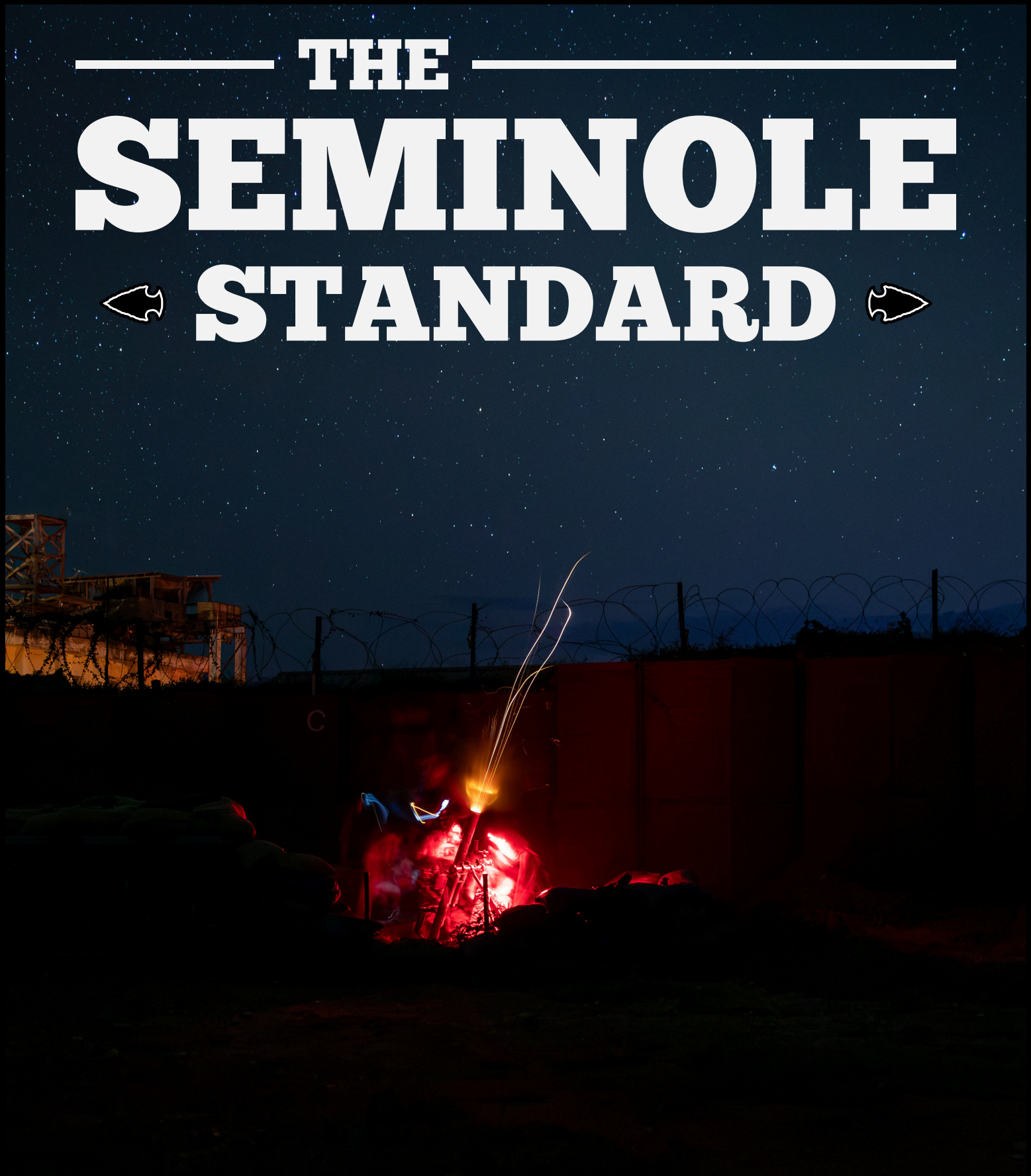
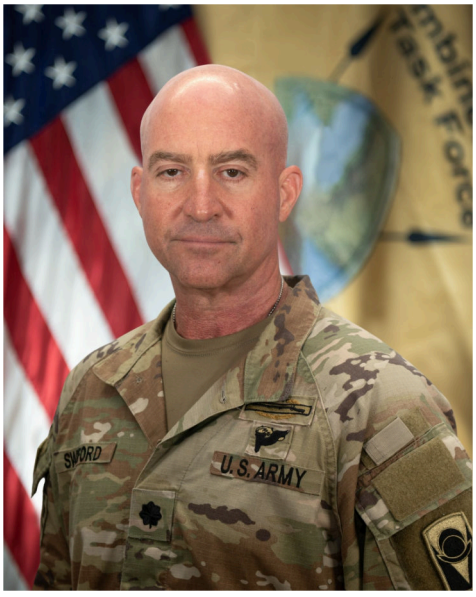
THE SEMINOLE STANDARD



Volume 7 | September, 2026

THE COMMANDER'S COUNCIL OAK

Finish Strong During the Final Stretch



Greetings once again from the Horn of Africa!

As we enter the final phase of this deployment, we find ourselves facing the most critical stretch of our mission. This is the phase that truly tests a unit's character and demands what some call mental toughness, but what I prefer to call intestinal fortitude. It is easy to maintain focus at the beginning of a deployment, but the real measure of an infantry unit is how we finish. We must resist the urge to look past the horizon or let complacency creep into our daily routines. There is still much to be done, and my charge to every single one of you is simple; do not quit until we are safely home!

Even as we maintain our operational focus, the transition process is beginning to take shape. Task Force Iron is currently at the Mobilization Force Generation Installation, and we should start seeing the first sections of our replacement force arrive in theater before the next edition of the Seminole Standard is published. Our task is to ensure a seamless handoff, passing the guidon with the same professionalism that has defined our entire tour. The discipline and dedication across the task force continue to impress me daily, and I know we will finish just as strong as we started.

Our commitment to professional readiness extends far beyond tactical proficiency; it includes the personal and professional growth of our individual Soldiers. This past month, we had the incredible opportunity to host the Academic Skills Improvement Program right here in theater.

I want to extend a massive thank you to the Florida National Guard for sending CW5 Jason Venable and CW2 Torri Ghaner to the Horn of Africa to conduct this invaluable course. Their dedication to our Soldiers' professional development allowed 31 service members from across the joint force to invest in themselves and significantly improve their general technical scores, unlocking future career and reclassification opportunities.

This program is a prime example of how we continue to build the bench of future leaders, ensuring our Soldiers return home not just as seasoned combat veterans, but as more competitive, highly qualified professionals.

In addition to this academic success, I must personally correct an oversight on my part from our previous newsletter. I missed the mark last month by not highlighting a truly remarkable achievement by four of our outstanding junior leaders. These individuals stepped outside their comfort zones to successfully complete the grueling Marine Corps Corporals Course, representing our task force with distinction in a highly demanding joint environment.

Please join me in congratulating CPL Cruz-Lopez of Hatchet Company, CPL Reyes Lopez and SPC Cribbs of Comanche Company, and SPC Moller of Apache Company for mastering key leadership development skills alongside our Marine and joint partners.

These Soldiers have shown exactly what the Florida Army National Guard brings to the joint fight, proving that our junior leaders are among the finest in the armed forces.

THE COMMANDER'S COUNCIL OAK

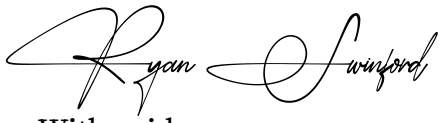
One Task Force, Always Ready to Respond

Down south, our operations continue to reach historic milestones. I want to commend the exceptional work done by Apache Company, Combat Company, and the Seminole TAC in Kenya. Together, they successfully integrated with both Kenyan and joint forces to execute the first-ever joint and combined base defense exercise in the region.

This historic exercise required immense synchronization, planning, and tactical execution. LTC Mook and CSM Williford of the Seminole TAC, CPT Benningfield and 1SG Figueroa of Apache Company, and 1LT Stephens and 1SG Grieves of Combat Company did a phenomenal job bringing this complex, multinational training event to life.

Their efforts have not only enhanced our immediate security posture but have also solidified our enduring relationships with our Kenyan Navy and joint partners. This is world-class work at the tactical edge.

To the families, friends, and employers back home: your steadfast support remains our greatest strategic asset, and the finish line is finally coming into view. To the Soldiers on the ground, keep your eyes on the direct front, watch out for your battle buddies, and maintain the high standards of discipline that have brought us this far.



With pride,
LTC Ryan M. Swinford
Seminole 6
NEVER SURRENDER!

THE WARPATH

This Month's Focus: Disciplined Initiative, Resilience, and Looking Out for Your Battle Buddy



At this point in the deployment, Task Force Seminole finds itself in a demanding operational window. From equipment wear to logistical delays, fluid mission requirements, and personnel management, operating across our dispersed footprint inevitably creates friction. At the same time, the physical and mental demands of a long deployment begin to compound. True combat readiness is not just about having clean weapons and secure perimeters. It is about maintaining mental toughness, solving problems at the lowest level, and actively looking out for the Soldier standing to your left and right.

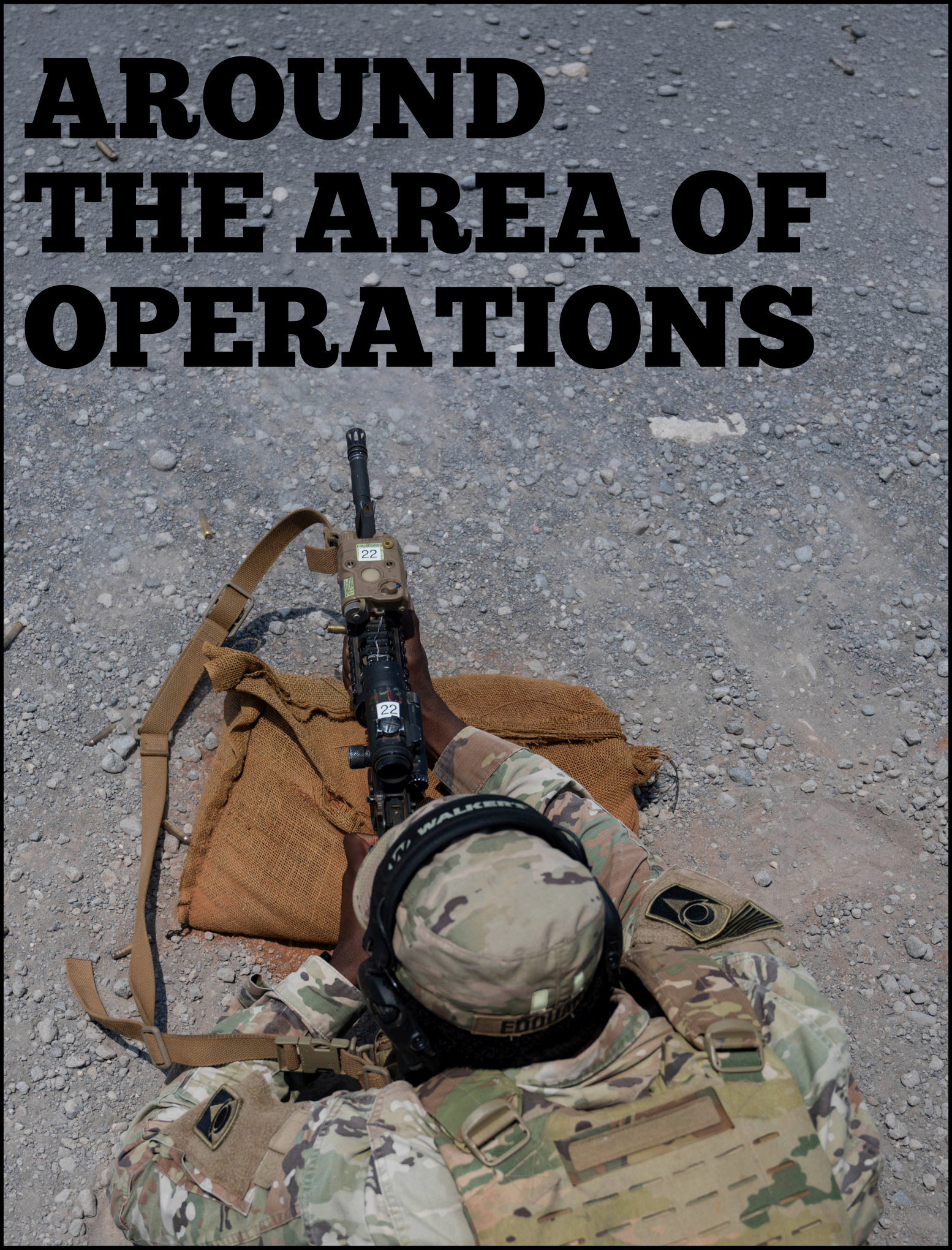
When friction occurs within our operations, we do not dwell on the problem or wait for someone else to fix it. We must rely on disciplined initiative. Team leaders, squad leaders, and individual Soldiers must understand the Commander's intent and have the confidence to act decisively within that intent. Figure out the solution, communicate up and down the chain of command, and execute. However, sound initiative is only possible when Soldiers are mentally sharp and resilient. You cannot lead effectively or make smart tactical decisions if fatigue and frustration cause you to tune out.

This is where Soldier care becomes a critical line of effort. Rather than suffering in silence, resilience is about staying connected and maintaining the discipline of our four developmental domains: mental, physical, spiritual/emotional, and financial. Take five minutes to genuinely check in on your battle buddy. Watch for signs of isolation, frustration, or complacency. As we look ahead toward our replacements arriving and our redeployment, stress and distractions from back home will naturally increase. Leaders at every echelon must be actively engaged, empathetic, and approachable, ensuring our personnel have the resources and support they need to stay focused on the mission.

Everything we do continues to rest on our two foundational tenets: discipline and professionalism. Discipline drives us to enforce standards, maintain our gear, and manage our personal stress proactively. Professionalism dictates how we treat our teammates, respect our support channels, and uphold our reputation across this theater. Stay resilient, take care of each other, and maintain the initiative. We have come too far as a Task Force to allow fatigue or friction to dull our edge.

CSM Jonathan D. Pletcher
Seminole 7
NEVER SURRENDER!

AROUND THE AREA OF OPERATIONS



APACHE COMPANY

September proved to be another busy month for Apache Company as Soldiers balanced competition, demanding physical challenges, tactical training, and individual milestones. From competing alongside Air Force counterparts to preparing Soldiers for international training opportunities, Apache continued finding ways to strengthen readiness and build camaraderie while maintaining its operational responsibilities in the Horn of Africa.

The Commander's Cup brought Army and Air Force service members together for a series of competitive events throughout the month. The friendly inter-service rivalry challenged participants across events designed to test strength, agility, teamwork, and technical skill. Competitions ranged from tug-of-war and volleyball to competitive marksmanship, giving service members an opportunity to represent their respective branches while building camaraderie across the joint force. With the overall standings remaining closely contested, the competition provided a welcome outlet for Soldiers and Airmen while strengthening relationships among personnel serving together during the deployment.

Apache Soldiers also competed for the opportunity to attend the French Desert Commando Course in Djibouti. The selection process challenged participants through physically demanding events designed to test their endurance, resilience, and ability to perform under fatigue in the harsh conditions of the Horn of Africa. Following the evaluation, SPC Christopher Sigman and PFC Christopher Torres were selected to represent Apache Company at the course. The two Soldiers will join participants from across the force for additional training conducted by French military personnel, providing a unique opportunity to challenge themselves while training alongside international partners.

Tactical readiness remained a priority as 2LT Joshua Baldwin and SSG John Robinson led specialized instruction focused on mounted operations. Soldiers conducted hands-on rollover drills and rehearsed reactions to different threats encountered during vehicle operations. Repetition of these procedures reinforces the fundamentals required to respond quickly during an emergency while building confidence in both individual responsibilities and crew-level actions. The training also provided Soldiers an opportunity to identify and correct potential issues in a controlled environment before those skills are required during real-world operations.

September also brought several personal and professional milestones for Apache Soldiers. CPL Liam Donovan was promoted to sergeant, recognizing his continued professional growth and assumption of greater responsibility as a noncommissioned officer. SPC Alejandro Urraya is also scheduled for promotion to sergeant, marking another important step in his Army career. Apache Company also congratulates SPC Ian Beaudoin and his wife, Amber, on the birth of their son, Nathan, celebrating an important milestone for a member of the Apache family back home.



U.S. Army SGM Tommy Wilford, assigned to Task Force Seminole, encourages service members during the Commander's Cup morale event at Manda Bay, Kenya, Sept. 4, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Jake Anico)

Whether competing, training, developing future leaders, or celebrating milestones together, Apache Company continued building upon the relationships and readiness developed throughout the deployment. As the mission progresses, Apache Soldiers remain focused on maintaining their standards and making the most of every opportunity available in the Horn of Africa.

BLACKHAWK COMPANY

Throughout September, Blackhawk Company Soldiers continued challenging themselves physically while maintaining the training and readiness necessary to accomplish their security mission. From competing for an opportunity to attend the French Desert Commando Course to testing their strength in the 1,000-Pound Club, Soldiers pushed beyond their normal physical training while continuing to rehearse the tasks required to protect the installation and respond to potential threats.

Physical readiness took center stage Sept. 8–9 as Blackhawk Soldiers participated in tryouts for the French Desert Commando Course. The selection event challenged participants through a five-kilometer run followed by a series of calisthenics, including burpees, push-ups, pull-ups, and sit-ups. Each event was scored using a point-based system, requiring Soldiers to perform consistently across multiple physical challenges rather than relying on strength or endurance alone.

At the conclusion of the tryouts, CPL Kevin George, SPC Joshua Perez, SPC Jack Meyers, and SPC Press Lawrence earned the highest scores and were selected to advance. The four Soldiers will continue training in Djibouti before attending the French Desert Commando Course, where they will have the opportunity to test themselves in a demanding training environment alongside French forces. Their selection reflects the physical preparation and determination required to earn an opportunity to represent Blackhawk Company during the multinational course.

Soldiers put their strength to the test again during the 1,000-Pound Club lifting competition. The event challenged participants to reach a combined 1,000 pounds across designated lifts, providing another opportunity for Soldiers to measure their progress and compete alongside their peers. While different from the endurance-focused demands of the French Desert Commando tryouts, the competition reinforced the importance of strength as part of a well-rounded approach to physical readiness. Events like the 1,000-Pound Club also provide a competitive outlet during deployment while encouraging Soldiers to continue setting and pursuing individual fitness goals.

Alongside these physical challenges, Blackhawk Soldiers continued conducting base-defense exercises and rehearsing their response to potential contingencies. Repeated exposure to established battle drills helps ensure Soldiers understand their individual responsibilities and can work together when required to respond quickly. These rehearsals also allow leaders to evaluate performance, reinforce standards, and identify areas that can be refined during future iterations. By continually rehearsing these tasks throughout the deployment, Blackhawk maintains familiarity with its defensive procedures while ensuring Soldiers remain prepared to transition from routine security operations to a coordinated response when needed.



From left, U.S. PFC Austin Barbarow and SPC Sebastian Rameriez, both assigned to Nasty Dawg Company, Task Force Seminole; U.S. Army 2LT Sylvain Ulysse, assigned to Blackhawk Company, Task Force Seminole; and U.S. Air Force SrA Tyson Gilmore, assigned to the Coordinated Response Team, pose for a photo after completing the 1,000-pound club that Blackhawk Company hosted in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 26, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

Blackhawk's September activities demonstrated that readiness extends beyond any single event or skill. Physical fitness supports Soldiers' ability to perform demanding tasks, while tactical training ensures that fitness is paired with discipline and teamwork required to accomplish the mission. Whether competing for an international training opportunity, pursuing a strength milestone, or rehearsing base defense, Blackhawk Soldiers continued investing in themselves and company readiness.

BLACKJACK COMPANY

Throughout September, Blackjack Company strengthened operational readiness at Chabelley Airfield through training focused on airfield security, emergency response, force protection, and interbranch coordination. From responding to potential airfield incursions to working alongside Air Force explosive ordnance disposal personnel, Blackjack Soldiers rehearsed procedures necessary to protect personnel and maintain security.



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Blackjack Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, complete a 6-mile ruck march during platoon physical training at Chabelley Airfield, Djibouti, Aug. 21, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Marshall Verkler)

Airfield security remained a key focus as Blackjack personnel trained to respond to unauthorized aircraft landings. These scenarios required Soldiers to assess developing situations, communicate across the formation, and coordinate an appropriate response. Soldiers also rehearsed bunker procedures, reinforcing accountability and protective measures during potential emergencies. Repeated rehearsals help ensure Soldiers understand their responsibilities and can rapidly transition from routine operations to a heightened protective posture.

Blackjack also worked alongside U.S. Air Force explosive ordnance disposal personnel and military working dog teams to practice security cordons and procedures associated with unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive device response. Soldiers rehearsed establishing inner and outer cordons while coordinating with specialized personnel responsible for assessing potential hazards. Training together helps establish shared procedures and communication before they are required during a real-world incident.

Those skills were reinforced as Blackjack personnel responded to a real-world emergency during the reporting period. The response allowed Soldiers to apply established procedures outside a training environment while coordinating across multiple organizations. Experiences like these demonstrate the importance of recurring rehearsals and allow leaders to assess how training translates into action.



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Blackjack Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, host and participate in a German Armed Forces Marksmanship Badge qualification event at Chabelley Airfield, Djibouti, Sept. 26, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt. Nicholas Ross)

Blackjack also supported multinational professional-development opportunities. On Aug. 25, the company hosted a German Armed Forces Badge for Weapons Proficiency qualification, with approximately 40 service members completing pistol and rifle events. Participants who successfully completed requirements for the weapons and physical proficiency badges were recognized during a Sept. 5 awards ceremony at Chabelley Airfield, highlighting individual achievement and the strong relationship between U.S. and German forces.

Through realistic training, real-world response, and joint and multinational cooperation, Blackjack Company continued refining the capabilities required to protect Chabelley Airfield and remain prepared for challenges throughout the AOR.

COMANCHE COMPANY



U.S. Army SSG Joushua Dey, a squad leader assigned to Comanche Company, Task Force Seminole, reports his location by radio during a combined mass casualty exercise with French forces at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 20, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by SrA Alicia Campbell)

Throughout September, Soldiers assigned to Comanche Company, continued building readiness as part of the East Africa Response Force (EARF). Across the company, Soldiers balanced emergency deployment exercises with leader development, multinational training, partner-force engagement, and physical challenges designed to prepare the formation for missions throughout the Horn of Africa.

Jabari Platoon conducted two deployments across the AOR, providing Soldiers an opportunity to rehearse the rapid response requirements associated with the EARF mission. Upon arrival, the platoon conducted familiarization ranges followed by squad and team level live fire exercises. The exercises allowed Soldiers and leaders to rehearse movement across the region while validating procedures required during a potential real-world response.

Leader development also remained a priority as Renegade Platoon conducted a three-week internal Basic Leader Course (BLC) program covering the educational phases of the Army's BLC curriculum. The training provided newly promoted sergeants an opportunity to develop leadership skills and become familiar with course requirements before attending BLC in 2027. By investing in junior NCOs now, Comanche continues building the leaders responsible for training and leading Soldiers beyond the current deployment.

Multinational training provided additional opportunities to expand the company's capabilities. Lightweight and Renegade Platoons partnered with members of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force to conduct bilateral react-to-contact drills emphasizing communication, maneuver, and tactical knowledge exchange.

The EARF Mortar Section conducted a two-phase knowledge exchange focused on the 60mm mortar system for members of the Djiboutian Rapid Intervention Battalion mortar sections. The exchnage provided an opportunity to exchange technical knowledge while developing partner proficiency.

Physical readiness remained another point of emphasis throughout September. Sixty-nine Comanche Soldiers completed the Danish Flyver Ruck, while 13 Soldiers participated in the French Desert Commando Assessment, challenging themselves through two distinct multinational physical events.

Several Soldiers also earned recognition during the month. SGT Richard Stolpman, SFC Sylvester Gomes, SFC Shaun Caruso, SSG Nicholas Hubert, SSG Cody VonLoh, SSG Jean Rodriguez, SSG Andrew Foss, and SGT Zachery Bastin earned the German Armed Forces Badge for Weapons Proficiency, or Schützenschnur. Comanche also celebrated the promotions of 1LT Christian Mejica, SSG Joshua Dey, SSG Zachery Bastin, SGT Tyler Cribbs, SGT Shuan Blackburn, SGT Justin Roman, SGT Riley Walker, and SPC Nicholas Brickle, marking important milestones in their Army careers.

From rapid-response exercises and leader development to multinational training and individual achievement, Comanche Company continued strengthening the people and capabilities behind the EARF mission. Each opportunity throughout September helped ensure the formation remains prepared to respond when called upon.

COMBAT COMPANY



U.S. Army SSG Anthony Frantantoni, assigned to Combat Company, 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, displays a photo on his rucksack of his cousin, New York City Police Department Officer James P. Leahy, in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 11, 2026. Leahy was killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Robert Butler)



From U.S. Army 1LT David Rogers and SSG. Anthony Frantantoni, assigned to Combat Company, 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, pose for a photo during a Sept. 11 memorial ruck march in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 11, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Robert Butler)

Throughout September, Combat Company continued strengthening its technical capabilities while taking time to honor the service and sacrifice of those who came before. From developing an organic training capability on a critical weapons platform to participating alongside international partners in a demanding September 11 memorial event, Combat Soldiers demonstrated both their commitment to readiness and the values shared across the joint and multinational force.

SPC Jed James successfully completed the 80-hour M153 Common Remotely Operated Weapon Station (CROWS) Train-the-Trainer certification, qualifying him to instruct and certify other Soldiers on the system. The course was divided into two 40-hour phases designed to develop the instructional skills necessary to train other operators.

Completing the curriculum gives Combat Company an organic capability to conduct operator training within the formation rather than relying solely on outside instructors. James can now help plan and conduct future CROWS training while sharing his expertise with other Soldiers. Building that knowledge within the company strengthens proficiency on the system while helping ensure those skills can be sustained and passed to additional operators as personnel and mission requirements change.

Combat Soldiers also joined partners from the United Kingdom for a multinational memorial event honoring the victims and first responders of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. 1LT David Rogers and SSG Anthony Frantantoni joined fellow participants in completing a 9.11-mile ruck march followed by 110 flights of stairs, representing the 110 stories of the World Trade Center towers.

For Frantantoni, the event carried a personal connection. He participated in memory of his cousin, New York City Police Department Officer James P. Leahy, who responded to the World Trade Center on Sept. 11 and was among the 23 NYPD officers killed that day. More than two decades later and thousands of miles from home, the memorial provided an opportunity to remember Leahy and the thousands of others whose lives were lost while honoring the first responders who answered the call that morning.

By completing the memorial alongside British partners, Combat Soldiers also shared that remembrance with members of an allied force whose service members have stood alongside the United States throughout the decades since the attacks. The event brought together physical challenge, personal remembrance, and multinational camaraderie in recognition of a day that continues to hold significance across the force.

Whether developing technical expertise within the formation or honoring the legacy of those who served before them, Combat Company Soldiers continued to strengthen both the capabilities and bonds that sustain the unit throughout its mission in the Horn of Africa.

NASTY DAWG COMPANY

Across the area of operations, Nasty Dawg Company continued balancing force protection, quick-reaction responsibilities, multinational training, humanitarian coordination, and Soldier development.

1st Platoon "Roosters" coordinated with the Hindi Red Cross in preparation for a joint humanitarian aid distribution operation. The platoon conducted key leader engagements and logistics coordination focused on community requirements, distribution locations, transportation, supply staging, and communications. Establishing these requirements in advance helped create a shared understanding between participating organizations and laid the groundwork necessary to effectively coordinate the planned distribution.

The Roosters simultaneously maintained their force-protection responsibilities, including providing security during a joint-service morale event. Soldiers also pursued individual physical challenges during the reporting period, with two Roosters completing the Norwegian Foot March and four participating in the French Desert Commando Course assessment.

2nd Platoon continued its security and patrol responsibilities while expanding tactical proficiency through training with NATO allies. Combined training included Stop the Bleed medical instruction, close-quarters battle rehearsals, and an M17 pistol range. Working alongside allied service members allowed Soldiers to exchange techniques while developing familiarity with how partner forces approach common tactical and medical tasks.

The platoon also supported an extended security mission for engineer operations outside the installation perimeter while continuing recurring Emergency Action Plan rehearsals. Together, these missions reinforced the platoon's ability to perform its daily force-protection responsibilities while remaining prepared to respond as a Quick Reaction Force when required.

3rd and 4th Platoon Soldiers conducted recurring combat-readiness drills, Random Antiterrorism Measures, communications training, and real-world security support designed to maintain familiarity with the procedures and responsibilities required during a contingency. Repeated rehearsals allow Soldiers and leaders to refine their response while identifying areas that can be improved during future training.

3rd and 4th Platoon Soldiers also participated in several multinational military events. SGT Santana and SPC Richardson earned the Gold German Armed Forces Military Proficiency Badge, recognizing their performance across the badge's physical and military proficiency requirements. Additional Nasty Dawg Soldiers completed the Danish Flyver ruk march and participated in the French Desert Commando Assessment, challenging their physical endurance alongside service members from across the multinational community.



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Nasty Dawg Company, Task Force Seminole, prepare to respond during a quick reaction force security augmentation exercise at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 21, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Adilia Hamdan)

Whether coordinating humanitarian support, training with allies, or maintaining quick-reaction readiness, Nasty Dawg Soldiers continued demonstrating the flexibility required of a company operating across the region. Their efforts strengthened individual skills, multinational relationships, and the force-protection capabilities supporting Task Force Seminole's mission.

DISCO COMPANY



U.S. Army SGT Lee Coreus and SFC Benjamin Edwards, both assigned to Disco Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, conduct base defense rehearsals at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 8, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Benjamin Bartlett)

Throughout September, Disco Company focused on refining its defensive posture and rehearsing responses to potential threats while maintaining its force protection mission at Camp Lemonnier. From constructing defensive positions and conducting threat-response drills to expanding medical capabilities, Disco Soldiers continued improving the systems and procedures necessary to protect the installation and respond effectively during an emergency.

Disco Soldiers put those efforts into action by constructing and improving defensive positions throughout their area of responsibility. Soldiers filled sandbags, emplaced concertina wire, and worked alongside Camp Lemonnier engineers to identify and address potential vulnerabilities. Cooperation between Disco and installation engineers allowed Soldiers closest to the mission to provide input on defensive requirements while leveraging engineering expertise to turn those ideas into practical improvements. The work strengthened existing positions while giving Soldiers a greater understanding of how those positions contribute to the installation's overall defense.

Alongside physical improvements, Disco continued conducting threat-response drills covering a variety of potential scenarios at Camp Lemonnier. Leaders progressively refined plans and expanded the complexity of training to ensure Soldiers remain familiar with their responsibilities while maintaining the flexibility to respond as conditions change. Company medics also integrated mass-casualty scenarios into the exercises, requiring Soldiers to balance force protection requirements with the treatment and evacuation of casualties during a larger emergency.

Medical readiness continued beyond those exercises through recurring Combat Lifesaver courses. Disco Soldiers received instruction on providing casualty care both under fire and after an immediate threat has been controlled. Training covered airway interventions, hemorrhage control, treatment for shock, and other traumatic injuries. Expanding these skills across the formation increases the number of Soldiers capable of providing immediate lifesaving care before a casualty reaches higher-level medical treatment.

Physical readiness remained another priority as 79 Disco Soldiers completed the Royal Danish Air Force Flyvermarch. The 20-kilometer ruck march, completed while carrying a minimum of 25 pounds, challenged Soldiers' endurance and provided another opportunity to test themselves during the deployment. Those who successfully completed the event earned the Flyvermarch medal and ribbon, recognizing their accomplishment in the Danish military tradition.

Other Disco Soldiers volunteered for an even different challenge by participating in tryouts for the French Desert Commando Course hosted by French Forces in Djibouti. The demanding two-day assessment included a five-kilometer run in boots, multiple calisthenics events, and a 600-meter swim, testing participants across several aspects of physical fitness and endurance.

From strengthening defensive positions to developing lifesaving skills and pursuing demanding multinational physical challenges, Disco Company continued building readiness throughout September. Each effort contributes to a formation prepared to protect Camp Lemonnier while ensuring Soldiers remain capable of responding when conditions demand it.

HATCHET COMPANY



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Hatchet Company, Task Force Seminole, load simulated casualties into a light medium tactical vehicle during a company exercise at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 7, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by 1LT John DiCampli Jr.)

Throughout September, Hatchet Company continued demonstrating its commitment to Soldier development, physical readiness, teamwork, and mission preparedness while supporting Task Force Seminole at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. As the deployment progresses, Hatchet Soldiers remain focused on maintaining high standards while taking advantage of opportunities that strengthen both individual and collective readiness.

Hatchet Company recognized an important professional milestone as SPC Amanda Fleitas was promoted to sergeant. Fellow Soldiers gathered to recognize her achievement as she joined the ranks of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps and assumed the increased responsibilities that come with leading Soldiers. Her promotion reflects both individual professional growth and Hatchet Company's continued investment in developing leaders throughout the formation.

Physical readiness and multinational camaraderie also remained a focus as 41 Hatchet Soldiers participated in the Royal Danish Air Force Flyver Ruck March. The event provided Soldiers an opportunity to challenge their endurance and resilience while participating alongside service members from across the multinational community at Camp Lemonnier.

Hatchet also emphasized operational readiness as 22 Soldiers participated in an internal full-scale exercise designed to improve proficiency and response times during a potential battlefield emergency. The exercise required participants to rehearse their individual and collective responsibilities while working together under more demanding conditions. Repeated exposure to these scenarios helps Soldiers identify areas for improvement and ensures established procedures remain familiar when rapid action is required.

Distribution Platoon continued developing its Soldiers through additional driver training, tactical battle drill familiarization, and hip-pocket training designed to build expertise across the platoon's mission-essential tasks. These training opportunities allow Soldiers to reinforce fundamentals while expanding the number of personnel capable of performing critical functions, increasing flexibility across the company as mission requirements change.

At the same time, Maintenance Platoon continued supporting vehicles and equipment from across Task Force Seminole. In addition to routine maintenance requirements, the platoon maintained its ability to serve as a recovery asset when vehicles experience breakdowns or accidents. Keeping equipment operational and providing recovery support allows units throughout the Task Force to continue their missions while reducing the operational impact of equipment failures. Together, Distribution and Maintenance Platoons remain central to Hatchet Company's role as a Forward Support Company and its ability to sustain the formation.

As the deployment moves closer to completion, Hatchet Company remains focused on accomplishing the mission while continuing to develop its Soldiers. From promotions and multinational physical challenges to emergency-response training, vehicle recovery, and sustainment operations, Hatchet Soldiers continue supporting one another and Task Force Seminole while maintaining the standards they have established throughout the deployment.

TOMAHAWK COMPANY

Throughout September, Tomahawk Company continued supporting Task Force Seminole through intelligence, operations, medical readiness, logistics, and religious support. Working largely behind the scenes, Tomahawk Soldiers provided the planning, coordination, and support that enable operations across the Horn of Africa.

SGT Dylan Rucki, a Task Force Seminole intelligence analyst, played an integral role in preparing the commanding general's Intelligence Deep Dive on southern Somalia. Rucki dedicated long hours to preparing the briefing, helping provide senior leaders with a detailed understanding of the operational environment and supporting informed decision-making.



Medical personnel assigned to Tomahawk Company, Task Force Seminole, transport a simulated casualty during a combined French and U.S. mass casualty exercise at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 20, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by SrA Alicia Campbell)

The S3 section continued coordinating multinational military events for service members across Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. In August, 623 personnel completed the Danish Flyvermarch, while 106 personnel have completed the Norwegian Foot March since July. To date, another 102 personnel have earned the German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge. Coordinating these events requires significant planning across organizations and partner nations while providing service members opportunities to challenge themselves and earn foreign military distinctions.

The Task Force Seminole Medical Section provided medical coverage for these events while also participating in a joint mass-casualty exercise with the French Army in Grand Bara. SSG John Sanders, SGT Ryan McLaughlin, SGT Riley Burrell, SGT Joshua Ortiz, and SPC Chevelle McDonald responded to five simulated French casualties, initiated battlefield treatment, and submitted a 9-Line medical evacuation request through Task Force Seminole Current Operations. The medics transferred their patients to U.S. Air Force pararescue specialists for transport to Camp Lemonnier, where the Task Force Seminole Medical Evacuation squad transported them to the Expeditionary Medical Facility. The exercise tested communication, triage, battlefield treatment, and coordination across U.S. and French medical elements.

SPC Shawyan Watson further expanded medical readiness by coordinating an opportunity for nine combat medics to attend a K9 Tactical Combat Casualty Care course with the Army Veterinary Team. The hands-on training introduced medics to veterinary emergency care and provided skills for treating military working dogs with traumatic injuries.

Tomahawk's S4 section continued sustaining the task force, with SGT Sapp standing out for his contributions as the task force warehouse clerk. Recently promoted from specialist to sergeant, Sapp has filled more than 170 unit orders throughout the deployment, helping ensure Soldiers across the formation receive equipment and supplies.

The Task Force Seminole Unit Ministry Team also continued expanding religious support throughout the region. In September, the team hosted regular Bible studies with Soldiers at CADJ, Camp Lemonnier, Baledogle Military Airfield, and other locations while conducting battlefield circulation to provide religious support, pastoral counseling, and spiritual encouragement. The UMT also extended joint religious support to Sailors assigned to MESRON and Airmen of the 75th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Sergeant Jorge Gomez



Hometown: Calhoun, AL

MOS: 68W Combat Medic

Favorite MRE: Brisket Entrée

Favorite Book: ATP 4-02.4

Hobby: Hunting

For SGT Jorge Gomez, serving as a combat medic is about more than providing medical care. After 13 years in the Army National Guard, Gomez currently serves as a 68W Combat Medic with Blackjack Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, where he takes pride in caring for the Soldiers around him and being part of a unit with a strong identity. His motivation for joining the National Guard was straightforward, to do his part.

For the past five years, Gomez has served with the 1-167th, an experience that has given him a strong appreciation for the battalion's history and the Soldiers who continue its legacy today.

"From the 4th Alabama to the Rainbow Division in World War I to our mission here today, the 1-167th is built on unmatched resilience, but the real heart of this battalion is the Soldiers beside you," Gomez said.

Among his most memorable Army experiences was the battalion's rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, prior to deployment. The demanding training provided Gomez an opportunity to develop as a combat medic while working alongside the Soldiers he would later deploy with. Completing the rotation remains one of the accomplishments he is most proud of in his Army career.

Gomez credits SGT Tucker Fables as one of the most influential leaders in his career, particularly for the example he sets through his work ethic. Watching that consistency firsthand has provided Gomez with an example of the standard and commitment expected from an NCO.

"That man works everywhere, all the time," Gomez said.

During the deployment, Gomez said one of the most important lessons he has learned has been understanding the true weight of moral courage. As the deployment moves toward its final stages, his attention is increasingly focused on helping Soldiers prepare for the transition back to civilian life.

Looking beyond the deployment, Gomez hopes to continue developing professionally and eventually serve with the Alabama National Guard's Lethality Group.

Outside of the Army, Gomez enjoys hunting and continuing to develop his knowledge as a combat medic. When asked about his favorite book, Gomez selected ATP 4-02.4, Medical Platoon, reflecting an interest in his profession that extends beyond his day-to-day responsibilities.

For Gomez, however, his connection to the Soldiers and history of the 1-167th remains one of the most meaningful parts of his service.

"Being their medic and helping foster our modern culture and heraldry has meant everything to me," Gomez said. "We are a tight-knit family that takes immense pride in our heritage and holds the standard high."

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Staff Sergeant Thomas Schmidt



Hometown: Middleburg, FL

MOS: 11C Indirect Fire Infantryman

Favorite MRE: Beef Ravioli

Favorite Movie: Signs

Hobby: Martial Arts

For SSG Thomas Schmidt, two deployments have reinforced what he values most about serving in the Army, being part of a team working toward a common goal.

Schmidt joined the Army National Guard seven years ago, driven by a sense of patriotism and a family legacy of military service. Since then, his career as an 11C Indirect Fire Infantryman has taken him from a deployment to Syria in 2020-21 to his current assignment with Blackhawk Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole.

Now serving as a mortar squad leader, Schmidt and his Soldiers provide indirect fire capabilities while maintaining proficiency across the unit's mortar systems. Some of his favorite training opportunities during the deployment have been random antiterrorism measure mortar missions, which give his team opportunities to train regularly and employ their different weapon systems.

Schmidt considers his two deployments among his proudest accomplishments, not simply because of the missions themselves, but because of the camaraderie that develops among Soldiers working toward the same objective.

Throughout his career, Schmidt credits 1SG Zach Lewis as one of the leaders who has had the greatest influence on him.

"The more time I spent with him, the wiser I found myself becoming in how I handled my peers and subordinates," Schmidt said.

While indirect fires remain his primary responsibility, Schmidt has expanded his role during the deployment by supporting Blackhawk Company's logistics operations. He helped consolidate the company's property accountability system and developed trackers to create a more organized process for managing equipment.

The additional responsibility has given Schmidt an opportunity to develop skills outside of his primary MOS while contributing to the company in a different capacity.

Outside of the Army, Schmidt enjoys studying martial arts and woodworking. He also spends time learning about communication, resilience and emotional regulation. His interest in communication stems from seeing how quickly misunderstandings can affect individuals and organizations and the importance of communicating effectively as a leader.

As the deployment continues, Schmidt recognizes that accomplishing the mission has required sacrifices from Soldiers throughout the formation.

"A lot of guys have sacrificed a lot to be here," Schmidt said. "I want to appreciate everyone's sacrifice."

For Schmidt, that shared commitment remains one of the most meaningful aspects of military service. Whether leading a mortar squad, supporting company logistics or working alongside his Soldiers, his focus remains on contributing to the team and accomplishing the mission together.

SEMINOLE STRENGTH

Building strength, endurance and readiness — Never Surrender!



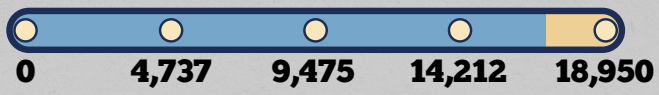
Ruck Around Africa

The Task Force Seminole Ruck Around Africa Challenge continued making tremendous progress, with Soldiers logging an additional 2,346 miles during September. Combined with previous months, the task force has now accumulated 16,394.92 miles toward its 18,950-mile journey around Africa's coastline.

With more than four-fifths of the route now complete, Task Force Seminole has completed 86.52% of the challenge, leaving only 2,555.08 miles remaining. The continued increase in mileage reflects the formation's commitment to physical readiness. Each contribution reinforces how individual effort adds up to a shared accomplishment across the task force.

With the finish line now within reach, every mile brings Task Force Seminole one step closer to circumnavigating Africa. Maintaining that momentum through the final stretch will help turn months of hard work into a milestone the entire formation can celebrate.





Current Distance: 16,394.92
Miles Remaining: 2,555.08

Academic Skills Improvement Program



The Florida Army National Guard conducted the Academic Skills Improvement Program at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 18-24, 2026, to help deployed service members supporting the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa mission prepare to take their Armed Forces Classification Test (AFCT).

Funded by the Florida Army National Guard, the course helps participants strengthen academic skills and prepare to increase their General Technical (GT) scores on the AFCT. A service member's GT score may affect eligibility for certain military occupational specialties and career-development programs.

"This course gives service members dedicated time and practical tools to strengthen the academic skills that support improved GT scores," said Chief Warrant Officer Jason Venable, the course's primary instructor. "More importantly, it helps them recognize that focused preparation and continued self-development can expand their future career opportunities in the military."

For many participants, improving a GT score may support goals such as job reclassification, applying for warrant officer programs, or pursuing Officer Candidate School.

"The course gave me an opportunity to focus on areas where I needed improvement and build confidence before taking the AFCT," said SPC Michelle Lopez, a student in the ASIP course. "If your brain wasn't fried, you didn't try! Improving my GT score will help me pursue a commission and continue progressing in my military career."

Lopez increased her GT score by 27 points after completing the course, meeting the GT-score requirement to submit an Officer Candidate School packet. Across the course, results showed participants increased their GT scores by an average of 16 points. Of the 31 participants, 74% earned GT scores that may qualify them to reclassify into a new military occupational specialty or pursue officer commissioning opportunities.

"Allowing our forward deployed Soldiers the opportunity to attend the ASIP course highlights our focus on our most valuable resource, our Soldiers," said 1SG Chad Caudill.

ACADEMIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

ASIP RESULTS

AVERAGE GENERAL TECHNICAL (GT) SCORE

97	113	+16
BEFORE CLASS	AFTER ASIP	POINT AVERAGE INCREASE

31 TOTAL STUDENTS

21 STUDENTS ACHIEVING A GT SCORE OF 110+

HIGHEST SCORE ACHIEVED

133 SPC Radmorales (D/2-124)
SSG Meggison (B/1-167)

LARGEST SCORE INCREASE

+33 POINTS — SSG Meggison (B/1-167)

Academic Skills Improvement Program

"Ensuring our Soldiers have the ability for self-improvement and career development will pay dividends across the organization for years to come."

By offering the course during the deployment, the Florida Army National Guard provided 31 service members across the joint force an opportunity to pursue professional development while supporting the CJTF-HOA mission.

"This course reflects the value of joint cooperation and investing in our people," said MG Shane Morgan, commanding general of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. "When service members from across the force improve themselves, they strengthen their units, expand their future opportunities and contribute to a more capable joint team."



U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Jason Venable, assigned to the Florida Army National Guard, instructs an Academic Skills Improvement Program course at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 24, 2026. The course helps participants strengthen academic skills and prepare to take the Armed Forces Classification Test to improve their general technical scores, which affects eligibility for certain military occupational specialties and career development programs. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Alicia Campbell)

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Prayer: Comment vs. Conversation

Chaplain Jason Fletcher



We live in a world where we post everything. Where we are going, what we are eating, what we are doing, and sometimes things nobody asked to know! We post, wait for the likes, comments, and look for affirmation. But have you ever considered that we might treat prayer the same way?

We make a post, tag God, and tell Him what we are doing, what we want, and where we are going. Then we wait for Him to give us a like or share. But here's the question: Are we actually having a conversation with God, or are we simply inviting Him into the comment section of our lives on decisions we've already made?

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, NKJV). Notice what Jesus didn't say. He didn't teach us to ask God to bless our plans. He taught us to surrender to God's plans.

Consider a man named Balaam in Numbers 22. A king offered him wealth and honor to curse the Israelites. Balaam initially did the right thing. He prayed, and God gave him a clear answer: Don't go! But when the king returned with a better offer, Balaam prayed again. Apparently, God's first answer wasn't the one he wanted.

Sound familiar?

How often do we pray, receive direction from God's Word, and then keep looking for another answer because the first one doesn't align with what we want? Balaam eventually found himself on a dangerous road, spiritually blind to what was happening around him. Ironically, it took a donkey talking to him to recognize the danger and get his attention!

Prayer isn't an opportunity to convince God to agree with us. It's an opportunity to enter into a conversation with the Creator of all things about what's going on in our lives.

Whether you're a Soldier navigating the pressures of deployment, a leader making difficult decisions, a spouse managing the challenges of life back home, or simply living your best life...God wants to have a conversation with you about all of it! That is what prayer is all about.

Prayer is more than presenting our requests or giving a monologue about the things happening in our lives. It's worship, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and surrender. It's bringing our fears, frustrations, and uncertainties before God. It's having a conversation with Him and being willing to listen and obey.

And sometimes, the most important part of prayer isn't what we say. It's what we do after we've prayed.

So here's my challenge to you. Before making your next decision, stop, pray, and begin a conversation with God. Open God's Word. Talk with Him about it. And when His Word challenges what you want, don't keep searching for a different answer. Trust Him and obey.

Don't wait until God has to use a donkey to get your attention like Balaam! Stop treating prayer like a comment section. Instead, have a conversation. God isn't simply interested in hearing about your plans. He wants a relationship with you that transforms how you live.

Stop commenting. Start a conversation, pray.

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD





U.S. Soldiers assigned to Task Force Seminole, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, conduct a mortar fire mission in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 30, 2026. The Soldiers conducted the fire mission to maintain mortar proficiency while operationally deployed. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr. Portions of this image were obscured for operational security.)



U.S. Soldiers assigned to Task Force Seminole, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, conduct a mortar fire mission in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 24, 2026. The Soldiers conducted the fire mission to maintain mortar proficiency while operationally deployed. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



U.S. Army SGT Benson Denis, assigned to Tomahawk Company, Task Force Seminole, configures a radio during a combined French and U.S. mass casualty exercise at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 20, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Alicia Campbell)



U.S. Army soldiers assigned to the East African Response Force, Task Force Seminole, fly onboard an MV-22B Osprey near Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 20, 2026. The VMM-362 (REIN) transported service members in support of a mass casualty exercise with French partners, enhancing U.S. and French forces' coordination and ability to provide timely medical support. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Alicia Campbell)



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Task Force Seminole fire M4 carbines during a German Armed Forces Marksmanship Badge event at Chabelley Airfield, Djibouti, Sept. 26, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt. Nicholas Ross)



U.S. Army 2LT Sylvain Ulysse, assigned to Blackhawk Company, Task Force Seminole, deadlifts 505 pounds during a 1,000-Pound Club event in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 26, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



U.S. Army SGT Brad Austin and SPC Zachary Senske, assigned to the East Africa Response Force, Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, throw a smoke grenade during team live-fire training in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 14, 2026. The EARF activation exercise includes follow-on range operations in support of outstation and embassy crisis response. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Luis Gautier-Martinez)



U.S. Army SPC Brima Smart and SPC Tydarius Geddis, assigned to the East Africa Response Force, Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, return fire during team live-fire training in the Horn of Africa, Sept. 14, 2026. The EARF activation exercise includes follow-on range operations in support of outstation and embassy crisis response. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Luis Gautier-Martinez)

MASTHEAD

The Seminole Standard

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