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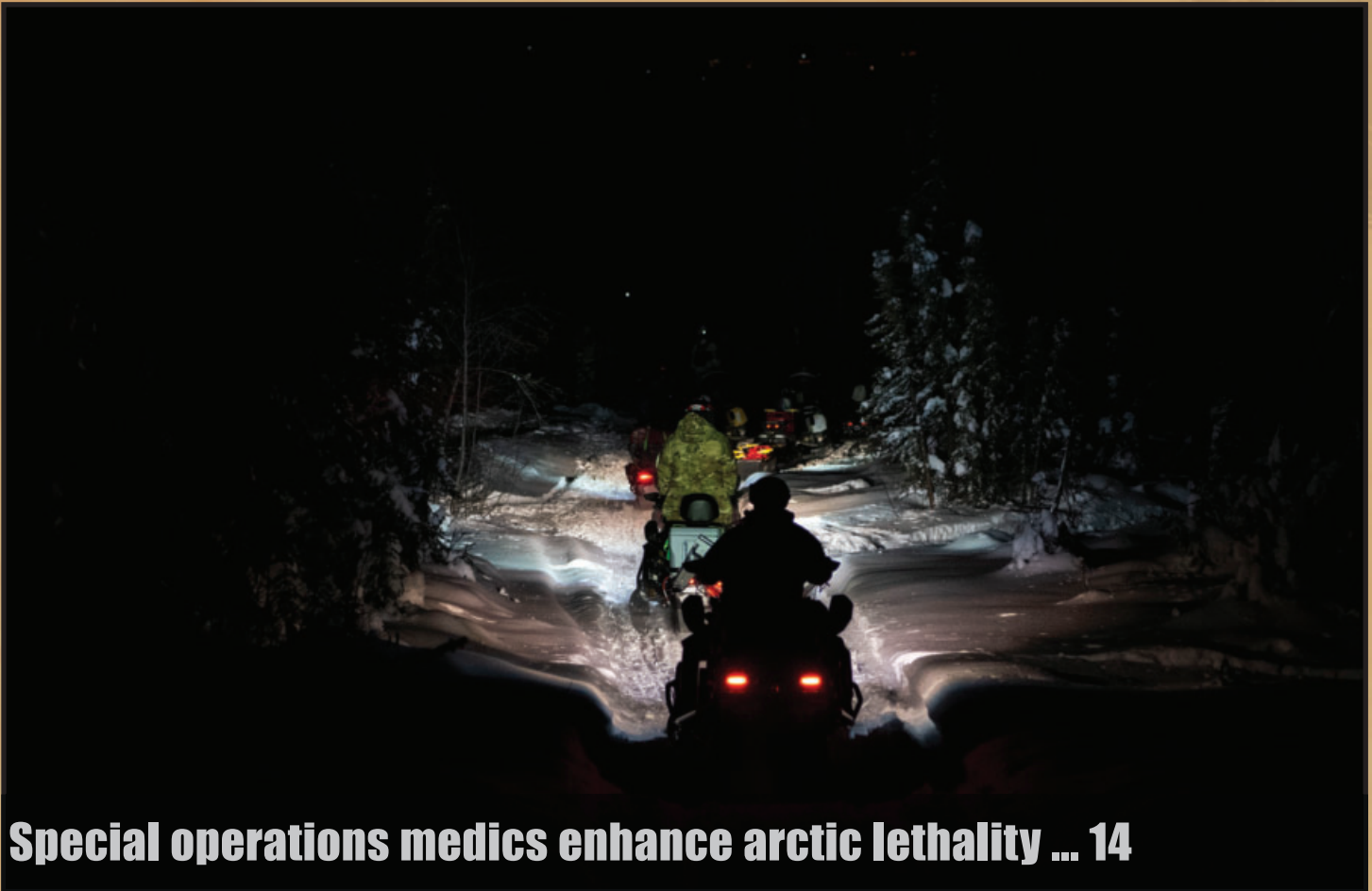
Tip Spear

April 2025

**Special operations
medics enhance
arctic lethality**



United States Special Operations Command



Special operations medics enhance arctic lethality ... 14

Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) U.S. East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare, U.S. Army, Canadian, U.K., and interagency Special Operations Forces (SOF) guide a simulated casualty as it is hoisted to a UH-60 Black Hawk, assigned to 52nd Aviation Regiment, during medical training at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 12, 2025. Special Operations Forces Arctic Medic 2025 enhanced SOF readiness through real-world scenarios in an austere climate and ensures a lethal fighting force to win wars. Naval Special Warfare Group TWO produces, supports, and deploys the world's premier maritime special operations forces to conduct full-spectrum operations and integrated deterrence in support of U.S. national objectives. (U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Trey Hutcheson)

The Quiet Professionals

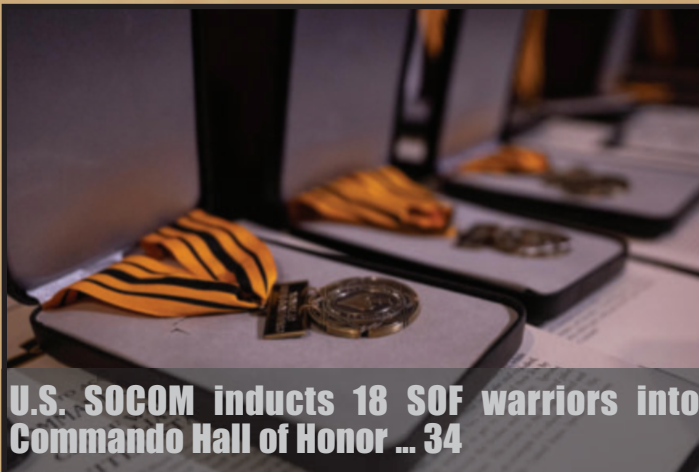
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U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



Ready to rescue: Kenya's Rapid Response Unit graduates first PJ pipeline

By Staff Sgt. Sabatino Dimascio
Special Operations Command Africa

With the assistance of U.S. Special Operations Command, the Kenya Air Force Rapid Response Unit recently graduated its first class of combat search and rescue trained operators, building Kenya's ability to conduct personnel recovery missions in high-threat environments.

The training pipeline, part of a joint U.S.-Kenyan initiative to enhance combat-ready forces, enables operators to execute complex combat search and rescue missions. The program focuses on combat medicine, personnel recovery, technical rescue and mass casualty response—skills modeled after the U.S. Air Force pararescue mission and capabilities.

"These are the elite of the Kenya Air Force and they now stand ready to go in first and extract aircrew" said a U.S. Air Force pararescueman instructor. "This new pipeline is designed with high standards and pushes both of our teams to develop and train to the most realistic and intensive situations available."

The RRU will serve as Kenya's primary special operations combat search and rescue force, providing medical and rescue support in austere and hostile environments. The unit will integrate with joint forces, offering rapid personnel recovery capabilities both independently and as a direct attachment to military operations. Both U.S. and Kenyan officials see the program as a critical step in strengthening their national security framework.

The journey for these graduates began in May of 2024. The competitive 10-month course tested students' mental and physical ability, ensuring that those who made it through were well equipped to work in dangerous, high-stress, no-fail environments. Only a handful were selected to proceed with training, even fewer made it to graduation to earn the title of a combat search and rescue RRU operator.



Members of the Kenya Air Force Rapid Response Unit provide security as other RRU members simulate stabilizing medical care to an aircrew casualty in Nanyuki, Kenya, Feb. 15, 2025. The RRU are the premier Kenyan combat search and rescue force, capable of providing personnel recovery and medical capabilities in austere or hostile environments through either direct attachment or rapid response to joint forces. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio)

"Training with the American PJs has been the greatest experience for me," said a Kenya Air Force Senior sergeant. "Seeing my students grow from zero knowledge to where they are right now, we can trust them with the mission set laid out for us."

For their culmination exercise, the RRU students validated their skillsets, successfully completing a simulated hostage rescue and casualty hoisting scenario during Justified Accord 25, U.S. Africa Command's largest East Africa exercise.

The RRU pipeline will continue in an effort to bolster U.S. and Kenya combat readiness and interoperability. As courses continue, RRU graduates are projected to assume full responsibility for training new operators, ensuring a self-sustaining organic combat search and rescue capability.

Members of the Kenya Air Force Rapid Response Unit rappel down a tower as a Kenya Air Force F-5EM conducts a low-level pass during the final exercise of Justified Accord 2025 in Nanyuki, Kenya, Feb. 19, 2025. The culminating exercise enabled the RRU to demonstrate their combat search and rescue capabilities including combat medicine, personnel recovery, technical rescue and mass casualty control. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio)



U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



U.S. and Kenya strengthen military ties through joint training in Mombasa

By Staff Sgt. Sabatino Dimascio
Special Operations Command Africa

U.S. and Kenyan forces concluded a four-week Joint Combined Exchange Training on Tuesday, Feb. 11, an event aimed at enhancing joint readiness and interoperability.

U.S. Marines assigned to Marines Forces Special Operations Command and elite members assigned to the Kenya Navy Special Operations Squadron, took part in the exchange.

“This JCET was a great opportunity for us as a Marine Raiders team to work with a strategic partner;

increasing their tactical capacity while simultaneously refining our skills and instructing ability,” said the U.S. Marine team commander. “The Kenyan Marine Commandos were eager to learn and add to their capabilities through the advanced medical skills and tactics shared during the JCET.”

The techniques and procedures featured in the training included tactical combat casualty care, combat marksmanship, machine gun employment, and full mission profile exercises.

“Kenya is a very important partner to the U.S.,” said the U.S. Marine team chief. “This trip afforded us the unique opportunity to deploy our team, learn about



Kenya Navy Special Operations Squadron members perform a simulated amphibious landing as part of a full mission profile exercise during a Joint Combined Exchange Training in Mombasa, Kenya, Feb. 5, 2025. The full mission profile exercise enabled Kenyan and U.S. Special Operations Forces to combine and practice the skills learned, strengthen tactics, techniques, and procedures and enhance overall readiness. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio)



A U.S. Marine Raider assigned to Marine Forces Special Operations Command observes a Kenya Naval Special Operations Squadron marine commando firing a M240B machine gun during a Joint Combined Exchange Training in Mombasa, Kenya, Feb. 6, 2025. JCETs enhance U.S. relationships with partner nations by developing and maintaining critical military-to-military connections and promotes stability by helping to mitigate underlying conditions that permit violent extremism. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio)

the culture, and hone our own training skills. This mission was the first for many of our young Marine Raiders and the experiences gained on this JCET could not be replaced with training within the U.S. We look forward to the continued growth of the Kenya Navy Special Operations Squadron.”

The KNAVSOS is known for its operational capability and plays a critical role in ensuring maritime security and stability in the region. The full mission profile, completed at the end of the JCET, offered a chance for members to demonstrate all lessons learned while being observed by Kenyan Special Operations instructors in real time.

“Being an instructor in tactics, this JCET broadened up my mind and showed me that we are up to the standards,” said Senior Sgt. Alvin Shem, Kenya Navy Marine Commando. “We would like to say thank you for coming in to help us so that we may grow our standards, and we proudly invite them to have more of these exchanges.”

Events like JCETs demonstrate U.S. Special Operations Command’s commitment to advancing partners’ military capabilities and readiness to aid in collective security and stability efforts.



U.S. Marine Raiders assigned to Marine Forces Special Operations Command give feedback to Kenya Navy Special Operations Squadron members after conducting a full mission profile exercise during a Joint Combined Exchange Training in Mombasa, Kenya, Feb. 5, 2025. The full mission profile allowed the Kenya Navy Special Operations Squadron to demonstrate techniques learned and enhance overall readiness. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio)

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



SOCAFRICA hosts joint training with Moroccan special forces

*By Staff Sgt. Spencer Slocum
Special Operations Command Africa*

Special Operations Command Africa hosted a Joint Combined Exchange Training between the U.S. Army 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Moroccan 1st and 2nd Brigade d'Infanterie Parachutiste, Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie and the Moroccan Air Force Special Forces Company, in Marrakech, Morocco, Jan. 28 – Feb. 25, 2025.

The four-week training course focused on sharpening specialized skills that play a pivotal role in improving the regional security environment of Northwest Africa.

Events kicked off with opening ceremonies and an orientation about the law of armed conflict to serve as the baseline of rules that need to be adhered to in real and training combat scenarios.

Participants then spent the next few weeks expanding upon skills such as tactical combat casualty care, rappelling, close quarters battle, squad and urban movements, and live weapon marksmanship in both day and nighttime environments.

“These events help make both us and the Moroccans a stronger force,” said a 19th SFG (A) team sergeant. “It helps increase border security, safety and denies the ability for violent extremist organizations to get a foothold in the country and abroad.”

As the course drew to an end, both forces prepared for a two-day culmination exercise. The operators had to plan missions, secure objectives and intelligence and capture a high value target utilizing the skills learned throughout the course.

The JCET concluded with a graduation ceremony where each unit was recognized for their work and contributions during the training.



A U.S. Army 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne) operator listens to feedback during a Joint Combined Exchange Training in Marrakech, Morocco, Feb. 19, 2025. Special Operations Command Africa is committed to building partner nations and regional capacity that promotes stability to mitigate underlying conditions that permit violent extremism. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Slocum)

“In the near future, we’re looking forward to more engagements with special forces teams as well as the Security Force Assistance Brigade, as Morocco is really seen as a pillar of security here within the African continent,” said a 19th SFG (A) detachment commander.

Moroccan forces have participated alongside the U.S. and other international partners in multiple other JCETs and exercises such as African Lion and Flintlock. These continued commitments help develop and maintain military-to-military connections and promote cooperation and cohesiveness in future exercises and real-world crises.

Two members of Moroccan special forces conduct reconnaissance during a Joint Combined Exchange Training in Marrakech, Morocco, Feb. 20, 2025. Members of the U.S. Army 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne), the Moroccan 1st and 2nd Brigade d'Infanterie Parachutiste, Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie and Moroccan Royal Air Forces Special Forces Company participated in the JCET. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Slocum)





U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



U.S., Lithuanian, German special ops enhance lethality

By Lt.j.g. Martin Carey
Naval Special Warfare Group TWO

Strengthening NATO alliances, U.S. East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) and U.S. Special Warfare Combat Crewmen (SWCC) recently conducted a two-week training exercise with Lithuanian and German Special Operations Forces.

The exercise, which took place in the Baltic region, aimed to increase warfighting readiness and allied lethality through a series of challenging maritime operations, small boat tactics, and low-light weapons live-fire drills. The training event was designed to foster greater cooperation and interoperability between the participating nations, maintaining a strategic advantage in the region.

"Exercises like this are crucial to ensuring we can operate seamlessly together to fight and win wars," said CAPT V. Scott King, Commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group TWO. "By training alongside our Lithuanian and German counterparts, we're not only enhancing our own warfighting readiness but also strengthening the bonds of friendship and cooperation that underpin our alliance."

Allied training exercises like this are vital to bolstering the collective defense capabilities of NATO nations and builds a stronger, more lethal alliance to address threats in the area.

Throughout the exercise, the units focused on developing and enhancing their skills in maritime special operations, as well as advanced marksmanship and close quarters combat techniques. The special operations forces refined their ability to launch, operate and recover small raiding crafts from the well decks of the Combatant

Craft Medium, one of Naval Special Warfare's most versatile boats. The event culminated with a full-mission profile,

The training we conducted was both realistic and challenging. We were able to learn from each other and share best practices. This type of cooperation is essential to achieving shared goals and maintaining elite levels of lethality.



East-coast based U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) conduct live-fire weapons training with Lithuanian special operations forces, Klaipeda, Lithuania, Jan. 21, 2025. This training showcases U.S. forces' lethality as well as re-establishes the U.S. military as a formidable deterrent to those who may try to test America's military capabilities. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Bill Carlisle)

bringing together all aspects of the training into a real-world scenario that showcased the special operations forces' readiness in the maritime domain.

"The training we conducted was both realistic and challenging," said the senior Naval Special Warfare Operator on site. "We were able to learn from each other and share best

practices. This type of cooperation is essential to achieving shared goals and maintaining elite levels of lethality."

U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



U.S., ROK special operations forces conduct routine combined training during exercise Freedom Shield 2025

*Story by Maj. Christopher Mesnard
Special Operations Command Korea*

During the weeks of March 10 – 21, 2025, combined U.S. and Republic of Korea special operations and conventional units conducted multiple command post and field training exercises at various locations across the Republic of Korea, in support of exercise Freedom Shield 2025.

The combined U.S. and ROK elements conducted field-based training that honed direct action, special reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, and other special operations forces' skills-based, core activities.

With the 75th anniversary of the Korean War approaching in June of this year, these training sessions continue a decades' long investment between both nations' SOF. This investment enhances interoperability between the two nations, deters aggression through a ready and lethal force, and elevates combat readiness to meet mutual homeland defense priorities, if called upon.

"We must never forget that today's training, exercises, and the readiness generated by them comes out of the blood of those who perished in the brutal Korean War that unnecessarily tore this great nation's people apart," said Brig. Gen. Derek N. Lipson, Special Operations Command Korea commander, United Nations Command Special Operations Component Command commander, and Combined Special Operations Component Command deputy commander. "As we continue to seek peace and stability through strength in the region, we must also leave no doubt in our adversaries' minds that we maintain the most lethal force they would face, if they mistakenly choose to disrupt the status quo through aggression."



Republic of Korea H-60 helicopters prepare to land with a combined U.S. and ROK special operations team during a multiday, multilocation training event associated with exercise Freedom Shield 25 at Paengnyong-Do (Baengnyeong-Do), ROK, on March 19, 2025. Freedom Shield is an annual combined exercise conducted in support of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty signed on Oct. 1, 1953. This combined exercise hones the U.S. and ROK combined lethality through defense capabilities that ensure the mutual defense of both nations' homelands and contributes to regional peace and stability through integrated deterrence. (U.S. Navy photo by Lt. Jaqueline Parashar)

U.S. personnel in the SOF community routinely participate in combined training as a means to continue a high level of proficiency in skills known as the SOF core activities.

During FS25, Joint and combined SOF elements on the Korean Peninsula honed their technical skills, ability to plan and conduct multinational missions, and

integrated information sharing toward a combined, Joint, and all-domain awareness, targeting, and operations process.

“Because of the SOF mindset, unique capabilities, specialized training, and commitment to maintaining readiness, our people have outsized impacts on our national interests,” said Lipson. “Our people are our competitive advantage, and they exert the ability to wield the most primitive to advanced technologies.”

FS25 is an 11-day exercise conducted by U.S. and ROK combined forces set to reflect the Korea Theater of Operations – a combined, joint, all domain, and interagency operating environment. The annual exercise validates the integrated readiness of a lethal force that directly empowers U.S. and ROK homeland defense while promoting security and stability through the Northeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific regions.

“Testing our lethality in the field is just one more way we invest in our readiness to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asia region,” said Lipson.

During FS25, Joint and combined special operations teams conducted field training exercises that

enhanced proficiency in military freefall and static line airborne operations, special reconnaissance, tactical air control and terminal guidance operations, and air assault in support of direct action and CWMD, and time sensitive target seizure skills at a variety of locations in the ROK and through rear-area support.

The Freedom Shield exercise series continues to feature various types of virtual and field-based training, with engagement from the military services and other federal agencies.

Additionally, it builds greater understanding between the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command, United States Forces Korea, the United Nations Command, and ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), ensuring their ability to fortify the combined defense posture and enhance Alliance response capabilities against a spectrum of security threats.

The exercise is defensive in nature, ensures a ready, lethal, and deterrent force, and is not associated with any current real-world situation. Specific dates, locations, and detailed dispositions of ROK and U.S. SOF units and personnel may be withheld to preserve operational security.



A combined assault force of U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) special operations personnel conduct a direct action raid on a time sensitive target in an underground facility during a multiday training event associated with exercise Freedom Shield 25 at a training site located east of Seoul, on March 17, 2025. The training event served as a capstone to two-weeks of various training that maintained the combined readiness and lethality of U.S. and ROK special operators. The routine training enables a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region through a strong deterrent force. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Taylor Zacherl)

U.S. Special Operations Command - North



Special operations medics enhance arctic lethality

*By Petty Officer 1st Class Trey Hutcheson
Naval Special Warfare Group TWO*

A thick blanket of white snow covered the environment as clear directions rang out in the cold, with the breath from the medic's mouth forming frost on his eyelashes in temperatures well below zero degrees. The pounding rhythm of a Black Hawk helicopter thumped louder and louder as calls were made to ensure care for a wounded service member. After exchanging the simulated patient with the causality evacuation personnel, teammates high-five as they start their journey back to the camp site.

This scenario was common in Ft. Wainwright, Alaska, for nearly three weeks in February where more than 100 Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel, 30 organizations, and two partner nations came together for Special Operations Forces Arctic Medic (SOFAM) 2025.

SOFAM, hosted by Special Operations Command North, introduced Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs), combat medics and surgical teams to an extreme cold environment that they would face when treating patients in the Arctic. Participants were challenged to adapt and innovate while in this harsh climate, enhancing SOF's warfighting capabilities and lethality when operating in the Arctic.

"The sub-freezing and Arctic environment is just as violent to a casualty as enemy fire," said Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman Wayne Papalski, the tactical medicine senior enlisted leader assigned to Naval Special Warfare Group TWO. "Equally, the environment is always working against you as a provider; from your gear, treatment, performance, as well as your own health."

Army Lt. Col. Maxwell Sirkin, a trauma surgeon and the trauma medical director at Womack Army Medical Center in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and



U.S. East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare, U.S. Army, Canadian, U.K., and interagency Special Operations Forces (SOF) transport a casualty during medical training at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 19, 2025. Special Operations Forces Arctic Medic 2025 enhanced SOF readiness through real-world scenarios in an austere climate and ensures a lethal fighting force to win wars. Naval Special Warfare Group TWO produces, supports, and deploys the world's premier maritime special operations forces to conduct full-spectrum operations and integrated deterrence in support of U.S. national objectives. (U.S. Navy Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Trey Hutcheson)

SOFAM surgical expert, echoed the sentiment.

"I have spent the last six years of my life as a trauma surgeon for a special far-forward surgical team," he said. "Part of my life and purpose in the organization is to provide surgery in very unusual and often inhospitable environments. The purpose of this exercise was to assess the functionality and adaptability of our current surgical platforms and partner force surgical platforms in Arctic conditions."

Throughout the exercise, medical teams were tested on how they handled caring for point of injury casualties, enroute care, and surgical procedures, all while operating in sub-freezing temperatures.



An aircrewman assigned to the 52nd Aviation Regiment is lowered to a patient from a HH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during Special Operations Forces Arctic Medic (SOFAM) at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 19, 2025. SOFAM 2025 enhanced U.S., Canadian, U.K. and interagency SOF readiness through real-world scenarios in an austere climate and ensures a lethal fighting force to win wars. (U.S. Navy Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Trey Hutcheson)

“We have been preparing to fight, and fighting war, in moderate and desert climates for the last 20 years,” said Sirkin. “Performing surgery even in ideal combat scenarios and settings can be extremely difficult and resource costly.”

Going into an unknown environment can have growing pains and lessons learned. SOFAM allowed the SEALs to increase their Arctic warfighting capability by working alongside other SOF and interagency partners in unique scenarios. They casevaced simulated patients via Black Hawk helicopters using hoists and long-range ski patrols pulling sleds.

“I learned that our personnel need to be prepared for the mindset of fighting and practicing medicine in the cold,” said Sirkin. “First, they need to acclimate to living in the cold, surviving in the cold and being comfortable in the cold. Second, they need to be able to alter their clinical practice guidelines slightly to do less interventions at times and instead focus on heat production and generation.”

For the course participants, it was a shock to the system as many of them had never trained in these conditions. It was vital to treat the patients in field hospitals, testing new capabilities.

“This exercise gave the medics a taste of the environment and an idea of how to prepare and train to it,” said Papalski. “There is no real course or training outside of specific exercise that allows for this training to be conducted.”

Overall, the lessons were invaluable to future training and operations in extreme cold environments worldwide.

“The training is important because the environmental factor completely changes the treatment game,” said Papalski. “It also established a precedent to train in and to prior to coming out to conduct training or operations in this environment.”

Sirkin said he was challenged by the exercise and he will take the lessons learned forward to future operations. SOFAM gave the experienced trauma surgeon new ideas and problem sets that he, and the medical community, can use to refine current warfighting capabilities to fight and wins wars.

“This is a very difficult environment to perform surgery in, with many challenges that must be critically assessed and overcome if we are to own this battle space in the future,” said Siskin.

Naval Special Warfare Group TWO produces, supports, and deploys the world’s premier maritime special operations forces to conduct full-spectrum operations and integrated deterrence in support of U.S. national objectives.



Special Operations Forces Arctic Medics (SOFAM) perform trauma surgery on a patient during a simulated casualty in the Arctic at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Feb. 19, 2025. SOFAM 2025 enhanced U.S., Canadian, U.K. and interagency SOF readiness through real-world scenarios in an austere climate and ensures a lethal fighting force to win wars. (U.S. Navy Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Trey Hutcheson)

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



U.S. Naval Special Warfare, Philippines NAVSOU conduct joint combined training exchange

*By Sgt. Adeola Adetimehin
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

A West Coast-based U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Unit and members of Philippines Naval Special Operation Units (NAVSOU) conducted a joint combined exchange training (JCET) exercise from Feb. 10 – March 7, 2025.

The JCET took place in El Nido, Philippines, where both parties took part in various training sessions to include gas and oil platform training (GOPLAT), land warfare training, tactical combat casualty care, target assault training, and close quarter combat training.

While JCET events primarily focus on U.S. military readiness and training; however, they are also mutually beneficial to U.S. allies and partners by enhancing bilateral relations and contributing to regional stability.

"Working with the NAVSOU has been a unique opportunity. They operate similarly to the U.S. SEAL Teams, and our cultures are alike in many ways," said an NSW operator.

During the JCET, NSW operators honed their skills in diverse environments, taking advantage of the opportunity to train in jungle terrain and maritime settings alongside their NAVSOU counterparts.

"Training in this environment provides unique opportunities to refine our skills, particularly in jungle warfare," said an NSW operator. "Working alongside NAVSOU in these challenging conditions has enhanced our capabilities and strengthened our partnership."

For nearly 75 years, since the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951, the United States and the Philippines have upheld, maintained, and enhanced our alliance. The enduring relationship covers political, security, and economic cooperation and a shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Naval Special Warfare is the nation's elite maritime special operations force, providing maritime special operations force capabilities to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas.



An Armed Forces of the Philippines service member carries a simulated casualty as part of tactical combat casualty care during a joint combined exchange training (JCET) event with U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators in El Nido, Philippines, Feb. 25, 2025. J. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Adeola Adetimehin)

U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators and Armed Forces of the Philippines service members rehearse securing a gas and oil platform during a joint combined exchange training (JCET) event in El Nido, Philippines, March 1, 2025. JCET events are designed to enhance bilateral relations, promote regional stability, and improve interoperability with allies and partners. NSW provides maritime special operations force capabilities to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Adeola Adetimehin





SOCPAC



U.S. Naval Special Warfare conducts over-the-beach training

A U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Operator and Royal Thai Naval Special Warfare Command members conduct over-the-beach training near Sattahip, Rayong province, Thailand, March 3, 2025, during Exercise Cobra Gold. NSW provides maritime special operations force capabilities to enable Joint Force survivability inside denied and contested areas. Cobra Gold 2025 is the largest joint and combined exercise in mainland Asia, held annually in Thailand, showcasing the U.S. commitment to the region by building interoperability, multilateral cooperative arrangements, and advancing common interests through a commitment to allies and partners in ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman)

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

75th Ranger Regiment Chaplain Mentorship Program, U.S. Army Ranger Course



By the 75th Ranger Regiment Unit Ministry Team

The U.S. Army Ranger Course is widely recognized as one of the toughest and most prestigious military schools in the world. Known as the U.S. Army's premiere leadership course, the U.S. Army Ranger Course takes place at Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade, Fort Benning, Georgia. ARTB falls under the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command. Graduates of the course earn the coveted Ranger Tab.

Servicemembers from all military branches and occupational specialties are eligible to attend the course, including chaplains. In fact, there is a pressing need for Ranger qualified chaplains, particularly for service with the 75th Ranger Regiment. However, the rigors of the Ranger Course pose a challenge to many Army chaplains, who as non-combatants, do not receive much training in small unit tactics prior to attending the course. Chaplains also require a waiver to train with weapons.

To help overcome the hurdles, the 75th Ranger Regiment's Unit Ministry Team has put together a training program to help chaplains navigate the path to the Ranger Course. The Ranger Course Chaplain Mentorship Program links chaplains across the Army to UMTs in the 75th Ranger Regiment who have completed the course. The goal is to develop a training plan that will set chaplains up for success.

The program also provides chaplains with access the Regiment's Pre-Ranger course, called Small Unit Ranger Tactics. This course is geared for low-density military occupational specialties and teaches them many of the skills they need to succeed. While the Ranger course may not automatically make someone a better chaplain, it does present many opportunities for personal and spiritual growth while building leadership experience.

For Chaplain (Capt.) Caleb Lau, who was recently assigned as the 3rd Battalion's, 75th Ranger Regiment's



Capt. Caleb Lau, Chaplain, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, takes a moment to stand on the flight line prior to a nighttime Airborne Operation. (Courtesy photo)

Chaplain, the Chaplain Mentorship Program proved to be a success. It all started when he was a chaplain candidate.

"I was a baby 2nd Lt. Lieutenant in the Oregon National Guard, but my brother-in-law was in 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Lau said. "I didn't know anything about being a Ranger or even being a chaplain."

Chaplain Lau was introduced to Capt. Drew Robinson, Chaplain, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. Robinson reached out to Lau, encouraging him to connect with other chaplains to get a better understanding of what it meant to be a chaplain in the Army and what it meant to be a Ranger.

“Chaplain Robinson encouraged me to come up with a list of questions to ask different Army chaplains,” Lau said. “I was able to interview chaplains from different backgrounds—Ranger, SOF, hospitals, and a few others. He reached out, challenged me, and got me connected with some awesome chaplains.”

Someone had poured into chaplain Robinson’s life and he wanted to pay it forward.

“This is what Rangers do,” Lau said about Chaplain Robinson, referencing the Regiment’s charter to make the Army better through innovation and leader development.

“Chaplain Robinson did that,” Lau said. “He was paying it forward, and it’s what I plan to do. I want to reach out to those young Second Lieutenants, those young Chaplain Candidates, and young Chaplains.”

Lau connected with Chaplain (Captain) John Bennett, the outgoing 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment Chaplain. “John reached out, developed that relationship, and began coaching me. He got me connected to Chaplain Erik Alfson who told me about the Ranger Chaplain Mentorship Program.”

“The Ranger Chaplain Mentorship Program is one of the ways we live out our charter,” (Maj.) Erik Alfson, Regimental Chaplain, 75th Ranger Regiment said. “We want to encourage chaplains who feel called and provide them the opportunity to participate in SURT. Not everyone will graduate from the Ranger Course, but we believe that this is a formative experience that can help shape chaplains for the better.”

Unlike noncommissioned officers who can make a career in the 75th Ranger Regiment, officers come and go from the organization. In particular, chaplains typically serve a three-year tour in the battalion chaplain position.

“Because our time in Regiment is so short, it’s important to be able to coach others, especially other Chaplains. We take what we learn in SURT, at the Ranger Course, at the Regiment, and use it to make others better, to pay it forward,” Lau said.

“The Mentorship Program is designed to give Chaplains an opportunity to grow in their pastoral identity, and to make themselves, and others in the Army, better,” Alfson said.

After connecting with Alfson, Lau successfully completed SURT and the Ranger Course. He returned to his unit at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, utilized his training to better those around him, and ultimately was presented with an opportunity to come to the 75th Ranger Regiment and serve as the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment Chaplain.

“Caleb shows that the process works,” Alfson said. “Another Ranger chaplain supported his preparation and coached him. He successfully prepared for and completed the Ranger Course, and is now investing in others’ lives.”

“It has been awesome to see so many chaplains pursue this calling, challenging themselves and those around them,” Alfson said. “While every chaplain may not have an opportunity to serve in the 75th Ranger Regiment, I fully believe that attending the Ranger Course, whether they graduate or not, will present opportunities to grow and become a better pastor and leader.”

Colonel Todd S. Brown, Commander, 75th Ranger Regiment views the Mentorship Program as a success not just for the Regiment, but for the Army as a whole.

“In the Army, chaplains are at the heart of caring for our people, and Ranger qualified chaplains take it a step further,” Brown said. “When the Chaplain can connect with other Rangers, other Soldiers, in a deeper way because he has trod through same mud and shared the same hardships, everyone wins.”

Since its inception in 2019, 23 chaplains have actively engaged with the Ranger Chaplain Mentorship Program and six have successfully completed the U.S. Army Ranger Course.



Capt. Caleb Lau, Chaplain, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, offers a word of encouragement and prayer for the Rangers of 3rd Battalion, before a nighttime Airborne jump and Battalion-level exercise. (Courtesy photo)

USASOC



USASOC hosts CAPEX 2025

An MH47 Chinook aircraft belonging to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment flies overhead during CAPEX2025 on Fort Bragg, North Carolina, April 3, 2025. Army special operations aviation aircraft are specially built and designed for a variety of applications unique to military special operations. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Isabel Diaz)



U.S. Army Special Operations Command

USASOC International Best Sniper Competition: 75th Rangers 'Lead the Way' by securing first place



By Elvia Kelly
USASOC Public Affairs

The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Special Operations Center of Excellence, concluded the 2025 U.S. Army Special Operations Command International Sniper Competition at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, March 16-17. With 21 teams from across the U.S. special operations force and allied forces, the 75th Ranger Regiment proved triumphant, securing first place followed by the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) in second and the Netherlands in third.

The competition tested sniper teams on a variety of skills — from performance, precision shooting to fieldcraft — highlighting the importance of honing lethal capabilities in line with the Department of Defense's continued focus on lethality, warfighting, and readiness.

“(Army special operations) Soldiers must optimize and maintain their performance across the tenure of their career,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Lionel Strong, Special Operations Center of Excellence command sergeant major. “All of our schools, whether it is the (Army special operations force) generation pipeline or advanced skills, are designed to test our students physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive capacity, so that they can perform at the top of their potential on their worst day.”

During the five-day competition, the teams completed a 23-stage event, including three-night shoots.

“Almost everything we do in (special operations) is high risk, time constrained, and politically sensitive,”



Competitors in the 16th Annual United States Army Special Operations Command International Sniper Competition engage long-distance targets on a range at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, March 17, 2025. Twenty-one teams competed in the USASOC International Sniper Competition where instructors from the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School designed a series of events that challenged the three-person teams' ability to work together engaging various targets at various distances for speed and accuracy in different types of environments. (U.S. Army photo by K. Kassens)

Strong said. “(Army special operations) Soldiers need to be able to perform when their teammates and the nation need it most. For snipers, in the world of long-range precision marksmanship, inches and second's matter. The ability to remain calm under repressure and maintain presence of mind are critical for snipers to make split-second decisions in high-risk environments.”

Sniper teams in this year's competition encompassed U.S. Marine Forces Special Operations Command; U.S. Army Special Operations Command; U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command; 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 10th, 19th and 20th Special Forces groups; the 75th Ranger Regiment; U.S. Coast Guard and allied forces from Switzerland, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, United Kingdom and Canada.

"Our partner nation (special operations) competitors enhance the competition," Strong said. "Everything we do in (Army special operations) is with and through partners. Their attendance at the comp reinforces our culture and our emphasis on generational relationships. Our partners all bring their own unique skills, training, and knowledge to the comp."

He added that "they are the best from their nation and across the special operations community. This comp allows us to collaborate, share best practices, and lessons learned to grow the capability."

In its 16th year, the competition has since grown, transformed, and modernized from its conception in 2009.

Retired Master Sgt. Kevin Owens, who was a guest at the competition, recalls when he was an instructor at Special Operations Center of Excellence from 2008 to 2011, serving as a noncommissioned officer at the sniper school from 2010 to 2011.

"I was a sergeant first class at the time," Owens said. "It was me and [another instructor]. We were modernizing the schoolhouse. The sniper comp came up and in 2009 was the first year we ran it. I ran both stress tests and had a lot of input into the building of it because I was a competitive shooter at the time. If you look back, we had a big committee of instructors, but only four of us shot sniper competitions and long-range shooting competitions."

Owens added that because of the history, "more of the instructors are competitive shooters, which brings a whole new dynamic to it."

"We took that experience, and we put it into building the competition," he said. "One conversation we had was that it was a sniper competition, not a shooting competition, so it should have sniper tasks. The other conversation we had was that all the events should be geared around combat tasks. They should be realistic tasks that you would do in combat. We always tried to build it around combat experience. So, the first year, it was only open to USASOC teams because it was a test bed. The next year in 2010, it was open to all special operations units."

Owens said that "every year, it gets better and that they build upon that because you can see where gaps are.

Since 2009, each year has improved its competitive edge by implementing new tactics and techniques.

"The comp has evolved and modernized everything about long-range precision marksmanship from how we train, the weapons, ammunition, and optics we shoot, to the types of ranges and targets we shoot," Strong said. "This competition has evolved not just sniper weapons systems but combat marksmanship and lethality for the Army."

Strong added that "the competition brings in some of the best shooters and industry partners from across the world and tests their abilities to the point of failure, so we can grow the capability. Fifteen years ago, no one with a weapons system from the arms room stood a chance at winning the comp. Today, it's a level-playing field, every shooter and sniper team have the best equipment and ammunition available. We can positively identify and engage targets out past a mile with precision. The competition, modernization and lethality of sniper weapons systems grew parallel to each other over the past decade."

The competition not only served as a platform to showcase grit and skill, but to strengthen camaraderie across the force and foster interoperability.

"This is great comp and thank you for coming out to represent your unit, your service, and your nation," Strong said. "Every shooter here is phenomenal! The margins between the first and last competitor are tight. No matter what, all the competitors out here deserve recognition for their effort and throwing themselves in the arena."



A competitor in the 16th Annual United States Army Special Operations Command International Sniper Competition runs across a range in a timed event, prior to engaging targets on a range at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, March 19, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by K. Kassens)

Naval Special Warfare Command

U.S. Navy SEAL and German Naval special ops dive training



German Naval Special Operation Forces conduct dive operations during a training exercise to improve warfighting readiness with U.S. East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) off the coast of Key West, Florida, Feb. 26, 2025. Naval Special Warfare Group TWO produces, supports, and deploys the world's most lethal maritime special operations forces to ensure the United States will deter and win wars. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Katie Cox)



Air Force Special Operations Command



AFSOC reveals name for OA-1K: Skyraider II

Air Force Special Operations Command

AFSOC's newest airframe, the OA-1K, will officially be the Skyraider II. AFSOC leaders made the announcement today at the Special Air Warfare Symposium. The moniker renews the rugged and versatile nature of the A-1 Skyraider, which was in service from 1946 to the early 1980s.

"I am excited about the Skyraider II, I think we have a capability that's only ours, and we are going to have the ability to shape that into something that the rest of the nation might not even know they need right now," said Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, Air Force Special Operations commander.

The Skyraider II is a cost-effective crewed aircraft that is adaptable across the spectrum of conflict. It will have the ability to support special operations forces as well as the Joint Force through close air support, precision strike, and armed intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

"AFSOC has enduring global missions," said Brig. Gen. Craig Prather, AFSOC's Director of Strategic Plans, Programs and Requirements. "While we don't expect the Skyraider II to go mix it up with 5th and 6th generation fighters, it will provide value to our supported forces globally."

The Skyraider II is a lean, agile, modular, and hardened aircraft but one of the most distinguishing feature, like its namesake, is its tailwheel. This prominent feature gives the Skyraider II the capability for short takeoffs and landings as well as the ability to operate from unimproved or austere airfields.

"Providing scalable and precision effects is where the Skyraider II will come in. The Skyraider II could take on missions from the southwest border to Africa and create dilemmas to those we are in competition with," said Prather.



An OA-1K Skyraider II pilot conducts a walkaround on the flightline at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Jan. 28, 2025. The OA-1K Skyraider II will deliver close air support, precision strike, and armed intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli)

While in use during the Korean War and Vietnam War, the Skyraider provided extra muscle and firepower for Air Commando combat operations. Its sturdy and persistent nature was showcased when Maj. Bernard Fisher was awarded the first Medal of Honor for an Airman in the Southeast Asia War in an A-1E Skyraider. Later in 1968, Lt. Col. William A. Jones III also received the United States military's highest decoration - the Medal of Honor - for his actions in an A-1H Skyraider.

The first Skyraider II is expected to arrive at Hurlburt Field in Spring 2025.

A U.S. Air Force OA-1K Skyraider II is parked on the flightline at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Jan. 28, 2025. The OA-1K Skyraider II is a new, flexible, cost-effective crewed aircraft adaptable to deliver capabilities in support of defense priorities. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli)



Air Force Special Operations Command

Melrose Air Force Range

achieves milestone Joint National Training Capability Certification



By Tech. Sgt. Jacob Albers
27th Special Operations Public Affairs

Melrose Air Force Range has reached a new milestone - achieving Joint National Training Capability accreditation.

The JNTC program provides consistent, holistic, and relevant assessment of joint training programs across the armed services and U.S. Special Operations Command. The program documents capabilities and enables valid comparisons of joint training challenges, setting the standard for training capabilities.

“This certification enables the DOD’s ability to conduct training scenarios which translate to battlefield application here at MAFR, ultimately enabling the strategic advantage and lethality of Special Operations Forces to accomplish their mission,” said Col. Robert Johnston, 27th Special Operations Wing commander.

Due to its prime location west of Cannon Air Force Base, MAFR is the crown jewel of Air Force Special Operations Command, providing more than 4,500 training hours for Special Operation Forces every year.

These future upgrades will enhance MAFR’s existing capabilities and introduce new features, further solidifying its role as a premiere training location. This includes bolstering the range’s ability to provide critical Certification, Validation, and Verification (CV2) for its primary users: AFSOC Special Operations Task Groups and Special Operations Task Units.

Achieving CV2 for SOTU’s and SOTG’s here at MAFR helps AFSOC align with the Department of the Air Force AFORGEN cycles. Upgrades to the range also align with the Secretary of Defense’s priority of ensuring Cannon’s Air Commandos are a ready, modern, and lethal fighting force prepared to defeat and destroy our nations enemies.

The range is a training site for multiple iterations of Emerald Warrior exercises annually. This joint, combined exercise provides realistic and relevant, high-end training to prepare special operations forces, conventional forces, and international partners for the evolving strategic environment. Emerald Warrior shifts the focus to growing kinetic and non-kinetic effects in strategic competition.

EW training sites are assessed to provide seven core joint functions: Command and Control (C2), Intelligence, Fires, Movement and Maneuver, Protection, Sustainment, and Information.

“In an effort to improve our joint warfighters training experience on the range, we have identified limitations that are being targeted for improvement,” said Johnston. “The JNTC certification will provide additional financial support through Unfunded Requirements and Presidential Budget Requests to the Joint Staff.”

A U.S. Air Force CV-22 Osprey assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron lands during a training exercise at Melrose Air Force Range, New Mexico, March 3, 2025. The CV-22 is a self-deployable aircraft offering increased speed and range over rotary-wing aircraft, enabling Air Force Special Operations Command aircrews to execute long-range special operations missions. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Gracelyn Hess)



Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



U.S. Marines conduct MOUT training during MRC

U.S. Marines assigned to Marine Raider Training Center conduct military operations on urbanized terrain during Marine Raider Course on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, Feb. 12, 2025. MRC, formally known as the Individual Training Course, is a 9-month long course designed to produce Marine Raiders who can operate across the spectrum of special operations in small teams. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Evan Jones)



Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

U.S. SOCOM inducts 18 SOF warriors into Commando Hall of Honor

By Michael Bottoms
U.S. SOCOM Public Affairs

U.S. Special Operations Command inducted 18 former special operators to include nine Medal of Honor recipients into the U.S. SOCOM Commando Hall of Honor located at the U.S. SOCOM headquarters, April 16, 2025, the 38th anniversary of the command. More than 100 people attended the ceremony and watched as each inductee received a medal from U.S. Army Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander of U.S. SOCOM, and U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter, command senior enlisted leader of U.S. SOCOM.

The Commando Hall of Honor was established in 2010 by former commander of U.S. SOCOM U.S. Navy Admiral Eric T. Olson and the award recognizes individuals who have served with distinction within the special operations forces community. These individuals embody the skills, values, spirit, and courage of a SOF warrior. The award gives a notable place in history for those whose efforts and careers will forever remain unknown to the public and do not seek recognition for their accomplishments. The inductees joined the storied ranks of those who preceded them.

These members will join other recognized warriors in the Commando Hall of Honor, which includes such legendary names as Col. Aaron Bank, Col. Charles Beckwith, Maj. Gen. Sidney Shacknow, Brig. Gen. William Darby and Col. Ralph Puckett, Jr., for their contributions and legacies to the special operations community and the Nation.

“Humans are without question more important than hardware, and today is a reminder of that,” said Fenton. “The legacy of extraordinary people in SOF extends back to the very inception of modern Special Operations in 1942, well beyond the 38 years that SOCOM has existed. Inducting these 18 heroes into our Commando Hall of Honor means that their contributions, their stories and their legacies will forever be enshrined as a part of the very foundation of this SOF community.”

2025 Medal of Honor inductees:

U.S. Army Maj. Drew Dix

U.S. Air Force Col. James Fleming

U.S. Marine Corps Pvt. 1st Class Henry Gurke

U.S. Air Force Col. Joe Jackson

U.S. Navy Capt. Thomas Kelley

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Leroy Petry

U.S. Army Lt. Col. Ronald Ray

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Jose Rodela

U.S. Army Capt. Humbert Versace

2025 inductees:

U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 William Donovan

U.S. Army Maj. Gen. William Garrison

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Jerome Klingaman

U.S. Army Maj. Christian Lambertsen

U.S. Army Col. Robert Mabry

U.S. Navy Fleet Master Chief Roy Maddocks

U.S. Army Col. Louis Mason

U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Robert Patterson

U.S. Army Col. Rodger Slaughter.



U.S. Special Operations Command inducted 18 honorees into the Commando Hall of Honor during the 2025 Commando Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, April 16, 2025. The Commando Hall of Honor was established in 2010 by former U.S. SOCOM Commander Admiral Eric T. Olson and recognizes individuals who have served with distinction within the special operations forces' community. This year, U.S. SOCOM inducted 18 former special operators, including nine Medal of Honor recipients. (U.S. Air Force photos by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Special Operations cyber officer regains health with help of SOF resources

By Michael Bottoms
U.S. SOCOM Public Affairs

Life has its struggles. Its ups and downs. For U.S. Navy Lt. Cdr. Brandon Hill, his struggle was weight. Coming off an 18-month deployment from Bahrain, Hill gained a significant amount of weight. Checking into U.S. Special Operations Command he went through a physical assessment and the doctor told him he needed to make some lifestyle changes and he join the Preservation of the Force and Family Program (POTFF) to assist.

The mission of POTFF is to optimize and sustain Special Operations Forces mission readiness, longevity and performance through integrated and holistic human performance programs designed to strengthen the Force and Family.

“POTFF helped in a myriad of ways, and, in a roundabout way, I want to explore how the Navy can implement something similar for non-SOF personnel. Physically, the facilities provided through two [Theater Special Operations Commands] helped fine-tune my personal strength and conditioning. By far, the gym facilities provided to SOCOM are some of the best I have trained at to date,” said Hill. “State-of-the-art equipment paired with a professional coaching staff who suggested certain movements and lifting techniques made me feel as if I was part of a top-notch college/professional football program. Psychologically, working with [U.S. Army] Maj. Maureen Mulholland has allowed me to focus on my emotional health to help me become the best version of me.”

The Goldsboro, North Carolina, native and U.S. Navy Maritime Cyber Warfare Officer (MCWO) became inspired to become a bodybuilder by his sister-in-law, Anna-Kate.



Lt. Cdr. Brandon Hill, Navy Maritime Cyber Warfare Officer (MCWO) assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command J3 Cyber poses during an OCB Amateur Bodybuilding Contest in Tampa, Florida. Hill credits the USSOCOM's Preservation of the Force and Family organization with helping him regain his health and losing 65 pounds and 24% body fat. The mission of POTFF is to optimize and sustain Special Operations Forces mission readiness, longevity, and performance through integrated and holistic human performance programs designed to strengthen the Force and Family. Courtesy photo.

“She was living up the road in Savannah, Georgia, at the time working as a personal trainer and competed in multiple shows leading up to the OCB Tampa show, an amateur bodybuilding contest in November 2023. When she competed at OCB Tampa, I was going through very serious medical issues with my obesity. At my heaviest, I was 234 lbs. at 34% body fat and miserable. Joint pain, poor emotional health and terrible eating habits were the daily occurrence,” Hill said. “Case in point, I would leave SOCOM in the afternoons, find the nearest convenience store or Publix, snag two king-sized candy bars, and chow down over my afternoon commute. These poor habits led to very serious conversations with my [Primary Care Manager] about my health.”

Hill continued to explain how his sister-in-law motivated him to change.

“I arrived to SOCOM in very bad shape. When I watched Anna-Kate compete, a spark ignited within me like no tomorrow. While observing her and several other athletes, many of whom were other military members in the Tampa Bay area, I told myself, ‘2024, it’s my turn to get on that stage.’”

Hill began a year-long journey and gradually got in excellent shape and regained his good health.

“I became a client of local OCB legend and U.S. Navy Veteran, Coach Marcus Harris – a Yorton Cup Champion, the Super Bowl of the OCB Federation. Under his coaching and guidance, he provided a rigorous diet and strength conditioning program tailored to my specific abilities. Within 11 months, I lost 65 pounds and 24% body fat,” said Hill.

Hill also credits his journey back to good health to the positive work environment at the command’s headquarters.

“Frankly, the best command I’ve been assigned to, period. First, I’ll start with the leadership at the very top. Let my story be an example of what it means to have great leaders. Great leaders directly correlate to increased morale, individual confidence and overall performance. I remember there was one morning where we did a command run. Gen. Fenton [commander of U.S. SOCOM] and Rear Adm. Sands [former Chief of Staff of U.S. SOCOM] were both in attendance,” said Hill. “I walked up to Rear Adm. Sands following our most recent leadership discussion to express how much I enjoyed his leadership talk. In that conversation, he asked about my time at SOCOM so far and I shared with him my weight loss journey. At the time, I had lost 40 pounds. As I am sharing this story, Rear Adm. Sands called over Gen. Fenton who was standing close to us to share my good news. The fact that both took time out of their busy morning to congratulate me skyrocketed my confidence.”



Lt. Cdr. Brandon Hill, Navy Maritime Cyber Warfare Officer (MCWO) assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command J3 Cyber Office credits the USSOCOM’s Preservation of the Force and Family organization with helping him regain his health and losing 65 pounds and 24% body fat. The mission of POTFF is to optimize and sustain Special Operations Forces mission readiness, longevity, and performance through integrated and holistic human performance programs designed to strengthen the Force and Family. Courtesy photo.

Additionally, Hill credits his direct supervisor for creating a positive work environment.

“The J3 Cyber and Electronic Warfare Chief, Col Alphanso “Fonz” Adams, is a leader who I aspire to be like one day. His leadership style is textbook when we talk about what it means to be a leader,” said Hill. “I have never witnessed him having a bad day. Far too often, we see leaders who put their emotions on full display. He is someone who arrives to work daily and greets the team with a smile or handshake, takes time to listen to concerns, and routinely engages in small talk to ask how things are going. The ‘human’ factor is very much prevalent with him and really makes life working in J3 Cyber and EW incredibly easy.”

Last, Hill is thankful for his wife, Candace’s, who also provided the support he needed to go from low self-esteem to the confidence he possesses today.

“Since Brandon started this personal voyage, I have been so proud to watch him change from the inside out. I watched him set a goal, stay committed and get his body ready for competition,” said Candace. “He went from low confidence and not knowing where to begin to being self-assured and currently encourages others who face similar struggles. He has proven if you want to see change you have to be willing to change.”

The command and POTFF stay true to the first SOF Truth – “Humans are more important than hardware.” Hill’s story is but one example of that truth.

Headquarters - U.S Special Operations Command

USSOCOM hosts successful Special Operations Forces 2025 Collaboration and Alignment Forum

*By Cdr. Tim McKay
USSOCOM J3-International*

From February 4th to 6th, 2025 the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) hosted the Special Operations Forces (SOF) Collaboration and Alignment Forum (SCAF) 2025 at the Davis Conference Center, MacDill Air Force Base. This pivotal conference convened representatives from 29 Allied/Partner Nations, NATO's Special Operations Force Command (SOFCOM HQ), Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, and operational leaders from USSOCOM's various regional Theater Special Operations Commands and Service Component Commands. The primary objective was to enhance collaboration and strengthen integration among SOF entities worldwide. Guest speaker USSOCOM Deputy Commander, Lieutenant General Sean M. Farrell opened the conference and said, "we look forward to all the opportunities that we discover". He emphasized, that working together and collaboration makes all of us stronger.

The SCAF plays a crucial role in enabling U.S. and Allied/Partner forces to discover opportunities for collaborative SOF interoperability, training, and exercise initiatives that transcend traditional geographic limitations. This year's forum was designed to support the development of strategic, asymmetric advantages for the U.S. and its Allied/Partners in strategic competition, crisis response, and conflict scenarios, as detailed in various strategic documents.

Over the course of three days, participants engaged in working groups dedicated to operations, training,

and force modernization. These discussions focused on capability enhancement, interoperability expansion, and the modernization of SOF concepts and doctrine. The forum also served as a platform for transregional coordination, facilitating collaboration between Theater Special Operations Commands and Allied/Partner Nations on multinational operations and exercises. The agenda was structured around three key pillars: Operations; Exercises, Training and Education; and Force Modernization, Capability Enhancement, and Experimentation. Additionally, numerous communities of interests addressed critical global regions fostering comprehensive bilateral and multilateral discussions.

A key discussion centered on integrating SCAF into the Global Special Operations Synchronization (GSOS) framework that operationalizes USSOCOMs' Campaign Plan-Global SOF Operations (CP-GSO). This integration effort focuses on identifying opportune timing and methods for synchronizing with Allies and Partners to support Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) campaign support plans where shared objectives and goals exist. During the SCAF, the monthly Experimentation Working Group, hosted by USSOCOM J7(P), welcomed its first international participation from J3-International Allied/Partner Nation members. The J7 representative emphasized potential opportunities and collaboration with partner nations in ongoing experimentation and exercise efforts.

The outcomes of SCAF 2025 were noteworthy, with participants identifying a wealth of opportunities for enhanced cooperation among Theater Special Operations Commands, Service Component

Commands, and international SOF Allies and Partners. These collaborations are poised to bolster collective interoperability and reinforce the global alliance network, which is essential for global stability and world order.

"Building upon the valuable experience of SCAF 2025, we are dedicated to making SCAF 2026 a landmark event, maximizing productivity and engagement while prioritizing the achievement of tangible and impactful outcomes."

- Romanian Exchange Officer, J3-I Plans and Integration Branch Chief and SCAF Lead.

As the conference drew to a close, attendees expressed optimism regarding the future of SOF

operations and the lasting opportunities identified through SCAF. By continuing to invest in alliances and partnerships, the U.S. aims to harness its collective strengths, ensuring a comparative advantage in

navigating evolving global challenges. SCAF 2025 not only marked a significant gathering of SOF representatives but also reaffirmed the commitment to strategic competition and a collaborative approach to contemporary military operations. As the international security

landscape evolves, the relationships and opportunities cultivated at this forum will be instrumental in shaping the future of special operations within the USSOCOM framework.

Building upon the valuable experience of SCAF 2025, we are dedicated to making SCAF 2026 a landmark event, maximizing productivity and engagement while prioritizing the achievement of tangible and impactful outcomes.

– Romanian Exchange Officer



The United States Special Operations Command hosted the Special Operations Forces Collaboration and Alignment Forum 2025 at the Davis Conference Center, MacDill Air Force Base, Feb. 4 - 6, 2025. Attendees included representatives from 29 Allied/Partner Nations, NATO's Special Operations Force Command, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, and leaders from USSOCOM's regional commands. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller)

A U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Operator secures a position during over-the-beach training near Sattahip, Rayong province, Thailand, during March 3, 2025, exercise Cobra Gold. NSW provides maritime special operations force capabilities to enable Joint Force survivability inside denied and contested areas. Cobra Gold 2025 is the largest joint and combined exercise in mainland Asia, held annually in Thailand, showcasing the U.S. commitment to the region by building interoperability, multilateral cooperative arrangements, and advancing common interests through a commitment to allies and partners in ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman)

