

Tip Spear

December 2023

**Hurlburt Field U-28A crews
awarded Distinguished
Flying Cross - first ever for
Draco community**



United States Special Operations Command



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Tip of the Spear

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2022 Defense Media Merit Award Winner

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(Cover) U-28A Draco aircrew members pose for a photo after receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross at a ceremony held at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Nov. 17, 2023. The crews earned the honor for their efforts in support of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Hussein Enaya.

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U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



Partnerships serve as the focus during SOCAFRICA's Silent Warrior 23

Courtesy Story

Special Operations Command Africa

Military and government leaders from across the globe came together for Silent Warrior 23, Dec. 4 – 7, 2023 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

The multi-day conference, hosted by Special Operations Command Africa, aimed to facilitate forums for senior military leaders to discuss shared concerns and identify collaborative solutions to the strategic, operational, and tactical issues in Africa. Many leaders in attendance were also from their respective countries'

special operations forces.

The annual conference, now in its 12th year, had 55 nations in attendance – 22 African countries and 33 international partners. This year, the conference placed a heavy emphasis on violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and the unique challenges they pose across the African continent.

U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Ron Foy, SOCAFRICA's commander, stated during opening remarks for the conference that the best way to combat the aforementioned VEOs was through sustained partnerships.



Lt. Gen. (Ret) Derick Mgwebi, South African National Defense Forces, conducts a presentation during Silent Warrior 23, Dec. 6, 2023, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Silent Warrior is a multi-day conference which facilitates a forum for senior military leaders to discuss shared concerns and identify collaborative solutions to the strategic, operational, and tactical issues in Africa. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Tyler McQuiston.

“We recognize the strong potential Africa brings not only to the continent but to the globe as a whole,” said Foy. “A stable and prosperous Africa continues to and always will be in the world’s best interest.”

Also in attendance was the U.S. Africa Command team, U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Michael Langley, AFRICOM commander, and U.S. Marine Corps Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Woods, AFRICOM senior enlisted leader. Langley provided opening remarks for the conference.

“Sessions such as Silent Warrior 23, give me the opportunity to listen,” said Langley. “Listen to your viewpoints. Listen to some of the challenges but moreover, listen to the opportunities across the continent of Africa.”

“Whether it be the enduring fight against al-Shabaab or against violent extremist organizations across the Sahel,” said Langley. “I am listening to you and your ideas collectively.”

Senior officials from SOCAFRICA’s African partner nations were some of the guest speakers for the event. On theme with the conference, Brig. Gen. John Njeru, Kenya Defence Force, organized an in-depth discussion on al-Shabaab, a VEO that has posed a significant security threat in Njeru’s home country of Kenya and other nations throughout east Africa.

Njeru spoke about the increasing capabilities of al-Shabaab, such as the spread of disinformation, large scale recruitment and the increasing use of drones and how those challenges can be addressed through partnerships and collective efforts

The conference also afforded leadership the opportunity to have small-group discussions on various topics. One breakout session focused on enlisted development within not only U.S. forces, but SOCAFRICA’s international and African partners as well.

Command Sgt. Maj. Garrick Banfield, the senior enlisted leader for SOCAFRICA, stressed the importance of enlisted service members and the benefits they bring to multilateral planning and operations.

“Enlisted leaders provide a unique perspective and a vantage point,” said Banfield. “These vantage points illuminate a situation which can then enable enlisted leaders to provide advice and counsel to their officers.”

Multiple agencies came together to ensure the success of the conference. SOCAFRICA staff took on a



U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Ron Foy provides opening remarks during Silent Warrior 23, Dec. 4, 2023, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Tyler McQuiston.

heavy load with the logistics and planning efforts of the conference. Airmen from the Language Enabled Airman Program ensured the practices shared were translated to French, Arabic and Portuguese-speaking countries.

“In conferences like Silent Warrior, we facilitate clear and accurate communication across languages and cultures,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Scott Guthrie, LEAP interpreter and 52nd

Health Care Operations Squadron physician. “This not only enhances mutual understanding and cooperation but also respects and acknowledges the cultural diversity of the participants – leading to more effective international collaborations.”

Foy thanked those in attendance for battling the elements to participate in the discussions, briefs, and breakout sessions. He also stressed the importance of SOCAFRICA’s enduring partnerships with their African partners.

“Partnerships serve as the backbone for our resolve to defeat violent extremism,” said Foy. “And I can say without reservation no VEO can match our collective strength. None. We’re much stronger together.”

Partnerships serve as the backbone for our resolve to defeat violent extremism.

– U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Ron Foy

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



SOCAFRICA forces train alongside partners in Tanzania

Courtesy Story

Special Operations Command Africa

U.S. Special Operations Command Africa conducted a joint combined exchange training alongside the Tanzania People's Defense Forces Marine Special Forces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania that concluded November 17, 2023. Naval Special Warfare forces assigned to SOCAFRICA completed the four-week exchange with their Tanzanian counterparts highlighting special operations focused training to bolster mil-to-mil interoperability.

During the JCETs' duration, partner forces collaborated on various tactical skills to include visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS), synchronizing greater maritime security efficiencies and cooperation. Honing VBSS and other marine operational capabilities underscores the critical significance of enabling maritime security throughout vital waterways providing sustenance and strategic transit in East Africa.

"Our Tanzanian partners are skilled and diligent operators navigating complex environments on land and at sea," said U.S. Navy Capt. Scott Fentress, director of operations at SOCAFRICA. "Collectively through this JCET, we've not only enhanced our interoperability and operational capability, but we forged tighter bonds. It is through those bonds that we remain committed to an enduring relationship for a prosperous Tanzania."

The U.S. maintains a 60-year partnership with Tanzania and during that history has conducted eight JCETs to include the first Civil Affairs JCET in 2022. Incorporating civil affairs elements into the defense process complements the traditional military exchanges, broadening the scope of the security aperture.

The U.S. recognizes the strides our Tanzanian partners have made in recent years to ensure security



Tanzania Marine Special Forces members host a closing ceremony following a joint combined exchange training with U.S. special operations forces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Nov. 17, 2023. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Joseph Pick.

throughout the nation and with other African partners regionally. The U.S.-Tanzania relationship encompasses more than solely mil-to-mil engagements but also strong diplomatic ties and presence.

"Tanzania has been a bastion of peace and stability," said U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania Michael Battle. "It is in our strategic interest and it's in our vested national interest as Americans to keep Tanzania stable because its stability represents a foundation in East Africa of governmental, constitutional and military stability, which allows us to have a better trading partner with the rest of the world."

U.S. special operations forces continually seek cooperatively beneficial African-led, U.S. enabled engagements across the continent. Through these engagements, U.S. forces strengthen their partnerships in Africa to attain greater regional security.

Tanzania and Special Operations Command Africa service members render salutes during the playing of anthems at a closing ceremony following a joint combined exchange training with U.S. special operations forces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Nov. 17, 2023. Joint Combined Exchange Trainings enhance U.S. relationships with partner nations by developing and maintaining critical military-to-military connections and improving readiness and interoperability. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Joseph Pick.



U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



US, Netherlands, and Belgian forces host medical exercise in preparation for Exercise Flintlock 2024

Courtesy Story *Special Operations Command Africa*

U.S. Special Operations Command Africa participated in a multinational field training exercise Sept. 24-30, 2023, in Texel, Netherlands. In preparation for the upcoming Exercise Flintlock 2024, U.S., Netherlands, and Belgian forces assembled to conduct preventative medical training.

The joint multinational force health protection training event amassed 25 personnel from SOCAFRICA and U.S. Army Europe and Africa's 71st Medical Detachment, 30th Medical Brigade, alongside Netherlands and Belgian FHP

units to hone preventative medicine skills following a crisis scenario focusing on initial entry operations. This will help to strengthen allied interoperability and medical knowledge between the partner forces. This training allowed the allied partners to share best practices and identify critical gaps on emerging threats impacting the present and future battlefield.

"This event allowed the participants to form a better understanding of regulatory requirements, procedures, capabilities, and thought processes across the three nations, and served as a critical training prior to supporting future Flintlock exercises," said Maj. Phillip George,



Personnel from 30th Medical Brigade and U.S. Army Special Operations Command – Africa along with Dutch and Belgian Preventive Medicine units pose for a photo during a multinational field training exercise Sept. 30, 2023. The exercise, which focuses on the preventive medicine response following a disaster scenario, builds interoperability between nations while allowing multinational preventive medicine specialties to train on individual tasks. Courtesy photo.



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Luengas explains to multinational preventive medicine counterparts how to setup a mosquito trap and how the device assists with the sampling, monitoring, and surveillance of vector-borne diseases on Texel Island, Netherlands, Sept. 25, 2023. Personnel from 30th Medical Brigade and U.S. Army Special Operations Command – Africa participate in a multinational field training exercise with Dutch and Belgian Preventive Medicine units. Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Mary Johnson.

commander of the 71st Medical Detachment. “We hope to continue these combined exercises to further build our knowledge base and camaraderie between preventive medicine assets across NATO.”

This Joint Multinational FHP exercise served as a follow-on engagement to February’s Preventative Medicine Pre-Deployment event held with U.S. and Netherlands forces. Building upon the February engagement, the partnership expanded the FHP exercise to include Belgian partners. This partnership highlights the value of Exercise Flintlock and its ability to build enduring relationships that extend far beyond the exercise.

“The opportunity for SOCAFRICA to cross train with international partners and allies not only enhances our own interoperability and capabilities but demonstrates the larger enduring resolve of NATO members and non-NATO

partners to support and empower our African partners as they continue to enhance capacity and interoperability across northwest Africa,” said Maj. Adam DeMarco, lead planner of Flintlock 2024. “Exercise Flintlock 24 is going to be the largest engagement of African and international partner special operations forces in history and the FHP teams’ strengthened collaboration will greatly contribute to the overall success of the exercise.”

This engagement not only enhances interoperability efforts between the three forces for Flintlock, but also for U.S. European Command’s Defender Europe exercise as well. Both military events will enable continued security cooperation in the African and European areas of responsibility.

“Being able to take part in this exercise was a real opportunity for us. We were able to compare our working methods and learn from each other. I hope that our approach as veterinarians within the FHP was also an added value for our American and Dutch colleagues,” said Belgian Vet Capt. Van Leeuw Corine. “This collaboration is extremely enriching, and we look forward to repeating the experience.”

The role of the FHP teams at Flintlock will be to identify, document, and mitigate environmental and occupational health exposures that pose a risk to the force and mission.

Hosted next year in Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire, Exercise Flintlock is U.S. Africa Command’s premier and largest annual special operations exercise focused on enabling our African partners to conduct counterterrorism operations while adhering to the rule of law to enable a safe, secure, and prosperous Africa.



2nd Lt. Zeiler and Sgt. 1st Class Luengas, Dutch Eerste-Luitenant (OF1) Pullens, and Belgian 1ste Sergeant-Majoor (OR-7) Nieuwenhuyse compare field water sampling methods and discuss the different procedures used in each country Sept. 25, 2023, on Texel Island, Netherlands. Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Mary Johnson.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



Naval Special Warfare enhances allied defense with Romanian Special Operations Forces

*By U.S. Navy Lt.j.g. Martin Carey
Naval Special Warfare Group TWO*

East-Coast based Naval Special Warfare operators (SEALs) and the 164th Romanian Naval Special Operations Forces (ROUSOF) conducted training on maritime interdiction operations, special reconnaissance, and special operations tactics to enhance allied defense throughout the European region. The joint effort was conducted Nov. 4-17, 2023 and enhanced maritime expertise and strengthened the capacity to respond to maritime crises in the Black Sea region.

“Our partnership with the Romanian Naval Special Operations Forces is in direct alignment with the U.S. National Defense Strategy’s emphasis on strengthening alliances and partnerships. Together, we prepare for the challenges posed by the unique operational environment here as we work in tandem to preserve security during this critical time,” said Maj. Gen. Steven G. Edwards, Commander of Special Operations Command Europe.

During the evolution, SEALs and ROUSOF conducted a multitude of interoperability and training iterations including close quarters combat techniques, urban patrol movements, breacher training and integrated visit, board, search and seizure tactics. The ability for U.S. and NATO special operations forces to integrate seamlessly across multiple operating areas further refines their capabilities to deploy in support of real-world operations in the area.

“Working alongside our allied Romanian special operators provides us the ability to further enhance our capabilities in order to meet operational demands,” said the senior Naval Special Warfare Operator on site. “These opportunities are not only invaluable for the SEALs, but also the numerous support personnel who



East-Coast based U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators (SEALs) conduct live-fire weapons training with the 164th Romanian Naval Special Operations Forces near Constanta, Romania, Nov. 9, 2023. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Bill Carlisle.

enable us to complete our mission in a joint environment.”

In the spirit of solidarity and shared commitment to regional security, the collaboration between SEALs and ROUSOF serves as a testament to the vital importance of international partnerships within the European Command Area of Responsibility. Strengthening alliances through joint training initiatives bolsters the capabilities of both nations’ special operations forces and underscores the collective dedication to preserve peace and security in the Black Sea region.

The 164th Romanian Naval Special Operations Forces are a highly specialized unit of the Romanian Navy who conduct direct action missions, special reconnaissance, and maritime operations to safeguard the interests of Romania and promote regional security.

East-Coast based U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators (SEALs) conduct visit, board, search, and seizure training with the 164th Romanian Naval Special Operations Forces near Constanta, Romania, Nov. 16, 2023. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Bill Carlisle.



U.S. Special Operations Command - North



Special Operations Command North hosts second annual Special Operations Forces Symposium

By Maj. Ann Marie Annicelli
U.S. Special Operations Command North

Special Operations Command North hosted its second annual Special Operations Forces Symposium at the U.S. Army Garrison Fort Carson, Colo., Oct. 23-27, 2023.

This year's event expanded on last year's Arctic focus to include a holistic look at threats across the entirety of the U.S. Northern Command's area of responsibility. The primary objectives of this year's symposium were to strengthen relationships and develop a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities of homeland defense within and approaching the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility, while also evolving the role of special operations in globally integrated layered defense and deterrence.

North American Aerospace Defense Command and USNORTHCOM commander Gen. Glen D. VanHerck opened the conference by discussing the importance of integrated deterrence through global collaboration across geographic regions and the unique role SOF serve in what he deemed, "The most noble mission – the defense of North America."

"Homeland defense starts forward with a global mindset that synchronizes integrated effects with our allies and other combatant commands," VanHerck explained. "We need to generate effects day to day and in crisis and conflict. SOF have incredible value through relationship building and day-to-day campaigning and are uniquely qualified to deny kinetic and nonkinetic threats."

More than 170 participants across 30 organizations and 8 nations spanning U.S. and foreign armed forces,



North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command commander Gen. Glen D. VanHerck delivered opening remarks at the second annual Special Operations Forces Symposium at Fort Carson, Colo., Oct. 23, 2023. VanHerck's comments focused on the importance of integrated deterrence through global collaboration across geographic regions and the unique role SOF serve in defense of the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility. The conference provided the opportunity to refine existing and identify new concepts necessary for SOF to support the defense of North America and allies and partners. Photo by U.S. Air Force Maj. Ann Marie Annicelli.

SOF, U.S. Coast Guard, interagency, intergovernmental, commercial, academia, and think tanks attended the conference.

To ensure the participants focused on strengthening relationships, identifying required authorities to execute defense and security activities, and projecting capabilities required to effectively campaign, U.S. Army Col. Matthew Tucker, SOCNORTH commander, set the tone at the start of the conference.

“Our Homelands are no longer a sanctuary immune to disruptive activity that could threaten our way of life,” said Tucker. “Our strategic competitors seek to transform our former sanctuaries into isolated garrisons from which we cannot project the forces necessary to secure our collective interests.

In order to address these facts, over the past two years, SOCNORTH focused on operationalizing SOF campaigning in the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility to enhance domain awareness and strategic understanding, counter malign influence and activities, strengthen partnerships with allies and partners, and build warfighting advantage in support of globally integrated layered defense and deterrence of the homelands – to include Canada, Mexico and the Bahamas.”

To establish a common understanding of the USNORTHCOM operating environment, the SOCNORTH intelligence division provided threat briefs on competitor activity in the Arctic, North America, and in partner nations.

The conference was then broken into three regions - southern, central and northern. The southern working group explored areas for enhanced cooperation with Mexican and Bahamian partners. In collaboration with interagency partners, the central region working group addressed vulnerabilities adversaries could exploit within North America that may endanger the U.S.’ ability to project power to a forward fight.

And, in the northern region working group, in support of the U.S. implementation plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic Region 2022, a key focus area for SOCNORTH, alongside participating nations from the United Kingdom, Canada, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the team advanced developing a SOF pan-Arctic approach to defending the North American Arctic and European high North.

“During the conference, the northern region working group discussed pathways for pursuing deeper integration through exercises and operations to share best practices not only for survival in the high latitudes, but more importantly, effective defense of the region,” said U.S. Army Col. Ronald Anzalone, SOCNORTH strategy and plans director. “Through a pan-Arctic approach, we can collectively improve domain awareness, advance exquisite capabilities in the challenging Arctic environment, and strengthen the integration of tactics to disrupt or deny malicious activity in the region.”

The week presented an opportunity to refine existing and identify new concepts necessary for SOF to support the defense of North America and allies and partners. The working groups honed key activities and agreed to continued collaboration while SOCNORTH leaders ensured SOF are integrated into allies’ and partners’, interagency, and

intergovernmental planning in the event of a crisis or conflict.

SOCNORTH plans and executes all-domain Special Operations to detect, deter and disrupt threats throughout the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility, and generate positions of advantage for the Nation.

During the conference, the northern region working group discussed pathways for pursuing deeper integration through exercises and operations to share best practices not only for survival in the high latitudes, but more importantly, effective defense of the region.

– U.S. Army Col. Ronald Anzalone



Special Operations Command North commander U.S. Army Col. Matthew Tucker delivered remarks at the second annual Special Operations Forces Symposium at Fort Carson, Colo., Oct. 23, 2023. Tucker’s remarks focused on strengthening relationships, identifying required authorities to execute defense and security activities, and projecting capabilities required to effectively campaign. The week presented an opportunity to refine existing and identify new concepts necessary for SOF to support the defense of North America and allies and partners. Photo by U.S. Air Force Maj. Ann Marie Annicelli.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



Indian MARCOS, US Navy SEALs conduct joint training exchange

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea Meiller

Naval Special Warfare Group ONE

A U.S. Navy SEAL Team conducted a joint training exchange with the Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) from Oct. 20 to Nov. 11, 2023.

The combined tactical training, which built upon the partner nation's collective maritime capabilities and long-standing partnership, included a focus on maritime interdiction operations, close quarters combat training, tactical combat casualty care and casualty evacuation procedures.

"Working with our partners in the Indian MARCOS was an enlightening experience," said a U.S. Naval Special warfare operator. "Strengthening partnerships and being able to connect operator to operator is always our focus, and we were able to do just that throughout this exercise."

The exercise helped to strengthen the U.S. and India's strong strategic partnership and highlighted both countries commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

As part of the training, the partner forces conducted multiple target assault iterations and maritime interdiction operations. The joint exchange culminated in two full-mission profiles — one direct-action raid and one maritime-interdiction operation.


U.S. special operations forces provide flexible response to contingencies in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. Integral to this capability is a forward-deployed posture and continuous engagement with partner and ally forces, furthering mutual interoperability and expanding regional expertise.

The U.S. and India have a rich history of cooperation on a wide range of diplomatic issues, including defense, non-proliferation, counterterrorism, peace-keeping, agriculture, education and more.

Naval Special Warfare is the nation's maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet's reach and gain and maintain access for the Joint Force in competition and conflict.



A West-Coast based Naval Special Warfare Operator conducts aerial sniper training with an Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) Operator from a CH-3 Sea King assigned to the Indian Marine Commando Flight during a joint training exercise. Photo by U.S. Navy Mass Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea D. Meiller.



U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators conduct medical evacuation training with a CH-3 Sea King assigned to the Indian Marine Commando Flight during a joint training exercise. Courtesy photo.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

The Originals conquer the shores of the Pacific Northwest



*By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael Wood
10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)*

Combat Divers assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) conducted maritime training in Astoria, Oregon, Oct. 30, 2023. The Green Berets partnered with Coast Guard Air Station Astoria and Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment for multiple training events, preparing them for a two-week long scenario-based exercise.

The cold and swift currents of the Columbia River provided training sites not readily accessible in Colorado. The most challenging exercises were reserved for portions of the Columbia River Bar, known as the “Graveyard of the Pacific.” An area of towering waves, turbulent waters, and shifting sandbars creates one of the most dangerous bar crossings in the world, responsible for more than 700 deaths. Waters fit to test the Army’s elite.

“This area creates some of the most challenging maritime conditions in the world,” said the Detachment Commander. “That’s the reason why the Coast Guard has their advanced helicopter rescue course, the national motorboat life skills course, for their 47-foot unsinkable boats; this is the waterway to prove that if you can execute proficiently here, you can perform anywhere.”

These Green Berets primarily conduct their training with the focus on special operations and deployments to Europe.

“Astoria’s hydrology looks very similar to Eastern Europe,” said the Detachment Commander. “It’s cold, visibility underwater is limited, high winds, extreme tides, and often in port cities challenging riverine conditions.”

The Army and Coast Guard have a relationship working with each other at the benefit of the United States. Coast Guard rescue swimmers provided these Green Berets tips and tricks on how to swim in the rough seas and water navigation techniques throughout the Pacific Northwest.

“We all have one goal and purpose, and that is to serve the American public, said Capt. Scott Jackson, the

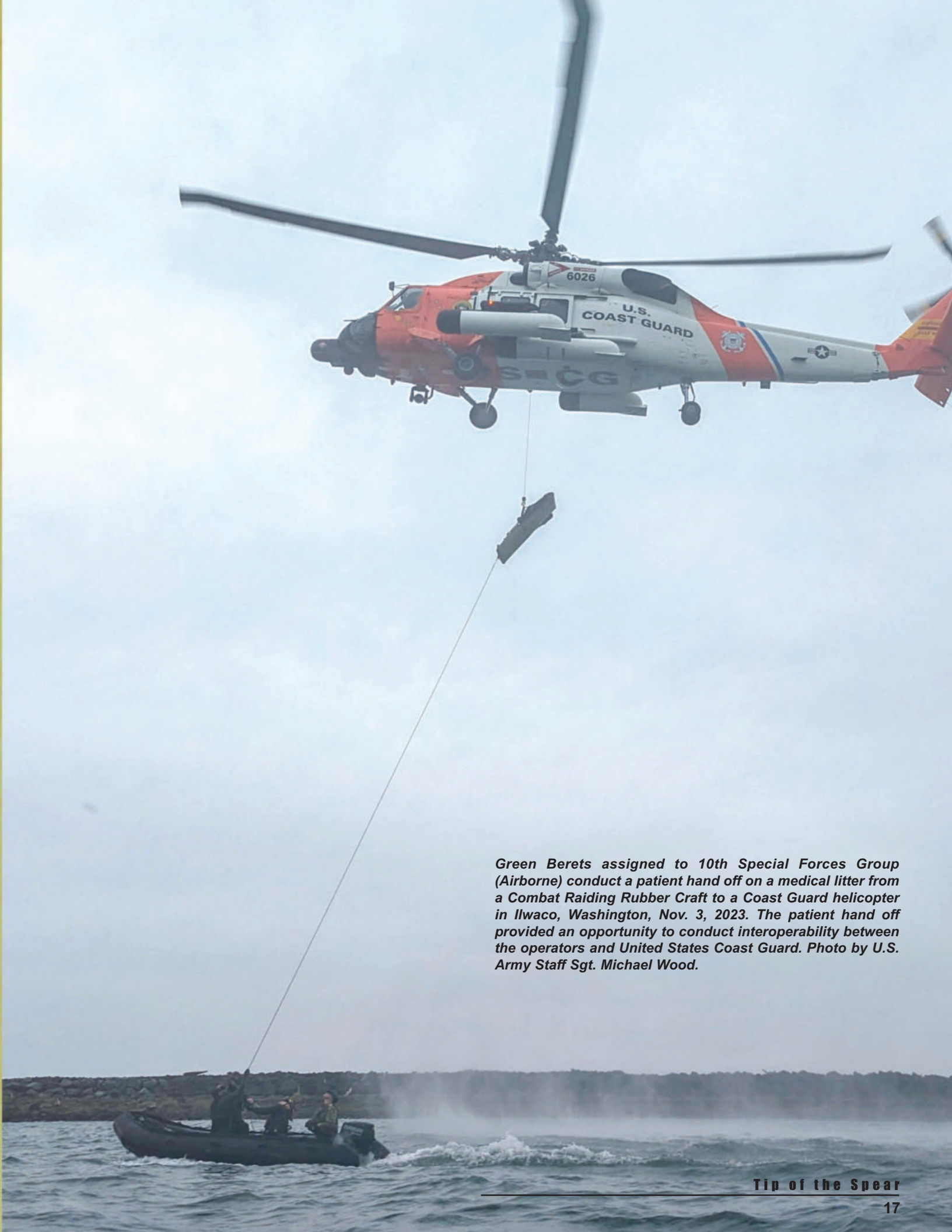


Combat Divers assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) prepare to dive into the Columbia River in Astoria, Oregon, Nov. 6, 2023. Combat divers hone their infiltration skills through rigorous training on a variety of platforms, including sea, land, and air. This training enables divers to swiftly insert into remote or hostile regions overseas and respond aggressively to the evolving threats of the 21st century. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael Wood.

commanding officer for Coast Guard Air Station Astoria. “Training events like this exist because we have a history of partnering together, like we did with hurricane Katrina and Rita; we saved American lives working together.”

The three weeks in Astoria was a progressive training evolution. The operators started with the fundamentals of maritime proficiencies focused on team members who have not had recent exposure to combat diving.

“Institutional knowledge can be difficult to maintain,” said a Detachment Commander with the 10th SFG(A) combat dive team. “Doing these kinds of exercises creates a solid foundation that enables us to operate safely, effectively, and proficiently, in a manner interoperable with joint forces and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies.”



Green Berets assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) conduct a patient hand off on a medical litter from a Combat Raiding Rubber Craft to a Coast Guard helicopter in Ilwaco, Washington, Nov. 3, 2023. The patient hand off provided an opportunity to conduct interoperability between the operators and United States Coast Guard. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael Wood.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

Florida National Guard holds Special Forces readiness evaluation event at CBJTC



*By U.S. Army Sgt. Spencer Rhodes
107th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

The Florida National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group, held a Special Forces Readiness Evaluation at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center Dec. 8-10, 2023. It's an event that happens a few times a year. It's open to civilians and military service members of all branches, and it is the first step of many for someone interested in becoming a Green Beret. A three-day event that grows more difficult each day, the process allows the 3-20th to gauge candidates on a range of traits and abilities to determine if someone is a good fit for the organization and to find those they believe will succeed in passing the official selection process held at Fort Liberty, North Carolina.

It's Friday morning, and around 20 men enter a classroom area for the welcome brief that will set the expectations for the weekend. In this SFRE, there are as many civilians as military personnel, some current and former soldiers, and even a few active-duty sailors from the U.S. Navy who traveled to CBJTC to participate. Each of them takes a number; it is the only thing they will be identified by until the weekend ends. Before they leave the classroom and are assigned training gear like rucksacks and dummy rifles, the cadre emphasizes a single critical point over and over: this is not just a tryout but a job interview. Everything they do and don't do, how they do it, and how they push through and engage with others as a group are all being evaluated, and it is not just a test. Those who perform the best will be invited to a board, where they will be literally interviewed by two of the most senior members in the unit: candidates will not get this chance if the weekend is deemed a failed interview.



Candidate 10 participates in a Special Forces Readiness Evaluation hosted by 3rd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center, carries a heavily weighted ammo can early Saturday morning, Dec. 9, 2023. Candidate 10, like all his peers, do not go by their names but a number given to them on day one. The day had ruck marches and strenuous team-building tasks that culminated in a down-pilot exercise that requires participants to push through and maintain their focus and communication to succeed. A SFRE is not selection, but a tryout to see if you are a good fit for the unit and deemed capable of likely passing the selection event held at Fort Liberty, North Carolina. The event is open to civilians and military servicemembers of all branches. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Spencer Rhodes.

All the candidates have trained for this in some way, shape, or form. The quality of that preparedness will show through when they reach a breaking point. One of the Green Beret instructors for the weekend, Staff Sgt. Jay,

says the most common miscalculation by participants is not adequately preparing their mind and body for the kind of work it will go through.

“A majority of time, they think that if they just can run good and ruck good, then they’re fine. But it’s getting that mental endurance going to really push them beyond the fact that like, understanding the body is going to shut down, they’re body is going to start quitting a lot earlier than they expect and how to work through that. That’s what I keep seeing a lot of candidates not understand. And they learn it the hard way,” says Jay.

An entire day is dedicated to PT tests, obstacle courses, and swimming tests; another day is dedicated to an additional ruck or land navigation, and another to team-building exercises that will push every candidate to their limit at every stage. Weaknesses and strengths quickly become apparent in different candidates, sometimes as a surprise even to them. Their instructors are strict and, at times, hard, but they never tear down an individual. Each instructor brings a different method to push candidates and assess the attributes of the men they engage throughout the day.

During the obstacle course, the group is split into different squads; those not in line preparing to start the course can eat and rest. While candidates wait for enough time to pass after the previous candidate starts, they stand at the first stage: two parallel bars for performing dips. Master Sgt. Dan Jones asks each candidate, “who are you, and why are you here?” A simple question, Jones says, but one that provides insight into their conviction for being there, what makes them tick when tested. He wants to find out their motivation in a very short amount of time. He says those who gave it real though prior to coming, should be able to give the answer confidently and quickly.

“There are the textbook answers, the elevator pitches, but I’m looking for something a little deeper. Who are you really? And does that come out in their presentation,” says Jones, “And when you bring it out you get that raw emotion and a better understanding of: is this person worth the effort? When they leave from that, they are now starting a very physically strenuous event, and now that mindset is at the vanguard of their thoughts, as they’re going through this event. Those are the kind of things that are like, ‘what pushes you to be better?’ Well, what did we talk about not thirty seconds ago? You have to keep that cycle going and get to know these people beyond just a number.”

Just as each prepared differently, each candidate possesses different motivations for being here. Alex Mayhan, a Petty Officer 2nd Class in the U.S. Navy granted permission to travel to CBJTC for the SFRE,

explained his primary purpose for being there during a brief period of rest during an exhausting portion of team exercises in the woods. His uniform drenched in sweat and half his face still covered with sand, Mayhan took a breath before answering: He was here for himself and his daughter. It was also not his first attempt at a path in special operations.

“I’ve already quit a special forces pipeline before, and when my kid grows up there’s going to be a time where she asks me: how do I get through the hard things in life? And If I can’t supply her with that answer because I have myself quit before then, uh, what kind of Dad would I be? So that’s partially why I’m here,” says Mayhan.

Staff Sgt. Jay, who has been an instructor for the SFRE for multiple years, says it’s rewarding to be a part of the process where you witness someone who was previously just a candidate at an event and to see them successfully become a Green Beret.

“Being able to see that progression, and seeing them go from you know, regular Joe Schmo, to making it through successfully, putting in the work and then making it to a team, it’s rewarding.”



During the Special Forces Readiness Evaluation, hosted by 3rd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center, Dec. 8-10, 2023, candidates are run through tests and exercises each day, some more grueling than others. Here, participants are told that after jumping into the lake, they will have a short amount of time to get back onto the raised deck; fail to meet the time hack, and they will have to re-enter the water and repeat the task until successful. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Spencer Rhodes.

Naval Special Warfare Command From the “Silent Ones” of Vietnam to today’s SWCC



By James D. Gray and Phil G. Garn

According to Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, Rear Adm. Keith Davids, “This is the Maritime Century, and NSW has a key role to play in terms of solving our Nation’s toughest problems in the maritime domain.”

During his remarks to the UDT/SEAL Association’s West Coast annual reunion Aug. 18, Davids explained the NSW team is adeptly positioned to bolster the Fleet’s operations in the world’s littorals—coastal waters that present unique challenges for naval operations.

To address those unique challenges, over the past six decades, Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen (SWCC) have evolved into a sophisticated force. Their expertise spans operational tactics, logistical support, and administrative governance, managing NSW’s fleet of agile small craft with precision and adaptability.

During World War II, the U.S. Navy’s prowess in small combatant operations was unmatched, with 45 Squadrons of PT Boats and a personnel complement ranging from 50,000 to 60,000 in roles spanning operations, training, and maintenance. The Office of Strategic Services’ (OSS) Maritime Unit further expanded this capability, maintaining its own fleet that included a PT Boat Squadron, crash boat flotilla, and submarine chasers. They also utilized a variety of indigenous craft, engaging in high-stakes littoral combat and reconnaissance missions across diverse theaters—from the icy Aleutians to the jungles of Burma, and the Mediterranean to the frigid Norwegian Coast.

Medal of Honor recipient John D. Bulkeley, who once served as commanding officer of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron Three, OSS Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron Two and the English Channel Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla, also led the Battle of La Ciotat off the coast of France. With a force of one destroyer, 17 PT boats and two British gunboats, the victorious Allies



Special Warfare Combatant-craft crewmen assigned to Special Boat Team 20 link together during a free-fall parachute jump from an Air Force C-130 at an altitude of approximately 12,500 feet. SWCCs employ their unique training, equipment, and tactics in missions worldwide. Courtesy photo.

sank a German merchant ship, corvette, and yacht, which led to the capture of 169 enemy sailors.

When asked why he engaged two enemy vessels, Captain Bulkeley, the most famous and influential PT Boat Sailors replied, “What else could I do? You engage, you fight, you win. That is the reputation of our Navy, then and in the future.”

However, these specialized littoral operations suffered a sharp decline in the post-war period as resources were reallocated and military strategy shifted focus. Although there was a brief resurgence during the Korean War, the Navy’s strategic emphasis soon returned to its conventional and nuclear blue water capabilities, leaving the small combatant expertise underutilized.

In the waning years of President Eisenhower’s term, a growing presidential focus on Counter Insurgency Warfare—recognized today as the genesis of U.S.



West Coast based Naval Special Warfare assets participate in an international maritime training evolution. Courtesy photo.

Special Operations—led to the formation of Boat Support Units (BSU). Even before the official commissioning of BSU-1 in February 1964, Gen. Paul Harkins foresaw their utility in Vietnam, calling upon the unit's Patrol Torpedo Fast (PTF) boats and SEALs to aid in the region's counterinsurgency efforts. With the commencement of their covert activities in 1964, the units of Mobile Support Team (MST) 1 initiated secretive missions targeting North Vietnamese operations. The versatile members of BSU-1 were also instrumental in testing a variety of riverine warfare vessels, including Patrol Craft Fast (PCF), Patrol Boat Riverine (PBR), hydrofoils, and hovercraft. These craft became the backbone of the Navy's newly instituted Task Forces 115, 116, and 117, designed to enhance the Navy's swift and flexible response to insurgent threats.

Ironically, the 'Silent Ones' from Mobile Support Team (MST) 2 of BSU-1 found themselves building their own SEAL support craft in 1967 due to the unavailability of the tested craft and trained personnel from Coronado for direct action operations. Their resourcefulness led to significant success in multi-craft clandestine operations across the Mekong Delta and on-the-ground missions throughout the Vietnam War. Despite their operational triumphs, there were considerations to disband the boat units post-conflict. It was the initiative of Jack Suddeth, a former commanding officer of BSU-1 and an Underwater Demolition Team veteran, that secured the necessary funding through the Naval Reserve Force. Suddeth's efforts were pivotal in sustaining the Riverine, Coastal Patrol, and Interdiction missions, along with integral

SEAL support. Although the rotation back to the Fleet for high-performing personnel from the BSU and Coastal River Squadron teams truncated their tours in NSW, the combat experience and expertise cultivated within Task Forces 115, 116, and 117, as well as MSTs 1, 2, and 3, continued to enrich the capabilities of NRF and active-duty boat units through joint training exercises over the decades.

From 1978 to 2002, Special Boat Squadrons on the East and West Coasts, served as the command headquarters for the operational Special Boat Units (SBU), much like today's Naval Special Warfare Group 4 (NSWG-

4). In the 1980s, personnel and vessels from the SBUs played pivotal roles in the Grenada invasion and the Lebanese Civil War. A strategic reorganization in 1987 saw NSW and its SBUs reassigned from the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets directly to United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Contrary to expectations, the first major deployment under USSOCOM was not a high-profile special operation but the 'Tanker Wars' against Iran, consisting of Operations like Earnest Will and Praying Mantis. These operations often involved non-stop Coastal Patrol/Interdiction and escort missions operating from mobile sea bases amidst the perilous, mine-laden waters of the Persian Gulf.

Relentless operations tempo typically leads to forgoing cosmetic upkeep and only completing necessary maintenance. This approach keeps boats in the water and on patrol but shines a spotlight on the material wear and tear of constant underway time. Retired Master Chief Jim Gray, who served as Chief Petty Officer in Charge of a Patrol Boat MK-III during Operation Earnest Will, recalls his response to a visiting VIP who mentioned the boats looked like they took a beating.

"It's not the NSW boats that are special," Gray told the visiting dignitary. "It's the crew that makes them work and successfully complete the missions."

During Operation Just Cause in Panama, SBU-26 distinguished itself by seizing assets belonging to Gen. Manuel Noriega, including his yachts and aircraft, and played a crucial role in quelling opposition forces

alongside SEAL units. SBUs were also integral to Foreign Internal Defense (FID) missions across Central and South America, reinforcing their adaptability and breadth of capability.

During the course of Operation Desert Shield/Storm from 1990 to 1991, Special Boat Unit operatives were swiftly deployed to the Persian Gulf. There, they conducted a variety of critical missions which included reconnaissance, combat search and rescue operations, and direct assaults on strategic oil and gas infrastructure. Additionally, SBU teams supported a major amphibious deception operation. They utilized high-speed boats to simulate an impending landing along the Kuwaiti coast, which effectively diverted approximately 10,000 Iraqi soldiers, diluting their defenses against Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf's main coalition ground forces. This maneuver played a key role in the success of the broader coalition strategy by misdirecting Iraqi military resources at a pivotal moment.

In the decade following, a transformational shift occurred within the Special Boat Units, spearheaded by

Master Chief Kelly Webb and a group of devoted enlisted personnel. Supported by admirals such as Thomas Richards and Raymond Smith, along with contributions from other SEALs, this team was instrumental in professionalizing SBU training. In a revolutionizing move for the community, they established the 'School House' within Naval Special Warfare Center, known today as the SWCC Training Center. This initiative enabled SWCC operators to pursue a dedicated career path exclusively within the NSW boat community, rather than rotating back to the general fleet after a single tour. As a result, specialized training in areas such as parachute qualifications, the Maritime External Air Transportation System (MEATS), and the Maritime Craft Aerial Deployment System for boat insertion became standard practice. Moreover, SWCC personnel were granted the opportunity to compete for positions within the elite Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU). The institution of the Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) program was another milestone, providing SWCC with their own commissioned leaders capable of guiding missions and



West Coast based Naval Special Warfare assets participate in a maritime training evolution. Courtesy photo.

serving in pivotal NSW leadership and advisory roles.

“The CWO program was established in 2002 to replace the Surface Warfare Officer requirement as MK-V officer in charge,” said retired CWO4 Dave Wylie, the first SWCC CWO. “Originally, we started with 32 billets to fill all MK-V OIC, training officers and NSWG-4 staff officer billets. By 2019, we were at 45 billets across all NSW echelons, to include Naval Special Warfare Command, N3, N8, NSW unit planners, DEVGRU, SOCOM acquisition office and the command Warrant Officer positions.”

The attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, marked the onset of the Global War on Terror, prompting the deployment of SWCC to multiple theaters worldwide. In Iraq, SWCC were engaged in the most intense riverine combat encounters since the Vietnam War. Their roles included conducting Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) missions, enforcing maritime denial operations, and executing the Maritime External Air Transportation System (MEATS). Beyond Iraq, the SWCC pursued the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in the Philippines, employing a variety of craft from

MK-V Special Operations Craft to NSW Rigid Inflatable Boats and even local dugout canoes for stealth and adaptability. In the Horn of Africa, they targeted the militant group al-Shabaab, and their adaptability extended to land-based operations in the rugged terrain of Afghanistan.

In October 2006, the transition of Special Boat Units into Special Boat Teams mirrored the organizational model of NSW’s SEAL Teams, a change underscored by the establishment of the Special Boat Operator (SB) rating. This structural evolution facilitated a more integrated and cohesive force within the Naval Special Warfare community. In tandem with these changes, SWCC veterans established the Combatant Craft Crewman Association, an organization committed to preserving the history and legacy of NSW service through historical preservation and charitable endeavors. Reflecting their expanded role, SWCC senior enlisted members have taken leadership positions in Special Reconnaissance Teams, and SWCC personnel have also joined the ranks of the esteemed Navy Parachute Team, ‘The Leap Frogs,’ showcasing their versatile skills in aerial operations.

In recent years, the Naval Special Warfare community has marked a historic milestone with women Sailors successfully qualifying as SWCC operators, demonstrating the community’s commitment to inclusivity and strength through diversity. Master Chief Joaquin Martinez furthered this progressive trajectory by becoming the first SWCC Command



Sailors assigned to Special Boat Team 12 navigate a Combatant Craft Medium through the Philippine Sea during an integrated transit with the expeditionary mine countermeasures (ExMCM) capability of Task Force 75. The maritime unmanned systems team in the 7th Fleet area of responsibility launched and recovered MK 18 Mod 2 unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV) to execute sonar hydrographic surveys in order to detect and identify underwater hazards. Photo by U.S. Navy photo Petty Officer 1st Class Adam Brock.

Master Chief at the Naval Special Warfare Center, where he oversees the rigorous training pipelines for both SEAL and SWCC candidates. Under his stewardship, SWCC are encouraged to excel across all facets of their profession. As Master Chief Martinez articulates, War Boat pin worn by SWCC Masters is a constant reminder that being a member of the world’s premier maritime special operations force requires mastering every facet of their profession and requires persistent dedication and refinement.

“The three stars of the SWCC Master War Boat device not only stand for Vietnam Task Forces 115, 116 and 117,” Martinez said. “They also represent administration, logistics, and operations; skills all SWCC must master and continually hone, especially at the senior enlisted levels.”

As the focus of global security shifts from the predominantly land-based engagements to a renewed emphasis on maritime strategy, the demand for the expertise of SWCC operators, their support teams, and high-performance craft has surged. In response to this new era, SWCC units tirelessly refine their maritime and tactical proficiencies. Their guiding motto, “On Time, On Target, and Never Quit,” reflects the SWCC community’s commitment to the relentless pursuit of excellence and readiness. As guardians of the sea, they remain vigilant and prepared, ensuring that their response is as stealthy as it is swift, reflecting the evolving needs of NSW in the 21st century.

Naval Special Warfare Command



USN SEAL Solomon 'Sol' Atkinson a life driven by service, native heritage

By Andre' Billeaudeau, Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Smedegard, and Balinda Oneal contributed to this story

Naval Special Warfare Command

Solomon 'Sol' Atkinson was born in Metlakatla, Alaska in 1930 and, as a Ts'msyen (Tsimshian) Native American he lived a purposeful life defined by both his Native American heritage and his service as a U.S. Navy SEAL.

His early years were shaped by the region's rugged lifestyle, which taught him to be resourceful and appreciate the support of his community. These values guided him through his career in the U.S. Navy and public service. He also inherited a rich cultural legacy from his ancestors, a society that follows the matriarchal line, and who belonged to the Gitlaan clan of the Xpi'hanak house in the Tsimshian nation.

"Dad was such a humble guy who had so little growing up here, but he never ever complained," said Atkinson's daughter Maria Hayward. "As a matter of fact, he only owned one pair of shoes and when those got a hole in them, he placed cardboard inside so he could still wear them."

The National Museum of the American Indian explains that many clans in tribal communities are based on animals that have history and meaning. As a Tsimshian, he was part of the raven and frog clans, two animal-spirits that matched his naval career with their stories and traits.

As the Creator's helper, the raven is a heroic figure. According to Tsimshian artist Bill Helin, the raven stole the Sun in an operation that required courage, cunning, and creativity and delivered it to humans who had never seen the light. Likewise, "Sol" Atkinson shone in service with brave deeds during conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, often putting his life on the line for the sake of his comrades and country.

The Sun that the raven brought is so vital to the 'long-



Solomon "Sol" Atkinson's early years were shaped by the region's rugged lifestyle, which taught him to be resourceful and appreciate the support of his community. These values guided him through his career in the U.S. Navy and public service. He also inherited a rich cultural legacy from his ancestors, a society that follows the matriarchal line, and who belonged to the Gitlaan clan of the Xpi'hanak house in the Tsimshian nation. Courtesy photo.

winter' Metlakatla community, that it is featured in the middle of the town's logo. And, as a SEAL, Atkinson prepared astronauts for space exploration, an act that launched humans into the sky and closer to the raven's Sun than ever before. The raven also symbolizes Atkinson's legacy as a protector, safeguarding others through his courageous actions during wars in Korea and Vietnam, frequently risking his life for his teammates and nation.

Meanwhile the frog represents the voice of the people and strives to build unity. The selfless frog teaches by example and is more focused on the us and we of the community and less on I – key notions also reflected in Atkinson’s SEAL ethos: “...I humbly serve as a guardian to my fellow Americans ...placing the welfare and security of others before my own.” And while many know Atkinson was the first Alaskan Native to join the Navy’s Underwater Demolition Teams (later becoming a SEAL) he may have also been the first “Frogman” descended from a frog clan.

“He was just a gigantic person and I’m not talking about him being six foot something,” says Verdie Bowen, director of the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs, who knew Atkinson since he was a kid. “He was a great storyteller.”

After retiring from his successful navy career, Sol was called to service again. As Metlakatla’s mayor, Atkinson used his charisma and “great storytelling” skills to motivate the town to pursue projects like an Olympic-sized pool for the high school which resulted in a certified dive program at the small school where about a fifth of the students participate in the lessons.

This career preparedness program exposes young Alaskans to U.S. Navy Diver and SEAL career paths. Four of Atkinson’s grandsons and two of his great grandsons have achieved SCUBA certifications through the program.

Brad Billings, the state’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program Administrator praised the program as unique and impressive, noting that Metlakatla offers the state’s only high school CTE dive certification course. “What was impressive is their discipline, they really stuck to the goal of certification and that’s quite an accomplishment considering the requirements and how small of a community they are.”

Atkinson wanted to give back to his community by championing the high school dive program and pool. He believed that anyone could excel by attacking every challenge and turning it into a chance to succeed.

“There wasn’t much here as far as opportunity when he was growing up,” noted Hayward. “He was shipped off to boarding school at one point, yet he overcame everything he had to deal with. Dad’s success in the SEALs allows young people here today to have hope that they too can really make something of themselves just like he did.”

Sol was proud of his Tsimshian heritage and served his community in many ways. Besides helping high school divers, he also led a team that created the first of what would eventually be three totem poles for Disney’s Canadian Pavilion at Epcot Center in Florida.

There, about 30,000 visitors a day can admire the amazing Tsimshian art that includes Atkinson’s own raven at the bottom of the first pole, carrying the entire weight of the vertical community on his feathery shoulders.

“Sol was really involved in the community, proud of having grown up in it. He was a leader, always carried himself so well... intelligent, thoughtful, kind and friendly, said Metlakatla board member and tribal historian David Boxley who was also responsible for carving two of the totem poles. “You never would have known that he had been a very capable Navy SEAL and did the incredible things he did while he was in service,” added Boxley.

Like the totem raven’s unflinching community support, Atkinson founded and launched the Metlakatla Veterans Association, working diligently to ensure his fellow veterans received the benefits and recognition they earned.

“As a mayor and a veterans’ advocate, he was a pillar in his community,” said Verdie Bowen, the director of the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs. “He was always putting others before himself.”

In the spring of 2019 – the same year as his passing – Atkinson’s contributions were displayed as part of the Avenue of Heroes Program by the City of Coronado, California, a tribute that underscores his enduring impact. And just this year, the Navy he heroically served paid tribute to Atkinson by naming a future Navajo-class Towing, Salvage and Rescue ship after him, serving as a lasting tribute to a man who gave so much to his country and his community.

“I am pleased to ensure that his name will extend globally to all who view this great ship,” said Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro when announcing the name of the future USNS Solomon Atkinson (T-ATS 12).

This honor is not just a recognition of Atkinson’s service but also a milestone in acknowledging the contributions of Native Americans in the armed forces. The National Indian Council on Aging reminds us that Native Americans serve in the military at five times the national average; the highest per-capita volunteerism of any other ethnic population.

Solomon ‘Sol’ Atkinson’s life was not just an account of military valor but also a narrative of Native American heritage and community leadership.

“His pioneering role as one of the first U.S. Navy SEALs, and his unwavering commitment to service both in and out of uniform, serves as an inspiration for the entire Naval Special Warfare community,” said Rear Adm. Keith Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command.

Naval Special Warfare Command Navy SEALs, joint force conclude training



Courtesy Story

Naval Special Warfare Group One

West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators recently concluded a joint training exercise focused on enhancing operational capabilities and partnerships, Dec. 15, 2023.

The joint training included forces from 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), 1st Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 137th Special Operations Wing, 527th Space Aggressor Squadron (SAS), and 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

“Our nation’s strategic advantage is bolstered by our collective ability to operate effectively in the joint environment,” said U.S. Navy Capt. Blake Chaney, commander, Naval Special Warfare Group 1. “NSW’s capability to augment the joint force offers our nation’s leaders unparalleled and distinctive options.”

During the exercise, the forces conducted numerous interoperability and training iterations, demonstrating the tactics and skills required for complex missions. The training encompassed direct action raid iterations, close-quarters combat techniques, maritime boat operations, aviation insertions, and combat medical tactics.


“The 15th MEU’s ability to integrate and partner with Naval Special Warfare enhances our capabilities as a crisis response force,” said U.S. Marine Corps Col. Sean Dynan, commanding officer of 15th MEU. “Premier training like this allows us to complement each other to support Combatant Commanders and the Joint Force.”



West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare operators fast rope from an MH-60 Blackhawk assigned to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment “Night Stalkers” while conducting maritime interdiction operations. Naval Special Warfare is the nation’s elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet’s reach and gain and maintain access for the Joint Force in competition and conflict. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Charles Propert.

The joint training exercise allowed each force to leverage its unique capabilities and share best practices. The exchange of knowledge and experiences among the units contributed to continuously improving tactics and strategies for future employment.

“The service members of the 527th and the 26th SAS provide the best sparring partner possible to our joint force partners by knowing, teaching, and replicating adversary electromagnetic warfare and cyber threats,” said U.S. Space Force Lt. Col. C. Gene Adams, commander of 527th Space Aggressor Squadron. “Training like this is essential to maintain U.S. advantage in great power competition.”

A black and white photograph showing a Naval Special Warfare operator from behind, walking away from the camera into a dark, tunnel-like underground space. The operator is wearing a full combat uniform, including a helmet and a large tactical backpack. A bright light source, likely a flashlight, is illuminating the operator's path from the foreground, creating a strong lens flare and highlighting the operator's gear. The tunnel walls are made of corrugated metal, and some structural elements are visible on the right side.

West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare operators prepare to clear an underground space while conducting direct action raid training at Fort Irwin, California. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet's reach and gain and maintain access for the Joint Force in competition and conflict. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Charles Probert.

Air Force Special Operations Command



Hurlburt Field U-28A crews awarded Distinguished Flying Cross - first ever for Draco community

*By Senior Airman Natalie Fiorilli
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

The sounds of gunfire woke U.S. Air Force Capt. James Ryan on an early August morning in 2021.

"There's a problem, we have to go now," his aircraft commander, U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Scott Hardman, told Ryan from their deployed location in Afghanistan.

The city of Kabul, Afghanistan would soon fall to Taliban Forces and a group of U-28A Draco units from Hurlburt Field, Florida, had been tasked with supporting the ongoing evacuation of roughly 2,000 Americans.

Two years later, on Friday, Nov. 17, 2023, those members received the nation's highest honor for aerial achievement – the Distinguished Flying Cross.

The presentation of the Distinguished Flying Cross represented a milestone for the U-28A community as it was the first-ever awarded to a Draco aircrew.

Col. Allison Black, 1st Special Operations Wing commander, presided over the ceremony held inside the Freedom Hangar at Hurlburt Field.

"They were ready to execute, they were ready to save lives and they were ready to answer the nation's call," Black said. "For its entire existence, the U-28 community has lived in the shadows of recognition, but today there are no shadows."

[Team No. 1: Draco 42 Dayline]

The three teams began their two-day mission on the morning of August 15, 2021. As one crew would land, another would take off to provide constant intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance support over the next 24 hours.

While the Draco 42 dayline crew prepared to depart

for a sortie supporting the evacuation of the U.S.

Embassy in Kabul, a firefight involving Afghan security forces broke out roughly 100 yards from their aircraft.

Knowing the urgency of their mission, U.S. Air Force Capt. Max Arnold said their team decided to proceed, taking off from their deployed location toward the U.S. Embassy.

"The sounds of the gunfire and the situation at the embassy only made us more eager to get after it and make sure we did our jobs," explained Arnold, a 319th Special Operations Squadron U-28A Draco pilot. "All of our training and instinct kicked in and we almost did our jobs subconsciously at that point."

Moments into their flight, opposing forces fired a rocket toward the U-28A. Realizing they had no time to spare, the pilots performed a quick descent as the rocket passed just above the aircraft.

"That encounter only bolstered the tenacity that we had to try and get after the mission and counter these threats that we faced and we knew our partner forces were facing," Arnold added. "It really set the tone for the rest of the flight."

The Draco 42 team continued its mission, providing overhead support of the ongoing embassy evacuation. Their initial flight ended with the crew landing in a recovery airfield, swarmed by crowds of unidentified and armed personnel.

Later that night, Draco 42 would be tasked with an additional sortie, providing support for the ongoing evacuation efforts at Hamid Karzai International Airport.

[Team No. 2: Draco 43 Nightline]

Standing by to relieve their teammates, the Draco 43 nightline team took off into the night sky on Aug. 15, 2021.

Traveling toward the airport, enemy anti-aircraft artillery targeted their U-28A - forcing the pilots to perform low-level defensive maneuvers to evade the surrounding threats.

Flying above Hamid Karzai International Airport, Draco 43, served as an “eye in the sky,” searching the area below for potential security breaches.

As their mission progressed, they could see large numbers of Afghans surrounding the perimeter of the airfield. Eventually, the crowd went on to surge the perimeter.

“There were just packs of people pushing onto the airfield,” said U.S. Air Force Capt. Nicklaus Lutz, a 319th SOS combat systems officer. “There was a lot of movement and a lot of craziness going on.”

Lutz added that to make matters even worse, his crew realized that members inside the air traffic control tower below had fled.

“That’s not a conversation you expect to have after takeoff, especially after you’ve already been shot at,” he said. “One situation we thought about was that when we landed we were going to be on our own.”

Without a functional control tower on the ground, the crews also helped to de-conflict inbound air traffic, which consisted mostly of C-17 Globemaster III aircraft assisting with the evacuation efforts.

As chaos ensued, Lutz recalled one moment of hope for his team.

“A group of U.S. Marines walked out on the airfield with their arms spread out,” Lutz described. “They cleared the airfield and there was a moment where we realized that we should be able to land and that we would be fine.”

Roughly an hour later, the Draco 43 nightline landed.

Walking away from the aircraft that night, the reality of what occurred sank in with their team, Lutz said.

“It dawned on us that we almost died,” Lutz explained. “It was a dire situation. There were so many variables. Getting shot at on takeoff, losing your landing base, not knowing who is hostile or who is a refugee, and then the possibility of getting shot at again. I was lucky to be on the crew I was on.”

[Team No. 3: Draco 43 Dayline]

As the sun began to peak over the horizon, the Draco 43 dayline crew climbed to a cruising altitude, heading directly for Hamid Karzai International Airport on the morning of Aug. 16, 2021.

Ryan, a 319th SOS combat systems officer, scanned their surroundings through a window toward the back of the U-28A.

“I remember hearing both pilots talking about avoiding the threats around us,” Ryan described. “We

didn’t have time to really think about the situation. We had a job to do and we knew we needed to be there to support the guys on the ground.”

Upon arrival, the team found the airfield below littered with abandoned burning vehicles, debris and other signs of the destruction that occurred in the hours prior.

Draco 43 worked to maintain oversight, providing security information for the ground forces below. By sunrise, more and more people began crowding the airfield’s perimeter once again.

“People were piling up around the airfield, trying to flee,” Ryan explained. “They eventually surged past the breaking point, and all of a sudden there were thousands of people rushing the airfield.”

In an effort to manage the crowds, Draco 43 assisted with de-escalation and deterrence efforts until they reached critically-low fuel levels. However, the crew noted that landing would be a challenge in and of itself.

“There were just too many people on the airfield,” Ryan said. “We were lining up on the taxiway, because there was just nowhere else to land.”

Just before touching down, a small opening on the runway widened and Draco 43 pivoted to avoid landing near the largest parts of the crowd. The crew then quickly powered down their aircraft and barricaded their doors.

Shortly after, ground forces arrived to escort the crew through the chaotic scene on the airfield.

After nearly 24 hours of continuous flying, the mission of Draco 42 and 43 was complete.

[“Being a real teammate”]

It wasn’t until after they returned home that Ryan said his unit completely reflected on the severity of the events.

“It was really when I got back and got to listen to our tapes from the flights that some of the more serious moments really resonated with me,” he said, adding that the crews sounded more calm than he would have expected.

“In those moments, you could tell that training kicked in,” Ryan added. “We were well prepared and we worked well together. Every part of the U-28A mission set is a crew effort, and I’m incredibly fortunate and proud to have been surrounded by such outstanding aviators.”

For Lutz, the award reflects the crew’s ability to be tested beyond their limits.

“It means being a real teammate,” Lutz explained. “We all understood that what we were doing was dangerous and we made the decision to stay. I’m proud that I have a tangible moment where I was tested and I was able to be a part of something where my teammates knew that they could rely on me and that I could rely on them.”

Air Force Special Operations Command



Foreign Air Attachés visit AFSOC

Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs

Air Force Special Operations Command welcomed Air Attachés from 12 various allied and partner nations to Hurlburt Field, Florida, October 23, 2023.

Attaché tours are a key function of the Department of the Air Force Foreign Liaison Office, which organizes the engagements to enhance partners' understanding of American history and culture and enable firsthand experience with U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force operations and structure.

During their visit, the Air Attachés were provided with a comprehensive briefing on several key aspects of AFSOC. This included an overview of the command's history, which dates back to its establishment in 1990. This historical context was provided to the Air Attachés, offering them a deeper understanding of the command's evolution and the critical role it has played in operations across the globe.

Later on, Lt Gen Tony Bauernfeind, AFSOC commander, engaged with the Air Attachés and introduced them to the AFSOC mission and capabilities.

The Air Attachés had the unique opportunity to delve into AFSOC's array of aircraft and mission sets visiting static displays and learning from subject matter experts.

The United States Air Force Special Operations School also gave a briefing highlighting the school's mission. The Air Attachés were provided insights into AFSOC's joint and combined training efforts as well as special operations best practices.

"Our enduring relationships with allies and partners are a cornerstone to our enhanced readiness," said Bauernfeind. "Engagements like these help educate our allies and partners on the unique capabilities and opportunities that our command can provide and strengthen our connections for future combined operations."

This visit served as a valuable opportunity to enhance international cooperation and understanding. By sharing insights into AFSOC's history, mission sets, and collaborative training efforts, this visit contributed to strengthening the bonds between allied and partnered nations, furthering our collective commitment to global security.



Foreign Air Attachés visit Hurlburt Field, Florida, Oct. 23, 2023. This visit provided a unique opportunity to educate the visiting members on AFSOC's capabilities and build a foundation for future operations. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Hussein Enaya.

Foreign Air Attaché attendees visit Hurlburt Field, Florida, Oct. 23, 2023. They received briefings on the capabilities of Air Force Special Operations Command. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Hussein Enaya.



Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



MARSOC conducts small unit tactics training with BLT 1/8

*By Cpl. Henry Rodriguez II
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command*

For the past 15 months, Marine Raiders from Marine Forces Special Operations Command trained alongside Marines from Battalion Landing Team 1/8, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, to build the most capable forces possible.

The trainings have enhanced the operational readiness of both Marine special operations companies in their core capabilities, as well as the level of performance seen by the Battalion Landing Team. Lt. Col. William Kerrigan, BLT 1/8 commanding officer, has placed an emphasis on raising the level of training for his Marines by working with MARSOC and other special operations forces, such as Naval Special Warfare, as often as possible.

“Ever since Lt. Col. Kerrigan took command at BLT 1/8, we’ve really ramped up the integration with MARSOC,” said Sgt. Frederick Owens, a squad leader with the BLT. “My platoon, alone, has worked with them multiple times in the last year.”

In that time, Marines from BLT 1/8 have trained with Marine Special Operations Teams and Companies from each of MARSOC’s three Marine Raider Battalions. The training events included a variety of live-fire events: marksmanship on both flat ranges and indoor shoot houses, emphasizing small unit tactics in a kinetic environment; mortar fire training to compare standard operating procedures between BLT 1/8 mortar platoon and MARSOC’s mortarmen; and squad and company level ground, air, and amphibious raids with MARSOC tactical support.

Additional integration between the two parties took place on exercises, such as BLT 1/8’s Marine Corps combat readiness evaluation and MARSOC’s Exercise Raven, a special operations forces level certifying exercise that all MSOCs attend before deploying. At



A U.S. Marine with Battalion Landing Team 1/8, clears a stairwell with a critical skills operator from Marine Forces Special Operations Command during an integration training event on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Nov. 21, 2023. MARSOC worked with Marines from BLT 1/8 to increase interoperability with the Fleet Marine Force. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.

every phase of training, preparation from both units ensured the mutual benefit had in relation to their relevant mission demands and requirements.

“It really is a win-win,” said a team chief on a Marine Special Operations Team with MARSOC. “We



U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Frederick Owens, a squad leader with Battalion Landing Team 1/8, prepares to move off an objective with a critical skills operator from Marine Forces Special Operations Command during an integration training event on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Nov. 21, 2023. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.

get to work on our ability to do foreign internal defense and the infantry Marines work through their small unit tactics and advance their skills before deploying.”

Foreign internal defense, one of MARSOC’s core capabilities, sees MSOC’s deploy to other nations and train their militaries, preparing them to conduct more complex operations.

“The more repetitions we can get on training other forces to operate at a high level, the better our processes and efficiency will be when we go down range,” added the team chief.

The latest of these integration training events included a live scenario that simulated a raid on an objective building where adversary combatants were housing dangerous munitions. The integration saw critical skills operators and special operations officers conduct full mission profiles alongside infantry squads.

Marine Raiders maneuvered side by side in all aspects of the training, from planning and briefing together, to being a seamless part of their assault and support elements. While developing skillsets to work more closely with partner forces outside of their team, the CSOs and SOOs were also able to highlight positive habits to increase combat effectiveness.

“It’s all about composure while you are operating,” said Lance Cpl. Liam Wood, a team leader with 1/8. “A lot of younger or more inexperienced guys have a

tendency to get overwhelmed or rush, and working side by side with the CSOs, it reinforces the right way which is to remain calm and composed.”

He added, “being able to move side by side with them really reinforces what we are taught and helps us step our training up to another level.”

Beyond just the physical tactics that benefit from the integration, the CSOs helped the infantry small-unit leaders improve their tactical evaluation.

“The CSOs are able to go into a situation and create an effective plan at a rapid pace and that has started to rub off on us as well,” said Sgt. Owens. “My thought process and how quickly I can work through problems has definitely improved from before my experiences with MARSOC.”

“It’s vital that special operations forces and conventional forces train, integrate, and complement one another,” said Lt. Col. William Kerrigan, commanding officer, BLT 1/8. “The current and future operating environments require a fast and adaptable battalion landing team that can respond to everchanging threats. From September 2022 to November 2023, Battalion Landing Team 1/8 built relationships early and often with our MARSOC teammates. Together, we learned that we have the same drive and professionalism to accomplish any mission assigned. As we look to the future, this training makes BLT 1/8 and the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit more lethal, employable, and sustainable to meet geographical combatant commanders’ operational needs.”



U.S. Marines with Battalion Landing Team 1/8, conduct a joint raid with critical skills operators from Marine Forces Special Operations Command during an integration training event on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command USSOCOM hosts 1st SOF Truth conference focusing on force health

By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication

U.S. Army Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command and Command Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter hosted the fourth of a series of virtual forums focused on people, at Joint Special Operations University, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, Dec. 14, 2023. This forum dealt with

force health.

This quarter's 1st SOF Truth Conference focused on force health with an emphasis on brain health and resiliency to empower leaders with access to the resources available for the command's people.

The series of quarterly events are a component to the USSOCOM Preservation of the Force and Family's Integrated Performance Campaign. The purpose of the events is to develop a mutual



U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander U.S. Special Operations Command and Command Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter open the "Focus on the First Truth" forum dealing with force health, at SOCOM's Joint Special Operations University on MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, Dec. 14, 2023. This quarter's 1st SOF Truth Conference highlighted humans over hardware and focused on force health with an emphasis on brain health and resiliency to empower leaders with access to the resources available for the command's people. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

understanding across senior leadership and explore a variety of approaches to address the threat of self-harm to the people in the formation. And the intent is to generate follow on actions for the leaders to implement at the echelons below.

To open the discussion, Fenton stressed the forum is for O6 and above command teams from across the entire SOF enterprise to attain the tools to take care of their teams at the lowest levels.

Discussions centered around understanding brain health, being aware of physiological recovery programs available, and knowing how to access integrated care services. Fenton and Shorter emphasized the commitment to the health and wellness of the force.

“This is an opportunity for our formation to be introduced to all the organizations we have as resources to help servicemembers – our number one priority; our people,” Fenton said.

“The O6 commands are where the rubber meets the road,” said Shorter. “The O6 commanders deal directly with the individual person, they are there to take care of their people, we do not see that at the headquarters. This virtual conference is for you to help you with your people.”

Guest speakers illuminated the data on performance and recovery programs aimed at special operations forces such as cognitive enhancement, resiliency, rehabilitation, and traumatic brain injury. As SOCOM is constantly looking to transform with emerging tech and scientific data, how doctors evaluate the performance and treat the recovery of our operators lends to our culture of continuous improvement.

Briefers from National Intrepid Center of Excellence, 7 East, Special Operator Performance and Recovery, Post-Deployment Rehabilitation Evaluation Program, Homebase, and a Lead Nurse Case Manager all explained their programs and how they help service members. The forum also hosted a

a panel discussion entitled Framing Warfighter Brain Health: what is it, effects, symptoms, types of conditions. Additionally, testimonials from four different people on how certain programs help them recover physically, mentally and spiritually.

Finally, Brian Johnson founder and CEO of Heroic Public Benefit Corporation gave a briefing on how his company Heroic uses ancient philosophers’ wisdom to empower and strengthen the modern mind.

“If people are more important than

hardware, the ultimate war is internal, [the mind] not external, and we win that war by learning how to flourish by putting our virtues in action,” said Johnson. “Then we must train and measure that.”

Note: All the presentations given that day are available through USSOCOM’s CAC-enabled internal portal and available for individual or unit

training purposes.

This is an opportunity for our formation to be introduced to all the organizations we have as resources to help servicemembers – our number one priority; our people.

— Gen. Bryan P. Fenton

If people are more important than hardware, the ultimate war is internal, [the mind] not external, and we win that war by learning how to flourish by putting our virtues in action. Then we must train and measure that.

— Brian Johnson



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Glen Dowling and his wife Kelli give a testimonial on how the health support system helped them prepare for retirement during the “Focus on the First Truth” forum dealing with force health at Joint Special Operations University, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, Dec. 14, 2023. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

House SOF Caucus hosts USSOCOM in D.C.

*By U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller
U.S. Special Operations Command*

Joint forces with the U.S. Special Operations Command enterprise engaged representatives, Dec. 6, at a House Special Operations Forces Caucus event.

The event provided an opportunity for members with SOCOM to communicate with members of Congress and their staffs on the SOF value proposition to the National Defense Strategy, the readiness and prioritization of our people, and the current and future modernization priorities to transform and win on an ever-changing battlefield.

“We’re bringing in those service members of the SOF enterprise so our members of Congress and their staff are able to meet our teammates and see that quality first-hand that they otherwise may see only very rarely, episodically in different engagements,” said Honorable Chris Maier, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. “This is why the SOF Caucus is so important and why this event, in particular, is so unique, and why I think it’s so valuable for the special operations enterprise.”

More than 100 subject-matter experts within SOF were prepared to share their experiences, stories and specialty that aligns with the SOCOM priorities.

“We’ll ask you, tonight, to take a look through the lens of ‘People, Win and Transform,’ said U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander of SOCOM. “We think we’re an atypical, asymmetric, irregular advantage for the nation – a national advantage to go after the hardest missions in the hardest places, under the most arduous of time constraints.”

PEOPLE

Teammates with U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fort Liberty, North Carolina, Marine Forces Special Operations Command, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida, and Preservation of the Force and Family, represented their commands to members of Congress and their Staffs, and showcased programs available for their members that focus on human performance that will optimize and sustain SOF mission readiness, longevity and performance.

“People are our #1 priority - they’re more important



Members of Congress and their staff test out new technology during the House Special Operations Forces Caucus event in Washington, D.C., Dec. 6, 2023. The SOF Caucus event provided an opportunity for members of SOCOM to showcase programs available for their members that focus on human performance that will optimize and sustain SOF mission readiness, longevity and performance. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.

than hardware,” said U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Veronica Baker, a J1 plans and policy officer with SOCOM. “So, some of the things we can offer them are to make sure they feel embraced, empowered, educated and they have the experience to be able to do their job and be able to do it well.”

WIN

Special Operations provides the nation with unique unconventional and irregular military options to compete current and emerging threats to national security. Alongside our U.S. Government interagency partners and the SOF network of international partners and allies, SOCOM is postured to win in competition and prepared to win in crisis or conflict.

“They’re going to see the effects of Green Berets in the fight, in certain regions, in recent conflicts and how the training they provided those teams, units and formations in the field, currently, has been invaluable,” said U.S. Army



Erin Logan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, speaks with U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter, senior enlisted leader for U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, during the House Special Operations Forces Caucus event in Washington, D.C., Dec. 6, 2023. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.

Master Sgt. Earnest Simpson, the senior ammunition logistics sergeant with the 528th Sustainment Brigade, Special Operations (Airborne), Fort Liberty. “It’s causing wins across

this very contested environment we find ourselves in, today.”

TRANSFORM

Looking toward the future, SOCOM’s representatives were prepared to communicate how SOF is working to advance technology in an approach to solve complex problems for current and emerging threats.

“We’re really focusing on the next 10 years, transforming the force from the world’s greatest [counter terrorism] and [counter violent organizations] combative force, into a force that is relevant in today’s fight and tomorrow’s fight,” said U.S. Marine Corps Col. Ian Fletcher, director of combat development and integration with MARSOC. “We can innovate with the ideas that come into SOCOM and we can act with an entrepreneurial spirit, but without the backing of Congress, without the resourcing – none of these ideas will happen.”

Congresswoman Kathy Castor, U.S. Representative for Florida’s 14th Congressional District, addressed special operators and their families, and recognized them for the missions they conduct around the world.

“The partnerships you build, over years with our allies across the world, to address some of the most intractable problems, is often underappreciated,” said Castor. “In this world, we really cannot thank you enough, but we are here for you, we’re proud of you and we want to make sure you’re successful – when you’re successful, America is successful.”



U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, during the House Special Operations Forces Caucus event in Washington, D.C., Dec. 6, 2023. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.



In memoriam



**Army Chief Warrant Officer 3
Stephen R. Dwyer**



**Army Chief Warrant Officer 2
Shane M. Barnes**



**Army Staff Sgt.
Tanner W. Grone**



**Army Sgt.
Andrew P. Southard**



**Army Sgt.
Cade M. Wolfe**



**Air Force Maj. Jeffrey
"Jeff" T. Hoernemann**



**Air Force Maj.
Eric "Doc" V. Spendlove**



**Air Force Maj.
Luke A. Unrath**



**Air Force Maj.
Terrell "Terry" K. Brayman**



**Air Force Tech. Sgt.
Zachary E. Lavoy**



**Air Force Staff Sgt.
Jake M. Turnage,**



**Air Force Staff Sgt.
Jacob "Jake" M. Galliher**



**Air Force Senior Airman
Brian "Kody" Johnson**



**Navy Special Warfare
Operator 1st Class
Christopher J. Chambers**



**Navy Special Warfare
Operator 2nd Class
Nathan Gage Ingram**

*We honor our teammates who lost their
lives performing missions since Nov. 2023.*

U.S. Special Forces Green Berets and a U.S. Navy SEAL team participate in a training scenario with various Republic of Korea special operations personnel as part of a culminating exercise at Rodriguez Range near Pocheon, Republic of Korea, Dec. 8, 2023. Republic of Korea Army photo by Cpl. Yeonung Kim.

