



TIP OF THE SPEAR

Exercise Flintlock 2009



- ♠ **Mulholland assumes command of USASOC**
- ♠ **75th Ranger Regiment Soldier earns Silver Star**
- ♠ **USSOCOM hosts Medal of Honor ceremony for Murphy, Monsoor**



Exercise Flintlock 2009

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Tip of the Spear



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Front Cover: Malian and Senegalese military forces prepare for an extraction maneuver with a CV-22 Osprey Nov. 12, 2008, as part of the joint training exercise Flintlock in Bamako, Mali. As a joint, multinational exercise, Flintlock was developed by exercise planners to help improve the effective sharing of information at the operational and tactical levels between participating nations across the Trans-Saharan region while fostering increased collaborative communication and coordination skills. Photo by Sgt. Nicholas Hernandez.

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FID partnership:

ISOF prepares for future without U.S. Forces

*By Staff Sgt. Mike Meares
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs*

The 6th Battalion, 1st Iraqi Special Operations Forces Brigade commandos in southern Iraq are learning all they can about counterterrorism and counterinsurgency techniques from U.S. Special Forces Soldiers.

Through a foreign internal defense partnership, the U.S. Special Forces detachment has teamed up with ISOF to teach them how to conduct kinetic operations and sustain security in their war-torn country – their war-torn home.

“It’s an enduring relationship,” said the detachment commander. “We created it and we are committed to seeing it through until the Iraqi and U.S. governments see the Iraqi forces are autonomous and self-reliant in every aspect of what they do.”

A FID partnership intentionally establishes a professional relationship between the Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition forces where the latter assists in the training to build a capable Iraqi force to counter insurgency. The partnership is designed to build on the strengths and improve the weaknesses of the Iraqi force.

“We are brothers in arms,” said an Iraqi colonel, commander of 6th Battalion, 1st ISOF Brigade “I’ve had a long-standing relationship with the U.S. military for many years.”

For Iraq, this partnership comes at a time when the nation wants to purge itself of lawlessness. With each day of training and operations, they continue to hone skills that will lead their country to a safe and secure home for their families and countrymen.

“One day the U.S. will not be in Iraq to advise the ISOF soldiers with every move we make,” said the Iraqi colonel. “We are working to build confidence through training. The Soldiers are working together to learn everything they can, from operations to maintenance.”

The mission of the Iraqi battalion is to conduct special operations throughout the Iraqi theater of operations to prevent, deter and respond to terrorism and insurgent activities.

“ISOF can do many things and are good at what they do,” the Iraqi colonel said. “We fight for everyone.”

It's the family and friends within their home communities they use as inspiration to focus on their training and operations.

"I have seen with my own eyes ISOF providing security for the Iraqi people," the Iraqi colonel said. "We all have one goal — to go after terrorism anywhere and everywhere."

Since the U.S. Special Forces team arrived in Basra, they developed the FID partnership with the ISOF battalion. By working together, they've revamped the focus of the battalion by going back to the basics.

"We had to get a good understanding of what their capabilities were before we could move forward," the U.S. SF captain said. He and his team served as advisors to the Iraqi unit and helped them develop mission statements, training plans and a continuity for progress during their back-to-basics training.

Born from the ashes of the battle for Basra, where Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition forces reclaimed the area from criminals in March, ISOF has conducted more than 25 missions in which they've captured wanted criminals and terrorists associated with acts of violence against Iraqi Security Forces, Coalition forces and local citizens.

For the first three months, they concentrated on weapons familiarization training, combat life saver medical skills, navigation, communications, physical fitness, tactical day and night driving skills and equipment familiarization. The continuous training also focuses on proficiency in advanced military operations in urbanized terrain and close-quarters combat techniques.

"These guys know they are a special operations force and train harder than a normal Iraqi soldier," said the detachment's team sergeant. "These soldiers are committed to protecting the people of Iraq. They are willing to execute a mission without the aid of our team if need be. That willingness is a testament to their commitment to the safety and security of Iraq."

Through the FID partnership, ISOF works to collect information on targeted individuals. They have developed a once-a-week fusion meeting to share information about targeted individuals and lay out plans for future training and operations. This meeting helps them paint a three-dimensional picture of the battlefield.

The fusion meeting is designed to discuss where the special operators are going, why they are going there and whom they are going after.

"When we first arrived here, we had three groups working independent of each other," said the Rapid Response Team sergeant and advisor. "By establishing lines of communication between the groups, they are working toward the same goal together, instead of independently."

The RCB is a group of highly trained commandos who actively pursue criminals and terrorists hindering the safety



An Iraqi Special Operations Forces commando provides security during .50-caliber machine-gun weapons familiarization training. The 6th Battalion, 1st Iraqi Special Operations Forces Brigade commandos in southern Iraq are learning all they can about counterterrorism and counterinsurgency techniques from U.S. Army Special Operations Forces Soldiers through a foreign internal defense partnership. The FID partnership establishes a professional relationship to train and build a force to counter insurgency and terrorism. Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Meares.

and security of the Iraqi people, but they are always ready at a moment's notice to execute an operation when conditions are right. Trained by and modeled after U.S. Special Operations Forces, the Iraqi brigade has fought in every major operation of the war since the battle of Fallujah in 2004. They have also been instrumental in the capture of hundreds of suspected insurgents in raids throughout the country. "We have to work together to be successful," said an Iraqi RCB major. "Like a body, we have to have all parts working properly. We have a good mission."

The FID partnership in Basra is learning to work as a cohesive unit and sharing information. According to the U.S. advisors, the partnership has some "growing pains" but is making strides with each week.

"We all want what's best for our family and our country," the Iraqi colonel said. "These men fight for everyone, not just Shia or Sunni. The brigade's soldiers sacrifice everything for their country's safety and security."

Guidance is key; working closely everyday provides the foundation for this ISOF brigade to stand alone in the future. The Iraqi Special Operations Forces soldiers hope to remember their training when the time comes to fly solo.

"They are the ones who are going to be here long after we leave," the detachment commander said. "This is their home."



ERB selection course pushes recruits to physical limits

By Staff Sgt. Mike Meares
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs

The recruits' faces wrenched in pain and hovered inches from the ground. The dusty, rock-laden earth below them absorbed large drops of sweat dripping off their noses, and an instructor yelled out orders to complete another set of push-ups.

The Iraqi national Emergency Response Brigade is conducting "Hell Week," the first of a five-week selection course to train new recruits to join the national counterterrorism units, continuing the efforts of the Iraqi government to bring security and safety to Iraq.

"The word is spreading about the good reputation ERB has," said a Coalition forces staff sergeant. "A lot of guys want to be a part of it."

There were more than 500 applicants from Baghdad, 1,500 from the Mosul area and 2,800 from Tikrit. The selection criteria of high-quality, high school-educated men narrowed down the field of selection to 217 men.

"It's crucial we have a selection process," said a Coalition forces sergeant serving as a technical advisor. "We go after wanted criminals and terrorists and need skilled and intelligent people who can handle the intensity of the high-value missions."

Applicants from Mosul to Basra had to complete a physical fitness test, medical screening and biological metrics. The physical fitness test weeds out those not physically capable of making it through training.

"We will find out here who can handle missions and who cannot," said the senior Iraqi instructor. "We never know what kind of conditions will challenge us while on a mission. If they comply with orders here, they will comply on mission."

The sun-up to sun-down training takes the trainees through dozens of obstacles across a hard, rocky ground, pushing the men to their physical limits. The applicants have a varied range of experience. Some of them have prior Iraqi security forces training while others have little to no training at all. Prior training or not, successful completion of the course is not guaranteed.



Covered in mud, an Iraqi recruit waits for further instruction while going through the basic training-style indoctrination of "Hell Week" with the national Emergency Response Brigade. Trained by Iraqi instructors and advised by Coalition forces soldiers, the recruits are going through the first week of a five-week selection course to train new men to join the national counterterrorism units. If they succeed, they will continue the efforts of the Iraqi government in bringing safety and security to Iraq. Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Meares.

"This is hard on these guys," said a Coalition forces training tactical advisor and ERB mentor. "They are not used to this kind of physical punishment."

A bell sits at the front of the training area and rings out to the entire group every time a man decides he can't continue the training. The sound of the bell announces defeat as one man after another, breathing heavily, calls it quits. Sixteen men ultimately rang the bell during day one, signaling the end of the training for them; they cannot continue.

"Every man has a breaking point," said one of the Iraqi men from the Tikrit area waiting to turn in his uniform and boots after ringing the bell. "I have found mine."

According to the training advisors, the training is designed to initiate self-motivation. They also said most of the Iraqi trainees, ages 18 to 45, have never done any type

of training as physical as this before.

The training is conducted from beginning to end by Iraqi instructors who are veteran members of one of the national units. They are hand-selected from active units. They complete a 12-week, train-the-trainer course to learn how to conduct basic combat skills training, then they spend an additional three weeks learning how to teach with professional aids. As seasoned operators who know what it takes to survive while on mission, they partner these newly learned skills with experience to either transform new recruits or usher them to their breaking points.

Ding, ding, ding! The sound of the bell turns every head to see another recruit quit. By the second day, 23 more trainees ring the bell, further thinning out the crowd of men, leaving the others pushing to complete training. The Iraqi and Coalition instructors' goal is not to kick men out of the program but to prepare the soldiers to battle a lawless insurgency threatening Iraqi progress.

"We are preparing them to fight criminals and terrorists," the senior Iraqi instructor said. "Anything can happen. Our men need to be physically and mentally superior to the enemies."

One trainee, a resident of Basra, hung up his hammer as a construction worker to provide a better living for his family. He said he also wants to be a part of a team that helps keep his family and countrymen safe. He feels bad every time he hears the bell ring but uses the sound to motivate himself to push on.

"It's OK, I can take it," he said, talking about the physical intensity of the training. "I want to tell the ones quitting not to, to tough it out."

Once the trainees are done with Hell Week, they will endure another four weeks of physical conditioning and learn weapons safety and marksmanship.

"Just because they make it through the first week doesn't mean they are going to make it," said a Coalition forces sergeant first class and ERB advisor.

The second and third week of the training concentrates on small-arms proficiency with a pistol and assault rifle. The final two weeks introduce them to close-quarters battle techniques. Close-quarters battle, also known as close-quarters combat, is when small security units engage an enemy with personal weapons at very short range, potentially to the point of hand-to-hand combat.

Enemies, hostages, civilians and fellow operators may be in very close proximity, increasing the chances of fratricide or other unintended injury or death. This

technique of fighting demands a rapid assault and a precise application of lethal force. The operators need great proficiency with their weapons and the ability to make split-second decisions.

"If they don't understand the concept of (close-quarters battle), I'm not going to let them continue," the sergeant first class said.

At the end of Hell Week, 144 men are left standing, ready to continue through the next four weeks. The successful completion of this challenging course will deliver more capability and capacity for Iraqis to increase national security.



A Coalition forces training advisor shows an Iraqi recruit how to do proper pull-ups during the basic training-style indoctrination of "Hell Week" with the national Emergency Response Brigade. Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Meares.



SWAT: Scorpions sting at the heart of criminal and terrorist activities in Iraq

By Staff Sgt. Mike Meares
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs

A group known as the “Scorpions,” symbolized by a scorpion holding a dagger, is successfully stinging at the heart of criminal and terrorist activities in central Iraq.

The Hillah Special Weapons and Tactics team is disrupting insurgent activities throughout the province and bringing criminals to justice. Through a foreign internal defense partnership with Coalition soldiers, these Iraqi soldiers are working to rid the communities of anti-Iraqi forces that threaten the peace and prosperity for their families and countrymen.

The partnership with Hillah SWAT has a long history, explained a Coalition forces Soldier. “There is a lot of trust between the two units.”

The partnership establishes a professional relationship between the Iraqi Security and Coalition forces where the training builds capable forces. The Soldier said working side-by-side with the SWAT teams, both in training and on missions, has provided the Iraqi soldiers the chance to observe how to act and move as a team.

The mission of SWAT is to conduct operations throughout the Iraqi theater of operations to prevent, deter and respond to terrorism and insurgent activities.

Hillah SWAT is trained to perform high-risk operations that fall outside the abilities of regular patrol officers,

including serving high-risk arrest warrants, hostage rescue, counterterrorism and engaging heavily-armed criminals. SWAT teams are often equipped with specialized firearms, equipment and vehicles. All the equipment employed by SWAT is designed to help mitigate inherent risks and execute precision-targeted operations.

“The criminals are in Iraq trying to destroy democracy,” said a local sheik during a tribal engagement. “Security is the main thing here in Iraq.”

During a combined operation recently, SWAT executed a warrant issued by the Ministry of Interior and arrested the leader of two criminal cells. A subsequent operation to serve multiple MoI arrest warrants issued yielded eight more wanted criminals. These are examples of operations SWAT has conducted successfully in their commitment to bring security to the region.

A simple Internet search can yield more than 4,500 hits on the accomplishments of Hillah SWAT. Headlines describe the number of terrorists captured, illegal weapons seized, weapons caches discovered, criminals detained or their involvement in community programs.

The unit is unique in that their constant exposure to training makes them operationally ready at all times. Training six days a week, they strive to improve deficiencies and sustain their strengths whether they are on the firing range or on the training ground practicing emergency medical response on the battlefield. For Hillah SWAT, the constant training comes at a time when their nation is relentlessly pursuing insurgents to eradicate lawlessness.

Now, Coalition forces feel SWAT is at a level where

they can not only conduct missions successfully, but have the ability to conduct their own training.

“They are one of the most effective units in Iraq,” the Soldier said. “Their years of training have made them a self-sustaining unit that is well-trained and equipped. They have good leadership and operate with sound judgment while on missions.”

The success of the unit has instilled “great confidence” in SWAT team members. It has also increased pride and security for the Iraqi people. While operating in their communities, whether it’s capturing criminals or helping citizens, they do not discriminate based on sectarian lines.

“There is no one above the law, from the government on down,” said the Iraqi colonel in command of the Hillah SWAT. “We work under the law to bring criminals to justice.”

The sheik agrees with this approach as he feels there needs to be a separation between religion and government. He also said that he is happy with the success of the SWAT team in helping to make the community a safer place to live. He said he is thankful the SWAT has good training.

“SWAT conducts non-sectarian targeting. This alone makes them very successful in the eyes of the local populace,” said the Soldier. “The local populace needs to feel the Government of Iraq has a capable, legitimate security force that is unbiased when it comes to arresting terrorists.”

Iraqi leadership agrees: Hillah SWAT will continue its success in capturing criminals and terrorists in the region while protecting the local citizens.



Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics soldiers fire the AK-47 assault rifle during a weapons class. The Hillah SWAT team, nicknamed the Scorpions, are disrupting insurgent activities and bringing them to justice. Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Meares.



GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM - PHILIPPINES
JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE – PHILIPPINES

U.S. Soldier saves three lives in Philippines, earns Soldier's Medal

By JSOTF-P Public Affairs

A deployed Army Soldier assigned to the U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines was awarded the Soldier's Medal in a ceremony at Camp Navarro, Zamboanga, Philippines, for risking his life to save three Philippines college students from drowning Sept. 30, 2007.

When calls for help were heard that day along the shores at Naval Station Zamboanga in the southern Philippines, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ruben Gonzalez sprang into action.

Arthur Atilano witnessed the events. He said, "One of the kids got pulled by the current, which brought him in the deep area below the pier. Then, two teenagers tried to save the kid. The two teenagers were also pulled to the deep water. That was when they started calling for help."

Students and staff of Zamboanga's MEIN College were enjoying a day at the beach, celebrating the college's "Foundation Day," when the three students got caught in the dangerous current.

"The water current that day was incredibly strong; even the LCT — a 65-ton naval vessel — could not dock at the pier," said Sgt. Sausha Jones of the JSOTF-P.

Gonzalez was in the area performing logistics work. Seeing and hearing the situation begin to unravel, he quickly dove headfirst into the water and went for the most exhausted swimmer first. Grabbing the victim around the chest, Gonzalez swam him to the nearest pier piling, which served as a makeshift life preserver. Telling the student to hold the piling as tightly as possible, Gonzalez swam back out for the other two distressed swimmers, pulling them both through the current to the nearest pier piling.

"I was so tired and exhausted, I could not hang on [to the piling] and accepted that I was going to die," said the first swimmer Gonzalez rescued.

Seeing Philippine Navy personnel throwing flotation devices down to the distressed swimmers, Gonzalez shouted out words of encouragement to hang on a little longer.

Upon reaching the beach, Philippine Navy medics



Staff Sgt. Ruben Gonzalez

tended to the victims. After it was clear the students were ashore and in good hands, Gonzalez left the growing crowd of onlookers, unnoticed. He got back in his vehicle and, despite several cuts on his arms, hands, legs, and feet, returned to duty.

"Knowing the danger of putting his life at risk to rescue my students is a heroism act that forever will be embedded in our hearts, for without him that very moment, my students would have died," said MEIN College teacher and eyewitness, Margie Janda. "Thank God for giving us Mr. Gonzalez."

From ashes, Amai Pakpak Medical Center rises with high hopes

By JSOTF-P Public Affairs

With the cut of a ceremonial ribbon, leaders from across the Mindanao region in the Philippines inaugurated the new Amai Pakpak Medical Center. U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines awarded a contract employing local workers to build the new center to replace the one destroyed in a 2006 fire.

Government, medical, civic and military leaders were on hand to celebrate the occasion with a crowd of about 100 Marawi citizens, including many doctors, nurses and staff from the APMC.

Col. Bill Coultrup, commander of the JSOTF-P, who attended the groundbreaking ceremony last spring, gave the keynote address. Additional speakers and distinguished guests included: Undersecretary of the Presidential Commission on the Visiting Forces Agreement, Edilberto Adan; Lanao del Sur First Lady to the Governor, Raifa Adiong; Professor Paladan Badron, Marawi City Administrator (on behalf of Mayor Fahad Salic, al Hadj); Dr. Amer Saber, Chief of APMC; Lt. Gen. Nelson Allaga, AFP WESMINCOM commander; Brig. Gen. Magalso, AFP 1st Infantry Division deputy commander; Col. Rey Ardo, AFP 103rd Brigade commander; and Mr. Harold Wolf, president and CEO of ENDEC, Inc.

“This will make a big difference in the lives of the people of Marawi and the people of Lanao,” said Adan, who, on behalf of the people of the Philippines, thanked the United States for making the project a priority. The United States also contributed \$660,000 toward the project.

Badron referred to the new center and its medical staff under Saber as “a ray of hope” for the people of the Lanao region.

In his keynote remarks, Coultrup spoke of the new building’s genesis following the fire in 2006. “The Marawi community incurred a great loss when the former Amai Pakpak Medical Center was destroyed by fire in 2006,” he said. “One of the first things the Armed Forces of the Philippines did was to team up with medical professionals here in Marawi as well as one of our liaison teams from



In front of the new Laboratory Section, distinguished guests applaud the partnership and teamwork involved in the eight-month effort to bring Amai Pakpak Medical Center to the citizens of Marawi and the Lanao region. The previous medical center was destroyed by a fire in 2006. JSOTF-P courtesy photo.

JSOTF-P to conduct a Medical Civic Action Program.”

Just two weeks after the fire, “The MEDCAP immediately provided free medical aid to people of the Marawi area,” Coultrup said. Approximately 1,000 patients were seen.

“Then, in concert with our AFP partners, we found funding for the project ... and just eight months ago, I remember challenging the contractor to get the project done by December. They came through and produced exactly what was needed. It’s a job well done and shows the excellent work of the people of Marawi who helped to construct this beautiful building,” said Coultrup, noting that this wouldn’t be the last demonstration of teamwork between the people of the Lanao region, the AFP and the U.S. military.

The new, two-story medical center is approximately 11 meters by 51 meters. Its provisions include a laboratory, radiology services, an intensive care unit and private rooms. A regional hospital, it will serve the medical care and medical training needs of the region’s surrounding communities.



**GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM - MALI
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA**

Exercise Flintlock 2009

*By Tech. Sgt. Victoria Meyer
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

The United States and 13 African and European countries came together with one common goal for Exercise Flintlock Nov. 3 through 20 — to increase the security of African nations.

Flintlock, conducted in Spain, Mali and Senegal this year, is a biennial exercise intended to enhance African nations' ability

to patrol and control their own territory and borders and to develop regional and military relationships. The large-scale exercise supports the State Department's Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and falls under U.S. Africa Command's Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara. Both are designed to increase the capabilities, cooperation and communication of African countries and their militaries.

Continued page 14



Malian and Senegalese military forces rehearse infiltration and extraction maneuvers alongside Special Operations Forces and European military forces with CV-22 Ospreys Nov. 12, as part of the multinational training exercise Flintlock in Bamako, Mali. Photo by Sgt. Nicholas Hernandez.



**GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM - MALI
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA**



The line forms outside the local air base's clinic Nov. 7. Flight surgeons, medics, translators, security, aircrew and maintenance members from the Joint Special Operations Air Component supporting Flintlock volunteered their time to provide much needed help to the infirmary. Photo by Andrea Walther.

Through two interpreters, Maj. William Fox, a physician's assistant with the Maryland National Guard, speaks with a 17-year-old girl about her health concerns and explains her negative malaria test results. "I have never had the opportunity to help as many people as I have here," Fox said. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Victoria Meyer.

Leaders Unite

The Multinational Coordination Center, located in Rota, Spain, served as the headquarters of the exercise. The exercise planners at the MCC assembled key leaders, planners and decision makers from all participating countries to collaborate and develop concepts and plan and synchronize exercise operations. All of the intelligence, logistics and mission planning took place at the MCC and was passed through communication channels to the soldiers in the field. Classes and conferences were held in Rota to let all of the countries' military leadership learn to work



together to enhance communications and build long-lasting relationships.

Through academic training and practical applications, participants gained the skills to plan, operate and cooperate with each other to prevent and deter transnational terrorist activities. They were able to put their skills into action at the culmination of the exercise by conducting a complete mission.

“The level of candor is impressive,” Army Brig. Gen. Patrick Higgins, commander of Special Operations Command–Africa, said regarding the planning groups in the MCC. He added that all participants were treating each other as equals, regardless of rank, religious background or country of origin.

However, the activities at the MCC were only one aspect of the joint, multinational exercise.

On the Ground and in the Air

A U.S. Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha from 1st Battalion, 10th SFG (A) from Germany and European partner nations’ trainers conducted a large part of the exercise. U.S., Dutch and German trainers worked with Malian and Senegalese commandos on basic rifle marksmanship, infantry skills training, urban situational training, and combat and reconnaissance patrol training.

Most of the African soldiers had trained with American Special Forces teams before and were able to build upon their skills.

“The first few days of the training are basically a refresher for most of the guys,” said Army Capt. Mike Wise, commander for the Special Forces ODA.

It is rare for Malian and Senegalese commandos to train together mostly due to transportation and logistical constraints, a commando from Senegal explained.

However, Flintlock provided them the opportunity to learn valuable skills regarding operating with other nations against a terrorism threat.

During reconnaissance training, soldiers from both countries patrolled, set up observation points and reported information about the “target” to each other and the MCC. They were able to use their newly improved skills to conceal themselves and learned how to link up with other units during a mission — a necessary skill to avoid confusion between teams.

They also had an opportunity to conduct exercise



Staff Sgt. Paul Schultzman watches over a group of Malian commandos clearing a building during Military Operations on Urban Terrain training. One of the Senegalese soldiers commended the training and said this was the first time they learned to clear an entire house. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Victoria Meyer.

missions and airborne operations using the MC-130 and the newest SOF aircraft, the CV-22 Osprey. Air Force Special Operations Command personnel gave the soldiers an overview of the aircraft, explained safety procedures and, for some, gave them their first flight. The Osprey’s support in Exercise Flintlock marked the tiltrotor aircraft’s first



GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM - MALI SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - AFRICA



operational deployment. The crews were able to prove the flexibility and operational capability of the Osprey through several configurations and exercise scenarios.

All of the field training was tailored for each country based on the current skills and knowledge of their commandos.

“We train in a way so they can build on it after we leave,” said Army Master Sgt. Doug Graham, team sergeant for the ODA, speaking of the soldiers from Mali and Senegal. “What is so impressive is their motivation,” he added. “It makes it really easy to train when the guys really want to be here and learn.”

Medical Outreach

Not as clearly related to defeating terrorism as training soldiers, yet extremely vital to enhancing the nation’s capabilities, was another part of Flintlock – the Medical Civic Action Programs in remote villages of Mali and Senegal.


This year, there were three MEDCAPs. The first one was sponsored by the Joint Special Operations Air Detachment supporting Flintlock. More than 31 volunteers met at the base infirmary in Bamako to help 400 local residents, mostly wives and children of the Malian soldiers.

Intestinal worm infestation was a common problem in the area due to the unsanitary conditions, so all children ages 2 years and older received deworming liquid. Most other patients were seen for symptoms of malaria, pneumonia, skin rashes and various infections.

The volunteers worked through a constantly growing line of patients for nearly nine hours straight.

They were also able to donate \$275,000 worth of medical supplies for use by the local medical staff.

The second MEDCAP was held in Podor, the northernmost town in Senegal. The Maryland National Guard provided most of the medical staff for the five-day event. They came with two tractor trailers full of medical



Malian commandos conduct a reconnaissance and assault exercise in Gao, Mali, during Flintlock Nov. 17, 2008. Photo by Sgt. Kieran Cuddihy.

supplies and a goal to treat 2,000 to 3,000 patients.

The MEDCAP team was happy to see the villagers healthier than they had originally expected, said U.S. Army Dr. (Lt Col.) Eyako K. Wurapa, officer in charge of the MEDCAP. Wurapa attributed the locals' health mainly to the village having running water, electricity and good roads into the city.

The medical staff saw a wide variety of cases such as malnutrition, staff and fungal infections and chronic back and neck pain.

"We want to practice medicine that is compatible with local medicine and learn common local issues. That way they can follow up with their doctor after we leave," said Lt. Col. Genine Consagra, with the Maryland National Guard.

The third MEDCAP was in a small village in Mopti and it too was a successful operation. Members of the SOF medical community operated the week-long medical

assistance visit and treated thousands of people from the local area.

During the MEDCAP, a separate veterinary team worked on the local livestock to provide basic healthcare and disease prevention to the animals.

"The MEDCAPS are so purely humanitarian," Marcia Bernicat, U.S. Ambassador to Senegal said. "I think it is really great when our military work alongside the host nation's military."

In a video message to exercise participants, U.S. Army Gen. William "Kip" Ward, commander of U.S. Africa Command, summed up the exercises accomplishments.

"Flintlock brought the expertise and experience from each nation together so that the entire team could benefit. By working alongside each other, you helped improve the security capacity and capability of all the participating nations," said Ward.



**GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM - MALI
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA**



During Flintlock 2009, a Malian boy stops to watch incoming CV-22 Ospreys carrying Malian and Senegalese troops near Bamako, Mali. The exercise provides U.S. Special Operations Forces the opportunity to work with African and European partner nations in the effort to build bonds of trust and confidence. Photo Capt. Bryan Purtell.

CV-22s complete their first operational deployment at Flintlock

By 1st Lt. Lauren Johnson
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs

The final two CV-22s broke across the Florida horizon just in time for Thanksgiving dinner. And after a 5,300 nautical mile flight across the Atlantic Ocean, they had surely worked up an appetite.

The aircraft, from the 8th Special Operations Squadron, arrived home Nov. 26 on the heels of two other CV-22s, all of which had spent the last month in Bamako, Mali, supporting Exercise Flintlock, a regularly scheduled training exercise in the Trans-Saharan region designed to build relationships and capacity and to enhance African nations' ability to patrol and control their sovereign territory.

The exercise marked an important milestone for the CV-22s as their first operational deployment.

"This is something we've been waiting for a long time," said Maj. Jim Rowe, an 8th SOS pilot, fresh out of the cockpit from the trans-Atlantic flight. "It was one of the highlights of my military career."

The exercise included personnel from 14 countries, and the CV-22 served as a platform for multinational training. Specifically, the aircraft was used to transport Malian and Senegalese special operations forces and their leadership teams.

"We did long-range, vertical lift, and dropped teams off at a landing zone," said Capt. Dennis Woodlief, 8th SOS pilot. "They practiced their ground movements, then we brought them back."

Lt. Col. Eric Hill, 8th SOS squadron commander, said missions like this allowed the CV-22 to take advantage of its unique capabilities as a tiltrotor aircraft.

"The tyranny of distance in the African continent is amazing," he said. "We were able to go over 500 nautical miles, infiltrate a small team for them to run their exercise and bring them back all the way to home base without doing an air refueling stop. And we were able to do that in the span of about four hours."

"It would take the MH-53 twice, sometimes three times as long to do these missions," Woodlief said. "And we did it with just one aircraft."

Hill said the CV-22 is an "unprecedented capability" and with the new capability, there were also new lessons to be learned.

"We learned some lessons like we always do on different equipment we'd like to have and requirements that we'll have in the future," he said.

Many of those lessons revolve around tailoring maintenance packages for future deployments.

The 1st Special Operations Helicopter Maintenance Squadron deployed to Bamako in support of the 8th SOS. Because the exercise was held at a remote location rather than an established base, one of the maintenance challenges was self-deploying with all the parts and equipment they needed to keep the CV-22s operational for the entire exercise - and for the cumulative 10,000 nautical mile trans-Atlantic flights.

"We have a laundry list about three pages long of things we'd like to take next time," said Master Sgt. Craig Kornely, the squadron's lead production supervisor. "As we grow into the machine, we realize our needs for equipment and resources."

Despite the challenges of operating a new aircraft for the first time overseas and in an austere environment, the squadron had a perfect mission success rate during the exercise.

"We had zero maintenance cancels, zero delays, and we executed 100 percent every time," Woodlief said. "I think we went above and beyond everyone's expectations."

Hill said he was extremely proud of the 8th SOS and the 1st SOHMXS's accomplishments.

"There's nothing more gratifying than seeing your squadron take a revolutionary capability out on its first deployment, have huge mission success, meet every mission task, and most importantly bring everybody back to home base safely," he said. "I couldn't be more proud as a squadron commander."



Lt. Gen. John Mulholland Jr., incoming USASOC commander, receives the unit colors from Adm. Eric T. Olson, USSOCOM commander, during the USASOC change of command ceremony Nov. 7. During the ceremony, Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner, outgoing USASOC commander, passed command to Mulholland. Photo by Spc. Tony Hawkins.

Army Special Operations Command welcomes new commanding general

*By Spc. Tony Hawkins
USASOC Public Affairs*

The U.S. Army Special Operations Command bade farewell to a familiar face and welcomed a new one during a change of command ceremony on Meadows Memorial Field at Fort Bragg, N.C., Nov. 7.

Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner relinquished command of

USASOC to Lt. Gen. John Mulholland Jr. during the ceremony. Mulholland comes to USASOC after serving as the commanding general for Special Operations Command Central at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

“There couldn’t be a better guy taking charge right now,” Wagner said about Mulholland. “The one thing that makes me feel good about leaving is that I know a good guy is taking over, and he will do all the right things for these Soldiers and their families.”

Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, served as the officiating officer for the ceremony.

“As we stand here in the shadows of Bronze Bruce and Dick Meadows, one can’t help but be impressed by the rich Special Operations Forces heritage displayed here,” Olson said, speaking of the unit memorials in Meadows Plaza. “Not only are there many present, but also in the story that is placed out across the granite tablets.”

Farewell to a mentor

Olson also spoke of Wagner’s service to the command.

“This is an important occasion as we gather to witness the transfer of authority from one commander to another, “As we recognize a great SOF Soldier, Lieutenant General Bob Wagner, for his leadership over the last three years, we thank him and his wife, ‘P.J.,’ for giving so much of themselves to the care and support of this command and its families.”

“General Wagner took command of USASOC during a time of unprecedented demand for Special Operations warriors because of unprecedented success by them”

*— Adm. Eric T. Olson
Commander of USSOCOM*

Many of the people present had been influenced in one way or another by Wagner, Olson said.

“General Wagner took command of USASOC during a time of unprecedented demand for Special Operations warriors because of unprecedented success by them,” he said. “On any given day throughout the years of his command, including today, the Soldiers of USASOC ... have been deployed to more than 40 countries conducting direct and indirect actions across the entire spectrum of conflicts.”

USASOC makes up the largest component of USSOCOM, representing more than 50 percent of the command and “contains our broadest array of skills, missions and inventory,” Olson said. Under Wagner’s leadership, Army Special Operations Forces has

Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner, outgoing USASOC commander, salutes the colors during his final formation as USASOC commanding general. Photo by Walter Sokalski Jr.





increased in size 36 percent in order to meet a growing demand.

As some of his last words to the Soldiers and civilians of the command, Wagner spoke of how proud he was of the opportunity

to serve with them.

“Service is something you do for someone else,” Wagner said. “In our case it’s for our country, for our teams, for our values. You’re putting your lives at risk to do what’s right, yet there’s not a moment of hesitation or a moment of lacking. There’s not an organization that’s represented here that goes out on the field to see what happens. They go out there to achieve a purpose, and they’ve been tremendously successful in that purpose.”

A new leader steps up

Olson said Mulholland is a proven leader.

“If you’ve read his bio, that says what he’s done; if you’ve spent any time with him, you know who he is,” Olson said. “What he’s done gives us a sense of his capabilities, but who he is nails our high level of confidence in him that he will meet our highest expectations.”

Mulholland said he is deeply appreciative and honored to take command of USASOC.

“This is the American Army’s Special Operations Force, our country’s Special Operations Force,” Mulholland said. “This is unapologetically the most capable and

effective warrior combat force on the planet in history. Of that I have no doubt. I am aware of my responsibilities to each of you and the organizations you represent.”

He also promised his full devotion in living up to that responsibility.

“The stories that we know of your actions are unbelievable, and the only unfortunate thing is they are not more widely known to the people of this great country,” he said. “But we know of your sacrifices. I know of my responsibility to ensure you have what you need, resources, training, whatever it may be so you can take the fight to our enemy.”

Mulholland assured Wagner he would do his best to “live up to the standard which you’ve so highly set.”

“No one has carried more or done more to take care



From left to right, Col. Andrew Milani, USASOC chief of staff, Command Sgt. Major Parry Baer, USASOC command sergeant major, Lt. Gen. John Mulholland Jr., incoming USASOC commander, and Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner, outgoing USASOC commander, do a final review of the troops during a USASOC change of command ceremony Nov. 7. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Baker.

of the men and women of this command,” Mulholland said. “That says a lot because there have been great men who have commanded this organization, and now I’m humbled to do so.”

For his departing words to Mulholland, Wagner reminded him of the importance of the Soldiers on the ground who will rely on his decisions.

“Whatever decisions we make, it’s never successful unless the people on the ground make it happen,” Wagner said. “The Soldiers out on the battlefield are in fact the strength of the command. If there’s one thing the commanding general of USASOC knows every day, its that there are no better people in the world more committed to what they are doing than you, the Soldiers of USASOC.”

History of a legacy

Mulholland, a native of Maryland, graduated with a bachelor’s in history from Furman University in 1978 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the infantry. His first assignment was with the 193rd Infantry Brigade in the former Panama Canal Zone, where he served as a rifle platoon leader, weapons platoon leader and company executive officer.

His next move brought him to Fort Bragg, N.C., where he joined the ranks of the Green Berets after attending the Special Forces Qualification Course. Upon graduating in September 1983, then Capt. Mulholland joined the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

Since joining Special Forces, Mulholland has commanded at the team, company, battalion and group levels. In addition, he has served in other Special Operations assignments, including Special Operations Command South in Panama and as the operations officer for the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta.

During the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom, Mulholland commanded the Joint Special



Lt. Gen. John Mulholland Jr. speaks at the change of command ceremony Nov. 7. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Baker.

Operations Task Force-North (Task Force Dagger). He also commanded the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-West in the initial campaign of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

He later served as the chief of the Office of Military Cooperation-Kuwait as commanding general of the U.S. Army Special Forces Command and as deputy commanding general of the Joint Special Operations Command.

Mulholland has earned a Master of Military Arts and Science in history while attending the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and a Master of Science in National Security Strategy from the National War College.

His awards and decorations include the Distinguished Superior Service Medal and the Legion of Merit.

Wagner, who assumed command Dec. 6, 2005, was the longest-serving commander in USASOC history. He officially retired after more than 38 years of service.



Army Special Operations leader retires after 38 years

*By Spc. Tony Hawkins
USASOC Public Affairs*

The head of Army Special Operations Forces retired after more than 38 years of service, spanning from Vietnam to the current War on Terrorism.

Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner, outgoing commanding general of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and the senior-most three-star general in the U.S. Army, retired in a ceremony inside Fort Bragg's Kennedy Hall Nov. 7. He has been in command of the nearly 20,000 Soldiers under USASOC since December 2005.

"Someone asked me the question, 'What accomplishment are you most proud of?'" Wagner said. "I can't really think of anything other than having the chance to serve on good teams with good people."

It is those people, their friends, whom Wagner said he and his wife, P.J., are most grateful for.

"The most important things in life you can't buy," Wagner said. "They are things given to you. We have memories of our friends and all the things we've done. There's nothing else I could say to repay you for that. There's no way we can thank you enough for the friendship we've shared with you."

Although Wagner has only spent the last three years of his 38-year service as the commanding general of USAOC, he said it was a sad thing to leave so many skilled Soldiers and civilians.

"I think the thing that motivates people the best is being around people who can do things better than you," he said. "That's why this command functions the way it does and why the Army as a whole does. There's tremendous talent."

A large part of his successful leadership of Army Special Operations is due to those who served under his command, he said.

"What we do is not a job," he said. "None of us here have a job. It's who you are and what you believe in. You serve with people who believe in and care about what they're doing, and they do it because it's right, and



Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner, former USASOC commander, speaks during his retirement ceremony Nov. 7. Wagner retired after 38 years of service, much of which was spent in the Special Operations community. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Baker.

they care about one another. It's about our values, those things we're willing to fight for and are important to us. That's what makes up our nation, what it was founded on, and it's one of the most important things we share."

Wagner was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and was raised in Independence, Ohio. In 1970, he graduated from the

U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., where he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the infantry. After attending Infantry Officer's Basic Course, Airborne School and Ranger School, he was assigned as a mechanized infantry platoon leader and executive officer with 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kan.

During his six months there, he met his future wife, Pamela Jayne Van Scoy, who was a junior high math teacher in Iowa. Shortly after their meeting in 1971, Wagner was reassigned to the 101st Airborne Division and deployed to Vietnam.

During his deployment, Wagner served in both the 501st and 506th Infantry Regiments, as well as with MAC-V Team 33 as an advisor to the 23rd ARVN Division.

After returning from Vietnam in July 1972, Wagner was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas, first as a mortar platoon leader, then as company executive and later as the battalion air operations officer for 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment.

Although they had only seen each other seven or eight times, Wagner and P.J. had been corresponding by letter for 18 months. In November 1972, the two were married in P.J.'s hometown of Fort Dodge, Iowa.

In 1974, Wagner was reassigned to Fort Leavenworth, Kan., to serve as the aide-de-camp to Maj. Gen. Jack Cushman, the installation commanding general. It was during their assignment there that their daughter, Annie, was born. Shortly afterward, Wagner attended the 10-month U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare Course at Quantico, Va.

Their next assignment was a three-year tour with 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, at Fort Lewis, Wash. From 1976-1979, he served in various positions, including the intelligence and assistance operations officers, and commander of Charlie Company. Fifteen of the company and field-grade officers Wagner served with went on to become general officers. Also, during that time, their son Van was born.

In 1980, Wagner graduated from the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., after which he moved on to Purdue University, earning a master's in industrial relations in 1981. His next assignment brought him back to the USMA at West Point, N.Y., from 1981-1984, where he served as the tactical officer for Company F-1 and later as the executive officer for the 1st Regiment. Several of Wagner's F-1 cadets are currently colonels, with a few

recently becoming general officers.

In 1984, Wagner joined the newly formed headquarters of the 75th Ranger Regiment at Fort Benning, Ga., where he served as the regimental operations officer for then Col. Wayne Downing. A year later, he became the battalion commander for 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, in Panama, where he served until 1987.

Later that year, Wagner attended the National War College at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. After graduating in 1988, he began an assignment at the Pentagon as a special technical operations officer in the J3 Directorate of the Joint Staff. Wagner was released from this tour early after five months in order to take command of the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, at Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Ga.

Wagner commanded the battalion until 1991, and during his time there he led his Rangers in the airborne seizures of Torrijos and Tocumen Airports during Operation Just Cause in Panama. From 1991-1993, he commanded the 193rd Infantry Brigade in Panama.

In July 1993, Wagner headed to MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., to again work for Gen. Downing at the U.S. Special Operations Command. He served as the chief of current operations and subsequently as the executive officer for Downing. In January 1996, Wagner was reassigned as the commanding general for Special Operations Command South in Panama.

After commanding SOCSOUTH, he became the deputy director of operations in J-33 Current Operations of the Joint Staff. From 2000-2003, he commanded the U.S. Southern European Task Force (Airborne), in Vicenza, Italy, with an area of responsibility covering Europe and Africa, including missions in Kosovo, Bosnia, Hungary, Senegal and Morocco.

Once he was appointed as a lieutenant general in January 2004, Wagner became the deputy commanding general of the U.S. Joint Forces Command at Norfolk Naval Base, Norfolk, Va. From August to November 2005, he also served as the acting commanding general.

His last assignment brought him to Fort Bragg, N.C., and USASOC, where he assumed command from Lt. Gen. Philip Kensinger Jr. Dec. 6, 2005. This position put him in charge of all Army Special Operations Forces, including Special Forces, Civil Affairs, Rangers, Psychological Operations and Special Operations Aviation.



SECDEF visits home of Army Special Ops for first time

*By Spc. Tony Hawkins
USASOC Public Affairs*

Special Operations Soldiers at Fort Bragg, N.C., showed off their expertise for a special, first-time visitor to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Oct. 23.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited USASOC for the first time since taking his current post in December 2006. Gates, who has said Special Operations Forces are the connective tissue for the U.S. military in the War on Terrorism, had the opportunity to talk with Army SOF Soldiers during his visit.

Accompanied by Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner, then commanding general of USASOC, Gates observed a USASOC capabilities demonstration and briefing, which presented some of the most advanced equipment and tactics used by Army Special Operations Forces.

Wagner, who escorted Gates through the demonstration and briefings, said they spoke of how SOF units in all branches of the military could better cooperate with each other and intelligence community organizations.

“We are fighting a war, and no one organization is fighting it alone,” Wagner said.

Gates brought a unique perspective to the meeting. A former intelligence officer with the U.S. Air Force during Vietnam, Gates was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency, working his way up from operations officer and eventually to the director of Central Intelligence.

The two also spoke regarding the current state of ARSOF and future growth of the force.

After the demonstration, Gates sat down for lunch with a group of NCO and officer SOF operators. Speaking directly with servicemembers is how he gets some of his best ideas, Gates said. He also noted that morale seemed high among those he met.

“These Soldiers believe they have been successful in Iraq,” Gates said. “There is nothing for morale like being successful. So my perception is ... morale is very high,



Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (middle) speaks with Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner (right), then commanding general of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, and Col. Curtis Boyd, commander of 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne), during a visit to Fort Bragg, N.C., Oct. 23. Gates toured several facilities used to train Army Special Operations Forces during the visit. Photo by Spc. Tony Hawkins.

and I think it’s in no small part because of the success that’s been enjoyed, but also by the fact that they know the American people support them.”

Later in the day, Gates was met by Maj. Gen. Thomas Csrnko, commanding general of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, and Brig. Gen. Michael Repass, commanding general of U.S. Army Special Forces Command (Airborne).

Repass and USASFC(A) Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Vigil escorted Gates through a “Faces of Special Forces” display. Here, SF Command showcased its most important resource, the SF Soldier and some of the unique equipment required by each SF military occupational specialty.

“Special Forces Soldiers provided Secretary Gates with an insider’s view of their unique training and capabilities, but more importantly the Secretary of Defense was able to hear first-hand accounts from the



men on the ground about the positive impact SF teams are having globally,” Vigil said.

To display the type of sophisticated communications equipment used while deployed, Gates also received an operations brief from a SOF sergeant in Afghanistan through a secure video teleconference.

After meeting with the SF Soldiers, Gates was accompanied by Csrnko on a tour of the school’s state-of-the-art Joint Special Operations Medical Training Center. There, he witnessed life-saving training procedures taught to SOF medical servicemembers throughout the entire Department of Defense.

Approximately 1,400 students from Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs, Rangers, Navy corpsmen, Marine and Air Force Special Operations pass through the JSOMTC annually before deploying across the globe with their fellow SOF operators to provide world-class medical care under austere conditions in the most remote locations.

The 75,000 square-foot JSOMTC facility is also home to the Naval Special Operations Medical Institute and Operating Location E for the Air Force’s 16th Special Operations Wing.

Gates’ last stop while visiting USASOC facilities was the 4th Psychological Operations Group’s Media Operations Complex, which he toured with Col. Curtis Boyd, 4th POG commander. Gates was greeted by several tactical psyop Soldiers who demonstrated some of the equipment they use, as well as Soldiers from a Mobile Information Support Team.

Soldiers from the 3rd Psychological Operations Battalion, the 4th POG’s psyop dissemination battalion, provide media expertise in the production of print and audio visual products for the MOC. Since June 2003, it has produced more than 30 million printed products, 300 videos and 10,000 hours of radio programs in support of psychological operations throughout the world. Its daily operations continue to enable psyop reach-back support in multiple theaters in a wide variety of psyop missions worldwide.

“Our efforts within the 4th PSYOP Group are designed to show various foreign audiences that the ideology and actions of violent extremists are not in their best

interests,” said Lt. Col. Richard Springett, 3rd POB commander. “So, we are using the tools of ideological engagement in many nations to create an environment that is hostile to violent extremism.

“We provide development, production, distribution, archival and post-production capabilities for products designed to communicate alternative visions to and divert potential recruits from violent extremist organizations worldwide,” he said.

During his tour of the facility, Gates witnessed this process first-hand. He watched as multimedia specialists worked on a real-world psyop product for use in Africa, allowing him to see Soldiers directly affecting the War on Terrorism.

“It can best be described as a product that will help insulate a particularly vulnerable audience from the voices that call for violence and extremism,” Springett said.

Overall, Gates said meeting with Soldiers and seeing them hard at work training was the highlight of the visit.

“The best part of the day is that I’ve met some incredible Soldiers, and I’ve seen various kinds of specialized training,” he said. “These people are in the forefront of protecting our country, and I am just very proud to be associated with them in any way.”



Secretary of Defense Robert Gates speaks with Soldiers from the 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne) during a visit to Fort Bragg, N.C., Oct. 23. The 4th POG is the U.S. Army’s only active duty psychological operations unit, whose main task is providing psyop support to Army Special Operations Forces. Photo by Spc. Tony Hawkins.



Ranger awarded Silver Star for heroic actions in Afghanistan

*By Tracey Bailey
75th Ranger Regiment Public
Affairs*

Sgt. 1st Class Ray Plasterer was recently awarded the Silver Star Medal during a valorous award ceremony at Fort Benning, Ga.

Plasterer, a reconnaissance assistant team sergeant with Regimental Special Troops Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, and his team were conducting a routine presence patrol in a rural area of Afghanistan in May 2008 when they were caught in a surprise attack initiated by rocket-propelled grenades, small-arms fire and fragmentary grenades.

Five friendly forces were wounded and four were killed in the firefight. However, Plasterer's actions, along with those of his team, saved the lives of numerous others and led to a decisive victory and the death of 22 enemy combatants.

"We did not really feel threatened during the initial part of the patrol, but we had the feeling we were being watched prior to the actual ambush," said Plasterer.

Upon the initiation of the enemy ambush, Plasterer found himself in the middle of the kill zone, receiving effective enemy fire from two locations. He immediately returned lethal fire to the north and south of the convoy in an effort to provide suppressive fire for the vehicles caught in the kill zone.

"We were about one day into our mission when we were attacked,"



Sgt. 1st Class Ray Plasterer, a reconnaissance assistant team sergeant with Regimental Special Troops Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, was awarded the Silver Star for heroic actions in Afghanistan. Plasterer's team was conducting a presence patrol when it came under enemy ambush. Photo by Tracey Bailey.

Plasterer said. “We were in a convoy of approximately 20 vehicles, and I was about four vehicles from the back of the convoy.”

Plasterer immediately took control of a nearby interpreter and a five-man squad, allowing the element to move to a more defensible location from which to fight. Plasterer identified two enemy combatants and quickly eliminated them.

“These types of missions are what we train to do,” he said. “It’s something, when it actually happens, you don’t even think about the danger. Nobody does; you just do your job.”

Soon after, a team member identified that a fellow member had received a serious gunshot wound to the neck. Plasterer knew that it was imperative to get to a radio and request emergency close-air support as well as MEDEVAC for the wounded individuals.

With complete disregard for his own personal safety, Plasterer moved out from his covered position under a barrage of AK-47 and RPG fire, moving through an open area to reach a vehicle that had a radio to report the situation. When he realized the radio in this vehicle was inoperable, he moved to his vehicle, which was in the middle of the kill zone, to contact higher headquarters. As he moved back through the open area and into the kill zone to reach his vehicle, the enemy was still laying down a high volume of fire.

“Sergeant First Class Plasterer did what every good Ranger NCO does. He took charge of the situation and got it under control,” said Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner, then commanding general of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

As Plasterer was calling in for close-air support and a MEDEVAC, his vehicle came under heavy small-

arms fire. Knowing he was pinned down and needing to link back up with his team, he used the vehicle and drove it in reverse back to the squad. As the vehicle was moving backwards, the volume of enemy fire increased, and the truck became disabled. He exited the vehicle, and again braved the intense small arms fire to link up with the squad. Once back with his squad, Plasterer reassumed command.

“Sergeant First Class Plasterer’s team turned what the enemy hoped to be a decisive victory over the Rangers into a decisive defeat of the enemy,” Wagner said.

Plasterer’s assessment of the situation allowed him to pass critical information to the ground force commander who was able to maneuver forces into a position to fix and kill a

seven-man enemy flanking element. Additionally, Plasterer’s decision making put his own element into a position that allowed

them to engage the enemy with deadly precision and maintain superiority. This enabled the remainder of the force to enter the larger building and kill the last of the enemy combatants.

“Many of you don’t realize how important

your work is; you put your lives on the line every day to serve our nation, and the impact you have on the war is tremendous,” Wagner said, addressing the Rangers. “You have been engaged in this conflict since the beginning, and your skills and ability continue to amaze and impress me.”

In receiving his Silver Star, Plasterer is quick to point out that he did what anyone else would have done that day.

“Nobody does it for the attention that you get out of it. You do it for job satisfaction,” Plasterer said. “You have the knowledge of what you are doing is important as well as the friendships that you make that will last a lifetime.”

Sergeant First Class Plasterer did what every good Ranger NCO does. He took charge of the situation and got it under control.

— Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner





The last of an old warrior



*By Lt. Col. Sal Herrera and retired Maj. Cortney Stratman
160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)*

The MH-6 Little Bird helicopter has been employed in the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) for more than 20 years supporting Special Operations ground forces during numerous campaigns and battles. However, the helicopter's long lineage of mission success started well before the Night Stalkers began utilizing it.

Now that the Regiment is complete with its MH-6 modernization efforts, and with the retirement of the last legacy MH-6C model in October, it's worth looking at not only a brief history of its predecessor, the OH-6 Cayuse, but also the history of one of the Regiment's legacy MH-6C helicopters: tail #68-17332.

History of the OH-6 helicopter

In 1960, the Department of Defense saw a need for a light observation helicopter capable of fulfilling various roles, including personnel transport, escort and attack missions, casualty evacuation and observation.

Twelve companies took part in the ensuing competition. Hughes submitted the Model 369, nicknamed the "flying egg" because of its shape. Two other aircraft designs, one by Hiller and one by Bell, were selected as finalists, but the Army later included the Hughes helicopter. The Bell design was eventually eliminated from the contest, and the Hughes 369 was redesignated as the OH-6A Cayuse. The first of the five prototypes ordered by the Army flew Feb. 27, 1963, and was delivered to Fort Rucker, Ala., the following November to begin trial testing.

The Cayuse quickly became distinguished for its high performance and low noise due to its four-bladed rotor and small size. The compactness of the fuselage made the helicopter light and

sturdy with low drag, while still offering the occupants good protection even in hard landings.

Following the trials, the OH-6A was announced as the winner in May 1965, and large-scale production began with an initial order for 714. The order was later increased to 1,300. In total, 1,434 helicopters were built, the last of which was delivered in August 1970.

Between March and April 1966, the Cayuse established no fewer than 23 world records, including speed, distance and altitude records. It also broke the speed record for helicopters of its class by reaching speeds of more than 277 kilometers per hour.

All of the MH6-Cs in the 160th SOAR(A) began their tactical employments during the Vietnam War era, including MH-6C #332. Nearly 39 years after purchase, its final resting place is as a combat mission simulator in one of several Night Stalker training areas at Fort Campbell, Ky.

The History of helicopter OH-6

Tail #68-17332 (MH-6C)

According to military records, the OH-6A tail # 68-17332, was purchased in October 1969. It was shipped to



Retired Maj. Cortney Stratman (left) and Chief Warrant Officer Myron Beals flew the last MH-6C flight for the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) during the night of Sept. 30, 2008. Photo by Kimberly Tiscione.

the Republic of Vietnam in December 1969 to the Division Artillery of the 23rd Infantry Division at Chu Lai.

The first incident recorded took place Oct. 11, 1970. By this time, #332 had seen more than 600 flight hours. The aircraft was on a resupply mission, flying at 2,500 feet above ground level when the metal cover of a water cooler flew out of the cargo door, slamming into the tail rotor system. Fortunately, the pilot was able to land at Duc Pho with no further damage.

After a second incident in July 1971, the aircraft returned to the United States. It later redeployed to Vietnam in May 1972 with the 388th Transportation Company. Once arriving in theater, it was then transferred to F Troop, 4th Cavalry Regiment, in Tan My.

The final incident recorded in Vietnam happened Dec. 21, 1972. Since its first incident more than two years prior, #332 had booked 1,476 flight hours. The aircraft was flying at 150 feet with an airspeed of 80 knots. The pilot noticed a change in engine noise signifying engine failure, and the engine out warning lit as the helicopter began an autorotation. The helicopter made a hard landing on a narrow dirt road and sustained some damage on touchdown.

In February 1973, OH-6A #332 returned to the United States at the close of the Vietnam War. It remained in storage until March 1974 when the Oklahoma National Guard received the aircraft. It remained there until assigned to the Task Force-160. It was transferred to Fort Campbell, Ky., where it remained in the Special Operations Aviation Training Company until its last flight on Jan. 9, 1998, at which time it was decommissioned from active military service.

During the time it served in SOATC, it had an engine failure while returning from a basic skills evaluation flight south of Nashville, Tenn., on the night of Feb. 6, 1996. Retired Maj. Courtney Stratman, a combat mission instructor, and rated student pilot Chief Warrant Officer Peter Schuessler accomplished a successful autorotation to an open snow-covered field, landing with no damage to the aircraft.

In 2006, MH-6C tail #68-17332 was transformed into



The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) MH-6M combat mission simulator utilizes an MH-6C airframe. Courtesy photo.

the Regiment's current LASAR (Little Bird) combat mission simulator at Fort Campbell, Ky. Not only will #332 be used to continue training Night Stalkers, but as of Oct. 1, #332 is the last remnant of an MH-6C in the 160th SOAR(A).

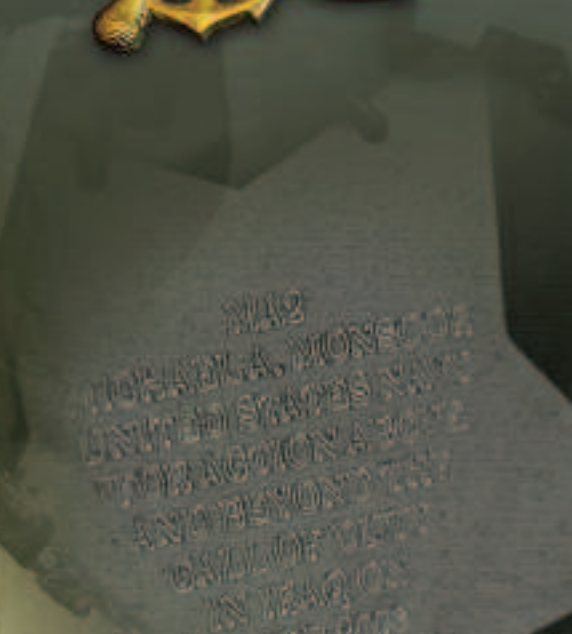
The Regiment has been modernizing its fleet of MH-6s for the past seven years. The modernization was completed in October 2008 when the 160th received its 51st MH-6M helicopter and turned in its last legacy MH-6C.

The upgrades of the MH-6M are significant, including increases in the maximum gross weight from almost 4,000 to nearly 4,700 pounds; increases in the aircraft power margin with six main rotor blades instead of five, and a four-bladed tail rotor instead of two. A digital cockpit provides single-point entry for navigation, communications and weapons management. There's increased commonality with similar avionics architecture to other airframes, an enlarged aft cargo opening, improved tail stinger and improved tail rotor drive shaft system.

Although the MH-6M will carry the Regiment far into the future supporting Special Operations ground forces, the MH-6C contributed directly to the success of this Regiment by flying in excess of 60,000 hours in support of operations and training. So, when the final MH-6C, tail #68-17249, flew away Oct. 1, it truly represented the last of an old warrior.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND



SECNAV names new Zumwalt-class destroyer USS Michael Monsoor

Courtesy of the Department of Defense

The Navy's newest Zumwalt-class destroyer will be named the USS Michael Monsoor. Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter made the announcement during a Navy SEAL Warrior Fund Benefit Gala at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City in October.

Designated as DDG 1001, the name honors Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor, a Navy SEAL who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions in Ramadi, Iraq, Sept. 29, 2006.

Winter discussed the qualities, values and dedication to duty that Navy SEALs exemplify, including the extraordinary acts of Monsoor.

"Tonight I would like to single out one of those heroes from the community of Navy SEALs," Winter said. "Those who served with Michael Monsoor will remember him always as a consummate professional who faced terrorist enemies with aplomb and stoicism.

"The full extent of Michael's courage, gallantry and selfless heroism was revealed on the twenty-ninth of September in Ramadi. When his team was surprised by an enemy grenade, Michael could have escaped and saved himself," Winter said. "But he chose a different

path, a path of honor that embodies the way of a Navy SEAL. For having chosen that path, Petty Officer Michael Monsoor joined the ranks of those who have earned our nation's highest distinction, the Medal of Honor."

Winter said Monsoor's heroism and self sacrifice for his teammates and his nation epitomize the Navy's core values and will forever provide prideful admiration for U.S. Sailors.

"Michael Monsoor's name will now be linked with one of our nation's most visible examples of military power, a U.S. Navy warship," Winter said. "His legacy will inspire the hearts of future Sailors who serve on the ship that bears his name."

The USS Michael Monsoor will be a multi-mission surface combatant tailored for advanced land attack and littoral dominance. The ship's mission is to provide credible, independent forward presence and deterrence and to operate as an integral part of

naval, joint or combined maritime forces.

The USS Michael Monsoor will be the second Zumwalt-class destroyer. The ship will be 600 feet long, have a beam of 80.7 feet and displace approximately 15,000 tons. It will have a crew size of 148 officers and Sailors, and it will make speed in excess of 30 knots.



Artist rendering of Zumwalt-class destroyer.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND



Citizens of San Clemente, Calif., and servicemembers from the Navy and Marine Corps gather at Park Semper Fi Marine Monument to honor Medal of Honor recipients. Cpl. Jason Dunham, Lt. (SEAL) Michael Murphy and Petty Officer 2nd Class (SEAL) Michael Monsoor were honored by memorial plaques placed at the park. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique Lasco.

Medal of Honor recipients honored

*By Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique Lasco
Naval Special Warfare Command Public Affairs*

Officials from the city of San Clemente, Calif., honored three deceased Medal of Honor recipients during a rededication ceremony Oct. 25 at Park Semper Fi Marine Monument.

The ceremony paid tribute to two Navy SEALs, Lt. Michael Murphy and Master-at-Arms 2nd Class (SEAL) Michael Monsoor, and Marine Cpl. Jason Dunham. All three were posthumously awarded the nation's highest military honor for courageous actions in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan. The ceremony marked the first time in the park's three-year history Sailors and Marines were honored together.

"It's so important to honor those who have received the Medal of Honor," said Wayne Eggleston, executive director of the Heritage of San Clemente Foundation and city council member. "They have really given their lives for the United States of America and our freedoms."

Twelve Navy SEALs from San Diego and 10 Marines from Camp Pendleton joined the city in honoring their fallen comrades. Other guests included Petty Officer Monsoor's mother, sister, and sister-in-law.

Sara Monsoor spoke highly of the ceremony and was proud to know that other services recognize and remember her brother.

"I think that it is wonderful that they want to add him to this park with the Marines," said Sara. "With all the different branches, it's nice to see that there is still recognition. It helps to know that people still talk and remember them."

According to Eggleston, Park Semper Fi honors veterans and active duty military members annually around Veterans Day and is visited by more than 8,000 people each year. Sara hoped the men like her brother who sacrificed themselves for their comrades and country would influence their fellow citizens.

"My hope," said Sara, "is that when people come here, these plaques inspire them to find out their stories and really inspire them to live their lives like these men did."

Champion cyclist Lance Armstrong visits NSWC

By NSWC Public Affairs

Champion cyclist Lance Armstrong recently visited the Naval Special Warfare Center at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, Calif. Besides visiting with senior instructors and Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL students, Armstrong also got the opportunity to experience the daunting BUD/S obstacle course.

While touring the facility, Armstrong spoke with several senior instructors about the program and what it takes to make a SEAL. He also had a chance to meet with members of the Naval Special Warfare Mountain Bike Team, who walked with him to the obstacle course and presented him with a team jersey.

After receiving instruction and a safety briefing, Armstrong took his place at the starting line of the course beside Lt. Cmdr. Shane Reilly, Basic Training Command's executive officer. He successfully completed the course amidst cheers from the gathered Sailors, including the NSW Cycling Team that stayed to cheer him on.

After they finished, Reilly said, "He did outstanding ... he did a great job coming out here and running the O-course, and seemed to have some fun too."

"Well, I'm glad I'm done. I was excited to come, I've heard a lot about it. It was tougher than I thought," Armstrong said.

While at the Center, Armstrong also spoke to Class 274, the newest group of students working to become Navy SEALs. He spoke on facing adversity and the pride he feels in U.S. servicemembers. "I think the true story is that we are all very proud of you, and we are all very appreciative of the work you're doing."

Reilly said, "Any time you get a chance to hear from someone who has overcome a lot of adversity, which is exactly what the students are going to be facing here, and get a window into what drives them, it's not lost on these guys the students at all."

Armstrong has recently returned from retirement and has begun competing again in competitive racing. He was in San Diego testing equipment configurations.





Combat controllers earn Bronze Stars, Combat Action Medals

*By Master Sgt. Buffy Galbraith
AFSOC Public Affairs*

Ten medals were presented to seven combat controllers during a ceremony Oct. 14 at the Hurlburt Field Air Park.

Three Bronze Star Medals, two with valor, and seven Air Force Combat Action Medals were presented to 23rd Special Tactics Squadron Airmen for their actions during a recent deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“The citations record the words that describe action on the battlefield, but the words do not equal the experience,” said Lt. Gen. Donny Wurster, Air Force Special Operations Command commander. “Our special tactics team members are performing in extraordinary ways in extraordinary circumstances.”

Special tactics team members like combat controllers are among the most highly trained people in the U.S. military. The mission of the combat controller is to deploy undetected into combat and hostile environments to establish assault zones or airfields while simultaneously conducting air traffic control, fire support, and command and control.

Wurster spoke of the great courage and personal acts of bravery and heroism exhibited by the squadron members.

Tech. Sgt. Christopher Grove was one of the three who received a Bronze Star Medal with valor and the Air Force Combat Action Medal.

The Bronze Star Medal, established in 1944, is awarded to someone who distinguishes himself or herself by heroic or meritorious achievement or service in connection with military operations against an armed enemy.

While deployed, Grove prepared the battlefield by calling in artillery fire while his team approached an ambush of 80 insurgents. Though severely outnumbered, he guided the release of 20,000 pounds of ordnance that destroyed an enemy compound.

During a subsequent four-day combat patrol, Grove identified targets and directed airstrikes while under attack. He controlled airstrikes during this time without regard for his own safety and was lauded for his heroic actions.

However, the combat controller does not consider his actions heroic, instead he honors the efforts of his fellow teammates.



Combat controllers from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron stand at attention while Lt. Gen. Donny Wurster, Air Force Special Operations Command commander, presents each Airman with the Air Force Combat Action Medal during a ceremony at the Hurlburt Air Park Oct. 14. Three Bronze Star Medals, two with valor, and seven Air Force Combat Action Medals were presented during the ceremony. Photo by Senior Airman Emily Moore.

“It’s good to see these guys getting the recognition they deserve for all they do, because many times their actions go unseen and unheard,” he said.

Another combat controller recognized for his unseen actions was Staff Sgt. David Solis, who also earned the Bronze Star with Valor and the Air Force Combat Action Medal.

The Air Force Combat Action Medal was established in March 2007 to recognize any servicemember who actively participates in combat. The individual must have been under direct and hostile fire while operating outside the wire or physically engaging hostile forces with direct and lethal fire.

Solis provided close-air support during 20 patrols that included three troops-in-contact situations where his air-to-ground proficiency allowed him to call in airstrikes that killed 21 insurgents and wounded more than 50 enemy combatants.

During one mission, his patrol came under direct fire while conducting a weapons cache demolition operation. Solis immediately directed suppressing fire, directing

airstrikes that killed 10 enemy fighters. During another situation, he helped defend his firebase from accurate rocket and rocket-propelled grenade fire. Disregarding his own personal safety, he moved to the top of the base tower to accurately employ close-air support overhead where he successfully released a 2,000 pound bomb that eliminated an enemy position.

“I just did what any other person would do in that situation,” he said. “We are trained to do our jobs and do them well, and I was only doing my job. There’s nothing heroic about that.”

Staff Sgt. Joseph Hepler received the third Bronze

Star Medal and the Combat Action Medal. Master Sgt. Terrance Saltzman and Staff Sgts. Michael Blout, Ryan Carter and Adam Malson all earned the Combat Action Medal as well.

The combat controllers’ motto, “First There,” reaffirms their commitment to undertaking the most dangerous missions behind enemy lines by leading the way for other forces to follow.

“In the entire Air Force today, there are very few Airmen who do more to create victory or face more danger routinely than those in special tactics,” said Wurster. “I am proud of each and every one in this community.”

Gunship pilot earns Cheney Award

*By Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski
Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs*

The aircraft commander of an AC-130H Spectre gunship was named the recipient of the Cheney Award Oct. 6 for providing close-air support to troops on the ground in Afghanistan in May 2007.

The Cheney Award is presented each year to aviators who demonstrate an act of valor, extreme fortitude or self-sacrifice in a humanitarian venture. This year, the award went to a captain with the 18th Flight Test Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

On the day before Capt. Chad Bubanas and his crew were headed home, they took off on one last routine patrol mission over Afghanistan. When they were radioed about a crashed CH-47 Chinook helicopter, Bubanas coordinated the efforts of his 13-person crew as they provided overhead support to the survivors facing direct fire from hostile forces.

“We called down to them on the radio and I spoke to a Soldier who had never gotten gunship support before, so he was a little rattled but was able to confirm targets for us,” said Bubanas, an Aurora, Colo., native. “It was probably a six- or seven-hour ordeal, and we were all over the place helping different units on the ground. There were Apache helicopters in the area, another Spectre and probably 15 units who called us in that day.”

Soon after, Bubanas and his crew were called to support Special Operations Forces as well. He coordinated several support efforts and, according to Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz, because of Bubanas and his crew, American lives were saved that day.

“It just proves that Americans never leave a comrade



Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz presents Capt. Chad Bubanas with the Cheney Award Oct. 6 at the Pentagon. Bubanas received the award for his actions as the aircraft commander of an AC-130H Spectre gunship providing close-air support to troops on the ground in Afghanistan in May 2007. The Cheney Award is presented each year to aviators who demonstrate an act of valor, extreme fortitude or self-sacrifice in a humanitarian venture. U.S. Air Force photo.

behind,” Schwartz said during the presentation ceremony. “This award is a testament to that.”

“Receiving this award from a fellow airlifter and special operations pilot really means a lot to my crew and me,” Bubanas said. “I really wish they could be here, but half of them are deployed and doing what they do best. But this award was a team effort for all of us.”

Established in 1927, the Cheney Award is presented each year in memory of 1st Lt. William Cheney, who was killed in an air collision over Italy in 1918.



Hurlburt Field intelligence units receive Air Force level awards

By 2nd Lt. Mark Lazane

1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs

Two intelligence units at Hurlburt Field have been named Best Intelligence Unit in their respective categories.

Lt. Gen. David Deptula, the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, presented the awards on a visit to Hurlburt Field Oct. 14 to both the 1st Special Operations Support Squadron Intelligence Flight and the 11th Intelligence Squadron.

The 1st SOSS intelligence flight received the 2008 Outstanding Operations Support Squadron Intelligence Unit of the Year Award. The award is presented annually to only one flight throughout the entire Air Force.

"I am extremely proud of the incredible accomplishments we have achieved during such an extremely busy period," said Maj. Joseph Barry, 1st SOSS intelligence flight commander.

Lt. Col. Ioannis Koskinas, 1st Special Operations Support Squadron commander, said he sees nothing but potential for his intelligence flight.

"We may have won the award, but we're not resting on our laurels," Koskinas said. "There is a lot more work to be done, and we look forward to keeping this award at Hurlburt Field for 2008 and beyond."

"With over sixty people, our flight is one of the largest in the Air Force," Barry said. "We support the largest and most diverse operations group and wing in the Air Force."

During the last year, the 1st SOSS intelligence flight deployed approximately 60 Airmen for a total of 5,000 days. At any given time, 30 percent of the flight was deployed.

Flight members who remained at Hurlburt Field gave more than 2,000 briefs and created more than 4,500 imagery products for use in supporting their brothers-in-arms who were in the middle of the fight or on their way to it.

Barry was also impressed with the flexibility his unit showed at various times throughout the year.

"In the middle of our Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom focus, we were able to shift to the Horn of Africa in a twenty four-hour period. This



Lt. Gen. David Deptula, Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, presents Maj. Joseph Barry, 1st Special Operations Support Squadron Intelligence Flight commander, with the 2008 Outstanding OSS Intelligence Unit of the Year Award. The award is given to one intelligence flight throughout the entire Air Force annually. Photo by Airman 1st Class Kimberly Darnall.

epitomizes our motto of Always Ready - Always There."

"In a world in which intelligence is the pace car for operations, the intelligence flight has to adapt to stay ahead of the power curve," Koskinas said. "We've had to do more with no manpower increases since the mid-nineties. With the 1st Special Operations Wing and the Special Operations Command's help, we're trying to improve our manning so we can continue to provide Air Force-level award winning support to America's Air Commandos."

During his visit, Deptula also presented the 11th Intelligence Squadron with the Outstanding Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Division/Information Operations Squadron/Intelligence Squadron Intelligence Unit of the Year Award. This award is given annually to the top intelligence squadron in the Air Force.

The 11th IS is tasked with analyzing, processing and disseminating intelligence gathered throughout the world. Their workload continues to increase as the Global War on Terrorism ceases to slow down.

A large role for the squadron is operating the intelligence portion of the unmanned aerial system program in relation to its use within the Special Operations mission.

17th Air Support Operations Sq. transitions from ACC to AFSOC

*By Master Sgt. Buffy Galbraith
AFSOC Public Affairs*

The 17th Air Support Operations Squadron transitioned from Air Combat Command to the 720th Special Tactics Group, Air Force Special Operations Command, in a ceremony at the Hurlburt Field Air Park Oct. 1.

The 17th ASOS has 61 Special Operations Forces Tactical Air Control Party Airmen and support personnel. The squadron will join the ranks of more than 900 special tactics combat controllers, pararescuemen, special operations weathermen and support personnel.

“The men of the seventeenth are the crown jewel of all TACPs—the top ten percent of their career field,” said Col. Bradley Thompson, 720th STG commander. “They are the most highly decorated TACP unit in the Air Force and have been involved in every contingency since 1983. The Air Force knows how valuable they are, and we are so lucky to have our SOF brothers join us.”

Among the many awards the 17th ASOS has earned are four Outstanding Unit Awards, one with valor, and the Gallant Unit Citation. The Gallant Unit Citation recognizes organizations for outstanding heroism in combat and is only second to the Presidential Unit Citation. Units must have performed with marked distinction under difficult and hazardous conditions in accomplishing its mission so as to set it apart from and above other units participating in the same conflict.

The 17th ASOS is bringing a rich history of proven combat experience, and this move is beneficial to everyone involved, said Lt. Col. Christopher Cronk, 17th ASOS commander.

“Not only am I the commander of the best TACP squadron in the Air Force, but now we join the ranks of the most outstanding group in the Air Force,” said



Col. Bradley Thompson, 720th Special Tactics Group commander, hands the guidon to Lt. Col. Christopher Cronk, 17th Air Support Operations Squadron commander, during a ceremony Oct. 1. The ceremony signified the 17th ASOS's transition from Air Combat Command to Air Force Special Operations Command. The 61 Tactical Air Control Party Airmen of the 17th ASOS join the ranks of more than 900 special tactics Airmen and support personnel. Photo by Senior Airman Sheila DeVera.

Cronk. “This move is beneficial because we provide Joint Terminal Attack Controllers - JTACs - to all Special Operations Forces and the SOF mission belongs in AFSOC.”

The squadron provides terminal attack and liaison services to the 75th Ranger Regiment and its 1st, 2nd, 3rd and Regimental Special Troops Battalions, and the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 10th Special Forces Groups.

“These men have the right leadership and the right synergy, and this transition was the right thing to do,” said Thompson.

The 17th ASOS will remain at Fort Benning, Ga., with operational locations at Hunter Army Airfield, Ga., Fort Campbell, Ky., Fort Bragg, N.C., Fort Carson, Colo., and Fort Lewis, Wash.



1st MSOB Marines conduct first MARSOC HRST Masters course

*By Cpl. Richard Blumenstein
MARSOC Public Affairs*

In a sign of its ever-advancing capabilities, Marines from 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, conducted the first MARSOC Helicopter Rope Suspension Training Masters course at Camp Margarita aboard Camp Pendleton, Oct. 27 to Nov. 7.

Before implementation of the new course, operators with MARSOC relied on Division Schools and Special Operations Training Groups to certify their Marines as HRST Masters. Seats in the training are often scheduled months in advance and can sometimes be difficult to obtain because those schools have the responsibility of training all HRST Masters in the Marine Corps.

With the new course in place, MARSOC is now more self sufficient and will no longer have to rely heavily on other commands to certify operators as HRST Masters before deployments, according to Staff Sgt. Scott Pettus, MARSOC HRST Master course lead instructor.

“Now, I can certify people within my own command,” Pettus said. “It is more efficient

Members of 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, are lifted from the ground by a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter during Special Purpose Insertion/Extraction rigging at Camp Margarita, Camp Pendleton, Calif., Nov. 4. The Operators took part in the first MARSOC Helicopter Rope Suspension Training Masters course, which ran from Oct. 27 to Nov. 7. MARSOC photo. (Opposite page) An Operator with 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, rappels out of a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter at Camp Margarita at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Nov. 4. MARSOC photos.

because now we don't have to compete with any other units for school seats. It is all in-house now."

While the future of the new course is still uncertain, Pettus said the Marines plan to make it a permanent part of their predeployment training.

"Nothing's been set in stone, but our plan is to run one HRST Masters course per company workup," he said.

The course criterion focuses on all things HRST, which includes rappelling, fast roping and Special Purpose

Insertion/Extraction rigging. The Marines must pass a knot test, which includes tying 15 different knots with a perfect score, as well as a rigging and a written test before they move on to the practical application part of the course.

"Because the Marines' lives are in our hands, it is important we know the course content thoroughly," said Staff Sgt. Ramon Navarro, a student in the course with

MARSOC. "The people we are responsible for need to be able to trust us."

In the final week of the course, the Marines conducted each method of helicopter rope suspension techniques before becoming certified HRST Masters. The course instructors evaluate the students' abilities during this

portion to ensure they are capable of conducting and teaching HRST.

"HRST allows us to insert and extract troops in conditions where we can't land a (helicopter) in the

area," Pettus said. "This is probably one of the most dangerous things we do. If a HRST Master doesn't know what he is doing, he is not going to be able to teach his guys (properly), and people are going to get hurt."

Once these Marines become HRST Masters, they can go back to their teams and conduct training to make their Marines more proficient in HRST and increase the teams overall combat readiness, he said.

"This is probably one of the most dangerous things we do. If a HRST Master doesn't know what he is doing, he is not going to be able to teach his guys (properly), and people are going to get hurt."

— Staff Sgt. Scott Pettus

MARSOC HRST Master course lead instructor





U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - HEADQUARTERS



Murphy, Monsoor enshrined in SOF Memorial Medal of Honor monument

By Mike Bottoms
USSOCOM Public Affairs

U.S. Special Operations Command unveiled the etched names of Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor and Lt. Michael Murphy, Nov. 17, at the memorial dedicated to Special Operations Forces who died in combat or training.

Monsoor and Murphy, both Navy SEALs, each received a posthumous Medal of Honor for actions in battles in Iraq and Afghanistan. They were recognized on a wall of the monument reserved for those receiving this highest of military honors.

Murphy, 29, was killed during a reconnaissance mission in Afghanistan June

28, 2005. He was leading a four-man team looking for a key Taliban leader in the mountainous terrain near Asadabad when they came under fire from a much larger enemy force with superior tactical position.

“Mortally wounded while exposing himself to enemy fire, Murphy knowingly left his position of cover to get a clear signal in order to communicate with his headquarters. While being shot at repeatedly, Murphy calmly provided his unit’s location and requested immediate support for his element. He returned to his cover position to continue the fight until finally succumbing to his wounds,” the Medal of Honor citation read.

Monsoor died in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, while



Lt. Michael Murphy



Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor

he was on a sniper detail with three other SEALs Sept. 29, 2006. According to the official citation, Monsoor was in a sniper hideout when an insurgent threw a fragmentation grenade into the building housing him and three other SEALs.

“The grenade hit Monsoor in the chest before falling to the ground,” the citation said. “Positioned next to the single exit, Monsoor was the only one who could have escaped harm. Instead, he dropped onto the grenade to shield the others from the blast.”

During the hour-long ceremony, members of USSOCOM’s para-commando team parachuted next to the memorial with three American flags displayed. The

flags were presented to the Murphy and Monsoor families.

Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of USSOCOM, addressed the audience, citing the bravery and sacrifice of both SEALs.

“These men excelled at everything they did ... In the end, each willingly and knowingly sacrificed their lives to save others.”

*— Adm. Eric T. Olson
Commander of USSOCOM*

“These men excelled at everything they did,” said Olson. “In the end, each willingly and knowingly sacrificed their lives to save others.”

The ceremony also included USSOCOM Command Sgt. Major Thomas Smith reading both Medal of Honor citations and the Monsoor and Murphy families laying a wreath next to Murphy’s and Monsoor’s etched names.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor’s and Lt. Michael Murphy’s family members are escorted to the two wreaths to be lain at the Medal of Honor monument where both Murphy’s and Monsoor’s names were unveiled at the Special Operations Forces Memorial, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Nov. 17. Photo by Mike Bottoms.



SOF Senior Enlisted Course lays foundation for SOF assignments

By Mike Bottoms
USSOCOM Public Affairs

If you ask any senior officer in the U.S. military today what makes the American military the best in the world, the answer is almost always because of the professional enlisted corps.

Ensuring senior NCOs perpetuate their legacy of professional competency in Special Operations, the Joint Special Operations University offers the Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Course. The course is designed to provide senior enlisted personnel with the knowledge necessary to enhance their effectiveness in the Joint SOF environment. SOFSEC also strengthens their inter-operational skills to make the senior NCOs effective in the joint environment.

“The key to the course is to give a foundation to senior NCOs who have limited SOF experience and are going to a SOF unit,” said Sgt. Maj. Learndro Sanfeliz Jr., Command Sgt. Maj., Joint Special Operations University. “A student leaving here can go into any TSOC (Theater Special Operations Command) or JSOTF (Joint Special Operations Task Force) and have an appreciation of the SOF mission.”

SOFSEC is a 10-day course covering more than 60 subjects and featuring more than 50 different speakers crossing the spectrum of SOF career fields. Subjects range from the tactical level like psychological operations or special boat operations to the strategic level featuring topics such as policy and support for insurgencies and internal defense and development.

Guest speakers for SOFSEC come from all disciplines of SOF. Lectures are given by AFSOC special tactics, USASOC’s Special Forces, NAVSPECWARCOM’s maritime Special Operations Forces and MARSOC Marines. Senior Fellows from JSOU also give lessons on U.S. foreign policy and military doctrine.

“The speakers that Sergeant Major Sanfeliz arranged for the class were very good at presenting the information,” said a MARSOC Marine. “The course provided an understanding every senior NCO should know before entering a SOF unit.”

SOFSEC is run three times a year and has been held at Fort Bragg, N.C., Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Va.,



Jeff Nelson, Senior Fellow from Joint Special Operations University, gives a lecture on foreign assistance to students attending the Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Course, Little Creek, Va., Oct. 30. Photo by Mike Bottoms.

and Camp Lejeune, N.C. The next scheduled SOFSEC course will be held in February at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, Calif.

According to Sanfeliz, the course was the idea of former USSOCOM commander Gen. Peter Schoomaker and his Command Sgt. Maj. Melvin Wick.

“They both saw the need for SOF and SOF enablers to undergo a formal course designed to teach the unique aspects of Special Operations,” Sanfeliz said. “General Schoomaker gave the order for the course and Sergeant Major Wick got the course off the ground.”

Students going through SOFSEC give the course high marks.

“The course was extremely helpful in expanding my knowledge base of Joint Special Operations,” said an Army Ranger attending the course. “I was able to network and develop contacts, and the course has certainly improved my professional development.”

Sanfeliz works with each component’s senior enlisted advisor to set up the course and to get senior NCOs to attend the course.

“We at JSOU have a good working relationship with all (USSOCOM) senior enlisted advisors, and they really push their people to come to the course, and the senior enlisted advisors are a big part of why the course is so successful,” Sanfeliz said.

JSOU, Harvard host COIN Symposium

Special Operations, academic and human rights communities identify operational and ethical lessons from overlooked counterinsurgencies

By Frank Reidy, JSOU University, and Tyler Moselle, Carr Center

The Joint Special Operations University and Harvard University's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, recently co-sponsored a symposium in Washington, D.C., titled "Overlooked and Understudied Counterinsurgencies." The purpose of this strategic education event was to evaluate historical and contemporary conflicts in different regions of the world, broaden traditional understandings of insurgency and extract new insights about irregular warfare, the effectiveness of counterinsurgency strategies and the protection of human rights.

The Carr Center, part of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, conducts similar events as part of its program on National Security and Human Rights. "It is essential to widen our aperture of understanding of insurgency and counterinsurgency. These twenty-first century challenges require looking beyond the usual case studies and demand engagement from practitioners and theorists from varied fields and perspectives," said Sarah Sewall, program and Carr Center director. "I am pleased to partner with the Special Operations community as the National Security and Human Rights Program continues framing the national debate about counterinsurgency."

For its part, the Joint Special Operations University provided several of its Senior Fellows as presenters and panel moderators. Altogether, USSOCOM and DoD representatives accounted for almost half the participants. Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of USSOCOM, and Joseph Miller, director of Strategy, Plans and Policies, USSOCOM, were among the featured military speakers. Dr. Brian Maher, JSOU president, said, "Educational events like this are symbolic of where JSOU can contribute to USSOCOM spheres of interest and influence. Serving as bridges to academic, interagency and NGO communities, these exchanges stimulate research, advance debate and can be a catalyst for SOF strategic planners."



In his keynote speech, Olson challenged participants to consider new models for addressing irregular warfare, particularly the counterinsurgency challenges. He suggested that counterinsurgency will be conducted simultaneously in many countries and in many regions as we work to uphold governments that are challenged by existing and emerging movements. Olson provided his thoughts about counterinsurgency operations in 15 points that reminded the audience of the vital process of learning and relearning about operations in the counterinsurgency environment. The presentations and panel discussion that followed involved lessons and insights from case studies and responded to Olson's challenge to harvest knowledge from the collective experiences of the audience.

Overall, this event brought together more than 60 experts from academic, military, governmental and nongovernmental organizations to expand counterinsurgency inquiry beyond the traditional post-colonial case studies. Participants discussed the nature of conflicts and effectiveness of counterinsurgency tactics and strategies in Burma, Nepal, the Philippines, Kashmir, Colombia, the Basque Region and Sri Lanka. They debated the causes and characteristics of these lesser-known insurgencies, the relationship of insurgency and counterinsurgency to terrorism and human rights violations, the challenge of assuring law enforcement and political stability, coordination of civil and military planning, and the historical and contemporary role of nongovernmental organizations in counterinsurgency.

The Carr Center National Security and Human Rights Program explores the relationship of military power and human rights through research, facilitated dialogue and publications. For more information on the National Security and Human Rights Program, visit <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/nshr/>. For more information on the Joint Special Operations University events and publications, visit the Website <http://jsoupublic.socom.mil/>.



The lions in winter

By retired Col. Bernard Moore II

On Sept. 30, 2008, the last MH-53 Pave Low was retired. This article briefly summarizes some of the highlights in its 28-year career in the U.S. Special Operations Forces.

From the Ashes of Dasht-e-Kavir

In the cool darkness of the early dawn of April 25, 1980, the maintenance crews of the 1550th Aircrew Training and Test Wing at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., were busy out on the huge concrete flightline making their final mechanical checks on a handful of big green and grey camouflaged helicopters. As usual, it looked like it was going to be a gorgeous day for flying low level over the high desert and pine-covered mountains of New Mexico's southern Rockies.

The flight crews were just beginning to arrive to plan the day's training flights when the news began to spread quickly through the hallways of the squadron. The image of a grim President Jimmy Carter giving an unannounced address to the nation was on every TV

Tip of the Spear

channel, his voice on every radio. The previous night, the president explained, a joint task force of U.S. Army commandos, Air Force crews flying C-130s and Marine crews flying Navy helicopters had attempted a daring rescue operation to free 53 American hostages who had been held captive since November 1979 by armed radical students in Iran's capital of Tehran. Not only had the operation been aborted in mid-phase, there had also been a tragic accident at DESERT 1, a secret ground refueling site in the Iranian Dasht-e-Kavir desert. Eight Americans had died when one of the Navy helicopters collided in the darkness with a C-130. Their bodies had to be left behind in the fiery inferno when the rescue team was forced to withdraw from Iran before the sun came up.

In addition to the eight men lost, a total of seven Navy helicopters and the wrecked Air Force C-130 were left on Iranian soil. By any measure, the rescue operation, codenamed EAGLE CLAW, had been a



*An MH-53J flies into the sunset at Hurlburt Field, Fla.
Photo by Mike Bottoms.*

tragic, total, and humiliating disaster for the United States. After months of fruitless, diplomatic negotiations, the president had given his armed forces the green light to execute “the military option.” But now, with the stunning failure of EAGLE CLAW, the President knew the United States was suddenly in an even weaker negotiating position vis-à-vis the Iranians.

Back at Kirtland, everyone tried to understand what had happened, what had gone wrong. But there was no time to mourn or debate, there were training missions to fly, and out on the ramp waiting for their flight crews were the newest helicopters in the Air Force’s Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS). They were officially known as HH-53H “Black Knights.” They were big, ugly, powerful, and were the world’s most advanced, most capable military helicopters.

The “Black Knights” had been recently built under a program codenamed PAVE LOW III to provide the ARRS with a helicopter that could that could fly combat search and rescue (CSAR) missions over hostile territory at very low altitude, at night or in adverse weather, even in mountainous terrain. These challenging tactical requirements were met by modifying nine Vietnam-era HH-53C Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters with state-of-the-art terrain following/terrain avoidance radars, forward-looking infrared sensors and advanced precision navigation systems. Plans called for the HH-53H “Pave Lows” (the name “Black Knight” never caught on) to eventually be based with ARRS rescue squadrons at Woodbridge, England, or McClellan Air Force Base, Calif., but the disaster at DESERT 1 had changed the destiny of the Pave Lows and their crews.



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National Assets

Within hours of learning of the failure of EAGLE CLAW, Carter directed his secretary of defense to begin preparing the military for another rescue operation. Carter was well aware that his best chance to successfully execute a surprise rescue raid had been played, but he also recognized that he must have an in-extremis military option, no matter how desperate and risky, should the hostage situation turn deadly.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that there was much work to be done to learn the lessons of EAGLE CLAW, and to develop a greatly expanded and enhanced range of advanced joint special operations capabilities. Only then could the US military present the President with a credible option for another rescue attempt. They immediately launched Project HONEY BADGER, an urgent, top priority and highly classified project to create, test, develop and exercise these new capabilities.

Generating a much expanded and vastly more capable special operations airlift force was the first priority. More specifically, EAGLE CLAW had revealed the need for heavy lift helicopters that could be refueled in-flight, penetrate at low altitude at night or through adverse weather in mountainous terrain and navigate with great precision. Only one helicopter in the world met this demanding criterion; the Air Force's HH-53H Pave Lows.

On May 14, 1980, a secret message arrived at Kirtland Air Force Base directing all Pave Lows, their flight crews, maintenance and other support personnel be deployed as quickly as possible to Hurlburt Field, Fla., for a temporary duty assignment of indefinite duration to take part in HONEY BADGER. Three days later, eight HH-53Hs touched down at Hurlburt after a 10-hour non-stop flight from Kirtland that included multiple in-flight refuelings by HC-130 tankers. On arrival at Hurlburt, the Pave Lows and their crew were quickly assigned to the resident 20th Special Operations Squadron. It became clear the Air Force's Aerospace Rescue and Recovery

Service had permanently lost their most valued assets.

The Pave Low team was quickly committed to intense unilateral tactical training with night vision goggles and frequent participation in complex joint HONEY BADGER exercises, including several at various locations throughout the United States. With its unique tactical capabilities, the Pave Lows demonstrated a major improvement in special operations airlift, but most importantly, it was the human factor – dedicated, focused, highly motivated, highly trained flight crews – that provided the most valuable contribution of the Pave Lows to our joint SOF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff soon declared the HH-53Hs and the 20th SOS to be “national assets.”

When Iran released the hostages in January 1981, the HONEY BADGER project ended, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff made it clear that expanding,

improving and maintaining joint SOF in peak readiness would remain a top national priority. Training never let up. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the nation's top tier SOF units to train together in extremely challenging joint exercises at least six times each year, often in distant and austere locations.

The continuous pace of highly realistic training scenarios often pushed men and machines to the limit and beyond. Despite the best efforts of unit commanders to balance the need for realism in training with safety, accidents and casualties became a rare but inevitable fact of life in high-end special operations. The 20th SOS suffered its first loss in October 1984 when one of its HH-53s crashed into a hillside during a heavy rain shower in the Philippines during Exercise COPE THUNDER, killing the six-man crew. A month later, in November 1984, another Pave Low went down in North Carolina, this time due to catastrophic mechanical failure. Fortunately the pilots demonstrated outstanding skill in executing a textbook autorotation and, although the HH-53 crashed, all personnel on board survived.

At this time, another interesting episode in Pave Low history was unfolding when it was revealed that in May 1984 the Air Force chief of staff had initiated action to



permanently end U.S. Air Force helicopter support for SOF and transfer the Pave Lows to the Army. This action, known as "Initiative 17," met with vehement protests from several powerful members of Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, who voiced their view that Air Force support for SOF had steadily diminished since HONEY BADGER had ended in 1981.

Furthermore, the losses of two Pave Lows meant that only seven HH-53Hs remained - two less than the number of helicopters launched on the failed Iran rescue operation. Faced with these criticisms, the Air Force put "Initiative 17" on indefinite hold in January 1985.

In 1986 the Air Force transferred every H-53 to AFSOC and modified all to a greatly improved configuration designated MH-53J Pave Low III (Enhanced). These actions gave AFSOC a total of 41 MH-53Js, enough to equip three new squadrons with Pave Lows - the 21st SOS in England, 31st SOS in Korea and 551st SOS at Kirtland. The strength of the 20th SOS was also doubled.

Into Combat

During the latter half of the 1980's the Pave Low squadrons were alerted several times in anticipation of being committed to "real world" contingencies, but each time the contemplated operations were canceled before they began. In one such "false start," the 20th SOS was directed to immediately deploy every available Pave Low at Hurlburt to an aircraft carrier steaming across the Caribbean Sea hundreds of miles to the south. After loading their MH-53s with guns and ammunition, the squadron launched their formation for the long, overwater flight across the Gulf of Mexico. After an epic and



MH-53J 68-10363 belonging to the 20th Special Operations Squadron taxis out for a mission in support of Operation Just Cause Dec. 30, 1989, at Howard Air Force Base, Panama. Photo by retired Col. Bernard Moore II.

grueling flight with multiple in-flight refuelings by HC-130s, the helicopters closed on the carrier. Just before they landed on the ship's deck, the anticipated operation was canceled by the Joint Staff.

In December 1989, the Pave Lows were finally sent into action for the first time in Operation JUST CAUSE, the U.S. military invasion of Panama. In JUST CAUSE, the 20th SOS self-deployed five MH-53Js to Howard Air Base in the Canal Zone just prior to D-Day. Combat operations commenced on Dec. 20 as the U.S. military took control of the country and deposed the regime of its brutal dictator, Manuel Noriega. Over the next several days, the Pave Lows flew dozens of day and night operational sorties all over Panama infiltrating Rangers and SEALs to various objectives and evacuating combat casualties. The 20th SOS redeployed to Hurlburt in January 1990 without having taken any damage or suffering any casualties.

In August 1990 the 20th SOS deployed to Saudi

An impromptu debrief is conducted between Capt. Joe Becker of 20th Special Operations Squadron and Master Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Thomas Vawter Dec. 26, 1989, at Howard Air Force Base after a mission in Operation Just Cause. Photo by retired Col. Bernard Moore II.





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Arabia for Operation DESERT SHIELD after Saddam Hussein invaded, occupied and annexed Kuwait. The Pave Low crews were given the primary responsibility for combat search and rescue coverage for U.S. and coalition aircraft in the theater. For six months, the squadron flew its eight MH-53Js on numerous practice missions over the Arabian Desert, honing its CSAR skills.

When the decision was made to prepare for an offensive campaign to oust Hussein's forces from Kuwait, the 20th SOS was given an additional assignment, this one entirely unexpected but vitally important to the ultimate success of the preliminary air campaign. Its task was to employ four MH-53s to lead a formation of Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopters on a night mission to strike several Iraqi early warning radars. Their plan was to blow a hole in the enemy air defenses so coalition bombers could pour through the breach unmolested as they headed for their targets in Iraq. In the opening minutes of Operation DESERT STORM, the Pave Lows flawlessly executed their pathfinder mission, leading the Apaches straight to their targets, which the Army pilots

quickly destroyed.

Just as DESERT STORM began on Jan. 16, 1991, the 21st SOS deployed five of its MH-53Js to Turkey to provide CSAR coverage for northern Iraq. The Pave Lows were soon busy in their CSAR role as Coalition aircraft began to go down over Iraq. After a frustrating lack of success and a failed attempt to rescue a downed Air Force F-15E crew in western Iraq, a 20th SOS Pave Low located and rescued a Navy F-14 pilot from Iraq in the first successful CSAR since the Vietnam War. In addition to standing CSAR alert, the 20th SOS Pave Lows began flying infiltration missions inserting Special Forces behind the Iraqi lines in Iraq and Kuwait. No MH-53s were lost in DESERT STORM, and there were no casualties.

One War after the Other

No sooner had DESERT STORM ended when the Pave Lows of the 21st SOS based in Turkey were tasked with supporting Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, which provided humanitarian assistance to Kurdish refugees being harassed by the Iraqi military. The MH-53s flew missions over northern Iraq carrying supplies for



MH-53J 69-5797 from the 20th SOS is shown camouflaged in desert warpaint March 16, 1991, at Hurlburt Field, Fla., following service in Desert Storm. Photo by retired Col. Bernard Moore II.

displaced Kurds and providing mobility for Army Special Forces who were organizing and providing security for the operations on the ground. The 21st SOS role in these operations ended in October 1991, which allowed the “Dust Devils” to return to England.

By 1993 the civil war in the Balkans was becoming increasingly violent as what had been Yugoslavia continued to break apart. With fighting between Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs and Croatian Serbs out of control, the United States and United Nations stepped in with several limited peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. In Operation DENY FLIGHT, U.S. fighters patrolled over Bosnia while Operation PROVIDE PROMISE was an airlift of food and supplies to isolated civilians. Once again, the Pave Low team from the 21st SOS was deployed for combat search and rescue duty, this time to Brindisi Air Base, Italy, just across the Adriatic Sea from Bosnia. When it became clear that the Brindisi deployment was going to continue for many months, if not years, members of the 20th SOS were soon sent to Brindisi to share the TDY burden.

The next call to action was Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, in Haiti in September 1994. In response to an increasingly violent political crisis, the United States prepared to invade Haiti with SOF leading the way, and the 20th SOS self-deployed its MH-53s to Guantanamo Naval Base, Cuba. Throughout the intervention, the Pave Lows flew numerous missions inserting and resupplying Army Special Forces and Rangers.

When atrocities increased in Bosnia in August 1995, NATO launched Operation DELIBERATE FORCE, a bombing campaign to force the Bosnian Serbs to peace talks. When a French Mirage 2000 was shot down by Bosnian-Serbs, the Pave Lows prepared to scramble, but there was no contact from the downed Frenchmen. During the next few days, the Pave Lows launched three operations into Bosnia to search for the MIAs. On the third



MH-53Js from the 20th Special Operations Squadron fly to Operation Uphold Democracy at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Sept. 16, 1994. Photo by retired Col. Bernard Moore II.

try, the MH-53s took heavy anti-aircraft fire, and their door and tail gunners returned fire. One of the MH-53s was hit several times, wounding both door gunners. The rescue force made it back to Brindisi, and the injured gunners soon recovered. It was later learned the French pilots had been captured immediately after they were shot down, but the French president sent his senior SOF general to Brindisi to thank the Pave Low team for risking all for their NATO brothers-in-arms. DELIBERATE FORCE resulted in the Dayton Peace Accords for Bosnia in December 1995.

Sadly, the next emergency call for the Brindisi-based Pave Lows came in February 1996 when an Air Force CT-43 transport crashed into a mountain in Croatia, killing all on board, including Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown. The MH-53s flew numerous dangerous missions in atrocious weather to assist in securing the crash site and recovering those who had lost their lives.

April 1996 saw the civil war in Liberia erupting again and triggering a call for an emergency evacuation of American and European civilians. In Operation ASSURED RESPONSE, Pave Lows from 21st SOS, along with “Night Stalker” MH-47s, transported more than 1,300 people from Liberia to the safety of Sierra Leone in multiple shuttles.

In Operation ALLIED FORCE, the 78-day NATO



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bombing campaign against Serbian targets from March through June 1999, the 21st SOS deployed to Bosnia for combat search and rescue duty. During the war, an F-117 and an F-16 were downed. In both incidents, Pave Lows acted as pathfinders to lead MH-60Gs of the 55th SOS to successfully rescue both American pilots despite poor weather and heavy enemy fire. In the meantime, USSOCOM had made a decision to begin drawing down and retire the global Pave Low force, and on March 31, 2001, the 31st SOS “Black Knights” in Korea was deactivated.

Maximum Effort

The terrorist attacks on U.S. soil Sept. 11, 2001, immediately thrust the two remaining Pave Low combat squadrons into a non-stop war. By Sept. 13, five MH-53s from the 20th SOS were busy flying over both New York City and the Pentagon assisting emergency recovery efforts.

October 2001 found the 20th SOS deployed to a forward base in the Afghanistan theater where its Pave Lows were initially assigned to combat search and rescue duties for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, the campaign to deny al-Qaida its safe haven in Afghanistan, and to depose the Taliban from control of Afghan governance. The MH-53s were soon also being employed for infiltration and resupply of Special Forces and other SOF in the rugged mountains, high altitudes, atrocious weather and dusty terrain in eastern and southern Afghanistan. Three MH-53s were lost in Afghanistan at a cost of four crew members and one Army soldier. Another was badly shot up but recovered to base. After flying hundreds of combat missions, the Pave Lows were redeployed in 2003 to get ready for an even bigger war.

During Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, MH-53s from the 20th and 21st SOS infiltrated U.S. Army and Navy SOF to their objectives in hundreds of combat missions from March 20, 2003, to Sept. 27, 2008. Blowing sand, thick powdery dust, oven-like heat, and a ferocious enemy made Iraqi operations among the most dangerous



MH-53s from the 20th Special Operations Squadron are prepped for a nighttime launch into Iraq June 9, 2003, from Ali al-Salem Air Base, Kuwait, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Photo by retired Col. Bernard Moore II.

for the flight crews and grueling for the ground support personnel. IRAQI FREEDOM was the Pave Low’s longest continuous deployment at a cost of three MH-53s destroyed. One Pave Low was shot down at Fallujah when a rocket-propelled grenade struck the front cockpit. Despite their injuries, the pilots landed the helicopter and all on board were rescued by their wingman. Two others were lost in accidents, but with no fatalities.

In the meantime, in July 2006 the fighting in Lebanon triggered the deployment of the 20th SOS to Cyprus to evacuate American civilians from Beirut. After successfully completing this operation, the “Dust Devils” returned to Mildenhall, England, where the squadron was stood down and deactivated in 2007, its MH-53s then being sent either to the Bone Yard or to museums.

Fighting in Iraq continued as our SOF stayed offensively engaged with the enemy night and day, every day. The relentless pace of operations notwithstanding, the clock continued to tick down toward the retirement date for the Pave Lows. Finally the last day arrived. As the sun set over Iraq on the evening of Sept. 26, 2008, six MH-53 Pave Low helicopters, flown by crews of the 20th SOS, thundered into the darkness and set course for their tactical objectives. A few hours later, they arrived back over their base, landed, taxied to their parking spots, and shut down for the last time. With their missions completed, the MH-53 Pave Lows were disassembled,

packed up, put on C-5s and sent home to the United States, and into retirement. The 20th Special Operations Squadron itself was deactivated Oct. 17, 2008.

The final flights over Iraq marked not just the end of the line for the Pave Lows; it also brought to a close the U.S. Air Force's long history of employing helicopters in special operations. In 1944, the 1st Air Commando Group had flown Sikorsky YR-4 helicopters in Burma supporting guerilla warfare operations. In the Korean War, the 581st Air Resupply Squadron had used Sikorsky H-19s to perform clandestine agent infiltrations. In the Vietnam War, the 20th and 21st SOS had employed UH-1s, CH-3s, and CH-53s over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in clandestine unconventional warfare operations.

Since 1980, the Pave Lows have played an essential role for SOF. For 12 years, they were the only helicopters that could provide the ability to infiltrate through adverse weather in near zero ceiling/zero visibility conditions. From 1988 to 2001, the MH-53s of the 31st SOS provided the only in-theater SOF helicopter support in the Asia-Pacific arena. Likewise, from 1988 to 2007, the Pave Lows of the 21st SOS provided the only in-theater SOF helo support in Europe and Africa. In numerous crises and wars, they were there, often providing the only helicopter airlift for Special Forces and SEALs. They will be missed.

When we think about the contribution of the Pave Lows, we must recognize that an MH-53 is a lifeless, inanimate machine made of aluminum and steel wrapped around a mass of electrical wires, hydraulic lines and black boxes. What gave the Pave Lows life, what made them thunder through the night skies were their pilots, flight engineers and gunners. And what allowed the flight crews to get these beasts on target were the hundreds of crew chiefs, maintenance specialists, back shop and supply troops, intelligence analysts, and many other hard working men and women who together made the Pave Low force unique national assets.

The U.S. SOF helicopter mission is now exclusively in the capable and proven hands of the USASOC's "Night Stalkers" while AFSOC progresses into a new era with the CV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor. With Ospreys, AFSOC gives SOF commanders, planners and operators unique and unprecedented tactical options with speed and range advantages never before available in vertical lift aircraft.

In the end, there can be no greater tribute to the Pave Lows than that they were retired while still engaging in daily combat missions on the front line. No one will soon forget the contribution to SOF and to this nation made by the Pave Low team, from HONEY BADGER to IRAQI FREEDOM – Pave Low Leads!



20th Special Operations Squadron MH-53J models head into the sunset. Photo by retired Col. Bernard Moore II.



SOF in Operation Earnest Will

By Jonathan Freudenthal and Jim Fream
USSOCOM History Office

To ensure the safety of neutral oil tankers and other merchant ships in the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War, the United States developed Operation EARNEST WILL. During the operation, the U.S. Navy provided escorts for tankers and ships, the Air Force provided aerial surveillance, and Army Special Operations helicopters searched for possible attackers.

After Iran attacked several tankers in December 1986, the government of Kuwait asked the United States to register 11 of its tankers as American ships so they could be escorted by the U.S. Navy. Since U.S. law forbade the use of Navy ships to escort civilian vessels under a foreign flag, the Kuwaiti ships had to be re-registered under the U.S. flag.

Despite the protection offered by U.S. Naval vessels, it did not stop Iran's attacks. The Iranians used mines and small boats to harass the convoys steaming to and from Kuwait. Since most of the Iranian attacks were conducted at night, the United States countered with Army Special Operations helicopters that were difficult to spot on radar and were relatively quiet, which allowed them to get close to a target. Shallow-draft Naval Special Warfare patrol boats conducted mine sweeps.

In late July 1987, Rear Adm. Harold Bernsen, commander of the Middle East Force, requested Naval Special Warfare assets. A few weeks later, six Mark III patrol boats, other Special Boat assets and two SEAL platoons were deployed to the area. Meanwhile, two MH-6 and four AH-6 Army SOF helicopters and 39 men were sent to the region for Operation PRIME CHANCE I.

The Middle East Force converted two oil barges, Hercules and Wimbrown VII, into mobile sea bases. The mobile sea bases, which became operational in October 1987, allowed SOF in the northern Persian Gulf to thwart clandestine Iranian mining and small boat attacks. On Aug. 8, the helicopters, called SEABATs, escorted the third EARNEST WILL convoy while searching for signs of Iranians laying mines. The patrol boats began escort missions Sept. 9.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic moments during Operation PRIME CHANCE I came on the evening of Sept. 21 with the attack of the Iran Ajr, an Iranian ship converted for use as a minelayer. During the evening, one MH-6 and



SEALs board the Iran Ajr. Courtesy photo.

two AH-6 helicopters took off from the frigate Jarrett to track the Iran Ajr. Using night-vision devices, the gunship crews watched the vessel as it laid several mines, and then engaged with mini-guns and rockets. After receiving permission to attack, the helicopters fired, stopping the ship. Bernsen then ordered a SEAL team from the Guadalcanal to board the Iran Ajr as two patrol boats provided security. The Iran Ajr was sunk Sept. 26.

Early in October, the mobile sea bases entered service in the northern Persian Gulf. From these bases, U.S. patrol craft and helicopters monitored Iranian patrol craft in the northern gulf and deterred their attacks. Within a few days, patrol boat and AH/MH-6 helicopter personnel determined that the Iranians hid during the day near oil and gas separation platforms in Iranian waters, and at night they headed toward the Middle Shoals Buoy, a navigation aid for the tankers.

With this knowledge, SOF sent three of its helicopters and two patrol craft toward the buoy on the night of Oct. 8. When the AH/MH-6s arrived, they were fired upon by three Iranian boats anchored near the buoy. After a short but intense firefight, the helicopters sank all three boats.

On Oct. 15, the reflagged U.S. tanker Sea Isle City, which was at anchor near the oil terminal outside of Kuwait City, was struck by an Iranian Silkworm missile, wounding the American captain and 17 crewmen. Four days after the attack, four destroyers shelled two Iranian oil platforms in the Rostam oil field during Operation NIMBLE ARCHER. After the attack, a SEAL platoon and a demolition unit destroyed both platforms.

Thereafter, Iranian attacks on neutral ships dropped drastically. On July 18, Iran accepted the United Nations cease fire; on Aug. 20, 1988, the Iran-Iraq War ended.

**SPECIAL OPERATORS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES
SERVING IN OPERATIONS ENDURING FREEDOM,
IRAQI FREEDOM AND
IN THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM
WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN**



**Army Maj. Robert D. Lindenau
95th Civil Affairs Brigade**



**Army Sgt. Nicholas A. Casey
7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)**



**Army Staff Sgt. Anthony D. Davis
75th Ranger Regiment**

Editor's note: Honored are SOF who have lost their lives since October's Tip of the Spear.



Malian and Senegalese military forces practice infiltration and extraction maneuvers with a CV-22 Osprey Nov. 12, 2008, as part of the joint training exercise Flintlock in Bamako, Mali.

Photo by Sgt. Nicholas Hernandez