate the state-of-the-art technologies necessary for this purpose built system. The eclectic team consists of uniformed military, engineers and acquisition professionals divided into distinct functional areas:

- Power and Energy
- Mobility and Agility
- Survivability
- Human Factors
- Operator Interface
- Processing and Control
- Offensive Systems
- Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence (C3I)

The exact technologies and capabilities TALOS will integrate are in development, but the vision requires advanced communications and displays, innovative power solutions, revolutionary armor, a powered exoskeleton, thermal management and physiological, cognitive and medical status monitoring devices.

Encouraged by USSOCOM's Acquisition Executive, Jim Geurts, TALOS is also operating as a pilot to pioneer a new, faster, more agile acquisition process.

He saw a need to streamline its acquisitions process in order to realize the end-state product in the required timeframe, which necessitate employing non-traditional



*The TALOS Team has participated in a variety of industry demonstrations focused on soldier protection technology. Courtesy photo.*

methods and tactics.

For example, the TALOS effort operates as an open and “unclassified effort to achieve technology and material solutions with industry, government and academia,” said Fieldson. The team actively pursues unprecedented outreach and collaboration with traditional and non-traditional partners to push technological boundaries.

“Their efforts at engaging industry have created a marketplace for technology that has application not only to TALOS, but other SOF applications as well. This allows us to quickly respond to the needs of our SOF Warriors,” said Geurts.

The JATF-TALOS team’s innovative process will be demonstrated at the 2014 SOFIC in Tampa this May. The team will provide attendees with a unique opportunity to contribute to the TALOS vision. TALOS will have an onsite build challenge that will encourage cross-collaborative teams to come together to design and build TALOS concepts. The teams will have tools at their disposal including clay, mannequins, power tools, 3D printers and 3D modeling and simulation capabilities to facilitate idea generation. As an incentive to participate, the teams with the most innovative ideas will be recognized and rewarded throughout the Conference. Rewards will range from coins to an invitation to the June 2014 first-generation prototype exoskeleton roll out event. The JATF-TALOS team will continue to harvest innovative ideas through these non-traditional means and provide opportunities for any technology developers to join the TALOS network.

The JATF-TALOS team will also kick-off a Rapid Prototyping event that will run through June. Subject matter experts from industry, academia and government with expertise in each TALOS functional area will visit USSOCOM to design, sketch and conceptualize a blueprint for the TALOS end-state product.

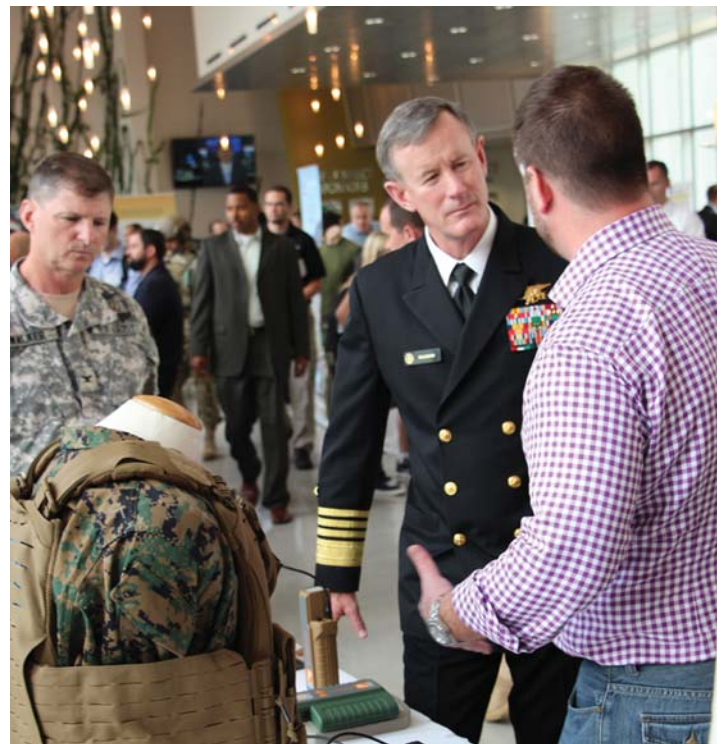
The JATF-TALOS Team will launch prize challenges, a popular mechanism among industry for innovative technology development methods, to reach a broad spectrum of non-traditional solution providers and accelerate innovative problem-solving. Prize challenges differ from traditional contracted efforts. The open participation format contrasts with the traditional request for proposal process and facilitates broader industry participation.

The prize challenges will accelerate the transition from designs to working prototypes. Contest participants may build from designs provided by the JATF-TALOS team, modify these designs or even fabricate entirely new designs.

Judging panels, safety protocols and performance tests will determine which prototypes best satisfy TALOS capability objectives and earn the designers monetary awards. The expanded number of skilled competitors expedites delivery of the world's most advanced assault suit to SOF.

In less than one year, the outside-the-box methods of TALOS have already led to astounding progress. In June, the TALOS team will roll out three first-generation prototype exoskeletons that will serve as the foundation for follow-on functional technologies. The roll-out event will highlight the prototypes and kick-off of integration leading to a fully functional, ballistically sound, First Article Prototype Combat Suit in 2018.

The development of TALOS is a priority, not only to produce a platform that will maintain a global advantage against near-peer competitors and threats to national interests, but also for the innumerable spinoffs hoped to benefit homeland security, police, firefighters, first responders and health care (especially wounded warriors). The team will continue to work outside the traditional box and push the boundaries to find innovative solutions to the meet the challenge on target, on time.



**Adm. William H. McRaven, commander USSOCOM, talks with an industry representative about body armor at a University of South Florida planning session in November 2013. Courtesy photo.**

# SOCOM jumpers train with an MV-22

Static-line paratroopers from U.S. Special Operations Command, Special Operations Command Central and the Joint Communications Support Element, all from MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., standby as they wait for the MV-22 Osprey to land at the Hernando County Airport March 26. This was a rare opportunity for those maintaining their parachute qualifications to jump from an Osprey, which is from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 264, Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C. The training consisted of static line jumps from 1,500 feet and free-fall from 13,000 feet.

Photo essay by Marine Corps Master Sgt. F.B. Zimmerman





*Top left: Italian Army Capt. Alberto Spinelli served as the jumpmaster during the static-line and free-fall training. Because of this, all jumpers that day received Italian jump wings.*

*Top right: Standing left is Army Master Sgt. Benjamin Evans and standing right is Army Lt. Col. Brad Reed as they ready the first stick of static-line jumpers as the MV-22 Osprey approaches the drop zone over the Hernando County Airport.*

*Middle Right: The last static-line jumper of the day exits the MV-22 Osprey as the parachutes of previous jumpers deploy.*

*Bottom Right: The MV-22 Osprey from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 264 drops static-line jumpers over the drop zone at the Hernando County Airport.*

*Bottom Left: From left to right Army Maj. Travis Mills, Army Sgt. Brian Tubbs and Spc. Joseph Flynn walk back to the staging area at the Hernando County Airport after safely floating to the ground after their 1,500 foot static-line jump from the MV-22 Osprey.*





# Ted Lunger and the creation of US Special Operations Command

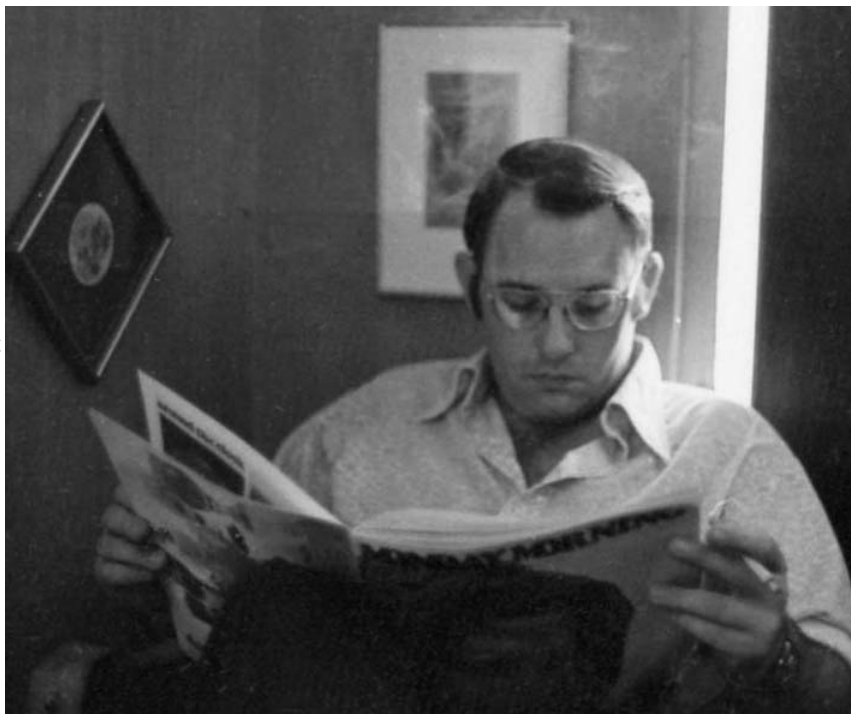
*“If he’s not the true father of USSOCOM, he is surely the midwife”*

**By Richard Green**  
*USSOCOM History & Research Office*

Daniel Hall, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) headquarters building, is named in honor of Rep. W.C. “Dan” Daniel, who was the leading proponent of legislation that created the command. The key staff member whom Daniel relied on for this effort was Richard T. “Ted” Lunger, about whom Lt. Gen. Donald Wurster, former commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, said, “Without Ted Lunger, there would be no USSOCOM.” Lunger was a former Special Forces officer with several deployments to Vietnam who later joined the Central Intelligence Agency and served as a foreign intelligence desk officer in Lebanon. He left the CIA in 1975 for family reasons and joined the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee (HASC), where he was responsible for land warfare authorizations and legislative oversight in the aftermath of the Vietnam conflict. In this capacity he was able to stymie an effort by the services to decommission or move Special Operations capabilities to the reserve components. Lunger left public service in 1977 and went to work for Chrysler, where he helped the company win the contract for the M1 tank.

Lunger was invited back as a HASC staff member in 1980 to organize a new Subcommittee on Readiness, where he oversaw authorization of one-third of the Pentagon budget. Daniel, the committee chairman from 1981-1988, relied on Lunger for issues related to Special Operations and rescue because of his background and understanding of special and clandestine operations. It was here that Lunger played a crucial role in the future of Special Operations Forces.

Following the failed attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran in 1980, Congress had taken a keen



**Richard T. “Ted” Lunger was a key figure in the creation of USSOCOM.**  
*Courtesy photo.*

interest in SOF and mandated modernization programs. SOF at this time relied on their parent services for funding and equipment. The services, however, had their own priorities, and there were instances where they disregarded congressional mandates and diverted funds for SOF modernization to their own priorities, including the Army’s effort to divert funds from SOF communications and the Air Force’s failure to purchase additional MC-130s.

Special Operations personnel tried to get the Pentagon to support SOF and override the services, without success. Frustrated, they turned to Congress for help and in doing so became known as the “SOF Liberation Front.” One of those individuals, Maj. Gary Weikel from the Air Staff, had heard that Lunger was an aggressive staffer, so he went to him with details on the Air Force’s failure to support SOF aviation. With this

information, Lunger leveraged congressional pressure through Rep. Daniel and Rep. Earl Hutto, another strong supporter in Congress. Together, they threatened funding for Air Force programs if it didn't support Special Operations. This process was repeated often as Lunger learned of programs not being supported and used congressional pressure to force the services to follow the law. Lunger and Daniel came to realize that SOF would always be susceptible to the budgetary whims of the services; a permanent solution required a budget process outside the normal joint staff channels.

Lunger, with the help of Weikel and also Lynn Rylander from Office of Secretary of Defense, ghost wrote articles discussing different solutions and published them in *Armed Forces Journal* and other magazines. These articles tested ideas but also created controversy. For example, they advocated SOF be formed into a sixth service, which was published under Daniel's name. Later, an article arguing against SOF as a sixth service was published under the names of others.

The men concluded that SOF needed its own command structure with its own budget and acquisition. The question then was what type of organization would work. They examined the structures of the Office of Special Services and British Security Coordinate from WWII and the contemporary CIA to find a suitable model. CIA Director William Casey was brought in on some of those discussions. In the end a proposal was crafted for an entity called the National Special Operations Agency (NSOA) with a civilian director and a military deputy. The NSOA would have the Special Operations Forces assigned to it and have its own budget and acquisition to ensure SOF was properly equipped and resourced. They also planned for Special Operations officers to be assigned to the unified combatant commands so the warfighter had Special Operations expertise on the staff. The NSOA proposal, H.R.5109, was passed by the House in June 1986 as part of the groundbreaking 1987 Defense Authorization Bill.

Lunger had earlier approached Sen. William Cohen's office to solicit Senate interest in developing legislation to modernize and revitalize Special Operations. The Senate staff members worked with the SOF Liberation Front and found the same problems Lunger had dealt with. The Senate, however, had been writing the Goldwater-Nichols legislation to restructure the military and strengthen the unified commands, and

the House plan for a civilian-led Special Operations agency ran counter to this. The Senate therefore developed a proposal for a unified combatant command under a four-star general officer or admiral to lead Special Operations.

The two bills went to reconciliation, and after much discussion Lunger relented to the Senate's call for a unified command instead of an agency, provided the unified command had its own budget and acquisition authority that the House believed was crucial. This was agreed to, and the compromise became the Nunn-Cohen Amendment, which was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on Nov. 14, 1986 as part of the fiscal year 1987 Defense Appropriations Act.

Following the passage of the legislation, Lunger continued his efforts on behalf of USSOCOM. He pressed the Pentagon to staff the new command with Special Operations professionals and worked to ensure the proper forces, units, equipment, and resources were cross-walked into it. Much of this was an uphill fight for Lunger, based on the Pentagon's seeming "anchor-dragging" approach to the establishment of USSOCOM, described by those both inside and outside the process as "malicious implementation." In the end, however, the tenacity of Lunger and his congressional allies prevailed and forced the Pentagon to activate and properly support USSOCOM, appoint an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, and give the commander of USSOCOM a budget.

In 1987, Lunger left the HASC and joined Rep. Daniel's staff as the senior staff member working with the Committee on Intelligence and the Armed Services Committee Special Operations Panel. Not long afterward, he returned to the private sector. Ted Lunger passed away in December 2013, ending a lifetime of service to his nation and to special operations.

*\* Col. Gary Weikel (USAF Ret) was the key member of the SOF Liberation Front who worked closely with Lunger throughout this period.*



**Ted Lunger. Courtesy photo**

*The sun begins to set as Soldiers from Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 228th Medical Aviation Command from Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras; participated in aviation medical evacuation training as part of Exercise Fused Response 2014 in Belize City, Belize, March 7. The U.S. Southern Command-sponsored exercise was executed by Special Operations Command South. Photo by Army Sgt. Scott D. Longstreet.*

