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U.S. Africa Command forces completed the first engagement into Somalia since the successful repositioning of U.S. forces under Joint Task Force - Quartz Jan. 30.

“Our first engagement back into Somalia so quickly after the repositioning shows we remain committed to our Somali and regional partners and support their fight against violent extremism,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, Special Operations Command Africa commander.

During the engagement, U.S. forces trained partners on a variety of topics that reinforced combat skills and operational planning.

This engagement continues the long-standing partnership between U.S. and Somali National Army Danab forces. Under this agreement, U.S. forces provide training, advice, and support coordination to Danab units.

“Our mission has not changed. We will support our partners no matter where we have a physical presence,” said Anderson. “We look forward to continuing our strong partnerships across the region in our collective fight against extremism.”

Separately, U.S. Africa Command’s East Africa Response Force completed an emergency response exercise in Mogadishu Jan. 22. This exercise demonstrated the ability to rapidly deploy forces to protect U.S. interests in Somalia.
U.S. service members walking to their post in Somalia Jan. 29, 2021. AFRICOM forces continue to train, advise and support Somali and other East African partners in their fight against violent extremism. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Hannah Strobel.
Naval Special Operations Forces from the Greek Underwater Demolition Team, Cypriot Underwater Demolition Team, and U.S. Navy Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen conduct Visit Board Search and Seizure in Souda Bay, Greece, during a trilateral exercise, Jan. 11-29. This trilateral maritime exercise strengthened cooperation and combined capabilities between Greece, Cyprus, and the United States in the European theater to better enable global operations. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Monique O’Neil.
Naval special operations forces from the Greek Underwater Demolition Team (DYK), Cypriot Underwater Demolition Team (UDT), and U.S. Navy Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen (SWCC) joined forces to conduct a maritime exercise in Souda Bay, Greece, January 11-29.

The trilateral Special Operations Forces (SOF) exercise, which was designed to better enable global operations, included Over the Beach (OTB), Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS), and Small Boat Interdiction (SBI).

“These exercises help keep us sharp, prepared, and consistent. We are able to communicate and integrate fluidly when we train together on a regular basis,” said the U.S. Naval SWCC team leader.

The United States, Greece, NATO allies and partners, continuously train together in the European theater operations to build trust, improve levels of cooperation and combined capabilities. The integration of the Republic of Cyprus is a demonstration of NATO’s commitment to increasing interoperability with regional partners in an effort to promote collective defense and stability.

“The inclusion of Cypriot forces created an opportunity to expand capabilities and relationships with partner nations in the neighboring area. We are all strong nations individually, but we can grow stronger by working collectively, in the context of joint military training activities,” said Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos, Greek Minister of National Defense. “It’s imperative to understand that we can always learn and grow stronger by cross-training together with our partners and allies.”

Although Cyprus has been divided since 1974, the country has a unified military and training objectives.

“We know the importance of joint exercises like this and hope to work closely with partners in the future in order to promote peace and stability in our region,” said Charalambos Petrides, Minister of Defense of Cyprus.

To enhance the VBSS training experience for the SOF participants, the Hellenic Navy added a frigate, HS Kanaris, from their fleet to the exercise.

“This training was very useful for our ship and our crew. We are very proud to have the Special Forces from all three countries on board,” said Lieutenant Commander George Lykousas, member of the Hellenic Navy.

Throughout the entirety of the exercise, the SOF components used Combatant craft-assaults assigned to Special Operations Command Africa.

“The collective efforts enabling global operations increase interoperability in a maritime environment, alongside our NATO allies and partners, helping increase security and stability in the region,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. David Tabor. “We appreciate having this opportunity to build upon already strong relationships while also improving cooperation between Special Operations Command Africa and Special Operations Command Europe.”

An MC-130J Commando II and a CV-22B Osprey, both assigned to the 352nd Special Operations Wing, prepare to perform a tilt-rotor air-to-air refueling over Sweden, Nov. 13, 2020. Special operations forces create conditions for a rapid response to an imminent threat with land, air, and maritime capabilities to enhance stability in the Baltic Sea region. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Roidan Carlson.
US, Maldives share experiences during military-to-military contact

By U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer William Tonacchio
U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific


The exchange focused on communications and tactical combat casualty care. MNDF participants included members of their Special Forces, Marine Corps, Signals Battalion, and Medical Corps.

Maldivian Minister of Defence Mariya Ahmed Didi, Maldivian Chief of Defense Maj. Gen. Abdullah Shamaal, U.S. Ambassador to the Maldives Alaina...

“We share a strong and growing defense partnership with the Maldives,” said Rudd. “A free and open Indo-Pacific depends on capable networks of allies and partners.”

All participants in the training were required to quarantine and show that they were healthy during daily medical checks. This allowed a higher level of partnership and hands on medical training to take place.

During the communications training, both sides shared best practices and participated in high frequency and line-of-sight relay practical exercises.

Medical training focused on tactical combat casualty care procedures, covering essential on-scene emergency response actions and culminating in a compressive medical evacuation mission profile.

During their visit, members of the MNDF and U.S. service members conducted a simulated joint, combined personnel recovery operation. They seized a captured vessel and nearby port facility, recovering personnel and demonstrating the tactical combat casualty care and communications procedures practiced during the three-week exchange.

Military members also bonded outside of tactical training with a sports day comprised of games of futsal and beach volleyball. They also enjoyed a traditional fish barbeque at one of the training locations.

The bilateral training follows the signing of the “Framework for U.S. Department of Defense-Maldives Ministry of Defense and Security Relationship” in Philadelphia on Sept. 10. The framework sets forth both countries’ intent to deepen engagement and cooperation in support of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean and marked an important step forward in the defense partnership.

We share a strong and growing defense partnership with the Maldives. A free and open Indo-Pacific depends on capable networks of allies and partners.

— Brig. Gen. Josh Rudd
First SOCSOUTH Airman becomes a Space Force Guardian

By U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Victor Aguirre
U.S. Special Operations Command South

A young mother turned on the television to entertain her son with the United States Space Shuttle launch twenty years ago. The space launch created a great impression on the child that would influence him for many years.

“Today is special for a number of reasons, as Tech. Sgt. Narain will extend his commitment to our nation through his military service by accepting his reenlistment,” said Special Operations Command South Commander Rear Adm. Keith Davids. “The uniqueness of this event resides in the service transfer to the newest U.S. Military Service, the United States Space Force.”

In a reenlistment ceremony at Special Operations Command South broadcast online, Rear Adm. Davids swore in Tech. Sgt. Krishan Narain, a Cyberspace Support Technician, into the Space Force, Feb. 5, 2021. Narain is the first Special Operations Command South service member selected for an inter-service transfer into the Space Force.

“It is historic for this command as he becomes the first member of SOCSOUTH to dedicate his service to this new branch. Tech. Sgt. Narain joins the estimated 2,200 service members currently executing initial Space Force operations.”


It is historic for this command as he becomes the first member of SOCSOUTH to dedicate his service to this new branch. Tech. Sgt. Narain joins the estimated 2,200 service members currently executing initial Space Force operations.


Inspired by an older cousin who joined the U.S. Air National Guard as a crew chief, Narain enlisted in the U.S. Air Force on May 4, 2010, originally intending to become an aircraft maintenance specialist. Narain’s recruiter convinced him to work with cyberspace-based systems instead as it is as critical as aerial weapon systems.

“Perhaps today reflects a bit of destiny as Tech. Sgt. Narain has been passionate about space since watching a shuttle launch on TV as a young child,” Davids said.

“I was so eager to apply that within a day’s announcement of applications being accepted, my paperwork was in routing,” Narain said. “Space is a big deal and I am intrigued by the vast complexity of it.”

Additionally, Narain was selected for promotion to Master Sgt. and will lead as a senior noncommissioned officer in the Space Force.

“Tech. Sgt. Narain has already been selected for
promotion to Master Sgt. and he will lead our new Space Force as a senior NCO,” Davids said. “He will do so, bringing his many years of experience to bear that he gained from service in places like Afghanistan, Arizona, and Nevada.”

“Space is critical to national security. Everything from bank transactions to global positioning is done through Space-based systems. Our adversaries are gaining capabilities in every warfighting domain, and the Space Force gives us a competitive edge to stay in the fight in Space,” Narain said. “It boils down to providing capabilities anywhere on Earth, allowing our warfighters to protect national security interests. A prime example is when one of our Space Force organizations were able to alert an installation in Southwest Asia of an incoming missile attack saving hundreds of service members’ lives.”

Rear Adm. Davids thanked Narain for his current and continued service in the Armed Forces and his courage as Narain joins Space Force pioneers in developing a robust space presence and expanding this warfighting domain for the U.S.

Joint Task Force-Bravo, SENAFRONT observe exercise Mercury operations
Joint Task Force-Bravo, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and Panamanian service members conduct fast rope insertion extraction system training with a U.S Army UH-60 Black Hawk assigned to the 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, JTF-Bravo, during exercise Mercury at Panama, Jan. 29, 2021. Exercise Mercury highlights the fact that JTF-Bravo is an integral part of USSOUTHCOM’s enduring promise to the Central American region, providing persistent, robust engagement with partner nations. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Elijaih Tiggs.
Green Berets with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and United Arab Emirates Special Operations Soldiers train together at the U.S. Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, Calif., Feb. 1, 2021. U.S. and UAE Special Forces partnered for a mountainous, high-altitude and cold-weather training exercise in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Gregory T. Summers.
On March 24, 1969, a young Special Forces Soldier from Georgia, found himself thousands of miles away from home and family. Instead of coaching Little League or playing catch, he was leading a group of Vietnamese soldiers who were serving in the Civilian Irregular Defense Group. The CIDG was part of the Mobile Strike Force Command – otherwise known as Mike teams, which were trained and led by American Special Forces.

The Soldier, Staff Sgt. William Maud Bryant, came of age during segregation, a time of economic and social inequality. Unlike many people at that time, Bryant volunteered to join the Army at the age of 20. His first assignment was with the 82nd Airborne Division. Later, he volunteered to go through Ranger School, graduating as the Honor Graduate. When he returned to Fort Bragg, he decided to tackle another challenge: Special Forces. He wrote in his journal that “he would see the guys on Fort Bragg who wore the Green Beret, and he wanted to do what they did.” It was at Fort Bragg, as a Special Forces Soldiers, Bryant found his calling. He wrote that he had “found what he was looking for in the Army . . . a chance to lead from the front.” He further explained that “amongst the Green Berets, race, color or creed did not matter.”

With a career he enjoyed and a family he loved, Bryant continued to excel in his military life and his home life. He had a wife, a daughter and two sons. For love of country, he left his family back at Fort Bragg and headed to Vietnam. Bryant was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group. At that time, the 5th SFG (A) was leading the fight in Vietnam. Once in country, Bryant trained, advised and assisted a paramilitary counterinsurgency force that included those indigenous to the area — known as Light Force 321. On March 24, while leading a patrol of the group in the Long Khanh Province, Bryant’s base camp came under fire. During a 34 hour attack, Bryant moved through enemy fire while establishing a defense perimeter, directing fire, distributing ammunition, assisting the wounded and leading a patrol.

During the patrol, Bryant was wounded but called for
helicopter support and directed suppressive fire toward enemy positions. Without fear, Bryant charged at an enemy automatic weapons position, destroying three of its defenders, before becoming mortally wounded by an enemy rocket. When a helicopter drop of ammunition was made to re-supply the beleaguered force Bryant, with complete disregard for his safety, ran through the heavy enemy fire to retrieve the scattered ammunition boxes and distributed needed ammunition to his men.

During a lull in the intense fighting, he led a patrol outside the perimeter to obtain information of the enemy. The patrol came under intense automatic weapons fire and was pinned down. Bryant single-handedly repulsed one enemy attack on his small force and by his heroic action inspired his men to fight off other assaults. Seeing a wounded enemy soldier some distance from the patrol location, he crawled forward alone under heavy fire to retrieve the soldier for intelligence purposes. Finding that the enemy soldier had expired, Bryant crawled back to his patrol and led his men back to the company position where he again took command of the defense. As the siege continued, Bryant organized and led a patrol in a daring attempt to break through the enemy encirclement. The patrol had advanced some 200 meters by heavy fighting when it was pinned down by the intense automatic weapons fire from heavily fortified bunkers, and he was severely wounded. Despite his wounds he rallied his men, called for a helicopter gunship support, and directed heavy suppressive fire upon the enemy positions. Following the last gunship attack, Bryant fearlessly charged an enemy automatic weapons position, overrunning it, and single-handedly destroying its three defenders. Inspired by his heroic example, his men renewed their attack on the entrenched enemy. While regrouping his small force for the final assault against the enemy, Bryant died.

For his actions on that day, Bryant was posthumously promoted to Sergeant First Class and was awarded the highest honor a Soldier can earn – the Medal of Honor. The citation reads: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. His selfless concern for his comrades, at the cost of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

In September 1974, the headquarters building of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School was dedicated in Bryant’s memory. On Feb. 16, 2021 the SWCS Command commemorated the 50th anniversary of Bryant’s sacrifice with a ceremony and the opening of the Bryant Gallery in the headquarters lobby. Bryant’s sons, Greg and Kelvin and their wives were on hand to take part in the ceremony.

Prior to the ceremony members of the SWCS staff visited the Bryants in their home and listened to their recollections and looked through what they had of their fathers, scrapbooks with photos, awards that proclaimed his bravery and love of country and love of his fellow soldiers. They also had the opportunity to see Bryant’s Medal that was hanging on a wall in Greg’s house.

Greg noted that his friends would come by and they would see it and think it was cool, but when he saw the reaction from the Soldiers who visited his home, he realized where the medal needed to be, and the family donated the Medal of Honor to SWCS as the centerpiece of the Bryant Gallery.

During the commemoration ceremony, Maj. Gen. Patrick Roberson, the Commander of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, noted, “Today, on the 50th Anniversary of President Nixon’s presentation of the Medal of Honor to Sgt. 1st Class Bryant’s family, we once again gather to commemorate his legacy. Today, he would have been 88.

“On 24 March, Sergeant 1st Class Bryant gave the last full measure of devotion to his teammates, his partners, and to the Nation. Sergeant 1st Class Bryant so firmly believed in the values of freedom and prosperity, that he was willing to give his life to this cause. He fought bravely, leading from the front, until his last breath in the triple canopy jungle of Vietnam, on a lone fire base…with his comrades.”

The lessons learned from SFC Bryant’s experiences — operating in austere and remote conditions and fighting by, with, and through indigenous partner forces — are timeless.

While the brothers can barely remember the ceremony at the White House, where President Richard Nixon posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor to their mother, seeing it in the lobby of the headquarters building that still carries his name was emotional for them, but it let them see and understand the kind of man their father was, and that while he is gone, he has not been forgotten.

In September 1974, Sgt. 1st Class William M. Bryant’s family attended the ceremony dedicating the headquarters building of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School in his memory. U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School courtesy photo.
Naval Special Warfare Command

Special warfare commands at Stennis Space Center hold a chief pinning ceremony

By Angela Fry
Naval Special Warfare Group Four

United States Naval Special Warfare Group Four commands located at the John C. Stennis Space Center in South Mississippi, recently recognized 19 Sailors advancing to chief petty officer in a formal pinning ceremony witnessed by a small gathering of family, command leadership, and fellow chiefs.

The ceremony, which is normally held in September but delayed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, is a time-honored U.S. Navy tradition that has been performed for more than 100 years. The pinning ceremony is described as the most significant transition that U.S. Sailors will ever make in their military careers.

The initiation process to the rank of chief petty officer ensures that this promotion is not focused on individual accomplishment but anchored in the institutional strengths of the Navy. During the ceremony, which was held along the banks of the Pearl River, the Sailors were pinned with the insignia that represents their new ranks, culminating years of training, assignments, and deployments away from their families.

While all branches of armed forces within the U.S. military utilize noncommissioned and commissioned officers, the Navy is the only armed force that has the rank equivalent to the USN bureau appointed chief petty officer, which is what makes this milestone in a Sailor’s career even more distinctive. Although the pay grade E7 is equivalent to those of the same rank in other services, the Navy is unique in that it confers more authority and responsibility on the chief, while demanding more performance and results than any of the other services. The Navy chief is required to be a fountain of wisdom, the ambassador of good will, and the authority on personnel relations, as well as the technical expert within their field.

NSW commands located at the Stennis Space Center consist of the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School, Special Boat Team 22, and NSWG-4 Training Detachment Stennis. The three NSW commands are situated on the NSW Western Maneuver Area Training Range, which is composed of some of the finest riverine and littoral training areas in the world.

NAVSCIATTTS is a security cooperation schoolhouse operating under NSW in support of Foreign Security Assistance and geographic combatant commanders’ theater security cooperation priorities. SBT-22’s mission is to organize, mentor, train and equip NSW personnel to conduct the full spectrum of special operations in riverine and coastal environments to support fleet and joint commanders worldwide. Det. Stennis provides training for more than 250 deploying special warfare combatant-craft crewman operators yearly from NSW’s three SBTs located in Virginia Beach, Virginia; Coronado, California; and the Stennis Space Center.

(Opposite page) United States Navy Chief Petty Officer Jesus Mercado salutes the small gathering of family, command leadership, and fellow chiefs during the formal Naval Special Warfare Stennis CPO pinning ceremony held on Jan. 29, 2021 at the John Stennis Space Center in South Mississippi. NSW commands located at the Stennis Space Center consist of the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School, Special Boat Team 22, and NSWG-4 Training Detachment Stennis. The three NSW commands are situated on the NSW Western Maneuver Area Training Range, which is composed of some of the finest riverine and littoral training areas in the world. Photo by Michael Williams.

Tip of the Spear
Sailors, attached to Naval Special Warfare Group 1, and 1st Medical Battalion, 1st Marine Logistic Group, wait for National Guardsmen, attached to 7-158th Aviation Regiment, General Support Aviation Brigade, to signal the loading of a simulated casualty. Naval Special Warfare Group 1 mans, trains, equip, develops and sustain Naval Special Warfare Forces to support combatant commanders and US national interests. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Eric Chan.
492d Special Operations Wing

When 1st Lts. Nicholas Brandt and Ricardo Orocho, pilots assigned to the 524th Special Operations Squadron, prepared for their training flight at Duke Field, Florida, they were unaware of the significance of the seemingly routine mission.

“While both Lt. Orocho and I knew we were flying together, I don’t think either one of us was readily aware of the historical significance of this flight,” said Brandt, who graduated from the program in August of 2018.

For the first time in Air Force Special Operations Command history, two new graduates from the Air Education and Training Command’s Pilot Training

Next (PTN), served as aircraft commander and co-pilot on a mission sortie.

“When we scheduled them to fly together, we weren’t looking at the historical nature of the flight,” said Lt. Col. Joshua Jensen, 524th SOS commander. “Their proficiency in accomplishing the objectives placed before them and their dedication to the mission are why we trust them at such an early point in their careers.”

PTN is part of AETC’s initiative to “reimagine” how the Air Force prepares its next generation of pilots. Unlike traditional pilot training, which is accomplished in phases and relies on the availability of aircraft, PTN improves the program by utilizing emerging technology to innovate training and provides a better, more adaptive and accessible learning environment. Additionally, by augmenting current practices with new technology, PTN pilots are trained and prepared for their follow-on formal training units at a fraction of the current time and cost.

“I think the misnomer about Pilot Training Next is that it was meant to replace undergraduate pilot training, when really it was meant to improve it. It was meant to innovate where innovation was needed. I do think it prepares aircrew to accomplish the mission.”

— Lt. Ricardo Orocho

I think the misnomer about Pilot Training Next is that it was meant to replace undergraduate pilot training, when really it was meant to improve it. It was meant to innovate where innovation was needed. I do think it prepares aircrew to accomplish the mission.

— Lt. Ricardo Orocho

The program, which includes virtual reality, artificial intelligence and data analytics, can be tailored to the training environment and individual student in ways that that training previously did not incorporate. It also includes a more advanced training aircraft and focuses heavily on developing peer-level conflict and multi-domain competencies.

This flight was made possible due to Brandt being upgraded early to aircraft commander. He credits his success as an Air Commando to the improved curriculum and innovative approach that was able to prepare him for the AFSOC mission.

“The program helped build the progressive mindset that AFSOC focuses on to accomplish our global mission,” said Brandt. “I think AFSOC and the PTN community very much subscribe to this same mindset — constantly finding new systems to implement and technologies to use to stay efficient, effective and relevant moving into the future.”
U.S. Air Force Special Tactics operators load hurricane relief supplies onto a CH-47 Chinook helicopter, assigned to the 1-228th Aviation Regiment, Joint Task Force-Bravo, before departing Hector C. Moncado Air Base, La Ceiba, Honduras, Nov. 27, 2020. The mission was in support of the U.S. government’s relief efforts following the devastation of Hurricane Iota. Special Tactics supported Joint Task Force-Bravo who are strategically located to rapidly respond to natural disasters and humanitarian aid efforts. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Rose Gudex.

**By U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Rose Gudex**  
24th Special Operations Wing

U.S. Air Force Special Tactics operators from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida, responded to a request for humanitarian assistance following the devastation of Hurricanes Eta and Iota in Central America.

Within hours of formal notification, the team deployed in support of Joint Task Force – Bravo and U.S. Southern Command, and based their operations out of Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras.

“It is important for the United States to help other nations when we can to strengthen the relationships with our allies and partners,” said Lt. Col. Jesse Wilson, 23rd STS commander.
One of the primary capabilities of Special Tactics is the global access mission, which provides the U.S. military and partner forces access to anywhere in the world. That mission includes assessing and surveying landing zones for aircraft, as well as controlling the airspace of major airfields to clandestine dirt strips in any environment, including those devastated by natural disasters.

“Our (Air Force Special Operations Command) team is able to rapidly deploy by any means available,” Wilson said. The team was trained and ready “to survey, establish and control austere airfields in order to bring in humanitarian aid to help the people of Honduras.”

A Special Tactics Officers from the 23rd STS said the team was prepared to conduct sustained austere air traffic control operations for a period of up to two weeks. They also deployed with limited personnel recovery equipment in the event a recovery situation arose due to the destruction caused by the hurricanes.

The biggest challenge the team faced in Honduras was getting to the objectives, partially due to weather in the mountains and surrounding the isolated locations.

“The airfields we assessed were in remote regions lacking robust infrastructure,” the STO said. “We were able to overcome the challenge by using creative problem solving and splitting the team in order to access the airfields from multiple avenues of approach.”

One team flew to the north side of Honduras to approach the airfield from the coastline, while the other drove into the mountains, then flew to the isolated location on a helicopter. After arrival, the team conducted an airfield survey in Puerto Lempira and then Mocoron in the department of Gracias a Dios, Honduras.

Data collected by the ST team provided commanders with valuable insights on the selection and suitability of airfields for providing much needed supplies to the people of Honduras, the STO said.

“Our team was able to answer priority information requirements for JTF-Bravo, providing them the support they needed in order to continue successful (hurricane assistance and disaster relief) operations in Honduras,” the STO said.

The 23rd STS is no stranger to hurricane relief operations.

Two short years ago, an ST team from the 23rd STS opened a runway at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, after Hurricane Michael caused catastrophic damage to the base. The team controlled more than 30 aircraft over a period of three days until the 821st Contingency Response Group, Travis Air Force Base, California, took over.

Special Tactics operators constantly train and hone their skills for global access and personnel recovery in order to remain ready for the day when disaster strikes. Any place. Any time. Anywhere.
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command celebrates 15th anniversary

By U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command


Fifteen years ago, the Marine Corps combined several of its specialized and uniquely trained units to become pioneers in a new chapter of Marine Corps history within Special Operations Command. While MARSOC can still be considered a relatively young unit, the history of Marine Corps specialized forces can be traced back much further than 2006.

The original Marine Raiders date back to World War II when the Marines were called on to solve complex problems posed by our nation’s adversaries. These specially trained Marines helped turn the tide in the early stages against the imperial Japanese Army. In honor and recognition of those that came before, the Marine Corps officially re-designated those serving with MARSOC as Marine Raiders in 2015.

MARSOC was created Feb. 24, 2006, by the Marine Corps at the request of U.S. Special Operations Command to execute unconventional missions in a variety of environments. At its inception, MARSOC was composed of senior Force Reconnaissance Marines that stood up 1st and 2nd Marine Special Operations Battalions under the new Marine Special Operations Advisor Group. These Marines brought decades of combat experience to the newly created unit from their time with the Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable Teams.

The first commander of MARSOC, Lt. Gen. Dennis J. Hejlik, was unable to attend the event due to weather but passed on his remarks to commemorate the fifteen-year milestone. “As MARSOC enters its 16th year, it’s important to know and understand the history of this exceptional group of warriors, where you came from, why and how.” Hejlik’s words continued to be read, “You have become the go-to Special Operations Force in the battlefield and are becoming world renown as...
America’s finest and most intelligent warriors with unparalleled technology, intelligence gathering and dissemination to many controlled surveillance, direct action and training techniques.”

MARSOC remains unique in how they build a fully capable special operations company. MARSOC utilizes the skills already found in the Fleet Marine Force by augmenting support Marines with advanced training and schools and preparing them to serve as Special Operations Capability Specialists. These SOCS then attach to and train with the companies in order to deploy as a fully enabled and capable unit.

MARSOC’s accomplishments over the last year include support to 13 named operations across 18 countries. While forward deployed, Raiders were called upon to respond to emerging situations and support regional partners in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Distributed teams supported diverse and complex missions in conflict zones and assisted in setting the conditions for integrated warfighting capacity of special operations forces, conventional forces, regional partner forces and allies adept in meeting the nation’s requirements in conflict and competition.

Major Gen. James F. Glynn, MARSOC commander, spoke of the accomplishments of MARSOC as well as his vision for the future, “We recognized that the strength of our organization would be the drive and the pride, the character, the esprit and the commitment to be the best. You all represent and are setting the conditions like those 15 years ago, that will stand here 15 years from now and profess with pride all that has been achieved.”

The fighting characteristics of the WWII Raiders and their unconquerable spirit will live on in the modern era as MARSOC proudly carries the Raider tradition into the twenty-first century. “Marines are who we are. Special operations are what we do.” This mantra points to the foundational experiences that unite all Marine Raiders.
Army Sgt. 1st Class Ashley distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity while serving with Detachment A-101, Company C. Ashley was the senior Special Forces Advisor of a hastily organized assault force whose mission was to rescue entrapped U.S. Special Forces advisers at Camp Lang Vei Feb. 6 - 7, 1968. During the initial attack on the Special Forces camp by North Vietnamese Army forces, Ashley supported the camp with high-explosive and illumination mortar rounds. When communications were lost with the main camp, he assumed the additional responsibility of directing air strikes and artillery support. Ashley organized and equipped a small assault force composed of local friendly personnel. During the ensuing battle, Ashley led a total of five vigorous assaults against the enemy, continuously exposing himself to a voluminous hail of enemy grenades, machine gun and automatic-weapons fire. During his fifth and final assault, he adjusted air strikes nearly on top of his assault element, forcing the enemy to withdraw and resulting in friendly control of the summit of the hill. While exposing himself to intense enemy fire, he was seriously wounded by machine-gun fire but continued his mission without regard for his personal safety. After the fifth assault he lost consciousness and was carried from the summit by his comrades only to suffer a fatal wound when an enemy artillery round landed in the area. Ashley's bravery at the cost of his life was in the highest traditions of the military service, and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, Army Sgt. 1st Class Bryant, assigned to Company A, distinguished himself while serving as commanding officer of Civilian Irregular Defense Group Company 321, 2d Battalion, 3d Mobile Strike Force Command, during combat operations March 24, 1969. The battalion came under heavy fire and became surrounded by the elements of three enemy regiments. Bryant displayed extraordinary heroism throughout the succeeding 34 hours of incessant attack as he moved throughout the company position heedless of the intense hostile fire while establishing and improving the defensive perimeter, directing fire during critical phases of the battle, distributing ammunition, assisting the wounded, and providing the leadership and inspirational example of courage to his men. As the siege continued, Bryant fell mortally wounded by an enemy rocket. Bryant's selfless concern for his comrades, at the cost of his life above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.
Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris
Medal of Honor recipient

Army Staff Sgt. Melvin Morris distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as commander of a strike force drawn from Company D, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, during combat operations against an armed enemy in the vicinity of Chi Lang, Republic of Vietnam on Sept. 17, 1969. On that afternoon, Morris’ affiliated companies encountered an extensive enemy mine field and were subsequently engaged by a hostile force. Morris learned by radio that a fellow team commander had been killed near an enemy bunker and he immediately reorganized his men into an effective assault posture before advancing forward and splitting off with two men to recover the team commander’s body. Observing the maneuver, the hostile force concentrated its fire on Morris’ three-man element and successfully wounded both men accompanying him. After assisting the two wounded men back to his forces’ lines, Morris charged forward into withering enemy fire with only his men’s suppressive fire as cover. While enemy machine gun emplacements continuously directed strafing fusillades against him, Morris destroyed the positions with hand grenades and continued his assault, ultimately eliminating four bunkers. Upon reaching the bunker nearest the fallen team commander, Morris repulsed the enemy, retrieved his comrade and began the arduous trek back to friendly lines. He was wounded three times as he struggled forward, but ultimately succeeded in returning his fallen comrade to a friendly position. Morris’ extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Maj. James Capers Jr.
USSOCOM Commando Hall of Honor

In 1965, Marine Corps Maj. (Ret.) James Capers Jr., volunteered for duty in Southeast Asia with the newly formed 3rd Force Reconnaissance Company, 3rd Marine Division. He was promoted to staff sergeant in February 1966 and in November was awarded a battlefield commission to second lieutenant. During his tour in Vietnam, Capers participated in 64 long-range reconnaissance and combat patrols, many of these patrols originated in and around firebase Khe San. He led a team of divers on a ship bottom search of the USS Boxer in Nha Trang Harbor with the mission to search, for explosives and saboteurs. Capers participated in five major campaigns and Operation Double Talk, in which his patrol attempted to rescue POWs being held in a prison camp behind enemy lines. Upon arrival, the prison had been evacuated, but the camp was destroyed by the patrol and Capers received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his actions. In 1967, as a result of hostile action on a long-range reconnaissance patrol behind enemy lines in Phuloc, Vietnam, Capers was wounded and eventually evacuated to Bethesda Naval Hospital, Md. Capers retired from the U.S. Marine Corps in November 1978. Capers was inducted into the USSOCOM Commando Hall of Honor in 2010.
A beautiful spring day. A bike ride. Then a violent crash.

April 7, 2019 was a day that would change the lives of Army Lt. Col. Larry Wyatt, U.S. Special Operations Command’s Physician Assistant and clinic director, and his mentor, retired Army Col. Thomas Wells, a Princeton University trained trauma surgeon and former Army Ranger, forever.

Wyatt had to give up running for physical reasons so Wells, an avid biker, suggested he take up cycling. Out on only his second bike ride with Wells on the Pinellas bike trail near Tampa, Florida while crossing a bridge they saw two motorcycles come racing toward them.

“We were at mile marker 25 on the trail coming on the bridge and I could see a motorcycle front end coming up and the trail motorcycle pulled around to pass and they approached us laterally and there was nowhere to go because of the chain link fence around the bridge,” said Wyatt.

The motorcycles struck the pair at more than an estimated 50 miles per hour knocking them unconscious. Wyatt was dragged approximately 30 yards after the collision.

“I came to maybe 15 to 20 seconds after impact, and all I could hear was my dad’s voice in my head,” Wyatt recalled. “He’s an old mountain man from the back woods of Oregon, and he raised my brothers and I rough, but fair and loving. I could just hear him saying ‘You will face rough times in your life. You always get up on your own two feet by yourself. So, get up.’”

Wyatt was badly hurt so rising to his feet was no easy task. He had serious head injuries to include a broken nose, fractured teeth, and split his eyebrow. Even worse, his left forearm was badly mangled; blood gushed from a hole showing the bone. Wyatt got to his feet asked one of the motorcyclists for his belt and tied a tourniquet around his arm to stop the bleeding. Once he secured the tourniquet, he attended to the two motorcyclists and advised them to sit down. Then he walked to where Wells laid entangled with the second motorcycle.

“I could hear Doc moaning. I was still trying to
clear my head because I’m still foggy. I see Doc laying on the motorcycle. I had one of the riders help me move Doc away from the motorcycle and then began to treat him,” Wyatt said.

Wells’ injuries appeared to be even more substantial. Wyatt hearkened back to his days as a Special Forces medical sergeant and began to do a hands-on assessment of all of Wells’ injuries and stabilized him.

“I performed what is called crepitus grimace exam on Doc feeling for grinding of the broken bones. Orthopedics is not the gentle part of medicine and he was in a lot of pain,” said Wyatt.

As he worked on Wells the makeshift tourniquet was not working well and his blood dripped on his friend whom he considers to be like an older brother. “I kept apologizing, ‘I’m sorry for bleeding on you, Doc,’” Wyatt recalled. “And his response was, ‘just do what you got to do.’”

He borrowed the phone of one of the motorcyclists and communicated the list of injuries to the 911 dispatch. Emergency services arrived and had to walk up and around because they were still on the bridge. “Doc kept saying, ‘don’t go anywhere,’” Wyatt said.

“And I said, ‘I’m not going anywhere, brother, I’m right here with you.’”

Wyatt has had more than a year-and-a-half recovery going through multiple surgeries to repair his injuries. Wells had nearly the same arduous recovery journey. Both men still need an additional surgery.


“Wyatt’s personal example of selfless service, superb medical knowledge, and unhesitating decisive action are consistent with the greatest traditions of our uniformed services and played a pivotal role in saving the lives of two individuals, including himself,” the citation reads.

Wyatt did take away one lesson from the accident promising himself he would carry a tourniquet with him everywhere he goes. “In the military we always do an after-action review replaying what could we have done better.” Wyatt said. “I wish I had a real tourniquet because I was bleeding everywhere, and I was just worried about my brother.”

By Michael Bottoms  
USSOCOM Office of Communication

Born into the Hazara Tribe, the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, 4-year-old Sher Najafy and his family had to flee from Afghanistan to Pakistan because of the menacing Taliban threat in 1990. So began the life journey of now U.S. Army Capt. Sher Najafy.

“When my family and I moved to Pakistan it was the end of the Soviet Union occupation and the Taliban started to become powerful, so families began migrating to Iran, Europe, Turkey or Pakistan,” Najafy said. “I remember going through the Taliban checkpoints. I was part of Hazara Tribe, the minority tribe, so it was not safe because of the genocide against my tribe. That is why my parents decided to move to Pakistan.”

Najafy and his family spent the next ten years living in Quetta, Pakistan, waiting for the Afghanistan civil war to be over. After 9/11 occurred and the Americans began dismantling the Taliban, his family decided to return to his hometown of Ghe Ghanto in the Ghazni province. A dedicated student, he earned his high school diploma at the age of 16, a significant achievement in Afghanistan considering UNICEF reports only 20 percent of the Afghan population had earned their diploma at that time.

Diploma in hand, Najafy decided to move to the country’s capital, Kabul. While there he joined the Afghanistan National Army and six months later, he became a transportation officer, still just 16. As a transportation officer he worked with the Central Movement Agency where he interacted regularly with American military learning and becoming proficient in English.

“We shared an office with the American military. I worked with the U.S. Navy, Air Force and Army and I learned English pretty quickly,” Najafy said. “We would do convoys together and eventually; I worked as a translator at meetings.”

Najafy served almost four years in the Afghan Army, but his work with the Americans made him want to enlist into the American Army.

In 2009, Najafy immigrated to the United States and got his green card. Living in Sterling Heights, Michigan, he began taking classes at Macomb Community College. He enlisted in the Army Reserve in 2010 as a supply specialist.

“I started out enlisted as a ‘Private Fuzzy’ [Nickname for lowest Army rank] and I was able to pass my Army fitness training test and I had some college credits, so I was promoted to Private First Class before shipping to basic training. When I was in boot camp, I applied to become an American citizen,” said Najafy. “Six months later, after the advanced Individual training, I became an American citizen.”

After earning his American citizenship in 2011, Najafy decided he wanted to go to college. He enrolled at the University of Michigan and became a member of the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps and received a scholarship. Najafy was commissioned as a Military Intelligence officer in 2015 when he graduated from Michigan.

The now 34-year-old Najafy has had assignments to
European Command’s Intelligence Directorate in Stuttgart, Germany, and the National Ground Intelligence Center, Charlottesville, Virginia. Today, he assigned to USSOCOM’s Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center working as an all-source, intelligence analyst.

Najafy’s mother, who has lived with her son since 2018, attended his recent promotion ceremony to captain and cried with pride.

A co-worker, Christopher Fridley, Deputy Branch Chief for the Intelligence Information Operations Cyber Branch, wondered what his mother thought about her son’s remarkable life.

“Think about this – sometime during the 1990s, Afghanistan was in complete civil war, you’re driving a beat-up old car through the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan with your children who are all probably under the age of 10. Your husband cannot come with you, he must meet you in Pakistan because if the Taliban find military aged males, they’re getting involuntary recruited. You get stopped at a Taliban check point just before the Pakistan border; the guards yell at you, ask you where your husband is, probably don’t like you because you’re female. The guards are probably waving their AK-47s back and forth; you don’t know what’s going to happen next; your children are in such danger. Finally, after a brief scare and arguing, you’re allowed to pass, then off to Pakistan.

“Now fast forward to 2020. That same child who rode with you in the back of your beat-up old car is now standing in a theater getting recognized, promoted, and swearing an oath as an officer and captain in the strongest Army in the world. You see your son standing up there, chest sticking out, proud to be a captain in the United States Army! Not only that, this ‘once upon a time little kid from Afghanistan’ is pursuing his master’s degree in Intelligence from the prestigious National Intelligence University. Her pride must be immense,” Fridley said.

Reflecting on his journey to American citizenship Najafy sums it up by saying “For me it’s a big deal and I have been working in the U.S. for about 12 years now. Earning the rank of captain in the U.S. Army was not easy. It’s been hard work. It’s been a journey throughout my enlisted and officer career. I have had great mentors and colleagues along the way. I’m living my American Dream. For some it may be a million-dollar house, but for me this was always my dream to serve in the U.S. Army as an officer as long as possible.”
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.
Ms. Carissa McCollum, daughter of Army Master Sgt. (Ret.) Alan Daniel McCollum, made her first skydive with the United States Special Operations Command Parachute Team – the Para-Commandos, on Jan. 31, 2021, at Skydive City in Zephyrhills, Fla. Jumping from a Twin Otter at 13,500 feet with Tandem Instructor/Evaluator Army Sgt. Major Jose Vazquez, was a special way for Carissa to honor her father, a 21-year U.S. Army veteran and long-time Special Operations Forces rigger and military freefall instructor. Alan continued to serve as a police officer with the Corpus Christi, Texas Police Department after military retirement, and made the ultimate sacrifice one year earlier on Jan. 31, 2020, when he was killed in the line of duty. Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Cory Christiansen.