



Tip OF THE Spear

United States Special Operations Command
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

June 2021



Colonel Ralph Puckett, Jr.

MEDAL OF HONOR
KOREAN WAR



United States Special Operations Command



President awards Medal of Honor to retired Ranger for actions on Hill 205 ... 14

Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) President Joseph Biden presented the Medal of Honor to retired Col. Ralph Puckett Jr. during a ceremony at the White House in Washington, D.C., May 21, 2021. Puckett was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions while serving then as commander of the Eighth Army Ranger Company when his company of 57 Rangers was attacked by Chinese forces at Hill 205 near the Chongchon River, during the Korean Conflict on Nov. 25-26, 1950. Photo illustration courtesy of the Army News Service.

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A harrowing night in Afghanistan

*By U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Brooke Moeder
31st Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

He sat back in his chair, recalling the tragic events that took place that night. The explosion, the fire, the confusion.

“The first thing that comes to mind is fire,” said U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Rogers, 57th Rescue Squadron pararescueman (PJ). “There were so many things covered in fuel and burning. It looked apocalyptic.”

Thinking back to a time before this life-altering event, Rogers explained he worked as a mountain guide and paramedic in Wyoming before he felt the call to join the U.S. Air Force in October 2014.

“I was reaching a place in my previous career where I wanted to take the next step forward, with medicine in particular,” said Rogers. “I started looking into flight-medicine and stumbled across the pararescue career field. On my honeymoon almost a year later, I got a text saying I was leaving for basic training in a couple weeks.”

After basic training, Rogers completed PJ training in just a year and a half, even though the average training time is more than three years. Remaining mentally resilient was essential to finish the training, Rogers said.

“It was a grind to see if you’re willing to commit to waking up, knowing what’s going to happen the next day, and just continue to do it over and over,” said Rogers. “It involved lots of swimming and rucking. It was pretty brutal, but it’s awesome.”

Rogers deployed to Afghanistan in 2017, and again at the end of 2019. During his second deployment as a technical rescue specialist, Rogers was tasked to recover endangered personnel while attached to a U.S. Army Special Forces unit that supported Afghanistan army units against the Taliban.

The missions were designed to help the Afghanistan army get the assistance and training they needed to defend themselves, said Rogers.

The area we were in was experiencing a full surge by the Taliban, with them trying to take and retake several districts and key cities attached to those districts. We were just trying to focus on a few districts that were holes for



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Rogers, 57th Rescue Squadron pararescueman, poses for a photo while deployed to an undisclosed location in Afghanistan in the winter of 2019. While deployed, he was a technical rescue specialist and was tasked to recover personnel when required. Rogers was awarded the 2021 Air Force Sergeants Association Pitsenbarger Award for his efforts in treating seven individuals after an explosion. Courtesy photo.

drugs and equipment, and prevent that from continuing to worsen.”

Sixteen-hour days on foot or in a vehicle was an average day for Rogers and his team. Missions were completed at night to specific locations of interest.

Although, one of those night missions wasn’t like the others.

“Right toward the end of our time there, we had a village that previously received a really bad ambush,” said Rogers. “We counted over 20 rocket-propelled grenades that were fired at our convoy, and two RPGs went right across the hood of our vehicle as we were trying to return fire.”

Locals in the village told the convoy about a compound listed as a Taliban headquarters building, located in a school. In this building they found a large stockpile of artillery.

“There were piles and piles of radio equipment and different kinds of electronics, Taliban propaganda, and about 50 to 60 pounds of homemade explosives,” said Rogers. “Ammunition for all different kinds of weapons, mortars and stacks of rocket boosters were also found there.”

Rogers and an SF communications specialist started sifting through the equipment, but two of his teammates asked them to leave the area; a request that saved Rogers’ life.

Other individuals, who Rogers knew and recognized, stayed behind to sort through the pile to identify artillery, including an SF intelligence sergeant, SF communications sergeant, and an SF engineer.

“I was looking at one of the guys organizing the pile through my night vision goggles when all of a sudden we saw a flash and heard two bangs,” said Rogers. “We then felt the concussive force from the explosion and immediately thought we were under attack, so we prepared to fire back.”

After the initial confusion and chaos of the moment, Rogers composed himself, realized they weren’t under attack, and jumped into action to assist individuals injured in the blast.

“The SF medic and I started going through the mass casualty procedures because we knew there had been a bunch of guys near the blast,” explained Rogers. “The engineer was blown over and down into a ditch, and appeared to be unconscious. The communications sergeant was set on fire with RPG fuel after it exploded near him.”

Rogers couldn’t locate the intelligence sergeant at first, but found him on the other side of the stockpile two meters away from the initial explosion. Rogers assessed his condition and found him in bad shape. To Rogers’ surprise, the communications sergeant had smothered the fire on himself and helped drag the intelligence sergeant out of the stockpile to safety.

“We were able to get a few steps before the kit that the intelligence sergeant was wearing ignited, as it was filled with ammo, grenades and a radio,” said Rogers. “They started going off in his kit and were burning through the material, cooking off the rounds in the bottom of his magazine.”

Before he had time to react, the communications sergeant ripped the burning radio off the intelligence

sergeant, in turn reigniting himself. Rogers then had to rip the kit and burning grenades free and throw it away from the intelligence sergeant.

“A TACP [Tactical Air Control Party] arrived and started to help,” said Rogers. “I directed him to start applying tourniquets to three different limbs of the intelligence sergeant that were bleeding heavily. He had a lot of blast injuries throughout his whole body.”

The group didn’t have the opportunity to leave the edge of the stockpile until they could treat the intelligence sergeant’s wounds. They instead positioned themselves between the intelligence sergeant and the ongoing explosions to keep treating. Three different medical bags were exhausted to treat the wounds, but it wasn’t enough.

Rogers helped treat six other of his teammates on the scene. While treating the intelligence sergeant’s wounds, he coordinated a medevac with the ground force commander. More than an hour later, the medevac airlifted them to a German surgical center.

“We kept trying to resuscitate the intelligence sergeant as best we could on the way to the hospital,” said Rogers. “After about 30 minutes at the hospital, [the medical staff] assessed his condition and determined he just wasn’t sustainable.”

The intelligence operator passed away later that night, and Rogers stayed with him the rest of the night as his team came to pay their respects.

“The intelligence sergeant was an ultimate professional,” said Rogers. “He’s definitely the best intel operator I’ve ever known. He was key to ours and the Afghan’s success that winter. Being able to hold that region... a large portion of it was due to his efforts. He really cared and believed in his mission.”

Rogers was awarded the 2021 U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa Sergeants Association Pitsenbarger Award for his efforts that night in Afghanistan. While Rogers expressed it’s extremely humbling to receive the award, he gave credit to the men he was with that night.

“It’s an honor to receive [this award], but I don’t think anyone else in that the same circumstance would have done anything different,” said Rogers.

The reason for the detonation was ruled as an accidental discharge into the RPG stockpile by partner forces.

Rogers says the experience has changed him but he’s gained an appreciation for the sacrifices that are made for our country.

“The men I was with didn’t have to work as much as they did,” Rogers said. “Everybody that was there was passionate about their job and doing it right. This loss wrecked our team. Losing families, losing a brother. Those men I was with are our absolute heroes, and I would fight alongside them any day, anywhere.”

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



A U.S. Civil Affairs team assigned to Special Operations Command Europe and mobilized in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) helped connect Jezero, BiH to NASA's Perseverance Rover mission on Mars. Courtesy photo.

SOF Civil Affairs: Bringing worlds together

*By U.S. Army Capt. Benjamin Ordiway
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe*

Forming meaningful relationships with civil society to achieve strategic effects requires persistent engagement—and perseverance. In 2019, a U.S. Civil Affairs team assigned to Special Operations Command Europe and mobilized in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) moved heaven and earth to do just that—playing an outsized role in connecting a small town in BiH to NASA's Perseverance Rover mission on Mars. What eventually progressed into an international headline, carried by news organizations from N1 media in the Balkans to National Public Radio in the U.S., all started over a cup of tea during a meeting in the Jezero, BiH mayor's office.

A Plan Comes Together

During a U.S. Embassy Country Team meeting, the Civil Affairs team was alerted to a flood event along the Pliva River. The river runs through both entities—the majority Croat and Bosniak Federation of BiH, and the majority Serb

Republic of Srpska. These ethnically bounded entities were products of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. While effectively putting an end to the Bosnian War, the agreement separated the country into two parts using former military frontlines as a boundary. Though hardened borders no longer exist, the inter-entity boundary line often serves as a de facto dividing line of political ideology and grievance.

With historical context in mind, the Pliva River flooding presented an opportunity—albeit a small one—to bring communities together to solve common problems. The team planned to conduct a site survey of the damage and identify ways to optimize existing community resources to improve emergency response. As the January 2019 meeting in the Jezero mayor's office came to a close, Mayor Snežana Ružičić mentioned offhand that a crater on Mars shared her town's name. To many, celestial small talk might be considered the chaff of communication. Yet, to a Civil Affairs officer, this was an opportunity to form a meaningful relationship with resounding effects.

Calling All Partners

Following the meeting, the Civil Affairs team immediately got to work—warming up their embassy office phone with cold calls across the European continent and the Atlantic. The plan: confirm and promote official recognition of Jezero, BiH as the namesake for Jezero Crater, Mars.

To pull it off required an expansion of the traditional “whole of government” approach. First, the team had to ensure that Jezero Crater on Mars was named after this specific Jezero, BiH, as there are numerous villages named Jezero throughout the Balkans. A phone call to NASA headquarters in Washington, D.C. led the team to contact the International Astronomical Union in Paris, France. As the authority on assigning designations to celestial bodies and their surface features, everything hinged on which Jezero in the Balkans the IAU referenced when naming the rover’s landing site.

After weeks of going back and forth with the IAU, a representative sent a surprising confirmation: a photo of a printed encyclopedia with Jezero, BiH circled. The IAU made this seemingly inconsequential naming decision back in 2007 to little fanfare. It would soon prove increasingly consequential for the citizens of Jezero.

The encyclopedia photo was all the team needed to begin developing an ambitious engagement. The list of partners would grow to include Special Operations Command Europe, NASA’s Headquarters and Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Embassy in BiH. Together, this motley interagency team would help propel the little-known intersection of the rover’s landing site and the town of Jezero, BiH to the international stage.

Earth Day in Jezero

With official recognition as one line of effort, the team expanded engagement in the region to include Jajce, a neighboring town situated along the Pliva River just across the inter-entity boundary line. In April 2019, the Civil Affairs team developed an “Earth Day” themed community engagement with support from the Environmental Protection Agency to connect environmental stewardship with flood prevention. Children from both Jezero and Jajce attended an event filled with music, dancing, and an intercommunity river cleanup. Local and regional media covered the day’s activities, setting the stage for a much larger event.

Additionally, the Earth Day event in Jezero, BiH helped set the conditions for possible future BiH participation in NASA’s Global Learning and Observations Program (NASA GLOBE). The program encourages student-led scientific inquiry to improve eco-awareness at the community level and supports global information sharing through educational resources and connection to the broader scientific community.

A Letter from Mars...

Seven months and a new Civil Affairs team later, the U.S.

Ambassador to BiH, Eric Nelson, delivered a letter signed by the Director of Mars Exploration Program to Mayor Ružičić in November 2019. The letter formally recognized the most unusual of sister cities: Jezero Crater, Mars and Jezero, BiH. With support from the Non-Governmental Organization Spirit of America, more than 300 school-age children were bussed from the neighboring towns of Jajce and Mrkonjić Grad to attend the event. NASA provided educational material, and Ambassador Nelson shared a message of unity and inspiration set against the backdrop of the heavens and children outfitted in iconic NASA t-shirts.

Operational Continuity Across Space and Time

Nearly 15 months and two Civil Affairs teams later, as a testament to operational continuity, the current team assigned to BiH promoted and attended the rover landing celebration in the town of Jezero late into the Feb. 18 night. Within hours, footage of the students and parents celebrating the event was shared across the world by major media outlets.

Two years ago, few outside of BiH could likely find Jezero on a map. Thanks to the big vision of a small-town mayor, the dedication from U.S. Army Civil Affairs teams, and NASA and U.S. Embassy Sarajevo leadership, Jezero is now internationally linked with the historic Mars mission.

With five successive Civil Affairs teams at the helm, the interagency effort did more than increase geographic awareness; it widened the aperture of scientific possibilities for generations of students of all ethnicities in the region.

Though focused on the upcoming Ingenuity Helicopter technology demonstration, Dr. Lori Glaze, Planetary Science Division Director at NASA headquarters, took a moment to recognize those who dared a mighty thing when first proposing the seemingly unusual interagency approach in January 2019.

“The U.S. Army Civil Affairs team made it possible for us to connect our Mars 2020 mission and the Perseverance rover to the town of Jezero, Bosnia and Herzegovina in a meaningful and exciting way,” said Dr. Glaze. “Inspiring the next generation of scientists, engineers, and explorers from around the world is part of our mission, and we are thankful for the unique opportunity enabled by this interagency collaboration to engage with the people of Southeastern Europe.”

Signs of Progress

On the main road leading into the town of Jezero stands a prominent billboard with the Perseverance Rover front and center. It is a reminder to travelers of all backgrounds that BiH has an inspiring connection with an ancient crater nearly 150 million miles away. Just as the rover will sample Martian soil for signs of past life, the billboard outside of Jezero, BiH is a just a sample of the value of Civil Affairs in the arena of information and influence right here on Earth.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



US Naval Special Warfare Operators

strengthen maritime capabilities in Europe

By Sgt. Monique O'Neill

U.S. Special Operations Command Europe

U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators deployed to Croatia, Germany, Hungary, and Romania for two special operations forces exercises, May 3-14, 2021.

Trojan Footprint 21, the premier annual SOF exercise led by Special Operations Command Europe, utilized SEAL and Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen teams in Romania and the Black Sea to conduct various training with SOF units from Georgia, Spain, and Romania.

“We appreciate the opportunity to train with a diverse group in a strategic location,” said a U.S. Navy SEAL commander present for the exercise. “Our objectives throughout Trojan Footprint are especially useful for the countries located on the Black Sea, and it also helps to standardize training for NATO partners and allies if they are called to support the region.”

While in Romania, the Naval units’ training included close air support with Joint Terminal Attack Controllers calling for fire from an AC-130J gunship, visit, board, search, and seizure; vehicle interdiction; over the beach; close quarters combat; fast rope infiltration and extraction; and special reconnaissance.

Concurrently, Naval Special Warfare units also mobilized to Croatia and Hungary for Black Swan 21. Black Swan 21 is an annual Hungarian led multinational special operations forces exercise. It was held in conjunction with Trojan Footprint 21 to test military synchronization capabilities and to defend multiple domains in Europe simultaneously.

“Our primary mission during Black Swan is to train with the Special Operations Craft-Riverine (SOC-R) along the Danube River,” said a U.S. Navy SEAL maritime planner.

The Danube River is Europe’s second longest river, flowing from the Black Forest in Germany, passing through ten countries, and emptying into the Black Sea in Romania. Training and familiarization with the SOC-Rs will help the Hungarian SOF maneuver and defend quickly whether in small towns or major cities like Budapest.

“Each year, Trojan Footprint and Black Swan provide

opportunities to evaluate SOF capabilities, particularly the more complex aspects of combined SOF integration,” said U.S. Navy SEAL Command Master Chief Peter C. Musselman, Senior Enlisted Leader of Special Operations Command Europe. “The continuous rotational deployment of NSW’s units to the European theater is a key component of SOCEUR’s operational approach. Combined maritime SOF training strengthens interoperability and drives capability development vital to successful operational employment. NSW engagements provide real impact and measurable effects to support our allies and partners’ efforts to maintain dominance in the maritime domain.”



Naval Special Operations Forces from Croatia, Hungary, and the U.S. conduct maritime training in the Adriatic Sea during Black Swan 21. Black Swan 21 is the annual Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercise conducted in Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the United States. Black Swan 21 was held in conjunction with Trojan Footprint 21 to test military synchronization capabilities and to defend multiple domains in Europe simultaneously. Courtesy photo by Croatian Ministry of Defense.



A U.S. Navy SEAL boards a vessel during a visit, board, search and seizure evolution as a part of Trojan Footprint 21 off the coast of Mangalia, Romania, on May 7, 2021. Trojan Footprint 21 is Special Operations Command Europe's annual exercise to demonstrate proficiencies, assess the readiness and lethality of our respective forces, and to continue improving interoperability with allies and partners. Photo by Petty Officer First Class Patrick W. Mullen III.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



Future NATO response force reaches initial operational capability during Black Swan 21

*By U.S. Army Sgt. Monique O'Neill
and Spc. Therese Prats*

U.S. Special Operations Command Europe

U.S. Army Green Berets and U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators trained with NATO allies and partners as they reached initial operational capabilities for the Nato Response Force during Black Swan 21, May 3 to 14, 2021.

Black Swan 21 is an annual Hungarian-led multinational

special operations forces exercise, which demonstrates peer-to-peer deterrence and resiliency of alliances and partnerships in Europe. SOF from Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the United States participated this year.

“I think this is the manifestation of everything that is great about NATO, several NATO allies coming together and even non-NATO partners coming together to share their tactics, techniques, procedures, and lessons learned so that we’re all better,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. David H.



A Hungarian Special Operations Forces operator conducts training during an infiltration and exfiltration exercise on the Danube River during Black Swan, May 6, 2021. Black Swan 21 is an annual Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercise, demonstrating peer-to-peer deterrence and the resiliency of alliances and partnerships in Europe. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Therese Prats.



Special Operations Forces from Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the United States conduct multinational weapons familiarization range training as part of Black Swan 21 in Szolnok, Hungary, May 12, 2021. Black Swan 21 is an annual Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercise, demonstrating peer-to-peer deterrence and the resiliency of alliances and partnerships in Europe. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Therese Prats.

Tabor, the commanding general of U.S. Special Operations Command Europe.

In Szolnok, Hungary, the Green Berets trained alongside Austrian, Croatian, Hungarian, Slovakian, and Slovenian SOF on aerial vehicle interdiction, close quarters battle, Fast rope insertion extraction system, and special reconnaissance.

“It’s been great training together with a variety of countries,” said a U.S. Army Green Beret team leader. “Every day we’ve gotten stronger and more fluid, and we’re confident to accomplish missions either side by side or as individual units.”

In Budapest, Hungarian SOF trained with Naval Special Warfare operators on Special Operations Craft Riverines on Europe’s second longest river, the Danube. Meanwhile, Croatia hosted maritime training with Hungary and the U.S. in the Adriatic Sea.

Black Swan 21 helped Austria, Croatia, Hungary,

Slovakia, and Slovenia qualify for the initial air, land, maritime operational capabilities required for the Regional Special Operations Component Command, a Hungarian-led, temporary deployable command element for Special Forces. The command will boost the ability of each nation to effectively employ their special operations forces and will

enable each nation to contribute separately, while benefiting from an integrated R-SOCC structure when activated for deployment.

“It’s important to see how NATO members can work seamlessly together, can support each other, and act well together to be a really credible

deterrent to any adversaries that face us,” said Brig. Gen. Rob Stephenson, Acting Commander of NATO Special Operations Headquarters.

The R-SOCC is expected to be fully functional by December 2024 and will act as the NATO Response Force in 2025.

I think this is the manifestation of everything that is great about NATO, several NATO allies coming together and even non-NATO partners coming together to share their tactics, techniques, procedures, and lessons learned so that we’re all better.

— Maj. Gen. David H. Tabor,

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



UK and US communicators conduct electronic warfare training in Cumbria

*By U.S. Army Capt. Orlando Florea
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe*

United Kingdom Signal Regiment and SOCEUR Signal Detachment conducted combined communications training in Cumbria, England, the only electronic warfare tactics facility in Europe where aircrews can practice maneuvers and tactics against a threats and targets that they face in contemporary warfare, April 19-22.

The exercise, designed to increase interoperability between the two NATO allies, facilitated mutual understanding of the combined tactical communication used by the U.K and U.S.

“The training we conducted with the U.K. communicators was beneficial and realistic to battlefield operations as interoperability between allies is critical to the success of NATO missions,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Dayson Lindsay, a senior satellite communication system operator-maintainer.

Participants validated communication systems by troubleshooting software and hardware errors, implementing combined radio networks and training on international radio protocols to communicate effectively.

“Enabling an effective mission command requires combined communications in today’s complex military environment,” Lindsay continued.

During the combined training event, the communicators explained and demonstrated each other’s communications equipment capabilities and functionality. This was followed by bridging solutions to facilitate secure communications between U.S. and U.K. radios.

“Working with the U.K. communicators has helped us improve communications interoperability by developing tactics and procedures that we can carry forward to future combined operations,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Andrew Reyes, a senior radio operator-



A CV-22B Osprey assigned to 352nd Special Operations Wing conducted infiltration and exfiltration training with the SOCEUR Signal Detachment at RAF Spadeadam, United Kingdom, on April 19, 2021, during a bilateral exercise. The exercise, designed to increase interoperability between the two NATO allies, facilitated mutual understanding of the combined tactical communication used by the U.K. and U.S. Courtesy photo.

maintainer from 112th Signal Battalion, assigned to SSD.

The SOCEUR communicators regularly conduct combined communications training throughout Europe to bridge partner radio systems between NATO allies and implement secure radio solutions for combat units.

SOCEUR employs Special Operations Forces across the USEUCOM area of responsibility to enable deterrence, strengthen European security collective capabilities and interoperability, and counter transnational threats to protect U.S. personnel and interests.

United Kingdom Signal Regiment and Special Operations Command-Europe Signal Detachment conduct electronic warfare training at RAF Spadeadam, U.K., on April 20, 2021, during a bilateral exercise. The exercise, designed to increase interoperability between the two NATO allies, facilitated mutual understanding of the combined tactical communication used by the U.K. and U.S. Courtesy photo.



U.S. Army Special Operations Command

President awards Medal of Honor to retired Ranger for actions on Hill 205



By Devon L. Suits
Army News Service

President Joseph Biden presented the nation's highest military honor to retired Col. Ralph Puckett Jr., May 21, 2021, for his actions as a first lieutenant and the Eighth Army Ranger Company commander during the Korean conflict Nov. 25-26, 1950.

It has been seven decades since the Battle on Hill 205, where Puckett led his 57 Rangers and Korean soldiers against six battalion-sized attacks, marking the start of China's involvement in the Korean conflict against U.S. and U.N. forces.

The company dealt with freezing weather conditions without proper cold-weather gear. Food, ammunition, and supplies were also limited, as supply lines struggled to keep up with the Army's advance.

"The intelligence briefing indicated that there were 25,000 Chinese troops in the area," Biden said. "[Puckett] believed in the fundamentals. It was how he trained his men, and how he had handpicked them, chosen from the ranks of cooks, clerks, and mechanics to [become] the first Ranger company since World War II."

Outnumbered nearly 10-to-1, Puckett directed his company and waves of artillery support through the constant barrage of heavy enemy small-arms and mortar fire. He continually exposed himself to enemy fire as he maneuvered out of this foxhole to scan his defense perimeter and motivate his Soldiers.

Puckett was injured three times throughout the attack. A mortar attack severely injured him during the final Chinese assault. As the enemy overrun Hill 205, he ordered his Rangers to leave him behind and withdraw.

Puckett watched as three Chinese fighters drew closer, bayoneting and shooting the wounded. Disobeying their commander's orders, two of his Rangers charged and killed



President Joseph Biden presents the Medal of Honor to retired Col. Ralph Puckett Jr. during a ceremony at the White House in Washington, D.C., May 21, 2021. Puckett was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions while serving then as commander of the Eighth Army Ranger Company when his company of 57 Rangers was attacked by Chinese forces at Hill 205 near the Chongchon River, during the Korean Conflict on November 25-26, 1950. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. XaViera Masline.

the three enemies and pulled their commander out of harm's way.

"They did not hold the hill but the Rangers extracted a high price," Biden said. "[The Korean Conflict] is sometimes called the 'Forgotten War'. Those men who were there under 1st Lt. Puckett's command will never forget his bravery. They will never forget that he was right by their side throughout every minute of it."

As he reached the base of the hill, Puckett requested a final white phosphorus incendiary munition attack at the top

of Hill 205 to secure their egress.

“After more than a decade of effort ... I’m incredibly proud to give Col. Ralph Puckett’s act of valor, the full recognition he always deserved,” Biden said.

Puckett was offered a medical discharge after the Korean conflict, but he refused. He endured a long recovery, which also led to a chance encounter with Jeannie, the lady who would become his lifelong wife as she visited him in the hospital on Fort Benning, Georgia, with a close friend. The two married nearly two years later.

“It is not just the person who wears the uniform who serves,” Biden said as he addressed Jeannie in the audience. “Military families make enormous sacrifices for our nation. So let me add our thanks to you and your life of service as well.”

Puckett was initially awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on Hill 205 in 1951. He served in Vietnam in 1967, where he received a second Distinguished Service Cross for his efforts.

Throughout his career, he received two Silver Stars; two Legions of Merit; two Bronze Stars with V device for valor; five Purple Hearts; ten Air Medals; the Army Commendation Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal, among others.

After retiring from the Army in 1971, he moved to Columbus, Georgia, and continued to serve in different capacities.

In 1992, he was selected as an inaugural inductee into the U.S. Army Ranger Hall of Fame. He also provided a wealth of experience to the 75th Ranger Regiment as the regiment’s first honorary colonel starting in 1996. What was supposed to be a conditional two-year term lasted until 2006.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in attended the ceremony to pay his respects to Puckett, his family, and the Eighth Army Ranger Company.

“I find it truly meaningful to join the Medal of Honor presentation ceremony for Col. Ralph Puckett Jr.,” Moon said, adding that it was a great honor to be invited to the ceremony as the first foreign leader to participate in an event.

“Col. Puckett is a true hero of the Korean War,” Mood said. “Without the sacrifice of veterans including Col. Puckett and the Eighth Army Ranger Company, freedom, and democracy we enjoy today couldn’t have blossomed in Korea.”

“From the ashes of the Korean War we came back and that was thanks to the war veterans who fought for Korea’s



Then-1st Lt. Ralph Puckett Jr. led fellow Rangers and Korean Augmentation to the United States Army soldiers across frozen terrain under enemy fire to seize and defend Hill 205 in Unsan, North Korea. Puckett received the Medal of Honor for going above and beyond the call of duty as the Eighth Army Ranger Company’s commanding officer during a multiday operation that started on Nov. 25, 1950. Courtesy photo.

peace and freedom,” Moon added. The Republic of Korea and the U.S. alliance was forged in blood from heroes has become a linchpin of peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula and beyond. Col. Puckett and his fellow warriors

are a link that thoroughly binds Korea and the U.S. together.”

Puckett’s wife, kids, and grandkids, along with retired Lt. Col. John Lock, a military historian that pushed for the Medal of Honor upgrade, were in attendance. Also joining them was retired Master Sgt. Merle Simpson, a former technical sergeant and heavy weapons squad leader that fought in the

battle.

“I never thought I would be picked for the company,” Simpson said, during an interview on Thursday. “Puckett impressed me. If you made a mistake, you would do 50 pushups, and he would do 50 with you. There is no telling how many a day he did.”

Puckett’s influence pushed Simpson to be a better Ranger and leader. He was defending the other side of Hill 205 when he heard his commander was severely wounded. The news was hard to accept for him and the rest of the company, he recalled.

“It was hard for Ralph to lose a man, and he has never forgotten that,” Simpson added. “I cannot speak for all those that passed away, but I am honored to be part of this. He was the type to influence everybody, including me.”

Without the sacrifice of veterans including Col. Puckett and the Eighth Army Ranger Company, freedom, and democracy we enjoy today couldn’t have blossomed in Korea.

— *South Korean President Moon Jae-in*

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

10th Group Culinary Specialist

trains with celebrity Chef Brother Luck



*By U.S. Army Sgt. Angela Walter
10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)*

One of 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)'s hardworking culinary specialists (92G) participated in the Bridge to Gap program with celebrity chef and restaurant owner Brother Luck. The 45-day program is designed to bring young Soldiers out of the Army's dining facilities to show them a whole new side of cooking and all its possibilities.

This year's participant showcased his newly found knowledge and expertise with a three-course meal he served to members of 10th SFG's Group Support Battalion, Fort Carson's food program manager, the 4th Infantry Division G4 Food Service Sergeant Major and the III Corps Food Service Sergeant Major out of Fort Hood, Texas. The menu told his story as a "Florida boy" raised by a Jamaican mother and American dad, and included Jamaican oxtail, Cajun style Florida snapper, and key lime pie.

Never having participated in a program as unique as this one, the Soldier expressed how grateful he was to learn from Brother Luck and expand his knowledge as both a culinary specialist and a leader.

"It's very different cooking in a fine dining restaurant than cooking in an Army kitchen," says the Soldier. "I've learned cutting skills, baking, and actually creating my own menu. I've learned how to manage, so when I come back to the DFAC I can be a better leader, help my guys, and train them on what I learned because I should pass this down."

With this unique opportunity, participants in the program get to learn under the guidance and mentorship



10th SFG (A)'s culinary specialist participating in the Bridge to Gap program prepares his capstone meal with chef and entrepreneur Brother Luck. The program is designed to bring Soldiers out of the Army's dining facilities and give them a holistic perspective of the food industry outside of the military. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Angela Walter.

of Brother Luck, owner of Four by Brother Luck and Lucky Dumpling in Colorado Springs. It offers Soldiers the chance to expand their horizons as both culinary specialists and potential business owners.

"We had some discussions about how to enhance culinary education beyond working in the dining facilities," says Brother Luck. "It started as an idea to get some of the 92 Golfs into the restaurants to gain some culinary experience, and over the last two years we've really just been rounding out and personalizing the experience for them."

The program introduces participants to a wide range of new knowledge and skills, broadening their view of

the food service industry outside of the military. Participants learn about the restaurant business as a whole, beyond just cooking and preparing food. They learn about financials, how to lead and manage staff, how to serve, and the hospitality aspect of creating a unique culinary experience for guests.

“It’s important because it’s more than just culinary,” says Brother Luck. “They get time on the line, they get to work with the cooks, and see new ingredients and new techniques, but at the same time, we want to ensure that if they decide to pursue this outside of the military that they’re understanding what they can utilize their benefits for.”

For Brother Luck, having a brother who was once a 92G himself without a good transition out of the military, the program is personally special. Watching Soldiers come into the program and become enlightened when they start to see

how to work with farm fresh ingredients and create a positive customer experience is a much more in depth experience than working in the dining facilities.

“It’s extremely special to work with our military here in Colorado Springs,” he says. “It’s a big part of

who we are as a community. Being able to create programs that give back and also offer education is what’s so special about it, and it’s extremely rewarding. The team that works here at both restaurants actually comes up to me and says, ‘Chef, I can’t believe we’re doing this in our restaurant.’ There’s pride that’s being created within the civilian life to work with these Soldiers.”

10th Group’s 92G will return to the LaRochelle Dining Facility with

knowledge and skills to pass on to his fellow culinary specialists. The program not only offered him the chance to grow in his specialty, but opportunities such as this strengthen our Army’s capabilities as a whole.

It’s extremely special to work with our military here in Colorado Springs. It’s a big part of who we are as a community. Being able to create programs that give back and also offer education is what’s so special about it, and it’s extremely rewarding. The team that works here at both restaurants actually comes up to me and says, ‘Chef, I can’t believe we’re doing this in our restaurant.’ There’s pride that’s being created within the civilian life to work with these Soldiers.

— Brother Luck



10th SFG (A)’s culinary specialist serves his capstone three-course meal as part of the Bridge to Gap program. The program is designed to bring Soldiers out of the Army’s dining facilities and give them a holistic perspective of the food industry outside of the military. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Angela Walter.

Naval Special Warfare Command

Two Medals of Honor, four generations of Navy SEALs at Class 342 graduation



By Scott Williams
Naval Special Warfare Center

Thirty Navy SEAL candidates earned their Tridents during a graduation joined by extraordinary guests onboard Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, California, April 30, 2021.

The members of SEAL Qualification Training (SQT) Class 342 completed Naval Special Warfare (NSW)'s assessment, selection and training pathway, the grueling process through which candidates must demonstrate they possess the cognitive, character and leadership attributes necessary to join the Navy's SEAL teams.

The graduation ceremony, which marks a pivotal moment in a SEAL's life, was all the more significant because of its speakers. Two Medal of Honor recipients offered their words of advice for Class 342. Master Chief (ret.) Edward Byers served as the guest speaker and former Sen. Robert Kerrey joined remotely.

Byers, who earned his Medal of Honor for actions in Afghanistan, challenged the newly-minted SEALs to remain committed to constant personal and professional improvement. "Your discipline is now warfare. It comes in many forms. It's an art – it has subtleties. It will mimic an orchestra. It will be complex like chess. Study it. Practice it," said Byers. "This job is as mentally demanding as it is physically. You are now part of a community that strives, seeks and demands excellence. You're going to make mistakes – to err is human. Own those failures, own the process that is required to learn from them and own the difficulty in changing the behavior."

Kerrey, whose service as a Lt. j.g. SEAL in Vietnam



Medal of Honor recipient Master Chief (ret.) Edward Byers addresses the class during SEAL Qualification Training Class 342's graduation, April 30, 2020. Naval Special Warfare Center provides initial assessment and selection and subsequent advanced training to the Sailors who make up the Navy's SEAL and Special Boat communities. These communities support the NSW mission, providing maritime special operations forces to conduct full-spectrum operations, unilaterally or with partners, to support national objectives. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Anthony W. Walker.

earned a Medal of Honor, advised Class 342 to choose humility and team over self. For the class he wished, "may your choices in life continue to bring you success, may your heart never tire of loving our imperfect country, and may you always understand the importance

of having teammates you trust with your life.”

Of special significance, Byers (SQT Class 242) and Kerrey (Underwater Demolition Team Replacement Accession Class 42) are considered “centennial” and “tri-centennial” graduates, respectively. Within the NSW community, operators often mark the passage of time through the sequential order of graduating classes, returning to Coronado to observe the next generation of candidates taking their place among the ranks 100, 200 or even 300 graduations after their own.

“Congratulations to Class 342. You’ve met our standard and demonstrated the character, cognitive and leadership attributes that make our force timeless and authentic. You are now a member of an incredible community of warriors and leaders, a community that was built on the shoulders of those who came before us – past teammates whose courage, grit and integrity formed our standard,” said the event’s presiding officer Rear Adm. H. W. Howard III, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command. “It is critical to reflect on who we are and who the nation needs us to be.”

To earn a Trident, candidates must first complete Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S), known for its crucible event, “Hell Week.” Upon completion of the 21-week BUD/S, remaining candidates move on to

SQT, where they learn additional warfighting skills of their craft including land warfare, maritime operations and parachuting. The assessment, selection and training pathway lasts 59 weeks, with an additional five weeks for officers.

The Medal of Honor is the United States’ highest award for military valor in action, awarded for exceptional display of bravery, courage, sacrifice and integrity in the moments that matter, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. There are currently 68 living Medal of Honor recipients. Seven Medal of Honor recipients hail from NSW.

Class 342 graduates will now go on to join the SEAL teams or to follow-on training as they prepare for careers as NSW operators.

Naval Special Warfare Center, located on Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, provides initial assessment and selection and subsequent advanced training to the Sailors who make up the Navy’s SEAL and Special Boat communities, a key asset of NSW. The NSW mission is to provide maritime special operations forces to conduct full-spectrum operations, unilaterally or with partners, to support national objectives. For more information on the NSW assessment, selection and training pathway, visit <https://www.sealswcc.com/>.



Medal of Honor recipient Master Chief (ret.) Edward Byers, guest speaker during SEAL Qualification Training Class 342’s graduation, congratulates the class honor man, April 30, 2020. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Anthony W. Walker.

Naval Special Warfare Command



Swedish special operations forces train with NSW Stennis commands



Swedish special operations forces prepare to test personal flotation equipment prior to recent training at U.S. Naval Special Warfare Group 4 facilities.

The Swedish training incorporated riverine scenarios with NSWG-4 commands Special Boat Team 22 and the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School to increase interoperability and further relationships with strategic partners. The unique location of the Stennis Space Center allows U.S. partners and allies, and NSW maritime mobility platforms access to the Western Maneuver Area, which offers some of the finest riverine and coastal training areas in the world.

NAVSCIATTS trains and educates partner nation special operations forces, combat service, and combat service support personnel across the tactical, operational, and strategic spectrums through in-residence and mobile training team engagements. SBT 22's mission is to organize, mentor, train, and equip NSW personnel to conduct the full spectrum of special operations in riverine and coastal environments to support fleet and joint commanders worldwide. Photo by Michael Williams.



Air Force Special Operations Command



'Service. Strength. Sacrifice': Special Tactics training complex dedicated to fallen ST officer

By U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Alejandra Fontalvo
24th Special Operations Wing

In a split second while on a mission in 2015, U.S. Air Force Capt. Matthew Roland made the last leadership decision he would ever make. Without hesitation, he chose to protect his team and give them the best shot at overcoming an insider attack in Afghanistan, sacrificing his life in the process.

To honor the fallen Special Tactics Officer's actions and courageous leadership, the 24th Special Operations Wing along with friends and family hosted a dedication ceremony in Roland's honor May 6, 2021, at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

"Today I have the privilege of dedicating the Roland Field Leadership Training Complex," said U.S. Air Force Col. Matthew Allen, commander of the 24th SOW. "It's particularly meaningful to dedicate this training site to Matt as he spent years of his life honing his leadership expertise."

The wing chose to dedicate one of the Special Tactics Training Squadron facilities used for training and assessing Special Tactics Officers just like Roland.

"It means everything to be a part of his legacy," said one of the young STOs attending the ceremony and finishing the training pipeline. "I think he embodies a lot of what a lot of people in our position are trying to do and why we joined. Guys like him paved the way for us and have shown us an example of who we should strive to be like. We're honored to be walking in his footsteps and everyone who came before us."

In the audience were also several distinguished guests,



U.S. Air Force Col. Matthew Allen, the commander of the 24th Special Operations Wing, and U.S. Air Force, retired, Col. Mark Roland, father of U.S. Air Force Capt. Matthew Roland, walk to unveil a sign during a building dedication ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Florida, May 6, 2021. The building was named after U.S. Air Force Capt. Matthew Roland, a 23rd Special Tactics Squadron officer who died in combat near Camp Antonik, Afghanistan, Aug. 26, 2015. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Amanda A. Flower-Raschella,

friends and family members of Matthew Roland including his sister, nieces, fiancé, mother and his father, U.S. Air Force, retired, Col. Mark Roland.

"Matthew was a patriot, he believed in his nation and was dedicated to service," said Mark. "He loved serving as a STO and leading his team. This complex is a testament that he was good at what he did and respected for how he did it."

Roland graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 2010 and then entered the rigorous Special Tactics Officer training pipeline to earn the coveted red beret. His last assignment was at the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

Members of the fallen Airman's former squadron watched as the Roland family unveiled the new sign to the Roland Field Leadership Training Complex followed by the Special Tactics tradition of memorial pushups.

"He never quit, he never gave up. Be strong in the face of adversity," said Mark. "To us, this complex dedicated to selecting and training Special Tactics Officers represents three things that Matthew

valued...service, strength and sacrifice."

As a Special Tactics Officer, Roland was a qualified battlefield commander prepared to lead reconnaissance, strike and recovery missions, as well as a military static-line and free fall jumper, an Air Force combat scuba diver,

and a joint terminal attack controller. For his actions during his deployment, Roland was posthumously awarded the nation's third highest honor for valor, the Silver Star medal, in June of 2016.

"At his core, [Matthew] was concerned with loving and protecting his family, being a leader in our Air Force and living out his warrior ethos," said Allen. "If there was a hardship, he'd endure it. If there was a burden, he'd help lift it. If there was a challenge...he'd meet it."

For future Special Tactics leaders, the complex will forever stand as inspiration to the selfless leadership and determination Roland displayed throughout his time in service.

Special Tactics is the Air Force's most highly decorated community since the Vietnam War specializing in global access, precision strike, personnel recovery and battlefield surgery. Since 9/11, Special Tactics Airmen have received one Medal of Honor, 12 Air Force Crosses and 50 Silver Star Medals.

To us, this complex dedicated to selecting and training Special Tactics Officers represents three things that Matthew valued...service, strength and sacrifice

— Retired Col. Mark Roland



The family of U.S. Air Force Capt. Matthew Roland unveils a sign during a building dedication ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Florida, May 6, 2021. The Special Tactics Training Squadron facility was renamed in honor of Roland, a 23rd STS special tactics officer who died protecting his teammates during an ambush at an Afghan-led security checkpoint near Camp Antonik, Afghanistan, Aug. 26, 2015. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Amanda A. Flower-Raschella.

Air Force Special Operations Command



551st flies one last time

By U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Vernon Walter III
27th Special Operations Wing

Members of the 551st Special Operations Squadron took an AC-130W aircraft for one last flight at Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, April 29, 2021.

The flight commemorated the drawdown of the 551st SOS. The squadron was officially made inactive June 15, 2021, but the flight marked the end of mission qualification training at the 551 SOS.

“It’s a bittersweet feeling,” said Lt. Col. Kris Aikens, 551st SOS commander. “I was here in 2009 when the unit stood up from a detachment to a squadron. I have seen almost 12 years of training gunships at the 551st, and now I get to see it end. Over a decade of training ends with that flight.”

The squadron, a geographically separated unit of the 492nd Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida, has been at Cannon since July 24, 2009, after its reactivation. The 551st SOS has a long legacy of training AFSOC personnel, having previously trained MH-53 aircrews at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico. Since being activated at Cannon, it has provided aircrew training on the AC-130W

aircraft and a wide array of other aircraft to ensure Cannon can carry out its specialized mission.

“The AC-130W is going to be retiring in the next couple years, so our mission to train new AC-130W crew members is done,” Aikens said. “Now, our personnel will be focused on refresher and continuation training for the wing’s operational units.”

While the 551st SOS is coming to a close, there are still units to train.

“Our mission isn’t going away,” Aikens said. “The Operational Support Squadron will just pick up where we left off. We were deeply involved with operational training at Cannon, and I’m proud of what the squadron accomplished here.”

As the aircraft touched down, it signified the end of the qualification training for the 551st SOS, and the sunset of the squadron began.

“From the beginning, I saw a large focus on quality,” Aikens said. “We wanted to make sure that the individuals that came here left even better. As we look to inactivate the squadron, and reflect on our years of training here at Cannon, I hope that every individual that came through the 551st feels that we met that goal.”



Members of the 551st Special Operations Squadron stand together for a group photo after the unit’s “fini” flight at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., April 29, 2021. Fini flights are an Air Force tradition when a pilot or unit conducts its last flight. The 551st SOS stood down June 15, 2021. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Vernon Walter III.



An AC-130W aircraft, piloted by members of the 551st Special Operations Squadron, flies over Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., April 29, 2021. The flight was flown to commemorate the last training flight of the 551st SOS. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Vernon Walter III.



Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



MARSOF conducts advanced sniper course

Marine Raiders train with the M40A6 while attending the MARSOF Advanced Sniper Course at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Apr. 27, 2021. MASC is designed to train critical skills operators or SOF equivalent MOS personnel in precision rifle fire to provide support to SOF operations. Training is designed to provide instruction in basic and advanced marksmanship techniques, special reconnaissance skills, counter sniper techniques, aerial operations and close proximity engagement. Photo U.S. Marine Corps by Cpl. Ethan Green.



Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command SOCOM patriarch retires after a remarkable 63 years of service

By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication

In the year 1958, Dwight D. Eisenhower was president, hula hoops became a national craze and the cost of an average house was \$12,750. Also, in that year, David Lee Northern Jr. began his remarkable journey of 63 years of service.

Enlisting in the Air Force as a civil engineer, Northern would have 12 assignments in his 26-year career including two tours in Vietnam. In Vietnam he was assigned to “Red Horse” (Rapid Engineer Deployable, Heavy Operational Repair Squadron, Engineer) squadrons which were heavy construction units like the Navy Seabees.

“We worked day and night doing 12 hour shifts in Vietnam doing runway and ramp construction projects. We erected metal buildings and aircraft revetments to protect fighter aircraft. The laboring hours in those positions of support on many occasions would cause me to lose track of time. We as Airmen would continue to perform assignments that made the time go by fast until it was time to rotate back to the United States mainland,” said Northern. “It was challenging. I discovered many things about my own resilience and what the human body could endure. I was humbled continuously and daily. We never really knew sometimes what the day would bring. We made it there and back in one piece physically sometimes and fragmented in other ways but, we stuck together. It is so very true that teamwork makes the dream work. Sometimes, I did not think I would make it, but God saw fit for us to make it. My faith kept me hopeful and praying for myself and others.”

Retiring from the Air Force in 1984 as a Master Sergeant he worked a year as a maintenance worker at the U.S. Air Force Regional Hospital on MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. In 1985, he took a job as a facility manager at U.S. Readiness Command which transformed



David Lee Northern Jr. while he was serving as an Airman in the Air Force in the early 1960's. Northern retired after 63 years of service May 14, 2021, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. He served 26 years in the Air Force, 37 years as a civil servant, and is an original member of USSOCOM. Courtesy of David Lee Northern Jr.

into U.S. Special Operations Command in 1987.

“My best memories are having the opportunity to work for and with some of the most patriotic and ‘wickedly smart’ professionals both military and civil service people on the planet.” said Northern. “I took pride in performing building maintenance in the main building of SOCOM while it was United States Readiness Command and subsequently Special Operations Command.”

Northern has seen many changes since USSOCOM



David Lee Northern Jr. (left) speaks with Army Gen. Richard D. Clarke, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, before his retirement ceremony after 63 years of service May 14, 2021, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. Northern served 26 years in the Air Force, 37 years as a civil servant, and is an original member of USSOCOM. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

was formed and reflected on the command's transformation.

"SOCOM was very interesting in the beginning and has never disappointed. It continues to be just as interesting if not more. There is never a dull day at SOCOM Headquarters. Nothing is as routine as it seems. Each day comes with new challenges and responsibilities. It was humbling to watch as it grew right before me. I smiled on the inside and outside. I loved what I did for a living. I was making history for my family and the country," said Northern.

When the finalization of the United States Readiness Command Headquarters was being transitioned to United States Special Operations Command everyone had to make the adjustment of accomplishing their duties with sharper precision and following the new philosophy and direction of USSOCOM."

His co-workers always admired his work ethic and his willingness to mentor and teach others.

"Mr. Northern has provided various types of private or professional counsel to the numerous younger facility specialists who have come and gone through the office on personal and professional issues. He has also maintained professional relationships for years with the base personnel and that has smoothed the way to rectify facility problems and issues at the headquarters," said Mitchell Dimmick, command engineer. "He always had a positive attitude. Despite his age, he never begged off an assignment, not that we sent him up on any roofs lately. But the thing I will always remember about him is an

infectious laugh and a huge smile. I can hear it in my head and see it in my mind."

"Mr. Northern is a walking symbolic meaning to the term perseverance. His generosity, passion, integrity, and willpower throughout the combined 63 years of military and civil service has been a delight to witness," said Leonard Settle Jr., facility manager. "He continuously maintained true to his inner thoughts and beliefs, while always giving his best to others when his support was needed. His valued impact and irresistible influence within the engineering section will never be forgotten."

Reflecting on his remarkable professional journey Northern is grateful to have served his country for more than six decades.

"I never imagined serving 63 years when I began my career in the United States Air Force. I really wanted a stable career with good benefits that I enjoyed. Being in the military was what I really enjoyed because of its structure and discipline. I knew that the military would allow me to break the cycle of poverty and it would be instrumental in doing just that," said Northern. "My civil service job was like an extension of being in the military, just another phase. It seemed like it was god sent. So, with my military time and civil service time, the years accumulated and didn't seem like work. I was so eager to just learn anything new daily and that is how I ended up with 63 years of service."



David Lee Northern Jr. walks into his retirement ceremony after 63 years of service May 14, 2021, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. Northern served 26 years in the Air Force, 37 years as a civil servant, and is an original member of USSOCOM. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

SOF community holds virtual industry, international conferences

By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication

U.S. Special Operations Command hosted Special Operations Forces Week from May 17 to 21 at the SOFWERX facility in Ybor City, Florida. This year SOF Week consisted of two virtual conferences, Special Operations Forces Industry Conference and International Special Operations Forces Conference.

The week began with the Special Operations Forces Industry Conference which took place May 17-

21, and was virtual for the second year in a row. The conference, co-sponsored by the National Defense Industrial Association and U.S. Special Operations Command, brought together senior U.S. SOF leaders, industry and academia to discuss USSOCOM acquisition program priorities. This year's theme was "Expanding the Competitive Space" and focused on emerging requirements, trends, and technology USSOCOM needs industry's assistance with to compete and win in the future.

"We have to innovate to transform our force," said



James H. Smith, U.S. Special Operations Command acquisition executive, addresses the annual Special Operations Forces Industry Conference held virtually from SOFWERX in Ybor City, Fla., May 17-21, 2021. SOFIC is the premiere virtual conference for the SOF community to interact with industry and to collaborate on the challenges, initiatives and way-ahead in delivering the most cutting-edge capabilities into the hands of SOF operators. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.



Army General Richard D. Clarke, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, addresses the annual Special Operations Forces Industry Conference held virtually from SOFWERX in Ybor City, Fla., May 17-21, 2021. SOFIC is the premiere virtual conference for the SOF community to interact with industry and to collaborate on the challenges, initiatives and way-ahead in delivering the most cutting-edge capabilities into the hands of SOF operators. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.

Army Gen. Richard D. Clarke, commander, USSOCOM. “Investing in both people and key technologies is going to be essential. Together, our military and industry will answer the call to innovate for the nation for the next 20 years and beyond.”

Expanding on Clarke’s comments, Mr. James Smith, USSOCOM’s acquisition executive, asked the audience of more than 3,500 participants, “Will the traits that have made us successful for the last twenty years be the same traits that will enable success in the next twenty years?” Smith explained that winning in the cyber, space and data environments remains a key priority as the SOF community expands the competitive space by bringing on new industry and academia partners and enhancing current partnerships.

Among the highlights of the conference, Clarke participated in a pre-recorded conversation with Microsoft Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella in a virtual fireside chat—Clarke in Tampa, Florida, and

Nadella in Seattle, Washington. They discussed the need for industry and government to work together to solve challenges in developing and adopting artificial intelligence solutions.

The conference also included presentations by USSOCOM acquisition leaders and a virtual forum with USSOCOM component commanders.

The second virtual conference, the International Special Operations Forces Conference began on May 20 and ended on May 21. More than 230 representatives from 58 nations from every continent except Antarctica participated. The international conference’s goals included creating a common understanding of the global SOF network’s efforts and challenges. Leaders also sought to increase SOF collaboration and alignment with common objectives and to identify and socialize methods to increase interoperability.

“ISOF gives us a platform to discuss and grow our SOF network and enhance our interoperability,” said Army Col.

Harold Miller, USSOCOM’s international division chief in the operations directorate. “We learn from each other through senior leadership presentations, as well as small group discussions to encourage cross-

cultural communication and problem solving. Together we are stronger and more capable to execute national security initiatives.”

General Clarke addressed the international partners stressing the

importance of relationships as a source of strength for all nations.

“If you go into an operational headquarters, what you’ll see every single time is international partners working side by side,” said Clarke. “Even at the most tactical level, our SOF forces are working side by side. They’re integrated and they’re interoperable in ways that did not exist 20 years ago. Taken as a whole, our SOF enterprise, and our partnerships are undeniable. They are without question, a source of strength for all our nations.”

We have to innovate to transform our force. Investing in both people and key technologies is going to be essential. Together, our military and industry will answer the call to innovate for the nation for the next 20 years and beyond.

— Gen. Richard D. Clarke

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Stronger together - International officers fuse SOF ops across the globe

By U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Erin Dorrance
USSOCOM Office of Communication

The last place anybody wants to exchange business cards is at the scene of a disaster. Instead, it is preferred to have years of an established relationship where both parties have bought complimentary equipment, trained together, shared intelligence, and understand each other's processes and procedures. To build these relationships, U.S. Special Operations Command stood up an international cell in its Directorate of Operations over a decade ago. Today, 26 countries have a military representative working at the headquarters building in Tampa, Florida.

Retired U.S. Navy Adm. William H. McRaven, former USSOCOM commander, initiated the global SOF Network Strategy in 2012 which included standing up an international coalition within the USSOCOM headquarters. Every commander since then has supported the mission. Today, the international division directly aligns with U.S. Army Gen. Richard D. Clarke's, USSOCOM commander, priority to advance partnerships.

"They give value back," said Mark Grdovic, a senior SOF advisor who works in the USSOCOM Directorate of Operations, International Division. "It is not merely an office manned with international liaison officers, it's a division with allied exchange officers who are full-up USSOCOM staff officers helping us execute the mission."

Not all of the 26 countries represented in the division are exchange officers, as some of them are also foreign liaison officers. The international officers sent to represent their country for the two to three-year tour are special operators themselves, and range from the enlisted rank of sergeant major, and the officer ranks of major to colonel.

"Chile joined because they wanted to continue to develop their SOF," said Army Lt. Col. Davor Versalovic, USSOCOM International Division Chilean exchange officer. "Since joining, Chile has stood up the Army Special



Hungarian special operations forces train in riverine boats on the Adriatic Sea during Black Swan-21, a Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercise. The Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercises conducted with Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the U.S. in May of 2021 to test military synchronization capabilities and to defend multiple domains in Europe simultaneously. Photo by Hungarian Army Lt. Sándor Róbert Király.

Operations Command, taking valuable lessons learned from this multinational environment which we have internalized, so we can peer with other SOF organizations that have a greater footprint worldwide."

Another area where USSOCOM and international partners have benefited from the ongoing exchange is force modernization.

"A gap in technology with our allies can make us inoperable," said Grdovic. "Twenty years ago, we could form a coalition and spend a few weeks muddling through how we would operate, but that is no longer the case today. When you consider how our C4I (command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence) systems operate, how we maintain situational awareness, and deconflict fires or messaging, the challenge of being integrated is much greater."

The international division shares information on force modernization to ensure allied SOF partners have

interoperability in the field. They also publicize security cooperation programs which enable partners to modernize their force.

Hungarian Army Col. Gabor Santa, a former exchange officer, was able to secure two Special Operations Craft-Riverine boats for his country through the Excess Defense Article program, a U.S. military program that transfers excess defense equipment to foreign governments or international organizations at a reduced price or grant. The boats are under refurbishment in the U.S., and will be delivered to Hungary in late 2021, said Hungarian Army Col. Attila Krezinger, USSOCOM International Division Hungarian exchange officer. While waiting for the delivery of the boats from the U.S., Krezinger coordinated efforts within USSOCOM to further enable Hungary to participate in Black Swan-21, a Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercise where Hungarian SOF were able to train, exercise, and gain experience on the SOC-R boats.

Back in the U.S., South Korean Army Maj. Jong Hwan Lee, USSOCOM International Division South Korean exchange officer, and the Republic of South Korea Special Warfare Command are coordinating to send South Korean special forces troops for the first time ever to engage and conduct combined special operations in an exercise with the U.S. Army 1st Special Forces Group-Airborne at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

The international division also offers a unique and valuable opportunity for the U.S. theater special operations commands. TSOC commanders can meet with regional officers to gain their perspectives on the theater which opens the aperture to their U.S.-centric views, and gives them incredible insight that otherwise could have taken months to acquire, said Grdovic.

The multiple success stories of USSOCOM's international division have made their way through SOF channels, and four new countries have requested to join the coalition. Colombia, Greece, India, and the Slovak Republic will be joining in 2021, Grdovic said. Once the nations are on board at USSOCOM, they are able to choose what Community of Practice (CoP) they would like to join. CoPs are based on special operations topical areas of personal interest to include unconventional warfare, SOF aviation, information operations and SOF, counter weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism partnership, and hostage rescue operations. Each CoP has resident and TDY events that expose international officers to aspects of the topics. This information enables the officers to better focus on their efforts and to effectively pursue projects related to their nation's objectives. There are also Communities of Interest (CoI) that are collaborative communities in which partners share their insights and perspectives on regional topics. Three CoIs which are currently offered are Counter-Russia, Counter China Malign Influence, and Africa. The command will

add an Arctic CoI in the near future, said Grdovic.

Although there is tremendous value for the nations who participate in the international division at USSOCOM, there is also a huge opportunity for the foreign officers who work in the headquarters.

"We are encouraged to attend Joint Special Operations University courses which fill our knowledge toolbox and widen our view," said Krezinger, who has attended four JSOU courses and the NATO Special Operations School during his U.S. assignment.

Many former USSOCOM exchange officers have returned to their countries and taken on high-level positions within their militaries where they continue to rely on their relationships and expertise from their time at USSOCOM, said Grdovic. Czech Republic Army Sgt. Maj. Radek Vajdecka is the first-ever senior enlisted advisor to the International Division director. When he returns to his country this summer he will take all of the experience, lessons learned, and networking over his three and a half years at USSOCOM with him as he assumes the role as the Czech Republic Special Operations Forces Command senior enlisted leader.

The partner SOF members are not the only ones who take advantage of the USSOCOM assignment. Most of the exchange and liaison officers bring their families.

"Me and my family are having a wonderful time exploring this beautiful country," said Lee. There is so much opportunity here for my kids to grow and learn, widening their scope and perspectives."

The experience working at the USSOCOM International Division is perhaps best summarized by an African proverb hanging on their wall, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Editor's Note: For more information about the International Division, contact Zoe Roquemore, Chief of Strategic Engagements at zoe.roquemore@socom.mil.



Hungarian special operations forces train in riverine boats on the Adriatic Sea during Black Swan-21, a Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercise. Photo by Hungarian Army Warrant Officer Zoltán Király

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Special Operations Command tackles countering-WMD mission

By U.S. Army Maj. Mike Loveall
USSOCOM J10 Directorate

U.S. Special Operations Command has many responsibilities for protecting and defending the nation. One recent addition is the coordinating authority responsibility for the Department of Defense's Countering-Weapons of Mass Destruction mission. To assist in executing this mission, USSOCOM Headquarters established the J10 (Countering-Weapons of Mass Destruction) Directorate in June, 2020.

Prior to August 2016, U.S. Strategic Command managed the CWMD planning and integration for the department. The 2017 Unified Campaign Plan shifted this responsibility. The 2017 UCP, reinforced in the most recent UCP, delegates the responsibility to plan the Department's CWMD campaign that support the geographic combatant commands, Secretary of Defense priorities, and other U.S. government agencies and departments to Special Operations Command.

To facilitate this transition, USSOCOM established the CWMD Fusion Cell following the publication of the 2017 UCP. USSOCOM was a natural fit for this critical mission. USSOCOM leverages its global presence and network as well as unique relationships with interagency and foreign partners against this complex and world-wide concern, as it does with all of its assigned missions.

The CWMD Fusion Cell transitioned into a USSOCOM Directorate, the J10, in 2020. This transition increases and improves integration within the Headquarters and SOF enterprise, among the theater special operations commands and the service SOF components. The SOCOM J10 enables the joint force to execute a campaign that ensures the U.S. and its interests worldwide are not attacked or coerced by the use of weapons of mass destruction. About one-third of the Directorate work out of USSOCOM headquarters in Tampa and further the planning and intelligence responsibilities within the SOF enterprise.



Imam Khomeini Space Center in Iran. Courtesy photo.

With many of the mission partners outside of the SOF enterprise, about two-thirds of J10 personnel are located in the National Capital Region. These teams focus on specific WMD actors of concern and interact with a myriad of mission partners also located in the NCR. These teams form the core of the Directorate's operational efforts and collaborative efforts with external U.S. governmental partners. While the J10's mission is focused primarily on the Department of Defense's coordination of military support, connection and collaboration with the various other agencies and entities within the U.S. Government is critical to ensuring proper military support is achieved.

The Defense Threat Reduction Agency is one of these agencies that J10 specifically has a close relationship with. DTRA fulfills roles as both a Combat Support Agency and Defense Agency. They provide focused expertise and innovative capabilities, along with unique authorities, to counter WMD proliferation across the globe. The J10 also works with multiple other U.S. Government agencies on CWMD strategy, policy, plans, organization, and doctrine to ensure alignment with all appropriate stakeholders.

Addressing the global nature of weapons of mass destruction is a high priority both in the Department and at

USSOCOM. As USSOCOM Deputy Commander Vice Adm. Tim Szymanski recently testified to Congress, “The landscape of nuclear, chemical, and biological threats has continued to evolve over this past year. We monitor and analyze progression of existing and over-the-horizon WMD programs closely with essential support from the Defense Intelligence Agency.” Szymanski highlighted Russia’s use of chemical weapons abroad and China’s diversification and rapid expansion of its nuclear weapons arsenal as challenges driving SOCOM’s CWMD efforts.

USSOCOM J10 provides several critical functions to the DOD in its new role established by the 2017 UCP change. First, it develops, authors, maintains, and leverages the Functional Campaign Plan to counter weapons of mass destruction to incorporate and integration CWMD objectives and tasks across the Department and through the Combatant Commands.

Second, it also uses assessments to provide the Secretary a clear picture of the Department’s ability to properly address or respond to CWMD threats. These assessments help the Joint Force effectively prepare and respond to WMD crises, including operations to counter WMD during major combat operations with global competitors and other potential adversaries, and response operations including with our allies or partner nations. In this role, USSOCOM J10 works with the Department and Services in their man, train, and equip responsibilities.

Closely related to assessments, the Directorate also works closely with Joint Force partners to provide expertise and help shape large-scale exercises. The inclusion of CWMD equities into these exercises helps demonstrate DOD capability and resolve to our allies and partners, as well as to competitors and potential adversaries, and provides opportunities for operational partners to implement the campaign framework in virtual and constructive environments.

The Functional Campaign Plan also enables the J10 to coordinate and integrate plans and intelligence priorities. This integration of plans and intelligence specifically focused on WMD is one of the key benefits of this new organization and mission construct. WMD sources of concern include states with established WMD arsenals such as Russia or China, states developing or potentially developing WMD arsenals, such as Iran, as well as other

potential non-state trans-national organizations like ISIS.

The central idea driving the CWMD campaign approach is defeating adversary activities along WMD pathways. Proper alignment of partnerships, planning and intelligence is crucial to addressing the international WMD problem “left” of WMD use – helping prevent states and non-state actors from developing, acquiring, or proliferating WMD capabilities that threaten the U.S or our allies and partners.

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— Vice Adm. Tim Szymanski

Understanding weapons systems and technology are examples of the intelligence function looking at the WMD problem early in the pathway. Clarity regarding potential WMD delivery systems activities to acquire or proliferate WMD, and efforts to conceal existing WMD threats or development

efforts is critical to addressing these threats. USSOCOM J10 works closely with partners, including DTRA and DIA, to understand advanced technologies such as biological or chemical development or missile technology procurement or assembly. A clear understanding of this technology allows USSOCOM to develop potential WMD threat mitigation options.

The CWMD mission is trans-regional in nature and requires a coordinated and unified effort across the joint force. Technology transfer, material procurement, and scientific research are not bound by geographic boundaries and, as such, require a holistic, wide-aperture functional approach. The Functional Campaign Plan allows the J10 to take inputs from our U.S. Government partners, like DTRA and the State Department, and our allies and codifies the collaborative benefits into an effective functional campaign.

There are few potential adversary actions that pose a more catastrophic threat to the nation than the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States or its interests abroad. In today’s globally inter-connected and complex world, where the movement of information and material occurs at a continually faster pace and technology becomes cheaper by the day, the countering-weapons of mass destruction mission is one shared by everyone.

U.S. Special Operations Command, through its newest Directorate, the J10, is spearheading this effort within the Department of Defense. With our partners across the DOD, within the U.S. government, and with our international allies and partners, we continue to ensure the safety and security of our nation.

Headquarters - U.S Special Operations Command USSOCOM leverages cloud capabilities to enhance SOF

By U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Erin Dorrance
USSOCOM Office of Communication

U.S. Special Operations Command has been transitioning programs and networks to the cloud for the past year and a half for the entire USSOCOM enterprise including component commands and theater special operations commands. The transformation has been seamless for USSOCOM computer users who may have only noticed that their programs are working faster, but the capabilities for those who develop and write code for the SOF enterprise has catapulted USSOCOM into a competitive space necessary to take on future challenges.

“USSOCOM is leading the charge on the cloud for DoD,” said Dr. Lisa Costa, USSOCOM chief information officer. “We invested \$5.5 million on this project out of hide because we needed it now. We have to operate at the speed of dialogue, and sometimes at the speed of transmit.”

USSOCOM is leading the charge on the cloud for DoD.

— Dr. Lisa Costa

The money spent on the project pales in comparison to what DoD and other companies have spent on similar programs. USSOCOM was able to keep the cost down by thinking outside the box. The first thing the command

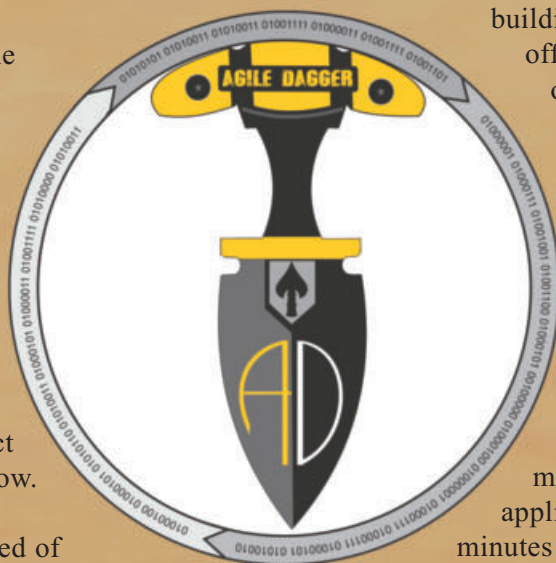
did was to solicit talent from the SOF enterprise. Anyone who knew about cloud technology was asked if they would like to work on the project, said Costa. Next, the command contracted with a cloud technology company, and worked side-by-side throughout the project. USSOCOM was able to use equipment they already owned to save money.

“One of the biggest ways we saved time and money was by utilizing our SOFWERX building in Ybor City,” said Costa. “The off-base property allowed us to work on the project in a collaborative space with all of the technology we needed, and we didn’t have to spend time getting visitor passes and badges, or to find building space on MacDill Air Force Base.”

After months of collaboration, USSOCOM’s Agile Dagger Development Security Operations Platform launched in mid-April 2021. It delivered a secure application development capability in minutes or hours, that once took months to years.

“Code is written to automatically build the cloud environment using infrastructure as code and is cloud agnostic and mobile regardless of whether that is the intended target, which gives flexibility to the next unknown competition,” said Costa. “It also allows anyone in the force to reuse microservices and base code components.”

In Agile Dagger the code is written at the lowest classification level, and then the code can be moved up to ensure greater assets are available to perform continuous integration and delivery, she said. Furthermore, Agile Dagger produces reciprocity across



the force. This functionality has allowed USSOCOM to operate a robust high intensity, high demand summer internship program where college students around the country can work on projects assigned by the command. The code is written securely at the lowest classification level, and then the code can be moved up in classification level if needed once the project is complete.

Using Agile Dagger, in partnership with our small business contract partners the USSOCOM Software Dojo delivered a comprehensive mobile app that helps the 75th Ranger Regiment assess Ranger candidates as they are evaluated through the selection program. Before the app, the cadre would stay a couple hours after the end of the training day to transcribe their notes which they now can write real-time on their securely-connected tablet devices in the training environment. The app also replaced a time-consuming selection process in which cadre used grease pencils on a white board. The organization will now be able to leverage data the app collects to use artificial intelligence tools and technologies to enhance the Ranger selection process and save hundreds of personnel hours every year, said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jerrold Castro, USSOCOM Directorate of Communications Transformation and Innovation Division deputy chief.

The Ranger selection app is just one of several USSOCOM apps that are written and developed on the cloud for SOF use.

Beyond USSOCOM-specific apps, the USSOCOM hybrid cloud increases compute and storage for users. USSOCOM users will not run out of email storage space on their unclassified email network as quickly since the cloud technology increases email inboxes from 2 gigabytes to 100 gigabytes, said Cliff James, Directorate of Communications-Modernization Branch chief.

The USSOCOM hybrid cloud also provides the command with a platform to build future multi-domain search and discovery capabilities that allows users to pull in massive amounts of data to look for common threads which can reveal an issue or concern. A similar capability gave the U.S. government “chatter” intelligence before events such as the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Paris bombings in 2015, and the

Capitol riot in 2021, said Ercell Sherman, USSOCOM Directorate of Communications-Modernization technical manager at Spathe Systems.

To ensure a smooth transition to the USSOCOM hybrid cloud, the command’s small business partner custom built Agile Dagger mobile training teams to work with USSOCOM coders and developers. The MTTs work in person and virtually to train the SOF force on the use of Agile Dagger principles from forward deployed

locations, to Korea, to Miami, and link operators with developers, Costa said.

The feedback from those USSOCOM users who have received the training said it has been some of the best technical training they have received in their career, according to the MTT feedback survey. Another user said the training was vital and gave him big picture context.

As the Agile Dagger MTTs administer training, the command is welcoming the

increased capability that comes along with the cloud technology.

“Cloud technology is changing the acquisitions process at USSOCOM,” said Costa. “You no longer have to wait three years for something to come online. We do an iteration, test, and then re-write based on feedback to immediately make it better—much like the Silicon Valley way of doing things.”

Beyond capability, Agile Dagger comes with a robust security package.

“Agile Dagger has security across multiple levels from identity, access, roles, device, application and platform design, cloud architecture, and integrated DevSecOps tools including automating security standards,” said Sherman. “People think the cloud isn’t secure because it lives on a server off premises, but the technology is actually as secure as it would be on premises. The banking industry has been using cloud technologies for over a decade and consume those services from our mobile devices as a daily way of life. We wouldn’t utilize the technology if it wasn’t secure.”

As USSOCOM continuously discovers more and more capabilities that cloud technology is bringing the command, the Directorate of Communications has set the next goal to start the testing and transfer of some SIPR network workloads to the cloud in the fourth quarter of 2021, said Costa.

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— Dr. Lisa Costa



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



Naval Special Operations Forces from Croatia, Hungary, and the U.S. conduct maritime training in the Adriatic Sea during the Black Swan 21. Black Swan 21 is the annual Hungarian-led multinational special operations forces exercise conducted in Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the United States. Black Swan 21 was held in conjunction with Trojan Footprint 21 to test military synchronization capabilities and to defend multiple domains in Europe simultaneously. Photo by Hungarian Sgt. Kiss Gábor.