



# Tip OF THE Spear

United States Special Operations Command  
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

October 2020



Sergeant Major Thomas P. Payne

## Medal of Honor

Operation Inherent Resolve





# United States Special Operations Command



**President awards Medal of Honor  
to Army Ranger for hostage rescue ... 12**

## Tip of the Spear

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*(Cover) The President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, awarded the Medal of Honor to U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Thomas "Patrick" Payne at the White House, Washington, D.C., Sept. 11, 2020. Payne was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as an assistant team leader deployed to Iraq as part of a Special Operations Joint Task Force in support of Operation Inherent Resolve on Oct. 22, 2015. Photo illustration by Michael Bottoms.*

# The Quiet Professionals

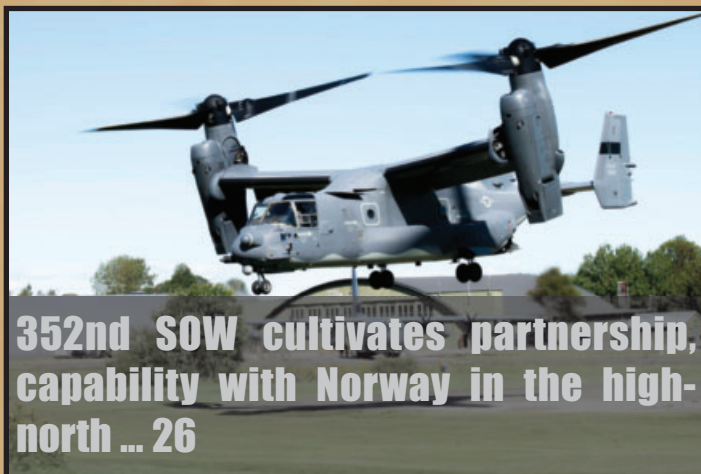
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A man in a U.S. Army camouflage uniform is speaking at a wooden podium. He is wearing sunglasses and has a name tag that reads "EVANS". The podium has a microphone and some papers on it. There are green plants in the foreground. The background is a concrete wall.

*Army Brig. Gen. Marcus Evans, NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) commander speaks to members of the NSOCC-A headquarters staff about the significance of the day, especially for the Special Operations community. Photo by NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan public affairs staff.*



# NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan



## NSOCC-A hosts 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony

*By U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jennifer Bocanegra  
NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A Public Affairs*

On Sept. 11, 2020 the NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan hosted a remembrance ceremony to honor the 2,977 victims from the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks that took place 19 years ago. The NSOCC-A command team, Army Brig. Gen. Marcus Evans and Army Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Teagle presided over the ceremony, which was attended by members of the NSOCC-A staff including Coalition forces, Afghan partners, U.S. government civilians and contractors.

During the ceremony, the NSOCC-A command team, Army Brig. Gen. Marcus Evans and Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Teagle paid tribute to the victims of the 9/11 attacks and honored the bravery and sacrifice of over 3,500 Coalition force service members, including the 618 members of the Special Operations community, who lost their lives during combat operations in Afghanistan over the past 19 years.

"9/11 was not just an attack on the United States; it was an attack on freedom," Evans said. "Citizens from more than 90 countries lost lives that day. The towers fell, but we did not. Instead we were collectively galvanized by the senseless loss of life and affirmed our commitment to never again be attacked in such a manner."

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, U.S. Special Operations Command took part in the response planning along with other U.S. government organizations, NATO and many of our international partners and allies.

On Oct. 7, 2001, U.S. and British forces began airstrikes on Taliban and al Qaeda targets. Members of the U.S. Army 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) were also deployed in support of preventing future terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies.

"Those of you serving today are part of the next great generation. The sacrifices you and your families have



**Marine Sgt. Caleb Mote reads names of two fallen service members who were killed in combat while supporting the NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan mission in 2020. Photo by NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan public affairs staff.**

made to support this mission, and your resolve to successfully see it through to completion are remarkable," said Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Teagle, NSOCC-A Senior Enlisted Advisor. "As we pause this morning to remember and honor those lost on September 11th, 2001, I hope the families and loved ones of the fallen find comfort in knowing that the next generation of men and women selflessly stepped forward to serve and protect their way of life."

Today, members of NSOCC-A continue to support a counterterrorism mission while training, advising and assisting Afghan National Defense and Security Force partners. The command is also supporting the Feb. 29 U.S.-Taliban agreement to reduce the number of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan based on the security conditions. Prior to the agreement, seven U.S. service members were killed while supporting combat operations in 2020, two belonged to the Special Operations Community.



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



## Moldovans take lead of SF operations at Saber Junction 20

*By U.S. Army Sgt. Patrik Orcutt  
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe*

“I’ve heard people say ‘I only care about the Americans, I’m not worried about multinational partners.’ Well, I don’t see it that way,” explains Major Gen. (Ret) Kurt Crytzer, acting as the commander for the Special Operations Component Command during exercise Saber Junction 20, “You have to worry about our multinational partners because you need to build up their level of competence.”

Saber Junction 20, took place in August at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. The exercise involved more than 3,500 multinational participants, including 140 Multinational Special Operations Forces from Albania, Moldova, and the United States, along with Lithuanian KASP (Lithuanian National Volunteer Force). The overall mission of Saber Junction was to assess the readiness of the U.S. Army’s 173rd Airborne Brigade to execute unified land operations in a joint, combined environment and to promote interoperability with participating ally and



*A crew chief from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade briefs Soldiers from the Lithuanian National Defense Volunteer Force (KASP), along with Moldovan, Albanian and U.S. Army Special Forces before an air mission during Saber Junction 20 at Hohenfels, Germany, August. 5, 2020. Saber Junction 20 is a force-on-force exercise with 3,500 multinational participants and over 140 multinational SOF from Moldova, Albania, the U.S., with members of the Lithuanian KASP, to improve integration and enhance their overall combat abilities. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Patrik Orcutt.*





***Soldiers from the Lithuanian National Defense Volunteer Force, U.S. Army and Moldovan Special Forces ride in a CH-47 Chinook helicopter during night operations at Saber Junction 20 in Hohenfels, Germany, August. 6, 2020. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Patrik Orcutt.***

Partner Nations.

Saber Junction 20 was the first time Moldova Special Forces took command of the Special Operations Task Group. The Moldovan SOTG commander was in charge of tasking the Special Operations Task Units with missions from the SOCC. Additionally, the SOTG commander was involved in coordinating communications between his units and Conventional Forces.

“The SOTG commander performed very well with all advice that not only I was giving him but other advisors, including a U.S. Special Forces contingent there,” said Crytzer. “I would give him advice, mentorship, and direction. I would hear that being articulated throughout his force. He would disseminate it down to those that need to know below him.”

To meet Saber Junction’s mission objectives, foreign militaries must work together to integrate members from different countries where English isn’t their first language.

“The integration has gone really well,” said a Special Forces commander from 10th Special Forces Group (Air bone). “We’ve gotten past the friction points with language barriers or differing tactics and now we are ready to tackle whatever problems come our way.”

After a rough start, the units learned from their mistakes by applying the lessons learned from the

previous missions. They also applied the advice from the SOCC and the Observer Coach Trainers.

“I saw an improvement in how they plan concepts of the operation. The actions on the objective of the first two were pretty rough,” explains Crytzer. “They had trouble initially with movement, not doing thorough reconnaissance prior to moving to a target, not having checkpoints or control measures along the way. That improved dramatically with a little mentorship.”



***A U.S. Air Force Joint Terminal Attack Controller communicates a target location to an Air Force C-130 aircraft during Saber Junction 20 at Grafenwoehr, Germany, August. 18, 2020. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Patrik Orcutt.***



# U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



## SOCAFRICA senior enlisted leader reflects on 35 years of service

*By Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Love  
Special Operations Command Africa*

It isn't uncommon for people to spend 20 years in the U.S. military and retire, having done what they set out to do. Twenty years is a long time, but it's not long enough for some. Command Sgt. Maj. Lyle H. Marsh, senior enlisted leader of Special Operations Command Africa, retired in a ceremony on Kelly Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany August 21, after spending 35 years in the U.S. Army.

Of those 35 years, 27 of those were served as a Green Beret. Marsh saw the majority of modern U.S. conflict in-person, but that's not what he wanted to talk about during his 40-minute speech to a sizeable, socially-distanced crowd.

"Some of you may have thought I was going to come out here and talk about being in Somalia when the Rangers got hit in the middle of Mogadishu or maybe [infiltrating] the early days of Afghanistan or [infiltrating] the early days of Iraq but I would rather talk to you about the people," Marsh said.

Marsh, born in the Adirondack Mountains of northern New York, entered the U.S. Army on Aug. 14, 1985. He served in the 3rd Infantry Division and 10th Mountain Division. In his words, early in his career, he didn't always live up to his potential.

"I actually was a poor soldier," Marsh said. "I've often wanted to go find my first company commander because he would be blown away that I am where I am. He didn't think I would make it through my first enlistment, though it was only a two-year enlistment. Those first two years I had two company grade article 15s. I made it because people have invested in me."



**Major Gen. Dagvin Anderson, (left) commander of Special Operations Command Africa, and Command Sergeant Major Hank Marsh, senior enlisted advisor of Special Operations Command Africa stand at attention during the start of Marsh's retirement ceremony August 21, 2020. Marsh retired after 35 years of service. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Love.**

Marsh credited his first squad leader in his first unit in Germany with pulling him through.

"I was really not a good soldier in everyone's eyes but one guy, Robert Randolph, my squad leader. That guy continued to show me the good in me. I can still show you the first counseling statement from him. Three quarters of it is the positive side. Only a quarter of it is 'hey, would you stay out of the beer garden?'"

Marsh said his string of positive leadership continued when he arrived at his first ODA.

"That team was one of the best teams they could possible be and they lived it night and day," Marsh said. "It was really a product of (Team leader, Master Sgt.)



Andy Marshall. He had the deep warrior spirit and you couldn't help it, if you're in the room with him, the warrior spirit is contagious. More contagious than COVID. That team was undoubtedly the best team, for a period of time, in 5th group, and if you don't believe me, they are, in fact, the horse soldiers."

Marsh is familiar with the mystique around the horse soldiers in the Special Operations community, but said he has never seen the movie or read the books.

"I don't know which one he was in the movie," Marsh said. "My wife asks me about books and movies and I tell her maybe someday when I'm retired and have some distance I'll look at those things but I know too much about too many people and I don't want to call them a liar."

Marsh spent nearly 23 combined years with 5th SFG(A) serving in a wide variety of positions. Assignments to Special Forces units typically feature constant deployments, and Marsh's decades in the community were no exception. He pointed out that while he faced challenges in his career, his wife, Jesse Marsh, ultimately enabled him to do so.

"My calling has put a tax on our family," Marsh said. "I can't tell you how many times I deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan after (we were married.) If you think she hasn't executed the same level of service and sacrifice that I have, you don't know our story. We both carried heavy loads, we just carried different loads."

In addition to his time as a Green Beret, Marsh counted his Ranger tab as something to be proud of in his career.

"I didn't want to get to the end of my career and regret not having done it," Marsh said.

He was injured to the point he could barely walk during the course and had to get surgery during a break. A week later, he went back to Fort Benning and finished Ranger school. He attributed this resolve to his mother, who raised him as a single mom with 3 kids in the 1960s.

"There wasn't a day in my childhood that my mom wasn't digging, scratching and fighting to provide for us," Marsh said. "She taught me resolve. Particularly when it comes to your family, you'd better be digging scratching and fighting every day."

Accordingly, he came to SOCAFRICA, his final



***Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Hank Marsh, former senior enlisted advisor of Special Operations Command Africa addresses the crowd during Marsh's retirement ceremony August 21, 2020. Marsh retired after 35 years of service. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Love.***

assignment, off of a deployment with Special Operations Joint Task Force - Afghanistan. Marsh arrived two weeks after a battle with an al-Qaeda affiliate left four special operators dead in Niger.

"I don't like to talk about Tongo Tongo because we as a command have learned the lessons, we've invested in those lessons," Marsh said. "We moved forward."

"We don't talk about that as much now because a lot of that is behind us," Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, commander of Special Operations Command Africa said during a change of responsibility ceremony earlier that day. "The reason a lot of it is behind us is because of the work Hank Marsh has done. He was absolutely critical in making sure we found what needed to be changed and changed it. He did it because lives were on the line and lives were lost because of that incident."

Marsh handed over the SOCAFRICA colors to Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Albaugh, formerly the 75th Ranger Regimental Command Sergeant Major.

"Working here has been truly satisfying," Marsh said. "After 35 years working in the military, I've come to see that this organization operates in a time of adversity and challenges better than I think any organization I've ever been in. With limited resources, we continue to get after our nation's top-tier targets. That's impressive considering the small amount of resources we use."

Marsh closed out by thanking his fellow SOCAFRICA members.

"I will always include myself in the SOCAFRICA family," he said. "If you cut me right now, I would bleed red and black, because my love for this organization runs clear through me."



# NATO Special Operations Headquarters

## I miss you



By Ciara Lang

*Editor's note: Ciara Lang is the 14-year daughter of U.S. Air Force Col. Christopher Lang and Lt. Col. Nichole Lang, both career special operations pilots. This article is a creative writing project and a reflection of how a child deals with their parents' military deployments.*

"Wake up buddy," my dad says shaking me. I roll over to look at him. My eyes are still bleary from sleep but I notice that he's already completely dressed in a red t-shirt, jeans and a dark blue jean jacket.

"Why daddy? I'm still sleepy," I say yawning.

"Because," he says, scooping me up in his big arms, "I leave today and I want to go out to breakfast. Sort of like a final countdown until I fly away," he jokes while swinging me around in the air like an airplane.

"Oh," is the only response I can muster.

"Do you want to go to iHop?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" I say, suddenly wide awake at the prospect of pancakes. It's a Tuesday and usually that means I have to go to school, but not today because it's Thanksgiving break!

"Okay, then you need to get ready to go." I nod my head as my dad swings me to the ground. When my dad leaves my room I walk over to my dresser and pick out my favorite shirt, a striped blue and red long sleeve. It's my favorite because the stripes remind me of a race car track. I want to be a race car driver when I grow up. I think my dad always wanted to be a pilot too, so I know I can do anything I want. I finish pulling on my blue jeans, to match my dad, and race car socks, then walk into the living room.

My mom is vacuuming the kitchen and my dad is checking his bags that are sitting next to the front door. I feel like my mom is always vacuuming.

I walk over next to my dad and ask, "Why do you need so many bags?" Next to us is a big pelican case, a massive duffle bag, and a suitcase that I could probably fit in if I tried.

"Well, in this bag," my dad says pointing to the suitcase, "I have mostly regular clothes. Things like socks, underwear, and t-shirts. In this one," he points to the duffle bag, "I have a helmet, oxygen mask, the tiny tank that goes with it and my headphones.

"That doesn't seem like very much for such a big bag," I say, frowning. "Well the headphones and helmet are pretty big compared to normal ones. Finally, in this big case, I keep all the uniforms, boots and gear I'll need for my deployment."

"Oh, okay."

"Are you ready to get some pancakes?!" he asks in a really excited voice.

"Yeah," I say back, not nearly as excited as I was before. As we walk out the door I stop to give my mom a good morning hug.

"Hey, kiddo. You're gonna miss your dad, huh?" she asks.

"Yeah," I nod.

"Okay, well let's go get some pancakes before he has to leave." I nod again and get ushered into the car. I just graduated from the car seat, so I can barely see out the window as the car roars down the highway on the way to iHop, my favorite breakfast restaurant.

"So buddy, what are you gonna do while I'm gone?" my dad asks.

"I don't know. Go to school."

"Are you gonna play baseball in the spring?"

"I'm not sure. Are you going to be able to watch the games?" I ask.

"No kiddo, I'm going to be gone for six months. You know that don't you?"

"Yeah," I say. I'm really sad that my dad is going away for six months. He's going to miss my birthday if the military doesn't let him come back for vacation. My birthday is in February. He's going to miss Christmas too, but he said he would facetime when ever he could.

Finally, we arrive at iHop and my hopes are starting to lift because I truly adore pancakes. Especially the blueberry ones from iHop because I can pour blueberry syrup on them too. The waitress leads us to a table and the three of us slide into the booth. I giggle under my breath when the cushions squeak under my weight. The squeak even more when my parents settle in across from me.

"Okay buddy, what are you going to order? Oh wait let me guess! Blueberry pancakes!" my dad says laughing. My mom is laughing too but, she's also snapping pictures the whole time which I find sort of weird. I just laugh with them, and nod my head. "Well, I'm going to order scrambled eggs, bacon, and two pancakes. How does that sound?"

"That sounds like a lot," I giggle. "What are you going to order, mom?"

"I'm going to order strawberry waffles," my mom says smiling.



Ciara Lang



"Mm, yum." We call over the waitress and order all our food. While we wait I color on the placemat and my parents talk. I respond when spoken too, but mostly I just want to be in peace. I still need time to process. When our food finally gets here I use my pile of blueberry pancakes as an excuse to just listen. It takes us about thirty minutes to finish our breakfast before we are on our way to the airport where we will drop off my dad. His flight leaves at twelve.

We ride along in silence for a few minutes before my dad turns around in the passenger seat to look at me.

"Are you gonna be okay, buddy?"

"I guess," I say, "I'm gonna miss you though."

"I know. I'm gonna miss you too. More than you know." I just nod my head and look out the window. "Hey, Max. I have something for you."

"You do?" I ask, looking at him with surprise.

"Yeah," he says holding out a bracelet.

"Umm, dad, I don't wear jewelry."

"Just hear me out. See I have one too. He holds up his wrist and a bracelet that looks just like mine is sitting there. Put it on," he commands. I slip the bracelet on and look at him expectantly. He holds his bracelet up and then simply touches it. I look at him confused for a second before I feel a vibration on my wrist and look down to see the bracelet glowing.

"Whoa! How did you do that? What just happened?"

"It's cool right," he says smiling, "It'll be like our own personal communication device."

Basically what happened is because I was thinking of you, I touched the bracelet. Then, it glowed and vibrated to let you know that."

"Cool," I say examining the bracelet up close. It is a thin band with a tiny block on top which glows and gives off the vibration. Mine is dark blue and my dad's is black. I touch the bracelet and look up to see if my dad's glows. It does and I feel a smile start to creep across my lips.

"Do you like it?" he asks.

"I love it. It's so cool," I say, still smiling.

"Good, but it looks like we're here," he says, turning back around to take in the airport. I turn to look out my window too. My mom pulls up to the drop off curb and lets my dad hop out. She gets out too and I follow. My dad and mom are loading all of my dad's stuff onto the curb, so I just wait to the side until I can give my dad a hug goodbye.

"Hey, kiddo," my dad says getting down on one knee to be at eye level with me.

"Hi," I say back.

"Are you going to be okay?"

"You already asked that."

"I know, but I'm asking again."

"I guess," I say again and then I feel tears start flowing down my face as my dad gives me a big warm embrace. "I'm gonna miss you daddy. A lot. It feels like I'm never going to see you again."

"I'm gonna miss you too big boy. Don't worry you'll see me again. I'll make sure of it."

He leans back to look me in the eye. "You're a big boy, right?" I nod. "And you're gonna take care of yourself right?" I nod again. "Okay then," he hugs me again, "I love you Max and I'm going to miss you so much and we'll facetime every chance we can okay?"

"Yeah daddy. I love you too." The tears are still rolling down my cheeks when my dad stands up to give my mom a hug and a kiss. Then, he's waving goodbye and walking into the airport, the wheels on his suitcase clicking across the stone. My mom and I get back into the car to go park so we can watch the plane take off from the viewing center. It's about a five minute drive to the parking lot and viewing center, but when we get there I practically launch myself out of the car so I don't miss his plane taking off. My mom hurries behind me and logs in so we can go to the big windows right next to the airplanes.

"Look how close we are, Max," she says pointing to the planes only a few feet away from us.

"Yeah and they're huge, like dragons. Dad is gonna fly away on a dragon," I say sadly.

"Yeah," she says laughing. Just then the intercom crackles to life and announces, "Flight 2-5D boarding now. Flight 2-5D boarding now."

"That's your dad's flight. He's about to get on the plane, Max." I nod and lean on the railing to look outside. I can feel my mom snapping pictures next to me. I'm still not sure why.

About twenty-five minutes later the intercom announces the my dad's flight is taking off and my mom and I watch it taxi out onto the flightline before my mom says, "Max are you ready to go?"

I've taken so many pictures today I could practically fill an entire scrapbook." I nod and take one last glance out the window to look at the grey sky with the sun just starting to peak out. It reflects my mood so perfectly, sad and hopeful. Sad because I miss my dad, but hopeful because I'll be able to tell him how much I love him and miss him whenever with my new bracelet. My mom turns on the radio as we drive away, but all I can think about is how it feels like he's been gone for ages already. "Are you going to be okay, buddy?" my mom asks.

"Yeah. I think I will be," I say with a growing smile on my face as I look down at the new bracelet my dad gave me. I touch it lightly and feel it vibrate on my own skin in hopes my dad feels it too.



**Long Distance Touch  
Bracelet Set**



# U.S. Army Special Operations Command

## President awards Medal of Honor to Army Ranger for hostage rescue



*By Sean Kimmons  
Army News Service*

Sgt. Maj. Thomas “Patrick” Payne received the Medal of Honor at a White House ceremony Friday for helping liberate over 70 hostages from an ISIS prison compound in Iraq five years ago.

President Donald Trump draped the nation’s highest military award around Payne’s neck during a ceremony on the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks -- a day that compelled Payne to enlist.

As news of the attacks spread throughout the world, Payne sat in his high school classroom listening to his teacher.

“His teacher solemnly told the students that their generation had a fight to win,” President Donald Trump said. “In that moment, Pat was called to action. He knew that his country needed him.”

Ten months later, Payne, of Batesburg-Leesville and Lugoff, South Carolina, shipped off to basic training. Since then, he has deployed 17 times to combat zones as a member of the 75th Ranger Regiment and in various



*President Donald Trump awards the Medal of Honor to Sgt. Maj. Thomas “Patrick” Payne at the White House, Washington, D.C., Sept. 11, 2020. Payne was awarded the medal for his actions while serving as an assistant team leader deployed to Iraq as part of a special operations joint task force in support of Operation Inherent Resolve on Oct. 22, 2015. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Zachery Perkins.*



positions with the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

In 2010, he was wounded by a grenade blast in Afghanistan, but later recovered and went on to win the Army's Best Ranger Competition in 2012.

While deployed again, Payne was part of a joint task force that assisted Iraqi security forces in raiding the ISIS prison near Hawija in northern Iraq on Oct. 22, 2015.

"The team soon received horrifying intelligence that the terrorists were planning to massacre their captives and bury them in freshly-dug graves," Trump said. "Pat and his teammates raced into action."

During the nighttime operation, Payne, now 36, risked his life amid heavy enemy gunfire and suicide-vest detonations to save the hostages, many of whom were captured members of Iraqi security forces.

After being infilled by CH-47 Chinook helicopters, Payne and members of the task force climbed over a wall into the prison compound. Payne, an assistant team leader at the time, helped lead his team as it cleared one of the two buildings known to house hostages.

Once inside the building after light resistance from the enemy, Payne's team used bolt cutters to pierce through the locks of a prison door, freeing nearly 40 hostages.

Payne and others then heard an urgent call for help over the radio from other task force members engaged in an intense firefight at the second building.

"Pat turned to one of his fellow Soldiers and said, 'let's get into the fight,'" Trump said.

Payne and his team maneuvered about 30 yards to the heavily-fortified building, which was partially on fire.

Once there, he and others scaled a ladder onto the roof of the one-story building as a sustained rate of enemy machine-gun fire shot out from below. From a vantage point on the roof, they engaged the enemy with hand grenades and small arms fire.

At that point, enemy fighters began to detonate their suicide vests, causing the roof to shake. Payne and others then moved off the roof to an initial breach point on the ground level.

"Pat and his fellow Rangers fought through the fire, the bullets and the deadly blasts," Trump said.

With barricaded enemies firing rounds toward him, Payne entered the structure to open another fortified door. After he managed to cut the first lock, he had to run out due to the heavy smoke and handed off the bolt cutters to an Iraqi partner. After the partner came out for fresh air, Payne took the tool again to sheer off the last lock and kick open the door.

"He ran right back into that raging blaze," Trump said. "He sliced the final lock and released the rest of the hostages as the building began to collapse."

Still being engaged by the enemy, Payne and others



***Then-Staff Sgt. Thomas "Patrick" Payne pulls security while on a deployment in Afghanistan in 2010. Payne, an Army Ranger and now a sergeant major, received the Medal of Honor after he risked his life to save dozens of hostages facing imminent execution by ISIS fighters in northern Iraq in 2015. Courtesy photo.***

escorted about 30 more hostages out of the burning building.

With disregard for his own safety, Payne then reentered the building two more times to ensure every hostage was out. One of those times he had to forcibly remove one of the hostages who had been too frightened to move during the chaotic scene.

"He was the last man to leave," Trump said. "He wouldn't leave, no matter what they said, no matter who ordered him to do it. He was the last one out.

"It was one of the largest and most daring rescue missions in American history," he added. "You truly went above and beyond the call of duty."

The mission left one U.S. Soldier, Master Sgt. Josh Wheeler, and at least 20 insurgents dead.

"Pat would be the first to remind us that he was not alone that day," Trump said.

The president then honored Wheeler's wife, Ashley, who was in attendance.

"Our nation endures because fearless warriors, like Josh, are willing to lay down their lives for our freedom," Trump said. "Our children can grow up in peace because Josh had the courage to face down evil. Our debt to him and to you is everlasting."

For his actions that day, Payne was initially awarded the Army's second-highest award, the Distinguished Service Cross, which was later upgraded to a Medal of Honor.

Payne currently serves as an instructor at the U.S. Army Special Operations Command where he trains "the next generation of American warriors," Trump said.

"Today, he joins the immortal company of our most revered American heroes," he said. "Pat, you personify the motto, 'Rangers lead the way,' and you inspire us all."



# U.S. Army Special Operations Command

## Operation Inherent Resolve

### October 22, 2015 | Kirkuk Province, Iraq



#### Mission

Then-Sgt. 1st Class Thomas “Patrick” Payne served as an assistant team leader deployed to Iraq as part of a Special Operations Joint Task Force in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. On Oct. 22, 2015, his task force was given a mission to rescue over 70 Iraqi hostages being held by ISIS in a prison compound in the northern town of Hawija.

#### Preparation

Before the mission began, Payne’s team spent an entire week planning, rehearsing and preparing for any contingencies they might run into. When the team received intelligence that freshly dug graves had been spotted and the hostages would likely be executed soon, they were given the green light to move out. Payne, his teammates and their Kurdish Special Forces partners loaded onto helicopters and took off.

As the combined American and Kurdish forces hit the ground, the firefight around them was already raging. Dust and smoke were everywhere, making it almost impossible to see. Relying on his training, Payne maneuvered his team to the first building. As they began to set up their ladders to move on their objective, the call came over the radio that a man was down.

The wounded Soldier was Master Sgt. Josh Wheeler, a fellow task force member and dedicated leader. Wheeler was at a different location, so Payne’s medic left to provide medical aid while the team continued their mission. The Kurdish forces were initially reluctant to continue, but Payne, along with another teammate, pushed them to take the necessary action. As they prepared to make their push forward, Payne’s teammate looked his Kurdish partner in the eye and said, “Follow me.” They pushed to their objective, a nearby building that held over 30 hostages.

#### Meeting only light resistance

Payne’s team secured the area and prepared to free the trapped men. As they cut the lock on the prison door inside the building, Payne could see the expressions on the faces of the hostages turn from fear and desperation to excitement and joy once they realized they were being rescued.

As the hostages were being released, Payne received a call on his radio that the team in the second building needed help. The sound of the firefight just 30 yards away was intense, and Payne knew he needed to move quickly. “Let’s get into the fight,” he said to a teammate.

#### Moving into action

Payne and his teammates moved to the roof of the burning building where the second team had called for help. They continued to receive constant fire from the enemy, who had set up a position to their west, and from the enemy in the building directly below them.

The team attempted to enter from the roof using small arms and grenades, but were unsuccessful. As Payne heard screams of “Allahu akbar” below, followed by the explosions of suicide vests, he was able to move his team to the ground and look for another position to enter the building.

As his team attempted to breach the building’s fortified walls and windows, several of the Kurdish forces were wounded by enemy fire. Through the smoke and chaos, Payne looked into the building’s entryway and noticed the main prison door used the same type of lock he had seen in the first building. He knew he would be exposed to enemy fire if he attempted to cut the lock himself, but he also knew the hostages trapped inside the burning building would die if something wasn’t done.

Payne grabbed a set of bolt cutters and ran into the building to cut the first lock on the door. Smoke poured out of the entryway as Payne received enemy fire. After







**Map depicting the area of Operation Inherent Resolve in Kirkuk Province, October 22, 2015.**

cutting the first lock, Payne moved back to a safer position to avoid incoming fire and recover from smoke inhalation, but there was still a second lock that needed to be cut. After the Kurdish forces tried unsuccessfully to cut the second lock, Payne again exposed himself to enemy fire and suffocating smoke to cut the lock and reach the hostages.

Once the second lock was cut, the combined force rushed into the burning building to reach the hostages and eliminate remaining threats. A call came over the radio that the building was beginning to collapse and the mandatory evacuation order was given. The hallways were thick with smoke and they were receiving enemy fire, but there were still hostages inside. Payne knew the team had to move quickly.

### **Preparing for extraction**

Many of the hostages were disoriented and unsure of what was happening. Payne directed the large group to safety, at one point grabbing a man and pulling him down the hallway, allowing the hostages to move out of the building. Still receiving fire, Payne went back in a second time, finding and dragging a large man out of the building to safety. Finally, after Payne entered and exited the building a third time to make sure everyone was out, he gave the “last man” call so the task force could prepare for extraction.

The combined force created a human wall so the hostages could be safely moved from the building as they continued to receive enemy fire. But when Payne and others returned fire, the hostages would stop running out of fear and confusion. Payne’s team held their fire and put themselves at risk to shield the hostages and safely get them out of the compound.

### **Flying back to Erbil**

As the helicopters arrived, Payne was faced with another problem. With so many hostages rescued, they could not be sure they had enough seats on the helicopters. After some quick math, they were able to get everyone on board, but it was so cramped that Payne’s team would have to stand for the entire flight back.

The hostages, Payne’s task force and the partnered forces flew back to Erbil. They had just taken part in one of the largest hostage rescues in history, and for his actions that day, then-Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Payne would be recommended for the Medal of Honor.



**Sgt. Maj. Thomas “Patrick” Payne**



# U.S. Army Special Operations Command

## 75th Ranger Regiment

### conducts Single Ranger Retreats



*By Tracey Bailey*  
*75th Ranger Regiment Public Affairs*

The year 2020 has definitely been one for the record books as the entire world continues to deal with the effects of a global pandemic.

For single Soldiers in particular, this year has forced them to adapt to one of the most unique challenges in their military careers. Resiliency has rarely been in such high demand.

“It’s been super frustrating,” Spc. Zachery Lind, a human resources specialist with the Military Intelligence Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment said referring to the many ways COVID-19 has impacted his personal and professional life in recent months.

These type of challenging environments are exactly where Unit Ministry Teams step in, assess the needs, and advise commanders on ways to provide innovative solutions to care for Soldiers.

Across the U.S. Army, UMTs are working hard to reduce the pressure created by the global pandemic environment for Soldiers of all faiths, improving the readiness, and overall health of the force.

This summer, the Unit Ministry Teams of the 75th Ranger Regiment did just that with each battalion executing a series of overnight single Ranger retreats, reaching nearly 100 single Rangers from four battalions and the Regimental headquarters.

“Just the chance to get away from the barracks and spend time with friends, to think about what I want my life and legacy to be, is a phenomenal opportunity,” a Ranger from 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment said.

Utilizing a commercial vendor specializing in outdoor resilience education, Ranger UMTs led three different series of overnight training events. Abiding by the constraints of COVID-19 was an essential

component of planning this trip.

The UMTs partnered with Ranger medical health professionals to mitigate risk, social distancing Rangers, donning masks whenever indoors, and limiting overnight iterations to groups of 15 people or less.

Each trip was a quick but very full 24 hours. Some Rangers went to Thomaston, Georgia, where they set up camp and kayaked a 12-mile stretch of the Flint River. Multiple bald eagle sightings, rock jumping, and a side excursion into a giant cave made for an exciting and memorable time.

Other Rangers traveled to the coast of Georgia, one battalion camping out and paddling down the shoreline to Little Tybee Island and another battalion camping and exploring the Cumberland Island National Seashore on bikes.

Setting up and breaking down camp, cooking and cleaning up from meals, and preparing for the outdoor activities were all group efforts. Integral to the resiliency training curriculum was practicing team work and the need to take responsibility for yourself and your buddies around you.

Throughout each day, Ranger chaplains led discussions on “responsibility, reflection, and refocus,” as components of resilience, equipping the Rangers with tools to grow as men of character, and enhance their mental, emotional, and spiritual fitness.

There’s nothing like good food around a campfire after a long fun day to bring out the stories and struggles that Soldiers are dealing with in their everyday lives.

“I have never been on a trip like this before, but I really liked it. It was fun to jump in and find ways I could help,” Spc. Adam Gathercole said who is assigned to the Regimental Military Intelligence Battalion.

“It was so encouraging to hear these guys go deep, and get real, and just talk about how they are really



doing and the struggles they are currently dealing with or have dealt with in their past,” Chaplain (Capt.) Bo Waldo, Deputy Regimental Chaplain, 75th Ranger Regiment said upon returning from one of the trips.

“It really is a privilege for me to care for these Rangers. The single Rangers are such a critical component of our force, and they are having to deal with this crazy season of isolation in some very challenging ways. This trip was well worth the effort to put it together,” Waldo added.

*It really is a privilege for me to care for these Rangers. The single Rangers are such a critical component of our force, and they are having to deal with this crazy season of isolation in some very challenging ways. This trip was well worth the effort to put it together.*

— Chaplain (Capt.) Bo Waldo

The reviews were overwhelming!

“This event has really helped be refocus on what is important in life,” another Ranger from 3rd Battalion said.

“I had such an awesome time. I hope we get to do more of these soon!” Pfc. Xavier Diaz, finance technician, assigned to the Regimental Funds Management section, said.

The Regiment plans to hold

additional single Ranger retreats in the future to ensure everyone has an opportunity to attend and benefit from these experiences.





# U.S. Army Special Operations Command

## 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Best Warrior Competition



*A member of 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and finalist for U.S. Army Special Operations Command Best Warrior Competition, completes an Army Combat Fitness Test, a 12-mile foot march and a rifle qualification with his special forces group. The Soldier is competing against twenty-one of the Army's top Soldiers and Noncommissioned Officers who are conducting their events at locations across the world for this year's U.S. Army 2020 Best Warrior Competition. Photo by Sgt. U.S. Army 1st Class Jacob Connor.*









# Naval Special Warfare Command



## Discipline, innovation, attention to detail: training combat medics

*By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Matthew Duncker  
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

The Navy SEAL ethos states that it demands discipline and expects innovation; a teammate's life, as well as the success of the mission depends on technical skill, tactical proficiency and attention to detail. Training is never complete. This is especially true for combat medics.

A combat medic's skills must be continuously practiced and maintained at the highest level. High-intensity training promotes and nurtures opportunities for skill advancement and sustainment which translates to lives saved on the battlefield.

Answering the call from deck-plate leadership for more medical training, Naval Special Warfare Group 1's newly established Tactical Medical Cell developed an advanced combat medicine course of instruction. The course covers Tactical Combat Casualty Care and Prolonged Field Care and provides training to an integrated team of SEAL medics and augmented independent duty corpsmen.

TMC Training Director Cmdr. Levi Kitchen believes that this course will help to ensure SEAL medics and IDCs are proficient in the latest combat medical concepts aimed to limit preventable combat trauma death.

"To my knowledge, there is no training like this within NSW that is organically sourced amongst Department of Defense components," said Kitchen. "There are courses similar to this, but they are generally contracted out with a heavy price tag. Though labor intensive for the NSWG-1 TMC, we provide advanced training for a fraction of the cost."

Kitchen added that the TMC is uniquely positioned to provide this excellent training because the unit has the support of its leaders in addition to the use of one of the largest military medical centers in the world.

The weeklong training, held at Naval Medical Center San Diego BioSkills & Simulation Training Center



***A Hospital Corpsman performs an ultrasound on a Special Operator during a combat medic training course at Naval Medical Center San Diego's bio simulation lab Aug. 5, 2020. The week-long course was held by Naval Special Warfare Group 1 Operational Medical Training Cell for Special Operator medics and independent duty Hospital Corpsmen to practice and develop Tactical Combat Critical Care and Prolonged Field Care training. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Matthew Duncker.***

focuses on TCCC which was initially developed by Dr. Frank Butler, a former Navy SEAL officer, in 1996. Hoping to reduce preventable combat trauma deaths, Butler developed research protocols and examined combat trauma experiences to find where medicine had fallen short in saving lives on the battlefield.

After identifying areas for improvement, a curriculum was developed and utilized by Special Operations Forces personnel beginning in 1997. It has since grown into a DoD-wide training curriculum.

PFC is an extension of TCCC concepts and designed to care for combat casualties in austere locations without available medical evacuation resources – a scenario not uncommon to SOF.

Special Warfare Operator 1st Class Noel Sons is the



TMC tactical medical lead. Sons states that from his experience in SOF medicine, the best possible outcome in SOF medicine is a result of dedicated and diverse teams of medical professionals working in close partnership with SEAL medics and IDCs.

“Cmdr. Kitchen and I developed the TMC program to be an example of the proud NSW tradition of persistence, perseverance, and excellence under challenging conditions,” said Sons.

According to Chief Special Warfare Operator Dave Dillehay, the TMC leading chief petty officer, SEAL medics are often cross-trained in different specialties such as sniper or breacher. The time available for specific medical training is limited or difficult to obtain due to the cost and logistics involved.

“This week is protected time specifically focused on combat trauma without the distractions of other roles and responsibilities,” said Dillehay. “The training via NSWG-1 puts the combat medics and IDCs in direct contact with a subject matter expert in combat trauma medicine by utilizing the extensive resources of NMCSO.”

The course is strategically placed at the end of the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle to provide a high-fidelity combat medical refresher prior to a SEAL team’s deployment.

The first three days of training employ the didactic method of learning and build upon the strong foundational knowledge of the combat medics and IDCs. Lectures are facilitated by SMEs from trauma surgery, orthopedic surgery, emergency medicine, otolaryngology, anesthesia, and general surgery. Additionally, time is spent in simulation and cadaver labs practicing TCCC and PFC techniques.

Kitchen notes that this training allows for the integration of IDCs into medical treatment teams with medics.

“IDCs and SEAL medics have completely separate training pipelines, rarely do they interact in a training environment which can lead to confusion with roles, responsibilities and capabilities in the operational environment,” said Kitchen. “By focusing this course on a SEAL team’s medics and IDCs, they are able to train together and become a fully integrated medical treatment team.”

The fourth day is the capstone of the week’s training. SEALs and IDCs are involved in realistic scenario training at Strategic Operations, a combat medical training facility in San Diego.

“The capstone event provides simulated environments in order to fully immerse the students and allow them to use the skills and training received throughout the course,” said Sons. “Environments range from naval

vessels and a crashed helicopter to a medical trauma center. Realism is added with explosions, sounds of gun fire, and role-players that utilize prosthetics and fake blood to simulate realistic combat injuries.”

The fifth and final day is conducted in small groups and covers controlled substance inventory, authorized medical allowance list refresher, advanced ultrasound.

Kitchen believes that in the current medical climate, developing in-house training for NSW combat medics and IDCs is crucial. The course is the first step of a training program which includes special operations diving medicine, whole blood transfusion, and high fidelity combat casualty scenarios interspersed throughout the training cycle.

“At a time when training is being cancelled or becoming untenable due to restriction of movement requirements, we are able to produce an extremely high quality, locally sourced product thereby reducing the risk of COVID-19 and the associated ROM requirements for course attendees,” said Kitchen.

In providing regular local training classes and simulated environments, NSWG-1’s TMC has created a program that, despite constrained timelines and a global pandemic, allows for combat medics and IDCs to remain fully prepared to care for combat casualties. With continued support, TMC will further develop a robust training program that will measure its continued success in lives saved on the battlefield.



***A Special Operator treats a medical dummy for simulated injuries during a Tactical Combat Critical Care and Prolonged Field Care training evolution held at Strategic Operations. The evolution was part of a week-long training course held by Naval Special Warfare Group 1 Operational Medical Training Cell for SO medics and independent duty Hospital Corpsmen to practice and develop TCCC and PFC training. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Matthew Duncker.***



# Naval Special Warfare Command Navy SEAL's heroism extends beyond the battlefield



*By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Mat Murch  
Naval Special Warfare Command*

An East-coast based Naval Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, the highest non-combat decoration awarded for heroism by the Department of Defense in a small ceremony, Sept. 22 Virginia Beach, Virginia.

"It was an honor to recognize the actions of one of our teammates," said Rear Adm. H. W. Howard III, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command. "His problem solving, grit, and humility is powerful testimony to our standard for character and service that we - the men and women of Naval Special Warfare - aspire to serve each day."

Over Memorial Day weekend 2019, the SEAL along with his wife, children, parents, and in-laws spent the weekend in Morehead, North Carolina. Throughout the long weekend, the SEAL's mother-in-law worried about the prospect of going to the beach. Her fears were based on the fact that the rash of drownings Atlantic Beach saw that year - six to date at the time - was more than occurred in all of 2018.

A topic of conversation for several days, the family decided to move forward with plans to go to the beach. Safety was a prime concern as the SEAL stepped onto the extremely crowded shoreline. On their arrival, five kids playing in the water drew his attention.

"These kids stuck out to me because they were playing just a little deeper than any of the other kids," he said. "There weren't lifeguards on the beach, and the red flag for rip current was up so not many people were in the water, and if they were, they were only knee deep, so

they had my attention."

As the family settled into their beach vacation, the SEAL glanced back to the children playing in the distance and saw three of the kids dive into a wave. As the children exited the wave, they began to drift out. Sensing trouble, he stood up and started to walk toward the water.

"My first thought was, is this happening after we talked about it for the last two days?" he said. "On top of that, I've never seen anyone drown. I've heard stories, I have a lot of training when it comes to life-saving techniques, but I had never seen it in person."

Walking closer to the ocean, the kids were slowly drifting away, but they weren't splashing or screaming. It was quiet.

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*When I got to him I expected him to be combative, he was only five-years old, but I still expected him to be flailing. He was incredibly still because he was hypoxic. I put him in the rescue position and began to swim to shore.*

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Grabbing a youth size boogie board, the SEAL walked the shore line and watched the kids.

"The kids had been in the water anywhere from 10 to 30 seconds, and that's when I saw their father bolt into the water," he said. "That's when I knew that the situation was bad."

The SEAL got about halfway to where the children were when he could hear their father screaming for help. While continuing to move toward the water to help, the SEAL got the attention of his family and had them call 911. He reached the father and saw that the man was treading water holding up two children trying to keep their heads above water.

The SEAL gave the father the boogie board for the children and saw that the third child, was 25 yards away. The father pointed at the child, saying he needed help. The SEAL immediately swam to his aid.

"When I got to him I expected him to be combative, he was only five-years old but, I still expected him to be



flailing,” he said. “He was incredibly still because he was hypoxic. I put him in the rescue position and began to swim to shore.” Hypoxia is a physical condition resulting from the deprivation of oxygen.

The SEAL swam hard despite his fear that he wasn’t sure he could get back to shore because the rip current kept pushing him out.

“I was pretty smoked by that point,” said the SEAL. “I was drained. I knew even if I couldn’t make it back, rescue crews would be showing up soon, so I just put my head down and kept going.”

As he kept swimming, all he could think of was how thankful he was for his training.

“Everything about rip currents, and surf zones I learned in BUD/S [the SEAL assessment, selection, and training program],” said the SEAL. “I was reminded of the seven-mile swim we do in BUD/S, and I thought to myself, if I have to I can do this all day.”

After ten minutes of swimming, the SEAL escaped the rip current and reached the surf zone, he was met by a Marine who assisted in bringing them back to shore.

After leaving the child with the Marine, his attention turned to the father and sons still about 125 yards off shore. The first rescue put the SEAL a few hundred yards down the beach, and he now had a greater distance to cover to reach the father and his boys again.

“I’m not sure how long it took me to get out there. I know it took longer than I thought because of my position. The whole time I could see all three of them,” said the SEAL.

“As I passed through the surf zone, I looked up and couldn’t see the dad anymore. I got close to the boys, and I saw the dad for a split second just below the surface, and then I lost him.”

The SEAL was able to get the boys onto the bigger boogie board and asked them where their dad went. One boy replied that he was gone. He looked around for the father but couldn’t find him.

Less than a minute later, rescue swimmers and a jet ski arrived. The SEAL told the rescue team the last place he saw the father and took the two boys back to shore as rescue personnel tried to locate the father.

Ernest Foster II, a 38-year-old school teacher, died trying to save his children. The SEAL and Foster’s family did their best to aid the police in follow-on reporting. After the event transpired, the SEAL noticed stories coming out based on sporadic stories from beachgoers who only witnessed segments of the event.



***A Navy and Marine Corps medal is placed on the uniform of an East Coast based Naval Special Warfare Operator after being awarded the medal for saving the two children from a rip current. The Navy and Marine Medal is the highest non-combat decoration awarded for heroism by the United States Department of the Navy. Photo by U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Andrew L. Johnson.***

“I was the only one who saw everything from start to finish,” said the SEAL. “The reports painted him [the father] as someone who was swimming in a red flag rip current with his kids. People on social media just trashed this poor guy and all reports failed to mention his true actions that day. A hero who died saving his family.”

The SEAL contacted Foster’s mother to give a first-hand account of what actually happened.

“I was able to set the record straight and was asked to speak at his funeral. We were able to make his funeral a celebration of his bravery and sacrifice because he was a hero. The man died saving his children; he was a hero.”

To this day the SEAL remains in contact with Foster’s mother.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The Naval Special Warfare Operator’s identity is not provided due to operational security and privacy concerns.

NSWC is committed to its Sailors and the deliberate assessment and development of their tactical excellence, ethics, and leadership as the nation’s premiere maritime special operations force supporting the National Defense Strategy. It is the maritime component of USSOCOM, and its mission is to provide maritime special operations forces to conduct full-spectrum operations, unilaterally



# *Naval Special Warfare Command*



## **Naval Special Warfare Group One conducts austere high altitude environment training**

*Sailors assigned to Naval Special Warfare Group One practice marksmanship during austere high altitude environment training Sept. 15, 2020 at Chugach Mountain Range, Alaska. Naval Special Warfare Command is committed to its Sailors and the deliberate deployment of their tactical excellence, ethics, and leadership as the nation's premiere maritime special operations force supporting the National Defense Strategy. Courtesy photo.*







# Air Force Special Operations Command



## 352nd SOW cultivates partnership, capability with Norway in the high-north

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Washburn  
352nd Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

Members with the 352nd Special Operations Wing recently returned home after participating in a training exercise, Fluid Needle, near Rygge and Banak Air Station, Norway, from Aug. 24 - 28.

The overall intent for the exercise revolved around completing two complex personnel recovery scenarios. One led by the The Royal Norwegian Air Force and one led by the U.S. with partner forces integrated into both scenarios. This exercise continues a long line of tradition of training

between the two countries, ever building to improve relations and capabilities.

"We have worked with the 352 SOW before," said Norway's Lt. Col. Morton Christiansen, Norwegian Special Operations Command air operations. "All the way back to the 90's when we were jumping out of the MCs [MC-130J Commando II]. It's been a long relationship, but this is the first time we have everyone together here at this base [Rygge] with the Ospreys and the MCs and this type of tight integration."

The cohabitation allows the U.S. and Norway to learn from each other and build upon existing skill sets along with



321st Special Tactics Squadron Airmen repel from a CV-22B Osprey, based out of RAF Mildenhall, U.K., during a training mission at Rygge Air Station, Norway, August 25, 2020. Integration with the Norwegian Air Force allowed the 352d Special Operations Wing to enhance and strengthen bonds with our partner nation and further secure the strategic high-north region. The exercise provided training for 352d Special Operations Wing members on capabilities such as personnel recovery, forward area refueling point, aerial refueling, maritime craft delivery system, and fast rope training. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Washburn.





***A Royal Norwegian Air Force Bell 412 helicopter crew member demonstrates refueling procedures with a U.S. Air Force 100th Logistics Readiness Squadron forward area refueling point specialist, during a training exercise at Rygge Air Station, Norway, August 26, 2020. Integration with the Norwegian Air Force allowed the 352d Special Operations Wing to enhance and strengthen bonds with our partner nation and further secure the strategic high-north region. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Washburn.***

vigilance,” Secretary Barrett said in the release.

Putting words into action, Secretary Barrett flew out to Rygge. Once there, she met with 352 SOW senior leaders and Airmen on the value of the U.S. and Norway partnership and the high-north region.

Witnessing the combined training first hand, Secretary Barrett saw fast rope training from a CV-22B Osprey between 321st Special Tactics Squadron Airmen and Norwegian Forsvarets Spesialkommando, Norway special forces, often referred to as FSK. This was the first time that FSK performed fast roping from a CV-22B.

“Besides the obvious exposure-to-the-elements factor of Norway, The U.S. and Norway have a great partnership with the same regional objectives,” Hagwood said. “We’re both aligned to ensure our mutual goals are met.”

The exercise concluded with Maritime Craft Aerial Delivery System drops with the MC-130J and aircrew, personnel recovery with the CV-22B and aircrew and special tactics Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape specialists, and aerial refueling between MC-130s and CV-22s.

“There are a lot of lessons learned, but we accomplished what we set out to do,” Hagwood said.

“Exercise Fluid Needle clearly demonstrated the close ties between the U.S. and Norway and our combined effort to counter the threats of potential adversaries.”

enhancing shared defense of the high-north from potential adversaries.

“We develop the trust and interoperability while we train so that when we meet in operations like we have done in Afghanistan, we know who we’re working with, how they plan and execute the mission,” Christiansen said. “We build the trust during peace-time training and we increase the trust when we actually do operations in a crisis or war.”

Norway is a prominent partner to the United States and has geographical significance to safety and security in the region.

“Norway was chosen because we wanted to build upon the lessons learned from Cold Response,” said Capt. Joshua Hagwood, Exercise Fluid Needle mission commander. “It’s pretty much a challenging environment and it gives opportunities to not only to develop with our partner nation, but also to further lay down the groundwork for the special operations wing’s future high-north persistent presence.”

Additionally, training and mission execution in Sweden demonstrates the commitment and implementation of the Secretary of the Air Force Barbara Barrett’s Arctic Strategy, released July 2020.

“The Arctic is among the world’s most strategically significant regions – the keystone from which the U.S. Air and Space Forces exercise



***Aircrew members of a CV-22B Osprey look at a MC-130J Commando II, all based out of RAF Mildenhall, U.K., while being aerially refueled during a training exercise near Bodø, Norway, August 27, 2020. Integration with the Norwegian Air Force allowed the 352d Special Operations Wing to enhance and strengthen bonds with our partner nation and further secure the strategic high-north region. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Washburn.***



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## Airmen test dropping blood from aircraft



*A box containing blood bags flies out of the back of a C-145 Skytruck for a study called Operation Blood Rain April 20 at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. Bags of fresh blood were placed into a secure cooler then dropped out of an aircraft flying at a low level. The study was to see if the blood would be damaged in any way from the drop. Courtesy photo.*

**By Samuel King Jr.**

***Air Force Special Operations Command***

It was just a normal sunny, spring day on the Eglin range, April 20; that is, until blood fell from the sky.

The blood, packaged in a cooler and attached to a parachute, was pushed out of a C-145A Skytruck for a test study called Operation Blood Rain.

The goal of the study was to determine if fresh blood could withstand an airdrop to combat medics in austere environments.

Providing blood to the critically injured is a life-saving treatment combat medics can apply to keep

service members alive until they can get them to a higher level of care like an airfield hospital, according to Maj. Roselyn Fuentes, 96th Medical Group and member of the research team.

This study, an Air Force Materiel Command Spark Tank semi-finalist, began as a dinner conversation during a combat aviation advisor team's high altitude and cold weather training. The idea was "sparked" by the time and resource intensive process of collecting fresh whole blood during their recent training as well as the various remote CAA deployment locations.

Air Force Special Operations Command's CAAs carry out foreign internal defense, security forces assistance and unconventional warfare tasks. The CAA





***A box containing blood bags flies out of the back of a C-145 Skytruck for a study called Operation Blood Rain April 20 at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. Bags of fresh blood were placed into a secure cooler then dropped out of an aircraft flying at a low level. The study was to see if the blood would be damaged in any way from the drop. Courtesy photo.***

tag incorporates a variety of Air Force career fields.

The project team, made up of 96th Medical Group doctors and 492nd Special Operations Wing CAAs began in earnest in January to lay out the logistics, coordination and the tactical process of the study.

The nature of the CAA unit with its teams of medics, pilots and aircrew flight equipment, made for easy communication of the requirements for the project. This benefit specially enabled the team to move fast and compress Operation Blood Rain's timeline from concept to action.

The 492nd SOW's Combat Coyotes were used for the initial tests. Teams dropped saline from the aircraft to test the delivery system prior to the actual blood drop.

On the day of the drop, blood from volunteers was placed into bags and vials. The vials would be the control group and the four 350 milliliter bags would be placed into a cooled secure box.

The box was attached to a parachute and given to the Coyote's aircrew. Part of the C-145 mission, located at Duke Field, is air drop training.

The C-145 passed over the drop zone at about 200 feet flying at approximately 115 mph. The loadmaster released the box of blood out of the aircraft and the parachute opened shortly after.

Operation Blood Rain's research team waited on the ground and watched as it drifted down.

The blood landed safely and was examined for any

visible damage on scene. Eglin's medical laboratory technicians analyzed the blood with the control group to see any changes or damage that would not allow it to be used due to the drop and impact. The Eglin lab team concluded there was no break down or disintegration in the red blood cells of the airdropped blood samples.

The research team determined an airdrop is a viable way of delivering blood to combat medics treating hemorrhaging patients in a pre-hospital setting. However, further research is required to fully validate the safety of the method.

The team's next step is to continue to develop the blood drops with various aircraft and ground conditions to determine the results are replicable.

An ultimate goal of the research team would be for drones to deliver vital blood to combat medics in the field. These deliveries would help extend the "golden hour" or period of time following a traumatic injury when there is the highest likelihood that prompt medical and surgical treatment would prevent death.



***Bags of blood are packed into a secure box to be used in a study called Operation Blood Rain April 20 at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. The Bags of blood in the box were dropped out of an aircraft flying at a low level. The study was to see if the blood would be damaged in any way from the drop. Courtesy photo.***



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## Special Tactics unit surpasses 6,900 days combating war in Middle East

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Rachel Williams  
24th Special Operations Wing*

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks which marked the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism, U.S. service members saw an increased spike in deployments that has ultimately sustained its high tempo for nearly two decades.

For the men and women of the 17th Special Tactics Squadron, since their initial response to the GWOT in October 2001, there have been no breaks in deployments and combat operations for over 6,900 days in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, Freedom's Sentinel and Resolute Support.

Day in and day out, members of the unit can be found scattered around the globe, bringing the fight to the enemy's front door. These never-ending actions are one of the many that directly reflect the testament of the heritage, courage and sacrifice of the unit that can only be foreseen to continue.

"The 17th STS members have single handedly removed [thousands] of [high value targets] from the battlefield and therefore severely degraded terrorist networks that pose a threat to U.S. interest," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Travis Deutman, the commander of the 17th STS. "Most importantly, our operators are consistently providing desperately needed close air support at the most critical times in combat, while also coordinating insertion, extraction, and medical and casualty evacuation lift for critically wounded teammates."

The 17th STS is unique within the Air Force Special Tactics community in several ways.

The squadron, instead of residing in one location, is geographically separated in three locations so that the unit can train and deploy alongside all five of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command's 75th Ranger Regiment battalions. Headquartered at Fort Benning, Georgia, alongside the Regimental Headquarters, 3rd Ranger Battalion, Regimental Special Troops Battalion, and Regimental Military Intelligence Battalion. Two operational detachments



***A Special Tactics Airman with the 17th Special Tactics Squadron watches as a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook prepares to land during exercise Red Flag-Alaska 18-3 at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, Aug. 16, 2018. Special Tactics is U.S. Special Operation Command's tactical air and ground integration force, and the Air Force's special operations ground force, leading global access, precision strike, personnel recovery and battlefield surgery operations. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Sandra Welch.***

are located at Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia, alongside the 1st Ranger Battalion, and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, alongside the 2nd Ranger Battalion.

Consisting of primarily tactical air control party Airmen, the unit's primary mission is to provide Air Force Special Operations Command's Special Tactics TACPs to the 75th Ranger Regiment, pairing the Department of Defense's most lethal joint terminal attack controllers with the most premiere direct-action raid force. Essentially, the 17th STS operators are directing precision strike munitions and delivering destructive ordnance on enemy targets in support of the Ranger ground scheme of maneuver.

Aside from TACPs, the unit also provides special reconnaissance Airmen, combat controllers, Special Tactics officers and combat mission support Airmen to the 75th Ranger Regiment to enhance its precision strike and global access capabilities.



“No other unit in the [United States Air Force] offers the opportunity to close with and destroy enemies of the United States like those of us selected to support the Ranger Regiment,” said an ST TACP operator with the 17th STS. “The Ranger Regiment is its own legend-generator and the opportunity to serve alongside one of the most lethal light infantry forces on earth is humbling.”

The bond between the 17th STS and the 75th Ranger Regiment is inimitable due to the respective units being geographically located together and conducting entire training cycles with the exact team that they will be deploying with.

“The 17th STS promotes what I would argue is the foremost example of joint service relationships,” said U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Aaron Inch, an ST TACP operator with the 17th STS. “This unit has an extremely proud lineage and comes with the responsibility for each member to uphold and/or surpass the standard that has been set by those before us.”

With ongoing involvement in combat comes valor, and the Special Tactics community has just that. It is the most highly decorated community in the Air Force since the end of the Vietnam War with the 17th STS having a large hand in that statistic, seeing its members receive more than 80 high valor medals for courageous actions in combat.

“The foundation of this unit is the heritage of warriors that distinguished themselves in combat before we walked these halls,” said U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Steve Reedy, the 17th STS operations superintendent. “Every member of this organization earns their right to be a member every day in keeping with that heritage.”

One of the latest examples of recognition that the 17th STS has been awarded was in April 2019 when U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Cam Kelsch, an ST TACP operator with the 17th STS, was awarded the Silver Star Medal for actions while deployed with the 75th Ranger Regiment to Afghanistan in 2018. With this presentation, Kelsch became the first TACP to be awarded a Silver Star for actions in combat during the last seven years.

“Getting to lead people for whom undertaking such dangerous missions are just another day is inexplicable,” said U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Evan Serpa, the 17th STS Senior Enlisted Leader.

For the quiet professionals of this prestigious squadron, it is common to hear throughout the unit for one operator’s battlefield successes to be credited to his entire team. They spend days, weeks, and months training alongside each other to forge trust and competency to take downrange.

“The training that we provide simply adds different layers and different [tactics, techniques, and procedures], seeing that the Ranger Regiment conducts operations in a very specific way,” said U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Evan Patoray, 17th STS, Detachment 2 flight commander. “All of our training is fast paced and complex, and although the basics

do not change, the level and repetition at which we do the basics is what sets us apart. As a team, we push each other beyond what we have all seen in combat. We do this because we understand that if this training does not save their own life, it will allow them to save the lives of the Rangers around them.”

The physical and mental challenges the operators undergo for at least 275 days out of the year equips them for the demanding environment they will face downrange.

“Technical competency matters, professionalism matters, but your mental fortitude and intellectual flexibility might be the most important attributes,” said an ST TACP operator with the 17th STS. “The training to get here and working with [the Ranger Regiment] prepares you for the realities of combat.”

The high-speed operations tempo can be brutal and toxic to the operator and their home life if they do not have the proper training and decompression time, according to U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ryan Duhon, an ST TACP operator with the 17th STS.

The Special Tactics Airmen aren’t alone with their sacrifices; their families have also sacrificed immensely for over 6,900 days in support of their loved ones. They’ve missed birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and much more, to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

“A lot of personal sacrifice has to happen to make a unit like this one so effective and professional,” said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Ferguson, squadron flight chief. “We do not take breaks. We operate alongside our 75th [Ranger Regiment] brothers.”

In order to be welcomed into the Special Tactics community, aspiring conventional TACP Airmen undergo a harrowing week-long assessment at Hurlburt Field, Florida. The assessment is designed to test the candidates limits and determine if they have what it takes to join the ranks within ST. Candidates are then hand-selected into the 17th STS.

“The team will push you to be the best version of yourself on and off the battlefield,” said U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Joey Hauser, an ST TACP operator with the 17th STS. “The missions you will be of have impact felt at a national strategic level, and the legacy you will be of, will be some of your proudest accomplishments in life.”

If you asked members of the 17th STS what it means to be a part of the combat-proven unit, one common answer would stand out – humbling.

“We fight, bleed and laugh beside [the Rangers]. We win as a team or fail as a team,” said Duhon. “When we are downrange, there is no deviation or segregation between Air Force and Army. We are one team fighting daily together to overcome adversaries.”

For anyone wanting more information on how to join the 17th Special Tactics Squadron, email [SDScreening@jdi.socom.mil](mailto:SDScreening@jdi.socom.mil)



# Air Force Special Operations Command



## Cannon Airman achieves military dream



**Master Sgt. Heriberto Mercado Rodriguez, 27th Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron C-130 aircraft parts storage section chief, poses for a photo with his family at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., Sept. 19, 2020. Mercado's family has been with him his entire military career. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Vernon Walter III.**

**By U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Vernon Walter III  
27th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs**

A trainee silently walks through the chow hall line on his first day of basic training. He holds his tray up despite being told not to. A training instructor approaches him, shouting at the trainee to put down the tray and push it. The trainee stares at him, confused. The instructor stops yelling after realizing the trainee's disoriented demeanor.

"Do you speak English, trainee?"

The trainee tenses. He sets down the tray and gives his reporting statement. "Sir, trainee Mercado reports as ordered. No I don't, sir." One of the few English phrases the trainee has memorized.

"Where are you from?"

"Puerto Rico, sir."

This was one of the first challenges that Master Sgt. Heriberto Mercado Rodriguez, 27th Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron C-130 aircraft parts storage section chief, had to face along his Air Force career. But it was just one more hurdle on the path to his lifelong dream of being part of the military.

"My father was part of the Army, back during the Korean War," Mercado said. "I lived with both him and my uncle, so I was around that culture a lot. While most other kids wanted to be doctors or firefighters, I knew that I wanted to join the military from the start."

While it was his goal to join from a young age, goals can get shrouded or pushed to the side. As Mercado grew, he had to take on other challenges.

"Being from a military family, I had a lot of pressure



to do well,” Mercado said. “I wasn’t the best kid, but I still did well enough. One day, when I asked a teacher about going to college, he laughed at me. He said ‘You won’t make it into college. If you keep up how you’re going, you’re going to become a drug lord and they’ll kill you in three years.’”

Wanting to prove the teacher wrong, Mercado worked harder and applied for his dream college, the University of Puerto Rico. They denied his application.

“I didn’t let that stop me though,” Mercado said. “I kept working and by the time I graduated high school, I made it into college. During college, I worked at a sushi place. In my second year of school, I got married and had my daughter. It goes without saying, it was really tough.”

One day, while working in the sushi shop, one of Mercado’s friends leaned towards him. “Hey, do you want to learn how to make real sushi?”

Eager for a new opportunity, Mercado agreed. His friend drove them to meet with Keiko Yabuuchi, Puerto Rico’s First Lady of sushi. From there, he spent years learning how to become a proper sushi chef. After being taught, Mercado decided to pursue a career in sushi crafting.

“I thought I could make some money to help pay for college,” Mercado said. “I decided to start working for catering. I would host for local events, and eventually started working at places like the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and the Coco Beach Golf Club. I was making good money, so after a college, I started my own business that same year. While I do remember it fondly, that place took over my life and made me lose track of my dream.”

Jampas Sushi Bar took up two years of Mercado’s life.

“It might have made money, but it didn’t do anything to support my family the way they needed,” Mercado said. “I was gone so often, I didn’t get to be with my wife or daughter as much, and it put a strain on us. I still didn’t feel right, either. I felt empty, hollow.”

Unhappy with where his life was going, Mercado needed to think about what he truly wanted to do.

“I was lost,” Mercado said. “My wife was there to support me, and told me she wanted me to be happy. So I had to think, and decided to join the military. I had been ignoring my dream for long enough, it was time to finally pursue it. With my wife supporting me, I knew I made the right choice. I went to see a recruiter and sold my restaurant. One year later, I was off to basic training.”

Then, 26-year-old Mercado, away from his home and family for the first time, stares up at the training instructor. Despite dreaming of joining the military, he was never active in learning English.

“Where are you from, trainee?”

“Puerto Rico, sir.”

The instructor, coincidentally also from Puerto Rico, starts to speak in Spanish. He continues yelling at Mercado the whole way down the chow hall line.

“It’s pretty embarrassing to get yelled at in a different language than everyone else,” Mercado said. “When you can’t understand the person yelling at you, it’s nice. You can kind of tune out the noise, since you don’t pick up on anything. But when you’re the only one getting yelled at in Spanish, you not only know what’s going on, but you also know everyone is staring at you trying to figure out why the trainee is getting yelled at in something other than English.”

Once trainee Mercado was at the end of the chow hall line, the instructor stopped yelling at him. He looked at Mercado and spoke softly, for only him to hear.

“Trainee, if you don’t learn English by the end of these eight weeks, you won’t make it in the Air Force.”

Determined to fulfill his dream, to make his family proud, Mercado found multiple avenues to take on this daunting task.

“Honestly, I was lucky to have the flight I had,” Mercado said. “There were two guys in my flight that spoke Spanish and English. They would teach me some necessary phrases and practice stuff with me like reporting statements. Not only that, but one was right in front of me in formation. He would whisper things to me if I needed help understanding. It took about three weeks for me to feel a lot more confident. By the end of basic, I was the one calling jodies. My instructors were impressed, and I was sure I made my family proud.”

After graduation, Mercado returned home to prepare his family to move. He also got to show his parents that he had done it, he had achieved his childhood dream.

“I remember the look my dad gave when he saw me in uniform,” Mercado said. “He looked at me and said ‘Son, I’m proud of you, really and truly proud.’ Then he told me it was the last time I would see him. He was right. He had cancer in his stomach and esophagus. He died 4 months after I left for my first duty station.”

The young boy who had aspired to be like his father, who had challenged himself again and again, who had started a new business and started his own family, had done it. He had joined the military, and still continues to this day.

“It’s been a challenging road to be sure, and I didn’t make it easy on myself. If I could go back to talk to 13-year-old Heriberto, I would tell him to prepare. If it’s really your dream, then you need to make sure you can achieve it. Learn English, start running and exercising. It’s up to you to make your dreams real.”



# *Marine Forces, Special Operations Command*



## **MARSOC Conducts raid on Camp Roberts**





*U.S. Marines with U.S. Marine Corps, Special Operations Command prepare to board MV-22B Ospreys with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 164 (Reinforced), 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, prior to executing a raid for Realistic Urban Training at Marine Corps Air Station Camp Pendleton, California, June 8, 2020. Marines trained in an unfamiliar, urban environment, focusing on tactics, techniques, and procedures applicable to raid operations. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Patrick Crosley.*





# Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

## SOCOM's international team expands global reach, strengthens bonds with partners under COVID-19

*By U.S. Air Force Maj. Ryan DeCamp  
U.S. Special Operations Command Public Affairs*

Imagine having to coordinate a mission across 16 time zones with as many as 25 different countries and an even greater number of languages. At the same time, state and terrorist organizations are trying to stop you from moving at every turn.

Now coordinate that mission without being able to meet your teammates in person, travel or see the frontlines firsthand.

This is the curveball COVID-19 threw at U.S. Special Operations Command's international operations team.

"We were faced with a situation where the standard telework tools did not meet our requirements. We needed a capability that was accessible by our partners around the world that also worked for our international partner's here in Tampa," said U.S. Army Col. Harold Miller, SOCOM's International Operations Branch team leader.

Like many businesses across the U.S., SOCOM's international team had to quickly find encrypted systems allowing them to securely connect with their partners virtually. But unlike some of those businesses, SOCOM's international team comprises 25 different countries across the globe and various time zones that need to connect at the same time. It took a little flexibility, but not much time to find a platform helping SOCOM's international team learn to hit the

COVID-19 curveball, Miller said.

"Fortunately, we had experience using the Defense Department's All Partners Access Network (APAN). Noah Schmiedecke, SOCOM's International Operations Branch Information Technology Planner, was very familiar with APAN and was able to adapt it very quickly helping us continue to connect with our partners while COVID was beginning. Noah is the unsung hero of SOCOM's APAN success and flexibility."

Schmiedecke built more than 50 new sites for APAN to support U.S. and partner nations responding to the virus. These include NATO's Special Operations Headquarters, SOCOM's network of international SOF partners, SOCOM's components and organizations in other combatant commands.

Multiple countries saw effects on their units. One used APAN to connect deploying troops with families prior to deploying to Afghanistan for Operation Resolute Support.

"Due to the COVID-19 situation in my country, our family care events are virtual instead of the usual weekend gatherings," said a partner country's special operations liaison officer assigned to SOCOM. "The international operations team here created a

tailored APAN portal allowing us to have video teleconferences, share files and chat. They also trained us to hose the event and troubleshoot errors."

The event had a positive effect on morale prior to heading to Afghanistan, the officer said. Overall, the virtual





event brought 120 family members together over eight hours allowing deploying troops, families and unit leadership to connect prior to leaving home.

The need to connect virtually and across continents during COVID-19 extends beyond just those heading to traditional deployment locations like Afghanistan.

SOCOM has 25 partner nations with fulltime representatives on MacDill Air Force Base. COVID-19 forced many of the U.S. and partner forces to telework, making it harder to connect to the infrastructure needed to link with partners without liaisons at MacDill. SOCOM could still connect with partners, but it took longer with members having to socially isolate due to the virus. They looked to APAN to provide a faster solution.

The Defense Department's APAN system came on line in Hawaii in 2001. The original goal was to support connectivity with partners in the Indo-Pacific. Since then, APAN has proved its value in supporting connectivity with US allies and partners all over the world.

APAN is web based and doesn't require the standard hardware issued traditionally to U.S. forces and partners. The program is free to use, only requires an internet connection and offers full encryption at a level similar to most modern credit card companies. Most significantly during COVID-19, it can be used by those using Windows and Mac-based computers while teleworking away from DoD facilities.

This flexibility helped the international team and their partners continue to connect despite not being able to travel or meet in person.

Since harnessing the full use of APAN, SOCOM's international team has routinely held meetings with up to 155 people simultaneously ranging from the Indo-Pacific, the Americas and Europe.

Brazil is the newest member of SOCOM's international team. Capt. Alan DaSilva has been at MacDill about a year and a half. Prior to COVID-19's arrival, the international team had APAN, but used other services to communicate. DaSilva said he's noticed APAN's effects.

"I started seeing APAN as a more useful tool which could save a lot of money replacing trips for meetings in person. It's really helped us to continue communicating while COVID-19 has prevented us from reaching out in traditional ways."

Sgt. Maj. Radek Vadjeka from the Czech Republic has served as the international operations branch's senior enlisted advisor the last two years. He said, "Investment in development of APAN turned out to be an excellent option for communication with the international community during COVID-19 days. It has helped us stay connected with our militaries around the world. The challenges our partners faced prior to COVID-19 did not go away because



***U.S. Special Operations Command's International Operations Branch, also known as J3-International, hosts 26 nations full time and maintains constant connectivity with more than 35 countries daily. Communications systems like the All Partners Access Network allowed the International Operations Branch and their partners to communicate securely and adapt to the changes brought by social distancing and teleworking during COVID-19. The branch coordinates on topics ranging from training to real-world actions taken by state or non-state actors like terrorist organizations. Photo by U.S. Special Operations Command Public Affairs.***

of the virus, so finding additional ways to continue working together is vital so we can keep addressing those threats."

Miller said the team has supported development of more than 50 new APAN sites for the global SOF community since March. The organizations come from countries on at least three continents. Specific countries are not named for security reasons.


A worldwide virus largely shut down regional economies, international travel and forced millions of people to remain in their homes. Given this environment, SOCOM's international team adapted and found ways to continue the mission and by virtually linking with partners in real time. Miller said the flexibility and availability of APAN has actually increased their ability to coordinate, respond to crisis and function in the long run.

"From the outset of COVID-19, we knew communication and transparency with our SOF partners were going to be key," Miller said. "The technology was important, but as we say in SOF, people are more important than hardware. Teammates like Noah Schmeidecke and Sgt. Maj. Vadjeka were able to adapt APAN to meet the needs of a broad international SOF community. We and our partners know what's on the line: 330 million Americans and the millions of residents in our 25 partner nations and growing are depending on our teamwork and continued success."







The background of the page features a repeating pattern of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) seal. Each seal is circular, with a rope-like border. Inside the border, the words "UNITED STATES" are at the top and "SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND" are at the bottom, separated by three stars on each side. The center of each seal contains a stylized torch with a flame.

*Editor's note: No special operations forces have lost their lives in combat or training since the Aug. 2020 issue of Tip of the Spear.*



*A Sailor assigned to Naval Special Warfare Group One rappels down a shaft in a glacier during austere high altitude environment training on Eklutna Glacier, Alaska, Sept. 11, 2020. Courtesy photo.*

