



TIP OF THE SPEAR

**SPECIAL TACTICS AIRMAN
RECEIVES MEDAL UPGRADE
TO AIR FORCE CROSS**



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLA., FEBRUARY 2017



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Special Tactics Airman receives medal upgrade to Air Force Cross ... 24

Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) The Air Force Cross will be presented to Staff Sgt. Christopher Baradat, now separated, who had previously received the Silver Star medal for his essential role in rescuing 150 coalition members in Afghanistan, April 6, 2013. Courtesy photo.

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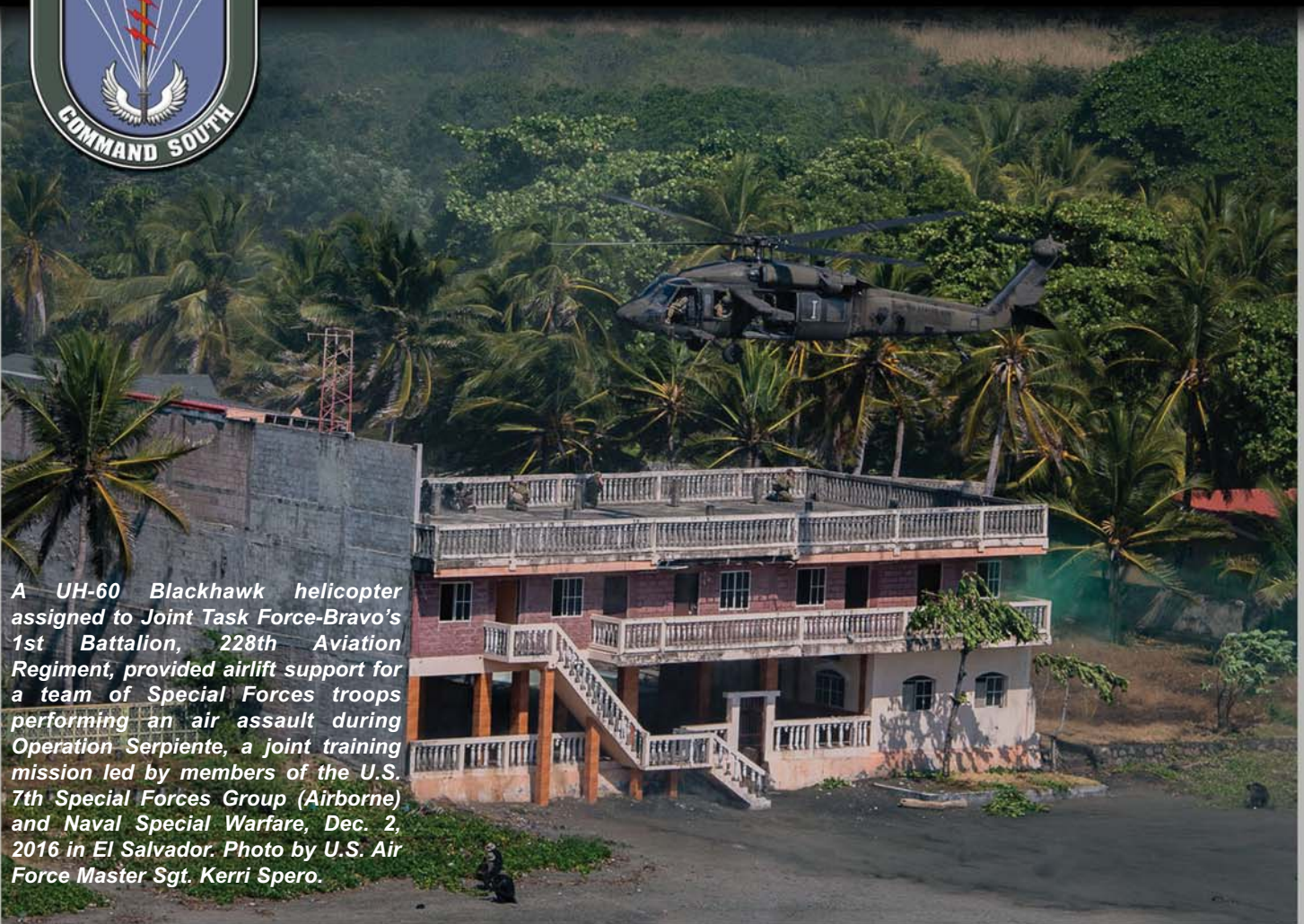
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SOF AROUND THE WORLD - EL SALVADOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – SOUTH



A UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter assigned to Joint Task Force-Bravo's 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, provided airlift support for a team of Special Forces troops performing an air assault during Operation Serpiente, a joint training mission led by members of the U.S. 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and Naval Special Warfare, Dec. 2, 2016 in El Salvador. Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Kerri Spero.

US, El Salvador forces combine to execute air assault training

By U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Kerri Spero
Joint Task Force - Base Bravo

Salvadoran soldiers and special operations personnel assigned to 1st Airborne Brigade and 1st Special Forces Command completed Operation Serpiente, a joint air assault training mission led by members of the U.S. 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Naval Special Warfare, and Joint Task Force-Bravo's 1st Battalion 228th Aviation Regiment Nov. 28 - Dec. 2, 2016 at Ilopango International Airport.

Operation Serpiente was the largest air assault exercise of its kind to take place in El Salvador in recent years, requiring an expert level of partnership cooperation among

ground and air assets.

"Synchronization of tasks and having different people working on different efforts, all at the same time, came together so we were prepared to conduct the training and the missions safely," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Richard Tucker, 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment commander, "We worked with the special operations forces teams here, who brought the specialized tactics and mission planning."

1-228 AVN provided airlift support at the request of the U.S. Special Forces group, and trained three elements of Salvadoran forces.

According to the U.S. Army, air assault operations are meant to rapidly reposition personnel and equipment to

enable the combined arms team to strike over extended distances and terrain to attack the enemy where and when it is most vulnerable by utilizing vertical take-off and landing aircraft--such as the helicopter--to seize and hold key terrain which has not been fully secured, and to directly engage enemy forces.

The week's training momentum began with a day of progressive rounds of Salvadoran personnel practicing rappel and fast-roping from UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters in a nearby soccer field at Ilopango International Airport. Approximately 45 partner nation personnel accomplished 490 rappel and fast rope executions.

Additionally, the 1-228 AVN Medical Evacuation Company provided tactically focused first aid and medical evacuation training and procedures to personnel assigned to the U.S. Embassy. They practiced techniques that incorporated the Blackhawk helicopter platform such as loading patients and testing timeline capabilities.

The next day's training mission involved a jungle insertion and a scenario-based exercise where personnel rappelled from two UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters into a jungle environment, engaged enemy forces and secured the area. This double-ship air assault enabled the soldiers to move quickly to their objective and seize the initiative from the opposing force.

The third day of training consisted of helocasting into Lake Ilopango. Helocasting is an airborne technique used by small unit, special operations forces to insert personnel into a military area of operations.

"This was a self-starting program," said Tucker, "The special operations teams provided us with rescue Zodiac boats and [the 228th] cast about 70 swimmers into Lake Ilopango. At the same time we validated and trained people out of our MEDEVAC Company for the overwater hoist rescues. So we had two separate lanes going at the same time in the lake."

The final day of training and culminating event, was an air assault that integrated all of the ground forces that were held previously during the week, as well as the aviation and U.S. special operations advisors, into a full mission profile.

The notional target was an abandoned hotel along the coast--the targeted area has real-world challenges with organizations that negatively influence the nation here. The air assault was conducted utilizing fast rope insertion onto the roof of the building. The assault team had to again move quickly to their objective and seize control of the building.

Both air assault missions concluded with a MEDEVAC

exercise, which helps build confidence in partner nation forces. It is important for personnel to know what to expect when a MEDEVAC helicopter arrives and how to approach the helicopters, load patients aboard and how to interact with their crew chief and flight medic in order to do ground handoffs.

Additionally, during this final mission, the 1-228 AVN employed a forward arming and refueling point via CH-47 Chinook helicopter with extended range fuel tanks. This capability validated training for petroleum supply specialists. A command post was also established in order to synchronize the forces further away from the operations area at Ilopango International Airport.

To many people, an air assault operation may seem simple: get on a helicopter, fly and fight. The reality is that, like most military operations, it is a complex synchronization of moving elements.

"We had a willing and able partner nation force that wanted to train and is involved with the U.S special operations forces here," said Tucker, "We had a group of leaders and planners who truly bought into the training objectives. We went through the efforts of investing the right assets and personnel who maintained the flexibility and aggressiveness to get through all training objectives."

Extensive planning is required to organize aircraft movement, logistics challenges of supplying and sustaining dozens of soldiers and their equipment for a multiple-day sustained engagement.

"We made the mission happen for the partner nation ground commander who wanted to train their soldiers, and by doing this we also trained our soldiers at the same time. We held everyone at a high standard," said Sgt. Maj. Luis Romero, 1-228 AVN command sergeant major.

Once the mission was complete, the U.S. and Salvadoran teams conducted an after action review. The AAR allowed everyone to understand what went well during the training, and how they can improve the training to obtain better results in the future.

"Through training and interactions like this we want to support the efforts to have JTF-Bravo and the United States be the partner of choice for El Salvador," said Tucker. "We met all the training objectives and it was a very successful training mission."

Operation Serpiente was an example of exercises designed to promote regional stability and security, while strengthening partnership capacity, and fostering trust while strengthening partnership capabilities between Central American nations and the United States.



SOF AROUND THE WORLD - COLOMBIA SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – SOUTH



U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers with Special Operations Command South salute Dec. 7, 2016 during an award ceremony in Florencia, Colombia. Colombia's National Army Special Anti-drug Brigade, known as BRCNA in Spanish, honored the Special Forces Soldiers' unit for their training contributions. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Osvaldo Equite.

Colombian army counter-narcotics brigade honors US Special Forces

*By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Osvaldo Equite
Special Operations Command South*

Every Dec. 7 for the past sixteen years, Colombian soldiers from the National Army's Special Anti-drug Brigade known as the BRCNA gathered in Larandia, Florencia, Colombia, for an end-of-year ceremony to celebrate the unit's anniversary and recognize distinguished service.

Unlike past award ceremonies, this year's hot December day marked the first time U.S. Special Operations Command South assigned Green Berets

marched their unit's colors across the parade field.

Waving high beside its partner nations' colors was B. Co., 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group's (Airborne) guidon, representing years of U.S. special operations forces' commitment to BRCNA's counter narcotics mission.

"Today we commemorate sixteen years of a permanent fight against drugs in a ceremony where all Colombians can recognize the special counternarcotic brigade's hard work against drug trafficking," said BRCNA Commander Colombian army Col. Walther G. Jimenez. "However, the ceremony is also an opportunity

to thank all the people who have helped this brigade develop in its operations.”

Operations that for sixteen years have weakened drug trafficking along the foothills of the Andes mountain range in Colombia’s Eastern Mountain Range Cordillera Oriental.

Although U.S. Special Operations Forces worked with the unit during exchange training since its creation in December 2000, it was not until 2014 when the Green Berets began to train the BRCNA to meet operational needs, said a U.S. Special Forces team leader currently working with the Colombian special unit.

Since then, four Operational Detachment Alpha teams have made training recommendations to improve the BRCNA’s effectiveness based on planning observations and while monitoring the unit’s operations from miles away.

“They bring us that training that’s so important to us,” said the BRCNA commander. “Our soldiers are proud to receive the American Soldiers’ training and support that continues to make us better and better.”

According to a Colombian military report, since the unit’s activation 890 thousand hectares of coca cultivation have been destroyed, 107 tons of finished or in-process cocaine have been seized and destroyed, and 854 narco-terrorists of different illegal groups have been

killed in combat or placed in the hands of authorities.

“Every time we do an operation we do better with the training and the assistance that the [7th SFG (A)] detachments give us,” said the BRCNA commander. “For those reasons, we decided to give them the medal that we receive when we go to combat.”

Several general officers attended the ceremony and conferred the military medal, which is detailed with each of the Colombian army’s military branch colors, for “Distinguished Services in Operations against Drug Trafficking” onto the B. Co., 3rd Bn., 7th SFG’s (A) guidon.

“For us the award is in recognition of 7th group’s commitment to the unit,” said the ODA team leader, who has led the unit’s training at Larandia three times since 2014. “It signifies the importance of the relationship we have and solidifies that relationship going forward.”

“The 7th Special Forces Group Soldiers have always left the BRCNA unit in high regard,” said the BRCNA commander. “That is why all Colombian special forces soldiers recognize them, admire them, and respect them for all the work they do here.”

Notably, the BRCNA also individually recognized seven State Department members from the U.S. Embassy in Bogota with the same award, known in Spanish as the “Bandera de Guerra,” for their contributions to the unit.



Colombian army Col. Walther G. Jimenez, right, salutes as a Colombian general officer places the “Bandera de Guerra” military medal onto the U.S. Army’s B. Co., 3rd Bn., 7th Special Forces Group’s guidon Dec. 7, 2016 during a ceremony in Florencia, Colombia. Jimenez is Colombia’s National Army Counter-narcotics Brigade commander. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Osvaldo Equite.



SOF AROUND THE WORLD - SERBIA
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – EUROPE



US Navy SEALs build relations with Serbian antiterrorist unit

*By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lorraine Whetstone
U.S. Special Operations Command Europe*

Members of Special Operations Command Europe conducted the first-ever joint combined exchange training with the Serbian Special Anti-Terrorist Unit in Belgrade, Serbia Nov. 23 through Dec. 13.

The 14-day JCET is designed to give U.S. Special Operations Forces an opportunity to conduct combined exercises with foreign security forces in a variety of areas to sharpen and enhance both U.S. SOF and host-nation skills.

“The JCET the U.S. SEALs conducted in Serbia was extremely important to promoting U.S. interests in Serbia,” stated U.S. Army Lt. Col. Corey Shea, Chief of Defense Cooperation at U.S. Embassy Belgrade. “The most important outcome of this event was the enhancement of the capabilities of the Serbian Special Anti-Terrorist Unit in Serbia.”

The combined units conducted several days of close quarters combat and weapon drills, using various scenarios as part of the training.

Participating in scenarios focused on close quarter combat and weapons drills provides participants with an opportunity to increase proficiency with their weapons and practice making split-second decisions.

U.S. SOF were impressed by the professionalism demonstrated by their Serbian colleagues and felt privileged to be the first such unit to work side by side with the Serbian Special Anti-Terrorist Unit, said the team chief assigned to Naval Special Warfare Unit 2.

Shea stated that Serbia is a potential transit route for foreign terrorist fighters travelling between Europe and the Middle East. By training together now, SOF and the Serbian Special Anti-Terrorist Unit ensure they can work side-by-side in the event of a real-world crisis.

“Enhancing Serbia’s ability to identify and interdict foreign terrorist fighters greatly enhances the security of U.S. citizens throughout Europe,” said Shea.

The JCET not only allows the U.S. SOF to work



A U.S. Navy SEAL assigned to Naval Special Warfare Unit 2 demonstrates proper procedures of clearing an area of engagement during a close quarter combat scenario during a Special Operations Command Europe joint combined exchange training Nov. 28, 2016. Close quarter combat drills are conducted to give the operators the ability to make split-second decisions and to become proficient with their weapons. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lorraine Whetstone.

with foreign partners, it is also a training event enabling participants to maintain instructional skills, develop training aids and refine language capabilities in preparation for a crisis environment.

“This engagement with a Serbian force established a solid foundation for continued exchanges of experience for both our countries,” said the team chief.



**SOF AROUND THE WORLD - UNITED KINGDOM
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – EUROPE**

352nd Special Operations Maintenance Squadron enables global SOF support





U.S. Airmen from the 352nd Special Operations Maintenance Squadron inspect a CV-22 refueling probe for leaks, cracks and deterioration prior to launch Jan. 17, 2017 on RAF Mildenhall, England. From pre-flight inspections to phase maintenance, 352nd SOMXS personnel inspect these tiltrotor aircraft multiple times annually in support of an active, long-range special operations role. Photo by U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Chris Sullivan.



59th Medical Wing cares for the wounded warfighter

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Ellis
59th Medical Wing*

“This is our purpose and my motivation for what we do,” said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. (Dr.) Ketu Lincoln, 59th Medical Wing oral maxillofacial prosthodontic fellow, describing the patient that inspired her. “He’s given so much, so we wanted to do whatever possible as a way of giving back to him.”

In mid-November, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Kenneth Dwyer, a Special Forces officer assigned to U.S. Army 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, traveled to San Antonio for a week for a follow-up appointment. Within that short timeframe, he left with more than he expected and was able to get one of his longtime wishes fulfilled thanks to the specialists here at the wing.

“I appreciate all the things the staff has done,” said Dwyer. “The staff has been incredible in helping get me to be the best me that I can be.”

In 2006, Dwyer was 29 years old and had only been in the Army for eight years. During a deployment to Afghanistan, he sustained near-fatal injuries from an enemy rocket-propelled grenade.

“After I got hurt, I remember my first thoughts when they pulled me out of sedation and I talked to my battalion commander,” said Dwyer. “I told him to send me back in. I wanted to know what I needed to do to get back in the fight because I didn’t want to let my guys down.”



Lt. Col. Kenneth Dwyer, receives a new prosthetic eye at the Air Force Postgraduate Dental School on Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, Nov. 17, 2016. Dwyer wanted the iris of his prosthetic eye to be his unit’s crest as a way of paying tribute his unit and the service members who never made it back home. Courtesy photo.

I have been in the Army now longer with one hand and one eye than when I had two hands and two eyes. I want the people around me — my soldiers, peers, and family to realize it’s not acceptable to quit doing what you love just because it gets a little bit harder or you get hurt. You just got to find a creative way to do it and make it happen.

— U.S. Army Lt. Col. Kenneth Dwyer

After a long road to recovery, Dwyer managed to not

only recover but excel at life, and he now commands an elite unit of Army Green Berets and Rangers on a daily basis.

“I have been in the Army now longer with one hand and one eye than when I had two hands and two eyes,” said Dwyer. I want the people around me — my soldiers, peers, and family to realize it’s not acceptable to quit doing what you love just because it gets a little bit harder or you get hurt,” said Dwyer. “You just got to find a creative way to do it and make it happen.”



Robert Shelley, 59th Medical Wing graphics illustrator, explains some of the projects the medical illustrations department has done to Lt. Col. Kenneth Dwyer, patient and Special Forces officer assigned to U.S. Army 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne), and Lt. Col. (Dr.) Ketu Lincoln, 59th MDW maxillofacial prosthodontic fellow, at Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center on Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, Nov. 18, 2016. Shelley also sketched the unit crest for Dwyer’s prosthetic eye. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Ellis.

For years Dwyer has wanted to honor the men and women he has served with and had a thought of reproducing his unit’s crest on his prosthetic eye. Lincoln consulted with the wing’s medical illustrators at the public affairs office to construct the crest.

Robert Shelley, 59th MDW medical illustrator, gladly accepted the task and coined the experience working with Dwyer as rewarding.

“Guys get tattoos and things they’re proud of such as their kids’ or family’s name, symbols or whatever,” said Dwyer. “For me it’s my tribute to the unit and the guys who never had a chance to come home. And how boring would it be if I just had a regular eye...now I can show off my unit and how proud I am.”

Dwyer described how the wing is a convenient location because there are so many assets here.

“It’s amazing what I was able to get done in a week and it was way more than I expected,” he said. “I didn’t think I was going to be able to get the surgery completed. I expected to have the initial consult, and thought I would have to come back for more treatment.”

Occasionally Dwyer’s previous prosthetic eye would

slip out of position due to the degeneration of muscles around the eye socket. Lincoln contacted Dr. Brett Davies, 59th MDW director of orbital and oculoplastic surgery, and within two days they were able to perform a surgery to tighten up Dwyer’s lower eyelid. He also received an oral examination for the evaluation of the dental implants placed following his injury. In addition, Dwyer had the opportunity to get his prosthetic arm worked on at the Center for the Intrepid at the San Antonio Military Medical Center.

“Overall the customer service, level of training and expertise, and professionalism of every single Airman, officer and doctor I have talked to here has been tremendous,” Dwyer said. “They get you in and take care of your needs. Everyone has jumped through hoops to make things happen.”

Every service member, regardless of branch or specialty, have their part to play in the greater construct of the military,” he said.

Lincoln described how she simply wanted to do her part as a way of giving back and contributing to the mission.

“As a dental specialist, I more than likely will never find myself in actual combat,” said Lincoln. “He’s the one that’s directly contributing to the war effort. By taking care of the warfighter and getting him back to the fight, we are doing our part in trying to save lives.”



Retired U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. William Vance, 59th Medical Wing graphics illustrator, presents one of his famous artworks, the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder art piece, to Lt. Col. Kenneth Dwyer, patient and Special Forces officer assigned to the U.S. Army 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne), at Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center on Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, Nov. 18, 2016. The PTSD art piece has been reproduced and seen all over the world and is currently part of the Pentagon’s Air Force Art Program. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Ellis.

AIRBORNE

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



The allied paratroopers made history, jumping together for the first time at the 50th annual Japan Ground Self Defense Force First Jump Ceremony, which celebrates the first training event of the new year for the Japanese Paratroopers -- also known as the Narashino Airborne Brigade. Courtesy photo from 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group.

A day of firsts for ‘First in Asia’ battalion: Special Forces Soldiers participate in first jump ceremony

*By Mr. Richard L Rzepka
U.S. Army Garrison Okinawa*

Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) put their knees in the breeze with soldiers from Japan Ground Self Defense Force’s 1st Airborne Brigade Jan. 8 at Camp Narashino near Chiba, Japan.

The allied paratroopers made history, jumping together for the first time at the 50th annual JGSDF First

Jump Ceremony, which celebrates the first training event of the new year for the Japanese paratroopers -- also known as the Narashino Airborne Brigade.

Participation by U.S. Army Paratroopers in the First Jump Ceremony has been a long time coming. The catalyst for the bilateral jump was a visit to Japan’s elite paratroopers by senior leaders from 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division more than three years ago, said U.S. Army Maj. Donald Kim, Foreign Area Officer. A visit to the event in 2016 by U.S. Army Japan Commanding

Tip of the Spear



A Special Forces Soldier walks through the landing zone after conducting bilateral airborne operations to strengthen the relationship between the allied-airborne units. Photo courtesy of 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group.

General. Maj. Gen. James F. Pasquarrette set the wheels in motion and approval was granted.

“[U.S. Army-Pacific] has strong ties with the JGSDF through various means of bilateral exercises, exchanges and seminars,” said Kim. “Continuous emphasis on ceremonial and anniversary events such as the First Jump Ceremony will inform the public and other nations that the alliance between U.S. and Japan is enduring. Further, both forces will share a common understanding of each other’s organizational differences and tactical activities to better prepare for any bilateral or multilateral collaboration in times of crisis,” he said.

Like U.S. Army paratroopers, paratroopers from the 1st Airborne Brigade participate in various airborne

jumps using C-130 Hercules turboprop aircraft, CH-47 Chinook helicopters, UH-1 Hueys and other available fixed-wing aircraft. They also conduct air assaults to display ground combat capabilities. Japan Air Self Defense Forces mainly provide fixed-wing aircraft for the ceremony, and the 1st Helicopter Brigade provides rotary wing aircraft.

“1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group is honored to represent the U.S. Army as the guest paratroopers for the ceremony. As guests of the country of Japan, we are always striving to show our respect and commitment to the alliance,” said Capt. Zach, whose last name is withheld for security purposes.

Zach said that conducting bilateral airborne operations and by being good ambassadors to host-nation allies helps strengthen the relationship between the allied-airborne units.

“The relationship between our units is a new one, however we always find common ground and special significance when working with paratroopers from around the globe,” said Zach. “Continued operations and relations with the 1st Airborne Brigade and enhancing future training opportunities is always something we are happy to develop. Bottom line: it is important.”



A Soldier with Japan Ground Self Defense Force's 1st Airborne Brigade completed his parachute jump during the 50th annual JGSDF First Jump Ceremony. Photo courtesy of 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group.



102-year-old 'Merrill's Marauder' recovering after heart attack

*By Jonnie Melillo Clasen
Liaison Officer for Merrill's Marauders Proud Descendants*

Tom Tsubota, the oldest World War II Merrill's Marauder, who turned 102 on Jan. 14, is recovering at Straub Hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii, after suffering a heart attack earlier in the week.

"On Monday, he went into the hospital with a mild heart attack," said his son, Leighton, 64, the youngest of Tsubota's three children who all live in Hawaii. "As soon as he can start walking, he'll be coming home, which we hope will be in a couple of days."

Fluent in Japanese, Tsubota is one of only 14 Japanese American -- or Nisei -- interpreters still living who served in Merrill's Marauders. Their language skills were crucial to the Merrill's Marauder success in the China-Burma-India Theater, known today as the "forgotten theater" of WWII.

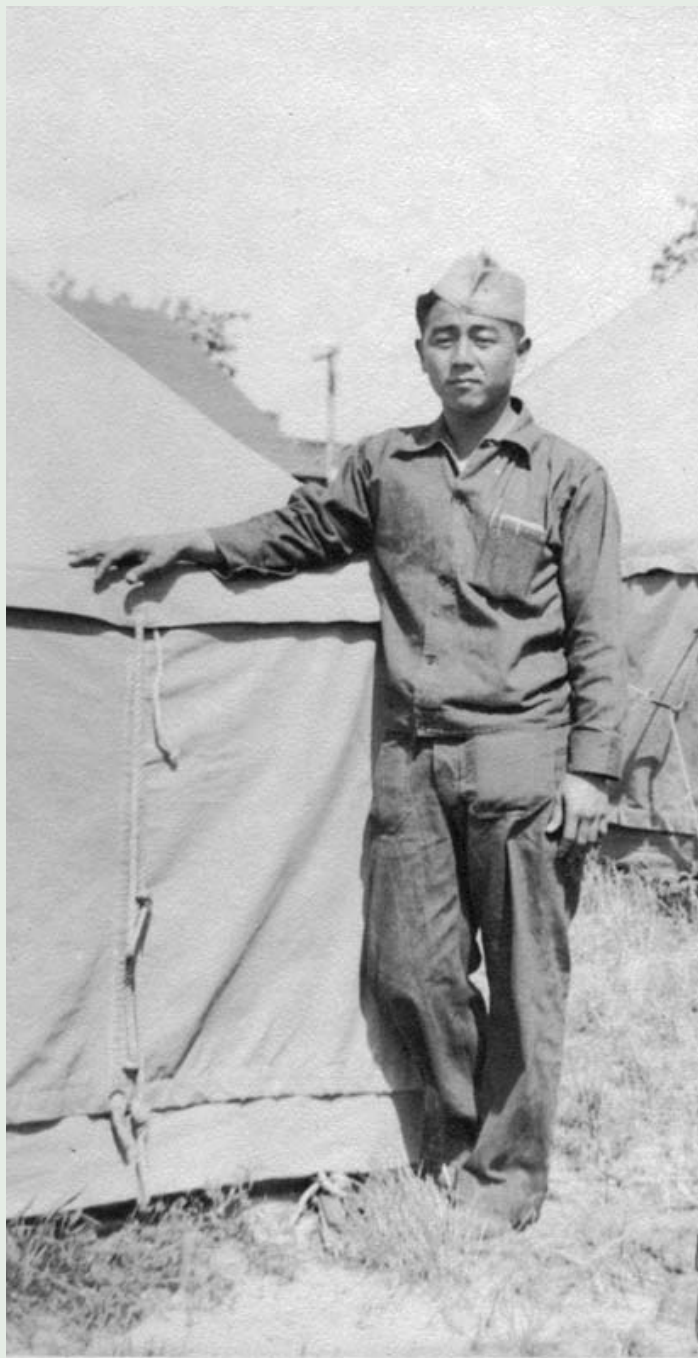
Although Tsubota has an impressive military background, his son said, "That generation is pretty humble, and my father didn't really talk about things until the last 20 years or so when more and more people started asking him questions. I think he wanted to forget some of the things he saw in the war."

'DANGEROUS AND HAZARDOUS'

Drafted in June 1941, Tsubota was on maneuvers with G Company of the Hawaii National Guard's 298th Infantry Regiment when Pearl Harbor was bombed Dec. 7, 1941.

Tsubota said in a 1993 interview that he and the other men thought the activity they were seeing on the morning of Dec. 7 was part of their maneuvers "until the machine gun firing started near Bellows Airfield. Then we knew it was for real."

On Dec. 8, 1941, Tsubota, who was guarding the shoreline, helped capture the United States' first prisoner of war, Lt. Kazuo Sakamaki, the only Japanese survivor of several two-man mini submarines attempting to reach land. Tsubota used his blanket to cover the body of



Thomas Tsubota at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. Courtesy photo of Thomas Tsubota.

Sakamaki's crew mate.

Following the Pearl Harbor attack, Tsubota and the other soldiers of Japanese ancestry serving in the 298th became part of the 100th Infantry Battalion, which was sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. Tsubota was going through combat training there when he was recruited for the Military Intelligence Service because his background included two degrees from Japanese universities and because he had qualified for the 1932 Olympic trials in Los Angeles.

While attending the Military Intelligence Service Language School at Camp Savage, Tsubota volunteered for a "dangerous and hazardous" mission. Today, he is one of just 24 original Merrill's Marauders still living out of the nearly 3,000 who volunteered in 1943 for that top secret mission. Merrill's Marauders were the first American ground troops to fight the Japanese in Asia.

MERRILL'S MARAUDERS

Officially designated the 5307th Composite Unit Provisional, the Marauders were nicknamed by the press after their commander, U.S. Army Brig. Gen. General Frank D. Merrill. Some called the volunteers, who represented 15 ethnic groups, the "dead end kids." "Magnificent" was how others described them.

Malnourished, poorly supplied and battling malaria, dysentery and mite typhus, the skeletal-looking Marauders defeated the much larger elite Japanese 18th Division in five major battles and 30 minor engagements. Their final objective of capturing north Burma's all-weather Myitkyina Airfield meant that supplies could be flown in to forge a critical pathway into China.

With only what they could carry on their backs or pack on mules, the tough jungle fighters made military history by walking farther -- almost 1,000 miles -- than any other WWII fighting unit through what Winston Churchill, British prime minister at the time, called "the most forbidding fighting country imaginable."

A SURVIVOR AT 102

Considered "expendable," the Marauders were not



expected to survive their 1944 mission. When the remaining elements of the unit were disbanded Aug. 10, 1944, in Burma, slightly more than 100 of the original Marauders remained.

Yet several Marauders have lived into their 100s. Tsubota, who survived 11 malaria attacks in Burma, is the oldest at 102. Two others, John Jones and Everett W. Stanke, lived to 101. Another Nisei, Roy Matsumoto, was weeks away from turning 101 when he died. Milton A. Pilcher turned 100 last November. Ernie Hubacker, who was a member of Mars Task Force, the unit succeeding the Marauders, is 101.

The legacy of these Infantry volunteers is being carried forward by members of the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment, whose crest is the Merrill's Marauder patch.



At 102 years old, Ranger Thomas Tsubota is the oldest living member of the famed Merrill's Marauders. Courtesy photo of Thomas Tsubota.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND



Lieutenant j.g. Brandon Myers poses for a portrait photo at his home in Imperial Beach, Calif., Jan. 31 Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Timothy Heaps.

Uncommon Desire: How becoming a Navy SEAL prepared Brandon Myers for the fight of his life

*By Petty Officer 2nd Class Paul Coover
NSW Public Affairs*

When Brandon Myers enters his garage gym in Imperial Beach, California, he does so as a man who's spent his entire life as an athlete. He draws up a simple progression of exercises for a circuit workout, then repositions equipment so he can easily move between

stations. He wastes no time with superfluous warm-up routines. Instead he starts his timer, grips the pullup bar and begins knocking out reps.

Myers weighs somewhere around 170 pounds, with a muscular torso and core, and the casual-but-alert posture of the military man he was and in many ways will always be. At peak fitness, Myers weighed around 190, courtesy of strength workouts that often lasted

upwards of four hours. Today he's shooting for 30 minutes.

Since the accident, every pullup, every weight lifted, is an act of defiance. The doctor who told him he'd never walk again? Myers just figures the guy has never worked with a Navy SEAL before.

Myers prides himself a patriot. It's apparent when he speaks about his decision to serve in the Navy, and it's apparent even when he's silent, finishing a set of overhead presses: his shoes, shorts and even socks all feature American stars and stripes.

Walking again is a long shot, Myers knows, and serving once more in the military a longer shot still. The accident was brutal. Those stories of guys who get hurt, but don't realize until later how bad their injuries are? This was different. Myers knew pretty much right away. After the fall, some of his first words were, "I can't feel my legs."

He's a product of Pittsburgh, the son of a steelworker, and of course it fits: the blue collar work ethic, the drive. He played football and baseball in high school, and then in college at Waynesburg University in Pennsylvania. Plenty of SEALs trace the genesis of their decision to serve back to lessons learned in sports, but Myers' decision came from even more fundamental origins.

In college, he decided he had no interest in pursuing professional sports, and instead wanted a job that reflected the values he'd learned growing up.

"I started thinking about my plans for after I graduated," he says, "and serving, and giving back to the country that had given me a quality education and the freedoms a lot of people take for granted."

But he didn't come from a military family, and in fact didn't even know anyone in the Navy who could help him navigate the administrative requirements to become an officer. It took him about a year just to get to the front door of Officer Candidate School -- a year he spent working construction to make ends meet. Getting into the Navy was probably the most difficult part for him, he says. Once he got through the door, he could control his own destiny.

After Officer Candidate School, which felt little



Lieutenant j.g. Brandon Myers exercises at his home in Imperial Beach, Calif., Jan. 31 Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Timothy Heaps.

more than a formality to a man preparing to enter the world of special operations, Myers moved on to Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training, more commonly and infamously known as BUD/S. With an attrition rate hovering somewhere around 70 percent, the difficulty of the curriculum speaks for itself. Yet it was there Myers thrived.

"I loved it every day," he says. "Every single day I was there, I would just think and smile, because I was just honored to be on those grounds where so many warriors had gone before me to train."

Even when the training forced him to confront the very limits of what his body could handle, like it did in the SEALs' notorious Hell Week, when Myers wondered if he would be able to continue without causing himself serious injury, he never thought about quitting.

"This was my dream," he says. "This was completely where my heart and soul were invested."

After Hell Week, SEAL candidates move on to more technical training, practicing covert diving, weapons skills, small unit tactics and other capabilities required to join the world's elite maritime special operations force.

One of Myers' best friends, now a lieutenant at SEAL Team 7, remembers the way Myers attacked



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

training after Hell Week even more than the way he endured the trials of the SEALs' most rigorous physical tests. When other men would ease up, feeling that perhaps they'd already accomplished what they'd set out to prove physically, Myers was relentless. He approached each challenge, no matter how seemingly insignificant, with the same determination he'd displayed on the very first day of training.

Throughout, Myers was also showing himself to be a mature and respected officer.

"What I liked about him most," his friend says, "was that he was never afraid to speak his mind. Whenever he did speak up, he was 100 percent right."

Though BUD/S relies heavily on peer evaluations, which can make or break a career in the SEAL Teams, Myers kept up his blunt honesty. He was regarded so highly by the class that even when Myers would call attention to efforts he perceived to be less than perfect - a challenge that could engender resentment on any team, let alone amongst a group of highly-competitive, soon-to-be-SEALs -- his words were taken more as a lesson than as criticism or arrogance.

"It's a gift that only he had," the lieutenant says. "He was a natural leader."

Finishing training and pinning on his SEAL Trident wasn't a surprise to Myers, but it was significant.

"It might as well have been a thousand pounds," Myers says of the gold insignia SEALs wear on their dress uniforms, "because I felt the weight of the brotherhood."

After training, new SEALs are assigned to specific teams, which are in various stages of training or deployments. Myers was assigned to SEAL Team 7, which had recently returned from a deployment. With the bulk of the team's next work-up yet to begin, Myers set about doing the only thing he could do: becoming the best-prepared junior SEAL officer he could be. He resumed a grueling individual schedule that included all of the weightlifting and high-intensity workouts that had allowed him to be so successful in BUD/S. On his rest days, he liked to run the SEALs' obstacle course -- a series of walls, nets and other awkward barriers that test combat-style athleticism -- to stay sharp.

He remembers something feeling off before he started running the obstacle course on the day of the accident. Nothing specific, just a sense. Myers hadn't planned on running the course at lunch, but the same



The SEALs' obstacle course -- a series of walls, nets and other awkward barriers where Lt. j.g. Brandon Myers was hurt. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Timothy Black.

classmate he'd become close with in training wanted to get in a workout in the middle of the day to break things up. Of course, Myers agreed.

Myers had completed the course dozens of times before. But something about the way one of the cargo nets was hanging that day was unfamiliar. While descending, Myers' foot became momentarily tangled, his hand grabbed for purchase and instead found air, and he was plummeting to the sand below. He fell past his friend, who instantly realized the speed and angle of the fall could be serious. That's when Myers told him he couldn't feel his legs.

The friend called for help, while Myers lay on the ground, alone, for roughly 10 minutes. Myers remembers trying to use sand to brace his own neck,

calling on some of the basic medical knowledge he'd learned in training to protect his spine. He focused on staying calm, though his breathing was labored. By the time the ambulance arrived, the medic wondered aloud at how his heart rate could possibly be so steady.

Once at the hospital, the memories become less clear. Doctors drained a lung that was quickly filling with blood, then sedated Myers. He remembers seeing his SEAL brothers when he woke up. He still gets emotional thinking about the way they showed up so quickly, and stayed by his side.

After a couple days of treatment and surgeries, a doctor walked into Myers' hospital room and told him he'd never walk again.

That's when Myers' calm disappeared.

He told the doctor to get out of his room. "You don't get to decide that," he remembers thinking.

By the time the sedatives wore off and a nurse came in to ask if he needed anything, Myers had an answer: a squat rack, because he fully intends to use his legs again -- and to make them as strong as they once were. Stronger, even.

There are no guarantees. And there are no current cures for spinal injuries like the one Myers sustained. All he can do is continue to get stronger, and hope for a medical breakthrough.

Myers is still figuring out what's next. He's considering graduate school, and possibly a return to work in the Department of Defense as a civilian. He is getting more comfortable in his wheelchair, though he's quick to note that he sees the chair as a temporary tool. He follows research on the spine and nervous system as closely as he can, given his lack of formal medical training. He's already learning the vocabulary needed to converse with doctors who specialize in cutting-edge treatments.

About a year after his injury, SEAL Team 7 held a small ceremony in Myers' honor. He is now medically retired from the Navy, but will never be separated from the SEAL teams and the men he calls his brothers.

"I can't help but feel undeserving of everyone's presence here," Myers told the Team.

"Brandon Myers!" someone called out from the back.

"Hooyah, Brandon Myers!" a chorus of his brothers yelled.

With the clock ticking down on his workout, Myers has hit a rhythm. He moves steadily between pullups,

dumbbell presses and a ski ergometer, which mimics the upper body mechanics of cross-country skiing. He finishes one set, then another, and another. With each passing minute, the effort required to continue increases. So he leans into the workout, inching up the intensity until the full 30 minutes has passed. Myers has always been willing to grit his teeth and move forward.

"He's not unique," says the commanding officer of SEAL Team 7. "He fits the mold of every frogman. In the face of adversity, he just continues to push."

Brandon Myers' first words after his fall were, "I can't feel my legs." But his second words were, "I'm going to finish this [obstacle] course."

He plans on keeping the promise.



Lt. j.g. Brandon Myers is carried to the ocean by his team mates. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Timothy Black.



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

I AM YOUR WALL

*The Rods and Wire of Steel at my Core are
For those Who gave their Lives
Never to return in Body.
They are the strength of our Wall.
The Mass of Mortar of my Body
Is for the Mass of Men and Women
Who left their Families and
Dedicated their Courage and Time to a Cause.
The Medal of Honors and Navy Crosses on my Face
Are for the strength and Resolve
For which We stood.
I am your Wall and
I stand before three Boats
That represent all the Units of our Conflict — all Conflicts.
I am your Wall,
Conceived and Nurtured and
Built with Loving Care and
Thought by a few for All.
I am your Wall,
Standing in Respectful Memory,
Hoping to have no others built like Me
But ready to Serve,
If ever called upon again.
I am your Wall,
Respect Me, Hold Me, Caress Me, Love Me,
As I Love You.*

*— Lt. Thomas Mason, USN
The Vietnam Unit Memorial on Naval
Amphibious Base, Coronado, Calif.*

Sailors read names on the U.S. Navy/U.S. Coast Guard Vietnam Unit Memorial Monument at Navy Amphibious Base Coronado, Calif., Oct. 1, 2016. The monument was funded by private contributions and was built by veterans to honor those Navy and Coast Guard sailors who died in Vietnam. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Abe McNatt.

Keeping link between past and present

*By Petty Officer 2nd Class Timothy Black
Naval Special Warfare Public Affairs*

When violent times arise, many brave men and women rise up to answer the call and serve in the military. Long after their tours have ended some of them, as veterans and civilians, come together once again to preserve and maintain the memory of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. One monument, that memorializes the 2,564 Navy and Coast Guard personnel who died while serving in the “Brown Water” Navy of the

Vietnam War, is meticulously maintained by a team of dedicated Vietnam War veterans.

Retired U.S. Navy Capt. Paul Murphy is the president of the Vietnam Unit Memorial Monument Foundation. This foundation leads the effort of maintaining the historical connection between all generations of Sailors.

“The mission is to establish a very strong link with the past,” said Murphy, “This was something a couple of guys with a vision started. Our mission is to maintain a link with the past and with new brown water youngsters

like the Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewman graduates that they have here.”

Murphy comes to the memorial four times a week to clean and maintain the boats and wall. VUMMF has a couple “working parties” during the month, where members averaging 60 years old, maintain the memorial.

Recently, Naval Special Warfare Sailors, which includes current Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen, from the West Coast participated in a community service project to help the regulars out.

“When I look at the memorial, especially now, it certainly seems like a representation of paying homage to those who have gone before us,” said Chief Petty Officer Benjamin Kongesor, a volunteer coordinator. “We did some initial swabbing, cleaned off the spider webs, brush off all the bird poop and hosed everything down. We cleaned it up and made it presentable for that next week when they were hosting a reunion.”

The connection between the Sailors of the past and present was solidified through the telling of sea stories in between bouts of cleaning.

“It was wonderful, we enjoy meeting them and they really enjoyed meeting us and hearing some of our stories that we have to tell,” said Murphy.

Kongesor reflected on one story that he heard while cleaning a command boat displayed at the monument.

“I remember a couple of guys telling me ‘Hey that is the one to be on, that was the comms suite, because it had communication equipment in it, it had to have A/C. So if you could get on that boat, you would jump down into that cool section and cool off on a hot steamy day. That would be the place to eat chow before you get kicked out and head back to your small boy,’” Kongesor said. “Which is something that we totally take for granted in most of our ships today.”

Basic Training Command for Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewman have their graduation ceremonies at the memorial frequently.

“The people that are most impressed with the boats are the students because they have these new high tech boats, satellites and all the gizmos,” Murphy said. “All we had was a [high frequency] and [ultra high frequency] radio when we went out on patrol when we went we could be out there 100 miles by ourselves.”

Members of the foundation seek fresh recruits to sustain the monument as they naturally grow older or move away.

“We are always reaching down for help and we think

there is enough redundancy in the people that we know and in our families, but sustainability is the big code word for us and we are always reaching out to the younger generation.”

Kongesor offers advice that could help sustain the history of the past for the future generations of Sailors. He believes the time is now for junior and senior Sailors to jump in and carry the torch.

“Wars were waged in the past and now you are seeing those aged Soldiers and Sailors reaching the point where they are starting to recognize that they have to pass the torch,” Kongesor said. “Who is going to carry that torch? That is the Sailors, that’s us in the Navy recognizing that we have history, pride and traditions that we have to maintain.”

The monument is located on Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, on the bay side next to the office of Commander, Naval Surface Forces Pacific and the Navy Gateway Inn and Suites.



Chief Master-at-Arms Krystal Meza, assigned to Naval Special Warfare, and her daughter Adriana clean the U.S. Navy/ U.S. Coast Guard Vietnam Unit Memorial Monument during a community service project at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. The Vietnam memorial honors the riverine Sailors who served in the Vietnam War. An All-volunteer force of six to eight Vietnam War veterans maintains the memorial. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Timothy M. Black.



The Air Force Cross will be presented to Staff Sgt. Christopher Baradat, now separated, who had previously received the Silver Star medal for his essential role in rescuing 150 coalition members in Afghanistan, April 6, 2013. Courtesy photo.

Special Tactics Airman receives medal upgrade to Air Force Cross

*By U.S. Air Force Capt. Katrina Cheesman
24th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

A combat controller will receive the Air Force's highest combat medal for extraordinary heroism, after a service-wide review of medals awarded since 9/11.

The Air Force Cross will be presented to Staff Sgt. Christopher Baradat, now separated, who had received the Silver Star medal for his essential role in rescuing 150 coalition members in Afghanistan, April 6, 2013.

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James approved Jan. 17, 2017, nine medal upgrades for eight Airmen, including Baradat and Keary Miller, a retired pararescueman from the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, an Air National Guard unit.

"Chris Baradat exemplifies the professionalism, courage and lethality of Special Tactics Airmen," said Col. Michael E. Martin, commander of the 24th Special Operation Wing. "Every day, Special Tactics Airmen like Chris willingly put themselves in harm's way to fight and

win our nation's wars.”

When on his third deployment, Baradat was attached to a U.S. Army Special Forces team tasked to support pinned-down coalition forces flanked by enemy fighters in a valley in Kunar province.

As the Special Forces convoy approached the steep valley, it became clear that the vehicles wouldn't fit through the narrow mountain path.

Baradat and eight others dismounted and sprinted toward the embattled friendly forces, but came under heavy, accurate fire within 1,000 meters of their objective. Without hesitation, Baradat identified the enemy's position and called in close air support from A-10 Thunderbolt II fighter jets and AC-130 gunships—eliminating the immediate threat.

The team pressed toward the friendly forces when they were again pinned down by an avalanche of enemy gunfire from the ridgelines above.

They took cover in a small compound nearby, but the thick walls limited the radio signal, interfering with the ground force's link to the aircraft above.

The team was outnumbered and outgunned, and Baradat knew it would only be a matter of time before the enemy had them surrounded.

With complete disregard for his own personal safety, Baradat left cover and exposed himself directly to enemy gunfire to communicate with the aircraft above and protect the team.

“That was where I needed to be standing to communicate with the aircraft and to get the mission done,” he said in an interview from 2014.

Although his team shouted at him to take cover, he systematically began engaging the enemy.

“I remember repeatedly yelling at him to get behind cover, yet he ignored the warnings, choosing instead to keep fires on the enemy positions,” wrote one of his Army Special Forces teammates about the event.

Baradat controlled multiple aircraft while he stood in the open courtyard -- sprayed by dirt as rounds impacted the ground near him -- relaying targets he spotted to the aircraft above.

“Throughout the next two hours, I witnessed [S]Sergeant Baradat call for fire and utilize eight different aircraft [six A-10s and two AC-130s] to eliminate the enemy threatening both his team and the friendly forces they were sent to rescue,” wrote one of the AC-130 pilots in an after action report.

This overwhelming barrage of airpower allowed the

three trapped U.S. and Afghan coalition forces to rally and exit from the valley. Baradat continued calling in controlled bomb drops and gun runs -- some as close as 200 meters from friendly forces.

But enemy fire intensified as the single element navigated through the narrow terrain in their armored vehicles, vulnerable to the enemy.

Baradat's radio connection was limited inside the vehicle, so with no hesitation, he positioned himself on the vehicle's running board outside the safety of the vehicle's armor ... secured only by a teammate holding onto his belt.

With his body scraping the narrow canyon walls, peppered by falling rocks knocked loose from the heavy machine gun fire, Baradat directed precise strafing runs and bomb drops until the entire team was clear of enemy fire.

“You never know what to expect going into any combat situation, but I do feel that the intense and diverse training that I received from ... the special tactics community set me up to handle the stress of the situation,” Baradat said of the battle. “I was only one piece of the puzzle that day; if it wasn't for the extreme professionalism and fearless intensity of my Army Special Forces team, the mission could have turned out a lot differently.”

In the end, Baradat precisely directed thirteen 500-pound bombs and over 1,100 rounds of ammunition during three hours of intense fighting, contributing to the safety of 150 troops and destruction of 50 enemy and 13 separate enemy fighting positions.

“He is an American hero who did an outstanding job under incredible circumstances, seamlessly integrating air power into a complex and dangerous ground mission,” said Martin.

The Air Force Cross is presented for extraordinary heroism while engaged in military operations against an enemy of the United States. This is the ninth Air Force Cross to be awarded since 9/11; all have been awarded to special tactics Airmen.

The upgrade was due to a DoD-directed review of medals from recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan to ensure service members are appropriately recognized for their actions.

“I am extremely humbled to receive this award,” said Baradat. “The men who have previously been awarded the Air Force Cross have done amazing things on the battlefield, and it is an honor to be a part of that group.”



Special Ops surgical team saves hundreds during deployment

By J.D. Levite
Air Force Medical Service

If they stood on the roof of the abandoned one-story home they were working out of, at night they could see bombs dropping on the city three kilometers north. Limited resources, limited manpower, limited backup, and limited time didn't stop this Air Force special operations surgical Team from treating more than 750 patients in eight weeks during a recent deployment to the Middle East.

SOSTs are teams of mobile surgical specialists with advanced medical and tactical training, with the mission of reducing time between the point of injury and the inevitable surgery.

In medical terms, a mass casualty is anything that overwhelms the team's capabilities and resources. This team dealt with 19 mass casualty events during that two-month period.

Lt. Col. Benjamin Mitchell, the team leader, said "We had one surgeon and five other guys. If we had three or four critically injured patients show up, that's too many for us to give them all the best care if they were there by themselves." At that point, they go into a "crisis mode" to try and do the best they can for everyone and determine the best way to treat each patient as quickly as possible.

SOST Airmen often carry specialized equipment and gear designed to support a wide spectrum of operations and mission sets from cities to remote areas. This flexibility enables them to be highly adaptable and operate with a smaller footprint than most conventional surgery teams. So while they had some of their own equipment and a small supply line that could bring them some resources, they had to rely on a local hospital for help sometimes as well.



U.S. Air Force special operations surgical teams practiced integration operations with a special operations partner force during a special tactics exercise, Hurlburt Field, Fla., Oct. 16, 2015. SOST members are military medical professionals selected to provide battlefield trauma and other surgical support in a special operations mission set. SOST members often forward deploy to austere or hostile areas to perform life-saving trauma surgery for special operators with little to no facility support. U.S. Air Force photo.

"I was blown away and awed by the support the locals gave us," Mitchell said. "Here's this war-torn country that doesn't have a whole lot, and when we told them we're running out of gloves, they brought us gloves."

He said the local hospital also supplied the team with morphine for the patients and as much as 90 units of whole blood with a cooler to store it in. "It was just amazing. They don't have a lot, but they gave us what they had because they saw our capabilities."

And they needed as many resources as they could get because many of their patients were dealing with pretty serious injuries, including more than 400 gunshot wounds or blast injuries.

Mitchell described one patient who had a gunshot wound that entered his collarbone and exited through his chest. He was hypotensive and bleeding to death in the

emergency room. They started blood resuscitation on him, but needed to pull blood from the men who had brought him in just to keep him alive.

He said it didn't end up being enough because while they were operating he started to bleed out again, which basically reversed all the work they had done before.

"I thought we were going to lose this guy," Mitchell said. "But Justin (Manley) stayed cool and tied off the artery. We didn't have any of the local supply of blood that was a match, and all the guy's buddies were gone because we had been in the operating room for 45 minutes to an hour at that point."

Mitchell said in order to save the patient's life he had to pull blood from one of the nurses on his team who happened to be a match. They gave it to the patient and finished their work.

"We'd had a lot of hard days. The mass casualties took a toll on my team. But one of our best days was about 11 days later, when this guy walked in and said 'Thanks for saving my life.'"

With no access to any of the tools and devices you'd find in a modern hospital, the SOST had to rely on a little innovation. He said the best diagnostic tool at their disposal was a handheld ultrasound device.

"When I had six patients show up with injuries in the chest and belly, I could use the ultrasound to triage them. I can tell which of those six needs surgery right now," he said. "It's a must-have for teams trying to do similar type of care in an austere environment."

Maj. Justin Manley, a SOST member, also relied on the unusual, but instead of using a modern tool for a modern age he used a technique first described to treat soldiers during the Korean War called REBOA, or Resuscitative Endovascular Balloon Occlusion of the Aorta.

"It's a minimally invasive technique to occlude bloodflow," Manley said. "Using an artery in the groin, you place the balloon up into the aorta, inflate it and occlude the blood flow."

According to Manley, this is a technique that had fallen out of favor until recent technological developments, like smaller catheters, helped military officials recognize its strength in downrange situations.

He said using the REBOA catheter during damage control surgeries showed immediate response from the patients and allowed his team to catch their breath and catch up to what was happening.

The work they were doing was intense and stressful,

and there wasn't always a lot of time to think about the gravity of the situation unfolding around them.

"You put it in the back of your head during the trauma, but any moment your brain starts to slow down it jumps right back in the forefront of your mind and can be overwhelming," Manley said. "There were several times I reached a point where I had to walk away. I knew everything was under control with the rest of the team, so I could walk away, compose myself, and get right back into it."

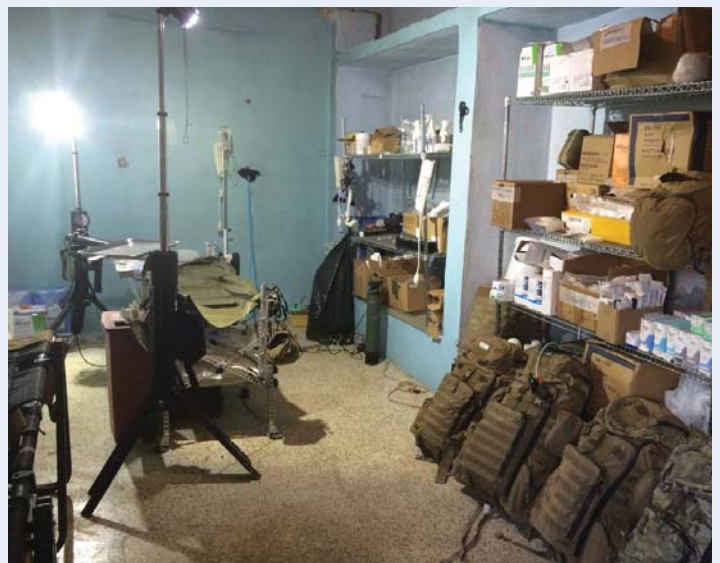
Mitchell said, "I specifically remember one of the pediatric mass casualties. We got through all the patients and got them transported out and two of our team (members) just broke down crying. Sitting there, spent. Sometimes being the team leader I was more worried about having that responsibility of keeping the team functioning."

Despite the difficulties, both Airmen said it was a time they never want to forget. They called it the "pinnacle" of their career so far.

Mitchell said, "I think I'll always look back on it as... I don't know..."

His voice started to crack as Manley finished his sentence for him: "Amazing. Humbling."

"Probably one of the most important things I'll ever do," Manley said. "I try to focus on the good we did, the lives we saved. We changed the course of their lives."



Special operations surgical teams members often forward deploy to austere or hostile areas to perform life-saving trauma surgery for special operators with little to no facility support. U.S. Air Force photo.



Air Commando awarded Airman's Medal for saving a life

*By Senior Airman Krystal M. Garrett
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

An air commando received an Airman's Medal during a ceremony at the 1st Special Operations Support Squadron on Hurlburt Field, Florida, Dec. 2.

Senior Airman Justin Barabash, an air traffic control journeyman with the 1st SOSS, was honored for his heroic life-saving actions that led to saving the life of a woman at a car accident scene.

"All I was thinking was if there is someone in there, I can't let them die," Barabash said.

Barabash was on the phone with his wife while he headed home from his night shift on August 20, 2014, when he came upon a car that was inclined in a ditch with gas dripping underneath causing flames.

"The night felt kind of odd as there were no cars on the road," Barabash said. "As soon as I was rounding the curve and saw the vehicle, I told my wife that I had to go."

Barabash's quick actions and instincts aided him in pulling the woman from her vehicle before help arrived.

Once first responders arrived, they spoke with Barabash about his actions.

"Apparently there were down power lines all over the area that could have blown up at any moment," Barabash said.

The fire chief told him that they had to cut power to the lines before even accessing the scene due to safety hazards, and that he was lucky to still be alive.

"His act of putting himself in danger to save someone else was heroic," said Senior Master Sgt. Tina Gilson, tower chief controller with the 1st SOSS. "That is exactly what the Airman's Medal is awarded for."

The Airman's Medal, established on July 6, 1960, is awarded to service members or those of a friendly nation who, while serving in any capacity with the United States Air Force, distinguish themselves by heroic actions, usually at the voluntary risk of life, but not involving actual combat. The saving of a life or the



Col. Tom Palenske, left, commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing, awards Senior Airman Justin Barabash, an air traffic controller with the 1st Special Operations Support Squadron, with the Airman's Medal during a ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Fla., Dec. 2, 2016. Barabash was awarded the Airman's Medal for risking his life to save a woman from her burning vehicle after an accident, Aug. 20, 2014. Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman Dennis Spain.

success of the voluntary heroic act is not essential.

"I am humbled to be receiving the medal," Barabash said. "I didn't do it for the recognition, but I am honored that my command thought the act was worthy of an Airman's Medal."

Allison Cademartori, who was rendered unconscious, had no recollection of the events that took place.

"I assumed someone called 911, and the first responders took care of me," Cademartori said. "When I woke up in the hospital I wasn't given any information. I was told I was fine and sent home."

Cademartori didn't learn of Barabash's lifesaving actions until she saw a video posted on the Hurlburt Field Official Facebook page.

"I had no idea what this awesome dude did for me," said Cademartori. "It is humbling and overwhelming."



Carol Powell and Ronda Ramsier take a photo with 58th Special Operation Wing and 512th Rescue Squadron members in front of one of the HH-60G Pavehawks used to perform a search-and-rescue for them. Powell and Ramsier became stranded for 36 hours with their two llamas during an evening hike early August. The hikers returned to Kirtland Dec. 12, 2016 to thank the members of the units who rescued them. Courtesy photo.

Rescued hikers return to Kirtland to thank 58th Special Operations Wing

*By Senior Airman Nigel Sandridge
Kirtland Public Affairs*

Two hikers rescued by the 58th Special Operations Wing and its 512th Rescue Squadron visited Kirtland Air Force Base Dec. 12, 2016 to offer thanks to the Airmen who saved their lives.

“It was a life-changing experience,” said Carol Powell, one of the rescued hikers. “You come that close to thinking that it is the end and then the military comes and saves you.”

Dawning the same clothing they were rescued in, Powell and fellow hiker Ronda Ramsier made a trip to bring pastries and thanks to the Airmen who saved their lives. Powell is from Ohio and Ramsier from Colorado.

“We heard from our local search and rescue that they never hear back from anyone rescued, and we couldn’t understand that,” Ramsier said. “Our memories of what these guys did for us are overwhelming.”

Powell and Ramsier became stranded for 36 hours with their two llamas near Durango, Colorado, during a hike in early August.

“To really be able to thank these guys, we had to come and thank them in person,” Powell said. “These Airmen went above and beyond to find us, so we wouldn’t have closure if we didn’t thank them in person.”

The hikers met with the two crews of the HH-60G Pave Hawks sent out to recover them and received a tour of the squadron.

“This is the first time that I’ve actually gotten to meet one of the people I’ve rescued,” said Tech Sgt. Matthew Champagne, U.S. Air Force Pararescue School instructor. “We pride ourselves on the motto ‘So that others may live,’ so it’s a very humbling experience to show them what equipment was used to help locate them.”

With four to nine months in training, aircrews spend countless hours preparing for challenging search-and-rescue environments overseas and stateside.

“This rescue was very challenging,” said Lt. Col. Nicholas Dipoma, 512th RQS commander. “Not just any crew would have been able to go out in such inclement weather and lead such a successful mission. I’m very proud of the crew for putting all the nonstop training that we do to use.”



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



An Air Commando from the 321st Special Tactics Squadron prepares to board a CV-22 Osprey Dec. 14, 2016, on RAF Mildenhall, England. The Osprey is a multi-mission, tiltrotor aircraft with both vertical takeoff and landing, and short takeoff and landing capabilities. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria H. Taylor.

321st Special Tactics Sq jumpmaster performs advance-level training

*By Staff Sgt. Victoria Taylor
352nd Special Operations Wing*

The groundwork begins hours before the execution of a mission Dec. 14, 2016, on RAF Mildenhall, England. U.S. Air Force Air Commandos assigned to the 321st Special Tactics Squadron familiarize themselves with equipment they have known since the beginning of their jump careers. No detail is left untouched—even those that would be considered minor.

After a thorough review of landing groupings and

the patterns they must be positioned in, the air commandos go as far as physically acting out how the ripcord will be drawn. They ensure everything will be implemented flawlessly before performing the high-altitude, low opening Military free fall.

Though the preparation is no different, this jump from a CV-22 Osprey, assigned to the 7th Special Operations Squadron, was a little more unusual.

The 8,000 foot drop was performed to certify a 321st STS jumpmaster, with use of night vision goggles, as well as the standard full combat and oxygen equipment, during future missions of similar

conditions.

“This was an advance-skill jump, meaning that it isn’t in our training requirements, but it’s a good method to use,” described the jumpmaster. “There is more risk involved when using this technique because night vision goggles will be attached to our helmets.”

Although the use of NVG equipment does increase risk, there’s an added safety factor.

Being able to see the other jumpers while airborne and landing more safely and accurately adds benefits that outweigh having the equipment exposed, which

causes drag.

The certification will also give this jumpmaster the ability to train others within the unit to use the new equipment.

There is an added responsibility that is placed in the hands of the jumpmaster, not only for this particular jump, but for each free fall—so safety is always paramount. With this training, the 321st STS will be able to better safely deploy personnel out of aircraft and reach remote objectives more effectively—adding to their mission success.



(Left) Air Commandos from the 321st Special Tactics Squadron perform buddy checks Dec. 14, 2016, on RAF Mildenhall, England. Buddy checks are performed to ensure equipment is configured and functioning correctly before the start of the mission. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria H. Taylor.

(Bottom) Air Commandos from the 321st Special Tactics Squadron perform a high altitude, low opening military free fall jump using night vision goggles Dec. 14, 2016, over a drop zone located in Sculthorpe, England. The jump was performed in order to certify the jumpmaster with the use of night vision goggles, which is an advance-level skill. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria H. Taylor.





AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



137th Special Operations Wing squadron and group commanders and senior ranking enlisted members stand in formation during a redesignation ceremony at the 137th Special Operations Wing at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, Dec. 3, 2016. The ceremony marks the official transition of the wing from its former air refueling mission to its current special operations mission, making the wing the second Air National Guard wing to be a part of AFSOC and the only U.S. Air Force entity to fly and maintain the MC-12W. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Caroline Essex.

137th SOW becomes part of AFSOC

*By Senior Airman Kasey Phipps
137th Special Operations Wing*

The 137th Special Operations Wing hosted an official redesignation ceremony to commemorate the wing's change to the Air Force Special Operations Command at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma, Dec. 3, 2016.

The ceremony comes after the implementation of the National Defense Authorization Act, in which the wing became only the second Air National Guard wing to be a part of the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command in history and currently the only U.S. Air Force entity flying and maintaining the MC-12W.

"It is exciting to be one of the first to welcome the patriotic men and women of Oklahoma and of the 137th SOW to AFSOC!" said AFSOC Commander Lt. Gen. Marshall "Brad" Webb. "Our command is a world-class organization, rich in history and heritage, as is yours. We are proud and fortunate to have you become an intricate part of that history and heritage as we become a part of yours ... woven together we become stronger."

The MC-12 is a medium to low-altitude, twin-engine turboprop aircraft whose primary mission is to provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support to joint ground forces overseas.

During the ceremony, the 137th SOW and its subordinate groups received their new pennants with the special operations designation and deactivated a former group and flight.

"We remember fondly our collective successes as an air refueling wing while we say farewell to the 137th Maintenance Group who for decades kept us flying world-wide with pride and to the 137th Airlift Control Flight who ensured our global reach included all four corners of the world," said Col. Devin R. Wooden, 137th SOW commander. "But, this transition to AFSOC and the manned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance mission brings tremendous new capacity and capability to the men and women of the 137th, the State of Oklahoma, and the Air National Guard."

The 137th SOW received its first MC-12 aircraft in July 2015, hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony Aug. 1, 2015 and has been carrying out base-wide structural

and procedural changes.

Wooden said he was proud of the efforts of the 137th Airmen and looks forward to their growing future.

"Throughout our history the Airmen of the 137th have made a habit of being ready when called," Wooden said. "Whether at home or overseas, you are ready to lead, ready to sacrifice, and ready to develop vital skills to remain relevant - all while looking after each other and the health of your units. Good luck to each and every one of you in this new endeavor, and Godspeed to the 137th Special Operations Wing."



Air Force Special Operations Command Commander Lt. Gen. Marshall Brad Webb speaks to the audience at the redesignation ceremony of the 137th Special Operations Wing at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, Dec. 3, 2016. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Caroline Essex.



Raider Spirit

Exercise Raider Spirit is the culminating event of phase I of the nine-month individual training course, where Marines that have been selected through a rigorous screening process to join MARSOC work toward learning the skills of a special operator and earning the 0372 critical skills operator military occupational specialty. In this photo Marines participate in MARSOC's ITC, patrol during Exercise Raider Spirit at Camp Lejeune, N.C. on May 5, 2014. Photo by Vance Jacobs.







Care Coalition evolves into USSOCOM Warrior Care Program

"They made a promise to us when they joined, whatever service they joined, and then they made another promise to us when they came in as special operations and we're making a promise to them, that we're going to be with them for the rest of their lives if anything happens to them and we're going to help take care of their families as well." Former USSOCOM Commander U.S. Army Gen. Doug Brown at the founding of USSOCOM's Care Coalition.

By Mike Bottoms
USSOCOM Office of Communication

USSOCOM's Care Coalition has changed its name to the Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) and still provides remarkable service to special operations forces wounded, ill or injured Service members and their families.

The Warrior Care Program's name change was implemented to mirror the services programs and alleviate the connotation the Care Coalition was a benevolent, private organization. The Warrior Care Program continues to assist in recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration as quickly as possible, thereby strengthening SOF readiness. Last, if needed, the Warrior Care Program facilitates career and medical transition back to civilian life.

"We changed the name to the Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) to standardize us (USSOCOM) with the services. We are all warrior care programs," said U.S. Army Sgt. Major H. Kelly Ammerman, USSOCOM Warrior Care Program senior enlisted advisor. "Care Coalition is our legacy name, but sometimes the name was misleading depicting us as a benevolent organization, something outside the government, but we are in fact a military organization with military leadership and military funded, so we needed a name that reflected what we are and that there is no confusion."

Founded in 2005 with the charter to advocate for SOF



The U.S. Special Operations Command Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) was established in 2005 to provide special operations forces wounded, ill, or injured service members and their families advocacy after life changing events, in order to navigate through recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration as quickly as possible, strengthening SOF readiness. Whether you are returning operational status, moving into a different field or transitioning into veteran status, the USSOCOM Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) will help you get there. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence.

and their families after life changing events, the organizations primary focus has always been on retention rather than transition. In fact, according to U.S. Army Col. Cary Harbaugh, Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) director, SOCOM's retention rate after illness or injury is 73 percent, the services are at about 10 percent.

"We are the gold standard in Warrior Care. Unfortunately, we have a steady flow of ill and wounded. Today, SOF are in dangerous and hazardous environments

and our training is high risk. So as we have a steady influx of ill and wounded and our focus is on returning them back to the force and we take all measures to do so,” said Harbaugh. “We view the medical evaluation board as the last step and we do everything we can to appropriately delay the board to ensure all treatments are tried. I think that is why we have such a high retention rate.”

Starting as a fledgling organization with just a few people, the Warrior Care Program today has 95 employees who take care of about 11,800 people. The Warrior Care Program embodies the SOF truth “Humans are more important than hardware” and they exist to serve the SOF community.

“When Care Coalition started Gen. Brown just wanted to know where his people were coming off the battlefield. No one could tell him. So that is what started the Care Coalition,” Ammerman said. “The second part Gen. Brown wanted the best possible outcome for his guys and retain them. Brown’s view was we had so much invested in our warriors and that we should do everything we could to keep them.”

Today, the Warrior Care Program is based on four pillars of service. Recovery is the first pillar of the Warrior Care Program and is where the organization ensures the wounded or ill Service member receives the best and appropriate treatment. Following recovery, the rehabilitation process begins with the end goal to maintain optimal medical and operational fitness to reintegrate the patient back to the best possible health outcome. The third pillar in the Warrior Care Program focuses on reintegration where retaining the special operator and returning them to active duty is the priority.

If retaining a service member is not medically possible then the last pillar of the Warrior Care Program places its energy in helping the service member with a seamless transition to civilian life for continued medical care, benefits, and career opportunities.

“We want the service member to leave service on their terms. We make every effort to keep people, but if we can’t then we make every effort to help with their transition,” Harbaugh said.

Supporting recovery, rehabilitation, reintegration philosophy the Warrior Care staff accomplish their mission with recovery care coordination, community outreach, military adaptive sports program and if needed career transition opportunities.

The staff works closely with SOF wounded, ill, and injured, their families and their recovery teams to develop a

Comprehensive Recovery Plan. This plan identifies the Service member's and family's goals and the resources they need to achieve them, such as assistive technology, education, employment, or housing.

The Community Outreach section seeks to bridge gaps in support during the treatment, recovery and reintegration processes by providing an avenue, directly to the service members in need, for non-government goods, services, and support provided by benevolent and charitable entities. The Community Outreach section also serves as the point of contact for organizations seeking to support SOF wounded, ill, and injured Service members through charitable gifts and special events.

“Benevolent organizations really want to help our SOF warriors. They are not tied to the Department of Defense and we make sure they meet all the legal guidelines,” Harbaugh said.

Military adaptive sports assists in both the physical and mental process to improve the overall health and welfare of wounded, ill, or injured SOF, by participating in adaptive team sports. The next adaptive sports camp will be held Feb 24 – Mar. 4 on MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. Former President George W. Bush will visit the camp Feb. 27.

Finally, if a Service member needs help transitioning to civilian life, the Warrior Care Program has fellowships with employers, an employment network and helps with education and training.

The USSOCOM Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition) headquarters are located in Tampa, Florida, but the recovery care coordinators and liaisons operate in multiple locations around the globe. These include major military treatment facilities and Department of Veterans Affairs Polytrauma Rehabilitation centers. RCCs and LNOs stand shoulder-to-shoulder helping the warriors and families providing services available to the total force – active duty, reserve, and veterans and their families.

“We want folks in our community to understand we are just not for the combat wounded. We can take care of the ill or injured Service member, but we can also help with a family member in a health crisis,” Harbaugh said. “We view it as a readiness issue if a Service member comes off the line to assist a sick family member then we want to help to resolve the issue quickly as possible for the well-being of the family and in turn the unit.”

The Warrior Care Program will hold their annual conference March 1-2 in Tampa, Florida. The USSOCOM Warrior Care Program hotline is (877) 672-3039 and their website is <https://www.socom.mil/care-coalition/>.





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Editor's note: Honored are special operations forces who lost their lives since December's Tip of the Spear.



A member of the U.S. Special Operations Command Parachute Team parachutes into Raymond James Stadium with a (Clemson University/ University of Alabama) flag during the opening ceremony of the 2017 College National Playoff Championship Game held in Tampa, Fla., Jan. 9th. U.S. Special Operations Command was recognized during the ceremony honoring its 30th anniversary. U.S. special operations forces are currently deployed to more than 97 countries worldwide, fulfilling geographic combatant requirements and supporting 10 named operations. USSOCOM supports a variety of missions ranging from working with indigenous forces and local governments to improve local security, to high-risk counterterrorism operations. U.S. Special Operations Command was established April 16, 1987. Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence.