



TIP OF THE SPEAR

**SENIOR CHIEF PETTY OFFICER (SEAL)
EDWARD BYERS
RECEIVES THE MEDAL OF HONOR**

U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLA., FEBRUARY 2016



U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



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Tip of the Spear

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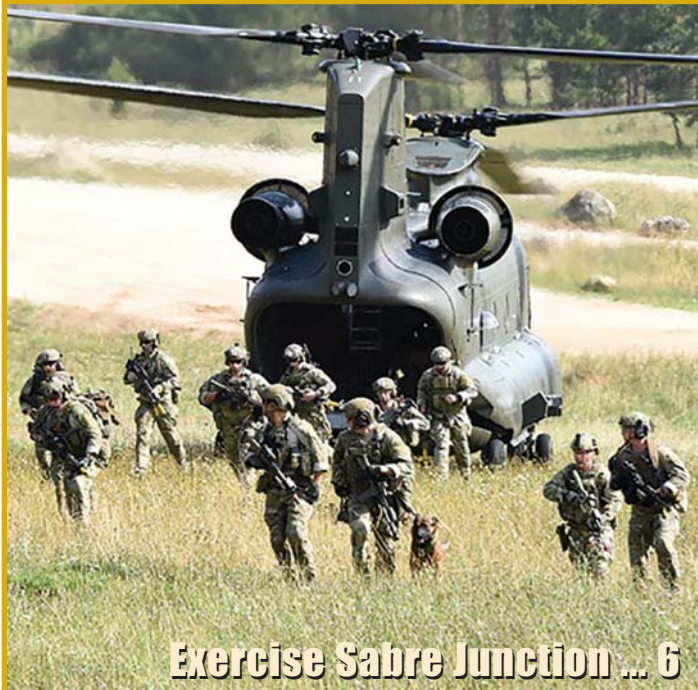


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(Cover) Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Edward Byers received the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama in a ceremony held in the White House, Washington DC, Feb. 29. Byers received the medal for his courageous actions while serving as part of a team that rescued an American civilian being held hostage in Afghanistan Dec. 8-9, 2012. Photo illustration by Mike Bottoms.

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SOF AROUND THE WORLD - AFGHANISTAN
COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE – AFGHANISTAN

From Afghanistan to Fort Benning: A soldier's year-long journey to Army Ranger School

*Story and photo by Lt. Charity Edgar
Resolute Support Headquarters*

Security Assistance Office-Afghanistan, 1st Lt. Mohammad Yarghal became the fourth member of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces to earn the title of Ranger.

The 27-year-old Afghan soldier recently returned to Afghanistan following a year of training in the United States. He first attended the four-month American Language Course at the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio. Then, he completed the 17-week Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course followed by a two-week Ranger Training Assessment Course, two months at Ranger School and three weeks of Basic Airborne Course, all at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Yarghal, who is from Khost province, was inspired to join the Afghan National Army at a young age by a general who hailed from his village. In high school, he enacted his plan to serve his country and prepared to apply for the National Military Academy of Afghanistan.

"I read a lot of books, and did PT [physical training] all the time," explained Yarghal. "In my village, I have a place where I would run, usually one or two hours a day, and the locals call it by my name."

Yarghal was accepted into the prestigious four-year academy, which is structured similarly to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Upon graduation in 2012, he attended infantry school in Afghanistan for three months.

"My father was a doctor for the Mujahedeen," said Yarghal. "He told me if I wanted to be a good officer and leader, I needed to do infantry. Massoud [Afghan political and military leader] was an infantry commander; so I chose that."

A fellow soldier told Yarghal about a four-month



First Lt. Mohammad Yarghal visits U.S. Air Force Maj. Umar M. Khan, Chief, Professional Military Education and Training Programs Branch, Security Assistance Office-Afghanistan, at Resolute Support Headquarters, Kabul, Afghanistan. Khan and his team helped coordinate and execute Yarghal's training in the United States.

infantry course in the United States that he could attend, along with a school where he could become a paratrooper, a skill he believes is important for all armies.

"My goal in the Afghan National Army was to become a leader who can keep my soldiers strong," said Yarghal. "I wanted to be the best I could be."

Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan's Security Assistance Office-Afghanistan stepped in to make the lieutenant's dream a reality.

"After a candidate for training in the U.S. is identified, they take the American Language Course Placement Test, which is administered by the Afghan Foreign Language Institute," said U.S. Air Force Maj.

Umar M. Khan, Chief, Professional Military Education and Training Programs Branch, SAO-A, who is deployed out of Maxwell Air Force Base. "The Training Branch receives the results of the ALCPT; if the candidate scores above a certain level on that exam, then SAO-A Training Branch administers the English Comprehension Level test."

Yarghal passed the tests, his request was approved and after SAO-A coordinated travel, he was on his way to the United States.

Following the completion of the advanced English language course, Yarghal traveled from Texas to Georgia and enrolled in the Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course. It was there that he heard his American peers discussing their desire to attend Ranger School, one of the toughest training courses for U.S. soldiers. He

immediately volunteered and spent any extra time reading the Army Ranger Handbook, and pushing himself through extra physical training.

It paid off. He passed the Ranger Training Assessment Course, qualifying him to attend Ranger School.

"I was very tired after two weeks of RTAC, but it prepared me for Ranger School, and Ranger School is not easy," reflected Yarghal.

The intensive leadership course consists of eight weeks of intense physical and mental training. There are three distinct phases of Ranger School called Benning, Mountain and Florida.

Yarghal said that the support of his squad proved instrumental in his success throughout the difficult course.

"The other classmates supported me and I supported them. It is teamwork," said Yarghal. "They told me 'You will be great in your Army.'"

"Yarghal is a fantastic soldier, man and teammate," said 1st Lt. Patrick Diehl, who was in a squad with Yarghal at Ranger School. "We come from very different cultures and live completely different lives but that didn't stop us from bonding through the hardships of Ranger School and working together. We laughed, sweat, bled and worked together to earn our tabs and I wouldn't have

wanted anyone else in my squad."

Less than 50 percent of students who enroll in Ranger School graduate. During the grueling course, Yarghal did not "recycle," a process where students must repeat a phase in order to continue with the training, and in Oct. 2015, Yarghal graduated from Ranger School.

"Maj. Gen. [Austin] Miller [Commander, U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence] had inspired me, and told me he thought I could complete the course," said Yarghal. "I didn't want to let him down, or all the other people who helped me get here."

Miller had the honor of pinning on Yarghal's Ranger tab.

"We are very proud of Lt. Yarghal not only for his successes in our course, but his very sincere desire to be as well trained as possible so that he is able to contribute

to the security and well-being of Afghanistan," said Miller.

Looking back, Yarghal says it was all worth it.

"I gained three important things from Ranger school: military leadership, time management and teamwork," said Yarghal. "If I am leading 40 to 60

soldiers, I know we can destroy the enemy. If your soldiers do not trust your abilities, you won't be able to do anything."

Khan has no doubt that Afghanistan's newest Ranger will be an effective leader.

"Leadership is the key to success for any military organization—that is its greatest asset, and it is what makes it strong. Make no mistake—the ANA is stronger because of Lt. Yarghal's drive, determination and skills as a combat leader," said Khan.

Following his graduation from Ranger School, Yarghal went on to successfully complete the Basic Airborne Course. Since his return to Afghanistan, Yarghal has been serving at the Ministry of Defense Headquarters Security Support Brigade.

"I was not completely confident about leading soldiers on a battlefield until Ranger School. Now I want to do Special Forces," said Yarghal. "I am not worried anymore; I know I am a good leader and soldier for Afghanistan."

I gained three important things from Ranger school: military leadership, time management and teamwork. If I am leading 40 to 60 soldiers, I know we can destroy the enemy. If your soldiers do not trust your abilities, you won't be able to do anything.

— Lt. Mohammad Yarghal



SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – EUROPE

Joint SOF training at exercise Sabre Junction



More than 150 Special Operations Forces from six nations take part in exercise Sabre Junction in Hohenfels, Germany. In this photo, members from the 75th Ranger Regiment conduct infiltration from a British Royal Air Force CH-47 to set conditions for a 82nd airborne and multinational joint forcible entry, in Hohenfels, Germany, August 2015. Photo by Ralph Zwilling.



(Top) Rangers from the 75th Ranger Regiment exercise another aspect of the full spectrum of Special Operations during SOF capability development at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, August 2015. (Bottom) U.S. and French Special Operations Forces conduct combined planning for special warfare operations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, November 2015. The JMRC is the Army's premier forward-stationed combat training center in Europe. Photos by Ralph Zwilling.





SOCEUR night airborne qualification jump



U.S. Army Soldiers from 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) attached to Special Operations Command Europe participate in an airborne qualification jump on the evening of Jan. 21, near Malsheim, Germany. Photo by Visual Information Specialist Martin Greeson.



SOF AROUND THE WORLD - KENYA

SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND – AFRICA

A member of the Kenyan Maritime Police stands guard outside a medical seminar (MEDSEM) in Kiangwe, Kenya, Dec. 6, 2015. Special Operations Command – East Africa, Team Manda Bay conducted the MEDSEM along with the Lamu County Ministry of Health and Safari Doctors to provide medical services to remote villages in the area.

Special Operations Forces Provide Medical Care to Kenyan Villagers



A man kisses his son while waiting for him to be seen by medical personnel from Safari Doctors during a medical seminar (MEDSEM) in Kiangwe, Kenya, Dec. 6, 2015. Special Operations Command Forward – East Africa, Team Manda Bay is conducting the MEDSEM along with the Lamu County Ministry of Health and Safari Doctors to provide medical services to remote villages in the area and engage with village leaders to address their concerns.

***Story and photos Petty Officer 1st Class
Tony DeFilippo
Naval Special Warfare Group TWO***

Service members from Special Operations Command Forward – East Africa, Team Manda Bay, Kenya, participated in a medical seminar (MEDSEM) in Kiangwe, Kenya, to provide medical services to Kiangwe villagers Dec. 6.

Team Manda Bay personnel were also joined by members of the Lamu County Ministry of Health and Safari Doctors, a nonprofit organization that focuses on delivering healthcare services to remote areas of Lamu County.

“We’re out here as part of our continuing partnership with the Kenyans,” said a Team Manda Bay service member. “Medical care is something that comes up a lot in our conversations with local leaders, so we

coordinated with the county government and Safari Docs to put this together.”

Medical personnel treated more than 200 villagers, including 87 children who received polio vaccinations, which were provided by the Lamu County Ministry of Health. Team Manda Bay also helped provide security for the MEDSEM along with members of the Kenyan Maritime Police.

“Everything we do is always in an advise and assist role with the Kenyans taking the lead,” said a Team Manda Bay service member. “We train them. We provide them with whatever assistance we can, but at the end of the day we won’t be here forever, so the goal is for them to be able to operate without us.”

The MEDSEM also provided Team Manda Bay with an opportunity to talk to village leaders about their concerns and identify ways Team Manda Bay can continue to help them.

“I think today went really well,” said a Team Manda Bay service member. “We were able to treat a lot of people, and we had some good conversations with the Kenyans about how we can continue to help. It feels really good to be a part of something like this.”

Team Manda Bay plans to participate in at least two more MEDSEMs in the near future as part of their ongoing partnership with the Lamu County government and the Kenyan Defense Force.



A medical officer from Special Operations Command Forward – East Africa, Team Manda Bay checks a villager’s vision during a medical seminar (MEDSEM) in Kiangwe, Kenya, Dec. 6, 2015.



President Barack Obama presents the Medal of Honor to Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Edward C. Byers Jr. during a ceremony Monday, Feb. 29, at the White House. Byers received the Medal of Honor for his actions during a hostage rescue operation, December 2012. Photo by Oscar Sosa.

President Obama presents Medal of Honor to SEAL for rescuing Taliban hostage



*By April Grant
Navy Office of Information*

On Feb. 29, Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Edward C. Byers Jr. became the sixth Navy SEAL in U.S. history to receive the Medal of Honor.

President Barack Obama presented Byers with the medal during a White House ceremony for his heroic gallantry as an assault team member attached to a Joint Task Force in support of Operation Enduring Freedom Dec. 8, 2012.

During the ceremony, Obama praised Byers' dedication to duty.

"Like so many of our special operators, Ed is defined by a deep sense of humility. He doesn't seek the spotlight. In fact, he shuns it. He's the consummate quiet professional," said Obama.

The president welcomed members of Byers' family, including wife Madison, daughter Hannah, and mother Peggy. The crowd laughed as Obama recounted Peggy's question when she heard the news of her son's award, "Do you think I can come?"

Obama called Byers "a special breed of warrior," part of a select few who serve the American people in the shadows with honor and sacrifice.

"Our special operations forces are a strategic national asset. They teach us that humans are more important than hardware," said Obama. "Today is a reminder that our nation has to keep investing in this irreplaceable asset; deploying our special operators wisely, preserving force and family, making sure these incredible Americans stay strong in body, mind and spirit.

The American people may not always see them. We may not always hear of their success. But they're there-



Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Edward C. Byers Jr. in battle gear. Byers received the Medal of Honor for his actions during a hostage rescue operation in December 2012. Courtesy photo.

in the thick of the fight, in the dark of the night, achieving the mission. And we thank God they're there," added Obama.

Byers spoke at a press conference following the ceremony.

"The important thing I want to say here is that everything we do is as a team; if it wasn't for that team I wouldn't be standing here today. Specifically for me,



my teammate, friend and brother Nick Checque,” he said, referring to fallen team member Petty Officer 1st Class Nicolas Checque. “The award is truly his. He was an American hero and he was the hero of that operation.

Today has been a very memorable day in my life surrounded by friends and family and it is truly something I’ll never forget. We’re gonna celebrate Nick’s life and celebrate the lives of the brothers that have fallen protecting our freedoms so that we can sleep peacefully in our beds at night,” added Byers.

In December 2012, Byers, along with other members of his team, was tasked with a mission to rescue Dr. Dilip Joseph, an American citizen being detained by the Taliban in a mountainous region in the Qarghah’i District of Laghman Province. Byers was the second assaulter on the approach toward the building identified as containing the hostage.

While Byers tried to rip down blankets that served as the door to the building, the first assaulter pushed his way through the doorway and was immediately shot by enemy AK-47 fire. Byers, fully aware of the hostile threat inside the room, boldly entered and immediately engaged a guard pointing an AK-47 toward him. As he was engaging that guard, another adult male darted toward the corner of the room. Byers could not distinguish if the person may have been the hostage scrambling away or a guard attempting to arm himself with an AK-47 that lay in the corner, so he tackled the

unknown male and seized control of him. While in hand-to-hand combat, Byers maintained control of the unknown male with one hand, while adjusting the focus of his night vision goggles (NVGs) with his other. Once his NVGs were focused, he recognized that the male was not the hostage and engaged the struggling armed guard.

By now, other team members had entered the room and were calling to Joseph to identify himself. Byers heard an unknown voice speak English from his right side. He immediately leaped across the room and selflessly flung his body on top of the American hostage, shielding him from the continued rounds being fired across the room. Almost simultaneously, Byers identified an additional enemy fighter directly behind Joseph. While covering the hostage with his body,

He immediately leaped across the room and selflessly flung his body on top of the American hostage, shielding him from the continued rounds being fired across the room. Almost simultaneously, Byers identified an additional enemy fighter directly behind Joseph. While covering the hostage with his body, Byers was able to pin the enemy combatant to the wall with his hand around the enemy’s throat. Unable to fire any effective rounds into the enemy, Byers was able to restrain the combatant enough to enable his teammate to fire precision shots, eliminating the final threat within the room.

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Byers quickly talked to Joseph and, after confirming that

he was able to move, extracted him to the helicopter-landing zone. Byers, a certified paramedic and 18D medic, subsequently assisted with the rendering of medical aid to the first assaulter. Byers and others performed CPR during the flight to Bagram Airfield where his teammate was declared deceased.

In a U.S. Navy video, Byers recalled the moment the president called to say he would receive the Medal of Honor. “I felt very honored and very humbled because now I’m gonna be a representative for the Navy and the Navy Special Warfare community and there’s a weight that that carries with it,” he said. “And

that weight is the sacrifice that everybody has made within this community ... it's an affirmation of the job that we do and an appreciation for the job we do."

The Medal of Honor is the nation's highest award given to members of the Armed Forces for gallantry in action. Byers is the first living active duty member of the U.S. Navy to receive the Medal of Honor since Apr. 6, 1976. He is the first living active duty enlisted member of the U.S. Navy to receive the Medal of Honor since Petty Officer Michael Thornton (also a SEAL) was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Richard Nixon Oct., 15 1973.

A husband and father to one daughter, Byers was born in Toledo, Ohio, and began his naval career in 1998 as a hospital corpsman. The following year, he was assigned to Great Lakes Naval Hospital and later served with 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. While on deployment with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit aboard USS Austin (LPD 4), Byers earned the Enlisted Surface Warfare

Specialist (ESWS) badge and Fleet Marine Force (FMF) warfare device.

After graduation, he attended the Special Operations Combat Medic (SOCM) course and was subsequently assigned to East Coast SEAL Teams. He has deployed overseas 11 times with nine combat tours. Byers was promoted to the rank of senior chief petty officer in January 2016.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Byers personal decorations include the Bronze Star with Valor (five awards), the Purple Heart (two awards), the Joint Service Commendation Medal with Valor, the Navy Commendation Medal (three awards, one with Valor), the Combat Action ribbon (two awards) and the Good Conduct Medal (five awards).



President Barack Obama applauds Senior Chief Petty Officer (SEAL) Edward C. Byers Jr. during a Medal of Honor presentation ceremony Monday, Feb. 29, at the White House. Byers received the Medal of Honor for his actions during a hostage rescue operation in Afghanistan, December 2012. Photo by Oscar Sosa.



1st Group trains with Indian Special Operations Forces

*Story by Staff Sgt. Terrance Payton
1st SFG (A) Public Affairs*

Green Berets assigned to 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), conducted the Vajra Prahar training exercise with Indian Special Operation Forces at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Camp Rilea, Oregon, Jan. 18-29, 2016.

The two-week exercise, which hasn't happened at JBLM since 2011, was a bilateral Joint Combined Exchange Training exercise that improved the ability of

the forces involved to respond to a wide range of contingencies. The past few years has seen increased cooperation between the two countries' military forces with a remarkable expansion of bilateral training exercises.

"I see our military to military partnership as a very important pillar that contributes to the strategic relationship between the two countries," said Lt. Col. Terry Butcher, commander of 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). "They [India] are a very important partner, both for the regional security of



South Asia and the maritime security. I think that we directly contribute to that by working with their special operation forces.”

The two countries are working together to safeguard maritime security and freedom of navigation, as well as, strengthening their partnership to combat terrorism and piracy.

“The exercise was strictly maritime focused so everything we did was in the water,” said 2nd battalion’s operational detachment commander. “We started with an introduction to boat movements and finished with the culminating exercise, which was an 8-nautical mile boat movement to a beach landing.”

Along with the boat movements and beach landing, the training exercise also included diving, navigation, helo-casting and an airborne operation.

“Working out there with them in the water, we get better and they get better,” said Butcher. “We improve upon our individual skills and collective skills as a unit.”

“We trained for this at home, jumping into cold water,” said Maj. Puneet Atwal, commander of the Indian forces. “This is good training. This military to

military interaction between the countries will be good for our future.”

Butcher said the training strengthens the partnership, builds relationships and provides better interoperability.

“If there ever comes a time where we have to work directly hand-in-hand with our Indian partners, understanding the way they operate on the ground or in the water is going to enable us to work with them using their particular tactics and their methods of operation,” said Butcher. “Just knowing that you have a foreign military unit you can reach out to, keeps the relationship strong between our units.”

“The greatest benefit for our soldiers is any chance that we get to work alongside our allies,” said the operational detachment commander. “It was a good exercise and we got a lot out of it and everyone came away a better-trained soldier.”

The U.S. is committed to broadening ties to Indo-Asia-Pacific partners. As part of the rebalance, the U.S. is strengthening traditional alliances while enhancing forward presence in Southeast Asia, in Oceania and the Indian Ocean.



Members of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) conduct a small boat casting exercise with the Indian Army Special Forces at Fort Rilea, Ore., Jan. 26. The training is to prepare Soldiers to properly maneuver through open waters and conduct a beach landing. Photo by Spc. Codie Mendenhall.



U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Four Chaplains who completed the U.S. Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection program, as well as the Special Forces Qualification Course. From left to right: Chaplains Timothy Maracle, Mike Smith, Tim Crawley, and Peter Hofman. USASOC courtesy photo.

Special Forces Tab, Green Beret, SFQC: A vehicle for Chaplains

By Sgt. Kyle Fisch
USASOC Public Affairs

A Roman poet named Juvenal is credited with saying: “Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?” --a Latin phrase accepted to mean “who will guard the guardians?” Chaplains are often seen as these guardians, someone who looks after those who protect others.

Historically, nearly every unit in the Army has had chaplains assigned to look after the spiritual and/or emotional needs of the force, to include elite units such as U.S. Army Airborne, Rangers, and Special Forces. While many chaplains assigned to these units decide to go through the Basic Airborne Course and Ranger School, which can help them better relate to the Soldiers in their care, few have had the opportunity to attend and complete

the U.S. Army Special Forces Qualification Course.

“Support Soldiers such as the Staff Judge Advocate, Surgeons Office and Chaplains, are a necessity to Special Forces, but they are not required and/or rarely offered the opportunity to attend SFQC, without having to re-class (change their MOS),” said Capt. Mike Smith, now a Special Forces qualified chaplain with 3rd General Support Aviation Battalion, 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division. “Now, since I completed the course and earned the coveted Green Beret, they see me as one of them. I have ‘survived’ the same challenges they had to survive in order to serve in the Special Forces community.”

“To me, it isn’t the fact that I am able to wear the beret as much as it allows me to understand the operators I serve. There is a sense of alienation when a support Soldier, including the chaplain, arrives to an SF unit. There is some

assessment time where the unit attempts to understand the new chaplain,” said Maj. Timothy Maracle, a Special Forces qualified chaplain with 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). “This period of acceptance and access to the unit allows a chaplain the ability to express their identity to the new group of Soldiers and operators. On the other side, when the unit finally does accept the chaplain, there is an unbreakable bond. We support one another as if they were our own flesh and blood. The beret is the vehicle of access, but it doesn’t do everything for a chaplain, just provides access.”

Smith recalls some of the challenges he faced through his journey, explaining that a mere week from graduation he was told he may be receiving a

certificate of completion rather than actually donning the Green Beret with the rest of his classmates. However, senior SF personnel such as Col. Keith Croom expressed those Chaplains who have met the same standards of SFQC as other candidates should be granted the opportunity to don the Green Beret and thus minister with their SF brethren.

Although these Chaplains have met the same standards, been through the same training, and hold the same qualifications as many SF Soldiers, they do not consider themselves ‘operators.’”

“If there is one thing I learned, it is that I am not an ‘operator.’ I was not and am not called to that role. It’s not to say that I couldn’t take on that role, because I have gone through the training, but it’s more to say that my role is different,” said Maj. Peter Hofman, a SF qualified chaplain and instructor at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School, Fort Jackson, South Carolina. “My role is to guard the guardians, to minister to those in the SF community.”

Hofman also recalls a moment during his time at SFQC when he was met with his share of adversity.

After his final patrol in the Small Unit Tactics portion of the course, Hofman notes that he was sitting with the rest of his platoon waiting for a final AAR (after action review), when an instructor walked up to him and said, “What’s your deal man?” which led him to believe he had done something wrong. The instructor then clarified his

initial question by asking why Hofman, as a chaplain, was learning about assaulting objectives and carrying weapons.

“I could tell he was irritated by my presence and after a little back and forth I finally said, ‘Well sergeant, I think the SF motto: ‘De Oppresso Liber’ is an important mission,” he said. “In fact, it is the same mission that Jesus stated was his mission in ‘Luke 4’ quoting from ‘Isaiah,

chapter 61’. It’s a mission that I would like to be a part of and the SF community is a brotherhood that I would be honored to serve in. Apparently, that satisfied him because he walked away. In that moment I became more aware than ever before what a huge responsibility I was being charged with and what a privilege it was to be there and serve with these

Any time a chaplain can successfully complete challenging courses and become tabbed, I believe it bolsters the reputation of the Chaplains Corps. I am a better man and chaplain for having gone through, and I believe it also gives us a voice in places we may not have without it.

— Chaplain (Capt). Tim Crawley

‘guardians.’”

Because of the unique situation these chaplains find themselves in (attending SFAS and SFQC as chaplains), they also share a unique perspective.

“The essence of what SFQC has done for me is knowledge. Knowledge about how much these Soldiers have been pushed, pulled, and stressed while going through the course. Knowledge about the way operators think, which assisted me during counselings with their spouse. Knowledge about how important perception is to an operator, as it is the first impression of a person that will assist an operator when he needs it,” said Maracle. “Knowledge about my own weaknesses and how understanding my breaking points, I can understand that in others as well. And finally, knowledge about the bigger picture of what is truly important to an operator and how to support them when they don’t even know they need it.”

According to Maracle, for him and his fellow chaplains, enduring and ultimately graduating this grueling course was never about the glory, but always about the Soldiers they would later serve.

“Any time a chaplain can successfully complete challenging courses and become tabbed, I believe it bolsters the reputation of the Chaplains Corps,” said Capt. Tim Crawley. “I am a better man and chaplain for having gone through, and I believe it also gives us a voice in places we may not have without it.”



Defining success in today's Army: A senior NCO's success story, lessons learned

*By Staff Sgt. Jorden Weir
10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)*

What does it take to succeed in today's Army? It's a question that many Soldiers wonder, and one that has many different answers. Some of the obvious marks of success, leadership and professionalism are some givens. Yet it's still a question that gets asked a lot, and although there is not a clear path to success, Soldiers often need only look at their senior leadership to know most of them possess the same traits for success. For Army Master Sgt. Amber Chavez, the logistics noncommissioned officer in charge at the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Carson, Colorado, success has been earned through inspiration from others and her own personal inner drive.

Chavez, an El Paso, Texas, native, was like many teenagers across the country, a high school student trying to figure out what to do after graduation, when she met a retired Army master sergeant while working a part-time job. It was this chance encounter that set her on her path to be a Soldier.

"He was a former paratrooper and Golden Knight [U.S. Army Parachute Team member]," said Chavez, "and he opened my eyes to the different opportunities that the Army had in a way that the recruiters at the time just couldn't."

Chavez, who was leaning toward a teaching career at the time and wondering how she could pay for college, suddenly saw the Army as a way to pave her own way toward her goal.

She enlisted in the Army Reserve in her junior year of high school and attended basic training and Airborne school during the following summer. She served in the



Army Master Sgt. Amber Chavez (left), the logistics noncommissioned officer in charge for 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), mentors a junior Soldier as she trains her in Army logistics Jan. 12, at Fort Carson, Colo. According to Chavez, mentoring and training Soldiers and possessing an inner drive to professionally improve every day are key components to success in the Army. USASOC courtesy photo.

Reserve during her senior year, but was already falling in love with the idea of serving full-time. She went active for two years in 1998 before moving back into the Reserve component.

She remained in the Reserve until Sept. 9, 2001, when she decided to transfer to active duty for good. According to her, it was divine intervention that led her back to full-time service just two days before the country was shaken to its core by the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history. It was then that she knew she had

made the right choice.

"I never considered myself a super Soldier by any means," said Chavez, "but I have always had a knack for leading junior Soldiers, and I felt like this was where I was meant to be at this time in my life."

Chavez, who has deployed six times in five different countries, credits much of her success as a leader to her family. Her husband is an Army Soldier as well, and her mother-in-law is a veteran.

Her husband and mother in-law have formed a foundation of support and mentorship for Chavez for the last 18 years. She said the biggest family-oriented challenges are determining the best career enhancement paths for both her and her husband.

"Sometimes," she explained, "it's just as important to take a step back from your career and focus on family, so that your spouse or significant other can focus on their career."

She also credits her Army leaders for instilling a drive for higher education in her early on. When she was a private first class, her NCOIC pushed her into college and gave her the time she needed to complete her studies, while also fulfilling her duties to the Army. It's something Chavez has continued with her own Soldiers.

"Civilian education is paramount, whether you want to stay in or get out after your first contract," Chavez said.

One thing she does for her Soldiers is encourage them to take a college-level English class first, in order for them to develop effective writing and communication skills.

"Lots of communication now is done through emails," she said. "You have to be able to communicate effectively, using proper grammar and punctuation if you want to be taken seriously in a professional environment. It's an often overlooked skill, and it can put you head and shoulders above your peers if you can do it well."

Chavez has also taken a vested interest in her military education as well, dating back to the beginning of her career when she insisted that Airborne School be a part of her initial enlistment contract. According to

Chavez, she had never seen herself as a paratrooper growing up, and it was just one of those things that came up while talking with the retired master sergeant who inspired her to be a paratrooper.

"I still have a great respect for gravity," she said. "But you just have to trust your equipment to get you through."

In addition to Airborne School, Chavez has also

graduated from Air Assault School, Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape School, Level-C, as well as several courses in the logistics field, along with her required noncommissioned officer education system courses.

Her biggest asset, according to those who know her, has always been her willingness to go down

to the lowest level, no matter what her rank or position, and teach Soldiers. Even as a senior noncommissioned officer, she has never lost sight of what it was like to be a brand new E-5, sometimes overwhelmed and uncertain. It's something she strongly recommends for leaders at all levels.

"Don't forget what it took to get where you are," she said. "If you forget how to function at the lower level, how can you expect to lead?"

Ultimately, she credits her success to those she has served with. "I wouldn't be successful if I didn't have Soldiers who went above and beyond, and leaders who went above and beyond. The key to being successful is realizing that it is always a team effort."

She also charges everyone to strive for excellence at all times, "No matter how small the mission or tasking is, you have to put forth your best effort, all day, every day. If you do that every day, you'll find that the overwhelming obstacles in your way aren't really obstacles at all."

And finally, she encourages everyone to remember why they became Soldiers in the first place.

"If you have the right attitude, then success will come to you," she said. "If you have the wrong attitude, you probably won't live up to either your professional or personal goals. Remember that you came into the Army to serve and not to be served."

No matter how small the mission or tasking is, you have to put forth your best effort, all day, every day. If you do that every day, you'll find that the overwhelming obstacles in your way aren't really obstacles at all.

— Army Master Sgt. Amber Chavez



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

Mental toughness underlies Navy SEAL's passion for sailing

*By Petty Officer 3rd Class Richard Miller
NSW Public Affairs*

Blue waters, steady winds, and the smell of salt in the air are all part of the distinct atmosphere of life at sea. At nearly any bar in a Navy town, old Sailors gather to talk about their time in the service and the memories they have from travelling the world. While most people who serve in the Navy only make it to sea in the line of duty, one man has excelled as a sailor in his spare time as well.

During his career as a Navy SEAL, Capt. Keith Davids has consistently functioned at an elite level. This success has transferred to another large part of his life: competitive sailing. In July 2015, Davids won the gold medal in the Masters' Division of the Laser World Championships in Kingston, Ontario. Lasers are a kind of Olympic-class sail boat known for their standardized features, preventing competitors from having any unfair advantage over those around them.

"The mental toughness of being a SEAL has helped me compete again at a national and international level," said Davids.

Davids, who has been sailing since he was a child, put his hobby on the backburner through the first half of his military career. Once he began competing again, he quickly started matching the success he achieved sailing in his youth.

"The first time I sailed I was probably eight years old," said Davids. "I started competing when I was 9 and was a youth national champion by 13."

Winning the Laser World Championship is just one of Davids' numerous accomplishments since returning to the sport. He finished fourth in the 2008 Olympic trials,



Capt. Keith Davids competes in the 2011 Chesapeake Bay Laser Masters Championship. Photo by Jon Deutsch.

although he acknowledges the difficulty of balancing high-level competition with a career as a SEAL.

"Realistically, to be an Olympian you have to be in it one hundred percent and with my career in the Navy that's not possible," said Davids.

The mental toughness of being a SEAL has helped me compete again at a national and international level.

— Capt. Keith Davids

Despite not being able to invest as much time into the sport as a lot of his peers, Davids still managed to win the national championships and credits his success to his military training while also acknowledging the impact the sport had on his career.

"Competitive sailing set me up to succeed in the SEAL community," said Davids. "I certainly understand winds, which helps me with parachuting and sniping. I understand tides and currents, which helps me with combat swimming and small boat navigation."

The work ethic and self-reliance needed to excel in an

individual sport can transfer into team settings.

“Racing a Laser is an individual sport, but being an effective member of the team also means being a good individual and requires individual effort and upholding your role on the team,” said Davids. “To be a good SEAL, it’s not enough to be a good member of the team. You also have to do a lot of individual work to make sure that you can contribute to the team effort.”

Sailing helps Davids stay productive during his off time and maintain a constant level of mental sharpness.

“Sailing for me is a hobby and passion, but it also keeps me grounded,” said Davids. “It gives me balance in my life. It’s also a way for me to continue to compete and keep me focused and on edge. It keeps me from slipping into complacency.”

Competing as a child taught Davids how to handle failure and overcome adversity, a skill essential for passing the grueling training to become a SEAL.

“To be truly great at anything requires a lot of sacrifice,” said Davids. “It requires failing. It requires being defeated along the way. You can’t really be a champion until you go through the process of winning, then losing, then bouncing back.”

BUD/s students often come from accomplished backgrounds. Like Davids, many were star athletes who were used to being on top their entire life before entering the Navy. The training pipeline levels the playing field and forces students to rely more on their mental ability, since they can’t make it on raw talent alone.

“A true champion can win repeatedly and when it matters, when the stakes are high,” said Davids. “That distinguishes real champions from guys who are talented and maybe don’t have the mental toughness.”

Even though he is a world champion, Davids says he has a long way to go.

“The people who remain humble, even when they’re at the top of their game, continue to learn,” said Davids.

Davids continues to train and brush up on his skills by challenging his peers.

“Train with someone better than you and they’ll push you,” said Davids. “The net result is both people get better.”

Along with training with talented peers, seeking the

guidance and wisdom of someone more experienced helps Davids succeed.

“I have a wonderful mentor who taught me to sail,” said Davids. “He’s 92 years old and still winning races. He’s an inspiration to me. If I’m doing that into my later years, I’ll be happy.”

After his career in the Navy comes to an end, Davids still plans to use the skills he learned while serving to continue getting better every day and follow in the footsteps of his mentor.

“The great thing about sailing, unlike most sports, is you can compete at a high level even as you get older,” said Davids. “I hope to do it the rest of my life.”

The main thing that keeps Davids motivated with his hobby and career is his love for what he is doing.

“Without the passion, you won’t persevere,” said Davids.

While Davids has a lot to say about what helps him succeed as a sailor and a SEAL, the views he holds about success can apply to all aspects of life. No matter what

curveballs life throws, only an individual can determine whether or not they overcome it. Some may falter while others, like Davids, learn to rise to the occasion.

“Every day life gives us a challenge,” said Davids. “How we decide to interpret that challenge ultimately decides our outlook on life.”

Davids is currently in a pre-deployment workup to lead joint special operations forward.



Capt. Keith Davids sailing during the 2011 Chesapeake Bay Laser Masters Championship. Photo by Jon Deutsch.

The people who remain humble, even when they’re at the top of their game, continue to learn.

— Capt. Keith Davids



NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND



SBU-12 Special Boat Detachment Desert Storm. Courtesy photo.

NSW boat teams set stage for Operation Desert Storm

By James D. Gray

Combatant Craft Historian of the Combatant Craft Crewman Association

On August 2, 1990 under Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded its neighbor Kuwait. An international coalition of forces, including the United States military, responded. U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command deployed a rapid response Task Group under Capt. Ray Smith. This Task Group was comprised of three SEAL platoons, and two high speed boat detachments from Special Boat Unit-12 and supporting staff. The missions they carried out resulted in critical support and intelligence that enabled the success of the coalition counter-invasion, ultimately making it possible to liberate the country of Kuwait.

Upon arrival at RAS Al Gar, Saudi Arabia Aug 10, the NSW task unit began responding to Commander in Chief U.S. Central Command's orders, and at the beginning of Desert Shield recognized the need to assess

the capabilities of Coalition Forces. Special boat detachments began working with the Saudi navy on high-speed boat operations and Free Kuwaiti naval assets. On Sept. 21, 1990, Special Boat Unit-13 deployed a 24-foot Willard rigid hull inflatable boat detachment to support operations. From August to January the special boat detachments also conducted nightly recon patrols and harbor patrol and the Coalition and U.S. Forces continued their build up of Forces in the area of operation.

As the Coalition Forces grew and shifted from defense of Saudi Arabia to the retaking of Kuwait, many amphibious readiness groups arrived for the possible amphibious invasion of Kuwait. Among the U.S. Marines aboard the ships were four detachments of SEAFOX boats and rigid hull inflatable boats from Special Boat Units 20 and 12. They were there to support SEAL amphibious operations.

January of 1991 was a defining month, as the forces went from defense to offense and task groups were

deploying to forward bases. NSW Task Unit Mike, commanded by Cmdr. Tim Holden, moved north with three SEAL platoons with the high speed boats and RHIB detachments to Ras Al Mishab. There the boat detachments conducted nightly patrols north into the oil slick and mined Kuwaiti waters.

With airstrikes being launched into Kuwait, special boat detachments from units 12 and 13 were required to do combat search and rescue, and bomb damage assessments as well as SEAL support operations. Wear and tear on the boats was taking a hard toll on the HSBs from SBU-12 and on they had to be towed back to base where the engines were replaced overnight and repairs done so they could make the next operational commitment.

On Jan. 17, 1991, Operation Desert Storm officially began and the special boat detachments and SEALs were conducting actual reconnaissance of Kuwaiti beaches. Nightly, the boats would depart with embarked SEALs and combat rubber raiding crafts, or CRRCs, lashed to their bows to transit through mined waters approaching the coastline. They launched the SEALs in the CRRCs about 500 yards from the beach. The SEALs would swim in and perform beach recon in oil-slick, 50-degree water, recording mines, beach obstacles, and even Iraqi patrols, which the SEALs passed within 50 yards of without being detected. Then the operators swam back to their raiding crafts to be recovered by the boats.

On Jan. 30, using the Free Kuwaiti ship Sawhill, NSW launched SEAL delivery vehicles and conducted mine charting of Kuwaiti waters. SBU-13 RHIBs acted as safety craft. The reconnaissance done during the operations negated the amphibious invasion of Kuwait.

Due to the wear and tear on the SBU-12 HSBs over the months of constant operations, Task Group Commanding Officer Smith brought in a four boat NSW Development Group HSB detachment. They arrived Feb 13, and began familiarization operations in the area of operation and in mined waters, with SBU-12 crewmen riding along as the area subject matter experts.

With the ground invasion approaching, NSW conceived a tactical deception mission, which was approved. On Feb. 22, a full mission profile was developed and a full dress rehearsal was conducted.

Upon receiving word to "proceed with mission," SEALs loaded two CRRCs onto the HSBs to conduct the actual beach diversion. With timing critical as the ground war of Desert Storm was looming to kick off in

just hours, the four DEVGRU HSBs with SBU-12 supplementing the crews and SEALs, departed on a night transit of 70 nautical miles in a sea state of two (smooth seas).

At Mina Saud, Kuwait, the SEALs under Lt. Daniel Dietz's command, assigned to Seal Team Five, boarded their CRRCs and moved into the target area. The HSBs loitered to provide recovery or hot extract if needed. Within two hours, the SEALs in the area planted demolition charges and beacons to indicate an amphibious landing and ex-filtrated. They linked up with the CRRCs then transited to the recovering HSBs. The escort HSBs then moved in within 200 yards of the beach and conducted two firing runs on bunkers on the beach with .50 cal machine guns and Mk-19 and 7.62 Mini-guns, and threw satchel charges into the water during egress. The planted demolitions by the operators, exploded shortly after leaving the area and air strikes were also called in. The raiders returned to base shortly before dawn.

Intelligence from Central Command indicated two Iraqi armored divisions were moved into Kuwait to stop the invasion that never was.

It must be said that the day-to-day long, hard hours of maintenance and operations on the boats made the missions seem glorious. It was the boat guys who worked through the night turning wrenches so they could go out and operate again. They are the unsung heroes.

The Naval Special Warfare forces returned home March 11, 1991 to a grateful nation.



The Halter HSB type used on the Great Deception Raid. Courtesy photo.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Air Force Chief of Staff awards Silver Stars to Vietnam vets

*By Air Force Staff Sgt. Alyssa C. Gibson
Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs
Command Information*

A star pendant necklace bought in 1984 has been tucked away for 31 years since its purchase. The necklace was a gift to Sue Roberts from her husband, Eric Roberts II, as a thank you for her efforts toward getting the Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to him and Ronald Brodeur's upgraded to a Silver Star. Unfortunately at the time, the request was denied, and Sue vowed to never wear the necklace until her husband and Brodeur received stars of their own.

The two gentlemen were awarded the Silver Star by Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III during a ceremony at the Pentagon, Dec. 17.

"Since the U.S. Air Force became an independent service in 1947 we've presented 285 Silver Stars," Welsh said. "That's not a whole lot when you think of all the combat sorties and contingencies we've participated in. One hundred and five of those were given from the Vietnam conflict -- soon to be 107. This is a very select group of warriors for a reason. It's presented for gallantry in action against enemies of the United States."

Roberts and Brodeur were awarded the Silver Star for their gallantry in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the U.S. in Duc Lap, Republic of Vietnam, Feb. 20, 1969. At the time, then-Staff Sgt. Brodeur and Sgt. Roberts were assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron as UH-1P helicopter gunners. Affectionately known as the "Green Hornets" the unit was responsible for supporting special operations in South Vietnam.

On that day, their crew was called upon to rescue a six-man Army long-range reconnaissance patrol. With a river on one side, enemy fire coming from every other



Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III congratulates retired Chief Master Sgt. Ronald W. Brodeur and Eric L. Roberts II after presenting them with the Silver Star during a ceremony at the Pentagon in Washington D.C., Dec. 17, 2015. Brodeur and Roberts received their medals for their gallant actions in Vietnam. Photo by Scott M. Ash.

direction, and the field they were hiding in ablaze, the patrol was in extreme danger of being overrun. Still, the Green Hornets were able to locate the patrol. With their harnesses secured to the aircraft and their weapons in hand, the sergeants climbed out of the helicopter and onto its skids to direct the pilot and copilot into a 10-foot hover, while using M-60 machine guns to suppress enemy fire.

A rope ladder was dropped to the patrol team below, and upon their ascent there was an explosion -- one of the Soldiers had triggered a mine on the ground. The explosion blew Brodeur off the right skid, and he dangled from the aircraft in his harness.

"After I recovered and I got back on my skid and near my gun, I glanced back and there was nobody in the doorway -- my heart stopped," Brodeur said. "And



Retired Chief Master Sgt. Ronald W. Brodeur thanks Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III after receiving the Silver Star during a ceremony at the Pentagon in Washington D.C., Dec. 17, 2015. Brodeur received the medal for his gallant actions in Vietnam. Photo by Scott M. Ash.

then I saw this guy scooting back up on the skid to get back to his gun.”

On the left side, the explosion had caused the co-pilot’s door to blow open and Roberts was thrown inside the helicopter. Determined, Roberts had unhooked his harness, climbed out of the helicopter, and inched his way up the left skid to secure the co-pilot’s door, protecting him from enemy fire.

“He got back up, hooked his gunner belt back in, got behind the gun and started covering fire for the team to get near the ladder and back up the airplane,” Brodeur said. “But it was a scary moment when I didn’t see anyone in that door.”

Thanks to their actions, the entire team was rescued and evacuated with no loss of life. For their actions, the pilot and co-pilot on this mission received the Silver Star; however, the nomination packages for Roberts and Brodeur were lost -- initially they didn’t receive an award at all. With Sue’s persistence, they received decorations in 1984 -- the Distinguished Flying Cross. The classification of the mission didn’t allow for a full picture of the courageous actions of the enlisted men.

Brodeur, Roberts and their spouses felt that since the crew worked together as a team, they should have received the same award.

“The first iteration of this award wasn’t actually presented until 1984 as the Distinguished Flying Cross to these two gentlemen,” Welsh said. “It was presented then

only because Sue Roberts, starting in 1971, pursued it. The awards recommendations for these two guys in the back of the helicopter were separated from the pilot and co-pilot’s awards and decorations recommendations and just never reached completion until Sue got involved. Thirteen years later, they were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

“This is a phenomenal story,” Welsh continued. “They’re looking back on this thinking this is pretty routine, this is just what the squadron did -- it’s what our job was, what we’re expected to do, what teammates did all the time. But according to the laws of this nation and the standards of our service, that was gallantry in action. It’s incredibly appropriate, finally, that we have the chance to say ‘thank you for what you did, for who you are for the example you set.’ And Sue, thank you for the opportunity to recognize what should have been recognized long ago.” Now, three decades later, three star pendants are worn for the first time -- two for gallantly serving the country, and one as a symbol of dedication to the one she loves.



Eric L. Roberts II, thanks Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III, and the audience after receiving the Silver Star during a ceremony at the Pentagon in Washington D.C., Dec. 17, 2015. Roberts received the medal for his gallant actions in Vietnam. Photo by Scott M. Ash.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



The MH-53 PAVE LOWs knocked out Iraqi early warning sites at the beginning of Operation Desert Storm. Courtesy photo.

25th Anniversary of Desert Storm

*By Airman 1st Class Kai White
1st Special Operations Wing Public Affairs*

At 8 a.m., Jan. 16, 1991, Iraqi forces were firmly planted in Kuwait after the U.N. Security Council deadline for their withdrawal had expired.

During his evening changeover briefing, retired Brig. Gen. George A. Gray III, then commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing, gave the order to begin taking the ‘P-Pills’ that 1st SOW Airmen had been issued earlier that August at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

The ‘P-Pills,’ designed to help fight the effects of chemical agents, became a very real reminder that war was upon them. At 3 a.m. Jan. 17, 1991, Operation Desert

Shield was over, and Operation Desert Storm had begun.

Desert Storm began 22 minutes earlier for a small group of Air Force Special Operations Command Airmen when four MH-53 Pave Low helicopters guided eight AH-64 Apache helicopters through total darkness to destroy two Iraqi air defense radar sites. This proved to be crucial to the initial invasion, opening a hole in the air defense network and allowing F-117 Nighthawks and Coalition aircraft to strike targets in Baghdad.

“At that point, all hell broke loose and people were dropping bombs all over the place,” said retired Lt. Col. Corby Martin, former MH-53 pilot for 20th Special Operations Squadron. “It looked like a 4th of July fireworks display.”

"In the 1st SOW everybody was focused, everybody knew what they were doing," said retired Col. Chris Snider, former wing electronic warfare officer for the 1st SOW. "We had experienced crews, experienced maintenance and a lot of combat veterans."

The 1st SOW began its missions on day one of Desert Storm.

"I landed in-country with about 60 others from the 1st SOW tasked with finding a suitable airstrip," said Snider. "We found an airfield being built out in the middle of nowhere ... I mean it had nothing in the control tower, most of the plumbing hadn't been finished and it was still two or three years away from being completed."

That airfield was King Fahd Air Base, AFSOC's headquarters for the war.

"There were no tire marks on the runway when we landed," said retired Col. Ray Chapman, former MC-130E navigator with the 8th Special Operations Squadron. "It was a ghost town ... think of Chicago International Airport before anybody ever set foot on it."

From this air base, the 1st SOW would launch psychological and combat operations.

One of the MC-130E Combat Talons I's missions was to drop leaflets warning Iraqi military troops if they did not surrender, they would be bombed. Chapman was one of the flyers who conducted those missions.

"The boxes were on a static line [attached to the aircraft] and the loadmaster would toss the boxes out. Then the boxes kind of exploded and the leaflets started drifting to earth," said Chapman.

According to Chapman, they typically flew above anti-aircraft threats at around 9,000 feet, making accurate leaflet drops extremely difficult.

"Up that high, the winds can change and these leaflets can end up somewhere other than where they were intended to go, but the coolest thing was when we'd come back from a mission and the surrendering Iraqis would be holding the leaflets that we'd dropped."

In addition to dropping more than 17 million leaflets during the war, Chapman, along with other MC-130E crews, released something more powerful. The BLU-82 Daisy Cutter, the world's largest conventional bomb at the time, was dropped 11 times by Air Force Special

Operations Forces.

"[The BLU-82] looks like a Volkswagen, it's gigantic," said Chapman. "This thing is 15,000 pounds of 'get your attention, hurt somebody' type of stuff ... We owned the air. We had air superiority from minute one when we started Desert Storm."

Additional combat sorties were flown by AC-130H Spectre aircrews, but not without a degree of peril.

According to retired Chief Master Sgt. Bill Walter, an AC-130H Spectre gunner, "The Iraqi tactic was to hold fire until the aircraft passed over their sites, then turn on their radars after the gunships were essentially boxed in. Weather was poor, and crews were diverted in-flight to

hunt for Scud missiles in designated 'kill boxes,'" making missions flown in Operation Storm dangerous.

"Spectre crews successfully engaged numerous Iraqi targets including armor, vehicles, gun sites and personnel," said Walter. On multiple occasions, crews were locked up, forced to perform aggressive maneuvers to keep from being shot down.

On the morning of Jan. 31, one mission did turn deadly, and Spirit 03 was lost to enemy ground fire. "Following the loss of Spirit 03 and the end of the Battle of Khafji, gunship crews were once again placed on airborne alert for the remainder of the war, although several AC-130A crews fired on Iraqi columns in Kuwait in the last hours of the war," said Walter.

But, the determination and sacrifice of 1st SOW Airmen helped shorten the ground campaign to only 100 hours, bringing a swift and decisive end to Operation Desert Storm.

"It wasn't just the experience level," said Snider, "but the fact that we went to so many exercises and played so many war games ... and that we did it continuously. The [training] gave our personnel the mindset of going to war."

According to Snider, that mindset, "still shows to this day."

On Feb. 28, 1991, after just a month and a half of fighting, President George H. W. Bush declared a ceasefire and an end to hostilities.

AFSOC aircrews tallied more than 10,000 flight hours and 5,000 sorties through Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

[The BLU-82] looks like a Volkswagen, it's gigantic. This thing is 15,000 pounds of 'get your attention, hurt somebody' type of stuff... We owned the air. We had air superiority from minute one when we started Desert Storm.

— Col. Ray Chapman



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

AFSOC's 25th Anniversary: Designated Year of the Air Commando

By Mike Raynor
AFSOC Public Affairs

Air Force Special Operations Command is mid-way through its 25th anniversary year, designated the Year of the Air Commando. This campaign highlights past and present accomplishments while never forgetting that people are its greatest asset.

"Our nation expects that we have the people and capabilities needed to quickly address our most threatening adversaries," said Lt. Gen. Brad Heithold, AFSOC commander. "That expectation hasn't changed over the years."

Throughout our history, Air Commandos have consistently met that challenge. Since the command's

creation, AFSOC Airmen have deployed to more than 40 countries around the world in support of combatant commanders.

In addition to military conflicts, AFSOC has supported numerous major humanitarian assistance campaigns, such as Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Operation TOMODACHI after the 2011 earthquake in Japan, Operation DAMAYAN after the 2013 typhoon in the Philippines and thousands were evacuated by AFSOC aircraft following Hurricane Katrina.

"Many of AFSOC's successes can be attributed to having the right people with the right training, the right equipment, the right support and the will to use it," said Herb Mason, AFSOC historian.



Tech. Sgt. Lem Torres, 38th Rescue Squadron pararecrueman, and a young boy are lifted to safety from the roof of the child's flooded home after Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Photo by Staff Sgt. Manuel J. Martinez.

Since standing up as an Air Force major command in 1990, AFSOC's Air Commandos have earned six Air Force Cross medals, more than 30 Silver Star medals and more than 260 Bronze Star medals with valor.

As the air component of U.S. Special Operations Command, AFSOC ensures they have the people and the capabilities to address the nation's conflicts, wherever they may be. By training smarter and harder, AFSOC stands ready to conduct special operations anytime, anywhere.

"Whether it's pursuing and developing a balanced force, improving aircraft reliability and maintainability, or taking care of our people, Air Commandos have displayed an unwavering ability to adapt and execute the missions presented to them," said Heithold.

Modernizing the force is imperative to remain relevant on the future battlefield. Heithold's vision is to install a high-energy laser and tactical off-board sensors to the AC-130 gunship by the end of the decade. While the laser offers offensive and defensive capabilities, the off-board sensor system launches a drone out of a

common launch tube, allowing the gunship to see below the clouds. These technologies ensure AFSOC's success in future missions and improve the survivability of Airmen and mission partners.

In addition to new technologies, new personnel changes are on the AFSOC horizon. While women have fortified the ranks of AFSOC throughout history, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter recently opened all military positions to women, including special tactics career fields.

"We have and will continue to create an environment that is fair and equitable for all who have the courage and fortitude to serve the nation as members of the special operations community," said Heithold.

From the beginning through today, AFSOC Airmen have shown dedication to continuous improvement, rigorous and realistic training, and mitigating risks; keeping AFSOC at the tip of the spear. As Air Commando heritage demands, AFSOC warriors are bound to get the mission done, or find a way where none exists.

A 320th Special Tactics Squadron pararescueman looks for trapped survivors March 16, 2011, at Sendai Airport, Japan, following an 8.9 magnitude earthquake. Photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse.



(Top) Staff Sgt. Antonio Garcia, 353rd Special Operations Group, directs Filipino passengers to the aircraft Nov. 17, 2013, at Guiuan Airport during Operation Damayan. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Kristine Dreyer.

(Bottom) A combat controller contacts the special tactics operation center by radio in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jan. 24, 2010, during Operation Unified Response. Photo by Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock.





AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Lt. Gen. Brad Heithold, Air Force Special Operations Command commander, presents a certificate of service to Herb Mason, AFSOC historian, at his retirement ceremony on Hurlburt Field, Fla., Jan. 7. Mason led the AFSOC history office in completing 25 on-time annual historical reports — a feat unmatched by any other major command.

AFSOC historian retires after more than 50 years of service

*Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Melanie Holochwost
AFSOC Public Affairs*

The longest-serving historian in the Air Force retired at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Jan. 7.

Herb Mason, Air Force Special Operations Command historian, spent more than 50 years preserving the Air Force story for generations to

come.

Lt. Gen. Brad Heithold, AFSOC commander, presided over the ceremony at the United States Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS).

“You all know Herb, he’s Mr. AFSOC history,” Heithold said to the audience. “He’s been our historian since we stood up our command in 1991.”

The general spoke at great length about Mason and

how he's been a tremendous asset to AFSOC and the Air Force.

"Herb, you've done a wonderful job. We've been blessed to have you," Heithold said.

Heithold presented Mason the Air Force Outstanding Civilian Career Service Award, which is the highest award a civilian can receive.

According to the citation, Mason led the history office in completing 25 consecutive on-time annual historical reports -- a feat unmatched by any other Air Force major command.

In fact, the AFSOC history office made history themselves in 2009 when they won the best command-level history report and the best history program in the Air Force. This was the first and only time a history office won both awards simultaneously.

"That says just a little bit about the quality of the person we had running our history shop," Heithold said. "This isn't a guy who settles for mediocrity, status quo or second place.

"In AFSOC, we strive for first in everything we do, and Herb did that time and time again with quality history reports," he added.

Mason's legacy extends beyond historic documents; he continuously reached out to Air Commandos, leaving a lasting impact on the future of AFSOC.

"It's history that makes you smart, and heritage that makes you proud," Heithold said. "Between giving countless tours in our Air Park and educating young folks at USAFSOS, Herb made people smarter and prouder to be a part of AFSOC."

During the ceremony, Charlie O'Connell, a representative from the Air Force history office, presented Mason the title page to the first history document that he wrote.

"This history report covered September through December 1965, which means that 50 years ago today, you were probably working on this report," O'Connell said.

O'Connell also went through history records and discovered that Mason is currently the most published historian in the Air Force.

"As far as I can tell, you are listed as 'author' on more Air Force organizational histories than anyone else in our system," he said to Mason. "On behalf of everyone in the history program, thank you for everything you've done."

Then, a very humbled Mason took the floor to reflect on his career and share three big lessons he has learned.

"Over the years I've learned that life is not fair," he said. "You never make bad decisions, just some are better than others. And, you never have a problem, you have a challenge."

He also encouraged the audience to seek change.

"Sometimes we get caught up in our daily tasks and just do them for the sake of doing them," Mason said. "I ask you to keep focus. If whatever you are working on doesn't help the Airmen in the field, then why are you doing it?"

"We need to lean in and truly be a step ahead in a changing world," he added. "That's what makes us AFSOC."



Herb Mason, Air Force Special Operations Command historian, speaks at his retirement ceremony on Hurlburt Field, Fla., Jan. 7. Mason served from April 28, 1965 to Jan. 3, 2016, making him the longest serving historian in Air Force history.



MARSOC Marine awarded Silver Star for bravery in combat

*Story and photo by Marine Corps Sgt. Donovan Lee
MARSOC Public Affairs*

Staff Sgt. Robert T. Van Hook, critical skills operator, 2d Marine Raider Battalion, Marine Raider Regiment, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, was awarded the Silver Star Medal during a ceremony at Stone Bay aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Jan. 15, for his actions in Afghanistan.

Van Hook was nominated for the prestigious award following a deployment to Herat Province, Afghanistan, with 2d MRB in 2013 where he served as an element leader.

It was during an operation Aug. 14, 2013, that Van Hook organized a hasty ambush on 10 insurgents, wounding two and killing four. He continued the fight, leading an attack on an enemy-held building with hand grenades and small arms, killing another insurgent and detaining two others.

Van Hook said the team excelled that day because of how thoroughly they prepared for the mission.

"We train like we fight," said Van Hook. "Plans from time to time become worthless, however, the planning process is unforgiving. Once you have done the planning process correctly and you've identified all your contingencies and rehearsed them to muscle memory, that's when you're successful on the battlefield."

Van Hook's actions during the ambush and the assault on the building were enough to earn recognition, but his fight that day wasn't over.

According to his citation, during a skirmish later that day Van Hook manned an MK-19 machine gun position which had been abandoned, directing enemy fire away from friendly forces.

"His effects on the enemy caused them to focus their efforts back to his position, targeting him with a rocket propelled grenade and machine gun fire which resulted in a wound and temporarily rendering him unconscious," reads the citation. "Despite his wounds affecting his ability to walk, he continued to direct fires on the enemy while under enemy fire; aggressively led his element; and ultimately played a pivotal role in coordinating 120 mm mortar danger close suppressive fires for aerial medical evacuation during approach into a hot landing zone."



Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, awards Staff Sgt. Robert T. Van Hook, critical skills operator, 2d Marine Raider Battalion, the Silver Star Medal during a ceremony at Stone Bay, Camp Lejeune, N.C., Jan. 15.

Despite what many consider heroic actions, Van Hook remains humble and said any of his MARSOC counterparts would have done the same thing.

"Any Raider could have been switched out with me and done the same exact thing," said Van Hook. "A Raider isn't going to let anybody down, not the brothers that went before him, not the Marine beside him. He might have done it differently, but he would have got the job done."

Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, presented the medal to Van Hook during the ceremony and spoke on his character.

"As a commander, I'm just incredibly appreciative that we have men of (his) caliber that are amongst our ranks," said Osterman. "You take a look at all his phenomenal accomplishments, it's everything we talk about at MARSOC and our culture of quiet professionals."

Van Hook said he accepts the award on behalf of the men he served with at the time, and for those who continue to serve.

"Walking past the memorial wall, to receive this award in front of the crowd that will be there is an extremely humbling experience," said Van Hook, a day before the ceremony. "This award isn't given to me; it's given to my team."

Raider corpsman earns Silver Star

*Story by Marine Corps Sgt. Lia Gamero
MARSOC Public Affairs*

Petty Officer 2nd Class Alejandro Salabarría, a corpsman with 2nd Marine Raider Battalion, was awarded the Silver Star Medal during a ceremony at Stone Bay, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Feb. 5, for his actions in Afghanistan.

Salabarría, a Miami native, joined the Navy in December 2008 with the full intention of becoming a corpsman serving at an infantry unit. However, his first orders directed him to Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina.

Unfazed, Salabarría decided to take control of his future service as a corpsman, taking an interest in Special Operations. He attended the Basic Reconnaissance School and Army Basic Airborne School, then received orders to 3d Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. As he was preparing for deployment with Scout Sniper Platoon, Salabarría jumped on the opportunity to attend the Special Operations Combat Medic Course in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Upon graduation, he received orders to 2nd MRB.

"From all of his training, he was basically a junior (Special Amphibious Reconnaissance Corpsman), which was exactly what we needed on the team," said a critical skills operator with Marine Special Operations Team 8214, Marine Special Operations Company F.

Salabarría checked into the team in 2013 and, from the start, set himself apart.

"Most corpsmen stay in their bubble ... but Sal was always the guy who wanted to go out and be a CSO before he was a corpsman," said a critical skills operator. "It was great because it's hard to instill that aggressiveness in someone."

In June 2014, the team deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Near the end of their deployment, on Sept. 15, 2014, that the team was caught by enemy fire.

The team was dropped off on the LZ and split into two groups for the flight, one team staging to the north, the other to the south. Because aircraft wasn't expected to land for several hours, the teams took a tactical pause to adjust their gear. It wasn't until dark settled over the LZ that they came under attack.

"It's funny that I heard (it) because we were a fair good distance away, but it was clear as day. I heard, 'What the (expletive),' and it almost sounded like a flash bang went off, and then just rapid fire," said the CSO.

A rogue shooter had fired an M203 round into the LZ before circling around firing off an automatic weapon into the groups of gathered Raiders and commandos.

"I immediately hit the deck, I thought Sal is right next to me. He wasn't," said the CSO. "I don't think he even hit the ground, I think he just ran."

Salabarría had grabbed his medical kit and taken off running toward the center of the LZ where someone was yelling in pain. He explained that the only thing visible were muzzle flashes and the outlines of people, so he followed the cries for help. Salabarría first came across the foreign interpreter who then directed him to the team SARC. The senior medic had been struck by rapid fire in his arm and leg, shattering the upper part of his shin bone.

"I checked him over real quick, and that's when I noticed that we were directly getting shot at," said Salabarría. "At that point, I laid on top of (the team SARC), told him not to move, and I shot at (the shooter) until he went down."

"Stories go, that other commandos were shooting, that our guys were shooting," said the CSO. "But from my perspective, it was a gunfight between two people."

"I think anybody on that team, given the opportunity, would have done the same thing. It just happened to be me that did it," said Salabarría.

Sgt. Charles Strong lost his life during this attack. His family attended the ceremony as guests of honor, along with the family of Capt. Stanford H. Shaw III, who was a part of the "Raider 7" lost in 2015. Shaw was the officer who first submitted Salabarría for the award.

"(This medal) is more for Capt. Shaw and Sgt. Strong than anything," said Salabarría. "It's all for them."



Petty Officer 2nd Class Alejandro Salabarría, a corpsman with 2nd Marine Raider Battalion, received the Silver Star Medal at Stone Bay, Camp Lejeune, N.C., Feb. 5. Photo by Marine Corps Sgt. Scott Achtemeier.

Headquarters early morning jump

On Feb. 19, Gen. Joseph Votel, commander U.S. Special Operations Command, parachuted on to MacDill Air Force Base, Florida with headquarters personnel. The jump would be Votel's last as commander of USSOCOM.

Photos by Tech Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence



Sustained airborne training.



Last minute adjustments.



*Gen. Joseph Votel
rigging up for the jump.*



*Looking for the
drop zone.*



Marching to the plane.



Out the tailgate.

An aerial photograph capturing a skydiving event. Several large, light-colored parachutes are deployed, with skydivers visible hanging beneath them. The scene is set over a lush green park with a winding blue lake. In the foreground, there are parking lots filled with cars, some buildings with red roofs, and a small white structure with a red roof. The overall atmosphere is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

Beautiful morning for a jump.





*Army Staff Sgt.
Matthew McClintock
19th Special Forces Group (Airborne)*

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



Deployed Aircraft Ground Response Element members stack up before heading through a door Dec. 22, 2015, Camp Hansen, Okinawa, Japan. The DAGRE is a group of highly trained Security Forces personnel that support Special Operations Command assets and resources worldwide. Photo by Airman 1st Class Nick Emerick.