

# Tip Spear

October 2023

**SOCNORTH deploys Special  
Operations Forces to Arctic  
during Operation Polar Dagger**





# United States Special Operations Command



**SOCNORTH deploys Special Operations Forces to Arctic during Operation Polar Dagger ... 8**

## Tip of the Spear

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*(Cover) East-Coast-based U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) fast-rope from U.S. Army MH-60M helicopters, assigned to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), while an AC-130J Ghosthunter provides overwatch during Operation Polar Dagger on Attu Island, Alaska, Aug. 31, 2023. During the operation, special operations forces projected the ability of U.S. forces to defend critical infrastructure, enhanced all-domain awareness, demonstrated operational reach and strengthened our understanding of activity in the Arctic. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Matthew Dickinson.*

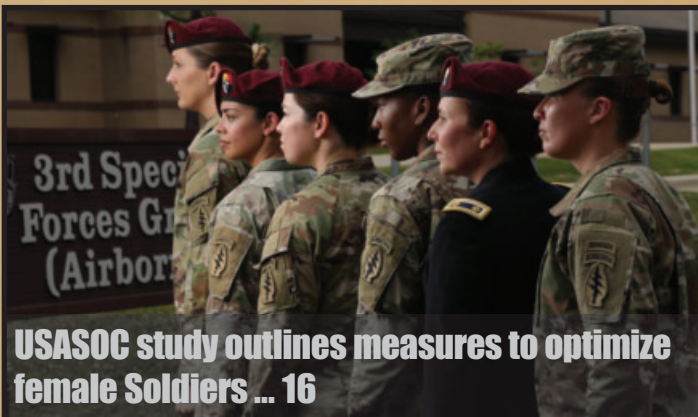


# The Quiet Professionals

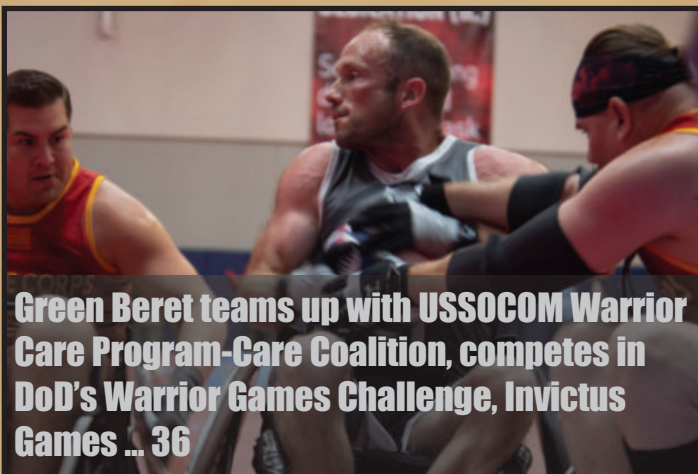
## Highlights



**Royal Thai Army, US Soldiers participate in historic all-female Airborne course ... 10**



**USASOC study outlines measures to optimize female Soldiers ... 16**



**Green Beret teams up with USSOCOM Warrior Care Program-Care Coalition, competes in DoD's Warrior Games Challenge, Invictus Games ... 36**

## Departments

### Theater Special Operations Commands

*US and African partners provide medical support in East Africa ... 4*

*SOCKOR, ROKSWC promote SOF Truth #1, host combine Airborne training with UN member states ... 6*

*SOCNORTH deploys special operations forces to Arctic during Operation Polar Dagger ... 8*

*Royal Thai Army, US Soldiers participate in historic all-female Airborne course ... 10*

*U.S. Civil Affairs, Navy SEALs host medical civic action program in Philippines ... 12*

*C-130J Super Hercules crew forward deploys to Chile in support of Southern Star 2023 ... 14*

### U.S. Army Special Operations Command

*USASOC study outlines measures to optimize female Soldiers ... 16*

*100-year-old WWII veteran receives special forces honor... 18*

### Naval Special Warfare Command

*Naval Special Warfare interoperates with USS John P. Murtha in Bering Sea ... 20*

*NSWC honored with DoD Suicide Prevention Recognition Award ... 21*

*Sharpening the Warrior Spirit ... 22*

*Philippines' SFR-A, NAVSCIATTS collaborate in establishment of Maritime Training Centers ... 24*

### Air Force Special Operations Command

*AFSOC embraces extended reality to enhance readiness ... 26*

*U.S. Air Force gunship crew trains in Chile alongside Bullfighter; Chilean, US JTACs ... 28*

### Marine Forces Special Operations Command

*MARSOC team wins Spectrum Excellence Award ... 30*

*What winning looks like: the Cognitive Raider ... 31*

*Combined Exercise Raven concludes ... 32*

*Welcome to the Jungle: MARSOC diversifies training environment ... 33*

### Headquarters

*USSOCOM Ignite 2024 kicks off in Boston ... 34*

*Green Beret teams up with USSOCOM Warrior Care Program-Care Coalition, competes in DoD's Warrior Games Challenge, Invictus Games ... 36*

*Foreign intelligence threats to SOF – Why counterintelligence integration is vital ... 38*



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



## US and African partners provide medical support in East Africa

*Courtesy Story*  
*Special Operations Command Africa*

U.S. military members in Kismayo, Somalia partnered with Kenya Defence Forces and Somali National Army Danab Forces to bring medical supplies and treatment to a local village as part of a medical civic action program clinic, July 1, 2023, in Dolsan Village, Somalia.

The 91st Civil Affairs Battalion, Special Operations-Airborne, coordinated with the mobile surgical response team to provide medical care to villagers as the KDF screened patients and distributed prescriptions for those who were ill. Members of the Somali National Army Danab Forces and Somali National Army provided security while the KDF and 91st Civil Affairs Battalion assisted patients.

“With the partner forces, we were able to administer medical supplies to the local population,” said U.S. Army Capt. Ben Coad, team lead with the 91st Civil Affairs Battalion Civil Military Support Element-Somalia. “It’s a great opportunity for the Kenya Defence Forces and the SNA Danab to work together and bolster those partnerships.”

Operated by host nation partner forces in coordination with U.S. joint services, MEDCAPs serve as temporary field clinics to provide limited medical treatment to the local population. U.S. forces regularly engage in MEDCAPs to work alongside African partners and provide medical care to remote communities, bolstering trust and security within the region.

“We have come to promote the safety of the local populace,” said Maj. D. K. Mosbey, KDF commanding




**Kenya Defence Forces medical professionals fill out prescriptions for villagers during a medical civic action program Event in Dolsan village, Kismayo, Somalia, July 1, 2023. More than 250 people came to seek medical aid, ranging from Dengue fever to urinary tract infections. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Enrique Barcelo.**

officer. “It’s about the promotion of security, justice and local authority to the federal government of Somalia, to include Jubaland. Today, we met with the chief of this area and had an opportunity for a positive engagement.”

More than 250 men, women and children sought medical aid at the MEDCAP for conditions ranging from Dengue fever to urinary tract infections. Patients that required specialized treatment were referred to the medical facility on Kismayo where more advanced treatment options were available from the KDF.

“It goes a long way toward building confidence,” said Capt. B. C. Omondi, KDF physician. “It has been a pleasure working with the locals, as well as working with our partner forces [Somali National Army, Danab, U.S. forces].”





*Medical personnel with the 91st Civil Affairs Battalion and mobile surgical response team work together to remove a growth from a child's back during a medical civic action program event in Dolsan village, Kismayo, Somalia, July 1, 2023. More than 250 people came to seek medical aid, ranging from Dengue fever to urinary tract infections. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Enrique Barcelo.*



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



## SOCKOR, ROKSWC promote SOF Truth #1, host combine Airborne training with UN member states

*By U.S. Air Force Maj. Christopher Mesnard  
Special Operations Command Korea*

Personnel assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command Korea and the Republic of Korea's Special Warfare Command conducted a combined and multinational Airborne jump training event Aug. 17, 2023, south of Camp Humphreys, ROK, with participants from the UN Command-Korea and senior special operations forces representatives from Thailand and the Philippines.

U.S. special operations personnel regularly conduct combined jump training with their ROK counterparts, ensuring proficiency in special operations forces-related skills and their ability to meet mutual defense priorities. Part of its role as the UN Special Operations Command, SOCKOR regularly conducts exchanges with other member states' SOF personnel, like the Thai and Filipino participants in this training jump.

"With over 70 years in the making, our ROK-U.S. Alliance is one of the strongest in the world,"



*From left center, U.S. Brig. Gen Derek Lipson, Thai Maj. Gen. Narongrit Kumpeera, Republic of Korea Lt. Gen. Sik Son, United Kingdom Lt. Gen. Andrew Harrison, and Col. Eliglen Villafior, all special operations leaders from their respective nations, gather in recognition of Airborne Day on Aug. 17, 2023, south of Camp Humphreys, Republic of Korea. Each nation participated in a combined training jump focused on interoperability and strengthening relationships between people of all ranks. Republic of Korea Army photo by Private 1st Class Yeonung Kim.*





***A U.S. special operations forces Soldier exits a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook in a combined static-line jump with counterparts from the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Philippines, and United Kingdom, Aug. 17, 2023, south of Camp Humphreys, ROK. Static-line jumps enable the rapid placement of a large amount of highly trained personnel on a single target area. U.S. Special Operations Command Korea, ROK Special Warfare Command, and regional SOF partners regularly conduct realistic training events to demonstrate their ironclad commitment to each other and reinforce mutual defense priorities in the Indo-Pacific region. Republic of Korea Army photo by Private 1st Class Yeonung Kim.***

said Brig. Gen. Derek Lipson, commander of SOCKOR. “We at SOCKOR advance that special relationship every day through training and engagements with unique special operations capabilities in mind.”

In addition to strengthening the interoperability of multinational participants, the jump served as an opportunity to demonstrate the command’s commitment to U.S. Special Operations Command’s SOF Truth #1, “Humans are more important than hardware.”

“In today’s technologically robust world, it’s easy to forget the fundamental principle that people are our greatest asset,” said Lipson. “That’s not to say we don’t use advanced tools to our advantage. But at the end of the day, we need to know we have

the relationships in place and an adaptive nature conditioned into our SOF warriors to meet both our nations’ defense priorities.”

The UNC Deputy Commander, United Kingdom Lt. Gen. Andrew Harrison, participated in the jump, reinforcing the command’s emphasis on maintaining engagement with the UN member states.

“Partner building is foundational to the strength of our command’s decades-long mission,” said Harrison. “It was an absolute pleasure to not only talk with our friends from Thailand and the Philippines but to see their skill and proficiency during today’s Airborne training.”

Special Operations Command Korea maintains a constantly ready force that regularly trains and collaborates with ROK allies, at all levels, in addition to UN member states in its role as a U.S. theater special operations command on the Korean Peninsula.



***A Republic of Korea Special Warfare Command soldier maneuvers prior to landing from a free-fall training jump, Aug. 17, 2023, south of Camp Humphreys, ROK. Freefall qualified personnel receive specialized training to ensure they are able to meet a flexible array of mission requirements, to include precision maneuver and landing, as well as inconspicuous infiltration into potentially contested areas. Republic of Korea Army photo by Private 1st Class Yeonung Kim.***



# U.S. Special Operations Command - North



## SOCNORTH deploys special operations forces to Arctic during Operation Polar Dagger

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

Special Operations Command North executed Operation Polar Dagger, a demonstration of rapidly deployable joint special operations forces in the Alaskan Arctic and Subarctic regions, to include Shemya, Attu and St. Lawrence Islands, Aug. 15-Sept. 10, 2023.

Starting Aug. 15, the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command initiated Operation Noble Defender in Alaska to demonstrate the commands' ability to advance integrated deterrence and layered defense for Canada and the U.S. Alaskan NORAD Region. U.S. NORTHCOM provided special operations forces and capabilities to Operation Noble Defender through Operation Polar Dagger.

During Operation Polar Dagger, joint U.S. SOF expanded their operational reach by integrating with the USS John P. Murtha, which was located in the Bering Sea. Additionally, U.S. SOF employed new and emerging technologies, demonstrated their ability to defend critical infrastructure in austere locations and assessed competitor activity in the Arctic.

"SOCNORTH demonstrated, throughout Operation Polar Dagger, SOF can effectively compete in the Arctic and will continue to identify challenges and develop creative solutions to detect, deter and disrupt threats in the region and throughout the U.S. Northern Command's area of responsibility," said U.S. Army Col. Matthew Tucker, commander of SOCNORTH. "Our greatest competitor in the Arctic is the environment. This year's operation provided SOF the opportunity to learn from challenges with the movement of forces and capabilities, employ and assess communication systems, and sharpen the skills necessary to



**East-Coast-based U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) engage with an AC-130J Ghost rider, assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron, as the aircraft conducts a flyover on Attu Island, Alaska, Aug. 31, 2023, as part of Operation Polar Dagger. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Matthew Dickinson.**

defend the northern approaches of the homeland."

More than 150 joint SOF forces from across 10 states conducted over the beach operations, special reconnaissance, long range movements, threat assessments against defense critical infrastructure, rapid resupply, personnel recovery, and community engagements with native tribes.

"Partnerships are fundamental to SOF and to all our missions and endeavors," said a U.S. Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Commander assigned to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). "Our team had the opportunity to engage with the Alaska Native people on St. Lawrence Island and learn about their best practices on survival techniques in the subarctic terrain. We place incredible value on what we can learn from the Alaska Native people who have generational experience in this





***East-Coast-based U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) conduct an over the beach infiltration on Eareckson Air station on Shemya Island, AK on Sept. 6, 2023, as part of Operation Polar Dagger. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Matthew Dickinson.***

extreme environment.”

Additionally, the integration of Naval Special Warfare personnel with the USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26), a San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship, underscored the flexibility and adaptability of the U.S. military in responding to the evolving strategic environment, according to a release by Naval Special Warfare Group TWO “Integrating U.S. Navy SEALs with the USS John P. Murtha during Operation Polar Dagger further prepares our forces to operate effectively in the extreme environment of the high north – while contributing to our national security objectives,” said Naval Special Warfare Group 2 Commodore Capt. Bill Gallagher. “Naval Special Warfare’s ability to operate with fleet assets provides combatant commanders greater flexibility in deploying forces to

counter emerging challenges in the region.”

In a show of airpower out to the furthest reaches of U.S. NORTHCOM’s area of responsibility, units from the 17th Special Operation Squadron deployed an AC-130J Ghost Rider gunship, a first for the unit to this austere location, alongside the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment MH-60 Blackhawks, and 207th Aviation Troop Command, Alaska Army National Guard, UH/MH-60 Blackhawks and CH-47 Chinook helicopters. The joint SOF and total forces air components supported the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Green Berets and East-Coast-based U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators with helicopter insertion and extraction, validating search and rescue capabilities, air to ground integration, aerial overwatch, fast-rope and close-air support.

U.S. Air Force Special Operations surgical team from the 720th Operational Support Squadron provided a rapidly deployable trauma medical capability in support of the integrated air, ground and maritime operations.

“Operation Polar Dagger provided our joint and total forces the opportunity to operate together and conduct in-person communications,” said U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Clint Grizzell, command senior enlisted leader for SOCNORTH. “The ability for our forces to look each other in the eyes, in real-time, provides unmatched value, especially in the austere environment of the Arctic. We’ve had some great lessons learned but it is about how we work together, joint SOF and total force, to evolve from the previous operation. We already found lessons that we’re going to build upon for the next iteration.”

SOCNORTH exists to plan, execute, and command and control special operations in support of U.S. NORTHCOM and our national objectives to meet the National Defense Strategy’s top priority – Homeland Defense.



***A combatant craft assault returns to amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26) during Operation Polar Dagger, Aug. 28, 2023. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Joshua Samoluk.***



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



## Royal Thai Army, US Soldiers participate in historic all-female Airborne course

*By U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Theanne Tangen  
U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific*

The Royal Thai Army invited U.S. Soldiers to participate in their first all-female Basic Airborne Course conducted by the Special Warfare School at Camp Erawan, Lop Buri, Thailand, July 18 – Aug. 9.

Nearly 100 female RTA soldiers from Airborne Class 345 earned their Parachutist Badge after completing four weeks of rigorous training to include four static line jumps, one with combat equipment and one at night. The course concluded with an 8k ruck march from the drop zone.

During the graduation ceremony, the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army General Narongpan Jittkaewtae reminded the soldiers what it means to wear the Parachutist Badge.

“To earn this badge you have to follow standing operating procedures strictly, including vigorous training,” said Jittkaewtae. “This badge represents your persistence, courage, and discipline to protect the country, which is the pride of the Royal Thai Army Airborne. May I remind those who wear this badge on your left chest, you are Airborne, you are capable of static line operations, ready for airborne operations.”

1st Sgt. Sarah Meyers, U.S. Army Forward Support Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), served as the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces jumpmaster mentor during the course. Meyers has 15 years of airborne operations experience and is the only female jumpmaster in her battalion.

“Being a part of a historic all-female jump feels empowering and significant, as it represents breaking barriers while working to improve combat effectiveness while promoting equality, diversity and inclusivity,” said Meyers. “It inspires a sense of pride, camaraderie, and a feeling of contribution to a positive change.”

At the completion of the course, Meyers recognized and



***A Royal Thai Army student receives encouragement from U.S. Army Capt. Amanda Veen, an airborne qualified mentor, after completing one of the four jumps required to graduate from the first Royal Thai Army all-female Basic Airborne Course conducted by the RTA Special Warfare School at Camp Erawan, Lop Buri, Thailand, Aug. 7, 2023. Courtesy Photo.***

gave encouragement to the female with the highest physical fitness score.

“Good job exceeding the standard, don’t just do the minimum push yourself all the way,” said Meyers. “To keep up with our airborne brothers try to meet their standards.”

Meyers also presented her U.S. Master Parachutist Jump Wings to a standout female to continue to motivate and encourage the soldiers of the RTA.

“I am so proud of them all,” said Meyers. “They are now officially my Airborne sisters.”

The United States and Thailand have nearly two centuries of diplomatic relations and have been security treaty allies for over 66 years.

“The U.S. can help recommend how we can do better, and they can see how we do things differently which creates an exchange of information between us,” said 2nd Lt. Akararin Yucharoen, Thailand Special Warfare Command, instructor. “We have a great partnership.”





*A student of the Royal Thai Army conducts an airborne jump during one of the four required airborne operations to graduate from the first Royal Thai Army all-female Basic Airborne Course conducted by the RTA Special Warfare School at Camp Erawan, Lop Buri, Thailand, Aug. 8, 2023. Nearly 100 female RTA soldiers from Airborne Class 345 earned their Parachutist Badge after completing four weeks of rigorous training to include four static line jumps, one with combat equipment and one at night. The course concluded with an 8 kilometer ruck march from the drop zone. The U.S. also participated in the historic jump by serving as airborne-qualified mentors. Our continued, face-to-face exchanges with our allies and partners are a foundation of our bilateral relationships, and bolster understanding in the region that we are going to be a reliable partner in both good and bad times. Photo by U.S. Army Cpl. P.J. Siquig.*



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



## U.S. Civil Affairs, Navy SEALs host medical civic action program in Philippines

*By Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Gaither  
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

Members of a Naval Special Warfare unit and the U.S. Army Civil Affairs hosted a medical civic action program (MEDCAP) with the local government of El Nido in Palawan, Philippines, from July 29-30, 2023. The team worked with medical professionals from local hospitals, the provincial health unit, the Palawan dental chapter and local volunteers to serve hundreds of patients in various medical and dental services.

According to the NSW lead planner and medic, the MEDCAP took approximately eight months to organize.

“The Barangays, Tagalog for village or district, of Manlag and San Fernando were recommended by the local government due to their relatively large population and limited access to care,” said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lyndon Wright, the Civil Affairs Philippines medical sergeant.

The MEDCAP allowed local nationals to receive various medical and dental care. Patients could also receive diagnoses for illnesses they could have missed by not seeing a doctor, ultimately improving the health of the community’s most vulnerable people.

The event also provided an opportunity to facilitate cultural exchanges and strengthen relationships with the Philippines and the U.S.

“We were able to provide medical aid and resources to the rural local populace, as well as build trust and rapport among the local government and people of El Nido Province,” said a U.S. Naval Special Warfare operator.

El Nido’s Mayor, Hon. Edna Gacot-Lim, recognized the U.S. Embassy and the Civil Affairs team for their help in organizing the MEDCAP in a post on social media, thanking the U.S. Embassy for choosing El Nido to conduct this mission, and hopes to do again in the future. The post also described the number of medical services provided and recognized the municipal offices and local medical professionals involved.

The NSW members and Civil Affairs team assisted

medical professionals with providing medical consultations, dental education and extractions, minor surgery, and pharmaceutical distribution. Over 1,650 medical services were provided during the two-day MEDCAP. They provided medical supplies, including fluoride, dental kits, prescription medication and more.

Uniformed personnel from the Philippine Coast Guard, 23rd Marine Company, Joint Task Force Malampaya, and local and national police assisted the MEDCAP by serving as marshals and organizers throughout the event.

“This event highlights the effects that a strong U.S.-Philippine partnership can have even at the local level and creates a pathway for future collaboration,” said Wright.

U.S. Naval Special Warfare is the nation’s elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the fleet’s reach. Integral to this capability is a forward-deployed posture and continuous engagement with partner and ally forces, heightening mutual interoperability and regional expertise.



***Lt. Cmdr. Alvaro Ramos, the physician assistant for a U.S. Naval Special Warfare unit, conducts a medical consultation for an infant during a medical civic action program hosted by members of a U.S. NSW unit and U.S. Civil Affairs in Palawan, Philippines, July 29, 2023. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Gaither.***





Naval Special Warfare personnel apply fluoride to local Children alongside Filipino medical professionals during a medical civic action program hosted by members of a U.S. Naval Special Warfare unit and U.S. Civil Affairs in Palawan, Philippines, July 30, 2023. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Gaither.



# U.S. Special Operations Command - South



## C-130J Super Hercules crew forward deploys to Chile in support of Southern Star 2023

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Clayton Wear  
Special Operations Command South*

Two C-130J Super Hercules crews with the 317th Airlift Wing, Dyess Air Force Base, Texas., supported Special Operations Command South and the Chilean Army during exercise Southern Star 23, from July 24 - Aug. 10, 2023, along the entire country of Chile.

Exercise Southern Star 23 is a Chilean-led, full-scale special operations, joint and combined employment exercise including training on tactical maneuvers, collaboration and decision-making during crisis scenarios.

During the exercise, pilots and maintainers with the 39th Airlift Squadron transported a Chilean Army HUMVEE in an Air Mobility Command C-130J for the first time, set up a mobile tactical operation center, as well as led a forward area refueling point as a proof-of-concept.

“Exercise Southern Star has allowed us a unique opportunity to work with the Chilean Air Force, which also employs the C-130,” said U.S. Air Force Capt. Chris Galemore, a 39th Airlift Squadron pilot. “We’ve been able to share TTPs that will enable both forces to work together to accomplish common goals. We have had the pleasure of having the Chileans fly with us on most of our sorties so we can share stories and build lasting camaraderie.”

While visiting his lead planners in Rancagua, Chile, Col. Thomas Lankford, 317th Airlift Wing commander mentioned the benefits gained through his squadron deploying in support of SS23 and the opportunity to develop a tailored force package.

“This exercise is teaching them to look at a lot of different problem-sets that they normally don’t think about,” said Lankford. “This exercise has allowed us to create a purpose-built maintenance package in order to show up in an expeditionary environment and start



***A pilot from the 39th Airlift Squadron out of the 317th Airlift Wing, Dyess AFB, TX flies a C-130J Super Hercules south of Santiago, Chile, July 28, 2023, during exercise Southern Star 23. Exercise Southern Star 23 is a Chilean-led full-scale Special Operations, Joint, and Combined Employment. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Clayton Wear.***

executing from day one.”

Building upon the mobile strength presented by individual force packages, Lankford went on to mention a program called LEAD, which creates multi-capable maintainers that are able to forward deploy with more specialty skills training.

“The Lethal Expeditionary Airman Development program, or LEAD, is where we take maintainers and split them into two career tracks in order for them to learn each other’s specialties,” said Lankford. “We then send these



maintainers to learn combat maintenance skills outside of their normal career fields. Through this education track, they also learn the bigger picture on how tasks roll down to each squadron.”

The LEAD program doesn’t only focus on job skills, it focuses on leadership skills.

“LEAD is also a leadership course where maintainers become multi-capable beyond job proficiency by giving briefings on maintenance topics,” said Lankford. “When they leave LEAD, they are able to go out and rapidly deploy to a combat environment and repair any aircraft with combat damage. They become a huge asset.”

With the opportunity to test 317th Airlift Wing members, Lankford didn’t hesitate to send the 39th Airlift Squadron.

“We are very good at deploying to a mature theater with mega bases built up with everything you need. So if you show up without stuff, somebody’s got it. In a sense, I wanted this [exercise] to be tough because I need folks to see that there is a different way to deploy than they’ve ever done in their career,” said Lankford. “This exercise came at the perfect time because I ordered us to do another exercise in the future doing the same thing,” said Lankford.

We also put some Humvees on a C-130J the other day and showed our Chilean partners that capability. By demonstrating that for them we were able to show them the value of a stretch C-130.”

As one of the lead pilots flying the Humvees, Capt. Tyler Jones, 39th Airlift Wing pilot addressed several of the safety measures, requirements, and hurdles they had to overcome.

“At the execution level, there were quite a few hurdles to pass to get this mission completed. The biggest issue is working jointly with a foreign nation to execute an airlift that included vehicles that are considered hazardous. This came with additional paperwork and inspections to ensure safety. Luckily, we had support from our American partners to get the cargo prepared and ready to go.”

“There was also an opportunity to educate our Chilean partners on the U.S. airlift requirements which extended the amount of time it took to prepare the cargo but was an easy hurdle to bypass since both sides were ready and

willing to get this mission done.”

One of the primary duties of a U.S. Air Force loadmaster is to ensure the safe loading and unloading of the aircraft. Tech. Sgt. Stefan Eiermann, a 39th Airlift Squadron Loadmaster explains the duties of a loadmaster, especially while working in Southern Star 23.

“The overall job responsibilities of a loadmaster are to ensure safe loading and unloading of the aircraft as well as the security of the cargo in flight. The loadmaster conducts pre-flights for the aircraft to include exterior and initial powering on. We’re also responsible for the execution of airdrop missions including rigging of airdrop equipment as well as the actual airdrop. Airdrops cover equipment, personnel, and container loads to support combatant commanders across the globe.”

Eiermann then explained the steps that his fellow teammates had to make in order to safely load the first Chilean Humvee on a C130J. “To prepare for a rolling stock cargo movement such as a Humvee, the loadmaster would check the weight and balance of the aircraft to ensure it’s positioned for safety of flight. The Loadmaster will check the weights of each axle and plan it so that it falls within the limits of our cargo compartment floor. They will also check for the overall condition of the vehicle, including gas and oil quantities and a shipper’s

declaration of dangerous goods. This paperwork means that the cargo was inspected and prepared for airlift and has been certified safe for airlift.”

A few days after transporting the Humvee, the 39th Airlift Squadron also provided a proof-of-concept by transporting a Tactical Operations Center, or TOC. This provides tactical airlift squadrons the agility to rapidly depart a runway

under attack, land elsewhere, and rapidly stand up a TOC to plan other flight routes.

Another proof of concept to increase maneuverability between AFSOC and AMC was in the form of a forward area refueling point.

“FARP allows us to transfer fuel on the ground in austere locations from one aircraft to another without shutting off either of the aircraft’s engines,” said Senior Airman Benjamin Pasley, a 1st Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron, 1 Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt, Fl. FARP technician.”

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*At the execution level, there were quite a few hurdles to pass to get this mission completed. The biggest issue is working jointly with a foreign nation to execute an airlift that included vehicles that are considered hazardous. This came with additional paperwork and inspections to ensure safety. Luckily, we had support from our American partners to get the cargo prepared and ready to go.*

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# U.S. Army Special Operations Command

## USASOC study outlines measures to optimize female Soldiers



By Joe Lacdan  
Army News Service

To better address obstacles facing female Soldiers serving in special operations units and to retain its top talent, Army Special Operations Command outlined 42 recommendations in a study released Monday.

The findings of the research will guide USASOC in optimizing female warfighters while noting their physical and anatomical differences.

“It is not about providing accommodations for women,” said USASOC Command Sgt. Maj. JoAnn Naumann. “It’s providing tools that allow women to maximize their performance and continue to serve at all levels and across time.”

During the yearlong study, researchers found that 44% of the female Soldiers surveyed said they experienced equipment-fitting challenges relating to body armor, helmets and ruck systems. The problem can impact women’s abilities to perform basic Soldier maneuvers and skills.

Female Soldiers also reported that the time they spent planning pregnancies negatively impacted their careers, leading to Soldiers scheduling childbearing around career milestones or avoiding pregnancy entirely, according to the 106-page report, titled, “Breaking Barriers: Women in Army Special Operations Forces.”

Researchers held more than 40 focus groups and interviews with women and men from across the force. The study focused on the areas of equipment fitting, childcare, gender bias, social support, sexual harassment, pregnancy and postpartum, and morale and wellbeing. Retired Lt. Gen. Francis Beaudette, former USASOC commander, initiated the 2021 study, which had more than 5,000 respondents. Additionally, the survey addressed other concerns including challenges of small-statured Soldiers and access to healthcare.

The study also explored attitudes towards females serving in combat and special operations units. The survey results showed Soldiers had a favorable view of women serving in



*In celebration of Women Veterans Day, June 12, 2020, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) paid tribute to female Soldiers, past and present who have supported the group’s mission. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Alexis Washburn-Jasinski.*

special operations units with no reported decline in morale. About 72% of women and 64% of men surveyed said they would support their daughter joining Army special operations units.

According to findings, 80% of men reported that gender-related concerns had no impact on their decision to remain in special operations forces. Researchers found most gender-biased comments and attitudes during the study came from senior NCOs, indicating a difference in generational views, Naumann said.

“Although disappointed by some of the findings and comments in the study, we are committed to addressing these issues with candor and transparency,” Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga, USASOC commander wrote in the report’s introduction.

“To change culture takes time,” said Braga. “We have to be better — we must be better.”

The Women in ARSOF Initiative outlined three lines of effort to address the hurdles: mentorship and sponsorship,



health and readiness, and modernization.

For mentorship and sponsorship, units can create a “culture of excellence” through education and accountability, said Lt. Col. Rachel Cepis, the director of the Women in ARSOF Initiative. For example, the Army can host more educational forums where Soldiers can learn how to schedule duties around breastfeeding or deal with postpartum related issues, as well as women’s health and nutrition.

Survey participants that have had children listed the top five postpartum challenges: (1) depression, stress, and anxiety, (2) inability to perform to the same level as the unit, (3) lactation, (4) maternity leave, and (5) diastasis recti abdominus. (stomach muscle separation)

Focus group participants said they experienced hardship finding adequate care during and after pregnancy. Soldiers also voiced concerns about pregnancy hindering career progression and having adequate breastfeeding locations, as well as convalescent leave following miscarriages.

The 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Carson, Colorado began a female mentorship program, while the 3rd Special Forces Group and 528th Sustainment Brigade at Fort Liberty, North Carolina, plan to establish a similar initiative at each battalion headquarters. The 528th Sustainment Brigade also hosts monthly engagements with female Soldiers.

“We’re looking at it holistically. I’m excited to see the growth of women in our formation in all positions,” Cepis said. “And I’m thrilled that we’re looking at ways to help them perform at their maximum potential.”

“This is about driving change and making ultimately, ARSOF and the [Defense Department] better,” she added.

In the second line of effort, health and readiness, USASOC partnered with Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine in Natick, Massachusetts to study physiological, metabolic and psychological responses during and after completion of extreme and prolonged training. USASOC has also submitted four topics to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2024 research solicitation: (1) women’s physical and physiological characteristics of elite female warfighters, (2) pregnancy and postpartum impacts on readiness, (3) long and short-term impacts of intentional dehydration, and (4) endocrine adaptations of female warfighters.

Cepis said USASOC is working with the Army, SOCOM, and academic partners to study the effects of menstrual cycles on female warfighters and ways to maximize performance. USASOC plans to examine sicknesses and illnesses that females suffer in the field and explore how to avoid musculoskeletal injuries related to female anatomy differences, she added.

Finally in modernization, the study recognizes the anatomical and anthropometric differences between men and women and Army Combat Capabilities Development

Command [DEVCOM] at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland will be modernizing dress and duty uniforms as well as body armor that better fits the varying body types and sizes.

USASOC has done limited user assessments with the Army Modular Scalable Body Armor, a lightweight, adjustable bulletproof vest, and the Army Integrated Helmet Protection System, a multi-faceted head gear, which consists of protection and retention systems, a helmet cover and hearing protection.

The Women in ARSOF Director has partnered with DEVCOM to better develop items ranging from pregnant female service uniforms to female urinary devices.

USASOC founded the Women in ARSOF Initiative to specifically study female-modernization challenges while advising Army and SOF senior leaders. ARSOF also began publishing a newsletter series, created an online platform and developed a portal site to keep Soldiers updated on the study findings and ongoing efforts.

“I have never felt so heard and understood in my career until [the newsletter] started being published,” wrote a 25-year-old Soldier who has spent five years in special operations forces.

USASOC, headquartered at Fort Liberty, North Carolina, trains, equips and educates special operations units in support of the joint force.



**Civil Affairs candidates from the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, take part in rifle physical training as part of the Civil Affairs Assessment and Selection course at Camp Mackall, North Carolina on February 1, 2023. U.S. Army Special Operations Command released a 2021 report that identified 42 key issues facing women in the Army today. The command is working with Army leadership to address the concerns of female Soldiers and improve their quality of life. Photo by K. Kassens.**



# U.S. Army Special Operations Command

## 100-year-old WWII veteran receives special forces honor



*By Christopher Hurd  
Army News Service*

U.S. Army Special Operations Command welcomed Ellsworth “Al” Johnson, a 100-year-old World War II Army veteran, into the community by presenting him with an Army Special Forces’ tab and a Green Beret during a ceremony at an assisted living center in Zeeland, Michigan, Sept. 1, 2023.

Johnson was recognized for his contributions during the war while serving in an Office of Strategic Services operational group, a precursor to Army Special Operations, and became eligible for the honor after an update to the Army awards regulation in 2019.

“We honor Mr. Johnson today as we look back at our roots and legacy in Special Operations,” said Brig. Gen. Lawrence Ferguson, 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) commanding general. “We talk a lot about



World War II Army veteran Ellsworth “Al” Johnson receives an Army Special Forces’ tab and Green Beret during a ceremony at an assisted living center in Zeeland, Michigan, Sept. 1, 2023. Johnson was recognized for his contributions during the war while serving in an Office of Strategic Services’ operational group, a precursor to Army Special Operations, and became eligible for the honor after an update to the Army awards regulation in 2019. Photo by Sgt. U.S. Army Dominique Cox.





***World War II Army veteran Ellsworth "Al" Johnson sits in a downed Japanese aircraft while waiting to evacuate China in 1945. Johnson received an Army Special Forces' tab and Green Beret during a ceremony at an assisted living center in Zeeland, Michigan, Sept. 1, 2023 for his contributions during the war while serving in an Office of Strategic Services' operational group, a precursor to Army Special Operations. Courtesy photo by Ellsworth Johnson.***

people and warfighting in the Army, and when you look at Mr. Johnson and his time, it's clear to see that although many years have passed, those two concepts are still with us today."

During WWII, the Office of Strategic Services was an intelligence agency for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The command formed several small self-sufficient groups composed primarily of Soldiers that would enter enemy territory to perform missions and gather intelligence.

Johnson, an Army medic, volunteered to join the command and was placed in the French operational group following training. His 25-man team parachuted into France behind enemy lines in August 1944, just prior to the allied invasion of southern France.

Their mission was to capture a hydroelectric plant and harass the German army while gathering intelligence for the unit's headquarters in London. The team, given the code name "Patrick," spent nearly a month in France working with a French underground group.

The unit successfully captured the plant and the nearby town of Eguzon. They continued to torment the

German army as it retreated through southern France.

Following this tour, Johnson volunteered to serve in China where he provided medical care and trained Chinese troops in airborne capabilities. He served as an advisor to a Chinese commando unit and parachuted with them during an attack against a Japanese-held town.

Johnson survived the battle and returned home to Michigan at the end of the war in 1945. The Office of Strategic Services disbanded that October.

"[Johnson] laid the groundwork for what we are today," said Maj. Gen. Patrick Roberson, U.S. Army Special Operations Command deputy commanding general. "Everything that he did in 1944, we model ourselves on in our training and the operations that we conduct - It's our origin story."

During the Korean War, U.S. Army leaders wanted to create an unconventional warfare unit to deal with guerrilla forces. Rather than start from scratch, they used the operational groups of the OSS from WWII as a model for the new unit structure.

This structure carried over in the formation of Army Special Forces under the U.S. Army Psychological Warfare Division in 1952.

Surrounded by his extended family, Johnson was honored nearly two months after his 100th birthday.

"I'm overcome by the emotion," said Johnson. "But proud to be here today," he said.



***World War II Army veteran Ellsworth "Al" Johnson poses for an official photo in 1943. Johnson served in an Office of Strategic Services' operational group, a precursor to Army Special Operations. Courtesy photo by Ellsworth Johnson.***



# Naval Special Warfare Command



## Naval Special Warfare interoperates with USS John P. Murtha in Bering Sea

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

East Coast based Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) seamlessly integrated with USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26) during Operation Polar Dagger, in the Alaskan Arctic region, demonstrating special operations forces capability to operate in austere locations to defend critical infrastructure and strengthen interoperability in the region.

Operation Polar Dagger demonstrates the United States' continued commitment to maintain mission readiness in various environments and to preserve capacity for follow-on operations. The integration of SEALs with Murtha, a San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship, underscored the flexibility and adaptability of the U.S. military in responding to the evolving strategic environment.

"Integrating U.S. Navy SEALs with the USS John P. Murtha during Operation Polar Dagger further prepares our forces to operate effectively in the extreme environment of the high-north – while contributing to our national security objectives," said Naval Special Warfare Group 2 Commodore Capt. Bill Gallagher. "Naval Special Warfare's ability to operate with fleet assets provides combatant commanders greater flexibility in deploying forces to counter emerging challenges in the region."

The Murtha's advanced capabilities and cutting-edge technology played a pivotal role in the successful deployment of SEALs and combat craft assault boats. Equipped with state-of-the-art command and control systems, the vessel offers unparalleled flexibility in orchestrating amphibious operations. Its well deck and specialized equipment facilitate swift and seamless launch and recovery of NSW assets, enabling precision missions even in challenging environments like the Arctic. This integration not only showcases the synergy



***A Combatant Craft Assault boat enters the well deck of amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26) during Operation Polar Dagger, Aug. 23, 2023. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Joshua Samoluk.***

between modern fleet assets and elite special forces but also underscores the U.S. Navy's commitment to maintaining a technologically advanced and adaptable fleet.

"Amphibious transport dock ships, such as ours, have many unique capabilities that make them ideal platforms to support special operations forces," said U.S. Navy Capt. Doug Langenberg, commanding officer of USS John P. Murtha. "The amphibious Navy's participation in Operation Polar Dagger in the High North allows us to test new capabilities and advance response options, giving our joint force an asymmetric advantage over our competitors in a maritime environment."

During the operation, the SEALs deployed from the well deck of the Murtha in combatant craft assault boats in the Bering Sea, navigated to a remote island, conducted an over-the-beach patrol and exfiltrated via helicopter. The joint operation underscored the strategic importance of the Arctic region, while also highlighting the United States' commitment to employing a multi-faceted approach to homeland defense.



# NSWC honored with DoD Suicide Prevention Recognition Award

*Courtesy Story*

*Naval Special Warfare Command*

Naval Special Warfare Command was formally recognized for its outstanding contributions to suicide prevention during the Department of Defense's annual Suicide Prevention Recognition ceremony Sept. 6, 2023.

The event, hosted by the Defense Human Resources Activity, celebrated the exceptional efforts of various military installations in increasing suicide prevention awareness and engagement. Other honorees included U.S. Army Garrison, Rheinland-Pfalz, Kaiserslautern, Germany; Guam Army National Guard, Barrigada, Guam; Marine Aircraft Group 12, Iwakuni, Japan; and Air Combat Command, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Hampton and Newport News, Virginia.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen H. Hicks addressed the recipients and guests, emphasizing the Department's commitment to taking a public health approach to suicide prevention.

"Taking care of our people is a top priority for Secretary Austin and for me," said Hicks. "Suicide has no single root cause or solution. That's why the Department is taking a public health approach—because this problem requires a range of prevention methods and treatment options."

According to Chad Rodarmer, NSWC deputy Force programs manager, NSW's approach to suicide prevention is to continually strive to promote connectedness and education amongst the entire NSW community.

"With a year-round focus on suicide prevention, we've relentlessly advocated for interconnectedness, leveraging resources, and prioritizing the value of human life over hardware," said Rodarmer. "We firmly believe that 'humans are more important than hardware,' and it is this mindset that has guided our efforts."

The NSWC was lauded for its comprehensive and innovative approach to suicide prevention, which



***Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen H. Hicks recognizes representatives from Naval Special Warfare Group, San Diego during the Department of Defense's annual Suicide Prevention Awareness Recognition Ceremony in the Pentagon Hall of Heroes, Sept. 6, 2023. DoD photo by Chad J. McNeeley.***

includes embedded care providers such as Navy chaplains, psychologists and licensed clinical social workers. Additionally, NSWC suicide prevention staff members provide practical, evidence-based training to all NSW personnel and families to educate everyone on signs, symptoms and available resources for suicide prevention.

"Our commitment to the mental and spiritual well-being of our workforce remains unwavering," said Rodarmer. "The initiatives I mentioned bring us closer together as a community, destigmatize mental health issues, and emphasize the importance of holistic health maintenance."

For those interested in viewing the ceremony, a recording is available at [www.dvidshub.net/webcast/32534](http://www.dvidshub.net/webcast/32534).

U.S. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the fleet's reach. Integral to this capability is a forward-deployed posture and continuous engagement with partner and ally forces, heightening mutual interoperability and regional expertise.



# Naval Special Warfare Command

## Sharpening the Warrior Spirit



*By Petty Officer 2nd Class Keypher Strombeck  
Naval Special Warfare Command*

In the realm of elite military training, U.S. Navy special operators have carved out a legendary reputation for pushing even the most formidable individuals past their known limits. These warriors embody qualities of mental resilience and unwavering determination. They also share an unbreakable spirit of camaraderie and brotherhood that serves as the bedrock of their strength.

At the heart of their warrior spirit is a training regimen that exceeds ordinary combat drills and physical exercise. The Naval Special Warfare combatives program is a fusion of multiple martial arts disciplines. This amalgamation is more than just a mix of fighting techniques; it is a conduit through which operators hone hand-to-hand and hyper-enabled operator combatant skills, forge bonds and fortify their mental resilience.

Contrary to what one might assume, stepping into the world of Naval Special Warfare combatives program is a far cry from the tense, grim atmosphere of hand-to-hand combat. Instead, newcomers are greeted with smiles, energetic music, and a surprisingly fun atmosphere.

“What is so special about the NSW combatives program is that it is a melting pot,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 John Kelly, an operator who was instrumental in the evolution of the NSW combatives program. “From male to female, E-5 to O-5, all are welcome.”

A typical day at combatives training transcends physicality. The spirit of camaraderie among participants enables them to navigate chaos with a sense of calm and unity in an algorithmic-like training that escalates through a series of moves and counter moves which cycle an operator into dominant positions that can solve any realistic combat contingency situation.

According to Command Master Chief Christian Hartwell, assigned to NSW Basic Training Command, commitment to discomfort and pushing boundaries intertwines with daily life. The decision to go to combatives every day, embodies the warrior spirit and resilience against the allure of the easy path.

“I live between my office and the training location,



***Ricky Lundell, Naval Special Warfare combatives program coach, instructs West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Sailors. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Keypher Strombeck.***

and I have a decision to make every morning,” said Hartwell. “Do I make the easy choice, turn right, and come to work, or do I make the hard choice and turn left and go to combatives? By turning left, and just showing up, mentally I have already won that day because it is not easy, especially Fridays. Fridays are a nightmare.”

On Fridays, operators participate in marathon sessions. Marathon sessions, devoid of clocks, last one hour and test mental fortitude, teaching operators to stay focused and composed even in extreme fatigue. Belts, earned through discipline and commitment, mark progress, shaping operators into better individuals.

“We take the clocks down,” said Chief Petty Officer Ronald Gilb, assigned to the NSW combatives program. “No one can see how far into the roll they are and it’s a mental exercise more than physical. When you’re physically engaged in combatives that long it is incredibly exhausting, especially if you’re on the receiving end of that session. If the guy that you’re with is a little stronger, a little more skilled, a little faster, and has a little more in the tank, it can be a very humbling experience.”

Guiding them is Ricky Lundell, a civilian martial arts



coach who stands as a luminary in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and judo with fourth-degree black belts and numerous international championships. Most notably, Lundell is a former Cael Sanderson D1 wrestler. Lundell's coaching prowess spans from high school wrestlers to UFC fighters. Assisted by Lindsie Lundell, the combatives program has been tailored meticulously for NSW operators.

Lundell paints the picture of the NSW combatives program as an operational art form training that imparts the skills vital for close combat.

"[This style] revolves around operating downrange," said Lundell. "It's about mastering the essential skills of shooting, moving, and communicating, while also enabling operators to effectively break contact or control adversaries. Staying on your feet is crucial for staying operational, and our training empowers operators to do that."

Gilb emphasizes the profound impact of this training on operator performance, especially in close combat scenarios. He explains the essence of mental fortitude and combat skills are woven into the fabric of this training.

"Our training prepares our operators to meet multiple different levels of resistance, so we can modulate our response," said Gilb. "We're good at gunfighting, but every situation does not warrant a bullet. The NSW combatives program builds confidence in operators to be able to stay on their feet and keep operating in close combat."

Lundell also added that the combatives program trains operators to be more versatile and capable of handling combat in any environment.

"Our unique combatives trains operators how to remain in a dominant position," said Lundell. "It's the only program that continuously applies moves from multiple disciplines to keep opponents down. Through maintaining dominance, operators gain a significant tactical advantage, and build confidence in handling any variety of situations."

It is through this art that operators embrace the value of patience, strategy, and adaptability. Each session at the Naval Special Warfare Advance Training Command combatives facility becomes a vital lesson in problem-solving and empowers operators to remain calm and focused amidst the chaos they might face during critical missions.

"There are very strict rules of engagement and that is where combatives training becomes crucial," said Hartwell. "To control a situation calmly and confidently, we must know how to handle people, we must be confident that we can always manage the situation, and more importantly, that our teammates can handle

themselves in any situation. That confidence comes from the mental resilience and comradery that NSW combatives provides. That's why it's critical."

Participants recognize that the skills learned in combatives prepares them to face adversity in all aspects of their life.

"This program is not just beneficial for mental or physical strength," said Lundell. "I have guys come up to me and tell me that the discipline and commitment they learned through the training has made them a better husband, a better father, a better teammate, better at receiving instruction, and even better a leader."

Through the voluntary commitment, dedication and perseverance, participants strengthen unit cohesion, forging an invaluable asset within their sacred training ground on the mats.

"Currently, combatives sustainment is a completely volunteer program," said Gilb. "I invite any operator to come and leave their ego at the door."

In the end, the combatives program is more than a training ground; it is a crucible where warriors are not only forged but where bonds are created, and spirits are lifted. It is a testament to the enduring power of camaraderie, brotherhood and the unbreakable warrior spirit.

"The struggles, victories and defeats shared during combatives training form an unbreakable bond, becoming a lifeline during missions, where trust in one another is paramount," said Hartwell.

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



**West Coast based Naval Special Warfare Sailors participate in an NSW combatives program training session. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Keypher Strombeck.**



# Naval Special Warfare Command Philippines' SFR-A, NAVSCIATTS collaborate in establishment of Maritime Training Center



*By Angela Fry*

*Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School*

In a visionary move aimed at strengthening maritime capabilities and transregional security, the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School and the Philippines Army's Special Forces Regiment - Airborne recently signed a letter of intent to collaborate on the establishment of a maritime training center in the Philippines province of Bohol.

Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Napuli, who traveled to the United States to also serve as NAVSCIATTS' Semester 23-5 graduation keynote speaker, and Cmdr. Robert LeClerc, newly assigned leader of the international training command, signed the letter as a formality to collaborate with the Philippines army's training center in areas to include maritime security, curriculum management, and instructor and training center development.

Napuli, who previously served as the deputy commander of the Philippines' Presidential Security Group, explained during the graduation ceremony that the training center will support the improvement of riverine capabilities in the unit and will also assist other units and government agencies in maintaining peace and security throughout the region.

"The donation of needed water assets and your assistance in the improvement of our much-needed riverine facilities are critical in our pursuit of realizing an armed force that is on par with modern countries," said Napuli, regarding watercrafts programmed through U.S. Department of Defense counterterrorism grant funds and the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization



***Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Napuli, commander of the Philippines Army's Special Forces Regiment – Airborne (SFR-A), and Cmdr. Robert LeClerc, commanding officer of the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS), sign letters of intent to collaborate in support of the SFR-A's riverine training center. The letters represent the two organizations' nonbinding commitment to cooperate in areas to include maritime security, curriculum management, and instructor and training center development. U.S. Navy photo by Michael R. Williams.***

Program. "With that, I would like to thank our counterparts from the United States Armed Forces for the continuing support."

The Philippines, an archipelagic nation with more than 7,000 islands, faces unique challenges in safeguarding its waters and territories, as its navy is unable to cover the entirety of its internal waters. Riverine assets substantially benefit the SFR-A, which consists primarily of ground forces, as maneuverability in these waters would optimize



the effects and ranges of their weapon systems.

“The improvement of the riverine capability of our unit is critical, not just in the maintenance of peace and security, but also in assisting other units and other government agencies in the performance of their function,” said Napuli, who also served as the commander of the Philippines’ 19th Special Forces Company and 3rd Special Forces Battalion.

Speaking to the NAVSCIATTS graduates from Bangladesh, Barbados, Cape Verde, Dominica, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, the SFR-A commander explained the importance of continuing to hone their skills throughout their career.

“These specialized trainings are part of the thrust of our armed forces to boost our capabilities, so that we will always be ready in case of any eventuality,” he stated. “Ladies and gentlemen, let us perform well and remain steadfast as we face whatever challenge that will come our way in the future. Let us work hand-in-hand for the betterment of our countries and the communities we ought to serve.”

LeClerc, a 2009 graduate of Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training, assumed NAVSCIATTS command on Sept. 8. In his first graduation as commanding officer, he addressed the LOI signing as a symbol of strengthening relationships.

“Perhaps the most important advantage of working together is the ability to strengthen relationships by building trust” said LeClerc. “Training and working with our allies and partners are not choices made from convenience. They are necessary in supporting our collective security and prosperity.”

“Proof of that trust in those relationships was demonstrated this week, as General Napuli and I signed and exchanged letters of intent for collaboration in the SFR-A’s training center,” said LeClerc. “Sir, thank you for trusting us with this partnership.”

The NAVSCIATTS’ commander further reiterated the importance of partnerships as demonstrated in the U.S. Naval Special Warfare security cooperation schoolhouse’s relationship with Napuli and the SFR-A, which specializes in air assaults, anti-guerilla operations, jungle warfare, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism.

“As we face an ever-evolving array of global challenges, the strength of our alliances reinforces our commitments to international diplomacy and peacekeeping,” said LeClerc. “It sends a powerful message to the world that we are dedicated to resolving conflicts by working together.”

The NAVSCIATTS’ nonbinding agreement to support the SFR-A’s efforts in establishing the maritime training



**Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Napuli, commander of the Philippines Army’s Special Forces Regiment – Airborne (SFR-A), and Brig. Gen. Val Jackson, commander of the Fourth Marines Logistics Group, receive a command tour of the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) facilities located on the John C. Stennis Space Center in South Mississippi, Sept. 13. Napuli traveled to the United States to serve as keynote speaker for NAVSCIATTS Semester 23-5 graduation and to sign a letter of intent to collaborate with NAVSCIATTS on the SFR-A’s riverine training center, which will be in the Philippines’ province of Bohol. U.S. Navy photo by Michael R. Williams.**

center furthers one of the command’s strategic priorities to support key partners in their endeavors to establish regional training centers. These centers would further address building partners’ capacities and capabilities, ultimately contributing to regional stability.

With this signed LOI, NAVSCIATTS agreed to provide support to the SFR-A in additional areas such as subject matter exchanges, conducting analysis on specific relevant curriculum and training issues, and participation in planned or emergent research projects pertaining to training; an action that highlights the Philippines’ efforts to bolster its defense capabilities in the maritime domain and showcases the importance of international cooperation.

The NAVSCIATTS also currently has LOIs with the NATO Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Center in Souda Bay, Crete, and the Colombian navy’s International Center for Advanced Riverine Excellence, located in Turbo, and the Colombian coast guard Maritime Training Center in Cartagena.

It operates in support of foreign security assistance and geographic combatant commanders’ theater security cooperation priorities. The command trains and educates international security force professionals across the tactical, operational, and strategic spectrums through in-residence and mobile training team courses of instruction. To date, almost 14,000 students from 125 partner nations have trained with the command.



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## AFSOC embraces extended reality to enhance readiness

*By Capt. Amy Rasmussen*

*Air Force Special Operations Command*

Extended reality (XR) is revolutionizing the way Air Force Special Operations Command is approaching training and readiness. It is an umbrella term that encompasses virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed reality to create a spectrum of experiences that range from fully-virtual environments to overlays of digital content onto the real world. These technologies manipulate our perception of reality, hence the term “extended.” The manipulation of reality is at the core of XR, and it’s transforming the training landscape of AFSOC.

The XR Training Program’s mission is to provide Air

Commandos the ability to conduct repetitive readiness training anyplace at any time through secure, autonomous learning distribution and reporting across all command disciplines. The vision is equally ambitious: to be a training program that employs virtual, mixed and augmented training methodologies, producing warfighters with greater skillset competencies and proficiency in a more realistic environment, at a reduced cost, and on a shortened timeline.

In the beginning of FY23, AFSOC established an XR cross-functional team dedicated to creating an XR training framework for the command.

“Our first step as a command was to admit we had fallen behind in the evolution of training technology,” said U.S. Air Force Capt. Kyle Schoonover, AFSOC XR



*Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, Air Force Special Operations Command commander, is briefed on a new capability of the Extended Reality training on September 29, 2023 as a part of a larger XR training demonstration. With a comprehensive XR Training Framework in place, AFSOC is poised to transform its training methodologies, ensuring that Air Commandos are better prepared and equipped for strategic competition. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Caleb Pavao.*



training program chief. “In true AFSOC fashion, in just a few months we went from this realization to producing a MAJCOM-wide framework capable of incorporating all existing XR technologies as well as charting a path forward for future development in the years to come.”

This framework operates on a crawl, walk, run strategy, composed of four distinct lines of effort:

#### **LOE 1: Virtual Hangar**

The foundational effort for XR in AFSOC focuses on initial qualification academic training for all aircrew support and mission support personnel, including maintenance and mission sustainment teams. A prime example of this is the Virtual Hangar initiative by AFSOC A4. This innovative program leverages VR to enhance AC-130J, MC-130J, CV-22 and munitions maintenance workforce training. The Virtual Hangar offers comprehensive instructor tools and custom-built learning modules, ranging from checklist execution to 3D-modeled schematic overlays.

#### **LOE 2: NexGen Instructor**

The command plans to incorporate VR into all flying training units responsible for training AFSOC aircrew. Training modules will cover the academic phases of the FTU syllabi such as academics on aircraft systems and mission equipment. Collaborative partnerships with other major commands will be pursued when appropriate, and pathfinding will be the norm when required.

#### **LOE 3: Fusion & Integration**

The integration of XR into operational units is a pivotal aspect of AFSOC’s strategy, with a particular emphasis on mission events. These events can range from emulated flight of AFSOC aircraft, to special tactics, to our medical community across the entire continuum of patient care.

#### **LOE 4: The Future Fight**

The pinnacle of AFSOC’s XR Training Framework envisions the utilization of augmented reality for aircrew and special tactics teams. Imagine a CV-22 pilot flying over Melrose Air Force Range, New Mexico, while their visor displays real-world terrain from distant locations like the Indo-Pacific region. Meanwhile, the pilot’s visor reveals a digital wingman controlled by a ground-based XR device. The goal is to replicate any battlespace via XR technology back at the home station.

“AFSOC’s XR framework provides every unit in the



*Tech. Sgt. Daniel Gonzalez, an AC-130 Special Missions Aviator Training Manager, tests out an AC-130J module of the “Virtual Hangar” technology. With a comprehensive XR Training Framework in place, AFSOC is poised to transform its training methodologies, ensuring that Air Commandos are better prepared and equipped for strategic competition. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Caleb Pavao.*

command with a readily digestible and easily repeatable strategy to modernize their training through next-generation methodologies of instruction,” said Schoonover.

The AFSOC XR Training Framework’s implementation is ongoing. While teams across AFSOC continue to work through LOE 1 by immersing in virtual reality and Virtual Hangars, LOE 2 is on the horizon with small group XR testing sessions with the AC-130J FTU planned for Summer 2024 and the C-146 FTU planned for Fall 2024. As investment into the training program framework continues, the line of efforts will gain momentum.

“AFSOC is heavily invested in enhancing readiness and training through initiatives like XR,” said U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, AFSOC commander. “The use of XR in training allows Air Commandos to experience highly realistic simulations of complex scenarios, missions and environments they may encounter in real-world operations. This practice is paramount as we prepare for current and future operating environments. I’m excited to see where this program goes and we will be ready to build upon each line of effort as resources become available.”

With a comprehensive XR training framework in place, AFSOC is poised to transform its training methodologies, ensuring Air Commandos are better prepared and equipped for strategic competition.



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## US Air Force gunship crew trains in Chile alongside Bullfighter, Chilean, US JTACs

*By 1st Special Operations Wing*

In the mountains of Chile, amidst Exercise Southern Star 23, an unexpected reunion took place. A Spanish Joint Terminal Attack Controller, known as Bullfighter, came across familiar voices while touring a Ghost rider gunship near Antofagasta. As it turns out, Bullfighter had collaborated with the AC-130J crew from the 1st Special Operations Wing just a year ago in U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility.

The serendipity of encountering former comrades in a different part of the world during a training exercise left Bullfighter astounded. Reflecting on their previous real-world operations, the meeting in Chile showcased the fruits of their past collaboration.

Throughout the week, Bullfighter joined other JTACs from the United States, Chile and Spain in honing their tactics, techniques, and procedures, all while engaging in simulated calls for fire.

"It shows how important it is to make connections," said U.S. Air Force Capt. Lauren Flores, combat systems officer with the 73rd Special Operations Squadron and the unmistakable voice Bullfighter recognized. Despite being in two different locations across the globe, their shared experience from nearly a year ago remained vivid, allowing them to seamlessly continue their collaboration during Southern Star.

Exercise Southern Star 23 is an annual special operations forces exercise led by Chile and from July 24 - Aug. 10. The training event, organized by Special Operations Command South, aims to strengthen relationships between partner forces, enhance integration, and enable asymmetric capabilities.

"It also demonstrates the significance of establishing relationships early and frequently," added U.S. Air Force Capt. Katherine Isaksson, an AC-130J Ghost rider pilot with the 7th SOS. "Maintaining those partnerships is equally, if

not more important, to our mission here."

Exercise Southern Star 23 offers participants the opportunity to engage in a challenging training exercise, fostering experience, cooperation and teamwork while developing processes for a rapid response to regional crises.

According to Isaksson and Flores, the training experience in Chile has already proven beneficial, with valuable learning points and enthusiastic participation from all involved. They also noted that the training was particularly unique as the Chilean JTACs had never worked with a gunship.

"One of the team leads here received a model gunship from his grandfather a long time ago," said Isaksson. "He had never seen one in person and we had the chance to share that moment with him and our crew, which was fantastic."

Despite the language barrier between some Airmen and their Chilean counterparts, the training has been enjoyable and rewarding, according to Flores.

"Everyone has shown remarkable improvement," said Flores. "Both sides have been enthusiastic and eager to learn. The overall excitement is palpable."

Flores noted significant improvements even within the first few days of training.

"This training is valuable for us because we don't always operate with Americans or native English speakers; it helps train our ears," said Flores. "This is an essential part of Chilean JTACs receiving the necessary training. They have already shown considerable proficiency growth in this short amount of time."

Understanding the NATO standard is crucial for all Allies and partners to know, familiarize themselves with, and eventually become proficient enough to use in real-world situations.

"The Chilean JTACs have limited experience with calls for fire using this platform and within NATO standards," said Isaksson. "At Cerro Moreno, they primarily work with F-16s. It's not the same as working and experiencing the





**Airmen with the 1st Special Operations Wing, 73rd Special Operations Squadron, showcase the AC-130J Ghost rider and its 30mm and 105mm weapons to Lt. Gen. Jean Desgroux, Chilean Chief of Defense, and Lt. Gen. Cristian Guedelhoefer, Comando de Operaciones Especiales (COPE) commander, during Exercise Southern Star, July 25, 2023. Exercise SOUTHERN STAR, a Chilean-led special operations forces exercise with close collaboration with Special Operations Command South, brought together forces from Chile and the United States to improve integration and enable asymmetric capabilities between Allies and partners. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Cody H. Ramirez.**

extensive support we can provide.”

“If we were to ever collaborate with Chile on a global scale, these training experiences would prove invaluable,” said Isaksson. “Each of us would have gained extensive experience and a deeper understanding of our collective capabilities. It has been a rewarding experience.”

The gunship aircrew were not the only teams gaining hands-on experience with their Chilean partners. Maintenance, support and explosive ordnance teams also had meaningful exchanges. U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command members were fully integrated, providing support throughout the exercise.

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. John Santiago Perez, an electrical environmental systems technician with the 1st Special Operations Maintenance Squadron, effectively utilized his native language, Spanish, to aid in accomplishing the mission during Southern Star.

“As one of the few Spanish speakers in my unit, I had numerous opportunities to communicate with the Chilean armed forces members to fulfill our mission and maintenance requirements,” said Santiago.

A simple example was coordinating a gunship refuel on the flightline, where Santiago’s Spanish language proficiency allowed for efficient communication and timing.

“Much of our support came from the local Chilean armed

forces, and some of them only spoke Spanish. I was grateful to be able to converse with them and contribute to the team,” said Santiago, who is originally from Puerto Rico, noting that communication has been straightforward.

Santiago’s language skills also extended beyond mission requirements as the team explored local restaurants and shops.

“The food in Chile is fantastic, so we tried everything when dining at nearby restaurants,” said Santiago. “We also enjoyed the food here on base; their empanadas, in particular, are amazing.”

Developing strong relationships with allies and partners is a crucial aspect of being a successful member of any multinational coalition. Southern Star has exemplified their ability to do so in an effective and meaningful manner.

These robust collaborations are fundamental to achieving success in global military operations. By drawing from the lessons learned during their experience in Chile, the U.S. and Chilean armed forces will enhance their future cooperation, accomplishing more with fewer resources and ensuring effective exchanges. The United States, Chile and their partners across Latin America and the Caribbean maintain multilateral relations and are fully committed to security cooperation. This exercise serves as a testament to their unwavering dedication to collaborative efforts in this domain.



# Marine Forces, Special Operations Command

## MARSOC team wins Spectrum Excellence Award



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

Marines with Marine Forces Special Operations Command were awarded the Navy-Marine Corps Spectrum Excellence Team Award for 2023.

The MARSOC Spectrum team, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew Evans, electromagnetic spectrum officer, Gunnery Sgt. Gary Hohn, spectrum manager, and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Dusty Hawk, now with Marine Forces Pacific, were nominated for the award by the Deputy Commandant for Information.

Competition for the award was narrowed to one Navy team and one Marine Corps team selected out of every command across each service.

"I think the work we are doing in the joint space with different and innovative waveforms is something that will work its way to the Fleet Marine Force," said Hohn.

The award recognizes contributions that electromagnetic spectrum management teams make to the Navy-Marine Corps mission.

"It's exciting to see their efforts highlighted beyond just our command," said Col. LeRon Lane, assistant chief of staff G-6, the senior communications officer for MARSOC. "The team has been consistently outwardly focused. They tackle problems and then, when they make a breakthrough, they share that with everyone across the force, strengthening those bonds between MARSOC and both the joint special operations force and the Fleet Marine Force."

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew Evans traveled to San Diego in order to receive the award on behalf of the team and recognizes the unique atmosphere that allows for innovation to occur.

"Working at MARSOC and having access to work with industry partners gives us the freedom to not only improve our current systems but also seek new solutions to expand our ability to operate in a deployed environment," said Evans.



***U.S. Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Gary Hohn, spectrum manager, Marine Forces Special Operations Command, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew Evans, electromagnetic spectrum officer, pose for a photo after receiving the annual Navy-Marine Corps Spectrum Excellence Team Award, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Aug. 29, 2023. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Evan Jones.***

"When we approach a new idea with maturity and conviction, MARSOC gives us the freedom of movement to experiment, said Hohn "That's how we get these new, innovative systems,"

This year is the second year that MARSOC has had a winner in the spectrum awards, with Hohn winning the individual award for excellence at last year's ceremony; and the team wants to use these accomplishments to build on the foundation they already have.

"We have a lot of momentum now, winning these awards," said Hohn. "Now when we go meet with our industry partners, they know us, they know how serious we are about innovating and advancing, and it advances that work much more."

"We are the tip of the spear," added Lane. "What was good enough for today, might not be good enough for tomorrow. That means innovation isn't just encouraged, it's critical. This team is an outstanding example of MARSOC preparing for unpredictability."



# What winning looks like: the Cognitive Raider

*By Cpl. Henry Rodriguez II*

*Marine Forces, Special Operations Command*

Special operations forces from across the joint force have developed a reputation for efficiency, lethality, and versatility over the course of their history. In recent years, units like Marine Forces Special Operations Command have sought to further develop another aspect of their SOF capabilities: intellectual creativity.

Beginning with the development and publication of Marine Special Operations Forces 2030, MARSOC has outlined the concept of the Cognitive Raider – a term that blends the requirements of the future Marine Raider to pose a high caliber of intellect, judgement, creativity and teamwork with the grit, determination and endurance that have generated so much success to this point.

Within the mold of advancing the ideals of a continuously thinking and learning command, MARSOC created an annual event designed to educate personnel, challenge thoughts and inspire new ideas. This event, known as the Cognitive Raider Symposium, began in 2019 and has featured topics such as irregular warfare, great power competition and enterprise-level agility. The topics are chosen yearly with the goal to align with MARSOC, U.S. Special Operations Command, Marine Corps, and DoD initiatives.

“We use the Cognitive Raider Symposium to expand the aperture of our personnel in understanding the changing landscape of the global environment, globally integrated operations, multi-domain concepts and cross-functional capabilities,” said a combat development and integration plans officer with MARSOC.

Throughout the year, leading up to the full event, MARSOC operates a series of educational seminars that highlight different aspects of the yearly topic. Through these seminars, the command can help facilitate an overall culture of learning and critical thinking. Through various organizations and guest speakers, MARSOC personnel are exposed to a variety of ideas and concepts that can directly build on the overarching theme of the year.

This year, MARSOC has chosen to focus on what winning looks like in integrated deterrence. As a concept, this takes a deep look at how MARSOC is currently positioned in the global security environment and how it can further adapt to how rapidly that environment is changing.

For MARSOC, this includes continuing to implement



***U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Michael K. Nagata speaks to Marine Raiders with Marine Forces Special Operations Command at Cognitive Raider Symposium 2023 on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, June 22, 2023. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Evan Jones.***

strategic shaping and reconnaissance as a force, as well as further development of littoral irregular warfare and littoral special reconnaissance to ensure MARSOC remains not only relevant in littoral special operations but a true pioneer in that space.

“The next generation raider force modernization, combined with SSR execution, demands an understanding of complex human terrain, relationships, and influences,” said the combat development and integration plans officer. “These factors have highlighted a need to explore and understand how MARSOC manages talent, creates trust, and prioritizes and understands relationships and networking building for what winning looks like,”

Guest speakers at CRS ‘23 included U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Antonio M. Fletcher, commander of NATO Special Operations Headquarters, retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Michael K. Nagata, and Dr. Carter Malkasian, Defense Analysis department chair with The Naval Postgraduate School. The guests led conversations on topics like the future of the battlespace, working with allies and partners, and leveraging external networks and technologies. All MARSOC personnel were invited to attend and contribute to furthering the intellectual capability across all echelons of command and contribute to the first SOF truth – humans are more important than hardware.



# Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



## Combined Exercise Raven concludes

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

Before heading out on any deployment, Marine Corps units are required to conduct a pre-deployment training cycle. What this cycle looks like varies greatly depending on the unit, mission and requirements. For Marine Raiders with Marine Forces Special Operations Command, it includes both individual and unit-level training. Part of that unit-level training is Exercise Raven.

Exercise Raven is a company level unit readiness exercise, designed to evaluate Marine Special Operations Companies and their teams. The MSOCs are tested and evaluated on a vast number of potentialities that they could see in a deployed theater.

“Through Raven, the company is able to establish connection points and refine processes that enhance our effectiveness,” said a U.S. Marine critical skills operator.

In addition to honing in on the attributes and capabilities within the teams and companies, other units are integrated to improve the MSOC’s ability to be a connecting force beyond its own structure. Past iterations have collaborated with foreign partners, units with the Fleet Marine Force, Marine Forces Reserve and members of the joint force.

Recently, Marines with 4th Marine Division, British Commandos, and French soldiers with 6th Light Armoured Brigade worked side by side in a simulated combat theater conducting operations in tandem with one another to achieve a collective goal.

Marines with the MSOC trained to coordinate with a Special Operations Task Force to handle the moving pieces of internal and external forces operating in conjunction with one another, much as they would on an actual deployment.

“Working with our conventional forces and foreign partners just increases our ability to integrate while deployed,” said a critical skills operator. “And them being here just shows their commitment to strengthening that relationship.”

During the exercise, a single MSOC will be given an ever-evolving problem set in which they must effectively utilize their assets and work with partners to solve. As they

begin to work through the situation and begin actions on targets, the battlespace and problem set changes, and leaders within the teams and company need to be able to improvise and adjust. The issues that arise are designed to require the company to leverage and utilize all of MARSOC’s capabilities.

The entire time this plays out, members of the exercise control, monitor and evaluate the companies to give live feedback to those leaders and better prepare them for their upcoming deployment. In addition, evaluators from the various partner force units attend to observe their training and increase interoperability with MARSOC.

“Being able to evaluate our guys while working with MARSOC and exchanging best practices is great,” said a British Commando and evaluator who recently attended Ex. Raven. “I think there is a lot of benefit to working together.”

Exercise Raven gives live feedback up and down the echelons of command, from the individual critical skills operator to the company commander, every member of the company has something to gain from the training and evaluations provided by Exercise Raven as they prepare to step out and travel overseas for deployment.



***U.S. Marines with 1st Battalion, 24th Marine Regiment, Marine Forces Reserve, conduct a direct action raid under the supervision and training of Marine Raiders with Marine Forces Special Operations Command during Exercise Raven, a unit readiness exercise, May 25, 2023. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.***



# Welcome to the Jungle: MARSOC diversifies training environment

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

A team of Marine Raiders recently completed a jungle tracking and mobility course as part of their pre-deployment training program.

The course, administered by instructors with the Tactical Tracking Operations School, teaches mobility in a jungle environment, rope and rappel work, jungle tracking, and anti-tracking techniques.

For roughly two weeks, the team worked on enhancing these skills to be able to effectively operate in a jungle environment while deployed.

“Looking at the Pacific and deployments in that region, learning these skills is essential,” said a critical skills operator. “For so long we trained for desert environments and now we have to look at where we could be needed next, and the jungle is top of that list.”

Since 2015, TTOS has been offering some manner of jungle training for U.S. Special Operations Command units, and in 2021, upon the arrival of their current vice president, Cody Carroll, the program began to evolve into what it is today.

“My last deployment as a reconnaissance officer was to the Pacific region,” said Carroll. “Through my own research and training, I realized most units didn’t have the hard skills or training to succeed in this environment.”

The creation of the current course was not about creating a new, innovative program, but more about getting back to how historical forces would have trained.

“These same problems that we have now: low visibility, difficulty for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms, broken communications, and logistical issues, they all existed for troops during WWII and Vietnam,” said Carroll. “We didn’t need to reinvent the wheel, just build the skills that we stopped training because we spent 20 years in the desert.”

Throughout the two weeks, the team trained in every aspect of jungle mobility. They had to navigate thick brush, scale and rappel cliff faces, and traverse rivers and other water features. All while either tracking an adversary or preventing an adversary from being able to track them.

They also spent time learning jungle specific counter improvised explosive device techniques, reaction to



***A Marine Raider with Marine Forces Special Operations Command navigates a single rope bridge during a jungle mobility course, Aug. 4, 2023. Marine Raiders in the training program learned to maneuver in a jungle environment, conceal their movements, and track adversary movements. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.***

contact in dense vegetation, and setting and countering ambushes.

“You see guys that are newer to the team start out very hesitant in these different drills and in tracking,” said a CSO. “By the end of it, the confidence is through the roof, you’ll see those same guys find a track and maneuver the jungle like they’ve been doing it their whole lives.”

The course culminates with an exercise designed to last up to 72 hours where the students are ambushed by an adversary and must regroup and utilize their command and control to organize tracking teams to capture the adversary using all of the tracking and mobility techniques learned over the two weeks.

The team all responded positively to the training, praising its effectiveness and the foundation it provides for SOF units to build upon as they deploy to regions where this sort of mobility is needed.

“I’ve been through this training with two teams now and both experiences were beneficial to everyone on the team,” said a CSO. “I really think every company that can deploy to a jungle environment should come do this training. It’s invaluable.”



# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

## USSOCOM Ignite 2024 kicks off in Boston

*By U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller  
U.SOCOM Public Affairs*

More than 90 military cadets from 18 universities and academies kicked off the 2024 U.S. Special Operations Command Ignite program, Sept. 14-17, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology campus and MIT's Lincoln Laboratory.

The kick-off ceremony was an opportunity for personnel with USSOCOM to present their command's most pressing 2024 objectives and for cadets to jump-start their projects with a two-day ideation and tech sprint supported by subject matter experts and special operations forces personnel.

During the SOCOM Ignite program, SOF operators,

military cadets and researchers work together to find solutions to real-world problems such as big data analytics, smart sensors, unmanned system autonomy and swarming, human-machine teaming, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and generating real-time actionable intelligence from battlefield sensors.

"The students here, all the cadets who are going to be future military officers, they learn a lot about SOCOM itself – what are the needs and how it works," said Tony Ingano, executive officer for SOCOM Ignite. "Then they become tech-savvy officers in the future, and hopefully we can retain them to become SOCOM officers."

Throughout the school year, cadets work with their teammates and mentors to come up with innovative



*U.S. Air Force Cadet Capt. Mihiri Fernando, a cadet with the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado, operates a remote vehicle during the 2024 U.S. Special Operations Command Ignite program kickoff at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts, Sept. 15, 2024. During the SOCOM Ignite program, SOF operators, military cadets and researchers work together to find solutions to real-world problems such as big data analytics, smart sensors, unmanned system autonomy and swarming, human-machine teaming, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and generating real-time actionable intelligence from battlefield sensors. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.*





**Military cadets learn to operate a robotic dog during the 2024 U.S. Special Operations Command Ignite program kickoff at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts, Sept. 15, 2024. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.**

solutions and build prototypes addressing those challenges.

“The direct impact is very important for the cadets to see and learn how important tech is to the future fight, and to start their brains turning on other ways to problem solve outside of traditional Army methodology,” said Army Capt. Jacob Lademan, a special operations future concepts officer. “There’s the immeasurable impact of spending time with those operators, with those SOCOM end users, who can provide their experiences, stories from their deployments and really share their perspective on how technology can impact the battlefield. The intangibles that are imparted upon the cadets are what really make this program special.”

The innovation and modernization office within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering co-sponsored the event by supporting the system analysis of the various challenges provided by the SOF operators, and the student prototyping during the summer through internships.

In January 2024, a handful of cadets will be selected to visit Fort Liberty, North Carolina, and present their projects to the operators who could be using their solution in the field or when they’re deployed.

“The [SOCOM Ignite] team selects 10-15 cadets who have worked hard and show the most promise on their challenges,” said Ingano. “While at Fort Liberty, the cadets get to work directly with unit operators, train with them, show off their prototypes and obtain valuable feedback. The week-long trip also allows the unit to determine who they should down select for a summer internship at Fort Liberty.”

One cadet shared his experience after his team’s

project was selected to be presented to operators at Fort Liberty, earlier this year.

“It’s been very helpful to work with the end user – being able to go down and talk to them [at Fort Liberty], as well as seeing them up here, and bounce ideas back and forth between them,” said William Chu, an Army Cadet at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. “We’ve been able to involve different assets, whether it’s different operators or different Lincoln [Laboratory] staff.”

Select teams will have the opportunity to continue developing their concepts in FY25 with the goal of reaching a stage where their projects can be transitioned to SOCOM for final development and operational use. In addition to the potential of seeing their projects transition, top military cadets will have opportunities for internships with various SOCOM components and MIT’s Lincoln Laboratory.

The SOCOM Ignite program also serves as an introduction to SOF culture by working in a joint environment.

“I definitely think my favorite part is just working with other cadets from other schools,” said Elizabeth Ross, an Air Force Cadet at Texas Tech University, San Antonio, Texas. “I love meeting new people, I love getting to know where they’re from, getting to know their backgrounds, and I really love seeing everyone’s different strengths because we all come together as a team – we’re all able to contribute to our projects.”



**Mentors and military cadets discuss their project during the 2024 U.S. Special Operations Command Ignite program hackathon at Massachusetts Institute of Technology ROTC building, Sept. 16, 2024. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.**



# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command Green Beret teams up with USSOCOM Warrior Care Program-Care Coalition, competes in DoD's Warrior Games Challenge, Invictus Games

*By Michael Bottoms*  
*USSOCOM Public Affairs*

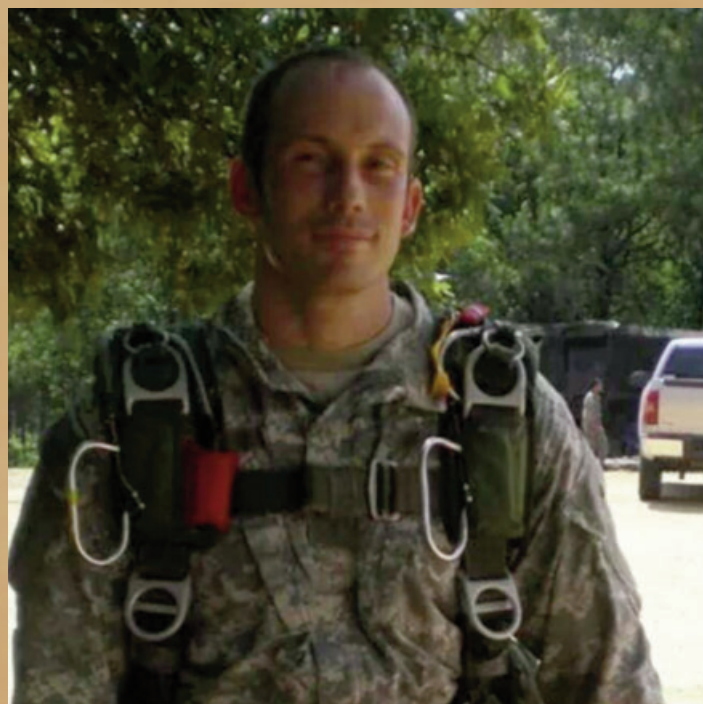
Green Beret Sgt. 1st Class Jacob “Jake” Anthony was deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 on a mission to find a target. His team was breaching a door that turned out to be booby-trapped, resulting in an explosion that killed his teammate in front of him. Anthony would take shrapnel to the right frontal lobe to his brain and had to be initially airlifted to Kandahar to be stabilized then to Landstuhl, Germany for further treatment and finally to Walter Reed Hospital in Maryland.

“My captain was in front of me, and he took shrapnel to the chest and unfortunately he passed away,” said Anthony. “They operated on me and removed some of the shrapnel.”

The 11-year Army veteran spent his career with 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) eventually separating in 2013, before being enrolled in USSOCOM’s Warrior Care Program- Care Coalition (WCP-CC) in 2014.

The mission of the WCP-CC is to provide special operations forces wounded, ill, or injured service members and their families advocacy after life changing events in order to navigate through recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration as quickly as possible, strengthening SOF readiness. Whether service members are returning to operational status, moving into a different field, or transitioning into veteran status, the USSOCOM Warrior Care Program – Care Coalition will help them get there.

“The Care Coalition has been a key component in



**Sgt. 1st Class Jacob “Jake” Anthony. Courtesy photo.**

helping me and my family connect with organizations outside of the military. By being instrumental in such things, I have been able to attend couples retreats to reconnect with my spouse and form lasting friendships with other SOCOM families, as well as several family bonding trips. Without such opportunities, my family would not have made such wonderful memories,” said Anthony.

Through the WCP-CC, Anthony learned about





**Sgt. 1st Class Jacob "Jake" Anthony competing in the 2023 Invictus Games held in Dusseldorf, Germany. Courtesy photo.**

military adaptive sports and has been competing as part of Team SOCOM for five years.

In June of this year, he took part in the DoD Warrior Games Challenge held in San Diego, California. The sports featured in the DoD Warrior Games are a part of the larger DoD Warrior Care program. Adaptive sports provide reconditioning activities and competitive athletic opportunities to all wounded, ill and injured service members to improve their physical and mental wellness throughout the continuum of recovery and transition. Modified equipment and additional classification systems allow each athlete to compete, regardless of their injury or illness. The Warrior Games are designed to enhance recovery by engaging wounded, ill, and injured service members outside of traditional therapy settings.

"I was originally a little apprehensive to compete in adaptive sports since I'm able bodied, however I found out that there is a category for everyone regardless of disability," Anthony said. "It is a very tight knit community that I was missing since I left the military.

It has motivated me and given me goals to work toward."

In September, Anthony took part in the International Invictus games held in Dusseldorf, Germany. Invictus offers a recovery pathway for the international wounded, injured and sick servicemen and women and their motto is "Through sport, we change lives, and save lives."

"The biggest difference between the Warrior Games and Invictus is it is a bit more competitive due to many other nations and competitors being involved in it. I really enjoy getting to connect with competitors from other countries as well," said Anthony. "However, I really enjoy the much tighter knit atmosphere at Warrior Games."

At the Warrior Games Anthony medaled in track with 100m gold, 200m gold, 400m gold, 4x100m gold, Powerlifting gold, Volleyball gold, and rugby with a bronze medal. At Invictus he medaled in track with 400m silver, 4x100m gold, and rugby gold.

After separating Anthony would graduate from the firefighting academy in Oklahoma and is now serving as a firefighter in Choctaw.

"I wanted to serve in another way, so I decided to become a firefighter. I enjoy the camaraderie and the feeling I get when I get to help people," said Anthony. "It is a lot like serving in the military."

The USSOCOM Warrior Care Program – Care Coalition guided Anthony throughout his entire transition from the military and he is but one success story in their mission of returning the servicemember to operational status, moving into a different field, or transitioning into veteran status.



**Army Staff Sgt. Kevin Coleman (left) and Army Sgt. 1st Class Jacob Anthony (center) celebrate their medals in the powerlifting competition during DoD's 2023 Warrior Games Challenge in San Diego, California June 3, 2023. Photo by Michael Bottoms.**



# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command Foreign intelligence threats to SOF – Why counterintelligence integration is vital

*“The U.S. Intelligence Community and Special Operations Forces (SOF) must collaborate on counterintelligence in unprecedented ways, like how the two communities came together for counterterrorism, post-9/11.”*

*Christopher Costa, Director of the International Spy Museum and former SOF operator*

**By Michael W. Parrott**

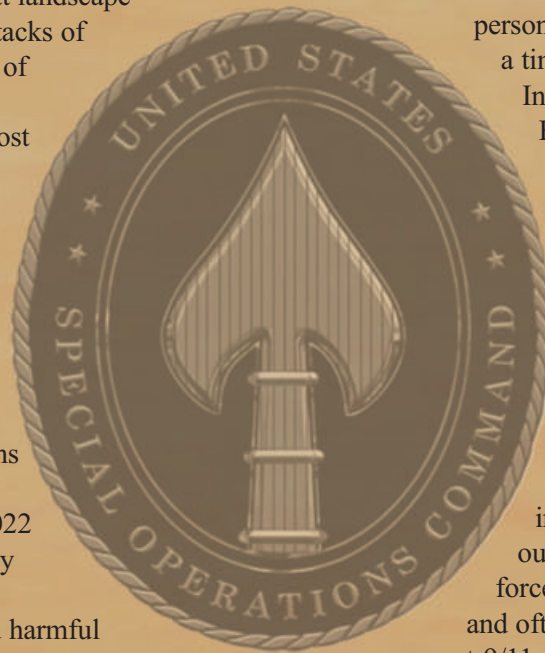
**Joint Special Operations University**

The foreign intelligence (FI) threat landscape has changed considerably since the attacks of September 11, 2001, with the number of actors who target the U.S. growing exponentially over that period. The most obvious, but not the only FI threat challenging our national security and societal well-being is the People’s Republic of China. Thus, there is a dramatic need for a more robust and effective counterintelligence (CI) posture across the U.S. Government (USG), the Department of Defense (DoD), and the U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) enterprise.

The National CI Strategy 2020-2022 explains “[t]hreats to the U.S. posed by foreign intelligence entities (FIE) are becoming more complex, diverse, and harmful to U.S. interests. FI actors – to include nation-states [China, Russia, Iran, etc.], organizations, and individuals – are employing innovative combinations of traditional spying, economic espionage, and supply chain and cyber operations to gain access to critical infrastructure, and steal sensitive information, research, technology, and industrial secrets.” As USSOF rebalances from its 20+ years of global counterterrorism (CT) operations to integrated deterrence and strategic competition against peer competitors and rogue nations in a complex multi-domain environment, the effective integration of CI across the entire conflict spectrum is paramount.

CI is a low-density, high-demand discipline; a critical skill set and an essential force multiplier for countering and disrupting the FIE threat to the USSOF enterprise, while mitigating threats to personnel, systems, and missions. This is not a time for parochialism or cultural ruts. Instead, USSOCOM Commando Hall of Fame inductee and former national security expert, Christopher Costa argues that the already existing collaborative relationships between the U.S. Intelligence Community, the U.S. Interagency, key international partners and the USSOF community must be deepened and codified in unique ways to successfully blunt FIE activities to degrade, disinform, infiltrate, or otherwise cause harm to our critical infrastructure or our deployed forces. The power of these collaborative and often interdependent activities in the post-9/11 environment have been clearly demonstrated and widely documented during two decades of conflict. Strengthening and amplifying these collaborative ties is necessary in this era of strategic competition and all-domain awareness and advantage.

The 2023 SOF Vision and Strategy presents the daunting and pervasive threat the U.S. faces from sophisticated state intelligence services that are very capable and intent on weakening the nation, hampering the department, and undermining SOF’s global advantage. Recent convictions of current and former USSOF members underscore the critical threat FIE pose to our operations,





activities, & investments (OAI), to our information systems and networks, to our critical facilities, and to our most important commodity...our people. The need for proactive and well-postured CI forces who are empowered to metaphorically 'strike back' is paramount for SOF to retain and expand its advantages now and into the future.

The time is now to leverage the Global SOF network to integrate CI more effectively into its campaigns, plans and OAIs to confront the ever-expanding and aggressive FIE threat. In a recent ThinkJSOU interview titled, "Counterintelligence and SOF in the Gray Zone," Chris Costa highlights some relevant, low-threat – high impact approaches to impose cost on the FIE with existing authorities. USSOF can adopt methodologies and asymmetric approaches refined and mastered in the War on Terror, and apply them to CI activities against the FIE in the gray zone to support partner finishes that impose cost on our competitors and adversaries.

So, what can SOF leaders do? A culture shift is underway as the SOF enterprise continues to rebalance and adapt to strategic competition and integrated deterrence initiatives and objectives. There is no better time than now for SOF to actively embrace the need for CI and to ensure its integration across the range of Special Operations activities

and tasks. In 2022, the USSOCOM Director of Intelligence closely collaborated with the Joint Special Operations University to create the SOF CI Integration Course for the advancement of the educational growth of the CI professionals assigned within the SOF Enterprise. The premise of the course is to provide those CI members with a working understanding of existing authorities, policies, capabilities, and shortfalls so that they may argue more effectively for the inclusion of CI into all SOF planning, operations, and activities. The USSOCOM Commander recently elevated the role of CI across the SOF enterprise to ensure his forces protect their competitive advantage, their global capabilities, and their indispensable relationships. Consequently, SOF leaders and staff must now consider integrating CI early and often, especially within the research, development, and acquisition sector, which remains particularly vulnerable to the intrusive efforts of FIE. CI can help ensure SOF technologies, programs, and systems are adequately protected and vigorously defended. SOF leaders must proactively foster a CI mindset within their organizations to ensure CI is always considered; is empowered to assertively detect, identify, exploit and/or neutralize the FIE threat to USSOF's competitive advantages today – tomorrow – forever.





*U.S. Special Operations Forces in Peru recently conducted high-altitude sniper training with their Peruvian counterparts, Fuerza Especial Conjunta in Jauja, located in the central part of the country 12,500 ft. above-sea level. The training was both demanding and beneficial due to unique ballistic challenges that occur at such a high altitude. Courtesy photo.*

