

Tip of the Spear

December 2024

353 SOW refines capabilities in Viking Jet 25-1



United States Special Operations Command



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Tip of the Spear

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(Cover) A combat controller assigned to the 320th Special Tactics Squadron sets up a communication antenna during exercise Viking Jet 25-1 on Dec. 10, 2024, at Yokota Air Base, Japan. The exercise integrated conventional forces and Special Operations Forces from various commands in a multitude of training events to validate joint interoperability within the first island chain. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Wisher.

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U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



SOCAFRICA conduct joint exchange with Madagascar Partners

*Courtesy Story,
Special Operations Command Africa*

U.S. Special Operations Command Africa conducted a Joint Combined Exchange Training with Malagasy forces near Antananarivo, Madagascar, from July 26 – Aug. 30, 2024.

Over 30 members from the Malagasy Ministry of Armed Forces 1st Battalion Parachutists participated alongside the U.S. Army's 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), assigned to SOCAFRICA, during the five-week training. Throughout the exchange, the partner forces honed small unit tactics training including marksmanship and weapons handling along with Tactical Combat Casualty Care. Refining these critical skillsets is aimed at improving mission and medical readiness to maintain the agility of both forces. These activities led to a closing culminating exercise where the partner nations conducted a joint training operation combining the skills acquired throughout the JCET's duration.

"The goal is to highlight increased security cooperation between our two countries especially between special operations and also to have an exchange of training, tactics, and procedures and really get that cultural exchange as well as building relationships between the two countries," said the Operational Detachment Alpha Team Lead for 3rd SFG (A). "JCETs are very important for building relationships throughout the theater and maintaining that face-to-face, military-to-military where we work on increasing cooperation with U.S. Special Operations and the local country."

The JCET program is designed to deliver special operations units specific training to assist partner nations with their security efforts across Africa. JCETs serve to continually strengthen key relationships throughout the African continent as they counter terrorism and violent extremist threats that impact the region.

The U.S. regularly engages in exchanges throughout the African continent through an African partner-led, U.S. enabled approach. Leveraging our partnerships across Africa aids in countering violent extremist expansion in the region.



A member of the Malagasy Ministry of Armed Forces 1st Battalion Parachutists uses hand signals as part of small unit tactics training with the U.S. Army 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) during a Joint Combined Exchange Training near Antananarivo, Madagascar, July 31, 2024. JCETs enhance U.S. relationships with partner nations by developing and maintaining critical military-to-military connections and improving joint and allied readiness and interoperability. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jennifer Healy.

Members of the Malagasy Ministry of Armed Forces 1st Battalion Parachutists conduct a patrol as part of small unit tactics training with the U.S. Army 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) during a Joint Combined Exchange Training near Antananarivo, Madagascar, July 31, 2024. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jennifer Healy.



U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



Special Operations Forces

Africa conduct medical civil action program with Beninese partners

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake Carter,
Special Operations Command Africa*

Working alongside a Special Operations Command Africa cross functional team, the Forces Armées Béninoises helped plan, advise and execute a Medical Civil Action Program in Natitingou, Benin, Nov. 6-8, 2024, with the goal of improving health conditions in Northern Benin.

A MEDCAP provides healthcare in underserved areas, as well as strengthens partnerships and builds trust between the military and the communities they serve. Medical personnel are also able to exchange best practices and learn about resources as well as challenges unique to that area.

“We are conducting the MEDCAP in Natitingou to provide free healthcare and medication to the local population in partnership with our American civil affair



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Alyssa White, Civil Affairs medical sergeant, hands a box of medication to a Forces Armées Béninoises doctor during a Medical Civic Action Program in Natitingou, Benin, Nov. 6, 2024. U.S. forces plan, assist and execute MEDCAPs alongside African partners to provide medical care to remote communities, bolstering trust and security within the region. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake Carter.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Anthony Walker, cyber systems technician craftsmen, holds a Beninese child while they wait to see a doctor during a Medical Civic Action Program in Natitingou, Benin, Nov. 6, 2024. In order to provide aid to patients, the Forces Armées Béninoises partnered with U.S. military and local medical professionals to include physicians and medics. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake Carter.

partners,” said FAB Lt. Col. Tassou Abdou Wassiou, Operation Mirador head of civil military actions. “This also allows us to grow and build a bigger relationship between the military and local population in this area which has had instability.”

During planning, the FAB and U.S. military worked with local leaders to identify healthcare needs across the community. Additionally, doctors and medics from Benin worked side-by-side with the FAB and U.S. military to complete medical examinations and prescribe medication.

“Most of these areas don’t have access to medication and the basics like malaria medication and mosquito nets which could prevent disease,” said U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Cheikhou Ngom, 91st Civil Affairs Battalion team sergeant. “The FAB compiled a list with the top 10 diseases in the area and from that list we try to provide as much medication to combat those problems.”

During the event, more than 1,300 members of the local population received aid.

“We were able to provide free care to the locals which helped create better relationships and connections between the FAB and the community as we try to deter recruitment from violent extremist organizations in the area,” said Wassou. “This is the fourth time we have conducted a MEDCAP in Benin, and we couldn’t do it without our American partners. We hope to continue growing this partnership while countering terrorism across Benin.”

MEDCAPs not only enhance the well-being and health across the community, but help with fostering enduring partnerships, facilitating cultural exchanges and strengthening relationships.

“Ongoing MEDCAPs underscore the U.S. military’s unwavering commitment to the health and well-being of our partners,” said U.S. Army Col. Benjamin Kenion, Benin’s Office of Security cooperation chief. “By working alongside partner forces, we not only enhance their capacity but also help them build trust and strengthen connections with the civilian populations they serve.”



A U.S. Army medical sergeant uses a syringe to inject water into a Beninese child’s ear to drain a blockage during a Medical Civic Action Program in Natitingou, Benin, Nov. 7, 2024. MEDCAPs aim to extend healthcare in underserved areas and show the collaborative efforts militaries can have with the communities they serve. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake Carter.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Africa



SOCAFRICA and Tunisian partners co-host Silent Warrior 2024 in Africa

*Courtesy Story,
Special Operations Command Africa*

Special Operations Command Africa and the Tunisian Ministry of Defense co-hosted more than 250 attendees from 40 nations during the weeklong Silent Warrior 2024 symposium, Dec. 9-13, 2024. This year's iteration was the first time that the symposium was hosted on the African continent in Silent Warrior's history.

A multi-day symposium with broad participation from African and international partners, Silent Warrior aims to enhance operational effectiveness and mission success through cooperation and coordination across African Special Operations Forces. Speakers included the Tunisian Land Forces commander, senior leaders from U.S. Africa Command and the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia.

"We look forward to building bridges between African nations and international partners to produce an enduring relationship," opened General Mohamed El Ghoul, Tunisian Land Forces commander. "We confronted the threats over the years, and we showed success and our abilities, and we are prepared to share the experience we gained."

The multi-day symposium included multiple breakout sessions, dedicating time for regional discussions, and relationship building amongst senior leaders.

"This week we shaped the future of African Special Operations through collaboration, identifying barriers to interoperability and fostering diversity," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. James Collado, International Cooperation and Engagements director for SOCAFRICA. "Tunisia's steadfast leadership in hosting this event in Africa for the first time and allowing us to see firsthand how they are building security and stability is a clear example of how Silent Warrior leads to African-led solutions and strong partnerships."



Gen. Mohamed El Ghoul, Tunisian Land Forces commander, and U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Michael E. Langley, commander of U.S. Africa Command, meet for lunch at the Silent Warrior 2024 symposium in Tunisia, Tunisia, Dec. 9, 2024. Silent Warrior is a forum for senior military leaders to discuss shared concerns and identify collaborative solutions to the strategic, operational and tactical issues in Africa. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio.

To aid in understanding, attendees had the opportunity to visit military units and cultural sites. Senior delegates and attendees witnessed demonstrations from the Tunisian Special Forces Brigade and the Tunisian Counter IED Center of Excellence on training to include canines, hand-to-hand combat techniques and urban terrain operations.

"Silent Warrior 2024 brought together partner-nations to discuss shared security interests," said Gen. Michael Langley, commander, U.S. Africa Command. "As a collective body, united by shared objectives and interests, joining together to confront these challenges is key to promoting regional stability and security. Silent Warrior serves as a bridge to further our bilateral relationships and is a testament to the dedication and respect we have with our African partners."



Members attending the Flintlock 25 mid-planning event listen to a working group presentation at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, U.K., Nov. 18, 2024. During the event, members had access to working groups spanning from academics, Women, Peace and Security, and information sharing. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake Carter.

SOCAFRICA and U.K.

host Flintlock 25 Mid-Planning Event

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jake Carter
Special Operations Command Africa*

In preparation for the largest U.S. Special Operations Command Africa exercise, the British Army's 2nd Battalion, Ranger Regiment co-hosted international partners alongside SOCAFRICA during the Flintlock 25 mid-planning event at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, U.K., Nov. 18-22, 2024.

For the 2025 iteration of Exercise Flintlock, Côte d'Ivoire is expected to host more than 30 nations. The MPE focused on capturing the logistical and operational requirements needed to execute an effective event.

"Being a critical milestone for Flintlock, the MPE brings together representatives from different nations to allow for cross-collaboration," said U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ian Hickey, Flintlock 25 exercise planner. "We are committed to creating an environment that promotes strengthening our defense capabilities both through real-life planning and an exercise scenario that is realistic."

During the event, members discussed exercise scenarios, Women, Peace and Security initiatives and logistical needs. Partner nations play an integral role in identifying these needs and offering their perspective on challenges related to regional stability and security.

"This year's iteration is aimed at enhancing interoperability across partners with an emphasis on information sharing, human security, and adherence to the rule of law," said U.S. Army Maj. Patrick Temperato, Flintlock 25 lead planner. "Our dialogue and planning efforts this week reaffirmed that we—U.S. and international partners alike—are committed to a human-centered approach that is built on mutual trust and shared community values."

Exercise Flintlock's mission contributes to strengthening key partnerships and enhancing interoperability across U.S., international and African partners with an overarching goal of a safer, more secure Africa.

"The complex operational environment we are facing poses global challenges that require global solutions," said Temperato. "Our team isn't simply planning an exercise, we are building a coalition forged through enduring partnerships that not only addresses the threats of today but is ready for the challenges of tomorrow."

*U.S. Special Operations
Command - Europe*



Swedish Arctic Rangers train during Exercise Adamant Serpent 25

Swedish Arctic Rangers conduct training as part of Exercise Adamant Serpent 25 in Sweden, November 2024. Adamant Serpent is a joint training exercise between the United States and Sweden. The annual exercise is used to strengthen the strategic and tactical relationship of the two forces and better enables them to respond to potential threats. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Xzavier Marte.





U.S. Special Operations Command - North



Special Operations Command North dedicates headquarters building

*By U.S. Air Force Maj. Ann Marine Annicelli,
U.S. Special Operations Command North*

Members of Special Operations Command North came together to dedicate their headquarters building during a ceremony on Peterson Space Force Base, Colo. Nov. 15, 2024.

SOCNORTH dedicated its new headquarters Frederick Hall in honor of Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick, who organized, trained, and led the combined Canadian-American First Special Service Force during World War II. SOCNORTH deemed Frederick the most appropriate Special Operations leader for the dedication due to the Canadian and U.S. Special Operations Forces' partnership represented at SOCNORTH and in the area of responsibility, as well as his vast accomplishments to include commanding the FSSF, training winter and mountain warriors, and developing specialized operators.

"Maj. Gen. Frederick was a legendary figure from whom the Special Operations community draws its lineage and legacy," said Col. Matthew Tucker, SOCNORTH Commander. "Dedicating the new SOCNORTH headquarters to Maj. Gen. Frederick not only embodies our historic and unique relationship with Canada, but also represents where we are today – another period of strategic competition. And, it's emblematic of what's being referred to as a SOF Renaissance, a return to what SOF was originally designed and constructed to do, which is compete and operate in places and in ways that require the small footprints and unique capabilities only SOF can provide."

Frederick's grandniece, Jennifer Parra, who serves as the First Special Service Force Association President, attended the ceremony. Parra toured the new SOCNORTH headquarters earlier in the day and participated in the ceremony.

"By all accounts Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick was a humble man who did not seek recognition for his efforts and accomplishments," Parra explained. "Though he never sought the spotlight in life, I have no doubt that he would be proud. Today, we stand in a spot where the tradition of Canadian and U.S. soldiers work side-by-side, as a cohesive unit, to protect North America and its citizens continues."

The ceremony was followed by a ribbon cutting in front of SOCNORTH's new headquarters signaling the growth and maturation of the command from its inception since 2013.

"Frederick Hall is a purpose-built facility that will allow SOCNORTH to operate at full capacity accompanied by modern digital capabilities that advance communication, coordination, planning, and execution of operations," said Command Sergeant Major Kevin Dorsh, SOCNORTH Command Senior Enlisted Leader. "The new facility will bring our team of elite and diverse active duty, reserve, National Guard, and civilians together in the right way to work towards the problem sets that we're assigned."

SOCNORTH was established Nov. 5, 2013, and was tasked with generating SOF options supporting counterterrorism and counternarcotics. With the Department of Defense's prioritization of strategic competition and Homeland Defense, and with emerging threats in the North America area of responsibility, U.S. Northern Command directed SOCNORTH to expand its scope and scale and establish a highly operational command that can defend forward, generate effects below the level of conflict, and conduct day-to-day campaigning.

"The dedication of this building comes at a critical time for USNORTHCOM and the nation," said Lt. Gen. Thomas Carden, Deputy Commander, U.S. Northern Command and Vice Commander, U.S.

Element, North American Aerospace Defense Command. “Now we look East to threats from Russia, China, and others, but agility and adaptability is the hallmark of a Special Operator. As the SOF community has evolved from counterinsurgency to [supporting] large scale combat operations, SOCNORTH has kept pace with opportunities and threats and only increased its relevance.”

Today, SOCNORTH employs SOF to degrade adversary capabilities, contest strategic lines of communication, and enhance domain awareness to enable the fight forward. SOCNORTH’s area of responsibility ranges from the western end of the Aleutian Islands to Canada, across the Homeland, Mexico, and portions of the northern Caribbean region to include The Bahamas, Puerto Rico, U.S. and U.K. Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos, Bermuda, and the Atlantic and Pacific approaches.

SOCNORTH executes Operation Polar Dagger, which is the Command’s premier operation that is a demonstration of rapidly deployable SOF to the Arctic. SOCNORTH’s marquee annual field training

exercise is ARCTIC EDGE, which provides SOF the opportunity to sharpen their ability to thrive and operate in the austere environment of the North American Arctic. SOCNORTH executes interagency exercises each year to rehearse SOF-specific support for the resolution of threats to the Homeland. Additionally, SOCNORTH works alongside Mexican and Bahamian partners to bolster their capabilities, address shared threats, pursue mutual interests, and build the generational relationships necessary for operational compatibility in support of North America.

“Our mission set is constantly evolving, but SOCNORTH remains focused on the threats most prevalent to the United States,” Tucker added. “Where strategic competition exists, it’s going to receive our attention throughout the entirety of the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility.”

SOCNORTH plans and executes all-domain Special Operations to detect, deter and disrupt threats throughout the USNORTHCOM AOR, and generate positions of advantage for the Nation.



Special Operations Command North members came together to dedicate their headquarters building during a ceremony on Peterson Space Force Base, Colo., Nov. 15, 2024. Photo by Joshua Armstrong.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



SEALs train with Indian MARCOS in Exercise SANGAM 2024

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

U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators and Indian Navy Marine Commando (MARCOS) members completed a Joint Combined Exchange Training during Exercise SANGAM 2024 in Goa, India on Nov. 23, 2024.

The bilateral training incorporated critical skills such as emergency medical training, dive medicine, maritime interdiction operations and shipboard close quarters combat, over-the-beach maneuvers and direct-action raids.

“This training was invaluable, providing us with a deeper understanding of the capabilities of our Indian partners and allowing us to demonstrate how we can enhance our collaborative efforts,” said an NSW operator. “By recognizing their strengths and sharing our expertise, we can effectively strengthen and solidify our partnership.”

Exercise SANGAM 2024 provided NSW members a valuable opportunity to engage in more than just an exchange of operational capabilities. It facilitated a rich cultural exchange and allowed for the building of lasting friendships with MARCOS, India’s elite maritime special operations unit. Through shared experiences and open dialogue, both teams established connections beyond professional collaboration, laying the foundation for enduring partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding.

“Getting to know our counterparts in the MARCOS from a cultural perspective enhanced our ability to exchange training on an operational perspective,” said another NSW operator. “This experience not only sharpened our skills but also deepened our partnership, enabling us to work together effectively and tackle any mission that comes our way.”

High-quality, realistic training is essential to maintaining and demonstrating the United States’ commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific and the U.S.-India partnership.



U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) operators and Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) members conduct a simulated visit, board, search and seizure operation during Exercise SANGAM 2024. Courtesy Photo.

NSW is the nation’s elite maritime special operations force, uniquely positioned to extend the Fleet’s reach. Furthermore, U.S. Special Operations Forces provide flexible responses to contingencies in the Indo-Pacific. Integral to this capability is a forward-deployed posture and continuous engagement with partner and ally forces, heightening mutual interoperability and regional expertise.



U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators and Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) members conduct urban combat training during Exercise SANGAM 2024 in Goa, India, Nov. 25, 2024. Courtesy Photo.



U.S. Naval Special Warfare operators and Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) members conduct a simulated visit, board, search and seizure operation during Exercise SANGAM 2024 in Goa, India, Nov. 25, 2024. Courtesy photo.

U.S. Special Operations Command - Pacific



SEALs train with Coast Guard MSRT in VBSS training

A U.S. Naval Special Warfare operator and U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Security Response Team (West) members prepare for an MH-60R Seahawk helicopter from the "Magicians" of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 35 to pick up a simulated casualty aboard the 2nd Lt. John P. Bobo-class cargo ship USNS PFC Dewayne T. Williams (T-AK 3009) during visit, board, search, and seizure training in the Andaman Sea, near Thailand, Dec. 15, 2024. Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Perlman.





U.S. Army Special Operations Command



The upward spiral continues: U.S. Army Special Operations Command celebrates 35 years

*By Christopher E. Howard,
USASOC History Office*

On Dec. 1, 1989, four Army Special Forces soldiers exited a UH-1 Iroquois helicopter hovering at 10,000 feet above the John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza on Fort Bragg, North Carolina (Fort Liberty since 2023). Spiraling downward through negative 15-degree temperatures, these Green Berets bore the activation order for the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), soon to become the Army's sixteenth major command (MACOM) and the Army service component of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Its mission would be to organize, train, equip, and validate Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) for worldwide employment, a mission that remains fundamentally the same 35 years later.

Although ARSOF capabilities began to take shape during the world wars of the 20th century, its command-and-control structure evolved during the latter half of that century, starting in April 1952 with the establishment of the Psychological Warfare Center, now the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS), at Fort Bragg. This command arrangement encompassed the late stages of the Korean War and the lengthy U.S. involvement in Vietnam, after which a sizeable portion of ARSOF was either inactivated, slated for inactivation, or reallocated to the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR).

In the 1980s, ARSOF experienced a revitalization that led Army leaders to relook its command and control. During this period, ARSOF found a champion in Gen. Edward "Shy" Meyer, the Chief of Staff of the Army from 1979 to 1983. With Meyer's blessing, the Army provisionally established 1st Special Operations Command (1st SOCOM)

in October 1982 to provide a higher headquarters for Special Forces, Ranger, Psychological Operations, and Civil Affairs units. By mid-decade, 1st SOCOM had added newly formed Special Operations Aviation and ARSOF Support units, along with an additional Ranger battalion and a Ranger regimental headquarters.

By the late 1980s, forward-thinking Army and SOF leaders acknowledged that the continued expansion of ARSOF had rendered 1st SOCOM, a two-star command that controlled only active component ARSOF units, an inadequate command and control solution. In September 1988, the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Carl E. Vuono, approved the concept for an ARSOF MACOM to consolidate command of active and reserve component ARSOF units. Accordingly, USASOC was provisionally established on December 1, 1988, using existing 1st SOCOM billets, and was formally activated a year later.

Upon activation, USASOC was commanded by newly promoted Lt. Gen. Gary E. Luck, whose considerable SOF experience included of multiple Special Forces assignments, service in Vietnam, and command of the Joint Special Operations Command. His top noncommissioned officer was Command Sgt. Maj. Ronnie Strahan, a fellow Green Beret and Vietnam veteran, who had earned the Silver Star for his role in the famed 1970 raid on Son Tay prison in North Vietnam.

USASOC provided a higher headquarters for the 14,000 active duty and 10,000 reserve soldiers assigned to 1st SOCOM, U.S. Army Reserve Special Operations Command, USAJFKSWCS, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Group, and the 75th Ranger Regiment. At the time of its activation, USASOC lacked full control of USAJFKSWCS and reserve component ARSOF units, although this would be resolved the following year. The

result was a unity of ARSOF command that had not existed previously.

The 1989 activation ceremony featured addresses from three keynote speakers, all of whom understood the significance of the day's events. Gen. Vuono spoke first, describing the activation of USASOC as "another step in the fulfillment of a vision ... [that] was first manifested in spirited colonial American soldiers, who ... combined discipline, stealth, and innovative tactics to win against an enemy in the forest." This "tradition of valor," as he called it, "has endured in our Army for over 200 years of peace and war."

Vuono highlighted select milestones in the ongoing revitalization of ARSOF, adding the activation of USASOC to that list. "This command," he concluded, "epitomizes to me the versatility that is so essential to our Army of today and to our role as a strategic force vital to our nation as we move into the next century. And this major command will be instrumental in ensuring that the Army's special operations forces, both in the active and the reserves, will continue to be trained to a razor's edge, and fully prepared for any mission."

The second speaker, Gen. James J. Lindsay, Commander, USSOCOM, pronounced it "a great day for Special Operations ... literally a dream come true." He acknowledged some of those who had helped bring this dream to pass, singling out Gen. Meyer, who, as "a real visionary, saw the changing world and realized the role special operations had to play in that world...and he created a foundation that permitted us to get where we are today." Both Gen. Vuono and Gen. Lindsay expressed the utmost confidence in the man they had selected to command USASOC, Lt. Gen. Luck.

Luck, as the new Commanding General, spoke last, expanding on the themes expressed by the two previous speakers. First, Luck elaborated on the dual nature of his new command's mission. "The Special Operations soldiers ... must remember that they are not only a tactical force but are also a strategic force. Our command has missions that reach across the entire operational spectrum." He then addressed the multi-component nature of the command, with active Army, USAR, and Army National Guard elements, and emphasized that USASOC was a Special Operations Command, "not a Special Forces or Green Beret command."

In closing, Luck recognized several of those in attendance who were responsible for bringing USASOC to pass, including Gen. Vuono and Gen. Lindsay. However, he reserved special praise for one person. "[I]f it wasn't for the drive and enthusiasm of Maj. Gen. Jim Guest," Luck said, "we wouldn't be here today activating this Special Operations Command." He continued, "Gen. Guest and his staff never gave up in the difficult pursuit of activating this

unit. There were and still are naysayers out there, but their doubts and, in some cases, their outright pessimism didn't deter Jim and his staff here at Bragg." He concluded, "Jim, the special operations community soldiers, retirees, veterans, and civilians owe a lot to you. You're an outstanding warrior and on behalf of everyone, thank you for what you did."

USASOC faced its first test within weeks of activation. Looking back, Lt. Gen. Luck recalled, "When we activated this command, no one knew that nineteen days later Special Operations Forces, along with U.S. forces stationed in Panama, would spearhead Operation JUST CA

USE, an operation that involved more than one-third of USASOC's active-duty soldiers." Once combat operations concluded, a combination of active and reserve component soldiers from USASOC's Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and Special Forces units remained in Panama for Operation PROMOTE LIBERTY. That mission was still ongoing when Luck passed command of USASOC to Lt. Gen. Michael F. Spigelmir in June 1990.

Before that summer had ended, USASOC again rapidly deployed a large contingent to Saudi Arabia for Operation DESERT SHIELD, and these soldiers figured prominently in DESERT STORM, which liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in early 1991. ARSOF soldiers maintained a brisk operational tempo for the remainder of the 1990s in the Balkans, Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, USASOC played a critical role in the U.S. response, becoming a weapon of choice, first in Afghanistan, then in too many places to mention. Since activating, it has lost 421 of its members.

As USASOC celebrates its 35th anniversary, one is reminded of Lt. Gen. Luck's prediction from December 1989 that USASOC would continue its "upward spiral." From the uneasy peace of the post-Cold War era, through the Global War on Terrorism, and beyond, USASOC soldiers have routinely deployed to the point of greatest need, whether in competition, crisis, or conflict. The command has evolved to meet each new and emerging challenge, reorganizing as needed and adding nearly 10,000 soldiers since 1989.

Today, USASOC is commanded by Lt. Gen. Jonathan P. Braga, who is assisted by Command Sgt. Maj. JoAnn Naumann and Command Chief Warrant Officer Steven C. Finney. More than 33,000 soldiers are assigned to its headquarters, 1st Special Forces Command, USAJFKSWCS, U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command, and the 75th Ranger Regiment. USASOC strives to be threat-informed, strategically driven, operationally focused and tactically prepared. It remains, as Lt. Gen. Luck said 35 years ago, "the perfect force to lead the Army's strategic options in these turbulent times."

U.S. Army Special Operations Command



A Soldier's General - 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) honors legacy of retired U.S. Army Gen. Gary Edward Luck

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Dahnyce Baucom,
7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Soldiers and leaders of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) gathered on Sept. 19, 2024, to honor the life and legacy of retired U.S. Army Gen. Gary Edward Luck, who passed away on Aug. 14, 2024. The memorial service occurred at Liberty Chapel on Camp “Bull” Simons, where family and friends reflected on the distinguished 36-year career of a leader who left a profound mark on the U.S. military.

After the memorial, Gen. Luck’s family, friends, and comrades gathered for a reception, where they shared stories of his leadership, mentorship, and impact on the Army. Gen. Luck’s influence extended beyond the battlefield, as he was a critical figure in shaping the future of military leadership for decades to come.

“His legacy, other than being really really smart, is that he genuinely loved people, especially soldiers, he loved his family. He was humble and communicated his faith through action. I thank God above for him. We look forward to the day we will see him again, in the place Christ Jesus has prepared for us,” said Retired Col. Gary Luck jr, son of Gen. Gary Luck.

Gen. Luck served in the U.S. Army for 36 years, leading troops in combat during some of the most significant conflicts of the 20th century, including the Vietnam War, Operations Desert Storm, and Desert Shield. He also commanded the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), where his leadership and tactical expertise were vital in strengthening joint military operations across all services.

After retirement in 1996, Gen. Luck served as Chief of the Senior Mentor Program and Senior Fellow for the Department of Defense. His work led to the development of

pivotal military leadership courses such as CAPSTONE, PINNACLE, and KEYSTONE, shaping the careers of thousands of senior officers and enlisted leaders. Even after his second retirement in 2017, Gen. Luck was recognized for his contributions to military education and mentorship, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff awarded him the Distinguished Public Service Award.



Gen. Gary Edward Luck

“Gen. Luck has done so much for the United States Army no one can name all the stuff, that would take too much time and we all truly would miss him. Gen. Luck is what I would call a Soldier’s General...sir I salute you, Airborne, all the way,” said Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Andrew McFowler.

On Sept. 20, 2024, a private interment was held at Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola, Florida. As the solemn ceremony ended, the 18th Airborne Corps performed a flyover in honor of Gen. Luck’s service and dedication to the nation. This poignant tribute marked the final farewell to a man who served his country for over five decades and was instrumental in shaping the future of U.S. military leadership.

Gen. Luck is survived by his wife Leah, his son Skip, daughter Kim, and grandchildren. His legacy lives on through the thousands of military leaders he mentored, as well as through his contributions to the programs that continue to guide our armed forces today.

UH-60 Black Hawks from the 18th Airborne Corps organize a flyover during a private interment for retired U.S. Army Gen. Gary Edward Luck was held at Barrancas National Cemetery, Pensacola, Fla., Sept. 20, 2024. The ceremony honored his life and legacy following his distinguished 36-year career in the Army. Gen. Luck led troops in combat during the Vietnam War, Operations Desert Storm, and Desert Shield, and served as head of the Joint Special Operations Command. Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Christopher Stevenson.



U.S. Army Special Operations Command

7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) hold a 2024 Best ODA Competition



7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) Soldiers participate in the 2024 Best ODA Competition on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. Dec. 4, 2024. The annual competition involved numerous weapon proficiency drills and physical endurance tests over several days. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Hunter Garcia.



Naval Special Warfare Command Senior Mountaineering Course



A U.S. Navy SEAL ascends a cliff face with his instructor's guidance during the Senior Mountaineering course at Advanced Training Command near Kodiak Alaska, Nov. 12, 2024. Naval Special Warfare Center trains the forces that provide maritime special operations capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas. Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Alex Kerska.



Air Force Special Operations Command



353 SOW refines

capabilities in Viking Jet 25-1

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Wisher,
353rd Special Operations Wing*

Emergencies and crises can happen at any time and place. The 320th Special Tactics Squadron stands ready with the skill sets to assist. Recently they tested their capabilities during the units' fifth iteration of Exercise Viking Jet from 9-13 December 2024.

Viking Jet integrated conventional forces from the Pacific Air Forces' 374th Airlift Wing and 18th Wing, and the U.S. Marine Corps' Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242, with Special Operations Forces from the 320th Special Tactical Squadron, 1st Special Operations Squadron, and other units from various commands in a multitude of training events to validate joint interoperability within the first island chain.



A combat controller assigned to the 320th Special Tactics Squadron sets up a communication antenna during exercise Viking Jet 25-1 on Dec. 10, 2024, at Yokota Air Base, Japan. The exercise integrated conventional forces and Special Operations Forces from various commands in a multitude of training events to validate joint interoperability within the first island chain. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Wisher.



A pararescueman assigned to the 320th Special Tactics Squadron treats injuries on a casualty role player during exercise Viking Jet 25-1 at Yokota Air Base, Japan, Dec. 11, 2024. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Wisher.

Training events included military free fall, alternate landing site operations, austere command and control, personnel recovery, direct action, and forward arming and refueling of two 1st Marine Aircraft Wing F-35B Lightning II's by MC-130J Commando II's. These activities demonstrated interoperability, providing a distinct advantage for the combined joint force.

“This training was designed to simulate realistic conditions to validate the unit’s ability to lead and execute a no-notice deployment of the joint force to an austere location with no host nation support. Furthermore, the unit was tasked to sustain and force project to conduct various operations from the austere site.” said the 320th Operations Officer.

U.S. Forces also worked to accomplish a series of training events highlighting mission capabilities and providing a venue for testing and experimentation.

“This kind of training gives us an advantage during a time of crisis, allowing us to test our skill sets and validate mission readiness to ensure we are postured to

prevail in crisis or conflict.” added the 320th Operations Officer.

This iteration simulated real-world conditions within a controlled training environment, demonstrating Agile Combat Employment, rapid response, DA, PR, and other activities that enhance the combined joint forces’ readiness to prevail in conflict.

“This exercise was focused on a multitude of

This exercise was focused on a multitude of objectives, from demonstrating ACE through execution of force projection operations, to deliberate joint and combined planning for personnel recovery. The team demonstrated the effectiveness of a light, rapid and agile force through tackling complex problems.

objectives, from demonstrating ACE through execution of force projection operations, to deliberate joint and combined planning for personnel recovery. The team demonstrated the effectiveness of a light, rapid and agile force through tackling

complex problems,” said the 320th STS Operation Chief.

From refueling fifth-generation aircraft to enhancing joint interoperability, Viking Jet 25-1 strengthened relations, provided mission partners with real time capability assessments, and equipped the joint force with the skills to act swiftly—any time, any place, anywhere.



Air Force Special Operations Command



Arrival of C-146A Wolfhound

*By Tech. Sgt. Westin Warburton,
352nd Special Operations Wing*

The C-146A Wolfhound arrived this week to the 352d Special Operations Wing at Royal Air Force Mildenhall. The Wolfhound is a twin-engine, high-wing aircraft equipped with a configurable cabin capable of various passenger and cargo combinations, as well as casualty evacuation missions. Its primary mission is to provide reliable, responsive, and flexible airlift support to U.S. operations worldwide, often occurring in austere and remote locations not routinely serviced by traditional logistics organizations.

U.S. and British officials agreed to activate a C-146A unit at RAF Mildenhall in March of this year to increase U.S. European Command's special operations capability within Europe. Forward basing the Wolfhound at RAF Mildenhall will speed up response time for a variety of missions and provide increased security, disaster response and emergency airlift capability across Europe. Before agreeing to station the aircraft in the United Kingdom, U.S. officials conducted an extensive environmental impact analysis and shared their results with the U.K. Ministry of Defense.



Air Force Special Operations Command



'Hands go, hands come': An Airman's journey from Ghana to graduation

*By Airman 1st Class Tori Haudenschild,
1st Special Operations Wing*

“There were bushfires and famine; people were dying of hunger—it was horrible.”

Growing up in Ghana, Staff Sgt. Isaac Barfi’s younger years were marked by conflict and adversity, but it was not the challenges that defined him rather, it was the kindness of strangers that shaped the course of his life.

Today, Barfi, a 1st Special Operations Wing unit training manager, stands as a graduate of the Community College of the Air Force, a drastically different position from the hardship of his childhood.

Barfi’s journey began in his teens when civil war erupted in neighboring countries in Africa. It was then when he witnessed the U.S. military’s relief efforts firsthand.

“I remember when the U.S. arrived with supplies and started evacuating people to safety,” Barfi noted. “Seeing the humanitarian aid happening and lives being saved, I was motivated to become a soldier and be involved in efforts like this.”

As the years passed, Barfi continued witnessing the positive impacts of U.S. Airmen in his community.

“Early in the morning, we would hike 15 kilometers to a stream where we would collect water and bring it back for our families to drink; it was extremely challenging and we had to make two to three trips before heading to school,” Barfi said. “The U.S. came in and provided clean, potable water and it was a huge relief to the entire community.”

These experiences planted a seed of service in Barfi’s mind and 12 years later he joined the Air Force.

“We have a saying in my language: ‘Hands go, hands come,’ which means I’ll be there for you like you were there for me, no matter what,” Barfi



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Isaac Barfi, 1st Special Operations Wing unit training manager, poses for a photo at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Nov. 26, 2024. Barfi graduated from the Community College of the Air Force with his Associate of Applied Science in Aviation Maintenance Technology. Photo by Airman 1st Class Tori Haudenschild.

explained. “I joined the Air Force to give back to this country, just like they did for Africa.”

To this day, the humanitarian relief efforts serve as a reminder to Barfi of what the Air Force symbolizes and the opportunities it has provided, inspiring him to achieve his goals— including his pursuit toward higher education.

On Dec. 4, 2024, Barfi was one of 150 members stationed here to receive an Associates of Applied Science degree through the CCAF.

A two-year program, the CCAF is a federally-chartered institution that awards AAS degrees exclusively to enlisted service members.

Barfi, who completed a degree in aviation maintenance technology, noted that considering his past, he could never have imagined the opportunities he has today.

“If someone would have told me this is where I would end up in life, I would never have believed them because I never imagined this is how my journey would unfold,” Barfi said. “Obtaining my degree has given me the knowledge to reinforce my perspective and the tools necessary to continue pushing myself.”

Chief Master Sgt. Ralph Oliver, 1st SOW command chief, noted that Barfi’s story is a reminder of the extensive impact the Air Force has worldwide.

“Those inspired by our mission go on to achieve incredible things,” Oliver said. “Barfi’s journey, from witnessing humanitarian aid in Ghana to earning his CCAF degree as a member of the 1st SOW, embodies the Air Commando mindset and the culture of excellence we strive to instill at Hurlburt Field. His achievement not only reflects personal determination and drive but also the opportunities the Air Force provides to develop the next generation of leaders.”

As Barfi looks to the future, he says he plans to pursue another CCAF degree in training and education. Building on his own success, he is now eager to share his perspective to help others achieve their educational aspirations.

“Don’t waste your life— take the time to educate your current self in hopes of bettering your future self,” Barfi noted. “Put in the maximum effort and sacrifice now to have a better tomorrow.”



U.S. Airmen assigned to Hurlburt Field, graduates of the Community College of the Air Force, pose for a photo at Hurlburt Field, Florida, Dec. 4, 2024. The CCAF’s mission is to offer and award job-related Associate of Applied Science degrees to enhance mission readiness, support recruiting and retention, and facilitate career transitions and professional growth for Air Force enlisted members. Photo by Airman 1st Class Tori Haudenschild.

Air Force Special Operations Command



Bivouac tests missions support group's rapid deployment capabilities

*By Airman 1st Class Raul Mercado,
1st Special Operations Wing*

Approximately 160 mission support group Airmen completed a field training exercise practicing rapid deployment capabilities at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, Nov. 3-7, 2024.

The 1st Special Operations Mission Support Group tested readiness for combat and humanitarian missions during their annual bivouac exercise by simulating real-world contingencies in austere environments.

This year's exercise underscored the role of agile combat employment concepts: rapid airpower projection, contingency operations and the necessity of integrated, cross-unit cooperation to ensure mission success.

"Bivouac tests our ability to build up air bases, to operate an airfield and to facilitate that forward airfield," Capt. Justin Jacobs, 1st Special Operations Force Support Squadron sustainment services flight commander and officer in charge during the exercise said. "To maintain air dominance or global superiority, military forces need the capability to project air power for that anywhere."

A bivouac exercise is a field training where personnel simulate living and working in forward operating conditions, often involving the construction of temporary facilities under realistic deployed environments to test readiness and operational capabilities.

The 1 SOMSG Airmen practiced skills such as



U.S. Airmen assigned to the 1st Special Operations Mission Support Group, take cover behind a humvee after donning Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear gear during a bivouac exercise at Eglin Range, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, Nov. 5, 2024. CBRN gear is designed to block chemical and biological agents and radioactive dust particles by filtering contaminants in the air. Photo by Airman 1st Class Raul Mercado.



A U.S. Air Force Airman drives a humvee through smoke during a bivouac exercise at Eglin Range, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, Nov. 5, 2024. The bivouac exercise tested readiness for combat and humanitarian missions, simulating real-world contingencies in austere environments. Photo by Airman 1st Class Raul Mercado.

airfield construction, medical response and maintaining base security. It offered an environment for participants to apply their skills in a simulated yet realistic scenario.

“This is the first time MSG as a whole really had all hands on deck for all of the units to participate,” Jacobs said. “It’s a good cross-organizational opportunity for us to learn each other’s field capabilities.”

Jacobs added the exercise served as proof of concept, demonstrating they could meet leadership expectations and build a base capable of projecting power. It also tested participants’ ability to respond quickly under pressure. For the 1st Special Operations Wing project manager, a highlight came when the team had to put on Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear gear during a simulated attack.

“CBRN is a huge thing that MSG does as a whole when we respond to an attack,” said the 1 SOW project manager. “It’s not just defensive fighting positions fighting back. When we hear incoming indirect fire or an explosion, all MSG participants in this exercise are putting on their CBRN gear.”

The exercise illustrated the Air Force’s commitment to maintaining a highly trained and adaptable force. By simulating real-world challenges, it demonstrated the Air Force’s readiness to respond to combat and humanitarian needs, while projecting air power globally.

“This bivouac is a prime example of how we’re training for the future and how we develop our United States Air Force as a whole,” said the 1 SOW project manager. “It’s a new capability--small teams making big impacts.”

Air Force Special Operations Command



'Knowing what to do and being ready can make all the difference'

*By U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli,
24th Special Operations Wing*

"Is there a doctor on board?"

Sitting in his aisle seat toward the back of a commercial flight, Air Force Staff Sgt. William Flaspoebler saw the flight attendants scrambling for help.

It was May 2023, and Flaspoebler was traveling to a deployed location in Southeast Asia.

He walked to the front of the cabin and found a 64-year-old woman, pale-faced, sweating and clutching her chest in pain.

After observing her symptoms, he checked the woman's pulse and blood pressure.

"We need to divert and land as soon as possible," he told the pilots, knowing the woman would soon go into cardiac arrest.

From there, Flaspoebler said he relied on both instinct and experience. He followed chest pain protocols, placed the passenger on oxygen and gave her aspirin and fluids. Next, he examined a bottle of nitroglycerin: a drug that could potentially stabilize the patient, but could also be lethal.

"I knew I had to do it," he said. "It was stressful, but I knew she didn't have much time."

As the aircraft began its descent to the nearest airport, Flaspoebler worked to keep the woman alive.

For Flaspoebler, an independent duty medical technician with the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida, providing life-saving care is almost second nature.

His journey to that moment began years before he joined the military.

Before enlisting in the Air Force in 2016, Flaspoebler honed his medical skills as a civilian emergency medical technician in Los Angeles. Later, his career led him to a level-one pediatric trauma



A U.S. Air Force independent duty medical technician, assigned to the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, packs a medical kit at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 24, 2024. IDMTs provide medical support during high-risk training activities and also offer life-saving trainings for personnel. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli.

center at LA Children's Hospital. There, he treated some of the most critically injured patients imaginable, he said.

"We responded to car accidents, fires, stabbings ... pretty much everything," he said. "As a whole, those jobs exposed me to a wide range of medical incidents."

Flaspoebler said that one of those incidents in particular left him wanting something more in life.

One day, the former EMT found himself in the back of an ambulance, speeding through the streets of Los Angeles, treating a man bleeding heavily from a neck wound.



A U.S. Air Force independent duty medical technician, assigned to the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, simulates performing life-saving care on a training manikin at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 24, 2024. IDMTs are trained to establish medical treatment facilities in remote and hostile environments. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli.

As he packed the wound to stem the bleeding, the same thought continued to flash through his mind: the injury was eerily similar to the one that had killed his friend, fallen Army Sgt. Michael Cable, who died in Afghanistan in 2013.

Flaspoeehler said that in the moment, he tried not to think about Cable's death. But afterward, he began to dwell on it. He couldn't shake the feeling that he could be serving a greater purpose, he said.

"I wanted to be able to be there to see and treat my friends and brothers and sisters," Flaspoeehler said. "As a civilian, I was usually treating strangers. I wanted to be with a team and have the responsibility of taking care of them."

That realization drove him to join the Air Force.

As part of the 23rd STS, Flaspoeehler's work is dynamic. His unit is tasked with missions involving austere airfield control, terminal attack control, personnel rescue and recovery, assault zone battlefield trauma care, and more.

In his role as an IDMT, he's trained to establish medical treatment facilities in remote and hostile environments.

"I can run a 911 call, pick up an active duty patient, treat them as a paramedic, bring them to the emergency room and then treat them and discharge them," Flaspoeehler said. "This kind of position doesn't really exist in the civilian world."

He also provides medical support during high-risk activities like airborne jump operations and dives, and trains personnel on Tactical Combat Casualty Care to prepare them for potential life-and-death scenarios.

"One day, it could be their friend that needs help out there," he said, referring to fallen Army Soldier Cable.

On the flight, the 64-year-old patient's blood pressure and heart rate returned to healthier levels and the medicine reduced her pain.

Soon after, the flight landed in Kuching, Malaysia, where Flaspoeehler helped first responders carry the woman off the plane and to an ambulance.

After arriving at his deployed location in Southeast Asia, Flaspoeehler followed up on the patient's status: the woman had survived after receiving additional care in Kuching.

"I felt relieved that I made the right call," he said. "While it was something I had handled so many times before, I had never had to do something like this on a plane, in international waters."

Ultimately, Flaspoeehler said he credits the medical experience he gained as a civilian and in the Air Force.

"Knowing what to do and being ready can make all the difference."



A U.S. Air Force independent duty medical technician, assigned to the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, prepares an IV bag at Hurlburt Field, Fla., April 24, 2024. IDMTs are trained to establish medical treatment facilities in remote and hostile environments. Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Natalie Fiorilli.

Marine Forces, Special Operations Command



Marine Raiders train in live-fire shoot house during direct action package

Marine Raiders with Marine Forces Special Operations Command train in a live-fire shoot house during a direct-action training package at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Oct. 10, 2024. The training package focuses on honing a Marine Special Operations Company's tactics, techniques, and procedures in conducting direct-action operations. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Evan Jones.



Headquarters - U.S Special Operations Command SOF honored at Pittsburgh Steelers Salute to Service game

Salute to Service games represent the NFL's dedication to honoring, empowering and connecting with our nation's service members, veterans and their families. U.S. SOCOM and the Pittsburgh Steelers teamed up for a Special Operations Forces-focused Salute to Service NFL game with static displays from the joint forces, the Para-Commandos jumping in the game ball and commandos honored throughout the game Nov. 16, 2024.



Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lawrence Wong.



Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lawrence Wong.



Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lawrence Wong.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Marleah Miller.

Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lawrence Wong.



Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) service members conduct a simulated visit, board, search and seizure during the Joint Combined Interagency Maritime Security Training Exercise aboard the Philippine Navy's LCT Draco in the Basilan Strait, Philippines, Oct. 19, 2024. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and AFP conduct these training exercises to increase interoperability, build U.S. and partner capacity, enhance effectiveness of maritime security, and to promote peace and stability to the Indo-Pacific region. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Trey Q. Michael.

