

U.S. Special Operations Command MacDill AFB, Florida

# Tip of the Spear

February 2025



**SOCOM athletes compete at  
Invictus games, display warrior ethos**

# United States Special Operations Command



**SOCOM athletes compete at Invictus games, display warrior ethos**  
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## Tip of the Spear

**U.S. Army Gen. Bryan P. Fenton**  
Commander, USSOCOM

**Command Sgt. Maj. Shane W. Shorter**  
Senior Enlisted Leader, USSOCOM

U.S. Army Col. Alexandra Weiskopf  
Special Operations  
Public Affairs Director

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Bunkley  
Special Operations  
Public Affairs Sergeant Major

Michael Bottoms  
Managing Editor

U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller  
NCOIC

## 2022 Defense Media Merit Award Winner

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*(Cover) Retired Army Master Sgt Ivan Morera and retired Air Force Colonel Jacquelyn Marty are co-captains of Team U.S. They took a moment to strike a pose before talking to the team about bonding during the 2025 Team U.S. Invictus Games Training Camp located at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington, February 2 – 5, 2025. In total, 50 competitors will represent the United States at the Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025 from February 8-16, 2025. The Invictus Games is an international sporting event for wounded, injured, and ill active duty and Veteran military personnel. The Games use the power of sport to support recovery and rehabilitation and generate a wider understanding and respect for those who serve their country. DoD photo by Corey Wallace.*

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# U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



## SOCAF and Tunisian partners co-host Silent Warrior 2024 in Africa

*The Maharani Desert Patrol, Tunisian 2nd Territorial Saharien Battalion, brief Silent Warrior 2024 attendees visiting Tozier, Tunisia, Dec. 12, 2024. The Mahari Desert Patrol is a mounted camel unit that protects the security and integrity of Tunisia's land borders. Silent Warrior is a forum for senior military leaders to discuss shared concerns and identify collaborative solutions to the strategic, operational and tactical issues in Africa. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio.*





# U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



## SOCKOR personnel strengthen ethical leadership at JSOU course

By Molly Polzin,  
Special Operations Command Korea

From Dec. 3-5, 2024, personnel with the Special Operations Command Korea headquarters staff and subordinate units enhanced their skills during the ethical leadership course at Camp Humphreys, Republic of Korea.

Sponsored and facilitated by the command's chaplain, Maj. Joonki Hong, the course honed in on U.S. Special Operations Command's 1st Special Operations Forces Truth, which states, "humans are more important than hardware."

The USSOCOM ethical advisory team—Rev. Dr. John Edgar Caterson, Dr. Kari A. Thyne, Mr. Michael W. Clark, Chaplain Col. Christopher Dickey, and Sgt. Maj. Howie Crosby—led the course and helped guide developmental discussions with the SOCKOR participants.

"The Religious Support Team is charged by joint doctrine to be the ethical advisors to the command," said Crosby, USSOCOM Special Operations Chaplain's Office Senior Enlisted Advisor. "This course fulfills that mandate by providing the environmental map so the service member can identify where they are on the moral, ethical continuum."

Crosby also articulated that the curriculum empowers participants through 13 ethical battle drills, or exercises, that provide people with the

experience and knowledge to make ethically and morally-based decisions in support of national defense priorities.

This sentiment amplified a key theme SOCKOR participants and leaders expressed an interest in, ensuring uninhibited leadership when high stress and distance factor into those decisions.

In his opening remarks for the course, Hong's tone for the participants impressed that their

commitment to advancing their personal skills and training better supports not only their own well-being, but that of their troops and the people they interact with.

"Here at SOCKOR we're closer to more threats listed in our National Defense Strategy than any other

[Theater Special Operations Command]," said Hong. "Ensuring we've invested in our people through the spiritual, moral, and ethical lines of effort has real impacts on our ability to meet those strategy goals."

Hong further emphasized that the SOCKOR culture must continue to encourage an environment where conversations about ethical decisions occur naturally.

"In ambiguous environments, leaders must balance mission success with ethical decision-making, even when the lines blur," said Clark.

A concern that the team preemptively addresses through the course material is a concept known as ethical drift, where people start to lose sight of their personal and organizational moral compass over time.

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*This course is targeted and specific for the SOF community. Training for ethical leadership should be just as rigorous and intentional as tactical and operational training.*

— John Caterson, USSOCOM Chaplain  
executive subject matter expert and Joint Special Operations University program director.

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“This course is targeted and specific for the SOF community,” stated John Caterson, USSOCOM Chaplain executive subject matter expert and Joint Special Operations University program director. “Training for ethical leadership should be just as rigorous and intentional as tactical and operational training.”

Though the conference concludes with participants receiving a certificate of completion, the real value the instructors and Hong described is carried inside each individual who participated.

“We need to keep in mind that even in the SOF community, we’re humans and susceptible to making decisions drifting from our meaning, values, and purpose,” said Hong. “We increase awareness of those factors offered in this course to prevent potential moral drift.”

The JSOU regularly hosts the ethical leadership and other courses as a means to invest in the broader SOCOM community. For course information, people can reference their website at: <https://jsou.edu/>.



*Mr. Michael W. Clark II, Joint Special Operations University, College of Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict faculty member, presents during an ethical leadership course at Camp Humphreys, Republic of Korea on Dec. 4, 2024. Special Operations Command Korea hosted the course taught by JSOU instructors who specialize in ethical leadership. The course enables people to develop their leadership skills through active discussions and exercises structured around 13 ethical battle drills. Photo by Pfc. Donghan Kim.*

*U.S. Special Operations  
Command - Korea*



# **SOCKOR maintains readiness through routine Airborne training**

*Service members assigned to Special Operations Command-Korea exit a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division/ROK-US Combined Division during a routine currency and proficiency static line jump on Dec. 6, 2024, at Camp Humphreys, Republic of Korea. The 2nd Infantry Division/ROK-US Combined Division frequently supports special operations readiness requirements, exemplifying the firm relationship between conventional and special operations forces. Photo by Pfc. Donghan Kim.*



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



## SOC PAC forces train in the East China Sea

*A U.S. Marine Corps F-35 Lightning II from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing receives fuel from a MC-130 Commando II assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Wing around the East China Sea, Jan. 30, 2025. The fixed wing air-to-air Refueling between special operations aircraft and conventional aircraft provide global reach capabilities generating air superiority in the Indo-Pacific region. In support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Special Operations Command Pacific, in conjunction with Pacific Fleet, Pacific Air Force, Marine Forces Pacific and U.S. Cyber Command, conduct air and maritime operations in the East China Sea to increase joint force lethality and readiness and demonstrate peace through strength for a free and open Indo-Pacific. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Wisher.*





# U.S. Army Special Operations Command

## The 75th Ranger Regiment remembers the great raid



*By Sgt. 1st Class Jorden Weir,  
75th Ranger Regiment*

On Dec. 14, 1944, at the Palawan Prisoner of War (POW) Camp in the Philippines, a Japanese officer, a man they called “The Buzzard”, stood before the POWs and proclaimed, “Americans, your days of working are over!”

Shortly after, he ordered the American POWs into wooden bunkers, doused them with gasoline, set it all ablaze, and opened fire on any who tried to flee.

One-hundred-thirty-nine American Soldiers perished in the flames and gunfire that night.

Eleven escaped to tell the grisly tale.

What followed was an urgent and furious campaign by the Allies to free as many of their POWs as possible from the clutches of their Japanese captors in the Philippines. Less than two months after the Palawan Massacre, the Allies began their rescue efforts and, over the course of thirty days, liberated four POW camps across the country, rescuing more than 7,000 POWs.

They started at Cabanatuan.

They sent in the Rangers.

So it came to pass that on 30 Jan 1945, the sun set on the Cabanatuan Prison Camp, with more than 500 POWs wondering if that night was the night they’d be massacred like in Palawan.



*U.S. Army Rangers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment present the colors during the commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Raid and Liberation of Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Camp at the City of Cabanatuan, Philippines, Feb. 1, 2025. Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Angelo Mejia.*

It rose the next morning on a silent prison camp filled with hundreds of dead enemy guards ...

... and not a POW to be found.

80 years later, members of the U.S. Army's 75th Ranger Regiment and Ranger veterans went back to Cabanatuan to commemorate its liberation.

"It's an incredible honor to be here and remember what those Rangers and Allies pulled off," said Capt. David Bryan, a member of 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, who was present for the 80th anniversary commemoration, held at the Cabanatuan American Memorial, "The Great Raid set the stage for saving thousands of POW lives across the Philippines."

The morning of the commemoration began with members of the Ranger veteran community joining with a group of Filipino Scout Rangers to walk the mission route that World War II Rangers took to reach their objective all those years ago, ending at the Cabanatuan American Memorial, where the infamous POW camp once stood.

There they, along with members of 2nd Ranger Battalion, dignitaries, and military and local officials, gathered for a ceremony that included a reading of the historical account, a commemoration of POW/MIA fallen, a youth rose-laying tribute, liberation messages from both the U.S. Armed forces and Filipino local perspective, and a wreath offering.

"80 years ago this week, one of the most bold and audacious military operations ever executed took place at this location," said Dr. Mike Krivdo, the U.S. Army Pacific Command Historian, "successfully planned and accomplished by a unique and formidable collection of U.S. Army Rangers, Alamo Scouts, and Philippine Guerrillas."

The Raid on Cabanatuan, comprised of the 6th Ranger Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Henry A. Mucci, Sixth U.S. Army, Alamo Scouts, and various guerrilla units, is considered today to be one of the most perfectly planned and executed raids in WWII.

Two days prior to the Great Raid, On Jan. 28, 1945, under cover of darkness and armed with only the clothes on their backs, a little food and water, and a whole lot of weapons and ammunition, the Rangers of Company C, commanded by Capt. Robert Prince, and Company F, commanded by 2nd Lt. John Murphy, trekked a grueling 24 miles through rivers, ravines, tall



*A Philippine Army Soldier from the First Scout Ranger Regiment and a U.S. Army Ranger assigned to 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, salutes the colors during the commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Raid and Liberation of Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Camp at the City of Cabanatuan, Philippines, Feb. 1, 2025. The commemoration honors the bravery, sacrifice, and enduring legacy of the U.S. Army Rangers, Alamo Scouts, and Filipino guerrillas and provided veterans, family members, and the community an opportunity to pay tribute to those who fought and contributed to the liberation of the Pacific 80 years ago. Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Angelo Mejia.*

grass, and thick underbrush, from allied-controlled land in Guimba deep into Japanese territory, hiding in ditches and rice paddies whenever enemy vehicles drove by and then running to make up time.

They eventually linked up with a force of 250 guerrilla fighters and the Alamo Scouts, who reported a couple hundred Japanese soldiers guarding the Cabanatuan prison camp.

But they had a problem.

"The scouts estimated another thousand or so Japanese fighters positioned at the Cabu Bridge, nearby," said Bryan. "Way more than the Rangers expected."

The Alamo Scouts estimated they'd move on toward Cabu in the next 24 hours, however. Therefore, the Rangers agreed to delay the attack until the next day.

That extra time gave the scouts and guerrillas enough time to gather a massive amount of information.

"One combined team even donned farmer's clothes and was able to recon the front gate of the camp while working the ground with a hoe," said Krivdo, "noting the materials used to construct the gate, which way it swung, and when the guard shifts changed."

Before long, they knew the layout and patterns of the camp through and through, and after briefing



**Ambassador MaryKay Carlson, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Philippines, places her right hand over her heart while Rear Adm. Jeromy B. William, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific, salutes the colors during the commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Raid and Liberation of Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Camp at the City of Cabanatuan, Philippines, Feb. 1, 2025. The commemoration honors the bravery, sacrifice, and enduring legacy of the U.S. Army Rangers, Alamo Scouts, and Filipino guerrillas and provided veterans, family members, and the community an opportunity to pay tribute to those who fought and contributed to the liberation of the Pacific 80 years ago. Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Angelo Mejia.**

Mucci, the Rangers drew up a plan to attack on 30 Jan.

With Scouts and Guerrilla soldiers setting up blocking positions to the north and south, laying out a blanket of land mines and effectively isolating the prison camp from reinforcements, the Rangers were finally ready to begin their work.

“Lt. Col. Mucci’s final guidance was, ‘Remember, all prisoners go. No one gets left behind,’” said Bryan.

They began with a three-kilometer approach to the objective, eventually dropping down to a slow and deliberate crawl, as low as they could get, toward their attack positions.

The Rangers inched closer.

Concealment grew less.

Eventually, it grew to nothing ... and darkness was approaching.

When they came within a few hundred meters of their fighting positions, suddenly, out of nowhere, a P-61 ‘Black Widow’ night fighter blasted on the scene, roaring over the camp, and drawing everyone’s attention upward. Prisoners cheered and guards froze in place.

It was all part of the plan.

“The Japanese had a well-known habit of putting all their attention on the sky any time an Allied aircraft went by,” said Bryan. “The P-61 was a planned distraction to cover the final approach as Rangers crawled up to the camp. The pilot made multiple passes, buzzing the Japanese over and over. He got dangerously low to the camp and cut his engines, which caused the plane to shake, sputter, and rattle in the air. Then he’d flip them back on and the engines would backfire, covering any noise the Rangers made. He’d waggle the wings up and down ... he basically did everything he could to keep the enemy’s eyes up on him and not out at the approaching Rangers. It was a gutsy move.”

And it worked like a charm. Rangers used the distraction to quickly crawl through the open space and get in position, and a few guerrillas and Rangers even managed to cut the camp’s telephone lines, killing the enemy’s ability to call for help.

Soon, they had encircled the entire camp.

They were set.

At precisely 7:45pm, Rangers, led by Murphy, opened fire on the unsuspecting Japanese guards. They wasted no time taking out the lone guard in the watchtower, eliminating the enemy pillbox to the north with a bazooka, breaching the main gate, and cutting barbed wire to allow entry.

Within minutes, they were in.

Masters of practicing disciplined savagery and operating in controlled chaos, the Rangers began to systematically and efficiently eliminate every enemy soldier they came across, picking off Japanese, destroying trucks and tanks with bazookas, and neutralizing entire bunkers. All the while, seeking out POWs and directing them to the main gate for exfil. It did not take long for the rally point to fill up.

But grouping everyone in one location proved to be costly.

The main gate became the only real point of opposition by the enemy, as it became target to Japanese mortars. The enemy only got off three rounds, but unfortunately for those in the area, the rounds were right on target, inflicting many casualties and mortally wounding the Rangers’ medical officer, Capt. James C. Fisher, who was treating POWs as they came through. One other Ranger, Cpl. Roy F. Sweeny, was killed in the encounter, and four more Rangers and two Alamo Scouts were seriously injured.

By the light of the full moon, and with a renewed sense of urgency, Rangers cleared the camp, moving from barracks to barracks and navigating the deadly

chaos with brutal efficiency, scooping up every POW they found, to include a couple of British POWs who reportedly said, “We’re not Americans, but we’re coming too!”

Thirty minutes after the first round was fired, every POW in the camp had officially become an ex-POW.

With that, the Rangers prepared to depart. They gave out cigarettes, candy, food, water, and in many cases their own clothes and shoes, to anyone who needed them, and began movement to freedom.

Over the next 24 hours, they would funnel POWs through the country, stopping at friendly villages, loading the weakest POWs onto carts to be pulled, and finally arriving back in Allied-controlled land. There they boarded trucks and ambulances and began their well-deserved trip home.

Mucci and Prince both earned Distinguished Service Crosses for their actions that night. All other officers, as well as selected enlisted Soldiers received Silver Stars, while the American enlisted men and guerrilla officers received Bronze Stars.

Twenty guerrillas were injured in the raid, along with two Alamo Scouts and four Rangers. Unfortunately, two POWs died during the rescue, one from illness on the road, and one of a heart attack

before they ever left the camp. But those who made it were eternally grateful to the Rangers and their relentless efforts to free them.

“In all the annals of military history, the raid at Cabanatuan is on the short list to be studied by military leaders,” said Krivdo, “exciting the imagination with its faultless execution and impact. The Raid exemplified ingenuity, determination and collaboration. It is a shining example of how U.S. and Filipino forces came together in wartime to overcome insurmountable odds for the most noble of causes, the preservation of life.”

For Bryan, the Great Raid is a poignant and humbling reminder of what the Ranger legacy is built on.

“The Ranger Creed wasn’t written until nearly thirty years after the Great Raid, but it’s clear to me that it was inspired by the actions of these Rangers, Alamo Scouts, Guerrillas, and pilots”, said Bryan. “Giving 100 percent and then some, energetically meeting the enemies of their country, never leaving a fallen comrade, displaying the intestinal fortitude required ... it all started in places like Cabanatuan. What they did there shaped not just the words in our Creed, but the expectations of who we are today and what we must continue to be every day.”



*U.S. Army Rangers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment and Philippine Army Soldiers from the First Scout Ranger Regiment, pose for a group photo during the commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Raid and Liberation of Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Camp at the City of Cabanatuan, Philippines, Feb. 1, 2025. Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Angelo Mejia.*





# Green Beret candidates participate in Robin Sage exercise

*A role player from the fictitious country of "Pineland," joins Special Forces candidates assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, as they take part in a raid against enemy role players as part of the final phase of field training known as Robin Sage in central North Carolina, December 17, 2024. Robin Sage is the culmination exercise for Soldiers in the Special Forces Qualification Course and has been the litmus test for Soldiers striving to earn the Green Beret for more than 50 years. Photo by K. Kassens.*

# Naval Special Warfare Command NSW Sailor recognized as 2025 Copernicus Award Recipient



*By Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea Meiller,  
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

Electronics Technician 1st Class Staal Githinji, a Sailor assigned to Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Tactical Communications Command (TCC) 1, was recognized at a banquet as one of 27 recipients of the 2025 Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association (AFCEA) International Copernicus Award, Jan. 28, 2025.

The Copernicus Award, established in 1997, serves as the blueprint for the Navy's future command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) structure. It honors individuals for their exceptional performance in C4I and information technology roles.

"Winning this award shows TCC-1's contributions to an ever-changing technological landscape," said Githinji. "Being recognized for this award has allowed me to see my work in this field come to fruition."

Each year, AFCEA International and the U.S. Naval Institute name selected service members and government civilians as Copernicus award recipients. Awardees from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard are chosen based on their contributions and sustained superior performance in C4I and information systems or information warfare.

"This recognition highlights the exceptional achievements of one of our NSW Tactical Communications Command ONE Sailors in the field," said Cmdr. Jonathan Alston, commanding officer, TCC-1. "Githinji has made

exemplary contributions in our field and deserves this award."

Githinji, who joined the Navy in 2012 and is originally from Nairobi, Kenya, has expanded his technical expertise in a unique and ever-changing technological space while assigned to TCC-1.

"Working in the NSW space has allowed me the opportunity to explore new solutions to unique problem sets," Githinji said. "NSW is unique in the challenges we work through to meet the mission set, and having the support of my leadership to grow within my field of expertise has been immensely rewarding."

Githinji's contributions toward earning this award included training and instructing Naval Special Warfare

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*Working in the NSW space has allowed me the opportunity to explore new solutions to unique problem sets. NSW is unique in the challenges we work through to meet the mission set, and having the support of my leadership to grow within my field of expertise has been immensely rewarding..*

*– Electronics Technician 1st Class Staal Githinji*

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operators in effectively using communication systems and software that directly supported NSW mission priorities. Additionally, he embedded and deployed with a West Coast-based Navy SEAL Team, ensuring that NSW information technology capabilities remained fully operational in support

of mission requirements while operating forward.

TCC-1 serves as Naval Special Warfare Group 1's C4I provider, tasked with maintaining and enhancing tactical communications capabilities while developing expertise to address future information battle space complexities.

NSW provides maritime special operations capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas.



# *Naval Special Warfare Command*

## **NSW operators conduct nighttime training**



*West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators return fire during an over the beach training evolution in San Diego, Jan. 21, 2025. NSW provides maritime SOF capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Charles Probert.*



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## AFSOC, Allies

# strengthen interoperability, readiness at Emerald Warrior 25.1

*By Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli,  
Air Force Special Operations Command Public  
Affairs*

Flying over a mountain range in southern Arizona, an Italian Special Operations Forces jumpmaster communicates with his team using hand signals.

To their right, a U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command special missions aviator stands on the ramp of an MC-130J Commando II, monitoring the drop zone below and relaying updates to the pilots and jumpmaster.

With the low hum of the turboprop engines overpowering the jumpmaster's voice, he gives one final command.

"Go."

One by one, the Italian SOF operators step off the ramp and begin their descent.

The jump is one of many trainings that took place as part of Emerald Warrior 25.1, held in multiple locations across the U.S. in Arizona and California, Jan. 27 - Feb. 14, 2025.

Emerald Warrior provides the venue for realistic scenarios designed to test readiness in special operations forces across services and partner nations.

The latest iteration, Emerald Warrior 25.1, saw participants from multiple U.S. military services training alongside forces from Italy, France and Romania.

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Matthew Thies explained that the exercise, which takes place twice a year, enables AFSOC, its Allies and partners to train amongst diverse and complementary capabilities.

"When it comes to training with our partners and Allies, when we practice together, we learn from each other," said Thies, an exercise lead for Emerald Warrior. "These kinds of trainings bring the necessary synergy our nations require for any future coalition effort."



*A U.S. Air Force MC-130J Commando II pilot assigned to the Air Force Special Operations Command flies over the southwest United States while wearing chemical biological radiological nuclear gear as part of Emerald Warrior 25.1, Jan. 30, 2025. Emerald Warrior is an exercise designed to match the speed and scale of real-world operations, both validating AFSOC capabilities and innovating new tactical solutions. Photo by Senior Airman Rachel Pakenas*

In addition to military free fall, other capabilities exercised during Emerald Warrior 25.1 included multi-ship formation flying, land navigation, medical readiness and urban tactics training.

For foreign military members, including the Romanian Air Force, Emerald Warrior offered the chance to test readiness and interoperability.

Specifically, the Romanian Air Force used Emerald Warrior 25.1 to assess the capabilities of the C-27J Spartan, a military transport aircraft. Traveling to the U.S. marked the ROAF's first-ever Atlantic Ocean crossing with the C-27J.

"The amount of challenges involved during the exercise



***Air Commandos assigned to Air Force Special Operations Command prepare to board a U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom during exercise Emerald Warrior 25.1 in California, Jan. 30, 2025. Photo by Senior Airman Jacob Cabanero.***

increases our ability to adapt and improves our overall readiness,” said Romanian Air Force Lt. Col. Florin Băltoiu, detachment commander.

Similarly, the French Air Force emphasized the importance of being able to train in a U.S. Department of Defense-regulated exercise.

As part of Emerald Warrior 25.1, the French Air Force flew its C-130H Hercules in formation with AFSOC’s MC-130J.

And while the U.S. and French militaries share some common tactics, techniques and procedures, French Air Force Capt. Julien, program manager and detachment commander, said the exercise allowed crews to conduct mission planning together and learn from one another.

“By practicing mission planning and flying together, we were able to strengthen our teamwork, ensuring we are ready to respond quickly when we are needed,” Julien said.

Emerald Warrior also provided the opportunity to refine agile combat employment, or ACE, capabilities. ACE is an operational scheme of maneuver executed within threat timelines to enhance survivability while generating combat power.

For Italian Special Forces, participating in Emerald Warrior presented the challenge of adapting to new harsh and unpredictable conditions.

“Training at Emerald Warrior helps us refine our skills in resource management, navigation and quick decision-making, enhancing our ability to remain effective under pressure,” said an Italian Special Forces representative. “During the exercise we tested ways to maintain secure communications lines and logistical support in remote areas, ultimately helping us to be able to thrive in challenging operational settings.”

AFSOC Mission Sustainment Teams from the 1st

Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida, and the 27th SOW at Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, worked to test ACE concepts throughout the exercise.

The MSTs experimented with ACE capabilities by rapidly deploying forces, establishing a forward operating base in isolated locations and providing site security, among other training simulations.

An MST lead assigned to the 1st SOW explained that the joint-training environment at Emerald Warrior helps prepare AFSOC forces to operate effectively in austere areas.

Particularly, he said working with foreign military members allows the MST to better understand their operations and procedures.

“Emerald Warrior gives us a ground-level understanding toward communications, planning and mission generation to optimize power projection with foreign militaries,” the MST lead said.

In addition to members from AFSOC, Emerald Warrior 25.1 included the U.S. Marines and conventional Air Force units, along with coordination with the U.S. Navy.

With the conclusion of Emerald Warrior 25.1, AFSOC, sister services and participating Ally and partner nations are already planning the next iteration of the exercise.

U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, AFSOC commander, noted the importance of the continuous training that Emerald Warrior offers.

“Emerald Warrior is critical because it pushes the limits of our capabilities, refines our readiness, and ensures we can operate seamlessly in any environment,” Conley said. “This training certifies we can execute decisive operations alongside our Allies and partners whenever and wherever needed.”



***An Italian special operation forces member uses a kestrel to detect the weather while a U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command MC-130J Commando II flies over during Emerald Warrior 25.1 in Arizona, Jan. 31, 2025. Photo by Staff Sergeant Tyler McQuiston.***

# Air Force Special Operations Command



## AFSOC accepts final MC-130J



*By AFSOC Public Affairs*

Maj. Gen. Justin Hoffman, Deputy Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, attended a delivery milestone on Dec 13, 2024 in Marietta, Georgia for the command's final MC-130J Commando II. The fly-away ceremony commemorated the final stage of Lockheed Martin's aircraft production for the MC-130J program and last handover to the Air Force.

"For decades, Lockheed Martin has consistently delivered critical capabilities for Air Commandos in a timely and effective manner," said Hoffman. "As we continue in an era of strategic competition, we will continue to develop platforms to address future needs and integrate new capabilities."

The first MC-130J was delivered in September 2011 to Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. It first deployed in March 2013 to Afghanistan and supported over 400 missions, flying more than 2,000 hours, and moving an estimated 12,000 passengers and 9.4 million pounds of cargo.

The C-130J served as the recapitalization solution for AFSOC, modernizing 40-year-old legacy AC and MC fleets providing advanced avionics, navigation, and survivability features to enhance Special Operations mobility and strike.

"AFSOC's receipt of the final MC-130J culminates an over fifteen-year effort to recapitalize and re-baseline the Special Operations C-130 fleet," said Col. T. Justin Bronder, Special Operations Command PEO Fixed Wing. "This delivery marks both the end of this effort and the beginning of a new era; we will continue to relentlessly evolve AFSOC's C-130s to ensure these aircraft possesses capabilities to advance our future force."

Known as the Commando II, the MC-130J flies infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply of special operations forces by airdrop or airland as well as air refueling missions.

The final MC-130J will be delivered to the 58th Special Operations Wing at Kirtland AFB in New Mexico to train future Air Commandos in the formal training unit.

*MC-130J departs a runway in Marietta, Georgia on Dec. 13, 2024 during a fly-away ceremony. The fly-away ceremony commemorated the final stage of Lockheed Martin's aircraft production for the MC-130J program and last handover to the Air Force. The aircraft will be delivered to the 58th Special Operations Wing at Kirtland AFB in New Mexico to train future AFSOC Air Commandos in the formal training unit. Photo by Neal Prutt.*



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## Exercise Reaper Castillo pathfinds MQ-9 sharpens capabilities in austere environments

By Senior Airman Deanna Muir,  
1st Special Operations Wing

An MQ-9 Reaper circles above the Melrose Air Force Range in New Mexico, surveying the area below as it prepares to land on a dirt strip. On the ground the 1st Special Operations Mission Sustainment Team (SOMST) secures the landing zone, ready to refuel and rearm the aircraft.

More than 1,100 miles away, at Hurlburt Field, Florida, an MQ-9 pilot and sensor operator control the remotely piloted aircraft from a ground control station.

The 65th Special Operations Squadron hosted Exercise Reaper Castillo Nov. 4 to Dec. 18, 2024 to sharpen mission-essential tasks and develop MQ-9 Agile Combat Employment (ACE) capabilities. The goal: create a lighter, leaner and more agile force.

The exercise validated the MQ-9's ability to conduct key operations in austere environments, including dirt-strip landings, refueling, rearming and rapid relaunch.

"In the future fight, we assess we will no longer be able to rely exclusively on the main operating bases that have persisted," said the 1st SOMST flight commander. "Operating in austere environments anytime, anyplace and anywhere is critical. It enables commanders to have options - something critically needed in special operations forces."

Typically, the MQ-9 requires a paved runway with a group of maintainers and extensive support functions. However, during the exercise a light SOMST footprint on an austere dirt airfield provided all necessary functions to support mission execution.

"If special operations MSTs can enable mission generation at the forward edge of the battlefield, it can



*A U.S. Air Force MQ-9 Reaper sensor operator participates in Exercise Reaper Castillo at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Dec. 16, 2024. The exercise aimed to sharpen the squadron's mission-essential tasks while pathfinding new MQ-9 combat capabilities such as landing on a dirt strip, refueling, rearming and relaunching in austere locations. Photo by Senior Airman Deanna Muir.*

increase the lethality, range, and overall capability of the aircraft for strategic and tactical national interests," the flight commander said.

The MQ-9 Reaper is a versatile and precise intelligence, surveillance and strike platform and its adaptability and range of capabilities make it an asset for modern military operations.

These capabilities align with ACE, a strategy focused on enhancing flexibility and resilience by dispersing forces across multiple, often austere, locations. With its ability to operate in remote environments and adapt to rapidly

changing mission requirements, the MQ-9 plays a role in supporting ACE's emphasis on decentralized operations and rapid deployment.

"The MQ-9 is extremely relevant in today's fight and will be in the future as well," said a 65th SOS MQ-9 evaluator pilot and exercise mission commander. "It allows us to go places and do things that we cannot risk sending manned aircraft – such as high-threat environments."

The exercise builds on the hard work of the 65th SOS's sister squadrons over the past few years and will provide important data and lessons learned for the next squadron to push the concepts even further, said Lt. Col. Kurtis Paul, 65th SOS commander.

"On its surface, Reaper Castillo 24 is an exercise created and executed by the 65th SOS. But in reality, it's another step in Air Force Special Operations Command's efforts to push MQ-9 operations beyond conventional means," Paul added. "It brought together many members from multiple AFSOC wings and it's humbling to have the Lucky Dicers' stamp on this iteration – this was truly a win for all of AFSOC remotely piloted aircraft and where we're headed in the future."

As the future of Air Force operations adapt to emerging technologies and evolving threats, the forward-thinking approach of these teams is crucial to unlocking the full potential of the MQ-9.



***U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 1st Special Operations Support Squadron Mission Sustainment Team refuel an MQ-9 Reaper assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing at Melrose Air Force Range, New Mexico, Dec. 16, 2024. Photo by Airman 1st Class Gracelyn Hess.***

"We have to break out of the mindset that we need a huge, paved runway with co-located launch and recovery aircrews," the mission commander added. "If we can free ourselves from the traditional mindset, it makes MQ-9 combat reach nearly limitless."



***A U.S. Air Force Airman assigned to the 1st Special Operations Support Squadron Mission Sustainment Team watches as an MQ-9 Reaper prepares to land on an unprepared dirt surface at Melrose Air Force Range, New Mexico, Dec. 16, 2024. Photo by Airman 1st Class Gracelynn Hess.***

# Air Force Special Operations Command



## 352d Special Operations Wing and Finnish Utti Jaeger Regiment strengthen NATO's interoperability in austere weather environments



**By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Caroline Parks  
352nd Special Operations Wing**

Finnish Special Operations forces from the Utti Jaeger Regiment and U.S. Air Force 352d Special Operations Wing participated in a bilateral training, Jan. 28-31, 2025, at Utti Jaeger Regiment base, Finland.

The training included airdrop operations in cold weather conditions utilizing the 352d SOW's MC-130J Commando II.

“The desired learning objective is familiarization with an allied force,” said the 352d SOW exercise mission commander. “With Finland joining NATO, we want them to gain familiarization of aircraft and procedures involving both cargo and personnel airdrops using proper safety procedures.”

This training qualifies forces from the Utti Jaeger Regiment on static line jumps, military free-fall – both high-altitude high-opening and high-altitude low-opening – jumps, allowing Finnish jumpmasters to perform required maneuvers with U.S. personnel and aircraft.

“We’ve worked with the Finnish military before, but this will be the first time with the Utti Jaegers since Finland joined NATO,” said the mission commander. “The 352d, and U.S. forces are proficient and well-versed in airdrop and Utti Jaegers are experts in extreme cold weather environments. We can take our combined experience and put them together to get a better product.”

A U.S. Space Force guardian assigned to the 352d SOW used the exercise as an opportunity to integrate with SOF operations by providing digital force protection capabilities, allowing U.S. forces to characterize malicious electromagnetic activities through signature matching and anomaly detection.

“Testing these sensors allows for higher fidelity in characterizing interference used by adversaries,” said the Guardian. “With this exercise we seek to build our knowledge base and better understand processes and procedures to set up a baseline of operations for future deployments of these sensors or others like it.”



# Marine Forces, Special Operations Command

## Retired MARSOC Marine

## Reflects on service and finds healing in a service dog



*By Bridget Bonnette,  
National Space Defense Center*

Chief Warrant Officer 3 (Ret.) Thomas J. Heaton's career in the U.S. Marine Corps encompassed over two decades of service, including nine deployments across various theaters of operations. Heaton, who served in both Counterintelligence (CI) and Human Intelligence (HUMINT) roles within Marine Corps Special Operations Command, has seen and experienced more than most in his field, but his journey post-service led him to his four-legged partner, Colt.

Entering the U.S. Marine Corps in 2002, Heaton first served as an Ammunition Technician before deploying to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. His dedication to his mission and country was clear early on, as he volunteered to deploy again for the next rotation. However, it wasn't until 2005 that Heaton transitioned to the CI/HUMINT field, a decision that would change the course of his career and set the stage for the future.

Through a series of leadership roles, Heaton deployed to various locations around the world, from Iraq to Afghanistan, and was instrumental in intelligence operations that helped shape military strategy and operations.

His ability to mentor and inspire other Marines was evident, and he became known for his leadership in high-pressure environments. Yet, despite his professional success, Heaton faced personal struggles upon returning from his numerous deployments.

"When I came home, I wanted to be overseas, and when I was overseas, I wanted to be home," Heaton shared. "I was so used to the discomfort of being displaced, and that became my comfort zone. Adjusting

to being present, to just being where I am, has been a challenge for me. And I still work on that every day."

The difficulties Heaton faced after his deployments were not only emotional but also psychological. Constant hyper-vigilance, a side effect of his combat experiences, created challenges in daily life. Heaton's mind was always on alert, unable to fully appreciate the moment or relax in everyday situations. This is where his journey took a significant turn.

It was through his connection with a fellow Marine from MARSOC, who had received a service dog, that Heaton began to consider how a service dog could support his own needs.

"One of my Marines, a subordinate I looked up to, received a service dog and it made me think, if he can accept a vulnerability and realize he would benefit from additional support, why can't I?" Heaton recalled. This realization led him to research and eventually apply for a service dog through the Warriors Choice Foundation in September 2023.

A.J. Longo, Executive Director for Warriors Choice Foundation, Inc., recalled the initial introduction to Tom's situation through their alumni network of ambassadors and handlers. "Tom and I discussed what the brand encompassed, the mission, short- and long-term goals and ultimately, how were we going to address Tom's needs collectively," Longo said.

The call from Warriors Choice Foundation came in July 2024, when Heaton was matched with Colt, a specially trained service dog who would soon become an inseparable part of his life. The two met for the first time in November 2024 at a Warriors Choice event, the Fairways to Freedom Golf Classic, in Jupiter, Florida. The emotional connection was immediate.

Longo vividly described the moment when Tom and Colt first met. “Tom’s eyes widened, his shoulders fell, his diaphragm expanded, and his eyes began to fill with tears of joy,” he said. “I asked him if he had something in his eye, or if he was allergic to something before passing the reigns to him, but it was in that moment to see someone as humble as Tom has never been gifted something of this magnitude.”

The bond between Tom and Colt was instantaneous. “We’ve been together ever since,” Heaton said. “Colt is never more than 10 feet away from me and is constantly searching and checking in with me.”

Colt now assists Heaton with grounding; proprioceptive (your body’s ability to sense movement, action, and location); and vestibular (balance and spatial orientation) support, helping him manage the hyper-vigilance that often affects his daily life.

The bond between Heaton and Colt has been more than just functional; it has been a source of healing. “Colt has provided me a peace and a level of comradery I have not felt since I left the MARSOC community,” Heaton explained.

One of the most poignant moments in Heaton’s journey came the first night he spent with Colt. He recalls meeting up with other Warriors Choice recipients—a group that included fellow MARSOC Marines, as well as Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and first responders. As he sat with Colt, he was overwhelmed by a mix of emotions.

Without being prompted, Colt responded by wrapping his paws around Heaton’s shoulders and burying his head in his neck, providing a moment of comfort and reassurance.

“It was surreal,” Heaton said. “Here was this dog, who didn’t know me, but he instinctively knew what I needed. It was like he understood the process I’d gone through to get to that moment, and he was there for me.”

Through Colt, Heaton has found a new sense of stability and peace, which has greatly improved his quality of life.

For other veterans considering a service dog, Heaton offers some advice: “It’s okay to admit you need help. The stigma around getting a service dog can be tough to overcome, but it’s about finding the right tool for the right job. The bond between you and your dog is unique, and it requires a level of accountability. You’ll have your good days and your bad, but the dog shows up every day, just like you need to.”

As Heaton reflects on his military career and his new journey with Colt, he hopes that his story will inspire both veterans and civilians to understand the power of service dogs in supporting veterans’ mental and emotional well-being.

“At the end of the day, it’s about the right tool for the right job, the right man for the mission, and the right wingman for the fight. Colt is my wingman. And the utility and versatility of these dogs is life-changing,” Heaton said. “As a Marine of mine, GySgt. Morgan Staal said to me, having [a service dog] is like having an entire Marine Special Operations Team watching your back. It’s a bond I never expected, but one I’m deeply grateful for.”

Heaton and Colt are assigned to the National Space Defense Center, here, where Heaton supports the protect and defend mission as a counterintelligence analyst.



**U.S. Marine Corps Chief Warrant Officer 3 (Ret.) Thomas J. Heaton poses for a photo with his service dog, Colt, at the National Space Defense Center at Schriever Space Force Base, Colo., Jan. 17, 2025. Heaton and Colt are assigned to the NSDC, where Heaton supports the protect and defend mission as a counterintelligence analyst. Photo by Tiana Williams.**

# Marine Raiders conduct direct action training package

*Marine Raiders with Marine Forces Special Operations Command detonate explosives to create a simulated abatis as part of demolition range during a direct-action training package at Guardian Centers training facility, Georgia, Oct. 16, 2024. The training package focuses on honing a Marine Special Operations Company's tactics, techniques, and procedures in conducting direct-action operations. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Evan Jones.*





# Headquarters - U.S Special Operations Command SOCOM athletes compete at Invictus games, display warrior ethos

By MaryTherese Griffin,  
Army Recovery Care Program

“Who do you play for? The UNITED STATES OF AMERICA!” That memorable line from the movie *Miracle on Ice*, which captures the spirit of the 1980 Winter Olympics Gold Medal Match between the United States and the Soviet Union, is making a comeback. Service members who make up Team U.S. that competed in the first Winter Invictus Games in Vancouver Feb 8-16th caught the fever while training at Lake Placid last month. “While training, we toured the Olympic facilities, including the hockey rink where the U.S. beat the USSR. We watched *Miracle on Ice* as a team, so we’ve adopted the slogan,” said Team U.S. Co-Captain retired Air Force Colonel Jacquelyn Marty.

The team is together in Tacoma, Washington, for one last training session, and Team U.S. Co-Captain, retired Army Master Sgt. Ivan Morera is taking this opportunity to help his teammates gel but look beyond the competition. “It’s not just a competition but building relationships with these other service members who are also going through a recovery journey. Sharing our stories so we learn from each other on how we deal with our recovery is important. We might exchange ideas and learn how to do things more efficiently by getting to know our fellow competitors, who are all service members. I tell them that building relationships is a key part of our journey.”

The journey to these inaugural Winter Invictus Games is a long but different road for every member of Team U.S. as they are all wounded, injured, or ill, settling into their new normal. Adaptive Sports have been their calling card to recovery, and they are about to take the world stage at Whistler in Vancouver. Marty’s journey began after a horrific car accident in 2015. She suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury, and the Air Force pilot credits her then five-year-old son with helping to save her. “He was in the



*Retired Army Master Sgt Ivan Morera and retired Air Force Colonel Jacquelyn Marty are co-captains of Team U.S. They took a moment to strike a pose before talking to the team about bonding during the 2025 Team U.S. Invictus Games Training Camp located at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington, February 2 – 5, 2025. In total, 50 competitors will represent the United States at the Invictus Games Vancouver Whistler 2025 from February 8-16, 2025. The Invictus Games is an international sporting event for wounded, injured, and ill active duty and Veteran military personnel. The Games use the power of sport to support recovery and rehabilitation and generate a wider understanding and respect for those who serve their country. DoD photo by Corey Wallace.*



**Master Sgt. Ivan Morera was returned to duty after losing his left hand while on deployment in Afghanistan. He served 24 years in the Army. “I tell my kids your situation doesn’t define you; it’s your ability to overcome that situation and come out better on the other side.” Courtesy photo.**

backseat in his car seat and had the little wings protecting his head. Although I don’t remember anything about the accident, he was my hero, and he was able to tell the people who approached our car what our names were, where we were from, and where we were going. He was able to unlock our cell phone and get a hold of my husband,” said Marty, who will compete in Alpine ski, skeleton, indoor rowing, and swimming.

Morera, an Army Green Beret who just retired after 24 years of service, lost his left hand in August 2013 after a suicide bomber in Afghanistan caused his vehicle to crash. He returned to duty and is the first one-handed medic in U.S. military history. He shares his hard times in recovery as a testament to resiliency, especially in adaptive sports. “That’s how resiliency is built through hard times. As we say in special forces, It doesn’t matter how bad it sucks if the weather is bad when it’s freezing, when you’re wet, you’re tired, you have to continue the mission. That’s where resiliency is developed. We must keep going,” said Morera, who will compete in the skeleton, the biathlon, and seated volleyball.

As they continue to strengthen that team bond, they include their pride in representing the red, white, and blue differently. “This is more of a privilege, and I felt that being in uniform was more of a duty. I’m taking it

seriously because this is our once-in-a-lifetime deal. I want us to make the best of it, have fun, and make our country proud,” said Marty.

“It’s an absolute honor for me to represent my country. Whether as a Green Beret or an adaptive military athlete, it’s an absolute honor. When I was a small boy, I watched the Olympics, and I was like, I want to do that when I grow up,” said Morera, who admits he wasn’t athletic before his injury, but adaptive sports changed all that.

The same holds for his co-captain, who credits adaptive sports with hope beyond the diagnosis. “That’s so true. You know you have people telling you what you can’t do, and the doctors are telling you all your new limitations. It seems like society is telling you all these things you can no longer do, but here are adaptive sports that show you what you can do! It’s a completely new take on everything and extremely liberating,” said Marty.

Morera says injuries or illness propelled his teammates to adaptive sports, bringing them to Winter Invictus. What they do with it can have lasting, far-reaching effects even more than individual recovery. “A big part of this is setting

a positive example to my kids, just showing them what a no-quit attitude looks like. I want them to see that no matter the situation, it doesn’t define who you are. It’s your character and your

integrity that defines you. It’s not because I have one hand but because of who I am: willing to fight through and overcome any obstacle. We are Team U.S., and we’re proud.”

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*It’s an absolute honor for me to represent my country. Whether as a Green Beret or an adaptive military athlete, it’s an absolute honor.*

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*– Retired Army Master Sgt. Ivan Morera*

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**Ivan Morera, a Special Operations Command veteran, practices volley passes with teammates from Team U.S. before a sitting volleyball match against Romania during the 2025 Invictus Games in Vancouver, Canada, Feb. 15, 2025. Photo by Michel Sauret.**

# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command Quarterly 1st SOF Truth event spotlights Care Coalition's role in reintegration, readiness

*Army Maj. Wes Shinego,  
DOD News*

Captain Timothy Bible stared at the beige ceiling tiles and fluorescent lights above his hospital bed at Walter Reed Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. It was 2010 — four months since the motorcycle accident — but the ceiling that greeted him each morning was still a daily reminder that life as Tim knew it was over. His leg was gone, amputated above the knee, and what remained would take months to heal. Confined to Walter Reed's "ward 57," Tim's mind raced. What now? What would he do? How would he care for his family, and be the same husband and dad they knew?

A year earlier, Captain Bible's future seemed golden. In 2009, after a decade spent in the conventional Army, he bet on himself. Tim applied for a transfer to psychological operations and moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina for the PSYOP qualification course. That November, Bible graduated and joined the ranks of the Special Operations community as a newly minted PSYOP officer. He was elated, thrilled to be a part of the SOF team.

"I was on top of the world," Tim said. "I had just finished the pipeline, and I had a beautiful wife and healthy one-year-old son at home. Life was perfect."

Tragically, disaster struck just three days later. On Monday, Nov. 16, a distracted driver slammed into Tim's motorcycle, crushed his knee, and destroyed the entire left side of his body from the hip down.

"I was t-boned going through an intersection," Bible said. "I knew immediately it was catastrophic — I looked down and saw what was supposed to be my leg and thought 'wow, that ain't good, please don't let me lose my leg.' I was bleeding out, then everything went black."

But this week, during a 1st Special Operations Forces Truth event at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, Bible briefed the Special Operations Command Team and hundreds of guests wearing an Army uniform. Despite his injury, he remains an active-duty officer.

Bible spoke to express his support for the Care Coalition — the Warrior Care Program featured by SOCOM during the forum.

The ethos "humans are more important than hardware" forms the bedrock of 1st SOF Truth, which reminds service members and leaders alike that the right people — well-trained and well-supported — remain the organization's most valuable resource.

The Warrior Care Program — and the Care Coalition, specifically — exists in direct alignment with that ideal. Its mandate is simple: if SOF personnel have been wounded, fallen ill or suffered an injury while serving the Special Operations community, there's a team ready to serve them and their families.

1st SOF Truth forums are held quarterly. On Jan. 29, over 400 virtual attendees listened as SOCOM's senior leaders emphasized the need to communicate the Care Coalition's capabilities across the SOCOM enterprise — especially to O-5-level command teams who best know their people.

SOCOM Commander Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, who convened this quarter's 1st SOF Truth event to educate the community's leaders on the value of Warrior Care Programs, opened the forum with a focus on his top priority: people.

"We take care of our people," he said. "We believe in starting with the human in all our approaches, and the Care Coalition is critical to that mentality."

Fenton expressed gratitude to the service members and veterans who shared their experiences, and offered guidance to attendees, with an emphasis on shared understanding. Resources known to SOCOM are not always common

knowledge at lower echelons, and Fenton believes that universal awareness is critical to the Warrior Care Program's success.

"First of all, to the men and women who provided testimonials, thank you," Fenton said. "But your stories need to reach beyond this event — they must reach our people, because whether they've been in for one day or 30 years, it's their Care Coalition."

That coalition saw Tim through his recovery and return to active duty, where he continued his service and achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Bible credits the program for his miraculous return to form after the six-month stint at Walter Reed, which he calls "the toughest time of [his] life."

"The SOF family and the SOCOM Care Coalition fought to be there for me when I needed it most," he explained. "I said I wanted to stay in the military, stay in the fight, and go back to work; they supported me through everything."

Established in 2005, the Care Coalition is a congressionally recognized Warrior Care Program that ensures SOF community members receive the critical support they need in the wake of life-altering injuries or illnesses.

Through a structured approach encompassing four key phases — Recovery, Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Transition — the program uplifts SOF personnel when they're at their most vulnerable, inspiring a renewed sense of purpose that allows operators to continue their military service or transition to a civilian career.

During recovery, Recovery Care Coordinators guide affected SOF personnel and their families through every stage of the process using a Comprehensive Recovery Plan, ensuring they have access to resources like assistive technology, education, employment and housing.

Through initiatives like peer-to-peer support, respite programs and the Families OverComing Under Stress program, RCCs provide personalized assistance to help SOF personnel and their families navigate their recovery journey.

Navy Command Master Chief Petty Officer Ryan Gray, command master chief, Naval Special Warfare Group 4, expanded on the RCCs' special role at the forum.

"Having the RCCs is critical because they have access to so many resources," Gray said. "They're trained to get the service member back to full duty as quickly as possible."

The program's reintegration phase leverages the Care Coalition's Military Adaptive Sports program, which promotes both physical and mental well-being among wounded, ill and injured SOF personnel.

Adaptive sports and wellness activities help service members build resilience and regain confidence. And specialized athletic retreats and the Warrior Games provide participants with opportunities to stay active, compete and connect with the broader SOF community.

Army Master Sergeant Jerry Millan, the Warrior Care

liaison to Army Special Operations, shared his story at the event. He credited the Care Coalition's Military Adaptive Sports program for his quick recovery from stage-four cancer.

"I put a half-marathon Spartan Race on my calendar, scheduled six months out from my last round of chemotherapy," he said. "I had to prove to myself that I could still do these things."

Millan, who is attending the Invictus Games this year, explained his sense of urgency through the lens of a warfighter, desperate to be back in the fight.

"The Military Adaptive Sports program provided me the opportunity to find new purpose in life [by] helping others going through similar situations", he said. "[They] helped me rediscover my warrior identity."

For those preparing to take off the uniform, the Care Coalition's Career Transition program offers tailored support to help SOF personnel successfully enter the civilian workforce. Career Transition Coordinators connect service members with fellowship opportunities, job placement programs and education resources to ease transitions. By leveraging an extensive network of companies and organizations, this program helps service members translate their skills into meaningful post-military careers.

"When the military is all you've known, the thought of life on the outside is a stressor," said Bible, who retires next month. "But I'm taking advantage of one of the Care Coalition's fellowship programs and I feel ready — I'm trained."

Finally, the Care Coalition's Benevolence program fills gaps in support that may not be covered by the Defense Department or the Department of Veterans Affairs. By working with charitable organizations and securing grants, the program provides essential goods and services directly to SOF personnel in need.

Speaking on behalf of her husband, Army Major David Carr, a Special Forces team leader, Lauren Carr described how the coalition's Benevolence program delivered critical support after an epidermoid brain tumor forced David to undergo surgery.

"After the surgery, my husband faced a long, hard road to recovery, with daily, in-patient therapy," Lauren said. "The Care Coalition helped me secure housing at the Fischer House when doctors transferred David to the James Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa.

Carr lauded the Care Coalition's support, which extended well beyond lodging.

"The coalition significantly eased our mental, emotional, financial and physical burdens" she said. "They were a steadfast presence in the worst season of our lives."

Bible, Millan and Carr's testimonials were reinforced by more than 10 other speakers who spoke to SOCOM's commitment to the 1st SOF Truth mantra.

# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

## USSOCOM headquarters holds a groundbreaking ceremony for SOF Operations Integration Facility

By Michael Bottoms,  
USSOCOM Public Affairs

On a chilly, cloudy morning leaders from U.S. Special Operations Command and MacDill Air Force Base held a groundbreaking ceremony for the Special Operations Forces Operations Integration Facility Jan. 23, 2025, on MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. The secure facility represents the first of various efforts to modernize the headquarters.

The SOF operations integrations facility will consist of a two-story building totaling 57,000 square feet in size and is expected to take two years to build.

The ceremony was hosted by U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Guillaume N. Beurpere, USSOCOM chief of staff.

“It’s significant because when construction on the SOF Operations Integrations Facility is complete, it will be the newest, most modern, and secure facility within the USSOCOM campus,” said Beurpere. “The USSOCOM HQ’s original buildings were built in 1968, so this facility – with its state-of-the-art design, security, and construction features – represents what special operations is all about.”

The command will celebrate its 38th birthday this year and the new facility will help modernize the headquarters.

“One of the hallmarks of the U.S. Special Operations community and something that has contributed to our success since our inception is the special operations commitment to innovation

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*It will be the newest, most modern, and most secure facility in USSOCOM, continuing a larger effort within the command to modernize our aging USSOCOM Campus here on MacDill.*

— Maj. Gen. Guillaume N. Beurpere

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**Lt. Cdr. Damian Mendoza, the special military construction program manager provides opening remarks during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Special Operations Forces Integration Facility on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Jan. 23, 2025. The SOF operations integrations facility consists of a two-story building totaling 57,000 square feet in size and will take two years to build. Photo by Michael Bottoms.**

and adaptability. We are always adapting to the threat, to the environment, to whatever the mission, or our nation, may ask of us,” Beurpere said. “Innovation helps us to solve challenging problems on behalf of the nation. This

facility represents a facet of that adaptability and innovation.”

“This facility is a specially designed and constructed facility represents in both its design and the construction we will see over the next two years that spirit of innovation and adaptability,” Bearpère said. “It will be the newest, most modern, and most secure facility in USSOCOM, continuing a larger effort within the command to modernize our aging SOCOM Campus here on MacDill.”

The facility is scheduled to be completed in 2027, and its unique features will serve as the node for SOF operations for a new task force conducting missions all over the globe that will better posture and enable special operations forces to accomplish whatever mission they are assigned.



*U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Guillaume N. Bearpère, USSOCOM chief of staff, gives remarks during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Special Operations Forces Integration Facility on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Jan. 23, 2025. Photo by Michael Bottoms.*



*Leaders from USSOCOM and MacDill Air Force Base participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for the Special Operations Forces Integration Facility on MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Jan. 23, 2025. The SOF operations integrations facility consists of a two-story building totaling 57,000 square feet in size and will take two years to build. Photo by Michael Bottoms.*

*Sgt. 1st Class Nathan Foster, a Special Forces Medical Sergeant and Talent Manager at Fort Drum, prepares to head down the slopes in Vail, Colo., Feb 13, 2025. From Feb. 18 to 24, 2025, soldiers will conduct rigorous ski and alpine training at Camp Hale and Vail, Colorado, retracing the steps of their WWII predecessors. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the pivotal Battle of Riva Ridge, which occurred on Feb. 18, 1945, and marked a successful turning point in World War II. Courtesy photo.*

