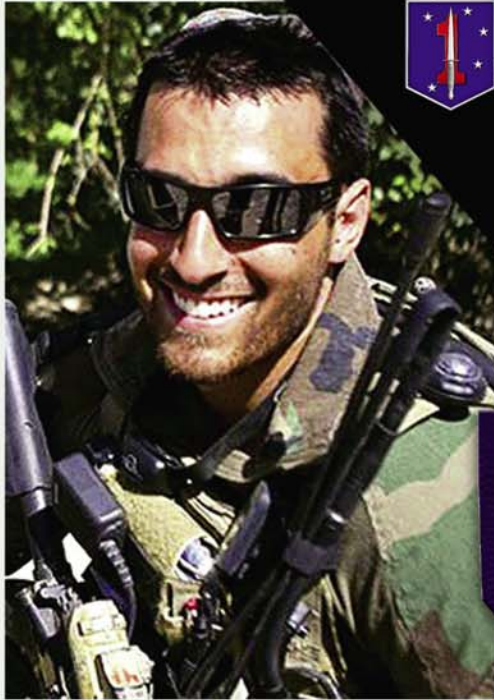
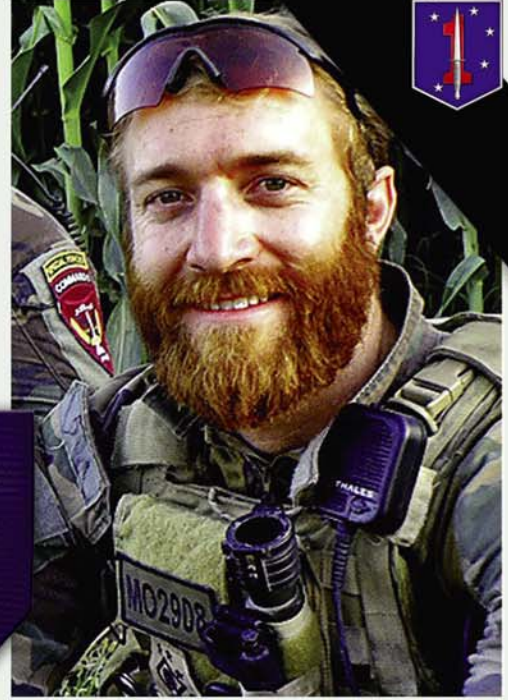




TIP OF THE SPEAR



Capt. Matthew Manoukian



Staff Sgt. Sky Mote



**1st MSOB Marines receive
posthumous Navy Cross**



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



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Tip of the Spear



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(Cover) Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Sky Mote and Capt. Matthew Manoukian, whose families were awarded the Navy Cross, posthumously, for their heroic and selfless actions during a ceremony held at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Jan. 18.

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Four American Soldiers earn Colombian title of ‘Lancero’

*Story and photo by
Army Sgt. 1st Class Alex Licea
SOCSOUTH Public Affairs*

Special Forces, SEAL, Ranger, and Paratrooper are all titles and terms that tend to garner respect and admiration from U.S. military personnel and civilians alike because of the physical and mental strength it takes to earn them.

In the country of Colombia and throughout much of Central and South America, the title of “Lancero” is viewed with the same admiration because it takes a certain amount of dedication to become one.

On a hot and humid afternoon at the Escuela de Lanceros, or Lancero School, a gold and red badge with the title “Lancero” was presented to four U.S. Soldiers during a ceremony at the Colombian military’s National Training Center in Tolemaida, Colombia, Dec. 3.

Capt. Richard Franko, Sgt. 1st Class Aledaine Lugo Garcia, Staff Sgt. Jose Centeno and Staff Sgt. Michael Hayden stood proud during the symbolic graduation ceremony as they were officially made part of a unique and multi-cultural brotherhood, the band of Lanceros.

Despite the pageantries, flare and colorfulness of the ceremony, the event was the culmination of 73 days of intense physically arduous and mentally grueling training described as intense and downright brutal by the U.S. Army’s newest Lanceros.

“I would say this was one of the toughest courses, if not the toughest course I will ever be a part of,” said Centeno, who is assigned to 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), based at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. “We were put through sleepless days and nights, lack of food and intense physical training every day.”

Rightly so, the Lancero course has earned the reputation of being one of the hardest military courses around the world.

The Lancero program was established in 1955, and its core system was founded after members of the Colombian National Army went through U.S. Army Ranger school at Fort Benning, Ga., and used what they learned to form



Brig. Gen. Sean P. Mulholland, the commander of Special Operations Command South and Lancero graduate, congratulates Staff Sgt. Jose Centeno, Sgt. 1st Class Aledaine Lugo Garcia, Capt. Richard Franko, and Staff Sgt. Michael Hayden for earning the title of Lancero before their graduation ceremony at the Escuela de Lanceros located at the Colombian military’s National Training Center in Tolemaida, Dec. 3. The school is designed to develop its students into experts in small-unit tactics and irregular warfare.

their own special operations school in Colombia.

The Escuela de Lanceros is designed to develop its students into experts in small-unit tactics and irregular warfare. The school helps prepare the Colombian military’s best warriors to combat hostile organizations such as the insurgency of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as the FARC, who the Colombian government has been in armed conflict with since 1964, although the Colombian government has engaged in peace talks with the FARC over the past year in order to seek an end to the conflict.

The two and a half month course is broken up into several phases and students learn several skills such as irregular and urban warfare in both mountain and jungle terrain; water survival; air assault procedures; Survival, Escape, Resist, Evade training, commonly referred to as SERE; and basic medical and human rights training.

The course is as much physical as it is culture-based,

and the four U.S. troops gained a better understanding of the Colombian culture and forged a bond with their Colombian and international counterparts.

Like Centeno, Franko and Hayden are assigned to 2nd Bn., 7th SFG(A) at Eglin. For them, earning the title of Lancero gives them instant respect with their regional partners. As members of 7th Group, these “Green Berets” specialize in working and building military capacity and lasting partnerships throughout U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility, which spans from the Caribbean and across Central and South America.

“The language barrier was a bit challenging in the beginning but as the course went on, I really applied all of my training to get me through the course,” said Hayden, a native of Phoenix, Ariz. “Despite the physical demands of the course, the best part was the friends made. There is a special bond that is formed with guys from different nations because we are all going through the same hardships of the course.”

Along with the four U.S. Soldiers, international military members from Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and for the first time, Paraguay, attended the course. No matter what flag is on their uniform, everyone in the course has something interesting and unique to share with their fellow Lanceros.

For most of the new Lanceros, they described the mountain and jungle warfare portion of the course as the most challenging. From long hikes, various road marches ranging from 10-30 kilometers and various other physical and mental draining events, the training took its toll.

“I can tell you that the jungle phase of this course was very hard,” said Lugo Garcia, a New York City native. “Rucking in the jungle was definitely the most difficult part of the course because the terrain is rough, the weather is hot and humid as we carried 70 pounds of gear walking up and down mountains and through the jungle.”

Franko, a native of North Judson, Ind., added that this school was just as tough and at times harder than the U.S. Army Ranger School.

With training like this, it’s no surprise each Soldier lost an average of 30-40 pounds during their time in the Lancero course. For Lugo Garcia, a graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School, assigned as an operations non-commissioned officer at the National Training Center based in Fort Irvin, Calif., the course was unlike anything he had done in the past.

He also said that he is proud and grateful for the

opportunity to attend this course, which is rare for anyone outside of the Special Operations community.

“This experience was certainly something I will never forget, and I am very proud I was given this opportunity since I am not assigned in Special Operations,” he said. “I hope more Soldiers in the “regular” Army get a chance to attend this course.”

Colombian Maj. Gen. Juan Pablo Rodriguez Barragan, the commander of the Colombian National Army, presided over the graduation ceremony and spoke to the graduates about the significance of being a Lancero.

“Lanceros hold a very special place in our nation,” he said. “Being a Lancero is something that is recognized around the world and nations send their best Soldiers and leaders to this course. I salute you for earning this accomplishment and you are forever a part of our family.”

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Sean P. Mulholland, the commander of Special Operations Command South, based at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla., was the senior U.S. official at the ceremony.

As a Theater Special Operations component under the guidance of the U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Southern Command, SOCSOUTH is responsible for all U.S. special operations training and personnel in the Caribbean, Central and South America.

During the official presentation of the Lancero badges, Mulholland and other senior Colombian military officials were invited by Rodriguez Barragan to “pin” and congratulate each Lancero.

Mulholland, a Lancero himself and former instructor at the school, presented each of the American Lanceros with the badge and congratulated them for the well-earned achievement.

In true Lancero fashion, the ceremony ended with all the graduating students doing push-ups before marching off the parade field.

Centeno, a Cuban-American from Kissimmee, Fla., placed second overall in his graduating class, and said the physical hardships of the past 73 days and lack of sleep and food was worth it because he truly has a new-found respect for his fellow American Soldiers and his international brothers-in-arms.

“As members of 7th Group and always working in this region, it gives us credibility with our Colombian partners,” he said. “Being a Lancero is a way of life and I can’t be prouder of this achievement.”



US, El Salvadoran forces conduct joint training

A crew chief and jumpmaster watch as U.S. Special Forces and El Salvadoran military members maneuver under canopy after jumping from the ramp of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter at an altitude of 1,250 feet during a joint airborne operations training exercise over Lake Ilopango, El Salvador, Jan. 21.

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

U.S. and El Salvadoran service members conducted joint airborne operations training, jumping from a CH-47 Chinook helicopter into a lake from an altitude of 1,250 feet, Jan. 21.

Joint Task Force-Bravo's 1-228th Aviation Regiment provided aerial support for the exercise, flying each chalk of jumpers from the Ilopango International Airport, El Salvador, to the drop zone over Lake Ilopango.

U.S. Special Forces from the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) conducted the training exercise alongside members of the El Salvadoran military. The joint-training, overwater static jump allowed members from both nations to maintain currency while strengthening the relationship between the U.S.

and El Salvadoran forces.

"It was a great opportunity for the U.S. and El Salvadoran forces to conduct training together," said a U.S. Special Forces member. "An operation like this helps to build confidence and also strengthens the trust and confidence that exists between the military forces of our two nations."

The exercise also demonstrated the capability of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

"An overwater jump demonstrates another means of infiltration from an airborne platform, which enhances our capability to conduct missions throughout the area of responsibility," said a U.S. Special Forces member.

In all, more than 15 U.S. Special Forces members and 40 members of the El Salvadoran military safely parachuted into the water.

U.S. Special Forces and El Salvadoran military members maneuver under canopy over Lake Ilopango, El Salvador, Jan. 21.






An U.S. Army cultural support team member with Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan scans the terrain while sitting in the back of a Humvee in Sarobi district, Kabul province, Afghanistan, Dec. 6, 2013. CSTs were traveling to multiple villages in order to speak with local women and children about issues within their community and to address their medical needs.

Cultural support team meets with Afghan Women in Kabul province



(Left) An Afghan doctor checks a patient's tonsils at a medical clinic in Sarobi district, Kabul province, Afghanistan, Dec. 7, 2013. The Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan medics visited the clinic as part of a medical outreach program. (Below) Local Afghan women and children gather around female U.S. Army soldiers in Sarobi district, Kabul province, Afghanistan, Dec. 6, 2013. Female soldiers met with the local populace in order to address general concerns in their villages.



A close-up portrait of a young Afghan girl. She is wearing a vibrant red headscarf with a decorative white and gold border. Her eyes are dark and expressive, and she has a gentle smile. She is wearing a dark blue turtleneck sweater under a red garment with intricate floral embroidery. Her hands are clasped near her chin. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

An Afghan child poses for a photo in Sarobi district, Kabul province, Afghanistan, Dec. 6, 2013.



Afghan commandos, aviators perfect battlefield helicopter capabilities



*Story and photo by Chief Petty Officer Bill Mesta
CJSOTF – Afghanistan*

Afghan National Army commandos from 8th Special Operations Kandak conducted a tactical training exercise with Afghan National Security Forces helicopter aircrews in Pul-E-Alam district, Logar province, Jan. 30.

The training was designed to sharpen skills needed while using Afghan helicopters, to and from the battlefield.

“This was the first time we have ever [trained] with these ANSF aircrews,” said an 8th SOK platoon leader.

The commandos conducted the training in two phases. In the first phase, they practiced entering and exiting procedures using stationary helicopters. Additionally, they practiced moving into positions to defend the aircraft during enemy attacks.

During the second phase, commandos boarded the helicopters, flew out to a remote location, and performed

Afghan National Army commandos from the 8th Special Operations Kandak perform a tactical boarding onto an Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) helicopter during a training evolution at the 8th SOK headquarters in Pul-E-Alam district, Logar province, Jan. 30.



tactical exiting procedures in a simulated battlefield environment.

The senior 8th SOK officer, who led the training, said he was pleased with the performance of the 8th SOK members.

The officer added that he would be meeting with ANSF aviation leadership to discuss future training missions and to share ideas on ways to improve the training exercises.

“It is important that the commandos push themselves to be better every day,” he said. “We have been fighting

alongside coalition forces for 13 years. It is critical that we keep improving our skills so we can continue to defeat the enemies of Afghanistan.”

The capability and effectiveness of the ANASF has progressed to the point that they now conduct most of their operations independently, improving security. By taking the responsibility for a secure Afghanistan into their own hands, ANASF continue to make progress and retain hard-won gains.



352nd Special Operations Group Combat Shadow's last training mission



An MC-130P Combat Shadow from the 67th Special Operations Squadron refuels a CV-22 Osprey from the 7th Special Operations Squadron Jan. 24. The flight was the Combat Shadow's last training mission while assigned to the 352nd Special Operations Group. U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Marshall B. Webb, U.S. Special Operations Command Europe commander, piloted the Osprey during his visit to the 352nd Special Operations Group. Photo by Senior Airman Kate Maurer.



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Green Berets from the 4th Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) stand during the valor award ceremony on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Jan. 16.

7th SFG (A) holds valor ceremony

By Army Staff Sgt. Ramon M. Marrero
7th SFG (A) Public Affairs

More than 350 Soldiers, families and friends gathered at the Liberty Chapel on the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) compound on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., to attend the 4th Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) valor award ceremony on January 16.

“I am truly humbled to be able to present these awards to these true American Heroes,” said Brig. Gen. Darsie D. Rogers, commanding general, United States Army Special Forces Command (Airborne) and the guest of honor for the ceremony.

4th Battalion recognized and awarded medals to 15 Green Berets for their valorous actions in 2013 during the Battalion’s deployment to Afghanistan.

“Today we have gathered together to honor the valor of a select few amongst us who, in that brief instant where tremendous courage was required, responded both immediately and brilliantly,” said Col. Robert M. Kirila, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) deputy commander.

Medals ranging from Silver Stars to Purple Hearts were awarded during the ceremony to the Green Berets whose actions stood out during their deployment.

Sgt. 1st Class Cesar E. Mojica was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action in Afghanistan on Sept. 12,

2013, performing duties as the ground force commander and advisor to a company of Commandos from the 3rd Special Operations Kandak. Mojica placed himself directly in the line of fire against superior enemy forces in order to allow friendly forces the freedom of movement. His actions allowed his team and the commandos the time and space to gain and maintain fire superiority over the enemy.

Staff Sgt. Eamon K. Anderson was awarded the Soldiers Medal for distinguishing himself by risking his own life to save the life of another U.S. service member. Anderson entered a barracks building that had been struck by an enemy rocket and was still collapsing, to find, dig from the rubble and render lifesaving air to a critically injured fellow service member.

The 4th Battalion also awarded Bronze Star Medals for Valor to four Green Berets for heroic actions during the deployment.

“All of these men placed not only the mission, but their fellow man before themselves,” said Rogers.

Six Green Berets were awarded the Purple Heart for injuries sustained during the deployment and Army Commendation Medals with “V” device were also awarded to 6 Green Berets during the ceremony.

“Men, your actions reflect great credit upon your families who raised you, your leaders and mentors who prepared you, and your teammates who inspired you or are inspired to be like you,” said Kirila.

Seven Civil Affairs Soldiers honored

By Jerry Green
95th Civil Affairs Brigade

While conducting a civil reconnaissance patrol the afternoon of Nov. 1, 2012, Civil Affairs Team 611 started on what was a routine mission, but in a matter of a few minutes, the mission turned into anything but routine. The patrol came under small arms and automatic weapons fire in an ambush east of the village of Sardar Kala, Afghanistan.

The trail man in the element was critically wounded when a bullet from the initial ambush struck him in the back and he went down. Seeing this, Staff Sgt. Michael P. Pate, the medical sergeant on the team, realized the necessity to immediately neutralize the enemy threat and render aid to his wounded teammate.

Disregarding his own safety, Pate ran more than 50 meters back toward the enemy fighting positions to provide aid. Pate and his team leader, Capt. Jacob A. Allen, ran through the heavy enemy fire, and dragged the wounded warrior more than 25 meters to the only cover available in the form of a six-inch retaining berm, and continued to return fire on the enemy position.

For his actions, Pate was awarded the Silver Star by Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, commanding general, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, at a valorous awards ceremony at the John F. Kennedy Memorial Auditorium, on Fort Bragg, N.C., Jan. 23.

“I was struck by the phrase used to describe CAT 611’s mission. The phrase was, while on a routine civil reconnaissance patrol,” Cleveland said. “It certainly didn’t turn out routine, it instead proved the point that our Army Special Operations Soldiers and leaders are assessed, selected and trained to perform as this team did on patrol.”

Pate was one of seven Soldiers from A Company, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), recognized for valorous actions spanning over four battles against the enemy while deployed to Afghanistan in 2012.

Allen received the Bronze Star Medal with “V” Device for his actions during the fire fight on Nov. 1, 2012.

Sgt. 1st Class Kevin L. Hargrove and Sgt. 1st Class Kevin W. Oakes received the Army Commendation Medal with “V” device for their actions during the same mission with Pate and Allen.

Staff Sgt. Philp A. Aubrey was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions during a combat reconnaissance patrol on Nov.

5, 2012. While under enemy fire, Aubrey preformed triage to a critically wounded casualty until safely aboard a medevac helicopter.

First Sgt. Jamie T. Mullinax received the Army Commendation medal with “V” device for his actions on Sept. 27, 2012. Mullinax displayed impressive courage and relentless tactical tenacity while responding to a highly organized enemy automatic weapons, rocket, and mortar base attack from seven elevated fighting positions.

Sgt. 1st Class Donovan S. Johnson received the Army Commendation Medal with “V” device for his actions on April 26, 2012. After entering an objective and experiencing relentless fire, Johnson selflessly exposed himself to the enemy at least a half dozen times, as rounds passed overhead and impacted the walls around him while providing protection to the patrol’s tactical communicator and ground force commander.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Cleveland commented that what is routine for our special operators is perhaps extraordinary for others.

“The country will call on Civil Affairs and the other ARSOF brothers and sisters,” said Cleveland. “The actions we honor today declare to everyone that you are equal to the challenge. Don’t look back, seize the future and make it yours. Be proud of who you are, what you do and who you do it with, for you are without equal.”



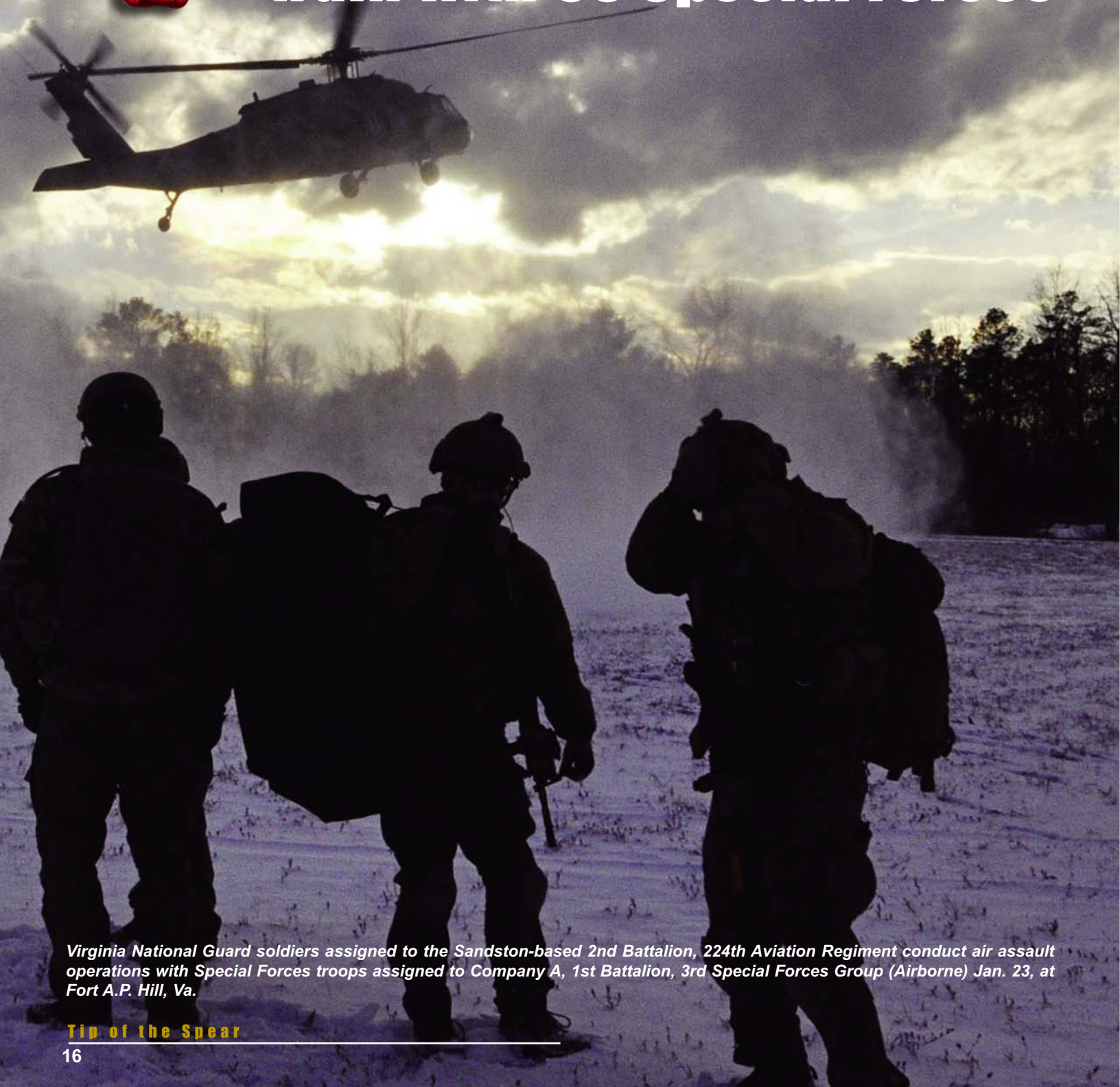
At the valorous awards ceremony in the JFK Memorial Auditorium, Jan. 23, seven Soldiers from Company A, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), were awarded medals for their actions during a 2012 deployment to Afghanistan supporting Operation Enduring Freedom. Left to right - Sgt. 1st Class Donovan S. Johnson, First Sgt. Jamie T. Mullinax, Capt. Jacob A. Allen, Sgt. 1st Class Kevin L. Hargrove, Sgt. 1st Class Kevin W. Oakes, Staff Sgt. Philip A. Aubrey, and Staff Sgt. Michael P. Pate. Photo by Army Sgt. Dan Carter.

AIRBORNE

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Virginia Guard aviators train with US Special Forces



Virginia National Guard soldiers assigned to the Sandston-based 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment conduct air assault operations with Special Forces troops assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) Jan. 23, at Fort A.P. Hill, Va.

Tip of the Spear

***Story and photos by Army Staff Sgt. Terra Gatti
Virginia National Guard Public Affairs Office***

With snow on the ground and temperatures holding just barely into the double digits, four Virginia National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, along with their crews and support personnel, trained with soldiers from the Fort Bragg-based Company A, 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) Jan. 22-28, 2014, at Fort A.P. Hill, Va.

The Virginia Guard Soldiers came from the Sandston-based 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, and the Chesterfield-based Detachment 2, Company G, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment, and were on hand to provide aviation support to the training conducted by the Special Forces troops preparing for an upcoming deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“We were excited to get aviation assets because they’re sometimes very hard to get,” said Maj. A. Christian Sessoms, commander of the Special Forces troops from Company A. “I can’t say enough how easy it’s been to make coordination and facilitate our training with the aviators.”

More than 30 Virginia Guard Soldiers made the trek to Fort A.P. Hill working not only as crew on the Black Hawk helicopters, but also providing support to keep those helicopters flying. Soldiers from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, set up and operated a forward arming and refueling point, or FARP, at Fort A.P. Hill to aid in the efficient and tactical refueling of aircraft. Additional soldiers from the 224th also provided maintenance support for the aircraft as well as flight and mission tracking.

“There’s a lot more the SF or any unit can do with aviation assets,” said Sgt. Andrew David Noble, a crew chief with Co. B, 2-224th. “Also, this gives us a more working knowledge of what’s going to happen in country if we deploy.”

The aviators worked with the Special Forces troops to conduct several air assault movements as well as hoist training and also worked through a downed-aircraft scenario, creating a realistic training environment for the elite troops from the 3rd SFG (A).

“What they’re able to help us with is that real world piece,” explained Sessoms. “Actually and physically being able to load the aircraft, do the hoist training, all these things that we might have to do to complete a real world mission or to save one of our guy’s lives, being able to do that here in a controlled environment before going into

theater is the difference between bringing everyone home and maybe not bringing everyone home. So it makes our guys that much more proficient for the mission aspect, and it makes us that much safer.”

The partnership began when the Special Forces unit contacted Fort A.P. Hill in advance of its training to inquire about aviation assets. Fort A.P. Hill connected it with a representative from the 224th and the two units began working together to develop a plan that effectively met the goals of both units.

“The lessons learned from a training event such as this prove to be invaluable, not only for the crews flying the helicopter, but also for the personnel tracking the flights as the aircraft performs missions, to those soldiers refueling the aircraft,” said 1st Lt. Andrew Mcmillion, commander of Co. A, 2-224th.

During the joint training event, Virginia Guard helicopter crews spent more than 50 hours flying, and transported approximately 180 passengers.

“The assets that we provide for these elite units who are deploying helps us to continue to be the premier, read, relevant and responsive force,” said Mcmillion.



Soldiers conduct air assault operations Jan. 23, at Fort A.P. Hill, Va. The use of Virginia Guard aviation assets added realism to the training conducted by the Special Forces Soldiers, who are preparing for an upcoming overseas deployment.



NC Guard Green Berets run airborne and maritime operations in Key West

*Story and photo by Sgt. 1st Class Graig Norton
382nd Public Affairs Detachment*

North Carolina National Guard Soldiers conducted airborne and maritime operations training at the southern tip of Key West, Fla., Dec. 6-7, 2013.

Conducting a water jump isn't an operation the units execute often, but it is a skill set they must practice and rehearse, said Army Lt. Col. John Pelleriti, who commands the company's higher

headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Operations of this manner do give Special Forces units a great opportunity to maintain their currency.

Soldiers had to go outside of their comfort zones after the water jumps were completed. Each Operational Detachment-Alpha, or 12-man team, mounted on a low-profile inflatable boat, or Zodiac, after changing out of their saturated body-hugging uniforms, performing maintenance on water-soaked parachutes and downing combat-camouflaged



floatation devices. These teams paddled their ways into the inlet waterway, while being tossed back and forth by the ocean's waves. After finding a location away from the other ODAs, the team members plummeted into the ocean and capsized the Zodiac. Using two or three-man teams, each ODA practiced flipping the crafts back over after they were capsized.

"This training enables us, Company B, to maintain our currency," said Army Maj. Rick Trimble, Company B's commander.

This currency, which is the soldier's readiness to execute successful operations, was achieved by the successful airborne operation, maritime operation, interoperability with the support company and other elements of their battalion, and interoperability and

operations with the North Carolina Air National Guard.

"The assistance by the North Carolina Air Guard was incredibly important," Trimble said. "The cooperation and support from the 145th Air Wing was simply fantastic by their willingness to travel to Fort Pickett, Va., to pick us up, and our ability to talk back and forth with them."

The Green Berets participating in the weekend's airborne and maritime training belong to one of the N.C. Guard's two Special Forces companies. Trimble's company has been a part of the NCNG for several years, and in 2012, Company B, 1st Battalion, 20th SFG (A), became the state's second Special Forces headquarters, established in Albemarle, N.C.



Green Berets assigned to B Company, 3rd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), land in the Atlantic Ocean after completing a static-line airborne jump from a C-130H Hercules aircraft in Key West, Fla., Dec. 7, 2013.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

Seal Team-Four grants a special warfare wish

*By Petty Officer 2nd Class Desiree D. Green
Naval Special Warfare Group 2 Public Affairs*

Naval Special Warfare Group TWO honored one child's wish of becoming a U.S. Navy SEAL for a day on Dec. 16.

Nicholas Portugal, a 13-year-old leukemia patient from Long Island, N.Y., realized his dream of camouflage uniforms, high-speed boats, surf passage and the echo of automatic weapons as he spent two days enjoying the SEAL experience.

"My middle son Nicholas was diagnosed with leukemia a year ago," said Carol Portugal. "His dream ever since he was a little boy was to play with Soldiers. When he got sick, he would go to the hospital dressed in the Army uniform that he's had since he was eight to face the chemotherapy world as a Soldier."

Carol explained that when Nicholas was a child, he always had an appreciation for what our Soldiers, Sailors and Marines do for our nation and his dream has always been to one day serve alongside them, especially as a U.S. Navy SEAL.

"Most kids want to go to Disneyland, not my Nick," said Carol. "His one and only dream was to meet the SEALs."

A U.S. airlines employee and one of the Something mAagic Foundations board of directors John Fenech teamed with Air Compassion for Veterans to make this dream a reality for Nicholas.

"The charity found out about Nicholas wanting to meet SEALs through the June Factory of Brooklyn," said Fenech. "I have a few connections in the military so I made a few phone calls and next thing you know, here we are."

In addition, Air Compassion for Veterans paid for the Portugals' flight to Virginia.

"They paid over \$3,000 for these tickets and were at the airport when we arrived just to meet him," said Fenech.

"This truly is a wish come true and a full effort from a lot of people," said Carol. "We met John Fenech



An East Coast based U.S. Navy SEAL gives weapons training to 13 year-old Nicholas Portugal and his family during a visit Dec 16, 2013, to Naval Special Warfare Group Two on Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Va. NSW and ST-4 teamed with two charity organizations to bring Nicholas, who suffers from leukemia, and his family to Virginia to fulfill his wish of meeting the U.S. Navy SEALs. Photo by Chief Petty Officer Casey Dillow.

through Nicolas' facebook page and he knew someone, who knew someone that could make his dream happen today."

Carol, her eldest son Michael, Nicholas, and youngest daughter Stephanie, enjoyed the opportunity to tour NSW on Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story with East-Coast based SEAL team FOUR (ST-4) servicemembers who provided a tour of the compound which included the NSW small land-based obstacle course, armory, range, paraloft, and the pool.

"My husband has to work three jobs just to pay for the medication and my other children have been alone," said Carol. "It's amazing that they were able to come and experience this with their brother and ST-4 has

welcomed them with open arms.”

Nicholas and his family enjoyed two days getting to know SEAL team members while experiencing the thrill of watching them in action, trying on gear, and viewing static displays. “I was the weapons part of the visit,” said Gunner’s Mate 2nd Class Shane May attached to Logistics Support Unit Two weapons department.

“I had the pleasure of showing him all the weapons, night vision and thermal equipment including the lasers.”

“I was the senior man for the close quarters combat demonstration,” said a ST-4 special warfare operator Chief and platoon leader. “We performed two different mission scenarios, one being hostage rescue and also the capture-kill of a high value target for Nicholas.”

He expressed why Nicholas’ story touched him personally.

“After losing my father to cancer at a very young age, I couldn’t help but share the Portugals’ pain,” he said. “Nicholas’ mother Carol asked us all to pray for her son and all I can do in addition to that is pass the word and ask anyone who reads this article to do the same.”

He added that he saw how captivated Nicholas was with the SEAL teams and how much he wanted to be one someday and it made him realize just how much impact our community has on kids today.”

The trip proved to be beneficial not only for the Portugal family, but the team as well.

“It important that we at NSW honor these requests because it helps us see how much everyone appreciates what we do,” said May. “It felt good to help someone make their dream come true for a day.”

In the days prior to Nicholas coming for the tour, the family was informed that his cancer was now in remission.

“He’s in remission but it’s a three-year process,” said Carol. “I believe that being here is nothing short of a miracle.”

Nicholas was told by his doctor that he would need a significant increase in blood count testing in order to fly. Within three days, he more than tripled them to make the trip.

“I don’t know how it happened,” said Carol. “It was just meant to happen. We are very happy, just knowing that he was coming here has given him hope and courage to get through this.”

In remarks made to Nicholas during the end of the tour, ST-4 Commanding Officer Cmdr. Brendan Leary

said, “I heard that during your treatment, you would hear the words ‘Navy SEAL’ and it gave you the strength to get through. I’m not kidding you, it’s going to be the exact opposite for us. You give us strength, we are blessed to have met you, and you are truly an inspiration.”

The entire Portugal family was presented with a certificate of appreciation and Nicholas was given a SEAL ethos plaque and an official ST-4 coin as a keepsake as well.

“It takes more than the team to do what we do,” said Leary. “There is a whole support structure around the team to get our mission done and it’s the same for Nicholas. As he goes through his treatment there are sacrifices that he must endure that pull at our heart strings and we would like to acknowledge and thank the family for showing us what it truly means to stand up behind someone, support them and be a team.”

Before departing NSW, Nicholas addressed the members of ST-4 with these words.

“I can’t thank you enough for giving me and my family this opportunity,” he said. “I will never forget this day and I won’t give up fighting.”



East Coast based U.S. Navy SEAL divers demonstrate their capabilities for 13 year-old Nicholas Portugal and his family Dec. 16, 2013, during a visit to Naval Special Warfare Group Two on Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Va. Photo by Chief Petty Officer Casey Dillow.



A simple tool

It's a simple tool, a compass. Its origins date back thousands of years, when it was first made of stone. It has evolved and been refined by many cultures, but the principle and purpose of the compass is the same: navigation. And this unembellished tool has a prominent place in the final stages of training for students hoping to join the Naval Special Warfare community as a special warfare combatant-craft crewman.

MIND YOUR HEADING



SB2 ANDREW SALONEN
SWCC CLASS 02

**By Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique Canales
NSW Public Affairs**

What is now called the SWCC compass ceremony can be traced to 2005, when the special boat community became its own rate of special boat operators and the SWCC Creed and Code were written.

Senior enlisted personnel in the community were invited to Stennis, Miss., to write the creed, but felt that something more was needed to make a lasting impact on newly-minted SBs.

“We felt like there was a need to find and present something that had a legacy effect,” said Pat Battles, deputy operations officer at Support Activity 1. Battles graduated in SWCC class 23 and was one of the senior enlisted men involved in the conception of the ceremony.

The choice to present a compass, rather than a KA-BAR knife as the Navy SEALs do, was meant to function not only as a representation of a SWCC tool but also as a symbol of how an SB should try to live his life.

“[The] compass is obviously a primary navigation tool for mariners,” said Battles. “The other part of it is that this is symbolic of your moral compass. It is not just a physical compass to point a quadrennial direction; it is also a symbol of how you act and what you do.”

The ceremony is also an introduction to the SWCC community. The students have made it through the physically grueling training and are welcomed by their instructors and seniors to the small community of special boat operators.

“Ultimately it’s a kind of rite of passage,” said Senior Chief Special Boat Operator Matt Pierce, crewman qualification training leading chief petty officer. “We want the new boat guys coming in to understand where we are going and where we have been in order to let them know that we are all one big team. To me it means they have been vetted by everybody. They have met the mark and now they are on the team with all the benefits and privileges of being a boat guy, but with the accountability and responsibility associated with that as well. So no more excuses. You are on the path now.”

The historical aspect of the ceremony is conducted in two parts. Similar to the SEAL KA-BAR knives, which are engraved with names of fallen teammates, each compass has the name of a Vietnam-era Sailor who served in early boat units. But the ceremony itself is held at the Vietnam Unit Memorial on Coronado, a memorial specifically made for those who served on boats.

“It’s a good tie to our heritage,” said Sam Brown, SWCC deputy operations officer and retired SWCC master chief. “That’s a great place to do that for the kids

to look at the boats, see the wall and all the people on the wall, and it’s tragic what happened, how many people lost their lives during the Vietnam War. It recognizes that they are going into a community that very well could cost them their lives.”

On graduation morning, students gather with their instructors in front of the memorial. Boats used on the rivers of Vietnam, restored and dressed in patriotic banners surround the students as they form into ranks. Veterans who care for the memorial watch from the benches or boats as the ceremony begins. The air is filled with a feeling of anticipation, triumph and reverence.

At each ceremony, a respected SWCC community member is invited to be the guest speaker. His words encourage and reiterate the community’s past, the creed and symbolism behind the small compass the men are receiving.

“You will soon be handed a compass. One that has navigated many Sailors safely to and from battle on unforgiving seas. Engraved on your compass is a name; the name of a teammate who has paid the ultimate sacrifice. This will tie you to our rich heritage. Uphold this man’s honor. Earn it! The compass you receive today is symbolic of your moral compass and the four cardinal points on your compass can be related to the SWCC Creed which is scribed inside its cover:

North: I am a Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman; a quiet professional, tried, tested, and dedicated to achieving excellence in maritime special operations. I am a disciplined, confident, and highly motivated warrior. South: My honor and integrity are beyond reproach, my commitment unquestioned, and my word trusted. The American people depend on me to carry out my mission in a professional manner. East: I maintain my craft, equipment, and myself at the highest level of combat readiness. I set the standard and lead by example. I am responsible for my actions and accountable to my teammates. I challenge my brothers to perform as I expect them to challenge me. West: I am ready for war. I will close and engage the enemy with the full combat power of my craft. My actions will be decisive yet measured. I will always complete the mission. I will never quit and will leave no one behind. Use this compass often to ensure you maintain a sound moral heading. Steer a good course and success will come to you all.”

The students’ names are then called and they are presented with their compasses by their future commanding officers. The names of the fallen are engraved on the front and the SWCC Creed is inscribed inside the box that holds the compass to serve as a reminder and instrument to help navigate their futures.



Special Tactics Airmen awarded top combat decorations

*By Rachel Caldwell
Special correspondent to
24th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

Already the U.S. Air Force's most decorated community since the end of the Vietnam War, Air Force Special Tactics added to its total over the weekend.

Three Air Force Special Operations Command Airmen received Silver Star and Purple Heart medals in a ceremony at Pope Field, N.C., Jan. 10.

"You will say you were just doing your job, but you were not just doing your job. You knew the dangers, and you did not back down," said Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, AFSOC commander and presiding official for the ceremony at Pope Field.

Combat controllers Master Sgt. Delorean Sheridan and Staff Sgt. Christopher Baradat received the Silver Star, the U.S. military's third-highest decoration for gallantry in combat, for their efforts in Afghanistan last year.

Technical Sgt. Jeremy Whiddon, a special tactics tactical air control party member, received the Purple Heart for injuries sustained in combat also in Afghanistan. Sheridan, Baradat and Whiddon are assigned to the 21st Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Field, N.C.

"Getting the Silver Star is a humbling experience, but I was just doing my job," Baradat said. "Everyone did what they had to do that day to make the mission successful."

Fiel presented the decorations in front of an auditorium full of the honorees' family and friends, fellow Special Tactics Airmen, members from Army Special Forces, and representatives for North Carolina's congressional delegation.

"Your strength and tenacity epitomizes what being a warrior and a Special Tactics Airman is all about," said



Master Sgt. Delorean M. Sheridan smiles at his daughter Kinsley, while Staff Sgt. Christopher G. Baradat and Tech. Sgt. Jeremy C. Whiddon look on during a 21st Special Tactics Squadron awards ceremony, presided over by Lt. Gen. Eric E. Fiel, Air Force Special Operations Command commander, who awarded Silver Star medals to Sheridan and Baradat and a Purple Heart medal to Whiddon on Jan. 10, at Pope Army Airfield, Fort Bragg, N.C. Photo by Marvin Krause.

Fiel.

All three Airmen attributed their ability to act decisively in critical moments on the battlefield to the extensive physical and physiological training they undergo. Training enabled Sheridan to act largely from muscle memory, he said.

"The training kicks in and there is a reason why it is as rigorous as it is because, at these times, you have to be able to step up and react," he said.

In March 2013, Sheridan was preparing for a mission with his Army Special Forces team when an Afghan National Police Officer working with the team opened fire from a machine gun at 25 feet. The teammates to Sheridan's immediate left and right were hit.

Puffs of smoke blew up around him. When he

realized what was happening, his first instinct was to grab his team leader and get him out, he said.

As he turned to react, Sheridan saw his team leader shot in the head at close range.

At the same time, a group of about 20 insurgents fired on the team from a position outside of the base in what was a coordinated attack.

To Sheridan the insider attack was like “having someone sneak into your house in the middle of the night.” It provoked an instantaneous reaction.

He ran toward the shooter, jumped into the turret of an armored vehicle and shot him twice with his pistol and nine times with an M4 rifle.

One by one, he dragged his team leader, team sergeant and the infantry squad leader to an area where they could be extracted by medevac.

Sheridan, 33, called in six medevac flights and helped transfer his wounded teammates to litters while controlling aircraft overhead.

He helped save the lives of 23 critically wounded personnel on what was his sixth deployment.

Baradat, of San Rafael, Calif., was working as part of an Army Special Forces team in April 2013 when tasked to retrieve a group of pinned-down coalition forces.

His job was to control the air assets supporting the team on the mission. When they came under fire, Baradat directed the 30mm guns of the A-10s overhead on the enemy prior to taking cover with his teammates.

When he realized he could not control the aircraft effectively from his covered position, he moved from safety to the center of the compound where he was sprayed with dirt from consistent machine gun fire.

Standing in the thick of the firefight did not phase Baradat, though his teammates were urging him to take cover.

“That was where I needed to be standing to communicate with the aircraft and to get the mission done,” he said.

Baradat, 24, continued to direct the A-10 and AC-130 aircraft even as his team left the area with the coalition members by jumping on the running board of his vehicle, again exposing himself to fire.

As a result of his actions, 150 coalition members were saved and more than 50 enemies killed on what was his third deployment.

On receiving their decorations, both Sheridan and Baradat thanked the Army members of their deployed teams for attending the ceremony.

“We lost two-thirds of our team [on the mission] so about half of the guys who were there today were

wounded in the firefight,” Sheridan said.

Lt. Col. Jason Self, commander of the 21st Special Tactics Squadron, said his Airmen contributed to the proud heritage of the squadron.

“The 21st Special Tactics Squadron has a

legacy of valor and heroism,” Self said. “Both Sheridan and Baradat contributed to this continued legacy of the unit in their phenomenal performance of protecting the lives of our servicemen.”

Sheridan and Baradat’s Silver Stars are the 27th and 28th for the Special Tactics community since the end of the Vietnam War. Conflicts that include Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, Operation Just Cause in Panama, the 1993 Battle of the Black Sea in Somalia - later made into a Hollywood motion picture titled “Black Hawk Down,” and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. During that span, six members of the community have also been awarded the Air Force Cross, second highest decoration to only the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism in combat.

As the small ribbons that speak volumes were pinned to the chests of the three Airmen, Fiel referred to their acts of extraordinary heroism as an example to all.

“This calls us to look into ourselves and be prepared for our own moments of courage and bravery.”

(Editor’s Note: Three Special Tactics Airmen with the Kentucky Air National Guard were awarded the Bronze Star with Valor and Distinguished Flying Cross medals in a separate ceremony at Staniford Field, KY, Jan. 12. 123rd Special Tactics Squadron Kentucky guardsmen Tech. Sgt. Jeff Kinlaw and Tech. Sgt. Robert Bonello received the Bronze Star with Valor while Capt. Nate Tingle received the Distinguished Flying Cross all for actions executed in Afghanistan as part of an expeditionary force.)

He ran toward the shooter, jumped into the turret of an armored vehicle and shot him twice with his pistol and nine times with an M4 rifle.

— action of Master Sgt. Delorean M. Sheridan



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Senior Airman Rebecca Stinson, 711th Special Operations Squadron loadmaster, Jordan Roby, 1st Special Operations Contracting Squadron contract specialist, and Capt. Joshua Stinson, 34th Special Operations Squadron U-28A instructor pilot, pose for a photo at Hurlburt Field, Fla., Dec. 18, 2013. The three family members serve within Air Force Special Operations Command as respective enlisted, civilian and commissioned Air Commandos. Photo by Senior Airman Krystal Garrett.

One family - three Air Commandos

*By Air Force Staff Sgt. Joe McFadden
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

Many Air Commandos within Air Force Special Operations Command pride themselves as belonging to a close-knit family built on pride for their country, devotion to duty and trust in each member's unique talents.

But for the Stinson family, the sense of pride of serving within AFSOC and upholding a family tradition runs deep across three distinct careers.

Capt. Joshua Stinson; 34th Special Operations Squadron U-28A instructor pilot, Jordan Roby, 1st Special Operations Contracting Squadron contract specialist; and Senior Airman Rebecca Stinson, 711th Special Operations

Squadron loadmaster, all serve within AFSOC as respective commissioned, civilian and enlisted Air Commandos.

While their current occupations share diverse responsibilities, they each said a shared sense of serving a cause greater than themselves brought them into the Air Force.

"I'm proud of my siblings for choosing to serve their country," Captain Stinson said.

The Stinson family's military service goes back several generations.

"This allegiance to a like cause runs deep and firm within my family," Roby said. "My family has a long history of service; my grandfathers both served, and subsequently some of their children and grandchildren

have picked a similar life path.”

While their family tree’s branches previously supported military service, the current generation of Stinson’s call to service rooted from a national tragedy.

“9/11 occurred during my senior year of high school,” Capt. Stinson said. “During class, the teacher’s aide turned on the news. That was the moment I knew I wanted to join the military.”

After high school, Capt. Stinson entered the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

And, in due time, his commitment filtered through the rest of his family.

“Josh started a chain reaction within us children,” Roby said. “We were all so proud of the accomplishment Josh achieved with his graduation and were certain his success would continue.”

Senior Airman Stinson moved from Jacksonville, Fla., to Fort Walton Beach, Fla., to study at Northwest Florida State College.

“I watched my brother, Joshua, and saw how motivated and dedicated the Air Force made him,” she said. “My brother has always been a second father-figure to me.”

With her interest piqued, Senior Airman Stinson researched aviation career fields. She enlisted in February 2010 as a loadmaster.

“I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself, but I didn’t know what or how to do that,” she said. “I never thought of myself as someone who could make it into the military, but now I see how much I have grown and thrived from being a part of the Air Force. I had to test myself physically and mentally, but it has been an amazing and fulfilling experience.”

Similar to Senior Airman Stinson’s situation, Roby said her interest in federal service began after Capt. Stinson sent her a Student Career Experience Program advertisement, and she applied.

“Contracting appeared to be a huge support component of the military,” she said. “Everyone wants to be a part of a greater cause, and I saw this as my chance to be just that.”

Regardless of what uniform they wear, Roby said the genesis of their service goes back to Capt. Stinson’s initial

decision to step forward during the nation’s hour of need.

“Josh set a standard of dedication to the armed forces for all of us younger siblings to follow,” Roby said. “I wanted to enable the same mission my family members support.”

Just as his siblings credit him with leading the way, Capt. Stinson first arrived at Hurlburt Field in the summer of 2008. Roby followed in September 2010, and Senior Airman Stinson arrived shortly afterward at Duke Field, Fla.

“I am so proud of the accomplishments my family has made thus far. My hope is that our contributions will have a positive ripple effect outside of our family, and into the lives of others. Each of us represents more than just ourselves -- we represent our siblings, our parents, extended families, friends and a great nation.”

— Jordan Roby

Although they serve in different squadrons and bases, the sibling’s contributions to the AFSOC mission are connected.

Contracting specialists order materials and equipment to supply missions. Then, the loadmasters prepare the equipment and supplies and deliver them to aircraft. Finally, pilots deliver those supplies all over the world.

Their actions, like every Airman’s, provide support to countless other Airmen and families.

As for being part of the Air Commando family, each sibling highlighted a willingness to put the needs of others before their own.

“Being an Air Commando means being a member of a dedicated family with a proud history,” Roby said. “Each member is willing to make sacrifices for the common thread that holds the family together without compromising the qualities required of each member, and never surrendering.”

Senior Airman Stinson said she intends to finish college so she may become a pilot like her brother.

But no matter where their careers and missions may take them, the Stinson family said they remain united in their dedication to protect their country.

“I am so proud of the accomplishments my family has made thus far,” Roby said. “My hope is that our contributions will have a positive ripple effect outside of our family, and into the lives of others. Each of us represents more than just ourselves -- we represent our siblings, our parents, extended families, friends, and a great nation.”



Wounded Explosive Ordnance Device Airman receives new home

*By Air Force Staff Sgt. Erica Horner
AFSOC Public Affairs*

The morning alarm wakes him. He gets dressed, brushes his teeth and gets his 2-year-old son ready for the day.

He does this with no legs, and only one arm.

On Sept. 27, 2011, Master Sgt. Joseph Deslauriers, then an explosive ordnance device technician, made his way through Afghanistan in a Humvee, a route he traveled many times.

“We were doing route clearance when we encountered several improvised explosive devices,” said Deslauriers, who was on his fourth combat deployment. “One vehicle got hit and then another vehicle got hit, and there were just guys everywhere trying to help each other out. Finally someone just said ‘Stop.’”

That’s when Deslauriers said he decided to step out of his vehicle.

“We started doing our investigation, making sure we could move the vehicles around just by using mine detectors,” Deslauriers said. “Once I was satisfied, I grabbed my equipment bag and walked the same path that I had walked three or four times before, and then bam -- that’s when I stepped on it.”

In that instant, Deslauriers said his life was changed forever. He returned home as a triple amputee.

Deslauriers spent two years in and out of the hospital undergoing surgeries, participating in intense physical therapy, and learning how to live his life with only one arm.

“It takes a long time to get to this point,” said Deslauriers, who now works at the Air Force Special Operations Command Headquarters as the Explosive Ordnance Disposal program manager. “As an EOD tech, we plan for the ultimate sacrifice but not for this. My wife and I had a funeral for my legs and we just cried and went through that grieving period.”

Despite all these challenges, Deslauriers has remained positive and determined.

“I’m able to get around with the help of assisted



Master Sgt. Joseph Deslauriers, Air Force Special Operations Command explosive ordnance disposal program manager, will receive a home from the Building Homes for Heroes foundation. Photo courtesy of Building Homes for Heroes.

devices such as my power chair and my van with a ramp,” Deslauriers said. “My wife, Lisa, has run errands and left me with my son, Cameron, and I can do it. It’s tough and he does test me on my capabilities, but I can do it.”

Now he’ll have even more assistance; the Building Homes for Heroes Foundation broke ground Nov. 18 on a new home for him and his family, complete with a work-out area, a therapy pool and enough space for him to move around freely.

“This is going to lift a huge weight off my shoulders, especially since I may be medically retiring in the future,” said Deslauriers, who currently lives in a small apartment. “In my apartment, I wreck into things and I scratch up a lot of things. I can’t wait to just have a place to call my own.”

The Building Homes for Heroes organization is a non-profit that was founded in 2006 by Andy Pujoh.

“The Deslauriers are such a wonderful and beautiful family,” said Pujoh, whose organization has donated 2,006 homes and has more than 3,500 volunteers. “Their hearts are filled with warmth, they’re so humble and so appreciative. They have already shared that they want to pay it forward. For him, the courage and character he has is inspiring to everyone.”



Members of the 16th Special Operations Squadron pose following the final AC-130H Spectre gunship mission conducted at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., Jan. 16. The C-130 began its operational service with the Air Force in 1956 and AC-130 development began in the early 1960s. Photo by Airman 1st Class Charles Slack.

16th SOS moving forward

*By Senior Airman Xavier Lockley
27th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

The 16th Special Operations Squadron stationed at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., conducted its final mission for the AC-130H Spectre gunship Jan. 16 at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M.

The C-130 began its operational service with the Air Force in 1956. AC-130 development began in the early 1960s. In the Vietnam War the gunships were credited with many life-saving close air support missions. To some, it is a privilege to have flown the Spectre gunship.

“It’s an honor to consider all the Spectre pilots who have come before,” said Capt. John Thompson, 16th SOS assistant operations officer. “You are filled with the truest sense of pride to fly in the last days of an aircraft; this has been a great honor.”

Though the impending retirement of the AC-130H marks the end of an era, the future of the C-130 is bright.

“As we close the books of the C-130H aircraft, we remember how phenomenal this plane was for more than

40 years,” said Lt. Col. James Mott, 16th SOS commander. “Now we transition onto newer models of the C-130 and begin to write new chapters of Air Force history.”

As Air Force Special Operations Command evolves, remembering the past will be vital.

“The best thing we can do for the future AC-130J community is to push forward with tactical principles that the past has taught us,” said Thompson. “From all standpoints we can learn something from previous experiences; be it from a flying, maintenance or operations point of view, the past can be your best teacher.”

In order to get all eight planes up at the same time, the 16 SOS had to put teamwork on display. Pilots, maintainers, loadmasters and other support members had to be in sync for all eight planes to fly.

“Being able to get all eight of the AC-130H aircraft up is remarkably unique and required everyone to play a vital role,” said Mott. “The 16th SOS worked extremely hard to get this mission accomplished and this is truly a testament to the men and women of this squadron. I’m very proud of them; they did a wonderful job.”



Maj. Gen. Mark A. Clark, commanding general of Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, addresses the families of Staff Sgt. Sky Mote and Capt. Matthew Manoukian, and all Marines present, during a Navy Cross presentation ceremony, held at the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion headquarters Camp Pendleton, Calif., Jan. 18. Mote and Manoukian were awarded the Navy Cross, posthumously, for their heroic and selfless actions during Operation Enduring Freedom. Photo by Marine Corps Capt. Barry Morris.

Two families receive Navy Cross for their sons' heroic actions

*By Gunnery Sgt. Robert Storm
MARSOC Public Affairs*

Staff Sergeant Sky Mote and Capt. Matthew Manoukian were posthumously awarded the Navy Cross, the highest decoration bestowed by the Department of the Navy and second highest decoration for valor, during an award ceremony at 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion headquarters, Camp Pendleton, Calif., Jan. 18.

“Staff Sergeant Mote could have exited the structure to safety. He instead grabbed his M4 rifle and entered the operations room, courageously exposing himself to a hail of gunfire,” cited the award.

Manoukian’s award cited, “Located in the

far corner for the room, Capt. Manoukian drew his pistol and, in the face of near certain death, engaged the attacker while commanding his Marines to maneuver to safety.”

Maj. Gen. Mark A. Clark, commanding general of Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, presented the Navy Cross to Mote’s and Manoukian’s families after speaking of them during the ceremony.

“The bravery of Matt ... and Sky was a continuation of the brave choices they made in the beginning, to choose a harder road fraught with peril, in order to have a chance at victory,” Clark said.

Both Mote, of El Dorado, Calif., and Manoukian, from Los Altos Hills, Calif., were



assigned to Marine Special Operations Team 8133, Marine Special Operations Company C, 1st Marines Special Operations Battalion, Marine Special Operations Regiment, U.S Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom when they came under intense enemy fire from a rogue Afghan local policeman attacking from inside the perimeter of their tactical operations center.

Mote and Manoukian became the third and fourth Marines in MARSOC's seven-year history to receive this prestigious award as a result of their extraordinary heroic actions taken during OEF.

"The Manoukian family is deeply honored and humbled to accept the Navy Cross on behalf of our dearly beloved son and brother, Capt. Matthew Patrick Manoukian. Our Matthew's courage and dedication inspires us on a daily basis to help others, to cherish our freedom, and to try to make a positive difference in the world," said Socrates Manoukian and Patricia Bamattre-Manoukian, Capt. Manoukian's father and mother.

Mote, in his final act of bravery, boldly engaged the gunman, now less than five meters in front of him, until falling mortally wounded. Mote's heroic actions and selfless actions enabled his fellow Marines to get to safety and survive the attack.

During the same attack, Manoukian, the team leader, was working in the operations center when the initial attack commenced with AK-47 fire ripping through plywood walls and partitions of the operations room. Manoukian courageously drew heavy fire upon himself, disrupting the enemy pursuit of his comrades and providing them the security needed to get to safety. Manoukian continued to engage the enemy until he fell mortally wounded.

"The actions of Sky and Matt are the essence of what drives us daily in this command. These two men truly

believed in their mission, their unit, this country and

ultimately each other. I have the honor to watch every Marine and Sailor of this battalion operate with the same passion and hunger daily because they too believe in the mission and one another," said Lt. Col. John Lynch, commanding officer, 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion. "We will always be inspired by the actions of our fallen brothers and we will strive to operate at a level that honors them; it is just who we are."

The Navy Cross is given for great gallantry and valor.

"Staff Sgt. Mote's and Capt. Manoukian's actions were truly and extraordinarily heroic, and I'm proud that their actions are honored here today," concluded Clark.

"The actions of Sky and Matt are the essence of what drives us daily in this command. These two men truly believed in their mission, their unit, this country and ultimately each other. I have the honor to watch every Marine and Sailor of this battalion operate with the same passion and hunger daily because they too believe in the mission and one another. We will always be inspired by the actions of our fallen brothers and we will strive to operate at a level that honors them; it is just who we are. "

— Lt. Col. John Lynch



Maj. Gen. Mark A. Clark, commanding general of Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, presents the Navy Cross Medal to Socrates Manoukian and Patricia Bamattre-Manoukian, for their son's heroic and selfless actions. Photo by Marine Corps Capt. Barry Morris.



Headquarters holds sports day

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

U.S. Special Operations Command held a sports day on Feb. 13. Events included a Crossfit challenge, racquetball, volleyball, basketball, frisbee football, bowling, golf and senior leadership participating in a Sumo wrestling contest. Special Operations Research, Development, and Acquisition Center (SORDAC) took the team and most participation award.





Photo by Mike Bottoms



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Angelita Lawrence



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Angelita Lawrence



Photo by Mike Bottoms



Photo by Air Force Master Sgt Larry W. Carpenter Jr.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Angelita Lawrence



Photo by Mike Bottoms



Air Force Master Sgt. Christian "Mack" MacKenzie, from U.S. Special Operations Command's Care Coalition, tosses beads to attendees of the annual Seminole Hard Rock Gasparilla Pirate Fest Parade of Pirates in Tampa, Fla., Jan. 25. MacKenzie was selected to serve as the Grand Marshal of the parade. Courtesy photo.

Care Coalition highlighted at 2014 Tampa Bay Gasparilla parade

*By Marine Corps Master Sgt. F.B. Zimmerman
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

The Care Coalition of U.S. Special Operations Command that tends to the needs of wounded, ill and injured servicemembers and their families was recently highlighted during an annual parade that celebrates the

pirate way of life in Tampa.

Air Force Master Sgt. Christian "Mack" MacKenzie was chosen to represent USSOCOM's Care Coalition and serve as the Grand Marshal of the Seminole Hard Rock Gasparilla Pirate Fest Parade of Pirates Jan. 25.

MacKenzie most recently served as a hospital liaison officer with the Care Coalition and superintendent of its

community outreach department, but is currently in the Transition Internship Program as he is being evaluated by a medical board. He was injured in Fallujah, Iraq, in 2004 when a rocket-propelled grenade struck the MH-53 helicopter he helped crew, causing facial trauma, shrapnel wounds to his upper body, the loss of his left eye and hearing damage.

While MacKenzie's prior missions were flying Special Operations missions, his goal during the parade was to throw out as many strands of plastic, colored beads to the spectators lining the three-mile route.

"This is a lot of work ... my arm's getting tired," MacKenzie said during the parade.

His arm wasn't just worn out from tossing all the beads, but also he had waves of costumed "pirates" coming up to the convertible he was riding in, shaking his hand and thanking him for his service. "You're welcome" and "thank you" were always MacKenzie's response.

"The people of Tampa truly appreciate what we're out there doing," MacKenzie said. "It's something we can be proud of ... it reaffirms that we are out there doing the right thing."

During the week leading up to the parade, MacKenzie visited numerous media outlets who were interested in the Grand Marshal's story. He was impressed with how the word spread and people at the parade recognized him.

"One thing that really surprised me was how many people saw the stories and knew who I was and were calling out to me by my name," he said. "I'd hear, 'hey, Mack' or 'master sergeant' — they knew who I was and what I stand for. I also saw veterans in the crowd stand up and salute."

When the sponsor of the parade reached out to the Care Coalition to notify them they were selected as Grand Marshal, Lt. Cmdr. Brian Hower, chief of Community Outreach with the Care Coalition, said he knew MacKenzie would be a great fit.

"He is a good figurehead, loves to talk, and has a great story," Hower said. "He loves to spread the message, so he was the perfect selection for this. He's a selfless guy ... always about the mission. Mission first."

When MacKenzie first heard he was selected to be the Grand Marshal, he said he was honored to be chosen. But out of all the organizations possible to fill the role, he was moved with the selection of the Care Coalition.

"There were so many choices, and the fact they chose the military, chose us, is truly indicative of the support the local community provides to the military," MacKenzie said.



Air Force Master Sgt. Christian "Mack" MacKenzie, from U.S. Special Operations Command's Care Coalition, is interviewed by a local reporter before the start of the annual Seminole Hard Rock Gasparilla Pirate Fest Parade of Pirates in Tampa, Fla., Jan. 25. Photo by Marine Corps Master Sgt. F.B. Zimmerman.



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - HEADQUARTERS



Robert Howard carries a wounded prisoner of war during the Vietnam War. Howard was a member of Military Assistance Command Vietnam - Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG) and was nominated for the Medal of Honor three times, eventually receiving the medal from President Richard Nixon in 1971. Howard was wounded 14 times during the Vietnam War and would retire as a Colonel. Courtesy photo.

MACV-SOG January 1964–April 1972

Actions of Covert Unit Recognized in Presidential Unit Citation

*By Laura LeBeau
USSOCOM History & Research Office*

Fifty years ago, in mid-January 1964, newly inaugurated President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized the operational plan to execute former President John F. Kennedy's earlier wishes for a more effective program of covert action against North Vietnam. As a result, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) headquarters created its "Studies and Observation Group," known as SOG or MACV-SOG,

on Jan. 24, 1964, as part of Kennedy's plan for the military to absorb the CIA's covert programs against North.

For eight years, this joint-service unit, comprised of personnel from all branches of the service, but primarily Army Special Forces, along with indigenous forces, operated deep behind enemy lines in North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, executing top secret missions including sabotage, calling in B-52 bomber strikes, search and rescue of downed pilots in the jungle, destruction and recovery of sensitive

equipment, and disruption of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The Ho Chi Minh Trail was the communication and transportation system consisting of a North Vietnamese Army logistical supply network, command-and-control structure, and troop staging areas. Stretching from North Vietnam through Laos and into South Vietnam, it was one of Hanoi's strategic keys for fighting the war in the South. It was what Carl von Clausewitz referred to as a "center of gravity," an enemy's "hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends." A second "center of gravity" was Hanoi's internal security system and control of the population. If these two "centers of gravity" could be undermined or disrupted, it could impair the North's ability to wage war in the South.

MACV-SOG intended to accomplish this through four core missions: reconnaissance missions against the Ho Chi Minh Trail; the insertion of agent teams and a program of deception; psychological warfare; and covert maritime operations. These four missions, taken together, constituted MACV-SOG's covert paramilitary campaign.

During MACV-SOG's existence between 1964 and 1972, five Special Forces officers under the title of Chief SOG commanded the unit. Col. Clyde Russell commanded from 1964-1965; Col. Donald Blackburn, 1965-1966; Col. Jack Singlaub, 1966-1968; Col. Steve Cavanaugh, 1968-1970; and Col. John Sadler, 1970-1972.

Other legendary names of SOF who served in MACV-SOG include Army Col. Arthur "Bull" Simons, for whom U.S. Special Operations Command's highest award is named; Army Maj. Gen. Eldon Bargewell, Army Sgt. Maj. William "Billy" Waugh, Army Maj. Larry Thorne, Army Command Sgt. Maj. Ernest Tabata, Navy Capt. Norman Olson, Army Maj. Richard "Dick" Meadows, Army Sgt. Maj. Walter Shumate, and Medal of Honor recipients Army Master Sgt. Roy

Benavidez, Army Staff Sgt. Jon Cavaiani, Air Force Capt. James Fleming, Army Spc. Fifth Class John Kedenburg, Army Staff Sgt. Franklin Miller, Army 1st Lt. Robert Howard, Army 1st Lt. George Sisler, Army Sgt. 1st Class Fred Zabitosky, Navy Lt. Thomas Norris, and Army 1st Lt. Loren Hagen.

In April 2001, 29 years after the deactivation of MACV-SOG, the Army acknowledged the accomplishments of the once highly secret organization with the award of the Presidential Unit Citation, a unit award equal to the individual award of the Distinguished Service Cross, the U.S. military's second-highest award for valor. Cited for "extraordinary heroism, great combat achievement and unwavering fidelity while executing unheralded top secret missions deep behind enemy lines across Southeast Asia," the award details how the courageous actions of SOG's ground, air, and sea units contributed to the war effort in Vietnam.

For example, reconnaissance teams penetrated strongholds in the Laotian jungle wilderness and the sanctuaries of eastern Cambodia to uncover key enemy facilities, rescue downed pilots, capture enemy prisoners, ambush convoys, and assess targets for B-52 strikes. SOG operations resulted in the destruction or capture of tons of munitions and supplies; SOG forces succeeded in tying down tens of thousands of North Vietnamese Army forces, diverting them from the battlefields of South Vietnam for rear security duty in Laos and Cambodia, and they inflicted enemy casualties disproportionate to their own losses.

Despite the outcome of the war, SOG forces demonstrated unsurpassed acts of courage and sacrifice in the face of tremendous odds. Names of SOG veterans are legendary throughout the SOF community, honored for their heroic actions, bravery, and contributions to today's Special Operations Forces.







Army Capt. Clayton Carpenter
160th Special Operations Aviation
Regiment (Airborne)



Air Force Master Sgt. Josh Gavulic
17th Special Tactics Squadron



Spc. Christopher Landis
3rd Special Forces Group
(Airborne)



Army Sgt. Daniel Lee
3rd Special Forces Group
(Airborne)



Spc. John Pelham
3rd Special Forces Group
(Airborne)



Sgt. 1st Class Roberto Skelt
3rd Special Forces Group
(Airborne)



Marine Corps Master Sgt. Aaron Torian
2nd Marine Special Operations Battalion

Operation Toy Drop



Units assigned to MacDill AFB, to include U.S. Special Operations Command, U.S. Central Command and Joint Support Communications Element, participated in Operation Toy Drop Dec. 11, 2013. A parachute jump was traded for a brand new toy to be donated to needy families. Photo essay by Tech. Sgt. Angelita Lawrence.

