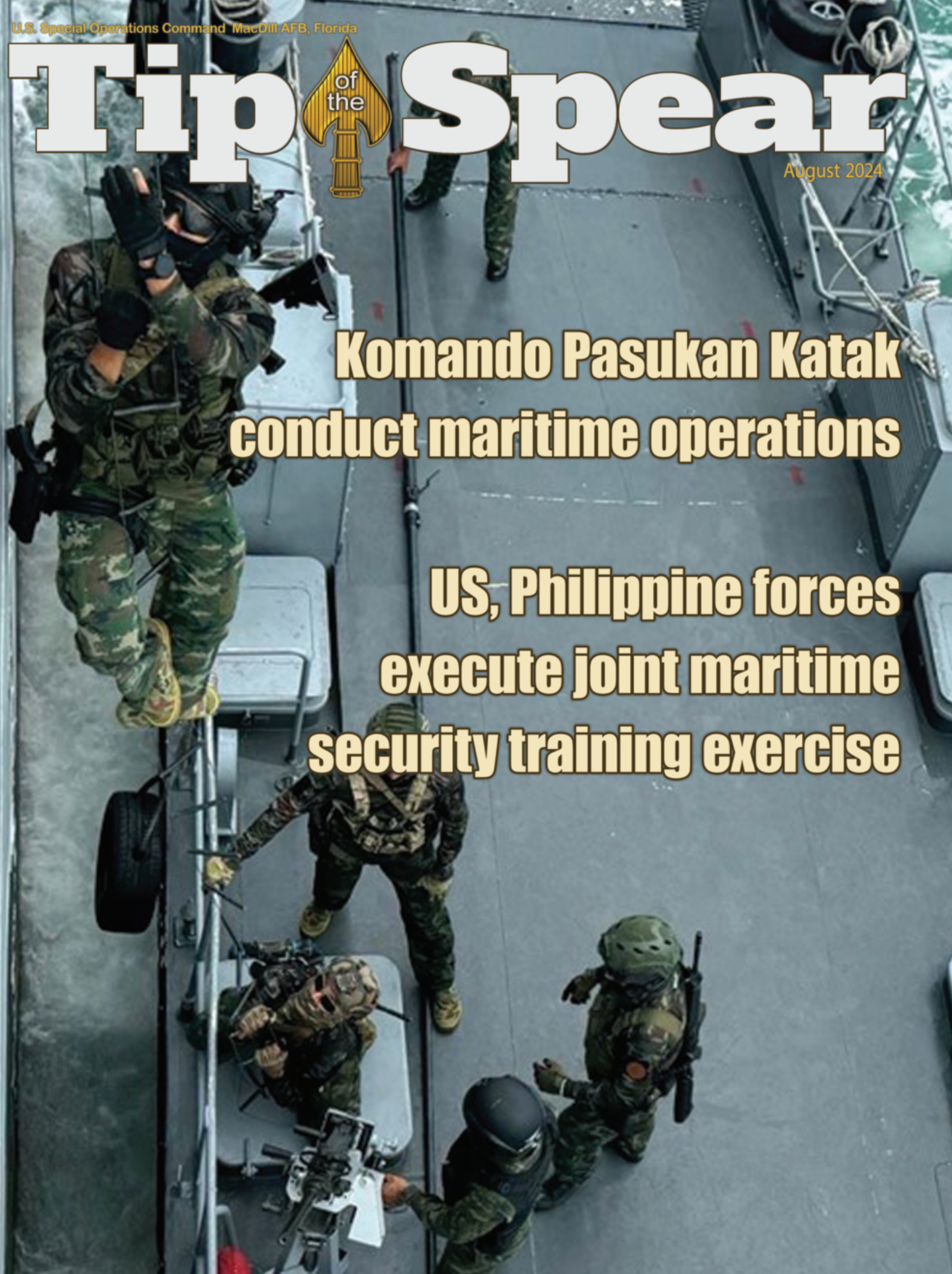


Tip of the Spear

August 2024

**Komando Pasukan Katak
conduct maritime operations**

**US, Philippine forces
execute joint maritime
security training exercise**



United States Special Operations Command



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Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) Members of the Indonesian Navy's Komando Pasukan Katak (KOPASKA) perform a ship boarding while conducting maritime interdiction operations during a joint combined exchange training (JCET) exercise with U.S. Naval Special Warfare personnel in Indonesia, July 20, 2024. Courtesy photo.

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U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



US Special Operations Forces Africa conduct joint exchange with Botswana partners

Courtesy Story
Special Operations Command Africa

U.S. Special Operations Command Africa conducted a Joint Combined Exchange Training between 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) Green Berets and the Botswana Defence Force at Thebephatshwa Air Base, which concluded July 18, 2024.

During the seven-week duration of the training, U.S. forces and the BDF refined multiple ground and aerial tactical skills including military freefall training, close quarter contact and shooting drills. The culmination of these activities is designed to strengthen U.S.-Botswana bonds and defense cooperation.

“We came to do tactic exchange or technique exchanges based on experiences fighting counterterrorism in various theaters,” said the 3rd Special Forces Group

(Airborne) Team Lead. “We basically come together, share our experiences and our different techniques we’ve used to counter these threats and learn from each other on what they’ve done to be successful.”

JCETs leverage existing relationships to provide partner nations with tailored special operations training to reinforce security training across Africa. JCETs are mutually beneficial for U.S. forces and African partners as they aim to enhance critical military-to-military connections and boost interoperability and mission readiness.

U.S. forces maintain a longstanding defense and diplomatic rapport with Botswana. This exchange marks the third collaboration with the BDF in the past three years. The U.S. previously engaged with their Botswanan partners through two previous JCETs in 2022 and intend for further security cooperation in the future.

A member of the U.S. Army 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) reviews contact drills conducted by members of the Botswana Defense Force during a Joint Combined Exchange Training in Thebephatshwa Air Base, Botswana, June 20, 2024. JCETs enhance U.S. relationships with partner nations by developing and maintaining critical military-to-military connections and improving allied readiness and interoperability. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joshua DeGuzman.



Ghana Armed Forces Department Religious Affairs Chaplaincy Course

*By U.S. Army Spc. Kevin Brown
Special Operations Command Africa*

Chaplains across Special Operations Command Africa, U.S. Army National Guard and the Ghana Armed Forces participated in the Ghana Armed Forces Department of Religious Affairs Basic Chaplaincy Course for Chaplains and Imams at Garrison Methodist Presbyterian Church in Burma Camp, Ghana, July 16-25, 2024.

The course provides education and resources specifically designed for newly commissioned chaplains and imams. It marks the beginning of a five-year curriculum to certify chaplains.

Throughout the course the religious leaders receive comprehensive training on various topics, to include institutional chaplaincy, working in multid denominational communities, civil-military cooperation, relationships with the press and social media, combat stress management, and military mental health.

“It is primarily intended for the new inductees into their chaplain core,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jason Hesselning, chaplain, SOCAF. “The basic course is mainly to give them the fundamental tools to succeed as a chaplain so that they can effectively support their commanders and reach out to the service members they are assigned to.”

The course aims to expand cultural frameworks for ethics, morale, human rights, the law of war. It also reduces the recruitment opportunities for violent extremist organizations. This collaboration between SOCAF and the GAF is one of many crucial elements of their enduring partnership, enhancing interoperability during crises and to promote security and stability in the region. The North Dakota Army National Guard is participating in the course as part of a state-sponsored partnership mission. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the partnership between the North Dakota Army National Guard and the Ghana Armed Forces.

“Last year was a vision materialized,” said Maj. Justin Fenger, chaplain with the 141st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade of the North Dakota Army National Guard. “Alongside U.S. Africa Command we participated in the first ever chaplain training school for the Ghana Armed Forces.”



U.S. Army Maj. A'Shellerien Addison, chaplain, 721st Troop Command, Delaware Army National Guard, provides insights on the role of U.S. chaplains as it pertains to the subject of military mental health during the Ghana Armed Force Department of Religious Affairs Basic Chaplaincy Course for Chaplains and Imams at Garrison Methodist Presbyterian Church, Burma Camp, Ghana, July 19, 2024. The intent of the course is to expand cultural frameworks for ethics, morale, human rights, law of war, civil military relationships and lower the recruiting opportunity of violent extremist organizations. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Kevin Brown.

Maj. A'Shellerien Addison, chaplain, 721st Troop Command with the Delaware Army National Guard, provided guidance on military mental health. Addison, a female chaplain, was introduced to Lt. Col. Cynthia Kunitse, the first female chaplain in the GAF. Female chaplains make up a small percentage within the religious affairs community in both the GAF and U.S. military, so the representation from both forces is a unique component of the ongoing Women, Peace and Security effort.

“This course is very essential and critical to us and that is why we appreciate the partnership with U.S. AFRICOM and our counterparts from North Dakota who come periodically to support,” said Col. Benjamin G. Kumi-Woode, the director general of religious affairs of the Ghana Armed Forces. “They bring certain experiences and know how and when we add what our partners are bringing, our chaplains are getting well rounded training so that whatever they are confronted with in the future, as the military troops’ chaplains, they will be able to deliver.”

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe



POTFF team producing results in Special Operations Command Europe

*By U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Tim Beery
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe*

The mission of the Preservation of Force and Family program is written in the name. Preservation is achieved by creating a holistic approach to address the strain of the high pace environment and mission. In a typical Special Forces unit, the focus is maintenance and rehabilitation from injury. At Special Operations Command Europe, the impetus shifts to cater to a more experienced workforce.

“We’re a little bit different here at SOCEUR because we have an older population,” explained Dawn Stottlemeyer, POTFF Director at SOCEUR.

“Most of our team has been through some combat and had a lot of surgeries, so we are trying to keep them together as long as they wish to stay in the military or help them transition out successfully into the civilian world.”

Stottlemeyer said the POTFF program was initially created during the Global War on Terror and intended for special operations forces service members to keep them in the fight. As operations have evolved, so too, has the program of the POTFF.

“We are no longer just focused on the operators,” she said. “Now we are able to help the enablers, the augmentees. As long as their orders say Special Operations Command Europe, we are able to assist them.”

The POTFF program extends beyond rehabilitation, however, and extends to mental wellness, physical fitness, holistic health, and spiritual health. The professional staff is dedicated to improving the lives of the servicemembers they see.

“I would tell people that when they come to SOCEUR as servicemembers, they have an opportunity of a lifetime because their next duty station might not have these resources,” said Stottlemeyer. “Here they



Lt. Col. Jesús Maldonado, Executive Officer to the Commanding General at Special Operations Command Europe works out in the Preservation of the Family and Force (POTFF) gym located at Patch Barracks, Stuttgart Germany. Utilizing POTFF programs, Maldonado shed over 40 pounds and significantly changed his body composition. Courtesy photo.

have access to 80 years of subject matter expertise ranging from nutrition and body composition to marital counseling. You just won’t find this at other locations.”

When Lt. Col. Jesús Maldonado arrived at SOCEUR, he was within Army standards but was more than 40 pounds over his ideal weight and made the decision to take action.

“I was about 40 pounds overweight when I got here in August, 2022,” he explained. “I started working with the POTFF program for about four months,” he said.

Maldonado, the Executive Officer to the Commanding General at SOCEUR, said he quickly dropped 10 pounds, but plateaued in his weight loss journey until he met with POTFF dietitian Rob Skinner to discuss his nutritional needs.

“I talked with Rob and he said I needed a catalyst,” he said. Working with Skinner, Maldonado created a program catered to his daily nutritional needs. Using a daily percentage of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates, coupled with reduced alcohol consumption, Maldonado was able to shed 30 more pounds.

“We do a baseline body composition assessment that looks at your total weight, body fat individual. As we take them through our program, we start to look at where weight gain or weight loss tends to be. If we are gaining muscle and losing fat, we are winning. If it’s the opposite, we have to figure out what that is.”

The program is effective, but it requires buy-in from the service member, said Maldonado.

“It takes some tedious work, actually counting your food, there are tools out there that help, but it does require some work. I would prep everything in the morning, and count my macros based on my body composition.”

Through Skinner’s program, Maldonado was able to obtain his daily values, thus giving him the answers to the test.

“Our nutrition is geared specifically to whatever the individual’s training stimulus is,” explained Skinner. “To be very general, nutrition should be based on what you’re training for, whether that be weight loss, physical performance, or general health. When you have a specific goal, we can tweak the nutrition from general health to whatever the goal is.” he said.

Maldonado explained that as long as he hit his daily protein intake goals, he was allowed a 10 percent variance on the other metrics, assuming he continued his daily workouts. Following this regimen, he was able to shed 4-5 pounds of fat per month for nearly 8 months.

“The tough part is when you are making meals,” he said. “My wife and I were both really good about measuring individual ingredients for recipes. If you can follow that, you can follow the workouts.”

Maldonado started individual workouts with the POTFF strength and conditioning staff, alternating strength and cardio sessions. Working with strength coach Brook Hamilton, Maldonado has been able to maintain his weight loss and physical fitness for over two years since coming to SOCEUR.

“We work with both SOF and non-SOF individuals to prepare them adequately for their positions,” explained Hamilton. “We coordinate with the dietitian and the sports medicine to get the results we want.”

In two years of involvement with the POTFF, Maldonado has changed his life both physically and mentally and said the program gave him the knowledge to accomplish his goals.

“It was a collective team effort,” he said. “The entire POTFF staff was outstanding. The lessons they teach you here can easily be taken everywhere you go.”



Lt. Col Jesús Maldonado, Executive Officer to the Commanding General at Special Operations Command Europe works with the battle ropes in the Preservation of the Family and Force (POTFF) gym located at Patch Barracks, Stuttgart Germany. Courtesy photo.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



Special Operations Forces cut through Kunsan's rainy skies to demonstrate strike capability



An Airman assigned to the 320th Special Tactics Squadron ensures an Airman's parachute equipment is secured and properly fitted prior to a flight at Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea, July 23, 2024. The Airmen participated in a variety of training events during a three-week joint combined exchange training event involving ROK special operations partner forces. The special operations forces' JCET program is managed at the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict level and ensures routine combat readiness of U.S. personnel in the special operations community. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman James Johnson.

***By U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Michael Charles
8th Fighter Wing***

The Republic of Korea's summers are famous for cloudy skies and torrential downpours that may appear at a moment's notice. However, during a week in mid-July, members of the Wolf Pack at Kunsan Air Base observed a spectacle precipitate from the open skies unlike the typical monsoon rains.

Spectators throughout the installation could spot paratroopers descending from the sky onto a drop zone near the base's alternate landing area, delivered by a U.S. MC-130J Commando II and a Republic of Korea Air Force MC-130K Hercules flying in formation together.

The nearly three-week, multi-national training called joint combined exchange training, (JCET) was hosted by the Special Operations Command Korea from July 15-31, 2024.

The goal of the training was to ensure interoperability with coalition special operations forces (SOF) partners in realistic training environments. To do this, mission organizers created challenging scenarios in different domains to replicate adversarial tactics in combat scenarios.

“A JCET is where USAF SOF train alongside our ROK SOF counterparts to rehearse mission essential tasks while enhancing our lethality,” said Capt Raymond Lessig, 320th Special Tactics Squadron drop zone controller and mission commander. “The training provided opportunities for U.S. and ROK SOF to work through language barriers, exchange tactics techniques and procedures, and gain a better understanding of our collective strengths/weaknesses so that we can better leverage each other’s capabilities during real-world contingency operations.”

As the only theater special operations command in which the U.S. and host nation SOF are institutionally organized for combined operations, SOCKOR and aligned units regularly train with their counterparts in the ROK Army Special Warfare Command, Air Mobility and Reconnaissance Command, Naval Special Warfare Flotilla command, and other units.

To successfully accomplish the training, planners relied heavily on the coordination between the 8th FW, SOCKOR, the 353rd SOW, ROK AMRC, and the 51st Fighter Wing at Osan Air Base. Each unit played a complementary role in achieving desired training objectives. Throughout the second week, participants utilized Kunsan AB to conduct the jump training portion of the JCET.

“This is the fourth year we’ve conducted this training at Kunsan,” said Lessig. “We keep choosing to come back because of how accommodating and helpful the Wolf Pack has been.”

The ability to accept follow-on forces is one of the key tenets of the Wolf Pack’s core mission and was on full display during the weeklong training on Kunsan. According to Col. Peter Kasarskis, 8th Fighter Wing commander, this is what makes Kunsan such a crucial asset in optimizing USFK’s agility and ability to project airpower throughout Asia.

“Kunsan exemplifies readiness in the Indo-Pacific,” said Kasarskis. “Our Airmen here at the Wolf Pack demonstrate daily what it means to be forward-deployed and ready to fight tonight. Supporting training, like the JCET, highlights our ability to rapidly receive follow-on missions and integrate with allies and partners. Kunsan is more than just a fighter base; it’s an agile power projection platform ready for any mission.”



An Airman assigned to the 320th Special Tactics Squadron, conducts a military freefall jump out of an MC-130J Commando II aircraft assigned to the 1st Special Operations Squadron over Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea, July 23, 2024. Air Force Special Operations Command Air Commandos participated in a variety of training events during a three-week joint combined exchange training event involving ROK special operations partner forces. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman James Johnson.

Lessig said Kunsan’s location also made the difference in ensuring this iteration of the training was as representative of potential real-world scenarios as possible.

“Kunsan’s location is invaluable to creating realistic training conditions,” said Lessig. “Its location, surrounding environment and mission set, forces participants to plan and rehearse airborne operations far from their desired landing area, potentially at night and in adverse weather conditions, and to safely navigate as a team with all combat equipment to their objective.”

As this portion of the JCET ends, the event showcased the military partnership between the U.S. and ROK forces, serving as a powerful reminder of their unwavering commitment to regional security. However, for some, this event was more than just a testament to their strength; it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness the seamless interoperability of two of the world’s most formidable military forces.



US, Philippine forces execute joint maritime security training exercise

*By U.S. Marine Corps 1st Lt. Arthur Deal
U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific*

For decades, the Sulu Archipelago, a collection of three main provinces in the southern Philippines, has served as a primary route for trafficking, illegal fishing, and smuggling illicit materials into the country. The islands create a seam between the Celebes and Sulu Seas, ending less than 50 miles from Malaysia. The area contains two vital sea lanes to the Philippines, the Sibutu Passage and the Basilan Strait. Violent extremist organizations (VEOs), like Abu Sayyaf Group, have used these southern sea lanes to funnel weapons and people to fuel illicit activities throughout Mindanao, the most southern region of the Philippines. For more than 20 years, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have fought VEOs throughout rugged mountains and thick jungles in this region. Now, the AFP is shifting their strategic focus to maritime security (MARSEC). With help from U.S. Special Operations Forces led by Marine Raiders, AFP units are developing methods and processes to secure the sea lanes and enhance the Philippine's territorial defense.

In March of this year, Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. signed Executive Order No. 57, creating the National Maritime Council (NMC) to strengthen the nation's MARSEC. President Marcos emphasized the need to strengthen MARSEC through Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) amid "a range of serious challenges that threaten not only the country's territorial integrity, but also the peaceful existence of Filipinos."

For many of the AFP partners who have lived on Mindanao, they know first-hand how smuggling from the sea can impact local communities. "Illicit goods coming in from other countries have hurt our local economy, and that has a negative impact on the individual and their families," said Major Emery Torre, acting Operations Officer for Joint Task Force Tawi-



Philippine Special Forces soldiers and U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific operators conduct Visit, Board, Search and Seizure drills during a Joint Maritime Security Training Exercise off the coast of Jolo Island, Philippines, April 16, 2024. The exercise, which is led by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and supported by U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific operators, strengthens maritime domain security by rehearsing interagency communication and maritime interdiction techniques. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps 1st Lt. Arthur Deal.

Tawi, one of the subordinate task forces in the southwestern region of Mindanao.

"There are cases of bad actors entering the country and creating local chaos in the southern Philippines," said Captain Cesar Pangan Jr., Operations Officer for Naval Forces Western Mindanao (NFWM) Command. He adds "It may be one way of weakening us."

In 2002, U.S. SOF began rotating troops to Mindanao to support the AFP, successfully conducting operations to remove VEOs from the central regions of the islands. Mindanao encompasses the southern third of the country, roughly 700 miles south of the Manila, the nation's capital. As Barry Stentiford writes in his book, *Success in the Shadows*, "The enhanced security in the region provided by the improved Philippine military and the improvements in public infrastructure allowed for sustained economic and social stability—diminishing the conditions that had fueled the insurgency."

With this success, a new mission emerged: maintaining internal security to prevent VEOs from resurfacing by protecting the local borders. In order to cut off VEO supply lines to prevent this resurgence, the Philippines identified the importance of shifting the AFP's focus to MARSEC.

To put this new focus into action, NFWM, with the support of U.S. Marine Raiders, developed their fourth iteration of Joint Maritime Security Training Exercise (JMSTX) -- an AFP- led exercise focusing on the enhancement of MARSEC in the Philippines. Captain Pangan, Captain Cesista, the commanding officer of Task Force 61, along with AFP forces throughout the Sulu Archipelago designed this iteration of JMSTX to enhance interdependence, integration, and interoperability (I3) by creating a joint interagency task force (JIATF). To enhance the JIATF I3, AFP units developed scenarios for the JIATF to conduct maritime interdictions of smuggling and other illicit activities.

The exercise spanned three provinces throughout the Archipelago: Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. JMSTX focused on command and control between multiple units integrating across these provinces during each of the training scenarios. "Different AFP units may have different standard operating procedures," said Captain Pangan. "This exercise gave us the opportunity to interact with each other and develop primary, alternative, and emergency communication plans from one unit to another."

During execution, a vessel, acting as a suspicious ship, traveled from Basilan to Tawi-Tawi using known and historic smuggling routes. Littoral Monitoring Stations (LMSs) along this corridor monitored the sea lanes, identified vessels, and routed reports. Each province in the exercise had a responding JTF who would then task an action unit with locating the vessel and conduct a maritime interdiction, rehearsing a concept called visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS). Multiple units across the JIATF practiced boarding, searching, and clearing a ship of illegal supplies and smugglers. "The units appreciated the interoperability of getting to work with each other," said Lieutenant Colonel Frank Baylon, the officer in charge of training and education for Joint Task Force Orion. He adds "For the troops that executed the vessel boarding, they were able to see their work pay off after several weeks of training."

Rear Admiral Donn Anthony Miraflor PN, Commander of NFWM, said "an exercise like JMSTX is timely." Philippine JMSTX participants have expressed an interest in expanding future iterations of the exercise. Moving forward, the AFP will rely on their LMSs to

monitor vessel movements through their sea lanes. "The infrastructure put in place, with the LMS, is not just for the Navy or Coast Guard," said Captain Pangan. He added by design, monitoring facilities offer all AFP units information critical to territorial security.

During the final After Action Review of the exercise, the Marine Raider Task Force Commander emphasized that JMSTX highlighted the resolve of the United States – Philippine Partnership.

A relationship born more than 70-years-ago still shows no sign of wavering; and while the operating environment may change, the United States and Philippine partnership will remain steadfast.



Philippine Special Forces soldiers conduct Visit, Board, Search and Seizure drills during a Joint Maritime Security Training Exercise off the coast of Jolo Island, Philippines, April 16, 2024. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps 1st Lt. Arthur Deal.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



Komando Pasukan Katak conduct maritime operations

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

Members of the Indonesian Navy's elite Komando Pasukan Katak (KOPASKA) engaged in a joint combined exchange training (JCET) with a U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) unit from July 1 to July 26, 2024.

The training encompassed various specialized skills, including maritime tactics, close-quarters combat, sniper shooting, tactical combat casualty care, casualty evacuation procedures, and mission planning.

JCET events demonstrate the partnership between the United States and Indonesia, improving bilateral relations, strengthening defense capabilities, and promoting interoperability among allied forces. These exercises show the U.S. commitment to enhancing readiness to address security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

"These exercises offer a unique opportunity for both nations," said an NSW operator participating in the JCET.


"They support both countries in forging lasting bonds, cultivating relationships, and exchanging invaluable cultural insights, which are indispensable during times of good and bad."

With a focus on maintaining a forward-deployed posture and fostering continuous engagement with partner nations, U.S. special operations forces stand prepared to provide agile responses to emerging contingencies in the Indo-Pacific theater.

Indonesia and the United States share a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, including a commitment to freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea. In November 2023, U.S. Secretary of Defense Austin and Indonesian Minister of Defense Prabowo Subianto signed a historic Defense Cooperation Arrangement and discussed ways to expand training opportunities, increase educational exchanges, and improve maritime domain awareness. Our strong bilateral defense relationship is at the heart of our strategic partnership.



Members of the Indonesian Navy's Komando Pasukan Katak (KOPASKA) clear a space while conducting maritime interdiction operations during a joint combined exchange training exercise with U.S. Naval Special Warfare personnel in Indonesia, July 20, 2024. Courtesy photo.



Members of the Indonesian Navy's Komando Pasukan Katak (KOPASKA) perform a ship boarding while conducting maritime interdiction operations during a joint combined exchange training exercise with U.S. Naval Special Warfare personnel in Indonesia, July 20, 2024. Courtesy photo.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command



Ranger walks grandfather's WWII path during D-Day commemoration

By Christopher Hurd
Defense Media Activity - Army

As Maj. Jack Gibson waited to board a plane to France last Thursday, he thought about his grandfather and what he went through 80 years ago fighting in Europe during World War II as part of the 2nd Ranger Battalion.

This wasn't a normal work trip for Gibson, a judge advocate with the 75th Ranger Regiment, this one was special he said, because he was taking part in the D-Day anniversary commemoration and getting a chance to walk the same path his grandfather did so many years ago.

"I was inspired by him to become a Ranger," Gibson said. "He inspired me by the way he lived his life, how he carried himself, and how he treated people. He was someone I emulated and even though he never really talked a lot about being a Ranger, I knew he was proud of it."

Gibson and his five siblings spent much time with their grandfather, Jim Shalala, as they grew up in Cleveland. They attended church together every Sunday, played cards, and celebrated holidays. They often saw their grandfather at their youth sporting events cheering them on from the stands.

"He just loved being around people, especially his grandkids," Gibson said.

When it came time for Gibson to decide on his future path, he followed his grandfather and older brothers into military service. In his junior year of high school, he was selected to attend the U.S. Military Academy.

To congratulate his grandson, Shalala gave him the red and black Ranger scroll he wore on his uniform during the war.

"This was something special to him about his time in service, and he wanted me to have it," he said. "At the time, I didn't really know what the 2nd Ranger Battalion was or what [the scroll] meant."

A year later, Gibson's grandfather, grandmother and sister passed away from injuries sustained in a car crash. They were traveling home from Louisiana after seeing Gibson's older brother off before a deployment to Afghanistan.

They were all suddenly gone as Gibson started his military journey. He kept his grandfather's scroll and learned more about the 2nd Ranger Battalion and their role in liberating Europe as his career progressed.

Prior to the war, the U.S. Army didn't have special operations forces. That changed in 1942 when the War Department authorized the activation of the first Ranger unit. That was followed by the formation of six more units, including the 2nd Ranger Battalion, which was activated in April 1943.

Shalala was drafted in July 1943 and joined the elite infantry unit as a replacement in Normandy, France. He fought alongside his fellow Soldiers during battles in northern France, western Germany and central Europe until victory was declared in 1945.

After graduating college, Gibson entered the Army as a Medical Service Corp officer with the 3rd Infantry Division. There, he led 44 combat medics taking care of more than 700 Soldiers before being accepted into a transition program to become a judge advocate.

He attended the University of Georgia School of Law as part of the program and met his wife, Meredith, while he was there. He was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky after finishing school and he continued to learn more about the Rangers.

During a deployment to Afghanistan in 2018, he worked closely with Rangers and learned about a possible career path as a Ranger judge advocate. This fueled his desire even more. When he got home, he told his command he wanted to go to Ranger School.

"Luckily, I had a brigade commander and a supervisor who were supportive of allowing me to do it," he said.

He went through the Pre-Ranger Course with the 101st before attending Ranger School in the summer of 2019. The 62-day course pushed the 32-year-old Gibson mentally and physically. During the Ranger assessment phase, he got lost leading a night patrol and got recycled, having to start the course all over.

He used his grandfather and his unit as motivation, learning more about the missions they went on and the hardships they endured. He also thought about his wife, who was pregnant with their first child, and his desire to set an example for his family, the way his grandfather had for him.

He pushed through and passed each phase of training earning his Ranger tab.

“I’ll definitely never forget that feeling,” he said. “It was satisfying for sure, but it’s also one thing to get the Ranger tab and it’s a completely other thing to try out for the Ranger regiment.”

That was next on his list and the timing worked out just right. He was promoted to major in early 2021 and a slot opened at the 75th Ranger Regiment at Fort Moore, Georgia that summer. He applied, went through the interview process, and was selected to attend the Ranger Assessment and Selection Program in the fall.

The eight-week course tests Soldiers in two phases. The first phase assesses their strength of character and leadership skills during ruck marches, land navigation exercises and medical first responder tests. The second prepares Rangers for their duties by developing skills for

direct-action combat, airfield seizure, personnel recovery, marksmanship, and explosives.

The final test comes in front of a board to find out whether you make the cut.

“I was actually a lot more nervous during this than I was in Ranger School,” Gibson said. “This was something that I really wanted and as the board deliberated it felt like years but was probably only a few minutes.”

The nervous energy subsided as they called him back in to congratulate him on making it into the regiment. He’s now been with the 75th Ranger Regiment for the last two years, getting a little taste of the experience his grandfather got.

“It was a really cool opportunity to wear a similar scroll that my grandfather wore,” he said. “It was kind of a full circle moment for me. It’s been everything I thought it would be and more.”

Topping it all off, Gibson is getting a first-hand look at some of the places where his grandfather fought in France while participating in the 80th anniversary of D-Day commemoration. He’s jumping out of a WWII-era C-47 Skytrain and supporting several ceremonies during the week.

“I’ll certainly never know what he was feeling [during the war,] but literally being able to walk in the same steps as him will be a very revealing experience for me,” he said. “I’m looking forward to it and just plan on soaking in the opportunity.”



Maj. Jack Gibson was inspired by his grandfather, a WWII Ranger with the 2nd Ranger Battalion, to become an Army Ranger. He entered the Army as a Medical Service Corps officer before transitioning to a judge advocate and later earned his Ranger tab and Ranger scroll as a member of the 75th Ranger Regiment. Photo by U.S. Army Maj. Justin Wright.



*U.S. Army Special
Operations Command*

USASOC hosts ARSOF professional development event

Two Crew Chiefs perform duties onboard an MH-47 Chinook helicopter during a Army Special Operations Forces demonstration above Fort Liberty, North Carolina August 15, 2024. ARSOF aims to educate and inform various enablers across the U.S. Army of ARSOF's mission, unique capabilities, and requirements. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt Lawrence Wong.



Naval Special Warfare Command



Naval Special Warfare Command holds change of command ceremony

*By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Destiny Cheek
Naval Special Warfare Command*

Rear Adm. Milton J. Sands III relieved Rear Adm. Keith B. Davids as commander, Naval Special Warfare Command during a change of command ceremony at Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, Aug. 2.

Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Lisa Franchetti attended the ceremony and provided welcoming remarks by thanking Davids for his innovative leadership in ensuring Naval Special Warfare (NSW) provides access and capabilities to the warfighter.

"You provided options to our Nation's decision makers every single day, keeping our most elite warriors--our naval commandos--at the forefront of the changing character of war, finding, testing, and using new technologies and innovating to ensure that we would be postured and ready to respond to any threat anytime and anywhere," said Franchetti. "Keith, you will leave behind an incredible legacy through those that you have trained, mentored, and led, but you will also be known for your laser focus on prioritizing and reinvigorating the connection between the Fleet and Naval Special Warfare. This is a game changer for our Nation."

Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, was the presiding officer and guest speaker. In his remarks, Fenton praised Davids' leadership. He highlighted his commitment to preparing NSW for increased challenges and risks. Fenton emphasized the importance of Davids' transformative changes to ensure NSW's relevance to the Joint Force and Fleet, its survivability, and lethality in defense of the Nation.

"During his watch, Davids ensured that the next generation of our naval commandos is prepared for the volatile, uncertain, and complex world at our doorstep. Our commandos continuously push the bounds of what is possible and achieve what others deem impossible," said Fenton. "Across the globe, our naval commandos provide



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti salutes Rear Adm. Keith B. Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) during NSWC's change of command ceremony. NSW is the nation's premiere maritime special operations force and is uniquely positioned to extend the fleet's reach and deliver all-domain options for naval and joint force commanders. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Keypher Strombeck.

new options and opportunities for our joint force, creating a range of dilemmas for our adversaries should they choose the path of crisis or conflict."

Davids assumed command of Naval Special Warfare Command in August 2022. During his tenure, he strengthened NSW's integration with Fleet, Joint, and Coalition partners and ensured NSW's ability to respond to global threats anytime, anywhere.

"As we speak, our teammates are conducting sensitive maritime missions in multiple theaters around the globe," Davids said. "They are closing gaps in national intelligence, strengthening strategic partnerships, helping friends and allies build their resilience, and fielding new capabilities that make the naval commando force extremely valuable to both the Joint Force and the Navy. This force is invaluable in peacetime, in crisis, and, should deterrence fail, in conflict as well."

The ceremony marks the end of a two-year command tour for Davids, who graduated from Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Assessment, Selection and Training with Class 177. He commanded at all operational and component levels of Special Operations, including service as commander, South Operations Command South. Prior to that, he served as Deputy Director for Joint Interagency Task Force South.

His operational tours include platoon commander tours at SEAL Team Two; element leader and squadron operations officer tours at Naval Special Warfare Development Group; executive officer of SEAL Team Seven; commanding officer of SEAL Team One, and commander of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, Iraq. He has made numerous operational deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, the Pacific, and Europe.

“Life’s greatest gift is doing hard work that is worth doing with people you love,” Davids said to his friends, family, and staff. “The Navy and the Special Operations communities have allowed me to enjoy that for over three decades. To cap it off, serving with all of you has been the biggest honor of my life.”

Davids welcomed Sands and his family and spoke to the journey that lies ahead under his leadership.

“Today marks the dawn of a new chapter,” said Davids. “NSW’s future is extremely bright with Rear. Adm. Milton “Jamie” Sands at the helm. I have no doubt you will continue to thrive under his strategic vision and leadership.”

Sands, a native of Farmington, Connecticut and 1992 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, most recently served as chief of staff, U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

With an eye to the future and his priorities, Sands expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Naval Special Warfare Command staff for ensuring a seamless transition. He also extended thanks to his family for their unwavering support and commended Davids for his visionary leadership and for leaving behind a strong, professional force.

“We will remain focused on producing and deploying the world’s finest, most creative, and most lethal maritime special operations force. While we don’t get to choose the threats we face, we do get to choose our priorities, our approaches, and our evolution as a force,” Sands said. “Our actions will be enabled by the NSW foundation of character, grit, professionalism, and competence. Throughout it all, our number one priority will remain our most valuable and important asset: our people.”



Rear Adm. Milton J. Sands relieves Rear Adm. Keith B. Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Keypher Strombeck.

Naval Special Warfare Command Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024



West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators conduct dive training at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay during Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024, July 18. Twenty-nine nations, 40 surface ships, three submarines, 14 national land forces, more than 150 aircraft and 25,000 personnel are participating in RIMPAC in and around the Hawaiian Islands, June 27 to Aug. 1. The world's largest international maritime exercise, RIMPAC provides a unique training opportunity while fostering and sustaining cooperative relationships among participants critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world's oceans. RIMPAC 2024 is the 29th exercise in the series that began in 1971. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman.



Naval Special Warfare Command



Naval Special Warfare, Submarine Squadron 11 display fleet lethality

*By Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman and Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Smedegard
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators participated in fleet interoperability training off the coast of Southern California June 24, focusing on increasing warfighting capabilities in the maritime domain.

The training involved aircraft from Commander, U.S. Naval Air Forces and the Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Greenville (SSN 772), assigned to Commander Submarine Squadron 11 (CSS-11).

“This training opportunity provided the submarine warfighters aboard USS Greenville the opportunity to practice a unique capability,” said Capt. Kenneth Douglas, Commander, Submarine Squadron 11. “Expanding joint interoperability capabilities effectively demonstrates our asymmetric advantage on and under the world’s oceans and I look forward to continued training events with our Naval Special Warfare operators.”

During the training, Naval Special Warfare operators performed a military freefall and conducted an airborne drop of combat rubber raiding crafts (CRRC) off the coast of Southern California. Following this, the NSW operators rendezvoused with Greenville at a designated location before returning to shore.


“Undertaking an operation of this caliber highlights the indispensable role that NSW and the submarine force play within the joint force,” said Capt. Blake L. Chaney, Commander, Naval Special Warfare Group 1. “By synchronizing our operations, activities and investments, we not only bolster fleet lethality but also provide substantial value in securing access to either denied or contested areas.”

Engaging in ongoing training with Naval Special Warfare and Commander Submarine Squadron 11, ensures that the U.S. Naval force is well-prepared to tackle the challenges of a dynamic and competitive maritime environment.



A West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare operator climbs aboard the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Greenville (SSN 772). Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman.

CSS-11 is home to five Los Angeles-class fast attack submarines, which are capable of supporting various missions, including: anti-submarine warfare; anti-ship warfare; strike warfare; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.



West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators perform a military free fall jump during fleet interoperability training with the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Greeneville (SSN 772) in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. NSW is the nation's elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet's reach and gain and maintain access for the Joint Force in competition and conflict. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman.

Air Force Special Operations Command



Total force integration: AFR aircrew executes live-fire training in Alaska on active duty AC-130J gunship

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt Dylan Gentile
919th Special Operations Wing*

Vast plains are within a mountain valley house, a simulated enemy complex and vehicles within the military range of Joint Base Elmendorf. Thousands of feet above them, an active-duty AC-130J Ghostrider Gunship from the 4th Special Operations Squadron flown by a crew from Air Force Reserve's 5th Special Operations Squadron struck targets with Hellfire and Griffin missiles, salvos of automatic 30 mm and 105mm munitions from the aircraft's guns.

Aircrew from the Air Force Reserve's 5th SOS at Hurlburt Field, Fla., trained on a 4th Special Operations Squadron AC-130J Ghostrider with support from active-

duty maintenance specialists from the 4th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron here July 15-21, 2024, to enhance readiness and practice logistical challenges inherent with operating in an unfamiliar environment.

"It's a huge benefit for us to train in different climate zones and terrain," said Master Sergeant Gregory Hosko, 5 SOS Aerial Gunner. "We walked away with some great lessons learned working the logistical challenges and operational planning."

Some of those challenges included transporting maintenance teams and support functions across the United States on a more than 3,000-mile journey from Florida to Alaska. While several Reservists have experience in this area, the planning, packing, and working through systems



An AC-130J Ghostrider parks within view of Mount Rainier during a stop near Tacoma, Washington, July 15, 2024. The AC-130J is a highly modified C-130J aircraft. It contains an advanced two-pilot flight station with fully integrated digital avionics. This photo has been altered for security purposes. Photo by U.S. Air Force by Staff Sgt. Dylan Gentile.



Master Sgt. Kyle Linebarger, 5th Special Operations Squadron aerial gunner, inspects a weapons system onboard the AC-130J Ghost Rider during livefire training near Anchorage, Alaska, July 17, 2024. Air Force Special Operations Command and Air Force Reserve Command placed a renewed focus on the gunship mission to align with the new peer-peer warfighting model. Photo by U.S. Air Force by Staff Sgt. Dylan Gentile.

necessary to move this amount of personnel and equipment across the continent isn't something they do every day. Combined with an extensive ongoing multinational exercise in the same locale, this further honed their logistical prowess.

"The weather and mountainous terrain added numerous challenges that we don't see at home station," said Lt. Col. Nick Beihl, 5th SOS Pilot and mission commander for the training. "This took a lot of coordination in advance on several fronts to include everything from range entry procedures to moving munitions to Alaska."

The aircrew who participated also enhanced their readiness by operating in the new and geographically diverse area, adding elements of uncertainty that would be reflected in an operational environment. Pilots, Weapon Systems Officers, aerial gunners, and maintainers made for a highly capable team who worked together to bring the mission to fruition.

The crew employed eight AGM-114 Hellfire missiles and four AGM-176 Griffin missiles, shooting 255 rounds of 30mm and 20 rounds of 105mm into ground-based targets in mountainous terrain below the weather. Gunners and maintainers gathered around the mission operator pallet displays to watch their rounds explode on impact with the simulated combatants.

"The AC-130J has an amazing standoff capability," said Hosko. "We could be 10-15 miles away and still provide more than just direct fire of guns overhead."

"The maintenance troops had the plane ready at every moment, which made the operation seamless," said Beihl. "This team of professionals made it so we didn't have to worry about the aircraft at any point in time."

While enjoying America's last frontier, they also built relationships and extended their capabilities with their 1st Special Operations Wing counterparts.

The team out of Hurlburt Field, Florida hosts a capability with deep ties to the Reserve Component of Air Force Special Operations Command. The 919th Special Operations Wing used to operate AC-130A Spectre Gunships decades ago. As national defense requirements changed, the wing diversified into other weapons systems. Currently, the 5th SOS serves as a schoolhouse teaching active-duty counterparts to fly and operate the AC-130J, C-146, and U-28A aircraft.

As the Air Force continues adapting to a peer-to-peer warfighting model, the aircraft continue to provide a critical capability. It is common for many of the seasoned aviators of the 5 SOS to train and fly with operational units.

"By the time the 5th SOS finished their return leg, the seasoned crew proved their ability to deliver lethal capability abroad," said Beihl.

The Great North offered challenges that improved their interoperability as a team and set a path for future training opportunities.



Aircrew members from the 5th Special Operations Squadron stop for a photo alongside a 4th Special Operations Squadron AC-130J Ghost Rider gunship on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, July 16, 2024. The 5th SOS serves as a schoolhouse teaching active-duty counterparts to fly and operate the AC-130J. This photo has been altered for security purposes. Photo by U.S. Air Force by Staff Sgt. Dylan Gentile.

Air Force Special Operations Command

Air Commando helps bring closure to POW/MIA families



*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kevin Williams
27th Special Operations Wing*

“You are not forgotten.”

Those are the words inscribed on the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) flag--the only flag to ever fly alongside the Stars and Stripes at the White House.

Those words convey America’s promise to service members who have become prisoners of war or have gone missing in action, and to the families left behind.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) is the Department of Defense organization charged with fulfilling that promise by providing the fullest possible accounting for America’s missing personnel, both to their families and the nation. Due to the unique demands of its mission, DPAA tasks joint volunteer teams from a variety of military services and specialties, including explosive ordnance disposal (EOD).

In 2023, U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Robert Hile, an EOD team leader assigned to the 27th Special Operations Civil Engineering Squadron at Cannon AFB, spent six weeks on a DPAA mission to Laos People’s Democratic Republic (Laos PDR) to recover the remains of two Air Force pilots who went missing in 1966.

Hile’s sense of duty was firmly established in his family’s long-running tradition of military service, long before he ever wore the uniform.

“My father was in the Navy,” Hile said. “My grandfather fought in World War II with the Navy. My great-grandfather fought in World War I. Great-greats all the way back to the Civil War. With the exception of Korea, my family’s been in every war.”

That same sense of duty drove Hile to enlist in the Air Force in 2011, at the height of the war in Afghanistan. He had seen news that improvised explosive devices were the most lethal weapon used against U.S. personnel in the Global War on Terror, helping him determine that the most



A Milsearch employee and U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Robert Hile, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Explosive Ordnance Disposal augment, excavate a unit during a recovery mission in Laos People’s Democratic Republic, March 26, 2023. There are currently 276 missing Americans from the Vietnam War whose remains are believed to be in Laos PDR. Photo U.S. Air Force by Staff Sgt. Ariel Owings.

impactful avenue for his service would be in EOD.

“It’s immediate gratification,” Hile said. “Anything that’s explosive, you destroy it. It’s gone. You just saved someone’s life.”

Whether in combat overseas or conducting base support operations stateside, EOD technicians are specially trained to identify, mitigate, render safe and dispose of any chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive hazard, making them a vital enabler to DPAA’s mission.

DPAA employs a contingent of archaeologists, investigators, laborers and other specialists to safely find and excavate remains that can often be surrounded by dormant explosive hazards. Hile’s mission in Laos PDR was no exception.

“When a plane crashes, there are explosive hazards, even if there’s no ordnance,” Hile said. “And Laos is the most bombed nation in world history. The area is riddled with unexploded ordnance.”

Between 1964 and 1973, the United States consistently flew bombing missions over Laos to dislodge

the Pathet Lao communist government and disrupt the flow of supplies to communist forces in Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh trail. In that time, more than two million tons of ordnance were dropped on Laos, which is an amount greater than all the bombs dropped throughout World War II.

On this mission in 2023, Hile and his DPAA team were excavating the 1966 crash site of a B-57 Canberra, a Cold War-era tactical bomber used primarily for nighttime bombing missions during the Vietnam War. The B-57 was piloted by U.S. Air Force Col. Everett Kerr and Col. Charles Burkhart, who perished in a mountainside crash enroute to a bombing mission over North Vietnam.

After an investigation team confirmed with local Laotians that a plane had crashed nearby in 1966, DPAA put out a call for recovery mission volunteers. When Hile's leadership notified him of the request, he did not hesitate to volunteer. For EOD technicians, DPAA missions are highly sought taskings.

"As soon as you get the opportunity, you clear your calendar and you go," Hile said.

Hile would have volunteered for a DPAA mission to any location, but his uncle's experience as a U.S. Marine aviator during the Vietnam War made the trip doubly special. After growing up hearing his uncle's stories of Vietnam, Hile would now be able to experience the sights, sounds and feel of the region for himself.

He arrived in Laos PDR in February 2023 for a six-week stint working the crash site with over a dozen other joint service members. Hile's duties alternated between excavating the site with other volunteers and diligently searching for buried unexploded ordnance, or UXOs, with his fellow EOD technicians.

"We were digging holes 12 hours a day, moving and sifting through tons of dirt daily just to try to get to the remains," Hile said. "And other days I'd swing my metal detector 12 hours a day, and any time it would hit for metal, we'd investigate. Any UXOs we found we'd take off to the side and blow up when we had time."

While many DPAA recovery missions search for members' biological remains, the team in Laos PDR faced a unique challenge: the Laotian jungle soil is so acidic that it erodes bones, meaning they would instead need to search for personal belongings or uniform items that could confirm the pilots' identity.

Hile recalls one member of the trip, a veteran of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), a joint-service unit used extensively in covert special operations during the Vietnam War. The man had come to Laos PDR repeatedly to search the hills and jungles for the remains of a teammate who had been killed in a firefight and left

behind. Hile distinctly remembers how sobering it was to watch the man tirelessly work to find his friend.

"This man's hunting around Laos for his partner who died out there in 1968," Hile said. "The guy's 74; he's got the right to just retire and live his life. But he won't because he's still fighting that war."

As the team continued uncovering the site and disposing of UXOs, Hile started to see that their work impacted more than just the families and friends of the missing; it also directly touched the lives of the local people.

"We were helping out by doing the normal bread-and-butter work of EOD," Hile said. "We were protecting people and property and restoring the site to a safe, usable condition."

Even with their difficult task and busy schedule, the team quickly became crowd favorites of the local children.

"We would buy a bunch of candy and soccer balls and go pass them out to kids in the village," Hile said. "The kids would latch onto us. You'd have a kid hanging out with you while you're digging on the mountainside. That was definitely something that I did not expect that I really enjoyed."

Finally, after weeks of digging and reaching depths of approximately 30 feet into the ground, the team found the pilots' helmets, uniforms, parts of their boots and a set of rosary beads, which Hile said Col. Burkhart always wore around his neck when he flew.

When teams like Hile's discover remains or personal items of missing service members around the world, it allows DPAA to provide families some level of closure that was previously lacking in the indefinite "missing" status of their deceased service member.

"I was talking to Col. Burkhart's son; he's a 65 year old man now," Hile said. "His dad went to war and never came home. He never got a casket and never got to have that closure. We owe that to them, whether it's Laos, Vietnam, Germany. We owe that to them."

Hile returned from the trip in April 2023 with an expanded interpersonal understanding of service, and of some of the lesser-known operations the U.S. military conducts around the world.

"This mission was completely different than anything else that you'll do in in the military," Hile said. "It was a completely different perspective from any mission that I've had."

Going forward, Hile plans to continue serving as an EOD technician for the remainder of his Air Force career.

"I love it," Hile said. "Can't imagine doing anything else."

Air Force Special Operations Command



AFSOC demonstrates ACE with historic highway landing

*By U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Ryan Conroy
AFSOC Public Affairs*

In a historic first, Air Force Special Operations Command successfully landed an AC-130J Ghost rider Gunship on Highway 63 in Bono, Arkansas, on August 4, 2024. This operation was part of a broader exercise, Emerald Warrior Field Training Exercise II, designed to showcase AFSOC's Agile Combat Employment capabilities.

The exercise provided an opportunity for participating units to refine their skills and advance ongoing pathfinding and experimentation efforts within AFSOC.

"This exercise serves as a significant milestone for AFSOC, demonstrating our ability to operate in diverse and austere environments," said Tech. Sgt. Robert Gallagher, lead planner for the highway landings, assigned to the AFSOC Air Commando Development Center. "By leveraging ACE concepts, we enhance our operational flexibility and resilience."

Throughout the morning, Special Tactics Airmen from the 1st Special Operations Wing established and secured a landing zone on the highway.

Shortly after, a C-146A Wolfhound and an MC-130J Commando II from the 492nd Special Operations Wing landed on the five-lane highway.

The MC-130J crew then set up a Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP), as the AC-130J assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida, made its approach, landed, refueled, rearmed and took off again.

The primary objective of this exercise was to validate AFSOC's capability to operate in austere environments with minimal infrastructure. Key tasks included securing the landing zone and performing FARP operations, both critical elements of the ACE framework.



A U.S. Air Force Airman assigned to the 1st Special Operations Wing, inspects ammunition during Emerald Warrior 24 FTX II highway landing operation in Bono, Arkansas, August 4, 2024. The objective of the operation was to train aircrews on runway-agnostic operations to enable Air Commandos to effectively work in contested spaces where traditional airfields may be unavailable or under threat. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Ty Pilgrim.

"Emerald Warrior FTX II demonstrates to our adversaries that we can meet them anytime, any place, anywhere, without the need for traditional runways to project air power," said Col. Patrick Dierig, 1 SOW commander. "By landing an AC-130J on a highway and conducting FARP, we're proving our ability to operate in austere and unique environments. It shows our commitment to maintain operational flexibility and readiness, ensuring we can deliver decisive airpower whenever and wherever it's needed."

The successful execution of this exercise underscores AFSOC's commitment to evolving its capabilities and adapting to emerging threats. By continuing to refine and operationalize ACE concepts, AFSOC ensures it remains at the forefront of innovative and agile combat operations.

A U.S. Air Force C-146A Wolfhound, assigned to the 492d Special Operations Wing, lands on Highway 63 during Emerald Warrior 24 FTX II in Bono, Arkansas, August 4, 2024. The "Wolfhound's" primary mission is to provide flexible and responsive operational movement of small teams and cargo in support of theater special operations commands. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Ty Pilgrim.



Air Force Special Operations Command



19th SOW faces, overcomes adversity in readiness exercise

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt Dylan Gentile
919th Special Operations Wing*

Citizen Air Commandos took to the air, traversed the ground and braved rough water during a readiness exercise on the Emerald Coast Aug. 5-9, 2024.

Specialties across the 919th Special Operations Wing fought brutal summer heat, logistical challenges, and terrain across a range of scenarios they might encounter in a future fight.

“There were a lot of moving parts to this dual hat exercise and a substantial amount of planning that went in to making it happen,” said Maj. David Hornsby, 711th Special Operations Squadron chief of training. “It highlighted some areas in which the Wing did really well, and a few in which there is some room for improvement.”

Responding to scenarios that demanded an efficient and organized response for a notional country amid chaos and upheaval required exceptional planning and logistics across numerous capabilities.

These challenges allowed the wing to complete the required certification of their Special Operations Task Group and a Special Operations Task Unit in the simulated response.

The SOTG functioned as the command component of the response, tasking the SOTUs with providing specific capabilities to help mitigate the ongoing crisis. The 859th Special Operations Squadron utilized the C-146 A Wolfhound to move two Special Operations Mission Sustainment Team (SOMST) elements and their equipment between airfields.

SOMST members used the exercise to refine their skillsets, equipment, and procedures. Challenges such as heat and coordinating career specialties provided insight on how to further develop sustainment capabilities.

“It was important for us to have this integrated support team thrown into an unfamiliar environment together,” said Tech. Sgt. Michael O’Callaghan, 919th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron resource and training manager. “In



Leadership of the 919th Special Operations Mission Sustainment Team coordinate with simulated local customs to get their team into a notional country as part of a wing-wide exercise at Camp James E. Rudder, Florida, August 6, 2024. Responding to scenarios that demanded an efficient and organized response for a notional country amid chaos and upheaval required exceptional planning and logistics across numerous capabilities. These challenges allowed the wing to complete the required certification of their Special Operations Task Group and a Special Operations Task Unit prior to a future mobilization. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Dylan Gentile.

a real-world scenario they would need to combine their skills in less-than-perfect conditions to accomplish the mission.”

Sustainment Airmen narrowed down their footprint by reducing the size and scope of equipment, utilizing portable items that could be hand-carried. They opted for tents, air conditioners, and other tools that are smaller than what would traditionally be used and occupied less space on the aircraft.

“We’re pressurizing the system to see where we can improve. We were able to identify needed improvements to our SOMST organization, training, and equipment that will help shape the capability moving forward,” said Col. Olivia



First Lieutenant Amy Wiley, 919th Special Operations Medical Squadron dental technician, performs tactical combat casualty care on a simulated casualty during a wing wide exercise Aug. 7, 2024, Camp James E. Rudder, Florida. Trainers from the 711th Special Operations Squadron placed mission sustainment Airmen in a variety of scenarios and then assessed the effectiveness of their response. Some of the situations Airmen faced included unrest outside the compound, medical emergencies, and engagements with regional media. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Dylan Gentile.

Nelson, 919th Special Operations Mission Support Group commander. “Perhaps most importantly, we leaned into the weather and gave our Airmen a chance to experience what deployment in the heat and humidity of the INDOPACOM theater would really be like. We identified the need for greater levels of personal fitness and an emphasis on hydration and work-rest cycles that will make us more ready if called upon to face a peer threat.”

The mission support Airmen stayed in-place overnight throughout the exercise. Controller Observers from

throughout the Wing placed them in a variety of scenarios and then assessed the effectiveness of their response. Some of the situations Airmen faced included unrest outside the compound, medical emergencies, and engagements with regional media.

“The team handled everything from small inconveniences like dealing with customs to larger problems like medical crises,” said O’Callaghan. “The differing levels of difficulty and engagement challenged them and encouraged them to be mindful of how they deal with adversity.”

While the SOMST maintained their encampments, the SOTU aviators also faced challenges that could parallel real-world scenarios. A simulated aircraft down left four aircrew members stranded aboard a raft in the Choctawhatchee Bay.

A C-146A Wolfhound crew coordinated rescue of the castaways with the U.S. Coast Guard. The team surveyed the bay to provide details on the rafts location and maintained communications between the raft and the Coast Guard vessel.

By the end of the exercise, the 919th SOW successfully completed various aspects of Air Force Special Operations Command warfighting model. Organizers coordinated the SOTG, SOTU and mission support elements in a way that could be reflected in real-world scenarios.

“The amount of work and time that went into all the unseen portions of the planning of this exercise, going back months, was significant,” said Hornsby. “Everyone on the planning cell did a commendable job. The [exercise] was successful and provided an excellent bellwether as to where the wing’s combat capability currently stands. It should help to provide the command a good direction in which to move forward.”



Aviators from the 859th Special Operations Squadron wrangle components of their raft during a water rescue as part of a wing-wide exercise across the Eglin Range, Florida Aug. 8, 2024. A C-146A Wolfhound crew coordinated rescue of the “downed aircrew” with the U.S. Coast Guard. The team surveyed the bay to provide details on the rafts location and maintained communications between the raft and the Coast Guard vessel. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Dylan Gentile.

Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



MARSOC conducts Honor Workout to remember fallen Marines, Sailor

*By U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez II
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command*

U.S. Marines, Sailors, and civilians of Marine Forces Special Operations Command conducted an honor workout at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, July 3, 2024.

The workout served to honor and remember the six MARSOC Marines and Sailor who lost their lives when a Marine Corps KC-130T crashed in Mississippi, July 10, 2017. The crash also claimed the lives nine Marines from Marine Aerial Refueler Squadron 452.

Throughout the workout, participants would pause and gather together to listen to the biographies of the fallen at each of seven stations, one for each fallen member of MARSOC, before executing the exercises.

Then, after completion of all seven stations, the participants gathered to reflect on the fallen.

“Today was about coming together,” said Thomas Reinhard, a strength and conditioning specialist at MARSOC. “Coming together, [training] together, and remembering the ones we’ve lost.”

Honor workouts are common throughout the Marine Corps and serve as an important link to the past. Units will often come together in remembrance of the Marines and Sailors that have given their lives in service, both out of respect and to serve as an inspiration of gallantry and heroism.

“This is the standard for MARSOC,” said Maj. Gen. Peter Huntley, MARSOC commander. “We came out here and it was challenging, it was fun, and it gave us the chance to honor those that gave all.”

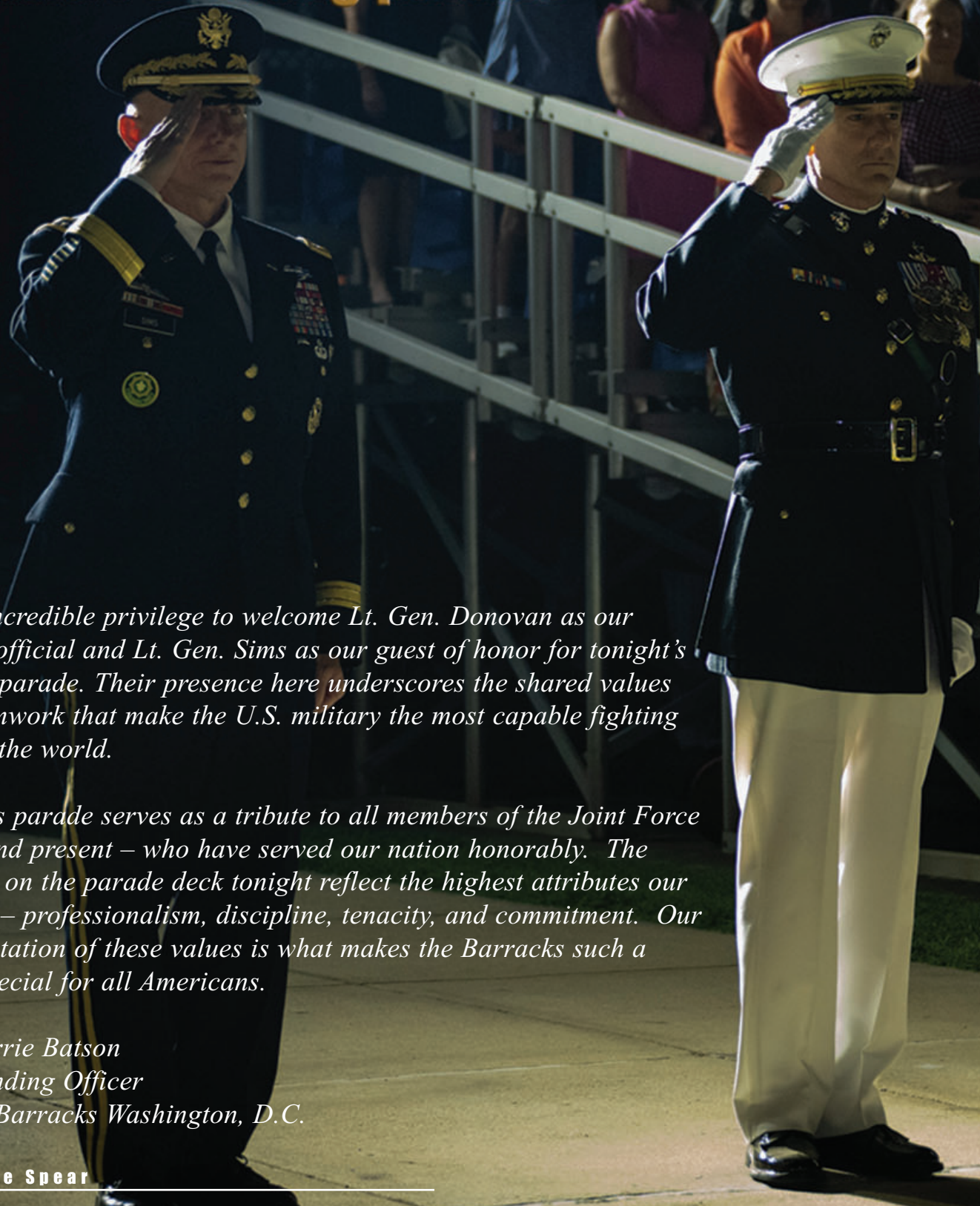


A U.S. Marine with Marine Forces Special Operations Command conducts a fireman carry during an honor workout at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, July 3, 2024. The workout served to honor and remember the six MARSOC Marines and one Sailor who tragically lost their lives in a KC-130T crash, seven years ago. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.



U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Peter D. Huntley, commander, Marine Forces Special Operations Command, conducts a fireman carry during an honor workout at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, July 3, 2024. The workout served to honor and remember the six MARSOC Marines and one Sailor who tragically lost their lives in a KC-130T crash, seven years ago. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.

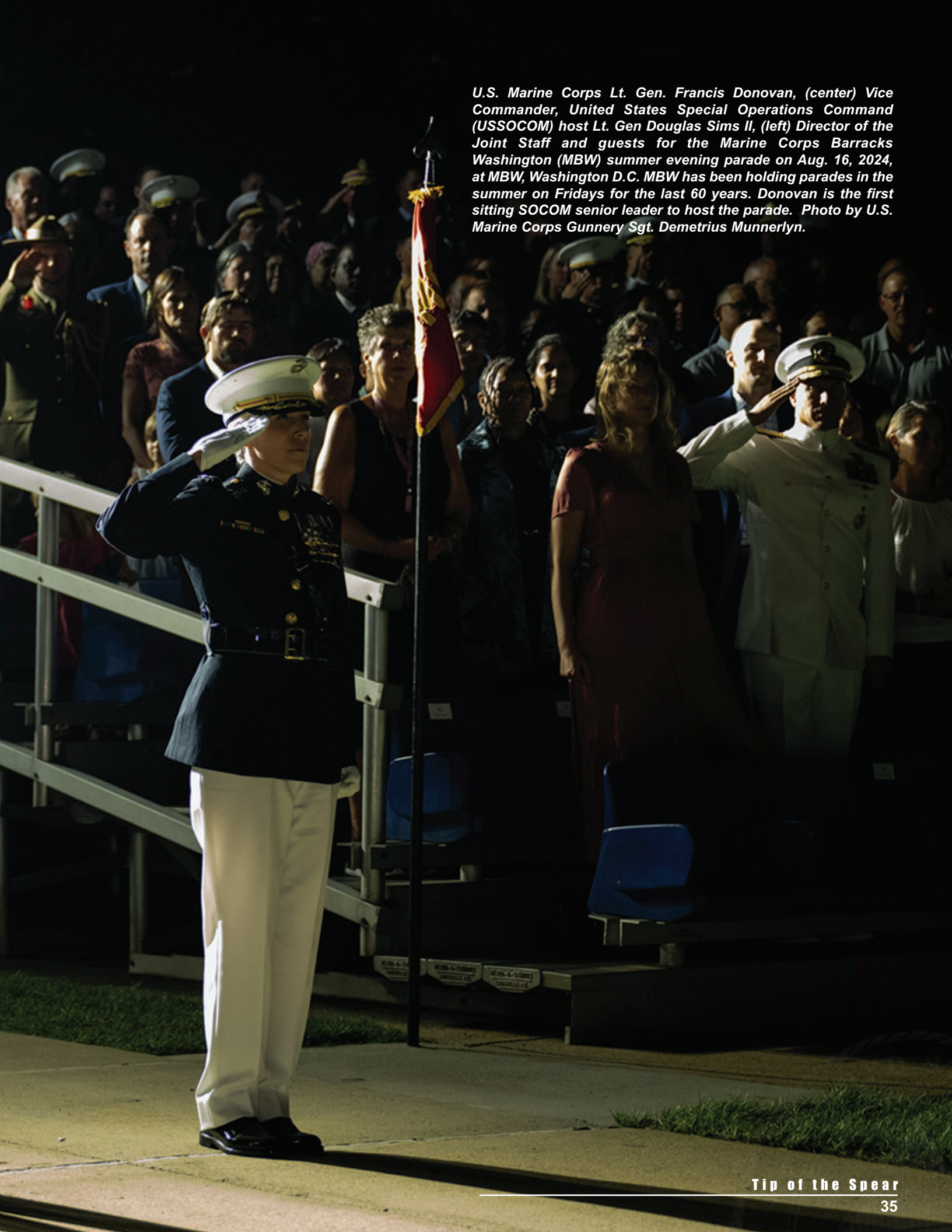
USSOCOM vice commander becomes first ever joint, SOF commander to host 8th and 1 evening parade

A photograph of two military officers in dress uniforms standing on a parade deck at night. The officer on the left is wearing a dark blue uniform with gold buttons and a peaked cap, saluting with his right hand. The officer on the right is wearing a dark blue uniform with gold buttons and a white peaked cap, also saluting with his right hand. In the background, a crowd of people is visible on bleachers, and the scene is illuminated by bright stage lights.

It's an incredible privilege to welcome Lt. Gen. Donovan as our hosting official and Lt. Gen. Sims as our guest of honor for tonight's evening parade. Their presence here underscores the shared values and teamwork that make the U.S. military the most capable fighting force in the world.

Tonight's parade serves as a tribute to all members of the Joint Force – past and present – who have served our nation honorably. The Marines on the parade deck tonight reflect the highest attributes our military – professionalism, discipline, tenacity, and commitment. Our representation of these values is what makes the Barracks such a place special for all Americans.

*Col. Carrie Batson
Commanding Officer
Marine Barracks Washington, D.C.*



U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Francis Donovan, (center) Vice Commander, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) host Lt. Gen Douglas Sims II, (left) Director of the Joint Staff and guests for the Marine Corps Barracks Washington (MBW) summer evening parade on Aug. 16, 2024, at MBW, Washington D.C. MBW has been holding parades in the summer on Fridays for the last 60 years. Donovan is the first sitting SOCOM senior leader to host the parade. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Demetrius Munnerlyn.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Mentoring future leaders: USSOCOM conducts Teen Leadership Program

By Michael Bottoms
USSOCOM Public Affairs

Taking care of families is a fundamental philosophy in the culture of U.S. Special Operations Command. As part of that culture, the Command sponsored a week-long Teen Leadership Program, July 22-26, for 19 children of members serving U.S. SOCOM.

U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander of U.S. SOCOM, and U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter, command senior enlisted leader of U.S. SOCOM, welcomed students to the headquarters during their visit.

“First of all, thank you for participating in the Teen Leadership Program. The sergeant major and I view you as the sunrise leaders – Shane and I are the sunset leaders,” said Fenton. “Your parents are so proud of you for attending this program and I can tell you are proud of them.”

“General Fenton is a huge supporter of taking care of our families, but more specifically, our military children. I have heard him say a number of times, ‘There is no smooth road for military children, we need to take steps to even out the potholes,’” said Ann Maglio, Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) Lead with U.S. SOCOM. “We took a concept from Joint Special Operations Command, at Gen. Fenton’s request, and created a more collaborative, community-based program. It mirrors a program done through the Chamber of Commerce (Collegiate Tampa) to expose the students to different backgrounds using Tampa Bay: professional and minor sports teams, hub for tech industry, culturally diverse, robust trade center and financial hubs, and hospitality to include cruise industry, and so much more.”

The Teen Leadership Program is part of POTFF, which aims to bring service members and their families together to alleviate daily stressors they experience through family and social connectedness. The primary objective for the Teen Leadership Program focuses on developing teens’ leadership competencies through an iterative framework that reinforces positive elements of their identities as military youth while



Children of members with U.S. Special Operations Command receive briefings from U.S. SOCOM's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Division on special operations equipment during U.S. SOCOM's Teen Leadership Program at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, July 23, 2024. The program is designed to help build holistic teens through emotional growth and exploration, leadership styles, problem solving and logic skills, effective communication, conflict resolution, professionalism and community partnerships. The five-day program consisted of leadership experiences that utilized a hands-on, personal approach to building resilience and leadership skills within U.S. SOCOM's teenagers. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

instilling a sense of self-awareness, confidence, resiliency and collaboration. The program also provides teens with opportunities to connect and grow by building their inclusive leadership, empathy, integrity, teamwork and strengthening healthy familial, peer-to-peer and community relationships.

This year’s program had a different theme for each day to include community services, media and education, government and tourism, local history, arts and culture, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The days incorporated values-based leadership capabilities, self-awareness and confidence in tandem with community engagement and post-secondary education exposure.

In addition to visiting U.S. SOCOM Headquarters, students toured U.S. Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg, Florida, a Federal Bureau of Investigation office, the Tampa Museum of Art and SOFWERX, the innovation platform for U.S. SOCOM.

Alethia La Cava, a student at Brooks Debartolo Collegiate High School, attended the Teen Leadership Program last year.

“The program helps influence other students to become better leaders and people. I was honored to be a part of the pilot program and meet all the wonderful people and see all the interesting places we visited,” said La Cava. “The program taught me so much about leadership, resilience, communication, their importance, STEM, career goals and preparations. The program also helped me with public speaking and taught me so much about SOCOM and how they use leadership in their everyday lives along with important leaders.”

La Cava’s experience the previous year led to her attendance this year, but in a different role.

“I returned because I enjoyed my time last year. I was also looking forward to meeting some more good people and helping them have a valuable experience like I did,” said La Cava. “My role this year is to help the rising leaders with their own experience in the program and make sure they have an enjoyable time and learn a lot.”

The leadership program is based on mentorship, students mentoring students, and developing the next generation of leaders.

“The second year of the SOCOM Teen Leadership Program was highly impactful! The involvement of previous graduates as team leaders not only enriched the program with their knowledge and experience but also empowered them to take charge by designing their own half-day programs,” Maglio said. “This initiative significantly



Children of members with U.S. Special Operations Command conduct an interview with U.S. Army Col. Marcus Hay, J8 Assessment Director with U.S. SOCOM, during media day at the Joint Special Operations University during U.S. SOCOM’s Teen Leadership Program at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, July 23, 2024. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

contributed to their personal growth and instilled a stronger sense of responsibility among the second-year participants. Moreover, by strengthening partnerships with local organizations and government entities, the program was able to introduce new perspectives and resources that enhanced the overall experience. This collaborative approach facilitated the acquisition of valuable skills and offered a range of opportunities for both new participants and returning teens.”

The Teen Leadership Program is now cemented as an annual program and will add quarterly leadership opportunities.

“Looking ahead, the anticipation of increased participation and the addition of quarterly leadership opportunities is exciting. These plans will undoubtedly further strengthen the program and foster continuous development for all our rising leaders,” Maglio concluded.



Children of U.S. Special Operations Command servicemembers participate in U.S. SOCOM’s week-long Teen Leadership Program at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, July 22-26, 2024. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

USSOCOM hosts quarterly 1st SOF Truth day on transitioning from the military

By Michael Bottoms
U.S. SOCOM Public Affairs

U.S. Army Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, and U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter, command senior enlisted leader for U.S. SOCOM, hosted the sixth 1st Special Operations Forces Truth Day, July 30, a series of virtual forums focused on people.

Every quarter, the command's leaders focus on resources for U.S. SOCOM personnel and their families. This quarter focused on ways to assist SOF members when they transition out of the military.

To open the discussion, Fenton stressed the forum is for O-6 and above command teams, from across the entire SOF enterprise, to attain the necessary tools to take care of their teams at the lowest levels. Discussions centered around



U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter, command senior enlisted leader with U.S. Special Operations Command, addresses the audience during "1st SOF Truth" day at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, July 30, 2024. The 1st SOF Truth day is hosted by the command and focuses on its #1 priority – people. This event focused on members transitioning from the military and empowering leaders and people with access to the resources available throughout the process. The seminar hosted representatives with the Department of Defense Human Resources Programs, 14 benevolent organizations, and transitioning program leads from the headquarters and components who shared information from their respective areas. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

understanding the transition process, being aware of programs available and knowing how to access transition services.

Fenton and Shorter emphasized leadership commitment to the welfare of the force.

“The command teams we have in the SOCOM organization are the most incredible in the entire world,” said Fenton. “So, it’s not just a conversation in the team room, but the resources come directly to them.”

The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations Policy and Programs Erin Logan also gave opening remarks and emphasized transitioning is another mission and commanders need to give time to their people for that process.

“No one does it alone,” said Logan. “Our concept is ‘you are SOF for life,’ so embrace that. Transition is simply the next mission. Service members need time to train and prepare for that mission.”

The seminar hosted representatives with the Department of Defense Human Resources Programs, 14 benevolent organizations, and transitioning program leads from the headquarters and components who shared information from their respective areas.

“The best recruiter is a successful veteran,” said Walter Herd, director of the Army Transition Division, Human Resources Command Center of Excellence, Fort Knox, Kentucky. “If you help a Soldier transition well, give them the time to transition and become successful, then they will become an excellent recruiter.”

Matt Stevens, chief operating officer with The Honor Foundation, shared how veterans transitioning from SOF can become successful.

“It is important to find identity and purpose as service members transition,” said Stevens. “Be

introspective and figure out what you want to do in the next phase of your life.”

The best recruiter is a successful veteran. If you help a Soldier transition well, give them the time to transition and become successful, then they will become an excellent recruiter.

— Walter Herd, director of the Army Transition Division, Human Resources Command Center of Excellence

service member.

“It is not only important to help the service member transition, but also their spouse,” said Jessica Long, program manager for Hiring Our

It is not only important to help the service member transition, but also their spouse. It is important to recognize that the whole family is transitioning.

— Jessica Long, program manager for Hiring Our Heroes

The Honor Foundation is a career transition program, specifically for SOF members, that provides a clear process and helps them translate their military service experience to the private sector.

During the seminar, leaders highlighted that the transitioning process doesn’t just affect the

Heroes, a non-profit organization. “It is important to recognize that the whole family is transitioning.”

The quarterly events are a component of the U.S. SOCOM Preservation of the Force and Family’s Integrated Performance Campaign to develop a

mutual understanding across senior leadership and explore a variety of approaches to address ways to help people.



U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, front right, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, and U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Shane Shorter, front left, command senior enlisted leader for U.S. SOCOM, give opening remarks during “1st SOF Truth” day at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, July 30, 2024. The 1st SOF Truth day is hosted by the command and focuses on its #1 priority – people. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) operators navigate through the water during dive training in Kaneohe Bay during Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024, July 19. Twenty-nine nations, 40 surface ships, three submarines, 14 national land forces, more than 150 aircraft and 25,000 personnel are participating in RIMPAC in and around the Hawaiian Islands, June 27 to Aug. 1. The world's largest international maritime exercise, RIMPAC provides a unique training opportunity while fostering and sustaining cooperative relationships among participants critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world's oceans. RIMPAC 2024 is the 29th exercise in the series that began in 1971. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman.

