

Tip OF THE Spear

United States Special Operations Command
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

February 2023

FOCUS on the

1st TRUTH

HUMANS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARDWARE

People - Win - Transform



United States Special Operations Command



U.S. Special Operations Command hosts 'Focus on the First Truth' event ... 34

Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, hosted the first of what will be a series of virtual "Focus on the First Truth" conferences for all O6 and above command teams and their spouses. Suicide and self-harm prevention were the focus areas for the day-long forum. USSOCOM is committed to saving the lives of our number one comparative and competitive advantage – our people. Graphic by Timothy Lawn.

The Quiet Professionals

Highlights



Retired Special Forces operator led charge to create elite Army EOD special mission units ... 10



Silver Star awarded to Naval Special Warfare legend ... 18



USSOCOM Care Coalition hosts its 2023 Warrior Care Conference ... 36

Departments

Theater Special Operations Commands

Civil Affairs, Ghanaian Soldiers conduct MEDCAP in Bole ... 4
NSW forces wrap up SOF engagement with Indian Navy Marine Commandos ... 6

Special warfare combatant-craft crewmen transit Apra Harbor; Guam ... 8

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

Retired Special Forces operator led charge to create elite Army EOD special mission units ... 10

Indomitable valor: Special Forces heroism during Tet Offensive ... 14

Tactical skills training ... 16

Naval Special Warfare Command

Silver Star awarded to Naval Special Warfare legend ... 18

Junior physical therapist of the year: How one officer is chasing her dreams ... 20

U.S. Navy, Republic of Korea SEALs conclude bilateral training exercise ... 22

SEAL training at Fort Chaffee ... 24

Air Force Special Operations Command

C-145A Combat Coyote makes final run after decade of service ... 26

70 dog years later, Major Edan ends her military service ... 28

Flightline Takeoffs ... 30

Marine Forces Special Operations Command

VMM-268 conducts fast-rope training with MARSOC ... 32

Headquarters

U.S. Special Operations Command hosts 'Focus on the First Truth' event ... 34

Deputy SECDEF visits the command ... 36

SECAF tours the headquarters ... 37

USSOCOM Care Coalition hosts its 2023 Warrior Care Conference ... 38

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



Civil Affairs, Ghanaian Soldiers conduct MEDCAP in Bole

Courtesy Story
Special Operations Command Africa

U.S. Army Civil Affairs members assigned to Special Operations Command Africa hosted a Medical Civic Action Program with Ghanaian soldiers from the 6th Infantry Battalion in Bole, Ghana, Dec. 10, 2022.

The team helped oversee treatment of more than 1,200 patients, providing a range of medical services including physical examinations, diagnostic care, vision exams, and prescription of medications.

“The medical services touch the medical and emotional needs of the vulnerable people in our area of operations,” said Ghanaian Air Force Flying Officer Camillus Buunaaisie, a principle public health officer.

While MEDCAPs aim to support the local community, they also allow partner nations to exchange best practices, facilitate cultural exchanges, and ultimately strengthen relationships to address insecurity and instability within the borders.

“The overarching goals of these programs is to protect the vulnerable from exposure to extremist ideology in our



A Ghanaian medic with the 6th Infantry Battalion collects a capillary blood sample from a local resident for diagnostic care during a medical civic action program in Bole, Ghana, Dec. 10, 2022. Civilian-to-military relationships are critical to maintain peace and security in Ghana. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Taylor Crul.

society and promote peaceful coexistence,” Flying Officer Buunaaisie continued, “We are in a global village, and instability in Ghana can affect U.S. interest as well. We must work together to protect our mutual interests.”

The U.S. and Ghana have partnered together to conduct several civil affairs engagements, including three MEDCAPs this year.



Bole’s district chief executive, Ghanaian soldiers with the 6th Infantry Battalion and U.S. Army soldiers assigned to Civil Military Support Element Ghana, address locals during a medical civic action program in Bole, Ghana, Dec. 10, 2022. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Taylor Crul.

A U.S. Army soldier assigned to Civil Military Support Element Ghana, hands out medical supplies to residents of the local community during a medical civic action program in Bole, Ghana, Dec. 10, 2022. MEDCAPs provide an opportunity for Ghana Armed Forces and partner nations to build relationships with local communities and civil society organizations. Photo by U.S. Air Force by Staff Sgt. Taylor Cruil.



U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



NSW forces wrap up SOF engagement with Indian Navy Marine Commandos

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

Naval Special Warfare forces deployed to U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific in Goa, India and concluded a joint combined training exercise with the Indian Navy Marine Commando Force on Dec. 22, 2022.

The three-week exchange built upon the two forces' collective maritime capabilities and long-standing relationship.

"We are committed to operationalizing the U.S.-India partnership through enhanced information sharing, regional security cooperation, integrated deterrence and cooperation in new domains," said the senior team leader of the U.S. Naval Special Warfare unit. "This exercise provides us the opportunity of a common understanding of a shared working environment at sea through practical hands-on scenarios as a combined team."

The exercise included tactical training with weapons, close-quarter combat drills, military free fall evolutions, helicopter insertions, and maritime boat operations.

"We started off doing subject matter expert exchanges and familiarizing with standard procedures," said the U.S. team lead. "And through this development with the [Indian Navy Marine Commando Force], we were able to cultivate and execute real-world scenarios towards the latter half of the exercise."

The realistic scenarios served as a capstone to the training and included maritime interdiction operations, visit, board, search and seizure operations, and direct-action missions.

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

"We consistently look for opportunities to enhance this ongoing professional partnership," said Rear Adm. Jeromy

Williams, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific. "The U.S.-India defense partnership is critical to securing a free and open Indo-Pacific."


India, the U.S., Australia, and Japan concluded naval exercise Malabar 2022 Nov. 15, a multi-national exercise designed to advance the collective planning, integration and employment of advanced warfare tactics between participating nations.

As part of Malabar 2022, there was a special operations forces-specific tri-lateral exercise between U.S. Naval Special Warfare, Indian Navy Marine Commando Force and Japan Maritime Self Defense Force Special Boarding Unit, focusing on maritime interdiction and tactical combat casualty care training.

Naval Special Warfare is the nation's premier maritime special operations force and is uniquely positioned to extend the fleet's reach and deliver all-domain options for multinational forces.



U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators and Indian Navy Marine Commandos prepare to conduct a fast-rope from an Indian Navy UH-3H Sea King Helicopter during a joint combined training Goa, India, Dec. 14, 2022. The engagement is an example of the enduring partnership between the Indian and American maritime forces, who routinely operate together in the Indo-Pacific, fostering a cooperative approach toward regional security and stability. Courtesy photo.



U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators and Indian Navy Marine Commandos conduct a maritime interdiction operation during a joint combined training Dec. 14, 2022, Goa, India. The engagement is an example of the enduring partnership between the Indian and American maritime forces, who routinely operate together in the Indo-Pacific, fostering a cooperative approach toward regional security and stability. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's premiere maritime special operations force and is uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet's reach and deliver all-domain options for naval and joint force commanders. Courtesy photo.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



Special warfare combatant-craft crewmembers transit Apra Harbor, Guam

Special warfare combatant-craft crewmembers transit Apra Harbor, Santa Rita, Guam, Dec. 15, 2022, in a combatant craft medium to refine tactics that integrate Naval Special Warfare with fleet operations. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's premiere maritime special operations force and is 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 Alex Smedegard.



U.S. Army Special Operations Command



Retired Special Forces operator led charge to create elite Army EOD special mission units

*By Walter Ham
20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear,
Explosives Command*

A retired U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal sergeant major, Special Forces operator and U.S. Army civilian led the charge to create the EOD companies that combat Weapons of Mass Destruction and support special operations missions.

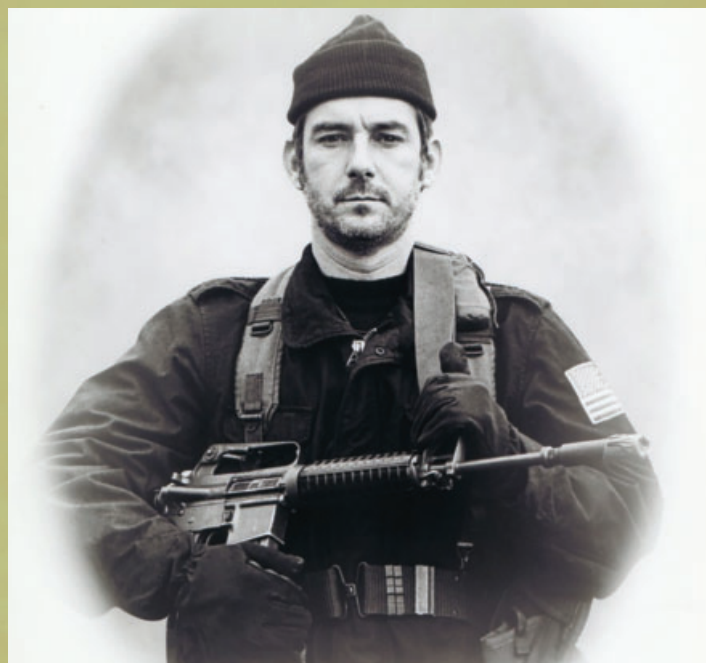
Retired Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Wolfe championed the establishment of the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) and 28th Ordnance Company (EOD Airborne) while serving as the civilian deputy special plans officer at the U.S. Special Operations Command.

The 21st EOD Company (WMD) was activated at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, in 1998 to respond to improvised nuclear devices and radiological dispersal devices. The 28th EOD Company (Airborne) was established in 2011 to support special mission units, including the 75th Ranger Regiment. Both units have rigorous selection processes.

The 21st EOD Company (WMD) is part of the 71st EOD Group and 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command, the U.S. military's premier all hazards command. The 28th EOD Company (Airborne) is assigned to the 192nd EOD Battalion, 52nd EOD Group and 20th CBRNE Command.

From 19 bases in 16 states, Soldiers and Army civilians from the 20th CBRNE Command take on the world's most dangerous hazards in support of joint, interagency and allied operations.

Often called the "father of EOD in Special Mission



Retired Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Wolfe (right) championed the establishment of the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) and 28th Ordnance Company (EOD Airborne) while serving as the civilian deputy special plans officer at the U.S. Special Operations Command. Often called the "father of EOD in Special Mission units," Wolfe is one of the founding members of the U.S. Army's premier Special Mission Unit and one of the first two EOD techs to pass Operator Training Course I. Courtesy photo.

Units," Wolfe knows from firsthand experience the importance of having trained, equipped and ready EOD technicians to support Special Operations missions.

Wolfe is one of the founding members of the U.S. Army's elite Special Mission Unit and one of the first

two EOD techs to pass Operator Training Course I. The other EOD tech was retired Sgt. Maj. Mike R. Vining.

“Establishing a program for developing an EOD capability in support of special mission counter proliferation efforts may probably be what I’m best known for. However, there were other missions throughout my assignment at the unit and the Joint Special Operations Command that were equally challenging,” he said.

Wolfe’s military career began in Port Trevorton, a small Pennsylvania town near the Susquehanna River.

“There was little work opportunity for me following high school graduation and no money to continue any further education,” said Wolfe. “I also had a strong desire to travel and experience new opportunities.”

After he graduated from boot camp, Wolfe was scheduled to go to Airborne School until a knee injury delayed it.

He was temporarily assigned as a clerk in an EOD unit and decided to become an EOD tech while serving there.

“I was fascinated with the unit and the work involved so I decided to attend EOD School in Indianhead, Maryland,” said Wolfe. “Shortly thereafter, I was sent to Germany and assigned to a special unit with both EOD and Technical Escort personnel. During my tour of duty, I traveled throughout Europe.”

His career then took him from West Germany to Hawaii where he provided support to VIP visits across the Pacific, including visits to Australia and New Zealand. While in the Aloha State, Wolfe got into surfing and scuba diving and took night courses at the University of Hawaii.

“I was eventually reassigned to the 55th EOD unit in upstate New York and then to the 21st EOD in Giessen, Germany,” said Wolfe. “I went back to the U.S., got married and returned to Germany with my new bride. During those assignments, I performed VIP support in Ireland, Israel, Morocco, Ethiopia and the Soviet Union.”

After moving back to the U.S., Wolfe served as an instructor at the Explosive Ordnance Disposal school at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama.

“My personal goal while assigned to the school was to teach every block of instruction in the course which I came close to achieving when I received a call from Fort Bragg to try out for a new unit being formed there (the premier Special Mission Unit),” said Wolfe. “The Formal Assessment and Selection for assignment was the most physical and mentally challenging event in my career.”

Wolfe spent the next 16 years in the U.S. Army’s



Retired Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Wolfe (right) championed the establishment of the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) and 28th Ordnance Company (EOD Airborne) while serving as the civilian deputy special plans officer at the U.S. Special Command. Courtesy photo.

premier counterterrorism unit, serving as a Special Forces operator and EOD sergeant major.

He later served as the director of EOD capabilities for the unit.

As the senior EOD technician in the unit, Wolfe served as a team leader during Operation Rice Bowl and Eagle Claw, the 1980 Iran hostage rescue attempt.

A year later, Wolfe traveled to Italy to support an Italian counterterrorism unit that was preparing to rescue U.S. Army Brig. Gen. James L. Dozier after the general had been abducted by the Red Brigades and held in captivity for 42 days. Without firing a shot, the Italian unit rescued Dozier and captured the entire Red Brigades cell.

Wolfe was also a team leader during Operation Urgent Fury, the U.S. invasion of the Caribbean Island of Grenada, following a pro-Cuban coup there.

In the mid-1990s, Wolfe helped to ensure



Then Capt. James E. Bonner (left) and Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Wolfe stand on a catwalk near the flight deck on the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65) during an exercise. Wolfe and Bonner served together at the Joint Special Operations Command. Today, Bonner is a major general and serves as the commanding general of the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence. Courtesy photo.

compliance with the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) as an inspector on the on-site inspection agency team. The sergeant major also supported the investigation into the bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia.

His career then took him to the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), an organization that was established to create greater joint coordination between U.S. military special operations units following Operation Eagle Claw.

As a civilian at the U.S. Special Operations Command, Wolfe was instrumental in the creation of the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) “Blackjack,” the first U.S. Department of Defense Weapons of Mass Destruction-capable EOD unit.

The company named its Kirtland Air Force Base rapid deployment building “Wolfe’s Gate” in honor of his role in its establishment.

Wolfe also took point on the creation of the airborne EOD unit to support special operations missions. Often operating on hostile terrain, U.S. Army Rangers and Special Operations units needed a dedicated airborne EOD special mission unit to take on the explosive devices that imperil lives and impede missions.

The Fort Bragg, North Carolina-based 28th EOD Company (Airborne) was activated in 2011 and EOD techs from the company have been deployed in support of combat operations for the entirety of its history.

EOD technicians from the 28th EOD Company (Airborne) have successfully conducted more than 5,200 operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan and have earned 32 valorous awards, including two Distinguished Service Crosses and 21 Purple Hearts.

Wolfe said that today’s Army EOD technicians are upholding and building on the legacy of the EOD technicians who served before them.

He said that flexibility, tenacity and determination are the key to continued success as Army EOD technicians shift focus from supporting counterinsurgency operations to preparing for large-scale combat operations.

“The Army EOD today, embedded in the Special Mission units, are amazing in their capabilities to support the most challenging missions,

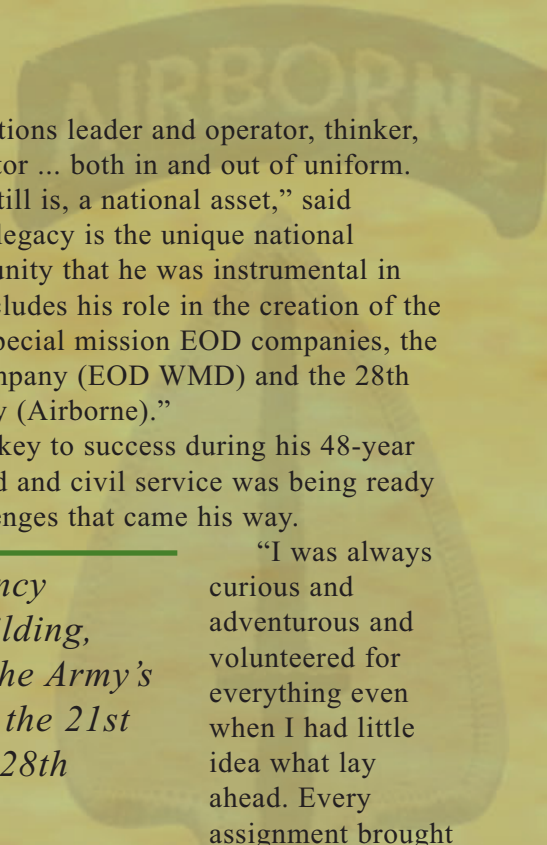
specifically in those time-sensitive, non-permissive environments,” said Wolfe. “This is a dream I honestly didn’t think I’d witness in my lifetime.”

For his service, Wolfe was awarded the Col. Arthur “Bull” Simons Award, the highest award given by the U.S. Special Operations Command in 2018.

He was also awarded the U.S. Army Chemical Corps Order of the Dragon in 2009 and Ancient Order of the Dragon in 2021. Wolfe was inducted into the U.S. Army Ordnance Corps Hall of Fame in 2019. In addition, Wolfe was named the Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Executive of the Year Award in 1997 and he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from his alma mater, Selinsgrove High School, in Pennsylvania in 2018.

Wolfe earned the Legion of Merit Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Army Meritorious Service Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, Master Explosive Ordnance Disposal Badge and Basic Parachutist Badge. For his civilian service, he earned the Superior Civilian Service Award in 1997 and 2007. Wolfe earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Philosophy from Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina.

Maj. Gen. James E. Bonner, the commanding general of the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence and senior mission commander for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, served with Wolfe and retired Sgt. Maj. Mike Vining at the Joint Special Operations Command.



Bonner said Wolfe had made a lasting impact on the EOD community.

“Dennis had the vision to analyze what was in the realm of possibilities and create a national strategic capability,” said Bonner, an Anna, Illinois, native, and U.S. Army Chemical Corps officer who also previously served as the commanding general of the 20th CBRNE Command.

Retired U.S. Army Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker commanded the Joint Special Operations Command when Bonner, Wolfe and Vining were in the JSOC J-3 Plans Office.

A former commander of the premier Special Mission Unit, Schoomaker also commanded U.S. Army Special Operations Command and U.S. Special Operations Command before retiring in

November 2000. Schoomaker was later recalled to active duty and served as the 35th U.S. Army Chief of Staff from 2003 to 2007.

“Forty-five years ago, Sgt. Maj. Dennis Wolfe volunteered for duty with the nation’s premier Special Mission Unit during its formative period,” said Schoomaker. “Over his multi-decade career, he did it

all ... special operations leader and operator, thinker, innovator and mentor ... both in and out of uniform.

“He was, and still is, a national asset,” said Schoomaker. “His legacy is the unique national interagency community that he was instrumental in building, which includes his role in the creation of the Army’s two elite special mission EOD companies, the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) and the 28th Ordnance Company (Airborne).”

Wolfe said the key to success during his 48-year career of uniformed and civil service was being ready to accept the challenges that came his way.

“I was always curious and adventurous and volunteered for everything even when I had little idea what lay ahead. Every assignment brought me new experiences. I volunteered for

everything and felt obligated as a Soldier to do so and never regretted it,” said Wolfe.

“My advice is to not understate your capabilities. You can do much more than you realize, step up to the plate, volunteer,” said Wolfe. “I believe the military offers the best environment to do this and to serve your country as well. No greater service.”

His legacy is the unique national interagency community that he was instrumental in building, which includes his role in the creation of the Army’s two elite special mission EOD companies, the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) and the 28th Ordnance Company (Airborne).

– Gen. Peter Schoomaker



Retired Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Wolfe earned the Legion of Merit Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Army Meritorious Service Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, Master Explosive Ordnance Disposal Badge and Basic Parachutist Badge. For his civilian service, he earned the Superior Civilian Service Award in 1997 and 2007. Courtesy photo.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

Indomitable valor: Special Forces heroism during Tet Offensive



By Christopher E. Howard
USASOC History Office

Fifty-five years ago, on Jan. 30-31, 1968, the North Vietnamese Army, in conjunction with their Viet Cong allies, launched an ambitious country-wide offensive in South Vietnam. Hoping to break the will of the South Vietnamese military and stimulate a popular uprising against the pro-American South Vietnamese government, they committed more than 80,000 troops to the initial wave of attacks. Timed to begin during the Tet Mau Than holiday, which marked the start of the lunar new year, the offensive soon took on the abbreviated name of that holiday: Tet. Four Green Berets from the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) demonstrated exceptional valor during a five-week period in early 1968, immediately preceding and during the Tet Offensive.

U.S. Army Special Forces and the Escalation in Vietnam

The U.S. Army's advisory role in South Vietnam began in the late 1950s with the deployment of Mobile Training Teams, including some drawn from the Army's nascent Special Forces units. The advisory mission accelerated in the early 1960s due to U.S. President John F. Kennedy's preferred counterinsurgency strategy, which leaned heavily on Army Special Warfare, particularly Special Forces. This strategy emphasized building the capacity of South Vietnam's Armed Forces and other indigenous partners, securing the populace, and defeating the Viet Cong, the main Communist insurgent force. Special Forces was tailor-made for such missions.

In early 1965, the U.S. deployed its first conventional combat troops to Vietnam. Rather than advising, their mission was to decisively engage and defeat both the Viet Cong and the NVA operating in South Vietnam. Special Forces continued to play an important role and, although their numbers continued to grow, their overall share of the war effort decreased as conventional troop levels rose

dramatically between 1965 and 1968.

More boots on the ground, coupled with more aggressive tactics, brought an increase in U.S. casualties. Still, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam commander, entered 1968 hopeful about the progress of the war. President Lyndon B. Johnson shared Westmoreland's optimism. Both men anticipated a successful conclusion to the war, despite increased casualties and a burgeoning anti-war movement at home.

The North Vietnamese were also optimistic, believing that their planned offensive would turn the tide of the war decisively in their favor. Throughout January 1968, the NVA and Viet Cong maneuvered into their positions. To distract U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, the Communists conducted diversionary attacks in the weeks leading up to the Tet holiday. One such attack took place east of the village of Thong Binh, South Vietnam, on Jan. 16, 1968.

Sgt. Gordon D. Yntema

During the ensuing battle, Sgt. Gordon D. Yntema accompanied two platoons of civilian irregulars to a blocking position east of the village of Thong Binh, where they were attacked by a much larger force of Viet Cong.

Yntema assumed control of the element after its commander was seriously wounded and led a tenacious defense despite overwhelming odds. Out of ammunition and reduced to using his rifle as a club, he held his ground until succumbing to enemy fire.

Staff Sgt. Drew D. Dix

Two weeks later, on the morning of January 30, communist forces attacked eight major South Vietnamese cities. The next day, fighting erupted almost everywhere across South Vietnam as the communists attacked more than 60 towns,



36 provincial capitals, and five of South Vietnam's autonomous cities, including the capital city, Saigon. Chau City, capital of Chau Doc Province, was attacked by two Viet Cong battalions. Staff Sgt. Drew D. Dix, along with the South Vietnamese patrol he was advising, were called on to assist in the defense of beleaguered city.

Dix organized and led two separate relief forces that successfully rescued a total of nine trapped civilians. He subsequently assaulted an enemy-held building, killing six Viet Cong and rescuing two Filipinos. The following day, he assembled a 20-man force and cleared the Viet Cong out of a hotel, theater, and other adjacent buildings within the city. In the process, he captured 20 prisoners, including a high-ranking Viet Cong official. He then cleared enemy troops from the Deputy Province Chief's residence, rescuing that official's wife and children in the process.

Sgt. 1st Class Eugene Ashley, Jr.

A week later, on the evening of Feb. 6, the NVA launched a surprise attack on the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei, in the northwest corner of South Vietnam. With the camp's surviving Special Forces advisors trapped in a bunker, Sgt. 1st Class Eugene Ashley, Jr., organized a rescue effort, consisting mainly of friendly Laotians.



Ashley led his ad hoc assault force on a total of five assaults against the enemy, continuously exposing himself to withering small arms fire, which left him seriously wounded. During his fifth and final assault, he adjusted airstrikes nearly on top of his assault element, forcing the enemy to withdraw and resulting in friendly control of the summit of the hill. Following this assault, he lost consciousness and was carried from the summit by his comrades, only to suffer a fatal wound from an enemy artillery round. Ashley's valiant efforts, at the cost of his own life, made it possible for the survivors of Camp Lang Vei to eventually escape to freedom.

Staff Sgt. Fred W. Zabitosky

Later that month, on Feb. 19, Staff Sgt. Fred W. Zabitosky was part of a nine-man Special Forces long-range reconnaissance patrol operating deep within enemy controlled territory in Laos when his team was attacked by a numerically superior NVA force. Zabitosky rallied his team members and deployed them into defensive positions. When that position became untenable, he called for helicopter extraction. He organized a defensive perimeter and directed fire until the rescue helicopters arrived. He then continued to engage the enemy from the helicopter's door as it took off, but the aircraft was soon disabled by



enemy fire.

Zabitosky was thrown from the helicopter as it spun out of control and crashed. Recovering consciousness, he moved to the flaming wreckage and rescued the severely wounded pilot. Despite his own serious burns and crushed ribs, he carried and dragged the unconscious pilot through a curtain of enemy fire before collapsing within ten feet of a hovering rescue helicopter. Zabitosky would become the fourth Green Beret to receive the Medal of Honor for actions during the Tet Offensive period, joining Yntema, Dix, and Ashley.

These four Special Forces heroes were in good company. The mettle of the U.S. forces in Vietnam was severely tested during the opening months of 1968 in places such as Hue, Saigon, Lang Vei, Dak To, Quang Tri, and Khe Sahn. At every turn, the men and women of the U.S. military rose to the occasion, demonstrating indomitable valor and dealing the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong a crushing defeat. Combined, the Communist forces lost an estimated 72,455 soldiers between January and March 1968, compared with 15,715 allied dead, of which 4,869 were Americans.

A Turning Point: The Impact of the Tet Offensive

The ferocity of the Tet Offensive, and the resulting increase in U.S. casualties, alarmed both U.S. government officials and the American people. It also discredited the claims of progress from both military and political leadership. Anti-war protests intensified as more and more Americans came to share the assessment of popular news anchor Walter Cronkite that the war in Vietnam was unwinnable. President Johnson terminated his reelection campaign. The fighting continued under his successor, Richard M. Nixon, who adopted a strategy of "Vietnamization," characterized by a gradual transfer of responsibility to South Vietnamese forces and a phased drawdown of U.S. troops.

On Jan. 27, 1973, nearly five years to the day after the start of the Tet Offensive, the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed the Paris Peace Accords. The long U.S. combat mission in Vietnam ended two months later, on March 29, 1973. North Vietnam later resumed offensive operations, eventually capturing Saigon on April 30, 1975, thereby ending the war and uniting Vietnam under Communist rule.

Twenty-two Green Berets earned the nation's highest award for valor for service in Vietnam, eight of them posthumously. In the 50 years since, time has not dimmed, nor will it ever dim, the glory of their deeds. Their valorous actions, often at the cost of their own lives, continue to inspire U.S. Army Special Operations Forces soldiers, the U.S. Army, and the nation.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command Tactical skills training



A Soldier assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School fires an M240B machine gun during tactical skills training as part of the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) at Camp Mackall, North Carolina Jan. 9, 2023. Soldiers participated in SFQC training that tested their knowledge of small unit tactics and basic urban operations to ensure they possess the combat skills required to successfully operate on a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha. Photo by K. Kassens.



Naval Special Warfare Command

Silver Star awarded to Naval Special Warfare legend



By U.S. Navy Lt. Kara Handley
Naval Special Warfare Command

A half-century ago, Lt. j.g. Thomas Richards, fighting through injury and exhaustion in the rice paddies of Vietnam, made repeated trips through enemy gunfire to rescue three injured SEAL Team One Zulu Platoon teammates. Nicknamed “The Hulk” for his size and strength, Richards demonstrated uncommon valor by hauling the wounded men across a dike and then lifting each into a friendly helicopter for evacuation. Without his courageous runs into the “kill zone,” the other men on patrol would not have survived the day.

On Jan. 17, over 50 years later, Rear Adm. Keith Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, presented the Silver Star to retired Rear Adm. Richards for his actions that day as the assistant patrol leader of Zulu Platoon. Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro upgraded the original Bronze Star, recognizing the meritorious nature of Richards’ actions.

“Today we were fortunate to attend a very long overdue ceremony to recognize one of Naval Special Warfare’s truest warriors, tribal elders and fantastic teammates,” said Naval Special Warfare Force Master Chief (SEAL) Walter S. Dittmar. “His humility was absolutely evident in the fact that he still recognizes and defers to all the brothers who were around him for why he is alive today.”

Despite originally being recommended for the Silver Star and demonstrating courage under fire typical of higher awards, the staff for Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Vietnam initially recommended Richards for a Bronze Star. The decision by Del Toro to upgrade the award is a reminder that the courage, grit, and integrity of past NSW teammates forms the standard upheld in the community today.

“The upgrade to the Silver Star provides recognition of the fact that things went terribly wrong that day in South



Retired Rear Adm. Thomas Richards is presented the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in action while deployed to Vietnam, Jan. 30, 1971, by Rear Adm. Keith Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, during an awards ceremony at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Jan. 17, 2023. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Jacob Owen.

Vietnam,” said Richards.

“More importantly, it brings attention to the fact that the SEALs and other special operations forces are put in those situations to support our country’s foreign policy in the most dangerous manner. This Silver Star reminds our country that we have people risking their lives for the democracy we enjoy daily.”

A native of Bay Shore, New York, Richards’ background in lifeguarding, wrestling, and experience with small boats led him to believe that the Navy Underwater Demolition Teams would be a natural fit. Moreover, as someone who could squat and deadlift more than 500 pounds, he was well prepared for the arduous physical evolutions of BUD/S except for the runs. His heavier frame was punished by the soft sand, and the runs left him “puking in front of the Hotel Del (Coronado) more times than you want to know.”

Richards credits his parents for instilling in him the values of integrity, bravery, and self-sacrifice — ideals

further refined during his military training. Reflecting on his actions, the retired SEAL matter-of-factly mentioned that he was laser focused on managing the situation and getting his teammates to safety.

“Thinking back on that day, I never gave any thought to my own personal exposure to enemy fire,” Richards said. “I wanted to get my friends out of danger and to safety.”

When questioned about the nature of his courage and whether it’s innate or imbued through rigorous military training, Richards sees it as a combination of the two. In his view, the candidates that begin SEAL training already have the tools built into their persona; it’s the job of the SEAL instructors to bring those values to the surface. Moreover, the bonds formed during training and pre-deployment workups made it so that he would risk his life rather than leave a teammate behind. His bravery speaks to the fact that Naval Special Warfare’s selectivity is built on the rock-solid foundation of earned respect and an unbreakable commitment to the mission.

Saving his teammates in Vietnam was just the beginning of the frogman’s long and colorful career. Over the next 30 years, Richards would “follow the conflicts,” leading special operations missions in the Arabian Gulf during Operation Praying Mantis and Operation Prime Chance. He would also serve in numerous staff and command positions, including as executive officer of Underwater Demolition Team 12 and as commanding officer of Special Boat Unit 13, SEAL Team One, and Naval Special Warfare Center. His final post would be as commander of Naval Special Warfare Command from 1996-1999, after which he retired from active duty.

Thanks to his extensive experience at the tip of the spear in various conflicts, Richards is uniquely qualified to comment on how NSW can advance capabilities that directly contribute to integrated deterrence and campaigning for influence.

“What most people do not understand about NSW is that we are the best problem solvers around. Bar none,” Richards said. “Special operations and NSW exist because there is that set of missions that take a different approach to successfully execute.”

As the NSW community shifts its focus to developing the force for strategic competition, Richards points out that NSW must be willing to adapt and innovate to execute its role of gaining, maintaining, and extending access for theater warfare commanders and the Fleet.

“We must be flexible in response to change,” Richards said. “More importantly, we must place ourselves ahead of change coming from our adversaries or potential adversaries.”

Effusive in his praise of others, Richards is a stellar

example of the servant leadership requisite of any naval officer. When discussing how the incident in Vietnam impacted his career and leadership style, Richards made it clear that he viewed his role as the commander of Naval Special Warfare as one in which he “worked for 6,000 people, not that there were 6,000 people under my command.” Moreover, he learned early the importance of taking care of his people first “drag the injured men out of the rice paddy, stay up as late as you need to get the Fitreps and awards done right for those within your command,” he said.

Evident when speaking with the retired admiral is the importance of family and personal relationships. His father, who had a successful law enforcement career, provided discipline that served Richards during his own career. According to the Richards, the BUD/S instructors never struck as much fear in him as his father did during a high school wrestling competition. The innovative young athlete had previously invented a new move which was quickly banned. After witnessing his son’s blatant use of the now illegal move, the elder Richards’ stood up from the bleachers and called out to his son in a tone more chilling than any future instructor.

In addition to the numerous commanding officers and executive officers he served under, his wife of 52 years, Jackie, is a source of strength and inspiration. Jackie, whom he describes as one of the most brilliant individuals he ever met, provided wisdom and counsel over Richards’ career. His advice for those pursuing careers in special operations and trying to make a relationship work is to understand the tremendous burden you’re asking of your partner. Just as a good teammate puts their fellow SEALs first, similarly, one must be considerate and accommodating in family life.



Mr. Wendell Hedge, a former Radioman 2nd Class in the U.S. Navy is presented the Bronze Star Medal (Gold Star in lieu of the third award with Combat “V”) for heroic achievement while deployed to Vietnam, Jan. 30, 1971, by Rear Adm. Keith Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, during an awards ceremony at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Jan. 17, 2023. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Jacob Owen.

Naval Special Warfare Command



Junior physical therapist of the year: How one officer is chasing her dreams

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea Meiller
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE

In the back of a room filled with racks of weights, tension bands, and workout machines is a physical therapist gently stretching out a patient's back. As she moves around her patient, she talks them through each movement. By the end of the session, the patient leaves smiling. With just enough time to clean her station, U.S. Navy's Lt. Tia Laine Blythe is onto the next patient.

While growing up in Santa Clarita, California, Blythe always knew she wanted to do something in the medical field. She was in college at the University of California, Los Angeles for pre-medical education when someone mentioned physical therapy to her.

"I knew I didn't want to be a doctor, but it wasn't until someone mentioned physical therapy to me that I started looking into it," she said. "Once I did, I realized physical therapy still has the medical component, but it also blends in sports medicine and personal training, which are other big interests of mine. I was sold."

After completing her bachelor's and master's degree at UCLA, she went on to receive her doctorate in physical therapy from the University of Southern California. Upon graduation, she began working as a physical therapist in the civilian sector. However, after a few years of working, she was ready for a change of pace.

"Something was missing," she remarked. "I was seeing the same patients day in and day out and doing the same things over and over. I just kept thinking 'I can't do this for the rest of my life, I need a change'. I sat down and thought about my goals in life and came back to the idea of joining the military."

Though she had previously considered joining the military, Blythe felt compelled to follow the more traditional college-to-career path. After all, outside of her grandfather's naval service in the 1950's, no one else in her family served.



Lt. Tia Blythe, a physical therapist assigned to Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) 1, poses for a portrait in the clinic onboard the Silver Strand Training Complex in Coronado, California. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet's reach and maintain access for the Joint Force in competition and conflict. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea Meiller.

"The military was an interest of mine in high school," she said. "But I did what I thought I was supposed to do – I applied to college, then one thing led to another, and I had graduated. I started working and I let go of that thought for a while."

However, in 2018 she decided to revisit her interest in joining the military. This led to her commissioning into the U.S. Navy as a Medical Service Corps Officer and physical therapist. After completing Officer Candidate School in March 2019, Blythe checked into her first duty station at Navy Medicine and Readiness Training Command Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, Calif.

"I really enjoyed working with Marines," Blythe said.

“But after a few years, I was ready for a new challenge, and I applied to Naval Special Warfare.”

In June 2021, she was assigned to the medical clinic at Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) 1 in Coronado, California, where she wasted no time integrating herself fully into her new environment.

“The cool thing about Naval Special Warfare is it’s an entirely new patient set,” she remarked. “The patients I see here are incredibly motivated; they’re the best of the best. They want to get better so they can get back to training and doing their job. The level of care is higher, the patients are more challenging, and it’s allowed me to grow so much.”

But it isn’t just her patients that are reaping the benefits of her dedication and passion – it’s the entire command and the commands NSWG-1 serves. Since checking in, Blythe has developed a pre-deployment combat medical course for Independent Duty Corpsman and SEAL medics, managed over 7,000 musculoskeletal specialty care encounters with patients, and embedded with a West Coast-based SEAL team for deployment.

While assigned to NSWG-1, Blythe – who was already a board-certified orthopedic clinical specialist – also obtained her dual specialty as a sport’s clinical specialist. This makes her one of only seven physical therapists in the Navy to have obtained this dual certification.

Her steadfast work ethic did not go unnoticed. Each year, the Department of the Navy’s Medical Service Corps recognizes medical practitioners across different specialties by holding a competitive awards selection board. In 2022, Lt. Cmdr. Cortney Shewmaker, NSWG-1’s director of sports medicine and physical therapy, nominated Blythe for the Navy’s 2022 Junior Physical Therapist of the Year Award. In December 2022, Blythe won the award.

“Lt. Blythe was nominated for this award because she’s deserving of it,” said Shewmaker. “She’s one of the best physical therapists that I’ve worked with, both in the civilian sector and in the Navy. She is incredibly hard working, she cares about her patients, and she strives to make the physical therapy community better.”

This award not only helps Blythe in her future career aspirations, but it also helps to further the relationship and trust she has worked to build with the elite group of patients she sees every day.

“Letting the [Naval Special Warfare] community know that she is good at what she does and that she cares is huge,” said Shewmaker. “Trust is so big in this community, and this just shows her commitment to the teams and helps build that trust even more.”

Capt. David Abernathy, commander, NSWG-1, praised Blythe for her unwavering support of Naval Special Warfare.

“Tia embodies what Naval Special Warfare is all

about,” Abernathy said. “Her talent, passion and relentless commitment speak volumes to her character, and the character we covet here within [Naval Special Warfare]. Tia actively seeks to better not only herself, but also our Sailors. She makes a positive difference every single day ensuring our physical therapy program stands as a best practice within the Navy. We are very proud to have her on our team.”

As for Blythe, winning the award was validation that her hard work is noticed and appreciated.

“Winning this award was extremely validating for me,” she said. “I spend 30 hours a week doing hands-on patient care, plus the administrative things that come with that. I’m also continually trying to grow and improve as a Naval officer. When I found out I won the award, it really confirmed that all the work and dedication I am putting into my job is noticed and appreciated.”

Blythe’s next set of orders after her tour at NSWG-1 will take her to Okinawa, Japan. From there, she hopes to complete a tour on an aircraft carrier and continue her career trajectory of growth and new experiences. She did have one piece of advice for aspiring physical therapists.

“My best advice for anyone who wants to be a physical therapist is to say yes,” she said. “Say yes to any opportunity you are given, even if it doesn’t sound good initially. You must be willing to push yourself outside your comfort zone to grow. You might flounder a little bit at first – everyone does when they’re doing something new or challenging – but that’s how you learn, thrive and ultimately succeed.”



Lt. Tia Blythe, a physical therapist assigned to Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) 1, stretches a patient’s back during an appointment at the clinic onboard the Silver Strand Training Complex in Coronado, California. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea Meiller.

Naval Special Warfare Command



U.S. Navy, Republic of Korea SEALs conclude bilateral training exercise



U.S. Navy and Republic of Korea Navy SEALs enter a room while practicing close-quarters combat drills during a bilateral training exercise at Silver Strand Training Complex, Coronado, California, Nov. 30, 2022. NSW 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 Daniel Gaither.

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Gaither
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE

A West Coast-based SEAL Team concluded a bilateral training engagement with the Republic of Korea Naval Special Warfare Flotilla on Dec. 9, 2022, Coronado, California.

The two-week training exercise provided an opportunity to increase interoperability and strengthen the relationship between strategic special operations forces partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Our combined forces have a common understanding of a shared working environment at sea," said a U.S. Naval Special Warfare operator. "NSW has taken away many lessons learned and we're eager to continue to develop the relationships and friendships made with the [Republic of Korea] SEALs."

The engagement included static and dynamic weapons training, combined close quarters combat drills, mission planning, and tactical combat casualty care, as well as

Tip of the Spear

knowledge and cultural exchanges.

"We were able to bolster the combined operational capabilities of our special operators," said the Republic of Korea Navy special warfare operator overseeing the Flotilla's participation. "We will continue such practical high intensity trainings to be ready for any situation."

The event culminated with two force-on-force full mission profiles, where integrated platoons of both Republic of Korea and U.S. Navy SEALs conducted various target assault scenarios in urban terrains, laying the foundation for the execution of future combined training exercises.

"This dynamic training event showcases our two forces' interoperability and resolve," said U.S. Navy Capt. David Abernathy, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 1. "It also sharpens our readiness and demonstrates our ironclad commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. We look forward to continuing to strengthen this relationship."

NSW 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.



U.S. Navy and Republic of Korea Navy SEALs lock down a stairwell while conducting a fully integrated target assault scenario during a military operations in urban terrain training as part of a bilateral training exercise Dec. 1, 2022, San Diego, California. NSW 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 Daniel Gaither.

Naval Special Warfare Command

SEAL training at Fort Chaffee



An East-Coast-based U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) fires at opposing forces, during a training exercise at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, Dec. 12, 2022. As a component of Naval Special Warfare, Naval Special Warfare Group TWO strives to produce, support and deploy the finest maritime commandos on the planet, enabling Naval Special Warfare to conduct full-spectrum operations, unilaterally or with partners, to support national objectives. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Trey Hutcheson.



Air Force Special Operations Command



C-145A Combat Coyote makes final run after decade of service

*By U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile
919th Special Operations Wing*

Aircrews from the Air Force Reserve's 711th Special Operations Squadron departed the Duke Field flightline Dec. 15, 2022, in four C-145A Combat Coyote aircraft for the last time after 10 years of service to Air Force Special Operations Command.

When the aircraft returned, aviators, loadmasters, and ground crew alike all gathered to respectfully mark the end of an era.

The Combat Coyote's landed in sequence and proceeded in tight formation down the taxiway as if to offer one final show for the small group of awaiting spectators.

"There weren't many other aircraft in the Air Force like this one," said retired Chief Master Sgt. Bobby Barton, former senior enlisted leader of the 919th Special Operations Group. "These guys loved this airplane, it really stood out from the crowd."

The 919th Special Operations Wing began utilizing the Combat Coyote in 2012. Combat Aviation Advisors from the 711th SOS used the aircraft to maintain proficiency prior to instructing partner nation aircrew on a wide range of advanced aviation tactics. Instructors from the 5th Special Operations Squadron Detachment 1 at Duke Field trained U.S. Air Force pilots on the aircraft for Air Force Special Operations Command.

Although it was not used for overseas deployments in recent years, the Combat Coyote's provided a tactical mobility advantage to missions downrange when they were initially purchased by the command. They could make short landings and takeoffs, ideal for rural, undeveloped airfields and cargo delivery to forward operating bases.

"Today's flight was a little bitter sweet," said Maj. Kristoffer Williams, 711th SOS chief of safety. "It's been



Four C-145A Combat Coyote aircraft taxi onto the flightline at Duke Field, Florida, Dec. 15, 2022 at the end of their last flight. The 919th Special Operations Wing was the last U.S. Air Force unit to fly the aircraft before they are decommissioned. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile.

a great aircraft to fly, the Wolfhound was good to us while it lasted."

The 919th SOW was the last wing operating the airframe, officially retiring it from the U.S. Air Force. Citizen Air Commandos and their families gathered on the flightline to watch the planes land and congratulate pilots on the final flight.

"We put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into this airframe," said Williams. "We learned to appreciate it, but it's time to move on to the next aircraft."

The wing has a historical precedent of adapting to the needs of the Air Force. The 919th SOW previously retired the beloved AC-130H Spectre and the MC-130E Combat Talon I. As it has in years past, the wing is prepared to transform to meet the future needs of Air Force Special Operations Command.

"The only constant in the Air Force is change," said Barton. "The people that flew the C-145 enjoyed it. It was a nice aircraft to have for a while, but I'm looking forward to the next one."



A C-145A Combat Coyote aircraft sits parked on a dirt runway on the Eglin Range, Florida, Dec. 15, 2022. The aircraft performed touch and goes as part of their last flight before being decommissioned. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile.

Air Force Special Operations Command



70 dog years later, Major Edan ends her military service

*By U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile
919th Special Operations Wing*

During Operation Enduring Freedom, a military hospital in Afghanistan was bearing the brunt of caring for service members wounded in combat. While staff worked around the clock to save lives, they found comfort in what would become the country's first and last combat stress therapy dog.

In 2012, now retired Maj. Edan, commissioned as a military working dog into narcotics detection. Her demeanor and propensity to disregard her duties in the presence of food

resulted in being relieved of her position. It wasn't until medical staff at the hospital discovered her ability to identify patients in acute distress and provide immediate comfort that she was given a new job as Afghanistan's only combat stress therapy dog. Edan's newfound skills and position led her down a distinct career path from other military working dogs.

"There were a lot of traumatic injuries with people getting critically wounded all the time, and a lot of the doctors were under extreme stress," said Lt. Col. Michael Brasher, 2nd SOS pilot and Edan's caretaker. "They realized



From left, retired Maj. Edan, 2nd Special Operations Squadron combat therapy dog, and Lt. Col. Michael Brasher, 2nd SOS pilot, stop for a photo at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Dec. 21, 2022. Brasher adopted Edan while working with a MQ-9 Reaper squadron in Afghanistan. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile.

Edan had a special gift, because she would go comfort the most stressed people specifically.”

After completing additional training and heading into duty, she became well-known across Kandahar Airfield for her position as the lone combat stress therapy dog. Edan made her rounds at the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation center and to various workplaces on base. She flew frequently to support service members at Bagram Air Base, Camp Bastion, Camp Dwyer and forward operating bases across the country.

“I met Edan while I was deployed to Bagram, and it felt so nice to pet her ears and talk to her,” said Tech. Sgt. Ashli Nelson, 2nd SOS sensor operator. “She was definitely great for morale.”

Edan’s service became very popular, landing her in publications such as Time Magazine and The Atlantic. Public affairs agencies across multiple branches produced stories about her exploits.

“All my friends I deployed with would show me pictures of her and we’d all talk about meeting her,” said Nelson. “She’s kind of a celebrity, I think anyone that was deployed to Bagram around that time knows her.”

In 2017, she met her caretaker, Brasher, while on duty at an MQ-9 Reaper compound in Afghanistan. Brasher checked her out of the kennels and brought her to their compound where the operators would play with and feed her.

“At the 2 SOS Operation Center, crewmembers would all lay on the floor with her, she was a small brown dot in a sea of flight suits,” said Brasher. “They would always tell me having Edan around made working so much better and they looked forward to their jobs”

After two more years of supporting service members around Afghanistan, Maj. Edan retired from her active-duty career when Brasher took her home to Florida.

Edan served alongside Brasher at the 2nd SOS for three more years using her unique skills to identify members feeling stressed.

“I’ve witnessed her picking up on stress in people over and over again,” said Brasher. “I was talking to this very outgoing and gregarious member, but she started licking his palm and I knew something was going on.”

Edan has multiple ways to indicate someone’s stress level. When an Airman is experiencing minor stress, Edan will place her head on them. If they are undergoing chronic



From left, Col. Jason Grandy, 919th Special Operations Wing commander, Maj. Edan, 2nd Special Operations Squadron Combat Stress Therapy Dog, and Lt. Col. Michael Brasher, 2nd SOS pilot, accept Edan’s retirement certificate at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Jan. 20, 2023. Brasher is Edan’s caretaker and shared his retirement ceremony with her. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile.

stress or illness, she will lay next to them or at their feet. If a member is going through acute distress, she will lick the palm of their hand.

On several occasions, Edan served as an indicator to larger issues in member’s lives by licking their palms. She was able to identify an Airman that was considering self-harm, allowing their wingmen and leadership to help with resiliency and mental health resources.

“She’s most definitely done her job,” said Nelson. “Edan has done at least her full 20 in dog years, and I’ve really appreciated having her and Brasher at the squadron.”

While Edan is putting her military service behind her, in her free time she volunteers at a Veterans Affairs hospital in Orlando. This service landed her a photo on the wall at the Orlando Mission BBQ adorned with her iconic therapy dog name tape.

“I love her to death and am extremely proud of her,” said Brasher. “She’s brought a lot of joy and love to people over the years.”

Brasher and Edan retired together at a ceremony on Jan. 20th, 2023, where they both received certificates of appreciation for their service and congratulatory words from Col. Jason Grandy, 919th Special Operations Wing commander.

Although the 919th SOW must bid a farewell to their keenest canine, she will spend her retirement mostly catching sticks, going on walks, and swimming according to Brasher.

Air Force Special Operations Command Flightline Takeoffs



An AC-130J Ghostrider Gunship takes flight at Hurlburt Field, Fla., Feb. 1, 2023. The AC-130 gunships have an extensive combat history dating back to Vietnam. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman Bailey Wyman.





*Marine Forces, Special
Operations Command*



**VMM-268 conducts
fast-rope training with MARSOC**



A U.S. Marine with Marines Forces Special Operations Command rappels down a MV-22 Osprey assigned to Marines Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 268 during a training exercise at Schofield Barracks, Jan. 24, 2023. VMM-268 provided the aerial support platform, enabling MARSOC Marines to complete their scheduled training. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Chandler Stacy.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

U.S. Special Operations Command hosts 'Focus on the First Truth' event

*By U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Jason Baker
USSOCOM Office of Communication*

U.S. Army Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command hosted the first of what will be a series of virtual forums focused on people, January 10, 2023. The initial "Focus on the First Truth" forum dealt with suicide and self-harm prevention.

The series of quarterly events are a component to the USSOCOM Preservation of the Force and Family's Integrated Performance Campaign, said Col. Michael Stone, POTFF director. The purpose of the events is to develop a mutual understanding across the 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 described the moment it was decided that the command needed to refocus on the topic of suicide and self-harm. During a commander's session this past September many senior leaders throughout SOF gathered and discussed a negative trend in suicides numbers. As the leaders discussed the topic for nearly two hours, the Command Sgt. Major of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Weimer admitted there was a lot he did not understand about the topic and that it was necessary to bring in professionals and other experts to



Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, hosted the first of what will be a series of virtual "Focus on the First Truth" conferences for all O6 and above command teams and their spouses. Suicide and self-harm prevention were the focus areas for the day-long forum. Here, Bob Delaney, a former undercover New Jersey State Trooper and 25-year NBA referee speaks about his experience battling through the years of stress that built up while performing a deep undercover operation to take down the mafia. USSOCOM is committed to saving the lives of our number one comparative and competitive advantage – our people. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Jason Baker.

learn more so they could better address the problem and find solutions.

“We said, ‘that’s a great idea,’” recalled Fenton. “We need to stop for a moment in time. We got to do a semi-stand down and we need to bring in anybody and everybody who will come and talk to us about how to take care of our team. How to focus on our force and families.”

The plan would be to look at the problem from many different perspectives. So, during the day-long forum leaders heard from renowned DoD and civilian researchers about their insights on effective intervention techniques, mental health treatments, and the role conditions such as traumatic brain injury may play.

Participants also listened to testimonials from service-members who overcame ideations and survived attempts to take their own life; and heard from surviving family members about the important role the family can play in self-harm prevention, the training family members need, and how our enterprise can support them.

The first half of the day focused on the academic and clinical experts in the fields of psychology and psychiatry with expertise in suicide and suicide prevention and post-traumatic stress. The panel provided the leaders with the latest research information and the latest mental health treatment and therapies.

One of the highlights of the day was the presentation given by Bob Delaney, a former undercover New Jersey State Trooper and 25-year NBA Referee. Bob recounted his experience battling through the years of stress that built up while performing a deep undercover operation to take down the mafia. His years of experience working with military and other first responders makes him a valuable resource on the topic of post traumatic stress.

The second half of the day was dedicated to the personal testimonies of surviving family members and service members who battled through suicide ideations and survived attempted suicide. At the end of the conference all leaders expressed their gratitude for the honest, frank first-hand testimonials and the personal emotional impact they experienced listening to the survivors tell their stories.

The conversations brought to life the challenges that service members and families face when dealing with a mental health crisis. The individuals expressed frustration with some of the programs like the Army Substance

Abuse Program that can sometimes treat a mental health condition as a discipline problem and is often focused on transitioning those in the program out of the military service. They also discussed how junior leaders might not be equipped to recognize or distinguish between indiscipline and a mental health issue. Exposing and exploring these barriers and gaps, when it comes to

mental health treatment and awareness, will better enable the leadership to change policy or find areas to better equip young officers and NCOs to handle these situations and help their personnel.

“When we talk about our first priority, it is about the people of this organization, the force

and families,” said Fenton. “And we call it the competitive and comparative advantage for who we are as the Special Operations community; it’s been that way for decades. We know that we’re in the people business.”

Following the senior leader event, all subordinate commands were tasked to conduct their own sessions at every echelon of command. The next iteration of the Focus on the First Truth will focus on other relevant threats to the formation, like safety, training, and risk management. These future sessions are meant to ensure USSOCOM matches its actions with the spirit of the ‘First SOF Truth.’

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



Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, hosted the first of what will be a series of virtual “Focus on the First Truth” conferences for all O6 and above command teams and their spouses. Suicide and self-harm prevention were the focus areas for the day-long forum. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Jason Baker.

We need to stop for a moment in time. We got to do a semi-stand down and we need to bring in anybody and everybody who will come and talk to us about how to take care of our team. How to focus on our force and families.

— Gen. Bryan Fenton

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Deputy SECDEF visits the command



Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, hosted the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Dr. Kathleen Hicks, to discuss USSOCOM support to the National Defense Strategy, our people and how the command innovates and transforms SOF for the future, Jan. 25, 2023, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. Additionally, she had lunch with service members and civilians to talk about the issues that most matter to them. Photos by Michael Bottoms.





U.S. Special Operations Command welcomed the Secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable Frank Kendall, Jan. 19, 2023, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida to discuss modernization, talent management and support to the National Defense Strategy. The Air Force's contribution to the Special Operations Forces enterprise and Air Force Special Operations Command is critical to the command's success. Photos by Michael Bottoms.

SECAF tours the headquarters



Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

USSOCOM Care Coalition hosts its 2023 Warrior Care Conference

By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication

U.S. Special Operations Command's Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) held its Warrior Care Conference in Orlando, Florida, Feb. 13-15, 2023. Nearly 300 people participated in the two-day conference which had panels discussing novel and emerging therapies, cancer treatment, and traumatic brain injury. Also, there were more than 30 federal and non-federal organizations in attendance providing important networking and veteran care opportunities.

The annual conference is a unique opportunity that brings together those who support special operations forces wounded, ill, and injured warriors and their families to share best practices, discuss current trends within the warrior care community, and learn from each other in a dynamic environment.

The conference kicked off with Vice Adm. Colin Green, deputy commander of USSOCOM, giving opening remarks and presenting the USSOCOM Patriot Award. The Patriot Award recognizes exceptional and enduring contributions to the welfare of USSOCOM's wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans, and their families.

This year's recipient, Francis A. Dailey II, was recognized for more than 7 years dedicated volunteer service as a Peer Mentor with Wounded Warrior Project, serving as the Director of Therapeutic Programs for Heroes coordinating retreats for severely ill, injured vets, and active-duty service members. Last, he serves as Director Emeritus for Healing Paws for Warriors, a service dog training program.

Tip of the Spear

38



Vice Adm. Colin Green, deputy commander USSOCOM, gives opening remarks to the 2023 Warrior Care Conference Feb. 14, in Orlando Florida. The Warrior Care Program focuses on wounded, ill and injured USSOCOM service members and their families. The Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) provides advocacy and care coordination services to more than 22,000 people. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Frank is the ultimate giver, he embodies the spirit of the Patriot Award. Frank knows what it's like to deal with injuries as he was medically retired from the Air Force. He turned his injuries into a passion to help others.

— Vice Adm. Colin Green

“Frank is the ultimate giver, he embodies the spirit of the Patriot Award,” said Green. “Frank knows what it's like to deal with injuries as he was medically retired from the Air Force. He turned his injuries into a passion to help others.”

“I was born into a servant family. My father taught me that you are not part of the community, not a human being, unless you are contributing. Those words put me on the path to service.” said Dailey. “I am just a guy and I hope I have made some difference in people's lives.”

Another keynote speaker for the conference was The Honorable James D. Rodriguez, the Department of Labor's

Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service. Rodriguez is responsible for preparing America's veterans, service members and their spouses for meaningful careers.

"I have a passion to help veterans and their families to find meaningful employment when it is time to transition to civilian employment, not just finding a job. Prepare yourself for the transition and the Department of Labor has many programs to help veterans." said Rodriguez. "You have to find the right organization with the right culture that you believe in. Veterans stay with organizations longer if they

find a work culture they believe in."

The Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) focuses on wounded, ill and injured USSOCOM service members and their families. Established in 2005 to provide special operations forces wounded, ill, or injured service members and their families advocacy after life changing events, in order to navigate through recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration as quickly as possible, strengthening SOF readiness. It also provides career transition assistance when necessary. The program currently provides advocacy and care coordination services to more than 22,000 people.



Vice Adm. Collin Green, deputy commander USSOCOM, presents the USSOCOM Patriot Award to Francis A. Dailey, II during the 2023 Warrior Care Conference Feb. 14, in Orlando Florida. The Patriot Award recognizes exceptional and enduring contributions to the welfare of USSOCOM's wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans and their families. . Photo by Michael Bottoms.



(Above) Col. April Verlo (left) from USSOCOM's Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) moderates the Novel and Emerging Therapies Panel during the 2023 Warrior Care Conference Feb. 14, Orlando, Florida. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

(Below) The Honorable James D. Rodriguez, the Department of Labor's Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service, speaks during the 2023 Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) conference Feb. 15, 2023. Rodriguez is responsible for preparing America's veterans, servicemembers and their spouses for meaningful careers. Photo by Michael Bottoms



(Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, hosted the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Dr. Kathleen Hicks, to discuss USSOCOM support to the National Defense Strategy, our people and how the command innovates and transforms SOF for the future, Jan. 25, 2023, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. Additionally, she had lunch with service members and civilians to talk about the issues that most matter to them. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

