



Tip OF THE Spear

United States Special Operations Command
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

December 2021



SOCNORTH training on Shemya Island



United States Special Operations Command



Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) With the Cobra Dane radar in the background, U.S. Special Operations troops train with a Stinger surface-to-air missile on Shemya Island, October 2021. SOCNORTH courtesy photo.

The Quiet Professionals

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U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



US special operations forces train alongside partners in Mauritania

*Courtesy Story
Special Operations Command Africa*

Mauritanian and U.S. special operations forces completed a joint combined exchange training Nov 10, 2021, in Nouakchott, Mauritania.

JCETs enhance the readiness of U.S. and partner forces while also improving interoperability between nations. The exercises help set the foundation for sustainable and productive military relationships.

“Our U.S. and Mauritanian teams put together an exceptional training event,” said Col. Amy Bogiel, U.S. Special Operations Command Africa Command Surgeon. “The high level of readiness and interoperability we collectively achieved is a testament to the professionalism of the teams and our strong enduring partnership.”

During the JCET, U.S. special operations teams and their Mauritanian counterparts trained for a month on marksmanship, small unit tactics, infiltration techniques, interdiction operations, combat casualty care, and mission planning and execution.

“The JCET is yet another excellent example of the close and enduring security partnership between the United States and Mauritania,” said U.S. Ambassador to Mauritania Cynthia Kierscht.

“Mauritania has proven to be a consistent partner in efforts to promote regional security through both military and civil action.”



A Mauritanian sailor applies a tourniquet to a simulated casualty during a final training exercise with U.S. Army Green Berets assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) while participating in a joint combined exchange training in Nouakchott, Mauritania, Nov. 8, 2021. The teams focused on honing basic skills such as close quarters battles, small unit tactics and mission planning. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Nicholas Byers.

This training event was one of multiple recent training events in Mauritania designed to increase the U.S. and Mauritanian security cooperation and interoperability. Mauritania hosted Flintlock, the premiere annual special operations exercise in West Africa, in 2020 and is scheduled to participate again in Flintlock in 2022.

U.S. Army Green Berets assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) oversee a final training exercise with Mauritanian sailors during a joint combined exchange training in Nouakchott, Mauritania, Nov. 8, 2021. The teams focused on honing basic skills such as close quarters battles, small unit tactics and mission planning. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Nicholas Byers.





Senegal Maritime Special Forces soldiers assault an objective while conducting a raid during a joint combined exchange training in Dakar, Senegal, Nov. 11, 2021. JCETs enhance U.S. relationships with partner nations by developing and maintaining critical military-to-military connections and improving joint and allied readiness and interoperability. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Duncan C. Bevan.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



US SOF conduct joint combined exchange training with Senegalese partners

*Courtesy Story
Special Operations Command Africa*

Senegalese and U.S. special operations forces concluded two military exchange training events Nov. 19, 2021, in Dakar, Senegal.

Joint combined exchange training events enhance the readiness of U.S. and partner forces while also improving interoperability between nations. The exercises help set the foundation for sustainable and productive military-to-military relationships.

“The Senegalese military and government have been great partners to us and leaders in exporting security,” said Col. Robert Zyla, Special Operations Command Africa chief of staff, who attended the closing ceremonies. “From their dedication to training alongside

our special operators during the recent exchange training to hosting Flintlock 2022, we thank our Senegalese partners and look forward to a continued strong relationship that promotes regional stability.”

During the JCET, U.S. special operations teams and their Senegalese counterparts trained for five weeks on laws of armed conflict, marksmanship, small unit tactics, infiltration techniques, interdiction operations, combat casualty care, and mission planning and execution.

This training event was the third JCET this year in Senegal bolstering U.S. and Senegalese skills, cooperation, and interoperability. Senegal is also hosting Flintlock, the premiere annual special operations exercise in West Africa, in early 2022.



A Senegal Maritime Special Forces soldier throws a concussion grenade into a hut before his team clears it during a joint combined exchange training in Dakar, Senegal, Nov. 10, 2021. JCETs enhance U.S. relationships with partner nations by developing and maintaining critical military-to-military connections and improving joint and allied readiness and interoperability. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Duncan C. Bevan.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



British Royal Marines assigned to the 45 Commando Royal Marines board a U.S. Air Force CV-22B Osprey assigned to the 7th Special Operations Squadron, 352nd Special Operations Wing, during a combined infiltration and exfiltration exercise over Scotland, Oct. 25, 2021. Combined allied exercises such as these strengthens the partnership between the U.S. and our Allies. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Brandon Nelson.

**7th Special Operations
Squadron conduct bi-lateral
training with British Royal Marines**



A U.S. Air Force flight engineer assigned to the 7th Special Operations Squadron, 352nd Special Operations Wing, mans the rear of a CV-22B Osprey during a bi-lateral exercise with the British Royal Marines over Scotland, Oct. 25, 2021. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Brandon Nelson.



British Royal Marines assigned to the 45 Commando Royal Marines board a U.S. Air Force CV-22B Osprey assigned to the 7th Special Operations Squadron, 352nd Special Operations Wing, during a combined infiltration and exfiltration exercise over Scotland, Oct 25, 2021. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Brandon Nelson.



A U.S. Air Force flight engineer mans his gunners position out of the back of a CV-22B Osprey assigned to the 7th Special Operations Squadron, 352nd Special Operations Wing during a bi-lateral exercise with the British Royal Marines over Scotland, Oct. 25, 2021. Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Brandon Nelson.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



US service members work with local orphanage, immerse in Korean culture

*By Cpl. Dae Hyeon Choi
Special Operations Command Korea*

In partnership with United States Forces Korea, U.S. Special Operations Command-Korea served a local orphanage as part of the Good Neighbor Program. The command was able to donate food, snacks, fresh fruit and approximately 1,400 pounds of rice to Jacob's House Sept. 17, 2021, in Pyeongtaek, South Korea.

The donation was collected by the Preservation of the Force and Family, Chaplain Jesse McCullough, Lt. Col. Brian Revell, Monica Menser, and Dr. Richard Sohn. It was an opportunity for SOCKOR's U.S. service members to learn more about the Korean national holiday, Chuseok.

Founded on May 20th, 1985, the orphanage served as an infant nursery that continues today in the care of children under the age of 3. Concern then focused on food insecurity and children orphaned through various situations. In 1989, it assisted 120 children and today serves 30 residents.

The partnership between the theater special operations command and local orphanage was developed in coordination with "The Eastern Pyeongtaek Welfare Town." The Eastern Pyeongtaek Welfare Town is an organization that secures appropriate living accommodations and overall quality of life initiatives through supporting five social service agencies, including Jacob's House. SOCKOR has partnered with both programs for about three years.

It has SOCKOR service members and families meeting and interacting with children in the program. "Normally [the service members and children] play on a small field and interact together," said Kim, Ah Ra, TEPWT planner. "However, with health and safety in mind, this year SOCKOR focused more on providing goods."

In anticipation of the donation, SOCKOR members participated in a 9.11-mile ruck march that carried the 1,400



U.S. Special Operations Command-Korea, in coordination with their Preservation of the Force and Family team and the Good Neighbor Program, donated food, snacks and fresh fruits to a local orphanage on Sept. 17, 2021. The command completed a ruck march in which SOCKOR service members carried approximately 1,400 lbs. of rice, which was included as part of the food donation. The 3-year relationship between SOCKOR and the local children's organization has helped develop opportunities for U.S. service members to learn more about Korean culture as they interact with the 30 children who are a part of the program. Photo by Cpl. Dae Hyeon Choi.

pounds of rice that was later donated. Apart from food, donations assisted in purchasing Han-Bok, a traditional, colorful Korean garment, for every child in the program.

This was not just the act of donating but also a cultural immersion between the Korean children and U.S. service members. While many SOCKOR members are key in planning training on the peninsula, this provided a unique opportunity for them to participate in seasonal activities as part of the local community.

Combat mentality, exercising the mind for special operations

By Cpl. Dae Hyeon Choi
Special Operations Command Korea

Special operations is known for its physicality – operators are able to adapt and overcome scenario-based challenges in any environment. But how does the mind play into that?

U.S. Special Operations Command – Korea is exploring the importance of exercising the brain as much as operators train their physical health through a program called Brain Headquarters. This program is intended for special operations forces to improve their psychological, cognitive, and emotional behaviors to fight more tactically and strategically on the battlefield.

Brain HQ is the part of the Preservation of the Force and Family program at SOCKOR. The overall program provides support uniquely designed for special operators and SOF employees.

Service members are provided with battlefield practice scenarios through computer-based training. Participants are given options to choose sessions based on what they want to focus on. There are options for exercises focusing on brain speed, attention, and memory categories.

“Brain HQ’s main objective is to provide the participants opportunities to enhance and measure their level of response when it comes to speed of attention or concentration as well as monitoring the ability to sustain cognitive effort,” said, Dr. Richard Sohn, SOCKOR psychologist. “There’s also opportunities to enhance short-and long-term memory, visual and spatial reasoning or navigation, and decision-making speed and accuracy.”

Brain HQ’s main objective is to provide the participants opportunities to enhance and measure their level of response when it comes to speed of attention or concentration as well as monitoring the ability to sustain cognitive effort.

— Dr. Richard Sohn



U.S. Special Operations Command-Korea psychologist, Dr. Richard Sohn, is focused on brain advancement training through a program called Brain Headquarters (Brain HQ). This program enhances participants’ brain functions and accuracy in regard to decision-making skills. The Brain HQ program is designed for special operators to increase their battlefield skills in uniquely training the mind. Through repeated computer-based training scenarios, the end goal is for participants to act faster, increase short-and long-term memory and increase accuracy in decision-making. Photo by Cpl. Dae Hyeon Choi.

One of the exercises involves the participants being given a scene of constantly moving targets to increase the ability to identify targets faster. Brain HQ’s model foundationally is that cognitive skills are learnable skills, and this natural ‘plasticity’ allows service members in SOF to re-wire the brain for better functioning.

“Brain HQ training is specific to cognitive and emotion skills,” said Sohn. “The training is based on repetition as similar scenarios are provided over and over. Participants are able to see their scores over time as they become familiar with given scenarios like combat situations.”

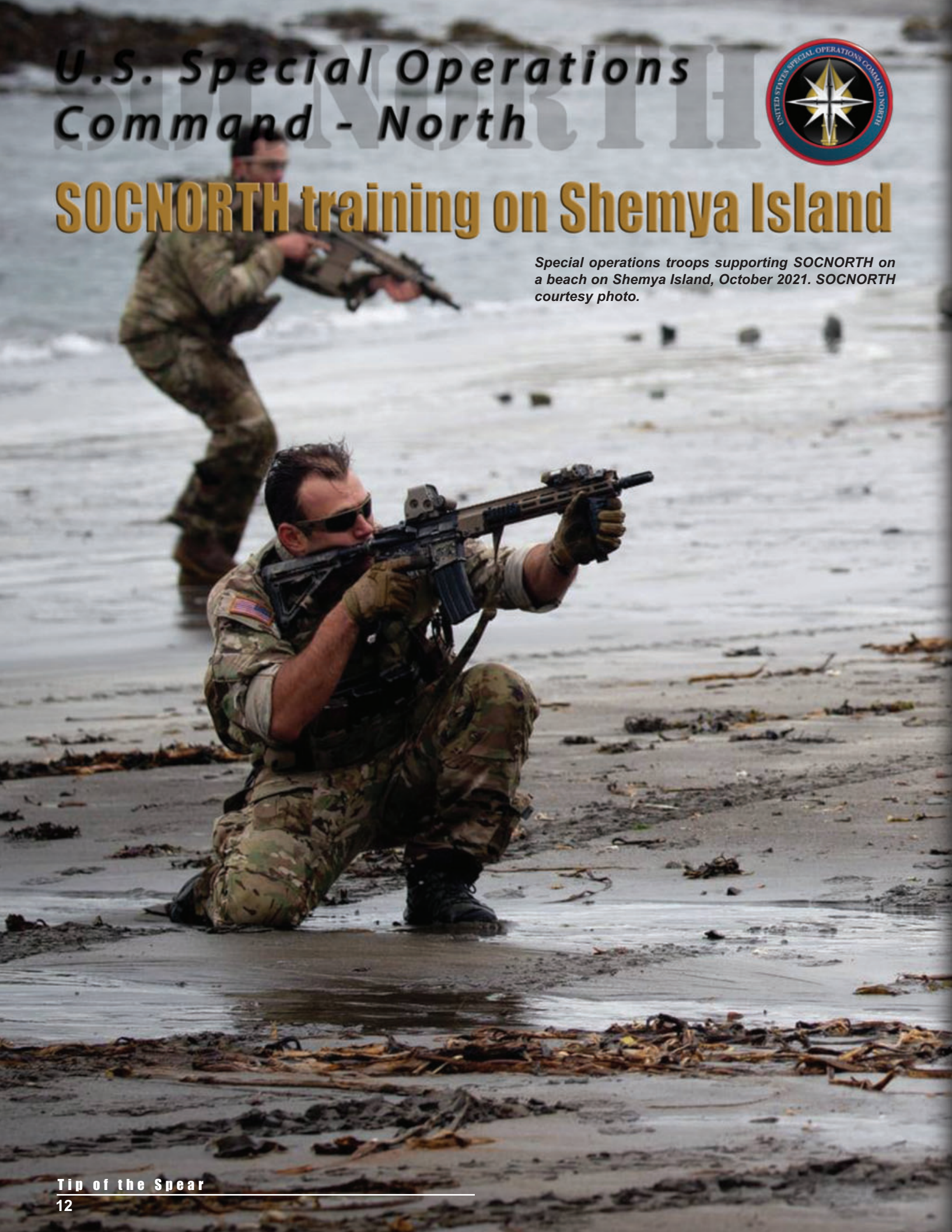
These brain skills are just as essential as the physical skills. Strong mental focus provides opportunities for service members to perform better and accomplish the missions.

U.S. Special Operations Command - North



SOCNORTH training on Shemya Island

Special operations troops supporting SOCNORTH on a beach on Shemya Island, October 2021. SOCNORTH courtesy photo.

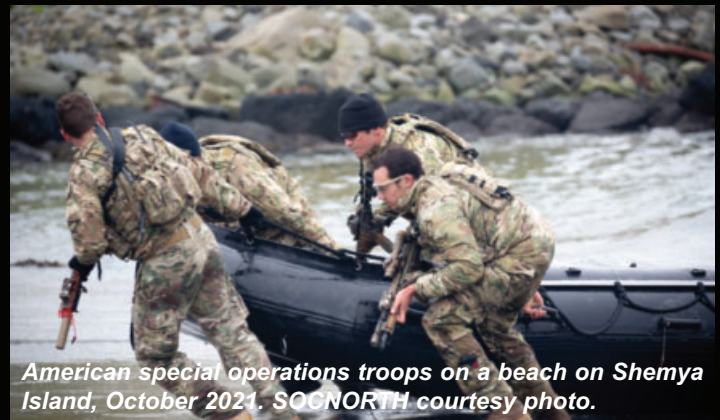




American special operations troops begin close quarters combat on Shemya Island, October 2021. SOCNORTH courtesy photo.



American operators train with a drone on Shemya Island, October 2021. The Cobra Dane radar is visible in the background. SOCNORTH Courtesy photo.



American special operations troops on a beach on Shemya Island, October 2021. SOCNORTH courtesy photo.



US Special Operations troops head toward an objective on Shemya Island, October 2021. SOCNORTH courtesy photo.



With the Cobra Dane radar in the background, U.S. Special Operations troops train with a Stinger surface-to-air missile on Shemya Island, October 2021. SOCNORTH courtesy photo.

Courtesy of SOCNORTH

In mid-October, U.S. Special Operations troops deployed to Shemya Island in Alaska’s Aleutian Islands as part of the NORAD-led exercise Noble Defender in order “to exercise capabilities for securing key terrain and critical infrastructure,” said Gen. Glen VanHerck, head of Northern Command and NORAD.

Noble Defender is a recurring operation meant to demonstrate NORAD’s ability to coordinate US and Canadian forces in defense of North America.

American Special Operators training activity on Shemya included maritime insertion, special reconnaissance drone launches, close-quarters combat, medical evacuations, and integrated short-range air defense, among other drills.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

FIA Formula 3 driver visits 7th SFG(A) wounded warriors



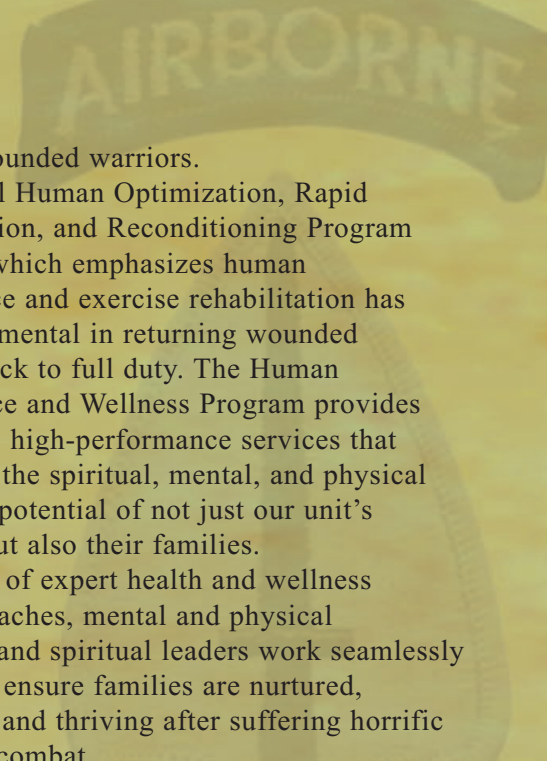
By U.S. Army Sgt. Carolina Sierra
7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Soldiers assigned to 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) hosted Juan Manuel (JM) Correa, a Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) Formula 3 Driver, for a day of range shooting, drift-car racing and a tour of the unit's Combat Readiness Training Facility at Camp "Bull" Simons, Oct. 27, 2021.

JM Correa visited with a group of wounded warriors to share his own experiences of recovering from a horrific injury. Correa suffered significant trauma from a near career-ending accident in August 2019 while driving in the Formula 2 championship at Spa-Francorchamps FIA in Belgium. After undergoing a full year of intensive recovery, Correa has been inspiring others who have overcome traumatic injuries and returning to service or their chosen profession. Throughout his journey, Correa has developed an even



7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) wounded warriors stand alongside JM Correa at the element training facility in Holt, Fla., Oct. 27, 2021. Correa was provided the opportunity to learn new skills taught by skilled marksmen. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Christopher Sanchez.



Lt. Col. Brockton Hershberger (left) and Command Sgt. Maj. Joffre Celleri (right), 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 2nd Battalion Command Team, engage in discussion with JM Correa at Camp "Bull" Simons, Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. Oct. 27, 2021. Correa tells his story and relates it to the experiences of wounded warriors. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Christopher Sanchez.

deeper respect for all wounded warriors and the challenges they face during their own recovery process.

“Before my accident, I was starting to get involved with military programs and wounded warriors,” said Correa “but after my accident, I now feel a great connection with wounded service members.”

7th SFG(A) Soldiers have been continuously deployed around the world in support of contingency operations since the attacks of 9/11. During these deployments, 7th SFG(A) has suffered more than 50 casualties and many wounded Soldiers as a result of engagements with the enemy. As part of 7th SFG(A)’s commitment to its Soldiers, various programs have been established to assist in rehabilitation and recovery efforts for both Soldiers and their Families.

Step One Automotive Group, the organization that sponsors Correa, collaborated with 2nd Battalion, 7th SFG(A) to champion the days activities recognizing members of the unit who had also experienced traumatic injuries as a result of combat and ultimately returned to service. After receiving a special forces capabilities brief and tour of the CRTF, Correa had a new perspective on the care provided to 7th

SFG(A) wounded warriors.

Tactical Human Optimization, Rapid Rehabilitation, and Reconditioning Program (THOR3) which emphasizes human performance and exercise rehabilitation has been monumental in returning wounded Soldiers back to full duty. The Human Performance and Wellness Program provides integrative, high-performance services that maximizes the spiritual, mental, and physical health and potential of not just our unit’s Soldiers, but also their families.

A team of expert health and wellness doctors, coaches, mental and physical therapists, and spiritual leaders work seamlessly together to ensure families are nurtured, connected, and thriving after suffering horrific injuries in combat.

“We have an extensive program designed to rehabilitate those who have experienced severe injuries,” said Dr. Tamara Copes, a 7th SFG(A) therapist.

The visit was a resounding success that forged new friendships and partners in the face of challenges due to catastrophic injuries. Together, each piece of the puzzle gets put back together to return heroes back to service and contributing to the mission, whether that is winning a racing championship, or defending freedom.



7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Master Sgt. Ivan Morera coaches and observes JM Correa shooting down range at the element training facility, Holt, Fla., Oct. 27, 2021. Morera coaches Correa through the steps necessary to become a skilled marksman. Photo U.S. Army by Spc. Christopher Sanchez.

Naval Special Warfare Command



Alaskan native Solomon Atkinson: Family man, patriot and countryman

*By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Smedegard
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

Alaskan Native Solomon Atkinson led an extraordinary life. He left his community and his career as a commercial fisherman to serve 22 years in the military and become one of the first U.S. Navy SEALs. A husband, father, mayor, veterans affairs advocate and community leader—his lifetime achievements by anybody’s standards are nothing short of remarkable.

“Sol, [as he was often called], did what he thought was best for his family, community, and country,” said JoAnn Atkinson, Sol’s wife. “He did what any man would do—follow his heart and do his best.”

Sol was born in 1930 in Metlakatla, Alaska, and raised by his parents in a small Tsimshian village located along Port Chester Bay on Annette Island—it remains the sole Indian Reserve in Alaska.

The small village of less than 500 people provided ample space for Sol to develop skills to hunt, fish, and live off the land. As the son of a successful fisherman, it came as no surprise that he would follow in his father’s footsteps. When Sol was older, he returned home from boarding school in the summers to work fish alongside his father.

“It was one summer when he was fishing near Seattle that he saw a recruitment poster for the Underwater Demolition Teams,” said JoAnn. “He thought it looked cool and at that point decided he wanted to become a frogman [the precursor to present day SEALs].”

When he was 21, Sol decided to leave his community and enlist in the U.S. Navy. In 1953, he volunteered for the UDT teams and became a frogman just as he imagined. When the first SEAL teams were established in 1962, Sol volunteered again and became one of the first Navy SEALs and one of 60 plankowners, or founding members, of SEAL Team 1.

As a SEAL, he deployed to Korea and the Pacific,



Engineman Seaman Solomon Atkinson smiles for a picture. Atkinson would go on to become one of the first U.S. Navy SEALs, complete 22 years of active Naval service and retire in 1973 as Chief Warrant Officer 4. Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy.

completed three combat tours in Vietnam, and became a SEAL instructor for new recruits where he received the nickname “the Mean Machine”.

“He earned that nickname because he was in charge of [physical training] for new recruits,” said JoAnn. “Sol was always passionate in his career. He was your typical SEAL—work hard, play hard.”

Sol rose to the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 4, received a Bronze Star and Purple Heart, and retired in 1973 after 22 years of service. Just days after his retirement ceremony in Little Creek, Virginia, Sol and his family drove their Ford Econoline van more than 3,500 miles back to Metlakatla.

In retirement, Sol volunteered his time talking to the youth in local schools. It was not uncommon for him to show off his most prized possession, a plaque signed by Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, Jim Lovell and many other astronauts from when Atkinson was the class proctor in underwater weight training for the astronauts enrolled in the Underwater Swimmers School in Key West.

Once Sol returned home to Alaska, he continued to serve his people, state and nation on the Indian Community

Council and Board of Education, as a founder and president of the first veteran's organization on Annette Island, and as mayor of Metlakatla.

"What is truly remarkable about Sol is that after he retired from the Navy, he moved back home to Metlakatla and continued to serve his country and serve his community," said U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan of Alaska during a statement submitted to the Congressional Record in 2017.

"He played a principal role in the Department of Defense Innovative Readiness training program. [Sol] was one of Alaska's most vocal veteran's advocates, leading delegation teams to lobby in [Washington], and before the Alaska state legislature," said Sullivan "[Sol] spent decades reaching out to his fellow veterans to make sure they receive the benefits, honor, and dignity they earned."

During a trip to Washington in 2001, Sol and his team were scheduled for a meeting at the Pentagon with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding a project in Alaska. The night before, he received a phone call—the meeting had been canceled. The next morning Sol heard the news the Pentagon had been struck by an airplane on Sept. 11.

"One of his coworkers would later tell us that when [Sol] found out, it was like a light switch, he went into SEAL mode," said Maria Hayward, Sol's daughter. "He quickly organized a plan to gather his team to safety and remove them from any potential danger."

Sol received various types of training throughout his naval career and used that for the greater good. As passionate as Sol was in the Navy, he was equally passionate about the members of his community.

"He was very serious about everything he did," said JoAnn. "And he did it whole-heartedly."

In recognition of his life of service, Sol received the Alaska Governor's Veterans Advocacy Award in 2018. When he accepted the award, Sol said, "Everything I do is for my people, not myself."

Surrounded by his family in his home in Metlakatla, Sol passed away in July 2019.

In the days before his passing, Sol received a call from the Secretary of the Navy thanking him for his service. His fellow SEAL teammates were there to support and remind him he had paved the way for the legacy to continue.

Family and friends, to include JoAnn and Maria, attended a ceremony in San Diego, hosted by SEAL Team 1 on Aug. 19, 2021, to render honors to the passing of one of their plank owners.

"This tradition serves to honor the memory of the founding members of our community, to remind current command members of the Naval Special Warfare legacy, and to provide surviving families with a connection to the service of their loved ones," said an active duty SEAL officer who serves as the command historian at SEAL Team 1.

"Chief Warrant Officer 4 Sol Atkinson was a dedicated family man, a patriot and a serviceman to his country," said the commanding officer of SEAL Team 1. "He set the standards high in a lot of regards, both in and out of uniform, and is certainly remembered throughout the teams for all he's done."

Sol was passionate throughout many facets of his life. Out of everything he did, one stuck out the most.

"His greatest accomplishment was being a husband, a father to four children, grandfather and great-grandfather to all," said Maria. "He had a full loving life."

Native American Heritage Month provides the Navy an opportunity to recognize the service and contributions of Native Americans. This year's theme, 'Grounded in Tradition, Resilient in Spirit', reflects on the rich culture and heritage of Native American communities and their strength to endure through the toughest of times.

"As we consider this year's theme, let us celebrate the past accomplishments and current service of Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, but also make time to engage and learn about the cultural traditions, background, and experiences of our colleagues," said Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro. "Let us remember how inclusion of many experiences, talents, and viewpoints are essential to mission and operational readiness."

There are more than 23,000 Active, 850 Full-Time Support, and 655 Selected Reserve American Indian or Alaska Native Sailors serving in the Navy today.

Naval Special Warfare is proud to celebrate the legacy, service and contributions of our teammates and is committed to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in our policies, programs and operations.



JoAnn Atkinson, wife of Chief Warrant Officer 4 Solomon Atkinson places a silver star next to his name on the SEAL Team 1 plank owner plaque in part of a star ceremony. The star ceremony commemorates original founding member Chief Warrant Officer 4 Solomon Atkinson, who passed away July 2019 and was one of the first of 60 U.S. Navy Seals at SEAL Team 1. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Chris Haskell.



Naval Special Warfare Command

SECNAV visits Naval Special Warfare Command, West Coast units

Courtesy Story *Naval Special Warfare Command*

The Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Carlos Del Toro, visited Naval Special Warfare Command, NSW Group One, NSW Group Four, NSW Group Eight and NSW Center units as part of a visit to the San Diego region Nov. 8, 2021.

During the visit, Del Toro spent time with NSW personnel to learn how the community gains, maintains and extends access for the Fleet in an era of strategic competition. They also discussed how NSW assesses and selects leaders with the character, cognitive and leadership attributes required for complex and high-risk missions.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro (left) meets with Capt. David Markle, deputy commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, during a visit to Naval Special Warfare commands in the San Diego area Nov. 8, 2021. During the visit, Del Toro spent time with NSW personnel to discuss ongoing digital transformation and innovation efforts, integrating NSW assets with the Fleet, and assessing and selecting leaders with character, cognitive and leadership attributes. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's premier maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the fleet's reach and deliver all-domain options for naval and joint force commanders. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Keypher Strombeck.

Del Toro received a brief on NSWC's recent digital transformation efforts and met with NSW leaders to discuss how the community is using artificial intelligence and multi-domain unmanned systems to extend reach and reduce risk to personnel. Del Toro also met with leaders from NSWG-8, which was recently

formed to converge NSW's undersea and advanced communications and intelligence capabilities.

"These targeted investments in artificial intelligence and unmanned platforms are crucial for maintaining information superiority and a competitive edge in all domains," said Del Toro. "I am amazed by the innovators at Naval

Special Warfare Command and look forward to seeing their progress in technological breakthroughs."

These targeted investments in artificial intelligence and unmanned platforms are crucial for maintaining information superiority and a competitive edge in all domains. I am amazed by the innovators at Naval Special Warfare Command and look forward to seeing their progress in technological breakthroughs.

— Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Carlos Del Toro





Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro (center) meets with Sailors assigned to Naval Special Warfare units and discusses unmanned systems during a visit to the San Diego area Nov. 8, 2021. During the visit, Del Toro spent time with NSW personnel to discuss ongoing digital transformation and innovation efforts, integrating NSW assets with the Fleet, and assessing and selecting leaders with character, cognitive and leadership attributes. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Keypher

SECNAV's tour continued with a visit to NSWG-1's combat training tank where naval commandos train to conduct high-risk combat diving evolutions. The force is placing a renewed emphasis on missions that only NSW can do on, under and above the sea. The combat training tank improves the training and readiness of NSW operators to carry out highly complex undersea missions.

Rear Adm. H.W. Howard III, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, said that now, more than ever, NSW is strengthening all-domain integrated deterrence and providing irregular warfare options that efficiently and effectively help solve the hardest national security problems.

"We were honored to host Secretary of the Navy Del Toro to share how Naval Special Warfare is urgently innovating to expand military advantage and edge," said Howard. "We are laser-focused on the complexities and political, strategic and military risks of the future operational environment, and we are grateful for the culture the Secretary fosters in his emphasis on innovation artificial intelligence, multi-domain

unmanned systems, and our greatest asset—the diversity and inclusivity of our people."

Before concluding his time with NSW, SECNAV spoke with NSWCEN and NSWC personnel about ongoing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, preservation of the NSW force and their families, and the newly formed NSW Leadership Assessment Program for officer and senior enlisted advisors.

NLAP is NSW's newest approach to increasing officer and enlisted selection precision, individual development opportunities, and officer & enlisted leader pairing decisions. Among other criteria, the program consists of peer and subordinate assessments of leader candidates; physical, psychological and writing assessments; and double-blind interviews that assess leadership potential and cognitive biases.

"The Navy special warfare community's success depends on recruiting and developing the most capable and talented Sailors," said Del Toro. "The NSW Leadership Assessment Program is one of the many tools we can use to build the strongest possible warfighting force."

Naval Special Warfare Command

Naval Special Warfare Logistics Support Unit 1 celebrates 20th Anniversary



*By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Smedegard
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

Naval Special Warfare Logistics Support Unit 1 held a ceremony to commemorate the command's 20th anniversary at the Silver Strand Training Complex, Coronado, California, Oct. 14, 2021.

"This milestone in our command attributes heavily to the support we have given to our nation's elite fighting force," said Cmdr. Joseph Bossi, commanding officer of LOGSU-1. "It is a great honor to be here and be a part of a community with such a rich history."

Among those in attendance included Rear Adm. H.W. Howard III, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command; Master Chief Bill King, force master chief, NSWC; Capt. David Abernathy, commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group 1; Capt. Mick Wilson, director of logistics, NSWC; retired U.S. Navy Capt. Gerry Harms, director of logistics at NSWC from 1999-2004; and retired U.S. Navy Capt. Bob Snyder, the first commanding officer of LOGSU-1, who traveled from his home in northern Virginia to serve as keynote speaker for the day's events.

"Our LOGSU concept has withstood the test of time and was absolutely the right decision in 2001," said Snyder. "The success our people achieved when responding to our nation's calling to act 20 years ago yielded profound impact throughout the years and is a direct testament to the resiliency, perseverance and aptitude our people endured at this command."

LOGSU-1's history dates back to Oct. 16, 2001. 9/11 occurred during LOGSU-1's early formation, and in the months immediately following, Snyder found his



Retired U.S. Navy Capt. Bob Snyder, Naval Special Warfare Logistics Support Unit 1's first commanding officer, delivers remarks during a ceremony to commemorate LOGSU-1's 20th anniversary. LOGSU-1 plans, coordinates, synchronizes, and provides logistics support for Naval Special Warfare Group 1, directly supporting forces during training and while deployed to U.S. Central and U.S. Indo-Pacific Commands. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Paolo Bayas.

command supporting Task Force K-Bar – America's initial response in Afghanistan. Task Force K-Bar, led by the NSWG-1 commodore, then Capt. Bob Harward, was tasked with carrying out President Bush's objective to eliminate Afghanistan as a safe haven for international terrorists.

"LOGSU changed the game and became an essential element, if not the key enabler, for transforming our community to the professional and strategic war-fighting

force we are today,” read a quote provided by retired Vice Adm. Harward for the ceremony. “The innovation and support we received was instrumental in our early war-fighting efforts and directly attributable to leaders like [Snyder] who demonstrated and provided the critical vision, culture, and support we needed as we responded to 9/11. We would not have succeeded without it, and the timing could not have been better.”

Retired U.S. Navy Capt. Gerry Harms served as a driving force for the implementation of the LOGSU concept under former Rear Adm. Eric Olson’s NSW-21 initiative. Harms spoke at the anniversary celebration and reflected upon LOGSU-1’s inception and early infancy.

“[Task Force K-Bar] was the first time the NSW task force commander had a single senior officer coordinating his theater logistics, synchronizing personnel and equipment support, and plugging into the joint logistics enterprise,” said Harms. “It was a herculean effort and a first for NSW.”

LOGSU-1 remained vital in supporting operations, and in 2003, during the invasion of Iraq, would support the largest special warfare forward-deployed effort in our nation’s history.

Retired Adm. William “Bill” McRaven, who rose through the ranks in the SEAL community and became NSW’s second four-star admiral and commander of U.S. Special Operations Command in 2011, served as the commander of Naval Special Warfare Command at LOGSU-1’s inception.

“When we look back 20 years... what would we have done without LOGSU,” read a quote provided by McRaven for the ceremony. “LOGSU came along at a time when we really needed to be professionalizing the force and talking logistics. They revolutionized Naval Special Warfare. The timing could not have been better.”

At the time of LOGSU-1’s infancy, it’s facilities were spread out across Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. Today, LOGSU-1 resides in newly constructed facilities located at the Silver Strand Training Complex in Coronado, Calif. LOGSU-1 is located in the middle of the complex allowing for improved access to the SEAL Teams it supports.

“The impact of the LOGSU’s has literally put us in the heart of the community,” said Snyder. “You men and women standing here today are writing the next chapter in LOGSU-1’s history.”

Today, 430 personnel at LOGSU-1 provide expeditionary logistics and support services to NSWG-1’s eight other subordinate commands, directly supporting NSW whether in garrison, training, or deployment.

“We must innovate and find ways to bring resources to bear on our most significant challenges to ensure the integrity of support for the fight to come,” said Bossi. “There is no doubt in my mind that you will more than meet the challenges that lie ahead, just as we have done so in the past. Happy 20 years to our robust enterprise, and with more phenomenal years to come!”



Service members and staff from Naval Special Warfare Logistics Support Unit 1 pose for a group photo in front of their headquarters building to commemorate the command’s 20th anniversary. LOGSU-1 plans, coordinates, synchronizes, and provides logistics support for Naval Special Warfare Group 1, directly supporting forces during training and while deployed to U.S. Central and U.S. Indo-Pacific Commands. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Paolo Bayas.

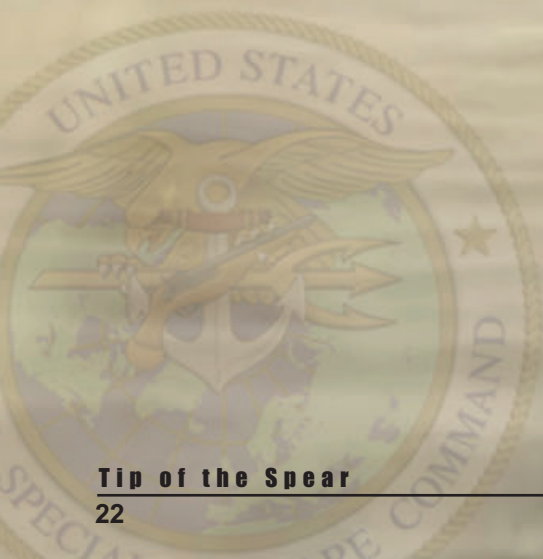
Naval Special Warfare Command

Naval Special Warfare

maritime training evolution



A West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare operator exits an MH-47 Chinook heavy assault helicopter, assigned to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, during a maritime training evolution. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's premier maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the fleet's reach and deliver all-domain options for naval and joint force commanders. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Paolo Bayas.





A MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft flies over the Hurlburt Field, Fla. flightline as they return from a deployment Oct. 6, 2021. Two MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft crews returned from a deployment to see their families waiting on the flightline. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Rito Smith.



Air Force Special Operations Command



Two MC-130Hs Combat Talon II return from Afghan deployment

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

Two MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft and their crews returned to Hurlburt Field, Florida, Oct. 6, 2021. Families patiently awaited the arrival of their loved ones as the aircraft flew in and landed.

The aircraft most recently supported Operation Allies Refuge and the final evacuation of Afghanistan. The MC-130H will be replaced by the MC-130J Commando II aircraft as the Air Force and Air Force Special Operations Command look to modernize the special operations mobility fleet.

“The MC-130J is going to be a more capable aircraft,” said Capt. Ramiro Leenen, a combat systems officer and chief of tactics at the 15th Special Operations Squadron. “It will have a longer range, more speed and be able to haul more things for us.”

The aircraft first came to Hurlburt Field in June of 1992. It went through various tests and then began flying in October of 1992.

“There are also some terrain following and avoidance radar systems in developmental testing,” said Leenen. “We currently have two of the MC-130J Commando II aircraft with that capability in testing right now.”

MC-130H’s have provided constant support since 2001 for special operations missions involving high-altitude air refueling, cargo and personnel transport, airdrop and tactical infiltration and exfiltration.

“The Talon II brought low level infiltration capabilities in adverse weather to the fight,” said Leenen. “We also brought in a refuellable C-130 which allowed us to extend our range.”

They have also been utilized for humanitarian missions worldwide such as Operation Unified Response in Haiti and Operation Tomodachi in Japan.



Families wave at the crew from an MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft as they return from a deployment Oct. 6, 2021 at Hurlburt Field, Fla. The MC-130H is being phased out in time for the new MC-130J Commando II aircraft to take over the mission. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Rito Smith.

“I participated in the Hurricane Maria humanitarian effort and we deployed to pick up a team of 10 Doctors Without Borders,” said Leenen. “Nobody was able to come into the airfield because they didn’t have power and we were able to approach and land on the runway to extract these doctors and fly them around to perform their duties.”

The aircraft is well known for missions such as; evacuation of non-combatant Americans from conflicts in Liberia, evacuating civilians from the Republic of the Congo in 1997, participating in combat operations in the Balkans during Operation Allied Force, and in 2003 it was the first U.S. aircraft to land at Baghdad International Airport to support missions for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“It’s bittersweet for them to phase out,” said Leenen. “We have been flying them for a long time, and I feel like we made a difference with them.”

Air Force Special Operations Command



Athletic trainer invaluable to special operations mission



Ellie Goldense, an athletic trainer with the Preservation of the Force and Family, takes the time for a photo in her work area at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Sept. 23, 2021. Goldense is the only athletic trainer embedded in the 2nd Special Operations Squadron and provides a wide range of support to members of the 2nd SOS, 65th SOS, and the 311th Special Operations Intelligence Squadron. Photo by Michelle Gigante.

*By Michelle Gigante
919th Special Operations Wing*

It was the perfect day to shoot hoops with the kids. Master Sgt. Jedidiah Payne, 2nd Special Operations Squadron operations superintendent, had his eye on the target, ready to show his kids his windmill slam dunk move when, in mid-jump, a snapping ping triggered a painful sensation through

his muscles.

Payne thought the popping sound indicated a muscle strain or tear which would likely require medical attention. However, he repressed the feeling and pushed through since he had a funeral to attend. After the funeral, Payne stopped by his office to follow-up on a few important items for work and planned to later seek medical treatment for the injury.

As he made his way into the office, Ellie Goldense, an athletic trainer with the Preservation of the Force and Family, paused to say hello to him.

“I bumped into Ellie, who was working in her area in the hanger,” said Payne. “She could see the look on my face and knew there was a problem.”

Payne, who has been a member of the 2nd Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida, for the last two years, explained the situation to her.

“She asked me what I did...I told her, and then she asked, ‘did you make it?’” said Payne. “I didn’t really understand the question, and I later learned she wasn’t planning to help me if I didn’t make the dunk in the basketball game.”

Goldense and he shared a laugh over the story.

“In 15 minutes she triaged me, showed me I had pulled a muscle, and not punctured a lung—like I thought I did,” chuckled Payne. “Maybe that’s a little sarcastic, but the injury was really quite painful.”

Goldense’s role is unique to the flying unit, because she is the only athletic trainer embedded in the squadron and yet she supports her organization and two others. In addition to the 2nd SOS, she takes care of the 65th Special Operations Squadron and the 311th Special Operations Intelligence Squadron.

“I am the first person to fill this position,” said Goldense. “I was originally brought in for night-time work, they didn’t have someone for after hours and this type of support is needed around the clock.”

Payne and his team’s line of work requires long periods of sitting, causing strain, tension, and fatigue on the body. Recently, the team received new cubicle walls to provide greater privacy in the sleep pods. In addition, there are massage chairs, and an athletic training table to help combat the bad posture they endure on the job.

“All of these things have made us better at our job,” said Payne. “We didn’t even realize what we were missing until we got the [resiliency equipment] we have now. We just knew we were tearing our bodies down.”

Goldense described while in combat, the brain can cause physical stress from experiencing what is referred to as ‘moral injury’ by those who study the psychological impact of combat operations among

certain segments of the military. To help counteract these stressors for the team, she developed individual fitness plans to make sure the flying unit performs optimally.

Some of the tactics she incorporates with the fitness plans focus on mobility stretches.

“Imagine just sitting in an upright position, for hours and hours on end,” said Goldense. “While we have people that can swap in and out [for crew relief], it is not that easy.”

While this technique is useful for combating fatigue, there are times when a team member cannot swap out at the end of their shift.

“That’s where I come in,” said Goldense, one of the many POTFF resources provided to the Wing. POTFF ensures special operations members have services to address the four main pillars of life -- physical, spiritual, psychological and social needs.

The athletic trainer position supports the physical pillar to optimize and sustain mission readiness.

She explained her process is to learn what ailments members might have from participating in activities with their families, so they are not compounding the situation by

being stationary for prolonged periods of time.

“I need to make sure they are able to maintain that cognitive focus by mitigating physical pain so they continue the mission,” said Goldense.

Payne was able to go home that night to his family and avert a trip to the emergency room because of Goldense intervening.

“Her ability to assess the situation, and help me in that moment is indicative of the care she provides our Airmen every day,” said Payne.

Both Payne and Goldense established a trusting working relationship, and he has since referred several team members to her.

“Having someone like Ellie here has given us the opportunity as a community and me personally to be better prepared to do the job,” said Payne.

I need to make sure they are able to maintain that cognitive focus by mitigating physical pain so they continue the mission.

— Ellie Goldense

Having someone like Ellie here has given us the opportunity as a community and me personally to be better prepared to do the job.

— Master Sgt. Jedidiah Payne

Air Force Special Operations Command



Pushing to the limit: Special Tactics Airmen compete together for Team USA Bobsled

*By U.S. Air Force Capt. Alejandra Fontalvo
24th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

For the first time ever, two Special Tactics Airmen assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing competed together in a major competition for Team USA Bobsledding Nov. 28-29, 2021 at Park City, Utah.

U.S. Air Force Special Tactics Officer Maj. Chris Walsh and Staff Sgt. Matt Beach, a combat controller, competed together at the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation North American Cup for a chance to represent Team USA at the 2022 Winter Olympics.

As a Special Tactics Officer, Walsh is trained to lead teams of special operations ground forces for global access, precision strike and personnel recovery missions, however since August of 2019 he's been training and competing as a full-time athlete in the Air Force's World Class Athlete Program. WCAP provides active duty, National Guard and reserve service members the opportunity to train and compete at national and international sports competitions with the ultimate goal of selection to the U.S. Olympic team while maintaining a professional military career.

"It's great to be in the Olympic team picture at all," said Walsh. "Competing with Team USA, USA Bobsled and the other athletes is a pretty big honor and to represent the Air Force on an international stage is awesome. You hope that you've done enough and things work out to where you end up making the olympic team, regardless of that outcome, to me the whole journey of learning a new sport and being able to compete and push myself to the highest level has been very rewarding."

Beach, currently assigned to the 22nd Special Tactics Squadron at Joint Base Lewis McChord, Washington, started his bobsledding journey in 2020 under the guidance of Walsh and fellow Air Force Special Operations Command teammate and bobsled athlete, Capt. Dakota Lynch, a U-28 pilot.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Chris Walsh, a Special Tactics Officer assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing and the Air Force's World Class Athlete Program and Staff Sgt. Matt Beach, a combat controller assigned to the 22nd Special Tactics Squadron, pose for a portrait on Nov. 28, 2021 at Park City, Utah. For the first time ever, two Special Tactics Airmen competed together at the International Bobsled and Skeleton Federation North American Cup for a chance to represent Team USA at the Olympics. Special Tactics Airmen serve as a special operations air-ground integration force leading global access, precision strike, personnel recovery and battlefield surgery operations. Courtesy Photo.

"Being introduced to the sport by a fellow ST member is an example of just how good the leadership in the community is," said Beach. "Having people like Maj. Walsh and Capt. Lynch to coach me through the process has been pivotal to getting me to where I am. Very rarely does anyone come in and instantly master the push and load. It's a process, but it's a process I look forward to."

Both ST operators are push athletes, who use their explosive strength and precision to accelerate a two or four-man bobsled. In order to excel in this role, the athletes have to conduct thousands of correct repetitions to make sure every hundredth of a second counts. Although the physical training for this process is different from the fitness training required for special operations missions, the mindset needed is similar.

“The biggest thing from Special Tactics that translates to bobsledding is the mindset that you gain from going through all the ST training,” said Walsh. “It’s that no-quit, figure out how to find a solution, figure out a way to be successful-type of mindset. There are days where it’s really tough and you have to do a lot of late-night work on the sled and then get up early the next morning to compete, so having that gritty mindset is very valuable.”

In addition to the “gritty” mindset, Special Tactics operators are accustomed to being in extreme pressure situations where high levels of precision are required in rescue missions, controlling aircraft or guiding bombs on targets, which in turn helps them as athletes compete at the highest levels.

“To compete at this level requires the same focus and attention to detail as pre-mission prep and mission execution,” said Beach. “[Bobsledding], believe it or not, has a lot of parallels with the ST community.”

Unlike Walsh, Beach is not currently part of the World Class Athlete Program and still works as a full-time combat controller continuing to train alongside his teammates at the 22nd STS.

“Competing at this level while maintaining all the currencies expected of us as operators is not an easy feat,” said Beach. “Scuba diving all day and jumping out of planes in the middle of the night is not the best recovery when having to race some of the best athletes in the nation, but I have found a way to make it work.”

In typical ST fashion, both athletes and operators are determined to continue to push themselves to the highest level in whatever they do. For example last year, Beach took on a popular internet fitness challenge back at his squadron in which he had to complete a sub-five-minute mile and squat 500 pounds in the same day. Not only did he complete the challenge, but made sure it was executed to the highest standard by using a certified professional running track and receiving official review from USA Powerlifting judges to verify the squat.

Meanwhile, Walsh also had his eye on professional car racing and became the first active-duty service member to compete in the TC America Series, a touring car racing series in Virginia earlier this year. He ended up placing third overall among some of the top car racers in North America.

Although the ST Airmen hope to represent their country

on the Olympic stage, in 2022 for Walsh and 2026 for Beach, even more so, they love the thrill of a good challenge and encourage others to pursue their goals no matter what.

“The best advice I can give anybody to accomplish anything they want to do is, to just start it,” said Walsh. “There’s never a perfect plan from the beginning. I can wait until the moment’s right or I can jump when I’m at an 80% solution and see where I land. And if I fail, figure out how to fail better the next time and eventually succeed. Just begin to build whatever it is that you hope to do. Once you start, you can figure things out as you go.”

Walsh and Beach placed 6th overall in their most recent competition, despite some equipment issues. They will be competing once more before the 2022 Olympics in Lake Placid, New York, Dec. 18-20, 2021.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Chris Walsh, a Special Tactics Officer assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing and the Air Force’s World Class Athlete Program and Staff Sgt. Matt Beach, a combat controller assigned to the 22nd Special Tactics Squadron, participate in a bobsled competition Nov. 28, 2021 at Park City, Utah. For the first time ever, two Special Tactics Airmen competed together at the International Bobsled and Skeleton Federation North American Cup for a chance to represent Team USA at the Olympics. Special Tactics Airmen serve as a special operations air-ground integration force leading global access, precision strike, personnel recovery and battlefield surgery operations. Courtesy photo.

Air Force Special Operations Command



24th SOW vice delivers keynote speech at Women Veterans Memorial unveiling

By U.S. Air Force Capt. Alejandra Fontalvo
24th Special Operations Wing

Col. Allison Black, vice commander of the 24th Special Operations Wing, Air Force Special Operations Command, delivered the keynote speech at the unveiling ceremony of the Okaloosa County Women Veterans Memorial in Fort Walton Beach, Fla. Nov. 11, 2021.

The memorial, located at Veterans Park on Okaloosa Island, will now feature eight statues of women veterans throughout history. Included in the list of honorees are:

Margaret Corbin, a soldier in the revolutionary war who fought courageously next to her husband in the Continental Army; Cathay Williams, an African American woman who enlisted under a male alias to serve in the U.S. Army during the civil war; Jacqueline Cochran, a pilot from Defuniak Springs, who became the first woman to break the sound barrier in a fighter aircraft and receive the Distinguished Flying Cross; and U.S. Air Force retired Maj. Naseema, a fellow Air Commando, who was born in Afghanistan and later became a Pashto linguist, critical in the early days of the Global War on Terror.

“The stories of the women honored by these monuments are utterly remarkable, but they’re not surprising,” said Brig. Gen. Scott Cain, commander of the 96th Test Wing at Eglin Air Force Base and ceremony guest speaker. “They exemplify everything we look for in our heroes and in our leaders: the

American spirit and courageous service with grit and grace.”

Cain shared a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt during the height of World War II encouraging women to serve, “This is not a time when women should be patient, we’re in a war and we need to fight it with every weapon possible.” He noted how the women memorialized in the park also weren’t patient when it came to serving their country.

“Col. Black is everything Eleanor Roosevelt had imagined,” Cain said as he introduced Black.

“Distinguishing herself as the first female AC-130H

The women memorialized here in the park represent the best of all of us. Like all of their brothers and sisters in uniform, past and present, they kept the promise that we will bear any burden and endure any hardship in the cause of freedom.

— Col. Allison Black

Spectre navigator to open fire in combat operations and the first female recipient of the Air Force Combat Action Medal. She’s an exemplary leader, Airman and represents not only the Air Force core values, but our nation’s values.”

Black, a native of Long Island, New York enlisted in the Air Force

in 1992 as a Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape specialist and later earned her commission as a navigator for Air Force Special Operations Command. She has flown a total of over 3,400 hours with 2,000 combat hours in the AC-130H Spectre gunship and the U-28A Draco.

“What an incredible way to celebrate Veterans Day,” said Black. “The women memorialized here in the park represent the best of all of us. Like all of their brothers and sisters in uniform, past and present, they kept the promise that we will bear any burden and endure any hardship in the cause of freedom.”

Black recalled her early years as one of only a

few female combat aviators and specifically, her first combat mission in Afghanistan. During this mission, the Afghan general and leader of the Northern Alliance was surprised to hear a woman's voice on the radio of a warplane. The Afghan general would later share his engagement with Black to a group of Afghan women at a Burkha unveiling ceremony to encourage the women to continue resisting Taliban rule.

"Like many women I had no idea the impact I was making," said Black.

"Every one of us has a story and as we walk on the trail outside and remember these specific eight selfless women, many more stories will come to light

and those stories will become inspiration for the next generation as they find their way in the world."

When wondering about how the women memorialized in the park felt about being honored this way, Black felt confident that the women would understand the importance of sharing their story and setting the example for others like her and her fellow Airmen to follow.

"This memorial for women veterans is important for our community as it provides a place to be inspired, it provides a place for families to

gather and talk about sacrifice and bravery," said Black. "It will serve as a reminder to young girls and young boys that anything is possible."

This memorial for women veterans is important for our community as it provides a place to be inspired, it provides a place for families to gather and talk about sacrifice and bravery.

— Col. Allison Black



Colonel Allison Black, vice commander of the 24th Special Operations Wing, speaks during the Women Veterans Memorial Unveiling at Veterans' Park in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, Nov. 11, 2021. The park features eight statues in honor of women who have served and continue to serve in the United States military. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Brandon Esau.

*Marine Forces, Special
Operations Command*

Guns up: Marine Raiders conduct company-level ranges





Marine Raiders fire the M2 .50-caliber heavy machine gun during a company training event in Jacksonville, N.C., Oct. 1, 2021. The Marine Raiders refined their marksmanship techniques on various weapons systems including sniper rifles, machine guns and grenade launchers prior to conducting team level training. Photos by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Brennan Priest.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command Green Beret talks resilience through life-changing injury

Army Master Sgt. Ivan Morera is a Special Forces medic wounded during a mission in Afghanistan. This is his story, in his words, about resilience and what it took to overcome a life-changing injury – losing his hand.

By USSOCOM Visual Multimedia Support Division

My name is Master Sgt. Ivan Morera, United States Army Special Forces. I'm an 18 Delta, a Special Forces medic. I've been in Special Forces for 14 years. When I joined the Army in 2001, I joined as a combat medic. I was part of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and during that time we had a Special Forces team come through our firebase. I saw them, they were all decked out in their cool uniforms and equipment, and I was like, "I want to do that."

After we got back from Iraq I went to the qualification course. It took two years to graduate the course because the medic portion is a year long. After I graduated, I was assigned to 1st Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group. I was junior medic at the time. I actually met my team in Afghanistan. It was an eye opener. It had been four years since I went to combat and it was a completely different scenario.

August 16, 2013, I was driving a mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicle in Kandahar, Afghanistan, on a convoy to conduct an operation. I was forced off the road by a Taliban insurgent on a motorcycle wearing an improvised explosive device vest. When I came off the road, I tried to come back and I overcompensated and the vehicle flipped. My driver-side door broke off and I was knocked unconscious. When I woke up, the vehicle and the ground had crushed my left hand. I was stuck (under the door.) My team sergeant put a tourniquet on me and the junior medic had to cut the rest of my hand off to pull me out of the vehicle.

Guys were coming over to make sure I was ok and I'm like, "Where's the bird, where's the bird!" They're like, "Two mikes (minutes) out, two mikes out!" And I passed out.



Parachute Operations Officer and U.S. Special Operations Command Para-Commando Andy Serrano, puts the final touches on a parachute rig for Army Master Sgt. Ivan Morera, SOCOM Warrior Care Program Southern Region NCOIC Aug. 19, 2021. Morera, a Green Beret, is the Defense Department's only upper-body amputee whose military freefall qualified or a combat medic. Photo by U.S. Air Force Maj. Ryan DeCamp.

I ended up in San Antonio, Brooke Army Medical Center. That second night was a real tough night. I was in really bad pain. I couldn't sleep and I started to doubt myself (crying). How am I going to support my family? What does my team think of me? What does my family think of me? What am I going to do?

So I started making goals. I was like, ok, first thing in

the morning, I'm going for a walk. Next, I'm going to do a workout. Those were short-term goals. Then I'm like, "What am I going to do next?" We're going to start rehab, we're going to get out of here in six months and deploy again. That didn't happen, but it was a goal.

We did a lot of rehabilitation on the knee and the shoulder and they were getting me ready to start using prosthetics. It really didn't take very long for me to get the hang of using prosthetics, maybe about a week. I was at the Center for the Intrepid for about 10 months. They did a great job. Their number one concern was ensuring I could meet my goals. Occupational therapy really focused on learning how to do small things with my prosthetics. One of the key things I did with my occupational therapist was learn how to tie knots. Every SF Soldier has to know how to tie knots, right? (laughing). I'm learning how to cook, how to make my bed. Those a little things people don't understand when they have both hands. When you're doing it with one hand it gets challenging.

Once I completed (all the therapy) I went back to 7th Group, concentrating on strength and conditioning, getting me back to combat shape. I just wanted to get back to the group. I wanted to get back to work. I wanted to get back to being a Green Beret again. At one point it defined who I was. The biggest thing was I'm not giving up on my dream of being a Green Beret.

Every day I get a little stronger. I get a little better. Eight years later I'm still recovering physically, mentally and spiritually. Everyday I'm able to let go of some anxiety,

some memories. Everyday I'm able to let go of something and get my old self back. Every day I get that second chance. I don't want to continue to do that (pointing behind himself), I want to do something better. So let's move forward and see how we can get better. Every day you open your eyes, it's like, "Alright, I got another chance."

I just want to show people, no matter what your situation is, you can overcome it, you can get through it. Your situation doesn't define who you are. It's your character, it's your heart, it's what you think of yourself that defines who you are. I've had guys come up and tell me I've inspired them, I've motivated them. To me, that means a lot. To be honest, I'm better for it. I'm a better man now. I'm a better husband, I'm a better father, because my priorities changed. At first it was just about me and my career and being the best Green Beret medic I could be. But then after my injury it was like, what's more important – my family or my career?

Every time I move forward I bring the people with me that need help. That's important to me. I'm just one guy. I look at myself as a regular guy. I'm not anybody special. I'm just too stupid to know how to quit.

Editors note: In addition to the medical care on his dominant hand, the vehicle rollover in Afghanistan also caused extensive damage to his left shoulder and knee, both requiring reconstructive surgery and extensive rehabilitation.

Despite all these injuries, Morera is the only upper-body amputee qualified for military free fall in the DOD. He's also the military's only upper-body amputee serving as a combat medic.



Army Master Sgt. Ivan Morera skydives with SOCOM's Para-Commandos Aug. 19, 2021, on a training jump in Zephyrhills, Fla. Morera was formally assigned to 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) as a Special Forces Medical Sergeant and Operations Sergeant. Courtesy photo.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command Special operations leadership visit Hungary



Gen. Richard D. Clarke, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, (center) and Maj. Gen. David Tabor, (center right) commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Europe, visited Hungary Nov. 18, 2021, as part of a routine, regional circulation through central Europe. Courtesy photo.

By U.S. Embassy Hungary

Gen. Richard D. Clarke, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, and Maj. Gen. David Tabor, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Europe, visited Hungary Nov. 18, 2021, as part of a routine, regional circulation through central Europe.

Clarke met with U.S. Embassy Budapest leadership, along with Hungary's senior military leadership. He also met with senior civilian and military leaders from several other countries in the region. Clarke also delivered remarks at the Hungarian Ministry of Defense-led Resiliency Conference.

"I want to thank Defense Minister Tibor Benkő and Defense Chief Lt. Gen. Romulusz Ruszin-Szendi for



Maj. Gen. David Tabor, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Europe, visited Hungary Nov. 18, 2021, as part of a routine, regional circulation through central Europe. Courtesy photo.

their hospitality and providing an opportunity for the various military leaders to connect today,” Clarke said. “The teamwork we build with our partners helps us continue to address mutual security concerns and increase interoperability. This year we mark the hundredth anniversary of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Hungary, and our

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— Gen. Richard D. Clarke

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Clarke’s visit underscores the U.S. government’s commitment to the military and security relationship in Hungary. In April 2019, the U.S. and Hungary signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement in Washington, D.C. The DCA modernized the previous status of forces agreement to reflect new realities in defense. That agreement represents another positive step forward in the journey that the

Hungarian people began more than thirty years ago, when they embraced liberty, and more than twenty years ago, when Hungary with overwhelming public support joined NATO. As we sign the implementing agreements further detailing our cooperation, we continue to train, exercise, and collaborate as Allies and partners.



Gen. Richard D. Clarke, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, visited Hungary Nov. 18, 2021, as part of a routine, regional circulation through central Europe. Courtesy photo.



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**U.S. Navy Cdr.
Brian Bourgeois
SEAL Team 8**

Editor's note: Honored are those special operations forces who lost their lives in combat or training since the October 2021 issue of Tip of the Spear.

Combat controllers from the 320th Special Tactics Squadron, left, and 7th Marine Communication Battalion radio operators, right, communicate with aircraft during Remote Island Disaster Exercise 2021 at Ukibaru Island, Japan, Nov. 2, 2021. U.S. Air Force CCT's specialize in a multitude of infiltration methods including diving, parachuting and military freefall. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Stephen Pulter.

