



TIP OF THE SPEAR



**Col. Charles Fry receives
2009 Bull Simons Award**

- ♠ **SOF with Sons of Iraq, Iraqi Army kill terrorist Abu Ghazwan**
- ♠ **3rd SFG Soldiers earn 10 Silver Stars for fierce Shok Valley battle**
- ♠ **SEAL awarded Silver Star for combat in Iraq**



Col. Fry 2009 Bull Simons recipient 20

Tip of the Spear

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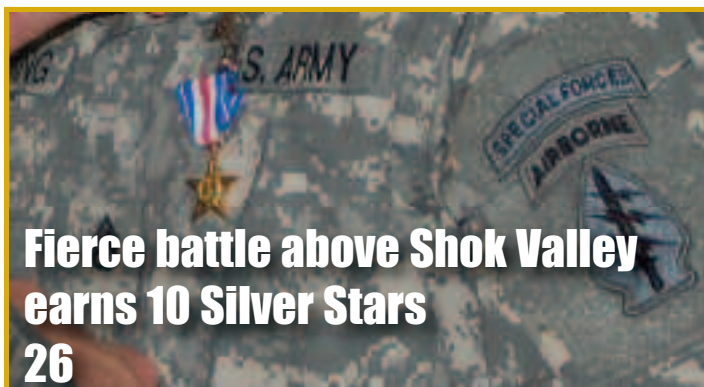
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Front Cover: Col. Arthur "Bull" Simons shakes hands with then Capt. Charles Fry at Fort Gullick, Panama. Retired Col. Charles Fry is the 2009 Bull Simons Award recipient. The award recognizes recipients who embody "the true spirit, values, and skills of a Special Operations warrior," and Col. Simons, whom the award is named after, is the epitome of these attributes. Courtesy photo.

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CURRENT OPERATIONS - IRAQ COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE – ARABIAN PENINSULA

Iraqi Security Forces meet challenge of Competition

Competitors work as a team during the final event of the Tactical Conditioning Competition at Ar Rutbah, Iraq. This test of strength and focus started as teams dismounted vehicles and charged a sand berm. As they descended the other side of the berm, they were greeted by a cacophony of explosions and other distractions as they were tested physically by flipping tires 100 yards then carrying their teammates back during the return trip to the vehicles. Photo by Cpl. Sean Cummins.

By Tech. Sgt. Shanda De Anda
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs

Iraqi Security Forces counterparts met near Ar Rutbah, Iraq, recently for the Tactical Conditioning Competition, which tested skills learned during foreign internal defense training.

Foreign internal defense training is an ongoing effort by Coalition forces to train, mentor and advise foreign security forces. Coalition forces have come a long way in building self-sufficient forces to help enforce the rule of law and maintain security.

“The improvements are good but gradual,” said a member of the Coalition forces team who has trained Iraqis over the past few months and hosted the competition.

Participants consisted of members of Al Qaim Special Weapons and Tactics, Rawah SWAT and 2nd Battalion Iraqi Army Scouts. All arrived eager to embark on the challenges of the competition.

“From start to finish, the motivation exhibited by each team was exceptional,” said a Coalition forces commander. “All competitors came to win and ‘put out’ harder than (their hosts) had ever seen before.”

“They did not need any motivation to get out there and push themselves to their limits,” said a Coalition forces soldier.

The competition was divided into two sections – individual skills and teamwork.

During the individual portion, the soldiers stood alone as they went through a series of events that tested their strength, focus and dexterity. They performed push-ups, crossed a berm, assembled AK-47s, sprinted to and fired from barricades, applied a field dressing to a simulated casualty then, using the fireman’s carry, transported the casualty 50 yards to the finish line.

“The most challenging part was shooting after the physical parts,” said an Al Qaim officer.

These challenges continued as competitors entered the two-man team portion of the competition. Here they had to conquer a sand berm, dive under a table, recover and race toward a tractor tire and work collectively to flip it 50 yards to a barricade. Once at the barricade, competitors had to shoot a target 10 times and flip the tire back the 50 yards to end this part of the competition.

Rest time between segments of the competition was short as men prepared for the relay portion. It was another race against time as competitors used pistols to hit targets 50 yards away, performed pull-ups in full battle gear then raced back to the line to tag the next teammate in line.

Coalition forces took a break from coaching, regulating and demonstrating each event to participate in this third portion of the competition with Iraqi teams. Their participation added to the good-natured competitive spirit of the day as trainees pushed to outperform their trainers.

Competitors gathered into eight-man teams to finish the final portion of the competition, which tested team

cohesiveness as they dismounted their vehicles, ran over a berm to face multi-colored smoke and a cacophony of explosions and other distractions to add confusion. In the commotion, teams were challenged to focus on the mission as they leapt into action and tackled flipping a tractor tire 100 yards, then half the team used the fireman's carry to lug the other half of the team more than 100 yards of the return trip to the vehicles to finish the event and the competition as a whole.

The portion that was the most fun was "the competition through the smokes and flash bangs; it makes the team keep their focus on the target," said an Al Qaim officer whose team won the competition. "We learned that we work together with our team quite well."

The competition ended with the presentation of awards for top performers, a cookout, recounts of the day's events and discussions of future combined operations. This competition helped establish working relationships that had not existed, while leaders could assess their force's capabilities as compared to other ISF.

"Throughout this competition, teams demonstrated improved weapons handling, but they still have a lot to learn. The winning team (Al Qaim SWAT) had the strongest leadership and maintained their members' professionalism throughout the competition in appearance and performance" said a Coalition forces soldier.

Although designed to test skills, perhaps the most valuable result of this competition was the newly formed relationships between ISF who share a vested interest in safety and security of Iraq.

"Hopefully we will be able to work a joint mission where the Iraqi army and Iraqi police can execute a target together, focusing on each others strengths to secure an objective safely and quickly," said a Coalition forces coordinator of the competition. "We have already had a few follow-on engagements with IA and IP (since the competition), and both parties were very helpful to one another."

Building relationships like these help in the progress as ISF move toward self-sufficiency and encourage CF to host events like this in the future; a similar competition is planned for later this winter. Coalition forces feel the time and effort invested is worth the return of establishing working relationships and improving/evaluating FID training progress. Members of the Iraqi teams share an

interest in participating in future events of this nature.

"This was the first time we had done a competition," said a member of the Al Qaim SWAT team. "(Another competition in the future) would be a good test for everyone ... we train and train, but you don't actually get to see how good you are until you compete in a competition such as this."

"New relationships were formed between various SWAT and IA units that built a mutual respect and interoperability between all three ISF teams," said a Coalition forces commander. "For that reason, the Tactical Conditioning Competition was a huge success."

(Editor's note: Full identification of sources is withheld to protect the identity of those quoted in this article.)



After making his way over a sand berm and diving under a table, this member of Rawah Special Weapons and Tactics quickly recovers to tackle the remaining obstacles in the second event of the Tactical Conditioning Competition Nov. 12 at Ar Rutbah, Iraq. In the background, a Coalition forces advisor cheers on a competitor from the Iraqi Army's team. In this part of the competition, two competitors at a time from each of the eight teams raced against opponents as they tackled a sand berm, dove under wooden tables and quickly recovered to race on to finish the rest of the competition. Photo by Cpl. Sean Cummins.



Riverine SWAT demonstration ensures election day safety

Photos by Staff Sgt. Heidi Davis
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs

Photos 1 through 4

The Tactical Response Team, which is the latest addition to Basrah's Special Weapons and Tactics, demonstrated their capability to monitor, infiltrate and capture terrorists and criminals while saving hostages from harm. This new team, inaugurated in December,

provides more flexibility in combating criminals on land and on water because of the special training this cadre received in maritime and urban-strike operations. The team used the crowd gathered for a city-wide celebration as an opportunity to demonstrate their skills to the public. Demonstrations were intended to showcase their new skills, instill confidence in local residents and demonstrate how those skills will add to the safety and security of all Iraqis.



Photos 5 and 6

Tactical Response Team members, demonstrate their knowledge in the use of advanced combat life-saving training as they treat a simulated casualty. Treating a gunshot wound to a lower extremity is just a small part of the special training the cadre received in maritime and urban-strike operations.

Photo 7

In a simulated hostage dramatization to help demonstrate the maritime capabilities of the new cadre that is now part of Basrah's Special Weapons and Tactics, the SWAT team's watercraft closes in on men role-playing as assailants and attempting to outrun the team (left, in small motor-powered watercraft). The Shatt al-

Arab waterway provided the venue for the Tactical Response Team to demonstrate their unique method of combating criminals in the water during a demonstration in front of crowds formed Jan. 10 for a city-wide celebration.

Photos 8 through 11

After a high-speed chase in a simulated hostage dramatization to help demonstrate the maritime capabilities of the Tactical Response SWAT team overtakes men role playing as assailants (right, in small motor-powered watercraft) and takes them into custody.





CURRENT OPERATIONS - IRAQ COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE – ARABIAN PENINSULA



An Iraqi Special Operations Forces soldier fast ropes from a U.S. helicopter during training near Mosul. The training prepares ISOF teams to conduct air assault missions designed to get soldiers close to their objective in minimal time.

Iraqi Special Operations Forces conduct fast-rope training

*Photos and story by Staff Sgt. Bryan Franks
SOTF – North Public Affairs*

Stepping out of a helicopter and sliding down a 50-foot rope is another routine day of training for Iraqi Special Operations Forces when they're not out improving security in Iraq and enforcing the rule of law.

In the Mosul area, ISOF recently conducted fast-rope training. This training is significant because it's one of the methods used during air assault missions designed to get soldiers close to their objective in minimal time to

disrupt insurgents' activities throughout the region and bring terrorists and criminals to justice.

"These ISOF teams have a large area of responsibility," a Coalition forces advisor said. "Some of their missions could require a convoy time of more than two hours, and there are risks that convoy could face. With an air assault, teams bypass the inherent dangers of convoys and can reach their objective in less time."

To help mitigate replacing convoy-operation dangers with new risks, fast-rope training is a two-day process for ISOF soldiers.

Day one consists of learning the techniques behind fast roping and conducting stationary drills, referred to as drops, off a 25-foot building. During drills, each member goes down the rope without tactical gear to get familiarized with falling and proficient at the technique. Once they complete drops training, they fast rope in full tactical gear.

“It’s important to hold the rope tight with your hands, however it’s your feet that will slow you down,” a Coalition forces advisor said. “No matter how tight you hold the rope you can’t slow yourself down without your feet.”

During day two of training, ISOF teams conducted fast-rope exercises from a U.S. helicopter. In the future, teams will use Mi-17s, the Iraqi Air Force’s new helicopter for aerial assault training and missions.

The training sequence will remain the same, but the aircraft will change.

“It’s a lot different from fast roping down the building,” an ISOF soldier said. “With the wind whipping around and all of the noise, you can easily get caught up in the moment and forget your training.”

For most ISOF soldiers, it was the first time they had fast roped from a helicopter. It’s a skill that will enable them to conduct future operations throughout Iraq to deter and respond to insurgent activities.

“Fast-rope training was a lot of fun,” an ISOF instructor said. “This was great training for my soldiers. I’m so proud of the way they performed today. I know our country will have a great future because of the work we do.”



An Iraqi Special Operations Forces soldier fast ropes from a U.S. helicopter during training near Mosul. ISOF teams will use the training to conduct air assault missions designed to get soldiers close to their objective in minimal time.



CURRENT OPERATIONS - IRAQ

COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE – ARABIAN PENINSULA

Iraqi Special Operations Forces Convoy Security Course graduates respond to a simulated improvised explosive device during one of the four demonstrations performed at the graduation ceremony in Baghdad, Iraq. Photo by Spc. Eric Haupt.



ISOF boost convoy security

By Staff Sgt. Heidi Davis
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs

Iraqi Special Operations Forces are expanding their capabilities by adding convoy security experts to their ranks following a course focused on keeping soldiers and convoys safe.

The ISOF Convoy Security Course graduates give the ISOF specially trained soldiers to meet full-time, convoy security duties.

“This training allowed these soldiers to expand ISOF capabilities to become an expeditionary support force,” said an ISOF battalion command sergeant major. “Not only are they capable of providing logistical support, but they are now trained to provide security for convoys traveling all over Iraq.

“This team makes it possible for other ISOF units to focus fully on ridding the country of terrorists,” said an Iraqi battalion command sergeant major.

Due to the dangerous and unique nature of the job, soldiers have to meet specific criteria to attend the course. Criteria include an extensive knowledge of combat techniques, disciplined military bearing, previous driving experience and commando qualification.

The soldiers’ disciplined foundation contributes to their ability to become proficient in weapons handling procedures for close fire, quick reaction to ambushes and improvised explosive devices. Each soldier also has to learn the responsibilities of each person in the Humvee so they could quickly fill any position in case of emergency.

“These men worked hard day and night learning how

to guard military convoys and how to use heavy and light weapons so they would be good enough to participate in the stabilization of Iraq,” said the head course instructor. “They’ll continue to train often to maintain skills learned so they can react quickly when they face danger.”

To exhibit their newly acquired skills, graduates demonstrated their battlefield dominance to distinguished guests and fellow ISOF officials during the graduation ceremony.

One of the more complex demonstrations required graduates to neutralize the enemy before leaving a danger area.

Following graduation, instructors will lead soldiers through additional on-the-job training as they accompany them on real-world convoy missions. The soldiers are required to demonstrate proficiency in each role of responsibility within the Humvee before instructors will allow them to go on missions unsupervised, said the Iraqi 3rd Battalion command sergeant major.

The Iraqi command sergeant major said even after the soldiers are “flying solo,” it’s important they continue periodic refresher training while performing convoy security duty. This will help keep skills sharp and responses second-nature when faced with unpredictable scenarios.

“The roads our guys must travel are some of the most dangerous in Iraq,” said a Coalition forces advisor. “They encounter IEDs, small-arms-fire attacks and suicide bombers, but they always return without any casualties.”

ISWCS streamlines SOF training

*By Staff Sgt. Heidi Davis
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs*

In an effort to maintain a strategic position ahead of the ever-evolving battlefield, Iraqi Special Operations Forces instructors turned to the Iraqi Special Warfare Center and School for assistance in updating their combative training program of instruction.

Thirty-four ISOF instructors graduated Dec. 25 from the first 10-day instructor refresher course, but not before Coalition forces advisors and ISWCS armed them with advanced rifle marksmanship skills, hand-to-hand combat techniques, close quarter battle maneuvers and military fundamentals knowledge.

"I want to thank the Americans who have come, shed blood and shared their lives to give us freedom to fight," said the ISWCS commander during the graduation ceremony.

Beginning each day on the firing range, ISWCS and Coalition forces advisors reviewed basic rifle marksmanship with the M-4 rifles and M-9 pistol with the instructors. Progressing in a building block pattern, instructors moved from weapons familiarization, which included changing magazines and overcoming malfunctions, to maneuvering around barriers to engage a target.

"Our students come from the streets with no previous knowledge or experience with weapons," said an ISOF instructor. "Now, we can train them to become soldiers who protect this community."

An armed soldier poses an obvious threat to the enemy, however, when a weapon malfunctions or the ammo runs dry, the soldier needs to know how to defend himself and still control the enemy," said a Coalition forces advisor who complimented the progress made during weapons training with hand-to-hand combat.

"Hand-to-hand combat is about leverage and violence of action," he said. "A soldier has to go into a room full force – dominate it. His goal is to put the enemy into a holding position until his battle buddies can relieve him."

For two days, the instructors learned basic defensive and offensive maneuvers, which, when correctly executed, allocate an extreme tactical fighting capability. Following the block of instruction, the Coalition forces advisor stressed the importance of knowing when to go full force and how to train so each student can execute maneuvers in a safe manner.



An Iraqi Special Warfare Center and School advisor oversees two Iraqi Special Operations Forces instructors during hand-to-hand combat on the last day of training for the first ISOF Commando Instructor Refresher Course. The 10-day Iraqi Special Warfare Center and School course provided instructors with a strong foundation from which to refine skills in basic marksmanship, military leadership, close-quarter battle rhythms, hand-to-hand combat, and an opportunity to update commando course program of instruction. Photo illustration by Staff Sgt. Heidi Davis.

"If you are on a mission and get the enemy to the ground, don't let up," he said. "On the other hand, when you are teaching combatives, stop every five minutes to review the rules and preach safety."

ISWCS and Coalition forces advisors escorted instructors to the training shoothouse to practice. After completing this portion of training, the instructors realize the importance of incorporating their newly learned skills into future commando courses.

"When we have to clear a home, they are always different in the design and layout," an instructor said. "(During training), we had to learn to react under any circumstance and situation. We also had to learn to work as a team and depend on each other as our battle buddy."

On graduation day, the students presented the ISWCS commander with a new, streamlined commando course curriculum that encompassed each block of instruction they had just completed.

"In the beginning, the class started with the basics and moved to advanced training," a Coalition forces advisor said. "Now, they are armed with the knowledge and tools to teach and develop a professional, combat-fighting soldier."



CURRENT OPERATIONS - IRAQ COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE – ARABIAN PENINSULA

Iraqi Air Force, ISOF train together

*By Staff Sgt. Bryan Franks
SOTF – North
Public Affairs*

As an Iraqi Mi-17 troop transport helicopter touches down in a dust-ridden field, Iraqi Special Operations Forces commando students from the Iraqi Special Warfare Center and School rush out from the rear and conduct a village sweep.

The joint training exercise, conducted Nov. 17, between the Iraqi Air Force Special Operations Squadron and ISWCS commando students, was a first. This training is expected to add to their skills set and enhance their ability to work together on future operations.


“I think the times have changed in Iraq,” said an Iraqi Air Force airman. “I believe that we, as Iraqis, must change our mindset as well.”

With the help of Coalition forces, members of the Iraqi Air Force have made strides toward being self-reliant in their ability to train personnel and fly and maintain aircraft.

According to an Iraqi Air Force airman, training like this wasn’t possible six months ago. With the acquisition of new aircraft Oct. 31, training of personnel and assistance of Coalition forces, joint training events like this one will become more frequent.

Iraqi Special Operations Forces also improved their operational ability in regards to training. This has put them in a better position to participate in joint training events like this one.

“The ISOF soldiers are training their own (personnel) with limited input from the Coalition forces advisors,” said a Coalition forces soldier. “In fact, this joint training was completely driven by Iraqi



Iraqi Special Operations Forces board an Iraqi Air Force Mi-17 during the first joint training conducted by the two services. Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryan Franks.

Security Forces seeing the need of two separate services.”

Using an area traditionally dedicated to training (the site contains a mock village that emulates real-life scenarios as much as possible), the exercise began in the early afternoon.

Training began with the Iraqi Air Force conducting a mission brief and planning objectives. Planning was followed by the execution process as the Iraqi Air Force completed a timed navigation course and joined commando students in load, off-load drills.

The exercise continued as Iraqi Air Force and commando students executed several mock drills. Then came the time to tie it all together.

Iraqi Air Force airmen prepped the helicopter. After students boarded, the helicopter roared to life and lifted off en route to the target area. The

helicopter landed in a cloud of dust and dirt; rotor wash completely engulfed the aircraft, concealing the disembarking commando students as they charged toward the village.

The students swept the village, putting what was learned during drills into action. The Iraqi Air Force Mi-17 greeted the ISWCS students at the completion of their sweeps to return them to base.

This exercise helped emphasize what both IqAF airmen and ISOF soldiers understood from the beginning: synchronizing training between the two services is important.

“The ability of IqAF and ISOF to carry out joint training missions is a great way ahead in fully developing security forces and supporting the institutions in place,” a Coalition forces soldier said. “The IqAF’s Mi-17s combined with the ISOF teams will be used to provide security and stability to Iraq.”

U.S. Special Forces with Sons of Iraq, Iraqi Army

Abu Ghazwan

*By Staff Sgt. Bryan Franks
SOTF – North Public Affairs*

Abu Ghazwan, a senior al-Qaida leader and designated commander of al-Qaida affiliated groups stretching from Baghdad to Tikrit, was killed Nov. 6 during an operation conducted by U.S. Special Operations Forces and the Iraqi army north of Baghdad.

Ghazwan, also known as Saad Ismail Abd Al Salah al Hayani, was the leader of a terrorist network responsible for numerous attacks against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces. Ghazwan was a well known al-Qaida commander who had avoided capture for years and fomented a violent insurgent campaign that spanned multiple provinces. Ghazwan was also

reported to be responsible for a murder and kidnapping campaign against Shia civilians as well as recruiting women and children to conduct suicide attacks. The removal of Ghazwan is a tribute to the tenacity and increasing capability of the Iraqi Security Forces and the close partnership that has been fostered with U.S. Army Special Forces advisors.

Key to the success of this operation was information reported by local tribal security

forces known across the country as Sons of Iraq. Local Sons of Iraq guards provided the initial information to the Iraqi army, which led the joint U.S./Iraqi patrol to the right area.

The operation that led to Ghazwan's death began when a Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alpha linked up with



*Artwork by Sgt. 1st
Class Timothy Lawn.*

kill terrorist Abu Ghazwan

a local Iraqi army unit to share intelligence on local insurgent activity and to investigate reports of possible enemy meeting sites and weapons caches. Included at the meeting were local Sons of Iraq commanders who also provided information and agreed to accompany the joint patrol to the suspected locations.

“It’s encouraging to see the (Iraqi army) getting in contact with local Sons of Iraq commanders and going on joint patrols together – without U.S. Forces pushing them to cooperate,” a Green Beret Soldier said.

“The Sons of Iraq has a wealth of intelligence because they live in these communities,” a U.S. Soldier said. “When they become comfortable sharing that information with IA, I think it’s a definite sign of the country’s security moving in the right direction.”

Following the meeting, a joint combat patrol was launched with the reconnaissance platoon from the 1st Tank Battalion, 34th Iraqi Army Brigade and members of the Sons of Iraq. The plan was to search three separate locations.

After finding nothing at the first location, the combined patrol searched the second location and captured Omar Sabah, a man identified by the locals as a close associate of Abu Ghazwan. The patrol also uncovered a cache consisting of various rounds of ammunition, knives, a bottle of gunpowder and a small amount of PE4 (plastic explosive).

While apprehending Sabah, the patrol discovered that Ghazwan was reportedly in the area. Taking advantage of the lead, the combined patrol proceeded to the final location, a house the Sons of Iraq identified as belonging to Ghazwan’s sister. As the patrol secured the location, a grenade exploded behind the house injuring two Sons of Iraq members. The patrol returned fire and the assailant fled down a narrow path toward the Tigris River.

While Special Forces medics stabilized the two wounded Sons of Iraq members, a small element, led by a Special Forces sergeant, pursued the fleeing individual down the path and into the dense vegetation along the

river. While moving down the path, the Soldier identified a trip wire booby trap connected to two grenades. After halting the patrol, the Soldier located the body of a man lying in the bushes. After determining that the man was dead, the team contacted a nearby U.S. explosive ordinance disposal unit to clear the booby trap.

It wasn’t until the body was recovered that the Sons of Iraq confirmed that Ghazwan had been killed.

“When we shot at the guy, no one knew it was Ghazwan,” a Sons of Iraq member said. “When it was safe, one of the guys went down to look at his face and yelled out, ‘It’s Abu Ghazwan!’”

The Special Forces team confirmed the identity of Ghazwan later through biometrics.

“I never thought Ghazwan would go out like this,” a Sons of Iraq member said. “I thought, ‘He’s a brave guy. He’s going to shoot back and fight brave.’ I never thought he would die like a coward.”

The Iraqi army and Sons of Iraq consider working together an important part of establishing security and enforcing the rule of law.

“I think we have a good working relationship with the local SOI, and I think killing Ghazwan is the proof,” an IA member said.

It’s evident the people are less fearful when Iraqi army and Sons of

Iraq work together to improve the security of their towns and cities.

“When you drive through the streets, you see the people of Tarmiyah walking through the city not afraid of the criminals who once tried to control this region,” an Iraqi army member said.

The locals in the community also see the Iraqi army and the Sons of Iraq as instrumental in regaining order and peace in the region.

“The people of Tarmiyah thank the IA and SOI for killing Ghazwan,” a local said. “People who break the rules are hiding. They have no safe place in Tarmiyah anymore.”



“I never thought Ghazwan would go out like this,” an SOI member said. “I thought, ‘He’s a brave guy. He’s going to shoot back and fight brave.’ I never thought he would die like a coward.”



Special Forces offer Iraqi boy hope for normal, healthy life

By Staff Sgt. Bryan Franks
SOTF – North Public Affairs

A 6-year-old boy living in the Jazeera Desert, west of Samarra, will now have a chance to live a normal, long life with the help of U.S. Special Forces and Iraqi doctors.

The Special Forces team first met the boy, Muhammed, as a result of a meeting with the tribal sheik. Muhammed had a deformity called encephalocele, a condition that forms a hernial protrusion of brain substance through a congenital opening in the skull, and the team advised the sheik that they would help the child.

“When we met him, Muhammed was wearing a special hat that the family made to cover the deformity in his head,” said a Special Forces surgeon. “Essentially, brain and tissue are being forced out of the hole and lay exposed outside the protection of the child’s skull. Other than the deformity, he’s an average 6-year-old boy.”

A Special Forces medic knew this brain matter protruding from Muhammed’s skull could become a life-threatening issue. The medic assessed this not only from the years of training he received in the military but also through the shared professional opinion of his father, a physician who specializes in pediatric neurosurgery in the United States.

“There is a high likelihood that, if left untreated, his condition would continue to worsen, leading to the boy’s death,” said the medic.

The team coordinated to get imagery of Muhammed’s head and further consultations with an Iraqi medical team.

“A lot of people had parts to play to make the surgery happen for Muhammed,” the medic said. “The team had to pick the boy up and escort him around for consultations and imaging. We also had to coordinate air support, and our surgeon worked a lot of the medical coordination.”

The medic’s father, a pediatric neurosurgeon based in the United States, also helped with the consultation process by evaluating the medical data and reviewing MRI and CT scan images to offer a diagnosis of the boy’s condition.

Once the diagnosis was made, the team contacted the



The Special Forces surgeon who was instrumental in the diagnosis and treatment of Muhammed’s condition visits with Muhammed during post-surgery recovery. The surgery was conducted at a medical facility in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, to remove herniated brain tissue caused by a congenital deformity to the boy’s skull. Photo illustration by Sgt. David Russell.

medical staff in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, with whom they had a great working relationship, to locate a surgeon willing to do the procedure. After a review of the case, the doctor agreed to perform the surgery, repair the skull and remove the protruding brain tissue.

“The medical facility hasn’t asked for anything from the family; they just wanted to help the boy,” the surgeon said.

The team transported the boy, a family member, the surgeon and the medic to the hospital in Sulaymaniyah on a helicopter.

During the surgery, doctors repaired the skull by removing the protruding brain material that has prevented the skull from completely closing. The skull should close on its own as the boy continues to grow. Two days after the surgery, Muhammed was out kicking a soccer ball around.

“Muhammed should recover fairly quickly. Once his hair grows back, you would never know that he had had surgery,” the surgeon said. “He has the potential to live a normal, healthy life.”

Kut orphans capture attention of Al Kut Special Weapons and Tactics

*By Staff Sgt. Heidi Davis
CJSOTF-AP Public Affairs*

Seven months ago, the children's orphanage at Al Kut, Iraq, was used by terrorists to take aim at those making progress and delivering hope in the area. With no regard for the children's safety inside, criminals climbed to the rooftop and engaged in firefights with local police and Coalition forces.

After months of dedicated policing efforts to defeat terrorists in the region, the Kut Special Weapons and Tactics unit returned to the orphanage recently to turn their attention to the country's future – the children.

With a trailer full of toys donated by their families in America, Coalition forces headed to the orphanage for a medical and humanitarian assistance visit with KSWAT and Coalition forces medical professionals.

"When we arrived in May, our focus had to be on reducing violence from terrorists," said a Coalition soldier. "Now, KSWAT and the Iraqi Police are ... planning and executing operations and sending criminals to jail."

Their efforts have led to a reduction in violence over the past several months, which has enabled Coalition forces to focus on missions that go beyond security, he said.

Although violence near the orphanage has diminished immensely, incidents of the past still haunt some of the children.

"Last March, we had to go into one of the inside rooms of the orphanage because the bad guys were shooting from our roof at the soldiers," said a 13-year-old boy living at the orphanage. "We were caught in the middle."

An orphanage employee explained that most of the children were sent to the facility after terrorists swept into the children's homes and killed many of their parents.

Now, when the children are near people who have weapons, they're fearful, the orphanage employee said, but he tries to quell their apprehension by explaining how KSWAT protects the children from the bad guys.

One of the boys declared, "I feel safe here, and I am happy," he said as a grin swept across his face.

The feeling of trust stems from the personal interaction with KSWAT and Coalition forces soldiers. One of those personal moments was overheard in the orphanage's kitchen, as two soldiers attempted to break the ice with the boys before their doctor's visit with the medics.

"Who knows a good joke?" one of the soldiers asked the boys. "OK, well, what kinds of tricks do you play on each other? I know you boys play tricks."

Responding to the sincerity of the soldiers, the boys began blurting out jokes until their laughter could be heard filling the orphanage. Once the boys were comforted and calm, the soldiers explained what each boy could expect during the medical exam.

"We evaluated each boy on an individual basis, first asking if they hurt anywhere, if they felt sick or had any rashes," said one of the medics. "Next, we checked their lungs, ears and throat and tested their reflexes, he said.

The medics reported the boys to be in good overall health with just a few cases of seasonal influenza, the common cold or a skin infection.

With boxes of toys within their view, the boys waited eagerly for the moment when the KSWAT would call them forward and pile toys high into their arms.

"They are so beautiful," said a 12-year-old boy, who said his favorite toy received was a soccer ball.



A U.S. Soldier chats with boys at the orphanage in Al Kut, Iraq, during a joint medical and humanitarian visit, along with the Kut Special Weapons and Tactics unit and Coalition forces medical personnel. Photo by Staff Sgt. Heidi Davis.



CURRENT OPERATIONS - POLAND
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - EUROPE

SEALs train with Polish GROM



1. Rehearsal: Special Operations Forces hone maneuver skills during a U.S.-Polish exercise near Gdansk, Poland, in early February. SEALs assigned to Special Operations Command Europe and Polish GROM further developed their interoperability skills as part of the USEUCOM active security strategy.

2. Observer: A Polish GROM soldier watches SEAL maneuvers.

3. Bounding: Polish GROM soldiers bound using smoke to conceal their movement.

4. Security: SEALs and Polish GROM soldiers conduct a security halt. SOCEUR courtesy photos.



5. The Approach: SEALs assigned to SOCEUR and Polish GROM operators quickly advance towards their target during bilateral exercises off the coast of Poland in the Baltic Sea. Both forces further developed their interoperability skills as part of the USEUCOM active security strategy.

6. David and Goliath: SEALs and Polish GROM operators approach their towering target.

7. Get Ready: SEALs and Polish GROM operators prepare to board a ship.

8. Boarding: U.S. and Polish special operations forces board their target. SOCEUR courtesy photos.



2009 BULL SIMONS Recipient

2009 Bull Simons Award goes to Col. Charles “Chuck” Fry

By Mike Bottoms
USSOCOM Public Affairs

Retired Col. Charles “Chuck” Fry, a legend within the Special Operations community, is the 2009 Bull Simons Award recipient. His long and distinguished career began as an enlisted man on the battlefields of Korea and ended with him commanding Special Operations Command - South.

Fry, born on a farm near Princeton, Mo., Feb. 7, 1933, began his Army career by enlisting in 1951. Following two distinguished combat tours in the Korean War, Fry joined Special

Forces in 1954 as a 20-year-old sergeant first class in Bad Toelz, Germany, with the 77th Special Forces Group. While there, he pioneered Special Forces scuba capabilities and led the first Special Forces team through the Navy Underwater School. Following more specialized training, he moved to 10th Special Forces Group where he helped develop scuba capability in that group and began experimenting with tactical applications for free-fall parachuting.

In 1961, Fry obtained his commission through Officer’s Candidate School and graduated with honors. For the next two years, he served as an instructor in the Basic Airborne and Pathfinder schools at Fort Benning, Ga., before joining the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Gulick in the Canal Zone, Panama. One month later, the unit was converted to the 8th Special Forces Group, and Fry operated as the

officer-in-charge of the group’s High-Altitude Low-Opening training course.

While at the 8th SFG, Fry served under Col. Arthur “Bull” Simons and thus became part of “The Bull’s” legacy. Fry distinguished himself during many field operations, to include successful actions in the 1964 Panama Riots and during a search and rescue mission in Ecuador. Also during this time, Fry shared an honor with then Master Sgt. Dick Meadows — the Bull Simons Award recipient in 2006 — as the first in Special Forces history to be awarded HALO Jumpmaster/Instructor wings.

Notably, the strong personal bond forged between Fry and Simons continued until the Bull’s death. To add to Simon’s lore, Fry established the “Bull’s Horn,” fashioned literally from a bull’s horn, as the 8th SFG’s “Prop Blast” drinking cup.

“The history of that mug is pretty colorful because it came from a civilian friend of Chuck’s who was a reservist,” said retired Col. Dick Guthrie. “His friend’s son brought a bovine’s head home and let it rot in the front yard for a while, not



pleasing his friend's wife too much, but anyway they eventually sawed the horn off and fashioned it into the 8th Special Forces Group 'Prop Blast' mug."

In 1966, Fry began the first of two combat tours as a company commander in the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam. He quickly established himself as a combat leader with a gift for adapting conventional forces to unconventional warfare. He innovated and trained a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, or LRRP unit, which quickly proved its worth in finding the elusive enemy. The unit's success led the Division to establish the LRRP concept as doctrine, and other U.S. divisions subsequently adopted the LRRP doctrine.

Later, Fry was assigned as commander of the 5th Special Forces Group's Two Corps Mike Force, and the mobile guerrilla "Stay Behind" missions he developed became a standard for future actions.

In one textbook operation, Fry led a stay behind force that inflicted heavy losses on North Vietnamese regulars for 48 non-stop days of intense close combat. For this, and other actions in enemy controlled areas, he was awarded the Silver Star by President Lyndon Johnson. Fry's tour in Vietnam also earned him the Bronze Star for Valor, Soldier's Medal, Army Commendation Medal for Valor, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm and three Purple Hearts.

Returning from Vietnam, Fry attended the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kan., where he graduated on the Commandant's List. He then attended Parks College in Parkville, Mo., earning his bachelor's degree and graduating summa cum laude.

Because of his fluency in Spanish, Fry was selected to attend the Uruguayan Military Institute for Superior Studies in 1971. At the Institute, he wrote a detailed strategy to deal with Uruguay's insurgency, and the Minister of Defense

The 8th Special Forces Group "Prop Blast" mug being used during a formal mess night. Col. Arthur "Bull" Simons is to the far left with then Capt. Charles Fry next to him. Courtesy photo.

requested Fry remain in Uruguay to help implement his plan. Fry is still recognized as the behind-the-scenes architect of the uniquely successful counterinsurgency against the Tupamaro urban guerrillas.

A personal highlight also occurred in Uruguay in September of 1971 when Fry married Marijane Knight. Today, they are the proud parents of two sons, Charles Jr. and Robert, and two daughters, Heidi and Debra, and have 6 grandchildren.

After leaving Uruguay in 1975, Fry completed his master's degree in Latin American studies at American University in Washington, D.C. In the course of his studies,



(From left to right) Retired Col. Charles Fry tests scuba gear for Special Forces use; Fry attending the Special Forces Training Group High-Altitude Low-Opening course at Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fry doing a freefall demonstration over Panama. Courtesy photos.



Retired Col. Charles Fry was assigned as commander of the 5th Special Forces Group's Two Corps Mike Force in Vietnam, and the mobile guerrilla "Stay Behind" missions he developed became a standard for future actions. In one textbook operation, Fry led a stay behind force that inflicted heavy losses on North Vietnamese regulars for 48 non-stop days of intense close combat. For this, and other actions in enemy controlled areas, he was awarded the Silver Star by President Lyndon Johnson. Courtesy photos.

he wrote "The Latin American Solidarity Myth and the Panama Canal," which was instrumental in shaping the congressional amendment to the Carter-Torrijos Treaty and the future of the Panama Canal.

In 1978, Fry returned to Panama to command the 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group. With a clear understanding of the insurgent and drug threats in Latin America, he developed, among other concepts, the Regional Survey Team or RST. This strategic concept would become an invaluable tool for the SOF community.

"The Regional Survey Team concept Chuck Fry developed became the model across the world," said Lt. Gen. John Mulholland, commander of U.S. Army Special Operations Command. "All the forward Special Forces battalions, the Theater Special Operations Commands, and USSOCOM all relied on the work that the RSTs did forward to make sure we had the mission planning data already in hand. It was an incredible, prescient move that is illustrative of the kind of forethought and understanding Chuck Fry had of the environments that Special Forces work in."

As communist insurgencies destabilized Central America in the 1970s, Fry's strategic actions became the basis for the U.S. political and military response. His vision guided strategic planning in the decade-long counterinsurgency in El Salvador, and that campaign is

widely recognized as staunching communist ambitions for revolution in the region.

"When the FMLM (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) finally came to the peace table, one of the comandantes (commanders) made the very telling point that 'the peace talks would not have gotten under way if it were not for them, as he pointed to a Special Forces Soldier,'"



Mulholland said. "The comandante continued by saying, 'If those men (Special Forces) had not had the impact on the Salvadoran army causing the Salvadoran people to align themselves to the government as opposed to us, then we would not be having this discussion today.' Well, there is no greater compliment when your adversary makes that kind of point... There are many men who made the Salvadoran mission a success, but make no doubt it was Chuck Fry and the men of the Three of the Seventh (3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group) that was key."

Also during this period, Fry's insights and briefings on threats to U.S. regional security were directly responsible for reversing the decision to deactivate the 7th Special Forces Group.

"If Seventh Group hadn't been saved, I don't know what would have happened in El Salvador, and I think the U.S. policy implications would have just been awful in Latin America," said retired Maj. Gen. Geoffery Lambert, former director of the Center for Operations, Plans and Policy for U.S. Special Operations Command. "Colonel Fry got us on the Chief of Staff of the Army's calendar for twenty minutes, and a gentleman named Captain Morgan wrote the intel piece and I wrote the operational piece on why Seventh Group needed to stay. Fry literally punished us for six weeks to get that thing right, but it worked. At the end of the briefing, the Chief of Staff nearly had tears in his eyes with laughter and visited Three Seventh the next day.

"The Chief of Staff wanted Fry to go to the war college so he could prepare him for promotion, but Fry turned him down because he loved Latin America too much. He asked the Chief to keep assigning him to the different military groups down there."



Retired Col. Charles Fry attends a search and rescue mission briefing in Ecuador. Courtesy photo.

After a series of assignments to U.S. embassies in Latin America, Fry assumed his final military command in 1987 as the commander of Special Operations Command - South. He shaped the command into a war-fighting stance, which later proved critical to the command and control of Task Force Black during Operation Just Cause.

Also as SOCSOUTH commander, his guidance was pivotal in expanding Special Operations at a watershed moment in U.S. military history. At that time, there was a widely perceived barrier between unconventional and conventional forces, and the perception influenced major decisions about the future of SOF. Fry's untiring efforts to demonstrate the true value of Special Operations at all levels of command triggered a positive transformation in perceptions and helped usher in the era of the "Quiet Professional."

The defining of the "Quiet Professional" concept grew from an article Fry wrote in the Army Times. "Quiet Professional" resonated throughout USSOCOM and is a defining characteristic of all U.S. Special Operations warriors today.

After retiring in 1989, Fry maintained a close relationship with Special Forces, paying particular attention to Latin America. To this day, he continues to assist families and companies of kidnapping victims and also advises on other threats requiring counterterrorist expertise.

Throughout his career, Fry consistently set and raised the standard for Special Operations.



Retired Col. Charles Fry (far right) presenting his credentials as the Defense Attaché to Venezuela. Courtesy photo.



Then Lt. Col. Charles Fry served as an executive officer, 101st Airborne Division, Vietnam. Courtesy photo.

He sharpened the cutting edge with imagination and energy and was a catalyst for advancing the Special Operations cause at critical moments. He taught, mentored, encouraged, drove, disciplined, set the example and brought out the best in others.

“Colonel Fry was an easy pick for this year’s Bull Simons Award,” said Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of USSOCOM. “He has a long and impressive history within Special Operations, and he was a great leader, pioneer and a personification of the values we hold today in the Special Operations community.”

His enduring legacy is today’s generation of “Quiet Professionals.” It is truly fitting that USSOCOM’s Bull Simons Award be awarded to a “Quiet Professional”—Col. Charles H. “Chuck” Fry.



Retired Col. Charles Fry salutes at his retirement ceremony, Fort Bragg, N.C.



History of the Bull Simons Award

USSOCOM has presented the Bull Simons Award since 1990.

The 2009 Bull Simons Award winner is retired Col. Charles “Chuck” Fry.

The award recognizes recipients who embody “the true spirit, values, and skills of a Special Operations warrior,” and Col. Arthur “Bull” Simons, whom the award is named after, is the epitome of these attributes.

A career Soldier, Simons led special operations in World War II and Vietnam. Born in New York City in 1918, Simons graduated from the University of Missouri in 1941 with a degree in journalism and served in the Pacific theater in World War II. He rose to company commander in the 6th Ranger Battalion and participated in several amphibious landings in the Philippines. On one noteworthy occasion, he and his men scaled a steep oceanside cliff under cover of darkness and overwhelmed a garrison of Japanese soldiers at the Suluan lighthouse.

Simons left the Army after World War II but returned to duty in 1951. He completed the Special Forces Officers Qualification Course in 1958 and took command of a detachment in the 77th SF Group (Airborne). From 1961 to 1962, as head of the White Star Mobile Training Team, he served as the senior military advisor to the Royal Lao Army. His familiarity with the region would prove useful a few years later.

In 1965, Simons returned to Southeast Asia as a member of Military





Retired Col. Charles "Chuck" Fry accepts the 2009 Bull Simons Award at a ceremony Feb. 17, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Victoria Myer.

which was teeming with Russian and Chinese soldiers. Simons and his team killed or repelled hundreds of these soldiers, eliminating the principal threat to the assault group. The raiders executed the entire operation in 28 minutes, successfully faced an enemy force of

Assistance Command Vietnam's Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG). Serving under then Col. Donald Blackburn, Simons commanded OP-35, one of three operational directorates within SOG. For approximately two years, he led OP-35 on an interdiction campaign against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia. OP-35 interdicted the trail by inserting "hatchet" teams and reconnaissance teams. The hatchet teams, composed of Nung or Montagnard tribesmen led by a Special Forces NCO, conducted hit-and-run raids against NVA units, and the recon teams ran long range patrols scouting the trail, but also "snatched" prisoners when the opportunity arose.

Simons left Vietnam in 1966, but returned four years later as the Deputy Commander of Joint Contingency Task Group Ivory Coast — the Son Tay Raiders. The task force, commanded by Air Force Brig. Gen. Leroy Manor, was formed in the spring of 1970 after American intelligence had identified Son Tay Prison, near Hanoi, as a prisoner of war detention camp. After six months of planning and rehearsals, the task force deployed to Thailand Nov. 18.

Two nights later, the task force flew into North Vietnam. The assault group, led by Capt. Dick Meadows, landed in the prison compound and killed about 50 NVA guards, but found the compound to be otherwise abandoned. Meanwhile, Simons had landed with the support group in an adjacent school compound,

approximately 350 men and left with only two injuries. Although the raid at Son Tay failed to accomplish its principal objective, it sent a clear message to North Vietnam, and the treatment of American prisoners improved somewhat thereafter.

Simons retired from the Army in 1971, but he was to conduct one more special mission. In 1979, Mr. H. Ross Perot asked Simons to rescue two of his employees; the Iranian revolutionary regime was holding them in a Tehran prison and was demanding a \$13 million ransom. In April of that year, Simons led a civilian rescue party into Iran and safely extracted the

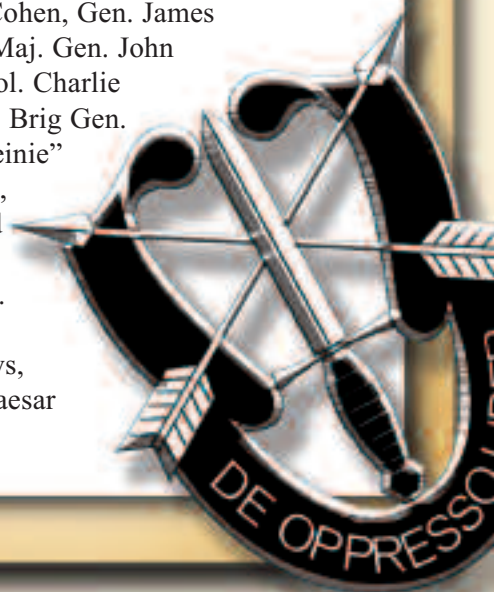
American hostages. Just one month later, Simons suffered a massive heart attack and died.

The previous award recipients are: Mr. H. Ross Perot, Gen. Edward "Shy" Meyer, The Honorable John Marsh Jr., Col. Aaron Bank, Lt. Gen. Samuel Wilson, Lt. Gen. Leroy Manor, the Honorable Sam Nunn, the Honorable William Cohen, Gen. James Lindsay, Maj. Gen. John Alison, Col. Charlie Beckwith, Brig Gen. Harry "Heinie" Aderholdt, Command Sgt. Maj.

Ernest Tabata, Maj. Gen. Richard Scholtes, Maj. Richard "Dick" Meadows, Col. John Carney and Caesar Civitella.



Retired Col. Charles Fry





Fierce battle above Shok Valley nets 10 Silver Stars

*By Janice Burton
Special Warfare Magazine*

There are no roads leading into the Shok Valley. A village that stands sentinel over the valley is home to one of the fiercest of the insurgent forces in Afghanistan - the Hezbe Islami al Gulbadin, or HIG.

A daring raid into the stronghold by Afghan commandos and their Special Forces counterparts April 6 tested the mettle of the Afghan forces and further forged the bond between them and their SF brothers.

During a ceremony Dec. 12, Lt. Gen. John Mulholland, commander of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, pinned Silver Stars on the chests of 10 of the men involved in the raid and the ensuing six-and-a-half-hour firefight that resulted in the killing of more than 150 insurgents.

It was the largest ceremony of its kind since the Vietnam era, but for the members of Team 3336 of the 3rd Special Forces Group, it was never about the medals.

When you ask them to use one word to describe April 6, their words pop, much like the gunfire that rained down on them.

"A nightmare."

"Baptism by fire," said Staff Sgt. Daniel Plants. "It was my first firefight."

"Cliffhanger."

More words followed as the team members recalled that day.

The Mission

The team was assigned to take out high-value targets within the HIG. The insurgent group was entrenched in the valley and was guarded by a number of highly trained foreign fighters. The sheer number of weapons and amount of ammo used by the insurgents led the team to conclude that they had been stockpiling the weaponry within the fortress-like village since the Russian invasion of the country during the late 1980s.

Accompanying the team that day was a group of Afghan commandos.



Members of Operational Detachment Alpha 3336 of the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) recon the remote Shok Valley of Afghanistan where they fought an almost seven-hour battle with terrorists in a remote mountainside village. Photo by Sgt. David Gunn.

"We have such a big rapport with the commandos we've trained," said Staff Sgt. Luis Morales, the team's intelligence sergeant. "They have such a loyalty to us. They try as hard to protect us as we try to protect ourselves."

"We eat, sleep and train with these commandos," said Capt. Kyle Walton, the detachment commander. "We die with them, too. These guys are close friends to us. At the outset of the attack, I lost my interpreter, and we were as close as anyone."

The interpreters hold a special place within the team.

"They are just like a member of the team," said Morales. "One of our interpreters has seen as much combat as any of us. He has six years of combat experience. He's been with six SF teams and been in hundreds of firefights - but he doesn't get the six-month break."

"With our tactical knowledge and their (the commandos) knowledge of the local populace, terrain



and customs, we can truly become a force multiplier,” said Walton. “That’s what SF does. We bring things to the fight that they don’t have, such as close air support and weaponry. But in the end, it’s an Afghan fight, and we are part of it.”

The commandos who accompanied the SF team on the mission have developed something of reputation throughout Afghanistan.

“The Taliban calls them the wolves. When they hear the wolves are coming, they know they are in trouble. The commandos are pretty feared. Everywhere we go, they identify us with the commandos, and the fact that this group of insurgents was prepared to sit and fight us to the death was indicative of an enemy force you don’t see every day,” said Morales.

One Way In

“Eighty percent of the guys on the ground that day had been in firefights before,” said Walton. “We feel fairly comfortable in a firefight anytime.”

But that day was different. The team was going into the unknown. The Russians, during their 20-year occupation of the country, never made it into the Shok Valley. To date, no Coalition troops had been there. This was a first. To get into the valley, the team had to fly.

“I feel comfortable with my feet on a ground,” said Morales. “I don’t feel comfortable in the helicopter; we can’t control what happens there. But on the ground, we have a plan, we go in and do it, and the rest falls into place.

“We knew this was going to be a difficult mission. We expected there to be a number of insurgents because of the high-value targets we were after, but we really thought the terrain would be the greatest difficulty,” explained Walton.

That thought proved correct. As the helicopters settled over the valley, the pilots couldn’t set the birds down, so the soldiers had to jump about 10 feet off the bird. Many of them landed waist-deep in an icy river. With temperatures in the low 30s, the climate immediately began to take its toll.

Then they faced a climb up the mountain.

Walton explained the idea was to go into the village unannounced, with the plan to take the fight to the insurgents in the village. “We didn’t want to fight uphill,” he said, adding that the village is at an altitude of 10,000 feet.

The team decided to use switchbacks, which were actually terraced farm plots, as a means to get up to the village. The team divided up into three maneuver units, with members of the SF team paired up with about six commandos and their interpreters.

The village itself is situated on a finger off the mountain. The team would have to head up a draw to the village.

“The buildings in the village are built one on top of the other, on top of a slope thousands of feet in the air,” said Walton. “So we started the climb. The insurgents waited until the lead element was within a couple hundred meters of the compound before they initiated contact. As soon as the shooting started, we realized that they had their defensive positions dug in, and they were occupying buildings three hundred sixty degrees all around us.”

The Fight

As soon as the opening salvo was fired, the interpreter standing beside Walton in the command-and-control element was killed. Moments later, Staff Sgt. Dillon Behr was shot in the leg. Behr, a communications sergeant, stayed in the fight and sustained another wound before he became unable to continue the fight.

“We knew we needed to regain the initiative, so we started initiating danger-close air runs,” said Walton.

Staff Sgt. David Sanders was in the lead assault force.

“I had approximately 10 commandos with me, and we got into the village before we started receiving fire. We couldn’t move any farther forward,” he recalled. “Through the radio traffic, we heard some of the team had gotten shot, so we started trying to identify the buildings where the fire was coming from. We hoped to neutralize the threat.”

Walton said Sanders was the first person he thought of who might be able to identify where the insurgents were.

“I was standing next to the combat controller, and when we got to a place where we could talk, he called in close air support, and the F-15s rolled in immediately. I knew my guys were up there, and I know that when you call in danger-close air, you are probably going to get injured or killed. I called back to Sanders and asked if he was too close. He said, ‘Bring it anyway.’ Bombs started exploding everywhere. When I called to see if he was still alive, all I could hear him saying was, ‘Hit





U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

them again.”

Walton said it is rare to call in danger-close air even once during a firefight. Throughout the afternoon, the team called it 70 times.

“We did take some casualties from the danger-close air,” said Staff Sgt. Seth Howard. “A lot of the commandos got injured from falling debris.

The bombs were throwing full trees and boulders at them; they were flying hundreds of meters.

At one point in the battle, when it looked as if the C2 element would be overrun, Sanders called for the bombing to come closer.

“They dropped a 2,000 pound bomb right on top of our position,” said Walton. “Because of the elevation, the bomb blew upward rather than down. It just didn’t seem like we had much of a decision. Our guys were wounded, and we couldn’t go back the way we came.”

“We knew we might get hurt, but we really didn’t think about it,” said Sanders.

“The insurgents were dug in so well that even the close air support wasn’t enough. It helped, but it was by no means a magic wand,” said Howard. “You would think when the bombs start dropping they would stop shooting at you. That’s the thought process, and you know it might kill you or somebody else, but when there are so many pieces of hot metal flying all around you constantly, you’ve got to let it go.”

With bombs falling and heavy gunfire coming from every side, the team returned fire. Team members recall going through masses of ammo, in addition to the bombs that were dropped and the rounds the aircraft were firing.

The team’s fire was controlled, though, according to Walton.

“Cloud cover was coming in, and there was no certainty that we would be able to get out that night. So we didn’t waste our ammo. We really didn’t fire unless we had a shot or when we needed to lay suppressive fire to allow people to move.”

The insurgents, likewise, were shooting in a controlled manner. The gunfire was heavy, sustained and accurate. Team members recall that even if the bullets weren’t kicking up beside them or hitting them, they definitely heard them crack near them.

Three-story Implosion

The only break in the battle was when a bomb was dropped on a three-story building. The building exploded outward. “Good guy or bad guy, you’re going to stop when you see that,” said Morales. “It reminded me of the videos from 9/11 - everything starts flashing at you, debris starts falling - and everything gets darker.”

“I was totally in the cloud of black smoke. I couldn’t see an inch in front of my face,” said Howard.

Plants recalls hearing the call for fire and wanting to see where the bomb was going.

“I was staring at it and saw the building go up,” he said. “I remember looking up, and then all of this stuff starting coming down. All I could do was roll up tight and hug the cliff wall.”

Sniper Turns Tide

The battle started to turn when Howard, a trained sniper, started picking the insurgents off. Howard was not in the lead element, and he had to fight his way up the mountain to come to the aid of his team.

The fight was not easy. He and the team of commandos he led up the mountain were under intense insurgent fire. They were getting hit with rocket-propelled grenades, small-arms and machine-gun fire.

“We knew some of our guys were hurt and that we had to get to them,” said Howard.

“We were pinned down,” said Walton. “When the fire became so intense, we moved out onto a ledge against the cliff to protect our wounded. What turned the battle was Seth (Howard) and his element.”

Howard directed the Afghan commandos to fire on insurgent positions so he could get into place with his sniper rifle and his recoilless rifle.

“They had been hunting us, and now they were getting hunted, too,” said Walton.

“We had been trying to return fire, but we couldn’t find them. They were firing in a very disciplined manner. They were not hanging out windows or running at us.”

As Howard and his element engaged the enemy, Walton knew time was running out. Reports from the air said more insurgents were moving in their direction. Everyone on the team had sustained some sort of injury, four of them critical, and the commandos had their share of injuries, as well.



"Everyone kept fighting, but there was a window closing on us," said Walton. "We knew we had to get out."

One Way Out

"Our higher command told us we had to get out of there," said Walton. "The weather conditions were closing in, and the window to be on the ground was rapidly closing. Most of the objective was gone at that point, but our casualties were mounting - we were in a mass-casualty scenario at that point - and they became our priority. We never thought of retreating. That was never an option."

"The weather was a deciding factor," continued Howard. "When the weather rolled in, we knew we could be stuck there at least overnight, possibly for days. They couldn't fly in to get us, and we would have been stranded in completely hostile territory. That was not a plan for success, especially with the pilots observing another two-hundred insurgents moving in on us."

With their backs literally against a wall and recognizing they couldn't go down the same way they came up - the switchbacks they had climbed up were the primary focus of the insurgent fire - they began assessing another route for exfil.

Final Cliffhanger

"We knew we couldn't go back the way we came, so our only option was going down the cliff," said Walton.

Had the team been healthy, that would have been a difficult scenario. But with the number of wounded and the fire raining down, it seemed impossible. But Walton knew he had to take the chance.

"We were completely pinned down. There was intense fire all around us. We couldn't leave the casualties. We were prepared to sit there and die with them, but we decided we were going to get them out of there," he said.

Sanders made the first climb down the mountain by himself. When he climbed back up the sheer face of the cliff, Walton had one question, "Do you think we can make it down?"

Sanders' reply put the climb in perspective, "Does it matter if they have broken necks or backs?"

"My question was will they live," said Walton. With Sanders' assurance that they would live, the team began the treacherous climb.

Master Sgt. Scott Ford, the team sergeant, set up the medevac and organized the less seriously wounded to carry the more critically injured down. While organizing the commandos, Ford was shot in the chest plate by

sniper fire. He immediately got to his feet and continued to lay down suppressive fire. One of the insurgent snipers had Ford in his sights, and he shot him in the upper left arm, nearly severing it. With a tourniquet around his arm, Ford climbed down the mountain and continued to organize the medevac.

Morales said that the team made its way down the cliff hanging onto branches and rocks. Near the bottom of the cliff, most made a 20-foot drop. "I remember seeing John (Walding) carrying his leg down," Morales said. (Walding's leg had been amputated by sniper fire.)

As the wounded made their way down the cliff, Howard, Walton and Spec. Michael Carter, a combat cameraman assigned to the unit, remained behind to lay down suppressive fire and retrieve equipment.

"There were a lot of guns around where everybody had been shot," said Howard. "It kind of became an issue that there were too many guns up there, and we didn't want to leave them in enemy hands."

Carter ran through a hail of fire to retrieve guns and other equipment. His own cameras had been shot up during the initial hours of the battle. He gathered equipment and began throwing it off the cliff, while Howard continued to pick off enemy combatants.

"The stars really aligned," said Walton. "Bullets were coming down from the side and behinds us, and we could hear guys yelling above us. An element that came to reinforce the team that was on the ground stepped out into the open and started firing and gave us the chance to get out. Seth was crazy enough to stay up there and cover us while we made the climb down."

Alone, with less than a magazine of ammunition left, Howard covered his team as they made their way down, and only after they were safe, did he leave the mountain.

"We didn't go into this mission hoping to make history. For us, it was just a regular mission - just like the one we had done the week before. Our goal is never to get into a fight; we'd rather sit down and drink some chai," said Walton. "We were hoping this mission would be the same, but we got into a big fight, and some of us got hit while trying to save each other. That's what we do."

The team as a whole is looking forward to returning to Afghanistan to continue its mission with the commandos.

"We think we sent a pretty big message to the insurgents. We let them know that we could penetrate their comfort zone. We told them there's nowhere you are safe that we aren't willing to come in and go after you," concluded Walton.





U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Up in the ranks: 26-year veteran now top SF enlisted

By Spc. Tony Hawkins
USASOC Public Affairs

Some things will never change. Young boys watch as their older brothers march off to war. With admiration in their eyes, they want to be just like those Soldiers.

Such was the case in 1968, as then 4-year-old Mario Vigil saw his older brother leave for Vietnam with the 82nd Airborne Division. Seeing his brother's act of service guided him to enlist 14 years later, eventually leading him to become a command sergeant major in Special Forces.

Now Vigil, who serves as the command sergeant major for the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (Airborne), reflects back on the road that brought him to the pinnacle of the SF noncommissioned officer ladder.

Born in Morton, Texas, in 1964, Vigil was always interested in joining the Army. After hearing stories about jumping out of airplanes from his brother, who was the only member of his immediate family in the military, he knew it was something he wanted to do.

So in June of 1982, at the age of 18 and only eight days after graduating high school, Vigil enlisted in the Army as a medical specialist. Following his brother's footsteps, he soon chose to go airborne.

"When I went to AIT, I volunteered for airborne school, which I promised my mother I wouldn't do," Vigil said. "She said, 'Whatever you do, I don't want you jumping out of airplanes.'"

After completing airborne school, Vigil had hopes of going to Fort Bragg, N.C., and the 82nd Airborne, however, those plans didn't work out.

"I ended up going to Fort McClellan, Alabama," he said. "I was stationed at Noble Army Medical Center and worked there in the ambulance platoon."

Had he not been working at the hospital there, his life could have turned out quite differently, Vigil said.

"Actually, I did not intend to make the Army a career," he said. "My intent was to join for three years, get some money for college using the GI Bill and then go from there. As it turned out, once I was at my first duty station I came across some SF Soldiers coming through for training."

The Soldiers he met were doing on-the-job medical training while going through the Special Forces Qualification Course. Soon, Vigil would be in their shoes, training to become a Special Forces medical sergeant.

"That was the biggest influence on me, those guys taking a personal interest in seeing me go to the Q course," he said. "Honestly, I didn't think I had the right stuff to make it through the course, but I thought I would give it a shot."

Vigil put in his paperwork and arrived at Fort Bragg, N.C., in February 1984. When compared to today's course, he said the quality of Soldiers has only improved.

"I think we're a lot more professional now in the way we select and train our Soldiers," he said. "Not that we weren't professional back then, but everything evolves."

One of the areas Vigil said his experience differed was in physical training.

"My experience was that from day one until the end of the Q course you were always subject to a weeding-out process," he said. "When it came to PT it was pretty much up to the individual instructors to set their own standards."

As graduation day grew closer for Vigil, he learned he would be assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

"I'm a native Spanish speaker," Vigil said, "but I ended up in 5th Group. As a young specialist, that didn't make sense to me. But things work out for a reason."

After arriving at 5th SFG(A), he was sent to the Defense Language Institute in Monterrey, Calif., to learn Arabic. He was also assigned to his first team, ODA 523,



Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Vigil

Bravo Company, 1st Battalion.

At only 21 years old, one of the youngest Soldiers in his unit, Vigil found a diverse mixture of experiences on his team. Several older, experienced NCOs, many of whom were Vietnam veterans, were teaching the younger guys on his team.

"I was one of four E-4s on the team, which you don't see now," he said. "We had a little more time to grow, plus we had those older, more experienced guys who took us under their wing."

Despite being a specialist on a team, Vigil said he did not feel it was a drawback. With more than three years in service at that point, and on his second enlistment, Vigil said the situation actually worked to his advantage.

"I don't think it put me at a disadvantage," he said. "There were not as many expectations. I'm not saying that in a bad way, but they just understood you were inexperienced. It let me mature, and not get thrown into things that were beyond my ability."

Being peacetime, overseas deployments were virtually nonexistent for his team. However, he did participate in a training mission to Jordan once during his first couple of years with 5th SFG(A), he said.

"If you contrast that to what our guys are doing now, they are all over the world," he said. "It was a good time to come in. SF was just starting to take off again."

Vigil and his teammates finally had the opportunity to put their training to use when the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait in August 1990. By the end of the month, his team was loading up to head for Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield.

"We were working with the Saudi special forces doing border surveillance missions and making sure nothing was coming across from the Kuwait side," he said.

Vigil soon had his first real taste of combat during Operation Desert Storm.

"The actual mission we were tasked with during Desert Storm was a special reconnaissance mission where we infiltrated into Iraq," he said. "We watched a road network to determine if vehicles were moving down into or away from Kuwait. There were nine of us on the team, dismounted."

Compared to the amount of intelligence teams receive in the field today, Vigil said they received very little.

"We were given a grid coordinate on a map and some other vague intel, because we didn't have a lot of assets like we do now," he said. "Once we got on the ground, we found it was a lot different than what we expected."

While preparing for the mission, his team had planned to dig into hide sites once in Iraq.

"When we got in Iraq, the ground was too hard to dig in," he said. "We had to find a lay-up spot for the first night, so we found some irrigation ditches we could stretch camo nets over."

A huge lesson brought back from the mission was the difficulty of being dismounted in the desert.

"You can't move fast enough, and you can't carry enough water or food," he said. "We were supposed to be on the ground anywhere from seven to nine days, so we had to carry supplies for that amount of time."

Expecting a vast open desert with no people, Vigil said his biggest surprise was seeing so many Bedouin nomads. They would lead Vigil and his team into action.

"The second morning on the ground we were compromised by some Bedouins in the area," he said. "They stopped some Iraqi army vehicles that were now retreating out of Kuwait. They responded and we became involved in a firefight for seven or eight hours before exfiltrating."

The team had intended to be picked up by elements of the 82nd Airborne Division coming into Iraq, though Vigil said the plan was a little shaky.

"We didn't know who was coming, what unit," he said. "I ended up taking an American flag with me. When American units were coming toward us, we were going to use it as a recognition signal. However, I didn't end up using that flag until later in Afghanistan."

After returning from their mission, Vigil and his team had expected to be sent out again, however, by that point the war was almost over.

"We went back into Kuwait City at the tail end just to do some security missions there, but it was very quick," he said. "I was surprised at the speed of how things happened."

After Desert Storm, 5th SFG(A) immediately began its mission in Kuwait. Over the next few years teams from Vigil's unit began missions all over the Middle East.

It was only a matter of time that Vigil found himself back in Saudi Arabia. He became team sergeant of ODA 535, which was tasked to teach light infantry tactics to the Saudi national guard.

After returning from Saudi Arabia, the officer-in-charge of the military training team put in a request specifically for Vigil to return for a year as an advisor.

"I resisted, to no avail," he said. "But, I ended up back over there in August of '97. I worked right outside of Medina, which is the second holiest city in Islam."



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



As a non-Muslim, Vigil wasn't allowed into the city. Instead, he lived on the outskirts of the city and advised a battalion stationed there. Since he was the only American advisor for the unit, Vigil said the opportunity allowed him to be immersed in the Arab culture unlike any other duty assignment.

"It was a good experience," he said. "I got to use my language capabilities again. Nobody likes leaving a team, but if you have to leave, that was a good duty to do."

After his time as an advisor, Vigil became a company sergeant major. His unit, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, was scheduled to deploy to Kuwait for its 90-day rotation in October 2001.

"We were training up to do that mission when September 11th happened," he said. "A couple weeks later we found out we were deploying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom."

Heading into Uzbekistan, Vigil and his Soldiers became the spearhead for 5th SFG(A) in the region.

"It was an exciting time," he said. "You really felt like you were at the tip of the spear. Guys were going to go into Afghanistan doing unconventional warfare, things we only dreamed about a few years ago."

One of Vigil's first tasks was to set up an isolation facility, which would prepare to move teams into Afghanistan. Shortly afterward, the decision was made to send in senior leadership to meet with Afghan warlords.

"I was there when the decision was made," he said. "They needed sergeants major to go in with the commanders. Since our battalion sergeant major was still back in the States, I was chosen to go in with our commander."

As one of the initial teams on the ground, Vigil arrived in Afghanistan early on the night of Nov. 2, 2001.

"We rode around on horseback and called in close air support in northern Afghanistan," he said. "I was there for the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif and for the big prisoner uprising in Qala-i-Jangi, where Mike Spann was killed."

Vigil said he became a part of these events by being in the right place at the right time.

"I took the same flag into Afghanistan that I had in Iraq during the Gulf War," he said. "When Mike Spann was killed and we recovered his body, I had the only American flag there. So we used it to cover his remains. Almost two years later that flag made it back to me through some folks at the Central Intelligence Agency."



Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Vigil (center) deep within Afghanistan in late 2001. Vigil was part of the initial force sent to Operation Enduring Freedom. Army photo.

With seven deployments with 5th SFG(A) under his belt from Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom alone, Vigil said he considers himself lucky to have served with the unit.

"I was fortunate enough to be in 5th Group at a time when it was pushed back into prominence," he said. "The Group had done a lot during Vietnam and had a very rich legacy from that time."

Although he originally expected to be in 7th SFG(A), Vigil said he wouldn't trade the last 22 years for anything.

"I think my biggest accomplishment was just serving in 5th Group, with a unit that has such a rich history," he said. "The Group has really been able to do a lot of things in the fight. I got to serve with a lot of great folks. You look around now and a lot of our senior leaders all did 5th Group time."

Vigil said moving from an operational unit to USASFC(A) has been a huge learning experience.

"It's a big change for me coming from a warfighting unit, but it's also educational," he said. "The Soldiers and civilians here do so much for the guys at the end of the spear to resource our ODAs down there actually doing the fighting."

His position as the USASFC(A) command sergeant major has also given him more access to see what SF Soldiers do every day in more than 50 countries, he said.

"One-man elements, detachments, companies - they're getting the job done," he said. "We're the quiet professionals, but part of my job is getting the word out about our great Soldiers, and what they're doing for the fight and the stabilization of other countries. As you move up, you get a wider focus on what's going on across the regiment."

Vigil attributes much of the successful work ODAs are doing to the quality noncommissioned officers throughout

the command.

“Contrast what we require them to do now to my experience as a young NCO, and it’s worlds apart,” he said.

The quality of SF Soldiers is directly related to the selection process, he said.

“We select the best, we train the best,” he said. “The Army has the most professional NCO corps. That’s one of the assets we have when we go to these other countries and help them stand up their armies. We hold our NCOs as role-models to what theirs should be.”

Vigil said his best advice to continue building on the quality of SF Soldiers is for them to set goals.

“Ask yourself, ‘Where do I want to be?’ not just twenty years down the road, but a year from now, two years from now,” he said. “Work towards that goal. If I didn’t have people pushing me toward that goal, I may have not been able to achieve what I’m fortunate enough to have done.”

Another piece of advice he had for younger Soldiers was to take advantage of educational opportunities.

“Take advantage of it because there’s not a lot of time,” he said. “With age comes experience. Sometimes it’s your own personal experiences or seeing others do things. If I could do it all over again, I would take more advantage of the educational opportunities out there.”

Vigil also said for SF Soldiers to prepare for continued increase in the force.

“No matter where the Army goes regarding force size, SF is going up,” he said. “Our senior leaders realize the awesome force they have on the ground and what they can do with relatively small numbers. SF Soldiers have proven their utility in the fight in the War on Terror.”

With the increase in size of Special Forces, which will be adding a new battalion to each group over the next four years, will come an increase in demand, he said.

“Wherever you look, conventional commanders want more SF Soldiers,” he said. “We will continue to professionalize the force even more. I don’t see SF numbers or capabilities decreasing anytime soon. There’s just too much demand for SF. If we sold stock, ours would be rising.”

Not only will the Regiment see growth and increase in personnel, but also in the technology that is available to the Soldiers.

“What our guys operate with on the ground, from night vision to weaponry, are things I didn’t even dream about,” he said. “It was almost unheard of twenty years ago.”

With SF stock on the rise, the only possible obstacle Vigil can see would be the availability of that equipment.

“I think that’s where we lack, getting that equipment

into the hands of the guys who need it,” he said. “That’s not an SF problem, but an industry problem, that is, building and producing in a large enough quantity for us.”

That’s not just for those wearing the green beret, he said.

“Our teams aren’t doing it alone,” he said. “You’ll have a team on the ground with guys doing things they weren’t MOS trained to do, like providing security. They’re all operating together on the battlefield. We have to equip those Soldiers at the same level we’re equipping our Green Berets.”

Although keeping equipment flowing down to teams will be an issue for the whole command, Vigil said he has a more personal responsibility.

“My biggest challenge is portraying our force accurately, promoting our force,” he said. “Our motto is the ‘quiet professional,’ and it sometimes works against us. I need to get out there and tell the story about what our men and women are doing on the ground.”

That currently proves to be one of his biggest challenges, he said.

“How do you roll up the accomplishments of all our folks into one story?” he said. “Every day our Soldiers are doing incredibly courageous things on the battlefield, and it’s almost down-played because they’re SF, just because that’s what we expect of them.”

One way Vigil plans to do this is by going out and meeting with Soldiers in each group.

“I look forward to settling into the job and getting out to see everybody,” he said. “I haven’t been able to travel much, but I want to see the groups. It will help me tell the story.”



Vigil (left) with members of his team and members of the Northern Alliance west of Konduz, Afghanistan, in late 2001. Army photo.



SF Soldier first amputee to complete Jumpmaster Course

*By Sgt. 1st Class Jason Baker
USAJFKSWCC Public Affairs*

When most Soldiers join the Army, there are schools they set their eyes on as goals to complete such as Air Assault, Ranger and Pathfinder. For any airborne qualified noncommissioned officer, the natural goal would be the Jumpmaster Course.

Sgt. 1st Class John (Mike) Fairfax, Special Forces Intelligence NCO, Headquarters Support Company, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), became the first amputee Soldier to successfully complete the Jumpmaster Course Nov. 15 and performed his first duty Dec. 3.

For Fairfax, this journey began the summer of 2005 in a remote region of Afghanistan when his truck was struck by an improvised explosive device. In the attack, he suffered a severe injury to his right leg, as well as injuries to his right eye and left lung. His team's medic, Sgt. 1st Class Derrick Coyme, quickly went to work to stop the massive bleeding caused by the severed femoral artery. Just before going unconscious, Fairfax faced the realistic possibility he may not survive the attack, due to his heavy loss of blood and the team's remote location.

Fortunately, he survived, and his next memory is waking to the voice of his wife at his bedside in the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. Fairfax knew he was not in the best condition, but felt committed to recovering from his injuries.

"It never crossed my mind that I wouldn't get back to a team," said Fairfax. "My only goal was to get better and continue on with business as usual."

Initially, Fairfax still had his right leg. Through several surgeries and battles with infection, doctors were able to save it, and he began the long road of rehabilitation.

In December of that same year, Fairfax returned to the group, and his leadership gave him one mission: "Go get better."

By June 2006 Fairfax was back to work but spent more



Maj. Robert Blease, (right) team chief, 274th Forward Surgical Team, talks with Sgt. 1st Class Mike Fairfax, Special Forces Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, Operations Detachment, 3rd Special Forces Group, following an airborne operation over P.K. Drop Zone, Raeford, N.C., Dec. 3, 2008. Blease, an orthopedic surgeon, has performed surgery on Fairfax and played an important role in his rehabilitation. Photo by Ken Kassens.

than a year struggling with the pain of the injured leg. After several unsuccessful surgeries to repair the leg to make it more functional and to reduce the pain, a friend and fellow amputee joked that he should just cut the leg off.

Fairfax gave the option serious consideration.

After consulting with several doctors and amputee Soldiers, he decided to go through with the amputation. A year prior to the day of his graduation from the Jumpmaster Course, he had the operation to remove his right leg.

The next year would be spent dealing with a cycle of rehabilitation and MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) infections. Each time the MRSA came back, he was forced to remain off the prosthetic. Once healed, he would have to rebuild the muscle strength to walk in the socket again.

When it came time for the Jumpmaster Course, it had been

three weeks since his last bout with a MRSA infection and return to using the prosthetic leg.

“Only being in the socket three weeks really increased the physical demand,” said Fairfax. “It takes time to build up the hip flexors and other muscles. I was pretty sore each night during the course.”

The majority of the Jumpmaster Course focuses on the Jumpmaster personnel inspection.

The sequence requires the jumpmaster to squat or bend down to visually inspect the jumper’s leg straps and positioning of the aviator’s kit bag. Most jumpmasters will go into a deep squat during this portion of the inspection because going to a knee will take more time when getting up and continuing the inspection. During the final, test students are required to properly inspect three jumpers - one wearing full combat equipment - in five minutes, find all deficiencies and conduct the inspection in the exact inspection sequence.

For Fairfax, his only option was to drop to a knee, at times with a violent thud, and then use his good leg to return to a standing position. For fellow students in the course, this was the only clue he was missing a leg.

“Most guys saw him kind of limping around, but didn’t know he was missing a leg,” said Master Sgt. David West, NCOIC during the course, 2nd Battalion, 3rd SFG. “It wasn’t until our first rotation in the (JMPI) circle, and he dropped down on the concrete slab. It made such a loud sound all the guys turned and looked. The crack was so loud it sounded like rounds were dropping in. One guy asked him, ‘Did that hurt?’ and he responded, ‘No I don’t have a knee.’”

Though Fairfax was disadvantaged, there were no changes made to the course’s standards. The Jumpmaster Course is typically one of the U.S. Army’s more challenging schools; the standards for success are purposefully strict. A typical course will see a 50 percent pass/fail rate.

“Before the start of the course I told myself failure is not an option,” said Fairfax. “I knew I would be paving the way for other amputees to go through the course and I didn’t want this to be something they couldn’t do.”

Not only did his success provide fellow amputees with inspiration but fellow Green Berets as well.

“The majority of the guys and all of the instructors were impressed,” said West. “Most were saying to ourselves, ‘Holy smokes, would I be able to do that?’ To do what he did with a prosthetic leg is a very real inspiration. These are the kind of guys you want in SF. The guys who are going to find a way to get things done. No matter what the circumstances are they will accomplish the task.”

West added that this is the kind of Soldier Fairfax has

always been. Even before his injury, his motivation has always been inspirational.

“When you wear an SF tab, you hold yourself to a higher standard,” said Fairfax. “If this can give another guy a glimmer of hope, then that’s good thing. Sometimes you need someone to look up to, someone to look to when you’re down.”

Fairfax expressed gratitude toward his command for supporting him the past three-and-half years through his recovery and for providing him a way to still be a contributing member of the Group. He sees being jumpmaster qualified as a way to be even more of a productive member of the unit.

“It has always been one of my goals,” said Fairfax. “If I can’t be on a team, at least I can be a productive Soldier in the Group.”

Just as any good Soldier does, Fairfax has set his eyes on more training and goals for the future.

“I don’t want this to be the last thing I do,” concluded Fairfax.

And as his fellow peers in the SF community can tell you, chances are it won’t.



Sgt. 1st Class Mike Fairfax, Special Forces Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, Operations Detachment, 3rd Special Forces Group, inspects a Soldier's parachute while performing duties aboard a CASA 212 aircraft during an airborne operation over P.K. Drop Zone, Raeford, N.C., Dec. 3, 2008. Photo by Ken Kassens.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

SEAL awarded Silver Star for combat actions in Al-Anbar Province

*By Chief Petty Officer Jeremy Wood
Naval Special Warfare Group One
Public Affairs*

U.S. Navy SEAL, Chief Special Warfare Operator Mitchell Hall was awarded the military's third-highest medal, the Silver Star, for conspicuous gallantry and heroic actions against the enemy while serving with Naval Special Warfare Task Unit – Habbaniyah.

Commodore Thomas Brown II, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group One, presented Hall the medal at a ceremony held in the Naval Special Warfare Group One conference room with family, friends and shipmates.

Though atmosphere was humble, formal and quiet, the heroic actions performed by Hall and his fellow squad members and the events leading up to this recognition is far above intrepid as depicted in the award citation, highlighted by a firefight that ensued April 2, 2007.

"I am not a man about awards," said Hall. "I know there are others who could be up here with me, but more importantly, I would trade this for the health and careers of wounded teammates."

During the 2007 deployment with SEAL Team Five, Hall's teams conducted operations up and down the Euphrates River, near Habbaniyah, Al-Anbar Province. Hall's team was called upon to create outposts to watch for suspected enemy activity overlooking key facilities and to provide support to Coalition forces operating in the area.

The task unit deployed two observation teams up the river to set up outposts in an area of interest. Hall, an attachment to SEAL Team Five from the Naval Special Warfare Center, was part of the mission to watch for and disrupt enemy activity in the insurgent stronghold of Albu Bali, northwest of Habbaniyah, Iraq. The squad of



Commodore Thomas Brown II (left), commander, Naval Special Warfare Group One, pins the Silver Star Medal on the uniform of Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Mitchell Hall in a ceremony at Naval Amphibious Coronado, Calif. Hall was recognized for his heroic combat actions in the Al-Anbar Province, Iraq. Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Antonio Ramos.

20 personnel, including Iraqi commandos, took up positions to confirm or deny insurgent activity in the area and to observe a mosque and surrounding buildings for suspected enemy activity.

In the early hours of April 2, 2007, the radios began to squawk for assistance; a Marine Corps unit was pinned down by enemy sniper fire less than a kilometer away. Calls went out to the first observation post for assistance in the fray, and then the fighting subsided.

"All was quiet for a short moment," said Hall. "There were conversations across the network of suspicious people moving around our position. I was just about to conduct turnover at the end of my shift, when (Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class) Guerrero brought to my attention that someone was carrying an AK-47 outside our position."

Hall recalls scrambling up to the top level of the abandoned house with Marc Robins, a SEAL who was

severely injured in the battle. A barrage of small-arms fire could be heard nearby as the first post stirred up a hornet's nest of fighters. An insurgent in the street was confirmed to have a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, while another was seen firing toward the previous fray's positions. Skillfully, Hall and Robins killed them with precision rifle fire, and then more insurgents shooting from buildings and alleys sent a wall of bullets toward Hall's position.

"Suddenly, I saw Marc's head snap back and he sat exposed to the incoming rain of bullets," said Hall. "I wasn't sure if he was dead or not, but I got up and pulled him prone behind our barricade."

SEAL Receives Leadership Award

*By Petty Officer 2nd Class Erika Jones
Naval Special Warfare Command Public Affairs*

The Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Gary Roughead, presented the 2008 Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership to Cmdr. Robert Smith, commanding officer, Naval Special Warfare Unit 2, in the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

Smith, the Atlantic Fleet recipient, is the first Navy SEAL to receive the award and was recognized for his time in command of SEAL Team 2.

"The SEALs are at the forefront of everything we're doing today," said Roughead as he complimented Smith on his performance in the fleet.

"It's very humbling," said Smith. "It truly is an honor for me to represent the SEAL Team members I deployed with and who work for me to the entire Navy."

Smith led Special Warfare Operators in the U.S. Central Command, South America and Africa, said Roughead. In Iraq, Smith's unit was responsible for engaging several hundred enemy fighters. His chain of command described how Smith set the "gold standard" in leadership.

Smith thanked command members and SEALs, both junior and senior, who followed him through his career.

"I get to be the one going to Washington to receive this award, but if there aren't people following your leadership, then you are quickly going to find yourself in the dark," said Smith.

The Stockdale Award is presented annually to two commissioned officers who are nominated by their peers.

Quickly, the fight escalated, resulting in the Coalition forces taking cover and becoming pinned behind walls and barricades.

Hall repeatedly exposed himself to heavy fire to engage the enemy and provide suppressive fire for his teammates. He and his squad then worked to secure a helicopter landing zone for the wounded SEAL's extraction.

"Hall acted with great skill to save an injured teammate. His heroic actions battling insurgents that day in Albu Bali is part of the story of Naval Special Warfare's remarkable work in defeating the insurgency in the west part of Iraq," said Brown.



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead honors Cmdr. Robert Smith, along with wife, Cindy, with the Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale Leadership Award during a ceremony in the Pentagon Hall of Heroes. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Tiffini Jones.

Cmdr. Paul Lyons, commanding officer, USS Stethem (DDG 63), was the Pacific Fleet recipient. The awardees must be on active duty and below the grade of captain. They also must have been, or are currently, in command of a single ship, submarine, aviation squadron, SEAL team, SEAL delivery vehicle team, special boat team, explosive ordnance disposal mobile unit, mobile diving and salvage unit, or Navy special clearance team.

The award was established in honor of Vice Adm. James Bond Stockdale, whose distinguished Naval career symbolized the highest standards of excellence in both personal example and leadership.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

SWCC named NSW Special Operations Combat Medic of the Year

*By Petty Officer 2nd Class Robyn Gerstenslager
Naval Special Warfare Group 4 Public Affairs*

The Special Operations Medical Association recently named Petty Officer 2nd Class John Cowgar of Naval Special Warfare Group 4 as the Naval Special Warfare Special Operations Combat Medic of the Year at a ceremony in Tampa, Fla.

Cowgar was up against more than 100 other SEAL and Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen SOCMs within Naval Special Warfare Command.

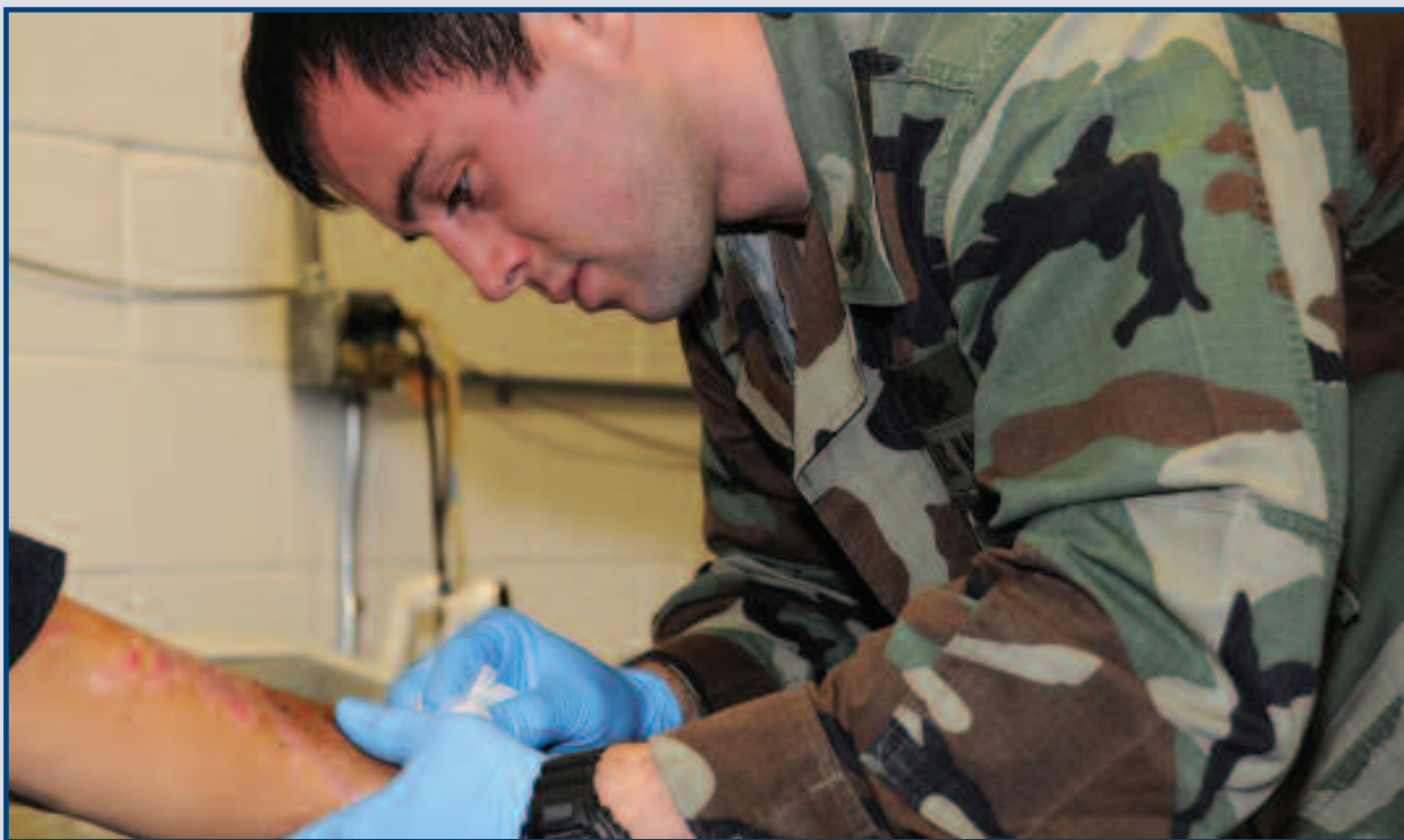
"He's an excellent example of a SOCM in Naval Special Warfare," said Senior Chief Petty Officer Rickie

Fry, NSWG-4's medical department leading chief petty officer. "He has excellent medical and leadership skills that he has proved in combat."

To become a SOCM within the SWCC community, a special boat operator must stand out during SWCC school and be recommended for the program by an instructor.

Upon graduation, he will transfer to the medical department at Special Boat Team 12 in Coronado, Calif., to complete mandatory online training modules.

The final and most challenging step to becoming a SOCM is six months of intensive training at the Joint Special Operations Medical Training Center at Fort Bragg, N.C.



Petty Officer 2nd Class John Cowgar examines a patient's wound. Cowgar, a Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman at Naval Special Warfare Group 4, was recently announced as the Special Operations Medical Association's Special Operations Combat Medic of the Year for Naval Special Warfare. Photo by Chief Petty Officer Kathryn Whittenberger.

The training will teach how to perform a variety of life-saving skills in an austere environment with a focus on trauma skills. A SOCM may be called upon to administer Advanced Cardiac Life Support, intubation, chest tube thoracostomy or venous cut downs.

Cowgar said he has always been interested in the medical field and that becoming a SOCM gave him an opportunity to explore those interests as well as gain the skills to save his fellow teammates' lives if called upon.

He put those skills to the test in 2006 while deployed to Iraq with a Riverine Troop from Special Boat Team 22. During a mission the RT was ambushed by an improvised explosive device and small-arms fire.

Cowgar was injured during the attack, but aggressively engaged the enemy until the troop was out of the contact area. He ignored his own injuries and tended to a teammate with severe shrapnel wounds.

His selfless efforts earned him the Bronze Star with Valor March 10, 2008.

"My training has benefitted me every day," said Cowgar. "Since becoming a SOCM, I have been given the chance to help others on a regular basis."

Since reporting to the NSWG-4 medical department in April 2008, Cowgar has taken the SOCM program within the special boat team community under his wing. He created a tracking program to stay current on the number of SOCMs at each team and at the schoolhouse.

After a SWCC receives his SOCM certification, Cowgar ensures each one maintains his credentials by tracking individual recertification dates.

Cowgar also developed a sustainment program for all SWCC medics.

"I created the sustainment program to further enhance and sharpen the skills of a SOCM, enabling them to better treat their teammates," said Cowgar. "So far it's working very well. It has provided an avenue for learning, which has increased our medical readiness across the board."

The sustainment program contains individual training modules taught at each boat team. The modules are made up of Tactical Medical Emergency Protocols that every SOCM is required to know, said Cowgar.

"My number one goal is to increase the number of qualified SOCMs throughout the boat teams, and to further



Petty Officer 2nd Class John Cowgar removes a patient's stitches. Cowgar, a Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman at Naval Special Warfare Group 4, was recently announced as the Special Operations Medical Association's Special Operations Combat Medic of the Year for Naval Special Warfare. Photo by Chief Petty Officer Kathryn Whittenberger.

build camaraderie through the SOCM community by introducing a SOCM challenge," said Cowgar.

The SOCM challenge is still in the works, but he plans to create a competition that will test the skills of the SOCMs.

Already Cowgar's efforts have led to an increase in SWCC SOCM manpower. Since the implementation of his sustainment program, SOCM numbers within the special boat team community have increased.

As the assistant command fitness leader, Cowgar leads numerous and individual physical fitness sessions. He also implemented the remedial PT program to prepare NSWG-4 Sailors for the semiannual physical fitness assessment.

"He just does the job without me even asking," said Fry. "I can just give him tasks and know that it's done."

Cowgar is very humbled by his selection as SOCM of the Year.

"Representing WARCOM as Special Operations Combat Medic of the Year is a great honor. It's an honor that not only comes with great recognition but also great responsibility," said Cowgar. "But I did not earn it on my own; superb leadership, support from my commands and outstanding teammates were key contributions to my selection."



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

SWCC undergo intensive coxswain training

Photos and story by Petty Officer 2nd Class Robyn Gerstenslager

A Special Operations Craft-Riverine performs a crash-back, where the craft comes from its top speed to a stop in one hull-length, during two weeks of coxswain training at Special Boat Team 22. The training is the first step of many for up-and-coming boat captains to familiarize them with the ins and outs of the SOC-R, and to teach them how to drive as a unit with the other boats in a formation. SBT-22 is the U.S. Special Operations Command's riverine command, focusing on insertion and extraction of SEALs and other Special Operations Forces in special operations around the world.

Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen from Special Boat Team 22 have been honing their driving skills on the water during two weeks of coxswain training on Mississippi's Pearl River.

Coxswain training is the first of numerous steps along the way for a special boat operator to earn his boat captain qualification. All SWCC receive a basic coxswain qualification, because they need to know the basics of how to drive the craft they operate in an emergency situation. In order to earn the title of boat captain, a special boat operator must go through a rigorous training pipeline, which begins with coxswain training.

"This training is a small, short step of many big, long

steps to becoming a boat captain," said Special Boat Operator 1st Class Brad Rumbaugh (SWCC/PJ), a boat captain with SBT-22. "This is a hop and a skip compared to the marathon ahead."

The SWCC receiving the coxswain training were selected because of their proven ability to lead Sailors and their capacity to read and react to stressful situations in an effective manner. They have also completed at least one deployment.

Coxswain training familiarizes the new drivers with the ins and outs of the boat and how it reacts to different situations on the water. Special boat operators assigned to SBT-22 operate and maintain the Special

Operations Craft-Riverine.

“They are learning how it reacts with the throttle accelerating and how the buckets control the boat’s movement,” said Rumbaugh. “They are also learning what it feels like when the boat hits a wake and how to mitigate that impact to make it nice and smooth. They need to be able to navigate the rivers in a smooth line.”

The driver must be able to keep a smooth course to provide a level platform for his gunners and the safety of his crew.

The boat drivers not only need to maintain control of their boat but must also be aware of the other boats in formation. By driving in formation they learn how the other drivers react to different situations and what they need to do to adjust because of the other drivers’ responses.

To gain a better understanding of the other drivers’ habits, they practice high-speed formations, tight-placement formations and starting and stopping together. They learn to navigate in small spaces along the twists and turns of the Pearl River at high speeds.

The Pearl River is ideal for this training because it is littered with fallen trees that are partially hidden underwater. The trees create somewhat of a series of slaloms for the boat drivers to maneuver through, thereby allowing them to learn how the boat reacts to quick turns. The unpredictable nature of the river trains the SWCC to stay alert and to react quickly.

“It’s common for there to be up to four drivers and four boats on the water at a time, but they are operating as just one unit,” said Rumbaugh. “All the boats need to be able to drive as one team; if one guy messes up it’s hard to correct it all the way through the formation.”

Special Boat Operator 2nd Class Troy Norrell, who is going through the coxswain training, agreed that learning to drive with other boats is a challenge.

“The biggest thing I’ve learned is how my actions on the water affect the whole unit,” said Norrell. “If one or two boats get herky jerky, the others are going to have to over correct for that.”



A senior Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman gives advice to another SWCC who is in the midst of two weeks of coxswain training at Special Boat Team 22.

In addition to driving the boat properly and adjusting to the reactions of the other drivers, a boat operator behind the wheel is in charge of his crew and the operations of the boat. He must continuously check for proper engine readings, water depth and grid locations.

“They are constantly multitasking,” said Rumbaugh. “There is no point when these guys aren’t doing a million different things, while at the same time taking the boats to the edge so they learn where the limitations are.”

The first week of coxswain training is conducted during the day to give the new boat drivers an opportunity to get familiar with the nuances of the boats before the second week of training, which is done at night.

“Amateurs train until they get it right,” said Norrell, of the intensive training. “Professionals train until they can’t get it wrong.”

SBT-22 is the U.S. Special Operations Command’s riverine command, focusing on insertion and extraction of SEALs and other Special Operations Forces in special operations around the world.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

NSWG-4 assumes NAVSCIATTS

By Naval Special Warfare Group 4 Public Affairs

Capt. Chuck Wolf, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 4, has accepted control of a fourth subordinate command, Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS), on Stennis Space Center, Miss., from the Naval Special Warfare Center.

The NAVSCIATTS mission is to provide partner nation security forces with the highest level of riverine and coastal craft operations and maintenance technical training. The change in structure aligns the operational expertise of the Naval Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen with the NAVSCIATTS schoolhouse. This will ensure the very latest techniques and procedures are being taught in addition to allowing closer engagement opportunities with friendly countries.

The NAVSCIATTS has been conducting security force assistance since 1963 to prepare partner nation forces to conduct small craft operations in riverine and littoral environments, as well as develop and sustain professional and personal relationships.

“The reason NAVSCIATTS exists is to provide technical training to our partner nation security force students, not only to improve their individual technical skills, but also to enhance the readiness of select maritime security forces within key partner nations,” said NAVSCIATTS commanding officer Cmdr. Bill Mahoney.

This mission is closely aligned with the Navy’s maritime strategy of increasing security and alliances in waterways across the globe. With this waterborne mission, it is a natural evolution for NAVSCIATTS to fall under NSWG-4, U.S. Special Operations Command’s maritime



Sailors assigned to Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) train personnel from the Iraqi Riverine Police Force on special boat maneuvers and weapon handling. NAVSCIATTS has transferred from belonging to the Naval Special Warfare Center to Naval Special Warfare Group 4, U.S. Special Operations Command maritime mobility component. NAVSCIATTS mission is to provide partner nation security forces with the highest level of riverine and coastal craft operations and maintenance technical training. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Brien Aho.

mobility component.

“This is phase zero of the Navy’s maritime strategy: pre-conflict capacity building. NAVSCIATTS provides us with the initial contact with a potential ally or partner nation force and helps set the stage for training with nations around the world,” said Wolf.

“Trust and cooperation cannot be surged, and our relationships with partner nations must include improving regional and cultural expertise through expanded training, education and exchange initiatives,” he added. “The defense of all countries against common threats to security— whether civil conflict; social instability; humanitarian crises; arms, drug or human trafficking; territorial disputes; piracy or terrorism; — is best achieved through improved cooperation, strong coalitions and regional partnerships that provide for our collective security. This training and relationship building begins with training programs exemplified by NAVSCIATTS.”

Additionally, NAVSCIATTS conducts security force assistance missions in support of combatant commanders in accordance with USSOCOM priorities using in-resident courses and mobile training teams to prepare partner nation security forces to conduct small craft operations in riverine or littoral environments within their own countries.

The goal of a mobile training team is to teach how to operate and maintain the craft used by the partner nation forces in their own environment and often includes establishing a logistics chain from the ground up. These are skills that the Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman instructors are specifically trained for as USSOCOM’s premier maritime experts.

Wolf would like to use NAVSCIATTS to shape Naval Special Warfare’s combatant-craft global impact through partner nation capability assessments. He envisions a cohesive strategy for developing partner nation maritime capabilities that will be formulated by engaging with the State Department, U.S. embassies and their military advisory and assistance groups abroad.

Wolf is enlisting the Naval Post Graduate School to send teams of interdisciplinary subject matter experts to designated countries to determine specific and reliable maritime security forces the government should work with, what their current capabilities are, and what their capabilities could become.

“There will be a closer lashing-up of NSW maritime components with partner nations we should be and are currently working with,” said Wolf.

NAVSCIATTS in-resident training is an effective first step of U.S. government development of partner nation forces, focusing on teaching independent maintenance, limited planning and the basics of combined operations. This initial training often leads to mobile training team deployments and more advanced training.

“NAVSCIATTS in-resident training pipeline is crucial to the overall security force assistance concept,” said Mahoney. “In fact, most countries use our NAVSCIATTS in-resident training as their respective nation’s qualification courses. After completing core in-resident and several iterations of train-the-trainer instructor development courses, the follow-on MTTs help partner nations to develop and sustain programs to operate independently on their own to effectively provide both internal and external security of their territorial waters,” said Mahoney.

After a period of sustained interoperability, the unit will ideally become more involved with the United States, specifically with Special Operations Forces, and develop its own training capabilities.

“Continual and persistent engagement with specific units and key partner nations through additional and advanced training, regional exercises, follow-on MTTs, and combined operations will ultimately improve their overall readiness. It’s in our mutual interest to improve security through enhanced interoperability, improved alliances and increased cooperative security,” said Mahoney.

Mahoney predicts the shift in control of his command to NSWG-4 will improve security force assistance efforts to build select maritime security force capacities within key partner nations.

“NSWG-4 will be better positioned to improve coordination with Naval Special Warfare units and theater special operations commands to ensure that Security Assistance Officers send partner nation military students to NAVSCIATTS from nations aligned with USSOCOM priorities. It’s in everyone’s interest to more effectively concentrate U.S. efforts on building select maritime security force capabilities,” said Mahoney.

In an ongoing effort to both continually improve the training provided to partner nation forces as well as sustain their reputation among its customers, the NAVSCIATTS schoolhouse instructor cadre seeks out and learns from best practices among similar Department of Defense training programs including those from the Western Hemisphere



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

Institute for Security Cooperation, the Inter-American Air Forces Academy, and equivalent NECC and Coast Guard courses.

For example, this year NAVSCIATTS water-based students will participate in a joint training exercise with WHINSEC's students undergoing land-based training. The maritime students will insert and extract the ground students during a final exercise to demonstrate that the scenario works, as well as the combined training.

Mahoney believes that synergies like these are critical as U.S. government and DoD efforts increasingly shift from direct toward indirect methods. This indirect focus has been NAVSCIATTS focus since its days as a start-up Coast Guard training team in Panama in 1961.

NAVSCIATTS is distinct from other commands with similar missions because the school exclusively trains international students; the cadre are full-time instructors and the command is adjacent to Special Boat Team 22, SOCOM's premier riverine command, allowing the instructors to easily draw upon a wealth of knowledge from the SWCC who operate at SBT-22.

Another benefit to NAVSCIATTS location is the ease of access to the Pearl River, which provides some of the finest riverine and coastal training environments in the world.

NECC and the Coast Guard offer similar training, but their equivalent courses are not as long, as in-depth, or facilitated by a dedicated full-time instructor force focused solely on training international students.

"Despite our relatively small size, our NAVSCIATTS master training specialist SWCC cadre provides unmatched professional knowledge and expansive institutional experience unmatched in the military," said Mahoney. "Our sustained competitive advantage within the maritime security force assistance arena is the result not of one single aspect of our command, but rather a mix of internal excellence through a culture of teamwork; a sterling reputation among our customers; and external stewardship from both NSW and SOCOM leadership over our 48-year history."

The NAVSCIATTS instructor force of less than 30 is comprised of full-time, bilingual, master training specialists,



International students attending a diesel engine maintenance course at the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) on Stennis Space Center, Miss., demonstrate what they've learned throughout the course. Courtesy photo.

including SWCC, government employees, civilian contractors and Navy engineers. The instructors are highly qualified, said Mahoney; their sole job is to effectively train international security forces on the operations and maintenance of small craft as well as sustain those relations for future U.S. government engagement.

The instructor cadre teaches partner nation maritime forces how to protect their own waterways through courses offered at the schoolhouse in Mississippi. Nine courses are offered in both Spanish and English and cover such topics as patrol craft familiarization, outboard motor maintenance, mission planning, navigation, weapons training, rules of engagement, laws of armed conflict and how a military law justice system functions in accomplishing military objectives.

All instructors are U.S. citizens, but many are originally from countries such as Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Panama. This cadre has trained more than 6,000 international students from more than 55 countries in the past 48 years.

"There simply is no other command in existence with the capacity to train partner nation students in small craft operations like NAVSCIATTS," said Mahoney.

The dynamic command that exists today started with somewhat humble beginnings in 1961, as a Coast Guard military training team deployed to the Panama Canal Zone to train the local military on small craft operations. In the midst of the deployment, the team recognized the need for sustained training and based a Coast Guard Small Craft Inspection and Training Team at the U.S. Naval Station, Rodman, Panama, in 1963.

In June 1969 control of SCIATTS was transferred to the Navy, and it was re-designated Small Craft Instruction and Technical Team and placed under the direction of U.S. Naval Station, Panama Canal as a department within that command. SCIATTS mission was defined as, "In conformance with the U.S. Security Assistance Program, foster increased level of professionalism and readiness in the Naval and Coast Guard Forces of Latin American and Caribbean Island nations through formal courses of instruction and mobile training teams in the operations of small craft including employment, maintenance and logistic support."

The school's continued success and increased demands for training and enrollment in courses led to the official establishment of NAVSCIATTS as a shore activity on U.S. Naval Base, Panama, Oct. 19, 1982, and assigned to Commander Training Command Atlantic Fleet, a functional commander for Commander Naval Education and Training.

NAVSCIATTS officially became a naval shore command July 21, 1983, under President Reagan's initiatives to enhance U.S. security forces relationships in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The school remained under the control of CNET until January 1999, when it was relocated to the United States as a result of the closure of Rodman Naval Station in the Republic of Panama.

According to Mahoney, the subsequent decision in 1999 by Naval Special Warfare and USSOCOM to take NAVSCIATTS as part of the NSW Coastal and Riverine Training Center concept led to the assignment of the school to USSOCOM, and ultimately the relocation of the command to the Stennis Space Center.

At that time, NAVSCIATTS shifted out from under CNET and was re-established and commissioned as an echelon four-shore command falling under the Naval Special Warfare Center and Naval Special Warfare Command operationally and administratively.

Although the ultimate goal of the schoolhouse is further reaching than a typical learning institution, it is still a schoolhouse with students and instructors who need the

occasional break from the routine. When the students at the schoolhouse aren't training, they make use of the nearby gym, soccer field, basketball and volleyball courts, barbecue areas or Internet lounge.

Under the International Military Education and Training program, NAVSCIATTS supports a robust Field Studies Program designed to ensure students return to their respective countries with a greater understanding of U.S. business, military and government cultures. As part of the Field Studies Program and in conjunction with the Navy International Programs Office, NAVSCIATTS coordinates educational trips to local businesses and civic activities in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama.

Students have the opportunity to learn about their classmates' cultures too; during each course students are asked to share a cultural presentation about their home country. This provides opportunities to cultivate relationships with foreign countries, as well as develop and sustain professional and personal relationships, in order to provide the United States with both access and influence in partner nations.

"The relationships forged at this small command in southern Mississippi will last a lifetime and will put a human face on very important decisions made in the future that will impact maritime security on a global scale," said Wolf.



International students attending a hull maintenance course at the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) on Stennis Space Center, Miss., repair damage to a combat rubber raiding craft. Courtesy photo.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Air Commando saves lives during fierce battle in Afghanistan

*By Capt. Laura Ropelis
AFSOC Public Affairs*

An Air Force Special Operations Command Air Commando saved lives in Afghanistan April 6 during a lengthy battle by calling in air strikes to protect his team.

Staff Sgt. Zachary Rhyner, 22, a special tactics combat controller assigned to the 21st Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., was deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom as the primary joint terminal attack controller while attached to a Special Forces team.

Then a senior airman, Rhyner was part of a 100-plus-man combined assault force whose mission was to enter Shok Valley and capture a high-value target who was funding the insurgency. Rhyner is credited with saving the 10-man team from being overrun twice during a six-and-a-half-hour battle.

Capt. Stewart Parker, Special Operations Forces commander at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, was the command-and-control link to the JTACs on the ground as they went into Shok Valley.

"This was the first time U.S. Special Operations Forces entered the territory," said Parker. "These were extraordinary conditions, and the situation was dynamic."

Shok Valley is located below 60-foot cliffs. The mission objective was at the top of the mountains surrounding the valley.

"Initial infiltration began that day with snow on the ground, jagged rocks, a fast-moving river and a cliff," said Rhyner. "There was a five-foot wall you had to pull yourself up. The ridgeline trail was out of control."

The expectation was to encounter fire from about 70 insurgents. One Air Force JTAC-qualified combat controller was attached to each team to call in air strikes, if needed.

"We were caught off guard as 200 enemy fighters approached," said Staff Sgt. Rob Gutierrez, a combat controller with the second team in the fight. "Within ten

minutes, we were ambushed with heavy fire from 50 meters. The teams were split by a river 100 to 200 meters apart, north to south."

Rhyner was in charge of coordinating the air assets.

"I have never seen a situation this bad," said Parker, who was monitoring the situation back at the base. "The intel said the enemy was 40 feet away from Zach and his team at one point. It was dangerous."



Staff Sgt. Zachary Rhyner, a special tactics combat controller assigned to the 21st Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., receives the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs Grateful Nation Award from Adm. Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during the Grateful Nation Award Ceremony. Courtesy photo.

Within the first 15 minutes of fire, Rhyner was wounded along with three team members.

"I was pulling security when I got shot in the leg," he said. "The rounds hit my left thigh and went through my leg and hit another guy in the foot."

He immediately felt pain and adrenalin.

"There was nowhere to go. I grabbed the wounded guys, but we were trapped by the enemy," he said. "I was calling in air strikes and firing, while moving the wounded down (the cliff)."

Gutierrez could see insurgent fire coming from the buildings on the hilltops above them and was trying to get across the river to meet up with Rhyner.

"Zach and I were in constant radio contact," he said. "I could hear the ammunition, sniper fire and rocket-propelled grenades with multiple blasts. We tried to push to the north to collocate with Zach's team, but every time we pushed up river, it put us in an open line of fire."

"My team ran across the freezing river. The water came off the mountains and we were 100 to 200 feet beneath the enemy, like fish in a barrel," said Gutierrez.

As the enemy surrounded them, Rhyner, who was being treated for his injuries by Capt. Kyle Walton, the Special Forces team leader, directed multiple rockets and gun runs from AH-64 helicopters against enemy positions.

"Zach was coordinating tremendous amounts of fire on both villages simultaneously," said Gutierrez. "Zach was in charge of the air strikes, since he was closest to the fight and could see even what the F-15 pilots could not."

Forty-five minutes to an hour had gone by since the fight began.

"We were pinned down and I could see the enemy all over the hills running around," said Gutierrez. There were no stable targets. I kept the Apaches and the Hellfire missiles pressed to the north."

Accurate sniper, machine-gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire poured down on the assault force in a complex ambush initiated simultaneously from all directions as the team ascended the near-vertical terrain. He called in more than 50 close air strikes and strafing runs.

Three hours into the fight, Gutierrez reached Rhyner's position.

"Sergeant Gutierrez and I met on the cliff during the battle briefly. We shared a laugh, but it was a busy, bleak situation," Rhyner said.

Rhyner had been calling in air strikes for three hours while he was injured, however, he still felt responsible for

the others who had been hurt. With disregard for his own life, he tried to get the injured to safety while still in the open line of fire.

"I left injured personnel in a house and I had to get over there," he said. "I was frustrated being wounded. I tried to get the bombs there fast and talk to the pilots who didn't see what I saw on the ground."

Five or six hours into the fight, as it was getting dark, intelligence informed the JTACs that enemy reinforcements were 10 kilometers away carrying enemy rockets and missiles.

"We continued to fight our way up the hill and the (helicopters) came," said Gutierrez. "Zach was talking to the helos and gave the coordinates to lay the bombs on the village, while I kept the A-10s and the Apaches out of the way."

Rhyner called in a total of 4,570 rounds of cannon fire, nine Hellfire missiles, 162 rockets, 12 500-pound bombs and one 2,000-pound bomb, constantly engaging the enemy with his M-4 rifle to deter their advance.

"Zach acted fast and shut down the fighting," said Gutierrez. "The wounded were taken out on medevac."

Back at command and control, Parker heard the helicopters were on the ground with the wounded, but he could not move the helicopters due to terrain and weather conditions.

"Radio transmissions would block the signal due to terrain and vertical cliffs," he said. "Helicopters were vulnerable and there was pressure to do everything we could to get the teams out quickly."

Fog started rolling into the valley.

"The helicopter couldn't fly (due to altitude) and the situation called for 'aggressive patience,'" said Parker. "More than 50 percent of the U.S. forces were wounded, and it was pretty grave."

Toward the end of the fighting, 40 insurgents were killed and 100 wounded.

Rhyner was directly credited with the entire team's survival due to his skill and poise under intense fire.

"Rhyner is out of training less than a year and is in one of the most difficult situations" said Parker. "It is an absolute testament to his character and the training these guys take. It tells me we are doing something right."

"If it wasn't for Zach, I wouldn't be here," said Gutierrez.

Rhyner received the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs Grateful Nation Award and is awaiting presentation of the Purple Heart for the injuries he suffered during the battle.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Members of the 1st Special Operations Maintenance Group, along with the 1st Special Operations Wing vice commander, Col. Mark Alsied, are presented with the Phoenix Award during a ceremony in Washington, D.C. The Phoenix Award is the highest field-level maintenance award within the DOD. Courtesy photo.

1st Special Operations Maintenance Group wins coveted Phoenix Award

*By Tech. Sgt. Sheri Kangas
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

The 1st Special Operations Maintenance Group was recently named the winner of the coveted Department of Defense Phoenix Award, the highest field-level maintenance award within the DOD.

Representatives from the 1st SOMXG were on hand at the award ceremony during the 2008 DOD Maintenance Symposium and Exhibition in Denver. "Colonel Soc (Socrates) Greene, the previous maintenance group commander, deserves the recognition for leading the group during this award period," said Col. Peter Robichaux, 1st SOMXG commander. "To be recognized as the Department of Defense's best field-level maintenance unit epitomizes the pride and excellence with which our Commando maintainers operate on a daily basis at home and abroad. We couldn't be any prouder of the men and women of the First Special Operations Maintenance Group."

The 1st SOMXG earned the honor by accomplishing "truly superior aircraft maintenance," which supported the generation of 3,200 combat sorties that flew nearly 14,000 hours over hostile territory. Challenged with a \$336 million modification program and the beddown of two new weapon systems at home, the maintainers were still able to generate 4,200 training sorties that produced more than 3,100 combat-ready aircrew needed for Air Force and joint missions.

Despite this imposing operation-tempo, maintenance Airmen throughout the group still supported 65 off- and on-station training and exercise commitments, learned multiple processes - highlighted by a revamped training program that saved 98,000 labor hours per year - and accomplished more than 33,000 training events.

The maintenance group includes 2,686 active duty Airmen, 135 civil service members and 450 contractors. "We celebrated with the entire maintenance group and unveiled the trophy Nov. 14 at the Phoenix Award Barbecue," Robichaux said.

AFSOTC offers college credits, training

By Capt. Laura Ropelis
AFSOC Public Affairs

The Air Force Special Operations Training Center at Hurlburt Field, Fla., is now offering college credits to Airmen and is expanding training opportunities, allowing warfighters more time to concentrate on their mission.

The U.S. Air Force Special Operations School, also at Hurlburt Field, under the umbrella of AFSOTC, offers 20 Community College of the Air Force accredited courses in irregular warfare, regional and cultural affairs, and special operations through Air University.

"It is important to let the trainers train and the warfighters focus on the fight," said Col. Paul Harmon, commander of AFSOTC.

Improving mission effectiveness is part of Harmon's vision. Individual units at Hurlburt currently train their Air Commandos in-house while fighting the war at the same time.

Training responsibilities will move to AFSOTC, which will oversee student management, academics, simulators and scheduling, taking it off the warfighters' plate, explained Harmon.

The shift to expand training under the AFSOTC umbrella will affect USAFSOS, the 19th Special Operations Squadron, the Special Tactics Training Squadron, the 5th Special Operations Squadron, the 745th Special Operations Squadron and Detachment 1 at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., while other warfighter units may experience lighter training requirements.

Training standards currently vary according to units. In many cases, Air Commandos do not get credit for weeks of required unit training. Under AFSOTC, this is already changing, said Harmon.

Det 1 recently offered its first class on anti-terrorism through a USAFSOS mobile team of educators.

"It is practical education that makes you think and expands horizons," said Col. Brian Cutts, commander of USAFSOS.

Results are already being achieved in response to growth, a need for standardization and increased warfighter demands.

"The Special Tactics Training Squadron has experienced exponential growth on the student and staff side," said Maj. Chris Larkin, commander of STTS.

"We introduced a new series of training courses for our

combat weathermen. They now earn their own Air Force specialty code. Most of the training at STTS is geared to shoot, move and communicate," said Larkin.

The STTS is also standing up the first Tactical Attack Control Party course this summer, said Larkin.

Virtual, live and constructive training will be integrated into AFSOTC exercises and courses to provide training that feels real, looks real and meets training standards.

During Emerald Warrior, an LVC AFSOTC training exercise, the 19th SOS uses CV-22 and gunship flight simulators to train pilots on computer-simulated realistic scenarios.

These flight simulators not only save wear and tear on Air Force aircraft, they prepare pilots for combat, allowing them more flight hours, saving both bullets and fuel, explained Lt. Col. Royce Lott, commander of the 19th SOS.

"The new consolidated training approach is cost-effective for units, giving students access to regionally accredited experts in flight, special operations, culture, language and training equipment they can't get at their units," said Harmon.

AFSOTC is looking at the "whole person" in their new assessment process to find the warrior ethos. Someone who can handle challenges physically, mentally and emotionally.

"Becoming an Air Commando requires a gut check," said Harmon. "Once selected, a recruit will undergo rigorous training through AFSOTC. We need to make sure these are the right people for the job so they will succeed."



Staff Sgt. Richard Corbett, 19th Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla., answers questions posed to him by Master Sgt. Sue Parker, Detachment 1, Air Force Operations Training Center, shortly before a flight over Melrose Air Force Range. AFSOTC officially stood up Oct. 6 at Hurlburt Field, Fla., to allow operational flying units to focus directly on the global war on terrorism. Photo by Greg Allen.



U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Advisor Group, Marine Special Operations Team - Eight, provide mentorship and guidance to Dominican Secretary of State Counter Terrorism Armed Forces during a Joint Combined Training Exercise at Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

MSOAG trains Dominican Republic forces, enhances relationships

*Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Felix Figueroa
SOCSOUTH Public Affairs*

U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Advisor Group, Marine Special Operations Team-Eight, recently provided training to the Dominican Republic Secretary of State Counter Terrorism Armed Forces, or SEFA CT, as part of a Joint Combined Exchange Training program.

Aside from learning the basics of marksmanship, SEFA CT was instructed in a myriad of skill sets ranging from advanced light infantry tactics, techniques and procedures to medical first responders. U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command carefully screens and selects each team member, who, for this

mission, is operationally attached to Special Operations Command — South.

These battle-hardened, highly trained Marines and Sailors possess multiple unique skills aside from their occupational specialties. They are charged with the responsibility to train, advise and assist friendly host nation forces.

The training they provide enables host nation forces to support their governments' internal security and stability by helping them prepare for future internal and external threats.

"In order for this training to succeed, it's crucial to establish rapport with them immediately, but you have to gain their trust first to help build their confidence," said an MSOT-Eight officer in charge.



A U.S. Marine assigned to U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Advisor Group, Marine Special Operations Team - Eight, hands out ammunition to Dominican Secretary of State Counter Terrorism Forces in preparation for marksmanship training in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, during a Joint Combined Exchange Training program.

According to Wilber Dotel, Ensign, Dominican Naval Forces, SEFA CT, trusting this team came easily because he and his men were extremely impressed with the knowledge base, experience and training MSOT-Eight brought with them.

"I know many who don't agree with the U.S. being in Iraq, but the experience your Marines brought back is extremely beneficial to us on an individual basis and to our country," said Dotel.

Dotel, 29, says his country is often used as a bridge to export contraband and, if not addressed, can lead to future problems in terrorism.

"This training helps us directly engage the problems regarding narco-trafficking in our country. Your (logistics) support is immense and extremely valued, and without that, none of this would have been possible," Dotel added.

As a testament to the training provided by MSOT-Eight, many of the host nation soldiers trained were chosen to work directly for the Dominican Republic president and other internal political figures.

The training team is primarily made up of junior ranking non-commissioned officers, one senior NCO and a mid-grade NCO. According to the team captain, the responsibilities placed on them individually are echelons above their current pay grade and experience, but they all agreed they have become well-rounded individually and a very tight knit group.

Additionally, the team's chief hospital corpsman and weapons NCO said the conventional side of the Marine Corps and Navy will benefit from having all of them if sent

back to serve in that function, however, they all expressed no interest in doing so.

"Although it's a relatively new concept, and aside from the challenges this unique structure brings about, being with this small, specialized, mature group of guys makes it all worth while," said the chief hospital corpsman and 15-year veteran.

"The concept and inception of Special Operations Forces within the U.S. Marine Corps came to fruition approximately three years ago, but I feel the impact throughout the corps and fleet will be beneficial and long lasting," added the chief hospital corpsman.

At the end of each day, MSOT-Eight instructors gather the SEFA CT around them and go over what was learned in the day's lesson. According to the team's captain, this allows him and his men an opportunity to practice the local language while testing the students on recently acquired knowledge, increasing respect for one another.

"It's truly a reverent feeling to see the guys you trained grow in ability and pass it along," said an MSOT-Eight weapons sergeant.

"Our efforts to learn their language and culture mixed with their desire to become a better fighting force has helped our relations, formed a bond and understanding of one another," added the weapons sergeant.



A member of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Advisor Group, Marine Special Operations Team - Eight, oversees range training to Dominican Secretary of State Counter Terrorism Armed Forces during a Joint Combined Training Exercise at Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.



United States, Poland sign Special Ops Memo of Understanding

Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich signed a memorandum of understanding Feb. 19 that will increase cooperation between the two countries' special operations forces.

The two men signed the document during a ceremony before the start of the NATO defense ministers meeting at Krakow, Poland.

Gates said the memorandum is part of the U.S.-Polish partnership to help to modernize the Polish military. U.S. and Polish special operations forces already have a close working relationship, and this memorandum builds on a declaration of strategic cooperation the United States and Poland signed in August, officials said. That commitment was to help the Polish military with modernizing and professionalizing its force.

The memorandum "underscores the growing cooperation between U.S. and Polish special operations forces," Gates said during the signing ceremony. "We will expand and deepen our cooperation and deepen our opportunities to work together toward common goals."

The Polish special operations command is expanding, and Gates vowed the U.S. military "will help in any way we can." Part of the agreement assigns an American Special Operations liaison officer to the Polish headquarters.

Poland's special operations force is as a separate service in the country's military structure. The force has about 1,500 personnel, and Poland hopes to grow the capability to 3,500 by 2012.

"Poland has a unique special operations capability, and they work very well with us," an American officer said, speaking on background. The force has five squadrons today and will grow to nine, said the officer.

The American liaison will help the force grow and share experiences and advice with the Polish force from U.S. Special Operations Command, based in Tampa, Fla.

U.S. Special Operations Command has partnerships with five countries: the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Poland and Jordan. Only Poland has an official memorandum of understanding.



U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates (right) signs a memorandum of understanding with Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich at Poland's II Mechanized Corps Headquarters, Krakow, Poland, Feb. 19, 2009. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jerry Morrison.

Polish special operations forces have worked alongside U.S. personnel since the fall of the Warsaw Pact. Polish troops have helped in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq, and now are in Afghanistan with a presence of roughly 1,600 military personnel, including 100 special operations soldiers. They are concentrated in Ghazni and work under direction from Combined Joint Task Force 101 in Regional Command East.

The memorandum recently signed is aimed specifically at helping the Polish force stand up a senior staff headquarters, building English-speaking capabilities and enhancing training opportunities, officials said.

U.S. Army Col. Bogdan Gieniewski is the U.S. Special Operations Command liaison. He speaks Polish and works daily with Polish leaders to set up the command, and he sponsors education and training with U.S. forces for the Polish special operators.

"This is a very professional force that brings everything to the operation," he said. In addition to combat troops, the Polish force has its own air assets and logistics support. The Polish forces can get to the fight and sustain themselves, he added.

Sen. Warner honored in USSOCOM Medal Ceremony

*Story and photo by Tech. Sgt. Victoria Meyer
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

An advocate for the U.S. Special Operations Command was recently awarded the command's single most prestigious award at a small ceremony held at the Pentagon.

Sen. John W. Warner Jr. was presented the U.S. Special Operations Command Medal by Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of USSOCOM, in recognition of his support to Special Operations Forces throughout his years of public service, especially during his 30 years in the U.S. Senate.

"I am deeply humbled by this honor," Warner said after accepting the award.

The senator played an important role in the establishment of U.S. Special Operations Command in 1987 and has remained a knowledgeable, vigilant and persuasive champion of Special Operations.

Since USSOCOM's establishment, Warner has continued to have a positive impact on SOF. He ensured SOF were adequately equipped and trained and had the most technologically advanced equipment available.

After telling the audience a few brief stories of his times in the service, the senator spoke about his long time connection with USSOCOM.

"I have watched this organization grow magnificently and carefully," Warner said.

Prior to his election to the U.S. Senate, Warner's public service started when he enlisted in the Navy during World War II and served as an officer in the Marine Corps during the Korean War. He also served as Undersecretary and Secretary of the Navy from 1969 to 1974. Warner was elected senator for Virginia in 1978 and during his tenure

he served more than six years as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

USSOCOM presents the medal to people who have made exceptional and distinctive contributions to Special Operations Forces during either war or peacetime operations. Medal recipients also exemplify the personal values and standards of those who serve in special operations units. Warner is the 52nd person to receive the award.



Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander of USSOCOM, presents the USSOCOM Medal to Sen. John Warner in a ceremony held at the Pentagon, Jan. 5.

SOF set the stage for the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime

*By Christain Fearer
USSOCOM History Office*

On March 19, 2003, President George W. Bush informed the American people that Coalition forces were in the early stages of military operations in Iraq. "On my orders," stated the president, "Coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war. These are the opening stages of what will be a broad and concerted campaign." Special Operations Forces were charged with spearheading the assault and prying open Iraq's defenses. Their subsequent performances proved a testament to careful planning, exhaustive rehearsals, overwhelming force and steadfast professionalism.

Leading the assault were helicopters of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, which destroyed observation posts along the border, allowing ground forces to enter undetected. The following day, air and ground reconnaissance began. Within two hours, Coalition SOF began securing drilling platforms at Al Faw while others entered Iraq's western desert and began moving toward their objectives.

While preparing for a possible invasion of Iraq, military planners quickly recognized the value of Al Faw and its importance to Iraq's oil industry. In an effort to prevent sabotage and avert a subsequent environmental disaster, a Naval Special Warfare Task Group consisting of U.S. Navy SEALs, the United Kingdom's 40 Commando Brigade and Polish SOF conducted one of the largest direct action missions of Operation Iraqi Freedom. After only two hours

on the ground, their mission was accomplished, and the bulk of the SEAL team returned to the Kuwait Naval Base. Nearly five months of planning and consistent training proved worthy investments.

Meanwhile, Operation Detachments Alpha from the Special Operations Task Force-West were pushing toward the interior in pursuit of their primary missions of preventing Scud missile launches and securing strategic airfields. By directing U.S. and allied aircraft, the detachments controlled the immense western desert and quickly overwhelmed the Iraqi military. In the early days of the operation, all of the SOF teams in the western desert were in contact with the enemy. Remarkably, there were no ODA casualties.

In southern Iraq, the primary task of SOTF-W remained target acquisition. MH-53s inserted ODAs deep into Iraq to monitor Iraqi troop movements and direct air strikes in support of the advancing ground campaign. Additional ODAs in the south worked with sympathetic Iraqi nationals and were able to root out Saddam loyalists and various terror cells. Again, SOF succeeded in their mission.

It was believed the organized and well-armed Kurdish militias would be instrumental in engaging Iraqi forces in northern Iraq. Reaching the Kurds, however, was not easy as Turkey had denied access to both its air and land space to Coalition forces. A primary responsibility of Special Forces was to show the Kurds that the United States was seriously committed to combat. When March 19, arrived, however, the leadership of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North was still seeking a way to get their forces into theater. Understanding the importance of an American presence, a Special Forces company, organized as an advanced operating base, successfully joined Kurdish forces until the remainder of the task force could be inserted in the coming days.

SOF were critical in the opening hours and days of the Iraq invasion. Years of training and months of preparation resulted in numerous successes and minimal losses. From Al Faw to the western desert, SOF accomplished various missions with precision and speed. In the north, SOF battled not only a real enemy, but incredible logistical obstacles. With flexibility, ingenuity and determination, SOF claimed yet another victory in the opening hours and days of the invasion. Together, these various forces pried open Iraqi defenses, setting the stage for the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime.



SEALs board a Gas and Oil Platform as part of the opening offensive into Iraq, March 2003. Courtesy photo.

**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 Staff Sgt. Jeremy E. Bessa
3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne)**



**Air Force Staff Sgt. Timothy P. Davis
23rd Special Tactics Squadron**



**Army Master Sgt. David L. Hurt
3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne)**



**Army Staff Sgt. Marc I. Small
3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne)**



**Army Staff Sgt. Joshua R. Townsend
7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)**

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



Col. Charles "Chuck" Fry

2009

Bull Simons Award recipient

