



# Tip OF THE Spear

United States Special Operations Command  
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

April 2021

## AFSOC's Next-Gen Emerald Warrior



# United States Special Operations Command



## AFSOC's Next-Gen Emerald Warrior ... 24

### Tip of the Spear

**U.S. Army Gen. Richard D. Clarke**  
Commander, USSOCOM

**Chief Master Sgt. Gregory A. Smith**  
Senior Enlisted Leader, USSOCOM

U.S. Army Col. Curtis Kellogg  
Special Operations  
Communication Office Director

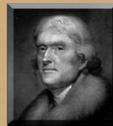
Daniel Wade

Command Information Chief

Michael Bottoms

Managing Editor

U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo  
Photojournalist



### Thomas Jefferson Award Winner

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U.S. Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Jacob Johnson  
Staff Writer/Photographer

*(Cover) A U.S. Air Force Special Tactics operator assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing surveys an exercise mission zone during Emerald Warrior 21.1, Feb. 22, 2021, at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Emerald Warrior is the largest joint special operations exercise involving U.S. Special Operations Command forces training to respond to various threats across the spectrum of conflict. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Gabriel Macdonald.*

# The Quiet Professionals

## Highlights



**U.S. and Qatari military partner in crisis action exercise ... 6**



**NATO ally, Romania, hosts U.S. Joint Forces for Dynamic Force Employment training near the Black Sea ... 12**



**Skydiving connects Gold Star moms with their heroes ... 34**

## Departments

### Theater Special Operations Commands

*SOCAFRICA commander visits Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Niger ... 4*

*U.S. and Qatari military partner in crisis action exercise ... 6*

*Going into the sunset: another chapter in the fight against Da'esh comes to a close ... 8*

*Serbian SAJ train with US Green Berets on mountain warfare tactics ... 10*

*NATO ally, Romania, hosts U.S. Joint Forces for Dynamic Force Employment training near the Black Sea ... 12*

*SOCKOR dedicates headquarters campus after Medal of Honor recipient ... 14*

*1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) participates in exercise Castaway 21.1 ... 17*

### U.S. Army Special Operations Command

*Ranger Unit Ministry Teams conduct intensive training to ensure mission readiness ... 18*

### Naval Special Warfare Command

*MCPON visits NSWC ... 20*

*SEALs participate in joint force integration in Indo-Pacific exercise ... 22*

### Air Force Special Operations Command

*AFSOC's Next-Gen Emerald Warrior ... 24*

*New proficiency exercise streamlines training for CAAs ... 26*

*Female aviators key element to the CAA mission ... 29*

### Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command

*Marine Raiders collaborate with Marines from 1/8 on CQB tactics ... 30*

*Special Operations Capabilities Specialists conduct amphibious training ... 32*

### Headquarters

*Skydiving connects Gold Star moms with their heroes ... 34*

*USSOCOM's Warrior Care Program hosts its annual conference virtually ... 36*

### Memorial

*Fallen Heroes ... 39*

# U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



## SOCAFRICA commander visits Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Niger

*By U.S. Air Maj. Andrew Caulk  
Special Operations Command Africa*

U.S. Special Operations Command Africa Commander U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, completed his multi-country West Africa visit March 8-12, 2021.

During his visit, he discussed security, human rights, and countering violent extremism with partners across West Africa.

“Countering violent extremism requires partnerships across international borders. The strong relationships between the countries in West Africa, our other international partners, and the whole of U.S. government are the cornerstone for a successful, long-term strategy to counter extremism,” said Anderson. “We continue to support the countries leading the fight in the Sahel.”

He first met with Malian Transition President N’Daw in Bamako Mali March 9 where they were able



*Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, commander of Special Operations Command Africa, meets with counterparts in Benin during a trip to West Africa March 8-12. Anderson met with partners in Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Niger. Courtesy photo.*

to discuss the ongoing efforts to counter violent extremist groups across the country and throughout the bordering Sahelian nations. His visit follows a recent operational assessment by U.S. forces in Gao, Mali, March 3.

The commander then traveled March 10 to Burkina Faso where he met with the Burkinabe Chief of Defense, General Moise Miningou. Anderson reaffirmed SOCAF's commitment to its relationship in building capacity within the Burkinabe armed forces. Miningou expressed appreciation for the recent training of Burkina Faso's

first military chaplains.

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—U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson

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In Benin, Anderson visited with senior civilian and military leaders March 11 to discuss the developing violent extremist threat in the northern regions of the country bordering Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso. This is the first visit by a senior military leader since 2019.

Finally, the commander visited Nigerian military leadership March 12 to discuss operations in the border regions between Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria, and Niger.



**(Above) Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, commander of Special Operations Command Africa, meets with counterparts in Benin during a trip to the West Africa March 8-12. Anderson met with partners in Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger. Courtesy photo.**



**(Top right) Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, commander of Special Operations Command Africa, is greeted by a Benin Navy counterpart upon arrival in Benin during a trip to West Africa March 8-12. Anderson met with partners in Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger. Courtesy photo.**

**(Right) Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, commander of Special Operations Command Africa, meets with a French counterpart during a trip to the West Africa March 8-12. Anderson met with partners in Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger. Courtesy photo.**



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Central



## U.S. and Qatari military partner in crisis action exercise



*U.S. and Qatari Special Operations Forces respond to a simulated, violent threat, March 24, 2021, during U.S. Central Command's crisis response exercise Invincible Sentry in Doha, Qatar. Working with a key regional partner like Qatar, provides a valuable opportunity to improve responses to common regional security threats. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Alex L. Smedegard.*

*By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Daryl Bradford  
Task Force Spartan Public Affairs*

U.S. Central Command hosted Invincible Sentry 21, an exercise between Special Operations Forces and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear elements from both the U.S. and Qatar around Doha, Qatar, March 21-25, 2021.

Invincible Sentry is a recurring exercise held with different partner nations each year within U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility. This year's exercise composed of crisis response scenarios evaluated the readiness and capabilities of U.S. and Qatari forces responding to a regional emergency.

IS 21 offered a unique opportunity for U.S. and

Qatari forces to practice and develop their skills prior to the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which will take place at locations around Doha.

"Invincible Sentry 21 is a multi-national exercise where we test joint capabilities with some of our allied forces as well as U.S. Forces," said Army Capt. Shelby Hensley, company commander, 318th Chemical Company, 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, Task Force Spartan. "Here we are going to be testing our response capabilities as well as the response capabilities for our host nation ahead of the World Cup in 2022."

The U.S. established diplomatic relations with the government of Qatar in 1972, and has continued to work closely with Qatar on a wide range of issues.

This was the second time Qatar has hosted Invincible Sentry in the past three years, allowing the U.S. and Qatari forces to strengthen interoperability with a key partner. By participating in the exercise, Invincible Sentry has delivered a clear message: relationships matter.

“I think it’s important to keep those relationships with all of our allied nations,” said Hensley. “It’s important to establish that common goal and operational language. We all do things a little differently, but if something were to happen, it helps to know how we could work together to accomplish something good.”

Col. Mohammad Al-Otaibi, Qatari planner for Invincible Sentry, agrees when he said that Qatari forces remain committed to the partnership, increasing interoperability between themselves and their U.S. partners.

The U.S. operates in a region with numerous violent extremists. There are no easy victories or quick wins, but Invincible Sentry is one way to deliver a unified message of deterrence to those who wish to do harm.

If harm is done, however, and a crisis arises, the U.S. and Qatar want to be prepared.

These are goals that both the U.S. and Qatari forces share.

“The objective of the exercise was to focus on furthering the abilities of both the Qatar Armed Forces and the U.S. Forces in responding to crisis and stress testing the operation capabilities of both forces,” said Mohammad Al-Otaibi. “These objectives have been met with great success.”

Exercises like this help to better prepare Qatar for the upcoming World Cup as well as to fine-tune their critical, crisis response capabilities for any real-world event.

“The exercise is a step,” said Army Lt. Col. Thomas Ludwig, IS21 lead planner for Special Operations Command Central. “I think it really helps set the foundation for the bilateral partnership. It’s important to not only train, but to build and maintain those relationships to keep us moving forward.”

Ludwig said the U.S. Forces who were already in Qatar for a Joint Combined Exchanged Training laid the

base-line for the events to come during IS 21 pre-exercise training.

“This exercise allowed them to expand into planning,” said Ludwig. “The U.S. team saw growth [with the Qatari soldiers] between the first two objectives. Both locations were extremely complex, many contingencies, and they really did well controlling the persons of interest and intelligence.”

Exercises, such as Invincible Sentry, stand as an ideal way for combined military training to prepare forces to operate together if and when the need arises.

The U.S. military participates in more than 80 exercises with partner nations in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility each year.

These types of exercises are designed to strengthen military-to-military relationships and promote regional security. IS 21 is no different, producing bonds that are developed by training together toward a common goal—maintaining prepared ready and responsive forces to defend nations and protect their citizens.



*Qatari Special Forces escort a restrained gunman role-player, March 24, 2021, during U.S. Central Command’s crisis response exercise Invincible Sentry in Doha, Qatar. The annual bilateral exercise represents a unique opportunity to train with Qatari partners to practice critical crisis response capabilities. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Alex L. Smedegard.*

# U.S. Special Operations Command - Central



## Going into the sunset: another chapter in the fight against Da'esh comes to a close

*By U.S. Army Sgt. Samuel D. Keenan  
Combined Joint Special Operations Task  
Force-Operation Inherent Resolve*

On a clear day with military aircraft thumping, and roaring overhead, leaders and service members from coalition forces formally recognized the deactivation of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. The ceremony took place in front of the civilian air terminal used as CJSOTF-OIR's headquarters in Erbil, Iraq and provided an opportunity to recognize all that CJSOTF-OIR accomplished in the fight against the Islamic State.

For six years, CJSOTF-OIR and its predecessors oversaw U.S. and coalition personnel, in addition to other elements in locations across Iraq and Syria, that were training, equipping, and conducting advisory missions with partner forces.

"A CJSOTF has the capacity and the capability to link tactical action with the operational approach while also looking ahead to future positions and points of frictions," said Army Brig. Gen. Guillaume (Will) Beaurpere, commander of Special Operations Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. "CJSOTFs are designed to enable success, mitigate risks and maintain a tempo required to defeat the enemy. In the war to defeat ISIS that agility was delivered by this CJSOTF in OIR."

Initially, CJSOTF-OIR was two separate entities, CJSOTF-Iraq and CJSOTF-Syria, said Army Maj. Tania Sang, command historian for SOJTF-OIR.

"In 2014 Central Command deployed a CJSOTF to Iraq to work with Iraq's special operations force" said



*Army Brig. Gen. Guillaume (Will) Beaurpere, commander of Special Operations Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, addresses the crowd of Coalition service members who gathered for the Combined Joint Special Operations - OIR deactivation ceremony in Erbil, Iraq, March 29, 2021. While the CJSOTF was deactivated, the Coalition remains committed to enabling and assisting its partners in the enduring defeat of Da'esh. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Samuel D. Keenan.*

Sang.

At that point, Da'esh territorially controlled areas of northern and central Iraq, as well as key east-to-west routes into and out of Syria.

The Iraqi special operations force, known as the Counter Terrorism Service, became largely responsible for controlling and beating back Da'esh advances during

that period. Fighting Da'esh as a conventional force was an atypical mission for the CTS. The small, but elite force was better equipped and trained for asymmetric warfare and targeted raids than for outright conventional warfare. Nonetheless, they were forced into taking on the role as the tactics and reputation of Da'esh led to large-scale degradation of and desertion from the regular Iraqi Army. This ultimately resulted in heavy losses of life and materiel for the CTS.

With the assistance of CJSOTF-I, the CTS was eventually able to rebuild into a capable security agency for all of Iraq.

The same year that a CJSOTF was established in Iraq, another U.S. special operations entity was stood up to enable partner forces in Syria to degrade and ultimately destroy Da'esh there, said Sang.

According to Sang, those deployed in support of the campaign against Da'esh in Syria were originally stationed in Jordan and Turkey. Eventually, U.S. Central Command directed U.S. Special Operations Command to establish a headquarters element that would become CJSOTF-Syria.

Through CJSOTF-Syria, the Coalition aligned Syrian forces were trained, advised and equipped to further their efforts to defeat Da'esh.

In 2016, the two CJSOTFs came together under one higher command when SOJTF-OIR was established.

“For four years after that, the two CJSOTFs fought side-by-side in this configuration through phase three of the campaign—each delivering devastating effects on the enemy,” said Beurpere during his remarks at the deactivation ceremony. “Then in late-2019, when ISIS was militarily defeated, CJSOTF-Syria and CJSOTF-Iraq merged into a single CJSOTF.”

As a single entity, CJSOTF continued its mission to defeat Da'esh by enabling partner forces right up until the end.

“We wanted to transition and make sure we transitioned correctly, said Marine Col. John (Jody) Lynch III, the last commanding officer of the CJSOTF. “But don't stop operating, and don't stop taking advantage of every opportunity until the last possible day.”

Less than 72 hours until its deactivation, personnel



**Marine Col. John (Jody) Lynch III, the last commanding officer of the Combined Joint Special Operations - OIR, gives his final remarks to the crowd gathered at the CJSOTF deactivation ceremony, Erbil, Iraq, March 29, 2021. Lynch thanked his staff, troops and leadership before dismissing the unit for the final time. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Samuel D. Keenan.**

at CJSOTF were actively involved in coordinating efforts to support Operation Ready Lion.

Operation Ready Lion was a joint mission between the Coalition and Iraqi security forces to force out and destroy Da'esh elements in the Makmour Mountains.

Lynch said that the power of the Coalition and its partners was on display for the world to see during the operation.

“We did some great things to empower Iraq security forces and the CTS to be at a better position to deal with Da'esh problem; it also highlighted how powerful the coalition is,” said Lynch. “We were able to layer the operation to take advantage of each other's authorities, permissions, and capabilities, and then nest it, sync it and operate in that manner all the way up [and] all the way down.”

At the deactivation ceremony, shortly before CJSOTF's colors were cased for the last time, Beurpere took a moment to recognize what the deactivation meant for those involved, past and present.

“Now as the campaign transitions through Phase four and into normalization...the need for multiple echelons of command has become less necessary as our security partners become more capable and more independent—but that is success,” said Beurpere. “CJSOTF, you should go home proud of your service to this righteous mission.”

# U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



## Serbian SAJ train with US Green Berets on mountain warfare tactics

*Serbian Police from the Special Anti-terrorist Unit (SAJ) and U.S. Green Berets assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command Europe conduct a range day exercise as part of their Joint Combined Exchange Training, March 15, 2021, Serbia. The JCET aims to strengthen the interoperability and response to crisis capabilities of Serbian and U.S. forces. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Christopher Moore.*





# U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



## NATO ally, Romania, hosts U.S. Joint Forces for Dynamic Force Employment training near the Black Sea

*By U.S. Air Force Capt. Kevyn Kaler  
352nd Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

In the early morning hours on April 10, 2021, Special Operations Forces at Ramstein, Germany, assigned to the 352nd Special Operations Wing, on-loaded the 41st Field Artillery Brigade's High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) in preparation for a cross-theater rapid aerial insertion operation to Romania. This is just one of a series of related missions

demonstrating U.S. European Command's ability to quickly employ long-range precision fires in a time and place of their choosing to support NATO allies and partners.

This type of complex mission is designed to increase the lethality and readiness for not only the Joint Force, but also strengthens and solidifies the NATO allied coordination while maintaining the U.S. commitment to collective defense. This operation set the conditions for future engagements, both within the rapid aerial



*Special Operations Forces from the 352nd Special Operations Wing and 41st Field Artillery Brigade executed another successful High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), Rapid Aerial Insertion (HIRAIN), coordinated with NATO allies, near Constanta, Romania Apr. 10, 2021. HIRAIN activities demonstrate USEUCOM's ability to quickly employ long-range precision fires across the theater in a time and place of our choosing, using dynamic force employment while employing cross-domain fires capabilities with our NATO allies and partners. Photo by Cristian Dobre.*



**Special Operations Forces from the 352nd Special Operations Wing and 41st Field Artillery Brigade executed another successful High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), Rapid Aerial Insertion (HIRAIN), coordinated with NATO allies, near Constanta, Romania, Apr. 10, 2021. Photo by Cristian Dobre.**

insertion (HIRAIN) mission-set and other joint training opportunities in Romania.

The work for this mission started long before the ground crews began loading the HIMARS in Germany. At RAF Mildenhall, in the United Kingdom, U.S. Air Force personnel prepped and fueled SOF aircraft for the combined NATO mission. Once ready, the air commandos were airborne and outbound to Germany.

Once the Special Operations Wing aircraft landed in Germany and joined up with the 41st FAB, stationed at Grafenwoehr, Germany, this joint package, including the MC-130J Commando II, the U.S. Army Europe’s HIMARS, soldiers and aircrew prepared to execute the HIRAIN from Germany to its final destination in Romania. These tactical professionals had practiced on-and-off loading training to expedite the real-time load of the asset to the capable aircraft, increasing the efficiency of employing these long-range systems.

“This is the second time in less than six months the 41st Field Artillery Brigade has been able to practice our HIMARS rapid infiltration mission along the Black Sea along with our joint partners in Special Operation Command Europe,” said Army Col. Daniel Miller, the commander of the 41st Field Artillery Brigade. “Each time we get better, faster, and more precise at being able to conduct these type of short notice deployments or missions.”

Once loaded, USAF Special Operations aircrew ran

final pre-flight checklists for the operation, showcasing one aspect of the increased interoperability between the components. These aviators fully understand SOF doesn’t work in a vacuum and are not the only solution to a crisis or contingency, they work as a part of a larger operational and strategic framework.

During the flight to the Romanian coast, the MC-130J aircrew conducts in-flight training as it transits NATO airspace. As they make their final approach, ground crew at MK International Airport prepare to rapidly off-load the high-tech HIMARS weapon systems and execute simulated fires within minutes of landing.

“The U.S. and Romania have an incredibly strong bilateral relationship, which provides the flexibility to stage forces and equipment in support of operations,” said Col. Marc V. LaRoche. “USEUCOM’s ability to integrate components and rapidly surge long-range precision fires capabilities into and across the theater, using dynamic force employment, is critical to project forces at a moment’s notice to support our allies and partners, both within the Black Sea region and beyond.”

Upon completion of fires, the SOF team reloads the MC-130J with the HIMARS, soldiers and equipment -- all in less than an hour.

The successful completion of this HIRAIN operation finishes with a safe off-load of the HIMARS back in Germany, and a return to home-station of the SOF aircrew and aircraft to RAF Mildenhall, with plans to execute further iterations solidifying this enhanced deterrent option to ensure peace within the European theater.



**A U.S. KC-135 Stratotanker and aircrew from the 100th Air Refueling Wing support the Special Operations Forces from the 352nd Special Operations Wing and 41st Field Artillery Brigade execute another successful High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), Rapid Aerial Insertion (HIRAIN), coordinated with NATO allies, near Constanta, Romania, Apr. 10, 2021. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Jennifer Zima.**

# U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



## SOCKOR dedicates headquarters campus after Medal of Honor recipient

*By U.S. Air Force Capt. David Murphy  
Special Operations Command Korea*

Special Operations Command Korea leadership held a dedication ceremony officially naming their special operations headquarters campus after Medal of Honor recipient, U.S. Army Col. Robert L. Howard, April 16, 2021, at U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys, South Korea.

Officially, the facility will now be called the Colonel Robert L. Howard Special Operations Campus. Howard was chosen for his heroic efforts earning him the MoH, by way of his contributions to the special operations forces community as a Green Beret and through his role as the second SOCKOR commander from 1989-1990.

“It’s truly an honor to be able to dedicate our campus in recognition of such a well-regarded and heroic individual and SOF member,” said Brig. Gen. Otto K. Liller, SOCKOR commander. “His courage, dedication, and selfless service all combine and give focus to the kind of person we want all SOCKOR members to aspire to be more like.”

This ceremony included a prerecorded message from Howard’s daughter, Melissa Gentsch, who, due to COVID travel restrictions, watched the event via livestream. Gentsch highlighted her father’s bravery and commitment to the men he led while in war.

“This dedication would have meant a lot to my father,” said Gentsch, “he only had fond memories of his time in Korea. My father never asked anyone to do anything that he wouldn’t do himself. He knew that real strength came from within. So when you step foot onto these grounds, I ask that you not think of my father but what my father stood for, being humble, being strong enough to put others before yourself, to always show honor and respect to your fellow man and, most importantly, to persevere and to never ever



*(From left to right) Command Sergeant Major Walter A. Tagalicud, U.S. Forces Korea senior enlisted leader, Gen. Robert B. Abrams, USFK commanding general, Brig. Gen. Otto K. Liller, Special Operations Command Korea commanding general, and Command Master Chief Petty Officer Stephen D. White, SOCKOR senior enlisted leader, unveil the plaque dedicating the SOCKOR campus in honor of U.S. Army Col. Robert L. Howard at the ceremony outside the SOCKOR headquarters building on Camp Humphreys, South Korea, April 16, 2021. Howard was chosen to have the campus named after him because of his tie to SOCKOR as its second commander, serving in the role from July 1989 to June 1990, his heroic acts in Vietnam, which earned him the Medal of Honor, his lifelong commitment to the military, his association to special operations forces, and his role as a Green Beret. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Anthony A. Enomoto.*

give up.”

In attendance at the ceremony included several United States Forces Korea component commanders, leadership from the Republic of Korea Special Warfare Command, and the USFK Commander Gen. Robert B. Abrams with his senior enlisted leader Command Sgt. Maj. Walter A. Tagalicud. During the speech Liller highlighted an anecdote that directly connected Abrams’ father, U.S. Army Gen. Creighton Abrams, to then Master Sgt. Howard.

During the Vietnam War, Creighton was the Military Assistance Command - Vietnam commander and was the one to issue the order to pick up Howard

from a fire fight after it was learned he'd been chosen to receive the MoH.

"It's a small world," said Command Master Chief Stephen White, SOCKOR senior enlisted leader, "but a testament to the strong ties that bind all service members with one another."

A special plaque made to honor Howard by identifying the campus in his name was unveiled during the ceremony by Abrams, Liller, Tagalicud, U.S. Forces Korea senior enlisted leader, and White.

Leadership from SOCKOR and USFK also cut the ribbon during the ceremony on the SOCKOR rock which identifies the unit to visitors and displays in distinguished unit insignia. The rock was designed to follow in the traditional art of stacked rocks known as suseok, which is popular in Korea and has origins going back more than 3,000 years.

"This project was a massive undertaking but I'm proud of my team for pulling it all together and helping to provide an outward-facing identity for SOCKOR to all who visit here," Liller said.

#### **History of Col. Howard**

Howard grew up in Opelika, Ala., and enlisted in the Army in 1956 at the age of 17. He received a direct appointment from master sergeant to first lieutenant in December 1969. Howard retired as a Colonel in 1992. In retirement Howard continued to stay involved in military affairs, visiting deployed troops and those injured in combat, until his death.

Howard had various military assignments during his career including duty with the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions; 2nd Ranger Battalion; 3rd, 5th, and 6th special forces groups; 5th Infantry Division; 7th Corps, and the XVIII Airborne Corps. In Vietnam, he served in the U.S. Army Special Forces and spent most of his tours in the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam-Studies and Observation Group, which was an unconventional force whose members were assigned to deep-penetration reconnaissance and interdiction missions.

During his 54 months of combat duty in Vietnam, Howard was wounded 14 times and was awarded 8 Purple Heart Medals, four Bronze Stars, and was nominated for the Medal of Honor three different times. The first two nominations were downgraded to a Silver Star and Distinguished Service Cross due to the covert nature of the operations in which Howard participated. He was awarded the MoH in 1971 for the rescue of a seriously wounded platoon leader who was under enemy fire.

Howard died on Dec. 23, 2009. He was survived by four children and five grandchildren. His funeral

was held in the Arlington National Cemetery on February 22, 2010.

#### **Medal of Honor Citation**

The President of the U.S. in the name of the Congress takes pride in presenting the MoH to 1st Lt. Robert L. Howard United States Army for service as set forth in the following citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Howard (then Sgt. 1st Class), distinguished himself while serving as platoon sergeant of an American-Vietnamese platoon which was on a mission to rescue a missing American soldier in enemy-controlled territory in the Republic of Vietnam.

The platoon had left its helicopter landing zone and was moving out on its mission when it was attacked by an estimated two-company force. During the initial engagement, Howard was wounded and his weapon destroyed by a grenade explosion. Howard saw his platoon leader had been wounded seriously and was exposed to fire. Although unable to walk, and weaponless, Howard unhesitatingly crawled through a hail of fire to retrieve his wounded leader. As Howard was administering first aid and removing the officer's equipment, an enemy bullet struck one of the ammunition pouches on the lieutenant's belt, detonating several magazines of ammunition. Howard momentarily sought cover and then realizing that he must rejoin the platoon, which had been disorganized by the enemy attack, he again began dragging the seriously-wounded officer toward the platoon area.

Through his outstanding example of indomitable courage and bravery, Howard was able to rally the platoon into an organized defense force. With complete disregard for his safety, 1st Lt. Howard crawled from position to position, administering first aid to the wounded, giving encouragement to the defenders and directing their fire on the encircling enemy. For three and a half hours Howard's small force and supporting aircraft successfully repulsed enemy attacks and finally were in sufficient control to permit the rescue helicopters to land. Howard personally supervised the loading of his men and did not leave the bullet-swept landing zone until all were aboard safely.

Howard's gallantry in action, his complete devotion to the welfare of his men at the risk of his life were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



## 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) participates in exercise Castaway 21.1

*A U.S. Army Soldier with 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), prepares to load a CH-53E Super Stallion with 1st Marine Aircraft Wing during Castaway 21.1 on Ie Shima, Okinawa, Japan, March 17, 2021. The exercise demonstrated the Marine Corps' ability to integrate with the joint force to seize and defend key maritime terrain, provide low-signature sustainment, and execute long-range precision fires in support of naval operations from an expeditionary advanced base. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Ujian Gosun.*

# U.S. Army Special Operations Command Ranger Unit Ministry Teams conduct intensive training to ensure mission readiness



*By Tracey Bailey and 75th Ranger Regiment Unit Ministry Team  
75th Ranger Regiment*

The 75th Ranger Regiment, our nation's large-scale special operations force, has been continuously deployed since Oct. 19, 2001. The organization's success does not come from high-tech gear, but its specially selected and well-trained people. At the heart of caring for the regiment's people are chaplains and religious affairs specialists.

Wherever you find Rangers, you will find Ranger unit ministry teams. The high operational tempo and challenging ministry can be demanding, and the need to refocus and refuel is great. The regiment's UMTs met at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, for three days of intensive training February 16th to the 18th.

Training together is essential for chaplains and religious affairs specialists to maintain their own mission readiness and spiritual health. During this short window, the regiment's UMTs trained on a variety of skills necessary for providing religious support to their formations.

The three-day training focused on pastoral skills, community revitalization, understanding generational shifts, operational religious support planning, crisis



*Ranger unit ministry teams with the 75th Ranger Regiment recently conducted environmental training and team building in Mount Rainer National Park, Wash. Photo by 75th Ranger Regiment Unit Ministry Team.*

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*This training is vital to our ability to minister to our formation. There are generational gaps between senior leaders from Generation X, millennial leaders, and young Rangers from Generation Z.*

*— Staff Sgt. Jared Enge*

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ministry, and self-care. One unique aspect of the training was a venture off-post into academia. UMTs spent an afternoon at Northwest University in Kirkland, Washington, engaging in a discussion with author and educator Dr. Earl Creps on emerging trends in church ministry, and the implications of generational shifts in society.

“This training is vital to our ability to minister to our formation. There are generational gaps between senior



***Dr. Earl Creps, professor at Northwest University in Kirkland, Wash., leads a discussion on reversing mentoring and understanding general shifts. This discussion was part of an overall training event for the Ranger Unit Ministry Teams of the 75th Ranger Regiment. Photo by 75th Ranger Regiment Unit Ministry Team.***

leaders from Generation X, millennial leaders, and young Rangers from Generation Z,” Staff Sgt. Jared Engel, 75th Ranger Regiment Regimental Religious Affairs non-commissioned officer said. “We have to understand our people and their needs, in order to advise our commands and provide the best possible ministry.”

Later in the week, the UMTs transitioned more tactical training on operational planning and casualty ministry. The team explored case studies in mass casualty scenarios, and the roles their predecessors had played.

Staff Sgt. Ben Wickerham, Company Senior Medic from Charlie Company, 3rd Ranger Battalion, led hands on medical training that tailored to the unique role of the UMT in a crisis. Special emphasis was placed on caring for dying or “expectant” patients, as some UMTs may be called on to do.

Throughout the week, the Ranger UMTs benefited from the expertise of many local trainers, including representatives from the Chief of Chaplains office, the 7th Infantry Division, Madigan Army Medical Center, and 1st Special Forces Group.

Sgt. Tyler Geurkink, Religious Affairs non-commissioned officer at 3rd Ranger Battalion, was very involved in the training this year.

“Being a Religious Affairs Specialist with the 75th Ranger Regiment has provided me with rewarding experiences I never could have imagined, and training

like this is one of them,” he said. “Whether its environmental training, mountaineering in the cascades, engaging in graduate-level discussion with university faculty members, or throwing on night vision goggles to sharpen our skills in casualty care, this is the kind of event that equips us for the future, and brings the team together.”

Colonel Todd S. Brown, commander, 75th Ranger Regiment, summed up the importance of this event for the regiment’s unit ministry teams.

“The 75th Ranger Regiment is ultimately in the people business, and our chaplains and religious affairs specialists are at the heart of that effort,” Brown said. “Taking care of our force and Families can take a toll, and training like this helps us better care for the caregiver.”



***Ranger unit ministry teams from the 75th Ranger Regiment recently conducted mountaineering training at Eagle Peak in Mt. Rainier National Park, Wash. Photo by 75th Ranger Regiment Unit Ministry Team.***

# Naval Special Warfare Command MCPON visits NSWC

*By Naval Special Warfare Command*

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith travelled to Naval Special Warfare Command as part of a visit to the San Diego, California, March 31, 2021.

During his visit, MCPON Smith spent time with NSW Force Master Chief Bill King and NSW Sailors to talk about how the command is assessing and developing cognitive, character, and leadership traits from the platoon chief-level all the way to major commanders. During his visit, Smith was able to meet with Sailors to discuss human factors in decision-making, as well developing individual and team resiliency.

He emphasized the importance of their key role in strategic competition on the front lines through fleet integration with the Navy or serving directly under Theater Special Operations Commanders.

“The work they do every day extends the reach

of Naval and Joint Task Force Commanders, and gives our adversaries pause – as it should,” said Smith. “I encourage you to continue learning and growing as you take on the mantle of personal and team responsibility. And for those of you who recently made board, yours is an especially high bar as in a few short months you may join the Chief Petty Officer’s mess at a critical time in our nation’s defense.”

Smith said that Sailors here demonstrate the very best of the U.S. Navy.

“What each of you does to help build confidence and trust within your teams and with the American people pays dividends that you may never fully understand,” said Smith. “I am incredibly proud of the work you continue to do each day, and the strategic impact you have for our national security.”



*Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith speaks with Naval Special Warfare Sailors at the Silver Strand Training Complex during a visit to various NSW commands in the San Diego, Calif., March 31, 2021. Smith visited NSW to see firsthand how the command is assessing and developing character, cognitive, and leadership traits throughout the Force as an asymmetric advantage in strategic competition. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Sean Weir.*



*Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith makes a tandem parachute jump with Chief Petty Officer Andrew Young of the Navy Parachute Team during a visit to various Naval Special Warfare commands in the San Diego, Calif., March 31, 2021. The Navy Parachute Team, "The Leap Frogs," travel across the United States to demonstrate Navy excellence. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Nick Fajardo.*

# Naval Special Warfare Command



## SEALs participate in joint force integration in Indo-Pacific exercise

*A Navy SEAL parachutes into the water near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, April 6, 2021. Navy SEALs worked in conjunction with aircrew from the 41st Airlift Squadron and drop-zone coordinators to accomplish required high-altitude low-opening jumps from two C-130J Super Hercules. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Jayden Ford.*



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## AFSOC's Next-Gen Emerald Warrior

*By U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Brandon Esau  
AFSOC Public Affairs*

Each year, Air Force Special Operations Command takes on the all-important role as host for U.S. Special Operations Command's exercise Emerald Warrior, a joint exercise which brings together U.S. special operations and conventional forces and those of its international partners and allies to prepare for current and future challenges.

In years past, the exercise focused on counter violent extremist organization efforts through enhanced teamwork, but EW 21.1 moved toward less direct action. This year, Emerald Warrior exposed operators to concepts they may not encounter in daily training to increase readiness, effectiveness, and make them more dynamic.

"This year, we've expanded outside of our normal focal area to an all-domain construct, whether it be the increased use of space, cyber, intelligence, public affairs and information operations," said U.S. Air Force Col. Kevin Koenig, commander of Emerald Warrior. "Our goal is to be prepared in all domains to deter adversaries now and avoid future conflicts. We're also testing new elements within the command while still maintaining our partner nation and joint training."

As with each iteration, Emerald Warrior is aligned with the National Defense Strategy of competing against near-peer adversaries and addressing the great power competition, but increased interconnectivity and information becoming a part of multiple domains, EW 21.1's focus shifted to shaping environments through different avenues.



*A U.S. Air Force Special Tactics operator assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing surveys an exercise mission zone during Emerald Warrior 21.1, Feb. 22, 2021, at Camp Shelby, Miss. Emerald Warrior is the largest joint special operations exercise involving U.S. Special Operations Command forces training to respond to various threats across the spectrum of conflict. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Gabriel Macdonald.*



**A U.S. Air Force Special Tactics operator, assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing, watches U.S. Navy MH-60 Sea Hawk helicopters, assigned to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9, prepare to land on an airfield during Emerald Warrior 21.1, at the Eglin Range Complex, Fla., Feb. 23, 2021. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Edward Coddington.**

One avenue was the cyberspace realm where, according to U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Louis Schuler, cyber liaison officer with Emerald Warrior, competitors are continuing to build up capabilities in this domain so the U.S., its allies, and partners must meet the challenge.

“The cyber domain is getting bigger and bigger because of the prevalence of technology expansion amongst our competitors,” Schuler said. “Our greatest strength is our ability to establish connectivity between different domains, so we must utilize our advantages so we can exploit the vulnerabilities of our adversaries and protect our operators.”

Alongside cyber proficiency, U.S. Space Force Guardians had an increased role in which they’re able to test new constructs that will support SOF even more.

“Our main focus was to provide situational awareness to the command and our operators on what’s going on around the world, kind of a peek around the curtain,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Kevin Aneshansley, Chief of Space Weapons and Tactics with AFSOC. “Essentially, we looked at new ways we can integrate the high ground more efficiently with our human capital. Without space advantages, we would be doing ourselves a disservice when it comes to the great power competition.”

Aneshansley stated that a paradigm shift has occurred in this year’s version of Emerald Warrior where satellite communications and GPS were more heavily involved, and space electronic warfare is being used to make the force more efficient, more integrated at tactical levels, and our warfighter even more effective.

In addition to introducing new capabilities in air, space, and cyberspace, the exercise had continued to be a forum of

collaboration between the U.S. and forces from Lithuania and France.

“AFSOC Airmen have the ability to flex and adapt to any problem set,” said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Christopher Ibsen, commander of Special Operations Air Component. “During this exercise, we’ve been able to demonstrate our use of soft powers, with less kinetic operations, to execute the mission while still supporting our foreign partners and allies.”

Ibsen said a significant part of the multi-national cooperation during Emerald Warrior this year was the increased spotlight put on the combat air advisor mission of the 492nd Special Operations Wing.

“Our operators have been able to make use of the CAA’s mission set and abilities to communicate objectives with our Lithuanian and French counterparts,” Ibsen said. “This has allowed for them to gain knowledge of tools outside their normal environment which will enhance the skillset they already possess.”

Emerald Warrior in 2021 brought about the latest in air, space, and cyberspace methods in the age of the great power competition, and though the kinetic aspects of the exercise still existed, exercise architects believe the soft powers that AFSOC possess, and will possess, will help the command remain relevant into the future.

“In AFSOC, we’re focused on investing in our human capital and testing new concepts to arm our warfighters with the tools to secure the advantage,” said Brig. Gen. Michael Martin, director of operations for AFSOC. “The training our forces received during Emerald Warrior is a testament to the commitment we have to the AFSOC we will need.”



**A U.S. Air Force Special Tactics operator assigned to the 24th Special Operations Wing provides medical care to a simulated casualty as a U.S. Navy MH-60 Sea Hawk from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron Nine prepares to move casualties to a follow on medical treatment center during a personnel recovery training mission for Emerald Warrior 21.1, Feb. 25, 2021, at the Eglin Range Complex, Fla. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Jason Robertson.**

# Air Force Special Operations Command



## New proficiency exercise streamlines training for CAAs

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

Combat Aviation Advisors from the 711th Special Operations Squadron employed a new method to accomplish annual training requirements. The squadron's first ever two-week long proficiency exercise in March combined specialized-training scenarios that took place at locations across the Eglin Range, Florida.

CAAs advise, assist, and instruct service members from our partner nations. Historically, their training was more fragmented which made it harder to track. The proficiency exercise established a more efficient avenue for meeting their specialized recurring currency requirements.

"The real achievement here was getting all the traditional reservists in one spot together, usually there's one over here and one over there," said Tech Sgt. Dane Tosi, 711th SOS CAA. "This new training cycle keeps them together. We train as a team because we fight as a team."

Airmen from the 24th Special Operations Wing, 492nd SOW and soldiers from the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) also participated in the exercise. They worked together to plan scenarios during the exercise that would allow the CAAs to embed with other units in a deployed environment.

The exercise provided a consolidated schedule for traditional Reservists to maintain currency in their field. The proficiency exercise also included training for fixed wing landing zone operations, casualty evacuation and close air support training.

"The inaugural 711 SOS proficiency exercise showcased the ingenuity and resourcefulness of our CAAs," said Lt. Col. Andrea McElvaine, 711th SOS Chief of Weapons and Tactics. "This was a valuable training opportunity that wasn't available previously within the unit."

Many of the participants in the exercise were experienced Reservists who brought experience from recent

deployments and previous operational engagements.

"We're dealing with professionals in their field that have been in [the U.S. Air Force] for years," said Tosi. "The training is based around problem-seeking and problem-solving."

The final day of the exercise included a scenario that combined all aspects of training earlier in the proficiency exercise. During this final event teams of CAAs dispatched through the Eglin Range on rugged dirt roads. They simulated providing security for a community leader, dealt with socio-political tensions, and traversed the wilderness to air evacuate a casualty they were caring.

This new method of accomplishing training to maintain readiness is slated to occur at least once a year going forward and will prepare Citizen Air Commandos to carry out the aviation foreign internal defense mission downrange.



**Combat Aviation Advisors assigned to the 711th Special Operations Squadron provide medical care to a simulated casualty during a proficiency exercise near Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., March 17, 2021. The team avoided simulated protests and social unrest that blocked roadways to access the casualty and provided care. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile.**

*A Combat Aviation Advisor from the 711th Special Operations Squadron aims his weapon around a tree during small unit tactics training during a proficiency exercise near Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., March 14, 2021. The unit learned defensive maneuvers and how to strategically approach an opposing force. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile.*



*A 711th Special Operations Squadron Combat Aviation Advisor watches a C-145 Combat Coyote as it comes in for landing on an unimproved runway March 15, 2021 near Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. CAAs advise, assist and instruct service members from partner nations on how to best perform their specialized mission. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Dylan Gentile.*



# Air Force Special Operations Command

## Female aviators key element to the CAA mission



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

Female aviators play an important role in the 711th Special Operations Squadron's Combat Aviation Advisor mission at home and around the globe.

Combat Aviation Advisors advise, assist, and instruct service members from our partner nations on how to best perform this specialized mission.

One of the female aviators working hard to get the mission done in the 919th Special Operations Wing is Maj. Brianna Thompson. She was a traditional navigator before joining the 919th Special Operations Wing, and is one of several female CAAs in the unit.

"We always need more people with diverse perspectives in aviation," said Thompson. "You don't have to be exactly like everyone on the aircrew to get along, be effective as a team, and enjoy the [heck] out of it."

Another female aviator and CAA in the 711th SOS is Lt. Col. Stacie Carroll who was a navigator on the AC-130U Spooky before becoming a CAA.

"I take a lot of pride in being a special operations aviator," said Carroll. "I love that I was able to continue as an Air Force Special Operations Command aviator as a Reservist."

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*I take a lot of pride in being a special operations aviator. I love that I was able to continue as an Air Force Special Operations Command aviator as a Reservist.*

— Lt. Col. Stacie Carroll

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*We always need more people with diverse perspectives in aviation. You don't have to be exactly like everyone on the aircrew to get along, be effective as a team, and enjoy the [heck] out of it.*

— Maj. Brianna Thompson

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CAAs receive special training to operate in diverse environments in austere locations around the world, creating space for a diversity of perspectives.

"The women I've ran into in this job seem to have it all," said Thompson. "The role we play is probably a lot more prominent than our numbers would suggest."

While just under seven percent of pilots are female, the Air Force has taken moves to grow the number of female aviators and removed the height requirements to fly in 2020.

Thompson noted that sometimes it can be difficult when she's the only female aviator on an aircrew. The challenges are far greater when performing the CAA mission as a lone female in a partner nation.

With the physical demands, mental strength, and skill required to fly, Airmen have to meet certain standards whether male or female.

"I love when you start to feel comfortable and confident with the mission set," said Thompson. "Typically ground-users will hear men on the radio, so when I know I'm doing my job really well and they're hearing me, there's nothing more powerful than that."

To see more coverage of our Citizen Air Commandos getting the mission done, be sure to check out the 919th SOW on Facebook and Instagram.

# Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



## Marine Raiders collaborate with Marines from 1/8 on CQB tactics

*By U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Ethan Green and Cpl. Brennan Priest  
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command*

Marine Raiders with 3rd Marine Raider Battalion and Marines from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, recently participated in a three-day close-quarters battle training evolution, Jan. 26-28, 2021, at Camp Lejeune,

North Carolina.

This training allowed for collaboration between Marine Forces Special Operations Command and Fleet Marine Forces that helps improve institutional and operational cooperation among the conventional Fleet Marine Force and Special Operations Forces.

“The purpose of this week’s training is to confirm the tactics, techniques, and procedures that we have done with an outside entity and professional force like



*Marine Raiders with 3rd Marine Raider Battalion train Marines with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines on close quarters battles tactics at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Jan. 28, 2021. The training included hallway and stairwell clearing procedures, as well as teaching sensitive site exploitation, which allows for better integration between Special Operations Forces and Fleet Marine Force assets to improve combat readiness for the future operating environment. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Ethan Green.*



**Marine Raiders with 3rd Marine Raider Battalion train Marines with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines on close quarters battles tactics at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Jan. 28, 2021. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Ethan Green.**

the MARSOC Marines, to see where we are at and refine out TTPs before we go forward on this deployment,” said Lt. Col. Chris Richardella, commanding officer, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines.

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*My biggest take away from working with the Raiders is that there is always a different way to do something, Being able to get my Marines in a place where they can practice their fundamentals that they have been working on this whole work up really solidifies what they have learned.*

— Cpl. John Rivera

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Raiders worked through CQB techniques with the infantry Marines, to include hallway and stairwell clearing procedures, room and building clearing, and sensitive-site exploitation. The training made it

possible for the Marines to work together, be more innovative in the way they accomplish a mission, understand the different ways a problem can be solved, and adapt to any situation that may be in their way.

“We’re applying our tactics to their individual actions within the house in order to have that integration and interoperability when the time does come for a conventional force to work with a Special Operations Forces unit,” said an element leader with the Marine Special Operations Team.

The infantry unit has been training with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit for the past several months in preparation for their upcoming deployment. The Raiders were able to give insight and perspective which in turn will make the 24th MEU more efficient, effective, and lethal during their deployment.

“My biggest take away from working with the Raiders is that there is always a different way to do something,” said Cpl. John Rivera, a squad leader with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines. “Being able to get my Marines in a place where they can practice their fundamentals that they have been working on this whole work up really solidifies what they have learned.”

Collaboration between Raiders and the Fleet Marine Force is crucial in the event that a conventional Marine Corps unit is requested to support a SOF unit on the battlefield. For this reason, training that supports interdependence, interoperability, and integration becomes vital to the success of our nation’s future conflicts.



**Marine Raiders with 3rd Marine Raider Battalion train Marines with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines on close quarters battles tactics at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Jan. 28, 2021. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Ethan Green.**

# Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



## Special Operations Capabilities Specialists conduct amphibious training

*Marines with Marine Raider Support Group conduct amphibious training during the Special Operations Capabilities Specialist D (Multi-Purpose Canine Handler) Level 1 training course in Camp Pendleton, Calif., Jan. 6, 2021. The students learn amphibious techniques during the first week which provides basic waterborne capabilities and prepares them for the rest of the amphibious operations conducted during the course. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Ethan Green.*





# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command Skydiving connects Gold Star moms with their heroes

*By U.S. Air Force Maj. Ryan DeCamp  
USSOCOM Office of Communication*

When Ellen Comfort learned her son died in Afghanistan in 2010, she said she had two choices on what to do next. She could dwell on his loss and face the darkness that comes with focusing on pain.

Or, she could live the life her son Capt. Kyle Comfort, an Army Ranger with the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, lived.

Ellen chose to jump into life with her son's same adventurous spirit. In this case, it involved a 120-mph free fall from 13,500 feet.

Ellen Comfort and Sandee Rouse, Gold Star mothers from the 75th Ranger Regiment, skydived with Special Operations Command's parachute demonstration team, the Para-Commandos, March 13, 2021, at Skydive City in Zephyrhills, Florida. Para-Commandos' tandem jumps allow families of fallen service members to connect with their heroes by going through some of the same military experiences they had. It also helps Gold Star families support each other in healing.

"When I read some people find relief from grief by participating in activities their loved one did, it was a relief to me," Ellen said. "Kyle was just such an adventurous spirit and soul and I thought, I'm going to do this."

"What was I going to do, sit at home and think about the pain? No, I took this option," she said. "I'm a person of action. I can't just sit here and not do anything. When I'm around people who are jumping from airplanes and doing all the things he did, I feel like I'm closer to him, I feel like I'm with him."

Much like Ellen's son who spent much of his time in the air as a parachutist and airborne-qualified Soldier, Sandee's son, Private 1st Class Jim Markwell, was parachute qualified too.



***Ellen Comfort and U.S. Army Lt. Col. Ken Ates, Special Operations Command Para-Commando, skydive March 13, 2021, in Zephyrhills, Fla. Comfort is a Gold Star mom. Photo by Army Master Sgt. Barry Steele.***

Markwell, a 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment medic, died in 1989 in Operation Just Cause during ground operations after parachuting into Panama.

"This was on my bucket list because I wanted to experience what both my boys did as both were airborne, especially Jim," Sandee said. "People used to ask him all the time why he wanted to jump. He would say, 'because of the rush.' So I thought I would try and jump out of a perfectly good airplane to feel his rush," she added with a laugh.

As a Gold Star Family Advocate, Sandee has connected with many families going through exactly what she experienced Christmas Day 1989 – Soldiers in uniform knocking on her door. But connecting with other families wasn't always natural for her.

"It took 11 years after Jim died for me to realize this

was my God mission,” Sandee said. “I started as a Gold Star Advocate in March 2001, then 9/11 happened and a month later we were taking care of our first family after a helicopter crash from a mission going into Afghanistan.”

She agreed with Ellen that knock on the door leaves families at a crossroads.

“When I talk to parents, when somebody’s grieving they don’t necessarily absorb everything being said to them,” Sandee said. “But I’ve always told them, you have two choices. You can either continue to grieve, or you can grieve and then you can turn around and find a way to honor your child. If you continue to grieve, you let the enemy win twice.”

Ellen said it was difficult for her to reach out and connect with other families or use the resources available to grieving families. But she’s happy she finally did open to the support she didn’t know she needed.



**Sandee Rouse, Gold Star mother, and Army Sgt. Maj. Jose Vazquez, Special Operations Command Para-Commando, skydive March 13, 2021, in Zephyrhills, Fla. Photo by Marine Corps Master Sgt. Steven Smith.**

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*If I could have one more conversation with Kyle, I would ask him if he’s proud of me for being brave enough to dare to live life, to be happy, healthy, joyful, and grateful, because I’m all those things I think he would say, ‘You know what mom, you got this girl. You go!’*

— Ellen Comfort

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“I wasn’t a person who initially participated in all this stuff, but not because I wasn’t included or received invitations,” Ellen said. “I didn’t recognize the benefit it would be to me, to be around the people and to experience that feeling again. When Kyle died it was the absence of energy. He was such an energetic and extroverted person. There was no longer any energy for me. I just needed that rush, I needed that energy.”

Both moms agreed the events they’ve been invited to, be it Ranger Balls or skydiving with the Para-Commandos, provided that connection to their sons. They also said that feeling of connection is key for grieving families.

“We have families that have started funds to help other Gold Stars, or to help the needy,” Sandee said. “We’ve got so many wonderful Ranger families who have gotten so many things going that honors their child and keeps that person alive. But everybody has to find their own way and get out of their own way to allow themselves to do this, whatever it turns out to be.”

“Like they have a brotherhood, we have a motherhood, or a familyhood. They connect us,” Sandee added.

Ellen said she’s happy to have made those connections despite the pain she faced. She knows Kyle is proud of how she’s taken the next step despite not being able to at first.

“If I could have one more conversation with Kyle, I would ask him if he’s proud of me for being brave enough to dare to live life, to be happy, healthy, joyful, and grateful, because I’m all those things,” Ellen said. “I think he would say, ‘You know what mom, you got this girl. You go!’”



**U.S. Special Operations Command Para-Commandos prepare to tandem skydive with Sandee Rouse and Ellen Comfort March 13, 2021, in Zephyrhills, Fla. Sandee and Ellen are Gold Star mothers whose sons died while serving with the 75th Ranger Regiment. Sandee’s son, Private 1st Class Jim Markwell, died during Operation Just Cause in Panama in 1989. Ellen’s son, Capt. Kyle Comfort, died during combat operations in Afghanistan in 2010. Photo by U.S. Air Force Maj. Ryan DeCamp.**

# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command USSOCOM's Warrior Care Program hosts its annual conference virtually

By Michael Bottoms

U.S. Special Operations Command Communication Office

U.S. Special Operations Command's Warrior Care Program- Care Coalition hosted its 2021 Warrior Care Conference April 6 – 7 virtually from the headquarters located on MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. WCP-CC brought together leaders, subject matter experts, and Special Operations Service members to discuss topics including the impact of repetitive blast exposures, military adaptive sports, career transition initiatives, and pain management during the two-day conference.

The conference kicked off with Army Gen. Richard D. Clarke, commander USSOCOM, giving opening remarks, honoring our Gold Star families, and presenting two Patriot awards.

“Each of you has suffered tremendous personal loss, yet you continue to give back. Your strength and commitment to help others is inspirational,” Clarke noted to the Gold Star Family members in attendance. To the

broader audience, he underscored the value of coming together under the umbrella of Warrior Care. “This conference is a key component in advancing the Warrior Care Program. It provides a valuable forum for each of us to learn about present challenges and emerging opportunities to grow this community of interest and help our SOF and families in need. It also provides an occasion to honor some among us who provide

significant and enduring contributions to the SOF community. We call this honor the Patriot Award.”

The Patriot Award recognizes exceptional and enduring contributions to the welfare of USSOCOM's wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans and their families. This year's recipients are Army Col. Kent Solheim and his wife Trina Solheim.

A Special Forces officer, Solheim was grievously wounded in Iraq in 2007 and is still on active duty. Mrs. Solheim works as the executive director of Gold Star Teen Adventures, a non-profit started and managed by the Solheims. The Solheim family received the Patriot Award for their work and outreach among the teenage children of fallen servicemembers.

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*This conference is a key component in advancing the Warrior Care Program. It provides a valuable forum for each of us to learn about present challenges and emerging opportunities to grow this community of interest and help our SOF and families in need. It also provides an occasion to honor some among us who provide significant and enduring contributions to the SOF community. We call this honor the Patriot Award.*

— Gen. Richard D. Clarke

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“By the very nature of this work, their positive impact will stretch across multiple generations. This type of commitment is more vital today than ever before,” said Clarke.

The Warrior Care Program was founded in 2005 to provide non-medical advocacy and support services to wounded, ill, and injured USSOCOM service members and their families. Its mission is to

help members return to operational status, move into a different field, or transition into veteran status. The program provides advocacy and care coordination services to more than 18,000 people.

“The USSOCOM Warrior Care Program, also known as the Care Coalition, strives to provide continuity and coordinate resources from the point of injury through the care continuum in order to achieve the best possible

outcomes for our recovering service members with the primary intent to get them back to their units, preserve their talent, and protect the USSOCOM investment in our most precious asset: our people. The unyielding desire to return to their teammates coupled with the tenacious drive inherent in our service members set the conditions for successful achievement of that objective,” said Kelly Ammerman, WCP-CC director.

The four pillars of the Warrior Care Program are

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*The USSOCOM Warrior Care Program, also known as the Care Coalition, strives to provide continuity and coordinate resources from the point of injury through the care continuum in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for our recovering service members with the primary intent to get them back to their units, preserve their talent, and protect the USSOCOM investment in our most precious asset: our people. The unyielding desire to return to their teammates coupled with the tenacious drive inherent in our Service Members set the conditions for successful achievement of that objective.*

— Kelly Ammerman

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recovery, where medical treatment is the focus; rehabilitation, where optimal medical and operational fitness is achieved; reintegration, where retaining special operations forces on active duty is the priority and when needed; and transition, where a seamless transition to civilian life for continued medical care, benefits, and career opportunities is pursued.

To contact the

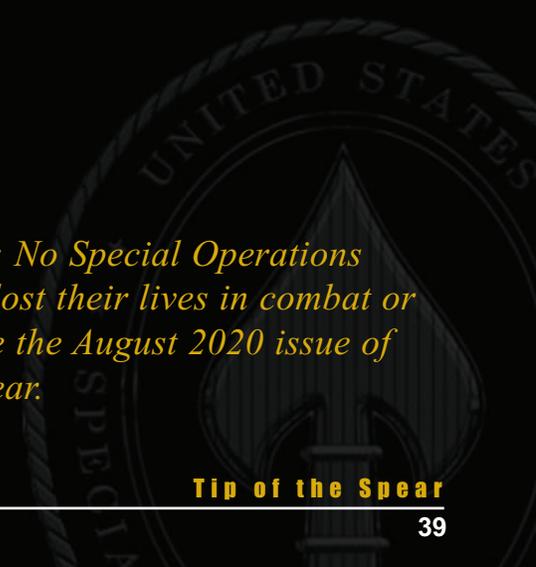
USSOCOM Warrior Care Program go to <https://www.socom.mil/care-coalition/>.



**Team SOCOM Army Staff Sgt. Travis Dunn’s family visits him prior to a track race during the 2019 DoD Warrior Games hosted in Tampa, Fla., June 22, 2019. The games introduce wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans to Paralympic-style sports and showcase their resiliency. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Barry Loo.**



GILBERT ALANZ (B) RALPH L. THOMPSON WESLEY B. AN. DAVID ALAN C. BRY  
S/MSG PVT USA 880125 MSG CPT USA 810120 SMO PVT USA 840922 MSG CPT USA 8  
JANISRY WILLIAM C. HAYES ROBERT A. BRADMAN



*Editor's note: No Special Operations Forces have lost their lives in combat or training since the August 2020 issue of Tip of the Spear.*



*Brute Krulak Center personnel give a brief on the Teslasuit to Marine Corps Special Operations Command personnel at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The brief was part of the 2021 Cognitive Raider symposium which aims to reinforce and enhance a culture of critical thought, innovation, cognitive agility and creativity across the Raider formation. The Teslasuit is a full-body haptic suit that accelerates the improvement, reflexes, and instincts, allowing faster, better improvement of the human mind and body which can be used for training and educational purposes. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis.*