

U.S. Special Operations Command MacDill AFB, Florida

Tip of the Spear

October 2024

Philippines, US complete Tempest Wind 2024



United States Special Operations Command



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Tip of the Spear

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

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

U.S. Army Col. Alexandra Weiskopf

Special Operations

Public Affairs Director

James Gregory

Special Operations

Public Affairs Deputy Director

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Bunkley

Special Operations

Public Affairs Sergeant Major

Michael Bottoms

Managing Editor

U.S. Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Demetrius Munnerlyn

Staff NCOIC

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

Photojournalist

2022 Defense Media Merit Award Winner

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(Cover) U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators and Federal Bureau of Investigation agents set security boundary in Combatant Craft Assault during a joint maritime interdiction operation scenario part of exercise Tempest Wind 24 in Bacuit Bay, Philippines, Aug. 27, 2024. TW 24 is the 15th iteration of the Tempest Wind series of exercises and the third time in the Philippines. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Joey Rolfe.

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U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



US Special Operations Command conduct civil affairs joint exchange with Gabonese partners

Courtesy Story
Special Operations Command Africa

U.S. Special Operations Command Africa concluded a Civil Affairs Joint Combined Exchange Training with members of the National Agency for National Parks of Gabon (Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux du Gabon/ANPN) near Libreville, Gabon, August 28, 2024.

Members from the U.S. Army 91st Civil Affairs Battalion, assigned to SOCAFRICA during the JCET, conducted the training with Gabonese partners of the ANPN at Pongara National Park. The partner nations engaged in civil-military operations to include civil engagement, mission analysis, and troop-leading procedures.

“The ANPN is a public administration. As such, it is our responsibility to take care of the wildlife of course. It is also our duty to take care of the community that live in our park and surrounding area. Thanks to this training our rangers have now understood how important it is to collaborate with the local populations in our parks,” said Omer Ntougou Ndoutoume, executive secretary of the ANPN during closing ceremony remarks. “Such trainings are a testimony about good collaboration – testimony of the good relationship that exists between the Republic of Gabon and the United States of America.”

Civil affairs elements play an integral role in promoting greater stability across African partner nations. A whole-of-government approach is required to target the destabilizing factors impacting the African continent. Integrating cooperative defense efforts with civil affairs activities aids in enhancing the regional security environment. CA JCETs enable U.S. CA teams to train with foreign military or civilian forces to boost cooperation in humanitarian assistance, civil-military operations, and local governance.



Members of the National Agency for National Parks of Gabon and the U.S. Army 91st Civil Affairs Battalion exchange patches after the closing ceremony of a Civil Affairs Joint Combined Exchange Training Aug. 28, 2024 near Libreville, Gabon. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jennifer Healy.

“As civil affairs, that interaction, that relationship, that partnership between the military and the civilian populace is extremely important to provide that stabilization in difficult and dynamic environments,” said U.S. Army Maj. Daniel Alvarez, commander of Bravo Company, 91st Civil Affairs Battalion. “Joint Combined Exchange – all those words relate to two things – one is partnerships, and the second is relationships. They get to work face to face with partners to build again that relationship so as the continued training goes along, that relationship built through trust is strengthened.”

SOCAFRICA also conducted a separate special operations JCET with the Gabonese forces in July 2024, fully demonstrating the commitment to developing tactical and CA skills through our continued partnership. JCETs allow specific special operations training with foreign partners to exchange knowledge and enhance readiness while strengthening interoperability.

US, European, and Somali senior leadership attend Somali National Army-Danab graduation

*By U.S. Army Capt. Darryl Padgett
Special Operations Command Africa*

Senior leaders from U.S. military, European Union Training Mission Somalia (EUTM-S), and Somalia attended the graduation ceremony of the Somali National Army (SNA)-Danab Lightning Brigade Oct. 9, 2024, marking a significant milestone in the nation's ongoing efforts to strengthen its military capabilities. The ceremony celebrated the successful completion of training for 49 Non-Commissioned Officers and 51 officers.

The event highlighted the crucial support and collaboration among the international community provided by the USAFRICOM, British Army, and EUTM-S.

"Remember you are embarking upon the most noble cause of freedom," said U.S. Army Col. David J. Haskell. "With every bit of effort, pain, and difficulty, you are the Somali National Army's future. Go forward and lead your soldiers with courage, humility, and skill. They deserve your very best leadership."



Somali National Army (SNA)-Danab soldiers stand in formation to receive Somalia's president during the SNA-Danab graduation, Oct. 9, 2024. Photo by U.S. Army Capt Darryl Padgett.

The joint efforts between the two nations and support from the international community have been instrumental in enhancing the capabilities of Somalia's military, enabling them to conduct effective counter-terrorism operations against al-Shabaab.



Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Defense Minister Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur arrive at Baledogle Military Airfield during the Somali National Army-Danab graduation, Oct. 9, 2024. The joint efforts between the U.S. and Somalia, along with support from the international community, have been instrumental in enhancing the capabilities of the Somali's military, enabling them to conduct effective counter-terrorism operations against al-Shabaab. Photo by U.S. Army Capt Darryl Padgett.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



US Special Operations Forces conduct medical knowledge exchange with Mozambican partners

Courtesy Story

Special Operations Command Africa

U.S. Special Operations Forces Africa (SOCAFRICA) conducted a medical knowledge exchange focusing on mental health with the Mozambican forces in Maputo, Mozambique, Aug. 26-29, 2024. This event represented SOCAFRICA's first mental health engagement hosted with the Mozambican forces.

Over the four-day engagement, nearly 20 officers from the Mozambican forces participated in the U.S.-Mozambican Mil-to-Mil Medical Knowledge Exchange Workshop, showcasing an array of topics to include mental health, stress, sleep management and trauma. The U.S. Special Operations Forces lecturers engaged in dialogue with the Mozambican partners on the critical role mental and holistic health play to support partner force mission readiness.

"The aim of the workshop is to provide participants with the knowledge they need to face the challenges related to the health support of forces in operational missions, with emphasis on the planning of operations, psychological support of deployed forces and respect of communities," said Commodore Sidonia Massangaie of the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces in opening remarks.

The workshop focused on facilitating bilateral exchanges to research, educate and implement contemporary strategies for planning expeditionary medical operations in support of counter violent extremism activities. Leveraging a whole-of-government approach is essential to promoting the health and vitality of the partner forces.

The U.S. has prioritized its partnership with Mozambique to advance the interagency Strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability. The U.S. Agency for International Development, the Joint Special Operations



U.S. and Mozambican participants pose for a group photograph during the U.S.-Mozambican Mil-to-Mil Medical Knowledge Exchange in Maputo, Mozambique, Aug. 26, 2024. The workshop showcased an array of topics to include mental health, stress, sleep management and trauma to illustrate the critical role mental and holistic health play to support partner force mission readiness. Photo courtesy of Mozambican forces.

University, and the U.S. Embassy's Office of Security Cooperation served an instrumental role in facilitating the planning for the knowledge exchange workshop alongside SOCAFRICA.

"Mental health plays a vital role in keeping our forces fit and ready to do their jobs. When you have a fit force, they are more capable of performing well," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Holly Hunter, Joint Special Operations Task Force – Somalia psychologist. "Hearing the Mozambicans' perspectives on mental health has been very beneficial to the team here. The relationship building, the camaraderie and the esprit de corps is hopefully something we can foster between the partner countries and militaries.

The assembled teams also incorporated a tabletop exercise into the workshop that tested how they would respond to several concurrent high-stress situations. The Mozambican partners then presented their planning procedures and responses to the group for collective feedback.

“Going through the final tabletop exercise with our Mozambican partners gave us a sense of their strategic and operational thinking. They did a fantastic job integrating the content we exchanged during the week,” said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Jared Bueche, JSOTF-SOM physical therapist. “This engagement has laid the groundwork for future collaborations to pursue with further real time applications alongside our partners.”

The workshop in Mozambique ran concurrently with a six-week Joint Combined Exchange Training with the Mozambican forces. These exchanges demonstrate the versatility in the U.S.-Mozambique relationship to not only refine tactical operational skills but also to address the mental health needs of Mozambican forces to better assist their counterterrorism efforts.

“Hosting both the JCET and medical exchange workshop with our Mozambican military partners highlights our expanding partnership, which uses a holistic approach to advance peace and security in Mozambique,” said Lt. Col. Louis Cascino, senior defense official and defense attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Mozambique. “We look forward to continued engagement in the future to boost the resiliency of both forces.”

SOCAFRICA conducts joint training with Moroccan partners

Courtesy Story

Special Operations Command Africa

U.S. Special Operations Africa Command concluded a six-week joint combined exchange training with members from the U.S. Army 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) and the Moroccan Groupement des Forces Spéciale at Tifnit Training Base, Morocco, Aug. 26, 2024.

During the JCET, the partner forces collectively honed operational and specialized skills including weapon familiarization, combat marksmanship, sniper tactics, vehicle bounding, and react-to-contact drills. Additionally, a special emphasis was placed on Tactical Combat Casualty Care training to bolster medical readiness.

“The common base of knowledge between ourselves and the Moroccan partner force helps us to be able to accomplish even more in training,” said a communications sergeant for 3rd SFG (A). “We’re starting with a common base of knowledge and understanding that we can work with and build from and in a JCET like this we get to much more advanced topics than we could otherwise.”

Engaging in JCETs with partner forces further builds relationships and maintains critical military-to-military connections to strengthen allied readiness in the region. This training allows partner forces to learn from one another and exchange lessons learned to refine current skill sets while expanding upon new tactics, techniques, and procedures.



Members of Moroccan Groupement des Forces Spéciale conduct marksmanship training during a joint combined exchange training in Tifnit Training Base, Morocco, Aug. 1, 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.

JCETs serve to mutually benefit both partner forces to increase interoperability and improve agility to combat threats from violent extremism and other malign activity.

In addition to JCETs, Moroccan forces have also participated alongside U.S., international, and African partners during Exercise Flintlock, to include the most recent 2024 iteration.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



Special Operations Command Africa holds change of responsibility ceremony

*By U.S. Army Master Sgt. Sierra Melendez
Special Operations Command Africa*

Special Operations Command Africa held a change of responsibility ceremony to mark the transition of senior enlisted leadership from U.S. Army Command Sgt. Major Garric M. Banfield to U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Evan Serpa, at Kelley Barracks, Germany, Sept. 13, 2024.

The ceremony is an integral part of military customs, symbolizing the continuity of leadership and the ongoing mission of the command. SOCAFRICA, charged with overseeing special operations across the African continent, remains a critical component of U.S. Africa Command's efforts to promote stability and counterterrorism initiatives.

Banfield was honored for his illustrious service that spans over two decades and for his leadership throughout his tenure at SOCAFRICA. Under his guidance, SOCAFRICA's enlisted personnel contributed to key missions that supported U.S. foreign policy objectives in Africa to include counterterrorism operations, interoperability with African partner forces and humanitarian efforts.

In his farewell remarks, Banfield expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to serve alongside SOCAFRICA's distinguished service members and reflected on the command's accomplishments under his leadership.

"Being a part of Special Operations Command Africa has been the best assignment of my career," said Banfield. "I do believe that AFRICOM is the best Global Combatant Command to serve under. We accomplish a lot with limited resources. It's been remarkable to watch this team do so much with so little, and you've truly shown the power of innovation and creativity under pressure."



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Garric M. Banfield, outgoing Special Operations Command Africa senior enlisted leader, gives remarks during SOCAFRICA's change of responsibility ceremony at Kelley Barracks, Germany, Sept. 13, 2024. The ceremony is an integral part of military customs, symbolizing the continuity of leadership and the ongoing mission of the command. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joshua DeGuzman.

Serpa, a California native, brings a wealth of experience from his prior assignments. Having previously served as the command chief of the 52nd Fighter Wing in Spangdahlem, Germany, he oversaw the morale and welfare of over 5,000 personnel assigned to the wing. Serpa served four years in the U.S. Army before enlisting in the Air Force in 2006, diversifying his leadership profile.

In his speech, he highlighted his commitment to advancing SOCAFRICA's mission and ensuring the force remains ready to confront emerging security challenges on the continent.

“For the women and men of SOCAF, I look forward to serving with you and to the unique challenges we’ll undoubtedly face together,” said Serpa.

The change of responsibility ceremony also serves as a reminder of the importance of leadership within the enlisted ranks. The senior enlisted leader plays a crucial role in mentoring and developing junior service members while ensuring the discipline, morale, and professional growth of the force. As SOCAFRICA operates in a complex and dynamic environment, the role of the command senior enlisted leader is critical in maintaining the readiness and effectiveness of the command.

SOCAFRICA's commander, U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Ronald A. Foy, echoed this sentiment and fondly looked back on his time serving alongside Banfield and the friendship they forged.

“It is clear that Command Sergeant Major Banfield deeply cared for the people of this command – making them his number one priority,” described Foy. “From your mentorship to your sound advice at every turn, this command is better because of you.”

Banfield will go on to serve as the senior enlisted leader at Joint Special Operations University in Tampa, Florida.



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Garric M. Banfield, outgoing Special Operations Command Africa senior enlisted leader; U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Ron A. Foy, commander, SOCAFRICA; and U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Evan Serpa, incoming SOCAFRICA senior enlisted leader, render salutes during SOCAFRICA's change of responsibility ceremony at Kelley Barracks, Germany, Sept. 13, 2024. The ceremony marked the transition of senior enlisted leadership from U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Garric M. Banfield to Serpa. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joshua DeGuzman.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Europe

US, Romanian Naval Special Warfare train in the Black Sea



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

In a display of international cooperation and military prowess, U.S. East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) and U.S. Special Warfare Combat Crewmen (SWCC) recently conducted joint maritime training with Romanian Naval Special Operations Forces. The training, held in the Black Sea, underscored the importance of NATO allies working together to ensure peace and stability in the European region.

The training included a series of complex maritime operations, firing weapons while navigating Combatant Crafts down waterways, shallow water patrols, and coordinated assaults on simulated enemy positions from the sea. These drills are designed to enhance warfighting interoperability between the U.S. and Romanian forces, ensuring that they can operate seamlessly in real-world scenarios.

Joint events like this are a testament to the strength and unity of NATO forces working together, which has become more critical than ever. "Training with our Romanian counterparts not only enhances our tactical capabilities but also strengthens the strategic bonds of friendship and trust that are essential for effective Allied operations," said Navy Capt. V. Scott King, Commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group TWO. "These training evolutions are a critical component of our strategy to maintain peace and stability in the European region."

This type of training aligns with the U.S. National Defense Strategy, which emphasizes the importance of alliances and partnerships, and maintaining elite levels of readiness to respond to attacks and deter adversaries through a united front. By conducting joint training evolutions, the U.S. and Romanian forces are not only honing their skills but also sending a clear message to potential adversaries about the strength and unity of NATO.



A Special Warfare Combat Crewman (SWCC) conducts riverine training with Romanian Naval Forces. Training with partner nations allows special operations forces to enhance their warfighting skills, build interoperability, ensure readiness, and demonstrate the capability of ready and postured special operations forces within the European theater. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Trey Hutcheson.

As the training concluded, both U.S. and Romanian forces expressed confidence in their enhanced capabilities and reaffirmed their commitment to working together. The successful completion of this training is a reminder of the enduring strength of NATO and the importance of international cooperation in maintaining global security.

While there, U.S. Naval Special Warfare personnel were invited to participate in the Romanian Navy Day Celebration. This annual event dates back to 1902 to honor naval heroes and includes events such as naval exercises, parades and ceremonies. Participating in the day's events provided the U.S. and opportunity to showcase their bond with their Romania counterparts.

U.S. Naval Special Warfare Combat Crewmen (SWCC) conduct riverine training with Romanian Naval Forces. Training with partner nations allows special operations forces to enhance their warfighting skills, build interoperability, ensure readiness, and demonstrate the capability of ready and postured special operations forces within the European theater. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Trey Hutcheson.



U.S. Special Operations Command - Korea



Colorado Army National Guard's Special Operations Detachment-Korea maintains C-WMD readiness in annual Korean exercise

*By U.S. Air Force Maj. Christopher Mesnard
Special Operations Command Korea*

During the most recent exercise Ulchi Freedom Shield 24—conducted between the Republic of Korea and United States governments from Aug. 19-29, 2024, across the Korean Peninsula in addition to remote stations off the peninsula—a small element from the Colorado Army National Guard played a pivotal role in the combined special operations training around responses to weapons of mass destruction that rounded out broader scenario events.

For the special operations component in Korea, the linkage to weapons of mass destruction aligns with the U.S. Special Operations Command special operations forces activity known as counter-WMD. The combatant command lists the C-WMD skills-based activity as one that supports U.S. Government efforts to curtail the conceptualization, development, possession, proliferation, use, and effects of WMDs, related expertise, materials, technologies, and means of delivery by state and non-state actors.

Simply, the special operations C-WMD mission spans all levels of competition and conflict, to include the various contingency scenarios that exercises like UFS play out.

Ulchi Freedom Shield 24, more than a conventional, large-scale combat operation scenario

Living on the Korean Peninsula, the common-place noise of nuclear and other threats related to weapons of mass destruction may slide into the background of an otherwise normal life. And, while the on again, off again saber rattling from North Korea to follow through with catastrophic scenarios designed to inflict pain and suffering on the millions of civilians in South Korea waxes and wanes, the need to remain militarily ready remains constant.

“The day we let our readiness slip is the day those threats from the North may slide into a scenario that



Command Sgt. Maj. Brien Hoo, Colorado Army National Guard and Special Operations Detachment Korea senior enlisted leader wears the Korea Defense Service Medal just awarded to him at Icheon, Republic of Korea, on Aug. 26, 2024. The SOD-K personnel awarded the KDSM at this ceremony met the requirement for spending more than 60 nonconsecutive days in Korea supporting defense activities in the country. Republic of Korea Army courtesy photo.

dramatically deteriorates into a shooting war that no one wants,” said Brig. Gen. Derek N. Lipson, Special Operations Command Korea commander. “We want to be clear that we train to maintain a high state of readiness to form a viable integrated deterrence and defensive posture with our joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners every chance we get.”

Typifying this priority of relationship building toward combined readiness, members of the COARNG traveled forward to Korea during UFS 24 and the 2024 springtime Freedom Shield exercise, building out a specialized fusion cell focused on C-WMD activities. During the exercise, the cell directly enabled SOCKOR, the Combined Special Operations Component Command, and other components

under the Combined Forces Command in better understanding potential crisis scenarios involving WMDs, effectively responding to them, and enabling options that avoid or avert unbridled escalation of any situation.

“This is a complex WMD scenario that takes time, expertise, and the right people to offer our leaders viable options in a time of crisis,” said Lt. Col. Quinton German, COARNG and Special Operations Detachment-Korea commander.

The SOD-K personnel fulfill a vital C-WMD role for both U.S. based contingency, as well as maintaining an alignment with the Korea and Northeast Asia region.

“It’s our job to think through some of the worst scenarios involving some of the deadliest weapons that our adversaries may seek to employ as a way to cause harm by targeting large groups of people and offer options to our senior leaders,” said German. “We need to make sure that in what would be a highly emotional situation, we can think and act with level heads to ensure more lives aren’t lost due to lack of preparation.”

A Colorado Army National Guard relationship and investment years in the making

The history of SOD-K and the COARNG’s relationship with SOCKOR dates to the 2001 establishment of the SOD program and alignment with the USSOCOM theater special operations commands. Since that time, SOD-K personnel have made over two decades worth of investment in recruiting, training, and retaining special operations personnel who meet broader SOF requirements while specializing in the specific WMD environment on the Korean Peninsula.

“We talk a lot about the SOF Truths and how a small, specialized group of people can tip the scales,” said German. “But with that specialization that’s inherent in our unit comes the supporting need to invest time and resources in developing those necessary skillsets for specific scenarios.”

According to German, SOD-K has built out a unit that specializes in C-WMD information gathering, intelligence processing and dissemination, and providing, directing, or enabling response options across a range of competition and crisis situations.

More than just an augmenting staff to SOCKOR or CSOCC during UFS exercises, the investment in SOD-K understanding the region, culture, and mission set have helped focus the unit’s training and readiness for the better.

“While our response and training mission is aligned with SOCKOR, we still activate to serve in other theaters, areas of operations, or in the U.S. to support various requirements,” said German. “The heightened focus on SOCKOR’s mission allows us to mirror that in our readiness when we spin-up for other deployments and missions.”

During UFS 24 two personnel assigned to SOD-K were

awarded the Korea Defense Service Medal. Recipients of the medal must meet one of the following requirements, be physically stationed and present in the Korean Area of Operations for 30 consecutive days to include flying operations, 60 nonconsecutive days to include flying operations, engaged in combat or armed engagement regardless of duration, or killed, wounded, or otherwise injured in the line of duty and requiring medical evacuation.

The SOD-K recipients all earned the KDSDM due to spending more than 60 nonconsecutive days in Korea, triggering the eligibility requirement.

“This was just one more chance to demonstrate not only our unit’s commitment, but that of the individuals here at SOD-K to the Korea mission set,” said German.

According to German, SOD-K now has five total personnel with the unit who have earned the KDSDM, emphasizing the retention of skilled personnel invested in the Korean area of operations.

SOF enabling the multidomain fight in denied and degraded environments

A growing benefit to the continued relationship and involvement in training between SOD-K, SOCKOR, and other elements on the Korean Peninsula is the ability to plan and execute missions across all domains.

During UFS 24, this often occurred through tabletop planning but also took form through cross-component discussions with various U.S. and ROK organizations.

“No matter who’s on the other side, we can’t expect them to go easy on us,” said Lipson. “We always hope the accepted international rules and norms in conflict are adhered to, but based on the rhetoric from North Korea’s leadership, we have to take a pragmatic approach in our readiness and prepare for the potential that they attempt to circumvent those norms through the use of WMDs.”

The SOCKOR commander charged the SOD-K leadership team to continue developing the network and relationships between SOF and conventional forces that could effectively conduct or enable C-WMD operations with this hope for the best, prepare to prevail during the worst mentality.

With this guidance in mind, SOD-K personnel focused on integrating capabilities across domains and components. German emphasized the unit’s ability to tap into to personnel in Colorado providing space-based expertise that helped add a sense of realism in working through the scenario and leveraging their standing relationship with the U.S. Army’s 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command.

Like other units not permanently assigned to the Korean Peninsula and participate in the UFS and FS exercises, SOD-K continues to develop and maintain a heightened state of readiness that meets various needs.

U.S. Special Operations Command - North



Special Operations Command North sets sail during Operation Polar Dagger

*By U.S. Air Force Maj. Ann Marine Annicelli
Special Operations Command North*

Special Operations Command North deployed U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) aboard the USS John L. Canley (ESB 6) to conduct operations in and around the Bering Sea, Arctic Circle, and Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska, during the command's first phase of Operation Polar Dagger (OPD24), Jul. 5-Aug. 2, 2024.

OPD24 is a demonstration of rapidly deployable joint USSOF to the Alaskan Arctic to refine a range of capabilities and response options to deter, disrupt, degrade, and deny competitor activity in the Arctic in support of U.S. Northern Command and layered defense of the homeland.

"As outlined in the recently released 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, military forces must effectively strengthen their ability to survive and operate in austere environments with honed expertise and specialized equipment to overcome the challenges presented by the Alaskan Arctic and High North," said U.S. Army Col. Matthew Tucker, SOCNORTH commander. "Operation Polar Dagger provided SOCNORTH the opportunity to expand its operational reach and evaluate disruptive capabilities that set the conditions for Homeland Defense and enable the operations forward."

Approximately 150 USSOF from SOCNORTH, U.S. Naval Special Warfare Combat Crewman (SWCC), U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs), the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), and the U.S. Army 528th Special Operations (Airborne) Sustainment Brigade Austere Resuscitative Surgical Team set sail aboard USS John L. Canley (ESB 6), which is a U.S. Navy Expeditionary Sea Base ship that supports a variety of maritime-based missions, including SOF and Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM).

"Deploying USSOF aboard the USS John L. Canley (ESB 6) during Operation Polar Dagger further strengthened joint USSOF and Fleet integration in the maritime environment," said the Operation Polar Dagger



As part of Operation Polar Dagger, U.S. Army MH-60M Blackhawk helicopters assigned to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) conduct Maritime Interdiction Operations on the USS John L. Canley (ESB 6), a U.S. Navy Expeditionary Sea Base ship that supports a variety of maritime-based missions, during Operation Polar Dagger, in the Bering Sea, July 24, 2024. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Johnny Diaz.


Task Group and U.S. Navy Special Boat Team Commander. "If you can operate in the Arctic maritime environment, you can operate anywhere."

During OPD, USSOF demonstrated over the beach operations, long range movements, maritime interdiction operations, medical evacuation and personnel recovery, and conducted engagements with the Alaskan Native people and communities.

"Operation Polar Dagger provided our joint forces the opportunity to build upon the maritime activity from last year's operation," said Chief Master Sgt. Clint Grizzell, SOCNORTH command senior enlisted leader. "Each iteration of Operation Polar Dagger advances USNORTHCOM and SOCNORTH's deterrence posture, domain awareness, and SOF proficiency in the Arctic."

OPD is an iterative operation primarily carried out during the summer months. The operation began in 2021 in support of National and Defense strategic guidance.

SOCNORTH plans and executes all-domain Special Operations to detect, deter and disrupt threats throughout the USNORTHCOM AOR, and generate positions of advantage for the Nation.



As part of Operation Polar Dagger, U.S. Navy Special Warfare Combat Crewman (SWCC) conduct Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) off the USS John L. Canley (ESB 6), a U.S. Navy Expeditionary Sea Base ship that supports a variety of maritime-based missions, in the Bering Sea, July 25, 2024. Operation Polar Dagger provided Special Operations Command North the opportunity to refine a range of capabilities and response options to deter, disrupt, degrade, and deny competitor activity in the Arctic in support of U.S. Northern Command and layered defense of the homeland. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Johnny Diaz.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific Philippines, US



complete Tempest Wind 2024

*By Petty Officer 1st Class Joseph Rolfe
U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific*

The U.S. and Philippines completed Exercise Tempest Wind 2024, a bilateral, Whole of Government (WOG), interagency counterterrorism (CT) exercise conducted in the Philippines, August 15-30, 2024.

TW24, a crisis action mission rehearsal, addressed contingency operations to applying current policies, authorities, and approvals of both the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the United States Government (USG). This integrated, WOG of the Philippines approach provided the most realistic environment possible to exercise strategic CT policy involving senior decision-making challenges and tactical CT responses, while deepening the overall partnership with the GPH.

This was the 15th iteration of Tempest Wind, and the Philippines third time hosting the event, having previously hosted the event in 2017 and 2023.

“We extend our gratitude to our ally, the people and the GPH, for hosting this exercise in the spirit of our shared interests and desire to collaborate and address counterterrorism security challenges in the region,” said U.S. Army Col. Sean Berg, U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) deputy commanding officer and U.S. special operations forces commanding officer for TW24.

Over 350 personnel participated in complex events designed to rehearse counterterrorism (CT) strategy to develop joint capabilities, strengthen the alliance, and deepen the WOG bilateral relationship. The exercise tested the ability of both nations to rapidly plan, coordinate, and conduct CT operations. The mission rehearsal also included a command post exercise that challenged Philippine and U.S. forces’ ability to plan, command, and communicate with each other in a simulated environment.

“The experience gained during TW24 complements our mutual training interests and the combined ability to respond to crises across a range of military operations. This gives us a more durable and strengthened advantage against malign actors and terror organizations,” said Berg.



A U.S. Special Tactics Airman assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Wing communicates with U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command MC-130J Commando II pilots prior to landing at San Vicente Airport, Philippines, during Tempest Wind 24 Aug. 28, 2024. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Joey Rolfe.

The training was tailored to help the region’s security forces work together in responding to terrorist incidences, while deepening the CT partnership between the United States and Philippines.

“Events like Tempest Wind provide a solid foundation for continued regional peace and security. These kinds of events posture us and our allies to be ready to counter terrorism however it may present itself,” said Berg.

Tempest Wind is one of many exercises that are part of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s military-to-military engagement program and are conducted with nations throughout the Indo-Pacific region, allowing U.S. forces and our allies and partners to increase skills in diverse environments.

“These robust theater exercise programs demonstrate U.S. commitment to defending the rules-based international order, highlight our resolve to our allies and partners, and build relationships between our forces,” added Berg, “Tempest Wind strengthens international partnerships and regional allies and partners’ ability to rapidly respond to crises throughout the region, promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific that brings peace, stability, and prosperity to all.”

U.S. Naval Special Warfare and Philippine Naval Special Operations Command operators and Federal Bureau of Investigation agents rehearse a joint maritime interdiction operation scenario during exercise Tempest Wind 24 in Bacuit Bay, Philippines, Aug. 27, 2024. TW 24 is the 15th iteration of the Tempest Wind series of exercises and the third time in the Philippines. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command conducts these mission rehearsals as part of its military-to-military engagement program with other nations in the region, enabling U.S. forces to enhance their skills in geographically and culturally diverse environments while promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific that fosters peace, stability, and prosperity for all. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Joey Rolfe. Portions of this image have been blurred for security reasons.



U.S. Army Special Operations Command



Turning tragedy into triumph: The Story of Dancing Angels, a woman's journey from loss to hope

*By U.S. Army 1st Lt. Kacie Perusek
United States Army Special Operations Command*

In March 2012, Louise Cantrell faced an unimaginable tragedy when a devastating house fire claimed the lives of her husband, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Edward Duane Cantrell, and their two young daughters, Isabella and Natalia. The fire occurred in Hope Mills, NC, shortly after Edward, a dedicated soldier with the 3rd Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, returned from his sixth combat deployment.

Edward's career exemplified bravery and commitment. Serving multiple tours overseas, he embodied the courage and dedication of Special Forces soldiers. His return from deployment should have marked a joyous reunion with his family, but it ended in heartbreak.

The loss of Isabella, six, and Natalia, four, was profoundly devastating. They were full of life, bringing joy to everyone they met. Their untimely deaths left an irreplaceable void among their loved ones and in the community. Louise was deeply affected, struggling to mention her daughters' names for a long time.

Louise, who grew up in New York and overcame a difficult childhood, always dreamed of being a wife and mother. This dream came true when she married Edward in February 2004 and became a stay-at-home mom. Her life was devoted to her family and losing them all at once left her grappling to find her identity.

"I was a wife and mother and in seconds I was nothing," said Louise.

The tragedy sent shockwaves through the tight-knit military community and the surrounding areas. Friends,



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Edward Duane Cantrell kneels with his two young daughters, Isabella and Natalia. Edward and his two daughters were tragically lost in a house fire in Hope Mills, NC, in March of 2012. Photo courtesy of Louise Cantrell.

neighbors, and fellow service members rallied around Louise, offering their support and condolences. The incident highlighted life's unpredictable and fragile nature, especially for military personnel and their families.

In the aftermath of the fire, people made various efforts to honor the memories of Edward, Isabella, and Natalia.

A significant turning point for Louise came a year and a half later when she attended a retreat called Leap of Faith, a three-day seminar for families of fallen service members, designed to transform their grief. Participants learn to embrace their "new normal" while honoring their loved ones, with an optional tandem skydive included.

There, she met Mike Elliot, president of the All-Veteran Group. Deeply inspired by Louise's resilience, tenacity and ability to keep moving forward, Elliot commented on her renewed hope after participating in a tandem jump.

"After her tandem jump, she was smiling and jumping around," Elliot recalled. "She told me she felt like she could stop a freight train with her bare hands."

This powerful experience marked a turning point for Louise. She realized that despite her immense loss, she had to continue living and find a way to honor her daughters, Isabella and Natalia.

Motivated by this newfound strength, Louise established the Dancing Angels Foundation. This organization became her way of preserving her daughters' memories and channeling her grief into something positive. Her greatest fear as a mother was that they would be forgotten.

Isabella and Natalia loved to dance. Wherever music played, they danced. After their untimely passing, Louise wanted to honor their memory through the art they loved. She approached Cumberland Dance Academy where her daughters attended dance with a heartfelt request to sponsor a dancer in memory of her daughters.

In June 2014, Louise presented the first scholarship at a recital, an occasion filled with deep emotion. It was a significant moment as, for the first time since their passing, she found the strength to speak aloud the names of her beloved daughters, Isabella and Natalia. A task that had been too difficult before, as it meant confronting the painful reality of her daughters' absences. In honoring their memory, she discovered solace and comfort.

In September 2014, Louise officially established the Dancing Angels Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit that awards tuition scholarships to help dancers receive world-class instruction at various prestigious summer intensive dance programs globally. These scholarships support dedicated dancers in furthering their training and reaching new heights in their dance education.

Through this initiative, Louise has turned her grief into a positive force, ensuring her daughters' love for dance continues to inspire and uplift others in the community. With every scholarship awarded, her daughters' names are spoken, and their stories are told.

In 2022, Louise was awarded the Fini Dance Italian International Lifetime Achievement Award. The award recognizes the positive impact she has had in the dance community.

Since 2014, the Dancing Angels Foundation has awarded 405 scholarships totaling over \$401,000.

The Dancing Angels Foundation stands as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of transforming grief into hope. Through the foundation, Louise continues to honor the memory of her beloved daughters while making a meaningful impact on the lives of aspiring dancers.

"I'm just a mom making sure the world knows how amazing my girls were," said Louise. "How beautiful, loving and giving my girls were, and how much they loved to dance. And as beautiful as they were on the outside, they were one hundred times over as beautiful on the inside. Doing this and giving back is something I strive to do in their honor."



Louise Cantrell after being awarded the Fini Dance Italian International Lifetime Achievement Award. This award recognizes the positive impact she has had in the dance community. Photo courtesy of Louise Cantrell.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) conduct fast rope drills



U.S. Army Green Berets assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) conduct fast rope drills out of the back of a UH-1Y Venom assigned to Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One, as part of Weapons and Tactics Instructor course 1-25 at K9 Village training complex, Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona, Oct. 5, 2024. WTI course is a seven-week training event hosted by MAWTS-1 which emphasizes operational integration of the six functions of Marine aviation in support of the Marine Air Ground Task Force, Joint and Coalition Forces. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Orlanys Diaz Figueroa.



U.S. Army Special Operations Command

10th SFG (A) complete training rotation in California desert



Special Operations Forces Soldiers with 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), proceed to an observation post during a training rotation at the National Training Center on Fort Irwin, California, Sept. 19, 2024. Special Forces units performed several missions over two weeks in a high-stakes military exercise designed to simulate real-world combat scenarios under extreme conditions. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Anthony Bryant.

*By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Anthony Bryant
10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)*

In the rugged expanse of the Mojave Desert, elite Special Forces units performed mission after mission in a high-stakes military exercise. Designed to simulate real-world combat scenarios, the drill tested their survival, navigation, and tactical skills under extreme conditions.

From Sept. 6-27, 2024, the National Training Center's miles of hostile desert offered Green Berets assigned to 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), an opportunity to hone their capabilities and prepare for future missions.

"From an [Operational Detachment Alpha] level, we figure out how our Special Operations Forces skill set and talents nest within conventional forces' methodology of fighting...where we can best support and enable their operations to set conditions for their success," said a Special Forces team sergeant, the senior NCO on a Special Forces team. "Our skills and ability to survive and make good decisions independently facilitates big Army's actions."

U.S. Special Forces core activities range from short-duration strikes and small-scale offensive actions to collecting and verifying information in sensitive environments to enabling a resistance movement to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a foreign government or occupying power.



A Green Beret assigned to 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), scans for enemies during a nighttime combat drill on a fuel depot in Daggett, California, Sept. 14, 2024. Special Forces units performed several missions over two weeks in a high-stakes military exercise designed to simulate real-world combat scenarios. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Anthony Bryant.

“We’ve moved patrol bases six times; done three or four deliberate assaults; and five or six straight up reconnaissance missions where we find and fix the enemy and coordinate through the advanced operating base for fires,” he said. “Moving from operation to operation with limited concealment is extremely challenging; you must be deliberate when choosing to expose yourself to the enemy and weigh if the mission will have effects beyond killing one or two guys.”

The team sergeant said he refined his understanding of the capabilities his attached service members lend in the Box—the National Training Center’s vast desert training area whose isolated location ensures an uncluttered electromagnetic spectrum so troops can train freely in data collection and communications jamming.

“We have [a signals intelligence-electronic warfare analyst] and two Tactical Air Control Party Airmen from the U.S. Air Force attached to our team which we learned to employ,” he continued. “The [analyst] has been pretty critical in terms of force protection—he’s able to pick out the signals around us, see if there are threats in the area we need to be aware of—and confirm or deny targets.”

Targets in the training area were sometimes beyond the range the Special Forces team could reliably observe.

“Using the [signals intelligence analyst], we’re able to identify the signals coming off a target...and confirm that is indeed what we want to strike,” the team sergeant said.

In the Box, each Special Forces team has a dedicated duo of Observer Coach and Trainers (OC/T) who observe unit actions, control the opposing force and training unit, ensure exercise procedures are adhered to, and provide feedback.

“We observe all their maneuvers to help guide them on the right path to ensure their mission is successful,” said an OC/T augmentee and Special Forces Operator with 2nd Bn., 10th SFG (A). “Last night, there was a key enemy asset the team took out—which is great—but they didn’t have [an exfiltration] plan in place as soon as they took it out, so you’re a sitting duck in the same area you just fired a (notional) missile from... We point out mistakes, so they don’t repeat themselves.”

The OC/T mentioned that in his role, he benefited by seeing how another team plans and conducts missions, enhancing his tactical knowledge.

“I coach and pull guys aside and tell them that, maybe, this is how to do things and then hear what they have to say to that,” he said. “[NTC] is where you figure it out; this is where teams can either make it or break it [without real-world outcomes].”



A Special Operations Forces Soldier with 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), mans a Ground Mobility Vehicle’s turret during a nighttime training mission at the National Training Center on Fort Irwin, California, Sept. 19, 2024. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Anthony Bryant

Naval Special Warfare Command

New York Air National Guard unit supports Navy SEAL training exercise



By Alexander Rector
U.S. Air National Guard

For three weeks this July, the New York Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing hosted more than 40 East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) and combat support personnel for a joint training exercise dubbed Oxblood East.

During the exercise the SEALs focused on honing their joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) skills by conducting fire support and close-air-support training scenarios.

The training reinforced skills taught at the Special Operations Terminal Attack Controller Course at Yuma Proving Ground, Ariz. That course equips special operation troops with the tactics, techniques, and procedures required to request, control, and adjust surface-to-surface fires; to provide targeting information in support of close air support; and to perform terminal guidance operations.

The Adirondack Range, where the training was held, is located at Fort Drum, NY and is staffed by 15 Airmen from the New York Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing. "They like our training, and they like our range, said Lt.



A group of East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operators (SEALs) conduct Joint Terminal Attack Controller training at Fort Drum, NY, July 24. Photo by U.S. Air National Guard Tech Sgt. Alexander Rector.



An East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) calls in an airstrike to a 174th Attack Wing MQ-9 Reaper during a Joint Terminal Attack Controller recertification training exercise at Fort Drum, NY, July 24. During the training event, more than 40 U.S. Navy SEALs completed JTAC recertification to maintain operational readiness and refine their interoperability with joint assets to extend their tactical reach. This photo has been altered for security purposes by blurring out service members faces. Photo by U.S. Air National Guard Tech Sgt. Alexander Rector.

Col. Ryan Hubbard, commander of Detachment 1, 174th Operations Group, 174th Attack Wing. “We’re one of the only ranges on the East Coast that can accept high explosive munitions and we’ve gotten a lot of good feedback.”

As the U.S. Navy’s premier maritime special operations force, U.S. Navy SEALs are highly trained in a multifaceted skill set of warfighting functions, one of which is coordinating joint fires. To maintain skill proficiency and deployment readiness, SEALs must train routinely to enhance their lethality.

“The training here provided my team an opportunity to refine our warfighting tactics and remain ready to conduct operations when called upon,” said the Ground Force Commander on site. “Joint training between the Air National Guard and Naval Special Warfare enhances real-world operations by ensuring seamless coordination and effective support in combat scenarios, expanding the Navy’s capabilities in high-end conflicts.”

With participating aircraft sourced from the United States Army, Air Force and Marines, the exercise was a true joint training event.

Due to its size and remote location, the Adirondack Range allows for a variety of training scenarios and is routinely used by numerous Department of Defense entities and airframes.

“The Adirondack Range is a gem and enables incredible joint training opportunities for the 174th Attack Wing and our joint service partners,” said Col. John O’Connor, the 174th Attack Wing commander. “We were proud to host the Navy SEALs and support this unique training event.”

During the three-week training event, more than 135 training sorties were conducted by a range of fixed and rotary-wing aircraft which allowed the SEALs to recertify their special operations terminal attack controller skills and remain deployment-ready.

The 174th Attack Wing is one of five wings that comprise the New York Air National Guard. The wing operates the MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft and is headquartered at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, NY.



An East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) calls in an airstrike to a 174th Attack Wing MQ-9 Reaper during a Joint Terminal Attack Controller recertification training exercise at Fort Drum, NY, July 24. Photo by U.S. Air National Guard Tech Sgt. Alexander Rector.

Naval Special Warfare Command RIMPAC 2024



West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators conduct a patrol during jungle reconnaissance training at East Range, Schofield Barracks during Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024, July 15. 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.



Air Force Special Operations Command



Duke Field Reservists play vital role in Northern Viking 2024 exercise

*By U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. James R. Wilson
919th Special Operations Wing*

A team of Reservists from Duke Field, Florida, demonstrated the versatility of the C-146A Wolfhound aircraft while supporting joint and NATO forces during Exercise Northern Viking 2024 in Keflavik, Iceland, Aug. 26 – Sept. 4, 2024.

Members of the 859th Special Operations Squadron used the venue to illustrate its mission is agile, accessible while still flexible enough to work with military and civilian entities during times of crisis. Aircrew from the squadron welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate skills in events across multiple domains.

“Not only were we challenged by having to contend with a drastically different environment, living up to its reputation as the land of fire and ice with storms and an active volcano, but we also benefited from working with other U.S and NATO forces,” said Capt. Jason Brown, 859th SOS pilot and lead planner for squadron’s participation in the exercise. “Our primary mission remains SOF focused, but there will always be a need to work with those who have differing requirements, missions or purpose. Northern Viking gave us an opportunity to work under a Navy and Marine Corps command structure with seven other NATO nations over a 10-day period.”

The multinational exercise, led by U.S. Naval Forces Europe and executed by the U.S. Sixth Fleet, brought together naval, air and land components from NATO allies including Iceland, Denmark, France, Norway, Poland and Portugal.

The unit, and its active-duty partners in the 524th SOS, provide the Air Force’s only Non Standard Aviation capability transporting SOF members and equipment to some of the world’s most austere locations. This was the first opportunity for the 859th SOS to train with the Icelandic quick reaction force and joint partners



A member from the National Icelandic Police prepares to embark on a C-146A Wolfhound attached to the 859th Special Operations Squadron from Duke Field Florida, in preparation for a training evolution during Northern Viking 24 (NV24) on Keflavik Air Base, Iceland, Aug. 29, 2024. NV24 strengthens interoperability and force readiness between the U.S., Iceland and Allied nations, enabling multi-domain command and control of joint and coalition forces in the defense of Iceland and sea lines of communication in the Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom (GIUK) gap. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Almagissel Schuring.

in a range of crisis response scenarios including a volcanic eruption and other humanitarian disasters.

“The greatest challenge we faced initially was figured out how we would fit into a naval exercise,” said Brown. “Our focus was on doing what we do best – moving people and cargo from one airfield to another while being flexible enough to adjust to constantly changing needs from the users. As the environment continued to evolve, our flexibility was key in being able to save quite a few scenarios from having to be cancelled or rescheduled.”

Throughout the exercise, Allied forces practiced a variety of operations to enhance their cooperation while evolving into taskings and requirements that progressed in complexity throughout the exercise. The teamwork between the Icelandic Coast Guard, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and the 859th SOS was on full display throughout the exercise. Not only did the unit provide vital airlift for an Icelandic Quick Reaction Force, it also supported an medical evacuation mission allowing Navy medics to provide triage and treatment on the versatile C-146A aircraft.

“The flight with the C-146 aircraft helped us to simulate a fixed wing transport as well as a simulated longer evacuation to a higher level of care and treatment,” said Lt. Cmdr. Clyde Martin, U.S. Navy Medical Officer in Charge of Combat Logistics Battalion 8. “It enhanced our readiness as there are problems within medicine that only occur during

transport. Simple things like communication can become a challenge during transport which isn’t easy to simulate. From our perspective, the range and carrying capacity of the C-146 makes it a very useful aircraft for patient transport.”

Members of the 859th SOS agreed and saw the unique training as mutually beneficial.

“This aircraft is well suited to the casualty evacuation mission as it can reach smaller airfields in a short amount of time, bringing in medical teams and supplies while transporting ambulatory patients along with their medical attendants,” said Brown. “This is especially useful in situations such as were presented in Iceland for us when evacuating patients from the other side of the island by road would be a 10-hour drive or four hours by helicopter. A 45-minute flight that can carry far more than a helicopter could literally be a life saver.”



Lt. Shelby Wolfe prepares an IV bag for a simulated casualty in a C-146A Wolfhound aircraft during a medical transport flight at a mass casualty drill held at Northern Viking 24 (NV24) in Keflavik, Iceland Sept. 2. Photo by U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Elizabeth Reisen.

Air Force Special Operations Command



CV-22 Osprey Flight

A U.S. Air Force CV-22 Osprey assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron flies during a training exercise over the plains of New Mexico, Oct. 9, 2024. The CV-22 is a self-deployable aircraft offering increased speed and range over rotary-wing aircraft, enabling Air Force Special Operations Command aircrews to execute long-range special operations missions. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Gracelyn Hess.





Marine Forces, Special Operations Command

Marine Raider presents keynote at Hispanic Heritage event



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

U.S. Marine Corps Master Gunnery Sgt. Roberto Alvarez, a Marine Raider and senior enlisted advisor with Marine Forces Special Operations Command, delivers the keynote address during a Hispanic Heritage Month event at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, 1 Oct. 2024.

The event, hosted by the Hispanic Engagement Action Team and sponsored by Fleet Readiness Command East, is held annually during Hispanic Heritage month to highlight the success and contributions that Latin American service members make to the United States Armed Forces.

The HEAT personnel sought to have a member of the MARSOC team present at the event for their unique insight into the special operations side of military service.

“Given the impact MARSOC has had on SOCOM and the Marine Corps since its creation, we felt it would be extremely impactful to have a Hispanic leader from within MARSOC’s ranks as a guest speaker,” said Brina Grubbs, President of HEAT Cherry Point. “We knew their expertise and experience would greatly enrich the event and provide invaluable knowledge to those in attendance.”

This year’s theme, *Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together*, emphasizes the innovation, resiliency, and unity that are hallmarks of both the Hispanic American and the American Service member.

Alvarez, in his address, spoke about his upbringing, as a Puerto Rican, being pivotal in shaping who he is and his work ethic.

“I had the best childhood, not privileged, but it was great. I always had what I needed,” said Alvarez. “My parents worked tirelessly to give us a good life, and that’s a point of pride for all Latinos, we know how to work hard.”



MGySgt Roberto Alvarez, a Marine Raider with Marine Forces Special Operations Command, delivers the keynote address for *Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together*, a Hispanic Heritage Month event hosted by Hispanic Engagement Action Team at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, 1 Oct. 2024. The event, held annually, seeks to highlight the personal and professional achievements of Latin American service members. Alvarez, who has spent his entire career in and around the special operations community, highlighted how his background and experiences have benefitted him in his service to his country. Photo U.S. Marine Corps by Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.

Alvarez’ distinguished career includes time in the Marine Corps Reconnaissance community, in Chile as part of the Marine Corps Exchange Program, and a careers worth of service within MARSOC to the joint special operations community. With more than a dozen deployments, Alvarez has worked in environments all over the world and credits his background with a large part of his success.

“Being Latino hasn’t made me a better Marine,” said Alvarez. “But it has given me a unique perspective and toolset that has helped me succeed every step of the way.”

MGySgt Roberto Alvarez, a Marine Raider with Marine Forces Special Operations Command, delivers the keynote address for Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together, a Hispanic Heritage Month event hosted by Hispanic Engagement Action Team at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, 1 Oct, 2024. "Being Latino hasn't made me a better Marine," said Alvarez. "But it has given me a unique perspective and toolset that has helped me succeed every step of the way." Photo U.S. Marine Corps by Cpl. Henry Rodriguez.



Marine Forces, Special Operations Command

Multi-purpose canines conduct amphibious and aerial fast-roping training



A U.S. Marine in the multi-purpose canine course from Marine Forces Special Operations Command prepares to fast-rope from a UH-1Y Venom assigned to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 (HMLA-167), Marine Aircraft Group 29 (MAG-29), 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (2nd MAW) at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Sept. 25, 2024. Special operations capabilities specialist multi-purpose canine handler students must be capable of inserting into various environments by using different techniques such as water and air insertions to graduate. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Salvador Flores Perez.



Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

SOCOM Ignite: Fresh perspectives, new MOS for future SOF

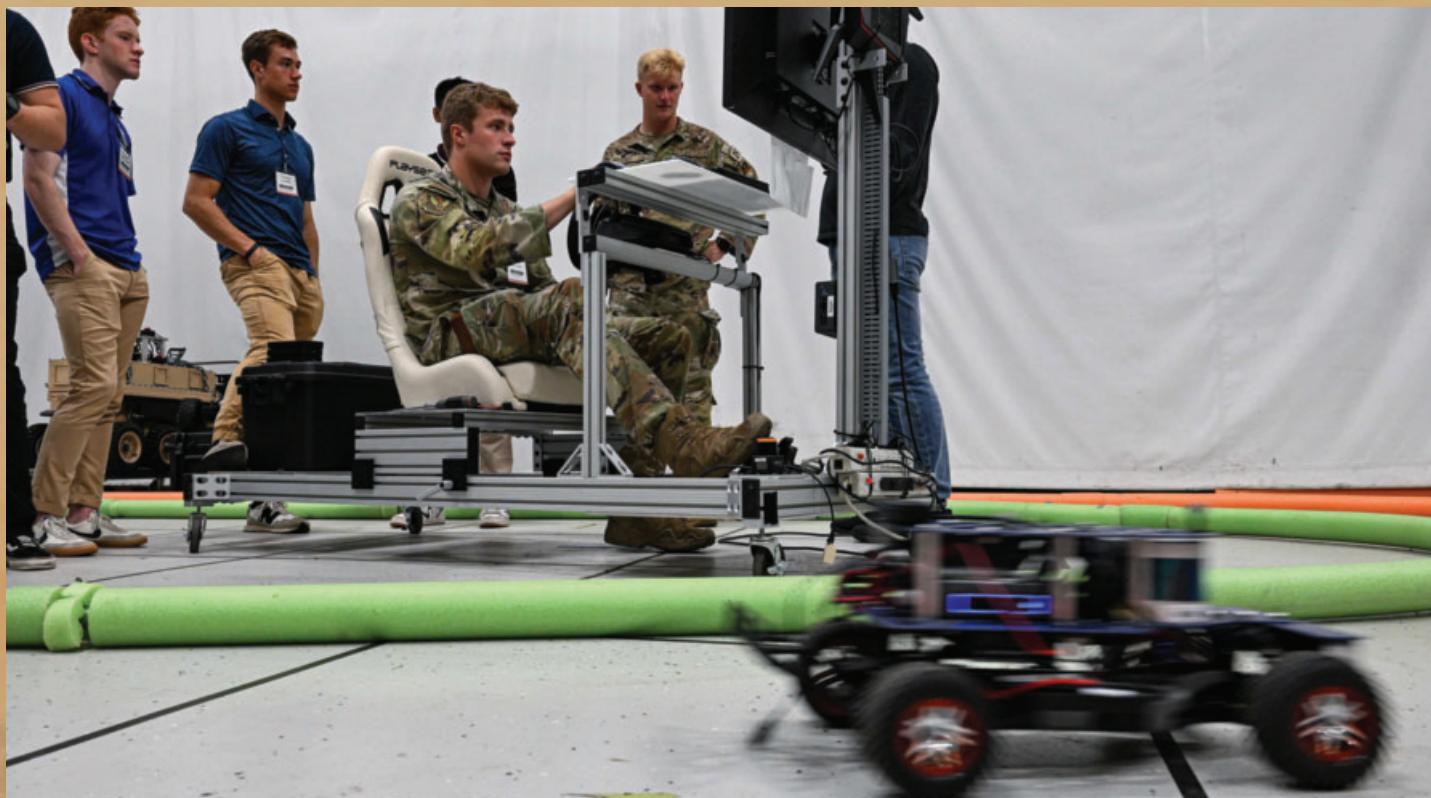
*By U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller
U.S. Special Operations Command*

U.S. Special Operations Command's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics directorate and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Lincoln Laboratory kicked off the 2025 SOCOM Ignite Program at MIT's campus, Sept. 19-22, where 94 cadets from 20 colleges and universities, as well as the Army, Navy and Air Force academies, prepared to continue on-going projects or begin their own.

The SOCOM Ignite Program is an innovation and talent pipeline development program aimed at creating an

opportunity for future military officers to apply their Science, Technology, Engineering and Math degrees toward building technology solutions for Special Operations Forces-submitted challenges.

During the kick-off event, personnel with U.S. SOCOM presented their challenges to the students, who then teamed up with SOF operators and researchers to innovate solutions for real-world problems. Challenges presented consisted of big data analytics, smart sensors, unmanned system autonomy and swarming, human-machine teaming, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and generating real-time actionable intelligence from battlefield sensors.



Cadets with U.S. Special Operations Command's Ignite Program learn about drones and interact with various autonomous systems at the Autonomous Systems Development Facility, Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts, Sept. 19, 2024. The SOCOM Ignite Program is an innovation and talent pipeline development program aimed at creating an opportunity for future military officers to apply their Science, Technology, Engineering and Math degrees toward building technology solutions for Special Operations Forces-submitted challenges. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.

U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. JoAnn Naumann, senior enlisted leader for U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fort Liberty, North Carolina, provided the keynote speech during the kickoff event and shared the importance of people and technology in the SOF enterprise.

“We’ve got great people in the SOF organizations, but they’re looking at these problems from the perspective of their experiences and from what they’re seeing on the battlefield,” said Naumann. “You all are looking at it with a totally new perspective. The brightest, freshest minds in our country, right here in this room, taking on hard problems and giving us a new way to look at them.”

Naumann also discussed what future careers await cadets within SOF, as well as a new military occupational specialty job created just for special operations.

“Special operations is leading the Army by creating a new MOS this year for technology, innovation and integration – a new MOS that does not exist in the Army,” said Naumann. “We’re creating it because we realized that we need it. We will have people whose job is to think about these kinds of problems, build prototypes and then help us once we get the technology integrated into the battlefield and make it work in real-world scenarios.”

Ignite started with less than 10 cadets participating to over 90 this year, but the goal was more than just figuring out the solutions to the challenges submitted.

“The goal was never to make more projects and have more outputs than actual tech, it’s always been about the people – it’s always been about building connections,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Brian McLaughlin, military lead with SOCOM Ignite. “We show them a lot of different opportunities they could do and that they’re not just going to join the military and do random things.

With the hopes of recruiting cadets into a SOF career field and the numbers of cadets attending SOCOM Ignite each year, the number of mentors for each submitted challenge is declining and McLaughlin would like to see more mentors from the SOF enterprise in the future.

“We’re investing,” said McLaughlin. “This is long-term where you’re not going to get an immediate benefit from it, but maybe that person comes back five years later in your unit. We have to start on the service member side and start thinking about it a little differently for the future of SOF.”

U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Katrina Thoms, with the Warrior Scholar Program, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, attended SOCOM Ignite last year as a cadet. Thoms and two former SOCOM Ignite Fellows were selected by U.S. SOCOM as part of a deliberate talent-scouting pipeline for SOF, as well as mentor cadets throughout the year.

“What I think is so different about this program is the environment that it instills. It’s not about the product and the end goal,” said Thoms. “The Ignite members are continuously supportive of everybody in the program. They

always say school’s first, they always make sure you’re going to graduate with your undergrad degree - that is first for them. The environment, alone, would inspire a cadet to come and be a part of it because it’s a win-win situation. There is no downside to being here.”

Thoms also shared her excitement for the new special operations MOS mentioned by Naumann during her keynote speech.

“I think this MOS is going to be great for recruiting for the Army, special operations and the military in general,” said Thoms. “This gives a new pathway and a new job opportunity for people who are really good at technology, and not just the gun-ho, ‘let’s be in the field,’ type of people.”

For some cadets, their first year at SOCOM Ignite is also their first year at college. Cadet 4th Class Angel Ko, a freshman with the Air Force ROTC at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, was introduced to SOCOM Ignite during the new cadet orientation at Texas Tech and knew that was exactly what she wanted to do.

“SOCOM Ignite is a really good way to get into the innovative side of the military,” said Ko.

For the upcoming school year, Ko shared hopes for her team’s project to get off the ground enough for it to be continued through a summer internship or even being picked up by U.S. SOCOM.

“I want to contribute to the processes involved with the special operations command,” said Ko. “Not with just engineering busy work like at the university, but actually contributing in a relevant way for the U.S. military and serving my country.”



Cadets with U.S. Special Operations Command's Ignite Program learn about drones and interact with various autonomous systems at the Autonomous Systems Development Facility, Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts, Sept. 19, 2024, providing them a headstart into their projects for the year. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

JSOU's "Academic Year 2025 Call for Special Operations Papers" to focus on informing People, Win, Transform efforts

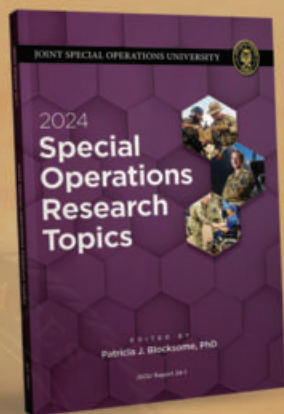
"Through research, we benefit from the insights of those within and beyond our Special Operations community. Research enables us to better understand the issues facing our world and explore what changes must be made across domains and capabilities to adapt for the future." – General Bryan P. Fenton & Command Sergeant Major Shane W. Shorter (USSOCOM), 2024 Special Operations Research Topics (SORT)

By Cameron Cobb

Joint Special Operations University

Background

As the United States refines national strategy, resourcing levels, and global focus to address the contemporary threat environment, the role of special operations has never been more vital. In response, USSOCOM is relooking at—and in some cases—reimagining its role in integrated deterrence, crisis response, and counterterrorism operations. Recognizing the critical need for advanced discourse and creative idea generation, the Joint Special Operations University Press (JSOU Press) is pleased to announce its call for papers for Academic Year 2025 (AY25).



Submissions must be informed by the 2024 Special Operations Research Topics booklet.

Informed by the 2024 Special Operations Research Topics (SORT) booklet, AY25 papers will focus on critical topics that address the USSOCOM lines of effort **People, Win, Transform**

Writing Categories

To ensure divergent and convergent perspectives, AY25 categories are as follows:

1. CAT 1: JSOU Enlisted Academy focusing on the Career Education Program (CEP)
2. CAT 2: Professional Military Education (PME) Students and Military Practitioners
3. CAT 3: Academic Faculty and Civilian Scholars

One paper from each category will be selected as the winner (with award specifics to be determined), and winning submissions will be published by the JSOU Press.

Required Topics

Submissions must be informed by topics included in the 2024 SORT booklet that focus on the USSOCOM commander's three lines of effort:

People: How can SOF improve the execution of its service-like responsibilities (e.g., Program, Planning, Budget, and Execution; Cost Assessment Program Evaluation; and Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities, Policy)?

Win: How can the SOF enterprise leverage asymmetric options and new forms of irregular warfare to fill critical gaps in Joint Force capabilities and to "Prevent, Prepare, Prevail, and Preserve" against near-peer competitors (i.e., Russia/People's Republic of China [PRC])?

Transform: How can SOF leverage emergent technology and/or advanced concepts that enable SOF operations, such as the SOF-Space-Cyber-Strategic Command Nexus, to “Prevent, Prepare, Prevail, and Preserve” in conflict against near-peer competitors (e.g., Russia/PRC)?



The “JSOU AY25 Call for Special Operations Papers” program is designed to spark ideas and generate conversations as related to USSOCOM’s priorities Photo by Sgt. Lauren Twigg, Arizona National Guard Public Affairs.

“Writing allows us to communicate these insights throughout our formation. We challenge all those across our Special Operations enterprise to seek opportunities to research and write about topics that can further hone our force and capabilities.” – General Bryan P. Fenton & Command Sergeant Major Shane W. Shorter (USSOCOM), 2024 SORT

Deadlines

To meet varied submission timelines, each of the three categories must adhere to the respective deadlines

Cat 1: Quarterly submission deadlines/winners as set by the JSOU Enlisted Academy Commandant

Cat 2: 28 February 2025

Cat 3: 28 February 2025

Evaluation

All submissions must be unclassified, between 1,500 and 3,000 words, and related to a required topic as outlined in the SORT.

“Together, we will ensure our force remains the world’s finest SOF and that we are poised to meet the challenges of this decisive era.” – General Bryan P. Fenton & Command Sergeant Major Shane W. Shorter (USSOCOM), 2024 SORT

For more information, visit www.jsou.edu/press/callforpapers, email callforpapers@jsou.edu, or scan the QR code shown here!



A U.S. Air Force MC-130J Commando II assigned to the 27th Special Operations Wing kicks up dust as it lands in Gabbs, Nevada, Aug. 7, 2024. Rapid infiltration and exfiltration on unimproved landing surfaces was one of the major focuses of the combat readiness inspection. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kevin Williams.

