



# TIP OF THE SPEAR

**Eagle Claw veteran,  
Special Ops aviator  
receives  
2013  
Bull Simons  
Award**



*U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., June 2013*





# U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



**Arooji receives Bull  
Simons Award ... 16**

## Tip of the Spear



Thomas Jefferson  
Award Winner

**Adm. William H. McRaven**  
Commander, USSOCOM

**CSM Chris Faris**  
Command Sergeant Major

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*(Cover) Retired Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 Fred Arooji's stands silhouetted in front of an MH-47. Arooji received U.S. Special Operations Command's highest honor when he was awarded the 2012 Bull Simons Award in Tampa, Fla., May 15. This lifetime achievement award, named for Army Col. Arthur "Bull" Simons, honors the spirit, values, and skills of the unconventional warrior. Courtesy photo.*

# Highlights



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## SOF AROUND THE WORLD - CAMEROON SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA



*A Troop 2 Element along with 3rd Rapid Intervention Battalion soldiers participating in Operation Silent Warrior demonstrate the proper way to pass hallways and intersections during Close-Quarter-Battle training in Bamenda, Cameroon, Jan. 17. With the assistance of a “glass house,” so that everyone in attendance could watch what was going on, they taught the proper techniques for two and four man clearing teams. Photo by Air Force Master Sgt. Larry W. Carpenter Jr.*

# Joint exercise ‘Silent Warrior’ strengthens partner development

*By Air Force Master Sgt. Larry W. Carpenter Jr.*

U.S. Special Operations Forces service members and Cameroonian soldiers held joint exercise Silent Warrior Jan. 19 through Feb. 15 in Cameroon.

The purpose of the exercise was to enhance partner development with soldiers of the 3rd Rapid Intervention Battalion or Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (BIR) and introduce additional tactics, techniques and procedures into the Cameroonian’s current operational capability, while familiarizing U.S. Special Operations soldiers with the

operational environment in this part of Africa.

During the opening ceremony, the Cameroonian officials were adamant that building bonds and strengthening the relationship between the U.S. and Cameroonian soldiers were important to their approach to providing security for the civilians of Cameroon.

“We would like to express our profound gratitude to the high command that chose the 3rd Battalion for this exercise, and believe that by the end of this operation we will continue to foster bilateral relations between the U.S. Army and the Cameroonian Army,” said Major Gen. Mahamadou Saly, 2nd



Joint Military Region commander.

American officials on hand described two objectives U.S. troops were hoping to accomplish from the exercise.

“The first is for the United States Soldiers to learn from our Cameroonian counterparts. The second aim is to teach our Cameroonian counterparts what we have learned over our years of combat experience so we can all improve,” said Lt. Col. Herbert Skinner, U.S. Special Operations Command Africa exercise coordinator. “The Rapid Intervention Battalion is built to improve internal security against banditry; against piracy out in the bay...we are here to help them improve our collective capabilities.”

The exercise was conducted in two phases. The first phase took place in Bamenda, located in the northwest province, in which USSOF provided technical training on tactical skills; such as close-quarters battle, urban movement, land navigation, combat marksmanship, tactical combat casualty care, entry control point operations and protection of convoys.

The culminating event pitted soldiers against one another in a friendly competition, using the skills they had developed during the preceding two weeks of training.

The second phase of the exercise took place in Bouba Ndjida, in northeast Cameroon. This phase consisted of the U.S. Soldiers advising soldiers from the BIR anti-terrorist unit.

The groups split into three teams, patrolling the Bouba Ndjida National Park in 72-hour increments to deter potential poachers.

Countering poaching is a challenge in Cameroon, where hundreds of elephants were killed in 2012 for their ivory.

The U.S. SOF commander noted that shared hardship strengthens a unit, and that the austere conditions of the Bouba Ndjida National Park positioned U.S. SOF and BIR soldiers together against the rigors of the environment.

Upon completion of the training, both the U.S. and Cameroonian soldiers had a different outlook on their counterparts.

“The BIR soldiers lived up to their reputations as the premiere forces of Cameroon,” the U.S. commander said. “The soldiers of the BIR demonstrated a level of competence and dedication to soldiership.”

Silent Warrior was the first major SOCAFRICA exercise of 2013, but the training relationship between U.S. SOF and Cameroonian Armed Forces stretches back years.

“This attitude is certainly proof of the American will to promote a worldwide peaceful environment, to

communication and international exchange,” Saly said.

Although the exercise focused mainly on U.S. SOF and BIR elements, officials on both sides felt it important to integrate other Cameroonian security services into the activities.

“We’ve [U.S.] expanded our training to include other security forces, so that more forces are available to contribute to stability in this area,” said Skinner.

The exercise concluded with a ceremony, where elite warriors from both sides were able to demonstrate their appreciation for each other and admire what had been accomplished in a few short weeks.

“I would like to thank your government, your army and especially those who came out here to carry out this training, which I believe has been very beneficial to us. We are very happy with this experience and we hope, and we pray that it should continue,” said Col. Ayukegba, the 3rd BIR commander. “We will make good use of it, and we hope that it will strengthen with time.”

“We accomplished our mission by working closely with BIR forces to build a strong relationship based on mutual respect,” said the U.S. SOF detachment commander. “We are now postured to build upon this relationship and improve combined capabilities during future engagements.”



***Troop 2 Elements along with 3rd Rapid Intervention Battalion soldiers—from the counterterrorism unit—return from a 72-hour foot patrol through the Bouba Ndjida National Park during the second phase of the Silent Warrior Exercise in February. The BIR soldiers have had a stronger presence in the National Park over recent months to try and eradicate the poaching that has greatly reduced the elephant population in the park. Photo by Air Force Master Sgt. Larry W. Carpenter Jr.***





# U.S., Peruvian SOF train together

*Photos by Army Maj. Emanuel Ortiz*

**A member of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) ensures the surrounding area is secure prior to the departure of a MH-60 Blackhawk helicopter in the Pasco region, located in central Peru, May 7. Soldiers of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) are working in the region in support of Special Operations Command South.**





*Army Brig. Gen. Sean P. Mulholland, commander of Special Operations Command South, speaks with a Peruvian special operations member during a combined U.S. - Peruvian Special Operations exercise in the Pasco region, located in central Peru, May 7. As the Special Operations component for U.S. Southern Command, SOCSOUTH is headquartered at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla., and assists special operations partners across Central and South America and the Caribbean to build its military capacity.*



*Peruvian Special Operations members position themselves in order to provide support fire for their fellow operators and their U.S. counterparts during a combined U.S. - Peruvian Special Operations exercise in the Pasco region, located in central Peru, May 7. The exercise allowed U.S. and Peruvian special operations to share military tactics, improve interoperability and strengthen partnerships between the two nations.*



*A member of 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) explains the capabilities of specialized military equipment to senior U.S. and Peruvian military officials during a combined U.S. - Peruvian Special Operations exercise in the Pasco region, located in central Peru, May 7. Members of 7th SFG (A) support Special Operations Command South in an effort to build partner nation capacity across the U.S. Southern Command theater.*







**SOF AROUND THE WORLD**  
**SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – KOREA**



*Special Operators assigned to SEAL Team 17 conduct a Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure on board a South Korean Navy ship in conjunction with the Republic of Korea's Naval Special Warfare Flotilla during exercise Foal Eagle March 28. Foal Eagle is an annual defense exercise designed to ensure Republic of Korea and U.S. forces are prepared to execute required tasks and missions to protect the Republic of Korea. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Tony Spiker.*

# SEAL Team 17 trains with Korean partners during Foal Eagle 2013

*By SOCKOR Public Affairs*

Special Operator Second Class Dan C. reached out into the blackness and grasped the rope. He swung his feet out into the air and let gravity take its course, feeling the warmth of friction burn its way through his leather clad hands, slowing his descent to a manageable speed. His feet impacted the pitching flight deck and he ran to the closest bulkhead, unstrapping his weapon as he went, to provide cover for his teammates following behind him. Fourteen Special Operators from the U.S. and South Korean Navy, as well as two Combat Controllers

from the U.S. Air Force boarded a ship in the East China Sea looking for components to weapons of mass destruction and a scientist capable of putting it all together.

The HAF, or helicopter assault force that Dan C. is a part of, moves swiftly, securing the bridge, steering, and the engine room of the ship and linking up with a similar force that simultaneously boarded the vessel from a small boat. Within 10 minutes the ship is under their control.

It began two weeks earlier when a platoon and support staff from SEAL Team 17, the Naval Reserve SEAL team stationed out of Coronado, Calif., arrived in



Chinhae, South Korea, as part of Exercise Foal Eagle 2013, an annual exercise designed to enhance interoperability and strengthen the alliance between both forces.

“Operating in a joint and combined environment like this is crucial,” said Cmdr. Andrew Schreiner, Foal Eagle Task Force Commanding Officer. “We need to know that if we are called upon, that we can work together as a single unit. By doing exercises like this we show commitment and build skill sets critical to the combined US/ROK NSW force.”

Speaking through a translator to his South Korean counterparts, Dan C. explained how U.S. Special Operations deconflict, or meet up with friendly forces who are clearing the same building. It is critical that both teams understand this, so they don’t accidentally shoot each other when they meet up onboard ship. After the message has been translated, they practice the technique inside the shoot house, both teams moving smoothly, quickly from room to room, hallway to hallway. The two teams meet at a doorway, and the lesson was successful. Then, Dan has them do it again.

Dan was the training petty officer for the SEALs on this exercise and worked to ensure that both the ROK SEALs and the U.S. SEALs were “speaking the same language” when it came to the tactical operations they would be working on. While the goal of both forces are the same, there are subtle differences in their execution - how they operate - that need to be covered in order to ensure that the two units can work together without confusion.

“The missions that we are doing are not anything that we, or the ROK, could not do on their own,” he said. “However, by training together and really getting good at working together, when we do combine, we are better than either could be on their own.”

In the East China Sea, Dan C. and his platoon mates begin to search the ship. Somewhere on board are parts that can be used to construct a weapon of mass destruction. Methodically they begin to clear each of the ship’s many compartments. The Air Force joint terminal attack controller coordinates with the MH-47s that brought them in, the Apache helicopters that are flying cover and the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platform that is providing eyes for the whole operation.

Arranging all these assets, and getting the assault team onto that ship in the middle of the East China Sea took considerable planning behind the scenes. Back at

Chinhae, Schreiner supervised the entire mission from the tactical operations center.

“Because we train for this on a semi-annual basis, the SEALs and combat service support Reservists at SEAL Team 17 are incredibly skilled at this mission,” Schreiner said. “Our task force serves as the supported commander for a number of U.S. and Republic of Korea SOF maritime and aviation assets, all of which get C2ed from the NSW Task Force Tactical Operations Center. When it’s all put together, our joint and combined force is as lethal and effective as SOF gets.”

Dan C. and his teammates located the scientist hiding in a forward compartment of the ship. The U.S. and ROK SEAL teams were able to secure the weapons parts, and deliver intelligence to the TOC; they did so by working together. There in lies the true value of exercises like Foal Eagle. One day these two groups of Special Operations Forces might be called on to conduct real world missions. Without the relationships built through combined operations, special operators would lack the ability to interface with allied forces effectively. When the time comes for the ROK and U.S. Navy SEALs to conduct a real world operation, they will be prepared.



***Special Operators assigned to SEAL team 17 practice a Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure on a South Korean Naval Vessel March 24 during Exercise Foal Eagle 2013. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Tony Spiker.***



# Emerald Warrior 2013



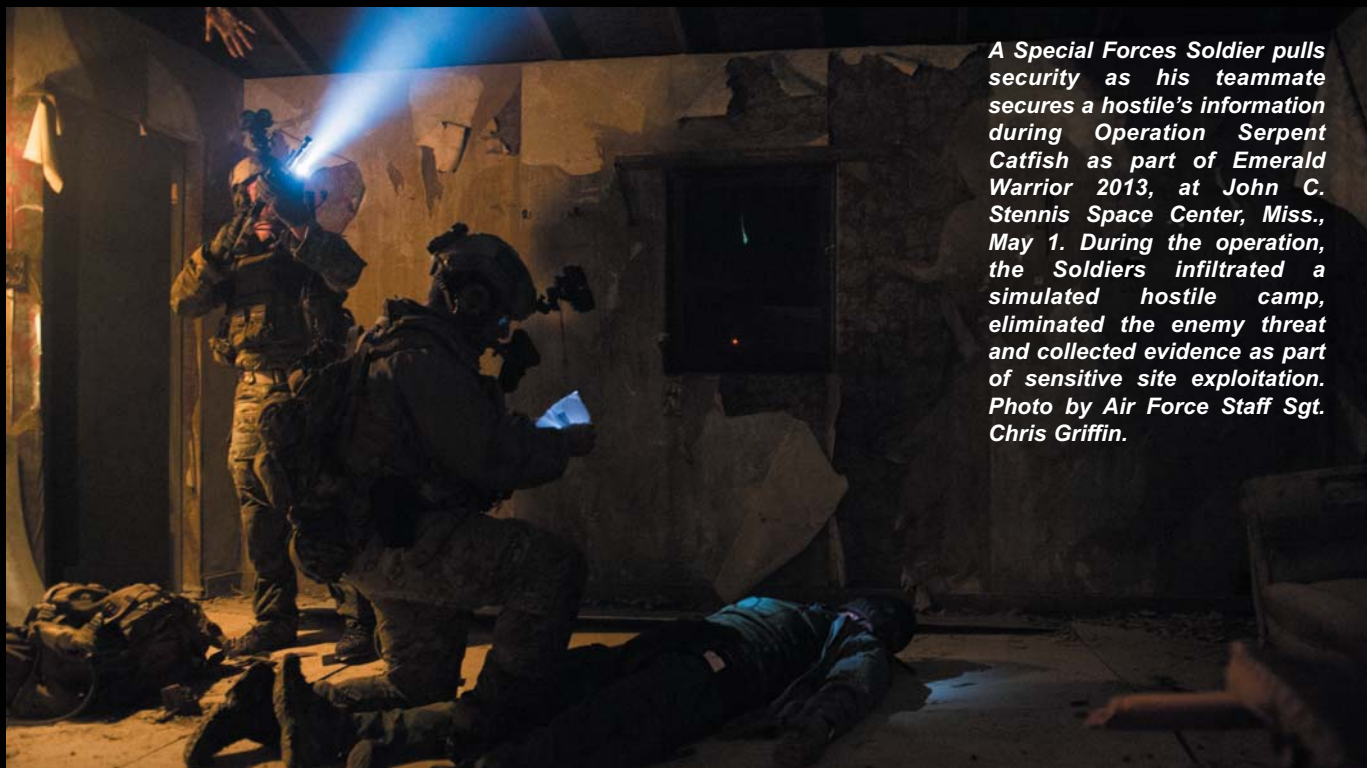


*Special Operations Forces fast rope from a MH-47G Chinook assigned to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) during Emerald Warrior 2013 at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 23. The primary purpose of Emerald Warrior is to exercise Special Operations components in urban and irregular warfare settings to support combatant commanders. Emerald Warrior leverages lessons from Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and other historical lessons to provide better trained and ready forces to combatant commanders. Photo by Staff Sgt. Vernon Young Jr.*



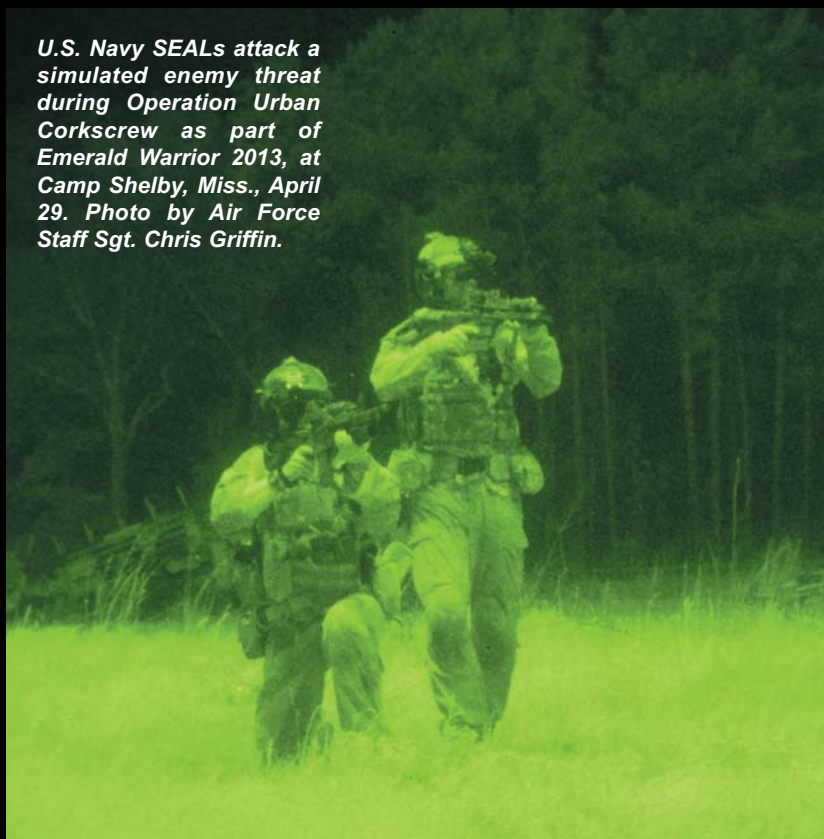


# Emerald Warrior 2013



*A Special Forces Soldier pulls security as his teammate secures a hostile's information during Operation Serpent Catfish as part of Emerald Warrior 2013, at John C. Stennis Space Center, Miss., May 1. During the operation, the Soldiers infiltrated a simulated hostile camp, eliminated the enemy threat and collected evidence as part of sensitive site exploitation. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Chris Griffin.*

*U.S. Navy SEALs attack a simulated enemy threat during Operation Urban Corkscrew as part of Emerald Warrior 2013, at Camp Shelby, Miss., April 29. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Chris Griffin.*



*A U.S. Army Soldier conducts a static line jump out of a C-17 Globemaster III during Emerald Warrior 2013, on Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 28. Photo by Senior Airman Matthew Bruch.*





*Special Operators rappel out of a U.S. Marine Corps CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter during Emerald Warrior 2013 at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 25. Photo by Senior Airman Colville McFee.*



*Rounds impact the range in support of a Special Operations Forces ground assault, on Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 29. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Jonathan Lovelady.*



*A Joint Terminal Attack Controller reviews coordinate points prior to calling in air support during Emerald Warrior 2013 at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 24. Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Vernon Young Jr.*





Senior Airman Kaleb Brooks, a Special Operations security forces member, uses a secure electronic enrollment kit to identify an opposing forces member, Sarah Mills of Altha, Fla., during Emerald Warrior 2013, in Apalachicola, Fla., April 29. Photo by Tech. Sgt. DeNoris A. Mickle.

# Hometown role players add realism to Emerald Warrior

*By Air Force Maj. Kelley Jeter*  
*USSOCOM Public Affairs*

There are plenty of ways to “support the troops” with an eye toward morale, but the people of Florida’s panhandle are taking the rare opportunity to support military members from a training perspective.

Exercise Emerald Warrior is an annual irregular warfare exercise that trains Special Operators and their support elements in skills and missions they will use on deployments. But Emerald Warrior has a unique feature, in that it also integrates Realistic Urban Training. The RUT portion of the exercise uses private land and integrates local civilian role-players in order to give the

operators realistic training conditions that can’t be replicated on a training range.

“The training the operators can get at Emerald Warrior is unique and is unlike what they could get on nearly any range on a federal installation,” said Lt. Col. Chris Robishaw, USSOCOM Exercise Branch Lead. “They learn how to perform complex operations in unfamiliar and challenging environments.”

But one of the things that makes Emerald Warrior’s RUT unique is the Florida panhandle setting. The panhandle has a rich history of helping out its military community with its training needs.

Going all the way back to WWII, the beaches at Carrabelle, Fla., were used as practice areas for the D-Day invasion at Normandy, France. The troops of the



Army's 4th Infantry Division had trained for three years, and the amphibious training they conducted at Carrabelle Beach and Dog Island was their last step before shipping out to England for the impending invasion.

Since then, the Florida panhandle and the adjacent gulf waters have continued to play host to countless land, air, and sea exercises. Most recently, Exercise Emerald Warrior has been in place in the panhandle since 2007, with the off-base RUT portions since 2010.

Getting an exercise like this to take place off-base requires a lot of coordination, starting more than a year out. Locations have to be scouted and vetted, landowners have to give consent and agree to parameters and compensation, and state and local law enforcement and other officials have to be briefed and give consent to the activities. Local law-enforcement is employed to help direct the public away from the area during the operation, where there might be any danger to themselves or the operators.

Once a location has been scouted and the exercise planners like what they see, they contact the landowner. One such landowner for this year's Emerald Warrior was Casie Reinholt; she provided a large plot of land named Ayavalla, with a grass landing strip and a small airplane hangar in a remote area outside of Tallahassee. The airplane hangar served as the objective for a night raid, with casualty and medevac exercises for the operators.

"I met with the organizers on several occasions prior to the date to go over details, run through possible scenarios and ensure that I felt comfortable throughout the process," said Reinholt. She was also invited into another exercise scenario where she acted as a role player. "I was thoroughly impressed by the step-by-step guidance I was given and the insight I gained...I also appreciate the chance to be a part of the training at multiple stages and seeing how it all came together," said Reinholt.

Another role-player who worked in several exercise scenarios is local corrections officer Ryan Hires. He is a "repeat customer," having worked with the Emerald Warrior organizers for multiple years now.

"I love being able to participate in this exercise," said Hires. "I get to do some things that not everyone can say they have done."

Hires wore the protective gear---padded shirts, face shields, earplugs, etc.---of a "bad guy" and was wrestled to the ground, shot with simulated munitions, handcuffed, fingerprinted, photographed, and interrogated night after night---and loved every minute of it.

"Even though I never served, I feel as though with this training I am helping our country in some valuable ways," said Hires.

Sarah Mills lives in Altha, Fla., near the Joint

Southeast Training, Research and Integration Capability, or JSTRIC compound, and worked as a role-player and as a contractor who maintains the JSTRIC facilities. She has also worked with Emerald Warrior in previous years.

"I love it! It's like an inside scoop on how they actually do things. It's one thing to read about it, or see how it's depicted in movies, but to actually see how these guys work first-hand is fascinating," said Mills. "Watching the way they work together as a team, and seeing how they move so quietly---they are in the room with you before you know or hear anything---it's just great to see how professional they are."

In one of the scenarios, she was to play the girlfriend of a terrorist who was found on the target when operators came looking for hostages. Her role was to confuse the operators, lying to them and being uncooperative.

"They GRILLED me! They were so thorough and persistent, I felt like it was really good practice for them, and I could see how they were working through the scenario and problem-solving as they went along," said Mills. "Supporting the military is something I enjoy, because of what they do for us every day, it's nice to be able to give back and help them out."

Casie Reinholt added: "After the scenario was over, it really meant a lot to have everyone come thank our family for giving them the opportunity train at Ayavalla. I always felt it was an asset for those who organize (the training), but to hear it from those being trained, that it actually made a difference in their experience was very gratifying."

Sarah Mills smiles and agrees, "Everybody wants to know when they're coming back."



*A U.S. Army special operator searches an enemy during a training mission for Emerald Warrior 2013, May 1. Photo by Senior Airman Colville McFee.*



Retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Fred Arooji (center) sits with his teammates in Iraq. Arooji was selected as this year's Bull Simons Award recipient for his more than 30 years of contributions to Special Operations. The Bull Simons Award is USSOCOM's lifetime achievement award, named for Army Col. Arthur "Bull" Simons, honoring the spirit, values, and skills of the unconventional warrior. Courtesy photo.



## Eagle Claw veteran, Special Ops aviator receives 2013 Bull Simons Award

By Mike Bottoms  
*USSOCOM Public Affairs*

Special Ops guys come in all shapes and sizes.

When you look at Fred Arooji, you think you are looking at a kindly grandfather. Standing about 5 feet 6

inches, weighing maybe 160 pounds and sporting gray hair that has long resided on his scalp.

Arooji is all that, but he is also a guy who entered Iran ahead of an American hostage rescue attempt in April 1980, survived on his own for two weeks after the mission was aborted, escaping only by his wits. A guy,





who would become a Special Ops pilot, help pioneer night vision goggle technology, and fly hundreds of Special Operations missions during his more than 30 years in Special Operations.

The hostage rescue mission in Iran became known as Operation Eagle Claw and the mission planners would have to bring in unique talent from throughout the Department of Defense. One skill they were looking for was Farsi language speakers.

“Shortly after the embassy in Iran had been overrun by so-called students, and at that point some 60

Americans were being held hostage, we quickly found the need to have some Farsi speakers or Iranian Americans,” retired Army Lt. Col. Bucky Burruss, an Eagle Claw participant, said. “We searched DoD and one of the ones we interviewed was a young Airman named Fred Arooji and pretty quickly we recognized that he was someone special.”

Born in Iran, Arooji immigrated to America as a child and enlisted in the Air Force in 1971. He served as an avionics mechanic for RF 4 Phantom jets when the call came out for Farsi language speakers. Intrigued,



Arooji went through the interview process not knowing the reason DoD was looking for Farsi speakers. Making it through the interview process, Arooji was selected for Eagle Claw.

"I went through all kinds of training, and months later General James Vaught (overall Eagle Claw mission commander) called me in his office and asked me 'Are you ready to travel?'" Arooji said. "I said yes and he said 'OK son, go and get your tickets to Tehran.'"

"It was decided that we needed to send in an advance party to do last minute reconnaissance and Fred, as a native Iranian, had the tongue, had the eyes, the ears, and had the sense of things happening in Iran, so we asked him to be part of the advanced party," retired Army Capt. Wade Ishimoto and Eagle Claw planner said.

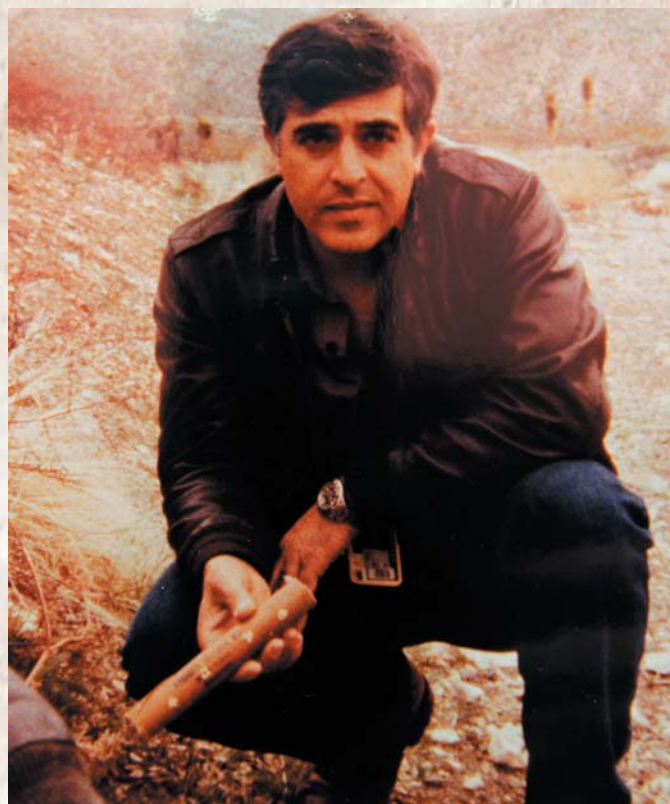
Vaught would be the overall commander, but the commander on the ground would be Special Operations legend Army Col. Charles Beckwith. Arooji's first meeting with Beckwith was testy.

"I was with Captain Bucky Burruss one day and Colonel Beckwith walks in the room, big guy, huge, he had a real raspy voice," Arooji said. "He looked at me and said 'That beard, that looks good, don't shave that beard.'"

"Colonel Beckwith turned to walk away, stopped and looked at me and said 'I'll tell you what son, while you're here, you keep your mouth shut, you understand?' I said yes I do. He looked at me again and said 'No, you don't understand, this is my country, I love my country, and I am not going to let any son-of-a-bitch destroy it, so you keep your damn mouth shut while you are here and if I ever find out you are talking too much I'll put you in a jail, or you will never see the



*Fred Arooji finishing a parachute jump. Courtesy photo.*



*Fred Arooji holding a stick of dynamite early in his career. Courtesy photo.*

sun again."

Arooji continued, "I stepped two or three feet toward Colonel Beckwith, I looked him straight in the eye and told him, 'sir, you know what the difference is between you and me?' He said 'What is it?' I said, 'the difference is you were lucky, you were born in this country as an American, I earned mine and I love it just as much as you do.' He looked at me and said, 'We'll see,' and turned and walked away. I thought I was going to faint. Bucky turns to me and says 'Hey Freddy, he really likes you.'"

Later that day, according to Arooji, Beckwith would approach him in the chow hall and give him a big hug and tell him "You know what, you are a true American."

Arooji joined another Special Operations legend, Army Maj. Dick Meadows, for the reconnaissance mission in Iran ahead of Eagle Claw and where they encountered significant challenges for which Arooji's ingenuity would prove to be invaluable.

"The mission was supposed to occur on the night of April 24th and 25th, 1980. That particular day, the 24th of April, Dick Meadows and Fred went by the warehouse where the vehicles were stored and Fred detected that a ditch had been dug across the driveway. That was significant and there was no way those



vehicles could be driven out,” Ishimoto said.

“I said, ‘man what are we going to do?’ and about 10 or 15 feet away there were kids playing soccer, so I said to Dick we need to give these kids a basket of oranges and I then asked them to help me move some concrete chunks into the ditch and they did,” Arooji said.

The ditch repaired, Meadows and Arooji waited for the rescue mission to unfold. Unfortunately, the hostage rescue mission was aborted when a helicopter collided with a C-130 killing eight servicemen at the Iranian staging area known as Desert One.

“After it was detected, that in fact an attempt was made, the media splashed that there were Americans of Iranian descent involved with the mission – this put Fred under great danger,” Ishimoto said.

“We had no idea what took place. I dropped Dick off at his hotel and I got back to my hotel and I turned the TV on and I see they are carrying the bodies of the individuals that got burned and the crash site burning, so I am in deep trouble at this point,” Arooji said.

Arooji then went back to Meadows’ hotel and took him to the airport.

“We had a Mercedes someone had bought us, so Dick told me, ‘Take the Mercedes and head to the Turkish border and we’ll contact you there,’” Arooji said. “Well as it turned out, the keys to the Mercedes were in the pocket of another gentleman and he was on his flight home. The only way in and out of Iran now was through Tehran.”

“We had no contact with him after the mission was aborted,” Ishimoto said. “I frankly thought I would never see Fred Arooji alive again.”

Arooji would spend a harrowing two weeks under the constant pressure of being caught before he safely made his way back to the United States.

“When Fred got back he was still an Airman in the United States Air Force,” said retired Gen. Richard

Cody, former vice chief of staff of the U.S. Army and commander of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. “When he got back to the United States President

Carter wanted to meet him, and at that meeting President Carter said, ‘Young man, I believe I have just met one of the bravest of young men in uniform.’”

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*“We had no contact with him after the mission was aborted. I frankly thought I would never see Fred Arooji alive again.”*

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*— Retired Army Capt. Wade Ishimoto*

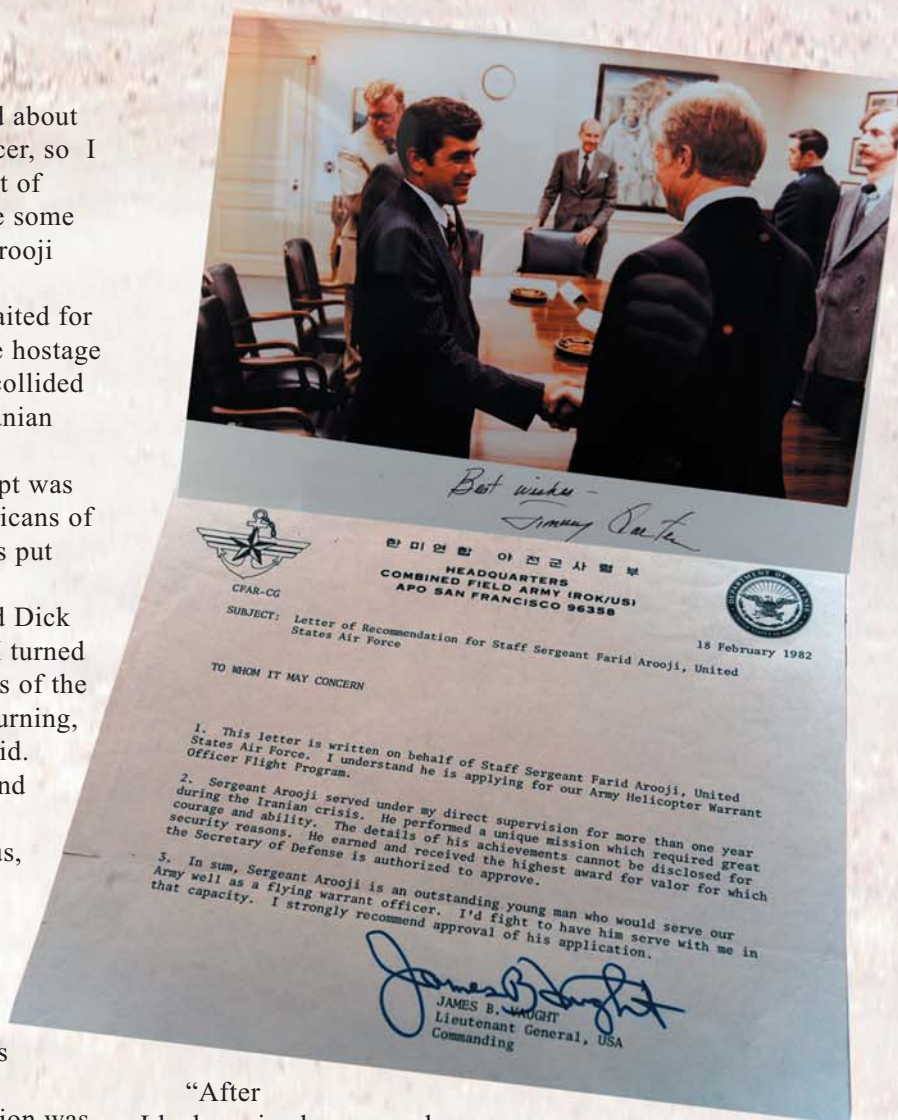
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“After I had received my award for the mission, President Carter asked me what my wishes were and I said I wanted to be a military pilot,” Arooji said.

Vaught would work to ask the Air Force to grant Arooji an inter-service transfer to the Army where he would become a Special Operations helicopter and fixed-winged pilot. Time would prove he was a natural and born to fly.

“Fred is the only one in the world to go from flight school to a special mission unit, stay 24 years and serve with distinction” said retired Chief Warrant

Officer 5 Ned Hubbard, fellow Special Operations aviator. “He’s a legend, shoes that will never be filled again, a perfect safety record, never aborted a mission, he is to be admired.”







**Retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Fred Arooji (5th from left) poses with his family after receiving the Bull Simons Award May 15. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Angelita Lawrence.**

Arooji and his colleagues in the special mission unit were assigned to test and teach the use of night vision goggles to the big Army.

"If you think about the 1980s and the type of the night vision devices we had back then, you were pretty much going from 20/20 vision to about 20/200," said Cody. "He was one

of the pioneers working out approaches to buildings at night, flying low-level missions for hours at a time under these conditions.

Cody pointed out one particular mission during the Iraqi war where night vision goggle technology and

Arooji's mastery of it saved a special mission unit.

"During the height of the Iraq war, there was a unit getting overrun, they couldn't get anyone there to pick them up, there was no real landing zone, but there was a small dirt road. Fred heard the call, turned around and said, 'I'll take the mission' and actually landed a rather large fixed-wing aircraft on the road, picked these guys up and got them out of there - all under night vision

systems," Cody said.

"Fred helped develop tactics, techniques and procedures for the entire Army and that is part of his legacy he can be very proud of," said retired Army Maj. Gen. Eldon Bargewell, a 2010 Bull Simons Award recipient. "Fred is not this 6-foot-5, 250 pound guy that

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*"Fred is not this 6-foot-5, 250 pound guy that everybody looks at and thinks 'that is a bad guy,' but he is in the sense the way I say it – he is a bad guy, he can do a lot of things with a helicopter and with a fixed-wing aircraft that I have never seen anyone do before and that to me epitomizes a Special Operator."*

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— Retired Army Maj. Gen. Eldon Bargewell

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Special Operator."

Reflecting on his career and what makes a Special Operator, Arooji summed it up.

"The strongest part of your body has to be your heart. It puts my heart in a different dimension to know all the years of my military service I served with the best," Arooji said. "We don't look for pats on the back, we don't live for what we did 15 or 20 years ago; we live for how well we accomplish the mission today."



# Remembering Bull Simons

By Mike Bottoms

USSOCOM Public Affairs

USSOCOM presented its highest honor, the Bull Simons Award, to retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Fred Arooji on May 15. The Bull Simons Award was first awarded in 1990 and has since become an annual tradition. The award recognizes recipients who embody “the true spirit, values, and skills of a Special Operations warrior.” Col. Arthur “Bull” Simons, whom the award is named after, is the epitome of these attributes.

A career Soldier, Simons led Special Operations in World War II and Vietnam. Born in New York City in 1918, Simons graduated from the University of Missouri in 1941 with a degree in journalism and served in the Pacific theater in World War II. He rose to company commander in the 6th Ranger Battalion and participated in several amphibious landings in the Philippines. On one noteworthy occasion, he and his men scaled a steep oceanside cliff under cover of darkness and overwhelmed a garrison of Japanese soldiers at the Suluan lighthouse.

Simons left the Army after World War II but returned to duty in 1951. He completed the Special Forces Officers Qualification Course in 1958 and took command of a detachment in the 77th SF Group (Airborne). From 1961 to 1962, as head of the White Star Mobile Training Team, he served as the senior military advisor to the Royal Lao Army. His familiarity with the region would prove useful a few years later.

In 1965, Simons returned to Southeast Asia as a member of Military Assistance Command Vietnam’s Studies and Observations Group. Serving under then Col.

Donald Blackburn, Simons commanded OP-35, one of three operational directorates within SOG. For approximately two years, he led OP-35 on an interdiction campaign against the North Vietnamese Army along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia. OP-35 interdicted the trail by inserting “hatchet” teams and reconnaissance teams. The hatchet teams, composed of Nung or Montagnard tribesmen led by a Special Forces noncommissioned officer, conducted hit-and-run raids

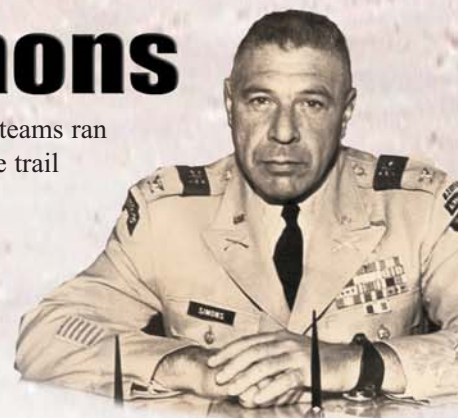
against NVA units. The recon teams ran long range patrols scouting the trail but also “snatched” prisoners when the opportunity arose.

Simons left Vietnam in 1966, but he returned four years later as the Deputy Commander of Joint Contingency Task Group Ivory Coast — the Son Tay Raiders. The task force, commanded by Air Force Brig. Gen. Leroy Manor, was formed in the spring of 1970 after American intelligence had identified Son Tay Prison, near Hanoi, as a prisoner of war detention camp. After six months of planning and rehearsals, the task force deployed to Thailand Nov. 18.

Two nights later, the task force flew into North Vietnam. The assault group, led by Capt. Dick Meadows, landed in the prison compound and killed approximately 50 NVA guards, but found the compound to be otherwise abandoned. Meanwhile, Simons had landed with the support group in an adjacent school compound, which was teeming with Russian and Chinese soldiers. Simons and

his team killed or repelled hundreds of these soldiers, eliminating the principal threat to the assault group. The raiders executed the entire operation in 28 minutes, successfully faced an enemy force of approximately 350 men, and left with only two injuries. Although the raid at Son Tay failed to accomplish its principal objective, it sent a clear message to North Vietnam, and the treatment of American prisoners improved somewhat

thereafter. Simons retired from the Army in 1971, but he was to conduct one more special mission. In 1979, Mr. H. Ross Perot asked Simons to rescue two of his employees; the Iranian revolutionary regime was holding them in a Tehran prison and was demanding a \$13 million ransom. In April of that year, Simons led a civilian rescue party into Iran and safely extracted the American hostages. Just one month later, Simons suffered a massive heart attack and died.



*Previous Bull Simons Award recipients are: Mr. H. Ross Perot, Army Gen. Edward “Shy” Meyer, The Honorable John Marsh Jr., Army Col. Aaron Bank, Army Lt. Gen. Samuel Wilson, Air Force Lt. Gen. Leroy Manor, the Honorable Sam Nunn, the Honorable William Cohen, Army Gen. James Lindsay, Air Force Maj. Gen. John Alison, Army Col. Charlie Beckwith, Air Force Brig Gen. Harry “Heinie” Aderholdt, Army Command Sgt. Maj. Ernest Tabata, Army Maj. Gen. Richard Scholtes, Army Maj. Richard “Dick” Meadows, Air Force Col. John Carney, Army Maj. Caesar Civitella, Army Col. Chuck Fry, Army Maj. Gen. Eldon Bargewell, Army Maj. Gen. John Singlaub and Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Fales.*





## U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



*Sgt. 1st Class Chris Spielhagen, a team sergeant in the Group Support Battalion of the Ft. Carson-based 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), was one of three U.S. Army Special Operations Command Soldiers who rendered first aid to victims of the Boston Marathon bombing April 15. Courtesy photo.*

# USASOC Soldiers provide first aid to victims of Boston Marathon bombing

*By USASOC Public Affairs*

The instincts of an American Soldier took over when three United States Special Operations Soldiers rendered emergency first aid to those who had fallen victim to the bombings at The Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013.

“I was recovering at the water point when the first bomb went off approximately 50 meters away,” said Sgt. 1st Class Chris Spielhagen, a team sergeant in the Group

Support Battalion of the Ft. Carson-based 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). “At first it sounded like a celebratory cannon had been fired off, which I thought was rather odd.” After turning towards the blast, his training as a Special Forces demolition engineer instantly told him that a bomb had just detonated.

“The sound of the blast reminded me exactly of the IED’s that I experienced during my five combat deployments to Iraq,” said Lt. Col. David P. Diamond,



United States Special Operations Command legislative affairs officer.

As Spielhagen moved toward the blast site, so did Diamond. Diamond and Spielhagen met heavy resistance from the volunteer force that was trying to keep the other runners out of harm's way.

"I had to physically push my way through these volunteers, as I was determined to provide any leadership and medical assistance as I could," said Diamond.

Shortly after the first bomb had exploded, a second separate explosion echoed the first. Cpl. Paul Cusack, forward observer in 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., arrived at the second explosion site to find multiple people lying in the street and on the sidewalk. Cusack's Army training immediately kicked in and he assessed the scene and began looking for people he could help. He moved quickly from one victim to the next, providing aid where it was needed. Once Cusack had helped as many of the victims as he could, he continued to provide assistance to the Boston Police.

After the explosions, Diamond began to re-organize the medical personnel and volunteers in the area of the first explosion in order to help all of the victims who needed help. Diamond had advised the group of emergency responders to distribute their medical supplies and treat those who desperately needed them, as the supplies were limited. Once the supplies were distributed, Diamond entered a sports store to find more medical supplies.

"I distributed these materials to as many responders as I could before exhausting my supplies," said Diamond, as he moved off to continue to render emergency aid to 10 more victims.

Once emergency first aid had been rendered to as many people as it could, Diamond, Spielhagen, and Cusack took a step back to assess the situation.

"At this point the area started to change over into an investigation scene," said Cusack, "I stayed for another few minutes to see if there was anything else I could do,



**Cpl. Paul Cusack**

but it was over."

Once they had realized that there was nothing more for them to do, as all the victims had been cared for, they immediately left to find their families who were also at the event.

"Completely exhausted and covered in blood, I departed Boylsten Street in the direction requested by Boston Police," said Diamond, "My next task

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*"While expected in combat, these men brought not only their experiences but clearly their courage as well to aid those injured during this terrible event."*

*— Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, commander,  
U.S. Army Special Operations Command*

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was to find my family."

The Soldiers' families had been near the bombing sites at the time of the explosions, although close by, all of their family members left the scene without injury.

"While expected in combat, these men brought not only their experiences but clearly their courage as well to aid those injured during this terrible event," said Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

The three Soldiers are being considered for Army and civilian awards for their actions.





## NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND



**Capt. Bob Smith, Commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group TWO, shakes the hand of Alfred Martin Palacios, a former Naval Combat Demolition-man, during a celebration held in his honor in Virginia Beach, Va., April 12. Palacios was recently awarded the French Legion of Honor for his actions on D-Day, June 6th, 1944. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class William S. Parker.**

## WW II D-Day veteran honored by SEALs

*Demolitionaire help lay foundation of modern day SEAL*

**By Petty Officer 2nd Class William Parker and  
Petty Officer 3rd Class Paul Coover  
NSW Public Affairs**

They are dying at a rate of 900 per day.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, a 20th century service member passes away nearly every two minutes. These patriots – men who signed blank checks made payable to The United States of America for an amount up to and including their lives -- are now in their late 80s and early 90s. But some current service members are working to ensure the sacrifice and service of World War II Sailors is not forgotten; that generation – the

“Greatest Generation” -- answered the call to serve when freedom and democracy were in peril, forging the way for our Navy and its Special Warfare community. The Greatest Generation began the movement that made our country and armed forces the best in the world.

“A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces,” President John F. Kennedy once said, “but also by the men it honors – the men it remembers.” On April 13, 2013, the commander of Naval Special Warfare Group Two walked into a small house in Virginia and presented a 95-year-old man with one of the enduring symbols of the most elite group of warriors in U.S. military history.

Capt. Robert Smith, an active-duty Navy SEAL,



handed Alfredo Palacios, a veteran of World War II, a carved wooden paddle, a customary gift given as a nod to the SEALs' maritime roots. Other active SEALs, too, stood nearby waiting for the opportunity to shake hands with a heroic teammate who in February traveled to Washington, D.C., and received the French Legion of Honor medal – France's equivalent to the U.S. Medal of Honor – at the French Embassy.

Palacios' service predated the creation of the SEALs. However, his unit helped free France from Nazi occupation and played a significant role in the development of Naval Special Warfare. After learning of his actions and unit achievements in France, Smith and others wanted to pay tribute to the man they say is as much a part of their exclusive group as any SEAL.

Like thousands of other young Americans, Alfredo M. Palacios enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1943 and received his initial training at the Naval Construction Training Center in Camp Peary, Va. He then went on to advanced training at the Navy Mine Disposal School in Washington, D.C. As a result of his training in construction and the handling of explosives, he volunteered for what was advertised as "hazardous, prolonged and distant duty" as a combat demolitionist at Amphibious Training Base, Ft. Pierce, Fla. Following training, he was assigned to a Naval Combat Demolition Unit – one of the groups that would eventually lead to the development of the Navy SEALs.

In April 1944, NCDUs 128 through 142 were airlifted from the United States to the United Kingdom and divided among three beach battalions. NCDU 131, which included Palacios, was one of 21 nine-man units assigned to clear the landing beaches of obstacles and thereby open gaps for the landing force to successfully assault Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944.

On the morning of the attack that would come to be known simply as D-Day, the landing craft medium carrying NCDU 131 was hit twice by artillery fire on the approach to shore, killing six demolition men and wounding four others. Palacios was among the injured. As he exited the landing craft in the first wave, dragging Bangalore torpedoes – long steel tubes of explosives used to clear barbed-wire obstacles – he was immediately hit in the left arm. Standing in the surf, he looked down and saw his exposed, shattered elbow.

Fighting for consciousness, he struggled toward the shelter of the shoreline cliffs roughly a football field away, where he took out his first-aid kit, wrapped up his arm and made himself a sling. He then struggled back to the landing craft and with his healthy arm grabbed several packs of explosives. As he proceeded onto the beach, he was hit

again in the back with fragments from an enemy shell. Still, he crawled back to the base of the cliff, where he propped himself up into a sitting position with a rifle given to him by a U.S. soldier. Still dazed, and holding the rifle as best he could with his good arm, German soldiers began coming over the dune line at a beach exit. Seeing him pointing a rifle at them, they raised their hands in surrender. He was credited with capturing six German prisoners of war that day.

That evening, he was evacuated to a field hospital in England, where medics amputated his left arm.

Shortly thereafter, he returned to the United States, and on Jan. 8, 1945, he was honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy as a petty officer second class. With nearly seven decades of life ahead of him, and only eleven days after returning home, he married the Joyce Palacios and they've been married 68 years.

Of the 190 men of NCDU force "OMAHA," 32 were killed in action and 65 were wounded. The unit was awarded the only Presidential Unit Citation to U.S. Naval forces during the Normandy invasion. It is the highest unit award for combat. Additionally, Palacios was awarded a Purple Heart for the wounds he sustained in combat.

Palacios' eldest daughter, Cheryl McLeskey, was 41 years old before she heard the full story of her father's service. Though she said Palacios children knew their father served in the Navy, they didn't realize the full impact of his time in Europe until the 50th anniversary of D-Day, celebrated in 1994, prompted him to tell his story.

"It closed the void that was there," she said of her father's retelling of the Normandy invasion.

"We were already humbled," she said, "but it just made us so proud."

Smith said he wanted his men to honor the sacrifices made in Normandy, and that men like Palacios laid the groundwork for the SEALs.

"Any man that is going to get out of a landing craft injured, continue to carry a Bangalore torpedo across the beach and then get injured again and go back and get the demolitions and bring them back and then capture six Germans," Smith said, "is a frogman in my book."



**Alfred Martin Palacios during WWII. Courtesy photo.**





## NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

# From the neck up: The physically taxing SEAL selection process heavy in mental toughness

*By Petty Officer 3rd Class Geneva G. Brier  
NSW Public Affairs*

How do you select someone for what some consider the most grueling physical and mental military training on Earth? What process would you use? It's easy to pick the biggest and strongest looking guys from a line up, but how would you know if they are mentally tough?

Now more than ever, young men across the country are thumping their chests and eager to take on the challenge of becoming Navy SEALs or Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen. Without a shortage of volunteers, NSW's biggest challenge in creating operators, is finding a way to effectively narrow the field and find the right candidates before they begin training.

The average Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/s) class includes approximately 145 enlisted recruits and 15 officers, averaging 160 per group and six classes per fiscal year.

The average passing rate for each class is about 27 percent for enlisted men. The percentage for officer candidates is dramatically higher, due to the intricate screening process in which they go through for selection. They have a passing rate of 70 percent.

From start to finish, the process of becoming a SEAL lasts about two-and-a-half years from the beginning of training to an operator's first deployment; it takes an individual who is extremely dedicated and motivated to earn a Trident and one day serve on the field of battle. Finding the ideal candidate over the past 50 years has been hit and miss. However, in the past few years there has been a breakthrough which has not only improved the selection process, but also the quality of candidates entering the pipeline.

A resiliency test was created about five years ago that helps determine whether an individual has what it takes to become a SEAL or SWCC. The test is called the Computerized-Special Operations Resilience Test (C-



**SEAL candidates undergo training during a Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL course at Coronado, Calif. Courtesy photo.**

SORT) and when paired with the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and Physical Screening Test (PST), is accurate at identifying candidates who are likely to quit training.

C-SORT is a one-time 40-minute computerized personality test that measures an individual's ability to react, respond and be able to fulfill the daily requirements of a SEAL or SWCC. There is no preparing for the test and the results have proven to have a 90 percent accuracy rate.

In 2006, C-SORT was first used to test Class 262, as a study. After a few years of research with constant positive outcomes, in 2010, the Chief of Naval Personnel authorized the use of C-SORT for screening all applicants.

Although the accuracy of the C-SORT algorithm is an effective tool, it is not the only process used to find suitable candidates. There are many methods the Navy SEAL and SWCC Scouting Team use to find high quality candidates. There are certain sports, tests and personality characteristics to consider when scouting future SEALs and SWCC.



One way the NSW Scouting Team finds qualified candidates is by focusing on certain athletes when hosting events to raise SEAL and SWCC awareness. Water polo, triathlon, lacrosse, rugby, boxing, wrestling and swimming have produced a large number of NSW operators and candidates who competed in those sports are given an extra look.

“If a young man participated in any of these sports, his chances of success within BUD/S are measurably improved,” said Bob Rohrbach of the SEAL and SWCC Scout Team. “The reason is all of these sports involve a team, as well as an individual effort; they also require a lot of persistence, determination and non-stop activity.”

Another factor in determining a candidate’s success is taking a look at where the recruit hails from. Individuals who come from states on or near the coast or states close to significantly cold water have a greater success record of completing training.

“The statistics do not mean someone from Oklahoma is not going to make it through training,” said Rohrbach. “It just means we have had more overall success with guys from certain areas, because of water temperature, climate, etc.”

Although various statistics are helpful in identifying future students, in order to target the best possible candidates, success lies in the results of testing. Every potential SEAL and SWCC must take the ASVAB, C-SORT and PST.

In recent years, there has been a significant rise in applicants and the overall quality of man interested in becoming an NSW operator is steadily improving. NSW attributes this boom to the status of the economy, as well as the recent popularity of the SEAL brand.

“Because of the spike in applicants, a backlog has occurred and resulted in a high quality applicant pool,” said Josh D. Cotton, Ph.D, Navy personnel research psychologist. “In the past, if an individual minimally qualified, he was guaranteed a SEAL contract. Today, minimums will only get you on a list and do not guarantee you anything but a look. It has become extremely competitive,” said Cotton.

Beyond education, sports and hometown there are three attributes all candidates must have in order to succeed and complete training. To become a SEAL or SWCC, an individual must be above average, intelligent and highly motivated. These three characteristics are not much different from what any other employer or organization looks for when filling its ranks, which is why

NSW’s screening process is so important - not only for the organization, but for the individual as well.

“We know a lot of these men show up fully capable of performing most physical tasks that are asked of them; the issue is about 80 percent of the training is from the neck up,” said Rohrbach. “It’s the attitude of ‘I will not quit no matter what’ that gets you through this kind of training. You will not make it through without that attitude.”

NSW begins looking at potential candidates while many are still in high school, the earliest screening system of all Special Operations Forces. This, coupled with the combination of the three tests, has helped identify high quality applicants and has saved an ample amount of money and time for both the Navy, as well as the individual.

“There is a moral responsibility here, in my opinion. If we, as the Navy say to the candidate, ‘You are what we are looking for,’ then we should be right about that,” said Cotton. “The impact on the individual is something we look at and take very seriously. The last thing we want is someone spending a year or two of their lives just to find out they didn’t have what it takes. We as an organization need to be good enough to know that from the start.”

Throughout the years, the process has drastically improved. More students are applying to and successfully completing training.

“Ideally, we would like to send one person to BUD/S and have one person graduate,” said Cotton. “We will most likely never achieve that unrealistic goal and we aren’t perfect, but we are as good as we can be right now.”



**SEAL candidates endure the cold surf water during Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training at Coronado, Calif. Courtesy photo.**





## AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



*Tech. Sgt. Christofer Curtis, a CV-22 flight engineer assigned to the 8th Special Operations Squadron, poses in a CV-22 Osprey on the flightline April 6, 2012, at Hurlburt Field, Fla. Curtis returned to active-duty service after recovering from injuries incurred during a CV-22 crash during a deployment. Photo by Airman 1st Class Gustavo Castillo.*

# The walk toward flight

*By Airman 1st Class Michelle Vickers  
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

There's a saying -- "a journey begins with a single step."

For a flight engineer assigned to the 8th Special Operations Squadron here, even a single step seemed like a lofty goal at one time.

After Tech. Sgt. Christofer Curtis' CV-22 Osprey

crashed during a mission in Afghanistan in April 2010, he was left with numerous serious injuries and uncertainty surrounding whether he would walk again.

Now, almost three years to the date of his crash, he has returned to the sky.

"We crashed and lost the aircraft, but more importantly lost four individuals along with it," Curtis said. "Since then, I've obviously been on the road to recovery. Seventeen broken bones will do that to you."

**Tip of the Spear**



After being evacuated from the battlefield to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, Curtis was airlifted to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Md., where he awoke from a coma. From the beginning of his recovery, Curtis said he decided not only would he walk again, but he would walk through the doors of his squadron.

"I was in the surgical intensive care unit when someone asked me, 'Are you going to get back up again?'" Curtis said. "I said, 'Not only am I going to get back up -- goal number one (is) to walk through my squadron's doors.' I did happen to accomplish that the same year, October 2010. Then they asked, 'What's your second goal?' And my second goal was literally today, it was to fly again."

Curtis said his natural mental resiliency was further strengthened by the encouragement he received from visitors and other wounded warriors while in the hospital.

"I had a lot of folks at Walter Reed come in to visit me and share their experiences of the do's and do not's of getting better, and I've learned to basically just stay positive," Curtis said. "Staying positive not only will it help you mentally, it will help you physically."

After leaving WRAMC, Curtis was sent on to Brooks Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, for the next almost year-long stage of his recovery. His physical resiliency was refined as he received therapy to help him achieve milestones, like being able to prepare his own meals. Now, reflecting back on the countless hours of physical therapy, the result was worth it.

"I feel great, but at the same time I do feel remnants of that pain," Curtis said.

The care providers, therapy he received, and even comments from naysayers were integral to his recovery, he said. "Without them I wouldn't even be close to here."

Once back at Hurlburt Field, Curtis worked with his unit to determine he was physically capable of returning to his job as a flight engineer responsible for maintaining the health of the CV-22 during flight. As he geared up for his first training flight, there were no visible jitters, just a slight stumble with putting on a new type of harness, the only indication Curtis had spent any time away from flying.

"I just did what I normally do, what I remembered normally doing, which is just getting up and thinking about the mission and my role, everything the Air Force taught me," Curtis said describing his preflight preparations.

While some questioned Curtis' drive and dedication to return to his job, his mental strength helped him push aside any doubts.

"I felt (in my) body and mind this is where I need to be and what I need to do," Curtis said.

After the flight, though Curtis had yet to hear his instructor's evaluations of his performance, both were all smiles.

"It isn't just me getting in the air," Curtis said postflight. "It's saying that I've made it this far physically, and mentally, as a bigger success. Flying, in the end, is something I always loved and will continue to do. I won't ever forget the path it took and the people I've met to get to this point."

Now in the position to pay it forward by relaying advice to other wounded warriors, Curtis offers what helped him most to get through his own challenges.

"Continue to stay positive and establish challenging but attainable goals," Curtis said. "More importantly, understand that you will have good days and bad days, but stay the course as it will pay off in the end."

On the road to regaining his flight qualifications, Curtis now looks forward to the normalcy of returning to the job he loves. Next on his radar: being assigned as part of aircrew charged with accepting new aircraft for the Air Force.



**Tech. Sgt. Christofer Curtis, CV-22 flight engineer of 8th Special Operations Squadron, inspects his helmet after his first flight back to regaining his flight status on Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 8, 2013. The CV-22 Osprey crashed in Zabul Province and left him with significant blood loss, as well as multiple fractures to his back, face, legs, left arm and pelvis. Photo illustration by Senior Airman Desiree Whitney Moye.**





AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

# World War II Doolittle Raiders greet, inspire Air Commandos

*By Senior Airman Joe McFadden  
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

Exactly 71 years ago to the day they and their fellow Airmen turned the tide of the U.S. war effort, three World War II legends spoke to dozens of Hurlburt Airmen at the 319th Special Operations Squadron auditorium April 18.

Lt. Col. Richard Cole, Lt. Col. Edward Saylor and Staff Sgt. David Thatcher all served alongside 77 fellow then-U.S. Army Air Corps Airmen taking off in 16 B-25s in the April 18, 1942 bombing over Japan known as the Doolittle Raid.

The raid, designed and led by then-Lt. Col. James Doolittle, served as the first air raid by the U.S. military in response to the Dec. 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, while both bolstering the morale of the American public and instilling doubt among the Japanese people.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Col. William Holt, vice commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing, before introducing the Raiders. "In my 22 years in the Air Force, I never imagined I'd be standing in front of three Doolittle Raiders. Without a doubt, this is the highest honor I've had."

After the three Raiders entered the squadron through a sword cordon from the Hurlburt Field Honor Guard, the Air Commandos opened the discussion by asking questions about their memories and impression of the raid's chief architect.

"Colonel Doolittle was a very persuasive individual," said Cole, who also served as his co-pilot on the lead aircraft. "He was very charming. He treated everyone with respect and was very polite. He was a team person, and it vibrated throughout all 80 people."

Cole also described Doolittle's dedication to his Airmen as a testament to his leadership.

"Outside of being in awe of him and being able to fly with him, we observed the way he treated his people," he said. "For instance, he would go to an air base and would not leave the airplane until the crew chief had finished gassing it up and doing the things that needed to be done.



*Retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col Richard Cole, left, Staff Sgt. David Thatcher, center, and Lt. Col. Edward Saylor, right, all of the Doolittle Raiders, answer questions from Hurlburt Field Airmen at the 319th Special Operations Squadron auditorium at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 18. The surviving Doolittle Raiders visited Fort Walton Beach, Fla., for their reunion tour as part of the 71st anniversary of this historic mission. Photo by Airman 1st Class Hayden K. Hyatt.*

He'd make sure the crew chiefs were taken to their barracks before he was taken to his. It indicated to me that he treats his people in a very, very polite way."

Prior to leaving the continental U.S., the Raiders spent a portion of the training for the mission at what is now Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., for three weeks of intensive training in March 1942. Given the base's proximity to the water, one Airman asked if the three had any downtime to enjoy the Emerald Coast.

"We did not receive any time off," Cole said. "We were based in quarters and not allowed to go off the base."

The questions then turned to how the Raiders personally prepared for the mission -- an element the team said they had little time to react to but enough resolve to ultimately see it through.

"When they presented the request for volunteers, we were given no information other than it was a dangerous



mission,” Cole said. “We were practicing takeoffs and so forth. It was very obvious we were going to takeoff from a carrier. We thought we were being transported to some place with a different carrier so we could takeoff and go to an island some place in the Pacific and land and start fighting the war.”

“When they announced over the loudspeaker our target was Japan, there was a huge shock that went all over the carrier,” said Thatcher, who served as an engineer and gunner in the raid. “No one knew where we were supposed to go, especially the Navy personnel.”

“We all volunteered, and I went not knowing what it was,” said Saylor, then an engineer. “My feeling was that I hope I could do the job as well as it needed to be done. The responsibility of the airplane was very heavy on my mind. That’s how I felt about going in -- I hope I could do the job.”

The air raid stormed over the Japanese island of Honshu, with none of the U.S. aircraft being gunned down. While heading across the East China Sea, the Raiders faced harsh conditions both during the flight and in their crash landings in China and the then-Soviet Union, especially under the threat of possible capture by enemy forces.

“I would advise you to be prepared as much as possible for any situation,” Thatcher said. “We were in a situation we didn’t have any control over. We crash landed on a Japanese-occupied island. There were no Japanese there at the time, and the Chinese Underground who were working on that island helped us escape.”

News of the raid’s success quickly reached American news outlets, rejuvenating the country’s morale for the budding war effort. However, the Raiders said many did not know of their reception in their homeland until years later.

“When I came home, the sense that the whole country was gung-ho to get on with the job -- it was a pretty good feeling,” Saylor said.

Shortly after the raid’s completion, Doolittle, who had been promoted to brigadier general and received the Medal of Honor from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, had the idea for a reunion among all the surviving Raiders, Cole said.

“Each day after the mission was over [Doolittle] said he was going to throw a party like one we’d never been to before,” Cole said. “In 1945, the first party was at McFadden-Deauville Hotel in Miami. The people who

were able to come came to it. The party grew to talking and conversations, and somebody suggested ‘Why don’t we do this every year?’ And then Doolittle said ‘Wait a minute, fellas -- I’m paying out a lot of money here!’”

Eventually, the reunions led to visiting bases and cities throughout the country. The gatherings soon began awarding out Traffic Safety Awards and recognition to deserving Airmen and later evolved into providing scholarships for local students beginning in 1962, Cole said.

As the session came to a close and the Raiders prepared for their final reunion weekend in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., Saylor concluded by giving his endorsement of the men and women who followed in their footsteps by serving in the Air Force today.

“I look this gang over, and I think we’re in good hands,” Saylor said. “I want to make sure we give you guys everything you need to get the job done. I’m hopeful.”

Cole, an Ohio native, enlisted in the Army Air Corps in November 1940 and received his pilot’s commission in July 1941. After serving in the Doolittle Raid, he continued to serve in the Burma-Indo-China theater as one of the original Air Commandos. He is the recipient of Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak leaf clusters, Air Medal with one oak leaf cluster, Bronze Star Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal and Chinese Army, Navy, Air Corps Medal, Class A, 1st Grade.

Saylor graduated high school in Montana and enlisted Dec. 7, 1939. He served both in the United States and overseas throughout the war until March 1945. He accepted a commission as an aircraft maintenance officer in October 1947. He is the recipient of Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Force Commendation Medal and the Chinese Army, Navy, and Air Corps Medal, Class A, 1st Grade.

Thatcher graduated high school and enlisted in December 1940. After the raid, he served in England, Africa and California before being discharged from active duty in July 1945. He is the recipient of the Silver Star Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters and the Chinese Army, Navy, and Air Corps Medal, Class A, 1st Grade.

All three Raiders were present for their final reunion parade in Fort Walton Beach April 20. For more information about the reunion, visit their website at [www.doolittlereunion.com](http://www.doolittlereunion.com).





## MARINE CORPS FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Participants of the infamous "Mud, Sweat and Tears Run" sponsored by U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, endure an intense trail filled with forest terrain, winding trails, fallen trees and giant mud pits April 27. The run consisted of a five-mile trek through the woods and muddy terrain of Stone Bay. Photo by Staff Sgt. Robert Storm.

# Grand Prix runners run murky waters

By Jessie Heath  
Globe Sports editor

The scene could have come straight from a movie.

Caked in mud, stumbling and sliding along the uneven ground, people reached out to grasp tree limbs and the hands of competitors, desperate to escape the murky waters that trapped them.

Others managed to wade through the mud but found themselves at a loss as to how to navigate the rocky terrain after the monster they had just escaped devoured their shoes and robbed them of their socks.

Barefooted, leaning on each other for mental and physical support, they put as much distance as they could between the mud pits and themselves.

It was impossible to move forward without reminders

of what lay hidden in the woods of Stone Bay Rifle Range.

Mud, mud and more mud.

There was no escaping it - no avoiding it - as more than 800 runners lined up to take part in the Mud, Sweat and Tears five-mile mud run aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, April 27, sponsored by Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command. The yearly mud run has arguably become one of the most popular races in the Grand Prix Series. Noted for its challenging and fun course that involves just as much teamwork as stamina, the Mud, Sweat and Tears run has gathered a following of devoted racers who are ready to get down and dirty.

As runners took their stances at the starting line, waiting for the signal to begin the race, the course before them seemed deceptively easy. They began the race on a smooth, paved road that curved slightly to the right and



led them down another paved road, just as most races do. However, the mood quickly changed as runners approached walls they had to either climb over or maneuver around before meeting their arch nemesis - the mud.

Murky waters that acted like quick sand easily engulfed the runners, thinning the herd as racers became stuck in the muck.

"It's hard," said Jeff Ferraro, who attended the run to support his son, a Marine, and all the other members of the Marine Corps. "You've got people out there who stepped into the mud pits and got stuck waist-deep. Then, after you get out, you can't just leave them there. You've got to turn and try to pull them up so they can finish the run."

Filling the air with an awful odor, the mud looked anything but turbulent until runners found themselves crying out to those around them, looking for a hand to grab to pull them up and away from the obstacle that threatened to bring their race experience to a screeching halt.

"It slows you down a lot," said Ferraro. "I've run in other runs like this and they're always great fun, but they're a challenge."

In true Hollywood fashion, participants had come to the race prepared to face the mud, just as in any good movie, in costume. Sporting tutus, bandanas, hats, and even capes and masks, runners battled their foe and crossed the finish line in a blaze of glory, having fought and overcome the sludge that threatened them.

Even the superheroes turned up for the fight. Team Avengers arrived, ready to tackle the mud like any superhero should - in full armor. Wearing the traditional clothing of the characters they emulated, Cpl. Brandon Focer, Petty Officer 3rd Class Gino Arena, Cpl. Peter DiFilippo III and Jacob Johnson took to the mud with vigor.

"We wanted to make a team and somebody at the Area 2 Gym suggested the Avengers," explained Focer. "We decided to use it and dressed up to complete the idea."

"The easiest part was finishing," said Johnson. "But to get there you had to go through everything else. I think the last mile through the woods, when we were going uphill, was the most difficult. And then, especially for people who has lost their shoes, running on the gravel was hard, too."

"The walls were hard," Johnson continued. "When we

came up to the walls we had to either go over them or run around them."

In true superhero fashion, Team Avengers did not let anything sway them from their goal of crossing the finish line. With his cape flapping behind him, Arena completed the race, followed by the rest of his team, only to be met with loud cheers from the families and friends who lined the sides of the road at the finish line. With children clamoring to take photos and meet the team, they did what all good superheroes do and spent time talking and laughing with their supporters and fans.

"It's all in fun and this race was great," said Focer.

Regardless of whether they dressed the part or not, every racer was a star in the battle between man and mud. Having overcome lost shoes and waist-deep gunk that enveloped them, and after hurdling themselves over the wall and crawling up the hill, each runner who crossed the finish line did so to loud cheers from families and friends who came out to watch the spectacle. No matter how long it took to complete the race, all that mattered was crossing the finish line.

"Really, the mud is what makes this race run," admitted Ferraro. "Working through those challenges, and getting nice and muddy, then crossing the finish line to get your drink and something to eat makes it all worth it. The (Grand Prix Series) knows how to put on some great runs and this is one of the best I've been to in a while."



**Runners compete on the road trek during the infamous "Mud, Sweat and Tears Run" sponsored by U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command April 27. Photo by Staff Sgt. Robert M. Storm.**



# 2013 Warrior Games celebrates an indomitable spirit

*By Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly and Mike Bottoms  
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

*Retired Sgt. 1st Class Sammy Lugo competes in the Seated Discus competition during the Warrior Games May 14 at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. Lugo would win the gold medal and set a Warrior Games record with a throw of 34.56 meters. Photo by Mike Bottoms.*



In a remarkable celebration of perseverance and resiliency more than 200 wounded military athletes competed in the 2013 Warrior Games. The games held at the U.S. Olympic Training Center and the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. May 11 -16 had seven events: archery, cycling, shooting, sitting volleyball, swimming, track and field and wheelchair basketball.

Opening ceremonies were held at the Olympic Training Center May 11 and included special guest of honor, Britain's Prince Harry, who joined U.S. Navy Lt. Bradley Snyder and Olympic swimming champion Missy Franklin in lighting the Olympic flame.

The Warrior Games was created to encourage a healthy, active lifestyle for troops with permanent physical disabilities such as amputations, as well as traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and other serious injuries.

In his first cycling race ever, Master Sgt. Mark Vomund won the silver medal in the 30 kilometer Men's Bicycle Open. A Green Beret and 24-year Army veteran with 10 deployments under his belt, Vomund was severely injured in an IED blast in 2010. A year later and in the midst of traumatic mental and physical recovery, he took up cycling.

"For me, it's not about winning medals, it's about doing something that I haven't done before – and becoming a more complete person in the process," said Vomund. "Cycling has given me back a part of what I was, which also has given me self-worth and self-pride."

This year marks the fourth year for the Games, an Olympic-style event open to Armed Forces servicemembers who were injured while serving on active duty. The USSOCOM team had more than 30 Special Operations athletes from across the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps. The team competed against athletes from all service branches including members of the United Kingdom's Armed Forces.

Army Capt. Ivan Castro, a veteran of the Warrior Games, was blinded by an Iraqi mortar round in 2007. Castro won 6 medals with the gold medal in 30 kilometer Mixed Tandem cycling race, silver medals in Men's Visually Impaired 100, 200, 1500 meter races and Shot Put Visually Impaired and a Bronze in the Discus Visually Impaired competitions. He feels the games are a way to rebuild lives and breaks down stereo types.

"The Warrior Games are a stepping stone for young talent to be seen," Castro said. "The games break down the idea that people with disabilities are very limited in what they can do."

Castro went on to explain that the power of sport is an amazing phenomenon and the Warrior Games serves as a morale building family reunion.

"Sports motivate you again with goals and that helps you get back to work and reintegrate with your family and society," said Castro. "A lot of the guys who compete here were injured in combat together and it is really great seeing friends who have a shared experience."

Retired Army Staff Sgt. Charles Claybaker, a former Army Ranger and badly injured in an CV-22 plane crash, won the gold medal in the Team Recurve Archery with retired Army Staff Sgt. Caleb Perkins and retired Spc. Jeff Garew. Claybaker thinks the best part of the Warrior Games is the fact that the injured compete, not winning medals.

"The best thing about the games is seeing the guys come out - the blind guys, amputees, everyone doing their best and competing," Claybaker said. "I am happy we won the gold medal because we won as a team, but the best part is seeing everyone out here."

The Warrior Games was created in 2010 as an introduction to Paralympic sports for injured servicemembers and veterans. Events concluded with an awards ceremony and celebration May 16.

**The following competitors medaled for SOCOM:**

**Army Capt. Ivan Castro**

**Gold Medal Mixed Tandem Cycling**

**Silver Medal 100 Meter Visually Impaired**

**Silver Medal 200 Meter Visually Impaired**

**Silver Medal 1500 Meter Visually Impaired**

**Silver Medal Shot Put Visually Impaired**

**Bronze Medal Discus Visually Impaired**

**Retired Army Staff Sgt. Charles Claybaker**

**Gold Medal Team Recurve Archery**

**Retired Army Staff Sgt. Alfredo De Los Santos**

**Bronze Medal Men's Discus Seated**

**Tech. Sgt. Israel Del Toro**

**Gold Medal Men's Shot Put Ambulatory**

**Retired Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Franklin**

**Silver Medal Men's Discus Visually Impaired**

**Retired Marine Corps Cpl. Justin Gaertner**

**Bronze Medal 10K Men's Handcycle**

**Bronze Medal Men's 200 Meter Wheelchair**

**Bronze Medal Men's 1500 Meter Wheelchair**

**Retired Spc. Jeff Garew**

**Gold Medal Team Recurve Archery**

**Retired Sgt. 1st Class Sammy Lugo**

**Gold Medal Men's Discus Seated**

**Army Staff Sgt. Caleb Perkins**

**Gold Medal Team Recurve Archery**

**Retired Army Sgt. Maj. Christopher Self**

**Gold Medal Men's 30K Bicycle Disability**

**Army Master Sgt. Mark Vomund**

**Silver Medal Men's 30K Bicycle Open**

**Total medal results can be found at:**  
**<http://www.teamusa.org/US-Paralympics/Military/Warrior-Games-presented-by-Deloitte/Competition-Results.aspx>**



# 2013 Warrior Games

*Celebrating an indomitable spirit*

Photos by Mike Bottoms

Retired Senior Airman Kendall Madden competes in the 100 yard dash May 14 as part of the Ultimate Champion competition at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.



Britain's Prince Harry, U.S. Paralympian Bradley Snyder, and Olympian Missy Franklin light the flame to start the Warrior Games open to armed service members who were injured while serving on active duty at Colorado Springs, Colo. May 11.



Retired Army Sgt. Major David Neumer competes in the Air Pistol shooting competition at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. May 13.



Retired Army Sgt. Major Christopher Self wins the 30K Men's Bicycle Disability race May 12.





*Retired Marine Corps Sgt. Jesus Vasquez serves during USSOCOM's sitting volleyball match against the Army at the Olympic Training Center May 12 in Colorado Springs, Colo.*



*Tech. Sgt. Israel Del Toro competes in the discus competition May 14 at the Warrior Games held in Colorado Springs, Colo.*



*Retired Marine Corps Cpl. Justin Gaertner, point guard for the USSOCOM wheelchair basketball team, brings the ball up the court at the U.S. Olympic Training Center May 12 in Colorado Springs, Colo.*



*(From left to right in white shirts) Retired Spc. Jeff Garew, retired Army Staff Sgt. Charles Claybaker, and retired Army Staff Sgt. Caleb Perkins competed and won the gold medal in the Recurve Archery Team competition May 15 in the Warrior Games held at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.*



*Army Capt. Ivan Castro (left) and his guide Army Capt. Richard Kirby compete in the Men's 1500 meter visually impaired race May 14 at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. Castro and Kirby would capture the silver medal in the race.*









**Marine Corps Staff Sgt.  
Eric D. Christian  
2d Marine Special Operations Battalion**



**Petty Officer Third Class (SEAL)  
Jonathan H. Kaloust  
SEAL Team Two**



**Army Warrant Officer 1  
Sean W. Mullen  
5th Special Forces Group (Airborne)**



**Army Staff Sgt.  
Michael H. Simpson  
1st Special Forces Group (Airborne)**



**Marine Corps Cpl.  
David M. Sonka  
2d Marine Special Operations Battalion**

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



Retired Marine Corps Cpl. Justin Gaertner competes and takes 3rd place in the 10K handcycling race May 12. Gaertner would also win the bronze medal in the 200 and 1500 meter wheelchair races. More than 200 wounded military athletes competed in the 2013 Warrior Games. The games held at the U.S. Olympic Training Center and the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., May 11 -16 had seven events: archery, cycling, shooting, sitting volleyball, swimming, track and field and wheelchair basketball. Photo by Mike Bottoms.

