



Tip OF THE Spear

United States Special Operations Command
MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

April 2023



**No man left behind:
Vietnam-era Special
Forces Soldier receives
Medal of Honor**



United States Special Operations Command



No man left behind: Vietnam-era Special Forces Soldier receives Medal of Honor ... 12

Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) President Joe Biden presents the Medal of Honor to retired U.S. Army Col. Paris D. Davis, March 3, 2023, in the East Room of the White House. Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz.

The Quiet Professionals

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U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



The Danab receives military equipment from the U.S

*By U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Rachel VanZale
Special Operations Command Africa*

As part of an effort to combat violent extremism and improve the quality of life of our partners in Somalia, personnel assigned to the 15th Airlift Squadron delivered military equipment to the Somali National Army (SNA) Danab in Mogadishu, Somalia, Feb.28, 2023.

There were several key leaders in attendance at the arrival of supplies including U.S. Embassy Charge d’Affaires Timothy Trenkle, Minister of Defense to Somalia Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur, and Somali Chief of Armed Forces Brig. Gen. Odowaa Yusuf Rageh.

“The arms and ammunition come from the United States in support of the Somali people who are engaged in a tremendously courageous fight against a horrendous terrorist organization,” said Trenkle. “This is a symbol of our support and it will help the SNA Danab, which is our partner force, in their training and also on the front lines against Al Shabab.”

The culmination of efforts resulted in a \$1.25 million delivery of three hundred Avtomat Kalashnikov Model 1947 assault rifles, known as AK-47s, 24 Pulemot Kalashnikova Modernizirovanniyi machine guns, also known as PKMs, along with training and live rounds to support this new equipment for the Danab.

“The weapons and ammunition received today from our U.S. partners will be used effectively to fight the enemy and we are thankful for this kind of support. This demonstrates the commitment of the U.S. government in supporting the Somali governments intent of eradicating Al-Shabab,” emphasized Nur. “Enhancing the capabilities of our forces is essential to our ongoing efforts.”

The United States is committed to supporting partners in combating violent extremists and malign actors in order to promote regional stability. This procurement of supplies is fundamental in enabling the SNA’s efforts against extremist organizations, furthering their partnership with



Somali National Army Lt. Col Ahmed Abdullah Nor, Commander of the Danab Brigade, and Timothy Trenkle, U.S. Embassy Deputy Charge d’Affaires, speak while waiting for a C-17 Globemaster III aircraft with military equipment for the Danab in Mogadishu, Somalia, Feb. 28, 2023. The U.S. Government partners with the Danab, the Somali National Army’s elite military force, to train, equip, and remote advise and assist in their operations against Al-Shabab, Al Qaida’s largest, wealthiest, and most violent affiliate. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman William Rio Rosado.

the U.S. and protecting their citizens.

“On behalf of the leadership of the federal government of Somalia, and the Somali people, allow me to thank the people and the government of the United States for their unwavering support to ensure the peaceful and prosperous Somalia,” said Nur.

Trenkle also noted that the U.S. is not alone in their support of the Somali people. The African Union, the European Union, the U.K. and many other partners are part of the international effort against Al Shabab.

U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster III aircraft loadmasters assigned to the 15th Airlift Squadron, unload pallets of military equipment for delivery to the Somali National Army in Mogadishu, Somalia, Feb. 28, 2023. The U.S. Government partners with the Danab, the Somali National Army's military force, to train, equip, and remote advise and assist in their operations against Al-Shabab, Al-Qaida's largest, wealthiest, and most violent affiliate. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman William Rio Rosado.



U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



U.S., Dutch medical teams enhance interoperability preparing for Flintlock 2023

Courtesy Story
Special Operations Command Africa

Special Operations Command Africa facilitated a knowledge exchange with preventative medicine teams from the U.S. Army Europe and Africa's 71st Medical Detachment and the Royal Netherlands Army on February 7, 2023, in Baumholder, Germany.

The Multinational Preventative Medicine Pre-Deployment Event assembled approximately 25 participants to synchronize mission protocols

surrounding preventative medicine in support of the March Flintlock 2023 Exercise in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. The engagement allowed both allied forces to align priorities, identify projected areas of highest risk, and formulate plans to pre-emptively mitigate those hazards.

"The opportunity to assemble the U.S. and Dutch preventative medicine teams prior to the exercise is a huge win," said Col. Amy Bogiel, SOCAFRICA Command Surgeon. "The preventative medicine teams at each site will be comprised of personnel from both



U.S. Army Preventive Medicine Specialists, assigned to the 71st Medical Detachment, 421st Multi-Functional Medical Battalion, and Preventive Medicine Specialists from Royal Netherlands Army pose for a photo after the multinational preventative medicine pre-deployment training event at U.S. Army Garrison Baumholder, Germany, Feb. 7, 2023. This training focused on increasing interoperability between the two countries as they prepare for Flintlock 2023. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Taylor Crul.



From left, U.S. Specialist Army Adrienne Wheeler, a preventative medicine specialist assigned to 71st Medical Detachment, Royal Netherlands Army Sgt. Major Maarten Sjerps, a preventative medicine specialist and U.S. Army Sgt. Deren Stewart, a preventative medicine NCO assigned to 71st MD go over information in preparation for Flintlock 2023 during a multinational preventative medicine pre-deployment training event at U.S. Army Garrison Baumholder, Germany, Feb. 7, 2023. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Taylor Crul.

nations and it is critical that they function as single unified team. From running equipment set layouts with familiarization training to simply working closely together, this event will allow us to hit the ground running at Flintlock.”

This engagement illustrates the value of Flintlock to assemble partner nations to form enduring relationships beyond the scope of the exercise, further enhancing interoperability. These partnerships are not only instrumental in maintaining mission priorities in the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility but also within the U.S. European Command AOR.

The upcoming Flintlock Exercise will be comprised of approximately 1,300 personnel from 30 African and international partner nations. Featured at the exercise will be U.S. and Dutch Preventative Medicine units. The NATO allies play a pivotal role in the Flintlock Exercises as well as contributing to both security and medical efforts with the African partners.

“The opportunity to train, work and especially to

The opportunity to train, work and especially to learn from each other is invaluable for us. It contributes to becoming a better Preventative Medicine team.

— Preventative Medicine Officer Irene Rijnen-Karstel

learn from each other is invaluable for us. It contributes to becoming a better preventative medicine team,” said Preventative Medicine Officer Irene Rijnen-Karstel of the Dutch Force Health Protection team. “I have complete confidence that this is just the beginning of a great long-term cooperation between the U.S. and Dutch Preventative Medicine.”

Flintlock 2023 represents the first time that the Dutch Force Health Protection Team will be joining forces with the U.S. Army’s 71st Medical Detachment to provide preventative medical services at the exercise.

“I am very excited for the potential future of interoperability and multi-national participation in exercises like these,” said Maj. Phillip George, commander of the 71st Medical Detachment. “Having willing and enthusiastic partners like the Dutch to cross-train and operate with add elements to conventional training that cannot be easily replicated.”

The Preventative Medicine team’s role at Flintlock will be to monitor and assess the exercise locations for exposure hazards to Flintlock participants and apply mitigation techniques to address these threats posed by

disease and injury. Mitigating these environmental hazards is critical to exercise readiness and mission success.



Royal Netherlands Army Capt. Maikel Wesseling, a preventative medicine officer, gives a presentation to a U.S. Army Preventative Medicine Specialist, assigned to the 71st Medical Detachment, and Preventative Medicine Specialist from Royal Netherlands Army during a multinational preventative medicine pre-deployment training event at U.S. Army Garrison Baumholder, Germany, Feb. 7, 2023. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Taylor Crul.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



AFRICOM's SOF exercise kicks off in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire

Courtesy Story
Special Operations Command Africa

Twenty-nine nations and approximately 1,300 personnel will participate in Flintlock 2023, the annual, combined military and law enforcement exercise that will take place in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire from March 1-15, 2023.

“Flintlock provides a critical training opportunity for special operation forces from the U.S., Africa, and international community,” said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Milton J. Sands III, U.S. Special Operations Command Africa Commander. “Together we work to exchange best practices to address the security challenges in the Sahel and Costal West Africa. A safer and more secure Africa will result in a more prosperous global society and security environment.”

This year, participating African nations include Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger,

Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo and Tunisia. Other international participants include Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Operations this year will focus on multinational staff headquarters operations based in Accra, Ghana. Headquarters operations will test and strengthen participants' ability to collectively address regional security challenges through a comprehensive scenario involving command and control of simulated participants at various outstations. Concurrently, some Western and African partners will train together remotely with the African partner nation hosting.

U.S. Africa Command sponsored exercises bolster partnerships between African, U.S., and other international military and law enforcement organizations, increasing interoperability during crises and operations to increase security and stability in the region.



A U.S. Marine Corps Marine observes the firing technique of a member of Ghana's Armed Forces during Flintlock in Accra, Ghana, March 8, 2023. Flintlock is an exercise focused on improving military interoperability and fostering cross-border collaboration. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Mario Hernandez Lopez.



Niger Soldiers pull security on a simulated village during Flintlock near Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, March 4, 2023. Multinational headquarters operations will test and strengthen participants' ability to collectively address regional security challenges through a comprehensive scenario involving command and control of simulated participants at various outstations. Photo by U.S. Army Cpl. Clara Soria-Hernandez.



Flintlock African partners maneuver towards a beach intended for an upcoming raid during Flintlock in Volta, Ghana, March 13, 2023. Flintlock is U.S. Africa Command's premier and largest annual special operations exercise that strengthens key partner nations throughout Africa, in partnership with other international special operations forces. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Charles Brock.



U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Milton Sands III, Special Operations Command Africa Commander, speaks with Flintlock participants during Distinguished Visitors Day near Volta, Ghana, March 14, 2023. This year's exercise builds on the success of previous iterations of Flintlock and focuses on the transition from tactical execution to operational planning and multi-domain integration. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Mario Hernandez Lopez.



Special Operations Forces from the Ghanaian Special Boat Service (SBS) await instruction for the phase of their swim Flintlock swim examination, in Volta, Ghana, March 2, 2023. These exercises and engagements highlight and improve joint force capabilities across all domains and strengthen relationships with partners in Africa and worldwide. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Faron High.



Ivorian Special Forces Soldiers conduct building clearance training, led and instructed by Netherland Special Forces, in a shoot house during Flintlock 23 near Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, March 2, 2023. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Katelynn Moeller.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



U.S. Navy SEALs, Royal Thai train prior to multinational exercise Cobra Gold 2023



U.S. Naval Special Warfare and Royal Thai Navy Special Warfare operators conduct maritime interdiction operations during Flash Torch 2023-1, a joint combined training exercise built upon the two forces' long-standing relationships and interoperability in the Indo-Pacific near Sattahip, Thailand, Feb. 16, 2023. Courtesy Photo.

*By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Smedegard
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

Naval Special Warfare forces deployed in support of U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific concluded a joint combined training exercise with Royal Thai Navy Special Warfare Command in Sattahip, Thailand, Feb. 22, 2023.

The three-week exchange built upon the two forces' long-standing relationships and cooperation within the Indo-Pacific region.

"We value our relationship with the Royal Thai Navy Special Warfare Command, and it is continued trainings like this that sharpen our tactics," said the senior team leader of the U.S. Naval Special Warfare unit.

The exercise began with tactical training with weapons, close-quarter combat drills, tactical combat casualty care, explosive breaching, and maritime boat

operations.

"Once we were able to share, establish and execute standard procedures, our two forces developed real-world special operations scenarios," added the senior U.S. team lead. "This training enhanced our forces' readiness and interoperability to successfully plan and execute modern-day missions."

The realistic scenarios served as a capstone to the forces' engagement and included maritime interdiction operations and visit, board, search and seizure rehearsals.

Personnel from U.S. Naval Special Warfare and Royal Thai Navy Special Warfare Command also exchanged culture history, traditions and customs.

"The bonds we formed while learning and understanding one another's culture cemented the friendships during the training," said the senior U.S. team lead. "Whether it was a traditional Thai BBQ one week or a traditional American dish the next, or Muay



U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators rehearse a direct-action mission during Flash Torch 2023-1, a joint combined training exercise built upon the two forces' long-standing relationships and interoperability in the Indo-Pacific near Sattahip, Thailand, Feb. 12, 2023. Courtesy photo.

Thai training sessions together, and even the exchanging of patches, memorabilia and sharing the history of each other's units and cultures – those deep personal connections are strengthened and forge a stronger shared interest of community.”

U.S. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet's reach.

U.S. Special Operations Forces provide flexible response to contingencies in the Indo-Pacific. Integral to this capability is a forward-deployed posture and

continuous engagement with partner and ally forces, heightening mutual interoperability and regional expertise.

“We have a strong, forward-looking U.S.-Thai defense alliance, rooted in history, which helps foster a region where all countries enjoy prosperity and peace,” said the senior U.S. team lead. “Our command remains committed to maintaining our enduring friendship with Thailand and the Thai people.”

The United States and Thailand have nearly two centuries of diplomatic relations and have been security treaty allies for over 65 years.

On Feb. 27, the two nations will participate in Cobra Gold 2023, a two-week-long multinational military exercise with thousands of service members and partners from across the Indo-Pacific.

This annual event increases the capability, capacity, and interoperability of partnered nations while simultaneously reinforcing their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The upcoming Cobra Gold 2023 exercise is the 42nd iteration and is set for a full-scale revival since the pandemic. The Thailand and U.S. co-sponsored exercise is conducted annually in the Kingdom of Thailand and will be held from Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2023, with seven full participants (Thailand, U.S., Japan, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Malaysia), three limited participants (Australia, India, China) and ten Multinational Planning Augment Team participants.



Royal Thai Navy Special Warfare operators rehearse a medical evacuation during Flash Torch 2023-1, a joint combined training exercise built upon the two forces' long-standing relationships and interoperability in the Indo-Pacific, Sattahip, Thailand Feb. 13, 2023. Courtesy photo.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

No man left behind: Vietnam-era Special Forces Soldier receives Medal of Honor



*By Christopher Hurd
Army News Service*

His entire body was covered in sweat and blood, having been shot too many times to count. After dragging a wounded Soldier to the helicopter for medical evacuation, Army Capt. Paris Davis went back into the Vietnam battle to retrieve another.

He heard the man had been shot in the head and was likely dead. Davis refused to accept it. He wasn't leaving anyone behind.

He called in cover fire and returned to the battlefield, searching for his missing Soldier. He crawled 150 yards and was hit by grenade fragments, causing even more damage to an already beat down body.

He kept pressing on, however, and was able to find his man. Spc. Robert Brown was indeed shot in the head but was still alive. He looked at Davis and asked, "Am I going to die?" to which Davis replied, "Not before me."

Davis grabbed him by his blood-soaked uniform and began the arduous trip back.

Having a sense of family and putting others first was nothing new to Davis, it was instilled in him from a young age.

"School was important, church was important, family was important, and neighbors were special too," he said thinking of his days in Cleveland, Ohio. "I think I had a very good childhood."

As a kid, Davis was curious about the world and how things worked. He loved learning and would read any book they put under his nose.

That tenacious appetite for knowledge led him to Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he studied political science and sociology.



Soldiers assigned to the 883rd Regional Forces stand in formation during training led by Capt. Paris Davis, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces at Camp Bong Son, Vietnam, 1965. Courtesy photo by Ron Deis.

"I was just interested in trying to figure out how the world turned," he said.

While there, he joined the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps on scholarship. He didn't come from a military family, but that wouldn't deter him from finding his way.

"Every step was a new step, just like a baby learning to walk," he said.

The noncommissioned officers ran a tight ship at the school and kept him in line, teaching him valuable lessons he would need in the future.

In 1959, Davis commissioned as an Army reserve armor officer and shortly after went to airborne school. He then heard about a little-known program then-President John F. Kennedy emphasized for counterinsurgency, and he jumped at the chance.

He became one of the first African American Special Forces officers in the Army.

After his first tour in Vietnam, where he helped recruit and train locals, he went from the Pentagon to Okinawa, Japan, for language school. While he was in

Japan, he got the news he was going back to Vietnam, this time in charge of his own Special Forces team and a South Vietnamese regional force.

It was a chance to put my fingerprint on it," he said. "I wanted that opportunity."

The team adjusted quickly after arriving, recruiting locals and doing patrols in the surrounding jungle. The key to their survival, Davis said, was not only getting locals to join them but taking care of their families.

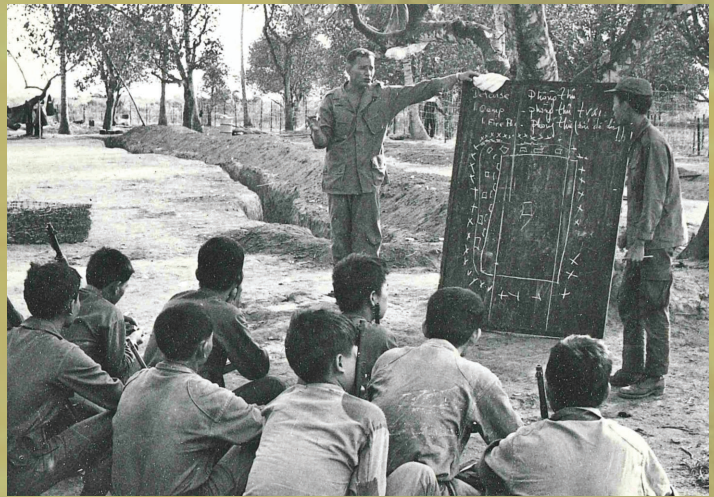
"It's the same in almost every ethnicity, family first," he explained. "If you treat it right, it will be medicine for you."

With the chance to lead his own team, Davis set out to get the best from his men. He empowered his NCOs to take charge and would often follow their lead. He didn't keep secrets and would discourage gossip. He even encouraged them to keep things as lighthearted as they could.

"I think it's really important when you get into a situation like that, you put as much humor in it as you can," he said.

The team did everything together, from patrols to chow to cleaning their weapons. They rapidly become more than just a unit.

"It was more of a family," Davis recalled.



Master Sgt. Billy Waugh gives a training class to soldiers assigned to the 833rd Regional Forces, Vietnam, 1965. Waugh's life was eventually saved by the actions of Capt. Paris Davis in June 1965. Courtesy photo by Ron Deis.



Capt. Paris Davis, while in Vietnam, 1965. Courtesy photo by Ron Deis.

On one late night patrol, Davis could hear snoring out in the shrubs. He searched and searched and eventually snuck up on an enemy soldier asleep on guard duty. After capturing him, the team found another unsuspecting soldier sleeping.

They took the prisoners back for questioning and received important information about a large enemy force gathering in the area.

Davis confirmed the intel and decided to act. His team started attacking small pockets of the North Vietnamese force, taking them by surprise. Davis was

wounded in the initial assault, but he continued to push forward.

The enemy launched a counterattack coming at them in waves. Facing intense gun fire, Davis led a small group of Soldiers as they destroyed enemy fortified locations. He then regrouped with his company and ordered air strikes.

"The battle lasted forever, and we thought we had beaten them back," he said.

They started congratulating themselves when suddenly they heard bugles playing. The North Vietnamese launched another attack with increased numbers.

"You couldn't see the ground or anything else there was so many of those guys coming at us," he recalled.

The battle was back on. The team moved into position and reengaged the enemy. At one point, Davis thought he was almost out of ammunition and went to get more.

As he was looking, he felt a gun barrel at the back of his head. An enemy soldier pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. Davis quickly took a bayonet from his boot, attacked, and killed the enemy.

With no time to lose, he returned to the battle and noticed several of his men were gravely wounded.

Master Sgt. Billy Waugh was shot multiple times in the leg and foot. He was unable to walk. Davis charged into an open field under heavy enemy fire to rescue him. He was shot again, blood starting to cover his uniform.

Davis continued to engage the enemy, killing several on his way. He finally reached Waugh, picked him up, and carried him to safety.

Helicopters were coming in and out, bringing supplies and evacuating the wounded. Just as several men finished taking supplies to the troops, Sgt. 1st Class John E. Reinburg was shot in the chest.

“He fell right into my arms, and we had to get him right back on the aircraft,” he said.

Davis carried Reinburg back up the hill to extraction.

The battle had been raging for hours as day was slowly turning into night. Davis managed to get all of his men out but one, Spc. Robert Brown. Defying orders to withdraw, Davis went back for his last Soldier.

“They said he was dead, but I wasn’t leaving him behind,” Davis said.

He again called in cover fire and went searching. He found Brown and dragged him back across the slick field to the medevac helicopter.

After rescuing his men, Davis directed the extraction of the remaining wounded but refused it for himself. He remained on the battlefield to coordinate the final aerial and artillery attacks, ensuring victory.

Davis saved the lives of multiple Soldiers during the 19-hour battle and led his company to victory over a much larger enemy force. He was awarded the Silver Star for heroism in December 1965.

Now, almost six decades later, Davis received the nation’s highest award for military valor, the Medal of Honor, in a ceremony at the White House March 3.

“He exhibited his bravery numerous times on that particular mission,” said Ron Deis, junior demolition man on Davis’s Vietnam Special Forces team. “He was either going to recover all of his team or die trying.”

When asked how he felt about receiving the medal, Davis said he didn’t want it to be about the lives he saved in Vietnam.

“I didn’t think about going after Brown to get a medal, or Waugh,” he explained. “For me, it was never ever a reason why I wanted to do something. Saving those lives were a part of what was human. Fighting the enemy was the part that was daring.”

Davis retired as a colonel after serving more than 25 years in the Army. In 2019, he was inducted into the U.S. Army Ranger Hall of Fame.



Capt. Paris Davis is awarded a Silver Star on Dec. 15, 1965. Davis received the award for his actions during a battle in Bong Son, Republic of Vietnam, June 17-18, 1965. U.S. Army photo.



President Joe Biden presents the Medal of Honor to retired U.S. Army Col. Paris D. Davis, Friday, March 3, 2023, in the East Room of the White House. Official White House photo by Adam Schultz.

Naval Special Warfare Command



An American hero turns 100

*By U.S. Navy Lt. Zachary Anderson
Naval Special Warfare Command*

When Art Nicholas, one of the first naval commandos responsible for the formation of Naval Special Warfare was born, the U.S. president was Warren Harding and the Ottoman Empire had yet to fall. A non-exhaustive list of global events that have come and gone since Feb. 15, 1923 include The Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, the rise and fall of Nazi Germany, the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, the formation of the Navy SEAL Teams, and the entirety of Beatlemania.

In 1923 the Academy Awards were yet to be established, and the Marathon world record was 2:40:17, set by Aksel Jansen of Denmark. In 2022, Eliud Kipchoge ran a new world record of 2:01:09, finishing at the Brandenburg Gate which stood as a symbol of Hitler's power, a physical barrier between East and West Berlin, and a representation of unity and peace all during Art's life.

On Feb. 15, 2023, Art celebrated his 100th birthday. To commemorate this milestone, he was joined by family and friends at his home in Englewood, Florida. So how does one discuss the life of the husband, father, businessman, and decorated war hero that stretches for a century? Start at the beginning.

In many ways, Art's life mirrors the story of America. His father, John, a Greek immigrant from the Island of Thassos, entered the United States through Ellis Island. He initially found work as a gandy dancer on the railroads, laying sections of track. As such, he and his cousin literally walked across the country, eventually finding themselves in San Diego, California where John trained as a barber and became a U.S. citizen.

In what would become a motif in the lives of this family, John Nicholas found his fledgling career interrupted by global conflict as World War I engulfed Europe, so he joined the U. S. Army. Following the cessation of the war, John would be discharged, ultimately settling in Lansing, Michigan, where he opened his own barber shop.



Art Nicholas, an NSW veteran of World War II who recently turned 100-years-old, poses at a makeshift camp in South Florida's marshlands. Nicholas served as a member of the Scouts and Raiders, the predecessors to today's Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators. NSW is the nation's maritime special operations force that gains and maintains access and placement for the Fleet and Joint Force. Photo courtesy of the Nicholas Family.

However, unbeknownst to John at the time a quick trip to Greece before returning to the U.S. at the end of the war had inadvertently negated his U.S. citizenship following his discharge. When the world was thrust into conflict once more during World War II, the U.S. Secret Service took him into custody. The government ordered

him to appear in Federal Court which was in the local post office at the time. However, in a show of genuine American spirit, the judge swore the elder Nicholas in as a U.S. citizen once again and informed John that he would visit his barber shop later that week for a touch-up.

Born in 1923 to his immigrant father and homemaker mother, Art's youth and adolescence were emblematic of the working-class ethos that defined that era in American history. A consistent trait throughout Art's life was a strong work ethic exemplified by his father and further refined by his time shining the shoes of barbershop patrons beginning at age five.

However, it wasn't all work for Art, as he was also a talented musician and self-taught drummer. Together with a group of friends, he created the "Art Nicholas Orchestra" in a similar vein as Glen Miller. Together, the band got a job at Wild's Casino in the Michigan vacation town of Saulte Sainte Marie located on the banks of Lake Superior. The band was so successful that Art made more money during the brief six-week stint at the casino than his father had made during the first six months of the year. Stashing his earnings in a shoe box for safekeeping, Art partially supported his family that summer during the Great Depression.

In addition to his musical talents, Art was also a talented swimmer, so much so that the Michigan State Athletic Department was able to put him in a Spartan uniform for a semester despite not being technically enrolled as a student. In his brief stint as a collegiate athlete, Art set several school records which would still be standing when he returned home from his time in the Navy.

The machinations of great power competition and brewing global conflict must have felt a world away for the young Nicholas tucked away in the Midwest. Nevertheless, after his short time at Michigan State, Art enlisted in the Navy and reported for duty at the Great Lakes Training Center. For the young Sailor and for the United States, more broadly, the bombing of Pearl Harbor brought the reality of war into sharp focus. Ironically, Art was on leave when the bombing occurred, but he was promptly recalled, like the rest of the U.S. service members away from their duty stations during the attack.

His first duty assignment was in North Africa aboard a cargo ship supporting amphibious operations conducted off the coast of Morocco. Although not a member of the fledgling special operations forces at that time, Art had a glimpse of what would be a part of his future when a new unit, the Scouts and Raiders (S&R), were initially implemented.



Art Nicholas, a Naval Special Warfare (NSW) veteran who celebrated his 100th birthday in Englewood Fla. Feb. 15th, 2023, is pictured third from the left in the back row, playing drums and leading the "Art Nicholas Orchestra" in the Michigan vacation town of Saulte Ste. Marie located on the banks of Lake Superior. Nicholas served in World War II as a member of the Scouts and Raiders, the predecessors to today's NSW operators. Photo courtesy of the Nicholas family.

Given the increasingly amphibious nature of operations in both the Pacific and European theaters, there was recognition amongst the Allied Forces of the necessity to develop teams of men that could handle a complex and daring mission set. When U.S. Marine forces were restructured, the European, African, and Middle East (EAM) Theater was left without any pre-landing reconnaissance ability. Consequently, the first Amphibious Scout and Raider school was established in Little Creek, Virginia to fill the void.

Originally a joint school, the Army "Raiders" were trained for beach and land reconnaissance, while the Navy "Scouts" acted primarily as boat crew commandos. Before an amphibious landing, the Navy personnel would locate the correct landing beaches to deliver reconnaissance crews and then serve as guides during the operation.

The S&R were first used during Operation Torch to invade North Africa through Morocco. Their primary role was pre-landing reconnaissance and guiding larger vessels during landings at Safi, Fedala, Mehdiya, and Algiers.

To say that the first implementation of the new unit was a complete success would belie the fact that there were some initial missteps and errors. Nevertheless, the S&R units had proven their worth, and as such the commander of amphibious forces in the Atlantic ordered

their continued training and relocation to Fort Pierce, Florida.

Following his assignment in North Africa, Art requested a transfer and soon found himself assigned to help establish and train the new recruits at Fort Pierce. After spending a few weeks conducting testing on the amphibious DUKW boats (colloquially known as the “Duck”) Art found himself in the rugged marshlands of South Florida.

It would be difficult to overstate the amount of work that went into transforming the soon-to-be amphibious training base. Interviews with the Navy Sailors who were there for the conversion process reveal that those early days mainly consisted of clearing trees and fighting off insects. Anecdotally, Jim Barnes, a fellow S&R veteran, said he never needed to pepper his eggs as the sand fleas took care of that.

The Scouts and Raiders would prove more resilient than Fort Pierce’s resident pests. Soon the base was up and running, and much of the training that has since become commonplace in today’s SEAL and SWCC communities was created. Each day began early for the men, rising at 0530 to eat breakfast before engaging in long hours of hauling logs for physical training (log PT), boat handling, swimming, and small arms practice.

Art’s previous experience as a swimmer were a blessing in the harsh training conditions.

“There was a lot of swimming. A lot of swimming. Especially during the day and at night,” the centenarian reports.

“At night it was pretty tough at times because you would either lose your way and there were a couple of times when I had to jump overboard with a line tied to me, and had to be pulled in,” Nicholas said. “It was scary sometimes.”

Some of the training recounted by the Sailors read more like a fantasy novel than a recitation of factual events. While Art was in Fort Pierce, there was speculation regarding the survivability of the East Coast in the event of an invasion. At the time, the widely shared belief was that there was no possibility of a successful attack by Axis forces.

Exhibiting hubris and confidence, which has since become a trademark of Naval Special Forces, a uniquely plucky S&R ensign voiced his vehement belief that Fort Lauderdale was vulnerable. Thus, planning for a mock invasion of the Sunshine State began in earnest.

According to Nicholas, the S&R took 11 small boats to Bimini in the Bahamas. They were divided into three-person teams, then proceeded to surround and capture their assigned areas, donned only in Navy blue coveralls, and lightly armed with combat knives. After setting off

smoke grenades in city hall, stealing the commanding officer of the local Coast Guard station, and causing an unfortunate bus driver to suffer impromptu incontinence, Fort Lauderdale was deemed capturable.

Unfortunately, some of the other training Art experienced did not go as planned. Prior to D-Day, British and American forces were conducting a practice operation off the southern coast of England at Slapton Sands. The secret event known as Operation Tiger was intended to prepare the English and American units for an actual amphibious assault at Normandy a few months away. Coincident with the event, German forces, specifically the Luftwaffe, were shifting their focus to the English Channel. The pilots collected detailed intelligence leading to calamitous results for the Allies.

Operation Tiger, conducted on the night of 27/28 April, 1944, would become one of World War II’s greatest and least talked about disasters. German U-boats interrupted the mock assault, attacking the approaching convoy, resulting in the deaths of at least 749 Americans. It was incredibly embarrassing and potentially devastating to morale considering the rapidly approaching D-Day invasion. The Operation Tiger failure remained a secret for many years with full details only emerging several decades later.

For Art and his fellow Sailors, Operation Tiger and the lost lives of U.S. servicemen were a tragedy. However, the impending invasion in France forced the men to compartmentalize and return to their preparations.

During the Normandy invasion, Art was assigned to LST-52 as a Boatswain’s Mate First Class. The Landing Ship Tank, or LST, was an amphibious assault vehicle used for landing soldiers, tanks, and other supplies on the beachhead. Assigned to the beaches of Gold, Juno, and Sword, his team functioned as a Special Forces unit tasked with initially clearing the beaches, then converting the LST into a hospital ship, picking up wounded and resupplying fresh troops. LST-52 was on its third trip when Art kicked a live ammo round and the resultant explosion sent him to the hospital for 29 days. Art was awarded the Purple Heart for his actions and injury during the invasion.

No great war story is complete without our protagonist finding love, and Art was no exception. Following his injury and hospitalization, the young Sailor began a new assignment in Weymouth, England where he was the Assistant Master-At-Arms. When off-duty during this tour, Art returned to his musical roots and began performing with a pickup band to entertain the war-weary Brits and fellow service members.

After being invited to a party in the small nearby town of Dorchester, Art volunteered to drive a truck full

of young lads to the event. Then, in a move befitting a true Navy man, Art wandered across to the street to a local bar after seeing the main activity in the dance hall was musical chairs.

If there were an opposite of a “meet-cute,” the ensuing events between Art and his now-wife Hazel would fit the definition. Art originally asked Hazel’s girlfriend to dance. Unfortunately for Art, the young lady had her eye on a different British sailor and denied his request. Biding his time, Art approached the couple after their dance and boldly told the woman, “You were very rude, and you’re no damn good. I’ll tell you that right now.”

For Hazel, her future husband’s ill-tempered behavior would prove fortuitous. Hazel approached Art, where she firmly scolded him, leaving the embarrassed young Sailor to sulk back over to the bar. Adding insult to injury, when Art struck up a conversation with the bartender intending to drown his sorrows in a lager, he discovered that the man was, unfortunately, Hazel’s father.

Improbably, the young duo had a movie date scheduled by the end of the night and, in Art’s words, “that continued.”

After the war, Art left the Navy and moved back to Michigan to start building a career and a family. He and Hazel were separated for 16 months, and during that time he worked a variety of odd jobs to support himself. Bouncing around from shoe salesman, to bartender, to restaurant worker, he found more consistent work at the REO Motor Car Company inspecting various parts that were used to build trucks intended for the Korean War. After that war ended, Art was offered and subsequently took a job as a salesman selling corrugated boxes. Then, with the encouragement of a local banker, Art would set out on his own to start a company that became Corrugated Paper Products Inc.

Never content with only one goal to occupy his time, Art’s post-war life was also filled with philanthropic pursuits. In the 1960s he was instrumental in building St. David’s Episcopal Church in Lansing, Michigan, as well as developing a blueprint for Real Services Inc. in South Bend, Indiana which provides housing, transportation, and nutritional services to senior citizens.

Proud of his Hellenic roots, Art is a member of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, the largest and oldest fraternal organization dedicated to preserving Greek heritage in America. In addition, he continues to exemplify the traits of selfless service embodied by so many of our servicemen and women, donating time and money to replace tattered American flags, establish Hospice chapters where they are needed,

and fund home repairs for those in need.

Art’s life and war experience came full circle when he, his wife, and two grown daughters had the opportunity to visit the five beaches of the Normandy coast in the Spring of 2009 on the 65th anniversary of the invasion. The local French receptionist presented the veteran with a silver medal, French and America flags, and a diploma recognizing his role in the D-Day invasion upon the family’s arrival at Utah Beach.

Then, at Omaha Beach, Art had the opportunity to participate in a flag lowering ceremony, folding the American ensign during evening taps. It was a powerful moment for the man, the backdrop of white crosses signifying the thousands of men who died on the beach. The setting sun fitting for the soldiers who gave their lives to prevent Hitler’s fascist spread.

“I didn’t know if I could stand it emotionally,” he said.

“I thought I might start crying like a baby.”

In many ways, Arthur Nicholas embodies the American Dream—an immigrant son with working-class roots, who fought for his country, raised a family, and built a successful company. Moreover, if one were to use a single word to sum up this amazing man it would be “builder.” Arthur Nicholas started his own band, was a critical member of the group that paved the way for Navy SEALs and SWCC, and literally helped raise a church.

The country has changed dramatically over the past century. One could argue it would be near impossible to swim at Michigan State without being enrolled as a student or support a family on six weeks of playing gigs at a casino. Nevertheless, individuals like Art built this country, and it will be people like him responsible for building our future.



Art Nicholas celebrates his 100th birthday in Englewood, Fla., Feb. 15, 2023. Nicholas served in World War II as a member of the Scouts and Raiders, the predecessors to today’s Naval Special Warfare. Photo by U.S. Petty Officer 1st Class Sean Weir.

Naval Special Warfare Command



First in History: Special Boat Team 20 Receives Inaugural Battle “E”

By Chief Petty Officer Dustin Kelling
Naval Special Warfare Group Four

Special Boat Team 20 (SBT-20) received the 2022 Naval Special Warfare Battle Efficiency Program Award in a message released Jan. 23, 2023.

This is the first year that the Naval Special Warfare (NSW) community has awarded the Battle Efficiency Program Award. Simply known as the Battle “E”, it is given to NSW teams that demonstrate a high degree of performance in an operational environment throughout the fiscal year.

“Earning the Battle ‘E’ is incredibly important as it validates the hard work and personal sacrifice of every Sailor that worked to make SBT-20 operationally focused and battle ready,” said the commanding officer of SBT-20.

The Battle “E” program within Naval Special Warfare Group 4, the NSW community’s special boat team headquarters, recognizes the unique challenges that Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen (SWCC) team members must navigate and overcome. SBT-20 had to dedicate time and funding to training a task group while maintaining standard command duties and responsibilities of manning, training and equipping deployable combatant craft detachments.

SBT-20 received the award in part for validating ground-breaking tactics and increasing the scope of combatant-craft capabilities.

“We had to get creative with our task group, requesting support from other NSW and Navy commands to ensure we could function as a command-and-control element,” said the commanding officer.

SBT-20’s success ties into every facet of an operational command such as “training, equipping, and manning,” said the SBT-20 Command Master Chief. “The SBT-20 Task Group is a great example of this, the Battle ‘E’ award confirms and reinforces the command’s ‘Brilliant on the Basics’ approach to excellence,” he said. “The command’s



A combatant craft assault craft (CCA) assigned to special boat team 20 steams alongside the Expeditionary Sea Base USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4) in the Mediterranean Sea, May 26, 2021. Hershel “Woody” Williams is on a scheduled deployment in the U.S. Sixth Fleet area of operations in support of U.S. national interest and security in Europe and Africa. Photo by U.S. Petty Officer 2nd Class Eric Coffey.

focus on individual Sailors through human factors, career development boards, recognition, and mentorship, highlights the link between effective sailorization and mission success.”

SBT-20 is a subordinate command under NSWG-4. As the NSW community focuses on strategic competition and contested maritime domains, the SWCC teams of NSWG-4 continue to grow and develop emerging capabilities to deter any threat and protect America from attack.

“I am incredibly proud of my Sailors,” said the SBT-20 commander. “They have constantly performed at an exemplary level as they prepare for and execute special operations in the maritime environment across multiple domains.”

Dissecting the Bull Frog – Exploring an NSW Tradition

By Petty Officer 2nd Class Alex Perlman
Naval Special Warfare Command

When the U.S. Navy established the Underwater Demolition Teams (UDTs) during World War II, the heroic Sailors that we now know as Navy SEALs were commonly referred to as “Frogmen.” Today’s Naval Special Warfare (NSW) community pays homage to its predecessors by using the same nickname.

However, a lesser-known word used to label the most experienced of SEALs exists. While the modern SEAL is synonymous with “Frogman,” only a special few can claim the coveted title — “Bull Frog”. A nod to both the legacy of Frogmen and the naval tradition of a “Bull Ensign” in every wardroom. The idea of the Bull Frog pulls upon NSW’s heritage and the naval tradition of cultivating leadership within a community.

Cmdr. Steve Elias, NSW’s 17th Bull Frog, explained that the senior ensign at a command is considered a bull because they are responsible for bullishly guiding junior

ensigns to success and serve as the focal point of the wardroom’s expression of spirit and pride. Wardrooms grant that senior ensign the title of Bull Ensign.

“In that vein, Rear Adm. Richard Lyon, the first SEAL flag officer adopted the term Bull Frog as a parallel in our warfare specialty,” said Elias. “The only requirement to become the Bull Frog is to be the longest, continuously serving active-duty SEAL on duty at the time of receiving the title from their predecessor.”

Although Rear Adm. Lyon adopted the term once he retired in 1981, former commander, Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC), Rear Adm. Joseph D. Kernan made it official with a Navy instruction in 2007.

When a Bull Frog retires, NSWC officially passes the title on during a ceremony. The former Bull Frog hands over an engraved trophy adorned with a small wooden frog on top and the names of former Bull Frogs inscribed on the side to the newly recognized Bull Frog.

“I’m humbled just to have received a trophy with my

name and the dates of cumulative service following the completion of my BUD/S training,” said Elias. “The highlight of this title is just being called the Bull Frog by current and former teammates who transitioned to the civilian sector. It really feels cool to say it now.”

The Bull Frog name highlights some of the key traits that are valued in the NSW and the SEAL community - adaptability, strength, and leadership.

“A lot of great people have served in the Navy, so they understand the tradition,” said Elias. “Most SEALs take pride in themselves staying in great physical shape; it’s part of the culture. I may not be as strong or as fast as I was in the past, but I am still a really competitive guy.”

While it may not be the most well-known tradition in the Navy, the passing of the Bull Frog has been an

The highlight of this title is just being called the Bull Frog by current and former teammates who transitioned to the civilian sector. It really feels cool to say it now.

— Cmdr. Steve Elias, NSW’s 17th Bull Frog

important part of SEAL culture, serving to honor and recognize the contributions of the most senior members of the team while also ensuring that their legacy and wisdom live on through the next generation of SEALs.

“I never thought I would be that man, but it happened,” said Elias. “I like the challenge that comes with being a SEAL and being a role model to this day.”



Rear Adm. Keith B. Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, presents a representative trophy during the Bull Frog turnover at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. “The Bull Frog” title is given to the longest continuously serving active-duty U.S. Navy SEAL. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Alex Perlman.



Naval Special Warfare Command

Naval Special Warfare commemorates Women's History Month, honors women's contributions to maritime special operations

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

The Naval Special Warfare community takes great pride in honoring its history and heritage, honoring the many servicemembers who have set the standard for today's maritime special operations community. Today's force stands upon the shoulders of those who have gone before us. March, as Women's History Month, is the perfect time to celebrate the rich history of the women within our ranks who have contributed to NSW's operational successes.

For Cmdr. Deanna Markey, an information professional officer at Naval Special Warfare Command, her interest in service began after the tragic events of Sept. 11 when she enlisted as an information systems technician. Following in the footsteps of her veteran grandfather and uncle, she knew the Navy was the right choice for her. After her first enlisted assignment, she knew she was contributing to the mission by doing her job well but felt constraints as an enlisted Sailor which led to her seeking a commission.

"Becoming an officer was always the plan, because I knew I wanted to make the largest contribution I felt I could and go as far as possible," said Markey.

Today, Markey serves on NSWC's staff within the communications department, ensuring seamless information flow to special operations teams who are deployed forward in support of integrated deterrence.

"Information is everything to the commanders," said



Chief Petty Officer Joan Jennings, supervises Navy Sea, Air and Land (SEAL) and Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewman (SWCC) candidates during swim training in the combat training tank onboard Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. Jennings is an instructor at Naval Special Warfare Basic Training Command, a component of Naval Special Warfare Center. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Benjamin K. Kittleson.

Markey. "The only way to make effective decisions is to understand the battlefield from both the enemy and your allies. Information is how that is possible."

As a member of the information warfare community, which includes communications, networks, intelligence, oceanography, meteorology, cryptology, electronic warfare, cyberspace operations, and space experts, Markey emphasized how critical the information environment is to

maintain and the challenges operators face in the information world.

“We take for granted just how much information flows on a normal day,” said Markey. “The biggest challenge we face is how to operate with the least amount of information due to denied communications.”

Markey says she’s appreciative of the opportunity to serve within the NSW community and the relationships she has built during her tour.

“Two mentors of mine came to work at NSW and recommended me to the [communications] department, and I will forever be grateful to them,” said Markey. “I love what I do, and I wish everyone could say that about their career.”

NSW is committed to increasing the representation of women in the force so the community can be reflective of the nation it serves. One way NSW works to achieve this equity is by employing a force integration officer (FIO). Lt. Konnor Cutrer, the current FIO, is a surface warfare officer with an operational background serving aboard ships and as an amphibious warfare tactics instructor, a difficult qualification to achieve. As the NSW FIO, Cutrer ensures the equitable integration of women into NSW by leading the Women in Special Operations instructor program. She provides support for instructors at NSW Assessment Command, NSW Basic Training Command, and female candidates for SEAL and SWCC programs.

“When I read the position description for NSW FIO, I was immediately excited for the challenges I would face while helping to pave the way for more women to join and thrive in the NSW community,” said Cutrer.

Women in special operations have contributed honorably to the force’s mission since it’s inception.

During World War II, Virginia Hall served in the Office of Strategic Services and supported the resistance in occupied France, which prompted the Gestapo to place a bounty on her. Later, she was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for her heroism and is now honored at the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Commando Hall of Honor.

Senior Chief Cryptologic Technician Shannon Kent paved the way for greater inclusion of women in Special Operations Forces, as one of the first women to pass the NSW Direct Support Course. Kent mastered signals and human intelligence throughout combat deployments and persuaded government and tribal leaders, along with merchants and soldiers, to give her information. Her intelligence work eventually led to the death and capture of some of America’s most wanted foreign adversaries. Unfortunately, Kent was killed in action in Syria in 2019.

“Today, women serve proudly across all our SOF formations in countless leadership roles and continue to forge new paths while serving in our most elite organizations,” said Gen. Bryan P. Fenton, commander, USSOCOM, in a March letter to the special operations force. “We are more effective and more lethal because of their service.”

Celebrating the contributions of women within the NSW community are not limited to one month a year. NSW continues to celebrate recent milestones of women in the community. In July 2021, NSW celebrated the first woman to graduate an NSW training pipeline when a woman Special Warfare Combat Craft-crewman completed Crewman Qualification Training with Class 115. In 2022, we celebrated Cmdr. Blythe Blakistone, who became the first woman to serve as a commanding officer of an NSW unit when she took command of Tactical Communications Command 1.

Since 1987, Americans have celebrated Women’s History Month, an annual heritage month that highlights the contributions of women to events in history and contemporary society. NSW joins the U.S. Navy and special operations community in celebrating the service, achievements and contributions women have given to make the military what it is today.

NSW is the nation’s elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet’s reach and gain and maintain access for the Joint Force in competition and conflict.



Cmdr. Blythe Blakistone salutes during a change of command ceremony for Naval Special Warfare Tactical Communications Command (TCC) 1. Naval Special Warfare Group 1, which mans, trains, and equips West Coast-based SEAL Teams, is comprised of SEAL Teams 1, 3, 5 and 7 as well as Logistics Support Unit 1 and TCC-1. TCC-1 supports SEAL Teams, other special operations forces, and conventional forces worldwide by providing tactical communications in all environments and levels of conflict. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Gaither.

Naval Special Warfare Command

Prince of Brunei visits Naval Special Warfare units



*By Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea Meiller
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

His Royal Highness (HRH) Prince ‘Abdul Mateen of Brunei visited Naval Special Warfare (NSW) West Coast-based commands in Coronado, Calif., for an immersive tour, March 13-14, 2023.

During the visit, HRH Prince Mateen, who is also a Brunei Royal Air Force Major, spent time with Rear Admiral Keith B. Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, and NSW personnel to discuss future areas for collaboration.

“One of my top priorities is to strengthen our relationships with like-minded maritime nations, deepening

interoperability and strategic cooperation,” said Davids. “Prince Mateen’s visit highlights the importance of our nations’ special operations capabilities to meet the challenges we face together particularly in the Indo-Pacific.”

During the visit HRH Prince Mateen also received an overview of NSWG-1’s human performance program. Comprised of strength and conditioning training, sports medicine, performance psychology, performance nutrition, and research and technology as it relates to human performance, the program uses a holistic approach to align resources for optimal performance and recovery.

With the U.S. Special Operations Command’s mantra of “humans are more important than hardware,” advanced programs like these increase NSW’s operational readiness



His Royal Highness Prince Abdul Mateen of Brunei, left, speaks with a Naval Special Warfare Sailor while viewing Naval Special Warfare Group 1’s combat training tank where U.S. naval commandos train to conduct high-risk aquatic evolutions. The visit helps enhance the interoperability of the United States and Brunei’s special operations forces, enable an exchange of expertise, and build capacity to respond to mutual threats and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea D. Meiller.



His Royal Highness Prince Abdul Mateen of Brunei fires an M4 carbine rifle during a visit to West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare units. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea D. Meiller.

and capability.

“We were honored to have His Royal Highness Prince Mateen visit our command and meet our Sailors,” said Capt. David Abernathy, commodore, NSWG 1. “The exchange of knowledge and expertise strengthens our partnership with Brunei and enables us to work more effectively together in the future.”

The tour also included a visit to the NSWG-1 combat training tank where naval commandos train to conduct high-risk aquatic evolutions. The force is placing a renewed emphasis on missions that only NSW can do on, and high-risk aquatic evolutions equips and prepares NSW Sailors to



His Royal Highness Prince Abdul Mateen of Brunei, right, and a service member assigned to Naval Special Warfare Basic Training Command watch an obstacle course demonstration during a visit to West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare units. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea D. Meiller.

carry out highly complex undersea missions.

“Maintaining and strengthening partnerships is critical to achieving the objectives laid out in the U.S. National Defense Strategy,” said Abernathy. “Our partnership with Brunei enhances our ability to operate in the Indo-Pacific region and supports our shared commitment to regional stability and security.”

On the second day of the tour, HRH Prince Mateen toured NSW Center, where he observed the training of NSW candidates. The prince’s next stop was an underway aboard a combatant craft in San Diego Harbor. Later that day, he toured a West Coast-based NSW unit headquarters.

The visit also builds upon HRH Prince Mateen’s visit alongside His Majesty the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah to Washington, D.C., to meet with President Biden last year during the U.S. Association of Southeast Asian Nations



His Royal Highness Prince Abdul Mateen of Brunei, right, speaks with Rear Adm. Keith Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command during a visit to West Coast-based Naval Special Warfare units. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea D. Meiller.

(ASEAN) Special Summit and continues a long tradition of security cooperation and people-to-people exchanges between the United States and Brunei.

Since signing the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce and Navigation over 170 years ago, the Navy has focused on strengthening and maintaining relationships with Brunei and throughout South and Southeast Asia and invigorating the Navy’s commitment to key ASEAN partners.

Brunei’s armed forces engage in joint exercises, training programs, and other military cooperation with the United States, with the annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise at the core of the bilateral defense relationship.

Naval Special Warfare Command

NSW, Naval Medical Center San Diego enhance partnership



*By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea Meiller
Naval Special Warfare Group ONE*

Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) 1 hosted Naval Medical Center San Diego's (Balboa) Executive Steering Committee – a collection of key leaders and subject matter experts across different medical specialties – on a tour of NSWG-1's medical facilities.

The visit encompassed a brief on the medical capabilities of NSWG-1 and included tours of the training pool and rope rescue course, physical therapy spaces, hyperbaric chamber, medical logistics warehouse, and human performance center. The tour also included the opportunity to observe special operations tactical medic skills sustainment training demonstrating casualty care from point of injury, trauma lanes, and prolonged care scenarios proctored in partnership with NMCS D Emergency Medicine physicians.

Cmdr. James Chung, group surgeon and senior medical officer at NSWG-1, led the tour group.

"This is an opportunity to showcase what we can do here at [Naval Special Warfare]," Chung said. "This tour allows us to discuss our capabilities, the unique patient set we cater to, and what we are doing to ensure we man, train and equip our medical personnel to be fully ready to forward deploy." "It is critical to prepare our medics to save lives in the future fight within the maritime environment... potentially geographically displaced, resource limited, and prolonged evacuation times."

As a Navy Medical Readiness Training Command, Balboa has a solid track record of providing training support to Naval Special Warfare medical personnel. The collaborative training within Balboa's bioskills and simulation training center has been instrumental in providing high fidelity models for basic and advanced medical skills.

Capt. Kimberly Davis, commanding officer, NMCS D, spoke highly of the partnership built with Naval Special Warfare.

"We have three main priorities at our command and the first one will always be warfighter readiness," she said.



Capt. David Abernathy, commander, Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) 1, speaks with Capt. Kimberly Davis, commanding officer, Naval Medical Center San Diego Balboa, during a tour of NSWG-1's medical facilities on board the Silver Strand Training Complex. Naval Special Warfare is the nation's elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet's reach and gain and maintain access for the Joint Force in competition and conflict. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea D. Meiller.

"Having an opportunity to really get to see the demand signals of these warfighters firsthand is crucial to us understanding how we can keep them healthy and quickly return them to the fight if illness or injury does occur."

While NSWG-1 organically provides much of the care that it's Sailors need, when a higher level of specialty care is needed, that's when the partnership between Naval Special Warfare and NMCS D is truly highlighted.

"We are the front lines of care for the warfighters here,

but when we need higher level care – specialty or inpatient care – we reach to Balboa to assist us in ensuring our service members are fully taken care of,” Chung said. “It is critically important to us to foster a healthy supporting/supported relationship with Balboa.”

One unique way NMCS D provides support to Naval Special Warfare is by setting up specialty clinic days at the Silver Strand Training Complex to meet the timely medical needs of SEALs and support staff.

“A few times a month, we set up point of care clinics at [Naval Special Warfare] to see Sailors and provide operative and non-operative care,”

said Cmdr. Lucas McDonald, NMCS D’s director of surgical services. “We have multiple specialties that can do this – urology, [ear, nose and throat], orthopedics, to name a few – and this capability allows us to expedite the care that our warfighters need so that we can get them healthy as soon as possible.”

Naval Special Warfare also possesses some unique medical skills training and treatment capabilities that were showcased on the tour.

“I had never seen a hyperbaric chamber in person after almost 27 years in Navy medicine,” said Capt. Wendy Cook, associate director for professional education, NMCS D. “The training pool was also really eye-opening to see. It’s very helpful to see all these capabilities in person and gain an awareness of just how wide our capabilities are.”

During the tour, Chung likened our warfighter readiness to ship maintenance cycles.

“Our priority here at [Naval Special Warfare] is to maintain our warfighters, our Navy SEALs, our enablers,” he said. “Just like the surface Navy conducts maintenance

Our priority here at [Naval Special Warfare] is to maintain our warfighters, our Navy SEALs, our enablers. Just like the surface Navy conducts maintenance and repairs on ships, we conduct maintenance and repairs too – but on our people. We need to make sure that our Sailors are recovered from any illness or injury they may have so that they can get back out there to train and be ready for whatever mission they are tasked with next.

— Cmdr. James Chung

and repairs on ships, we conduct maintenance and repairs too – but on our people. We need to make sure that our Sailors are recovered from any illness or injury they may have so that they can get back out there to train and be ready for whatever mission they are tasked with next.”

NSWG-1 medical offers services ranging from primary care to mental health

and undersea medical services and serves the West-Coast based SEAL teams and support commands.



Steven Elliott, Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) 1’s medical supply manager, speaks to members of Naval Medical Center San Diego Balboa’s Executive Steering Committee during a tour of NSWG-1’s medical facilities at the Silver Strand Training Complex. Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chelsea D. Meiller.

Air Force Special Operations Command



The last of them: The boneyard receives final MC-130H Combat Talon II

By U.S. Air Force Capt. Jantzen Floate
Air Force Special Operations Command

On April 2, 2023, the final MC-130H Combat Talon II made its last flight, arriving at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona to retire at the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG). This aircraft was the last of the final six MC-130Hs transferred for storage at the 309th AMARG, known as the boneyard.

The aircraft, tail number 89-0280 belonging to the 1st Special Operations Wing, was flown by a Total Force crew and included Lt Gen Tony Bauernfeind, AFSOC commander, to pay homage to the heroic legacy and service the Talon II has provided for AFSOC and the joint force over the past 30 years.

“Today marks the end of a legacy for one of the finest airplanes ever flown in AFSOC,” said Bauernfeind. “The MC-130H Combat Talon II, or as the crews that’ve flown it call it: “The Chariot of Armageddon,” held a critical mission of special operations forces mobility in infiltrating and exfiltrating into many of the hardest locations in the world while upholding the Talon Standard of absolute precision. I’m very proud of the entire Talon community; the crews, maintainers, and operations support personnel.”

Initially arriving at Hurlburt Field in June 1992, the MC-130H Combat Talon II is a derivative of the C-130H Hercules modified for special operations and played a vital role in AFSOC operations across the globe.

The mission of the Combat Talon II was to provide infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply of special operations forces and equipment in hostile and denied territories, while also providing a secondary air refueling capability for helicopters and vertical lift platforms. Additionally, it also provided SOF commanders with an all-weather, low-level penetration option utilizing its terrain following capabilities.

The standard aircrew complement for the MC-130H



On April 2, 2023, members of the Talon community gathered at Hurlburt Field, to see MC-130H, Tail Number 89-0280, take off for the last time. As members of the 15th Special Operations Squadron prepared for takeoff, families, friends and former MC-130H crew joined them to say goodbye to the aircraft. Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Natalie Fiorilli.

was seven consisting of two pilots, a navigator, two loadmasters, a flight engineer, and an electronic warfare officer.

“The Talon II was a navigator’s dream due to the planning required and systems expertise necessary to fly it,” said Col. Richard Greszler, Jr., AFSOC Operations Center commander and prior MC-130H navigator. “The ability to fly in mountainous terrain in [instrument meteorological conditions] required extremely detailed mission planning, so every flight required the whole crew to understand the limitations of the aircraft and the crew, and to push right up to the edge in order to be successful. The ability to project power and penetrate denied or sensitive areas to further our Nation’s interest was the hallmark of the Talon II.”

Over the last 30 years, the Combat Talon II was critical to many missions from evacuations of civilians

from the Republic of the Congo in 1997, to enduring counterterrorism and counter-violent extremist organizations (C-VEO) operations.

“The legacy of the Talon II fills me with pride,” Greszler said. “Pride in a community which looked to be tasked to defend our Nation no matter the danger. The aircraft was an amazing machine, but it was the men and women who crewed and maintained the Chariot of Armageddon that made it special. They constantly strove to improve and never let their teammates down.”

With the completion of the final trip to AMARG, the MC-130H fleet has approximately 264,442 total flight hours and 106,850 sorties since its start of operations in late 1992.

Replacing the MC-130H, along with the retired E and P models, is the MC-130J Commando II, which has been in operation since 2011.

The Commando II flies clandestine, or low visibility, single or multi-ship, low-level infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply of special operations forces, by airdrop or airland and air refueling missions for special operations helicopters and tiltrotor aircraft, intruding politically sensitive or hostile territories. The MC-130J primarily flies missions at night to reduce probability of visual acquisition and intercept by airborne threats.

The last MC-130H in the 1st SOW’s inventory will be retired later this summer in Hurlburt Field’s airpark, cementing the retirement of the Talon II fleet in AFSOC.

Below are a few of the notable MC-130H tail numbers and missions that highlight the various missions

the Combat Talon II will be remembered for:

89-0280: Coined “The Highlander”, 89-0280 is one of the few Combat Talon II aircraft to have been stationed at every permanent duty location for Talon II aircraft, it was later the first aircraft to respond and land at Sendai International Airport during Operation Tomadachi following the 9.0 earthquake and tsunami in Fukushima, Japan on March 16, 2011. The mission to Sendai opened the airfield for mass follow-on relief missions, and the first C-17 was able to land four hours later.

85-0011: Coined “The Ace of Spades”, aircraft 85-0011 is known for transporting Saddam Hussein after his capture near the town of Tikrit in December 2003. Additionally, this aircraft participated in earthquake relief efforts during a 1997 JCET down in Venezuela. During the immediate aftermath, the crew of 0011 airlifted 175,000 lbs of supplies and received the Order of Jose Antonio Anzoategui, Venezuela’s highest medal for gallantry.

86-1699: Coined “Merlin’s Magic”, it participated in Operation Firm Response to conduct a 14.4 flight hour NEO of 56 non-combatants from the Republic of the Congo in 1997.

89-0283: This aircraft was the fourth of four Talons that opened OEF as a Rhino Raider in 2001. Rhino LZ was the first combat airfield seizure in Afghanistan in 2001. Additionally, 0283 conducted the exfil of Hamid Karzai on November 4, 2001. This aircraft also conducted a BLU-82 drop on Masir-e-Sharif and participated in the 2008 Colombia hostage rescue.



The MC-130H Combat Talon II used for the airframe’s final flight under the 492nd Special Operations Wing is photographed before take-off at Hurlburt Field, Florida, May 31, 2022. Combat Talon IIs first arrived at Hurlburt June 29, 1992, and after acceptance testing, began official flying operations Oct. 17, 1992. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Miranda Mahoney.

Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



Marine Raiders celebrate 17 years of exceptional service



An explosive ordnance disposal technician with Marine Forces Special Operations Command prepares to remotely assess a building using a robot during a training event June 18, 2022. The EOD primer tests all aspects of a technician's knowledge and expertise needed to perform as the only tech on a Marine Special Operations Team while operating in austere, politically sensitive, or hostile environments. EOD technicians assigned to MARSOC have completed Marine Special Operations Forces Explosive Ordnance Disposal Level 1, which trains Fleet Marine Force EOD technicians in the knowledge and skills required to support the core tasks assigned to MARSOC as a special operations capability specialist. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Brennan Priest.

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

During its 17th anniversary on Feb. 24, 2023, Marine Forces Special Operations Command and the Marine Raiders that fill its ranks celebrated a history and legacy that extends beyond the most recent years as a service component under U.S. Special Operations Command.

Dating back to Feb. 16, 1942, with the establishment of 1st Raider Battalion in World War II, Marines

consistently participated in and shaped special operations. 1st Raider Battalion, along with 2nd, 3rd and 4th Raider Battalions, proved essential in the Pacific theater providing a unique skillset and operational capability that differed from conventional Marine units at the time. Even with the success of the Marine Raiders during WWII, 4th Marines, 6th Marine Division assumed command of the four Raider battalions and aligned them to a more conventional mission in February 1944.

While Marines assisted or participated in special

operations in various capacities throughout the next 60 years, the Marine Corps would not establish a dedicated special operations unit until after 9/11. Up until that time though, Marine Force Reconnaissance and the innovations of units such as Marine Corps Test Unit 1, which developed specialized tactics and techniques including employment concepts for relatively new rotary-wing aviation, carried on the legacy of the Marine Raiders.

Once the Global War on Terrorism began, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld directed the creation of a Marine Corps component in SOCOM. This began with Detachment One, a pilot program made up of predominately Force Reconnaissance Marines and support staff who operated alongside Navy SEALs from Naval Special Warfare Group One.

Following Det One's successes in Iraq, the Marine Corps officially activated MARSOC on Feb. 24, 2006. The 2,500-person command, pulled largely from Force Reconnaissance units on both coasts and deployed its first units within six months of its creation. MARSOC would later expand and redesignate its units as Marine Raiders in honor of its WWII heritage.

"The unconquerable spirit of our people builds on the foundation and legacy of Marines throughout our history," said Maj. Gen. Matthew Trollinger, MARSOC Commander. "Our Marine Corps and Marine Raider heritage shapes the way we attack unique problems with novel and innovative approaches grounded in our ties to the littorals and expeditionary, amphibious operations."

Moving forward while honoring the legacy of the Marine Raiders of the past, MARSOC remains focused on achieving success. As the 21st century battlefield rapidly evolves and the need for multi-domain special operations capabilities increases in an ever-changing global landscape, the command continues to adapt to meet new threats.

"Looking to the future," stated Trollinger, "MARSOC will pursue strategic shaping and reconnaissance in the littorals; experiment, innovate, and evolve faster than adversary comprehension and adaptation; and create a more capable, professional, and effective force to fight and win around the globe if required."

Prioritizing SSR in the littorals will ensure that MARSOC achieves success across the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environment. By developing special operations elements to conduct activities to gain awareness of adversary intentions and capabilities, Marine Raiders will deter, disrupt, or increase current and future adversary risk.

At the core of MARSOC's SSR focus stands capable

Marine Raiders able to outmaneuver adversary forces by employing a range of skillsets. These skillsets, when employed by special operations officers, critical skills operators, special operations capability specialists, and the many servicemembers and civilians which comprise the command, exponentially increase unit performance as the demands of SSR transform MARSOC into a littoral special operations force of the future.

"Each and every person in MARSOC contributes to our Marine Raider legacy by bringing diverse experiences and skillsets that contribute to solving today's challenges and tomorrow's problems," concluded Trollinger. "We remain focused on our role in shaping that future as a highly motivated team committed to providing high-performing Marine special operations forces to achieve global mission success."



Explosive ordnance disposal technicians with Marine Forces Special Operations Command and Air Force Special Operations Command conduct a patrol alongside critical skills operators during a training event June 24, 2022. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Brennan Priest.

Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



3rd Marine Raider Battalion, V18 conduct interoperability training

*By U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command*

Marine Raiders with 3rd Marine Raider Battalion hosted close-quarters battle training with Marines from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, Aug. 29 to Sept. 9, 2022.

This training evolution allowed the Marine Raiders to collaborate with members of the Fleet Marine Force in advanced tactics, techniques and procedures and foster a relationship promoting integration, interoperability and interdependence. The Marine Raiders were also able to use this training evolution to maintain their proficiency in CQB skillsets while developing skills necessary to develop training with a partner nation.

“The level of training that we are able to get, it’s above and beyond what we can sometimes facilitate,” said 2nd Lt. James Durden, a platoon commander with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines. “I think that everybody having a chance to get this training would only take the Marine Corps to bigger and better places.”

During the two-week event, Marines from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, conducted training at the flat range to assess their marksmanship skills, executed stationary and moving drills to mimic the CQB environment, and were introduced to the new M18 Modular Handgun System to familiarize them with the weapon system.

“All of this [training] compressed into these two weeks, they can take it back to their units and continue to refresh themselves but also carry it to their brothers in other platoons, in other companies, and let their knowledge filter outward and upwards to make them more lethal down range,” said an element leader with the Marine Special Operations Team.

This training fostered an environment that helped break down barriers between Special Operation Forces and conventional force communities, unite tactical and operational efforts, and create a healthy environment of interdependence on the battlefield.



Marine Raiders with 3rd Marine Raider Battalion and Marines with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, conduct shooting drills at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Aug. 28 – Sept. 9, 2022. The training included static and moving drills, single and multi-room clears, and full team house runs. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis.

“The only way that we generate efficiency on the battlefield is by working together, doing what we’re doing right now with the Marines from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines,” said an element leader with the MSOT. “Learning as much as we possibly can about each other, and how each entity operates so that when the time comes for us to get the job done down range, we already have a reference point and we can come together, iron out any rough spots, but the foundation is already laid for us to increase our lethality in the battlespace.”

MARSOC will continue to hold collaborative training events to strengthen the collective efforts between SOF and conventional forces and emphasize the importance of combined effects in tomorrow’s conflicts.

“I was very impressed with their fire team leaders and squad leaders and the healthy dynamic of the platoon,” said the MSOT commander. “It was great to see the beginning product and extremely rewarding at the end to see where our Marine brethren came to with the training and the increase of their lethality.”

MARSOC, 2nd MLG evaluate new CH-53K King Stallion Helicopter

*By U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command*

Marine Forces Special Operations Command's Paraloft personnel teamed up with 2nd Marine Logistics Group's Air Delivery Platoon to evaluate the secondary mission capabilities of the CH-53K King Stallion helicopter, Oct. 25 – Nov. 3, 2022. This evaluation included day and night aerial cargo delivery, low-level static line parachute operations, and military freefall operations.

“The validation of these operations and the data collected will provide added capability to the fleet in support of the initial [Marine Expeditionary Unit] deployment and lay the groundwork for future operational employment of the CH-53K,” explained Lt. Col. Adam D. Shirley, Marine Raider Regiment Air/Fires Officer and CH-53K pilot. “This event was significant because it was the first time that any of these tasks have been conducted from this new, immensely capable aircraft.”

Headquarters Marine Corps chose MARSOC to assist in the evaluation of the new helicopter due to the command's unique insertion and extraction proficiency. 2nd MLG provide subject matter expertise to augment MARSOC's Paraloft personnel during the aerial delivery operations.

“The CH-53K will surely play a crucial role in supporting not only MARSOC and the Marine Corps, but our joint, combined, and coalition partners worldwide,” said Shirley.

The CH-53K King Stallion helicopter is the Marine Corps' newest, and most advanced assault support, heavy-lift helicopter replacing the CH-53E Super Stallion. The primary mission of the CH-53K is the ship-to-shore transport of

heavy equipment and supplies in support of amphibious operations and subsequent actions ashore.

“A requirement for the Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Two One is to validate an aircraft's ability to execute those mission essential tasks, as outlined in the Training and Readiness Manual,” explained Shirley.

MRR's Paraloft personnel evaluated all tasks in accordance with Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Two One's test plan and evaluation criteria using a crawl-walk-run approach. Flight Test Engineers and program representatives observed and recorded data while MARSOC subject matter experts validated aircraft rigging procedures for static line parachuting and aerial cargo delivery.

“The first phase began with packing parachutes, jumper and Jump Master refresher training, [drop zone] preparation, and safety briefs,” continued Shirley. “The next phase included experimentation with the aerial delivery via parachute of 200-pound door bundles and 500-pound cargo drops from the ramp of the aircraft. The final phase consisted of personnel parachute operations that included military free fall jumps from 10,000 feet.”

The tests are designed to validate the aircraft's ability to execute tasks that not associated with the aircraft's primary mission of assault support transport. Secondary missions include helicopter insertion and extraction operations, medical transport, and casualty evacuation.

“Once secondary mission tasks are validated, the CH-53K will be authorized to conduct all tasks required in the Training and Readiness Manual that received a favorable evaluation,” said Shirley. “If any task does not receive a favorable evaluation, it will be referred to engineering for a solution and be re-evaluated at a later date.”

Marines with Marine Forces Special Operations Command and 2nd Marine Logistics Group evaluate secondary mission capabilities of the CH-53K King Stallion helicopter in the vicinity of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, Oct. 25, 2022. The evaluation included day and night aerial cargo delivery, low-level static line parachute operations, and military freefall operations. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis.



Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



Marine Raiders to explore “What Winning Looks Like”

By *U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Matthew Finnerty*
Marine Forces, Special Operations Command

The Cognitive Raider – a foundational concept established with the development and publication of Marine Special Operations Forces 2030 – encompasses the requirement to develop qualities of intellect, judgement, creativity, and teamwork in future Marine Raiders while maintaining the determination and endurance which serve as hallmarks of current success. MARSOF 2030 identified four innovation pathways including the Cognitive Raider, which applies both to the individual and the collective capabilities of the team. It also serves as a challenging imperative as

thinking Marine Raiders provide the foundation for developing and sustaining a learning organization like Marine Forces Special Operations Command.

While MARSOC continues to examine, improve, and validate its training to provide high-performing MARSO, the command also began an annual educational symposium to advance critical and creative thinking around topics vital to the future operating environment. The inaugural Cognitive Raider Symposium took place in 2019 when Marine Raiders partnered with the Naval Postgraduate School’s Defense Analysis Department to examine irregular warfare. Since the first symposium, MARSOC partnered with NPS on subsequent themes covering great power competition and enterprise-level agility as



Christopher C. Miller, former Acting Secretary of Defense, visits Marine Forces Special Operations Command as part of the Cognitive Raider Education Series on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Mar. 24, 2023. Miller shared his views on organizational dynamics and what winning looks like for special operations forces. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis.

the yearly topic changed to align with current MARSOC, Special Operations Command, Marine Corps, and Department of Defense initiatives.

This year's fifth iteration scheduled for June 22, 2023, explores What Winning Looks Like in integrated deterrence. The main symposium serves as a culmination of several events throughout the past year including education seminars led by the U.S. Agency for International Development, former Acting Secretary of Defense Chris Miller, and Army special forces veteran John Stryker Meyer. These quarterly events brought together historical perspectives, interagency partners, and distinguished visitors while ensuring Marine Raiders remain engaged throughout the year regardless of their ability to attend the main symposium.

"The 'warm-start' events facilitated a culture of learning throughout the year by exposing our Marine Raiders to experts, opinions, and concepts from across a spectrum of topics valuable to special operations and directly linked to What Winning Looks Like," said the CRS '23 lead planner. "As an ambidextrous organization, accomplishing the mission today while experimenting and innovating for future success, MARSOC must focus on unique education opportunities to diversify our way of thinking and provide the most capable MARSOF in support of SOCOM and the joint force."

What Winning Looks Like encompasses a holistic evaluation of future missions and requirements for MARSOF and how MARSOC positions itself to prepare its personnel to succeed in a rapidly evolving global security environment. For the command, this includes the further implementation of strategic shaping and reconnaissance and development of littoral irregular warfare and littoral special reconnaissance to ensure MARSOC remains relevant in littoral special operations. Given the urgency to modernize the force in anticipation of that future, What Winning Looks Like contains implications for short and long-term capabilities, organization, missions, and partnerships of significant interest to Marine Raiders and SOF overall.

To explore, evaluate, and innovate with regard to MARSOC's posture to win now and in the future, CRS '23 will include education sessions, keynote speakers, and discussion panels focused on What Winning Looks Like. Structured to provide value for all MARSOC personnel, including service members, civilians, and contractors of all ranks, the symposium will prove valuable to participants from SOCOM and the Marine Corps as well.

"Marine Raiders, and our partners across the



Christopher C. Miller, former Acting Secretary of Defense, visits Marine Forces Special Operations Command as part of the Cognitive Raider Education Series on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Mar. 24, 2023. Miller met with Maj. Gen. Matthew G. Trollinger, MARSOC commander, to discuss how MARSOC is implementing information as a warfighting function and leading the charge in strategic shaping and reconnaissance. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Jesula Jeanlouis.

SOCOM enterprise, will leave CRS '23 with a more robust understanding of MARSOC's contributions to winning in the future as well as experiencing the opportunity to directly impact that future state," said the lead planner. "Each year that we host this event, and the numerous events leading up to the symposium, ensures that our people foster a creative and critical-thinking mindset while expanding the aperture of knowledge at the lowest levels."

In addition, the symposium will take time to recognize the winners of the Cognitive Raider essay contest which asks authors to examine topics including how MARSOC contributes to winning as part of SOCOM, how organizational culture contributes to future success, and what initiatives best posture the command to address upcoming operational requirements. Past winners came from across the ranks of MARSOC and the symposium allowed authors to present transformational ideas to the larger force.

The Cognitive Raider concept and its supporting educational and training events such as CRS '23 directly contribute to the First SOF Truth – humans are more important than hardware. As MARSOC and SOF operate in a constantly evolving global security environment requiring urgent modernization across the force, the capabilities of a creative and strategic thinking individual provide an outsized impact on mission accomplishment and the success of the team.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command Paraguay President Mario Abdo Benitez meets with U.S. military commanders in Tampa



Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benitez (left) visited U.S. Special Operations Command headquarters March 30, 2023, where he met with U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, USSOCOM commander, (center) and U.S. Army Gen. Laura Richardson, commander of U.S. Southern Command, as well as other senior command and Department of Defense officials. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

U.S. Southern Command courtesy story

Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benitez visited U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) March 30, where he met with U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, SOCOM commander, U.S. Army Gen. Laura Richardson, commander of U.S. Southern Command

(SOUTHCOM), as well as other senior command and Department of Defense officials.

The leaders discussed the continuing defense-cooperation partnership between Paraguay and the U.S. The close, collaborative ties between the United States and Paraguay include many decades of strong security-cooperation based on common interests, shared goals



Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benítez (left) and his wife, Silvana López Moreira, are escorted by U.S. Army Gen. Bryan Fenton, U.S. Special Operations commander, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., March 29, 2023. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

and mutual respect.

This is President Abdo’s first visit to SOCOM after he was initially invited last year by former SOCOM commander, Army Gen. Richard D. Clarke. The Paraguayan President previously visited SOUTHCOM in 2018 as president-elect.

Richardson briefed President Abdo on the command’s mission and its commitment to working closely with enduring partners across the region, like Paraguay, to support lasting peace and stability in the Western Hemisphere.

“From working with regional partners in support of counter illicit trafficking efforts, to their widely recognized contributions to international peacekeeping operations, the Paraguayan armed forces are a highly respected and trusted security partner,” said Richardson. “We are committed to continuing our longstanding security cooperation and supporting our Paraguayan partners’ readiness and capacity-building goals.”

Fenton discussed SOCOM’s role as a global combatant command with a strong SOUTHCOM connection, emphasizing special operations’ history of working with nations like Paraguay to build the type of long-standing partnership the region can rely on.

“The power of enduring relationships with partners around the world is a hallmark of U.S. special

The power of enduring relationships with partners around the world is a hallmark of U.S. special operations forces, and the relationship we have with our Paraguayan counterparts is incredible.

— Gen. Bryan Fenton

operations forces, and the relationship we have with our Paraguayan counterparts is incredible,” said Fenton. “Through our conversations with President Abdo during his visit, and thanks to his commitment and leadership, I’m confident our partnership will only grow stronger, benefiting the security interests of the U.S., Paraguay, and the wider region.”

The U.S. and Paraguayan armed forces enjoy longstanding ties, and defense cooperation between them includes a wide range of partnership activities, such as exercises, training, counter-narcotics cooperation, humanitarian assistance, reciprocal visits, personnel exchanges, and the sharing of information and expertise.

Most recently, U.S. Air Force leaders joined Paraguay’s top military officials to commemorate the Paraguayan Air Force’s Centennial Anniversary Feb. 21-24. President Abdo was on hand to greet senior members of visiting delegations and pinned each of them with the Medal of Honor for the Centennial Commemoration of the Paraguayan Air Force.

At SOUTHCOM, the headquarters’ staff includes one senior Paraguayan military officer whose invaluable expertise, advice and insights support the command’s security cooperation with partner nations in the region.

Paraguay also has a State Sponsorship Program relationship with Massachusetts. The state’s Army and Air National Guard have completed more than 100 exchanges with their South American defense counterparts.



Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benítez receives a briefing on Special Operations Forces equipment at U.S. special operations command headquarters, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., March 30, 2023. Photo by Michael Bottoms.

Headquarters - U.S. Special Operations Command

Joint Special Operations University conducts countering violent extremism course for U.S. and allied partners

*By Jennifer Arnold
Joint Special Operations University*

The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) course offered at the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) began in 2013, when awareness for counter-extremism and prevention of violent extremism was brought to the forefront as an ongoing topic of concern. To this day, the course is frequently updated to reflect the changing nature of extremism and the evolving tactics used by those that seek to perpetuate violent extremism. The course continues to develop future military and senior key leaders around the world and aims to heighten awareness of a diverse range of national, and international military and civilian leaders from various backgrounds to work together to derive creative solutions to detect, deter, mitigate, and counteract violent extremism.

Throughout the two-week course, different instructors facilitate discussions via the Socratic method while sharing their unique perspectives on violent extremism, highlighting how it varies from country to country, and how it is addressed in different societies around the world. Discussion topics include critical thinking, strategic public policy and development, preventative measures for local threats, factors and indicators common to radicalization, and the exploitation of under-governed spaces and people. The most recent course had a total of 14 students from nine different countries.

“Due to world changes, there has been a shift in the rise of irregular warfare. With irregular warfare, there is more focus on indirect approaches, community policing, and stopping extremism before it becomes an issue,” says Hugh Sutherland, CVE course director. “[Methods of prevention could include] informational



Student groups play a computer simulation entitled, “Contagion,” to learn how extremist ideology can spread, and steps the government can take to counter that ideology Feb. 7, 2023. It is administered by, and in partnership with, the Naval Postgraduate School’s Global Education and Community Collaboration Online program, and each class executes the simulation at the beginning and end of the course. Joint Special Operations University photo.

operations, strategic communication, and modifying government policies to address root causes of problems.”

At the beginning and end of the course, student teams play a strategic gaming application entitled, “Contagion,” administered in partnership with the Naval Post-Graduate School’s Global Education Community Collaboration Online Program. Each team attempts to gain control of a country. Teams work together to gain the support of a population majority or regional majority of the country, demonstrating how extremist ideology can spread, and the steps the government can take to counter that ideology. As a

result, teams must collaborate to decide how to gain influence with the resources at their disposal. The simulation aims to offer a new perspective on the resources, decision-making, and strategic thinking that goes into gaining influence.

“[Throughout the course], we take a look at the root causes,” states Sutherland. “What are they? What causes them to be extreme, and what can the government do to mitigate and or prevent extremism? [Bearing these questions in mind], students develop a policy option for their governments and present these recommendations in the final course presentation.”

The culminating project of the course is a 20-minute presentation addressing a violent extremist group in a specific assigned country. Considering the current state of this country, teams decide how to address common issues after evaluating the factors of modern-day extremism. The small groups articulate the best courses of action for their selected country’s criteria and assess potential risks with the recommended policy option. After their presentation, course instructors give constructive feedback on their policies.

“This is the first group of students that had a real insurgency in some of their home countries as an ongoing problem. Two weeks ago, they were strangers from nine different countries...we worked in networks together, and I saw three teams that worked together to create a solution,” says Maj. Gen. (Ret) Simeon Trombitas, course Senior Mentor and evaluator.

Students from around the globe are nominated by their governments, vetted and selected by their respective Theater Special Operations Command and American Embassy to attend the course. As a result, this presents the opportunity to gain insight from a unique background of countries and cultures. Additionally, the Regional Defense Fellowship Program (RDFP) includes a Field Studies Program that encourages and permits visiting students to see the local area around MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. For example, the first activity was a tour of Ybor City’s Historic District. The Field Studies Program strengthens the relationships between the students and encourages connection outside of the classroom.

“As we prepare to go overseas, this course has



The students of the Countering Violent Extremism course participate in the field studies program which includes a tour of the Ybor City Historic District, Feb 6, 2023. While learning about the local history of Tampa, Florida, they create lasting relationships with other fellow classmates. Joint Special Operations University photo.

helped me to network and create an open forum at an international level,” says Sergeant First Class Stefanie

This is the first group of students that had a real insurgency in some of their home countries as an ongoing problem. Two weeks ago, they were strangers from nine different countries...we worked in networks together, and I saw three teams that worked together to create a solution.

— Maj. Gen. (Ret) Simeon Trombitas

Fendry, reflecting on her experience as a student. “As soldiers, we go everywhere, and now I have the tools to connect my fellow soldiers with other allied partners. This course has helped me gain an understanding of different countries and their backgrounds, and we can apply this knowledge in real-time to problems in different areas of the world.”

“Students analyze problems... and then consider

what the government can do to address those issues,” reflects Sutherland on the course trajectory. “If those initial steps don’t work, what else can they do? What are the long-term efforts? And always, we evaluate and develop solutions, continually assessing and changing our approach.

The CVE course is sponsored by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency’s Regional Defense Fellowship Program. It is offered two times an academic year at JSOU. Formally organized in 2000, JSOU’s mission is to educate Special Operations Forces to address strategic and operational challenges, arming them with the ability to think through problems with knowledge, insight, and foresight.



Member of Cote D'Ivoire Armed Forces practice movements before conducting raids on a naval ship during Flintlock in Volta, Ghana, March 9, 2023. Exercises like Flintlock help strengthen the defense capabilities of African governments and regional organizations to address security threats more effectively – ultimately opening opportunities and reducing threats to the international community abroad and at home. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Charles Brock.