



# TIP OF THE SPEAR

**Special Issue:  
Preservation  
of the  
Force and Families**

*U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., February 2012*





# U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



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of the Force and Families ... 4**

## Tip of the Spear

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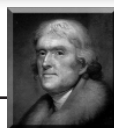
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*(Cover) A father and son come together during Operation Homecoming at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., Jan. 7. Operation Homecoming is a monthly event that reunites Cannon's Air Commandos with their loved ones. Photo by Senior Airman Jette Carr.*

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# What is the Preservation of the Force and Families Task Force?

*By Army Lt. Col. Jonathan Allen, USSOCOM Public Affairs, and the POTFF Task Force*

The men and women of our Special Operations Forces have experienced ever-increasing levels of stress due to 10 years of continuous combat operations. This is particularly true for our SOF whose deployment rates have tripled over the last decade.

Admiral William H. McRaven assumed command of USSOCOM from Admiral Eric Olson in August 2011 and upon receiving the POTFF task force brief, changed the "P" for "Pressure" to "Preservation," and placed the task force under flag officer leadership, lending it greater authority and empowering it to build and implement solutions.

Those solutions will help to sustain recruitment of the right people and retain them and their experience in the service. McRaven and his POTFF task force are addressing the problem from two sides. First, the source of the problem is being addressed through greater restrictions on service members' personnel tempo, the time an individual spends away from home station. Second, the POTFF team has embarked on a comprehensive series of resilience programs targeting service members and their families to better prepare them for the environment in which they will be asked to reside. These programs build on pre-existing service programs, and are meant to fill gaps and strengthen available assistance required by the unique nature of SOF.

These programs are organized along five lines of effort: personnel tempo, human performance, behavioral health, spiritual enhancement, and family stability through family life programs.

### **Personnel Tempo**

McRaven has instituted a policy on personnel tempo focusing on creating "white space" for the service member and turning that "white space" into inviolable "black space." Commanders at all levels are charged with monitoring their service members' personnel tempo and ensuring that the "red line" is not broken. Personnel



*A father and daughter enjoy some time together during USSOCOM's family day held at the headquarters Nov. 20, 2012. Photo by Mike Bottoms.*

tempo implementation efforts directly support the commander, USSOCOM's SOF2020 Vision and his top priority to maximize readiness.

The implementation of DefenseReady and its personnel tempo capability has already begun. DefenseReady is a commercial-off-the-shelf capability that will provide the USSOCOM enterprise an effective means for enhancing management of SOF readiness down to the individual service member level.

"DefenseReady is not a new capability but has been used by select SOF units for up to the last four years with tremendous success," Mr. Rich Toney, DefenseReady Program Manager said. "DefenseReady currently contains approximately 10 modules and more than 356 application features that can improve economies and efficiencies in all human resource and readiness management program areas. The commander of USSOCOM directed that priority emphasis be given to implementing its Personnel Tempo capability across the USSOCOM enterprise."

Due to the increased demand for DefenseReady across USSOCOM, McRaven directed the acceleration of the implementation effort.

"The implementation of DefenseReady is continuing

to accelerate across USSOCOM and is progressing well.” Lt. Cmdr. Manny Cordero, DefenseReady Program Manager said. MARSOC was declared fully operationally capable effective Dec. 1, 2012. USASOC implementation is well underway within HQ USASOC and 528th Sustainment BDE. Other USASOC organizations will soon follow. SOCCENT, WARCOM, and AFSOC planning has begun and implementation will commence in early spring. Implementation of DefenseReady at other TSOCs will follow afterwards.”

### **Human Performance Programs**

The Human Performance Program is a significant portion of the POTFF effort. This program, which regards the Special Operator as a tactical athlete, is focused on creating high-caliber physical strength, conditioning and rehabilitation programs, along the lines of what may be afforded to a professional athlete.

“Sports psychologists improve performance by combining SOF-specific mental skills training with existing strength and conditioning programs,” said Ryan J. Caserta, Ph.D., Sport Psychology Consultant-HQUSSOCOM. He explained that a SOF-specific sport psychology model, includes key mental components such as focus and concentration, emotional regulation, imagery, pattern recognition and spatial reasoning, situation awareness, and high-speed decision-making, can provide SOF operators skills to improve their performance across a wide range of combat skills. By providing elite athletic trainers and human performance facilities that directly support the Special Operator, the program not only looks to the short-term requirement of supporting operations, but also to lengthening service life of the Special Operator as a “human weapon system.”

### **Behavioral Health Programs**

The Behavioral Health Program institutionalizes and expands current capabilities provided by the services. The goal is to help servicemembers cope with the current levels of stress on the force and builds upon existing strengths to improve the resiliency of the forces and families. The POTFF study acknowledged that there is a stigma attached to seeking psychological assistance. Accordingly, leadership has engaged at all levels to remove the stigma associated with seeking help. Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Faris, USSOCOM senior enlisted adviser, has traveled with his wife to all components over the last year to talk about how his family sought help in order to let SOF servicemembers and their families know it is okay to seek assistance.

“For the first time, I see hope,” Faris says. “I definitely see hope for our families, and its hope in the fact that, yes, (the problem) is recognized and two, it’s going to change.”

A critical component of this program is devoted to embedding assistance at the unit levels by trusted agents that are familiar to the servicemembers and their families.

### **Spiritual Enhancement Programs**

The Spiritual Enhancement Program capitalizes on traditional religious programs. Healthy spirituality has a high correlation to resiliency. While existing religious support teams are good, the POTFF found that some units did not have ready access to them and the teams required additional education to support the force. The USSOCOM chaplains and POTFF team are implementing chaplain training at all levels to bridge this gap.

### **Family Life Programs**

The Family Programs Branch recognizes that Service-provided programs often do not fit the unique SOF environment and that when a service member is recruited, so is his family.

“The POTFF task force is looking for ways to synchronize and augment Service programs to account for the service member’s training and deployment schedules” Dr. Rob Neff, Family Programs Director said. “For example, one popular program that USSOCOM wants to augment is a Naval Special Warfare program that takes advantage of youth summer camps specifically designed for children in a SOF family.”

Other pilot programs the command is planning on undertaking include: enhanced assessments and interventions for marital enrichment; parent/child relationship/reconnection programs; and third-location decompression for service members and their spouses, an already-proven program for Marine and Navy servicemembers that can be extended to spouses.

### **Conclusion**

“Preserving the force will require all of us to take an active role in the process and we must strive to continually care for one another.” McRaven emphasized the importance of this initiative when he stated in a Jan. 9, 2012, memo to the SOF community that. “Every person in our SOF family is vitally important and as your commander, there is no responsibility I take greater pride in than leading and caring for you – the greatest Special Operations Force our world has ever known.”



## PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES - USSOCOM

# SOCOM leaders convene to discuss SOF suicide prevention

*Story and photo by GySgt. Ryan O'Hare  
Digital Engagement Cell*

United States Special Operations Command hosted a suicide prevention conference recently at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., to develop and integrate a robust Special Operations Forces suicide prevention program.

The meeting consisted of SOF command representatives, academic leaders, chaplains, psychiatrists and doctors discussing existing service specific programs to ensure SOF-unique aspects are improved and standardized throughout the force.

"We need to have a coordinated approach to mitigating suicide," said Cmdr. Winston Shearon, Marine Corps Special Operations command chaplain. "We have to have a cooperative view that takes into account multiple cultures in approaching our service members and families in a caring and compassionate way that brings credible, validated help to our people."

The first day consisted of component representatives providing an overview of their current suicide prevention programs and providing insight into what aspects are successful and what areas need improvement in the future.

Dr. Lanny Berman, the Executive Director for the American Association of Suicidology, addressed prevention measures and identified some risk factors that lead to suicide, including substance abuse, anger, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness.

"Suicide is not only a military concern, it's a national concern," said Berman. "If you want to solve a problem, you really need to understand the problem first."

According to Berman, of 153 suicide survivors surveyed, 25 percent acted within the first five minutes of having the impulse, while 75 percent acted within the first hour. By limiting risk, such as access to firearms, which were used in 49 percent of U.S. Army suicides in 2010, it allows for the temporary feeling of hopelessness to subside without permanent fatal consequences, he said.

The second day of the conference focused on better understanding the effects of suicide within the SOF community and discuss the best practices of service-



**Chaplain (Col.) Thomas Solhjem (left), USSOCOM command chaplain, discusses the importance of developing a robust USSOCOM suicide prevention program during a conference at Macdill AFB, Fla.**

unique programs.

The goal of the new strategy would be to build a robust resiliency program incorporating the body, mind and spirit, and building from the strength of the SOF ethos. The process includes screening and assessing holistic programs for prevention, intervention and post deployment care.

Family members can also play an important role in identifying and seeking assistance for their loved ones.

"Family members call me frequently and say 'Chaps, I don't know who else to call, can you help me with this subject,'" said Shearon. "And often, those are dark paths that they are traveling, so you cannot help but to help families when you address suicide...the one thing you can't do is let it go."

As the conference wrapped up, the takeaways were positive and laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive SOF prevention program. A suicide prevention program that supports both operators and enablers forward deployed and at home, including their families, will ensure service members have the resources needed to cope.

"There are options," said Shearon. "Don't let what looks like only one option be your driving course of action. Let's get together and explore some options and find out why you can live, and live with hope."



# Sport Psychology and the operator

*By USSOCOM Preservation of the Force and Families Task Force*

Human performance is related to keeping the force operators more resilient and operationally ready by utilizing strength coaches, athletic trainers and sports psychologists.

USSOCOM has brought in Ryan Caserta, Ph.D., an expert in sport psychology, to augment the Preservation of the Force and Families Task Force.

“In recent years Special Operations Forces have placed increased emphasis on Human Performance Programs, taking the latest developments from professional sports teams in strength, conditioning, performance improvement and rehabilitation and adapting them for SOF operators,” said Dr. Caserta. “At its root, sports psychology is about improving performance, such as a SOF operator able to more quickly identify, decide and act in stressful situations.”

Sports psychologists have improved SOF human performance by combining SOF-specific mental skills training with existing strength and conditioning programs.

“A SOF-specific sport psychology model, including key mental components such as focus and concentration, emotional regulation, imagery, pattern recognition and spatial reasoning, situation awareness, and high-speed decision-making, can provide SOF operators skills to improve their performance across a wide range of combat skills,” Dr. Caserta said.

Some components already have staff on board to work with their force members. Brittany Loney is the Human Performance Program Mental Performance Coordinator at Special Operations Center for Enhanced Performance at Ft. Bragg, N.C..

“There are currently experts in the field of sport psychology working at SWCS, 3rd Special Forces Group, and other SOCOM entities to systematically train, apply, and integrate mental skills, helping to ensure that operators are at their best both at work and at home,” Loney said.

SOCOM supports the continuation of proven best practices as building blocks to enhance resources available to the force. SOF operators devote significant time to training critical skills, such as cultural awareness, target engagement, negotiations, and language proficiency; however, combining these with SOF-specific mental skills training will enhance skill acquisition and execution in stressful environments.

“The Performance Enhancement Specialists at SWCS and operational SOF units are utilizing all of the key mental components in the SOF-specific model as well as effective thinking, goal setting, breath control techniques to regulate nervous system function, sleep quality and quantity, and memory and recall,” said Loney.

Dr. Caserta asserted the sports psychologist can be a great help to the operator.

“Along with these mental components, experts in the field of sport psychology can provide training in the following areas: skill acquisition (expert/novice differences, motor development and control, augmented feedback in motor skill acquisition, deliberate practice, intentional movement behavior, and development and maintenance of expert performance), psychological characteristics of high-level performance (motor skills and psychological responses, personality traits, stress and anxiety, self-efficacy of individuals and teams, psychophysiology of expert performance, perceptual expertise, anticipation, and gaze control), motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, achievement goal orientation, attributions, and group cohesion), life span development (moral development and behavior, physical activity and quality of life, and career termination), and exercise and health psychology (physical activity and maintaining an active lifestyle, psychology of injury risk, prevention, and rehabilitation, staleness and burnout, and perceived exertion and exertion tolerance).”

Providing operators with performance enhancement-based, mental skills training, develops more holistic operators who can focus more effectively, recover faster, and make better decisions throughout their careers regardless of age. SOF Truth #1, “Humans are more important than Hardware,” truly captures the work that experts in the field of sport psychology will offer an operator.

To learn more about sport psychology contact your component HPP manager.



**Ray Bear, 3rd Special Forces Group (A) human performance coordinator and strength coach, checks the time on his stopwatch during a morning workout. USASOC photo.**



# Taking a leap of blind faith

*By Army Sgt. Daniel A. Carter  
USASOC Public Affairs*

Some people would believe that being blind is a curse, that it is a condition that would leave you helpless and limit you to what you can accomplish. Others would look at this belief like it is an enemy, and fight back with everything they have.

Capt. Ivan Castro has fought this enemy, and he continues to fight this enemy every day.

While on a mission in the village of Yusufiya, Iraq, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006, Castro was struck by a mortar round. At the time, Castro was serving as a platoon leader for the Scout Reconnaissance Platoon, 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.

“We went out there, and the day before, our mortar platoon got hit,” said Castro. Castro explains that during that attack on the mortar platoon one soldier lost his life.

The very next day, Castro was given the orders to occupy the position that the mortar platoon had been attacked at. He knew that this position was a horrible position, and that it was dangerous. Following orders, he took the position.

Castro said that he knew the enemy already had this position locked in. Knowing this, he told his soldiers to come down off the roof of the building that they were occupying. Castro went on to the roof to look for a position to occupy that the enemy had not already targeted. While on the roof, Castro and his platoon took enemy mortar fire.

“When I got up on the roof, immediately mortar rounds came in,” said Castro. “One mortar round landed on the ground. When that one landed I looked over to my left to tell my guys to jump off the roof. Right when I did that, the next mortar round landed five feet to my left.”

The mortar round that landed to the left of Castro broke his nose, cheekbone, and it instantly enucleated his right eye. A fragment entered his left eye and his neck, he also sustained an open fracture of the humerus bone in his arm and his deltoid muscle was torn. As a result of the violent blast from the mortar round, Castro’s lungs collapsed and he suffered a pulmonary embolism.

“Immediately, guys jumped on the roof top and pulled me off,” Castro said.



***Capt. Ivan Castro, United States Army Special Operations Command, competes in the 2008 Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C. Castro finished the race in the top third of overall racers with a time around four hours. Photo courtesy of Capt. Ivan Castro.***

After the combat medics that were attached to his platoon provided first-aid, Castro was medically evacuated to Baghdad. Castro’s final destination would be the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

“I spent six weeks in the intensive care unit,” said Castro, “I was hooked up to every possible machine known to man in the ICU. I was basically on life-support.”

When Castro had come to, the doctors lowered the sedation levels in order for his wife to be the bearer of the unfortunate news.

“They told me that I had a fragment in my eye and I



was going to go into surgery,” said Castro, “but the worst news was to find out that Pfc. Justin Dreese and Sgt. Ralph Porras had died...from that one mortar round, the same mortar round that I was injured by.”

A few days later, Castro came out of surgery and the doctors informed him that they would not be able to restore his vision.

“They told me that I would be blind for the rest of my life,” said Castro.

He explains that he went through stages of grief, depression, sadness, and survivor’s guilt. Castro said that at the time, he had wished and felt as if though he should have died alongside the men who had died that day.

As time went on, Castro realized that through faith and religion he could carry on and continue his fight. He realized that, being a man of faith, there was a plan for him, that there was a reason, that it was not his time to go.

“God decided that it was not my time, that there was something else that I had to accomplish,” said Castro, “God gave me this cross to bear.”

With a smile on his face, Castro explains that bills do not stop, that they continue to keep coming whether you’re injured or not.

“I was still a father, a husband, and an officer in the United States Army,” Castro stated, “I was still a leader, and I still had guys deployed.”

As an outstanding example of resiliency, Castro was determined to continue doing the best that he could. He realized that he had to keep moving forward, and not back down in the face of adversity.

Castro knew nothing about being blind. He didn’t know what it meant. He didn’t know how a blind person did anything.

“I had to re-learn how to walk again and how to balance,” said Castro. “How do I shave? How do I put toothpaste on a toothbrush? How do I get in and out of the shower? How do I walk from one point to another without falling down and cracking my head open?”

Castro faced the problem of having to re-learn everything over again. There was one thing that he did know; he knew that he wasn’t going to let this problem take him down.

Soon after setting his goal, Castro started researching what he could to further his rehabilitation. He started to learn more about being blind, and what programs and activities were in place to facilitate him reaching his goal.

“I quickly came to realize that if I put all my effort and hard work into my rehab,” said Castro. “That I would be able



***Capt. Ivan Castro, United States Army Special Operations Command, prepares for a military free-fall jump operation in Fayetteville, N.C. in 2004. Photo courtesy of Capt. Ivan Castro.***

to turn this around, and be able to live a productive life.”

Not only did Castro realize that if he focused on recovery and looking forward towards the future and what it could hold for him, as long as he maintained a positive attitude and outlook on life, he realized that he had the support of everyone around him. Castro had support from his family, friends, and the support from his command.

“There is one thing we have in our organization, that says your reputation will follow you and once you’re part of the family, you always will be,” Castro explained.

United States Army Special Operations Command, United States Army Special Forces Command (Airborne), and the USASOC organization as a whole supported Castro’s goals and helped take care of him and his family while he was going through recovery.

While Castro was in the hospital going through an intensive recovery process, he came to the conclusion that in order to turn his situation around he needed to formulate a plan, give himself a mission. This was something that, to Castro, every soldier, every leader should do so that he could tackle this situation that he was faced with. So he did.

“The first thing I needed to do was to get physically fit to get out of that hospital,” said Castro.

In-between surgeries, Castro decided that he was going to increase his cardiovascular training and double-up on his resistance training. Castro had, at that point, committed to living a healthy life with a healthy diet. With the support of his family, friends, command, and the support that he found



## PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES - USASOC



*Capt. Ivan Castro, United States Army Special Operations Command, participates in a cycling challenge in which he traveled across the United States in 2012. Photo courtesy of Capt. Ivan Castro.*

through his faith, Castro moved forward.

"After everything, I realized that I had two choices: either sink or swim," said Castro.

Castro maintained the view that he could be sitting in his house, watching television all day and doing nothing, or he could be trying to make a difference. Castro had two things that kept him going, positive attitude and gratitude. He realized that he still had two arms, two legs, his memories, and everything else.

"The only thing I didn't have was my sight," said Castro.

Being able to carry on and move in a positive direction with his life after what had happened was the least that Castro said that he could have done. For the Soldiers that had lost their lives, it would be unjust to them to quit and give up, Castro explained. So with keeping his Soldiers and other friends who have made the ultimate sacrifice uppermost in his mind, Castro pushes the limits of rehabilitation and exceeds all expectations.

In 2007, the year after Castro was wounded and hospitalized for 13 months, he ran his first marathon, the Marine Corps Marathon. After this amazing achievement, Castro moved forward at full speed, competing in multiple marathons, races, and many other events.

To this day, Castro has competed in more than 20 marathons, 15 half-marathons, two 50-mile races, three

triathlons, and has cycled across the country traveling more than 3,870 miles.

Castro continues to prove that he can do anything, even if he is blind. His accomplishments have proven this fact time and time again. Although he may be blind, he makes it a point to show others that he is still the same as anyone else.

"On top of my blindness, I have everybody's struggle," Castro said, "I have kids, a spouse, I own a house, grass has to be cut, light bulbs go out, bills have to be paid..."

The list goes on as Castro explains that his life is the same as everyone else, and that he has to keep going, for his kids, his wife, and his brothers in arms. This is resiliency in its purest form: the ability to grow and thrive in the face of challenges and bounce back from adversity.

Castro explains that if someone could walk away after hearing his struggle, he would want them to take away with them one last piece of advice.

"One: to have extreme patience; two: to never quit, never surrender, never accept defeat, and to keep on moving forward. Never look back, just keep on moving forward," said Castro. "No matter what is going on in your life whether its family or bills, whether its physical struggles you may have, it could always be worse. Maintain a positive attitude and have gratitude, ask for help, and it will always work its way out."



# Preserving the force and family spiritually - A POTFF initiative

*By Mr. Jerry Green  
USASOC Public Affairs*

The Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) initiative was the result of a task force study designed to support the Soldier and their Family during continuing training and deployment cycles. One aspect of the POTFF focused on the spirituality of the Soldiers and their relationships with others.

The Center for Spirituality and Healing in Minnesota defines spirituality as the individual search for connection with a source while seeking the ultimate meaning of being who they are. Religion with its traditions, rites and institutions, has a basic function to create and nurture a spiritual community. In the search for meaning and connection, all humans are spiritual beings, but not all are religious. Chaplain (Col.), Thomas B. Wheatley, USASOC Command Chaplain agrees. "The concepts of preserving a Soldier's resiliency is directly proportional to his or her ability to connect mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually to others be it in the combat zone, ongoing training exercises or at home with family. Every successful Soldier, as a stable part of their mental well-being, develops a high degree of confidence in their own abilities and a degree of trust of those around them." said Wheatley.

A normal response of human nature, for the most part, is our desire to understand our purpose on earth as a reason for being who we are and our actions and responses in a moral world. The mental and physical pressure put on Soldiers before and after deployments can either challenge or strengthen that understanding.

"While we as USASOC Soldiers build our physical strength, we need to build our mental strength at the



**Chaplain (Col.) Thomas B. Wheatley, United States Army Special Operations Command Chaplain, hosts a marriage couple seminar during which Soldiers and their spouses from USASOC renew their wedding vows on Fort Bragg, Oct. 13. Photo by Sgt. Gregory Boster.**

same time. Taking the time to build these strengths is a challenge, but the emotional, social and spiritual rewards complete the total person and builds the bonds that solidify the spiritual person's resilience," said Wheatley. "It is a completed package."

Spirituality affects fitness in ways appropriate to the military primarily as it interacts with other domains, especially psychology. Research has established strong links between spirituality and physical, psychological, and medical health exercises for enhancing mental agility, emotion regulation, attention, and situational awareness.

Communication is key to the success of any psychological process. One such tool the Army uses is the Strong Bonds program. Strong Bonds is basic and straight forward, focusing on communication skills. It is a unit-based, chaplain-led program which assists commanders in building individual resiliency by strengthening the Army Family. The core mission of the

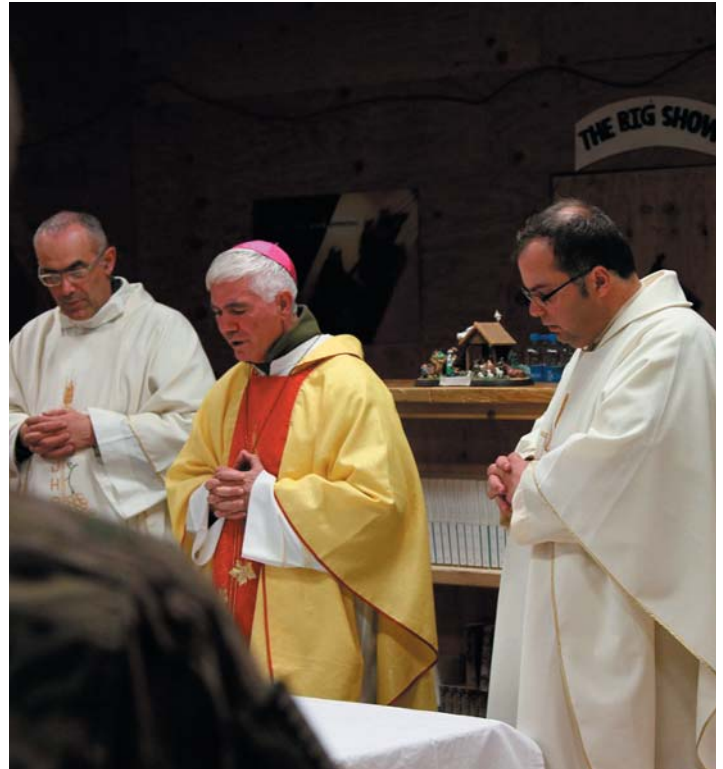


## PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES - USASOC

Strong Bonds program is to increase individual Soldier and Family member readiness through relationship education and skills training. The premise of Strong Bonds is that everybody needs vital beliefs that give some sense of meaning and hope in the midst of losses, tragedies, and failures. Furthermore, every person needs to have values, priorities, and life commitments – usually centered in issues of justice, integrity, and love – that guide the person to socially responsible living. Each human being needs to discover and develop their inner wisdom, creativity and love of their unique transpersonal/spiritual self.

BAM Adventures is another program available to address the POTFF Spiritual Initiative. BAM is a subtle acronym for Being A Man. BAM Adventures is a unique learning system designed to empower young men on the journey to manhood by strengthening the bonds between fathers and sons. Through multi- or single-day events and a take-home curriculum called Clip-In, the mission is to empower a new generation of strong healthy men (mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually) to be leaders in their family, work, community, and around the world.

BAM Adventures supports the core philosophy and goals of Strong Bonds by building strong military families that will create greater resilience, readiness, and retention. BAM Adventures creates a common bond between fathers in a unit as well as fathers and sons. Within this bond, fathers and sons are given a common language for interacting. Thus, enabling them to create stronger relationships and more open communication, critical tools to help families prevent many problems. If BAM Adventure events are implemented before and after deployment, they strengthen the bond before deployment and enable father and son to break through problem barriers quickly upon returning. In addition, if father and son can interact through



**A military chaplain performs Christmas services in Afghanistan. Photo by Marine Corps Sgt. Chadwick de Bree.**

technology, they could use the discussion guides from Clip-In during deployment, thus keeping the relationship growing even when not at home.

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*“Spirituality is about getting in touch with one’s self-realization and developing the mental and physical foundation thus establishing one’s self identity. It is the connection that a person uses to establish their mental strength and resiliency within themselves and their family.”*

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*— Chaplain (Col.), Thomas B. Wheatley*

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“Spirituality is about getting in touch with one’s self-realization and developing the mental and physical foundation thus establishing one’s self identity,” said Wheatley. “It is the connection that a person uses to establish their mental strength and resiliency within themselves and their family.”

For more information on the Strong Bonds and BAM Adventures programs, USASOC Soldiers and

Spouses should contact their unit or command Chaplain’s office. Several events are in the planning and scheduling phase for 2013.



# Ranger families – winning war of words

By Tracy A. Bailey

75th Ranger Regiment Public Affairs

Ranger Families from the Regimental Special Troops Battalion and Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 75th Ranger Regiment spent time in Buford, Ga., learning ways to strengthen their marriages and communicate better with each other.

After checking in to their rooms at the Legacy Lodge on Lake Lanier Island and to the Strong Bonds retreat, the 54 Ranger couples and 90 children were treated to dinner in the Windows Restaurant.

“This was a great weekend,” said Sgt. 1st Class Bradley Moore. “It was a great location, with plenty to do for the families and the sessions were very informative and helpful.”

During the opening session, the couples played getting to know your neighbor bingo. The six winning couples received gift certificates to local restaurants.

Over the course of the weekend, the Ranger couples shared lots of laughs, especially during the first session with RSTB Chaplain (Capt.) Light Shin’s, “Top 10 questions men should never answer.” And the number one question a man should never answer: “Do you think these pants make my butt look fat?”

The Ranger couples learned multiple tools and techniques to communicate better with their spouses.

“The overarching theme of this weekend was Winning the War of Words,” said Shin. “My hope is that Ranger Families understand the nature of their communication struggles in relationships and apply the practical steps, or even just one practical step to improve their communications.”

The purpose of a Strong Bonds event is to provide Ranger Families with world class instruction on marriage and family in a relaxed setting.

“It gives them a weekend away to create memories with their families,” said Chaplain (Maj.) Brian Koyn, Regimental Chaplain. “And it gives them a dedicated time to focus on their most important relationship.”

The speakers for the weekend were Shin and Koyn, as well as Mr. Ed Nash, the Military and Family Life Consultant for the 75th Ranger Regiment. Topics included “Words do Matter,” “Talk like an Ambassador,” “Marital

Combat-How to Fight Fairly,” and “Winning the War of Words.”

“This was a great weekend in an awesome location,” said Amy Lertiz whose husband is assigned to RSTB. “And having childcare provided, gave us a lot of one-on-one time.”

The 75th Ranger Regiment has been deployed continuously for more than 10 years and the impact of the deployment and training cycle on the Families can be overwhelming.

“Strong Bonds makes a huge impact on families, first by encouraging them to focus on their relationship,” said Koyn. “It serves to make strong marriages stronger and provides the opportunities for those who are struggling to find the resources and time they need to make some significant changes so they are prepared for life together during war, in peace, and long after they have ended their service.”

Families also had time to enjoy the beach, water park, boating, horseback riding and other activities to relax as a Family and renew their commitment to one another.

The Strong Bonds weekend retreat is designed to strengthen relationships, inspire hope and rekindle marriages — even start the journey of healing for relationships under fire.

According to the Strong Bonds website, over the past year, more than 160,000 Soldiers and Family members Army wide have participated in more than 2,600 Strong Bonds events. The program’s success has led to increased funding, expansion Army-wide, and more training options.



**Rangers and their wives from Regimental Special Troops Battalion and the Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Company participate in an icebreaking session, ‘Getting to know you bingo,’ during the first day of the Strong Bonds Retreat Aug. 24, 2012. Courtesy photo.**



## PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES - USASOC



*Geoffrey P. Steinbacher, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School THOR3 Strength & Conditioning Specialist, performs a stability exercise during a Performance Enhancement Screening on Jan. 8, at Fort Bragg, N.C. Courtesy photo.*

# New SOF: Special Operations Fitness

*By Sgt. Daniel Carter  
USASOC Public Affairs*

The performance training level of all Special Operations Forces Soldiers is critically important to the completion and execution of SOF missions.

This is the mission of the Tactical Human Optimization, Rapid Rehabilitation & Reconditioning (THOR3) team assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS).

All Special Forces groups, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), and the 75th Ranger Regiment have their own Human Performance programs that specialize in the specific needs of their units. The USAJFKSWCS THOR3 team in addition to providing training and programming, are also responsible for the human performance education and training mission for all of USASOC. It lays the groundwork for SOF

Soldiers to learn why they are in need of such specialized professionals and how to utilize them effectively.

The USAJFKSWCS THOR3 team consists of strength and conditioning coaches, physical therapists, and a performance dietitian who work daily with Soldiers from all aspects of the command. The THOR3 team assures all Soldiers assigned, from the students to the General Officers, reach the proper level of human performance for the mission at hand. The THOR3 team's goals vary from Soldier to Soldier. Some Soldiers are recovering from an injury sustained while deployed, while others are training to prepare for an upcoming mission or deployment.

While the focus of the THOR3 program is to improve current operational longevity and reduce the potential for injury, the added value to the SOF operator is the improvement in their overall quality of life lasting long after retirement.



The THOR3 team at USAJFKSWCS develops customized, periodized and personalized strength and conditioning, rehabilitation and performance nutrition programs for students and Special Operations Soldiers in order to optimize their human performance goals.

When an operator begins working with the THOR3 Team, the first step they go through is the Performance Enhancement Screen. This screening includes tests designed to assess movement and performance as well as the Soldier's potential for injury. The results provide the THOR3 team with a physical profile for each operator or student. From there, the team will work with operators and students in groups or individually to enhance their physical capabilities.

The Performance Enhancement Screening begins with a Functional Movement Screening, which is comprised of seven tests measuring quality of movement. Scoring on this test indicates the potential risk for injury. The second step in the PES is to assess performance. This is done through a series of four tests measuring mobility, agility, strength and endurance. Lastly, the performance dietitian also completes a body composition test.

After completing the Performance Enhancement Screening, the operator or student is then placed in either the THOR3 Rehabilitation Program or the THOR3 Human Performance Program. The THOR3 team then facilitates rapid return to unrestricted duty or maximizes the physical potential for each operator or student.

In addition, proper nutrition is required to optimize rehabilitation and performance, according to Christi M. Logan, USAJFKSWCS THOR3 Performance Dietitian. This is an often overlooked, yet vital aspect of human performance, which is emphasized by the THOR3 team. Briefings are conducted by Logan in order to inform all students of the Civil Affairs, Military Information Support Operations, and Special Forces pipelines within USAJFKSWCS to include advanced skills training sites. The performance nutrition briefings inform operators and students of the proper fuel that is essential to the success of the SOF Soldier. These briefings set the nutritional foundation for the remainder of the SOF Soldiers' career.

"SOF personnel have unique physical requirements with time-sensitive, mission specific physical demands. I provide the operators and students with the education needed to make informed decisions when it comes to their daily food choices that will improve their

performance today, next week or next year," said Logan.

During her briefings, Logan helps them understand that in different settings their nutritional needs change. SOF personnel do not have the benefit of an "off-season" or a down day and their schedules are ambiguous and ever-changing. Additionally, their bodies are taxed daily by heavy training and various physical and mental stressors, as well as by limited access to quality food when in austere environments. Therefore, ensuring adequate calorie and nutrient intake on a day to day basis aids in improving performance. As with physical training and tactical skills that are performed daily, solid nutrition intake is just as vital to support their time-sensitive and mission specific demands.

Due to the ever changing mission of the Special Operations Soldier, THOR3 provides the program that allows SOF Soldiers to meet their mission requirements physically, mentally and nutritionally. The USAJFKSWCS THOR3 team aids the Soldiers assigned to the Special Warfare Center and School by providing them the tools necessary to meet the physical demands of the Special Operations community. With these tools, not only can SOF Soldiers meet the needs of the mission but they will extend the longevity of their operational capabilities.



**Katie Krall, USAJFKSWCS THOR3 Strength & Conditioning Specialist, teaches a Soldier the proper position for a mobility exercise during a Performance Enhancement Screening on Jan. 8, at Fort Bragg, N.C.**





## PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES - NSWC

# FOCUSing on NSW Families

*By Mandy McCammon  
NSW Family Support Office*

Wartime deployment takes a toll on the service member and family members on the home front, with multiple deployments often causing additional stress, disrupting family roles and routines, and impacting parenting at a time when there is decreased support within the family.

Since 2008, NSW has been using the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) program called FOCUS (Families Over Coming Under Stress) to provide assistance to its forces, spouses and their children. While BUMED is the executive agent for all program funds, the program is available to all service members and their families. FOCUS helps combat unique stressors and builds personal strength and resiliency.

According to Kirstin Woodward, the program's director, FOCUS is Navy Medicine's vanguard program on family psychological health and resiliency building. It addresses family functioning in the context of the impact of combat deployments, multiple deployments and high-operational tempo.

Although the program is funded by BUMED, according to Woodward, it is a unique, out of the box mental health option that is community, – not BUMED – based, and takes a de-stigmatized approach to care.

“What we do, across the board, at each installation is very different,” said Woodward. “FOCUS acclimates itself to the culture and pulse of the families and the different missions, deployment cycles and those other elements that create different strengths and stressors. By learning the ‘language’ and understanding the culture, we can provide better context to the service members and help them truly recognize what is going on.”

Jane Worthington, the NSW Family Support Program

*A Navy SEAL monitors two campers as they climb a rock wall at the Naval Special Warfare Teen Camp at Julian, Calif., Aug. 7, 2012. The six-day camp, sponsored by the Navy SEAL Foundation, provides a venue for teens to come together for fun, team-building, and resilience skills development. Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Geneva G. Brier.*



Regional Manager – West, says that’s what makes it work so well.

“Part of the success and one of their great strengths is their ability to adapt to our community,” Worthington said. “The program isn’t cookie cutter.”

The application of a three-tiered approach to care -- community education, psychological education and brief-treatment intervention for families -- has shown statistically significant outcomes in increasing family functioning and decreasing negative outcomes such as anxiety and depression in both parents and children.

Using some of the project’s core components, like parent and child skill building, dealing with deployment stress, and goal stressing, family members learn about and practice core resiliency skills. These skills include active communication, effective problem solving, strategies for setting and achieving goals, and regulating family emotion.

FOCUS has and continues to adapt to what the community’s needs are. According to Karen Vezina, the NSW Family Support Program Regional Manager – East, FOCUS personnel attend command meetings, family picnics and weekend events. They answer questions, provide guidance and make recommendations. They also make sure that from the commanders down to the children, everyone knows who they are.

“They’ve made themselves a completely trusted agent within the community,” Vezina said. “The kids know them, and the families trust them. They completely get who we are.”

One of the most successful collaborations has been at the week-long NSW kids camps that are held each summer on both coasts. “We focus on the fundamentals of resiliency at camp, but it also lets the children find support from each other and just be kids,” Woodward said. “FOCUS brings key elements to camp and tailors events by age group and adapts to the unique needs of the campers to build appropriate coping skills.”

For service members and families who aren’t near a FOCUS facility – they’re located on the East and West coasts, as well as Japan – they can also utilize FOCUS’s online virtual reality application of their program, Focus

World. The site [www.focusproject.org](http://www.focusproject.org) provides great tools and resources for families who cannot, or perhaps aren’t ready to attend in-person training and workshops.

“The site is a great starting, or adjunctive tool that uses the same tools and language as our in-house workshops,” Woodward explained. “Each family member can build an avatar and deployed families can use it together.”

FOCUS is recognized at the highest levels of

leadership, to include the Executive Office of the President of the United States and the Office of the First Lady, as the model for prevention/intervention psychological health services for military families.

Since its inception within NSW in 2008, more than 35,000 people have used some form of FOCUS service. Woodward says the success can be attributed to

the service members, their families, and the FOCUS staff.

“I think the numbers show how motivated the NSW community is to take care of themselves, and that’s really huge,” said Woodward. “The numbers really speak volumes about the strength and resilience already built in.”

It also speaks to the trust the community has in the FOCUS people, she said.

“I have never met a core group of mental health care providers working together on a program like them; their passion is truly because they care,” Woodward said. “The staff is so dedicated, it’s so special, and that’s the kind of people you’ll find at any FOCUS site in the world.”

In August 2011, NSW saw the largest loss of life in its history when a helicopter crashed, claiming the lives of 38 people, including 22 NSW members. NSW FOCUS staff from the West Coast flew to Virginia Beach to provide emergency grief counseling, as well as psychological health first aid to the families, bringing their strength-building skills precisely where they were needed. They also attended a previously scheduled kid’s camp, and helped the children work through the horrific tragedy.

“We can talk all we want about what FOCUS does,” Vezina said, “but what’s made the difference is that they’re there.”

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*“They’ve made themselves a completely trusted agent within the community. The kids know them, and the families trust them. They completely get who we are.”*

*– Karen Vezina, NSW Family Support Program Regional Manager*

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## PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES - AFSOC

# 24 SOW strengthens force through resiliency programs

*By Raquel Sanchez*  
*AFSOC Public Affairs*

Special Tactics Airmen have held the forefront of combat operations for more than a decade, undertaking the most dangerous missions. These mission-ready operators are the first ones there. They cannot be mass produced and are in great demand.

The U.S. Special Operations Command's Preservation of the Force and Families initiative supports the Special Operations Force's truth that humans are more important than hardware. It provides resources targeted on physical, mental and spiritual aspects of resiliency for Airmen and their families.

Their motto, "First There ... That Others May Live," is a testament to the commitment of a Special Tactics Airman. These battlefield Airmen face multiple deployments and intensive training schedules that impact them and their families.

The 24th Special Operations Wing has led the way to ensure ST Airmen and their families have the resources available to them to deal with the stressors of a demanding operations tempo.

The 24th SOW is the third and newest wing in Air Force Special Operations Command, and the only one comprised of ST Airmen that include officers, combat controllers, pararescuemen, special operations weathermen, tactical air control party operators and specialized combat support Airmen from 58 Air Force specialties.

Their mission is to provide ST forces for rapid global employment to enable airpower success. Special Tactics Airmen are often the first to deploy into crisis situations because of their exceptional capabilities. These include airfield reconnaissance, assessment, and control. They also engage in joint terminal attack control, personnel recovery, and environmental reconnaissance.

"It's a mission that we have to sustain," said Col. Robert Armfield, 24th SOW commander. "We have a generation of people who have 10, 12, 14 rotations of doing this."

"The cumulative effect of this type of lifestyle can



**An AFSOC Special Operations Weather Team dons parachutes before boarding an MC-130P for Operation Nimble Response, Hurlburt Field, Fla., May 11, 2011. Photo by Staff Sgt. Julianne M. Showalter.**

cause psychological and physical trauma, and we have to continue to take this highly trained force and employ it on the next 10 rotations," Armfield said. "So how do you do it, how do you invest your resources to take care of your force and their families?"

The 24th SOW is taking care of their force and families through resiliency programs, resources and counseling. Leadership at the wing identified the need for specialized care for their force then assigned caregivers to their units to provide continuity of care and immediate one-on-one treatment to ST Airmen and their families.

The physical requirements of an ST Airman are demanding. No day is the same, and Airmen must be willing to test their physical and mental abilities to get the job done. ST Airmen are trained in parachuting, scuba diving, rappelling, skiing, motorcycling, survival skills and much more.

"The nature of the job is that they take risks," said Lt. Col. Chetan Kharod, the 24th SOW surgeon general. "We study what the most likely types of injury are during training, during deployment and off-duty to come up with prevention measures."



“Physical fitness covers exercise, nutrition, and overall health of the mind and body. Each unit has their own fitness operations with an athletic trainer and strength coach who shapes the building of an ST Airman,” Kharod said. “They also have a physical therapist that knows them and who can treat their injuries to ensure an effective recovery.”

The 24th SOW hopes to improve its return to duty rates by having caregivers on site who can help identify risks early on and who can provide treatment to get Airmen back to daily life and operational capability.

The wing is also one of the first to embed a psychologist and chaplain into each of its deploying units.

“We are identifying issues very early during the deployment and building rapport with the operators so they feel more comfortable talking about them when they get back,” said Lt. Col. James Young, the 24th SOW chief of psychological applications. “This allows us to connect them with resources and provide treatment almost immediately.

“In the past there was sometimes a stigma attached to those who asked for help, and many would continue to struggle and never seek the care they needed. Embedding psychologists into the units has made it easier for Airmen to ask for help,” Young said.

“For every deployment rotation that I’ve done, there have been four to five guys who have sought follow-up care just based off the conversation we had while deployed,” Young said.

Chaplains also deploy alongside psychologists to provide counseling to ST Airmen and their families before, during and after a deployment.

“When not on the battlefield with our prizefighters, our main focus is to take care of our families,” said Maj. Jason Botts, 24th SOW chaplain.

Family members are just as invested in the mission as the service member, and they are affected by the lifestyle of a career ST Airman. To help care for the needs of their families, the wing has off base resiliency retreats. Each squadron has two per deployment cycle: one mid deployment for spouses and one post deployment for the entire squadron. Retreats provide a setting that encourages interaction, information sharing and access to caregivers.

A psychologist, chaplain, military family life consultant, and doctor are present to educate and consult with members and their families. A psychologist begins the retreat by providing training on stress physiology followed by the chaplain who teaches spiritual resiliency. Both

seminars help attendees thoroughly understand the various stressors associated with ST deployments and provide tools for effectively managing the associated stress with the latest psychological techniques and spiritual formation practices.

These resiliency based retreats have proven to have an impact on the Airmen and their families, Botts said.

“We continually receive feedback from spouses that say, ‘We’ve never had anything like this before; now I understand my husband and can more effectively reintegrate my life with his upon returning home.’”

The military family life consultant teaches the latest relational resiliency strategies for adults and recently began a program to help children cope with the continual ST deployment cycle.

“There’s not a universal formula for resiliency,” Botts said. “However, I do know one truth about keeping people poised under pressure which we try to take advantage of via the retreat paradigm,” Botts said.

“The likelihood of bouncing back is much greater when we look out for each other, helping one another bear the stress that comes with ST deployments whether on the objective or at the diaper changing table,” Botts said. “So, along with getting high quality training, our retreats provide strategic down time for attendees to build stronger friendships with each other.”

The 24th SOW plans to continue to strengthen their force through the POTFF initiative adding personnel and facilities to take care of the Airmen and their families. AFSOC will build its first Resiliency Operations Center at Hurlburt Field with a groundbreaking expected in fiscal year 2014. The center will provide streamlined deployment processing, and integrated physical and mental health care. It will also provide top-tier training for ST Airmen, aviators and medical specialists.

“We hope the results of what we’re doing for the 24th SOW will help influence the future of how the Air Force and how special operators across the services train and take care of their people,” Armfield said.

The POTFF initiative has been a key component to help enhance mission readiness of the 24th SOW.

“When people join Special Tactics their lives are on the line every day. Since 9/11 we’ve lost 17 members and have had more than 100 critically injured,” Armfield said. “What we’re asking them to do is pretty incredible. We owe them the most we can do; to take care of them, to make them ready to be successful in combat, and to take care of the families that we’re asking to give so much to us.”



## PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES - MARSOC



*A Marine in the U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command Individual Training Course receives acupuncture therapy during a weekly 'Alternative Pain Management Clinic' as part of MARSOC's Performance and Resiliency (PERRES) program at the MARSOC gym aboard Camp Lejeune, N.C., Aug. 23, 2012. The PERRES program is a holistic approach to physical fitness, performance enhancement and injury prevention that emphasizes personal and unit development of the mind, body and spirit. Photo by Marine Corps Cpl. Logan Constant.*

# MARSOC PERRES continues to grow

*By Marine Corps Cpl. Kyle McNally  
MARSOC Public Affairs*

The Marines and Sailors at U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command are innovators; solvers of complex problems who are committed to achieving their mission to the best of their abilities. Their approach to fitness is no different.

MARSOC's Performance and Resiliency (PERRES) program was conceptualized in 2009 with the help of Col. George Bristol, the architect of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program and then MARSOC's inspector general and Assistant Chief of Staff. The program doesn't just focus on enhancing physical fitness, but largely aims to strengthen the mind and spirit.

"Ultimately, PERRES is a culture," said Brad Lambert, MARSOC's PERRES program manager. "It emphasizes personal and unit development, spiritually,

mentally and physically."

PERRES takes what Lambert calls "a resiliency approach" to wellness, focusing on performance enhancement and prevention rather than reactive measures.

"We want to teach, educate and train Marines to optimize their capabilities while preventing injury and sustaining a career within the Corps," said Lambert.

MARSOC's leadership has embraced the PERRES program and is taking an aggressive approach to incorporate all available and emerging capabilities to preserve its forces and their families throughout their assignment, said Lambert. In addition to resourcing this effort, another huge push is informing and educating MARSOC personnel to ensure they know the program's "pro-habilitative" focus on mind, body and spirit, he said.

Through proactive measures, PERRES addresses the personal complexities that can sometimes arise from war,



such as injury and anxiety. However, according to Dr. Carroll Greene, MARSOC's command psychologist, the effects of combat on the mind and spirit are often more positive than negative.

"The unsensational – and therefore unspoken – truth is that 75 to 95 percent of our warriors and their families experience long-term growth, family pride, enhanced self-esteem, strength development from stress inoculation and many other benefits from their service, acceptance of risk and personal sacrifices," he said.

Greene says that Marines have a "warrior mindset"; something that attracts them to the challenging lifestyle of the Corps. According to Bristol, the PERRES emphasis on spirituality targets that mindset.

"You're living a life less ordinary," said Bristol in an interview with the Marine Corps Times. "You're doing something tremendous for your country, something tremendous for the Marine Corps, something tremendous for your family."

Each component within U.S. Special Operations Command uses a PERRES program of some type. Although the newest command in SOCOM, MARSOC has already steered innovations in a different direction than those of its Special Operations counterparts.

"We've placed a big emphasis on the integration of PERRES within the command," said Lambert. "We want to increase force readiness while maximizing the health of the service member and family member in a proactive manner."

As part of this integration, PERRES has aligned with MARSOC's family readiness program, said Lambert.

"This will shift the focus of the family readiness program from supporting the Marine to supporting the personal growth and development of the family member," he said, referring to the "holistic" concept of PERRES.

MARSOC provides its Marines, Sailors and their families with PERRES subject matter experts at the battalion level, the first time a Marine Corps organization has done so, said Lambert.

Representatives include physical therapists, strength coaches, psychologists, chaplains and a command dietician.

These additions provide MARSOC personnel with an ability to recover amidst a high operational tempo, said Lambert. One example is the Third Location Decompression (TLD), which provides an immediate release for Marines and Sailors returning from deployment, allowing them to reintegrate and decompress at a third

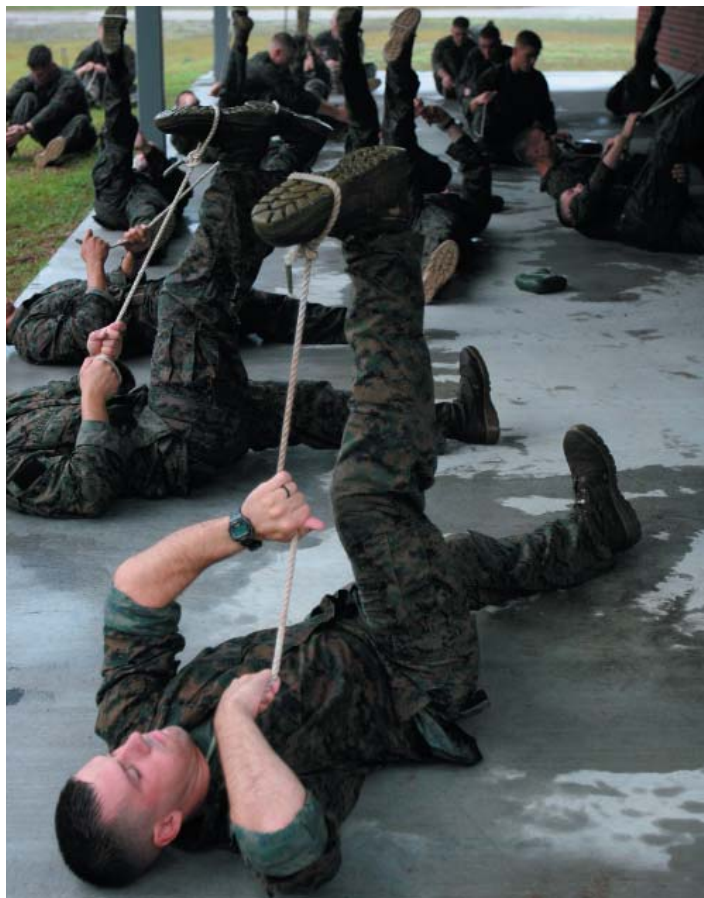
location prior to coming home.

During TLD, Marines check in with a physical therapist, a psychologist and a chaplain to screen for potential issues, and to "expedite their access to subject matter expertise," Lambert said.

Marines can access the same services in garrison. A weekly "Alternative Pain Management Clinic" provides acupuncture, physical therapy and trigger point dry needling to address musculoskeletal pain and symptoms of anxiety and insomnia, all without medication.

While PERRES has made significant strides at MARSOC, Lambert says that the program will continue to grow.

"Ultimately, we're going to find better ways to make Marines and their families more efficient and resilient at what they do," he said



**Marines in U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command's Assessment and Selection Preparation and Orientation Course conduct dynamic stretching exercises after a 10-mile hike Sept. 29, 2010, aboard Camp Lejeune, N.C. Photo by Cpl. Thomas Provost.**



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

# Ranger graduates from Kaibil jungle warfare school

*“...for I am better trained and will fight with all my might,” Ranger Creed.*

**By Tracy A. Bailey**  
**75th Ranger Regiment Public Affairs**

For the first time in more than 25 years, an American Soldier has graduated from the Guatemalan special operations Kaibil School, in Poptún, Guatemala.

Staff Sgt. Joel R. Rodriguez, Jr., a Ranger Reconnaissance Team Leader assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., graduated December 2012.

“I volunteered to attend this school because I wanted the challenge,” said Rodriguez. “I wanted to test myself and it’s something I wanted to accomplish during my military career.”

The Kaibil School is considered one of the most prestigious, vigorous, arduous military courses in Central America. Their motto: “If I advance, follow me. If I stop, urge me on. If I retreat, kill me.”

Within one week of starting the process, Rodriguez was en route to Guatemala City to start his training with no preparation whatsoever.

The Kaibil School specializes in jungle warfare tactics and counter-insurgency operations, and small unit tactics. Students endure great mental and psychological stresses and physical fatigue.

According to the Ministry of Defense, the Kaibil Center’s mission is to train and develop elite commando forces: “To select by means of arduous, difficult training under physical and mental pressure, members of the (Guatemalan) army are capable of engaging in commando operations.”

“Our training started with an introduction to our instructors while rolling around in mud puddles and a duck walk in four foot deep puddles and saying the Kaibil creed and motto at the same time,” said Rodriguez.

The students ran five miles to the school grounds, stopping for extracurricular activities such as high and



**Staff Sgt. Joel R. Rodriguez, Jr.**

low crawling through brush, duck walking in formation, for an unknown distance, followed by low crawling in the mud.

“Once we arrived at the school, that’s where the actual course began,” said Rodriguez. “And there was only one way in – low crawling 400 meters to the classroom.”

Eating is always a challenge when attending any military course but the Kaibil School puts unique demands on its students.

“A Kaibil student must do several events in order to eat,” said Rodriguez. “Run 2 miles in 18 minutes or less



in full combat gear, conduct five pull ups and 10 pushups. Then we duck walked 50 meters to the dining facility and while waiting to enter the building, we had to stay in the duck walk position.”

Once the students reached the Dining Facility, they were given 30 seconds to eat.

“We ate what we could as fast as we could,” said Rodriguez.

It’s no wonder the Ranger lost 40 pounds.

Phase One training consisted of forced road marches from distances of three miles to 32 miles, introduction to GPS and land navigation course, basic first aid, introduction to patrolling, hand-to-hand combat, obstacle courses and introduction to the Kaibil doctrine of patrolling.

During Phase One, which is three weeks long, 30 students out of 49 dropped from the course.

Phase Two is the mountain phase and consisted of mountaineering techniques, waterborne operations, introduction to SCUBA training, construction of improvised bridges, SERE training, incursions, weapons familiarization, small unit patrols, basic demolitions, basic air mobile techniques, react to contact, and ambush classes.

“The intensity of the course did subside some in Phase Two,” said Rodriguez. “The course was a little more relaxed.”

The students were exposed to prisoner of war camp situations and survival courses. However, Rodriguez did not want to say too much in order to protect the integrity of the course.

“I experienced what it is like to be a POW and what stresses and stressors a POW may experience,” said Rodriguez. “We were also taught how to process game and forage for food.”

Phase Two is four weeks long and Rodriguez experienced the same physical and mental stress as Phase One. Four additional students dropped from the course during this phase.

Several events took place during the final phase of the course, including final patrols, ambushes, raids, partisan link-up procedures, react to contact and infiltrations.

Throughout the entire course, “...displaying the intestinal fortitude required to fight on to the Ranger objective and complete the mission” was always in the back of Rodriguez’s mind but never more so than in the final phase.

“I conducted patrols in nothing but underwear, with no boots, while walking on azimuth through thorn filled brush, and rolled around in the thorns to fortify the body,” said Rodriguez. “As crazy as it sounds, after a while, the body goes numb and no pain is felt.”

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*“I conducted patrols in nothing but underwear, with no boots, while walking on azimuth through thorn filled brush, and rolled around in the thorns to fortify the body. As crazy as it sounds, after a while, the body goes numb and no pain is felt.”*

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— Staff Sgt. Joel R. Rodriguez, Jr.

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“The mental change is that no matter what happens, no matter what task is given, no matter how impossible the task may seem, everything is possible if one can push through the pain and discomfort to accomplish the mission,” said Rodriguez. “This is what makes a Kaibil, a unique soldier.”

Rodriguez was one of 15 students to graduate from the course.

“I recommend this course to all who want to attend. However, you will go through very intense training that may be considered inhumane by others but this is the kind of training a Soldier needs to be prepared for combat,” said Rodriguez. “I see the world in a whole new way, and have learned what my body is capable of accomplishing with minimal equipment, food, water and support from outside sources.”

Rodriguez is no stranger to taking on the tough military schools.

He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger Course Jumpmaster Course, Advanced Leader Course, Pathfinder Course, Long Range Surveillance Leader Course, Javelin Training Devices, Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape Course, Combatives Level 1 and 2, the Warrior Leader Course, Emergency Medicine Technologist Basic Course, the Ranger Assessment and Selection Program and the Basic Airborne Course.

Rodriguez has deployed six times in support of the War on Terror with four tours to Iraq and two to Afghanistan for a total of 23 months deployed.

Rodriguez is a native of Penitas, Texas and has been in the U.S. Army since May 2005.

**AIRBORNE**

**U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**



*Sgt. David M. Gerardi, a weapons sergeant with the Army National Guard's 19th Special Forces Group, received the nation's third highest medal for his actions while deployed in 2011 as an active-duty Marine with 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Marine Division (Forward), II Marine Expeditionary Force. Photo courtesy of Sgt. David M. Gerardi*

# Soldier earns Silver Star for valor in Afghanistan as Marine

*By Army Cpl. Jacob D. Osborne  
Army News Service*

It's not every day a National Guard sergeant receives a Silver Star for actions performed as a Marine. But that's exactly what happened in Pittsburgh, Dec. 10.

Sgt. David M. Gerardi, a weapons sergeant with the Army National Guard's 19th Special Forces Group,

received the nation's third highest medal for his actions while deployed in 2011 as an active-duty Marine with 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Marine Division (Forward), II Marine Expeditionary Force.

When Gerardi completed his enlistment with the Marine Corps in 2012, he transferred to the Army National Guard to pursue a new challenge -- to become a Green Beret.



Gerardi, whose award reads like a script from a big studio movie production, humbly accepted his Silver Star in front of a small group of family, friends and Marines from 3rd Recon Bn.

He credits his fellow recon Marines for his heroic actions.

"I know the award talks about me a lot, but those guys did more to bring me home than I could ever do for them," Gerardi said of his brothers-in-arms as tears swelled in his eyes. "I have been honored to serve with the best Marines and Soldiers."

He choked up when answering questions about the day for which he was being recognized.

It was June 6, 2011, in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Gerardi, a corporal at the time, and team mates were providing security near Balozai village when they came under fire. They were pinned down in a canal, receiving fire from several enemy positions a little more than 100 yards distant.

Gerardi identified a firing position at a mud wall forward of the team that would give him a clear line of sight to the enemy position presenting the greatest danger to his team. Without hesitation, he crossed an open field to get to a wall less than 45 yards from the enemy. He was greeted with a volley of rocket-propelled and 30mm grenades, as well as medium machine-gun fire that prevented him from returning fire.

Despite the intense fire, he maneuvered to a more vulnerable position along another wall that afforded a better angle for him to fire on the enemy. Despite rounds striking within inches of his body, Gerardi provided suppressive fire, which allowed his Marines to extract a wounded Afghan soldier.

"The training kicked in," Gerardi said. "Going to that position just made sense. That way, I wasn't conflicting with the other guys' line of fire."

Gerardi continued to coordinate with other Marines on the ground to provide suppressive fire despite the chaos of enemy fire continually impacting around his position.

Throughout the five-hour engagement, Gerardi

showed "stalwart determination and vigilance" while providing precision fire, thereby allowing his team to extract after nightfall, according to his Silver Star citation.

"Because of his dedication and superior knowledge, he was able to accurately engage," said Cpl. Josh Davenport, a recon Marine who served with Gerardi.

"He wasn't just shooting blindly or because he was scared," Davenport said. "He was saying, 'I'm going to do this job better than anyone else,' and he did. For that reason, he got the Silver Star. He was braver and more dedicated. He definitely earned it."

Maj. Gen. Melvin Spiese, commanding general of 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade, presented the medal to Gerardi.

Spiese said Gerardi was a testament to his generation.

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*"He wasn't just shooting blindly or because he was scared. He was saying, 'I'm going to do this job better than anyone else,' and he did. For that reason, he got the Silver Star. He was braver and more dedicated. He definitely earned it."*

— Marine Corps Cpl. Josh Davenport

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"He proved himself to be an astute and courageous tactical fighter that day, and his heroic and selfless actions under fire saved the lives of his fellow Marines, turned the tide in an intense firefight and was an inspiration for those serving with him," Spiese said.

"Sergeant Gerardi choose to serve his country in a time of war and to do so as an infantryman and reconnaissance Marine. He, like every other Marine on the battlefield, could have chosen to do something different other than

accept the responsibility for the security of their country as a U.S. Marine," he said.

Gerardi's parents attested to his passion for the military. They said they never doubted their son's tenacity.

"We always knew he'd grow up to do something amazing," said Gerardi's father Michael "I'm just happy he's home. I'm so proud of him."

Though Gerardi has left the Corps, his impact on the Marines who served with him will last a lifetime.

"He's an example to all of us in our community," Davenport said. "One of the biggest things we take from him is his heart. He puts everything into it. He brings guys together."

"You can feel the sense of pride that he has in the job that he does, and he's definitely one of the best."



## NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

# From Seaman to Admiral

*By NSW Public Affairs*

There are a finite number of Navy admirals who began their careers at the bottom of the rank totem pole, navigated their way through the enlisted ranks, earned a commission and rose to the top. One of the select few, who went from being the newest of new guys to earning ruffles and flourishes, walks amongst the NSW ranks – actually leading the community he has served for more than four decades.

Rear Adm. Garry J. Bonelli, former Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, is a Bronx street urchin and proudly claims his native New York City. He grew up in a predominately Catholic Italian/Irish neighborhood known as Woodlawn and McLean Heights.

On Nov. 26, Bonelli turned over the reigns as NSW's deputy commander to Rear Adm. Scott Moore. Bonelli's career is not only full of occupational milestones, but historical ones as well. He has served in every major U.S. conflict since Vietnam and has worn a variety of Navy hats over the years. He served as an undesignated Seaman, a Commissaryman, now known as Culinary Specialists, an enlisted SEAL, a public affairs officer and a SEAL officer. As he has watched the NSW Enterprise evolve during the last 45 years, his perspective, goals and outlook on life have changed as well, making him one of NSW's most diverse commanders.

"Ad astra per aspera" is Latin for "To the stars through difficulty." This is the motto of Mount Saint Michael Academy, an all-boys high school in the Bronx where Bonelli spent his teen years. It serves as a fitting maxim for a Sailor who chose a challenging path and became a Navy SEAL flag officer, although initial signs might have pointed to a life as a man of the cloth.

"The Marist Brothers who taught at the Mount had me seriously thinking about the priesthood; however, I discovered girls by my sophomore year," Bonelli said.

After high school graduation, Bonelli began college at Pace University in New York, and at the time, had never given the military much thought. After two semesters he, in his words, "flunked out" as an accounting major in 1968. By that time, the Vietnam War was raging and the U.S. had instituted the draft. Not knowing if he would be



**Seaman Garry J. Bonelli**

drafted or not, Bonelli decided to join the Navy. Years later he discovered that his number would not have been selected in the draft.

"I had two neighborhood buddies, Paddy O'Keefe and Bobby Geary, who enlisted in the Army. Both men made the ultimate sacrifice," he said. "So to avoid the Army, I decided to join the Navy to see the world."

After shipping off to boot camp in Great Lakes, Ill., he was there less than 24 hours before a Chief showed his boot camp company a grainy 16mm film depicting Navy frogmen SCUBA diving.

"It never dawned on me that the Navy could teach a Sailor how to dive. I was into the frogman program hook, line, and sinker," he said. "I took the PT test and became a member of the first ever UDT/SEAL boot camp company. We graduated from boot camp in greens, jump boots, and black berets much to the consternation of our other boot camp company contemporaries who wore service dress blues. We all thought we were Navy SEALs. Little did we know the real and only test was BUD/S."

Bonelli classed up with BUD/S Class 50 to begin training. On the very first day, the instructors addressed



the entire class and ordered all the members of Bonelli's former boot camp company to fall out and form up separately. Bonelli and his counterparts proudly strutted away from the rest of the class. Little did they know that the instructor cadre's only intention was to identify them.

"Being in that first ever UDT/SEAL boot camp company really kind of worked against us," said Bonelli. "The instructors went down the line and memorized every one of our names. Most of the guys dropped within a few weeks."

One week after completing "Hell Week," Bonelli broke his collar bone during an obstacle course mishap and was rolled back to Class 51. Much to his chagrin, after recovering from his injury and being deemed fit for duty, he was placed at the beginning of the training pipeline and had to survive Hell Week a second time.

"With solid student officer and enlisted leadership, I made it through training and graduated with Class 51. As it turns out, when I started day one again, I was in a lot better physical and mental shape the second time around," he said.

In the spring of 1969, Seaman Apprentice Bonelli reported to Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) 12 and immediately deployed to Vietnam. Once in country, he began asking questions about the Navy's promotion process. He remembers asking one of the petty officers how to earn a crow and chevron on his sleeve. The petty officer responded by saying, "Well, you got to make seaman first." After making the joke, he explained to Bonelli that he would have to pick a rate and test to advance. After looking at the three available rating manuals there, Bonelli picked the thinnest book and began studying to become a Commissaryman.

By the end of 1971, Bonelli had completed two deployments in Vietnam and was proud of his service in the war.

"I listened to my LCPO and platoon commander and felt I had made a difference for my country. Many of my civilian peer group at that time, including some of my boyhood friends who completed college saw the world and the war in Vietnam quite differently," he said. "It took a lot of years but most of my enduring childhood friends now have a deep appreciation and respect for the military service of Vietnam vets as well as today's vets."



**Seaman Garry J. Bonelli**

After four years of active duty service, Bonelli left the Navy in 1972 as a commissaryman 2nd class and returned to college using his Vietnam-era GI Bill to earn two undergraduate degrees in journalism and marketing. He would later earn a Master of Science degree in mass communications from San Diego State University.

"It never dawned on me before to be a Navy officer because officers had college degrees – something I had failed to achieve," he said. "Toward the end of my first enlistment that perspective changed. In fact, the responsibilities and decisions given to junior officers didn't seem much greater than those of senior enlisted – the only difference was the college degree."

In 1974, Bonelli volunteered for the first ever Reserve augmenting unit in NSW and began asking how he could get a commission to become an officer.

"I asked many times, to as many Navy people who would listen to me if I could get a direct commission as a Navy SEAL and the answer was always, 'No!' At the time, there was no such program; however, I kept asking," Bonelli said. "Finally, a yeoman master chief at the Reserve Center took me under his mentorship. The master



## NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND



**Petty Officer 3rd Class Garry J. Bonelli**

chief told me that with my educational background and experience, he could get me a direct commission as a public affairs officer (PAO). I was stupid enough to tell the master chief that I wanted to be a SEAL officer not a PAO. He took me by the scruff of my collar and let me know that once I became a PAO, he could change my designator to a Naval Special Warfare officer. That's all I needed to hear, and in four months, I went from an E-5 SEAL to O-1 PAO to O-1 NSW officer in the Naval Reserve," he said.

Bonelli's aspirations as an Ensign were very straightforward – he looked forward to drill weekends so he could dive, jump, shoot, blow things up, and most importantly, hang out with his teammates. Advancement however, was not high on his priority list.

"My goal was to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant and retire from the Navy Reserve with 20 years of combined active and reserve service," he said. "However, the world would change for all of us in 1990. Many of us reservists were mobilized to join our active duty teammates for the first Persian Gulf War."

In response to that crisis, Bonelli received a call to return to active duty and returned to SEAL Team Five after leaving there 18 years earlier as an E-5. This time, as a commander, Bonelli would report as the commanding officer.

"I remember walking across the Quarterdeck and then, Master Chief Radiomen (SEAL) Chuck Miller, handed me a big, ladies hat pin. I said 'What's this for Master Chief?' He said, 'to poke you in the head if it becomes too inflated,'" said Bonelli.

As a Navy Captain, Bonelli was called upon once again. The Global War on Terror was in full swing and he was requested by Rear Adm. Joe Maguire to take the position as Naval Special Warfare Command's (WARCOM) chief of staff. That four-month job morphed into a seven-year tour that saw Bonelli promoted to rear admiral take over as WARCOM's deputy commander, and eventually Force Commander, and rise to the rank of rear admiral (upper half).

During the course of a 45-year career, Bonelli has much to be proud of, but he is most pleased by the evolution of NSW's Reserve component, which he helped shape into what it is today.

"Since 1990, our Reservists have answered the call time and time again," he said. "They have forgone their jobs and professions to man our ranks at all echelons. Our Reservists are combat proven, seamlessly integrated and value-added. The NSW Reserve is a model every reserve component seeks to emulate."

As an officer, the time spent in command is often a special one. For Bonelli, it's no different.

"Two active duty command tenures truly stand out - serving with teammates as the commanding officer of SEAL Team Five during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990/1991 and having the SOCOM Commander, Adm. Eric Olson, fleet-me up from the deputy position to serve as the ninth force commander of NSW for a brief duration in 2008."

After four and one-half decades of service, Bonelli is on the brink of retirement and has no regrets. He has treasured his time spent in the community and the experiences that have shaped him.

"I wouldn't do anything different. Every day in the teams has been special. Whether hot or cold, wet and sandy, exhausted, just plain miserable or scared shitless; it's been a blast," he said. "Few have felt the exuberance derived from a successful mission. Few have felt the depths of sorrow during a memorial service when handing an American flag to a mother who has lost her son in combat. It's been a lifetime of experiences few can truly understand and fewer can live guided by our SEAL Ethos."



## *Parting thoughts*

### **How has your perspective changed regarding the community over the years?**

As a young team guy, I had the wrong-headed notion that if you weren't a SEAL, you weren't much. Today, the professionalism and pride now imbued into all NSW military and civilian personnel clearly manifests itself on the battlefield because we are all about "teams." The team truly encompasses our mission specialists – combat support and combat services support NSW personnel. The team includes our civilian subject matter experts, who help provide continuity and enhance our professional relationships across the joint, combined, and interagency arenas.

But I definitely have a new hero – the Navy SEAL and SWCC wife. These magnificently courageous women will never truly be appreciated for the sacrifices they make daily on behalf of our Nation. NSW wives are the bulwark that keep our operators resilient and in the fight, time and time again. They bear the children who will raise their hands to defend our freedoms in the future.

In addition, NSW now enjoys and cherishes the benevolence of civilian, non-profit support organizations such as the Navy SEAL Foundation, the SOF Care Coalition, and the NSW Family Foundation. Made up of mostly volunteers, these organizations help our teammates and their families during casualties, with educational support, and promote our rich history and heritage.

### **What advice would you provide the youngest SEAL in the community today?**

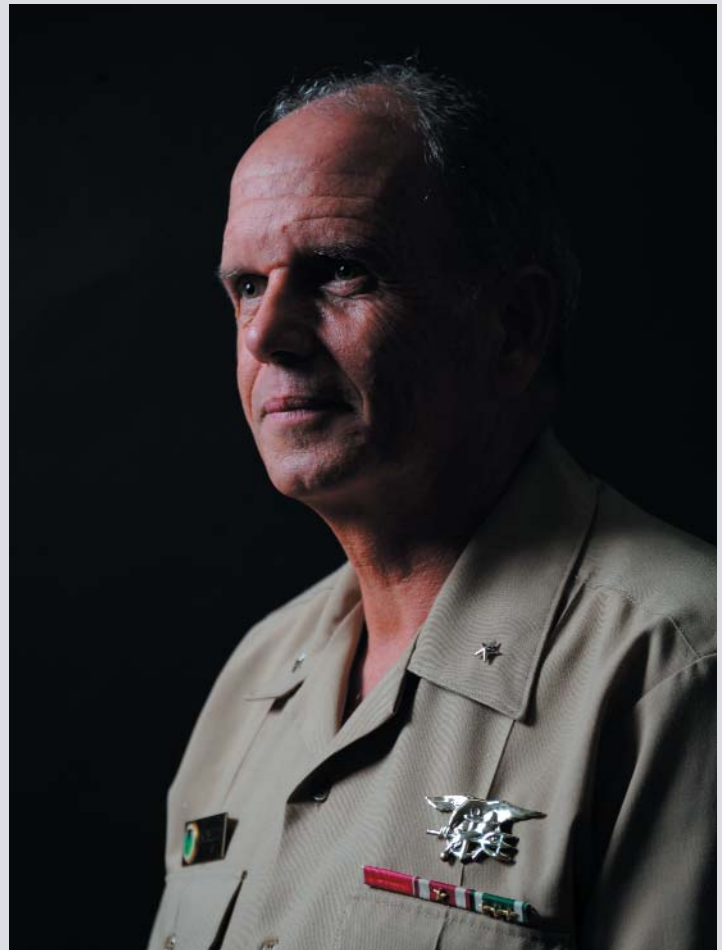
Show up 5 minutes early to musters, ready to go, with the right gear, in the right uniform, no matter how much it hurts. Listen to your Chief and carry out his orders; ask why later. As the beer commercial says – "stay thirsty!" Remember, the Trident you have to earn every day has an American bald eagle with a bowed head. It's good for a SEAL to be humble.

### **What advice would you provide to a young officer?**

Listen to your Chief. Then lead from the front. Take care of that junior enlisted SEAL in your platoon. Who knows - he may someday become the NSW Force Commander.

### **What would you say are the strongest leadership traits in today's NSW operators?**

For SEALs and SWCCs, it's to be a culturally-attuned warrior, diplomat, and problem-solver, a military professional who continually hones his education and



*Rear Adm. Garry J. Bonelli*

training, and actively learns from his real-world experiences.

### **Is there a message or messages you would like to send to the Force today?**

In our Navy, and especially in the teams, it's all about opportunities: opportunities to serve our Country in places most Americans only see on TV; opportunities to get to know people who see the world differently from us; opportunities to make a real difference for our national security; opportunities to have a blast!

### **Is there anything you would like to add?**

Today, the teams have never been better resourced, equipped, trained, and lead. Our Force Commander, RADM Sean Pybus, Force Master Chief Steve Link, and new Deputy Commander, RDML Scott Moore, form a leadership triad and brain-trust that will keep Naval Special Warfare at the forefront of our national security strategy.

It's been an honor, a privilege, and a blast! Hooyah – Naval Special Warfare!



## AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

# 007: The spy who loved spec ops

*Retired Lt. Col. Charles Russhon, military advisor to the James Bond films in the '60s and '70s, poses with Sean Connery during the production of "Thunderball." Russhon took Connery in tow when he arrived in New York, and they remained friends until Russhon passed away in 1982, Russhon's wife, Claire Russhon, said. Photo courtesy of Christian Russhon.*



**By Rachel Arroyo**  
**AFSOC Public Affairs**

Quartermaster “Q” supplied Skyfall’s 50-year anniversary James Bond with a radio and a Walther PPK handgun, but Sean Connery’s 007 relied on an Air Commando for some of the bigger stuff.

Retired USAF Lt. Col. Charles Russhon, one of the founding Air Commandos assigned to the China-Burma-India theater in World War II, was a military advisor to the Bond films in the ‘60s and ‘70s.

Among the gadgets Russhon procured for filmmakers were the Bell-Textron Jet Pack and the Fulton Skyhook, both featured in the 1965 “Thunderball,” as well as the explosives that were used to blow up the Disco Volante ship.

He arranged for exterior access to Fort Knox, coordinated filming locations in Istanbul, Turkey, and facilitated film participation by USAF pararescuemen in “Thunderball.”

“Roger Moore called him ‘Mr. Fixit’ because he seemed to be able to do or get anything in New York City,” Russhon’s wife, Claire, wrote in an e-mail. “For example, suspending traffic on F.D.R. Drive for a Bond chase scene (and that isn’t done in one take).”

As special associate to the producers, Russhon, a native New Yorker, researched new technologies, locations and permissions for whatever the scripts required, she said.

Russhon, who passed away in 1982, worked on “From Russia With Love,” “Goldfinger,” “Thunderball,” “You Only Live Twice,” and “Live and Let Die.”

#### **“Mr. Fix-It”**

Christian Russhon remembers his father’s business card read “catalyst - agent that brings others together.”

For him there was never a dull moment, he said.

“He was larger than life.”

The film crew commemorated the colonel’s penchant for life on the set of “Goldfinger” in which they promoted him to the rank of general. In the film, a banner hung on the Fort Knox airplane hangar reads, “Welcome, General Russhon.”

Christian Russhon said he also remembers seeing his dad on film in “Thunderball” in which he appeared as an Air Force officer at a conference with other agents. According to the International Movie Database, Russhon is sitting to the right of “M” in the scene.

Russhon’s connections with movers-and-shakers made



**Claire Russhon, wife of retired Lt. Col. Charles Russhon, military advisor to the James Bond films in the ‘60s and ‘70s, poses in the Aston Martin DB5 made famous in the films. Photo courtesy of Christian Russhon.**

him the right man for the Bond job post retirement from USAF active-duty service. His acquaintance with film producer Albert “Cubby” Broccoli predated Broccoli’s work on the Bond films, Claire Russhon said. He was available when Broccoli needed a man stateside to work on the films.

Russhon relied on his acquaintance with President John F. Kennedy’s press secretary Pierre Salinger for access to film at Fort Knox in “Goldfinger.”

He worked with his military connections to get approval for filming in Turkey in “From Russia with Love” and to arrange for pararescuemen conducting a water training jump to be featured in “Thunderball.”

He was also there for a young Sean Connery when he arrived in New York City, Claire Russhon said.

“Connery was a stranger in New York, and Charles took him in tow.”

When Connery was at odds with the producers, Russhon would serve as the go-between, she said.

“Despite his reputation with the girls, Sean was a man’s man,” she said. “They kept in touch long after working together, and Sean called me when Charles died.”

Christian Russhon, who has also worked in the film industry for 30 years, remembers Sean Connery stopping by their New York apartment all the time.

“I called him Uncle Sean,” he said.



## AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

The BSA Lightning motorcycle from “Thunderball,” complete with rockets, also left an impression on young Christian Russhon.

The motorcycle was gifted to his dad who gave it to his godson. Christian was not old enough to drive yet, so he missed out on the BSA Lightning, he recalled.

### Some Real Spy Work

Russhon not only had the connections, but he had the credentials to advise Bond filmmakers. He conducted his own top secret special operations work with the 1st Air Commando Group during World War II.

The group, led by co-commanders and then Lt. Cols. John Alison and Philip Cochran, assisted one of the fathers of irregular warfare, British Army Maj. Gen. Orde Wingate, and his ground forces, the “Chindits”, as they penetrated the Burmese jungles in the fight against the Japanese.

Their mission was to provide air support to British ground forces through infiltration and exfiltration, combat resupply and medical evacuations in hostile territory using a wide variety of aircraft flying low-level, long-range missions.

Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Russhon worked as a sound engineer for NBC in New York City and for Hollywood-based Republic Pictures, which specialized in Westerns.

Claire Russhon said her husband’s deep patriotism and education at Peekskill Military Academy, Peekskill, N.Y., motivated him to join the United States Army Air Corps following the attack.

As a young lieutenant, he was sent to Burma where he led the 10th Combat Camera Unit, a small group of cameramen supporting the 1st Air Commando Group.

Alison and Cochran built a rapport with Russhon based on his exemplary work as a cameraman. He later became permanently attached to the Group, said Air Force Special Operations Command historian William Landau.

“They became fast friends,” Claire Russhon said. “Gen. John Alison was later best man at our wedding.”

Russhon became critical to mission success in the days leading up to Operation Thursday when he was cleared by Cochran to defy Wingate’s orders and conduct last minute photo reconnaissance of the three landing strips Allied forces were to use during the mission, Landau said.



*This photograph from a 1945 article published in the “San Francisco Examiner” features retired Lt. Col. Charles Russhon as a captain (center) after his return from Japan in the wake of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Russhon was one of the first Americans on the ground in both locations within 24 hours of the bombs being dropped on both. One of the original Air Commandos, Russhon worked as a military advisor to the James Bond films in the ‘60s and ‘70s. Photo by the “San Francisco Examiner” courtesy of Christian Russhon.*

Operation Thursday, a mission in which gliders were used to drop the Chindits deep behind Japanese enemy lines, marks the first time in military history that air power was the backbone of an invasion, Landau said.

“The photo reconnaissance was used to survey and select the landing sights,” he said. “By cutting it off, Wingate basically left himself open to the possibility of a nasty surprise upon landing.”

Russhon got in the air with his camera. The first airstrip, Broadway, was clear. Chowringhee airstrip was clear. Piccadilly, which was to be used in the first night of operations, was strewn with teak logs locals had dragged



out to the clearing to dry, he said.

“Russhon was so taken aback, he actually forgot to photograph the area,” Landau said. The pilot doubled back.

He rushed to develop about 30 photographs from the nearest base of operations and had them delivered to Cochran, Alison and Wingate.

“It [Russhon’s photo reconnaissance] not only saved many lives. It saved the operation itself,” Landau said. “If they had landed with logs and debris at Piccadilly, the mission had the potential of being a catastrophic failure.”

Russhon received the British Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions in August 1945. An excerpt from the citation reads:

This officer has displayed exemplary keenness and devotion to duty and was signed by Gen. Wingate for his courageous action.

Russhon continued to serve as a photographer through the end of World War II.

After the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he was among the first Americans on location documenting the destruction.

A 1945 article from the “San Francisco Examiner” interviewed Russhon about being on the ground in both cities within 24 hours after each bomb dropped.

“A strange, rusty-looking haze hung over Nagasaki when I flew above the city at 3,000 feet the day after it was hit by the atomic bomb...It was unlike anything I’ve ever run into before or since. I got out of there in one hell of a hurry,” Charles Russhon told the Examiner.

Following his active-duty career with the USAF, Russhon entered the Air Force Reserves and began his work bringing life to Ian Fleming’s Bond on the big screen.

Claire Russhon said her husband enjoyed working on all of the Bond films but that one of the most interesting was “You Only Live Twice” because it required him to return to Japan where he recalled some of his World War II experiences.

“In preparing for the Bond filming, there was a reception for the Japanese officials at which a gentleman greeted Charles and said ‘you have gained weight,’” she said. “It was a Japanese general who explained that he was on the welcoming committee at Atsugi Air Base when that first plane arrived [post atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki] and Charles stepped off.”

Russhon’s legacy is extensive.

Not only has he been immortalized onscreen in the Bond films, but friend and celebrated American cartoonist Milton Caniff crafted “Charlie Vanilla” from his “Steve Canyon” comic strip after his person.

The “Charlie Vanilla” character was a mister fix-it with an affinity for vanilla ice cream who always managed to save the day, Claire Russhon said.

“The ice cream cone was fashioned after Charles’s addiction to chocolate ice cream, but Caniff decided that ‘Vanilla,’ with the dangling vowel sounded more ominous,” she said.

Beyond the life he breathed into Bond by supplying filmmakers with the cool gadgets and locations viewers remember when they watch classic movies like “Goldfinger,” Russhon is immortalized in Air Commando history through his photos and his leadership.

“I get a sense of adventure. I get a sense of cunning,” AFSOC historian William Landau said. “To me he embodies what an Air Commando more or less should be. He’s fearless.”



**Sean Connery feigns shoving a vanilla ice cream cone in retired Lt. Col. Charles Russhon’s face during the production of “Thunderball.” The vanilla ice cream cone had special significance to Russhon, who inspired the “Charlie Vanilla” character, an ice cream loving mister fix-it, in friend and esteemed American cartoonist Milton Caniff’s comic strip “Steve Canyon.” Photo courtesy of Christian Russhon.**



## MARINE CORPS FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

*Marines with the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, rappel from a MH-47 helicopter onto a mock cargo ship during Visit, Board, Search and Seizure training with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) near Camp Pendleton, Calif., Dec. 11, 2012 .*





# MARSOC conducts joint VBSS training with the 160th SOAR (A)

*Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Kyle McNally  
MARSOC Public Affairs*

“Marines are first and foremost a naval force,” said Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James F. Amos, speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., Nov. 8. “The Marine Corps fills a unique lane in the joint fight, one that leverages the sea as a primary conduit for global power projection.”

After 11 years of landlocked warfare, the Marine Corps and its SOCOM component are gearing up for a return to the sea. Marines with the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, demonstrated this recently by conducting Visit, Board, Search and Seizure training off the shore of Camp Pendleton, Calif. Dec. 4 to 11.

“[VBSS] provides us a way to insert and extract our forces during amphibious operations,” said a 1st MSOB Marine involved with the training. “With today’s changing battlefield, it’s an increasingly important capability.”

During their VBSS exercise, 1st MSOB’s Marines harnessed the technical skill of the Army’s elite 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). SOAR pilots hovered over a mock cargo ship as Marines fast-rope onto the deck, and flew just feet over the open ocean as Marines leapt into the water and climbed ladders back into the aircraft.

“It was extremely beneficial to train with the 160th,” said the 1st MSOB Marine. “Each of our communities are very small, so it’s good to establish those relationships. The guys we work with here are the same guys we see in theater.”

During the seven-day evolution, the Marines trained in fast roping, shooting drills and hoist and ladder operations. The training culminated with day and night runs of two exercises – one a ship takedown, the other insertion and extraction drills over the open ocean.

“MARSOC Marines are capable of operating in any environment,” said the 1st MSOB Marine. “But in order to do that effectively, you have to train,” he said.

Although some aspects of VBSS are conducted solely by special operations and reconnaissance forces, such as the helocasting drills practiced by 1st MSOB, the basic elements are used by conventional Naval and Coast Guard forces.

In 2009, a coalition of allied navies formed Combined Task Force 151 to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. The task force regularly uses VBSS to search vessels, conduct inspections and disrupt drug and arms trafficking.

According to the International Maritime Bureau, incidents of piracy have decreased as of 2012, arguably as a result of a heightened coalition presence and more preventive measures by merchant shipping.

“But the threat [of piracy] isn’t going away anytime soon,” said the 1st MSOB Marine. “That’s why it’s critical to sustain our amphibious capabilities.”

In his speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Amos also cautioned against neglecting amphibious preparedness.

“The world is not necessarily a nice place, and there is no indication that the next two decades are going to be a whole lot nicer,” he said. “The Marine Corps is purpose-built for exactly the kind of world we’re living in today.”



**Marines with the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, carry Combat Rubber Reconnaissance Crafts ashore after conducting helocasting drills as part of Visit, Board, Search and Seizure training with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) near Camp Pendleton, Calif. Dec. 11, 2012.**



## NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS HEADQUARTERS - BELGIUM



*NATO Special Operations Forces, comprised of 26 member nations and three non-NATO partners, celebrate the completion of a new state-of-the-art, 23,000-square-foot headquarters building during a ribbon-cutting ceremony Dec. 12, 2012 at SHAPE in Mons, Belgium. NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Adm. James Stavridis, center left, and Lt. Gen. Frank Kisner, NATO Special Operations Headquarters commander, addressed distinguished guests and expressed their desire for the building to serve as an ideas hub for 21st-century special operations.*

# NATO Special Operations Headquarters building opens in Mons, Belgium

*By Vince Little  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*

U.S. and international military officials cut the ribbon on a state-of-the-art facility constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District that will enable the NATO special operations forces community to plan, coordinate and conduct vital missions around the globe.

Leaders from Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, 26 member nations and three non-NATO partners, and USACE gathered here Wednesday for an opening ceremony, heralding the new NATO Special Operations

Headquarters as a significant achievement in engineering expertise, modernization and sustainable construction. It's expected to yield major cost savings by significantly lowering energy and water use, but the NSHQ also provides the alliance with a consolidated platform to better develop and direct all activities within its Special Operations Forces arm.

"I believe with all my heart in Special Operations as an undeveloped part of the future of security and military operations," said Adm. James Stavridis, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe and the head of U.S. European Command. "This headquarters will help us with training



and doctrine. It will help us connect interoperability, because in this 21st century, security is not about building walls.

“What I’m looking for from this command is that training and mentoring, a venue for ideas about doctrine and certainly equipment, and above all, to build those bridges among every nation. I look for you to be the centerpiece of our ability to connect Special Operations. You will be the flagship operation for this, and I would argue, in the world. ... It’s that kind of ability to outthink your opponent. That’s where I count on you from this headquarters.”

The new headquarters is necessary to complete the NATO Special Operations Forces Transformation Initiative begun under the NATO Atlantic Council after the Riga Summit in 2006. Since that inception six years ago, the organization had operated out of a temporary facility at SHAPE.

About 3,300 U.S. and international troops have gone through NSHQ training programs, education and schools in the past two years, Stavridis told the audience.

“This magnificent building shows us the art of the possible,” said Air Force Lt. Gen. Frank Kisner, the NSHQ commander. “The building is transformable -- the walls can be moved. We can reconfigure the size and shape of rooms in a matter of a few hours. Adaptability is huge for us.”

Kisner praised USACE’s Benelux Resident Office for helping to overcome project delays and environmental concerns while carrying out construction.

“They had the boots on the ground and boots in the mud,” he said. “We all know what that means and the importance of that effort.”

The new headquarters allows NATO to collaborate more efficiently by seamlessly connecting the Special Operations Forces headquarters of all 26 member nations and three non-NATO partners. A robust operational command, control, communications, computers and intelligence system -- known as C4I -- enables effective planning and coordination of highly sensitive missions, including special operations downrange, said Col. Joar Eidheim of the Norwegian army, the NSHQ director of operations.

“This is a necessary step,” he said. “We needed a building where we could collect all the nations within the alliance and our partners, so we could come together and actually do the planning and coordination of all SOF activities. This building is optimized to connect the nations ... and reach out to our capitals.”

Ground was broken on the \$19 million construction project in November 2010. Europe District managed the endeavor through a partnership with joint venture contractors Bilfinger-Berger and Besix. A total of 116 local subcontractors and suppliers were involved.

The 23,000-square-foot facility meets strict environmental and energy savings standards. It’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Silver certifiable by the U.S. Green Building Council, according to Bob Sommer, the USACE Benelux regional program manager.

Among the NSHQ’s environmental and energy features, planners say they anticipate a water-use reduction of more than 50 percent. It’ll be achieved through modern water-management techniques, as compared to non-LEED facilities. The building also has a “green” roof to reduce stormwater runoff and provide added insulation.

About 98 percent of construction materials -- based on cost -- were sourced from within 500 miles of the project site, supporting local economies and reducing the overall carbon footprint during assembly. The building design makes use of an interior courtyard area and innovative placement of offices to maximize natural lighting, which reduces the need for artificial, overhead light sources.

“What we’ve tried to integrate is the most current technology. We have a complete fiber network,” said Air Force Maj. Mark Workman, an NSHQ engineer who acted as a liaison between the command, USACE and the contractors. “The audiovisual systems are state-of-the-art. Each of the offices has a monitor, and all the monitors are connected to a central system. ... The facility we were in is undersized.

“This will allow us to come together, work and brainstorm to create those ideas that Adm. Stavridis is asking for.”

Workman said teamwork was crucial in completing the headquarters project.

“Coordination with SHAPE public works and logistics (and) integrating the utilities was tough ... and required a lot of moving pieces to come together,” he added. “And we had to work across multiple languages.”

Three years ago, the NSHQ numbered less than 100 personnel, he said. That’s expected to reach almost 300 at full capacity.

“It’s all about our people and the vision,” Kisner said. “This building is phenomenal. Our ability to look at the needs of security and stability is all enabled because we have this tremendous work space.”



# SOF's ministry of presence

*SOF chaplains help the body, mind and spirit*

**By Mike Bottoms**  
**USSOCOM Public Affairs**

Military chaplains have always been interested in preserving the force and their families. Leading USSOCOM's chaplain corps is Army Chaplain (Col.) Thomas Solhjem, and he and his team has developed a ministry of presence throughout the command.

"Chaplains are inclusive of others and chaplains help build teams," said Solhjem. "Chaplains have to navigate and understand the Special Operations teams."

Solhjem has been a chaplain for more than 26 years with 18 years of SOF experience.

"It is a privilege to serve the SOF community," he said. "SOF allows you the freedom of innovation which in turn makes you more effective."

The SOF chaplains are trained to be effective in a diverse environment and provide a moral compass to the commander. SOF Chaplains have the burden of care and provide care to the caregiver.

Developing the care to the caregiver concept is Chaplain (Cmdr.) James Edwards, USSOCOM deputy command chaplain. Edwards designed the *Joint Special Operations Chaplains/Chaplains Assistant Course* hosted by the Joint Special Operations University.

"Senior chaplains from each component briefs at the course and teach jointness," said Edwards. "They also teach what chaplain assistants do."

Army, Air Force Chaplain Assistants and Navy Religious Program Specialists are enlisted positions and are part of the Unit Ministry Team supporting a variety of religious programs, including worship services. Additionally, since chaplains are non-combatants, the chaplain assistant provides force protection for chaplains in combat environments.

The jointness concept is important because chaplains can and do work with each of the services.

"During the mass casualty in August 2011 where the SEALs were killed in that helicopter crash in Afghanistan you had Army chaplains helping the NSW families," said Edwards. "That is the stark reality in Special Operations."

The course trains and educates Army, Navy, and Air Force active duty, reserve, and National Guard Chaplains and Chaplains Assistants/Religious Program Specialists



**Army Chaplain (Col.) Thomas Solhjem, USSOCOM command chaplain, speaks at a National Prayer Breakfast at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., Mar. 12, 2012. Photo by Airman 1st Class Maynelinne De La Cruz.**

regarding the chaplain programs and religious ministry aspects of SOF and SOF operations. The course covers SOF missions and units, the history and development of SOF, religious support for SOF missions, an overview of SOF religious support issues in each component, Special Operations unique funding issues, the chaplain's role in the Preservation of the Force and Families, interdisciplinary teams and chaplain involvement, and the future religious ministry within SOF.

Besides the chaplains' course, Solhjem has built a mentoring program for SOF chaplains.

"We have brought in retired chaplains to mentor the active duty chaplain," Solhjem said. "The active duty chaplain gets to choose their mentor and they cannot opt out. This sensitizes the chaplains to each other and is a top down model."

The Special Operations community has different problem sets than the conventional force because SOF tends to be more mature.

"It takes at least a year to develop a trusting relationship with Special Operations Forces whereas it takes two to six months for conventional force," Edwards said. "In SOF, problems develop over time."

Solhjem explained that the SOF military chaplains come equipped with programs to deal with life's problems and have the ability to reach back to the services for help.

"Chaplains are a go-to crisis manager, share hardships, and bring programs such as the Army's 'Strong Bond,' Navy 'Credo' and the Air Force's 'Marriage Care' program," Solhjem said. "We share in life's hardships and are there in all of life's cycles."





**Army Master Sgt.  
Bradley S. Keys  
U. S. Army Special  
Forces Command  
(Airborne)**



**Marine Corps Sgt.  
Michael J. Guillory  
1st Marine Special  
Operations Battalion**

**Editor's note: Honored are Special Operations Forces who lost their lives since December's Tip of the Spear.**





*Air Force Staff Sgt. Robert O'Bannon, 16th Special Operations Squadron, walks down stairs with his wife after departing an aircraft during Operation Homecoming at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., Dec. 9, 2012. Photo by Airman 1st Class Eboni Reece.*