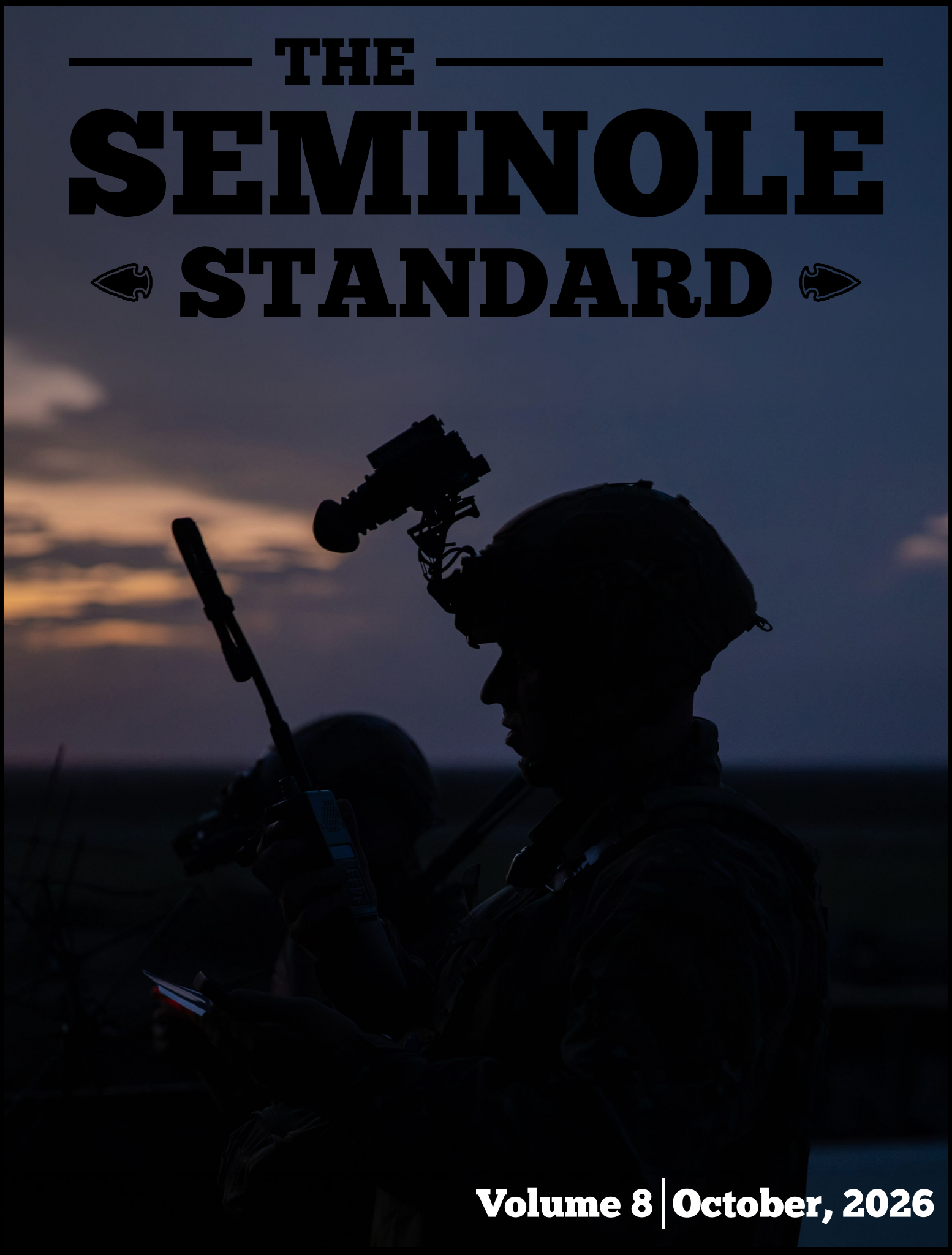
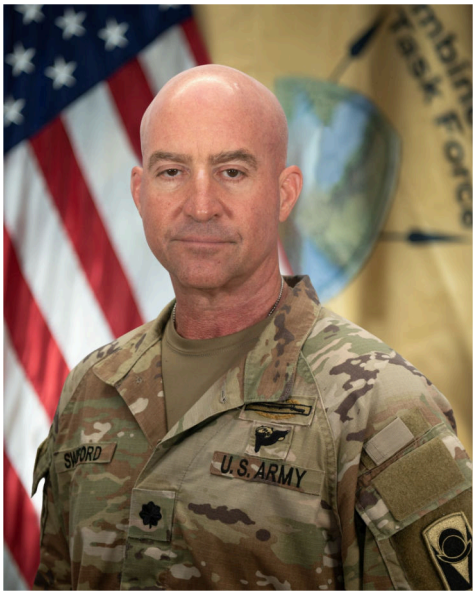
THE SEMINOLE STANDARD



Volume 8 | October, 2026

THE COMMANDER'S COUNCIL OAK

One Team, One Mission, One Final Push



Greetings once again from the Horn of Africa! As we progress through another highly successful month of continuous operations across our outstation locations, the scope and impact of what our Task Force is accomplishing never cease to amaze me. I am continually humbled by the grit, dedication and professionalism of the Florida Army National Guard.

Operating across the vast tyranny of distance that defines the Horn of Africa requires exceptional leadership at every echelon, and our formations prove every day that they are more than up to the task.

This deployment has been fast-paced, demanding and highly dynamic. Recently, we completed a major operational milestone for our Task Force and Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa by executing a complex strategic reposture. Through meticulous planning and disciplined execution, we successfully repositioned forces in Somalia while simultaneously increasing our mission footprint and operational scope.

Transitioning and expanding force packages in a high-threat environment is no small feat. I want to highlight the phenomenal work and detailed planning of MAJ Johnny McDonald, 1SG Anthony Calvi, MAJ Shane DeMarco, 1SG Dereck Simmons, CPT James Wiley and 1SG Jose Rosario. Their efforts made this transition seamless.

While we celebrate these operational successes, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the difficult month many of our Soldiers and families have endured. Deployment is challenging under any circumstances, and that burden has been compounded by heartbreaking losses at home. We suffered multiple tragic deaths within our rear detachment during the past month that have deeply affected Soldiers deployed here and families in Florida. Additionally, the larger Florida Army National Guard team mourns the passing of former Seminole 6, LTC (Ret.) Dan Hartman. LTC Hartman left an indelible legacy on this battalion and Florida Army National Guard as a whole.

On behalf of the entire Task Force, we extend our deepest prayers and heartfelt condolences to his family and to the families of all our fallen comrades. Now more than ever, we must lean on one another and look out for our battle buddies.

Even in difficult times, the compassion and character of our Soldiers shine through, proving that deployments are about more than the tactical mission. Shortly after our arrival in theater, a dedicated team from Comanche Company, led by 1LT Christian Mejica and SFC Sylvester Gomes, began volunteering off-duty time and making personal financial contributions to support Caritas Djibouti, a local orphanage. Continued on next page --

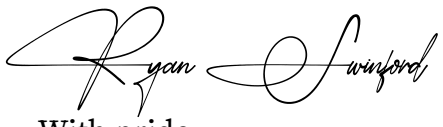
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Their efforts were recently recognized by Jamal Daibes, bishop of Djibouti, who personally thanked them for their life-changing contributions. This is outstanding work and a testament to the heart of this Task Force.

Looking ahead, our transition home is officially on the horizon. Over the coming weeks, we look forward to executing a professional and seamless relief in place with the incoming force and setting it up for continued success.

We approach our final month in the Horn of Africa with an unwavering resolve to finish this deployment as strongly as we started it. Let's keep our eyes to the front, look out for one another and return home proud of the historic mission we have accomplished together.



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

THE WARPATH

This Month's Focus: Setting the Conditions for Transition



As this edition of the Seminole Standard reaches the formation, Task Force Seminole is officially entering the transition window. Our replacements are beginning to arrive in theater, and the initial stages of our Relief in Place and Transfer of Authority (RIP/TOA) are underway. Over the past eight-plus months, our Soldiers have distinguished themselves across our dispersed footprint in the Horn of Africa through unwavering discipline, resilience, and consistent execution. However, how a unit closes out a deployment and conducts its handoff is what cements its professional reputation. Task Force Seminole will not just coast across the finish line, and we will not drop the ball during transition.

A successful relief in place is not simply handing over the keys and wishing the next unit luck. Our obligation to our fellow service members, and to the mission, is to set them up for immediate success. That means complete, transparent, and accurate continuity books, thorough equipment and sensitive item inventories, and uncompromising honesty about the operational environment, maintenance statuses, and challenges at every outpost. If there is a deficiency, identify it and fix it. Do not sweep problems under the rug for the incoming unit to inherit. Leaving the mission better than we found it is the ultimate standard of an elite formation.

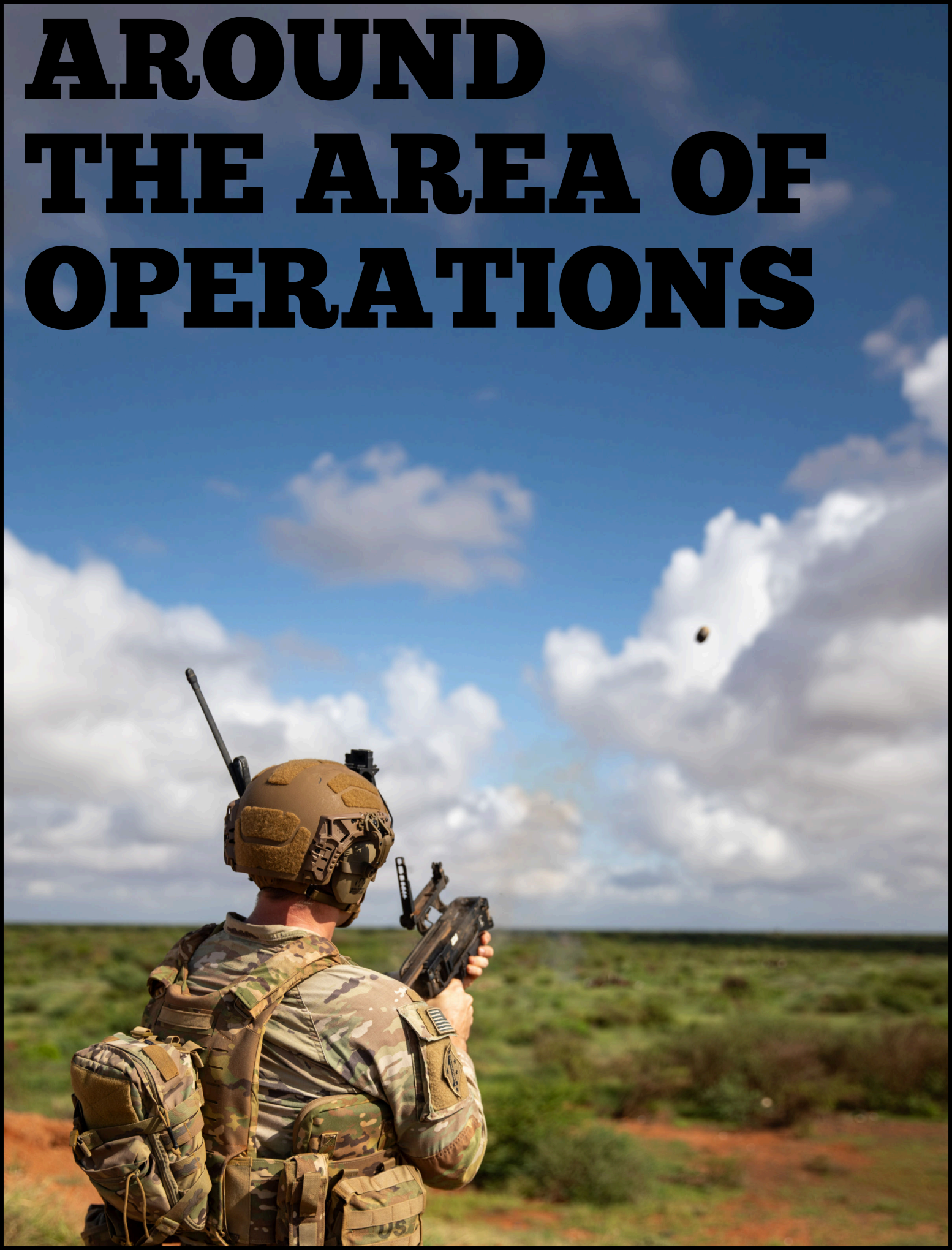
This critical phase demands an even higher commitment to our two core tenets: discipline and professionalism. As Task Force Iron arrives, they will watch everything we do. The standard you project in your uniform, your bearing, your tactical posture, and your off-duty conduct sets the tone for their entire deployment. Remain vigilant on operational security. Do not compromise force protection standards or get complacent with daily battle rhythms just because our relief has arrived. Our mission continues at 100% operational tempo until authority is officially transferred and the colors are cased.

To the Task Force Seminole NCO Corps: this handoff is your responsibility. Lead from the front, personally verify every inventory, and mentor the incoming team and leadership so they step into their roles with total confidence. To our Soldiers: stay locked in, take pride in what you have built here, and finish this fight with the exact same focus and professionalism you have carried throughout. Let's complete this mission with honor and ensure our legacy across the Horn of Africa remains untarnished.



CSM Jonathan D. Pletcher
Seminole 7
NEVER SURRENDER!

AROUND THE AREA OF OPERATIONS



APACHE COMPANY

Throughout October, Apache Company continued maintaining operational readiness while preparing for the final stages of its deployment in the Horn of Africa. As the company approaches its relief in place with the incoming rotation, Soldiers remain focused on physical readiness, multinational training, and documenting lessons learned to ensure a successful transition.

Apache Company was among the first units in theater to conduct a diagnostic Combat Field Test, providing Soldiers an opportunity to assess their performance against the Army's new physical fitness requirements. 1LT Dylan Mandel and SGT Justin Cochran coordinated the equipment, logistics, and execution of the event.

With the Army's 30-minute standard serving as a benchmark, CPT Aaron Benningfield challenged Soldiers to complete the test in under 20 minutes, offering his commander's grit coin to those who achieved the goal. Three Soldiers met the challenge: SPC Jasean Coston, SPC Branson Piantavinha, and SPC Christopher Torres. Piantavinha recorded the company's fastest time at 16 minutes, 50 seconds, earning immediate recognition from Benningfield and 1SG Lictor Figueroa. The event provided an opportunity to evaluate individual fitness while encouraging Soldiers to challenge themselves as the deployment approaches its conclusion.

Apache also continued strengthening relationships with host-nation partners through a tactical knowledge exchange with Kenyan Rangers and Marines. The bilateral training combined classroom instruction with practical exercises, allowing participants to review tactical concepts before applying them during simulated combat scenarios. SGT Liam Donovan led practical instruction focused on the fundamentals of a coordinated squad attack, sharing techniques and procedures with Kenyan personnel. The exchange allowed both forces to develop tactical proficiency while building familiarity with their partners' approaches to small-unit operations.

As preparations for the incoming rotation progressed, Apache leadership began reviewing and refining the company's standard operating procedures. Officers, senior noncommissioned officers, and subject matter experts worked together to document operational lessons learned and develop a comprehensive continuity book for the incoming Blackjack Company of the Pennsylvania National Guard. The effort draws on Apache's experience throughout the deployment to provide incoming Soldiers with established procedures, practical guidance, and information that can help them assume their responsibilities more effectively.



1SG Lictor Figueroa, SPC Joshua Harkins and SPC Benjamin Solum, assigned to Apache Company, Task Force Seminole, treat a simulated casualty during a base defense exercise at Manda Bay, Kenya, Oct. 8, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Jake Anico)

By capturing lessons learned and identifying areas for improvement, Apache aims to reduce the challenges associated with transitioning between rotations while preserving the knowledge developed during its time in theater. These preparations will support the relief-in-place process and help the incoming company maintain continuity across its assigned missions.

As Apache Company enters the final weeks of its deployment, Soldiers continue balancing current mission requirements with preparations for their replacements. From physical fitness and multinational training to transition planning, Apache remains focused on maintaining the standards.

BLACKHAWK COMPANY

Throughout October, Blackhawk Company continued strengthening operational readiness while supporting a significant transition in Task Force Seminole's mission throughout Somalia. From live-fire training and force-protection exercises to the repositioning of personnel and resources, Blackhawk Soldiers remained focused on maintaining security and adapting to changing operational requirements.

One of the month's most significant accomplishments was the execution of a strategic repositioning of forces in Somalia. The operation represented an important milestone for Task Force Seminole and Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, requiring extensive planning and coordination to adjust the disposition of forces while expanding the task force's operational responsibilities.

Conducting a transition of this scale in a complex security environment required coordination across multiple organizations and careful consideration of ongoing mission requirements. MAJ Johnny McDonald, 1SG Anthony Calvi, MAJ Shane DeMarco, 1SG Dereck Simmons, CPT James Wiley, and 1SG Jose Rosario played important roles in planning and coordinating the effort. Their contributions helped ensure the repositioning was executed while maintaining continuity of operations and supporting the expanded mission.

The successful transition reflected the ability of Soldiers and leaders across the formation to respond to evolving requirements without losing sight of their existing responsibilities. By maintaining coordination throughout the process, the task force was able to reposition personnel and resources while establishing the conditions necessary to support its adjusted mission in Somalia.

Alongside these operational requirements, Blackhawk Soldiers continued developing their tactical proficiency through mortar live-fire training. The event provided an opportunity to reinforce weapons handling, fire-control procedures, and crew coordination associated with employing indirect-fire systems. Maintaining familiarity with these capabilities contributes to the company's ability to support defensive operations and respond to changing tactical situations.

Soldiers also conducted live-fire training with the M320 grenade launcher, reinforcing proficiency with the 40 mm weapon system. The training allowed personnel to practice safe weapons handling, target engagement, and the fundamentals necessary to employ the system effectively. Together, the mortar and M320 ranges helped maintain individual and collective weapons proficiency while reinforcing the importance of regular training throughout the deployment.



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Blackhawk Company, Task Force Seminole, fire a Carl Gustaf recoilless rifle in Somalia, Oct. 4, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

As Blackhawk Company approaches the final weeks of its deployment, Soldiers continue balancing daily security responsibilities with evolving mission requirements. Through the successful repositioning of forces, continued weapons training, and force-protection measures, Blackhawk remains focused on maintaining operational readiness.

BLACKJACK COMPANY

Throughout October, Blackjack Company maintained security and operational readiness at Chabelley Airfield while strengthening joint and multinational partnerships. Soldiers balanced emergency-response training, quick reaction force operations, and individual development with their daily security responsibilities.



SPC Jacob Payne and SPC James McClendon, assigned to Blackjack Company, 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole receive a situation report during an early morning base exercise at Chabelley Airfield, Djibouti, in October 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Marshall Verkler)

On Oct. 16, Blackjack participated in an installation-wide readiness exercise alongside U.S. Air Force personnel and joint medical assets. Beginning with accountability and bunker drills, the exercise tested the newly arrived Air Force rotation's emergency-response procedures before transitioning into a mass-casualty scenario. Blackjack combat medics and Joint Medical Aid Station personnel practiced triage, emergency treatment, and patient evacuation, reinforcing coordination between Army and Air Force responders.

Blackjack also maintained quick reaction force readiness, including an Oct. 12 activation supporting the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. The activation allowed Soldiers to apply established response procedures while coordinating with Air Force personnel. On Oct. 14, 1st Platoon conducted range training to reinforce weapons proficiency and maintain the skills required for its security mission.

Joint and multinational cooperation remained a priority. During a Sept. 9 medical engagement, SGT Robert Mitchell, 2nd Platoon medic, instructed partner personnel on entry control point emergency medical procedures, while CPL Piper McIntosh, headquarters platoon medic, reviewed range operations and the local medical evacuation plan. On Sept. 26, Blackjack hosted a German Armed Forces Marksmanship Badge qualification, providing service members an opportunity to demonstrate marksmanship under German military standards.

Blackjack leadership also presented Army Achievement Medals to Air Force personnel from the 776th Air Expeditionary Group's 26.2 rotation. The awards recognized their contributions to joint operations, installation security, and operational readiness.



1LT Dalton Buchan, assigned to Blackjack Company, 1-167th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, poses for a photo with a vegetable garden he built as a personal passion project at Chabelley Airfield, Djibouti, Aug. 5, 2026. The top-right image shows the garden in October 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Marshall Verkler)

During Chabelley's marathon and half-marathon event, CPL Garry Siccardi completed the marathon in 5 hours, 9 minutes, while SGT Garret Smith, 3rd Platoon medic, finished the half-marathon in 2 hours, 29 minutes.

Beyond operational duties, 1LT Dalton Buchan continued developing a garden using repurposed HESCO barriers as raised beds and a homemade compost system. After cultivating tomatoes and okra, the garden produced its first harvest of okra, demonstrating how Soldiers can use available resources to improve quality of life during deployment.

COMANCHE COMPANY



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Comanche Company, East Africa Response Force train during Exercise Bull Shark in Arta, Djibouti on Oct. 26, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Luis Gautier-Martinez)

Throughout October, Comanche Company continued strengthening its capabilities as part of the East Africa Response Force (EARF) through partner-force training, mission preparation, and Soldier development. Across the Horn of Africa, Comanche Soldiers supported multinational engagements, emergency-response planning, and tactical training while maintaining readiness for contingency operations.

From Oct. 6-14, Lightweight Platoon conducted a knowledge exchange with members of Djibouti's Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide (BIR) at Ali Oune on convoy operations, M4 marksmanship, battlefield zeroing, patrolling, and small-unit tactics. On Oct. 11, 2LT Cole Murray and SSG Christopher Baumgartner instructed BIR leaders on troop leading procedures and the military decision-making process. Four Lightweight Soldiers also attended site exploitation training at Camp Doraleh on Oct. 14, expanding their familiarity with investigative procedures and battlefield evidence collection.

Jabari Platoon, headquarters personnel, and attached enablers participated in JACT-EARF at Manda Bay, Kenya. Training included weapons familiarization, team- and squad-level live fire, stress shoots, and vehicle close-quarters battle. EARF Soldiers also conducted reconnaissance at the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, while the EARF Sniper Section provided overwatch for an Apache Company patrol at Manda Bay. Jabari further developed its Soldiers through medical and tactical training with the sniper section, including injured-man drills, weapon-malfunction procedures, and target acquisition. SSG Nicholas Hubert and SGT Sebastian Bennoon also led an NCO evaluation report support-form class for newly promoted sergeants.

Renegade Platoon completed Transformational Moral Leadership instruction and a Combat Conditioning Circuit while continuing mission preparation. Soldiers attended the French Desert Commando Course and trained alongside Navy Master-at-Arms personnel on K-9 Tactical Combat Casualty Care. The platoon also mobilized in support of the Somalia Reposture, demonstrating its ability to respond to changing operational requirements.

An EARF contingent additionally deployed to Somalia, supporting the Regional Security Office through battle drills and crisis-management planning. The team documented crisis-response procedures for a potential military-assisted departure, strengthening coordination and preparedness for emergency situations.

Physical readiness remained a priority throughout the company. Renegade Soldiers used conditioning circuits to prepare for the Combat Field Test, while Lightweight facilitated Jabari's assessment on Oct. 13. SGT Jacob Bradley recorded the platoon's fastest time at 20 minutes, 27 seconds. SPC Jordan Terrell and SPC Lauren Murillo completed the Norwegian Foot March, with Murillo earning his first bronze award.

Comanche also recognized several individual achievements. SGT Joseph Brill, SGT Thomas Martin, SGT Damien Servano, and SGT Dana Rausch-Lamberson earned the German Armed Forces Marksmanship Badge. SGT Riley Walker and CPL Cristian Reyes earned silver marksmanship badges and bronze Norwegian Foot March badges. Promotions included SGT Gino Monzon, SFC Andrew Foss, and SGT Sebastian Nieuwenhuijzen.

COMBAT COMPANY



SGT Juan-Pablo Moreno, assigned to Combat Company, Task Force Seminole, instructs Kenyan Rangers on U.S. signaling devices and techniques during a knowledge exchange at Manda Bay, Kenya, Oct. 22, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Jake Anico)

Throughout October, Combat Company continued strengthening regional partnerships and tactical readiness through a bilateral knowledge exchange with Kenyan security forces. Conducted Oct. 21-29, the engagement brought together U.S. Soldiers, Kenyan Rangers, and Kenyan Marines to exchange infantry tactics, improve coordination, and reinforce the relationships supporting security operations throughout the Horn of Africa.

The training involved nine U.S. service members, including seven Soldiers assigned to Combat Company, alongside 36 Kenyan Rangers and four Kenyan Marines. Representing Combat were SSG Kyle Johnson, SGT Juan-Pablo Moreno, SGT Oscar Gonzolez, SGT Christian Labra, SGT Mauricio Vasquez, SGT Derek Dyer, and SPC Kenneth Lopez.

The engagement took place at Kenya Navy classroom facilities and range complexes, providing opportunities for participants to combine classroom instruction with practical tactical training.

Throughout the engagement, U.S. and Kenyan personnel exchanged knowledge on small-unit infantry tactics, dismounted patrol operations, movement formations, and defensive security procedures. Classroom instruction focused on tactical planning, communication, and the fundamentals of coordinating small-unit operations. These discussions allowed participants to compare their respective procedures and develop a shared understanding of how each force approaches common tactical challenges.

Following classroom instruction, participants transitioned to practical exercises where they applied those concepts in a field environment. Training included coordinated team movements, tactical marksmanship, and response drills designed to reinforce the techniques discussed during instruction. Working together allowed Soldiers and Kenyan personnel to practice communicating across formations while identifying similarities and differences in their tactical procedures.

Beyond individual skills, the engagement emphasized the importance of interoperability between U.S. and Kenyan forces operating around Manda Bay. Developing familiarity with partner-force procedures helps improve coordination during combined operations, particularly when personnel from different organizations must respond to changing conditions. The opportunity to train together also strengthened professional relationships and encouraged the exchange of techniques that participants can incorporate into future training.

The event concluded with integrated field exercises that brought together the skills developed throughout the engagement. Participants applied lessons from the classroom and range while working alongside their international counterparts, reinforcing communication, teamwork, and small-unit coordination. The training demonstrated the value of continued partner engagement in maintaining readiness and strengthening cooperation between U.S. and Kenyan forces.

As Combat Company approaches the final stages of its deployment, Soldiers continue contributing to Task Force Seminole's mission through partner-force training and security cooperation.

NASTY DAWG COMPANY

Throughout October, Nasty Dawg Company continued supporting Task Force Seminole through humanitarian assistance, force protection, multinational training, and redeployment preparations across Kenya, Somalia, and Djibouti. As operational requirements evolved, Soldiers adapted to changing responsibilities while maintaining readiness throughout the region.

At Manda Bay, Kenya, 1st Platoon “Roosters” conducted a multiweek humanitarian aid and medical supply distribution operation with Army Civil Affairs personnel and Hindi Red Cross volunteers. The effort provided resources to local families while strengthening relationships with the surrounding community. The platoon also expanded weapons-training capabilities as selected Soldiers completed Common Remotely Operated Weapon Station (CROWS) Train-the-Trainer certification and developed a three-phase mobile curriculum to qualify Apache Company Soldiers. Additional training reinforced proficiency with pintle-mounted M2 .50-caliber machine guns. Several truck commanders also received U.S. Air Force recognition for their rapid-response and perimeter-security coordination with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

In Somalia, 2nd Platoon transitioned from quick reaction force and mounted-security responsibilities to supporting retrograde and redeployment operations. Soldiers inventoried, prepared, and turned in organizational equipment and supplies, including M-ATVs, while maintaining operational readiness. The platoon conducted a final joint live-fire range with the Italian Army and continued weapons training on the FGM-148 Javelin, AT4, and Carl Gustaf recoilless rifle. As vehicles were processed for redeployment, Soldiers adapted to dismounted security responsibilities and assumed entry control point operations, helping maintain installation security throughout the transition.

In Djibouti, 3rd Platoon continued supporting force protection through random antiterrorism measures across the installation cluster. Soldiers also partnered with Civil Affairs to assess a local school receiving assistance and supported Marine Corps personnel during a joint operation. Meanwhile, platoon combat medics and certified Combat Lifesavers completed casualty-care training focused on strengthening medical-response skills, endurance, and decision-making under demanding conditions.

Also in Djibouti, 4th Platoon emphasized weapons proficiency and contingency readiness. 2LT Sengthhavanh Sengkhounmany and SPC Jordan Rengifo participated in the French Desert Commando Assessment at Arta, testing their endurance and tactical skills. The platoon also conducted an M4 qualification range and internal shooting competition to reinforce marksmanship fundamentals. Embassy-response training further developed Soldiers' familiarity with procedures for responding to potential security incidents and protecting personnel during an emergency.



A U.S. Army Soldier assigned to Nasty Dawg Company, Task Force Seminole, traverses a cable during the French Desert Commando Course in Arta, Djibouti, Oct. 4, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Adila Hamdan)

As the deployment approaches completion, Soldiers remain focused on maintaining security, supporting partner forces, and preparing for transition.

DISCO COMPANY



Soldiers from Disco Company and Nasty Dawg Company, Task Force Seminole, and U.S. Navy security forces personnel pose for a group photo at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Sept. 22, 2026.

Throughout October, Disco Company continued maintaining security at Camp Lemonnier while refining its response procedures, strengthening defensive positions, and pursuing opportunities for individual development. As the deployment approaches its final stages, Disco Soldiers remain focused on sustaining the standards established throughout the rotation and ensuring the installation remains prepared to respond to potential threats.

Disco continued improving its emergency-response procedures through coordinated rehearsals with Camp Lemonnier personnel and Navy security forces. The training covered a variety of potential incidents that could threaten installation security, allowing participating organizations to practice their responsibilities and improve coordination. By rehearsing alongside other security elements, Disco Soldiers reinforced established procedures while developing greater familiarity with the personnel and organizations they may need to work alongside during an emergency.

Beyond response rehearsals, Soldiers continued strengthening defensive positions throughout their area of responsibility. Disco personnel dedicated additional time outside their regular duty hours to improving existing positions and supporting the installation's defensive posture. These efforts reflected the company's commitment to maintaining the security improvements developed throughout the deployment while ensuring its defensive capabilities remain effective as the mission continues.

Physical readiness remained a priority as several Disco Soldiers completed the Norwegian Foot March. The demanding 18.6-mile ruck march requires participants to carry a minimum of 25 pounds while meeting established time requirements. Completing the event challenged Soldiers' endurance and determination while providing an opportunity to earn a foreign military distinction and demonstrate their commitment to personal fitness.

Medical readiness also expanded as seven Disco Soldiers earned American Red Cross CPR certifications. SPC Patrick Ashmen, SPC Leo Crabb, SPC Pascual Vallejo, SPC Daniel Cogdell, SPC Matthew Myrick, SPC Daniel Lopez, and SGT Jaytee Dolabaille completed the training after previously earning their Combat Lifesaver certifications. The additional instruction strengthened their ability to respond to medical emergencies and reinforced the importance of having trained personnel available to provide immediate assistance when needed.

Disco Soldiers also returned to the ranges at Camp Lemonnier to re-zero their individual weapons. The training allowed personnel to verify their weapon systems' accuracy and reinforce marksmanship fundamentals, ensuring Soldiers maintain the proficiency required to perform their security responsibilities.

Five Disco Soldiers also began the French Desert Commando Course, hosted by French Forces in Djibouti. The five-day course was designed to challenge participants through ocean and mountain obstacle courses, mountaineering techniques, and small-unit tactics. Although the course was terminated before completion, participating Soldiers gained exposure to additional tactical techniques and opportunities to train alongside French personnel.

From maintaining defensive positions and rehearsing emergency responses to expanding medical skills and participating in multinational training, Disco Company continued reinforcing the capabilities necessary to protect Camp Lemonnier. As the deployment moves toward its conclusion, Soldiers remain committed to maintaining readiness and supporting the installation's security mission.

HATCHET COMPANY



1LT Kevin Opalensky, SFC Bryan Barnash and SFC Rodrigo Espana, assigned to Hatchet Company, Task Force Seminole, pose with the MVP award their company received for supporting Exercise Bull Shark 27-1 at Camp Doraleh, Djibouti, Oct. 28, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)

Throughout October, Hatchet Company continued supporting Task Force Seminole through logistical operations, professional development, multinational engagements, and Soldier recognition. As the deployment approaches its final stages, Hatchet Soldiers remain focused on sustaining the formation while preparing for a successful transition home.

Soldier development remained a priority as Hatchet personnel participated in the Academic Skills Improvement Program (ASIP). The program provided targeted instruction designed to help Soldiers improve their General Technical scores, potentially expanding their eligibility for additional military occupational specialties, professional education, and career advancement opportunities. Consistent participation reflected the company's investment in developing Soldiers beyond the immediate requirements of the deployment.

Three Hatchet Soldiers participated in a knowledge exchange with the Djiboutian Coast Guard, strengthening partner relationships and multinational cooperation throughout the Horn of Africa.

In early October, Hatchet shifted its attention to logistical support for the French Desert Commando Course. Supporting the course required coordination of resources and personnel to help facilitate a demanding training opportunity hosted by French forces in Djibouti. The company's contributions reinforced the importance of sustainment operations in enabling multinational training, allowing participating service members to focus on completing the course's physical and tactical requirements.

The company also celebrated a personal milestone as SPC Marlon Tyler welcomed his first child during the deployment. While Hatchet Soldiers continue fulfilling their responsibilities overseas, moments like these serve as reminders of the families supporting them from home and the personal milestones that continue throughout a deployment.

Hatchet recognized the contributions of its Soldiers during an awards ceremony where personnel received Army Commendation Medals for their performance throughout the rotation. The recognition highlighted the work Soldiers have performed in support of Task Force Seminole and provided an opportunity to acknowledge individual contributions to the company's accomplishments.

Physical readiness remained another priority as Soldiers completed the semiannual Army Fitness Test. The assessment provided an opportunity to evaluate individual fitness and reinforce the physical standards required of Soldiers throughout the deployment. Maintaining these standards remains important as the company balances its ongoing responsibilities with preparations for redeployment.

As Hatchet Company enters the final phase of its mission, Soldiers continue demonstrating the value of a capable and dependable support formation. From enabling multinational training and developing individual skills to recognizing accomplishments and maintaining physical readiness, Hatchet remains focused on sustaining Task Force Seminole and preparing for a successful conclusion to the deployment.

TOMAHAWK COMPANY

Throughout October, Tomahawk Company played a central role in supporting Task Force Seminole's operational priorities, particularly Exercise Bull Shark 27-1, a multinational exercise involving the United States, Djibouti, Japan, France, Spain, and other partners. Designed to strengthen preparedness for potential military and humanitarian crises in Djibouti, the exercise marked a significant milestone as Task Force Seminole assumed the lead planning role traditionally held by Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

Soldiers from nearly every unit across the task force participated, with Tomahawk personnel supporting planning, command post operations, and medical coordination. Operating from Camp Doraleh, home to the Djiboutian Coast Guard, 1LT Mary Dykens and 1SG Anthony Calvi helped direct the exercise's planning and execution. Additional staff support included SPC Malek Naija from the S2 section and SFC Christopher Close and SGT Benson Denis from the S6, whose contributions helped maintain coordination and communications throughout the event.

In the field, Tomahawk combat medics integrated with the East Africa Response Force (EARF), Djiboutian military personnel, and other allied and partner forces during simulated combat operations. Their participation supported the exercise's medical requirements while providing opportunities to practice working alongside multinational personnel. Together, Tomahawk's staff and medical sections helped coordinate the complex requirements of an exercise involving multiple services and nations.



SSG Kurt Switzer, the battalion aid station noncommissioned officer in charge assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force Seminole, draws the noncommissioned officer sword during his promotion ceremony at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, Oct. 19, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Morgan Cooper)

Medical readiness remained a priority beyond Bull Shark. Earlier in October, Task Force Seminole medics participated in a mass-casualty exercise alongside the Expeditionary Medical Facility (EMF). Responding to a 9-Line medical evacuation request, medics conducted casualty triage, treatment, and transportation to the EMF. Following treatment by medical personnel, the medics transported simulated casualties to the flight line for a static loading exercise aboard a C-130 aircraft. The training reinforced the coordination required to move patients through multiple levels of care and evacuation. The section also celebrated the promotion of SGT Kurt Switzer, Task Force Seminole Aid Station NCOIC, to staff sergeant.

Foreign military qualification opportunities also continued throughout October. Supported by the S3, S4, and medical sections, more than 38 personnel at Camp Lemonnier earned the German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge, including SPC Tito Vega from the S1 section. Coordinating these events required cooperation across staff sections while providing service members opportunities to demonstrate their physical fitness and military proficiency.

Tomahawk's S4 section continued supporting the task force's evolving logistical requirements by securing additional buildings to accommodate an increased force presence at Camp Lemonnier. The team also began coordinating relief-in-place requirements with incoming Task Force Iron personnel, working across units to maintain operational continuity while supporting redeployment preparations. The section additionally celebrated the promotion of its property book officer, CW2 Rufuss Lafont, from warrant officer 1 to chief warrant officer 2.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Private First Class Damarius J. Geddie



Hometown: Ocoee, FL

MOS: 11B Infantryman

Favorite MRE: Beef Strips

Favorite Show: Dragon Ball Super

Hobby: Video Games

In his first year in the Army National Guard, PFC Damarius J. Geddie has completed initial entry training and deployed to the Horn of Africa.

A native of Ocoee, Florida, Geddie joined the Florida Army National Guard shortly after graduating from high school. Inspired by his cousin, he saw military service as an opportunity to begin building his future while taking advantage of the opportunities the Army could provide.

Geddie currently serves as an 11B infantryman in the battalion's S3 section. Although his Army career is still in its early stages, the deployment has provided opportunities to develop professionally while working alongside experienced Soldiers and leaders.

Among his favorite Army experiences was the final field training exercise during Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT), where he applied the infantry skills he had learned throughout his initial training.

"The training we received was fantastic and excited me to go to my new unit," Geddie said.

Geddie considers receiving his first challenge coin from MAJ Derek Henry one of his proudest accomplishments so far. For him, the recognition demonstrated that his efforts were being noticed by leadership. He also considers deploying so early in his career an important milestone.

Throughout the deployment, Geddie has benefited from the mentorship of 1LT Anfernee Rodriguez, SSG Zach Price, SGT Kayla Bailey and SGT Riley Kirby. He credits their professionalism, willingness to teach and approachability with helping him adjust to military life.

One of the biggest lessons Geddie has learned during the deployment is that leaders, regardless of rank, are approachable people. Working closely with officers and NCOs has helped him become more comfortable communicating with others and stepping outside his comfort zone.

Looking ahead, Geddie hopes to continue developing his skills and eventually become a noncommissioned officer.

Outside of the Army, Geddie enjoys video games, long drives and spending time outdoors with friends. He also volunteers with his former high school football team and hopes to become a football coach someday. One talent many of his fellow Soldiers may not know about is his ability to create fictional characters and stories, particularly superheroes and villains.

As the deployment continues, Geddie remains appreciative of the Soldiers and leaders who have helped him through his first year of service. He takes pride in maintaining a positive attitude, treating others with respect and contributing to the team.

For Geddie, the experience has reinforced the importance of working together, learning from others and making the most of every opportunity to improve.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Sergeant Zachery Galloway



Hometown: Gainesville, FL

MOS: 11B Infantryman

Favorite MRE: Chili with Beans

Favorite Book: Draw Four

Hobby: Fitness

For SGT Zachery Galloway, his first deployment has provided opportunities to develop as a Soldier, improve his physical fitness and take on new leadership responsibilities.

A native of Gainesville, Florida, Galloway joined the Florida Army National Guard three years ago, drawn by the educational benefits and opportunities to travel and gain new experiences. He currently attends Santa Fe College, studying exercise science, with plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in applied kinesiology and physiology.

Galloway currently serves as an 11B Infantryman with Comanche Company, Task Force Seminole, supporting the East Africa Response Force (EARF). He considers the current deployment his favorite Army experience, particularly the opportunities it has provided to improve his physical readiness and develop as a newly promoted noncommissioned officer.

Among his proudest accomplishments is earning a score of 499 on the Army Fitness Test (AFT), reflecting his commitment to physical fitness and personal improvement.

Galloway credits Chaplain Jason Fletcher as one of the most influential leaders in his development during the deployment, particularly for his emphasis on building relationships and developing self-awareness.

“One of the biggest things he's taught me about leadership is the importance of the relationships you form,” Galloway said.

Since his promotion to sergeant, Galloway has become more aware of the example he sets for other Soldiers in day-to-day interactions.

“No matter what, someone is always watching you, whether you're having a good day or a bad day,” Galloway said.

Galloway also credits 1SG Michael Kendall and CPT McGuire Bennett for fostering a strong sense of teamwork and cohesion within Comanche Company. Their leadership has helped create an environment where Soldiers support one another while maintaining readiness for the EARF mission.

Outside of the Army, Galloway enjoys working out, Latin dancing, attending church and participating in his church's worship team. He also enjoys socializing and spending time with friends.

Looking ahead, Galloway hopes to continue his education and eventually earn a commission as an officer.

As Task Force Seminole continues its mission across the Horn of Africa, Galloway remains focused on building the experience and relationships that will help him grow as a leader. His recent promotion marks another step toward his long-term goals as he continues learning from the Soldiers and leaders around him.

SEMINOLE STRENGTH

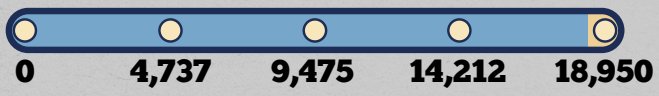
Building strength, endurance and readiness — Never Surrender!

Ruck Around Africa

After months of logging miles across East Africa, Task Force Seminole is within reach of completing its Ruck Around Africa Challenge. Soldiers added 1,199.94 miles in October, bringing the task force to 17,594.86 miles, or 92.85% of its 18,950-mile goal. The challenge began with a distance equivalent to rucking around Africa's coastline. Now, just 1,355.14 miles stand between the task force and the finish line.

November gives Soldiers a real shot at closing that gap. The task force needs about 155 more miles than it logged in October to finish by the end of the month. Every ruck in November will build on the miles Soldiers across the formation have already put in. Reaching 18,950 miles would give Task Force Seminole one more milestone to celebrate together before heading home.





Current Distance: 17,594.86
Miles Remaining: 1,355.14

CPT John Clark, Nasty Dawg Company commander, tied for first place in the Last Man Standing Ultra Marathon in Djibouti, completing 30 laps for an official distance of 114 kilometers, or about 71 miles. Clark shared first place with Victor Groisard of France. They were the only runners to complete 30 laps, finishing nine laps ahead of third-place finisher Moumim Ali Ayanleh of Djibouti.





EXERCISE BULL SHARK

The Republic of Djibouti led Exercise Bull Shark 27-1 from Oct. 25 to 28, 2026, bringing together military forces from Djibouti, the United States, France, Spain, Italy and Japan. Facilitated by the United States, the annual exercise focused on strengthening coordination, interoperability and crisis-response capabilities among participating nations.

Task Force Seminole played a major role in the exercise, providing logistics and sustainment support throughout the training. The task force also contributed a platoon from the East Africa Response Force and provided Soldiers to serve as the opposing force (OPFOR). These contributions supported exercise operations and helped create realistic training scenarios for participating forces.

Exercise Bull Shark is a multinational, multidomain exercise integrating air, land and maritime operations. The training is designed to improve participating forces' ability to operate together in dynamic environments and respond effectively to a range of real-world contingencies.

The exercise reflects the shared commitment of participating nations to promote regional security, strengthen readiness and enhance the ability to act collectively in support of stability in East Africa. By bringing together military partners based in Djibouti, Exercise Bull Shark reinforces unity of effort and highlights Djibouti's role as a key hub for multinational cooperation and operational coordination in the region.



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Stronger Together

Chaplain Jason Fletcher



As we enter the final stretch of this deployment, the finish line is finally coming into view. We've spent months away from our families, our homes, and the comforts of everyday life. We've faced challenges, overcome obstacles, and pushed through moments of exhaustion. And now, with the end in sight, there's one thing I want every Seminole Soldier and family member to remember: We didn't get this far alone.

Recently, I completed a CrossFit partner workout that absolutely humbled me. Now, I know I'm strong. I know I'm competitive. And if there's one thing I don't like, it's being the guy who can't keep up!

The workout was brutal. Part 1 started with a 1,200-meter run, followed by eight rounds of burpee box jump-overs, dumbbell snatches, and wall balls. The catch? One partner had to complete an entire round before the other could go. Meaning, you had to carry your own load.

Then came Part 2. Another 150 burpee box jump-overs, 120 dumbbell snatches, and a combination of toes-to-bar, chest-to-bar pull-ups, and bar muscle-ups. But this time, we could divide the work however we wanted, and this is where I was humbled.

I couldn't keep up in certain portions. He had to carry more of the load and I had to come face-to-face with something that isn't always easy for someone who's competitive, used to leading, and accustomed to carrying the load for others. I needed his strength. Not because I wasn't trying, but because I had reached a point where my strength wasn't enough.

Here's what I discovered: It wasn't that I was weak. It was that we were strong in different areas. When I struggled with the box jump-overs, he carried more of the load. And when we got to the shoulder movements, I carried more so he could recover. Neither of us had to be strong at everything. We just had to be there for each other.

But here's something else that challenged me. Had I been doing that workout by myself, I probably would have quit. But knowing my partner was there, counting on me, and fighting through the same workout kept me going. His strength helped carry the load, but his presence kept me from quitting.

Solomon wrote: "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble." — Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NLT)

These words remind us that we don't just need someone else's strength. We need their presence. Someone to remind us that we're not alone. This is why family, church, and community are so important. We need people who will push us when we're tired, encourage us when we're frustrated, and stand beside us when the mission gets difficult.

Here's probably the most important thing I learned during that workout: We weren't competing against each other. We were fighting to finish together. That's what makes a team successful.

As we enter these final weeks, that truth matters more than ever. This is why we need to check on our battle buddies, carry a little extra weight when someone else is running low, and recognize when we need someone to take a few reps for us. As your Chaplain, I'm here to take a few reps, pray, encourage, and stand alongside you as we complete this mission. Remember, the greatest victory isn't proving how strong, fast, or tough you are. It's crossing the finish line TOGETHER.

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD





U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Blackhawk Company, Task Force Seminole, fire a 60 mm mortar during a live-fire exercise in Somalia, Oct. 4, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



U.S. Army soldiers assigned to Blackhawk Company, Task Force Seminole, load a C-130 Hercules aircraft during reposture activities in Somalia, Oct. 12, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



U.S. Army soldiers assigned to Blackhawk Company, Task Force Seminole, fire a Carl Gustaf recoilless rifle in Somalia, Oct. 4, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Dakota Burr)



U.S. Army SPC Trey Lear, assigned to Blackhawk Company, Task Force Seminole, fires an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon in Somalia, Oct. 26, 2026. Soldiers maintain proficiency with their assigned service weapons while operationally deployed in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Nicholas Ferrari)



A Soldier assigned to French Forces in Djibouti teaches participants how to climb a rope during the mountain obstacle course portion of the French Desert Commando Course at Arta Beach, Djibouti, Oct. 4, 2026. The course tests participants' physical and mental endurance through mountain confidence exercises, knot tying and nighttime obstacle courses. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Adila Hamdan)



A French instructor checks the harness of U.S. Army CPT John Clark, commander of Nasty Dawg Company, Task Force Seminole, during the mountain obstacle course portion of the French Desert Commando Course at Arta Beach, Djibouti, Oct. 4, 2026. The course tests participants' physical and mental endurance through mountain confidence exercises, knot tying and nighttime obstacle courses. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Adila Hamdan)



U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Comanche Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Seminole, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, train during Exercise Bull Shark in Arta, Djibouti, Oct. 26, 2026. Exercise Bull Shark is a Djiboutian-led, multinational, multidomain training exercise between the Djiboutian, U.S., French, Japanese, Italian, and Spanish militaries. The exercise focuses on conducting crisis response, personnel recovery, and security operations to reinforce combat capabilities and partnership interoperability between like-minded partners in a combined joint environment. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Luis Gautier-Martinez)



U.S., Djiboutian, and French military personnel pose for a group photo as a helicopter flies overhead during Exercise Bull Shark near Arta, Djibouti on Oct. 27, 2026. Exercise Bull Shark is a Djiboutian-led, multinational, multidomain training exercise between the Djiboutian, U.S., French, Japanese, Italian, and Spanish militaries. The exercise focuses on conducting crisis response, personnel recovery, and security operations to reinforce combat capabilities and partnership interoperability between like-minded partners in a combined joint environment. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Belinda Guachun-Chichay)

MASTHEAD

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