



Tip OF THE Spear

United States Special Operations Command
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

June 2018

**MEDAL OF HONOR
AWARDED TO
NAVY SEAL FOR
HEROIC AFGHANISTAN
ACTIONS IN 2002**





U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Navy SEAL receives Medal of Honor for Afghanistan actions in 2002 ... 18

Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) Medal of Honor recipient retired Master Chief Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) Britt Slabinski stands on the stage during his induction ceremony into the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon Auditorium. Slabinski was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Donald J. Trump for his heroic actions in March 2002 during the Battle of Takur Ghar while serving in Afghanistan. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Paul L. Archer.



**Thomas Jefferson
Award Winner**

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SOF AROUND THE WORLD
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – KOREA



Soldiers from the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) and the Republic of Korea Special Forces provide lifesaving emergency care to a Korean farmer April 25. The partnered forces were traveling from one training location to another when a local flagged them down to treat the injured farmer, saving his life. 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) courtesy photo.

1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) Soldiers save Korean farmer's life

*By U.S. Army Maj. Alexandra Weiskopf
1st Special Forces Group (Airborne)*

Soldiers from the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) and Republic of Korea Special Forces responded to a farming accident while conducting partnered training in the Republic of Korea on April 25, saving the civilian's life.

Together, the U.S. and Republic of Korea Special Forces Soldiers responded to an injured and unconscious Korean farmer who fell from his tractor and lacerated his right knee. The tractor subsequently caught fire and burned the farmer's airway. Local civilians flagged down the Soldiers who then stabilized the patient and extinguished the tractor fire before transferring the patient to emergency medical services.

"There's a Korean man who is alive today because of the efforts of U.S. Special Forces and Republic of Korea special operations troops who were training nearby. We are exceptionally proud of their effort as well as the training and expertise they possess that allowed them to stabilize an injured civilian, extinguish a vehicle fire, and transfer the patient to local emergency medical services personnel," said

Lt. Col. Matt Gomlak, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 1st SFG (A) Soldiers involved in the event. "This incident is indicative of the broader strength of the ROK-U.S. alliance and the things that we can accomplish together as one team."

The farmer in his 50s was injured and unconscious after an accident with his tractor, which turned over and caught fire, in the vicinity of Yeongcheon, North Gyeongsang province.

A Republic of Korea Special Forces general presented the American Soldiers with citations on behalf of the Republic of Korea Special Warfare Command commanding general.

"It was a great opportunity for the detachments to demonstrate the friendship and interoperability of ROK and U.S. SOF," said the Republic of Korea Special Forces battalion commander in charge of the Korean Special Forces soldiers involved in the event. "Further, it demonstrated to the Korean people that we can be trusted as a combined force. It was truly the friendship between our forces that set the conditions for the Soldiers to help the elderly farmer, and leave a positive impression on the local community."



Soldiers from the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) and the Republic of Korea Special Forces receive recognition from the Republic of Korea Special Warfare Command for their lifesaving actions on April 25. The partnered special operations forces were taking part in training when a local Korean asked them to assist a badly injured elderly farmer. Their emergency care saved the farmers life. 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) courtesy photo.



Special Forces, attack aviation helicopters strike behind enemy lines at exercise Combined Resolve X

By U.S. Army 1st Lt. Benjamin Haulenbeek
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe

U.S. Army Green Berets assigned to 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and attack aviation helicopters assigned to the 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division conducted missions to engage targets deep in enemy territory during exercise Combined Resolve X at Hohenfels, Germany in early May 2018.

The ability to operate far from friendly lines is a core capability for special operation forces.

“Something that SOF elements are experts at is doing deep reconnaissance,” said a senior communications sergeant assigned to 19th SFG(A). “We can take the conventional forces mission further and deeper. Their forward observers can only push out so far from friendly lines, and we are able to go in as far as the commander needs us to.”

Combined Resolve is a biannual U.S. Army Europe-led exercise series that is designed to give U.S. and NATO combat brigades in Europe the opportunity to train within a joint, multinational environment.

On a mission during Combined Resolve where the objective was to destroy a truck carrying missile system components several kilometers behind enemy lines, the 19th SFG(A) Soldiers and 227th Avn. Regt. leveraged their strengths to destroy the target.

“It was great to have a Special Forces team to work with on this mission which was a deep attack,” said 1st Lt. Blake Lemmons, an AH-64 Apache pilot assigned to Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 227th Avn. Regt. “Anyone with a device that can shoot coded laser energy can designate for us. What SOF can do is get to places that a conventional force cannot.”

Operating deep in enemy territory, Special Forces teams greatly enhance the ability of aviation assets to effectively engage targets with their weapon systems without being exposed to enemy fire. SOF is able to designate a target allowing the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter to launch a



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jared Seat, an opposing forces role player and section sergeant assigned to Dakota Company 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, stands guard next to a target being surveilled by U.S. Army Special Forces in southern Germany, May 1, during exercise Combined Resolve X. Photo by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Benjamin Haulenbeek.

Hellfire missile from a concealed location several kilometers away. During the maneuver portion of an exercise such as CBR, the fires are notional. During a real-world combat mission, the AH-64 Apache would launch a Hellfire missile at a high trajectory that would then be guided onto the target by the SOF team’s laser.

“They were set in somewhere with positive identification and could laser the target,” said Lemmons. “The power of a remote shot is that we can fire and forget. We don’t have to have positive identification on the target, this means we are not designating for the missile that we fire, which minimizes the risk of us being seen or engaged by the enemy.”

The increased level of combat survivability is a mutual benefit for both aviation and SOF. When the capabilities of SOF and attack aviation are combined, it greatly enhances the ability of a commander to strike deep in enemy territory.

“We are a small element,” said the communications sergeant. “We don’t want to get decisively engaged. It is not necessary that we destroy the target, so it’s good we can get in and get eyes on and then call for fire or have an aircraft take care of it. Then we can get out without being detected.”



Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Forces conduct familiarization with pyrotechnics to be used while acting as observer-coach-trainers ahead of Allied Spirit VIII at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, Jan. 19. Allied Spirit VIII was a multinational exercise which integrated special operations forces and conventional forces from 10 nations; improving combined interoperability and interdependence. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Karen Sampson.

Green Berets mentor US, Albanian, Lithuanian forces at Allied Spirit VIII

*By U.S. Army Sgt. Karen Sampson
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe*

Allied Spirit was a multinational exercise involving approximately 4,100 participants from 10 nations at 7th Army Training Command's Hohenfels Training Area. The U.S. Army Europe-directed multinational exercise series Allied Spirit is designed to develop and enhance NATO and key partner's interoperability and readiness.

Texas Army National Guardsmen from 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne) augmented the observer-coach-trainer teams from U.S. Special Operations Command Europe and the JMRC Special Operations Forces Cell. Teams acted as on the ground trainers supporting SOF and conventional forces during training exercise Allied Spirit VIII conducted Jan. 15 through Feb. 5.

The 19th SFG(A) OCT teams worked with a diverse group including U.S. SOF assigned to 1st SFG(A), Albanian SOF, and the Lithuanian National Defence Force Volunteers (KASP).

"Being on the OCT assisting in unit tactical development, bridging the units together and integrating them into action was a great experience," said a 19th SFG(A) team sergeant. "Everyone gained from completing the exercise."

The Texas-based Green Berets were particularly impressed by the performance of their Lithuanian allies.

"Lithuania's KASP trained smart, were decisive and their tactics were sound," said the team sergeant.

The opportunity to observe and train other U.S. Special Forces Soldiers provided a training opportunity for the 19th SFG(A) OCTs, challenging them to remain experts in their doctrine.

"This experience was worthwhile as a guest because you get to evaluate another unit's tactical training and standard operations and witness what works for them," said the operations officer in charge. "As a Special Forces Soldier, observing a [team] from another group gives you the perspective they have from their area of responsibility and strengthens your unit's repertoire."



2000 NATO, partner special operations forces rapidly deploy to Baltics for exercise Trojan Footprint 18

By U.S. Army Maj. Michael Weisman
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe

Approximately 2,000 special operations forces and armed forces from 13 nations rapidly deployed to the Baltic region for Exercise Trojan Footprint 18 from May 23 to June 8.

Trojan Footprint is a biennial U.S. Special Operations Command Europe-led exercise that incorporates U.S., NATO and European partner special operations forces. This year's exercise included special operations forces from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and the U.S., as well as the armed forces of Sweden and the U.K.

This year's exercise focused on the rapid deployment of SOF into a crisis, the establishment of multinational mission command structures and the integration of SOF and conventional forces.

"Trojan Footprint is an extremely large exercise by SOF standards," said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Mark Schwartz, the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Europe.

"We deliberately built this exercise over the past two years to replicate a dynamic and somewhat denied environment over multiple countries, to challenge every facet of our combined SOF from the individual operator to the highest headquarters staff. Everyone will take away lessons from this exercise that will assist their real-world planning across a range of contingencies."

Trojan Footprint 18 took place on the ground, in the air and on the Baltic Sea in and around Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

"Due to its importance, Trojan Footprint has the highest priority in the training cycle of Latvian Special Operations Forces," said Latvian SOF Commander Lt. Col. Juris Usackis. "This is a unique opportunity to improve interoperability and cooperation with the special operation forces of our allies as well as improve our ability to execute tasks specifically assigned to Latvia's SOF. These efforts directly support the strengthening of Latvia's ability to defend itself."

This year's exercise was also directly linked to the annual Lithuanian SOF-led multinational exercise Flaming Sword.

A U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon assigned to the 140th Wing Colorado Air National Guard, conducts close air support for Lithuanian and allied special operations forces during exercise Trojan Footprint 18/Flaming Sword 18 in Lithuania, June 5. Trojan Footprint is a U.S. Special Operations Command Europe-led exercise over land, sea and air that rapidly deployed 2,000 NATO and partner nation special operations forces from 13 nations to the Baltic region. Courtesy photo by Erika Cebatoriene.



The focus of that exercise was Lithuanian SOF's ability to command and control SOF from multiple nations, and integrate with their conventional forces and irregular forces, as well as units of Ministry of Interior and other defense agencies to defend against an adversary.

"The relation between Flaming Sword and Trojan Footprint gave an opportunity to conduct a full spectrum of special operations in realistic, challenging and dynamic environments," said Col. Modestas Petrauskas, commander of Lithuanian special operations forces. "It broadened the potential to ensure rapid communication, share resources and information, strengthen interoperability and abilities to conduct joint and combined operations in the most professional manner."

In order to exercise the systems and processes required to deploy rapidly to a real-world crisis, most exercise participants did not know exactly where the exercise would occur, or the specific tasks they would be expected to perform.

"This is not a plug and play exercise," said U.S. Army Col. Lawrence G. Ferguson, commander, 10th Special Forces Group. "Trojan Footprint helps us identify capabilities and vulnerabilities and turn them into opportunity."

The exercise served to evaluate the responsiveness of NATO and partner SOF to quickly assemble and work together, providing lessons to take into future exercises and planning.

"We are all aware that national security nowadays is only possible within a strong, well-organized and well-integrated alliance," said Polish Brig. Gen. Wojciech Marchwica, commander of Polish Special Operations Component Command. "Polish Special Forces participation in Trojan Footprint 18 exercise is yet another occasion to strengthen the SOF partnership within NATO. We feel that we need to participate in such exercises, because it is a great opportunity to check and adapt our skills and abilities for new challenges and modern threats."

In the scenario for Trojan Footprint, SOF are deployed rapidly at the start of crisis because of their unique capabilities and high state of readiness. Once on the ground, NATO SOF and partner forces were received by Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian SOF, in order to assist with their defensive capabilities, such as working with organizations like the Estonian Defense League, Latvian National Guard and the Lithuanian National Defense Forces.

"Estonia is one of the very few countries in NATO who have integrated unconventional warfare plans into its standing defense plans. ESTSOF together with specific EDL units has



U.S. and Danish maritime special operations forces board a ship in the Baltic Sea during exercise Trojan Footprint 18 June 4. Courtesy photo.

a very important role as a main facilitator of unconventional warfare in Estonia," said Estonian Special Operations Commander Col. Riho Ühtegi. "Trojan Footprint 18 put these plans to the test. Having completed this exercise both Estonian SOF as well as their NATO allies have a better understanding of how they integrate and operate together in the defense of Estonia."

Trojan Footprint participants included F-16C Fighting Falcons from the Colorado Air National Guard's 140th Wing, B-1B Lancers assigned to the 345th Bomb Squadron, the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Air Support Operations Group, and the Washington Air National Guard's 194th Wing.

"We are focusing on close air support and dynamic targeting with [SOF elements on the ground] to enhance our lethality," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Marc Garceau, an F-16C pilot and lead planner from the 140th Wing for the exercise. "We are also enhancing our Baltic partnership and our ability as NATO to deter against current and future aggression. The trust and proficiency we're building with Allied SOF here is critical."

Building upon the interoperability and familiarization built over years of training, and demonstrated in combat and peacekeeping operations, Trojan Footprint 18 provided a complex and realistic environment for SOF to exercise the role of SOF on the modern battlefield.

"Special Operations Forces don't work in a vacuum and are not the only solution to a crisis or operation," said U.S. Navy Command Master Chief Andrew Harrison, SOCEUR's senior enlisted leader. "Exercises like Trojan Footprint allow SOF to exercise the very unique things we bring to the fight, like enabling our allies to resist, causing havoc behind enemy lines, and acting as the eyes and ears for larger forces."



Multinational SOF conduct capabilities demonstration in Tampa



Multinational special operations forces assault a mock village from Special Operations Craft – Riverine during a capabilities demonstration as part of the 2018 International Special Operations Forces week in downtown Tampa, Fla., May 23. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

*By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication*

U.S. and international special operations forces conducted a scenario-based special operations capabilities demonstration in downtown Tampa, Florida, May 23.

The demonstration incorporated special operations forces from across the globe highlighting the interoperability of U.S. and international SOF.

“The capabilities demonstration really highlights what happens on a persistent basis worldwide,” said U.S. Navy Cmdr. Roy Espinosa, USSOCOM Joint SOF Development Director. “It is a snapshot of how SOF is able to integrate together and accomplish a very complex mission and perform it well.”

The demonstration included various vehicles, boats and rotary and fixed-wing aircraft from U.S. SOF which were used throughout the multi-phase event. U.S. and international SOF units could be seen in and around the downtown area throughout the demonstration. Commando teams descended from helicopters to take up positions on

the roofs of the Tampa General Hospital and Tampa Convention Center and fast-rope onto a cruise ship located in Tampa’s inner harbor. Other special operations ground forces converged on an enemy encampment while teams infiltrated via water on rigid-hull inflatable boats to rescue hostage role-players including Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn.

“The effort put into the exercise is a testament to that high level of capabilities that are resident in U.S. and partner nation SOF,” Espinosa said. “In a matter of a few days they were able to integrate, plug-into a scenario and execute it safely and flawlessly.”

The demonstration is put on every two years and showcases SOF from different nations coming together to accomplish a mission as a multinational unit. Partner nation SOF training and collaboration exercises similar to the international SOF demonstration in Tampa occur regularly worldwide to prepare international SOF for contingencies. U.S. Special Operations Command averaged 8,300 U.S. SOF deployed to approximately 95 countries last year.



(Clockwise) Multinational special operations forces rescue a simulated hostage during 2018 International Special Operations Forces week in downtown Tampa, Fla., May 22. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.

A U.S. Special Operations Command Para-Commando descends during 2018 International Special Operations Forces week in downtown Tampa, Fla., May 23. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.

An MH-6 Little Bird helicopter transports special operations forces during a capabilities demonstration as part of the 2018 International Special Operations Forces week in downtown Tampa, Fla., May 23. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.

Multinational special operations forces aboard an MH-6 Little Bird helicopter and a Special Operations Craft – Riverine boat approach a simulated enemy position during 2018 International Special Operations Forces week in downtown Tampa, Fla., May 22. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.



AIRBORNE

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Lt. Gen. Kenneth E. Tovo relinquishes command of USASOC to Lt. Gen. Francis M. Beaudette at Meadows Field, Fort Bragg, N.C., June 8. Photo U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Eli Velazquez.

USASOC farewells Lt. Gen. Tovo, welcomes Lt. Gen. Beaudette

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Eli Velazquez
USASOC Public Affairs

Soldiers from the U.S. Army Special Operations Command said farewell to Lt. Gen. Kenneth E. Tovo, USASOC commanding general, and welcomed Lt. Gen. Francis M. Beaudette during a change of command ceremony at Meadows Field June 8.

Tovo relinquished command of USASOC to Beaudette after nearly three years as the commanding general of the prestigious unit. During the ceremony, Tovo also retired from the Army after 39 years of service.

Everyone in attendance was on their feet as the orders were read and Tovo was officially retired from active duty. Members of the 1st Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment, fired a 15-gun salute in his honor. Tovo was then presented with the artillery shell casting as a symbol of Tovo's last salute as the commanding general.

Gen. Raymond A. Thomas III, commanding general of U.S. Special Operations Command, officiated the ceremony and passed the unit colors from Tovo to Beaudette, representing the transfer of authority.

Thomas said that under the command of Lt. Gen Tovo, USASOC has undergone significant changes that affected the entire community. Tovo was responsible for addressing the deployment to dwell ratio, going from a one to one ratio, to a one to two ratio. Tovo also directed and supervised an end-to-end review of USASOC to identify challenges to be addressed, such as restructuring pay, community outreach, strategic messaging, and unit based recruiting.

"SOCOM is blessed to have no shortage of superb, combat tested, senior leaders," Thomas said. "If anything, the biggest challenge or dilemma I face is a tough selection of the very best to assume positions of greater responsibility."

"In Fran Beaudette, we have that man. In my opinion, the most qualified officer to take this great organization to the next level," Thomas added.

Tovo congratulated Beaudette and his family on taking command of USASOC, adding "You now have the best job our Army can offer you."

Tovo said he's had the opportunity to serve the nation, alongside its finest sons and daughters, and uphold the ideals



Lt. Gen. Kenneth E. Tovo relinquishes command to Lt. Gen. Francis M. Beaudette during a change of command ceremony at Meadows Field, N.C., June 8. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Eli Velazquez.

embodied in the Constitution.

"I am keenly aware that my success in the Army has many stakeholders. I appreciate all of you, more than you can know, and certainly more than I can adequately express," Tovo said.

"I once served under a commander who would often remind us, that contributions to success in combat are not measured solely by ones proximity to the sound of gun fire. That certainly applies to the staff of this headquarters," he added.

Suzanne Tovo was presented with a bouquet of 33 long stem red roses from Lt. Gen Tovo, representing the number of years of marriage, in appreciation for her support throughout the their service.

Suzanne presented Liz Beaudette with her USASOC pin, which she wore over her heart throughout her three years as the senior spouse. Additionally, Liz Beaudette was presented with a bouquet of long stem yellow roses as a symbol of the command's heartfelt welcome.

"This is an exceptional command with a tremendous responsibility," Beaudette said. "We will continue to empower our men and women to be the global standard of excellence," he added.

Beaudette is assuming command of USASOC after completing his previous command assignment at 1st Special Forces Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.



First USASOC Command Chief Warrant Officer passes reigns, retires after 36-year career

*By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Dillon Heyliger
USASOC Public Affairs*

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Heriberto Serrano Jr. served as the first United States Army Special Operations Command, command chief warrant officer and now, at the end of his 36-year career, he has passed responsibility to Chief Warrant Officer 5 Mark Meyer, June 1.

Serrano held the position since June 18, 2015.

The change of responsibility ceremony was held in the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, where Serrano previously served as the first John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School CCWO.

Serrano's career spans almost four decades, joining the Army in 1983 as an infantryman, completing Special Forces Qualification Course in 1987, and attaining the rank of warrant officer in 1994.

His service was largely spent on the ground in various Special Forces Operational Detachment -- Alpha teams -colloquially known as an A-Team. On these teams he combated both Islamic terrorism and narcoterrorism in South America. His distinguished history can be found both within his biography and amongst the military awards and badges that adorn his uniform.

"Being the first, I felt a little bit like Christopher Columbus," Serrano said.

"Working with the USASOC staff is like working with indigenous personnel," he said, making reference to the Special Forces' need to work with a variety of cultures throughout the world.

"You have to work by, with and through. That's what I found having a CCWO at that level was."

"They have such an amazing team up there, really you don't run around like a staff officer trying to get things done, you just have to bring up the issues, have the meetings, and the team will tackle it."



Lt. Gen. Kenneth E. Tovo, (left) U.S. Army Special Operations Command commander, stands with Chief Warrant Officer 5 Mark Meyer (center) and Chief Warrant Officer 5 Heriberto Serrano Jr. during a change of responsibility ceremony, Fort Bragg, N.C., June 1. Tovo welcomed Meyer as USASOC's new command chief warrant officer while celebrating Serrano's 36 years of service and retirement. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Dillon Heyliger.

Serrano served as the senior warrant officer advisor for USASOC on all aspects of Army Special Operations. The position serves as the principal advisor to the command regarding the unique capabilities and needs of warrant officers within the command.

With more than 34,000 men and women serving in special operations around the globe, Serrano was a valuable set of eyes and ears to the commander and a direct line of communication to Special Forces Soldiers at the lowest levels.

"He (LTG Kenneth Tovo, USASOC commander) could send me places to dive deep ... and I could come back and say, 'These are some of the issues the teams

are seeing and here are some of the remedies the planners are already working on ... and this is where you can assist.' That way he can have conversations with FORSCOM (U.S. Army Forces Command) commanders and all the way up to the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army."

During his tenure at USASOC Serrano said one of his greatest accomplishments is the establishment of a special operations command chief warrant officer panel to select senior warrant officer leaders across the command.

"It's unlike any other because we do it at the DA Secretariat level, at HRC (U.S. Army Human Resources Command), the same place where they do promotions and command-select lists. You can't go any higher."

Serrano says this will allow USASOC to vet and choose the absolute best warrant officer candidates, from Special Forces or aviation, in an objective manner, to fill the CCWO role.

CWO5 Meyer is the first USASOC command chief warrant officer selected by the panel.

Prior to his selection, Meyer served as the command chief warrant officer for U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command, a stone's throw from his new position.

Serrano offered advice to his successor.

"Keep the relevancy (of the position), know what the requirements are and where we need to be (as an organization) every five to 10 years. Be ready for anything and try to have the vision to prepare (for the needs of the nation) through education and training."

Reflecting on his time in service, leading from his first years in the Army until his retirement, Serrano tells a story from his first duty position in the infantry in 1983.

"My first First Sgt. I had as a private in the infantry, in Germany during the Cold War in 1983...he had a Silver Star, was a decorated war hero from Vietnam, we looked up to him."

"Well, Pfc. Serrano was a little sloppy on the machine gun and my first sergeant was not happy. He drilled us for hours, we even went into night drills," Serrano continued.

The First Sgt. asked, "Pfc. Serrano why do you think I'm working you so hard?" Serrano replied that he thought he wanted them to be better.

The first sergeant replied with something a young Serrano didn't expect but would reflect on for the rest of

his career, "I'm going to make you the best. I want you to keep winning the nations' wars because losing armies don't pay their retiree's anything and I want to stay retired."

Serrano now reflects on that statement with the strategic thought of a 36-year career Soldier.

"We can lose the nation that quickly. It can be one battle that leads to another loss in another battle and before you know it we could lose the republic, we could lose the nation as a whole."

Regarding his next step in life, Serrano adds, "I'm staying right here in North Carolina, here in Fayetteville."

Serrano spent more than 24 years of his 36-year career at Fort Bragg, longer than he spent in his native city, El Paso, Texas.

"Special Operations...this is my family."



Lt. Gen. Kenneth E. Tovo, U.S. Army Special Operations Command commander, presents the Outstanding Civilian Award to Angela Serrano during a ceremony honoring her husband, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Heriberto Serrano Jr., Fort Bragg, N.C., June 1. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Dillon Heyliger.

AIRBORNE

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



10th Group conducts rescue training

*Photo essay by Sgt. Connor Mendez
10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)*

A Green Beret assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), ascends a mountainside during personnel recovery training at Cheyenne Canyon, Colo., June 6. Special Forces mountaineers routinely practice various mountain operations in difficult terrain in order to maintain proficiency for real world contingencies.



A Special Forces team pulls one of their Green Berets across a canyon using a rope bridge during personnel recovery training at Cheyenne Canyon, Colo., June 6.



(Above) Green Berets, assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), prepare to haul rescue equipment across a canyon using a rope system during personnel recovery training at Cheyenne Canyon, Colo., June 6.

(Right) A Green Beret assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), ascends a canyon wall with a mock casualty during personnel recovery training at Cheyenne Canyon, Colo., June 6.





NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

President Donald J. Trump awarded the Medal of Honor to retired Master Chief Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) Britt Slabinski during a White House ceremony May 24, for his heroic actions during the Battle of Takur Ghar in March 2002 while serving in Afghanistan. Slabinski was recognized for his actions while leading a team under heavy effective enemy fire in an attempt to rescue SEAL teammate Petty Officer 1st Class Neil Roberts during Operation Anaconda in 2002. The Medal of Honor is an upgrade of the Navy Cross he was previously awarded for these actions. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Paul L. Archer.



Navy SEAL receives Medal of Honor for Afghanistan actions in 2002

By Jim Garamone

DoD News, Defense Media Activity

Sitting in the White House reading the citation for the Medal of Honor doesn't give the real flavor of why retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer and special warfare operator Britt K. Slabinski is receiving the award.

The nicely air conditioned room with comfortable chairs, impeccable floors, historic artwork and gilt on many surfaces isn't right, somehow.

The dispassionate words on the award talk of Slabinski's heroism in assaulting bunkers, rallying his men, and going back into the center of the firefight.

The White House is literally half a world away from a mountain in Afghanistan in 2002, where Slabinski -- and America -- lost seven good men.

When the master chief talks of the action, you realize he is reliving his time atop Takur Ghar -- a 10,000-foot mountain near Ghazni, on March 4, 2002. He is remembering his decisions. He is remembering what he felt. And he is remembering his brothers who were killed.

He speaks in present tense, because in his mind's eye. It is still happening.

'I Was Just Doing My Job'

He believes he did nothing special. "I was just doing my job that day," Slabinski said during an interview.

Slabinski -- then a senior chief petty officer -- and his men were just supposed to set up an overwatch position on the mountain to support the conventional forces in the valley below. "Now the enemy gets a vote," he said. "We plan, we train, we rehearse and we rehearse some more for every possible contingency, but sometimes the fog and friction of war is just out of your control and a leader has to adapt."

The team was aboard an Army MH-47 helicopter and as it was landing, well dug-in al-Qaida fighters opened up. "When we land, the ramp goes down," he said. "I'm standing on the very back of the helicopter ... and almost immediately take an RPG rocket to the side of the aircraft. It goes off, fills the aircraft full of smoke and

we are getting shot up right away. There's bullets flying through the aircraft the size of your finger [from] 12.7 machine guns that were up there."

The pilot was able to take off, but the bird was wounded and experienced what Slabinski called "the worst turbulence you could imagine."

Those gyrations caused Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Neil Roberts to fall off the ramp. The crew chief grabbed Roberts' pack, and the weight of the SEAL pulled him off the ramp, too. But the crew chief was tethered into the aircraft and was able to get back in. Roberts fell 10 feet into the meter-deep snow.

"It happens that fast," Slabinski said as he snapped his fingers.

He told the pilot that he had lost a man, but with the chopper's hydraulics shot out, there was no way the bird could circle and retrieve him. "[The pilot] was flying a brick," Slabinski said. "It was basically a controlled crash into the enemy-held valley."

The master chief assessed the situation. "Now my mission originally was to support the overwatch, then my teammate Neil fell out, and now I have a downed helicopter I have to deal with," he said.

Calling For Support

The first problem he dealt with was the helicopter, and he called in a second aircraft to take the crew and team to a safe place. Once there, Slabinski was able to focus his attention on Neil.

The information he received was Roberts was alive. "I knew there was a superior enemy force up there and they had heavier weapons than I had," he said.

The enemy, the cold, the altitude -- "Everything that could be stacked against us, was stacked against us going back, and I had the feeling that this was a one-way trip," he said. "I knew though, that if I go now, there's a chance I could rescue Neil. I knew if I tried to develop a battle plan more on my terms, it would certainly be better, but I knew Neil didn't have that time."

The weight was on Slabinski's shoulders. "I remember sitting in the helicopter," he said. "The [rotors are] turning, it's cold, trying to sort through the tactical piece of it ... and this thought keeps coming back to me:



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

If I go now what's the cost going to be versus the cost if I wait. If you are the leader and you have peoples' lives that you are responsible for, the decisions don't come easy."

This was Slabinski's loneliest moment. He was sitting in the chopper with a headset on and people are talking to him. He was thinking of all the tactical problems and the lives. "And this thought kept coming back to me, and it's the first line of the Boy Scout Oath ... 'On my honor, I will do my best,'" said Slabinski, who attained the rank of Eagle Scout at his hometown troop in Northampton, Massachusetts "The only thing that is in the back of my mind is, 'On my honor I will do my best, On my honor I will do my best, On my honor I will do my best.'

"That's when I said, 'I'm gonna go do this.'"

The master chief assigned his men jobs, and the pilot of the first aircraft, Army Chief Warrant Officer Al Mack, went up to Slabinski and told him he would be flying them back in the new MH-47, even though he had just survived a harrowing experience with the first helicopter.

There was no other place to land, so the team had to go right back to the place the first bird took the fire. As the chopper took off, it got quiet for Slabinski and he thought of his son, who was 6 years old at the time. "I remember saying, 'I love you. Sorry for what's to come. Be great,'" he said. "Then I put it in another room in my brain and went on with my duties."

Enemy Fire

This Chinook also took fire coming in to the landing area, and as soon as the ramp went down, the team went off the back of the ramp. Two men went to the right, two to the left and the master chief and Tech. Sgt. John Chapman, an Air Force combat controller, went out together.

Slabinski and Chapman were hit by a burst of automatic weapons fire. "The burst hit John and he went down," Slabinski said. "The bullets from the same burst went through my clothes on each side, and I jumped behind a rock."



A file photo taken in March 2002 of then Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Britt K. Slabinski on Roberts Ridge. U.S. Navy courtesy photo.

The belt-fed weapon kept firing at them. "I looked for John and he is lying in a very odd position, and I look to my other guys and they are engaged with another dug-in position and the two to my left are engaged there.

There are enemy muzzle flashes on three sides."

There is no cover, and Slabinski tosses two grenades at the bunker, but the position is too well dug in. He looks to his men and sees Chapman still in the same odd position and the others engaging the enemy. His M60 gunner is next to me.

"I have a 40mm grenade launcher ... and I have six grenades," he said. "I'm too close to the big bunker because they won't go off. They have to spin to arm."

Firefight Continues

He fired at the farther bunkers and silenced those, but the big bunker remains a deadly problem. He has the M60-gunner fire on the bunker and he wants to charge to the bunker to clear it under the cover of that automatic fire. Before he could do that, a grenade flies out of the bunker and explodes right in front of the barrel of the

The only thing that is in the back of my mind is, 'On my honor I will do my best, On my honor I will do my best, On my honor I will do my best.'

— Retired Master Chief Petty Officer (SEAL)
Britt K. Slabinski

M60, wounding the gunner.

Slabinski again assesses the situation. “The gunner is down. John hasn’t moved and my other two guys are still engaged in contact,” he said. “The plan in my head isn’t working so I have to do something different.”

He decided to get his small band out of direct fire. As he is doing that another SEAL was hit in the leg from the same machine gun Slabinski was trying to take out. “I sent the wounded over first and I crawled over to John, looking for some sign of life from John and didn’t get anything,” he said.

The place he chose to seek shelter from the fire was just about 30 feet away over the side of the mountain.

Mortar Fire

Slabinski called for support from an AC-130 gunship to hit the bunkers. At the same time as the aircraft was hitting the mountain he noticed shell fragments were landing around the team. Slabinski thinks at first it is the AC-130, but it is from an enemy mortar that is ranging his position.

He moves again to a more protected area and now the U.S. Army Ranger quick reaction force is coming in. The first chopper is hit and crashes on the top of the mountain. Slabinski contacted the second bird and it lands on another spit of land and the Rangers work their way to the SEAL position and attack up the mountain to secure the top.

The master chief can’t move his wounded to the top of the mountain, so he moved to a place he could secure and await medevac, which came that night.

Estimates of the number of al-Qaida fighters on the top of that mountain range between 40 and 100. They had heavy weapons galore with automatic machine guns, mortars, RPGs and recoilless rifles. It was the headquarters for al-Qaida operating against U.S. forces engaged in Operation Anaconda. The SEAL team went in to try to rescue Roberts with six men.

Footage taken by a remotely piloted vehicle and examined later showed that Chapman was not dead. The technical sergeant regained consciousness and engaged the enemy killing two of them -- one in hand-to-hand combat. “I was 100 percent convinced that John was dead,” Slabinski said. “I never lost track of John.”

He never would have left the airman on that mountain, he said, if he thought for an instant that Chapman was alive.

For his actions that day, Slabinski received the Navy Cross, the nation’s second-highest award for valor. As

part of then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter’s directive to the services to re-examine all of the valor awards beginning in 2001, the Navy recommended upgrading that award to the Medal of Honor. The master chief -- who retired from the Navy in 2014 -- received a call from President Donald J. Trump in March telling him of the decision.

The master chief is conflicted about the award. He believes he was just doing his job and still feels the loss of the seven men -- Navy, Army and Air Force -- he served with that day. “There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t think about them,” he said. “If I could give up this medal to have them back, I would.”



A file photo taken in February 2002 of then Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Britt K. Slabinski at Bagram Airfield. President Donald J. Trump awarded the Medal of Honor to Slabinski during a White House ceremony May 24, 2018 for his heroic actions during the Battle of Takur Ghar in March 2002 while serving in Afghanistan. U.S. Navy courtesy photo.



24 Airmen awarded DFCs

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ryan Conroy
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

There were 808 lives that hung in the balance as terrorists launched coordinated attacks against friendly forces.

Joint special operations teams were exposed and under duress as AC-130U Spooky Gunship crews circled above, pushing the limits of gun barrels to the melting point and providing precision airstrike capabilities to the troops below.

Four separate missions and each presented different and complex challenges. Daytime operations, low fuel, low ammunition, gun malfunctions and emergency procedures pushed crews beyond normal measures to save lives on the ground.

Four Spooky gunship crews with the 4th Special Operations Squadron were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses for four separate engagements in Afghanistan spanning less than one year.

Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, awarded 24 Airmen the prestigious accolades during a ceremony, at Hurlburt Field, Florida May 11. Three Airmen were unable to be in attendance.

“All of the DFCs presented today were earned in the dangerous skies of Afghanistan,” said Webb. “Although dates and objectives differ, the general mission remained the same ... defend Americans and their partner forces, and decimate the enemy.”

The DFC is awarded to any officer or enlisted person of the U.S. Armed Forces who have distinguished themselves in actual combat in support of operations by heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight.

On July 25, 2016, the first aircrew awarded provided over watch for 114 American and Afghan Special Operations Forces during a high risk, daylight, armed assault in Nangahar province, Afghanistan. As the friendly forces pushed deeper into a valley, more than 50 insurgents executed a complex ambush utilizing higher terrain and buildings to effectively surround the friendly forces with multiple fortified positions and strongpoints.

The crew precisely employed danger-close 105mm



U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Commandos with the 4th Special Operations Squadron prepare to enter a Distinguished Flying Cross ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Fla., May 11. During the ceremony, 21 Air Commandos from four Spooky gunship crews with the 4th SOS were presented DFCs for their heroic actions in Afghanistan. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Rachel Yates.

howitzer rounds within 120 meters of friendly forces while continuously working through gun malfunctions. When the gunship crew ran low on fuel, they coordinated the launch of another available gunship to provide backfill, but upon arrival, enemy forces began a new wave of firing. Both gunships established a formation and immediately began engaging with four guns simultaneously.

The crew coordinated for the launch of the other available gunship to provide backfill, to allow them to refuel and rearm. As the third gunship arrived, the enemy began a new wave of firing on friendly forces. The AC-130s established a gunship formation and began engaging with four guns simultaneously, providing lethal effects on the insurgents. In total, the crew flew 12.3 hours in support of ground forces which led to zero friendly fatalities, 31 enemy killed in action and 28 structures destroyed.

“These are exactly the kinds of missions where Air Commandos thrive,” said Webb. “No matter the challenge, the difficulty or the personal hardship endured, Spooky finds a way.”

On March 29, 2017, the second aircrew awarded was providing close air support for 35 American and Afghan special operations forces during a high risk daylight armed reconnaissance mission in Kot Valley, near Nangahar

province, Afghanistan. Overwhelming hostile fire erupted, pinning the ground force inside hostile territory with a heavily armed and concealed force of more than 65 insurgents impeding their path to secure territory.

The gunship crew immediately dropped to a lower altitude to increase weapons accuracy, putting them at risk for effective anti-aircraft artillery and man-portable air defense systems.

Over the next 90 minutes, the aircrew prosecuted 25 fires missions, 21 of those within danger-close range with the closest strike 35 meters away from friendly forces. The crew battled gun malfunctions, low fuel and MANPADS launch indications to enable the friendly force to repel the enemy attack and return to their mission support site without a single casualty.

On April 8, 2017, the third aircrew awarded was providing close air support for 281 American and Afghan special operations forces when alerted for a high risk daylight close air support mission near Nangahar province, Afghanistan.

Upon the gunship's arrival to the target area, coalition forces were already receiving enemy fire within 100 meters of the friendly position. The crew immediately located and engaged the danger-close threat while simultaneously receiving an engagement clearance from a separate team already suffering casualties. Tactical necessity required the crew to judiciously exceed the cooling requirements for the 40mm and 105mm cannons, providing continuous fire upon the enemy.

Recognizing the aircraft's dwindling ammunition, the aircraft commander directed command and control to prepare another AC-130 with an increased load of armament and fuel. As soon as the aircrew landed, they swiftly stepped to the other aircraft, spending little time on the ground.

Then, fighting through a cacophony of malfunctions with the weapons systems and communication shortfalls due to electromagnetic interference, they continued to engage the enemy while friendly forces remained pinned down.

Ultimately, the crew nearly depleted two full combat-loaded gunships, successfully repelling multiple enemy ambushes, killing 32 enemy forces and one weapons cache.

"These are the stories of legend and lore told around the squadron," said Webb. "The men and women of this command live our ethos everyday ... There is a way, we find it."

On May 24, 2017, the fourth aircrew awarded was

providing close air support for 378 American and Afghan Special Operations Forces during a high risk daylight armed reconnaissance mission in Nangahar province, Afghanistan.

While inbound, the crew was informed the friendly ground force was taking effective enemy fire and was able to put rounds on enemy forces within seconds of verifying friendly positions – eliminating the threat.

The crew battled smoke and fumes from a malfunctioning generator, electrical issues and major gun malfunctions to keep the ground force safe.

"I like to think the sounds of Spooky are a beautiful symphony of destruction," added Webb. "To our aircrews being honored today ... on target and fire for effect!"

First aircrew for July 25, 2016 engagement:

Maj. Philip Garito, Fire Control Officer
Capt. Jonathan Rodgers, Aircraft Commander
Tech. Sgt. Benjamin Narro, Special Missions Aviator
Staff Sgt. Dale Trant, Special Missions Aviator

Second aircrew for March 29, 2017 engagement:

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Grant Sharpe, Aircraft Commander
Maj. Frederick Robertson Jr., Fire Control Officer
Capt. Jeremy Mooney, Navigator
Tech. Sgt. Austin Parrent, Special Missions Aviator
Tech. Sgt. Erik Petersen, Sensor Operator
Staff Sgt. Andrew Portz, Sensor Operator

Third aircrew for April 8, 2017 engagement:

Maj. Christopher Goad, Electronic Warfare Officer
Capt. Gene Strickland, Fire Control Officer
Capt. Joseph Tomczak, Pilot
1st Lt. Nadeem Toor, Navigator
Tech. Sgt. Gregory Matthews, Sensor Operator
Tech. Sgt. Brett Laswell, Special Missions Aviator
Staff Sgt. Dillon Dummit, Flight Engineer
Staff Sgt. Jordan Gelnett, Special Missions Aviator
Staff Sgt. Jerrel Williams, Special Missions Aviator
Senior Airman Cory Smith, Special Missions Aviator
Senior Airman Nicholas Snyder, Sensor Operator

Fourth aircrew for May 24, 2017 engagement:

Maj. Jarrod Judd, Aircraft Commander
Staff Sgt. William Hills, Flight Engineer



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Retired Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Fales, director of Strategic Plans and Programs and combat development with the 724th Special Tactics Group, and his wife Kathy pose after a ceremony at Pope Field, N.C., May 4. Fales, a former Special Tactics pararescueman and Silver Star Medal recipient, retired from his civil service duties after 20 years, ending a 42-year long federal career. Courtesy photo.

ST legend earns second retirement

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Victor J. Caputo
24th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

Scott Fales' demeanor wouldn't lead you to believe the long list of accomplishments he has had in the Air Force and as a civil servant.

The retired Air Force master sergeant spent 20 years on active duty, primarily as a pararescueman, and in that time he saw conflict across the globe from Panama to Somalia. He's earned a Silver Star Medal, Purple Heart, and been inducted into both the U.S. Special Operations Command Hall of Fame and the Air Commando Association Commando Hall of Honor.

"Scott epitomizes what you would think of as a

"Quiet Professional," said Michael Rizzuto, chief of staff for the 724th Special Operations Group and compatriot of Fales' for more than 30 years. "He never brags about his accolades or seeks attention, but make no mistake, he is a warrior."

Fales spent many years assigned to the 24th Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina, working as one of the primary combat search and rescue planners and designing plans for some of special operations' most complex missions.

Upon his retirement from active duty in 1997, Fales transitioned to a position with the Joint Service Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape Agency, starting another 20+ year career. His civilian duties never took him far from his passion: rescue and personnel recovery.

“I love a good combat mission, saving lives, and enjoy the challenge of depriving the enemy of opportunities to capture and hold our operators,” said Fales.

He made his way back to Joint Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in 2006, eventually working his way to his final position as director of Strategic Plans and Programs and combat development for the 724th Special Tactics Group at Pope Field, North Carolina.

‘Cut from the same cloth’

“In Special Tactics, you work with the best operators and support in the world, bar none,” said Fales. “It takes courage and a force of will to live the SOF life because it’s not just a job, it’s a calling.”

The tight-knit SOF community kept Fales engaged until the very end, where his role gave him the opportunity to help not just his pararescue brethren, but the whole ST and SOF enterprise.

“Across my 42 years, I’ve confirmed that it doesn’t matter if you’re Army SOF, Navy/Marine SOF, or Air Force SOF, the people are cut from the same tough, flexible cloth, period,” he said.

Fales’ love for his work and the care he takes in accomplishing the mission has continuously set him apart from his peers.

“His tireless work ethic and positive attitude have not changed in the 30 years I have known him,” said Rizzuto. “His extensive combat experience and expertise as a pararescueman provides him a level of instant credibility. His absolute professionalism and his can do attitude has made him a true leader in Air Force Special Operations Command and the joint community.”

Despite being a legendary figure in the ST world, Fales never saw himself as different from his peers, never being anything other than a good teammate.

“With all those phenomenal people around you, it’s hard to think you have any more impact than the man to the left or right of you,” he said.

The future of ST

Fales’ involvement in the evolution of ST dates all the way back to the days of Tactical Air Command in 1980, while his final position with the 724th STG saw him heavily invested in developing for future conflicts.

“The future was specifically designed for ST,” said Fales. “The contested environment is where ST thrives, and in this new and demanding battlespace, the coherent integration of air power and Special Tactics enabled by leadership, discipline, intellect, advanced technology and fueled by innovation will pave the way for unimagined new capabilities to surprise and defeat our enemies.”

Fales proved he was just as capable at navigating bureaucratic channels as he was in a firefight, deftly articulating the requirements his operators had and increasing their budget in a time of significant fiscal restraint.

“He led our innovation efforts, working to give our warriors the equipment that provided them a competitive edge on the battlefield over our adversaries,” said Rizzuto. “His contributions to Special Tactics and special operations will be felt for years to come.”

Lasting impressions

“Missions come and go, and don’t get me wrong, I

love a good and tough mission, whether I’m in it or supporting it, but my fondest memories will always be of the people,” Fales said. “Active duty and civilian, I have met, worked with, trained with, and bled with the greatest

ST is my home, it’s where the mission is real, the people are even more real, and it’s where my surrogate family will always be.

Retired Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Fales

people in the Air Force family.”

He looks back on the years and credits the tight-knit ST enterprise for keeping him together through everything. To him, special operations is a special community of like-minded, intelligent, smart, adaptive and adventurous people that he will surely miss.

“ST is my home, it’s where the mission is real, the people are even more real, and it’s where my surrogate family will always be,” Fales said. “Active duty and civilian, I have worked with, trained with, and bled with the greatest people in the Air Force family. I’ll be forever grateful to the Air Force for providing me with an opportunity to serve for so many years, and I’m even more grateful to the men and women who stand in the breach every day to stem the tide of evil.”

Editor’s note: Fales was awarded USSOCOM’s 2012 Bull Simons Award. This lifetime achievement award in special operations is named for Army Col. Arthur “Bull” Simons, and honors the spirit, values, and skills of the unconventional warrior.



Scruffy special operator retires with honors

U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command SOF multipurpose canine Nero proudly displays his U.S. Military Working Dog Medal during his retirement ceremony at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif. on May 21. During his five years of service, Nero served two deployments. Nero will be adopted and spend his retirement as a companion to his handler. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Bryann K. Whitley.





Army Staff Sgt. Lauren Montoya was selected to carry the torch for Team SOCOM during the opening ceremony of the 2018 Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 2. Created in 2010, the DoD Warrior Games introduce wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans to Paralympic-style sports. Warrior Games showcases the resilient spirit of today's wounded, ill or injured service members from all branches of the military. These athletes have overcome significant physical and behavioral injuries and prove that life can continue after becoming wounded, ill or injured. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Steadfast, resilient, relentless

*By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication*

At five foot three, with piercing eyes, Army Staff Sgt. Lauren Montoya, carries herself as a serious, professional Soldier. In fact, when you see her walk in uniform you cannot tell she has a below the knee amputation and walks with a prosthetic.

The Austin, Texas, native joined the Army in January 2011 and trained to be a human intelligence collector. In 2013, Montoya joined a cultural support team and did her pre-deployment training with 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne). As a member of a CST, Montoya would engage with Afghanistan's female and adolescent

population. Eventually she would be assigned to a 7th SFG (A) operational detachment alpha team in southern Afghanistan in November 2013.

"I had a great experience as a CST and was able to accomplish a great deal in the five month period that I was deployed. I was able to learn a lot from the ODA and develop into a better NCO and soldier," Montoya said. "I was blessed to have unique experiences as a female Soldier prior to combat MOS's (military occupational specialty) opening up and I carry myself with pride that I was part of a small collective of strong women to have done it before it was allowed."

On March 22, 2014 Montoya was conducting a reconnaissance mission for another team and on the way

back to her firebase the truck she was operating in as a gunner rolled over a command detonated roadside bomb.

“I remember the blast, and remember being pinned underneath a ton of equipment inside of the truck. I also remember climbing up and down a mountain earlier in the day,” said Montoya. “March 22nd is a day that I will never forget, but it is also the day that I was given another opportunity at life.”

Initially she sustained a crushed heel bone, muscle and nerve damage to her foot and lower leg, a ruptured Achilles heel, and a mild traumatic brain injury. She was told by her first doctor when she returned to the United States that she would not be able to walk well again, let alone run or continue active duty service. She went through a year of limb salvage treatment to include nine surgeries on her foot. After a year of making very little progress to be able to walk, she decided to have an amputation surgery.

She worked for two years with physical and occupational therapists to regain strength, her gait, and power to build herself back up physically and mentally. She describes her recovery as “steadfast, resilient, and relentless.”

“My journey to recover was on and off for the first year, lots of surgeries and hospital stays, but once I had my amputation I never looked back. I underwent one revision surgery, but after a month of recovery I was able to walk and run,” said Montoya. “The adaptive sports program through the Care Coalition was instrumental in my recovery process. I was able to be part of a team again and meet people that were going through similar things, or had overcome them already. I was able to surround myself with positive influences that helped my life goals become reality. I was also fortunate enough to have family and friends that never let me lose sight of my goals and never let me believe that I was my injury and nothing more.”

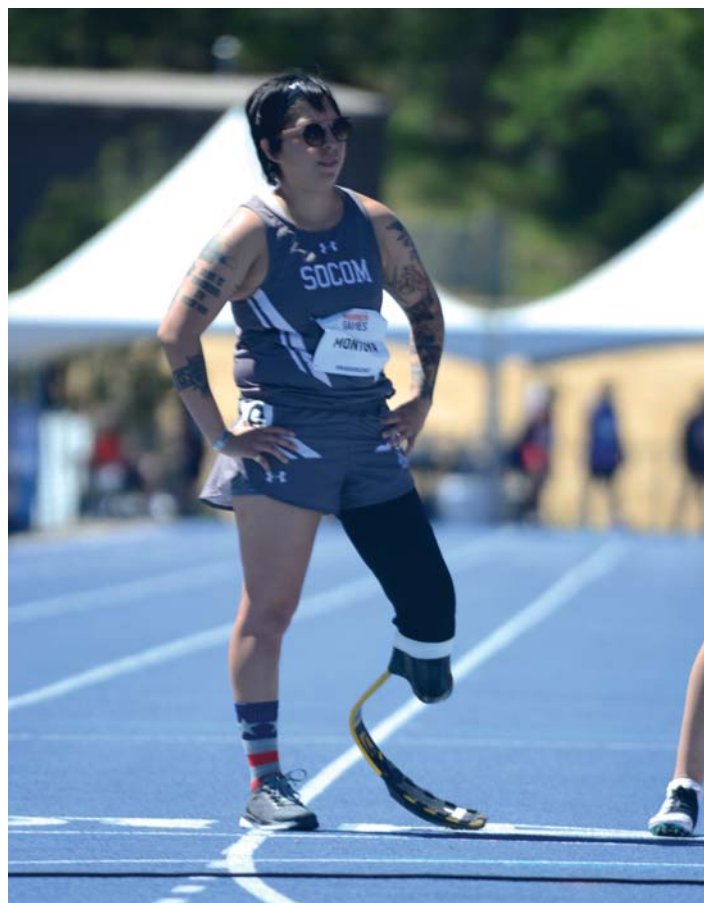
U.S. Special Operations Command’s Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) whose mission is to provide special operations forces wounded, ill, or injured service members and their families advocacy after life changing events in order to navigate through recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration as quickly as possible, strengthening SOF readiness helped retain Montoya in the Army. Montoya went through a medical evaluation board and was found fit for duty and is now stationed at MacDill Air Force Base working at USSOCOM Headquarters.

“The Care Coalition was instrumental with my recovery. I have so much gratitude that the Care Coalition

never questioned my ability to be part of the organization,” Montoya said. “They helped with medical appointments and making sure that my family was taken care of. They continue to be a shining light in my enduring recovery process.”

Montoya participated and medaled in track, field, swimming, and seated volleyball in the 2018 Warrior Games.

Founded in 2010, more than 250 U.S. military and international service members and veterans participate in the 2018 Warrior Games. The athletes will represent the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Special Operations Command. Historically, the Warrior Games have also invited international partner nations, and this year, athletes from the United Kingdom Armed Forces, Australian Defence Force and the Canadian Armed Forces will compete. It will be the sixth time for athletes from the U.K., second time for athletes from Australia and the first time for the Canadian team.



Army Staff Sgt. Lauren Montoya gets ready to compete in the 200-meter race for Team SOCOM during the Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 2. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

7th Group Green Beret competes, enjoys his first Warrior Games

*By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication*

On Aug. 7, 2015 a complex attack was launched on Camp Integrity, a special operations forces facility in Kabul, Afghanistan. A vehicle laden with explosives detonated at an entry gate initially killing eight people. The detonation allowed enemy fighters to infiltrate the base.

Reacting to the attack, Army Master Sgt. George Vera, a 7th Special Forces Group Green Beret, ran to the scene and began to defend the base. With him was his best friend and fellow Green Beret Army First Sgt. Andrew McKenna.

“I was on a small base north of Kabul, the base came under attack and it was hit with a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device at the front gate killing all the guards and opening up the gate. From there a few people along with myself formed a quick reaction force. We met the enemy at the gate. A few minutes later my best friend, First Sergeant Andrew McKenna showed up with four guys. We came up with a quick plan to fight these guys. Sadly, he (McKenna) was killed right away,” Vera said. “Another guy was also injured. We recovered both of them and from there we eliminated the enemy and secured the breach point. Then about an hour and a half later we didn’t realize that two guys were hiding on the base.

Unfortunately, they opened up on me with small arms and machine guns and I was shot four times. From there it was a long road to where I am at today.”

Vera would sustain two gunshot wounds to his legs and two to his back leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. His recovery journey took him from Landstuhl, Germany to Walter Reed in Maryland to treatment from Veterans Affairs hospitals and from the Stay in Step Spinal Cord Injury Recovery Center founded by fellow Green Beret, retired Chief Warrant Officer 3 Romulo “Romy” Camargo.

“It has been a long process, but I am getting better, and hopefully be back to work in several months,” said Vera.

Today, Vera is assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command’s Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) whose mission is to provide special operations forces wounded,



Army Master Sgt. George Vera competes in the shot put competition for Team SOCOM during the Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 2. Created in 2010, the DoD Warrior Games introduce wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans to Paralympic-style sports. Warrior Games showcases the resilient spirit of today’s wounded, ill or injured service members from all branches of the military. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

ill, or injured service members and their families advocacy after life changing events in order to navigate through recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration as quickly as possible, strengthening SOF readiness. They accomplish this through the four pillars of recovery, rehabilitation, reintegration, and career transition. Retention of the wounded warrior is always the goal.

An important part of the Care Coalition’s approach to recovery is the military adaptive sports program. The DoD understood the importance of the military adaptive sports program and created the DoD Warrior Games in 2010.

“The military adaptive sports program has helped me remain on active duty and it keeps me in shape, keeps me in the right frame of mind working with others, the team concept. I know for my job everything is about the team,” Vera said. “I will be competing in track and field, wheelchair basketball, swimming.”



Army Master Sgt. George Vera competes in the time trial for the recumbent bike division during the 2018 Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 6. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

The games introduce wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans to Paralympic-style sports. Warrior Games showcases the resilient spirit of today's wounded, ill or injured service members from all branches of the military. These athletes have overcome significant physical and behavioral injuries and prove that life can continue

after becoming wounded, ill or injured.

“The best part about the Warrior Games is the camaraderie, the bonding with the other wounded warriors. We share a lot of the same issues and it’s good to meet people who are on your same level,” said Vera. “The other guys push you. I see the amputees running around the track, that guy is out there doing it, then I can do it too.”

The games are an important part of the recovery process, but an often unrecognized partner in the recovery process are the caregivers.

“My wife and daughter have inspired me the most. Particularly my wife because she has a lot on her plate. She keeps the house together, the family together, she’s the core,” said Vera. “She does a lot of things that were my role before I was injured. She’s the glue of the family and keeps us together.”

The athletes enjoyed winning their medals at the Warrior Games, yet most of them believe their biggest takeaway from the week was the sense of camaraderie and friendship. The ultimate team honor is the Heart of the Team award and is awarded to the team member who best exemplified character, integrity and sportsmanship. Team SOCOM chose Vera as their heart of the team.



The moment Army Master Sgt. George Vera is announced as “The Heart of Team” for Team SOCOM during the 2018 Warrior Games closing ceremony held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 9. Army Gen. Raymond A. Thomas III, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command presented the award. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Camaraderie, competition: Team SOCOM in 2018 Warrior Games

Team SOCOM and more than 250 U.S. military and international service members and veterans participated in the 2018 Warrior Games. Created in 2010, the DoD Warrior Games introduce wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans to Paralympic-style sports. Warrior Games showcases the resilient spirit of today's wounded, ill or injured service members from all branches of the military. Athletes represented the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Special Operations Command and international partner nations from the United Kingdom Armed Forces, Australian Defence Force and the Canadian Armed Forces competed.



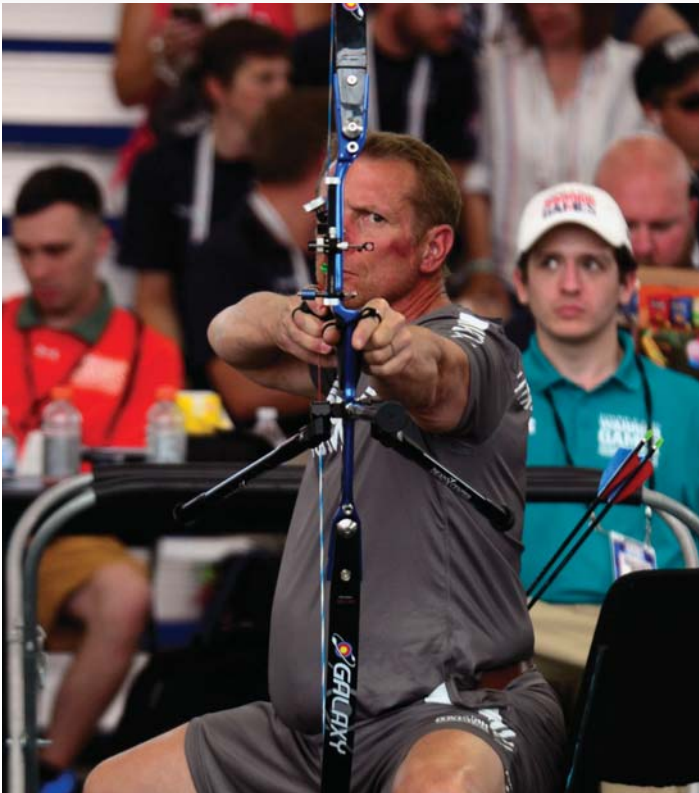
Navy Chief Petty Officer Phillip Fong competes in the discus competition for Team SOCOM during the Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 2. Photo by Michael Bottoms.



SOCOM veteran Army Capt. James Howard is helped from the pool after swimming in the 100-meter freestyle during the 2018 DoD Warrior Games at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 8. Howard, a quadriplegic, earned a gold medal in his category. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg.



Army Sgt. 1st Class Brant Ireland wins his time trial in the seated recumbent bike division during the 2018 Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. June 6, 2018. Photo by Michael Bottoms.



(Above) Army Master Sgt. Curtis Allen eyes his target in the archery competition during the 2018 Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 7. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

(Right) Army Staff Sgt. Lauren Montoya from Team SOCOM finishes her 50-meter breaststroke race during the 2018 Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 8. Photo by Michael Bottoms.



SOCOM's U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jimmy Covas reacts to winning gold in the 2018 DoD Warrior Games shooting competition at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. June 5. Photo by EJ Hersom.



Army Maj. Adam Ziegler races in the recumbent bike race during the 2018 Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 6, 2018. Photo by Michael Bottoms.



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND - HEADQUARTERS

SOCOM commemorates historic D-Day with a memorial shoot

Military and civilian personnel, along with local law enforcement, participated in the U.S. Special Operations Command D-Day Memorial Shoot on MacDill Air Force Base., Fla., June 1.

*Photo essay by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo
USSOCOM Office of Communication*



Army Command Sgt. Maj. Patrick McCauley, U.S. Special Operations Command senior enlisted leader, speaks to an audience of military and civilian personnel, along with local law enforcement, about the history of D-Day during the USSOCOM D-Day Memorial Shoot on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., June 1. USSOCOM hosted the event to honor the brave men that stormed the beach on D-Day, while also building comraderie and unit cohesion through shared physical exertion.



(Left top) Members of U.S. Special Operations Command prepare to transport military and civilian personnel, along with local law enforcement, during the USSOCOM D-Day Memorial Shoot on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., June 1.

(Left middle) Members of U.S. Special Operations Command, including Army Command Sgt. Maj. Patrick McCauley, center, USSOCOM senior enlisted leader, rush toward the beach during the USSOCOM D-Day Memorial Shoot on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., June 1.

(Right top) Military and civilian personnel, along with local law enforcement, fire blanks from an M240B machine gun during the U.S. Special Operations Command D-Day Memorial Shoot on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., June 1.

(Right) Service members celebrate their team's completion of the U.S. Special Operations Command D-Day Memorial Shoot on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., June 1.



“Wild Bill” Donovan: Special Operations Forces pioneer

The importance of OSS lies not only in its role in hastening military victory, but also in the development of the concept of unorthodox warfare, which alone constitutes a major contribution

—Maj. Gen. William J. Donovan in his preface to the OSS War Report

By Tom Neven

USSOCOM Research and History Office

William J. Donovan, the head of the Office of Strategic Services in World War II and one of the forefathers of today’s special operations forces, was born on New Year’s Day in 1883 in Buffalo, New York. After college and law school he entered private practice, where he prospered as a Wall Street lawyer.

In search of a way to serve his country, Donovan joined the New York National Guard’s 69th “Fighting Irish” Regiment as a captain in 1912. During World War I, the 69th was redesignated the 165th Regiment of the U.S. Army and was incorporated into the “Rainbow” Division, so named because of the cross-country makeup of its ranks. Then-Lt. Col. Donovan was troubled by the poor training and lack of physical conditioning of his troops, so one day he ran them in full packs on a three-mile obstacle course over walls, under barbed wire, through icy streams and up and down hills. At the end the men collapsed, gasping for air. “What the hell’s the matter with you?” Donovan demanded. “I haven’t lost my breath!” At age 35, he had carried the same load. The voice of an anonymous soldier in the back responded, “But hell, we aren’t as wild as you are, Bill.” From that day on, the nickname “Wild Bill” stuck. Donovan publically expressed annoyance at the name because it ran counter to the cool, careful image he wanted to cultivate, but his wife, Ruth, said that deep down he loved it.

On Feb. 28, 1918, Donovan and his battalion entered the fighting for the first time. He had wondered how he would react the first time he came under fire and discovered he had “no fear of being able to stand up under it,” he wrote to Ruth, thrilled at the danger of combat like a “youngster at Halloween.” Growing “easily accustomed” to standing up under fire, Donovan eschewed being a “dugout

commander” and led his troops from the front.

On the morning of Oct. 14, 1918, during the Meuse-Argonne Campaign, Donovan would earn the Medal of Honor. His unit was being decimated by enfilade fire from his right, and Donovan’s advance stalled, with horrifying casualties. Donovan rallied his troops and exposed himself to enemy fire as he moved from

position to position. He was wounded in the leg by machine-gun bullets but refused to be evacuated and continued with his unit until it withdrew to a less exposed position. Donovan would be wounded three times during the war and is the only American to have received the nation’s four highest awards: the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, and the National Security Medal. He also received the French Croix de Guerre.

After the war, Donovan wanted to become more involved with the government. He served on many different federal commissions and delegations. He also unsuccessfully campaigned for lieutenant governor and governor of New York in 1922 and 1932, respectively. His business also took him frequently abroad, and Donovan’s extensive travel experience brought him to the attention of President Franklin Roosevelt, who asked him to visit



Maj. Gen. William J. Donovan when he headed the Office of Strategic Services. Courtesy CIA photo.

England as an unofficial envoy in November 1940 to interview British officials and determine if they could withstand Nazi Germany. Through his meetings with Col. Stewart Menzies, the head of the British Secret Intelligence Service, as well as King George VI, Winston Churchill, and other British government and military leaders, Donovan realized that the United States needed a centralized means of collecting foreign intelligence. Donovan returned to Washington and shared what he had learned with Roosevelt.

On July 11, 1941, Roosevelt established the Office of the Coordination of Information and named Donovan as its director. The COI was tasked with coordinating information collected abroad for the president. After the United States became involved in World War II, the COI became the Office of Strategic Services in June 1942, with Donovan, now a major general, in charge. Based on the lessons he learned from the British, Donovan was the impetus behind the creation of a military psychological warfare capability, which included both psychological and unconventional warfare. Donovan hoped that by employing a military psychological warfare capability in conjunction with conventional forces, the carnage of World War I trench warfare could be prevented.

Donovan's concept of psychological warfare was all-encompassing, including the elements of what would later be called "special operations" (with the exception of counterinsurgency). The first stage would be "intelligence penetration" with the results, processed by the OSS's Research and Analysis Branch, available for strategic planning and propaganda. Donovan called propaganda the "arrow of initial penetration" and believed that it would be the first phase in operations against an enemy. The next phase would be special operations in the form of sabotage and subversion, followed by commando raids, guerrilla actions, and behind-the-lines resistance movements. All of this represented the softening up process prior to invasion by conventional units. Donovan's visionary dream was to unify these functions in support of conventional unit operations, thereby forging a "new instrument of war." By war's end, the OSS had evolved into the first truly unified special operations command.

The OSS conducted operations around the world. Jedburgh teams parachuted into France and Holland in support of the D-day invasion, where they made contact with resistance groups, set up training and security programs, established intelligence networks, and engaged in hit and run tactics. The operational groups or OGs were small formations of specially trained U.S. Army Soldiers,

many recruited from ethnic communities in America, who fought in uniform and had no obvious connection to the OSS (so they would be less likely to be shot as spies if captured). Designated the 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional) in 1944, the OGs fought in France, Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia, usually alongside partisan formations. In Burma, OSS's Detachment 101 came perhaps the closest to realizing Donovan's original vision of strategic support to regular combat operations. Det 101 developed relationships with native Kachin guides and agents, and when Allied troops invaded Burma in 1944, Det 101 teams advanced well ahead of the combat formations, gathering intelligence, sowing rumors, sabotaging key installations, rescuing downed Allied fliers, and snuffing out isolated Japanese positions.

Toward the end of the war, Donovan tried to persuade both Presidents Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman to make the OSS a permanent civilian centralized intelligence agency, but his efforts were unsuccessful. The OSS was dissolved in September 1945, but Donovan continued to advocate for the formation of a centralized intelligence agency. His persistence paid off when President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947, which established the Central Intelligence Agency. Its first civilian director was a former OSS man, Allen Dulles.

Donovan retired from active duty and returned to his work as a lawyer. His first job after the war was serving as an aide to the U.S. chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg war crimes trials. He died at the age of 76 on February 8, 1959 at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Washington, D.C. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



William J. Donovan briefing a plan during World War II. Courtesy CIA photo.



USSOCOM receives a Office of Strategic Services Congressional Gold Medal Replica

By Michael Bottoms

USSOCOM Office of Communication

75 years in making, the U.S. Congress bestowed its highest civilian honor upon the Office of Strategic Services March 21, 2018. The OSS is the precursor for the Central Intelligence Agency and U.S. Special Operations Command. The men and women of the OSS were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their superior service and significant contributions during World War II.

“This medal marks the first time the OSS has been officially recognized for its critical contribution to America’s victory in World War II, said Charles Pinck, president of The OSS Society. “Many OSS veterans never thought it would happen.”

Pinck, whose father was an OSS veteran who served behind enemy lines in China also said “we’ve been working on this bill many, many years and for the OSS to be recognized is incredibly gratifying.”

In a ceremony held at USSOCOM headquarters on MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, May 24, Pinck, presented a replica of the medal to the command.

“An OSS staffer said General Donovan’s imagination was so powerful, he could see an acorn and envision an oak tree. The acorn was the OSS. The oak tree is the U.S. Special Operations Command. I am not sure that Donovan’s imagination, as powerful as it was, could have imagined what the OSS has become,” said Pinck. “I know he would be incredibly proud of SOCOM’s accomplishments. I am sure he would tell its personnel what he frequently told OSS personnel: ‘You cannot succeed without taking chances.’ The OSS spearhead continues to point the way forward.”

The OSS Congressional Gold Medal Act states that “the OSS was America’s first effort to implement a system of strategic intelligence during World War II and provided the basis for the modern-day American intelligence and special operations communities.”

The OSS was led by Medal of Honor recipient Maj. Gen. William Donovan and at its peak in 1944, according to



Charles Pinck, president of the Office of Strategic Services Society, presents Army Gen. Raymond A. Thomas III, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, with a replica of the Congressional Gold Medal on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., May 24, 2018. The medal, one of the highest U.S. civilian awards, was awarded to the USSOCOM’s predecessor, the OSS, on Dec. 14, 2016. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.

the CIA, employed almost 13,000 individuals, a third of whom were women. The OSS organized, trained, and fought with resistance groups in Europe and Asia playing an important role in America’s ultimate victory in World War II. It pioneered counterintelligence and worked with foreign intelligence services.

According to the CIA, special operations forces today trace their lineage to the OSS. Its Maritime Unit was a precursor to the U.S. Navy SEALs. The OSS Operational Groups and Jedburghs were forerunners to U.S. Army Special Forces. The 801st and 492nd Bombardment Group led to Air Force Special Operations Command. The Marines who served in the OSS were predecessors to the Marine Special Operations Command. Ultimately, the OSS spawned the Central Intelligence Agency.

Today fewer than 100 members of this great organization are still alive, and the gold medal is displayed at the Smithsonian Institution.



U.S. Army
Staff Sgt. Alexander W. Conrad
3rd Special Forces Group
(Airborne)

Editor's note: Honored are special operations forces who lost their lives since April's Tip of the Spear.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Brant Ireland wins his time trial in the seated recumbent bike division during the 2018 Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., June 6. Created in 2010, the DoD Warrior Games introduce wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans to Paralympic-style sports. Warrior Games showcases the resilient spirit of today's wounded, ill or injured service members from all branches of the military. These athletes have overcome significant physical and behavioral injuries and prove that life can continue after becoming wounded, ill or injured. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

